

NATIONAL SOCIAL INVESTMENT PROGRAMME (N-SIP), VULNERABLE POPULATIONS AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGS) IN ENUGU STATE, NIGERIA: TRACING A NEXUS

F. N ONAH¹, S. O. ANIKWE^{2*}, FAB O. ONAH¹

¹ Department of Public Administration and Local Government, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria, fab.onah@unn.edu.ng

² Department of Industrial Relations and Personnel Management, Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike, Nigeria, Anikwe.obinna@mouau.edu.ng* 08037791088

Abstract

The National Social Investment Programme (N-SIP) of Nigeria is a social welfare initiative created by the Federal Government in 2015 to ensure equitable distribution of resources to vulnerable populations to address, hunger, poverty and well-being which incidentally are the first three Sustainable Development Goals. In spite of the huge N-SIP annual budget, the well-being of vulnerable populations has not shown any satisfactory improvement. The main goal of this study was to trace the impact of N-SIP on SDGs 1, 2 and 3 in Enugu State, Nigeria. The specific objectives are to; (a) find out the impact of Conditional Cash Transfer of N-SIP on poverty and well-being of vulnerable populations in Enugu State; (b) examine the effectiveness of the home-grown school feeding programme in Enugu State and (c) find out the obstacles impeding the success of N-SIP. The study used a multi-dimensional approach which includes visits to a sample of the 421 Communities in Enugu State, documentary evidence, interviews with key informants (KIs) in relevant ministries and Focus Group Discussions. The findings were analyzed and discussed based on sustainable development theory which is the study's theoretical platform. The less than satisfactory impact of N-SIP on poverty and hunger of vulnerable populations in Enugu State was demonstrated. The paper argues that N-SIP lacked focus, predicated on imaginary data and unsustainable. We ended the paper by packaging some proactive policy intervention measures including putting more efforts in data banking and management.

Keywords: *National Social Investment Programme, Sustainable Development, Sustainable Development Goals, Vulnerable populations, Poverty, Hunger; Well-Being*

1. Introduction

The Federal Government of Nigeria established the National Social Investment Programmes (N-SIP) in 2015 and launched it in the year 2016. N-SIP is a portfolio of programmes created to support the underprivileged Nigerians across the country by reducing poverty and improving their standard of living through direct support, capacity building, and investment. These programmes are designed to provide Nigerians with the opportunity to partake and benefit greatly from the socio-economic transformation of the nation. N-SIP is divided into four major programmes namely:

- National Home Grown School Feeding Programme (NHGSFP)
- Government Enterprise and Empowerment Programme (GEEP)
- Job creation and Youth Employment (N-Power)
- National Social Safety Net Programme

i. National Home Grown School Feeding Programme (NHGSFP)

As contained in Info guide Nigeria (2020), National Home Grown School Feeding Programme (NHGSFP) is one of the Social Investment Programmes in Nigeria that is carried out to increase the enrolment of pupils in Nigerian primary schools. It also helps in addressing the health status and poor nutrition rate in children that have been affected due to poverty as this is a contributing factor to the poor learning abilities of children. The major objective of NHGSF Programme is to daily provide a healthy meal to up to 5.5 million pupils in public primary schools (from classes 1 to 3). The school children are the primary target of this programme. The programme also creates job opportunities for unemployed citizens in the hospitality industry and provides a source of livelihood for small-owner farmers, thus, improving the rural economy.

ii. Government Enterprise and Empowerment Programme (GEEP)

GEEP, another Social Investment Programme in Nigeria is designed to provide financial support and training to businesses that find themselves at the bottom of the financial pyramid. The GEEP is targeted at providing micro-loans to 1.66 million businesses in the bottommost part of the financial pyramid. The Federal Government Administration launched an initiative called “TRADER MONI” which is under GEEP. Trader Moni is created for petty traders and market women; artisans and MSMEs; enterprising youth; Farmers and agricultural workers.

iii. Job Creation and Youth Employment (N-Power)

N-power is job creation and youth employment programme for individuals between 18-35 years of age. The N-Power initiative is a programme aimed at providing a platform where most citizens, especially the youths can acquire skills and develop themselves. The Volunteers of N-Power are given devices containing relevant contents alongside ₦30,000 stipend which is usually paid every month. The contents contained in the device encourage continuous learning. They also facilitate the volunteers’ ability to implement the chosen vocation successfully.

iv. National Social Safety Net Programme

The National Social Safety Net Programme is a social investment programme in Nigeria that focuses on vulnerable and poor households. The National Social Safety Net Coordinating Office (NASSCO) is responsible for setting standards and coordinating all social safety net programmes, as well as setting up the registry. It is aimed at making available a targeted structure for the development of an authentic and credible database of the vulnerable and poor households.

v. National Cash Transfer Programme (N-CTP)

This Programme is a project developed under the National Social Safety Net Coordinating Office (NASSCO) and has its major aim as making efforts to reach out to the poor and vulnerable families. This program provides cash transfers of ₦5,000 monthly to families so as to liberate them from poverty.

According to WHO (2002), vulnerability refers to the extent to which an individual or organisation fails to forestall and recover from the impacts of disasters. Children, pregnant women, elderly people, malnourished people, and people who are ill or immunocompromised, are particularly vulnerable when a disaster strikes, and take a relatively high share of the disease burden associated with emergencies, poverty and its common consequences such as malnutrition, homelessness, poor housing and destitution is a major contributor to vulnerability. As documented by NBS (2019), the vulnerable namely, the aged, the poor, the poorest of the poor who are on subsistence living in Nigeria and who live without sufficient means to support themselves are over 124 million

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also known as the Global Goals, were adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015 as a universal call to action to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity by 2030. The SDGs are made up of 17 goals. The 17 SDGs are integrated that is, they recognize that action in one area will affect outcomes in others, and that development must balance social, economic and environmental sustainability. Through the pledge to 'Leave No One Behind', countries have committed to fast-track progress for those furthest behind first. That is why the SDGs are designed to bring the world to several life-changing 'zeros', including zero poverty, hunger, AIDS and discrimination against women and girls. Everyone is needed to reach these ambitious targets. The creativity, knowhow, technology and financial resources from all of society is necessary to achieve the SDGs in every context. (UNDP, 2020).

In this study we are concerned with SDGs 1, 2 and 3 which the UNDP (2020) explains as follows;

Goal 1: End poverty in all its forms everywhere

Goal 2: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture

Goal 3: Ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing for all ages.

The N-SIP design and initiative appears to be reasonable and well-meaning being focused on vulnerable people and in tandem with the spirit of SDGs, especially goals. 1, 2 and 3. However, the implementation remains the question. With such huge annual budget for N-SIP, one expects the reduction of poverty and the increase in welfare of the vulnerable population. But the reverse appears to be the case as more Nigerians are progressively sliding into misery, especially the vulnerable populations. This is why Eno-Abasi (2020) described N-SIP as lofty in design but poor in execution. Similarly, Mohammed (2020) saw N-SIP as a fraud and conduit pipe for handlers. Meanwhile, the social investment programme commenced in 2016 with an annual budget allocation of N500 billion which has been sustained since then for the past four years cumulating to about N2 trillion since 2016. In spite of the huge N-SIP annual budget, the well-being of vulnerable populations has not shown any satisfactory improvement. The main goal of this study was to trace the impact of N-SIP on SDGs1, 2 and 3 in Enugu State, Nigeria. The specific objectives are to; (a) find out the impact of Conditional Cash Transfer of N-SIP on poverty and well-being of vulnerable populations in Enugu State; (b) examine the effectiveness of the home grown school feeding programme in Enugu State; (c) assess the extent to which N- Power project has created direct Jobs for the youth in the State; (d) find out the obstacles that impede the success of N- SIP in the State and (e) recommend policy options for improving social investment and protection in Nigeria.

2. Methodology

A survey design was adopted for the research. In this direction, Enugu State in southeastern Nigeria, was purposefully selected as a case study. A mixed method combining quantitative and qualitative data collection was employed in the study. The study therefore used a multi-dimensional approach which included visits to a sample of Communities in Enugu State. Interviews with Key Informants (KIs) in ministry of social development and N-SIP focal persons and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) were undertaken with Presidents-General of Town Unions of the selected Communities. With respect to the selection of the Communities, we took note that there are three (3) senatorial zones in Enugu State and for representativeness we randomly selected sixty (60) Communities from each zone. This added up to 180 Communities as sample Communities. We also utilized documentary

evidence which included records and government publications. The findings were subjected to meta-analysis since data was harvested from diverging sources. The discussion was aided by sustainable development (SD) theory by Lele (1991), Mebratu (1998), Zhang (2018) Longyu, et al (2019) and other scholars. One of the major assumptions of the theory is that many developing countries appear to have weak sustainability especially as it relates to development programmes.

3. Literature Review

Nearly two thirds of children worldwide are not shielded from the lifelong effects of poverty and discrimination (UNICEF, 2020). Social protection involves the array of programmes and policies that are required to help improve the lives of poor communities. Cash transfers in the form of child grants, providing meals in schools, skills acquisition and development, as part of the social protection programmes, provides families with health care, nutritious food and quality education to all children, regardless of environments they are born into.

Yet, according to UNICEF (2020), two out of three children worldwide are not covered by any form of social protection, leaving them vulnerable to economic hardship and social exclusion. Children may be cut off from social protection for various reasons. Families that reside in areas that might be difficult to assess because of incessant conflict and disasters, are most times not captured in social protection programmes and other services. However, critical services can also be fragmented in areas where the programmes are accessible. Governments often finance programmes to improve child education but forget to solve the problem of malnutrition. Children seems to be left out when social protection programmes do not strengthen each other in education and other areas. Government should provide child care support for parents to help ensure promising future for their children. (UNICEF, 2020).

Growing poverty and insecurity issues in Nigeria has posed serious threats to national development. In a bid to address various problems facing Nigeria and other developing countries, social protection is increasingly being seen by the international community, regional bodies and national governments as a policy tool to address such development challenges. Generally, it is seen as a type of intervention designed to handle issues on poverty and vulnerability. Owing to this, various social protection programmes have been put in place by previous government regimes to reduce the poverty level in Nigeria (Okunola, 2020).

Conditional cash transfer (CCT) programmes was designed to reduce poverty by making welfare programs conditional upon the receivers' actions. The government transfers money to persons who meet certain criteria, like enrolling children into public schools and getting regular medical check-ups. CCTs seek to help the current generation in poverty, as well as breaking the cycle of poverty for the next through the development of human capital. It can also help to minimize feminization of poverty.

CCTs have resulted in sizeable reductions in poverty among recipients—especially when the transfer has been sufficient, well targeted, and structured in a way that does not discourage recipients from taking other actions to escape poverty. Because CCTs provide a steady income, they have helped protect poor households from the worst effects of unemployment, catastrophic illness, and other sudden income shocks. And making cash transfers to women, as virtually all CCTs do, may have increased their bargaining power (Fiszbein et al, 2019)

Owing to the issues observed from the adoption of MDGs, the UN sought to provide some improvements by adopting SDGs in 2015 (UN, 2015). SDGs is made up of 6 salient elements, 17 goals and 169 sub-goals designed to guide the SD for all developed and developing nations in the next 15 years (Rudra, 2015, Mu, 2019). These elements are dignity, human beings, the planet,

prosperity, justice, and partnership. In order to ensure efficiency and effectiveness in the implementation of SDGs, they were generally grouped into four categories: economy (goals 8, 9, 10, and 12), society (goals 1, 3, 4, 5, 11, and 16), environment (goals 2, 6, 7, 13, 14, and 15), and governance (goal 17) (Lu, 2015).

4. Findings and Discussion

a. Impact of Conditional Cash Transfer of N-SIP on poverty and well-being of vulnerable populations in Enugu State.

Our findings indicate that in Enugu State with a population of 4,411,119 (NBS, 2020), the poverty headcount is 58.13%. This is barely above the national average of 40.1%. The implication therefore is that over 2.5 million people are poor and vulnerable in Enugu State.

The National Social Register (NSR) of the poor and vulnerable as published by National Social Safety Coordinating Office (NSSCO, 2020) again shows that there are 6,886 poor and vulnerable households with 27013 individuals in Enugu State. The conditional cash transfer of N-SIP is expected to benefit the 6,886 households having commenced in 2016. However, table 1 below indicates the actual number of households that have benefited since 2016 which is 3450.

Table 1: Direct Jobs and Other Benefits Offered by N-SIP as at September, 2020

S/N	PROGRAMME	Direct Jobs Created	Other Categories of Beneficiaries	Total Per Programme
1	N-POWER	16,453*	1,508 (have been trained and collected set of relevant tool boxes)	17,961
2	NHGSFP	1,591	114,195 791 primary school	115,786
3	GEEP	Nil	41,444 (collected soft loans between N10,000 to N50,000) each	41,444
4	NCTP	Nil	3,450 (** PVHHs collect N5,000 monthly)	3,450
Total		18,044	115,703	133,747

*These beneficiaries work in schools, hospitals, farms, tax offices, etc **PVHHs=Poor and Vulnerable Households Source: N-SIP Office Enugu

Even as unimpressive as the above picture may be, the Enugu State N-SIP Focal Person confirmed that as at September 2020 the project is still at pilot stage in Enugu State as only 15 wards in 3 local government areas have benefited from National Cash Transfer Programme (NCTP). Meanwhile, Enugu State has 17 local government areas. Again 70% of the Town Union Presidents in the 180 Communities visited informed us at the FGD sessions that they were not aware of the programme. The impact of Conditional Cash Transfer of N-SIP on poverty and well-being of vulnerable populations in Enugu State is evidently poor as it is not felt in the State. This probably was why Muhammed (2020) feels that the so-called social investment programme is failing because the former ones that failed were deliberately compromised and created as an avenue for embezzlement. For him the whole SIP thing is opaque, and is being run in a manner that is not accountable and transparent. We feel that in such situations sustainability is called to question.

b. Effectiveness of the Home-grown School Feeding Programme in Enugu State.

Table 1 above shows that since inception, the programme has provided 1591 jobs to women in the State and 114,195 in 791 primary schools were being fed, adding up to a total of 115,786

beneficiaries from the programme. The Home-Grown School Feeding Programme (HGSF) component of N-SIP aims to deliver school feeding to young children, with a specific focus on increasing school enrollment, reducing the incidence of malnutrition among the poor communities and empowering their women and small farmers.

Since its inception, the scheme has had the misfortune of attracting controversies with the latest being the newly introduced Modified Home-Grown School Feeding Programme, which got many to conclude that feeding schoolchildren to improve their health and school enrollment were not among the major objectives of the initiative.

Despite protestations from Nigerians, the Minister in charge of the programme went ahead with the strange feeding programme claiming that the Presidency directed her ministry to carry out the exercise even when schools are closed. According to her, she was mandated to deliver feeding support to 3.5 million homes, as against pupils. In spite of the Minister's defense, the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) on 28th September, 2020 uncovered a N2.57 billion fraud surrounding the school feeding programme. Such discoveries give credence to the believe of not a few Nigerians including the leadership of the National Assembly that the programme is riddled with fraud and lack of transparency.

The scenario in Enugu State lacks seriousness. At best it is a clear case of exclusion considering the number of needy pupils in the State. As of 2020 the number of public primary schools in the State according to National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) is 1223, with 225,136 pupils. Meanwhile, the Key Informants (KIs), the Presidents General of Town Unions and N-SIP Officials we interviewed observed that no school feeding has taken place since March, 2020 up till the time of writing this paper (October,2020).

c. Extent to which N- Power project has Created Direct Jobs for the Youth in Enugu State

The N-Power Programme is a Nigeria job creation and skills empowerment programme with the major aim of helping Nigerian youths between the ages 18 and 35 acquire and develop required skills to become creative and innovative in their communities, as well as in the global markets.

The records in table 1 above shows that N-Power programme of N-SIP has provided 16,453 direct jobs to the youth. The beneficiaries work in schools, farms, hospitals and tax offices. Additional 1,508 have been trained and collected set of relevant tool boxes. It can therefore be assumed that for batches A and B, 17,061 have benefited from the programme since 2016. Batch C is being processed apparently being delayed by the current national financial shock occasioned by COVID-19 pandemic.

Considering the 1,676,225 unemployed youths in Enugu State, the N-Power programme has only been able to provide direct jobs for 1.02% of the unemployed in Enugu State. The N-Power programme is therefore scratching unemployment on the surface as it were. N-Power is hardly the panacea for unemployment in Enugu State The high level of unemployment in Enugu State and as a matter of fact other states of the federation is antithetical to sustainable development.

d. The Obstacles to the Success of N- SIP

i. Changes in programme administration have delayed the implementation schedule and lead to decreased efficiency. In 2019 the Vice President who was in charge of N-SIP was dropped and the programme handed over to the Minister of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management and Social Development. This caused considerable anxiety and delay in the programme implementation.

ii. Another factor that can hinder N-SIP's success pertain to unexpected financial crisis. The structure of N-SIP has not yet been adjusted to retain success in the event of a large financial crisis even

though it operates with annual budget. The programme bears the brunt of occasional financial shock experienced in Nigeria.

iii. Yet another common obstacle to success is exclusion of needy homes in the targeting process. This exclusion was as a result of communities' inability to access schools or clinics. Many such communities are poverty-stricken populations but cannot follow through with the programme because enumerators of households did not reach them. One sure reason for low coverage might be attributed to political, financial and capacity limitations, which limits the effectiveness of the N-SIP interventions towards poverty and vulnerability alleviation in the country.

iv. Targeted populations distrust of the programme due to lack of adequate information. Few citizens are aware of N-SIP. As we mentioned earlier, 70% of the Town Union Presidents in the 180 Communities visited informed us at the FGD sessions that they were not aware of the programme.

v. Related to the above is the over-centralization of the programme. The N-SIP is being centrally run by the Federal Government making the State Governments strangers to the programme. This arrangement creates mutual distrust, inefficiency, low impact, poor communication, lack of grassroots content and corruption. The goal of the programmes will be hurt if the current arrangement is not reformed.

vi. There is little disaggregation of available data in the data bank. The implementation of N-SIP has exposed the weakness of Nigeria in data banking and management. Poor data management has negatively affected N-SIP as the parameters on which the selection of the beneficiaries were predicated upon are rather doubtful.

6. Recommendations and Policy Options

- ❖ Sufficient evidence should be generated by National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) on poverty and vulnerability, and the impact of social protection programmes on Communities in Nigeria. Social protection without appropriate database is synonymous to fetching water with basket. It is extremely essential to create a robust and sustainable database at local government level to enable it identify the needy and vulnerable. This would accentuate proper evaluation and monitoring of N-SIP in Nigeria.
- ❖ Governments and development partners should work together to translate SIP and social protection goals into laws and policies for sustainability.
- ❖ Social investment programme should be clearly outlined in a piece of legislation to enable a coordinated and legalized implementation plan devoid of mistrust and acrimony. This is why the National Assembly leadership speaking through the Speaker, Hon. Lawan asserted that “We also believe that it is time to reform the way and manner we implement the Social Investment Programme. This is a very important programme that is to help Nigerians who are poor and vulnerable. We believe that, having implemented this programme from 2016 to date, it should be reviewed to evaluate the efficacy and efficiency” (Eno-Abasi, S. et al, 2020). The Speaker equally urged Minister to liaise with relevant Committees of the National Assembly to achieve the goal of making the NSIPs accountable, transparent and efficient.
- ❖ Through technical support, the cash transfer programme should be expanded utilizing core diagnostics, registries, monitoring and evaluation systems, and decentralized capacity development. In this direction the programme should be decentralized so that States should take more responsibilities and to make the programme sustainable.

- ❖ Communication between Government and the people should be improved so that citizens will have information in abundance. Significant percentage of potential beneficiaries are not aware of N-SIP.
- ❖ There should be more concerted efforts towards improving data management in Nigeria. Intervention programmes in Nigeria are weakened by dearth of reliable data.

Conclusion

The N-SIP has a weak relationship with the SDGs irrespective of the elegant goals of the programme, especially SDGs 1 2 and 3. In 2016, Nigeria government in a bid to combat the invasion of poverty and hunger across the country established the National Social Investment Programmes (NSIPs), aimed at ensuring a more equitable distribution of resources to vulnerable populations, including children, youth and women. The programme was meant to provide assistance to these vulnerable people across the country through a fair and transparent process, supported by the Ministry of Budget and National Planning (MBNP), other notable MDAs with aligned goals including the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management and Social Development (MHADMSD).

This lofty idea has not yielded the desired result especially in Enugu State. The impact of Conditional Cash Transfer of N-SIP on poverty and well-being of vulnerable populations in Enugu State is evidently poor as it is not felt in the State. Regarding the school feeding programme, the scenario in Enugu State shows lack of seriousness. The State is a clear case of exclusion considering the number of needy pupils in the State that are not captured and therefore not benefiting. On the other hand, N=Power is hardly the panacea for unemployment in Enugu State. The high level of unemployment in Enugu State and, as a matter of fact, other states of the federation is antithetical to sustainable development. The way and manner that the N-SIPs are being implemented is unsatisfactory. The current national social register being used, which the ministry claims is the World Bank standard is not effective as it does not capture significant percentage of the vulnerable population in the states, hence the compelling need for it to be immediately reviewed because the funds have failed to reach those for whom the initiative was created.

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