

**SUBSIDY REINVESTMENT AND EMPOWERMENT
PROGRAMME (SURE-P) AND YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IN
IMO EAST SENATORIAL ZONE, IMO STATE**

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ABSTRACT: Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Programme (SURE-P) was aimed at ensuring youth development through youth empowerment programmes that were aimed at creating jobs and alleviating poverty. However, SURE-P may not have been able to actualize this mandate in the 36 states of the federation. Thus, this study sought to examine the extent to which SURE-P was able to achieve its mandate in Imo East senatorial zone. The study reviewed Literature that were related to SURE-P and adopted Abraham Maslow's theory of hierarchy of needs as its theoretical framework. This theory was used to explain the extent to which SURE-P was able to ensure youth development in Imo east senatorial zone however, data were collected using primary sources of data collection like, Key Persons Interview (KPI), non-participant observation and secondary sources of data collection technique like internet materials. The interviewees were chosen from Nguru, Uwo, Umuneke Umugwuma and Iho in Aboh-Mbaise, Mbaitoli, Ngor Okpala, Owerri West and Ikeduru through a purposive sapling technique. Findings revealed that SURE-P was able to provide employment opportunities for youths but youths were underpaid. It was also found out that the implementation of SURE-P suffered some bias and that the Imo east senatorial zone did not benefit from the Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programme of SURE-P. The study recommends that beneficiaries of subsequent interventionist programmes be paid higher amount of stipends without any form of inconsistency and that skill acquisition and permanent employment opportunities should be considered as critical issues in ensuring youth development in the zone.

Key words: SURE-P, youth development, programmes, beneficiaries, interns

INTRODUCTION

Youth development in the absence of job opportunities and the enabling environment that ensures adequate youth empowerment through skill acquisition and entrepreneurial activities is one of the major challenges facing the nation. It is highly commendable that successive governments have tried addressing this issue by setting up of statutory bodies such as ministries, departments and agencies and through established agencies such as the National Directorate of Employment (NDE), the Directorate of Food and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI), and the National Poverty Alleviation Program (NAPEP).

However, due to the inability of these statutory bodies to effectively tackle the ever increasing problem of youth development in the country, successive administrations in Nigeria have tended

to function with interventionist programmes such as Youth Empowerment and Development Initiative (YEDI), Young Entrepreneurs of Nigeria (YEN), Youth Empowering People (YEP), Youth Enterprise with Innovation in Nigeria (YOUWIN), Youth Initiative for Sustainable Agriculture in Nigeria (YISA), Youth Entrepreneur Support Program (YES-P), Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Programme (SURE-P) and most recently, N-power.

Originally, these interventionist programmes may seem an effort in futility judging from the rate of unemployment and poverty in the country or a waste of limited resources as they tend to duplicate certain functions carried out by some statutory bodies like the National Directorate of Employment (NDE). But all the same, they have served the need of various successive governments that sought to effectively address some developmental issues especially at the grass root level.

In the same vein, in the area of youth development, many youths have over the years benefited from interventionist programmes in the area of skill acquisition, entrepreneurial training and employment generation especially as these interventionist programmes seem to have proven to be effective in the fight against unemployment and its concomitant poverty and, by extension, crime. Nonetheless, as the Nigerian social structure continues to adopt various forms of interventionist programmes, it is very instructive to note that successive administrations have also focused on the removal of fuel subsidy as a means of raising additional revenue for some of these interventionist programmes aimed at improving the living conditions of the masses, especially the youths. For instance, the Sani Abacha's administration introduced the Petroleum Trust Funds (PTF) in which the funds derived from subsidy removal were saved and reinvested into specific and identifiable projects (Ekpu, 2018). Though this basically did not to have recorded much success, there was a further removal of subsidy in 2012 that brought into the fore another interventionist programme known as Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Programme (SURE-P).

SURE-P, like others before it, was targeted at investing the savings from the fuel subsidy removal or reduction on critical areas like infrastructural development and job creation so as to mitigate the spate of youth unemployment in the country. This was done through the various programmes that were incorporated into the Social Safety Net schemes like the Graduate Internship Scheme (GIS), the Technical, Vocational, Education and Training (TVET), the Community Service, Women and Youth Empowerment (CSWYE) which were aimed at youth development and the infrastructural developmental projects of SURE-P like the Niger-Delta Development Project, the road infrastructure projects, the rail transport project, the water and agricultural projects, selected power projects, petroleum NNPC projects and ICT projects that were aimed at ensuring an environment that fosters economic activities like entrepreneurial activities and innovation (The SURE-P annual report, 2012).

This certainly was aimed at encouraging local and foreign investments and investors thereby, creating more job opportunities for the teeming unemployed youth. By extension, crime rate and perhaps some other security challenges will be reduced thereby creating an atmosphere for a sustainable socio-economic development that ensures an improvement in the living condition of the populace, most especially, the youths (Abu, 2015). Nonetheless, due to some impeding

factors that have affected the primary objective and the effective implementation of other youth development programmes in the country, the extent to which SURE-P as a youth development initiative was able to actualize its mandate remains and calls for empirical investigation.

Statement of the Problem

SURE-P as an interventionist programme may have had the mandated to ensure youth development in the 36 states of the federation. However, it may have failed to ensure sustainable youth development in Imo state. Youths who participated in SURE-P's employment programmes like the GIS, CSWYE and MCH may have been employed yet, underemployed and perhaps, unable to liberate themselves from poverty due to the amount they received as their monthly stipend. Worst still, after the short duration of the scheme, beneficiaries may be forced back into the labour market, to co-exist with the teeming unemployed youths searching for non-existing jobs and possibly, become agents of social instability instead of propellers of development.

It is likely that the Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Programme would have given more room for sustainable youth empowerment through entrepreneurship. However, the programme may have failed to encourage skill acquisition training in Imo state. While this part of the scheme may have been neglected, the entire Social Safety Net programme may not have been self-sustaining thereby mitigating against the mandate of SURE-P in the state. Therefore, even as SURE-P sought to actualize its mandate, it may have offered only but a temporary relief to the problem of youth development in Imo state. In view of this, this study tried to investigate the extent to which SURE-P as an interventionist programme was able to develop the youths in Imo East senatorial zone of Imo state through its youth empowerment programmes.

Research Questions

This study tried to answer the following questions.

- To what extent was SURE-P able to ensure sustainable youth development in Imo East senatorial zone through job creation?
- To what extent was SURE-P able to ensure the financial empowerment of youths in Imo East senatorial zone?
- How best can subsequent youth development programmes be implemented to ensure a successful youth development programme?

Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored on the Maslow's hierarchy of needs that was propounded by Abraham Maslow in 1943. According to Maslow, human needs are arranged and ranked from the lowest to the highest level in a hierarchical order and humans strive to attain the highest level which is synonymous to self-actualization. In his postulation, Maslow used the terms "physiological", "safety", "belonging and love", "social needs" or "esteem", and "[self-actualization](#)" to describe

the pattern of human need. He opined that before humans attain self-actualization, other needs must have been met in a hierarchical order (Maslow, 1943).

Based on Maslow's postulation, self-actualization is the ability to attain ones full potentials. In view of this, youth development can only be achieved when youths attain self-actualization. However, despite the fact that SURE-P sought to ensure youth development, its programmes have gone beyond satisfying the physiological needs of youths in Imo east senatorial zone. Outside the fact that youths in the zone were underpaid, job security was also, a major challenge militating against the ability of youths to attain other needs in the hierarchy like safety, belonging and love, social needs or esteem and most importantly, self-actualization.

Hence, though SURE-P was able to satisfy the basic needs of youths especially in the aspect of food and clothing, it is not sufficient to assert that SURE-P actualized its mandate of youth development in Imo east senatorial zone because most youths did not actualize their full potentials and thus, they were not self-actualized. In view of this, this theory was able to explain the extent to which SURE-P was able to develop youths in Imo east senatorial zone. It was also, able to explain the essence of youth development thereby, making it more suitable for this study.

Research Methodology

This study focused on SURE-P as an interventionist programme in the Imo East senatorial zone of Imo state and the extent to which it was able to promote youth development in the zone. Therefore, this study was situated in the different local government areas in the zone where the activities of SURE-P as an interventionist programme took place. These areas which include Nguru, Uwo, Umuneke Umugwuma and Iho in Aboh-Mbaise, Owerri West, Ngor Okpala, Mbaitoli and Ikeduru were purposively chosen because they were the places where the presence of SURE-P was actually felt in the zone.

Data derived were collected using non-participant observation, Key Person Interview (KPI), textbooks, journals and internet materials. Snowball sampling technique was adopted in selecting the key persons that were interviewed in this study. This is to enable the researcher identify the target population with ease. These Key Persons Interviewees comprised of 38 persons basically, 20 beneficiaries; 2 beneficiaries of GIS and 2 beneficiaries of CSWYE from each of the chosen local government areas and 18 non-beneficiaries of SURE-P which included 5 youth leaders, 5 administrative officers, 3 staff of SURE-P and 5 heads of the department of health in the selected local government areas.

While the youth leaders were interviewed in their communities, the administrative officers, staff of SURE-P and the heads of the health department were interviewed in their various offices in the local government. Some the beneficiaries that were available for the interview were beneficiaries of GIS who were beneficiaries of the N-power programme of the present administration and those beneficiaries of CSWYE who still reside in the village. With their help, the researchers were able to get the phone number of the other beneficiaries of the GIS and CSWYE and a phone interview was conducted afterwards.

Literature Review

Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Programme (SURE-P) and Youth Development in Nigeria

The fundamental socio-economic and political issues that led to the establishment of SURE-P was the January 1, 2012 announcement on the removal of fuel subsidy which increased the pump price of the Premium Motor Spirit (PMS) to over 100 percent (Obuzuwa, 2012). According to the federal government of Nigeria, the Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Program (SURE-P) was aimed at:

- Mitigating the immediate impact of the petroleum subsidy discontinuation on the Nigerian population, but particularly for the poor and vulnerable segments. This applies to both direct and indirect effects of subsidy removal.
- Accelerating economic transformation through investments in critical infrastructural projects so as to drive economic growth and achieve the vision 20:20, which is part of the spirit of the administration's transformation agenda.
- Laying the foundation for the successful development of a national safety net programme that is targeted at the poor and the most vulnerable on a continuous basis including public works and employment schemes, maternal and child health, mass transit programme, vocational training, skill acquisition schemes (SURE-P, 2012).

There were two components of SURE-P under which SURE-P scheme was implemented so as to achieve these mandate. They were:

- Social Safety Net Component
- Infrastructural Development

Social Safety Net Component

This component was made up of the following subparts:

a) **The Graduate Internship Scheme:** According to the SURE-P Annual Reports (2013), the Graduate Internship Scheme (GIS) was launched in October 2012 to create job opportunities for 50,000 unemployed graduates to be engaged for a period of one year in reputable firms and institutions to enable them acquire skills and experience and enhance their employability and also, to mitigate the spate of youth unemployment through the reinvestment of the subsidy funds.

The scheme was a form of partnership with firms and institutions in which they get free labour and undertake to groom and mentor the interns to acquire skills on the job experience while government pays a monthly stipend of ₦18, 000 to the interns. This helped to equip graduates towards meeting the demands of employers in the current labour market. Interns were deployed according to the relevance of their discipline to the firms; in firms and institutions in their areas of residence for convenience. While GIS was designed as a short term measure, it has a prospect for job creation (SURE-P Annual Reports, 2013).

As Abu (2015) has noted, about 1000 beneficiaries would come from each of the states with the number of participants raised to 100,000 in the next phase. Out of about 84,772 applications received on inception of the scheme, 59,872 were males while 24,900 were females and 329 physically challenged individuals. About 1,371 firms out of about 1,937 that registered were verified; out of which 1,078 applications were rejected and only 293 approved.

To be eligible, interested firms must be legal entities registered with Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC) with evidence of Value Added Tax (VAT) clearance certificate in addition to the provision of a mentoring plan for each intern. Prospective interns must be graduates aged between 18 and 40 years who must have either completed their mandatory National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) or collected the exception certificate from relevant authorities.

Organizations who were interested in taking interns were expected to set selection criteria for each position while the electronic system would automatically send them pool of qualified candidates from where the organizations would choose their preferred candidate. Interns' field of study and state of residence were matched to firms/organizations on a first come first to be served basis. Selected candidates were notified and invited to report at the organization for documentation. Interns were provided with an orientation training to prepare them for the challenges in the workplace. Interns that demonstrated virtues of industry, exemplary conduct and commitment to diligent service during their internship period stood a chance of being hired on a performance basis (Sure-P., 2012).

b) Community Service, Women and Youth Empowerment Programme (CSWYE): Community Service, Women and Youth Employment (CSWYE) Programme was aimed at tackling the problem of youth unemployment by creating temporary employment for 10,000 youths in each state of the federation and federal capital territory. Of these, at least 30 percent must be women and the jobs were designed to be created in labour intensive community development services. All beneficiaries were deployed to render community-oriented services such as maintenance of community infrastructures including healthcare facilities, drainages, markets, vigilance groups and related activities which include sweeping, mowing of grasses and clearing of drains based on their specific needs, for a monthly stipend of ₦10,000 (Abu, 2015).

c) Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Programme: in a bid to encourage wealth creation and mitigate the scourge of youth unemployment in the country, the federal government through SURE-P developed a Technical, Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programme to be managed by a Project Implementation Unit (PIU) in the Ministry of Labour and Productivity.

The scheme was expected to stimulate the economic growth needed as part of the transformation agenda of the Goodluck Jonathan's administration, while also enhancing opportunities towards the attainment of vision 20:20. The scheme had the mandate to equip young Nigerians with skills in three broad areas; vocational/technical skills, life skills and entrepreneurship. It was targeted at bridging the gaps in some industry such as; ICT/Telecoms, creative industry (e.g. movies, music, fashion etc.). Others were the hospitality and tourism industry, agro business, mass

housing/construction, artisans, marine, oil and gas and mechanical fabrication/woodwork (SURE P Annual Report, 2012).

d) Mass Transit: under the mass transit component of the SURE P, the scheme collaborated with stakeholders in the transport industry by applying parts of its funds to support a revolving loan scheme for road transport operators across the country. The loan scheme managed by an infrastructure bank helped to reduce cost of transportation to citizens, and cushion the effects of the partial fuel subsidy removal. In 2012, SURE-P disbursed N8.9 billion for the mass transit programme; out of which 18 registered transport companies nationwide drew from to purchase 809 buses for the use of Nigerians (Abu, 2015).

e) Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Programme: Ogbebo (2014) asserts that the total number of work force recruited as at July 2013 stood at 6,630. This population was deployed to provide quality antenatal services, skilled birth delivery at birth, and post natal services for previously underserved rural, poor women accessing maternal neonatal and child health services in 1500 SURE-P supported Primary Health Care (PHC) centres spread across the 36 states and FCT. These healthcare workers comprised of 1,304 midwives, 254 Community Health Extension Workers (CHEWS); and 3,072 Female Village Health Workers (VHWs) (Ogbebo, 2014).

Infrastructural Development Projects

This aspect of SURE-P included the:

a) Niger Delta Project (East-West Road): The main road project in the Niger Delta is the 338km East – West Road, spanning from Warri in Delta state through Kaiama (Bayelsa) to Port Harcourt (Rivers) through Eket to Oron in AkwaIbom state (SURE P Annual Report, 2012).

b) Railways: The railways component of the SURE-P entails the rehabilitation and restoration of abandoned railway infrastructure and the construction of new standard gauge railway lines (SURE P Annual Report, 2012).

c) Roads and bridges: The road component focused on the completion of core road projects. Overall, the road projects included in the 2012 SURE-P budget covered a total distance of 1,664km in addition to two new bridges across Rivers Niger and Benue. The selected SURE-P roads and bridges intervention were evenly distributed across the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria (SURE P Annual Report, 2012).

The Social Safety Net component of SURE-P may have focused more on youth empowerment however, infrastructural development seem be a more viable means of ensuring youth development. There is no doubt that job creation is an important aspect of youth development however, programmes like the Social Safety Net cannot be seen as an effective means of development as it cannot absorb the teeming population of unemployed youth. On the other hand, Infrastructural development tends to create a conducive environment for economic activities as it encourages entrepreneurship, innovation and invention. It also helps to create a level playing ground for every individual to attain their full potential even while it attracts foreign

investors which will not only create employment opportunities but also, bringing to the fore the much needed economic growth and development that would help to check the rate of unemployment and its concomitant poverty.

In view of this, infrastructural development has a greater tendency of ensuring development especially youth development that is self-sustaining unlike job creation programmes like the Social Safety Net programme. Therefore, in a view to revamp the country's economy, infrastructural development as well as other factors like stable power supply that affect the country's economy should be given optimum consideration even as the importance of providing job opportunities is not to be overemphasized.

Research Findings

Findings from Key Persons Interview (KPI)

Findings from the Key Persons Interview (KPI) were discussed under two subheads.

- Beneficiaries
- Non-beneficiaries

Findings from Beneficiaries

All the beneficiaries of the Graduate Internship Scheme (GIS) stated that they worked in health centres while all the beneficiaries of the Community Service Women and Youth Empowerment Scheme (CSWYE) stated that they worked on roads and streets. None of the beneficiaries knew the general population of beneficiaries in the state (both as GIS interns and CSWYE workers). 80% of the GIS beneficiaries stated that they were about four to five interns who worked in their place of internship while 20% of the population stated that they were about seven interns in their place of internship. On the other hand, 40% of the CSWYE beneficiaries stated that they worked in a group of four while 60% stated that they worked in a group of three.

20% of the GIS beneficiaries stated that at first, they were posted to work in institutions/organizations that was not within their discipline/specialization and had to source for the place where they did their internship by themselves. All the beneficiaries of the CSWYE however, stated that had no issues with their place of work as they were posted to sweep roads, weed grasses and clean gutters in places that were close to their place of residence.

All the beneficiaries agreed that the interns were indigenes of Imo state but from various local government areas. All the beneficiaries of the GIS also agreed to have been paid a monthly stipend of ₦30, 000 by the federal government during their internship but 20% of these beneficiaries added that the payment of their stipend suffered some irregularities as about 10% of the interns complained about getting their stipend late while another 5% complained about not being paid part the full stipend. They however added that this problem began about three months to the end of their internship programme and they cannot say for sure if those who were not paid their full stipend were eventually paid. On the other hand, all the CSWYE beneficiaries agreed to

have been paid ₦10, 000. They all stated that they were paid their full stipend as at and when due and encountered no challenge getting their stipend. All the beneficiaries were grateful to the government for the employment opportunities as they acknowledged that the stipend paid by the federal government increased their income level since about 70% of the beneficiaries were unemployed before the programme.

They all stated that they were not aware of any skill acquisition programme that took place under SURE-P and that, they were not retained in their place of internship. 20% of beneficiaries under GIS stated that they were beneficiaries of N-power and that was the reason they continued to work in their place of Internship even after the expiration of SURE-P.

Findings from non-beneficiaries

- **Findings from those who were employers under SURE-P.**

All the head of the health department (HODs) of the various local government areas admitted to have acted as employers under the SURE-P Graduate Internship Scheme (GIS) as interns worked under their supervision. They all stated that beneficiaries of the GIS reported to their offices when they were selected to work in the local government health centre but the selection process was unknown to them. 40% of these HODs stated that they didn't know how much the beneficiaries were paid. However, another 40% stated that interns were paid ₦30, 000 while 10% stated that interns were paid ₦40, 000. In one of the health care facility visited, an interviewee who acted as an employer to interns stated that while those who worked as Village Health Workers (VHWs) under SURE-P were paid ₦10, 000, Community Service Women Youth Empowerment (CSWYE) were paid ₦25, 000 and others were paid about ₦40, 000 and ₦45, 000.

60% of those who acted as GIS employers stated that they do not know if the stipend paid to the GIS interns suffered some irregularities, 20% stated that it did not while another 20% stated that the stipend paid to interns suffered some irregularities but only towards the end of the internship programme. They all agreed that the stipend paid to these youths who worked as interns was poor and suggested that the stipend paid to beneficiaries of subsequent programmes be improved. 60% of the interviewees stated that irregularities attached to the payment of stipend be tackled. 80% of the interviewees further suggested that such employments are necessary and should not be temporary especially when most health centers lacked adequate health personnel. In addition, they all stated that there was no skill acquisition center built under SURE-P in their various local government areas and also, they are not aware and do not think there was any skill acquisition training under SURE-P.

- **Findings from youth leaders and administrative officers**

All the youth leaders agreed that youths in their community benefitted from SURE-P through the GIS and CSWYE programme but they didn't fail to mention that the percentage of beneficiaries was nothing compared to the large population of unemployed youths in their community. 80% of them stated that they got to know about the programme when they met some youths working in

their community health centers and sweeping the roads. They all admitted that they also saw some bike with SURE-P emblem with the Imo state security network but couldn't say if that was part of the programme. While they all admitted that beneficiaries were paid, 70% of them didn't know how much beneficiaries received as stipend but 30% stated that beneficiaries received between 30, 000 to 40, 000 as stipend. All the youth leaders also stated that there was no skill acquisition center built under SURE-P and that they were not aware of any youth who acquired skill under SURE-P.

Similarly, all the administrative officers who were interviewed in the various local government areas stated that there was no skill acquisition center that was built under SURE-P. They all stated that youths were employed and paid to work in health centers and to sweep roads. They all stated that they do not know how much beneficiaries were paid under the CSWYE but beneficiaries of GIS were paid 30, 000. In addition, they stated that they do not have information on SURE-P because they local government had nothing to do with SURE-P. They however, admitted that they saw some bikes with SURE-P emblem but while 60% of the administrative officers said the bikes was seen with some youths, 40% stated that they were seen with the Imo state security network. 20% of these administrative staff also added that buses with SURE-P emblems were also seen at the park of the Imo State Transport Company (ITC) at the time of the programme.

- **Findings from SURE-P staff**

Findings from the assumed staff of SURE-P revealed that SURE-P had no staff designed specifically for the programme. However, some staff of NDE were co-opted to work as Ad hoc staff during the implementation of SURE-P. One of the staff interviewed stated that at first some graduates who were youths and perhaps unemployed visited the federal secretariat for information about the GIS scheme but they were referred to the internet and they never returned to give them feedback even when they were advised to return feedback. Thus, he couldn't categorically state the number of beneficiaries in the GIS.

According to him, the staff were representatives of NDE in the 6 geopolitical zones in the federation. In Imo state they were about 11 staff who worked as Ad hoc staff under SURE-P and were charged with the responsibility of the verification and supervision of beneficiaries in the state. These staff also took charge of writing and submitting the state's report on SURE-P to the federal government through the state coordinator. They also carry out clearance exercise for beneficiaries of the CSWYE so as to enable them get their monthly stipend.

Another staff added that even with the massive population of unemployed youth that was so glaring SURE-P could only absorb but a few unemployed youths. He added that they had no business with the youths wanting to apply for GIS under SURE-P as they were assumed to be graduates and had a better understanding of the internet and could take care of their application. However, he and his colleagues were co-opted to handle the CSWYE scheme of the programme which had to do with youths with little or no education.

Both staff however, stated categorically that there was no skill acquisition center built under SURE-P and that the Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) did not take place in Imo state. Though they hoped it would take place later but if it had taken place the government would have empowered beneficiaries financially at the end of their training. According to them, while CSWYE workers were paid ₦10, 000, those who worked as interns under GIS were paid ₦30, 000. They also stated that CSWYE workers were paid ₦10, 000 to work for 20 days; ₦500 per day. However, beneficiaries who failed to carry out their duty were not given full stipend as ₦500 was multiplied by the number of days he/she was absent and the amount deduced from their stipend. Beneficiaries were given a dual SIM ITEL phone to aid communication. They both added that they can't say if the payment of stipend of those who worked under GIS suffered any form of irregularity as that part of the scheme was handled by the Ministry of Finance. However, they stated categorically that all the youths who worked as CSWYE workers were given their full payment as at and when due.

Both staff affirmed that the CSWYE workers were posted to clean gutters, trim grasses, sweep roads and carry out other forms of community service work in areas that are not far from their residence. They also stated that even though all the beneficiaries of CSWYE were indigenes of the state, they were not necessarily from the local government area where they benefited from the scheme.

In addition, one of the staff stated that the programme was able to absorb only 3,500 unemployed youths under the CSWYE scheme which was nothing to compare the massive unemployed rate in the state. He further stated that the programme was divided into two stages. The first stage was a pilot scheme which absorbed 500 unemployed youths in the state while the second stage which absorbed 3000 unemployed youths was the ramp up stage. He also cited the experience he had with a widow in the course of the scheme and stated categorically that the widow amongst other experiences was able to send her son who dropped out of school back to school and also, establish a petty trade with the savings she was able to gather from the stipend as a CSWYE worker under SURE-P.

All the staff stated that GIS and CSWYE were the only programmes that were executed under the social safety net component of SURE-P in Imo State. When asked if bikes were distributed under SURE-P they all denied knowledge of such as they did not handle such programme. However, one of the staff stated that they saw he bike labeled SURE-P with some members of the state security network and added that they also saw some buses parked in the premises of the Imo State Transport Company (ITC). He further explained that they may have been acquired by the state government, with the state government's allocation of SURE-P.

Findings from observations

It was observed that a structure was built under SURE-P in the health department of AbohMbaise local government area. A Maternal and Child Health Facility was also constructed in Eke NguruEzuala in AbohMbaise local government. It was also observed that AbohMbaise benefited from SURE-P, more than the other local government areas in Imo East senatorial zone. Outside the fact that a Maternal and Child Health Facility was constructed in Eke NguruEzuala

and a structure was erected in the health department of the local government area, the local government also had more beneficiaries working in their health care centers than the other local government areas in the zone. While some local government areas had about 3 beneficiaries to 5 beneficiaries, AbohMbaise had 7 beneficiaries or more. Though, these beneficiaries may have originated from other local government areas however, there was no structure or health care facility built under SURE-P in the other local government areas studied.

Discussion of research findings

This study revealed that SURE-P provided the youths in Imo East senatorial zone with employment opportunities however, these youths were underemployed judging from the amount that was paid to them as stipend. Worst still, at the expiration of the programme, none of the beneficiaries were retained instead; they were forced back into the labour market to add to the teeming unemployed population. This is also, in addition to the irregularities that affected the payment of stipend to the beneficiaries of the GIS. However, it is important to note that only reason interns may not have been retained in the health centers where they worked as interns may have been because, the local government felt they could not afford to additional expenditures by employing them as staff and not necessarily because, these interns were unemployable or not needed in the health centers where they worked.

Though the impact of SURE-P in improving the income and employability of youths cannot be overemphasized however, it was also found out that youths were deprived of other aspects of the programme that would have propelled youth development. Despite the diversion of bikes meant for youths to security agencies and the dumping of buses at the premises of the Imo Transport Company, there was no skill acquisition center or skill acquisition training in the state even when money may have been allocated to it. Certainly, this may have hampered the rate of entrepreneurial development in the state and may have also, sustained the overdependence on government for job creation.

But on the other hand, it was also found out that while youths in the zone may have been deprived generally, there was bias in the implementation of SURE-P programmes within the zone. This is judging from the fact that Aboh-Mbaise benefited more from the programme. While other local government areas had about four interns in their health centers Aboh-Mbaise had about seven interns. The local government also had a structure and health facility built under SURE-P. It is possible for Aboh-Mbaise to have been favoured by the federal government but judging from the level of corruption in the society, one cannot help but wonder if the money meant for the structure and health center was diverted by a few individuals at the expense of the masses.

Conclusion

SURE-P, like every other government initiatives before it, was designed to solve a social problem which in its case was youth development. The programme was mandated to create jobs and equip youths with developmental skills through skill acquisition and entrepreneurial training and create employment opportunities for youth and help to reduce the rate poverty in the 36

states of the Federation and the FCT. Its structure may have supported its mandate however, due to some shortfalls; the programme may not have effectively carried out its mandate. Even when it is unnecessary to blame the government for the drawbacks suffered by the programme, it has become necessary to draw a line between good programme formulation and effective implementation of the programme.

There may be no acceptable definition of a youth; however one common feature of youths all over the world is that they remain the active economic population that propels a nation to develop. Thus, the development of any nation to a greater extent depends on the ability of the government to effectively harness this population not by introducing these youth development initiatives but by ensuring the effective implementation of these programmes even at the grass root level so as to ensure, youth do not turn out to be agents of instability.

Recommendations

Based on the finding of this study, the following recommendations were made.

- **Improvement in stipend.**

It was recommended that beneficiaries of subsequent youth interventionist programmes be paid higher income in line with the country's economic condition so as to effectively cater for their economic needs and improve their livelihood. Measures that will ensure regular and full payment of beneficiaries should also be put in place. This could be through the establishment of a monitoring or supervisory unit that will ensure that money meant for youth interventionist programmes are not diverted or misappropriated.

- **The prioritization of entrepreneurial training and skill acquisition.**

Skill acquisition and entrepreneurial training should be prioritized as a key strategy in ensuring adequate youth development in the implementation of subsequent youth development programmes so as to reduce the rate of job seekers and increase the rate of job creators.

- **Creation of permanent employment opportunities.**

Government should strive to create an environment that fosters job creation. Youths should as well be empowered with permanent employment especially in certain parts of the country/sectors that lack adequate personnel. This will improve productivity and service delivery in most of the sectors in the economy and also, improve the socio-economic status of most youths who will benefit from the programme. Employment should be based on merit and on one's specialization or discipline as this will efficiency in the various sectors of the country. Every youth should be given the opportunity to participate and benefit irrespective of their discipline or social status; without discrimination or favour.

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