

National Directorate of Employment (NDE) and Socioeconomic Development in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The paper discussed the impact of the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) on social and economic development in Akwa Ibom State. The study took a cross-sectional research design where both primary and secondary data were used. Questionnaires were distributed to NDE programmes beneficiaries in the three senatorial districts in Akwa Ibom State. Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to test the hypotheses developed. Based on observations, the paper indicated that Vocational Skill Development (VSD), Small Scale Enterprises (SSEs), Rural Employment Promotion (REP), Special Public Works (SPW) and Graduate Coaching Scheme (GCS) are the main aspects of National Directorate of Employment (NDE). These interventions opened income-generating opportunities, enhanced employability for the youths and women, promoted self-reliance and facilitated inclusive development, thus bringing positive changes in poverty in Akwa Ibom State. The research recommended more funding by the government and transparency in programme execution, periodic monitoring and evaluation to enhance accountability, enhanced collaboration with the players in the private sector towards sustainability and availability of micro credit programme to help the trained beneficiaries start businesses. Enhancing such measures would make the NDE an effective approach of socioeconomic development in Nigeria.

1 Introduction

Nigeria is a natural resource-rich nation. Still, the country has difficulties in making the resources the foundation for significant development. Underdevelopment is severe, as the government and the people have failed to properly exploit these resources. It especially impacts the youths who make up the largest proportion of the population, and their abilities are not maximally utilised as they have minimal access to employment and skill development programmes (Ekpe, 2017). They have a problem in converting these resources into significant development. The failure of the government and the people to utilise these resources has led to a high rate of underdevelopment. Among the most affected are the human capital of the country, especially the youth, whose talents and energy have not been fully exploited because of a lack of employment and access to skill development programmes (Ekpe, 2017). Udoms & Atakpa (2021) have fingered governance deficit at the heart of development challenges in Nigeria. In a similar vein, issues such as insecurity and election irregularities have been blamed for the lack of socio-economic development in Nigeria.

The high unemployment situation among Nigerians who are willing to work but for whom no jobs have been created is not just a story told by numbers. It represents the large number of people living in both the urban and the rural areas whose means of livelihood have been endangered. The unemployment situation not only devastates individuals' lives but also has economic side effects since it may lead to a situation where most youths will be engaged in illegal or non-formal work due to the lack of legitimate options for survival. Unemployment in Nigeria was relatively low in the sixties and seventies, at 2.0 per cent and 4.5 per cent respectively. However, by the mid-1980s, these figures escalated rapidly - 8.5 per cent in 1985, 10.0 per cent in 1986, and 12.2 per cent in 1987. Such a backdrop points to the gravity of the issue of the mounting unemployment crisis in Nigeria.

As a result of severe unemployment, the government launched the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) in November 1986. The Directorate had as its main mission the fight against mass unemployment, which was the most significant challenge. The Agency, apart from other functions, was charged with the creation of the labour-intensive work schemes, the drafting of employment policies, the provision of a national database of job vacancies with the help of other agencies, and the issuing of local and foreign employment-related instructions (Adebisi & Oni, 2012). Over the years, NDE has initiated some key programmes that aimed at equipping Nigerians with skills and promoting the culture of self-dependence among them. The Vocational Skills Development (VSD) programme, which focused on technical and trade training, was one of the initiatives. The Small-Scale Enterprises (SSE) programme, which promoted entrepreneurship, the Rural Employment Promotion (REP) programme, which concentrated on agricultural and rural lifestyle, and the Special Public Works (SPW) programme, which temporarily employed people as a result of the public infrastructure projects, were among such programmes (NDE, 2019).

The Akwa Ibom State government, through the local office in Uyo, the capital of the state, set up a coordinating unit to monitor and execute the employment programmes at the state level. The programmes were implemented in all local government areas. Unemployed youth, new graduates, school leavers, retirees, and other job seekers were the target groups to be involved in the initiatives (Toluwalase & Omonijo, 2013). The VSD programme was oriented towards equipping young people with practical skills like tailoring, carpentry, welding, auto mechanics, and ICT. Meanwhile, the SSE programme also fostered entrepreneurship, and along with the business management training they were providing, a micro-credit facility was made available. The programme was relevant particularly in the remote areas, as the rural communities were trained in agriculturally based fisheries, piggery, poultry, and cassava processing.

At the beginning of the year 2000, the NDE had varied initiatives that had reached a wider part of the state among which were the Graduate Coaching Scheme (GCS), School-On-Wheels, and Start-Your-Own-Business (SYOB). Programmes like these increase the employability and entrepreneurial capabilities of school leavers as well as graduates. Even with the issues of low funding and logistical constraints, the NDE's interventions in Akwa Ibom have led to socio-economic development since several youths, artisans, and rural dwellers have been empowered through its programmes, thus they are living better lives and even have good incomes (Adebayo, 2013). Akwa Ibom makes a strong case for the evaluation of the effectiveness of employment interventions in a resource-rich but economically vulnerable state when one discovers that, despite the numerous programmes initiated by the NDE for skills development, micro-enterprise facilitation, and rural community empowerment, the impact of these activities on poverty alleviation and sustainable development is still scantily reported. This study aims to conduct an

assessment of the role of the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) in socio-economic development in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria.

2 Statement of Problem

Unemployment and poverty are among the major socio-economic issues of Nigeria, despite the fact that numerous government-driven initiatives and policies have been put in place over the years to address these problems. The idea behind the establishment of the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) in 1986 was to provide a strategic response to the issues, and the mandate was to create jobs, promote entrepreneurship, and enhance skills acquisition in the country. However, recent statistics and personal experience indicate that the problems not only persist but have actually deepened in some areas. As a matter of fact, the National Bureau of Statistics (2020) stated that unemployment and poverty rates had risen, particularly among the youth and other vulnerable groups. This situation puts forward very important questions about the effectiveness, extent, and sustainability of the NDE programmes in achieving their core objectives of economic empowerment and inclusive development.

The paradox of the Akwa Ibom State case is that it is a particularly challenging one because although the state is rich in natural and human resources, such as crude oil, fertile land, and a large number of young people, it is struggling to get out of the high unemployment index, underemployment, and poverty (Udoh, 2018). The absence of any link between resource availability and socio-economic outcomes exemplifies the need for further investigation of the implementation of the NDE programmes in Akwa Ibom State and whether they are adequately tailored to local realities. Though the NDE has initiated various programmes, including VSD, SSE, and REP in Akwa Ibom, there has been no proper investigation into the effectiveness of these programmes. There are often structural barriers, such as a lack of access to funds, absence of institutional support, lack of proper monitoring systems, and political interference that put these initiatives in danger, and, because of this, most beneficiaries are unable to convert training and support into viable livelihoods. This paper is, therefore, aimed at analysing the extent to which the NDE interventions contributed to socio-economic development in Akwa Ibom State.

3 Objectives of the Study

The goal of this research is to investigate how the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) has contributed to the socio-economic development of Akwa Ibom State. The specific objectives of the research are:

- i. to illustrate the relationship between VSD programme and job creation in Akwa Ibom state.
- ii. to examine the relationship between small-scale enterprise (SSE) and income generation in Akwa Ibom State.
- iii. Determine the correlation between Rural Employment Promotion (REP) and the growth of agriculture in Akwa Ibom State.

4 Research Questions

- i. What is the relationship between Vocational Skill Development Programme (VSD) and job creation in Akwa Ibom State?
- ii. What is the relationship between Small Scale Enterprises (SSE) and income generation in Akwa Ibom State?
- iii. What is the relationship between REP' and agricultural development in Akwa Ibom State?

5 Research Hypotheses

- H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between Vocational Skills Development Programme and job creation in Akwa Ibom State
- H₀₂: Small-scale enterprise is not significantly related to income generation in Akwa Ibom state.
- H₀₃: There is no significant relationship between Rural Employment Promotion and Agricultural development in Akwa Ibom state.

6. Review of Related Literature

The concept of the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) in Nigeria

The creation of the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) was a move that was necessitated by the economic recession in Nigeria, the high rate of unemployment that followed and the resultant deprivation of people's jobs in the early 1980s. NDE commenced operation in January 1987 (Emeh, 2012). Adebayo (2013) stated that the idea leading to the formation of the committee was taken from the report of the Chukwuma Committee, which was set up to provide solutions to the problem of unemployment. The main function of the NDE was to implement programmes that create jobs, thus Nigerian youths who do not have jobs would get proper vocational training, education and skills, self-employment would be encouraged, and eventually the youths would become economically independent (National Directorate of Employment [NDE], 2019). These plans were to increase job opportunities in rural areas, temporary jobs within the underserved population, train labourers, and initiate capital and business growth (Ekpe, 2017). The NDE was also to enable socioeconomic growth and sustainable national development by cutting down unemployment and empowering the people economically. The conceptual definition of the NDE is the shift of an economy that is traditional and relies on white-collar positions to emphasise skills development, self-employment and growth of small businesses. It placed priority on the development of human capital as part of its approach to dealing with unemployment and poverty, a policy that is in line with the global best practices of creating employment opportunities and alleviating poverty (Oni, 2014).

Concept of Socio-economic Development

The increase in living standards and the general well-being of the citizens as a result of growth of the economy, the even distribution of resources in the country, the elimination of poverty, and the enhancement of social facilities such as education, health, infrastructure, and employment, among other social factors, is socio-economic development. It does not just limit itself to economic growth, but rather it includes policies and activities that consider a reduction in inequality and enhance inclusion. The entire process of development is multi-dimensional and, as argued by Todaro & Smith (2015), consists of significant social structural, attitudinal, and institutional transformations, the acceleration of economic growth and reduction in inequality. The socio-economic development is generally gauged with reference to such indicators as the GDP growth, the literacy rates, access to health services, life expectancy, and the poverty levels.

The trend in the socio-economic development of Nigeria was linked with a mixed performance. The country had its fair share of economic boom ever since it became an independent nation in 1960, and most conspicuously, during the oil boom era of the 1970s, which registered a massive increase in government revenues and government investments. These revenues had, however, been hampered by bad governance, corruption and mismanagement, thus crippling the potential benefits they could bring. As suggested by Ake (1996), the crisis of development in Africa and Nigeria in particular is that not only did the deficits of resources culminate in the crisis,

but also a structural weakness of institutions and governance. This had developed a long-term challenge of unemployment, poor infrastructure, and regional imbalances, particularly in the oil-rich Niger Delta and other parts of the country. It has been pegged on different national development plans and poverty reduction strategies, whereby the endeavours of developing Nigeria socio-economically have been established. Indicatively, in the mid-1980s, the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) came to reorganise the economy, which made matters worse by increasing poverty.

Vocational Skills Development (VSD) programmes and Job creation

The Vocational Skills Development (VSD) programme of the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) has significantly contributed to the unemployment and poverty problems in Akwa Ibom State. It was expected that the VSD would provide practical training to the unemployed youths and that the beneficiaries would have skills in tailoring, catering, welding, carpentry, ICT and electrical installation. These are the skills that were driven by market demand and made the participants more employable, as well as relevant to the needs of the formal and informal sectors. Emeh (2012) says that the vocational training through the NDE equipped the recipients with practical skills that make them less dependent on the limited white-collar jobs, thus creating a pool of skilled people who could either get jobs or start up businesses.

VSD has provided the youths with the ability to be job creators and not job seekers through skills acquisition centres and through apprenticeship training. Okoye & Okwuosa (2016) commented that most of the beneficiaries of the vocational programmes offered by NDE frequently graduate into small-scale entrepreneurs who create businesses that employ other individuals in their respective communities. This is well illustrated where a tailoring scholar starts a fashion company that hires other employees in the process; thus, the cumulative impact will contribute to job creation and the socio-economic growth at the grassroots level. Besides this, the fact that the programme was focused on practical training and business support services resulted in a multiplier effect on the Akwa Ibom State economy. Many of the recipients of the VSD programme had utilised starter packs as well as business counselling and financial literacy workshops offered by NDE, which helped them to maintain their businesses. This resulted in the establishment of micro and small-scale enterprises in different local government areas, which have enhanced employment opportunities among the skilled and semi-skilled labour. This is as observed by Adebayo (2013), that vocational skills programmes not only created direct jobs for the trainees but also indirect jobs along the value chain and therefore had an inclusive economic growth.

Small-Scale Enterprises (SSEs) on the generation of income

Small-scale businesses also emerged as a very considerable source of income due to high unemployment and poverty rates in Akwa Ibom State. The National Directorate of Employment (NDE) helped individuals by allowing them to participate in its Small Scale Enterprises (SSE) programme to start businesses that were viable by training them in entrepreneurship, management and financial literacy. Emeh (2012) asserts that SSEs not only provide the unemployed youths with an alternative source of livelihood but also bring about growth of incomes through the creation of self-employment. A high number of people who have benefited from NDE entrepreneurship development training in Akwa Ibom have established successful small businesses in trade, services and production sectors and increased their household incomes.

Their capacity to generate self-dependence and wealth is currently underscoring the role of SSEs as far as income generation is concerned. It has offered the beneficiaries accessibility to

loans, business advisory services, and start-up capital. NDE has also ensured that they convert the acquired skills into ventures that are viable in terms of making profits. Okoye & Okwuosa (2016) state that it is predominantly small businesses that have turned out to be stepping stones that enable families to get out of poverty as they are establishing more sources of income and less dependence on the irregular employment of wages. Small business ventures in Akwa Ibom State, including poultry farming, tailoring, catering and ICT services, have played a significant role in increasing the income level of the beneficiaries to improve the living standards both in rural and urban centres.

Rural Employment Promotion (REP) and Agricultural Development

The Rural Employment Promotion programme was developed by the National Directorate of Employment to generate employment opportunities for rural populations by promoting several agricultural and other agro-related businesses. Particularly, in Akwa Ibom State, where agriculture continues as the centre-point of most communities in the region, the REP helped in the advancement of the agricultural sector. Training on modern farming methods, animal husbandry and agro-processing is provided to the farmers and the youth who are unemployed. Bassey & Okon (2012) state that the primary goals of REP are not only to decrease rural unemployment but also to enhance the output of farming, which is one of the primary ingredients of rural economic growth. Therefore, NDE enhances the acquisition of agricultural skills among the rural youth as a way of developing sustainable livelihood and enhancing food security within the state.

One of the attributes of the relationship between REP and agricultural development in Akwa Ibom State was the promotion of entrepreneurial agriculture. Training, farm inputs, as well as starter packs under the programme, enabled REP beneficiaries to open small-scale agricultural enterprises that dealt with fish farming, poultry and crop farming, among others. This also conformed to the claim by Okoye & Okwuosa (2016) that REP gives the rural inhabitants a period to convert subsistence farming to more lucrative and commercial pursuits. This has enabled the majority of the farmers in Akwa Ibom to increase their level of output and income, aiding the general development of agriculture in the state. Value addition and agro-processing were also part of the programme that led to the development of agriculture. Training on REP in such fields as food preservation, agronomy-allied processing and marketing equips the participants with the ability to minimise post-harvest losses, as well as make the most of farm output in order to make higher profits. As Adebayo (2013) asserts, this has resulted in some multiplier effects, taking into consideration the fact that rural farmers have the opportunity to earn more money and, at the same time, provide other individuals with employment opportunities across the entire agricultural value chain. In Akwa Ibom, the small-scale agro-processing ventures that were created by REP had increased the rural industrialisation and thus increased the role of agriculture in the local economic development.

7. Theoretical framework

Human Capital Theory

The human capital theory by Schultz (1961) and Becker (1964) pointed out that investment in people in terms of education, acquisition of skills and training makes such people more employable and productive, which leads to economic growth enhancement and alleviation of poverty. The theory comes in handy to give a solid ground that is required to comprehend the interventions of the National Directorate of Employment, or NDE, in Nigeria. Since its inception in 1986, the NDE has concentrated on equipping unemployed youths, women and rural residents with vocational knowledge, entrepreneurial knowledge, as well as financial literacy, which are key areas of human

capital development. In a way, the NDE was the only institution that gave the people marketable skills, which meant that they would be in a position to generate jobs for themselves and other people, hence less reliance on government jobs, and alleviating poverty.

The power of the NDE on the socio-economic development of the country can be placed in the context of modernisation theory and human capital theory. To start with, structural transformation, industrialisation, and institutional reforms were the epitomes of modernisation theory since these factors spurred development and poverty alleviation (Rostow, 1960). Within this theoretical setting, the NDE had its own place since it aimed to modernise the Nigerian workforce by providing the unemployed youths with entrepreneurial, vocational, and technical skills needed to integrate into the modern economy. The NDE provided a bridge between the past system of subsistence livelihoods and modernity and skill-based economy, resulting in socio-economic development and decreased reliance on government jobs. The conception of investing in individuals by way of education, training, and learning working skills is, however, underpinned by human capital theory as a sure way of attaining socio-economic development (Becker, 1993; Schultz, 1961). In this regard, NDE has been correspondingly offering programmes in skills acquisition, agricultural training schemes, and entrepreneurship that have been able to increase the level of employability and productivity of the beneficiaries. This implies that the more human capital one has, the less unemployment is known as NDE, and the self-reliance and income of an individual are raised to mitigate poverty at the household and community levels. NDE is a viable intervention under human capital theory to solve the problems of poverty and unemployment in Nigeria because the investment in the skills and education offered high economic and social returns (Psacharopoulos and Patrinos, 2018).

8. Empirical Review

The research by Akpan et al. (2024) aimed at determining the sufficiency and spatial distribution of rural transport infrastructure, which is supposed to be provided by the public works. It used the field survey and map analysis design. A stratified sample of 93 rural communities -10 per cent of 930 grid cells-was carried out spatially. The analysis was directed by descriptive and inferential statistics, involving comparisons of paved road length and basic facilities in communities. The results produced acute shortages in infrastructural provision; more than half of the communities surveyed had no paved road whatsoever, and existing public works could not inject rural socio-economic development. The study recommended that the rural public works be scaled in terms of community level road surfacing, basic terminals, drainage and maintenance regimes.

Offor & Uwah (2024) investigated government budgeted expenditure and rural development in some of the Local Government Areas of Akwa Ibom State. The rationale behind this research was an attempt to single out the effects of public capital expenditure, which is basically achieved by extraordinary works and capital projects as far as the rural development outcomes are concerned. The research design was the panel research design (longitudinal). A 9 LGA balanced watch of observations between 2016 and 2022 (63 LGA-year observations) was observed. Data analysis was done using descriptive statistics and panel regression. It was discovered that capital expenditure is a strong predictor of rural development indicators, which underscores the role of publicly financed works and infrastructure on rural development. The study recommended a sustained rise in capital expenditures focused on rural roads and other basic infrastructure, as well as enhanced checking and transparency measures of the provision of these projects.

The study of Ijeoma (2023) evaluated NDE performance in relation to employment status in the years 2012- 2021 in Nigeria. The aim was to determine whether NDE programmes enhanced or did not enhance the employment status of beneficiaries across the nation in general. The evaluation design utilized the descriptive statistics and hypothesis testing with a sample of 291 using a multistage sampling of 1,200 using a sample of 291 divided into six geopolitical zones. The findings showed that NDE guaranteed employment, although disparities were massive across zones. It implied area-customised programme blends and robust M&E.

In 2023, Ijeoma conducted a study on the Relationship between NDE Job Creation Initiatives and Socio-economic development in Kaduna State. This research was conducted to determine the level of standard of living that NDE job creation programmes brought to beneficiaries. The author took an interdisciplinary research strategy by conducting a survey of 220 individuals and conducting a focus group discussion with 30 respondents. Based on the results, it was noted that such job creation programmes not only lower levels of poverty among the participants but also demonstrate this through better lifestyles. The research suggested long-term investment in job creation initiatives, and greater working together with the private partners.

Obi & Njoku (2022) discussed the role of the Graduate Internship Scheme on the entrepreneurial capacity of Nigerian graduates. The paper reviewed how the internship experiences helped in acquiring skills and preparedness to be employed. The researchers used a cross-sectional survey method. The sampled participants were 600 in various industries. In the analysis, statistical procedures such as ANOVA and multiple regression analysis were employed by the authors. Based on the findings, it was determined that internship experiences had a great and positive influence on the entrepreneurial skills that were developed among the graduates, particularly in areas of networking and business development. Nevertheless, not all small enterprises have sufficient capital and the collaboration of the host organisations. Thus, one of the recommendations was enhancing the interaction between learning institutions and industries to make better internship placements.

9. Methodology

The study adopts a survey research design, which allows the collection of data from the population in a highly cost-effective way. The target study was the category of the populace who were beneficiaries of the National Directorate of Employment, NDE, in three senatorial districts in Akwa Ibom State. The population consists of 3654 beneficiaries of NDE in Akwa Ibom State. Taro Yamani's formula was used to derive the sample size, which was 360. There are both primary and secondary sources in the data. With an alpha level of significance of 0.05, the gathered data were analysed utilising the coefficient of determination and the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient to evaluate the hypotheses and provide the research question.

10. Results and Discussion of Findings

Among the 360 questionnaires that were disseminated, 312 copies were returned in a functional state after being duly completed.

Hypothesis 1

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between Job creation in Akwa Ibom State and the Vocational Skills development programme.

Table 1: PPMC Result of Hypothesis One

Correlated Variables	VSD.	Job creation.
VSD	Pearson Correlation 1	.875**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	312
Job creation	Pearson Correlation .875	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	312

Source: SPSS Computed Result (2025).

The data in Table 1 indicates a very strong relationship between vocational skills development and job creation in Akwa Ibom State. Evidence of these can be seen in the value of the Pearson correlation coefficient, which is statistically significant at a 95% confidence interval. Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, we can conclude that there is a significant relationship between VSD and job creation. These results are in line with those of Okoye & Okwuosa (2016), who asserted that the majority of the beneficiaries of the NDE vocational programmes also tend to become small-scale business owners who start businesses to provide jobs to others within their communities.

Hypothesis 2

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between small-scale enterprises and income generation within the Akwa Ibom state.

Table 2: PPMC Result of Hypothesis Two

CORRELATED VARIABLES	SSE.	Income Gen.
Small Scale Enterprises	Pearson Correlation 1	.828**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	312
Income Generation	Pearson Correlation .828	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	312

Source: SPSS Computed Result (2025).

The findings presented in Table 2 showed a positive correlation between small-scale enterprises (SSEs) and income generation in Akwa Ibom State. It implies that small-scale businesses have a good and meaningful correlation with income generation. SSEs not only provide alternative sources of livelihood to the unemployed youths but also fuel the growth of income by enabling them to be self-employed. The significant positive correlation between small-scale enterprises and income generation is supported by the correlation coefficient ($r = 0.685$ and p -value (Sig. = 000) falling below the predetermined significant level of 0.05 alpha. These results are similar to those of Emeh (2012), who stated that SSEs not only provide alternative sources of livelihood to the unemployed youths but also fuel the growth of income by enabling them to get self-employment.

Hypothesis 3

H₀₃: The promotion of rural employment does not significantly relate with Agricultural development in the Akwa Ibom state.

Table 3: PPMC Result of Hypothesis Three

Correlated Variables	REP.	Agric Dev.
REP	Pearson Correlation	.724**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	312
Agricultural Dev	Pearson Correlation	.724
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	N	312

Source: SPSS Computed Result (2025).

Table 3 indicates that the correlation coefficient (r) and the probability value are 0.724 and 0.000, respectively. Therefore, as the correlation coefficient (0.724) is greater than the probability value (0.000), we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis. It implies that there is a positive and significant relationship between REP and the agricultural development in Akwa Ibom State. The results are congruent with the work of Bassey & Okon (2012), who assumed that REP was not only focused on lowering the levels of rural unemployment, but also on increasing the level of productivity of farming, which represents a highly significant factor of rural economic development.

11. Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

Indeed, the NDE contributed significantly but unevenly to solving unemployment and socio-economic development challenges in Akwa Ibom State. The Directorate had, upon the implementation of programmes like Vocational Skills Development, Small Scale Enterprises and Rural Employment Promotion, provided opportunities for a considerable number of indigenes to acquire skills, create enterprises, and get employment. The interventions, therefore, created avenues for generating income, increased employability among youths and women, and promoted self-reliance in a state with high unemployment and poverty levels. The findings confirm that NDE is a vital instrument in Nigeria's broader poverty reduction framework. Therefore, the study concludes that though the strategies of NDE are directionally sound and impactful, they have to be scaled up and remodelled to produce long-term poverty reduction.

Recommendations

1. The state government should increase and institutionalise vocational training centres in all the local government areas and provide modern equipment along with qualified trainers.
2. The state government should provide structured financial support in the form of low-interest loans, grants, and tax incentives that are specifically fit for small-scale entrepreneurs.
3. This calls for government investments in mechanised farming tools, irrigation facilities, and storage infrastructure, which would enhance rural employment and agricultural productivity. It needs to create agricultural clusters and value-chain programmes that connect the rural

farmers with agro-processing industries, promoting better income and reducing post-harvest losses.

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