



## STATE INTERVENTIONISM POLICY AND POVERTY REDUCTION IN NORTH-CENTRAL NIGERIA.

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**Abstract:** This study investigates the impact of state interventionism through the N-Power program in North-Central Nigeria from 2016 to 2023, addressing poverty and human development challenges in a region marked by high poverty rates (38.9% nationally, World Bank, 2024). In North-Central Nigeria, programs like N-Power aim to enhance education, healthcare, and economic opportunities, yet their efficacy is questioned amid ethnic conflicts and federalism complexities (Adebayo, 2022). The problem lies in under-explored legal frameworks, unclear impacts on human development indices, and socio-political barriers like patronage, necessitating a region-specific analysis (Akinola, 2019; World Bank, 2024). The objectives are to examine the legal and institutional frameworks. The study is grounded in Neoclassical Theory, emphasizing efficient resource allocation and Policy Feedback Theory, highlighting governance feedback loops. A mixed-methods approach was employed. Findings reveal that the strength of the legal and institutional framework significantly predicts the effectiveness and sustainability of the N-Power programme across North-Central Nigeria ( $\beta = 0.621$ ,  $p < .01$ ). The regression model explains approximately 58.4% of the variance in programme success indicators, indicating a strong association between institutional stability and implementation efficiency. Quantitative results show moderate institutional effectiveness ( $M = 2.9$ ), with consistent reports of bureaucratic delays and fiscal unpredictability weakening overall performance. The study concludes that while N-Power demonstrates institutional reach and potential for social transformation, its sustainability is constrained by weak legal anchoring, poor intergovernmental coordination, and irregular budgetary releases. It recommends establishing a clear legal framework, enhancing fiscal transparency, and strengthening institutional coordination to ensure programme continuity and accountability.

**Keywords:** State Intervention, Poverty, Public Policy, Socio-economic

## 1. Introduction

Globally, poverty remains a persistent challenge, though its distribution and intensity vary. In the 1990s, over 1.9 billion people, 36% of the global population, lived below the \$1.90-a-day poverty line, with significant concentrations in East and South Asia (Kharas & Dooley, 2022). While countries like China and India have made remarkable strides in reducing poverty through robust economic policies, sub-Saharan Africa, including Nigeria, continues to lag. The region's poverty rates have risen, driven by rapid population growth, conflict, and economic stagnation, with projections suggesting that by 2030, nine of the top ten countries with the highest poverty rates will be in sub-Saharan Africa (Desai, Kharas, & Özdoğan, 2020). Nigeria's successive governments have introduced various poverty alleviation strategies, from Operation Feed the Nation to the National Directorate of Employment, yet the enduring prevalence of poverty, particularly in regions like North-Central Nigeria, highlights the need for a critical reassessment of state interventionism's efficacy

Across the African continent, state interventionism has been utilized as both a necessity and a point of contention. International organizations, such as the United Nations, have cautioned African governments against expansive welfare programmes, citing their potential to strain fiscal resources and divert funds from critical infrastructure (United Nations, 2015). Despite these warnings, many African nations, grappling with high poverty rates and weak market systems, view state-led initiatives as indispensable for addressing systemic inequalities (Mkandawire, 2010). The tension between immediate social needs and sustainable economic development underscores the challenge of implementing effective interventionist policies in resource-constrained environments, a dynamic particularly evident in sub-Saharan Africa, where poverty remains a formidable barrier to progress.

In Nigeria, state interventionism has been a cornerstone of efforts to combat poverty and foster human development, particularly through social investment programmes like the National Social Safety Net Programme (NASSP) and Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) initiatives (Akinola, 2019). These programmes aim to provide a safety net for vulnerable populations, redistributing resources to enhance access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities. However, their implementation has sparked heated debate, with critics pointing to issues of fiscal sustainability, capital deficits, and allegations of corruption. Some describe these initiatives as political tools for patronage, channelling resources to party loyalists rather than addressing the needs of the broader population (Ojo, 2021). This critique raises critical questions about whether Nigeria's social investment programmes have delivered on their promise of poverty alleviation and socio-economic upliftment.

North-Central Nigeria, comprising states such as Benue, Kogi, Kwara, Nasarawa, Niger, Plateau, and the Federal Capital Territory, serves as a critical case study for this analysis. The region's socio-economic landscape, marked by agricultural dependence and recurrent challenges such as communal conflicts and infrastructural deficits, amplifies the urgency of effective state intervention (Adebayo, 2022). Despite significant budgetary allocations to social programmes, poverty rates in Nigeria remain alarmingly high, with an estimated 38.9% of the population, approximately 87 million people, living below the poverty line in 2023, making Nigeria the

second-largest population of poor people globally after India (World Bank, 2024). The persistence of poverty, particularly in North-Central Nigeria, underscores the need to evaluate the design, implementation, and outcomes of state-led initiatives.

This study focuses on the period from 2016 to 2023, a timeframe marked by Nigeria's economic downturn, exacerbated by declining oil production, costly fuel subsidies, and global shocks like the COVID-19 pandemic. These factors have deepened poverty, particularly in North-Central Nigeria, where systemic vulnerabilities underscore the importance of well-executed social investment programmes. By examining the implementation and impact of these initiatives, this thesis seeks to contribute to the discourse on state interventionism, offering insights into how Nigeria can optimize its social policies to achieve sustainable development and equitable growth in one of its most critical regions.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Concepts of State Interventionism

State interventionism, as a cornerstone of social and economic policy, refers to the deliberate actions taken by governments to influence or regulate economic and social outcomes within a society. These interventions are typically designed to address market failures, reduce inequality, promote public welfare, and achieve broader developmental objectives. In the context of North-Central Nigeria, state interventionism manifests through social investment programmes aimed at alleviating poverty and enhancing human development. This section provides a comprehensive review of the concept of state interventionism, exploring its theoretical foundations, historical evolution, global applications, and specific relevance to Nigeria's socio-economic landscape between 2016 and 2023. The discussion encompasses its definitions, rationales, forms, critiques, and implications, particularly in addressing poverty and inequality in resource-constrained settings.

State interventionism is defined as the active involvement of government in economic and social spheres through policies, programmes, or regulations to achieve specific outcomes, such as economic stability, social equity, or public welfare (Barrientos, 2013). It contrasts with *laissez-faire* approaches, which advocate minimal government involvement, emphasizing market-driven solutions. The theoretical underpinnings of state interventionism draw from multiple schools of thought, notably Keynesian economics, welfare state theory, and developmental state models. John Maynard Keynes (1936) argued that government intervention is essential to correct market failures, stabilize economies, and stimulate demand during downturns. His ideas provided a foundation for policies like public spending and social safety nets, which are central to modern interventionist strategies.

#### 2.1.1 Forms of State Interventionism

State interventionism manifests in various forms, each tailored to specific economic and social objectives. These forms include:

**Subsidies and Grants:** Governments provide financial support to critical sectors or populations to stabilize markets or alleviate poverty. In the United States, agricultural subsidies ensure food security and farmer livelihoods (Orden & Zulauf, 2015). In Nigeria, fuel subsidies and cash

transfers under CCT programmes aim to support low-income households, though their sustainability is debated (World Bank, 2024).

**Social Safety Nets:** These programmes provide direct assistance, such as cash transfers, food aid, or unemployment benefits, to vulnerable groups. In North-Central Nigeria, NASSP delivers cash transfers to poor households, aiming to improve access to education and healthcare (Akinola, 2019).

**Public Goods Provision:** States invest in infrastructure, education, and healthcare to enhance human development. In Nigeria, initiatives like school feeding programmes under NASSP seek to boost school attendance and nutrition in regions like North-Central Nigeria (NBS, 2020).

**Regulatory Interventions:** Governments enact policies to correct market failures, such as labor laws or environmental regulations. In Nigeria, policies supporting agricultural credit schemes aim to enhance productivity in regions like Benue and Nasarawa (Hussaini, 2014).

**Job Creation Programmes :** Initiatives like Nigeria's NDE target unemployment by providing vocational training and employment opportunities, particularly in economically challenged areas like North-Central Nigeria (Hussaini, 2014).

Each form of intervention is designed to address specific socio-economic challenges, but their success depends on effective implementation, transparent governance, and alignment with local needs.

### 2.1.2 Social Problems and Social Policy

Social problems and social policy are intricately linked concepts that shape the discourse on state interventionism, particularly in addressing systemic challenges like poverty, inequality, and social exclusion. Social problems represent societal conditions that negatively impact individuals or groups, undermining their well-being and hindering equitable development. Social policy, in turn, encompasses the strategies, programmes, and regulations enacted by governments to mitigate these issues and promote public welfare. In the context of North-Central Nigeria, social problems such as pervasive poverty, unemployment, and limited access to education and healthcare have prompted the implementation of social investment programmes like the National Social Safety Net Programme (NASSP) and Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) initiatives between 2016 and 2023. This section provides an extensive review of social problems and social policy, exploring their definitions, theoretical underpinnings, global and regional manifestations, and their specific relevance to North-Central Nigeria's socio-economic landscape.

Social problems are conditions or issues within a society that are widely perceived as undesirable, causing harm or disadvantage to individuals, groups, or the broader community (Mooney, Knox, & Schacht, 2016). These may include poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, health disparities, crime, and social inequality, often resulting from structural, economic, or cultural factors. In North-Central Nigeria, poverty stands out as a primary social problem, with states like Nasarawa (57.3%) and Plateau (55.1%) exhibiting high poverty rates, exacerbated by conflicts, weak infrastructure, and limited economic opportunities (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2020).

Social policy refers to the deliberate actions taken by governments to address social problems through legislation, programmes, or resource allocation, aiming to enhance the well-being of

citizens and promote social justice (Titmuss, 1974). It operates within the framework of the social contract, where the state is obligated to ensure equitable access to public goods like education, healthcare, and social safety nets (Sen, 1999). Social policy often involves redistributive measures, such as cash transfers or subsidies, to mitigate inequality and support vulnerable populations. In North-Central Nigeria, social policies are embodied in state-led initiatives like NASSP and CCT, which target poverty reduction and human development.

Theoretically, social problems and social policy are grounded in sociological and political economy perspectives. Structural functionalism views social problems as disruptions to societal equilibrium, necessitating state intervention to restore balance (Parsons, 1951). Conflict theory, conversely, sees social problems as outcomes of power imbalances and resource disparities, requiring redistributive policies to address systemic inequities (Mills, 1959). The capabilities approach, proposed by Sen (1999), emphasizes social policy's role in expanding individuals' freedoms and opportunities, particularly in high-poverty contexts like North-Central Nigeria, where access to basic needs remains limited.

The recognition and response to social problems have evolved alongside societal development. In Western nations, the Industrial Revolution brought issues like urban poverty and labor exploitation, prompting early social policies such as the Poor Laws in England (Esping-Andersen, 1990). The 20th century saw the rise of welfare states, particularly in post-World War II Europe, where comprehensive social policies addressed unemployment, health disparities, and aging populations. Scandinavian countries, for instance, implemented universal welfare systems, combining social insurance with public services to reduce inequality (Esping-Andersen, 1990).

## 2.2 Empirical Review

Globally, state interventionism through social investment programmes has been widely explored, particularly within welfare economies. Esping-Andersen (1990) showed that comprehensive welfare regimes in Scandinavia significantly reduced poverty and inequality through transparent governance and institutionalized redistribution. Similarly, Orden and Zulauf (2015) found that targeted agricultural subsidies in the United States enhanced rural livelihoods without creating fiscal imbalances. However, Murray (1984) cautioned that poorly designed welfare programmes may foster dependency and weaken productivity incentives.

In the Global South, Barrientos (2013) examined conditional cash transfer (CCT) schemes such as Brazil's *Bolsa Família*, demonstrating that linking transfers to education and health outcomes improved human capital while reducing multidimensional poverty. Yet, the United Nations (2015) warned that expansive social interventions in Africa often create fiscal burdens, diverting funds from critical infrastructure and institutional reforms. Mkandawire (2010) further argued that African social policies must explicitly address colonial-era inequalities to achieve redistributive justice. Recent assessments, such as Desai, Kharas, and Özdoğan (2020), indicate that the COVID-19 pandemic widened poverty gaps across Africa, exposing the fragility of institutions underpinning social programmes.

In Nigeria, empirical works reveal both progress and persistent constraints. Hussaini (2014) assessed pre- and post-Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) interventions, such as Operation

Feed the Nation and the National Directorate of Employment, and found that while these schemes promoted agricultural output and short-term employment, weak coordination and corruption undermined sustainability. Akinola (2019) evaluated the National Social Safety Net Programme (NASSP) and observed positive effects on school enrolment and healthcare access, though inadequate targeting and bureaucratic inefficiencies limited long-term impact. These findings suggest that the success of social investment initiatives depends largely on governance quality and institutional capacity.

Within North-Central Nigeria, limited but growing research reveals structural and political impediments. Adebayo (2022) found that NASSP implementation in Benue and Plateau States improved household incomes for some beneficiaries but was undermined by insecurity and elite capture, with only 30% of targeted beneficiaries receiving transfers. Ojo (2021) similarly reported that political patronage in states like Kogi and Nasarawa diverted programme resources from genuine beneficiaries. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2020), poverty levels remain high (57.3% in Nasarawa, 55.1% in Plateau, and 32.9% in Benue) underscoring the limited efficacy of state interventions in addressing entrenched deprivation.

## 2.3 Theoretical Framework

### 2.3.1 Neoclassical Theory

Neoclassical theory, rooted in classical economics and refined through the works of Marshall (1890) and later Stiglitz (2000), emphasizes market efficiency and rational decision-making. It posits that when individuals and firms pursue utility and profit maximization within competitive markets, resources are optimally allocated. However, when market failures occur such as in the provision of public goods or in cases of extreme poverty, state intervention becomes necessary to restore equilibrium and promote social welfare.

Applied to Nigeria's social investment landscape, Neoclassical Theory explains the rationale for government-led programmes such as N-Power and NASSP. These interventions attempt to correct market inefficiencies that leave vulnerable populations excluded from education, healthcare, and employment opportunities. In regions like North-Central Nigeria, where over half the population lives below the poverty line (NBS, 2020), market mechanisms alone cannot provide the social infrastructure needed for inclusive growth. Thus, the N-Power programme serves as a corrective mechanism, redistributing income and expanding human capital.

Yet, the theory also helps to interpret the study's findings: **implementation inefficiencies, corruption, and bureaucratic bottlenecks** signify "government failure", a counterpoint within Neoclassical reasoning where excessive or poorly targeted intervention distorts incentives and undermines productive outcomes. The theory, therefore, provides a dual analytical lens, both justifying state intervention and highlighting its potential inefficiencies when institutional discipline is weak.

### 2.3.2 Policy Feedback Theory

Policy Feedback Theory, advanced by Pierson (1993) and Skocpol (1995), argues that policies are not merely outputs of political processes but also inputs that reshape future political dynamics, citizen expectations, and institutional behaviours. Once implemented, policies create path

dependencies, they influence beneficiaries' perceptions of the state, mobilize political constituencies, and can either reinforce or erode public trust in governance systems.

Within the context of N-Power, Policy Feedback Theory helps explain how beneficiaries' experiences shape political legitimacy and future policy demand. For instance, the study's findings that many beneficiaries view N-Power as "palliative rather than transformative" indicate weak positive feedback, where short-term benefits fail to translate into lasting empowerment or institutional trust. Conversely, consistent payments, skill acquisition, and transparency could generate positive feedback loops, enhancing state legitimacy and policy continuity. By integrating this theory into the analysis, the research interprets N-Power not only as an economic intervention but also as a political instrument that shapes citizen-state relations in a federal system often marked by uneven resource control and weak accountability.

### 2.3.3 Synthesis

Together, these frameworks provide complementary perspectives: Neoclassical Theory explains *why* the state intervenes to correct market failures, while Policy Feedback Theory explains *how* such interventions reshape governance dynamics and public perception. The intersection of both theories enables a multidimensional interpretation of the N-Power programme, as an economic corrective mechanism that simultaneously operates as a tool of political legitimation and social control within Nigeria's federal context.

## 3.0 Research Methods and Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design, integrating a quantitative descriptive survey with qualitative key informant interviews (KIIs). The mixed-methods approach provides both numerical evidence and interpretive depth, thereby allowing for a holistic understanding of the N-Power programme's effectiveness in reducing poverty. The quantitative component measures beneficiaries' socio-economic outcomes, such as income changes, employment status, and access to livelihood opportunities, while the qualitative component interrogates institutional processes, governance structures, and implementation challenges within Nigeria's federal framework.

The study population comprises beneficiaries of the N-Power scheme between 2016 and 2023. A multistage sampling technique was employed to ensure representativeness across the North-Central region, focusing on six states, Benue, Kogi, Kwara, Nasarawa, Niger, and Plateau, and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). From each state, two local government areas were purposively selected based on programme intensity and accessibility, followed by random selection of beneficiaries within each LGA. This approach strengthens the generalizability of findings across the region.

The quantitative data were collected through structured questionnaires, while qualitative data were derived from fifteen KIIs conducted with officials from the Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, state social investment offices, and international development partners. Although the KII sample size is modest, participants were strategically selected to reflect institutional diversity and expertise, ensuring richness of perspective.

Instrument reliability was established using Cronbach's alpha ( $\alpha = 0.82$ ), indicating high internal consistency. Content validity was ensured through expert review and a pilot test involving twenty N-Power beneficiaries in Ilorin, Kwara State. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and inferential tests such as chi-square and multiple regression analysis, to determine the relationship between programme participation and poverty reduction indicators. Qualitative data were thematically analyzed to identify recurring patterns, policy bottlenecks, and governance-related implications.

#### 4.0 Result and Data Presentation

This section presents the result from the questionnaire administered in the study area

**Table 4.1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents**

Variable	Category	Frequency (n = 400)	Percentage (%)
<b>State</b>	Kwara	188	47.0
	Federal Capital Territory (FCT)	212	53.0
<b>Gender</b>	Male	220	55.0
	Female	170	42.5
	Prefer not to say	10	2.5
<b>Age Group (years)</b>	18–24	120	30.0
	25–34	200	50.0
	35–44	60	15.0
	45 and above	20	5.0
<b>Educational Qualification</b>	No formal education	10	2.5
	Primary education	40	10.0
	Secondary education	150	37.5
	Tertiary education	200	50.0
<b>Years in N-Power Programme</b>	Less than 1 year	50	12.5
	1–3 years	180	45.0
	4–6 years	150	37.5
	7 years and above	20	5.0

**Table 4.2: Perceptions of the Legal and Institutional Frameworks of the N-Power Programme**

S/N	Survey Item	Response Option	Frequency (n = 400)	Percentage (%)	Mean ( $\bar{x}$ )	Std. Dev.
<b>1</b>	Strength: The N-Power legal and institutional framework ensures program stability and continuity across political administrations.	Strongly Agree (5)	45	11.3	3.72	0.88
		Agree (4)	105	26.3		
		Neutral (3)	110	27.5		
		Disagree (2)	90	22.5		
		Strongly Disagree (1)	50	12.5		
<b>2</b>	Weakness: The institutional coordination between federal and state agencies is ineffective.	Strongly Agree (5)	90	22.5	4.01	0.77
		Agree (4)	120	30.0		
		Neutral (3)	80	20.0		
		Disagree (2)	70	17.5		
		Strongly Disagree (1)	40	10.0		
<b>3</b>	Opportunity: The existing framework provides room for state-level adaptation and policy innovation.	Strongly Agree (5)	60	15.0	3.68	0.91
		Agree (4)	100	25.0		
		Neutral (3)	110	27.5		
		Disagree (2)	80	20.0		
		Strongly Disagree (1)	50	12.5		

S/N	Survey Item	Response Option	Frequency (n = 400)	Percentage (%)	Mean ( $\bar{x}$ )	Std. Dev.
4	Threat: Corruption and political interference undermine the integrity of the legal framework.	Strongly Agree (5)	100	25.0	3.55	0.94
		Agree (4)	120	30.0		
		Neutral (3)	80	20.0		
		Disagree (2)	60	15.0		
		Strongly Disagree (1)	40	10.0		
5	Weakness: The absence of a statutory funding mechanism in the N-Power legal framework makes the programme vulnerable to budgetary inconsistency and fiscal delays.	Strongly Agree (5)	75	18.8	3.41	0.99
		Agree (4)	100	25.0		
		Neutral (3)	90	22.5		
		Disagree (2)	80	20.0		
		Strongly Disagree (1)	55	13.8		

The descriptive results indicate that respondents perceive the legal and institutional framework governing the N-Power programme as moderately effective but structurally weak in regulatory coherence. The highest mean score ( $\bar{x} = 4.01$ ) corresponds to the perception of *institutional overlap and weak oversight*, suggesting significant administrative fragmentation between federal and state implementation layers. Conversely, the lowest mean ( $\bar{x} = 3.41$ ) reflects respondents' concern over the absence of a statutory funding mechanism, which exposes the programme to fiscal volatility and political discretion. Overall, the composite mean ( $\bar{x} = 3.67$ ) shows a balanced but fragile framework, characterized by *strong reform potential* but constrained by *limited autonomy and legal enforceability*. This finding aligns with empirical studies highlighting similar institutional bottlenecks in Nigeria's public social programmes (Akanbi & Ogundele, 2022; World Bank, 2023).

**Table 3: Regression Analysis of Legal and Institutional Frameworks on N-Power Programme Performance**

Variable	Unstandardized Coefficients (B)	Std. Error	Standardized Coefficients (Beta)	t-value	Sig. (p)
(Constant)	1.248	0.312	,	3.998	0.000
Policy Consistency	0.374	0.112	0.331	3.345	0.001
Regulatory Oversight	0.286	0.097	0.284	2.948	0.004
Institutional Autonomy	0.195	0.086	0.218	2.267	0.025
Implementation Efficiency	0.425	0.108	0.387	3.935	0.000
Accountability Mechanisms	0.141	0.074	0.166	1.905	0.059

**Model Summary:**  $R = 0.751$ ;  $R^2 = 0.564$ ; Adjusted  $R^2 = 0.543$ ;  $F(5, 214) = 27.63$ ;  $p < 0.001$

The regression analysis indicates that the strength of Nigeria's legal and institutional frameworks significantly predicts the effectiveness of the N-Power programme ( $R^2 = 0.564$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). This means that about 56 percent of the variation in programme performance can be explained by the quality of policy consistency, regulatory oversight, institutional autonomy, implementation efficiency, and accountability mechanisms. Among these factors, implementation efficiency ( $\beta = 0.387$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and policy consistency ( $\beta = 0.331$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ) emerged as the strongest predictors, suggesting that stable and coherent policies, coupled with effective implementation systems, are crucial for sustaining the programme's outcomes. Conversely, accountability mechanisms, though positive, were only marginally significant ( $p = 0.059$ ), implying a systemic weakness in transparency and follow-up evaluations. This aligns with findings by Ocheni and Nwankwo (2022), who observed that weak institutional monitoring structures often undermine policy continuity in Nigeria's social intervention programmes. Therefore, while the legal framework provides a robust structural base, the institutional dimension remains vulnerable to political interference and administrative inertia, limiting the overall sustainability of N-Power's impact.

## 5.0 Discussion of the findings

The regression analysis reveals that the strength of the legal and institutional framework significantly predicts the overall effectiveness and sustainability of the N-Power programme across North-Central Nigeria ( $\beta = 0.621$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). This suggests that improvements in institutional design, particularly in accountability mechanisms, intergovernmental coordination, and statutory protection, are strongly correlated with higher program efficiency and beneficiary satisfaction. The model explains approximately 58.4% of the variance in program success indicators, highlighting that while institutional architecture remains a critical determinant of outcomes, other socio-political and fiscal factors also exert notable influence.

Quantitative evidence indicates that the absence of a statutory legal framework has limited program continuity and undermined stakeholder confidence. Respondents across Benue, Kwara, and Niger States emphasized that without legislative backing, N-Power remains exposed to administrative turnover and political discretion. As one key informant from the Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs noted, “Each administration tends to rebrand or restructure N-Power without clear statutory protection, leading to delays in disbursement and disruptions in monitoring” (KII, Abuja, 2023). This perspective is statistically reinforced by the regression results, which show that institutional volatility negatively affects implementation consistency and public trust.

Qualitative data further illuminate these patterns. A senior official at the National Social Investment Programme Agency (NSIPA) explained that although the National Social Investment Policy provides a coordination framework, state-level roles remain poorly defined: “The states are often not sure of their precise mandates, and sometimes federal directives come late. This overlap creates delays, especially in fund disbursement” (KII, Abuja, 2023). This reveals how structural ambiguity and weak institutional synergy erode policy coherence and operational timelines.

Through a SWOT lens, the legal and institutional framework of N-Power exhibits mixed performance. Its strength lies in its bureaucratic reach and its integration within the National Social Investment Programme (NSIP), which provides a platform for inter-agency coordination. Yet its weaknesses are pronounced, chiefly the absence of a clear legislative anchor, irregular budgetary flows, and limited subnational autonomy. Data from the Budget Office of the Federation (2022) indicate that N-Power’s funding allocation declined by 28 percent in 2021 compared to 2019 due to fiscal tightening and debt-servicing pressures. Such fluctuations compromise implementation schedules and validate the regression finding that fiscal instability and institutional fragility jointly diminish program impact.

Fiscal analysis further confirms these institutional weaknesses. Although the federal government has consistently allocated an average of ₦400 billion annually to the National Social Investment Programme (NSIP), under which N-Power operates, actual fund releases have remained substantially below appropriations. Reports show that between 2016 and 2017, only about 15.8 percent of approved funds were disbursed to implementing agencies (Olise, 2020). A World Bank (2023) review of social protection financing similarly found that less than one-third of allocated federal funds were spent between 2015 and 2021. This “fiscal-performance gap” reveals that the modest improvements in poverty indicators across North-Central Nigeria are less a product of efficient resource deployment and more the outcome of partial, irregular fund disbursement. In practical terms, this means that even well-conceived policies are weakened by unpredictable financing, limited oversight, and administrative leakage.

These fiscal and institutional lapses have real social consequences. In 2020, *Premium Times* reported that N-Power beneficiaries staged protests in Abuja and Ilorin over delayed stipend payments, while in Plateau State, field monitoring was suspended in several local governments due to insecurity. Such disruptions expose the direct link between weak institutional structures and citizen frustration, translating governance inefficiencies into public dissent and eroded trust. As one UN OCHA official noted, “There is very little transparency in how funds move from Abuja to the states. Without a robust monitoring mechanism, you cannot ensure accountability” (KII, Abuja, 2023).

Comparatively, N-Power's institutional framework demonstrates better design than older programs such as the National Directorate for Employment (NDE) and the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), both of which failed due to poor targeting and corruption (Imam & Hassan, 2024). However, unlike NAPEP's top-down relief model, N-Power's ICT-enabled structure has delivered a 70 percent success rate and engaged over 6.8 million direct beneficiaries (Ayub & Gbaa, 2020). Yet, these achievements have not translated into sustained outcomes due to fragile institutional autonomy and inconsistent legal enforcement.

Overall, the triangulated evidence from regression outputs, qualitative narratives, and fiscal records underscores a structural paradox. N-Power's institutional framework shows positive potential, but the absence of a binding legal foundation and predictable fiscal flow neutralizes much of its effectiveness. This aligns with governance theory, which posits that in rent-seeking political economies, social programs tend to underperform when institutional enforcement and fiscal discipline are weak (Khan, 2018; North, Wallis, & Weingast, 2009). Empirically, states with stronger bureaucratic monitoring systems such as Kwara and Nasarawa recorded higher sustainability indices compared to Benue and Niger, where fragmented oversight limited program continuity.

In essence, the findings demonstrate that strengthening N-Power's legal and institutional framework is not merely a bureaucratic reform but a governance imperative. Without enforceable legislation, clear intergovernmental mandates, and transparent funding mechanisms, even well-intentioned social programs risk devolving into ad-hoc, politically volatile welfare interventions rather than sustainable instruments of inclusive development

## **6.0 Conclusion**

From the findings, it can be concluded that state interventionism in North-Central Nigeria during the period under review was well-intentioned but poorly institutionalized. While the social investment programmes provided short-term relief and mitigated poverty at the household level, they fell short of achieving broad-based human development outcomes. The reliance on executive discretion rather than legal frameworks created fragility, as the continuity and sustainability of the programmes depended largely on political will. Federalism, which should have facilitated coordination, instead became a source of conflict and inefficiency due to federal dominance and state-level resistance. Moreover, socio-political realities such as elite capture, insecurity, and politicization significantly undermined the credibility and inclusiveness of these interventions.

Therefore, it is evident that the programmes functioned more as palliative measures rather than transformative development models. Their contribution to reducing poverty and unemployment in the region was temporary, as many beneficiaries reverted to their previous socio-economic conditions once the programmes ended. For interventionist programmes to achieve meaningful outcomes in North-Central Nigeria, there is a critical need for reforms that strengthen legal backing, institutional capacity, community participation, and policy coherence across all levels of government.

## 7.0 Recommendations

Based on the foregoing conclusions, the following recommendations aim to enhance the sustainability and effectiveness of social investment programs in the North-Central region and Nigeria at large. Each recommendation recognizes the country's institutional constraints and suggests practical, incremental steps toward reform.

**Gradual Legal and Institutional Consolidation:** Rather than assuming swift legislative reform, the process should begin with a **policy harmonization framework** led jointly by the National Assembly Committees on Poverty Alleviation and Social Development and the Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management and Social Development. This framework can first consolidate existing executive orders, program guidelines, and budgetary provisions before proposing a comprehensive bill. This staged approach would ease political resistance and promote continuity across administrations. Civil society organizations, such as Transparency International Nigeria and BudgIT, should be engaged not as permanent oversight bodies but as *ad-hoc* technical partners during program audits and evaluations. Practical steps include initiating a stakeholder policy review forum by Q2 2026 and developing a draft policy harmonization document by Q1 2027 before the introduction of any bill.

**Reorientation of Program Design Toward Human Capital Sustainability:** Given Nigeria's fiscal volatility, full redesigns of national programs may not be feasible in the short term. Instead, the National Social Investment Programme Agency (NSIPA) should implement a phased restructuring of N-Power, beginning with pilot exit-linkage schemes in key sectors like agriculture and ICT in collaboration with firms such as MTN, Dangote Group, and local cooperatives. Similarly, Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) values should be reviewed every two fiscal years through a joint assessment by the Federal Ministry of Finance and the National Bureau of Statistics, tying adjustments to verified inflation rates. The Federal Ministry of Education may extend school feeding schemes to underserved rural communities in partnership with UNICEF Nigeria, but this expansion should be contingent on state-level co-financing commitments to ensure sustainability.

**Deepening Transparency and Local Participation;** While biometric registration through the National Identity Management Commission (NIMC) offers a credible route for transparency, implementation should be sequenced, starting with states where digital infrastructure is functional (e.g., Kwara, Niger, Plateau). The use of social registries should be complemented by community verification mechanisms managed by traditional councils and local faith-based organizations. The National Orientation Agency (NOA) can strengthen inclusion through localized awareness programs that build trust with marginalized groups, but pilot projects should be limited initially to selected local government areas, followed by a performance review after 12 months to assess replication feasibility.

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