

THE CHALLENGES AND PROSPECT OF SOCIAL INVESTMENT PROGRAMMES IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The Social Investment Programme (SIP) in Nigeria aims to address the socio-economic challenges faced by the country's vulnerable populations, particularly women and youth. This initiative holds the potential to foster economic development, promote entrepreneurship, and enhance social equity. Social investment programmes are crucial for tackling socioeconomic challenges by enhancing human capital, encouraging social inclusion, and fostering sustainable economic growth. In the face of rising inequalities, unemployment, and social instability, these initiatives are key to building fairer and more resilient communities. Some of the social investment programmes in Nigeria that have recorded successes though now defunct include Trademoni, N-Power, Conditional Cash Transfer, Market Money, and the Homegrown School Feeding Programme, all of which fall under the National Social Investment Programme (NSIP) launched in 2016. However, despite its accomplishment, the SIP encounters several critical challenges, including transparency deficits, inadequate funding, political interference, and corruption. Some of the programmes full of prospects currently running are the Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP), the National Youth Academy (NiYA), Presidential Youth Empowerment Scheme, and the Presidential Conditional Grant Scheme (PCGS). Based on the challenges of the previous programmes, the following recommendations are necessary for the success of the ongoing and proposed social investment programmes. The federal government should create a centralized, user-friendly database to monitor fund distribution, beneficiary selection, and project outcomes. This system should provide real-time access to information, enhancing oversight and accountability. To ensure transparency and accountability, it is crucial to establish internal audit systems and independent oversight committees tasked with monitoring the use of funds and the implementation of programmes.

Keywords: poverty; empowerment; social investment; social security; development

Introduction

Nigeria stands as Africa's most populous nation and ranks seventh globally in population size, according to the National Bureau of Statistics, NBS (2022), with a population exceeding 200 million. The country boasts a wealth of human and natural resources, surpassing many developed nations, and it is recognized as Africa's largest economy (Agwudagwu et al., 2023). Despite these advantages, Nigeria grapples with significant challenges, including high poverty rates, unemployment, brain drain, terrorism, and inflation, among various social issues (Umeaoukwu & Ilias, 2022). Throughout its history, successive administrations have attempted to address these challenges through different national plans, strategies, and programs

(Akujuru, & Enyioko, 2019; Umearoukwu & Ilias, 2022). The first national development plan was implemented from 1962 to 1968, followed by the second plan from 1970 to 1974, the third between 1975 and 1980, and the fourth from 1981 to 1985 (Agwudagwu et al., 2023). While these plans aimed to empower the population, they often faltered once the initiating administration left office, worsening the issues (Sanusi & Gado, 2017; Omeje et al., 2021).

Critics attribute the lack of success in these national plans to problems such as inadequate implementation, insufficient funding, and corruption, which has plunged the country into deep poverty (Ogwola et al., 2024).

The welfare system of Nigeria is faced with many challenges and obstacles arising essentially from a high degree of poverty, inequality (Lamidi & Igbokwe, 2021), and the widespread nature of social problems, including a high level of unemployment, inadequate housing, poor health, and education (Onah & Olise, 2019). The Nigerian Government has been trying to grapple with these problems using social investment programmes such as the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) (Okoli & Ledogo, 2023), Better Life for Rural Women (Udegbe, 1995), Family Economic Advancement Program (Jacob, 2019), Conditional Grants Scheme, Millennium Development Goals Initiatives (Okere & Okeyika, 2016), Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Programme (SURE-P) (Obilor & Osita-Njoku, 2021), NPower (Olorunsola, 2022), Trader Moni (Olatuje, 2021), and other poverty alleviation programs. Despite all these interventions, the World Bank reports that the poverty rate in Nigeria is about 38.9% in 2023, with an estimated 87 million people living below the poverty line (World Bank, 2024). The aim of this paper, therefore, is to assess the past and present social investment programmes in Nigeria, their challenges, as well, as prospects.

The concept of Social Investment

Social investment programmes are crucial for tackling socioeconomic challenges by enhancing human capital, encouraging social inclusion, and fostering sustainable economic growth (Olatuje, 2021). In the face of rising inequalities, unemployment, and social instability, these initiatives are key to building fairer and more resilient communities (Obilor & Osita-Njoku, 2021; Ndema, 2022). Social investment involves the strategic distribution of resources by governments, organizations, and institutions aimed at improving social welfare and ensuring economic stability (Idoko & Udentia, 2023). These programs include a range of initiatives designed to boost individual capabilities, facilitate social inclusion, and alleviate poverty (Onah & Olise, 2019).

The approach focuses on the long-term advantages of investing in human capital including education, health, and employment as opposed to merely providing short-term support through welfare measures (Sunday, 2022). According to Dodo & Isa (2020), social investment seeks to generate both social and economic value by confronting the underlying causes of social challenges, which ultimately leads to more sustainable economic development. Investments in education and skill development are particularly important for equipping individuals with the necessary skills to effectively engage in the labour market and contribute to society (Plavgo & Hemerijck, 2020; Sakamoto, 2021). At its core, social investment is about empowering individuals (Aminu, 2019). These programs and policies were designed to enhance youth employability and functionality within the system by developing their skills and building their

capacity (Idoko & Udent, 2023). Key areas of focus include education, quality childcare, healthcare, training, job-search support, and rehabilitation services (Oyewo, 2021).

One of the recently established initiatives is the Nigerian National Social Investment Program (NSIP), a social welfare project initiated by the Federal Government of Nigeria in 2016, overseen by the National Social Investment Office (Jev et al., 2023). This programme aims to promote fairness and equity in the distribution and accessibility of resources for the general populace, particularly targeting vulnerable groups such as children, youth, and women (Adebisi et al., 2019). Under President Muhammadu Buhari's administration, four distinct components were introduced to address poverty and stimulate economic growth (Elemo & Ajayi, 2023).

The National Social Investment Program encompasses various strategies, including conditional cash transfers, job creation, school feeding initiatives, skills training, education, and financial inclusion, all aimed at enabling the Federal Government to fulfill its social protection responsibilities, mitigate poverty and inequality in Nigeria, and advance human development (Oyewo, 2021). These initiatives are driven by the urgency for sustainable and inclusive economic growth, decreasing poverty rates (Idoko & Udent, 2023), and bridging the significant inequality gap between the wealthy and the less fortunate, as well as addressing gender disparities (Elemo & Ajayi). The programmes are organized into five main components: Trademoni, N-Power, Conditional Cash Transfers, Market Money, and the Home-Grown School Feeding Programme (HGSF) (Jev et al., 2023). They have been extensively implemented across all states in the federation.

Historical Background of Social Investment Programmes in Nigeria

Social investment programs in Nigeria have undergone significant evolution over the years, largely in response to the nation's socioeconomic challenges. Prior to gaining independence in 1960, the social welfare framework was primarily defined by informal systems based on community traditions, alongside a few limited initiatives introduced by the British colonial government (Irele, 2019). These community-centered systems offered support through mechanisms such as mutual aid, kinship connections, and social solidarity (Mushunje, 2014). For example, the extended family model served as a crucial safety net, providing assistance during periods of illness, unemployment, or other crises (Tanga, 2013). The ethos of communal living enabled informal social protection that was adapted to the cultural contexts of Nigeria's diverse ethnic groups (Mushunje, 2014). The dynamics of colonial policies played a substantial role in shaping the nature and extent of social welfare services available to Nigerians (Irele, 2019).

After independence, the government began to roll out various social investment programs designed to tackle persistent challenges such as poverty, unemployment, and inequality (Lamidi & Igbokwe, 2021). Many of these initiatives specifically aimed to reduce youth unrest, especially in regions experiencing turmoil (Aminu, 2019). In the years following Nigeria's independence in 1960, several key youth-focused programs were implemented to enhance social investments for the younger population (Idoko & Udent, 2023). Nnamdi et al. (2013) noted that between 1962 and 1968, as well as during the periods from 1970 to 1974 with the National Accelerated Food Production Programme (NAFPP), and again from 1975 to 1980 and 1981 to 1985, various administrations introduced programs aimed at delivering essential

infrastructure, diversifying the economy, reducing unemployment, achieving sustainable growth, and improving overall living standards (Lamidi & Igbokwe, 2021).

In a related context, Adoba (2005) highlighted that social investment programs established between 1985 and 1999 aimed to enhance the growth of small and medium enterprises, boost trade activities, and reduce poverty, particularly among the youth, while encouraging sectoral participation in the state's economy. Reflecting on earlier efforts, several policies introduced in the 1970s targeted poverty alleviation in Nigeria, such as Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) launched in 1977 (Arua, 1982), the Free and Compulsory Primary Education (FCPE) initiative also in 1977 (Kolawole, 2021), and the Green Revolution (GR) initiated in 1980 (Iwuchukwu & Igbokwe, 2012). The GR and OFN specifically aimed to enhance agricultural productivity and improve performance across various subsectors of agriculture (Ibrahim & Umar, 2008). In contrast, the FCPE initiative was designed to address the high rates of illiteracy prevalent in rural areas throughout Nigeria. These programs marked significant progress in improving educational and social outcomes for many individuals in rural communities (Agboola & Lamidi, 2017). However, the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN, 1998) noted that the lack of sustained commitment to these initiatives was frequently attributed to inadequate political will, social instability, and minimal public involvement.

Some Notable Social Investment Programmes in Nigeria

Nigeria has introduced a variety of social investment programmes focused on tackling socioeconomic challenges, particularly in areas such as poverty reduction, employment generation, education, and health enhancement (Ogujiuba & Mngometulu, 2022). These initiatives aim to assist vulnerable groups, improve human capital, and promote inclusive economic growth (Plavgo & Hemerijck, 2020). The most recent programmes include Trademoni, N-Power, Conditional Cash Transfer, Market Money, and the Home-grown School Feeding Programme, all of which fall under the National Social Investment Programme (NSIP) that was launched in 2016 (Jev et al., 2023).

I. N-Power Programme

The N-Power program is one of the many initiatives launched under the National Social Investment Programme (NSIP) by the Federal Government of Nigeria in 2016. This program is strategically designed to tackle youth unemployment and improve skills development among young Nigerians, aiming to create pathways for self-empowerment, economic stability, and community involvement (Olorunsola, 2022). One of its main objectives is to mitigate the high unemployment rate faced by Nigerian youth, a challenge that has been longstanding and worsened by insufficient skills and opportunities (Dodo & Isa; Olorunsola, 2022).

Targeting individuals aged 18 to 35, the N-Power program offers training and opportunities to engage in community services across vital sectors, including education, health, agriculture, and technology (Omeje et al., 2021). The program is divided into several components: N-Power Volunteer Corps, which encompasses N-Power TEACH, N-Power HEALTH, N-Power AGRO, and N-Power TECH (Nnaeto & Nwambuko, 2023; Omeje et al., 2021). Each component is designed to address specific developmental needs within communities, equipping young people with skills in education, healthcare assistance, agricultural advancements, and technology-based solutions (Dauda et al., 2019).

The N-Power programme has successfully enrolled a large number of beneficiaries across the country, enabling them to contribute as teachers, healthcare providers, and agricultural workers in their communities (Olorunsola, 2022). Since its launch, reports suggest that more than 500,000 young people have participated in the program (Omeje et al., 2021). In addition to offering stipends for financial assistance, the program includes training and mentorship that help participants develop valuable skills for future employment or entrepreneurship (Attaha et al., 2021). Furthermore, the initiative is designed to promote broader community development, especially in the education and health sectors (Attaha et al., 2021). For example, the N-Power Teach component has been instrumental in addressing educational resource shortages in underserved areas, where participants act as teachers and thus enhance literacy and educational outcomes (Akujuru & Enyioko, 2019). Similarly, volunteers from the N-Power Health stream have been deployed to assist in primary healthcare services, thereby improving healthcare delivery in both rural and urban settings (Akujuru & Enyioko, 2019).

However, the N-Power programme has encountered several challenges that have limited its effectiveness. A major concern is the issue of funding and sustainability. Although the programme initially received government support, later budget cuts and delays in disbursements have negatively impacted participants' motivation, leading to dissatisfaction and lower engagement levels (Okonkwo et al., 2021). The irregular payment of stipends has been particularly harmful, as many beneficiaries depend on these funds for their daily needs (Okonkwo et al., 2021). Additionally, the program has suffered from inadequate monitoring and coordination, resulting in reports of fictitious beneficiaries and resource misallocation, which undermine its overall impact (Umeaokwu & Ilias, 2022). Furthermore, the program's focus on volunteerism without clear pathways to permanent employment has drawn criticism regarding its long-term viability and effectiveness in fostering actual job creation (Okonkwo et al., 2021).

II. Tradermoni

The Tradermoni initiative offers interest-free, non-collateral loans aimed at assisting economically disadvantaged Nigerians (Ayogu et al., 2019). As part of the government's social investment programmes, Trader Moni specifically targets small-scale businesses that require minimal startup capital. These loans, administered by the Bank of Industry on behalf of the Federal Government, do not require any collateral and bear no interest (Abubakar, 2019).

The primary goal of Tradermoni is to provide financial assistance to small traders who often do not have access to conventional banking services (Ogbette et al., 2019). By offering loans that are both interest-free and collateral-free, the program aims to foster an environment conducive to the growth of small businesses (Olateju, 2021). This approach to financial inclusion is particularly important, as many small traders operate in the informal sector and face challenges in obtaining credit from traditional financial institutions (Akujuru & Okezie, 2019). The loans are typically intended for purchasing inventory for resale, which can help increase beneficiaries' incomes and stimulate local economic growth (Ayogu et al., 2019; Akujuru & Okezie, 2019).

The absence of interest on these loans is a notable feature of Tradermoni, allowing traders to utilize the entire loan amount for their businesses without the pressure of interest repayments. This aspect is especially advantageous for small traders who may struggle with additional debt,

thereby promoting a more inclusive financial landscape (Adamolekun et al., 2021). **III. Marketmoni**

MarketMoni provides interest-free loans targeted at market women, traders, artisans, youth, and farmers (Akenbor & Obeki, 2022). This initiative is one of the social intervention programs implemented by the Federal Government through the Bank of Industry (Akenbor & Obeki, 2022). The program aims to support small traders in expanding their businesses by offering loans of N50,000 without requiring collateral (Akujuru & Okezie, 2019). These loans are to be repaid within six months.

The Federal Government recognizes that every individual, regardless of age or education, has the potential to make significant contributions to the nation's economy (Arikewuyo & Akanbi, 2020). The primary goal of MarketMoni is to address the funding challenges that small traders and entrepreneurs face, particularly those who do not have access to traditional banking services or collateral for securing loans. The Bank of Industry administers MarketMoni, managing the application process and distribution of funds. The program generally offers interest-free loans that range from N10,000 to N100,000, tailored to meet the specific needs of businesses following an assessment of each applicant (Ogbette, 2019). **IV. Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT)**

The Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) programme was officially launched in Nigeria in 2016 as a key element of the National Social Investment Programme (NSIP), aimed at alleviating poverty and enhancing the living standards of citizens (Elumah et al., 2018). This initiative offers a monthly cash transfer of N5,000 specifically to the most impoverished and vulnerable households, with the goal of helping them move out of extreme poverty (Omaje et al., 2021). Approximately 300,000 Nigerians benefit from this monthly support.

To facilitate a transition towards sustainable livelihoods before beneficiaries graduate from the programme, they receive ongoing support, mentorship, and guidance. Trained Cash Transfer Facilitators visit these households weekly, helping them to form savings groups and providing essential training in life skills, basic financial literacy, nutrition, hygiene, and sanitation practices (Ogbette et al., 2019). Beneficiaries, particularly those aged 18 to 40, are encouraged to engage in activities such as establishing a home garden or woodlot and implementing erosion control measures, all tailored to state-specific initiatives (Jev et al., 2023).

V. The National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme (NHGSFP)

The National Home Grown School Feeding Programme (NHGSFP) is an educational initiative aimed at enhancing the quality of education while also increasing enrollment in primary schools (Achoba & Saliu, 2023). It specifically targets the reduction of out-of-school children in Nigeria, focusing on public primary education (Adepoju & Johnson, 2020). This feeding program varies across countries, each with unique objectives. However, its overarching goal globally is to better the quality of education in primary schools (Jacob & Musa, 2021).

The home-grown aspect of the programme involves supplying food that is produced and sourced locally for children attending public schools (Munuhe, 2014). The World Food Programme emphasizes a model where food for the school feeding initiative is obtained from smallholder farmers within the region. This approach not only aims to enhance children's health

and nutrition but also promotes local agricultural development by creating a reliable marketplace for these farmers (Jev et al., 2023).

In Nigeria, the NHGSFP was specifically designed to align school food demand with the supply capabilities of local small-scale farmers, utilizing local procurement strategies (Jumare, 2020). This initiative is anticipated to bolster local market dynamics, encouraging farmers to increase their production. Ultimately, the program strives to meet several objectives, including boosting domestic food production, enhancing school enrollment and retention rates, improving child health and nutrition, supporting local agricultural growth, generating employment opportunities, and fostering both micro and macroeconomic improvements (NHGSFP, 2016).

VI. The Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP)

A pivotal moment in the history of Nigerian families was the launch of the Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP) in 1997 by the Federal Military Government (Obinne, 1999). This initiative aimed to promote economic self-sufficiency and social integration among Nigerian households. The program was specifically designed to support potential entrepreneurs as well as local producers of goods and services (FEAP Establishment Act, 1997).

FEAP focused on creating employment opportunities for these local producers and aspiring business owners, facilitating the development of small-scale industries (Nwachukwu & Ezeh, 2007). The program placed a particular emphasis on empowering rural communities, especially low-income families and cooperatives, by providing access to loans for economic development.

Objectives of the programme according to FEAP Establishment Act (1997) were to provide basic working capital requirements for small-scale farming and traditional processes as loans to the low-income groups; provide facility for the procurement of machinery and equipment for Nigerians to set up and run cottage and small-scale industries; encourage the design and manufacture of appropriate plants, machinery, and equipment; create employment opportunities at ward levels through the establishment of enterprises and pilot projects in the wards; encourage producers of goods and services at ward levels to form co-operative societies; utilise all available local resources for the benefit of Nigerians through improved production, preservation, etc.; provide an enabling environment for private sector and United Nations Agencies participation in the Programme.

The present government has resuscitated the programme after many years of abandonment by the previous government. On the 3rd of July 2024, the Punch Newspaper reported that the Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP) has commenced its Registration for the 2024/2025 Economic Empowerment in Nigeria and is meant for those between the ages of 18 and 65 years.

VII. The Nigerian Youth Academy (NiYA)

NiYA serves as a vibrant platform dedicated to youth education and empowerment, with the potential to influence millions throughout Nigeria. As stated by the Federal Minister of State for Youth Development, Ayodele Olawande, NiYA is committed to comprehensive skill development aimed at enhancing critical thinking, communication, and problem-solving skills, thereby equipping youth for the challenges of today's world (NiYA, n.d.).

The initiative is projected to train and empower 7 million young people in Nigeria over the next two years, with a goal of creating 5 million jobs within four years (Joseph, 2024). NiYA seeks to transform the lives of Nigerian youth by linking them to essential resources, networks, and communities that foster skill development, entrepreneurship, patriotism, innovation, and leadership (Joseph, 2024). However, Agbo (2024) notes that the planned mentorship network, which aims to recruit two million volunteers, has experienced delays in its implementation. While the Nigeria Youth Academy (NIYA) is operational, its scope and effectiveness have not met expectations, leaving many aspiring young entrepreneurs in need of proper guidance and support.

Additionally, the current Tinubu administration has launched other social investment initiatives, including the Presidential Youth Empowerment Scheme targeting individuals aged 18 to 35 and the Presidential Conditional Grant Scheme (PCGS), which provides financial assistance of 50,000 Naira to women, youth, persons with disabilities, senior citizens, and other groups.

4 Challenges Facing Social Investment Programmes in Nigeria

The National Social Investment Programme (NSIP) in Nigeria has been a significant initiative aimed at addressing poverty, unemployment, and social development (Onah & Olise, 2019). However, a couple of challenges have been identified.

I. Poor information management and accountability

A significant critique of the National Social Investment Program (NSIP) is the perceived shortcomings in transparency and accountability, as highlighted by Ndema (2022). The insufficiency of documented information regarding the sourcing and utilization of funds hampers the effective use of information as a resource. This lack of clarity affects the identification of target beneficiaries, particularly the extremely poor, vulnerable populations, and those facing social exclusion (Fuseini et al., 2022). Consequently, many proposed activities under NSIP do not reach a substantial number of the intended recipients, particularly those living in rural areas or among the urban poor (Onah & Olise, 2019). These groups often lack access to mainstream media platforms like newspapers, television, and the internet, resulting in their dependence on intermediaries, who may prioritize their own connections (Onah & Olise, 2019). This deficiency in information is seen as a critical issue in the effective execution of NSIPs, compounded by the absence of official updates detailing the progress of these initiatives (Onah & Onah, 2021).

II. Funding

Funding represents a core obstacle in the realization of the NSIP objectives. According to the National Director of NSIP, merely 15.8% of the allocated budget for 2016 and 2017 was actually disbursed (Onah & Olise, 2019). Just N300 billion was spent out of a planned N1.5 trillion budget, clearly indicating that appropriations without actual disbursements hinder effective project implementation (Lamidi & Igbokwe, 2021). The inadequate financial support significantly hampers the national program's ability to tackle pressing issues such as poverty, education, and health (Taylor & Ogbogu, 2016). Insufficient funding limits these initiatives'

outreach and effectiveness, preventing them from impacting a wider demographic (Adamolekun et al., 2021).

III. Corruption

Corruption remains a critical hurdle in the execution of NSIPs within Nigeria. Reportedly, funds allocated for these programs have been misappropriated and poorly managed by some officials involved in their implementation (Sanusi & Gado, 2017). Observations from Jacob & Musa (2021) indicate that certain program officials have engaged in fraudulent activities, including diverting funds to personal bank accounts. Additionally, Eugene et al. (2017) identified mismanagement as a significant obstacle specifically affecting the School Feeding program, one of the components of NSIP. Corruption has systematically undermined poverty alleviation and empowerment initiatives in Nigeria (Iheonu & Urama, 2019), adversely affecting the quality of training and opportunities afforded to beneficiaries. This misappropriation has been cited as a key reason why Nigeria continues to struggle with improving its poverty rates, despite substantial investments in empowerment and poverty reduction programs (Lamidi & Igbokwe, 2021).

IV. Politics and primordial factors

The effective implementation of the National Social Investment Program (NSIP) is significantly hindered by the intertwining of politics and other narrow interests. Research indicates that previous poverty alleviation initiatives and social policies in Nigeria have often faltered due to issues such as politicization, ethnic bias, favoritism, and nepotism (Jebbin & Osu, 2016; Taiwo & Agwu, 2016). These factors frequently influence the collection of data and other critical indicators, undermining the reliability of the information gathered (Taiwo & Agwu, 2016). The NSIP is similarly affected by these dynamics. The harsh realities brought about by high inflation rates (Adamolekun, 2021), rising fuel prices (Ocheni, 2015; Omotosho, 2019), and the declining purchasing power of the Naira have led many individuals to become increasingly reliant on the N5,000 monthly stipend (Ogbette et al., 2019). As a result, political affiliations, family ties, and other personal considerations often dominate the beneficiary selection process.

V. Absence of a Cohesive Policy Framework and Continuity

A significant barrier to the successful execution of social investment programs in Nigeria is the absence of a well-defined policy framework and the lack of continuity in addressing unemployment and fostering entrepreneurial growth. Since the launch of these programs, their continuity has been inconsistent (Oyadiran & Ayi, 2022). Successive administrations have struggled to mobilize sufficient resources to ensure the effective implementation of social investment initiatives, regardless of their duration. Frequently, these programs are initiated and then abruptly halted when political power shifts, reflecting the priorities of the ruling party. Politicians often seek to implement their own policies to claim credit, further complicating the continuity and effectiveness of social investment efforts (Oyadiran & Ayi, 2022).

Prospects of Social Investment

The federal government of Nigeria has consistently sought to demonstrate its impact on citizens through the introduction of various social investment programs across the country. According to Oluwotin and Lamidi (2019), these initiatives have positively affected millions of people in

all 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory. The programs have generated jobs in both the formal and informal sectors (Oyadiran & Ayi, 2022). Since the launch of the Social Investment Program, it has successfully deployed approximately £4.45 billion, benefiting over 42 million Nigerians. This includes more than 12 million individuals who benefit directly, along with around 30 million indirect beneficiaries, such as family members, employees, cooks, and farmers.

The federal government has also proposed a range of empowerment initiatives, including the Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP), the Nigerian Youth Academy, the Presidential Youth Empowerment Scheme, and the Presidential Conditional Grant Scheme (PCGS). These programs aim to tackle economic challenges, improve livelihoods, and foster entrepreneurship, particularly among youth and vulnerable groups. They have the potential to provide financial support and training, stimulate economic activity, support small businesses, and enhance productivity, ultimately contributing to nationwide economic growth (Taiwo & Agwu, 2016).

Programs offering grants and low-interest loans, such as the PCGS and FEAP, can empower individuals and families to start or expand small businesses, thus driving local economic development (BoI, 2024). The Nigerian Youth Academy and similar initiatives focus on youth engagement, leadership skill development, and promoting civic participation. If effectively implemented, these efforts could result in more active and informed young communities that contribute to governance. All these programs highlight the importance of vocational and entrepreneurial training (Punch, 2024; NiYA, n.d.), equipping participants with essential skills for success in today's economy and nurturing a culture of self-reliance and innovation. Additionally, these initiatives prioritize the inclusion of marginalized groups to foster social equity and cohesion, which in turn can enhance societal stability and mitigate grievances and social issues (Victor-Aigbodion, 2023).

Conclusion and Recommendations

The Social Investment Programme (SIP) is an essential effort designed to tackle the socioeconomic issues faced by Nigeria's vulnerable groups, especially women and youth. Although this initiative holds promise for stimulating economic development, encouraging entrepreneurship, and improving social fairness, it must confront several challenges, including issues of transparency, inadequate funding, political meddling, and corruption. Strengthening the programme's framework and implementation can empower individuals and communities, fostering a more stable and just society. As Nigeria progresses and its population expands, the effectiveness of these social investment initiatives will be vital in paving the way for inclusive economic growth and social unity, ensuring that all segments of society benefit.

Considering the challenges identified and the promising potential of Nigeria's Social Investment Programme (SIP), the following recommendations are proposed to tackle key issues and improve the programme's effectiveness

I. The federal government should create a centralized, user-friendly database to monitor fund distribution, beneficiary selection, and project outcomes. This system should provide realtime access to information, enhancing oversight and accountability. It is essential to implement regular updates and reports on programme activities, funding, and beneficiary data

through an official bulletin, website, and community outreach efforts. Collaborating with local leaders to share information in rural and underserved regions using accessible methods (such as community meetings and local radio) is also recommended.

II. The Minister for Youth Development, along with other ministries and agencies, should push for increased financial allocations for the SIP in annual budgets, ensuring that funding meets projected needs. Exploring partnerships with NGOs, international donors, and private sector entities can help supplement government resources. These collaborations can bring in additional funding and expertise to improve programme execution.

III. To ensure transparency and accountability, it is crucial to establish internal audit systems and independent oversight committees tasked with monitoring the use of funds and the implementation of programmes.

IV. Standardized criteria for selecting beneficiaries and implementing projects should be developed, ensuring these processes are free from political or ethnic biases. Training for implementing officials on the importance of equity and fairness in programme execution should be provided. Additionally, fostering community engagement in decision-making will help minimize political influence and ensure that community needs are accurately represented in programme prioritization.

V. The National Assembly should develop comprehensive, evidence-based policies that support the sustainability and stability of social investment programmes, regardless of political changes. A strategic multi-year plan for the SIP should be designed, setting clear goals, benchmarks, and timelines. This approach will allow the programme to adapt to evolving socioeconomic conditions while preserving its core objectives.

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