An Evaluation of Communication Strategies Used in Promoting the National Social Investment Programmes in Nigeria under the Buhari Civilian Administration

Hafsah Suleiman
&
Gonsum Jude Joseph
Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University Bauchi
hafsahdearie@gmail.com
shafsah@atbu.edu.ng
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Abstract

The study examined the communication strategies of ex-President Muhammad Buhari's National Social Investment Programme (NSIP) which aimed to empower unemployed Nigerians and small-scale businesses. Despite past social safety nets yielding little success, the NSIP was established as a social safety net to cushion the impact of harsh economic policies. The Empowerment Theory guided the study that employed a survey method to gather data from beneficiaries in three states: Plateau, Kaduna and Bauchi, representing the north-central, north-west and north-east geo-political zones. A total of 1200 copies of the questionnaire were purposively distributed to direct beneficiaries across the three states. Majority of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that they learned about the various NSIP programmes through friends and family members (80.1%), that the programmes were successful due to effective communication strategies (96.7%) and that the communication strategies used during the programmes were commendable and effective (91%). The NSIP had been highly effective, with 99.8% of respondents affirming it enabled them to become self-employed and independent and 99.1% believing it provided a good platform for Nigerian youths to participate actively in national development. The study recommended that the Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs and Poverty Alleviation should explore alternative communication channels, such as community-based initiatives in future NSIPs targeting national development.

Keywords: Communication Strategies, National Development, Empowerment, National Social Investment Programme, Poverty Alleviation

Introduction

Since attainment of political independence in 1960, successive governments in Nigeria, at national, sub-national and local government levels, have made the elimination of poverty as one of their cardinal points of governance ranking, just below its traditional function of protecting lives and properties of its citizens. Some past programmes aimed at eliminating poverty and enhancing national

development included Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) (1976), The Green Revolution (GR) (1985), Better Life for Rural Women Programmeme (BLRWP) (1986), National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) (1999), SURE-P (2011), YOUWIN (2011) etc. However, according to Onyinshi and Collins (2019), these programmes managed to achieve the opposite of their objectives that at the termination of the timeline set by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Nigeria was declared as the "poverty capital of the world". Therefore, to pull the county out of its socio-economic conundrum, the Buhari administration introduced some social investment/intervention programmes aimed at alleviating the suffering of Nigerians. On May 29, 2016, the administration of President Muhammed Buhari announced the National Home-Grown School Feeding Programme (NHGSFP), Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT), N-Power, National Youth Empowerment Fund (NYEF), TraderMoni, MarketMoni, FarmerMoni, Survival Fund, Special Grant for Rural Women and Government Enterprise and Empowerment Programme (GEEP) (Obijiofor, 2016).

Globally, effective communication strategies are crucial for the success of social intervention programmes aimed at national development. For instance, this can be seen in the role of communication in overcoming cultural barriers in the empowerment programme for Indigenous Papuans in Teluk Bintuni District, Papua New Guinea who were agitating for economic privileges from large corporations in their district (Haris et al*.,* 2024). To achieve the needed national development, many countries in the world have employed different communication strategies in development programmes. Mohammad et al. (2017) examined the role of communication in poverty mitigation, highlighting the importance of access to information and media representation for the poor and marginalized. The study by Ikem and Akintayo (2022) identified media ownership structure, political concern, media bias, or lack of interest as part of the communication constraints limiting poverty alleviation efforts in Nigeria. Also, Oji's (2014) study revealed that despite efforts to communicate poverty alleviation programmes in the Niger Delta, there is a significant lack of awareness among indigenes, suggesting that communication strategies are often inadequate or ineffective and recommended that anti-poverty agencies reassess and improve their communication approaches to better reach their target audience. The above studies justify the investigation of ex-President Muhammad Buhari's NSIP to compare how communication strategies were a precursor to the success of the programme and ultimately impacting national development.

Statement of the Problem

Effective public policy communication is crucial for the successful implementation of poverty alleviation programmes. Strategies that prioritize clarity and transparency can build public trust and foster participation (Hidayat & Dariyanto, 2023). However, social investment programmes in the Global South often fail due to economic constraints, inadequate policy frameworks and lack of political will. High inflation further diminishes the benefits of social spending, undermining the impact of such programmes (Kentikelenis & Stubbs, 2024). In Nigeria, communication strategies and public engagement play a significant role in the success or failure of poverty alleviation initiatives. Despite substantial investments, the country's persistent poverty underscores the importance of effective communication. Poor communication leads to misunderstandings and limited participation among target populations (Ikem & Akintayo, 2022). Additionally, erratic policies and corruption exacerbate communication challenges, creating public skepticism about government efforts (Rex, 2019). Research evaluating communication strategies in promoting the National Social Investment Programmes (NSIP) is therefore vital. Addressing issues such as inadequate communication, misinformation and skepticism could enhance the effectiveness of poverty alleviation initiatives in Nigeria and other contexts within the Global South.

Research Questions

The purpose of the study is to evaluate the communication strategies and the contribution of the NSIP programme to a nation's development. The research questions that guided the study are:

1. What are the communication strategies used to promote the National Social Investment Programme as perceived by beneficiaries from Bauchi, Kaduna and Plateau states?
2. What are the outcomes of the National Social Investment Programme in contributing to national development as perceived by beneficiaries from Bauchi, Kaduna and Plateau states?

Objectives of the Study

This study seeks to:

i. To find out the communication strategies used in promoting the National Social Investment Programme as perceived by beneficiaries from Bauchi, Kaduna and Plateau states

ii. To examine the outcome of the National Social Investment programme in contributing to national development as perceived by beneficiaries from Bauchi, Kaduna and Plateau states.

Empirical Review of Studies

The study, Adoption of Communication Strategies in the Promotion and Management of Social Investment Programmes in Nigeria from 2017-2021 by Inobemhe et al. (2024), examined the corporate communication strategies employed by the Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management and Social Development in promoting and managing NSIPs during the specified period. Using data from In-depth Interviews (IDIs), the study identified various strategies, with a focus on policy communication and overall programme management. The findings highlighted a predominant reliance on social media platforms to engage programme beneficiaries, with traditional media serving complementary roles.

A study on N-Power Programme and Poverty Reduction in Niger State, Nigeria by Aminu and Aliyu (2024) examined the N-power programme and poverty reduction in Niger State, Nigeria. The study adopted a descriptive survey design with the population of 31,107 beneficiaries who benefited from the N-power programmes. To determine the sample size, Taro Yamane formula was adopted where the study arrived at 392. The study revealed that there exist negative perceptions among the beneficiaries regarding the programme's effectiveness in addressing critical issues. Given the identified challenge of inadequate funding as a hindrance to N-power's effectiveness, it was recommended that the government and relevant stakeholders increase the programme's funding allocation.

Kayode (2021) studied N-power agro advisors' knowledge of Agricultural Development Programme (ADP) communication methods in Akoko area of Ondo state, Nigeria where he examined the knowledge of N-power Agro Advisors of ADP communication methods used for information dissemination to clients. A two-stage sampling technique was used to sample 120 respondents and they were interviewed. Binary logistic regression model was used for data analysis. Results showed that respondents had high knowledge of the use of local contact farmers and Small Plot Adoption Technique but they frequently used contact farmers. Age (wald = 3.186), education (wald = 2.913) and experience in extension works (wald = 3.116) were the significant determinants of the high knowledge level of the communication methods.

A study on the Communication Channels as Predictors of Knowledge and Participation in National Social Investment Programmes in Selected Local Government Areas in South-South, Nigeria by Akintayo et al. (2022) investigated the impact of communication channels on knowledge and participation in the National Social Investment Programme (NSIP) in South-South, Nigeria. A survey research design was employed, with a sample size of 827 respondents selected from a population of 2,371,276 residents of nine Local Government Areas. Data was collected using a validated questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The findings revealed that face-to-face, radio and television were the most effective communication channels for disseminating information about NSIP, with a significant influence on knowledge (Adj.R2 = 0.403, F(2, 808) = 22.404, $p < 0.05$) and participation (Adj.R2 = 0.042, F(2, 808) = 151.103, $p < 0.05$). The study recommended continued use of these channels to enhance knowledge and participation in NSIP poverty alleviation initiatives.

The Effect of N-Power Scheme on Youth Empowerment in Anyigba, Dekina Local Government Area of Kogi State was studied by Ifatimehin et al. (2020). He employed a descriptive research design, surveying 220 N-Power beneficiaries in Anyigba selected from a population of 491 using Taro Yamane's formula. Data was collected via questionnaire. Descriptive and inferential statistics, as well as One-Way ANOVA analysis, were used to analyze the data. The findings revealed that the N-Power scheme has significantly empowered youths in skills acquisition, financial status, self-reliance and productivity. The study recommended that government initiate more youth empowerment programmes, provide mandatory training and workshops in ICT and agriculture and enhance beneficiaries' technical skills to promote development.

Odey and Sambe (2019) assessed the Contribution of N-Power Programme to Youth Empowerment in Cross River State, Nigeria. The study employed a cross-sectional survey design, using cluster random sampling to select 167 N-Power beneficiaries. Data was collected through questionnaire and 8 key informant interviews, analysed using percentages. The study found that the programme contributed to poverty reduction, ICT skills proficiency, financial empowerment, on-the-job experience and small-scale business investment, with N-Teach being the most represented strand among beneficiaries. However, challenges such as delayed payment of allowances, unpaid allowances, distance to work places and lack of teacher training for N-Teach beneficiaries hindered the programme's effectiveness. To address these issues, the study recommended prompt payment of stipends, timely resolution of unpaid allowances, posting beneficiaries near their

residences and teacher education for N-Teach beneficiaries to enhance the programme's impact on youth empowerment.

Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored on the Empowerment Theory, as articulated by Marc Zimmerman in his work Empowerment theory: Psychological, organizational and community levels of analysis published in 2000. The theory emphasizes the importance of fostering individual and community strengths to promote positive development. Communication in empowerment theory, as per Zimmerman, focuses on empowering individuals through clear, honest and respectful communication to enhance self-control, independence and freedom in the empowerment process (Suadnya, 2023). This theory is particularly relevant in social work and youth development contexts, where it serves as a framework for understanding how empowerment can lead to beneficial outcomes.

Methodology

This study employed a multistage sampling design involving three stages: selection of states, selection of beneficiaries and questionnaire distribution. Three states - Plateau, Kaduna and Bauchi - were purposively selected from three geo-political zones (north-central, north-west and north-east) in Nigeria. Within each selected state, direct beneficiaries of the social investment programmes were identified and selected using purposive sampling. 400 copies of the questionnaire were distributed online in each of the three states. 1,200 copies of the online questionnaire were distributed across the three states and 1,148 were filled within two weeks of the online questionnaire hosted by Google Forms representing 95.7% response rate. The collected data were analysed and presented in tabular form using simple percentage tables.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Table One: States of Respondents

State	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Plateau	394	34.3%
Kaduna	358	31.2%
Bauchi	396	34.5%
Total	**1148**	**100%**

Table 1 showed the states of respondents. It was discovered that out of the 1148 responses, 394 were from Plateau State representing 34.3%, Kaduna State had 358 responses representing 31.2% while Bauchi had 396 respondents representing

34.5%. This means that Bauchi State had more respondents than Plateau while Kaduna had least number of respondents.

Table Two: I heard about President Buhari administration's NSIP through a friend, family members and social media.

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly agree	920	80.1%
Agree	228	19.9%
Undecided	0	0%
Strongly disagree	0	0%
Disagree	0	0%
Total	**1148**	**100**

The table above sought to find answers to the statement, 'I heard about President Buhari administration's NSIP through a friend and family member'. Of the total number of respondents, 920 (80.1%) strongly agreed while 228 (19.9%) agreed. Meanwhile, none was undecided, strongly disagreed or disagreed. This means that the majority of the respondents strongly agreed that they heard about the various NSIP through their friends and family members.

Table Three: NSIP was successful because the right communication strategies (verbal and non-verbal) were used to provide a good platform for beneficiaries to participate actively in national development.

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly agree	662	57.7%
Agree	448	39.0%
Undecided	23	2.0%
Strongly disagree	4	0.3%
Disagree	11	1%
Total	**1148**	**100**

The results of the analyses in table 3 showed that 662(57.7%) strongly agreed that the NSIP was successful because the right communication strategies were used to provide a good platform for beneficiaries to participate actively in national development while 448(39%) agreed with the statement. 23(2%) were undecided, 4(0.3%) and 11(1%) strongly disagreed and disagreed in that order. Going by these results, majority of the respondents strongly agreed with the statement that NSIP initiative of the ex-President Buhari's administration was successful because the right communication strategies were used to provide a good platform for beneficiaries to participate actively in national development.

Table Four: Communication strategies used before/during the NSIP were commendable and effective.

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly agree	294	25.5%
Agree	752	65.5%
Undecided	2	0.2%
Strongly disagree	40	3.5%
Disagree	60	5.2%
Total	**1148**	**100**

Table Four showed that 294(25.5%) strongly agreed, 752(65.5%) agreed that the communication strategies used before/during the NSIP were commendable and effective while 2(0.2%) were undecided. 40(3.5%) and 60(5.2%) strongly agreed and disagreed with the statement respectively. With these results, it means that majority of the beneficiaries agreed that communication strategies used before/during the NSIP were commendable and effective in achieving national development.

Table Five: NSIP has provided a good platform for Nigerian youths to participate actively in national development.

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Strongly agree	1000	87.1%
Agree	138	12.0%
Undecided	0	0%
Strongly disagree	8	0.7%
Disagree	2	0.2%
Total	**1148**	**100**

This table showed that 1000(87.1%) and 138(12.0%) strongly agreed and agreed that NSIP provided a good platform for Nigerian youths to participate actively in national development while 8(0.7%) and 2(0.2%) strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively. None was undecided. From the results, it means that majority of the respondents strongly agreed that the NSIP provided a good platform for Nigerian youths to participate actively in national development.

Discussion of Findings

Following the responses and analysis of the data gathered from the beneficiaries of NSIP from Bauchi, Kaduna and Plateau States with regards to the effectiveness of communication strategies and implementation of the NSIP, the following findings were arrived at:

i. Answers to research question one from the results of the analyses in tables 2, 3 and 4 revealed that majority of respondents heard about President Buhari's NSIP through friends and family members (80.1%), believed the NSIP was successful due to effective communication strategies (57.7%) and agreed that the communication strategies used were commendable and effective (91%). On the finding of the use of family and friends as communication channels, this was a complementary strategy used by the then Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management and Social Development who primarily utilised social media platforms as a dominant channel to reach beneficiaries of the NSIP complemented by traditional media, despite facing challenges with fake news and rumor spread on social media (Inobemhe et al., 2024). Additionally, in tune with the efficacy of family and friends, Akintayo et al. (2022) found that face-to-face communication was an effective channel for disseminating information about the NSIP in South-South, Nigeria, significantly influencing knowledge and participation among beneficiaries. The use of word-of-mouth especially from family and friends is also supported by the findings of Aminu and Aliyu (2024) who also identified insufficient information and inadequate communication channels, including website and internet issues, as key challenges in the implementation of N-Power programmes in Niger State, Nigeria.
ii. The second research question sought to know how the NSIP contributed to national development. The survey results from Table five showed that majority of the respondents agreed that the NSIP provided a platform for active participation in national development (99.1%). These findings aligned with the study of Ifatimehin et al. (2020) that noted how the N-Power scheme had significantly empowered youths in Anyigba, Kogi State, by enhancing their skills acquisition, financial status, self-reliance and productivity, ultimately promoting youth development and self-sufficiency. Also, Odey and Sambe (2019) found that the N-Power programme in Cross River State, Nigeria, contributed significantly to youth empowerment by reducing poverty, enhancing ICT skills, financial empowerment, providing on-the-job experience and supporting small-scale business investment, despite facing challenges that need to be addressed to enhance its impact. The findings of the study align with the Empowerment Theory, which posits that individuals and communities can be empowered through access to resources, skills and opportunities, leading to increased self-reliance, productivity and participation in national development. The results show that the NSIP, specifically the N-Power programme, has empowered Nigerian youths.

Recommendations

Based on the research findings, two recommendations are made:

i. Despite the majority of respondents agreeing on the effectiveness of NSIP's communication strategies, some respondents disagreed. Therefore, it is recommended that the Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs and Poverty Alleviation should explore alternative communication channels, such as community-based initiatives to address communication gaps perceived by beneficiaries.
ii. Secondly, although the majority of respondents agreed that NSIP has contributed to national development, some respondents identified challenges, such as delayed payment of allowances, unpaid allowances, distance to work places and lack of teacher training for N-Teach beneficiaries. To address these gaps, it is recommended that the Federal Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs and Poverty Alleviation should establish a feedback mechanism to promptly address beneficiaries' concerns, ensure timely payment of allowances, provide training and support for beneficiaries and review the programme's implementation strategy to enhance its impact on national development.

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