

Lessons Learned

Youth Employment and Empowerment: Addressing Transparency and Inclusion



Introduction and Background

The socio-economic and political marginalisation of youth is a major driver of conflict in Nigeria. **An estimated 50 million youth are considered underemployed** by the World Bank, with an unemployment rate of 38 percent. The country's overall unemployment rate was 27.4 percent, doubling over 10 yearsⁱ It is estimated that 4.5 million new jobs are required every year in Nigeria to satisfy labour market supply. Together, these figures represent the worst youth employment figures in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The Ministry of Youth Development, Rivers State

"The long neglect of the youth development sector has resulted in youth restiveness, militancy, and unemployment, and if not properly addressed may lead to national insecurity and chaos, hence the need for a comprehensive plan and programmes for youth development."

Young men are particularly vulnerable to being recruited to groups and gangs that engage in criminal and violent activities. Although successive governments have made substantial investments in employment and economic empowerment programmes, both youth unemployment and levels of insecurity continue to grow in Nigeria, casting doubt on their effectiveness. NSRP research identified key weaknesses in employment schemes, including: inconsistent quality of programme design, delivery and monitoring; flawed beneficiary selection processes which are open to (political) manipulation; and structural gender inequalities. Limited consultation with young people whose views and priorities are mostly excluded exacerbates the situation. Data collected by NSRP during its research and baseline measurements, revealed:



These data reveal a perceived lack of transparency, consultation and fairness in these programmes and indicated the reforms required if these schemes and programmes are to allay, rather than increase, grievance. Consequently, NSRP identified government employment and empowerment programmes, including the Subsidy Re-Investment and Empowerment Programme (SURE-P) as an entry point for engagement, both because of the dissatisfaction by participants, as well as the scale of resources that federal and state governments expend on them.

The NSRP Intervention

Against this background, component 2.1 was designed to help reduce grievances around current employment and empowerment programmes, with two specific objectives:

- to improve the design and implementation of economic programmes run by government in these states, so they are seen to be more inclusive, gender equitable, transparent and effective, and are able to benefit more people;

The pathway to change

'If NSRP is able to help improve the fairness and effectiveness of target government employment programmes then it will help reduce the grievances arising from social exclusion and unemployment that partly drive youth involvement in violence in target states.'

- to strengthen the ability of civil society - youth groups and other target beneficiaries - to organise, engage in policy debate and advocate for programmes that have these 'good governance' characteristics.

The planned **outcome** of this component was that NSRP will have contributed to a measurable reduction in perceptions of grievances in target areas around employment and empowerment programmes. This component was implemented in Delta, Kaduna, Kano, Plateau, Rivers, and Yobe states, over a period of four years.

NSRP conducted comprehensive research into the problem, publishing a widely peer-reviewed report, which developed visibility and traction for the work by involving key government agencies, such as the Kaduna State Bureau for Public Service Reform in the public presentation of the report. Working with civil society implementing partners, NSRP facilitated the engagement between civil society and key government MDAs, developing platforms that could connect youth directly to decision-makers in government. NSRP simultaneously invested in building the capacity of youth and youth networks to **engage effectively** with the media and government, by building capacity in communications and other 'soft skills' to advocate for the changes young people want to see in employment programmes. Significant emphasis was placed on reaching out to young women, who research showed were heavily discriminated against.

NSRP's strategy also required deep engagement with federal and state institutions involved in the design, implementation and management of employment and empowerment programmes. NSRP initiated dialogue with the federal level Office to the Special Assistance to the President on Job Creation, and gained support for the establishment of a Policy Working Group, which tasked with improving coordination among the multiplicity of youth employment programmes. Similar approaches were deployed at State level, in Kaduna, Rivers, and Kano. NSRP provided technical assistance to policy working groups on design, delivery and monitoring of programmes, and provided conflict and gender sensitivity training, to ministries departments and agencies (MDA) responsible for youth employment in Kano, Kaduna, Rivers and Delta, and Yobe States. NSRP used an adaptive approach, placing greatest emphasis where space and opportunity presented itself more favourably, for example in Kano State, where multiple stakeholders demonstrated commitment to reforms.

Results achieved

- Although modest, related to the overall scale of the challenge, NSRP and its partners delivered results that have potential for lasting change. Data taken from the annual Youth Cohort Studies is captured in the text box. Key results include:
- Over 4,000 young women and men empowered to advocate for improvements to fairness and transparency in government employment programmes through NSRP training
- Over 300 youth directly benefitting by gaining employment, training or state loans as a result of NSRP interventions
- Youth Networks in 3 States registered with the state ministries of youth, enabling their membership to more regularly access opportunities from government programmes

- 71% of respondents in the North West said that employment programmes were transparent, fair and consultative
- 51% of youths agreed that the government regularly publishes information on the selection process for employment programmes
- 20% fewer respondents said that being politically connected was necessary to gain a position on a government programme
- 47% of respondents believe that female youths are able to be selected and benefit from employment programmes, and 58% believed that there had been an improvement on the previous year

- A draft 'Code of Principles' for employment programmes in Kano state developed by NSRP-supported interventions
- New mechanisms for collecting feedback from youth on employment programmes established in Kano State through the Liaison Officers in all 44 LGAs, and Town Hall Meetings to better share information on employment programmes and opportunities
- Draft policy to "improve accountability, inclusion and transparency in youth employment" developed in Delta State, and being used as an advocacy tool with the Office of the Chief Job Creator in Delta State.

On RSSDA, there is not MoV to back up the allusion, but no doubt that politics impacted public sector and public administration deeply as noted in reports of the time.

Lessons Learned

The component has delivered scattered results, some of which may only reach full potential well beyond the life of NSRP. There are positive lessons to draw from NSRP's engagement in this sector, and a number of lessons from interventions that did not deliver as expected. Many of the lessons outlined below are based on a consultation with the NSRP team, and the author's interpretation.

An innovative approach, but assumptions have not always held

NSRP's intervention on youth employment was designed to reduce grievances around current employment and empowerment programmes. It was not designed as a 'youth employment' programme. The distinction is important. **NSRP's intervention offered something new on the landscape** which, if successful, could significantly change the *rules of the game* and reduce conflicts around a highly contested issue. The approach, to work with both demand and supply actors to build a demand for change that would incentivise decision makers to make programmes more effective, was different and valuable. Assumptions around the willingness of stakeholders to work with NSRP have proven to be correct in part, as testified by the relationship NSRP struck with key agencies such as the Federal Office of the Special Assistant to the President on Job Creation, under whose oversight a Policy Working Group with over 10 relevant MDAs was established.

However, **regardless of the willingness of agencies to engage**, their own **political capital was limited**. In the run up to the 2015 elections, implementation of employment programmes came to a halt as a result of political interests. However, where assumptions have held more strongly, for example in Kano State, where the DYD and NDE have engaged in a sustained way with NSRP, outcomes with significant potential for impact have resulted. Factors behind the relative success of this intervention are explored below.

Developing a Code of Principles for Employment Programmes in Kano

Following advocacy activities and the publication of “A Recommendation for a Kano State Action Plan on Youth Employment and Empowerment”, NSRP partner CHRICED (Resource Centre for Human Rights and Civic Education) finalised a set of *Draft Principles for Programme Design and Implementation in Youth Employment and Empowerment Programmes in Kano State* to aid employment / empowerment agencies’ programme design and implementation. It also places a heavy emphasis on self-empowerment of youths, peaceful coexistence, inter-communal tolerance and peace building. The Code includes recommendations for improving transparency, inclusion and coordination and has been validated by relevant MDAs in Kano, including the Directorate of Youth Development (DYD) and the National Directorate of Employment. It is currently a voluntary, non-binding document, which a multi-stakeholder committee is lobbying Kano State Government to enact.

Key success factors behind this intervention include:

- Highly engaged and positive youth groups and networks to work with in the State (whose perceptions, perhaps importantly, were not as bleak as in other locations)
- Significant willingness to engage – and adopt change – by key State level institutions with responsibility for employment programmes
- The relatively high number of employment programmes in the State, and the opportunity to coordinate effectively across them as a potential entry point
- An “unprecedented” level of contact between unemployed youth and government employment agencies (Upper Quartile, Independent Evaluator, 2016)
- A vibrant, committed, capacitated implementing partner (CHRICED), serving as change agent

Nigeria’s patronage politics hinders change

NSRP recognised the risk of Nigeria’s patronage politics from the earliest stages, and the issue was thoroughly reported in NSRP’s research into employment and violence: *Winners or Losers?* As suggested in the previous paragraphs, political competition and capture of the substantial resources of Nigeria’s employment programmes limits the possibilities for reform. NSRP aligned itself with some key agencies in target States and at federal level (eg the Office of the Special Assistant to the President on Job Creation, and the Rivers State Sustainable Development Agency), which were both hamstrung in the run up to the 2015 elections, and subsequently disbanded. For this reason, NSRP was only able to agree an MoU with the OSAPJC for a period of 6 months, severely limiting the impact of any investments. The problem is captured well by one key informant from a representative of a government agency (in Kano):

“The partnership [with CHRICED] has been fruitful, as they have been able to show the implication of irregularities in employment and empowerment programmes, but all that is at an advisory level, because people in government, mostly the top echelon do not regard such due process in either appointments or empowerment programme[s]. As it is now, even if another employment programme is to be done, not much would change, because of [the] vested interest of public officers in such exercise[s]”ⁱⁱ

Working with established employment programmes was highly challenging

NSRP chose to engage with well-established programmes such as the Subsidy Re-Investment and Empowerment Programme (SURE-P), which was initiated in 2012 and uses resources saved from the former Government’s controversial policy decision to end fuel subsidies. From the start, however, there was widespread controversy around the politicisation of SURE-P, including allegations that Committee Members were picked for their allegiance to the (then) President, and that civil society and youth were under-represented

on SURE-P Committees. Given the programme's (SURE-P) national reach and potential to make meaningful contributions across multiple important areas, NSRP's choice to engage with it was well informed. However, team reflections suggest that patronage networks around SURE-P were already so established that NSRP, with limited resource and political capital was, perhaps, unlikely to be the required catalyst for institutional change, especially in the charged environment leading up to the 2015 election. Youth were already disaffected, and had limited motivation to engage, believing for the large part (especially in the Delta States) that programmes were too in the control of political actors and not ripe for reform.

Build skills for young people, and address issues of reach

NSRP has trained over 4,000 youths, including in advocacy, communications, IT, conflict sensitivity and other soft skills. As highlighted in the NIEP 2016 mid-term review, a qualitative assessment of the value of the training would be beneficial. Key informants from the NSRP have also raised the issue that 'reach' is a significant concern. Whilst those youths that have received training may be better placed to engage with relevant MDAs and advocate for change and / or access opportunities through more open recruitment processes, the vast majority of young people outside of these networks have not had these opportunities, and may see little, if any, change in the availability of government-offered employment or training opportunities. For example, despite the apparent achievements behind the development of the 'Code of Principles' in Kano, fieldwork undertaken by the Independent Evaluator revealed a low level of youth knowledge of the Code.

Focus on resilience

Future training for youths in areas where there are poor employment prospects may be more effective working to a 'resilience' theory of change. Whilst technical and vocational training is clearly essential, ideally backed by evidence-driven labour market analyses, it is increasingly recognised that sustained engagement to develop the skills that are linked to 'individual resilience' in young people who lack opportunities and are susceptible to being mobilised into violence is an effective approach. This approach would emphasise empowering young people to engage with security issues that are important to them, in their community, whether related to employment or other key drivers of conflict. On the basis of this learning, the British Council will adopt a similar approach to its work with young people in Northern Nigeria, under EUTF funding.

Adopt a more gender targeted approach

NSRP "reached out" to young women by design in terms of its youth advocacy work, and when the component was ended in 2016, almost half of young people surveyed believed that young women could access and benefit from government employment programmes, and that a majority thought that the situation was improved from 2015. However, it is far from clear whether young women's employment or training opportunities increased during NSRP. Anecdotally, numbers of women did access jobs or training (eg 5 women trained in tailoring and hairdressing....3 women trained in hairdressing etc.), however overall there is very limited evidence that gender imbalances or stereotypes have been addressed in employment and empowerment programmes. Additionally, although new mechanisms such as Town Hall meetings in Kano State have provided greater opportunities for citizen-state engagement, young women's participation has been very low, averaging just 13% across the target LGAs.ⁱⁱⁱ Future programming must emphasise women's participation, both in advocacy and in access to opportunities, in a highly targeted way, and monitoring of outcomes for young women must be a key measure of effectiveness.

Strengthen capture of data, monitoring and evaluation

Previous reviews (eg NSRP Independent Evaluation Provider's mid-term review) highlighted weaknesses in NSRP's monitoring and evaluation ((M&E) systems, and poor data in a number of areas. Better data would have enabled the programme to provide a stronger

narrative, and could have been used to adapt the component strategy more effectively. For example, there was limited tracking of change outcomes against key achievements such as the development of the Kano Code of Principles; and limited evaluation of the effectiveness of building capacity of 4,000 youths for advocacy purposes. NSRP did emphasise building M&E capacity with a variety of agencies with which it engaged, for example the Kaduna State Bureau for Public Service Reform and the Rivers State Sustainable Development Agency. However, future concerted efforts to improve information capture and sharing across actors would be of huge benefit.

Conclusion

Work under component 2.1, to reduce grievances around current employment and empowerment programmes has posted some modest successes. In some specific contexts there has been visible behaviour change, for example in Kano State, where there has been a concerted effort made to endorse and adopt the 'Code of Principles' on employment programmes, the introduction of town hall meetings for improved information sharing, and liaison officers receiving youth feedback. Although the objective of the component was not specifically to increase the numbers of youth securing employment, the very limited numbers of youth that did secure employment as a result of NSRP initiatives may limit its value in the eyes of youth. A concern is that building the expectations of young people could lead to further disillusionment, which could fuel rather than address grievances. However, Youth Cohort Survey data did record an overall improvement in the proportion of young people who believed youth employment programmes to be transparent, fair and consultative, though the sample size may not be sufficient to discern any statistically relevant trends from.

Clearly there is value in engaging with employment programmes, given the scale of youth unemployment in Nigeria, and the proven links between unemployment and criminal and violent activity. And without institutional change, a change in the '*rules of the game*', there is limited scope within Nigeria's system of political patronage to make programmes fully transparent, fair and consultative. However, whether a programme of NSRP's type, with limited investments to make, and limited political capital of its own, could realistically challenge deeply embedded practices, particularly in deeply political programmes such as SURE-P, is questionable. NSRP may have had more impact working *in partnership* with other implementers in the employment and growth sectors to strengthen the conflict sensitivity of programmes and implementing partners, rather than acting as a lead agency in an area outside of its influence. Examples such as the advocacy that led to the development of a Code of Principles in Kano reveals that with some political will, change is possible, though even here higher political support is still required to formalise the Code.

The sustainability of the youth networks was premised on them continuing to use the skills and knowledge they acquired to canvas for transparent and effective employment programmes. However, whether this will happen is uncertain, as the search for meaningful employment takes precedence. In the short term, sustained advocacy on fairer employment programmes will largely depend on the interest and incentives of implementing partners, and their ability to secure funds, which cannot be assumed.

NSRP identified the risks of political patronage from a very early stage, and has shown evidence of adapting the interventions to fit context. But as the team reflect, political control over employment programmes extends well beyond the level of the MDAs responsible for them. As one key informant quotes, "would you not give jobs to your brothers?" Therein lies a major stumbling block to the type of institutional reform required.

ⁱ Banfield J et al (2014). 'Winners or Losers: Assessing the Contribution of Youth Employment & Empowerment Programmes to Reducing Conflict Risk in Nigeria'. NSRP report

ⁱⁱ Upper Quartile (2016) NSRP Independent Evaluation Provider; MTE Report

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid.