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ENTREPRENEURSHIP POLICY EVALUATION AND DECISION ANALYSIS FOR JOB CREATION A STUDY OF NPOWER PROGRAMME

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Abstract

This study investigates the institutional foundations of entrepreneurship policy in Nigeria by assessing the design and effectiveness of the N-Power programme as a mechanism for employment generation. Despite years of government intervention, the country continues to experience weak entrepreneurial dynamism, as evidenced by Nigeria's Index of Dynamic Entrepreneurship (IDE) score of 0.387. Using an *ex post facto* research design, the study examines secondary data across ten dimensions of the IDE framework to evaluate the enabling environment for entrepreneurship. Anchored in institutional theory, the analysis identifies low scores in technology absorption (0.30), product innovation (0.33), and networking (0.35), signaling weak institutional coordination, policy incoherence, and limited access to innovation systems. While dimensions such as start-up skills (0.50) and opportunity perception (0.45) suggest pockets of progress, these are insufficient to drive sustainable enterprise development. The N-Power programme, although ambitious in scope, represents the risks of treating entrepreneurship policy as a standalone intervention rather than as part of a institutional ecosystem. The study concludes that sustainable job creation in Nigeria requires institutional coherence where rules, norms, and enforcement mechanisms are predictable, aligned, and responsive. Policy recommendations focus on regulatory reform, mandate clarity, and the formalization of support structures for entrepreneurship.

Keywords:
Entrepreneurship, institutional theory, N-Power programme, sustainable job creation.

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Introduction

Entrepreneurial activity has long been recognized as a critical driver of economic growth and employment generation (Stoica *et al.,* 2020; Bilan and Apostoaie, 2023). In both advanced and developing economies, entrepreneurship has emerged as a strategic lever for addressing persistent labour market challenges, particularly rising unemployment and underemployment. As markets evolve and structural changes redefine the global economy, the need to harness entrepreneurship as a mechanism for inclusive and sustainable development has intensified (Naghshizadian *et al.,* 2024). Accordingly, national and subnational governments have, over the past decades, intensified policy attention on engaging citizens in entrepreneurial ventures, particularly through start-ups and innovation-driven enterprises. These efforts are premised on the notion that entrepreneurship contributes to long-term improvements in living standards by stimulating innovation, enhancing productivity, and expanding job opportunities (Pradhan et al., 2020).

Despite this increased policy focus, the outcomes of entrepreneurship-led development strategies have been mixed. In the United States, for instance, start-ups account for approximately 39.75% of new jobs annually, with each new establishment creating an average of 6.54 jobs (Kabungo *et al.,* 2018). Yet, this dynamism is tempered by a high rate of business failure about 40% of new firms exit the market within their first three years. This premature exit results in job destruction and imposes significant economic costs on displaced workers and communities. Estimates from the U.S. Census Bureau's Business Dynamics Statistics (BDS) show that firms aged one to five years contribute roughly 43% of new jobs, but nearly 20% of these positions are lost within the first year due to establishment closure (Lui et al., 2020). These statistics mirror global patterns and highlight the fragility of entrepreneurship-driven job creation, particularly in environments where policy frameworks do not adequately support business sustainability.

In Nigeria, government efforts to stimulate job creation through entrepreneurship policy have mirrored global trends in deploying public initiatives to combat unemployment, particularly among young people. Over the past two decades, a range of programmes such as the Youth Enterprise with Innovation in Nigeria (YouWiN), the Graduate Internship Scheme (GIS), the National Directorate of Employment (NDE), and more recently, the Nigeria Youth Investment Fund (NYIF), have sought to promote self-employment and enterprise development. Among these, the N-Power programme which was introduced in 2016 under the National Social Investment Programme (NSIP), represents one of the most ambitious youth-targeted entrepreneurship and skills development schemes in sub-Saharan Africa. The programme was structured to address large-scale unemployment among young Nigerians aged 18 to 35 by offering temporary

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employment, digital skills training, and enterprise development opportunities across sectors such as education (N-Teach), agriculture (N-Agro), and technology (N-Tech) (Bello *et al,* 2022). Its design reflects a policy turn from passive welfare-based interventions to more active labour market strategies focused on employability and entrepreneurial capability (Osimen *et al.,* 2025).

While N-Power reportedly reached over 500,000 beneficiaries during its initial phases, questions persist regarding the sustainability and transformative impact of such interventions on long-term employment outcomes (Bello *et al.,* 2022). Some studies suggest that, although the programme offers temporary relief and useful skills exposure, it often lacks the structural linkages and institutional support necessary for sustained enterprise development (Danladi *et al.,* 2023). Previous research has largely examined various strands of the N-Power initiative, primarily focusing on its capacity to generate short-term employment and ease immediate income pressures among young Nigerians (Udodiugwu, 2022; Ogwola, 2024; Konkwo and Egbodion, 2024). However, there remains a significant gap in understanding the extent to which participation in N-Power catalyses long-term self-employment, entrepreneurial readiness, or transition into formal job markets. The absence of a coherent post-exit strategy and weak monitoring frameworks has further complicated assessments of the programme's enduring impact. As a result, critical questions remain about the programme's capacity to move beyond temporary work placement toward enabling sustainable livelihoods and broader entrepreneurial ecosystems.

The core of the problem lies not merely in programme design but in the absence of systematic evaluation frameworks and decision-support systems that can inform iterative policy refinement. Most evaluations of entrepreneurship policies in Nigeria tend to rely on descriptive statistics or anecdotal evidence, lacking rigorous analytical methods that link inputs, processes, and outcomes. This makes it difficult for policymakers to distinguish between temporary outputs (such as short-term job placements) and sustainable employment outcomes that reflect real entrepreneurial capacity and resilience. Moreover, there is limited integration of decision analysis tools in the evaluation process, which hinders evidence-based policymaking and the adaptive learning necessary to refine programmes like N-Power. Without a robust understanding of what works, for whom, and under what conditions, entrepreneurship policies risk becoming symbolic gestures rather than strategic tools for job creation and inclusive growth.

To bridge the identified gap in understanding the long-term efficacy of entrepreneurship policy interventions like N-Power, this study sets out to pursue three interrelated objectives. First, it aims to assess the design logic and implementation structure of the N-Power programme as a mechanism for promoting entrepreneurship and generating employment among young Nigerians. This involves examining the policy's strategic

alignment, delivery mechanisms, and institutional frameworks. Second, the study seeks to identify the structural factors that influence the effectiveness of entrepreneurship policy interventions in the Nigerian context. Third, the study adopts decision analysis techniques to critically evaluate the effectiveness and scalability of N-Power as a model for sustainable job creation. By doing so, it aims to offer a nuanced evidence base to inform policy decisions on youth employment and enterprise development in Nigeria.

The remaining sections of this article are structured as follows. The next section reviews relevant literature on entrepreneurship policy and employment creation, followed by the theoretical framework. The methodology section outlines the data sources and analytical approach. This is followed by the presentation of findings, discussion, and policy recommendations.

Conceptualising Entrepreneurship within the context Job Creation

Entrepreneurship is frequently cited in Nigeria's academic and policy discourse as a solution to youth unemployment, yet its conceptual framing remains weak. Its frequent association with low-productivity, survivalist activities such as petty trading or informal commerce, positions it more as a response to labour market failure than as a catalyst for structural economic transformation. This conceptual dilution undermines the effectiveness of policy and educational interventions, which often prioritize basic skills training at the expense of cultivating entrepreneurial reasoning and innovation.

To clarify the concept in the context of job creation, this paper draws on Kirznerian and Schumpeterian entrepreneurship. Kirznerian entrepreneurship highlights alertness to market inefficiencies and resource reallocation (Kirzner, 2009; Masango and Lassalle, 2020). It improves allocative efficiency but does not necessarily induce structural change. Conversely, the Schumpeterian perspective frames the entrepreneur as an innovator who introduces new combinations of resources and technologies, thus driving creative destruction and long-term economic development (Emami, 2021).

While both perspectives are relevant, their implications differ. Kirznerian entrepreneurship helps explain individual responses to market gaps, especially in informal settings. Schumpeterian entrepreneurship is essential for policies targeting structural transformation and sustainable employment. This aligns with Acs et al.'s (2018) notion of *productive entrepreneurship* ventures that are scalable, innovation-driven, and capable of integrating into formal economic systems.

However, entrepreneurship policy in Nigeria which largely expressed through entrepreneurship education by tertiary institutions remain necessity-based and vocational in nature. University curricula are often limited to microenterprise models which emphasizes business plan writing and self-help frameworks, with little focus on

innovation or market integration. As a result, programmes like N-Power risk becoming rebranded welfare interventions rather than pathways to economic dynamism.

Typologies of entrepreneurship and Job creation

Having established the true nature of entrepreneurship, it is important to delineate the different typologies through which entrepreneurial activities manifest in practice and how these shape employment outcomes. Such distinctions provide diagnostic lens through which to understand why successive entrepreneurship policies in Nigeria have fallen short of delivering meaningful and sustainable job creation (Ibrahim, 2019).

At the broadest level, entrepreneurship is often classified as **necessity-driven** or **opportunity-driven.** Necessity-driven entrepreneurship arises when individuals engage in self-employment not out of strategic choice but as a last resort, due to the absence of formal job opportunities. This form of entrepreneurship is typically embedded in the informal sector, low-capital, low-productivity, and largely subsistence-oriented. It is the dominant form in Nigeria and is often supported, albeit unintentionally, by government programmes that treat entrepreneurship as a quick-fix to unemployment. However, necessity-driven ventures rarely generate jobs beyond the owner-operator and contribute little to economic transformation. As such, policies anchored on necessity entrepreneurship are structurally limited in their capacity to address Nigeria's youth employment crisis.

In contrast, **opportunity-driven entrepreneurship** reflects a proactive pursuit of market opportunities, underpinned by innovation, strategic risk-taking, and aspirations for growth. Ventures in this category are more likely to expand, formalize, and absorb labor at scale. They embody the productive capacities needed for structural economic change. A compelling example can be found in Nigeria's emerging fintech ecosystem, where startups such as Flutterwave, Paystack, and Moniepoint have demonstrated the transformative potential of innovation-led entrepreneurship. These ventures not only create high-value jobs across software engineering, data science, digital marketing among others, but also facilitate broader financial inclusion and economic efficiency. However, these successes remain outliers rather than evidence of a systemic shift primarily because Nigeria's policy environment fails to priorities ecosystem-level enablers of opportunity-driven entrepreneurship. Compounding this is the institutional inertia within universities, whose leadership often lacks the conceptual clarity and strategic orientation needed to cultivate innovation ecosystems

For instance, while the **National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA) and Central Bank of Nigeria** has made commendable strides by establishing ICT & innovation hubs in several Nigerian universities, many of these institutions lack the strategic vision or capacity to integrate such hubs into functional entrepreneurial

ecosystems. The result is a proliferation of underutilized spaces disconnected from real industry problems, market demands, or policy levers.

Entrepreneurship Policy: Objectives and Instruments

The deployment of entrepreneurship policy as a deliberate tool of economic engineering has become an enduring feature of statecraft in both advanced and emerging economies. Contrary to the widespread belief that entrepreneurship flourishes best in unregulated markets, the historical record reveals that some of the most dynamic entrepreneurial ecosystems have emerged under conditions of strong institutional support and strategic policy coordination.

In East Asia, for instance, the so-called "Asian Miracle" was not merely the outcome of cultural traits or market spontaneity. Rather, it reflected a conscious mobilisation of the state to orchestrate entrepreneurial energies toward national development goals. Countries such as Singapore and Thailand exemplify this approach, often referred to as **state-guided entrepreneurship**. In Singapore, from the 1960s onwards, institutions like the Economic Development Board (EDB) were instrumental in identifying priority sectors, attracting foreign direct investment, and fostering technology-intensive entrepreneurship. Thailand's Board of Investment similarly played a role in steering capital and skills toward sectors deemed vital for industrial transformation.

The epistemological roots of such policies can be traced to a logic that rejects laissez-faire orthodoxy and instead embraces entrepreneurship as a public good i.e. a means to realise structural economic upgrading, job creation, and global competitiveness. This stands in contrast to the Anglo-American model, where entrepreneurship policy often assumes a minimalist form: focused on deregulation, tax incentives, and access to finance, but with limited coordination or long-term vision. (Ibrahim, Aminu, Ifegwu, & Tyohen, 2023).

Entrepreneurship policy, in its robust form, entails more than simply encouraging individuals to start businesses. It encompasses a complex array of instruments aimed at shaping the quality, orientation, and impact of entrepreneurial activity. These instruments may include direct funding for innovation, public procurement targeting startups, intellectual property protection regimes, education reforms that prioritise problem-solving and creativity, as well as infrastructure development for digital and industrial clusters.

At its core, the objective of entrepreneurship policy is to align individual entrepreneurial actions with national economic priorities. When well-executed, such policies can shift economies from low-productivity traps into high-growth trajectories. But when entrepreneurship policy is reduced to ad hoc interventions such as disbursing micro-grants or conducting isolated trainings, it fails to generate the structural effects required for mass employment and long-term competitiveness.

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Design logic and implementation structure

The N-Power programme, introduced under Nigeria's National Social Investment Programme (NSIP), was conceived as a large-scale intervention to address youth unemployment through skills training and temporary job placement. Its design logic was relatively straightforward: absorb unemployed graduates into structured work experience schemes while also offering digital and vocational training modules. However, unlike East Asian models such as Singapore's EDB or Thailand's Board of Investment, N-Power lacked a long-term industrial anchor or integration into a national economic strategy. Whereas East Asian policies were embedded within a broader development plan targeting strategic sectors (Wu *et al.,* 2022), N-Power operated more as a palliative intervention with limited institutional coordination or sectoral focus.

Structural factors of Entrepreneurship Policy

Effective entrepreneurship policy requires institutional coherence, infrastructure, and human capital alignment (Bakir et al., 2021). In East Asia, entrepreneurship was guided by clear developmental mandates, with institutions empowered to direct credit, coordinate investment, and stimulate technology transfer (Wu et al., 2022). By contrast, N-Power suffered from structural constraints, including political turnover and fiscal unpredictability. The absence of industrial clustering or innovation ecosystems meant that the programme could not transition beneficiaries into growth-oriented entrepreneurship. Moreover, the informality of Nigeria's labour market and its weak intellectual property systems further restricted the programme's structural impact.

Entrepreneurship Policy effectiveness and scalability

The effectiveness of entrepreneurship policy is measured not just by immediate job creation, but by its ability to trigger economic transformation and scale beyond pilot phases. East Asian cases show that when entrepreneurship is embedded in national industrial strategy, it catalyses structural change. The N-Power programme, while commendable in intent, has largely functioned as a temporary welfare mechanism (Bello et al., 2022) rather than a sustainable engine of innovation or enterprise development. Its scalability has been undermined by high fiscal cost, politicisation, and limited private sector linkage. Unlike Singapore's or Thailand's models, there is little evidence that N-Power has created enduring entrepreneurial capacity or contributed to productivity upgrading (Unger and Chan, 2021).

Theoretical foundation

Institutional theory provides a compelling lens through which to understand the design, implementation, and outcomes of entrepreneurship policy. At its core, institutional

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theory posits that economic actions and organizational behaviours are shaped not merely by market logic but by the institutional environments, formal rules, informal norms, and enforcement mechanisms that govern them (Eijdenberg et al., 2019). In this context, institutions provide the enabling or constraining architecture within which actors make decisions, allocate resources, and respond to policy incentives.

Three major assumptions underpin institutional theory. First, economic outcomes are not purely market-driven but depend on the quality and configuration of supporting institutions. Second, organizations tend to adopt practices that confer legitimacy within their institutional environment, even when these practices are inefficient, a phenomenon referred to as isomorphism (Yang, 2022). Third, institutional change is often path-dependent; policies and practices are shaped by historical legacies that constrain future reforms.

Applied to entrepreneurship policy, institutional theory draws attention to the coherence, credibility, and embeddedness of policy instruments. It explains why similar policy models such as entrepreneurship training produce divergent outcomes across contexts. In East Asia, strong institutions enabled policy alignment, enforcement of performance standards, and integration with broader economic goals. In Nigeria, by contrast, institutional weaknesses, manifested in fragmented coordination, political turnover, and limited bureaucratic capacity, could undermined the effectiveness of programmes like N-Power. The failure to embed entrepreneurship interventions within supportive institutional frameworks has the potential to engender short-termism, policy reversals, and limited scalability.

Methodology

This study employs a secondary data approach, drawing primarily on the Index of Dynamic Entrepreneurship (IDE) as the principal analytical framework. The IDE is a composite index developed by *Prodem* at the National University of General Sarmiento (Argentina) in 2014. It was designed to assess systemic conditions for entrepreneurship by capturing a wide range of institutional, social, and economic factors that enable or constrain entrepreneurial activity. Since 2018, the IDE has been scaled to a global level through a partnership with the Global Entrepreneurship Network (GEN), making it a widely recognised evidence base for entrepreneurship policy and comparative analysis across countries.

The IDE is structured around a multidimensional model that integrates quantitative indicators derived from various internationally recognized sources. These indicators are aggregated into thematic dimensions that reflect critical enabling conditions for entrepreneurship, such as access to finance, entrepreneurial human capital, culture, regulatory framework, and innovation capabilities. This multidimensionality allows the

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IDE to serve not merely as a measurement tool but also as a diagnostic instrument for identifying systemic strengths and weaknesses within national entrepreneurial ecosystems.

Each variable was first assigned to one of the ten dimensions outlined in the IDE's conceptual model. Within each dimension, the associated variables were aggregated using the **geometric mean**, a method chosen for its sensitivity to proportional differences and its ability to moderate the influence of extreme values. Once the geometric means for each dimension were obtained, a second-level aggregation was conducted to compute the overall IDE score for each dimension, again using the geometric mean across all ten dimensions.

Formally, the procedure is expressed as follows:

$$x_{1i} + x_{2i} \ldots\ldots + x_{ni} \; denotes \; the \; n \; variable \; associated \; with \; each \; dimension$$

$$d_{1i} + d_{2i} \ldots\ldots + d_{ni} \; denotes \; the \; n \; scores \; associated \; with \; each \; dimension$$

Then dimension scores for each is represented as follows:

$$d_{1i} = \sum_{j=1}^{n} x_{j1}$$

This approach ensures that all dimensions are treated multiplicatively and that a low score in one dimension exerts a dampening effect on the overall index which reflects the systemic logic of entrepreneurial policy where weaknesses in one area may constrain the whole.

Table 1: geometric mean result

Dimension	H1	H2	H3
Opportunity Perception	0.45	0.50	0.60
Start-up Skills	0.50	0.55	0.65
Risk Acceptance	0.40	0.48	0.58
Networking	0.35	0.42	0.55
Cultural Support	0.42	0.44	0.50
Technology Absorption	0.30	0.35	0.48
Human Capital	0.38	0.40	0.55
Competition	0.37	0.39	0.52
Product Innovation	0.33	0.36	0.50
Finance	0.41	0.43	0.60

Source: Author, 2025

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Nigeria's overall IDE score stands at 0.387 which indicates a weak enabling environment for dynamic entrepreneurship. Most of the component dimensions score below 0.5, with particularly low results in technology absorption (0.30), product innovation (0.33), and networking (0.35). While relatively stronger dimensions such as start-up skills (0.50) and opportunity perception (0.45) offer some optimism, these are not sufficient to counterbalance systemic weaknesses in institutional support, regulatory coherence, and resource access.

Technology Absorption (0.30) and Product Innovation (0.33) score particularly low, revealing institutional gaps in knowledge transfer, intellectual property regimes, and incentives for research commercialization. These scores suggest that Nigeria lacks formal structures such as effective research policies, state-industry partnerships, or enforceable innovation frameworks that can support the absorption of new technologies by entrepreneurs. Institutional fragmentation, overlapping mandates, and policy inconsistency further compound this weakness.

Networking (0.35) also records a poor score. This dimension captures the extent to which entrepreneurs can form productive relationships with other actors in the system—such as suppliers, regulators, mentors, or peers. In institutional terms, the weakness of networking reflects both the absence of trust-based informal norms and the limited availability of formal structures that facilitate cooperation, such as chambers of commerce or innovation hubs.

Start-up Skills (0.50) and Opportunity Perception (0.45) show relatively higher performance. These reflect the growing presence of entrepreneurship awareness and training initiatives, particularly those driven by private actors, NGOs, and international development agencies. However, institutional theory reminds us that the effectiveness of such interventions is conditioned by the broader system of rules and norms. Without a stable regulatory environment, access to finance, and predictable enforcement, skills and perceptions may not translate into sustainable entrepreneurial behaviour.

The implications of this weak institutional environment are exemplified by the underwhelming performance of the N-Power programme, a federal government initiative launched to tackle youth unemployment and stimulate entrepreneurial activity through skills acquisition and temporary job placements. Despite its ambitious scope and wide coverage, the programme failed to generate long-term employment outcomes or foster sustainable entrepreneurship among beneficiaries. Institutional theory helps explain why. The programme operated in an environment characterized by weak absorptive capacity, limited follow-up mechanisms, and unclear integration with existing market structures. Without strong institutions to embed the acquired skills into viable entrepreneurial pathways, such as access to finance, innovation infrastructure, and formal mentorship

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networks, the initiative struggled to produce durable economic outcomes. This aligns with the low IDE scores in technology absorption, networking, and innovation, which signal a systemic inability to translate short-term interventions into long-term entrepreneurial transformation. In effect, N-Power became another top-down effort undermined by institutional fragility and poor ecosystem coordination.

Theoretical Implications

Applying institutional theory allows us to interpret Nigeria's IDE performance not merely as a technical issue of resource gaps, but as a consequence of systemic institutional weaknesses. Entrepreneurial activity is embedded in a wider context of regulatory frameworks, cultural norms, and governance structures. In Nigeria, inconsistencies in policy enforcement, lack of coordination among regulatory agencies, and a weak legal environment for business formation and protection of investor rights create uncertainty and increase the cost of entrepreneurial action and undermines job creation capacity of entrepreneurial policies. This uncertainty also undermines the legitimacy and efficiency of entrepreneurial activity, discouraging both entry and formalization. Moreover, weak institutions limit the feedback mechanisms through which entrepreneurial actors can influence the evolution of the ecosystem.

Conclusion and recommended Policy Implications

This study was motivated by the persistent gap between entrepreneurship policy design and its long-term effectiveness in addressing youth unemployment in Nigeria. Programmes like N-Power have drawn significant investment and attention but have struggled to yield sustainable outcomes due to systemic institutional weaknesses. Using the Index of Dynamic Entrepreneurship (IDE) and institutional theory, this study demonstrates that Nigeria's entrepreneurial ecosystem suffers from structural deficiencies in technology absorption, innovation support, and network formation, conditions necessary for translating skills acquisition into durable economic activity.

- Strengthening the rule of law and predictability of regulatory enforcement.
- Clarifying institutional mandates and reducing bureaucratic overlap.
- Formalizing entrepreneurial support systems such as incubators and mentoring programmes through national policy.
- Embedding feedback loops that allow entrepreneurs to shape institutional reforms through consultation, experimentation, and accountability mechanisms.

Rather than isolated interventions, what is needed is **institutional coherence** where rules, norms, and enforcement mechanisms are aligned and oriented towards enabling entrepreneurial activity.

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