

**PUBLIC POLICY AND EMPOWERMENT PROGRAMMES: AN ASSESSMENT OF RENEWED HOPE EMPLOYMENT INITIATIVES (RHEI) PHASE ONE (I) IN TARABA STATE, NIGERIA**

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**Abstract**

The objective of the paper is to examine an in-depth assessment of the Renewed Hope Employment Initiatives (RHEI) Phase I in Taraba State, a Federal Government empowerment policy launched in 2024 to address persistent national challenges of unemployment, poverty, and limited access to livelihood opportunities. The method of data collection in the study is secondary. The data collected is analyzed by way of qualitative descriptive analysis. Using insights from public policy analysis, Human Capital Theory, the study examines how citizens' socioeconomic demands are transformed by governmental structures into outputs such as empowerment programmes. Taraba State recruited and trained 978 out of the national allocation of 93,731 beneficiaries, distributed across the four departments of the National Directorate of Employment (NDE). The research evaluates the programme's objectives, implementation processes, distribution patterns, gender spread, scheme allocation, and coverage across senatorial districts and local government areas. Findings show that RHEI Phase I recorded achievements in skills training, job creation, and engagement of youths, women, and vulnerable groups. However, limitations such as administrative gaps, insufficient coverage, and external factors affected implementation. The study concludes that while RHEI Phase I has made measurable impact on empowerment in Taraba State, strengthening institutional capacity, expanding programme reach, and improving monitoring mechanisms are essential for long-term sustainability.

**Keywords:** *Public Policy, Empowerment Programme, Renewed Hope Employment Initiatives*

**Introduction**

Globally, unemployment and poverty remain among the most critical socio-economic challenges confronting both developed and developing economies. Despite sustained economic growth in some regions, large segments of the global population particularly youths, women, and vulnerable groups continue to experience exclusion from decent and productive employment. The International Labour Organization (ILO) observes that global labour markets are increasingly characterized by job insecurity, underemployment, and skills mismatches, thereby reinforcing cycles of poverty and social inequality (ILO, 2023).

In response to these challenges, governments across the world have increasingly adopted public policy interventions focused on empowerment, skills acquisition, and human capital development as strategies for inclusive growth and social stability. Human capital-oriented policies emphasize education, vocational training, and entrepreneurship as means of improving labour productivity and reducing long-term unemployment (Schultz, 1961; Becker, 1964). Similarly, the World Bank (2022) underscores that investment in human capital is central to

sustainable development and poverty reduction, particularly in low and middle-income countries.

These global challenges are more pronounced in developing regions, especially Sub-Saharan Africa, where rapid population growth, weak industrial capacity, and limited social protection systems exacerbate unemployment and poverty levels. The region records some of the highest youth unemployment rates globally, prompting renewed policy debates on the effectiveness of state-led empowerment and employment programmes (World Bank, 2023; UNDP, 2022).

Nigeria exemplifies this broader global and regional challenge. Despite its abundant human and natural resources, the country continues to grapple with high unemployment and widespread poverty, particularly among the youth population. Since the return to democratic governance in 1999, successive Nigerian governments have implemented various empowerment and employment policies aimed at addressing these socio-economic challenges, including skills acquisition, entrepreneurship promotion, and public works programmes (Mohammed et al., 2019).

It is within this national context that the Renewed Hope Employment Initiatives (RHEI) was introduced in 2024 as a federal empowerment policy designed to enhance employment opportunities, promote skills development, and reduce poverty at the sub-national level. This study therefore assesses the implementation and distributional outcomes of RHEI Phase I in Taraba State, with particular emphasis on beneficiary allocation, programme coverage, and implications for sustainable empowerment.

However, Public plays a crucial role in shaping the masses outcomes, particularly in developing regions where poverty, unemployment, and limited access to empowerment opportunities are persistent challenges. The Renewed Hope Employment Initiatives (RHEI), introduced as part of Nigeria's broader development and social protection framework, aims to enhance economic empowerment, reduce unemployment, and facilitate skills acquisition at the sub-national level, including Taraba State. Phase one (I) of the programme targets vulnerable groups, youths, women, and low-income households through job creation, entrepreneurial training, and financial support mechanisms.

The policy was mounted in 2024 in response to the above lamentation. Out 93,731 of the entire population 978 were registered and trained in taraba state and it was further shared across the four programme departments of National Directorate of Employment (NDE) (NDE, 2024).

Nigerian economy in the 60s and 70s depended heavily on agriculture with over 75% of the population engaged in farming (Mohammed et al, 2019). Due to the subsequent discovery of oil in commercial quantity and the emergence of political patronage system, the agricultural sector was neglected for decades which killed diversification and innovation. Since the oil boom of the early 70s, Nigeria has remained a mono-cultural economy which has aggravated unemployment and poverty especially among the youth demography. Unemployment is a major challenge in the Nigerian economy. Unemployment covers persons between ages 15-64, who during the reference period are currently available for work, actively seeking for work but are without work. Nigeria with current population of about 237.5 million (41% under 15 years, 56% 15-64 years, 3% 65 years above) which is 2.97% of the world population, the unemployment rate is 33.79% (Daily trust, 2025). Nigeria is one of the countries with highest

number of poor people with 139 million poor people who are living below the poverty line (World Bank, 2025). The various policies by the Federal Government since the return to democracy in 1999 were aimed at empowering the people to reduce unemployment and poverty (Mohammed et al, 2019). For instance; National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), Subsidy Re-Investment Programme (SURE P), You-Win N-power Youth Employment and Social Support Operation (YESSO), N-power, Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) and Government Enterprise and Empowerment Programme (GEEP). There is shortage of manpower in the education and health sectors and lack of will to go back to farm to boost agriculture even though the security architecture of the country is weak which affect the farming system. It is based on the above that the RHEI programme in Taraba State will be discuss extensively.

### **Review of Related Literature on Public Policy and Empowerment Programme**

Public Policy denotes the relationship of government and its environment. Policies whether at the level of individuals, governments or groups involve choice among alternatives in order to solve a problem. Anderson (1975) cited in Mohammed et al, (2019) public policy is a relatively stable, purposive cause of action followed by an actor or set of actors in dealing with a problem or matter of concern. Policy is a principle or rule to guide decision to achieve rational outcomes. According to Ikelegbe (1996) cited in Mohammed et al, (2019) policy is a statement of what an organization wants to do, what it is doing, what it is not doing and what would not be done. Hence, Dye (1974) cited in Mohammed et al, (2019) postulated that a policy is what government chooses to do or not to do. RHEI is a policy aimed at empowerment through human social development for progress. Nigeria is known for the masses bulge and high poverty rate which necessitates the formulation of empowerment programmes as temporary policies to cushion the effects of underemployment, unemployment and high rate of poverty.

The term “public policy” refers to a set of actions the government takes to address issues within society. For example, public policy addresses problems over the long-term, such as issues with healthcare or gun control, and as such, it can take years to develop. Public policy addresses issues that affect a wider swath of society, rather than those pertaining to smaller groups. To explore this concept, consider the following public policy definition. A course of governmental action established to address the problems of the society at large, rather than individual needs on a smaller scale. There are various studies about public policy and many scholars have attempted to define public policy from different angles. Before explaining the meaning of public policy, let us first go through some of its definitions. Robert (1971) cited in Akujuru (2019) define the terms public policy as "the relationship of government unit to its environment. Dye (1972) cited in Akujuru (2019) viewed "public policy is whatever government chooses to do or not to do" Richard (1969) cited in Akujuru (2019) "public policy is not a decision, it is a course or pattern of activity. Friedrich (1963) cited in Akujuru (2019) viewed public policy is a proposed course of action of a person, group or government within a given environment providing opportunities and obstacles which the policy was proposed to utilise and overcome in an effort to reach a goal 01 realise an objective or purpose. From these definitions, it is clear that public policies are governmental decisions, and are actually the result of activities which the government undertakes in pursuance of certain goals and objectives. It

can also be said that public policy formulation and implementation involve a well-planned pattern or course of activity. It requires a thoroughly close-knit relation and interaction between the important governmental agencies viz., the political executive, legislature, bureaucracy and judiciary.

Akujuru (2019) outlines the following points to explain the nature of public policy.

- i. Public Policies are goal oriented. Public policies are formulated and implemented in order to attain the objectives which the government has in view for the ultimate benefit of the masses in general. These policies clearly spell out the programme of government. Public policies are the policies that have been declared by the state that covers the state's citizens. These laws and policies allow the government to stop any action that is against the public's interest. There may not be a specific policy that an action pertains to but if it is not deemed good for the public it will be quashed.
- ii. Public policy is the outcome of the government's collective actions. It means that it is a pattern or course of activity or the governmental officials and actors in a collective sense than being term as their discrete and segregated decisions.
- iii. Public policy is what the government actually decides or chooses to do. It is the relationship of the government units to the specific field of political environment in a given administrative system. It can take a variety of forms like law, ordinances, court decisions, executive orders, decisions etc.
- iv. Public policy is positive in the sense that it depicts the concern of the government and involves its action to a particular problem on which the policy is made. It has the sanction of law and authority behind it. Negatively, it involves a decision by the governmental officials regarding not taking any action on a particular issue. Policy and Goals to understand the meaning of policy in a better manner, it is very important to make a distinction between policy and goals. Goals are what policies aim at or hope to achieve. Goal is a desired state of affairs that a society or an organisation attempts to realise. Goals can be understood in a variety of perspectives. These can be thought of as abstract values that a society would like to acquire. There are also goals that are specific and concrete.
- v. Removal of poverty is a goal that the government wants to pursue. Public policies are concerned with such specific goals. They are the instruments which lead to the achievement of these goals.
- vi. If the government announces that its goal is to provide housing to all the members Public Policy: of the deprived sections of society, it does not become a public policy. It is a Meaning and Nature statement of intention of what the government wants to do. Many a time the government, for political reasons, announces goals that it has little desire to achieve. In order to become a policy, the goal has to be translated into action. Programmes have to be designed to achieve specific objectives. As an illustration, let us look at the policy of poverty alleviation. Several programmes have been designed for this, e.g., The Integrated Rural Development Programme (IRDP), The National Rural Employment Programme (NREP) etc. Each programme has certain goals to achieve within a specified time and each programme is provided with financial resources and

administrative personnel. These become concrete efforts to achieve a goal. Policy spells out the strategy of achieving a goal. Thus, policy is essentially an instrument to achieve a goal. Statement of a goal does not make it a policy. During the Great Depression, which happened in the 1930s, the U.S. created a sort of “social safety net” to support those who had felt significant impacts from the Depression. The social safety net extended to those who had lost their jobs, homes, and all their savings. Working with the government, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt created programme like the Work Progress Administration and the Civilian Conservation Corps. These groups were to specifically focus on improving rates of unemployment. President Roosevelt also created the Home Owners’ Loan Corporation to help individuals refinance their mortgages and ease the debt created by the Depression. Once the Depression began to let up, the government started phasing out these programs as well. However, some of the programs the government started back then are still around today, including Social Security, Medicare, and minimum wage.

The term empowerment originates from American Community Psychology and is associated with a social scientist Julian Rappaport (1981 cited in Mohammed et al, 2019). In social work, empowerment forms a practical approach of resource oriented intervention. Robert (2008) cited in Mohammed et al, (2019) posits that empowerment is the capacity of individuals, groups, and/or communities to take control of the circumstances, exercise power and achieve their own goals, and the process by which, individually and collectively, they are able to help themselves and others to maximize the quality of their lives. In capability approach, empowerment is linked to wellbeing and livelihood of persons. Arising from the foregoing, empowerment programme is an organised policy aimed at empowering the people. Empowerment programme is divided into two; instrumental and intrinsic. The former is means to an end and the latter is an end in itself (Sen, 1999; 2001; Nussbaum, 2011 cited in Mohammed et al, 2019). Hence, ideas and education for freedom is an empowerment and resources for general wellbeing are empowerment. This brings to fore the idea of skills acquisition and practical knowledge for development. Empowerment revolves around human development and power in society for social justice and progress. This assessment examines the objectives, implementation processes, achievements, and limitations of RHEI Phase one (1) in Taraba State. It also evaluates the programme using public policy analytical lenses, including the rational choice model, implementation theory, and empowerment theory (Anderson, 2011; Parsons, 1995).

#### **Human Capital Theory: Analytical Framework**

Human Capital Theory provides a foundational framework for understanding the role of public policy in employment generation and empowerment. The theory posits that investments in education, training, health, and skills development enhance the productive capacities of individuals, thereby improving their employability, earnings potential, and overall contribution to economic growth (Schultz, 1961; Becker, 1964). From this perspective, labour is not merely a factor of production but a form of capital that yields returns when appropriately developed through deliberate policy interventions.

Human Capital Theory assumes that unemployment and low productivity, particularly in developing economies, are largely attributable to deficits in skills, education, and relevant

competencies. Consequently, governments are expected to intervene through policies that expand access to education, vocational training, and skills acquisition programmes in order to bridge the gap between labour supply and labour market demand (Becker, 1993). Employment and empowerment programmes are therefore justified as strategic investments rather than welfare expenditures.

Within the context of public policy, employment initiatives such as active labour market programmes (ALMPs) including vocational training, entrepreneurship development, and job placement schemes are practical expressions of Human Capital Theory. These programmes seek to enhance individuals' knowledge and skills so they can either secure paid employment or engage in productive self-employment (ILO, 2015). Empirical studies have shown that well-designed human capital investments can reduce unemployment, improve income levels, and promote inclusive economic growth (World Bank, 2019).

In Nigeria, high unemployment rates especially among youths have often been linked to skills mismatches and weak alignment between the education system and labour market needs (NBS, 2021). In response, both federal and state governments have increasingly adopted human capital-oriented policies that prioritize skills acquisition, vocational education, and entrepreneurship training as pathways to employment and empowerment. These interventions reflect the Human Capital Theory assumption that enhancing individual capacities can address structural employment challenges.

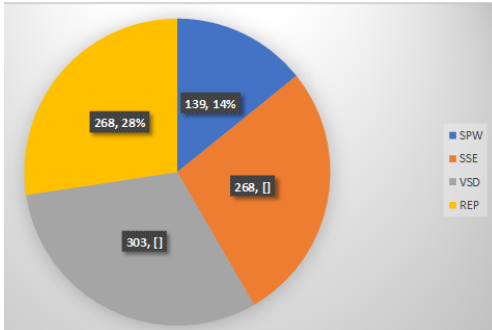
In Taraba State, the Renewed Hope Employment Initiative can be interpreted as a human capital development strategy aimed at improving the employability of youths and vulnerable groups. By providing vocational training, skills acquisition opportunities, and enterprise support, the programme seeks to equip beneficiaries with market-relevant competencies that increase their chances of securing employment or starting sustainable livelihoods. From a Human Capital Theory perspective, the initiative represents a deliberate public investment in the productive capabilities of the population, with the expectation of long-term socio-economic returns in the form of reduced unemployment, poverty alleviation, and economic development. However, Human Capital Theory also suggests that the effectiveness of such programmes depends on the quality, relevance, and equity of skills development interventions. Where training content is poorly aligned with labour market needs, inadequately funded, or unevenly distributed, the expected returns on human capital investment may be limited. This underscores the importance of effective policy design, adequate funding, and continuous monitoring in ensuring that employment initiatives such as the Renewed Hope Employment Initiative achieve their intended empowerment objectives.

### **Methodology**

This study adopted descriptive survey research design to assess the implementation and outcomes of the Renewed Hope Employment Initiatives (RHEI) phase I in Taraba state. The design was considered appropriate because it enables systematic description, analysis, and interpretation of existing phenomena without manipulating variables, particularly in policy and programme evaluation studies. Secondary method was used to generate data such as official NDE documents and RHEI phase I enrolment and empowerment, Journals, Newspaper.

## Data Presentation and Analysis

### Distribution based on Programme Departments



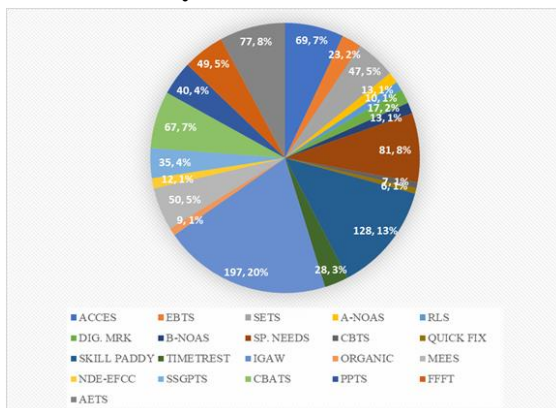
The RHEI Programme is structured into four (4) major departments under the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) which includes:

- i. Special Public Works (SPW) Department (139, 14%)
- ii. Small Scale Enterprise (SSE) Department (268, 28%)
- iii. Vocational Skills Development (VSD) Department (303, 31%)
- iv. Rural Employment Promotion (REP) Department (268, 28%)

Based on the generated data obtained from NDE, out of 93,731 only 978 participants were registered and trained in Taraba state (NDE, 2024). This allocation reflects an effort by the Federal Government to distribute empowerment opportunities across states but the numerical distribution remains relatively small considering Taraba state population and unemployment levels.

Analysis of the distribution shows clear disparities among NDE departments. Some departments received significantly higher beneficiary's numbers, while others recorded minimal participation. For instance, Practical vocational departments such as VSD appear to have a larger representation, likely due to the programme's emphasis on skills acquisition for self-reliance. This aligns with existing literature that places vocational education at the centre of youth empowerment and poverty reduction (Mohammed et al., 2019).

### Distribution by Schemes

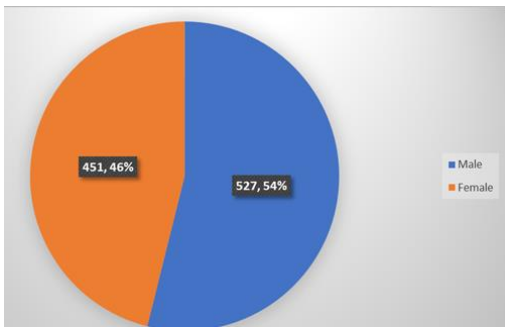


Source: NDE 2024

Each department implements multiple schemes. The findings show:

Special Public Works department constitutes the following Artisans in Collaborative Construction Employment Scheme (ACCES) 69 (7%), Environmental Beautification Training Scheme (EBTS) 23 (2%), Solar Energy Training Scheme (SETS) 47 (5%), while Vocational Skill Department constitutes the following Advance National Open Apprenticeship Scheme (A-NOAS) 13 (1%), Resettlement Loan Scheme (RLS) 10 (1%), Digital Marketing For Wealth Creation (DMSWC) 17 (2%), Basic National Open Apprenticeship Scheme (B-NOAS) 13 (1%), Special needs 81 (8%), Community Based Training Scheme (CBTS) 7 (1%), Quick fix 6 (1%), Skillpaddy 128 (13%), Timetrest 28 (3%), Small Scale Enterprises encompasses: Income Generating Activities for Women (IGAW) 197 (20%), Natural Organic Home Supplements 9 (1%), Micro Enterprises Enhancement Scheme 50 (5%), NDE Enterprise and Finance Counselling Clinic (NDE-EFCC) 12 (1%), and Rural Employment Promotion department encompasses: Small Stock Goat Production Training Scheme 35 (4%), Community Based Agricultural Training Scheme 67(7%), Poultry Production Training Scheme 40 (4%), Fish Feed Formulation Techniques 49 (5%), Agricultural Extension Training Scheme 77 (8%)

**Distribution by Gender**

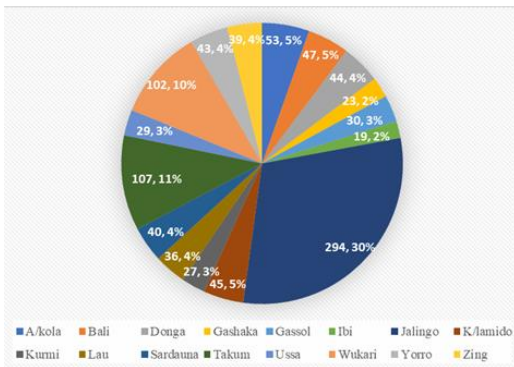


Source: NDE 2024

The gender distribution graph in the dataset indicates:

A noticeable gap between male (527, 54%) and female (451, 46%) beneficiaries. Although female were included, the representation suggests under-participation, reflecting wider socio-economic inequalities in the state. Empowerment emphasizes inclusivity as a core element of developmental justice (Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 2011). Thus, the existing gender imbalance implies that RHEI phase one did not fully address intrinsic empowerment dimensions.

**Distribution by Local Government Areas**



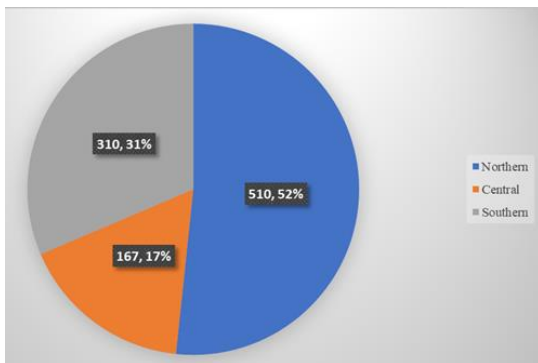
Source: NDE 2024

The data presented shows:

Significant disparities in how slots were distributed among the 16 LGAs of Taraba state. LGA like Jalingo the state capital appear to have highest beneficiary with 294(30%), Takum 107(11%), Wukari 102(10%), Ardo-kola 53(5%) Bali 47(5%) Karim-lamido 45(5%) Donga 44(4%), Yorro 43(4%) Sardauna 4 (4%), Zing 39(4%), Lau 36 (4%), Gassol 30(3%), Ussa 29 (3%), Gashaka 23(2%) and Ibi 19(2%).

Remote areas like Ibi, Gashaka, Ussa and Gassol, had relatively fewer beneficiaries. This suggest geographical inequality possibly caused by weak information dissemination, poor accessibility, administrative bottlenecks or lower political influence by peripheral LGAs.mUneven distribution contradicts public policy expectations that programmes should reflect equity and fairness (Dye, 1974; Anderson, 2011).

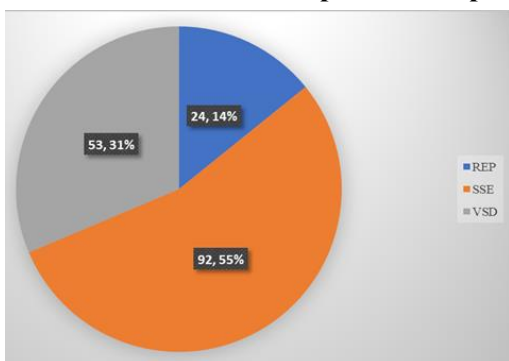
**Distribution by Senatorial Districts**



Source: NDE 2024

The beneficiary spread among the three (3) senatorial districts (North, Central and South) shows that: One district receiving a higher share of beneficiaries than others North 510 (52%) South 301(31%) and central 167 (17%). This outcome may be linked to population size, political representation or implementing agency networks.

**Distribution based on empowered Departments**



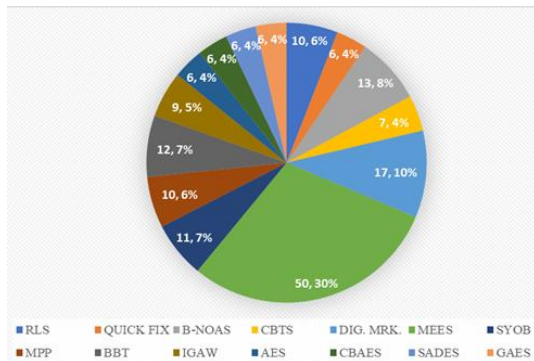
Source; NDE, 2025

From the empowerment dataset:

The majority of empowered beneficiaries fall under Small scale enterprises (SSE) with 92 (55%) beneficiaries’ then vocational skills development (VSD) with 53 (31%) beneficiaries’, Rural Employment promotion (REP) with 24 (14%) Special Public Works with no single beneficiary recorded in Taraba state.

These schemes provided quick-impact economic opportunities but have limited long-term employment absorption capacity. For sustainable impact, empowerment must be both instrumental (means to an end) and intrinsic (an end itself), in line with capacity theorists (Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 2011). The empowerment is not free but rather loan at the interest rate of nine percent (9%).

**Distribution based on empowered Scheme**



Source: NDE 2025

Resettlement Loan Scheme (RLS) 10(6%), Quick fix 6(4%), Basic National Open Apprenticeship Scheme (B-NOAS) 13(8%), Community Based Training Scheme (CBTS) 7(4%), Digital Marketing (TIMETREST) 17(10%), Micro Enterprise Enhancement Scheme (MEES) 50(30%), Start Your Own Business (SYOB) 11(7%), Matured Peoples Programme (MPP) 10(6%), Basic Business Training (BBT) 12(7%) Income Generating Activities for Women (IGAW) 9(5%), Agricultural Enhancement Scheme (AES) 6(4%), Community Based Agricultural Empowerment Scheme (CBAES) 6(4%), Sustainable Agricultural Empowerment Scheme (SADES) 6(4%), Graduate Agricultural Empowerment Scheme (GAES) 6(4%)

From the analysis above, High enrolment in schemes requiring short-term training, low enrolment in high-skill schemes that could generate long-term employment and limited evidence of post-training monitoring and support.

This indicates that while RHEI successfully provided initial empowerment, the sustainability of the outcomes remains uncertain.

**Discussion of findings**

The finding reveals a serious mismatch between policy intention and practical impact. Taraba state faces high unemployment and poverty levels, yet the scale of RHEI intervention was numerically insignificant when compared to the magnitude of socioeconomic need. From a public policy perspective, Dye’s conception of policy as “what government chooses to do or not to do” becomes irrelevant. Limited coverage reflects a constrained governmental response rather than a comprehensive solution.

Applying Human Capital Theory to the findings of RHEI Phase I in Taraba State provides a useful analytical lens for assessing both the achievements and limitations of the programme.

**Skills Acquisition and Human Capital Formation**

The findings indicate that RHEI Phase I placed significant emphasis on vocational skills development (VSD) and small-scale enterprise (SSE) schemes. This orientation aligns with

Human Capital Theory, which emphasizes skills and knowledge as critical drivers of productivity and income generation. Training programmes such as Skillpaddy, Digital Marketing (TIMETREST), apprenticeship schemes, and enterprise development initiatives represent deliberate attempts by the state to enhance the productive capacities of beneficiaries. From a human capital standpoint, these interventions constitute investment goods rather than mere welfare transfers. By equipping beneficiaries with vocational, entrepreneurial, and digital skills, RHEI sought to improve their future employability and capacity for self-employment. This supports Becker's (1964) argument that training increases individual efficiency and raises expected lifetime earnings.

However, while the focus on skills acquisition is theoretically sound, the findings reveal that most beneficiaries were enrolled in short-term, low-skill programme. Human Capital Theory suggests that the depth and duration of training matter. Shallow or brief training periods such as the maximum three-month duration observed may result in limited skill mastery, thereby reducing the long-term returns on human capital investment. This partly explains why the sustainability of employment outcomes remains uncertain.

#### **Scale of Investment and Human Capital Impact**

A critical finding of the study is that only 978 beneficiaries were trained in Taraba State out of a national allocation of 93,731, despite the state's high unemployment and poverty levels. From a Human Capital Theory perspective, the scale of investment is insufficient relative to the magnitude of human capital deficits in the state.

Schultz (1961) emphasizes that meaningful economic transformation requires broad-based investment in human capital. The limited coverage of RHEI Phase I implies that its aggregate impact on Taraba State's labour market is minimal. While individual beneficiaries may experience improved skills and income prospects, the programme lacks the critical mass needed to significantly influence unemployment rates or productivity at the state level. Thus, the findings suggest that RHEI Phase I functioned more as a micro-level intervention rather than a transformative human capital development strategy.

#### **Uneven Distribution and Human Capital Inequality**

The study found significant disparities in the distribution of beneficiaries across LGAs and senatorial districts, with urban and politically central areas such as Jalingo receiving a disproportionate share. Rural LGAs with higher poverty incidence received fewer slots.

Human Capital Theory warns that unequal access to education and training perpetuates structural inequality. When human capital investments are geographically skewed, regions already disadvantaged remain trapped in low-skill, low-productivity equilibria. The uneven distribution observed in RHEI Phase I therefore undermines the programme's potential to reduce regional inequality and inclusive growth. Instead of correcting human capital deficits in the most deprived areas, the programme inadvertently reinforced existing spatial inequalities.

#### **Gender Dimensions of Human Capital Development**

The gender distribution of beneficiaries 527 male (54%) and 451 female (46%) shows moderate female inclusion compared to previous empowerment programme. From a Human Capital Theory perspective, this is a positive development, as investing in women's skills has multiplier effects on household welfare, child education, and community development.

However, the persistent gender gap indicates underinvestment in female human capital. Becker (1993) argues that discrimination and barriers to female skill acquisition reduce overall economic efficiency. Socio-cultural constraints, limited access to information, and domestic responsibilities likely restricted women's participation in RHEI Phase I. Consequently, the programme did not fully harness the potential productivity gains associated with gender-balanced human capital investment.

#### **Post-Training Support and Returns on Human Capital**

One of the most significant findings is the limited post-training support, including weak monitoring, inadequate access to finance, mentorship, and market linkages. Human Capital Theory emphasizes that skills yield economic returns only when complementary factors such as capital, technology, and market access are available.

Training beneficiaries without follow-up support reduces the rate of return on human capital investment. Skills may depreciate over time if they are not applied, a phenomenon Becker describes as human capital depreciation. The loan-based empowerment model, with a 9% interest rate, further constrained beneficiaries' ability to productively utilize acquired skills, particularly for poor and vulnerable participants.

#### **Short-Term Orientation and Sustainability**

The dominance of short-term schemes reflects a policy preference for quick-impact outcomes. While such programmes can temporarily enhance employability, Human Capital Theory suggests that sustainable development requires continuous and cumulative investment in education and training. Low enrolment in advanced or high-skill schemes indicates underinvestment in specialized human capital that could generate long-term employment and innovation.

As a result, RHEI Phase I produced immediate but fragile human capital gains, with uncertain long-term labour market absorption. This limits its contribution to sustained poverty reduction and economic transformation in Taraba State.

#### **Institutional Capacity and Human Capital Conversion**

Finally, the findings highlight institutional constraints insufficient funding, weak monitoring and evaluation, insecurity, and inadequate training infrastructure. Human Capital Theory recognizes the role of institutions in converting training into productivity gains. Where institutions are weak, the efficiency of human capital investment declines.

In Taraba State, the limited capacity of implementing agencies constrained the effective translation of skills acquisition into stable employment outcomes. Thus, the challenge is not merely human capital formation but also the institutional environment necessary to absorb and utilize skilled labour.

#### **Challenges in the Implementation of the Programme**

Insufficient funding limiting training depth and beneficiary reach-Limited financial resources constrained the scale of implementation, reduced the number of beneficiaries, shortened training duration and affected the overall quality of empowerment support. Insufficient funding is a common challenge in public policy implementation in developing economies (Dye, 1974; Anderson, 2011).

Uneven distribution of Beneficiaries-empowerment slots were disproportionately concentrated in urban and politically central areas, while rural LGAs with higher poverty and unemployment levels received fewer opportunities. Such inequitable allocation contradicts equity principle of public policy (Dye, 1974; Parsons, 1995).

Weak monitoring and evaluation-there was inadequate tracking of beneficiaries after training, limiting the ability to assess long-term employment outcomes and programme effectiveness. Weak monitoring frameworks are widely identified as a major limitation of empowerment programmes in Nigeria (Anderson, 2011; Mohammed et al., 2019).

Limited Post-training Support-Most beneficiaries received training without sufficient access to startup capital, mentorship, or market linkages, empowerment without follow-up support weakens capacity expansion and livelihood sustainability (Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 2011).

Security Challenges-insecurity in parts of Taraba state negatively affected agricultural and enterprise-based schemes, discouraging participation, investment, and continuity of empowerment activities. Security challenges have been linked to poor programme performance and rural economic stagnation (World Bank, 2025).

Short Training Duration-the maximum training period of three months was inadequate for effective skill mastery and business readiness, particularly for technical and vocational schemes. Short-term training has been shown to limit long-term employability and productivity (Parsons, 1995; Mohammed et al., 2019).

Low Employment Absorption Capacity-the weak local economy and limited industrial base reduced the ability of beneficiaries to secure paid employment or sustain self-employment after training. This reflects broader structural economic challenges facing empowerment programmes in Nigeria (Sen, 1999; Mohammed et al., 2019).

### **Conclusion**

Public policy represents deliberate government action toward solving collective problems. The RHEI fits this definition as a targeted intervention aimed at tackling unemployment and poverty in Nigeria. High unemployment rates and widespread poverty justify empowerment initiatives such as RHEI. The programme shows signs of moderate success, particularly in providing skills acquisition and short-term empowerment opportunities. However, structural limitations constrain full realization of its goals.

RHEI demonstrates significant potential for poverty reduction and livelihood improvement but requires stronger institutional coordination, equitable allocation mechanisms, sustainable post-training support expanding programme reach, and improving monitoring mechanisms are essential for long-term sustainability.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings the following recommendations are made:

- i. Increase funding allocation for RHEI to improve training quality and expand participation.
- ii. Ensure equitable distribution of slots across LGAs using transparent criteria such as 774,000 jobs.
- iii. Strengthen monitoring and evaluation systems for long-term tracking of beneficiaries and introduce post-training support including microcredit, mentorship, and market linkage.

- iv. Enhance security to support agriculture and SMEs in rural communities and upgrade training facilities with modern equipment and ICT tools.
- v. Partner with private sector organizations for internships and job placements and elongating training duration because the training period is maximum of three (3) months which is not enough for skills acquisition

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