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Escaping Poverty through Tricycle Business Operations in Jalingo Metropolis, Taraba State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Poverty today has become one of the biggest global challenges facing mankind. Global poverty statistics shows that the percentage of people living in extreme poverty has not declined especially in Third World countries. In Nigeria, recent data from the National Bureau of Statistics have shown that over 40%, which represents 82.9 million people lived below poverty line. Taraba state presently occupies 2nd position in poverty level among the 36 states of the federation with poverty prevalence put at 87.72%. Tricycle operations, otherwise known as Keke-NAPEP as an interventionist scheme, was introduced in 2012 to reduce incidence of poverty in the state, though initially tailored towards addressing rising insecurity but eventually metamorphosed into reduction in unemployment and poverty in the process. As it stands today, well over 13,000 registered tricycles are providing intra-city commercial operations in Jalingo metropolis. This study aims at interrogating the relationship between tricycle business operation and poverty alleviation in Taraba state. Has tricycle business operation caused a reduction in poverty among operators? What are the challenges faced by tricycle operators? The study adopted the Marxian Political Economy approach as a theoretical model. The study discovers that there's a significant improvement in income generation by tricycle operators which consequently reduces poverty among them. Therefore, the study recommends that government should get directly involved in tricycle business by making provisions for more tricycles for operators at subsidized rates in order to strengthen and sustain its anti-poverty measures in the state.

Keywords: Poverty, Poverty Alleviation, Tricycle, Political Economy, Taraba

INTRODUCTION

Human society today has been battling with excruciating poverty which makes it very difficult for people to meet up with essential needs. It is an incontrovertible fact that poverty has constituted a huge challenge to many households especially in developing countries, and has attracted the attention of many researchers who have been exploring ways to tackle this knotty phenomenon. Global poverty incidences show that tackling widespread poverty effectively across the globe requires multi-dimensional approaches. In 2018, United Nations Development Programme report of Global Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) estimated that about 560 million people experience poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa.

In Nigeria, the poverty situation is frightening in spite of numerous poverty alleviation strategies being introduced by both government and the private sector and modified over time in order to reduce poverty incidences to its barest minimum. In Taraba state however, the latest approach by the state government aimed at poverty reduction among the people is the introduction of commercial tricycle operations. Nigeria, as a country is endowed with enormous human resources yet poverty indicators show that its people are still wallowing in abject poverty with majority living below the poverty line in spite of the fact that most of the succeeding governments have initiated different poverty alleviation schemes. Experts believed that under both the military and civilian rules notwithstanding, most programmes introduced by successive regimes were largely not sustained. Some of the most recent anti-poverty programmes introduced include National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) in 2001, Community Skills Development Programme (CSDP) in 2010, Youth Enterprise with Innovation in Nigeria (YOUWIN) in 2011, Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Program (SURE-P) in 2012 and Social Investment Programme like N-power in 2016.

Since the adoption of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in Africa as a way of coming out of developmental challenges, situations have proven that poverty wasn't actually tamed as expected, but rather become exacerbated. The General Ibrahim Babangida administration against the interest of Nigerians adopted SAP sponsored by the Bretton Woods institutions. This, experts believed that the failure of the SAP to tackle poverty was due to the stringent conditionalities attached to such loan facilities (Mbah and Obiora, 2015).

Today, over 80 million Nigerians are estimated to be living in extreme poverty. This ugly scenario has prompted the World Poverty Clock in its recent survey to aver that "the outlook for poverty alleviation in Nigeria is currently weak", stressing that nearly six people slipped into extreme poverty every minute (World Poverty Clock, 2018).

Since the return of democratic rule in Nigeria in May 29, 1999, the country under President Olusegun Obasanjo adopted several palliative measures aimed at poverty reduction. The programme was christened National Poverty Eradication Programme, NAPEP. Within this period, tricycle business operation was introduced as a multi-purpose scheme aimed partly at reducing poverty in the society. Evidence from across the country reveals that the adoption of tricycle operations, which was christened "Keke-NAPEP", has contributed immensely in providing employment and therefore, mitigating the scourge of poverty in Nigeria in the process.

In Taraba state, the scheme came as a replacement of the traditional motorcycles as means of intra-city transport system and to curtail an emerging threat to security of lives and property in the state which many believed was aggravated by its proximity to Boko Haram ravaged states of Adamawa and Borno. This scheme was prompted by the April, 2012 attack on the police commissioner's convoy by a motorcycle rider in Jalingo, the state capital.

However, the role of Keke-NAPEP in poverty reduction in Taraba state is an interesting part of the state economy that warrants a comprehensive study. It is in line with this however, that this study examines the nexus between poverty alleviation and tricycle business in Taraba state with focus on Jalingo metropolis.

Review of Related Literature

Tricycle Operation in Nigeria: Evolution and Growth

Tricycles are a three-wheeled vehicle commonly used in conveying more than one individual and deliveries as well as intra-city transportation activities. The term 'Keke' is known in Hausa as any form of cycled vehicle which is either used in commercial or personal transportation. Also, NAPEP is a project initiated during the regime of President Olusegun Obasanjo in 2001 aimed at alleviating or reducing poverty, wealth creation, value re-orientation, etc. So, tricycles (Keke NAPEP) are given out to youths in form of loans by the government as well as private entrepreneurs to reduce unemployment among the ever-growing population (NAPEP, 2001).

The history of Keke as a means of commercial transportation in Nigeria is directly traced to the government of Mohammed Buba Marwa, who was the military Governor of Lagos State from 1996 to 1999. He first launched the use of tricycle as a means of commercial transportation in Lagos. This led to the name Keke Marwa, which commercial tricycle is still referred to in Lagos till date.

However, the popularity of Keke across the nation can be attributed to National Poverty Eradication Programme NAPEP, which was inaugurated under the administration of President Olusegun Obasanjo to alleviate poverty and provide economic empowerment to the people. NAPEP in 2001 launched and distributed two thousand units of tricycles with the inscription Keke NAPEP as a commercial means of transportation in the Federal Capital Territory FCT, Abuja. This was to serve as a strategy to convert area boys from idlers to a productive work force. According to NAPEP, the justifications for the distribution of Keke nationwide include:

i. To ensure mass gainful employment for the idle work force;
ii. To sustain wealth creation;
iii. To provide affordable mass transit services;
iv. To provide opportunity for the growth of other ancillary services such as vending, portal water, mobile food canteens, mobile grocery shops, post-delivery, etc.
v. To facilitate technical entrepreneurs and related small businesses that will in turn facilitate transfer of technology;

vi. To facilitate other subsidiary businesses such as the sale of tricycle spare parts, operators, mechanics and building of local contents, among others (NAPEP, 2001).

Again, in 2004, five thousand units of tricycles were distributed to the thirty-six states of the federation to further ensure the actualization of the set objectives (NAPEP, 2001). However, NAPEP is not the only source of Keke in Nigeria. After the distribution of Keke NAPEP to several parts of the country, businessmen and other individuals in Nigeria began to import, buy, sell and operate Keke as a means of intra city commercial transportation in several cities in Nigeria.

Concept of Poverty

Poverty, as of its multidimensional nature, does not lend itself to easy definition. It is a vicious cycle which keeps the poor in a perpetual state of destitution (Eko, 2018). Widespread poverty is seen as a phenomenon and in fact, one of the greatest challenges facing mankind worldwide today (Zira, 2017) that has defied effective solutions. It is manifested in lack of basic needs such as food, clean water, health, basic education, minimum conventional clothing, clean and barely adequate housing, a minimum of traveling, and minimum of recreation (Toyo, 2010).

Sources reveal that about 2.8 billion people in the world live in complete poverty (Ajegi, 2011) which constitutes about 40% of the world population. With the deteriorating economy across the world due mostly to factors such as climate change, this could be much higher. Ikon (2010) observes that in all parts of the world, the extent, severity and characteristics of poverty differ greatly within and across countries.

The concept of poverty can be viewed from two main perspectives: absolute and relative poverty. Absolute poverty refers to the lack of minimum physical requirements of a person or household for existence: it is measured not only by low income, but also by malnutrition, poor health, clothing, shelter and lack of education (Jhingan, 2016:42) whereas relative poverty simply denotes the condition of a person or group of people as compared with another group. It is believed that the macroeconomic conditions that exacerbate poverty are triggered by certain international and domestic policies which lead to some economic imbalances.

In retrospect, recent studies have painted a more pitiable scenario where Nigeria is found to have the highest extreme poverty population in the world (World Poverty Clock, 2018). Before this, UNICEF in 2017 reported that over 64% of the population lives below poverty line. Consequently, the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF) and United Nations forecast that Nigeria will not hit the 2030 target for ending global poverty. Breaking it down on state-by-state basis, the picture gets gloomier as statistics specifically reveal that Taraba state today is the 2nd poorest state in Nigeria with ravaging poverty measuring up to 83.72% (NBS, 2019).

Poverty in Nigeria is evenly distributed across the country, rather than strong in specific geographical areas. In some areas in the North bordering the Niger, the condition is getting worse which is infertile, marginal to agriculture, environmentally damaged and densely populated (Arhewe, 2014). On the other hand, the fishing communities living in the mangrove swamps and along the Atlantic coast is also part of the poorest in the country (Paul, Agba and Chukwura, 2015:10).

To many scholars and administrators, Nigerians have no justifiable reason to be poor because of the abundance of human and natural resources available in the country (Mbah and Obiora, 2015). Generally, poverty situation in Nigeria can be likened to a paradox of poverty in the midst of wealth. Unfortunately, this description of Nigerian poverty situation is at variance with available human and natural resources.

Causes and Consequences of Poverty

Poverty does not just occur as a happenstance, but as a result of certain causative factors to numerous to mention. A non-governmental organisation, *Concern Worldwide* has identified nine (9) factors as responsible for global poverty, viz: Inadequate access to clean water and nutritious food, little or no access to livelihoods or jobs, conflict, inequality, poor education, climate change, inadequate infrastructure, limited capacity of the government and lack of reserves. This is further corroborated by Adekoya (2018) and Ewubare and Mark (2018) in an empirical study which revealed the implication of human resource underdevelopment to poverty in Nigeria.

Severe poverty however, has its consequences. To Ngoma and Mayimbo (2017), high rate of maternal and child mortality is as a result of poverty, where women and children cannot afford healthcare services. Poverty also results in increasing the fragility and vulnerability of members of society to external influences. Furthermore, poverty makes production remain largely subsistence due to lack of capital needed for expansion. In all of these, labor becomes intensive and marginal productivity remains low.

Henry Ekwuruke (2005) in his treatise titled *Poverty Alleviation and the Nigerian Experience*, describes Nigeria as a "poverty-ridden society" where the majority of its citizens are poor, families no longer feed properly due to the high cost of basic staples such as garri, rice, yam and beans and so forth and so on. Meats like beef and poultry have disappeared from the family pot. A Poverty ridden society also experiences rising rates of illiteracy as a result of the increasing number of school drop outs and declining school enrollment, engendered by the inability of parents to afford the cost of training their children. This is a reality in Nigeria. In the last 5 years or so, Nigeria has descended to a lowly and pitiable position to find itself among the 20 poorest countries of the world, while holding sway next to the Republic of Columbia and Haiti as the most corrupt country in the world.

Poverty Alleviation

Poverty alleviation is a process of attempting to improve the quality of life for those people currently living in poverty. It simply refers to those different set of measures, both economic and humanitarian, that are intended to permanently lift people out of poverty. Poverty alleviation measures are not only restricted to government alone but it involves the participation of the private sector and non-governmental organizations to be able to make it more effective. It involves deliberate measures introduced to lessen the excruciating poverty ravaging the people. Jev (2014) in his *Issues in Politics of Development and Underdevelopment in Africa*, sees poverty alleviation as a "major subject of concern in national and international policy discourse after decades of its relegation to the background (Jev, 2014:269).

Poverty alleviation measures, according to Henry George in his 1879 classics, *Progress and Poverty,* are aimed at raising, or intending to raise ways of enabling the vulnerable poor in the society to create wealth for themselves as a means of ending poverty. This school of thought posits that poverty occurs in both developing and developed countries, though more pronounced in developing countries.

Therefore, the situation of poverty alleviation and eventually, poverty eradication requires more than just money: it requires carefully designed and solid institutional frameworks, as well as technical expertise.

Poverty Alleviation Programmes in Nigeria

In reaction to the horrendous poverty crisis in Nigeria, different interventionist programs have been established by successive governments over the years. Poverty alleviation strategies implemented so far in Nigeria have focused more on growth, basic needs and rural development approaches. However, poverty alleviation programs in Nigeria are means through which the government aims to revamp and boost the economy. Measures taken to combat poverty and promote development in the country actually started at the beginning of Nigeria's statehood. This was achieved through the adoption of different development plans.

Most of these programs were designed to take care of such objectives as employment generation, enhancing agricultural output and income, and stemming the tide of rural-urban migration, which no doubt affected poverty reduction.

Despite some significant degree of success made by some of these programs, most of them could not be sustained. In fact, with time, many of them failed as a result of diversion from the original focus. Nonetheless, most of these poverty alleviation programs suffered the same fate as a recent government assessment showed. It found that they all failed due largely to the fact that:

i. They were mostly not designed to alleviate poverty
ii. They lacked a clearly defined policy framework with proper guidelines for poverty alleviation
iii. They suffered from polity instability, political interference, policy and macroeconomic dislocations
iv. They also lacked continuity
v. They are in most cases poorly implemented
vi. They are characterized by corruption on the part of government officials and public servants.

These anti-poverty measures notwithstanding, poverty has consistently been on the increase in Nigeria, showing the ineffectiveness of the strategies and programs. The previous policies of past governments obviously failed to eradicate poverty in Nigeria. During these periods, the poverty situation in Nigeria seem unabated. The failure of these measures has been attributed to lack of targeting mechanisms for the poor; political and policy instability; inadequate coordination of various programs; several budgetary, management and governance problems; lack of accountability and transparency; and lack of mechanisms for the sustainability of the programs (Obadan, 2001; Oshewolo, 2010.

Table 1: Selected government poverty alleviation programmes in Nigeria from 1972 to 2019 (Modified)

Programme	Year Estd.	Target Group	Nature
National Accelerated Food Production Programme (NAFPP)	1972	Peasant farmers	To educate farmers
Nigeria Agricultural and Cooperative Bank (NACB)	1972	Peasant farmers	Agricultural financing
Operation Feed the Nation (OFN)	1979	Rural dwellers	Increase food production
Directorate for Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructures (DFRRI)	1986	Unemployed youths	Training, financing and guidance
Better Life Programme (BLP)	1987	Rural women	Self-help and rural development programmes, skill acquisition and healthcare
People's Bank of Nigeria (PBN)	1989	Under-privileged in rural and urban areas	Securing loans and credit facilities
Family Support Programme (FSP)	1994	Families in rural areas	Healthcare and child welfare development
Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP)	1998	Credit facilities to support the establishment of cottage industries	Credit facilities to support the establishment of cottage industries.
National Poverty Alleviation Programme (NAPEP)			
National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS)	2004	The entire society	To provide easy access to health services
National Economic Empowerment Scheme (NEEDS)	2004	The entire society	Government reformation, growing private sector, access to health, education, welfare, employment, security and participatory governance
Social Investment Programme (SIP)	2015	Youths and women	To encourage the development of small businesses

Source: Arogundade, Adebisi and Ogunro (2011) in Jide, I et al (2014) modified by Enganya (2019).

Theoretical Framework

The Marxian Political Economy (MPE) approach was adopted to provide a suitable prism for studying, explaining and interpreting the interplay between commercial tricycle operation and poverty alleviation. Marx political economy provides the scientific study of the society in its totality and takes into consideration the interconnectedness of social relations, class conflict and the organic relationship between the sub-structure (economy) and the superstructure (polity), according to Momoh & Hundeyin in Anifowose & Enemuo (1999).

The theory assumes the primacy of the substructure, which is the economy over the superstructure which represents the legal system, political system, beliefs, etc. of the society. Specifically, the theory argues that the desire for economic buoyancy necessitated the engagement in tricycle business operation either to augment initial sources of income or establish a new one. The economy, argues Marx, remains the foundation where every other aspect of life revolves around. To the average tricycle operator, the need to cope with socio-economic trends and adverse economic situations in the country forces its operations (Muktar, 2015).

However, the bourgeoisie scholars have strongly disagreed with Marx analysis. They argued that this approach amounts to economic determinism or a unilineal analysis of society. They frowned at Marx's dogmatism and insistence on viewing the entire society through the economic prism. This claim however cannot be sustained because Marxist analysis emphasizes that the economy is the "determinant in the last instance" as described by Louis Althuser (Anifowose & Enemuo, 1999).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data generated through an interface with different tricycle operators spread across Jalingo metropolis indicate that the intervention of tricycle operations has in many ways triggered a significant reduction in mass poverty amongst operators, though not completely effective due to many other factors. However, this study categorized tricycle operators are into three (3) classes, viz: The Mega class, Medium class and Subsistence class based purely on their respective earning capacities.

The Mega class are those operators who own and control tricycles and are better beneficiaries of the tricycle economy. The level of productivity in terms of income generation under this class is comparatively the highest. This is attributed to its ability to generate more income with no additional burden or pressure from a second party. In terms of escaping poverty through tricycle business, this group has made tremendous progress in that regard.

The Medium class category does not own tricycles but rely heavily on tricycles purchased by other business persons. They are further sub-divided into two: those who operate as 'professional riders' and others who are on hire-purchase. The hire-purchase sub-group represents operators on agreement to eventually own the operational tricycle after the agreed cost of purchase is fully paid to the owner. On the other hand, tricycles under the hire-purchase sub-group are most times leased out to willing operators at an agreed sum price which necessitates the individual operator to make daily remittances to the owner. This, according to some operators, is exploitative and has the propensity of plunging many tricycle operators into deeper poverty in the long run as a result of low savings and low investments. Generally, earnings for this group comparatively aren't as high as those of the Mega class but enough to combat poverty.

Lastly, the Subsistence class of operators earns just a little to support themselves and mostly consists of operators using much older and rickety tricycles plying feeder roads that lead to nearby hamlets or communities. Earnings here are the lowest compared to the other two categories mentioned above. Most operators here are merely striving to survive with the little earnings from their trade, and are constantly bogged down by mechanical problems now and then as wears and tears caught up with their tricycles. To this group, the essence of engaging in this business is to make little earnings for sustenance. Cost of maintenance and the weakened tricycle engines have made it difficult for them to compete favourably with Mega and Medium classes. The challenge of poverty therefore, has not been successfully mitigated for this class.

The issue of the curfew in many parts of Jalingo metropolis has been revealed to be one major setback to commercial tricycle operators. Sharp decline in earnings due largely to limited time-frame allotted to operators tends to adversely affect expected income generation. For instance, the evening 'rush hour' which had hitherto, being considered a key factor in this business has being impeded by recent regulations, hence the downward slide especially among civil servants who also operate tricycles after working hours to augment their monthly salaries.

However, this governmental regulatory strategy might have improved safety and security situations in the affected areas but unfortunately becomes counter-productive to the anti-poverty drive of the Keke-NAPEP scheme.

Furthermore, the conspicuous absence of government-owned tricycles providing services to the people in the metropolis is a major challenge. The monopoly of the private sector in the tricycle economy has paved way for exploitations by those who own capital on the poor Keke operators and in consequence, affected the anti-poverty intent of government in this important sector of the economy.

Of all the challenges facing this noble trade, the most worrisome today as revealed by this study is the insufficient operational hours for operators by the state government as a result of the recent elongation of curfew in the metropolis.

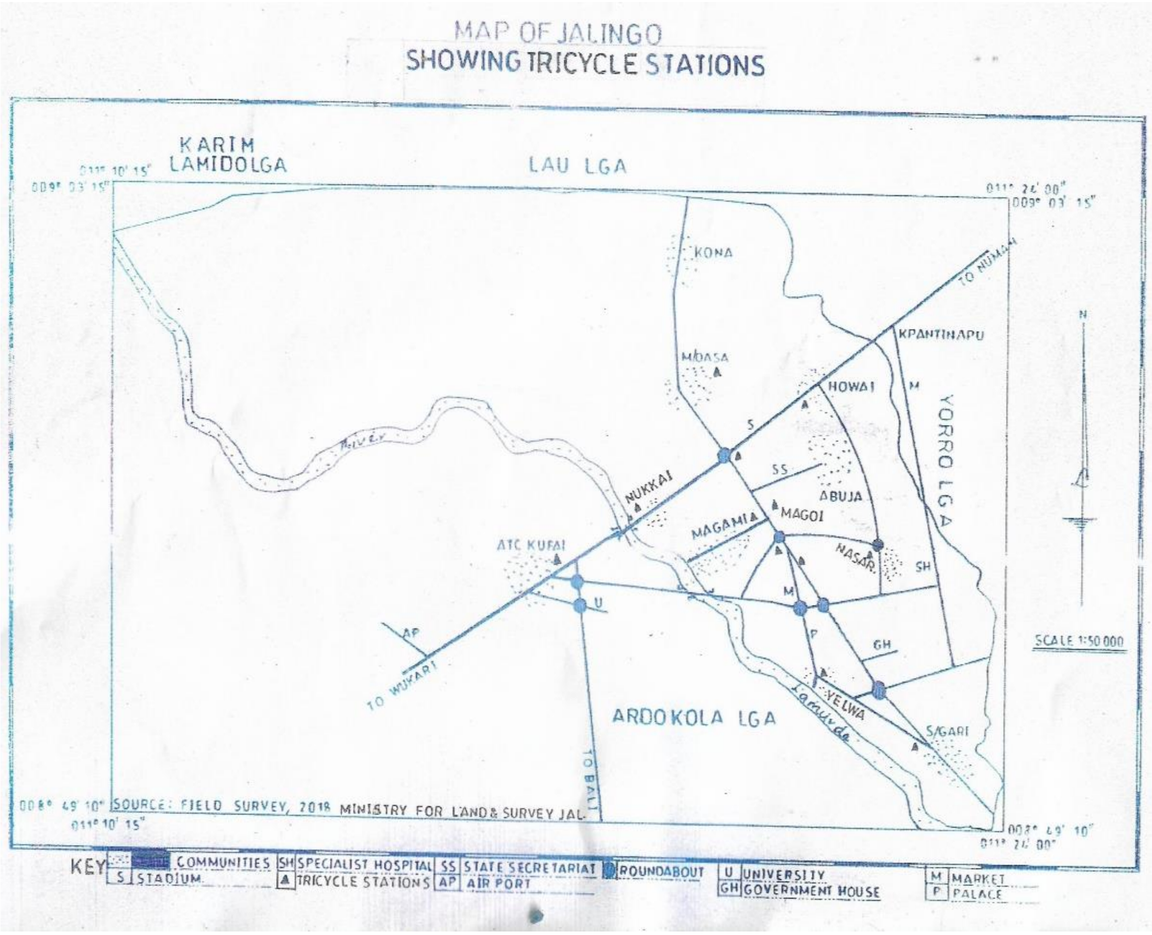

Figure 1: Map of Jalingo metropolis showing some Tricycle Stations
Source: Taraba State Ministry of Land & Survey, extracted from Enganya, 2019.

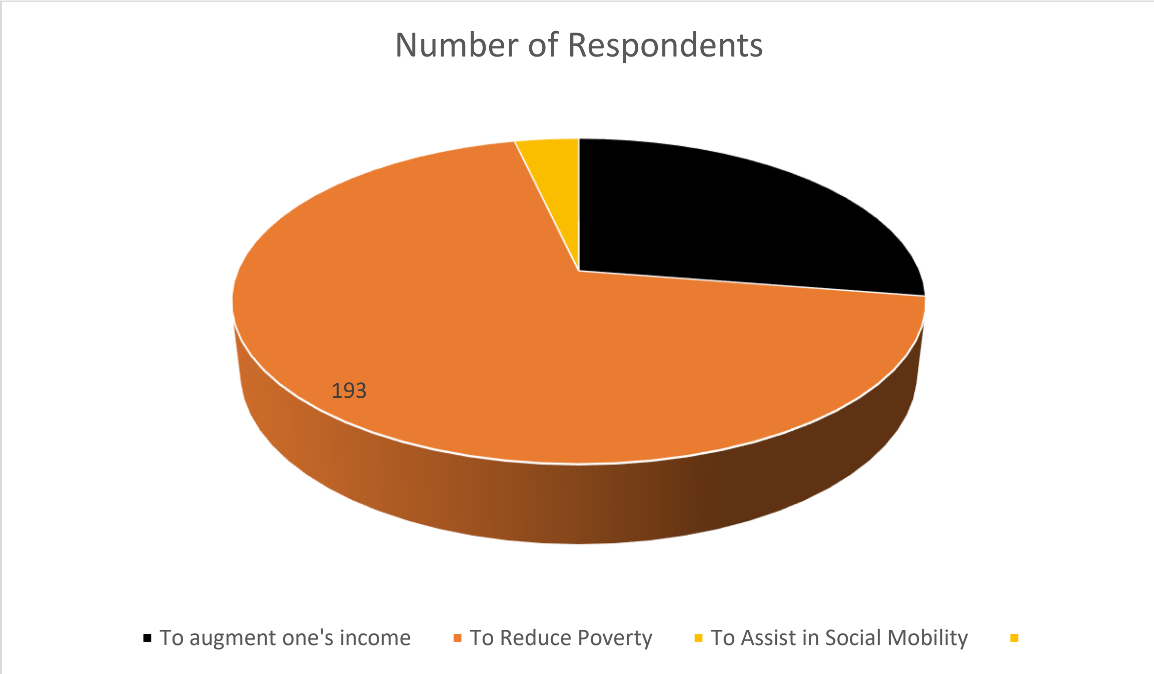

Figure 2: Reasons for Operating Tricycle

Source: Field Survey, 2022.

The above pie chart shows that majority of the tricycle operators are engaged in the trade for the purpose of reducing poverty or job creation. This amounts to 68.92% covering a total of 193 operators. 27.5% of them representing 77 of the population engaged in tricycle business operation in order to augment their exiting income level while only 3.57% joined the trade for the purpose of assisting in social mobility. Interestingly, none engaged in tricycle operation for leisure purposes. This shows that poverty and low income earnings were the driving force behind tricycle business operation.

Table 2: Daily Income of some Tricycle Operators

Income (₦)	Number	Percentage
1500-2000	55	19.64%
2000-3000	168	60%
3000-4000	46	16.42%
4000 and Above	11	3.92%
Total	**280**	**100%**

Source: Field Survey, 2022

The above table depicts the daily income of respective tricycle operators. It shows majority of them earn between N2000 and N4000 in a combined total of 214 represented by 76.42%. Those earning above N4000 are just 3.92% while the lowest earners (19.64%) amongst them go home with between N1500 and N2000. This shows that after all expenses on fuel and sundry, the operators still make substantial earnings.

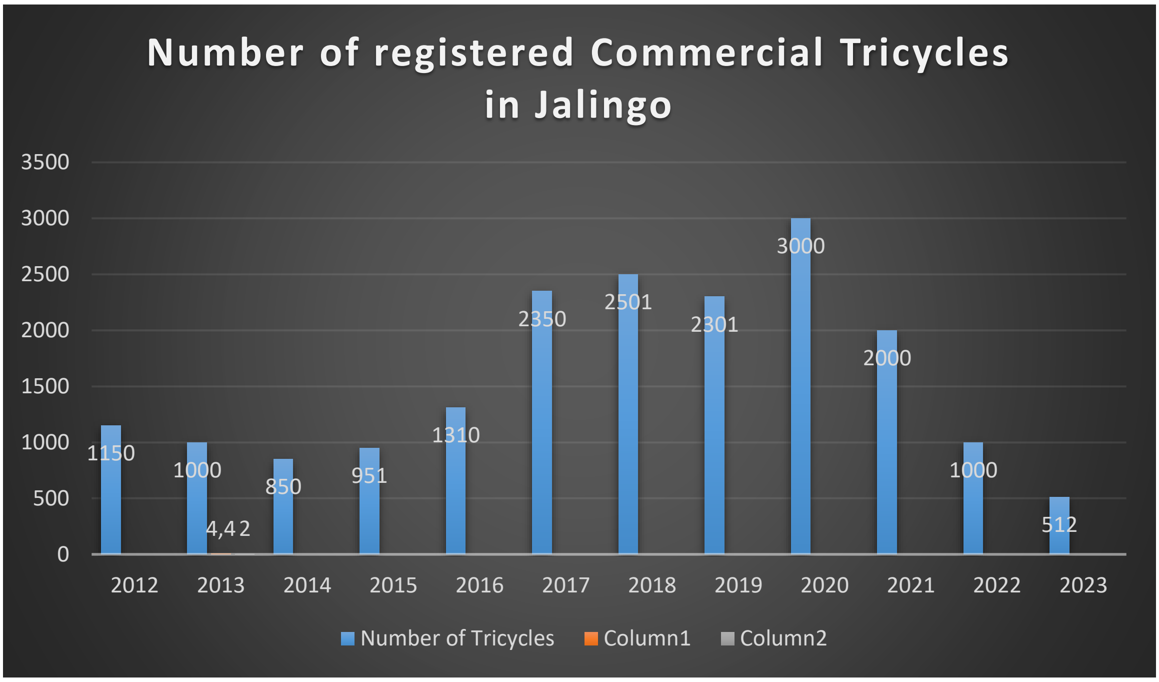

Figure 3: Total number of Tricycles registered in the period under study

Source: Taraba State Ministry of Transport, 2024.

The table above shows steady progress in tricycle business in the state as the number keeps increasing which explains the viability of the Keke enterprise as an anti-poverty measure.

Summary

With increasing poverty among citizens today, it becomes expedient for governmental and non-governmental bodies to come up with anti-poverty strategies to curtail the menace. Therefore, the introduction of tricycle business operation in Taraba state came as a substitute to the use of traditional motorcycles in the state capital to curtail a new dimension of insecurity that was stealthily creeping into the state. Security of lives and property was threatened due to a new wave of pseudo-insurgency attacks in the capital city of Jalingo in 2012. This policy eventually metamorphosed into a viable anti-poverty strategy which directly or indirectly employed majorly youths.

The fight against poverty has always been a rhetoric to every successive government in Nigeria both military and civilian leaderships. A lot of poverty alleviation programmes have been initiated over the years such as the OFN, CSDP, YOUWIN, SURE-P, N-POWER etc with the aim of combating the ubiquitous poverty challenges facing the population. But these attempts at attacking poverty headlong have either been misjudged by policy formulators or poorly implemented at the end. To this day, poverty has remained an existential threat to man and even exacerbated among majority Nigerians despite the seeming efficacy of the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) in 2001.

One of the major ingredients of NAPEP is the introduction of tricycle business as a means of engaging the teeming population in productive ventures that may generate income for themselves. Across the states of the federation, Keke-NAPEP, as it was widely referred to, became a household name and a veritable source of livelihood to many, especially youths.

The advent of tricycle operation in Taraba state has, to an extent helped many operators combat poverty considerably. Moreover, the steady intervention of the private sector in complementing government efforts cannot be over-emphasized as there are well over 13,000 registered tricycles providing daily income for these operators today with shows the steady growth of the tricycle industry in the state.

CONCLUSION

Tricycle, as an intervening variable in the quest to alleviate poverty has played an unimaginable role in reducing the number of poor people in Jalingo metropolis today. In spite of the other constraints associated with tricycle business coupled with stringent conditions of operation, incomes generated by tricycle operators on daily basis have improved livelihood amongst operators and effectively provided them with basic needs. A daily earning of N2,500 by a commercial tricycle means that a tricycle operator earns well above poverty line using the International Poverty Line of $1.90.

Findings revealed that many tricycle operators have been able to own personal houses, become entrepreneurial, improve their standards of living, etc due to a boost in income attributed to the Keke-NAPEP business. Generally, the numerous hiccups associated with

Keke NAPEP business have not deterred the enterprise from blossoming in Taraba state. Conclusively, tricycle business operation in the state has appreciably and effectively slowed down poverty spread amongst operators.

Recommendations

i. Government should provide more tricycles for the youths at subsidized rates so as to further reinforce the fight against poverty in the state;

ii. Regulatory agencies of government should ensure strict compliance with laid down rules and regulations such as compulsory registration of tricycles and operators, respect for traffic laws to ensure smooth operations;

iii. The lingering curfew in some parts of the metropolis be reviewed so as to create more operational hours for operators and therefore improve earnings from the tricycle business;

iv. To properly address poverty conditions in the state, government should work in synergy with both the tricycle operators and their union officials to periodically review poverty reduction impact of tricycle business operation in order to ascertain other areas of improvement.

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