

Fadama III and Poverty Reduction Among Rural Farmers in Akwa Ibom State: Challenges and Opportunities

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Abstract

This study investigates the impact of the Fadama III program on poverty reduction and rural development in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Fadama III, a community-driven development initiative, was implemented to boost agricultural productivity, improve living standards, and reduce poverty among rural farmers. The study adopted qualitative and documentary research designs, relying on secondary data sourced from official reports, program evaluations, and academic literature. Theoretical underpinnings were drawn from the Theory of Change and Rural Development Theory, both of which emphasize improving rural livelihoods through enhanced access to resources, capacity building, and income diversification. These frameworks guided the analysis of how the program affected farmers' assets, capabilities, and overall well-being. Data were analyzed using content analysis, which enabled systematic identification and interpretation of key themes related to the program's outcomes. Findings indicate that Fadama III significantly improved agricultural productivity, increased household incomes, and facilitated the development of rural infrastructure. Nevertheless, challenges such as limited access to resources, insufficient program reach, and environmental constraints impeded the program's full effectiveness. The study concludes that while Fadama III made notable contributions to poverty alleviation, there remains a need for more targeted and inclusive interventions to ensure

sustainable rural development. Key recommendations include enhancing resource accessibility, expanding program outreach, and promoting environmentally sustainable agricultural practices to amplify the program's long-term impact.

Keywords: Public Policy, Fadama III, Poverty Reduction, Agricultural Production and Rural Farmers

Introduction

Agricultural development has long been recognized as a cornerstone for fostering economic growth, reducing poverty, and ensuring food security, particularly in developing countries where a significant proportion of the population depends on agriculture for their livelihood (World Bank, 2018). The sector contributes substantially to gross domestic product (GDP), serves as a primary source of employment, and acts as a catalyst for rural transformation. In Nigeria, agriculture remains central to the nation's socio-economic fabric, employing approximately 70% of the rural population and accounting for a significant share of non-oil exports (National Bureau of Statistics, 2020). Despite its importance, the sector continues to face persistent challenges such as rural poverty, low productivity, limited market access, and infrastructural deficits, necessitating targeted government interventions.

In response to these challenges, successive Nigerian governments, often in collaboration with international development partners, have implemented a range of agricultural programs aimed at revitalizing rural economies. One such initiative is the Fadama III Project, the third phase of the Fadama series, which was specifically designed to promote sustainable rural development and reduce poverty. Jointly funded by the World Bank and the Federal Government of Nigeria, and executed through State Ministries of Agriculture, Fadama III adopted a Community-Driven Development (CDD) approach. This model emphasized empowering rural farmers through the provision of productive assets, skills training, advisory services, and rural infrastructure (Adetunji, Adepoju, & Otekunrin, 2020).

Launched in 2008, Fadama III aimed not only to enhance agricultural productivity but also to improve rural incomes, promote social inclusion, and target diverse groups, including women, youth, and vulnerable populations (National Fadama Coordination Office, 2017). In Akwa Ibom State, a predominantly agrarian region where rural communities form a substantial portion of the population, the program was tailored to address endemic problems such as chronic poverty, low agricultural output, poor access to finance, and a lack of value chain development (Akpan & Obot, 2021).

Although the project recorded significant achievements, such as improved rural infrastructure, increased awareness of modern farming practices, and effective community mobilization, numerous challenges undermined its full potential. These included bureaucratic delays, slow fund disbursement, limited credit access, exclusion of some vulnerable groups, weak extension services, and political interference (Effiong & Udo, 2018; Udoh, 2020). Also, there are growing concerns about the sustainability of the program's benefits in the absence of robust post-project maintenance strategies and market linkages for rural producers.

Given these mixed outcomes, it is essential to conduct a systematic evaluation of the Fadama III program's impact on **poverty reduction** among rural farmers in Akwa Ibom State. Such an assessment will provide valuable insights into the program's successes and shortcomings, highlight critical implementation challenges, and identify pathways for future agricultural interventions. Ultimately, this analysis seeks to inform policy frameworks that foster inclusive growth, enhance sustainable livelihoods, and drive long-term rural development in Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

Despite sustained efforts to promote agricultural development as a catalyst for economic empowerment, rural poverty remains a persistent and complex challenge in Akwa Ibom State. Successive administrations—often in collaboration with international development partners such as the World Bank—have launched various interventions aimed at improving agricultural productivity and rural livelihoods. One of the most notable of these is the Fadama III Project, which was conceived as a transformative initiative to enhance income generation, increase access to productive assets, and upgrade rural infrastructure through a community-driven development (CDD) model (Adetunji, Adepoju, & Otekunrin, 2020).

However, more than a decade since its implementation, the expected long-term improvements in rural living standards remain elusive. While some communities recorded modest gains in agricultural output and income levels, a large segment of rural farmers continues to face entrenched issues such as market exclusion, poor infrastructure, inadequate access to extension services, and minimal economic mobility (Akpan & Edet, 2019; Effiong & Udo, 2018). In addition, the program's overall effectiveness has been undermined by factors such as mismanagement of project resources, bureaucratic inefficiencies, weak monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, and the exclusion of vulnerable populations—particularly women, youth, and persons with disabilities (Udoh, 2020).

Another critical concern is the limited awareness and uneven participation of intended beneficiaries across different local government areas. In many instances, the project's bottom-up approach was diluted by top-down political influences and insufficient capacity-building efforts, leading to a disconnect between program design and the real needs of local communities (Akpan & Obot, 2021). Consequently, while Fadama III may have achieved short-term outputs in certain areas, its long-term impact on poverty alleviation remains uncertain, raising important questions about the efficiency, sustainability, and contextual adaptability of such rural development models.

Furthermore, a notable gap in the existing literature is the lack of localized, critical assessments of the Fadama III project in Akwa Ibom State. Most existing studies focus on national or regional evaluations, often overlooking the unique socio-economic, cultural, and political dynamics that shape development outcomes at the state and community levels. There is also a dearth of analysis on how emerging opportunities, such as digital agriculture, climate-smart practices, and innovative rural financing mechanisms, could enhance the sustainability and inclusiveness of rural development initiatives in the post-Fadama era.

This study is therefore motivated by the need to address these gaps. It seeks to conduct a context-specific evaluation of the Fadama III project's contributions to poverty reduction among rural farmers in Akwa Ibom State. In doing so, the study will examine the effectiveness of the project, explore the challenges that limited its success, and identify pragmatic strategies that can inform the design of future agricultural development interventions aimed at achieving sustainable rural transformation.

Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of this study are:

- i. To examine the extent to which Fadama III has contributed to poverty reduction among rural farmers in Akwa Ibom State.
- ii. To identify the major challenges faced in the implementation of the Fadama III project.
- iii. To propose recommendations for improving the effectiveness of agricultural intervention programs like Fadama III.

Research Questions

- i. To what extent has Fadama III contributed to poverty reduction among rural farmers in Akwa Ibom State?
- ii. What are the major challenges faced by rural farmers in accessing and benefiting from the Fadama III project?

- iii. How can the effectiveness of Fadama III and similar agricultural intervention programs be improved to better reduce rural poverty?

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Review of Conceptual Literature

Concept of Public Policy

Public policy refers to the deliberate decisions, actions, and strategies undertaken by governments to address societal challenges, regulate behavior, allocate resources, and achieve defined objectives. It represents the priorities and values of a government and is shaped by a combination of political ideologies, economic conditions, cultural norms, and the interests of diverse stakeholders (Anderson, 1979). Public policy spans various domains, including healthcare, education, infrastructure, economic development, and national security, making it a fundamental instrument of governance. In democratic systems, the formulation and implementation of public policy are influenced by political parties, public opinion, interest groups, and the media (Dye, 1978), all of which play key roles in shaping policy agendas and outcomes.

At its core, **public policy** provides a structured framework through which governments make decisions aimed at addressing societal challenges or improving the overall quality of life for their citizens. It involves a continuous and dynamic process that integrates problem identification, stakeholder input, strategic planning, and the deployment of governmental instruments. According to Wright (2018), the **public policy process** typically unfolds through the following key stages:

- i. **Agenda-setting:** Identifying issues that require government intervention.
- ii. **Policy formulation:** Developing strategies and approaches to address the issues.
- iii. **Policy adoption:** Formalizing the policy through legislative processes or executive decisions.
- iv. **Policy implementation:** Executing the policy through government agencies and public institutions.
- v. **Policy evaluation:** Reviewing the policy outcomes to assess its effectiveness and inform future decisions (Hill, 2020).

Public policies can take many forms, including laws, regulations, programs, or executive orders, depending on the nature of the issue being addressed. The process of policy development is often complex and involves negotiations among diverse actors within the government and society (Shapiro & Stone, 2019).

Public policy implementation requires the use of various instruments designed to achieve the desired outcomes. These instruments include:

- i. **Regulations:** Legal rules set by governments to control behaviors, such as environmental standards or labor laws.
- ii. **Provision of Goods and Services:** Direct government involvement in the delivery of services like healthcare, education, and infrastructure.
- iii. **Incentives:** Financial or non-financial rewards or penalties, such as tax cuts or subsidies, to encourage specific behaviors.
- iv. **Public-Private Partnerships:** Collaborations between government entities and private organizations to provide public goods and services, such as in infrastructure projects or public health initiatives (Osborne, 2020).

The effective use of these policy instruments requires careful consideration of the policy context, available resources, and the specific challenges posed by the issues at hand.

Concept of FADAMA III Program

The Fadama III Program, launched in 2008, forms part of the broader Fadama Development initiative implemented by the Nigerian government in partnership with the World Bank. The program aims to enhance agricultural productivity, improve rural livelihoods, and reduce poverty among rural farmers by promoting sustainable agricultural practices and empowering communities through community-driven development (CDD) strategies (World Bank, 2008). Fadama III specifically targets the development of smallholder farming systems and operates within a framework that emphasizes local participation, capacity building, and income generation (National Fadama Coordination Office, 2017).

The project is jointly financed by the World Bank, the Federal Government of Nigeria, and participating state governments. While the World Bank contributes the majority of the funding, both federal and state governments provide counterpart funds (Adetunji, Adepoju, & Otekunrin, 2020). The implementation is coordinated by the National Fadama Coordination Office (NFCO) in collaboration with state-level Fadama Coordination Units (FCUs), which are responsible for adapting and executing program activities in accordance with regional needs (National Fadama Coordination Office, 2017).

The primary objective of Fadama III is to increase the agricultural productivity of rural farmers and fishermen, particularly in Fadama areas land typically located along rivers and other water bodies with high potential for irrigation and diversified agricultural production. The program seeks to achieve this goal through a range of integrated components, including:

The Fadama III Program implements a multi-faceted approach to achieve its development objectives through the following key components:

i. Enhancement of Agricultural Productivity: The program aims to boost farm output by facilitating access to modern agricultural technologies, improved seed varieties, fertilizers, and farmer training programs focused on best practices in cultivation and land management (World Bank, 2008).

ii. Provision of Rural Infrastructure: Fadama III addresses critical infrastructure gaps by supporting the development of rural roads, market facilities, and water management systems. These investments are essential for improving market access and supporting sustained agricultural production (National Fadama Coordination Office, 2017).

iii. Access to Credit and Financial Services: The program promotes financial inclusion by supporting the establishment of community-managed microcredit schemes. These initiatives enable smallholder farmers to obtain loans for purchasing agricultural inputs and expanding their enterprises (Akpan & Obot, 2021).

iv. Institutional Capacity Building: Fadama III emphasizes the strengthening of institutional capacity through training programs for farmers, local government personnel, and community-based organizations. This component is aimed at enhancing local governance and promoting self-reliance in rural communities (National Fadama Coordination Office, 2017).

v. Promotion of Environmental Sustainability: The program integrates climate-smart agricultural practices, encouraging the adoption of environmentally sustainable techniques to mitigate the adverse effects of climate change on rural livelihoods (Effiong & Udo, 2018).

Concept of Poverty Reduction

Poverty reduction remains a central objective of development policy, particularly in low- and middle-income countries where a substantial proportion of the population lives below the poverty line. The term "poverty reduction" encompasses a range of policies, strategies, and interventions aimed at decreasing the number of people living in poverty and enhancing their overall quality of life by improving access to essential resources, economic opportunities, and social protection mechanisms (Ravallion, 2016). Effective poverty reduction extends beyond mere income enhancement; it involves addressing the multidimensional nature of poverty, which includes deficits in health, education, housing, and social inclusion (Sen, 1999).

Poverty is commonly conceptualized in both economic and multidimensional terms. The traditional, income-based measure defines individuals or households as poor if their income falls below a specified national or international poverty line (World Bank,

2020). However, a more comprehensive understanding of poverty also considers non-monetary deprivations, such as:

1. **Economic Poverty:** Lack of sufficient income or resources to meet basic needs (Ravallion, 2016).
2. **Social Exclusion:** Marginalization from society due to factors such as disability, race, gender, or location (Sen, 1999).
3. **Human Development:** Inadequate access to healthcare, education, clean water, and nutrition, which are critical for improving life opportunities (UNDP, 2020).

Reducing poverty, therefore, requires comprehensive interventions that address both the income and non-income aspects of poverty, promoting inclusive and sustainable development (Alkire, 2015).

Strategies for Poverty Reduction

Several strategies have been proposed and implemented globally to reduce poverty. These strategies are often interlinked and require coordinated efforts across various sectors. Some common strategies include:

- i. **Economic Growth:** Economic growth remains a key driver of poverty reduction. It is widely believed that growth in the economy creates jobs, increases income, and helps reduce poverty (World Bank, 2018). However, growth must be inclusive, benefiting marginalized and vulnerable groups to have a significant impact on poverty levels (OECD, 2019).
- ii. **Social Protection Programs:** Programs such as cash transfers, food assistance, and subsidies aim to directly improve the living conditions of the poor. Conditional cash transfer programs (CCTs), which tie financial assistance to behaviors like children's school attendance or health check-ups, have been particularly successful in many Latin American countries (Fiszbein & Schady, 2009).
- iii. **Education and Healthcare:** Ensuring access to quality education and healthcare is essential for breaking the intergenerational cycle of poverty. Improved education increases the earning potential of individuals, while better healthcare ensures that individuals remain healthy and productive (UNICEF, 2016).
- iv. **Agricultural Development:** In rural areas, where poverty is often concentrated, promoting agricultural development can significantly reduce poverty. Small-scale farming is often the primary livelihood, and improving agricultural productivity through access to technology, credit, and markets can raise incomes (FAO, 2017).

- v. **Gender Equality:** Empowering women and ensuring gender equality is critical to poverty reduction. Women's economic participation, access to education, and involvement in decision-making are all factors that influence household well-being and community development (World Bank, 2017).
- vi. **Environmental Sustainability:** Sustainable management of natural resources and addressing climate change is increasingly recognized as important for long-term poverty reduction. Environmental degradation disproportionately affects the poor, especially in rural areas where livelihoods depend on natural resources (Sachs, 2015).

The Role of Agricultural Development Programs in Poverty Reduction: An Assessment

Agriculture remains a critical sector for poverty alleviation in many developing countries, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, where a significant proportion of the population relies on farming as their primary source of livelihood. Agricultural development programs are widely recognized as effective instruments for reducing poverty, primarily through enhancing productivity, improving food security, and generating employment opportunities in rural areas (World Bank, 2018). These initiatives aim to strengthen agricultural systems by providing resources, knowledge, and infrastructure that empower farmers to increase both their productivity and income (FAO, 2017).

The potential of agricultural development programs to reduce poverty is especially evident when they address key constraints faced by rural communities, such as low productivity, inadequate infrastructure, limited market access, and insufficient technical knowledge (Ravallion, 2016). The effectiveness of these programs can be assessed through several core dimensions:

i. **Improved Productivity:** A primary objective of agricultural development programs is to enhance farm productivity. This is achieved through the provision of improved seed varieties, fertilizers, irrigation systems, and training in modern agricultural techniques. Such interventions have been instrumental in raising crop yields, particularly in regions like sub-Saharan Africa where productivity has traditionally been low (World Bank, 2018; Otsuka, 2015).

ii. **Increased Income:** Enhanced productivity translates into higher incomes for farmers. These programs often support the cultivation of surplus crops for market sale, creating new income-generating opportunities. The introduction of high-value cash crops, such as cocoa, coffee, and oil palm, alongside staple food crops has significantly boosted rural household income. Furthermore, programs that facilitate market access

for smallholder farmers enable them to secure better prices for their produce, further improving their economic standing (FAO, 2017; Binswanger-Mkhize, 2012).

iii. **Food Security:** Agricultural development programs play a vital role in improving food security by increasing the availability and accessibility of nutritious food within rural households. By enhancing local food production, these programs reduce dependency on food imports, minimize vulnerability to global price fluctuations, and promote self-sufficiency. In areas plagued by chronic food insecurity, such interventions help mitigate hunger and malnutrition (Sen, 1999; UNICEF, 2016).

iv. **Job Creation:** Agriculture is a primary source of employment in rural economies. Agricultural programs contribute to poverty reduction by generating employment not only for farmers but also for individuals engaged in agricultural value chains, such as processors, transporters, and market vendors. This broad spectrum of job creation supports income generation and helps lower unemployment rates in rural communities (World Bank, 2017).

v. **Empowerment of Women:** Many agricultural development programs actively promote gender equality by focusing on the empowerment of women farmers. In numerous developing countries, women constitute a substantial portion of the agricultural workforce but often face significant barriers to accessing land, credit, training, and markets. Programs that address these disparities enhance women's agricultural productivity and income, thereby contributing to both poverty reduction and greater gender equity (FAO, 2017; World Bank, 2017).

Challenges Faced by Agricultural Development Programs

Despite the positive impacts of agricultural development programs, several persistent challenges hinder their effectiveness in achieving sustained poverty reduction:

i. **Limited Access to Credit and Finance:** Access to affordable credit remains a major constraint for smallholder farmers in many developing countries. Without adequate financial resources, farmers are often unable to invest in essential agricultural inputs such as seeds, fertilizers, and equipment, thereby limiting their productivity (Otsuka, 2015). Although many agricultural development programs incorporate microfinance initiatives or partner with rural banks to address this gap, these efforts are frequently undermined by insufficient funding and low levels of financial literacy among beneficiaries (Moser, 2009).

ii. **Inadequate Infrastructure:** Rural infrastructure such as roads, storage facilities, and irrigation systems, is vital for the successful implementation of agricultural programs. In many regions, poor infrastructure significantly limits farmers' access to

markets, resulting in high transportation costs and substantial post-harvest losses. Moreover, inadequate infrastructure poses a barrier to scaling up effective agricultural practices, especially in geographically isolated or underserved areas (Binswanger-Mkhize, 2012).

iii. **Climate Change and Environmental Degradation:** Climate change poses a significant threat to agricultural development, particularly in areas dependent on rain-fed farming. Increasingly frequent climate events such as droughts, floods, and erratic rainfall patterns compromise crop yields, disrupt water supply, and destabilize farming systems (Sachs, 2015). To address these risks, the integration of climate-smart agricultural practices, focused on adaptation, resilience, and sustainability, has become increasingly essential to ensure the long-term success of agricultural interventions (World Bank, 2018).

iv. **Market Access and Weak Value Chains:** While increased agricultural production is a primary goal, its impact on poverty alleviation depends heavily on farmers' ability to access markets. In many rural areas, producers face challenges in finding reliable buyers, obtaining fair prices, and integrating into value chains. Strengthening agricultural value chains and improving market infrastructure and linkages are therefore critical to enabling farmers to realize the economic benefits of increased productivity (FAO, 2017).

Review of Case Study Literature

Numerous studies have assessed the impact of the Fadama III program on agricultural productivity and poverty reduction in rural Nigeria. Overall, findings indicate that the program contributed positively to improving farm output and rural livelihoods, though significant challenges remain.

Akpan and Edet (2019) reported that Fadama III significantly enhanced agricultural output among participating farmers. Key interventions, such as the provision of high-yielding crop varieties, modern farming equipment, and irrigation systems, contributed to substantial increases in crop yields across various regions. These improvements facilitated a shift from subsistence farming to more commercially-oriented agricultural practices (Adetunji, Adepoju, & Otekunrin, 2020). For example, the adoption of improved varieties of rice, cassava, and maize helped increase overall production, thereby reducing food insecurity.

Similarly, Udo and Effiong (2018) observed that the introduction of modern farming techniques and inputs under Fadama III improved the efficiency and productivity of smallholder farmers in Akwa Ibom State. Access to quality inputs, training, and

agricultural technologies was identified as a major factor in the improved yields of staple crops. However, despite these gains, concerns have been raised regarding the sustainability of these outcomes. Effiong and Udo (2018) emphasized that short-term improvements in productivity were often undermined by weak post-program support, limited extension services, and inadequate follow-up mechanisms.

In terms of poverty reduction, Osei and Fosu (2019) found that participation in the Fadama III program led to increased income levels among farmers, largely as a result of enhanced productivity and improved access to markets. Infrastructure investments, such as rural roads and storage facilities, facilitated more efficient transportation of goods, thereby reducing post-harvest losses and increasing sales revenue. Furthermore, the provision of financial services and credit enabled farmers to invest in their operations, enhancing their economic resilience (World Bank, 2017).

However, several studies have questioned the program's overall effectiveness in reducing poverty across all demographics. Akpan and Obot (2021) noted that while many participants experienced increased income, poverty levels remained high in some communities due to persistent challenges, including poor market access, inadequate infrastructure, and the exclusion of vulnerable groups such as women and the elderly. Asogwa et al. (2020) echoed this finding, highlighting the uneven distribution of benefits and ongoing difficulties faced by marginalized groups in accessing program resources.

Despite these concerns, Fadama III was credited with empowering women and promoting gender inclusion. Omoregie and Ogbeide (2020) found that the program helped improve women's skills and confidence in managing agricultural enterprises. In many rural areas where women serve as primary agricultural producers, access to training, credit, and farming inputs significantly enhanced their productivity and income. Ibekwe and Adebayo (2018) reported that Fadama III played a key role in closing the gender gap by enabling women to gain access to agricultural resources, thereby improving their social status and household decision-making power.

Nevertheless, the empowerment of women through Fadama III was not without its limitations. Udo and Effiong (2018) pointed out that although many women benefited from the program's interventions, cultural and structural barriers, such as limited decision-making power and unequal access to land, continued to impede their full participation.

In terms of structural challenges, Mordi (2018) identified the absence of post-program support, weak monitoring and evaluation systems, and limited institutional capacity at

the local level as major constraints to the sustainability of Fadama III's outcomes. Furthermore, various studies (e.g., Akpan and Edet, 2019; Effiong and Udo, 2018) highlighted persistent issues of exclusion. Despite the program's stated commitment to inclusivity, many women, youth, and elderly farmers were either unaware of the initiative or unable to benefit from it due to bureaucratic inefficiencies, cultural barriers, or lack of program awareness. Other frequently cited challenges included limited access to credit, inadequate rural road networks, and weak extension services—all of which reduced the program's potential to alleviate poverty and improve rural livelihoods (Adetunji, Adepoju, & Otekunrin, 2020).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study draws on the Theory of Change (ToC), Rural Development Theory, and Sustainable Livelihoods Theory. These frameworks provide insights into how agricultural development programs like Fadama III can influence poverty reduction and rural development. This section elaborates on the key concepts of these theories, their origins, assumptions, and how they relate to the objectives of this study on the impact of Fadama III on poverty reduction in Akwa Ibom State.

Theoretical Framework

A robust theoretical foundation is essential for evaluating the design, implementation, and outcomes of development interventions such as Fadama III. This study draws on three interrelated frameworks: the Theory of Change, Rural Development Theory, and Sustainable Livelihoods Theory. These theories collectively provide a comprehensive lens for understanding how the Fadama III program aims to reduce poverty and improve agricultural livelihoods in rural Nigeria, particularly within Akwa Ibom State.

i. Theory of Change (ToC)

The Theory of Change (ToC), initially conceptualized by Connell and Kubisch (1998), is a strategic planning and evaluation tool that articulates how specific activities and interventions lead to short-, medium-, and long-term outcomes. It emphasizes the importance of mapping causal linkages and underlying assumptions in order to understand how and why change occurs. At its core, ToC requires a clear articulation of inputs, processes, outputs, and expected impacts.

In the context of Fadama III, the ToC assumes that providing farmers with access to productive assets (e.g., irrigation infrastructure, machinery), technical training, and financial services will increase agricultural productivity, raise household income, and ultimately reduce rural poverty. This theory is particularly relevant for evaluating whether the program's interventions align with its stated objectives and whether the

anticipated outcomes—such as poverty alleviation and improved food security—have been realized.

For this study, the ToC serves as a diagnostic framework for assessing the effectiveness of Fadama III. By tracing the logical pathway from inputs to impacts, the study can identify gaps in implementation, unanticipated outcomes, or contextual barriers that may have affected the program's success.

ii. Rural Development Theory

Rural Development Theory, pioneered by Lewis (1954) and later expanded by Todaro (1997), posits that rural poverty is multidimensional and cannot be addressed through agricultural productivity alone. It recognizes that development in rural areas is constrained by systemic issues such as poor infrastructure, lack of access to education and healthcare, limited market integration, and social inequalities. The central assumption of the theory is that a comprehensive, integrated development approach is necessary to improve the quality of life in rural communities.

Fadama III reflects this theoretical orientation by adopting a multi-sectoral strategy that includes infrastructure development (e.g., rural roads and storage facilities), market linkages, institutional strengthening, and support for community-driven development. The program's broad scope aligns with the Rural Development Theory's emphasis on addressing both economic and social dimensions of poverty.

Within this study, Rural Development Theory provides a valuable framework for analyzing the broader socio-economic impacts of the Fadama III program beyond just farm-level productivity. It facilitates an assessment of how the program contributes to structural transformation and long-term development in rural areas.

iii. Sustainable Livelihoods Theory

The Sustainable Livelihoods Theory, developed by Chambers and Conway (1992), offers a holistic perspective on poverty that focuses on the assets and capabilities people use to sustain their livelihoods. The theory identifies five key types of capital—natural, human, financial, social, and physical—and argues that sustainable poverty reduction can only occur when individuals and communities are empowered to access and manage these forms of capital effectively.

Fadama III is closely aligned with this theoretical approach through its provision of agricultural inputs, financial services, capacity-building programs, and institutional support. The program seeks to strengthen the livelihood assets of rural farmers, thereby

enhancing their ability to withstand economic shocks, adapt to environmental changes, and sustain their development over time.

For this study, Sustainable Livelihoods Theory provides a lens to examine the resilience and adaptability of rural farming households participating in the Fadama III program. It enables an evaluation of whether the program's benefits are sustainable and whether participants are equipped with the necessary tools and resources to maintain improved livelihoods beyond the life of the project.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative research design complemented by documentary research to evaluate the impact of the Fadama III program on poverty reduction among rural farmers in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The qualitative approach was selected due to its effectiveness in exploring complex social phenomena and understanding the contextual and experiential dimensions of development interventions.

Data Collection relied primarily on secondary sources, including official reports from government and development agencies, program evaluation documents, academic journal articles, policy briefs, and relevant grey literature. These documents provided comprehensive insights into the implementation, achievements, and challenges of the Fadama III program, particularly in relation to agricultural productivity, income generation, market access, gender empowerment, and infrastructure development.

The collected data were analyzed using content analysis, a systematic qualitative method that enables the identification of recurring patterns, themes, and meanings within textual data. Through this analytical approach, the study distilled relevant information on the program's contributions to poverty alleviation, highlighted persistent implementation challenges, and identified areas for policy and programmatic improvement.

The focus was on interpreting how the Fadama III interventions influenced key development outcomes and whether these effects were consistent with the theoretical frameworks underpinning the study—namely, the Theory of Change, Rural Development Theory, and Sustainable Livelihoods Theory. This methodology facilitated a critical and context-sensitive understanding of the program's impact and its implications for future agricultural development initiatives in the region.

FADAMA III and Poverty Reduction in Akwa Ibom State

i. Program Implementation in Akwa Ibom State

The implementation of the Fadama III program in Akwa Ibom State was designed to address the persistent challenges faced by rural farmers, with a particular focus on poverty alleviation, agricultural productivity, and rural infrastructure development. The program was executed through a collaborative partnership between the Federal Government of Nigeria, the World Bank, and the Akwa Ibom State Government, placing local communities at the center of its design and delivery. This community-driven development (CDD) approach ensured that farmers and local stakeholders were actively involved in all stages of the program, from the identification of needs to the implementation of interventions (Akpan & Obot, 2021). By prioritizing local participation, the program sought to align its activities with the specific needs and priorities of rural farmers, thereby enhancing its effectiveness and sustainability.

A key feature of Fadama III's implementation in Akwa Ibom State was the establishment of Fadama Community Associations (FCAs), which played a pivotal role in the management of project activities. These grassroots associations facilitated transparency, accountability, and effective communication between farmers and program implementers (National Fadama Coordination Office, 2017). FCAs were responsible for organizing beneficiaries, managing resources, and overseeing the distribution of agricultural inputs such as seeds, fertilizers, and pesticides. They also coordinated training and extension services, ensuring that farmers received the necessary technical support to implement modern agricultural practices.

To improve agricultural productivity, Fadama III provided a range of essential services. Technical training was a critical component, designed to enhance farmers' knowledge and skills in areas such as integrated pest management, irrigation systems, soil fertility management, and crop diversification (Akpan & Edet, 2019). Access to high-quality agricultural inputs, including improved seeds and fertilizers, was also a cornerstone of the program's support. This intervention was particularly significant in Akwa Ibom State, where farmers often struggled with inadequate access to inputs and technical expertise (National Fadama Coordination Office, 2017).

Beyond technical interventions, Fadama III prioritized improvements in rural infrastructure, recognizing its importance for enhancing agricultural productivity and market access. Infrastructure projects under the program included the construction and rehabilitation of rural roads, water systems, and storage facilities. The construction of rural roads was especially vital, as it improved farmers' access to local and regional markets, reduced transportation costs, and facilitated the movement of agricultural goods (Effiong & Udo, 2018). Storage facilities were also crucial, as they minimized

post-harvest losses by allowing farmers to store their produce until market conditions were favorable. Also, the provision of irrigation systems helped farmers maintain productivity during dry seasons, ensuring more consistent agricultural output throughout the year (Akpan & Edet, 2019).

Collectively, these interventions were instrumental in reducing the vulnerability of rural farmers in Akwa Ibom State. By providing farmers with access to essential tools, resources, and infrastructure, Fadama III not only improved productivity but also contributed to enhancing the socio-economic conditions of rural communities. In this way, the program served as an essential vehicle for poverty reduction, addressing both the immediate needs of farmers and laying the groundwork for sustainable agricultural growth and development in the region.

Key Achievements of FADAMA III in Rural Communities

The Fadama III program made significant contributions to rural communities in Akwa Ibom State, particularly in enhancing agricultural productivity and improving the living standards of farmers. One of the program's key achievements was the provision of modern agricultural inputs, which led to substantial increases in crop yields. Farmers who participated in the program gained access to high-quality seeds, fertilizers, and irrigation equipment, enabling more efficient and productive farming practices. These inputs contributed to higher yields of staple crops such as cassava, maize, and yam, and allowed farmers to diversify into high-value crops like tomatoes and peppers, thereby enhancing their income-generating capacity (Akpan & Obot, 2021).

In addition to providing agricultural inputs, Fadama III made notable contributions to rural infrastructure development. A major success of the program was the construction and rehabilitation of rural roads, which improved farmers' access to local and regional markets. This infrastructure development reduced transportation costs and minimized post-harvest losses, as farmers were able to transport their produce more efficiently and profitably. Consequently, the program's investments in infrastructure had a direct positive impact on the profitability and competitiveness of farming in Akwa Ibom State (Effiong & Udo, 2018). The construction of storage facilities and improvements in water supply systems further supported the program's goal of enhancing rural productivity and food security. These interventions enabled farmers to store their produce longer, reducing spoilage and ensuring that more produce reached the market under favorable conditions.

Another significant achievement of Fadama III was its emphasis on capacity building and training. Through a range of workshops and training programs, farmers were equipped with knowledge and skills on modern agricultural practices, including

climate-smart techniques. These training sessions were critical in helping farmers manage their resources more effectively, increase productivity, and build resilience to climate change—a pressing issue in rural Nigeria. By introducing sustainable farming practices, Fadama III helped farmers adapt to increasingly unpredictable weather patterns, thereby safeguarding their agricultural livelihoods (National Fadama Coordination Office, 2017).

Furthermore, the program placed a strong emphasis on inclusivity by involving women and youth in agricultural activities. This focus not only advanced gender equity in rural communities but also empowered youth to take on leadership roles within agriculture, fostering long-term development and generational renewal in the sector.

Overall, the Fadama III program's achievements in Akwa Ibom State encompassed improvements in agricultural productivity, rural infrastructure, capacity building, and social inclusivity. These successes contributed significantly to enhancing farmers' incomes and livelihoods, thereby supporting poverty reduction and sustainable rural development in the state.

Impact on Farmers' Income and Living Standards

The impact of Fadama III on farmers' income and living standards in Akwa Ibom State has been substantial, though varied across different communities. For many farmers, the program resulted in increased income through improved productivity, enhanced market access, and the adoption of more efficient farming practices. Beneficiaries of the program were able to sell their crops at higher prices, thanks to better infrastructure and stronger linkages to regional and national markets. In addition, the provision of high-quality seeds and fertilizers led to higher yields of key crops such as cassava, maize, and yam, directly translating into higher revenues and improved economic stability (Akpan & Edet, 2019).

In many communities, increased income also contributed to broader improvements in living standards. Many farmers reinvested in their farms, upgraded their homes, and were able to afford better healthcare and education for their families. This financial upliftment helped alleviate some of the economic challenges commonly faced by rural households. Moreover, the additional income built financial resilience, enabling farmers to manage shocks such as crop failures, price fluctuations, or adverse weather events. In a region like Akwa Ibom, where agricultural production is seasonal and market conditions are often volatile, this resilience was particularly critical (Effiong & Udo, 2018).

However, despite these positive outcomes, the program's impact was not uniformly experienced across all communities. Some farmers encountered challenges that prevented them from fully benefiting from the program's interventions. For instance, limited access to credit, inadequate extension services, and insufficient infrastructure continued to hinder some farmers' capacity to fully exploit the program's benefits. Certain communities, for example, still struggled with poor road conditions, which limited their market access and reduced their ability to sell produce at competitive prices. In some cases, farmers did not receive the full range of resources, such as training or agricultural inputs, necessary to adopt the new technologies and practices promoted by the program (Akpan & Edet, 2019).

Overall, while Fadama III made significant contributions to improving farmers' income and living standards in Akwa Ibom State, its impact was uneven, underscoring the need for targeted efforts to address the persistent challenges that continue to affect some communities.

Challenges Faced by Rural Farmers in Implementing FADAMA III

The implementation of Fadama III in Akwa Ibom State was designed to reduce poverty and enhance agricultural productivity among rural farmers. However, several challenges hindered the program's ability to fully achieve its objectives. These challenges ranged from limited access to resources and infrastructure, issues of program accessibility and outreach, environmental factors, sustainability concerns, and insufficient extension services, to inadequate monitoring and evaluation systems. Analyzing these obstacles is essential for understanding the program's limitations and for informing future agricultural development initiatives.

i. Limited Access to Resources and Infrastructure

One of the primary challenges encountered by rural farmers in Akwa Ibom State was limited access to essential resources and infrastructure, which impeded their capacity to fully benefit from Fadama III. Although the program provided agricultural inputs such as high-quality seeds, fertilizers, and irrigation equipment, many farmers experienced logistical difficulties in obtaining these resources due to distribution challenges. Farmers in remote communities, in particular, faced delays in receiving necessary inputs, which disrupted planting and harvesting cycles.

Furthermore, critical rural infrastructure—including roads, storage facilities, and reliable electricity—remained underdeveloped in several areas, undermining the efficiency of agricultural activities. For example, poor road networks hampered farmers' ability to transport produce to markets, leading to post-harvest losses and reduced incomes (Effiong & Udo, 2018). Access to affordable and reliable credit facilities also

posed a significant barrier. Many farmers lacked the collateral required to secure loans, limiting their ability to invest in farm expansion or technology adoption, and thereby constraining the full realization of the program's benefits.

ii. Challenges in Program Accessibility and Outreach

Program accessibility and outreach presented additional challenges that affected the overall impact of Fadama III. Despite the program's emphasis on a community-driven development (CDD) approach, many farmers—particularly those in remote or marginalized communities—were unaware of the program's opportunities and benefits. Inadequate dissemination of information meant that some farmers did not fully understand the program's objectives, processes, or available support. Consequently, these farmers were unable to participate effectively, thereby missing out on critical assistance (Akpan & Edet, 2019).

Moreover, despite its stated commitment to inclusivity, the program did not sufficiently engage all targeted groups, such as women and youth. The lack of tailored outreach strategies to integrate these groups limited their participation, despite their potential to contribute significantly to agricultural productivity. This exclusion further constrained the program's impact on poverty reduction in the region (National Fadama Coordination Office, 2017).

iii. Environmental Factors Affecting Agricultural Productivity

Environmental factors also posed substantial challenges to the implementation of Fadama III in Akwa Ibom State. The region is prone to unpredictable weather patterns, including floods, droughts, and erratic rainfall, all of which directly affect agricultural productivity. While the program promoted climate-smart agricultural practices, such as improved irrigation systems and drought-resistant crops, many farmers struggled to adopt these techniques due to limited access to technology and inadequate training (Akpan & Obot, 2021).

Soil degradation and pest infestations further undermined productivity. Although Fadama III offered training on sustainable farming practices, many farmers lacked the capacity and resources to effectively address these environmental challenges. Consequently, crop yields in some areas did not meet expectations, reducing the program's overall contribution to poverty alleviation (National Fadama Coordination Office, 2017).

iv. Issues of Sustainability and Long-Term Impact

Concerns about sustainability and the program's long-term impact were significant. While Fadama III had positive short-term effects on agricultural productivity and

farmers' livelihoods, the long-term sustainability of these gains remains uncertain. The program's heavy reliance on external funding (from the federal government and international donors) raises questions about its continuity after the funding period ends. Without a sustainable financial model, there is a risk that many of the program's improvements could be reversed once external support is withdrawn (Akpan & Edet, 2019).

Moreover, some farmers struggled to maintain the improvements achieved under the program once it concluded. The lack of continuous support and access to resources often led to a decline in productivity. And rural infrastructure, such as roads and storage facilities, requires ongoing maintenance and investment, which was not always guaranteed post-implementation (Effiong & Udo, 2018).

v. Limited Capacity of Extension Services

The limited capacity of agricultural extension services further constrained the effective implementation of Fadama III. Although the program provided technical training and support to farmers, many extension workers were overwhelmed by the large number of farmers they were tasked with assisting. As a result, some farmers did not receive adequate follow-up support to fully adopt and sustain new technologies and practices. Extension services, which are essential for introducing climate-smart agriculture and innovative farming techniques, were often understaffed and underfunded, reducing their effectiveness in supporting farmers' needs (National Fadama Coordination Office, 2017).

vi. Inadequate Monitoring and Evaluation Systems

Finally, the implementation of Fadama III in Akwa Ibom State was hindered by inadequate monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems. Robust M&E mechanisms are critical for tracking progress, assessing impacts, and making data-driven adjustments to program implementation. However, Fadama III often struggled with data collection and analysis, limiting its capacity to evaluate its own effectiveness in enhancing agricultural productivity and reducing poverty. The absence of strong M&E systems also made it difficult to assess the program's long-term impacts on farmers' incomes and living standards, thereby constraining learning and accountability (Akpan & Edet, 2019).

Summary of Key Findings

The Fadama III program in Akwa Ibom State achieved notable milestones in enhancing agricultural productivity and fostering rural development. A major success was the provision of high-quality agricultural inputs, such as seeds, fertilizers, and irrigation systems, which significantly boosted crop yields and overall farm productivity (Akpan & Obot, 2021). Complementing this, the program facilitated the development of vital

rural infrastructure, including roads, storage facilities, and water supply systems. These improvements enhanced market access, reduced post-harvest losses, and increased the efficiency of agricultural activities (Effiong & Udo, 2018).

A key strength of Fadama III was its focus on capacity building. Through training in modern agricultural techniques—including climate-smart practices—farmers improved their resource management and resilience to environmental challenges (National Fadama Coordination Office, 2017). The program also emphasized inclusivity by empowering women and youth to participate more actively in agricultural production and rural development.

Fadama III's impact on poverty reduction and rural livelihoods in Akwa Ibom State was significant. By increasing agricultural productivity and facilitating better market access, the program contributed to higher incomes and improved living standards (Akpan & Edet, 2019). Many farmers diversified their production, enhancing their financial resilience against agricultural shocks. The empowerment of women and youth, coupled with the program's inclusive approach, fostered more equitable growth and a sustainable development trajectory in the region (National Fadama Coordination Office, 2017).

However, several challenges constrained the program's full potential. These included limited access to resources and infrastructure, inadequate outreach to some farmers, environmental constraints, and issues of sustainability. Consequently, not all farmers benefited equally, and the long-term sustainability of the program's gains remained uncertain (Akpan & Edet, 2019). These disparities highlight the need for more targeted interventions to address the specific needs of underserved communities and ensure that the benefits of programs like Fadama III reach all intended beneficiaries.

Conclusion

The Fadama III program in Akwa Ibom State represented a critical initiative in improving agricultural productivity, raising the living standards of rural farmers, and reducing poverty. By providing high-quality agricultural inputs, enhancing rural infrastructure, and promoting capacity building, the program significantly increased crop yields and contributed to economic growth. The inclusion of women and youth further advanced inclusive development by narrowing gender gaps and creating diverse opportunities within the agricultural sector.

Nevertheless, the program faced challenges such as limited access to resources, inadequate outreach to marginalized farmers, and environmental factors that impeded agricultural productivity. These challenges hindered some farmers from fully realizing the program's benefits. Despite these constraints, the program's overall positive impact

on poverty reduction and rural development underscores the importance of targeted, locally responsive interventions. Future research and policy initiatives should prioritize overcoming these barriers to sustain and maximize the program's long-term benefits.

Recommendations

1. Enhancing Resource Accessibility

Future interventions should prioritize improving access to critical resources, including credit facilities, high-quality seeds, fertilizers, and modern farming equipment. Strengthening rural infrastructure, such as roads and storage facilities, will help reduce post-harvest losses and improve market access, enabling farmers to realize higher incomes.

2. Strengthening Outreach and Inclusion

To ensure equitable benefits from agricultural programs, it is crucial to enhance outreach efforts. This includes targeting underserved and marginalized communities, particularly women and youth, with tailored information and support. Strengthening extension services and ensuring that all farmers are aware of available resources will foster inclusive participation and reduce disparities in program outcomes.

3. Promoting Sustainable Practices

Future agricultural development initiatives should emphasize the sustainability of program interventions. This includes supporting the adoption of climate-smart agricultural practices to build resilience against environmental challenges. Ensuring the long-term impact of programs like Fadama III requires continuous monitoring and evaluation, regular maintenance of infrastructure, and ongoing capacity-building efforts for farmers.

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