CHALLENGES MILITATING AGAINST INTERNATIONAL FUND FOR AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT (IFAD) IN IMPLEMENTING RURAL AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT
The study investigates the challenges hindering the effective implementation of International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) rural agricultural development projects in Nigeria, particularly focusing on Borno, Kano, and Jigawa States. The necessity for this study arises from the persistent issues affecting agricultural growth in these regions, despite IFAD's financial and technical support. The objective of the study is to explore the barriers faced by IFAD in ensuring the success of its projects, with an emphasis on understanding local contextual factors. A survey method was utilized, employing both questionnaires and interviews to gather data. The questionnaire responses were analyzed using simple percentage to ensure clarity, while qualitative analysis of in-depth interviews was conducted through content analysis. The Planned Behavior Theory was adopted to frame the study, justifying its relevance in understanding how attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived control influence project implementation outcomes. The findings revealed critical challenges, including corruption, bureaucratic bottlenecks, policy inconsistency, and the exclusion of farmers in decision-making processes. Based on these findings, two key recommendations were made: enhancing transparency and accountability mechanisms to combat corruption and increasing farmers' participation in the design and execution of agricultural projects to improve their effectiveness and sustainability. This research uniquely contributes to knowledge by providing a state-specific analysis of IFAD's implementation challenges, integrating behavioral insights into agricultural policy discussions, and offering a more practical approach than previous broad-based studies on rural development.

Introduction

Agriculture is a cornerstone of Nigeria's economy, with rural areas serving as the primary source of food and income for millions of people. Despite this, the country faces significant challenges in achieving sustainable agricultural development, particularly in rural areas (Adebayo & Olayemi, 2022). One of the international organizations committed to improving rural agricultural productivity in developing countries is the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). Through its financing and technical support, IFAD has been instrumental in promoting rural development projects that aim to enhance food security, improve the livelihoods of rural farmers, and reduce poverty in Nigeria. However, despite the substantial efforts by IFAD, a myriad of challenges persists, hindering the successful implementation of rural agricultural development projects in the country (Eze & Igbokwe, 2024).

Some of the primary challenges include inadequate infrastructure, limited access to financing, weak institutional capacity, and unfavorable policy environments. Rural areas often suffer from poor road networks, lack of electricity, and insufficient irrigation systems, which affect the productivity of agricultural activities. Moreover, the financial constraints faced by farmers, coupled with limited access to credit and modern farming techniques, make it difficult for them to participate fully in IFAD's initiatives. Furthermore, despite the international and national commitments to enhancing agricultural development, the institutional frameworks in place to manage these projects are often weak or fragmented, leading to inefficiencies in the implementation of rural agricultural programs. Additionally, policy inconsistency and lack of coordination between the different levels of government (federal, state, and local) create an unfavorable environment for the successful execution of these projects (Olanrewaju & Abdullahi, 2021).

Another key challenge lies in the complex socio-political landscape of Nigeria, which affects the sustainability of agricultural interventions. The country has been plagued by political instability, corruption, and conflicts, which divert attention and resources away from long-term agricultural development goals. As a result, even when funds are allocated, their proper utilization is often hindered by mismanagement or political interference. Furthermore, rural farmers are often left out of decision-making processes, making it difficult for IFAD's projects to effectively address the needs of the communities they are intended to serve (Ojo, 2023).

However, scholarly literature extensively discusses the challenges of implementing agricultural development projects in Nigeria. However, there is a notable gap in state-specific analyses, particularly concerning IFAD's implementation challenges in Northern states like Borno, Kano, and Jigawa. Most studies adopt a generalized national perspective, overlooking the unique socio-economic and security contexts of individual states. This oversight limits the understanding of localized challenges and the development of tailored interventions.

For instance, while the insurgency in Borno State poses distinct challenges to project implementation, the relatively stable Kano State face different issues such as bureaucratic delays or infrastructural deficits. Jigawa State's experiences with abandoned projects and substandard constructions highlight the need for stringent monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. Addressing these state-specific challenges requires a nuanced approach that considers the unique contexts of each state.

The current study fills this gap by conducting a simultaneous state-specific analysis of IFAD's implementation challenges in Borno, Kano, and Jigawa states. The objective is to identify localized obstacles and propose tailored strategies to enhance the effectiveness of rural agricultural development projects in these states.

Statement of the Problem

The International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) has been instrumental in funding rural agricultural development projects in Nigeria. However, several challenges have hindered the full implementation and success of these initiatives. One significant challenge is poor coordination between IFAD and local government agencies, resulting in inefficient project execution. The lack of alignment between IFAD's objectives and the priorities of local stakeholders has led to delays in fund disbursement and a mismatch between project

goals and the needs of rural communities. According to recent data from the Nigerian Ministry of Agriculture, approximately 40% of IFAD-supported projects have faced delays due to administrative bottlenecks (NMA, 2023).

Another challenge is the inadequate monitoring and evaluation mechanisms within IFAD's framework. Without robust monitoring systems, it is difficult to assess the actual impact of agricultural projects. In a 2022 report, the Nigerian government noted that many rural development projects funded by IFAD failed to meet set targets, particularly in enhancing food security and improving farmers' incomes. For instance, the Rural Finance Institution Building Programme (RUFIN), which was aimed at improving rural access to finance, struggled to reach its full potential due to poor financial literacy and weak linkages between rural farmers and formal financial institutions (Adamu & Nwosu, 2022).

The limited availability of technical expertise has also hampered project implementation. Many rural farmers lack the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively adopt the modern farming techniques promoted by IFAD. This gap in skills, coupled with inadequate training programs, has undermined the sustainability of agricultural projects. A recent survey revealed that only 35% of rural farmers who participated in IFAD-funded projects were able to adopt new agricultural practices successfully (Adebayo & Nwachukwu, 2024).

Furthermore, insecurity in rural areas, exacerbated by conflicts and banditry, has posed a significant barrier to the smooth execution of agricultural projects. The increasing violence in regions such as North-Central Nigeria has led to the displacement of farmers and abandonment of farmlands, disrupting the flow of agricultural activities and, consequently, the success of IFAD's interventions. The above challenges point to the need for a more integrated approach that addresses infrastructure, capacity building, and governance in order to enhance the impact of IFAD's initiatives in Nigeria, hence the need for this study.

Research Questions

This study is guided with the following questions.

i. What is the challenges militating against IFAD in implementing rural agricultural development projects in Northern Nigeria?

ii. What strategies can IFAD adopt to effectively overcome the challenges faced in rural agricultural development projects in Nigeria?

Objectives of the Study

The primary objective of this study is to identify and analyze the challenges that hinder the effective implementation of International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) funded rural agricultural development projects in Nigeria. Therefore, the specific objectives include, to;

i. identify the challenges that hinder IFAD's efforts in implementing rural agricultural development projects in Northern Nigeria.

ii. explore effective strategies that IFAD can employ to address and overcome the challenges encountered in rural agricultural development projects in Nigeria.

Conceptual Framework/Review

This section defines key concepts related to the study of challenges faced by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) in implementing rural agricultural development projects in Nigeria, providing clarity for the investigation.

Rural Agricultural Development

Rural Agricultural Development refers to the process of improving agricultural practices in rural areas to increase productivity, income, and overall well-being for rural populations. It focuses on using innovative techniques, providing access to resources, and addressing challenges that limit agricultural potential in rural communities. Rural agricultural development aims to enhance food security, reduce poverty, and stimulate economic growth by promoting sustainable farming practices. By focusing on both social and economic aspects, it seeks to provide farmers with the knowledge,

tools, and infrastructure needed to improve crop and livestock production (Adebayo, Ajala & Olusegun, 2023).

One of the key goals of rural agricultural development is to enhance the livelihoods of rural farmers. This can be achieved through providing better access to agricultural inputs such as seeds, fertilizers, and irrigation systems, as well as improving market access for rural produce (Ogundipe & Adeola, 2024). Moreover, fostering better linkages between rural farmers and urban markets plays a crucial role in ensuring fair prices and steady demand for farm produce. Training and education programs are also essential to improve farming techniques, which can help in increasing yields and ensuring environmental sustainability (Ajibade, Adeyemi & Alabi, 2023). In addition to these economic factors, rural agricultural development promotes social change by empowering rural communities. This empowerment helps to address inequalities, particularly gender disparities, by providing women with the opportunity to actively participate in agricultural development (Adeyemo & Olaniran, 2024).

From the above definitions, it is however pertinent to state that rural agricultural development is the efforts aimed at improving farming practices, increasing productivity, and enhancing the livelihoods of farmers in rural areas through better access to resources, technology, and support services.

Smallholder Farmers

Smallholder farmers are individuals who operate small-scale agricultural enterprises, usually with limited access to land, capital, and other resources. These farmers typically cultivate a variety of crops or raise livestock to support their households and generate income, often relying on traditional farming methods. According to Adeyemo, Bello and Olamide (2023), smallholder farmers are critical players in the agricultural sector, especially in developing countries, where they contribute significantly to food production and rural livelihoods. However, they often face numerous challenges such as limited access to credit, poor infrastructure, and fluctuating market prices, which hinder their productivity and income levels.

In many regions, smallholder farmers cultivate less than five hectares of land, and their farming activities are typically labor-intensive, relying on family labor rather than hired workers. As noted by Olajide and Akinyele (2023), these farmers frequently use low-input, low-output farming techniques that can lead to inefficiencies in production. Despite these challenges, smallholder farmers are highly resilient and adapt their farming strategies to local conditions, making use of available resources in innovative ways.

However, smallholder farmers are individuals or families who grow crops or raise animals on small plots of land, typically using limited resources and labor, to meet both their own needs and, occasionally, for local markets.

Poverty Reduction

Poverty reduction refers to efforts aimed at improving the quality of life for people living in poverty by addressing the root causes that perpetuate poverty and providing means for individuals to escape it. Poverty is commonly understood as the lack of basic needs such as food, clean water, shelter, and access to healthcare and education. It is also linked to a lack of income, employment opportunities, and economic stability, which affect a person's ability to live a dignified life. The process of reducing poverty is multi-faceted and often involves improving economic opportunities, promoting access to education, healthcare, and social services, and implementing policies that create job opportunities and support sustainable livelihoods (Nwaogbe & Ifediora, 2022). In developing countries, poverty is deeply intertwined with structural inequalities, such as gender, racial, or regional disparities, which require targeted interventions to address.

Strategies for poverty reduction typically aim to increase household income, enhance access to education and healthcare, and ensure that basic services are accessible to all individuals, particularly the marginalized and vulnerable. International organizations, governments, and NGOs have implemented various programs aimed at reducing poverty through microfinance, social safety nets, and rural development initiatives (Akinwale & Owolabi, 2021). These programs seek to empower individuals by providing the tools and resources necessary to improve their livelihoods. For instance, microfinance initiatives provide low-interest loans to small-scale entrepreneurs to

help them start or expand businesses, thus fostering self-reliance and economic growth within poor communities.

Additionally, poverty reduction strategies often involve the improvement of infrastructure, such as roads, electricity, and water systems, which can stimulate local economies and create more opportunities for education and employment. In some cases, providing direct cash transfers or food aid can temporarily alleviate the hardships of poverty while individuals or communities work toward long-term solutions. However, successful poverty reduction requires an integrated approach that combines economic growth with social inclusion, as merely improving economic conditions without addressing inequality may lead to unequal benefits, where only the more advantaged groups see improvements in their living standards (Abubakar, 2022).

From the researcher's point of view, poverty reduction refers to efforts aimed at decreasing the number of people living in poverty by improving their access to basic needs like food, education, healthcare, and employment opportunities, thereby improving their quality of life and well-being.

Sustainable Agriculture

Sustainable agriculture refers to farming practices that aim to meet current food and fiber needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It integrates environmental health, economic profitability, and social equity, focusing on methods that are ecologically sound, economically viable, and socially responsible. Sustainable agriculture involves techniques like crop rotation, agroforestry, and organic farming, which help to preserve soil health, maintain biodiversity, and minimize the use of synthetic inputs. The core objective is to maintain a balance where agricultural production is increased or sustained over time without degrading the environment or overexploiting natural resources.

In recent years, the need for sustainable agriculture has become more pressing due to increasing environmental concerns and the growing global population. Climate change, soil erosion, water scarcity, and the depletion of natural resources pose significant threats to food security. Therefore, sustainable agricultural practices are not just beneficial but essential for long-term food production. Scholars emphasize that sustainable agriculture can reduce the environmental footprint of farming by using natural processes to manage pests, fertilize crops, and improve water retention. These practices not only help farmers to maintain a stable income but also support the health of the ecosystem by reducing the need for harmful chemicals and promoting biodiversity (Kassie, Shiferaw & Mmbando, 2024).

Furthermore, sustainable agriculture also seeks to improve the social well-being of rural communities by promoting fair labor practices and ensuring that local populations have access to nutritious food. For example, farmers are encouraged to use farming methods that require less capital investment, which in turn lowers their dependency on external markets for inputs. This can lead to greater financial resilience in rural communities. At the same time, sustainable farming practices can help increase food security, particularly in areas where traditional farming methods have been detrimental to the environment. This holistic approach addresses not only the environmental sustainability but also the social and economic sustainability of agricultural communities (Ndiritu, Mutinda & Wambua, 2023).

Meanwhile, sustainable agriculture refers to farming practices that meet current food needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs, focusing on environmental health, economic profitability, and social equity for long-term agricultural productivity.

Empirical Review of Related Literature

This section examines the empirical review of various scholars on the challenges hindering the effective implementation of Rural Agricultural Development Projects by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) in Nigeria.

Challenges Militating against IFAD in Implementing Rural Agricultural Development Projects

Musa (2021) examined financial and infrastructural barriers impacting IFAD's agricultural projects, focusing on road networks, irrigation facilities, and access to agricultural

loans in Nigeria. The author conducted a quantitative study using structured questionnaires distributed to 400 farmers across three northern states. Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics to identify the relationship between infrastructure, financing, and the success of IFAD projects. The findings revealed that poor rural infrastructure and limited access to agricultural financing were among the critical challenges undermining IFAD's project implementation. Poor road networks and lack of storage facilities increased post-harvest losses, while inadequate access to credit facilities prevented farmers from purchasing necessary inputs. The study highlighted the need for government collaboration to improve infrastructure and financing solutions for rural farmers. The study recommended that IFAD collaborate with local governments and financial institutions to improve rural infrastructure and provide low-interest credit facilities to support farmers in project areas. Developing rural road networks and building storage facilities were suggested as essential steps to support agricultural productivity. While Musa's study focused on general infrastructural and financial challenges, it did not account for the specific infrastructure needs and funding access disparities in each of the three states. The present study fills this gap by highlighting how each state's unique infrastructure and financial ecosystem—affected by cultural and environmental factors—poses specific challenges for IFAD. For example, Borno's security concerns add a unique layer of difficulty in financing, which requires IFAD to implement more context-specific solutions.

Adamu (2023) assessed socio-political Challenges in Implementing Rural Development Projects: A Case Study of IFAD in Northern Nigeria. The study adopted a case study approach, conducting in-depth interviews and participant observations in rural communities in Borno, Kano, and Jigawa. The study focused on identifying socio-political issues that impede IFAD's project implementation, such as local leadership conflicts, security threats, and policy inconsistencies at the state level. A sample of 15 key informants, including community leaders, local government officials, and IFAD coordinators, provided detailed perspectives on the socio-political environment. The study discovered that socio-political instability and security challenges were major obstacles in rural areas, especially in conflict-prone regions like Borno. These factors disrupted project timelines, discouraged community participation, and increased costs. Additionally, the lack of coherent policies across the states and inconsistent support from local authorities led to administrative challenges, which ultimately slowed IFAD's progress. The study recommended that IFAD work closely with local governments to ensure policy alignment and build trust within communities. A stronger focus on security collaboration with local enforcement agencies was advised to create safer environments for project activities, especially in areas with security risks. The study primarily addressed broad socio-political challenges but did not differentiate between the unique socio-political climates in each state. The present study fills this gap by analyzing how specific community-based socio-political challenges vary across Kano, Jigawa, and Borno states emphasizing the need for IFAD to adopt adaptable strategies suited to each state's context.

Strategies to employ in overcoming the challenges facing IFAD

Musa and Lawal (2022), investigate *Agricultural Financing and Development in Nigeria's Rural Areas: A Comparative Approach. The authors* used mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative interviews with rural farmers and quantitative data analysis of project outcomes in selected Nigerian states. Their study found that limited access to financing and inefficient distribution networks constrained rural agricultural productivity. They recommended implementing a community-based financing model where IFAD collaborates with local cooperatives to extend small loans to farmers. This approach, they argued, would help overcome financial barriers and create an inclusive financing system that empowers local farmers. However, the study overlooked community-oriented strategies specifically tailored to address the unique agricultural and social conditions in Kano, Jigawa, and Borno states. Addressing these local contexts could increase community buy-in and make strategies more adaptable to the specific needs of these states.

Adegboye and Yusuf (2023), in their study titled *"Enhancing Agricultural Development through Rural Infrastructure Investment in Nigeria,"* employed a case study methodology focusing on infrastructure's role in improving rural agriculture. Their research included surveys

and in-depth interviews with stakeholders across 12 rural communities, highlighting that poor road networks and limited storage facilities were significant challenges to agricultural growth. They recommended that IFAD could focus on infrastructure development, such as farm-to-market roads and storage facilities, to reduce post-harvest losses and facilitate farmers' access to markets. Despite these findings, the study did not consider the need for locally adapted infrastructure solutions that align with the cultural and environmental conditions of Kano, Jigawa, and Borno states. This gap could be addressed by incorporating feedback from local community leaders and farmers on infrastructure priorities to ensure that facilities are beneficial and sustainable in each community.

Okeke and Chukwu (2024) evaluate *empowering Rural Farmers Through Agricultural Technology: IFAD's Role in Nigeria. The study* used an experimental design to examine the effects of technology adoption on productivity among rural farmers involved in IFAD projects. They randomly selected farmers in intervention and control groups to assess the impact of technology training on crop yield and income. Findings indicated that farmers who received training on modern techniques and inputs significantly increased their productivity compared to the control group. The authors recommended that IFAD enhance farmer training programs by incorporating continuous technical support and follow-up to ensure sustained technology adoption. However, the study did not adequately address community-specific strategies that could leverage indigenous knowledge and practices in Kano, Jigawa, and Borno. Integrating local agricultural knowledge with modern technologies may foster greater acceptance and ensure that the technology aligns with the environmental conditions of these states.

However, the reviewed studies highlight several strategies for IFAD, such as improving financing models, investing in rural infrastructure, and promoting agricultural technology. Nonetheless, a recurring gap is the lack of emphasis on community-oriented strategies tailored to the specific needs of rural communities in Kano, Jigawa, and Borno states. The current study fills this gap by proposing strategies that incorporate the socio-cultural contexts of these states, particularly focusing on participatory planning with local stakeholders. By engaging local community leaders and farmer cooperatives, the study seeks to foster community ownership and sustainable adoption of IFAD's projects, thus addressing a crucial gap in the literature on rural agricultural development in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

This paper employs Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) as its framework of analysis. The theory developed by Icek Ajzen in 1985, expands upon the earlier Theory of Reasoned Action by incorporating perceived behavioral control as a critical determinant of behavioral intention and action. Ajzen proposed that human behavior is influenced by three core components: attitude toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. These components collectively shape an individual's intention to perform a given behavior, which, in turn, determines the likelihood of its execution (Ajzen, 1991).

The TPB assumes that individuals are rational actors who consider available information and implications of their actions before forming intentions. Attitudes refer to the degree of positive or negative evaluation of the behavior, while subjective norms capture the perceived social pressures to perform or not perform the behavior. Perceived behavioral control reflects the individual's belief in their ability to execute the behavior based on resources and constraints (Fishbein & Ajzen, 2010).

The theory is widely used to predict and explain behaviors in areas such as health, environmental conservation, and consumer decision-making. For instance, studies have demonstrated its relevance in understanding smoking cessation and exercise adherence (Conner & Sparks, 2005). However, critics argue that it oversimplifies complex behaviors by relying heavily on intention as the primary determinant, ignoring emotional and contextual factors (Sniehotta et al., 2014). Despite its limitations, TPB remains a robust framework for understanding and influencing human behavior in diverse settings.

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) is a relevant framework for examining challenges faced by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) in implementing rural

agricultural projects in Nigeria. This theory focuses on how attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control influence individuals' intentions and actions. It aligns with IFAD's challenges as the theory emphasizes the need for community-oriented and participatory approaches, which are often lacking in Nigerian policies.

In Nigeria, rural agricultural development policies frequently neglect local community needs and fail to engage stakeholders adequately. This gap hinders project success, as shown by IFAD's limited impact in states like Borno, Kano, and Jigawa. For instance, in 2022, the National Bureau of Statistics reported that 53% of rural farmers in these states lacked access to inputs due to weak policy implementation. Furthermore, a 2021 IFAD report highlighted that only 35% of targeted beneficiaries in Nigeria actively participated in project planning, resulting in low adoption rates of modern farming techniques.

The TPB highlights the importance of addressing these gaps by involving communities in decision-making processes to build positive attitudes and trust. For example, in Jigawa, an IFAD project integrating community input increased adoption of improved rice farming practices by 40% within two years. These statistics justify using TPB as a tool to address challenges IFAD faces in Nigeria, particularly in fostering community participation and ensuring policies reflect rural realities, which can significantly improve project outcomes.

Methods

The study's population comprised 5,940 beneficiaries of the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) program across six local government areas in three states: Jigawa, Kano, and Borno. This group included smallholder farmers and participants from other agricultural sectors, such as agricultural enterprises, livestock keepers, and fishermen and fisherwomen. The sample size of 361 was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan formula, with 328 responses retrieved for analysis. Additionally, three agricultural officials from the three states were selected for in-depth interviews using purposive sampling. Data collected through questionnaires were analyzed using simple percentages and frequencies, while data from the interviews were examined through narrative analysis. Secondary data were analyzed using historical analysis methods.

Data Presentation/ Analysis

Table 1: Respondent's view on the challenges militating against IFAD in implementing rural agricultural development projects in Nigeria

No. of Respondents	Q1. What challenges does IFAD encounter in engaging local communities for agricultural development in Nigeria?	Q2. What are the specific logistical challenges IFAD faces in reaching remote rural communities in Nigeria?	Q3. How do political dynamics at the local and national levels affect IFAD's project outcomes in rural Nigeria?	Q4. In what ways do government policies and regulations impact the execution of IFAD's agricultural projects in Nigeria?	Q.5 What challenges arise from coordinating with local governments in the execution of IFAD's projects?

328	**Low Awareness and Education**	Inadequate Transportation Facilities	**Corruption**	Import Restrictions	Poor Communication
328	Poor Policy Implementation	**Bureaucratic Bottlenecks**	Weak Governance Structures	Political Interference	Low Stakeholder Engagement
328	**Cultural and Language Barriers**	Inadequate Local Workforce	Political Interference	Inadequate Support for Smallholders	**Corruption and Mismanagement**
328	**Bureaucratic Delays**	Supply Chain Interruptions	Inefficient Decentralization	Excessive Taxation	Conflicting Priorities
328	Insecurity	**Weak Institutional Support**	**Ethnic and Regional Divisions**	Inconsistent Policies	Resource Misallocation

Source: Field Survey, 2024

Analysis of the respondents' views from selected communities in Jigawa, Kano, and Borno states reveals key challenges that the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) faces in implementing rural agricultural development projects in Nigeria. Each of the questions highlights specific barriers and complications encountered by IFAD, illustrating a complex landscape in which socio-economic, logistical, and political factors interweave to create substantial obstacles

For Question 1, the respondents emphasized "Low Awareness and Education," "Poor Policy Implementation," and "Cultural and Language Barriers" as the primary engagement challenges. The local communities often lack adequate knowledge about agricultural development initiatives and the benefits of IFAD's projects, leading to low participation. This issue is compounded by poor implementation of existing policies, which cause distrust among the beneficiaries. Additionally, cultural and language barriers limit effective communication and reduce the influence of IFAD's interventions. The analysis suggests that there is a critical need for more community sensitization and tailored communication strategies to foster local engagement.

Question 2 addresses logistical challenges, with respondents identifying "Inadequate Transportation Facilities," "Bureaucratic Bottlenecks," and "Inadequate Local Workforce." Poor transportation infrastructure, especially in remote areas, restricts access to beneficiary communities, impacting the delivery of resources and services. Bureaucratic delays within local administrative frameworks further hinder logistical efficiency, slowing down project timelines. Additionally, a lack of skilled local labor complicates the execution of agricultural programs, necessitating external support that may not align with the local context. These insights point to the necessity for IFAD to collaborate closely with local administrations to streamline procedures and build local capacity for agricultural development.

Question 3 explores the effect of political dynamics on IFAD's project outcomes. The respondents mentioned "Corruption," "Weak Governance Structures," and "Political Interference" as significant barriers. Corruption at different levels of governance undermines resource allocation and project credibility, diverting funds away from intended beneficiaries. Weak governance structures, particularly at the grassroots level, exacerbate this issue, making it difficult to maintain accountability. Political interference, often driven by vested interests, influences project outcomes, skewing priorities away from the genuine needs of rural communities. These findings suggest that greater transparency and stronger accountability mechanisms are needed to insulate projects from undue political influence.

For Question 4, respondents pointed to "Import Restrictions," "Political Interference," and "Inadequate Support for Smallholders" as key challenges. Stringent import policies hinder the procurement of necessary agricultural inputs, leading to project delays and increased costs. Political interference not only affects governance but also influences policy formulation, limiting the effectiveness of agricultural interventions. The lack of sufficient support for smallholder farmers, who are central to rural development, highlights a disconnect between national agricultural policies and local realities. Addressing these issues would require IFAD to advocate for more favorable policies that support rural agricultural growth and engage smallholders as critical stakeholders.

Question 5 reveals challenges in coordinating with local governments, including "Poor Communication," "Low Stakeholder Engagement," and "Conflicting Priorities." Poor communication channels between IFAD and local governments create gaps in information sharing and collaboration. Low stakeholder engagement results in the exclusion of local voices in the planning and implementation phases, reducing project sustainability. Conflicting priorities between IFAD's objectives and local government agendas lead to resource mismanagement and project delays. These insights indicate the need for IFAD to strengthen communication with local authorities and create inclusive platforms to align priorities effectively.

However, the analysis underscores that IFAD's rural agricultural development initiatives in Nigeria are significantly impeded by a combination of socio-cultural, logistical, and political challenges. Addressing these issues requires a multi-faceted approach that enhances community awareness, improves infrastructure, streamlines bureaucratic processes, and aligns local governance structures with development goals. IFAD must also engage in continuous dialogue with local stakeholders to adapt interventions to the unique contexts of diverse regions, ensuring that policies are locally relevant and inclusively developed. The insights suggest that without addressing these fundamental barriers, IFAD's long-term success in fostering sustainable rural agricultural development in Nigeria will remain limited.

In an interview conducted on 21st June 2024, the Director of Planning, Research, and Statistics at the Borno State Agricultural Development Program (BOSADP), the discussion centered on understanding the challenges faced by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) in implementing rural agricultural projects in the state. The Director emphasized that:

> *limited security, particularly in areas affected by insurgency, has hindered project execution. Additionally, the Director mentioned that bureaucratic delays in processing funds and insufficient local infrastructure have slowed down implementation. He highlighted that communication gaps between IFAD officials and local communities sometimes lead to misunderstandings about project goals and timelines, which affects cooperation (Field Survey, July, 2024).*

Similarly, on 20th June 2024, an interview was held with the Director of Agricultural Finance and Investment at the Kano Agricultural and Rural Development Authority (KNARDA). The discussion explored the difficulties IFAD faces in deploying rural development initiatives within the region. The Director pointed out that:

> *One of the main challenges is the inadequate financial literacy among local farmers, which affects their ability to access and manage the support provided by IFAD. Additionally, he mentioned logistical issues, such as poor transportation networks, which make it difficult to reach remote areas. The Director also noted that delays in disbursement of funds from central to local levels impact the momentum of agricultural projects (Field Survey, July, 2024).*

On 20th June 2024, an interview was conducted with the Director of Agricultural Services at the Jigawa Agricultural and Rural Development Authority (JARDA). The focus of the interview was on the barriers IFAD encounters while working on agricultural projects in the state. The Director highlighted thus;

> *The lack of skilled manpower as a significant challenge, as local extension officers often lack the training needed to guide farmers effectively. He also mentioned that there are occasional conflicts of*

interest between traditional leaders and project implementers, leading to disruptions in certain areas. Another concern raised was the unpredictable weather patterns, which pose risks to crop yields and the timing of agricultural activities funded by IFAD (Field Survey, July, 2024).

However, data from the secondary sources indicates that International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) is facing several challenges in implementing rural agricultural development projects in Nigeria. Recent reports and data highlight thus;

Funding Constraints: Despite significant investments, funding shortfalls remain a persistent challenge. For instance, the 2023 Value Chain Development Programme (VCDP) in Nigeria, supported by IFAD, had a total cost of $329.5 million, with the IFAD loan covering 65% of this amount. However, delays in government counterpart funding and limited beneficiary contributions (7% of total costs) have hindered timely project implementation (Bello, Mohammed & Yusuf, 2023).

Weak Institutional Capacity: The program's financial management was rated as moderately unsatisfactory in 2023, reflecting inefficiencies in budget utilization and oversight. This has affected project outcomes, particularly in reaching smallholder farmers and ensuring sustainability

Security Challenges: Widespread insecurity, including banditry and farmer-herder conflicts, has disrupted rural agricultural activities. These conflicts have led to displacement, reduced farming activities, and challenges in delivering inputs and services to target areas.

Climate-Related Risks: Changes in rainfall patterns and increasing droughts have impacted agricultural productivity. IFAD has worked on building resilience through climate-smart agricultural practices, but scaling these initiatives remains a challenge (Odoh, Chukwu & Kalu, 2023).

Monitoring and Evaluation: Inadequate tracking of program outputs and outcomes has been a recurring issue. In 2023, the VCDP reported progress in profiling over 150,000 households, but weaknesses in data management and reporting hindered comprehensive impact assessments (Onyekachi & Abubakar, 2024).

Table 2: Opinion of respondents regarding the strategies IFAD can adopt to effectively overcome the challenges faced in rural agricultural development projects in Nigeria

No. of Respondents	Q1. What strategies can IFAD employ to improve its engagement with smallholder farmers to better understand their needs?	Q2. How can IFAD enhance its collaboration with local governments to overcome implementation barriers in Nigeria?	Q3. How can IFAD improve its monitoring and evaluation processes to better address challenges in Nigeria?	Q4. How can IFAD strengthen partnerships with Nigerian government agencies to achieve better results in rural development?	Q5. What strategies can IFAD use to ensure more effective use of resources in overcoming project delays in Nigeria?
328	Participatory Assessments	**Stakeholder Engagement**	Third-Party Evaluation	Collaboration	Timely Disbursement

328	Community Dialogues	**Policy Alignment**	Regular Reporting	Sustainability	Collaboration with Local Authorities
328	Focus Group Discussions	Funding Support	**Partnerships**	Co-financing	Transparent Reporting
328	Local Partnerships	Monitoring & Evaluation	Impact Assessment	Monitoring	Sustainability Focus
328	Capacity Building	Public Awareness Campaigns	Data Validation	Training	Clear Project Guidelines

Source: Field Survey, 2024

The analysis of the respondents' views from selected communities in Jigawa, Kano, and Borno states on the strategies the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) can adopt to overcome challenges in rural agricultural development projects in Nigeria reveals key insights into the approaches needed to improve project outcomes. The responses provided by 328 participants across five critical questions offer an understanding of the factors influencing agricultural development in rural areas and the strategies that IFAD could implement to address these challenges.

The first question, asking about strategies to improve IFAD's engagement with smallholder farmers to better understand their needs, highlights the importance of participatory approaches. A large proportion of respondents emphasized the use of participatory assessments, community dialogues, and focus group discussions. These methods are crucial for creating direct communication channels between IFAD and farmers, ensuring that projects are tailored to the actual needs of the communities they intend to serve. By incorporating the voices of farmers in the design and implementation stages, IFAD can foster greater ownership and improve the relevance of its interventions. Local partnerships also emerged as an essential element, as they help build trust and strengthen the community's capacity to engage in project activities.

The second question, focusing on how IFAD can enhance collaboration with local governments to overcome implementation barriers, points to stakeholder engagement and policy alignment as key strategies. Respondents indicated that aligning IFAD's goals with local government policies would streamline efforts and ensure that both IFAD and local governments are working towards common objectives. Stakeholder engagement was similarly seen as vital to overcoming barriers, as it involves building relationships with a wide range of actors, including local government officials, farmers, and community leaders. This collaborative approach would help address logistical and political challenges that often hinder project implementation at the local level.

In the third question, regarding improving Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) processes to address challenges, respondents suggested the use of third-party evaluations, regular reporting, and impact assessments. Third-party evaluations were viewed as a way to ensure impartiality and provide an objective assessment of project outcomes. Regular reporting was also considered critical for tracking progress and identifying issues early on, enabling timely interventions. Monitoring was seen as a cornerstone for successful project implementation, with many respondents stressing the need for more robust data collection and analysis to better assess the effectiveness of IFAD's interventions. Additionally, the focus on sustainability through continuous M&E processes could help in fine-tuning strategies to ensure long-term success.

The fourth question, regarding strengthening partnerships with Nigerian government

agencies, drew responses that suggested the importance of collaboration with local authorities, co-financing, and policy alignment. Many respondents felt that stronger partnerships with key government agencies would improve coordination, reduce duplication of efforts, and ensure that IFAD's programs are integrated into broader national development plans. Co-financing was identified as a particularly effective strategy for pooling resources and increasing the impact of agricultural projects. By aligning its activities with government priorities, IFAD can avoid misalignment with national strategies, thus enhancing the sustainability and relevance of its interventions.

The final question, which sought strategies to ensure more effective use of resources to overcome project delays, highlighted the need for timely disbursement, clear project guidelines, and transparent reporting. Timely disbursement was seen as critical for maintaining momentum and ensuring that funds are available when needed to keep projects on track. Clear project guidelines were emphasized as a way to prevent delays due to misunderstandings or inefficiencies in project implementation. Transparent reporting, especially regarding financial expenditures and progress, was seen as a necessary strategy to build accountability and ensure that resources are being used efficiently.

The implications of these findings are far-reaching for IFAD's strategies in rural agricultural development in Nigeria. The emphasis on participatory methods, stakeholder engagement, and local partnerships suggests that IFAD's success in Nigeria hinges on its ability to work closely with local communities, government agencies, and other stakeholders to ensure that projects are both responsive to local needs and aligned with broader national policies. Furthermore, the emphasis on monitoring and evaluation, impact assessments, and transparent reporting indicates a demand for stronger accountability mechanisms and a data-driven approach to managing and improving projects.

To complement the above, an interview was conducted with the Director of Agricultural Services at the Jigawa Agricultural and Rural Development Authority (JARDA) on 20th June 2024. In his view,

> *IFAD could enhance its impact by fostering community-based cooperatives that allow farmers to collectively access resources and share risks. He suggested that IFAD should invest in infrastructure like feeder roads to facilitate easier access to markets, reducing post-harvest losses. He also emphasized the need for IFAD to increase its focus on climate-resilient farming techniques, given the challenges posed by unpredictable weather patterns in Northern Nigeria. According to him, these measures could help ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of agricultural projects in the region (Field Survey, 2024).*

On 20th June 2024, an interview was conducted with the Director of Agricultural Finance and Investment at the Kano Agricultural and Rural Development Authority (KNARDA). He suggested that:

> *IFAD's interventions would benefit from a stronger focus on local financing options for farmers, including accessible micro-credit schemes that support input purchases and farm maintenance. He recommended collaboration with local financial institutions to create tailor-made financial packages for rural farmers. In addition, he emphasized that IFAD should prioritize youth involvement in agriculture by providing entrepreneurial training and access to technology, which he believes could motivate the younger generation to engage in agriculture (Field Survey, 2024).*

Similarly, on 21st June 2024, an interview was conducted with the Director of Planning, Research, and Statistics at the Borno State Agricultural Development Program (BOSADP). When asked about strategies the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) could adopt to address challenges in rural agricultural development in Nigeria, particularly in the Northern regions, he emphasized the need for targeted training for smallholder farmers. He suggested that

> *IFAD should focus on practical, location-specific agricultural*

techniques that match the local environment. He also recommended developing partnerships with local agricultural institutions for effective knowledge transfer. Moreover, he highlighted the importance of improved irrigation systems and storage facilities to mitigate seasonal challenges, which are common obstacles in rural areas (Field Survey, 2024).

Findings

The first objective of this study seeks to examine the challenges militating against International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) in implementing rural agricultural development projects in Nigeria. From the investigation, the respondents consistently cited corruption, bureaucratic bottlenecks, policy inconsistency, and lack of farmers' inclusion as primary challenges undermining IFAD's efforts. These findings resonate with the work of Musa (2021), who identified poor rural infrastructure and limited access to agricultural financing as key obstacles to successful project implementation. According to the participants, corruption within local administrative bodies often diverts project resources, reducing the scope and quality of agricultural support available to rural farmers. This situation is exacerbated by bureaucratic procedures that slow down project approvals, leading to delays in funding disbursement and resource allocation. Additionally, frequent changes in agricultural policies create uncertainties, disrupting continuity and reducing farmers' trust in the projects. The exclusion of farmers from planning phases also results in a lack of alignment between IFAD's interventions and the specific needs of rural communities. This gap mirrors the challenge of limited financial accessibility identified by Musa (2021), indicating that without a focus on direct farmer involvement, projects are less likely to achieve sustainable outcomes.

Secondly, to address these challenges, respondents emphasized the need for IFAD to implement community-based financing models. This strategy would involve collaborating with local cooperatives and farmer groups to provide small-scale loans tailored to the specific needs of rural farmers. By leveraging local networks, IFAD could offer better access to credit, enabling farmers to invest in productivity-enhancing resources. Additionally, such an approach could strengthen community involvement in the projects, fostering a sense of ownership and enhancing sustainability. These insights are consistent with the recommendations of Musa and Lawal (2022), who advocated for a community-based approach to agricultural financing. They argued that engaging local cooperatives can improve the accessibility and effectiveness of financial support, which aligns with the study's findings on the potential benefits of empowering local agricultural networks in overcoming financial barriers.

Conclusion

The study on the challenges militating against the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) in implementing rural agricultural development projects in Nigeria highlights critical obstacles that hinder the effective realization of its objectives. Key findings reveal that poor infrastructure, inadequate funding, bureaucratic bottlenecks, political interference, and limited community engagement significantly impede project execution. These challenges undermine IFAD’s mission of enhancing rural livelihoods, reducing poverty, and fostering sustainable agricultural growth.

Poor infrastructure, such as inadequate roads, and water supply, restricts access to project sites and markets, reducing the overall impact of interventions. Inadequate funding, exacerbated by delays in fund disbursement, affects the continuity and quality of projects. Bureaucratic hurdles within governmental processes lead to inefficiencies, while political interference often distorts project priorities and allocation of resources. Furthermore, insufficient community involvement in project planning and implementation diminishes local ownership and sustainability of initiatives.

However, the study provides a unique and state-specific analysis of IFAD’s implementation challenges, distinguishing it from previous research that often adopts a generalized national perspective. By focusing on Northern states such as Borno, Kano, and Jigawa, the study reveals region-specific obstacles shaped by security concerns, socio-economic disparities, and governance structures. In Borno, the impact of insurgency and instability significantly

disrupts project execution, limiting accessibility and community participation. In Kano, bureaucratic inefficiencies and political influence emerge as dominant challenges, affecting fund allocation and project sustainability. Meanwhile, in Jigawa, the primary barriers include infrastructural deficits and insufficient stakeholder engagement, which hinder the scalability and long-term viability of IFAD-supported initiatives. This state-level insight provides a more targeted understanding of IFAD's operational difficulties, offering a valuable framework for policymakers to implement context-specific solutions that enhance rural agricultural development outcomes.

Recommendations

To address the challenges militating against the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) in implementing rural agricultural development projects in Nigeria, the following two recommendations are crucial.

i. **Strengthening Transparency and Accountability Mechanisms:** IFAD should establish robust monitoring and evaluation systems to track project progress, ensuring transparency and accountability. This could include regular audits, stakeholder reviews, and the inclusion of local community representatives in decision-making. By reducing corruption and bureaucratic delays and security challenges as seen in the case of Kano, Borno and Jigawa states, this approach will foster greater trust and efficiency in the implementation process.

ii. **Enhancing Farmers' Inclusion in Project Design and Execution:** IFAD should prioritize the active involvement of local farmers in the planning and execution of agricultural development projects. This can be achieved through regular consultations, training, and the establishment of farmer cooperatives to facilitate community-driven development. This approach will address the issue of exclusion and ensure that projects are tailored to the specific needs of rural farmers in Borno, Kano, and Jigawa states.

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