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Extension Agents' Perspective on the Effect of Funders' Mandate and Fund Access in Sustainable Development in Ogun State Nigeria

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TLO: Interpretation of data and proofreading (10%)

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Abstract

This study examined extension agents' viewpoints on how funders' mandates and access to funds influence sustainable development in Ogun State. Simple random sampling was used to select 80 extension agents, and the data collected were analysed with frequency count, percentages and mean statistics. Findings revealed that eleven projects were funded, mainly by IITA (4) and the World Bank (3). The major challenges were too many instructions and

requirements for accessing funds and a short project timeframe. Most (82.5%) of the respondents perceived that funders' mandates and fund access impede sustainable development. It is concluded that the stringency of accessing funds and fund mandates could make agricultural projects fail. It is recommended that funders and funded organizations address these issues for the smooth implementation of sustainable agriculture and development.

Introduction

Agriculture is one of the sectors that have drawn the attention of world governments in recent years, considering its magnificent contribution to economic development and the industrial revolution in raw material assessment, especially in Africa and the most underdeveloped countries (Samaila and Idris, 2023). It is widely recognized as a crucial sector for economic development and food security in Nigeria, contributing significantly to the country's gross domestic product (GDP) and providing employment opportunities for millions of people in the country. Agriculture is a way of life that involves the production of food, livestock rearing through fishing, animal husbandry, and the systematic growing and harvesting of crops for the production of commodities such as feed and fibre, among others (Helen, 2023).

Despite its contribution to the economy, Nigeria's agriculture still faces several challenges, including low productivity, inadequate infrastructure, poor access to finance, and limited access to markets, amongst others, and this has stifled agricultural productivity. In addressing the challenges of the agricultural financing deficit and achieving food security, the Federal Government of Nigeria has introduced various financing schemes to enhance the availability and accessibility of funds for agriculture. Agricultural financing is a key component in Nigeria's agricultural growth and development (Afolabi et al., 2022).

Financing agricultural programmes is crucial to overcome these challenges and promote the growth and development of the sector. Financing is also needed to expand farms, improve productivity, and access new markets. The range and diversity of funding sources accessible to development programmes include government, international aid, donor contributions, public-private partnerships, and grants. Jamil, et al. (2021) opined that the role of extension agents is expected to help solve farming problems through knowledge and insight. Creating an extension programme that will assist farmers in their livelihoods is very important. Even though funds restrain most of the extension programmes which discourage some of the farmers from participating in agricultural extension activities, extension workers still put effort into helping farmers overcome challenges in their agricultural enterprises.

Since the withdrawal of World Bank funds, extension services rely mainly on foreign interventions and government support across the nation. The funders always have their mandates as well as approaches to obtaining their funds. The rule guiding access to funds stipulated by funders and agencies releasing the funds played a major role in the progress and successful completion of the agricultural extension program. Fund recipients and end users have varied perceptions of financing channels. These perceptions of fund recipients about the funding process are shaped by their experiences, observations, and interactions with the different funders and their approaches to accessing the fund. They consider factors such as ease of application, transparency in

funding allocation, and inclusiveness of the selection process, and they also evaluate the effectiveness and impact of financing channels on agricultural programs.

One of the users of agricultural funds is the extension agents, who have accessed several intervention funds for the dissemination of innovation for agricultural improvement and sustainable development. Extension agents' perceptions of the effectiveness of financial channels, the impacts of the funder's mandates on fund allocation decisions, fund access strategies, and the requirements for the implementation of interventions and grants are crucial to sustainable development. Inadequate funding cannot be overemphasized, especially within the agricultural extension delivery system. Even when funds are available, bottlenecks, restrictions, and stringent requirements hinder fund access and release for project implementation. The difficulty in accessing funds could affect the rate of success of the project as well as its status. Extension agents can provide valuable insights into how the mandates of the funders and the challenges faced in the process of accessing funds can influence extension programs.

In this view, this study examined extension agents' perspectives on the effect of funders' mandates and fund access on sustainable development in Ogun State. Specifically, the study identified funded projects, ascertained extension agents' perceptions of funders' mandates and fund access approaches to sustainable development, and assessed challenges faced in accessing the funds for agricultural projects. The study also tested the relationship between challenges faced in accessing the funds for agricultural projects and the extension agents' perceptions of the fund access procedure and funders' mandates.

Methodology

The study was conducted in Ogun State. The state lies between latitudes 6.9980°N and 3.4737°E, with a total land area of approximately 16,406 km². The annual rainfall is between 1000 mm and 2599 mm in the northern and southern parts, respectively. The Ogun State Agricultural Development Programme (OGADEP) coordinates the activities of the extension services in the state. The population for the study comprised the extension agents in Ogun State with the four agricultural zones (Abeokuta, Ilaro, Ijebu-Ode, and Ikenne Zone). From the four agricultural zones, three zones were selected using simple random sampling. From the selected zones, ninety percent of a proportionate sample of the extension workers in Abeokuta (37), Ijebu-Ode (27) and Ilaro (26) were selected to give 33, 24 and 23, respectively, which makes a total sample of 80 extension workers for the study.

The dependent variable of this study captured the perceptions of the extension workers. It was measured using a twelve-item scale of five responding points: strongly agree = 5, agree = 4, undecided = 3, disagree = 2, and strongly disagree = 1 for the positive statements, and in reverse order for the statement stated otherwise. The scores were aggregated and categorized into favourable and unfavourable perceptions.

Some of the independent variables were measured as follows:

Funded projects were measured at a nominal level using yes = 2 and no = 1.

Challenges of accessing funds from funders were measured using a scale of 3 points, scored as major = 3, minor = 2, and never = 1.

Primary data were collected from the extension workers in Ogun State with the use of a questionnaire for the study.

Frequencies, percentages, and means were used to analyse the collected data. The results were presented in tables, charts and graphical representations.

Results and Discussion

Funded Extension Projects for Sustainable Agriculture and Development

Figure 1 shows the projects funded by various donors that the extension agents implemented in the study area. Above 80 percent of the extension agents indicated that the funded projects were the Tomato and Pepper Project (TOMAPEP), the Value Chain Development Programme (VCDP), and the Anchor Borrowers' Programme. Others include SASAKAWA, ACAI, AKILIMO, CAVA I and II, the Ogun State Economic Transformation Project (OGSTEP), N-CARES, FADAMA I, II, and III, and Farmers' Business School (FBS). Each of the projects is guided by different mandates and approaches to accessing the fund.

The extension agents, having experience in accessing funds and implementing the projects based on the donors' mandates, could express their opinions on how the mandates and fund access process can affect the projects and the sustainable development of agriculture in the study area. Oyeboode and Akinbile (2023) reported that Ogun State is one of the states in the southwest where the FADAMA project was carried out. Shaibu (2023) also stated that several programs were sponsored by both the government and other donors to transform the agricultural sector of the country, and each of the funded projects comes with its objectives and mandates.

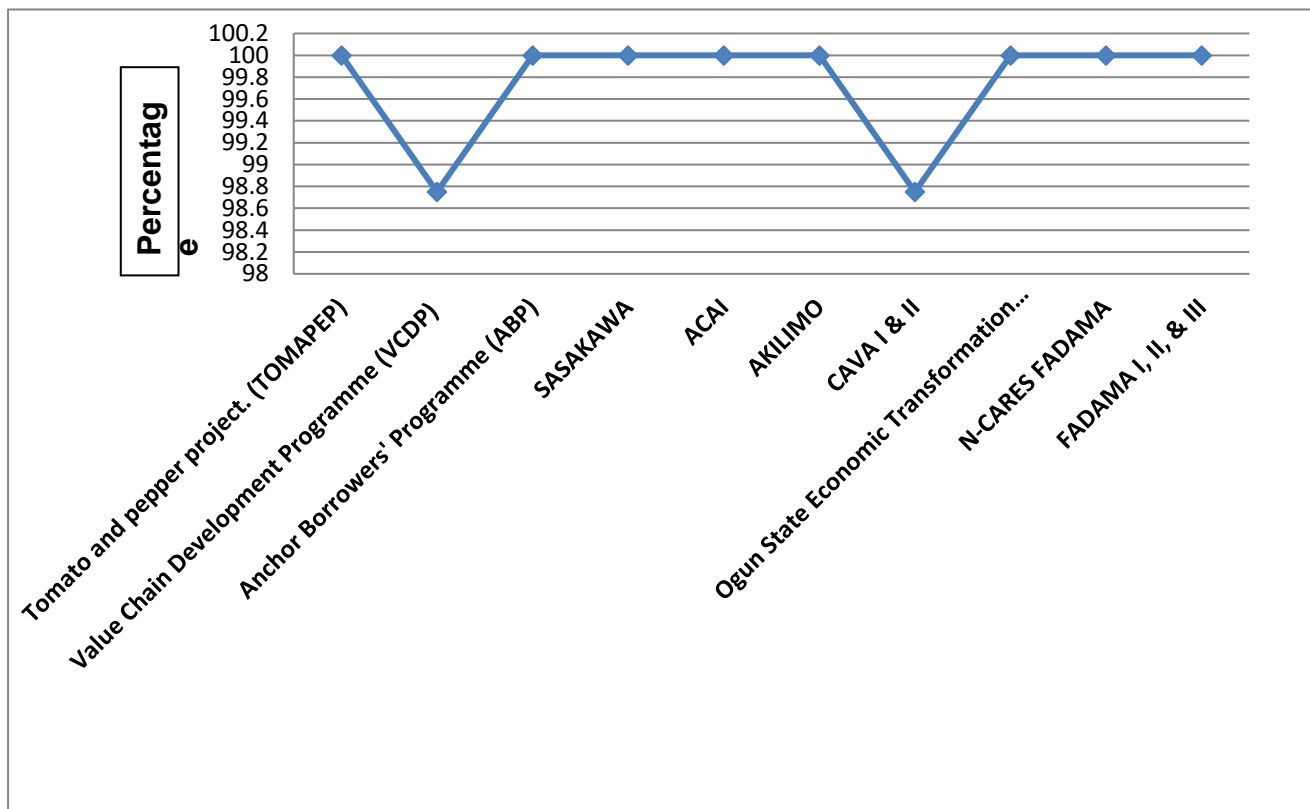


Figure 1: Funded projects

Extension Projects' Funders and their Mandates for Sustainable Development

Entries in Table 1 show funders and the objectives of each project. The funders include the World Bank, the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN), the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA), the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), the Ogun State Government (OGSG), and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD). The mandates of these organizations and the government for the funded projects cover food security, livelihood improvement, crop management skills, an improved farming system, quality yields, increased income, and a better business-enabling environment. Yahaya (2020) reported that non-government and private organizations, especially international bodies, play vital roles in funding agricultural projects through their numerous interventions for soil improvement and agricultural productivity to improve rural livelihoods. Helen (2023) opined that private financing is more effective at improving agricultural output than public finance.

Table 1: Funded agricultural projects and funders' mandates

Project Names	Funders	Mandate (s)
Tomato and pepper project.	GIZ	Quality output and improved farmers; income
Value Chain Development Project	IFAD	Food security and improved better lives of agricultural stakeholders across the production line.
Anchor Borrowers' Programme (ABP)	FGN	Empowerment to combat food insecurity
SASAKAWA (SAA)	IITA	The major objectives of SG2000- <i>Nigeria</i> were to raise the crop management skills of front-line extension staff and smallholder farmers in order to increase crop
ACAI	IITA	To ensue sustainable improvement in cassava production in Africa
AKILIMO	IITA	To provide optimized and economically beneficial recommendations tailored to the biophysical and socioeconomic situation of cassava growers.
CAVA I & II	IITA	developing value chains for HQCF in Ghana, Tanzania, Uganda, Nigeria and Malawi
Ogun State Economic Transformation Project	World Bank	Registration of farmers and management of data. improving the business-enabling environment (BBE),
N-CARES FADAMA	World Bank	To Expand access to livelihood support and food security services, and grants for poor and vulnerable households and firms
FADAMA , I, II, & III	World Bank	Improve farming system through cultivation across the water area (river bank)
Farmers Business School	OGSG	To promote entrepreneurship and business skills of smallholder farmers.

Results in Figure 2 show that out of the eleven identified projects, four, namely, SASAKAWA, ACAI, AKILIMO, and CAVA I and II, were funded by IITA. Three, namely FADAMA I, II, and III, OGSTEP, and N-CARES, were funded by the World Bank. The VCDP and TOMAPEP are being funded by IFAD and GIZ, respectively, while the Anchor Borrowers' Programme and Farmers Business School were funded by the Federal and Ogun State Governments, respectively. More of the projects were still funded by international organizations, and it is more likely that their intervention might not factor the local content and situation into their mandates and expectations of the projects.

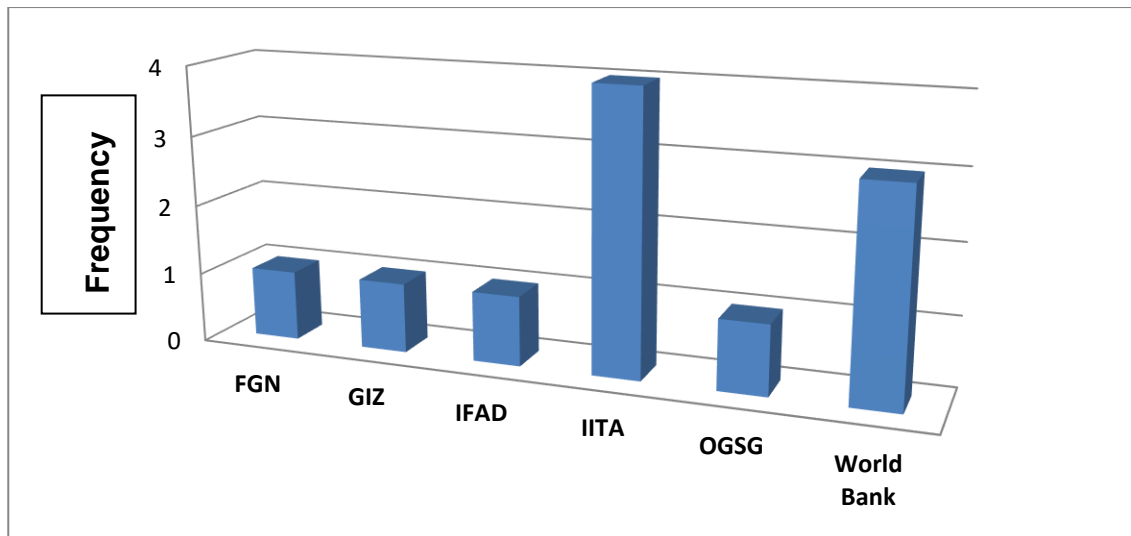


Figure 2: Number of agricultural projects supported by different funders

Antwi-Agyei and Stringer (2021) opined that the time-bound nature of agriculture, which is location-specific, requires the timely release of funds for increased extension performance, and not considering that is one of the factors responsible for poor extension performance. In some cases, funders execute projects in partnership with certain organizations based on their mandate simply to take the lead in project execution without adequate consideration of the beneficiaries and end users (Okike et al., 2021).

Effect of Funders' Mandates and Fund Access in Sustainable Development

The perspective of extension agents is vital because they are one of the executors of agricultural projects for development. This involves accessing funds and being guided by funders' instructions, mandates, and interests. Adhering to the funder's mandates and templates for interventions, as well as bottlenecks in accessing funds, has impacts on the project. Entries in Table 2 show that the respondents strongly agreed that conditions to access funds from providers are too stringent. ($\bar{x} = 4.58$) The implication is that potential grantees can be discouraged because of terms and conditions, thereby abandoning the process of obtaining the fund, and the agricultural project might also be abandoned. More than 50 percent of the extension agents within the categories strongly agreed and pointed out from their perspectives that the funder's mandates, bottlenecks in accessing funds released, and undue delays impede the smooth implementation of projects for sustainable development. Barua (2019) asserted that a key challenge in achieving sustainable development is the financing procedure and the obstacles around it, which create a huge financing gap for the actors implementing a project that will lead to sustainable development.

Many of the extension agents disagreed that excellent monitoring and evaluation of the funding and implementation of the project tracking records can still aid corruption ($\bar{x} = 4.17$); meanwhile, extension agents disagreed that the fund providers would go beyond their mandates to address emerging issues from the project ($\bar{x} = 4.40$). This implies that adequate and timely monitoring of the project will help keep track of records of resource utilization and eliminate corruption, unwanted practices, and interference in the implementation of sustainable development projects. Fadairo et al. (2023) asserted

that consistent funding and monitoring of agricultural interventions are required to sustain the impact of interventions among beneficiaries. Sikhupelo and Amoah (2023) opined that regulations should be put in place, enforced, and monitored to eliminate corruption and unwarranted practices leading to project failures. Corruption and nepotism in public extension as well as unfavourable government policies are some of the factors affecting extension service delivery, which has the potential to promote the privatization of the extension system in Nigeria (Akinagbe et al., 2024).

Results in Figure 3 show that most (82.5%) of the extension agents have a negative (unfavourable) perception of the impact. This implication is that the difficulty experienced while putting effort into complying with the funder's mandate and obtaining funds for projects discourages executors. This is one of the reasons for the project's slow pace and abandonment. The finding is in line with Bassey et al. (2023), who opined that extension agent views on financing for agricultural projects are valuable and worthwhile for the successful implementation of the projects.

Table 2: Perceived effect of funders' mandates and fund access procedures

Perceptual statements	Mean	Standard Deviation
Funders instructions and conditions make it difficult to obtain funds for agricultural projects	4.58	0.65
The mandates and interests of funders are of much more concern to them than the beneficiaries' viewpoints	4.18	0.64
Funders stipulated period and duration for their intervention is a threat to the success of agricultural projects.	4.40	0.56
Undue delay of fund disbursement discourages project stakeholders even before implementation.	4.33	0.69
The bottlenecks in accessing released funds affect the implementation of the action plans when due	4.31	0.75
Funders do not consider special locations or people that cannot conform to intervention frameworks due to their peculiarity	4.21	0.89
Poor funding does not lead to poor implementation of projects	4.38	0.83
Government policies for fund release and utilization of agricultural projects cannot hinder sustainable development	4.37	0.75
The early demand of track records by funders can affect the outcome of the projects for sustainable development	4.20	0.76
Funders do address issues from the past projects which are off their mandates for better transformation in agrarian communities	4.41	0.61
Excellent monitoring and evaluation of funds released aid corruption in the implementation of agricultural projects	4.17	0.63
The primary goal of most fund providers is to address all aspects of agriculture and well-being of rural people	4.26	0.86

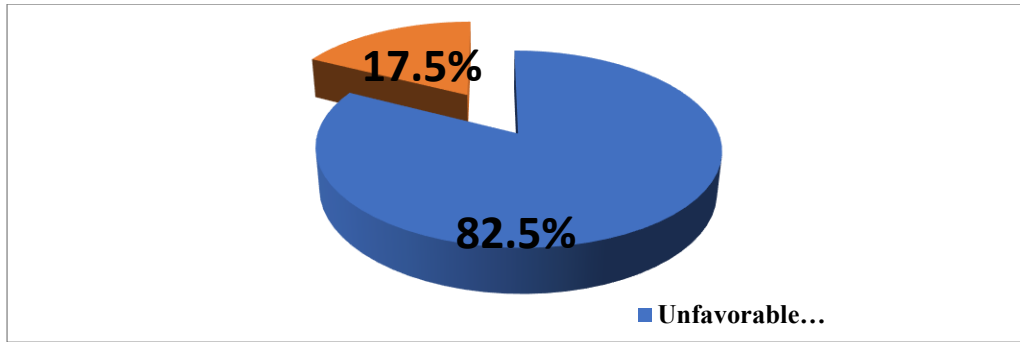


Figure 3: Categorization of extension agents' perception

Challenges Faced in Accessing Funds for Agricultural Projects

Results in Table 3 reveal that the requirement for obtaining funds for agricultural projects was ranked first with a mean of 2.66 as a challenge faced in getting sponsors for agricultural projects. This was closely followed by the time frame allotted for some projects, which could be too short ($\bar{x}=2.60$) to complete the project ranked 2nd. This finding implies that most of the donors for agricultural projects set a stringent requirement for project grants, and the time frame for the completion of the project could be too short before the disbursement of funds for the projects. This result is similar to that of Ndlovu, Mwale, and Zuwarimwe (2021), who opined that conditions by funders and time frames have an impact on the execution of agricultural projects.

Furthermore, the donors' difficult formula for disbursement of funds ($\bar{x}=2.54$) was ranked 3rd. It could be adduced that disbursements of funds for projects in tranches could delay some necessary actions that could expedite the rate of project completion, while the exchange rate of transactions ($\bar{x}=2.57$) was ranked 4th as the major challenge faced in accessing funds for agricultural projects. Muluh, Jude, and Ngwa (2019) opined that several constraints impede donor-funded projects and influence the changes and transformations that are expected in rural communities.

Table 3: Challenges of obtaining funds for agricultural projects implementation

Challenges	Mean	Standard deviation
Requirement for obtaining funds	2.66	0.56
Time frame for the project is too short	2.60	0.57
Donors' difficult formula for disbursement	2.54	0.60
Exchanging rate of currency of transaction	2.48	0.73
Politicians interference in funded projects	2.47	0.76
Politicizing/favourism with agricultural projects	2.42	0.62
Nature of agricultural activities seasonality	2.43	0.61
Stringent requirement for selecting beneficiaries for the project	2.37	0.56
Requirement for gender inclusiveness	2.14	0.60

Conclusion and Recommendation

Funding for agricultural projects comes from both national governments and international sources. Sourcing funds for agricultural development comes with a lot of challenges from an extension agent perspective, and it impedes successful sustainable development. The Funder mandate is a potential predicament to sustainable development if not addressed. The stringent requirements and challenges in funding agricultural projects play an important role in the failures and abandonment of some of the agricultural projects. The more challenges encountered in accessing funds and the severe effects of funders' mandates, the more fund recipients or users will have a negative perception of the funding process for sustainable development.

Funders should be flexible with their mandates to accommodate the concerns of the beneficiaries, considering peculiar situations in different locations. This can be done through regular review and feedback from the fields. Efforts should also be made by all actors in the agricultural sector to ensure that the primary aim of financing agricultural projects is upheld while defining terms for funding agricultural projects and making the requirement flexible. The funded organizations should also be willing to address obstacles to accessing funds and work closely with government actors to achieve sustainable agriculture and development.

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