

Effectiveness of the Implementation Modalities of Anchor Borrower Program – An Evaluation from the Perspectives of Benefiting Smallholder Farmers in Northwestern Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The research tends to evaluate the effectiveness of implementation modalities of Anchor Borrower Program (ABP) from the perspectives of benefiting smallholder farmers in northwestern Nigeria. Qualitative research paradigm will be deployed through focus group discussions with the benefiting smallholder farmers in seven northwestern states of Nigeria. Members of Rice Farmers Association of Nigeria (RIFAN) in each of the states served as a focus group. The Anchor Borrower Program implementation modalities issued by Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) were used as thematic areas for the discussion. The research made interesting findings which highlights the scope for improvement in Anchor Borrower Program implementation modalities. The key of these areas include training aspect of the implementation modalities which in practical terms is significantly lacking. The strategic monitoring especially from the perspectives of farmers is also lacking. The activities and operations of vendors that supply inputs to farmers need to be checked and strategically sanitized. The concerns of the farmers during town hall meetings need to be attended to. The paper also highlights some important areas in which future research will be conducted.

KEYWORDS: Anchor Borrower Program (ABP), Effectiveness, Implementation Modalities

1. INTRODUCTION:

Anchor Borrower Program (ABP) was introduced in 2015 by Federal Government of Nigeria through Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN, 2015). The program was aimed to achieve a major broader objective of creating linkage between smallholder farmers and reputable large-scale processors with view to boost agricultural output and improve the capacity utilization of processors (CBN, 2016). Some of the specific objectives include: creating new generation of farmers/entrepreneurs and employment, reducing the level of poverty among smallholder farmers, and assisting rural smallholder farmers to grow from subsistence to commercial production levels among others. While these objectives when attained can have the potentials in employment creation, poverty reduction and wealth creation, however, many lapses were identified by agricultural experts in the

implementation processes of the program. For instance, Coker et al. (2018) opined that the weakness of ABP include lack of robust program appraisal, some aspects of the program implementation are unclear, no comprehensive program implementation manual to guide the stakeholders, role of stakeholders are overlapping and the input distribution system is haphazardly implemented. While the work of Coker et al. (2018) tried to evaluate the effectiveness of ABP through SWOT analysis its approach may not provide convincing evidence to the policymakers as their result was arrived at mainly based on the opinion of the researchers through secondary sources of information, specifically documents and website of CBN. ABP will be more informative to the policymakers in evaluating the effectiveness of the implementation modalities of the program.

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Furthermore, another practical issue relating to ABP was default in loan redemption which could be connected with the implementation modalities. In this, Vanguard Newspaper reported in 2017 that Kebbi state government vowed to prosecute 11,541 beneficiaries of ABP in Suru Local Government Area, who failed to redeem their loan. Failure of beneficiaries to redeem their loans at it became due also signifies the need to examine the effectiveness of implementation modalities. Therefore, this study tends to evaluate the effectiveness of the implementation modalities of ABP from the perspectives of benefiting smallholder farmers in northwestern Nigeria.

In line with the problem statement and the gap identified from the literature on the lack of empirical evidence on the effectiveness of the implementation modalities of ABP from the perspectives of benefiting smallholder farmers, the paper tends to achieve two objectives. Firstly, it tends to explore the effectiveness of the implementation modalities of ABP from the perspective of beneficiary farmers. The paper also tends to identify the key modalities that have weaknesses in their implementation from the view of benefiting smallholder farmers.

The paper is divided into five sections, with this current section as introduction. The next section is literature review in which the conceptual design of ABP was discussed, theoretical framework highlighted and empirical studies were reviewed. In section three, the methodology used in the research was explained. This was followed by the result and discussion section where the result obtained from Focus Group Discussion was presented and discussed. The last section is conclusion and implication, in which implication to policy as well as future research direction were presented.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Anchor Barrower Program

Anchor Barrower Program is an intervention program introduced by federal government through Central Ban of Nigeria with key objective of alleviating farmers' challenges relating to agricultural inputs. ABP utilizes financing model that integrate relevant stakeholders such as anchor firms, CBN, NIRSAL and State Governments. This model not only organizes out-growers but also to ensure that they comply with contractual terms so as to reduce the problem on non-redemption of the loan facilities at the due date. Apart from government agencies identified above other stakeholders from the private sector include farmers association, banks and individual farmers are also integrated into ABP financing model. The programme was launched by President Muhammadu Buhari on November 17, 2015 with Kebbi state as a pilot. Later, the policy document of ABP was issued by CBN in 2016. Currently, there are about 25 participating states out of 36 states of the country (Coker et al., 2018). The programme also aimed at boosting agricultural production and non-oil exports in the face of dwindling crude oil prices. The policy documents outline the following specific objectives of the program; increase banks' financing to the agricultural sector, reduce agricultural commodity importation, conserve external reserves, increase capacity utilization of agricultural firms, and create new generation of farmers/entrepreneurs. The other objectives include; employment, deepen the cashless policy and financial inclusion, reduce the level of poverty among smallholder farmers, and assist rural smallholder farmers to grow from subsistence to commercial production levels.

The transaction dynamics as outlined by CBN are presented in Fig.1. It is based these dynamics that the implementation modalities were identified as documented in previous studies (Coker et al., 2018; Tinuke and Joseph, 2018).

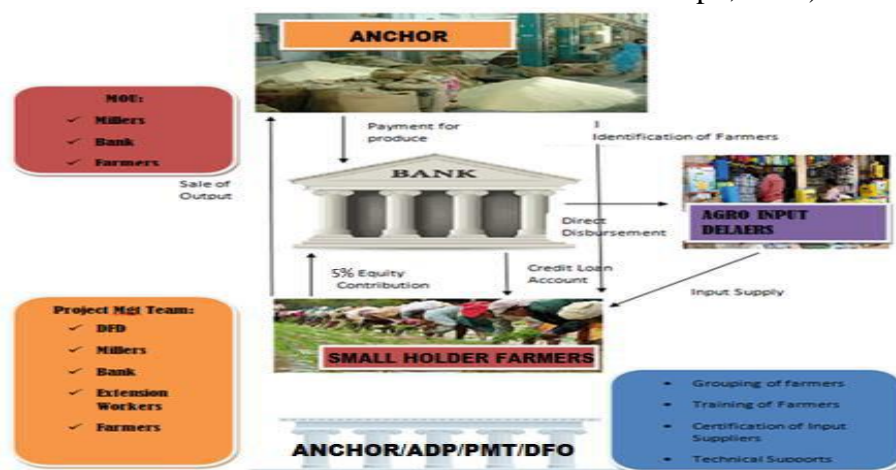


Fig. 2.1: Anchor Barrower Program The transaction dynamics (Central Bank of Nigeria, 2016)

It is worth to note that the implementation of the program experience some challenges such a defaulting the redemption of the loan as it becomes due by the benefiting farmers. For instance, it was reported by Vanguard Newspaper in 2017 that Kebbi State Government says it will prosecute 11,541 beneficiaries of the program in Suru Local Government Area who failed to redeem their loan. Aside this, experts also highlight the weaknesses in the implementation modalities of ABP as discussed in the problem statement. This situation warrants the need for a research.

2.2. Theory of Effectiveness Measurement

Theory of Effectiveness Measurement (TEM) developed by Bullock (2006) will serve as a theoretical foundation of this study. The theory originated from United States through Major Bullock who underwent his PhD study in the Air Force Institute of Technology of the US Air University. The proponent of this theory posits that effectiveness measures provide feedback to the decision makers on the impacts of actions or critical issues such as allocation of scarce resources. Effectiveness measures also highlight to the policymakers whether or not there is a need to maintain or change an existing strategy. Bullock (2006) combined the accepted effects-based principles and fundamental measurement concepts which enabled him to come up with not only effectiveness measurement methodology but also the theory. Bullock (2006) recommended that the outcome of his study should not just be applied from the perspective of theoretical effectiveness measurement but also from the practical view. In fact, that was why Bullock viewed the theory as an axiomatic-based measurement theory which gives future researchers an opportunity to explore its application in wider perspective. The theory developed fundamental effectiveness measurement principles, which meant to give theoretical and practical guidelines for implementation of effectiveness measurement as concluded by Bullock (2006)

Drawing from the conclusion of Bullock (2006), TEM will serve as a guide here to evaluate the implementation modalities of ABP in Nigeria from the perspective of the beneficiary farmers. Thus, the study will be able to establish in line with TEM whether or not there is a need maintain or change the implementation modalities of ABP based on the opinions of the benefiting farmers. Eventually, the researchers could be able to give feedback to the policymakers regarding the guidelines or strategies required for redesign of ABP to meet the needs the beneficiary farmers.

2.3. Previous Research on the Effectiveness of Anchor Barrower Program

The first available scholarly study in relation to ABP was that Evbuomwan and Okoye (2017) which evaluate the overall prospective of ABP on improving income and productivity of the farmers. However, no attempt was made by this study to evaluate the weaknesses or otherwise of its implementation modalities of ABP and the study mainly concentrated only in one of the states in northwestern Nigeria; the piloted area of Kebbi state. Alexander, Abdulmumin and Adeneye (2018) examined the impact of ABP on agricultural commodity prices and employment generation in Kebbi state. The study found positive impact of ABP on both agricultural commodity prices and employment generation, however, the author suggested for the periodic review of the program. Thus, it can be argued here that such periodic review can only be possible when inputs are received on the implementation modalities of the program from the stakeholders such as smallholder farmers. Interestingly, this is the focus of this study. Similarly, the work of Tinuke and Joseph (2018) focuses only evaluation of ABP on poverty alleviation in only one local government in Kebbi state. The work was not only purely conceptual using secondary sources of information but also has no focus on evaluating the implementation modalities of ABP from the practical perspective of smallholder farmers.

In the relation to the evaluation of implementation modalities of ABP, Coker et al. (2018) conducted a SWOT analysis through which several weaknesses were identified in the implementation of ABP in Nigeria. The weaknesses identified include lack of robust program appraisal, lack of clarity in some aspect of ABP program implementation strategies, nonexistence of comprehensive program implementation manual to guide the stakeholders, overlapping roles of stakeholders and haphazard input distribution to the beneficiary farmers. These weaknesses were identified through review of information from secondary sources particularly documents and website of CBN. While this effort could have a policy relevance to the relevant government agencies, however, does not provide practical evidence from the primary concerns of the program, in specifics, the smallholder farmers who are targeted as major beneficiaries. Consequently, it is argued here that real evidence from benefiting farmers on the effectiveness of ABP will be more informative to the policymakers in evaluating the effectiveness of the implementation modalities of the program. Therefore, this study tends to evaluate the effectiveness of the implementation modalities of ABP from the perspectives of benefiting smallholder farmers in northwestern Nigeria. In line with these arguments the following research questions are raised for this study tend to provide answers.

3. Methodology

3.1. Area/Site of the study/Subjects of the Study

The study covered the ABP participating states in Northwestern Nigeria covering Jigawa, Kano, Kaduna, Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto and Zamfara. The justification for selecting the region is that ABP was first piloted in the region and it has the highest participating farmers. For example, about 70,000 and 60,000 were screened and registered in Kebbi and Sokoto respectively compared to only 5,000 in Northcentral state of Kogi (Coker et al., 2018). Thus, the large concentration of benefiting smallholder farmers in the region is the major justification for its selection as area of the study.

Subjects of the study were selected from smallholder farmers in the three states from Northwestern Nigeria covering Jigawa from old Kano state, Katsina from old Kaduna state and Kebbi from old Sokoto state. Specifically, members of the Rice Farmers Association of Nigeria (RIFAN) will be the subjects of the study.

3.2. Data Collection Method

Data was collected through Focus Group Discussions with members of the Rice Farmers Association of Nigeria (RIFAN) in the three selected states in the northwestern region. In Jigawa state, the Focus Group Discussions was held with 12 RIFAN members, in Katsina with 9 RIFAN while in Kebbi with 14 RIFAN members. In each state, before conducting the Focus Group Discussions contact was established with the executives of the association, while later linked the research team to their members. In ease case venues were identified where the discussions. The Focus Group Discussions was conducted based on the nine thematic areas as contained in the ABP implementation dynamics.

3.3. Method of Analysis

The qualitative data from the focal group discussion with the smallholder farmers from all the sites of the study was analyzed using thematic analyses. The implementation modalities identified by Coker et al. (2018) which are also consistent with ABP transaction dynamics issued by CBN were used as key themes for the analysis. Specifically, the themes analyzed in evaluating the effectiveness of ABP from the perspective of the benefiting smallholder farmers include; (i) sourcing and distribution of funds to farmers at 9% interest rate, with crop specific tenors; (ii) identification and verification of farmers with 1-3 hectares varied cultivable land; (iii) grouping of farmers into cooperatives linked to anchor companies; (iv) training and certification of farmers; (v) opening of bank accounts by farmers, with banks and receipt of Bank Verification Number, (vi) town hall meeting to discuss with stakeholders (Anchor, Participating Financial Institutions, farmers, CBN, Agricultural Development Programmes (ADPs), input suppliers, Nigerian Agricultural Insurance Corporation (NAIC), (vii) reaching agreement on key implementation modalities (economics of production, input supply, agreed baseline price, disbursement modalities, payment terms, cross guarantee by farmers and default consequences), (viii) disbursement to beneficiaries in kind and cash through banks, and (ix) strategic monitoring and direction of program.

4. Results and Discussions

The presentation of result in this section was undertaken based on the nine thematic areas contained in the ABP implementation modalities. In each of the thematic areas relevant questions were raised that guide the conduct of the Focus Group Discussion.

4.1. Sourcing and distribution of funds to farmers

Normally, the issue of sourcing fund has never been an issue in ABP. The federal government provided sufficient fund through the Development Finance Department of the CBN. The major concern is the distribution the fund to farmers. The central question here is whether the implementation dynamics with respect to the distribution of fund has been effective. In understanding this, three questions were discussed during the Focus Group Discussion as contained in Table 4.1

Table 4.1 Outcome from Focus Group Discussion on Theme One

S/N	Questions	Outcome of the Discussion
1	How much interest rate (%) applicable to your loan?	CBN proposed an interest rate of 9% for ABP. Coincidentally, in each of the three states, the implementation of the 9% interest rate has been effective as revealed the farmers. Though farmers in Jigawa and Katsina opined for downward review of the interest to 5%, farmers in Kebbi considered this the existing rate of 9% as appropriate.
2	What is the tenor of the loan?	In response to this questions, farmers from the three states opined that tenor of the loan is three production season which is 18 months. While farmers in Jigawa and Kebbi suggested for that it should be reduced to seasonal dry or wet season which will reduce loan default.

3	Is there a match between crop and loan tenor?	On the match between the loan tenor and type of crops cultivated, the farmers agreed that there is clear match between the duo. Each season is considered as a six month period which corresponds with the type of crop.
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4.2. Identification and verification of farmers

The implementation modalities provide for the identification and verification of farmers with 1-3 hectares of cultivable land. As measures of effectiveness to this implementation modality, the central questions are whether the identification and verification was conducted in time, whether the process of identification and verification was efficient and whether there was equity in distribution of loan by land size; that is the size of the loan given to correspond with the size of the loan while maintaining the provision of 1-3 hectares as contained in the implementation modalities. Table 4.2 provides insights on this thematic area from the Focus Group Discussion.

Table 4.2 Outcome from Focus Group Discussion on Theme Two

S/N	Questions	Outcome of the Discussion
1	Timeliness of process of farmers' identification and verification? So that farmers can prepare well ahead of planting	Farmers in Jigawa and Kebbi reported that process of farmers' identification and verification was late and the inputs often arrived lately. In fact, farmers in Kebbi suggested that the process should commence few weeks before the commencement of the season. While in Katsina they reported that the process of farmers' identification and verification was done on time.
2	Land size compliance in giving loan. Does equity is made between farmers with different land sizes? Or larger sizes are favored?	In Jigawa and Katsina the process of farmers' identification and verification was efficient as it was done in group. However, farmers in Kebbi lament on the need for improved efficiency in the process of farmers' identification and verification.
3	Efficiency in the process of farmers' identification and verification. Does the process avoid unnecessary bureaucratic huddles?	Though the ABP provides land size 1-3 hectares, however, across all the states equal amount of loan is given irrespective of the land size. With respect to this, farmers from Kebbi suggested that farmers with larger farm size would be given large amount of loan commensurate with their land size.

4.3. Grouping of farmers into cooperatives linked to anchor companies

There is no doubt that farmers have been grouped into cooperatives such the RIFAN. However, the key question with respect to the effectiveness of this grouping modality is whether it has been used effectively. Whether it has promoted support and collaborative among the team with respect to judicious utilization of the loan. Whether group members share important information among themselves with respect to the program, and whether the group members are trustworthy in such a way that the leadership of the group can leverage on that to reduce loan default. Insights on these important issues are provided in Table 4.3 from the outcome of the Focus Group Discussion.

Table 4.3 Outcome from Focus Group Discussion on Theme Three

S/N	Questions	Outcome of the Discussion
1	Do group members support and collaborate with each other with respect to the AGP?	In all the three states, the farmers disclosed that the members support and collaborate with each other with respect to the AGP, though in Kebbi the farmers lament that such collaboration was not much.
2	Do group members share important information with respect to the program itself?	In all the three states, the farmers disclosed that they share important information among themselves especially on type of crop that perceived to have high yield.
3	Are the group members trustworthy or have a good credit worthiness or rating?	In all the three states, the farmers disclosed that the group members are trustworthy, however, in some instances, defaulters are found. Hence, their association need to filter such defaulting members in deciding the beneficiaries of the loans in the future.

4.4. Training and certification of farmers

The fourth modality of ABP provides for the training and certification of farmers on the improved process of farming. The expectation is that farmers' organization can initiate the training program, so terms global NGOs with focus on farmers also organize farmers training program, so also the government organizations. The central questions relate to the effectiveness of these programs in terms of whether the training was conducted, whether

the program add value to the farmers and whether certificates were issued after the programs. Thus, the following discussions were held with farmers' groups.

Table 4.4 Outcome from Focus Group Discussion on Theme Four

S/N	Questions	Outcome of the Discussion
1	Was training conducted to the farmers on improved process of farming by the group, government agencies, NGOs or any other organization in relation to this program?	The farmers interacted with in Jigawa and Katsina informed the researcher that no any training was conducted to the farmers on improved process of farming by the RIFAN, government agencies, NGOs or any other organization in relation to this program. However, in Kebbi the farmer revealed that training was conducted to the farmers on improved process of farming, though they do not disclose who gave the training.
2	Does the training add value to the farmers?	In Jigawa and Katsina, since no any program training program was held, it could assume that no value was added to farmers with respect to training them on improve method of farming. In Kebbi, the training added value and farmers were certified through the training. However, they suggested that, in the future the training should be mixed mode combining trainers and experienced farmers in the team, and the training should cover majority if not all the beneficiaries.
3	Was certificate given after the training?	No any form of certification was provided to the farmers interacted with in Jigawa and Katsina. However, a certificate was given to the group of farmers interacted with in Kebbi.

4.5. Opening of Bank Account and Issuance of Bank Verification Number

Though it is undoubted that banks undertook their responsibility of opening accounts and issuing bank verification number. However, the central effective questions to ask here are whether the process of account opening was made simple for the farmers, whether the process of issuance of Bank Verification Number was made simple, and whether the banks were supportive in these processes. Towards understanding these, the outcome of the Focus Group Interview is reported in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5 Outcome from Focus Group Discussion on Theme Five

S/N	Questions	Outcome of the Discussion
1	Does the process of account opening made simple for the farmers?	In all the three states, the farmer interacted with confirmed that the process of account opening has been made simple by the respective commercial banks.
2	Does the process of issuance of Bank Verification Number made simple?	Also, all the farmers interacted with in the three states confirmed that the process of issuing Bank Verification Number has been made simple by their respective banks. However, farmers in Jigawa cautioned the banks to be careful as some farmers whether intentionally or unintentionally are maintaining double Bank Verification Number. Similarly, farmers in Kebbi lament the process of issuing Bank Verification Number sometimes become cumbersome when there is mismatch in names with that if the means of Identity (ID).
3	Have banks being supportive in these processes?	The farmers from the three states who whom the researcher interacted with confirmed that the banks have been supportive in the processes.

4.6. Town hall Meeting

The sixth modality for the implementation of ABP proposed the holding of town hall meeting to discuss with stakeholders (Anchor, Participating Financial Institutions, farmers, CBN, Agricultural Development Programmes (ADPs), input suppliers (vendors), Nigerian Agricultural Insurance Corporation (NAIC). Some central questions to ask in relation to the effectiveness of the implementation modalities was whether such meeting was held, whether all the stakeholders were present during the meeting, whether all relevant issues were exhausted at the meeting and whether the concerns of the farmers were given important attention. With respect to this, the result of the Focus Group Discussion reported in Table 4.6 offered important insights.

Table 4.6 Outcome from Focus Group Discussion on Theme Six

S/N	Questions	Outcome of the Discussion
1	Was the town-hall meeting held?	All farmers interacted with in all the three states confirmed that the town hall meeting was held and mostly at the state capital.
2	Were all stakeholders present during the meetings?	All the farmers from all the three states also confirmed that all the relevant stakeholders were present during the meetings.
3	Were all the relevant issues discussed during the meeting?	All the farmers from all the three states also confirmed that all the relevant issues were discussed during the meeting
4	Were all the concerns of the farmers given important attention during the meeting?	In Jigawa, the farmers lament that not all their concerns were given priority but only some concerns were taken care of during the meeting. In Katsina and Kebbi, farmers lament that they were only briefed about the modalities of the loan, their concerns were not listen to. Farmers suggested that their complaints need to be listen instead of just briefing them.

4.7. Reaching agreement on key implementation modalities

The seventh modality seek to confirmed whether agreement was reached with the farmers' groups or associations with respect to the key implementation modalities of the ABP. These include economics of production, input supply, agreed baseline price, disbursement modalities, payment terms, cross guarantee by farmers and default consequences. The outcome of the Focus Group Discussion with respect to these modalities are discussed in Table 4.7.

Table 4.7 Outcome from Focus Group Discussion on Theme Seven

S/N	Questions	Outcome of the Discussion
1	Was clear agreement reached on economics of production?	In Jigawa, farmers interacted with lament that no clear agreement was reached on economics of production; farmer have to agree with which they were told during the meeting. Same situation was found in Katsina but a clear agreement was reached on economics of production; it was based on the market price at the time of harvest was informed by Kebbi farmers with whom the researcher interacted.
2	Was clear agreement reached on inputs supply?	In Jigawa, no clear agreement was reached on inputs supply, vendors supply on their planned time and at their own decided price. Farmer suggested that price and type of input should be agreed with them. In Katsina and Kebbi, a clear agreement was reached on inputs supply, the farmers share their anxiety on the need to supply inputs on time which was agreed upon.
3	Was clear agreement reached on baseline price?	In Jigawa, farmers confirmed that agreement was reached on baseline price, and farmers were made aware of the baseline price for which their produce will be taken and agreed with such. In Katsina, farmers interacted with disclosed that no agreement was reached on baseline, farmers were just told about the baseline price for which their produce will be taken. In Kebbi, farmers mentioned that there was agreement on baseline price which is mostly based on prevailing market price.
4	Was clear agreement reached on disbursement modalities?	In Jigawa, farmers with whom the researcher interacted laments that no clear agreement was reached with the farmers on disbursement modalities, farmers were just briefed. Thus, they suggested that they should be made to know the time of disbursement. In Kebbi, there was a clear agreement with the farmers on disbursement modalities.
5	Was clear agreement reached on payment terms?	In all the states, the farmers interacted with confirmed that there was a clear agreement on payment terms which is three season. However, farmers in Jigawa and Kebbi suggested that the payment terms to be shorten by one season, that is to be two season, this could have the potential of reducing default, such longer period of repayment is one of the reason some farmers defaulted.

6	Was clear agreement reached on cross guarantee by farmers?	In Jigawa and Katsina no application of cross-guarantee was reported by the farmers. In fact, farmers in Jigawa opined that such is not required, lets each person be responsible for his action. In Kebbi, farmers interacted with confirmed that the issue of cross-guarantee was mentioned to them and was facilitated by the farmers' association.
7	Was clear agreement reached on default consequences?	In each of the three states, a clear agreement reached on default consequences. Farmers in Kebbi added that advance notice is given to the farmers before taking action. A second chance is also given to the farmers and if there is harvest problem the supervisor channel such problem to the relevant authority.

4.8. Disbursement to beneficiaries

The eight modality provides for the disbursement of inputs to the beneficiaries by vendors and or cash through banks. The central questions on the assessment of effectiveness of this modality relate to whether the disbursement made to the beneficiaries either by the banks and vendors has been made in time. Whether pricing of the inputs given by the vendors' fair, and whether there was transparency in the process of disbursement of inputs. In understanding these, the outcome of the Focus Group Discussion offered some important insights on the effectiveness of this modality.

Table 4.8 Outcome from Focus Group Discussion on Theme Eight

S/N	Questions	Outcome of the Discussion
1	Was timely disbursement made to the banks and vendors?	The farmers interacted with in Jigawa and Kebbi lamented that the inputs were not timely disbursed. Thus, suggested for timely disbursement of inputs. In Katsina, the farmers with whom the researcher interacted reported for timely disbursement of inputs.
2	Was pricing of the inputs given by the vendors' fair?	In Jigawa and Kebbi, the farmers also latent that the pricing of inputs given by the vendors is not fair, it is some time above the actual market price. While in Katsina, the farmers with whom the researcher interacted reported that the price was fair.
3	Was the process of disbursement of inputs transparent?	Farmers interacted with in Jigawa and Katsina confirmed that there was transparency in disbursement of inputs due to the supervision of the process by the relevant stakeholders. However, farmers in Kebbi, emphasize the need for improved transparency in the distribution of inputs. They claimed that they are charged with what they do not collect. Hence, they suggest the use of input disbursement register so that they can sign against each input they collect.

4.9. Strategic monitoring and direction of program

The last modality of the ABP relates to the strategic monitoring and direction of the program. While this can be broad, that can include monitoring of commercial banks by the CBN, monitoring of the vendors as well as the monitoring of farmers by their relevant stakeholders. The central issue with respect effectiveness of this modality relate to the farmers only as the they those who participated in this Focus Group Discussion. In essence, the effectiveness of this modality in relation to farmers revolve around two questions; whether the on-the-program monitoring was made by the relevant stakeholders such as farm visit and assessment, and whether the monitoring information was shared with the farmers to enable them evaluate their performance and improve upon. In response to this, Table 4.9 offered important insights about the views of the farmers in assessing the effectiveness of this modality.

Table 4.9 Outcome from Focus Group Discussion on Theme Nine

S/N	Questions	Outcome of the Discussion
1	Was there on-the-program monitoring by the relevant stakeholders such as farm visit and assessment?	The farmers in all the three states with whom the researcher interacted disclosed that there was on-the-program monitoring by the relevant stakeholders such as farm visit and assessment. Consequently, the farmers suggested there should be monitoring by Anchor Barrower.
2	Was the monitoring information shared with the farmers to enable them	Since there was no on-the-firm monitoring, all the farmers agreed that monitoring information was shared with them. Consequently, the farmers suggested there should be monitoring by Anchor Barrower and

evaluate their performance?	such monitoring information should be shared and commendation of should be given to performing farmers, so also encouragement and guidance should be given to those who perform below expectation by the visitation team.
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5. Conclusion and Implications

The research to evaluate the effectiveness of implementation modalities of Anchor Borrower Program (ABP) from the perspectives of benefiting smallholder farmers in northwestern Nigeria. Three states were selected from the seven states that formed the northwest. A representation was given to each of the three older states the initially formed the region. From the old Kano state, which now comprised of Kano and Jigawa states, Jigawa was selected. From old Kaduna state, which now comprised of Kaduna and Katsina states, Katsina was selected. From the old Sokoto state, which now comprised of Sokoto, Kebbi and Zamfara states, Kebbi was selected. These states are agricultural hub in northwestern Nigeria. Qualitative research paradigm will be deployed through Focus Group Discussion with the benefiting smallholder farmers in seven northwestern states of Nigeria. Members of Rice Farmers Association of Nigeria (RIFAN) in each of the states will serve as a focus group. ABP implementation modalities issued by Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) were used as thematic areas for the discussion.

5.1. Implications to Policy and Practice

Through this study, the research identified many stakeholders to whom this study will have practical implication. The key stakeholder is the CBN, which need to ensure enforcement and where necessary the modification of ABP modalities. Firstly, some farmers viewed that interest rate of 9% though considered fair compared other commercial banks' lending, but pleaded that it should be reviewed to 5%. This plea is in line with other Federal Government Intervention Programs such as Covid-19 Loan (CBN, 2020). Secondly, the CBN should also review the loan tenor from three seasons to a single season either dry or wet season. This is based on the opinion that this adjustment has likelihood of reducing loan default.

The second implication relates to ABP stakeholder group. This include the Anchor, Participating Financial Institutions, CBN, Agricultural Development Programmes (ADPs), input suppliers (vendors), Nigerian Agricultural Insurance Corporation (NAIC). These stakeholders should ensure that during town hall meeting the concerns of the farmers are given priority, where necessary alignment should be established between the proposed modalities and the interest of the farmers.

The farmer laments that mostly during these meetings they were only briefed about the modalities without taking into consideration their important concerns, which are important in improving the effectiveness of the program.

Specifically, the Anchor need to improve the effectiveness of farmers' identification and verifications. It was suggested that the process should commenced few weeks before the commencement of the season, and the efficiency of this process should be improved. The Anchors should not exercise fairness at the expense of equity in loan distribution. The ABP provides land size 1-3 hectares, giving equal loan to beneficiaries can be seen as a fair movement, however, the distribution should equitable; farmers with larger farm size would be given large amount of loan commensurate with their land size.

Further, commercial banks were commended by farmers in ensuring efficiency and effectiveness in the process of account opening and issuing Bank Verification Number as it was made simple and efficient. However, farmers, particularly in Jigawa cautioned the banks to be careful as some farmers whether intentionally or unintentionally are maintaining double Bank Verification Number. Similarly, farmers in Kebbi lament the process of issuing Bank Verification Number sometimes become cumbersome when there is mismatch in names with that if the means of Identity (ID). Banks need to find a way of easing this situation when encountered.

The study also offers important implication to vendors, in fact there is the need for CBN to revisit their operations or the RIFAN to mount pressure to ensure fairness in their activities. The fact is that farmers interacted with lamented that the inputs were not timely disbursed. The prices are sometimes higher than prevailing market price at the time of disbursement. However, unless in rear case where need for improving transparency in the disbursement of input was reported, in most instances, the distribution process was said to be transparent as it includes important stakeholders, sometimes including security agencies. In case of the need of improved transparency, some farmers in Kebbi claimed that they are charged with what they do not collect. Hence, they suggest the use of input disbursement register so that they can sign against each input they collect.

One of the major weakness identified in the ABP is poor training. Most of the farmers' group interacted with lament that no any training was conducted to the farmers on improved process of farming by the RIFAN, government agencies, NGOs or any other organization in relation to this program. Thus, the farmers who did not receive any form of training lament that no value was added to them in terms of improved farming process and procedures. Only, in Kebbi the farmer revealed that training was conducted to the farmers on improved process of farming which added value to the knowledge of farming and were issued certificate, though they do not disclose who gave the training. However, they suggested that, in the future the training should be mixed mode combining trainers and experienced farmers in the team, and the training should cover majority if not all the beneficiaries. Hence, it is suggested that CBN should strengthen this modality to ensure that farmers are trained all over so that value can be added to their existing farming skills and productivity and yield could likely improved. Farmers association need also to pressurize the Anchors to ensure all that supposed to be done is actually done.

In the case of agreements during town hall meetings, farmers' association need to exercise high bargaining power in the areas of economics of production; on inputs supply by vendors, baseline price, disbursement modalities, application of cross-guarantee and default consequences. The fact is that farmers lamented these issues are just briefed to them without agreeing upon by both parties

Lastly, State Government/ RIFAN/ NGOs have important role to play especially in relation to on-the-program monitoring such as farm visit and assessment. This is mostly lacking. Hence, farmers suggested that there should be firm monitoring by Anchor Borrower, RIFAN and NGOs so as evaluate the farm performance of the benefiting farmers. There should also be sharing of monitoring information so that farmers will understand their lapses and improve upon.

The relevant stakeholders to whom this study has an implication should provide necessary support for improving and redesign of ABP so as to resolve the current conflicts being experienced between farmers and anchor-borrowers. This in essence, will attract more participants especially young individuals in agribusiness. Additionally, it will improve the livelihood of rural farmers since majority of farming activities are carried on by the rural areas in most of the states in northwestern Nigeria.

5.2. Implications for Future Research

In addition to the practical implication, the study has some implication to future researchers. Firstly, this study centered only on northwest, however, ABP covers other regions. Thus, future research can replicate same study in other regions. Secondly, this study is exploratory and qualitative in nature. In its own way, the study identified important variables that could serve as independent variables to ABP Effectiveness as dependent variables. For instance, some independent variables that can be studied as potential predictors to ABP effectiveness includes; training, monitoring and evaluation, vendor behavior, banking support, role of farmers' association among many others. With this variables, conducting cross-section quantitative study is possible. Lastly, the study also highlighted how future studies can underpin their studies using Theory of Effective Measurement.

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