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IMPACT OF RURAL ACCESS AND AGRICULTURAL MARKETING PROJECTS ON POVERTY ALLEVIATION IN LAVUN LGA, NIGER STATE

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Abstract
This paper examines the impact of rural access and agricultural marketing project on poverty alleviation in Lavun LGA. The study adopts quantitative method, using questionnaire. The finding reveals that rural access and agricultural marketing projects has marginal impact in reducing poverty. This was as result of poor infrastructure development and poor application of successful marketing tactics. as well as ineffective implementation of marketing strategies. The study recommends that addressing these constraints can be achieved by increasing investments in infrastructure development and improving marketing strategies and interventions within the rural access and agricultural marketing project, thereby enhancing its effectiveness in poverty reduction.

Keywords: Rural Access, Agricultural Marketing Projects, poverty alleviation.

Introduction
The setback of poverty is intricate and multidimensional, affecting civilizations everywhere. It describes a state in which people or communities are unable to meet their fundamental needs and live comfortably due to a lack of money and basic essentials. Inadequate access to clean water, food, healthcare, education, housing, and work opportunities are among the many factors that contribute to poverty. Poverty has significant effects on people, families, and society at large. Therefore, tackling poverty necessitates a thorough comprehension of its causes, effects, and possible remedies.

The World Bank estimates that more than 700 million people relied on less than $1.90 a day to survive in extreme poverty as of 2021. Furthermore, it was estimated that 3 billion people lived on less than $5.50 a day. Underemployment and unemployment are two major causes of poverty. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO) (2020), there were 267 million unemployed people worldwide, or an 8.3% unemployment rate. Because it limits income and chances for economic mobility, a lack of jobs, especially in emerging regions, prolongs poverty.

The UNDP highlights that institutional disadvantages impede the access of marginalized groups, such as women, ethnic minorities, and people with disabilities, to social services,

work opportunities, and education. Reducing poverty requires addressing inequality and fostering social inclusion. Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index illustrates the harmful impact of corruption on economic development and poverty eradication. The efficiency of social welfare and development projects' ability to combat poverty is hampered by the diversion of funds (UNDP).(Kuhl, 2023).

Environmental variables that disproportionately impact impoverished areas include climate change and natural catastrophes. According to the UN, food insecurity rises, vulnerable populations are displaced, and agricultural output is negatively impacted by climate change, all of which worsen poverty. The World Health Organization (WHO) notes that there is a direct link between low health outcomes and poverty. Lack of access to clean water, sanitary facilities, and healthcare services increases the burden of disease and prolongs poverty (WHO, 2023).

Despite having the largest economy in Africa, Nigeria nonetheless faces a great deal of poverty. The nation's high rates of poverty are a result of its large population, economic inequality, and a number of sociopolitical variables. According to the World Bank, Nigeria has one of the highest poverty rates internationally. Over 83 million Nigerians, or over 40% of the country's population, were estimated to be living below the national poverty line in 2020 (World Bank, 2020). This startling statistic emphasizes how serious the poverty problem is in the nation even though it has the greatest economy in Africa. The high rates of underemployment and unemployment in Nigeria are major causes of poverty. The labor force and available jobs are out of sync because of a lack of work possibilities and population growth. Because of this circumstance, a sizable segment of the populace struggles to find adequate, long-term employment, which contributes to income instability and poverty.

Given that a large percentage of Nigerians live in rural regions, rural poverty is a serious problem there. Basic infrastructure, such clean water, electricity, and roads, is frequently unavailable in rural areas, which impedes economic growth and prolongs poverty. Since that for many people agriculture is their main source of income, the challenges faced by rural inhabitants are further exacerbated by limited access to markets, agricultural inputs, and modern farming practices. Health is inextricably related to poverty, and Nigeria suffers substantial health difficulties that worsen the poverty crisis. A greater illness load and higher individual healthcare costs are the outcomes of inadequate access to high-quality healthcare services, especially in rural areas. Due to medical costs and lost productivity, families are further placed into financial vulnerability when there is a lack of access to affordable healthcare (Odunyemi, et al. 2023)

According to Fadairo& Keita (2021), Nigeria has carried out a number of projects and programs over the years with the goal of ending poverty and enhancing the welfare of its citizens. Even after numerous efforts to reduce poverty have been put in place, the threat continues to grow. In light of this, the study aims to investigate how RAAMP has helped to reduce poverty in Lavun LGA, Niger State.

Research Objectives

To achieve the aim of this study, the following objectives will be pursued:

1. To examine the contribution of RAAMP on market development in Lavun Local Government.

2. To examine the contribution of RAAMP on poverty alleviation inLavun Local Government.

Research Questions:

The following are the research questions for the study.

1. Does RAAMP contribute to market development in Lavun Local Government?

2. Does RAAMP contribute to poverty alleviation in Lavun Local Government?

Conceptual Clarification

Concept of Poverty

Poverty is not a self-defining concept. Experts and academics have suggested many definitions over time. For example, poverty could be the lack of command over commodities in general alternatively it could be the lack of command over some basic goods (e.g., food and housing). More generally, Sen, 1985, argued that poverty is the lack of capability to function in a given society. All these definitions point to poverty as a status in which a reasonable standard of living is not achieved. A synthesis of the various positions has been made by the World Bank, "Poverty is the lack of, or the inability to achieve, a socially acceptable standard of living" (Yang, de-Sherbinin&Liu, 2020). Poverty is a condition characterized by the lack of income and resources necessary to meet basic human needs, including food, shelter, clothing, and access to healthcare and education. It is often accompanied by limited opportunities for socio-economic advancement and exclusion from full participation in society (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2019). Poverty is a multidimensional and dynamic concept that encompasses not only low income or consumption levels but also the lack of basic capabilities and opportunities needed to lead a fulfilling life (Ravallion, 2016).

Concept of Poverty Alleviation

Yang, et al. (2020) poverty alleviation is the process of reducing and finally eliminating poverty by implementing methods and programs that attempt to improve the economic and social conditions of individuals and communities living in poverty. This entails making basic necessities like food, water, healthcare, education, and shelters more accessible as well as giving them the tools they need to start their own businesses, creates jobs, and receive vocational training in order to provide a steady income. The purpose of poverty alleviation is to enable individuals and communities to attain more economic self-sufficiency and to improve their overall well-being.

According to Scuderi, et al (2023) all strategies used by the government, non-governmental organizations, or affluent people to lessen or completely eradicate poverty within a community are collectively referred to as poverty alleviation. The best way to reduce or eradicate poverty is to increase people's capacities or their freedoms. Empowerment, or providing those living in poverty with the means to meet their fundamental requirements, is the corollary of this development strategy that aims to end poverty in the long run. Hasan and associates (2023).Numerous advantageous societal effects come along with the reduction of poverty. These include easier access to food, which leads to better health and nutrition, easier access to school because of increased income levels and the capacity to pay for tuition and supplies, and easier access to jobs.

Concept of Rural Access and Agricultural Marketing Project (RAAMP)

According to Federal Project Management Unit,(2018) program or initiative known as the "rural access and agricultural marketing project" aims to support the growth of the

agricultural industry while simultaneously giving residents of rural areas better access to markets and essential goods and services. The provision of infrastructure and services, such as communication and transportation networks and access to essential services like healthcare and education, to rural areas is known as "rural access." Contrarily, agricultural marketing focuses on enhancing the selling of agricultural products through initiatives like building or enhancing market infrastructure, educating farmers about enhanced production and marketing strategies, and encouraging the adoption of contemporary marketing strategies. The goal of the combined rural access and agricultural marketing initiative is to give rural residents more access to markets while simultaneously developing a more effective and efficient mechanism for farmers to sell their goods. This can serve to foster economic growth and development in rural areas, while also boosting the supply of food and other important items for customers.

Projects pertaining to rural access and agricultural commercialization are crucial for a number of reasons. Management Unit for Federal Projects (2022).Encouraging economic development: Improving agricultural marketing and rural access can contribute to job creation, income growth, and economic development in rural areas. This has the potential to lower poverty and raise living standards generally. Increasing food security can be achieved by expanding market accessibility and encouraging the use of contemporary marketing techniques. This will raise the availability of food in rural regions and lower the likelihood of food insecurity. In favor of sustainable agriculture: Rural access and agricultural marketing initiatives can contribute to raising the productivity and sustainability of agricultural systems and lowering the adverse effects of agriculture on the environment by fostering better production and marketing strategies. Enhancing public health: Rural access initiatives can enhance public health outcomes in rural areas by giving access to essential services like healthcare and education. Reducing inequality: By enhancing rural residents' access to basic services and markets, rural access and agricultural marketing initiatives can aid in closing the gap between rural and urban people.

RAAMP and Target Beneficiaries

The following groups of persons may be impacted by rural access and agricultural marketing projects, according to Ezeh (2023): Farmers and businesspeople in rural areas: Projects aimed at improving rural access and agricultural markets primarily benefit farmers and rural entrepreneurs. Enhanced accessibility to financial resources, markets, technical expertise, and services can boost their output, earnings, and competitiveness in agricultural markets.

Consumers in rural areas: These customers stand to gain from easier access to necessities like food, medical care, and education. Enhancing the availability and lowering the price of these goods and services can both be achieved with improved market infrastructure.

Women and youth: These groups are frequently marginalized in rural areas and may encounter additional obstacles when trying to access financial and market resources. Projects aimed at improving rural access and agricultural marketing may incorporate focused interventions to remove these obstacles, like offering technical support and training or encouraging women's and young people's involvement in value chains.

Local communities: Initiatives pertaining to agricultural marketing and rural access can support the growth of the rural economy by generating employment opportunities and fostering sustainable means of subsistence. Local communities may benefit from this in the form of enhanced public health and educational outcomes, among other things.

Environment: Deforestation, soil erosion, and water pollution are just a few of the negative effects that agricultural operations can have on the natural world. Initiatives pertaining to

agricultural marketing and rural access may incorporate strategies to lessen adverse environmental effects and advance sustainable agriculture.

RAAMP and Poverty Alleviation

The goal of the World Bank-funded Rural Access and Agricultural Marketing Project (RAAMP) is to boost agricultural productivity and market accessibility in Nigeria's rural areas (Akpan, 2022). Because the project addresses some of the root causes of poverty in rural areas, it has made a substantial contribution to the reduction of poverty. The following are some ways that RAAMP has contributed to reducing poverty:

Roads, bridges, and culverts are examples of the improved rural infrastructure that has been made possible by RAAMP. Farmers now find it simpler to convey their products to marketplaces, and market accessibility has expanded as a result.

More credit availability: RAAMP has made finance available to farmers so they can buy supplies like fertilizer and seeds. Farmers' earnings have improved and agricultural output has increased as a result.

Better agricultural extension services: By giving farmers access to knowledge on best practices in agriculture, RAAMP has contributed to the improvement of agricultural extension services. Farmers' earnings have improved and agricultural output has increased as a result.

strengthened agricultural value chains: By connecting farmers to markets and facilitating better access to markets for their products, RAAMP has contributed to the strengthening of agricultural value chains. Poverty has decreased and farmer earnings have increased as a result.

Empirical Review

Some empirical research has been conducted out showing Rural Access and Agricultural Marketing Project has assistance in relieving poverty. Etuk and Ayuk's (2021) study, which examined the relationship between agricultural commercialization, poverty reduction, and pro-poor growth using data from a commercial agricultural development project in Nigeria, is one of them. Most people believe that commercial agriculture development will lead to the commercialization of agriculture, the eradication of poverty, and growth that benefits the poor in emerging nations. Additionally, Kolawole (2021) looked into the demand-driven approach perspective for evaluating poverty alleviation programs in Nigeria. The purpose of this review was to investigate why, in spite of the Nigerian government's implementation of certain measures, the country's poverty rate is still high. The analysis revealed that the majority of the poverty alleviation strategies that have been put into place to date have concentrated on growth, necessities, rural development strategies, and agriculture. Mukaila (2022).examined the factors that contribute to rural women's poverty in Nigeria: implications for rural development and poverty reduction. Because they are the most vulnerable, rural women in developing nations are disproportionately affected by extreme poverty. Extreme poverty makes it harder for rural women to be productive and reduces their purchasing power, which keeps them from being able to afford basic necessities like food and healthcare. Maulu (2021).looked into ways to improve the contribution of rural agricultural extension programs to the reduction of poverty. In rural communities, extension programs are essential for establishing connections between farmers and other stakeholders involved in the development agenda. Since farmers are the primary stakeholders in agriculture, these initiatives' capacity to address their needs will determine how relevant they are. Reviewing research on strengthening the function of rural agricultural extension programs in reducing poverty was the goal of this work. Su, Song, et al.'s (2021) investigation focused on

evaluating farm households' capacity for sustainable livelihoods and poverty alleviation strategies in rural China. This study intends to determine efficient methods for government initiatives to reduce poverty that take into account the viability of farm households' livelihoods in China's Southern Shaanxi province. Therefore, the issue that this study aims to solve is to investigate how agricultural marketing and rural access initiatives affect the reduction of poverty and to pinpoint the critical elements that influence their efficacy. By doing so, this study intends to provide insights into how poverty alleviation initiatives might be created and administered more successfully to help rural farmers and reduce poverty in Lavun local government.

Theoretical Framework

Zimmerman's (2000) empowerment theory served as the foundation for this essay. Referenced in Clark et al. (2019).In order to eliminate poverty, empowerment theory highlights the need of empowering people's capacities, agency, and decision-making authority. Rural communities can be strengthened by the rural access and agricultural marketing project by giving them the tools, information, and abilities they need to participate successfully in agricultural markets. The initiative can provide farmers with the tools they need to make better decisions, bargain for higher prices, and enhance their standard of living through expanded market access, enhanced infrastructure, and capacity building.The most generally recognized content theory of motivation, Maslow &Frager's (1987) motivational theory, was included in the study's theoretical framework.and the empowerment theory Zimmerman, (1995). Zimmerman, (2000). The study reviewed and outlined the characteristics that influence the potential for entrepreneurship through income-generating activities by integrating the two theories. Empowerment theory not only offers a useful framework for furthering human growth, but it also suggests doable tactics for thwarting oppression and enhancing people's fortitude, ingenuity, and resilience.

Nonetheless, because empowerment theory highlights the significance of giving people and communities the tools to take charge of and improve their economic circumstances, it is extremely pertinent to the research on the effects of rural access and agricultural marketing initiatives on poverty alleviation in Nigeria. Projects focusing on agricultural marketing and rural access can open up new business prospects by enhancing value chain development, market accessibility, and transportation infrastructure. Through enabling people to participate in farming, gain access to markets, and produce revenue, these initiatives can aid in the alleviation of poverty and promote economic empowerment.

The philosophy of empowerment highlights the significance of giving people and communities a say in the decisions that impact their lives. Projects aimed at improving rural access and agricultural marketing can provide underprivileged people a voice in the creation of policies, the distribution of resources, and decision-making processes. These programs give communities the power to actively direct their own development and have an impact on policies that affect their means of subsistence by incorporating them in project planning and executionThrough the use of empowerment theory, this study examines the multifaceted effects of agricultural marketing and rural access initiatives on poverty reduction, taking into account political, social, and economic empowerment as essential components of sustainable development. This method emphasizes the value of inclusive and participatory development processes while acknowledging the agency of people and communities in creating their own routes out of poverty.

Methodology

This study uses a cross-sectional survey research design. A cross-sectional design is the kind in which every factor is measured concurrently. the study's population The estimated population of the Lavun local government area in Niger State is 209,917. The Taro Yamane formula was used to determine the sample size. The study used a simple random technique to ensure that every resident of the study area had an equal chance of being selected via questionnaire. A five-point Likert scale, ranging from "Strongly agree" to "Strongly disagree," was used to examine the collected responses. In order to obtain secondary data, the study uses a qualitative survey that looks at published empirical research reports, journals, publications, textbooks, and other documentary sources like the internet. Simple statistical methods, such as tables, frequency, and simple percentages, were used to examine the data collected for this research study and describe the results received from the surveys. With the help of the statistical packages SPSS Social Science (version 23), hypotheses were evaluated using chi square.

Data Presentation, Analysis, Interpretation and Discussion of Findings

Table 1 Descriptive Analysis of Training and Development on employee commitment

S/N	Statement		SA (1)	A (2)	U (3)	D (4)	SD (5)
1	RAAMP contributes to Market development.	Freq	200	120	5	20	5
		Perc	57.1	34.3	1.4	5.7	1.4
2	RAAMP has positive impact on poverty alleviation in lavun LG.	Freq	110	190	3	40	7
		Perc	31.4	54.3	9.0	11.4	2.0

Source: Field Survey, 2023.

Table 1, above shows that 200 (57.1%) of the respondents strongly agreed that RAAMP contributes to market development, 120 (34.3%) of the respondents agreed, 5 (1.4%) of the respondents were undecided, 20 (5.7%) of the respondents disagreed while the remaining 5 (1.4%) of the respondents strongly disagreed.

Table 2, 110 (31.4%) of the respondents strongly agreedthat RAAMP has positive impact onpoverty alleviation in lavun LG.190 (54.3%) of the respondents agreed, 3 (9.0%) of the respondents were undecided, 40 (11.4%) of the respondents disagreed while 7 (2.0%) of the respondents strongly disagreed.

According to the report, the Rural Access and Agricultural Marketing Project (RAAMP) has a significant positive impact on rural development. This suggests that a significant portion of the participants firmly concurred that the Rural Access and Agricultural Marketing Project (RAAMP) makes a significant contribution to rural development.

Discussion of Findings

The study looked at how agricultural marketing initiatives and rural access affected the fight against poverty. The results show that poor infrastructure development and poor application of successful marketing tactics are two of the Rural Access and Agricultural Marketing Project's (RAAMP) main barriers to reducing poverty. This study, however, concurs with the findings of Kolawole (2021), who examined the demand-driven approach perspective in the evaluation of poverty alleviation programs in Nigeria. The purpose of this review was to investigate why, in spite of the Nigerian government's implementation of certain measures, the country's poverty rate is still high. The review revealed that approaches to rural development, growth, and basic requirements have received more attention than other aspects

of poverty alleviation. The majority of Nigeria's poverty reduction initiatives were heavily concentrated in the country's rural areas and agricultural sector. Additionally in line with Maulu et al.'s research (2021). Who investigated on strengthening the function of rural agricultural extension programs in poverty alleviation in rural communities, extension programs are essential for establishing connections between farmers and other stakeholders involved in the development agenda. Since farmers are the primary stakeholders in agriculture, these initiatives' capacity to address their needs will determine how relevant they are. Not at all at odds with Etuk&Ayuk's (2021) research on agricultural commercialization, poverty alleviation, and pro-poor growth: evidence from Nigeria's commercial agricultural development initiative. In emerging nations, commercial agriculture development is frequently viewed as a means of achieving agriculture commercialization, reducing poverty, and fostering growth that benefits the poor.Su, Song, et al. (2021) also looked into how well farm households in rural China could support themselves sustainably and how effective poverty alleviation strategies were.Thus, this study looks at how agricultural marketing and rural access initiatives affect reducing poverty and pinpoints the critical elements that influence these initiatives' efficacy. By doing so, this study intends to provide insights into how poverty alleviation initiatives might be created and administered more successfully to help rural farmers and reduce poverty in Lavun local government.

Conclusion

The study emphasizes the value of agricultural marketing initiatives and rural access in reducing poverty, stressing the necessity of infrastructure spending, the use of successful marketing plans, and complementing interventions to optimize their effects. Through infrastructure development, market accessibility, and farmer empowerment, these programs foster economic growth and improve rural communities' quality of life.

Recommendations

1. In order to overcome obstacles and improve the Rural Access and Agricultural Marketing Project's (RAAMP) ability to reduce poverty, more money should be allocated to the building of infrastructure as well as stronger marketing plans and initiatives.
2. To expand the project's reach and improve its efficiency in connecting farmers to markets, more funding for rural infrastructure improvements, including as roads, bridges, and storage facilities, should be encouraged.
3. To lessen reliance on price swings and boost household income, agricultural product variety should be encouraged. This can entail learning how to raise livestock or cultivate novel crop varieties.
4. To attract funding and support, the public should be made aware of the project's beneficial effects on reducing poverty using a variety of communication methods.
5. A plan for the project's long-term sustainability should be created, one that includes giving local institutions and communities control over the project's operations.

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