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ANCHOR BORROWERS' PROGRAMME AND AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT IN PLATEAU STATE, NIGERIA: A POLITICAL ECONOMY ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT
Agriculture remains central to Nigeria's pursuit of food security, employment generation, poverty reduction and economic diversification. Despite numerous government interventions, institutional and governance challenges continue to constrain sustainable agricultural transformation. This study examined the political economy of agricultural development through an appraisal of the Anchor Borrowers' Programme (ABP) in Plateau State, Nigeria. The study adopted a descriptive survey design anchored on Modernisation Theory and complemented by Participatory Development Theory. The target population comprised ABP beneficiaries and key agricultural stakeholders in six selected Local Government Areas. Owing to the absence of a comprehensive sampling frame, purposive sampling was used to select 100 knowledgeable respondents, of whom 95 valid questionnaires were retrieved. Data were collected using a structured researcher-developed questionnaire and analysed using descriptive statistics and the Chi-square (χ^2) test at the 5% level of significance. Findings revealed that respondents perceived the programme as improving access to agricultural credit and farm inputs, increasing productivity and household income, and contributing to food security. However, delayed loan disbursement, inadequate extension services, political interference, weak institutional coordination, insecurity and poor loan recovery undermine programme effectiveness. The study concludes that ABP's developmental impact depends not only on financial support but also on transparent institutions, accountable governance and effective implementation. It recommends timely delivery of credit and inputs, stronger extension services, improved monitoring and institutional accountability. Given the purposive sampling procedure, findings should be generalised to the wider population with caution.

Keywords: Anchor Borrowers' Programme; agricultural development; political economy; Modernisation Theory; Plateau State

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Introduction

Agriculture remains one of the strategic sectors of the Nigerian economy because of its contribution to food security, employment, income generation, rural development and economic diversification. Beyond supplying food and industrial raw materials, agriculture contributes to poverty reduction, inclusive growth and national economic resilience (Food and Agriculture Organization [FAO], 2023).

Despite its recognised importance, agricultural performance in Nigeria remains constrained by limited access to finance, inadequate rural infrastructure, weak extension services, insecurity, climate variability and policy inconsistencies. These challenges have undermined food security and efforts to reduce dependence on food imports (World Bank, 2022; FAO, 2023).

Successive governments have introduced interventions including Operation Feed the Nation (1976), the Green Revolution Programme (1980), the National Fadama Development Programme (1992), the Agricultural Transformation Agenda (2011) and the Anchor Borrowers' Programme (ABP) (2015). Introduced by the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) in 2015, the ABP sought to link smallholder farmers with anchor firms through credit, improved inputs, extension services and guaranteed markets (CBN, 2016).

The programme was designed to increase domestic agricultural production, improve farmers' incomes, create employment, reduce food imports and strengthen food security. It supports strategic crops including rice, maize, wheat, cotton and sorghum (CBN, 2021). However, delays in loan disbursement, political interference, weak monitoring, inadequate extension support, poor loan recovery and insecurity have affected its implementation.

These challenges require a political economy perspective that goes beyond measuring agricultural output or credit disbursement. Political economy examines how governance structures, public institutions, political interests and policy processes influence development outcomes. Accordingly, agricultural intervention programmes should be assessed in terms of both their economic outcomes and the institutional conditions shaping implementation.

Existing studies on the ABP have largely examined access to credit, productivity and income, with comparatively less attention to the political and institutional factors influencing programme implementation. Empirical evidence on the programme in Plateau State also remains limited despite the State's agricultural potential. This study therefore examines the ABP from a political economy perspective by assessing its contribution to agricultural development and identifying the institutional and governance factors influencing its effectiveness.

Objectives of the Study

The broad objective is to examine the political economy of agricultural development through an appraisal of the Anchor Borrowers' Programme in Plateau State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study seeks to:

i. examine the contribution of agriculture to national development in Nigeria;
ii. assess the contribution of the Anchor Borrowers' Programme to agricultural development in Plateau State;
iii. identify the major challenges affecting implementation of the Anchor Borrowers' Programme in Plateau State; and
iv. examine strategies for improving the effectiveness of the Anchor Borrowers' Programme in promoting sustainable agricultural development.

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance:

H_{01}: There is no significant relationship between agriculture and national development in Nigeria.

H_{02}: There is no significant relationship between the Anchor Borrowers' Programme and agricultural development in Plateau State.

H_{03}: There is no significant relationship between the challenges associated with implementation of the Anchor Borrowers' Programme and agricultural development in Plateau State.

H_{04}: There is no significant relationship between the proposed strategies for improving the Anchor Borrowers' Programme and agricultural development in Plateau State.

Conceptual/Theoretical Frameworks

Political Economy

Political economy examines the interaction between political institutions, economic systems and public policies in the allocation, production and distribution of resources. It recognises that economic outcomes are influenced by governance structures, institutional capacity, policy decisions and power relations (Mazzucato, 2021).

In agricultural development, political economy provides a framework for understanding how government policies, institutional arrangements and governance practices influence agricultural intervention programmes. It emphasises transparency, accountability, policy consistency and institutional effectiveness. Thus, the performance of the ABP cannot be assessed only through credit disbursement or agricultural output but also through the governance and institutional environment in which the programme operates.

Agricultural Development

Agricultural development refers to sustained improvement in agricultural production through increased productivity, access to inputs and finance, technological innovation, extension services, efficient markets and supportive public policies. It seeks to improve farmers' incomes, food security and rural livelihoods while contributing to economic growth (FAO, 2023).

It also involves rural infrastructure, mechanisation, irrigation, research, value-chain development, institutional strengthening and climate-resilient practices. In Nigeria, agricultural development is important for inclusive growth, employment creation and reduced dependence on food imports (World Bank, 2022).

For this study, agricultural development refers to the extent to which the ABP has enhanced access to agricultural finance, productivity, household income, food security and sustainable rural livelihoods in Plateau State.

Modernisation Theory

The study is anchored on Modernisation Theory, which explains development as a process through which traditional societies transform into modern and productive economies through technological innovation, institutional reforms, capital investment and improved governance. The theory was advanced by scholars including Talcott Parsons (1951) and Walt Whitman Rostow (1960). Modernisation theorists argue that economic progress is facilitated by modern production techniques, stronger institutions, investment and innovation.

In agriculture, the theory emphasises improved technology, credit, mechanisation, quality inputs, irrigation, extension services and efficient markets. Government intervention can facilitate this transformation by creating an enabling policy environment, investing in infrastructure and supporting farmers' transition from subsistence to commercially oriented production.

These assumptions are reflected in the ABP, which seeks to modernise smallholder agriculture through affordable credit, improved seeds, fertilisers, agrochemicals, extension support

and linkages with off-takers (CBN, 2016). The intended outcomes include increased productivity, household income, food security and rural development.

Modernisation Theory has nevertheless been criticised for giving insufficient attention to governance, political interests and historical realities. Technological and financial interventions alone may not produce sustainable development where institutions are weak. Thus, successful agricultural programmes require transparent institutions, policy coordination and accountable governance.

The theory is appropriate for this study because it explains how government-supported finance, technology and institutional support can facilitate agricultural transformation, while recognising that effective implementation is essential to achieving the intended outcomes of the ABP.

Participatory Development Perspective

The study is also informed by the Participatory Development perspective, particularly Chambers (1997), which emphasises the involvement of local people in decisions and processes affecting their livelihoods. Smallholder farmers are not merely recipients of interventions but important actors in agricultural development.

The ABP's organisation of farmers into groups and cooperatives and its linkage of farmers with financial institutions, input suppliers and anchor firms reflect elements of participation. Effective participation can improve ownership, information flow, accountability and programme relevance. However, participation may be weakened by politically influenced beneficiary selection, weak coordination or limited opportunities for farmers to influence implementation.

The perspective therefore complements Modernisation Theory by emphasising local ownership and stakeholder participation alongside finance, technology and institutional support.

Literature Review

The ABP was introduced by the CBN in November 2015 to address financing constraints facing smallholder farmers and strengthen agricultural value chains. It links farmers with anchor firms while facilitating access to credit, inputs, extension services and markets. The programme seeks to increase food production, improve food security, generate employment and promote rural economic development (CBN, 2016, 2021).

The programme reflects Modernisation Theory through its emphasis on credit, improved inputs, technology and productivity (Rostow, 1960). It also corresponds with Participatory Development through farmer organisation, cooperative arrangements and linkages with processors and financial institutions (Chambers, 1997).

Agricultural transformation, however, requires more than financial support. FAO (2023) identifies effective institutions, technological innovation, efficient markets and supportive policies as important to agricultural development. The World Bank (2022) similarly recognises agricultural productivity as important to poverty reduction and inclusive growth. Odutola (2020) argues that agricultural commercialisation requires policy consistency, transparency and effective institutional coordination.

Empirical evidence on the ABP is mixed. Evbuomwan and Okoye (2017), Umeh and Adejo (2019) and CBN reports (2019, 2021) indicate that the programme expanded farmers' access to credit, increased cultivated land, enhanced production and strengthened farmer–processor linkages. Mojeed (2022) and Alimi (2022) also report expansion of beneficiaries and improvements in domestic agricultural production.

However, implementation challenges remain. Evbuomwan and Okoye (2017) identify shortages of extension personnel, delays in input distribution and weak monitoring. WorldStage

(2018) reports difficulties in accessing credit caused by administrative bottlenecks, while Ibekwe (2018) highlights poor loan repayment, political interference and perceptions of intervention funds as a "national cake." CBN (2021) also reports substantial outstanding loan balances, raising concerns about sustainability. Insecurity, side-selling, poor beneficiary targeting and inadequate institutional coordination further affect implementation.

Akighir et al. (2021) found that late input supply and unproductive seedlings limited the poverty-reduction effects of the programme among smallholder farmers in Benue State. Chibueze and David (2021) reported improved access to finance and livelihoods among farmers participating in the programme in Anambra State, while Gwadabe et al. (2024) found significant improvement in the food security status of participating smallholder rice farmers in Kano State.

Although previous studies have examined national implementation, financing and production outcomes, fewer have assessed the ABP from the perspectives of beneficiaries and agricultural stakeholders in Plateau State while simultaneously considering its contributions, implementation challenges and improvement strategies. This study addresses this gap using the complementary perspectives of Modernisation Theory and Participatory Development.

Methodology

The study adopted a survey research design to obtain quantitative data on respondents' perceptions of the contribution of the ABP to agricultural development in Plateau State and the relationships among the variables examined. The study was conducted in Plateau State, North-Central Nigeria. The State is predominantly agrarian and supports the cultivation of crops including maize, rice, Irish potato, millet, sorghum, beans, vegetables and fruits. Agriculture is a major source of livelihood, making the State appropriate for assessing the implementation and contribution of the ABP. The target population comprised ABP beneficiaries and key agricultural stakeholders in six selected Local Government Areas: Bassa, Bokkos, Jos South, Pankshin, Qua'an-Pan and Shendam. Stakeholders included smallholder farmers, members of farmers' cooperatives, agricultural extension personnel, agricultural programme officials and other persons knowledgeable about the ABP. Because a comprehensive and publicly verifiable register of ABP beneficiaries in Plateau State was unavailable, the exact population could not be established from official records. Purposive sampling was therefore used to select respondents with relevant knowledge and experience. A sample of 100 respondents was selected from the six Local Government Areas. Purposive sampling was employed to obtain information from respondents directly or indirectly involved in the implementation and outcomes of the programme. Because the sampling procedure was purposive rather than probability-based, the study does not claim statistical representativeness of all ABP beneficiaries in Plateau State. Findings are therefore interpreted primarily within the study sample and generalised with caution. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire developed by the researchers following a review of relevant literature and the study objectives. Section A covered socio-demographic characteristics, while Section B contained four clusters corresponding to the study objectives: agriculture and national development; ABP and agricultural development; implementation challenges; and strategies for improving programme effectiveness. Responses were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree (5) to Strongly Disagree (1). The questionnaires were administered personally by the researchers with the assistance of trained research assistants. The purpose of the study was explained to respondents, participation was voluntary, and anonymity and confidentiality were assured. Completed questionnaires were retrieved after respondents provided the required information. Data were analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 23.0. Frequencies and percentages were used for socio-demographic

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characteristics and responses to the research questions. The hypotheses were tested using the Chi-square (χ^2) statistic at the 0.05 level of significance. The null hypothesis was rejected where the p-value was less than 0.05 and retained where it was equal to or greater than 0.05. Given the purposive sampling procedure, inferential results are interpreted as evidence of patterns or relationships within the study sample rather than unrestricted generalisations to the entire population.

Results

A total of 100 questionnaires were administered. Ninety-five were correctly completed and returned, representing a 95.0% response rate, while five (5.0%) were not returned or were improperly completed and excluded from analysis.

Socio-demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 95)

VARIABLES	CATEGORY	FREQUENCY (N=95)	PERCENTAGES (%)
Sex	Male	52	54.7
	Female	43	45.3
Age (years)	18-25	37	38.9
	26-35	23	24.2
	36-45	14	14.7
	46-60	15	15.8
	61 and above	6	6.3
Educational qualification	WASSCE	32	33.7
	First degree	36	37.9
	Post graduate degree	11	11.6
	Other qualifications	16	16.8
Occupation	Farmer	20	21.1
	Civil/public servant	24	25.3
	Business person	18	18.9
	Clergy	9	9.5
	Retiree/pensioners	7	7.4
	Policy analyst	4	4.2
	Applicant	13	13.7
Awareness of ABP	Aware	61	64.2
	Not aware	34	35.8

Source: Field Survey (2022).

Of the 95 respondents, 54.7% were male and 45.3% female. The largest age group was 18–25 years (38.9%), followed by 26–35 years (24.2%). Respondents with first degrees constituted 37.9%, while 33.7% had WASSCE and 11.6% had postgraduate degrees. Civil/public servants (25.3%) and farmers (21.1%) were the largest occupational groups. In addition, 64.2% were aware of the ABP.

1 Descriptive Analysis

Respondents showed strong agreement on agriculture's contribution to national development. Between 74% and 96% agreed that agriculture contributes to food security, employment, rural income, foreign exchange earnings, industrial growth, domestic market expansion and GDP.

Regarding the ABP, between 70% and 91% agreed that the programme contributed to poverty reduction, food security, employment, farmers' income, access to agricultural credit,

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reduced dependence on food imports, reduced post-harvest losses, commercial farming, extension knowledge and reduced rice importation.

Major implementation challenges identified included late disbursement of loans and farm inputs (90%), political interference and patronage in beneficiary selection (84%), poor loan repayment (92%), side-selling (75%), inadequate extension services (83%), insecurity and destruction of farmlands (80%), poor-quality farm inputs (93%) and limited programme coverage (88%).

Respondents recommended timely disbursement of loans and inputs (96%), increased deployment of extension workers (91%), farmer-centred agricultural policies (91%), greater government commitment (87%) and a stable business environment capable of attracting agricultural investment (94%).

2 Hypothesis Testing

The four hypotheses were tested using the Chi-square (χ^2) statistic at the 0.05 level of significance with SPSS version 23.0. The decision criterion was to reject the null hypothesis where the calculated χ^2 exceeded the critical value and the p-value was less than 0.05.

Hypothesis One

H_{01}: There is no significant relationship between agriculture and national development in Nigeria.

The analysis produced a combined χ^2 value of 361.18 with 10 degrees of freedom (critical value = 18.31, $p < .05$). Since the calculated value exceeded the critical value and was statistically significant, the null hypothesis was rejected. This indicates a statistically significant relationship between respondents' assessment of agriculture and national development within the study sample.

Hypothesis Two

H_{02}: There is no significant relationship between the Anchor Borrowers' Programme and agricultural development in Plateau State.

The combined χ^2 value was 171.10 with 12 degrees of freedom (critical value = 21.03, $p < .05$). The null hypothesis was rejected because the calculated value exceeded the critical value. This indicates a statistically significant relationship between respondents' assessment of the ABP and agricultural development within the study sample.

Hypothesis Three

H_{03}: There is no significant relationship between the challenges associated with implementation of the Anchor Borrowers' Programme and agricultural development in Plateau State.

The calculated χ^2 value was 297.70 with 12 degrees of freedom (critical value = 21.03, $p < .05$). The null hypothesis was rejected, indicating statistically significant differences in respondents' assessments of the challenges confronting the ABP.

Hypothesis Four

H_{04}: There is no significant relationship between the proposed strategies for improving the Anchor Borrowers' Programme and agricultural development in Plateau State.

The calculated χ^2 value of 222.24 with 9 degrees of freedom (critical value = 16.92, $p < .05$) exceeded the critical value. The null hypothesis was rejected, indicating a statistically significant relationship between respondents' assessments of the proposed improvement strategies and agricultural development within the study sample.

Overall, all four hypotheses produced statistically significant results ($p < .05$). However, because respondents were selected purposively, the results should not be interpreted as unrestricted statistical generalisations to all ABP beneficiaries in Plateau State.

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Discussion

The findings demonstrate that respondents perceive agriculture as a strategic sector for Nigeria's socio-economic development. Agreement on its contribution to food security, employment, rural income and industrial growth is consistent with FAO (2023), which identifies agriculture as important to food systems transformation, poverty reduction and rural livelihoods. It also supports the World Bank's (2022) position that agricultural investment remains essential for inclusive growth.

The study further found that the ABP has contributed positively to agricultural development through improved access to credit, farm inputs and market opportunities, with associated improvements in productivity, income and food security. This supports Chibueze and David (2021), who reported improved access to finance and agricultural livelihoods in Anambra State, and Gwadabe et al. (2024), who found improved food security among participating rice farmers in Kano State.

The findings reinforce Modernisation Theory (Parsons, 1951; Rostow, 1960), which emphasises capital, technology and institutional support as drivers of transformation. They also support Chambers' (1997) participatory perspective, which stresses stakeholder involvement and local ownership in rural development.

However, delayed loan disbursement, inadequate extension services, political interference, insecurity, poor loan recovery and weak institutional coordination continue to constrain the programme. This agrees with Akighir et al. (2021), who identified late input supply and unproductive seedlings as limitations to the programme's poverty-reduction effects in Benue State. Evbuomwan and Okoye (2017) similarly identified institutional and value-chain constraints affecting agricultural financing.

The findings also support FAO (2023), the World Bank (2022) and Odutola (2020), who emphasise effective institutions, innovation, policy consistency and governance in achieving sustainable agricultural transformation. Thus, agricultural finance alone is insufficient where implementation and governance remain weak.

The hypothesis tests further established significant response patterns regarding agriculture and national development, the ABP and agricultural development, programme challenges, and proposed improvement strategies. These results support the view that public investment, technology and institutional support can contribute to development but that outcomes depend on governance, accountability and effective implementation.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that agricultural development is shaped by both economic and institutional factors. The ABP has considerable potential to improve productivity and rural livelihoods, but its sustainability depends on stronger governance, institutional accountability and meaningful stakeholder participation.

Conclusion

This study examined the political economy of agricultural development through an appraisal of the ABP in Plateau State. The findings indicate that the programme has contributed to agricultural development by improving access to credit, inputs, market opportunities and productive resources, thereby supporting productivity, household income and food security.

However, financial support alone does not guarantee sustainable agricultural transformation. Delayed disbursement, poor-quality inputs, inadequate extension services, political interference, poor loan recovery, side-selling, insecurity and limited coverage constrain programme outcomes.

From a political economy perspective, attention must therefore be given not only to the resources committed to agriculture but also to how those resources are allocated, delivered, monitored and governed. Transparent beneficiary selection, timely resource delivery, effective monitoring, institutional coordination and accountability are essential to converting agricultural finance into sustainable development outcomes.

The study concludes that the ABP has considerable potential to contribute to food security, rural livelihoods and agricultural transformation in Plateau State, but its long-term impact depends on addressing the identified implementation weaknesses and strengthening governance arrangements surrounding agricultural interventions.

Limitations of the Study

The study has three major limitations. First, the absence of a comprehensive and publicly verifiable register of ABP beneficiaries necessitated purposive sampling. Findings therefore reflect the selected respondents and should be generalised with caution.

Second, the study covered six of the seventeen Local Government Areas in Plateau State. Although the areas were selected because of their agricultural activities and involvement in the programme, this geographical coverage may limit representation of all agricultural communities.

Third, the study relied substantially on respondents' perceptions and experiences obtained through questionnaires, which may be influenced by individual knowledge and experiences. Nevertheless, the high response rate and structured instrument provided useful evidence for assessing the issues investigated.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study recommends that:

1. Timely disbursement of loans and inputs: The Central Bank of Nigeria and participating financial institutions should ensure that agricultural financing and inputs are delivered in accordance with the agricultural production calendar.
2. Improvement in the quality of farm inputs: Programme authorities should strengthen the certification, procurement and monitoring of seeds, fertilisers and other agricultural inputs.
3. Strengthening agricultural extension services: Government and relevant agricultural agencies should recruit, train and deploy more qualified extension personnel to participating farming communities.
4. Improved loan recovery and financial accountability: Financial institutions and programme managers should strengthen loan monitoring, repayment mechanisms and farmer financial-literacy programmes while ensuring transparent recovery procedures.
5. Reduction of political interference: Beneficiary selection should be based on transparent, verifiable and farmer-centred criteria, supported by appropriate monitoring mechanisms.
6. Strengthening programme coverage: The programme should be expanded to more eligible agricultural communities, subject to adequate institutional capacity and effective monitoring.
7. Reduction of side-selling: Stronger contractual arrangements between farmers and anchor firms should be developed, alongside market incentives that encourage beneficiaries to honour agreed production and marketing arrangements.
8. Strengthening agricultural security: Relevant government authorities should improve security mechanisms in farming communities to protect farmers, agricultural investments and productive assets.

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