

# **Government Support for Small Business in Nigeria: Focus on Agriculture**

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*Nigeria's economy depends heavily on Agriculture, which provides the basis for both employment and food security. Smallholder farmers make up a notable portion of the agricultural workforce and play a crucial role in the development of the industry. However, these farmers face a number of obstacles that hinder their productivity and sustainability, such as limited access to capital, cutting-edge innovation, and infrastructure. Maintaining these borders is essential to unlocking their potential and ensuring Nigeria's rural development continues for a long time. This article critically examines the current frameworks for government support that are designed to strengthen small enterprises in Nigeria's rural areas. It specifically evaluates how well these initiatives are working to increase smallholder farmers' productivity and viability. This essay critically examines the current government assistance programs intended to encourage small enterprises in Nigeria's agricultural sector. In particular, it assesses how well these programs work to improve smallholder farmers' sustainability and productivity. Reviewing policy documents, examining program evaluations, and evaluating secondary data on agricultural output and farmer incomes are all part of the study's extensive approach.*

*The results paint a contradictory picture. On the one hand, a number of government initiatives, such as expanding access to inputs and training farmers, have had noteworthy achievements. However, there are still large gaps. Most smallholder farmers are not reached by financial inclusion programs, which leaves them without the funds necessary to invest in contemporary farming methods. Similarly, farmers' capacity to increase their produce is still constrained by a lack of proper infrastructure, including roads, storage facilities, and irrigation systems. Improved agrotechnologies have also been sluggish to spread, which has limited farmers' access to advances that could increase sustainability and productivity.*

*The study comes to the conclusion that, even if current initiatives have advanced, a more comprehensive strategy is needed. This includes increasing budgetary integration, assisting with the rustic framework, and expediting the selection of sophisticated agrarian innovations. Nigeria can unleash the potential of its smallholder farmers by tackling five crucial issues, which would promote steady agricultural expansion and advance the country's overall economic development.*

**Keywords:** *Government support, small business, agriculture, Nigeria, agricultural policy, rural development.*

**JEL codes:** *Q18, O12, H54.*

## **Государственная поддержка малого бизнеса в Нигерии: акцент на сельское хозяйство**

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*Экономика Нигерии в значительной степени зависит от сельского хозяйства, которое обеспечивает как занятость, так и продовольственную безопасность. Мелкие фермеры составляют значительную часть сельскохозяйственной рабочей силы и играют решающую роль в развитии отрасли. Однако они сталкиваются с рядом препятствий, снижающих их производительность и устойчивость: ограниченный доступ к капиталу, передовые инновации и инфраструктура. В статье критически рассматриваются текущие рамки государственной поддержки, которые предназначены для укрепления малых предприятий в сельских районах Нигерии. Проводится оценка, насколько хорошо эти инициативы работают для повышения производительности и жизнеспособности мелких фермеров. В работе рассматриваются действующие программы государственной помощи, предназначенные для стимулирования деятельности малых предприятий в сельскохозяйственном секторе Нигерии. В частности, анализируется, насколько хорошо эти программы работают для повышения устойчивости и производительности мелких фермеров. Обзор программных документов, изучение программ и оценка вторичных данных о сельскохозяйственной продукции и доходах фермеров являются частью обширного подхода исследования.*

*Результаты показывают противоречивую картину. С одной стороны, ряд правительственных инициатив, таких, как расширение доступа к вводимым ресурсам и подготовка фермеров, принесли заслуживающие внимания результаты (впрочем, есть еще большие пробелы). С другой, - большинство мелких фермеров не охвачены программами финансовой доступности, что оставляет их без средств, необходимых для инвестирования в современные методы ведения сельского хозяйства. Способность фермеров увеличивать свою продукцию по-прежнему ограничена отсутствием надлежащей инфраструктуры, включая дороги, хранилища и ирригационные системы. Более совершенные агротехнологии также медленно распространяются, что ограничивает доступ фермеров к достижениям, которые могут повысить устойчивость и производительность.*

*В исследовании делается вывод о том, что несмотря на продвижения благодаря принятым инициативам, необходима реализация более объемной стратегии, включающей в себя усиление бюджетной интеграции, помощь в деревенских рамках и ускорение отбора сложных аграрных инноваций. Нигерия может раскрыть потенциал своих мелких фермеров, решив пять важнейших проблем, которые будут способствовать устойчивому расширению сельского хозяйства и ускорению общего экономического развития страны.*

**Ключевые слова:** *государственная поддержка, малый бизнес, сельское хозяйство, Нигерия, сельскохозяйственная политика, развитие сельских районов.*

## **Introduction**

The foundation of Nigeria's economy majorly depends on the agricultural sector, which generates a sizable portion of the country's GDP and sustains a sizable portion of the populace, especially in rural areas [18]. The industry has many obstacles that prevent it from reaching its full potential, despite its crucial role. These issues disproportionately affect Nigeria's smallholder farmers, who make up the bulk of the country's agricultural producers. Due to their limited access to financing facilities, they are unable to invest in necessary inputs like machinery, seeds, and fertilizer. Inadequate infrastructure also makes it harder for them to maximize output and lower post-harvest losses. Examples of this include inadequate irrigation systems, poor transportation networks, and limited storage facilities. The lack of access to contemporary agricultural technologies exacerbates these problems. Compounding these issues is the lack of access to modern agricultural technologies, which are essential for improving efficiency and ensuring sustainable farming practices [4]. Acknowledging these difficulties, the Nigerian government has put in place a number of assistance initiatives designed to meet smallholder farmers' needs and promote sustainable agricultural growth [7]. These programs include infrastructure development projects, agricultural extension services, and financial inclusion schemes. Nonetheless, there is still much to learn about how well these initiatives work to change the agriculture industry and raise smallholder farmers' standard of living [5]. This paper explores the impact of existing government support systems on small businesses within Nigeria's agricultural sector. The study assesses how much these programs have improved smallholder farmers' productivity and sustainability by looking at policy papers, program assessments, and secondary data on agricultural output and farmer incomes. The results give policymakers practical suggestions while also shedding light on the advantages and disadvantages of the current actions. Nigeria can unleash the full potential of its agricultural sector, empowering smallholder farmers and propelling economic transformation, by filling in the gaps in infrastructure, financial inclusion, and technological diffusion.

*This study's main objective is to provide a thorough evaluation of the efficacy of the current government assistance programs designed to raise the sustainability and productivity of smallholder farmers in Nigeria's agricultural sector. The foundation of the nation's agricultural output, small farmers, confront numerous obstacles, such as restricted loan availability, inadequate infrastructure, and a lack of exposure to contemporary agricultural technologies. Their capacity to increase yields, lower post-harvest losses, and implement sustainable agricultural methods is significantly hampered by these difficulties. It also seeks to analyse how well government initiatives have addressed these challenges and whether they have successfully empowered smallholder farmers to overcome the barriers to productivity and sustainability. By systematically reviewing policy documents, program evaluations, and secondary data, the study aims to assess the real-world impact of financial inclusion programs, infrastructure development projects, and technology dissemination efforts on the livelihoods of smallholder farmers. The study also seeks to determine these projects' advantages and disadvantages. Some initiatives may still face challenges including poor implementation, poor beneficiary targeting, or restricted scalability, even while others may have seen notable advancements in specific areas. The study aims to offer practical suggestions for enhancing the planning and implementation of government assistance programs by drawing attention to these shortcomings. The ultimate goal is to aid in the creation of a more comprehensive and inclusive framework for agricultural policy that takes into account the particular requirements of smallholder farmers. By doing this, the research hopes to fully realize Nigeria's agricultural sector's potential, guaranteeing food security, fostering economic expansion, and raising the standard of living for millions of rural households.*

### **Literature Review**

Agriculture as stated earlier is a key industry that supports the country's economy and provides a significant number of jobs, especially in rural areas [18]. The World Bank emphasizes the socioeconomic significance of agriculture by stating that it is not just a significant source of employment but also the foundation of rural livelihoods [8].

This importance is further highlighted by Akintole and Ogunbi [4], who point out that the agricultural sector employs and supports more than 70% of the rural population, accounts for roughly 22% of the nation's GDP, and is essential to Nigeria's socioeconomic growth. Nevertheless, despite its significance, the industry has many obstacles that prevent it from expanding and remaining sustainable, especially for smallholder farmers and small enterprises involved in the agricultural value chain.

Smallholder farmers, whose contribution to agricultural production is significant, play a particularly important role in food security and socio-economic development. However, «despite the importance of small-scale farming for food production, they continue to face significant constraints, such as limited access to credit, lack of infrastructure and outdated farming techniques» [10]. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations states that «low levels of mechanization and inadequate infrastructure are persistent problems that limit small scale farming productivity and market access in Nigeria» [8].

The Nigerian Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development [11], has emphasized that «effective government intervention is essential for enabling smallholders to overcome systemic barriers and enhance agricultural productivity» [2]. According to the Central Bank of Nigeria, targeted programs such as the Anchor Borrowers Program aim «to provide the necessary financial support to improve smallholder productivity and reduce poverty in rural areas» [7]. Olawale and Alabi point out that the ABP has greatly expanded farmers' access to financing, allowing them to buy inputs including equipment, seeds, and fertilizer. However, because of poor information and regulatory obstacles, many smallholder farmers are still unable to get these incentives, limiting the program's scope.

The Nigeria Incentive-Based Risk Sharing System for Agricultural financing (NIRSAL) is another important program that attempts to de-risk agricultural financing and entice banks to make investments in the industry. Adekunle et al. claim that although NIRSAL has increased the flow of loans to agribusinesses and smallholder farmers, its effects are limited by issues like insufficient monitoring and evaluation systems.

## **Challenges in Government Support for Small Business.**

Notwithstanding these initiatives, a number of studies show that there are still shortages in government assistance for small agricultural enterprises [6]. For example, Eze and Chukwu contend that smallholder farmers' production and profitability are still constrained by a lack of proper infrastructure, such as roads, storage facilities, and irrigation systems [8]. In a similar vein, Okafor et al. note that many farmers continue to rely on antiquated and ineffective farming practices due to the sluggish adoption of contemporary agricultural technologies [14]. Financial inclusion is still a significant obstacle, too. Many smallholder farmers do not have access to formal banking facilities, which makes it difficult for them to take advantage of government lending programs, claim Adebayo and Onuoha. According to the authors, removing these financial obstacles is essential to improving the efficiency of government assistance initiatives [5].

### **The Role of Policy and Institutional Frameworks**

The robustness of institutional and policy frameworks also affects how well government assistance programs for farmer's work [16]. In order to guarantee the effective execution of agricultural assistance programs, studies by Umeh and Ezeaku [16] emphasize the significance of policy coherence and coordination among government institutions. But these initiatives are frequently thwarted by problems like corruption, bad governance, and a lack of accountability, which lessens the total effect of government actions [17].

Furthermore, it is impossible to ignore the function of regulatory frameworks. Fair access to resources, safeguarding smallholder farmers from exploitation, and encouraging sustainable farming methods all depend on effective legislation [19]. For instance, laws that support private sector involvement in agriculture while protecting smallholder farmers can make the agricultural industry more robust and inclusive. Monitoring and assessing policies and programs is another crucial component. Frequent evaluations guarantee that government programs stay current and are modified to meet new issues [19]. Strong data collection and analysis systems are

essential for monitoring the effectiveness of agricultural assistance programs and facilitating evidence-based decision-making, according to Umeh and Ezeaku [16].

In conclusion, the viability of government assistance initiatives in Nigeria's agriculture sector depends on robust institutional and policy frameworks. These frameworks can assist in addressing the ongoing difficulties small enterprises in agriculture encounter by promoting coherence, accountability, and sustainability, which will ultimately spur growth and enhance rural livelihoods.

### **Methodology**

The study used a combined methodology including qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection and analysis. Main stages of the study:

**Primary data collection:** Interviews and surveys with 150 smallholder farmers from the three major agricultural regions of Nigeria (North-Central, South-West and South-East regions). Respondents were randomly selected to ensure a representative sample.

**Secondary Data Collection:** Analysis of official reports from the Nigerian Ministry of Agriculture, Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) documents, and academic publications on small business support in the agricultural sector.

**Data Analysis Methods:** Quantitative data were processed using descriptive statistical techniques, while qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis to identify key issues and trends.

**Focus groups:** Discussions were held with farmer cooperatives to determine collective views on the impact of government programs on their business operations.

### **Research**

This study uses both primary and secondary data to examine the effectiveness of government support programs for small companies in Nigeria's agriculture industry. Primary data were gathered through surveys and interviews with smallholder farmers from various regions, while secondary data came from official reports, policy documents, and prior research projects. The purpose is to assess how effectively these

initiatives handle crucial issues such as financial access, infrastructural development, and the adoption of modern agricultural technologies. The research also looks at the primary results of these efforts and highlights holes that need to be filled in order to increase their impact.

*Table 1*

### Key Government Programs and Outcomes

<b>Programs</b>	<b>Impacts</b>	<b>Objectives</b>	<b>Challenges</b>
Anchor Borrowers Program (ABP)	Provide credit facilities to smallholder farmers	Increased access to finance for over 3 million farmers; boost in rice and maize production	Bureaucratic delays, limited awareness among farmers
NIRSAL	De-risk agricultural lending and encourage financial institutions to invest	Enhanced credit flow to agribusinesses; increased mechanization rates	Insufficient monitoring, limited reach in rural areas
Growth Enhancement Scheme (GES)	Subsidized inputs such as fertilizers and seeds	Improved yields for participants; reduction in input costs	Poor distribution networks, corruption in allocation

*Source:* compiled by the authors based on [10].

According to 68% of farmers polled, government initiatives like ABP and NIRSAL have made it easier for them to obtain finance. Nonetheless, a significant obstacle mentioned by 45% of these farmers was loan delivery delays.

Programs such as Anchor Borrowers' Program (ABP) and the Agricultural Credit Guarantee Fund (ACGSF) have provided loans to smallholder farmers to purchase seeds, fertilizer and machinery. However, only 35% of the respondents were able to benefit from these programs.

High interest rates and strict collateral requirements remain major obstacles to accessing credit, especially for farmers in remote rural areas.

*Table 2*

### Farmers Access to Finance

<b>Region</b>	<b>Farmers with Access to Loans, %</b>	<b>Average Loan Amount, \$</b>	<b>Major Barriers Identified</b>
North-Central	40	500	High interest rate
South-West	35	\$600	Lack of collateral
South-East	30	\$450	Limited program outreach

*Source:* compiled by the authors based on [1].

### *Education and skill development*

Of the farmers polled, only 32 percent have access to contemporary farming technologies. When compared to conventional means, those who had access reported a 40% boost in productivity. Programs such as the Youth Employment in Agriculture Program (YEAP) have been able to train young farmers in modern agro-technology and agribusiness. However, these initiatives are limited in reach and are often concentrated in urban areas, making it difficult for rural populations to access.

### *Infrastructure and access to markets*

Only 28% of farmers reported receiving assistance through infrastructure programs, indicating the need for greater coverage of these initiatives.

The yield was 25% higher in areas with greater access to government-subsidized inputs than in those without. However, in some areas, post-harvest losses of up to 30% were caused by deficiencies in the infrastructure (such as a lack of storage facilities). Problem with transportation infrastructure and lack of storage facilities remain major challenges leading to high crop losses and limited market access.

*Table 3*

**Farmer Satisfaction with Infrastructure Programs**

<b>Program</b>	<b>Farmers assisted, %</b>	<b>Satisfaction level, %</b>	<b>Key issues identified</b>
Road construction	28	55	Corruption, insufficient coverage
Storage access	15	45	High cost, lack of proximity

*Source:* compiled by author based on [12].

### **Discussion**

The findings of the study revealed that government support for small scale business in Nigerian agriculture has a mixed impact

The paper conclusions paint a conflicting picture of how well government assistance initiatives for small enterprises in Nigeria's agriculture sector work. Even though programs like the Nigeria Incentive-Based Risk Sharing System for Agricultural Lending (NIRSAL) and the Anchor Borrowers' Program (ABP) have

significantly improved access to financing, their reach is still restricted. Many smallholder farmers still encounter obstacles like bureaucratic hurdles, a lack of understanding, and restricted access to official banking services, especially those in rural areas. In order to guarantee fair access to government assistance programs, these problems must be resolved.

Deficits in infrastructure also show themselves as a persistent problem. Smallholder farming's profitability is decreased by inadequate roads, storage facilities, and irrigation infrastructure, which also limit output and raise post-harvest losses. The government's sluggish efforts to bridge these infrastructural gaps underscore the need for more funding and better development project execution. The spread of contemporary agricultural technologies is another major topic of worry. Because of their high costs, lack of knowledge, or restricted access, many smallholder farmers continue to use conventional practices even in the face of improved seeds, fertilizers, and farming equipment. Targeted interventions that place training and capacity-building initiatives first, along with subsidies for necessary inputs, are needed to close this gap. Government support programs' effectiveness is largely determined by institutional frameworks and policy coherence. Poor governance, corruption, and weak institutions frequently make these attempts less successful. To address these systemic difficulties, it is imperative to ensure accountability, strengthen institutional capacity, and promote inter-agency collaboration. Furthermore, it is essential to regularly monitor and assess government initiatives in order to spot any gaps and make the required corrections. Effective resource allocation and program responsiveness to smallholder farmers' demands can be ensured by evidence-based policymaking backed by strong data collecting and analysis systems [5].

### *Implementation problems*

Corruption and bureaucratic barriers significantly hinder the implementation of state support programs. Many farmers note the lack of transparency and accessibility of information about existing programs.

The survey results confirmed that although there are different support plans, their effectiveness is significantly limited due to implementation gaps and infrastructure issues. (Table 2 and 3). Loan programs, such as the anchor borrower support program, have had a positive impact in some areas, but have failed to benefit smallest farmers. In addition, the low degree of mechanization and limited access to training and consultation continue to hinder the implementation of best agricultural practices. Thus, a more holistic approach that takes into account each monetary and infrastructural guide is wanted to improve the effectiveness of country help. Increased transparency and accessibility of packages, in addition to the elimination of administrative barriers, can significantly growth the range of farmers who can advantage from state aid.

### *Opportunities*

Despite the obstacles faced by smallholder farmers and agribusinesses, there are various chances to expand government support and increase the agriculture sector's contribution to economic development. International partnership with financial institutions and foreign governments might result in additional money and technical help. Adoption of digital and technology advancements, such as mobile banking and precision farming instruments, has the potential to increase efficiency and resource access. Furthermore, specialised programs for women and youth in agriculture provide a road to greater inclusion and job creation. Expanding value chain operations, such as food processing and export options, can help small enterprises boost their profitability and market access.

*International Collaboration.* Small agricultural enterprises stand to gain directly from partnerships with institutions such as the IFC and foreign governments (like France), which offer chances to enhance infrastructure and financial availability.

*Innovation and Technology.* Leveraging technology, such as digital tools for farm management or mobile platforms for loan access, helps close gaps in knowledge sharing and financial inclusion.

*Empowerment of Women and Youth.* Programs like the GEEP that are specifically designed for women and youth in agriculture have the potential to lower unemployment and promote equitable growth.

*Focus on Value Chains.* Growing the processing, packaging, and marketing components of agricultural value, chains can increase revenue and provide employment.

## **Recommendations**

To maximise the impact of government assistance programs, various strategic steps are required. Increasing agricultural budget expenditures, particularly in line with international commitments, can provide additional resources for smallholder farmers. Simplifying loan applications and lowering interest rates will increase credit availability, while infrastructure investments in rural roads, storage facilities, and irrigation systems will boost production and reduce post-harvest losses. Improving regulatory frameworks through transparent and consistent regulations will stimulate private-sector participation. Finally, creating public-private partnerships (PPPs) can help to scale up assistance efforts by providing extra knowledge and funds.

*Boost the allocation of funds.* To guarantee sufficient resources for small enterprises, the government should reach or surpass the 10% goal for agricultural support.

*Improve Credit Access.* Simplifying loan processes, lowering lending rates, and implementing more flexible collateral criteria can all help to increase smallholder participation.

*Invest in infrastructure.* Building rural roads, storage facilities, and irrigation systems can dramatically increase output while lowering post-harvest losses.

*Strengthen policy frameworks.* Consistent and transparent policies will increase stakeholder confidence and stimulate private sector investment.

*Promote Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs).* Collaborations between the government and business groups can lead to innovative solutions and broaden the scope of support programs.

## *Future Outlook*

The future of smallholder farmers in Nigeria's agricultural industry appears bright, providing the government and stakeholders handle existing difficulties and capitalise on developing opportunities. Key trends and possible developments include:

*Increased Government Investment.* Agriculture is increasingly recognized as a driver of economic diversification; thus, future budgets are likely to provide additional resources to the industry. Meeting the 10% Maputo Declaration target might greatly increase support for small agricultural firms.

*Digital Transformation.* Technological advancements such as precision farming, mobile lending platforms, and blockchain for supply chain management are projected to transform agriculture. These advances will increase production, minimize waste, and boost market access.

*Youth and Gender Inclusion.* Continued focus on empowering women and youth through tailored programs will attract more participants to the sector, fostering innovation and reducing unemployment.

*Private Sector Engagement.* Increased involvement of private investors in agribusiness value chains will bring in much-needed capital, expertise, and technology, further driving growth and profitability.

## **Conclusion**

The government's support for small businesses in Nigeria's agriculture sector has made significant progress, but it is limited by financial gaps, infrastructure deficits, and policy inconsistencies. Despite these problems, the sector has enormous potential to boost economic growth, ensure food security, and generate jobs. Addressing these difficulties requires a collaborative effort from the government, the private sector, and foreign partners. Increased investment, policy stability, and the adoption of innovative technology will be critical for realizing the sector's full potential.

The future of small agricultural enterprises in Nigeria is bright, as long as there is a consistent commitment to tackling obstacles and creating an enabling environment. By

doing so, Nigeria may achieve its economic diversification and inclusive development goals while also placing agriculture as a key component of its economy.

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