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## **Evaluation of International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) Interventions on Sustainable Rural Livelihood Improvement in Niger State**

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<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18743348>

### **Abstract**

The study evaluates the contributions of International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) interventions on sustainable rural livelihood improvement in Niger State, Nigeria. The research design adopted for the study is descriptive survey research design, with a total population of seven hundred and eighty four (784) comprising of all the participants in the on-going IFAD Interventions in the selected three Local Government Areas (Bidida, Shiroro and Kontagora) as at 2025. One hundred and eighty (180) respondents were selected from the entire population as the sample using stratified simple random sampling. The instrument used in collecting data was a researcher made questionnaire, named; IFAD-RLIQ. The questionnaire was subjected to face and content validity test by three experts, one in the field of test and measurement as well as two from the field of rural and community development. The findings revealed that, majority of the beneficiaries agreed that IFAD intervention, emphasised the provision of land, vegetation and biodiversity, promotion of social networks, acquisition of new skills, ability to labour, promotion of savings and access to credit facilities for their livelihood improvement. The findings from the research also revealed that, security challenges is one of the major factors affecting the effective implementation of the Interventions. Part of the recommendations made by the researcher were: IFAD should explore more platforms to promote dialogue and cooperation among relevant institutions and stakeholders for rural livelihood improvement; governments at all levels should fulfil their responsibilities in terms of improving the security and providing the contributory funds on time for the effective implementation of the Interventions.

**Keywords:** IFAD interventions, sustainable rural livelihood, livelihood improvement

## **Introduction**

The world; whether rural or urban settings, is made up of communities, and majority of the world population lives in the rural areas where they are engaged in to agricultural activities. Developing countries and their rural areas in particular are characterized by poverty, unemployment, unequal distribution of resources, acute shortage of social, physical and institutional infrastructure and increasing rural-urban drift (Food and Agricultural Organisation: FAO, 2020). Nigeria is facing two key gaps in agriculture today: inability to meet domestic food requirements and inability to export at quality levels required for market success. The former problem is a productivity challenge, driven by an input system and farming model that is largely insufficient. While the later challenge is driven by insufficient system for vetting and enforcing food quality standard as well as poor knowledge of target markets (Federal Government of Nigeria: FGN 2016).

The 2020-2021 Nigeria Living Standard Survey (NLSS), indicated that States in the Sahel region recorded the highest incidence of poverty, with about 80 per cent of the population described as poor (Elnady, El-Bendary, & Ismail, 2024). The quality of life in any community is a function of the level of development achieved by the people of that particular community themselves, with meaningful assistance from governments and other agencies (Adi, Nyaku, Daniel, Haruna, Tubasen, Gaisa, & Dantani, 2024).

Nigeria's rural people could be the most deprived of all Nigerians, having least access to services such as health, educational facilities, and access to modern agricultural input in addition to the issues of insecurity. In essence, infrastructural and institutional arrangements are deficient at the local level where most people who need them live (FAO, 2020). Poverty situations of rural people in developing countries like Nigeria, and the urgent need for its improvement as a means of empowering the beneficiaries has led to the conceptualization of various targeted and non-targeted poverty alleviation programmes worldwide (Muntaka, Ibrahim, & Ali, 2024). An example of such programme is International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD).

Moreover, international fund for Agricultural Development is an integrated Agriculture and rural development programme aimed at improving livelihood of the rural people with emphasis on youth, women and other vulnerable groups especially physically challenged and dejected people. Despite all the efforts made by government and non-governmental organizations in Nigeria, there have been stagnant levels of socio economic development, especially in the rural areas of Niger State, this has led Niger State government to devote its attention in the implementation of various policies and rural poverty alleviation programmes of both local and international origin (Elnady, et al 2024). Considering the peculiarities of IFAD and its ability to help rural folks learn and develop skills required for informed decision making in complex domain, based on accurate problems analysis in local contexts, effective decision-making build on local knowledge, understanding of the local agro-eco system and existing

capacity and availability of literature. It is based on this background that this research intends to evaluate the Impact of International Fund for Agricultural Development's Interventions on Rural Livelihood Improvement in Niger State Nigeria.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Agriculture was and is still the main source of livelihoods in Niger state, with majority of the rural population depending on smallholder farming for income and food security. However, despite its potential, rural communities in the state continue to experience widespread poverty, low productivity, limited access to credit and markets, and vulnerability to climate-related shocks. These challenges hinder the ability of rural households to secure sustainable livelihoods and improve their socioeconomic conditions. In recognition of these constraints and the features of IFAD as a multilateral development institution that focuses exclusively on transforming rural economies and food systems; that works in remote regions of developing countries and fragile situations, where few aid agencies or international financial institutions venture; that provide improvement in farmer's access to and use of agricultural knowledge, technologies, marketing system and infrastructure.

Furthermore, little is known about the extent to which IFAD interventions have enhanced the core pillars of sustainable livelihood; livelihood assets, diversification, resilience, and long-term environmental sustainability: within rural communities of Niger State. Existing assessments often focus on output indicators (e.g., yield increases or number of beneficiaries trained) rather than holistic livelihood outcomes such as resilience to climate shocks, improvements in natural resource management, or sustained income growth (Akinola, 2021). This gap in rigorous, localized, and livelihood-oriented evaluation constrains policymakers' ability to determine whether the interventions are achieving their intended developmental goals. Without such evidence, rural poverty and vulnerability may persist despite substantial investments in the agricultural sector.

Therefore, based on the foregoing, this research is necessary to systematically evaluate the effectiveness of IFAD interventions on sustainable rural livelihoods in Niger State, identifying the extent of impact, the challenges encountered, and the areas requiring strategic improvement to enhance livelihood sustainability in the state.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of the research work to:

1. Evaluate the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) interventions that targets livelihood improvement in Niger State Nigeria.
2. Examine the livelihood conditions of the beneficiaries before and after being exposed to International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) Interventions in Niger State Nigeria.

3. Evaluate the constraints to the effective implementation of International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) interventions in Niger State Nigeria.

## **Literature Review**

### **IFAD in Rural Communities**

IFAD invests in the very people most likely to be left behind: poor small-scale producers, women, youth, indigenous peoples and other vulnerable groups. Investing in rural areas promotes prosperity, food security and resilience (IFAD, 2025). Economic growth in agriculture is two to three times more effective at reducing poverty and food insecurity than growth in other sectors. IFAD acts as a catalyst for increasing public and private investments in agriculture and the development of rural enterprises. It places poor rural women and men at the centre of its activities and involves them as participants in project design and implementation (IFAD, 2019).

IFAD works closely with the private sector. About 70 per cent of IFAD projects support the development of value chains that generally include small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). IFAD supports public-private producer partnerships (4Ps) that help small-scale producers acquire the knowledge, technology and finance to grow their businesses and meet market standard, it helps build strong producer organizations that enable farmers to aggregate produce, access markets and resources, and increase their bargaining power (Tijjani 2017). The term Rural refers generally to areas of open country and small settlements, but the definition of “Rural areas” in both policy-oriented and scholarly literature are terms often taken for granted or left undefined, in a process of definition that is often fraught with difficulties (Dantani, 2024). Some of the key points describing rural communities are:

- Rural areas, even after significant demographic shifts, still account for almost half of the world population.
- The overwhelming majority of the world’s rural population lives in less developed or least developed countries.
- Rural dwellers also account for about 70% of the developing world’s poor people.
- Rural areas are a spatial category, associated with certain patterns of human activity, but with those associations being subject to continuous change.
- Rural areas are largely defined in contradistinction to urban areas, but that distinction is increasingly seen as problematic.
- Rural populations have, and will have, a variety of income sources and occupations, within which agriculture and the exploitation of natural resources have privileged, but not necessarily predominant, positions, (Tijjani, 2017).

### **Sustainable Livelihood**

Livelihood “is the means of gaining a living”. “a livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (including both material and social resources) and activities required for a means of living (FAO 2018). A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks and maintain its capabilities and assets both now and in the future, while not undermining the natural resource base. The term “Sustainable Livelihood” has been well-defined in a different way by several authors in the context of Poverty Alleviation and Agricultural Development.

A sustainable livelihood can be defined as people’s capacity to sustain a living by surviving shocks and stress and enhancing their quality of life on a long-term basis without threatening the livelihood possibilities of others. The concept of sustainable livelihoods is increasingly important in research about regional development, poverty alleviation, rural agricultural development and rural resource management (Gustafson, 2016).

A Sustainable Livelihoods approach to development demands a more holistic understanding of poverty, and of the linkages between different livelihoods components. Rural people’s ownership of and access to certain livelihood assets may have a positive impact on their strategies for coping with vulnerabilities and risks.

### **Methodology**

#### **Research Design**

The research design used for the study is a descriptive survey research method. Survey research involves collecting data to test hypothesis or to answer questions about people’s opinion on a specific topic or issue (Abubakar, 2013).

#### **Population, Sample and sampling Technique**

The total population for the study is seven hundred and eighty four (784), comprised of all the participants in the on-going IFAD Interventions from the selected three Local Government Areas (Bidida, Shiroro and Kontagora) and the entire IFAD Local Government Support Staff in the selected LGAs. The total sample size is one hundred and eighty (180) respondents. Stratified sampling technique was used in selecting the respondents. Twenty (20) respondents from participating rural communities of the selected Local Government Area, on ratio 1:4, i.e. four (4) IFAD Local Government Support Staff and sixteen (16) participants.

#### **Data Collection Instrument**

The instrument used was a researcher made questionnaire, named; IFAD Rural Livelihood Improvement Questionnaire (IFAD-RLIQ). The instrument was

divided in to two sections: “A” and “B”. Section A, contains the demographic characteristics of the respondents, while section “B” contained item statements soliciting information on the aspects of IFAD that (i.) targets livelihood improvement of the beneficiaries, (ii.) livelihood conditions of the beneficiaries Before and After being exposed to IFAD interventions and (iii.) constraints to the effective implementation of IFAD interventions for rural livelihood improvement.

The IFAD-RLIQ was based on 5 points Likert Type Scale of Strongly Agreed (SA), Agreed (A), Undecided (UD), Disagreed (D), and Strongly Disagreed (SD), with scores of 5, 4, 3, 2, and 1 respectively. Therefore, a mean of 3.00, and above was regarded as agreed and a mean below 3.00 is regarded as dis-agreed.

### **Validity and Reliability of the Instrument**

Three experts validated the instrument for content and face validity, one from the field of test and measurement and two from the field of rural and community development. The reliability of the instrument was obtained as 0.05 alpha value using Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC).

### **Administration of the Instrument**

The data was collected using the instrument which was administered and retrieved by the researcher with the aid of research assistants, after given the respondents a reasonable time to fill.

### **Data Analysis**

The data collected was coded and analysed using descriptive statistical tools of frequency tables and percentages, the data was later subjected to Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), Version 30.0, 2024.

### **Results**

The descriptive statistical results and analysis with their respective interpretations are presented as follows:

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Gender		
Male	112	62.28%
Female	68	37.72%
<b>Total</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>100</b>
Age Bracket		

15-24	15	8.33%
25-34	63	35%
35-45	72	40%
Above 45	80	16.67%
<b>Total</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Married	149	82.78%
Single	31	17.22%
<b>Total</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Household Size</b>		
1-5	43	23.89%
6-10	61	34%
11-15	67	37.1%
Above 15	9	5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Highest Qualification</b>		
Religious Education	33	18.33%
Adult Education	27	15%
Primary Education	21	11.7%
Secondary Education	57	31.56%
Tertiary Education	8	4.41%
Others	34	19%
<b>Total</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: Field Survey 2025.

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents in terms of gender, age, marital status, household size, and highest educational qualification. However, the findings indicate that the respondents are predominantly male, middle-aged, and married, with large households and generally low levels of formal education, which may have implications for their socio-economic participation and engagement with development programmes.

**Table 2: Mean Responses of IFAD Interventions that Target Livelihood Improvement among Beneficiaries.**

S/No.	Statement	Mean	S.D.	Remarks
1.	IFAD Interventions give emphasis to the provision of land, vegetation and Biodiversity	4.42	0.89	Agreed
2.	IFAD Interventions promote social networks, groups, trust and social relations	4.64	1.20	Agreed

3.	IFAD Interventions encourages the acquisition of new skills, additional knowledge, good health and ability to labour	4.82	1.47	Agreed
4.	IFAD Interventions emphasize the provision of shelter, means of transportation and communication and source of energy	3.71	0.74	Agreed
5.	IFAD Interventions promote savings, access to credit facility, bank loans remittances	4.91	1.70	Agreed
Mean		4.50	1.20	Agreed

Source: Field Survey 2025.

The result in Table 2 presents the mean responses regarding the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) interventions aimed at improving the livelihoods of beneficiaries. The results indicated that majority of the respondents agreed with all the statements, (provision of savings, access to credit, bank loans, and remittances). Thus, the findings imply that IFAD's diverse focus areas significantly contribute to improving the livelihood conditions of the beneficiaries in Niger State.

Table 3: Frequency & percentage on Livelihood Conditions of Beneficiaries before and after being exposed to IFAD Interventions

S/NO	Item	Before	%	After	%
<b>Assets Owned</b>					
1.	Shelter	92	51%	88	49%
2.	Farm Land	121	67%	79	33%
3.	Vegetation	74	41%	106	59%
4.	Biodiversity(Animals)	95	53%	85	47%
5.	Means of Transportation	52	29%	128	71%
6.	Means of Communication	99	55%	81	45%
Mean		86	48%	94	52%
<b>Abilities and Capabilities Possessed</b>					
7.	Social Networks	61	34%	119	66%
8.	Group Membership	101	56%	79	44%
9.	More Knowledge	5	3%	175	97%
10.	Improved Agricultural skills	7	4%	173	96%
11.	Good Health	61	34%	119	66%
Mean		47	26%	133	74%

Activities Engaged				
12. Improved Agricultural Practice	11	6%	169	94%
13. Processing of Agricultural Products	52	29%	128	71%
14. Active participation in decision making and implementation	18	10%	162	90%
15. Social Mobilization	14	8%	166	92%
16. Acquisition of Agricultural Loan	31	17%	149	83%
17. Expanding economic activities to non-agricultural sector	27	15%	143	85%
Mean	25	14%	153	86%

Source: Field Survey 2025.

Table 3 provides a comparison of the livelihood conditions of beneficiaries before and after being exposed to the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) Interventions. The table is divided into three categories: assets owned, abilities and capabilities possessed, as well as activities engaged.

The grand mean for assets owned shows a slight increase from 48 percent to 52 percent after the intervention which reveals a modest improvement in the overall asset accumulation. The grand mean for abilities and capabilities possessed increased significantly from 26 percent to 74 percent. This illustrates notable enhancements in these areas. The mean percentage for activities engaged rose sharply from 14 percent before exposure to 86 percent after exposure, reflecting a pronounced shift towards more productive and diversified livelihood activities.

Therefore, the findings indicate that, IFAD interventions have significantly enhanced the beneficiaries' abilities, capabilities, and participation in productive activities, although some aspects of asset ownership, such as farmland and biodiversity, have decreased.

Table 4: The Constraints to the Effective Implementation of IFAD Interventions in Niger State.

S/NO.	Statement	Mean	S.D.	Remarks
1.	Security challenges in many IFAD Intervention areas	4.014	0.81	Agreed
2.	Difficulty in mobilizing members contribution for purchases	4.27	0.51	Agreed

3.	Difficulty in the recovery of agricultural loans disbursed	4.18	0.69	Agreed
4.	Low level of participants knowledge about IFAD Interventions	4.08	0.31	Agreed
5.	Political instability in Local & State government administration	4.08	0.60	Agreed
6.	Negligence of some IFAD-Support staff	4.14	0.52	Agreed
7.	Administrative bottleneck also constitutes a challenges	3.83	0.67	Agreed
	Mean	4.10	0.59	Agreed

Source: Field Survey 2025.

Table 4, presents the constraints to the effective implementation of International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) interventions on livelihood improvement, based on respondents' agreement with each identified challenge. The overall mean score across all constraints is 4.10 (SD = 0.59) and indicates a broad agreement among respondents that these factors pose challenges to the effective implementation of IFAD programmes.

Finally, the findings revealed that addressing security, financial mobilisation, institutional support, and administrative efficiency is highly needed for enhancing the success of IFAD programmes in improving livelihoods in Niger State.

### **Discussion of Findings**

The findings of the study show that, IFAD interventions emphasised the provision of land, vegetation and biodiversity, promotes social network and social relations, encourages the acquisition of new skills, additional knowledge, good health and ability to labour. The findings also emphasise the provision of shelter, source of energy, means of transportation and communication. Muntaka et al (2024), is also of the opinion that the training organized under IFAD, assists farmers in improving their capacity to make critical decisions that will make their production systems more productive, profitable, and sustainable as well as improve their livelihood.

The findings also revealed that, majority of the beneficiaries of IFAD programmes in Niger State owned assets like shelter, vegetation, animals, means of transportation and means of communication after being exposed to IFAD programmes. The result also shows that some of beneficiaries improved their abilities and capabilities like; social networks, group membership, more knowledge, improved skills, good health, and ability to labour, etc. this agrees with the assertion of Gustafson (2016) that, IFAD provides a common ground to the actualization of sustainability of production and natural resources needed by present and future generations, which is largely in the hands and heads of local farmers, fisher folk and pastoralist.

Finally, the findings divulge that, the major constraints to the effective implementation of IFAD programmes are: insecurity and difficulty in the mobilisation of members' contribution anytime the need arises. Other bottle necks to the effective implementation are; difficulty in the recovery of loan given to participants, low level of the participant's knowledge about IFAD's nature of operations, political instability in local government administration and some administrative difficulties.

## **Conclusion**

The research work evaluates the contributions of International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) interventions to sustainable rural livelihood in Niger State, with emphasis on improvements in income, food security, productivity, asset ownership, and community capacity. The findings indicated that IFAD interventions particularly those targeting smallholder farmers, women and youth, have had measurable positive effects on livelihood outcomes. Beneficiaries reported increased access to agricultural inputs, enhanced technical knowledge, improved market linkages, and strengthened community-based institutions. These gains collectively contributed to more resilient and diversified livelihood strategies.

However, the evaluation also revealed several constraints that continue to limit the full impact of the interventions, including inadequate extension support, delays in input delivery, weak sustainability mechanisms, limited access to credit, infrastructural challenges in rural communities and the major challenge of insecurity. Addressing these gaps is essential for consolidating IFAD's achievements and ensuring that livelihood improvements persist beyond the project lifecycle.

In a nutshell, the research study concludes that IFAD interventions have played a significant role in promoting sustainable rural livelihood in Niger State, but sustained progress will depend on stronger institutional support, improved coordination among stakeholders, and deliberate efforts to scale up successful practices. The insights from this evaluation therefore, provides a valuable guidance for policymakers, development practitioners, and donor agencies working to enhance rural development outcomes in Nigeria.

## **Recommendations**

The following recommendations were made:  
IFAD in collaboration with the State government should prioritize those aspects of IFAD interventions that targets Livelihood improvement among beneficiaries in the State.

1. IFAD should build platforms to promote dialogue and cooperation among relevant institutions and programmes in all sectors with the aim of developing rural sectors and strengthen the implementation strategies as adopted by IFAD.

2. Governments at all levels should work squarely on improving the security situations in the rural areas in the State and create agricultural development teams to respond to community expressed needs.

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