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Perception of Farmers on Sharp Practices on Grant Disbursement to SEEFOR-FADAMA III Beneficiaries in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area, Rivers State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The study focused on the perception of farmers on sharp practices on grant disbursement to SEEFOR-FADAMA III beneficiaries in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area, Rivers State, Nigeria. The study described the socio-economic characteristics of the SEEFOR-FADAMA III beneficiaries in the study area, identify farmers perception on sharp practices on grant disbursement and to ascertain the procedures adopted for grant disbursement. A population frame of 40 respondents constituted the sample size for the study. Data were collected using interview schedule and analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage and mean. The study showed that the majority (60%) of the SEEFOR-FADAMA III beneficiaries are male while (40%) were female within the age range of 30-39years (45.0%) and 20-29years (20.0%) and married (55.0%), with one form of education or the other and are engaged in farming activities (67.5%). Results on farmers perception showed that offering of percentage of fund to officials (Mean=2.60) was the only sharp practice as perceived by the farmers in the study area and if not properly handled will raise the level of other sharp practices, thereby favouring the corrupt officials and negatively affecting the farmers. The study also showed certain procedures to be followed by farmers to benefit in the SEEFOR FADAMA III grant, strive hard to be profitable in their venture, thereby increasing income and improving their standard of living. It was therefore recommended that there should be public orientation using the media and other public enlightenment strategies, also prospective organizers of community development programmes should ensure set objectives are attained without attaching personal interest in so doing the issue of sharp practices will be diminishing.

Keywords: Sharp Practices, Grant Disbursement, SeeforFadama III, Grant Beneficiaries

Introduction

Sharp practices have remained endemic in the fabrics of the Nigerian society over the years. Sharp practices according to World Bank (2007), involve abusing what is meant for the public as private gain, when an official solicits, extorts or accepts a bribe. Public office can also be abused for personal advantage if bribery occurs through nepotism and patronage, the theft of the state asset or diversion of the state revenue. In some other instances, sharp practice may result when bribe are being offered to circumvent public policies and processes for competitive advantage and also profit in business. For Morris (1991), it is the unauthorized use of power to benefit a private interest. In this wise khan (1996) gave his definition as any act which deviates From the rules of conduct, including standardized values, guiding the actions of an individual in the position of an authority or trust, in both private and

public domain. According to Ades & Di Tella (1996) corrupt practices is one of the biggest threats to development, as it tends to benefit the rich. It enriches the rich and disproportionately affects the poor and underprivileged. What is even more disastrous today is the growing tolerance and our acceptance of corruption as a certain and basic part of the civil society (Anand, 2006).

Although sharp practice is not a new phenomenon, what is new and unpleasant is the magnitude and forms it has taken, spreading its tentacles to every sphere of the national life. The forms in which it takes includes; incompetence, inefficiency, bribery, kickbacks, nepotism, diversion of public resources to private ownership (privatization), different types of discriminations, ethnicity etc. Elum (2014) noted that ethnic background may cause public and private officials to likely favour more of their relatives and often times to the detriments of others. All these constitute the forms in which sharp practices appear in our society today. It is evident that sharp practices have brought about damages on various government agencies.

Despite the efforts of government to deal with sharp practices through campaigns, policies and the likes, sharp practices have continued to thrive in both private and public agencies. Sharp practices has led to the collapse of various government agencies like the National Orientation Agencies, Agricultural Development Programmes etc because of their failure to channel funds, training opportunities to the target groups etc. It is obvious that if this menace is not properly tackled SEEFOR-FADAMA III and other on-going programmes will continue to find it difficult to achieve set objectives thereby making the supposed beneficiaries suffer deprivations. This becomes more critical since SEEFOR-FADAMA III project is supposed to achieve the objectives of poverty alleviation, increase the income of the rural poor, increase food security and contribute in achieving the key millennium development goal (IDA, 2010).

Sharp practice as a social malice has done great damage to the society over the years, bringing about abuse to both the public and private sectors. With the public sector being perceived as most affected, this is seen in virtually every point of official transactions. The rate of the unpleasant attitudes being manifested by these sectors is on the increase especially in Nigeria.

In view of the above background, the study was set to describe the socio-economic characteristics of SEEFOR-FADAMA III beneficiaries, identify farmers' perception on sharp practices on grant disbursement to SEEFOR- FADAMA III beneficiaries and ascertain the procedures adopted for grant disbursement to SEEFOR-FADAMA III beneficiaries in the study area.

Materials and Methods

The study was conducted in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria. The population of the study composed of 40 SEEFOR- FADAMA III beneficiaries in the 4 Fadama Community Associations (FCAs) in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria. Because the population is small

and manageable, the population frame of 40 constituted the sample size for the study. Data were collected with the aid of a structured interview schedule designed and validated by the researchers. The interview schedule was designed in three sections. Section 1 sought for responses on the socio-demographic characteristics and nominal scale was used to measure the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents. Sections 2 and 3 contained item clusters on farmers' perception on sharp practices and procedures in grant disbursement to SEEFOR- FADAMA III beneficiaries in the study area respectively. Items in these sections were weighted on a 4-point likert-type summated rating scale of agreement (strongly agree, agree, disagree and strongly disagree). The values of the scale (4, 3, 2 and 1) were summed up to obtain 10. The mean value of the sum gave 2.50, which served as the cut-off mean. This became the benchmark for accepting any item as farmers perceived sharp practices and procedures in grant disbursement to SEEFOR-FADAMA III beneficiaries in the study area. Data analysis was carried out using descriptive tools namely: frequency, percentage and mean.

Results and Discussion

Socio Economic Characteristics of SEEFOR FADAMA III Beneficiaries in the study area

The Result revealed that majority of the respondents (60.0%) are male while (40.0%) are female. This is in agreement with the findings of (Ajayi, 2008) that male rural dwellers are easier to mobilize for adopting new ideas and development activities. Majority of the respondents (45.0%) are between the age bracket of 30-39 years. (Table 1). This implies that majority of the beneficiaries in SEEFOR-FADAMA III programme are young people who are in their active and productive years. The result shows that majority of the SEEFOR-FADAMA III beneficiaries covered are mostly married (55.0%). This indicates that the beneficiaries are responsible and capable of managing available resources to sustain the wellbeing of their families. From the survey it is noted that secondary education recorded the highest educational status in the study area with (52.5%) followed by tertiary education (30.0%). Education has been discovered to be an important factor in understanding the need for involvement and participation in Agricultural programmes. According to Imonikhe (2004), education would greatly enhance farmers' ability to make accurate and meaningful management decisions.

The result showed that majority of the respondents (67.5%) is engaged in farming activities. This is essential since increasing agricultural productivity, income as well as improving the livelihood of the beneficiaries is the mandate of SEEFOR-FADAMA III project.

Table 1: Distribution of SEEFOR FADAMA III beneficiaries by Sex.

Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	24	60
Female	16	40
Age (Years)		
20 -29	8	20.0
30 -39	18	45.0
40 -49	7	17.5
50 – 59	5	12.5
60 – 69	2	5.0
70 and above	0	0.0
Marital status		
Single	11	27.5
Married	22	55.0
Divorced	3	7.5
Widow/widower	4	10.0
Educational level		
Non formal education	2	5.0
Primary education	5	12.5
Secondary education	21	52.5
Tertiary education	12	30.0
Major occupation		
Civil servant	8	20.0
Trading	5	12.5
Farming	27	67.5

Source: Field Survey, 2015.

Farmers Perception on Sharp Practices on Grant Disbursement

The result showed that offering of percentage of fund to officials (mean = 2.63) is a sharp practice as indicated by the respondents (Table 2). This indicates that despite the presence of other sharp practices observed by the farmers in the study area, offering of percentage of fund to officials assumed the mean threshold over the other form of sharp practices observed in the study area. This might arise especially where the officials make it mandatory for their own personal gain before the farmers can access the grant.

Conditions for Grant Disbursement to SEEFOR FADAMA III Beneficiaries.

The result on Table 3 showed that submission of written undertaken (mean = 2.60) is among the conditions for grant disbursement to SEEFOR FADAMA III Beneficiaries. Such undertaken is likely to ensure that beneficiaries are abreast with the terms and obligations associated to the grant. Also, Provision of guarantors is indicated as a condition for grant disbursement (mean= 2.60). This is expected to enhance the validity of the transaction and to further build a sense of responsibility among the beneficiaries.

Table 2: Farmers Perception on Sharp Practices on Grant Disbursement

S/N	Statements	Mean	Remark
1.	Embezzlement of fund.	2.40	Rejected
2.	Dishonesty in disbursement of grant.	2.20	Rejected
3.	Diversion of fund to other enterprise.	1.95	Rejected
4.	Offering of percentage of fund managers.	2.63	Accepted
5.	Extortion by fund Managers.	1.60	Rejected
6.	Bribery to facilitate disbursement of fund.	1.55	Rejected
7.	Favouratism by officials.	1.67	Rejected
8.	Improper use of process.	1.80	Rejected
9.	Lack of due process in grant disbursement.	1.97	Rejected
10.	Gratification in disbursement of fund.	2.12	Rejected
11.	Misappropriation of fund.	2.05	Rejected

Source: Field survey, 2015. Mean score <2.50 implies rejection while mean score \geq 2.50 implies acceptance.

As indicated by the respondents, Submission of passport photograph (mean = 3.93) is among the conditions for grant disbursement. It was also indicated that membership of agricultural cooperative society (Mean=4.00) is one of the conditions. This finding confirms the importance to organize farmers into cooperatives for ease of handling and contact. Furthermore, the result revealed that submission of written feasibility (Mean=3.05) is a condition for grant disbursement among SEEFOR-FADAMA III beneficiaries. The condition might ensure that that viable and demand driven agricultural projects are included for selection. It is revealed that submission of bank account details (Mean=4.00) is one of the conditions. This might be necessary to ensure that transactions are safe with proper and formal documentation that lends itself to auditing process. Also, provision of fixed deposit before processing of grants (Mean=4.00) is indicated by the respondents as one of the conditions. Though stiff condition, this is expected to encourage the commitment of the prospective beneficiaries. Result on Table 3 further showed that provision of land (Mean=4.00) is a condition. This finding is essential since land is a major resource in agricultural projects. It further serves as collateral for the beneficiaries. Also, provision of training/workshop certificate (Mean=4.00) is another procedure in grant disbursement to SEEFOR FADAMA III beneficiaries in the study area. All these procedures are fulfilled to ensure that the farmers have a sense of ownership and the drive to succeed in their venture. All the procedures as noted occurred at different levels of the process, some at the bank, others at the co-operate affairs commission (Ministry of Agriculture), and the ADP office. All of which are necessary in the acquisition of the disbursed grant in the study area.

Table 3: Procedures adopted in grant disbursement to SEEFOR FADAMA III beneficiaries

S/N	Statements	Mean	Remark
1.	Provision of collateral before processing of grant	1.17	Rejected
2.	Submission of written undertaken	2.60	Accepted
3.	Provision of guarantors	2.60	Accepted
4.	Submission of Local government I.D	2.33	Rejected
5.	Submission of passport Photograph	3.93	Accepted
6.	Provision of other documents	2.23	Rejected
7.	Membership of agricultural Cooperative society	4.00	Accepted
8.	Submission of written Feasibility	3.05	Accepted
9.	Submission of bank account details	4.00	Accepted
10.	Provision of fixed deposit before processing of grant	4.00	Accepted
11.	Provision of counterpart	2.27	Rejected
12.	Provision of land	4.00	Accepted
13.	Provision of training/work shop certificate	4.00	Accepted

Source: Field survey, 2015.

N/B: Percentage in parenthesis, mean score <2.50 implies rejection while mean score ≥ 2.50 implies acceptance.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the results, it is concluded that the SEEFOR FADAMA project incorporates married male and female farmers who are educated, active and productive in their ventures. Despite the progress in the project, the project encountered some form of sharp practices as perceived by the farmers, with the most recognized which is offering of percentage of fund to officials. Also certain procedures must be followed in grant disbursement to enhance beneficiaries' sense of ownership and drive to succeed in their venture, thereby increasing income, improving their living standard and hence eradicating poverty.

It is therefore recommended that:

- There should be an inbuilt mechanism to penalize those who are involved in sharp practices.
- There should be public orientation using the media and other public enlightenment strategies to curb the issue of sharp practice in the nation.
- Since sharp practices have different forms in which it thrives, different strategies should be developed to tackle each of them in so doing sharp practices will be diminishing in Nigeria.
- Prospective organizers of community development programmes should ensure that set objectives are attained without attaching personal interest in so doing the issue of sharp practices will be dealt with.
- Procedures in disbursements should not be made tedious, so farmers can easily comply. There should be a reformation of the country's value system.

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