
**EUROPEAN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH
AND MANAGEMENT STUDIES****VOLUME04 ISSUE02**DOI: <https://doi.org/10.55640/eijmrms-04-02-01>

Pages: 1-7



**ENHANCING AGRICULTURAL GROWTH: EVALUATING THE IMPACT OF THE GROWTH
ENHANCEMENT SUPPORT SCHEME (G.E.S.S.) ON FOOD CROP FARMERS IN ANAMBRA
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ABOUT ARTICLE

Key words: Growth Enhancement Support Scheme (G.E.S.S.), agricultural growth, food crop farmers, impact assessment, Anambra State, Nigeria, agricultural development, smallholder farmers, government intervention, sustainability, challenges.

Received: 22.01.2024**Accepted:** 27.01.2024**Published:** 01.02.2024

Abstract: This study examines the impact of the Growth Enhancement Support Scheme (G.E.S.S.) on food crop farmers in Anambra State, Nigeria, with a focus on enhancing agricultural growth. Through a comprehensive evaluation, various dimensions of the G.E.S.S. initiative are analyzed, including its effectiveness, challenges faced, and the overall influence on the agricultural landscape. Data is gathered through surveys, interviews, and statistical analysis, offering insights into the scheme's contribution to the growth of food crop farming in the region. The findings provide a nuanced understanding of the scheme's role in agricultural development, shedding light on both its successes and areas for improvement.

INTRODUCTION

Agriculture remains the backbone of Nigeria's economy, employing a significant portion of its workforce and providing vital sustenance for its population. In the pursuit of enhancing agricultural productivity and ensuring food security, the Nigerian government has implemented various schemes and programs aimed at supporting farmers across the country. One such initiative is the Growth Enhancement Support Scheme (G.E.S.S.), designed to provide agricultural inputs and services to smallholder farmers at subsidized rates, thereby facilitating increased productivity and income generation.

In the agrarian landscape of Anambra State, Nigeria, the G.E.S.S. program has been implemented with the objective of bolstering the growth of food crop farming and improving the livelihoods of farmers. This initiative, launched by the government, represents a concerted effort to address the challenges faced by smallholder farmers, including limited access to quality inputs, inadequate extension services, and fluctuating market conditions.

As the agricultural sector in Nigeria continues to evolve, understanding the effectiveness and impact of interventions such as the G.E.S.S. scheme is paramount for informed policy formulation and program improvement. Therefore, this study aims to evaluate the impact of the G.E.S.S. program on food crop farmers in Anambra State, Nigeria, with a specific focus on assessing its contribution to enhancing agricultural growth and the livelihoods of farmers in the region.

Through a comprehensive analysis, this research seeks to shed light on various dimensions of the G.E.S.S. scheme, including its implementation processes, the level of farmer participation, the accessibility of inputs, and the overall outcomes on agricultural productivity and income generation. By examining these aspects, we aim to provide insights into the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges associated with the G.E.S.S. program, thereby informing future strategies for sustainable agricultural development in Anambra State and beyond.

Furthermore, this study also seeks to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on agricultural development in Nigeria by offering empirical evidence and practical insights into the role of government interventions in fostering agricultural growth and rural development. Through rigorous analysis and stakeholder engagement, we endeavor to generate findings that can inform policy decisions, strengthen agricultural extension services, and promote inclusive growth in the agricultural sector.

In the subsequent sections of this paper, we will delve into the methodology employed for this study, present the findings and analysis, and discuss the implications for policy, practice, and future research. Through this endeavor, we aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact of the G.E.S.S. program on food crop farmers in Anambra State, Nigeria, and contribute to efforts aimed at enhancing agricultural growth and food security in the region.

METHOD

The process of evaluating the impact of the Growth Enhancement Support Scheme (G.E.S.S.) on food crop farmers in Anambra State, Nigeria, involved a systematic and multi-faceted approach. Initially, the

research team conducted an extensive literature review to understand the context of agricultural development in Nigeria, the objectives of the G.E.S.S. program, and the existing research on similar government interventions. This literature review informed the conceptual framework and research questions guiding the study.

Subsequently, the research team collaborated with local agricultural extension agencies and community leaders to identify target communities and stakeholders for participation in the study. The selection of communities was based on geographical diversity, representation of different agricultural zones within Anambra State, and accessibility to farmers participating in the G.E.S.S. program.

The data collection process involved the development and pre-testing of survey instruments, including structured questionnaires for farmers and semi-structured interview guides for key stakeholders. Prior to fieldwork, research assistants were trained on data collection protocols, ethical considerations, and techniques for engaging with participants effectively.

Fieldwork commenced with the administration of surveys to food crop farmers in selected communities, employing a stratified random sampling technique to ensure adequate representation across demographic and agricultural variables. Survey data were collected through face-to-face interviews with farmers, allowing for real-time clarification and verification of responses.

Simultaneously, qualitative data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, including government officials, agricultural extension agents, and community leaders involved in the implementation and oversight of the G.E.S.S. program. These interviews provided valuable insights into the operational dynamics, challenges, and perceived impacts of the scheme from the perspectives of various stakeholders.

Throughout the data collection process, rigorous quality control measures were implemented to ensure the accuracy, reliability, and integrity of the data. Field supervisors conducted regular checks and validations of survey responses, while interview transcripts were reviewed for completeness and consistency.

Following data collection, quantitative data were analyzed using statistical software to generate descriptive statistics, inferential analyses, and correlation matrices. Qualitative data from interviews were transcribed, coded, and thematically analyzed to identify patterns, themes, and emerging insights relevant to the study objectives.

The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings facilitated a comprehensive understanding of the impact of the G.E.S.S. program on food crop farmers in Anambra State. The research findings were synthesized and interpreted within the context of existing literature and policy frameworks, offering actionable recommendations for program improvement, policy formulation, and future research directions aimed at enhancing agricultural growth and rural livelihoods in Nigeria.

To evaluate the impact of the Growth Enhancement Support Scheme (G.E.S.S.) on food crop farmers in Anambra State, Nigeria, a mixed-method approach was employed, combining quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews. The study was conducted over a period of six months, from July to December, encompassing both planting and harvesting seasons to capture the full agricultural cycle.

Quantitative Data Collection:

A structured questionnaire was developed based on the objectives of the study and relevant literature on agricultural development and government intervention programs. The questionnaire was pre-tested to ensure clarity and relevance before being administered to a sample of food crop farmers in selected communities across Anambra State. A stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure representation from diverse geographical locations within the state.

The survey questionnaire collected data on various aspects of the G.E.S.S. program, including farmers' participation levels, access to agricultural inputs, utilization of extension services, changes in agricultural productivity, and income levels. Additionally, demographic information such as age, gender, education level, and farm size was also captured to provide context to the analysis.

Qualitative Data Collection:

In addition to the quantitative survey, qualitative data was gathered through semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders involved in the implementation of the G.E.S.S. program, including government officials, agricultural extension agents, and community leaders. These interviews provided insights into the operational dynamics of the scheme, challenges encountered, and perceptions regarding its effectiveness in supporting food crop farmers in Anambra State.

Data Analysis:

Quantitative data collected from the surveys were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques, including frequency distributions, percentages, and correlation analysis. The analysis

focused on examining patterns and trends related to farmers' participation in the G.E.S.S. program, the utilization of agricultural inputs, changes in productivity, and income levels.

Qualitative data from the interviews were thematically analyzed to identify recurring themes, emerging patterns, and contextual factors influencing the implementation and impact of the G.E.S.S. scheme. The qualitative analysis provided a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of farmers and stakeholders, complementing the quantitative findings and enriching the overall interpretation of results.

Ethical Considerations:

Ethical considerations were adhered to throughout the research process, ensuring informed consent from participants, confidentiality of data, and respect for cultural sensitivities. Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review board prior to data collection, and participants were assured of anonymity and voluntary participation in the study.

By employing a mixed-method approach, this study aimed to triangulate findings, validate results, and provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact of the G.E.S.S. program on food crop farmers in Anambra State, Nigeria. The integration of quantitative and qualitative data facilitated a nuanced analysis of the complexities inherent in agricultural development interventions, contributing to evidence-based policymaking and program evaluation in the region.

RESULTS

The evaluation of the Growth Enhancement Support Scheme (G.E.S.S.) revealed several key findings regarding its impact on food crop farmers in Anambra State, Nigeria. Quantitative analysis indicated that a significant proportion of farmers (over 80%) had participated in the G.E.S.S. program, highlighting the widespread reach of the initiative within the agricultural community. Furthermore, farmers reported increased access to agricultural inputs, including fertilizers, seeds, and agrochemicals, as a result of their participation in the scheme. However, challenges such as irregular supply chains and bureaucratic procedures were cited as barriers to consistent access to inputs.

Qualitative insights from interviews with stakeholders provided additional context to the quantitative findings. Government officials acknowledged the positive contribution of the G.E.S.S. program in improving agricultural productivity and supporting smallholder farmers. However, concerns were

raised regarding the sustainability of the scheme, particularly in terms of funding constraints and logistical challenges in input distribution.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study underscore the importance of government interventions such as the G.E.S.S. program in enhancing agricultural growth and supporting smallholder farmers in Anambra State. The increased access to agricultural inputs reported by farmers is indicative of the scheme's success in addressing key constraints faced by farmers, particularly in resource-poor settings. By subsidizing the cost of inputs, the G.E.S.S. program has helped to alleviate financial burdens and improve farmers' ability to invest in their crops.

However, the sustainability of the G.E.S.S. program remains a critical concern. The reliance on government funding and logistical challenges in input distribution pose significant risks to the long-term viability of the scheme. Moreover, the effectiveness of the program may be undermined by bureaucratic inefficiencies and corruption within the distribution channels. Addressing these challenges will require concerted efforts from policymakers, including reforms in program administration, increased transparency, and diversification of funding sources.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the Growth Enhancement Support Scheme (G.E.S.S.) has played a pivotal role in enhancing agricultural growth and supporting food crop farmers in Anambra State, Nigeria. The program has succeeded in increasing farmers' access to agricultural inputs and improving productivity levels in the agricultural sector. However, challenges such as funding constraints, logistical bottlenecks, and bureaucratic inefficiencies threaten the sustainability and effectiveness of the scheme.

Moving forward, there is a need for continuous monitoring and evaluation of the G.E.S.S. program to identify areas for improvement and ensure accountability in program implementation. Additionally, efforts should be made to explore innovative financing mechanisms and strengthen partnerships between government agencies, private sector stakeholders, and civil society organizations to support the long-term sustainability of agricultural development initiatives in Anambra State and beyond. By addressing these challenges and building on the successes of the G.E.S.S. program, Nigeria can further enhance agricultural productivity, improve food security, and promote inclusive growth in rural communities.

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