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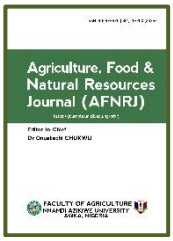

Original Article

Effects of participation in the village alive development initiative on the socioeconomic status of beneficiaries in Kwara State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the impact of the Village Alive Development Initiative (VADI) on the socioeconomic status of rural farmers in Kwara State, Nigeria. The primary aim was to assess how VADI, initiated by the Agricultural and Rural Management Training Institute (ARMTI), impacted on the livelihoods of small-scale farmers through training, credit access, and capacity building. Employing a three-stage sampling method, 120 beneficiaries were surveyed to gather data on their socioeconomic characteristics and the perceived benefits of VADI. Frequency counts, percentages and weighted mean scores (WMS) were used for data analysis. Key findings reveal that participants reported significant improvements in their economic conditions, with increased income (WMS = 3.34) and productivity attributed to enhanced access to credit (WMS = 3.78). Also, the intervention helped beneficiaries to reduce post-harvest losses (WMS = 3.24) and facilitated diversification of income sources during the dry season (WMS = 3.37). The study concludes that VADI effectively empowers rural dwellers, promoting sustainable development and economic resilience. Recommendations include streamlining loan disbursement processes, increasing educational initiatives, and establishing local banking facilities to further support beneficiaries.

K E Y W O R D S : *Credit access, Economic resilience, Empowerment, Sustainable development, VADI*

INTRODUCTION

The agricultural sector in Nigeria is predominantly dominated by rural dwellers, mainly with small farm holdings (Ajibade & Olajide-Taiwo, 2021; Olagoke *et al*., 2024). Hence, there is a need for training and retraining of the rural people to enhance the dissemination of new skills and ideas on the establishment, management, and skills of these small-scale farmers. Furthermore, there is a need to focus on identifying inhibiting wealth creation, improving the standard of living, ensuring peaceful co-existence among them, and proffering ameliorating strategies through wealth creation, networking, knowledge, and skills empowerment. Staggering poverty among others is one of the world's unsolved issues, especially in developing countries (Sukmana *et al*., 2022; Hassan & Rizwan, 2022). Poverty has a multidimensional nature and can be evident in different forms

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such as deficiency of material income adequate to guarantee the standard of living, hunger and under-nutrition, illness, limited education and fundamental services, persistent rise in mortality and morbidity due to sickness; homelessness and insufficient housing, insecure environments and social exclusion and discrimination (Siddiqui *et al.*, 2020). Most of these poor are found in rural areas and they are majorly small-scale farmers who contribute to supply the ever-increasing demand for food production (Ajibade, 2022).

Nigeria's agriculture has been experiencing deterioration in agricultural productivity over the years. Many reasons have been indicated for the declining agricultural productivity, one of the factors attributed to the declining productivity of the sector is farmers' limited access to credit facilities (Silong & Gadanakis, 2020; Kehinde & Ogundeji, 2022). Credit is a vital factor in agricultural production and many cases may be a limiting factor in small-scale agriculture (Balana & Oyeyemi, 2022). The Agricultural and Rural Management Training Institute (ARMTI) was established as a Parastatal under the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development in 1980 (Yahaya *et al.*, 2022). The mission of the Institute is to improve management practice in the agricultural and rural sectors, and, ultimately improve the quality of rural life (Alalade *et al.*, 2022). In pursuance of its mission, ARMTI embarked on an intervention programme in nine communities around ARMTI for sustainable development of the grassroots. The intervention is necessitated by the need to engender participatory development at the grassroots as against the bureaucratic process often adopted in the past, which does not emphasize social inclusiveness at all levels. According to Alalade *et al.*, (2022), this project serves as a social laboratory for applied research by ARMTI and it is called Village Alive Development Initiative (VADI).

Village Alive Development Initiative, action-oriented research; initially took off in 1995 as Village Alive Women Association (VAWA) in the communities of Idofian, Elerinjare, Jimba Oja and Kabba Owode in Kwara State (Ajibade, 2022). The intervention of VAWA was aimed at reducing the challenges of women in the selected communities in food processing, value addition and other farming enterprises. This was a result of a socio-economic survey which showed that more than 80% of the dwellers of the selected communities lived below the poverty line and had challenges from seasonal food insecurity (Alalade *et al.*, 2022). The women did remain idle during the dry season and experienced severe food shortages. Their productivity levels were low because they used mainly traditional methods in processing their farm produce, and they could not expand their production activities and these largely accounted for the low income and quality of the food consumed by them. This low productivity is purely because they produce for subsistence consumption and a little marketable surplus (Ukwuaba *et al.*, 2021) The literacy level in the communities is low. According to Ajibade (2022), the study also indicated the low nutritional status of the food consumed by the people. Hence, they were usually prone to health hazards and, the consequent high mortality rate. Also, they lacked access to credit sources for value addition in their agriculture. There are no market opportunities, too.

The introduction of VAWA in 1995 in these communities greatly increased the productivity of community members with improved access to modern farm inputs and extension services, thus reducing post-harvest losses as a result of access to credit facilities provided by the project. However, these interventions soon became inactive due to funding. ARMTI Management resuscitated the project as the Village Alive Development Initiative (VADI) 2011 to include Men, Women, and Youth as beneficiaries in the project (Ajibade & Olajide-Taiwo, 2021). The nine pilot communities involve Jimba-Oja, Elerinjare, Falokun-Oja, Igbo-Owu, and Amoyo from Ifelodun Local Government Areas (LGA); Fufu, Apa-ola, Ilota, and Omomere-Oja from Ilorin South Local Government Areas of Kwara State (Ajibade & Olajide-Taiwo, 2021). These communities were selected because of their farming system (rain-fed) and poor accessibility to basic rural infrastructure to enhance livelihood opportunities when compared with what is obtainable in urban centres.

According to Alalade *et al.* (2022), the project was aimed at creating village-level opportunities for rural dwellers to alleviate their poverty. In addition, it would also allow them to engage in farm and nonfarm income activities. The credit opportunity also covers family and consumption expenses, especially during the off-season period. In other words, VADI aims for employment and income generation, and good governance in the participating communities. It ensures capacity development, farmers' access to productive resources, and knowledge exchange (Ajibade & Olajide-Taiwo, 2021).

Several problems are faced by rural dwellers such as low investment and productivity, poor infrastructure, inadequate funds, and weak linkages between agriculture and other sectors some of these foregoing problems are part of what VADI as ARMTI intervention aims at addressing (Ajibade & Olajide-Taiwo, 2021). This study aims at investigating the effect of intervention on the socioeconomic status of the beneficiaries given that there have been few independent research studies available in the literature on the subject matter. Specifically, this study intends to describe the socioeconomic characteristics of the participants, determine the benefits of VADI intervention, and examine the perceived effect of participation on beneficiaries' socioeconomic status.

METHODOLOGY

Study Area

The study was carried out in Kwara State. Kwara State is one of the states in the North Central Political Zone of Nigeria. It lies between latitudes 45′N and 30′N and longitudes 30′E and 25′E, covering a total landmass of 32,500 km^2 with a population of

about 2.5 million people (Adeyonu *et al.*, 2022). The sample of the study was picked in Ifelodun and Ilorin South local Government, Kwara state, Nigeria. The tribe in the study area is predominantly Yoruba. The communities involved are Jimba-Oja, Elerinjare, Falokun-Oja, Igbo-Owu, and Amoyo from Ifelodun local Government and Fufu, Apa-ola, Ilota, and Omomere-Oja from Ilorin South Local Government respectively. These pilot communities are selected as the study areas because only these communities have a VADI presence in Kwara State.

Data Collection

A three-staged sampling procedure was used to select 120 respondents for the study. In the first stage, the 2 pilot LGAs where VADI operates were purposively selected. The second stage involves the random selection of 3 communities each from the 2 participating LGAs. The third stage involves a random selection of 18% from the total number of beneficiaries (670) in the six selected communities, totaling 120 respondents.

Measurement of Variables

Socioeconomic characteristics of respondents, including age, sex, marital status, religion, educational status, household size, and primary occupation were measured at nominal level. To assess the benefits of participating in the VADI, a 4-point Likert scale was employed, with responses ranging from "never" (0 points) to "always" (3 points). This approach allowed for the calculation of mean weighted scores for each benefit. Further, the average income of respondents was evaluated both before and after their participation in VADI to determine the economic impact. Also, the perceived effects of participation on beneficiaries' socioeconomic status were also measured using a 5-point Likert scale, which ranged from "not at all" (0 points) to "to a great extent" (4 points). Mean weighted scores were calculated across various items used to depict their socioeconomic status including poverty alleviation, food security, and access to credit services.

Data Analysis

Frequency count and percentages were employed to summarize and describe the socioeconomic characteristics of the respondents, including age, sex, marital status, and level of education. Weighted mean score (WMS) was obtained to analyse the Likert-type based responses. To calculate the WMS, the frequency of each response option was multiplied by its corresponding Likert-type scale value, all summed up and then divided by the total number of respondents (N=120). For the 4-point Likert scale, with response option scores from 0-3 (Table 2), the maximum attainable WMS was 3, while for the 5-point Likert scale, with response option scores from 1-5 (Table 3), the maximum WMS was 5. The WMS values were interpreted such that the higher the WMS scores, the more attributes of focus in the variables. For example, higher WMS indicate more benefits derived from participating in VADI, as well as more positive perceptions of the programme's impact on socioeconomic status among beneficiaries respectively.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socio-Economic Characteristics of VADI Beneficiaries

The socio-economic characteristics of the VADI beneficiaries in the two (2) local government areas of Kwara state are presented in Table 1 The result in Table 1 shows the socio-economic characteristics (age, sex, marital status, household size and primary occupation), means of membership in VADI and the average income (per month) before and after VADI of the respondents in the study area.

The respondents for this study consisted of (38.3%) males and (61.7%) females as shown in Table 1. This finding implies that females participated more in the program than males, this dominance is because females engage more in different farming activities including value addition in terms of processing which tends to make them benefit more. This finding is in coherence with Olagoke *et al.* (2024) in their study on the impact of VADI on farming households' productivity in Kwara state where they stated that the majority of the VADI beneficiaries are female.

The marital status of the respondents shows that the majority of the respondents (70.8%) are married, (5.8%) are single, (1.7%) are divorced and (21.7%) are widowed. The fact that the majority of the farmers across all communities are married indicates that they are viewed as responsible adults who are looking for ways to better their household lives and show low interest in youth in the program. The study is in conformity with Olagoke *et al.* (2024) who discovered that about 64% of them are married while 36% are either single or widowed, and married farmers have more responsibilities that can only be compromised by their farm income, unlike single farmers.

Five forms of education were observed among the respondents, these were; no formal, adult, primary, secondary, or tertiary education. The table shows that 55% of the respondents have no formal education, 5.8% have adult education, 32.5% have primary education, 4.2% have secondary education and 2.5% have tertiary education. This study, therefore, revealed that the majority of the farmers are not educated, this implies that they depended on the VADI officials mostly for information, thus this keeps beneficiaries in propinquity with the officials. The low level of education affects the majority of the beneficiaries in accessing loans or information, but the few educated ones are better positioned to take advantage of new techniques that could lead to increased output. Formal education is generally considered a veritable tool that enhances the community in development initiatives, this is why VADI officials seek to educate the respondents at all levels regardless of their educational status because it is believed that the more the community advances in their level of education, the more they

tend to improve their knowledge, skills, and capacity to make important decisions. The assertion is also in agreement with the findings of Alalade *et al.*, (2019) that a high level of education helps to raise farmers' income and their probability of escaping poverty. This supports the fact that improvement in education can contribute to raising the income of the farming household and alleviate poverty.

Table 1: Distribution of respondents by socioeconomic characteristics

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Sex		
Male	46	38.3
Female	74	61.7
Marital status		
Single	7	5.8
Married	85	70.8
Divorced	2	1.7
Widowed/widower	26	21.7
Religion		
Islam	98	81.7
Christianity	22	18.3
Educational status		
No formal education	66	55.0
Adult education	7	5.8
Primary education	39	32.5
Secondary education	5	4.2
Tertiary education	3	2.5
Primary occupation		
Farming	42	35.0
Hunting	7	5.8
Fishing	4	3.3
Trading	67	55.8
Household size		
1-3	4	10.5
4-6	4.7	39.2
7-9	48	40.1
10-13	15	12.4
14-16	6	5

The findings show that the majority of the beneficiaries are traders (55.8%), farmers (35.0%), hunters (5.8%), and fishers (3.3%). This implies that although VADI seeks to address farmer's problems, it later involves every other people in the community regardless of their occupation, this could be that VADI has a direct bearing on their well-being. The findings show that the majority of the beneficiaries were not engaged in a secondary occupation, they relied majorly on their primary education as their source of income, and this implies that respondents were involved in income-generating activities and thus capable of contributing to the developmental growth of their society by ensuring different income generating activities. The findings show that a larger proportion of the participants had a household size of between 5-9 with 6 being the highest, this household size may have a positive implication on the beneficiaries since it's been discovered that most rural households depend on their family members to provide labour on the farm and help in running businesses. It is believed that farmers are committed to whatever they do because they have large households' sizes who depend on them for food, shelter, and clothing, large household provides more farm labour and will reduce the expenses spent on hired labour.

Benefits of Participating in VADI

The results in Table 2 show the benefits of VADI and how often respondents participate. The majority of the respondents benefit more from the financial actions and the special skills, and the relatively higher involvement of the respondents in these projects could be a result of their importance to the beneficiaries and community at large. Focus group discussion (FGD) participants from various VADI intervention locations applauded the program's effectiveness as it has benefited them a lot. Fufu beneficiaries said that the programme's twice-yearly ₦3,000 grants have helped with their farming operations. Those who benefited from Apa-Ola said they were taught about irrigation farming and given access to processing facilities. According to VADI's Ilota respondents, the programme has

helped them refine their rice farming and processing techniques, and it has also exposed them to irrigation. Also, beneficiaries in Falokun-Oja have reported that VADI has supplied them with irrigated farming training and pumping equipment.

Microfinance from Formal Banks

The result in Table 2 with WMS = 2.77 show that a larger percentage of the beneficiaries benefited from this loan scheme and this encourages them to participate more because people participate more in projects when the projects have a direct bearing on their well-being. This is following Muluh *et al*. (2019), active participation in a project by the target beneficiaries will promote and sustain the success of the project. The active involvement of beneficiaries helps farmers access funds for their farm enterprise because the scale of production affects the mean income of farmers and participation in the VADI credit acquisition scheme has a positive impact on poverty reduction among participating households in the study area.

Insurance Cover at a Premium price

The result in Table 2 shows WMS of 1.03. This implies that getting insurance coverage for beneficiaries is not a financial action implemented by VADI officials

Table 2: Distribution of the respondents based on the benefits of participating

Benefits	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Always	WMS
Microfinance from formal banks (FA)	3(2.5)	2(1.7)	15(12.5)	100(83.3)	2.77*
Insurance cover at a premium price (FA)	21(17.5)	80(66.7)	13(10.8)	6(5.0)	1.03
Formal credit access (FA)	1(0.8)	7(5.8)	17(14.2)	95(79.2)	2.72*
Training about financial literacy (FA)		10(8.3)	69(57.5)	41(34.2)	2.27*
Training on record keeping and loan management (SS)	2(1.7)	14(11.7)	54(45.0)	50(41.7)	2.27*
Basic skills acquisition for small enterprise management (SS)	1(0.8)	19(15.8)	74(61.7)	26(21.7)	2.04*
Training on cooperative and group management (SS)	4(3.3)	20(16.7)	44(36.7)	52(43.3)	2.20*
Training on adult literacy (SS)		9(7.5)	71(59.2)	40(33.3)	2.26*
Improved/increased regular savings (FA)		5(4.2)	13(10.8)	102(85.0)	2.81*
Promotion of non-farm micro-enterprise (EA)	5(4.2)	82(68.3)	28(23.3)	5(4.2)	1.28
Promotion of off-farm enterprise (EA)	6(5.0)	90(75.0)	18(15.0)	6(5.0)	2.64*
Value addition in agric. Produce/agro-processing EA)		17(14.2)	20(16.7)	83(69.2)	2.55*
Linkages with agro-processors (SA)	9(7.5)	77(64.2)	28(23.3)	6(5.0)	1.26
Linkages with marketers as off-takers (SA)	14(11.7)	64(53.3)	22(18.3)	20(16.7)	1.40
Group mobilization (SA)	12(10.0)	28(23.3)	36(30.0)	44(36.7)	1.93
Partnership opportunities with other stakeholders (ADP, NAIC, BANK) (SA)	97(80.8)	13(10.8)	4(3.3)	6(5.0)	0.33

***FA=** financial action; **SS=** special skills; **EA=** enterprise action; **SA=** social action; WMS= Weighted mean score*

Training on Record Keeping and Loan Management

The results in Table 2 shows WMS = 2.27. This implies that the majority of the beneficiaries are trained in record keeping and how to manage and utilize loans obtained from formal banks, this helps the beneficiaries to keep tabs on how much is generated and how much is spent and this management could lead to the expansion of farms.

Training on Adult Literacy

The results in Table 2 show WMS of 2.26. This corroborates Alalade *et al.* (2019), who found in a similar study that when disaggregated by year of education, income increases as year of education increases both for participants and non-participants. This implies that the beneficiaries benefited from being educated at one point or another to stand a better chance of getting a better life for themselves, this could be because the educated farmers are good adopters of new technologies, Olagoke *et al*. (2024). This is also in consonance with Ukwuaba *et al*. (2021) who showed that the income level of rural households increases with an increase in education.

Improved/Increased Regular Savings

The results from Table 2 further show that, with WMS = 2.81, majority of the beneficiaries were involved in regular saving and were able to get multiples of their savings and this helps them expand their farms or invest the money in petty trading where they can get more income.

During the focus group discussions (FGDs), the participants engaged in discussions regarding how VADI has contributed to the enhancement and improvement of living conditions. The participants from FUFU expressed approval that their membership in VADI has positively impacted their quality of life by enhancing their ability to manage savings and loans. This, in turn, has resulted in increased savings and facilitated the growth and expansion of their businesses. According to the participants from Apa-Ola, VADI has been instrumental in enhancing their quality of life by facilitating effective

management of savings and loans, as well as providing opportunities for adult education. Based on the accounts of Ilota participants, it was observed that their participation in VADI has resulted in an enhancement of their living conditions through the facilitation of beneficiary savings and the provision of business management skills. Also, participation in VADI has had a positive impact on the participants from Falokun-Oja, leading to an improvement in their overall living conditions. One notable outcome of this initiative is the increased ability of the beneficiaries to save a greater amount of money.

Value Addition in Agricultural Produce/Agro-Processing

The results in Table 2 further shows WMS = 2.55 for "value addition in agricultural produce/agro-processing variables". This implies that beneficiaries' awareness of value addition influenced their likelihood of practising it, rather than selling for giveaway prices, value addition helps to increase returns of farmers while also making the produce attractive and durable, value addition helps farmers to minimize or prevent wastage and it makes produce available in different products, this idea increases the income of beneficiaries as it has contributed positively to prevent loss.

The participants of the FGD overwhelmingly provided their responses regarding the extent to which VADI has facilitated the development of rural enterprises through the provision of relevant skills. According to the feedback received from participants of the FUFU programme, it was found that VADI has effectively facilitated the development of rural enterprises by imparting relevant skills, such as rice processing, as well as tomato and vegetable farming. Based on the feedback provided by participants from Apa-Ola, it was observed that VADI has effectively facilitated the development of rural enterprises through various means, which include the organization of seminars for the beneficiaries, provision of practical demonstrations when deemed necessary, as well as the provision of guidance on important aspects such as post-harvest loss prevention, record-keeping, cassava processing techniques for the production of garri and starch, and effective management of marketing activities related to agricultural produce. According to Ilota participants, the VADI programme has effectively facilitated the development of rural enterprises by showcasing various practices and imparting beneficiaries with essential business management skills. Finally, according to the participants from Falokun-Oja, it was stated that the VADI has effectively facilitated the growth of rural enterprises by providing education and training to farmers on the various methods of enhancing the value of cassava and vegetables.

Beneficiaries' Perception of the Effect of Participation in VADI on their Socioeconomic Status

Table 3 shows that the program has significant importance to the beneficiaries and the community and it has bettered the lives of the beneficiaries by providing credit and also helping them manage the credit and increasing their production and productivity, the programme helps the beneficiaries to reduce post-harvest loss and they have access to extension agents that educates them on how to process their produce to products to increase the market value and increase income. People's participation in projects is more likely to be high when the projects have a direct bearing on their well-being. According to Muluh *et al*. (2019), active participation in a project by the target beneficiaries will promote and sustain the success of the project, the participation of beneficiaries ensures the continuity of the project leading to an increased income and bettering the lives of the respondent.

The findings from the focus group discussion (FGD) indicate that the VADI Initiative has effectively contributed to the achievement of sustainable economic development for both the beneficiaries and their respective communities. According to the responses received from participants across various locations, it can be concluded that the initiative has successfully facilitated the establishment of garri processing factories, thereby meeting the needs of the participants.

All participants in the FGD unanimously acknowledged that financial inclusion has effectively facilitated their economic activities. Specifically, it has fostered cooperative farming practices among farmers and facilitated access to loans, enabling business expansion. Establishing a micro-credit scheme by VADI has further augmented the financial institutions of both the participants and communities involved.

Effects of VADI Participation on Poverty Reduction

As found in Table 3. the study reveals MWS of 3.83 for the variable "the intervention has helped beneficiaries out of poverty", this implies that VADI has a positive impact on the lives of this beneficiaries. This is similar to the findings of Alalade *et al.* (2019) who concluded that a high level of education and large farm size as well as access to loans helps to raise the farmers' income and their probability of escaping poverty. This supports the fact that improvement in education and farm size with credit accessibility can contribute to raising the income of farming households and alleviate poverty in the study area.

Table 3: Distribution of respondents on their perception of the effect of participating in VADI on their socioeconomic status

Perception	Not at all	To a small extent	To some extent	To a moderate extent	To a great extent	WMS
The intervention has helped beneficiaries out of poverty		3(2.5)	2(1.7)	8(6.7)	107(89.2)	3.83*
It has helped participants to diversify and now engage in other activities during dry season		2(1.7)	11(9.2)	48(40.0)	59(49.2)	3.37*
The intervention has helped to reduce food shortage due to its food processing and value addition component		3(2.5)	14(11.7)	66(5.0)	37(30.8)	3.14*
The intervention has helped to reduce post-harvest loss		5(4.2)	13(10.8)	50(41.7)	52(43.3)	3.24*
The intervention enhances production and productivity level		6(5.0)	17(14.2)	56(46.7)	41(34.2)	3.10*
The intervention has led to an increase in income		1(0.8)	9(7.5)	58(48.3)	52(43.3)	3.34*
It has increased the quality of food consumed by my household	5(4.2)	27(22.5)	40(33.3)	29(24.2)	19(15.8)	2.25*
It helped to reduce malnutrition	9(7.5)	56(46.7)	30(25.0)	16(13.3)	9(7.5)	1.67
It reduces health hazard	15(12.5)	38(31.7)	43(35.8)	14(11.7)	10(8.3)	1.72
It led to improved access to and enhanced use of modern farm inputs	11(9.2)	22(18.3)	29(24.2)	42(35.0)	16(13.3)	2.25*
It led to improved access to extension services		1(0.8)	2(1.7)	12(10.0)	105(87.5)	3.84*
It provides an opportunity for access to credit services		1(0.8)	5(4.2)	14(11.7)	100(83.3)	3.78*
Improve the overall standard of living and socioeconomic status quo of participating communities	2(1.7)	41(34.2)	47(39.2)	17(14.2)	13(10.8)	1.98
Access to high-yielding varieties via research component in the scheme	43(35.8)	29(24.2)	32(26.7)	9(7.5)	7(5.8)	1.23

WMS= Weighted Mean Score

Effect of Participation on the Beneficiaries

The findings indicate that VADI has successfully met several requirements, positively impacting beneficiaries by helping them diversify into other activities during the dry season, reducing post-harvest losses, increasing income, improving access to extension services, and providing opportunities for accessing credit services.

Earlier, women did remain idle during the dry season, their productivity was low because they used traditional methods and they also experienced post-harvest loss, but VADI has helped them by demonstration, timely visits of extension agents, and participation in the credit acquisition scheme.

The results obtained from the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) demonstrate that engagement in the VADI initiative has led to enhanced skills and knowledge among the individuals who have been recipients of this programme within the respective communities. Based on the feedback provided by participants of the FUFU programme, it was observed that the VADI programme has successfully enhanced their skills and knowledge through educational instruction and when appropriate, practical demonstrations.

Based on the feedback provided by participants from the Apa-Ola community, it can be inferred that the VADI programme has demonstrated efficacy in enhancing the competencies and understanding of its recipients. The accomplishment of this objective has been facilitated through a range of strategies, including the organisation of demonstrations, seminars, and educational initiatives that have been made available to the intended beneficiaries. Concerning the feedback provided by the respondents from Ilota, it can be inferred that the VADI programme has demonstrated efficacy in enhancing the competencies and understanding of its beneficiaries. This has been achieved through various means, including active engagement in seminars and educational excursions, such as the visitation to a rice processing facility. In contrast, the respondents of the Falokun-Oja indicated that their participation in VADI has resulted in the improvement of farmers' skills and knowledge. This improvement is attributed to the provision of guidance on the appropriate storage of agricultural produce, utilising high-quality materials.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Village Alive Development Initiative (VADI) has demonstrated a significant positive impact on the socioeconomic status of its beneficiaries in Kwara State, Nigeria. The findings indicate that participation in VADI enhances productivity and fosters a sense of community engagement among rural farmers. The initiative effectively addresses critical challenges such as limited access to credit, low productivity, and poverty alleviation. Despite some bureaucratic hurdles in loan disbursement, the majority of participants reported improvements in their economic conditions, with 89.2% indicating substantial progress towards escaping poverty. The results show the importance of sustainable development programmes like VADI in empowering rural communities and promoting economic resilience.

Based on the study's conclusions, the following recommendations are proposed: simplify the bureaucratic processes related to loan disbursement to enhance accessibility for beneficiaries and involve them in the planning process to foster ownership and commitment; establish local banking institutions within communities to facilitate easier access to financial services, addressing banking-related challenges and encouraging savings; offer more adult education classes and hire additional facilitators to improve participants' educational levels, empowering them to better manage financial resources and adopt new agricultural practices; advocate for government policies that stabilize agricultural prices to protect farmers when selling their produce, thereby improving income stability; and increase the frequency of visits by extension agents to provide ongoing support and training, ensuring beneficiaries effectively implement the knowledge and skills acquired in their farming practices.

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Authors' Contributions

OJY and IA conceived the study idea, and developed the proposal. RO was involved in the data collection. LA did data analysis. MB, LA and OJY wrote the first draft of the manuscript. OJY vetted the final manuscript.

Ethical Statement

Not applicable

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