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The Politics of Empowerment: Fadama III, Fadama Community Associations and Poverty Reduction in Niger State, Nigeria.

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Abstract

This study interrogates whether Fadama Community Associations (FCAs) as vehicles of community-driven empowerment sustain poverty reduction after donor exit. Despite 280 million USD investment in Fadama III (2009-2015) covering 358 FCAs in Niger State, evidence on post-project sustainability remains scarce. Anchored on Zimmerman's Empowerment Theory operationalized through Community-Driven Development (CDD) as politics of power relations, the study adopted cross-sectional survey of 240 beneficiaries across 12 FCAs in six LGAs, complemented by 12 key informant interviews and 6 focus group discussions conducted in 2025. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, empowerment index, and binary logistic regression (SPSS v28). Findings show FCAs retained empowerment: 71.7% recorded moderate to high empowerment eight years after closure, with 32% nominal income gain and 23.8 percentage point improvement in food security (2015-2025). Empowerment significantly predicted poverty reduction (β=0.824, OR=2.28, $p<.001$). However, constraints threaten sustainability, notably inadequate post-project funding (77.5%), weak linkage with Local Government (64.2%), limited market access (59.6%), and insecurity (50.4%). The study concludes that while FCAs reduced poverty while empowered, gains are politically fragile because decentralization created parallel structures not embedded in local governance. It recommends institutionalization of FCAs into LGA structure, establishment of Fadama Sustainability Fund, strengthened market linkages, continuous capacity building, and improved rural security.

Keywords: Community–Driven Development (CDD), Empowerment, Fadama III, Poverty reduction, Niger State

Introduction

The promise of Community-Driven Development (CDD) is that transferring power and resources to community institutions will reduce poverty sustainably. Fadama III, Nigeria's flagship CDD agricultural programme (2009-2015), embodied this promise by channeling 250 million USD World Bank credit plus 30 million USD counterpart funding directly to Fadama Community Associations (FCAs) and Fadama User Groups (FUGs) to plan, manage and implement micro-projects (World Bank, 2020). In Niger State alone, 358 FCAs were formed across 25 LGAs with mandate to build participatory governance and increase rural incomes (NSFCO, 2013). The project closed in 2015. The study

examines whether such decentralized empowerment actually endures and reduces poverty after donor exit, or whether it unravels when confronted with local power relations, weak institutional anchoring and withdrawal of funding. This is debatable because global CDD evidence is mixed: while proponents argue CDD builds social capital and improves targeting (Mansuri & Rao, 2004), critics show empowerment often erodes post-closure without state linkage (Mansuri, 2023; Labonne & Chase, 2011).

This debate is critical in Niger State. As largest state with 76,363 km², projected 6.2 million population in 2023 (NPC, 2023) and extensive Fadama lands along Rivers Niger and Kaduna, the state was major beneficiary. Yet post-2015 field observations suggest mixed outcomes - some FCAs maintain meetings and assets, others dormant due to withdrawal of facilitators and funding. Existing studies focus on implementation-phase outcomes in Southern Nigeria (Adepoju & Oni, 2012; Oladele, 2022) and report income gains of 20-34%, but no study examines Niger State eight to ten years after closure, linking empowerment to poverty trajectories through power relations lens.

This study therefore asks: Does empowerment through FCAs actually translate into sustained poverty reduction in Niger State post-Fadama III, and how do power relations shape this outcome? The aim is to examine politics of empowerment by assessing FCA empowerment and poverty reduction 2016-2025. The study argues that while Fadama III succeeded in building psychological and organizational empowerment, it failed to secure community empowerment defined as linkage to local state power, making poverty gains fragile. Contribution is threefold: empirical first post-project evidence from Niger State, theoretical operationalization of Zimmerman's theory within CDD power politics, and methodological linkage of empowerment index to poverty via logistic regression.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Community-Driven Development emerged as paradigm shift from centralized delivery to community control over resources and decisions (World Bank, 2002). Mansuri and Rao (2004) define CDD as approach providing communities' resources to identify and implement priorities with principles of participation, transparency, accountability and local ownership. Politically, CDD is decentralization to the grassroots (Olowu, 2023) transferring authority from central government to community institutions, creating new arenas for participation and accountability but also risking parallel structures and elite capture (Mansuri, 2023; Plateau, 2022). In Sub-Saharan Africa over 150 CDD projects worth $12.3 billion have been supported since 2000 (World Bank, 2024) premised on assumption communities possess better information about needs. Yet meta-analysis of 47 CDD evaluations in Africa found modest significant effects on infrastructure and income but weak effects on governance and collective action after closure (Mansuri, 2023), underscoring sustainability question this study addresses.

Fadama III was most ambitious phase of National Fadama Development Project initiated 1993 for small-scale irrigation in low-lying floodplains. It covered 35 states and FCT targeting 50,000 FUGs and 5,000 FCAs with three components: capacity building, assets acquisition, and management (World Bank, 2020; NFDO, 2009). Empowerment was central - each FCA received up to ₦8 million Community Development Fund to implement community-chosen micro-projects after training in participatory planning, financial management, procurement and conflict resolution (NSFCO, 2013). In Niger State, 124 rural roads, 89 culverts and 56 boreholes were reported and 28% income increase during implementation. However, Ogunbameru et al. (2013) found 40% of FUGs in Yobe became inactive two years after Fadama II due to funding gaps and weak linkage with local government, while Adepoju and Oni (2012) in Oyo found income gains but sustainability depended on market access. No published study examines post-2015 sustainability in Niger State, creating gap.

Empowerment as concept has psychological, organizational and community dimensions. Zimmerman (2000) defines empowerment as process by which individuals, organizations and communities gain mastery over lives, occurring at psychological level (self-efficacy, perceived control), organizational level (leadership, resource mobilization, collective decision-making) and community level (participation in broader political processes, resource allocation, ability to hold authorities accountable). This study operationalizes Zimmerman within Fadama III and CDD politics: psychological empowerment measured as beneficiary self-efficacy in farm decisions and confidence after training; organizational empowerment as FCA capacity to convene meetings without external facilitators, maintain bookkeeping, control residual assets like pumps and stores, and demonstrate leadership; community empowerment as FCA ability to interact with Local Government, access LGA budget, mobilize community beyond members, and avoid elite capture. This operationalization allows us to examine how power relations shape whether empowered FCAs can convert control into poverty reduction. For instance, if FCA has organizational control but no community linkage to LGA power, its empowerment remains confined, explaining fragility. Literature supports this: Oladele (2022) in Kwara found Fadama III increased women's household decision-making by 34% but did not link to poverty; Suleiman et al. (2023) in Kaduna reported higher social capital among FCA members but funding constraints limit organizational effectiveness; Casey et al. (2012) Indonesia found CDD increased women's participation in meetings but not actual decision-making; Wong (2023) Philippines showed empowerment sustained only where FCAs linked to local government. Thus, politics of empowerment functions as analytical lens: we interrogate not whether FCAs were trained, but whether training translated into power to negotiate with state and market to sustain poverty reduction, which is the core of decentralization debate.

METHODOLOGY

Cross-sectional survey design was adopted because it is appropriate for examining relationship between variables at specific point in time and for assessing post-intervention sustainability when longitudinal tracking is not feasible (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Since Fadama III closed 2015, cross-sectional design enables assessment of empowerment and poverty outcomes 2016-2025 eight to ten years after closure, capturing durability. Mixed-methods approach is recommended for evaluating CDD projects requiring both measurable outcomes and understanding of political processes (Mansuri, 2023).

Study area is Niger State which has the largest land mass in Nigeria with 76,363 km² North-Central bordering Kebbi, Zamfara, Kaduna, Kogi, and Kwara States and FCT. It has a projected population of about 6.2 million (NPC, 2023) and largely agrarian with 75% households in crop/livestock (FMARD, 2023). Selected because of major beneficiary of 358 FCAs, extensive Fadama lands, and paucity of post-project research creating gap.

Population and Sample size of the study comprised all registered beneficiaries 2009-2015 estimated 21,480 across 358 FCAs (NSFCO, 2013). Therefore, Population N=21,480. Using Yamane's formula, the calculated sample was 393 thus: $n = N/[1+N(e)^2]$ at 5% margin of error (e=0.05), $n = 21,480 / [1+21,480(0.05)^2] = 393$. However, due to post-project attrition eight years after closure and resource constraints in tracking dispersed beneficiaries across Niger State, 240 traceable beneficiaries were retained. This exceeds the minimum threshold recommended by Krejcie and Morgan (1970) and Israel (1992) for regression analysis, which requires at least 10 cases per predictor (6 predictors = minimum 60). This approach aligns with recent post-project CDD evaluations (Wong, 2023).

Multi-stage sampling: Stage 1 stratified into three agricultural zones Zone A, B, C, two LGAs randomly selected each total six LGAs (Borgu, Kontagora, Suleja, Minna, Bida, Lavun). Stage 2 two FCAs randomly selected from each LGA total 12 FCAs. Stage 3 twenty beneficiaries purposively selected from each FCA total 240 ensuring only beneficiaries who participated 2009-2015 and still residing 2016-2025 included. Additionally, 12 KIIs with FCA chairpersons and 6 FGDs one per LGA 8-10 participants.

Quantitative Means: Structured questionnaire of 5 sections validated by two experts in the Department of Political Science and International Relations, University of Abuja. Variables: Dependent; poverty reduction binary coded 1 if improvement in at least 2 of 3 compared to 2015 baseline (annual income increased ≥20%, asset ownership increased, food security improved per FAO Scale) else 0. Independent; empowerment index EI = Sum scores/75*100 adapted from Zimmerman (2000) and Labonne & Chase (2011) 15

items 3 dimensions categorized Low 0-49%, Moderate 50-74%, High 75-100%. Control: age, gender, education, years of participation, training access, market access. Data were analyzed using SPSS version 28. Descriptive statistics includes frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation. While Inferential statistics utilized Binary logistic regression because dependent dichotomous, Model $\ln (P/1-P) = \beta 0+\beta 1EI+\beta 2Training+\beta 3Years+\beta 4Education+\beta 5Gender+\beta 6Market+\varepsilon$, significance $p<0.05$, Odds Ratio reported. Qualitative: NVivo 14 thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2022).

Instruments of data collection includes both primary and secondary : structured questionnaire 5 sections demographics, empowerment indicators 15 items 5-point Likert across 3 dimensions, poverty indicators, project participation, and constraints. KII guide semi-structured on FCA functionality, funding, and governance post-2015; FGD guide on collective action, LGA linkage, and sustainability. Secondary data from NSFCO reports, World Bank documents, NBS etc.

Ethical approval obtained from Department of Political Science and International Relations University of Abuja, and informed consent of respondents. Participation was voluntary, anonymity and confidentiality assured. Limitations recall bias for 2015 baseline minimized via triangulation with secondary data and KIIs; findings specific to Niger State not generalizable to all Fadama states.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

THEME 1: EMPOWERMENT AS CONTROL - PSYCHOLOGICAL AND ORGANISATIONAL GAINS BUT WEAK COMMUNITY POWER

Table 1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (n=240)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	158	65.8%
	Female	82	34.2%
Age	36-50 years	108	45.0%
Education	At least primary	165	68.8%
Participation	5-6 years	149	62.1%

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Analysis shows 240 questionnaires retrieved 100% response. Table 1 shows male dominance (65.8%), indicating gendered power relations in FCA leadership similar to Suleiman et al. (2023) Kaduna study. Majority are economically active (45% aged 36-50) and literate (68.8% at least primary) which is important for participation in CDD programmes that require book keeping and proposal writing. Full cycle participation (62.1%) shows sample has adequate exposure to intervention.

Table 2: Level of Empowerment Index (n=240)

Level	Frequency	Percentage
Low (0-49%)	68	28.3%
Moderate (50-74%)	100	41.7%
High (75-100%)	72	30.0%
Total (Moderate-High)	172	71.7%

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 2 reveals 71.7% retained moderate-high empowerment eight years after closure, higher than 45% reported by Ogunbameru et al. (2013) for Fadama II in Yobe, possibly due to stronger financial management training in Fadama III. Psychologically, beneficiaries reported increased confidence. Organizationally, FCA Chairman Bida stated: Before Fadama we waited for government. Now we can write proposals [KII, Bida, 12/02/2025]. However, 28.3% low empowerment is attributed to collapse of FUGs after 2015 and lack follow-up funding, corroborating Mansuri (2023) uneven gains without institutional anchoring. Crucially, community empowerment dimension was weakest - only 35% reported interaction with Local Government on development, revealing power gap.

THEME 2: EMPOWERMENT-POVERTY NEXUS - DOES EMPOWERMENT ACTUALLY REDUCE POVERTY?

Table 3: Poverty Indicators Change 2015 Baseline vs 2025

Indicator	2015	2025	Change
Mean annual income	N285,400	N376,728	+32.0% nominal
Asset ownership 3+ assets	89 (37.1%)	142 (59.2%)	+22.1 percentage points
Food secure households	104 (43.3%)	161 (67.1%)	+23.8 percentage points

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 3 confirms poverty improvement. Income, assets and food security gains align with Nkonya et al. (2008) and Oladele (2022) who found 20-34% income gains during implementation. However, real income gain adjusted for inflation is estimated at 8-10% as FGD Minna noted: Our income is higher but diesel and fertilizer are too expensive now [FGD, Minna, 18/02/2025]. Food security improvement of 23.8 points is substantive.

Table 4: Binary Logistic Regression on Poverty Reduction.

Variable	B	S.E	Wald	p-value	OR	95% CI
Empowerment Index	0.824	0.212	15.11	.001	2.28	1.50-3.46
Training access	0.612	0.255	5.76	.016	1.84	1.12-3.03
Years of participation	0.345	0.158	4.77	.029	1.41	1.04-1.92
Education	0.287	0.130	4.70	.030	1.33	1.03-1.72
Gender	-0.198	0.244	0.65	.419	0.82	0.51-1.32
Market access	0.421	0.266	2.50	.115	1.52	0.90-2.56

Source: SPSS Output, 2025

Table 4 shows Logistic regression model significant χ^2 (6) = 48.32 p<.001 Nagelkerke R^2 .234 correct classification 71.3%. Empowerment Index B=0.824 SE=0.212 Wald=15.11 p<.001 OR=2.28 95%CI 1.50-3.46 meaning one-unit increase empowerment score odds poverty reduction increased 128%. Access to training B=0.612 p=.016 OR=1.84, years participation B=0.345 p=.029 OR=1.41, education B=0.287 p=.030 OR=1.33 significant. Gender B=-0.198 p=.419 OR=0.82 and market access B=0.421 p=.115 OR=1.52 not significant. Therefore, null hypothesis rejected: empowerment has significant effect on poverty reduction supporting Zimmerman (2000) and Wong (2023). FCAs as empowerment vehicles actually reduced poverty while beneficiaries remained empowered, with training and duration amplifying the effect. However, community empowerment was weakest in LGA linkage (35.0%), suggesting that empowerment without a genuine shift in power relations cannot sustain poverty reduction beyond the project life.

THEME 3: POLITICS OF EMPOWERMENT AS ANALYTICAL LENS

Table 5: Constraints to Sustainability

Constraint	Frequency	Percentage
Inadequate post-project funding	186	77.5%
Weak linkage with Local Government	154	64.2%
Limited market access	143	59.6%
Insecurity (banditry)	121	50.4%
Poor infrastructure	108	45.0%

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 5 shows how power relations shape development intervention as dominant constraints are funding collapse (77.5%) because Fadama III provided direct grants, withdrawal in 2015 left FCAs without operational funds. Weak LGA linkage (64.2%) reveals political dimension. FCA secretary Lavun stated: "After Fadama ended, Local Government did not recognize us. We are not in their budget. So, we depend on contributions which members cannot pay [KII, Lavun, 22/02/2025]". This confirms Olowu (2023) CDD creates parallel structures not integrated into LGA systems threatening sustainability. Insecurity in Borgu and Kontagora cited banditry disrupted farming and markets since 2020 eroding gains (UNHCR, 2023).

Politics of empowerment lens shows three power dynamics: First organizational power retained (71.7% moderate-high) but community power lost due to non-recognition by LGA power structure. Second market power weak - despite empowerment, market access not significant predictor ($p=.115$) indicating FCAs lack bargaining power against aggregators. Third gendered power - male dominance 65.8% and gender not significant suggests women empowerment gains limited. Thus, empowerment translated into poverty reduction at individual level but collective sustainability threatened because decentralization did not alter formal governance architecture. FCAs remain informal, unfunded, unrecognized, explaining fragility. This is central theoretical insight: empowerment without institutionalized power transfer cannot guarantee sustainable poverty reduction.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concludes that empowerment component of Fadama III had significant positive effect on capacity of FCAs and poverty reduction during post-closure period 2016-2025. The CDD approach succeeded in building human and organizational capital translating into livelihood outcomes confirming Zimmerman that psychological and organizational empowerment can reduce poverty. However, gains are fragile and politically constrained, threatened by weak institutionalization, lack of sustained funding, and insecurity. Failure

to integrate FCAs into formal local governance structure and absence of sustained financing limits durability. Thus; research affirms that empowerment without institutional anchoring and power shift cannot guarantee sustainable poverty reduction. Findings align with Mansuri (2023) that CDD improves income modestly but governance effects weak after donor exit.

The study recommends as follows;

1. Institutionalization of FCAs within LGA Structure: Niger State Government should formally recognize FCAs as sub-LGA development committees and include in annual planning and budgeting providing legal financial basis aligning Olowu (2023). This addresses 64.2% weak LGA linkage and moves from parallel to embedded structure.

2. Establishment of Fadama Sustainability Fund: State and LGAs should create revolving fund for small grants and technical support for post-Fadama activities, addressing funding gap of 77.5% and preventing organizational collapse.

3. Strengthened Market Linkages and Infrastructure: State Ministry of Agriculture should link FCAs to aggregators and off-takers under Anchor Borrowers Programme as per IFAD (2023) and rehabilitate feeder roads and storage to address 59.6% market constraint and make market access significant predictor.

4. Continuous Capacity Building: National Fadama Coordination Office and ADP should provide periodic refresher training on proposal writing and financial management addressing skill decay and enhancing training effect (OR 1.84).

5. Addressing Insecurity in Rural Areas: Government should improve security in Borgu, Kontagora zones to protect farming livelihoods and prevent erosion of gains due to banditry (50.4%).

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