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CONSTRAINTS ON BUDGETARY PROCESS, AND EFFORTS OF EBONYI STATE GOVERNMENT AT AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

The idea of agricultural development evolved over the years as man sort to sustain life and expand farm production for sustenance and better economic earning. Therefore, agricultural development is central and strategic to economic and national development of Nigeria. Despite the strategic contribution of agriculture to Nigerian economy and national development, agriculture has remained with daunting challenges of poor government and budgetary attention. The general objective of this study is to investigate and analyse the efforts and constraints of budgetary process on agricultural development in Ebonyi State. The paper was anchored on structural-functionalism theory, to understand the place of institutions of government in spurring agricultural development in Ebonyi State. Data for the study were collected from questionnaire, in-depth interview from a sample of 399, while secondary data were collected from documents of Ebonyi State government on budgetary allocations to agricultural sector. Findings revealed that Ebonyi State government had made conscious efforts at using budgetary process for agricultural development. However, poor fund allocations, fund releases, legislative oversights, and corruption are constraints on budgetary process in enhancing agricultural development in Ebonyi State. It was recommended, among other things, that Ebonyi State government should invest more in agricultural mechanisation through adequate budget releases for agricultural development.

Keyword: Budget, Budgetary process, Development, Agriculture, Agricultural development

Introduction

The idea of agricultural development evolved over the years as man sort to sustain life and expand farm production for sustenance and better economic earning. Therefore, agricultural development is central and strategic to economic and national development of Nigeria. Despite the strategic contribution of agriculture to Nigerian economy and national development, agriculture has remained with daunting challenges of poor government and budgetary attention. At the first quarter of 2020, agriculture contributed approximately 22% to GDP. But only ₦40 billion was appropriated for agricultural research and development in 2019.

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Budget for agriculture was 1.8% or (₦183 billion) of total budget size in 2020, below 10% recommendation of African Union (AU) at Maputo in 2003, otherwise known as "Maputo Declaration". Nigeria's food imports between 2016-2019 was ₦3.35 trillion, far higher than the exports within the same period. Nigerians spent about ₦22.8 trillion on food items in 2019, 56.7% of household expenditure of ₦40.2 trillion of the same year (Oyaniron, 2020).

According to Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural development, in Oyaniron (2020), there was agricultural trade deficit in 2019 with imports exceeding exports by ₦689.7 billion compared to 2018 ₦549.3 billion. The agricultural imports increased by 12.7% from ₦851.6 billion to ₦959.5 billion between 2018 and 2019. The contribution of agriculture in total export was insignificant at 2%, compared to crude oil 76.5% in 2019. Agricultural export declined by 11% from ₦302.2 billion in 2018 to ₦269.8 billion in 2019 (Oyaniron, 2020). Federal government, in order to halt the trend, adopted agricultural programmes, like Farm Settlement Scheme (FSS), River Basin Development Authorities (RBDAs), Green Revolution, Agricultural Development Programmes (ADP) etc, to spur agricultural and economic development (Ogbodo, 2019).

Similarly, Ebonyi State government intervened in agricultural development by selecting and training youths in agricultural production at Songhai Agricultural Centre in Benin Republic, establishment of rice mills with parboiling plants, provision of start-off loans, procurement and distribution of tractors to farmers for farm production (Ebonyi State Ministry of Agriculture, 2015). Yet, agricultural development in Ebonyi State remains dysfunctional despite policy and budgetary interventions by the state government. Agriculture received 2.16% of the total capital expenditure of N62.397 billion naira in 2016 (Ebonyi State Budget, 2017). In 2017, agriculture was allocated ₦5,554,926,343 billion naira, or 4.366% of the total budget of ₦127.233 billion naira, with only 1.2% or ₦1,603,232,790 billion naira, released. In 2018, agriculture was allocated ₦6,153,472,000 billion, or 2.954% of the revised budget of ₦81,333,102,377.34k, only 2.31% was released (Ebonyi State Budget, 2020). This trend continued in 2019, 2020, and 2021 as agriculture received budgetary allocations of 2.83%, 2.11% and 1.62% respectively, of the total budgets (Ebonyi State Budget, 2020 & 2021). Thus the need to investigate the constraints on budgetary process and efforts of Ebonyi state government at using budgetary process for agricultural development. The following questions were relevant to guide the study; What are the efforts of Ebonyi State government at using budgetary process for agricultural development? What are the constraints on budgetary process to agricultural development in Ebonyi State? Therefore, the study proposed that Ebonyi State government had made no conscious efforts at using budgetary process for agricultural development. Again, that poor fund allocations, fund releases, legislative oversights, and corruption were constraints on budgetary process to agricultural development.

Statement of the Problem

Ebonyi State budgets from 2011 to 2021 showed that budgets to the agricultural sector remained poor compared to Maputo declaration that 10% of annual budgets be set aside for agricultural production. This problem raises more concern as the poor allocations were not completely released. Agricultural sector received less than 3% of the state annual budgets in 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014, and 2015, (Ebonyi State Budgets, 2011; 2012; 2013; 2014; & 2015). Ebonyi State government budgeted N2,184,224,663 in 2016; N1,603,232,970 in 2017; N6,153,472,000 in 2018; N1,879,613,815 in 2019; N1,301,627,684.36 in 2020; and N1,193,320,000 in 2021 respectively for agricultural sector ((Ebonyi State Budgets, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, &2021). The above statistics show that

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budgets to agricultural sector were less than 3% in 2016 and 2017, but in 2018, 2019, 2020, and 2021, it declined to less than 2%. The downward trend of budgetary allocation to agricultural sector might have exacerbated the level of food insecurity, unemployment, poverty, rural-urban migration etc, and directly impinged on economic development of the state by near zero contribution of agriculture to internally generated revenue. Agricultural sector contributed less than 18.94% of the expected revenue in 2018, 1.62% in 2019, and 0.059% in 2020 (Ebonyi State Budget Performance, 2020). This shows the State has not achieved her desire for robust agricultural development. Therefore, the need to examine the constraints on budgetary process and efforts of Ebonyi state government at using budgetary process for agricultural development.

Conceptualization

Budget

Budget is an essential tool of legislative control for accountability over the executive in the management of the programmes that received fund appropriation. Budget is a management tool, and an operational document that shows detailed expenditure items, the costs, the time, and the kind of results expected. It is a tool for national economic management, of which its surplus or deficit has far reaching implications for the stability of the economy as a whole. It is a tool for plan implementation. Annual budget is linked to national development plan, as the financial resources needed for the implementation of each phase of the national development plan are contained in the budget (Obadan, 2003). While Aliegba, (2017) defined budget as the most essential document government produces that drives its policy priorities. Budget is a major political document that is at the centre of the success of every government. It identifies and targets at government annual major concerns, focus, and direction. A budget is an exhaustive plan of intended expenditure and revenue for a set period of time, usually one year. The definitions did not significantly capture the purpose of this paper. The study defines budget as an annual financial and nonfinancial policy priorities or programmes of Ebonyi state government set out in an instrument that contains the receivable financial revenues and expenditures with the expected goals of enhancing agricultural development, that is prepared by the executive and approved by the State Assembly, signed into law by Ebonyi State governor.

Budgetary Process

The budgetary process involves budget conception, budget preparation, budget approval, budget execution, monitoring and control, and budget evaluation. These stages of budget process according to Obadan, (2003), lead to the appraisal of government activities in terms of their contributions to national objectives, the projection of governmental activities over an adequate period, usually January to December, in Nigeria; the determination of how these objectives can be attained with minimum resources; and the revision of the budget in the light of changing circumstances and experiences. Budgetary process is majorly political, as budget itself is a political instrument of decision making that relates to allocation of public resources, influenced by the interplay of government machineries, the executive, legislature, bureaucrats, and various stakeholders and interest groups affected by public expenditure.

Therefore, the study defines budgetary process to mean the allocation of funds, release of funds for programmes of Ebonyi State government and its legislative oversights geared towards

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enhancing agricultural production as contained in the approved annual budget for agricultural development programmes in Ebonyi State.

Development

Onyekpe (2004), defined development as a generic term that encapsulates the transformation of the economy, the state, and the society by achieving greater capacity to deal with the challenges of production and its expansion, political governance, administration, and organizing civil society into a community of people. This means development is seen as progress of society that directs its attention on improving society and its structures towards growth. It also shows that development can be seen as economic growth (production and expansion) and improvement of political and social structures of every society. That is, development occurs when the productive forces of agricultural production are improved and expanded.

Therefore, development in the study is the transformation of agriculture, the individual farmers and the farming communities in Ebonyi State from deprivation of budgetary allocation, agricultural education, improved seedlings, pesticides, herbicides, farm inputs, farm lands, research information, etc, to freedom of choice to access all the materials and technical know-how necessary, and required to achieve increased agricultural production that translates to increase in income, sustenance, and better community living in Ebonyi State.

Agriculture

Agriculture is a practice that is as old as man. The early people were involved in gathering of foods, fishing and hunting for sustenance and livelihood. According to Oyaniron, (2020), agriculture can be defined by identifying its four sectors in Nigeria: Crop production, fishing, livestock and forestry, with crop production accounting for about 87% of the total output, Livestock 8.1%, fishing 3.1%, and forestry 1.1%. Also, Harris, and Fuller (2014), saw agriculture as a process of landscape-scale food production. While, Aremu, (2014), defined agriculture as a way of life, an inherited dominant occupation that employs about 70% of Nigerians.

The study defines agriculture as the art, science, and business of rice and yam production as policy priority of Ebonyi State government, contained in the state annual budgets as intervention of government through budgetary processes of fund allocations, fund releases, and legislative oversights towards agricultural development in the State.

Agricultural Development

Agricultural development is an age long practice that started by man discovery of plants, herbs, nuts, seeds, fruits etc as edible things for livelihood and sustenance of life. Agricultural development is to address the challenges hindering agricultural practices, especially in rural areas. These challenges include, the soil condition, inadequate seeds supply, fertilizers, water irrigation, diseases, and weather conditions. Also, transportation is important in agricultural practice, as farm products are to be transported to markets for farmers to sale and make money. This makes roads and other physical infrastructure, like communication pertinent in agricultural practice. Therefore, overcoming these challenges call for agricultural development, hence government funding.

The study sees agricultural development beyond physical farming conditions. It means the use of budget allocations, budget releases, legislative oversights, by the Legislative and Executive arms of Ebonyi state government to enhance soil condition, provide adequate seed supplies, fertilizers,

research, technology, security, physical infrastructures, like good road network, water irrigation, communications, extension services, control diseases, and general support to farmers that lead to increased production and distribution of farm produce, especially rice and yam.

Therefore, agricultural development means in this paper the use of budget allocations, budget releases, and legislative oversights to enhance soil condition, provide adequate seed supplies, fertilizers, disease control, research, technology, security, physical infrastructures like good road network, water irrigation etc, and general support to farmers for increased agricultural production.

A review of previous works on the efforts of Ebonyi State government at using budgetary process for agricultural development showed that Ibeogu and Abah (2016) researched on the role of government in strengthening food security towards rural development by Ebonyi State Agricultural Development Programme (EB-ADP) from 2011 to 2015. The study was built around the diffusion model theory. The design for the study was survey research design. It was found that less than 80 % of the rural areas of Ebonyi State were still largely underdeveloped and farmers in the state lack access to credit facilities which affects their capacity to produce on commercial basis. It was equally found that the state's ADP has not really fulfilled its mandate in the area of helping rural farmers on the best method to be adopted in improving as well as enhancing agricultural productivity in the state. However, the study did not show the efforts of Ebonyi State government at making budgetary process tool for agricultural development in the State.

Similarly, Nnadozie, Oyediran, Njoku and Okoli (2015) examined the Nigerian agricultural cooperative and rural development in Ivo local government area of Ebonyi State. Descriptive research design was used in the study, with a population of 129,068 inhabitants. Data were analysed, using simple percentages and frequency counts. The result showed that challenges confronting agricultural cooperatives in Ivo local government area were low income, inadequate government interventions, and lack of adequate personnel, but it did not cover the assessment of the efforts of Ebonyi State government at using budgetary process for agricultural development.

Shuaibu (2014), studied rural development planning in Nigeria 1960 – 1999 to review the efforts of the government and their challenges towards agricultural development. Data were generated via secondary method, and were content analysed. Urban-bias approach was the theoretical basis of analysis. It was discovered that democratic government in Nigeria has failed to evolve programmes and policies that would address the plethora of needs of the rural population. The author reviewed government planned programmes and challenges towards rural development, but not the efforts of Ebonyi State government at using budgetary process for agricultural development in Ebonyi State.

Also, the literature on the constraints on budgetary process in agricultural development revealed that Omini, Ofana, and Effiong (2016), studied the constraints to agricultural development in Nigeria from 1970 to 2010 with the aim to discover major hindrances to the development of agriculture in Nigeria within the study period. Descriptive design and econometric approaches of unit root, co-integration, and error correction mechanisms were applied in the study. Jacque Bera normality test was used to re-assess the constraints to agricultural development in Nigeria. It was discovered that rainfall, food exports and exchange rate constitute most significantly, the positive determinants of agricultural output in Nigeria. Also the study found major constraints to agricultural development in Nigeria to include diversion of funds for agriculture, and food imports.

Garuba and Oghuma, (2018) reviewed the Nigeria budgeting process, focusing on the challenging roles of the legislature from 2012 -2016. Data were collected via primary, and secondary sources.

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The study revealed an increase in the involvement of the legislature in budgetary process amid daunting challenges, and poor implementation of budgets over the reviewed period. The authors studied the challenging roles of the legislature in Nigeria budgetary process, and not the constraints on budgetary process on agricultural development in Ebonyi state.

Omoniji, Toluwase, Oludayo and Uche (2014) studied the implication for Agricultural Development Programmes (ADP) on rural dwellers in Nigeria, focusing on Isan-Ekiti, Ekiti State. Structured questionnaire was used for data collation, and data analysed using descriptive statistics, percentages, frequency distribution, graphical illustration, pictorial representation and regression approach. Study hypotheses were tested with linear regression analytical tool. The result showed that agricultural development programmes assessed, impacted positively in increasing agricultural production, due to increase in the provision of fertilizers, pesticides, improved seedlings, and enhanced infrastructure, but this did show the impact of Agricultural development programmes on rural dwellers of Isan-Ekiti, Ekiti State, but not the constraints on budgetary process.

Theoretical Framework

Structural-Functionalism Theory

Structural-functionalism theory of Gabriel Almond is at state-level of analysis and institutionalism paradigm. According to Davies and Lewis, cited in Nitisha (2020), structural functional analysis originated from the biological and mechanical sciences. But, was developed in social sciences as a model of sociological analysis by Talcott Parsons. Other scholars of this theory include, David Easton, Emile Durkheim (1858 – 1917), Radcliffe-Brown (1881-1955), Bronislaw Malinowski (1884-1947), among others, whose works were on comparative political systems of nation-states. The theory assumed more impetus with Gabriel Almond structural-functionalism approach in 1970 with a perspective that, to understand any political system, there is need to understand not only the structural components, like the political parties, executives, the legislatures, the judiciary, and the bureaucracies, but, to understand their respective functions. The major postulations of structural-functionalism theory are that: There are structures in all political systems, whether simple or complex across the globe. The developed societies of the West have complex political structures, while the developing countries have simple political structures. All systems perform mostly the same political functions, irrespective of differences among the systems and structures. Political structures in practice perform multi-functions whether specialised, non-specialised, or primitive. The culture of any political system is a mixture of modern and traditional cultures. There cannot exist any all-modern or all-primitive culture. This theory will aid in understanding the efforts of various institutions and agencies of government at using budgetary process for agricultural development, and the inherent constraints in Ebonyi State. The theory was used to assess how Ebonyi State House of Assembly performed its functions of funds allocation, and oversights to agricultural sector and the efforts of executive arm at releasing funds and implementing policy programmes for agricultural development in Ebonyi State.

Research Methodology

The study used survey and historical research designs. The population was 643,688; with sample size of 399 respondents, determined using Krejcie and Morgan formula, drawn from inhabitants of Abakaliki, Ikwo, and Ivo Local Government Areas. Also, from the Budget Office, the Rural Development Office, Auditor-General Office, and State House of Assembly. The primary data were

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collected by administering questionnaire to 399 respondents, of which 370 were returned, and interviewing 7 key-informants using in-depth interview method. Data from questionnaire were analysed using percentages and frequencies, while data from in-depth interview were analysed using narrative technique, and secondary data were content analysed.

Data Presentation, Analysis and Discussion of Findings

Table 1: Opinions of respondents on efforts of Ebonyi State government at using budgetary process for agricultural development are presented as follows:

Variables/Questions	Strongly Agree(SA)	Agree (A)	Undecided (UD)	Disagree (D)	Strongly Disagree	Total (100%)
1. Ebonyi State allocates funds for establishment of water irrigation.	36(10.3%)	108(29.2%)	21(5.7%)	184(49.7%)	19(5.1%)	370(100%)
2. state government acquired and distributed farm implements for rice and yam cultivation	68(18.4%)	137(37%)	18(4.9%)	115(31.1%)	32(8.6%)	370(100%)
3. House of Assembly ensures fertilizer availability to farmers through oversight	20(5.4%)	53((14.3%)	190(51.4%)	61(16.5%)	46(12.4%)	370(100%)
4. Government budgets for nursery farms for distribution of improved rice and yam seedlings.	21(5.7%)	238(64.3%)	12(3.2%)	70(19%)	29(7.8%)	370(100%)
5.State Assembly allocates 10% annual budgets for agricultural development.	30(8.1%)	80(21.6%)	21(5.7%)	69(18.6%)	170(46%)	370(100%)

Question 1, in Table 1 shows that 184(49.7%) of the respondents disagreed that Ebonyi State government allocates funds for the establishment of water irrigation facilities for agricultural production, while 19(5.1%) of the respondents strongly disagreed; but, 108(29.2%) agreed with the statement. The Table, also, shows that 137(37%) of the respondents affirmed that through budgetary allocation, government acquired and distributed farm implements for cultivation of rice and yam crops in Ebonyi State; while 32(8.6%) of the respondents strongly disagreed, but, 18(4.9%) of the respondents were undecided. The Table further reveals in question 3, that majority of the respondents 190(51.4%) were undecided on whether the State Assembly ensured availability of fertilizers to the farmers through budget oversights. Data in question 4 of Table 1, shows that majority of the respondents 238(64.3%) agreed that government budgets for the establishment of nursery farms in local government areas, for distribution of improved rice and yam seedlings to farmers in the state, 70(19%) disagreed, while 12(3.2%) of the respondents were undecided. Also, question 5 of the Table shows majority of the respondents 170(46%) strongly disagreed that the State Assembly allocated 10% of the annual budgets for agricultural development in the state, while 30(8.1%) of the respondents strongly agreed, but, 21(5.7%) of the respondents were undecided. The

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opinions of in-depth interviewees; Excerpts: Nwokpor: The state government made enormous efforts developing agriculture, by assisting rice farmers with improved seedlings, pest control chemicals, and up to helping in rice milling. The efforts of Ebonyi State government, especially the present government of Dave Nweze Umahi, made many rice farmers to develop enormous capacity in rice production in the State. Nwankwo: The State government had been assisting farmers through budgetary process especially in the area of farm infrastructures, like the maintenance and construction of rural roads. Those roads help farmers to bring agricultural produce to urban markets to sale, which ensure better income. Ochada: The efforts of the government in human development in agriculture had given rise to a lot of farming activities, and the resultant bumper harvest in the State. The farmers had benefited from the trainings on modern farming methods organised by the state ministry of agriculture at various local government areas (Personnal Communication, 2023).

Findings from in-depth interview showed that Ebonyi State government had made efforts at using budgetary process for agricultural development especially in providing training, improved seedlings, farm infrastructure, rural roads etc.

The result from the primary sources of data in the study is slightly related to the findings of previous studies in the areas of issues covered and findings. Ibeogu and Abah (2016) found that less than 80% of the rural areas of Ebonyi State were still underdeveloped, as the farmers lack access to credit facilities, which affected their capacity for commercial production. Also, ADP, failed to fulfil its mandate in assisting rural farmers to understand best methods in improving, and enhancing agricultural productivity in the State, thereby continuing the challenges of food insecurity. The findings align with the intent of the findings of the study, that Ebonyi State government does not allocate funds for the establishment of water irrigation facilities for agricultural production, and that, it is not clear whether the State Assembly ensured the availability of fertilizer to farmers through budget oversights. While, Nnadozie, Oyediran, Njoku and Okoli (2015) found that the challenges facing agricultural cooperatives in Ivo local government area were low income, inadequate government interventions and lack of adequate personnel. Also, that agricultural cooperatives in the local government area were not effective in supporting agricultural production. These findings differ significantly from the findings of the study.

Shuaibu (2014), analysed rural development planning in Nigeria 1960 – 1999 and found among other things that democratic government in Nigeria failed to evolve programmes and policies that would address the plethora of needs of the rural population which is different from the findings of the study, while findings by Deneji (2011) showed that the various agricultural and rural development policies and programmes in Nigeria were developed and implemented by successive regimes in the country from 1960 to 2011, with the intention to enhance agricultural production, and achieve self-sufficiency in agriculture. The findings are related to the findings of the study, that Ebonyi State government provided funds in budgets for the acquisition and distribution of farm implements for farm production; establishment of nursey farms for improved seedlings

Findings from the study have failed to support research proposition (i), showing that Ebonyi State government made efforts at using budgetary process for the development of agriculture in the State. This is because findings showed how Ebonyi State government provided money in the budgets for the establishment of nursey farms in local government areas, for distribution of improved rice and yam seedlings to farmers in the State. Also, it showed how Ebonyi State government acquired and distributed farm implements for rice and yam production from

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budgetary allocations to agriculture. Therefore, it implies that, with constant budgetary interventions in all facet of agricultural sector, the state economy could be sustained with agriculture, as jobs would be created, foods would be available for the teeming population, farmers' income would increase, rural-urban migration and poverty would be reduced.

The theoretical implication of the findings of this paper showed clear difference from the findings from the studies of Scholars like Shuaibu (2014), Ibeogu and Abah (2016), Deneji (2011), Nnadozie, Oyediran, Njoku and Okoli (2015), among others. The findings of the Scholars were not focused on the development of rice and yam production through budgetary process of budget allocations, releases, and legislative oversights on agricultural development in Ebonyi State. The findings of this study showed that Ebonyi State government had made some efforts at using budgetary process for agricultural development. Though those efforts did not include the establishment of water irrigation facilities, and allocation of 10% annual budget for agricultural production in Ebonyi State, which is oppressive and exploitative in intent. This finding has shown that the political structures- the executive, legislature, and the bureaucracy failed to perform their function of providing good governance to ensure agricultural development. Rather, farmers were allowed to depend on natural water resources, rainfalls, arbitrary distribution of fertilizers, and poor budgetary allocations for agricultural farming in Ebonyi State. Therefore, research proposition (i), Ebonyi State government had not made conscious efforts at using budgetary process for agricultural development is invalid.

Table 2: Opinions of respondents on constraints of budgetary process on agricultural development in Ebonyi State are presented as follows:

Variables/Questions	Strongly Agree(SA)	Agree (A)	Undecided (UD)	Disagree (D)	Strongly Disagree (S A)	Total (100%)
1. Poor allocation and release of funds can hinder establishment of nursery farms	80(21.6%)	209(56.5%)	34(9.2%)	27(7.3%)	20(5.4%)	370(100%)
2.Inadequate oversight hampers agricultural development	214(57.8%)	65(17.6%)	14(3.8%)	54(14.6%)	23(6.2%)	370(100%)
3. Diversion of funds for fertilizers, chemicals cause poor production	78(21%)	183((49.5%)	30(8.1%)	28(7.6%)	51(13.8%)	370(100%)
4. Connivance of executives and legislature cause poor oversight.	221(59.7%)	105(28.4%)	3(0.8%)	27(7.3%)	14(3.8%)	370(100%)
5. Poor allocations, releases, oversights and corruption cause poor budgetary performance	112(30.3%)	163(44%)	11(3%)	66(17.8%)	18(4.9%)	370(100%)

The data in question 1 of Table 2 show that majority of the respondents 209(56.5%) agreed that poor allocation and poor release of funds hindered the establishment of nursery farms for the distribution of improved rice and yam seedlings to farmers, while 20(5.4%) strongly disagreed.

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Table 2, further shows in question 2 that 214(57.8%) being majority of the respondents strongly agreed that lack of adequate legislative oversight on agricultural programmes hampered agricultural development, but 23(6.2%) strongly disagreed, while 14(3.8%) were undecided. Also, question 3, of the Table, reveals majority of the respondents 183(49.5%) agreed that diversion of funds for procurement of fertilizers and chemicals for pest control caused poor agricultural production, while 28(7.6%) strongly disagreed. Again, question 4 reveals that 221(59.7%) of the respondents strongly agreed that executive and legislature connivance is the reason for poor budget oversight in Ebonyi State, while, 14(3.8%) strongly disagreed, 3(0.8%) were undecided. The majority of the respondents to question 5, 163(44%) agreed that poor budgetary allocations, releases, oversight, and corruption were major causes of poor performance of budgetary process on agricultural development in Ebonyi State.

The opinions of in-depth interviewees; Excerpts:

Ogbaga: The major constraint on budgetary process in enhancing agricultural development was the issue of corruption in the system, as the budgeted funds were not put to use for the purposes they were meant. Instead of acquiring farm implements and inputs for agricultural development with the money they end up in private pockets, thereby hampering development of the sector. Ikonta: Lack of Education is a challenge on budgetary process in enhancing agricultural development, since most farmers know nothing about what was budgeted, therefore could not ask questions as to the release or otherwise. Madu: The challenge is dearth of funds, that's the major constraint in developing agriculture. Funds allocated to agriculture in budgets were not enough to show any significant impact on agricultural development. To develop agriculture, farm infrastructures must be developed, which entails a lot of funds. When funds are available, farm implements would be provided and farmers trained on the use of such implements. Okpoko: The members of the House of Assembly constitute major drawback on budgetary process in enhancing agricultural development in the State. The State Assembly members abdicate their oversight functions on agricultural programmes to please the government, as most of the funds for agriculture were usually diverted to other things; thereby stagnating agricultural development (Personal communication, 2023).

Majority of the in-depth interviewees agreed that there were constraints of budgetary process in agricultural development; ranging from corruption, lack of education, dearth of funds, poor oversight function by the legislature which if tackled, would ensure agricultural development.

The results from the primary sources of this study slightly differ from the findings of previous studies. Findings by Omini, Ofana, and Effiong (2016) revealed that rainfall, food exports and exchange rate constitute most significantly, the positive determinants of agricultural output in Nigeria. Also, diversion of funds meant for agriculture, and food imports were major constraints to agricultural development in Nigeria. This is different from the finding of the study that poor allocation and release of funds hindered the establishment of nursey farms for the distribution of improved rice and yam seedlings to farmers. Garuba and Oghuma, (2018), found that there is increased involvement of the legislature in budgeting irrespective of some daunting challenges, and poor implementation of budgets over the period of the study. The findings of the study were similar to the findings that lack of adequate legislative oversight on agricultural programmes hampered agricultural development, and that diversion of funds for procurement of fertilizers and chemicals for pest control caused poor agricultural production in Ebonyi State. Again, Omoniji, Toluwase, Oludayo and Uche (2014) discovered that agricultural development programmes

reviewed, impacted positively in increasing agricultural production, due to increase in the provision of fertilizers, pesticides, improved seedlings, and enhanced infrastructure, which aligned with some findings of the study.

The findings from the study significantly support research proposition (ii) showing that poor fund allocations, fund releases, legislative oversights, and corruption are constraints on budgetary process in enhancing agricultural development in Ebonyi State. Findings also, showed how poor allocation and release of funds hindered the establishment of nursey farms for the distribution of improved rice and yam seedlings to farmers. This means with adequate fund allocations and releases agricultural development is realisable and sustainable. Findings also, showed lack of adequate budget/legislative oversight by the State Assembly on agricultural programmes hampered agricultural development and encourages corruption, laxity, incompetence, and negligence, which led to the failure of agricultural programmes, and were further exacerbated by diversion of funds for fertilizer, chemicals for pest control, leading to poor agricultural production. The theoretical outcome of this study showed clear difference from the findings of previous studies by other Scholars like Omini, Ofana, and Effiong (2016), Garuba and Oghuma, (2018), Omoniji, Toluwase, Oludayo and Uche (2014), among others. The findings of the Scholars were not focused on rice and yam production in relation to budgetary process of funds allocation, fund releases, and legislative oversight in Ebonyi State. The findings from the study unlike the previous studies clearly showed that poor fund allocations, fund releases, inadequate legislative oversights and corruption were constraints on budgetary process in enhancing agricultural development in Ebonyi State. Therefore, research proposition (ii), is valid.

Conclusion

This paper examined the budgetary process and agricultural development in the state looking at the efforts of government and challenges confronting them in enhancing robust agricultural production in Ebonyi State. The paper argued that improved budgetary allocations and releases are crucial to improvement in agricultural production in the state. The argument espoused in the paper agreed with the findings from questionnaire, in-depth interview and previous studies. Therefore, it is concluded that unless adequate budgetary allocations and releases are made by Ebonyi State government to the agricultural sector, with the corresponding oversight function of the legislature, agriculture in the State would continue to be underdeveloped, with the attendant challenges.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are important in this paper:

i. Ebonyi State government should invest more in agricultural mechanisation through adequate budget releases for agricultural development; and
ii. Ebonyi State House of Assembly should eradicate corruption among their members during oversight functions in order to minimise constraints on budgetary process in improving agricultural development in Ebonyi State.

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