



Original Research Article

Public policy and rural private sector development in Nigeria

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The rural private sector remains the basis upon which social development, healthcare service delivery, education and social security systems in rural areas rely. Nonetheless, this sector has often been neglected by policymakers in Nigeria. The purpose of this study was to examine public policy and rural private sector development in Nigeria, using the integrated rural development theory. This study seeks to answer the following research questions; What are the policies of women market access and pro-poor growth? In what ways can rural private sector development in Nigeria be compared to what is obtainable in China and Russia? What are the major challenges of the rural private sector development in Nigeria? The survey research design was adopted for this study and data were generated using both primary and secondary sources and analyzed using descriptive statistics. The findings of this study reveal that there is a significant relationship between public policy and rural private sector development in Nigeria; unnecessary control by the Nigeria government affects rural private sector development. This study recommends that barriers to formalization should be removed from rural areas and other sectors of the Nigerian economy and there is a need to adopt policies that allow more rural women to access the market. This study concludes that to achieve a better future for everyone, including rural dwellers by 2030, the Nigerian government should strengthen public-private dialogue/partnership. The government should partner the rural private sector to improve infrastructure in rural areas, make technologies available and promote agricultural value chains in the rural areas as done by some emerging nations.

Keywords: Agriculture, integrated rural development, Pro-poor growth, public-private dialogue.

INTRODUCTION

Background to the study

The private sector is one of the major contributors to economic growth in Nigeria. It plays a vital role in poverty reduction, job creation, and the attainment of sustainable development goals (SDGs). The rural private sector is a conglomeration of all profit-making activities that run in rural areas. It includes formal and informal businesses,

individual and households that sell their labour, farms or produce goods and services. The rural private sector is the basis upon which social development, healthcare service delivery, education, and social security systems in rural areas can sufficiently rely (Wilton, 2014). Generally, a talk about the private sector in every economy is a talk about

the community at work; to influence economic, environmental, and social development in a more effectively and efficiently manner. The private sector remains more efficient and better at job creation than the public sector. Yet, it cannot act alone to deliver on its full potentials without the support of policymakers to create an enabling and secured environment. In the words of Wilson, "governments have the main responsibility to provide the legislative and regulating environment that enables businesses to play their parts. Vital issues such as open trade policy, sound and stable governance, infrastructure investment, economic and monetary policy, tax and social protection structures, and the cost of doing business must be balanced by governments in a way that gives the rural private sector the ability and incentive to act" (Wilson, 2014:1).

To reduce poverty, there has to be a policy designed to address the needs of residents of rural areas as well as maximize the contributions of the rural private sector to deliver pro-poor growth. Such policies should enhance or create an enabling environment for public-private dialogue (PPD). This will promote a better diagnosis of investment climate problems, build mutual trust and promote transparency in government (OECD, 2001). PPD will lay a solid foundation that will encourage capable private organizations to join the government in problem analysis, identification of policies and needed institutional reforms as well as strengthen local-private organizations in the interest of informal firms and workers in rural areas, without these big firms imposing their agendas on dialogue process to gain more attention than the constituencies of the informal (small) firms (OECD, 2007). This paper is concerned with public policy and rural private sector development in Nigeria. It explains some policies of rural private sector development and how rural private sector development can enhance pro-poor growth in the country.

List of abbreviations

DTI -Department of Trade and Industry

IFPRI -International Food Policy Research Institute

IRD -Integrated Rural Development

METI -Ministry of Economic Trade and Industry

OECD -Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development

PPD -Public-private Dialogue

PPP -Public-private Partnership

SDGs -Sustainable Development Goals

SMEs -Small and Medium Scale Enterprises

UN -United Nations

USAID -United States Agency for International Development

Statement of the problem

Going by the United Nations (UN) SDGs, which is a blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for everyone by 2030, the government alone cannot handle the promotion of sustainable development. Hence, there is

the need to incorporate the private sector, which can provide some services and technologies more effectively than the government, into the development plans (Kaplan et al., 2019). Many developed nations have leveraged on the opportunities created by PPD and partnership to improve their economies as well as the living standard of their citizens. For instance, Germany established the Agency for Business and Economic Development in 2016, to serve as an interface between the government and the private sector. From 2016, there has been great improvement in agriculture in rural areas as private companies in the country contribute immensely to the provision of technologies, know-how, as well as promote agricultural value chain (Federal Ministry for Economic Development, N.d).

Nigeria still depends on crude-oil export, even as there are indications that oil prices will crash drastically soon, as automobile and other manufacturers of crude-oil consuming machines are making serious efforts to reduce crude-oil consumption. The country is yet to tap from the wealth of potentials that lie within rural areas. Oil dependency has affected food security and is responsible for subsistence-oriented agricultural production, poverty, and hunger in many regions (Etim et al., 2017a; Etim et al., 2017b; Ekuri and Etim, 2017). Many rural farmers in Nigeria operates on small landholdings, these farmers lack adequate access to infrastructures, modern technologies, and know-how. It is important for Nigeria, as a country, to learn from achievers like China and Russia in this regards. There is an urgent need for rural private sector development in the country. To this end, the government should partner with private sectors to fast-track the availability of infrastructures, technologies, know-how, and increase investment and capital in the rural economy. Several studies have been conducted on public policy and private sector development. For instance, Hilhorst et al. (2008) in their study, made attempts to answer the big question: what can rural local governments contribute to private sector development? Tersoo (2013). Investigated agribusiness as a veritable tool for rural development in Nigeria. Kolawole and Omobitan (2014) examined some of the determinants of private sector performance in Nigeria. Innovative agricultural policy and rural poverty reduction in Nigeria (Ajulor and Etim, 2019). However, these studies have not made any case for rural private sectors in the country. This study is concerned with public policy and rural private sector development in Nigeria. From the review of extant literature, it was observed that there has been no stock of recent theoretical and empirical developments links to public policy and rural private sector development in Nigeria with emphasis on the removal of barriers to formalization, women market access enhancement, competitive rural market policy implementation and PPD. This study seeks is to explain the role of public policy in rural private sector development in Nigeria. The study will;

a. Examine some policies of women market access and pro-poor growth in Nigeria,

- b. compare rural private sector development policies in China and Russia,
- c. x-ray some of the challenges of rural private sector development in Nigeria.

Research questions

- i. What are the policies of women market access and pro-poor growth?
- ii. In what ways can rural private sector development in Nigeria be compared to what is obtainable in China and Russia?
- iii. What are the major challenges of rural private sector development in Nigeria?

Conceptual explanations

Public policy

Dye (1972)'s definition of public policy as "what government chooses to do and what it chooses not to do" remains the shortest, best known, and most criticized definition of the concept. Other scholars that have to lend their support to the conceptualization of public policy include Laswell that saw the concept as multidisciplinary, problem-solving, and explicitly normative (Ajulor, 2019). Public policy is the fundamental activity of governments, through which the framework within which individuals and corporations must function. It is through this framework that the government decides on the best approach to solving societal problems (Young, 2013). Anyebe (2018) see Dye's definition as mentioned earlier as making public policy look like a mere decision. In his words, "public policy should mean actual resources allocation presented by projects and programs designed to respond to perceived public problems and challenges requiring government action for their solution". The success of government can be measure by the strength of its policies and how well those policies have been implemented to solve societal challenges and improve the people's living standards.

Rural private sector development

The private sector is part of the economy that is not owned and controlled by the government. The private sector is usually operated for profit-making purposes and provides about 90% of both formal and informal employment in developing countries.

"Since the start of reform and opening up, private sector enterprises have played an important role in creating employment, tax revenue, and promoting economic development. In recent years, private-sector enterprises have become economic bright spots. Among the newly released top 500 Chinese enterprises in 2018, private-sector enterprises comprise 237, an increase of 11 over last year. At present, the total assets of the top 500 private-sector enterprises have exceeded 28 trillion yuan (\$4 trillion), and the total net profit after taxes has exceeded 1

trillion yuan (\$144.5 billion) for the first time. A private-sector enterprise's flexible mechanism makes it easier for it to fit into the market and more effective in optimizing the industrial structure and promoting technological innovation, transformation, and upgrading. It is calculated that 65 per cent of China's patents, over 75 per cent of technological innovations, and more than 80 per cent of new product development is done by the private sector." (Maorong, 2018)

The private sector provides for the goods and services needs of the people and contributes to capital flow and tax revenues (Bella et al., 2013). The rural private sector is a conglomeration of all profit-making activities running in rural areas. This includes enterprises, organizations, and associations of varying sizes. According to World Bank (2003), "a competitive and innovative private-sector and well-functioning markets are critical to rural growth and structural change". Rural private sector development is, therefore, a conglomeration of strategies for promoting economic growth and poverty reduction in rural areas by building and promoting the functioning of private enterprises; as well as providing for a competitive market in rural areas.

Theoretical review

This study is situated within the integrated rural development (IRD) theory. There are several arguments in support and against IRD as an approach to sustainable rural development. However, IRD remains an important approach to development in many aspects due to its inherent synergistic and symbiotic potentials (Jacob, 2016). IRD explains that for rural areas to attend development, there should be an adequate mobilization of local, natural, and human resources with a focus on increasing agricultural production and improving the overall quality of rural life (Cohen, 1980). The different types of IRD, as identified in the literature include target-oriented, comprehensive and multi-sectional, decentralization, participatory/community base, and multi-sectoral infrastructure improvement. IRD became popular within the United Nations in the 1970s and 1975, there was a policy draft by World Bank to guide modernized rural society in the shift from "traditional isolation to integration within the national economy". This framework highlighted central leadership and coordination, decentralization and participation at the local level, research framing and technical assistance, and the establishment of effective intermediary organizations to help governments design and implement IRDs. IRD is relevant to the present study because it explains the role of government in rural development through a strategic partnership with relevant private organizations. Through integrated rural development it becomes easier to achieve a breakthrough in the fight against hunger, under-employment, and dependencies because the government will adequately dialogue with the private sector in rural sectoral development and the provision of better living standards

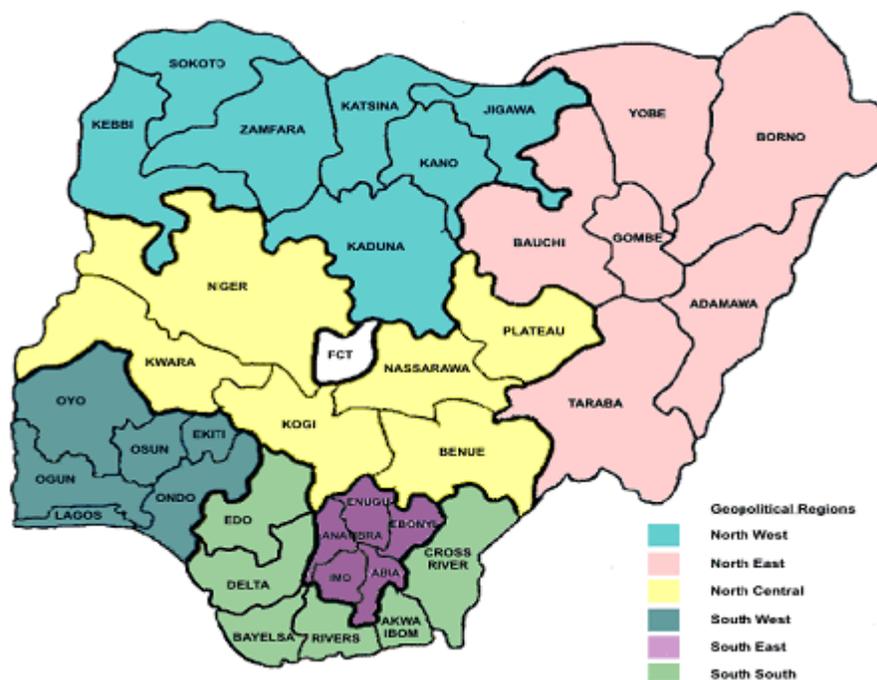


Figure 1: Map of Nigeria
Source: Shutterstock (2020)

from rural communities.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts the survey research design and the population of the study was drawn from six (6) states to represent the six geo-political zones in Nigeria (Figure 1). In Lagos State (South West) Ojo Local government (LGA); In Cross River State (South-South) Akpabuyo LGA was selected; In Enugu State (South East) Nsukka LGA was selected; Gombe State (North East) Gombe was selected; Kogi State (North Central) Dekina LGA was selected; Kano State (North West) Wudil LGA was selected. Three major factors led to the selection of the aforementioned LGAs and States. These factors include accessibility of data, the concentration of manufacturing and service industries (rural private sector) within the LGAs (both high and low), and pro-poor growth level within the states. As at the last population census conducted in Nigeria, the Lagos population stood at 9113605; Cross River has 2892988; Enugu has 3267837; Gombe has 2365040; Kogi has 3314043; while Kano has 9401288 (Figure 2). Adding up these figures gave a total of 30354801.

Taro Yamane’s formula for sample size determination ($n=N/(1+N(e)^2)$) was used to determine the sample size of 400 which was spread across the six (6) selected Local governments at 67 each. The instrument for data collection was the questionnaire. Interviews were conducted where necessary. Data were analyzed using both descriptive statistics and stated hypotheses were tested using

Person Moment Correlation Coefficient.

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N \cdot e^2} \dots\dots(1)$$

where *n* is the sample size, *N* is the population size, and *e* is the acceptable sampling error. For *N* between 20 and 40 million and *e* = 0.05 *n* is obtained approximately 400, which motivates the total number of people surveyed.

Empirical review: The nexus between public policy and rural private sector development in Nigeria

Lovachikova and Pervykh’s (2014) study indicates that business failure in rural areas and the rural private sectors’ under-development are brought about by underdeveloped public policy instruments, high taxes, excessive bureaucracy, and inadequate legislation. As a result, macro enterprises continue to flourish with a concentration in the metropolis. Surveys by DTI (2001) and METI (2002) revealed the need for industrial policies in both developed and developing economies to support the development of private-sector small and medium enterprises to reduce poverty. Earlier, Hohti (2000) established that small firms generate the majority of new jobs in both developed and developing economies. In like manner, Xinhua (2004) submits that the importance of rural private sector development to the overall development of the country has made the Chinese government focus more on rural economic development policies.

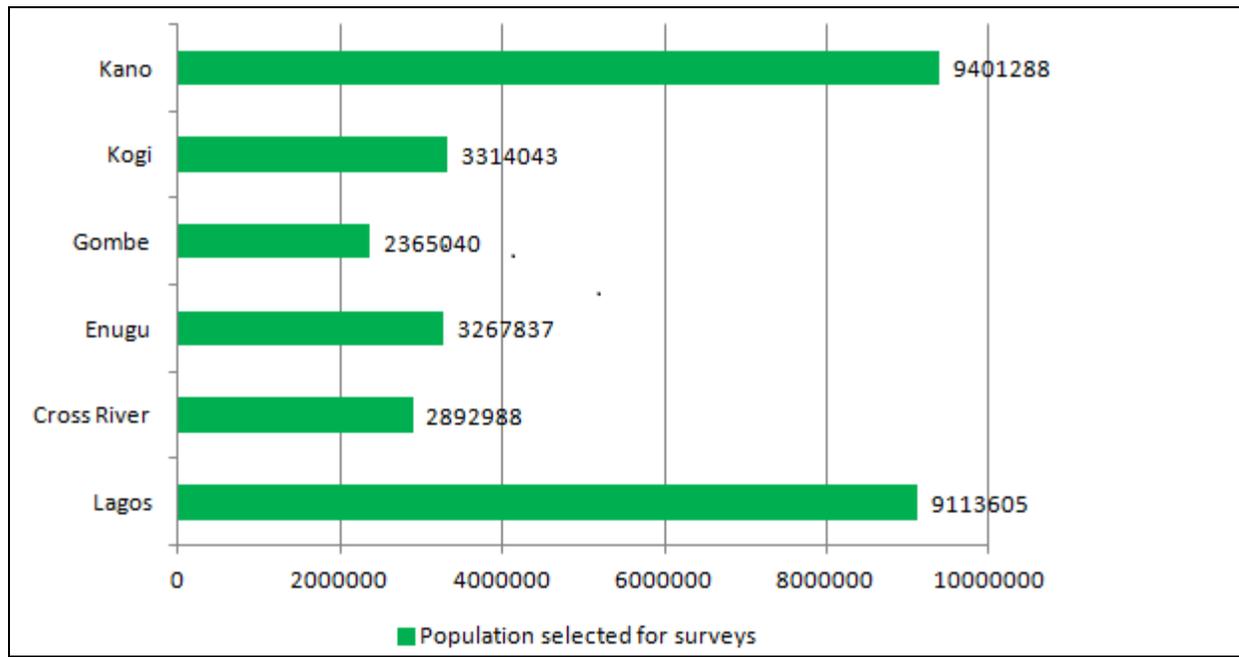


Figure 2: Populations of the regions of Nigeria in which the surveys were conducted.

Source: World Population Review (2020); Authors' compilation (2020)

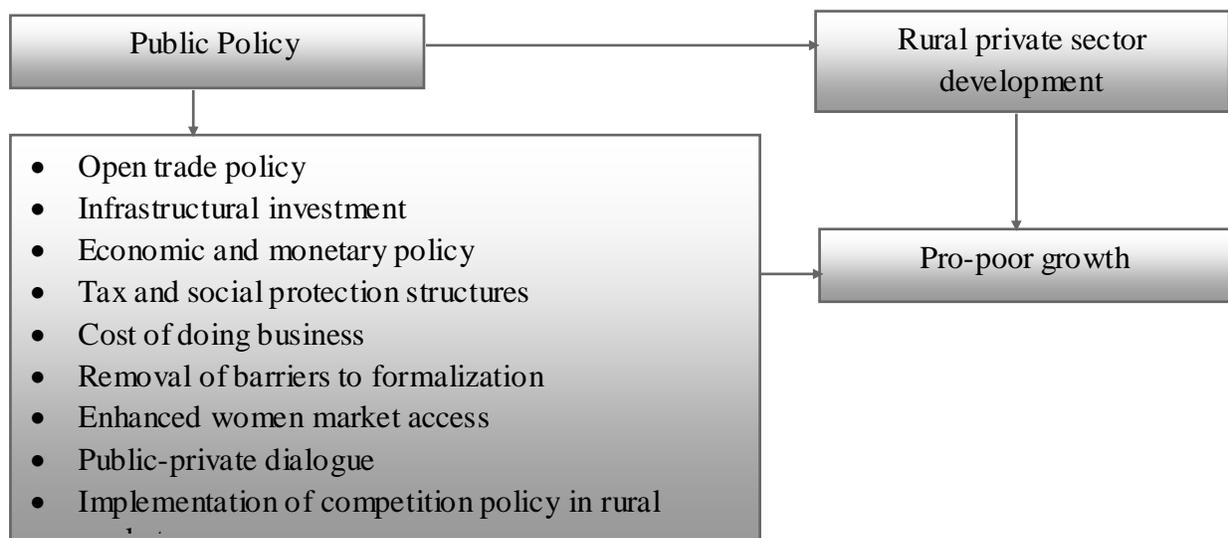


Figure 3: Public policy and rural private sector development

Source: Authors' compilation (2020).

In Haggard and Huang's words;

"Governments that create the appropriate conditions for private risk-taking foster capital accumulation, efficient allocation of resources, and sustained growth. Governments that arrogate "too much" economic activity to themselves risk low levels of investment, inefficiencies in the state sector, and defensive private strategies, such as capital flight and nonproductive investments" (Haggard and Huang, N.d).

From Figure 3 above, it is clear that public policy influences rural private sector development in Nigeria. The inclusion of certain barriers to formalization, poor infrastructural development in rural areas, poor economic and monetary policies, the cost of doing business in the rural area, the level of private-public dialogue, to mention a few, are determinants of pro-poor growth in Nigeria.

a. Removing barriers to formalizations: The informal economy in Nigeria forms a great part of the

economy and provides jobs to many people that are of the disadvantaged group. However, this economy alone cannot provide for a long term solution to reducing poverty. Therefore, there is a need to develop the informal private sector to be able to deliver sustainable growth and development with more stable jobs, higher-quality jobs, increased investors' confidence, better citizen-state contact, better tax, etc. (Ajulor and Etim, 2019). Below are some of the activities that are needed to remove barriers to formalization;

- The informal economy should be mainstreamed with national legislation.
- There should be appropriate macro-economic frameworks
- Administrative barriers like excessive paperwork, inefficiency, low level of civil service capacity, bureaucratic obstruction, abuse of position, etc. should be addressed (USAID, 2005).

b. Implementing competition policy in rural markets in Nigeria: Rural markets are growing faster in many developed and emerging markets of the world including Nigeria, Russia and China (Kapur et al., 2004). To achieve sustainable rural private sector growth, the government must implement policies that will transform the rural markets to become more competitive. These competitive rural markets should efficiently and effectively distribute goods and services in the interest of the poor (OECD, 2007). Here, the poor will have the opportunity to be employed or to start their own business. The government can partner with donor agencies to adopt appropriate competitive regimes through the provision of technical assistance as well as building the capacity of rural farmers and businessmen, and the strengthening of various institutions that are responsible for necessary law enforcement (Levenstein and Suslow, 2001). According to Tracey-White (2003), in an attempt to implement this competitive market policy, the government should;

- Provide for an adequate meeting point between rural farmers and traders
- Enforce strict hygiene policy
- Provide vocal point for rural activities
- Protect produce and reduce post-harvest losses.

Further, according to OECD (2007), "competitive firms find better ways to produce and distribute goods and services, innovate and drive lower productivity activities out of the markets to allocate resources to more productive users". The category of people that possibly can benefit from this kind of competition include, but are not limited to; farmers, entrepreneurs, and consumers in rural areas. The competition offers better prices for goods and services, better quality, increase in the standard of living, improved choice of inputs and products, to mention a few. Also, in the presence of innovation; knowledge about technologies, management techniques, and practices are enhanced through adequate business associations and the enablement of specialization and flexibility to improve productivity in rural private sectors. The knowledge gained

helps poor farmers and businesswomen to increase their productivity ratio.

c. Inclusive public-private dialogue (PPD): To improve rural private sector growth in Nigeria, the government should consult with private firms during policy development and implementation stages. PPD involves all forms of interactions between the government and the private sector during public policy design (OECD Development Centre Studies, 2007). The potential benefits of PPD are;

- It promotes better diagnosis of investment climate problems and design of policy reforms,
- It facilitates investment climate reforms,
- It makes policy reforms easier to implement,
- It promotes good governance and transparency,
- It builds mutual trust (USAID, 2005).

PPD should involve well-organized, capable, and accountable private organizations, and poor entrepreneurs. Here, donor organizations can strengthen private organizations at local levels in the interest of informal firms and workers without imposing their agendas on the dialogue process to gain more attention than the constituencies of these informal firms (OECD, 2007).

d. Incentives for entrepreneurship and investment: the rural private sector growth fosters pro-poor growth in the areas of entrepreneurship and investment. The duo contributes sufficiently to rising productive capacity, job creation, and technology application. PPD improves transparency in governance, improves property rights, and ensures adequate enforcement of contracts. Transparency, as mentioned earlier makes businesses less bureaucratic, corruption-free, and less expensive, with affordable infrastructure and financial services to private sectors. It also helps pro-poor farmers that operate with meagre savings.

FINDINGS

The challenges of rural private sector development in Nigeria

The result from Figure 4 shows that 51.95% of the respondents strongly agreed that unnecessary control by the government affects rural private sector growth in Nigeria, 41.56% agreed, 3.90% were undecided, while 2.60% disagreed. This shows clearly that unnecessary control affects rural private sector development in the country. As regards the lack of finance and credit, 53.25% strongly agreed, 41.54% agreed, 2.60% were undecided, 2.60% disagreed. This shows that the lack of finance and credit affects rural private sector growth in Nigeria. Also, on the low ratio of profit, 59.15% strongly agreed, 36.62% agreed, 4.23% were undecided, while none of the respondents disagreed. This shows that a low ratio of profit affects rural private sector development in Nigeria.

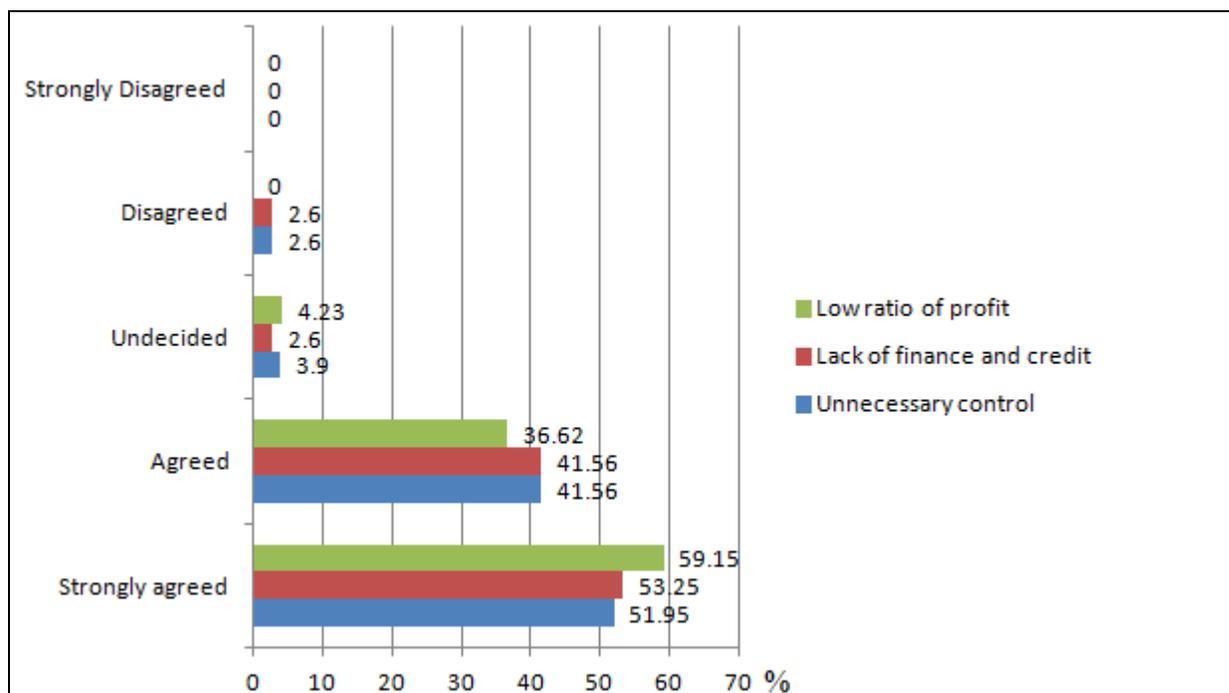


Figure 4: Distribution of answers to the survey

Source: Authors fieldwork (2019).

DISCUSSION

Women's market access and pro-poor growth in Nigeria

Over time, it has been discovered that smallholder farmers, especially women often lack access to profitable, value-added markets due to poor infrastructure and other challenges (Ripley, 2017). Poor farmers can be more productive with access to lucrative markets. Hence, to foster pro-poor growth, the government should provide for an enabling environment for farmers to sell profitably (Tsakok, 2018). This can be achieved through public-private partnerships (PPP). For instance, IFPRI argued that "there are also emerging opportunities for new PPP to improve infrastructural provision which can reduce transport and communication costs, and for cheaper information and communication (ICT) delivery in rural areas". Private sector development and partnership are vital to pro-poor growth in Nigeria.

In the words of OECD (2007), "Gender-specific exclusions and inadequacies stem mostly from biases, social norms, prohibitions and gender division of labour. The situation affects women and girls more than it affects boys and men. As a result, lower investments are made in the human capital of women and girls, and their access to labour, finance, goods and service markets are limited". This has been a clog in the wheel of institutional effectiveness and policy reforms which are supposed to be targeted at enhancing pro-poor growth in the country. It is important

to create an enabling environment for the removal of the barriers to women's participation in rural markets. Also, the process of developing interventions for rural private sector growth should be guided by gender analysis tools to take adequate stock and account of women's role as entrepreneurs, social actors, workers, and consumers.

Public-private partnership and rural private sector development in Russia and China

Two-third of Russian territory is occupied by rural residents. As of 2002, the total population of rural residents in Russia stood at 39.2million which represents 27% of the country's population (Patrick & Weingarten, 2004). The "emergence of privately owned peasant farms in the early 1990s was one of the most important reforms in Russia's agrarian sector" (Wegren, 2011). This success can be attributed to government policy as regards the strategic relationship with the private sector. However, in contrast to what was obtained in China, instead of stopping at enacting laws to become policy rationale for public support for small and medium-scale enterprises (SMEs) operating in the private sector, the Russian government went further to financially support the sector. The Russian government also supported nascent private farmers with selective incentives to spur the growth in the number of private farms between 1992 and 1994. In an attempt to expand its support for the rural private sector, the Russian government also implemented a policy of "freedom from land taxes for five years, free land acquisition, subsidized credit and a special

assistance program funded from the federal budget" (Wegren, 2011). It is specifically important to say, and according to Lovchikova and Pervykh (2014) that small businesses development, especially in Russian rural areas, remain a veritable instrument for economic growth and policies of the healthy competitive environment have proven critical for an increase in the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), life upgrading, employment as well as income growth in rural areas.

In China, there has been increasing participation of entrepreneurs in the political process mainly to protect and promote their economic interest via a strong relationship with authorities. A study conducted by Zhao (2004) shows that as of 2002, "17.4% of private entrepreneurs became representatives of the NPC and the proportion of party members to private entrepreneurs rose from 19.8% in 2000 to 29.9% in 2002". Having discovered that the activities of state-owned enterprises (SOEs) were insufficient in curtailing the increasing rate of unemployment in China, there was the need to substitute SOEs with private enterprises and as at 2003, the number of workers in private enterprises rose to 89.5 million and 20 million above the number of employees in SOEs. To enhance the activities of private sectors in China, the Chinese government enacted the SME promotion Law of 2003. This law became a policy rationale for public support for SMEs operating in the private sector, especially in rural areas (Atherton and Fairbanks, 2006). Earlier, there was also the emergence of the township and village enterprises (TVEs) to cater for rural private sectors. In the words of Tong (2001); "TVEs represented a major change in the structure of the domestic Chinese economy. The enterprises generated significant growth in rural areas through the second half of the 1980s and into the 1990s. it is on this note that Atherton and Smallbone (2013) summarized that rapid economic growth in China can be traced to the emergence of a vibrant private sector. He, however, pointed out that irrespective of governments' pronouncement in support of private sectors, public policy, and relevant institutions have not reflected or acted promptly to address most of the private sector needs. In China, the government has created room for the private sector to be tolerated through legislation, although business support is still lacking (Smallbone and Welter, 2009). Further, in 2015 Gurria presented an economic survey of China to Chinese officials. According to her, by 2020, the agricultural sector and rural income of China shall improve to accommodate the following groups of rural citizens that;

- a. Choose to stay in farming,
- b. Choose to leave farming,
- c. Will struggle to adjust to the transition of the rural economy.

Conclusion and the way forward

Evidence shows that to achieve a better future for everyone, including residents in rural areas by 2030, the Nigerian government has to strengthen the partnership

with, and the involvement of the private sector to improve infrastructure, make available technologies and know-how and promote agricultural value chains in rural areas as done by some emerging economies such as Russia and China. It has been established that in the presence of PPD and PPP, the government should provide for an enabling environment, through sound policies, for the private sector to flourish and fulfil its role as the main engine of growth in rural areas. This can be achieved through joint problem analysis, institutional reforms and the strengthening of local private organizations in the interest of informal firms and workers in rural areas, without allowing big organizations to impose their agendas on dialogue process to gain more attention than the constituencies of these informal firms. The following are suggested as a way forward;

- i. Barriers to formalization should be removed in rural areas and other sectors of the Nigerian economy
- ii. An enabling environment needs to be created to remove barriers to women's participation in markets in rural areas through an adequate policy framework.
- iii. There should be improved market access and functioning. This can be achieved through the provision of necessary infrastructures like goods and electricity in local producing communities.
- iv. There should be incentives for entrepreneurship and investment in rural areas in Nigeria

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interests regarding the publication of the paper.

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