

PUBLIC POLICY

State Capacity and Resource Starvation: Assessing the Impact of Policy Inconsistencies on Domestic Food Access and Infrastructure Resilience in Nigeria

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Abstract

Nigeria has launched several agricultural and climate-smart policies since 2016, yet food access has worsened. This article uses Van Meter and Van Horn's policy implementation model to examine how inconsistent policy and limited state capacity affect physical access to food and logistics. It draws on 20 in-depth interviews with officials and association representatives and two focus group discussions with smallholder farmers and food traders, all held in Abuja, read against budget and policy documents. Participants described funding that is thin and slow to be released, weak communication between agencies that hold climate data and those that hold agricultural budgets, and discontinuity between policy cycles. The move from the Agricultural Promotion Policy (2016–2020) to the National Agricultural Technology and Innovation Policy (2022–2027) is the main example, with planned cold hubs, irrigation and farm roads reported as stalled. Because both policies were launched under the same federal administration, the discontinuity is attributed to shifting appointments, ministerial priorities and policy-cycle gaps and not to a change of president alone. Without storage and transport, smallholders reported selling to intermediaries at low prices and losing produce, which traders linked to higher retail prices. The sample is small and Abuja-based, so findings are exploratory. The article recommends protecting multi-year capital projects, reporting budget performance against the 2003 Maputo target, a shared cross-agency data platform, and decentralised solar cold hubs and flood-resilient roads.

Keywords: food access; Nigeria; policy implementation; post-harvest infrastructure; state capacity

1 Introduction

Whether a state can put food within its citizens' reach is a basic test of institutional capacity. Under Sustainable Development Goal 2, governments are expected to build logistics that carry harvests from rural production areas to urban markets, even in extreme weather [1]. Across much of the Global South those plans stumble on institutional friction, thin budgets and sudden changes of direction.

Nigeria illustrates the problem. Between 2016 and 2025 the country saw a succession of national agricultural blueprints, each launched with some fanfare, and several were later under-funded, reshaped or left to lapse as ministerial leadership, institutional mandates and fiscal priorities shifted in Abuja [2], [3]. In 2003 African governments, Nigeria among them, pledged in the Maputo Declaration to devote at least 10% of national budgets to agriculture [4]. In the dissertation's series the federal share stayed between about 0.9% and 2% from 2015 to 2022 [5] (Table 2).

This article uses Van Meter and Van Horn's policy implementation model [6] to ask how inconsistent policy and limited state capacity affect physical access to food. Much agricultural research looks at yields or soils. The focus here is administrative: funding, coordination between agencies, and

continuity from one policy cycle to the next. The evidence comes from interviews with policy makers and focus groups with grassroots stakeholders in Abuja, read against budget and policy documents. The article is derived from the author's doctoral dissertation [7]; a companion article [8] examines the gendered side of the same fieldwork.

2 Research elaborations: State capacity and policy resources

Van Meter and Van Horn argue that even well-designed policies fail on the ground when implementing agencies are short of resources or disrupted by changes in leadership [6]. Their model links several variables: policy standards and objectives; resources; communication between organisations and enforcement activities; the characteristics and disposition of implementing agencies; and the surrounding economic, social and political conditions. This article uses four as its frame: resources, interorganisational communication, the continuity and disposition of implementing agencies, and the wider conditions in which they work.

The mechanism of interest is what the article calls resource starvation. A state that does not build flood-resilient roads, local energy supply and storage cannot shield its food chain from shocks. Harvests then sit in rural areas, exposed to heat and pests, while urban markets run short and prices rise. Following food access therefore means following the money, checking the condition of rural corridors, and watching how separate agencies behave when they act as silos. Other causes of implementation failure, corruption in particular, are discussed in the wider literature but were not examined directly in this study, and no claim is made about them.

3 Methodology

3.1 Design and participants

This is a qualitative case study of the regulatory and logistical links between Abuja and its surrounding farming belt. Participants were selected purposively [9], [10], since senior officials and informal market actors cannot be drawn from a ready sampling frame. Table 1 summarises who took part: 20 officials and staff of ten institutions interviewed individually, and two focus group discussions (FGDs) in Abuja, one with AFAN smallholders (FGD-1) and one with NANFT food traders (FGD-2). The 20 were drawn from a listed population of 201, taking roughly 10% from each institution, an allocation rule the dissertation takes from Black and Champion [11]; it is used here as a pragmatic quota within a purposive sample, not as probability sampling. FGD members were chosen for availability, accessibility and willingness to take part, and interviewees were required to have at least five years' experience in climate and food-security work.

Table 1. Fieldwork participants.

Code	Participants	n	Institutions / location	Date
IDI-01 to IDI-20	Officials and staff of ten institutions with at least five years' experience in climate and food-security work	20	Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security (2); Nigerian Meteorological Agency (2); National Council on Climate Change (2); Federal Ministry of Environment (2); National Agency for the Great Green Wall (2); Forestry Research Institute of Nigeria (2); International Fund for Agricultural Development (1); Centre for Environmental Sustainability and Development Awareness (1); All Farmers Association of Nigeria (3); National Association of Nigerian Food Traders (3). All in Abuja	May 2025– May 2026

Code	Participants	n	Institutions / location	Date
FGD-1	Smallholder farmers, members of the All Farmers Association of Nigeria (AFAN)	3–8	Youth Centre, Area 8, Abuja	2025–26
FGD-2	Food traders and merchants, National Association of Nigerian Food Traders (NANFT)	3–8	Abuja	2025–26

IDI = in-depth interview; FGD = focus group discussion. The same participant table appears in the companion article. Source: dissertation Table 3.1 and Appendix IV.

3.2 Data, analysis and ethics

The institutional guide covered afforestation and food availability, policy inconsistency and food access, climate awareness and affordability, and alignment with the UNFCCC; the FGD guide asked about land, transport, storage, middlemen and security. Fieldwork took place in Abuja between May 2025 and May 2026. Interviews averaged about 45 minutes and were recorded with permission. Responses were coded in phases aligned with the research questions and analysed thematically [12], then compared with budget and policy documents, chiefly the budget series in Table 2 and the policy documents cited in the text. Participants received an introduction letter from the Department of Political Science, Nasarawa State University, Keffi (5 October 2024) and were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. Participants are cited by code (IDI-n corresponds to “Participant n” in the dissertation; FGD-1, FGD-2), with titles generalised. Quotations were lightly edited for readability.

With only two FGDs and a single study site, the study cannot claim saturation in the strict sense [13]. The data are used to build an exploratory account of how implementation gaps are seen from the centre and from the ground, not to generalise to all of Nigeria.

4 Results or findings

4.1 Resources: Funding that is thin, late and volatile

Officers repeatedly said the agricultural sector has been neglected, with little investment in technology that would improve market access. Table 2 sets the federal agricultural share of the budget against the 10% Maputo target [4]. In the dissertation’s series, taken from ministry records [5], the share ran from 0.90% in 2015 to 2.01% in 2018 and 1.80% in 2022, never close to the target. Informants added that even when the national budget was expanded to respond to food insecurity [14], release of funds was slowed by central processing delays.

Table 2. Federal budget allocation to agriculture against the Maputo target.

Year	Agriculture share of federal budget (%)	Source document
2016	1.30	[5]
2017	1.80	[5]
2018	2.01	[5]
2019	1.56	[5]

Year	Agriculture share of federal budget (%)	Source document
2020	1.34	[5]
2021	1.37	[5]
2022	1.80	[5]

The Maputo target is 10% of national budgets. The series covers 2016–2022 as reported in the dissertation; later years are left out because published estimates for 2023–2025 vary widely.

Fiscal shocks made matters worse. One interviewee (IDI-08) said the total removal of the fuel subsidy had distorted how climate information shapes market prices, and IMF analysis describes how such adjustments, arriving alongside climate events, pushed spending toward short-term relief and away from long-term adaptation infrastructure [15].

4.2 Coordination: Data that does not reach budgets

Agencies such as the NCCC and the Nigerian Meteorological Agency (NiMet) produce risk data and seasonal forecasts, yet interviewees described weak coordination. One (IDI-06) put it this way:

“One of the major challenges to the integration of climate action into food security is the weak policy coordination around climate change, agriculture, environment, and food safety policies. The various ministries and agencies having interrelated functions are all working independently, often trapped in bureaucratic silos.”

The same interviewee added that the government lacks reliable data on the number of active small-scale farmers, the scale of investment or the results of climate-smart interventions, so progress cannot be measured. Another (IDI-01) said inadequate public funding for data infrastructure delays forecast delivery to small-scale farmers in remote areas. Rural areas are left with volatile food supplies, high transport costs and no local storage buffers, a pattern reported most strongly for the northern zones [3].

4.3 Continuity: Policy cycles that do not connect

Interviewees described discontinuity as a routine feature of public administration. One (IDI-02) said decades of poorly coordinated policy had taken a heavy toll on the agrifood sector, citing the government’s insensitivity to rural needs, under-capitalisation, the lack of local storage and the absence of credit lines for smallholders.

Earlier work on national poverty-reduction and food-security programmes points the same way, citing bureaucratic inefficiency, weak local government capacity and poor continuity [3]. The move from the Agricultural Promotion Policy (APP, 2016–2020) to the National Agricultural Technology and Innovation Policy (NATIP, 2022–2027) [2] is the clearest example. Interviewees said that the gap between the two stalled planned projects, including solar-powered cold hubs, small-scale irrigation and farm-to-market road rehabilitation [14], [16].

One point needs care. Both policies were launched under the same federal administration, so the stall cannot be explained by a change of president alone. Participants pointed instead to changing appointments, shifting ministerial priorities and the lag between policy cycles. The 2023 change of government may have added to the disruption of NATIP. The article therefore frames the problem as discontinuity between policy cycles and institutions, not simply as electoral turnover.

4.4 Wider conditions: Prices, floods and insecurity

These administrative gaps played out against a harsh economic backdrop. Food inflation passed 40% in 2024 [17], though the rebased series shows 13.12% for October 2025 [18], so the earlier figure describes the 2024 peak and not conditions at fieldwork. The dissertation cites FAO and OCHA figures that floods in the 2024/25 cycle inundated over 761,000 hectares of cropland in ten frontline states and that 33.1 million people were projected to face acute food insecurity [7]. Grassroots participants also raised local tension over shrinking farmland and grazing, which they linked to herder–farmer clashes and abandoned fields, in line with [16]. This was raised in passing and is reported as context, not as a finding.

4.5 What the gap looks like on the ground

AFAN participants (FGD-1) described how missing storage and rural roads turn weather shocks into losses:

“In our rural areas, bad roads, a complete lack of storage facilities, and poor electricity make it nearly impossible to transport our produce to the cities or preserve it from spoiling. ... Because we have no solar cold hubs or silos, our post-harvest losses routinely reach 30% to 40%, completely wasting the effort and money we spent on sustainable farming.”

A food trader in FGD-2 linked prices to weather and transport costs: maize that sold for ₦150 around 2020 now goes for ₦500 or more, which the trader attributed to smaller harvests, transport costs after the fuel subsidy removal, and farmers spending more on inputs. The 30–40% loss is the participants’ own estimate and is not generalised here.

Intermediaries featured in both FGDs. Participants said cooperatives without transport or cold storage are forced to sell to wealthy middlemen at very low prices to avoid spoilage, and that the middlemen then hoard stock and release it at inflated prices. This is participants’ account. The data show how missing storage and transport leave producers open to intermediaries; they do not show how common abusive practices are.

FGD-1 participants also reported distrust of state input schemes. Some said that a state-introduced variety of insect- and drought-resistant beans gave very low yields and did not suit local soils, and that many smallholders had therefore rejected state seed programmes. This is one group’s perception, and the article takes no position on the agronomic claim. What it does indicate is a loss of trust that can weaken uptake of future schemes [2].

Table 3. Implementation variables, participants’ accounts and effects on food access.

Variable	What participants described	Effect on food access	Evidence
Resources	Low and late agricultural funding; fiscal shocks diverting spending to relief	Extension, irrigation and storage not delivered	IDIs; Table 2
Interorganisational communication	Climate data not linked to agricultural budgets; directorates working separately	Early warning does not protect supply routes	IDI-01; IDI-06
Continuity and disposition of agencies	Changing appointments and priorities; gap between APP and NATIP	Capital projects stall; farmers’ trust falls	IDI-02; FGD-1

Variable	What participants described	Effect on food access	Evidence
Wider conditions	Fuel subsidy removal, currency depreciation, flooding, local tension	Higher transport and input costs; risk of abandoned fields	IDI-08; FGDs
Grassroots outcome	No storage, transport or credit	Distress sales, spoilage, price rises, fewer meals	FGD-1; FGD-2

Source: fieldwork in Abuja (dates as in Table 1); budget and policy documents as cited in the text.

5 Discussion

Read through the implementation model, the interviews and FGDs make food access look less like a weather story and more like an execution story, though the two interact. Resources arrive thin and late, the agencies that hold climate data are not tied to those that hold budgets, and projects do not survive the move from one policy cycle to the next. The effect at the grassroots is visible in missing storage and transport: perishable produce is sold cheaply, and prices climb further down the chain.

This matches analysts who find that agricultural interventions are undermined by bureaucratic inefficiency, irregular enforcement and weak green financing [3]. It does not show that execution failure is the only cause. Flooding, the end of the fuel subsidy and currency depreciation all affect prices, and a qualitative study of this size cannot separate their effects. What it can say is that when these shocks hit, the lack of local adaptive capacity, in the form of storage, roads and energy, left producers and consumers with little protection.

6 Recommendations

- 1. Protect multi-year capital projects across policy cycles.** Projects such as cold hubs, irrigation schemes and farm roads should carry funding commitments that survive a change of policy name or ministerial leadership. The FMAFS, the Federal Ministry of Finance and the National Assembly appropriation committees are the natural owners (Finding C).
- 2. Report budget performance against the Maputo target.** The Federal Ministry of Finance should publish yearly figures for appropriated and released agricultural funds so that shortfalls and delays can be seen and challenged (Finding A).
- 3. Link climate data to budgets through a shared platform.** A joint mandate from the Presidency and the FCT Minister should create an integrated digital dashboard connecting the NCCC, NiMet, the FMAFS and the FCT ARDS, so that early-warning data inform agricultural budgets and adaptation grants are tied to visible delivery of inputs and infrastructure (Finding B).
- 4. Build decentralised storage and resilient roads.** The FCT Administration, working with the FMAFS and the relevant works authorities, should prioritise off-grid solar cold hubs and flood-resilient farm-to-market roads, managed together with farmer cooperatives (Finding E).
- 5. Reduce dependence on intermediaries.** Rather than trying to remove intermediaries by decree, government should support cooperative aggregation and marketing and subsidised or cooperative-run freight from farm gate to Abuja markets, so that producers have real alternatives (Finding E).

7 Limitations and future research

The study rests on 20 interviews and two FGDs collected in Abuja, so conclusions about Nigeria as a whole, and about the northern zones in particular, are suggestive and not general. Officials speak for their own institutions and may present them favourably. Banks, extension officers in the field, state governments and farmers outside the FCT were not part of the sample. The herder–farmer and state seed-programme themes arose in passing and need dedicated study. Future work could pair the interview material with project-level tracking of the stalled capital projects and with measured post-harvest losses.

8 Conclusion

Food access in Nigeria depends on whether climate and agricultural policy can survive its own transitions. The evidence from 20 interviews across ten institutions and two focus groups is consistent. The federal agricultural budget share ran between 0.90% and 2.01% from 2015 to 2022, roughly 1.6% on average over 2016–2022 against the 10% Maputo target; funds approved were released late; and ministries and agencies worked in silos with no shared monitoring system. Input programmes changed as administrations changed, and rural producers were left without the storage and transport that would keep food moving, losing 30–40% of produce by their own estimate. Floods in the 2024/25 cycle inundated over 761,000 hectares of cropland, 33.1 million people were projected to face acute food insecurity, and food inflation peaked at 40.87% in June 2024. Because the discontinuity occurred within a single federal administration, the remedy lies in protecting projects and coordination across cycles, not only in hoping for stable politics. These figures describe a small, Abuja-based sample and the dissertation's own series, so they indicate the scale of the problem rather than measure it exactly.

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