

IMPACT OF THE MICROCREDIT SCHEME OF THE BANK OF AGRICULTURE ON LIVING STANDARD OF THE LESS PRIVILEGED IN BORNO STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Bank of Agriculture (BOA) is the largest poverty alleviation and rural development finance institution in Nigeria. It has a priority objective of reaching less privileged groups with micro credit facilities to enable the beneficiaries improve their living standard. The study aimed at assessing the impact of the BOA micro credit on the beneficiaries' living standard in Borno State, Nigeria. The study covered ten local government areas where 164 samples were purposively selected. The study employed both questionnaire and interview as research instruments. Both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques were used for the analysis of data. The result shows that males (66.5%) dominated the loan scheme and that they are mostly married (87.2%). Also, only 29.9% of borrowers attained secondary education and they are mostly farmers (56.1%). The determinant of less privileged group ranges from those with low income (28.1%) to victim of violence (18.9%). Perhaps the greatest challenge posed by Bank of Agriculture to beneficiaries is the late disbursement of loan facility (41.0%) and long distance to the bank (35.9%). Chi square test revealed (p-value .000) for all the indicators of standard of living thereby rejecting the null hypothesis at .05 alpha value. There is therefore, significant difference between living standards before and after utilization of micro credit facility. On the basis of the findings, the study recommends the establishment of more Bank of Agriculture with a view to reducing distance covered by the potential beneficiaries. Also, the interest rate should be reduced to enable less privileged to benefit from the scheme. Moreover, government can reach out less privileged groups through provision of anti-poverty services such as basic education, health care, housing, portable water and rural electricity.

Key words: Bank, Less Privileged, Living Standard, Microcredit, Poverty

INTRODUCTION

The pressing issue of socio-economic development in the developing countries has been the widening gap between the urban, rich, commercial and industrial on the one hand, and the rural, poor, agrarian and agricultural on the other. Obasanjo (2004) set programmes that could address poverty of the vulnerable groups of which the Bank of Agriculture (BOA) is part of it. The Nigerian Human Development Index (HDI) was 0.416 (UNO, 2005), which made the government to review all existing poverty alleviation schemes in the country with a bid to harmonize them to achieve the desired result of improving the living standard in the rural areas (Elumilade, Asaolu and Adereti, 2006).

The government scrapped some of the previous schemes such as the Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI), Better Life Programme and Family Support Programme, while the Agricultural Credit Guarantee Scheme (ACGS) and the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) were sustained. In 2000, the People's Bank of Nigeria, Family Economic Advancement Programme and Nigerian Agricultural and Cooperative Bank were merged to form the Nigerian Agricultural, Cooperative and Rural Development Bank (NACRDB) and subsequently renamed as Bank of Agriculture (BOA) (Akinyele *et al*, 2003). This action positioned BOA as the largest poverty alleviation and rural development financial institution in Nigeria (Shiklam, *op cit*).

The reformed BOA has a unique mandate of reaching rural masses with micro credit and specifically the less privileged segments of the Nigerians aptly described as the unemployed and low income earners such as the peasant farmers, artisanal, petty traders, bakers, low salary, hair dressers and the physically challenged persons. The first objective of the BOA as stated in the NACRDB brochure (2000) was the purveyance of affordable credit facilities to the less privileged segments of the Nigerian society who cannot readily access the services of conventional banks. The less-privileged groups were given the micro loan to enable them invest in productive ventures that can generate income thereby improving living standard.

The performance of the BOA micro credit programme has been variously reported in different studies. For example, Tarauni (1996) studied the impact of the former Nigerian Agricultural and Cooperative Bank (NACB) small holders' loan scheme on the beneficiaries in Kura Local Government Area of Kano State without differentiating them on any set of criteria, specifically on their level of vulnerability. Level of accessibility to loans was compared in terms of input used and productivity differentials. The result confirmed that sustained credit to farmers increased their use of farm inputs which lead to increased productivity.

Ahmed, Eyo and Usman (2005) examined the impact of the NACRDB loan scheme on artisanal fishermen in the Lake Kainji area of Niger State where access to loan in relation to membership of the cooperative societies revealed that the members who had access to the loans, used modern fishing techniques and generated incomes from sales of fish caught better than the non-members. Also, Jumare (2006) investigated the effects of micro credit on Agricultural production among small scale farmers in Makarfi Local Government Area of Kaduna State. The study revealed that micro credit has positive effects of boosting the small scale farmer's production.

BOA has been running its reformed micro credit schemes since 2000-2014, a period which seems long enough for the harmonized scheme to have attained some level of achievement of its objectives worth appraising. The issue is if the previous rural credit schemes failed because they treated rural dwellers as a homogenous entity, BOA micro credit scheme that has targeted a less-privileged group is expected to perform better in resolving the plight of the target poor beneficiaries. Therefore, the focus of this research is the assessment of the extent to which the micro credit scheme of the BOA has empowered the less-privileged group to improve their living standard. Furthermore, it is to assess the differences in the living standards of the beneficiaries for the periods before and during the utilization of the BOA micro credit facility in Borno State, Nigeria.

THE STUDY AREA

Borno State is situated in the extreme North Eastern part of Nigeria between Latitudes $10^{\circ} 00' N$ - $13^{\circ} 43'$ North of the Equator and Longitudes $11^{\circ} 37' E$ - $14^{\circ} 38'$ East of the Greenwich Meridian (Fig. 1). The State covers an area of about $70,898 \text{ km}^2$ (UNFPA, 2014).

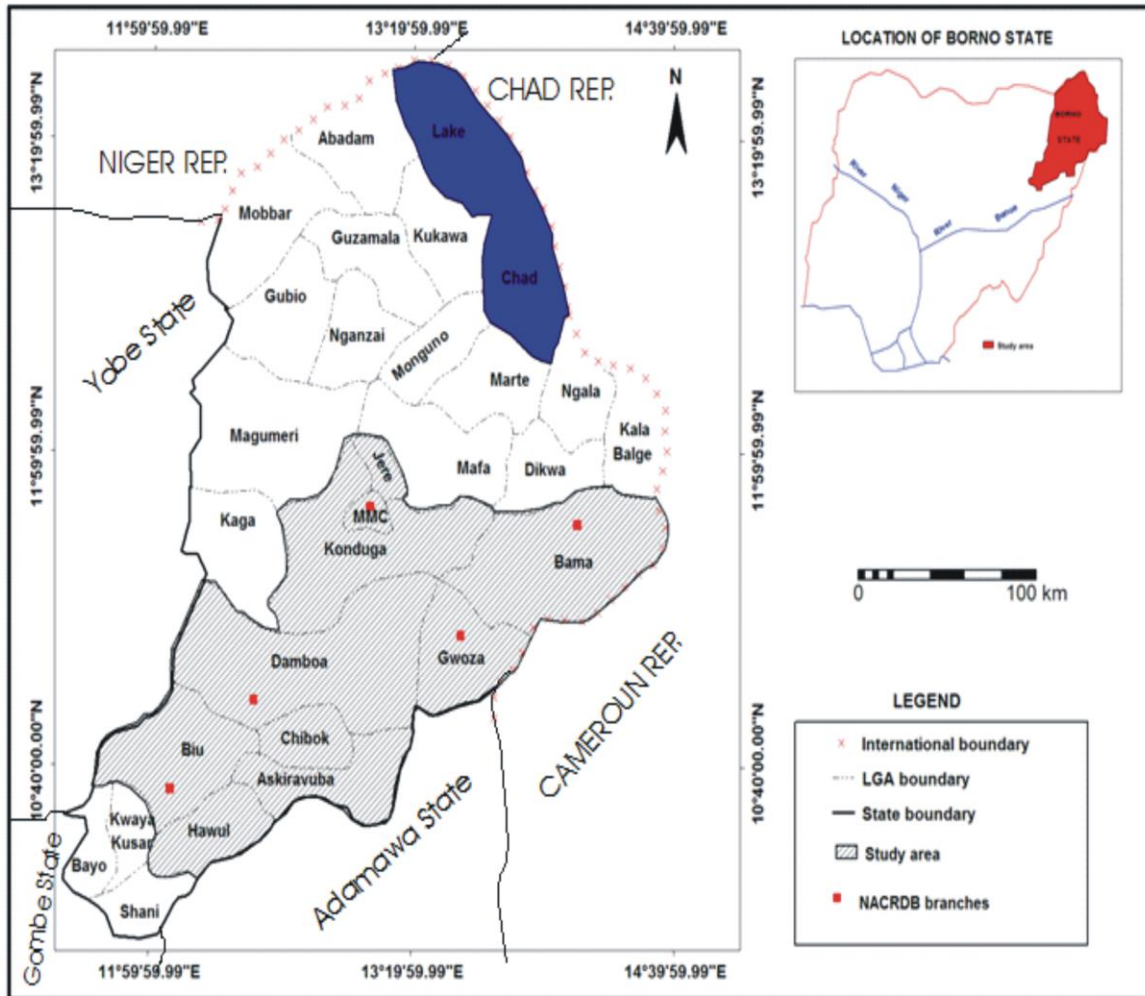


Figure 1: Locations of 'BOA' Branches and Sampled LGAs in Borno State

Source: Adapted from the Atlas Map of Nigeria

It shares international boundaries with Niger, Chad and Cameroon Republics in the north and east and is bordered in the south and west by Adamawa, Gombe and Yobe States. Borno State possesses a large portion of the Lake Chad water. Except River Hawul which drains its water into River Niger through River Gongola all other streams drain their water into the Lake Chad (Ologe, 2002). It should be noted that the presence of rivers and streams make it possible for fishing to be carried out as a means of livelihood in the area.

The climate is basically governed by the movement of Inter-Tropical Convergence Zone (ITCZ). Some 80% of the annual rainfall is recorded between April and October and usually falls in an irregular pattern with mean annual rainfall between 600 mm – 900 mm. During the dry seasons

north-east trade wind brings cold, dry dust called '*Harmattan*' associated with very harsh weather mostly between November and March. The climate is favourable for the cultivation of grain crops such as sorghum, millet, rice, groundnut, cowpea, and maize (Adefolalu, 2002).

The temperature is moderately hot with mean annual temperature range between 24°C and 27°C. Borno State has an estimated livestock population of over six million made up of cattle, sheep, goats, camels and poultry and form international market for livestock (Investment Focus, 2002). It produces nearly 70% of the Nigerian cattle and that the livestock forms the primary source of animal protein for the region but surprisingly, a lot of the grazing land is continually being taken up by arable farming to feed the rapidly growing population (Ariyo, 2002). Borno State has one of the largest National Parks such as Zambisa Game Reserve, and forest reserves. Other important scenic resources in the area include the Alaw Dam in Konduga, Jafi water fall, and Lake Tilla (Filani, 2002)

MATERIALS AND METHODS

There are five BOA branch offices located in Bama, Biu, Damboa, Gwoza and Maiduguri in Borno State. The study covered ten local government areas that were well served by the Bank of Agriculture. Primary data was collected using questionnaire and interview. The types of data include locations of beneficiary cooperative societies, information on their profiles, loan sizes given to them and the impact of the bank micro credit on the accessed less privileged groups while secondary sources of data was collected from the bank documents, library materials and electronic media.

Regarding sample size, the bank management provided a list of 94 registered micro credit cooperative societies with a total of 1099 borrowers in the ten study LGAs. A purposive sampling technique was adopted with the assistance of the BOA management staff to select a sample of 164 borrowers and this constituted some 15% of the borrowers' population used for the study. Descriptive statistics such as frequency counts, mean, averages and percentages was used to summarize the data into tabular forms, charts and graphs. On testing the hypothesis, the Chi-square was employed with a significance level 0.05 to test the mean score differences in living standards of the beneficiaries for the periods before and during the utilization of BOA's micro credit facility.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socio-Economic Profiles of the BOA Micro Credit Beneficiaries

The socio-economic profile of the less privileged groups that gained access to BOA's micro credit were examined and the result is presented in Table 1. On the ages of the beneficiaries, by law the minimum age is 18 years to enjoy micro-credit of the Bank of Agriculture facility.

Table 1: Socio-Economic Profiles of Sampled BOA Micro Credit Beneficiaries

Characteristics	Status	No. of respondent	%
Age (years)	18 - 30	11	6.7
	31 - 40	60	36.6
	41 - 50	70	42.7
	51 - 60	13	7.9
	61 - 70 >	10	6.1
	Total		164
Gender	Male	109	66.5
	Female	55	33.5
	Total	164	100
Marital status	Married	143	87.2
	Widow	10	6.1
	Divorced	6	3.7
	Single	5	3.0
	Total	164	100
Literacy level	Secondary	49	29.9
	Quran	30	18.3
	Adult	30	18.3
	Primary	25	15.2
	Illiterate	20	12.2
	Tertiary	10	6.1
	Total	164	100
Farm sizes (hectares)	Less to 1	20	12.2
	1 to 4	74	45.1
	5 to 7	38	23.2
	8 to 10	24	14.6
	11 to 13>	8	4.9
	Total	164	100
Main occupation	Farming	92	56.1
	Paid employment	42	25.6
	Artisanal	16	9.8
	Trading	6	3.7
	Casual labourer (before)	5	3.0
	Others (redundant retired)	3	1.8
Total	164	100	

Source: Field Survey (2016)

It is observed that 93.9% of the beneficiaries fall within the productive ages of 18-60 years. On the gender, the male borrowers of 66.46% was quite larger than that of the female borrowers 33.54% indicating some preferential treatment of the BOA management for the male borrowers. On the marital status, some 87.2% of borrowers were married. Widows were only 6.1%, divorced 3.6% and single 3.0%. The BOA management thus, has not favoured the single unmarried individuals. The Table 1 showed that only 29.8% had attained secondary education, adult and Qur'anic 18.3%, and primary education 15.2%. On the farm sizes, 45.1% of the

borrowers have between 1-4 hectares and only 4.8% of the borrowers have farm size of above 11 hectares. According to the BOA objectives, agriculturally based occupations were given priority. The Table 1 shows that 56.1% are engaged in farming. This means that farming plays an important role in micro credit businesses. Salary workers accounted for 25.6%, the high percentage could be attributed to ability of the beneficiaries to repay their loan from monthly salary deductions.

Determinants of the Less-Privileged Target Groups

The study investigated the determinants of the less privileged groups and the result is presented in Table 2. The target of the micro credit scheme of the BOA has been the less privileged groups in the society. Accordingly, attention was focused on the physical and social impediments that qualify the respondents as less privileged in the society. Some sixteen impediments found common among the study population with 87.1% belonging to the very low income farmers, artisanal, small paid workers, victims of violence and disaster, underemployed, outcast (socially segregated), orphan and ill-health.

Table 2: Determinants of the Less Privileged Study Group

S/No.	Respondent's Impediments	Borrowers	%
1.	Mere poor (very low income)	46	28.05
2.	Victim of violence	31	18.90
3.	Under-employment	23	14.02
4.	Victim of disaster	20	12.19
5.	Deformed body	9	5.49
6.	Loss of formal job	7	4.27
7.	Audio-Visual problem	7	4.27
8.	Unemployed youth	5	3.05
9.	HIV/AIDS victim	5	3.05
10.	Social segregation (Outcaste)	5	3.05
11.	Others (debilitating illness)	3	1.83
12.	Old age	2	1.22
13.	Orphan	1	0.61
TOTAL		164	100

Source: Field Survey (2016)

The physically challenged such as amputations, deformed body, audio-visual problems form only 12.8%. Many low salaried workers and artisanal professions fell within this category. Other significant forms of social disabilities included victims of violence and disaster, who constituted 31.1% of the borrowers and underemployed constituted 14.0%.

This finding is convincing to say that BOA has achieved its goal of reaching the target less privileged low income earners and physically debilitated groups with its micro credit. But the omission of the streets destitute, the beggars and lepers has left yet a big challenge needed to be addressed by the government and the BOA management. It has been rightly observed that inclusion of such groups could be a safety net to poverty reduction in the society (Chandra, 2001; World Bank, 2012)

Borrowing Pattern of the BOA Micro Credit

The borrowing pattern of the Bank of Agriculture (BOA) covering the period (2001-2014) was examined and the result is presented in Table 3. It shows the actual amount borrowed ranged from #26,000.00 - #200,000.00. Only 52.2% of the sampled borrowers participated in BOA micro credit scheme in 2001/2002.

Table 3: Borrowing Pattern of BOA to the Less Privileged Groups (2001-2014)

Loan Amount Category (=N=000)	2001/2002		2003/2004		2005/2006		2007/2008	
	No.	Loan #	No.	Loan #	No.	Loan #	No.	Loan #
1 – 25	0:	0	0:	0	0:	0	0:	0
26 – 50	16:	608	25:	950	30:	1,140	25:	950
51 – 75	16:	1,008	25:	1,575	36:	2,268	31:	1,954
76 – 100	14:	1,232	17:	1,496	22:	1,936	24:	2,112
101 – 125	13:	1,469	17:	1,921	27:	3,051	28:	3,164
126 – 150	10:	1,380	14:	1,932	21:	2,898	25:	3,450
151 – 175	8:	1,304	14:	2,282	12:	1,956	13:	2,119
176 – 200	7:	1,316	12:	2,256	16:	3,008	18:	3,384
201 – 225	0:	0	0:	0	0:	0	0:	0
226 – 250	0:	0	0:	0	0:	0	0:	0
Total	84:	8,317	124:	12,412	164:	16,257	164:	17,133

Source: Field Survey (2016)

Table 3: Continued

Loan Amount Category (=N=000)	2009/2010		2011/2012		2013/2014	
	Brs. No.	Loan Amount	Brs. No.	Loan Amount	Brs. No.	Loan Amount
1 – 25	0:	0	0:	0	0:	0
26 – 50	22:	836	18:	702	16:	752
51 – 75	24:	1,512	20:	1212	22:	1,408
76 – 100	28:	2,464	22:	1936	24:	2,064
101 – 125	30:	3,390	32:	3680	31:	3,472
126 – 150	24:	3,312	22:	3080	23:	3,174
151 – 175	16:	2,608	28:	4480	26:	4,212
176 – 200	20:	3,760	22:	4070	22:	4,356
201 – 225	0:	0	0:	0	0:	0
226 – 250	0:	0	0:	0	0:	0
Total	164:	17,882	164:	19,160	164:	19,438

Source: Field Survey (2016)

Subsequently others joined such that by 2005/2006 all the 164 borrowers have all become participants. It also shows that the number of the borrowers and amount borrowed become larger in subsequent periods. Only 11.38% of the borrowers collected as large as 20.40% of the micro loan fund at the larger amount categories. Even if the number of borrowers remain constant 164 as from 2005/2006 to 2013/2014 the total loan amount still increased from #16,257,000.00 -

#19,438,000.00 respectively indicating borrowers are gaining capacity to borrow larger amount over time of continuous borrowing.

Cheng (2006) had remarked that demand for micro credit could be a determining factor for microfinance outreach in a region. This implies that where there is thirst for credit facility, there is tendency for establishing a micro-finance institution there.

Bank of Agriculture Micro Credit and Borrowers' Standard of Living

The study examined the impact of the Bank of Agriculture Micro credit scheme on the living standards of the borrowers in the study area. The result is presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Frequency scores of the impact of micro credit on the living Standard

Dependent Living Standard Variables	Before	After	Difference
Self-employment	387	403	16
Enterprises productivity	354	644	290
Agricultural productivity	375	663	288
Re-investments capacity	39	111	72
Clothing expenses	235	280	45
Housing Material	254	282	28
Food Security	341	735	394
Improved Diet	787	877	90
Household equipment	388	435	47
Children education	615	759	144
Health Services	336	352	16
Assets acquisition	417	476	59
Coping with Obligations	486	575	89
Decision making Power	447	419	-28
Participation in Politics	288	260	-28
Leadership promotion	362	356	-6
Finance transaction	166	876	710
Mode of Carriage	766	793	27
Phone call Expenses	396	596	200

Source: Authors (2016)

The most important measure is to look at the differences in the living standard of the beneficiaries and explain the possible reasons for the change. Looking at the differences, financial transaction stands the highest. This was surely because banking transaction has been made as a compulsory precondition for micro credit beneficiaries. There were food security, agricultural productivity, and enterprises productivity which directly reflect the goal of the micro loans. The next highest difference is the GSM communication among the beneficiaries. This

could be attributed to the fact that the period of micro credit has coincided with the period of GSM proliferation in the country.

The most unimpressive outcome is the difference in self-employment which is very negligible but was one of the main objectives of micro credit scheme. It simply means that self-employment status of the beneficiaries did not change much due to access to the micro credit. Some differences which show negative impact include participation in politics, decision making power and leadership promotion. This means the situation was better before than during the use of micro credit. It can be deduced from this analysis that micro credit has indeed made an impact on living standard of the micro loan borrowers as shown by the differences in most of the variables.

Challenges of Bank of Agriculture in Micro Credit Administration

The challenges facing Bank of Agriculture in micro credit administration in the study area was investigated and the result was presented in Table 5. It shows multiple responses and that the greatest difficulty encountered by the borrowers is late disbursement of micro loans attested to by 41.01% of the respondents. It is followed by 36.0% of the borrowers who complained of long distance to the bank to get loans.

Table 5 Constraints to BOA Micro Credit facilities

S/No	Difficulties in Borrowing BOA loans	Respondents	%
1	Late disbursement of funds	146	41.01
2	Far distance from the bank	128	35.95
3	Long procedure	42	11.80
4	Dishonest officials	20	5.62
5	High interest rate charges	20	5.62
6	Others not specified	0	0
TOTAL		356	100

Source: Field Survey (2016)

Another constraint was identified is associated with the maximum lendable amount of #250,000.00 which in 2000 could buy large quantities of inputs. Fourteen years after that amount could buy very little due to inflation in the economy. The respondents are of the view that the procedure from cooperative society formation through certified registration to application for and approval of loans takes too long for the vulnerable group. Nonetheless, looking at those who got the micro loan reveals that there are the inclusion of non-eligible persons and the exclusion of the eligible persons in selecting micro credit clients. This could be due to the fact that most disabled persons were denied membership by the cooperative societies since they cannot afford the initial start-up deposit amount. Social safety net in form of grants to serve the poorest has not been included in the BOA micro credit services in the areas studied. The issue of late loan fund disbursement could be solved by the management's time schedules that suits the participants' nature of investments.

Chi Square Test Results

Chi-Square test was employed to measure the mean differences in living standards of the micro credit beneficiaries for the periods before and during the utilization of BOA micro credit

services. The result is presented in Table 6. The result shows that calculated X^2 values of mean differences, the degree of freedom (df) and the p -value which measures the coefficients of the strength of the results of the test. It shows that all the coefficients of the computed p -values are less than the level of significance 0.05, thereby rejecting the null hypothesis.

Table 6: Results of X^2 Test on Differences in Living Standards among Borrowers

	Variables	X^2 -value	Df	p-value
1	Self-employment	80.239a	56	.019
2	Enterprises productivity	2.112E2a	24	.000
3	Agricultural productivity	1.972E2a	32	.000
4	Re-investment capacity	1.461a	1	.227
5	Clothing expenses	1.520E2a	4	.000
6	Housing Material	95.139a	15	.046
7	Food security	31.954a	12	.001
8	Improved diet	6.311E2a	56	.000
9	Household equipment	2.900E2a	35	.000
10	Children education	3.802E2a	24	.000
11	Health Service	4.483E2a	15	.000
12	Assets acquisition	5.274E2a	25	.000
13	Coping with obligations	5.687E2a	42	.000
14	Decision power	5.687E2a	42	.000
15	Participation in Politics	6.119E2a	25	.000
16	Leadership promotion	5.187E2a	42	.000
17	Finance transaction freq.	18.986a	6	.004
18	Mode of goods carriage	7.606E2a	49	.000
19	Phone call expenses	1.187E2a	28	.000

Source: Field Survey (2016)

However there is only one exception which is re-investments capacity which exhibits p-value 0.227 thus, the null hypothesis is hereby sustained hence, there is no significant differences between the living standard of the beneficiaries for the periods of before and during the utilization of the micro loans

This analysis has shown clearly that the application of the micro loans has empowered the less privileged group borrowers to be able to improve their living standard in the society.

CONCLUSION

It is prevalent that poor people live in a deplorable and high risk conditions such that their ability to take advantage of opportunities that can lead to improved living standard and protect themselves is hampered by poverty. It was in the effort to remove the constraints faced by the less privileged poor that the Nigerian government reformed the BOA micro credit scheme with its first objectives stated as “purveyance of affordable credit facilities to the less privileged segments of the Nigerian society who cannot readily access the services of other conventional banks” to empower them and pull out themselves from poverty. Although BOA has reached its target groups with the micro credit, a very important segment of the Nigerian populace has been found neglected and this segment composed of the destitute, street baggers and the ultra-poor suffering from debilitating illness such as leprosy and severe deformation.

The impact of BOA micro credit on the living standard of the sampled population is found to be statistically significant particularly on the lives of the borrowers. However, BOA has reached only a small segment of the less privileged target groups in the study area with its micro credit. One can deduce that the bank has gone a long way in empowering those that could access its facilities to begin to pull themselves out of poverty and embark upon productive ventures in the society.

The five BOA branches in Borno state are too few for the numerous less privileged populations. The branch locations were biased towards southern Borno making the distance too long for the majority of northern parts to access the micro credit, therefore its recommended that more branches of BOA should be opened in favour of the northern less privileged groups thereby reducing long distance covered to access the credit facility

The BOA management can increase substantially the amount of loan facility to less privileged groups. Unlike ten years ago, the BOA’s current minimum micro loan amount of Twenty six thousand naira given to the borrowers has become too meagre because of the ever increasing rate of inflation over the years. The bank should raise the amount to a minimum amount of not less than Fifty thousand naira and the maximum amount raised to Five hundred thousand naira, which should be reviewed from time to time to keep up with inflationary tendencies.

Prospective borrowers who are farmers should apply ahead of the farming season so as to get the fund in time for the season’s investments period. They should invest the loan in the project for which it was meant rather than non-profit generating ventures. It is the profit made on the loan that should be used on other life coping expenses.

The requirement of a minimum initial deposit as start-up capital to qualify a person to benefit from BOA micro credit has excluded many of the poor masses as potential beneficiaries from the scheme. This prerequisite should therefore, be removed. It is difficult for the poor to feed talk less of saving certain amount for the minimum start up deposit.

The management of the micro credit scheme of the BOA should extend its services to the destitute, the physically challenged and street beggars. The management should be cautious about attaining sustainability at the cost of ignoring important persons in scheming of micro

loans. The management should reduce the loan interest for very poor from the current 8% such that the poor masses would benefit from the scheme.

There is the need to reform BOA management to strengthen the safety net package to reach more of the physically challenged that are poor who cannot meet the requirement to participate in the current BOA micro credit schedule. The social safety-net could be in form of interest free loans, grants to repay after several years of using the loan on income generating projects that will empower them to the level of acquiring the ability to make profitable investments. In addition to micro credit, the government should reach the less privileged groups with some other anti-poverty services such as basic education, primary health care, family planning, nutrition interventions, sanitation projects, provision of shelter, water and electricity.

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