

**An exploration of the phenomenon of ‘crowding in’  
on inclusive agribusiness initiatives: A study of  
2SCALE’s program in Nigeria**

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## **List of Acronyms**

|      |  |
|------|--|
| DCED | Donor Committee for Enterprise Development |
| DME  | Department of Mass Education               |
| FCT  | Federal Capital Territory                  |
| FCTA | Federal Capital Territory Administration   |
| IAB  | Inclusive Agribusiness                     |
| NLTP | Nigeria Livestock Transformative Plan      |

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# Abstract

## ***“What you don’t know, you will not recognise” – African proverb***

While inclusive agribusinesses have been acclaimed to be able to achieve sustainable development in agriculture and food systems, paradoxically, not much research has been given to identifying the early signs through which it realises system change, to enable and deepen its impacts. Therefore, to further stretch the African proverb above, how can we act upon what we do not recognise?

This question speaks directly to this exploratory study which seeks to understand the phenomenon of crowding in as a lens for identifying system effects from inclusive agribusiness interventions; on the premise that, if we can recognize it, we can act upon it.

Using 2SCALE/Nestle inclusive agribusiness (IAB) partnership in the Nigerian dairy value chain as the case study, the study’s research question investigates the pathways through which crowding in could occur in an inclusive agribusiness initiative and the conditions that could facilitate crowding in.

The theory of Institutional Isomorphism provides the framework for exploring the phenomenon of crowding in. The study examined the institutional pathways that could activate crowding in in an IAB environment and observed the following types of crowding in: competitive crowding in – actors seeking to gain competitive advantage through the opportunities created by the IAB; coercive crowding in – actors are nudged by subtle, direct, or indirect use of power to align to an IAB’s initiative; or normative crowding in, whereby actors conform to an IAB for social incentive.

The study applies a qualitative case study approach. Data was gathered through field observation, participatory workshop, and key informant interviews. Participants were selected using the purposive sampling method in order to include actors that may have nurtured crowding in because of their role in the value chain development.

Alignment to sustainable development, organized structure, wide scope of IAB operations, long track record of the partners, and IAB’s accessibility to the public were observed as conditions that facilitated crowding in on the 2SCALE/Nestle inclusive agribusiness initiative.

To conclude, the study advocates for further studies to firmly conceptualize crowding in, to bring more value to inclusive agribusiness models as a practical tool for development.

## **Key words**

Inclusive agribusiness, Crowding in, Systemic Change, Cross-sector collaboration, Institutional Isomorphism

# Chapter 1 | Introduction

## 1.1 Research background

As the agenda for sustainable development continues to gain thrust, critical arguments are being raised on how inclusive agribusiness (IAB) initiatives, organised as cross-sector collaboration, bring about development outcomes; and even more importantly, through what pathways are these outcomes realised. These discussions draw attention to the need to advance knowledge on how inclusive agribusiness initiatives, enable development outcomes that benefit targeted and none-targeted actors (Faling 2022, p.124).

For context, agribusinesses are often leveraged to increase value adding economic activities that catalyse the role of agriculture in national economy (Mrówczyńska-Kamińska and Bajan 2019, p.2). The inclusion of the private sector as an active player in attaining societal goals is believed to have produced inclusive agribusiness models that has integrated different levels of the economic strata, particularly those in rural communities, into profitable value chains and giving them access to larger markets, inputs, and services, in commercially viable ways; with corresponding food availability and access for marginalized consumers (Van Westen et al. 2019, p.64). Primarily, inclusive business in the context of agribusiness pursues two priorities: “inclusion of (low-income) consumers at the downstream end of the agri-food chain to ensure access to affordable and nutritious food; and of (smallholder) producers at the upstream end of the agri-food to induce processes of inclusive economic growth” (Schouten and Vellema 2019, p.38).

In recent times, inclusive business has been recognized as a means of enabling wider social sustainability (Pouw et al. 2019, p. A1). The inclusion of vulnerable smallholder producers and base of the pyramid actors have become accepted, by some researchers, as valuable towards actualising development needs (Likoko and Kini 2017; Woodhill 2016). Development actors including the private sector, civil society, local communities, governments, support inclusive agribusinesses that reach out and include these vulnerable groups and their communities in their business operations, with the persuasion that such business models bring about development outcomes (MacDonald et al. 2019). Equally, inclusive business models have enabled the blueprint for many development policies and projects- “at the international level, inclusive business has been embedded in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) — supporting poverty alleviation, zero hunger, gender equality, the provision of water, sanitation and energy and responsible production and consumption for the rural and urban poor” (Pouw et al.2019, A1).

Certainly, value chains have been around for a long time, but have recently been leveraged as an approach for reducing poverty through models such as inclusive agribusinesses. The notion of inclusive agribusiness reflects the idea that social progress and business success are connected (Kramer and Pfitzer 2016). It is therefore the case that inclusive agribusinesses, viewed from a transformative lens, are usually organised as cross-sector partnerships “given that one of the key drivers of partnerships is the need to address complex social and environmental problems that are too large or intractable for one organization or sector to tackle alone” (Clarke and Crane 2018, p. 303). Cross-sector partnerships are “expected to deliver improved and innovative solutions for economic, social, and environmental problems via the combination of the capacities and resources of organizational actors across different sectors” (Van Tulder et al. 2016, p.2). This is evident in an IAB multistakeholder design, often involving the private sector, public sector, and civil society and is considered a realistic approach towards providing a win-win solution for supply chain of businesses and the development of rural communities (Ros-Tonen et al. 2019, p.10).

However, the recent attention being paid to partnerships on the global level is motivated by the heightened need to bring about widespread systemic change that can bring about development outcomes to the larger population in marginalised communities. There is now more demand to look at cross-sector partnerships from the lens of ‘collaborative governance’ and to translate the value of partnerships to realise ‘deep-level change’ in relation to the so-called ‘wicked problems’ rather than only seeing partnerships in terms of organizational-level outcomes (Clarke and Crane 2018, p. 303; Van Tulder and Keen 2018).

Situating the argument in the context of IABs, the need for inclusive agribusiness, organised as cross-sector collaboration, to realise systemic change is premised on the knowledge that poverty, vulnerability and marginalization are reinforced by persistent institutions which are usually less susceptible to transformative capacity of interventions (Vellema et al. 2020, p.717) and therefore, for development results to materialise, the system entrenching those societal challenges must change (Faling et al. 2022a). Inclusive agribusiness as a development tool, seeks to attain this system change in the structures of a society by introducing commercially viable agriculture approaches to smallholder farmers (usually at their subsistence) and including them in the larger economic value chain, which is expected to stimulate growth at the base of agricultural/food systems, changing people’s lives at the very basic level and ultimately resulting in transformation in the larger economy.

However, the notion that inclusive agribusiness can attain system change is essentially an assumption yet to be established (Pouw et al. 2019; Schoneveld 2022, p.158). On one hand is the concern of its capacity to contribute to systemic change (Schoneveld 2022, p. 156) another is the insufficient evidence of how IABs realise systemic change (Thorpe 2014, p.11).

There are also questions, on the complexity of defining the concept of system change. However, a practical approach suggests that a standard definition is not necessary to understand systemic change but rather the ability of development practitioners to “understand the systems in which they work, how and why these systems are changing, and the impact for people living in poverty” (Kessler 2021, p.3). Systemic change is explained as “a modification to how a system works, and what happens as a result” (Kessler 2021, p.5). For example, systemic change can happen in a system because an agribusiness program partners a local investor to establish a channel that supports smallholder farmers with improved agricultural inputs and over time, more investors are able to establish more of such channel to service more farmers therefore creating a large network of learning and experimenting with different approaches (Kessler 2021). Also, scholars of system change confirm that measuring systemic change in the context of evaluating development outcomes has been less thoroughly studied and requires more investigation to understand how they are realised (Fowler and Dunn 2014, p.13). They propose copying, crowding in, changes in factor market systems and innovation as some of indicators of systemic change (Fowler and Dunn 2014, p.13).

This study investigates ‘crowding in’ as one of the suggested frames for capturing systemic change realised through inclusive agribusiness. Some experts posit that “if inclusive business is to realise wide and sustained development impacts, it is likely to depend on crowding in of other public and private actors” (Faling 2022, p. 123) outside the IAB partnership design. The viewpoint of crowding in suggests that actors crowd in on an IAB initiative or its impact “in a manner that supports the intervention’s development objectives” (Faling 2022, p. 124) helping targeted enterprises provide a new service or improve the market environment (Fowler and Dunn 2014, p.13). For instance, an NGO taking advantage of an IAB organised structure to provide infrastructure for primary education in the IAB community which enhances the operating environment, likewise a crop farmer developing a new crop variety in order to fit into a livestock value chain to make more income or a mobile phone service provider expanding its coverage to a rural community because of increased agribusiness activities in the area, further enabling inclusion and supporting the objective of the inclusive agribusiness.

However, literature on ‘crowding in’ is limited and it is not clear how this process is realised to enable systemic change that can bring about development outcome. Accordingly, this research explores crowding in by identifying pathways through which crowding in could occur in an IAB initiative and what conditions that could facilitate crowding in.

## **1.2 Research question**

This study focuses on exploring the concept of crowding in within 2SCALE’s inclusive agribusiness initiative in the Nigerian dairy sector, in partnership with Nestle Nigeria. The study poses the following research question: What are the pathways through which crowding in is unfolding in 2SCALE’s inclusive agribusiness and what conditions is facilitating crowding in? This was investigated based on the following sub-questions:

- a. How does crowding in occur (which pathways)?
- b. Which conditions facilitate crowding in on an inclusive agribusiness initiative?

## **1.3 Justification and relevance of this research**

This study focuses on the empirical manifestations of crowding in on 2SCALE’s inclusive agribusiness initiative in Nigeria. Specifically, it explores the identification of pathways to crowding in and provides insight to conditions that could facilitate crowding in.

Agriculture in sub-Saharan Africa is dominated by smallholder farms cultivating an average of 1-2.5 hectares, acting individually while producing most food crops (Byerlee and Haggblade 2013, p. 6). Inclusive agribusinesses such as 2SCALE aim to mobilize various actors to deliver socio-economic changes that are expected to yield development outcomes. These programs seek to build organizational, technical, and business capacity (Nestle-2Scale, 2020) that challenge inefficient standards and practices that slowdown development. I observed this from my professional experiences over the past 15 years leading sustainability and engagement, and seeing first-hand, the impact, effective cross-sector collaboration can have in potentially creating positive social change, especially in developing countries. I have also observed this while working on a partnership with over 100 communities and engaging over 10,000 pastoralist farmer families (including over 1500 women) to develop a pioneer local dairy program that has been successful, not just as a social development program, but from a profitability viewpoint.

Nonetheless, more research is needed to understand the complexities through which IABs facilitate development outcomes that move beyond the boundaries of targeted interventions (Lashitew et al. 2020, p.421; Pouw et al 2019, p.A1) to further enable practitioners track and improve on emerging results of their intervention and better engage marginalized communities in development efforts.

# Chapter 2 | Framework for analysis and review of related literature

This section explains the concept of inclusive agribusiness, provides the background to the case study for this research, 2SCALE's inclusive agribusiness model, and specifies the working definition for the study's reference to crowding in and systemic change.

## 2.1 Inclusive Agribusiness

Inclusive agribusiness (IAB) is a model of inclusive business that facilitates smallholder farmers to participate in commercial agrifood chains by upscaling their capacity, providing them with technical support and with relevant input. IABs seek to progress the overall capacity of smallholder farmers, with the potential to improve market failures and coordination problems pervasive in rural areas, therefore its promotion in sustainable development and food system agendas (Schoneveld 2022, p. 2). The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) defines inclusive agribusiness as business that integrates smallholders into markets with mutual benefits for the poor and the business community while enabling the poor to move out of poverty (Likoko and Kini 2017, p. 85). Development actors are enamoured by the potential of inclusive agribusiness to provide a collaborative and transformative lens through which public and private interests and investments can be aligned to achieve Sustainable Development Goals, as well as its design to include smallholder farmers, small and medium-sized enterprises /micro-entrepreneurs and low-income groups as consumers of nutritional products (Woodhill 2016; Schouten and Vellema, 2019).

Research on inclusive agribusiness acknowledges that there are merits to the model of including small-scale or vulnerable actors into global value chains such as “income; access to basic goods, services, infrastructure, and finance; job creation and improved job quality; skills development; and choice” (German et al. 2020, p.2). These explanations recognize the ability of inclusive agribusinesses to bring about meaningful development outcomes within and outside of their intervention target and captures its long-term approach.

Although IABs are accepted as a practical model for improving synergy in agribusiness expansion for development outcomes (German et al. 2020; Woodhill 2016) there are also concerning criticisms as to its ability to realise the ambitious development narratives attributed to it. For example, there is the argument of the ability of its scale of operations to meet the quantity and depth of needs required to generate systemic change (Palomares-Aguirre 2017, p. 4507); the difficulty of convincingly demonstrating the explicit role of an IAB intervention in the complex environment in which programs are implemented (Faling 2022, p. 124) and the ambiguity as to how partnerships coordinate their collaborative activities to achieve specific and independent goals (MacDonald et al., 2019).

What is clear is that further research is required to add more depth to inclusive agribusiness models, also considering the significant role it plays in various development cooperation by governments, such as the Dutch Government's collaboration with public and private actors on food security in sub-Saharan African, that targets small scale food producers (Ontwikkelingssamenwerking, 2022).

## 2.2 About 2SCALE

This study on the exploration of the phenomenon of crowding in is undertaken using the activities of 2SCALE, a catalyst for inclusive agribusiness in sub-Saharan Africa that manages a portfolio of public-private partnerships for inclusive business in agri-food sectors and industries. 2SCALE's inclusive agribusiness initiatives, co-funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, aim to incubate

and accelerate businesses through partnerships with enterprises, small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and producer organizations (POs) that want to build commercially viable strategies in food industries. This is driven through sustainable sourcing, based on mutually beneficial relations with smallholder farmers and other local micro, small- and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs); and/ or by serving Base-of-the-Pyramid (BoP) markets with nutritious foods such as animal produce, staple crops, soy, and oil seeds (Nestle-2SCALE, 2020).

2SCALE's implementation modality is organized around public-private partnerships (PPPs) and its strategy is three-pronged: (1) Incubating inclusive business; (2) Replicating inclusive business; (3) Facilitating sector transformation and policy alignment. The incubator program seeks to consolidate and strengthen its mandate by synergizing its programs with existing initiatives at national, regional, and international levels (2SCALE 2022, p.6). It is convinced that its initiatives add value to value chains and have, "helped build agribusiness 'clusters' that support local economies and create jobs" (2SCALE 2018, p.4).

2SCALE's inclusive agribusiness initiative in the Nigerian dairy sector, in partnership with Nestle Nigeria, a large-scale enterprise focused on providing Nigerians with nutritious foods, is the focus of this study. Under the Nigeria Livestock Development Project (NLDP) Nestle has requested the support of 2SCALE to co-design with other value chain stakeholders, an inclusive agribusiness that organizes Fulani pastoralists (who are typically nomads) into smallholder farmers, to improve the productivity of their indigenous cattle and ultimately increase supply, access to quality milk, and enhanced income for the farmers.

The focus area is Paikon-Kore grazing reserve in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) Abuja, Nigeria. Through this collaboration, the partnership aims to grow a resilient agri-food system by professionalizing and including small-scale producers and entrepreneurs in a new fresh milk value chain built around the Fulani dairy cooperative model.

Local dairy production in Nigeria is still at its subsistence. Only 34 percent of Nigeria's 1.7 million tons annual consumption of dairy products is sourced locally (PWC, 2017) presenting a huge opportunity to grow the sector albeit in a highly complex landscape. Nigeria's population of over 200million people is expected to double by 2050 and the demand for livestock products is projected to become most important in the agriculture sector (FAO, 2019). Pastoralists are the main actors on the value chain, accounting for an estimated 95% of the total dairy output (PWC, 2017). The Nigerian government has tried to increase milk yield by developing grazing reserves. This has not yielded any significant impact, as most pastoralists have remained nomadic because of limited grazing areas and cultural practices (PWC, 2017). More recently, farmer and herder conflict have become common, forcing the government to review its livestock policy under the National Livestock Transformation Plan (NLTP). The NLTP has the mandate to roll out a "comprehensive national strategy for transforming the Nigerian livestock sub-sector and provide the framework to sedenterize the transhumance-pastoralist, meet the animal protein needs of the teeming populace, provide jobs and reduce the massive importation of animal-based foods into Nigeria" (FMARD, 2022).

Consequently, implementing livestock focused agribusiness programs successfully and sustainably requires collaboration to bring about the desired development outcome in the Nigerian local dairy sector. 2SCALE's agribusiness initiatives aspire to bring about the required actions and processes in facilitating a system change in this value chain.

## 2.3 Systemic change

Research suggests that systemic change occurs when shifts in the structural elements and patterns that characterize the system are altered (Fowler and Dunn 2014, p.3) thereby “tackling underlying causes to deliver tangible and enduring benefits with significant impacts on the material conditions or behaviors of large numbers of people” (Thorpe 2014, p.5). Some system authors argue that systemic change is not the final result, but that it alters the system to provide the pathway for achieving development outcomes such as improved incomes, employment, and food security (Fowler and Dunn 2014, p. 20). However, there are still several difficulties in understanding systemic change within the context of cross-sector collaboration in IABs. For instance, it is still unclear how to create partnerships that will effectively bring about systemic change, or perhaps more importantly, under what circumstances such change could be achieved or not, or what form of systemic change could be realised (Clarke and Crane 2018, p. 304).

To examine what characterizes systemic change, the Donor Committee for Enterprise Development (DCED) standard identified the following three criteria: “sustainability – it should be able to continue without input from the project under evaluation; scalability – it should be capable of benefiting increasing numbers of people over time; and resilience – it should be able to adapt to changing conditions” (Vellema et al. 2022, p.104). This study refers to the explanation of systemic change by DCED to guide its exploration.

## 2.4 Crowding in

Systemic change is usually envisaged to be achieved through several possible ways, including scaling, copying, crowding in, changes in factor market systems and innovation (Fowler and Dunn 2014, p.13). This study focuses on crowding in as a pathway for system change.

It is discussed that crowding in is a key phenomenon to capturing systemic change as actors and events are stimulated into the impact created by partnerships (Fowler and Dunn, 2014 p.14).

Crowding in is defined as “the phenomenon whereby other public and private actors in the system adjust their practices in a manner that supports the intervention’s development objectives” (Faling 2022, p. 124) or “adjust their practices in reaction to activities of inclusive agribusiness whereby the actors may reorganize, take on new roles and responsibilities, or develop their own offers” (Vellema et al. 2022, p.110). Crowding in may materialize through multiple different pathways in an IAB environment as actors exercise agency to seek ways to take advantage of opportunities around the IAB intervention. It is assumed that crowding in “encourages a response, so that pro-poor outcomes do not remain small and vulnerable to 'opposing' economic, political, social, and environmental forces” (Nippard et al. 2014, p. 7). Deductively, the authors propose that crowding in is desired to enhance the realisation of inclusive agribusiness objectives.

The perspective of the multi-pathways that crowding in is likely to occur is supported by the complexity and multidimensionality of food systems in which inclusive agribusinesses operate. Characteristically, it deals with diverse stakeholders, entities, processes, interactions, and outcomes at levels of households, farms, communities, natural resources, trade networks, processors, retail, consumers, policy, climate (Leeuwis et al. 2021, p.762). For instance, crowding in may occur because an academic institution taps into the benefit of the presence of an IAB in its environment to establish a demo farm for learning purpose and to participate in the value chain. It could also be a development whereby the local government invests around the IAB to build capacity in technical skills for its youth employment, which can support the deepening of such value chain; or a situation whereby a surrounding community not targeted by the IAB reorganizes (in a cooperative) to fit into the value chain created by an initiative.

## 2.5 Framing crowding in in the context of Institutional Isomorphism

Since this study seeks to understand what could be happening in the IAB environment that signals crowding in and there are no theories yet on crowding in, the study leaned on the theory of Isomorphism as a starting point to understand (a) how organizational systems influence the environment; and (b) what conditions could prompt a response by actors in a business environment. The Institutional theory of Isomorphism proved most relevant and supportive to the study to reflect on how activities of inclusive agribusiness in realising targeted transformation, exact influence beyond its defined scope, signaling in-crowders to join in the collaboration and correspondingly, the in-crowders responding to this signal because of a perceived legitimacy or success from the IAB (DiMaggio and Powell 1983, p.152; Faling et al. 2022b).

Isomorphism can be described as the process of organisations becoming similar to other organisations in the environment by taking actions consistent with the responses of other actors in the environment (Dutta 2016, p.358). This explanation provides a significant background in understanding the reason for the adjustment in behaviour and activity that may produce crowding in. IABs seek to create value beyond the direct inclusion of low-income actors into the larger value chain, with the view that the success of enterprises and social development are intertwined (Kramer and Pfitzer 2016). Practically, in-crowders depend on signals from an IAB to manifest, they are stimulated by the opportunity in their environment and are willing to take up such opportunity created by the IAB in their environment. This happens when actors adjust their practices in a way that supports the partnership's inclusive objectives; take on new or improved roles and responsibilities; or develop their own offers and move to take advantage of opportunities that have been created by the inclusive agribusiness initiative (Faling et al. 2022b).

The seminal literature on isomorphism by DiMaggio and Powell defines isomorphism as “a constraining process that forces one unit in a population to resemble other units that face the same set of environmental conditions” (1983, p.149). They argue that once organizational models are institutionalized, they become easily transmitted, which causes organizational structures to grow more and more similar. Communities tend to be locked up in the complex activities of IAB and are therefore significantly influenced by the initiative; isomorphism suggest that actors (including non-targeted actors) in the community will over time, align with the IAB, under certain circumstances and conditions. For example, a drug store in an IAB community adjusting its business to include veterinary input to benefit in a livestock IAB initiative while helping pastoralists maintain the health of their livestock.

Institutional isomorphism uses pressures from coercive, mimetic, and normative processes to homogenise organisational structure. This happens because organization rely on both formal and informal pressures from other organizations and they influenced by various social construction in the society in which they function (DiMaggio and Powell 1983, p.150). Referencing the study by DiMaggio and Powell (1983) Beckert highlights the mechanism behind the processes of institutional change to include: “power (coercive isomorphism), attraction (normative pressures), mimesis (mimetic processes) and competition as a fourth mechanism” (2010, p. 152). This exploratory study leans on these studies on the theory of isomorphism to demonstrate how the processes of isomorphism can influence pathways towards crowding in.

### 2.5.1 Coercive isomorphism

Coercive isomorphism looks at the role of power in homogenising institutions. Power maybe used as force, persuasion or offer to collaborate on an IAB initiative, and in some situation, may come about as subtle, direct, or indirect response by the IAB to a pressure by an external authority such as the government, trade association and others (DiMaggio and Powell 1983, pp. 150-151). In a

development or entrepreneurial state, as proposed by Evans (1989) and Mazzucato (2011) respectively, the government in a development capacity deploys its authority to mobilize actors for national interest, and could as well, harness resources for investment in significant innovations that enable development. In doing this, they may use several instruments including push policies to drive compliance that put actors (such as those in IAB operations) under pressure, to act on a particular development interest or in a standardised way. In addition, conducting inclusive business depends on public policies to support the means (Van Westen et al. 2019) which can enforce conformity to a particular approach. Likewise, IABs seek collaboration as an essential approach in expanding their capacity to confront complex society problems, such coalition of organizations enhance their ability to becoming more uniform within their institutions (DiMaggio and Powell 1983, p. 150).

**Pathway to coercive crowding in** – The above suggests that coercive crowding in could be exemplified by the government facilitating or coordinating activities in a particular IAB sector which may introduce regulations that harmonise practices or even incentivise an IAB environment to attract complementary actors to scale success and further create jobs, improve infrastructure and livelihoods in rural communities.

### 2.5.2 Competitive isomorphism

Theories referring to competition as a mechanism of homogenization assume that competition causes organizations to converge as inefficient solutions are eliminated (Buchko 2011, p. 160).

Competitive isomorphism is described as the pressure created when businesses seek competitive advantage over scarce resources- “as organizations seek to gain control over scarce resources, it leads to competition among firms, and in turn competitive forces lead to isomorphism as the market selects those firms which possess the requisite characteristics for survival” (Buchko 2011, p.13). Competitive isomorphism assumes a rational system that emphasizes free and open competition (DiMaggio and Powell 1983).

**Pathway to competitive crowding in** –This relates to economic homogeneity that results when organizations are motivated to employ strategies based on performance evaluations (Tan et al. 2013, p.84). This is characterized by competition, which drives businesses to seek economic opportunity around their environment. In the case of crowding in, this may entail taking on new roles or responsibilities, developing new offers to fit into an opportunity or businesses adjusting its process to compete favorably (Faling et al. 2022b). Value chain integration of marginalised consumers is believed to create sustainable performance (Rosca and Bendul 2018, p. 162) which business actors align with to gain control over limited resources.

### 2.5.3 Normative isomorphism

While power is a push factor, institutional change can also be because of a pull factor. Normative (attraction) pressure in isomorphic institutional change occurs when there are attractive solutions to problems being faced by institutions, which they actively seek to leverage (Beckert 2010, p. 155). In this case, actors are pulled towards institutional solutions as isomorphic change occurs; institutions are willing to associate with these models because of their desire to achieve better outcomes. The attraction to institutional models is more influential where there are strong organizational field that help diffuse these standards which promote more homogeneous viewpoints (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). Another reason why normative pressure can cause isomorphism is the viewpoint that institutions tend to fulfil their tasks well when they are surrounded by other institutions that complement them (Buchko 2011, p.157); such as what is obtainable in a value chain arrangement.

**Pathway to normative crowding in** – This can therefore be described as organizations adjusting their practices and processes to conform with the standards established by the IAB and adjusting to

the innovations put forward by the initiative. This process could be explained in the context of organizations seeking social relevance and status competition, since organizations expect to derive value by conforming to socially constructed standards and are willing to align toward a specific institutional solution to achieve social license to operate (DiMaggio & Powell 1983, p. 152-153).

In this pathway to crowding in, organizations act to validate their social narrative, competitive posture without necessarily focusing on profit maximization. Practically, normative isomorphism is considered important in situations where external models are perceived as adequate or superior solutions. IAB initiatives designed as cross-sector collaboration have been adjudged as best practise towards addressing the challenges of sustainable development challenge. Some school of thought confirm that by “joining multi-stakeholder partnerships and helping to achieve the collaborative sustainability goals of these partnerships, firms and other organizations are enacting their social and environmental responsibilities” (MacDonald et al. 2019, p.103). Correspondingly, in an operating landscape where reporting on sustainability initiatives burnishes the reputation, organisations seek to align with such standards set by IABs, not just for profitability, but significantly for social fit (Gray and Stites 2013, pp. 31-32).

Mimetic isomorphism, which is the homogenization process realised when organizations model themselves after similar organizations for legitimacy or to become successful (DiMaggio and Powell 1983, p.152) was not found to be a very good fit in explaining crowding in but may be better suited for other forms of system change such as scaling, where wider changes in the system occur through the copying of inclusive agribusiness approaches by similar players, whereas crowding in focuses on the adjusting of practices that that are essentially supportive to but different from what the inclusive agribusiness initiative in question is doing (Faling et al. 2022b).

**Table 1: Pathways to crowding in in an IAB environment**

| Pathway                        | Defining features   | IAB environment  |
|--------------------------------|---|--|
| <b>Coercive crowding in</b>    | Direct, indirect, or subtle power is used to facilitate development, drive compliance         | Actors respond to an incentive to crowd in on an IAB environment for development benefits, act in a standardized pattern in line with regulation |
| <b>Competitive crowding in</b> | Inspired to seek competitive advantage, takes advantage of economic opportunity               | Actors conform to IAB initiatives to increase profitability, take up economic opportunity  |
| <b>Normative crowding in</b>   | Pressure to conform to standardized institutional solutions, validate social presence/fitness | Actors align with IAB as socially acceptable behavior, and to increase social license to operate   |

\*Source: Author's- inspired by DiMaggio & Powell (1983) and Faling et.al (2022b)

# Chapter 3 | Research methodology

## 3.1 Research method

The research outlook for this study is exploratory in nature. The study focuses on answering the research question: What are the pathways through which crowding in is unfolding in 2SCALES's inclusive agribusiness and what conditions is facilitating crowding in? This was investigated based on the following sub-questions:

- a. How does crowding in occur (which pathways)?
- b. Which conditions facilitate crowding in on an inclusive agribusiness initiative?

The study adopts a qualitative case study research and a participatory research methodology to explore the phenomenon of crowding in within the activities of 2SCALE/Nestle partnership in the Nigeria dairy sector, with the objective of exemplifying the concept of crowding in, highlighting pathways through which crowding in may unfold, and the conditions that could facilitate crowding in. A qualitative case study research method was considered appropriate for the exploration due to its support to explaining complex phenomena within their context (Baxter and Jack 2015, p.1) while the participatory research approach was necessary to give voice to the experiences of key stakeholders in the IAB in exploring the phenomenon of crowding in (Cornwall and Jewkes 1995).

2SCALE's inclusive agribusiness partnership with Nestle Nigeria, is challenged with developing local dairy sourcing in Paikon-Kore grazing reserve located in Abuja, Nigeria. In consultation with the partnership, this initiative was considered likely to have crowding in manifestations and therefore a typical case (Zina 2021, p. 230). In addition, it is designed as a cross-sector partnership with a clear focus on building capacity with small holder farmers in rural communities, to deepen and accelerate inclusive business model in the Nigerian dairy sector.

## 3.2 Data collection

As characteristic of case study research, this study employed different data collection processes, to improve the credibility of the data and capture the complexity of the study focus.

Significantly, in collecting data for this study, I was mindful of my bias. Therefore, I tried to mitigate this by ensuring that every evidence observed was tested using the three key features of crowding in: actors adjusting their practices in a way that supports the partnership's inclusive objectives; taking on new or improved roles and responsibilities; developing their own offers, moving to take advantage of opportunities that have been created by the inclusive agribusiness initiative (Faling et al. 2022b).

The following methods were deployed to collect data: visit to the partnership's operating site/community to observe its operations, participatory workshop, interviews, and relevant document analysis. The data collection process included key stakeholders that are involved in the partnership as listed in table 2 below:

**Table 2: List of study participants**

| Stakeholder              |                           | Number of participants | Action  |
|--------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------|---|
| Partnership facilitators | 2SCALE                    | 2                      | Provide background to the study; validate non-targeted actors. Participate in both workshop and interview |
|                          | Nestle                    | 1                      |   |
| Key stakeholders         | Government                | 2                      | Validate activities of the partnership; participate in both workshop and interview                        |
|                          | Private Sector            | 6                      |   |
|                          | Dairy Cooperative members | 3                      |   |
| Total                    |                           | 16                     |   |

### 3.2.1 Participatory workshop

To organize the workshop, the study leveraged an introduction from the partnership, where the researcher has existing organizational platform for an audience with these key stakeholders. Participant information explaining research background and purpose, the voluntary nature of participation, confidentiality, and the means of communication through the process were covered.

The participatory workshop was organized to (a) identify possible crowding in examples on the 2SCALE/Nestle partnership and (b) explore conditions facilitating crowding in on the initiative. In addition, the workshop validated the concept of crowding in with participating stakeholders such as the government, member of Paikon Dairy Cooperative, livestock extension officer, service provider enterprises, aggregators, women association leader and the partnership managers from 2SCALE and Nestle. The study adopted a purposive approach, relying on the judgment of the partnership (Zina 2021, p. 2222) to select the stakeholders that participated in the workshop. This sampling approach was influential to include actors that may have nurtured crowding in because of their role in the value chain development. A total of 16 participants attended the workshop which was held on 22 August 2023 in Abuja, Nigeria, where majority of the actors are located.

The workshop involved, firstly, a brain dump to comprehensively note activities that stakeholders may identify as crowding in. This was followed by a smaller group discussion to review which examples qualified using the unique characteristics of crowding in including how the identified examples have (a) adjusted their practices in a way that supports the partnership's inclusive objectives (b) taken on new or improved roles and responsibilities that support the IAB operations (c) developed their own offers, moving to take advantage of opportunities that have been created by the partnership. The output was further subjected to joint synthesizing by the larger group and significant examples were selected for further deep dive using the interview technique. Several informal conversations were held with the workshop participants to cross check information, gain insights and make necessary validations.

Facilitating the workshop proved to be quite a useful first tool in unpacking the phenomenon of crowding in with the stakeholders since it was not a familiar concept to them, even though they all recognise its possible unfolding in the operations of the partnership in different patterns. Likewise, seeing other participants speak about crowding in during the brain dump session provided the right motivation for participants to think widely and uncritically of the chances of crowding in taking place in their own space. The workshop was instrumental in designing the questions for the key informant interviews.

### **3.2.2 Semi-structured key informant interviews**

Semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted for four key informants directly involved in the examples harvested during the workshop. Key informants are individuals who, because of their role or experiences, possess relevant knowledge on the research topic and are willing to share (Zina 2021, p.224). An input enterprise on the partnership who was nurturing an in-crowder; official from the Federal Capital Territory Administration, a government agency crowding into the IAB environment; an official from the financial institution crowding into the IAB operations; and a member of the dairy cooperative, who nurtured an in-crowder, where interviewed to better understand the unfolding of the crowding in examples, and significant conditions that facilitated crowding in on the IAB. The interviews took place at various locations depending on the convenience of the stakeholder. Partnership facilitators with 2SCALE and Nestle (one each) were also interviewed to gain insight on how the partnership came to know about the actors crowding in and how they are reacting to them. One interview was conducted online.

The interviews were recorded to allow the researcher to concentrate on the information exchange rather than taking notes. Open discussions were encouraged, and confidentiality assured for the purpose of this report. Each interview session lasted between 30-60 minutes as the interviewees became more comfortable to explore and learn more about the unfolding of the phenomenon.

### **3.2.3 Document collection**

Relevant documents on the establishment of the partnership, its mandate, roles and responsibilities and theory of change were made accessible by the partners for this study. These documentations were necessary in understanding the background of the case and preparing for the workshop. Furthermore, it enabled the study to draw a timeline of progress and understand the partnership's targeted future growth areas which provides a lens to understand the signals from the IAB environment. Referenced documents by other participants were also sighted.

## **3.3 Data analysis**

Along with the partnership, it was decided that the study would not use the real names of the research participants, since this is not critical to exploring the research question, and the data collection process could be easily verified, if necessary.

Post-interview transcriptions were carried out immediately to ensure participants' voices were captured accurately. The study followed a deductive coding approach (Azungah 2018, p. 391) to analyze the pathways to crowding in and the conditions that facilitate crowding in. The theory of institutional isomorphism was used in identifying and coalescing interview texts that exemplified the same thematic aspects of the theory against the key features of crowding in.

### **3.3.1 Sense-making session**

A sensemaking session with two eminent authors in the field of inclusive agribusiness, leading action research with the 2SCALE program on inclusive agribusiness, partnerships, poverty, and food and nutrition security in Africa was organized where we reflected upon the study's findings to interpret observed crowding in examples.

### 3.4 Positionality and limitations

This topic explains the likely biases and limitations I experienced while carrying out this study. This is important in situating the study in context and ensuring its validity and credibility.

A key bias for me would refer to my former experience working in the private sector, with Nestle as a major competition; and specifically, working on programs in agribusiness, where I worked in partnership with 2SCALE, although in a distant role from the partnership. This experience makes me both positive and critical of this study. My enthusiasm stems from the fact that I have witnessed what may be the unfolding of crowding in and its realisation of systemic change and my opinion that the private sector has the scale and capacity to collaborate on development initiatives that can bring about the right impact. Being aware of these biases, I ensured the data collected were reviewed by the participants and the field observations were reported daily. Equally, I was critical in exploring the fundaments of crowding in to contribute to a firmly conceptualised concept that is beneficial in furthering sustainable development. More so, this knowledge and experience provides me with the relevant footing in understanding the intricacies of such collaborations and capturing what is practical for achieving the objective of the study.

More so, choosing to work on a project with its research focus on rural activities in Nigeria, was a decision informed by my positionality as a Nigerian with the capability to understand implicit activities at the community level, also leveraging my lens as a Governance and Development professional. In the same vein, my familiarity with the country of study reduced the contextual complexities as well as safety concerns, particularly since the research was conducted in a period of heightened national security.

In addition, working on a research for a project presents some level of bias. Practically, this research followed Bell and Bryman (2007) guidance for using the academic institution's ethical research form to identify potential ethical breaches, consistent with papers previously submitted to the institution, ensuring the researcher is compliant with formal requirements. Interviewees were provided with a detailed Information Sheet on paper accompanied by a Participant Consent Form which required their signature – assuring confidentiality and anonymity. Interviewees were given the option to review the interview to correct any errors or completely take back their words.

The study benefitted from an excellent response from participants selected. However, the respondents were limited to 16 participants relevant to the study. This means that while the research inferences provide good insight to the research question, a more representative study with a wider spread across other IABs is recommended for generalizability.

Further, the research represents a 'snapshot in time' and with the rapidly evolving development space, may not be an indicator of the reality in the future. Bringing in participants who look forward into the future such as government agencies, helped to further mitigate this. Effort was made to ensure that in the chosen case study, enough depth and breadth of voices were allowed to speak, with perspectives from multiple stakeholders to ensure sufficient validity of the outcomes.

## Chapter 4 | Results and Analysis

The study's investigation produced four results of crowding in on the 2SCALE/Nestle partnership. This section provides an analysis of the results derived from the data collected. It aims to analyse the findings in response to the study's research question: What are the pathways through which crowding in is unfolding in 2SCALES's inclusive agribusiness and what conditions is facilitating crowding in?

The three main characteristics of crowding in and the theoretical framework were used to identify and categorize the pathways towards crowding in, as observed by the study. This section considers (a) the pathway of crowding in- what pressure in the surrounding environment is bringing about crowding in? (b) what feature of crowding in qualifies each example as crowding in (c) under what conditions is the pathway facilitated? (d) how does the crowding in examples support the objectives of the IAB.

The section is organized as per each crowding in result observed by the study. First, the unfolding of the crowding in is discussed, followed by a discussion of the pathway through which the crowding in unfolded and then the condition(s) that facilitated the crowding process. A summary is presented in a table at the end of the chapter.

### 4.1 Unfolding of crowding in by a wholesaler

The first case of crowding in is by a wholesaler who specializes in trading inputs such as veterinary drugs, vaccines, and different categories of feeds for livestock. The wholesaler had carried out a livestock vaccination contract for an input enterprise supporting the 2SCALE/Nestle partnership, prior to the input enterprise's involvement with the partnership operations in Paikon-Kore grazing reserve in Abuja.

The input enterprise supplies inputs such as concentrates, feeds, veterinary drugs, vaccine services to pastoralists on the IAB partnership. The input enterprise is a medium scale business that joined the partnership from its inception and is recognized by the partnership as the preferred partner for input supplies. Its strategy on the IAB is tied to its ability to supply quality feeds, grow its reach amongst the pastoralists through regular sensitization in order to build a culture of herd vaccination and animal care. This approach has enabled the input enterprise to gain trust and steady penetration within the pastoralist community in Paikon-Kore grazing reserve in Abuja. In recent times, the wholesaler observed the increased demand by the input enterprise to offtake more input, and then approached the input enterprise to discuss its increasing business needs.

Through this conversation, the wholesaler learned about the enterprise's involvement in the IAB and its access to a sizable ready market that could expand further. The input enterprise interviewed said, "when the (wholesaler) saw the potential, by this I mean they saw a market that was ready for them and its large and it can grow bigger, and so, because we buy from them they thought that as their own way of deepening their own involvement with us, they came to us and said, we understand that you have this platform, we may have the inputs but we don't have the market, you have the market, whenever you have need for input, we will give it to you, and when you get paid, you can pay us. The reverse should be this case, particularly in this our trade, otherwise we have to go looking for credit to cater for our business needs." The input enterprise has since been doing business with the wholesaler.

#### ***Pathway to competitive crowding in***

In this case of competitive crowding in, the wholesaler sees a business opportunity within the IAB and moves to secure it by crowding in on an input enterprise working within the partnership;

therefore, aligning with the objective of the IAB to gain competitive advantage. The wholesaler firms up this competitive position with the input enterprise by proposing a credit facility to the input enterprise, by so doing, the wholesaler reduces its chances of being selected out by competitive pressure, as the input enterprise expands its business. Competitive isomorphism suggests that competitive pressure can force organizations to become more similar because “organizational actors making rational decisions construct around themselves an environment that constrains their ability to change further in later years” (DiMaggio and Powell 1983, p.148). Likewise, selective pressures caused by competition may force some firms to become competitively isomorphic since organizations compete not just for resources and customers, but for economic fitness as well (DiMaggio and Powell 1983, pp.148-150). This alignment with the input enterprise demands the wholesaler to conform to the standards of the IAB as a requirement for contributing to the core objective of the IAB while enabling the input enterprise to significantly extend his reach to the pastoralists and consolidate the partnership objective. Reflecting on the key reason for their alignment on the wholesaler’s proposal, the input enterprise explains, “the wholesaler may have the inputs, but he does not know the market as much as I do. I understand the business landscape, the route to market, I have the required logistics to reach the market and my business has gained the trust of my clients.”

### ***Conditions facilitating competitive crowding in***

In this case of competitive crowding in, the wholesaler has a functional relationship with the core business of the IAB and it’s relatively dependent on its coordination. The study observed that the wide scope of the IAB and the long track-record of the organizations on the IAB as conditions that facilitated crowding in. The IAB’s wide scope is critical for the wholesaler to grow his own business as confirmed by the input enterprise “when they (wholesaler) saw the potential, by this I mean they saw a market that was ready for them and it’s large and can grow bigger.” Equally, the long track-record of the organizations on the partnership offers a long-term outlook and stability for the wholesaler to invest in the business of the input enterprise which directly contributes to the productivity of the pastoralists – “they (wholesaler) know we are working with 2SCALE and Nestle and Nestle has been in the milk business in Nigeria for a long time” (the input enterprise noted).

## **4.2 Unfolding of crowding in by the FCTA**

The second case of crowding in is by a state actor: the Federal Capital Territory Administration (FCTA) on Agriculture and Rural Development, who is leveraging the presence of 2SCALE/Nestle dairy value chain partnership at the Paikon-Kore grazing reserve to establish the Special Agro-Industrial Processing Zone (SAPZ) within the grazing reserve.

As part of its development plan, the Federal Government of Nigeria intends to develop Special Agro-Industrial Processing Zone (SAPZ) in seven (7) states across the country and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) in Abuja. The objective of the program is to support inclusive and sustainable agro-industrial development in Nigeria.

In line with the project, the FCTA carried out a feasibility study for a location to set up the Special Agro-Industrial Processing Zone (SAPZ) in FCT, Abuja. The Paikon-Kore grazing reserve which had remained moribund for several years, until the partnership started operations in the grazing reserve in 2021, was selected for the SAPZ program. The government representative interviewed said “when this project came up, we had to identify a location that will be suitable for it. Paikon-Kore grazing reserve was selected because it already has existing activities on-going there within the selected commodity value chain. It has a concentration of key actors, Nestle is there working with 2SCALE and CBI, the dairy cooperative groups are already organized and other farmers that could be mobilized are there too.” The FCTA is currently in the process of developing the grazing reserve (an

area reserved for livestock development by the government) with relevant infrastructure in order to harness the dairy and beef value chain and support investment within the grazing reserve. The FCTA has advanced engagement with the host community for necessary compensation and their buy in of the project. A steering and inter-agency technical committee was inaugurated in the first half of 2023 to provide strategic direction and policy guidance on the project.

### ***Pathway to facilitative crowding in***

In this case of facilitative crowding in, the government uses coercive pressure to facilitate development in the IAB operating environment. German et al. confirms that governments are increasingly seeking new investment into rural areas through inclusive agribusiness driven by the private sector (2020, p. 2). In this case, the presence of a partnership with a long track record of dairy value chain development in the grazing reserve provided the necessary signal to the government, who has now assumed the role of facilitating investment from the private sector into the grazing reserve. Coercive isomorphism suggests that units subject to or operating within similar environmental arrangements will develop similar forms of structure and action (Buchko 2011, p.30) to become isomorphic. Equally, the presence of the government signals that they may play an important role in shaping and defining the strategic outlook of the IAB environment. Although this policy is still in the process of realisation, the presence of the government engaging on communal sensitization, within the operating environment and the surrounding communities, ahead of policy implementation, further enhances the community mobilization by the partnership, thereby strengthening the IAB's credibility. Unlike the first case of crowding in which is not immediately detectable on the value chain activities, the second case of crowding in is quite evident, and seeks to further mobilize actors into the IAB environment.

### ***Conditions for facilitative crowding in***

In this case of facilitative crowding in, the FCTA is organizing the grazing reserve for investors to come in and is therefore showcasing the presence of recognizable actors with long track-record and their operations are already established in the grazing reserve with tangible and visible process that could be referenced. These conditions are substantiated by the representative of the government noting that - “it (the grazing reserve) has a concentration of key actors, Nestle is there working with 2SCALE”; and “it is easy for an investor to drive down and see for themselves what is happening in the grazing reserve,” respectively.

## **4.3 Unfolding of crowding in by the Department of Mass Education**

The third case of crowding in is by the FCT Department of Mass Education (DME). The DME has the mandate, within the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) to provide “relevant educational services designed to empower learners with knowledge, skills and moral values for the challenges of globalization” (FCT Education Secretariat 2018).

Before the establishment of 2SCALE/Nestle partnership in Paikon-Kore grazing reserve, the DME had previously approached the community to provide educational and skills acquisition training for its members. However, the arrangement did not materialize since the community members were hardly available. The women had to hawk their produce and the youths were largely nomads. In the Fulani culture, where the IAB operates, the women own the milk, and the men own the cows. The women use the milk as a source of income, by using the fresh milk to make wara (local cheese) and fura da nono, which they hawk.

The establishment of the IAB organized the women and youth into cooperative groups. With this structure, the partnership started to aggregate milk from the community. The cooperative member interviewed noted: “our women now have time, and they stay at home doing nothing because the 2SCALE/Nestle partnership pay them for their milk.” As a result of this development, the cooperative went back to the DME to negotiate a program for their women and youth. “They came here to visit and saw the operations and a large number of women and youth organized in a cooperative, and they immediately picked interest on how they will assist the women and youth,” said the Cooperative member. The training started in 2022 with different vocational workshops.

### ***Pathway to dependence crowding in***

In this case of dependence crowding in, the Department of Mass Education (DME) sees a shared value with the IAB’s objective to improve lives in a marginalized community. This shared objective is maintained by the IAB organized cooperative structure which the DME requires to facilitate its mandate of community development and empowerment. The IAB’s cooperative structure and its wide reach benefits the local government who may not have the resources to solve complex interrelated problems (Head and Alford 2015) in communities under its authority.

The interviewee, a member of the dairy cooperative, corresponds this dependence by the DME on the IAB, noting that “the neighboring communities are unhappy with the activities, our women are earning more money, everything is just happening only in our community, nothing is happening in their side.” This may be a risk of crowding in, as non-benefiting communities may perceive community development to be unequal and concentrated only around the partnership, even though crowding provides opportunity for actors outside the IAB. The DME’s activities aligns with the IAB’s theory of change which envisages empowerment and an improved livelihood at the community level. Some inclusive business scholars recommend that to generate inclusive outcomes through agro-industry models, high-value activities such as “enhanced investment in infrastructure, education, training and health for rural people” (Suttie and Benfica 2016, p.15) should be integrated for inclusive transformations. In this case of crowding in example, whereby the state turns to the IAB’s resources to solve social challenges at the community level, isomorphic change results because there is uncertainty which increases the likelihood that organizations will seek out each other for solutions (DiMaggio & Powell 1983, p.155).

### ***Conditions facilitating dependence crowding in***

In the case of dependence crowding in, the activity by the Department of Mass Education (DME) is evidently dependent on the organized structure of the IAB since their initial attempt to mobilize the community did not materialize. Equally, the surrounding communities (whom the agency had previously approached) are yet to benefit from the services of this government agency given that they are not yet organized and settled in a convenient daily routine. The cooperative member interviewed noted: “They came here to visit and saw the operations and a large number of women and youth organized in a cooperative, and they immediately picked interest.”

## **4.4 Unfolding of crowding in of a financial institution**

The fourth case of crowding in is by a private actor. A commercial financial institution, with national presence, adjusting its operations to provide banking services to the pastoralists. This service provider is not in partnership with the IAB but has one of its branches located around the IAB’s operating community.

One of the bank's team members who was interviewed recounted how the bank was approached by the Paikon Dairy Cooperative to offer its members, who previously had not used banking services of any kind, support to open individual accounts and provide awareness on the importance of banking services. According to the bank representative, this will be the branch's first time working with pastoralists. However, because the bank sees itself as part of the larger community, they took up the proposal. Practically, the bank set up an initial meeting to visit the pastoralists in their community in order to assess the opportunity and how to address their peculiarity. The bank representative said, "when we went there, we saw the establishment of a milk collection center and how the agribusiness operation works. We met with the IAB partners who explained to us what the value chain is all about. Of course, Nestle products are well known." However, the representative noted that the bank was challenged on how to include the farmers in their services- "the basic requirement in the country to open an account is to have a Bank Verification Number (BVN) which is a number linked to the customer's biometric data. For these customers, they didn't have the BVN, so we had to contract a service provider to go into their community to capture their biometrics, which was a rigorous process considering they didn't have documentation for requirements such as their date of birth, and the pastoralists still migrate, which means going into the community severally." The bank noted that after interaction with them, they realised that to be efficient, it was important to create for the pastoralists, their own financial ecosystem that suits their culture, "we are training their members (members of the community) so that they can provide the needed services within their community because we see that this is one way that we can make progress." This relationship which started in February of 2023, is still being developed to meet the needs of the pastoralists.

### ***Pathway to normative crowding in***

This case of normative crowding in is by a financial institution. Despite the transaction cost of integrating the pastoralists into the financial sector, the bank sees this as an opportunity not only to increase its customer base, but also to ascertain its presence in the community. The bank representative interviewed noted, "we were the financial institution that was on-ground at the time the pastoralists needed to open account." Likewise, its profiling of the IAB indicated the embedded growth opportunity as well as an opportunity to improve its sustainability profile by offering financial inclusion to the pastoralists – "by the time they open accounts with us, they have established banking relationship, then we are able to include them financially, the bank can see them on its reporting lines and their contribution to the economy," the bank representative noted. Normative isomorphism explains the pressure to conform to accepted social values and institutional legitimacy (DiMaggio & Powell 1983, pp.152-153). In addition, the IAB's credibility and an already organized structure within the pastoralist community, encouraged the bank to devise ways to adjust its process in order to enroll the pastoralists. Certainly, financial institutions play a crucial role in scaling businesses of different sizes. Some researchers in the inclusive agribusiness agree that supporting farmers with some capacity to be commercially successful, enables them overcome constraints faced in value chain development (German et al. 2020, p.3). Access to financial services provide such enablement for farmers and establishes the required reporting for IAB performance for investors and policy needs. Also, integrating minorities and underrepresented groups is one of the best ways to guarantee inclusive outcomes from growth and transformation processes (Suttie and Benfica 2016, p.19).

### ***Conditions facilitating normative crowding in***

In this case of normative crowding in, the financial institution is motivated by the participation of organizations with a long track-record in the sector in which they are playing; this improves the credibility of the business case for the financial institution. Likewise, the wide scope of the IAB is an indicator for profitability while an already organized structure of pastoralist community into

cooperatives reduces the administrative requirement for the bank therefore motivating it to devise ways to adjust its process to enroll the pastoralists. The bank representative noted “when we went there, we saw the establishment of a milk collection center and how the agribusiness operations works. We met with the IAB partners who explained to us what the value chain is all about. Of course, Nestle products are well known.” An outstanding facilitating condition for the bank is the program’s outlook on sustainable development. The bank sees its involvement in the IAB as an alignment to sustainable development as the bank representative noted- “by the time they open accounts with us, they have established banking relationship, then we are able to include them financially, the bank can see them on its reporting lines and their contribution to the economy.” The bank also noted- “we are training their members so that they can provide the needed services within their community,” this signals a long-term approach towards doing business with the community.

**Table 3: Summary of results and discussion**

| Crowding in pathway     | Unfolding of crowding in  | Crowding in characteristic observed   | Conformity to theory of isomorphism  | Facilitating condition for crowding in   |
|-------------------------|---|---|--|--|
| Competitive crowding in | Wholesaler moves to take advantage of the market opportunity created by the IAB, while contributing to its core objective to improve livestock productivity           | Moving to take advantage of opportunities that have been created by the partnership                               | Competitive isomorphism- wholesaler seeks to secure business opportunity, therefore aligning with the objective of the IAB to gain competitive advantage               | Wide scope; Long track-record  |
| Coercive crowding in    | The government through the FCTA crowds in to facilitate investment in the IAB environment with the focus to create jobs and improve lives in marginalized communities | Taking on new or improved roles and responsibilities that support the IAB operations, developed their own offers. | Coercive isomorphism – Government uses coercive pressure to homogenize strategy in the IAB environment for development objectives                                      | Long track-record; Accessibility   |
| Dependence crowding in  | Department of Mass Education (DME) leverages the IAB’s organized structure to deliver skills acquisition training for women and youth in the pastoralist community    | Moving to take advantage of opportunities that have been created by the partnership                               | Coercive isomorphism – the DME as a government agent, sees a shared value with the IAB and turns to the IAB’s resources to solve social challenges                     | Organized structure  |
| Normative crowding in   | Financial institution adjusts its practice to provide customized banking services to the pastoralist to improve their financial inclusion                             | Actors adjust their practices in a way that supports the partnership’s inclusive objectives                       | Normative isomorphism - forces financial institution to crowd in with customized offer, conforming with its operating environment to increase institutional legitimacy | Long track record; Link to sustainable development; Wide scope and Organized structure |

# Chapter 5 | Discussion and recommendations

This chapter summarizes the outcome of the study and discusses key findings of the study as well as recommendations for further research.

## 5.1 Discussion

This exploration of the phenomenon of crowding in is premised on the relevance to further understand the pathways through which inclusive agribusiness could realise development outcomes. Therefore, in addressing the study's research question which explores the pathways through which crowding in could occur in an inclusive agribusiness initiative and the conditions that could facilitate crowding in, the study observed activities around 2SCALE/Nestle inclusive agribusiness partnership in the Nigeria dairy sector.

The theory of institutional isomorphism provided the framework for exploring the phenomenon of crowding in. The study looked at the institutional pathways that could activate crowding in in an IAB environment and observed the following types of crowding in: competitive crowding in – actors seek to gain competitive advantage through the opportunities created by the IAB; coercive crowding in – actors are nudged by subtle, direct, or indirect use of power to align to the IAB initiative; or normative crowding in – actors conform to an IAB for social incentive. The examination of these pathways give credit to empirical evidence of the natural tendency of actors to follow existing institutional templates, which is further reinforced by globalization and trans-nationalization (Beckert 2010, p.163).

The study observed that alignment to sustainable development, organized structure of the IAB operations, wide scope of operations, long track record, and the IAB's accessibility to the public were conditions that facilitated crowding in on 2SCALE/Nestle inclusive agribusiness environment. These conditions are not unique to the crowding in examples. In recent times, actors in the private sector, civil society, and the public sector are seeking ways to improve their impact around social and environmental sustainability topics (Knorrtinga and Nadvi 2016, p.56). Research also confirms that operating within a well-designed and organised system as an effective strategy for development actors (Mountford 2009, p.4). In addition, although a long track record does not safeguard future business results, businesses such as the financial institution still rely on such conditions to make business investment decision that take a long period to pay off (Souder and Shaver 2010).

Significantly, across the crowding in examples observed by the study, each example demonstrated support to the IAB's objective, as well as to wider development objectives. Two of the crowding in pathways, the competitive crowding in by the wholesaler and the normative crowding in by the financial institution, were found to respond to the immediate requirements of the IAB operations by providing livestock input and giving the pastoralist access to financial services respectively. The dependency crowding in by the Department of Mass Education and the normative crowding in by the financial institution were found to respond to existing social challenge of capacity building and financial inclusion for marginalised communities, lending credence that crowding in could foster development.

However, when the capacity of the crowding in examples to bring about a system change in the larger environment, outside the operations of the IAB was examined, the study found that only two of the observed crowding in - the coercive crowding by the FCTA and the normative crowding in by the financial institution- demonstrated capacity to: continue without input from the IAB (sustainability); benefit increasing number of people over time (scalability); adapt to changing conditions (resilience) (Vellema et al 2022, p.104; Nippard et al. 2014, p. 5). This suggests that IABs have the right potential to contribute to realising systemic change. Equally, being attentive to system

change indicators such as crowding in and acting upon it can enable a sustainable, scalable, and resilient impact for development outcomes.

Some unintended impacts from crowding in were observed by the study, such as competition and perceived inequality if the development benefits are not widely diffused. In the pathway to competitive crowding in, the input enterprise expressed awareness that the wholesaler may become competitive in the future. Equally, in the pathway to dependency crowding in, whereby the Department of Mass Education (DME) leveraged the organized structure of the cooperatives within the IAB community to provide skill acquisition training to the women and youth. The DME's action as a state agency empowering a certain community and were yet to enroll neighboring communities, was perceived negatively by the communities; also considering that the women and youth in the IAB community now have access to a steady income by supplying milk to the IAB.

The study's observation provides evidence to suggest that cross-sector partnerships serve as an enabler for crowding in with the example of the input enterprise, who the wholesaler is crowding in on.

While the study made valuable contribution to understand how crowding in could occur in an IAB, it is not clear if the observed example of the wholesaler, was realised strictly as an influence from the IAB or as a combination of other factors, such as the wholesaler seeking strategies to improve its relationship with its customers.

## 5.2 Recommendations

Firmly conceptualizing crowding in may help to strengthen pathways that can possibly bring about systemic change. Practically, understanding the process can inspire policy actions in addressing complex issues in the development of rural communities as crowding in offers creativity towards development from actors outside the IAB.

A key recommendation from the study is the need for partnerships to be attentive to actors crowding in as they can play an important role in shaping and defining the strategic direction of the IAB environment. Largely, the study observed that the partnership was more focused on the key deliverables of the IAB. This could be because its operations are still at the initial stages. However, it is important for facilitators of systemic change to continuously reflect on "how players in the wider system are reacting to new behaviours and practices" (Nippard et al. 2014, p. 6). Also, crowding in can occur at any point along the timeline of the IAB program, therefore by being attentive to crowding in, the partnership can gain insight to understand and influence inclusive opportunities in its environment. Following this observation, the study recommends further research to counter the assumption, by some studies, that systemic change is only realised after development impact is achieved.

While this exploration on crowding in focused on a single case study and a limited sample size to arrive at the study's results, the case study was carefully selected and is representative of a typical inclusive agribusiness initiative designed as a cross-sector collaboration. Accordingly, the presented insights represent valuable examples of how crowding in could occur in an IAB and the conditions that could facilitate crowding in. However, the study acknowledges that certain observations from the case study may be correlated with specific regional characteristics, and therefore the need for wider studies to firmly conceptualize crowding in.

A significant area for further study could seek to understand how stakeholder configuration, the size of the key partners involved in the IAB or the value chain type, could influence crowding in.

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