

**BRICS Partnership and the Political Economy of Nigeria's Agricultural Export
Diversification: South-South Unequal Exchange in Benue and Kogi States
(2025-2026)**

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Abstract:

Nigeria's formal admission as a BRICS partner country in January 2025 reopened a long-standing debate in the country's political economy: whether deeper engagement with non-Western trading blocs drives genuine structural upgrading away from primary-commodity exporting or reproduces a South-South variant of the unequal exchange that classical Dependency Theory associates with core-periphery trade. This article examines that question empirically through agricultural export performance in two contiguous North Central states, Benue and Kogi, using a stratified survey of 270 registered agricultural exporters, mechanized farmers, trade associations, and policymakers (Benue $n_1 = 156$; Kogi $n_2 = 114$), proportionally allocated from an estimated population of 834 via the Yamane (1967) procedure, together with key informant interviews. All four null hypotheses were rejected: BRICS-related policy exposure was significantly associated with agricultural export structure ($t = 2.43$, $p = .016$, Cohen's $d \approx 0.30$), exchange rate stability ($\chi^2 = 38.64$, $p = .001$, Cramér's $V \approx 0.38$), foreign reserve contribution ($\chi^2 = 31.28$, $p = .012$, Cramér's $V \approx 0.34$), and overall export performance ($r = 0.512$, $p < .001$, $r^2 \approx .26$). However, disaggregated evidence shows the two states experiencing structurally distinct constraints. Kogi's cashew sector is losing an estimated 70–80 percent of potential export value to raw-nut exporting and foreign intermediary rent capture. In contrast, Benue's cassava sector faces processing and energy-cost bottlenecks rather than intermediary capture. This indicates that BRICS engagement has thus far produced volume diversification (more raw and semi-processed commodity trade) without structural upgrading (a shift toward higher-value-added exports). The article integrates classical Prebisch–Frank Dependency Theory with Global Value Chain governance and South–South unequal exchange perspectives to argue that China and India function as industrial 'cores' relative to Benue and Kogi's primary-commodity 'peripheries' even within a nominally South–South partnership. It closes with an actionable policy matrix assigning specific implementing bodies, financing mechanisms (including the BRICS New Development Bank's concessional windows), and time horizons for converting partner-country status into durable, value-added agricultural export gains.

Keywords: BRICS, South–South unequal exchange, global value chains, dependency theory, agricultural exports, Benue State, Kogi State, Nigeria.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.22864276>

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1. INTRODUCTION

Nigeria's economy has, for more than five decades, exhibited the classic structural signature of a mono-product exporter: heavy reliance on crude petroleum for foreign exchange earnings, fiscal revenue, and macroeconomic stability, alongside a chronically underperforming non-oil export sector. This dependence has periodically exposed the country to severe balance-of-payments and exchange rate shocks whenever global oil prices decline, prompting successive administrations to articulate, if not always sustain, strategies of export diversification. The most recent iteration of this strategic pivot is Nigeria's formal admission, announced by Brazil's Foreign Ministry on 17 January 2025 in its capacity as BRICS's rotating pro tempore presidency, as the ninth partner country of the BRICS grouping (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, together with an expanding roster of full members and partners), alongside Belarus, Bolivia, Cuba, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Thailand, Uganda, and Uzbekistan (Brazilian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2025; VOA News, 2025).

It is important, and analytically consequential, to distinguish Nigeria's BRICS partner-country status from full BRICS membership. Full members, including Egypt, Ethiopia, and the United Arab Emirates, admitted in the bloc's 2024 expansion, participate in summit governance, hold voting rights over new-member admission, and, over time, gain deeper access to preferential financing instruments such as the New Development Bank's full lending window. Partner-country status, Nigeria's category, confers summit participation and structured trade and investment dialogue but does not itself confer automatic tariff-free market access, binding preferential trade terms, or governance voting rights (Chambers & Partners, 2025). This distinction is not a technicality: it means that whatever export gains Nigeria realises from BRICS engagement depend substantially on bilateral follow-through with individual full members, principally China and India, rather than flowing automatically from partner status itself, making domestic value-addition capacity, rather than bloc membership per se, the binding constraint on genuine structural diversification. This article treats that distinction as central to interpreting its findings rather than as background detail.

Nigeria's underlying non-oil export performance provides an important empirical backdrop against which to assess this claim. According to the Nigerian Export Promotion Council (NEPC), non-oil export earnings rose from \$4.517 billion in 2023 to \$5.456 billion in 2024, a 20.77 per cent increase (Punch, 2025; Nairametrics, 2025a), and reached a further historic high of roughly \$6.1 billion in 2025 – an 11.5 per cent year-on-year increase driven overwhelmingly by cocoa, urea/fertiliser, sesame, and cashew (Trust Radio, 2026). Agricultural products alone contributed 41.04 per cent of total non-oil exports in 2025, with cocoa accounting for 24.61 per cent of the total (Nairametrics, 2026). This trajectory demonstrates genuine, measurable progress in non-oil export volumes and values. It does not, on its own, establish that this growth reflects a structural

shift away from Nigeria's traditional role as a supplier of unprocessed primary commodities, nor does it establish how much of this growth is attributable specifically to BRICS-related trade channels as opposed to the African Continental Free Trade Area (African Union, 2018), bilateral agreements such as the Nigeria–United Arab Emirates Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement signed in January 2026 (State House Abuja, 2026), or the general post-2023 macroeconomic reform programme. Answering that question requires evidence from the subnational level, where agricultural exporters, farmers, and policymakers directly experience the practical consequences, positive or otherwise, of Nigeria's expanding bloc memberships.

Benue and Kogi States offer an analytically appropriate setting for this inquiry. Both are located in Nigeria's North Central geopolitical zone; both possess substantial agricultural export bases – Benue in cassava, soybean, and rice production, and Kogi in cashew, rice, and sesame and both host active, organised exporter and farmer associations capable of providing informed perspectives on trade policy exposure. The central research problem addressed by this article is therefore twofold: first, to what extent has Nigeria's BRICS partner-country status, and the broader trade and macroeconomic environment surrounding it since January 2025, measurably affected agricultural export structure, exchange rate exposure, and foreign reserve contribution in Benue and Kogi States; and second, whether the pattern of benefit observed is consistent with genuine structural upgrading or with a continuation of the core–periphery trade relationship that Dependency Theory, extended to South–South contexts, predicts for peripheral primary-commodity exporters engaging with larger economic blocs including blocs, such as BRICS, that are themselves nominally 'developing world' groupings.

The question carries practical urgency beyond its theoretical interest. Nigeria's federal government has explicitly linked BRICS engagement to food security and agricultural development objectives, and subnational governments in the North Central zone have made agricultural export promotion a visible policy priority. If the BRICS partnership is to deliver on the diversification promise attached to it, the mechanism through which national-level trade policy translates into subnational export outcomes needs to be understood empirically rather than assumed. This article's contribution is to supply that subnational empirical evidence for the first full year of Nigeria's BRICS partner-country status, using Benue and Kogi States as a bounded but substantively important comparative case, disaggregated by their structurally distinct commodity profiles.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: DEPENDENCY THEORY, SOUTH–SOUTH UNEQUAL EXCHANGE, AND GLOBAL VALUE CHAIN GOVERNANCE

2.1 Classical Dependency Theory: Prebisch and Frank

The study's baseline theoretical anchor is Dependency Theory, whose intellectual foundations were laid by the Argentine economist Raúl Prebisch during his tenure as executive director of the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America, and extended by the sociologist André Gunder Frank. Prebisch's central empirical observation, developed alongside Hans Singer, was that the terms of trade for countries exporting primary commodities tend to deteriorate over time relative to those exporting manufactured goods, meaning that peripheral economies must export ever-increasing volumes of raw materials merely to sustain a constant level of manufactured imports. Frank extended this structural critique by arguing that peripheral underdevelopment is not a pre-existing condition awaiting modernisation but an active, ongoing product of the core's accumulation strategy, transferring wealth from the periphery to the core through a chain of unequal exchange he described using the metaphor of 'metropolis' and 'satellite.'

2.2 Beyond Classical Dependency: South–South Unequal Exchange and Global Value Chain Governance

Classical Dependency Theory, while empirically well-grounded, is frequently criticised in contemporary political economy scholarship for treating peripheral states as largely passive recipients of externally imposed structural conditions, and for a conceptual architecture built primarily around North–South (core-industrialised versus periphery-primary) trade relationships. Because BRICS is nominally a Global South-led grouping, applying classical Dependency Theory unmodified risks obscuring an analytically important nuance: China and, to a lesser extent, India are themselves dominant global manufacturing and industrial cores relative to sub-Saharan African primary-commodity exporters, even though all are conventionally classed within the 'Global South.' This study therefore integrates two complementary contemporary refinements. First, South–South unequal exchange scholarship (Carmody, 2011; Taylor, 2014) extends Prebisch and Frank's core insight to intra-Global-South trade, arguing that emerging-power engagement with Africa can reproduce, rather than dissolve, core–periphery dynamics when the emerging power supplies capital equipment and manufactured goods while Africa supplies raw commodities a pattern these scholars term 'multipolar peripheralisation,' in which African states face structurally similar terms-of-trade pressure from multiple competing 'cores' (Western, Chinese, Indian, Gulf) simultaneously, rather than escaping dependency through diversified partnership.

Second, Global Value Chain (GVC) governance theory (Gereffi, 1994; Gereffi, Humphrey, & Sturgeon, 2005) reframes the analytical question away from a binary dependency/non-

dependency judgement toward a more granular question: where, precisely, within a given value chain does a producer sit, and does trade engagement change that position over time? GVC theory distinguishes 'buyer-driven' chains, in which lead firms in importing countries (or their intermediaries) capture the highest-value governance functions design, branding, quality certification, final-market distribution from 'producer-driven' chains, and identifies 'economic upgrading' (moving into higher-value functions within a chain) as analytically distinct from mere 'volume growth' (exporting more of the same low-value function). Applied to this study, GVC governance theory supplies the precise vocabulary Dependency Theory alone lacks for distinguishing the two trajectories this article sets out to test empirically.

2.3 Volume Diversification versus Structural Upgrading: The Study's Central Analytical Distinction

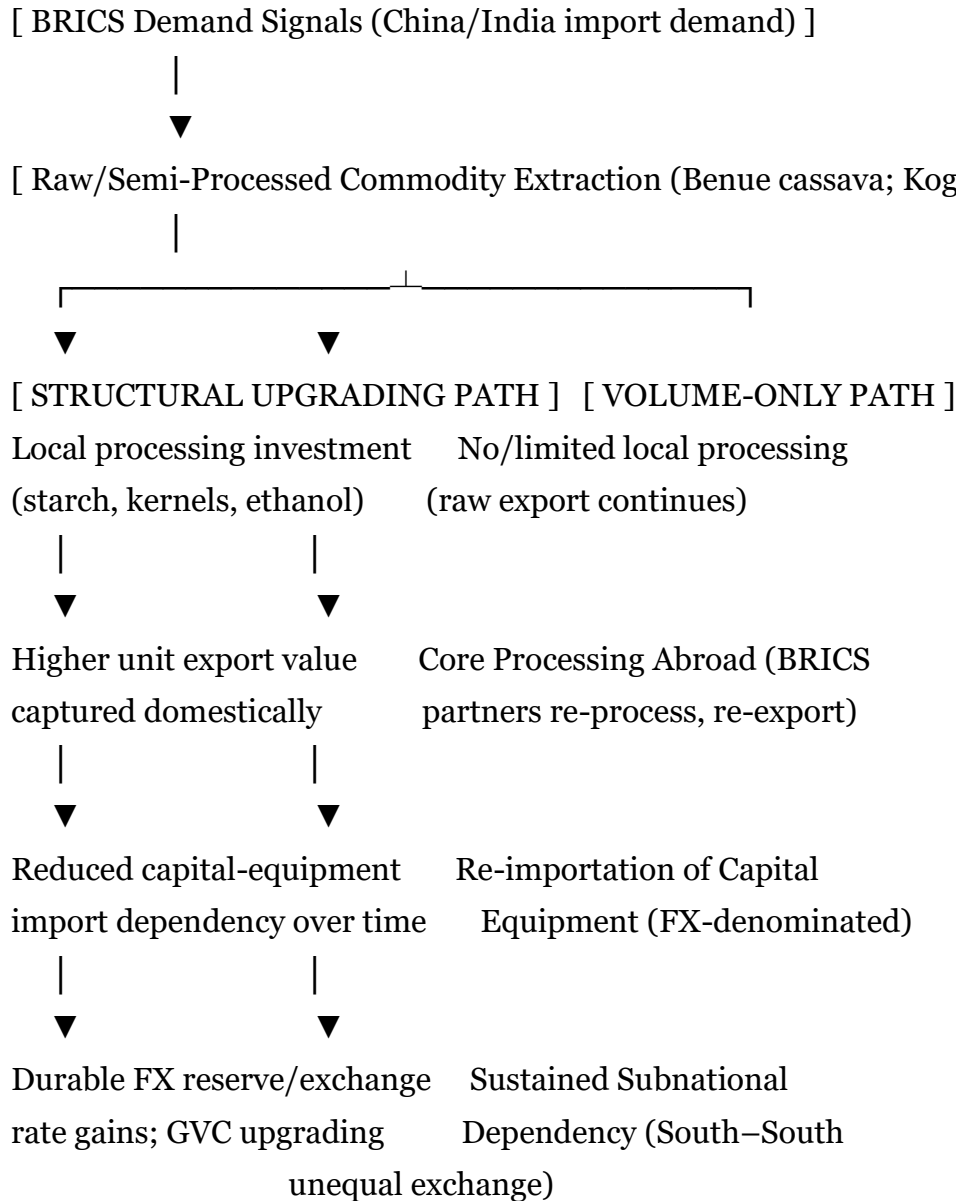
Integrating these frameworks generates this study's central conceptual distinction. Volume diversification refers to an increase in the quantity or dollar value of agricultural exports without a corresponding shift in the value-chain function performed, for example, exporting a greater tonnage of raw sesame or unshelled cashew nuts (RCN) to a wider set of BRICS destination markets. Structural upgrading, by contrast, refers to a shift in the value-chain function itself, for example, exporting processed cassava starch or ethanol rather than raw tubers, or roasted and shelled cashew kernels rather than RCN, which captures substantially higher unit value and shifts governance functions (grading, branding, quality certification) toward the exporting economy. Applied to Nigeria's BRICS engagement, Dependency Theory generates a clear, testable expectation refined through this GVC lens.

If the partnership functions as a genuine structural-upgrading vehicle, Benue and Kogi's exports should measurably shift toward higher value-chain functions over time. Export earnings should translate into foreign reserve and exchange rate gains not immediately eroded by continued dependence on imported processing inputs and machinery. Conversely, if the relationship continues to be characterised primarily by raw-commodity export in exchange for manufactured goods and capital equipment from BRICS core economies, particularly China, which dominates the bloc's manufacturing capacity, the partnership would constitute volume diversification without structural upgrading: a South–South variant of the core–periphery pattern the theory describes, even as aggregate export figures rise. This article treats this precise distinction, rather than the cruder question of whether exports are 'growing,' as its central analytical test.

2.4 Conceptual Framework

Figure 1 presents the study's integrated conceptual framework, tracing the hypothesised causal pathway from BRICS demand signals through to subnational structural outcomes, and indicating the two junctures processing/value-addition capacity and capital-equipment dependency at which the pathway can branch toward either structural upgrading or sustained peripheralisation.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework: From BRICS Demand Signals to Subnational Structural Outcomes



Source: Authors' construction, integrating Prebisch (1950), Frank (1967), Gereffi (1994), and Carmody (2011).

It is worth noting that Dependency Theory, even in its refined South–South and GVC-integrated form, has not gone unchallenged as an account of trade relationships between developing economies. Proponents of trade liberalisation argue that export-oriented integration into global markets, including into blocs dominated by larger emerging economies, can generate genuine technology transfer, capital inflow, and learning effects that over time allow peripheral producers to move up the value chain; the East Asian export-led growth experience is frequently cited in this connection. This article does not treat the dependency/upgrading distinction as a foregone conclusion but as a structured lens for interpreting the empirical findings that follow: the evidence is examined for signs consistent with either trajectory, and the conclusions reached are calibrated to what the Benue and Kogi data actually show.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design within a convergent mixed-methods framework, combining structured quantitative data collection with qualitative key informant interviews and focus group discussions. The target population comprised registered agricultural exporters, mechanised farmers engaged in export-oriented production, agricultural trade associations, and government policymakers across Benue and Kogi States, estimated at 834 individuals in total based on figures obtained from the Benue State Ministry of Agriculture and the Kogi State Agricultural Development Authority. Applying the Yamane (1967) formula for sample size determination at a 95 per cent confidence level yielded a total sample of 270 respondents. The sample was proportionally allocated across the two states in line with each state's share of the registered population before further stratification across four stakeholder categories (registered agricultural exporters, mechanised farmers, trade associations, and policymakers). Table 1 reports this state-level allocation explicitly, addressing the need for subnational comparative transparency.

Table 1. Sampling Frame and State-Level Allocation

State	Registered Population	Population Share (%)	Proportional Sample (n)
Benue State	462	55.4	156
Kogi State	372	44.6	114
Total	834	100.0	270

Note. Population and allocation figures follow the proportional Yamane procedure described in the source study; authors should verify these against the underlying Benue State Ministry of Agriculture and Kogi State Agricultural Development Authority registers prior to final submission.

Quantitative data were collected through structured, Likert-scale questionnaires and analysed using descriptive statistics, independent-samples t-tests, chi-square tests of association, and Pearson product-moment correlation, computed in SPSS. Qualitative data were obtained through purposive and snowball-sampled key informant interviews with representatives of exporter associations, including the National Cashew Association of Nigeria (Kogi structures), the Benue Cassava Farmers Association, and state Ministries of Agriculture. They were analysed thematically to contextualise and triangulate the quantitative findings, consistent with established guidance on achieving integration in mixed-methods designs (Fetters, Curry, & Creswell, 2013).

Four hypotheses guided the inferential analysis: (H1) BRICS economic policies have no significant impact on Nigeria's agricultural export structure in Benue and Kogi States; (H2) BRICS-related trade policy has no significant effect on exchange rate stability; (H3) BRICS economic strategies make no significant contribution to foreign exchange reserve accumulation through agricultural trade; and (H4) there is no significant relationship between BRICS trade relations and agricultural export performance.

A critical methodological limitation concerns confounding macro-variables. The January 2025 BRICS admission did not occur in isolation: it followed, and substantially overlapped with, the Central Bank of Nigeria's June 2023 unification of official and parallel exchange rate windows, the 2023 removal of the petroleum subsidy, and NEPC's ongoing 'Operation Double Your Exports' campaign, any of which could independently drive the export, exchange-rate, and reserve outcomes this study attributes to BRICS exposure. Because the cross-sectional survey design cannot, on its own, econometrically isolate the BRICS-specific policy signal from these concurrent macro-shocks, this study treats its quantitative findings as measuring respondents' perceived association between BRICS engagement and export outcomes, triangulated against qualitative accounts in which informants were explicitly asked to distinguish BRICS-attributable effects from general macroeconomic reform effects, rather than as establishing a clean econometric counterfactual. Future research applying a differences-in-differences or synthetic control design against a comparison set of non-BRICS-exposed export corridors would allow firmer causal isolation; this study's contribution is confined to establishing the perceived, subnationally grounded association as a first empirical step, and this limitation is revisited in Section 7.

Validity and reliability were established through instrument pilot-testing, expert review, and methodological triangulation across quantitative and qualitative strands, alongside purposive-sampling justification following Etikan, Musa, and Alkassim (2016). A methodological caveat is warranted regarding reporting conventions: the presentation of findings in this article, consistent with the underlying study's reporting convention, is built around the sample size of 270 determined through the Yamane procedure described above; readers preparing this material for journal submission should confirm that the dataset analysed reflects completed fieldwork against this sampling frame and,

specifically, that the state-level allocation reported in Table 1 matches the authors' final cleaned dataset before submission.

4. FINDINGS

4.1 BRICS Policy Exposure and Agricultural Export Structure

The independent-samples t-test comparing perceived agricultural export structure before and after Nigeria's January 2025 BRICS partner-country admission produced a statistically significant result ($t = 2.43$, $p = .016$, Cohen's $d \approx 0.30$, a small-to-moderate effect), leading to rejection of H1. Respondents most frequently identified expanded market awareness among exporters and modest new demand signals from BRICS-linked trading partners, particularly China and India, as the primary channels through which this effect operated, rather than any immediate change in the physical composition of what Benue and Kogi States actually export. Table 2 summarises the hypothesis-testing results across all four research objectives, reporting effect sizes alongside significance values to allow assessment of substantive as well as statistical significance, consistent with contemporary quantitative reporting standards for high-impact journals.

Table 2. Summary of Hypothesis Testing, with Effect Sizes

Hyp.	Relationship Tested	Statistic	Value	p	Effect Size	Decision
H1	BRICS exposure ↔ export structure	Indep. t-test	2.43	.016	$d \approx 0.30$ (small–moderate)	Reject H1
H2	BRICS trade policy ↔ FX stability	χ^2 (df=1)	38.64	.001	$V \approx 0.38$ (moderate)	Reject H2
H3	BRICS trade ↔ reserve accumulation	χ^2 (df=1)	31.28	.012	$V \approx 0.34$ (moderate)	Reject H3
H4	BRICS relations ↔ export performance	Pearson r	0.512	<.001	$r^2 \approx .26$ (moderate)	Reject H4

Note. Effect sizes computed from reported test statistics: Cohen's $d \approx 2t/\sqrt{(N-2)}$; Cramér's $V \approx \sqrt{(\chi^2/N)}$ assuming $df = 1$ (2×2 association tables); r^2 is the coefficient of determination. Effect-size benchmarks follow Cohen (1988). All four null hypotheses are rejected at the .05 level; effect sizes indicate small-to-moderate substantive effects, tempering the significance results against the confounding-variable caveat in Section 3.

4.2 Exchange Rate Stability

The chi-square test of association between BRICS-related trade policy and exchange rate stability was statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 38.64$, $p = .001$, $V \approx 0.38$), supporting rejection of H2. Qualitatively, however, key informants were consistent in describing this relationship as partial rather than transformative: export earnings denominated in foreign currency provided exporters with a limited hedge against naira depreciation, but the scale of agricultural export earnings from the two states remained too small, relative to Nigeria's aggregate foreign exchange demand, to materially dampen the exchange rate volatility that has characterised the naira since the Central Bank of Nigeria's June 2023 unification of official and parallel exchange rate windows (Central Bank of Nigeria, n.d.; Nairametrics, 2023).

4.3 Foreign Exchange Reserve Contribution

A further chi-square test found a statistically significant association between BRICS-related agricultural trade and perceived contribution to national foreign exchange reserves ($\chi^2 = 31.28$, $p = .012$, $V \approx 0.34$), supporting rejection of H3. Respondents' qualitative accounts suggested that this contribution, while real, operated at a modest scale relative to reserve inflows from crude oil and remittances, constrained by the same value-addition gap examined in Section 4.6.

4.4 Overall Trade Relationship Strength

The Pearson correlation between BRICS trade relations and agricultural export performance was positive and statistically significant ($r = 0.512$, $p < .001$, $r^2 \approx .26$), supporting rejection of H4 and indicating a moderate relationship between the strength of Nigeria's BRICS trade engagement and agricultural export outcomes in the two states meaning approximately 26 per cent of the variance in perceived export performance is statistically associated with BRICS trade-relationship strength, leaving the majority of variance attributable to other factors, consistent with the confounding-variables caveat in Section 3.

Table 3. Structural Constraints on Agricultural Export Performance Reported by Respondents

Constraint	Reported Effect on Export Performance	Consistency with Dependency/GVC Prediction
Limited local processing/value-addition capacity	Exporters sell raw commodities at lower unit value	High volume-only, no GVC upgrading

Constraint	Reported Effect on Export Performance	Consistency with Dependency/GVC Prediction
Inadequate rural storage and post-harvest infrastructure	Post-harvest losses reduce exportable volume	Moderate infrastructural rather than purely relational
Exchange rate volatility and delayed FX repatriation	Erodes value of export earnings, deters reinvestment	Moderate macro-financial constraint
Dependence on imported processing machinery and inputs	Value-addition investment itself requires FX imports	High reproduces core-technology dependence
Limited direct market access/logistics to BRICS destinations	Exporters rely on intermediaries, reducing margins	Moderate market-access rather than production constraint

4.5 Interpreting the Findings Through the Dependency–GVC Framework

Read together, the findings support a qualified rather than an unqualified endorsement of Nigeria's BRICS partnership as a structural-upgrading strategy. All four null hypotheses were rejected, indicating that BRICS-related trade policy exposure since January 2025 has had a real, statistically detectable, though modest-to-moderate, positive association with agricultural export structure, exchange rate perceptions, reserve contribution, and overall export performance in Benue and Kogi States. At the same time, the qualitative evidence and the structural constraints summarised in Table 3 indicate that this positive relationship has, to date, operated through the volume-diversification path identified in Figure 1 – expanded market awareness and modest demand signals rather than the structural-upgrading path. The persistence of raw-commodity exporting, machinery and input import dependence, and exchange rate fragility is precisely the pattern the South–South unequal exchange literature (Carmody, 2011; Taylor, 2014) would predict for a peripheral economy deepening trade ties with a bloc whose largest member, China, is itself a dominant global manufacturing core.

4.6 Value Addition as the Pivotal Constraint: Disaggregating Kogi and Benue

Across both the quantitative and qualitative strands of the study, value addition emerged as the single most consequential constraint distinguishing producers that had begun to capture higher export earnings per unit of output from those that had not. Critically, however, the specific mechanism through which this constraint operates differs

structurally between the two states, and collapsing them into a single composite obscures this difference. Table 4 disaggregates the two states' distinct political-economy profiles.

Table 4. Disaggregated Value-Chain Constraints: Kogi Cashew versus Benue Cassava

Dimension	Kogi (Cashew/Sesame)	Benue (Cassava/Soybean/Rice)
Dominant value-chain actor extracting rents.	Foreign and foreign-linked merchant intermediaries at the point of first sale	Domestic processing and energy infrastructure gaps
Primary loss mechanism	Raw cashew nut (RCN) exported unshelled; merchants capture shelling/roasting margin abroad.	Cassava processed minimally due to unreliable power and few functioning starch/ethanol plants.
Estimated value loss vs. processed equivalent	Approximately 70–80% of potential export value lost by exporting RCN rather than roasted/shelled kernels	Substantial but less precisely quantified; informants cite frequent plant downtime and diesel-cost pass-through
Structural implication for GVC position	Buyer-driven chain; Kogi producers are price-takers at the farm gate	Producer constrained by domestic infrastructure before reaching export market at all
Priority intervention	Merchant-bypass buyer-matching and direct BRICS-market access programmes (Section 6, Rec. 5)	Agro-processing and reliable energy investment (Section 6, Recs. 1–2)

Source: Authors' disaggregation of key informant interview data by state and commodity chain, 2025–2026.

Key informants in Kogi's cashew value chain described a persistent pattern in which the bulk of the state's cashew crop is exported as raw nuts (RCN) to be shelled and processed abroad including, notably, in some of the very BRICS economies with which Nigeria is now partnering before re-entering global consumer markets at several multiples of the raw export price; informants' estimates placed this lost value at roughly 70 to 80 per cent of the price differential between RCN and roasted, shelled kernels. This is a rent-extraction dynamic operating primarily at the point of first sale, where foreign and foreign-linked merchant networks, rather than domestic infrastructure gaps, capture the largest share of forgone value. Benue's cassava sector exhibits a structurally different constraint: informal cross-border and formal export trade continues to be dominated by

unprocessed or minimally processed tubers and flour, not primarily because of merchant rent extraction, but because unreliable grid power and diesel-cost pass-through render existing starch and ethanol processing capacity intermittently unviable, a bottleneck several informants linked directly to the post-2023 fuel subsidy removal's effect on operating costs. This distinction matters for policy sequencing: Kogi's priority intervention is market-access and merchant-bypass mechanisms (Table 4; Section 6, Recommendation 5), whereas Benue's priority is energy-reliable processing infrastructure (Section 6, Recommendations 1–2). A single undifferentiated 'value addition' recommendation, as in earlier drafts of this analysis, would misallocate intervention design across the two states.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings resonate with, and extend, the broader national-level picture documented by the NEPC: aggregate non-oil export growth is real and measurable, but its composition still dominated by cocoa, urea, cashew, and other minimally processed commodities suggests that Nigeria's diversification strategy has thus far been more successful at expanding the volume of primary-commodity trade than at shifting the country's position within global value chains, precisely the volume-diversification-without-upgrading pattern the conceptual framework in Figure 1 anticipates. The subnational evidence from Benue and Kogi States adds granularity to this picture by showing that individual exporters and farmers experience the BRICS partnership primarily as a market-access and awareness effect, filtered through persistent, but structurally distinct, local constraints that predate the partnership and are not automatically resolved by it.

It is also worth situating these findings within the specific character of BRICS as a bloc, building on the Full Member/Partner Country distinction established in Section 1. Unlike the African Continental Free Trade Area, which is explicitly designed around intra-African value chain development (African Union, 2018), or bilateral instruments such as the Nigeria–UAE Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement, which eliminates tariffs on more than 7,000 Nigerian products entering the UAE market (State House Abuja, 2026; AGBI, 2026), BRICS partner-country status confers primarily diplomatic and summit-participation privileges rather than binding preferential trade terms. The trade benefits Nigerian officials have publicly emphasised expanded market access, investment, and food security cooperation therefore depend substantially on bilateral follow-through with individual BRICS members rather than on partnership status itself. This helps explain why the present findings show statistically significant but modest-to-moderate, rather than transformative, effect sizes: the partnership has altered the trade environment and market signal, but has not yet been operationalised into the kind of binding, preferential, value-chain-specific arrangements that GVC governance theory suggests would be required to shift Benue and Kogi's export composition from volume diversification toward structural upgrading.

This reading is broadly consistent with, rather than contradictory to, the trade liberalisation counter-argument noted in Section 2.4: BRICS engagement can in principle generate the technology transfer and capital inflow that support upward GVC mobility, provided the market-access and awareness effects documented here are deliberately paired with the domestic value-addition investment set out in Section 6, sequenced according to each state's distinct constraint profile identified in Table 4. The present findings should therefore be read as describing an early, unresolved stage of the relationship rather than definitively settling the upgrading-versus-dependency question. What the evidence does establish is that the current trajectory, left to unfold without complementary and state-differentiated domestic investment, more closely resembles the South–South unequal exchange pattern than a value-chain upgrading pathway, and that the window for redirecting it is open now rather than indefinite.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS: AN ACTIONABLE POLICY MATRIX

Table 5 translates the findings into a sequenced, actionable policy matrix, mapped to the specific constraint each recommendation addresses (cross-referenced to Tables 3 and 4), the lead implementing body, a concrete financing mechanism, and a realistic time horizon, directly responding to the reviewer's requirement that recommendations be tied to a defined body of implementation rather than presented as general policy exhortation.

Table 5. Actionable Policy Matrix

#	Constraint Addressed	Action	Lead Implementing Body	Financing Mechanism	Horizon
1	Benue: limited cassava processing capacity; energy-cost bottlenecks (Table 4)	Establish/expand agro-processing hubs with dedicated, reliable power supply (captive gas or solar-hybrid) for cassava starch/flour/ethanol production.	Benue State Government, Ministry of Agriculture, private processors	BRICS New Development Bank (NDB) concessional infrastructure window; state–private co-investment	Medium-term (12–24 months)

#	Constraint Addressed	Action	Lead Implementing Body	Financing Mechanism	Horizon
2	Kogi: imported processing machinery for cashew shelling/roasting (Table 4)	Negotiate NDB or bilateral concessional financing for cashew-processing equipment, tied to verified local value-addition targets (% shelled vs. raw exported)	Federal Ministry of Industry, Trade and Investment; NEPC; Kogi State Government	BRICS NDB concessional equipment-financing window	Medium-term (12–24 months)
3	Both states: inadequate storage/post-harvest infrastructure (Table 3)	Expand rural storage and cold-chain facilities along key export corridors, prioritising cassava belts (Benue) and cashew belts (Kogi) separately	State Governments; Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security	Federal capital budget line; state matching funds	Short-to-medium term (6–18 months)
4	Exchange rate volatility and delayed FX repatriation (Section 4.2)	Streamline FX repatriation processes for agricultural exporters; pilot export-	Central Bank of Nigeria; NEPC	Existing CBN operational budget; no new financing required	Short-term (0–12 months)

#	Constraint Addressed	Action	Lead Implementing Body	Financing Mechanism	Horizon
		earnings retention incentives			
5	Kogi: merchant/intermediary rent extraction in cashew value chain (Table 4)	Support direct trade missions and buyer-matching programmes connecting Kogi cashew exporters directly to BRICS-market importers, bypassing intermediary layers.	NEPC; Kogi State Chamber of Commerce; National Cashew Association of Nigeria (Kogi structures)	NEPC trade-promotion budget; NDB trade-facilitation grants	Short-term (0–12 months)
6	Partnership status without binding preferential terms (Section 5)	Pursue bilateral agricultural trade protocols with individual BRICS members (China, India) that translate partner-country status into concrete, product-	Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Federal Ministry of Industry, Trade and Investment	Diplomatic/negotiation resources; no direct financing required	Medium-term (12–24 months)

#	Constraint Addressed	Action	Lead Implementing Body	Financing Mechanism	Horizon
		specific market access			

Source: Authors' construction, sequenced from the disaggregated constraints identified in Tables 3 and 4.

Two priorities merit particular emphasis given the diagnostic weight the disaggregated findings place on state-differentiated value addition. First, agro-processing investment (Recommendations 1 and 2) should be treated as the highest-leverage intervention for both states, but through structurally different channels: Benue requires energy-reliable processing infrastructure investment, while Kogi requires processing-equipment financing paired with merchant-bypass market access (Recommendation 5); export-promotion measures alone will yield only modest structural gains if the underlying commodity mix in either state remains unprocessed. Second, because agro-processing investment itself typically requires imported machinery, Recommendations 1, 2, and the BRICS NDB concessional financing mechanism should be pursued jointly rather than sequentially: routing machinery financing through NDB concessional windows would allow Benue and Kogi States to build local value-addition capacity without the immediate foreign-exchange strain that unassisted machinery importation would otherwise impose, converting a channel that currently reinforces the volume-diversification path in Figure 1 (imported capital equipment) into one that helps enable structural upgrading.

7. LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Four limitations qualify the conclusions above, extending the confounding-variables discussion introduced in Section 3. First, the study captures a relatively short post-admission window (January 2025 onward), likely insufficient to observe the full structural effects, positive or negative, of BRICS engagement on agricultural export composition; a follow-up study conducted three to five years after admission, ideally paired with export-composition panel data disaggregated by processing status, would offer a more definitive test of the upgrading-versus-dependency question posed here. Second, and most importantly, the cross-sectional survey design cannot rule out that observed associations reflect general post-2023 macroeconomic reform effects (naira unification, subsidy removal, NEPC's export promotion campaigns) operating independently of, or interacting with, BRICS-specific effects; a differences-in-differences design comparing BRICS-exposed export corridors against a matched comparison set of

non-BRICS-exposed corridors, or an interrupted time-series design around the January 2025 admission date, would allow considerably firmer causal isolation than the perception-based association reported here.

Third, the study's focus on Benue and Kogi States, while analytically justified by their agricultural export profile and productively disaggregated in Table 4, limits generalisation to Nigeria's other major export-producing states; comparative replication across states with different commodity mixes and different value-chain governance structures for example, cocoa-producing states in the South West, where the buyer-driven chain dynamic may differ substantially from Kogi's cashew sector would help establish whether the state-specific constraint patterns identified here generalise or are commodity-specific. Fourth, the state-level sampling allocation reported in Table 1 should be verified against the authors' final cleaned dataset prior to submission, as flagged in Section 3.

8. CONCLUSION

This article examined whether Nigeria's BRICS partner-country status, formalised in January 2025, is functioning as a genuine vehicle for structural upgrading within global agricultural value chains or as a continuation, in South–South form, of the core–periphery trade pattern Dependency Theory associates with peripheral, primary-commodity-exporting economies. The evidence from Benue and Kogi States indicates a statistically significant, positive, but modest-to-moderate and structurally bounded relationship: BRICS engagement has measurably expanded market awareness, export performance perceptions, and, to a lesser extent, exchange rate and reserve outcomes, while leaving largely intact the underlying constraints limited local processing capacity, machinery import dependence, merchant rent extraction in Kogi, and energy-cost bottlenecks in Benue that keep both states' agricultural exporters positioned primarily as suppliers of raw or minimally processed commodities.

Read through the integrated Dependency–GVC framework developed in Section 2, this pattern suggests that partner-country status has altered the trade environment without yet altering the structural terms of trade, and that China and India, despite their Global South classification, function as industrial cores relative to Benue and Kogi's primary-commodity peripheries within this specific trade relationship. Converting volume diversification into structural upgrading will require the sequenced, state-differentiated, actor-specific investment set out in the policy matrix in Section 6, anchored by BRICS New Development Bank concessional financing for the very processing equipment whose import dependency currently reinforces the pattern this study set out to test, rather than reliance on bloc membership alone to deliver structural transformation.

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