

Effect of Cultural Norms and Traditional Beliefs on the Lived Experiences of Women in Agriculture in Rural Communities

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This study examined the effects of cultural norms and traditional beliefs on the lived experiences of women in agriculture in rural communities in Nigeria. Semi-structured interviews with rural Nigerian women and men yielded thematically examined qualitative data. The results revealed that cultural and traditional practices significantly impact the involvement, economic and social progress of women in agriculture in rural communities in Nigeria. Conservatism and patriarchy are central cultural norms and traditional beliefs in these communities. These norms and beliefs institutionalize discrimination against women, exclusion of women from decision-making, relegation of women to domestic duties, restriction of women's access to productive resources and economic opportunities, perpetuating their dependence on the menfolk, and subsistence farming. Women's groups act as a support system because they enable women to voice their concerns in various forums. The study recommends interventions that promote gender justice, education, and resource access to empower women and improve their livelihoods.

Keywords: Cultural norms, Traditional beliefs, Rural women, Lived experiences, Decision-making/leadership

Introduction

Developing and underdeveloped countries highly prioritize agriculture as an important economic sector (Pawlak & Kołodziejczak, 2020) because poverty and hunger are prevalent (Glazebrook & Opoku, 2020). Food insecurity is a significant challenge in underdeveloped and developing economies. Women make up the majority of farmers in the rural smallholder communities of these countries (World Food Program [WFP], 2021), and Africa principally relies on women's subsistence production to fill its food baskets (Glazebrook & Opoku, 2020). Furthermore, Oxfam (2025) indicates that low growth and food insecurity are caused in part by women smallholder farmers' being held back from reaching their full potential in the agricultural sector. The role of women in Africa's agriculture cannot be overemphasized.

Despite their effort in propelling the economy towards advancing agricultural productivity, achieving food security, and sustainable growth, women's potential to run the leadership sphere within the community effectively has been characterized by perceived incompetence (Babalola et al., 2021; Savari et al., 2020). Consequently, this has greatly impacted their ability to scale, assimilate innovation, and diffuse technological provisions (BenYishay et al., 2020; Fletcher & Kubik, 2016; McGuire et al., 2022). The reality of their daily lives is greatly influenced by a particular form of social relations based on their gender (Fletcher & Kubik, 2016). There has been little focus on their capacity to hold leadership positions and engage in the decision-making process within the agricultural value chain. This neglect of equitable representation and participation in decision-making and governance has entrenched women in a vicious cycle of poverty that places them in a less advantageous position (Lwamba et al., 2022; Oyebamiji et al., 2022; Staab et al., 2024).

Agriculture across the world is imbued with a masculinist culture and hegemony sustained by ideologies, discourses, and practices on farms and up to national policy levels, especially in underdeveloped and developing countries where cultural norms and traditional beliefs hinder women in agriculture from meeting and surpassing their potential (Richardson-Gilley 2021; McMahan, 2002). Cultures impact women's access to resources, decision-making, and overall well-being. Patriarchy regards women as subservient and solely dependent on men, excluding them from owning assets like land (Amusan et al., 2021), reinforcing gender stereotypes and inequalities, and hindering women from succeeding in agriculture. Gender role orientations historically placed women at home since farming with the plough was considered incompatible with childcare (Giuliano, 2020). These expectations have limited women's access to income-earning opportunities because agriculture is subsistent. Subsistence farming leaves women farmers with nothing to sell and generate income, and this has a significant impact on their lives.

Literature Review

Agricultural production is important for food security. It is a major source of income in most developing economies. In sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), agriculture accounts for about 22% of the region's gross domestic product (GDP) and provides employment for 60% of the labor force, and accounts for more than 10% of export revenues (Wudil et al., 2022). Thus, eradicating food insecurity and rural poverty requires the full and equal participation of both women and men in

agriculture and the equitable distribution of the benefits from agricultural and rural development activities.

Women have always been significant in the agriculture industry, but their perspectives have been absent because they are typically the unpaid and invisible labor force (Contzen & Forney, 2016). In SSA countries, including Nigeria, they are known to engage in agricultural activities more than men (Baba et al., 2015). In addition to their traditional domestic responsibilities, women produce more than 50% of the world's food and make up around 43% of the agricultural workforce, both globally and in developing nations (Kehinde et al., 2021), especially in rural communities where agriculture self-employs 53.5% of the women. The majority of smallholder farmers are women, providing most of the labor and managing a large part of daily farming activities (Ochieng et al., 2014). Despite their significance in the economies of these countries, development projects focused on their productivity are yet to be considered in national agricultural planning and policies (Adeniyi, 2010), and men seem to have more control over farm decisions, and thereby control the productive resources (Adeola et al., 2024). About 54 million of Nigeria's estimated 78 million women live in rural areas and off the land (Oxfam, 2017). Though agriculture remains the largest economic platform for women, it is mostly subsistence farming with hoes and cutlasses. Women remain disadvantaged: 55% of female-headed households are landless, and 29% own less than one hectare (Oxfam, 2017).

According to Beach's (2013) study on US agriculture and Pierotti et al.'s (2022) study on Nigeria, women in agriculture were portrayed as support to the male farmer, the homemaker, or the one who raises the children and caregiver for the elders. While men in the agriculture industry agree that women have a place in the industry, they disagree over the value of the contributions of women (Duncan, 2022). According to Fremstad and Paul (2020), the only way to help women identify as farmers is to open the farm gate to women by shredding historically entrenched patriarchal roles and norms. In Africa, due to tradition and culture, agricultural (and domestic) decision-making has been dominated by men (Enete & Amusa, 2010b; Mgalamadzi et al., 2024; Nartey et al., 2023), even in areas where women are the largest providers of farm labor.

Sociocultural norms, women's multiple burdens and triple duties, access to assets and resources, agricultural training and education, suitable working conditions, and decision-making are some of the ways that women have been traditionally excluded from participation in agricultural organizations (Kaaria et al., 2016, Kennedy-Duckett, 2019). The ability of women to participate in leadership appears to be closely linked to their perceived domestic and familial responsibilities and skills (Niewoehner-Green et al., 2019). There is a gendered division of labor where women are part of the decision-making process, with men concentrating on commercial cash crops and women on subsistence crops (Enete & Amusa, 2010a). Irrespective of women's important role in the agricultural sector, they are less likely to have access to resources, such as land, credits, education, technology, and extension services, than men (Kehinde et al., 2021).

These challenges are not restricted to SSA. In Australian agriculture, women are mainly appointed to leadership positions as token gestures and are often left feeling isolated and ignored even though Australia has equal opportunity policies, their issues are often sidelined, and their presence is merely tolerated (Alston, 2014). This can be seen in how agricultural women have been under-represented as leaders in commodity boards, producer groups, agricultural bureaucracies, agricultural research and development, and agricultural media (Alston, 2014; Pini,

2005). In parts of Asia, although women contribute more to the management of the family farm and other areas of revenue generation, there is still a gendered division of labor in the home that leaves women nearly entirely responsible for maintaining the home and caring for children (Leder, 2022).

Given that property ownership is traditionally patrilineal, women are mostly connected to the farm through their father or their spouses (Curtin et al, 2024; Pilgeram & Amos, 2015) and are rarely considered farmers in their own right. Traditionally, a farm woman's identity as wife, mother, daughter, or sister to the farmer gave them financial stability, respectability, and prestige. According to Braiser et al. (2014), the heteronormative nuclear family and its related gender norms governed women's sense of belonging in farm communities. Women do not function solely as *farm wives* or *mothers*; they are *chameleonic* and take on the *third shift* (Bharadwaj et al., 2013; Tutor-Marcom et al., 2014). They take on multiple roles on and off the farm, which include maintaining three working shifts: managing the household and children, performing their farm duties, and maintaining off-farm employment (Bharadwaj et al., 2013; Pierotti et al., 2022; Tutor-Marcom et al., 2014). They face a labyrinth of complexities and a variety of challenges that create barriers to attaining leadership and decision-making positions (Carli & Eagly, 2016).

In a study analyzing how gender mainstreaming in development programs affects women in rural Europe, Bock (2015) noted that addressing the gendered nature of policy domains and changing structures and processes has been both conciliatory and conflicting, particularly within the institutional framework and cultural norms of specific countries. The study (Bock, 2015) concluded that gender is a political process; for gender mainstreaming to be effective, it requires a participatory approach that includes women's presence and women's specific needs for revitalizing rural communities taken into account. According to Richardson and Roberts (2020), Thai women experience persistent barriers to gender equality; despite having a distinctly positive perception of themselves and their abilities, they internalize prescribed gender stereotypes and thus impede their sense of empowerment in the agricultural industry and its workforce. In their review of women's membership in various women farmer groups and organizations, specifically their roles in agricultural development programs in rural communities, Baba et al. (2015) suggested that encouraging women to participate in agricultural leadership through gender-sensitive institutional frameworks is effective and should be supported. Few women in Africa hold national policy-making roles (Oyebamiji et al., 2022). The fact that women are underrepresented in technical ministries like agriculture has a significant impact on the policies that are developed there (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2017; McGuire et al., 2022). There are extremely few women in positions of authority in public policy-making agencies and organizations (Oyebamiji et al., 2022; Roppel et al., 2006). This has led to a neglect of issues of most concern to women in the design and implementation of many development policies and programs. The policies of organizations and governments would more fairly balance the concerns of women and men if women had unrestricted access to leadership positions (Kark & Eagly, 2010).

Theoretical Framework

This study is informed by the Social Role Theory. This theory argues that sex differences and similarities in behavior reflect gender role beliefs that, in turn, represent people's opinions of

men and women's social roles in their society (Eagly & Wood, 2012). Societal norms for women have been set for women to conform to thereby defining stereotypical gender roles of women. According to Eagly and Wood (2012), the inherent physical differences between men and women led to divisions of labor in society. Early societies associated men with their physical prowess and women with their reproductive nature. Implementing this labor division in economic and social systems, the differences resulted in gender roles and stereotypes. These stereotypes, or gender role beliefs, form as people observe male and female behavior and infer that the sexes possess corresponding dispositions (Eagly & Wood, 2012). Gender roles seemed to reflect men and women's innate biological characteristics, making them inevitable and natural. Even in modern societies, where these physical differences are a non-issue, the stereotypes persist due to long-held cultural socialization (Eagly & Wood, 2012).

Society defines feminine leadership styles in terms that conform to the conventional gender roles of women. This puts women under pressure to conform to cultural norms for leadership in the struggle to be taken seriously as farmers and advance in leadership positions because they are also expected to primarily play the traditionally defined roles of nurturers and homemakers, including communal, cooperative, and nurturing (Archer, 1996). Using the social role theory, we can begin to comprehend why labor division occurs based on men and women's distinctive physical capabilities and characteristics and the continuous socialization of men and women into predefined gender roles. The gendered division of labor and the distribution of resources, responsibilities, agency, and power are governed by different laws, norms, and principles (Wood & Eagly, 2012). These elements influence and are critical to understanding the nature of gender inequality and inequity in different cultures. This study explored the impact of these on the lived experiences of rural women in agriculture through the gender role lens.

Purpose and Objectives

Agriculture in rural communities of Nigeria is influenced by conservative cultural norms and traditional beliefs that enforce gendered roles. Notwithstanding the prominent role women play (research has shown that smallholder rural women farmers in Nigeria produce two-thirds of the food crops [ActionAid International, 2015]) and their position in addressing the challenges of household management and agricultural production and development, men and not women make the crucial decisions. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore the effect of cultural norms and traditional beliefs on the lived experiences of women in agriculture in the rural communities of Nigeria. The specific objectives were to;

1. explore the cultural norms and traditional beliefs of the rural Gbagyi communities of Nigeria.
2. determine how these norms and beliefs affect the lived experiences of rural women in agriculture in the rural Gbagyi communities of Nigeria.

Methodology

This study was conducted with the approval of an Institutional Review Board (IRB) under protocol number 26484. It employed the basic qualitative approach to enable us to

determine the existing cultural norms and traditional beliefs of these rural communities and how they affect the smallholder women in agriculture in rural communities of Nigeria. It allowed the participants to share their own first-hand experiences in agriculture. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), basic qualitative research study stems from the belief that people acquire knowledge by participating in and making sense of an experience or activity. Basic qualitative research is also the logical design because this study targets a specific group of participants, women in agriculture in the rural communities. On the assumption that culture intersects with gender dynamics, male participants were included in this study because men's roles as partners, family members, and community members can significantly influence women's lives; and help identify differences in perceptions, behaviors, and experiences that are relevant to the objectives of this study (Graheim & Lundman, 2004; Yin, 2018).

Data Collection

Data were collected by conducting 60- to 90-minute semi-structured interviews with women and men of these communities. A purposive sample size of six (four women and two men [who consented and volunteered]) participated in this study. This sample size was chosen to enable the collection of in-depth data and the resources available at the time (Patton, 2002). These participants are indigenes of two rural Gbagyi farming communities in the outskirts of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), who are involved in agriculture either as farmers or members of families and rely on agriculture as a source of living or a way of life. Purposive sampling also enabled the researchers to choose a sample from which the most can be learned and to discover, comprehend in-depth, and gain insight into the subject matter (Dooley, 2007; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As its approach to inquiry, semi-structured interviews were conducted via phone call, and the participants were in the community where they were comfortable in their cultural settings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A well-connected community member served as a recruiter. They were provided with the participation criteria and the purpose and objectives of the study to explain the study to would-be participants and gain consent. Additionally, they provided the participants with their phone for the duration of the interview. Once the participant was on the phone, we reread the consent form and received verbal consent before beginning the interview.

The interview protocol was a set of eight open-ended questions designed to ascertain the effects of cultural norms and traditional beliefs on women's participation in agriculture. Some of the questions were paraphrased based on the participant's responses, and follow-up questions were used to clarify and probe deeper into the issues raised. The assumption was that individual participants define and see the world uniquely. Although specific information on issues being explored was required from all participants, the questions were used flexibly and were designed to generate participant perspectives about ideas, opinions, and experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Data Analysis

Qualitative research seeks to find the meaning of an experience from the participants of the study by gathering detailed data/information to provide answers to emerging research questions; data is prepared and organized before being reduced into themes through coding, condensing the codes, and finally presented (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The handwritten notes from these interviews were transcribed immediately after the interview sessions; process descriptions and initial impressions of the exercise were also noted.

The researchers, separately, coded the data by hand and discussed the outcomes; they also reviewed the findings of the analysis (Saldana, 2021). During the first cycle of the coding, reading of the transcribed interviews was done iteratively; creating the opportunity to note and document similarities, dissimilarities, emerging themes, and insights (Berkowitz, 1997; Srivastava & Hopwood, 2009) and sorted into units of the data and regrouped (coded) into categories after recurring themes were identified (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004; Saldana, 2021). In the second cycle of coding, the emerging themes, from the individual analysis done by the researchers, were pooled together, and patterns were matched (Saldana, 2021). These enabled the researchers to apply context and interpretations to the themes and present the data meaningfully.

Trustworthiness Criteria

To establish credibility, both women and men were selected as participants to provide insight into the research issue from different perspectives (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004), and data collection was done by conducting semi-structured interviews to enable the collection of rich data and the drawing of more detailed findings that take into account nonverbal cues, spontaneous reactions, and emotional responses (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Credibility was also addressed through member checking – using interview transcripts and peer debriefing (Ahmed, 2024; Korstjens & Moser, 2017; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

In this study, transferability was by a detailed description of the research process and the experiences shared by the participants; this will enable readers to properly comprehend the research and compare the cases of the phenomena detailed in this report with those they have observed in their own situations (Korstjens & Moser, 2017; Shenton, 2004). Also, a purposive sample was used in the study so the researcher can have an in-depth understanding of the subject of study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). A detailed description of the research design and data collection process addressed dependability (Korstjens & Moser, 2017; Shenton, 2004). Confirmability was further ensured through transcript review by peer debriefing, which also minimized researcher bias.

Findings

Findings from this study reveal the themes of conservatism and patriarchy as some of the norms and beliefs that these rural communities conform to. Subsistence farming, gendered roles, access to resources, “cooperatives”, lack of political will/trust in authorities, and formal education, emerged as themes related to how these norms and beliefs affect the lived experiences of women in these communities. These laid the groundwork for interpretations that will be presented in the context of the research objectives. For the purpose of this report, these participants will be named Participant A, Participant B, Participant C, Participant D, Participant E, and Participant F.

Conservatism

All six participants made responses alluding to this theme with 28 quotes falling under this theme. From their responses, these rural farming communities tend to share a sociocultural structure that thrives on seeking and preserving traditional institutions, practices, and values. Participant C: “... we are communal ... we are religious, we have guiding principles, e.g., we attach importance to authority and respect for the elderly or leaders ...” All the participants in this

study echoed this comment. There is the view that certain moral and social orders and hierarchies are inevitable, natural, and normal; and that these norms, rules, and beliefs should be transcendent and timeless. This is reflected in Participant E's comment; "... we live as normal as nature wants it to be." Participant D said (with a sad tone), "... but recently, things have started to change with new people coming to settle down here; you have different people with their own culture and religion... now it is different ... the communal way of ... is fast eroding." These ideals generally define lifestyle and interactions within the communities.

Patriarchy

Male hegemony persists. This is visible in the cultural, social, and economic mechanism that exerts male dominance over women, thereby seeing women as subordinates and relegating them to the background. This theme had 27 quotes. All the participants acknowledged that men control a disproportionately large share of power in their community. This is characterized by the supremacy of the father/most senior adult male in the clan or family, the (legal) dependence of wives and children, and the reckoning of succession and inheritance in the male line. They are generally the final decision-makers in families and the community. As noted by Participant E, "Men control our society," and Participant C, "... inheritance is patrilineal ...", and Participant A, "...we defer to men, and women are seen as subordinates ... decisions are generally made by men ... generally women do not claim ownership of land". The participants made responses alluding to the trend that there is institutionalized discrimination against women, exclusion of women from decision-making, and the relegation of women to domestic duties. According to Participant B, "... in my community, adult males in the household make decisions ... even when a woman takes on these roles (the man's roles), she has to put a lid on it". This finding indicates that there is a strong adherence to patriarchal norms across the communities.

Subsistence farming

Availability and accessibility of food are mainly achieved through subsistence agriculture, where community members produce and preserve food using local traditional practices. Subsistence farming describes a form of farming in which nearly all the crops produced or livestock raised are used to support the farmer and their family, with little to no surplus left for trade. An objective is self-sufficiency and reduction of hunger. This theme was made up of 17 quotes. This is a common thread that connected the participants and has been normalized. Participant E stated, "... we are mostly subsistent farmers." Similarly, Participant F said, "we farm what we need. It is either we do that so you can eat or you starve... you farm what will keep you alive". All the participants alluded to farming food crops for survival, Participant B added "... although we have a few 'big farmers'" which was corroborated by Participant C, referring to the presence of a few larger farms located in their communities.

Gendered roles

Gendered roles and responsibilities remain a significant impediment to women in agriculture, especially in communities where they are strongly entrenched. The participants expressed that traditional gender roles and responsibilities in their communities limit women's involvement in agriculture, which leads to lower income and fewer opportunities for women. Participant D: "Culturally, the woman takes care of the home and ... the household." Men are generally viewed as providers, protectors, disciplinarians, and spokespersons. According to Participant F, "... adult males are not supposed to do domestic work...". On agricultural

practices on the farm, Participant A commented that, "... women farm food crops like millet, maize, and sorghum—men farm commercial/cash crops like rice, cowpea, etc." Participant C elaborated thus: "men to do, like land preparation for planting, while the women mostly do the planting and weeding. Like when we harvest rice, the men do the cutting, the women do the gathering, and the men do the threshing." This theme was made up of 21 quotes.

Access to resources

Participants highlighted that cultural and traditional practices hinder women's access to resources, including land, loans, and extension services. This theme was made up of 21 quotes. Participant A noted, "... traditionally, women do not own land, so we have nothing to use as collateral to secure loans. After harvest, we put aside some viable seeds for the next planting season. As for extension agents, we only hear that they exist." On the issue of extension agents, Participant F said, "Some young people who started a farm nearby told us about extension services; we have not heard of them before and have not seen them either. We hope with the presence of that farm here, things will change." Participant D stated,

If you are lucky, your family has farmland, then you can reduce the cost, if not, you will have to rent the land. Even for men, securing a loan is hard. For inputs, we make do with what we have; we put aside good seeds for the next planting season.

These statements corroborate the statement made by Participant A. Participant B also agreed, noting that "extension agents are mostly men. Men talk to men and also to 'keep the women from predators.' Inputs are expensive. Sometimes, if a woman tries to rent a piece of land, the rent may be higher than usual." Participant E noted, "... for women, sometimes, even when they want loans, their husbands might not agree." The impact of cultural and traditional practices on women's access to resources is a crucial challenge that must be addressed to ensure women have equal opportunities in agriculture.

"Cooperatives"

Some women have resorted to forming self-help groups to solve their problems. Participant A stated, "... some of us belong to savings groups that do thrifts to fund farm activities and other personal commitments." Participant B, "... some women have formed informal cooperatives to help themselves, but there is only so much they can do." For Participant F, the women's group is "our support system." These organizations also give women "a chance to be taken seriously when we speak as one" said Participant F; and "a place to go to when we need to take a break; being part of the group helps encourage us to push ourselves to improve" stated Participant D. Participant C's membership "helps me make informed choices and decisions in my farming operation, making me more effective." The leadership of these organizations also "act as representatives in certain functions or events" – Participant E. This theme, which was made up of nine quotes, shows that involvement in formal or informal groups is beneficial to women in agriculture as they are seen to provide social support and serve as advocacy groups.

Lack of political will/trust in authorities

There is a lack of political will by authorities or at least some form of enabling, resulting in a lack of trust in the authorities. According to Participant A, "government/authorities say they are trying to address these issues; these things are on paper but not implemented on the ground."

Participant B commented, "... the judiciary and the constitution recognize these cultural practices; what does that tell you?" Participant C noted that "the execution of policies and the corruption in the system are stumbling blocks." A total of six quotes fell under this theme.

Formal education

Equal access to quality formal education was recognized as an agent of change. The participants are of the opinion that access to formal education, especially for the girl child, would galvanize the change needed. A total of seven quotes were generated under this theme. According to Participant A, "formal education is a great starting point, especially for the girl child." All the participants echoed this sentiment. Participant B noted that "there should be equal access to education," and Participant C further stated that

Education is a leveler. Basic education should be free and of excellent quality so that those who are not so privileged will be encouraged to send their children to school and not have to choose which gender to enroll in school. Most times, the girl child stays home and is married off early.

Conclusions

This study aimed to explore how cultural norms and traditional beliefs impact the lived experiences of women in agriculture in rural Gbagyi communities of Nigeria. Findings from this study highlight that these communities exhibit characteristics of conservatism. Many believe that the established moral values and social orders are natural and inevitable. In their opinion, these values/orders should be transcendent and timeless. This is evident where some participants decry that change would mean that their cultural values are eroding.

Cultural and social mechanisms position men as more superior than others. This is evident in property ownership being conventionally patrilineal, and women are mostly connected to the farm through their fathers, husbands, or male proxies (Curtin et al., 2024; Pilgeram & Amos, 2015). The research sheds light on the effect of cultural norms and traditional beliefs on women in rural farming communities. In these communities, women are generally not part of the decision-making process. Traditional gender roles and responsibilities are still firmly entrenched, hindering women's ability to participate fully in agricultural activities. This finding agrees with Beach (2013) and Pierotti et al. (2022) studies that women in agriculture are portrayed as support to the male farmer, the homemaker, or the one who raises the children and the caregiver for the elders; which limits their full participation in agriculture.

Furthermore, there is a gendered division of labor, with women taking on domestic work at home and engaging in activities such as planting and weeding on the farms while men are not supposed to do domestic work. Gender disparity is also evident in the choice of crops with men concentrating on commercial cash crops and women on subsistence crops (Enete & Amusa, 2010). This study's findings also reveal that women in these rural communities have limited access to resources and opportunities in agriculture. This has further entrenched subsistence agriculture in rural areas, because they mainly focus on achieving self-sufficiency and reducing hunger rather than commercial agriculture for economic gain (Glazebrook & Opoku, 2020; Lwamba et al., 2022; Oyebamiji et al., 2022). Many women in these communities have resigned

themselves to the situation, suggesting a need for increased awareness and advocacy to promote gender equity and empower women in these communities.

This study found that women have resorted to forming self-help groups to solve their problems, indicating a need for community-driven solutions to address gender disparities. The resolve is informed by sociocultural norms hindering women from decision-making and involvement in agricultural organizations (Kaaria et al., 2016; Kennedy-Duckett, 2019). This finding highlights the importance of community-driven solutions in addressing gender disparities in agriculture. This is significant as previous studies have often overlooked the role of local communities in promoting gender justice.

This study's findings revealed that the lack of political will and enabling environment for women (and communities) to thrive has led to a lack of confidence in authorities, such as the legislature, the judiciary, and other forms of constituted authority, to address women's issues. This finding agrees with Adeniyi (2010), Baba et al. (2015), and Oyebamiji et al. (2022) that despite women's contributions to the country's economy, development projects have yet to consider them in national agricultural planning and policies.

Additionally, this study found that access to quality formal education is an essential change agent for women in agriculture. According to Kehinde et al. (2021), irrespective of women's important role in the agricultural sector, they are less likely to have access to resources, such as land, credits, education, technology, and extension services, than men. This study highlights the importance of education as a change agent for women in agriculture. This is an important contribution, as previous studies have often overlooked the role of education in promoting gender equity in the agricultural sector.

Implications and Recommendations

Traditional and cultural beliefs can create resistance to change, which can impede efforts to promote gender equity, equality, and women's empowerment in agriculture. This perpetuates a gendered culture where male domination and female subordination are normalized. This resonates with the Beach (2013) study on US agriculture and Eagly and Wood's (2012) social role theory that the persistence of gender inequality and inequity in agriculture, as seen in the long-held cultural and social mechanisms that perpetuate male dominance, reinforces stereotypes and results in the underutilization of women's potential and loss of valuable contributions to the development of their communities. Recommendations include challenging the patriarchal norms and values that reinforce gender disparities, to promote gender equity, equality, and empowerment. This can be achieved through programming that targets community sensitization on restrictive and gender biased norms and beliefs, campaigns, and other awareness-raising activities to educate community members on the benefits of gender justice.

Secondly, women's limited access to resources and opportunities in agriculture due to traditional gender roles and male dominion results in reduced productivity and income, which, in turn, exacerbates poverty and food insecurity in rural communities (Glazebrook & Opoku, 2020; Lwamba et al., 2022; Oyebamiji et al., 2022). To overcome the constraints of subsistence farming, women's access to resources such as land, credit, and extension services should be improved. This study recommends the implementation and enforcement of policies and programs that promote gender equity in the distribution of resources and extension services, providing women with equal access to land, credit, training, and support to build their capacity to thrive.

Extension and education programming should intentionally target rural smallholder communities.

The perceived lack of political will to address these challenges and create an enabling environment for women's participation in agriculture can limit rural development and reduce the country's overall economic growth. Political will and faith in leaders are crucial in effecting change in rural communities. This study recommends that retrogressive practices should be recognized, challenged, and abolished to ensure women have equal access to resources and decision-making power. Bock (2015) noted that the gendered nature of policy domains and changing structures and processes needs to be addressed within a country's institutional frameworks and cultural norms.

The lack of access to education, training, and decision-making processes can erode women's self-esteem and confidence, which can have long-lasting effects on their ability and zeal to participate in development projects and forums (Gupta & Singh, 2024; Kozica et al., 2015; Tanwir & Safdar, 2013), including in agriculture. This study recommends that access to quality formal education for all, regardless of socio-economic status, to build capacity, boost self-esteem and confidence, and improve livelihoods (Kehinde et al., 2021) can help empower women and improve their livelihoods. Also, the participation of women in cooperatives, farmer groups, informal thrift associations, and other gender-sensitive institutional frameworks should be encouraged (Baba et al., 2015). These groups and organizations benefit women in rural agricultural communities by providing women a place to take a break and organize, a platform for sharing knowledge and experiences, and support to build their capacity to thrive.

Finally, this study recommends that additional research is needed to determine best practices for the implementation and enforcement of policies and programs that promote gender equity by organs of government. Furthermore, research is needed on how extension service providers in Nigeria can develop a structure that will provide a springboard for actionable change and support the implementation and enforcement of effective policies and programs tailored to address the specific needs of rural women in agriculture in these communities.

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