

## **Constraints to Women's Empowerment in Agriculture in Rural Farming Areas in Oyo State, Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

*This study examined the major barriers to women empowerment in agriculture in rural farming areas in Oyo State, Nigeria. A multi-stage sampling procedure was used to select 100 women farmers and primary data was collected with the aid of a semi-structured questionnaire. Descriptive statistics was used to analyse the data and the findings are presented in table and chart. The study revealed that the inability to access formal credit ( $\bar{x} = 4.61$ ), heavy domestic workload ( $\bar{x} = 4.36$ ), and poor pricing of produce ( $\bar{x} = 3.89$ ) are major barriers to women empowerment in agriculture in the study area. Therefore, providing access to formal credit facilities, provision of labour-saving technologies, and regulation of agricultural produce prices will enable women's empowerment in agriculture.*

**Keywords:** Women farmers, rural, empowerment, agricultural productivity

### **Introduction**

Women make up about half of the world's agricultural labour force, this includes two-thirds of all livestock farmers, twelve percent of fish farmers, and a huge number of agroforestry workers (FAO, 2017). However, they face numerous challenges at different stages within the food system that impede their productivity. Women are actively involved in farming, harvesting, processing, marketing and final food preparation; but they do not have equal access to productive resources and decision making like their male counterpart (Doss, 2018). Many constraints are perceived to obstruct women's empowerment in agriculture. Although several studies have been carried out to detect the limitations women encounter in agriculture, most of these studies are directed towards the challenges they face in agricultural production, while neglecting the fact that women's empowerment in agriculture goes beyond agricultural production alone. Therefore, there is a need to detect and overcome the constraints to women's empowerment in agriculture to help women maximize their full potential in agriculture.

According to Kabeer (1999)cited in Huis *et al.*, (2017), empowerment is the ability to make strategic life choices in areas where this ability has been previously denied. These choices can be exercised in three interrelated dimensions: (i) resources

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(access to material, social, and human resources) (ii) agency (processes of decision-making) (iii) achievement (well-being outcomes). It is worthy to note that women empowerment is a context-specific, multidimensional social process; thus, it lacks a definite meaning. Women's empowerment is subjective to individual personalities, aspirations, cultures, and experiences (Alkire *et al.*, 2013). Hence, any study aimed at women empowerment needs to put this into consideration.

It has been proven that most women are being marginalised and disempowered in the agricultural sector (Mohsin *et al.*, 2021; Tsiboe *et al.*, 2018). Many females face several constraints and inequities, most of which are embedded in cultural practices and norms, some are even encoded in legal provision (Schutter, 2013). For instance, some laws such as those that governs access to land, include inequitable and exclusionary provisions, thus institutionalising gender parity. Where such legislative measures are not in place, customary laws and practices most times have restrictive effects on females, thereby restraining their access to major resources such as land and credit, and thus, affect their productivity.

Mitigating these constraints would lead to an increase in their contribution to the agricultural food system and subsequently result in an overall increase in food security (FAO, 2018). Over the years, most of the challenges women face have been generalised, neglecting the fact that the nature and extent of gender inequity and the conditions necessary to empower women vary across countries, communities and regions (Akter *et al.*, 2017). In some communities, women may enjoy considerable decision-making power over production and input while they are disempowered with respect to control over income, asset ownership or community leadership (Akter *et al.*, 2017; Alkire *et al.*, 2013). Therefore, there is need to identify the specific challenges women face in different regions in order of priority because their challenges are not homogeneous in nature and should be treated in a more specific context in order to provide well-tailored solutions/interventions to address their constraints. Based on this, this study identified the major constraints to women's empowerment in agriculture in rural farming area in Oyo State.

## Methodology

This research was carried out in Oyo State, Nigeria. Oyo State covers a total land area of 28,454 square kilometers with an estimated population of 5,591,589 people, comprising 2,778,462 females and 2,802,432 males (National Population Commission, 2006). The major occupation of people in this region is farming.

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This study was carried out using a quantitative research method. Primary data was collected from the respondents (women farmers) with the aid of a semi-structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was filled with the aid of a translator, who also helped in writing the answers given by the respondents because the majority of the respondents could neither read nor write. The questions were structured to capture the socio-economic characteristics of the women and the constraints they encountered based on the five domains of women's empowerment in agriculture as listed by Alkire *et al.*, (2013). The domains are production, income, resources, time and leadership.

A multi-stage sampling procedure was used to select the respondents. The first stage involved a purposive selection of two local government areas (LGAs); Atiba and Ido out of the thirty-three LGAs. These two LGAs were selected because they have many rural communities with a high number of women farmers. Stratified sampling technique was used at the second stage to group the communities in the two LGAs into urban and rural communities; the former was discarded. In the third stage; five villages were selected from the rural communities in each of the two LGAs through a simple random sampling technique. This made up ten villages namely; Lagbin, Koguo, Alajata, Akufo, Akinware, Ikolaba, Onre Bare, Otefon, Lagunna, and Oridota. Finally, 10 households were randomly selected in each of the ten villages, although the population of each of the villages differ. This gave a sample size of 100 households. The respondents for the study were adult female farmers in selected households. The data was collected from the 2nd to the 23rd June 2019.

Prior to the commencement of the main data collection, a pilot survey was carried out in Akanran village, Ona-ara LGA, Oyo State among non-sample respondents having similar characteristics with the study area. This was done to ascertain the accuracy, efficiency and adequacy of the research instrument. Data collected was analysed using descriptive statistics. IBM SPSS Statistics 20 was used for the statistical analyses. Results from the analyses were presented using tables and charts.

### **Results and Discussion**

#### **Constraints to Women's Empowerment in Agriculture**

Table 1 shows the perceived barriers to women's empowerment in agriculture in the study. The constraints were ranked according to their means. The major perceived constraint to women's empowerment in agriculture in the study area is their inability to access formal credit ( $\bar{x}$  =4.61). From the interview, it was gathered that the credit they get was mostly from informal sources and was usually small, about ₦5000 (~US\$13.88).

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**Table 1: Perceived constraints to women’s empowerment in agriculture**

Constraints	Mean( $\bar{x}$ )	Rank
Inability to access formal credit	4.61	1 <sup>st</sup>
Heavy workload	4.36	2 <sup>nd</sup>
Poor pricing of farm produce in the market	3.89	3 <sup>rd</sup>
Lack of access to productive resources	3.77	4 <sup>th</sup>
Lack of land ownership and right	3.68	5 <sup>th</sup>
Lack of input in productive decision-making	3.34	6 <sup>th</sup>
Lack of control over income/profit	3.17	7 <sup>th</sup>
Lack of access to trainings and extension services	2.76	8 <sup>th</sup>
Lack of access to storage facilities	2.72	9 <sup>th</sup>
Lack of access to group membership	2.71	10 <sup>th</sup>
Inability to purchase, sell or transfer assets	2.69	11 <sup>th</sup>
Inability to participate in leadership positions	2.61	12 <sup>th</sup>
Poor market access	2.41	13 <sup>th</sup>
Inability to speak in public	2.31	14 <sup>th</sup>

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## Field Survey, 2019

It made it difficult for them to purchase agricultural inputs, so they would often divert the loans to meet pressing household needs such as food, healthcare, etc. This is consistent with (Ogunleye, 2017) who found out that formal institutions like microfinance banks in Nigeria lend more to male clients than female clients. Most of the women claimed that if they had access to bigger credits with little interest rates, their agricultural productivity would increase as they would be able to rent or lease more agricultural land and purchase necessary farm inputs. The next major constraint is heavy workload ( $\bar{x}$  =4.36). This is similar to Ayevbuomwan *et al.*, (2016) report that heavy workload is a major hindrance to women in rural Nigeria. From this, it can be inferred that women need labour-saving technologies that can remove drudgery and reduce their time spent on domestic and farm activities allowing them more time for leisure. This will also have a positive impact on their health and general well-being.

Poor pricing of their farm produce in the market is another important constraint indicated by the women ( $\bar{x}$ =3.89). This was said to reduce their profit/income most times. The perishable nature of their produce mostly denies them of negotiation advantage, and they concede by selling at not-so-profitable prices. They reported that often, they were left with little proceeds that could barely feed them let alone sufficient enough to expand their farming business. This is one of the underlying reasons why most of them still operate at small scales. In addition, lack of land ownership and right ( $\bar{x}$  =3.68) was mentioned by the respondents as one of the barriers they encounter. This is not unexpected as Chigbu *et al.*, (2019) reported that accessing land is a major limitation women encounter in agriculture. Several empirical studies support this claim that women lack access and control over land (Chigbu *et al.*, 2019; Dery, 2016). This might be the reason they have little or no decision-making ability/input regarding agricultural production. On this note, advocacy and legislation are needed to break the cultural norms that make it

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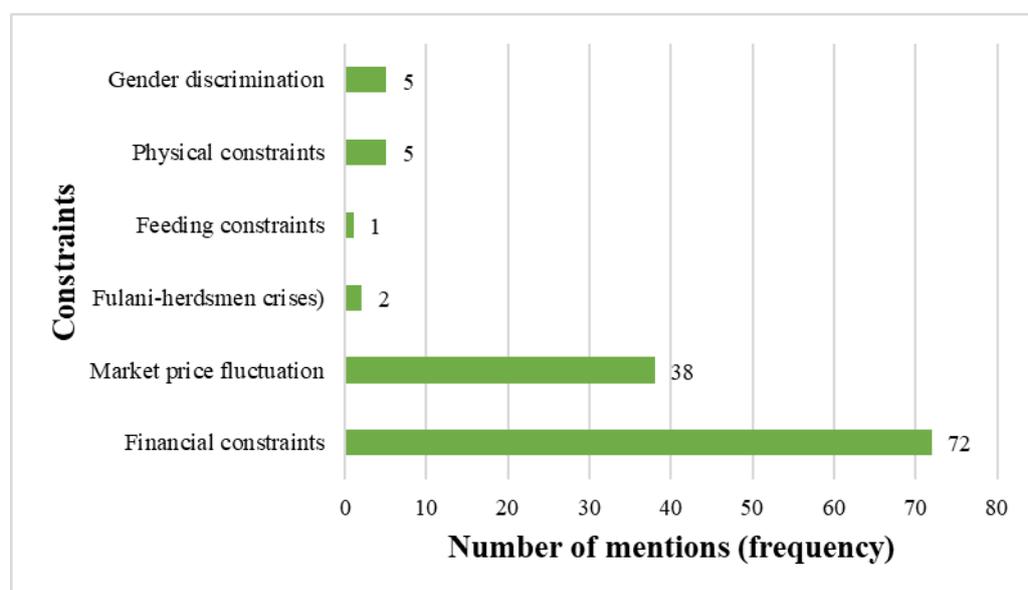
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difficult for women to acquire their own land in these rural communities.

The inability to speak in public ( $\bar{x}=0.97$ ), e.g. discussion with extension agents is the least barrier to their empowerment in agriculture in the study area. This implies that women have a voice to a certain extent, this is not surprising since the majority of them belong to groups.

Other constraints indicated by the women were financial constraints which can be linked with the inability to acquire substantial credit facilities, market price fluctuation, gender discrimination, Fulani's herdsman-farmers conflicts, and so on (Figure 2). How these constraints were perceived differ amongst the respondents, which is obvious by the number of mention(s). However, this does not imply that they are not significant. For instance, Okoro (2019) reported that some women are been raped on their farmland as a result of the Fulani's herdsman-farmers conflicts and the fear of the herdsman has kept some of the women away from farming on their own farmland. Evidently, there is a need to advocate for interventions that can help women overcome these barriers to improve their productivity and subsequently improve their household food security status.



**Figure 2: Other constraints to women's empowerment in agriculture**  
**Source: Field Survey, 2019.**

### Conclusion and Recommendations

The majority of the women farmer in the study area have difficulty in accessing formal credit, and are also saddled with a heavy domestic workload alongside their farming activities. All these challenges reduce their productivity level. Empowering

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women in areas where they have been previously denied will help improve food availability.

Government should liaise with the microfinance institutions to provide soft loans to women without bureaucracy. Also, legislations should be made, in agreement with the monetary policy department of the apex bank, Central Bank of Nigeria to ensure loans are available, accessible, and affordable for smallholder women farmers.

There is the need for interventions that brings about accessible, cost-friendly and labour-saving technologies such as row-weeders, power tillers, crop processors, and so on. This can be made available to the women through the social groups they belong.

There is a need to set up a standard regulatory board that will oversee the fixing of produce prices in such a way that local farmers will not be adversely affected.

Law review and reforms are needed to eradicate traditions and norms that prevent women from owning lands.

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goal-to-end-poverty-by-2030