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Rural Women Farmers' Empowerment in Kwara State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study assessed rural women empowerment in Kwara State, Nigeria. The specific objectives were to: identify the sources of empowerment among women farmers; identify the forms of empowerment among women farmers; ascertain the benefits of empowerment among women farmers; and identify the challenges to empowerment of women farmers. A multistage sampling procedure was employed to select one hundred and fifty (150) respondents. Data were collected using structured interview schedule and analysed using percentage, mean, and standard deviation. Findings revealed that the majority (90.0%) of the respondents relied on women's groups and spousal support (86.7%) as primary sources of empowerment. The result shows that personal empowerment (100.0%) and psychological empowerment (98.0%) were the major forms of empowerment experienced by the women. Furthermore, empowerment benefits were financial *independence ($\bar{x}$=4.59; SD=0.49), Decision-making confidence ($\bar{x}$=4.71; SD=0.46), workforce participation ($\bar{x}$=3.55; SD=0.70).Major challenges to empowerment included education/training gaps ($\bar{x}$ =2.16), resource scarcity ($\bar{x}$=2.10), and poverty ($\bar{x}$=2.04). The rural women farmers exhibited moderate empowerment. The study therefore recommended that women empowerment should be strengthened by the government through adult literacy programs.*

Keywords: Empowerment; Rural Women Farmers***;*** Sources.

Introduction

Agriculture remains globally indispensable employing 27% of the world's workforce and contributing to global GDP (FAO, 2023). The Agricultural sector accounts for up to 22.4 percent of total GDP growth in Nigeria and is a major source of income for people in Nigeria especially in rural areas (Kramer, 2022). Although agriculture remain essential in Nigeria's economy, the country faces declining per capita food production and rising food insecurity which is attributable to the neglect of the role of women in agricultural production in Nigeria (IFPRI, 2023). In kwara State, despite women central role in farming; government and NGO programmes have not adequately addressed their lack of access to land, credit training and technology, contributing to low productivity and persistent limited empowerment among women (Yusuf et al., 2022). Women empowerment refers to the process of enhancing women's ability to access resources, make strategic life choices, and control assets to improve their socioeconomic status (Malapit et al., 2023). Globally, women empowerment in agriculture remains a

challenge, with women contributing over 40% of the agricultural labor force in developing countries yet facing systemic discrimination in land ownership, credit access, and decision-making (FAO, 2021). In Nigeria, patriarchal norms often restrict women's participation in economic activities, reinforcing gender disparities (Ogunniyi et al., 2022).

Women's empowerment in agriculture is critical for enhancing food security, yet rural women farmers in Nigeria face persistent gender-based constraints. Studies show that empowering rural women can increase agricultural productivity by up to 30%, reducing poverty and improving household nutrition (Nwosu et al., 2022; FAO, 2023; Berretta et al., 2023). There have been various attempts at women's empowerment from the government, NGOs, and other groups (Osegboun, 2025). However, implementation gaps persist due to bureaucratic bottlenecks and inadequate gender-sensitive monitoring (Olanrewaju et al., 2023). Women empowerment is seen as an important component of rural development because it is linked to better health, education, economic outcomes and the general well-being of rural women and their families (Urhibo et al., 2023) Ogunniyi et al., (2022) found that empowered rural women experience improved income, better family nutrition, and increased participation in community leadership. In addition, Nwosu et al., (2022b) found that financial independence for empowered women reduce vulnerability to shocks, while education and training enhance agricultural innovation adoption. Kwara food security and agric GDP depend on women, but disempowerment keeps productivity low, only 5% rural women had empowerment index>0.6. (Muhammed-Lawal et al., 2022). There is limited empirical data on the forms of empowerment and sources of empowerment for rural women farmers in Kwara State. The study is out to assess the empowerment of rural women farmers in Kwara State, Nigeria. The specific objectives of the study were to; identify the sources of empowerment among women farmers; identify the forms of empowerment among women farmers; ascertain the benefits of empowerment among women farmers; and identify the challenges to empowerment of women farmers.

Methodology

The study was carried out in Kwara State, Nigeria. The state covers a total land area of 36,825 square kilometres, located between parallels 11° 71' and 11° 45' and 6' 40' East longitude, and coordinates 80 300N 5000E, with a population of 2,365,353 in 2006 (National Bureau of Statistics, NBS, 2009), which made it the 30th among the 36 states in Nigeria. Kwara State is characterised by a diverse landscape, encompassing hills, plains, valleys, and a network of rivers, including the Niger and Benue.

The population for this study consists of rural women farmers in Oyun, Offa and Ilorin east local government areas. A multistage sampling procedure was used to select 150 respondents for the study. In the first stage, three local government areas (Ilorin East, Oyun and Offa) were randomly selected out of 16 LGAs in Kwara State. The second stage involved a proportionate sampling of 15% of the communities in each LGA (Ilorin east communities are Oke-Oyi, Iponrin, Apado,Ibagun, Okelele, Amule, Woru, Pepele, Onikoko, Oke-Ogun, Marafa, Lajolo, Kure, Iporin, Panada, Agbeyangi, Ile-Apa Lajiki, Budo Are, Baboko, Oke-Ose, Agbabiaka, Aiyekale, Akanbi, Apa-Ola, and Fufu. Oyun communities are Ilemona, Erin-Ile, Ira, Igosun, Ojoku, Igbona, Inaja, Ikotun, Ijagbo, Ipee, Oro, Ileogbo,Oko, Ajase, Aho, Agbamu, Olomitaka, Okelede, Gbolowuduro, Ajoko,

Dalemo, Odowo, and Sakongba. Communities in Offa are Offa, Adeleke, Igbewere, Igbadu, Ajelanwa, Gudugba, Ilemona, Ira, Awesu, Galiadi, Faje, Eleeku, Inisha, Balogun, Balogun Ojoku, Oga-nla, Dada, Odo-Ogofa, Awopa, Alabata, and Olowa) to obtain 6 communities, which are: Oke oyi, Lajiki, Ipee, Ira, Ilemona and Offa.

The third stage involved a proportionate sampling of 30% women farmers from the list of registered women farmers obtained from an enumeration of the communities with the help of Kwara State Agricultural Development Project (KWADP) extension personnel.

The sources of empowerment were measured by asking the respondents to indicate Yes or No from the list provided: e.g. Agricultural Development Program (ADP), Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs), Husband, Women Group, Family/Friend and Social Network.

The forms of empowerment were measured by asking the women to indicate Yes or No for each empowerment listed: e.g., Personal empowerment, Psychological empowerment, Economic empowerment, Social empowerment, Technological empowerment, and Political empowerment.

The benefits of empowerment were measured by asking the women to indicate how they have benefitted from each form of empowerment. It was measured on a 5-point Likert type scale type of (5) strongly agree (4) agree (3) neutral (2) disagree (1) strongly disagree. The bench mark was 3. This implied that any benefits whose mean is equal or greater than 3 was considered as a major benefit to rural women farmers' empowerment while any benefits whose mean is lower than 3 was considered as a minor benefit. The challenges to the empowerment of rural women farmers was measured on a 3-point Likert type scale of (3) very severe, (2) severe (1) Not severe. The bench mark was 2 and this implied that any challenge whose mean is equal to or greater than 2 was considered as a severe challenge but any challenge whose mean is lower than 2 is considered as insignificant challenge.

Frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were used to analyse the data.

Table 1: Sampling frame

Tota LGASample size	**LGA**	**15% communities proportionate sampling**	**Rural**	**30%(Registered women farmers)**	
	Ilorin east	Oke oyi		100(30)	
	Oyun	Lajiki		73(22)	
	Offa	Ipee		60(18)	**150**
		Ira		133(40)	
		Ilemona		50(15)	
		Offa		83(25)	

Source: Field survey, 2025

Results and Discussion

Sources of Empowerment to Women Farmers

Figure 1 shows the sources of empowerment for rural women farmers'. Women groups was (90%) This implies that the women groups serve as the primary platform for collective empowerment. The report is similar to the findings of Njuki (2022) who reported that women groups increase women's access to agricultural loans by 40% compared to working individually. Also, Aderinoye- Abdulwahab et al. (2021), find out that women rely on informal groups as main source because formal training is inadequate. Husbands (86.7%), This implies that there was support from the spouse to the women farmers' empowerment. Family and friends (68%). This demonstrates how informal networks compensate for institutional gaps. This corroborates the findings of Bandiera (2021) which found that 65% of women farmers rely on relatives for seed sharing rather than formal suppliers. NGOs (16.7%), this may be because of limited program outreach or funds. This is in line with the findings of Okeke (2022) who found out that NGO services fail to reach 83% of rural women due to geographic and cultural barriers. Social networks (15.3%), this implies that there is minimal use of broader community connections. This confirms the findings of Adebayo (2023) who reported that just 18% of rural women access farming information through digital platforms. ADP (10%), this implies that there is failure of government programs to engage women farmers. This confirms the study of Akinola (2021) who revealed that 90% of ADP beneficiaries are male due to biased implementation.

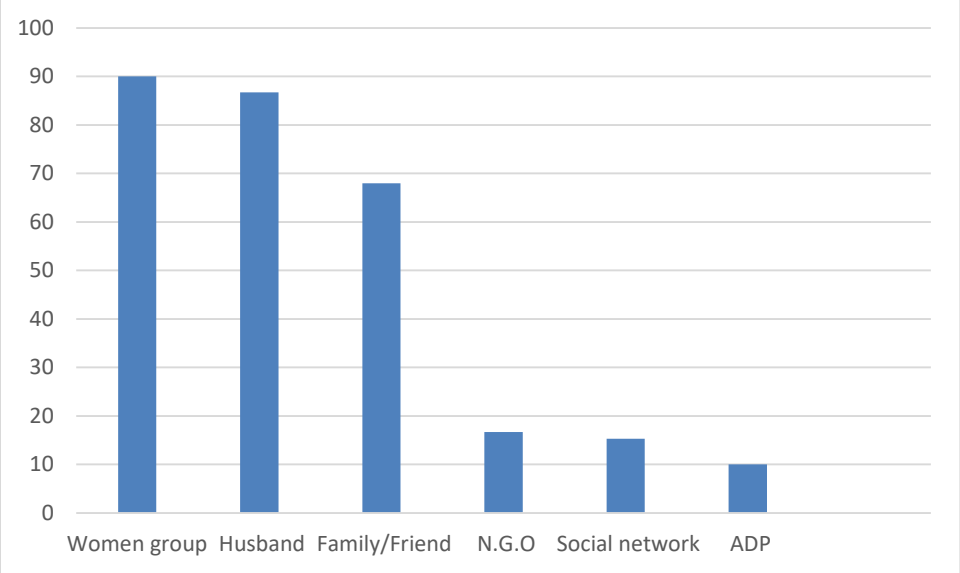

Figure 1: Sources of Empowerment for Rural Women Farmers'

Form of Empowerment to Women Farmers

Table 2 shows that the forms of empowerment received by the women farmers were personal empowerment (100%), psychological empowerment (98%), political empowerment (86%), economic empowerment (73.3%), and Social empowerment (45.3%). This indicates that there is universal access to basic skills and confidence-building programs. This aligns with the study of Ogunleye (2023) who found similar comprehensive coverage of personal development training in women's agricultural initiatives across Nigeria. This result also shows that there is near-universal provision of

mental resilience and self-efficacy training. This result confirms Kabeer (2022) who demonstrated that psychological support interventions improve women's perseverance in farming activities by 38%.

This result suggests relatively strong participation in local governance. This is consistent with Agarwal's (2022) findings that found 84% of empowered women farmers engage in agricultural policy discussions at village levels. revealing significant but incomplete access to financial resources. This result is in line with Alene's (2023) findings that three-quarters of West African women farmers participate in microcredit programs. This implies limited integration into broader community networks. This result supports Mudege (2021) who documented that only 44% of rural women participate in community decision-making structures.

Table 2: Form of empowerment to women Farmers

Form of Empowerment	Yes
Personal empowerment	100
Psychological empowerment	98.0
Political empowerment	86.0
Economic empowerment	73.3
Social Empowerment	45.3
Technological empowerment	20.7

Source: Field Survey 2025

Benefits of Rural Women Farmers Empowerment

Table 3 shows the benefits of empowerment to rural women farmers. The benefits were financial independence (=4.59; SD=0.49), This implies that the women farmers have a sense of empowerment when they have financial independence. This finding aligns with Aminu (2023) who found financial autonomy to be the most significant driver of women's empowerment in agricultural communities. Decision-making confidence (=4.71; SD=0.46), This implies that the women farmers believe that the ability to make informed decisions by themselves empowers them. These results support Bandiera (2021) who demonstrated that self-belief significantly enhances women's agricultural productivity. workforce participation (= 3.55; SD=0.70), this implies that women farmers' participation in collective action empowers them for accomplishment. This result corroborates the findings of Babatunde & Olawuyi (2021), who observed that cooperative membership among rural women in Kwara State enhanced their access to markets, reduced exploitation by middlemen, and improved income stability. Access to quality education having the lowest score (= 2.34; SD=1.00). This implies that the women farmers do not have access to quality education. The result generally shows that they are not empowered socially. The result aligns with Adekola et al. (2023), who found that patriarchal norms and rural infrastructural deficits in Nigeria disproportionately restrict women’s access to formal schooling and lifelong learning programs. Technology access was critically low (=1.77; SD=1.32). This result shows that women farmers are not technologically empowered. This may be because of poor education. This result confirms Adebayo's (2023) findings about the digital gender gap in rural farming communities. Voting rights (=4.08; SD=1.06). This implies that women farmers understand their right to vote. This is in line with the findings of Johnson (2022) that rural women farmers engage in voting to protect their livelihood.

Table 3: Benefits of Empowerment

Items	Mean	Std. Dev
Ensures access to quality education	3.24	0.69
ensures financial independence	4.59	0.49
build strong support network	4.08	0.48
advocate for women	3.95	0.53
Ensures ability to make decisions	4.71	0.46
helps to experience greater autonomy in personal and professional spheres	3.26	0.54
ensures i express my opinion and assert my rights	4.34	0.54
helps to be more resilient in the face of adversity	4.55	0.55
ensures increase participation in workforce	3.55	0.70
empowered through extension and training to improve my skill	2.93	0.73
ensures access to capital and resources which fosters entrepreneurship	3.36	0.90
empowered economically to impact poverty reduction	3.44	0.86
help to take on leadership roles	2.64	0.97
ensures equal access to quality education	2.34	1.00
helps to raise awareness against gender-based violence and discrimination	2.82	1.02
helps to access vital information and resources through technology	1.77	1.32
empowered through digital platforms	1.81	1.23
ensures social media to share experience and support each other	1.80	1.30
help to exercise my right to vote	4.08	1.06
helps to get farm inputs from the government	2.50	0.91
ensures participating in local government decision-making processes	3.30	0.85

Source; Field Survey 2025 mean cutoff= 3

Challenges to Empowerment of Rural Women Farmers

Table 4 reveals the challenges to the empowerment of women farmers. They were poor education and training was (2.16), Inadequate access to resources (2.10). Poverty (2.04), Workload and time constraints (1.52), Poor health (1.21) and cultural norms (This implies that limited education has limited the empowerment of women farmers. This confirms the study of Ojo (2023) who found that 82% of rural women lack access to formal agricultural training, reducing their productivity by 30%. women farmers have restrictions on farming inputs. This corroborates the findings of Nweke (2022) who documented that 78% of women struggle to access quality seeds, fertilizers, and land for cultivation. revealing financial limitations as a key barrier. This aligns with World Bank (2023) reports showing that rural women's incomes remain below national poverty thresholds in developing economies. demonstrating the heavy burden of domestic and farm labor. This supports Diiro's (2021) findings that women spend 65% more time than men on combined farm and household duties. This highlights healthcare access as a challenge. This is consistent with Omotayo (2023) who linked poor rural healthcare to

25% lower agricultural productivity among women farmers. Cultural norms showing persistent gender barriers despite being less severe than other challenges. This confirms Agarwal's (2022) research that cultural restrictions reduce women's land ownership opportunities by 40%

Table 4: Challenges to empowerment of women farmers

Challenges	Mean
Poor education and training	2.16
Inadequate access to resources	2.10
Poverty	2.04
Workload and time	1.52
Poor health	1.21
Cultural norms	1.12

Source; Field Survey 2025 mean cutoff=2

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concluded that rural women farmers were empowered mainly through the women groups and their husbands. They see financial independence as the most benefits received through empowerment. They believe that the ability to make informed decisions is crucial to their psychological empowerment. They also verified that participation in workforce and collective action strengthen their accomplishment in economic empowerment. However, the women were not socially, technologically and politically empowered as expected. Some of the challenges to empowerment of rural women farmers include poor education, inadequate access to resources, cultural norms among others.

Soft loans can be provided by the government for the rural women farmers to support their farm enterprises. Farm inputs can be subsidised by the government to promote the activities of women farmers. Training should be organised for women farmers on leadership and political initiatives.
Rural adult education should be encouraged to improve the literacy level of the women farmers. Women farmers should be integrated into simple farm technology to enhance their productivity.

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