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Characterisation of Farmers' Groups in Agricultural Development in Osun State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study characterized farmers' groups in agricultural development in Osun State, Nigeria. Quantitative data were collected from 180 respondents in selected farmers' groups across the state through structured interviews. Data were analyzed using means, percentages, and Pearson Product-Moment Correlation. Most (96.5%) farmer groups were mixed and registered (96.9%), with a mean establishment age of 6 ± 4 years. Group leaders were elected and served a 2-year term. Members gained technical assistance (95%) and access to inputs (83.9%) from the groups. A little above half (53.3%) of the farmers' groups performed at a high level in agricultural development. The key roles were providing extension services ($\bar{x}$=2.77) and marketing access and information ($\bar{x}$=2.67). However, inadequate equipment ($\bar{x}$=1.67) and inadequate funds ($\bar{x}$=1.56) were the major barriers that limited their performance. Age (0.164), year of membership (0.254), group size (0.497), and year of formation (0.253) were significantly related to the role performance of farmers' groups. The study concluded that although many farmers' groups performed at a relatively high level, their performance can be strengthened through capacity-building for both leaders and members, as well as through institutional support.

Keywords: farmers' groups, agricultural development, role

Introduction

Agriculture is central to global development, providing food, raw materials, employment, and income for millions, especially in developing economies (World Bank, 2025, 2026). The sector employs about 1 billion people, or 28% of the global workforce, and sustains roughly 65% of poor working adults (ILO, 2026; World Bank, 2025).In Nigeria, agriculture employs over 36% of the workforce and contributes about 24% of GDP while supporting food security (National Bureau of Statistics, 2023; Famakinwa et al., 2025). However, smallholder farmers face persistent constraints, including limited access to credit, quality inputs, improved technology, markets, and extension services (Balana &

Oyeyemi, 2022). In Sub-Saharan Africa, including Nigeria, these challenges are more severe because agriculture is dominated by smallholders with low mechanization, weak institutions, poor infrastructure, and limited market access (Touch et al., 2024; World Bank Group, 2026). This problem has led to declining productivity and rising food imports in Nigeria (Famakinwa, 2024; Development Agenda for Western Nigeria Commission, 2026), despite smallholders producing 70–80% of global food and dominating Nigeria's rural economy (Touch et al., 2024).

Because individual farmers cannot overcome these barriers alone, collective action through cooperatives and farmers' groups has emerged as a sustainable solution (Kareska, 2025). Registered and unregistered groups such as associations, self-help groups, and women's groups improve productivity and reduce rural poverty by pooling resources, sharing information, and strengthening market access (Byaruhanga et al., 2025). They also improve access to production information, inputs, credit, storage, and value-addition opportunities, leading to higher incomes (Pasupuleti et al., 2025). Farmers' groups empower smallholders by improving access to resources, strengthening bargaining power, promoting market linkages, and promoting technology adoption (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit, 2023; Ma et al., 2024). They enable small and marginal farmers, who typically lack bargaining power and access to formal markets, to act collectively, reduce dependence on intermediaries, and negotiate better prices (Beniwal & Singh, 2026). Farmers' groups provide political representation that shapes agricultural transformation and serve as platforms for agencies to introduce innovations and mobilise resources (International Fund for Agricultural Development, 2023; Byaruhanga et al., 2025).

The extant literature indicates that participation in farmers' groups contributes to increased farm productivity, improved food security, stronger bargaining power, and enhanced farm management skills (Demont, 2022; Lin et al., 2022). Zou and Wang (2022) further observe improvements in household welfare and livelihoods, product quality, value chain integration, and rural income. In Nigeria, farmers' groups enable bulk purchase of inputs such as fertilisers and herbicides, group farming, and policy advocacy (Farmsquare, 2024; Olaoye et al., 2024). Olatinwo et al. (2023) and Kehinde et al. (2025) also reported that group membership improves access to inputs, output quality, yields, and income stability through credit and storage support.

Despite these potentials, evidence on the actual role performance of farmers' groups in driving agricultural development in Osun State remains limited. Policymakers and development partners lack empirical data to strengthen these groups for optimal productivity and welfare. Furthermore, the fragmented nature of many groups in the study area constrains coordination of agricultural activities (Development Agenda for Western Nigeria Commission, 2026). Without a clear understanding of their role performance, governance, and organisational characteristics, efforts to support smallholder farmers risk being undermined. This gap justifies the present study.

The main objective of this study is to characterise farmers' groups in agricultural development in Osun State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study

1. ~~d~~described the leadership structure, governance and emergence;

2. identified the benefits derived from participating in the farmers' group;
3. determined the role performed by the farmers' group; and
4. identified the barriers to their performance in the study area.

Ho: There is no significant relationship between members' characteristics, group characteristics and the farmers' groups' performance.

Methodology

The study was conducted in Osun State, one of the six states in southwestern Nigeria. It shares boundaries with Kwara State to the north, Ekiti and Ondo States to the east, Ogun State to the south, and Oyo State to the west. It lies between latitude 7°30′0″N and longitude 4°30′0″E (Agboola et al., 2024). The state has 30 local government areas (LGAs), divided into three agricultural zones: Oshogbo, Iwo, and Ife/Ijesha. The target population for this study was the members of the farmers' group in Osun State. Respondents were chosen through a multistage sampling procedure. At the first stage, 20 per cent of local government areas (LGAs) in each zone were selected, yielding 3 LGAs from Osogbo, 2 from Ife-Ijesha, and 1 from Iwo, for a total of 6 LGAs. At the second stage, 35% of farmers' groups in each LGA were proportionately selected based on the number of groups in each LGA, yielding a total sample of 55 groups. At the final stage, based on the number of farmers' group members, 180 members were selected using a proportionate sampling technique. A structured interview schedule served as the data collection instrument. Data were elicited on the characteristics of the 'farmers' group, criteria for leadership emergence and governance, benefits derived from the 'farmers' group, roles performed by the 'farmers' group, and barriers to their performance.

The dependent variable for this study was the role performance of farmers' groups in Osun State. Role performance was conceptualised by asking the respondent to indicate the extent to which they perform the expected 13 roles using a four-point scale ranging from always perform (3), occasionally perform (2), rarely perform (1), and never perform (0). The responses from each of the expected roles were calculated into a performance score, with a maximum of 39 and a minimum of 0. The total score was categorised into high- and low-performance roles using an equal-interval approach. Any performance score below 19.5 was considered low, and those above 19.5 were considered high. Barriers to role performance of the members of the farmers' group were measured using a three-point scale of Not a problem (0), Minor problem (1) and Major problem (2). Respondents were asked to rate each listed barrier in terms of its impact on farmers' group performance. Percentage, mean, standard deviation, chi-square, and Pearson product-moment correlation were adopted to analyse the data.

Results and Discussion

Characteristics of the Farmers' Groups

The results in Table 1 show that the mean year of establishment of farmers' groups was 6 ± 4 years. This finding shows that most farmer groups were relatively young and may not yet have fully matured in terms of organisational development, which would equip them with the experience required for growth. Higher years of existence will no doubt influence the

internal structures and performance of farmers' groups. This is because age-old groups would have developed internal cohesion and mechanisms for conflict resolution, thereby encouraging their performance (Famakinwa et al., 2025). The mean farmers' group size was 17±14, suggesting that most farmers' groups have few members. This result may reflect the minimum membership requirement for some development programmes. Njenga et al. (2023) observed that smaller groups are more efficient for straightforward tasks, while larger groups benefit from greater labour, stronger bargaining power, and greater influence. Larger groups also perform better in problem-solving, especially in fact-finding roles. Similarly, Akinola et al. (2023) reported that small group size constrains bargaining power and the ability to influence market outcomes. Besides, the results show that farmers' groups were primarily formed to access development interventions (73.9%). This suggests that most farmers' groups were established to access free services or assistance from government and donor agencies, rather than out of common needs. This finding is consistent with result of Issa et al. (2022) that development interventions often stimulate the establishment of enterprise groups, such as farmers' groups, to facilitate training, input distribution, members' coordination, and access to subsidies and grants. Most farmers' groups (96.9%) had formal constitutions, were registered, and operated as formal organisations. Registration confers legal recognition and legitimacy, enhancing access to financial aid, government programmes, credit, and development interventions, whereas unregistered groups face limitations in formal institutions (Famakinwa et al., 2025). The presence of a constitution in farmers' groups indicates a stronger organisational structure and governance that regulate members' participation, enforce discipline, and enhance performance and sustainability.

Table 1: Farmers' groups' characteristics

Variables	% (n=180)	Mean
Group composition		
Male and Female	96.1	
Female only	3.3	
Years of group establishment		
≤ 5	55.6	
6-10	26.7	6 ± 4
11+	17.7	
Mode of group formation		
Development intervention	73.9	
Felt needs	26.1	
Group registration		
Yes	96.9	
No	3.1	
Constitution		
Had constitution	96.9	
No constitution	3.1	
Membership strength		
10-20	83.3	17 ±13
20-30	16.7	

* Multiple responses

Source: Field survey, 2024

Governance, Emergence Criteria and Operational Structure

Results in Table 2 show that the majority of groups (82%) elected their leaders. This result is expected because it gives each member the right to contribute to group governance, suggesting that democratic leadership selection can enhance transparency, legitimacy, and member participation in governance. Leaders chosen through this process are likely to adopt a democratic leadership style, which fosters stronger leader-follower relationships, unlike situations where leaders are imposed or appointed. This finding is similar to that of Famakinwa et al. (2024), who asserted that most farmer cooperatives prefer a democratic method for selecting their leaders, as this empowers members. This result aligns with reports by Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (2023) that farmers' groups promote democratic engagement and offer farmers the opportunity to participate in political processes. Further results reveal that the majority of the farmer group executives were selected based on the leader's competence (82.4%), sound agricultural knowledge (81.6%), and honesty and integrity (77.2%). The result clearly shows that competence, coupled with sound agricultural knowledge and honesty, were the most sought-after criteria by the farmers' groups in selecting their leaders. This result implies that farmers' groups placed greater emphasis on technical, professional, and communication skills, as well as personality and ethical qualities, in choosing their leaders, rather than wealth or economic prowess. This evidence shows that groups value leadership qualities that support transparency, accountability, and performance. This result aligns with Famakinwa et al. (2024), who reported that most farmer cooperatives in Osun State selected their leaders based on active participation in the cooperatives, competence, and integrity/honesty, among other factors.

Table 2: Governance, criteria for emergence, and operational structure

Variables	%(n=180)
Governance structure	
Mode of leadership emergence	
Election	81.0
Appointment	13.5
Permanent leadership	5.5
Tenure of office	
2 years	96.7
>2 years	3.3
*Criteria for selecting leaders	
Sound Agricultural Knowledge	82.4
Competence	81.6
Integrity and honesty	77.2
Good communication skills	76.7
Problem-solving ability	66.7
Experience and active participation	60.2
Diligence	59.4
Self confidence	58.7
Innovativeness	56.1
Education level	52.8
Fame and popularity	32.2
Successful farm business	14.4
Mobilisation skills	13.9
Sex	10
Economy prowess	8.3
Religion belief	5.0
Operational Structure	
Frequency of meeting	
Monthly	81.7
Fortnightly	18.3
Decision-making process	
Debating /consensus	80.5
Committee decision	10.
Executive decision	8.9

*Multiple responses

Source: Field survey, 2024

Benefits of Joining the Farmers' Groups

Result in the Table 3 shows that most group members identified that they benefited improved income and reduce poverty (95%), better investment through access to credits (93.4%), access to capacity building technical assistance through access to training and extension service (89.5%), and access to essential and scarce production inputs (85.9%), increase in agricultural production (85.6%) among others. These findings indicate that farmers' groups provide both economic and technical support to members. They also reinforce the importance of group membership in improving access to difficult-to-obtain resources. These findings imply that members of farmers' groups benefited significantly. This finding validates Ibe et al. (2026) finding that members join farmers' groups to access income, materials, technical assistance, and essential and scarce production resources, among others.

Table 3: Benefits of joining farmers' groups

*Benefits	%(n=180)
Increased income and poverty reduction	95.0
Encourage investment through credit access	93.4
Increased production output	85.6
Capacity building and technical assistance	89.5
Access to essential scarce production inputs	83.9
Improved sale of Products	84.4
Receive assistance from government	77.7
Easy Mobilisation	66.1
Access to credits	62.8
Increase bargaining power	52.3

*Multiple Responses,

Source: Field survey, 2024

Role Performance of Farmers' Groups

The results in Table 4 show the ranked mean order of the roles performed by the farmers' groups in agricultural development. The results show that the provision of extension services to farmers ($\bar{x}$ = 2.77), the provision of marketing information and platform marketing of agricultural products ($\bar{x}$ = 2.72), and the provision of financial support and access to credit ($\bar{x}$ = 2.67) were the highest-ranked roles performed by farmers' groups. Extension services provision ranked first due to the low government-to-farmer extension ratio. Farmers organise themselves into groups to enable the few available officers to train them more efficiently, making groups a suitable platform for accessing government extension services. This observation supports Olatinwo et al. (2023), who found that the provision of extension services was the leading role of farmers' groups in Kwara State. Marketing information and platforms for agricultural products were another key role. Most smallholders join groups to overcome marketing challenges, such as intermediaries' exploitation, low prices, and limited market access, by aggregating produce to strengthen bargaining power, secure better prices, reduce

individual costs, and connect members to markets. This finding aligns with the result of Adetarami et al. (2026), who found that group membership improves market access for farmers in Ogun State. Unsurprisingly, financial support and credit access ranked third. Smallholders are poor and lack the financial stability that groups offer. Most farmers secure timely, collateral-free loans from farmers' groups for farm investment and receive collective support that builds resilience against shocks during crises. This result is consistent with Olatinwo et al. (2023) and Adetarami et al. (2026). The overall results show that farmers' groups excel in basic service delivery (extension, inputs, marketing) but struggle with higher-level functions, such as policy advocacy and large-scale mobilisation, due to structural limitations.

Table 4: Role performance of farmers groups

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation
Provision extension services to farmers	2.77	0.37
Provision of marketing information and marketing of produce	2.72	0.43
Provision of financial support and access to credit	2.67	0.51
Provision farm inputs at reduced price	2.55	0.56
Facilitation of knowledge sharing and technology adoption	2.29	0.54
Building social capital and community resilience.	2.18	0.49
Enhancement of adoption of new ideas and technologies	1.64	0.34
Subsidising agricultural inputs to members	1.58	0.31
Access to government grants	1.15	0.24
Mobilisation of Fund or resource	1.11	0.25
Raising of funds for agricultural activities	1.04	0.18
Lobbying and advocacy	0.70	0.13

Grand mean score: 1.68
Source: Field survey, 2024

Level of Role Performance of Farmers' Groups

Figure 1 shows that slightly above half (53.3%) of the respondents indicated that their farmers' groups performed their roles in agricultural development at a high level, while 46.7% reported low performance. This result suggests that many farmers' groups are active, but almost half still fall short of their expected roles, possibly due to challenges such as limited funding, poor governance, and unfavorable government policies.

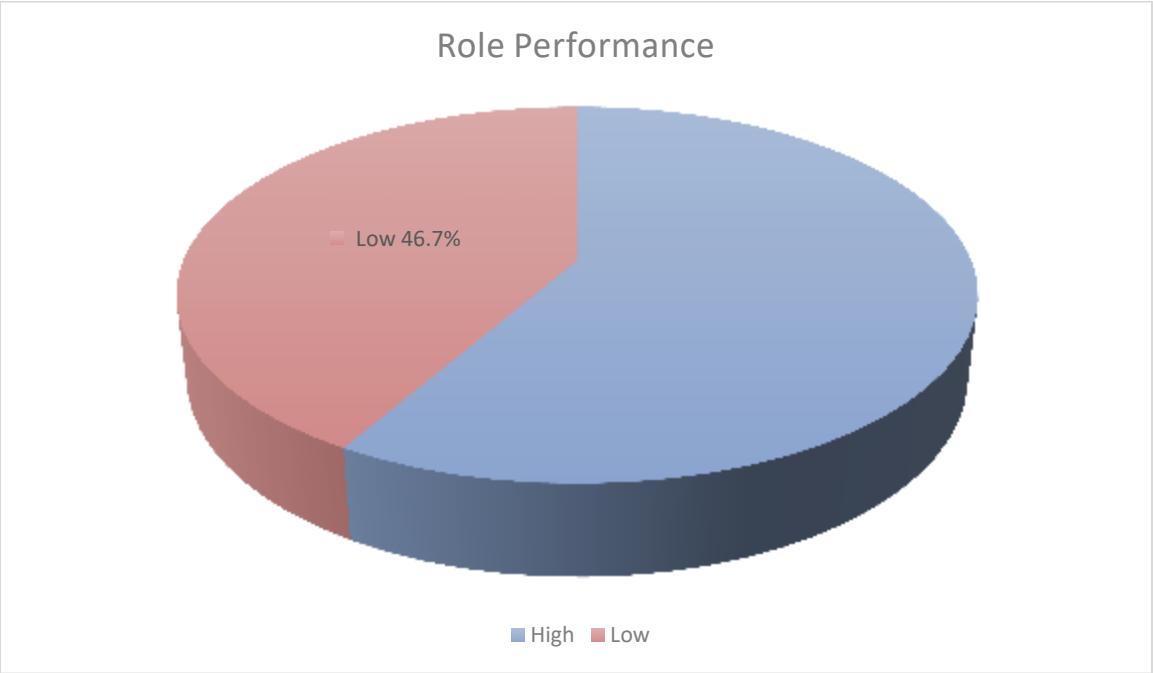

Figure 1. Level of role performance of farmers' groups
Source: Field survey, 2024

Barriers to the Role Performance of the Farmers' Groups

Results in Table 5 show that inadequate modern equipment was the foremost barrier affecting the performance of farmers' groups in the study area ($\bar{x}$=1.66), followed by inadequate funding ($\bar{x}$=1.57), inadequate management capacity ($\bar{x}$=1.54), and unfavourable government policies and regulatory barriers ($\bar{x}$=1.46). This result implies that farmers' groups face many persistent challenges, with inadequate funds remaining the biggest obstacle to investing in infrastructure and providing meaningful services to members. Apart from this, governance and leadership issues are also prevalent; elite capture sidelines poorer members and women. Due to inadequate leadership skills, many of the farmers' groups struggle with record-keeping, financial planning, and accountability. These findings align with previous studies of Olaoye et al. (2024), Olatinwo et al. (2023) and Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (2023) that documented limited funding, unstable policies, infrastructural deficits, limited technology access, poor governance, inadequate technology access, weak infrastructure, and high loan costs as limitations to performance and sustainability of farmers' groups, which contribute to food in security and low agricultural productivity in Nigeria.

Table 5: Barriers to the role performance of the members of the farmers' groups

Barriers	Mean	Standard Deviation
Inadequate modern equipment	1.66	0.61
Inadequate funds	1.57	0.65
Inadequate management capacity	1.54	0.78
Policy and Regulatory Barriers	1.46	0.58
Poor infrastructure	1.34	0.63
Governance and leadership issues	1.31	0.60
Market Integration Issues	1.19	0.58
High interest on loan	1.16	0.51
High illiteracy among farmers	1.07	0.34
Organisational Limitations	0.60	0.25
Poor group leadership	0.55	0.20
Conflicts and disagreement among members	0.43	0.15
Discrimination of individuals	0.35	0.13
Gender inequalities by group members	0.41	0.10
Poor participation of farmers	0.30	0.07

Source: Field survey, 2024

Relationship between Members' Attributes, Group Characteristics, and the Role Performance of Farmers' Groups

The result in Table 6 shows that there is a significant relationship between age (-0.164, p≤0.01), household size (0.291, p≤0.01), years of group membership (0.254, p≤0.05), and annual income (0.164, p≤0.05) and the role performance of farmers' groups in the study area. The direct relationship of the years of active participation of group members and their income with the role performance of farmers' groups implies that the longer the years of active participation of members in group activities, the higher their commitment to group success and performance, and the higher the members' income, the better their commitment and contribution to group activities and performance. The inverse correlation between household size and role performance means that the larger the household, the lower their commitment to group activities due to family demands, and the lower the group performance. These findings indicate that members' characteristics influence group performance. In addition, a significant relationship existed between group size (0.497, p≤ 0.01), length of leader tenure (-0.253), decision-making process (0.265, p≤ 0.01), years of formation (0.353, p≤0.05), and leadership selection criteria (0.218, p≤0.05). The negative correlation between leadership tenure and group role performance suggests that the longer executives remain in office, the lower their performance tends to be. This evidence suggests that longer leadership tenure is associated with weaker performance. There is positive correlation between group size, years of formation, the decision-making process, leader leadership selection criteria, and role performance of farmers' groups. These results imply that the larger the group, the more established it is, the better its decision-making, and the better the criteria adopted in selecting group leaders, the better its performance. These results suggest that organisational maturity influences group performance. These results support the

findings of Famakinwa et al. (2025), who reported that group size and leadership tenure influence the performance of community-based organisations in rural development in Osun State, Nigeria.

Table 6. Correlation between members' characteristics, group characteristics and the performance of farmers' groups

Variables	R
Age	-0.164*
Household size	-0.291**
Year of membership	0.254**
Farm size	0.134
Annual income	0.164*
Group size	0. 497**
Decision making method	0.265**
Length of leadership tenure	-0.253**
Criteria for leadership	0.218**
Years of formation	0.353*
Group registration	0.107
Use of constitution	0.021
Frequency of meeting	0.015

****P≤ 0.05**

Source: Field survey, 2024

Conclusion and Recommendations

The majority of the farmers' groups had male and female membership, were registered, and formally structured, with most leaders elected and selected primarily for competence and sound agricultural knowledge. Also, farmers benefited from improved income, technical assistance, inputs, and access to credit through group membership. Although many of these groups were active in role performance, inadequate equipment, poor funding, poor management capacity, and policy barriers limit their performance. Statistically, members 'age, household size, income, years of group membership, group size, leadership tenure, decision-making process, years of group formation, and leadership selection criteria influence the role performance of farmers' groups in the study area. To strengthen their performance, the government and relevant stakeholders should organise targeted capacity-building training and workshops for both farmers' group leaders and their members to enhance leadership, governance, and management capacity. Government and development partners should support farmers' groups by providing access to modern farm equipment through subsidies, low-interest loans and credits, and grants to enhance their group performance. Agricultural extension agents should use farmers' groups as platforms for training, demonstrations, input distribution, and market information. Besides, farmers' groups should be encouraged to maintain democratic leadership selection, regular meetings, and formal registration with constitutions to enhance accountability and sustainability. Small farmers' groups should be encouraged to merge or form clusters where possible to enhance their performance, since group size was directly related to performance. Finally, both state and local governments should provide institutional support by investing in rural infrastructure,

such as good roads and storage facilities, and by implementing more favourable policy interventions that enable farmers' organisations to operate effectively and thrive.

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