



EFFECTS OF CULTURAL PRACTICES ON RURAL WOMEN PARTICIPATION IN AGRICULTURE

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Abstract

This study examines the ways cultural practices influence the extent to which rural women take part in agricultural work, using Nigeria as the main setting and drawing comparative evidence from Africa, Asia, North America and South America. The general objective is to determine how culture affects rural women's engagement in agriculture, to identify prominent practices across the selected continents, to examine the practices found in Nigeria's six geopolitical zones, and to compare areas of similarity and difference among the zones. The study used a systematic review approach. Evidence was obtained from scholarly journal articles, books, government publications, policy materials and reports issued by recognised organisations and institutions between 2020 and 2026. The evidence was interpreted through qualitative content analysis. Findings show that rural women make substantial contributions to Nigerian agriculture through crop farming, livestock keeping, fishing and fisheries, processing of agricultural produce, agricultural trade and other related activities. Nevertheless, restrictive and discriminatory cultural arrangements continue to weaken women's ability to obtain land, farm credit, advisory support, improved technologies and other productive assets, and they also limit women's influence over agricultural decisions. Across the settings reviewed, recurrent constraints include patriarchal inheritance arrangements, customary rules governing land, gender-based allocation of work, restrictions on movement, early marriage and male dominance in household and community decisions. Although comparable practices are found in Africa, Asia, North America and within Nigeria's geopolitical zones, their form and severity differ with social and regional conditions. The study therefore argues for legal and institutional reform, gender-responsive agricultural measures, community sensitisation and stronger pathways through which women can obtain and control farming resources. Greater investment in women's skills, finance, agricultural advisory services and decision-making voice is also necessary if their contribution to agriculture and rural development is to be fully realised.

Keywords: Agriculture, Cultural Practices, Rural Women, Agricultural Participation, Rural Development

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Study

Agriculture is among the sectors most closely connected with economic development, reduction of poverty, food availability and the improvement of rural livelihoods throughout the

world. More than 2.5 billion people depend on agricultural activities, either directly or indirectly, for work and income, with the dependence being especially strong in developing countries (Food and Agriculture Organization [FAO], 2023). Farming is wider than crop cultivation alone: it includes



livestock, fisheries, forestry, plantation activities and the management of natural resources used to provide food, fuel and industrial materials. The World Bank (2024) similarly presents agriculture as a major productive sector that supports employment and household livelihoods and contributes to the wider development of national economies.

Agriculture is also a major source of employment and earnings. The sector has a significant share in the world's workforce, with its role being especially prominent in low and middle-income economies, where approximately 27% of all workers are engaged in agricultural activities (World Bank, 2024). The sector is linked to a number of Sustainable Development Goals, such as SDG 1, poverty; SDG 2, hunger; SDG 5, equality between women and men; and SDG 8, decent work and economic growth. In sub-Saharan Africa, agriculture has a share of 15% to 35% in GDP and is one of the largest employers, accounting for a significant proportion of the regional labour market (African Development Bank [AfDB], 2024). In Nigeria, agriculture contributes about 24% of GDP and supports more than one-third of the labour force (World Bank, 2024; National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2024). It therefore remains one of the principal means through which millions of rural households, particularly women, obtain income and sustain their families despite continuing urbanisation and industrialisation.

Women are indispensable to agricultural production and represent a substantial share of the agricultural labour force in many developing countries. They participate in crop cultivation, animal husbandry and fisheries, food processing, storage and marketing (FAO, 2023). Across Africa, estimates commonly place women's share of the agricultural workforce at about 40% to 60%, although the proportion differs by country and farming system (United Nations Women, 2024). In Nigeria, rural women carry out a broad range of activities including land preparation, planting, harvesting, processing, transportation and marketing (Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security [FMAFS], 2024). Despite this contribution, they often receive unequal access to land, agricultural finance, extension services, improved technology, education and decision-making opportunities, which limits both productivity and the food-security position of households.

Deeply rooted cultural arrangements help to explain many of the differences between women and men in agricultural settings. Culture refers broadly to the beliefs, values, customs, traditions, norms, knowledge systems and patterns of conduct through which a society organises social and economic relations. UNESCO (2022) describes culture in terms of shared beliefs, customs, traditions and knowledge transmitted across generations, while the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2023) also draws attention to institutional arrangements that structure rights, duties and social roles. These cultural systems can strengthen identity, continuity and social cohesion. At the same time, some long-standing practices create or reproduce unequal expectations for women and men and thereby narrow the space available to rural women in farming and agribusiness.

Cultural influences operate through several channels, including inheritance practices, customary ownership of land, gendered divisions of labour, religion, marriage, widowhood, mobility restrictions and household decision-making. Such arrangements affect who may own land and livestock, obtain finance, join producer organisations, access farm inputs and extension services, use technology, take leadership positions and make decisions about agricultural assets. Consequently, many rural women may contribute heavily to agricultural production while remaining economically disadvantaged or excluded from control over the resources needed for farming (FAO, 2023; UN Women, 2024).

Gender inequalities are apparent in agriculture, despite years of attention at the international and national level. Women farmers frequently have less access to productive assets, agricultural technologies, climatic information, extension services and financial services than men. Restriction of these inputs can lower yields, limit investments and lower the food-security situation of households. It can also exacerbate wider disparities in women's economic status and intra-household and community bargaining power (FAO, 2023; World Bank, 2024).

In many African societies traditional land and inheritance laws still grant men greater rights to land ownership, and women rely on secondary, temporary, or use rights that are mediated by men, usually by their husbands, fathers, or other male relatives. Evidence from countries such as Ghana, Kenya, Ethiopia, Uganda, Tanzania and Nigeria shows that women remain disadvantaged in their ability to obtain and control farming assets because patriarchal inheritance, local customs and male-dominated decision structures are still influential (AfDB, 2024; UN Women, 2024). Heavy domestic and care responsibilities create an additional constraint by reducing the time women can devote to commercial production, leadership, training and market activities.

Nigeria reflects these broad patterns but with marked differences from one region to another. Across the six geopolitical zones, the particular cultural restrictions vary, although gender continues to organise access to resources and authority. In parts of the North-West and North-East, early marriage, restrictions on movement, religious expectations, limited educational attainment and exclusion from inheritance can reduce women's direct involvement in commercial production and their contact with agricultural advisory services (FAO, 2023; UN Women, 2024; World Bank, 2024; FMAFS, 2024). In the North-Central zone, customary tenure and patriarchal inheritance remain important in determining access to farmland. In the South-East, patrilineal inheritance can prevent daughters and widows from inheriting family land and can consequently limit investment and access to agricultural finance (UN Women, 2024; NBS, 2024; World Bank, 2024). The South-West tends to have higher education and economic activity but the influence of patriarchy can still be felt in women's access to land and other productive assets and major farm decisions (FAO, 2023; IFAD, 2023; FMAFS, 2024). Customary land allocation and traditional leadership are also in some cases influencing women's access to land or

control over land use in parts of the South-South. The variations reflect that women's contribution to agriculture must be viewed in the context of the culture of specific communities and not one national explanation (FAO, 2023; World Bank, 2024; IFAD, 2023).

These cultural limitations have ramifications that reach beyond the women themselves. Limited land, financial, technological and agricultural decision-making can affect production, household nutrition, food security, rural incomes, poverty and the overall development of the local economy (FAO, 2023; IFAD, 2023; UNDP, 2023). Conversely, studies indicate that narrowing gender gaps and increasing women's ability to obtain and use farming assets can raise agricultural productivity, improve the resilience of households and make economic growth more inclusive (FAO, 2011; World Bank, 2024; AfDB, 2023). Understanding the cultural conditions that shape women's agricultural work is therefore important not only for gender policy but also for national development and progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, 2023; FAO, 2023).

Although a substantial body of research now addresses gender and agriculture, important gaps remain. Many studies focus on a single issue, for example women's land rights, access to farm credit, extension contact, climate-smart farming or financial inclusion, rather than examining the wider cultural setting in which those issues occur (FAO, 2023; IFAD, 2023; World Bank, 2024; African Development Bank, 2023). A second limitation is geographical: many empirical studies are confined to particular states, communities or local samples and cannot automatically be applied to Nigeria's broader multicultural setting (Ogwugo, 2014; Afolabi et al., 2021). In addition, few studies compare evidence from Africa, Asia, North America and South America while simultaneously examining Nigeria's six geopolitical zones. Continental experiences are also not often considered alongside Nigeria's regional realities. A broader comparative review is therefore needed to show both the recurring cultural patterns and the differences in intensity, form and consequence that exist across locations.

1.2 Statement of the problem

In Nigeria, agriculture remains one of the foundations of the rural economy and of the livelihoods of rural households, and women are highly visible in crop farming, livestock management, fisheries, processing of agricultural produce and agricultural marketing. Even with this substantial contribution, women do not enjoy equal control over the resources required for productive farming. Many rural women continue to face disadvantages in access to land, farm finance, improved technology, extension contact, education and decision-making in agriculture compared with men (Food and Agriculture Organization [FAO], 2023; International Fund for Agricultural Development [IFAD], 2023; World Bank, 2024; African Development Bank [AfDB], 2023). These inequalities have consequences for productivity, the food-security position of households, women's economic position, poverty reduction and the sustainability of rural development (FAO, 2023; UNDP, 2023; World Bank, 2024).

Research on gender and agriculture has expanded, but the evidence is still fragmented across topics and locations. A large number of studies examine women's access to land or credit, land-tenure arrangements, climate-resilient production, agricultural advisory services, financial inclusion or technology adoption without directly analysing how culture connects these constraints and shapes rural women's overall agricultural engagement (FAO, 2023; IFAD, 2023; World Bank, 2024; African Development Bank, 2023). Empirical research is also commonly limited to particular states, communities or groups, making it difficult to generalise the findings to Nigeria's multicultural population. Comparative work that brings together African, Asian, North American and South American experiences is limited, and similarly few studies systematically compare the practices found across Nigeria's six geopolitical zones. This fragmentation leaves policy makers with incomplete evidence about which constraints are widely shared and which are specific to particular cultural settings.

There is therefore a clear need for comparative evidence that is broad enough to identify common patterns while still recognising cultural and regional differences. Policies designed to advance equality in agriculture are more likely to work when they respond to the particular norms, institutions and practices that shape women's lives in different locations. By examining women's level of agricultural involvement in Nigeria, identifying prominent cultural practices across selected continents, assessing the practices operating in Nigeria's geopolitical zones and comparing similarities and differences among the zones, this study provides a more integrated evidence base for culturally appropriate agricultural and gender policy (United Nations, 2023; FAO, 2023; World Bank, 2024). In this sense, the review responds directly to the gap in existing literature and seeks to support more context-sensitive recommendations for rural development.

1.3 Research Questions

1. What is the level of women participation in agriculture in Nigeria?
2. What are the prevalent cultural practices in different continents that affects rural women?
3. What are the prevalent cultural practices affecting women in different geopolitical zones of Nigeria?
4. What are the similarities or differences in the cultural practices affecting women in different geopolitical zones of Nigeria?

1.4 Research Objective

The general objective of this study is to analyze the effects of cultural practices on participation of rural women in agriculture.

The specific objectives are:

1. Ascertain the level of women participation in agriculture in Nigeria;
2. identify the prevalent cultural practices in different continents that affects rural women (Africa, Asia and North and South America);

3. identify the prevalent cultural practices affecting women in different geopolitical zones of Nigeria;
4. Compare prevalent cultural practices affecting women in different geopolitical zones of Nigeria.

1.5 DEFINITION OF TERMS

1.5.1 Agriculture

Agriculture can be understood as the organised cultivation of crops and the raising of animals, together with fisheries, forestry and related activities used to produce food, fibre, fuel and other raw materials on which livelihoods and economies depend (Food and Agriculture Organization [FAO], 2023). The World Bank (2024) likewise treats agriculture as a productive sector that brings together crop farming, livestock, fisheries and forestry and contributes to jobs, food availability, poverty reduction and wider national development.

1.5.2 Cultural Practices

Cultural practices describe the customary ways of life through which a community expresses and maintains its beliefs, traditions, values, norms and patterns of social conduct. They influence how people relate with one another and how access to social, political and economic opportunities is organised. The United Nations Development Programme further presents such practices as accepted customs and institutional arrangements that shape people's roles, duties, entitlements and responsibilities within their communities.

1.5.3 Rural Women

Rural women are women who live in rural households and communities and whose livelihoods are closely connected with farming or other natural-resource-based activities. In many such settings, they contribute to producing food, processing and preserving farm output, marketing agricultural products and helping households to maintain an adequate food supply.

1.5.4 Participation

Participation means taking an active part in an activity or programme, including contributing to planning, choices, implementation, management and the sharing of benefits (International Fund for Agricultural Development [IFAD], 2021). In an agricultural setting, participation is broader than supplying labour; it also covers the ability to obtain farming resources and to have a voice in decisions about agricultural production and related activities.

1.5.5 Women's Participation in Agriculture

women's involvement in farming and agribusiness means the different ways women take part in farming and agribusiness. It covers crop cultivation, livestock keeping, fishing and fisheries, processing of farm produce, marketing, agricultural enterprise and the decisions through which land, labour, finance and other agricultural resources are used.

1.5.6 Gender

Gender describes the roles, duties, behaviours, opportunities and expectations that societies attach to women and men. These expectations are created socially rather than

biologically fixed, and they can differ between cultures, communities and historical periods.

1.5.7 Patriarchy

Patriarchy refers to a social arrangement in which authority and control are concentrated mainly in the hands of men across family, economic, political and other institutions. Where such arrangements are strong, women may have less influence over resources, decisions and opportunities than men.

1.5.8 Customary Land Tenure

Customary land tenure is the system through which communities allocate, inherit, use and manage land according to long-established customs, traditions and indigenous rules rather than only through formal statutory law.

1.5.9 Rural Development

Rural development is the deliberate improvement of living conditions in rural areas through stronger productivity and incomes, better infrastructure and services, broader economic opportunities and improvements in the social, environmental and institutional conditions that shape everyday life (IFAD, 2021).

1.5.10 Geopolitical Zones

Geopolitical zones are broad administrative and socio-political groupings of states used to support regional planning, governance and policy coordination. Nigeria is organised into six such zones: North-West, North-East, North-Central, South-West, South-East and South-South.

1.6 JUSTIFICATION OF STUDY

The study is relevant because it brings together evidence showing how cultural institutions continue to shape rural women's agricultural roles and their place in the wider rural economy (FAO, 2023; UN Women, 2024). By comparing experiences across continents and across Nigeria's geopolitical zones, it makes it possible to distinguish practices that occur widely from those that are strongly tied to particular regional contexts. The findings can inform more culturally responsive agricultural and gender policies, including measures that improve women's ability to obtain and control land, finance, extension support, technology and other productive assets while also strengthening food security and inclusive rural development. The study is also useful to policy makers, agricultural development agencies, traditional institutions, non-governmental organisations, researchers and development partners. In addition, it speaks to the Sustainable Development Goals, especially SDG 2 on ending hunger, SDG 5 on equality between women and men, SDG 8 on decent work and SDG 10 on reducing inequality, while contributing to Nigeria's broader agricultural transformation agenda (United Nations, 2023; FMAFS, 2024).

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Conceptual Framework

2.1.1 Cultural Norms

Cultural norms are the shared standards, expectations, values and rules through which a group defines behaviour that is acceptable, desirable or inappropriate in a particular setting.

They are learned through socialisation and passed across generations through institutions such as families, religious bodies, schools, traditional authorities and community organisations (UNESCO, 2022; UNDP, 2023). Because these institutions help define rights, duties and acceptable conduct for women and men, cultural norms influence attitudes, relationships and everyday decisions. In agricultural communities they can determine who is expected to farm particular crops, who owns or inherits land, who speaks in household decisions, who controls income and who gains entry to economic opportunities (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2023; Food and Agriculture Organization [FAO], 2023; UN Women, 2024; World Bank, 2024).

Farnworth et al. (2023) explain that gender norms are socially created expectations about the roles and conduct considered appropriate for women and men within agrifood systems. These expectations may influence women's ability to obtain and use productive assets, their authority and their ability to participate in agricultural activities. Climate-smart adaptation and access to agricultural innovations can therefore be limited where restrictive gender norms affect who may use or control resources (FAO, 2023; IFAD, 2023).

FAO (2023) further shows that social and cultural norms remain among the important institutional obstacles to equality in agrifood systems. Formal laws may provide equal rights while everyday customs continue to restrict women's access to farmland, agricultural finance, education, extension information and leadership opportunities (World Bank, 2024; UN Women, 2024). This difference between formal entitlement and practical access is important because it helps explain why women may contribute greatly to production while exercising less control over productive assets. Persistent unequal power relations can consequently weaken women's productivity, income and wider economic empowerment (FAO, 2023; African Development Bank, 2023).

Njuki et al. (2023) similarly observe that social and gender norms affect women's access to food-system resources and shape their participation in production, processing, marketing and governance. Their analysis reinforces the importance of addressing discriminatory norms when seeking sustainable, inclusive and resilient food systems (IFAD, 2023; FAO, 2023).

Within this study, cultural norms are understood as the accepted social expectations that define the roles, entitlements and responsibilities of rural women in agricultural settings. These expectations influence whether women can own or inherit land, participate meaningfully in decisions about farming, obtain productive assets and take part in the different stages of agricultural value chains (FAO, 2023; UN Women, 2024).

2.1.2 Traditional Beliefs

Traditional beliefs refer to inherited ideas, values, customs and worldviews that communities recognise as meaningful and legitimate. They may be rooted in indigenous knowledge, religion, spirituality, customary practice and historical

experience. Such beliefs can shape ideas about gender, family organisation, inheritance, leadership, authority and ownership of resources and may therefore influence agricultural behaviour in ways that are not captured by formal law alone (UNESCO, 2022; FAO, 2023).

Ramirez-Santos et al. (2023) argue that inherited belief systems are an important part of indigenous knowledge and help to organise farming practices, environmental management and food production. Their review also indicates that agricultural knowledge can be distributed differently between women and men. Where women are excluded from certain forms of knowledge, resources or authority, their farming choices and responses to environmental change may be constrained. The role of traditional beliefs is therefore likely to positively or negatively affect women's participation in farms, resource management and adaptation to climate risks (IFAD, 2023; FAO, 2023).

Many inherited belief systems continue to view men as the primary landowners and decision-makers of the household and major farm decisions, with women being the ones who have domestic, reproductive and supportive roles, according to FAO (2023). These expectations may prevent women from taking control of productive assets or from participating in commercial activities, despite their labour being essential in food production. This results in a disconnect between women's work and their control over land, crops, income and investment (World Bank, 2024; UN Women, 2024).

In addition, evidence from Nigeria and Tanzania shows that traditional beliefs are also associated with restrictions on women's mobility, opportunities to lead and inherit land, and voice in decisions related to agriculture. Understanding the deeply rooted ideas of proper roles of women and men is an important factor that contributes to women's economic resilience and their role in agrifood systems (Seymour et al., 2023). These beliefs can be particularly binding when backed up by family dynamics and other institutions that manage land and other resources (FAO 2023; African Development Bank 2023).

For the present study, traditional beliefs are taken to mean inherited community understandings of the social and economic position considered appropriate for women. They matter because those understandings can affect women's farm work, their ability to obtain and use productive assets and their influence over decisions within rural households and communities (UNDP, 2023; FAO, 2023).

2.1.3 Traditional Practices

Traditional practices are the customary routines, rituals, ceremonies and repeated forms of behaviour that communities maintain over time and transmit from one generation to the next. They express local beliefs and values and can regulate marriage, inheritance, land use, leadership, conflict resolution and the division of social and economic responsibilities. Because they are embedded in daily life, such practices can continue to shape agricultural relationships even where formal rules or policies have changed (UNESCO, 2022; UNDP, 2023).

The United Nations and FAO identify numerous customary practices that shape women's opportunities and the resources available to them, thereby affecting the extent to which they can take part in agrifood systems (United Nations, 2023; FAO, 2023). Some traditions support community identity, environmental stewardship and social cohesion. Others reproduce inequalities by giving men stronger claims to land and leadership or by limiting women's movement and voice. Examples include male preference in inheritance, customary restrictions on women's landholding, widowhood practices, limits on travel or public participation and exclusion from community leadership (UN Women, 2024; World Bank, 2024; IFAD, 2023).

Traditional agricultural knowledge can nevertheless make an important positive contribution. Indigenous practices may support biodiversity, soil management, conservation and the long-term sustainability of local food systems (Ramirez-Santos et al., 2023). The problem arises where access to knowledge and authority is strongly gendered. In such cases, women may possess valuable farming knowledge but still have less control of land, technology, finance or decisions about how resources are allocated.

House et al. (2024) similarly explain that farming and food-consumption behaviour are deeply embedded in local culture. Agricultural programmes that are technically sound may therefore be resisted, adapted or ignored when they conflict sharply with accepted community practices. This observation is important to the present review because it shows why interventions intended to support rural women must consider the cultural setting in which agricultural decisions are made.

In this study, traditional practices refer to customary activities and institutional arrangements such as inheritance rules, land rights, marriage and widowhood practices, religious expectations and the authority exercised by community leaders. These practices are relevant because they influence the roles available to rural women in farming, the resources they can control and the decisions in which they are able to participate (UN Women, 2024; World Bank, 2024).

2.1.4 Cultural Practices

Cultural practices are the observable routines, behaviours, rituals, norms and institutional arrangements that express and reproduce a society's values. They facilitate social interactions, establish responsibilities and contribute to the distribution of resources and opportunities. Cultural practices are not completely static; they can change as communities respond to economic change, education, policy, migration, environmental pressures and wider social transformation (UNESCO, 2022; UNDP, 2023).

Cultural practices are integrated within customs and institutions of agrifood systems that determine access to resources, to paid labour, to leadership and to key decision-making processes. However, discriminatory arrangements can persist to restrict women's participation in agriculture, including unequal land rights, limited access to finance, access to less education, less extension contact, and lower

access to agricultural technologies (World Bank, 2024; UN Women, 2024; IFAD, 2023) (FAO, 2023).

Farnworth et al. (2023) also demonstrate how cultural practices intersect with gender norms and how they can affect women's ability to be economically resilient, productive on the farm and adapt to climate change. Limited mobility, high domestic responsibilities, lack of access to income and limited decision-making power over household resources can limit women's capacity to invest in agriculture or in adopting new technologies or to increase the size of their farming operations. Thus, culture is manifested not only in social relations, but also in material results.

Njuki et al. (2023) highlight that institutionalized rules and broader economic structures influence women's role in food systems. To achieve more equal cultural expectations, it is therefore necessary to change cultural expectations in order to achieve more balanced participation in production, processing, marketing and governance. Simultaneously, reform needs to differentiate between practices that discriminate against women and indigenous practices that promote social cohesion or environmental sustainability. This distinction is key to creating inclusive and resilient food systems.

Frequently reported examples include patriarchal authority, customary systems for allocating land, early marriage, a gender-based division of household and farm labour, male dominance over major household decisions, widowhood customs and weak representation of women in community leadership. These practices are not identical across Nigeria, but many of them reduce women's ability to obtain farming assets, influence agricultural decisions or convert their labour into stronger economic returns (FAO, 2023; World Bank, 2024; African Development Bank, 2023).

For this review, cultural practices are defined as the norms, traditions, values and institutional arrangements that affect the character and extent of rural women's engagement in farming, processing, marketing and authority over farm decisions in different societies, including Nigeria (FAO, 2023; UN Women, 2024; World Bank, 2024).

2.1.5 Cultural Practices in Rural Agriculture

Cultural practices are particularly important in rural agriculture because farming is organised through local systems of land access, labour, knowledge, family authority and community relationships. Agricultural activities are embedded in values, customs, traditions, beliefs and social institutions that influence land rights, the allocation of work, the distribution of inputs and income, and the way production decisions are taken (FAO, 2023; IFAD, 2023; UNESCO, 2022). Some practices preserve ecological knowledge, strengthen community cooperation and support environmental conservation. Others create gender inequalities by limiting women's control over the resources required for productive farming and by restricting their influence over agricultural decisions (Ramirez-Santos et al., 2023; FAO, 2023; UN Women, 2024).

FAO (2023) reports that cultural arrangements within agrifood systems affect ownership and control of farmland and other farm assets, access to finance and extension information, and involvement in decisions about production. Where discriminatory inheritance, customary tenure or restrictive gender expectations remain powerful, women may be excluded from resources that are necessary for investment and commercial farming (World Bank, 2024; IFAD, 2023). This separation between women's labour contribution and their control of productive assets can limit the benefits they receive from agriculture and reduce their ability to participate fully in agricultural transformation (African Development Bank, 2023; UN Women, 2024).

Recent empirical work also confirms that agricultural development can be held back by norms that influence women's access to farm assets, climate-smart technologies, markets, leadership and new forms of agricultural knowledge. Farnworth et al. (2023) note that cultural expectations surrounding mobility, household responsibilities and authority affect women's decisions about whether and how to engage in agricultural production or agribusiness (FAO, 2023; World Bank, 2024). Njuki et al. (2023) thus call for intentional efforts to tackle discriminatory norms as part of a transition towards more sustainable food systems, alongside the preservation of indigenous practices that have a positive impact on the environment and community health (African Development Bank, 2023; IFAD, 2023).

These cultural influences are different and diverse in the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria. In some northern regions of Nigeria, limited mobility, isolation and early marriage, and restricted involvement in extension services may constrain women's agricultural activities outside of the home (FMAFS, 2024; UN Women, 2024; World Bank, 2024). Even in the more developed communities of the south, customary inheritance and local landholding systems are important constraints in several of these communities. The regional differences show that interventions should focus on local institutions and assume no one cultural pattern works in the same way across the country (NBS, 2024; FAO, 2023; Agarwal, 2021).

2.1.6 Effects of Cultural Practices on Participation of Rural Women in Agriculture

Cultural practices can produce both supportive and restrictive outcomes for rural women in agriculture. Community labour arrangements, indigenous farming knowledge, cooperative production and customary resource-sharing can reinforce social cohesion, spread practical knowledge and increase the resilience of rural food systems (Ramirez-Santos et al., 2023; UNESCO, 2022; FAO, 2023). Traditional knowledge about crop diversity, local weather, soil management, food preservation and natural-resource conservation can be especially valuable where women are recognised as holders of such knowledge and can make use of it. These positive practices show that culture should not be treated only as a barrier; some cultural resources can strengthen local production and food security (FAO, 2023; IFAD, 2023; House et al., 2024).

Even so, the literature more frequently records the negative consequences of discriminatory cultural arrangements for women farmers. FAO (2023) identifies gendered norms as a major structural obstacle to equal participation in agrifood systems. Women may have weaker claims to land, less control over finance, lower access to mechanisation and agricultural advice, fewer links to markets and limited representation in agricultural leadership (World Bank, 2024; UN Women, 2024; African Development Bank, 2023). These inequalities have consequences beyond the individual household. International evidence suggests that reducing gender gaps across agrifood systems could add close to one trillion United States dollars to global GDP and improve food security for tens of millions of people (FAO, 2023; United Nations, 2023).

Restrictive gender expectations also weaken women's influence over farm decisions and reduce their ability to control income, adopt improved technologies or enter higher-value agricultural activities. Farnworth et al. (2023) show that unequal social expectations can affect the uptake and use of agricultural technologies, while Njuki et al. (2023) link gender inequality with restricted involvement across value chains, from production to processing and marketing. The resulting disadvantage is therefore both economic and institutional: it affects the returns women receive from their labour and can also slow the wider transformation of rural agriculture (FAO, 2023; African Development Bank, 2023).

Across sub-Saharan Africa, patriarchal inheritance frequently leaves women without secure ownership or control of farmland, causing many to depend on borrowed, family or marital land whose use can be withdrawn (Agarwal, 2021; FAO, 2023; UN Women, 2024). Related patterns occur in parts of Asia, where son preference, dowry, early marriage, seclusion and restrictions on movement can reduce women's educational opportunities, contact with extension workers and participation in commercial farming (FAO, 2023; UN Women, 2024; World Bank, 2024). Formal protections are typically more robust in North and South America, but Indigenous and rural women can still experience cultural discrimination in their access to ancestral land, leadership of agricultural operations and access to financial and productive resources (United Nations, 2023; FAO, 2023; IFAD, 2023).

The prevailing cultural barriers vary from region to region in Nigeria. Early marriage, seclusion, restricted mobility and limited access to extension services in some parts of the North-West and North-East can limit women's involvement in commercial farming (FMAFS, 2024; NBS, 2024; UN Women, 2024). Patrilineal inheritance and customary land arrangements can hinder women's ability to own or manage farm land in some communities in the South-East, South-South and some South-West communities, which can limit their access to agricultural credit and confidence in farm investment (FAO, 2023; World Bank, 2024; FMAFS, 2024). The cumulative impact may result in reduced productivity and household incomes, increased food insecurity and less progress in rural development (United Nations, 2023; World Bank, 2024).

There is also evidence that interventions are more likely to be effective if they are culturally responsive. To overcome discriminatory norms, while not doing away with useful indigenous knowledge, legal reform, gender responsive agricultural policy, women's education, community sensitisation and sustained engagement with traditional and religious leaders can help (FAO, 2023; UN Women, 2024; IFAD, 2023). Meanwhile, reforms need to be accompanied by tangible steps to enhance women's land, credit, agricultural extension and technology, and other farm inputs. These changes are crucial for food security, reducing rural poverty, and achieving more sustainable rural development (United Nations, 2023; African Development Bank, 2023; World Bank, 2024).

2.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study is based on two theories that explain various, yet related aspects of the problem: Liberal Feminist Theory and Gender Role Theory (also known as Social Role Theory). Liberal Feminism focuses on inequities in rights and institutional arrangements, and Gender Role Theory points to the socially learned expectations that influence the tasks and positions that are designated for women and men. The theories are used together to interpret the institutional discrimination and gender expectations that are observed in literature on rural agriculture (FAO, 2023; UN Women, 2024; World Bank, 2024).

2.2.1 Liberal Feminist Theory and the Relevance of the Theory to the Study

The focus of this study is on the concept of inequality, and Liberal Feminist Theory is relevant because it views inequality as unequal legal, social and institutional opportunities. It may shed light on the reasons behind the fact that rural women make significant contributions to agricultural production but still face discriminatory inheritance, limited access to credit, fewer extension opportunities, less representation in decision-making, and less access to leadership roles (FMAFS, 2024; NBS, 2024; World Bank, 2024). The theory thus highlights the disconnect between formal equality and de facto access to resources and rights in rural life.

The objectives of the study are supported by the theory as a basis to explore the influence of cultural practices on agricultural involvement of women in Nigeria's geopolitical zones. It also permits comparison of regional differences in discriminatory institutions and offers a framework for considering reforms that remove legal or customary barriers to equal involvement in rural development (FAO, 2023; IFAD, 2023; United Nations, 2023; African Development Bank, 2023). In this study, the theory is especially useful for interpreting unequal land rights, access to agricultural services and women's voice in decisions.

One limitation of Liberal Feminist Theory is that its emphasis on laws, rights and institutional reform may not fully explain inequalities that are sustained through culture, ethnicity, religion and other intersecting social identities. Women's experiences of agricultural exclusion are not shaped by gender

alone, and a reform that changes formal rules may have limited effect where community norms or household power relations remain unchanged (Crenshaw, 1989; Tong & Botts, 2022).

2.2.2 Gender Role Theory (Social Role Theory)

Gender Role Theory, or Social Role Theory, is associated particularly with the work of Alice H. Eagly (1987), who developed a social-role explanation of differences in the behaviour expected from women and men. Rather than treating such differences as fixed, the theory links them to the division of social and economic roles and to the expectations that grow around those roles. It has since been applied in fields including gender studies, labour economics, rural sociology and agricultural development (Eagly & Wood, 2012; Koenig & Eagly, 2014).

2.2.3 Relevance of the Theory to the Study

Gender Role Theory is relevant because it explains how expectations about appropriate behaviour for women and men can influence their involvement in farming and other economic activities (Eagly & Wood, 2012; FAO, 2023). Nigeria's geopolitical zones differ in religion, ethnicity, customary institutions, family arrangements and historical experience, and these differences can produce different expectations concerning women's ability to move freely, labour, leadership and authority over household resources (FMAFS, 2024; NBS, 2024). The theory therefore helps to explain why similar agricultural tasks may carry different social meanings for women in different parts of the country.

The same theory also supports a comparison of cultural practices affecting rural women across Africa, Asia, North America and South America. It emphasises that gender expectations are produced and reinforced through families, communities, education, law, policy and economic arrangements; as a result, barriers do not operate identically in every society. A limitation is that the theory can place greater emphasis on socialisation and cultural expectations than on structural economic inequality, political power and formal legal institutions. Those limitations are addressed in part by combining it with Liberal Feminist Theory (Tong & Botts, 2022; Connell, 2009).

2.2.4 Justification for the Adoption of the Theories

Liberal Feminist Theory and Gender Role Theory were selected because they explain different but connected dimensions of the same problem. Liberal Feminism emphasises institutional discrimination and unequal access to and control over agricultural assets, while Gender Role Theory explains how culturally assigned roles and expectations shape women's agricultural engagement (FAO, 2023; UN Women, 2024; World Bank, 2024).

Combined, the theories paint a general picture of the influence that culture has on the participation of rural women in agriculture across continents and in Nigeria's geopolitical zones (IFAD, 2023; African Development Bank, 2023). They also help to understand how cultural practices (the independent variable) are related to the participation of rural women in agricultural activities (the dependent variable).

Unequal rights and access to institutions are interpreted through the lens of Liberal Feminist Theory, and the social expectations through which those inequalities are reproduced in day-to-day agricultural life are interpreted through Gender Role Theory (United Nations, 2023; FAO, 2023).

2.3 EMPIRICAL STUDIES

Aniche et al. (2025) explored the experiences of women farmers in rural communities in Nigeria, focusing on cultural norms and inherited beliefs. The researchers wanted to know how such cultural factors impacted women's everyday farming. A qualitative approach was used and semi-structured interviews of women and men respondents from selected farming communities. The interview material was organised thematically so that recurring experiences, restrictions and forms of support could be identified across participants.

Their findings indicated that patriarchal norms and inherited beliefs could institutionalise unequal treatment by restricting women's use of productive assets, reducing their voice in farm and community decisions, limiting ownership of land and keeping many women in subsistence production and domestic roles. At the same time, the study identified community arrangements that could strengthen women's collective voice and agricultural involvement. The authors therefore advocated gender-responsive policy, changes to discriminatory customary rules, better educational and resource opportunities for women, and greater engagement of traditional leaders in local equality initiatives. The study is directly relevant here because it demonstrates that cultural rules can materially shape both the opportunities available to rural women and the benefits they receive from agriculture.

Adekunle et al. (2024) investigated women's bargaining position over farmland among arable-crop households in Southwest Nigeria. The purpose was to assess how much influence women had over rights over land and to identify the conditions that strengthened or weakened their involvement in land-related decisions. The researchers used a mixed-methods design, combining structured interviews with 282 rural women engaged in arable farming in Ogun State and additional qualitative interviews. Quantitative and qualitative procedures were then used to examine the factors associated with women's bargaining position.

The study found that women's bargaining position was constrained by customary inheritance systems, patriarchal family structures and traditional land-tenure arrangements. Women with higher education, stronger incomes and membership of cooperative societies were more likely to possess greater bargaining power. The authors recommended reform of customary land inheritance, expansion of agricultural finance, improved education and stronger community awareness programmes to reduce discriminatory traditions affecting women's place in farming and agribusiness.

Kehinde et al. (2021) analysed the relationship among women's empowerment, land-tenure security, property rights and the food-security position of smallholder households in Nigeria. Using national household survey information and

econometric techniques, the study examined whether women who had stronger rights over land and property also had greater agricultural influence and better household outcomes.

The results indicated that women with secure land and property rights were more involved in agricultural production, had stronger authority in decision-making over agricultural activities and were better positioned to contribute to households' ability to secure adequate food. In contrast, discriminatory customary inheritance and weak land rights reduced women's agricultural involvement and access to credit. The researchers thus recommended for an enhanced statutory ownership right, gender sensitive land policy, and reforms of customary inheritance systems that discriminate against women farmers.

Ifeanyi-Obi et al. (2023) investigated the role of traditional perception of climate change on adaptation decisions of women crop farmers in Southern Nigeria. Four agro-ecological zones were covered and questionnaires and focus-group discussions were used. A total of 420 crop farmers from rural communities were selected through a multistage procedure, and the quantitative data were assessed using descriptive statistics and binary logistic regression while qualitative responses were used to clarify the reasoning behind farmers' choices.

The study found that inherited beliefs and indigenous interpretations affected decisions about crop choice, planting periods, adaptation strategies and the willingness to adopt climate-smart technologies. Some beliefs supported locally appropriate adaptation, while others discouraged the use of unfamiliar agricultural innovations and could contribute to lower productivity. The authors recommended extension approaches that work with useful local knowledge while correcting inaccurate perceptions, improving farmers' understanding of climate risks and supporting climate-resilient production. This study demonstrates that culture can shape agricultural adaptation through the meaning farmers attach to new information and technology.

Daudu et al. (2025) investigated gender differences in the adoption of climate-smart agricultural practices and the consequences for farm production and household welfare in Nigeria. The researchers used nationally representative quantitative survey data to compare women and men and to determine whether unequal use of climate-smart practices was linked with differences in productivity and welfare outcomes.

The researchers found that cultural norms, gender roles and unequal access to and control over agricultural assets continued to reduce women's use of climate-smart technologies. Female farmers generally had less access to extension services, agricultural credit, mechanisation and information than male farmers. These inequalities affected productivity and welfare. The study recommended gender-sensitive climate-smart programmes, greater access to agricultural finance and extension support for women, and community-level efforts to address discriminatory norms and institutional barriers.

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

Systematic literature-review design was used for the research. Planned search of electronic databases, institutional repositories and official websites led to the location of relevant evidence. Google Scholar, Scopus, Web of Science, JSTOR, ScienceDirect, SpringerLink, ResearchGate and university digital repositories were searched. Relevant websites for international organisations and government agencies were also reviewed for the most recent reports, policy documents and statistical publications. Search terms included "rural women," "women in agriculture," "cultural practices," "gender norms," "gender inequality," "patriarchy," "land tenure," "women's agricultural engagement," "Nigeria," "Africa," "Asia," "North America" and "South America. Boolean operators (AND, OR) have been used where required to narrow, combine or broaden the search.

3.2 Sources of Data

The review was based completely on documentary evidence and not on new field data. The sources included published and unpublished materials such as scholarly journal articles, textbooks, conference proceedings, government publications, and policy documents and reports from credible international and national institutions. Some of the key institutions involved were the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), UN Women, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), World Bank, African Development Bank (AfDB), National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) and the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security (FMAFS). When useful evidence was available, relevant postgraduate theses and dissertations were also taken into account. The focus was on literature published between 2020 and 2026 to ensure literature that reflects current debates, recent policies and contemporary developments was used; however, older foundational sources were included where necessary for theoretical or methodological discussion.

3.3 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

There were clear criteria for the selection of materials to be included in the review and those to be excluded. The sources were peer-reviewed journal articles, official reports, books, conference papers and dissertations published primarily in English between 2020 and 2026 that addressed cultural practices, gender, rural women, or agricultural participation. Data from well-known international organizations and reputable academic journals were also incorporated. Materials were excluded when they duplicated evidence already retained, did not address the aims of the study, consisted mainly of unsupported opinion, or provided too little empirical, theoretical or methodological information to be assessed meaningfully. These criteria were intended to strengthen the relevance and credibility of the evidence used in answering the research questions.

3.4 Method of Data Collection

Data collection involved an in-depth review of documentary material available in electronic and print formats. Information

on rural women's place in farming and agribusiness in Nigeria, cultural practices affecting women across continents and patterns across Nigeria's six geopolitical zones was extracted, organised and compared. The review process emphasised evidence that directly addressed the research questions and objectives of the study.

3.5 Method of Data Analysis

The evidence was analysed using qualitative content analysis. Rather than treating the documents as isolated summaries, the analysis involved reading across sources to identify recurring concepts, themes and patterns in the material (Bowen, 2009). The literature was organised around the objectives of the study: women's level of involvement in agriculture; prominent cultural practices affecting rural women in Africa, Asia, North America and South America; practices affecting women across Nigeria's geopolitical zones; and points of similarity or difference among the regional patterns. Evidence within each theme was compared for convergence, disagreement and contextual variation. This approach enabled the review to move from individual documents to broader conclusions about how cultural conditions shape rural women's agricultural roles.

3.6 Trustworthiness of the Study

Credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability were strengthened through data triangulation. Evidence from peer-reviewed journals, government publications and international development organisations was compared across multiple sources. This cross-checking reduced reliance on a single authority and improved the credibility of the findings. Priority was also given to recent and authoritative publications that directly addressed the central focus of the review.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

No human participants were recruited and no primary information was collected for this review. Questions of participant consent, recruitment risk and direct confidentiality therefore did not arise. Ethical responsibility nevertheless remained important because the study depended on the intellectual work and findings of other authors. All sources were acknowledged through citation and referencing in accordance with APA 7th edition, and the researcher sought to represent arguments, statistics and findings faithfully rather than removing them from their original context. Care was also taken to avoid presenting other authors' ideas as original work or altering the meaning of evidence in the course of synthesis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Research Question One

What is the level of women participation in agriculture in Nigeria?

4.1.1 Objective One

To ascertain the level of women's participation in agriculture in Nigeria.

4.1.2 Result Presentation

The reviewed evidence indicates that women constitute one of the largest groups participating in agricultural production in Nigeria. Across sub-Saharan Africa, women commonly make

up about 40% to 60% of the agricultural workforce, although the share varies according to country and farming system (FAO, 2023). Nigerian women are involved not only in crop cultivation and livestock management but also in fisheries, agroforestry, food preservation, processing, storage, transportation, marketing and other agribusiness activities. Reports from the National Bureau of Statistics (2024) and the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security (2024) further indicate that women carry particularly important responsibilities in food-crop production, food processing and small-ruminant production. However, a high labour contribution coexists with relatively low ownership of farmland and weaker access to improved inputs, mechanisation, irrigation, agricultural advice, finance and formal market opportunities. The available evidence therefore points to a clear difference between the amount of work women contribute and the level of control they exercise over the assets required for profitable commercial farming.

4.1.3 Discussion of Findings

The results indicate that rural women are vital to agricultural production and food security of the Nigerian households. They are spread throughout the value chain – from growing to processing, transport and marketing. However, a significant investment of labour does not necessarily lead to access to productive resources, enhanced bargaining power or control over land. The FAO (2023), UN Women (2024) and the World Bank (2024) also highlight that women are significantly contributing to agricultural activities but are not benefiting from equal shares of inputs that would boost productivity. The imbalance has kept many women focused on labour intensive and subsistence activities and it is challenging for women to transition into mechanised, higher value or commercially oriented agriculture. These limitations impact not only on women's own incomes but also on the welfare of households, food availability and rural livelihoods' resilience.

4.1.4 Answer to Research Question One

The evidence therefore answers Research Question One by showing a high level of female involvement in agriculture when participation is measured by labour and by the number of activities performed. Women are present throughout production, processing and marketing. However, their level of ownership, control of farming assets and influence over agricultural decisions is much lower than their labour contribution would suggest. Recent international evidence reports that women constitute about 36% of the global agrifood workforce and that almost two-thirds of women in sub-Saharan Africa are employed in agrifood systems (FAO, 2023). The main problem is consequently not that women are absent from agriculture, but that unequal rights to land, credit, extension information, technology and decision-making prevent them from obtaining returns and productive gains that are proportionate to the work they perform.

Farnworth et al. (2020) similarly found that unequal power relations and limited agency among women farmers can weaken their ability to obtain farming resources and to benefit from their own labour. Women may perform extensive

agricultural work while patriarchal household arrangements leave major production decisions in male hands. Nchanji et al. (2022) also reported that women who were deeply involved in West African agricultural value chains continued to encounter socio-cultural constraints that restricted access to assets and commercial opportunities. In the Nigerian context, Afolabi and Akinbode (2023) likewise show that women are prominent food-crop producers in rural communities yet remain less represented in control of farmland, agricultural finance and mechanisation. Taken together, these studies reinforce the distinction between high participation in labour and low control over agricultural assets.

4.2 Research Question Two

What are the prevalent cultural practices in different continents that affect rural women?

4.2.1 Objective Two

To identify the prevalent cultural practices affecting rural women in Africa, Asia, North America, and South America.

4.2.3 Result Presentation

Much of literature reviewed indicates significant cultural differences between continents. While the customs, institutions and expectations of gender roles are not the same, each of the four regions discussed has cultural practices that can influence the opportunities of rural women and the resources they have in agriculture.

Africa

In Africa, traditional land tenure and traditional inheritance systems are some of the most entrenched cultural constraints on women's participation in agricultural activities. In many communities land and other farming resources belong to the men with women having a secondary and/or temporary access through marriage or male relatives. Other practices are widowhood rites, early marriage, male-dominated household leadership, gendered labour divisions, unequal rights to land and unequal access to farm finance and agricultural advisory services.

Asia

Commonly mentioned cultural barriers are son preference, dowry, purdah or seclusion, lack of land and inheritance rights in certain cultures, lower social status of women in some cultures and mobility restrictions. These practices can decrease women's access to education, productive assets, employment/commercial farming opportunities.

North America

Formal legal protections are generally stronger for women in North America, but there are cultural and historical inequities that impact specific groups. Ancestral land, representation in agricultural leadership and the legacy of discriminatory agricultural policies and institutions can create ongoing challenges for Indigenous women. Thus, the nature of disadvantage is rarely a legal prohibition, but rather the legacy of past discrimination and exclusion, unequal institutional access and under-representation in decision-making.

South America

For Indigenous women in some parts of South America, they may be subject to marginalisation related to the patriarchal family structure, unequal land ownership, and customary inheritance. While several countries have made great strides in women's property rights, traditional practices may influence access to agricultural resources, community leadership, and economic opportunities in rural communities.

4.2.4 Discussion of Findings

The comparison reveals that there are common features and significant regional differences in the cultural practices that influence the women in rural areas. Many traditional African and Asian communities have a strong male-dominated influence, and discriminatory inheritance and gender norms are particularly apparent. Formal rights are typically more robust in North and South America, women's access to land, finance, leadership and productive assets can still be a source of exclusion for Indigenous and rural women. The results are in line with Liberal Feminist Theory which focuses on unequal institutional opportunities and Gender Role Theory which emphasizes the continuity of women's economic role with expectations socially produced. The theories in combination serve to explain the non-observance of equality of outcomes at the agricultural level despite formal equality.

4.2.5 Research Question Two Answer

The key cultural practices that impact rural women throughout the continents examined are: Patriarchal inheritance, customary land tenure, early marriage, purdah or seclusion, son preference, gendered household labour, male dominance in household decision-making, widowhood practices, and machismo-related expectations and low representation of women in leadership and influence over agricultural decisions.

It was found that in many contexts, patriarchy is a significant obstacle to women's participation in agriculture. Customary tenure and inheritance systems, widowhood customs and discriminatory gender norms persist in Africa to undermine women's rights to land and other agricultural resources (UN Women, 2024; FAO, 2023). In some sub-Saharan African countries, customary inheritance systems often restrict female ownership or control over farmland, with a preference for men (Doss et al., 2021). Patriarchal institutions in East Africa can also hinder women's decision-making power on farms despite the fact that they make significant contributions to food production, as noted by Odour and Kibaru (2022). These studies reveal that even when women contribute to labour, they cannot be protected from exclusion as long as the power of property is gendered.

Asian countries such as India, Nepal, Bangladesh and Pakistan still face gender disparities in agricultural opportunities due to discriminatory inheritance practices, preference for sons, dowry and restrictions on women's mobility (Agarwal, 2021). UN Women (2024) also highlights entrenched gender stereotypes, unequal access to land, and other factors as key barriers to women's empowerment in agriculture in Southern Asia. Weaker property rights and

limited mobility may lead to lower levels of education, market access, access to agricultural information and decision-making.

Legal frameworks to achieve gender-equitable outcomes are generally stronger in North and South America, although cultural discrimination has not been eliminated. Deere and León (2021) point to ongoing obstacles to Indigenous women's land access, to access to agricultural finance and leadership, and Cornhiel (2022) suggests that in some parts of Latin America, progressive land reform has not eradicated the patriarchal notions regarding land ownership and control. Thus, evidence indicates that, while legal reform is important, it may not be enough if household and community practices continue to reinforce unequal power.

4.3 Research Question Three

What are the prevalent cultural practices affecting women in different geopolitical zones of Nigeria?

Literature indicates that cultural practices that impact rural women are different in each of the geopolitical zones in Nigeria. Some of the more visible socio-cultural restrictions on women's mobility in the North include limited mobility, early marriage and purdah or seclusion. Patrilineal inheritance via customary law is particularly significant in some communities in Southern Nigeria (Akinbile and Nwosu, 2022). From the South-East, it can be argued that customary inheritance can be a factor that discriminates against women and excludes them from the agricultural assets, and in the South-West, women may face other mobility limitations, even if they have some access to and control over agricultural resources.

Discriminatory land-tenure rules are also a significant constraint on women's participation in farming in developing countries as noted by FAO (2023). However, even if the law is reformed, the impact of discriminatory customs is not erased when ownership and control of land and inheritance in rural communities remains with community institutions (World Bank, 2024).

4.3.1 Discussion

While the six geopolitical zones have varying degrees of restrictions on women's lives, the common denominator is that of patriarchy. Northern Nigeria tends to exhibit more features of purdah, early marriage, constraints on mobility and less education, and many of the southern settings more features of discriminatory inheritance and customary land holding. The findings are in line with Liberal Feminist Theory as institutional and customary rules determine unequal access to property and opportunities. They also facilitate Gender Role Theory, as notions of appropriate social and productive roles for women shape levels of mobility, domestic responsibilities and participation in productive activity. So, the theories explain the general trend of inequality as well as the regional differences in the manifestation of inequality.

4.4 Objectives Three and Four

To identify the prevalent cultural practices affecting women in different geopolitical zones of Nigeria.

To compare the prevalent cultural practices affecting women across the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria.

Geopolitical Zone	Predominant Cultural Practices	Effects on Women's Participation
North-West	Purdah, early marriage, patriarchal household arrangements, low female education	Restricted movement, weaker access to extension support, reduced decision-making power
North-East	Early marriage, religious restrictions, male inheritance, gender inequality	Reduced land ownership, lower educational attainment, limited agricultural leadership
North-Central	Customary land tenure, male inheritance, patriarchal family structure	Limited ownership of farmland and agricultural assets
South-East	Patrilineal inheritance, exclusion of daughters and widows from land inheritance	Lower investment in commercial agriculture and reduced ownership
South-West	Patriarchal land ownership despite relatively stronger education	Restricted control of productive assets and agricultural leadership
South-South	Traditional inheritance, male community leadership, customary allocation of land	Reduced control over agricultural land and productive resources

4.4.2 Discussion of Findings

The comparison indicates that all six geopolitical zones contain patriarchal cultural arrangements, although the particular form and severity differ. Northern Nigeria is more strongly associated with restrictions on movement, early marriage and lower educational opportunity, whereas southern zones more frequently reflect the effects of discriminatory inheritance and customary landholding (FMAFS, 2024; NBS, 2024; FAO, 2023; UN Women, 2024). Despite these differences, a common consequence is that women have weaker access to agricultural assets, leadership positions, extension information, farm finance and other productive opportunities than men (World Bank, 2024; IFAD, 2023; African Development Bank, 2023). The comparison therefore shows both regional specificity and a shared pattern of unequal control over resources.

Early marriage, purdah and limitations on women's education are especially significant in parts of the North-West and North-East (UN Women, 2024; FMAFS, 2024; World Bank, 2024). In contrast, the South-East records comparatively strong effects from patrilineal inheritance and customs that exclude daughters and widows from land. The South-West and South-South generally show fewer restrictions on movement, but women can still face inequality in land control, authority over farm decisions and use of productive assets (NBS, 2024; FAO, 2023; Agarwal, 2021; IFAD, 2023). Thus, lower visibility of seclusion does not necessarily mean equal economic power in agriculture.

These regional differences show that gender inequality is expressed through different institutions even when the economic effect is similar. Women's agricultural role and economic empowerment can be weakened by discriminatory inheritance, limited access to land and technology, weak extension contact, exclusion from leadership and reduced influence over decisions (FAO, 2023; UNDP, 2023; African Development Bank, 2023). Evidence from FAO (2023), UN

4.4.1 Result Presentation

The review shows substantial regional differences in the cultural practices that shape women's agricultural roles across Nigeria, even though several forms of patriarchal authority recur in more than one zone.

Women (2024) and the World Bank (2024) similarly identifies cultural institutions as important constraints on women's productivity in developing countries. Njuki et al. (2023) and Seymour et al. (2023) also connect women's access to land, financial services, agricultural knowledge and leadership with the surrounding institutional and cultural environment. Legal reform is therefore necessary, but it must be combined with changes in customary rules and local power relations if women are to gain stronger economic authority in agriculture (Agarwal, 2021; IFAD, 2023).

Overall, the study identifies several recurring practices across Nigeria's geopolitical zones: patriarchal inheritance, customary landholding, early marriage, purdah or seclusion, gender stereotypes, male dominance of household decisions, exclusion from community leadership, restrictions on mobility and limits on women's ownership or control of productive assets (FAO, 2023; NBS, 2024; UN Women, 2024; FAO, 2024). Their severity varies by location, but the practical outcomes are similar: reduced access to markets, modern technologies, agricultural advisory support, finance, leadership positions and secure land. These constraints narrow women's ability to expand farming and agribusiness even where they supply a large share of agricultural labour. The findings therefore support region-specific interventions that recognise differences in culture while ensuring that women have fairer opportunities to obtain and use agricultural resources (United Nations, 2023; FAO, 2023; UNDP, 2023).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

5.1 CONCLUSION

The study concludes that rural women remain essential to agricultural production and rural development in Nigeria. Their work supports national food supply, crop production, livestock and fisheries, food processing and wider agricultural marketing, thereby contributing directly to the food-security position of households, rural livelihoods and the national

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economy (FAO, 2023; NBS, 2024; FMAFS, 2024). Yet their productive contribution is still constrained by deeply rooted cultural practices that limit access to land, other productive assets, decision-making in agriculture and agricultural support services (UN Women, 2024; World Bank, 2024; IFAD, 2023).

Across Africa, Asia, North and South America and Nigeria's geopolitical zones, patriarchal institutions, discriminatory inheritance, customary land tenure, gender stereotypes, restricted mobility and unequal social expectations continue to affect women's involvement in agricultural activities. The specific practices differ by region, but the consequence is similar: women experience weaker practical control of farming resources and opportunities for economic empowerment (African Development Bank, 2023; United Nations, 2023; UNDP, 2023).

Responding to these constraints requires a combination of legal reform, gender-responsive agricultural policy, institutional change, education, community sensitisation and sustained dialogue with traditional and cultural authorities (IFAD, 2023; FAO, 2023; UN Women, 2024). Formal rights must also be matched by practical opportunities for women to obtain secure land, agricultural finance, extension information, improved technologies and other productive assets. Strengthening women's capabilities and authority in this way can improve productivity, household welfare and rural incomes while reducing poverty and food insecurity. Equality between women and men in agriculture is therefore both a social-justice concern and an economic development issue, and it is directly related to progress on SDG 1, SDG 2, SDG 5 and SDG 10 (FAO, 2023; United Nations, 2023; African Development Bank, 2023; World Bank, 2024).

5.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

On the basis of the findings and conclusions reached in the study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Federal and state governments should enforce existing laws that protect women's rights to land, inheritance and other productive assets, while ensuring that statutory protections are not displaced in practice by discriminatory customary rules.
2. Traditional rulers, community leaders and religious institutions should work with government agencies and civil-society organisations to review customs that restrict women's farming opportunities, while preserving cultural practices that contribute positively to community cohesion and well-being.
3. Federal and State Ministries of Agriculture, together with agricultural development programmes, should design extension support, technology programmes, farm-input distribution, mechanisation and climate-smart initiatives in ways that respond specifically to the constraints faced by rural women and improve their practical access to these services.
4. Rural women should have better access to affordable agricultural credit, grants, insurance and other forms of farm finance so that they can invest in equipment, technology, production, processing

and agribusiness without relying entirely on male-controlled household resources.

5. Government and development partners should expand education, skills development and capacity-building for rural women, especially in modern production methods, digital agriculture, agribusiness management, financial literacy and climate-resilient farming.
6. Community sensitisation should be strengthened to challenge harmful gender stereotypes and discriminatory norms through public education, adult learning, advocacy and dialogue that involves women, men, young people and traditional institutions.
7. Agricultural extension systems should recruit and support more women extension agents and strengthen outreach to rural communities so that women farmers receive timely information on production, markets, technology, climate adaptation and available agricultural services.
8. Future studies should use empirical, mixed-methods or longitudinal designs to examine more directly how cultural practices influence women's agricultural engagement across Nigeria's geopolitical zones and in comparable developing-country settings. Such research should pay attention to regional differences and to the mechanisms through which culture affects land, finance, technology and decision-making.

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