

Improving the Status of Women in Nigerian Sahel Region: Research, Innovation, and Empowerment

Women in the Sahel region are major contributors to farming and livestock production in the pastoral economy. Women's additional responsibilities in the pastoral economy such as maintenance of kitchen gardens, homebuilding, cooking, cleaning, and washing require natural resources like timber and water. As such, dependence on the availability of natural resources is especially evident in women's daily livelihood and household responsibilities. When climate variability makes these scarce, it can affect the assets (such as time, security, and money) required for women to perform these tasks. A key central natural resource that pastoral women rely upon for their livelihoods is land. Agricultural production, feeding livestock and building homes depend essentially upon land, fodder and timber availability. While women are dependent upon these natural resources for survival, they often do not have equitable ownership rights. Policies directed at pastoral development often emphasize technical and security issues but overlook crucial socio-economic measures which could empower women to manage their resources better for their own benefit.

Given that gender inequalities characterise pastoral and farming systems in the Sahel region, actions are required to eliminate barriers to women's access to resources; engage men/boys to change gender relations and cultural norms that perpetuate gender inequalities. Research is needed to understand the enabling environment and interventions that are required to support women into secure, decent livelihoods. Research is also needed to identify barriers and find effective women empowerment strategies that focus on changing the prevailing norms that promotes perpetual gender inequality in pastoral communities. It is in this context that the present research focused on the improvement of the status of women in pastoral communities in

Nigeria's Sahel region entailing knowledge generation, proposing and testing innovative women empowerment approaches, and promoting knowledge mobilisation and scaling up of tested interventions.

Key Findings from the Primary Data

Women participation in farming activities and their use of income

The findings reveal that women in Bauchi and Gombe play significant roles in food crop farming. In Bauchi, 65% of women and 74% of men engaged in farming over the past year, while in Gombe, the figures were 53% for women and 68% for men. This highlights women's crucial contribution to food security in their households and communities. (Figure 1).

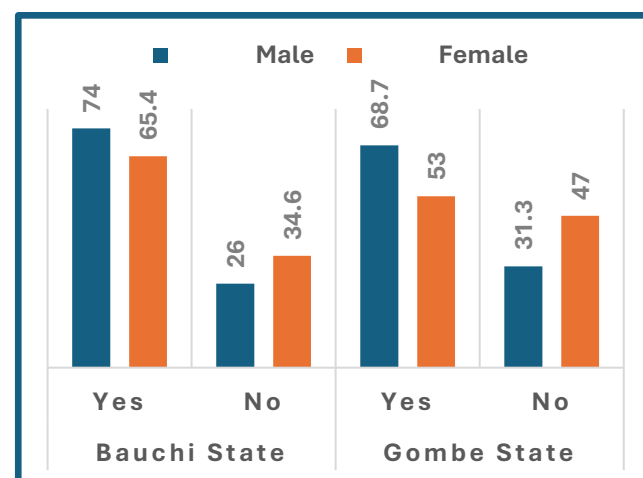


Fig. 1: Percentage distribution of respondents by their participation in food crop farming in the past 12 months.

Despite women's significant role in farming activities, men still dominate decision-making. Table I indicates that a higher proportion of the female respondents in the survey localities of Bauchi and Gombe States reported that they make input into very few decisions compared with the males that indicated that they do make input into most decisions regarding food crop

farming. In Bauchi, 58% of men but only 8% of women participate in all farming decisions. In Gombe, 46% of men and 27% of women do. Limited female input in decisions may cause conflicts, as women balance farming with household duties.

Table 1

Percentage distribution of respondents by how much input into decision of household food crop farming

Respondents by how much input into decision of household food crop farming	Male	Female
Bauchi State		
No input	0.4	1.2
Input into very few decisions	5.7	23.9
Input into some decisions	11.5	43.6
Input into most decisions	24.0	23.2
Input into all decisions	58.4	8.1
Gombe State		
No input	0.0	1.5
Input into very few decisions	5.1	6.6
Input into some decisions	6.2	21.1
Input into most decisions	42.0	43.8
Input into all decisions	46.7	27.0

The dominant role of males in decision making regarding farming activities is further shown with regards to the person who takes decision on types of crops to grow for agricultural production in their household. Figure 2 indicates that in Bauchi, 65% of males independently choose which crops to grow, compared to just 12% of females, while Gombe shows similar patterns with 60% males versus 24% females. Often as shown in Figure 2 the females reported that their spouses took such decisions without their involvement. The best the females got involved in decision

making is when they jointly took decisions with their spouses. This male dominance extends to decisions on marketing their products, where approximately 60% of men in both states independently decide on product sales, while only 12% of women in Bauchi and 20% in Gombe have this authority (Figure 3). The best situation in which the females took part in decisions regarding the marketing of their farm products is when such decisions are jointly taken with their spouses. Finally, Figure 4 shows that in both Bauchi and Gombe States while males make input in all decisions regarding the use of income from farming activities females make fewer decisions, except jointly with their spouses.

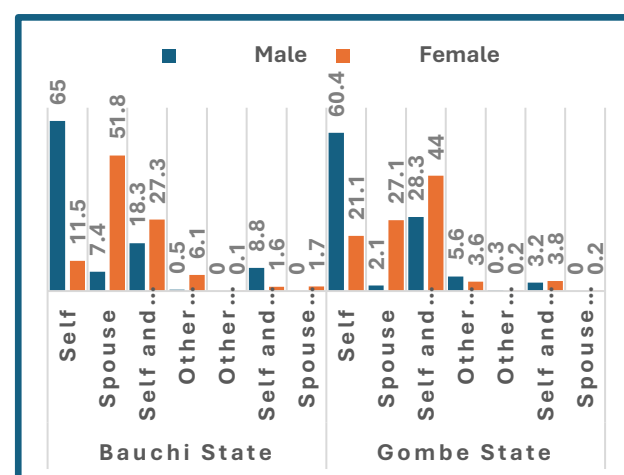


Fig. 2: Percentage distribution of respondents by the person who takes the decision on types of crops to grow for agricultural production in their household

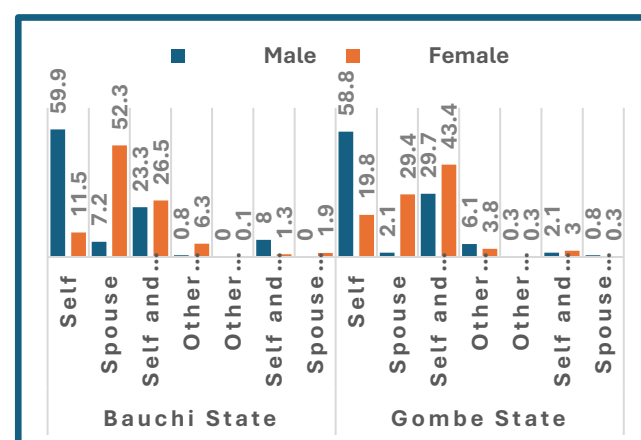


Fig. 3: Percentage distribution of respondents by persons who take the decision on when to take or who will take crops to the market in their households

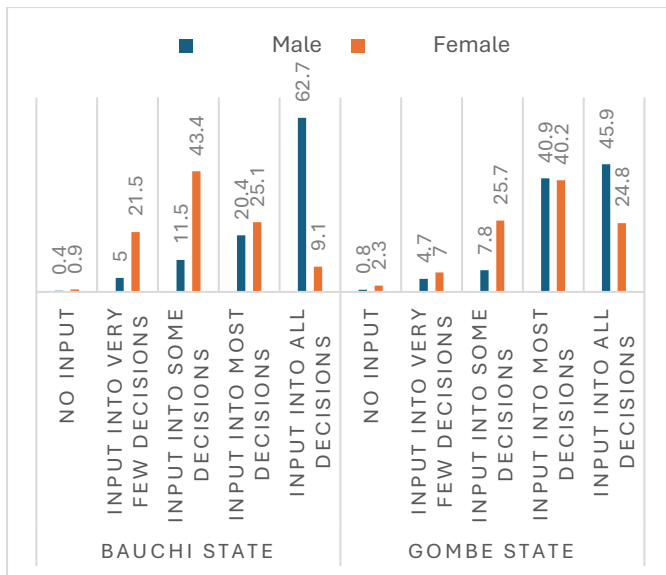


Fig. 4: Percentage distribution of respondents by how much input they make into decision on the use of income generated from food crop farming

Access to agricultural land

Figure 5 shows that in Bauchi State about 42 percent of the males reported that they have access to land for farming whenever they want while about 58 percent of them stated that they do not have access to land. On the other hand, about 45 percent of the females reported that they have access to land for farming while 55 percent indicated that they had no access to land for farming.

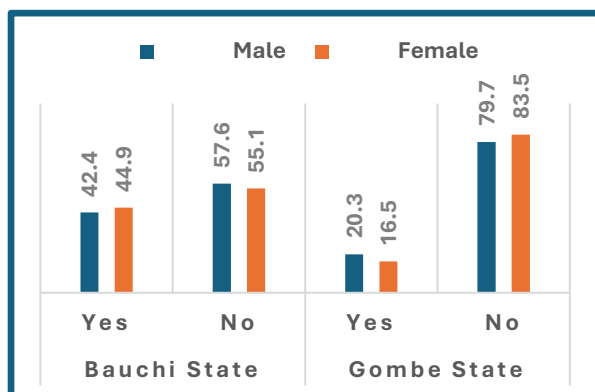


Fig. 5: Percentage distribution of respondents' household members currently having any Agricultural land, or any land not presently used for agriculture

Figure 6 reveals significant gender disparities in land ownership across Bauchi and Gombe states. In both regions, approximately 72% of males

reported owning farmland independently, while female ownership rates were markedly lower at 22% in Bauchi and 30% in Gombe. Women's access to farmland primarily comes through joint ownership with their spouses, with 70% of female respondents in Bauchi and 53% in Gombe reporting such arrangements. This dependence on joint ownership underscores women's limited autonomy in land use decisions, as they typically require spousal approval for farming activities. The data highlights the vulnerable position of women regarding land rights, particularly in cases of marital discord where they risk losing access to agricultural land altogether. These findings demonstrate the significant barriers women face in achieving independent land ownership and agricultural autonomy in these regions.

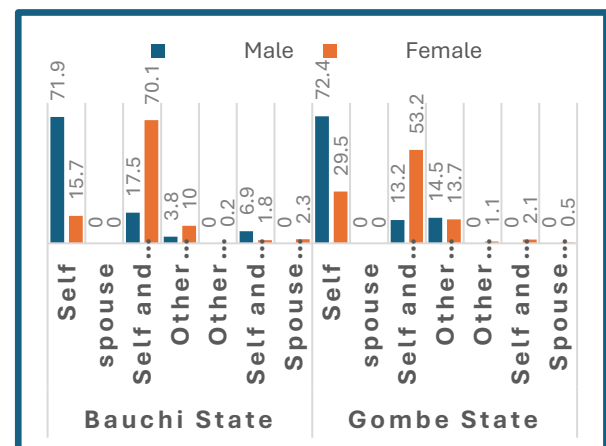


Fig. 6: Percentage distribution of respondents by ownership of most of the agricultural land or any land not in use

Other Project Activities

Training of the Members of the Community-based Project Implementation Committee in Target Pilot Communities

The initial phase of CPIC (Community Project Implementation Committee) member training in the pilot communities began in the project's fifth quarter, starting with capacity building for collaborating CSO members in Gombe and Bauchi states. These CSO members were prepped to subsequently train CPIC members at the community level, utilizing CPED's training

guide on Gender and Climate Change in the Sahel Region. This comprehensive guide features various modules combining interactive activities and presentations to enhance understanding of climate change's gender dimensions in Nigeria's Sahel region and Africa broadly.

The training program was structured to help participants identify gender-based inequities that increase the vulnerability of women and girls in pastoral and agropastoral communities. Sessions incorporated both traditional learning methods, such as presentations and discussions, and participatory approaches including group work, role play, breakout sessions, and reflections on personal experience were used during the training of the collaborating CSO members. These approaches were also adopted in the training of CPICs at the community level.



Photo: Train the Trainers' Workshop organised by Project team members in Gombe state

To ensure that each member of the CPIC in selected communities is carried along, a time convenient for the committee members was agreed upon, taken in cognizance that most of the participants are farmers and pastoralist who may need to take their livestock for grazing or may need to go to their farms. Each session began with an overview of the training approach, creating a welcoming and relaxed environment conducive to learning. The training emphasized real-life scenarios based on community experiences, encouraging active participation through various engagement techniques. To ensure inclusivity, sessions incorporated energizing activities and, when necessary, local language interpretation,

making the training accessible and engaging for all participants.



Photo: CPED Project staff Training members of Community-based Project Implementation Committee on Gender and Climate Members in Bare-Tangji Community

Training of Community Members on Management of Village Savings and Loan Cooperatives in Pilot Communities

Village Savings and Loan Cooperatives play a pivotal role in rural communities by promoting financial inclusion, poverty reduction, and community empowerment. They offer tangible benefits to individuals and communities alike, fostering economic growth and resilience while empowering the most vulnerable members of society. This training, therefore, was designed to equip individuals and communities in rural areas including pastoral communities with the knowledge and skills needed to establish and manage Village Savings and Loan Cooperatives (VSLCs). VSLCs are community-based financial groups that empower members to save money, access credit, and improve their financial well-being. The training provided an opportunity for participants to have a comprehensive understanding of VSLCs and be prepared to initiate and sustain their own VSLC in their rural communities.

Acknowledgement

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About CPED

The Centre for Population and Environmental Development (CPED) is an independent, non-partisan, non-profit and non-governmental research and development organisation based in Benin City, Nigeria. CPED is committed to promoting sustainable development, reducing poverty and inequality, and strengthening evidence-based decision-making through policy-oriented research, advocacy, capacity building, stakeholder engagement and community-level intervention programmes.

Vision

The vision of Centre for Population and Environmental Development (CPED) is to be a key non-state actor in the promotion of grassroots development among the inhabitants of various communities in Nigeria.

Mission

The overall mission of Centre for Population and Environmental Development (CPED) is to promote action-based research programmes and undertake intervention programmes on sustainable population and environmental issues in Nigeria in general and the Niger Delta in particular.

Core Values

In order to achieve the vision and mission, CPED staff will be guided by a set of core values designed to motivate staff towards professional excellence, intellectual competitiveness, innovation and productivity. The core values include the following:

- **Intellectual Freedom:** The universal ideals of intellectual and academic freedom are promoted and respected by CPED. In this respect CPED will remain an independent, professional and non-membership organization.
- **Non-partisanship:** CPED is a non-partisan organization which is not associated with any political party or organization. However, when the need arises, CPED in its research, advocacy and outreach activities will address key political issues that have considerable impact on development, especially at the local level.
- **Quality of service delivery:** CPED is committed to excellence in research, advocacy and outreach programmes. This is essential to put CPED on the highest pedestal of policy research think tank in Nigeria. Consequently, quality service delivery is a non-negotiable feature of all the key organs and units of CPED.
- **Integrity:** CPED staff are committed to the highest ethical standards in all official obligations and personal responsibilities to society and the organization. Integrity shall be manifested through honesty, trustworthiness, honouring commitments and taking full responsibility for our actions, both success and failures.
- **Teamwork:** CPED emphasizes teamwork, networking and partnership without frontiers. It defeats any tendency towards hero-worshipping, pigeon-holing and stonewalling which make development a mirage.
- **Participatory decision-making:** This bottom-up and horizontal approach to development planning makes feasible the collective ownership of programmes and all the processes of governance. It makes CPED, policy makers and beneficiaries of development to share

a common vision of the public good work mutually for its realization.

- Non-discrimination: CPED is committed to a policy of non-discrimination and equal opportunity for all persons regardless of race, colour, religion, creed, gender identity or disability. CPED respects all applicable laws regarding non-discrimination.