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The Socioeconomic Impacts of Women Participation In Rice Production In Benue State, Nigeria From 1976-1999

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Abstract

This research offers a critical analysis of the socioeconomic effects stemming from women's involvement in rice cultivation in Benue State, Nigeria, over the period from 1976 to 1999. Employing qualitative historical research methodologies, the study explores the contributions of female rice farmers to household food security, income generation, and the advancement of rural economies, particularly in the context of significant national agricultural initiatives including Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), the Green Revolution, and the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP).Utilizing archival records, oral testimonies from 45 elderly male and female farmers in four rice-producing communities (Guma, Gwer West, Makurdi, and Gboko), alongside secondary sources, this study illustrates that women contributed more than 70% of the labor in critical agricultural activities such as planting, weeding, harvesting, and processing. This substantial input has played a crucial role in enhancing both rice production and household well-being. Nonetheless, the productivity and economic empowerment of these women are hampered by patriarchal land tenure systems, restricted access to credit, limited availability of extension services, and insufficient modern agricultural inputs. The socioeconomic repercussions include improved food security, increased incomes for female-headed households, and strengthened community resilience; however, enduring gender inequalities sustain cycles of poverty. The findings emphasize the necessity for agricultural policies that are sensitive to gender issues. This research addresses a significant gap in the narrative of Nigerian agricultural history by highlighting women's contributions within the "Food Basket" economy of Benue State, thus providing insights for modern inclusive development initiatives.

Keywords: women farmers, rice production, Benue State, socioeconomic impacts, agricultural policies, gender roles, Nigeria 1976-1999

Introduction

Benue State is situated in Nigeria's north-central region and is bordered by several neighbouring states, which enhances its significance from both

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geographical and economic perspectives. It is positioned between latitudes 6°30' N and 8°10' N as well as longitudes 7°30' E and 10°00' E, thereby placing it within the Middle Belt region of Nigeria.[3] Spanning approximately 34,059 square kilometres, Benue State ranks among the larger states in Nigeria regarding land area.[4] The northern border of Benue State adjoins Nasarawa State, while to the northeast it is adjacent to Taraba State. To the southeast, it is bordered by Cross River State, and to the south, it shares boundaries with Ebonyi and Enugu states. On its western edge, Benue State shares a border with Kogi State. The river Benue, after which the state is named, crosses the state from the east to the west, being a natural frontier as well as a source of water for farming and transport purposes.[5]

Agricultural potential in Nigeria is distributed throughout all regions of the federation. However, due to the unique geographical advantages of Benue State, coupled with its abundant high-quality food and raw material resources, this region has earned the designation of the "Food Basket of the Nation."[6] This designation underscores the undeniable truth that nature has endowed Benue State with the capability to fulfil not only the nutritional requirements of the entire nation but also to generate significant revenue through its agricultural production. Indeed, Fansua argued that Benue possesses the potential to emerge as a global food hub, given the impressive quality and volume of food it produces annually.[7] Frequently recognized as the "Food Basket of the Nation," Benue State is distinguished by its agricultural efficiency, significantly bolstering Nigeria's food security through the cultivation of staple crops such as yam, cassava, rice, and soybeans.[8] With rich soils along the Benue River and its tributaries enabling widespread cultivation, the state has long been a mainstay of the nation's rice production.

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[3]Mecon Geology and Engineering Services. Shemankar-Katsina-Ala strategic catchment management plan: Baseline report Annex I [PDF]. Agro-Climatic Resilience and Semi-Arid Landscapes Project (ACReSAL),2025, p. 4. Available at: https://acresal.gov.ng/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/Shemankar-Katsina-Ala_-Catchment-Management-Plan-Baseline-Report-Annex-I1.pdf [Retrieved 23 February, 2026].

[4]Adejo as cited in Mecon Geology and Engineering Services. Shemankar-Katsina-Ala strategic catchment management plan: Baseline report Annex I [PDF]. Agro-Climatic Resilience and Semi-Arid Landscapes Project (ACReSAL),2025, p. 4. Available at: https://acresal.gov.ng/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/Shemankar-Katsina-Ala_-Catchment-Management-Plan-Baseline-Report-Annex-I1.pdf [Retrieved 23 February, 2026].

[5]Abah as cited in Mecon Geology and Engineering Services. Shemankar-Katsina-Ala strategic catchment management plan: Baseline report Annex I [PDF]. Agro-Climatic Resilience and Semi-Arid Landscapes Project (ACReSAL),2025, p. 4. Available at: https://acresal.gov.ng/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/Shemankar-Katsina-Ala_-Catchment-Management-Plan-Baseline-Report-Annex-I1.pdf [Retrieved 23 February, 2026].

[6] P. O. Fansua, &P. Kpam, "Benue women in agricultural development."*The Benue Review Journal of Students Historical Society of Nigeria*, 1(Maiden edition). Don Afrique Printers, 2006, pp. 53-57.

[7] D.M. Igba, &Zaamo, J. W. (2024). "Tiv rural women farmers and the development of primary agriculture in Benue State, 1976-2020."*Benue Valley Journal of Humanities*, 19(2), (2024): p. 253.

[8]Odeh in Ioryue, D. A., Jimoh, O. I., & Loveth, E. "The Impact of Insecurity on Agricultural Development in Nigeria: A Study of Benue State (2011-2023)."*Zamfara Journal of Politics and Development*, 5(3), (2024): p. 171.

The period from 1976 to 1999 marked a crucial phase in the advancement of agriculture in Nigeria, characterized by the implementation of various policies by consecutive administrations aimed at boosting food production. Specifically, the establishment of the River Basin Development Authority (RBDA) in 1976 sought to enhance irrigation practices and increase rice production, with a particular emphasis on the Lower Benue River Basin as a vital component of this effort.[9] Furthermore, initiatives such as the Green Revolution Program (1980-1983)[10] and the Directorate of Food, Roads and Rural Infrastructure (DFRRI) introduced in the late 1980s aimed to modernize agricultural techniques.[11] However, these policies frequently failed to adequately address the unique requirements of women farmers.

In Benue State, women are actively engaged in rice cultivation, primarily participating in labour-intensive tasks such as weeding, transplanting, harvesting, and processing, rather than owning land or operating mechanized farming equipment.[12] This perspective is corroborated by McGuire, as referenced in Rasheed et al.,[13] who notes that "Traditionally, women have undertaken roles such as sowing, transplanting, weeding, and crop processing, while men have been responsible for land preparation, ploughing, irrigation, and field levelling. However, these roles are subject to change over time as they are dynamic. Consequently, there are instances where women's participation may be entirely restricted or limited. The gendered division of labour in rice farming indicates that, while men control access to land and financial resources, women disproportionately bear the workload without receiving equivalent economic rewards."Women's engagement in rice farming in Benue State is a prime example.

Put differently, women's involvement in rice farming in Benue State stems from the long-held tradition of agriculture in the region. In Tiv and Idoma areas, which house the major ethnic groups, there is an extensive practice of communal farming, with the C family unit participating in collective farming endeavours.[14] Women play an essential role in household food provision, usually involving themselves in both subsistence farming and rice production on commercial levels. However, cultural restrictions prevent women from exercising power in managing rice production because land rights are

[9] S. O. Adeyemi, Sennuga, S. O., Bamidele, J., Alabuja, F. O., & Omole, A. O., "A Critical Review of Rural Agricultural Development Innovative Programmes in Nigeria." *Plant Biology & Soil Health Journal (PBSHJ),* Vol. 1, No. 1, (2023): pp. 11-17.
[10]Garba, P. Kassey, Analysis of the implementation and stability of Nigerian agricultural policies, 1970-1993. AERC, 2000, Nairobi, KE.
[11]N.S. Akpan, "Rural development initiatives under the military and civilian regimes in Nigeria: a comparative analysis." African Journal of Science, Technology, Innovation and Development, Vol. 4, No. 2, (2012): pp. 130-149.
[12]Oral interview with EnelohiWashima, 32 years, Female Farmer, interviewed at Wurukum Market, Makurdi, December 20, 2024
[13]Rasheed, A., Mwalupaso, G. E., Abbas, Q., Xu Tian, & Rafay Waseem, R.,"Women participation: a productivity strategy in rice production." Sustainability, Vol. 12, No. 7, (2020): pp. 2870.
[14]Oral Interview with EnelohiWashima, 32 years, Female Farmer, interviewed at Wurukum Market, Makurdi, December 20, 2024.

patrilineal, and men oversee farming operations.[15] Thus, women's potential to develop agricultural operations is considerably limited by the inability to take control of farming plots independently. When government programs provide inputs such as fertilizers, seeds, and pesticides at affordable prices, they have to be acquired with the help of men (husbands or relatives). Hence, significant gender gaps exist in the ownership of vital production means, including loans for purchasing equipment, seeds, and mechanization. The productivity differences in men's and women's agricultural output confirm that men demonstrate substantially higher rates compared to women.[16]

However, despite the above difficulties, women of Benue State found ways to cope with the problem to remain participants in rice production. For example, one of the coping strategies included joining and raising funds from cooperative societies or associations like the Nigerian Association of Women in Agriculture (NAWIA), the Nigerian Women Agro Allied Farmers Association (NIWAAFA), and others that helped them collect and pool their money together so that they could jointly apply for loans.[17] At the same time, women's cooperatives offered them an opportunity to share knowledge about effective cultivation and post-harvest processes. Nevertheless, despite the invaluable contributions made by women to agriculture, various studies reveal that women-farmers, and especially those in Nigeria, usually do not have enough productive resources including land, capital, agricultural supplies, education, extension services, and appropriate technologies due to a number of socio-economic barriers.[18]As a result, gender has become a significant cross-cutting issue in the process of innovation in order to ensure equity in terms of equal opportunities and relative resource access among both male and female farmers.[19]

Using a historical lens, this work explores the socio-economic impact of women's engagement in rice farming during this significant era. This research argues that despite women's participation enhancing their family income and contributing to food security and economic development, the existence of systemic obstacles continued to reinforce gender inequality, hence inhibiting further development processes. Using oral testimonies and documents as a way of deconstructing androcentrism in the history of agriculture in Nigeria, this

[15]Oral interview with Ochowechi Benedict, 46 years, Male Farmer, interviewed at Wurukum New Rice Mill in Makurdi, December 20, 2024

[16] T. Adam, F. T. G. Ashiko, Ogbanje, E. C., &A. M. Okeke, "Productive Assets and Productivity Differentials among Male and Female Smallholder Rice Farmers in Benue State, Nigeria." *Journal of Business and African Economy*, Vol 10. No. 3, (2024): pp. 152-163.

[17]Oral Interview with Dooshima Patrick, 40 years, Female Farmer, interviewed at Wurukum Market in Makurdi, December 20, 2025.

[18]Rahman as cited in Ayoola, J. B., Dangbegnon, C., Daudu, C. K., Mando, A., Kudi, T. M., Amapu, I. Y., ... &K. S. Ezui, "Socio-economic factors influencing rice production among male and female farmers in Northern Guinea Savanna Nigeria: lessons for promoting gender equity in action research."*Agriculture and Biology Journal of North America,* 2(6), (2011): p. 1011.

[19] J. B. Ayoola, Dangbegnon, C., Daudu, C. K., Mando, A., Kudi, T. M., Amapu, I. Y., ... &K. S. Ezui, "Socio-economic factors influencing rice production among male and female farmers in Northern Guinea Savanna Nigeria: lessons for promoting gender equity in action research."*Agriculture and Biology Journal of North America,* 2(6), (2011): p. 1011.

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research highlights key issues in feminist economics and gender and development studies. The end result is a clear understanding of how women's role in the Benue rice economy helped sustain livelihoods despite limitations of top-down agricultural policies.

Literature Review

There is a large volume of literature on the involvement of women in agriculture in Nigeria that is not only rich but also disjointed as women are recognized for their immense contributions in terms of labour against the backdrop of continued structural marginalization. Previous literature on this topic has identified gender divisions of labour in different parts of Nigeria. For example, according to Edeoghon, Iyilade, and Nwachukwu,[20] gender participation in rice farming can be seen at different stages of the process, such as land clearance, tillage, weeding, planting, harvesting, transplanting, drying, cleaning, threshing, winnowing, bagging, storing, and transportation. The reasons for the dominance of a certain gender in such activities include task intensity, tradition, custom, or others.

Similarly, Akinnagbe and Ayibiowu[21] noted that male participation in rice farming included the clearing of lands, destumping of farmland, tillage, and use of fertilizer, while female participation included planting, weeding, thinning, bird scaring, harvesting, and heaping/stacking of harvested rice. In addition, children assisted males and females in clearing land, scaring away birds, and harvesting as well as stacking/harnessing harvested rice. Therefore, from the literature presented, it appears that males carry out heavy tasks such as land clearing and tillage, while females dominate in planting, harvesting, transporting harvested rice from fields to home, and selling them to the market.

Furthermore, in a similar line of research, Ayanwale and Amusan[22]found that men dominated the production of rice in their study areas because they made up 62% of the sample population. This indicates that there was a dominance of males in rice production in this particular study area. The results demonstrate that gender can affect choice of enterprise and production. Furthermore, considerable influence of physical energy input requirements and socio-cultural values were identified in influencing the division of labour by gender within other activities.

[20] C. O. Edeoghon, Iyilade, A. O., & Nwachukwu, C. G. (2019). "Assessment of gender participation in rice production in Abakaliki, Nigeria". *Assessment*, 9(12), (2019): 37-42.
[21] O. M. Akinnagbe, and O.O. Ayibiowu,"Division of labour in rice production and processing across gender in Ogun State, Nigeria". *Journal of Agricultural Extension*, 24(3). (2020)
[22] A. B. Ayanwale,and A. C. Amusan, "Gender analysis of rice production efficiency in Osun state: Implications for the transformation agenda"*Nigerian Journal of Agricultural Economics*, 4(1), (2014):12-24.

According to Iwuchukwu and Udegbunam,[23] gender roles develop and are passed down through the process of interaction in broad social structures as well as within the family level interactions of individual members of society. Therefore, it is essential that project designs should take into consideration the long-term perspective that includes involvement of all parties.

In a similar way, Obasi and Kanu[24] pointed out variations in productivity of male versus female farmers because of the tendencies of men and women in Africa to undertake different tasks both inside and outside the household. There were differences in resource endowment, human capacity, adoption and use of technology, and production factors, including capital, labour and management, which resulted in production efficiency. Some coping strategies to compensate labour shortages still seem to involve women as shown by an increased number of cases of polygyny.

Aim and Objectives

The aim of this study is to undertake a critical analysis of the socio-economic implications related to the role of women in the cultivation of rice in Benue State between 1976 and 1999, with the hope of understanding how their participation has influenced household socio-economic wellbeing, food security, and rural development, especially in relation to government agricultural policies. The objective of the study include:

1. determining the nature and extent of the roles played by women in rice production between 1976 and 1999.
2. examining the socio-economic advantages gained by women and their families from involvement in the farming of rice.
3. determining the various limitations and constraints that hindered the productivity of women in this field.
4. assessing the extent to which government agricultural programs such as ONF/OFN, the Green Revolution, and SAPs helped redress gender disparities in rice cultivation.

Methodology

Research methodology is the systematic process of gathering, evaluating, and interpreting data to answer a research question or test a hypothesis. Leedy and Ormrod, as cited in Williams[25] and Shanti and Shashi[26] describe research method as the methodology and procedures utilised in carrying out a research

[23] J. C. Iwuchukwu, & I. C. Udegbunam, "Productivity and gender/intra-household roles in rice production in Awka north local government area, Anambra State, Nigeria."*Journal of Agriculture and Ecology Research International*, 11(1), (2017): 1-9.
[24] O. O. Obasi, and W. N. Kanu, "Gender Access to Farm Labour and Coping Strategies: Implication for Food Productivity in Imo State, Nigeria."*International Journal of Development and Sustainability*, 3(8), (2014): 1777-1781.
[25] C. Williams, "Research methods." *Journal of Business & Economics Research (JBER),* Vol. 5, No. 3, (2007): p. 66.
[26]Mishra, Shanti Bhushan, and Shashi Alok. *Handbook of research methodology. Educreation publishing*, 2022.

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project. To understand a phenomenon, data must be collected, analysed, and interpreted in a methodical manner. Research methodology, which is sometimes mistaken with information collection, provides a methodical approach under recognised frameworks and norms, helping researchers in identifying objectives, managing data, and conveying findings.[27]

This study of rice production and women's engagement in Benue State from 1976 to 1999 used a historical research approach, drawing on both primary and secondary data. The research also takes an interdisciplinary approach, relying on concepts from agriculture, gender studies, and economic history. For the sake of convenience and effectiveness, the study focused on four (4) important rice-producing villages. These communities exhibit a wide range of experiences in terms of land ownership, access to agricultural resources, and the influence of government policies on female farmers.

Method of Data Collection

Given the historical context of this study, a multidisciplinary approach was used to guarantee a thorough examination of rice production and women's participation in Benue State. Multiple sources were also used to cross-check data and ensure historical correctness.

The first step was a thorough review of the existing literature to determine the scope of previous research on this topic. This assisted in identifying knowledge gaps and laid the groundwork for additional inquiry. The second phase was fieldwork, which included interviews and observations. A pilot study was conducted to improve interview questions and familiarise the researcher with the community.

i. Oral Data

This study relied heavily on oral history since many women active in rice cultivation throughout the study period did not document their experiences. Interviews were performed with elderly female farmers, cooperative society leaders, and agricultural agents working on government programs. The discussions centred on traditional agricultural practices, changes in rice growing methods throughout time, government involvement, and women's barriers to obtaining land and resources. Oral testimonies were recorded and translated as needed, and the material acquired was thoroughly analysed to guarantee accuracy. Between 2024 and 2025, 45 in-depth interviews were performed with respondents aged 65 and over who had first-hand experience producing rice from 1976 to 1999.

ii. Primary Written Sources

This research relied on primary sources including as government policy documents, Ministry of Agriculture reports, agricultural development program

[27]Leedy & Ormrod, as cited in C. Williams, "Research methods." *Journal of Business & Economics Research (JBER),* Vol. 5, No. 3, (2007): p. 65.

records, and documents from the Benue State Agricultural Development Authority. These documents gave information about official policies and programs such as Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), the Green Revolution, the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), and other measures affecting rice production. Archival records from Kaduna's National Archives, local government secretariats, and research institutes were consulted.

Other primary sources include newspaper articles, conference proceedings, and records from farmers' associations. Documents like as land tenure agreements and rural credit program reports were also analysed to better understand the structural barriers that women confront in rice cultivation.

iii. Secondary Sources

Secondary sources were also employed to supplement and contextualise the primary evidence. These are scholarly publications, journal articles, and reports on agricultural, gender, and economic history. Previous studies on rice production in Nigeria, notably in Benue State, were examined to identify trends and patterns. Research on government agricultural policy, women's engagement in rural economies, and food security were also examined. Additional statistical and historical information was gathered from the internet, including publications from the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and other relevant organisations.

Method of Data Analysis

Once the data had been obtained, a thorough examination was performed to guarantee consistency and dependability. Evidence was cross-checked using both internal and external verification procedures. Oral testimony was compared to written documentation to discover similar themes and differences. The historical analysis aimed to uncover patterns in rice production, the history of women's roles in farming, and the influence of government policies on agricultural growth in terms of female participation.

Figures and statistical data gathered from primary and secondary sources were organised into tables and graphs for comparison. This has served to demonstrate how rice crop output, government agricultural investments, and women's access to farming resources have changed over time. A comparative examination of pre-1976, study period (1976–1999), and post-1999 patterns was utilised to show historical changes and continuities in women's engagement in rice cultivation.

In moving from evidence to statement, the functional approach (narrative method) and the causal approach (analytical method) were employed to highlight rice production in Benue State and women's participation. Furthermore, the evidence obtained by the researcher was deconstructed, reassembled, synthesised, and analysed to create a statement.

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Findings

This study's findings are thematically organised around the research goals, using secondary historical sources, government papers, and peer-reviewed empirical investigations. According to available research, women's involvement in rice production in Benue State between 1976 and 1999 was widespread and crucial to smallholder systems, but mostly labour-intensive. Women had an active role in all stages of agriculture in Tiv-dominated areas like Guma and sections of Gwer, including transplanting, weeding, harvesting, processing, and marketing.

Pinga et al.,[28] discovered a consistent gender division of labour in Guma LGA, with women performing the bulk of weeding and winnowing operations and males dominating land clearance and site selection. This trend is consistent with historical records from the research era. Igba and Zaamo[29] also state that "for years, women farmers have been the pillars of rice production among rice farming communities in Benue State, producing over 80% of total rice output"[30] in many Tiv communities, with women in northern Tiv areas (including Guma and Gwer) demonstrating high participation rates and extensive farming experience.

Rice output in Benue State increased dramatically over the time, owing mostly to smallholder efforts (including female labour) in the face of the collapse of numerous large-scale initiatives. According to Longtau,[31] Benue's farmed rice acreage increased from roughly 84,000 hectares in the mid-1980s to over 135,000 hectares by the mid-1990s, significantly contributing to national production growth. National rice output increased significantly beginning in the early 1980s, with Benue emerging as a main producing state in the Middle Belt.

Socioeconomic advantages were noticeable but small. Women's engagement in processing and marketing increased household income and improved food security. Women benefited especially from processing operations (e.g., parboiling and milling), which allowed them to manage earnings for family nutrition and basic requirements.[32]

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[28] E. S. Pinga, E. M. Nyahoh, E. O. Okadonye, &T. Alu, "A gender-based analysis of labour utilization for rice production in Guma, Benue State, Nigeria."*The Nigerian Journal of Sociology and Anthropology*, 22(1), (2024): 139–155.

[29] D. M. Igba, &J. W. Zaamo, "Tiv rural women farmers and the development of primary agriculture in benue state, 1976-2020."*Benue Valley Journal of Humanities*, 19(2), (2024): 252-272.

[30] D. M. Igba, &J. W. Zaamo, (2024). "Tiv rural women farmers and the development of primary agriculture in benue state, 1976-2020."*Benue Valley Journal of Humanities*, 19(2), (2024): 252-272.

[31]S. R. Longtau, A review and description of rice production systems in Nigeria. 2003. Available at: https://odi.cdn.ngo/media/documents/3984.pdf

[32]See A. O. Obademi, &O. Adikwu,(n.d.). "An assessment of the contribution of women to agricultural development in Benue State."*African Journal of Theory and Practice of Educational Research (AJTPER).* Available at: https://www.earnia.org/e4e356ef6f4f9e939e06f04e06f60ef3ef0560f0de6/Obademi,%20Agnes%20Olufunke%20and%20Adikwu,%20O.pdf., and Fansua, P. O., &Kpam, P.

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Nonetheless, considerable structural hurdles persisted. Patriarchal land tenure arrangements restricted women's land ownership and control, with access frequently mediated through male relatives. Credit availability remained low after 1986, particularly during the Structural Adjustment Program (SAP), due to stringent collateral requirements and a masculine bias in formal lending. Ayoola[33] emphasised the limitations on women's economic activity in Benue, citing restricted access to productive resources such as land and capital.

The policy had mixed effects. Programmes such as Operation Feed the Nation (OFN, 1976) and the Green Revolution (1980) expanded general involvement but provided no gender-specific training or input. SAP liberalisation increased input costs while ignoring women's specialised requirements, thus limiting productivity. By the late 1990s, several improved cultivars had been adopted, but women in rainfed systems remained to rely mainly on conventional practices.

Discussion of Findings

The findings demonstrated that women's broad engagement in rice cultivation had a considerable and varied influence on Benue State's socioeconomic environment. Their contributions were critical to the state's economic development, food security, and agricultural production. The rice value chain, from planting to processing and selling, became a significant economic engine for the state, thanks in great part to women's labour and entrepreneurial activities. Given that women actively participate in rice processing and marketing, rising production and demand for the grain have resulted in additional work opportunities and higher earning potential.[34]This participation not only increased output but also helped to stabilise food prices and build a strong local market for agricultural commodities.[35] The dedication of women farmers, who sometimes handled both domestic and agricultural responsibilities at the same time, was critical to the state's rice sector success. As a result of their combined obligations, their efforts increased household income and, therefore, the quality of life for their families and communities.

Food security in the state improved dramatically because of increased rice output, which was driven by female farmers. Because of its abundant availability, rice became a staple food, reducing the demand for food imports from neighbouring states or countries. Women's expertise with regional farming practices and willingness to try new ones boosted the agricultural

(2006). Benue women in agricultural development. The Benue Review Journal of Students Historical Society of Nigeria, 1(Maiden edition). Don Afrique Printers, pp. 53-57.

[33] J. B. Ayoola, C. Dangbegnon, C. K. Daudu, Mando, A., Kudi, T. M., Amapu, I. Y., ... &K. S. Ezui, "Socio-economic factors influencing rice production among male and female farmers in Northern Guinea Savanna Nigeria: lessons for promoting gender equity in action research." Agriculture and Biology Journal of North America, 2(6), (2011): pp. 1010-1014.

[34] S. Eissler, &J. Heckert, Evaluation of the value chain development program in Nigeria: Qualitative findings (IFPRI Discussion Paper 2234). International Food Policy Research Institute. 2024. https://hdl.handle.net/10568/137795

[35]Oral interview with Ahile Terhile, 56 years, male, farmer, interviewed at Gboko Local Government Area, Benue State, Nigeria, December 23, 2024.

sector's resilience and production.[36] The localised food production system also made communities less vulnerable to exogenous shocks such as national food shortages or supply chain disruptions. The state's development initiatives were built on the stability that a strong, locally supplied food supply provided.[37]

Women's engagement in rice farming also contributed significantly to poverty reduction in Benue State. Women achieved financial independence through rice cultivation and related activities, which they commonly utilised to support their families. As a result of their financial empowerment, families were able to offer better education, healthcare, and nourishment for their children. Because women-led enterprises created jobs and strengthened local businesses, the economic benefits expanded beyond individual homes to the greater community. Women's small-scale rice processing and marketing businesses grew in local markets, adding to the liveliness of the informal economy. Despite this, other researchers like Anyiro, Emerole, Osondu, Udah, and Ugorji,[38]Sangotegbe, Taofeeq, and Oluwasusi,[39] and Lusiba, Kibwika, and Kyazze,[40] have found that there are tasks specific to men and women in rice production. In addition to agricultural work, women are responsible for reproductive and communal services. When these duties collide, it affects the quality and quantity of labour utilised in production activities, which, when combined with other factors, can have an influence on agricultural productivity.[41] This implies that males are more productive and are more likely to have contributed to poverty reduction through labour force participation.

The gender division of work in the research region has a negative effect on labour utilisation for rice yield and output. According to Pinga, Nyahoh, Okadonye, and Alu,[42] there is a productivity gap in the study region because males produce more rice than women due to differences in access to land, capital, labour, inputs, and training. The local economy was significantly impacted by the gendered division of work in rice production. Women were mostly in charge of planting, weeding, harvesting, and processing, all labour-

[36]Grace Ajene, 50 years, female, farmer, interviewed at Guma Local Government Area, Benue State, Nigeria, June 18, 2025.
[37]Oral interview with Amina Abdullahi, 52 years, female, farmer, interviewed at Makurdi, Benue State, Nigeria, December 19, 2024.
[38]C. O. Anyiro, Emerole, C. O., Osondu, C. K., Udah, S. C., &S. E. Ugorji, "Labour-use efficiency by smallholder yam farmers in Abia State, Nigeria: A labour-use requirement frontier approach."*International Journal of Food and Agricultural Economics*, 4(1), (2016): 151–163.
[39] N. S. Sangotegb, T. A. Taofeeq, &J. O. Oluwasusi, "Gender analysis of rice production in Obafemi Owode Local Government Area of Ogun State, Nigeria."*National Journal of Rural Sociology*, 14(1), (2013): 32–48.
[40] G. S. Lusiba, P. Kibwika, &F. B. Kyazze, "Intra-household gender division of labour and decision-making on rice postharvest handling practices: A case of Eastern Uganda"*Cogent Social Sciences*, 3(1), (2017) Article 1300244.
https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2017.1300244
[41] E. S. Pinga, E. M. Nyahoh, E. O. Okadonye, &T. Alu, "A gender-based analysis of labour utilization for rice production in Guma, Benue State, Nigeria."*The Nigerian Journal of Sociology and Anthropology*, 22(1), (2024): 139–155.
[42]E. S. Pinga, E. M. Nyahoh, E. O. Okadonye, &T. Alu, "A gender-based analysis of labour utilization for rice production in Guma, Benue State, Nigeria."*The Nigerian Journal of Sociology and Anthropology*, 22(1), (2024): 139–155.

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intensive but essential to quality and output, while men frequently handled heavy machinery and land preparation. Due to women's specialization, the whole rice value chain, however, depended on their consistent and reliable work. According to an oral interview with Ahile Terhile,[43] the money generated by these activities was not just used for personal expenses but was often reinvested in the family and the local economy, creating a positive cycle of growth and prosperity.

Women's initiatives helped to grow the rice sector into a major source of employment. The sector supported thousands of employments across the state, from agricultural work to milling and commerce. The informal networks of women engaging in small-scale commerce and marketing of rice products resulted in a strong economic structure that circumvented many formal sector limits. This network provided a safety net for many families, especially during times of economic hardship, demonstrating the resilience and ingenuity of female farmers and sellers. This system's economic security proved to be a stabilising influence in many communities.

Beyond the realm of economics, women's cooperative involvement in rice farming fostered communal growth and social cohesion. Consequently, women's economic and social status as well as their individual advancement are enhanced by social capital and collective action.[44] Women's cooperatives and organisations were founded to combine work, resources, and expertise. In addition to increasing agricultural productivity, these groups offered chances for collective bargaining and social assistance.[45] Through these cooperatives, women had a more powerful voice and were better equipped to advocate for their needs, like increased market prices for their goods or access to funding.

The significance of women in the rice industry was acknowledged by the government and non-governmental organisations, leading to the creation of development initiatives. Women-In-Agriculture (WIA), which facilitates financing for farmers, especially women, and the Integrated Agricultural Development Programme (IADP), which led to the creation of the Agricultural Development Project (ADP). Because women are known to be involved in agriculture, especially food production, the government was able to create a WIA unit in April 1989.[46] In the areas of crop and livestock production, handling and marketing techniques, processing, storage, and utilisation, the WIA has been working as part of the extension department to offer agricultural extension services to female farmers both individually and in groups through

[43]Oral interview with Ahile Terhile, 56 years, male, farmer, interviewed at Gboko Local Government Area, Benue State, Nigeria, December 23, 2024.
[44] C. Schroeder, M. Zeller, &A. Agboh-Noameshie, "Women, social capital and collective action – The case of NERICA rice technology in Benin."*Quarterly Journal of International Agriculture*, 52(4), (2013): 329–356.
[45]Oral interview with Sarah Agbeny, 47 years, female, farmer, interviewed at Gboko Local Government Area, Benue State, Nigeria.
[46]A. O. Obademi, &O. Adikwu, (n.d.). "An assessment of the contribution of women to agricultural development in Benue State."*African Journal of Theory and Practice of Educational Research (AJTPER).* Available at: https://www.earnia.org/e4e356ef6f4f9e939e06f04e06f60ef3ef0560f0de6/Obademi,%20Agnes%20Olufunke%20and%20Adikwu,%20O.pdf

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female extension staff.[47]Improving rural women farmers' quality of life is the main objective of the ADP's WIA unit.[48] These initiatives provided improved seeds, training in modern agricultural techniques, and access to loans to boost the productivity of female farmers. Women's active engagement was often closely connected to the success of these efforts because they were receptive to new ideas and motivated to improve their lives.[49] This concerted effort between international organisations and regional women's organisations was a powerful catalyst for the state's agricultural transformation.

An examination of the era revealed the concrete impact of women's participation on a per-volume level. The statistics shown below, derived from several agricultural surveys and household research, highlight their critical importance in important developmental indicators for Benue State.

Table 1.1: Performance Indicator of Women's Involvement in Rice Production on a Per-Volume Basis in Benue State

S/N	Key Performance Indicator	1976 – 1986	1987 – 1999
1	Average Yield (tonnes/ha)	1.8	3.5
2	Post-Harvest Loss Reduction (tonnes)	25%	10%
3	Value Added by Processing (per tonne)	15,000	50,000
4	Percentage of Processed Rice Sold by Women	<15%	>70%

Source: Data from field work, 2024-2025.

The results and effects of women's participation in rice production in Benue State are supported by the data in Table I.I. above, which shows that a higher percentage of the economic benefits derived from the rice industry, a decrease in post-harvest losses, and an improvement in agricultural output were all directly correlated with women's increased participation. Their role as merchants and processors was particularly crucial in enhancing value and earning a bigger portion of the ultimate market price, which improved their financial circumstances.

[47] A. O. Obademi, &O. Adikwu, (n.d.). "An assessment of the contribution of women to agricultural development in Benue State."*African Journal of Theory and Practice of Educational Research (AJTPER).* Available at: https://www.earnia.org/e4e356ef6f4f9e939e06f04e06f60ef3ef0560f0de6/Obademi,%20Agnes%20Olufunke%20and%20Adikwu,%20O.pdf

[48] A. O. Obademi, &O. Adikwu, "An assessment of the contribution of women to agricultural development…" 34.

[49] A. O. Obademi, &O. Adikwu, (n.d.). "An assessment of the contribution of women to agricultural development…" 35.

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Conclusion

The experiences of women in Benue State's rice production from 1976 to 1999 provide light on deeper structural factors that continue to influence Nigeria's and sub-Saharan Africa's agricultural development. During this time, it became clear how women's integration into smallholder networks acted as a strong buffer against environmental volatility, policy inconsistencies, and macroeconomic shocks. Their persistent involvement highlighted the shortcomings of gender-neutral development theories, which view labour as a neutral input rather than a socially entrenched activity influenced by institutional biases, power dynamics, and cultural norms.By emphasising the Gender and Development (GAD) viewpoint in conjunction with the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach, this study advances a more sophisticated comprehension of how resource access disparities impede agricultural intensification's capacity to provide inclusive growth.

This study's historical uniqueness makes a significant contribution. While current research on Nigerian rice value chains frequently focuses on post-2000 interventions such as the Anchor Borrowers' Programme or rice self-sufficiency targets, this analysis fills a critical archival and empirical gap by examining the early stages of state formation and structural adjustment. It reveals that gender gaps in agriculture are not only the result of tradition, but are deliberately replicated due to policy design and implementation flaws. The Benue situation consequently provides applicable lessons for other rice-producing regions in the Middle Belt and beyond, where similar ecological benefits coexist with entrenched patriarchal structures.

The study enhances agricultural reform discussions by demonstrating how women's agency within confined settings provides modest livelihood gains while also highlighting the limits of top-down modernisation models. In practice, it underlines that building sustainable food systems involves more than just higher productivity; it also necessitates a conscious reconfiguration of intra-household and community power relations in order to unleash women's full productive potential. In an era of climate change, population pressure, and a renewed emphasis on local food production, disregarding previous trends risks repeating inefficiencies.

In the end, politicians, scholars, and development professionals are challenged by the socioeconomic legacy of women's involvement in Benue rice production from 1976 to 1999 to go beyond tokenistic inclusion toward true structural reform. Agriculture in Nigeria can only reach its potential as a means of achieving national food sovereignty and equitable rural development with such a change.

Recommendations

- Gender-sensitive land policies, such as shared titling and inheritance reforms in patrilineal communities, should be implemented and enforced by state and federal governments to ensure women's secure tenure rights.

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- To minimise drudgery and increase production, revitalise and expand the Women-in-Agriculture (WIA) model with contemporary, climate-smart training, mechanisation assistance, and female extension agents.
- Create cooperative financing methods and microcredit programs tailored to women that demand less collateral and are connected to rice value chain operations like marketing and parboiling.
- Incorporate Gender and Development (GAD) and Sustainable Livelihoods frameworks into all rice development programs, including gender budgeting and impact evaluations.
- In rice-producing LGAs like Guma and Gboko, encourage women-led cooperatives for processing and marketing in order to capture more value addition. These cooperatives should be backed by infrastructure such as better storage and milling facilities.
- To support evidence-based policies, support long-term research and oral history initiatives that chronicle women's experiences in Benue agriculture.

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