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Research article

Gendered Constraints to Rice Value Chain and Participatory Policy Processes: Evidence from Southern Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This research examined gendered constraints to the livelihood activities of rice value chain actors and the role of gender in shaping their participation in policymaking in southern Nigeria. Although rice has become a staple food for millions of people in Nigeria, the domestic supply remains insufficient to meet the demand. In addition to production-related constraints, limited stakeholder participation in policy decisions has been identified as a factor contributing to poor policy outcomes in Nigeria's rice sector. With the need for participatory policies gaining traction in global development discourse, this research argues that understanding whether men and women face similar constraints in their value chain activities, and how gender shapes participation in policymaking will lead to better policy outcomes. The research provides the evidence from southern Nigeria, using quantitative data generated through questionnaires administered to 573 rice value chain actors. The data was analyzed using means and chi-square analysis. The results revealed statistically significant gender differences for the lack of experience on policy issues, low level of education, and lack of confidence between men and women. Women also faced greater exclusion from institutionalized platforms where agricultural policies are debated and shaped, reflected in the highly significant difference in the absence of formal consultation spaces between men and women. It concludes that women face greater structural constraints in both their enterprises and their participation in policymaking. The paper concludes that women are more constrained by production-related factors and participate disproportionately in policymaking compared to men. It recommends redesigning formal policymaking platforms to facilitate women's sustained and meaningful participation rather than merely their symbolic inclusion.

Key words:
participatory policymaking, gendered constraints, rice value chain, gendered policymaking, agricultural policy

Abbreviations:
LGA – local government areas; SPSS – statistical packages for the social sciences

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INTRODUCTION

Agricultural production systems in Nigeria are shaped by socio-cultural and institutional arrangements that structure access to productive resources along gender lines. While this is observed across different agricultural enterprises, the focus of this study is on rice value chain activities, namely, rice farming, processing, marketing and agro-input supply. The paper examined how gender shapes rice value chain activities and participatory policymaking in the agriculture sector. Studies in Nigeria have shown that women play an important role across the rice value chain, particularly in processing and marketing, yet they face disproportionate constraints in accessing land, credit, improved inputs, and extension services (Abdullahi, 2025; Effiong and David, 2025; Yusuf et al., 2025). These constraints contribute to consistent productivity gaps between male and female farmers, thereby affecting household

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livelihood and national food security outcomes. While these constraints have persisted, affecting rice value chain outcomes for the millions of households who depend on rice value chain activities for their livelihoods and food security, their persistence has also been linked to limited participation in the agricultural policy process, as shown by some studies in Africa, including Nigeria (Mulema et al., 2019; Tirivangasi et al., 2023; Olomu et al., 2020).

Studies on agricultural policymaking in Nigeria have demonstrated that the limited participation of rural communities in policy decisions has direct consequences for access to productive inputs and national food security. Although agricultural policies frequently emphasise productivity and self-sufficiency, policy design and implementation remain largely centralised, with minimal incorporation of those directly affected in identifying workable solutions to address their problems. Empirical evidence shows that this exclusion contributes to persistent mismatches between policy instruments and the actual needs of small-scale producers (Nwankwo et al., 2024). Studies evaluating Nigeria's major agricultural programmes reveal that input-oriented interventions such as subsidised seeds, fertilizers, credit schemes, and mechanization support are often captured by political and administrative elites. Weak grassroots participation reduces transparency in beneficiary selection and limits farmers' ability to shape distribution mechanisms, resulting in uneven and unreliable access to inputs. As a result, many smallholders remain excluded from formal input markets, despite being the primary targets of agricultural policies (Adekunle and Aregbeshola, 2025). The absence of meaningful participation also undermines evidence-informed policymaking. A systematic review of agricultural evidence use in Nigeria finds that policy processes rarely integrate farmer-generated knowledge or end-user feedback, leading to policies that prioritize macro-level objectives over household-level food security concerns. This disconnect weakens implementation effectiveness and contributes to low adoption of improved inputs and technologies (Aremu, 2024).

The above literature points to two important research gaps. First, while existing studies extensively document the production challenges faced by smallholder farmers in Nigeria, including limited access to inputs, credit, extension services, and markets, they do not adequately explain how these challenges are linked to farmers' exclusion from agricultural policymaking processes. There is a lack of empirical evidence demonstrating how limited participation in policy formulation, programme design, and input-allocation decisions contributes to production constraints. Second, although the literature highlights the exclusion of rural communities from agricultural policy processes, they provide limited gender-disaggregated evidence on how participation barriers differ between men and women. Specifically, there is insufficient understanding of how gender influences access to consultation platforms, awareness of policy processes and the ability to shape decisions within the rice value chain. For instance, studies show that gender gaps in African agriculture are driven by unequal access to land, labour, credit, extension and inputs, rather than lower female efficiency (Palacios-López and López, 2015; Rodgers and Akram-Lodhi, 2019). Moreover, fewer studies connect these production constraints to the gendered architecture of agricultural policymaking or test whether men and women experience policy-participation barriers differently within a specific rice value chain. This gap is particularly evident in Nigeria, where rice-sector studies often document women's constraints without empirically linking them to exclusion from policy consultation, agenda-setting and input-allocation processes. Globally, many agricultural and development policies, whether driven by states, donors, or international organisations, continue to assume that participation is neutral once consultation forums are in place (Cheong et al., 2024; Yami et al., 2019). This study challenges this assumption by showing that without deliberate attention to gendered constraints, participatory policymaking reproduces existing inequalities rather than correcting them. This insight is particularly valuable for global policy frameworks on inclusive governance, food systems transformation, and gender mainstreaming, which frequently emphasise participation but underspecify how power and inequality shape who participates, how, and with what effect. In this sense, this paper provides empirical grounding for calls to move from symbolic participation to substantive, influence-based participation.

There is strong evidence that participation in agricultural policymaking is deeply gendered, with women who constitute a substantial share of the agricultural labour force systematically excluded from decision-making spaces that shape policy priorities, resource allocation, and programme design. Across Sub-Saharan Africa, including Nigeria, agricultural policy processes are often dominated by male elites, policymakers, and producer representatives, resulting in policies that inadequately reflect women's production constraints, input needs, and time burdens (Adeola et al., 2024; Wekesah et al., 2019). This gendered exclusion has measurable consequences for agricultural output. Empirical studies consistently show that women farmers face lower productivity not because of inefficiency, but due to structurally limited access to land, improved seeds, fertilizers, credit, extension services, and policy-driven input subsidies, which are constraints that are reinforced when women lack voice in policymaking processes (Rodgers and Akram-Lodhi, 2019). When participatory mechanisms fail to include women, agricultural policies tend to reproduce these inequalities, reducing aggregate output below its potential (Rodgers and Akram-Lodhi, 2019).

By contrast, research has shown that increasing women's participation in agricultural decision-making at both household and institutional levels positively affects productivity and food outcomes. Studies have shown that women's decision-making power is associated with greater production diversity, higher input efficiency, and improved dietary outcomes, indicating synergistic links between inclusive participation and output performance (Mohammed et al., 2025; Buehren, 2023). Given the actors in Nigeria's rice value chain who require a mix of effective seed systems, production, aggregation, processing, and marketing, participatory policymaking remains uneven and gendered. Even though women are heavily represented among smallholder rice producers and processors in Nigeria, they are underrepresented in policy consultations, in leadership of commodity associations, and on input allocation committees that shape subsidy design, credit access, and extension priorities. This exclusion reproduces policy blind spots around women's constraints, manifesting in their limited land tenure, delayed or unsuitable input delivery, and restricted access to mechanisation, thereby affecting productivity along the chain (Wekesah et al., 2019; Adeola et al., 2024). These constraints appear in women's daily roles through insecure plots, delayed inputs, labour shortages, rudimentary processing, weaker market bargaining, and limited voice in consultation forums (Nwankwo et al., 2024; Obayelu et al., 2020). Where women lack a voice in policy design, rice input programs, including improved seed, fertilizer, and mechanized services, are less accessible and less responsive to the timing and varietal needs critical to yield gains. These participation gaps translate into measurable output losses (Nur et al., 2025; Gupta, 2025).

This study therefore examines gendered constraints affecting rice value chain activities and participation in policymaking among rice value chain actors in Southern Nigeria, encompassing the South-East, South-South, and South-West regions. Employing a quantitative approach, the study addresses two research objectives: (1) to determine whether men and women experience similar constraints in their respective rice value chain activities; and (2) to assess whether significant differences exist between men and women in the factors constraining their participation in agricultural policymaking. In doing so, the study contributes to ongoing debates on inclusive agricultural transformation in Nigeria by providing context-specific evidence highlighting the need for gender-responsive policymaking and structural frameworks that address gender-related gaps in policy development and implementation.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Study Area

The study was conducted in Southern Nigeria, comprising the South-East, South-South, and South-West geopolitical zones. States within these zones are characterised by extensive involvement of smallholder actors across different nodes of the rice value chain. While rice grows across all agroecological zones in Nigeria, including the northern geopolitical zones, the focus on Southern Nigeria was due to increasing insecurity in the north. However, the cultivation of both upland, lowland, and swamp rice varieties in the region, which require different levels of policy intervention, provides a robust context for examining participatory agricultural policymaking and gendered outcomes.

Research Design

The study adopted a survey research design and used a quantitative approach to examine gendered constraints on their rice enterprises and their participation in agricultural policymaking. This design enables a comprehensive analysis of the measurable outcomes of gendered constraints to policy processes within the rice value chain in Southern Nigeria. As noted by Van Wijk et al. (2020), surveys enable rigorous analysis of agricultural systems, policies, and livelihoods across diverse contexts and can capture multidimensional indicators essential for evaluating agricultural policies.

Sampling Technique and Sample Size

A multi-stage sampling technique was employed. As stated by Wiśniowski et al. (2020) and Innocenti et al. (2021), multistage sampling is appropriate in survey research when the population is large, dispersed, and clustered, and it is suitable for hierarchical populations in which larger units are selected first and individual respondents are selected later. In the first stage, rice-producing states within Southern Nigeria were purposively selected based on production capacity, leading to the selection of Cross River from the South-south, Ebonyi from the South-east and Ekiti from the South-west. In the second stage, high rice-producing local government areas (LGAs) were randomly selected. In the third stage, communities with high rice production were selected, while in the fourth stage, respondents were purposively selected from registered value chain associations, including rice farmers, processors, input suppliers, and marketers. While gender stratification was planned, it was not achieved because women were underrepresented in the

associations and were unwilling to participate in the study due to family commitments, even though most associations had more male members. Hence, while 573 respondents participated in the research, most were male (409), with only 164 female participants. Figure 1 presents the gender distribution of selected respondents by state.

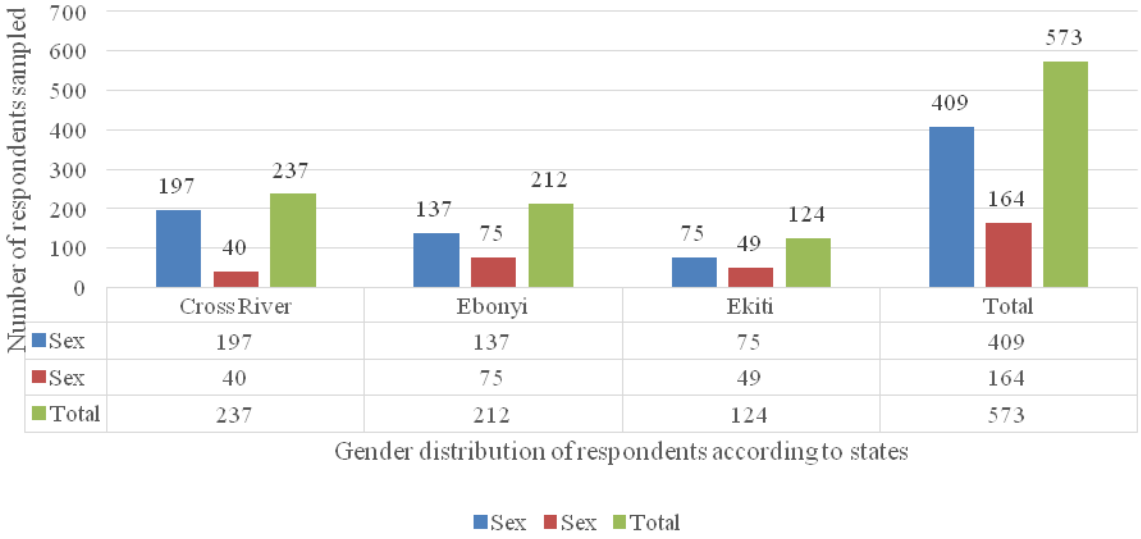


Figure 1. Gender distribution of respondents according to states

Gender imbalance, as observed in Figure 1, poses a limitation to the findings. However, to reduce reporting bias, a chi-square analysis was used to account for unequal group sizes and assess gender-associated differences without requiring equal male–female sample sizes.

Methods of Data Collection

Primary data was used for the study through the administration of structured questionnaires. The questionnaires were first pretested with 30 respondents in Oyo State, which is not one of the states included in the study. This was to ensure the instrument's reliability in measuring its intended construct. Cronbach's alpha was used to assess the reliability of the questionnaires, yielding a coefficient of 0.7, which was considered reliable for the study. It was then refined and administered to 573 respondents in the study, using a face-to-face process.

Operationalisation of variables

The questionnaire captured data on socioeconomic characteristics, constraints to the rice value chain, and constraints on participation in policymaking processes. Binary responses were used for both the constraints on the rice value chain (19 items) and participation in the policy process (19 items). The reliability analysis revealed reliability coefficients of 0.92 and 0.94 for the constraints to rice value chain activities and participation in the policy process, respectively. These reflect a very high level of reliability of the instruments used for the study (Table 1).

Table 1. Reliability analysis

Variable	Chronbach's alpha	Number of items	Reliability
Constraints on rice value chain	0.92	19	Highly reliable
Constraints to participation in the policy process	0.94	19	Highly reliable

Note: a 0.7 coefficient is appropriate for reliable internal consistency

Methods of Data Analysis

For objective one, to determine whether constraints on the rice value chain were gendered, respondents' composite scores were derived from factors constraining it. Nineteen variables were analysed for constraints on rice value chain activities using binary responses. These scores were then computed, and from the composite scores, the mean scores for males and females were determined. Higher mean scores indicated that the variable highly constrains their rice value chain activities, and vice versa. To further determine the significance of the difference, an independent t-test was conducted. Similarly, the respondents' composite scores for constraints on participation in the policy process were derived from the composite scores of 19 binary-response variables. From these scores, the mean scores for

males and females were determined. Higher mean scores indicated that the variable highly constrains their rice value chain activities, and vice versa. To further determine the significance of the difference, an independent t-test was conducted.

The data were analysed using Statistical Packages for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 20. The data was analysed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics, including crosstabulations presented as frequencies and percentages, as well as means, were used to describe the gendered constraints in the rice value chain and in participatory policymaking. Pearson's chi-square test and the Phi coefficient were used to assess the statistical significance of gender differences in the constraining factors affecting their rice enterprises and their participation in policymaking. This was appropriate given that the variables were measured as binary responses.

RESULTS

This section presents the results of the study. First, it presents the sociodemographic characteristics of the study's respondents before delving into the results and discussing the study's objectives.

Table 2 presents the sociodemographic characteristics of the respondents, analysed using crosstabulations as within-gender variables. It showed that men dominate at higher levels of educational attainment, with particularly large gaps at the bachelor's degree level (83.9% male vs. 16.1% female). Across rice farming, processing, marketing, and agro-input supply, men make up over 70% of participants in each enterprise category, rising to 82.0% in agro-input supply. Additionally, men dominate the higher experience brackets across farming, processing, marketing, and agro-input supply. Notably, in the longest experience categories (31–50 years), women are nearly absent (Table 2).

Table 2. Sociodemographic characteristics of the respondents

Sociodemographic		Male Frequency (%)	Female Frequency (%)
Educational qualification	Non-formal education	20 (62.5)	12 (37.5)
	Informal education	12 (57.1)	9 (42.9)
	Primary school	77 (65.8)	40 (34.2)
	Secondary school	173 (72.2)	65 (27.30
	NCE	76 (75.2)	25 (24.8)
	Bachelor	47 (83.9)	9 (16.1)
Marital status	Single	23 (67.6)	11 (32.4)
	Married	380 (71.6)	151 (28.4)
	Separated	4 (100.0)	-
	Divorced	2 (50.0)	2 (50.0
Household size	1-3	27 (73.0)	10 (27.0)
	4-6	156 (74.3)	54 (25.7)
	7-9	166 (68.3)	77 (31.7)
	10-12	46 (69.7)	20 (30.3)
	13-15	14 (82.4)	3 (17.6)
Types of enterprise	Rice farming	349 (72.1)	135 (27.9)
	Rice processing	176 (72.1)	68 (27.9)
	Rice marketing	400 (71.3)	161 (28.7)
	Agro-input supply	41 (82.0)	9 (18.0)
Number of years in rice farming	1-10	134 (71.7)	53 (28.3)
	11-20	122 (66.3)	62 (33.7)
	21-30	66 (78.6)	18 (21.4)
	31-40	25 (92.6)	2 (7.4)
	41-50	3 (100)	-
Number of years in rice processing	1-10	55 (68.8)	25 (31.3)
	11-20	91 (70.5)	38 (29.5)
	21-30	22 (81.5)	5 (18.5)
	31-40	7 (100)	-
	41-50	1 (100)	-
Number of years in rice marketing	1-10	163 (71.2)	66 (28.8)
	11-20	137 (65.6)	72 (34.4)

	21-30	70 (77.8)	20 (22.2)
	31-40	27 (93.1)	2 (6.9)
	41-50	3 (100.0)	-
Number of years in agro-input supply	1-10	20 (80.0)	5 (20.0)
	11-20	12 (85.7)	2 (14.3)
	21-30	2 (50.0)	2 (50.0)
Number of rice farms	1-2	210 (75.0)	70 (25.0)
	(3-4)	98 (67.1)	48 (32.9)
	>4	31 (70.5)	13 (29.5)

Gendered Constraints to Rice Value Chain Activities

The results presented in Table 3 show that both male and female rice value chain actors experience high levels of constraints across various activities, as reflected in the high mean values for most variables (largely >0.90). However, women reported higher mean constraints in key structural domains compared to men: market access (0.98 vs 0.94), land tenure insecurity/fragmentation (0.92 vs 0.84), elite capture of benefits (0.96 vs 0.86), and labour scarcity (0.94 vs 0.89), as well as slightly higher exposure to flooding and irrigation limitations (both 0.96 vs 0.94). In contrast, men reported higher constraints only in a few areas, notably access to extension services (0.75 vs 0.68) and competition from imported rice (0.70 vs 0.68), with a marginal difference in lending rates (0.96 vs 0.95).

Table 3. Gendered constraints to rice value chain activities

Constraints to rice value chain activities	**Male (N = 409) Mean (Stdv)**	**Female (N= 164) Mean (stdv)**
Limited access to credit	0.93 (±0.26)	0.94 (±0.24)
Poor rural infrastructure	0.94 (±0.24)	0.95 (±0.23)
Poor access to markets	0.94 (±0.24)	0.98 (±0.16)
Annual flooding	0.94 (±0.24)	0.96 (±0.20)
Lack of irrigation facilities	0.94 (±0.23)	0.96 (±0.20)
Land tenure system/fragmentation	0.84 (±0.37)	0.92 (±0.28)
Lack of access to marketing information	0.94 (±0.24)	0.94 (±0.24)
High cost of inputs	0.95 (±0.23)	0.96 (±0.19)
Lack of processing facilities	0.93 (±0.26)	0.95 (±0.22)
Fluctuating market price of rice	0.94 (±0.24)	0.95 (±0.23)
Lack of access to extension services	0.75 (±0.43)	0.68 (±0.47)
Competition from imported rice	0.70 (±0.46)	0.68 (±0.47)
Lack of storage facilities	0.92 (±0.27)	0.95 (±0.22)
Elite capture of benefits	0.86 (±0.34)	0.96 (±0.20)
Poor access to improved rice seeds	0.95 (±0.23)	0.95 (±0.22)
Late arrival of inputs from the government	0.95 (±0.22)	0.95 (±0.22)
High interest rates of lending institutions	0.96 (±0.19)	0.95 (±0.23)
Scarcity of labour	0.89 (±0.32)	0.94 (±0.24)
Inadequate access to tractors	0.95 (±0.22)	0.96 (±0.20)

To highlight the significance of the observed gaps in constraints to rice value chain between male and female actors, a chi square analysis was conducted, as shown in Table 4. The results show consistently high levels of reported production and market-related constraints among both male and female respondents. Statistically significant gender differences were observed for land tenure system/fragmentation (χ^2=5.94, p=0.02, φ=0.10) and elite capture of benefits (χ^2=10.62, p<0.01, φ=0.14), while poor access to markets (p=0.06) and scarcity of labour (p=0.05) were close to conventional significance thresholds. Most other constraints had non-significant p-values, indicating broadly similar responses across gender groups.

The significant gender differences for land tenure system/fragmentation and elite capture of benefits indicate that women experience some institutional and access-related barriers differently or more intensely than men. This has important implications for policy design: programmes aimed at improving input delivery, credit access, mechanisation, and infrastructure should include safeguards against exclusion, transparent benefit distribution mechanisms, and gender-sensitive land and resource access strategies. The small phi values suggest that the gender associations are weak in magnitude, but they are still policy-relevant because even modest differences can reinforce inequities when they occur within already constrained production systems.

Table 4 Chi square analysis of gendered constraints to value chain activities

Variables	Male n (%)	Female n (%)	χ^2	p-value	Fisher's exact test	Phi (φ)
Limited access to credit	379 (92.7)	154 (93.9)	0.28	0.60	0.72	0.02
Poor rural infrastructure	385 (94.1)	155 (94.5)	0.03	0.86	1.00	0.01
Poor access to markets	383 (93.6)	160 (97.6)	3.62	0.06	0.06	0.08
Annual flooding	383 (93.6)	157 (95.7)	0.9	0.33	0.42	0.04
Lack of irrigation facilities	386 (94.4)	157 (95.7)	0.43	0.51	0.67	0.03
Land tenure system/fragmentation	342 (83.6)	150 (91.5)	5.94	0.02	0.02*	0.10
Lack of access to marketing information	384 (93.9)	154 (93.9)	0.00	0.99	1.00	0.00
High cost of inputs	387 (94.6)	158 (96.3)	0.75	0.39	0.52	0.04
Lack of processing facilities	379 (92.7)	156 (95.1)	1.14	0.29	0.36	0.05
Fluctuating market price of rice	384 (93.9)	155 (94.5)	0.08	0.78	0.85	0.01
Lack of access to extension services	307 (75.1)	112 (68.3)	2.73	0.10	0.12	-0.07
Competition from imported rice	288 (70.4)	114 (68.3)	0.25	0.62	0.62	-0.02
Lack of storage facilities	377 (92.2)	156 (95.1)	1.56	0.21	0.28	0.05
Elite capture of benefits	353 (86.3)	157 (95.7)	10.62	<0.01	<0.001*	0.14
Poor access to improved rice seeds	387 (94.6)	156 (95.1)	0.06	0.81	1.00	0.01
Late arrival of inputs from government	388 (94.9)	156 (95.1)	0.02	0.90	1.00	0.01
High interest rates of lending institutions	393 (96.1)	155 (94.5)	0.70	0.40	0.50	-0.04
Scarcity of labour	362 (88.5)	154 (93.9)	3.80	0.05	0.06	0.08
Inadequate access to tractors	388 (94.9)	157 (95.7)	0.19	0.66	0.83	0.02

Legend**: *** Significant at 5% level of significance

Gendered Constraints to Participatory Policymaking

Table 5 reveals clear gendered patterns in constraints to participation in agricultural policymaking among rice value chain actors, with women consistently reporting higher mean constraint scores than men across most dimensions. Across individual-level capacity indicators, women reported higher mean constraints than men in lack of experience on policy issues (female: 0.92 ± 0.27; male: 0.86 ± 0.35), low level of education (female: 0.93 ± 0.26; male: 0.87 ± 0.33), and lack of confidence (female: 0.87 ± 0.34; male: 0.81 ± 0.39). Gender differences become more pronounced when institutional access to policymaking spaces is taken into account. Women report higher mean constraints for the absence of formal consultation spaces for stakeholders (female: 0.94 ± 0.24; male: 0.82 ± 0.38).

Table 5. Gendered constraints to participatory policymaking

Participatory policymaking	Male (N = 409) Mean (stdv)	Female (n = 164) Mean (stdv)
Lack of legal framework that ensures stakeholder participation	0.92 (±0.27)	0.96 (±0.20)
Lack of awareness of the policy process	0.93 (±0.25)	0.95 (±0.23)
Lack of experience on policy issues	0.86 (±0.35)	0.92 (±0.27)
Low level of education	0.87 (±0.33)	0.93 (±0.26)
Lack of financial resources	0.93 (±0.26)	0.94 (±0.24)
Lack of confidence	0.81 (±0.39)	0.87 (±0.34)
Absence of formal consultation space for stakeholders	0.82 (±0.38)	0.94 (±0.24)
Weak lobbying capacity of stakeholders	0.73 (±0.45)	0.88 (±0.33)
Lack of time	0.75 (±0.44)	0.88 (±0.32)
Scattered nature of stakeholders' population due to geographic distances	0.76 (±0.43)	0.90 (±0.30)
Weak capacity of stakeholders in policy development	0.77 (±0.42)	0.92 (±0.28)
Poor communication network	0.78 (±0.42)	0.93 (±0.26)
Poor transportation network	0.91 (±0.29)	0.93 (±0.25)
Lack of organisation among stakeholders' organisations to speak with one voice	0.99 (±0.42)	0.92 (±0.27)
Poor leadership structure of stakeholders' organization	0.81 (±0.39)	0.92 (±0.27)
Negative attitude of government towards stakeholders' organisations	0.93 (±0.26)	0.91 (±0.29)
Cultural barriers	0.64 (±0.48)	0.62 (±0.49)
Poor social capital of stakeholders	0.83 (±0.37)	0.92 (±0.28)
Ethnic barriers	0.57 (±0.49)	0.62 (±0.49)

At the level of collective action and representation, women again report markedly higher mean constraint values. This is evident for weak lobbying capacity of stakeholders (female: 0.88 ± 0.33; male: 0.73 ± 0.45) and poor social capital (female: 0.92 ± 0.28; male: 0.83 ± 0.37). Women also consistently report higher mean constraints regarding the practical and logistical conditions that shape participation. Notably, lack of time to participate is more severe for women (0.88 ± 0.32) than for men (0.75 ± 0.44), reflecting women's heavier care burdens and competing livelihood responsibilities. Similarly, women reported greater constraints associated with the scattered nature of stakeholders due to geographic distance (female: 0.90 ± 0.30; male: 0.76 ± 0.43), weak capacity in policy development (female: 0.92 ± 0.28; male: 0.77 ± 0.42), and poor communication networks (female: 0.93 ± 0.26; male: 0.78 ± 0.42).

The chi-square analysis results reported in Table 6 revealed that several variables showed statistically significant gender differences, including lack of experience on policy issues (χ^2=4.50, p=0.03, φ=0.09), absence of a formal consultation space (χ^2=12.64, p<0.01, φ=0.15), weak lobbying capacity (χ^2=15.23, p<0.01, φ=0.15), lack of time (χ^2=13.31, p<0.01, φ=0.15), geographic dispersion of stakeholders (χ^2=14.82, p<0.01, φ=0.16), weak capacity in policy development (χ^2=15.97, p<0.01, φ=0.17), poor communication network (χ^2=17.26, p<0.01, φ=0.17), lack of organisation to speak with one voice (χ^2=16.60, p<0.00, φ=0.17), poor leadership structure (χ^2=10.13, p<0.01, φ=0.13), and poor social capital (χ^2=6.25, p=0.01, φ=0.10).

Table 6. Chi square analysis of gendered constraints to participatory policymaking

Participatory policymaking	Male n (%)	Female n (%)	χ^2	p-value	Fisher's exact test	Phi (φ)
Lack of legal framework that ensures stakeholder participation	377 (92.2)	157 (95.7)	2.33	0.13	0.15	0.06
Lack of awareness of the policy process	382 (93.4)	155 (94.5)	0.25	0.62	0.71	0.02
Lack of experience on policy issues	350 (85.6)	151 (92.1)	4.50	0.03*	0.04	0.09
Low level of education	357 (87.3)	152 (92.7)	3.44	0.06	0.08	0.08
Lack of financial resources	379 (92.7)	154 (93.9)	0.28	0.60	0.72	0.02
Lack of confidence	330 (80.7)	143 (87.2)	3.44	0.06	0.07	0.08
Absence of a formal consultation space for stakeholders	337 (82.4)	154 (93.9)	12.64	<0.001*	<0.01	0.15
Weak lobbying capacity of stakeholders	297 (72.6)	144 (87.8)	15.23	<0.001*	<0.01	0.15
Lack of time	305 (74.6)	145 (88.4)	13.31	<0.001*	<0.01	0.15
Scattered nature of stakeholders' population due to geographic distances	311 (76.0)	148 (90.2)	14.82	<0.001*	<0.01	0.16
Weak capacity of stakeholders in policy development	315 (77.0)	150 (91.5)	15.97	<0.001*	<0.01	0.17
Poor communication network	319 (78.0)	152 (92.7)	17.26	<0.001*	<0.10	0.17
Poor transportation network	370 (90.5)	153 (93.3)	1.18	0.28	0.33	0.05
Lack of organisation among stakeholders' organisations to speak with one voice	317 (77.5)	151 (92.1)	16.60	<0.001*	<0.00	0.17
Poor leadership structure of stakeholders' organisation	333 (81.4)	151 (92.1)	10.13	<0.001*	<0.01	0.13
Negative attitude of government towards stakeholders' organisations	379 (92.7)	149 (90.9)	0.53	0.47	0.49	-0.03
Cultural barriers	260 (63.6)	101 (61.6)	0.20	0.66	0.70	-0.02
Poor social capital of stakeholders	341 (83.4)	150 (91.5)	6.25	0.01*	0.01	0.10

Legend: * Significant at 5% level of significance

The significant gender differences across several indicators imply that participatory policy processes may be less accessible or more burdensome for women, particularly where consultation spaces, lobbying capacity, time, communication networks, leadership structures, and social capital are weak. This points to the need for more inclusive policy platforms that reduce the costs of participation, strengthen stakeholder organisations, improve communication channels, and create formal mechanisms for regular consultation, from a gender lens. The relatively small phi values imply modest gender effect. Nevertheless, their consistency across several variables suggests that gender-sensitive capacity building, leadership development, and stakeholder mobilisation should be integrated into participatory policymaking interventions.

DISCUSSION

The discussion of the findings is based on the paper's objectives.

Gendered Constraints to Rice Value Chain Activities

The sociodemographic profile of the respondents revealed a clear male dominance across all categories of the rice value chain, establishing the structural backdrop against which gendered participation in policymaking occurs. Although women are present across all educational categories, their underrepresentation at higher education levels is notable, with implications for their ability to engage in technically framed policy discussions. The dominance of men across all value chain enterprises indicates that women are not only fewer in number overall but also particularly under-represented in strategic, capital-intensive nodes of the value chain, which tend to enjoy greater policy visibility and influence. The relatively few women with many years of experience are concerning because experience often translates into leadership positions within associations and greater legitimacy in consultation processes, reinforcing men's advantage in policy engagement.

On the gendered constraints to rice value chain activities, the findings suggest that, although constraints that limit rice sector performance are widespread for both sexes, women face systematically higher barriers in the most structural domains, especially market access, secure land tenure, including flooding/irrigation, and access to farm labour. This aligns with evidence that observed gender gaps in agricultural outcomes are driven less by women's technical inefficiency than by unequal access to, and control over, productive resources and markets, particularly land and complementary inputs, including land (Palacios-López and López, 2015; Maindi et al., 2025; Ayoola et al., 2011). The pronounced land tenure disparity is especially important, given that women in most Nigerian communities do not have the right to own land and instead depend on family or rented land for their agricultural activities. This system implies that their farm sizes will be proportional to the extent to which they can access family land or their economic ability to rent land for their livelihood activities. Given the challenge of collateral, which makes it difficult for women to readily access land available to men, this further hinders their access to credit, as land is often required as collateral.

Additionally, gender gaps in labour access are critical for women engaged in different activities along the rice value chain, whether as farmers, processors, or marketers. In this regard, women's disproportionate disadvantage in accessing farm labour implies that critical rice operations are more likely to be delayed, under-done, or done with lower labour quality, especially land preparation, transplanting, weeding, fertilizer application, bird control, and harvesting. In rice, many of these tasks are highly time-sensitive, so labour shortages can directly translate into yield losses, higher post-harvest losses, and poorer grain quality. Moreover, women have historically relied on household members as a low-cost source of labour, but this option is increasingly limited as family sizes shrink and more children remain in school rather than participating in farm work, thereby reducing the availability of family labour as a coping strategy. The aging population in rural communities in Nigeria also poses a serious challenge to the availability of farm labour, as younger rural residents are migrating to urban areas due to limited access to social and economic infrastructure and in search of better economic opportunities. As affirmed by Koledoye (2024), some family members engage in their own personal agricultural activities or migrate to urban areas and these contribute to the scarcity of family labour for some households. These dynamics in rural communities further highlight how labor scarcity hinders the performance of the rice sector, especially for women. Where hired labor is available and could be a good alternative to address this labor gap, women face higher effective labor costs (Obayelu et al., 2020), which reduce input use and profitability and ultimately reinforces gender productivity gaps in rice production. Therefore, policy efforts in Nigeria's rice value chain must go beyond "generic" production support to address gendered constraints, particularly in land governance, market inclusion, and farm labour that disproportionately limit women's productive activities in the rice value chain, compared to men.

The chi-square analysis of gender differences in constraints on rice production enterprises among the actors suggests that women's disadvantages are not marginal but are embedded in institutional and governance arrangements that shape access to resources and opportunities. For instance, the findings indicate that elite capture disproportionately disadvantages women and where this is the case, it will limit their access to resources, interventions, decision-making platforms, and value chain opportunities, which are often controlled by influential actors. This finding suggests gendered power asymmetries within the rice value chain and implies the need for targeted institutional and policy measures to enhance women's inclusion, equitable access to benefits, and effective participation in rice production, processing, and marketing. The significance of these differences implies that women are more exposed to insecure land rights and inequitable distribution of government and development benefits, which directly undermine their productivity and livelihood outcomes compared to men.

Gendered Constraints to Participatory Policymaking

The findings on the constraints to participation in policymaking exposed a pattern in which women are mainly disadvantaged. The higher mean values reported for women indicate greater severity of constraints and suggest that women experience more intense barriers to effective engagement in policy processes, particularly in areas related to capacity, institutional access, collective organisation, and the practical conditions required for participation. These mean differences indicate that women perceive themselves as less equipped, both academically and experientially, to engage in policy discussions and as less confident in doing so. In the context of participatory policymaking, such differences suggest that women are more likely to self-exclude or be marginalised in deliberative spaces that demand technical knowledge, familiarity with policy language, and assertive engagement. Ballangé (2025) noted that in policy-dense and technically framed deliberative spaces, women are more likely to self-exclude or be marginalised due to perceived knowledge deficits and dominant norms of assertive participation.

The substantial gap observed in women's reportage of higher mean constraints for the absence of formal consultation spaces underscores women's weaker access to formal forums and channels through which agricultural policy agendas are shaped. It suggests that even where consultation mechanisms exist, they may be less accessible, less welcoming, or less responsive to women's participation, thereby limiting their opportunities to contribute to policy formulation. Evidence from deliberative and governance studies indicates that the mere presence of consultation mechanisms does not guarantee women's effective participation. Even where such mechanisms exist, they may remain inaccessible, unwelcoming, or weakly responsive to women's contributions, resulting in limited influence on policy formulation (Prastiwi and Yunas, 2025; Ballangé, 2025).

The patterns observed in higher mean constraints of women in collective action and representation suggest that women face deeper challenges in mobilising collectively, exercising leadership, and leveraging networks to influence policymaking outcomes. As participatory policymaking often privileges organised groups and articulate representatives, such disparities imply that women's interests are less likely to be aggregated, articulated, and defended within policy arenas. This finding supports the perspectives of Ahrens and Meier (2024), who opined that policy influence depends heavily on internal organisational location and coordination, not just presence, and Binderkrantz et al. (2020), who opined that policy access and influence are strongly skewed toward well-organised actors with stable organisational structures, professional representation, and capacity for sustained engagement across multiple arenas.

Additionally, the differences reported by higher mean constraints for wonen in the practical and logistical conditions that shape participation implies that women are more constrained by spatial isolation, limited access to information, and weaker technical capacity to engage with policy content, all of which reduce the likelihood of sustained and effective participation.

In contrast, some constraints appear broadly shared across genders, with relatively similar mean values reported by men and women. These include a lack of legal frameworks ensuring stakeholder participation, a lack of awareness of the policy process, a lack of financial resources, negative government attitudes, and cultural and ethnic barriers. The similarity in these mean scores suggests that certain weaknesses in Nigeria's agricultural policymaking environment are systemic rather than gender-specific. However, the concentration of higher mean values among women in areas related to capability, organisation, access to consultation spaces, and logistical feasibility indicates that women experience these structural weaknesses more acutely.

The findings from the chi-square analysis of the significance of the difference between men's and women's participation in the policy process further confirm that women enter policymaking processes with comparatively weaker policy literacy, less formal educational exposure, and reduced self-confidence in engaging with policy actors and institutions, as observed by their means. The findings align with Afsahi (2021), who argued that women's effectiveness in deliberation is constrained by structural and behavioral norms rather than just their presence. Such disadvantages directly affect women's ability to articulate their interests, interpret policy proposals, and participate effectively in deliberative forums, thereby limiting their substantive contribution to policy outcomes.

The statistical significance further highlights the structural weaknesses in women's collective representation within agricultural governance systems. Considering that participatory policymaking often privileges well-organised groups with strong leadership and lobbying capacity, these gendered disparities imply that women's perspectives are less likely to be aggregated, amplified, and translated into policy influence. The findings further highlight how spatial isolation, limited access to information, and technical capacity deficits combine with time poverty to constrain women's sustained engagement in policy processes more than men's. In their study on time poverty in Nigeria, Ndimele et al. (2023) highlighted how women's care burdens and spatially embedded domestic responsibilities systematically limit their capacity for sustained participation beyond livelihood activities. Such situations reinforce gender gaps in public and policy engagement.

In contrast, the absence of statistically significant gender differences for such variables as lack of legal frameworks ensuring stakeholder participation, lack of awareness of the policy process, lack of financial resources, poor transportation networks, negative government attitudes, and cultural and ethnic barriers suggests that some participation constraints are systemic and affect male and female actors similarly. However, the concentration of statistically significant differences in areas related to empowerment, organization, access to spaces, and communication underscores that gender neutrality in formal policy arrangements does not produce gender-neutral participation outcomes.

Although this study provides insights into the agricultural policy environment in Southern Nigeria, the findings are clearly relevant to the broader Nigerian policy environment because the structural features identified: centralised decision-making, elite capture of policy processes, gendered land tenure systems, and weak grassroots consultation mechanisms, are national characteristics of Nigeria's agricultural governance. Agricultural policies, rice input programmes, and subsidy schemes are largely designed and coordinated at the federal level, with similar implementation logics across geopolitical zones. Nevertheless, it is imperative to state that while the findings reflect a regional outcome, that is perspectives from Southern Nigeria, this is a limitation to its generalisation to the wider Nigerian policy landscape.

CONCLUSION

The paper analysed the gender constraints that limit the livelihood activities of rice value chain actors in Southern Nigeria and the gendered constraints that also limit their participation in policy processes. While men and women share some constraints on their value chain activities, women face more structural constraints in both their enterprises and their participation in policymaking processes. In their participatory policymaking processes, they face higher, statistically significant constraints precisely in those domains that enable actors to move from symbolic inclusion to meaningful influence, particularly access to consultation spaces, organizational strength, leadership, lobbying capacity, time availability, and information flows. The implication is that without deliberate, gender-responsive reforms, participatory policymaking processes risk reproducing existing inequalities by privileging actors who already possess the social, organizational, and institutional resources to engage effectively. For Nigeria's agricultural sector, this has important consequences: policies formulated through uneven participatory processes are less likely to reflect women's needs and constraints, potentially weakening both equity and the effectiveness of agricultural development outcomes. Apart from the limitation that the data do not represent perspectives across Nigeria, given their focus on Southern Nigeria, another limitation of the study is its reliance on self-reported data, which may reduce representativeness and introduce perception and response biases.

Future research should examine the mechanisms of elite capture in rice value-chain interventions, particularly how local power relations, political connections, cooperative leadership, and programme gatekeeping influence women's access to inputs, credit, mechanisation, extension services, and market opportunities.

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Data protection: The study was conducted in accordance with standard ethical principles for social science research. While no ethical approval was obtained, the study was conducted under the written permission of the National Agency for the Great Green Wall, which provided field support to beneficiaries of their interventions, and with the consent of non-beneficiaries of the study. Participation in the survey was voluntary, and respondents were informed of the study's purpose. No personal identifying information was collected during the study to maintain anonymity.

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