

GENDER ANALYSIS OF FOOD SYSTEMS POLICIES:

Supporting gender responsive policies and policy development processes in Nigeria.

DECEMBER 2025

KEY MESSAGES

- Nigeria's food systems are critical for national development, yet **women face deep-seated gender inequalities** that restrict their participation, productivity, and access to resources, significantly hindering overall food security.
- Achieving a resilient and equitable food system requires moving beyond gender-neutral rhetoric towards **intentional policy shifts**, fostering inclusive governance, and investing in gender equity across the entire food system.
- Prioritise **equitable access to productive resources**, strengthen women's leadership in decision-making, enhance gender-disaggregated data systems, and champion **community-led social norm change** to build a sustainable food system where no one is left behind.



UNLOCKING NIGERIA'S FOOD SYSTEMS POTENTIAL: ADDRESSING GENDER DISPARITIES

Nigeria's food system is fundamental to the nation's economic and social development, with the agricultural sector contributing approximately **22% to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP)** and employing over **70% of the population**, predominantly smallholder farmers¹. Despite their pivotal role in agricultural production, food processing, and ensuring household food security, women in Nigeria



encounter substantial gender-based barriers and inequalities². These obstacles include restricted access to essential resources such as land, financial services, and decision-making power, which collectively impede their full participation and significant contributions to the food system. The Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN), through its Nourishing Food Pathways (NFP) programme, aims to support government-led efforts to transform food systems, specifically focusing on making these processes more **gender-responsive** in alignment with the outcomes of the UN Food Systems Summit. This policy brief critically examines how current national policies address existing gender equality barriers, with the overarching goal of ensuring a truly equitable, inclusive, and sustainable food system across Nigeria.

WHY GENDER-RESPONSIVE FOOD SYSTEMS ARE ESSENTIAL FOR NIGERIA'S FUTURE

Addressing gender disparities in food systems is an urgent national priority for Nigeria. Gender equality is explicitly recognised as a critical driver of sustainable development under the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 and is fundamental to achieving SDG 2, which aims to end hunger, ensure food security, improve



nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture. In Africa, the imperative to transform food systems is heightened by persistent challenges such as chronic food insecurity, conflict, low agricultural productivity, and the increasing impacts of climate change. Nigerian women, who comprise a substantial portion of the agricultural workforce, are disproportionately affected by systemic barriers that limit their potential³. For example, women farmers in Nigeria produce significantly lower yields, a 30% national productivity gap compared to their male counterparts due to unequal access to vital inputs, finance, and land⁴. Implementing gender-responsive policies is thus crucial not only to enhance food security and nutrition outcomes but also to build resilient and inclusive food systems capable of withstanding future shocks and stresses, thereby fostering prosperity for all Nigerians⁵.

1 World Bank. (2022). Agriculture, forestry, and fishing, value added (% of GDP) - Nigeria. Retrieved from <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NV.AGR.TOTL.ZS?locations=NG>

2 Adekunle, O. A., Adefalu, L. L., Oladipo, F. O., Adisa, R. S., & Fatoye, A. D. (2016). Constraints to women's participation in household decision making in selected rural communities of Kwara State, Nigeria. *Journal of Agricultural Extension*, 20(2), 104-117.

3 Oliver, U., Adelabu, A., Abdussalam, J., Ayodele, O. M., Gabriel, M. B. & N. P., Eshiet, M., Ajieroh, V., Conteh, F., Nicolo, G., Lyamouri, S., Adeyemi, O., Aminu, F., Okoruwa, A., & Adetoyi, O. (2016). Agriculture-FSN-Strategy-2016-25_Printed-Version_1562696265 (1).pdf. https://ngfrepository.org.ng:8443/jspui/bitstream/123456789/5377/1/Agriculture-FSN-Strategy-2016-25_Printed-Version_1562696265%20%281%29.pdf

4 Gender Gaps in Agriculture Productivity.pdf. (2023). World Bank <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099091823113036874/pdf/P175095086510b001080e30d147463456d6.pdf>

5 Adekunle, O. A., Adefalu, L. L., Oladipo, F. O., Adisa, R. S., & Fatoye, A. D. (2016). Constraints to women's participation in household decision making in selected rural communities of Kwara State, Nigeria. *Journal of Agricultural Extension*, 20(2), 104-117.

CHALLENGES IN NIGERIA'S FOOD SYSTEM

1. Weak Enforcement of Legal Frameworks and Entrenched Customary Practices

Despite the existence of legal frameworks such as the National Gender Policy in Agriculture, their enforcement remains weak, and deeply entrenched customary practices continue to restrict women's equal access to and control over essential agricultural resources. For instance,



a clear disparity exists where only **8.2%** of women report sole land ownership



compared to **34.2%** of men in Nigeria⁶.

2. Restrictive Gender Norms and Limited Mobility

Prevailing gender norms especially those that limit women's ability to own land and assets, often confine women to low-capital, low-return roles within agricultural value chains, such as small-scale manual processing (e.g., drying, shelling, milling), informal retail and marketing, while men dominate more profitable activities⁷. These norms also severely limit women's mobility, access to credit, technology, and vital information thereby reinforcing traditional roles that often confine them to less valued work.

3. Policy Design and Implementation Gaps

Nigeria's food systems policies, including the National Pathways for Food Systems Transformation (NPFST)⁸, the National Policy on Food and Nutrition in Nigeria (NPFN)¹⁰, and the Agricultural Sector Food Security and Nutrition Strategy (AFSNS) , generally fail to adequately address these gender norms as fundamental barriers in the food value chain. While these policies acknowledge gender inequality to some extent, they largely ignore the underlying social and cultural norms that influence resource distribution, responsibilities, and opportunities between men and women. The policies lack concrete actions to challenge or transform these deeply embedded gender norms, which critically impact women's access to productive resources, economic opportunities, knowledge, services, and decision-making power.

4. Inadequate Access to Resources, Knowledge, and Technology

As a result of these policy gaps and restrictive cultural practices, women's participation in agriculture remains constrained with only 8% of Nigerian women benefiting from agricultural extension programmes, hindering their ability to adopt improved farming techniques. In addition, cultural restrictions, such as the purdah system in Northern Nigeria, further limit women's mobility and participation in agricultural activities^{9,12}.

6 Women's Land Rights in Sub-Saharan Africa: Where do we Stand in Practice? <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099432211092367495/pdf/IDU0afeba6800588804d2a0ad290368a53e64004.pdf>

7 Nigerian Investment Promotion Commission. (n.d.). Market Analysis and Strategy for Cassava. Retrieved from Nigerian Investment Promotion Commission website: <https://nipc.gov.ng/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Market-Analysis-and-Strategy-Cassava.pdf>

8 National Pathways for Food Systems Transformation (NPFST) 2024-2030 page 22

9 Agricultural Sector Food Security and Nutrition Strategy (AFSNS) 2016-2025 page 20

5. Inadequate Policy Response to Specific Gender Concerns

The policies under review inadequately address legal issues, gender norms, mobility, and safety concerns specific to women. While the NPFST supports implementing the National Gender Policy in Agriculture (NGPA), enforcement remains weak and often conflicts with customary practices. There are also barriers to education, particularly as there seems to be unequal access to knowledge and training opportunities between male and female¹². Again, proposed solutions are not consistently clear or strong enough across the policies.

6. Lack of Targeted Interventions for Systemic and Cultural Barriers

Critically, current policies frequently acknowledge these disparities but often lack clearly, targeted interventions designed to dismantle these systemic and cultural barriers effectively¹⁰. Analysis of the NPFST, NPFN, and AFSNS shows that none of the three policies adequately address entrenched cultural gender norms that restrict women's access to land, finance, inputs, technologies, and decision-making power. By failing to acknowledge these social barriers, current strategies risk reinforcing existing inequalities, thereby limiting the transformative potential of food and nutrition policies. Tackling these systemic constraints is critical to achieving Nigeria's food security and nutrition goals.

PROPOSED ACTIONS TO ADDRESS GENDER DISPARITIES IN NIGERIA'S FOOD SYSTEMS

A. Overcoming Barriers to Productive Resources and Addressing Deeply Rooted Gender Norms

Despite the crucial contributions of women to Nigeria's food systems, their full participation and productivity are consistently undermined by deeply entrenched legal, structural, and socio-cultural barriers. To address these challenges, it is essential for the Nigerian government to adopt targeted actions, including:

- **Operationalise the National Gender Policy in Agriculture (NGPA):** Ensure full and robust implementation of the NGPA across federal, state, and local government levels¹¹. This requires providing technical support for state-level adaptation, with a strong focus on legal harmonisation and customary law reform to genuinely secure women's rights to own, inherit, and control land. This can be done by drawing lessons from Rwanda's Land Tenure Regularization (LTR) program with default joint spousal land titling and joint ownership – which increased women documented land rights, boosted tenure security, and catalysed land-related investments – while proactively addressing gaps that disadvantaged unmarried women and those in informal unions¹². Furthermore, linking access to agricultural programs with documented co-ownership, and setting up legal aid support to assist women in securing land rights. Engaging customary and religious leaders to document and enforce women's rights according to NGPA and introducing safeguards for unmarried women and informal unions will further promote transparency and accountability. Lastly, combining awareness and education campaigns with formal titling and legal reform, as these have been shown to improve women's land rights in Nigeria. These measures can bridge gender gaps in land ownership and enable women's greater participation in high-value agricultural activities.

¹⁰ National Policy on Food and Nutrition in Nigeria (NPFN) 2016 page 9

¹¹ Revised National Agricultural Gender Policy. (2016). Revised draft national policy on gender in agriculture. Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Abuja https://nesgroup.org/download_policy_drafts/Revised-National-Agricultural-Gender-Policy-2_1562696342.pdf

¹² Núñez, P.S. (2023) How land titling prevented conflict, increased women's land ownership, and reduced corruption in Rwanda, Pathfinders. Available at: <https://www.sdg16.plus/policies/how-land-titling-prevented-conflict-increased-womens-land-ownership-and-reduced-corruption-in-rwanda/> (Accessed: 08 July 2025).

- **Boost Inclusive Financing and Input Access:** Scale up collateral-free credit schemes, gender-responsive agricultural insurance, and digital financial tools specifically tailored for low-literacy rural women. Also, the need to strengthen input supply chains by establishing women-only distribution points, subsidised bundles, and cooperative-based procurement systems.
- **Enhance Gender-Responsive Extension Services:** Increase the number of female extension agents and offer flexible training formats, such as mobile platforms and field-based training centres, specifically incorporating childcare support to improve women's access to critical agricultural knowledge and modern techniques¹³.
- **Community engagement and social norm change** initiatives should be facilitated through sustained dialogues with traditional/religious leaders, local influencers and context-specific behaviour change communication campaigns. Also, these community engagements should promote intergenerational conversations to shift certain gender norms such as household food distribution, or reproductive decisions etc. Investments in shared care infrastructure such as community childcare centers, water access points, and time-saving technology can reduce women's time poverty and enable broader participation in agriculture and leadership.
- **Prioritize women's safety and security in food systems:** It is important to incorporate protection from gender-based violence into food security programs as well as ensuring that physical security measures consider women's unique safety concerns, including safe access to markets and transport, and protection in conflict-affected regions. This could include implementing security patrols on market routes and in farming areas and establishing secure and well-lit market facilities, and also explicitly integrating women's specific safety needs into early warning systems and conflict resolution mechanisms.

13 Women's Economic Empowerment Investment In The Agricultural Sector In Nigeria. <https://drpcngr.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/WOMEN-ECONOMIC-EMPOWERMENT-INVESTMENT-IN-THE-AGRICULTURAL-SECTOR-IN-NIGERIA-ADJUSTED-1.pdf>



- **Institutional capacity building for policymakers on gender-responsive planning, budgeting, and monitoring** should be conducted, ensuring adequate financing for gender-related interventions and monitoring legal enforcement of existing protections for women within agriculture and food systems. Additionally, it is important to incorporate gender analysis, audits and gender budget performance reporting at national and state levels. This is crucial because successful implementation of gender-responsive policies requires robust institutional frameworks that translate policy commitments into concrete actions, necessitating clear mandates, adequate resource allocation, and effective accountability mechanisms. Gender-responsive budgeting is essential for integrating gender considerations into agricultural planning, programming, and budgeting processes, ensuring that resource allocations reflect gender and equity goals. Therefore, institutionalizing these practices ensures that inclusion is not just aspirational, but measurable, sustainable, and capable of addressing systemic and structural inequalities.

B. Strengthening Inclusive Governance and Data Systems for Equitable Outcomes

Nigeria's food system policies often reflect a top-down design, leading to limited genuine engagement of grassroots communities, particularly rural women and other marginalized groups, in vital policy development processes. Even where inclusive structures like local food and nutrition committees are mentioned in policies, they are frequently inactive or merely symbolic, preventing the incorporation of diverse perspectives into decision-making¹⁴. A significant gap exists in the availability of robust gender-disaggregated and diversity-sensitive data, which is crucial for effective policy planning and monitoring. Existing national surveys often lack the depth required to capture the detailed realities and intersectional vulnerabilities of diverse groups such as displaced women or women with disabilities thereby hindering the design and evaluation of truly targeted interventions.

To ensure equitable outcomes, it is important to:

- **Institutionalize Women's Representation:** Strengthen the enforcement and full implementation of the existing mandate for formal quotas for women in national and subnational food and nutrition bodies, including the State and Local Government Committees on Food and Nutrition (SCFN and LGCFN), potentially aligning with the National Gender Policy's 35% affirmative action quota¹⁵. This is crucial as enforcement of existing gender-related policies often remains weak and conflicts with customary practices, and weak institutions, unenforced laws, and unfunded mandates can leave well-intentioned policies hollow, hindering the translation of commitments into concrete action. Also, revitalise dormant participatory structures by providing funding and support for functional community food and nutrition committees with clear mandates for inclusion and accountability.
- **Build Leadership Capacity:** Implement comprehensive civic education, mentorship, and leadership development programmes specifically for grassroots women to empower their roles in cooperatives, producer groups, and local governance structures.
- **Develop Robust Data Systems:** Establish a centralised national gender and food systems data hub, building upon existing structures like the Nigeria Food Systems Dashboard and National Bureau of Statistics systems, ensuring open-access reporting and visualisations for policymakers and civil society. The hub can be placed under the Federal Ministry of Agriculture & Food

14 Revised National Agricultural Gender Policy. (2016). Revised draft national policy on gender in agriculture. Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Abuja. https://nesgroup.org/download_policy_drafts/Revised-National-Agricultural-Gender-Policy-2_1562696342.pdf

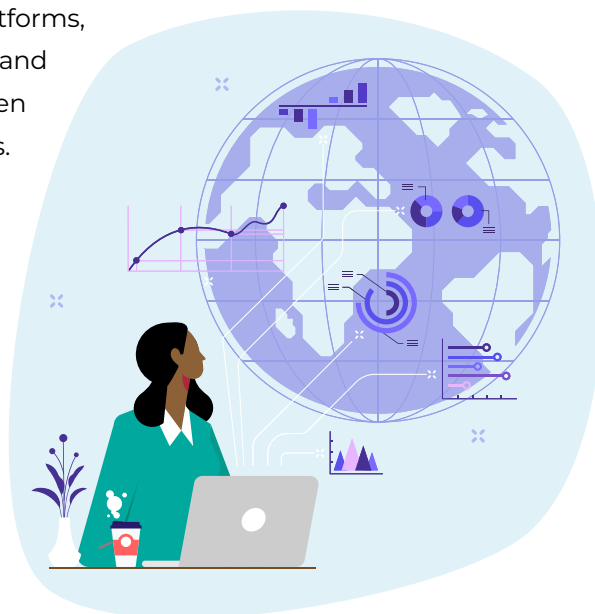
15 National Gender Policy (2006), <https://uprdoc.ohchr.org/uprweb/downloadfile.aspx?file=EnglishTranslation&filename=12503&utmm>

Security (FMAFS) or the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) for ownership as well as coordination and integrated with platforms like the National Social Protection Registry and existing dashboards for synergy. Furthermore, it is important to mandate the systematic collection of sex, age, disability, and location-disaggregated data across all agriculture and food security programmes, integrating it into household surveys and Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) frameworks supported by updated tools, trained data collectors, and federal directives for consistency across programmes. Importantly, robust data safety and protection protocols, including strict adherence to ethical and confidentiality standards and the anonymization of sensitive information, must be built into this system from the outset to prevent any unintended harm, particularly for vulnerable groups involved in data collection. Also develop and integrate intersectional indicators into national dashboards to inform annual policy reviews and legislative oversight, ensuring data is used for actionable insights. By starting with a phased approach enhancing current dashboards, embedding disaggregated indicators into existing surveys, and gradually building capacity for real-time analytics Nigeria can create a sustainable evidence ecosystem to close gender gaps and strengthen equity in food systems.

C. Strengthen Gender-Sensitive Nutrition Education and Communication

A multifaceted approach is essential to enhance gender-sensitive nutrition education and communication. This strategy should encompass;

- The **integration of tailored educational content**, encompassing **productive asset information** (such as access to land, credit, irrigation technologies, and market information), **practical skills training** (including food budgeting, time management, financial literacy, and nutrition-sensitive farming techniques), and broader capacity building for women farmers (in areas like nutrition-sensitive agriculture, information and communication technology (ICT), conflict resolution, social protection models, and adult education), across diverse platforms, ranging from formal educational curricula to community-based initiatives and mass media channels. The content must be culturally sensitive, acknowledging local food practices and taboos while addressing the unique caregiving responsibilities often shouldered by women.
- Leverage **Social and Behaviour Change Communication (SBCC)** by Integrating gender-transformative messaging into agricultural extension and nutrition programmes, targeting household decision-making and community norms that restrict women's participation.
- **Harnessing technology**, particularly mobile platforms, is crucial for extending the reach of nutrition and agricultural education, however, many rural women face limited access and digital literacy gaps. To transform mobile platforms into inclusive tools, interventions must combine digital solutions with initiatives that improve women's access to devices, connectivity, digital literacy, capacity building and provide offline or blended delivery options. By doing so, mobile platforms can become powerful tools for delivering time-efficient, culturally appropriate information on nutrition and farming while also bridging existing gender gaps in technology use.



- To maximize impact, nutrition education should be closely **linked with broader women's empowerment** initiatives as envisaged in the National Gender Policy in Agriculture (NGPA) and the National Gender Policy (NGP). Specifically, policies in review (NPFST, NPFN, and AFSNS) should ensure women's access not just to nutrition messaging but also to productive assets – such as land, credit, irrigation technologies, and market information. Additionally, it is important to incorporate practical skills training in areas such as food budgeting, time management, financial literacy and nutrition-sensitive farming techniques into existing economic empowerment programs and agricultural extension services. By leveraging these national policy frameworks, Nigeria can strengthen women's capacity to make informed nutritional choices, enhance their participation in high-value agricultural value chains, and improve household food security. This integrated approach not only deepens nutritional knowledge and outcomes, but also contributes to women's overall economic resilience, decision making power and social empowerment within the food system.



A CALL TO ACTION

Nigeria's desire for a resilient, inclusive, and sustainable food system critically depends on bold, intentional shifts towards genuine gender equity. Therefore, as stakeholders undertake the review of the National Policy on Food and Nutrition (NPFN), the Agricultural Sector Food Security and Nutrition Strategy (AFSNS), and other relevant policy documents, it is crucial that the recommendations presented in this brief are thoroughly considered. By rigorously operationalising gender-responsive policies, ensuring equitable access to vital resources, empowering women in decision-making roles, and strengthening comprehensive data systems, Nigeria can unlock the full potential of all its citizens. This transformative approach will lead to immense improvements in livelihoods, nutrition, health, and national prosperity, making gender equity an urgent imperative for sustainable development.

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