

## Gender Responsive Budgeting in Nigeria

*Using the African Feminism Perspective to analyse GRB in Nigeria*



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### **Abstract**

Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) is an essential tool for advancing gender equality by ensuring equitable resource allocation. This research examines how NGOs in Nigeria manoeuvre around culture and religious barriers to facilitate the implementation of GRB, enhancing women's access to productive resources and promoting the adoption of sustainable agricultural practices. It explores the impact of gender-neutral agricultural budgets, which disproportionately affect female smallholder farmers. Cultural beliefs, religious doctrines and Nigeria's tripartite legal system further hinder gender equality in agriculture. Using African feminism and Marxist feminism as analytical frameworks, the research paper investigates how NGOs advocate for GRB, engaging with local communities and policymakers, to foster women's access to productive resources. Qualitative method via online interviews was used for data collection and inductive analysis was employed to examine the challenges, strategies, and impact of GRB initiatives which helped capture the regional variations in women's experiences in Nigeria and how NGOs tailor strategies accordingly. This paper also reflects on Nigerian women's lived realities and the need for tailored gender equality analysis that takes into account diverse cultural contexts. Finally, it also highlights the role of men as allies in shifting gender norms while revealing the systemic issues such as domestic violence, mental health challenges, and low self-esteem that NGOs attempt to address beyond GRB.

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## **1.0 Introduction**

### **1.1 Gender Inequalities in Food Security**

Reducing gender inequality is globally acknowledged as a key factor in promoting agricultural growth and a crucial step toward achieving food and nutrition security (Oseni et al., 2014). In Africa, women produce 60-80% of food. Their significant contributions to food security extend across various agricultural sectors playing a vital role in Africa's economy and in attaining food security (Palacios-Lopez et al., 2017). Despite their critical role in agricultural production, gender inequalities remain a major stumbling block to productivity and efficiency in the sector (Quisumbing & Doss, 2021). The failure to integrate or acknowledge women's crucial contribution to the agricultural value chain has resulted in lower agricultural output, reduced income and food insecurity. The poor performance of the sector is exacerbated by women's restricted access to essential resources, such as land, technology, agricultural extension services, and key inputs like loans, seeds, and fertilizers (Elwell et al., 2023).

A deeply rooted African patriarchal culture reinforces the idea that women should be subordinate to men, holding that women are entirely dependent on them. This ideology has been a significant factor in the exclusion of women from land rights (Amusan et al., 2021). Furthermore, social norms and gender-specific labour divisions perpetuate disparities in income, productivity, and access to vital resources (OEDC, 2022). These stereotypes constrain women's decision-making power and limit their capacity to respond effectively to agricultural challenges, including climate change (Fapojuwo et al., 2018). In sub-Saharan Africa, social-cultural norms, political barriers, and economic pressures further heighten women's vulnerabilities to climate change. These challenges limit their participation in policymaking, restrict their access to education, and reduce opportunities for them to adapt to environmental challenges (Connolly-Boutin & Smit, 2016).

Addressing these barriers holistically is essential to achieving global sustainability goals, especially Zero Hunger, Gender Equality, and Environmental Sustainability, as women are key contributors to both mitigation and adaptation to climate change, making their empowerment critical to sustainable development (Glazebrook et al., 2020).

### **1.2 Problem Statement**

The African Union (AU) has taken the lead in gender equality and women's empowerment across the continent, as outlined in its Constitutive Act. A key instrument in this effort is the Maputo Protocol, which protects and promotes the rights of women and girls (WiLDAF, 2005; Phiri et al., 2022). The treaty emphasizes gender equality, the elimination of harmful traditions that dehumanize women, and the restoration of female dignity (Phiri et al., 2022). According to the Maputo Protocol, member states committed to allocating at least 10% of their national budgets to agriculture to achieve a 6% annual growth rate in the sector. In response, many sub-Saharan nations have adopted gender budgeting to address gender disparities and enhance women's productivity. Rwanda and Uganda were among the first

African countries to integrate these gender-focused objectives into their financial plans and processes, whereas Nigeria, Ethiopia, and South Africa still fall significantly short of meeting the agreement signed (Phiri et al., 2022).

In 2006, the Nigerian government introduced the National Gender Policy (NGP) to integrate gender equality into the economic and development plans, following international best practices (Borar, 2024). This was followed by the National Gender Policy in Agriculture (NGPA) in 2019, aimed at improving food security and ensuring equal access to productive resources for men and women. However, these policies have failed to achieve their intended impact, largely due to poor implementation (Amadi, 2017). A Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) analysis conducted by OXFAM, in 2024 revealed that less than 2% of Nigeria's agricultural budget was gender-sensitive, despite the Ministry of Agriculture receiving a 175% increase in funding (OXFAM, 2024). This underfunding disproportionately affects female farmers especially smallholder farmers, who struggle to access essential resources. Cultural beliefs and religious doctrines also pose major obstacles to achieving gender equality in agriculture in Nigeria. For instance, traditional inheritance laws often prevent women from inheriting land, directly conflicting with statutory laws that recognize their rights (Amusan et al., 2021). This legal ambiguity not only limits women's economic independence but also restricts their involvement in decision-making at both household and community levels, reinforcing gender disparities (Amusan et al., 2021).

Nigeria's gender inequality is deeply rooted in societal customs and its tripartite legal framework (statutory, customary and religious), making it difficult to harmonize laws that eliminate discrimination (Sam and Justina, 2016). The Nigerian Senate which is dominated by men, has repeatedly blocked the Gender and Equal Opportunity Bill (GEOB), citing conflicts with religious and cultural values. This has sparked national debates on balancing traditional beliefs with the need for gender equality legislation (Makinde et al., 2017). For meaningful progress, more women must actively participate in decision-making processes and leadership positions. Without increased representation, cultural norms that promote female subordination will continue to hinder gender equity in agriculture (Oluwalogbon, 2021).

The adoption of sustainable agricultural practices is still minimal in sub-Saharan Africa, including Nigeria, due to gender disparities in resources access and decision-making (Oyawole et al., 2021). Ironically, women are more inclined to adopt Climate-Smart Agriculture (CSA) practices, such as agroforestry and the use of green manure. However, cultural resistance and policy gaps restrict their ability to implement these sustainable practices. Addressing gender-based challenges is therefore critical to closing the gender gap and increasing women's adoption of CSA strategies, which in turn improves their productivity and economic self-sufficiency (Oyawole et al., 2021).

Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in Nigeria, play a crucial role in bridging the gap where government efforts fall short. These organizations address critical issues such as economic empowerment, healthcare, gender-based violence, and reproductive health. By providing services and advocacy, NGOs fill the gaps left by inadequate government programs, ensuring that women's rights are

protected, and their voices are included in policy discussions and peacebuilding efforts (Job Ochimbo, 2024).

These efforts highlight the urgent need for Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) implementation to ensure equitable resource distribution. Institutionalizing GRB will help sustain women-centred programs, drive lasting empowerment, and promote inclusive agricultural development in Nigeria.

### **1.6. Research Aim**

Given this, the aim of this thesis is to explore how NGOs in Nigeria manoeuvre around culture and religious barriers to facilitate the implementation of Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) that enhances women's access to productive resources and encourages the adoption of sustainable agriculture practices. The study will also analyse the role of men as allies in promoting gender equality. By doing so, it seeks to provide a nuanced understanding of the relationship between GRB and women's access to agricultural resources amidst cultural, religious, and policy implementation challenges in Nigeria.

### **1.7. Research Objectives**

- To investigate how NGOs implement agricultural projects that promote gender equality in collaboration with the government, and the rural communities.
- To explore the experiences of NGOs working with rural women farmers, focusing on the impacts of cultural and religious obligations on women's access to productive resources.
- To examine the strategies employed by NGOs in advocating for gender equality in rural communities, including culturally appropriate approaches to improve women's access to resources such as land, and the role of men in achieving these objectives.
- To identify the challenges NGOs face in advocating for Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) in agriculture regarding policy implementation gaps and assessing its potential contributions to sustainable farming practices among rural women farmers in Nigeria.

### **1.8. Main Research Question**

In what ways are NGOs in Nigeria facilitating the implementation of Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) to empower farming women?

#### **1.8.1 Sub-Questions**

1. How do cultural and religious differences across Nigeria influence the effectiveness of NGO-driven gender equality initiatives in agriculture in the various communities?
2. How do Nigerian NGOs adopt their advocacy strategies for gender equality in response to socio-cultural dynamics, and what are the perceptions of rural men and women farmers of these initiatives?

3. What are the challenges faced by NGOs in advocating for GRB in agricultural policies, and how do cultural, religious and institutional factors impact their efforts?
4. What is the impact of Nigeria's gender insensitive agricultural budget on the productivity and self-esteem of women farmers, and how are NGOs addressing this gap?
5. In what ways do GRB projects facilitate the adoption of more sustainable agricultural practices within the cultural climate and its diversity?

## **2.0 Literature Review**

The literature review for this research will explore Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) in agriculture, focusing on the Global South through three case studies: India, Rwanda, and South Africa. India, as one of the most populous countries in the Global South, presents an interesting case for studying GRB due to the huge contribution of agriculture to its economy along with the pivotal role women play in India's food production, making the implementation of GRB essential for promoting gender equality and economic sustainability. Rwanda, recognized globally for its strides in women's empowerment, provides an insight into how gender equality in agriculture can thrive when men and women are equally engaged in farming activities. Finally, South Africa highlights challenges of GRB implementation, but despite government shortcoming NGOs successfully empower women through agroecology and targeted extension programs. Together, these case studies illustrate GRB's transformative potential in the Global South.

### **2.1 Defining Gender Responsive Budgeting**

Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) is a policy tool that involves analysing and taking into account the diverse needs of individuals in order to ensure a fair distribution of resources (UN Women, 2023). Government economic models and budget have a huge tendency to have gender-biased fiscal policies and budgets, which ultimately omit women's specific needs, leading to unintended negative consequences. By increasing the visibility of gender gaps, governments can more effectively allocate available resources to address gender inequalities and promote sustainable, inclusive development for all (UN Women, 2023). According to a report by UNFPA & UNIFEM, 2006, "Gender Responsive Budgeting helps ensure government accountability to the commitments made to women in the *Cairo Program of Action on population and Development in 1994*, and the *Beijing Platform of Action for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment in 1995* and to the achieving of the Millennium Development goals which was launched in 2000 and ended in 2015". These commitments were historic milestones in advancing gender equality and women's rights.

According to UN Women, (2017), gender-responsive budgets increase government accountability, advance equity, and better match national budgets with the Sustainable Development Goal (SDGs). Gender equality, in which women and men are regarded as equal partners in the home, community, and society, can be accomplished through GRB. It guarantees that both women and men's distinct rights, obligations, and opportunities are not based on gender, but it does imply that they must be the same (FAO, 2024).

#### **2.1.2 Gender Responsive Budgeting in Agriculture**

The integration of Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) into agricultural policies aims to reduce gender-based inequalities, promote inclusivity, and enhance women's socio-economic conditions in agriculture. GRB highlights women's contributions to agriculture, helping to close gender gaps and improve productivity (Elwell et al., 2023). Some social scientists view GRB as a tool for embedding feminist perspectives into policy frameworks at both local and global levels (Khalifa & Scarparo, 2021). Government budgets, often perceived as neutral instruments, can perpetuate gender disparities if they

fail to consider the different socio-economic realities of men and women. GRB helps to expose such disparities and ensures public resources are allocated more equitably (Rubin et al., 2019). However, merely including women in existing patriarchal systems without addressing structural inequalities limits the transformative potential of budgets.

From a postcolonial perspective, empowering marginalized groups to influence development remains a critical challenge (Carrasco-Miró, 2016). Thus, GRB helps in confronting and transforming structural obstacles that sustain gender inequalities, such as biased social norms, behaviours, and attitudes, while nurturing both individual and collective initiatives to promote change (FAO, 2024).

## **2.2. Gender Responsive Budgeting Through Agricultural Policy in the Global South**

### **2.2.1. Agriculture in India**

Over 58% of India's population depends on agriculture for their livelihood. The agricultural sector, along with allied sectors, accounts for approximately 13.9% of India's GDP. Data from nationwide surveys indicate that a significant majority of women participate in agriculture as both farmers and labourers across rural India (UN Women, 2017). However, despite women's crucial role in agriculture and related sectors, they face limitations in controlling productive assets such as land and livestock, as well as in accessing essential resources like technology, irrigation, credit, extension services, and markets that are necessary for sustaining agricultural practices.

In India, over 70% of the population lives in poverty, with 80% of these individuals residing in rural areas. This scenario makes land a critical resource for the rural populace, as it serves as a primary determinant of their livelihoods. Arable land is the most valued form of property and a vital resource in the rural agrarian economy; for a significant number of rural households, land is the most crucial security against poverty. As a symbolic and cultural level land offers a sense of identity and stability to many individuals India (UN Women, 2017).

For decades, both central and state governments in India have launched various land reform initiatives aimed at redistributing land to the landless and smallholder farmers through policies, legal frameworks, and administrative actions such as granting land rights, eliminating intermediaries, consolidating fragmented holdings, and regulating tenancy agreements (Rachna et al., 2023). Although women can acquire land through inheritance, purchase, gifts, or government allocations, these pathways often are biased against them. In South Asia, where private land ownership is common, inheritance is especially significant. However, factors like income disparities tied to religion, limited access to credit, deep-rooted social biases, and declining land redistribution programs for women make ownership even more challenging (Rachna et al., 2023). While legal progress, such as the amendment to the Hindu Succession Act, provides equal inheritance rights, cultural customs and systemic loopholes continue to hinder their enforcement (Rachna et al., 2023).

## **2.2.2 Gender Responsive Budgeting in India**

Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) was introduced in India in 2005, and funds were directed towards women's education, health, food security, nutrition, and income generation (Sushant & Laha, 2021). However, GRB's implementation has faced criticism due to design flaws, inadequate budgeting, and ineffective execution. An analysis of 24 ministries found that eight, including the Department of Agriculture, lacked dedicated funding for women, despite agriculture being vital for women's empowerment (Sushant & Laha, 2021). Despite women comprising nearly half of India's population, only 4–6% of the national budget is allocated to GRB, which remains insufficient. Additionally, the government has yet to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of GRB's impact (Sushant & Laha, 2021).

In agriculture, the Ministry of Agriculture launched rural extension programs, but a 2017 UN Women analysis found significant gaps. The National Horticulture Mission (NHM) lacked dedicated women-focused funding, and gender-disaggregated data to track expenditure was missing. Funds were often redirected without proper monitoring (UN Women, 2017). Policies continue to overlook the unique needs of women farmers, limiting their effectiveness in addressing gender disparities (Barooah et al., 2023). Strengthening GRB mechanisms is crucial for achieving gender equality in agriculture.

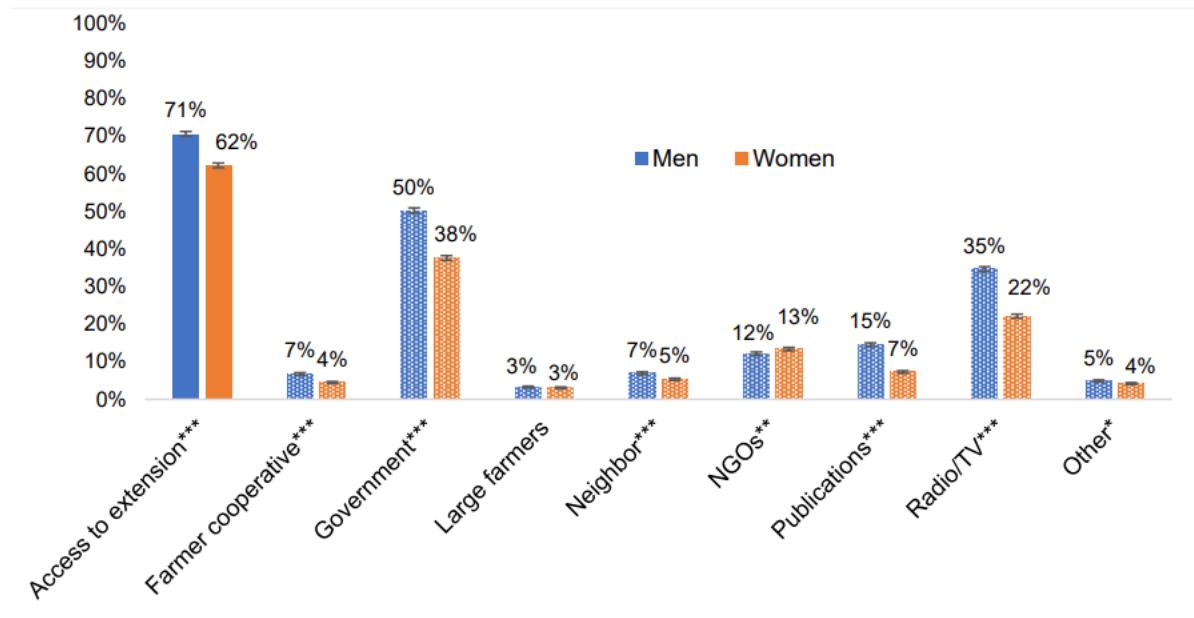
## **2.3. GRB and Agriculture in Rwanda**

Rwanda is widely acknowledged as a global and regional leader in promoting women's empowerment. However, no nation has yet fully achieved gender equality, leaving significant portion of their potential unutilized (Rosenbach et al., 2023). Women played a vital role in revising the 2003 Constitution to require 30% representation of women in decision-making positions, promoting harmony and reducing violence. Elected female representatives influenced legislation focused on gender issues related to inheritance, land rights, and gender-based violence while promoting gender-responsive budgeting (Randell & Mccloskey, 2014). Agriculture, employing over 80% of Rwanda's population mostly women who produce 90% of the nation's food, remains dominated by subsistence farming, contributing to persistent poverty, food insecurity, and malnutrition (Randell & Mccloskey, 2014). In response to these difficulties, Rwanda has broadened agricultural extension services and included female farmers in program development. A 2019 baseline survey conducted by the Women's Empowerment in Agricultural Index (WEAI) highlighted gender imbalances in access to agricultural information and extension services, showing that 71% of men and 62% of women received these services. Although government services and media outlets were common sources of information, women leaned more on NGOs, underscoring the importance of these organizations in bridging the gaps caused by gender biases in public services (Rosenbach et al., 2023).

According to the 2019 baseline survey for the Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI) conducted by the Ministry of Agriculture and Animal Resources (MINAGRI), both men and women in Rwanda demonstrate relatively high levels of empowerment across various agricultural domains (Randell & Mccloskey, 2014). However, women's involvement in economic development initiatives, especially in agriculture, remains minimal due to a lack of skills, inadequate organization, limited access to resources, soil degradation, and poor coordination. These obstacles contribute to the ongoing poverty in

Rwanda (Randell & Mccloskey, 2014). In response to these challenges, the government implemented the Agriculture Gender Strategy, which encourages equal rights and opportunities in rural development for both genders. This strategy details actions to ensure that agricultural programs establish a basis for gender equality in rural communities (Randell & Mccloskey, 2014).

Figure 1: Access to source of extension services, by gender



Source: From “Women’s Empowerment in Rwanda” by Rosenbach et al., 2023. Rosenbach, G., Benimana, G., Ingabire, C., Spielman, D. J., & Tumukunde, R. (2023). *Women’s Empowerment in Rwandan Agriculture A baseline assessment in the context of Rwanda’s Gender and Youth Mainstreaming Strategy and the Fourth Strategic Plan for Agricultural Transformation* (pp. 1-21). © 2023, Copyright remains with the author(s).

Rwanda’s participation in the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD) aligns with the Comprehensive Africa Development Program (CAADP), which promotes sustainable agricultural growth and commits 10% of national budgets to agriculture (Rosenbach et al., 2023). NEPAD emphasizes gender empowerment and integrates gender into its poverty reduction strategies. Rwanda stands out as one of the few countries in sub-Saharan Africa where women have relatively comparable access to the resources and opportunities, they need to be productive in agriculture and thus stand to contribute more actively to the country’s agricultural and wider social and economic transformation (Rosenbach et al., 2023).

### 2.3.1. Legal Process and Cultural Tensions Towards Women’s Empowerment in Rwanda

The 2003 Constitution mandates at least 30% female leadership, supported by the 2010 National Gender Policy, which integrates gender into development through institutions like the Gender Monitoring Office and the National Women’s Council. This framework is supported by gender sensitive budgeting and

legislation that enhances women's legal rights, notably concerning inheritance and land ownership (Randell & Mccloskey, 2014). Nonetheless, challenges in local execution arise from coordination problems, limited capacity, and cultural barriers. The 2005 Land law, which ensures women have equal rights to land and mandates its registration, illustrates the potential effectiveness of targeted political initiatives (Randell & Mccloskey, 2014). Rwanda has shown demonstrated strong leadership in dismantling obstacles to women's involvement and inclusion, suggesting that it will reap the benefits for an extended period (Randell & Mccloskey, 2014).

A study done by Kagaba 2015, on the effects of gender budgeting on women farmers in a Rwanda village indicated that significant changes have occurred since 2003. Discussions with the women in Kamonyi District show varied experiences with the legislation; some report that they now have the right to access family assets through inheritance and job opportunities. Conversely, these women encounter gender 'dilemma' regarding whether to assert their rights as outlined in the constitution, as doing so may create marital tensions with their families. This conflict underlines the intricate relationship between legal frameworks and cultural traditions in influencing women's experience of gender equality in rural (Kagaba, 2015).

#### **2.4 GRB and Agriculture in South Africa**

The lack of gender-disaggregated data on women's role in agriculture has resulted in a limited understanding of their opportunities and constraints in South Africa (Thobejane et al., 2022). The South African government has implemented various laws and endorsed conventions to empower women. The National Development Plan (NDP) recognizes the significant presence of women in impoverished communities, and advocates for initiatives to secure land tenure for women communal farmers, who frequently belong to marginalized social groups (Levendale. C & J Watson, 2019). It also stresses the need to increase asset ownership and enhance the representation of women and other underrepresented groups in skilled, technical, professional, and agricultural fields (Thobejane et al., 2022). Despite the legal and policy improvements made since the 1996 constitution, including initiatives like the South African National Policy Framework on Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality is still not realized. The challenges include the ineffective transmission of legal rights to women and obstacles such as restricted access to land, socio-cultural norms, and a history of racial and gender discrimination (Thobejane et al., 2022). Although women are crucial in food production, constituting 11% of the total production, the problem of gender-biased land ownership continues to persist (Thobejane et al., 2022).

##### **2.4.1 NGO Efforts and the Agroecology Movement in South Africa**

Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) in South Africa are implementing programs and extension services that assist women through agroecology, empowering them in spite of the government's ineffective gender focused strategies. The agroecology movement, especially in the Eastern Cape, advocates for climate-appropriate, affordable farming methods that equip women farmers, thereby boosting community resilience and sustainable practices through efficient social learning and collaborative approaches (Chanyau & Rosenberg, 2023). The Zingisa Educational Project (ZEP), a

women-led initiative, aims to confront the unsustainable practices. With a vast network, ZEP offers farmers valuable learning opportunities and resources, boasting over 2,700 members in the Eastern Cape. This internationally recognized movement empowers farmers to craft practices that align with their specific resources and climatic conditions (Chanyau & Rosenberg, 2023).

Community gardens established ZEP act as centres for active learning and mobilization, fostering co-learning and tackling issues through discussions designed to meet community needs. The 'train-the-trainers' approach, which primarily involves women extension officers, encourages social learning and adaptation to climate change, even in the face of resistance stemming from socio-cultural norms and patriarchy (Chanyau & Rosenberg, 2023). This collaborative method has yielded positive results, improving crop diversity, productivity, and socio-economic resilience. The movement also targets gender-based violence and patriarchal structures, advocating for women's involvement in agriculture through fair access to land and resources. Initiatives like 'One Woman, One Hectare with Water' have effectively engaged traditional leaders to allocate land for women without land, securing nearly 88 hectares for them. This effort challenges negative stereotypes surrounding women farmers and promotes their leadership roles in agriculture (Chanyau & Rosenberg, 2023).

The achievement of the agroecology movement in South Africa, particularly via ZEP, underscore the significance of community-driven inclusive strategies for empowering women in agriculture. By focusing on farmer led experimentation and utilizing local knowledge, this model has improved gender equality, social unity, market accessibility, and economic advantages. Successes in countries like Ghana, Kenya, and Zambia further illustrate the effectiveness of this model in various African settings (Chanyau & Rosenberg, 2023). Agroecology is becoming increasing popular in certain African regions, with East African nations taking the led thanks to government backing, strong NGO presence, and international support. While adoption is expanding in other parts of Africa, countries like Nigeria has not yet fully embraced agroecological methods (Emeana, 2021).

## **2.5 Significance of the Study**

The literature review highlights the significant influence of socio-cultural norms on policies as it explores how Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) is integrated into agricultural policies in India, Rwanda, and South Africa. It explores how NGOs advocate for GRB to address gender disparities, empower women, and navigate policy implementation gaps and inconsistent government support. The study assesses GRB's potential to enhance gender equality in sustainable agriculture while analysing socio-political constraints. By evaluating NGO efforts and policy frameworks, it highlights the effectiveness of GRB in promoting women's empowerment within agricultural systems and the structural challenges that impact implementation.

### **3.0 Theoretical Framework**

This research explores how NGOs in Nigeria navigate culture and religious barriers to promote the implementation of Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) in Nigeria, which improves women's access to productive resources and supports the adoption of sustainable agriculture practices. Grounded in two feminist theories; African feminism theory and Marxist feminism, the study provides a unique lens for analysing and addressing systemic barriers to ensuring women's equality in Nigeria. These theories offer complementary perspectives, with African feminism emphasizing the interplay of culture/religion and gender in the African context, and Marxist feminism highlights the political and economic dimensions of women's underdevelopment (Sam and Justina, 2016).

#### **3.1. African Feminism Theory**

The field of feminist theory is frequently viewed as a singular cohesive whole, especially in Western contexts, despite its numerous variations. Modern western feminism can be categorized into multiple branches, such as Liberal, Radical, and Social Feminism (Sanya Osha, 2006). In recent decades, a clear rise in various feminist viewpoint has emerged, addressing the needs of groups historically marginalized or overlooked by mainstream Western feminism. These perspectives are often developed in opposition to or as critiques of what is generally termed Western feminism.

African feminists, including Chandra Talpade Mohanty critique how Western feminist theories are applied to the experiences of women from the so-called "Third World" nations. She argues that these theories, coming from a western perspective, reinforce a separation between "self" (the West) and "other" (the developing countries) (Mohanty, 1988). This division suggests that the narratives of developing nations are perceived as politically naive or underdeveloped relative to Western benchmarks (Feyzi Ismail, 2018). Mohanty notes that Western feminist theories often claim universality, but this perceived universality conceals their inherent Western biases and concerns. She raises crucial questions regarding the assumptions at the core of Western feminist theories and their relevance across diverse cultural contexts (Mohanty, 1988). Mohanty advocates for a deeper understanding of feminist ideas and calls for the acknowledgment of the distinctiveness of various cultural and political experiences (Mohanty, 1988).

African feminism emerged as a reaction to the dominance of white perspectives in traditional feminism and the necessity to consider the unique material and cultural realities of African societies. This movement has given rise to concepts such as Chikweye Ogunyemi's African womanism, Mary Kolawole's womanism, and Molara Ogundipe Liseli's stiwanism, among others (Arndt, 2002). These ideas embody the complexity and specific social and cultural circumstances of African societies. African feminism emphasizes women's autonomy and solidarity among women. It values natural elements and relationships over cultural constructs, while also placing significant importance on children, the practice of multiple mothering (where several women share parenting duties), and strong kinship connections (Desireé Manicom, 2001). Although it draws from the global feminist movement, African feminist discourse deliberately addresses issues pertinent to the African context by critically assessing traditional

African cultural practices without outright dismissal, recognizing that different classes of women may interpret these traditions in various ways (Sanya Osha, 2006).

### **3.1.1 A Framework for Addressing Gender Dynamics, Cultural Challenges, and Systemic Inequalities.**

African feminism emphasizes the dynamics of gender relations and the structural obstacles that African women encounter. Its objective is to transform gender relations and improve women's societal status. It advocates for cooperation with men while endorsing the roles of motherhood and family, all while critically assessing which traditional practices that help or hinder women (Arndt, 2002). In contrast to some Western feminist theories that may support separatism, African feminism stresses the importance of integrating men into the feminist movement. Reformist African feminist aim to negotiate within patriarchal systems to broaden opportunities for women without fully rejecting patriarchal frameworks (Arndt, 2002). They urge men to recognize the distinct forms of oppression that women face, which may vary from the wider oppression faced by all people in Africa. The movement seeks humane reforms that involve men as partners instead of opponents

Nonetheless, Omolara Leslie Ogndipe, 1987, advocates for an African feminism that self-defines women's identities as African and part of the Third World. She underscores the necessity for African feminists to diverge from Western influences. Leslie introduces STIWANISM (Social Transformation Including Women in Africa) as a substitute for Western feminism. This framework aims at achieving social equality with men within an African context and tackles gender related economic disparities. STIWANISM is presented as a more fitting approach than conventional Western feminism, as it better reflects the specific needs and cultural realities of African women (Omolara Leslie Ogndipe, 1987). Clenora Hudson-Weems, 2022), developed the concept of "Africana Womanism." The author argues that the terminology (language) is significant and that there is a need for an African centred perspective for women of African descent, as mainstream feminism is based on Eurocentric notions that do not resonate with the historical and cultural contexts of African women. The author describes "Africana" to include both Continental Africans and those in the diaspora, observing that terms like Black Feminism and African Feminism fall short due to their associations with Western feminism. Africana womanism distinct from both White and Black feminism, concentrates on the unique experiences and challenges faced by women of African descent (Hudson-Weems, 2022). Some feminist assert that feminism is not alien to Africa, highlighting that dismissing all forms of feminism as imperialistic overlooks the longstanding history of women's resistance to both local and imperialist patriarchies, which often preceded or were independent of Western feminist movement (Hudson-Weems, 2022)

### **3.1.2 African Feminism and Gender Equality**

The most efficient method for tackling the oppression and realities faced by women is through an inclusive viewpoint that takes into account both common and specific issues, as well as the distinct self-definitions of women as individuals and groups (IDLO, 2013). Nkealah (2022), characterizes African feminism "as an effort to cultivate a new generation of independent, self-sufficient African women within

the diverse cultural settings of Africa.” Given the extensive diversity of the continent, some scholars challenge the notion of a singular “African Feminism” asserting that regional, ethnic, political, and religious variations notably affect how women from different countries understand feminism and freedom (Pereira, 2018). For instance, although women from nations like Egypt, Kenya, South Africa, Nigeria, and Senegal may possess certain commonalities, their interpretations of gender and their quests for equality can differ significantly. This highlights the fact that the experiences of African women are anything but uniform (Ouguir & Sadiqi, 2018).

This research acknowledges and values the diverse experiences of rural women farmers in Nigeria, thus concentrating on their specific obstacles and unique circumstances. Utilizing the framework of African feminism, this paper critically investigates the impact of religious and cultural practices on gender equality, particularly concerning rural women farmers. It examines how collaboration with men can foster a mindset geared toward equity, influencing dynamics from family structures to government frameworks. Additionally, the study incorporates Marxist to analyse the intersection of class exploitation and gender inequality, emphasizing how women’s oppression is deeply rooted in capitalist systems that disproportionately disadvantage women. By employing this dual feminist lens, the study takes a nuanced and sensitive approach to analysing the application of Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) in Nigeria.

### **3.2. Marxist Feminism Theory**

Marxist highlighted the divide between the bourgeoisie, who possess the means of production, and the proletariat, who provide labour. However, Marxist analysis overlooked housewives in its examination of capitalism (Robinson, 2018). Marxist feminists incorporated the work of housewives into capitalist frameworks. They assert that inequalities arising within various institutions, including the family, contribute to the oppression of women. Women are not only oppressed as individuals but also through capitalist and private property systems. They contend that women’s right will be realized through reformation of the existing capitalist framework in which a significant portion of women’s labour remains unrecognized (Robinson, 2018). Women’s subjugation is considered a result of class oppression, sustained (similar to racism) as it benefits the interests of capital and ruling class, causes divisions between men and women, privilege working-class men relatively within the capitalist system to ensure their allegiance, and justifies that capitalist class’s refusal to compensate for the domestic labour that is assigned to women (Robinson, 2018).

Marxist feminist anthropologists argue that women’s oppression is linked to exploitative production relations, highlighting women’s social status based on access to resources like land and work conditions (Robinson, 2018). According to Veronica Adeleke (2002), although some women contribute to household income and leadership roles, gender prejudice prevails. The majority of women are low wage, low status jobs and lack essential skills and resources, thereby necessitating intervention from the government and NGOs to enhance women’s representation and conditions. Existing gender ideologies in African countries, shaped by cultural and religious influences, continue to marginalize women, emphasizing the necessity for comprehensive public policy that seeks to advance gender equality (Dibie & Dibie, 2012).

### **3.2.1 Linking Class, Gender and the Struggle for Equality**

Marxist feminism posits that the inequality faced by women arises from class oppression under a capitalist system, where the ownership of private property bolsters patriarchal family dynamics, putting women and children in subordinate positions (Armstrong, 2020). This economic dependence bonds women to men, restricting their autonomy and sustaining male dominance. Access to employment and financial resources is seen as a means for women to achieve economic independence and break free from patriarchal influence (Dibie & Dibie, 2012). Marxist feminism calls for recognizing and compensating women's contributions across all sectors and for challenging societal gender stereotypes to attain genuine gender equality and progress (Sam and Justina, 2016). Nonetheless, some feminist critiques of Marxist feminism point out its emphasis on women's issues mainly in connection with capitalism, rather than addressing the specific challenges women encounter as women. Critics contend that Marxist feminism does not provide a thorough analysis of how sexism functions with capitalist frameworks and how it contributes to the oppression of women. Even with the progress women have made in the public arena, they still endure oppression and discrimination both privately and publicly (Sam and Justina, 2016).

Feminist like Martha Gimenez, believe that there is a need to move from personal consciousness to class consciousness, recognizing that women's individual struggles are linked to their economic and social conditions under capitalism (Gimenez, 1975). According to the author, personal challenges are essentially social issues, influenced by historical and class dynamics. Gimenez (1975), asserts that efforts to raise consciousness must link personal experiences of oppression to women's collective economic status as labourers reliant on selling their labour power. While a separate feminist consciousness may lead to reform, merging it with a critique of capitalism can advance the development of class consciousness among workers and contribute to a broader fight for liberation for both men and women. This combination is crucial for realizing substantial and widespread social transformation (Gimenez, 1975).

### **3.3. Justification for using both Feminism Theories**

The synergy between African feminism and Marxist feminism lies in their shared focus on systemic oppression and the intersectionality of various forms of discrimination. African feminism highlights the unique experiences of African women, considering factors like, socio-economic, culture, religion and ethnicity differences. Marxist feminism, on the other hand, focuses on the intersection of gender and class oppression within capitalist systems (Bozzoli, 1983). Additionally, Marxist feminism brings attention to the undervaluation of reproductive labour (housework, childcare) and its role in sustaining capitalist economies. African feminism also recognizes the importance of reproductive labour but contextualizes it within the broader socio-economic and cultural realities of African societies (Madhavi & Nageswar Rao, 2024).

### **3.4 Operationalization of both theories**

African Feminism theory and Marxist Feminism theory will be used to analyse the implementation of Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) in Nigeria. Thus, these theoretical frameworks are operationalized using specific indicators, as explained below:

A. African Feminism:

#### **1. Religious/cultural barriers**

This refers to religious beliefs, practices that restricts women's access to resources, opportunities or decision-making roles.

Operationalization:

- Religious/cultural doctrines that reinforce traditional gender roles for instance, women's submissiveness or exclusion from leadership.
  - Religious leaders influencing gendered topics or practices
  - Perceived conflicts between religious/cultural values and gendered equality initiatives.

#### **2. Restrictive Femininity and Masculinity**

This refers to societal expectations that dictate appropriate roles and behaviours for men and women, often perpetuating gender inequality.

Operationalization:

- Expectations for women to prioritize caregiving or domestic responsibilities over economic activities.
- Perception of masculinity that discourage men from supporting gender equality or engaging in caregiving roles.
- Representation of men and women in decision-making or leadership roles within households or communities.

B. Marxist feminism is measured based on this indicator:

#### **1. Access and control over resources and finances**

This refers to how capitalism, and the exploitation of labor intersect with gender to influence women's access to and control over economic resources. The ownership and distribution of resources, highlighting the unequal control that women often face due to subordinate position in the capitalist system. Women's labor being undervalued or exploited, which affects their economic independence and financial control.

Operationalization:

### **Access to Resources and Finances**

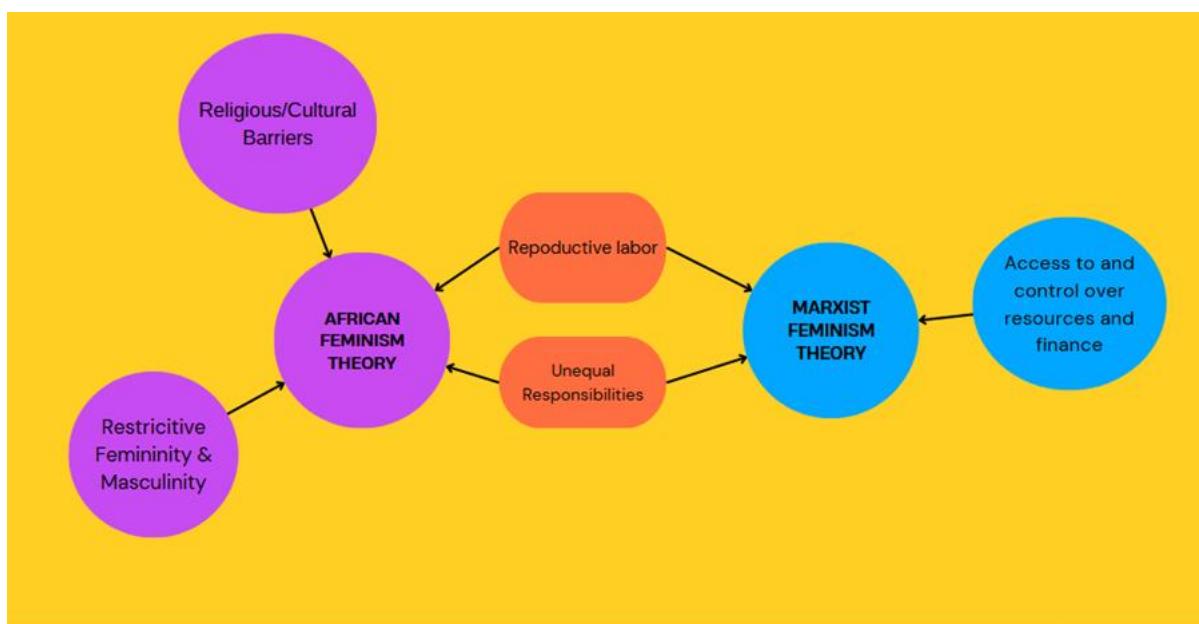
- i. Women's involvement in economic decision-making (for instance, influence in household budgeting or control of earnings)
- ii. Availability and accessibility of financial services for instance; access to loans, bank accounts, or financial literacy programs.
- iii. Land ownership and access to agricultural resources or production inputs for instance land titles, tools, seeds, or irrigation systems.

### **Control of resources and finances**

- i. Decision-making authority over household finances, such as income management, savings and expenditure for example, control over personal earnings or joint financial decisions.
- ii. Legal or customary rights to resources, including property or inheritance rights.

These theories are thus important for this study as together, they advance a framework for critical analysis of the implementation of GRB in an African country like Nigeria where gender inequality is fostered by both cultural and religious beliefs and a socio-economic system built on patriarchy. By operationalizing these frameworks, this study examines GRB as a tool for promoting women's empowerment and addressing structural inequalities in agriculture.

*Figure 2: Operationalization of African feminism and Marxist feminism theories*



Source: authors own

### **3.5. Contextual Knowledge Gaps**

There is insufficient data on what GRB can achieve regarding gender equality in Nigeria and its limitation considering the economic, socio-cultural, and religious barriers faced by women. Therefore, it is crucial

to examine the effectiveness of GRB implementation and its impact on rural women farmers across diverse cultural and religious contexts. Part of this research will focus on how cultural norms and practices specifically impede the adaptation and implementation of GRB in Nigeria. Additionally, there is a noticeable gap in information regarding the inclusion of men in gender equality programs. Thus, it is important to explore the role of men in GRB and agriculture, including how they can be engaged as allies in promoting gender equality and shifting gender norm.

Feminist and Marxist theories both address this knowledge gap concerning gender equality. African feminism emphasizes the importance of recognizing men as allies in gender equality efforts. It advocates for their active involvement in gender programs, arguing that achieving sustainable change requires collaboration between men and women. This perspective highlights the need to shift gender norms through inclusive approaches that engage men as partners rather than adversaries. Marxist feminism, on the other hand, given men's relative power within the capitalist system, engaging them as allies could help challenge and transform gender inequalities. By working with men to dismantle class-based and gendered oppression, feminist movements can reshape the trajectory of women's inequality.

## **4.0 Research Methodology**

This chapter revisits the research aim and associated research question introducing the before methodology. It then outlines the theoretical frameworks used to analyse the results, which is developed based on the findings from the interviews conducted. The research design and strategy, including specific methods employed for data collection and analysis, are described in detail. The chapter concludes with a review of ethical considerations.

### **4.1 Research Aim and Question**

The study aims to explore how NGOs in Nigeria manoeuvre around culture and religious barriers to facilitate the implementation of Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) that enhances women's access to productive resources and encourages the adoption of sustainable agriculture practices.

*“In what ways are NGOs in Nigeria facilitating the implementation of Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) to empower farming women?”*

The research question guided the interviews, leading to analysis of the collected data with the selected theoretical frameworks.

### **4.2. Research Approaches/Paradigms**

This research made use of a qualitative approach, and this is because qualitative research explores complex social phenomena, such as cultural beliefs, social norms, or political processes which suits the African context that will be examined. Creswell (2014) describes qualitative research as a method focused on exploring and understanding the meanings individuals or groups attributed to social or human issues. This approach emphasizes human experiences and values in its interpretations. The goal of the conversation is to reveal the meaning behind their experiences and explore their lived realities (Willy and McLymont, 2021).

This study used a qualitative approach to examine the complex socio-cultural and organizational factors affecting Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) implementation in Nigeria, focusing on the socio-economic, cultural, and religious constraints that impact rural women farmers. The analysis for this study will be framed by applying the African feminism theory as it is best suited for this research as it contextualizes the unique cultural, social, and historical factors shaping gender relations in the African setting, where traditions norms, religious practices often interfere with government policies. The supporting Marxist feminism theory complements this perspective by focusing on the structural and economic dimensions gender inequality, emphasizing how systemic power imbalances impact women's access to and control over resources and finances. By the application of the theoretical framework described above the study aims to develop a nuanced understanding on how these factors shape budgeting processes and identify challenges faced by NGOs in their advocacy efforts to ensure women empowerment. Insights from interviews with NGOs are analysed to highlight key barriers to GRB and raise awareness about its potential and limitations in the Nigerian context.

### **4.3. Method of Data Collection**

Data was collected through an online interview with NGOs (National and International) who are involved with gender advocacy with a specific focus on rural women farmers in various communities in Nigeria.

#### **4.3.1 Study Site**

The study was conducted in Nigeria. Nigeria was chosen because of its diversity in religion and culture spanning from the East, West, North and South. This research selection was done to investigate if these regions have different levels of Gender Responsive Budgeting effectiveness and gender equality awareness. Also, if they all have cultural and patriarchy commonality between them.

#### **4.3.2 Target Population**

The target Population of this research study are NGOs in the domain of Gender Responsive Budgeting through Agriculture, the empowerment of rural women farmers through agriculture, gender equality advocacy. This is because they are aware of the socio-cultural, religious, economic and political dynamics that influence policy adoption and gender budgeting in their regions.

#### **4.3.3. Sampling Method**

Judgment sampling was used in this study to choose the experts for the interview. According to Sekaran and Bougie (2010), judgment sampling ‘involves the choice of subjects who are most advantageously placed or in the best position to provide the information required’. Hence, NGOs in Nigeria whose domain is on gender equality advocacy in agriculture were interviewed. The reason been they are aware of the existing marginalization women face that is often perpetuated by gender inequality and can provide invaluable information on the dynamics of gender equality in Nigeria.

#### **4.3.4. Sampling and Sample Size**

The sample size for this study was selected from NGOs operating in the agricultural sector, specifically those involved in gender advocacy across Nigeria’s geopolitical zones (East, West, North, and South). The initial goal was to first interview ten NGOs, with the possibility of conducting additional interviews if some research questions remained unanswered or saturation was not reached, ensuring a diverse and representative perspective. The decision to stop at ten was based on data saturation observed during the seventh interview, as subsequent responses became repetitive, indicating that no new insights were emerging. Also, relevant literature was reviewed to support this research. The NGOs were interviewed on their knowledge of advocacy related to Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB), women’s empowerment, and other gender equality initiatives in agriculture. Below is the list of NGOs that participated in this study:

Table 1: NGOs and their areas of specialization as it relates to this research.

	<b>Non-Governmental Organization (NGO)</b>	<b>Area of specialization</b>
1	UN Women	Gender Equality Advocacy, Women Empowerment, GRB advocacy
2	Sahel Consulting	Policy training on GRB, gender advocacy and women empowerment
3	Small-scale Women Farmers Organization in Nigeria (SWOFON)	Policy advocacy, gender equality advocacy, women empowerment through agriculture
4	Young Professionals for Agricultural Development (YPAD)	Women empowerment through agriculture
5	OXFAM Nigeria	Gender Equality Advocacy
6	OXFAM Nigeria	Policy training on GRB, Women empowerment through agriculture
7	Civil Society Coalition for Poverty Eradication (CISCOPE)	Policy training on GRB, gender equality advocacy, women empowerment through agriculture
8	Refuge Fund	Women Empowerment, Policy advocacy
9	Against All Odds	Women Empowerment, Policy Advocacy
10	International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD)	Budgeting Funding and monitoring, Gender Equality in Agriculture

#### **4.3.5. Data Collection Instrument**

Information for this study was gathered using a semi-structured interview. The reasons for choosing this method are:

- i. A semi-structured interview allows researchers to gather detailed and rich information from interviewees (Mashuri et al., 2006).
- ii. Its flexibility allows researchers to ask additional or follow-up questions, making it easier to explore new areas that may come up during the interview (Mashuri et al., 2006).
- iii. Semi-structured interviews were suitable for the study because it allowed me to get an in-depth and objective understanding of complexity of gender responsive budgeting and sustainable farming practices in Nigeria under the influence of a patriarchy government, deeply entrenched in cultural and religious beliefs, in order to determine what is/not achievable with GRB in Nigeria.

#### **4.4 Method of Data Analysis**

Inductive analysis was used to analyse the data for this research because it allows for the discovery of patterns or similarities in the data collected without pre-imposed assumptions. This approach aligns with the study's objective of understanding the lived realities of rural women farmers as perceived through the lens of NGOs and contextualized within Nigerian socio-cultural and economic setting. Thematic analysis was used to organize and code the data, enabling the identification of patterns and insights that emerge from interviews and literature review. By using inductive analysis, I was able to explore how the realities of rural women farmers differ across various regions, shaped social norms and how NGOs tailor strategies for advocacy unique to each region. This approach supports the theoretical framework applied in this study by grounding gender analysis in the lived experiences of African women, ensuring that findings are context-specific and reflective of diverse cultural landscapes. The link to second theory is visible through the identification of economic power inequalities in the experiences of women farmers, as revealed by NGOs. This method allowed the data to reveal these structural inequalities in resource access and opportunities, aligning to Marxist focus on economic system and class dynamics.

##### **4.4.1 Recording and analysing data**

Data for this study were obtained through two methods: interviews (primary data) and a literature review (secondary data), both essential for the analysis. Primary data collection was conducted via online interviews, which were subsequently analysed using ATLAS.ti software. During the interviews, the researcher continuously reviewed and tracked responses, ensuring that all questions on the interview guide were addressed. When participants deviated from the main topic, the guide's structured questions were used to redirect the discussion, maintaining focus. Follow-up questions beyond the main interview guide questions were utilized whenever the researcher identified responses that required further probing. This approach aimed to gain deeper insights and uncover additional information relevant to the research questions. This approach also allows me to identify any questions requiring additional clarification.

Table 2. Examples of quotes from the study interviews and codes applied. Created by the author

INTERVIEWEES	INTERVIEW RESPONSE	CODE APPLIED
UN WOMEN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“they work so much but they don't have a voice in terms of decision making, in terms of policy, also even decision making in terms of controlling their finances. In some families, women farm, carry the produce out to the market, sell and come and give the husband the money and the man determines how the money is spent. So, you see the woman laboring, farming her crops, taking to the market, selling and coming back to hand over the money to his husband”.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(S-RQ1): Influence of cultural/religious differences on gender equality initiatives.</li> <li>(S-RQ3): Impact of gender insensitive budget on women's productivity and self-esteem.</li> </ul>
SAHEL CONSULTING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“So, this orients policy makers to say, if you have a program, government program, on soil fertility and soil health, you need to understand that you have to budget that extra mile to make sure that women get this information to where they are and where they're safe to go to”.</li> </ul>	(S-RQ2): NGOs advocacy, strategies and farmers perception.
SWOFON	<p>“So where we said, we no longer want to use the obsolete way of farming. We want to have gender free equipment. A woman farmer wants to have planter. A woman farmer wants to have thresher. A woman farmer wants to have a tractor that she can easily use, you know, so that she doesn't have to carry her child and bend down or begin to think or how to bend to pick weed”.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(S-RQ3): Impact of gender insensitive budget on women's productivity and self-esteem.</li> <li>(S-RQ5): GRB projects and sustainable agricultural practices</li> </ul>
CISCOPE	<p>“So, if a woman is not supposed to be seen outside, why is a woman going to the farm? Why is a woman engaged in buying and selling? Why is a woman interacting with, why would a woman be interacting with a buyer from another state or talk more of another country? So, it is more of religion”.</p>	(S-RQ4): Challenges in advocating GRB, impacts of culture/religious factors.

authors own

## 4.5. Ethical Consideration

### 4.5.1. Ethical Considerations and Confidentiality

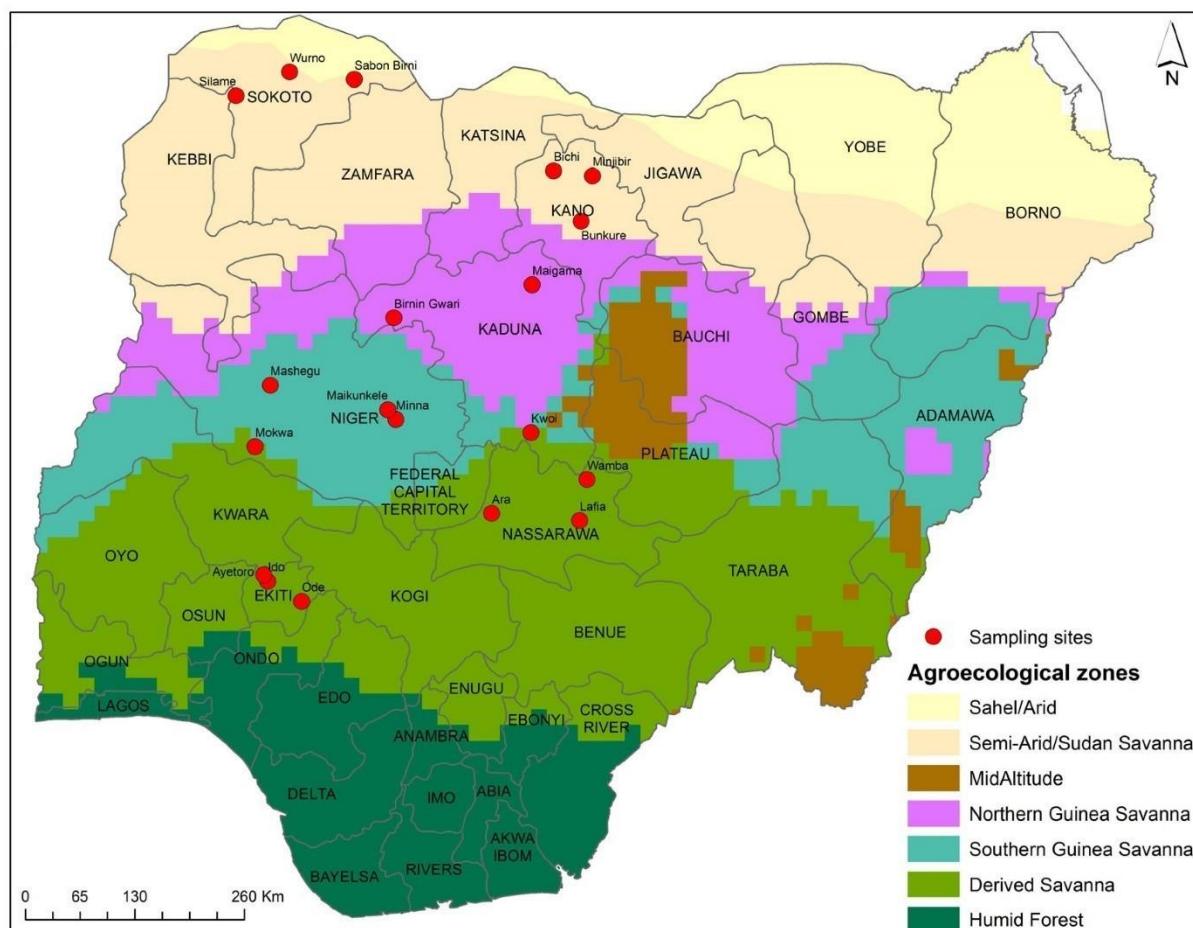
The researcher prioritized obtaining participant's consent for their involvement in the study. Using an informed consent form\_aligned with those used in the SWIFT project, I clearly outlined the purpose of the study, the data collection process, and assurances regarding participants' privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity. Further details about the study were provided through an interview guided questions sent to all participants, where they had the questions before the interview date so they could prepare better. Participants were encouraged to review the consent form critically, raise any concerns, and offer suggestions if necessary. Moreover, it was emphasized that they could withdraw from the study at any time and request the removal of any data collected from or about them.

## 5.0 Case Study and Interview Results

### 5.1 Agriculture in Nigeria

Nigeria spans 923,768 square kilometres and is the most populous country in Africa, with an estimated population of 185 million (Amusan et al., 2021). Situated along the Gulf of Guinea, its varied agro-ecological zones facilitate the cultivation of numerous crops, establishing agriculture as fundamental part of the economy. This sector plays a crucial role in employment, GDP, and export earnings (Okoye and Adamade, 2016). Small-scale agriculture, using basic tools and rational farming generates 80% of Nigeria's food supply. With its climate varying from tropical in the south to arid in the north, the country can grow almost all tropical and semi-tropical crops. Nevertheless, large-scale agriculture is uncommon due to ineffective farming methods and poor soil fertility, despite having suitable climatic and water conditions (Okoye and Adamade, 2016).

Figure 3: Map of Nigeria showing the divisions of the agroecological zones.



Source: From “Toxins” by Chilaka et al., 2016. Chilaka, C. A., De Boevre, M., Atanda, O. O., & De Saeger, S. (2016). Occurrence of Fusarium mycotoxins in cereal crops and processed products (Ogi) from Nigeria. *Toxins*, 8(11). <https://doi.org/10.3390/toxins8110342>

### 5.2. Nigerian Women in Agriculture

Nigeria is divided into six geopolitical zones: three located in the North (Northeast, Northwest, and North Central) and three in the South (Southeast, Southwest, and South South). Agriculture is mainly practiced

in the northern regions, where about 80% of families engage in farming. In contrast to around 50% in the southern region (Oseni et al., 2014). Although agricultural growth in Nigeria has risen over the past decade, this development is primarily fuelled by commercial farmers who are cultivating larger plots rather than by enhanced productivity of smaller farmers. Women contribute significantly to Nigeria's agricultural sector, making up approximately 65% of the workforce, particularly in subsistence farming and livestock rearing. Despite women expanding their involvement throughout the agricultural value chain including production, processing, and marketing, the sector still largely favours men (Oseni et al., 2014). In the southeast and southwest regions, women actively participate in farming and related value chain tasks such as processing, transporting, and marketing food products, whereas men generally concentrate on cash crops (Amusan et al., 2021). Conversely, women in northern Nigeria face more limitations in their involvement, primarily engaging in subsistence farming, which often aligns with their household duties, with minimal participation in the agricultural value chain (Amusan et al., 2021).

*Figure 4: Map of Nigeria showing the Agricultural Value Chain (with farms in the northern region and markets largely in the south)*



Source: Onwude et al., 2023. Bottlenecks in Nigeria's fresh food supply chain: What is the way forward? <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/361786201> © 2008 - 2025 ResearchGate GmbH. All rights reserved. DOI : 10.31224/2447

### 5.2.1 Gender roles in Nigeria

The sexist ideology and division of labour in Nigeria categorize agricultural produce as cash crops for men and food crops for women. Men are prioritized in accessing government-managed land through

agricultural officials, while women face challenges shaped by patriarchal systems and traditional ideologies (Amusan et al., 2021). For example, some regions in southern Nigeria, women are prohibited from owning cash crops independently, despite their involvement in all facets of crop production. While men manage the sales of crops, women are relegated to subsistence farming for household requirements. In Northern Nigeria, women are allowed to take part in certain aspects of crop cultivation but are largely confined to subsistence farming and household responsibilities (Ugonna et al., 2024). Cultural and religious factors often necessitate that women submit entirely to their husbands, preventing them from engaging in economic activities without their husbands' permission. These same influences are invoked to justify discriminations and violations of women's rights, particularly regarding marriage, land ownership, and property rights (Adam & Njogu, 2023).

Research conducted by Oyawole et al. (2021) on women's empowerment and uptake of sustainable agricultural methods in Nigeria indicates that gender plays a significant role in the adoption of these practices at the plot level. Their research shows that in households where women are empowered, there is a higher likelihood of embracing new agricultural technologies. Moreover, although women may have less empowerment, female plot owners tend to adopt sustainable agricultural practices more readily than their male counterparts. Bridging the gender gap could enhance the implementation of agroforestry and other sustainable farming techniques, benefiting both women and the agricultural sector as a whole (Oyawole et al., 2021)

### **5.3 Agricultural Budgeting and Role of NGOs in Nigeria**

The Federal Government of Nigeria adopts a multi-sectoral approach to agricultural budgeting, with the Federal Ministry of Agricultural and Rural Development (FMARD) managing over 80% of the funds. However, challenges persist, particularly in allocating resources to women farmers. The lumping of funds for women and youth, inadequate extension services, and poor integration between research institutions and farmers hinder effective budgeting. Furthermore, training and empowerment programs often lack transparency, while vague budget provisions enable mismanagement. The absence of gender-disaggregated data and weak monitoring mechanisms undermine efforts to achieve gender-sensitive agricultural investments (SWOFON & CSJ, 2020).

NGOs play a critical role in rural development by advocating for gender equality, sustainable policies, and poverty reduction. They influence governance, ensuring women gain equal access to resources and decision-making roles, particularly in agriculture. NGOs have proven more effective in addressing challenges that affect women than government initiatives, as women are more likely to engage in NGO-led programs (Precious, 2021). Despite financial constraints, corruption, and insecurity, NGOs persist in advocating for systemic reform. Their grassroots efforts in poverty alleviation, education, and policy advocacy are vital for achieving gender-responsive policies, strengthening rural development, and fostering sustainable food systems (Sam and Justina, 2016).

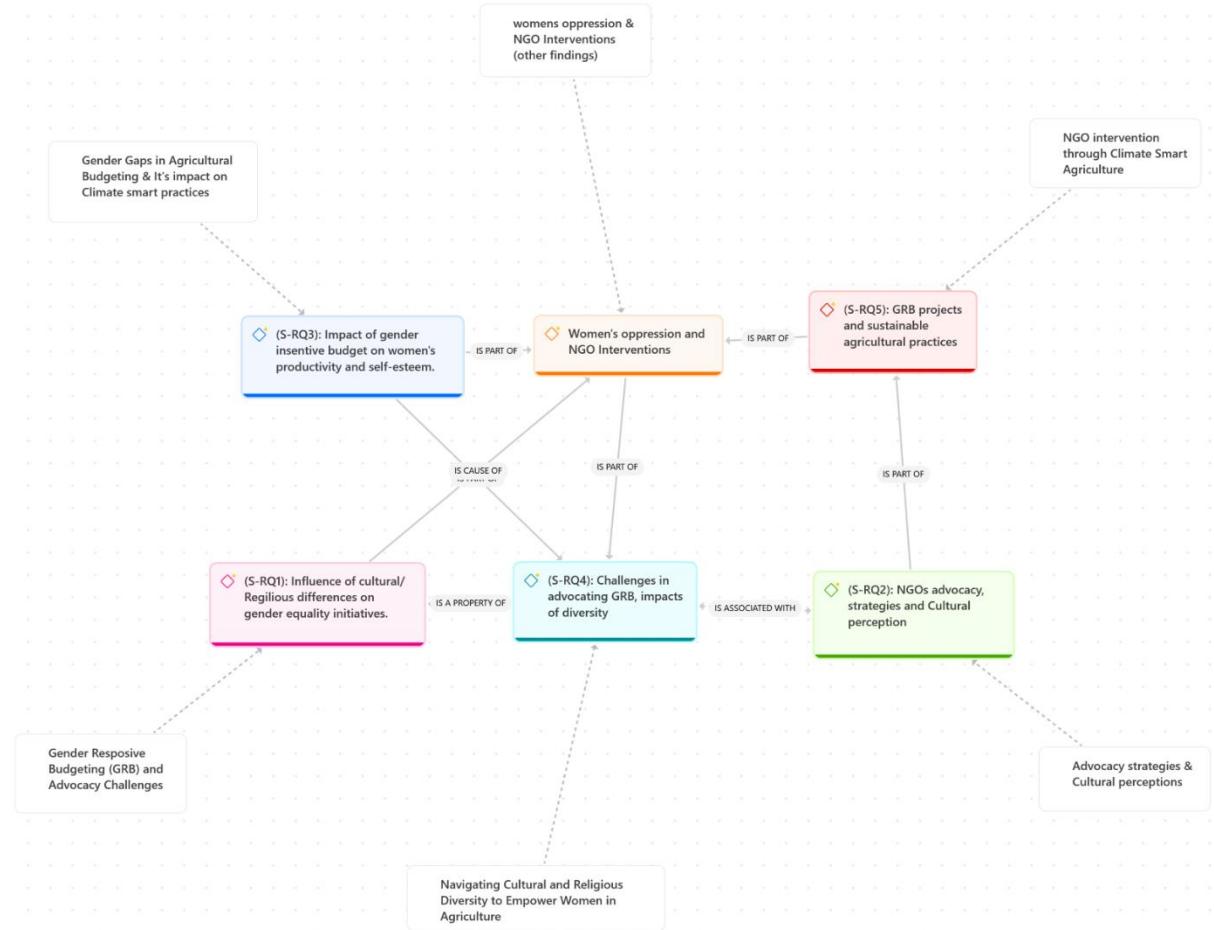
#### 5.4 Interview Results

Chapter 5 presents the findings from the data collected to examine how NGOs in Nigeria facilitate the implementation of Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) as a strategy to empower rural women farmers. The results are organized into themes and subthemes that address the research questions (see figure 6). Theme 1 (section 5.1) presents the result on GRB advocacy strategies used by NGOs and the subthemes delve into the difficulties encountered by NGOs during advocacy, answering S-RQ1. Theme 2 (section 5.2) reveals the inter- and intra-regional diversity in perspectives and practices that exist within the same cultural and religious society, addressing S-RQ4. Theme 3 (section 5.4) examines gender gaps in agricultural budgeting, its impact along with NGO interventions through Climate-smart practices, addressing S-RQ3 and S-RQ5. Theme (4.5), which was not directly linked to the research questions, provides insights into the underlying struggles women face and how NGOs navigate these challenges as they operate across diverse regions of Nigeria. The final Theme 5 (section 5.3) and subtheme (5.3.1) explore how NGOs employ cultural adaptation strategies, financial literacy programs, and collaboration with community leaders to advocate for gender equality, which answers S-RQ2.

Figure 5 visually represents a thematic map showing the themes, and their interconnectedness between the research questions as it relates to Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) and women farmers.

- S-RQ1: Labelled as a “PROPERTY OF” Women’s oppression and NGO Interventions, this highlights how cultural and religious factors influence the challenges women face and shape NGO responses.
- S-RQ2: Both “PART OF” Women’s oppression and NGO Interventions and “ASSOCIATED WITH” S-RQ4, as findings reveal that NGO advocacy strategies are intertwined with cultural perceptions, affecting their effectiveness in addressing women’s challenges.
- S-RQ3: Labelled as “CAUSE OF” Women’s oppression and NGO Interventions, the data show that gender-insensitive budgets exacerbate women’s oppression in agriculture, necessitating NGO interventions.
- S-RQ4: Labelled as “PART OF” Women’s oppression and NGO intervention and “ASSOCIATED WITH” S-RQ2, this examines the challenges of advocating for GRB, which are closely tied to NGO strategies and the diversity of perceptions.
- S-RQ5: Labelled as “PART OF” Women’s oppression and NGO interventions, findings demonstrate how GRB projects contribute to sustainable agricultural practices, addressing women’s oppression in farming communities.

Figure 5: Diagram showing the connection between the selected themes and the research questions.



Source: author's own

### 5.1 Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) Advocacy and Challenges

One of the key themes that emerged from the interviews relates to the advocacy of GRB associated challenges. The data reveals that one of the primary advocacy strategies employed by NGOs in Nigeria is conducting training sessions for government officials. This involves identifying relevant stakeholders, such as budget and policy officials, legislative representatives, such as budget and policy officials, legislative representatives, particularly those involved in budget preparation and local community representatives. Through GRB training, they aim to increase the number of gender-sensitive allocations in government's annual fiscal budgets. As one of the participants explained:

*“If the government can look at this budgeting aspect, improve the budget, make sure our women have access to the budget, access to the funds, they can be empowered.”* (Participant B)

According to the statement above, the objective of these advocacy training sessions is to create a collaborative environment where government officials and local community members work together to ensure that budget planning and implementation at all levels of government recognize the diverse gender needs and maintain a strong focus on gender-consciousness.

One of the main aims of NGO advocacy as noted during the interviews, was to bring to light the unique challenges women face and to determine the best ways to allocate budgets that address the diverse needs of women across the different geopolitical zones in Nigeria. This is exemplified in this quote:

*So, the challenge I think now is about designing for what works and we need to stop treating women, especially when it comes to financial services, gender responsive budgeting, like women are all the same. No, the needs of farmers in northern Nigeria are quite different from the needs of farmers in southern Nigeria. (Participant A)*

Another key advocacy approach by organizations is the push for consistent policy review. They highlighted that many existing agricultural policies are over a decade old and have not been reviewed, stating that the government tends to rely on outdated and supposedly gender-neutral policies. They (NGOs) are of the opinion that these policies were developed without women's input and fail to account for the diverse needs of women. Hence, these Organizations work to orient policymakers by emphasizing the importance of revising the policies to reflect the changing landscape and evolving gender dynamics. This form of advocacy is facilitated through budgetary meetings, training sections and workshops focused on building the capacity of policymakers, trade unions and government officials. During these reviews, NGOs strongly advocate for the establishment of a mandatory minimum quota or percentage for women involved in agricultural intervention programs. This is done to ensure that any community-based agriculture initiative allocates a predefined portion of resources, opportunities, or roles to women, ensuring their inclusion and empowerment in the sector.

According to the data collected, NGOs noted that the policy review briefs, and orientation they organized revealed a significant gap as they discovered that some government officials are not familiar with the concept of Gender Responsive Budgeting and what it entails. This gap was addressed by orienting policymakers with practical advice on how to plan a gender responsive budget, as Participant A explained:

*So, we orient policy makers by saying, if you have a program, government program, on soil fertility and soil health, you need to understand that you have to budget that extra mile to make sure that women get this information to where they are and where they are safe to attend. (Participant A).*

Overall, results above indicate that GRB advocacy focuses on sensitizing relevant stakeholders in policy formulation, demanding mandatory quotas for women farmers, and promoting consistent policy reviews along with the need for region-specific strategies tailored to women's needs. However, the use of outdated policies, and lack of consistent policy reviews by policy makers pose as one major challenge towards achieving GRB.

### **5.1.1 Challenges to Effective GRB Advocacy**

This sub-theme explores the barriers to women's participation in associations, policy gaps, political instability, and opposing NGO views, highlighting how the lack of gender representation in leadership

hinders GRB advocacy. Findings under this sub-theme highlight a critical challenge identified by NGOs, which is the lack of women's representation in farmer associations. These associations are key platforms for influencing agricultural policies and securing government support through budget allocations, yet their gender imbalance contributes to the exclusion of women's specific needs in budget planning and implementation. Leadership positions in organizations such as the Rice Farmers Association of Nigeria (RIFAN) are dominated by men, resulting in policies and funding priorities that fail to address the needs of women farmer. With minimal influence in these groups, women farmers are often left out of critical advocacy efforts, resulting in inadequate access to resources and support. This perspective is echoed by Participant F, who highlighted that:

*The issue extends beyond the government to traders and commodity associations. In Nigeria, there are about 50 agricultural commodity associations most led entirely by men, with some having 100% male membership at the state level. (Participant F)*

Another significant challenge limiting GRB advocacy efforts is the substantial gap between policy design and implementation. While agricultural gender policies exist, there is often a disconnect in their execution. Even when budgets include allocations for women's agricultural empowerment, funds frequently fail to reach the intended beneficiaries. The issue arises due to a lack of accountability among government officials, along with citizens, particularly farmers, who are expected to demand an answer and hold the government accountable for the existing implementation gaps. Additionally, many women farmers remain unaware of the provisions in these policies, the benefits allocated to them, and the individuals or entities responsible for ensuring their access to these resources. According to NGOs, these factors highlight systemic inefficiencies and the gaps between policy design and execution.

A statement by respondent B reveals that the policy mandating a 35% budget allocation for women in agriculture is poorly monitored. As a result, funds rarely reach their intended beneficiaries, and no mechanisms for accountability are in place. Respondent B also emphasizes the importance of involving women in policy formation, as they constitute the majority of primary agricultural producers in Nigeria. NGOs argue that prioritizing women's needs in policy formulation and budget allocation processes would enhance equity and effectiveness in addressing gender gaps in agriculture, thereby achieving Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB), which would lead to food security and the much-needed agricultural development. However, Participant B highlights another major obstacle encountered during grassroot GRB advocacy trainings which is, the lack of enthusiasm among women farmers to push for gender equality during farmers' association meetings and dialogues with the government. Women farmers express frustration and fatigue from repeatedly voicing their needs and concerns, only for it to be ignored. This persistent neglect has left them disheartened and reluctant to engage further. As a result, many women have become reluctant or outright unwilling to participate in advocacy efforts proposed by NGOs, perceiving these actions as futile due to the consistent indifference they encounter.

Some organizations also argue that the persistent barriers to GRB advocacy stems from the absence of gender representation in leadership positions. As Nigeria has never had a female Minister of Agriculture, and most agricultural development agencies are led by men. They believe this lack of gender diversity at leadership levels contributes to a limited understanding and prioritization of women's roles and challenges in agriculture.

Another challenge faced by NGOs during policy discussions with the government is the frequent changes in political leadership. This inconsistency in leadership further hinders their advocacy efforts, disrupting the continuity of development and implementation of certain Gender Responsive Budgets. NGOs have observed that new administrations often prioritize their own agendas and budgeting processes, sidelining previous initiatives and budget allocations. As NGOs explained that each new government in Nigeria has its own agenda, which may ignore or change the ongoing development plans by the previous government. This is illustrated by the following quote by a participant:

*Every new government comes with its own agenda that may or may not take into account the work that has been done by the previous regime in terms of the development plan. The Nigerian system is such that it gives room for the governor to have such powers to change the project or the development agenda of that state, for instance, some of the empowerment programs we set up for women and youth, were being used for political purposes, as a result, it wasn't impacting on those beneficiaries that it ought to have reached. (Participant C)*

This political takeover has led to the misuse of institutions and action plans, intended to benefit specific sectors, for political purposes rather than its original goals.

One of the organizations interviewed reported that sometimes they work to implement Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) in agriculture as a standalone project targeting women farmers. These projects also aim to address the gender disparities faced by women farmers, which are rooted in cultural and religious beliefs, gender oppression, and maltreatment. This organization also reported that a pervasive belief held by some men about the position of women within the family structure, extends into other aspects of women's lives, including agriculture, thereby perpetuating the suppression of their voices. The following quote illustrated below narrates the experience of the Organization:

*I recall an engagement where we displayed a banner on the Maputo Protocol, emphasizing women's autonomy to decide on childbirth. We faced resistance, and were told to remove it and questioned if we were the ones to tell them the rights of their wives or to decide the number of children she wants to have or not? And then this is usually being justified or backed up by religious practices. (Participant H)*

### **5.1.2 Cultural and Religious Barriers to Advocacy**

This sub-theme explores the significant cultural and religious challenges that hinder women's participation in gender-focused projects within rural communities. From the data, Participants emphasized how deeply ingrained norms and beliefs create barriers that limit women's access and

involvement. Reports show that in northern Nigeria, access to women is more difficult compared to other regions in the country. NGOs believe northern Nigeria presents unique challenges due to their religious practice (majority are Islam) that often limit interactions between male facilitators (extension workers) and women farmers, thereby reinforcing women's isolation from gender equality projects, agricultural training, and assistance. In many regions of Northern, agricultural extension workers are only allowed access to these women if they are female, however, the number of male extension agents far exceeds that of female agents, creating a significant barrier. Additionally, cultural norms and beliefs influence roles of women in agriculture across Nigeria, often restricting their autonomy and participation. For instance, NGOs reported that in regions like Sokoto (in the Northeast), where strict interpretations of Sharia law are prevalent, women face limitations in public engagement, mobility, and interaction with outsiders, particularly men. These restrictions make it challenging for NGOs to directly engage or involve women in their programs.

In many communities in the North, a woman needs her husband's permission to participate in gatherings, committees, or receive assistance. Organizations must often seek the husband's consent before involving the wife in any activities or even meeting her. These cultural and religious practices create significant barriers, resulting in low participation rates among women in gender-focused projects. This, in turn, limits the ability of such programs to effectively address women's needs and empower them. In contrast, states like Nasarawa in the North-central region of Nigeria, while being religiously sensitive, apply these restrictions more flexibly and moderately. This allows greater access to women which fosters better participation in gender-related projects. Consequently, some states have experienced rapid progress in gender equality advocacy programs, while others lag behind due to slower progress. NGOs have differing opinions on the reason behind the restrictive access to women, as one of the NGOs argues that based on their experience, they believe that the bias of inaccessibility is deeply rooted in religious beliefs. This is illustrated in the quote below:

*So, if a woman is not supposed to be seen outside, why is a woman going to the farm? Why is a woman engaged in buying and selling? why would a woman be interacting with a buyer from another state or talk more of another country? So, it is more of religion (Participant D).*

However, another NGO contends that the issue is more cultural than religious. According to their perspective:

*It boils down to culture, that has really affected women's productivity and accessibility. From our experience, in communities where 80% of the men support and allow gender advocacy project, the 20% of men who hinder access to their women for development training do so based on culture. They have the mindset that we are trying to bring in western education and this is mostly common in some parts of the northern area (Participant B)*

Despite the differing opinions, they all agreed that this inaccessibility has led to delayed progress in women's empowerment and gender advocacy measures.

In the Southwest and Southeast regions of Nigeria, the reality of women in agriculture differs greatly from that of the North. Women in these regions enjoy greater freedom, largely due to religious practices, literacy levels and increased exposure to modern technology, such as basic mobile phones and the internet. The impact of education is evident in these regions, as men have different orientation compared to men in the North who are less educated. Women are allowed to head some commodity association groups, particularly in the Southwest, and rural women farmers actively participate in projects, training, and other women empowerment programs. This disparity between the involvement of women farmers in the North and their counterparts in other regions is believed to be largely attributed to the level of education and exposure. The North has the lowest literacy rates in the country, which plays a significant role in limiting women's participation in programs. Moreover, the lack of enlightenment among men in the North about gender equality further restricts women's involvement. As explained by a participant:

*Most of them do not understand English and are not educated. So, it is the kind of mentality they have towards women, their perspective of women is that they must be housewives, who do domestic work. In our little way we try to break it down and make them understand that their women are more than just housewives. (Participant C)*

The obstacles faced by rural women are context specific, however, one reality common across all regions as noted by all participants is the entrenched patriarchal norms that perpetuate women's economic subordination. Many men view the financial empowerment of women as a threat to family stability and male authority. One of the participant NGOs shared an experience as illustrated in the quote below:

*We came to a community where the men told us bluntly, that they were not interested in our imputes, that we should take our imputes to somewhere else. So, we asked them why, one of the community leaders came up and said, women don't know how to manage resources, financial resources. He was said that once a woman is financially stable or financially independent, she tends to be disrespectful. (Participant D)*

Another key policy challenge for NGOs during advocacy is the lack of policies that ensure women's land ownership rights. This has reduced their investment incentives as land ownership is seen as a source of empowerment. Data from the interviews revealed that in many regions in Nigeria, land is typically inherited by male heirs, while women can only access it in absence of male successors. However, this varies by region; in some areas, especially in the Southeast, women are excluded from any inheritance. In parts of northern Nigeria, women can own land, but its utilization remain uncertain, as married women often loose ownership to their husbands. Regional variations in women's land ownership are significant, because in some areas in the northern regions, women may inherit land from family members, but low literacy levels often prevent them from effectively utilizing or managing it, leading many to entrust it to their male relatives. Conversely, in southeastern communities, female land ownership is discouraged, and advocacy groups work to challenge these restrictions by providing legal support and promoting

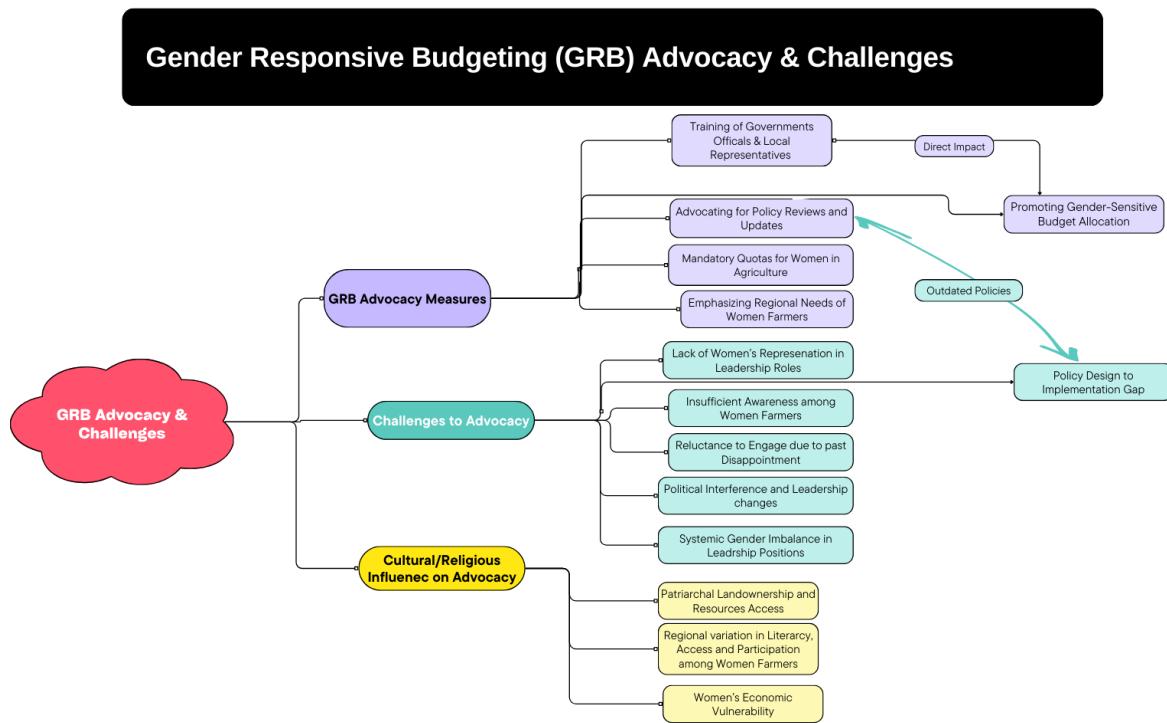
inheritance rights. Some Organizations argue that religion and culture heavily influence governance in Nigeria, as leaders often emerge from these cultural backgrounds. They believe that the Nigerian government frequently align with religious and cultural institutions, affirming their values and decisions. They noted that this form of governance further restricts women's ownership of land and autonomy, which hinders women's full participation in the agricultural sector, gender advocacy programs, and restricts their ability to voice their specific needs even as wives within the household. Despite advocacy and legal efforts, NGO still face barriers in challenging societal norms around land ownership, especially in the southeast, where cultural resistance remains strong. Organizations believe a change in mindset is the best approach, but they are also aware that shifting mindsets is a slow process, and while legal interventions help, achieving lasting change continues to be a complex and gradual process.

Lastly, NGOs also point out that many women who are frustrated by cultural practices but lack the resources to challenge them even if they want to, find hope when organizations intervene to promote women's rights and livelihoods. For instance, they narrate that widows often endure severe hardships, such as being denied inheritance rights and left destitute. This leaves them with no means of empowerment, and they are discouraged from going into agriculture, as they fear losing their leased land when the owners change their mind and demand an eviction from the land. Consequently, many women opt to grow vegetable crops like tomatoes, which mature quickly and serve as a safety net in case the land or property is taken away. Moreover, financial mechanisms, such as loans, are frequently inaccessible to rural women due to collateral requirements, particularly land ownership, which they are often unable to meet. As a result, women farmers prefer grants (from NGOs and other organizations) over loans, as grants offer critical support for their agricultural activities without imposing financial risks. Despite the progress made through various women's empowerment initiatives, NGOs express frustration that women remain predominantly involved in lower-value agricultural activities, such as small-scale farming, poultry, and fisheries, with limited access to more profitable sectors. Furthermore, although agriculture contributes substantially to Nigeria's GDP, women continue to face systemic discrimination. Patriarchal structures and a lack of political will hinder their advancement, as political leaders often prioritize the need of men, their political constituencies, while avoiding the implementation of radical changes that challenge societal norms or threaten male-dominated sectors.

The findings identified key measures taken by NGOs to advocate for Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) and address associated challenges. These measures include training government officials and local representatives, advocating for policy reviews and updates, promoting gender-sensitive budget allocation, demanding mandatory quotas for women in agriculture, and tailoring budgets to meet the regional needs of women farmers. However, the study also highlighted several challenges to GRB advocacy, such as a lack of women's representation in leadership meetings, insufficient awareness among women farmers, reluctance to engage in advocacy due to past disappointments, political interference, leadership changes, and systemic gender imbalances in leadership positions. These challenges are said to be influenced by cultural and religious beliefs, such as patriarchal land ownership

and resource access, regional variation in literacy, access and participation among women farmers, and women's economic vulnerability (see figure 6).

Figure 6: Thematic Map showing the summary of GRB Advocacy and Challenges



Source: authors own

## 5.2 Navigating Cultural and Religious Diversity to Empower Women in Agriculture

This theme examines how cultural dynamics shape the realities of women. While NGOs observed that similar ideologies about women prevail across Nigeria, they highlighted significant inter-regional and intra-regional diversity. Even within the same cultural or religious belief system, neighbouring communities may hold differing perspectives and practices regarding women. This variation underscores the complexity of advocacy and the need to avoid assumptions. Recognizing these barriers, NGOs have adopted various strategies to empower women and challenge restrictive norms. For instance, to address the restrictions placed on women from speaking in public gatherings in some communities in the North (chapter 5.1.2). NGOs reported that they often organize gender and age segregated gatherings, a strategy they say has proven effective in creating safe spaces where women feel comfortable sharing their needs and concerns admits the contrivances of social norms, while in other communities within the same local government such strategy is not used/needed as women have the freedom to speak in public and engage in advocacy programs. As one participant explained:

*The kind of advocacy we do differs because of cultural differences across regions or within communities. In the north, for instance, we just know that it is going to be a bit of a struggle because the men do not allow their women to speak" (Participant B)*

NGOs also gave examples of places such as Yobe state (Northeast), where women face severe limitations in accessing land and scaling-up in agriculture as those allowed to farm can only do so in their backyards due to certain customs. As one participant explained

*Yes. Just like I said in Yobe that women are not allowed to practice agriculture on a large scale. They only relegate them to just cultivating vegetables and just for their household consumption. It has affected them because you see a lot of women coming at the back to tell you, oh, I don't know, how can you people help us? (Participant E).*

And conversely, in Adamawa state (Northeast), in Michika local government area, they highlight that women enjoy relatively greater freedom and can cultivate both for household and commercial purposes. As a result of these experiences, some NGOs believe that this is due to religious diversity present in these regions (Christianity and Islam being the two dominant), where one religion grants more freedom to women than the other.

Farming practices in some communities in Taraba State (Northeast), were reported to be highly gendered due to the prevailing cultural values of the communities. Women in these areas are often confined by their husbands to cultivating low-income crops such as tomatoes, leafy vegetables, and groundnut. In contrast, higher value cash crops like yams and cocoa remain predominantly under male control. NGOs also reported that the recent economic shift has increased the profitability of groundnut which has led to a growing male dominance this crop in the communities. This trend has further marginalized women farmers in Taraba state, pushing them to greater financial vulnerability and limiting their economic opportunities. Although existing literature does not fully confirm these gendered practices, Miftahu and Habiba, (2022) observed that women in the Ibi community of Taraba state engage in diverse farming activities, including crop production, fisheries, livestock production, and agroforestry. However, men often have access to more fertile lands, while women are allocated less fertile plots for cultivation

Overall, NGOs acknowledge the inter-regional complexities that exist in addressing challenges that confront women farmers, and the difficulty in developing strategies that help overcome these barriers.

### **5.3 Gender Disparities in Agricultural Budgeting and NGO-Led Climate-Smart Interventions**

This theme highlights the gender disparities in agricultural resource allocation and the role of NGOs in promoting climate-smart practices to empower rural women. Despite Nigeria's commitment to the Maputo Declaration, which mandates a 10% budget allocation to agriculture, only 1-3% is allocated, disproportionately affecting women farmers. NGOs report that agricultural inputs such as fertilizers, seeds, and financial support are often provided to men first, limiting women's productivity. One participant explained:

*"Because of the low budgeting of finances to women, I think humanitarian agencies are filling up that gap... the NGOs. Yes, so the NGOs are filling the gap that the government has created." (Participant G)*

In addressing this, NGOs actively train rural women in climate-smart agriculture, emphasizing sustainable practices such as using crop residues and animal waste as organic fertilizers to reduce reliance on synthetic inputs. This shift has been met with strong receptiveness from women, as one NGO representative noted:

*“Women are very attentive and want to adopt every principle that we bring in because they do not just produce to sell; they also think about the family. The family eats what they farm, so they tend to put more care into what they produce.”* (Participant C)

To further support sustainability, NGOs introduce biogas plants, which generate bio-slurry, a natural fertilizer that improves soil quality while reducing environmental harm. However, some male farmers in southeastern Nigeria resist this transition, favoring chemical fertilizers for their predictability. Nonetheless, NGOs highlight that many farmers are willing to adopt sustainable practices if they improve yields.

Another challenge is women's limited landownership, which threatens the long-term success of sustainable farming initiatives. To mitigate this, NGOs promote Cluster Farming, where women collectively own and cultivate land, share profits, and engage with off-takers who purchase their produce at fair prices. Additionally, NGOs tailor interventions to regional disparities in literacy and technology access. While southern farmers use digital platforms like WhatsApp to exchange agricultural information, mobile access is lower in the north, requiring alternative communication strategies.

According to NGOs this underscores the need for continuous education, policy advocacy, and financial investment to ensure that rural women farmers are not left behind in the transition to sustainable agriculture

#### **5.4 Women's Oppression and NGO Interventions**

This theme, based on the observation and analysis of the data, reveals that NGOs unanimously emphasize that Nigeria is a society deeply rooted in patriarchy, where gender roles are rigidly defined and rarely questioned. They further report that women are often seen primarily as mothers and homemakers, responsible for domestic chores and childbearing. These gender roles, they believe, have significantly limited women's capabilities, eroding their self-esteem and creating mental barriers to personal growth and well-being.

During the interview, one of the NGOs interviewed hinted at upcoming projects that will focus on the mental health of women, who after several observations the Organization found out that women rarely have someone to confide in about their struggles. Hence, they aim to establish support systems in communities where women can seek advice from trusted individuals and be referred to professionals when necessary. This initiative is particularly significant, as many women face not only agricultural challenges but also personal and domestic issues. These programs aim to address the high illiteracy level of rural women, their poor health conditions and issues of domestic violence that hamper gender

equality advocacy efforts and women's wellbeing. This is illustrated by the following quote by one of the participants:

*We have also integrated savings and loans associations into our programs, which deepen women's participation in the financial sector, particularly in underserved communities. This platform enables us to integrate additional activities, such as adult education for female farmers and training in climate-smart agricultural practices. (Participant A)*

During NGO advocacy discussions with several government authorities, some NGOs emphasize the importance of gender-friendly equipment to ease the burden on women, who work while carrying children on their backs or heavy loads. They highlight that the lack of government support exacerbates the challenges, creating frustration among women and advocacy groups alike. This perspective is exemplified by a participant in the following quote:

*We have decided that we no longer want our women to use obsolete methods of farming. We want the government to provide gender-friendly equipment. A woman farmer should have access to planters, tractors, and other tools that she can easily use. This way, she won't have to carry her child and bend down, or struggle with how to bend to pick weeds or perform other laborious tasks. (Participant B)*

One of the Interviewee further describe their experiences visiting communities where men often spend their time sitting under trees, chatting, or playing games while women work on farms, gather firewood, care for children, and perform physically demanding task that result in them developing several health issues. NGOs report that Women in these communities are responsible for planting, harvesting, processing, and selling of their agricultural products, contributing to 90% of the agricultural labour. While the men believe that are the ones who engage in the "hard labor" at the farm due to their involvement in land clearing, which is considered strenuous. Another challenge faced by rural women farmers is their lack of control over their finances and the products they produce. Organizations highlighted that in many communities, women do the farming, harvest the crops, sell their produce, and then hand the money over to their husbands, as women are mandated by tradition to submit and be financially dependent on their husbands. NGOs report that efforts to organize women empowerment programs in these communities that is aimed at women achieving financial independence are often met with resistance as the men reject the idea on the grounds that women are incapable of managing financial resources and should not participate in decision-making.

Participant B also recounts instances where men expressed fears that women's financial independence would destabilize marital relationships. To address these challenges, NGOs have taken steps to strike a balance between empowering women and maintaining social harmony. Sensitization programs implemented to mitigate the risk of empowerment leading to household conflict such as divorce. NGOs observed that increased financial autonomy, achieved thorough improved agricultural activity, has, in some cases, led to household tensions. For instance, some women divorced their husbands due to prolonged domestic abuse. According to participant B, their programs emphasize the need for women to

balance financial independence with respect for household dynamics to minimize potential domestic conflicts. One such programs is the introduction of “gender champions” who are community members. This includes men and their wives who oppose gender-based violence, and they are serve as advocates for gender equality in their localities.

NGOs also observed that, despite the hardships women endure in households where traditional gender roles are deeply ingrained, many women who experience physical abuse are reluctant to accept help. They reported that their mothers faced similar circumstances without complaining, leading them to accept such treatments as part of family life. According to participant A, these women often feel compelled to accept their burdens and abuse as a cultural norm, believing, “this is how things are meant to be.” Participant A further noted that, “*I think most of them feel that is how it’s supposed to be. And they are not even enlightened on how it should be and how it should not be*” (Participant C). According to some of the interviewees (Participant B, C and I), this reflects a broader societal issue in which women view their roles, particularly in non-economic tasks, as fixed, leaving them disempowered and hesitant to voice grievances.

### **5.5 Advocacy Strategies for Gender Equality in Amidst Social Norms.**

Another key theme that emerged from this study, is the various strategies NGOs employed when advocating for gender equality in agriculture amidst the social norms in the country. The findings reveal the delicate interplay required to successfully promote gender equality in a country with patriarchal norms. Participant D identified two schools of thought surrounding gender equality, each differing in interpretation and level of acceptance within the Nigerian society. One was the avoidance of the term “feminism,” due to its negative connotations in some communities where it is often misunderstood as being synonymous with women challenging or overriding traditional gender roles. The other was that, the term “gender equality” is perceived as a direct challenge to existing societal structure and is met with resistance. So, instead of contentious terms, they believe organizations within Nigeria employ the term “women empowerment”, which is believed to be less confrontational and more culturally acceptable. This approach focuses on highlighting the benefits of empowering women rather than framing it as a challenge to traditional norms, stating that tailoring their communication effectively fosters acceptance and engagement within communities.

#### **5.5.1 Approaches used for Women Empowerment Advocacy in Nigeria**

This sub-theme highlights the approaches NGOs have implemented to overcome cultural, religious, and political barriers in their advocacy for GRB in agriculture. Despite these challenges, NGOs reported some success in ensuring the implementation of projects aimed at supporting rural women farmers. From the data, one key strategy adopted that has shown positive results is the training of rural women in financial education. These training programs are organized to empower women farmers economically and enable their greater participation in agricultural development. Emphasis is placed on the importance of having a bank account, especially for women in the northern regions of Nigeria. To address this, Agent Banking was introduced as a solution for women in remote areas with limited access to banking facilities.

According to NGOs, this financial awareness gives them access to services such as savings, loans, and insurance. These services are believed to unlock opportunities for women to scale up their agricultural production. One of the organizations interviewed emphasized the importance of integrating financial literacy components into donor-funded agricultural programs. It is believed that this component will enable women to manage earnings, reinvest income, and benefit from insurance, bridging the gap between grassroots and policy levels while promoting sustainable agricultural growth. Participant A believes that organizing financial literacy and access to training programs is key to helping women understand the power of collective advocacy. This perspective is illustrated in the following quote:

*So, if they have a bank account with the Ministry of Agriculture, they understand that funds allocated to support women entrepreneurs are meant for them. So, when they realize this, they begin to champion gender-responsive budgeting. They begin to hold their representatives accountable.* (Participant A)

By demanding a fair share of government and agricultural funding designated for women, NGOs observe that these groups grow into larger cooperatives that strengthen their influence. This bottom-up advocacy helps close the gap in resource distribution. It combines grassroots advocacy by women's self-help groups with broader support from donor-funded programs, such as those led by the Food and Agricultural organization (FAO), World Food Programme (WFP) and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), to address women's financial and development needs more effectively. Advocacy trainings programs also focus on coordinating efforts among government officials, community leaders, and men to raise awareness about the importance of women's financial independence in enhancing agricultural development.

Another strategy employed by NGOs is the involvement of men in advocacy programs. NGOs believe that men's participation helps shift perceptions about gender roles in agriculture. By engaging men and educating them on the need to empower women as it benefits families and communities, these programs foster collaboration and gender equality. Participant C shared a practical example of this approach below:

*We had training on the use of biogas which we wanted to distribute to rural women. Some of their husbands came and participated and were educated. They saw the positive impact it had in the family, and we also were able to work with them in this initiative.* (Participant C).

This strategy emphasizes treating men as allies in advocacy efforts.; by directly inviting and educating them. Through gender education, NGOs help men understand that shared income between men and women leads to improved education for children, financial stability at home, which help reduce burdens on their wives. According to participant E, “*Where possible, we try as much as possible to have mixed groups, so that the men and the women are all sat together when the sessions are being held. There is no secrecy.*” NGOs are of the opinion that a gradual shift in mindset can be achieved by addressing men directly and emphasizing the consequences of limiting women's potential. Hence, they conduct sensitization sessions to address harmful cultural norms and beliefs. As the men are enlightened about

the adverse effects of confining women, such as diminished self-confidence and limited opportunities for their daughters to grow into confident individuals. These sessions also emphasize the need to reduce the dual burden on women, who often juggle responsibilities as mothers, farmers, caregivers, highlighting the associated impacts on their health. Men are encouraged to share household responsibilities, which reduces the physical and mental strain on women.

A common strategy used by all NGOs interview is the use of feminist men. In communities, NGOs look out for “feminist men” those who are eager to champion women empowerment programs in their communities, and these men become forerunners of such initiatives. Additionally, NGOs also established community-based assemblies in various political wards to provide platforms for discussing gender-related issues (e.g., violence) and other government matters. These initiatives aim to raise awareness about the unequal distribution of responsibilities, abuse, discrimination and other challenges. The aim is to alter societal perception and foster open dialogue for potential change in communities.

As NGOs continue to implement sensitization campaigns, they report observing gradual but positive changes in mindset. According to a statement by participant C “*We make the men understand that every project we bring is to try and reduce the stress women go through that is also affecting their health.*” In communities where such programs have been ongoing for years, men are beginning to recognize the benefits of supporting and empowering women. These incremental changes contribute to breaking down outdated cultural beliefs and fostering an environment of gender equality and shared responsibility. There has been a gradual but noticeable change in attitudes, and traditional ideologies have gradually been eroded as more women are given opportunities to participate. The reason for this shift is further explained in the following quote from a participant:

*Because at first, it was a barrier. But with awareness and sensation that is going on in the communities, the men are desensitized, and the women too are being sensitized. They are becoming aware. They (men) now know the importance of engaging these women.* (Participant F)

The approach has resulted in many men becoming allies and advocates of change. These men are then empowered to serve as agents of transformation within their communities, fostering a new era of gender inclusivity and progress.

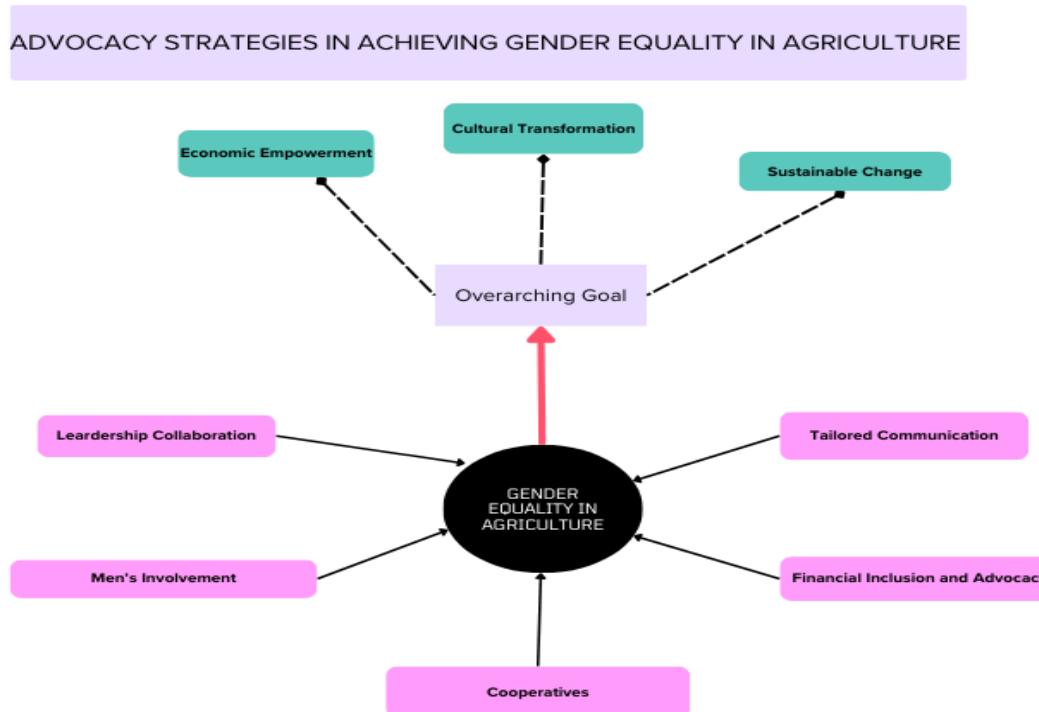
Another strategy used by NGOs involves engaging traditional and community opinion leaders as well as religious and cultural figures. These leaders are considered pivotal in shifting mindsets about women’s empowerment. This approach is highlighted in the following quote from participant A:

*So, it is keeping the gatekeepers in the loop, community leaders, religious leaders, and some of these communities, they value their religious leaders very, very highly. So, if the religious leader or the community leader says, ‘This intervention is happening, the women are going to participate,’ That's it. That is, it.* (Participant A)

NGOs report that by collaborating with the Council of Traditional Leaders (COTLA), they are able to engage with leaders at multiple levels, from lower-tier traditional figures such as Obas (a traditional title in the Southwest) to highly respected rulers like the Oni of Ife (a prominent Southwest leader) and Oba of Benin (a key figure in the South south) to Northern Emirs (Traditional leaders in the Northeast). They use these meetings with the leaders as an avenue to encourage them to consider the importance of women holding key leadership positions within traditional and political arenas. They try to convince them by pointing out that by allowing women to occupy positions of power, they can better advocate for women's rights, including access to land and other essential resources. Organizations believe that advocacy through traditional leaders tend to be impactful, as it results in greater participation of men and women in gender-based initiatives. It can also lead to more women being appointed to leadership roles within larger Commodity Associations (as mentioned in chapter 5.1.1) and other relevant platforms. These leaders, whether religious or cultural, hold noteworthy influence over their communities and their opinions often shape societal norms. Therefore, their support is critical for driving change. However, NGOs also acknowledge that their level of influence can pose challenges as the opinions of these authority figures are often binding and difficult to challenge, which can act as a barrier to proposed initiatives if deemed culturally or religiously inappropriate. Navigating such cultural and societal structures requires NGOs to engage in extensive dialogue and convincing efforts to ensure the support of these influential leaders. By securing their backing, NGOs leverage their influence to create a supportive environment for women's empowerment initiatives.

Overall, to achieve gender equality in rural communities in Nigeria, key strategies include local leadership collaboration, men's involvement, the formation of women's cooperatives, tailored communication, and financial inclusion. These strategies must be implemented, and financial inclusion. These strategies must be implemented to realize the overarching goal of economic empowerment, cultural transformation, and sustainable change (see Figure 7).

Figure 7: Conceptual diagram showing a summary of advocacy strategies implored by NGOs to achieve gender equality in agriculture.



Source: authors own

This chapter has explored how NGOs in Nigeria address gender inequality in agriculture through advocacy for Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB), through cultural, sensitive strategies, and the promotion of women's empowerment. Despite significant efforts to navigate cultural, religious, and societal barriers, deeply ingrained norms and gendered farming practices persist as significant obstacles. While limited agricultural budgets hinder the impact of these interventions, NGOs continue to address broader issues through adult education, gender-friendly tools, and community dialogue. By combining these approaches, they strive to foster gender equality, enhance rural women resilience through climate-smart practices, and create supportive environments for sustainable change across Nigeria. These findings offer valuable insights into the role of NGOs in promoting gender equality in agriculture around Nigeria.

## **6.0 Discussion**

This chapter critically examine the findings of this study, focusing on how NGOs in Nigeria navigate cultural and religious barriers in advocating for the implementation of Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB). The discussion contextualizes these findings with the study's theoretical framework, using African feminism and Marxist feminism to analyse systemic oppression and the intersectionality of gender-based discrimination. This chapter is structured around three key indicators, analysed through the lens of African feminism for the first two indicators and Marxist feminism for the third indicator, as follows: (i) Religious and Cultural Barriers: this section analyses how NGOs address the interplay between religious beliefs, cultural traditions, and gender equality initiatives. It highlights the necessity of balancing respect for cultural norms and challenging oppressive practices and leveraging the influence of progressive community leaders to foster women's empowerment. (ii) Restrictive Gender Norms: this section examines the role of patriarchal norms in perpetuating gender inequality. It also discusses NGOs engagement with men as allies to reduce cultural resistance while acknowledging women's fear of social stigma, divorce, and disrupted family dynamics. (iii) Access and control over resources and finance: this analyses the level of control women are allowed to have over productive resources such as land and other agricultural input and their rights to be financial independent. It also explores NGOs advocacy for legal reforms, education, and land rights, decision making power, and leadership positions for women. All of which are emphasized as critical to achieving GRB implementation in agriculture and success adoption of sustainable agriculture practices. These indicators provide a framework to understand the factors that influence the implementation of GRB in Nigeria and the efforts of NGOs in advocating for gender equality in agriculture.

### **6.1 Religious and Cultural Barriers**

This section addresses the profound influence of religious and cultural beliefs on gender equality in Nigeria. The findings reveal that these beliefs are deeply rooted in societal norms, perpetuating patriarchal ideologies that justify the subjugation of women and hinder their productivity. This aligns with Taiwo Sade (2010) who highlights that in predominantly conservative Islamic regions of northeastern Nigeria (places such as Kano, Katsina, Jigawa, Sokoto, and parts of Kaduna), women often lose their freedom of movement and ability to make independent economic decisions after marriage. As a result, activities like trading and small-scale businesses are typically mediated through their husbands, children, or male relatives, leaving women with minimal direct engagement with the market. Furthermore, cultural expectation requiring women to seek spousal permission before engaging in activities outside the home restricts their involvement in agricultural or empowerment initiatives.

These findings align with the literature by (Ufuoma & Matthew, 2010) who noted that cultural norms in Nigeria perpetuate gender inequality assigning higher value to men's contributions. Similarly, (Ugonna et al., 2024) that social norms, often justified by religious doctrines, limit women's autonomy and economic. Data emerged also shows that cultural and religious restrictions are experienced at varying levels depending on the region where the women are from, as each culture has its own parameter for

measuring the status of women. For instance, the study reveals that in the southern regions, where religious and cultural practices are less restrictive, and literacy rates are higher, affording women the opportunity of taking up leadership roles and engaging in economic activities. This regional disparity highlights how local interpretations of cultural and religious doctrines can either reinforce or challenge gender inequality. This corresponds with the findings of (Taiwo Sade, 2010), which indicate that the utilization of female labour in agriculture varies across Nigeria's agro-ecological zones based on socio-cultural factors. While female labour is widely accepted in the southeast and north-central regions, it is significantly less common in many parts of the core northern zones due to the influence of religious norms. This further aligns with the principles of African feminism, which emphasizes the need to contextualize African women's struggle within specific socio-cultural, religious, and historical realities, as opposed to applying universalist feminist frameworks (Sanya Osha, 2006). The theory further asserts that the unique experiences of African women are profoundly shaped by regional, cultural, and religious contexts. Therefore, African feminism underscores the importance of grounding analyses in the lived realities of African women to effectively understand and address these dynamics (Ouguir and Sadiqi, 2018). Secondly, due to the severe restrictions rural women face in the North, empowerment projects must consider cultural and religious sensitivities while working to challenge discriminatory norms. On the other hand, in the South, where women experience greater freedom, initiatives can build on existing progress to further advocate gender equality. Thus, emphasizing the importance of tailored, localized strategies that address regional and cultural specificities.

Findings also reveal that tension between gender equality and traditional norms is further compounded by how feminism and related initiatives are framed. Terms like "women empowerment" is often used as a more culturally acceptable alternative to "feminism" or "gender equality" to avoid negative connotations in some communities where it is often misunderstood as being synonymous with women challenging or overriding traditional gender roles. This linguistic strategy reflects the delicate balancing act required to navigate patriarchal systems founded on age long traditional orientation without directly challenging them, a tactic that underscores the depth of cultural and religious beliefs. These socio-cultural norms also influence governance in Nigeria, as noted by NGOs. This aligns with the literature by (Makinde et al., 2017), which highlights how the Gender and Equal Opportunities Bill in Nigeria aimed to eliminate all forms of discrimination and violence against women, by recognizing unpaid care work, ensure equal leadership opportunities, and improve access to health and economic resources. However, the Nigerian Senate voted against this bill, citing conflicts with religious and cultural beliefs. Furthermore, such beliefs have contributed to the justification of restricting women's financial independence. For instance, data reveals that the fear of financially empowered women becoming "disrespectful" and potentially disrupting traditional family dynamics underscores the extent to which deeply ingrained socio-cultural norms challenge gender equality efforts. This is particularly evident in regions with lower literacy rates and limited exposure to modernity.

This ideology, which has contributed to the domestic abuse of women, has presented NGOs with a complex dynamic to navigate. Increased financial autonomy, often achieved through agricultural activities, has, in some cases, heightened household tensions. Notably, some women, upon gaining financial independence, have utilized it as a means to escape prolonged domestic abuse. This decision, contrary to the prevailing narrative of disrespect for traditional and religious beliefs or reduced submissiveness, is a means of liberation from oppressive relationship. These findings align with the literature by Harrington Conner (2013), who argues that while an abuser is often empowered by his partner's financial dependence, the victim's autonomy is significantly diminished as her abuser leverages financial control to exert power over her. Economic dependence, therefore, plays a critical role in providing freedom from abuse. This perspective is further supported by Sukeri & Nik (2017), who suggest that divorces can serve as an effective strategy for women seeking to escape domestic violence. For this reason, the success of women's empowerment programs like Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) depends heavily on understanding and navigating cultural and religious nuances.

The results have also shown that, the role of religious and traditional leaders is pivotal in not only shaping societal norms and opinions but in determining the level of access NGOs can have to the women. In essence, local leaders wield significant influence within their communities, particularly in determining the extent of freedom or access to education women can attain. Their support is, therefore, critical for women empowerment or gender equality programs. NGOs in Nigeria acknowledged that securing the endorsement of these leaders to advocate for gender equality is essential for gaining community acceptance and ensuring the success of initiatives such as Gender Responsive Budgeting. However, NGOs have also emphasized the challenges posed by the significant power and influence held by traditional and religious leaders within their communities. According to participants, leaders who perceive gender equality as a threat to traditional beliefs and practices can act as substantial barriers to women's empowerment and gender equality initiatives especially when gender equality is perceived as a threat to local customs and beliefs, thereby reinforcing patriarchal dominance. This reflects how patriarchal authority, intertwined with both region and culture, perpetuates existing inequalities. According to Sam and Justina (2016), and Amusan et al. (2021), customary and religious laws continue to undermine constitutional protections for gender equality, highlighting the complex interplay between institutional frameworks and traditional authority.

This analysis demonstrates that the success of NGOs' gender equality initiatives depends on a nuanced understanding on the interplay between religious and cultural beliefs about gender equality. Therefore, advocates for gender equality must strike a balance between respecting cultural traditions and challenging oppressive norms. By leveraging the influence of progressive community leaders, NGOs can create inclusive spaces for women's empowerment.

## **6.2 Restrictive Femininity and Masculinity**

An important discussion that emerged from the result is restrictive femininity and masculinity, which underscores the tension between progressive gender equality efforts and societal norms that define

gender roles. The analysis shows that, Nigeria is a society where gender roles are rigidly defined and rarely questioned. Interview participants confirmed that, women are often seen primarily as mothers and homemakers, responsible for domestic chores and childbearing. The restrictive gender roles have significantly limited women's capabilities, eroding their self-esteem and creating mental barriers to personal growth and societal contribution. The biased understanding of domestic work as solely female responsibility has perpetuated a cycle where women bear the dual burden of household responsibilities and additional labour, such as farming. Hegemonic masculinity has hindered gender equality by discouraging men from embracing caregiving roles or supporting equitable practices. This concept of masculinity reinforces a divide where caregiving is perceived as a feminine and undervalued role. This aligns with the literature findings of Costenbader et al. (2025), who interviewed men in Nigeria (across different regions) about their views on caregiving. According to the interview reports, these men believe that a women's responsibility to fetch water, wash dishes, taking care of the children, prepare food, and handle all household tasks. They expressed that caregiving is not the role of a father but should be left to women. However, they noted that if a man loves his wife, he may assist with the household chores, although this assistance does not imply that such tasks are his responsibility.

These restrictive gender roles have also perpetuated a gendered system of agriculture. According to the report by some NGOs, in regions such as Taraba state, agricultural roles are distinctly gendered. Women in this region are confined to cultivating low-income crops like tomatoes, leafy vegetables, and groundnuts, while higher value cash crops, such as yams, cocoa, remain predominantly under male control. Although this report could not be fully substantiated by existing literatures, Miftahu and Habiba (2022), observed that in communities like Ibi (Taraba state), women are often allocated less fertile lands to grow their crops while the men take the fertile plots.

These findings align with Amusan et al. (2021), who argues that the sexist ideology and division of labour in Nigeria have resulted in the labelling of agricultural outputs, with cash crops being associated with men and food crops with women. Similarly, Sam and Justina (2016), contend that although discrimination varies across regions, social norms enforce rigid gender roles that privilege men in socio-economic and political spheres. This systemic imbalance hinders GRB advocacy as it excludes women from decision-making and leadership positions. African feminists address gender roles in agriculture by challenging patriarchal systems and advocating for structural reforms that empower women farmers (Iruonagbe, 2009). This approach combines critique of historical inequities with actionable solutions to dismantle barriers in land access, resource allocation, and decision-making power (Ufuoma & Matthew, 2010). Although, African feminism recognizes that gender roles cannot be understood in isolation from other factors like race, class, and colonial history. It seeks to dismantle patriarchal systems that devalue women while addressing broader issues such as racial hierarchies and economic inequality (Arndt, 2002; Amaefula, 2021).

Another significant strategy employed by NGOs to dismantle traditional gender roles involves engaging men as allies in advocacy initiatives. This approach is carried out by the deliberate inclusion of men in women's empowerment programs. Men are invited to participate actively, educate on importance of gender equality, and oriented to view women's empowerment as critical tool for fostering an equitable society. By involving men in these programs, NGOs create opportunities for them to understand and support the broader objectives of gender equality. Furthermore, this strategy allows men to play supervisory roles in women's activities, ensuring that empowerment interventions do not disrupt existing family structures. The exclusion of men from such programs could result in resistance, as findings show that they fear that these initiatives would introduce western ideologies to their wives, potentially leading to family discord. Consequently, involving men alleviates these concerns, reducing the likelihood of opposition and fostering a supportive environment for women's participation in empowerment programs. This approach underscores that women's empowerment is not aimed at opposing men or encouraging rebellion against family dynamics. Instead, it emphasizes fostering independence among women, which contributes to financially stable homes and the development of a society where women are valued and respected.

Results also indicated that, NGOs have recorded success in some regions of the country, where men in rural communities are beginning to develop a better understanding of the need for women empowerment. This gradual shift in mindset aligns with one of African feminist principles, which seeks to negotiate within patriarchal systems to expand opportunities for women without entirely rejecting these structures (Arndt, 2002). African feminists encourage men to recognize and understand the specific way which women are oppressed, which may differ from the broader oppression experienced by African people. By fostering gender reforms, African feminism advocates for including men as allies rather than adversaries. This collaborative approach underscores the shared benefits of dismantling restrictive gender roles, emphasizing that gender equality enhances societal progress for all.

It is important to also note that, while NGOs empowerment initiatives bring significant relief to women, findings highlight that they also encounter resistance among women in certain regions of the country, due to fears of divorce, deviation from custom and social stigma. These fears point to the mental grip of societal norms, resulting in a conflict of interest. For instance, literature highlights that in Rwanda, despite the positive impact of Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) on women farmers, many face a "dilemma" in exercising their constitutional rights, fearing repercussions in their marriage (Kagaba, 2015). Similarly, NGOs in Nigeria observe that despite the hardship women endure in households with rigid traditional gender roles, many women who experience physical abuse view such conditions as culturally inevitable. These perceptions stem from witnessing similar experiences in their mothers' lives and a belief that change is unattainable. This phenomenon aligns with African feminist discourse which critically examines traditional cultural practices without rejecting them outright, recognizing that different classes of women might view these traditions differently (Sanya Osha, 2006).

This section highlights the pervasive influence of patriarchal norms in shaping gender roles, which perpetuate systemic gender inequality, particularly in rural Nigeria. It also analysed the effort of NGOs in addressing these challenges by using men as allies in their initiatives. This approach seeks to mitigate cultural resistance to women's empowerment, alleviating fears of disruptions to family dynamics. Through the active engagement of men in advocacy and education, NGOs work to create a supportive environment where gender equality can be achieved.

### **6.3 Access and Control over Resources and Finances**

This section examines the degree of access to and control over resources and finances available to women within a capitalist system deeply intertwined within societal norms that privilege patriarchal structures. Existing literature reveal that despite women contributing approximately 65% to subsistence and livestock production, they face systemic gender disparities in land access, credit, and education (Ufuoma & Matthew, 2010). Marxist feminism contextualizes these inequalities within the capitalist and patriarchal structure that perpetuate class oppression. Women are not only oppressed as individuals but also through capitalist and private property systems. They contend that women's right will be realized through reformation of the existing capitalist framework in which a significant portion of women's labour remains unrecognized (Robinson, 2018). A different dynamic emerges in Northern Nigeria, where findings reveal that women can own land but are often pressured to handover control to male relatives. This illustrates how capitalist and patriarchal structures adapt to local traditions while maintaining exploitative outcomes. Results further reveals that low literacy levels among women in Northern Nigeria exacerbate their inability to effectively manage and utilize land. This limitation constrains women's ability to challenge the interplay of patriarchal and capitalist exploitation. From Marxist feminist perspective, this inequality is a manifestation of class oppression within capitalist systems, where private property reinforces patriarchal family structures. Women's labour, often unrecognized and undervalued, sustains male authority and perpetuates economic dominance (UNFPA & UNIFEM, 2006). Consequently, the systemic exclusion of women from resource control not only marginalizes women farmers economically but also entrenches broader structures of inequality within the agricultural sector.

Findings show that financial independence among rural women farmers not only strengthens their decision-making power but also improves their access to productive resources such as land, loans, seeds and fertilizers. These resources, in turn, enable women farmers to make autonomous decisions regarding agricultural production, health and education. Despite these potential benefits, structural barriers persist, particularly in Nigeria's financial systems, where access to loans often require land as collateral, a requirement that disproportionately disadvantages women. To overcome this challenge, rural women tend to favour grants provided by NGOs, as these offer a much-needed support without financial risk. This aligns with literature by Precious (2021), who highlights that NGOs have demonstrated greater efficacy in helping women deal with this complexity than the federal and state government. As a result, women are more likely to participate in programs led by NGOs rather than engage in political activities since government equality measures tend to be less impactful for women compared to men.

NGOs have taken a proactive role in advocating for women's ownership of resources and financial independence, primarily through engagements with policymakers. These efforts include organizing budget reviews, capacity building workshops, and training of policymakers, trade unions, and government officials.

A key focus of such advocacy is the introduction of mandatory quotas to ensure women's inclusion in agricultural intervention programs. By institutionalizing a minimum allocation of resources and opportunities for women. NGOs have also been instrumental in equipping stakeholders with knowledge and skills necessary to implement Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB). They believe these trainings will help achieve an integrated, gender specific consideration in budget allocation which will foster women's empowerment and improve their access to essential resources and services. Such interventions are consistent with Martins Robert (2023), who underscore the transformant role of NGOs in raising awareness, influence policy, and driving positive societal change at local, national, and international levels. Similarly Kabita and Binash (2024), highlights the potential of GRB advocacy to promote gender equality and women's empowerment by addressing systemic gaps in fiscal policy, thereby advancing social inclusion and economic development. NGOs have also provided legal aid to support women in securing inheritance rights (land ownership), encouraged cooperative formations among women farmers to help increase their access and control over finances. Additionally, sustainable agricultural promoted by NGOs such as Cluster farming, have allowed women gain access to land and adopt low-cost, climate-appropriate techniques. These initiatives not only enhance women's economic agency but also strengthen their resilience through organized market access. Such efforts by NGOs align with the findings of Chanyau & Rosenberg (2023), who document the impact of NGOs in South Africa, particularly through agroecology initiatives in the Eastern Cape. These initiatives promote sustainable, cost-effective farming practices while empowering women farmers through participatory approaches that enhance crop diversity, productivity, and socio-economic resilience. Beyond agricultural outcome the movement addresses broader issues of patriarchy and gender-based violence, advocating for equitable access to land and resources for women. These interventions not only empower women economically but also contribute to broader societal transformation by challenging patriarchal structure and advancing gender equality.

This section has examined the extent of women's access to productive resources such as land, agricultural inputs, and financial independence, highlighting how patriarchal norms in Nigeria perpetuate their exclusion, highlighting how landownership and decision-making. It emphasizes the significant role of NGOs in mitigating gender-based disparities by advocating for legal reforms, enhancing women's education, and promoting land rights. The analysis underscores the importance of empowering women through cooperatives, advancing their decision-making power, and integrating Gender Responsive Budgeting (GRB) into agricultural policies to ensure equity and sustainable farming practices. Achieving true gender equity, however, requires collective efforts to challenge societal norms and reshape

economic structures, enabling women to meaningfully contribute to a more inclusive and sustainable society.

#### **6.4 Study Limitation**

The study faced several limitations. Firstly, conducting online interviews restricted the observation of non-verbal cues like gestures and mood, which could have added depth to the findings. However, this method still yielded detailed responses that address the research questions. Secondly, the limited sample size, focusing solely on 10 NGO representatives, excluded the inclusion of women farmers who are the recipients of these advocacy efforts, leading to NGO centered research rather than a holistic view of GRB advocacy. Additionally, the absence of direct observation of GRB dialogue meetings or community projects reduced contextual insights. Nevertheless, online interviews helped capture participants' experiences.

## **7.0 Conclusion**

This study set out to explore how NGOs in Nigeria navigate rural and religious barriers in advocating for GRB. The findings suggest that African feminism provides a suitable framework for analyzing gender equality in Nigeria, as it acknowledges the diverse cultural and religious landscape and the need for context-specific solutions to the women's challenges. This theory also highlights the role of men in either facilitating or obstructing women's empowerment efforts. Moreover, it underscores the importance of respecting social-cultural norms while challenging those that are detrimental to women's well-being. While existing literature addresses GRB and gender equality often focusing on women farmers, this research offers a broader perspective by examining NGOs' strategies in advocating for marginalized women and the influence of societal norms on their success. Additionally, the study highlights the negative impact of Nigeria's tripartite legal system on women's empowerment, as it perpetuates harmful cultural practices. The findings also align with Marxist feminist perspective, which emphasizes the structural economic inequalities that hinder women's access to resources and financial independence.

GRB in agriculture has the potential to enhance women's productivity and create equal opportunities. However, it cannot, on its own, dismantle the cultural and religious norms that shape gender roles, inheritance rights, and women's access to resources. NGOs play a crucial role in bridging this gap through grassroots interventions such as sensitization campaigns, financial literacy programs, and advocacy against domestic abuse. However, government shortcomings in GRB implementation, weak monitoring systems, and outdated policies remain significant obstacles. Thus, gaining support from local traditional leaders is critical for achieving meaningful gender equality and women's empowerment at the grassroots level.

Although progress in GRB implementation in Nigeria is slow, the success seen in some states, driven by NGO efforts, serve as a beacon for hope. Finally, this research reveals that while NGOs advocate for gender equality through GRB, they often find themselves addressing deeper systemic issues such as domestic violence, mental health challenges, and low self-esteem, which significantly impacts women at the grassroots level.

### **7.1 Recommendations for Further Studies**

Future studies should assess the effectiveness of various NGO strategies such as sensitization, advocacy, and education in overcoming gender-based barriers and advancing GRB at the grassroots level across different Nigerian states. Also, long-term studies are needed to track the impact of these interventions over time and identify factors that contribute to sustained women's empowerment.

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