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## Policy Brief

### **Promoting gender inclusivity in Nigerian food wholesale market leadership: Issues for policy action**

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## Introduction

Gender inequality remains a pervasive global issue cutting across multiple sectors including organizational leadership. Despite long standing efforts to advocate for more female involvement in leadership, women still play limited or background leadership roles in many spheres of the economy. In addition, while increasing attention is being paid to female leadership in the corporate world (Ayman & Korabik, 2010; Catalyst, 2020, Gooty et al., 2023, Minehart et al., 2020), there is much less empirical evidence on gender roles and determinants in non corporate organizations generally and particularly in developing regions. One of such important but informal spaces are food markets where women are present and often the majority of food traders. Food markets provide an important source of livelihood to the millions of traders and associated service providers operating within them. They are also the main source of food for the vast majority in developing regions (Liverpool-Tasie et al., 2024; Market, 2014, Robinson and Yoshida, 2016). Despite their importance, there is a dearth of empirical research on food market governance and the extent of female engagement therein. Thus, this study contributes to filling this gap by exploring the extent, drivers and impacts of female engagement in the governance of food wholesale markets. Using data from ~470 commodity section associations in ~300 food wholesale markets across seven Nigerian states and Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). The three focal commodities whose markets are studied (fish, tomatoes and green leafy

vegetables) are sources of important macronutrients, vitamins and minerals and the study states are major regional producers of at least one of the priority commodities (APS, 2022) and represent a wide diversity

of agro-ecological, and socio-economic conditions in Nigeria (see Figure 1). The data used in the analysis was collected via a structured questionnaire administered to a focus group consisting of market leaders and traders between July 2023 and February 2024.

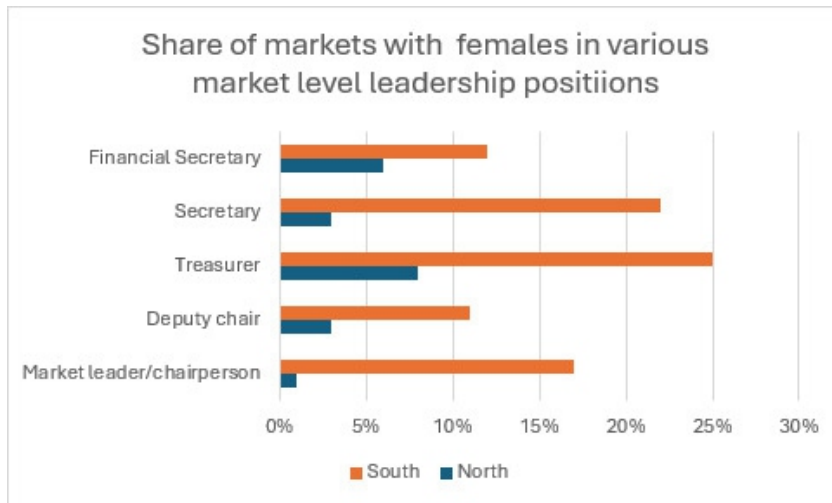
## Understanding gender differences in leadership positions in the wholesale markets

We explore female engagement in market leadership at two levels: the overall market level and at the level of commodity trader associations within markets. We measure female engagement in three ways at each level. First whether the overall market/commodity section leader is female? Whether there is at least one female in the market/commodity section leadership committee and the share of the leadership committee that is female at both levels.



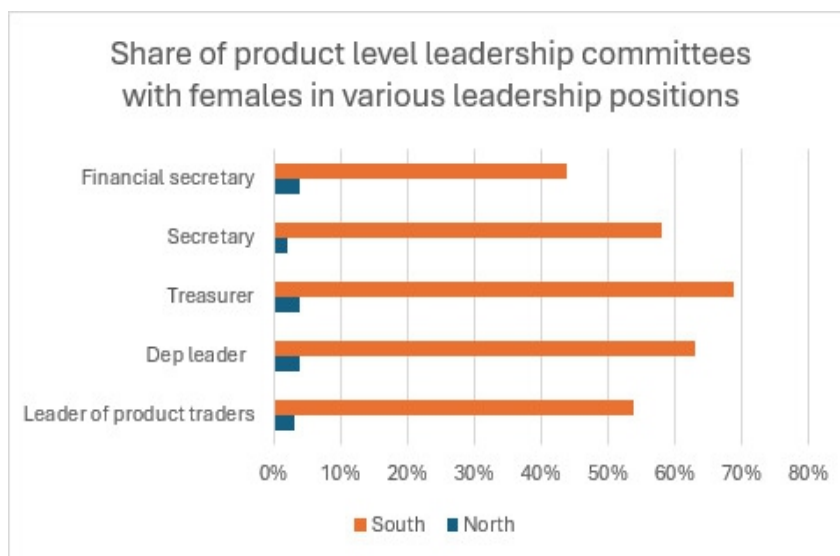
Figure 1: Map of Nigeria showing the eight study locations

**Fig. 2: Female participation in overall market leadership**



*Source: Authors calculation*

**Figure 3: Female engagement in product level leadership**



*Source: Authors calculation*

Figures 2 and 3 present the extent of female leadership in the study markets and reveal four key points

1. Female engagement in leadership (at any level) is more common in markets in the south than markets in the more conservative northern region
2. When women are engaged in overall market governance, they are not in positions of chair or deputy chair. In the north, the market chairpersons and deputy chairpersons are male in 99% and 97% of markets and in the south, these figures are ~85% and ~90% respectively.

3. While women are not in overall leadership positions in the market, women are most commonly found in positions related to finance such as the treasurer or financial secretary in the overall market or commodity section leadership committees.
4. While females remain largely absent across all positions at commodity section level in the north, their presence in non chairperson leadership positions occurs in most markets in the south. For example, at commodity level, only five percent or less of all market associations with various positions (other than chairperson or deputy chair) had women in such positions in northern markets. This contrasts with the south where ~65%, ~70% and ~45% of markets with commodity specific associations with executive members have a female in positions of deputy chairperson, treasurer, and financial secretary, respectively.

### **Addressing gender disparity in leadership of the wholesale markets**

A regression analysis of the factors associated with female engagement in leadership revealed that three factors are key for higher female participation in leadership in Nigerian food wholesale markets:

1. Higher female participation as traders in the food wholesale markets
2. Cultural norms with markets in the south having much higher female participation in leadership than markets in the north
3. Having market and commodity section leadership determined by election vs. appointment or by inheritance increases the likelihood of female engagement in market leadership.

The regression analysis also shows that female engagement in market leadership is significantly and positively associated with the provision of key hygiene services (i.e. toilets) and security services (number of security guards and having security at tight) expected to improve the functioning of markets and the experience of traders and customers.

### **Policy implications and recommendations**

We offer five recommendations for consideration by policy makers and development partners based on the analysis done<sup>1</sup>

1. Promotion of inclusive leadership selection processes such as elections for leadership positions rather than relying on appointments or traditional heritage-based methods. A transparent and democratic selection process could promote more equal opportunities for women.
2. Encouraging more female engagement in food trading in markets is likely to increase their interest in engaging in leadership. This could include policies and/or the provision of loans to encourage and support women to access trading spaces in markets or to expand their businesses.
3. Engaging with local and national governments to advocate for policies that promote gender equality in leadership at the market level can drive systemic change. This could include lobbying for legal reforms, gender quotas, and financial incentives for markets that demonstrate progress in female leadership representation.

4. Having specific programs targeting markets in rural areas and more conservative regions (such as the north) could be implemented to challenge traditional gender roles and promote female leadership. These programs could include awareness campaigns, leadership training for women, and the introduction of policies that encourage gender diversity and support women who engage in leadership. Our data suggests that there are opportunities for learning from states with norms/cultural backgrounds that are more similar. For example,
  - a. Females account for ~30% of traders in the northern markets ~10% in Borno, Kaduna and Kebbi to ~35% in FCT and Plateau. However, having at least one female involved in market leadership is very low in Kebbi (0%) compared to 15% in Kaduna and ~20% in Borno (also in the core north) and 35% and 70% in Plateau and Abuja respectively. Can Kebbi and Kaduna learn from Borno?
  - b. Though most food traders in the southern wholesale markets were female (80%), apart from Oyo State where 65% of the markets have at least one female in the overall market leadership, the shares are lower in states such as Ebonyi (40%) and Cross River (55%). Can Ebonyi and Cross Rivers learn from Oyo?
5. Creating a market environment that supports women's ability to balance their leadership roles with their other work and family responsibilities is essential. Policies such as flexible working arrangements and leadership training focused on diversity and inclusion can help create an enabling environment for female leaders to thrive while allowing women receive necessary support to manage their multiple responsibilities.

These recommendations are complementary (with significant overlap) and will require coordinated efforts across multiple stakeholders.

<sup>1</sup> The full details of the data used, analysis, findings and recommendations are available in the full paper.

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