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## **Gender Dynamics of Poverty Coping Strategies Among Farming Households in Akoko South-West Ondo State, Nigeria**

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*Received: 10-10-2025    Reviewed: 12-11-2025    Accepted: 15-12-2025*

### **Abstract**

This study examines gender-based differences in poverty coping strategies among rural farming households in Akoko South Local Government Area, Ondo State, Nigeria. A multi-stage sampling technique was used to select 120 respondents, comprising equal numbers of male- and female-headed households from six randomly chosen communities. Primary data were collected through structured questionnaires and analyzed using descriptive statistics, the Foster–Greer–Thorbecke (FGT) poverty index, and logistic regression models. Findings reveal significant gender disparities in household characteristics, economic activities, and poverty levels. The average age of female-headed households was 44.7 years, compared to 53.4 years for male-headed households. Educational attainment was relatively high, with 56.7% of female and 46.6% of male household heads having tertiary education. Male-headed households recorded higher average incomes (₦56,664,100) and a lower poverty incidence (30%) than female-headed households (53.4%). The FGT index further indicated a greater poverty depth among female-headed households (0.534). Livelihood activities differed, with 70% of male-headed households engaged in farm labour and an equal proportion of female-headed households involved in the sale of agricultural products. Logistic regression identified marital status, income level, and participation in crop processing as significant determinants of poverty status. Reducing the number of daily meals was the most common coping strategy. The study highlights the need for gender-responsive rural development policies that promote equitable access to credit, productive resources, and training. Targeted empowerment programmes for female-headed households can strengthen resilience and support sustainable poverty reduction in rural communities.

**Keywords:** Gender, Dynamics, Poverty, Coping, Strategies, Households.

## **1. Introduction**

A household refers to individuals—related or unrelated—who share a dwelling unit, meals, and housekeeping arrangements (World Bank, 2001). Membership is based on co-residence rather than kinship; some members may be absent for extended periods (Posel et al., 2006). Typically, a household has a designated head responsible for income generation and decision-making. While household heads are usually male, female heads often emerge in the absence of a male member, resulting in female-headed households (Ngwenya, 2008).

Men and women experience poverty differently due to their distinct social roles, constraints, and priorities. Women often face socio-cultural barriers limiting their access to land, capital, services, decision-making authority, and representation in economic and political spheres (Ministry of Finance and Economic Development, 2008; Mofed, 2008).

Poverty is a central marker of underdevelopment, reflecting inadequate access to resources and dysfunctional economic, ecological, and governance systems (Central Bank of Nigeria, 1999; Onibokun and Kumuyi, 1996). It deprives individuals of the ability to achieve their full potential and contributes to the "vicious cycle" wherein poverty perpetuates intergenerational disadvantage.

In Nigeria today, poverty remains acute. As of April 2025, 75.5% of rural dwellers live below the poverty line, compared to 41.3% in urban areas (World Bank, 2025). Overall, over 54% of Nigerians are estimated to be impoverished (World Bank, 2025). Additionally, 63% of the population is multidimensionally poor—72% in rural zones versus 42% in urban areas—according to the 2022 National MPI (National Bureau of Statistics, 2023).

Poverty is closely tied to malnutrition and poor health outcomes. Nigeria's under-five mortality rate was 105 deaths per 1,000 live births in 2023 (WHO, 2024), and 27% of African children under five are affected by severe food poverty, with many from Nigeria (AP, 2024). Infant mortality remains high at 53.7 per 1,000 live births in 2024 (Macrotrends, 2025).

Nigeria's rural poor—commonly farmers and informal traders—continue to bear the brunt of poverty. National social investment programs (e.g., N-Power, Conditional Cash Transfer, Government Enterprise and Empowerment Program, Home-Grown School Feeding) initiated since 2015 have reached millions (National Social Investment Office, 2024). However, poverty persists and deepens across the country.

### **1.1 Problem statement**

Despite numerous government interventions and poverty alleviation programs, poverty remains a significant and persistent challenge among farming households in rural Nigeria. The agricultural sector, which is the mainstay of rural livelihoods, continues to experience low productivity and limited profitability, contributing to the high incidence of poverty. Recent data indicate that approximately 38.9% of Nigerians live below the national poverty line, with rural populations disproportionately affected (World Bank, 2025). Additionally, 63% of Nigerians are multidimensionally poor, with deprivation most severe in health, education, and living standards—conditions that are particularly acute in rural farming communities (National Bureau of Statistics, 2023; OPHI, 2022).

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Gender disparities further compound the poverty challenge. Female-headed households often face systemic barriers to accessing resources, credit, land, and extension services, which limit their ability to adopt effective coping strategies or improve their economic conditions. Yet, most existing poverty-related studies focus primarily on macro-level indicators and production-side constraints, with limited attention paid to how male and female farming households differentially experience and respond to poverty at the grassroots level.

Understanding the gendered dimensions of poverty and the coping mechanisms adopted by rural farmers is essential for designing inclusive and effective poverty reduction strategies. This study therefore seeks to examine the gender-specific coping strategies employed by farming households in Akoko South-West Local Government Area, Ondo State, Nigeria. It addresses the critical gap in empirical evidence regarding how gender influences poverty experiences, access to support, and adaptive capacity among rural agricultural households. This study seeks to investigate gender-based poverty coping mechanisms among farming households in Akoko South-West Local Government Area of Ondo State, Nigeria, by addressing the following key research questions:

1. What are the socio-economic characteristics of male- and female-headed farming households in the study area?
2. What income-generating activities are predominantly undertaken by male and female in the study area?
3. What are the main determinants of poverty status among rural farming households in the study area?
4. Which socio-economic and demographic factors significantly influence the poverty status of respondents?
5. What coping strategies are adopted by farming households to mitigate the effects of poverty, and how do these differ by gender?

### **1.2 Objectives of the Study**

The primary objective of this study is to examine the poverty coping strategies employed by farming households in Akoko South-West Local Government Area of Ondo State, Nigeria, with a focus on gender-based differentials. The study specifically aims to:

1. Describe the socio-economic characteristics of male and female farming households in the study area;
2. Identify and analyze the various income-generating activities undertaken by male and female respondents;
3. Assess the poverty status among rural farming households disaggregated by gender;
4. Investigate the socio-economic and demographic factors influencing poverty status among farming households;

5. Ascertain the poverty coping strategies adopted by male- and female-headed households in the study area.

### **1.3 Justification of the Study**

Nigeria continues to grapple with high levels of poverty, particularly among its rural population, despite years of government and donor-led interventions. Recent statistics reveal that poverty is not only widespread but also multidimensional in nature, with rural farming households being among the most affected (World Bank, 2025; National Bureau of Statistics, 2023). While many studies have explored the causes and manifestations of poverty, there is a significant gap in literature regarding the gender-differentiated coping mechanisms used by rural farmers to navigate poverty.

This study is justified on several grounds:

- i. **Policy Relevance:** It will provide empirical evidence to guide the formulation of gender-sensitive poverty alleviation strategies and programs.
- ii. **Literature Gap:** The study addresses the dearth of localized and gender-disaggregated data on coping strategies among farming households.
- iii. **Development Planning:** Understanding how gender shapes poverty experiences and responses is vital for effective rural development planning and resource allocation.
- iv. **Sustainable Livelihoods:** The insights gained will be valuable in designing interventions that enhance the resilience of vulnerable groups, especially female-headed households, thereby promoting inclusive agricultural development and food security.

In sum, this study is crucial for policymakers, development practitioners, and researchers interested in targeted poverty reduction, gender equity, and sustainable rural development in Nigeria.

## **2. Research Method**

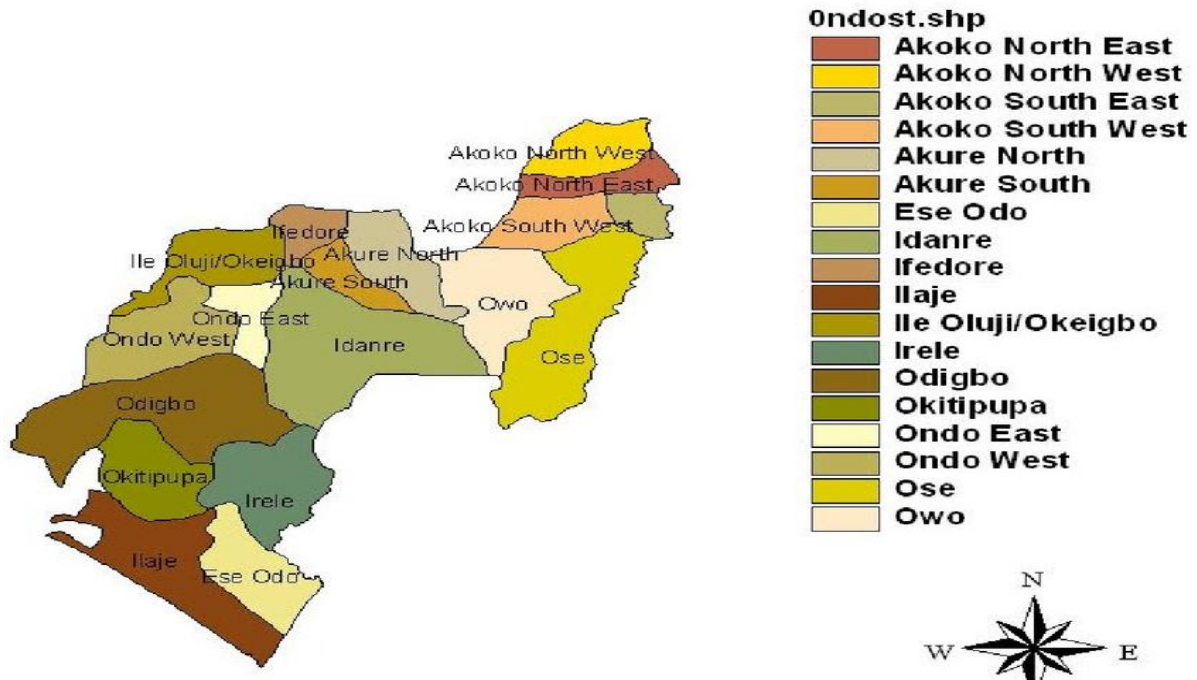
### **2.1 The Study Area**

This study was conducted in Akoko South-West Local Government Area (LGA) of Ondo State, Nigeria. The administrative headquarters is located in Oka-Akoko, and the LGA comprises fifteen communities: Akungba, Supare, Oka, Ayegunle, Oba, Ikun, Okia, Korowa, Ikese, Iwonrin, Ebo, Owalusin, Ayepe, Okela, and Bolorunduro. Geographically, the LGA covers an estimated area of 226 square kilometers and recorded a population of 229,486 during the 2006 national census (National Population Commission [NPC], 2006).

Akoko South-West LGA is bordered to the north by Akoko North-East LGA, to the south by Ose and Owo LGAs, and to the west by Ekiti State. The area is predominantly agrarian, with agriculture serving as the primary economic activity. Farmers engage in the cultivation of both food and cash crops, including cassava, rice, yam, plantain, cocoa, cashew,

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palm produce, citrus, coffee, soybeans, cowpea, timber, and kolanut. Among these, cocoa remains the leading cash crop and a major source of non-oil export earnings for Nigeria. Notably, Ondo State contributes approximately 60% of Nigeria’s total cocoa output, highlighting the state's pivotal role in the national cocoa value chain (International Institute of Tropical Agriculture [IITA], 2007).



Source:(Ojo, O.S. 2025)

**Figure-1.** Map showing the location of Akoko South-west Local Government Area within Ondo State.

**2.2 Sampling Technique**

A multi-stage sampling technique was employed for this study. In the first stage, six communities were randomly selected from the fifteen (15) communities within Akoko South-West Local Government Area. In the second stage, a total of twenty (20) respondents were randomly selected from each of the chosen communities, comprising ten (10) female-headed and ten (10) male-headed households. This yielded a total sample size of 120 respondents—60 female household heads and 60 male household heads—for the study.

**2.3 Data Analysis**

Data for analysis were generated primarily using interview scheduled and structured questionnaires administered to one hundred and twenty (120) respondents selected for the study. Data analysis was achieved through the use of descriptive statistics, the Foster-Greer-Thorbecke (FGT) model and Logistic regression model.

**2.4 Analytical Technique**

Data for the study were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Objectives (i), (ii) and (v) were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as mean, percentages and frequency distribution. Objective (iii) was analyzed using Foster-Greer-Thorbecke (FGT) model while Objective (iv) was analyzed using Logistic regression model

**2.5 Model Specifications**

**2.6 Foster-Greer-Thorbecke (FGT) Poverty Index**

To assess the poverty status of rural farming households in the study area, the Foster-Greer-Thorbecke (FGT) poverty index was employed. This model is widely used in poverty analysis due to its capacity to capture not only the incidence of poverty but also its depth and severity. The general form of the FGT poverty measure is given as:

$$P_{\alpha}(y, z) = \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^q \left( \frac{z - y_i}{z} \right)^{\alpha} \dots \dots \dots (1)$$

Where: n = total number of households in population, q = the number of poor household's Z = the poverty line for the household, y<sub>i</sub> = household income, α = poverty aversion parameter and takes on value 0, 1, 2

$\left( \frac{z - y_i}{z} \right)$  = proportion short fall in income

Below the poverty line

Determining the poverty index When α = 0 in FGT, the expression becomes:

$$P_0 \left( \frac{1}{n} \right) q = \frac{1}{n} \dots \dots \dots (2)$$

This is called the Incidence of poverty or headcount index, which measures the proportion of the population that is poor i.e. falls below the poverty line.

When α = 1 in FGT, the expression becomes:

$$P_1 = \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^q \left( \frac{z - y_i}{z} \right) \dots \dots \dots (3)$$

This is called Poverty depth or Poverty gap index, which measures the extent to which individuals fall below the poverty line as a proportion of the poverty line. When α = 2 in FGT, the expression becomes:

$$P_2 = \frac{1}{n} \sum_{i=1}^q \left( \frac{z - y_i}{z} \right)^2 \dots \dots \dots (4)$$

This is the *poverty severity index*, which gives more weight to the poorest among the poor by squaring the poverty gap, thereby accounting for inequality among the poor.

**2.6.0. Poverty Line and Classification**

This study adopts the World Bank's international poverty line of USD \$1.90 per capita per day (post-2020 benchmark) as the absolute poverty threshold. Using the prevailing exchange rate

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at the time of the study (₦1,400 per USD), this corresponds to approximately **₦2,660 per capita per day**. Per capita daily household expenditure was computed based on total household expenditure. Households with per capita daily expenditure below ₦2,660 were classified as poor, while those at or above this threshold were considered non-poor.

**2.7. Logit Regression Model**

To identify the determinants of poverty among rural farming households, the logistic regression model was employed. This model is appropriate when the dependent variable is binary—in this case, indicating whether a household is poor or not.

Let the dependent variable  $Y_i$  represents the poverty status of the  $i^{th}$  household, such that:

$Y_i=1$  if the household is classified as poor

$Y_i=0$  if the household is classified as non-poor

The probability of being poor depends on a set of variables listed below and denoted as  $x$  so that:

$$\text{Prob} = (Y_i = 1) = F(\beta'x) \quad \text{----- (1)}$$

$$\text{Prob} = (Y_i = 0) = 1 - F(\beta'x) \quad \text{----- (2)}$$

Using the logistic distribution, we have:

$$Z_i = \ln \left( \frac{p_i}{1-p_i} \right) + \alpha + \beta_1 X_{1i} + \beta_2 X_{2i} + \beta_3 X_{3i} + \beta_4 X_{4i} + \beta_5 X_{5i} + \beta_6 X_{6i} + \beta_7 X_{7i} + \beta_8 X_{8i} + \beta_9 X_{9i} + \epsilon_i \quad \text{----- (3)}$$

Where,  $Z_i$  is the log odds of the  $i^{th}$  household,  $\alpha$  is constant,  $\beta_1, \beta_2, \beta_3,$  are coefficients of independent variables  $X_{1i}, X_{2i}, X_{3i}$ , and  $\epsilon_i$  is an error term for the  $i^{th}$  household.

The explanatory variables specified as determinants of poverty are:

$X_1$  = Age of the household head in years;

$X_2$  = Marital status of the household head (D = 1 If married, 0 if other wise);

$X_3$  = Educational level of headed households in years;

$X_4$  = Household size;

$X_5$  = Year of experience

$X_6$  = Size of farm

$X_7$ =Access to health (1=access, 0= do not have access)

$X_8$  = Cooperative association (= 1 if yes, 0 if no).

$X_9$  = Access to credit (= 1 if yes, 0 if no).;

$X_{10}$  = Crop processing (= 1 if yes, 0 if no);

$X_{11}$ = Income (N)

## **2.8. Poverty Coping Strategies Use Index (PCSUI)**

The Poverty Coping Strategies Use Index (PCSUI) was used to assess the extent of utilization of coping strategies by rural farming households in the study area. This index is crucial for understanding the mechanisms that households employed to cope with poverty and for identifying potential intervention points for policy makers and stakeholders.

To compute the PCSUI, coping strategies were first ranked based on their frequency of use. Each strategy was scored on a four-point scale as follows: frequently used (3), occasionally used (2), rarely used (1), and not used (0). This approach was adopted from Oluwatayo, (2008) and subsequently modified to suit the context of the study.

The formula for calculating the PCSUI is presented as follows:

$$\text{PCSUI} = (N_1 \times 3) + (N_2 \times 2) + (N_3 \times 1) + (N_4 \times 0)$$

Where:

PCSUI = Poverty Coping Strategies Use Index

$N_1$  = Number of households frequently employing a particular coping strategy

$N_2$  = Number of households occasionally employing a particular coping strategy

$N_3$  = Number of households rarely employing a particular coping strategy

$N_4$  = Number of households not employing the coping strategy at all

The PCSUI scores were subsequently ranked to reflect their relative significance, thereby offering a clear view of the most frequently used coping strategies among the surveyed households in the study area.

## **3. Result and Discussion**

### **3.1 Socio-economic characteristics**

The socio-economic characteristics of the respondents considered in this study include age, marital status, household size, educational attainment, years of marketing experience, business size, access to credit, and sources of credit. The study revealed that female household heads had a mean age of 44.7 years, while their male counterparts averaged 53.4 years, indicating that both groups remain within economically active age brackets. This suggests a strong capacity for participation in income-generating activities. Recent studies support this, highlighting continued productivity among rural men and women in similar age ranges across Nigeria (Awoyemi et al., 2023; Otekunrin et al., 2023; Bigwa and Ibrahim, 2024 ; Ojo, 2024). These findings underscore the age-related potential of farming households to engage actively in poverty reduction efforts.

An analysis of the marital status of respondents revealed that 56.6% of female-headed households and 90.0% of male-headed households were married. Marital status, particularly being in a union, has been shown to influence household labour dynamics positively. In

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agricultural households, married couples often engage in joint labour contributions, which enhances productivity and reduces dependence on external labour sources. This observation aligns with recent findings by Adedokun et al., (2021), who reported that household structure and marital stability significantly improve labour efficiency and resource management among farming households in rural Nigeria.

The result of household size revealed that 46.7% of male-headed households comprised between 6 and 10 members, while 50.0% of female-headed households had between 1 and 5 members. This pattern indicates the potential availability of family labour within many households, which could reduce reliance on hired labour and subsequently minimize production costs. This finding is consistent with recent research suggesting that moderately sized households contribute significantly to smallholder farming systems by providing necessary labour, thereby boosting productivity and supporting the adoption of improved agricultural practices (Oyinbo et al., 2022; Adeniyi and Ogundipe, 2021). However, larger household sizes may also place greater pressure on household resources by increasing consumption needs and dependency ratios, which can aggravate poverty and food insecurity—particularly in economically vulnerable settings (Adepoju and Oyewole, 2023). Therefore, while household size may present opportunities for economic efficiency through labour contributions, its net effect on household welfare is influenced by broader socio-economic conditions.

The results indicated that 56.7% of female respondents and 46.7% of male respondents had attained tertiary education. This suggests that a substantial proportion of the farming household heads in the study area are literate, which enhances their ability to access, comprehend, and adopt agricultural innovations. Higher educational attainment is also associated with better health awareness and informed decision-making, which can contribute to reduced illness incidence and, ultimately, lower levels of poverty.

These findings are consistent with those of Olutumise and Apata (2021), who observed that a significant proportion of food crop farmers in southwest Nigeria had formal education, facilitating their engagement with agricultural development programs. Additionally, contemporary research confirms that increased years of schooling positively correlate with improved household income, wealth accumulation, and resilience to economic shocks (Ogunniyi et al., 2022; Ajayi & Oyetade, 2023).

The results revealed a clear gender-based disparity in farm size among the respondents. Male-headed households reported an average farm size of 4.8 hectares, whereas female-headed households operated smaller holdings, averaging 3.2 hectares. This variation suggests that men have comparatively greater access to land resources, which may influence agricultural output and income levels. Despite this difference, both groups fall within the smallholder category, commonly defined as farmers cultivating between 0.1 and 5.9 hectares (Adepoju et al., 2021). This finding corroborates the study by Oparinde et al., (2022), which noted that the majority of cassava and maize producers in Southwestern Nigeria are small-scale farmers. Notably, approximately 1% of respondents indicated that their farms were situated directly adjacent to their residences, underscoring the limited scale of agricultural activity in the area. The

dominance of smallholder farming in the region may be a contributing factor to the persistence of poverty, as land constraints can limit economies of scale, hinder investment in technology, and ultimately suppress productivity and income (Ogunniyi and Olagunju, 2023).

The findings reveal that 73.3% of female-headed households and 66.7% of male-headed households in the study area do not belong to any cooperative association. This low level of cooperative participation may significantly limit farmers' access to essential resources such as agricultural credit, training programs, and market information—factors critical to enhancing productivity and reducing poverty. Cooperative societies serve as platforms for collective bargaining, capacity building, and information sharing, which are essential for improving farm-level decision-making and resilience to economic shocks (Awotide et al., 2022); Ololade and Olagunju, 2021). The limited involvement of farmers in such institutions suggests the need for targeted sensitization and policy interventions to enhance rural household participation in collective organizations, thereby strengthening their socioeconomic outcomes.

A substantial proportion of female-headed households (95.0%) and male-headed households (86.7%) reported having no access to credit. This limited financial access poses a critical barrier to poverty alleviation, as it impedes farmers' ability to invest in productive inputs, expand income-generating activities, and respond effectively to health and livelihood shocks. Access to credit is strongly correlated with improved welfare outcomes, enhanced decision-making capacity, and increased resilience among rural households. Omar and Inaba (2020) underscores that financial inclusion is a key driver of poverty reduction and income equality, particularly in underserved rural communities. The observed credit constraints among respondents may therefore exacerbate their vulnerability to poverty and reduce their capacity to transition into more sustainable livelihoods.

As presented in Table 9, the income analysis reveals that female-headed households reported a higher average of mean income (₦87,000) compared to their male-headed counterparts (₦59,644). This finding suggests that female household heads in the study area may be more engaged in a broader range of income-generating activities, possibly including both farm-based and non-farm enterprises. It also indicates a shifting dynamic in rural economic participation, where women increasingly contribute to household income beyond subsistence roles. This observation is consistent with recent literature emphasizing the growing economic agency of women in sub-Saharan Africa. For instance, Edeh et al. (2022) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2021) report that women account for a substantial share of agricultural labor and are increasingly involved in diversified livelihood strategies that enhance household income and resilience.

The findings reveal a notable gender disparity in access to healthcare services among farming households in the study area. Specifically, 80% of female-headed households reported access to healthcare, compared to only 46.7% of their male-headed counterparts. This disparity has significant implications for household welfare, as access to healthcare services is intrinsically linked to labor productivity and economic stability. Health challenges can constrain farmers' capacity to work efficiently, thereby reducing agricultural output and increasing the risk of poverty. The relatively higher healthcare access among women may be attributed to their active role in household health decision-making, which often prioritizes

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medical needs and preventive care. Recent studies affirm that women are more likely to influence healthcare spending and utilize services when empowered to do so (Afolabi and Ajani, 2022; OECD, 2021). These findings underscore the importance of promoting equitable access to healthcare as a critical poverty reduction strategy in rural communities.

**Table 1.** socio-economic characteristics of the respondents

Characteristics	Category	Female-Headed Freq.	Female-Headed %	Female-Headed Mean	Male-Headed Freq.	Male-Headed %	Male-Headed Mean
<b>Age (Years)</b>	20 – 30	9	15		6	10	
	31 – 40	6	10		14	23.3	
	41 – 50	31	51.7		32	53.3	
	51 – 60	10	16.7		8	13.4	
	61 – 70	4	6.6	<b>44</b>			<b>53.4</b>
<b>Marital Status</b>	Married	34	56.6		54	90	
	Single	24	40		6	10	
	Divorced	2	3.4		0	0	
<b>Household Size</b>	1–5 Persons	30	50		14	23.3	
	6–10 Persons	28	46.7	<b>5.7</b>	28	46.7	5.8
	11–15 Persons	2	3.3		18	30	
<b>Education Status</b>	Primary	6	10		10	16.7	
	Secondary	6	10		22	36.7	
	Tertiary	34	56.7		28	46.6	
<b>Farm Size(Ha.)</b>	2-5	35	58.3		31	51.7	
	6-9	25	41.7		20	33.3	
	10-13	0	0		3	5	
	13-17	0	0	3.2	6	10	
<b>Cooperative</b>	Yes	16	26.7		20	33.3	
	No	44	73.3		40	66.7	
<b>Credit Access</b>	Yes	3	5		8	13.3	
	No	57	95		52	86.7	
<b>Income(N)</b>	<50,000	15	24.6		14	23.3	
	51,000-100,000	10	16.4		27	45	
	101,000-150,000	25	41		10	16.6	
	151,000-200,000	8	13.1		7	11.7	
	>200,000	3	4.9	87,000	2	3.3	59,664
<b>Health care</b>	Yes	48	80		28	46.7	
	No	12	20		32	53.3	

**3.2 Income-Generating Activities of Respondents in the study Area.**

A gender-disaggregated analysis of respondents' income-generating activities (Table 2) reveals notable variations between male- and female-headed households. Approximately 80.0% of female-headed households were engaged in crop processing compared to 73.3% of male-headed households, suggesting that women play a more significant role in value addition. This pattern aligns with recent findings that women dominate post-harvest processing and marketing within the cassava value chain, largely due to cultural roles and limited access to production resources (Ndjouenkeu et al., 2021; Alabuja et al., 2023). In the study area, cassava was predominantly processed into *fufu* to enhance shelf life, improve value, and diversify income streams.

Participation in farm labor exhibited a contrasting trend, with 70.0% of male-headed households and 60.0% of female-headed households involved. This reflects the physically demanding nature of field operations, which men are more likely to undertake (Ogunleye et al., 2021). Conversely, marketing of agricultural products showed female predominance, as 70.0% of female-headed households sold agricultural produce compared to 50.0% of male-headed households, a finding consistent with gendered roles in rural markets across sub-Saharan Africa (Adepoju et al., 2022).

To mitigate poverty risks, respondents diversified into alternative income-generating activities. Trading, which included the sale of yam, cassava, maize, and *fufu*, was reported by 73.0% of male-headed households and 70.0% of female-headed households. Handicraft production was more prevalent among female-headed households (83.3%) than their male counterparts (16.7%), reinforcing the notion that women often adopt flexible income options compatible with household responsibilities (Adebayo et al., 2021). Employment in civil service roles, such as teaching in public schools was reported equally by both household types (46.7% each), while engagement in private businesses such as driving and artisanal work was higher among male-headed households (63.3%) than female-headed households (50.0%).

These findings underscore the critical role of gender in shaping livelihood diversification strategies among rural households. They corroborate earlier evidence that women rely more on processing, petty trading, and craft-making as coping strategies, while men gravitate toward physically intensive and higher-capital activities such as commercial driving and artisanal work (Alabuja et al., 2023; Ndjouenkeu et al., 2021). Such gendered patterns have significant implications for poverty reduction programs, emphasizing the need for targeted interventions that enhance women's access to processing technologies, market infrastructure, and credit facilities.

**Table 2.** Distribution of Respondents Based on Gender income generating activities

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Source: Field Survey, 2025

S/no	Agricultural activities				
			Yes	No	Total
1	Crop processing	Male	73.3	26.7	100
		Female	80.0	20.0	
2	Farm labour	Male	70.0	30.0	100
		Female	60.0	40.0	
3	Selling of agricultural products	Male	50.0	50.0	100
		Female	70.0	30.0	
Non agriculture activities					
5	Trading	Male	73.3	26.7	100
		Female	70.0	30.0	
6	Handicraft	Male	16.7	83.3	100
		Female	30.0	70.0	
7	Civil servants	Male	46.7	53.3	100
		Female	46.7	53.3	
8	Private business	Male	63.3	36.7	100
		Female	50.0	50.0	

### 3.3. Determinants of Poverty Status among Respondents in the Study Area

Table 3 presents the poverty status of male- and female-headed farming households. Based on the international poverty line of USD 11.90 per day, 53.3 % of female-headed households were classified as poor, whereas 46.6 % were non-poor. By contrast, 70.0 % of male-headed households were non-poor and 30.0 % were poor. These results indicate that interventions aimed at improving farmers' incomes as a poverty-reduction strategy are beginning to yield measurable outcomes. However, they also reveal persistent gender disparities. Recent evidence shows that female-headed cassava farming households in Nigeria continue to experience higher levels of poverty, largely due to limited access to productive resources and markets (Alabuja et al., 2023). Similarly, Odozi and Oyelere (2024) demonstrate that unequal access to land remains a key driver of poverty among agricultural households.

The relatively better poverty status of male-headed households in the study area may reflect their greater control over land and other productive resources. This is consistent with Adekunle et al. (2024), who attribute women's disadvantage to patriarchal inheritance systems that limit their bargaining power and ownership of land. These findings underscore the need for gender-responsive land access policies and agricultural support programmes to further reduce rural poverty.

**Table 3:** Distribution Based on Poverty Status of the Respondents

Female headed	Household		Male headed	Household
Poverty status	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Non poor	28	46.6	42	70
Poor	32	53.3	18	30
Total	60		60	

Source: Field Survey, 2025

**3.3.1. Determinants of Poverty Status of the Respondents Using (FGT)**

The Foster–Greer–Thorbecke (FGT) poverty indices reveal marked gender disparities in poverty among farming households in the study area. As presented in Table 3, female-headed households recorded a poverty incidence (headcount) of 0.533, considerably higher than the 0.30 observed for male-headed households. The poverty gap (depth) was also greater for women (0.69) than for men (0.43), while the poverty severity (squared gap) was highest among female-headed households (0.96) compared with male-headed households (0.42). These findings differ from those of Ajewole et al. (2006) on rice-farming households, where male-headed households exhibited higher poverty incidence (0.47 vs. 0.37), greater depth (0.18 vs. 0.09) and severity (0.10 vs. 0.05) than their female counterparts. More recent evidence underscores the persistence of gendered poverty in Nigerian agriculture. Ameh, Okoye, et.al., (2021) applied the FGT measure to rice-farming households in Kogi State and reported that 58.7% of female farmers were poor compared with 43.2% of males, with higher depth and severity indices for women. Similarly, Obi-Egbedi, et.al.(2021) show that although women in Southwest Nigeria diversify more into non-farm activities, they continue to experience greater poverty burdens than men. Oladele, et.al. (2022) report persistent welfare inequalities between male- and female-headed agricultural households despite livelihood diversification. Alabuja, et.al.,(2023) further demonstrate that limited access to land, credit and other productive resources exacerbates poverty among female-headed cassava farming households. The pattern observed in the present study aligns with these recent findings and suggests that structural constraints—especially restricted access to land and productive resources under patriarchal inheritance systems—remain key drivers of female poverty in rural Nigeria. Policies aimed at improving women’s access to farmland, credit facilities, and value-adding opportunities could therefore accelerate poverty reduction among female-headed farming households.

**Table 4:** Distribution Based on Poverty Incidence, Depth and Severity of Poverty among male and female households

*Source: Field Survey, 2025*

Gender Household head	Sample Size	No of Poor	Incidence	Depth	Severity
Female	60	32	0.533	0.69	0.96
Male	60	18	0.30	0.43	0.42

**3.4 Factors Influencing Poverty Status of Respondents**

To identify the determinants of poverty among farmers in the study area, a logit regression model was estimated using selected socio-economic variables. The explanatory power of the model was confirmed by the likelihood ratio (chi-square) statistics of 62.5 for female-headed households and 53.8 for male-headed households, both significant at  $p < 0.001$ , indicating a strong overall fit. In this model, a positive coefficient indicates that an increase in the explanatory variable raises the likelihood of a household being poor, whereas a negative coefficient implies that an increase in the variable lowers the likelihood of poverty. Three

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variables were statistically significant for female-headed households are family size, access to health care services, and income, while for male-headed households, marital status, crop processing, and income were significant. For female-headed households, family size was negatively significant at the 10% level, suggesting that a one-unit increase in family size reduces the likelihood of being poor by about 3.71%. This may be because children or other household members contribute to family income, as also noted by Krishnaji (1980). Similar evidence of household composition influencing poverty risk among Nigerian farmers is reported by Olarinde et al. (2020), who found that larger family sizes sometimes dilute per capita poverty through increased labour supply. Access to health care services was positively significant at the 5% level for female-headed households, implying that a one-unit increase in health care access increases the likelihood of being poor by about 2.71%. This is consistent with OECD (2003) and with findings by Adewoyin et al. (2022), which show that, although access to health and financial services benefits women in the long run, the short-term costs of uptake can increase measured poverty. Income was negatively significant for both female- and male-headed households, indicating that higher household income reduces the probability of being poor, a result supported by Oyewunmi and Obayelu (2023), who observed that improved earnings from non-farm activities significantly lower the odds of being poor among rural households in Nigeria. For male-headed households, marital status was negatively significant at the 1% level, suggesting that marriage reduces poverty likelihood by approximately 2.5%. This aligns with Liu et al. (2006), who reported that marital disruption can increase unemployment and poverty risk, and with Oyewunmi and Obayelu (2023), who noted that stable households exhibit lower poverty incidence. Finally, crop processing was significant at the 5% level for male-headed households, indicating that increased engagement in processing activities contributes to poverty reduction. This corroborates Olarinde et al. (2020), who found that value-adding activities such as cassava processing reduce multidimensional poverty among smallholder farmers.

**Table 5:** Results of logistic regression showing the factors affecting Gender poverty status

Logistic regression		Female			Male		
No of observations		60			No of observations		60
Log likelihood		-62.5			Log likelihood		-53.8
Variables	Coe fficient	Std error	Sig.	Coe efficient	Std error	Sig	
Constant	-6.423	3.177	.043	-2.889	3.036	.341	
Age	.028	.034	.405	.001	.046	.979	
Marital status	-1.276	.888	.151	2.587	1.001	.010***	
Education	2.082	1.469	.156	.131	.800	.870	
Family size	-.371	.213	.082*	-.263	.164	.109	
Year of experience	.032	.053	.541	-.053	.076	.489	
Size of farm	.440	.382	.249	.032	.171	.851	
Access to health care	2.711	1.285	.035**	-.074	1.142	.948	
Cooperative association	.837	1.064	.432	-1.192	1.174	.310	
Access to credit	.307	.905	.735	1.168	1.111	.293	
Crop processing	.067	.811	.934	2.315	1.162	.046**	
Income	-.000	.000	.003***	.000	-.000	.003***	

*Source: Field Survey, 2025*

Note: \*\*\*, \*\*, \* indicated significant levels at 1%, 5% and 10% respectively

Dependent variable (Non Poor = 0 and poor = 1).

\*\*\* < 0.01-1%

\*\* 0.01-0.05= 5%

\*0.051-0.099=10%

### 3.5 Gender-Based Coping Strategies Adopted by Respondents

To identify poverty-coping mechanisms by gender, a four-point Likert scale was employed (Table 5). Multiple responses were permitted, as most respondents relied on several strategies simultaneously. Fourteen principal strategies were identified. Across both male- and female-headed households, the most frequently employed coping mechanisms were reducing the number of daily meals and consuming less preferred foods, ranked first and second respectively. These behaviours are consistent with recent evidence from rural Nigeria, where food rationing and dietary substitution are common responses to income shocks (Okoli, 2024). Fasting and prayer, ranked fourth among female-headed households but only eighth among males, reflecting the higher salience of religious coping for women. Field observations showed that many households had already reduced meal frequency from three meals to two or even one per day—often breakfast and dinner or dinner alone—rarely with preferred foods. Purchasing food on credit was ranked fifth for female-headed households and sixth for male-headed ones, suggesting women’s higher propensity to obtain foodstuffs on credit and repay after selling farm produce. Conversely, selling farm implements or other productive assets ranked fourth for male-headed households and seventh for female-headed households, indicating men’s greater likelihood to liquidate assets to meet urgent needs. Social-network strategies also differed by gender. Seeking help from relatives and friends ranked sixth among female-headed households but only thirteenth among male-headed ones. Education-related adjustments, such as withdrawing children from private to public schools, ranked eighth for female-headed households and seventh for male-headed ones, whereas full withdrawal from school ranked twelfth for both groups—indicating that this is a less common, last-resort strategy. Other low-frequency strategies included sending children to social events to collect leftover food, engaging in non-farm activities (e.g., artisanal work, petty trading, driving), begging for alms, child hawking, family planning or contraceptive use, and borrowing from cooperatives, though the ranking of these varied considerably between male- and female-headed households. Overall, the results show that women rely more on consumption-smoothing and informal credit strategies, whereas men are more likely to sell assets or borrow formally. This gendered differentiation is consistent with recent studies showing that female-headed households in Nigeria adopt more diversified, consumption-oriented coping strategies in response to poverty and food insecurity (Igene et al., 2025; Okoli, 2024).

**Table 6:** results of poverty coping strategies based on frequency of use

	Female headed household poverty coping strategies							Male headed household poverty coping strategy						
Coping strategies female	FU(3)	OU (2)	RU (1)	NU 0	PCSUI	%	R	FU (3)	OU (2)	RU (1)	NU 0	PCSUI	%	R

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Eating of less preferred food	22	18	10	10	112	10	1	14	32	4	10	110	8.6	3
Reducing the frequency of eating per day	22	14	14	10	108	9.7	2	36	12	4	8	136	10.6	1
Consumption of stored produce meant for planting	26	10	10	14	108	9.7	2	24	14	12	10	112	8.8	2
Result to fasting and prayer	16	24	4	16	100	9	4	14	14	8	24	78	6.1	10
Purchase food on credit	22	10	10	18	96	8.6	5	18	12	12	18	90	7	6
Seeking help from friends/relatives	10	24	14	12	92	8.2	6	2	24	6	28	60	4.7	13
Selling off farm implement/selling assets	10	20	6	24	76	6.8	7	16	20	8	16	96	7.5	4
Withdrawing children from private to public school	10	10	16	24	66	5.9	8	18	14	4	24	86	6.7	7
Sending your children to party to pack left over meal /food	14	8	6	32	64	5.7	9	4	20	2	34	54	4.2	14

Engaged in non-farming activities	6	16	12	26	62	5.6	10	14	8	14	24	72	5.6	11
Begging for alms	10	4	14	32	52	4.7	11	4	14	6	36	46	3.6	15
Withdrawing children from school	8	8	10	34	50	4.5	12	10	16	6	28	68	5.3	12
Children hawking	0	16	14	30	46	4.1	13	18	14	4	24	86	6.7	7
Family planning/use of inceptives	0	16	12	32	44	3.9	14	6	28	8	18	82	6.4	9
Borrowing money from cooperatives	0	12	16	32	40	3.6	15	16	18	12	14	96	7.5	4
<b>Total</b>					<b>1,116</b>	<b>100</b>						<b>1,272</b>	<b>100</b>	

Source: Field survey, 2025.

FU (3) stands for frequently used.

OU (2) stands for occasionally used

RU (1) stands for rarely used.

NU (0) stands for not used.

PCSUI-Poverty Coping Strategy Based on Frequency

#### 4.0 Conclusion

This study examined poverty coping strategies among male- and female-headed farming households in Akoko South-West Local Government Area of Ondo State, Nigeria. The findings revealed that both male and female household heads were within the economically active age range and possessed moderate to high levels of education, indicating strong potential for productivity and innovation in farming. However, gender disparities persist across key livelihood dimensions such as access to land, credit facilities, and income-generating opportunities. Female-headed households were more engaged in crop processing and agricultural product marketing, while male-headed households cultivated larger farm sizes and were more involved in farm labor. Despite these contributions, female-headed households experienced higher poverty incidence (53.3%) compared to male-headed households (30%), reflecting persistent gender inequality in resource access and control. The Foster-Greer-Thorbecke (FGT) poverty index and logit regression results highlighted income, family size, and access to healthcare as significant determinants of poverty among female-headed households, while income, marital status, and crop processing were major determinants among

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male-headed households. These results underscore the complex interplay between gender, socioeconomic factors, and poverty outcomes in rural Nigeria (Adeleke et al., 2021; Etim et al., 2022; Ojo et al., 2023). In sum, addressing gender-based disparities, promoting financial inclusion, and supporting livelihood diversification are critical for enhancing the resilience and welfare of rural farming households.

### **5.0 Recommendation**

Based on the above findings, the following aligned policy recommendations are proposed: promote inclusive access to credit and financial services, strengthen gender-specific empowerment and capacity building, ensure equitable distribution of agricultural inputs and support programs, promote diversification into off-farm and non-farm enterprises and enhance access to healthcare and family welfare services.

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