

The Political Economy of Rice in Nigeria: Whose Voice Counts for Best Policies?

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Abstract

This paper examines the participation of rice value chain stakeholders in the agricultural policy process in Southern Nigeria. Rice is an important staple that has become a serious concern in political discourses given its importance in the diet of millions of people in Nigeria. Although rice has the potential to address the food security challenge in the country, its production has failed to meet domestic demand, which is over seven million metric tons, with domestic supply meeting only about 50% of the demand. Attempts by the government to address the constraints on rice sector performance have not successfully addressed the demand-supply gap due to the limited participation of the rice value chain stakeholders in agricultural policy decision-making processes. Agricultural policy domains are dominated by political officeholders and civil servants who lack an understanding of the indigenous views of the problems affecting the sector. This has resulted in the continual failure of policy interventions implemented to address the shortages in the domestic production of rice in Nigeria. The availability of space for the stakeholders' contribution to decision-making processes will ensure their indigenous perspective of the problems they are encountering and localized solutions to their challenges. A Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analytical approach is used to provide insights into how the internal and external environments could enhance or hamper the stakeholders' participation in the policy process which, if addressed, would strengthen the rice economy in Nigeria. Using a quantitative survey approach (which emphasizes numerical values to answer the question *what*), the paper reveals that the participation of the rice value chain stakeholders in the policy process in Southern Nigeria was low; and that while increased access to agricultural inputs is one of the opportunities, the stakeholders stand to gain when they participate, albeit the bureaucratic processes of the government and corruption are threats to their participation.

Keywords: Agricultural Policy Process, Rice Value Chain Stakeholders, Participation in Policy Process, Inclusive Participation, SWOT Analysis

Introduction

The study examined the participation of the rice stakeholders in the rice value chain in Southern Nigeria and whether the voices of the stakeholders were considered in policy processes that address the rice sector. Rice was identified as one of the crops that can address food insecurity in Nigeria because the crop can be grown in all the agroecological zones in the country. The area of land under rice cultivation in Nigeria increased from about two million hectares in 2000 to about three million hectares in 2018. During the same period, the quantity of milled rice increased from about two million metric tons in 2000 to almost four million metric tons in 2018 (FAO/UN, 2019). While the trend in rice production appeared to be on the increase, sufficiency to meet the growing population of consumers in the country remained elusive. FAO/UN (2019) data revealed that while domestic production was about four million metric tons, domestic consumption was about seven million metric tons, leaving a shortfall of three million metric tons. Rice importation has always been the measure taken by the government in meeting the demand-supply gap, a problem that disenfranchises local producers, while at the same time increasing the government's expenditure on food imports.

While policy failures have been blamed for the poor performance of the rice sector in Nigeria, the participation of the stakeholders in policy decisions is also an issue of interest, since their absence in policy processes could mean that the ultimate policy decisions may not address their concerns. This is particularly important given that different players dominate the rice value chain, including rice farmers, processors, marketers, and agro-input suppliers. These different value chain players have different expectations and contributions to the performance of the rice sector; and where the needs of one is ignored, there will be disruption in the system that will affect the capacity of the sector to meet domestic demand. The inclusion of these different, yet important, stakeholders in policy decision processes is important for the performance of the rice economy in Nigeria vis-à-vis Southern Nigeria.

The study argues that the voice of the rice stakeholders is imperative in policy decisions that affect their livelihood activities and in the attainment of self-sufficiency in rice production as a crop that can address food insecurity in Nigeria. The local perspectives in the rice economy are an important component that can enhance policy development decisions. Their participation will help to inform policies that are realistic, specific to the stakeholders' environment, and sustainable for national development.

The study will therefore help the government to reassess the policy development process by taking into account a more holistic approach that will involve all the stakeholders in the agricultural policy process—a demand-driven approach so that their needs can be adequately identified and incorporated into the policy development pathways for increased rice sector performance. It will also help to sensitize stakeholders in the rice value chain on the need to engage in advocacy efforts as an avenue to make their needs known to the government. It will further facilitate their interest to be more willing to identify with the policy development environment in order to make meaningful contributions that will enhance rice sector-friendly policies in Southern Nigeria vis-à-vis nationally and even with a spillover effect on the African continent.

Thus, the study provides answers to the following two questions: (1) What is the level of participation of the rice stakeholders in the agricultural policy process in southern Nigeria? (2) What are the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to the stakeholders' participation in the agricultural policy process in southern Nigeria? Accordingly, the rest of the paper focuses on the clarifications of some concepts used in the analysis, the methodology, the results and discussion of the findings, and the conclusion and recommendations.

Conceptual Clarifications

Three major concepts are clarified in the paper. They are discussed one by one in the ensuing subsections for lucidity.

Rice Value Chain

A value chain explains the linkage that exists between the participants of a product and their value-adding activities that enhance the movement of goods and services from production and processing to the end users (Global Value Chain Initiative, 2007). In agriculture, value chains represent the actors and activities involved in moving agricultural products from the field to the final consumers, such that value is added at each stage of the product (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2010).

In the rice sector, some of the value chain activities include production, post-harvest processing, distribution, marketing and consumption (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2009; Terdoo and Feola, 2016). The importance of agro-input suppliers to the overall activities of the rice sector makes them important in this study—thus, their consideration as another key player in the rice economy in Nigeria.

Agricultural Policy Process

Policies are instruments used by governments to change the socioeconomic outcomes of citizens. Agricultural policy process is the engagement of different stakeholders to develop new or revise existing agricultural policies (Mapila, 2014). It is the active involvement of agricultural stakeholders in all the stages of the policy development process for adequate targeting of policy options and increased performance of policy interventions.

The policy process occurs in stages, ranging from problem identification to the impact of the policy on the target population. Different authors have identified various stages for the development of any policy, spanning from four to ten (Corkery, Land and Bossuyt, 1995; Buttoutd and Samyn, 1999; Torjman, 2005; Idachaba, 2011). Under the Agricultural Transformation Agenda in Nigeria, an eight-stage policy process was used, including (1) problem identification, (2) evaluation of policy alternatives, (3) selection of optimal policy, (4) policy adoption, (5) policy implementation, (6) monitoring and evaluation, (7) impact assessment, and (8) policy review for scaling up or down (Babu, Gyimah-Brempong, Nwafor and Edeh, 2014). Nonetheless, critics of the stages model of the policy process argue that assuming that the rational model of the public policy process represents a linear approach; it is unrealistic as demarcations among stages can be blurred in practice (see Sabatier, 2007).

Stakeholders' Participation in the Agricultural Policy Process

Stakeholders' participation in the agricultural policy process is the engagement of stakeholders in the development of policy interventions that concerns their wellbeing. Participation is the active, informed and voluntary involvement of people in a development process (Department for International Development, 2010). The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development—OECD (2001) noted that the participation of poor citizens in the policy process should relate to the different phases in the development and implementation of policies; from the definition of the problem to evaluation. Haring, Vairo, Dabbert and Zanoli (2006) further argued that the bottom-up approaches to policy design with a broad debate among stakeholders can

contribute to an increased understanding of policy practices and their impact. Participatory planning that is broad-based and decentralized with mechanisms for public participation of key stakeholders helps to validate and rationalize key considerations that will ensure diversity in agriculture (Dasgupta and Roy, 2011). The FAO (2008) also noted that apart from the government, other players that are key in the agricultural policy process include landowners, farmers' organizations, cooperatives, non-governmental organizations (NGOs,) research institutes, microfinance institutions, etc.

Nevertheless, Babu et al. (2014) noted that policy processes in Nigeria are driven by the political agenda of the incumbent government, with minimal contribution from stakeholders. The policy domain in Nigeria is dominated by political office holders and civil servants, such that the stakeholders who are directly affected by the problem are only engaged at the level of consultations and debate of policy draft (Sanyal and Buba, 2010; Idachaba, 2011). The failure to integrate the stakeholders, whose livelihood environment remains the testing ground for the success or failure of any policy intervention, deprives the policy of the local perspective that is needed to drive the achievement of the goals of the policy document.

In understanding the participation of the rice stakeholders in the agricultural policy process in Nigeria, the study adopts the OECD (2001) framework for citizen participation. In the model: accordingly, stakeholders' participation was at three levels: (1) the information level, where the stakeholders are only informed of the policy actions of the government without formal feedback pathways for their input into the process; (2) the consultation level which involves the consultation of the stakeholders at certain stages of the policy process, with the government predetermining and dominating the process; and (3) the partnership level that entails a collaboration between the government and the stakeholders in all stages of the policy process. It is expected that when stakeholders participate in the third stage, they will be able to actively engage policymakers, and this will result in increased performance of the rice sector and improved livelihoods of the rice stakeholders.

Data Collection Procedure

The study was carried out in Southern Nigeria, which is comprised of the South-east, South-south, and South-west zones of Nigeria. Different ethnic groups dominate each of the zones in southern Nigeria. The Igbo dominate in the South-east; the Binis, Urobos, Itsekiris, Ijaws, Ibibios, Efiks, Isokos, etc. in the South-south; and the Yoruba in the South-west. The region is endowed with numerous natural resources such as limestone, crude oil, coal, bitumen, etc., vast agricultural lands for the cultivation of food and cash crops such as cassava, rice, cocoa, plantain, yam, and rubber, etc., and large rivers, particularly in the South-south where fishing activities are extensively carried out.

The study's population included all rice stakeholders in Southern Nigeria. These include rice farmers, input suppliers, rice processors, and rice marketers. A cross-sectional research design was used for the study, given that the stakeholders are from different population groups with different characteristics which were analyzed at the same time. A state with the highest production of rice was purposively selected from each of the southern zones, with Cross River selected from the South-south, Ebonyi from the South-east, and Ekiti from the South-west. From the list of registered stakeholders in the sampled communities (rice farmers, processors, marketers, and agro-input suppliers), an appropriate sample size was selected, using a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error (SurveyMonkey, 2021). A total of 484 farmers, 244 processors, 561 marketers, and 50 input suppliers were used for the study, giving a total sample size of 573 stakeholders. Also, Key Informant Interviews (7), In-Depth Interviews (14), and Focus Group Discussions (6) were also

conducted with several representatives of government institutions, including the Ministry of Agriculture, the agricultural development project, and the rice value chain stakeholders. The field research was carried out between October 2021 and October 2023.

Result and Discussion of Findings

The findings of the study are presented in this section. The major focus is on the stakeholders' participation in the agricultural policy process in Southern Nigeria.

To start with, the need for stakeholders' participation in the policy process was amplified by Nigeria's Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (2015), noting that stakeholders need to actively participate in policy development and program implementation in the agricultural sector for the development of the agricultural sector in Nigeria. The collective role of all the stakeholders in the policy process is necessary to drive a robust policy that will address the persistent problems that hamper the performance of the rice sector in Nigeria. This was amplified during interview sessions with stakeholders in the rice value chain, as highlighted in the following excerpts:

If you want to get a good policy, from the grassroots, you get the people. That is where you will know what is involved. If you do an analytics policy where you get academicians, big people and you leave people at the grassroots, at the end of the day it will not work out because you have to transmit whatever it is there to the root. The best policy is one that encompasses everybody. Are you getting what I'm trying to say? From the farmer level, both the commercial farmer, both the domestic, whatever you have in the farming sector, that it is the way a policy should be done, it should be holistic and it should incorporate everybody in the system at all levels (Interview with the Ministry of Agriculture, Cross River State in November of 2021).

In addition,

Yes, you see we need stakeholders at all levels because every stage is very important so we need stakeholders at all levels to enable the system to succeed" (Interview with the Chairman of the Rice Farmers Association of Nigeria, Cross River State in November of 2021).

Expanding on the place of stakeholders in the policy process, the representative of the National Cereals Research Institute (NCRI) mandated on rice research in Nigeria, highlighted the players in agricultural policy process in Nigeria. While the respondent noted that the process is inclusive, the extent of the value chain stakeholder' inclusiveness is however limited as they were not extensively involved in all the stages of the policy process. This is evident in the following extract:

The principal team leader for policy formulation for agriculture, specifically rice in Nigeria, is the federal minister of agriculture and rural development, or food security, as it is now called. They, most of the time, lead the process. And at a certain point in the policy development process, they engage different stakeholders, principally the state's ministries of agriculture, NGOs working on agriculture in Nigeria, or supporting agriculture in Nigeria, and key value chain actors, mainly Rice Farmers Association, the Rice Processors Association, and other key members of the actors of the value chain. So together with research institutes and development

organization. And at every level, each of these, we also have members of the parliament who participate in the policymaking process. So that once it is submitted to the National Assembly, or once it is approved by the executive as a policy, they will get in tune with exactly what is done. And if there's any need for policy agenda, they will enact easily. So these are the key people at the process level for rice” (Interview with NCRI official, Oyo State in September of 2023).

The analysis of the rice stakeholders’ participation in the agricultural policy process assessed their participation in different stages of the process. In this study, the agricultural policy process was disaggregated into a 12-stage model, which includes (1) agenda-setting, (2) consultation with stakeholders, (3) draft policy formulation, (4) policy validation, (5) policy re-validation, (6) policy approval, (7) policy trials, (8) policy adoption, (9) policy coordination, (10) policy implementation, (11) monitoring and evaluation, and (12) policy impact assessment. In most policy process models, policy trials and impact assessment stages are generally missing. In Nigeria, however, the failure to test policies on a small scale before nationwide implementation and the absence of impact assessment of most interventions of the government are major gaps in government policy efforts.

To determine the level of participation of the stakeholders in the policy process, items were generated to evaluate each of these policy stages and their scores were computed. Their mean scores were used to categorize their participation as either high or low. Given that the study analyzed the participation of four categories of stakeholders in the rice sector—(1) farmers, (2) processors, (3) marketers, and (4) agro-input suppliers, the analysis of the participation in the policy process was disaggregated based on the stakeholder category as presented.

An analysis of the participation of the farmers in the policy process revealed that 75% of the farmers fall into the low category participants (see Figure 1). This means that they may not be able to influence policies that affect their enterprises, given their low interactions with the policy domains. Similarly, the rice processors’ participation in the policy process was low (84%), with only 16% of the rice processors reported as having high participation levels (refer to Figure 1). This implies that the processors may not be able to contribute significantly to decision-making processes that affect their development. The rice marketers’ level of participation in the policy process was also low (77%), with only 23% of the marketers enjoying high participation in the policy process (see Figure 1). The generally low participation in the policy process and the passive engagement of those who participate imply that the marketers may not be able to make meaningful contributions and influence decisions that affect them. Additionally, only 38% of the agro-input suppliers were reported as having a high level of participation in the policy process (consult Figure 1) compared to 72% whose participation level was low.

Although some representatives from some agencies of the government noted that there is a level of involvement of the stakeholders through their representatives in the policy process, what is important is whether such representatives are able to influence policies that address the needs of the majority of the stakeholders. A stakeholder noted the following: “But I am aware that in the policy process, it is not exclusive of the farmers though the grassroots may not fully participate but their leaders are fully informed” (Interview in Ekiti State in January of 2022). While this is generally the practice since everyone affected by an issue may not be at the decision table all the time, nevertheless, approaches abound that ensure the voice of a larger proportion of those that are affected by an issue are considered, particularly through town hall meetings or opinion polls to harvest their suggestions on an issue. Hence, the key point in this study is whether such voices truly represent the views of the stakeholders and the extent to which they are able to influence policies that represent the voice of the grassroots stakeholders who dominate the rice sector activities.

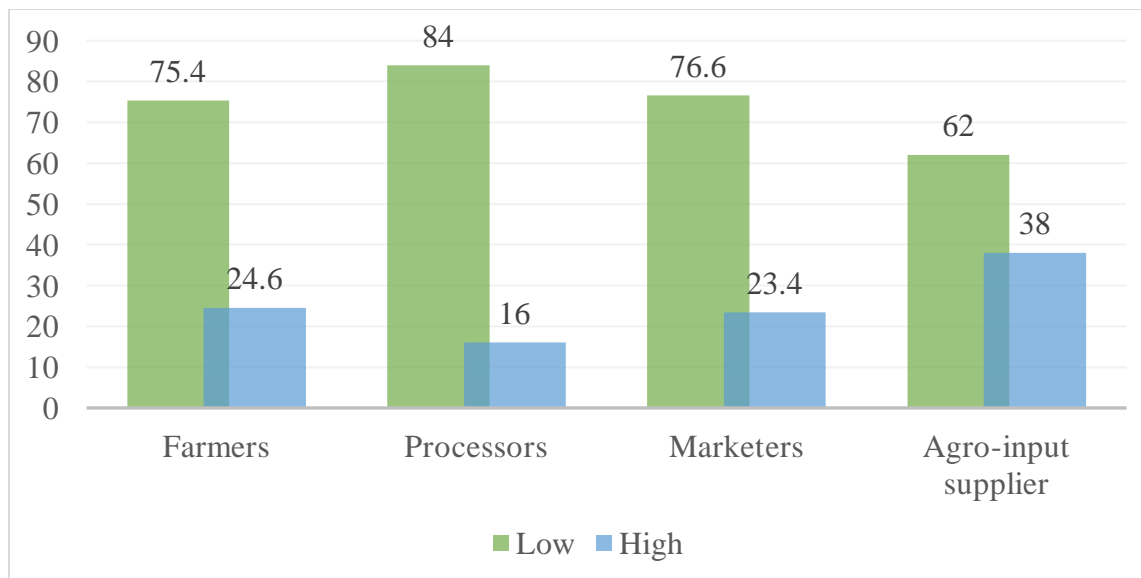


Figure 1: Stakeholders' Participation in the Agricultural Policy Process
Source: Self-generated by the Authors

Interviews with various stakeholders confirm the statistical findings from the study area which reveal a low level of participation by the stakeholders in various activities in the policy-making process. Several of the stakeholders, both within rice value chain actors and the support institutions of the government, indicate that the voices of the rice value chain stakeholders are hardly heard in the policy circle due to the absence of space for their participation and the domination of the policy arena by political office holders. For some of the stakeholders, the process is more of a political affair; and where representatives of the stakeholders' groups are expected to engage, there is no guarantee that such representatives speak in the interest of their groups or are self-serving. As can be gleaned in the following response by an interviewee, "Stakeholders' representation in Agricultural policy processes in Nigeria is highly political. In most cases, the people that come to represent the farmers here in Abuja are political farmers. Some of them do not own farms and some are only here for their self-interests, not the interests of their communities" (interview at the Extension Department, Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development in Abuja in October of 2021)

As another respondent indicated, representatives of the farmers' groups in policy processes are mostly those who have close relations with the government; and where this is the case, their objectivity in addressing the needs of the group they represent becomes questionable, since such representatives can easily be swayed where the government's policies are not in the overall interest of the rice stakeholders. A respondent put it as follows: "Now we have farmers aggregated into farmer base associations or commodity associations. They are part of it but mostly from the privileged government circles" (Interview in Cross River State in November of 2021).

From the rice stakeholders' viewpoint, their representation in policy decision processes is seriously debated, as they argue that it is not reflected in their access to resources, not minding their contribution to the rice economy in Nigeria and indigenous knowledge that could enhance the production capacity of the crop for national food security and improved livelihood for rural households. The following statements buttress the perspective: (a) "Our participation is minimal, if the policy is to succeed, they should involve us to know what to do to make it work" (Interview in Cross River State in November of 2021). (b) "The voice of the farmers should be heard because they are the foundation, if the farmers don't cultivate rice, the processors will have nothing to

process. If we have abundant rice produce, then it will call for the role of the processors. It is the voice of the rice farmers that should be heard first, before the processors that will attract markets” (Interview in Cross River State in November of 2021). (c) “No, our voices are not represented because we don’t have who will speak for us, we don’t have representatives, and nobody is hearing our voice” (Interview in Cross River State in November of 2021).

Additionally, while several pieces of literature have suggested that stakeholders’ participation is more obvious at the implementation stage, this study revealed that even at the level of policy implementation, the process is highly political, with several cases of marginalization and elite capture, especially by those with political influence stated. The following are a few examples of statement supporting the contention: (a) “We are not truthful about the things we need to do about the rice value chain. For instance, the anchor borrower program is a failure. It has been a failure as far as Cross River State is concerned because you are using the wrong people for input distribution” (Interview in Cross River State in November of 2021). (b) “Presently, stakeholders do not participate in all the stages of the process; there is a gap at the implementation stage” (Interview with the RIFAN Chairman in Cross River State in November of 2021). (c) “Yes, we have spoken to our leaders here, but we are not sure they take our concerns out” (Interview in Cross River State in November of 2021).

The failure to ensure grassroots participation through appropriate channels was identified as a major cause of policy failures as indicated in the preceding responses. Participation in policy processes will ensure the inclusiveness of the stakeholders’ needs from their standpoint to ensure implemented policies are responsive to their local demands.

SWOT Analysis of Stakeholders’ Participation in the Policy Process

Given the myriad of issues that trail and continue to undermine the rice sector in Nigeria, a SWOT analysis was also carried out to understand the external and internal conditions that either contribute to or hamper the respondents’ participation in the policy process. SWOT analysis involves the assessment of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of any group of people in their interactions with systems that affect their activities. Here, the focus is on processes that affect stakeholders’ rice enterprises, which are their primary means of livelihood.

The strength of the stakeholders’ participation in the policy process was determined by using such factors as collaboration with other stakeholders, educational status of members of their association, the financial base of their association, technical capacity on policy issues, legitimacy of their association, length of existence of their association, and the size of their association. Factors that were analyzed to identify the weaknesses of the stakeholders include low literacy levels, inadequate human capacity of their association, insufficient funding of their association, poor communication network, poor transportation network, lack of “proactiveness” among the stakeholders, poor image of their association, lack of awareness of policy processes, lack of capacity building in policy processes, lack of experience in policy issues, scattered nature of their population, corruption among the leaders of their association, and linkage gaps with other stakeholders. The stakeholders’ strengths and weaknesses help to explain the internal factors that could enhance or hinder their participation in the policy processes: i.e. issues that stem from the social environment in which they engage.

Furthermore, the opportunities the stakeholders could gain from their participation in the policy processes was determined using such factors as access to inputs, development of rural infrastructures, implementation of stakeholder-friendly policies, increased rice production, access to funds for their association, increased marketing outlet for rice, reduced costs of agricultural inputs,

access to marketing information, access to extension services, development of innovations that are based on local knowledge, increased uptake of innovations and technologies, greater involvement in local governance, equitable distribution of benefits, access to production and trade information, access to markets and governance, enhanced training, enhanced financial capacity, increased rural employment opportunities, reduced rural poverty, and enhanced private investments in rural development.

Additionally, the threats to their participation were determined using factors such as political instability, lack of a legal framework that ensures stakeholders' participation in the policy processes, bureaucratic obstacles, elite capture by large-scale agricultural stakeholders, religious barriers, ethnic barriers, gender barriers, the negative attitude of the government towards agricultural stakeholders, poor representative structure of small-scale agricultural stakeholders, frequent changes in policies on agriculture, absence of formal consultation space for agricultural stakeholders, poor access to extension services, and cultural barriers.

The opportunities and threats are indicators of the influence of the external environment on the stakeholders' participation in the policy process. The SWOT analysis of the stakeholders is presented using a matrix. Although a wide array of factors were analyzed to understand the internal and external influences on the participation of the stakeholders in the policy processes, however, only factors with response scores of 50% and above were included in the matrix. The SWOT analysis was conducted according to the stakeholders' categories. The findings are presented in the ensuing subsections.

Strength of Rice Stakeholders' Participation in the Agricultural Policy Process

The study reveals that most of the stakeholders identified the items analyzed as issues that could potentially strengthen their participation in the policy processes. The educational status of members of the association (42.4%), the financial base of the association (44.5%), and the legitimacy of the association (46.8%) were indicated as having a very high impact on their participation in the policy processes (see Table 1). This implies that having members of the association who are highly educated will enhance the likelihood of their representation in policy decision domains than when they lack people with quality education to represent them. Similarly, a strong financial base of the association implies the likelihood of participating in policy decisions. Additionally, legitimating the stakeholders' association provides a greater platform for participation in policy decision processes than when the association is not legitimized. While these and other issues assessed proved as important considerations that could strengthen the stakeholders' participation, it is equally important to note that these responses were more or less based on observations from patterns of representation, especially given the long-standing problem of elite capture in the agricultural sector. In this sense, the elites, who are the more educated and more financially situated generally constitute the participants in policy decision-making processes and the prime beneficiaries of government's interventions that proceed from implemented policies. But, according to one respondent, "No, they don't give our men also. Except for the politicians, they have not given us anything in this community. It is only the politicians in the community that benefit, they hijack the benefits" (Interview in Ebonyi State in November of 2021).

This situation remains a major point of marginalization against the rural poor who, although constitute the major players in the rice value chain activities, are hardly engaged in policy decision processes due to their poor financial capacities, limited education, and inability to access spaces of policy decision. Grassroots mobilization, capacity building, and organization of formidable coalitions remain alternatives that the rice stakeholders at the rural grassroots level need to explore in order to

enhance their capacity to engage policy decision processes in Nigeria.

Table 1: Strength of Rice Stakeholders' Participation in Agricultural Policy Process

S/N	Strength of participation	Impact on participation (%)											
		Very high impact		High impact		Low impact		Very low impact		No impact		Total	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1.	Collaboration with other associations	222	38.7	248	43.3	30	5.2	53	9.2	20	3.5	573	100.0
2.	Educational status of members of the association	243	42.4	193	33.7	39	6.8	66	11.5	32	5.6	573	100.0
3.	The financial base of the association	255	44.5	208	36.3	44	7.7	44	7.7	22	3.8	573	100.0
4.	Technical capacity on policy issues	155	27.1	310	54.1	42	7.3	41	7.2	25	4.4	573	100.0
5.	The legitimacy of the association	268	46.8	161	28.1	67	11.7	47	8.2	30	5.2	573	100.0
6.	Length of existence of the association	192	33.5	191	33.3	110	19.2	48	8.2	32	5.6	573	100.0
7.	Size of the association	117	20.4	256	44.7	89	15.5	80	14.0	31	5.4	573	100.0

Source: Self-generated by the Authors

Weaknesses of Rice Stakeholders' Participation in the Agricultural Policy Process

The weaknesses of the rice value chain stakeholders that could hamper their participation in the policy process were analyzed and the findings reveal that most of the issues that constitute weaknesses could have a very high impact on their participation in policy decision-making processes. Specifically, inadequate human capacity (48.2%), insufficient funding of the association (51.8%), poor image of the rice stakeholders' association (41.0%), lack of experience on policy issues (47.3%), corruption among leaders of the association (51.0%), and linkage gaps with other stakeholders (44.7%) were reported as having very high impact on their likelihood of participation in the policy process (refer to Table 2).

The preceding finding implies that the capacity building of the value chain stakeholders is an important factor that should be addressed to enhance their participation in policy decision-making processes. Human capacity deficiency may not necessarily be in terms of limited number of players in the association, but the capacity of the players to engage. In this regard, the educational capability, understanding of policy issues and windows of opportunity to influence are important for meaningful engagement in policy domains that will trickle down to other members of the association at the grassroots levels. Another important concern for the rice stakeholders is the poor image of the association, a problem that continues to undermine the performance of agriculture in Nigeria.

Where the stakeholders are easily sidelined either by the better-situated elites who are few or the political class that pays little attention to the importance of the rural poor who constitute the vast majority of the players in the rice value chain in Nigeria, the barrier created by gaps in linkages among the players and the formal institutions in the policy processes is also critical in addressing the problems that are affecting the rice sector in Nigeria. One way the stakeholders can address this gap is through collaborative activities among their various associations, forming of coalitions that can influence policy spaces and attract the attention of other policy players for their inclusive participation in policy processes.

Table 2: Weaknesses of Rice Stakeholders' Participation in the Agricultural Policy Process

S/N	Strength of participation	Impact on participation (%)											
		Very high impact		High impact		Low impact		Very low impact		No impact		Total	
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1.	The low literacy level of members	182	31.8	203	35.4	105	18.3	63	11.0	20	3.5	573	100.0
2.	The inadequate human capacity of the organization	276	48.2	121	21.1	83	14.5	75	13.1	18	3.1	573	100.0
3.	Insufficient funds available to the association	297	51.8	155	27.1	44	7.7	52	9.1	25	4.4	573	100.0
4.	Poor communication network	112	19.5	281	49.0	96	16.8	65	11.3	19	3.3	573	100.0
5.	Poor transportation network	173	30.2	271	47.3	75	13.1	37	6.5	17	3.0	573	100.0
6.	Lack of proactiveness among rice stakeholders	128	22.3	266	46.4	89	15.5	71	12.4	19	3.3	573	100.0
7.	Poor image of rice stakeholders' association	235	41.0	191	33.3	73	12.7	51	8.9	23	4.0	573	100.0
8.	Lack of awareness of the policy-making process	162	28.3	248	43.3	87	15.2	51	8.9	25	4.4	573	100.0
9.	Lack of capacity building in the policy-making process	188	32.8	241	42.1	75	13.1	46	8.0	23	4.0	573	100.0
10.	Lack of experience in policy issues	271	47.3	155	27.1	60	10.5	61	10.6	26	4.5	573	100.0

11.	Scattered nature of rice stakeholders' population	147	25.7	214	37.3	126	22.0	60	10.5	26	4.5	573	100.0
12.	Corruption among leaders of the association	292	51.0	138	24.1	40	7.0	83	14.5	20	3.5	573	100.0
13.	Linkage gaps with other stakeholders	256	44.7	180	31.4	53	9.2	60	10.5	24	4.2	573	100.0

Source: Self-generated by the Authors

Opportunities for Rice Stakeholders' Participation in the Agricultural Policy Process

The opportunities that abound to the rice stakeholder due to participation in agricultural policy process were also analyzed in the study. The attractiveness of such opportunities highlights the stakeholders' assessment of such benefits. Access to inputs (51.5%), implementation of stakeholder-friendly policies (50.8%), increased rice production (58.3%), access to funding of the association (51.5%), increased marketing outlet for rice (46.9%), reduced costs of inputs (48.7%), access to marketing information (47.6%), access to extension services (57.2%), development of innovations that are based on local knowledge (48.3%), etc., were rated as very attractive by the stakeholders (see Table 3).

The high rating of most of the opportunities that abound through the stakeholders' participation in policy decisions is an important consideration that should guide inclusive policy-making in Nigeria. The attractiveness attached to most of the issues is indicative of the expectations of the stakeholders and the benefits their participation holds for them. This also reflects the understanding of the value chain stakeholders of what they need to make the sector work and the associated gains for them as enterprisers and for rural and national development.

Table 3: Opportunities for Rice Stakeholders' Participation in the Agricultural Policy Process

S/N	Opportunities of participation	Attractiveness of opportunities for participation (%)						Total	
		Very attractive		Attractive		Not attractive		F	%
		F	%	F	%	F	%		
1.	Access to inputs	296	51.5	92	16.1	185	32.2	573	100.0
2.	Development of rural infrastructures	157	27.4	218	38.0	198	34.6	573	100.0
3.	Implementation of stakeholder-friendly policies	291	50.8	74	12.9	208	36.3	573	100.0
4.	Increased rice production	334	58.3	122	21.3	117	20.4	573	100.0
5.	Access to the funding of the association	295	51.5	40	7.0	238	41.5	573	100.0
6.	Increased marketing outlet for rice	269	46.9	103	18.0	201	35.1	573	100.0
7.	Reduced costs of agricultural inputs	279	48.7	54	9.4	240	41.9	573	100.0
8.	Access to marketing information	273	47.6	95	16.6	205	35.8	573	100.0
9.	Access to extension services	328	57.2	89	15.5	156	27.2	573	100.0
10.	Development of innovations that are based on local knowledge	277	48.3	173	30.2	123	21.5	573	100.0

11.	Increased uptake of innovations and technologies	264	46.1	142	24.8	167	29.1	573	100.0
12.	Greater involvement in local governance	166	29.0	209	36.5	198	24.6	573	100.0
13.	Equitable distribution of benefits	271	47.3	92	16.1	210	36.6	573	100.0
14.	Access to production and trade information	266	46.4	80	14.0	227	39.6	573	100.0
15.	Access to markets and government	271	47.3	82	14.3	220	38.4	573	100.0
16.	Enhanced training	283	49.4	70	12.2	220	38.4	573	100.0
17.	Enhanced financial capacity	184	32.1	143	25.0	246	42.6	573	100.0
18.	Increased rural employment opportunities	151	26.4	179	31.2	243	42.4	573	100.0
19.	Reduced rural poverty	267	46.6	66	11.5	240	41.9	573	100.0
20.	Encourage private investments in rural development	165	28.8	173	30.2	235	41.0	573	100.0

Source: Self-generated by the Authors

Threats to Rice Stakeholders' Participation in the Agricultural Policy Process

While the need for the rice value chain stakeholders' participation in the agricultural policy process cannot be undermined given the relevance of rice in the national food security in Nigeria, addressing the threats that limit or prevent their participation in policy decision processes is important in Nigeria. Findings from the study indicate that political instability (66.7%), bureaucratic obstacles (58.6%), elite capture by large-scale agricultural stakeholders (44.7%), the negative attitude of the government toward the stakeholders (48.3%), poor representative structure of small-scale stakeholders (42.2%), and frequent changes in agricultural policies (42.1%) were highly serious threats to the stakeholders' participation in the policy processes (refer to Table 4).

From the findings, the political environment in Nigeria constitutes a serious threat to the stakeholders' participation in the agricultural policy process with implications for their rice enterprises and livelihood outcomes. The termination of a policy intervention of a previous government by a new government without recourse to the likely direct or indirect implications on the beneficiaries of the policy remains one of the major problems that have continued to undermine the performance of the rice sector vis-à-vis the poor agricultural performance in Nigeria. Apart from the direct negative impact of policy termination on beneficiaries, the cost implication should also be given consideration, as a fluctuating policy direction that is driven by instability in political regimes will not be able to attain any meaningful development strides in any society. Rather, the policies of an outgoing regime where credible should be completed and built upon or modified by a new government as a way of policy sustenance for progressive development.

Bureaucracy in the agricultural policy pathway in Nigeria is a major barrier to access to inputs, a problem that continues to drive the poor performance of the rice sector. Several of the value chain stakeholders interviewed in the three states where the study was carried out attested to the late distribution of inputs as a major problem they encountered. Situations where inputs were distributed late and, in some cases, when the planting season was completely over were commonplace. Another common scenario in the distribution of inputs which also constituted a major problem was the bias in such distribution, such that stakeholders in the northern part of the country, who generally cultivate their rice later in the year due to differences in climate, were said to

enjoy such distributions compared to the southern farmers whose climatic conditions require planting early. Distributing inputs when the northern farmers are about planting whereas the southern farmers have peaked or about harvesting was seen by the stakeholders as having a political undertone in favor of the northern stakeholders. While not confirming this bias, the representative of the National Cereals Research Institute (NCRI), mandated on rice research in Nigeria, however, noted that policy direction cannot address the concerns of all the stakeholders at the same time due to the variances in climatic, ecological and environmental conditions along the north-south division.

Table 4: Threats to Rice Stakeholders' Participation in the Agricultural Policy Process

S/N	Threats to participation	Seriousness of threat to participation								Total	
		Highly serious		Serious		Not serious		Not a threat			
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
1.	Political instability	382	66.7	117	20.4	48	8.4	26	4.5	573	100.0
2.	Lack of legal framework that ensures agricultural stakeholders' participation	220	38.4	245	42.8	84	14.7	24	4.2	573	100.0
3.	Bureaucratic obstacles	336	58.6	117	30.9	32	5.6	28	4.9	573	100.0
4.	Elite capture by large-scale agricultural stakeholders	256	44.7	244	42.6	41	7.2	32	5.6	573	100.0
5.	Religious barrier	107	17.7	90	15.7	292	51.0	84	14.7	573	100.0
6.	Ethnic barriers	62	10.8	156	27.2	274	47.8	81	14.1	573	100.0
7.	Gender barriers	81	14.1	145	25.3	268	46.8	79	13.8	573	100.0
8.	The negative attitude of the government toward agricultural stakeholders	277	48.3	222	38.7	50	8.7	24	4.2	573	100.0
9.	Poor representative structure of small-scale agricultural stakeholders	242	42.2	243	42.4	49	8.6	39	6.8	573	100.0
10.	Frequent changes in policies on agriculture	241	42.1	220	38.4	85	14.8	27	4.7	573	100.0
11.	Absence of formal consultation space for agricultural stakeholders	216	37.7	288	50.3	43	7.5	26	4.5	573	100.0
12.	Poor access to extension services	183	31.9	156	27.2	194	33.9	40	7.0	573	100.0
13.	Cultural barriers	67	11.7	124	21.6	210	36.6	172	30.0	573	100.0

Source: Self-generated by the Authors

In summarizing the SWOT of the rice value chain stakeholders, Figure 2 presents the major strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats that were reported as having very high impact, highly attractive or highly serious as applied in the study. Hence, in order to ensure the voices of the stakeholders are incorporated into agricultural policy process that drives the rice value chain in Nigeria, paying attention to these critical issues is sacrosanct.

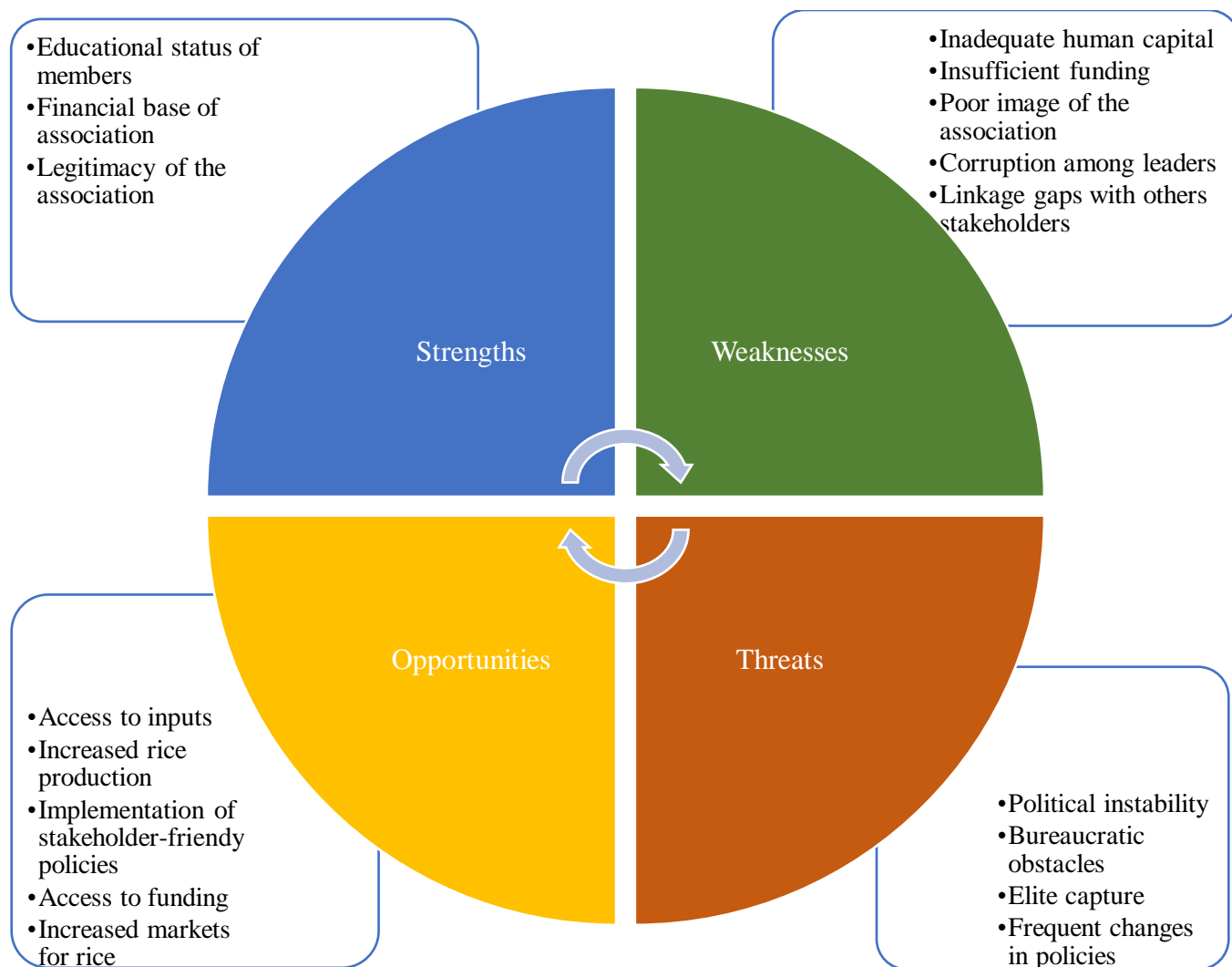


Figure 2: SWOT Analysis of the Participation of Rice Value Chain Stakeholders in Agricultural Policy Process in Southern Nigeria
 Source: Self-generated by the Authors

Conclusion and Recommendations

The collective efforts of the value chain stakeholders and the support institutions that interface with them are crucial in achieving sustainable rice production that ensures food security and reduces hunger in Nigeria in line with the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The study concludes that to improve the performance of rice in southern Nigeria, enhancing those factors that will improve the stakeholders’ participation in the policy processes with better access to opportunities, while at the same time removing the barriers that threaten their participation, both the internal and external, is imperative. For instance, increasing the financial base of their association will strengthen their participation in the policy processes, and increasing their access to productive inputs was reported as having the potential to increase their production capacity.

Similarly, the draconian problem of corruption and bureaucratic obstacles were reported as a weakness and a threat, respectively, across the stakeholder categories that limit their participation in

the policy process. Accordingly, three recommendations are offered. First, in order to improve the participation of the rice stakeholders in policy decisions that affect their livelihoods and general well-being, the issues highlighted by the SWOT analysis should be given important consideration. Second, the government, other interest groups, and development partners should focus on these issues in their efforts to address the policy-related challenges that limit the performance of the rice sector in Nigeria. And third, the rice value chain stakeholders should build potential of coalitions as a way of bridging linkage gaps and maximizing opportunities of influencing policy windows for their benefits.

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