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# **CHALLENGES FACED BY GHANAIAN FEMALE PEASANTS IN ACCESSING FARM CREDIT:**

## **A STUDY IN THE MION DISTRICT**

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## List of Acronyms

ADB	Agricultural Development Bank
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
IFAD	International Fund for Agricultural Development
MFI	Microfinance Institution

REP	Rural Enterprise Program
ROSCA	Rotating Savings and Credit Association
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SME	Small and Medium-sized Enterprise
WIAD	Women in Agriculture Development

## Abstract

Agriculture, for many years, has been one of the major contributors to Ghana's economic growth and because of this, all governments have tried to enact and implement policies to help boost Ghana's agricultural growth. Women over the years have been an active part of the agricultural growth in the country, stemming from off-farm duties such as shelling, processing, and marketing, and now going into direct farming and even owning lands themselves. Using a qualitative research method, I assessed the various forms of funding for female farmers in the Mion district in the Northern region of Ghana where farming is dominant. I analyzed how these female farmers get funds to invest in their farming and how these sources of funding have affected them. I analyzed how formal vs. informal sources of credit are preferred, and the consequences this has on their farming activities and their livelihoods. I found that farmers with favorable loan terms, those with the family option, tend to experience the least negative consequences on failure to repay. The most common sources of credit are family (50%) and credit unions (26.7%). Private lenders (20%) and banks (3.3%).

## **Relevance to Development Studies**

The implications arising from debt resulting from farm credit among the female peasants are of considerable importance, especially to Development Studies. This is so because Development Studies, at its core, is all about analysing and explaining the configurations that sustain poverty, inequity and under-development. And the most important element of financial resource is financial capital which plays strategic role in economic enfranchisement and poverty reduction. I further argued that credit considerably affects productivity, food security, and sustainable livelihoods in many agriculture-dependent countries such as Ghana. Although this study has explored the impact of debts that majority of women face in accessing credit despite the challenges, they face socially, economically and institutionally, the paper outlines an important point of convergence between gender, rural development and financial loss.

Female farmers are pivotal in household food production and income earning in the context of rural development but they are discriminated against in access to credit. For this reason their economic impact is restricted and this has wider impacts for agricultural productivity at the community, regional, and national levels. By examining this issue, the current paper contributes to policy implications that ensure effective and efficient credit services for empowering women farmers and improving their credit accessibility without plunging them deeper in debts; ultimately leading to enhanced rural development.



## **Keywords**

Debt, Consequences, Productivity, Collateral, Studies, Economic, Informal, Empowerment, Financial, Inclusion, Development, Gender, Disparity, Agricultural, Institutional, Barriers, Loan, Peasant, Repayment, Farming, Poverty, Cycle, Rural, Finance, Indebtedness, Socio-cultural, Barriers, Subsistence, Women's, Empowerment, Farming, Sustainable, Credit, Access, Ghana.



# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1 Background

The rain was pouring down in torrents, accompanied by the harsh sounds of thunder crackling through the sky. Flashing streaks of lightning illuminated the dark clouds, intensifying the ominous atmosphere. Amidst the storm, a taxi parked in front of the community center. The driver gets down to open the boot of the car to bring the wheelchair down. A young lady gets down from the passenger seat in the back to help the driver with that. Her face reflected both concern and urgency. Mama Rose was calmly seated in the front near the driver's seat, her frail body slightly slumped toward the door. Her frame was wrapped in layers of fabric to protect her from the cold, but the weariness on her face revealed how little comfort it provided. She suffered a stroke a few weeks ago, and one could clearly tell she was not well enough to be joining a social gathering. The driver and the young lady moved towards Mama Rose to help her sit in the wheelchair. It was a slow and delicate process, with each movement carefully calculated to avoid causing her pain. She needed to be present at this meeting. She took a loan to invest in her small farm before she fell ill and could not pay her weekly loan. Her presence at the meeting was unavoidable. Hence her presence there was to reassure her Rotating Savings and Credit Association (ROSCA) members that her inability to pay was not intentional. The financial system she belonged to demanded that each member be accountable for their loans, no matter their personal circumstances. The ROSCA operated on trust, and any deviation from expected payments threatened the group's collective stability. With the seasons changing and crop yields dropping, she had exhausted every alternative to meet repayment deadline however failed. Now she faced the burden of proving to the group that she had not intentionally neglected her debt obligations. "But what is happening here?" I wondered. It puzzled me how indebtedness suddenly made people so untrustworthy. Why is debt pushing people into such cruel demands? How did something meant to empower people financially lead to such distress and social tension? How could something as common as credit suddenly render a person unreliable, subjecting them to such harsh demands? Moreover, I kept wondering, what social structures and systems perpetuate such rigid expectations in financial lending circles? What prevents people from accessing credit under fair conditions in the first place? Were formal lending institutions also as strict, or did community-based financial groups like the ROSCA impose stricter "moral codes" because they depended heavily on mutual trust? What are the barriers to accessing credit in the first place? If debt had such an unpleasant effect on one

individual, Mama Rose, what could be the actual barriers that exist to influence the decision of the few lenders that may exist to demand a sick woman's presence as proof? Could it be that, on a much broader scale, the omnipresence of debt could also have very hostile consequences? These are some of the central questions of this study.

Peasant farming is the mainstay of many of Ghana's uneducated population, with both men and women engaged in this type of farming. Peasant farming is a lifeline for many rural households, especially among the uneducated population, relying heavily on these activities for their livelihood. Among most peasant farmers, it is very difficult if not impossible to save any amount of money from the sales of their produce season by season because they are not able to produce much for sale that would enable them to save up some of their income (Awunyo-Victor, 2012, p.339) and that is why it becomes imperative for most of these farmers to turn to borrowing money from any available source in order to increase their production. Peasant farmers experience difficulties in getting access to loans some of the reasons being that their farmlands may be too small to attract any lender to give them money and also, most of these farmers do not save with banks who can grant them loans and those who are willing to grant them loans too demand for surety or collaterals of which these poor farmers are not able to provide (Awunyo-Victor, 2012, p.339).

This research therefore aims to investigate the challenges associated with farm credit access among female peasant farmers in the Mion District of the Northern Region of Ghana and to suggest avenues by which the plight of such rural farmers can be alleviated. The research will also discuss the consequences that debt may have among female farmers in particular, like in Mama Rose's story above.

More than 50% of the Ghanaian population are rural dwellers whose main source of livelihood is subsistence small-scale farming (Doku, Obubuafo and Hagan, 2020, p. 17). Access to credit and other financial services for small-scale farmers is one of the most promising ways in which agriculture-dependent economies like Ghana can alleviate poverty, enhance farm productivity (Biyase & Fisher, 2017; Chandio et al., 2020, pp. 50–60).

However, an inadequate supply of credit or the inaccessibility of what may be available is a major constraint on agricultural production in Ghana (Assouto & Houngbeme, 2023; Ngong et al., 2022, p. 2). Over the years, the government of Ghana has made efforts to make farm loans more accessible to small-scale farmers, who constitute about 70% of all agricultural production in the country (Doku, Obubuafo and Hagan, 2020; Darfor *et al.*, 2021, pp. 1-13). Some of these interventions include the creation of the Agricultural Development Bank (ADB), whose original core mandate was to lend to such categories of farmers at significantly lower interest rates of 19% compared to the other

financial institutions, which were lending at average interest rates of 27%. Nonetheless, as of 2020, only 29% of the bank's lending went to farmers, and much of its loans were accessed by working middle-class customers and SMEs. The main aim of the government of Ghana introducing banks in the rural areas was to make accessibility of loans easy by peasant farmers who reside in rural areas such as the town of Mion (Awunyo-Victor, 2012, p.339).

Several factors have been identified as being responsible for why farmers struggle to access credit in Ghana. Key among these factors is the informal operational model by which peasants run their farms. The lack of proper records of operations, inventory, and financial records, coupled with the lack of high-value properties of earnings that can be collateralized, makes it difficult for financial institutions to grant loans to such a category of farmers for fear of non-repayment (Kiros and Meshesha, 2022, pp. 1-22). Furthermore, Anang et al., (2015, pp. 2460–2469) investigated factors influencing Ghanaian farmers' access to agricultural microcredit and identified gender, household income, farm capital, technology adoption, extension services, farm location, and awareness of lending institutions as factors that hindered farmers' access to credit. They also noted that for the few who were able to access the loans, their loan amounts were determined by their gender, household size, cattle ownership, and farm capital.

A paper by Daemane, et al., (2022,) on Access to credit by the rural small scale maize farmers of Lesotho revealed that education level, farm size, savings and employment status are the determining factors of credit access among the farmers. Similarly, Sebatta et al., (2014) evaluating the role of credit access, farm education, off-farm employment, and use of extension in Zambia determined that a farmer's level of education, engagement in off-farm employment and use of extension have positive and significant influence on credit access. Availability of farm credit plays a critical role in supporting agricultural transformation because it facilitates investment by women farmers on productivity inputs such as seeds, fertilizers, technologies and services from agricultural extension agencies. This paper sought to discuss some of the problems that hinder female peasants in Ghana and particularly those in Mion District from securing financial credits.

This document explores the economic, socio-cultural, and institutional barriers restricting female peasants from accessing farm credit. The impact of these challenges and initiatives to improve agricultural productivity through access will also be touched on.

On the economic side, female peasants often lack collateral. If loans are to be secured from a formal financial institution like ADB, this is a critical requirement for securing such credit (Awunyo-Victor, 2012, p.339). Linked to the poverty levels palpable in rural areas like Mion, is the economic barrier to accessing credit. According to Quisumbing et al., (2014), women have little to offer in the

form of land as collateral for loans. Land, which in such situations could be the most common form of collateral, is owned mostly by men. Even when women are eligible, some will rather stay away from assessing the loans due to high interest rates from local lenders, unfavorable terms of payment, and short repayment periods. The unavailability and limited access to information regarding what might even be available as credit or support further increase the challenges women farmers' face, as many are unaware of the financial options.

According to Sarpong-Kumankoma et al., (2023), many financial institutions in Ghana are gender-biased. They tend to favor male clients because they are perceived to be more creditworthy and reliable to pay back and also, most male farmers own vast of land which means they can make more profit from the farm than women whose land sizes are small and incapable of giving high productivity. When interacting with female peasants, bureaucratic hurdles, and lengthy application formalities impede ease of access for women, especially those with low literacy levels. Also, the lack of tailor-made credit products that target specifically women who invest in agribusiness dominant in the Mion district limits their access to financial services, whichever form they take.

The difficulty of female peasants obtaining farming credit has serious consequences for agricultural productivity and the welfare of households in Mion. Women are not able to invest in essential farm inputs. This lowers crop yields and lowers income. It affects food security and the general economic stability of families that rely on agriculture as their primary livelihood source (Ehiakpor, Adzawla, and Danso-Abbeam, 2016, pp. 40-46). The long-term socioeconomic effects are particularly substantial, as women's lack of access to financial services reinforces poverty cycles and hinders development potential.

Admittedly, numerous initiatives have been launched to tackle the exclusion of female peasants from agriculture financing. In providing small loans to female farmers, cooperative societies and some microfinance institutions (MFIs) have played a critical role in supporting such farmers without the need for traditional collaterals that apply in bigger financial places like banks. Rural Enterprise Program (REP) and Women in Agriculture Development (WIAD) are programs that have aimed to enhance women's access to credit by giving them training and financial services that are tailored to their needs (IFAD, 2024, p. 8).

Female peasants in the Mion District face different challenges in getting access to farm credit. These challenges include socio-cultural, economic, and institutional barriers. Even in the face of the stated initiatives, significant gaps still exist. Enhancing access to credit for women in agriculture is not only crucial for agricultural productivity but also for gender parity and economic development in rural communities. Resolving these challenges necessitates concerted efforts from financial institutions,

policymakers, and development agencies in order to establish inclusive financial services that address the specific needs of female peasants.

## 1.2 Statement of the Problem

Financial aid plays a crucial role for the growth for countries which consist of a significant number of population involved in agriculture like Ghana. Majority of farmers belong to the class of poor people in developing rural regions. This was captured by Gerber (2015, pp. 413–423) where he argued that, “the provision of credit is crucial for existence of many families in the low income bracket.”

A major challenge that is evident among female peasants in the rural farming communities in Mion District in Ghana and other similar districts in Ghana is access to credit. Even though they are central in agriculture and food production, they remain locked out of the financial instruments that can help them enhance production and incomes. Mama Rose's story serves as an example of a common problem: women are not able to access credit and the others struggle with debt repayment when they do attain it. What development consequences does this issue pose to the women farmers across different socioeconomic classes, and why is such an issue more rife now?

A significant factor that contributes to this problem is the lack of other sources of financial support in institutional form that is designed exclusively for rural female farmers. In most of the cases these are women with financial options that are either illegal or available only when they are in compromising situations. Even when some female peasants are given financial loans, seeds, or fertilizer, such forms of assistance are normally insufficient and do not have the structural support that would enable them to endure. Where credit is not easily and appropriately accessible, women cannot improve their productive assets that could improve their returns, income levels and food security for their households. These women are locked out of financial assistance options, and thus are confined to the vice-like grip of poverty with little hope of escaping the cycle or obtaining economic freedom.

Moreover, profound social prejudices aggravate this financial constrain even further. Because men have traditionally been expected to head households and make decisions, women encounter a structural barrier. Female farmers, especially those who have no land or property for which they can use to secure an official loan cannot gain access to official loans. Quisumbing et al. (2014) and Atakli & Agbenyo (2020) noted that cultural beliefs about women farmers are seen as unsuitable to engaging in financial activities. This has continued to exacerbate the neglect of women's financial needs, the splitting of their workload and downplaying of their input to agriculture. This marginalization has led to economic dependence on male relatives, and unofficial lenders through borrowing with interest.

The problem is worsened by economic factors. Many female peasants, especially those with low savings and salaries, do not meet the stringent requirements of official financial institutions. If they are able to secure financing, they may face high interest rates, short payback periods, or both—terms that are ultimately nearly impossible to meet. Furthermore, it is challenging for these women to

properly apply for loans or research other credit options due to their lack of financial literacy. Due to their ignorance of financial products and support systems, many rural women are subjected to unethical lending practices that worsen their financial situation (Sarpong-Kumankoma, Ab-Bakar, and Akplehey, 2023).

Also, what we cannot overlook is the consequences or negative effects of these loans given to female farmers whether poor, middle or rich female peasant farmers. The government of Ghana brought policies which improved women in agriculture's access to loans to improve on their farming but at the same time, it increased the rate of loan repayment default on the part of loan beneficiaries who were not able to make payments on time or make payments at all which not only affected the borrowers but the lenders too (Awunyo-Victor, 2012, p.339-340). Gerber (2021) also states that rural indebtedness does not impact negatively on the poor or middle-class peasants only but the rich peasants as well. One of the main consequences of debts is land dispossession a situation which results from landowners having to give away their land due to their inability to repay their debts (Gerber, 2021, p.550). Thus to say, some landowners are not able to repay their debts and the only means for them to settle the debts is to give out their lands to their creditors or face other consequences such as being dragged to court which might result in imprisonment of debtors. This research aims to discuss female farmers' access to credit/loan and also the consequences these loans or credits have on them as farmers.

### **1.3 Research Objective**

The objective of this study is to examine the nature and characteristics of debt among female peasants in the Mion District of Ghana and analyze how access to farm financing affects their agricultural and general livelihoods.

### **1.4 Research Question**

What are the barriers to accessing farm financing and the consequences of debt for the female peasant farmers in the Mion District of Ghana?

#### **Sub-Questions;**

- A. In what ways are the access to farm financing differentiated across social classes?
- B. What are the different sources of credit used by female peasants, and how do these various sources influence the consequences of their debt?
- C. What are the consequences of debt arising from the inability of female farmers to repay farm credit, and how do these affect livelihoods?



## **1.5 Organization of the Paper**

This research is structured in such a manner that Chapter Two is about the methodology of the research. It considers the exact methods used and a reflection on doing such research in the study area, particularly with female farmers who have financial challenges.

Chapter Three is about the Theoretical and Conceptual foundation on which this research is based.

Chapter Four is about the hard findings of the research and analysis done. This chapter looks at the empirical findings and analyzes the nexus of debt and financial access and availability in the lives of female peasant farmers.

Chapter Five concludes and makes some recommendations based on the findings.

## Chapter 2: Research Methodology

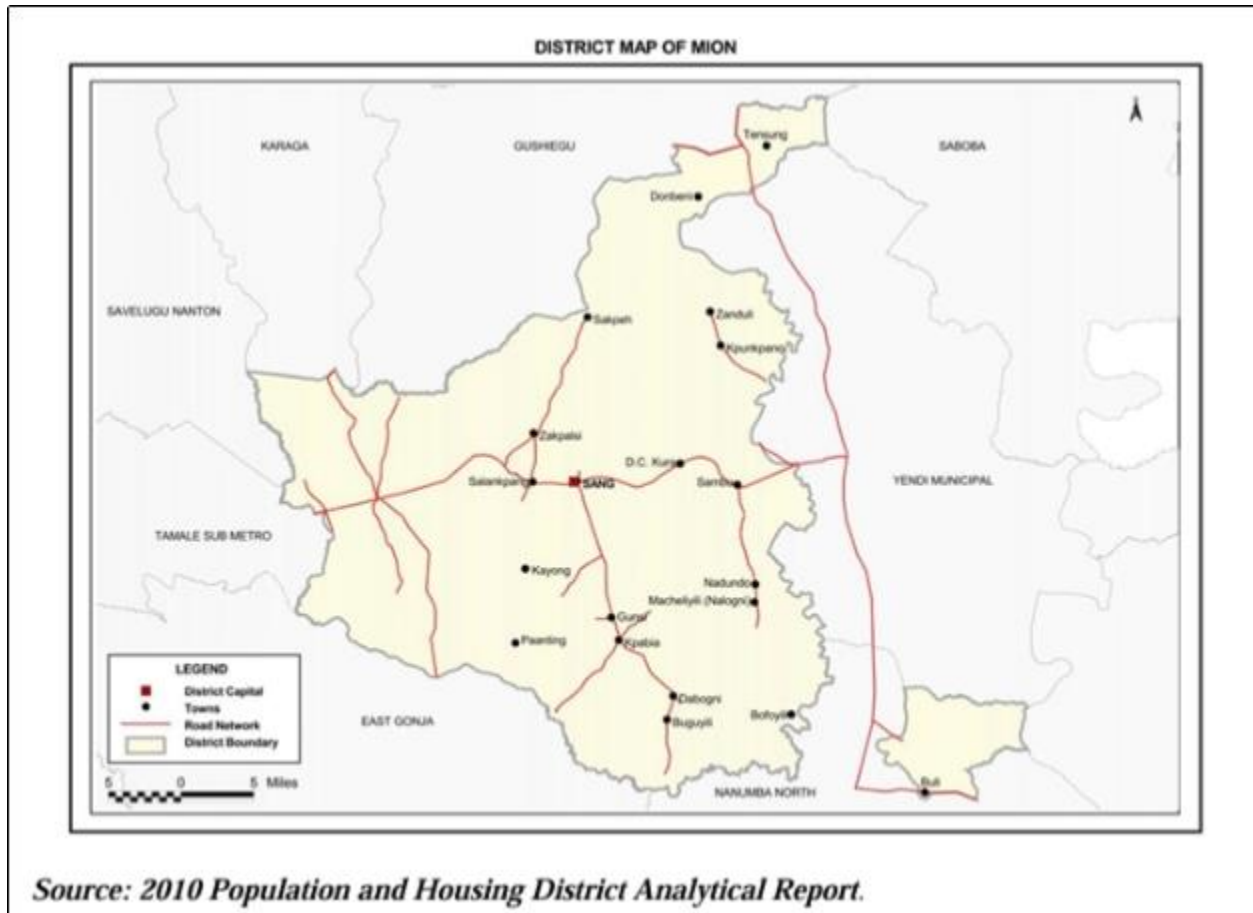
### 2.1 Profile of the Study Area

This study was conducted within the Mion District, one of the eighteen districts in the northern region. Mion District has proved to be ideal in directing research and development activities because of its geographical and socio-economic endowments. Mion is in the eastern belt of the Northern Region in the Republic of Ghana at longitudes 9° to 35° North, 0° to 30° West and latitude, 0° to 15° East. This new district which was established to ensure efficient administration; economic development, and to take development closer to the door step of the citizens. It was created in 2012 from the Yendi Municipality by Legislative Instrument 2064, 2012. This administrative modification was crucial stepping up a process of local management and making sure that resources are distributed better to cater for the community needs.

The district occupies an area of approximately 2,714 square kilometers, and hence is considered to be among the largest districts in the region. While there is sufficient expanse of land area for agriculture expansion there are still credit constraints and lack of modern methods of farming. Its district capital is Sang which is a town where most business and political activities in the district take place. Sang is not only the focal point of governmental activities, but also contains several markets, and business which are helpful to the local people for trading purpose, improving the trade and economy. Table 1 below highlights some demographic characteristics index of Mion District, culled from the recently conducted census by the Ghana Statistical Service. It reveals that the total population of Mion District is estimated at 94000 individuals. The major indicators among this population include: it has a youthful population density, development strategies in the area will thus have to factor this in a bid to help them make positive progress and also not be a liability to development. The district is largely rural whereby more than 80% of the people in the district depend on agriculture. Such reliance on agriculture calls for the need to establish and implement proper innovative agricultural policies and frameworks to support productivity and income of peasants in this region.

The population is inevitably young with more than a third of the population aged less than 35 years as is commonplace with most rural areas in Ghana. The ethnic demography of the district is cosmopolitan with the Dagombas as the primary inhabitants in comparison to other smaller ethnic groups. Therefore, this cultural diversity in the district influences tradition, and agricultural practices and relations among communities. Below is a geographic map of the district. The map reveals the various communities within Mion District, their road networks; schools; and healthcare facilities that are vital in shaping the future development of Mion. Small holder farming is the dominant type of farming adopted by the indigenous people (Ghana Statistical Service, 2020, pp. 1-70). This practice is normally associated with peasants using old techniques whereby most of what they produce is for their own utilization and not for sale. Even though this approach is essential for the food security, it also supports the need for interventions that would improve agriculture, that would increase access to market and above all, advance economics to be less sensitive to incidences like climate change, changes in prices and the like.

**Map 1.1**  
A map showing the study area



*Source: Map 1: Population and Housing District Analytical Report, (2010)*

## 2.2 Research Design

According to Indu and Vidhukumar, 2019, research design can simply be described as a structured approach to applying scientific research in solving a scientific problem. This is a crucial plan to consider since it creates order and flow of the research process and therefore impacts validity and reliability of results. Broadly put, it directs the study by pointing out how data will be gathered and analysed in a methodical study. Through the specification of methods and procedures expected to be followed, a research design reduces biases and increases the reliability on the findings. Just like the building design plays an important role in architectural creation, research design is central to planning and structuring of a research work (Brent and Leedy, 1990, p. 271). They give a guide that helps me stay oriented to the objectives and the research questions of the study. For this study, an exploratory,

descriptive design was used to assess the implications of debt from farm credit to the female peasant farmers.

This type of design was appropriate for the study since it enabled the researcher to interview participants one on one in a bid to grasp a phenomenon as suggested by McCallum and Howes (2018; pp. 1-8). Exploratory descriptive studies are most useful in fields where little base research has been done as this methodology provides patterns, themes and insights for subsequent explorations. It is therefore for these reasons that a descriptive–qualitative design was deemed appropriate to inform the investigation of the experiences of the women in relation to debt and its implications for their agricultural production. This approach focuses on recognizing participants’ perceptions, attitudes, and original life experiences and which offer thorough context to the subject under discussion.

I conducted extended one-to-one oral interviews with the participants in order to let them explain their situation and opinions. Conducting the exercise in this manner, ensures that none of the participants is influenced by another. Promoting free flow of ideas that can help further define the challenge the group is facing.

## **2.3 Target Population**

The target population of this study included all female smallholder farmers residing in Mion District. Participants were categorized based on social class and farmland ownership status.

## **2.4 Sampling Technique**

Sampling is the process of choosing participants to take part in the study on the basis that they provide information that is considered current study. It entails the selection of the desired number of participants to take part in the study (Palinkas *et al.*, 2015, pp. 533-544). The researcher used a purposive sampling technique to select participants for the study. Purposive sampling is a form of nonprobability sampling method where the researcher consciously selects a sample from a population with the characteristics required for the study (Beck, 2009, pp. 543-554).

This sampling technique was employed because it makes it possible for researchers to select participants with homogenous features that have rich information regarding the purpose of the study (Shaheen, Pradhan and Ranajee, 2019, pp. 25-51). Hence, the technique enabled the researcher to choose participants who have first-hand experience with the issue of debt related to farm credit.

## **2.5 Sample size**

According to Verma et al. (2017, p. 298), the research sample size is the total number of respondents or subjects chosen from the sampling unit as a representative sample of the larger population being studied. In qualitative research, the determination of the maximum sample size is usually guided by

data redundancy or saturation, the point at which no new responses emerge from the participants (Saunders *et al.*, 2018, p. 1894).

Hence, data analysis will be done concurrently with the interviews until a point when no new information emerges from the views and/or experiences of the respondents.

## **2.6 Data Sources**

Using an Ethnographic method allowed me to get access to the personal emotions and experiences of the people in the study area, especially the female peasant farmers. The primary data will be obtained through oral interviews with respondents in the communities. Secondary data will be sourced from policy documents, annual reports of ministries, departments, and agencies (MMDAs), and articles and journals on smallholder farmers' access to credit and related effects on their agricultural productivity.

## **2.7 Data Collection Tool/Procedure**

### **2.7.1 Qualitative Interviews**

A semi-structured interview guide was used to guide the data collection. This method allows for flexibility while ensuring that essential questions are covered, thus facilitating a more comprehensive exploration of the research questions. A Google Form developed and the questions were answered during interviews with the participants. This approach helped me to modify questions according to the responses given by the respondents so that the research guide would still remain useful and relevant until the last stage of collecting data. The interview guide was divided into various simple questions. The first section was designed to elicit data on participants' demographic characteristics, such as land ownership; the second part contained questions that assessed the social class location and credit sources of the respondents; the third part evaluated the role of credit in helping the peasant farmers expand production and transition into large-scale agricultural production; and the last part looked at the consequences of debt on the living standards of the women. This structured yet adaptable format allowed for a detailed examination of how these factors interconnect and impact the participants' lives.

Adams, (2015, p. 492-505) noted that a semi-structured interview, conducted in conversation with one participant at a time, uses a combination of closed- and open-ended questions, frequently followed by follow-up why or how questions. This style encourages participants to elaborate on their answers, providing richer, more detailed data that can illuminate underlying issues and themes.

On average, the field consultant, who could easily speak the language for better comprehension and response from the farmers, used about 30 minutes and had some of the conversations recorded with consent. Recording the interviews, with the permission of the farmers, not only ensured accuracy in data collection but also allowed me to focus on the conversation rather than solely on the entries of responses.

## 2.7.2 Field Assistant

Iddrisu is a Mion Resident. His local knowledge and connections within the community proved invaluable for the study, as he could facilitate trust and rapport with participants. He himself is into farming too. This shared background enabled him to relate to the farmers, creating a comfortable environment for open dialogue.

He is a friend to a Fire Officer who happens to be a close friend of mine. When I shared the idea of my research work and the help I may need in translating the language to make understanding and collection of data easy, he contacted Iddrisu. This network highlights the importance of leveraging local relationships to enhance the quality and depth of qualitative research.

We spoke at length via WhatsApp about what exactly the demands of the study will be so we could understand each other before stepping into the field. This preparatory discussion was crucial for aligning our expectations and ensuring that Iddrisu was fully equipped to assist in the data collection process.

The interviews were kept solely in the local dialect. This made it easy for the expression of views and sentiments by the women who were part of the sample chosen. Utilizing the local dialect not only facilitated clearer communication but also allowed the women to express their thoughts and feelings more authentically, reflecting their true experiences. Recorded versions of most of them were sent in via WhatsApp for further scrutiny to be sure the right questions were being posed to the female farmers and they understood what was required of them in terms of response.

This made it easy for expression of views and sentiments by the women who were part of the sample chosen. After running it by my Fire Officer friend, the recorded versions were transcribed to English as well. Transcribing interviews in this manner ensures that nuances and cultural context are preserved during the translation process.

Since it was in their local dialect, the interview did not follow a strict kind of question and answer format but a conversation with the various needed responses embedded in the random questions that flowed through the interview. This conversational approach often leads to unexpected insights, as respondents may share information that they might not have disclosed in a more rigid interview structure. My initial fear of not having a female interview the women was averted because they could relate to an indigenous male farmer like any of their brothers or husbands and respond freely to the interview questions as part of their dialogue.

All interviews were conducted in the local language of the people of Mion and later translated into English for entry into the Form for specificity and analysis. This dual-language process enhances the rigor of the research, as it allows for thorough analysis while maintaining the authenticity of the participants' voices. Additionally, the translation ensured that the findings can be communicated effectively to a broader audience, contributing to the overall understanding of the challenges faced by female peasant farmers in the region.

## 2.8 Data Processing and Analysis

Qualitative data analysis has to do with the categorization and ordering of information in such a manner as to make sense of the data and write a final report that is true and accurate (Mayan, 2016, pp. 85-100). In this inquiry, data collection and analysis were done concurrently. The recorded qualitative data were transcribed verbatim into English to eliminate the tendency of losing data and the respondent's interpretation of concepts.

Each transcribed interview was then keyed into the various outlined questions in the Form to correspond to what exactly the research seeks to find about land ownership, for example. Respondent identifiers were not used to maintain confidentiality and not be able to trace a specific response to any particular respondent.

The data entered into the Form automatically gave a picture of how the various responses took shape in general.

## **Chapter 3: Analytical Framework: The political economy of credit and debt.**

### **3.1 Towards a political economy of access to credit**

One key assumption of agrarian political economy is that different classes of farmers will have different access to credit. This was already observed by Lenin at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Russia (Gerber, 2014). He noted that both poor and rich farmers had access to credit but that their debt had very different implications. Although poor peasants consume relatively less than rich ones, they spend relatively more on basic goods and credit is typically necessary if they lack cash to meet these needs. Wealthier farmers, on the other hand, are simultaneously less dependent on the market for basic goods and more dependent on it to sell their production. The bulk of their cash expenditures go towards sustaining or increasing their production. As they routinely use investment credit, they hold a much larger mass of total debt. The emergence of agrarian capitalism thus gave rise to two different types of credit: one was a sign of precariousness, the other of increasing consolidation and capitalization. In my case study, I will seek to clarify to what extent poorer and richer farmers relate differently to the credit they are able to secure.

But this is not the only difference in accessing credit. There are also differences along gender lines. The agrarian political economy framework offers a good perspective from which one can examine the structural inequalities that impede women's access to farm credit in rural Ghana. Access to land, labor, and capital is integral to agricultural production and economic participation. Nonetheless, in patriarchal systems, men traditionally control these resources, leaving women in subordinate economic positions. In Ghana, particularly in rural areas like Mion District, a vital asset for securing credit like land and land ownership is predominantly in the hands of men. This limits women's ability to use land as collateral for loans. (Doss, 2001, p. 2080). Such a gendered distribution of land and other productive resources highlights broader agrarian structures that reinforce economic disparities when it comes to accessing credit. The agrarian political economy approach underscores how social relations of production in agriculture, such as those based on class, gender, and power, shape economic outcomes for rural women. The segregation of female peasants in the agrarian economy is not simply a result of individual behavior but is ingrained in the socio-economic structures of rural Ghana. For example, women's access to farm credit is constrained by gendered agrarian relations that stipulate that men should have control over land, agricultural inputs, and decision-making processes (Whitehead and Tsikata, 2003, pp. 67–112). The concept of patriarchal bargaining described by Kandiyoti (1988, pp. 274–290) is valid in this context, as it throws light on how women navigate patriarchal agrarian systems to access resources, albeit often through informal means that do not challenge the status quo of gendered power dynamics.

Empirical evidence from rural agrarian economies across Sub-Saharan Africa, Ghana included, underscores the structural challenges faced by women in accessing credit. According to Quisumbing & Pandolfelli (2010, pp. 581-592), how land is inherited in favor of men exacerbates the difficulties women face in securing the collateral required for formal loans. Class dynamics observed in the context of female farmers in Mion District are deeply intertwined with socio-economic realities that shape access to resources such as land, credit, and the terms of payment, all of which reflect broader



disparities in wealth, social class, and power. In many cases, lower-class female peasants in the Mion District thus have to resort to only informal credit sources such as savings groups, but these do not provide the scale of financial resources necessary for significant agricultural investment, which could transition them from subsistence to market-oriented farming.

## **3.2 Formality vs. informality in accessing credit**

In rural economies, institutions such as banks, microfinance institutions (MFIs), agricultural co-operatives, and informal savings groups are key actors in determining access to credit. These institutions operate within a framework that is influenced by the agrarian structure, including land tenure systems and agricultural labor practices. Those formal financial institutions that dominate the credit market, often demand financial documentation and collateral that are often hard to come by due to their exclusion from land ownership and formal economic networks (North, 1993, pp. 11–23). This exclusion from formal credit markets reinforces the marginalization of women in rural economies, limiting their potential to invest in productivity-enhancing inputs and technology.

In rural Ghana, agrarian credit markets are in two parts: on the one hand, the formal institutions, such as the agricultural development bank and other commercial banks, and on the other, informal setups like savings groups, rotating credit associations (ROSCAs), and family-based lending. Even though the informal setups make it easy for female farmers to access credit, the kind of credit provided fails to meet the needs of modern agricultural production because they are mostly insufficient (Acheampong, 2011, p. 2) and does not give credit beneficiaries the amount they wished to have for investing in their farm. Additionally, gender biases, as institutional barriers in the formal sector further restrict lower-class and middle class women's access to larger loans. Some financial houses perceive women as less creditworthy than men due to their perceived smaller landholdings and lower economic activity, particularly in places like the Mion District where subsistence farming is dominant (Fletschner and Kenney, 2014, pp. 32-35).

Boahene, Dasah and Agyei (2012, pp. 1–10) noted that some MFIs in Ghana offer some financial products designed to meet the specific needs of women, such as smaller loans with flexible payment terms and minimal collateral. However, these efforts have had limited reach, especially in remote areas like the Mion District, where agrarian credit markets remain underdeveloped. If these supporting models could be expanded and integrated into the broader institutional reforms, it would be critical to enhance women's access to credit and enable their participation in the agrarian economy.

## **3.3 The consequences of debt**

Agrarian political economy has produced a large body of literature on rural debt and its consequences. People going into debts is not a new thing, rather, debts in rural settlements go along way before the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Graeber, 2011 as cited in Gerber, 2021, p.547), people have borrowed money for various purposes at all times. Some people at a point in time have held the belief that charging interest on loans or monies given to other people was morally wrong but this belief did not prevent money lenders from charging interests on debts and as to whether this was morally right or wrong depended on the person lending out the money and charging interest (Jones, 1989 as cited in Gerber, 2021, p.547). The effects of debt have often been analyzed as land dispossession and bonded labor, two outcomes that occur when credit becomes out of hand. But the consequences are more varied than that. Debt also has various behavioral, economic, social, and environmental effects (Gerber 2014). These effects are complex and sometimes contradictory. They can be benign for wealthier farmers or landlords, or extremely negative for a poor farmer experiencing a bad harvest. It is this complexity of the credit-debt relationship among rural women that I will investigate in the present study. As financial indebtedness became a normal part of day to day life, it always gave way for the rich to have more financial dominance on the poor in various ways, in other words, indebtedness gave capitalism firm grounds within various communities (Gerber, 2021, p.547). Different forms of technology have been introduced into the agricultural sector and for any farmer to be abreast with modern technology, there is always the need to lend more money in order to invest in your farm so as to also stay in business (Gerber, 2021, p.548).

According to Gerber (2014, 2021), credit-debt relations have four broad sets of consequences. He calls them four 'theses'. Firstly, these consequences may impact the ownership structure, both positively and negatively for the farmer (Thesis 1). Some farmers may gain by acquiring land via credit; others may lose by being unable to repay their debts and becoming agricultural workers as a result. Secondly, credit-debt relations may instill market discipline among borrowers thereby making them obliged to calculate, cut costs, work harder, trade more, compete, and grow (what is referred to in this research as the disciplinary mechanism of debt). This ultimately reinforce the emerging capitalist culture in the countryside (Thesis 2). Third, credit-debt relations can weaken traditional community bonds (dismantling of commons, promoting individualism and social differentiation) and the environment (Thesis 3). Finally, credit-debt relations may act as a powerful mechanism shaping the trajectory and nature of capitalism (Thesis 4). In this study, I will particularly look at Thesis 1 and 2.

The above theses corroborate Steppacher's (2008) position that interest-bearing and guarantee-based loans generate three key economic pressures; (a) the pressure of increasing production far greater than the loan amount to pay principal and interest (economic growth), (b) the time pressure to adopt short-term measures of meeting repayment schedules (short-termism), and (c) the pressure of adopting technological and institutional innovations to improve solvency. These three pressures of credit-based growth represent the engine behind the evolution of capitalism. While I will not be able to explore these aspects in great detail, they nonetheless offer a framework from which my findings can be put in perspective.

### 3.4 Credit, Debt, and Capabilities

But this is not the full story. Some farmers still need credit – in a capitalistic context – to make a living. They will thus do everything they can to access credit despite the sometimes-adverse consequences. Once again, not all these consequences are adverse. Some farmers, including women, may manage to climb the class ladder thanks to investment credit. Ultimately, it may increase their capabilities. Pioneered by Amartya Sen, the capability approach offers a framework for evaluating rural development by keeping the focus on an individual's ability to achieve the kind of life that is valued with reason. The capability approach emphasizes the importance of enhancing the ability of rural women to participate fully, in this context, in agricultural production and financial markets (Sen, 1999, pp. 1-150). Female peasants in the Mion District often lack the basic resources and freedoms needed to maximize their agricultural productivity.

In an agrarian economy, the capability approach appreciates the need to expand women's economic freedoms by addressing both material challenges, such as land and credit, and social barriers, such as gender discrimination and limited education. Should women's capabilities be expanded, it will allow them to invest in high-quality seeds, fertilizers, and farming technologies essential for increasing agricultural productivity and transitioning into large-scale producers instead of staying at the subsistence level.

A study conducted by Dzadze *et al.*, (2012, p. 417) on rural farmers indicated that access to credit significantly increased the capabilities of women to invest in agricultural inputs, which leads to higher yields and improved food security. However, the study also mentioned that expanding women's capabilities depends on overcoming all kinds of barriers in the agrarian economy, such as restrictive land tenure systems and limited access to formal financial assistance.

# Chapter 4: Empirical Findings and Discussions

## 4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the research findings regarding the nexus between Credit/Debt and land ownership with access to credit in the Mion District. In discussing these findings, this chapter is divided into several sections.

### 4.1.1 The consequences of debt: Stories that bite

If you want to become rich in Africa, and Ghana's Mion district to be specific and if you want it so bad and quick then agriculture as a woman is not for you. You may have to join the choreographed political class and those in government who benefit from tenders. Farming will make you poor than a court case or ill health especially if something suddenly disrupts the seasonal planting cycles.

I am not saying agriculture cannot make anyone rich but the very stories that one hears from these women in agriculture and the ordeal some of them have had to endure in times past gives less room for hope.

In the vast agricultural landscape of Ghana, a paradoxical narrative unfolds. The nation's farmers, hailed primarily as the backbone of the economy are burdened by poverty. Despite Ghana's agricultural sector contributing significantly to the billion-dollar food industry, it struggles to uplift many of those in that space from facing the dire consequences of running into debt while trying to first put food on the family table and then feed the nation at large.

Weird stories are told of some families, especially women losing their children as a form of payment for the debts they owe their lenders who may insist on taking their pound of flesh.

As transcribed from the interviews, these are some of the consequences as shared by two female peasants, aged twenty four (24) and thirty-nine (39) respectively;

“Before you start farming, you have to make your intentions known. After making that known, you have to acquire land through your husband. After acquiring the land, you go and clear the land depending on the number of acres you can. You look for a tractor who will plow it. After plowing, you sow. Some are sowing maize and groundnuts others, are sowing soya beans. Some are farming two acres, others are farming three acres. When it germinates and it starts growing, others apply fertilizer, others don't apply fertilizer, and then how they control the farm and then one acre is hundred and fifty Ghana Cedis (Ghc150.00) so if you plough two acres, meaning you pay Ghc200.00 and you provide food for them. Some are saying they have been in the farming for five years, others are saying three years, and then the first farmer said she has been in the farm since she has been a child. The person who took care of her was a farmer so she has been in the farm for a very long time. But for her to start her own farm, it has been about five years now and their source of income is some of them sell their sheanuts and then others are through charcoal burning and then the last one is through cutting of logs and firewood selling so that they can get money to farm. Some are also saying that they

borrow from the credit unions, thus Susu and the terms of loans are not suitable for them. So if you are not lucky and then you borrow this year, next year if you are not lucky you will borrow again and then because the terms are not favorable with them, and if you do not have good yield, definitely, you have to pay them the debt and then next year you have to borrow again. Some of them were saying the products, the farm produce is not sufficient for their farms and they can't sell in bags, they can only sell in bowls, maybe one bowl or two bowls.

Some of them were also saying that, they had to contract the tractor drivers through negotiations like, if I plough one acre for you now, when you harvest, you will give me one bag of maize. And they negotiate that way before. So if a farmer is able to farm two acres, meaning she will use two bags of maize to pay the tractor owner who ploughed for her for free during the start of the season. That one is affecting their farm system.”

From Fatima (pseudo name) who on the tour of the few farms to find the real peasants broke a conversation with the field guy and spoke about times when someone she knows had to give out her daughter in marriage in exchange for the debt and land that was used for a farming season. She described the horrific turn of events for this said peasant farmer who by no fault of hers lost significant parts of the yield due to bad seeds and an unusual rainfall pattern. This she said, has been some of the critical turn in the lives of some farmers who, when they cannot pay their debt must dance to music that is life-wrenching. This is Fatima's personal story.

Another woman, Fawziah (pseudo name) also speaks about how some microfinance like ASA microcredit will not loan out credit to any female farmer who is pregnant. She Fawziah was denied a personal loan based on pregnancy. One of the basic questions this particular finance house asks is whether or not a woman is pregnant. “This is a personal experience for me because I was taking a loan for my business and I was asked if I was pregnant. Those who are pregnant are refused. I had sleepless nights because it made no sense to deny a woman credit that could be used to start something that would improve situations even before the arrival of a child”. A personal experience that corresponded to Fawziah's experience.

#### **4.1.2 The consequences of debt: Stories that bite, Discussed.**

Negotiating gendered land ownership barriers is the first step for a typical female farmer in Mion, where acquiring property usually involves the help of male family members, including husbands. After obtaining land, these women are responsible for clearing and preparing it, hiring tractors to plow the soil, and purchasing expensive farming materials like seeds and fertilizer. Due to financial limitations, they must use a range of income sources, including the sale of shea nuts, the burning of charcoal, and the collection of firewood, to fund their farming operations.

However, the lending arrangements they offer are usually unworkable. Many female farmers have to take out fresh loans every season to settle previous obligations, especially when crop yields don't meet loan requirements. This narrow debt cycle has confined them in unending battle to continue their existence financially. In their practice, farmers negotiate with owners of tractors and promise to give part of the harvested crops in the future in exchange for the tractor. This limits their chances to invest back into their operations and thus reduces their ultimate sales.

In those rural places, farmers such as “Fatima” and “Fawziah,” reveal the extreme life consequences of debt in societies. A story narrated by Fatima reveals how she was forced to marry her daughter to a creditor as a way of paying a debt. Such incidences indicate that female farmers are among the most vulnerable members of society, as they may lose their livelihoods and any control over the fate of their families because of low yields, unfavourable conditions, or poor seed quality.

Lenders resort to choices that do not uphold modern human freedom and dignity each time some families are unable to pay back the loans because unforeseen circumstances. These practices can be equated to the past forms of slavery practices, where debt means indebtedness. This continues the discrimination of women in the Ghanaian rural society and results in a form of bonded labour. Such findings raise awareness on the moral problem that some lending companies create in targeting the needy citizens and offering them the loans that do not address their suffering while also offering them inadequate support systems.

Worse still, particular micro-financing institutions, including ASA Microcredit, knowingly turn a blind eye to loan applications from pregnant women. Fawziah narrates one of the many evils of discriminative banking practices prevalent in the rural regions; she was denied a loan because of her pregnancy. Such policies perpetrate negative discourses of women, supporting and maintaining unfair belief about women’s economic value and capabilities, further excluding them during development phases.

In making pregnancy a factor in determining loan eligibility, such institutions exacerbate the economic vulnerability situation of women as they seek to attain economic independence. Such discriminative behavior not only eliminates women’s sources of income but also prevents further improvements of yield in agricultural production and rural development. The potential advantages of enabling women to raise agricultural output, improve family status and escape poverty is overshadowed when loans are not issued to pregnant women.

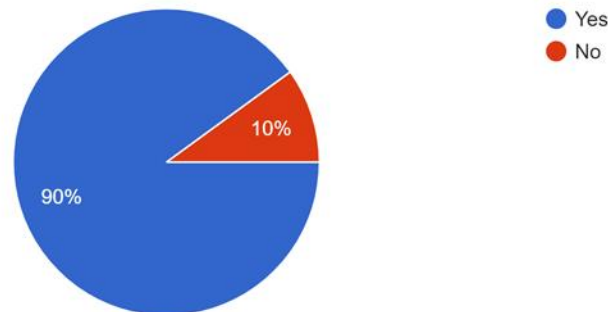
The Mion District experiences reveal the necessity for improving the profitability for women farmers by providing better understanding of the local needs of these farmers and need for having supportive financial institutions. The gender-segregated problems require appropriate policies and funding programmes to be redesigned and the avenues for support systems established for potentially sustainable rural development. By creating a more inclusive financial sector for female farmers it will result in positive economic change in rural oriented agricultural based economies. The female farmers’ standard of living can be advanced drastically and they will increase their value in the local agricultural and food security sectors. The terrible experiences of these women highlight a little-known facet of rural poverty: the relationship between debt, gender, and agricultural adversity. To break the cycle of exploitation and deprivation, official action and public awareness are needed.

## 4.2 Socio-economic Traits of Respondents.

The socio-economic traits used to classify the respondents were first to find out their land ownership status in the agrarian system, age, and years of farming.

Do you own a farmland yourself?

30 responses



**Figure 1: Farmland Ownership**

Out of the 30 female peasants who were interviewed, only 3 responded not to be owners of the lands they farm on. This came as a surprise because the belief is that in African settings, male counterparts are taken as heads of families who are basically breadwinners and control all sources of production, land being the fundamental one in this case study. According to Doss (2001; Agarwal, 2003), this increases men's power in the household and community and renders women's rights less secure. The findings of the research revealed that more women are now owning land even in the northern region of Ghana which is known to be a male dominated land area. According to Duncan (2004), women used to play supporting roles when it came to farming such as shelling, storage and marketing as well as cooking for the men before and after farming but this trend has changed over the years as more and more women are now directly involved in farming and this is one of the findings of the research. The women interviewed for this research spoke proudly of being landowners because had to fight and pay lots of money to acquire the land.

Production activities in rural settings are very much ingrained in cultures, where men are considered superior to women, and thus women are perceived as less capable of engaging in economic activities. The findings from Mion corroborate (Agarwal, 2003, p. 197). Women involvement in agriculture can go a long way to curb a country's food insecurity problems and thereby improve the overall economy of a country (Duncan, 2004, p.107).

For 90% of women to own the lands they farm on, I would like to suggest that all that the government of Ghana should enact and implement policies that may favor women in agriculture since women's contribution in agriculture can help boost the economy of the country (Duncan, 2004, p.107). This, I believe, will see a great increase in production should such a change be coupled with extension and

monetary advisory services, which in the long term will assure women consistent participation in agriculture with large productions and not just subsistence farming.

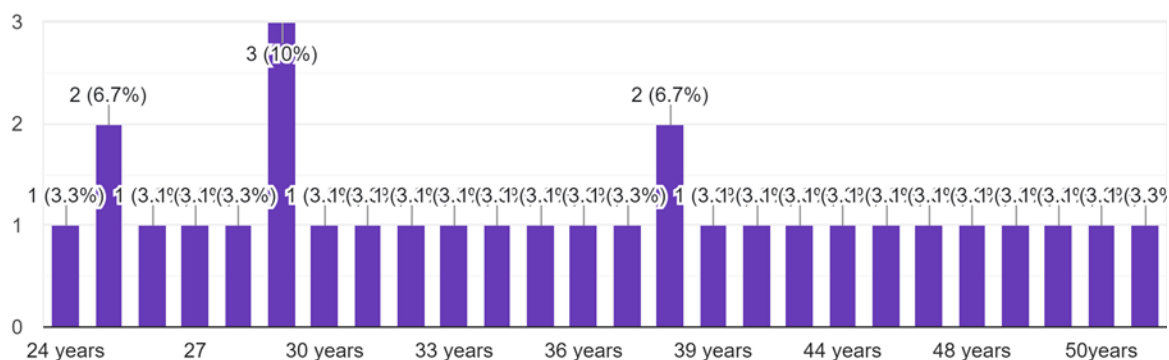
The fact that 90% of the respondents own farmlands suggests that a significant number of female farmers in the study have direct access to land for farming. This level of ownership is vital for these farmers since land is a crucial factor in determining their agricultural productivity and ability to generate some income.

Land ownership might enhance their ability to access credit, as many lenders use land ownership as collateral for loans. This could potentially improve their chances of receiving favorable loan terms, whereas the small percentage (10%) without land ownership may face challenges in accessing credit. The study showed that this small percentage of women who do not own the lands they farm on have to engage in other economic activities such as being in charge of all household chores and helping their husbands to sell the farm produce harvested, this tends to affect their productive lives (Duncan, 2004, p.106) because they have to juggle between taking care of their homes, the needs of their husbands and children and performing their farming duties too.

Overall, there is a strong land ownership pattern among female farmers in Mion, which plays a crucial role in financial empowerment and farming success. Access to credit can be great in terms of empowerment but it can also be a disaster if the terms surrounding it plunges those who get access to it into even more debt and demeaning consequences. The small minority without ownership may require additional support in terms of access to credit and land leasing agreements.

#### How old are you?

30 responses



## 4.2.2 Age and Generations

Figure 2: Age of Farmers



The age distribution of the respondents reveals a broad range of females who are into agricultural activities. The youngest is 24 years old and the oldest is 52 years old. This gives an idea of the generational diversity within the female farming population.

**Age Range:** The range from 24 years to 52 years indicates that both the young and elderly are actively engaged in the economic production of farming. The wide age gap shows that farming continues to be a sustainable livelihood across generations in the Mion District. For instance, in Ghana most young girls in the northern regions of Ghana tend to migrate to the southern sector and engage in what we call “kayayo” or “kayayei” which translates to mean head porter, in other words, carrying loads of goods on one’s head in the market and all this is to seek for greener pastures in order to better their lives (Mahama, 2015, p.106). The study’s revelation that young girls are still in agriculture is a good thing for the development of the northern region.

**Age Representation:** The notable 10% of respondents aged 29 years point to the fact that women in their late twenties form a significant portion of the farming population. This could be an indication that women in this group might be transitioning into more independent roles in farming and, after owning lands, gaining experience. Women aged 25 years and 38 years make up 6.7% of the respondents each. These age groups are representative of both the younger group of farmers, potentially in their early years of farming, and the more experienced middle-aged farmers. Those aged 38 may have accumulated more experience and are likely to have more established farms. The 25-year-olds are indicative of younger women entering farming either through family involvement or personal initiatives. It can also be said that if these small percentage of women farmers who do have access to land are frustrated in their farming, they can decide to migrate to the southern part of Ghana like others have done to engage in menial jobs such as “kayayo” (Mahama, 2015, p.107).

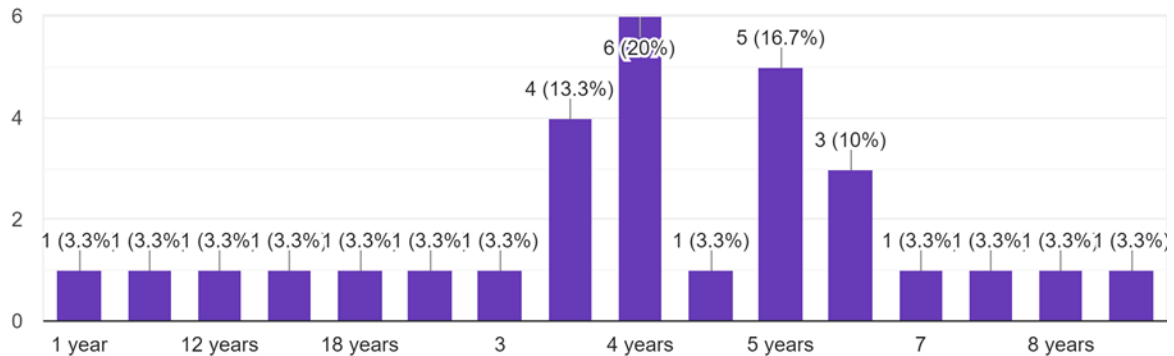
**Implications for Credit and Productivity:** Age most often correlates with experience, land ownership, and financial stability, which could influence their access to credit facilities. Younger farmers may have less experience and fewer assets. This can make it harder for them to secure loans, while older farmers might be more established and have better credit access if the opportunity exists. The distribution also reflects different life stages, with the young women possibly focusing on growth, childbearing, and expansion, and the older women are likely concerned with farm sustainability and debt management.

This diversity in age emphasizes the need for tailored policies and support systems that account for different needs at various life stages, especially in terms of credit access, debt management, and farming resources.

### 4.2.3 Years of Farming

How long have you been farming?

30 responses



**Figure 3: Years of Farming.**

The farming experience ranges from 1 year to 18 years among the 30 female peasants, hence, it provided a good sample of different experience in farming.

From the study, the respondents indicated that 20% have been farming for 4 years. This is evidence that a large proportion of these females are still early in their career and have produced data that represents four years practice experience. It also implies that there was massive investment on farming during their early years, and this could be linked to their current stage in life. 16.7% of the participants have been farming for five years and this is another big group that has only slightly improved on their level of stability and familiarity with farming as the most respectable occupation in the society. They are likely moving from beginner to intermediate stages, showing sustained involvement and adaptation to farming practices.

For the thirteen percent (13.3%) who have been farming for 3 years, they still represent a considerable percentage of female farmers within the early stages of their farming journey. For these farmers, access to resources like credit may be particularly important as they look forward to scale up. The average of 3.3% of farmers with 1 to 18 years of experience reflects the diversity in farming experience among the respondents. The fact that some have been active for as long as 18 years can only mean that farming is a long-term livelihood for some. This can account for the passing on of such inheritance to the newer entrants when they hit their early twenties, as the data already shows.

This diversity in farming experience underscores the need for financial solutions to be tailored to both the new and experienced farmers. Access to credit, training, and resources may need to be differentiated based on the experience level of the farmers to ensure optimal support.

#### 4.2.3.1 Correlation: Age and Farmland Ownership

Looking at the relationship between age and farmland ownership, I can claim that older farmers all own farmlands due to accumulated experience needed for land acquisition if it is not coming as

inheritance and accumulated financial resources, while younger farmers do not own or enjoy what might have been inherited from family or through marriage.

Typically, older farmers are expected to have higher rates of land ownership, as it has already been shown that ninety percent (90%) of respondents own their lands because they have had more time to acquire resources or inherit family land. This would suggest a positive correlation, as age increases, the likelihood of owning farmland also increases. Older women, especially those aged above 40, might be more stable and have better access to land through either purchase or inheritance.

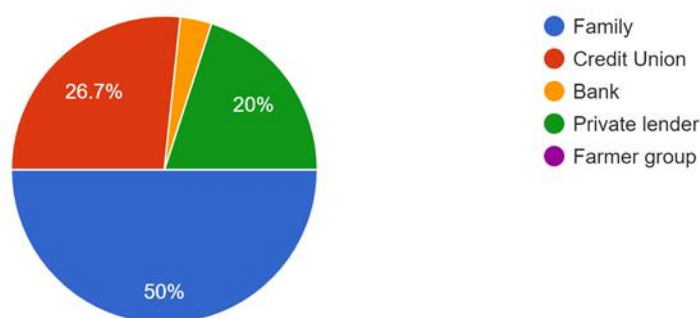
However, younger female farmers (such as those in their early 20s and early 30s) might be less likely to own land and correspond to the 10% who do not own their farmlands. They could either lease land, work on family lands, or be involved in some agreed sharecropping systems. This group might face more barriers in accessing farmland due to social and financial constraints in the absence of any inheritance.

Land ownership might also impact the number of years a farmer remains in the agricultural sector. Farmers with access to their own land are more likely to farm long-term, whereas those who do not have may face sustainability issues in making farming a career, possibly having to exit if conditions of land use become unbearable. Age and land ownership are positively correlated, with older farmers having more ownership stability, which supports farming over longer periods.

### 4.3 Sources of Credit and their Access.

What is the main source of credit for your farming?

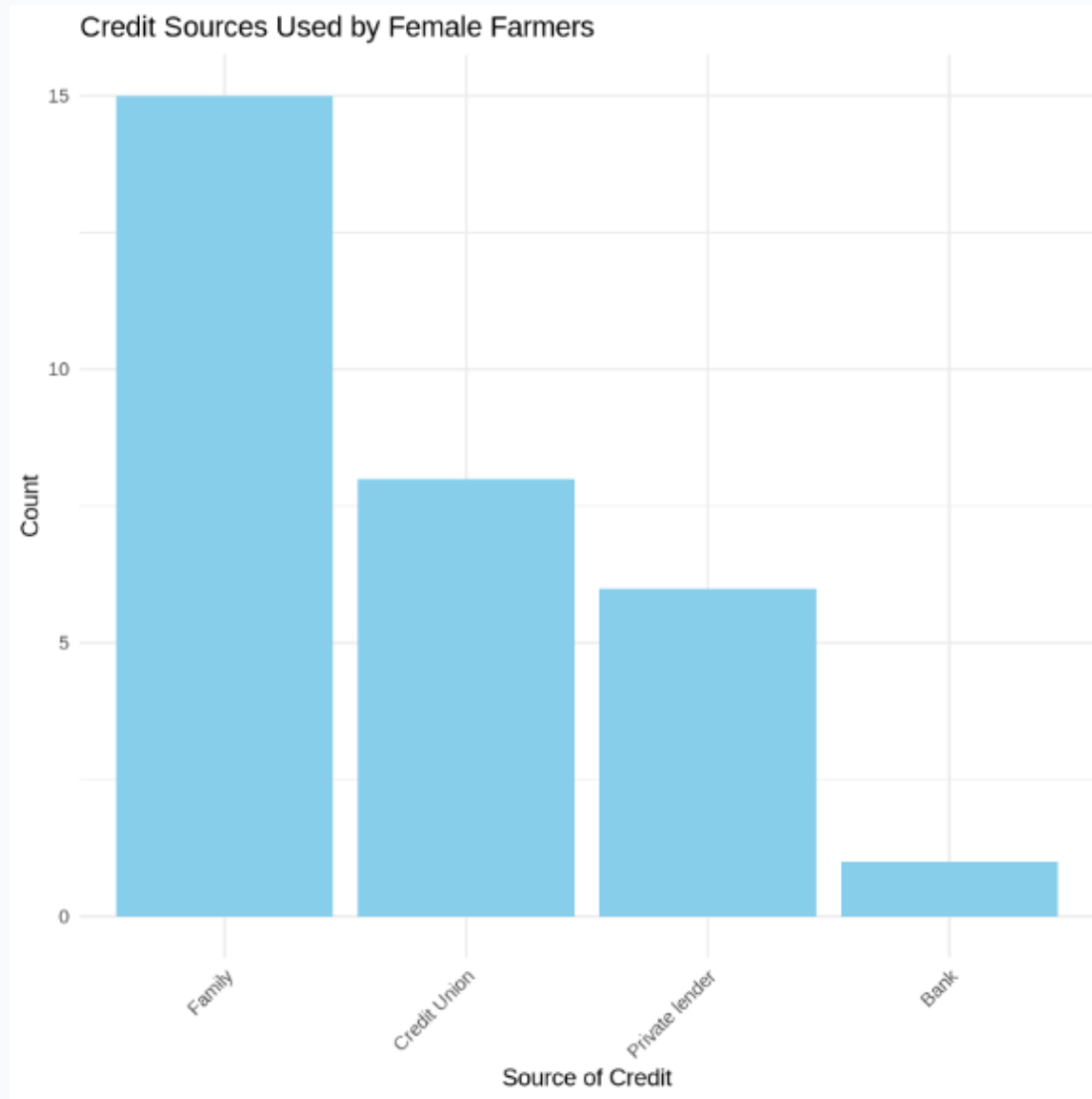
30 responses



**Figure 4: Source of Credit for Farming (a).**

Figure 4.4

## Credit Sources Used by Female Farmers:



**Figure 5: Source of Credit for Farming (b).**

The most common sources of credit are family (50%) and credit unions (26.7%). Private lenders (20%) and banks (3.3%). The survey information on sources of credit for the 30 female farmers show that 50% of the respondents borrow from family which makes this form of credit easy to access. A family loan as a rule is considered an informal source and has less strict demands to repayment; that is why it is preferred by small-scale farmers. Among those who use credit union for their loans 26.7% have a preference for semi-formal, community based and often relatively more favorable terms whereas 20% of the farmers use private credit. This is a remarkably significant population who prefer high-interest informal loans.

Lastly, only 3.3% borrow their loans from banks, which, therefore, explains how hard it can be for rural female farmers to access formal sources of credit perhaps because of collateralization or tedious conditions set by the banking institutions offering credit services.

This distribution shows that despite the fact that some of the female farmers have access to community based financial products, many of them still meet their financial needs through family related arrangements. This could be due to the absence and rarity of formal financial institutions within rural regions and farmers inability to meet the formal loans requirements.

From the research, semi-formal and informal sources were the most dominant; highlighting how the financial situation that women farmers in rural Ghana are in is rather grim. This finding shows that majority of the users preferred family loans (50%) rather than access the formal banking loans (3.3%), a sign of high hurdles to formality supported by the literature on Sub-Saharan Africa rural financial inclusion. According to literature, high interest rates, formal procedures and non-tempting collaterals which are beyond the reach of small scale farmers often hinder rural women from seeking formal sources of credit including the bank (Akudugu 2012, Kuwornu et al., 2017).

These observations are related to the theories of dualism of financial systems which explains that informal and semi-formal fund sourced complement the formal ones. Concerning family loans, they suggest the loans are favorable since they are usually easily accessible, have low or no interest rates hereby offering the security as a shield with no possible hefty consequences in case the pay-back period is delayed (Aryeetey & Udry, 1997). Nonetheless, this dependence on family also shows the absence of finance structure to support and develop such financial systems. It also shows that such a system brings dependency in the kinship networks and thus limits women's ability to bargain and be financially independent (Johnson, 2004).

Nonetheless, reliance on credit unions (26.7%) suggests that informal family loans can be effectively replaced by semi-formal institutions, which offer a bit more structure without the stringent rules of banks. By building trust and providing better loan terms to female farmers, community-based credit unions can help close the gap between informal and formal lending (Basu, 2010). 20% of respondents claimed to have used private lenders, who present a higher risk due to their frequently exorbitant interest rates and strict repayment schedules that resemble those imposed by microfinance institutions. Like the research on debt traps in unregulated lending markets, private loans, which are frequently classified as "predatory" or high-cost debt, can lead to debt cycles, particularly in the event of low crop yields (Karlán & Morduch, 2009).

These findings have significant implications: family loans may not support the long-term financial stability or growth of female farmers, even when they provide easily available and less punitive financing.

Since most of these women cannot access credit facilities in normal commercial banks as they cannot prove credit worthiness by presenting accounts which show that they have proper sources of income. These women who rely on family loans are unlikely to expand on their farming enterprises, or on inputs which give production a boost, and they are likely to fall prey to the financial shocks which they meet along the way. Moreover, women's dependence on the families hinders their economic independence by impeding their ability to be agents of change and manage their own finances since they have to adapt to meet the family expectations (Quisumbing & Maluccio, 2003). On the other hand, the availability of credit unions may create an orderly but achievable framework to improve women's empowerment.

This study concludes that the lack of formal credit access leaves women farmers to rely on informal family credit that hampers their ability to assume financial transformation and autonomy. These results indicate the important ongoing debate of special legislation amendment, including the reduction of

collateral demands or offering particular credit form within accessible community-based microfinance for females in rural settings. The adoption of this approach could lead to overall increase in the production of agricultural yield and the economic wellbeing of women in Ghana.

## **4.4 Correlational Analysis of Repayment Terms, Ability to Repay, and Effect on Productivity.**

An in-depth analysis of the data obtained reveals a correlation between the source of credit, the favorability of repayment terms, and the resulting impact on farming productivity. Productivity in general terms measures the economic performance by comparing the amount of goods and services produced (output) with the amount of inputs used to produce those goods and services.

### **4.4.1 Favorable Loan Terms and Repayment Ability:**

Farmers who source their loans from family typically experience “softer” repayment terms (as represented by 50% of the farmers engaged), which means the conditions for repayment are more flexible and lenient. Due to that, these farmers are more likely to repay their loans before the next farming season. This helps maintain or slightly improve productivity. This is evidenced by the fact that they report no significant effect or mild effects on productivity.

On the contrary, farmers who borrow from private lenders and credit unions, (20% for private lenders and 26.7% for credit unions) struggle with repayment, especially those with “tough” repayment terms.

### **4.4.2 Impact of Tough Repayment Terms:**

Tough loan terms are prevalent among those in need of credit from banks, private lenders, and credit unions. These farmers report difficulty in repaying loans before the next planting season, leading to a significant decline in productivity. Female peasants in this group report subsistence farming with low production levels, directly linked to their challenges with loan repayment. The difficulty in paying back the loan worsens the debt cycle. Some have to divert resources from the farming activities to meet their financial obligations.

### **4.4.3 Consequences of Debt**

Debt has serious negative effects on the economic stability, productivity, and even social standing of female farmers in rural Ghana, particularly in regions like the Mion District. As these women try to increase their agricultural productivity by gaining access to labor, fertilizer, seeds, and other necessary resources, debt frequently accrues. However, these financial commitments usually result in negative effects that impede rather than promote their development because of restricted access to formal finance and unfavorable loan terms from informal sources. Particularly for women whose income is seasonally reliant on crop production, high interest rates, limited payback terms, and rigid loan conditions cause a significant strain.

One of the most serious effects of debt for these women is the possible loss of assets; when loans are obtained from credit unions or informal lenders with strict repayment requirements, any default can have serious consequences. In certain cases, women are forced to sell vital assets like livestock or equipment, or even lose their land as a means of paying off their debts. Land dispossession is particularly devastating, as it directly affects their ability to continue farming and supporting their families. When these yields fall short due to bad weather or other disruptions, the risk of default rises, trapping these farmers in a cycle of debt from which they find it difficult to break free.

Gerber (2021) asserts that the loss of land brought on by debt can have a long-term negative influence on the economic and social stability of both relatively wealthy peasants and poor and middle-class farmers.

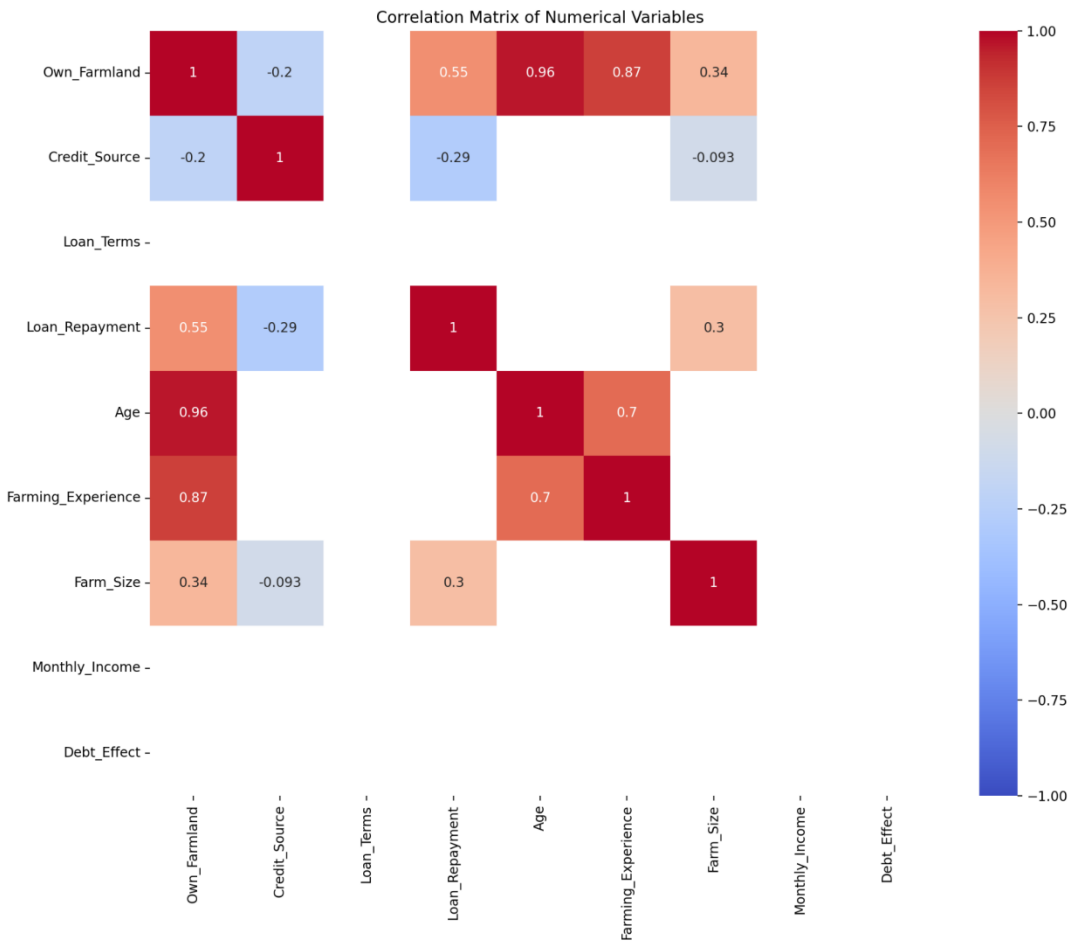
Furthermore, stress brought on by debt can have a significant negative psychological and social impact on female farmers. Anxiety, low motivation, and even decreased productivity might result from the ongoing concern over payback deadlines and the risk of losing assets. Social stigma frequently exacerbates this stress since some groups can interpret it as a sign of personal failure, further marginalizing women who are already at a disadvantage due to established gender norms. These sociocultural elements make it challenging for women who are in debt to look for additional assistance, which strengthens their reliance on unofficial, frequently exploitative loan sources and prolongs a cycle of poverty and economic vulnerability.

#### **4.4.3 Consequences of Debt on Productivity:**

Farmers with favorable loan terms, those with the family option, tend to experience the least negative consequences on failure to repay. Reasons understood both from data and interactions clarify that, with family credit, they are free to focus more on farming and less on immediate financial pressures.

Conversely, those with unfavorable terms experience severe reductions in productivity due to loan repayments, resulting in poor crop yields, reduced income, and an inability to expand or improve their farms. An example is where, in some of the private lenders, credit unions, or bank sources of credit, you start repayment as soon as a month after taking the credit facility, by which time sometimes land preparation or planting is not even complete. This shows a clear negative correlation between tough loan terms and farming productivity. On one hand, it is understandable that tough loans take more from the borrower and therefore one gets less from what was invested, thus, productivity decreases. However, according to Gerber, 2014, argued that tough loans can also force peasants to work more, to be more disciplined, to be more calculated in their expenses, basically self-exploiting which can, in the medium term, increase productivity the hard way if one survives.

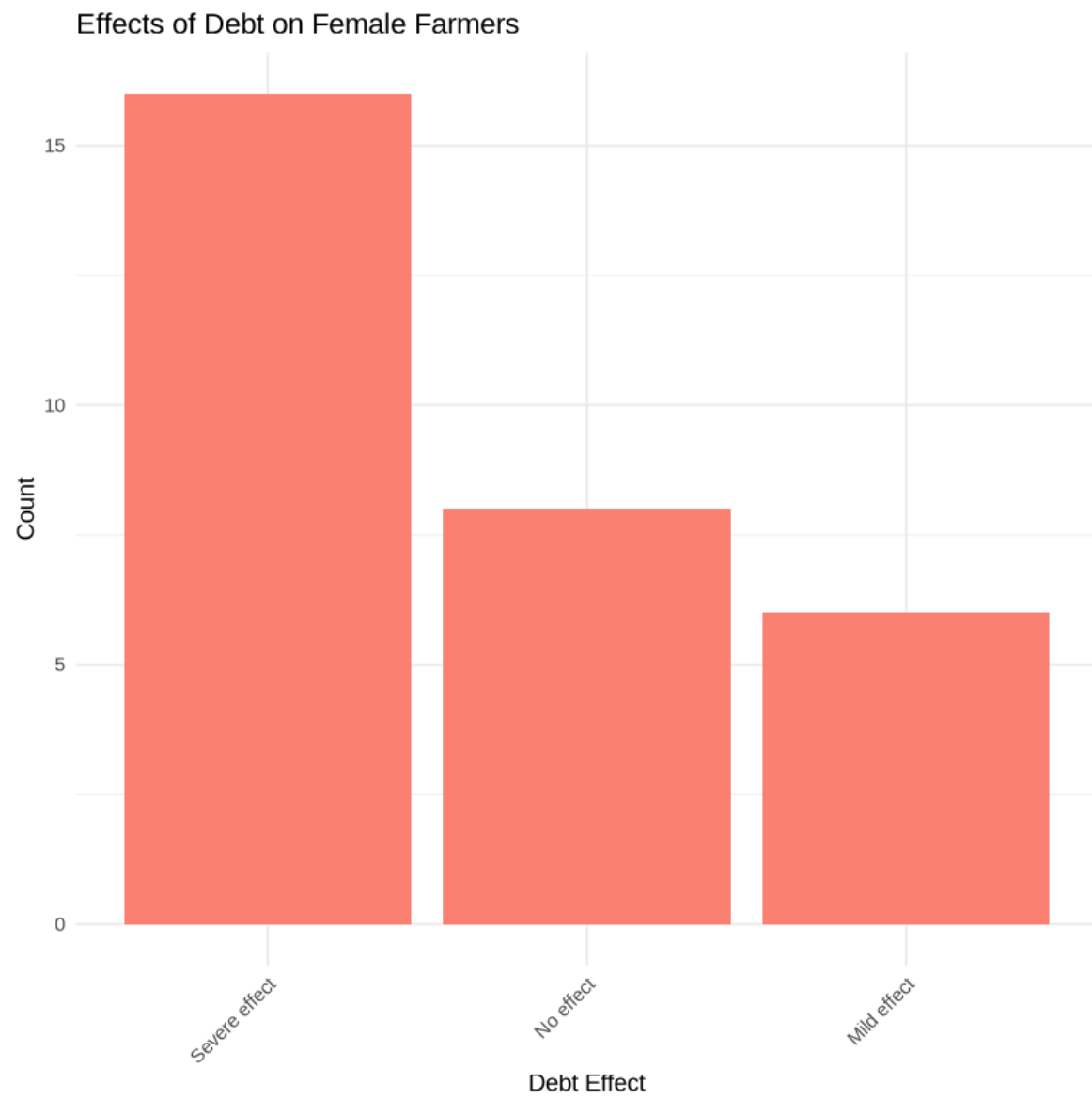
**Figure 6: Correlation Matrix.**



This analysis allowed me to observe the relationships between different variables in the dataset.

Figure 4.6





**Figure 7: Effect of Debt on Female Farmers.**

Figure 4.7

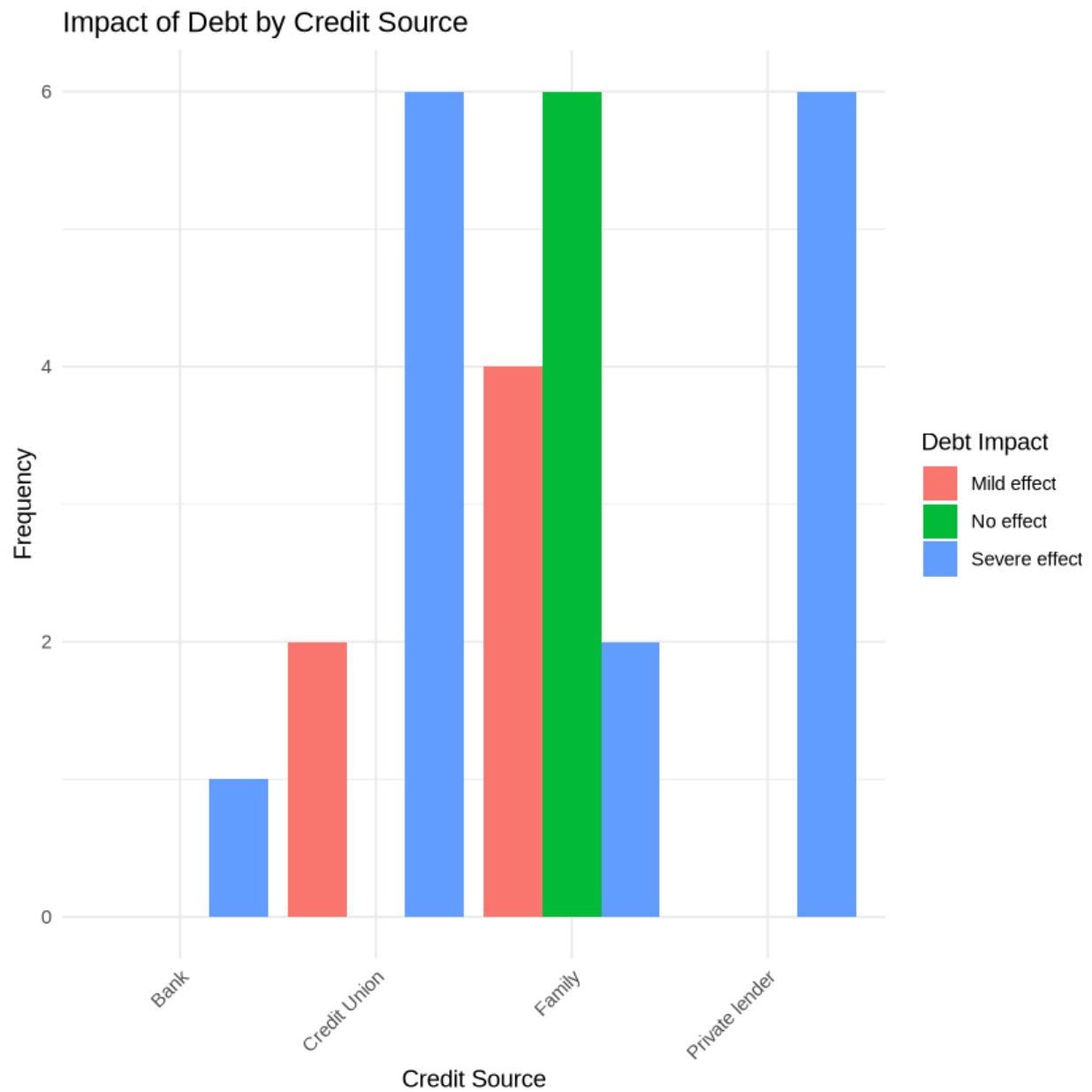
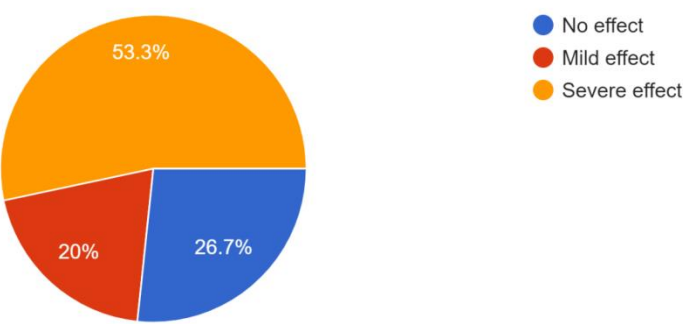


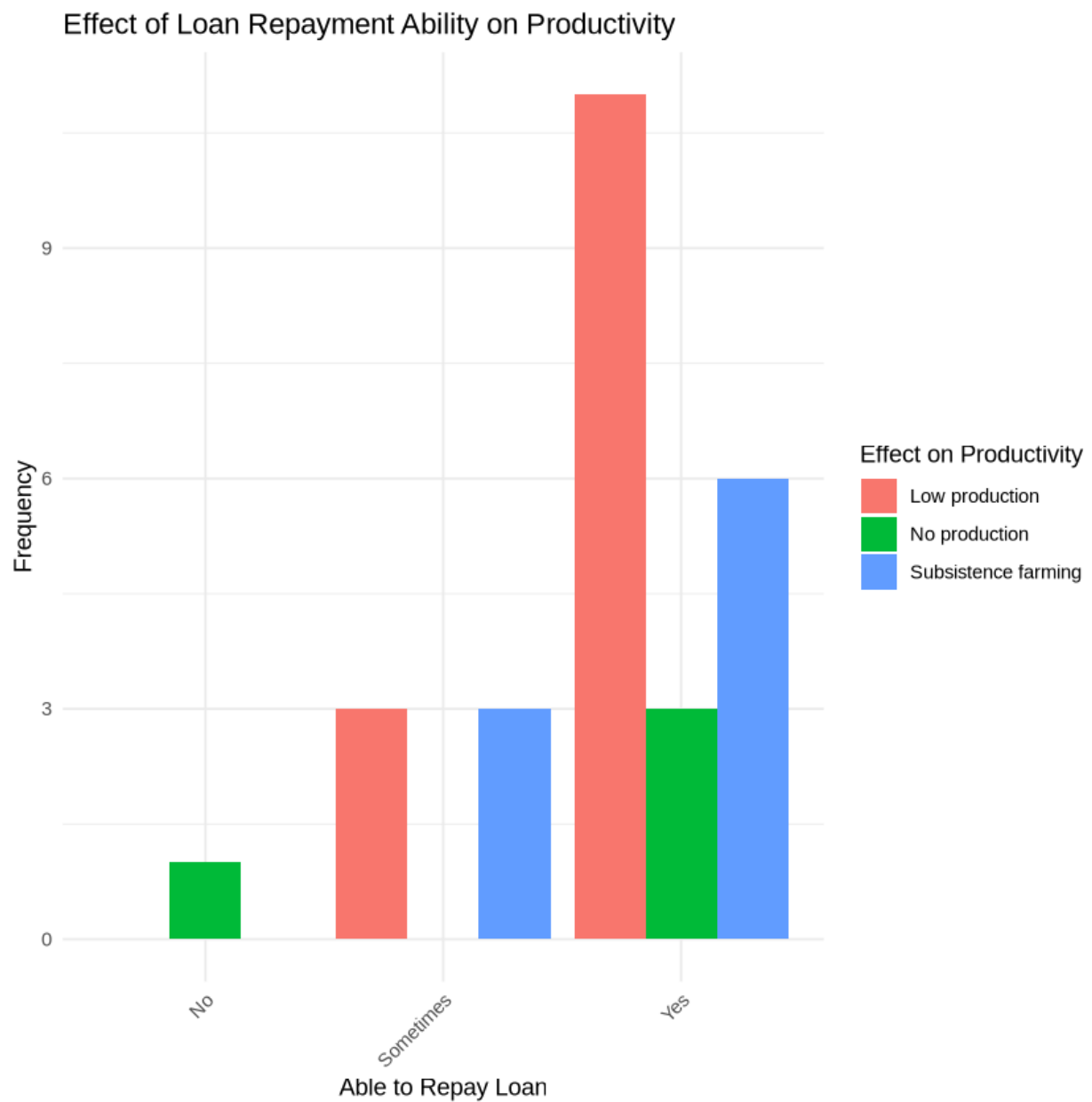
Figure 8: Impact of Debt by Credit Source (a).

Figure 4.8

How bad does debt affect your farming as a female farmer?  
30 responses



**Figure 9: Impact of Debt by Credit Source (b).**  
Figure 4.9

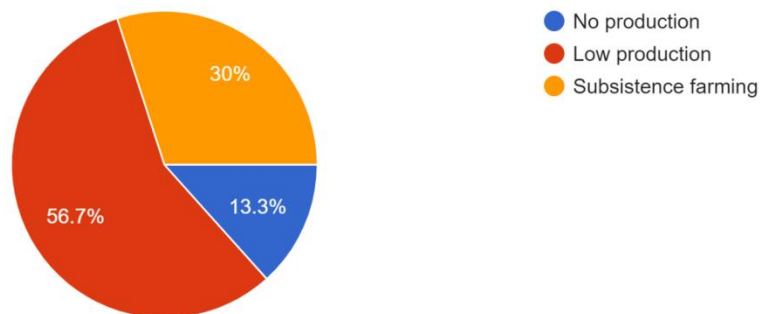


**Figure 10: Effect of Loan Repayment Ability on Productivity (a).**

Figure 4.10

What is the effect of credit unavailability on the productivity?

30 responses

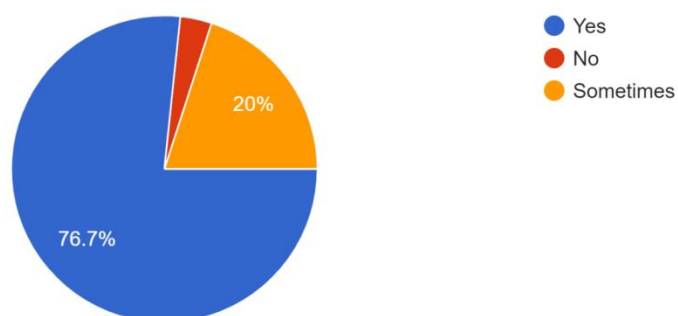


**Figure 11: Effect of Loan Repayment Ability on Productivity (b).**

Figure 4.11

Are you able to repay the loan(s) before the next planting season?

30 responses



**Figure 12: Effect of Loan Repayment Ability on Productivity (c).**

In an attempt to answer the specific questions posed from the onset, the data was loaded into 'R' to visualize the data with a focus on descriptive statistics, extrapolation, and correlation analysis, with a particular emphasis on access to credit, consequences of debt on productivity, and farmlands.

It became clear early on that farmlands were not a challenge as assumed and propounded by some literature in the Mion District. Therefore, in trying to answer how the consequences of debt differentiated across social classes, I resorted to using the average monthly income as a proxy for economic status.

This summary statistics show:

**Table 1**

Min.	1st Qu.	Median	Mean	3rd Qu.	Max
20.0	50.0	90.0	130.2	155.0	500.0

This indicates a wide range of monthly incomes among the female farmers, from Ghc20.00 to Ghc500.00. The impact of debt on farming varies across these income levels:

#### Summary

**Table 2**

Mild Effect	No Effect	Severe Effect
6	9	15

We can see that the majority of farmers (15) report a severe effect of debt on their farming, while 6 report a mild effect, and 9 report no effect at all.

This suggests that debt significantly impacts different income levels, but the severity is more pronounced for those with lower incomes and hence those from subaltern classes. For this reason, the concept of vulnerability of development theories stating that poor people have less ability to recover from economic shocks such as debt due to limited asset and financial base fits well into this. Often due to their inability to access capital or having adequate capital buffers or even affordable credit, low income farmers are forced to borrow from non-bank sources at high interest rates or take high-cost credit products. This pattern corroborates dependency theory that argued that socially subjugated groups in societies particularly in the third world are often trapped in a cycle of debt which held them back from improving their social status and consequently have no right to be independent.

In addition, high level of debt impact on agricultural performance supports dualism theory which posits that rural financial systems consist of both informal and official financial sectors. The main sources of funds for Ghanaian women farmers are loans from close relatives or friends, or borrowing from a quack lender, meaning they do not have the opportunity to use banks and the protections that come from it. From their nature, it is seen that they hardly offer ways of building credits or improving methods of farming. Moreover, the informal loans also exposes the individuals to exploitation and subjects them to endless cycles of loans. This unofficial debts ensnares low-income farmers to be discrimination and they also face difficulties with improving their circumstances or status.

This paper also demonstrates how gendered financial exclusion is in rural Ghana where institutional impediments deny the female farmers from accessing the formal loans. Research has indicated that due to the social norms and legal constraints, women's credit market is constrained by absence of collateral, land, and financial literacy which compel them turn to card compulsive facilities as one of unofficial ones (Johnson, 2004; Akudugu, 2012). Consequently, debt is a burden in women's lives that contributes to their poverty and hence is not seen as a means of empowerment as it is

envisaged. The above supports the feminist development theory that challenges the conventional style of development that ignores women's lived experiences and hinders their entrepreneurship. All things considered, the detrimental consequences of debt on low-income farmers highlight the necessity of more inclusive financial regulations that take into account the systemic obstacles faced by rural women farmers. These financial strains could be lessened, reliance on unofficial lenders could be decreased, and women could be able to invest in sustainable farming practices, ultimately enhancing rural livelihoods and economic resilience, by making credit easily accessible and affordable through government-backed initiatives or community-based financial schemes.

What are the different sources of credit used by the farmers, and how do these various sources influence the consequences of their debt?

The main sources of credit for female farmers are:

**Table 3**

Family	Private Lender	Credit Unions	Bank
15	6	8	1

Family is the most common source of credit (15), followed by Credit Unions (8), Private Lenders (6), and Banks (1).

What are the consequences of debt arising from the inability of female farmers to repay farm credit, and how do these affect livelihoods?

I took a look at the relationship between loan repayment ability and its effect on productivity in Figure 4.8.

The graph shows how the ability to repay loans relates to productivity, with observations that even among those who repay their loans, there is still a significant impact on productivity, with many reporting "Low Production."

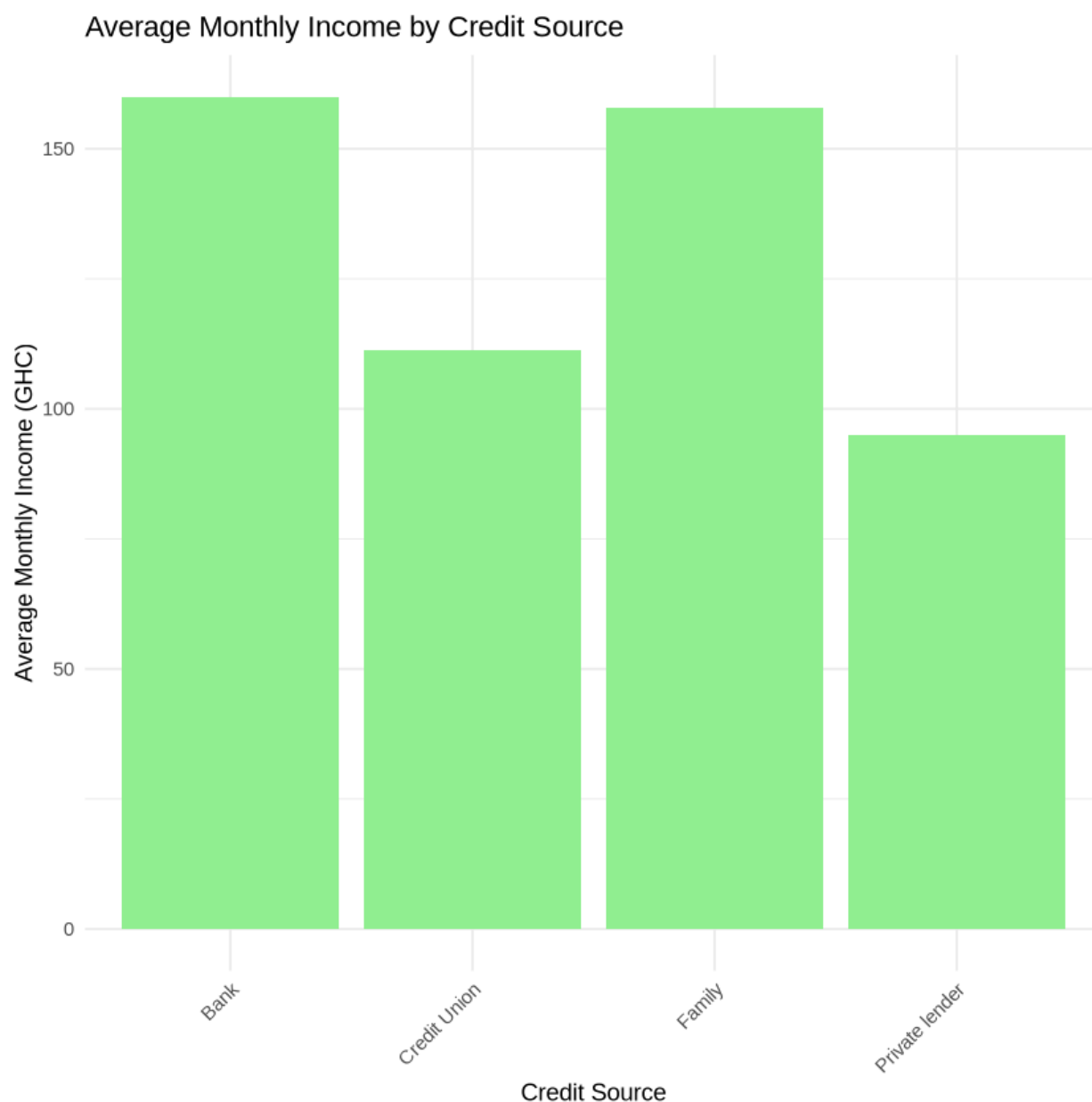
Those who can only "Sometimes" repay their loans tend to experience "Low Production".

Interestingly, some farmers who report being able to repay their loans still experience "No Production", suggesting that other factors might be at play. It can be deduced that most of the monies made from their production are used to settle their loans since they have to sell most of their produce in order to repay their loans to still make them eligible to take another loan or credit for the next farming season. When this happens, a farmer, though has paid off her loan, yet she is left with nothing for herself and her family how much more to talk of saving some of the money or produce for their own consumption.

The study revealed that consequences of debt and the inability to repay loans include reduced productivity. Many farmers report "Low production" or "No production" as a result of credit unavailability. A majority of farmers report that debt has a "Severe effect" on their farming activities as no matter how hard they have worked and how much yield they get at the end of the harvest period, they have to use mostly or all the money they made for offsetting their credit or loan in order to avoid other consequences which includes losing their land to creditors.

These consequences directly affect the livelihoods of female farmers by reducing their ability to produce crops or farm the next farming season and generate income.

Additional insights on access to credit and farmlands show that almost all respondents own their farmlands, which is a positive factor for their ability to access credit and maintain their livelihoods. The average monthly income varies by credit source as well.



**Figure 13: Average Monthly Income by Credit Source.**

Figure 4.9 shows that farmers who access credit from family and banks have higher average monthly incomes. This is understandable because anyone who will qualify for a bank loan should already have something going to meet the criteria for loan acquisition, and on the family side, how ‘wealthy’ the



family influences this factor. Credit unions and private lenders are associated with lower average monthly incomes.

## Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

Female farmers in the Mion District provide insightful conclusions faced by these women in accessing credit facilities, loan repayment, and how debt affects their productivity. Access to farmland is widespread, with 90% of farmers owning farmland. The key issue lies in the availability of credit and the terms of loans offered to these women. Family loans are the most common source of credit at 50%, followed by credit unions at 26.7%, private lenders at 20%, and a very small proportion relying on banks at 3.3%.

The predominance of informal lending highlights the lack of access to formal financial services in rural areas.

Those who rely on family for credit enjoy softer terms, allowing them to repay their loans more easily. These farmers experience minimal impact on productivity. Those who borrow from the other available options face tougher repayment terms, often resulting in severe productivity losses.

Moreover, there is evidence that age and experience do have some bearing on the debt outcomes. The study also pointed out that young farmers who have been farming for a relatively shorter period are more likely to borrow from informal sources and they have more issues with repaying loans. On the other hand, older farmers who are slightly more experienced are comparatively better at repaying their loans even though they are also affected by tougher loan terms.

Concerning research questions like “How does indebtedness influence productivity?” and “What kind of credit resource is available to women farmers?” and “What source of credit are available to the female farmers?”; the findings have established that most credit sources are informal and inadequate to ensure sustainable progression of agriculture. The negative effects of debts are worst on those tied with restrictive creditor’s conditions offered by the banks or any private financier where there is high interest rates and cumbersome conditions of repayment. These individuals have minimal chances to reinvest in farming business. Most of them are women who end up being financially vulnerable as they are reliant on high interest lenders. This exacerbates their debt and plunges them in a vicious cycle instead of fixing their problems; sentiments supported by the dependence theory. The findings also show that younger farmers who entered farming more recently and with less experience have significantly more severe credit problems. That is why such farmers use services of unauthorized lenders, who offer rather expensive, but rather fast loans, and do not require any collateral or credit history. The fact that elder farmers still face difficulties due to a lack of income diversification, although having somewhat improved debt management skills, underscore the vulnerabilities faced by female farmers in rural Ghana.

Debt exacerbates systemic injustices stemming from conventional gender norms and socioeconomic inequities for the subaltern classes, particularly smallholder female farmers. These women not only face barriers to credit due to their lack of collateral but also grapple with the social stigma attached to debt, which further isolates them from community support. Additionally, their position within the broader economic structure as subaltern laborers limits their bargaining power, often forcing them to accept exploitative loan terms.

A crucial convergence of gender, class, and economic vulnerability is thus highlighted by the structural challenges these farmers experience, highlighting the necessity of financial policies and agricultural support systems that are truly sensitive to the requirements of Ghana's rural subaltern classes. In order to address these problems, it is necessary to acknowledge the particular burdens that debt places on

those who are economically marginalized, particularly women, and to rethink credit systems in a way that empowers rather than oppresses them. This will help to end the cycle of poverty and land loss that restricts the potential of the rural farming community.

By highlighting the limited independence of female farmers in managing productive resources and gender-based socioeconomic exclusion, this situation theoretically matches feminist development theory. These findings emphasize the need for policies like government-backed low-interest loans and well-designed microfinance programs that are tailored to the needs of rural women farmers. Equal financial access will not only help people become financially independent, but it will also increase productivity and maybe break the cycle of dependency on unofficial lenders.

## **Possible ways forward**

Various technical recommendations within the agricultural sector targeted at women only have been implemented in the past. If these policies and interventions are still not working in empowering women, it is due to the fact that they do not address some of the motives for implementing them. A review of these interventions can lead to new adoptions. On the background of the findings in Mion District, the following recommendations can be made in women's access to credit in the agrarian system and how to minimize the effect of credit on them:

- **Improving access to formal credit facilities:** There is a clear need for increased access to formal financial institutions such as banks in rural areas like Mion. Government and NGOs could collaborate to make bank loans more accessible to female farmers. The guarantees or collaterals for acquiring these loans or credit should be less demanding and if possible, no collateral should be taken at all. When this happens, both landowners and farmers who do not own lands can get access to credit or loan without it affecting their production in the long run.
- **Offering Flexible Loan Terms:** Credit institutions should be encouraged to offer more relaxed repayment terms with their private lender counterparts to female farmers, at least to those with their own farmlands. Loans should be adapted to the agricultural cycle, allowing farmers to repay loans during or after harvesting when they have more liquidity.
- **Financial Literacy Programs:** There is a need for financial education aimed at female farmers in the Mion District. Many farmers do not fully appreciate the financial implications of credit agreements they enter into, particularly with private lenders. Training on budgeting, loan management, and repayment strategies would empower farmers to make informed finance decisions, thus improving their ability to manage and repay debts. They should also be encouraged to form ROSCAs where they get make contributions to assist one another since this arrangement does not come with any interest rates. This is because high interest rates causes most of these women to default in repaying loans or paying too much money at the end of the day which rips them off no money at the end of the farming season.
- **Agricultural Subsidies and Grants:** The government should consider providing or, if already in existence, improving agricultural subsidies and grants specifically for female farmers. These grants could alleviate the financial burden on farmers when it comes to inputs like seeds, fertilizers, and tools. This would help improve productivity without increasing debt. When these female farmers have access to government subsidies and funds, it would reduce the rate

at which they may want to go in for other sources of funding which in the long run would lead to high indebtedness which may be difficult to repay.

- Debt Relief Programs: For farmers trapped in severe debt, relief or restructuring programs could be introduced to provide a way out of the cycle of debt. They could be the opportunity to renegotiate loans, reduce the principal amount, or extend repayment periods. In extreme cases, if possible, loan forgiveness could be considered for the most vulnerable, particularly in cases where debt has caused significant productivity losses.
- Also, I recommend the government and other NGOs helping these female farmers to encourage them on how to save some of the income made from the sales of their farm produce. Some conversations made with these women during field study revealed that most of these women do not buy the idea of saving their monies with formal bankers but rather, they either keep the monies on them which gives them easy access to the money at anytime or give their monies to individuals who claim they can help keep their monies. In Ghana, these people are called “susu” collectors who mostly end up running away with the monies of these women rendering them penniless. This is one of the reasons which leads most of these farmers to go in for credit from other sources.

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