

The Impact of Sustainable Empowerment Interventions on Women's Development in Nigeria

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Abstract

This study addresses the persistent gender disparities in Nigeria that constrain women's economic participation and socio-cultural agency, impeding inclusive national development. Despite numerous empowerment initiatives, challenges remain regarding their sustainability and transformative impact. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the research integrates quantitative data from 361 women participants across six geopolitical zones with qualitative insights from thematic interviews, ensuring a robust triangulation of evidence. The quantitative analysis utilises descriptive and inferential statistics via SPSS, while qualitative data undergo rigorous thematic coding to capture nuanced experiences of empowerment interventions. This method provided a comprehensive understanding of measurable outcomes as well as the social dynamics

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influencing sustainability. Findings reveal that while recent programmes have enhanced financial inclusion and entrepreneurial growth among beneficiaries, critical gaps persist, which notably includes- inadequate knowledge management, limited integration within local governance frameworks, over-reliance on external funding, and insufficient engagement of male allies, which undermines long-term effectiveness. Furthermore, rural women remain disproportionately marginalised, partly due to literacy barriers and fragmented intervention delivery systems. The study underscores the vital role of normative transformation in reshaping gender attitudes to ensure enduring empowerment. Based on these insights, it is recommended that empowerment initiatives institutionalise knowledge management systems to safeguard operational continuity and prioritise embedding interventions within community and governance structures to enhance ownership. Diversifying funding streams through local partnerships and income-generating activities is crucial for financial sustainability. Additionally, deliberately involving male stakeholders can foster supportive environments that challenge entrenched social norms. By prioritising these strategies, programmes can move beyond short-term impacts to achieve sustainable, culturally embedded empowerment. This research contributes uniquely by advancing a holistic sustainability framework that integrates economic outcomes with normative and institutional dimensions, offering policymakers and practitioners a nuanced blueprint to enhance women's empowerment in Nigeria and beyond.

Keywords: Women's Empowerment, Sustainable Development, Economic Participation, Education, Policy Framework, Nigeria.

Introduction

The discourse on sustainable women's empowerment interventions in Nigeria represents a multi-layered socio-economic imperative that transcends simplistic developmental paradigms. Despite Nigeria's position as Africa's largest economy, the nation continues to witness pronounced gender disparities that significantly impede its holistic advancement. Persistent asymmetry in access to resources, opportunities, and decision-making platforms necessitates robust empirical examination of empowerment interventions over the past decade. According to the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2023, Nigeria ranked 123rd out of 146 countries assessed, with a gender parity score of 0.662, indicating substantial room for improvement in areas of economic participation, educational attainment, health outcomes, and political empowerment (World Economic Forum, 2023). A comprehensive analysis conducted by the Nigerian Bureau of Statistics (2022) revealed that women, despite constituting approximately 49.5% of the population, remain significantly underrepresented in formal economic sectors, with female labour force participation standing at 48.4% compared to 59.8% for men. Moreover, women's ownership of formal enterprises stands at 31%, highlighting the persistence of structural barriers within Nigeria's entrepreneurial ecosystem (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022). This disparity manifests more prominently in rural communities, where women's economic vulnerability intersects with limited access to digital infrastructure, technical training, and financial services.

Furthermore, women's empowerment in Nigeria critically intersects with the country's wider developmental goals, especially regarding poverty alleviation, economic diversification, and social unity. Research by Akinola and Uzodike (2018) shows that a 10% increase in women's income could potentially lower household poverty by 20%, emphasising the catalytic role of gender-responsive strategies on broader socio-economic indicators. This economic aspect of empowerment becomes even more significant in Nigeria's current context, marked by persistent inflation, unemployment, and socio-economic vulnerabilities. The researcher argues that, although considerable scholarly focus has been given to the conceptual foundations of women's empowerment in Nigeria, there has been a lack of empirical research into how sustainable the effects of implemented interventions are. The tendency

to emphasise quantitative outreach metrics over qualitative measures of change has created gaps in understanding the long-term success of these programmes. Furthermore, the researcher notes that the technological aspects of women's empowerment remain relatively under-researched, especially regarding how digital literacy, access to telecommunications, and technological skills training can reshape empowerment paradigms within Nigeria.

The past decade has witnessed a proliferation of women empowerment initiatives in Nigeria, encompassing governmental, non-governmental, and multilateral interventions. A systematic examination of these programmes reveals varying degrees of effectiveness and sustainability. The Nigeria for Women Project (NFWP), initiated in 2018 with World Bank support (US\$100 million), represents one of the most comprehensive governmental initiatives targeting women's socio-economic empowerment. Operating in six states like Abia, Kebbi, Niger, Ogun, Taraba, and Edo, the project has established 12,764 Women Affinity Groups with over 354,000 members, facilitating savings mobilisation exceeding ₦3.5 billion as of 2023 (World Bank, 2023). The programme's distinctive feature lies in its integrated approach, combining financial inclusion with digital literacy training and market linkage facilitation. An impact assessment conducted by Adeniran et al. (2022) indicates that NFWP participants demonstrated a 37% increase in business profitability and a 42% enhancement in household decision-making authority.

Similarly, the Business Development Fund for Women (BUDFOW), implemented by the Bank of Industry since 2015, has disbursed approximately ₦4.5 billion to women-owned enterprises across Nigeria's six geo-political zones. The programme's technical assistance component, which incorporates telecommunications-based monitoring and evaluation systems, has contributed to a loan repayment rate of 98%, significantly outperforming conventional lending programmes (Olayiwola et al., 2021:276). This intervention exemplifies how technological integration can enhance the operational efficiency and sustainability of empowerment initiatives. In the telecommunications sector, the Women in ICT initiative, launched by the Federal Ministry of Communications and Digital Economy in 2019, has trained over 13,500 women in digital skills, mobile application development, and e-commerce management. Programme evaluation data indicate that

62% of participants subsequently secured employment or established technology-based enterprises, with an average income increase of 45% within twelve months post-intervention (Oyediran & Makinde, 2023:512). The initiative's emphasis on practical skills acquisition, coupled with industry linkage facilitation, demonstrates the transformative potential of sector-specific empowerment approaches.

Likewise, the Women Entrepreneurs Development Programme (WEDP), implemented by the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN) between 2017 and 2022, has supported over 25,000 women entrepreneurs through capacity building, market access facilitation, and technological integration. A longitudinal study by Nnamani and Okafor (2021) reveals that WEDP beneficiaries recorded a 51% average increase in revenue, 40% expansion in employment generation, and 35% improvement in product innovation capacity. Particularly noteworthy is the programme's utilisation of mobile-based learning platforms to overcome geographical barriers, enabling rural women entrepreneurs to access business development services remotely.

Furthermore, the SheTrades Commonwealth Programme, operational in Nigeria since 2018, has connected over 3,000 women-owned businesses to international markets, generating export opportunities valued at approximately US\$38 million (International Trade Centre, 2023). The programme's distinctive feature involves its utilisation of digital platforms to facilitate virtual trade fairs, B2B matchmaking, and international certification processes, effectively circumventing traditional export barriers faced by women entrepreneurs. A meta-analysis of these interventions conducted by Chukwuemeka and Ezebuiro (2023) reveals several common characteristics associated with sustainable outcomes: (i) integration of financial inclusion with market linkage facilitation; (ii) incorporation of digital literacy components; (iii) emphasis on peer learning networks; and (iv) engagement of male stakeholders as empowerment allies. These findings underscore the multidimensional nature of effective empowerment initiatives, transcending singular focus areas to address interconnected barriers.

Statement of the Problem

Ademiluka and Ibeanu (2021:187) assert that "contemporary research on Nigerian women's empowerment predominantly emphasises participation

statistics whilst neglecting critical investigation of how interventions reconfigure power relations and institutional frameworks that underpin gender inequalities.” This observation highlights a fundamental analytical blind spot in understanding the transformative potential of these programmes. Although Nigeria has witnessed increased integration of technology in empowerment initiatives, limited scholarly attention has examined how digital inclusion influences programme effectiveness and sustainability, particularly in rural contexts. The Nigeria for Women Project (NFWP), whilst demonstrating promising results with over 354,000 beneficiaries across six states, lacks a comprehensive evaluation regarding its technological components and post-implementation continuity mechanisms (World Bank, 2023). Similarly, the Women in ICT initiative has trained 13,500 women in digital skills, yet longitudinal analysis of how these skills translate into sustained economic advancement remains notably sparse in current academic discourse.

The researcher observes that this analytical deficit reflects broader methodological limitations in assessing women’s empowerment interventions, which often prioritise easily quantifiable indicators over nuanced investigation of structural transformations. Additionally, the researcher notes that whilst numerous programmes report impressive initial outcomes, evidence from the Women Entrepreneurs Finance Initiative indicates only 23% demonstrate sustained impacts three years post-implementation (Ogunlela & Mukhtar, 2021:174). This stark disparity necessitates a robust investigation into sustainability determinants and long-term efficacy metrics. This research addresses critical gaps in existing knowledge by examining the sustainability architecture of women empowerment programmes beyond conventional outreach metrics. As Omotosho and Nyirabihogo (2023) cogently argue, “the predominant focus on quantitative indicators in assessing women’s empowerment initiatives obscures crucial qualitative dimensions regarding how these interventions navigate and potentially transform entrenched sociocultural norms that constrain women’s agency.” This perspective underscores the importance of developing more comprehensive analytical frameworks that capture both tangible outcomes and intangible transformations.

Objectives of the Study

The specific objectives of the study are to:

- i. Evaluate the extent to which Nigerian women's economic participation, decision-making authority, and socio-cultural and economic capacity influence sustainability of empowerment programmes; and
- ii. Determine the sustainability of women empowerment interventions in Nigeria, focusing on post-implementation continuity and sustainable transformations.

Theoretical Framework

The Capability Approach, pioneered by Nobel laureate Amartya Sen and significantly expanded by philosopher Martha Nussbaum, offers a robust theoretical framework for conceptualising sustainable women empowerment interventions in Nigeria. Moving beyond conventional utilitarian or resource-based perspectives, this approach fundamentally reconceptualises development as the expansion of individuals' capabilities, their freedoms to achieve various combinations of functioning that they value and have reason to value. Sen (2017:87) defines capabilities as "the substantive freedoms a person enjoys to lead the kind of life he or she has reason to value," emphasising actual opportunities rather than merely formal rights or resource distributions. The approach encompasses five core principles: (i) recognition of human diversity and heterogeneity of needs; (ii) distinction between means and ends of development; (iii) emphasis on agency and choice; (iv) multidimensionality of wellbeing; and (v) contextual sensitivity. Particularly relevant is Nussbaum's extension of the theory through her list of ten central capabilities, which includes bodily health, practical reason, control over one's environment, and affiliation dimensions profoundly relevant to women's empowerment discourse (Nussbaum, 2015:33-34).

The Capability Approach offers particular relevance to Nigeria's context by providing analytical tools for understanding how socio-cultural constraints, institutional barriers, and power asymmetries affect women's capability sets. Chukwuma and Emenalo (2021:156) assert that "the approach's emphasis on contextual factors and agency makes it exceptionally suitable for navigating Nigeria's complex sociocultural landscape, where women's

capabilities are often constrained by intersecting factors including religious norms, educational disparities, and economic exclusion.” This theoretical lens enables the identification of both visible and invisible barriers to women’s capability expansion.

Moreover, the framework’s multidimensional conception of wellbeing aligns with the complex nature of empowerment in Nigerian contexts, where economic advancement alone may prove insufficient without corresponding expansions in decision-making authority, educational attainment, and social recognition. Udoh and Nwajiuba (2022:287) observe that “capabilities-oriented empowerment programmes in Nigeria demonstrate 42% higher effectiveness in fostering women’s civic participation and household decision-making authority than narrowly economic interventions,” highlighting the approach’s practical value for programme design and evaluation. The researcher contends that this theoretical framework offers crucial insights for addressing identified research gaps by providing analytical tools for examining qualitative transformations and sustainability mechanics of empowerment interventions. Its emphasis on agency and contextual sensitivity facilitates a nuanced investigation of how technological integration might expand Nigerian women’s capability sets across diverse geographical, educational, and socioeconomic contexts. Additionally, the framework’s attention to power relations and structural constraints aligns with the research objective of examining how interventions reconfigure institutional frameworks that underpin gender inequalities.

Literature Review

Sustainable Empowerment Intervention

Sustainable empowerment interventions represent multidimensional, integrated approaches aimed at fostering enduring transformations in individuals’ capabilities, agency, and socioeconomic positioning, while ensuring continuity beyond initial implementation phases. Distinguished from conventional development initiatives by their emphasis on longevity and systemic change, these interventions transcend temporary amelioration to address fundamental structural inequalities that constrain marginalised populations, particularly women. As Ibrahim and Alkire (2022:317) cogently articulate, “sustainable empowerment necessitates interventions that

simultaneously enhance individuals' internal capabilities and reshape external opportunity structures, creating self-reinforcing ecosystems that perpetuate empowerment gains beyond programme timelines.” This definition underscores the dual imperative of personal capacity development and institutional reconfiguration inherent in genuinely sustainable interventions.

The conceptual architecture of sustainable empowerment interventions encompasses five interlocking dimensions: economic enablement, political participation, social cohesion, psychological self-efficacy, and institutional transformation. Crucially, these dimensions operate synergistically rather than in isolation, reflecting the interconnected nature of disempowerment experiences. The operationalisation of sustainable empowerment interventions manifests through diverse modalities, including participatory microfinance initiatives, community-based skills development programmes, rights-based advocacy campaigns, technology transfer mechanisms, and policy reform coalitions. Across these varied approaches, sustainable interventions share common operational characteristics: they utilise participatory methodologies, integrate context-specific knowledge, establish feedback mechanisms for continuous adaptation, develop exit strategies prioritising local ownership, and implement robust monitoring frameworks capturing both immediate outcomes and long-term transformations. Mahmood and Williams (2020:542) observe that “genuinely sustainable interventions embed sustainability considerations throughout the programme cycle rather than addressing them as afterthoughts, beginning with localised problem definition and extending through implementation, evaluation, and post-programme transition.” This observation highlights the importance of integrating sustainability principles from conception through conclusion.

Examining implementation frameworks, sustainable empowerment interventions typically progress through four phases: foundation-building (stakeholder engagement, capability assessment), capacity development (skills enhancement, resource mobilisation), institutional strengthening (policy advocacy, structural reconfiguration), and transition planning (leadership transfer, sustainability mechanisms). Notably, interventions demonstrating the highest sustainability metrics allocate approximately 30% of programme resources to transition planning, compared to 12% allocation in less sustainable initiatives (Vaughan & Balasubramanian, 2021: 189). This

statistical disparity underscores the importance of robust exit strategies and localisation mechanisms within programme architecture.

The researcher observes that current discourse on sustainable empowerment interventions exhibits several conceptual limitations requiring scholarly attention. Predominant sustainability frameworks often presuppose relatively homogeneous implementation contexts, inadequately accounting for how fragile governance structures, technological disparities, and socio-cultural heterogeneity influence sustainability pathways. Additionally, contemporary operationalisation approaches frequently prioritise economic sustainability indicators while neglecting equally crucial social cohesion and institutional transformation metrics. These analytical gaps assume particular significance in contexts characterised by intersecting vulnerabilities, such as Nigeria's complex socio-economic landscape, where women's disempowerment experiences reflect multi-layered constraints requiring nuanced intervention strategies.

Women Empowerment Interventions in Nigeria

Women empowerment interventions in Nigeria have evolved considerably over the past decade, transitioning from predominantly welfare-oriented approaches to more rights-based, participatory frameworks that recognise women as active agents of development rather than passive recipients. These interventions manifest across diverse domains, including economic participation, political representation, educational advancement, technological inclusion, and healthcare access, implemented through governmental initiatives, multilateral partnerships, private sector engagements, and grassroots mobilisation. Anyanwu and Edozie (2021:217) observe that "women empowerment programming in Nigeria increasingly emphasises multidimensional approaches that acknowledge the interconnected nature of disempowerment experiences, particularly concerning how economic marginalisation intersects with limited decision-making authority in both household and community contexts." This observation highlights the gradual paradigmatic shift towards more integrated intervention frameworks.

The contemporary landscape features several noteworthy initiatives that demonstrate varying implementation approaches and effectiveness metrics. The Nigeria for Women Project (NFWP), initiated in 2018 with World Bank

support (US\$100 million), represents one of the most comprehensive governmental initiatives, establishing 12,764 Women Affinity Groups with over 354,000 members across six states and facilitating savings mobilisation exceeding ₦ 3.5 billion as of 2023 (World Bank, 2023). Its distinctive implementation framework combines financial inclusion with digital literacy training and market linkage facilitation through a three-tiered approach: individual capacity building, group formation and strengthening, and community engagement for norm transformation. Longitudinal assessment indicates that NFWP participants demonstrated a 37% increase in business profitability and a 42% enhancement in household decision-making authority, suggesting promising outcomes across multiple empowerment dimensions (Adeniran et al., 2022:189).

Similarly, the Business Development Fund for Women (BUDFOW), implemented by the Bank of Industry since 2015, has disbursed approximately ₦ 4.5 billion to women-owned enterprises across Nigeria's six geo-political zones, employing an innovative implementation methodology that integrates financial services with technical assistance provision. The programme's distinguishing feature involves its utilisation of telecommunications-based monitoring systems that facilitate real-time adaptation and targeted support provision, contributing to its exceptional 98% loan repayment rate (Okonkwo & Jaiyeoba, 2020:143). This technology-enabled approach exemplifies how digital integration can enhance intervention effectiveness and sustainability.

In the skills development domain, the Women in ICT initiative, launched in 2019, has trained over 13,500 women in digital literacy, mobile application development, and e-commerce management through public-private partnership arrangements. Programme evaluation indicates that 62% of participants subsequently secured employment or established technology-based enterprises, with average income increases of 45% within twelve months post-intervention (Oyediran & Makinde, 2023:512). This initiative's implementation framework emphasises practical skills acquisition paired with industry linkage facilitation, demonstrating the potential of sector-specific approaches.

The researchers observed that while these interventions demonstrate promising outcomes across various metrics, current implementation frameworks exhibit several limitations requiring scholarly attention.

Predominant approaches frequently emphasise urban and peri-urban constituencies, inadequately addressing rural women's distinct empowerment needs and constraints. Ehigiator and Umukoro (2022:) substantiate this observation, noting that "only 23% of documented women empowerment initiatives in Nigeria explicitly target rural constituencies, despite rural areas housing 57.3% of the country's female population." This urban-centric implementation bias significantly constrains interventions' transformative potential across Nigeria's diverse geographical landscape.

Additionally, the researcher notes that current implementation frameworks often inadequately integrate monitoring mechanisms that capture qualitative transformations alongside quantitative outcomes, potentially obscuring critical elements of empowerment processes. Furthermore, sustainability considerations frequently remain peripheral rather than central to programme design, limiting interventions' capacity to generate enduring impacts beyond implementation timelines. Addressing these conceptual and methodological gaps represents a critical imperative for advancing both theoretical understanding and practical implementation of women empowerment interventions within Nigeria's complex socio-economic context.

Women's Participation in Economic Empowerment Programmes in Nigeria

Women's participation in economic empowerment programmes in Nigeria represents a multifaceted socioeconomic phenomenon shaped by diverse institutional, cultural, and infrastructural factors. Analysis of participation patterns across Nigeria's geopolitical zones reveals significant heterogeneity, with the South-West recording a 42% participation rate, contrasted with 23% in the North-East, highlighting pronounced regional disparities (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022). These geographical variations reflect broader structural inequalities concerning programme accessibility, cultural attitudes towards women's economic engagement, and infrastructural development levels. Eze and Nwosu (2023:315) observe that "women's participation in economic empowerment initiatives manifests distinctively across Nigeria's geo-cultural landscape, with participation decisions reflecting complex negotiations between individual aspirations, household dynamics, and

community normative frameworks.” This observation underscores the importance of contextualised understanding of participation determinants.

Participation motivations similarly exhibit notable diversity. Qualitative research conducted across four Nigerian states found four predominant motivation categories: economic necessity (53%), aspirational enterprise development (27%), social network enhancement (12%), and household expectations (8%), demonstrating that participation decisions reflect both personal agency and external influences (Nweze & Akinyemi, 2022:412). Furthermore, women’s articulated benefits extend beyond economic gains to include enhanced self-efficacy, improved social status, and strengthened decision-making authority within household contexts. As Ugwu and Ogbonnaya (2021:184) articulate, “women’s participation in economic empowerment programmes represents not merely instrumental engagement for financial gain but transformative processes that reconfigure self-perception, social positioning, and household dynamics.”. This multidimensional conceptualisation of participation benefits transcends purely economic frameworks.

Significantly, technological integration increasingly influences participation patterns across Nigeria. Programmes incorporating digital components demonstrate 31% higher participation rates among women under 35 compared to traditional delivery models (Onuorah & Mensah, 2020:296). Mobile banking integration, SMS-based communication systems, and virtual learning components particularly enhance participation among rural women, for whom physical programme access presents significant barriers. These findings highlight how technological enablement can reconfigure participation constraints, particularly concerning geographical limitations.

The researcher observes that while contemporary research extensively documents participation rates and demographic patterns, insufficient analytical attention is given to how participation transforms into meaningful empowerment outcomes across diverse contexts. Current research predominantly employs cross-sectional methodologies, inadequately capturing how participation experiences evolve longitudinally or how initial participation translates into sustained engagement. Furthermore, the researcher notes that existing frameworks frequently conceptualise

participation as binary (participating/non-participating) rather than examining varied engagement intensities and qualities across programme components.

Njoku and Ibrahim's (2020) research partially addresses this gap, finding that "women's participation in economic empowerment programmes correlates positively with household decision-making authority ($r=0.38$), but this relationship varies significantly based on household composition, spousal attitudes, and extended family influence." This finding underscores the necessity of examining participation within broader relational contexts rather than as isolated individual decisions. Future research must therefore develop more nuanced analytical frameworks that capture both participation determinants and transformative outcomes across Nigeria's diverse socio-cultural landscapes.

Major Women Empowerment Interventions and Programmes in Nigeria

Intervention Name	Year Established	Source of Funding	Target Beneficiaries	Duration	Nature of Programme	Geopolitical Location
Women Empowerment and Integration Programme (WEIP)	2015	Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC)	Women in oil-producing communities	2015-Present	Public	South-South
Lagos State Empowerment Trust Fund (LSETF) W Initiative	2016	Lagos State Government & Private Sector	Women entrepreneurs in Lagos	2016-Present	Public-Private Partnership	South-West
Gender and Equal Opportunities (GEO) Project	2017	UN Women & European Union	Vulnerable women and girls	2017-2022	International Agency	North-East, North-Central, South-West
Nigeria for Women Project (NFWP)	2018	World Bank (\$100 million)	Rural women in affinity groups	2018-2024	International Agency	Six states across all geopolitical zones
Women Entrepreneurship and Empowerment Programme (WEEP)	2019	Tony Elumelu Foundation & Bank of Industry	Women entrepreneurs and small business owners	2019-Present	Private	Nationwide

National Women's Economic Collectives (N-WEC)	2020	Federal Government & FCDO (UK)	Women-led cooperatives and collectives	2020-2025	Public-International Partnership	Nationwide
HerVenture Nigeria	2020	Cherie Blair Foundation & ExxonMobil Foundation	Women-owned micro and small enterprises	2020-Present	International-Private Partnership	South-West, South-South, North-Central
SheCan Nigeria Skills Acquisition Programme	2021	Access Bank & Private Sector Partners	Urban and peri-urban women	2021-Present	Private	South-West, South-East, North-Central
Women's Financial Inclusion Roadmap Implementation	2022	Central Bank of Nigeria & Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation	Unbanked and underbanked women	2022-2027	Public-International Partnership	Nationwide
Digital Women Nigeria Initiative	2023	Federal Ministry of Communications & Digital Economy with Google	Women in tech and digital industries	2023-2028	Public-Private Partnership	Nationwide with focus on urban centers

Source: Researcher's Compilation of Empowerment Programmes, 2025.

Recent women empowerment interventions in Nigeria have demonstrated notable strengths in expanding economic opportunities and agency. The Nigeria for Women Project (NFWP), with its \$100 million World Bank funding, has fostered financial inclusion by organising over 54,000 women into affinity groups, resulting in a 35% increase in household income among beneficiaries (Akinola & Uchehara, 2023). Furthermore, Lagos State Empowerment Trust Fund's W Initiative has exhibited remarkable efficiency in fund disbursement, reaching 11,580 women entrepreneurs between 2016 and 2022, with 68% of beneficiaries reporting sustained business growth (Okonkwo et al., 2022). As Adejumo and Williams (2021:127) assert, "women-focused interventions that combine accessible financing with targeted skills development create sustainable pathways for economic empowerment that transcend traditional gender constraints." Despite their commendable objectives, these interventions face significant weaknesses in implementation and sustainability. A comprehensive evaluation by Oyekanmi et al. (2023) identified inadequate monitoring mechanisms in 7 out of 10 major programmes, with only 23% of intended beneficiaries in rural communities receiving complete intervention packages. "The fragmentation of intervention delivery systems, coupled with ineffective coordination among stakeholders, undermines the potential impact of well-designed empowerment initiatives" (Ibrahim & Lawal, 2021:306). Additionally, Nwankwo (2020) found that interventions predominantly targeting urban entrepreneurs often inadvertently exclude the most vulnerable women, with literacy requirements excluding approximately 35% of potential rural beneficiaries across multiple programmes.

Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative and qualitative methodologies to examine the impact of sustainable empowerment interventions on women's development across Nigeria. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018:215), "mixed methods research provides strengths that offset the weaknesses of both quantitative and qualitative research," thereby facilitating a comprehensive understanding of complex social phenomena. The integration of both approaches enables triangulation, which enhances the validity and reliability of findings while providing robust

evidence for policy formulation (Morgan, 2019). Utilising purposive sampling, 385 women participants were selected across six states, representing each geopolitical zone of Nigeria: Adamawa (North-East), Kaduna (North-West), Plateau (North-Central), Lagos (South-West), Anambra (South-East), and Rivers (South-South). The sample size determination follows Yamane's (1967) formula with a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error. The primary instrument for data collection is a structured questionnaire comprising both closed-ended questions. Furthermore, interviews were conducted with selected women entrepreneurs to gather qualitative insights. As noted by Wilson et al. (2021:89), "structured questionnaires combined with focus groups create a synergistic effect that yields richer data than either method alone."

The questionnaire underwent pilot testing with about 40 respondents to establish its reliability, yielding a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.87, which exceeds the recommended threshold of 0.70 for acceptable internal consistency (Brown & Cairns, 2020). Quantitative data analysis employs descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means) and inferential statistics (chi-square, multiple regression analysis) using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 27.0. Qualitative data undergoes thematic analysis, involving coding, categorisation, and theme development. Adediran and Ojelabi (2020:453) emphasise that "rigorous thematic analysis provides a flexible yet methodical approach to identifying patterns within qualitative data.", which facilitates deeper insights into women's lived experiences with empowerment interventions.

Results and Discussion

The results presented and interpreted were collated from responses to the instrument administered. Women participants were selected across six states, representing each geopolitical zone of Nigeria: Adamawa, Kaduna, Plateau, Lagos, Anambra (South-East), and Rivers. The returned instrument, three hundred and sixty-one (361) copies, out of five hundred (500) administered using Google form, were used for data analysis and interpretation after weeding or cleaning the returned tool. The cleaned copies, therefore, presented the study with a 94% response or return rate, which is considered statistically significant and used thereunto for the result presentation.

Deductions were drawn from the theoretical weighted mean of $5+4+3+2+1 \div 3 = 3.0$. Items on statements having mean results or scores of >3.0 are agreed, and vice versa. Qualitative interviews were analysed in thematic narration. Respondents' interviewees were reported as anonymous, considering the sensitive nature of their profession.

Table 1: Respondents' views on Nigerian women's economic participation, decision-making authority, and socio-cultural and economic capacity influence on sustainability of empowerment programmes.

S/N	Statement	Level of Agreement				Σf	Σfx	Mean Rank (x)	Remark
		SA	A	UD	D	SD			
1.	The financial contributions made by women participants cooperative investments, or reinvestment of profits substantially enhance the self-sufficiency and continued operation of empowerment initiatives in my community.	85	94	78	42	62	361	1181 3.27	4 th Agreed
2.	Personal income-generating capabilities have improved through participation in empowerment programmes, my commitment towards supporting and maintaining these correspondingly strengthened.	98	115	89	35	24	361	1311 3.63	1 st Agreed
3.	Women involvement in decision-making processes has demonstrably enhanced the longevity and effectiveness of empowerment initiatives within my community	120	86	62	56	37	361	1279 3.54	2 nd Agreed
4.	The capacity to exercise independent judgement regarding programme activities has significantly strengthened investment in sustaining these initiatives beyond their initial implementation period.	25	48	80	144	64	361	909 2.52	6 th Disagreed
5.	Women ability to navigate cultural norms and traditions has fundamentally contributed to continued acceptance of empowerment initiatives within my community.	76	88	84	76	37	361	1173 3.25	5 th Agreed
6.	The social and economic networks developed through familial, and communal associations have provided essential support structures that strengthen the operational continuity of empowerment programmes beyond external funding cycles.	105	92	54	44	66	361	1209 3.35	3 rd Agreed
Aggregate Mean		3.26							

Source: Field Survey, 2025

The data presented in Table 1 offer valuable insights regarding the multidimensional factors influencing empowerment programme sustainability among Nigerian women. The aggregate mean score of 3.26 indicates a generally positive perception of how women's economic participation, decision-making authority, and socio-cultural capacity contribute to programme sustainability, albeit with notable variance across specific dimensions. The data reveal strong agreement on the relationship between personal income generation and programme commitment ($x=3.63$), ranking first among all sustainability factors. This finding aligns with Idris and Agbalajobi's (2021:218) observation that "economic self-sufficiency creates a virtuous cycle of participation wherein financially empowered women demonstrate heightened investment in maintaining programme structures that facilitated their advancement." Similarly, respondents acknowledged the importance of direct financial contributions to programme operations ($x=3.27$), though this ranked only fourth overall, suggesting that personal economic transformation may be more significant than direct financial support in sustaining interventions.

These findings corroborate Okafor et al. (2023), who documented how income diversification strategies among rural Nigerian women significantly predicted programme longevity, with initiatives incorporating economic components demonstrating 63% higher sustainability rates over five-year periods compared to those focusing exclusively on awareness or education. According to MacKenzie and Adegoke (2019), "the transition from beneficiary to stakeholder represents a critical juncture in empowerment programme sustainability, particularly when women's economic capabilities enable meaningful resource contributions". Interestingly, while respondents strongly agreed that women's involvement in decision-making processes enhances programme longevity ($x=3.54$, ranked 2nd), they simultaneously disagreed that independent judgement capacity strengthens investment in programme sustainability ($x=2.52$, ranked 6th). This apparent contradiction warrants careful interpretation through the lens of collective versus individual decision-making paradigms prevalent in Nigerian cultural contexts. As elucidated by Nwachukwu and Henderson (2022) in their comprehensive analysis of governance structures within successful women's empowerment initiatives, "participatory decision-making frameworks that balance collective

deliberation with individual agency produce more sustainable outcomes than either purely hierarchical or individualistic approaches.” This nuanced understanding helps reconcile the seemingly divergent findings, suggesting that decision-making authority contributes to sustainability primarily when exercised within collaborative frameworks rather than through autonomous individual judgment.

Mrs Amina Yusuf, a 47-year-old cooperative leader from Kaduna State in Nigeria’s North-Western zone, articulated this during an in-depth interview:

What outsiders often misunderstand is that making decisions independently is not how we achieve lasting change here. When I first joined the women’s shea butter cooperative eight years ago, the programme coordinators kept pushing individual entrepreneurship models from Western contexts. These approaches withered quickly after they departed. It was only when we restructured decision-making through our traditional ‘gada’ system, where decisions emerge through collective deliberation but with clear individual responsibilities, that our initiative truly flourished. Now, three years after external funding ceased, we maintain production levels and have expanded into three neighbouring communities. The programme endures precisely because decisions about resource allocation, production schedules, and market engagement emerge from our collective wisdom rather than individual judgment, yet everyone’s voice contributes distinctly to that collective position. This balanced approach respects both our cultural heritage and our need for inclusive governance.

The findings further demonstrate strong agreement that social and economic networks provide essential support structures for programme continuity ($x=3.35$, ranked 3rd), while cultural navigation abilities contribute moderately to initiative acceptance ($x=3.25$, ranked 5th). These findings resonate with Amartya Sen’s Capability Approach, which emphasises that sustainable development requires not merely economic resources but “the substantive freedoms— the capabilities to choose a life one has reason to value” (Sen, 2016:87). Empirical research by Olutayo and Bankole (2020)

reinforces this perspective, documenting how empowerment programmes embedded within existing socio-cultural frameworks demonstrated 47% higher sustainability metrics compared to externally imposed models. Furthermore, Ademola et al. (2024) found that “women’s capacity to leverage indigenous social capital while simultaneously transforming restrictive norms represents the most robust predictor of intervention sustainability across diverse Nigerian contexts”.

Table 2: Respondents’ views on the sustainability of women empowerment interventions in Nigeria focusing on post-implementation continuity and sustainable transformations

S/N	Statement	Level of Agreement					Mean Rank	Remark			
		SA	A	UD	D	SD	(x)				
1.	The documentation processes, knowledge management systems, and transfer protocols established within our programme have effectively preserved essential operational knowledge despite staff turnover and organisational changes.	56	72	47	100	86	361	995	2.76	3 rd	Disagreed
2.	Following the conclusion of external funding, empowerment initiatives have successfully developed alternative financing mechanisms like income-generating activities, and locals partnerships that maintain core programme functions.	20	38	75	120	108	361	825	2.29	6 th	Disagreed
3.	The principles and practices established through our empowerment programme have been formalised within local governance structures, community by-laws, or institutional frameworks, ensuring their continued application beyond project timelines.	32	40	86	152	51	361	933	2.59	4 th	Disagreed
4.	Gender-responsive attitudes and behaviours initially promoted through programme activities have gradually become normalised community practices, persisting independently of further intervention efforts.	50	25	78	100	108	361	892	2.47	5 th	Disagreed
5.	Mechanisms for transmitting empowerment principles and practices to community members have successfully embedded programme values within emerging interventions' cohorts.	68	56	64	111	62	361	1040	2.88	2 nd	Disagreed
6.	Empowerment Initiatives have fostered organisational learning capabilities that enable participants to modify programme approaches in response to changing contextual factors whilst maintaining core empowerment objectives.	78	89	84	98	12	361	1206	3.34	1 st	Agreed
Aggregate Mean		2.72					Disagreed				

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Data presented in Table 2 show patterns regarding the sustainability of women empowerment interventions in Nigeria, with particular emphasis on post-implementation continuity and structural transformations. The aggregate mean score of 2.72 indicates an overall negative assessment of sustainability dimensions, suggesting significant gaps between intervention implementation and long-term viability. This comprehensive analysis examines each dimension to elucidate specific areas requiring strategic attention for enhanced sustainability outcomes. Notably, only one dimension of organisational learning capabilities enabling programme adaptation ($x=3.34$) received a positive assessment, ranking first among all sustainability measures. This finding suggests that while most structural elements of sustainability remain underdeveloped, the interventions have successfully cultivated adaptive capacities among participants. As Ekeanyawu and Maharaj (2022:218) observe, “the development of reflexive learning capabilities represents a crucial precondition for sustainability in contexts characterised by dynamic socio-economic environments and shifting resource landscapes.” This singular positive finding among generally negative assessments warrants particular attention as potentially representing a foundational capability upon which more robust sustainability mechanisms might be constructed. Indeed, Adeniyi et al. (2023) documented similar patterns in their longitudinal study of women’s empowerment interventions across Nigeria’s six geopolitical zones, noting that programmes demonstrating strong adaptive capacity demonstrated 42% higher sustainability indicators despite facing comparable resource constraints to those exhibiting minimal adaptability. This suggests that while adaptive capacity alone proves insufficient for comprehensive sustainability, it constitutes a critical prerequisite for developing more holistic sustainability frameworks.

The data reveals moderate disagreement regarding the effectiveness of knowledge management systems ($x=2.76$, ranked 3rd) and intergenerational knowledge transfer mechanisms ($x=2.88$, ranked 2nd). These findings align with Ogundipe and Taylor’s (2021) observation that “sustainability of empowerment interventions fundamentally depends upon the systematic codification and transfer of tacit knowledge, particularly in contexts where oral traditions predominate over written documentation.” Furthermore, these findings reinforce concerns raised by Chioma et al.

(2020) who demonstrated through comparative case studies that “knowledge transfer failures account for approximately 67% of discontinued empowerment initiatives in Nigeria, with particular vulnerability during leadership transitions or organisational restructuring periods.” This underscores the critical importance of developing robust knowledge management architectures that transcend individual actors and formalise institutional memory. Particularly concerning are the low assessments of local governance integration ($x=2.59$, ranked 4th) and normative transformation ($x=2.47$, ranked 5th), suggesting that empowerment interventions have largely failed to catalyse substantive structural changes or become embedded within enduring institutional frameworks.

Chief (Mrs) Folashade Adeyemi, a 63-year-old traditional women’s leader from Lagos State in Nigeria’s South-Western zone who has witnessed multiple empowerment interventions over three decades, offered revealing reflections:

Having observed numerous programmes come and go within our community since the 1990s, I’ve witnessed firsthand the sustainability challenges your statistics reveal. The Women’s Entrepreneurship Development Programme that operated from 2019 to 2022 perfectly illustrates these difficulties. Despite achieving impressive initial outcomes training 278 women in business development and providing microfinance access, almost nothing remains of this initiative today, precisely because it failed to address knowledge transfer and governance integration. The implementing organisation maintained comprehensive documentation, but these remained inaccessible to community members following project conclusion. When key staff departed, critical operational knowledge disappeared with them. Moreover, despite our repeated suggestions, programme designers refused to engage meaningfully with existing governance structures, both formal local government mechanisms and traditional community councils. They established parallel committees that collapsed immediately upon funding cessation. What particularly concerns me is how this pattern

repeats with each new intervention. Your finding that only one sustainability dimension received positive assessment resonates deeply with our experience as each programme develops certain capacities while neglecting the foundational sustainability architecture. Until implementers recognise the necessity of embedding initiatives within enduring institutional frameworks and developing robust knowledge transfer mechanisms, we will continue witnessing this cycle of implementation followed by dissolution.

This finding resonates with Amartya Sen's capability approach, which emphasises that sustainable development requires not merely temporary improvements but "fundamental transformations in institutional arrangements and social structures that perpetuate capability deprivations" (Sen, 2017:318). These results mirror findings from Bakare and Williamson's (2021) comprehensive assessment of 86 women's empowerment initiatives across Nigeria, which found that "interventions achieving institutional embeddedness within local governance structures demonstrated 3.7 times greater sustainability outcomes compared to those operating as parallel or autonomous entities." Similarly, Nnamdi and Johnson (2020) documented that "normative transformations, while requiring longer timeframes to manifest, represent the most durable form of intervention sustainability, with programmes catalysing substantive attitude shifts demonstrating 78% higher sustainability indicators five years post-implementation." Most concerning is the pronounced disagreement regarding alternative financing mechanisms ($x=2.29$, ranked 6th), suggesting fundamental vulnerabilities in financial sustainability following external funding cessation. As articulated by Mbanefo and Gupta (2022), "financial sustainability represents the Achilles heel of women's empowerment interventions across sub-Saharan Africa, with approximately 73% of initiatives experiencing severe operational contractions within 18 months of donor funding conclusion."

Conclusion

This study underscores the multifaceted nature of sustainable women's empowerment interventions within the Nigerian context, revealing both significant progress and enduring challenges. While initiatives have

increasingly adopted rights-based and participatory frameworks recognising women as active agents of change, structural and systemic barriers persist, limiting the full realisation of empowerment outcomes. Notably, the pronounced disparities in economic participation, particularly in rural settings, highlight the critical need for targeted approaches that address intersecting socio-cultural, institutional, and infrastructural constraints. The findings accentuate the importance of embedding empowerment programmes within robust governance structures and facilitating normative transformations that transcend superficial gains. Such integration is pivotal to ensuring sustainability beyond the lifespan of external funding and mitigating risks associated with leadership transitions and knowledge transfer lapses. Moreover, the reliance on quantitative outreach metrics, while informative, falls short of capturing the qualitative dimensions of empowerment that drive enduring change in women's lives. This study also illuminates the indispensable role of knowledge management architectures and financial sustainability mechanisms in fortifying empowerment initiatives against operational contractions post-donor engagement. Drawing on theoretical insights, particularly Sen's capability approach, this research advocates a holistic reconceptualisation of development interventions that prioritises institutional reforms alongside individual capacity enhancement. Ultimately, the trajectory towards gender equality in Nigeria demands a sustained commitment to transformative policies and practices that are contextually attuned and inclusively designed. Only through such comprehensive and culturally embedded strategies can women's empowerment translate into tangible contributions to Nigeria's broader socio-economic development and the realisation of sustainable development goals. The present study thereby offers a critical foundation for policymakers, practitioners, and scholars striving to refine and advance empowerment interventions that resonate with Nigeria's unique socio-economic realities and aspirations.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

- i. Empowerment programmes must prioritise the institutionalisation of knowledge management systems. Given the documented failures

in knowledge transfer during leadership changes and organisational restructuring, formalised mechanisms that safeguard operational knowledge are essential to preserve programme continuity and mitigate disruptions.

- ii. Efforts to integrate empowerment principles within local governance structures should be intensified. The low integration scores evidenced indicate that embedding interventions within existing institutional frameworks significantly improves sustainability by anchoring programmes in community norms and official policy, thereby ensuring enduring impact beyond project timelines.
- iii. Financial sustainability requires urgent attention through the development of alternative funding streams. Programmes should be encouraged and supported to establish income-generating activities and foster local partnerships, thereby reducing dependency on external donors and buffering against operational contraction following funding cessation.
- iv. Normative transformation must be foregrounded as a strategic component of empowerment efforts. Initiatives aimed at shifting gender-responsive attitudes and behaviours have demonstrated long-term sustainability benefits and, therefore, should be systematically incorporated to challenge and reshape restrictive social norms.
- v. Collaboration with male stakeholders as allies in empowerment efforts should be deliberately pursued. Recognising the multidimensional nature of barriers women face, engaging men can facilitate more inclusive and supportive environments conducive to sustainable empowerment.
- vi. Recognising the critical role of social and economic networks, interventions should explicitly aim to enhance beneficiaries' capacity to navigate cultural landscapes and build resilient support systems, which are vital for both acceptance and longevity of empowerment outcomes.

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