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Women's Empowerment and Poverty Reduction in Nigeria: An
Assessment of the National Women's Economic Empowerment
Policy in Egbe-Idimu LCDA, Lagos State



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Women's Empowerment and Poverty Reduction in Nigeria: An Assessment of the National Women's Economic Empowerment Policy in Egbe-Idimu LCDA, Lagos State



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Abstract

Purpose: This study investigated the effectiveness of the National Women Economic Empowerment (WEE) Policy as a poverty-reduction mechanism among women in Egbe-Idimu LCDA, Lagos State. It assessed the extent to which the policy has empowered women, examined its influence on access to national entrepreneurship funding, and analysed the relationship between empowerment programmes and poverty reduction.

Methodology: Anchored on a pragmatic research philosophy, the study adopted a mixed-methods design. A probabilistic sampling procedure combining simple random and cluster sampling was used to select 300 women engaged in small-scale enterprises, with sample size determined using the Taro Yamane formula. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire. Descriptive statistics were used for summarisation, while Chi-square, Pearson correlation, and regression analysis served as inferential tools, supported by SPSS (Version 25).

Findings: The study found that orientation and sensitisation initiatives significantly enhance the implementation of the WEE Policy, particularly in promoting entrepreneurship and skills acquisition among women in Egbe-Idimu LCDA. Results further showed that WEE interventions strengthen women's economic independence and reduce vulnerabilities, including exposure to corrupt practices. Overall, the implementation of the WEE Policy has substantially empowered women, and empowerment programmes exhibit a significant and positive association with poverty reduction.

Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy: The study contributes theoretically by establishing an empirical link between empowerment initiatives and measurable decreases in women's socio-economic vulnerabilities. Practically, it highlights the value of continuous skills development and entrepreneurship support in enhancing women's self-reliance. Policy-wise, it underscores the need for sustained investment in lifelong capacity-building and targeted sensitisation to maximise the long-term poverty-reduction impact of the National WEE Policy.

Keywords: *Alleviation, Economic Development, Policy, Poverty Eradication, Women Empowerment*

1. Introduction

The level of economic growth and development of any nation depends largely on the productive utilisation of its human resources. Women's economic empowerment has therefore been widely recognised as a prerequisite for sustainable economic development and pro-poor growth. Achieving this empowerment requires sound government policies, long-term commitment, and gender-specific perspectives embedded at the design stage of policy and programming. According to the OECD DAC Network on Gender Equality (2012), equitable access to assets, infrastructure, and employment opportunities—along with recognition of women's unpaid work—is central to inclusive growth. Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) entails equal access to and control over economic resources and opportunities, as well as the dismantling of structural gender inequalities in the labour market, including unequal care burdens.

Adegbite, Badmus, and Medewase (2023), citing Omodero (2019), argued that global economic assessment has shifted from counting millionaires to evaluating nations by the proportion of economically productive and financially independent citizens. The Human Development Index (HDI), which measures not just GDP but also quality of life, has become a key indicator of progress. In Nigeria, however, human development efforts have historically favoured men, despite a near gender balance in population. Female unemployment and economic disenfranchisement thus remain major drags on national development (Kalu et al., 2020). Although Nigeria has ratified several continental and regional instruments—such as the African Charter on Human and People's Rights, the Women's Rights Protocol (2003), and the ECOWAS Protocol on Democracy and Good Governance—gender inequality persists (Kelly, 2013; Egwurube, 2022).

Empirical studies (Adeosun & Owolabi, 2021; Iro-Idoro & Jinoh, 2020; Kalu et al., 2020) confirm that Nigerian women, despite their numerical advantage, continue to lag behind men in access to education, political participation, and economic decision-making. Prominent examples of successful women—such as Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala and the late Professor Dora Akunyili—demonstrate the immense developmental potential that widespread female empowerment could unlock (Ovute et al., 2015). Yet, the exclusion of women from economic activities remains inconsistent with global development norms and impedes Nigeria's advancement.

Poverty compounds this inequality. Defined as the lack of basic capacity to participate effectively in society (Ogu et al., 2016; United Nations, 2020), poverty manifests through hunger, malnutrition, poor education, and social exclusion. Despite global commitments, extreme poverty persists—particularly in rural areas where 80 percent of the world's poor reside (Castañeda et al., 2018; Ali & Thorbecke, 2017). Studies show that rural residents, especially women, experience poverty longer and more intensely than their urban counterparts (Cotter, 2002; Kyzyma, 2019; Cuaresma et al., 2018). Projections indicate that without major policy reforms, sub-Saharan Africa will continue to record high poverty rates by 2030 (Mubecua & David, 2019).

Nigeria's poverty profile reflects this reality. Women—constituting about 45.5% of the labour force (World Bank, 2019)—are disproportionately employed in low-skill, low-income informal sectors due to limited education and access to credit (Aluko & Mbada, 2020). Although successive governments have implemented numerous programmes such as Operation Feed the Nation, Better Life for Rural Women, the National Poverty Eradication Programme, and the IFAD-Assisted LIFE project, most lacked gender-sensitive frameworks and suffered from poor continuity, corruption, and weak monitoring (ODI, 2014; Campos et al., 2018).

Recognising these gaps, the Federal Government of Nigeria formulated the *National Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) Policy* in May 2023 to promote gender equality, women's empowerment, and social inclusion. The policy acknowledges persistent structural barriers—including patriarchy, social norms, insecurity, and displacement—that hinder women's full participation in the economy. Implemented through the Federal Ministry of Women's Affairs (FMWA), the policy seeks to mainstream gender perspectives across national development processes, enhance access to resources, and institutionalise gender equality mechanisms through a structured Action Plan. This initiative aims to translate policy commitments into measurable outcomes that strengthen women's capacities and promote inclusive economic growth.

Despite these efforts, poverty among Nigerian women remains widespread. The 2018 Human Development Report indicated that over half of Nigerians (51%) are multidimensionally poor, with women forming the majority (UNDP, 2018; World Bank, 2020). Persistent gender wage gaps, limited property rights, and unequal access to credit and education further entrench women's economic marginalisation (UN Women, 2018). Cultural and customary practices—especially in rural areas—continue to deny women inheritance rights, limiting their ownership and control of productive assets. Consequently, women remain vulnerable to poverty and financial dependence, often constrained by unpaid domestic labour and caregiving responsibilities (Charmes, 2019).

Against this background, this study examines the *National Women Economic Empowerment (WEE) Policy as a panacea for poverty eradication among women in Nigeria*, with a specific focus on Egbe-Idimu Local Council Development Area (LCDA) in Lagos State. The study explores how the WEE policy has empowered women, its influence on their access to national funding for entrepreneurship, and its relationship with poverty reduction in the study area. By assessing the practical outcomes of WEE policy implementation, this research contributes to understanding the gendered dimensions of poverty and the policy's potential to promote inclusive and sustainable development in Nigeria.

2.1 Literature Review

Women's economic empowerment (WEE) has emerged as a critical strategy for achieving inclusive growth, poverty reduction, and gender equality in Nigeria. Empowerment encompasses enhancing women's access to resources, participation in decision-making, and self-reliance in livelihood improvement (Adeosun & Owolabi, 2021). The Federal Ministry of Women Affairs

(FMWA) has underscored that achieving gender equality and social inclusivity requires dismantling inequalities that exist between men and women, as well as boys and girls. The introduction of the National Women Economic Empowerment Policy represents a milestone in addressing patriarchal barriers, social exclusion, and gender-based discrimination that limit women's access to economic opportunities. The policy promotes skill development, access to finance, entrepreneurship, and women's leadership across economic sectors, while establishing a framework for accountability through monitoring and evaluation mechanisms (FMWA, 2023).

Women's empowerment, as noted by Mayoux (2006), is both an end and a means to broader development outcomes such as increased participation in governance and sustainable rural development. It involves strengthening women's capacity to make purposive choices and transform those choices into desired outcomes (World Bank, 2001). Gender mainstreaming, particularly in education and Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM), is identified as a strategic approach to overcoming socio-economic exclusion (Ovute, 2015). Studies further highlight that empowerment enhances self-reliance and household wellbeing, while the lack of access to capital remains a major cause of female poverty in Nigeria (Adeosun & Owolabi, 2021).

The conceptualization of empowerment varies, but scholars generally view it as a multidimensional process encompassing social, economic, political, and legal dimensions (Nussbaum, 2000; Taylor & Pereznieta, 2014; Kabeer, 1999). Kabeer's transformative approach situates empowerment within the dynamics of power relations, emphasizing structural constraints on women's agency. Similarly, Urhobo et al. (2023) emphasize the importance of contextualizing empowerment, particularly within rural development, where access to land, credit, and education is crucial. Women's empowerment is thus integral to achieving sustainable livelihoods, improved health, and household welfare (Vaid & Kumar, 2015; Matira, 2015).

Entrepreneurship serves as a major pathway for women's empowerment. Women entrepreneurs possess unique attributes such as resilience, independence, and risk tolerance (Udechukwu, 2014; Pareek, 2012). Their participation contributes significantly to socio-economic development by creating employment and stimulating innovation (Ali & Ali, 2013). Globally, women account for substantial portions of agricultural and industrial production, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, where they produce over 80 percent of food output. Despite these contributions, women entrepreneurs in Nigeria continue to face barriers in accessing credit, property, and markets, limiting their capacity for business growth (Igwebuike & Barnabas, 2018).

Poverty remains a major obstacle to women's empowerment in Nigeria. It is defined as a condition of deprivation, exclusion, and lack of access to basic necessities of life (Salami, 2013). Studies show that women, especially in rural areas, experience higher rates of multidimensional poverty than men, primarily due to limited education, low skills, and restricted access to productive resources (Aluko & Mbada, 2020; Castañeda et al., 2018). The feminization of poverty is further reinforced by gender wage gaps, unpaid care work, and discriminatory social norms that restrict

women's economic participation (UN Women, 2018; ILO, 2018). Cultural practices that deny women inheritance rights and access to land also perpetuate their economic vulnerability, while lack of professional skills limits access to decent employment opportunities (United Nations, 2020).

Successive Nigerian governments have implemented several initiatives to address women's poverty, including Operation Feed the Nation, Better Life for Rural Women, Family Support Programme, Family Economic Advancement Programme, and the National Poverty Eradication Programme. Despite these efforts, poverty among women persists due to inadequate implementation, weak institutional frameworks, and overemphasis on financial access rather than capacity development (World Bank, 2020). Empirical evidence suggests that sustained women's empowerment policies, complemented by skill acquisition, education, and gender-responsive governance, are vital to achieving meaningful poverty reduction and fostering inclusive national development (Ogu, 2014).

2.1.1 Review of Selected Women Empowerment Programmes in Nigeria

Since independence, Nigeria has implemented several programmes to promote gender equality and women's empowerment. A few notable ones are reviewed below.

a. The Nigerian Women in Agriculture (WAE)

Launched in 2008, the WAE programme sought to increase women's participation in agriculture by improving access to credit, training, and extension services (Oyelere et al., 2019). Its initiatives—such as the Women in Extension Services—trained female agents to support rural farmers. Research indicates that women participants increased their incomes by 36% relative to non-participants (Ajabu et al., 2018). WAE also enhanced women's access to agribusiness opportunities and influenced the passage of gender equality legislation, including the Gender and Equal Opportunities Bill (Ajabu et al., 2018).

b. Women Agripreneurship Development Programme (WADP)

The WADP, launched in 2016 under the National Agricultural Technology and Innovation Policy in collaboration with the FAO, aimed to empower 500,000 women farmers nationwide (Omonoa, 2018). It focused on skills development, financial inclusion, and market linkages. Implemented across states such as Kano, Kaduna, and Sokoto, it not only increased productivity but also enhanced women's involvement in agricultural decision-making and policy dialogues (Ajabu et al., 2018). The programme further shifted Nigeria's agricultural outlook from subsistence farming toward a more commercialized, market-driven model.

c. Women's Right to Property Initiative (WRPI)

Introduced in 2017 as a five-year collaboration between the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and UNDP, the WRPI sought to strengthen women's access to land and property (Morrisey, 2018). It promoted legal reforms, awareness, and participation of women in land administration. By

working alongside NGOs and civil society organizations, the initiative advanced property rights advocacy and addressed gender barriers in asset ownership.

d. Agriculture and Gender Empowerment Strategy (AGES)

Launched in 2017 by the Federal Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, AGES aimed to increase women's contributions to agriculture by improving access to land, finance, inputs, technology, and markets (World Bank, 2018). The policy rested on four pillars: land, finance, inputs/services, and markets. It promoted gender-sensitive financial products, female-focused technologies, and gender mainstreaming in planning, budgeting, and monitoring (Ajayi & Adetula, 2019). Through these measures, AGES strengthened women's economic inclusion and built institutional capacity for gender-responsive agricultural development.

e. YouWin Programme

The Youth Enterprise with Innovation in Nigeria (YouWin) initiative, established in 2011 under President Goodluck Jonathan, provided grants and business development training to Nigerian youth and women entrepreneurs. Many beneficiaries expanded small businesses and improved income stability (Sanusi, 2012).

f. Public Works and Women/Youth Empowerment Scheme (PW/WYE)

Implemented under the Subsidy Re-investment and Empowerment Programme (SURE-P), this scheme targeted employment generation for 370,000 Nigerians—50,000 skilled and 320,000 unskilled—through labour-intensive public works (Sanusi, 2012). It was jointly executed by the federal, state, and local governments, using petroleum subsidy savings to fund the initiative. However, the programme was discontinued under the Buhari administration, limiting its sustainability.

g. N-Power Programme

Established in 2016 under President Muhammadu Buhari, the N-Power Programme remains an ongoing empowerment scheme providing vocational and entrepreneurial skills across sectors such as agriculture, health, education, and technology. Its subprogrammes—N-Power Agro, Health, Teach, Build, Creative, Tech, and Tax—have trained thousands of unemployed youths and women, enhancing self-reliance and productivity (Sanusi, 2012).

Despite these commendable efforts, bureaucratic bottlenecks, nepotism, corruption, and weak monitoring mechanisms have constrained the impact of most empowerment initiatives. While the programmes have improved skills acquisition and self-employment opportunities, particularly for women, many beneficiaries still face challenges in accessing funds and sustaining enterprises. Consequently, employment generation and entrepreneurial capacity development remain the most visible outcomes of women empowerment schemes in Nigeria, though implementation inefficiencies continue to hinder their full transformative potential.

2.1.2 Improving the Empowerment of Women toward Sustainable Development

Mela, Paul and Yakubu (2024) on women empowerment programmes toward sustainable development in Nigeria suggested ways that will help to improve the empowerment of women toward sustainable development in Nigeria; they include, but are not limited to the following;

1. Improvement in the provision of basic infrastructure: When there are basic infrastructures like pipe-borne water and electricity, other economic activities will not be restricted; there will be the production of goods and services which brings about economic development and growth. Building and maintenance of good roads will help in the transportation of farm produce from rural to urban areas easily and economically.

2. Improvement in the provision of quality and well-equipped health facilities: The government should try as much as possible to bring home what most of the officials that have gone overseas have seen there to our own country. This will help all of us and will make our leaders access health care within Nigeria and not abroad. Also, the provision of healthcare delivery facilities is an important source of empowering women and youths. In 2008 World's Safe Motherhood Day, Nigeria was rated with the notorious record as the second most fatal country worldwide for pregnant women and complications-related cases. By this ranking, Nigeria had the highest maternal mortality rate in Africa as of 2008. Other common health problems such as malaria, typhoid fever and HIV/AIDS are still ravaging the people. Increased public investment in healthcare delivery will be therefore a fundamental way of enhancing the wealth-creation capacity of women and youth in Nigeria

3. Stability in government policies: Policies adopted by the governments at the three tiers of Nigeria's federal system have to do with the fiscal, monetary and trade policies with emphasis on pro-poor measures. The policy objective for empowering the poor and vulnerable members of the population, of which women form a majority of its composition, has always been to increase opportunities for livelihood for the poor through job creation, easing access to credits, provision of infrastructure, enhancement of business incentives, and increased participation in wealth-creation. For these purposes, budgetary allocations are made annually by federal, state and local governments, yet the policy outcomes usually fall short of expected policy targets. The government should try to make stable policies that can stand the test of time. The policies should be in favour of the Youth and women; not only politicians and lawmakers.

4. Repositioning an effective, efficient and result-oriented economic team: The creation of this economic team will help stabilise and improve our economy by bringing down the exchange rate of Naira to the dollar and British pound. This will also make prices of commodities come down and stabilise and improve our economy; thus, reducing inflation. Similarly, political reforms that engender populist enlistment into political power positions, and adjustment towards a belief system that is more adaptable to changes and equality also provide opportunities for empowerment of the disadvantaged and vulnerable segment of the population.

5. Land law Reforms: are a necessary way to empower all marginalised segments of the population; but social campaigns, advocacy and re-orientation that will change people's traditional value system are essential to begin the process that will empower women through participation in land ownership. After all, more women are engaging in farming than men in Nigeria.

6. Starting up of new businesses: Government and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) can channel their interventions towards advocacy and training for the creation of entrepreneurship skills among youths and women. So, talking about empowering women and youth in Nigeria through assisting them to set up, manage well and earn a living from micro and small-scale enterprises is a well-considered process of solving the problem of poverty among these groups.

It is an employment avenue and a sustainable income-generating process. It is a sustainable job creation process. It is a potential source of revenue for the government.

7. Formation of Cooperative Organisations/societies: Cooperative organisations/societies emerged as self-help entities to combat economic and social inadequacies. Hence, cooperation is a form of collective action in which individuals join together to accomplish what would be more costly or possible for them.

2.1.3 Obstacles to Women's Economic Empowerment in Nigeria

Women's economic empowerment in Nigeria continues to face multifaceted structural, institutional, and cultural barriers that inhibit their full participation in economic life. Wowo, Ibrahim, and Garba (2023) identify several interconnected challenges confronting women entrepreneurs across the country. Foremost among these is lack of access to finance, as many women depend on personal savings or informal contributions from relatives and friends to fund their enterprises. The absence of property ownership further limits their ability to provide collateral required by formal financial institutions. This constraint not only stifles enterprise expansion but also reinforces the small-scale and informal nature of women's businesses, particularly in rural areas, where limited access to markets, credit, and technology restricts their competitiveness and productivity.

In addition, limited education and technical training continue to undermine women's capacity to manage and grow businesses effectively. Many women lack the requisite knowledge, confidence, and professional networks needed to navigate competitive markets. Discriminatory attitudes embedded in property, marital, and inheritance laws also curtail their economic independence (Wowo, Ibrahim & Garba, 2023). Cultural and structural factors further compound these limitations, as traditional gender roles assign women to caregiving responsibilities and domestic labour, restricting their participation in vocational training and wage employment.

A significant proportion of Nigerian women remain illiterate, which constrains access to information and technological innovations. Gender-biased norms and restrictive land tenure systems continue to deny them ownership and control of productive resources (Wowo, Ibrahim & Garba, 2023). Similarly, exploitative and discriminatory work conditions, gender segregation in

labour markets, and women's double work burden—arising from both domestic and economic roles—reduce their efficiency and overall wellbeing. Poor infrastructural development, especially in rural communities lacking reliable transportation, communication, and electricity, aggravates their marginalization. Education also improves women's decision-making abilities. When women are educated, they can think critically and make better choices about their health, finances, and families. They are more likely to invest in their children's education, creating a cycle of progress that benefits future generations (Fatile, Ejalonibu and Aliu, 2017). Educated women understand their rights and can stand up for themselves in different situations. Malmberg (1996) observes that 87 percent of trips in rural Africa occur on foot, illustrating the mobility constraints faced by women.

Moreover, sexual exploitation and abuse, both at community and household levels, pose additional threats to women's safety and autonomy (Mayoux, 2006). The burden of unpaid work—particularly in the domestic sphere—remains one of the most persistent obstacles to economic empowerment, depriving women of the time and energy needed for entrepreneurial or wage-earning activities.

Legal and socio-cultural frameworks also reinforce these inequities. Egwurube (2022) highlights how discriminatory regulations within institutions such as the Nigerian Police Force—which mandates the discharge of unmarried female officers who become pregnant—reflect deeply entrenched gender biases. Similarly, Itua (2021) notes that in several states, women are still perceived as subservient to men and, in extreme cases, treated as part of their husbands' property, thereby limiting their capacity to accumulate wealth and achieve economic independence.

2.1.4 Strategies for Effective Women's Empowerment

To address these deep-seated structural barriers, scholars have proposed several strategies aimed at promoting women's empowerment and gender equity. Egwurube (2019) argues that existing socio-economic challenges—including low educational attainment, poverty, and early marriage—are symptoms of a broader structural imbalance that must be dismantled. A key strategy involves reviewing and repealing discriminatory laws and policies, particularly those enshrined in Nigeria's constitutional and institutional frameworks, to ensure equal opportunities for women in all spheres of life.

Furthermore, gender mainstreaming in education, especially in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM), is essential to expanding women's participation in high-growth sectors (Egwurube, 2019). Encouraging more women to assume leadership roles in education, politics, and business management will also promote gender-sensitive policymaking and inclusive governance.

Access to finance remains a critical enabler of empowerment. Therefore, credit systems and loan conditions should be redesigned to remove gender-biased requirements such as the need for male guarantors or spousal consent. Expanding access to microfinance, mentorship, and capacity-

building initiatives would not only enhance women's entrepreneurial potential but also foster self-confidence and resilience (Egwurube, 2019).

To provide training and skill development to create opportunities that can enhance women employability and career advancement prospects. This includes vocational training, mentorship programmes and leadership development initiatives through educational programmes which improve women's decision-making abilities (Fatile, Ejalonibu and Aliu, 2017).

Ultimately, achieving genuine women's economic empowerment in Nigeria demands a holistic, multi-sectoral approach that addresses institutional discrimination, enhances women's access to productive assets, and promotes their active participation in decision-making and leadership processes.

2. Theoretical Framework

Understanding women's economic empowerment in Nigeria requires a theoretical foundation that explains both the structural barriers limiting women's participation and the processes through which empowerment can be achieved. This study adopts two complementary frameworks — the Feminist Theory and the Theory of Change (ToC) — to provide conceptual clarity on gender disparities and the transformative pathways necessary for achieving inclusive empowerment outcomes.

2.1 Feminist Theory

The feminist theory offers an explanatory lens for understanding why the experiences, challenges, and performance of women-owned enterprises often differ from those of men. It combines insights from the liberal and social feminist perspectives, both of which emphasize the socio-structural and cultural roots of gender inequality.

The liberal feminist theory, grounded in liberal political philosophy, asserts that all individuals are rational and capable of self-actualization if given equal access to opportunities. It attributes gender disparities to the unequal distribution of power, resources, and opportunities between men and women in society (Beasley, 1999). From this perspective, women's limited achievements in business are not the result of biological inferiority but of societal structures that restrict access to education, credit facilities, and economic participation. The theory maintains that once women are granted the same access to resources and markets as men, differences in performance and productivity tend to disappear.

In contrast, the social feminist theory, influenced by social learning theory and psychoanalysis, argues that men and women develop distinct attitudes, motivations, and behaviors due to early-life socialization. These differences shape their worldview, self-perceptions, and management styles. For instance, women's nurturing roles and relational orientation often lead to collaborative and empathetic leadership approaches, which may differ from men's competitive tendencies (Fischer, 1993). While these approaches are not necessarily less effective, they are often undervalued within

patriarchal business structures. Collectively, the liberal and social feminist theories provide a dual framework that explains how structural exclusion and social conditioning jointly influence women's entrepreneurial experiences and outcomes in Nigeria.

2.2 Theory of Change

The Theory of Change (ToC) complements feminist theory by outlining the logical progression through which empowerment occurs. It provides a framework for understanding how specific interventions can lead to measurable empowerment outcomes when implemented systematically. The ToC posits that women's economic empowerment materializes when they have control over resources, can make independent economic and social decisions, and enjoy the ability to manage risk and improve their welfare (Oxfam, 2022). It emphasizes agency, autonomy, and the freedom to participate meaningfully in economic and political decision-making processes.

True empowerment, according to the ToC, extends beyond resource access to include changes in women's confidence, voice, and capacity to influence community and household decisions. However, the theory has been criticized for paying limited attention to individual behavioral and emotional factors such as risk-taking, resilience, and decision-making biases, which can shape how women respond to empowerment opportunities. Emotional stability, self-belief, and perseverance are essential attributes that determine whether empowerment initiatives translate into sustainable economic outcomes. Thus, effective empowerment programmes must integrate both structural reforms and personal development dimensions to achieve lasting transformation.

2.3 Empirical Framework

Empirical investigations into women's empowerment and poverty reduction have yielded diverse findings across contexts. Addae-Korankye (2014), through content analysis, attributed Africa's poverty to corruption, weak leadership, inadequate infrastructure, mismanagement of resources, and poor global economic structures. He emphasized the need for equitable wealth distribution and strong leadership to combat deprivation, noting that funds meant for poverty alleviation often end up misappropriated.

In a related study, McFerson (2010) examined the interplay between traditional property rights, leadership, and social conflict in perpetuating gender bias and female deprivation in Sub-Saharan Africa. Findings showed that progress in women's development indices correlated with improved leadership and post-conflict recovery. The study recommended creating supportive networks for women's associations to strengthen empowerment outcomes. Likewise, Okeke (2018), focusing on Nigeria, found that women faced limitations in access to education, healthcare, and decision-making rights, which hindered their economic potential. The study recommended microfinance inclusion and compact farming systems as pathways to improved food security and women's welfare.

Empirical work by Adamu (2021) using Logit Model analysis on 400 women farmers in Kebbi State found that empowerment significantly improved women's welfare and suggested

maintaining empowerment programmes for sustainable benefits. Similarly, Mahbub (2021) reviewed women's empowerment from theoretical and practical perspectives and concluded that empowerment enhances women's identity, potential, and social contribution while alleviating illiteracy and unemployment. Wei et al. (2021) further demonstrated, through OLS and Logit models, that women's access to education, property rights, healthcare, and decision-making authority substantially reduced poverty indices in rural areas. However, gender conflicts and restrictive social norms were shown to erode these gains. Complementing this, Kabeer (2020), through a content review of the Millennium Development Goals, highlighted that gender equality in education, employment, and politics contributes significantly to women's empowerment.

Several country-level studies affirm the role of entrepreneurship and participation in poverty reduction. Misango and Ongiti (2013), studying women entrepreneurs in Kenya's Maasai market, found that 83% of participants improved their economic status through small business ventures that also enhanced tourism and job creation. In Nigeria, Fajimi and Omonona (2011) showed that women participating in agro-allied SMEs had lower poverty levels (17%) than non-participants (51%), indicating that enterprise participation is an antidote to poverty. However, they observed that government incentives to promote women entrepreneurs were insufficient.

Further evidence by Adofu and Ocheja (2013) in Kogi State revealed that 60% of women who benefited from entrepreneurship skill-acquisition programmes could afford basic necessities, indicating the transformative impact of such interventions. They recommended that government scale up these programmes as core poverty eradication tools. Similarly, Akpanobong and Usoro (2010) confirmed that women entrepreneurs significantly contribute to sustainable development, though their study lacked explicit poverty indicators. Onwurafor and Enwelu (2013) also observed that women's involvement in agro-food processing enhances job creation and economic stability. Okey (2010), examining government support for female entrepreneurs in Edo State, found that while mentorship and training existed, greater governmental involvement in awareness and sponsorship of such programmes was necessary to expand impact.

Synthesizing these studies reveals a consistent empirical pattern: women's empowerment—through access to education, entrepreneurship, property rights, and social inclusion—plays a critical role in reducing poverty and promoting economic growth. However, implementation gaps, weak leadership, and inadequate institutional support persist as barriers. The current study contributes to this body of knowledge by investigating the impact of the National Women Economic Empowerment (WEE) Policy on poverty reduction in Egbe-Idimu LCDA, Lagos State, covering a 20-year analytical span (2001–2021), thus addressing the empirical gap on causality between women's empowerment and poverty eradication.

3. Materials and Methods

This study adopted a descriptive survey design to examine the National Women Economic Empowerment (WEE) Policy: A Panacea for Poverty Eradication Amongst Women in Egbe-Idimu

LCDA, Lagos State, Nigeria. The research methodology provides the systematic procedure for objectively addressing the study's research questions. The target population comprised 1,954 self-employed women engaged in small-scale businesses such as bead making, fashion design, food catering, hairdressing, pepper grinding, and baking. Given the size of the population, a combination of simple random and cluster (area) sampling techniques was employed to ensure fair representation, and a total sample of 330 respondents was determined using the Taro Yamane (1967) formula. Fifty-five respondents were drawn from each of the six identified business categories to achieve a balanced sample distribution.

Both primary and secondary data were utilized in the study. The primary data were obtained through a structured questionnaire personally administered by the researcher, while the secondary data were sourced from relevant textbooks, journals, and official reports. The questionnaire consisted of two sections: Section A captured respondents' demographic information, and Section B contained research items aligned with the study's objectives and hypotheses, using a simple Yes/No response format. To ensure content and face validity, the instrument was reviewed by two experts in measurement and evaluation as well as the researcher's supervisor. The reliability of the questionnaire was established through a pilot test involving 15 respondents using Cronbach's Alpha and the test-retest method, with the coefficient exceeding the 0.6 minimum threshold, confirming internal consistency.

Data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive tools such as frequency and percentage tables summarized responses, while inferential analyses including Chi-square tests, regression analysis, and Pearson correlation (via SPSS Version 20.0) were used to test hypotheses and determine relationships among variables. The study was limited to the Egbe-Idimu LCDA due to time and financial constraints, which restricted wider generalization. Ethical standards were strictly upheld: informed consent was obtained from all participants, their anonymity and confidentiality were maintained, and participation remained voluntary, with the right to withdraw at any stage without consequence.

4. Data Presentation, Analysis and Result Interpretations

4.1 Presentation of Personal Characteristics of Respondents

This section presents the demographic characteristics of respondents using descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages to provide insights into their profiles and their likely influence on women's economic empowerment in the study area.

Table 1. Presentation of personal characteristics of respondents

Variables	Categories	Frequency (N=330)	Percentage (%)	Cumulative %
Age	20–30	74	22.4	22.4
	31–40	130	39.4	61.8
	41–50	60	18.2	80.0
	51–60	36	10.9	90.9
	61 & above	30	9.1	100
Educational Qualification	FSLC	131	39.7	39.7
	SSCE/NECO	88	26.6	66.3
	NCE/OND	57	17.4	83.7
	B.Sc/HND	35	10.6	94.3
	Postgraduate	19	5.7	100
Marital Status	Married	174	52.7	52.7
	Single	87	26.4	79.1
	Divorced	34	10.3	89.4
	Separated	30	9.1	98.5
	Widowed	5	1.5	100
Business Status	Full-Time	140	42.4	42.4
	Part-Time	190	57.6	100
Business Size (₦)	100–200k	147	44.5	44.5
	201–300k	89	26.9	71.4
	301–400k	64	19.5	90.9
	401–500k	20	6.1	97.0
	Above 500k	10	3.0	100
Years of Business Experience	1–10 years	90	27.8	27.8
	11–20 years	45	13.2	41.0
	21–30 years	148	44.8	85.8
	31 years & above	47	14.2	100

Source: Field Survey, November 2024.

The data show that most respondents (39.4%) were aged between 31 and 40 years, indicating a predominantly youthful and productive group capable of innovation and policy implementation. Educationally, 39.7% had First School Leaving Certificates and 26.6% held SSCE/NECO qualifications, suggesting that all respondents possessed at least a basic level of formal education. Marital status data revealed that over half (52.7%) were married, while 26.4% were single, which reflects a socially active and responsible population balancing household and economic roles.

Furthermore, the majority (57.6%) engaged in business on a part-time basis, implying that many women combined entrepreneurship with domestic or other work responsibilities. Most respondents

(44.5%) operated small-scale businesses valued between ₦100,000 and ₦200,000, indicating limited access to finance and the need for targeted empowerment programmes. Notably, 44.8% of respondents had between 21 and 30 years of business experience, implying substantial practical exposure and resilience among women entrepreneurs. These socio-demographic features highlight a strong potential for growth and sustainability in women's economic empowerment initiatives in the study area.

4.2 Data Presentation and Analysis based on key issues

This section presents and analyzes data gathered from respondents based on the research questions designed to evaluate the effectiveness of the Women Economic Empowerment (WEE) policy in promoting poverty eradication among women in Egbe-Idimu LCDA, Lagos State. The analysis combines responses from fourteen key survey items, using frequencies and percentages to depict the extent of agreement among respondents.

Table 2. Summary of Responses on the Implementation and Effects of WEE Policy

S/N	Survey Statement	YES (%)	NO (%)	Interpretation
1	Organizing training for women promotes implementation of WEE policy	79.7	20.3	Regular training enhances policy execution
2	Engagement of women in agriculture serves as empowerment	83.1	16.9	Agricultural participation supports empowerment
3	Entrepreneurship and skill acquisition programmes facilitate empowerment	85.5	14.5	Skills development drives empowerment
4	Orientation on self-employment contributes to effective policy implementation	86.1	13.9	Sensitization enhances WEE success
5	Poverty eradication programmes need monitoring and evaluation	86.6	13.4	Oversight improves programme success
6	Policy enlightens women on financial management	85.2	14.8	Financial awareness strengthened through WEE
7	Women can expand businesses through cooperative loans	86.9	13.1	Cooperative financing supports expansion
8	WEE policy helps women access loans from friends/family	80.0	20.0	Policy improves informal credit access
9	Implementation of WEE policy enables access to government loans	86.1	13.9	Policy expands access to government credit
10	Job opportunities are provided through WEE policy	86.9	13.1	Policy generates employment opportunities
11	WEE programmes promote entrepreneurship and skill acquisition	75.5	24.5	Strong impact on enterprise development
12	WEE policy reduces corruption among women	77.6	22.4	Policy fosters ethical and transparent practices
13	Women economic programmes enhance food provision	82.7	17.3	Initiatives improve food security
14	WEE programmes improve standard of living and promote growth	81.2	18.8	Economic empowerment boosts living standards

4.3 Data Presentation and Analysis According to Test of Hypotheses

This section examines the relationships among key variables using inferential statistics — particularly Chi-square and Pearson correlation analyses — to test the hypotheses formulated in the study. The level of significance (α) was set at 0.05 for all tests. The decision rule states that when the p-value is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis is accepted.

Table 3: Summary of Hypotheses Testing Results

Hypothesis	Statistical Test	χ^2/F -Value / r	DF	Sig. (p)	Decision	Inference
H_0_1 : Implementation of the National Women Economic Empowerment (WEE) Policy has not empowered women	Chi-square	105.21	4	0.000	Reject H_0	Implementation of WEE Policy significantly empowers women in Egbe-Idimu LCDA
H_0_2 : WEE Policy has no significant influence on funding for entrepreneurship	Chi-square	94.13	4	0.000	Reject H_0	WEE Policy significantly influences funding for entrepreneurship among women
H_0_3 : No significant relationship exists between women empowerment programmes and poverty eradication	Pearson Correlation	r = — 0.683**		0.000	Reject H_0	Strong positive correlation between empowerment programmes and poverty reduction

Source: Field Survey, November 2024.

Note: Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

4.4 Interpretation of Findings

The results of the inferential analyses reveal that the implementation of the National Women Economic Empowerment (WEE) Policy has had a statistically significant effect on women's empowerment within Egbe-Idimu LCDA. The chi-square value of 105.21 ($p = 0.000 < 0.05$) indicates that effective policy implementation enhances women's access to training, resources, and entrepreneurial opportunities. This finding supports the argument that adequate policy execution translates to tangible empowerment outcomes for women in Nigeria.

Similarly, the result of the second hypothesis ($\chi^2 = 94.13$; $p = 0.000$) confirms that the WEE Policy has a significant influence on funding for entrepreneurship. This implies that women's access to credit and business support has improved through empowerment programmes. The finding aligns with the World Bank (2018) and Ajayi and Adetula (2019) reports on the Agriculture and Gender

Empowerment Strategy (AGES), which emphasized gender-sensitive interventions to enhance women's access to finance, land, inputs, and markets. The AGES model further highlighted that improving women's access to microfinance, extension services, and markets is central to sustainable economic inclusion.

The third hypothesis revealed a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.683$, $p < 0.01$) between women empowerment programmes and poverty eradication. This indicates that empowerment initiatives contribute meaningfully to poverty reduction within the study area. The result corroborates the findings of Akpanobong and Usoro (2010) and Ndimele (2022), who found that women's economic participation significantly enhances poverty alleviation and sustainable development in Nigeria. According to Ogu et al. (2016) and the United Nations (2020), poverty manifests through deprivation in income, food, healthcare, and education — challenges that empowerment programmes directly address through increased livelihood opportunities and inclusion.

Despite global and national efforts, poverty remains pervasive, particularly among rural women, due to structural and policy instability (Cuaresma et al., 2018; Mubecua & David, 2019). Yet, the findings from Egbe-Idimu suggest that empowerment interventions — particularly those improving women's access to finance, agricultural inputs, and entrepreneurship — play a transformative role in reducing multidimensional poverty, this finding is in consistent with Aluko and Mbada (2020) and Kim (2019).

Overall, the results substantiate that the National Women Economic Empowerment Policy serves as a vital tool for enhancing women's capabilities, income levels, and entrepreneurial potential in Lagos State. This is consistent with Mela, Paul, and Yakubu (2024), who emphasize that improving infrastructure, health facilities, and policy stability are prerequisites for sustainable women empowerment and inclusive development. Other strategic recommendations, such as land law reforms, formation of cooperatives, and entrepreneurship promotion, also resonate with the study findings.

The results confirm that effective implementation of empowerment programmes not only improves access to economic opportunities but also strengthens women's participation in decision-making, enhances household welfare, and promotes social inclusion — key drivers of poverty eradication and sustainable community growth.

5. Summary, Conclusion and Recommendation

5.1 Summary

This study examined the *National Women Economic Empowerment (WEE) Policy* as a panacea for poverty eradication among women in Egbe-Idimu LCDA, Lagos State, Nigeria. The research was premised on the observation that despite women's potential contributions to economic development, they remain inadequately empowered, which has perpetuated poverty, unemployment, and socio-economic vulnerabilities. Poverty remains a global challenge despite the concerted efforts of governments, NGOs, and international organizations. As Moyer and

Hedden (2020) note, the world is not on track to achieve the UN 2030 Agenda target of reducing global extreme poverty to less than 3 percent. In Nigeria, successive governments have launched various empowerment and poverty alleviation initiatives—such as *Operation Feed the Nation (OFN)*, *Green Revolution*, *Better Life for Rural Women*, *Family Support Programme*, *National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP)*, and *Youth Empowerment Scheme (YES)*—aimed at enhancing livelihoods and promoting social inclusion. However, many of these initiatives were largely gender-neutral, neglecting the specific constraints faced by women. Mubecua and David (2019) observe that without transformative policy adjustments, poverty levels in sub-Saharan Africa will remain significantly high by 2030.

Against this backdrop, the *National Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) Policy* was introduced in May 2023 under President Muhammadu Buhari as a comprehensive national framework to promote gender equality, women's access to economic opportunities, and social inclusivity. The policy underscores the importance of equipping women and girls with relevant skills, resources, and decision-making power to compete equitably in the economy and contribute meaningfully to development.

Methodologically, the study employed a descriptive and quantitative design. Using the Taro Yamane formula, a sample size of 330 was derived from a population of 1,950 self-employed women in Egbe-Idimu LCDA. Structured questionnaires were administered using simple and cluster random sampling techniques. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequency tables, percentages, and means) and inferential statistics, specifically Chi-square and Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC), with the aid of SPSS version 20.0. The study was guided by three research questions and corresponding hypotheses to test relationships between WEE policy implementation, entrepreneurship development, and poverty eradication.

5.2 Conclusion

The study reveals that women's participation in agriculture, entrepreneurship, and skill acquisition significantly enhances empowerment and reduces poverty in Egbe-Idimu LCDA. Sensitisation and self-employment training strengthen the effectiveness of the Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) policy, while improved monitoring and evaluation are necessary to maximise the impact of government-led programmes. Access to cooperative loans and public funding was found to promote business growth, financial independence, and improved living standards. Statistical evidence confirms significant relationships between WEE policy implementation, women's empowerment, and poverty reduction, underscoring the policy's potential as a sustainable tool for addressing gendered poverty and promoting inclusive economic development in Lagos State and Nigeria at large.

5.3 Recommendations

The study recommends that governments at all levels strengthen women's economic empowerment by establishing agro-allied industries, improving basic infrastructure, revitalising

skill acquisition centres, expanding access to microcredit, and fostering partnerships among government, civil society, and development agencies, while promoting cultural reorientation to address gender barriers. It further calls for deeper research into the structural, institutional, and governance challenges undermining poverty eradication, with particular attention to the roles of education and digitalisation in enhancing transparency, entrepreneurship, and service delivery. Overall, the study contributes to knowledge by demonstrating a strong link between women's economic empowerment and poverty reduction, highlighting entrepreneurship and skill acquisition as key drivers of inclusive growth, and advancing a conceptual framework that enriches discourse on gender and development in Nigeria.

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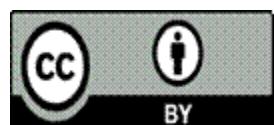
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