

Innovations

Micro finance and women economic empowerment in Sub-Saharan Africa- evidence from Nigeria

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Abstract

In sub-Saharan Africa, women play important role in economic development of the region, they are involved in different sectors of the economy but in spite of their critical contributions to the growth of the Continent, they are neglected and regulated to the background, thus giving rise to inequality, financial and socio-economic backwardness. Therefore, this study examined the role of microfinance in empowering women in Sub-Saharan Africa- with Nigeria in focus. The study adopted a survey research design with a target population of 400 women entrepreneurs selected randomly from the six geographical regions of Nigeria and identified through a preliminary survey. Taro Yamane's formula was used to derive 267 respondents using structured questionnaire and analyzed by mean and standard deviation. Pearson moment correlation and simple regression were used to analyze the data. The result of the analysis revealed that microfinance empowered women, fast track gender equality and economic growth. However, lack of awareness of the benefits of credits facilities, inadequate collateral security, high interest rate, gender-disparity and cultural limitations were constraints women encountered in accessing credit from micro-finance institutions in Nigeria and by extension sub-Saharan Africa. Based on the findings, the study recommended that regulatory and other statutory bodies should reduce and monitor the interest rates on microcredits and make it accessible to women entrepreneurs. Policies and programs are tailored to the promotion of women empowerment and put into practice strategies that can prop up entrepreneurial culture. Importantly, government needs to design framework that will fast track women empowerment through innovative finance for women.

Key words:1. Microfinance, 2.Empowerment, 3.Innovative finance

Introduction

Economic empowerment of women has been recognized as one of the significant tools in achieving inclusive growth in the global economy particularly in Sub Saharan African. Women's economic empowerment includes financial and social inclusion; their access to and control over productive resources, access to decent work, and control over their own time, lives and bodies. Importantly, meaningful participation in economic decision-making at all levels from the household to international institutions.

According to the World Bank (2015), putting resources into women's hands to attain gender equality in society will result in significant development. Females have the God-gifted ability to be more responsible, committed, and innovative. In this way, if they get financial support then they could serve their families well and could contribute towards building a better future. (Malhotra, et. al., 2002).

In sub-Saharan Africa, women play important role in economic development of the region, they are involved in different sectors of the economy but in spite of their critical contributions to society, they are neglected and regulated to the background, thus giving rise to inequality, financial and socio-economic backwardness. In fact, about 54 million of Nigeria's female population lives in rural areas where they provide 60-79 percent of the rural labour force (United Nations Population Fund, 2012). Nigerian women form an indispensable part of human resources for development because without their contribution, the economy will be difficult to advance to a better level (Onah, 1998). Women constitute a formidable demographic force therefore; their well-being have implications not only for their own lives, but also for the society at large. Empowering them is a crucial challenge which calls for constant review of policies, re-assessment of priorities, commitment of adequate financial resources, and effective implementation of programmes (Sanusi, 2012).

The role of women entrepreneurs in national development is becoming widely recognized in both developing and developed countries (Kuratko and Welsch, 1994). The rate at which women now contribute to economic development through their participation in micro, small and medium-scale enterprises (MSMEs) is quite unprecedented despite several barriers to the full optimization of their economic potential (Global Partnership for Financial Inclusion, 2011). Female entrepreneurs have been identified by Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 1997) as a major force for innovation, job creation and economic growth. It is a fact that improving financial support for women would increase the number of new businesses, which in turn would boost economic activity, enable the expansion of old businesses leading to increased productivity and growth. Financial empowerment enhances the bargaining power of women at the family level and this allows larger latitude for investment in child-nutrition, health and education, thereby regenerating the future workforce. Beyond the family, financial freedom is a precursor to gender equality and consequently, the assurance of social security (Sanusi, 2012). This calls for women's economic, social and political empowerment but this can't be achieved without the provision of business finance for the growth and development of women owned enterprises, therefore making it imperative for the Federal Government of Nigeria during the Obasanjo regime in 2005 to introduce the Micro finance banks in order to replace the former community banks. This was established to fill the gap created by the formal financial sector by improving the socio-economic condition of the poor and their income generational activities. The idea of creating Micro Finance Institutions (MFIs) is to provide an easy accessibility of SMEs to finance/ fund particularly those which cannot access formal bank loans. Microfinance banks serve as a means to empower the poor and provide valuable tool to assist the economic development process. Kolawole (2013) is of opinion that the promotion of micro enterprises in developing countries is justified because of their abilities to foster economic development.

Microfinance is considered to be an effective mechanism for empowering women economically, psychologically and socially which result in better living standard, social status, etc. Microfinance positively contributed towards decision making power, skill development, participating in family development, knowledge, confidence, courage, legal awareness, self-worthiness and social status (economic and social situation); which ultimately translated into the better income level, household assets, savings, the standard of living, and well-being of the family (Ifelunini, & Wosowei, 2012). For this very reason many MFIs particularly targeting women (through direct lending and/or through SHGs), providing them financial and non-financial services.

It is imperative to state that access to finance remains a key constraint to women empowerment in Sub-Saharan Africa. In the World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Report 2014/2015, in almost two thirds of the Sub-Saharan African countries, access to financing was deemed to be the most problematic factor for doing business. Despite the productive aim of microfinance, it has been observed that microfinance banks is only serving the people who are slightly below or above the line of poverty, which implies that the poor and destitute which are mainly women are systematically excluded. Also it is worth mentioning, that despite decades of public provision and direction of micro-credit, policy re-orientation and the entry of new players, the supply of microcredits to women in Nigeria by extension Sub-Saharan African is still inadequate in relation to demand. No doubt, this has negative implications for gender equality and women economic empowerment. It against this background that the study seeks to examine the role of micro-finance in enhancing entrepreneurship among women and optimally women empowerment in sub-Saharan Africa.

Statement of the Problem

Women consist of half the world's population still majority of the women do not have access to micro finance. In sub-Sahara Africa, women play a vital role in the economic development of their families and communities. However, women are subjected to gender-related discriminations especially in lower middle countries. Some of such discriminations, occasioned by culture, are in the areas of distribution of social wealth such as education and health. Yet women contribute to the rural and urban economic development of their countries through their greater involvement in credit schemes and job creation through micro-enterprises.

It has been globally acknowledged that women play critical role in economic advancement of society, despite the homogenous role played by women in socio-economic development of nations, particularly in the rural settings, they are grossly marginalized, oppressed, deprived, most unfortunately, lack of access to financial capital. To address, these issues, micro-financing or micro-banking has been pursued by many governmental and nongovernmental organizations, individuals in sub-Sahara African with view to empowering women thereby reducing gender equality, poverty and starvation in most African Countries. Unfortunately, most of the programs and policies have not yielded the desire results of lifting African's women from extreme poverty. Therefore this study will examine the role of micro finance in empowering women in sub-Saharan Africa with Nigeria in focus.

Objectives of the Study

The purpose of the study is to examine the role of micro-finance in empowering women in sub-Sahara -Africa with focus on Nigeria. Specifically the study seeks:

1. To determine socio-economic characteristics of women entrepreneurs in the study country (Nigeria)

2. To examine the extent microfinance institutions enhance women entrepreneurship development in Nigeria.
3. To identify the difficulties women encounter in accessing credit from micro-finance banks in Nigeria

Statement of Hypotheses

HO₁: There is significant relationship between micro finance and women empowerment in Sub-Saharan Africa, Nigeria in focus.

HO₂: Microfinance institutions enhance women entrepreneurship development in sub-Saharan Africa, Nigeria.in focus

Review of related literature

Overview of Sub-Saharan Africa:

Sub-Saharan Africa comprises 48 countries (Appendix 1) and occupies mainly center and south of the Africa continent with over 960 million people. The region has the world's largest untapped natural resources and considerable capacity to provide a stable food supply globally. It is also predicted to have the world's youngest population by 2050.

In terms of per capita income, sub-Saharan Africa is the poorest region in the world. 72 per cent of the population lives on less than US\$ 2 a day. Labour Market. About 70 per cent of the population in sub-Saharan Africa over the age of 15 has a paid job, even though most are low paying. Despite a recent slowdown due to the sharp decline in global commodity prices, regional economic growth is forecast to pick up to 3.8% in 2019 according to the IMF.

It is however important to state that in spite of this negative narrative, there has been substantial progress in financial development, including mobile payments technology and the emergence of Pan-African banks. In the past 20 years, Sub-Saharan Africa has benefited from improved communication and globalization, resulting in economic growth but slow development. The IMF forecast that this financial development could add a further 1.5% to regional economic growth. The improved business environment in specific countries and favourable demographics can support growth drivers in the medium term.

For Sub-Saharan Africa to witness sustainable development, the region must focus aggressively on industrialization, technology and innovative finance that will drive key sectors.

Theoretical Framework:

Entrepreneurship Theory of Shane

The theory was propounded by Shane (2003). The theory consists of opportunity discovery, evaluation of the opportunity and the decision to exploit the opportunity. Others elements of the theory include self-employment, business operation and performance. The theory highlighted four operational measures of performance which are survival, growth, profitability/income, and experiencing initial public offering. In relation to the study, opportunities are created by the existence of microfinance banks which can assist women entrepreneurs to improve the survival, growth, profitability/income of entrepreneurial or business activities. However, it depends individual attributes such as education, age, experience and others socio-economic characteristics to fully utilize or tap these opportunities. Micro-finance and other financial institution consider these attributes before giving opportunity (loan or credit) to women entrepreneurs.

Feminist Theory

This theory aims to understand and address the nature of gender inequality. According to Beauchamp and Bowie (2004), feminist theories recognize that subordination, inequality, or oppression of women is unethical and that women deserve equal political and legal rights. Feminist theorists asserted that is disparity between men and women advancements and earnings. This disparity may largely result from the disadvantage of

women because of family issues and the requirement for flexible schedules (Orhan and Scott, 2001; Gale, 1994). Feminist theories argue that in society, the different treatments of men and women may explain why compensation is less for women than their male counterpart's earnings (Lowrey, 2006). This theory is relevant for this paper because it gives insights on the differences between men and women and some challenges for women to venture into any sector of the economy.

Evolving from the feminist theories, the deprivation argument states that societal views deprive women of education, industry experience, networking relationships and access to capital (Appelbaum, Audet and Miller, 2003; Cron, Bruton and Slocum, 2006). Deprivation of these opportunities can affect women in entrepreneurial successes. In relation to the study, opportunities in the society such as access to credit facility from micro-finance banks are marred by subordination, inequality, or oppression of women instead of same equal political and legal rights as men. These problems hinder them from adequate socio-economic benefits available in the society. Therefore, negatively affecting their entrepreneurial successes in the society. This study adopted the feminist theory in line with the focus of this study that sought to address the role of Micro-financing in empowering women in Sub-Sahara Africa.

Empirical Review of Related Studies

Aruna and Jyothiramayi (2011) investigated the role of microfinance in women's empowerment: study of the SGH bank linkage program in Hyderabad-India ---- The empirical findings of the study suggests that microfinance has profound influence on the economic status, decision making power and self-worthiness' of women.

Rana Ejaz Ali Khan¹ and Sara Noreen (2012) investigated the role of microfinance in women empowerment: A case study of District Bahawalpur in Pakistan. They concluded that females using loan by themselves have better effects of microfinance on empowerment as compared to the loans utilized by other members of the household. The study concluded that microfinance as a major explanatory variable had positive effect on empowerment of women but not as much as it was expected. The study suggested that along with provision of education and family protection the enlarged volume of microfinance and its utilization by the woman must be ensured.

Kato, Mushumbusi Paul; Kratzer, Jan (2013) examined the concept of Empowering Women through Microfinance: Evidence from Tanzania. The researchers argued that the position of women in Tanzania has been low compared to men. Women are poorer, have low education and suffer from traditions and customary laws. Thus, empowerment of women is one of the main issues in Tanzania and beyond. Microfinance services are considered as an entry point or a vehicle toward empowering women. However, it is also considered that Microfinance Institutions are extorting money from poor women through high-interest rates, causing higher social pressure and in some cases lead to domestic violence. The findings reveal that women members of MFIs have more control over savings and income generated from the business, the greater role in decision-making, greater self-efficacy and self-esteem, and greater freedom of mobility and increased activities outside home.

In Nigeria, Oluwafemi (2010) examined the impact of microfinance on entrepreneurial development in Nigeria (using Ekiti State as a case study) . The result from the test shows that microfinance has impact on entrepreneurial development and that there is a significant relationship between entrepreneurial

development and industrial development of Ekiti State. It was concluded that microfinance institutions and their activities go a long way in the determination of the pattern and level of economic activities and entrepreneurial development in the Nigerian economy.

Eze, Emenyonu, Henri-Ukoha, Oshaji, Ibeagwa, Chikezie & Chibundu (2016) examined women entrepreneurs' access to microfinance bank credit in Imo State, Nigeria. Data were collected from 80 loan beneficiaries and 71 non-loan beneficiaries selected from Microfinance banks with the aid of two sets of questionnaire. This study identified Microfinance banks as a major source of formal credit to women entrepreneurs with 80.26% of the overall credit requested accessed and repayment performance of 83.41%. Microfinance banks should create incentives to increase women entrepreneurs' access to credit and loan repayment.

Osuji (2014) examined the impact of micro credit on the performance of women owned micro enterprises in Delta State. Data were sought through structured questionnaires and analysis using tables, frequencies, percentage, and charts while chi square was used to test the hypothesis. Although 46.6 percent of the respondents were aware of the existence of micro finance banks, only 16.67 percent patronized them. However, the performance of those that patronized them did not improve significantly. This was due to high interest rates and short repayment periods. It was thus recommended that regulatory and statutory bodies should be made to monitor the interest rates on loans and advances as well as accessibility of Women Entrepreneurs to finance. Also, micro finance policy should be further publicized to create more awareness to attract patronage from members of the low income group who would then have better knowledge of the finance banks offers.

Fatima, Salisu, Garba & Ibrahim (2012) evaluated the impact of microfinance banks (MFBs) on women entrepreneurial development in metropolis. Among the objective of this study was to examine the impact of MFBs in contributing towards women economic and financial sustainability. The study found that women entrepreneurs knew about MFBs existence. The MFBs also impact positively in enhancing socio-economic life of women entrepreneurs in Nigeria. The study therefore, recommends that MFBs, should come up with appropriate strategies to attract more investors and women participation in entrepreneurial activities should also be encourage for women self-reliance and financial sustainability in the society.

Iheduru (2002) maintained that, micro-finance provides the means to generate income that eventually leads to sustainable development and provide the drive to develop a "broad access" to financial resources crucial to the poor (among whom women comprises the majority) in order to provide the basic requirements for sustainable development. Micro-finance institutions have rapidly evolved in the last decade and have been able to enhance socio economic activities of rural people and women in several ways.

CBN (2005) reported that "the latent capacity of women for entrepreneurship would be significantly enhanced through the provision of micro-finance services to enable them engage in economic activities and to be more self-reliance. In addition rural dwellers comprising women, needs technical and financial assistance; need more funds and obviously financial and economic advice (Osagie, 1999). Micro finance offer advisory service to its customers on current business trends. More so CBN reports on microfinance institutions state that agriculture and petty traders were relatively large recipients of the bank loan facilities while significant amount also went to restaurant business, collage industries and substantial amount to small scale enterprises engaged in manufacturing and transportation (CBN, 1993). Many organizations like the World Bank, UNDP, USAID, Canadian, Swedish and German Governments have all made funds available to micro-finance in to alleviant poverty and enhance self-reliance (Iheduru, 2002).

Osaze (1999) asserts that, rotating drift and credit association is an association of equals who have decided to

come together to pool resources for financial structure of formal financial institutions, the informal financial institutions is structured horizontally with powers of members diametrically neutral” More ever, microfinance is about providing financial services to poor who are traditionally not served by the conventional financial institutions.

Gender advocates say that as key drivers in implementing Africa’s post-2015 development agenda and Agenda 2063, female business owners must be empowered to go beyond small- and micro-enterprises and get access to the finance needed to create medium- and large-scale businesses. Access to finance on such a scale would be transformative, and empower women to enter productive value chains, expand hiring and employment opportunities, utilize efficient technologies and expand the reach of their businesses beyond their borders.

A paper presented at the 8th international interdisciplinary congress on women (2002) stated that “the declaration on participatory development noted that, sustainable development only can be achieved with the full participation of women who constitute approximately 50% of the population”. The declaration also noted that “women lacked access to resources including credit and technology. This declaration urged most governments including government in to initiate priority actions that would substantially increase women participation in entrepreneurial activities.

Summary of Literature Review

From various literature on the role of microfinance on women’s economic empowerment, it is imperative to point out there are different position as per impacts and role. Some scholars maintained that microfinance plays significant role in women economic empowerment. Others argued that women empowerment may not be influenced by microfinance that it helps to retard women advancement in SSA and Muslim society. Credit facility from micro-finance banks are marred by subordination, inequality, or oppression of women instead of same equal political and legal rights as men. These problems hinder them from adequate socio-economic benefits available in the society. Therefore, this study investigates the nexus between microfinance and women empowerment in Sub-Saharan Africa by using Nigeria, a critical country in the region as a case study.

Methodology

The research design for this study is descriptive survey research. Primary and secondary data were relied on for this study. Structured questionnaire was used to source for information. Newspaper, internet, journals and books were used to source for secondary data.

The study area is Sub-Saharan Africa with focus on Nigeria; located in West Africa bordering Niger in the north, Chad in the northeast, Cameroon in the east, and Benin in the west. Its southern coast is on the Gulf of Guinea in the Atlantic Ocean. Nigeria is a federal republic comprising 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory, where the capital, Abuja, is located.

It is our area of study because is the most populous country in Africa which includes Sub-Saharan Africa and the seventh most populous country in the world, with an estimated 206 million inhabitants as of late 2019. Equally, Nigeria has the largest economy in Africa and is the world’s 24th largest economy according to the list by the IMF. Presently rated the head quarter of poverty by World Bank with women population accounting for the bulk of the population.

The population of the study consisted of 400 women selected from the six geographical regions of Nigeria

that were initially identified through a preliminary survey. Taro Yamane’s formula was used to derive 267 respondents used as sample for the study. The respondents were randomly selected from the list of women entrepreneurs who have borrowed from Eight (8) selected micro - finance institution in Nigeria

Taro Yamene’s formula: $n = N / 1 + N (e)^2$

Where: n= sample size required
 N= number of people in the population
 e = allowable error (%)
 $n = 400 / 1 + 400 (0.05)^2$
 $= 400 / 1 + 1$
 $= 400 / 2$
 $= 200$
 Aprox= 200 respondents

Data collected from the field were analyzed using the statistical tools: frequencies, percentages, mean and standard deviations were used for the research questions SPSS 16 statistical package was used to analyse the data. Items with mean value of 2.50 and above were accepted while items with mean value of less were rejected. The hypothesis was tested using Pearson moment correlation at 0.05 level of significance to determine acceptance or rejection.

Results and discussion

The data collected for the study were analysed based on research questions and hypotheses formulated for the study.

Table 1: Socio-economic characteristics of women entrepreneurs in the study area (N=164)

	Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
	Highest Educational Level		
1	No formal education	13	7.92
	Adult literacy	16	9.75
	Primary education	22	13.41
	Secondary education	46	28.05
	Tertiary education	67	40.85
2	Age (years)		
	10-20	22	13.41
	21-30	60	36.59
	31-40	48	29.27
	Above 40	34	20.73
3	Marital Status		
	Single	35	21.34
	Married	111	67.68
	Divorced	09	5.49
	Widowed	09	5.49
4	Years of Business		

	Operation 0-5	16	9.76
	6-10	20	12.20
	11-15	56	34.15
	16-20	50	30.49
	Above 20	22	13.45
6	Monthly Income level Less than 40,000	12	7.32
	41,000-80,000	45	27.44
	81,000- 120,000	60	36.58
	Above 120,000	47	28.65

Source: Field Work, 2021

The result in Table 1 showed that response on educational level indicated that 7.92% of the women had no formal education, 09.75% had adult education, 13.41% had primary education, 28.05% had secondary education while 40.85% had tertiary education. Response on age indicated that most (65.86%) of the women entrepreneurs were within the age bracket of 21 - 40; 13.41% were within 10-20 years, and 20.73% were above 40 years. Response on marital status indicated that most (67.68%) of the women were married, 21.34% were single, 5.49% were divorced, 5.49% were widowed. Response on years of business operation indicated that 9.76% of the respondents had operated the business for 0 - 5 years, 12.20% of the respondents had operated 6-10 years, 34.15% had operated within 11-15 years, 30.49% had operated within 16-20 years; and 13.45% operated above 20 years. Response on monthly income indicated that 7.32% of the women earn less than N40, 000; 27.44% earn within the range of N41, 000 - 80,000; 36.58% earn within the range of 81,000 - 120,000; and 28.65 earn above 120,000.

Research Question 2

To what extent have microfinance enhance women empowerment in Nigeria.

Table 2: Mean responses of respondents on the extent microfinance institutions enhance women empowerment in Nigeria (164)

Statement items	Mean	S.D	Remark
Microfinance enhances easy access to banking services	3.09	0.74	High Extent
Microfinance encourages women to Save	3.53	0.77	High Extent
Microfinance offer advisory service to women entrepreneurs on current business trends	3.68	0.68	High Extent
Micro-credit delivery of microfinance institutions gives greater business opportunities, economic independence as well as sustainable development in women economic activities	3.63	0.81	High Extent
Microfinance helps existing business of their client to grow or diversify	3.31	0.86	High Extent
Microfinance contributes to entrepreneurial development with the help of external funding from bilateral and multilateral organizations to women entrepreneurs	2.22	0.76	Low extent

Source: Field Work, 2021

The data presented in Table 2 showed that the items had a mean range of 2.22 to 3.68. Items 1-5 had mean value were above the cut-off point of 2.50; while item 6 was below the cut-off point. This indicates that the respondents agreed that most of the items showed the extent microfinance institutions enhance women

entrepreneurship development in the study area. The standard deviation of the items ranged from 0.68 to 0.86. This indicated that respondents were unanimous in their responses as they were not from each other.

Research Question 3

What constraints do women entrepreneurs encounter in accessing credit from micro-finance banks in Nigeria?

Table 3: Mean responses of respondents on the constraints women encounter in accessing credit from micro-finance banks in Nigeria (N=164)

Statement items	Mean	S.D	Remark
Lack of awareness of the benefits of credit Facilities	3.03	0.62	High Extent
Inadequate collateral security required from financial institutions	3.09	0.74	High extent
Difficult loan process procedures by microfinance banks	2.43	0.77	low Extent
High interest rate by micro-finance banks	3.68	0.68	High Extent
Gender- disparity as men decides what happens the woman (wife) business	3.14	0.82	High Extent
Micro-finance institutions exclude women and lack of access to land, credit, training, technology, infrastructure and information	2.32	0.77	Low Extent

Source: Field Survey, 2021

The data presented in Table 4 showed that the items had a mean range of 2.43 to 3.68. Most of the means were above the cut-off point of 2.50. This indicates that the respondents agreed items 1, 2, 4 and 5 were constraints women entrepreneurs encounter in accessing credit from micro-finance banks in the study area. The standard deviation of the items ranged from 0.62 to 0.86. This indicated that respondents were unanimous in their responses as they were not from each other.

Hypotheses

HO₁: There is significant relationship between socio-economic characteristics of women entrepreneurs and constraints encountered in accessing credit from microfinance banks

Table 4: Pearson’s product moment analysis on the mean responses of respondents on relationship between socio-economic characteristics of women entrepreneurs and constraints encountered in accessing credit from microfinance banks

Variables	$\sum x^2$	$\sum y^2$	$\sum xy$	R	P-value	Remark
Socio-economic characteristics (x)	76.13	87.77	85.17	0.76	0.05	Rejected
Constraints (y)						

Source: Field Work, 2021

Table 5 presented Pearson’s product moment analysis on relationship between socio-economic characteristics of women entrepreneurs and constraints encountered in accessing credit from micro-finance banks in the study country. The result showed that the R-value is greater than the critical value of P at 0.05 level of significance. This indicates that there is relationship between socio-economic characteristics of women entrepreneurs and constraints encountered in accessing credit from micro-finance banks. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected.

H0₂: Microfinance enhanced women empowerment in Nigeria

Table 5: Regression analysis on the extent microfinance institutions enhance women empowerment

Variables	R	R-Square	Adjusted R-square	P-value
Women empowerment Development	0.793	0.712	0.702	0.05

Source: Field Work, 2012

Table 6 shows that regression analysis on the extent microfinance institutions enhanced women empowerment. The result showed that the R² value (0.71) is higher than the critical value of P at 0.05 level of significance. This indicates that microfinance institutions enhanced women empowerment. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected

Findings of the Study

1. Microfinance institutions provided business development services such as providing easy access to banking services, encourages women to save, offer advisory service to women entrepreneurs on current business trends, promotes economic independence as well as sustainable development, and assist business of their client to grow or diversify
2. Lack of awareness of the benefits of credit facilities, inadequate collateral security, high interest rate, and gender- disparity were constraints women entrepreneurs encounter in accessing credit from micro-finance banks from the study area
3. There was relationship between socio-economic characteristics of women entrepreneurs and constraints encountered in accessing credit from microfinance institutions
4. There is positive relationship between microfinance activities and women empowerment

Discussion of Results

The result in Table 2 indicated most of the women had secondary and tertiary education. This implied that most of the women were educated which give an edge to in running their business proficiently. Response on age indicated that most of the women entrepreneurs were within the age bracket of 21 - 40. This implies that they are economically viable as their age will allow them to venture into profitable business if provided with capital to run them. In line with the result, Parker (2009) found that age and the level of education, as components of the individuals' human capital, are considered to be important factors of entrepreneurial activity by most studies of entrepreneurship. Middle aged entrepreneurs who are still physically active, vibrant, dynamic and are more likely to adopt innovations better and faster than their older counterparts (Ohajianya *et al.*, 2010).

Response on marital status indicated that most of the women were married which may make them prone to the decision made by husband with regards to their entrepreneurial activities.

Response on years of business operation indicated that most of the respondents had operated their business for 11-20 years. This implied that that they must have acquired adequate experience to handle their business and if provided with loan or credit from micro-finance banks they will be prudent in utilizing fund provide to them.

Response on monthly income indicated that most of the women entrepreneurs earn within 41 - 120 thousand naira monthly. This income rate will make them open or have easy accesses to fund from financial institutions. It also indicates that their business activities are flourishing.

The result in Table 3 indicated that to high extent microfinance institutions business development services as: providing easy access to banking services, encourages women to save, offer advisory service to women entrepreneurs on current business trends, promotes economic independence as well as sustainable development, and assist business of their client to grow or diversify. Yunus (2003) noted microfinance as a financial system that relies on the traditional skills and entrepreneurial instincts of the active poor people, mostly women, using small loans (usually less than US\$200), other financial services, and support from local organizations called microfinance institutions (MFIs) to start, establish, sustain, or expand very small, self-supporting businesses. Micro-finance provided the needed opportunity for entrepreneurs to start or improve business in order to make profit and improve their lives (Allen et al., 2008; Brana, 2008). Also (Vanguard, March 2017) stated that micro finance banks empowered over 100, 000 rural women who - were financially excluded in Nigeria .

The result in Table 4 showed that lack of awareness of the benefits of credit facilities, inadequate collateral security, high interest rate, and gender- disparity were constraints women entrepreneurs encounter in accessing credit from microfinance banks from the study area. In earlier report, Kasali (2006) state that as laudable as the government programmes are towards financing of small enterprises, micro-finance banks introduce stringent conditions day in, day out as they are not willing to release funds to micro-entrepreneurs. As micro-enterprises expand in size, the characteristics of loans they require become increasingly difficult for the informal credit sources to satisfy, yet they remain too small for the formal lenders (Aryeetey, 1996).

The result in Table 5 indicated that there is relationship between socioeconomic characteristics of women entrepreneurs and constraints encountered in accessing credit from micro-finance banks. This implied the socio-economic characteristics such as experience in business, educational level, income level amongst other contributed to the inaccessibility of women entrepreneurs to credit from micro-finance institutions. For instance poor capital base of a business and inability of an entrepreneur to keep record of her may mar the opportunity of getting credit assistance from financial institutions.

The result in Table 6 showed that there was positive relationship between microfinance activities and women economic empowerment In earlier study, Otero (2000) found out that micro finance evolved the economic development approach to benefit low income men and women, the term refers to the provision of financial services to low income clients, including the self-employed.

Summary, Conclusion and Recommendation

The purpose of the study is to examine the role of micro-finance in enhancing women economic empowerment in Sub-Saharan Africa with Nigeria as case study.. Specifically the study seeks to: determine socio-economic characteristics of women entrepreneurs, examine the extent microfinance institutions enhance women entrepreneurship development; identify the difficulties of women entrepreneurs in accessing credit from micro-finance banks in the region.

In carrying out this research, relevant literatures were reviewed. The researcher adopted survey research

design which used a structured questionnaire to elicit response from the respondents. The structured questionnaire was validated by two experts. Reliability was also established with split half technique and Cronbach alpha statistical package. A reliability coefficient of 0.89 was established which was reasonably high to be used for the research.

The study used 200 women entrepreneurs, who were initially identified through a preliminary survey. One hundred and sixty four (82%) out of 200 copies of the instrument distributed were duly retrieved. The data collected was analysed using percentage, frequency, mean and standard deviation while Pearson moment correlation and simple regression statistic was used for the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

The study revealed that microfinance institutions provided business development services such as: providing easy access to banking services, encourages women to save, offer advisory service to women entrepreneurs on current business trends, promotes economic independence as well as sustainable development, and assist business of their client to grow or diversify. Lack of awareness of the benefits of credit facilities, inadequate collateral security, high interest rate, and gender- disparity were constraints women entrepreneurs encounter in accessing credit from micro-finance banks from the study area.

5.1 Conclusion

Microfinance institutions render services that have greatly enhanced the entrepreneurial performance of women in sub- Sahara Africa particularly in Nigeria. Microfinance creates opportunity for entrepreneurial activity as such there is a positive relationship between micro-finance and opportunity for entrepreneurial activity by women. This is evident as study showed that microfinance provided the needed opportunity for women entrepreneurs to start or improve business in order to make profit and improve their lives. However, lack of awareness of the benefits of credit facilities, inadequate collateral security, high interest rate, and gender- disparity were constraints women entrepreneurs encounter in accessing credit from micro-finance banks from the study area.

Recommendation

Innovative finance products and policies that focus mainly on women should be developed and implemented holistically in the region. Also, adequate publicity on activities of micro-finance institute should be embarked on by government and non- government institutions; particularly in the rural areas. Regulatory and other statutory bodies to aggressively reduce interest rates on loans and advances and make it accessible to women entrepreneurs. Policies and programs need to be tailored to the promotion of women entrepreneurship development and put into practice strategies which can prop up entrepreneurial culture among rural and urban women in Sub –Saharan Africa.

Proposal for Further Studies

1. Micro finance and Poverty reduction in Sub-Saharan African

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Annex 1: A list of Sub-Saharan African countries

- Angola
- Benin
- Botswana
- Burkina Faso
- Burundi
- Cameroon
- Cape Verde
- Central African Republic
- Chad
- Comoros
- Congo
- Cote d'Ivoire
- Djibouti
- Equatorial Guinea
- Ethiopia
- Gabon
- The Gambia
- Ghana
- Guinea
- Guinea-Bissau
- Kenya
- Lesotho
- Liberia
- Madagascar
- Malawi
- Mali
- Mauritania
- Mauritius
- Mozambique
- Namibia
- Niger
- Nigeria
- Rwanda

- Sao Tome and Principe
- Senegal
- Seychelles
- Sierra Leone
- Somali..
- South Africa
- Sudan
- Swaziland
- Tanzania
- Togo
- Uganda
- Zaire
- Zambia
- Zimbabwe