

Women Empowerment through Cooperative Societies and Entrepreneurship in North-western Nigeria: A Conceptual Analysis

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Abstract

Empowering women entails outfitting women to be financially autonomous, have positive self-esteem that can confront any challenging situation and take part in development and decision-making activities. This conceptual study is aimed at promoting women empowerment through cooperative societies and entrepreneurship. This study reviewed the existing literature and eventually developed the conceptual framework on the constructs Women Entrepreneurship, cooperative societies and entrepreneurship. The study discovered that there is still much to be done to ensure that women's rights, opportunities, and responsibilities are unaffected by their gender. This can be done by creating a cooperative society that is thought to be a good environment for empowering women and enhancing their unique skills and abilities. Cooperative Societies and Entrepreneurship can be used as a tool to empower women and enhance their economic standing due to their enormous contributions to the society. Additionally, the empowerment of women would result from efforts to promote skills including entrepreneurial activities and cooperative society.

Keywords: Empowerment, Women Empowerment, Cooperative Societies, Entrepreneurship.

1. Introduction

Emerging markets have been the central theme for empowering women ever since the 1990s and have been stressed in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Women empowerment (WE) in developed countries is recognised as necessary for sustainable economic development and poverty reduction (Khan & Kanwa, 2018; Zapalska, 2017). The word empowerment varies based on its viewpoint, cultural and socio-economic background. Empowerment is a multiform social mechanism which helps people influence their lives, their families, their society and their communities (Kusa, Duda & Suder, 2021; Aguda- Oluwo

& Oni, 2017). Many women are still not treated equally and they face discrimination and exclusion from choices that affect their families and economy. A sizable portion of society still relies upon women to take care of the entire family and manage a lot of household chores without being acknowledged (Dixit, Malik, Seth & Seth, 2022; Asitik & Abu, 2020). This demonstrates that empowering and encouraging women will be crucial to development because they typically care for their families and children. Consequently, it has been established that empowering women also means empowering society as a whole (World Bank, 2011).

According to global figures, women handle 60 % to 80 % of the world's employment and provide 50% of its food (FAO, 2017). They may have little economic advantage and access to valuable capital, considering their substantial contribution (Kusa, et al., 2021). In a similar vein, it has been demonstrated that women constitute more than 50% of the agricultural workforce in the majority of emerging nations. Women make up 47% of the agricultural labour force in sub-Saharan Africa and work as the majority of wage workers in the food supply chain (Tsiboe et al., 2018). In Nigeria, 49.3% of economically active women participate in agricultural labour, which provides 70% of the nation's food supply. According to statistics on gender participation in the workforce, women make up 87%, 78%, and 75% of workers in the hospitality/food service, food production and wholesale/retail industries, respectively (FAO, 2017).

The significance and relevance of women empowerment to the growth and development of a nation cannot be overemphasized and Nigeria not an exception. While the emancipation of women is not an adequate condition, the growth process remains a critical condition (Ezeokafor, Jacobs & Ekwere, 2021; Unanam, 2020). There are three aspects of empowerment for women. The social

dimension means respectful and non-discriminatory social positions. Political dimension means participating in corporate and institutional governance and economic equality makes women in the same role in terms of jobs, investment and control (Tariq Khan, Bhat & Sangmi, 2022; Gupta, 2021; Nayak & Mahanta, 2019).

In this paper, women empowerment means encouraging and assisting them to handle their problems and increase their participation in economic activities. Empowering women means giving them access to school, employment, help, childcare, housing and other support services. Sensitivity, integrated growth and economic inclusion should include women who can have a lasting impact. Bastian, Metcalfe & Zali (2019) suggested that restricting access and ownership of productive assets restrict women's involvement in the entrepreneurship.

Entrepreneurship can also be used as a means to improve women's abilities and skills. Due to its role as a catalyst for social change, entrepreneurship may greatly aid in the empowerment of women by focusing on the underprivileged and weaker segments of society and working to improve their life prospects (Kusa, et al., 2021; Elia, Margherita & Passiante, 2020; Pallavi & Cheruvally, 2018; Agarwal & Lenka, 2014).

There are an estimated 210 million social entrepreneurs worldwide who are working extremely hard to create novel solutions to the world's ongoing environmental and social issues. Social entrepreneurship tackles social issues such as gender violence, unemployment, women's and girls' maltreatment, poverty and other issues (Dixit, et al., 2022; Rosca, Agarwal, & Brem 2020). In particular, the Northern region of Nigeria has a distinctly masculine type of system where male supremacy in all spheres is specified. Although the male monopoly has not yet been overcome in this region, government and NGOs continue to promote women's empowerment.

This is partially a product of the education system and the overwhelming commitment of women to serve in their households due to the segregation of workers and the increased discontinuity of work experience. Meanwhile, the growth of women's entrepreneurship is a vital part of women's economic empowerment and inclusion in the country's economic development (Yen Ng, Wood & Bastian, 2022; Parveen, 2022). The economic potential of women through starting and pursuing small businesses alone has been thought to be improved by the advancement of women through cooperatives and entrepreneurship (Nurasyiah, et al., 2020; Rosca, et al., 2020).

The fact that entrepreneurial empowerment contributes to self-fulfillment and makes women conscious of their place in society has been shown in many studies (Tariq Khan, et al., 2022; Unanam, 2020; Tsiboe, et al., 2018; Zapalska, 2017). Many women engaged in entrepreneurial activities have little access to schooling, productive opportunities and other facilities in developed countries. Such prejudice prohibits them from receiving profits and from engaging effectively in social and political circumstances (Varsha, Gayathri, Sudheendra & Amit, 2019; Khan & Ali, 2016). Likewise, cooperatives are encouraging women's engagement, assuming sustainability, reducing poverty and improving socio-economic growth (Ezeokafor, et al., 2021; Roopchind, 2020).

Cooperatives must be taken into account to address this issue as women empowerment is an international agenda. Cooperatives offer their participants major socio-economic gains. Co-operatives boost their members' profits and negotiation leverage from the economic point of view. It was noted that the social aims of cooperatives are separate from economic ones. They give participants a rare platform for education and training and promote constructive engagement in committees, membership in the Committee and leadership (Adelowokan, et al., 2019; Olawumi, 2015).

Women have been relegated for so many years in many countries especially the developing countries like Nigeria because of diverse perceptions about their femininity (gender) despite their huge contributions to the development and sustainability of the society, families and the world at large (Ezeokafor et al., 2021; Aguda- Oluwo & Oni, 2017). This is equally due to the inconsistency of government policies in respect of women empowerment and the absence of effective monitoring to ensure they yield the desired results. These have made a significant number of the vulnerable in society. Hence, the need to promote women empowerment through cooperatives and entrepreneurship is apparent (Parveen, 2022; Tariq Khan, et al., 2022; Ezeokafor et al., 2021; Asitik & Abu, 2020). Therefore, the objective of this study is to conceptualise how WE can be promoted through cooperative societies and entrepreneurship.

Hence, the paper aims to achieve the following specific objectives:

- i. to examine the relevance and significance of women empowerment particularly in developing economies,
- ii. to investigate how entrepreneurship promotes women empowerment,
- iii. to determine the extent to which participation in cooperatives promotes women empowerment, and

- iv. to propose a model for promoting women empowerment through entrepreneurship and cooperatives.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Concept of Women Empowerment

The World Bank (2011) describes empowerment as an extension of freedom of choice and action and strengthens one's authority and autonomy over life-intensive resources and decisions. In other words, women empowerment (WE) is the mechanism by which women influence and own their lives by widening their options. Then, in a situation where this potential has been historically refused, it is the process of having the capacity to make strategic life decisions. WE, therefore, means that women have the responsibility of their own lives and have the influence of their own such that their rights, opportunities and obligations are irrespective of whether they are born women or men.

Olawumi (2015) proposed that WE is the mechanism by which women redefine gender norms in widespread ways. In the same way, the United Nations Women's Development Fund (UNIFEM) (2010) described economic empowerment for women as "a means of obtaining entry, managing and enjoying the material benefits of access and control on a permanent and long-term basis. In line with the

Development Policy of the United Nations (2015), empowering women means empowering women by inspiring them to live for desired aims. This is a mechanism in which women gain more influence over capital (income, knowledge, information, technology, skills and training), decision-making, enhancing the self-image of women, taking an active part in the process of transition and developing the skills to protect themselves.

2.2 Concept of Entrepreneurship

An entrepreneurial practice plays an important role in the creation of jobs, the provision of self-employment and enhancement of the economic position for those who have started their own companies (Kusa, et al., 2021; Elia, et al., 2020). Several studies address the concept of entrepreneurship as a desire to do something, and the one who demonstrates the will is generally regarded as a businessman (Khan & Kanwa, 2018; Paul, Parthasarathy & Gupta, 2017). Yen Ng et al (2022) and Alkhaled & Berglund (2018) defined entrepreneurship as ability to find and transform challenges into marketable innovations, goods and services. In Mitchell (2014), entrepreneurship is described as the method of efficiently assembling required development factors consisting of human, physical and information capital. Entrepreneurship is also seen as a creative

and risk-taking development element, with business incentives related to uncertainty and profit (Muberekwa & Nkomo, 2016).

It was also suggested that entrepreneurship helps creative people to make rewards and survive better than others. He continues to claim that the desire for business is inherent to humans, who strive for profit in life, close to what they do in business. In general, analysis of the subsequent literature indicated that there were a growing curiosity and study in the field of women entrepreneurship recently documented by several researches (Khan & Kanwa, 2018; Mallick, 2015). However, it was noted that today, entrepreneurial analysis goes beyond looking into whether gender affects the way things change. In certain economic sectors (especially in the developed countries), women are not only majority workers, but also their companies in one way or another shaped the structure of all economies (Asitik & Abu, 2020).

2.3 Empowering Women through Entrepreneurship

Woman entrepreneurs are also seen as women players in overall undertakings and take all chances in integrating capital in a special way to search and find prospects in the field by creating products and services (Yen Ng, et al., 2022; Bastian, et al., 2019; Alkhaled & Berglund, 2018; Rajendhiran &

Masiyamoorthy, 2016). In the same vein, note that women entrepreneurs play an important role, especially in small businesses, for the improvement of economic and social growth (Khan & Kanwa, 2018; Palavi & Cheruvally, 2018). Saiful Islam, (2022), Gupta (2021) and Bastian, et al., (2019) views women entrepreneurs as a new phenomenon because of extreme economic restrictions, increasing aspirations of the sexist population of working women, declining patterns among major businesses and the general sense of enterprise as a solution to several economic disasters in the world.

Similarly, it has been argued that for sustainable development to take place in African countries there is a need to develop an entrepreneurial mind-set of the poor geared towards opportunity search and exploitation. In addition to this, most studies and information about entrepreneurship generally, and in particular about women, come primarily from developed nations and little is understood about women and their companies in developing countries, such as Nigeria (Zapalska, 2017; Minniti, Arenius & Longowitz, 2015; Mitchell, 2014). In specific, as there exist a favourable institutional climate to experience stability in Northern Nigeria, women entrepreneurship should be promoted. The promotion of WE through entrepreneurship

therefore means a lot for the business development which enhances women's economic strength and status in society.

The socioeconomic status of men and women differ significantly in Nigeria. Religious and cultural norms have led to a patriarchal society in which men rule and women submit to their authority. Nigerian women are perceived as a minor and disorganized force that has made little political progress. Economically speaking, they make up the majority of the peasant labor force in the agricultural sector, with the majority of the rest working at the bottom of the occupational ladder in service and domestic jobs (Nurasyiah, et al., 2020). Ezeokafor, et al. (2021) and Aguda- Oluwo and Oni's (2017) findings revealed that social and economic activities of women have significant influence on WE. According to Dixit, et al.'s (2022) findings, social entrepreneurial leadership significantly affects WE. Additionally, it was discovered that financial inclusion significantly aided low-profile rural women in creating their own sources of income and that women's empowerment scores remained higher in urban than rural settings. (Debnath et al. 2019; Islam & Islam, 2018; Muberekwa & Nkomo, 2016). Similarly, Unanam (2020) revealed that women need more empowerment to determine and improve their livelihood.

2.4 Empowering Women through the Cooperatives

The principle to shield economically vulnerable people from abuse by the economically rich has been evolved around the eighteenth century in Europe (Debnath, et al., 2019; Shashikala & Uma, 2019). Cooperatives are democratically-owned and regulated businesses based on self-help, transparency, independence, justice and equity and solidarity principles. The crucial role that women play in society has gained recognition. In the long run, women's contributions to rural development have begun to receive some acknowledgment attributable to succeeding development strategies. Women naturally have a significant part in childbirth, childrearing and socialization and ensuring generational continuity and raising kids in accordance with their cultural background (Ezeokafor, et al., 2021; Asitik & Abu, 2020).

Although cooperation is known to be an organisation that encourages economic interest among its members, it also supports the social element of life and seeks to create a new democratic social order, founded on freedom and equality, in which individuals have a united spirit and economic partnership in peace, care and joint communities (Zapalska, 2017). Cooperatives then build a healthy atmosphere where women improve their trust, recognise their

problems, take decision-making and mitigate risk (Pallavi & Cheruvally, 2018). Women are therefore, motivated and involved in fostering and supporting transforming enterprise and social change.

Empowering women economically increases their access to and prospects for economic wealth. Women's participation in most forms of schools is seen to be poor if women have the same access to competitiveness as men's and women's efforts to help the SDGs to alleviate extreme poverty and hunger figures could decrease the number of hungry people by 12% to 17% (FAO, 2017). Although both men and women can participate in cooperatives, there are typically fewer women in leadership positions and among the membership. Women's cooperatives demonstrate the willingness of women to expand their enterprises, improve their professional abilities and capacity for self-help (Parveen, 2022; Ezeokafor, et al., 2021). The potential outcomes of household cooperatives supporting women's businesses include self-employment, healthy livelihoods, more social respect, and improved women's status (Tariq Khan, Bhat & Sangmi, 2022; Bastian, et al., 2019; Sraboni & Quisumbing, 2018).

2.5 Empirical Review of Related Literature

Many scholars have established that entrepreneurial activities accomplish WE and minimize suffering around the world (Tariq Khan, Bhat & Sangmi, 2022; Dixit, et al., 2022; Bastian, et al., 2019; Nayak & Mahanta, 2019; Varsha, et al., 2019; Sraboni & Quisumbing, 2018). However, none of the reports has examined the entrepreneurial activities, cooperative societies and women's empowerment. In addition to economic, political and social empowerment, very few studies have examined how WE are conducting legal and psychological empowerment (Roopchind, 2020; Nayak & Mahanta, 2019; Shashikala & Uma, 2019).

It has been demonstrated that the advancement of women is crucial for cooperatives, sustainable development and economic expansion (Yen Ng, et al., 2022; Ezeokafor, et al., 2021; Nurasyiah, et al., 2020). Numerous earlier studies have shown that cooperatives and entrepreneurship can foster a secure setting where women can build their self-confidence, recognize their own obstacles, make choices and handle risks. Consequently, women become more independent, active agents of change, businesswomen and advocates for social change who can better their own lives as well as the lives of the community (Tariq Khan, et al., 2022; Yen Ng, et al., 2022;

Asitik & Abu, 2020; Bastian, et al., 2019; Alkhaled & Berglund, 2018; Sraboni & Quisumbing, 2018).

Varsha, et al. (2019) and Rajendhiran and Masiyamoorthy (2016) demonstrated that the empowerment of women is helped by some capacity-building initiatives (i.e. governance formation, technical livelihood promotion, networking promotion, social justice and harmony). Similarly, Shashikala and Uma (2019) indicated that an effort is being made to examine how women empowerment in the study field is accomplished through Micro-credit programme. The study showed that developed micro-credit led to the consolidation of women's emancipation, social unity and socio-economic change for the disadvantaged. Khan and Ali (2016) indicated that women boost economic competitiveness and empowerment by preparation, knowledge and access to credit. The findings of Pallavi and Srihari (2018) suggested that there is a huge impact on the economic status of women and the country's GDP.

3. The Conceptual Framework

In an attempt to clarify the gender problems between women and their men counterparts, Stüwe and Ortner (1974) suggested the idea of the devaluation of women. The theory suggested that women are devalued based on

their society's worth. Moreover, Stüwe and Ortner (1974) indicated that the subordination of women is widespread. They clarified that it is not dedication that gives women their social standing but the way that each society interpret and assess women's ideology. To offer a general reason for the global devaluation of women, then the foundation of women's subordination would be lost if this universal appraisal had improved. She also found that culture is more significant than nature in all cultures. This resulted in a lower status and the loss of economic influence that has been historically unevenly divided between men and women. The result is that women became underestimated. For many decades,

this situation has made girls' schooling worldwide unavoidable. In summary, the devaluation of women theory was considered suitable for the understanding of a comparative analysis of input and output contribution of women to the societies. Therefore, the theoretical framework of this study is based on the integration of the main ideas in the theory of devaluation of women.

A conceptual framework has been constructed to emphasise the variables examined in determining WE with the addition of extra construct to the existing theory. The conceptual framework created and examined in this study is presented in Figure 1 below.

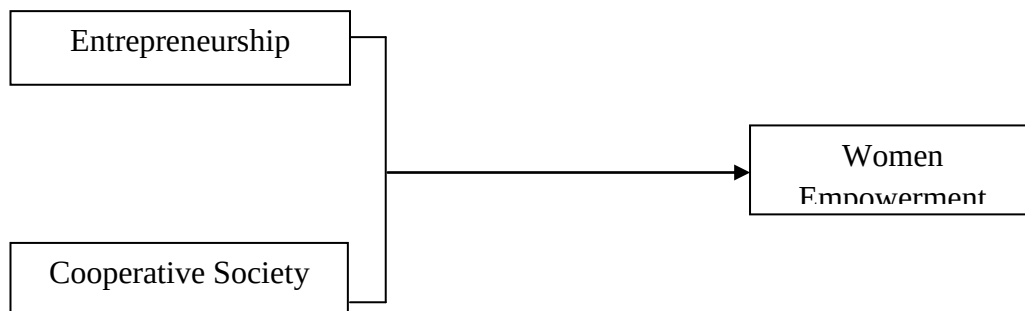


Figure 1: Proposed Conceptual Model

Source: Author's Conceptualisation (2022)

The above model describes the dependent and independent variables. Hence, the independent variables are cooperative society and entrepreneurship (cause) as depicted in the model while the dependent variable is women empowerment (effect). The purpose is to show the level of women

empowerment through cooperative society and entrepreneurship.

4. Methodology

The primary goal of this conceptual analysis is to find out the implication of the association between entrepreneurship,

cooperative societies, and WE in Northwest States, Nigeria. The study's primary goals include reviewing the current literature and developing a conceptual framework and identifying knowledge gap in entrepreneurship and cooperative societies that require further inquiry by taking into account the elements that positively enhance WE. This paper serves as an introduction to describe how cooperative societies, entrepreneurship, and WE are related. It also develops a conceptual framework to illustrate how the study's constructs relate to each other.

5. Conclusion

The paper explored cooperative and entrepreneurial empowerment of women and it was indicated that men were more powerful, largely due to the patriarchal background and the age we live in. However, the challenges of women's empowerment are very nuance and hierarchical, which women overcome in different ways irrespective of race, age, marital status or role in their daily lives. The study also concluded that women's cooperative and entrepreneurial endeavors raise their economic and social status. The encouragement of WE has positive overall effects and may lead to women achieving financial independence, social identity, autonomy, self-confidence, creativity and innovation. However, supporting resources

are needed to properly link the concepts of entrepreneurship, cooperative and women to effectively address gender restrictions and cultural sensitivity that restrict women entrepreneurs' fair access to local markets.

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