



Sociological exploration of the contribution of women to the development of small-scale businesses in Abraka community, Delta state

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Abstract

This study explores the pivotal, yet often overlooked contributions of women to economic development. The context of this study nonetheless centres on women's contribution to Abraka's local economy in Delta State, Nigeria. The specific focus highlights Abraka vibrant entrepreneurial landscape led by women across various sectors, from retail and food vending to agriculture and tailoring. Despite their essential roles, societal norms and structural barriers often hinder their recognition and hinder their access to resources and opportunities. Using a functionalist theoretical framework, the study explores how women-led local economies function within Abraka, emphasizing their role in maintaining social stability and fostering economic growth. By adopting a cross-sectional research design, and systematic sampling technique, 370 women were drawn out to participate in the study. Findings unveil the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs, including access to capital, competition, and balancing family and business responsibilities, as well as their resilient strategies, such as networking, community savings schemes, and leveraging family support in their ventures, and finally notes how these economic activities contributes to local economy which included job creation, provision of essential goods/services, and community support. Recommendations are however proposed to enhance financial inclusion, advocate for gender-responsive policies, foster community collaboration, and provide tailored educational and training programs, aiming to empower women entrepreneurs and drive sustainable economic development in Abraka.

Keywords: Community, Local Economy, Small-Scale Businesses, Women

1. Introduction

Women are a driving force in the global economy (Kamberidou, 2020). They actively participate as both paid and unpaid contributors. In the workforce, they bring diverse perspectives and skills, boosting innovation and growth across industries (Ibourk & Elouaourti, 2023). Studies show increased agricultural productivity and business success when women are well-represented (Bullough *et al.*, 2022). However, a significant portion of their economic power lies unseen. Women shoulder a much larger burden of unpaid care work, essential for families and societies to function. If valued financially, their work would represent a substantial portion of the global Gross Domestic

Product (GDP) (Bullough *et al.*, 2022). Factually, in 2014, women's paid labour contributed significantly, accounting for about 37% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Kulshreshtha, 2016). Globally, women own roughly a third of small-to-medium-sized businesses, and experts suggest that aligning women's entrepreneurship rates with men could potentially inject \$5 trillion into the global economy, according to the Harvard Business Review (Figueroa-Armijos & Berns, 2022). Moreover, women currently control around \$20 trillion in annual consumer spending worldwide, with projections indicating this figure could reach \$28 trillion in the next five years (Kotlikoff & Burns, 2005).



In local economy discourses, Women's roles are multifaceted and have been described as crucial to economic growth, while their contributions are significantly noticed through both formal and informal sectors (Akpuokwe *et al.*, 2024). Many women are entrepreneurs, running small businesses or stalls, often in food service, textiles, or retail. This informal sector can be a source of income and flexibility. In agriculture, women play a critical role, managing livestock, cultivating crops, and selling produce (Okolie *et al.*, 2021). These jobs have been described as essential for food security. Within formal employment sectors opportunities for women vary. In some regions, they hold a strong presence in education and healthcare, while facing potential gender pay gaps or underrepresentation in leadership positions. Generally, the recognition is that women's economic participation is vital for the local economy's health (Akpuokwe *et al.*, 2024).

Women in Nigeria are highly active in entrepreneurship, owning 41% of micro-businesses, which represents one of the highest rates globally (Esther & Ukamaka, 2022). Their entrepreneurial endeavors, highlighted in a white paper by PwC Nigeria, significantly influence the country's economic development (Esther & Ukamaka, 2022). Regarding employment, women comprise 43.1% of the workforce in Nigeria. Their engagement in small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) not only contributes 50% to the nation's GDP but also plays a pivotal role in job creation (Tekola & Gidey, 2019). According to the World Bank, as of 2022, the labor force participation rate among females in Nigeria was 52.1%, compared to 65.5% among males (Ahuru & Akpojubar, 2020). This rate indicates the proportion of the population aged 15 and older actively participating in the economy. Despite these contributions, female labor force participation has seen a decline since 1990 (Tekola & Gidey, 2019).

This is particularly evident in Abraka, a vibrant town in Delta State, Nigeria. The women of Abraka, with their entrepreneurial spirit, have significantly contributed to the proliferation and sustenance of small-scale businesses, which are vital to the local economy (Iji *et al.*, 2021). Historically, Abraka has been known for its agricultural activities, with women predominantly engaged in farming, trading, and other forms of commerce. Over time, these women have diversified their economic activities to include various small-scale businesses, ranging from retail shops and food vending to tailoring and hairdressing (Mukaila *et al.*, 2022).

The socio-economic landscape of Abraka has been shaped by the collective efforts of these women, who, despite facing numerous challenges such as limited access to credit, societal norms, and inadequate infrastructure, have managed to thrive and drive the local economy forward (Eromafuru & Adidi, 2021). The entrepreneurial activities of Abraka women have not only provided employment opportunities but also contributed to the socio-economic stability of the community. This study seeks to explore the multifaceted contributions of these women to the development of small-scale businesses in Abraka, understanding the socio-cultural dynamics that influence their entrepreneurial endeavors (Eromafuru & Adidi, 2021).

Statement of the Problem

Despite the significant role women play in the economic development of Abraka, their contributions are often under-recognized and inadequately documented (Eromafuru & Adidi, 2021). The traditional patriarchal structure of the society often places women in a subordinate position, limiting their access to resources and opportunities necessary for business development. Moreover, small-scale businesses, which are the backbone of Abraka's economy, face numerous challenges such as inadequate funding, lack of proper



infrastructure, and limited market access (Mukaila *et al.*, 2022). The recent increase in the price of Petroleum Motor Spirit has further negatively influence welfare and economic activities of Nigerians (Oboro & Agbamu 2024). These challenges are further exacerbated for women due to gender biases and discriminatory practices. There is a need to systematically document and analyze the contributions of Abraka women to small-scale businesses to highlight their role in the community's economic development. Additionally, understanding the barriers they face and the strategies they employ to overcome these challenges is crucial for formulating policies and programs that support and empower women entrepreneurs. This study aims to fill this gap by providing a comprehensive sociological exploration of the contributions of Abraka women to the development of small-scale businesses in their community.

Objectives of the Study

The primary objective of this study is to explore the contributions of women to the development of small-scale businesses in Abraka community. Specific objectives include to:

- i. examine the types of small-scale businesses operated by women in Abraka.
- ii. identify the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in Abraka and the strategies they use to overcome these challenges
- iii. assess the impact of women-operated small-scale businesses on the local economy of Abraka.

2. Literature Review

Women-Led Local Economy

A women-led local economy signifies a dynamic ecosystem within a specific geographic area where women play a pivotal role in driving economic activity. This extends beyond mere participation to encompass leadership, ownership, and decision-making across various economic

spheres. Understanding this concept necessitates delving into the multifaceted contributions women make and the unique challenges they encounter (Sarkki *et al.*, 2021).

At the heart of a women-led local economy lies women's entrepreneurship (Fang *et al.*, 2023). This manifests in a multitude of ways, from establishing and managing small businesses in retail, food service, or handicrafts to spearheading innovative ventures in technology or social services. These women entrepreneurs are often driven by a desire for financial independence, community upliftment, or the pursuit of personal aspirations (Modaffari & Guzmán, 2023). Their businesses contribute significantly to the local economy by generating employment opportunities, fostering innovation, and catering to specific community needs (Sunny *et al.*, 2023). The informal sector, often overlooked in traditional economic analyses, plays a crucial role in women-led local economies. Many women engage in informal income-generating activities, such as street vending, home-based businesses, or providing childcare services. While these activities contribute substantially to household income and local markets, they often operate outside the formal regulatory framework, limiting access to credit, training, and social safety nets (Dinar, 2020).

Women's leadership extends beyond business ownership. They are vital actors in agricultural production and food security. From managing livestock and cultivating crops to processing and selling produce, women's contributions are essential for local food systems. Additionally, women often take charge of household finances, influencing consumption patterns and contributing to economic decision-making within families (Aziz *et al.*, 2021). However, the path for women in a local economy is not without hurdles. Gender-based barriers pose significant challenges. Unequal access to



land ownership, financial resources, and training opportunities restricts women's entrepreneurial potential. Societal norms and cultural expectations regarding childcare and domestic responsibilities often create a time burden, limiting women's ability to fully participate in economic activities (Quisumbing & Doss, 2021).

Despite these challenges, women in local economies exhibit remarkable resilience and resourcefulness. They form social networks and support systems, fostering collaboration, knowledge sharing, and market access (Balayar & Mazur, 2022). They leverage microfinance initiatives to access capital and invest in their businesses. Notably, women-led businesses often prioritize ethical practices, environmental sustainability, and community well-being, contributing to a more inclusive and socially responsible local economy (Bain *et al.*, 2020).

Theoretical Framework

The study adopts the Functionalism school of thought to explore the sociological contribution of Abraka women to local economy. Functionalism emerged in the early 20th century, drawing from the foundational works of Emile Durkheim and Herbert Spencer.

Functionalism and Women Economy

Functionalism, as a theoretical framework provides a lens through which to analyze various aspects of society, including economic activities. The core arguments of functionalism revolve around the idea that different parts of a society work together to maintain stability and functionality (Clarke, 2020). When applied to economic activities, functionalism emphasizes the roles that economic institutions and practices play in ensuring societal equilibrium and meeting the needs of individuals and the collective. Here are the core arguments of functionalism related to economic activities:

Functionalism posits that economic institutions are interdependent with other

social institutions such as family, education, and government (Orsini, 2024). Each institution fulfils specific functions that contribute to the stability and continuity of society. For instance, the education system prepares individuals with the skills and knowledge needed in the workforce, thereby supporting economic productivity (Orsini, 2024). The government, through regulatory frameworks, ensures economic stability and fairness, which in turn supports social order.

Similarly, functionalist theory asserts that economic systems strive for equilibrium, where supply meets demand, and resources are allocated efficiently. However, disruptions such as economic crises or technological changes can lead to disequilibrium (Rathgeb & Tassinari, 2022). Therefore, Functionalism suggests that mechanisms within the economic system, such as market adjustments, government interventions, and innovations, work to restore balance and stability. Although functionalism provides valuable insights into the role of economic activities in maintaining social order, it has been criticized for its conservative bias, tendency to overlook social inequalities, and inability to account for rapid social changes. Critics argue that functionalism often justifies the status quo and underplays the conflicts and power imbalances inherent in economic systems (Rathgeb & Tassinari, 2022).

From a functionalist perspective, it would mean that women's contributions to the development of small-scale businesses and the local economy are vital for societal stability and functionality. Functionalism views social institutions and roles as interdependent parts that work together to maintain equilibrium (Rathgeb & Tassinari, 2022). Women's participation in entrepreneurship fulfills several key functions within this framework. Women's involvement in small-scale businesses integrates them into the economic fabric,



enriching it with diverse skills and perspectives. This integration helps stabilize families and communities, enhancing overall social cohesion and functionality (Rathgeb & Tassinari, 2022). It would also suggest women entrepreneurs also bring innovative solutions to local markets, ensuring the economy adapts to changing conditions (Hass, 2020). Their small-scale businesses often cater to specific community needs, driving local economic dynamism and resilience. Similarly, women-owned businesses often serve as community hubs, fostering networks of support and trust (Hass, 2020). This builds social capital, which is crucial for community stability and collective well-being. The enhanced social cohesion from these enterprises strengthens the local economy. The manifest functions of women in small-scale businesses include job creation, income generation, and provision of goods and services. Latently, these businesses empower women, promote gender equality, and serve as role models for future generations, contributing to long-term social stability and progress (Hass, 2020). By implication, women's entrepreneurship diversifies income sources and reduces economic vulnerability by balancing the local economy. This diversification is essential for maintaining economic stability and societal equilibrium, core tenets of functionalist theory. Moreover, women-led businesses often address unique local needs, filling market gaps that larger enterprises might ignore. This responsiveness to community-specific demands enhances the quality of life and economic sustainability (Hass, 2020).

3. Methodology

This study utilized a cross-sectional survey method to investigate women's contributions to Abraka local economy. Abraka town serves as the study area, hosting diverse ethnic groups and significant economic activities such as oil

production and agriculture. Abraka, a key location within Delta State, was chosen due to its agricultural focus and the presence of Delta State University, attracting a diverse population. The target population comprised Abraka women involved in various economic activities, excluding students. A sample size of 370 was determined using Taro Yamane's formula from a projected population of 79,963; employing a purposive sampling technique due to the dispersed nature of the women across Abraka.

Data collection utilized a structured questionnaire with demographic and economic section. Data analysis involved presenting data in tables, conducting frequency counts, and calculating percentages. Ethical considerations were prioritized throughout the study.

Presentation and Analysis of Data

This section presents and analyses data gathered from field survey. Of the 370 questionnaire copies distributed, only 299 were duly filled and retrieved. The analysis is based on these responses and has implication for the generalization arrived at the discussion section.

The analysis shows that most respondents are aged 34-41 (43.1%), followed by 42-49 (26.1%), 26-33 (11.0%), 18-25 (7.7%), and 50+ (12.0%). Educationally, 40.1% had primary or secondary education, 18.1% attended technical school, and 1.7% completed tertiary education. Marital status includes 39.8% separated, 28.1% married, 18.1% single, and 14.0% divorced.



Table 1: Types of Small-Scale Businesses Operated by Women in Abraka

Question	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Section A: Types of Small-Scale Businesses Operated by Women in Abraka		
1. What type of small-scale business do you operate?		
<i>Retail Shop</i>	91	30.43
<i>Food Vendor</i>	49	16.39
<i>Tailoring</i>	60	20.07
<i>Hairdressing</i>	39	13.04
<i>Agriculture</i>	60	20.07
<i>Others (Please specify)</i>		
Total	299	100
2. How long have you been operating your business?		
<i>Less than 1 year</i>	81	27.09
<i>1-3 years</i>	69	23.08
<i>4-6 years</i>	40	13.38
<i>More than 6 years</i>	109	36.46
Total	299	100
3. Do you pay taxes?		
<i>Yes</i>	97	32.44
<i>No</i>	202	67.56
Total	299	100
4. How much do you pay in taxes?		
<i><20,000 NGN</i>	80	26.76
<i><100,000 NGN</i>	15	5.02
<i>>100,000 NGN</i>	2	0.67
<i>I do not pay tax</i>	202	67.56
Total	299	100

Source: Author's field survey, 2024

The survey further reveals that retail shops are the most common type of enterprise, making up nearly a one-third of all businesses surveyed. Food vendors and those in tailoring, agriculture, and hairdressing follow closely behind. Interestingly, the survey also shows that over two-thirds of the respondents don't pay taxes, while a quarter of the businesses have been operating for less than a year. In terms of tax amounts paid by those who do contribute, most pay under 20,000 NGN.

Table 2: Challenges Faced by Women Entrepreneurs and Strategies Used

Question	Frequency	Percentage (%)
5. What are the major challenges you face in running your business? (Select all that apply)		
<i>Access to capital</i>	111	37.13
<i>Competition</i>	41	13.71
<i>Balancing family and business</i>	144	48.16
<i>Lack of business skills</i>	3	1.00
<i>Others (Please specify)</i>		
Total	299	100



Question	Frequency	Percentage (%)
6. What strategies do you use to overcome these challenges? (Select all that apply)		
<i>Seeking financial assistance (loans, grants)</i>		
<i>Attending business training/workshops</i>	3	1.00
<i>Networking with other business owners</i>	110	36.79
<i>Utilizing family support</i>	42	14.05
<i>Starting community savings scheme</i>	144	48.16
<i>Others (Please specify)</i>		
Total	299	100

Source: Author’s Survey, 2024

The survey further highlights balancing family and business as the primary challenge women-led businesses face in Abraka, with nearly half of the respondents facing this difficulty. Moreover, access to capital comes in as a close second, and competitive forces in the market also posing a hurdle for some of these women. Interestingly, lack of business skills was a challenge for very few respondents. Looking at how these women tackle these challenges; the survey reveals a strong sense of community and self-reliance. The most common strategies involve starting community savings schemes and relying on networks of other business owners, while seeking financial assistance through loans or grants is less prevalent, and business training or workshops appear to be the least used strategy to mitigate the identified challenges.

Table 3: Impact of Women-operated Small-Scale Businesses on the Local Economy

Question	Frequency	Percentage (%)
7. How has your business contributed to the local economy of Abraka? (Select all that apply)		
<i>Providing employment opportunities</i>	101	33.78
<i>Offering essential goods/services</i>	99	33.11
<i>Supporting local suppliers</i>	43	14.38
<i>Women-led associations are formed to support female entrepreneurs</i>	56	18.73
<i>Others (Please specify)</i>		
Total	299	100
8. Have you seen any improvement in your financial status since starting your business?		
<i>Significant improvement</i>	187	62.54
<i>Moderate improvement</i>	34	11.37
<i>Slight improvement</i>	26	8.70
<i>No improvement</i>	52	17.39
Total	299	100
9. In what ways do you think women-operated businesses can further contribute to the development of Abraka?		
<i>Enhancing community services</i>	112	37.46
<i>Encouraging other women to start businesses</i>	89	29.76
<i>Supporting local charities/initiatives</i>	48	16.05
<i>There is rise in women supporting women ideology</i>	50	16.72
Total	299	100

Source: Author’s Survey, 2024



Finally, the survey highlighted the positive impact women-run businesses have on Abraka's local economy. These businesses create jobs and provide essential goods and services to the community. Additionally, a significant number of respondents reported supporting local suppliers, highlighting the interconnectedness of these businesses to general economic distribution. Encouragingly, the survey shows that over two-thirds of the women surveyed saw an improvement in their financial situation since starting their businesses. Looking ahead, the women themselves see further potential to contribute to Abraka's development. Enhancing community services and inspiring other women to become entrepreneurs are the most commonly proposed ways to achieve this. The rise of women supporting women through associations and charities is another promising trend highlighted by the survey.

4. Results and Discussion

The study on the contributions of women to the local economy Abraka in Delta State aimed to provide a comprehensive sociological exploration of the role of women in small-scale businesses.

The findings revealed that trading is the predominant type of small-scale business operated by women in Abraka, constituting the majority of all businesses surveyed. Food vendors, tailoring, agriculture, and hairdressing also feature prominently. These findings align with the functionalist perspective, emphasizing the interdependence of societal parts. The economic activities of these women contribute to the stability and continuity of society, fulfilling specific functions that support economic productivity and social integration.

The survey results also indicate that financial independence was the primary motivator for starting a business for women in Abraka, with family tradition and lack of

employment opportunities also influencing their decision. This resonates with the work of Eromafuru and Adidi (2021), highlighting the need to understand the socio-cultural dynamics that influence the entrepreneurial endeavors of Abraka women.

The challenges identified in the survey, such as inadequate funding, competition, and balancing family and business, resonate with the findings of Mukaila et al. (2022). Their work emphasizes the barriers faced by small-scale businesses, particularly the challenges exacerbated for women due to gender biases and discriminatory practices. The strategies used by women-operated businesses to overcome challenges, such as networking with other business owners and starting community savings schemes, align with the concept of social capital as discussed by Hass (2020). The development of social networks and trust within the community builds social capital, which is crucial for community stability and collective well-being.

The findings also demonstrated that women-operated businesses contribute to the local economy by providing employment opportunities, offering essential goods/services, and supporting local suppliers. These contributions align with the functionalist perspective on the necessary functions that economic activities must fulfill to maintain social stability. The enhanced social cohesion from these enterprises strengthens the local economy and tended to have contributed to the long-term social stability and progress experienced in Abraka.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The study's findings underscore the vital role of women-operated small-scale businesses in contributing to the economic development of Abraka. The research emphasizes the need to recognize and support the contributions of women to the local economy, addressing the barriers they



face and leveraging their potential for sustainable economic growth.

The study's comprehensive exploration of the socio-economic dynamics and entrepreneurial endeavors of women in Abraka sheds light on the multifaceted nature of their contributions to small-scale businesses. Additionally, family support was identified as a crucial factor, with over half of the respondents indicating varying levels of support from their families.

Moreover, the challenges faced by women-operated businesses hasten urgency for the need for targeted interventions and support mechanisms. The study's insights provide a foundation for developing holistic strategies that address the systemic challenges and leverage the strengths and contributions of women-operated businesses to the local economy. Recognizing the barriers and opportunities for women entrepreneurs is essential for formulating policies and programs that support and empower them, ultimately fostering sustainable economic growth and community development in Abraka.

To address the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in Abraka, several recommendations have been made based on the findings;

Firstly, targeted initiatives should move to improve women entrepreneurs' access to funding and financial resources, including microfinance programs, grants, and low-interest loans. Enhancing financial inclusion can empower women to overcome economic barriers and expand their businesses.

Secondly, there must be strong advocacy for policies that promote gender equality, address discriminatory practices, and foster an inclusive entrepreneurial environment. Collaborating with local authorities and stakeholders to create supportive regulatory frameworks can enhance the business environment for women-operated enterprises.

Thirdly, it is important to encourage collaboration and networking among

women entrepreneurs and local business owners to strengthen social capital and support networks. Community-based initiatives, such as savings schemes and mentorship programs, can enhance the resilience and success of women-operated businesses.

Lastly, it is important to also invest in educational and training programs tailored to the needs of women entrepreneurs to enhance their business skills and innovation capabilities. Providing access to resources and knowledge can empower women to overcome challenges and drive sustainable economic growth in Abraka.

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