

**INFORMAL SECTOR GROWTH, WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS, AND THE ROLE
OF PROFESSIONAL WOMEN ACCOUNTANTS**

BY

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1.1.Introduction

The informal sector covers a wide range of labour market activities that combine two groups of different natures namely those formed by the coping behaviour of individuals and families in an economic environment where economic opportunities are scarce, while the second is where rational behaviour of entrepreneurs' desire to escape government regulations.

The term "informal sector" also refers to a group of industries that share some peculiarities, including informal business structures, the use of primitive technology, the ease of entry and exit, the use of family labour and apprentices, and low capital requirements. The Economic Commission for Africa ECA (2005) affirms that next to the agricultural sector, the informal sector is the largest employer of women in most African countries. This allows them flexibility in their time management. Due to the current economic difficulty in Nigeria and the current worldwide recession brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, women are becoming more involved in the informal sector.

The majority of informal economy workers are women. Policies and developments affecting the informal economy consequently have a distinctly gendered effect. With the contraction of formal sector jobs, the informal sector has become a "safe haven" for most women who are unable to obtain formal sector employment. Therefore, they have taken participation in the informal economy as a means of survival with limited access to critical resources like education, land, technology, and credit.

Okafor and Mordi (2010) define women entrepreneurs as, "women that participate in total entrepreneurial activities, who take the risks involved in uniquely combining resources, to take advantage of the opportunity identified in their immediate environment through production of goods and services". The majority of women-owned businesses in Africa are micro and small businesses operating in the informal sector (Spring, 2009). An estimate of 60 to 70 percent of African families depend on the informal sector as one of their major

sources of income with more women entrepreneurs globally, and approximately 26% of women in Sub-Saharan Africa are into entrepreneurial activities (Center for African Studies, 2020).

Today's world of work is still marked by pervasive gender inequality, despite the increasing labour force participation rates in many countries. Women are still disadvantaged in the labour market in terms of their share in employment, remuneration, and working conditions. Informal work which is depicted as unplanned, uncontrolled, and messy with no government presence, takes various forms which include domestic workers, construction workers, street vendors, waste pickers, home-based workers, and day labourers among others. Most women are found in this sector, though studies have exposed opportunities that abound in these informal micro and small businesses and the women also face risks and vulnerabilities.

Encouraging women's entrepreneurship is key to economic development, wealth creation, and poverty reduction as they reinvest their earnings on household well-being such as education, nutrition and care for children which produces positive upsurge results in generations and communities. However, despite women's increased participation in entrepreneurship, the persistent gender gaps in many developing countries (ILO, 2014) have led to women's entrepreneurial activities being overrepresented in the informal economy. The informal economy perpetuates gender norms by constraining women's activities mainly to the home location or low-skilled and saturated sectors with implications on their welfare and business affecting in turn their empowerment through entrepreneurship (UN HLP, 2016; Anyanwu, 2005). Thus, the Western donor agencies and international organizations, including the OECD (2012), and USAID (2008) have advocated the inclusion of these marginalized populations into a formal organization that would improve the lives of such informal workers.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Women who work in this so-called "informal sector" are frequently left without any legal protection from the workplace, social benefits like pensions, health insurance, or paid sick leave. They frequently put up with risky working conditions, and the absence of social safeguards has a lasting effect on women. In Nigeria, for example, women are generally

under-represented in the formal sector of the labour force. Many of them start their businesses in the informal sector. In most cases, the women work in unfriendly environments and are overlooked in terms of public policy. They are frequently viewed as unlawful traders who should be prevented by the law authorities. The majority of the women working in the informal sector have restricted access to credit, technology, raw materials, and working capital.

Against the backdrop, this study seeks to look at the informal sector, women entrepreneurs, and the roles of professional women Accountants.

1.3 Objectives of the Paper

This main objective of this study is to assess the informal sector, women entrepreneurs, and the role of professional women Accountants. Specific objectives are to bring to focus the impediments and contributions of women entrepreneurs in the informal sector and the roles of women professional Accountants in national development.

In terms of the organization of the paper, it starts with an introduction, the literature review, the performance of the informal sector, and the women entrepreneurs, the challenges of the informal sector and prospects, challenges of the women entrepreneurs and prospects, the role of professional women Accountants, the recommendations and conclusion of the paper.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Conceptual Issues

The concepts of entrepreneurship, women entrepreneurs, professional women Accountants, informal sector, and economic growth are highlighted as follows:

2.1.1 Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship is the willingness and aptitude of an individual to seek out investment possibilities to develop and run businesses successfully, Suleiman (2006). Entrepreneurship begins with action and the creation of a new organization. This organization may or may not become self-sustaining and in fact, may never earn significant revenues. Many scholars and schools of thought have come up with several other definitions of entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurship, according to Onuoha (2007) is the practice of starting new organizations or revitalizing matured organizations, particularly new businesses generally in response to identified opportunities. To an economist, an entrepreneur brings resources, labour,

materials, and other assets in, to make combinations that create greater value than before, or one who introduces changes, innovations, and new order.

2.1.2 Women Entrepreneurs

Overwhelmingly, men have held positions of power in the economic world. In contrast, the phrase "women entrepreneurship" has come to signify the growing power of women in setting up their business enterprises. Women in the twenty-first century are becoming a force to be reckoned with. The range of women entrepreneurs includes MSMEs and home-based businesses (ILO, 2015). Female entrepreneurship is a cross-cultural phenomenon with culture-specific aspects that influences entrepreneurial behavior across countries and gender. Though the universal determinants of entrepreneurial behavior are the same, they may have gender-specific effects and influence both sexes but not necessarily in the same way or with the same intensity.

Dealing with these reoccurring challenges is not a matter that is once and for all because new challenges will surely keep re-occurring. Specifically, many challenges confront entrepreneurs regardless of their gender, but other challenges are very peculiar to women entrepreneurs. Nigerian women entrepreneurs face challenges such as business shops, lack of marketing skills, family issues, gender discrimination, religious issues, early/child marriage, insufficient cash flow, or working capital, inadequate access to raw materials/spare parts, and issues relating to culture and families, such as a spouse, kids, extended families, and insufficient business support systems, all these hinder them from achieving their entrepreneurial aspirations and negatively impact on their economic empowerments.

Also, challenges such as inadequate access to training, market information, insufficient women entrepreneurs' role models, business growth, patriarchal issues, and lack of career guidance are being faced by women entrepreneurs in Nigeria (Anyanwu 2005). Emmanuel (2013) summarised the challenges facing women entrepreneurs in Nigeria as lack of support from governments, family issues, lack of access to capital, markets, and adequate information, personal characteristics peculiar to women's physiological nature, gender discrimination, weak networking power, lack of access to important assets like land, and equipment, cultural and social barriers. Forbes list of women entrepreneurial challenges

include lack of technology advancement, lack of policy for entrepreneurship, corruption, poor attitude of the government towards entrepreneurship, bank policy and bureaucracy, family responsibility, etc. (Abd Rani & Hashim, 2017).

2.1.3 Professional Women Accountants

Professional Women Accountants train to become career Accountants as they hope to excel and to progress steadily to the highest positions in their profession. Soyode (2002) adds that accounting is "the process of recording and interpreting financial transactions and events." In addition, accounting is defined as "the systematic recording, classification, and summarization in terms of money of transactions and events that are at least in part of a financial nature, and the analysis of the results thereof" (American Institute of Certified Public Accounts, AICPA, 1975). Professional women accountants may be seen as a privileged group, with a special obligation to their families to ensure their well-being monetarily and psychologically.

Dambrin and Lambert (2012) suggest that until stereotypes are challenged, gender issues and gender inequality will still be common issues. Thus posing the need to perform critical and reflective research on gender with an ongoing struggle to improve the position of women's representation in the accounting profession. Given the masculine history of the profession, stereotypes are difficult to shift and it has continued to affect the male organizational homo-sociality of the profession. Research has shown that the lack of representation of women in the upper cadre of the profession, traditionally, is due to the dominance of established male power structures that make it difficult for women to progress in their careers.

2.1.4 Informal Sector

According to the ILO (1998), the labour in the unorganized sector can be divided into three major groupings, which are as follows: Owner-employers of micro-enterprises, which employ a few paid workers, with or without apprentices; Own-account workers, who own and operate one-person businesses, work alone or with the help of unpaid workers, generally family members and apprentices; Dependent workers, paid or unpaid, including wage workers in micro-enterprises, unpaid family workers, apprentices, contract labour,

homeworkers and paid domestic workers. Since its invention, the concept of the informal sector has attracted much interest, discussion, and disagreement.

Consequently, the informal sector refers to all economic activities carried out by workers and economic units that are legally or practically not covered or inadequately covered by formal arrangements (ILO, 2002). In the informal sector, agriculture and related industries, such as blacksmithing, weaving, and poultry, are prevalent in rural areas, while trading, small-scale manufacturing, and repairs, such as upholstery, furniture making, woodworking, metalworking, bakery, masonry, and printing, are prevalent in urban areas.

According to Okojie (2003), the majority of young people are employed in informal occupations such as shop assistants, farm workers, administrative assistants, stewards, gardeners, cooks, street vendors, and casual labourers. According to the United Nations Report (2020), a significant number of informal workers depend on society's scraps for survival and reside in informal settlements with severely inadequate or non-existent social infrastructure. If the goals of the global campaign on urban governance and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 1, 8, and 11 are to be realized, these workers should be the primary focus of development interventions. More than 2 billion people worldwide are employed in the informal economy, which accounts for 61 percent of the global labour force; the vast majority of these informal workers reside in low- and middle-income countries (ILO 2018).

The NBS – SMEDAN (2021) definition of informal sector comprises of Nano and Micro Enterprises in Nigeria as shown in the Table below.

S/N	CATEGORY	EMPLOYMENT SIZE	TURNOVER (Naira)
1.	Nano Homestead Enterprises	1-2 persons	Less than 3 million
2.	Micro Enterprises	3-9 Persons	3 < 25 Million
3.	Small Enterprises	10-49 persons	25 < 100 Million
4.	Medium Enterprises	50-199 persons	100 Million < 1 Billion

2.1.5 Economic Growth

Economic growth is sometimes confused with economic development, and it is linked to elements including population growth, resource development, technological innovation, and increasing capital creation. The term economic growth refers to a rise in a country's production over time. It is an important indication of a country's economic health. The degree of connection between actual production and the maximum output that might be achieved if all available resources and advanced technologies were completely employed given the demand pattern is referred to as performance. Thus, economic growth is a rise in per capita income which connotes an increase in the total output of an economy per person all things being equal (Jelilov& Muhammad, 2015, Anyanwu, 2015).

Economic growth may also be described as the market value of an economy's products and services which rises over a given time. It is traditionally expressed as a percentage rate of increase in the gross domestic product (GDP) (IMF, 2017). Economic growth is a positive trend in the nation's total output over the long term. This implies a sustained increase in Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for a long time.

3.2 Theoretical Review

Several theories have tried to explain the reasons why there are few women at the top in the organization(s) and business enterprises (entrepreneurship).

3.2.1 Sociological Theory

This theory was established in 1920 by George Mead, an American Sociologist. Studies have shown that the sociological theory of entrepreneurship postulates that the catalyst of entrepreneurship in a society is social culture. The entrepreneur performs his duties following what society expects from an entrepreneur. These duties are usually based on customs and traditional and religious beliefs. A prosperous entrepreneur is defined by discipline and adventurous free-spirit. Sociology indicates that social values determine entrepreneurship. The entrepreneur has been taken to conformity to the expectations of society based on taboos, religious beliefs, and customs.

3.2.2 Human Capital Theory (HCT)

The human capital theory began in the field of economics that was developed in 1954 by Authur Lewis and was popularised by other scholars such as Gary Backer, Jacob Mincer, and Theodore Schultz. According to Cooper (2008), HCT proposes that education and experience are the backgrounds for decisions to start a business. Research has shown that years of formal education of the entrepreneur before starting a business is related to subsequent learning towards the success of the venture (Brush &Hirsrich, 2015). According to Lydall (2008), there are variations in the combination of education, intelligence, and environment at the individual level that account for the circulation of personal income. Investment in education or skills is key to avoiding low pay and avoid poverty.

3.2.3 Structuralism Theory

In the 1970s and 1980s, the Structuralist school of thought founded by Alexandro Portes and Caroline Moser came into being (Chen, 2012). According to the theory, the informal sector is primarily made up of micro-businesses that supply large formal-sector companies with goods and services in an effort to lower labour and input costs and boost the formal sector's competitiveness in the face of accelerated globalization. The theory explains that the scarcity of women in top positions is attributed to the late entrance of women into the labour market.

3.2.4 Anthropological Entrepreneurship Theory

Anthropology theory is the study of the origin, development, customs, and beliefs of a community. In other words, the culture of the people in the community. The anthropological theory says that for someone to successfully initiate a venture the social and cultural contexts should be examined or considered. Here the emphasis is on the cultural entrepreneurship model. The model says that a new venture is created by the influence of one's culture. Cultural practices lead to entrepreneurial attitudes such as innovation which also leads to venture creation behaviour. The socio-economic and cultural environments can produce attitude differences as well as entrepreneurial behaviour differences.

3.2.5 Opportunity-Based Entrepreneurship Theory

The opportunity-based theory is anchored by scholars such as Drucker (1985). An opportunity-based approach provides a wide-ranging conceptual framework for entrepreneurship research. Entrepreneurs do not cause change but exploit the opportunities

that change (in technology, consumer preferences, etc.) to create enterprises (Drucker, 1985). “This defines entrepreneur and entrepreneurship, the entrepreneur always searches for change, responds to it, and exploits it as an opportunity”. What is apparent in Drucker’s opportunity construct is that entrepreneurs have an eye more for possibilities created by change than problems.

3.2.6 Empowerment Theory

Empowerment theory rose from entrepreneurs' involvement initiatives of the 1980s and 1990s. It came as management's response to the increasingly competitive business environment. Specifically, it has originated due to the realization that outmoded classified knowledge and control organization meet demands for flexibility and quality (Hill & Huq, 2014). Empowerment has emerged as a construct deemed critical to business effectiveness and innovativeness, as such empowerment initiatives should target changing the role of entrepreneurs.

However, empowerment theory has been accepted by researchers as a sound basis for which to develop theory in the field of human resource management. The theory depicts the relationship between an entrepreneur's empowerment and performance.

3.2.7 Dualists Theory

In the 1970s, the International Labour Organization (ILO) supported the dualist viewpoint (Chen, 2012). According to Todaro and Smith (2015), the economy consists of a rural subsistence farming sector and an urban capitalist industrial sector. The urban sector, which produces industrial goods, offers higher wages than the rural sector. The urban sector accumulated capital and was therefore considered the engine of economic growth. Todaro and Smith (2015) classified the dual sectors in urban regions as formal and informal, the entire economy was defined. Due to minimum wage regulations, workers are migrating from rural to urban areas or from informal to the formal sector because earnings in urban or formal sectors are anticipated to be higher than earnings in rural or informal sectors. When economic growth is sluggish due to low levels of investment or when population expansion exceeds economic growth, urban or formal employment options cannot accommodate all job seekers. Unemployed individuals seek informal employment. Therefore, for those who are unable to find regular employment, the informal sector is their last resort. A growing

number of job seekers who cannot find work in the formal sector have turned to informal employment.

3.3. Empirical Studies in Informal Sector

Several empirical studies have looked at the relationship between a flourishing informal sector and a thriving economy. Cost accounting practices were studied by Obiora and Ukpai (1998) for their potential effect on the expansion of Nigeria's black-market economy. The research found that in the Eastern geopolitical zone, where there is a high concentration of micro-enterprises, the absence of proper cost accounting systems is a major impediment to the expansion of the informal sector. Nwaka (2005) looked at how the informal sector in Nigeria's cities has affected development. The study says that the urban informal sector can't grow and help the country develop as much as it could because there aren't enough reforms in place, and there aren't enough policies in place to help the informal sector to grow.

Okeke et. al' (2021) looked at the informal sector as a way to help Nigeria's economy grow. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse the primary data collected. The results show that not having enough money, feeling unsafe, having to deal with inconsistent government policies, and the COVID-19 pandemic are the biggest problems facing people who work in the informal sector in Awka. The study suggested that the government get more involved in the sector through appropriate economic policies including funding.

Bigsten, Kimuyu, and Soderbom (2010) acknowledged the importance of the informal sector in Kenya, but they also pointed out that the informal enterprises are still small and can not take advantage of economies of scale because there are not enough private and government investments and the technology is not there yet. This limits their contributions to output and income. Fridah, Muriungi, and Mwobobia (2012) looked at the problems that small-scale women entrepreneurs in Kenya face and the steps that have been taken to solve those problems. MSEs Baseline survey was used and it was found that 612,848 women were working in Micro and Small Enterprises (MSEs) in Kenya. For example, there is now funding and donor support for a university dedicated to educating and empowering women in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) fields. According to the study, female entrepreneurs need access to resources including funding, legal advice, and educational opportunities to succeed.

4. Macro-Economic Indicators, and Performance of Women in the Informal Sector

4.1 Women Entrepreneurs and Job Creation

Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (2004) found that women entrepreneurs generate jobs, wealth, and innovative ideas for their businesses (Ndemo and Maina, 2007). Entrepreneurship is the key to job creation and income generation which in turn reduces irregularities among men and women. Women are now able to create employment for society through engaging in various activities. Women are setting up businesses at a faster rate presently, which enables them to significantly contribute to employment creation and economic growth. In a patriarchal society, where men are expected to play a crucial role as providers, poverty has a gender component.

This is however changing as more and more women are engaging in business activities due to economic empowerment education support, feminist movements, and political support from the government (Onsongo,2006). Women employees enhance productivity in the workplace given the right employment conditions. In a study done by Ngonze (2006), women make up to 40% of the worlds workforce as they help run the economy in vital and key areas of the society such as production, agriculture, hospitality industry, and the service industry. Over the past decade, the share of females in the total employment figure for Nigeria has marginally increased. In 2019, about 51% of females were employed among the total female labour force, compared to 59.8% of males as a proportion of the total male labour force. (PwC, 2020).

The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) found that over the past decade, women all over the world have made significant strides in the field of entrepreneurship and that the amount of economic activities they engage in, has steadily increased (GEM, 2015). It's becoming increasingly accepted that women who pursue entrepreneurial endeavours are more likely to realize and express their full potential (Eddleston and Powell, 2008).

Research findings showthat the rise of women's entrepreneurship in emerging countries is consistent with those reported in developed countries. Table 1 depicts the gender breakdown of start-up activities by various Countries and Sex.

Table 1: Gender Distribution of Early-stage Total Entrepreneurial Activities (TEA) in Developing Economies

Countries	Male TEA (% of adult male population)	Female TEA (% of adult female population)
Brazil	17%	17%
Ghana	23%	28%
Indonesia	26%	25%
Nigeria	29%	41%
Philippines	19%	18%
Uganda	25%	25%
Zambia	29%	41%

Source: Umar, 2017

Table 1 illustrates that in African nations women have a higher level of entrepreneurial engagement than men. Recent societal factors such as increased education, later marriage, increased freedom for females, lower childbirth, and a desire for financial independence might be contributory factors to the surge in female entrepreneurship.

4.2. Macroeconomic Indicators and Informal Sector in Nigeria

In Nigeria, the informal economy is significant because it provides employment opportunities for the teeming unemployed citizens mostly women, and the medium to meet the needs of poor consumers through cheaper and accessible goods and services. Also, due to the ease and flexibility attached to the operations of informal enterprises, the sector is devoid of a bureaucratic regulatory framework with little or no formal educational requirements. The Nigerian informal sector is a major contributor to the Nigerian economy, accounting for a significant portion of employment and national GDP. According to the IMF, the Nigerian informal sector accounted for 65% of Nigeria's 2017 GDP. Meanwhile, the Nigerian informal sector accounted for 49.7% of Nigeria's 2021 GDP (Ohnsorge & Yu, 2021).

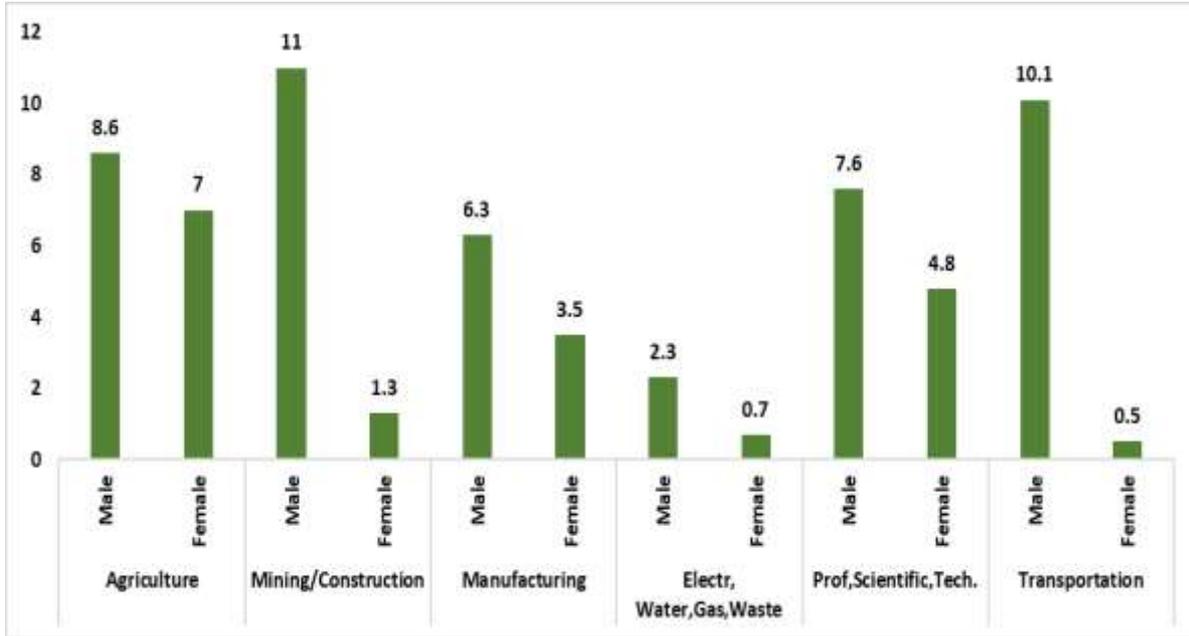


Figure 1: Industry of Activity for Wage Employment by Sex (in percent of individuals engaged in wage employment)

Source: NLSS NBS report 2019/2020

The wage employment by activity in 2019/2020 shows that males recorded more compared to females. The highest male employment was found in mining activity with 11% and 7% for highest female employment in agriculture.

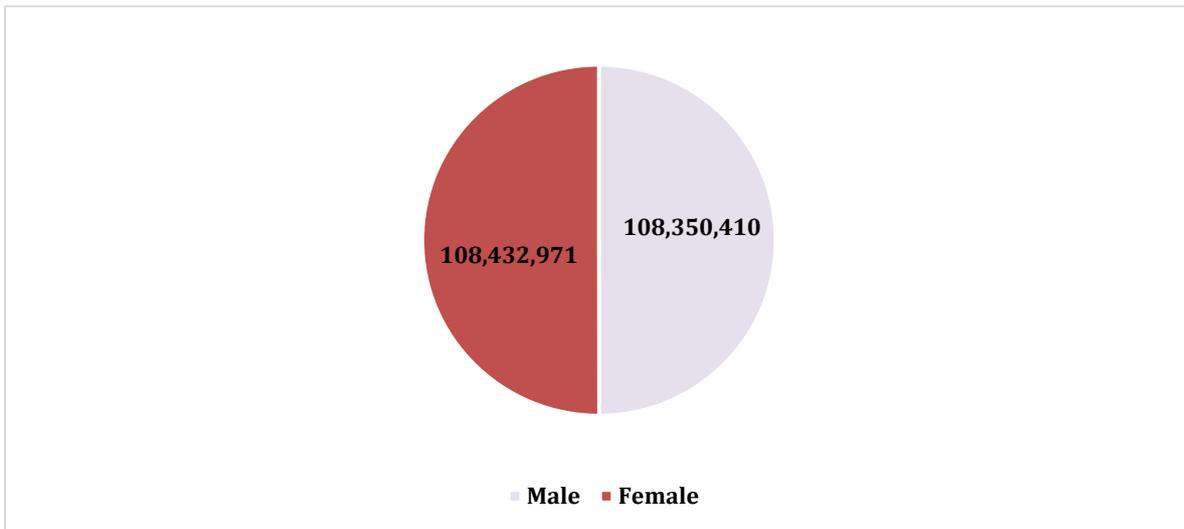


Figure 2: 2022 Projected Population Numbers

Source: 2020 Projected Population by NPoPc

By 2022, it is projected that there will be more females than males 82,561 persons. These projections would mean that women should be keyed into government policies and plans based on numbers.

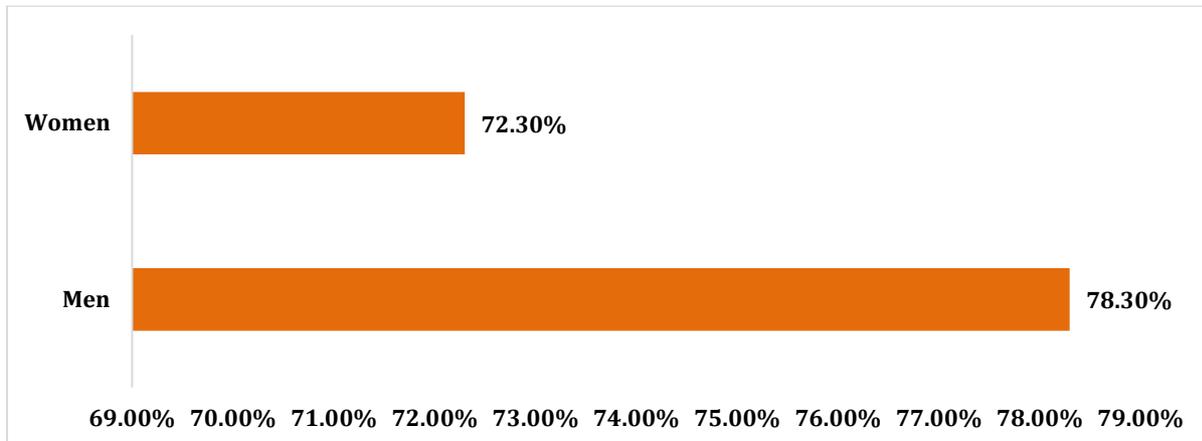


Figure 3: Literacy Rate in the English Language among Young Women and Men in Nigeria in 2019

Source: NBS Men and Women 2020 Report

The literacy rate in Nigeria between young women and men in 2019 was 72.30% for women and 78.30% for men. This shows that men are more educated than women and as a result could have better opportunities than their women counterparts.

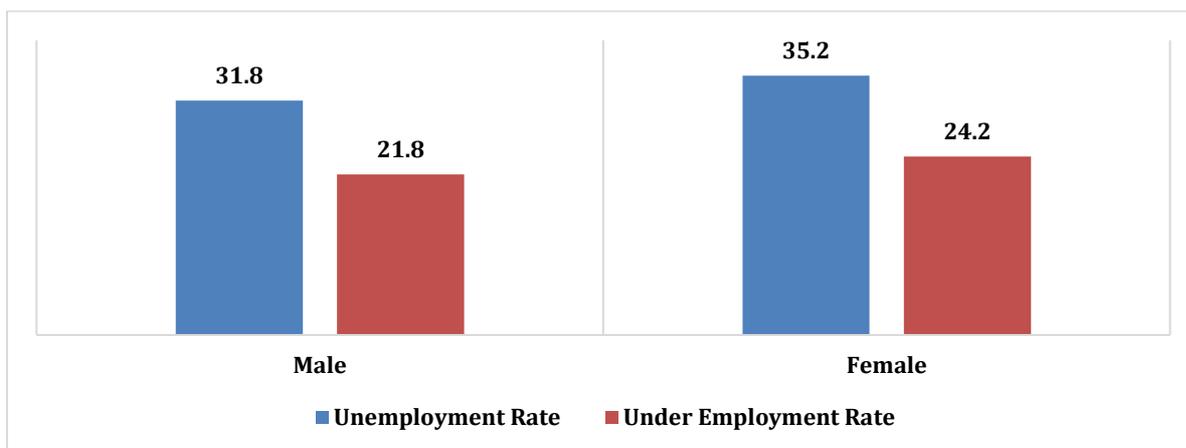


Figure 4: Unemployment and Underemployment Rates in Nigeria

Source: NBS Q4 2020 unemployment report

The unemployment rate and underemployment rate for males in 2020 were 31.8% and 21.8%, while females stood at 35.2% and 24.2% respectively. This shows that females are more jobless and underemployed than men in Nigeria. This would have prompted more women to enter the informal sector for a greener pasture.

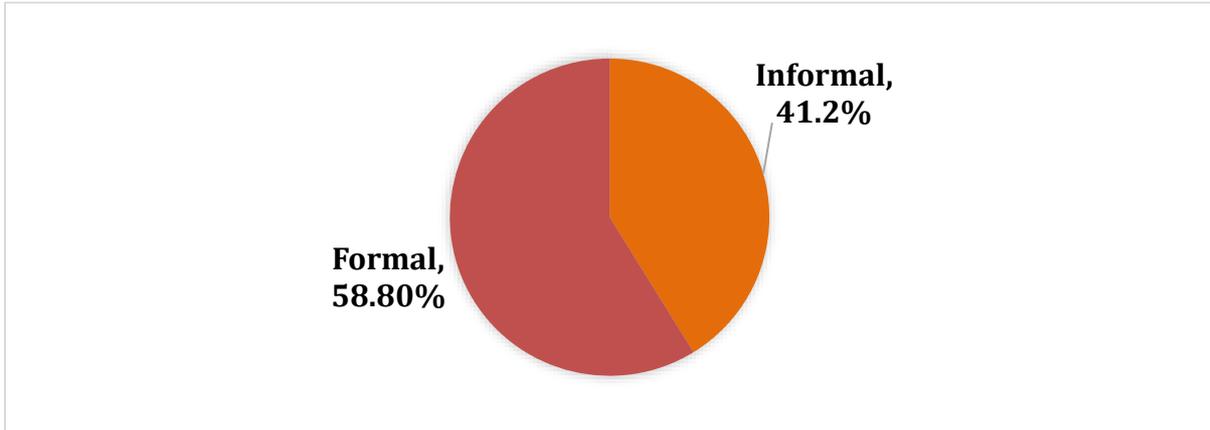


Figure 5: Formal and Informal Sector Percentage Share to GDP

Source: NBS report 2016

The percentage share of the informal sector of nominal Gross Domestic Product stands at 41%, while the formal sector contributes 59%. This shows a significant contribution of the informal sector to the economy despite the stringent working conditions under which they operate in Nigeria.

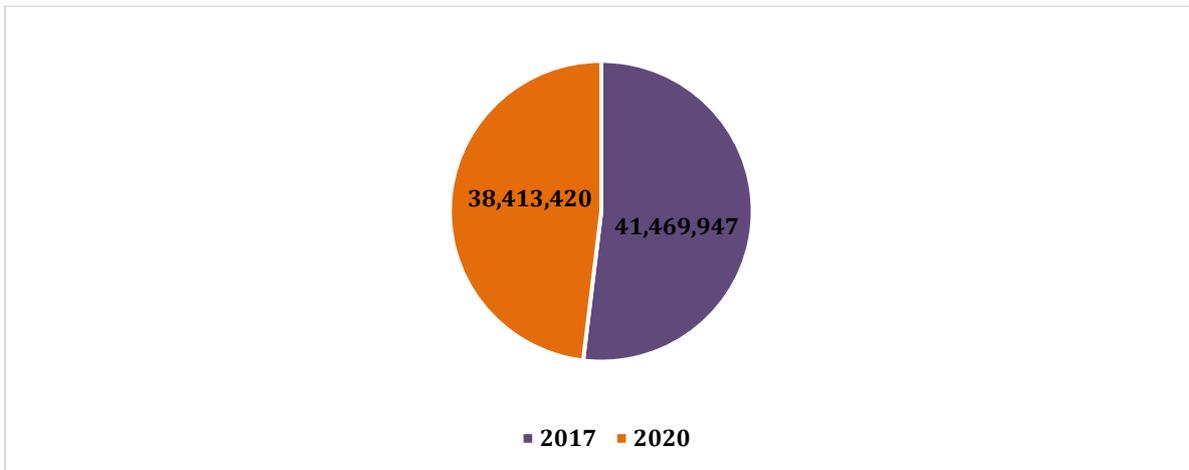


Figure 6: Total Informal Micro-Enterprises

Source: NBS SMEDAN 2021 MSME Survey Report

In 2017, 41.4 million microenterprises (inclusive of nano enterprises) were recorded in the country compared to 38.4 million enterprises in 2020. This shows a decline in the number of enterprises over time. The decline might be due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and other unfavorable government policies.



Figure 7: Total Informal Enterprises by Ownership Structure

Source: NBS SMEDAN 2021 MSMEs Survey Report

As shown in Figure 7, of the total 38.4 million microenterprises in 2020, Sole Proprietorship stood at 36.9 million, Partnership was 1.2 million, Faith-Based Organisation recorded 44,210, and other enterprises were 154,747. This indicates that the majority of the women enterprises are sole proprietorships which may lack continuity with the death of the owners and with limited liabilities.

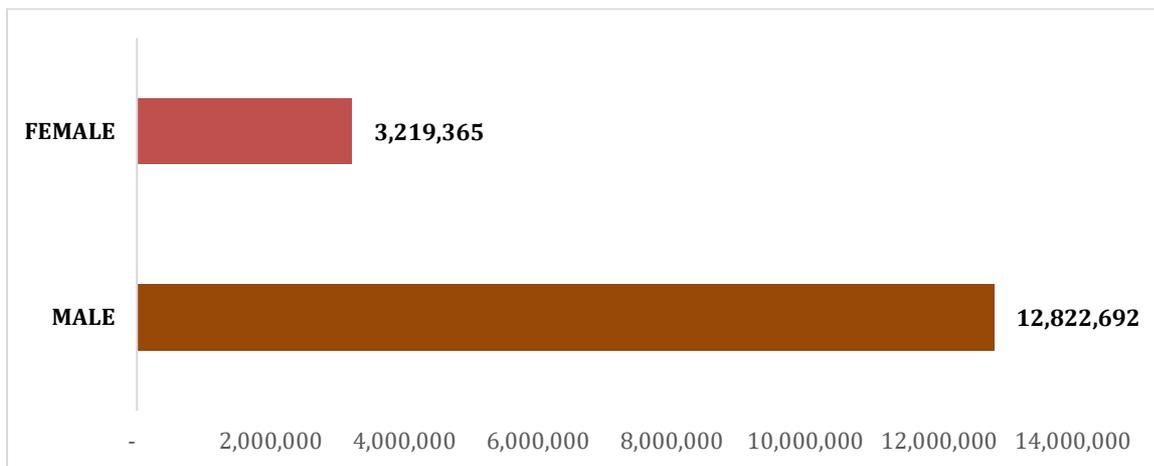


Figure 8: Total Informal Employment in Microenterprises

Source: NBS SMEDAN 2021 MSMEs Survey Report

Informal employment in microenterprises was 12.8million male and 3.2 million female in 2020. This shows that more males were employed by micro-enterprises in the country, accounting for 80% of total informal employment while the female microenterprises were only 20%.

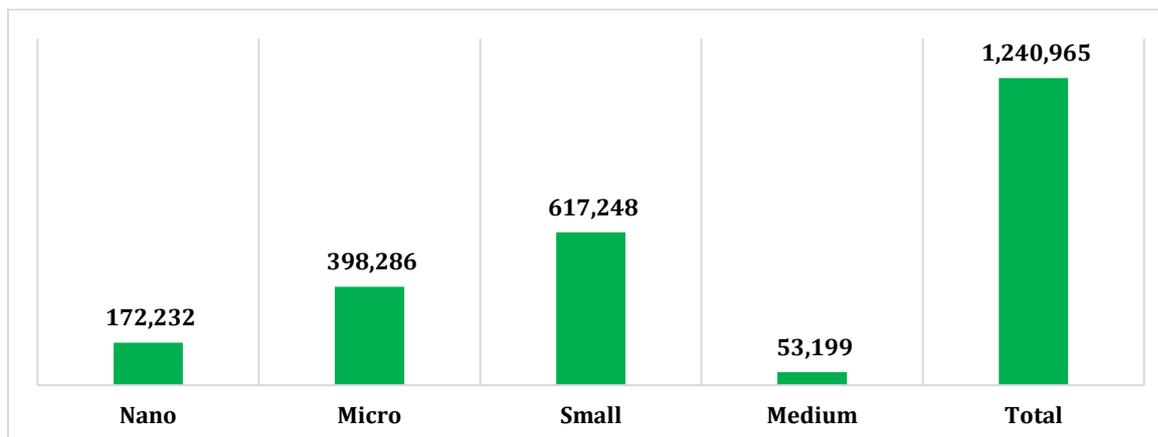


Figure 9: Total Formal Enterprises

Source: NBS SMEDAN 2021 MSME Survey Report

A total of 1.2million formal enterprises (MSMEs) were reported in 2020, of which nano enterprises were 172,232; micro-enterprises were 398,286; small enterprises were reported at 617,248 and medium enterprises stood at 53,199. Small enterprises accounted for 50% of the total formal enterprises. More favourable government policies are required to grow nano, micro, and small enterprises to enable them to expand their status to medium and large-scale enterprises.

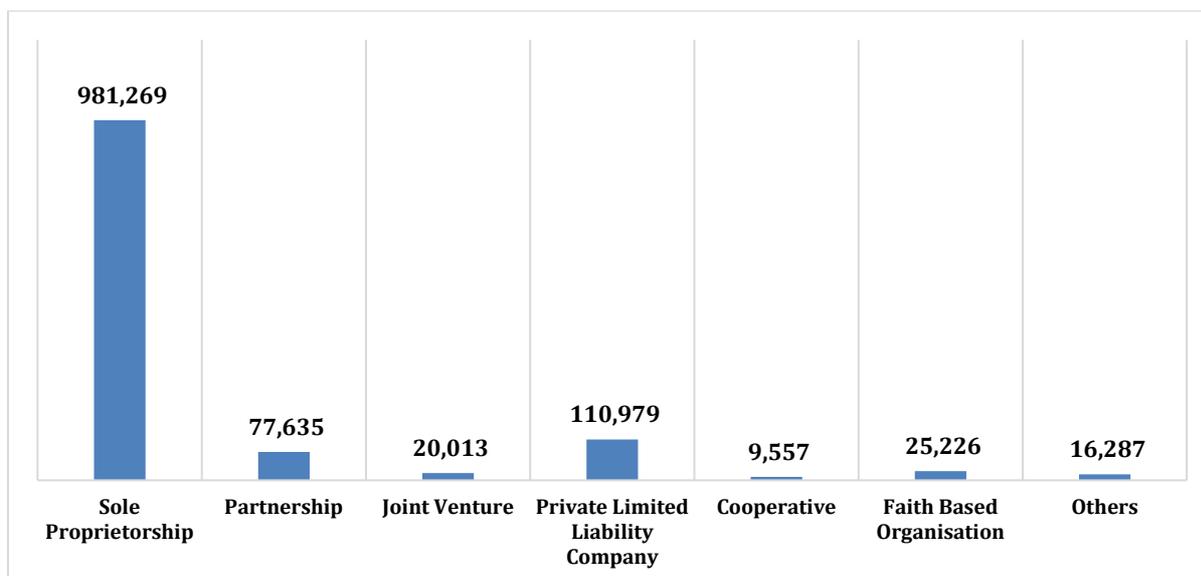


Figure 10: Total Formal Enterprises by Ownership Structure

Source: NBS SMEDAN 2021 MSMEs Survey Report

Of the total of 1.2million formal enterprises, Sole proprietorship stood at 981,269, accounting for 79% as the largest. This was followed by Private Limited Liability Companies with 110,979 and Partnerships with 77,635. The Faith-Based Organisations were 25,226, Joint Ventures with 20,013,

cooperatives were 9,557 and others were 16,287. In Nigeria, the formal enterprises were a majorly sole proprietorship. A conducive business environment is required to grow these enterprises.

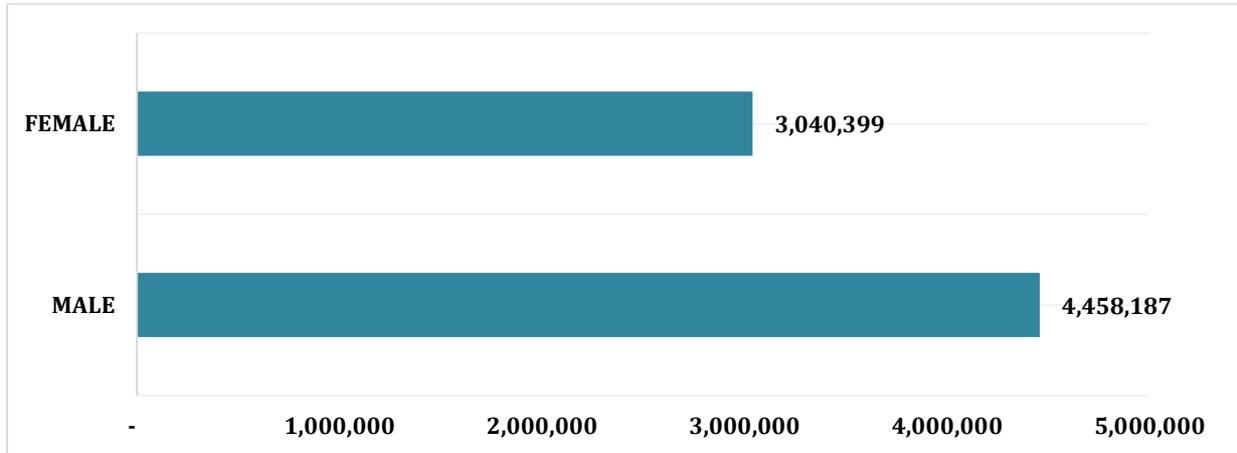


Figure 11: Total Formal Employment

Source: NBS SMEDAN 2021 MSMEs Survey Report

Total employment generated by formal enterprises (MSMEs) in 2020 amounted to 4.4 million for males and 3.0 million for females, signifying that males had more jobs than females. This signifies the need to promote women's entrepreneurship in Nigeria.

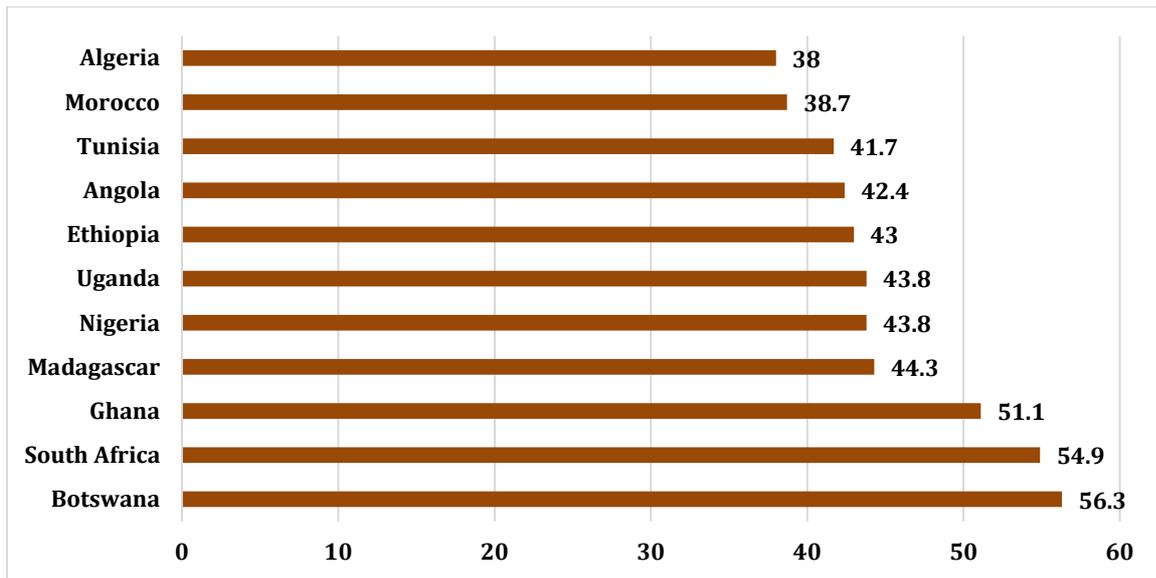


Figure 12: Index of Women Entrepreneurs in Africa 2021 by Country

Source: Statista- Africa: women entrepreneurs index by country 2021 | Statista

The report shows that Botswana was the leading African country for favouring women's entrepreneurship in 2021. In the Mastercard Index of Women Entrepreneurs (MIWE), the

country scored 56.3 points and was followed by South Africa (54.9) and Ghana (51.1). According to the index, these nations not only have a high percentage of female-owned businesses but also formally support women entrepreneurs. According to Statista ‘Worldwide, male-owned businesses are prevalent in both developing and developed countries, with women often suffering from gender discrimination and burdening family responsibilities’ Nigeria’s index was 42.8.

Table2: Number of MicroEnterprises (Informal) bySector

SECTOR	2020	2017
Agriculture	14,759,148	8,687,580
Wholesale/Retail Trade	12,802,827	17,533,925
Manufacturing	1,617,754	3,722,292
Transport&Storage	1,455,044	1,274,270
Accommodation &FoodServices	1,413,706	2,351,498
Others Services Activities	6,364,941	7,900,382
Total	38,413,420	41,469,947

Source: NBS SMEDAN 2021 MSMEs Survey Report

Table 2 shows that Agriculture is the main economic sector that micro-entrepreneurs in the informal sector followed by the wholesale/retail trade, manufacturing, transport and storage, and accommodation and food services respectively.

Table3: Economic SectorbyOwnership (SoleProprietorship & Gender2020) in the Informal Sector

Sector	Male	Female	Total
Agriculture	12,063,18	2,122,679	14,185,864
Wholesale/Retail Trade	5,958,653	6,471,173	12,429,826
Transport &Storage	1,369,018	9,654	1,378,672
Construction	852,226	5,618	857,844
Manufacturing	743,520	820,684	1,564,204
Others Services Activities	3,814,242	2,727,282	6,541,524
Total	24,800,84	12,157,09	36,957,934

Source: NBS SMEDAN 2021 MSMEs Survey Report

As presented in Table 2, in all the sectors, male micro-entrepreneurs were more than female micro-entrepreneurs in all the sectors in 2020.

Table4: Ownership (SoleProprietorship byAge for Informal Enterprises)

Agegroup	Number	Percentage (%)
below 20	76,542	0.21
20-25	1,237,415	3.35
26-35	7,989,748	21.62
36-50	16,414,146	44.41
51-60	6,160,982	16.67
above 60	5,079,100	13.74
Total	36,957,934	100

Source: NBS SMEDAN 2021 MSMEs Survey Report

For the sole proprietorship informal enterprises, the youths dominate the sector. This calls for economic empowerment of the youth in Nigeria through dedicated business support services to enable them to contribute significantly to national development.

Table 5:Ownership (Sole Proprietorship)by Educational Qualification in the Informal Sector

Level	Number	Percentage (%)
NoEducation	8,885,364	24.04
Primary	8,932,912	24.17
Secondary	12,933,034	34.99
Vocational/Commercial	1,025,729	2.78
Tertiary	3,817,759	10.33
Others Specify	1,363,136	3.69
Total	36,957,934	100

Source: NBS SMEDAN 2021 MSMEs Survey Report

As shown in Table 5, out of 36,957,934 sole proprietorship enterprises in the informal sector, 12,933,034 have secondary education, 3,817,759 have tertiary education, and 8,885,364 have no education. There is a need to encourage the informal sector to acquire educational qualifications in addition to vocational skills.

Table 6: Awareness of Regulatory Bodies by MES

Regulatory Bodies	Number	Percentage (%)
CAC	6,164,447	13.90
ConsumerProtectioncouncil	2,364,645	5.33
NAFDAC	10,512,491	23.71
StandardOrganizationofNigeria	3,575,065	8.06
FIRS	5,370,886	12.11
Nigeriancustom services	8,966,244	20.22
NigerianImmigrationServices	7,198,015	16.23
Others	194,744	0.44
Total	44,346,537	100.00

Source: NBS SMEDAN 2021 MSMEs Survey Report

The awareness of the regulatory bodies by the micro-enterprises in the informal sector reveals that the NAFDAC came first, followed by the Nigerian Customs Services, the Nigerian Immigration Services, the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC), the Federal Inland Revenue Service (FIRS), among others. It will be desirable if adequate publicity and public enlightenment programmes are put in place by the regulatory bodies in Nigeria.

Table 7: Distribution of Micro-Enterprises by Source of Capital

Source of Capital	2020	2017	2013
PersonalSaving	30,300,612	31,931,514	28,885,499
Loan	5,085,049	2,756,946	1,344,326
FamilySource	11,673,191	12,325,244	8,681,701
Cooperative	1,429,506	681,550	
Contribution	4,301,174	3,642,087	
Cooperative/Esusu			3,139,794
Grants	209,577	344,991	730,434
Others	332,138	452,346	872,930

Source: NBS SMEDAN 2021 MSMEs Survey Report

Capital is key to the growth and expansion of the MEs. Table 6 shows that in 2020, the majority of the micro-enterprises got capital from personal savings (30,300,612), followed by family sources, loans, contributions, and cooperatives among others. This means that the MEs rely mainly on informal sources of financing. The SMEs intervention of the government should be extended to cover the MEs in Nigeria.

5.1 Stylized Facts

5.1.1 Factors Influencing Female Entrepreneurship

Despite the growing number of female entrepreneurs, the share of female entrepreneurship is still significantly low when compared to their participation rate. For example, female entrepreneurs account for approximately 30 percent of the total number of entrepreneurs in the Western World, whereas more than 40 percent of employees are female. Thus, it is important to understand what factors may favor or hinder female entrepreneurship, such as the combination of social and economic responsibilities and the consequences of these specific barriers. Several variables are important in influencing the level of female entrepreneurship across countries.

i. Demographic Environment and Family Structure

In low-income countries, population growth is associated with higher levels of entrepreneurial activities for both men and women. Across genders, the increase in demand resulting from the growing population generates more entrepreneurial opportunities while, at the same time, competition for jobs is likely to push more people into necessary entrepreneurship. For women, in particular, the relatively high involvement in necessity entrepreneurship may indicate that self-employment is used as a way to circumvent institutional and cultural constraints with respect to female employment, as well as a way to provide supplemental family income.

It is surprising, for example, that more female entrepreneurship is found in low-income countries that traditionally have higher birth rates. One would expect the presence of more children to reduce women's ability to enter the labour force, whether through dependent work or self-employment as entrepreneurs. The law and customs of marriage also influence whether women will become entrepreneurs.

In addition to immediate family, both male and female entrepreneurs rely on social networks for access to resources within the community or industry. In many low-income countries, however, these networks operate quite differently for gender. Women in low-income countries often have significantly smaller networks and less geographical mobility than men. As a result, they construct relatively personal but strong networks that allow them to partially substitute personal network relations for formal contracts.

ii. Challenges of the Informal Sector

Despite the industry's significant economic contribution, environmental and developmental issues are prevalent. It ranges from financial, managerial, marketing, incentives, technological, training, lack of basic physical infrastructure, raw materials and many more (Balogun & Osagie, 2020; Balogun & Orukotan, 2019; Farinmade & Anyankora, 2012, Anyanwu, 2015, 2005).

In Nigeria, the informal sector has a lower level of labour organization as well as poor management and with lack of access to public benefits. The informal sector, which has the potential to play a significant role in the development of Nigeria, was neglected in favour of other sectors like the oil industry, health care, and many others.

According to the NBS – SMEDAN (2021), some of the challenges facing the informal sector in Nigeria include: inadequate access to finance, weak infrastructure, inadequate entrepreneurship vocational training, insufficient workspace, high fuel prices, higher taxes/multiple taxes, custom duties issues, demolition exercise by the government, high-interest rate, inconsistent government policies, lack of access to Research and Development (R&D), obsolete equipment among others.

The COVID-19 pandemic which was a public health crisis led to a serious economic crisis and affected the Nigerian economy negatively, especially the actors in the informal sector who should have helped revive the economy were not encouraged in their economic activities. To this, the informal sector will continue to leave behind a gap in Nigeria until it is given priority.

iii. Prospects of the Informal Sector

The prospects of Nigeria's informal economy in the short term are predicated on the following factors: employment generation, wealth creation, poverty reduction, and contribution to national GDP.

On employment generation, an estimate by the ILO (2018) shows that 93% of all employment in Nigeria is informal in which women predominated with 95% of the share as compared to 90% of men. Similarly, the United Nations (2020) reports that youth

unemployment surged from less than 15 percent in 2015 to above 35 percent in 2018, with more than half of the country's young people unemployed or underemployed. These statistics indicate that the informal economy is not only the largest employer of labour, but also provides a vent for surplus unemployed and underemployed Nigerian youths.

As regards **wealth creation and poverty reduction**, the informal economy has been a key player in that direction as demonstrated in China's experience where millions of rural farmers living in the interior of the country moved to the industrialised coastal cities (Elliot,2005), and the informal SMEs and vendors to overseas which resulted in large scale movement of the poor out of poverty.

In Nigeria, President Buhari promised that his administration would lift 10 million people out of poverty in the last two years (farmers, small-scale traders, artisans, market women, etc).

The MSME Survival Fund Initiative was put into place in the following ways to aid MSMEs in coping with the shocks brought on by the COVID-19 Pandemic: and to enable them to create employment and reduce poverty in Nigeria.

- i. Payroll Support Scheme disbursement to 460,000 beneficiaries of which 43% were female-owned businesses;
- ii. General MSME Grants disbursement to about 45,000 beneficiaries of which 35 % of female-owned businesses have benefited;
- iii. Transport and Artisan Grant disbursement to about 120,000 artisan and 200,000 transporters;
- iv. CAC Formalisation Scheme which provided free company registration for over 200,000 MSMEs;
- v. Establishment of an N15 billion MSME Guaranteed Offtake Stimulus Scheme (GOSS), to protect and sustain the income of vulnerable Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises by guaranteeing the offtake of their products.

Another source for optimism in the poverty reduction drive is provided by the revitalisation of agriculture, a renewed interest in solid mineral exploitation with a window for artisanal mining, and large-scale emigration of Nigerian workers overseas in search of higher wages, part of which are remitted back home. In revitalisation of agriculture, for instance, the fact that Nigeria's agricultural sector employs nearly 70% of the population coupled with the abundance of arable land and a favorable climate for the production of nuts, fruits, tubers,

and grains (International Trade Administration., 2021), is a source for optimism in wealth creation and poverty reduction.

The significance of the informal sector in Nigeria's economic growth and national development was officially recognised for the first time when accounted for an estimated 57.9% of the country's rebased GDP (Awojobi, Ayakpat, and Adisa, 2014). The GDP value rose from \$269.5 billion to \$510 billion (Eribake, 2015; Daka *et. al*, 2020). Micro, small and medium enterprises could play a catalytic role in the economic transformation of Nigeria.

The role includes the substantial contribution of the sector to the gross domestic product, employment generation, export, increasing local value addition, and technological advancement. Other measures advanced by the advocates of micro, small, and medium enterprises development in the country include:

- i. The low level of capital required in the establishment of the enterprises.
- ii. A large number of establishments and their labor-intensive modes of operation guarantee employment for a large number of persons (labour intensive).
- iii. Inventions, adaptations, and general technological development are common in these enterprises.
- iv. A more equitable distribution of income is usually achieved in this sector.
- v. Industrial diversification and a relatively more balanced regional development are assured.
- vi. The evolution of indigenous enterprise is common amongst these establishments.
- vii. General enhancement of the tempo of industrial development is visible among these enterprises.
- viii. Tendency among these enterprises to become feeders of large-scale enterprises and service products made by the latter.

5.1.2 Prospects of the Women Entrepreneurs

Women entrepreneurs' participation in economic activities is essential as an indicator of a society's stage of development and *therefore* imperative for government to consider women's social, economic, and political activities in policy decisions. Women

entrepreneurs make essential contributions to every economy and they have collectively contributed to national development:

There are opportunities for women to run informal businesses, including better pay, more autonomy, and greater flexibility, especially for home-based jobs for women that juggle work and childcare (Kasseeah and Tandrayen-Ragoobur, 2014). Thus, it is seen that women adopt entrepreneurial values and take an active role in economic transactions. The development of biotechnology and environmentally friendly technology has given women more business opportunities. They are establishing businesses that use IT, as well as the ones in event management, tourism, telecommunication, plastics, mineral water, herbal and health care, food, fruits, and vegetable processing, and sector (PradnyaChitrao, 2020).

According to Mayoux (2001), the development of women's enterprises contributes to the following: economic growth, poverty alleviation, employment creation, and economic, social, and political empowerment.

The roles that women entrepreneurs play in a developing country like Nigeria can be summarized as follows:

- i. Employment generation
- ii. Increased productivity through innovation.
- iii. Transfer/adaptation of technology
- iv. Food production and processing
- v. Food preservation and storage
- vi. Raw materials processing
- vii. Increased resource utilization
- viii. Re-invigoration of large-scale enterprises
- ix. Economic dynamism that enables the economy to adjust successfully to a rapidly changing global economy
- x. Wealth creation and poverty reduction
- xi. Local and cross-border trade help to boost the economy

5.1.3 Challenges Faced by the Women Entrepreneurs

Entrepreneurs are inherently marked with some qualities to make them stand out from the crowd and overcome the challenges that are evolving. The issue of gender bias in urban areas is usually a less severe factor to prospective female entrepreneurs than it is in rural areas, with their self-esteem and managerial skills being higher when compared to rural women and access to external financial resources being more accessible than in rural areas (Ezeibe, Diogu, Eze, Chiaha&Nwokenna, 2013).

Women entrepreneurs encounter a variety of obstacles, such as barriers based on gender when registering their businesses. Legal restrictions on women starting firms in their names do play a role in some of these cases, but social norms, gendered discrimination, and official harassment are what prevent women from acting as independent business owners more frequently. Additionally, they frequently lack knowledge of business registration procedures as well as the abilities and know-how to deal with these operations (Hearle, Baden, and Kalsi, 2019).

Furthermore, women's access to capital is hampered by unconscious bias and structural exclusion from business networks (Hearle, Baden, and Kalsi 2019). As a result, women may become more reliant on informal sources of finance, making them vulnerable to further changes in payback conditions. Bribes and other unofficial payments hurt women entrepreneurs more than male ones, and women entrepreneurs view corruption as a very serious barrier to doing business (Evert-janQuak and Iana Barenboim, 2022). The following are some of the challenges that women entrepreneurs face in general.

a) Family structure

The United Nations Declaration of 1948 defines a family as a fundamental group unit of society that is entitled to protection by society and the state. Linehan and Walsh (2011), reported that career success was still founded upon the male career model that largely ignores the impact of marriage, household duties, pregnancy, and children. When individuals take time off their careers for family reasons, they are perceived as lacking the necessary commitment needed to advance. Windsor and Auyeung (2006) further reiterated

that motherhood is synonymous with a slowing, even halting, of career progression specifically in audit firms.

A survey done by the upward mobility of Women Special Committee in 1988, provides a different perspective as to how family and marriage affect career progression. It identifies that as more women enter the accounting profession, the possibility of emotional involvement among co-workers causes more friction in an organization and/or also marriages requiring one party to leave the organization which in many cases would be the woman. Women, therefore, forfeit the opportunity to rise on the corporate ladder as they are forced to exit prematurely. Most women normally encounter family as a barrier and motherhood and find it difficult to balance family commitment with job demands. Where work conflicts with family, they prefer to opt-out or even take career breaks. One study showed that as many as 37% of high-level women executives had taken a break during their careers as compared to 24% of men. When asked about what was the major reason, 44% of women identified caring for children and parents as a significant factor while only 12% of men did so (Hewlett and Luce 2005).

Ukuta et al (2013) study concludes that the gender of an individual does not affect the technical competencies of the auditors. The main driver of performance is the level of education and experience of the auditor. However, the family structures affect the productivity of auditors. Productivity is mainly seen as an issue for women who are married as it impacts their dedication to engagements.

b) Cultural factors

According to Stills (1994) cultural factors have emerged as the significant impediment to women's progress through the glass ceiling. She is of the view that a cultural dilemma arises whenever either a male or female enters a non-traditional area and needs a very concerted effort to overcome prejudices, stereotypes, and traditions. Maupin (2013), positions the cultural issue from a different perspective. She categorizes this from i) a person-centered perspective where the failure of women to reach the upper management positions is attributed to the woman herself. That is her upbringing, her personality, and her understanding of human nature. These female socialization practices discourage women from developing skills and personality traits that were akin to their success at top

management levels, especially in the accounting profession. ii) a situation-centered perspective where the organization is to blame for women not moving to the top. The lack of role models and aid programmes will help them succeed at the top. Ruderman et. al (1996) further assert that connected to culture, are gender bias and stereotyping. He is of the view that HR policies and processes are often biased against women. Women are stereotyped as communal, and passive whereas, men are considered as action-oriented and good at making decisions.

c) Stress

Women accountants are under greater stress than male accountants due to family and management pressures, prejudices, and the perception that for a woman to succeed, her performance must be way above that of a man (Zubaidah 2008). Schwanke (2013) is of the view that in many instances, women are normally candidates to take over crises and due to lack of a proper support network, they find these roles very stressful and, in many instances, they tend to leave these positions. When they leave, their departure is often attributed to poor stress management skills or unwillingness to commit to hard work.

Mac Lean (2013) identified that the most independent indicator of departure in audit firms was stress. Most of the stress resulted from workload, work-home conflict, and low expectations of advancement. Both women and men suffer the stress but the low expectations of advancement affect women causing them to leave.

d) Complacency

It is observed that many women in organizations, sit back and expect that their good results and high performance will translate into rewards. The problem is that women rarely advocate for themselves as this will not be aligned with society's expectations as they will be stereotyped as being aggressive and negative (Sandberg 2014). There is also the view that women are not always willing to take risks and they, therefore, avoid a role in functional areas. They are also not willing to look for new assignments and many of them prefer not to be mobile. Strongly linked to complacency is the lack of visibility. Society refers to women who are in highly visible roles and whose management approaches are more directive than collaborative as “the Iron maiden”. This tends to make most women shy away from leadership positions (Schmitt *et. al*, 2009).

e) Job demand

Zubaidah (2008) suggests that the nature of audit and consultancy which was predominantly the kind of work in audit firms is extremely labour intensive and therefore demanding. In addition to the demand, there was a lack of appreciation from supervisors, a lack of a clear role profile, the performance evaluation process is too rigid and there is a lack of transparency in performance reviews. This has caused many women auditors to leave the firms prematurely as it is difficult to combine this with domestic and caring responsibilities.

f) Lack of Networking and Social Barriers

Generally, that networking brings significant advantages to career progression and it can help individuals climb the corporate ladder as networking provides avenues for sharing personal successes. A study conducted by Cross (2006), however, revealed that there was a realization among the female managers that even though networking was considered critical, their male counterparts were eager and more willing to engage in networking activities which gave them increased levels of visibility among senior management.

Broughton and Miller (2009) identified networking as a challenge for many women. Networking structures which include 'old boys' networks are seen to increase ambiguity about advancement. These clubs are difficult for women to break into as women are often uncomfortable with networking in the social context of these settings and are also unable to commit extra time outside of working hours due to family commitments. They further observe that men are also not willing to let women into their social circles resulting in a poor support network around women at higher levels of leadership.

g) Stereotyping

There are particular attitudes associated with the female gender known as stereotypes. They affect the way people perceive the abilities of women and how they feel women should perform. Stereotypes are further encouraged when women are deemed unfit for a particular position of authority because of their gender, their responsibility for motherhood, and organizational policies about their welfare are not spelled out.

Furthermore, Lauer and Lauer (2004) described this stereotype in the “damsel in distress and white knight of folklore illustrating the longstanding notion that men are the independent and women are the dependent creatures”. Consequently, women may not occupy equal positions with men even in professions.

h) Pipeline Theory

Based on the pipeline theory (Wulson and Moyes, 1998), women enter the lower end of the pipeline in the accounting profession with the expectation of rising to the top but they are not able to emerge at the top of the 'pipeline'. Consequently, the women who have reached the top positions in professional practice are few and this condition may be traced to stereotyping in the workplace.

i) Work-Family Conflict

Work-family conflict has been found to exist as pressures from work and family roles are mutually exclusive (Twomey *et. al*, 2002). Therefore, a major concern for the majority of accounting professionals is work/life balance. Thus, the real and perceived responsibilities of women to home and family may prevent upward mobility in their careers. Perhaps, commitment to work may be impaired as they are responsible to their families. However, it is noted that some accounting firms are offering career breaks and part-time work and this trend will be useful to women who want to enjoy successful careers while raising a family. Some accounting firms are taking steps to provide more family-friendly work environments by introducing flexible and compressed work schedules to assist women.

6.0 The Role of Professional Women Accountants

An individual involved in the professional practice of accounting works in an accounting firm that renders services like auditing, tax management, forensic accounting, management consultancy, and other financial expert services to the public. It also includes one who has an accounting firm.

A professional accountant has acquired broad-based knowledge and skills of accounting practice, has been formally admitted into a recognized body with the formal charter, and made subject to rules of conduct that conform to the highest ideals of the expert protocol. A female Professional Accountant holds her position by statute and professional competence, a position secured and bordered by law. She has been found worthy in character and learning, a fit and proper person, to be entrusted with the liberty to operate at the commanding heights of the nation's economy. She recognizes that she has a social contract

with the wider society, yet she holds the confidence and trust of the people, borne out of her commitment to their highest good.

Practicing women accountants may be classified as elitist professionals who are expected to bring financial and emotional stability to their families. They train others to become career accountants as they hope to excel and progress steadily to the highest positions of management. Women in practicing accounting firms have superior technical skills and the ability to work hard alongside their male counterparts.

Professional Women Accountants are expected to be ethical in their profession and avoid violation of the ethics of their profession. Ethics is referred to as the accepted principle that upholds the practice of accounting. Professional Accountants need to be conscious of blackmail, avoid extortion of money and abuse of privileges.

The revised Code establishes a conceptual framework for all professional accountants to ensure compliance with the fundamental principles of ethics as follows: Integrity, Objectivity, Professional Competence, Due Care, Confidentiality, Professional Behaviour, Ethical leadership, Moral courage, and Maintaining personal and professional reputation.

According to the Global Leadership Bulletin (2015), there are 12 principles expected of a good leader which to me are required of Professional women Accountants to excel in their profession. These are:

- Honesty.
- Integrity.
- Promise-Keeping.
- Loyalty
- Fairness.
- Caring.
- Respect for others.
- Law Abiding.
- Commitment to Excellence.
- Leadership.
- Reputation and Morale.
- Accountability.

7.0 The Way Forward / Recommendations

From the foregoing, this paper recommends that:

- a) Generating more stable and better working conditions for workers in the informal sector; and, reducing the vulnerability of the poor in the informal sector through:
 - *Availability of Credit for the Informal Sector*

It has been noted that one of the government policy prescriptions for assisting women in the informal sector is to improve their access to credit. However, it has been observed that the subsidized credit is often 'hijacked' by the more prosperous sections of the formal sector instead of reaching the intended informal entrepreneurs.

- *Entrepreneurial Training/Capacity Building*

These should include training and capacity building. This implies that if training programmes are to be effective, they should be responding to real demand or need for training by the informal sector. SMEDAN needs to continue to assist the informal sector in this aspect.

- *Use of Appropriate Technology*

The issue of appropriate technology for the informal sector should be encouraged. Existing technologies can be adapted and new technologies could be introduced to improve the productivity and efficiency of the informal producers.

- *Improve Legal and Institutional Environment*

There are some ways in which government policies may discriminate against the informal sector. These include trade policies; tax policy; government regulations concerning land allocation, infrastructure development, industrial sites, and licensing requirements; and public spending patterns. The governments need to promote the informal sector by orienting the macroeconomic environment to become more favorable to the informal sector.

- *Social Infrastructure Development*

Policies should be aimed at, credit delivery (micro-loans) to the poor, low-level technical assistance, education (such as literacy), and other 'basic needs' requirements, which can improve basic nutrition, health, and housing of the poor especially those in the informal sector.

- *Physical Infrastructure*

The informal sector faces transport (road, power problems). This needs to be addressed for proper marketing of their products and to gain easy access to the markets and processing of products that requires electricity.

- b) To expand women's participation in decision-making in society, women's institutions in the community, markets, and trades must be acknowledged and exploited. It, therefore, makes economic sense to take into account gender biases and tailor planned interventions to improve women's ability to take advantage of incentives, thus enhancing overall economic efficiency.
- c) The constraints on women's access to land, credit, extension services, and inputs must be removed, and opportunities should be created for their enterprises. Adequately funded and staffed technical units should be established to support actions on behalf of women.
- d) To develop the country women's leadership must be developed. The informal sector is a medium of reducing unemployment in Nigeria and it should therefore be embraced in this task.
- e) Although the informal sector has its challenges especially for women, which revolves around the inaccessibility of credit to finance its activities, the women's role in the informal financial sector in Nigeria cannot be overemphasized. Governments must build partnerships with the emerging associations of women and women entrepreneurs to create an enabling policy environment. Making credit available to women at any time at affordable rates, with the private sector assisting government efforts to get credit to women.
- f) Capacity building and skill acquisition: Self-empowerment through reflection, education, training, and development for skills acquisition on computer operations including internet, public speaking, writing, human relations awareness, and economic independence should be encouraged among women entrepreneurs.
- g) Assistance with Business Development: Training, mentoring, and business accelerators are crucial components of non-financial forms of business development assistance. These promote enhanced entrepreneurial actions and outcomes by enhancing participants' understanding of their barriers and entrepreneurial potential.
- h) Reforms to the business environment: The personalized approach to business development support has limitations because women conduct their businesses in a business climate that does not always work for them. Simplifying business registration and licensing procedures; enhancing tax policies and administration; facilitating better access to finance; enhancing labour laws and administration, and streamlining and expediting access to commercial courts could assist in business

environment reform as suggested by the Donor Committee for Enterprise Development (Miles 2017).

- i) As more women participate in decision-making processes, issues relating to harassment and discrimination may become increasingly prominent, hence, should be addressed. Furthermore, the government should formulate a policy that will protect women entrepreneurs from the exploitation received from men in the informal sector.

Other Recommendations

- **Security of Lives and Prosperity:**
The operators in the informal sector need adequate security. The budget for security should be improved significantly to ensure that the security agencies have what it takes to fight crimes, violence, militancy, kidnapping, robbery, and eradicate insurgencies in Nigeria. The country should secure its borders and regulate the influx of foreigners to Nigeria.
- **Good Business and Economic Environment:**
The provision of a conducive business environment is important to the informal sector. The Government should revive all the ailing resource-generating sectors of the economy – agriculture, wholesale/retail trade, manufacturing, services, etc. These are the main economic sectors in the informal sector.
- **Availability of Data in the Informal Sector**
The National Bureau of Statistics should be adequately funded for data collation and dissemination in the informal sector for government interventions. There is a need for adequate data disaggregated by gender.
- **Enactment of Gender-Based Specific Laws**
There is every need to enact gender-specific laws to curb gender bias in the informal sector and in Nigeria at large. Women entrepreneurs will benefit a lot from gender-specific laws in Nigeria.
- **The Role of the Media**
The media should devise more effective awareness-raising programmes, especially at the grassroots concerning the activities of the informal sector to promote women entrepreneurs.

- **Functional Gender Violation Monitoring Agencies and Desks**

More gender monitoring agencies are to be established by the Nigerian Government, especially at the grassroots level for effective monitoring and reporting of gender rights violations against female entrepreneurs in Nigeria. In addition, the MDAs gender desks should be made functional and effective.

- Training agencies like SMEDAN, ITF, NDE, etc should target specific training and programmes to the business needs of the informal sector, especially the women entrepreneurs. These agencies can mentor women entrepreneurs to become successful in business and other careers most especially those in the informal sector.
- The Federal Ministry of Women Affairs (FMOWA) can assist to create new business networks for women entrepreneurs and get them affiliated with regional and international business networks to discuss business opportunities and market access.
- Nigerian Export Promotion Council (NEPC) and Nigerian Investment Promotion Council (NIPC) and SMEDAN to provide women entrepreneurs with information on market opportunities, especially export markets. A dedicated system for business support services for women entrepreneurs in the informal sector is required, The National Export Promotion Council (NEPC) need to assist the women entrepreneurs in capacity building, export of their products, and participating in international trade fairs to be exposed to, and share best practices on business enterprise development.

- **Human Capital Development**

The educational system needs to be restructured to produce the right graduates with the requisite skills for the economy. The NUC directive that all tertiary institutions should mount entrepreneurship studies for all the students and also establish centers for entrepreneurship development for skill acquisition will go a long way to help in this aspect (Anyanwu, 2015).

- Need for the government to reduce the cost of governance, curb corruption, eradicate multiple taxations, ensure consistent policies and pay priority to formalization of the informal sector.

8.0 Conclusion

The informal sector has a sizable impact on the expansion of the Nigerian economy. It is better placed to absorb unutilized resources that the formal sector is unwilling or unable to use. In terms of output and employment, the sector considerably contributes to the national economy, and the majority of those employed in the informal sector are women. Therefore, gender differences are a result of sector-affecting policies and changes.

Women make up the majority of the informal sector because employment in the sector is the source of employment that is most readily available to them and a vast majority of women are employed from their homes. Furthermore, men tend to be overrepresented in the top segment of the sector and women overpopulate the bottom segment. Through the provision of supportive legislation and environmental factors, the government must encourage and uplift women working in the informal sector.

The informal sector in Nigeria is here to stay, especially for women, thus it has to be maintained to contribute as much as possible to the country's economic growth and development. The issue is how to encourage employment, productivity, and income for the underprivileged and women who, unsurprisingly, dominate the informal sector.

In addition, these informal sector employees lack contemporary business skills, so frequent capacity-building training and skill acquisition programs are required. Additionally, they require unrestricted and condition-free credit access. In addition, informal sectors cannot be content with self-help and other coping strategies. With their diverse and widely dispersed businesses and residences, it is more challenging to attract much-needed assistance. To achieve this objective, workers must form groups and unions to engage the government and other development partners and bolster their capacity to negotiate, lobby, and influence public policy in their favour. SMEDAN has a lot to do to assist the informal sector to strive, grow and be able to be the engine of growth of the Nigerian economy.

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