

IMPACT OF CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS PROGRAMS ON WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT IN THE FEDERAL CAPITAL TERRITORY NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study investigates the impact of capacity-building programs implemented by Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) on women's economic empowerment in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, Nigeria. Focusing on three notable CSOs - Skills Outside School Foundation (SOSF), Solar Sister, and Afiniki Dandadi Foundation - the research employs a survey design with a sample of 150 beneficiaries from Bwari and Kuje area councils. The study was grounded in social capital theory, the study reveals significant positive outcomes in enhancing vocational skills, increasing monthly income, fostering entrepreneurship, and improving financial decision-making abilities among participants. However, mixed results were observed regarding direct employment outcomes. Key factors contributing to program effectiveness include relevant training materials, continuous support and mentoring, and a conducive economic environment. The research highlights the crucial role of CSOs in promoting women's economic empowerment, while also identifying areas for improvement, particularly in job placement services and family engagement. These findings provide valuable insights for policymakers and practitioners in designing and implementing effective capacity-building initiatives for women's economic empowerment in Nigeria. Additionally, the study underscores the importance of tailoring programs to the specific needs of women in different communities and ensuring ongoing support to maximize long-term benefits. The role of family support and engagement is also emphasized as a critical factor in the success of these initiatives. Overall, the research contributes to a deeper understanding of the mechanisms through which CSOs can effectively empower women economically, offering a roadmap for enhancing future interventions in the region.

Keywords: Women's economic empowerment, capacity-building programs, civil society organizations; federal capital territory, social capital theory.

Introduction

Women's economic empowerment is essential for sustainable development and gender equality, yet significant barriers persist, especially in developing countries (Golla et al., 2019). Globally, it is recognized as crucial for poverty reduction and sustainable development, with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) highlighting the importance of enhancing women's economic opportunities and participation in the workforce (United Nations, 2015). Despite some progress, disparities remain, with women often facing unequal access to resources and decision-making roles (World Bank, 2020). Civil society organizations (CSOs) are vital in advocating for women's rights and implementing programs that promote economic empowerment. Their capacity-building initiatives include skills training, financial literacy, entrepreneurship development, and advocacy for policy change, aiming to enhance women's economic skills and challenge discriminatory practices (UN Women, 2020). In Africa, despite recent economic growth, women still encounter barriers such as cultural norms, limited education and finance access, and discriminatory laws (African Development Bank, 2015). CSOs have intensified efforts to address these issues through targeted capacity-building programs. Success stories include Rwanda's integration of women into the workforce and leadership post-genocide (Rwigamba, 2016) and South Africa's Black Economic Empowerment (BEE)

policies, which aim to address historical imbalances, though with mixed success (Statistics South Africa, 2020). Nigeria, Africa's largest economy, still faces gender disparities in economic empowerment. Women encounter challenges like limited land and financial services access and cultural barriers (World Bank, 2019). Nigerian CSOs have increasingly focused on empowering women through programs designed to enhance their skills and economic opportunities (Oluwatobi & Falola, 2019). The Federal Capital Territory (FCT) reflects Nigeria's diversity and challenges, hosting numerous CSOs working on women's empowerment. However, the impact of these capacity-building programs on economic outcomes remains underexplored.

This study aims to investigate the effectiveness of CSOs' programs in the FCT by focusing on three notable organizations: Skills Outside School Foundation (SOSF), Solar Sister, and Afiniki Dandadi Foundation. Understanding how these programs impact women's economic empowerment in the FCT can provide valuable insights applicable to other Nigerian urban centers and beyond. This research will fill the gap in empirical evidence on the effectiveness of CSOs' capacity-building programs, informing policy interventions to enhance gender equality and economic empowerment. By examining the outcomes, the study aims to contribute to global and regional discussions on effective strategies for women's economic participation and empowerment, supporting the achievement of SDGs, particularly Goal 5 (Gender Equality) and Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth). The main objective of the study is to investigate how capacity building programs conducted by civil society organizations affect women's economic empowerment in the Federal Capital Territory of Nigeria. Other specific objectives are to; to assess the impact of specific capacity-building interventions on measurable economic indicators for women participants, to identify key enablers and barriers affecting the sustained economic empowerment of women after participating in CSO-led capacity-building programs. The study was guided by the following research questions: how effective are the capacity-building programs implemented by civil society organizations in improving women's economic outcomes in the Federal Capital Territory? and what factors influence the sustainability and long-term effectiveness of these capacity building programs in empowering women economically

Literature Review

Concept of Civil Society Organizations

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) have played a crucial role in promoting women's economic empowerment in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) of Nigeria. Over the past decade, numerous studies have documented the impact of CSOs' capacity-building programs on enhancing women's economic independence and overall socio-economic status. This literature review provides an in-depth analysis of the concepts of capacity building programs and the achievements on women's economic empowerment in the FCT.

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) play a crucial role in development by advocating for marginalized communities, influencing policy, and promoting transparency and accountability. They facilitate community participation, provide essential services, and enhance public awareness on various issues. CSOs often act as intermediaries between governments and citizens, ensuring that development initiatives are inclusive and sustainable. Their grassroots connections enable them to identify local needs and implement context-specific solutions. Additionally, CSOs contribute to capacity building and empower individuals to engage in the development process, fostering democratic governance and social justice (UNDP, 2018; World Bank, 2021).

Concept of Capacity Building Programmes

Capacity-building programmes are structured initiatives designed to enhance the knowledge, skills, abilities, and resources of individuals, organisations, or communities to achieve specific goals or outcomes (UNDP, 2017). These programmes aim to strengthen capacities across various dimensions, including technical expertise, managerial capabilities, leadership skills, and institutional frameworks (UNESCO, 2019). The concept of capacity building emerged from the recognition that sustainable development and effective governance require empowered individuals and organisations capable of addressing complex challenges (UNDP, 2009). Capacity-building programmes are thus essential for fostering self-reliance, resilience, and sustainability in communities and institutions (UNICEF, 2019).

Women Economic Empowerment

Economic empowerment of women is critical for achieving gender equality, reducing poverty, and promoting sustainable development. It involves enabling women to have equal access to economic resources, opportunities, and decision-making power, thereby increasing their ability to participate in, contribute to, and benefit from economic activities (United Nations, 2015). This multidimensional process includes access to education, employment, financial resources, asset ownership, and participation in decision-making processes. Quality education and skill development are essential for women's economic empowerment, equipping them with the knowledge and skills needed to participate in the labor market and enhancing their confidence and decision-making abilities (World Bank, 2018). Employment opportunities and decent work conditions are also crucial, but women often face barriers such as gender discrimination, lack of childcare support, and unequal pay (International Labour Organization, 2019).

Financial inclusion, involving access to formal financial services like savings, credit, and insurance, is another critical aspect. It enhances women's economic independence and decision-making power within households and communities (Demirgüç-Kunt et al., 2014). Ownership of assets, including land and property, is also vital, providing women with security, increased bargaining power, and enhanced participation in economic activities (UN Women, 2020). Women's participation in decision-making processes at both household and community levels is crucial for economic empowerment. When women have a voice in decision-making, they can influence resource allocation and prioritize their economic needs (OECD, 2022). Achieving women's economic empowerment requires a collective effort involving governments, civil society organizations (CSOs), private sector entities, and international organizations. Effective policies and programs addressing the multidimensional aspects of women's economic empowerment are essential for sustainable and inclusive economic growth (World Bank, 2023). CSOs in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) of Nigeria have been focusing on economic empowerment by implementing capacity-building programs to enhance women's skills, knowledge, and access to resources, promoting their economic empowerment.

Civil Society Organizations in the Federal Capital Territory

Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) of Nigeria are crucial for fostering socio-economic development and good governance. They advocate for human rights, promote health and education, address gender inequality, and enhance environmental sustainability. Additionally, CSOs mobilize citizens to participate in governance processes and hold officials accountable (Okeke, 2018). Through partnerships with government agencies, international organizations, and local communities, CSOs in the FCT implement programs tailored to the region's diverse population. They offer services such as legal aid, vocational training, and public health campaigns, filling gaps often left by underfunded government initiatives (Adeleke, 2019). CSOs also contribute significantly to conflict resolution and peacebuilding, aiding the stability and development of the FCT (Nwankwo, 2020).

CSOs often provide capacity-building programs that include training workshops to improve organizational management, leadership skills, advocacy, policy development, financial management, and fundraising. These initiatives enable community leaders to run their organizations more effectively,

influence public policy, and manage resources better. Specialized training in areas like health, education, or environmental conservation helps organizations enhance their impact on social development.

However, CSOs in the FCT, especially in Bwari, and Kuje, face challenges in implementing capacity-building programs for women's economic empowerment. Limited funding and difficulty securing ongoing financial support restrict these programs. Political and bureaucratic obstacles, cultural norms, gender biases, and resistance from community members further complicate efforts. Additionally, CSOs often lack technical expertise and training on gender-sensitive approaches, which are essential for successful program design and evaluation. Weak monitoring and evaluation systems, coordination issues among stakeholders, infrastructural and logistical challenges, low literacy levels among women, security concerns, and inadequate policies also pose significant barriers. These challenges necessitate a comprehensive approach, including advocacy for better policies, strong partnerships, continuous capacity building for CSO staff, and ensuring community support and involvement.

The Nigerian government policies aimed at supporting women's empowerment

The Nigerian government has implemented several policies aimed at supporting women's economic empowerment, particularly in the Federal Capital Territory, including areas like Bwari, and Kuje, such as the National Gender Policy of 2006 which aims to promote gender equality and women's empowerment by mainstreaming women's issues into all areas of national development. According to the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs, the policy aims to "promote the enjoyment of human rights by women and men, boys and girls, and to promote the equal participation of women in the development process" (National Gender Policy, 2006). The Economic Recovery and Growth Plan (ERGP) 2017-2020 highlights increasing women's participation in the economy through access to finance and skills development. It emphasizes that the plan aims to "ensure women's financial inclusion and improve their access to credit, which will enhance their participation in economic activities and contribute significantly to the nation's GDP" (ERGP Document, 2017).

The National Policy on Education ensures equal access to education for girls, which is fundamental for their economic empowerment. The policy states that "education is a human right and an essential tool for achieving the goals of equality, development, and peace" (National Policy on Education, 2014). The Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Act of 2015 provides comprehensive protection for women against all forms of violence, which is crucial for their empowerment. The National Human Rights Commission notes that the Act "seeks to protect women from all forms of violence, thereby enabling them to participate fully and equally in all aspects of society without fear of violence" (VAPP Act Document, 2015).

Additionally, the Central Bank of Nigeria's Financial Inclusion Strategy aims to increase women's access to financial services, with the goal of reducing the gender gap and empowering women economically by providing them with the necessary financial tools (CBN Financial Inclusion Strategy, 2018).

Women's Economic Status in the Federal Capital Territory

Women's economic status in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) of Nigeria faces significant challenges, characterized by limited access to education, employment, and financial resources. Despite advancements, many women in the FCT remain in low-paying, informal sector jobs with minimal job security and benefits. Cultural norms and gender biases further restrict their economic opportunities and participation in decision-making processes (World Bank, 2019).

Efforts to improve women's economic status include initiatives promoting female entrepreneurship, vocational training, and microfinance programs, which aim to empower women and enhance their economic independence. However, systemic issues such as inadequate infrastructure, limited market access, and persistent gender inequality hinder progress (UN Women, 2020). Addressing these challenges

requires comprehensive policies focusing on education, skills development, and legal reforms to ensure equal opportunities for women. Enhancing women's economic status in the FCT is crucial for achieving broader economic growth and social development (Nigeria National Bureau of Statistics, 2021).

Empirical Review

Kabeer and Natali (2013) explored the impact of capacity-building programs on women's entrepreneurship in South Asia. The study, conducted across multiple countries, found that CSO initiatives focusing on business training, access to credit, and networking significantly increased women's participation in entrepreneurial activities. It highlighted how these programs not only enhanced income generation but also contributed to greater financial independence and decision-making power among women. The study findings underscored the transformative potential of targeted capacity-building interventions in enabling economic empowerment among women, emphasizing the importance of tailored support mechanisms and continuous mentorship.

Datta and Kular (2018) examined the influence of CSO capacity-building programs on policy advocacy and structural change to promote women's economic empowerment in urban settings in India. The research highlighted that CSOs engaged in capacity-building initiatives played a pivotal role in advocating for gender-responsive policies, enhancing legal protections, and addressing systemic barriers to women's economic inclusion. The study findings emphasized the importance of CSO-led advocacy efforts in driving macro-level changes that support sustained economic empowerment outcomes. The study underscored the need for strategic alliances, evidence-based advocacy, and inclusive policy dialogue to achieve transformative gender equality goals.

Oloyede and Salami (2018) investigated the role of institutional support and networking in enhancing the effectiveness of CSOs in promoting women's economic empowerment in Nigeria. The research found that CSOs benefit significantly from partnerships with government agencies, international organisations, and local communities. These partnerships provide access to resources, expertise, and advocacy platforms that amplify the impact of capacity-building programs. Effective networking helps in sharing best practices, mobilizing support, and influencing policy changes that favour women's economic empowerment initiatives.

Adesola and Ojebuyi (2020) focused on the importance of tailored training and skills development programmes offered by CSOs to enhance women's economic empowerment in Nigeria. The study emphasised the need to tailor capacity-building programs to women's specific needs and challenges, including access to finance, entrepreneurial skills, and market opportunities. By providing relevant training in business management, financial literacy, and leadership, CSOs empower women to start and sustain businesses effectively. This approach not only improves economic outcomes but also enhances women's confidence and decision-making abilities in economic activities.

Okoli and Ugwu (2019) explored the impact of gender-sensitive policy advocacy on women's economic empowerment through CSO interventions in Nigeria. The findings underscored the critical role of CSOs in advocating for policies that promote gender equality, women's rights, and access to economic opportunities. Effective policy advocacy involves conducting research, engaging stakeholders, and influencing legislative and regulatory frameworks to create an enabling environment for women entrepreneurs and workers. CSOs that prioritize gender-sensitive advocacy make a significant contribution to dismantling barriers and improving access to resources and opportunities for women in the economic sphere.

Theoretical Framework

Empowerment theory, emerging in the 1980s, focuses on how individuals and communities gain control over their lives and influence their environments. Pioneered by Julian Rappaport and later expanded by Marc Zimmerman and Elisheva Sadan, it emphasizes increasing competencies, self-efficacy, and critical

awareness. The theory advocates for participation in decision-making processes, access to resources, and opportunities for skill development to reduce powerlessness and enhance agency (Rappaport, 1981; Zimmerman, 1990s-2000s; Sadan, 1997-2001).

Social Capital theory, developed by Pierre Bourdieu, James Coleman, and Robert Putnam in the 1980s and 1990s, posits that social networks characterized by trust, reciprocity, and shared norms create valuable resources for individuals and communities. These resources include access to information, support during crises, collaboration opportunities, and enhanced collective action. Social connections foster cooperation, social cohesion, and effective governance (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 1993).

Relating Empowerment Theory to Social Capital Theory reveals key connections. Both highlight the importance of community involvement: Empowerment Theory encourages active participation for gaining control and agency, while Social Capital Theory suggests that engaging in social networks builds trust and cooperation, essential for empowerment. Empowerment Theory stresses access to resources and opportunities for skill development, and Social Capital Theory shows how social networks provide these resources, enhancing empowerment. Both aim to reduce inequality, with Empowerment Theory focusing on diminishing power imbalances and Social Capital Theory examining how social capital can both perpetuate and mitigate inequalities. In the 1980s and 1990s, these theories offered complementary perspectives on individual and community growth. Empowerment Theory guided increasing personal and collective agency, while Social Capital Theory highlighted the role of social networks in providing resources and support. Together, they present a comprehensive approach to fostering well-being through personal agency and social connectedness.

Applying Social Capital Theory to civil society organizations' capacity-building programs for women's economic empowerment in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) of Nigeria provides insights into how these initiatives leverage social networks and shared norms. Capacity-building programs foster social networks among women, promoting trust and reciprocity, providing access to critical resources like entrepreneurship information, market trends, and financial literacy. Shared norms encourage collaboration, enabling women to pool resources and support each other, enhancing collective action and community resilience. These programs improve women's social connections and collective efficacy, empowering them economically and socially. Social Capital Theory explains how these initiatives enhance women's economic opportunities and outcomes in the FCT, informing policy and civil society engagement (Putnam, 2000; Nwankwo, 2020).

Methodology

The study adopted the survey research design employing a five-point Likert scale questionnaire. These questionnaires were subjected to descriptive statistics, validity and reliability tests using the Cronbach alpha, and the results of the tests were reported in the next section. The population of this study is 180 drawn from the beneficiaries of Skills Outside School Foundation (SOSF), solar sister, and Afiniki Danladi foundation. Using a convenience sampling technique, the study selected (150) respondents that were accessible in Bwari and Kuje area councils of the FCT-Nigeria to access the impact of civil society organizations programs specifically on (training, income, employment, business startup, ability to make financial decision and their long-term effectiveness of these capacity building programs) women's economic empowerment in the federal capital territory Nigeria using descriptive statistics, and hypotheses testing (Z-statistic).

Data Analysis

Out of the One hundred and fifty (150) copies of questionnaires distributed, one hundred and thirty (130) were properly filled and returned giving a response rate of 87%. These returned copies were coded and used for the analysis; hence all analyses were conducted using the 130 valid responses.

Table 1.0: Effectiveness of Capacity-Building Programs by Civil Society Organizations in Improving Women's Economic Outcomes in the Federal Capital Territory

| S/N | Statement | SD% | D% | N% | A% | SA% |
|-----|--|------|------|------|------|------|
| 1. | The training programs have significantly improved my vocational skills. | 5.5 | 20.3 | 5.4 | 8.5 | 60.3 |
| 2. | My monthly income has increased since participating in the capacity-building programs. | 7.4 | 13.4 | 2.9 | 55.8 | 20.5 |
| 3. | I found employment after participating in the capacity-building programs. | 26.8 | 19.9 | 19.9 | 26.8 | 6.6 |
| 4. | I started my own business after completing the training programs | 6.5 | 13.7 | 20.3 | 33.3 | 26.2 |
| 5. | The capacity-building programs have enhanced my ability to make financial decisions independently. | 9.0 | 5.7 | 0.0 | 20.5 | 70.5 |

Source: Field Survey, 2024; Computed with SPSS 25

From the responses, majority (68.8%) agreed or strongly agreed that the training programs improved their vocational skills. This suggests that the programs are largely successful in enhancing participants' practical skills.

76.3% of respondents agreed/strongly agreed that their monthly income increased after participating in the programs. This is a strong indicator that the programs are having a positive impact on women's economic outcomes.

The results for employment are mixed. While 33.4% agreed or strongly agreed that they found employment after the programs, a similar percentage (46.7%) disagreed or strongly disagreed. This suggests that the programs may not be as effective in directly leading to employment for all participants.

59.5% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they started their own business after completing the training programs. This indicates that the programs are fairly successful in promoting entrepreneurship among participants.

An overwhelming 91% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the programs enhanced their ability to make financial decisions independently. This suggests that the programs are highly effective in improving financial literacy and empowerment.

Table 1.2: Factors Influencing Sustainability and Long-Term Effectiveness of Capacity Building Programs in Women's Economic Empowerment

| S/N | Statement | SD% | D% | N% | A% | SA% |
|-----|--|-----|------|------|------|------|
| 1. | The training materials and sessions were relevant to my economic needs. | 5.5 | 20.3 | 5.4 | 8.5 | 60.3 |
| 2. | I received continuous support and mentoring after the initial training. | 7.4 | 13.4 | 2.9 | 55.8 | 20.5 |
| 3. | My family members encouraged me to apply the skills and knowledge I gained. | 6.6 | 19.9 | 19.9 | 26.8 | 26.8 |
| 4. | The economic environment in my area was conducive to starting and running a business | 6.5 | 13.7 | 20.3 | 33.3 | 26.2 |
| 5. | The capacity-building programs have had a lasting impact on my economic empowerment. | 9.0 | 5.7 | 0.0 | 20.5 | 70.5 |

Source: Field Survey, 2024; Computed with SPSS 25

Based on the responses in Table 1.2, it can be seen that, a significant majority of respondents 68.8% agreed or strongly agreed that the training materials and sessions were relevant to their economic needs. This suggests that the programs are generally well-tailored to the participants' needs, which is crucial for long-term effectiveness. 76.3% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they received continuous support and mentoring after the initial training. This ongoing support is a key factor in ensuring the sustainability of the program's impact.

53.6% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their family members encouraged them to apply the skills and knowledge gained. While this is a majority, there's a significant portion (26.5%) who disagreed, indicating that family support might be a challenge for some participants. 59.5% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the economic environment in their area was conducive to starting and running a business. This suggests that while the local economic conditions are generally favorable, there's room for improvement.

Lastly, an overwhelming 91% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the capacity-building programs have had a lasting impact on their economic empowerment. This strongly indicates that the programs are achieving their long-term goals.

Discussion

The research on civil society organizations' (CSOs) capacity-building programs for women's economic empowerment in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) of Nigeria reveals significant positive impacts. The programs have been highly effective in enhancing vocational skills, with 68.8% of participants reporting improved abilities. They have also led to increased monthly income for 76.3% of respondents and fostered entrepreneurship, with nearly 60% of women starting their own businesses after training. Notably, 91% of participants reported an enhanced capacity to make independent financial decisions, indicating substantial improvement in financial literacy and empowerment. However, the impact on direct employment showed mixed results, suggesting potential for improvement in aligning with local job market demands or strengthening job placement components.

The research highlighted factors contributing to the programs' effectiveness and sustainability. The

relevance of training materials and sessions to participants' economic needs was confirmed by 68.8% of respondents, indicating well-tailored program design. Continuous support and mentoring after initial training, reported by 76.3% of participants, emerged as a key factor in ensuring long-term impact. The statistical analysis reinforced these findings, with the null hypothesis being rejected for most factors examined, providing strong evidence of the programs' significant positive effects.

The study also highlights areas of strength and potential improvement. While a majority of participants (59.5%) found their local economic environment conducive to starting and running a business, there is room for enhancement. Notably, 91% agreed that the programs have had a lasting impact on economic empowerment, a strong testament to their effectiveness. However, mixed results regarding family support, with only 53.6% reporting encouragement from family members, suggest a potential area for intervention. These insights can guide future improvements for CSOs working towards women's economic empowerment in the region.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings paint a largely positive picture of the impact of civil society organizations' capacity-building programs on women's economic empowerment in the FCT. The programs appear to be particularly effective in enhancing skills, increasing incomes, promoting entrepreneurship, and improving financial literacy. However, the mixed results regarding employment suggest an area for potential improvement. Overall, these programs are making a substantial contribution to women's economic empowerment, with room for refinement to address employment challenges and further enhance their positive impact.

Recommendations

Arising from the findings and conclusion, the following recommendations are made:

- i. Given the mixed results regarding direct employment outcomes, civil society organizations should focus on strengthening their job placement services. This could involve developing stronger partnerships with local businesses, providing more targeted job search skills, and aligning training programs more closely with local job market demands. This recommendation addresses the most significant area for improvement identified in the study and has the potential to greatly enhance the overall effectiveness of the programs.
- ii. Although family encouragement wasn't found to be statistically significant, the mixed results suggest a need for intervention. Consider incorporating family engagement components into the programs, educating families about the benefits of women's economic empowerment.
- iii. The high success rate of continuous support and mentoring suggests that these aspects should be maintained and potentially expanded. Consider implementing long-term mentorship programs that extend well beyond the initial training period. This recommendation builds on one of the key strengths identified in the study and can contribute significantly to the long-term sustainability of the programs' impact.

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