

Constituency Projects Empowerment Programme and Women Entrepreneurial Development in Jos- north/Bassa Federal Constituency, Plateau State, Nigeria.

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Abstract

This paper assesses the relationship between constituency projects empowerment programme and the advancement of women's entrepreneurial endeavours in Jos-north/ Bassa federal constituency. The study explores how constituency projects, designed to uplift communities through infrastructure development and socio-economic empowerment, have become pivotal in fostering the growth of women-led businesses. The study adopts a qualitative research design using two FGDs comprising eight diverse participants each, six key informant interviews with two women leaders, two legislative aids, and representatives of CSOs from the two local government areas (Jos-north and Bassa). In addition, two representatives from federal agencies and the representative of the constituency at the National Assembly were also interviewed in Abuja. The paper is premised on identity empowerment theory, which is used as an integrated frame of reference regarding women and empowerment. Ultimately, the paper found that although constituency projects are controversial, the empowerment programmes on the other hand, are novel and have enhanced entrepreneurial development of women in Jos-north and Bassa federal constituencies, by lessening the stress of household duties through access to infrastructure and necessary services that empower them. It advocates for targeted interventions, policy reforms, and institutional mechanisms that prioritize women's participation and amplify their contributions to the country's economic growth and development agenda.

Keywords: Constituency projects, Empowerment programmes, Women, Women empowerment, Women entrepreneurship development.

Introduction

In 1999, Nigerians experienced the transfer of power from the military to civilian administration. By this experience, there was a general expectation that

opportunity has come for democracy to provide the much-needed representation for Nigerians, especially the women, to be closer to the government and be empowered. Even though, Nigeria's presidential system like that of the United States is characterized by the principle of separation of power and checks and balances, between and among the three arms of government; namely the legislative branch which makes laws, the executive branch that executes policies, and the judiciary which interprets the constitution and other laws of the land.

However, despite the provisions of the 1999 Constitution (as amended), the legislature in Nigeria has in addition to its constitutional responsibilities (law making and oversight), are seen to meddle into the domain of the executive branch, through the instrument of constituency projects (CPs) also known as Zonal Intervention Projects (ZIP). Often, this has led to tension between the executive and legislature in the country. Constituency projects are 'earmarks' or 'pork-barrel' legislation as known in the US (Tsubura, 2013:1), and the other variant of it comes in the form of Constituency Development Funds (CDFs) which is practiced in places like; Malaysia, Jamaica, Kenya, Malawi, Sudan, Uganda, the Philippines, Tanzania etc. (Baskin, 2010; Murray, 2011; Ngacho & Das, 2014; Zyl, 2010). Hence, constituency projects in whichever way it is being seen or viewed have become synonymous with development in developing societies, particularly in the rural communities, where priorities of development are in the areas of education, health care, roads, water, agriculture, entrepreneurship and other vital infrastructure.

In Nigeria Constituency projects revolves around education, health care, roads, water, rural electricity, agriculture, financial grants, entrepreneurship and other vital infrastructure, implemented to uplift the standard of living of the citizens. However, constituency projects fussy legal framework and poor institutionalized structures have enabled Members of Parliament (MP's) excessive control of CPs process by including it in the federal budget to execute same in their various constituencies across the country (Omorotionwan, 2010; Olugbenga, 2015; Tsubura, 2013). Hence, it is argued that legislators tinkering with the budget (padding) to insert constituency projects makes it hard to discern the exact meaning of the term constituency project. However, it is used here to mean a project in any community that is nominated into a budget by a particular legislator. Any other project articulated by an agency or ministry for the community without the legislator's involvement is therefore not a constituency project but an executive project.

However, despite their novelty CPs have faced some forms of controversies, including their legality, structure, poor execution, the corruption involved, its failure rates and even their efficiency as a form of government public service deliveries (Idoro & Patunola-Ajayi, 2009; Sam *et al.*, 2017). This notwithstanding, Members of Parliament have through CPs' been able to provide opportunities to people especially women with financial support, entrepreneurial training and access to networking platform, helping to create a means of livelihood and sustenance. Thus, this research attempts to examine not the issues anchored on corruption by the MP's, being a key debate, but on how CPs' have been able to support the local women in Jos-north/Bassa Federal Constituency through empowerment projects in the form of entrepreneurial support aimed at uplifting their standard of living and that of their families.

Conceptual Clarification & Literature Review

Constituency project

A constituency is a group of people or a region that an elected official represents. A community is represented in a national, state, or municipal assembly by a representative chosen by their voters. A constituency is an area that has been carved out for electoral purposes and from which a legislative member is chosen to serve in a parliament; in other words, it is a government electoral district (Benjamin, 2014). The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (as amended) provides for a legal backing, which delineate the country into constituencies. According to Section 71 of the Constitution, the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) must draw three districts for each state in the Federation in order to elect senators, making a total of 109 districts nationwide (www.nationalassembly.gov.ng). In addition, INEC is required by Section 49 of the Constitution to further split the nation into 360 federal constituencies to hold elections for the House of Representatives (1999 Constitution of Nigeria; Benjamin, 2014), with the population index being the primary determining criterion.

By supplying local infrastructure to all electoral seats, CPs are a creative approach to resource redistribution to achieve uniform development (Ngacho & Das, 2014; Udefuna *et al.* 2013). Others refer to it as fiscal decentralisation, when the federal government disburses legislated funds to the general public after collecting them (Gathoni & Ngugi, 2016; Smoke, 2015). Whatever the case, in many developing nations, in recent years, governments have turned their attention to CPs (Fjeldstad, 2001; Zyl, 2011; Barkan & Mattes, 2013; Baskin *et al.* 2010). In order

to eradicate poverty, distribute resources, and encourage public participation, constituency projects (CPs) are utilised for local public utilities, such as constructing public restrooms, fixing drainages, grading roads, remodelling of school buildings, water projects, vocational training and cash grants for businesses (Harris & Posner, 2013), aimed at eradicating poverty, distributing resources, and promoting public participation. A number of nations have recently adopted CPs in one way or another, including Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Zambia, Southern Sudan, Zimbabwe, Nepal, Bangladesh, Ghana, India, Jamaica, Malawi, Nigeria, the Philippines, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, and the Solomon Islands (Zyl, 2010; Murray, 2011; Tsubura, 2013; Ngacho & Das, 2014). Nonetheless, a variation of the CDF is referred to as the "pork barrel" in the United States of America (US) (Baskin, 2010; CID, 2009; IBP, 2010; Zyl, 2011).

i. Empowerment

Empowerment is a concept commonly found across many disciplines and sectors and understood differently (Elson 2003; Cornwall, 2016; Mikkola, 2005). Thus, Wahid *et al.*, (2017) submit that the term empowerment is vague and disputed; it encompasses both the ability of a person or group to accomplish goals for both themselves and other people, as well as control over others. However, one of the tenets of community development is empowerment. It is a process that helps people take charge of their life and develop self-assurance, fortitude, and vision in order to change both their own and other people's lives (Njagi *et al.*, 2019). However, Acharya sees enhancing disadvantaged people's ability to change their personal, collective, and communal circumstances as the goal of empowerment (2018). Empowerment can also be seen as the strategy of increasing disadvantaged people's ability to influence state institutions that impact their lives by enabling their role in the decision-making that empowers them to participate successfully in economic activity (World Bank 2001). It is not a new idea that improving associational life may strengthen communities. Hence, Paulo Freire's concepts of organising the "oppressed" (Freire 2000, p. 31) to enable people to take care of their own destiny, cooperative movements, and the Gandhian concept of village self-reliance gained popularity in many regions of the world after World War II (Acharya, 2018 as cited in Platteau, 2004). Therefore, it is becoming more widely accepted that the empowerment of the poor is a necessary component of participatory development techniques and a requirement for development aid (Mansuri & Rao, 2004). But, according to Wahid *et al.*, (2017), empowerment can also enable policies that give those in positions of power a disproportionate amount of influence over the marginalised. Speer *et al.*, further

argues that empowerment needs to be purposeful, as an ongoing process that requires the community to inculcate reciprocal respect, empathy, group action, critical reflection, and action. They further add that, where the above is the case, individuals' chances who possess a smaller portion of the resources is improved (2001).

ii. Empowerment Programmes

Empowerment programmes are schemes in the form of skill acquisition, trainings, and grants that are a dominant feature of the constituency projects by members of the National Assembly. Unarguably, these projects have the potential to create wealth and economic development across the country. Often these projects aimed at empowering people are intangible and often help a select few, not the general mass (Tracka, 2023). These projects also called soft projects may include of delivery of products and items, payment of monetary awards, and events for vocational or capacity training. In part to their nature, legislators have used them over time as a way to reward allies and party faithful. These initiatives frequently have unsustainable long-term effects that are difficult to quantify (ibid). It is also argued that these initiatives' mid- to long-term effects are hard to quantify or assess, because of this, the outcomes are described as unclear (Dataphyte, 2021). Furthermore, it is challenging to track and evaluate the influence of those soft initiatives among the politicians' constituents, which undermines the goal of the CPs and detracts from grassroots investments (ibid).

iii. Women's Economic Empowerment

The process of transforming women's lives from one in which gendered restrictions have limited their power to one in which they have equal power with men is known as women's empowerment. In support of this perspective, Chamber (2003) notes that empowerment is acceptable depending on who is empowered and how they use their newfound influence. Women's empowerment and economic empowerment have been linked; hence, women's empowerment should encompass not just their ability to earn a living but also their capacity to make independent decisions and act on those decisions (Njagi *et al.*, 2019). The 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, especially Goal 1 on eliminating poverty, Goal 5 on achieving gender equality, and Goal 8 on promoting full and productive employment and decent work for everyone, depend heavily on women's empowerment and narrowing gender disparities. The economic, social, personal, and political empowerment of women is intertwined; advancement in one area of a woman's life cannot be sustained in isolation from advancements in the other.

The ability of women to engage in, contribute to, and profit from growth processes is referred to as Women Economic Empowerment (WEE) (OECD, 2012). According to the Oxfam's Conceptual Framework on Women's Economic Empowerment (2017), WEE promotes women's empowerment by emphasising their capacity to get access to and control over productive resources and to be acknowledged as fully engaged economic players. According to Omollo (2014), a woman is therefore considered economically empowered if and when she has a source of income, can work towards her goals, is educated, has access to credit, and can make small or large purchases on her own (i.e., has economic security). She also has the freedom to own and control property, homes, and animals (i.e., she has assets). It has been determined that empowerment is a useful strategy for improving women's access to finance, information, and technology as well as their inclusion in the creation of institutions and capacity building (Van den Bold *et al.*, 2013).

iv. Women's Entrepreneurship

To understand the concept of entrepreneurship one will require a grasp of who is an entrepreneur. An entrepreneur is someone who constantly seeks out change, adapts to it, and seizes the chance it presents (Drucker, 2002). Entrepreneurship is a discipline (Crocì, 2016). In the 21st century, with the global recession driving most of the world's economic activity, Schumpeter (2003) described an entrepreneur as a person who innovates novel combinations of means of production that create equilibrium or believes that nothing should be left to chance in the growth of entrepreneurship. However, Hessels and Naude (2019) defined entrepreneurship as the nexus between development economics and entrepreneurship. He emphasised the value of knowledge and skills as the fundamental entrepreneurial traits that will foster innovation. This is demonstrated by its ability to generate innovative concepts, turn those concepts into profitable and sustainable endeavours, develop game-changing procedures, and provide abundant job chances for the hordes of young people around the globe (Gelaidan & Abdullateef, 2017; Ossai & Nwalado, 2012), most especially women from the grassroots. It is argued that given the necessary policies to support their entrepreneurial activities, it is projected that women entrepreneurs would perform better since they are inventive (Aliyu *et al.*, 2019).

Theoretical Framework

Identity Empowerment Theory guides the study's analysis. Hall (1991) has presented an identity empowerment theory which is a clinical sociological one

that has been built on documented patterns and predictabilities in interpersonal, family and group behaviour. It is used as an integrated frame of reference regarding women and empowerment. The theory is grounded on the assumption that empowered women make meaningful commitments and undertake effective, goal-oriented activities that they choose for themselves; can understand the strengths and weakness of their personal and collective past and present; and can cope with conflict in their relationships. The theory suggests that women's understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of their personal and collective past and present will increase their sense of purpose and direction for the future. Through examination of their values, women become better able to consciously determine life time goals in their own interests. This theory is applicable to this study as women become aware of the problems they face and, in a bid, address them; they commit themselves to undertaking activities with the main aim of generating income. The women choose to make changes in their lives so that they can accomplish dramatic shifts in their life course (Mwangi, 2005)

Women Entrepreneurial Development in Nigeria

Globally, women are integral to the social, political, and economic life of every country. In both developed and developing countries across the world, female entrepreneurs boost the economy and generate new employment (Federal Ministry of Women Affairs & Social Development, 2006). In general, Akinbami and Aransiola (2016) have argued that women's contributions to national development were not acknowledged until the United Nations established the Decade for Women (1976–1985). This is not unrelated to the higher acceptance of democracy across the globe, which has enabled gender parity. Countries that are developing have increased their attempts to advance gender parity in order to safeguard women's rights as equal stakeholders in the process of development (Adebowale, 2012). Despite this, challenges remain for women entrepreneurs (Aina, 2003; Farrington, 2006; Mordi *et al.*, 2010), compared to the male entrepreneurs. However, their role in development cannot be ignored given their contributions to the socioeconomic spheres of their countries (Nkpoyen & Bassey, 2012). This is evident in developing countries including Nigeria, where consistent effort has been put in place to scale-up women support initiatives by the government at various levels. In the past, the Federal Government of Nigeria has implemented initiatives aimed mostly at women, providing them with access to financing facilities for their companies (Oluwatomipe *et al.*, 2015). Among these are the Family Support Programme (FSP), Better Life for Rural Women, and Family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP), which all seek to give

rural women and entrepreneurs access to financial facilities so they may enhance their quality of life (Abimbola *et al.*, 2007)

Thus, Akinbami and Aransiola (2016) go on to say that initiatives aimed at advancing the agenda of rural women entrepreneurship are where these efforts are most visible. Although Mordi *et al.*, (2010) have noted that this is not unrelated to the ways in which the structure and dynamics of families have changed, allowing women to assume more useful and productive roles in society. However, these positions are largely found in the informal economy, which is common in developing nations like Nigeria (Arum & Eze, 2022). The reason behind this is that women are frequently excluded from formal employment opportunities due to social and cultural barriers, lack of skills, and family responsibilities. As a result, the only way for them to earn a living is through the informal sector (Fapohunda, 2012). It is further asserted that the majority of Nigerian women entrepreneurs still rely on their spouses and themselves for their first financial investment (Oluwatomipe *et al.*, 2015). However, it is reported that despite these setbacks, women have played very active roles in numerous sectors of the nation's growth, according to Mordi. *et al.* (2010). The contribution of Nigerian women to food production has been steadily growing, accounting for over 50% of the country's food needs (Oluwatomipe *et al.*, 2015; Effiong, 2013; Asogwa *et al.*, 2020).

Leveraging Constituency Projects in Supporting Women's Economic Empowerment

Constituency projects are any initiatives that are planned, developed, or carried out within a legislative district with the assistance, input, or influence of the legislator(s) who represent that specific constituency in the legislature. However, the funding for these projects comes from either the federal or state budget (Olugbenga, 2015). It makes it possible for the numerous stakeholders to share limited resources of government equitably in an acceptable and agreed manner. The constituency initiative is a means of fostering a sense of community, and has led to the development of the rural areas including the cities. This has increased the presence of government in every constituency. Despite its benefits, CPs' have however been subjected to controversies, with debates bothering around its legality, legislative/executive feuds, legislators' dominance of the project or programme, corruption among others (Barkan & Mattes, 2013; CPTI, 2021; Kalu & Chikwe, 2017; Udefuna *et al.*, 2013).

Irrespective of its challenge, CPs novelty cannot be ignored. CPs are good things, given how they are able to support women through training and grant support to their businesses. Supporters of CPs have argued that CPs have direct bearing on the constituents, given their closeness to their representatives, who in-turn collate and present their problems to the federal government to be captured in the budget (Gbajabiamila, 2014; Barkan & Mattes, 2013). Although, CPs have in the past concentrated on capital projects, the shift away to human capital development in the form of empowerment programmes is most welcome. Accordingly, Baruwa (2024) notes that CPs are designed to address a range of community needs, such as infrastructure development, which includes building or renovating roads, bridges, schools, health facilities, water supply systems, electricity, and other social welfare programmes that may include initiatives to support healthcare, education, and poverty alleviation as well as empowerment programmes like youth and women empowerment schemes and skills acquisition training.

Without any doubt, these initiatives have the ability to boost the nation's economy and generate prosperity especially for the women. Some of these schemes directly target women's economic empowerment, such as skills training workshops, vocational training programs, microfinance schemes, and entrepreneurship development initiatives. Understanding the vital responsibilities that women play in socioeconomic development, CPs have chosen these initiatives aimed at empowering women to overcome the enduring obstacles that stand in the way of women's ambition to pursue entrepreneurial growth.

The National Assembly's report on constituency projects for the years 2019 to 2021 states that Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) projects received N10 billion in 2019, N18 billion in the 2020 budget, and N19 billion in the 2021 budget, out of the N100 billion budgeted as constituency projects annually (See Table 1). In addition, the amount allocated to the WEE project grew by 7% in 2021 and 66% in 2020. As such, the proportion of constituency projects to the women's constituency economic empowerment projects was 10.9%, 18.1%, and 19.4% for the budgets of 2019, 2020, and 2021, respectively. The federal government, through the National Assembly is becoming more committed to women's empowerment, as seen by the ongoing growth in WEE financing.

Table 1: Ratio of WEE Allocation for Constituency Projects between 2019-2021

| Year | Total value of CPs' | WEE Allocation | % of WEE to CPs |
|------|---------------------|----------------|-----------------|
| 2019 | 100,000,000,000 | 10,942,595,675 | 10.9% |
| 2020 | 100,000,000,000 | 18,129,856,331 | 18.1% |
| 2021 | 100,000,000,000 | 19,396,132,234 | 19.4% |

Source: Federal Government Approved and Revised Appropriation Acts, 2019, 2020 and 2021; PAWED, 2021.

Methodology

This research employs a qualitative case study approach, which prioritises a comprehensive analysis of the selected social unit and also considers its contextual background and functioning (Kothari, 2004). As a result, the qualitative data consist of the responses provided by the study population, as reflected in their narratives and words. The study population was arrived at purposely in the two local government areas involving participants knowledgeable about the study phenomenon from the constituency. Two FGDs, six key informant interviews with two women leaders, two legislative aids and representatives of CSOs from the two local government areas (Jos-north and Bassa) were conducted at different convenient locations between 20th to 23rd November 2023, in the constituency. According to Moore (2006), focus group discussions (FGDs) with participants should occur in an informal, comfortable environment that do not provide any risks. Additionally, two key officials representing the government (MDAs') from Border Communities Development Agency (BCDA) and Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency (SMEDAN) were also interviewed along with a member of the National Assembly representing the constituency between 27th to 29th November 2023, to provide insight on the institutional frame of the policy. In all, a snowball sampling was adopted for the total nine key informant interviewees and two FGDs that participated in the study.

Following the two in-depth interviews, with the representatives the two government agencies involved in CPs, the first focus group discussion (FGD) was held on the 1st of January 2024 in a secured location to get further details on the participants' real-life experiences with six males, and two women, for an hour and a half. The second FGD took place on the 2nd of January 2024 with eight participants comprised of 4 women representations various community groups and a male clergy, CSO representative, a Civil Defence staff and an Imam. The

choice of public holiday was deliberate as it allows access to participants easily. Morgan's (1997) example suggests that during fieldwork, in-depth interviews may occur prior to FGDs. The selection of the FGD participants, the setting, the location, the time, and the length of the FGDs all contributed to the learning that was attained since more knowledge improved comprehension of the research phenomenon. This was useful in generating conversations on certain subjects so that vital information about the phenomena being studied could be gathered from the participants' own experiences, providing the researcher with a comprehensive and collaborative image of the problem(s). Additionally, the sample was kept small due to paucity of funds and the fact that the study is an exploratory one. According to Welman *et al.*, (2005), for the results to be generalised, the sample chosen needs to be a true representative of the population.

Using Atlas.ti software, the interview data were transcribed and subjected to a thematic analysis. The opinions of the respondents about community involvement in CPs in the NDR were used to build and conceptualise a coding framework. The Atlas.ti software was used to create themes through an iterative process of consultation with the data, which took the form of quotes from the assigned codes and themes. This aided in accelerating the report's development. According to Saldana (2013), the coding procedure involved the use of both open coding and in-vivo coding approaches to provide descriptive and explanatory codes.

Findings and Discussion

The goals of the study were taken into consideration while analysing and presenting the participants' ideas and perspectives. The study discovered that CPs are projects that aimed to address lopsided development at the grassroots and they are facilitated by legislators. Although CPs are full of controversy, the findings agree that CP is a welcome development scheme which has helped women in the Bassa/Jos North Federal Constituency develop their entrepreneurial careers through the provision of infrastructure development initiatives, socioeconomic empowerment programmes, access to capital and skill-building opportunities, networking opportunities, and collaborations. According to Baskin *et al.* (2010) and Udefuna *et al.* (2013), constituency funds are financial resources designated for infrastructure projects within political constituencies, with allocations controlled by the legislators representing those communities. These findings agree with Harris and Posner (2013), that constituency projects (CPs) enable the provision of infrastructure like local public utilities such

establishing public bathrooms, repairing drainage systems, grading roads, remodelling school buildings, water projects, vocational training, and financial awards for enterprises. In the same vein, Nwankwo and Iwuala (2022) assert that in order to improve the socioeconomic and political landscape and raise residents' standards of life, infrastructure is essential.

A. Infrastructure Development Initiatives

Infrastructure provisions are at the core of CPs initiatives according to the findings. Although participants 2,4,5 and most of the FGD participants agree that 'infrastructure do not directly fall under the WEE, they do however agree that they have significant impact on women's empowerment and entrepreneurship. Nwankwo and Iwuala (2022) also agree that CPs are designed to reduce poverty, create or enhance existing infrastructure; as a result, the provision of these facilities and aid should genuinely and selflessly fulfil their stated purposes. These kinds of initiatives typically lessen the stress of household duties and increase women's access to necessary services, which indirectly empowers them (Civil Society Organisation, CSO)¹. Kimenyi (2005) states that the CP's are designed to combat poverty via local developmental initiatives, especially those that provide basic necessities like water, power, healthcare, security, and agricultural services. This was also emphasis by a community chief that: Improved access to good roads, electricity, and health care in the community has greatly enhanced our development most especially that women are now able to from their homes sell sachet water and enhance their tailoring businesses².

However, participant 4, who is a Legislative Assistant to the legislator representing Bassa/Jos North Federal Constituency argues that "infrastructure projects tend to gulf large portion of the CPs budget, impacting on what is left for WEE, often being insignificant to the overall funds, thus unable to make meaningful impact." Although this may not be completely disputed, the value of the infrastructural projects to the overall community's development cannot be disputed (Key informant, LA1)³. In his study, Kimenyi (2005) also confirmed that CPs is a tool used for assisting in the provision of services to communities that did not significantly benefit from government services for a long time.

¹ CSO

² Community Chief

³ Key informant (LA1)

B. Constituency Projects Empowerment

Constituency projects empowerment programmes enables access to resources such as skills training workshops, vocational training programs, microfinance schemes, and entrepreneurship development initiatives etc., the findings revealed. that improve the social and economic standing of the women and/or their communities. This was confirmed by the women leader from Jos-North, stating that, empowerment initiative is what we see and benefit from as constituents. Another participant shared same view and went on to add that:

Empowerment programmes are veritable tools that endear representatives to their constituents. When we return for campaigns, women beneficiaries that have benefitted WEE and are perhaps successfully running a trade or business are presented and held as success stories (LA-1).

A study by Gbajabiamila (2014) confirmed that legislators believe that they know the needs of the people in their constituencies, hence, they can decide on projects that best suit the constituents' needs. which Hapompwe *et al.*, (2020) see as socioeconomic development, being the goal of CPs'. It is evident from the findings also that women population constitute the active voting blocks in the rural communities. Therefore, programmes that enhances their entrepreneurial potentials are considered high priority by their representatives. This view was collaborated by a Legislative Aide who shared that:

You see in the rural communities we strategies and get votes from the women folks. They are reliable and dependable once you commit them with some form of benefits either entrepreneurial training, seed capital to start a business or beauty salon kits or even tailoring machines (LA-2).

Even though constituency projects empowerment programmes have become a sort of signature programmes due to their emancipatory nature, the findings revealed that, in some instances, the finance provided for women businesses is inadequate to establish sustainable business ventures. This collaborates Dataphyte (2021)'s finding that funds for empowerment initiatives are often meagre. This view was authenticated by Focus Group Participant 2, who stated that; "yes, empowerment programmes are meagre here, though well appreciated". Similarly, Tambuwal (2016) sees CPs as crucial and strategic driver of socio-economic development and regeneration within the country. Although, the funds provided is inadequate for a meaningful business. On the contrary, however an

interviewee from the CSO argues that these funds provided through empowerment have impacted women businesses in the constituency, as evident in the informal businesses springing up.

Obstacles to Women Entrepreneurial Development via Constituency Empowerment Programmes

Despite the novelty of CPs empowerment schemes, challenges do exist that impede the success of women entrepreneurial development programmes, the findings revealed. Institutional corruption is evident in the implementation of the programmes as evident in the absence of genuine monitoring and evaluation (M&E). The study, thus, agrees with Kalu and Chikwe (2017) who argued that the absence of early M&E is the reason for the constituency projects' failure in Nigeria. A traditional chief confirmed that the absence of M&E is evident in these schemes. As expressed by him, “you will expect that given my position as the traditional chief in this community, some form of role should have been assigned to me”. The opinion of Yusuf *et al.*, (2017) also highlighted that CP's M&E are not comprehensive enough, with the majority of CPs monitoring activities only involving site visits and verbal reports that provide just a cursory overview of the project.

A significant number of the FGDs participants also confirmed the absence of genuine M&E, which they attached to the significant influence of the legislators as facilitators of the programmes. Highlighting the overwhelming influence of the legislators (facilitators) in the empowerment process, one of the women leaders, stressed that: “The legislators deliver women empowerment through their loyalists. They bring them together, take pictures and also address them; meaning they have empowered this person and that and that person”. On this, Iredia (2016) argues that despite the fact that constituency projects are promoted as mandated by law, legislators have come up with questionable strategies to guarantee that only interest that represent them or their friends benefit. Hence, Ngigi (2015) argues that political sway over CPs administration has historically provided a channel for corruption and the misappropriation of resources intended for development.

On the contrary, an FGD participant argued that all policies have their challenges, but the benefits of this policy are quite significant to the women economic development especially if they can be monitored. This was highlighted by a traditional chief who added that: “I have seen people I know who has benefitted

from the capacity-building initiative. Although they were trained in the making of detergents and household essentials and provided with funds to start up the enterprise”. However, Ataire and Ibanga (2021) agree that regular evaluation of the appropriate project implementation is necessary to manage the constituency project in Nigeria.

Conclusion

This study found how constituency projects empowerment programmes helps in the advancement women's entrepreneurial endeavours in Jos-north/Bassa Federal Constituency, Plateau State, Nigeria. The study further discovered how constituency projects, designed to uplift communities through infrastructure development and socio-economic empowerment, have become pivotal in fostering the growth of women-led businesses in Jos-North/Bassa Federal Constituency. Firstly, the findings revealed that though CPs have somewhat been controversial, it does not take away its novelty as an empowerment scheme that seeks to address grassroots development by providing infrastructure that are crucial to alleviating women's' challenges by lessening the stress of household duties and increase women's access to necessary services, which indirectly empowers them. Secondly, the result also showed that CPs empowerment scheme also provides access to resources such as skills training workshops, vocational training programs, microfinance schemes, and entrepreneurship development initiatives etc., which improve the social and economic standing of the women and/or their communities. Thirdly, the study also found that obstacles exist that hamper women entrepreneurial development, especially in the areas of systemic corruption. The absence of M&E also affects the implementation CPs women empowerment development, but the benefits of this policy is quite significant to the women economic development especially if they can be monitored.

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