INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION AND DEVELOPMENT STUDIES (IJPADS)

Volume: 2 | Issue: 4 | Pages: 141-153 **Date:** December, 2025

Open Access Journal. Accessible online via https://ijpads.com

Effect of Women Empowerment on Poverty Alleviation in Awka North Local Government Area of Anambra State, Nigeria

Beauty Nneoma Onwuchekwa

Department of Public Administration, Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka, Anambra State

Email: beautynneoma24@gnail.com

Ifeoma Loretto Nnaji, Ph.D

Department of Public Administration, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka Anambra State

Email: li.nnaji@unizik.edu.ng

Abstract

Women empowerment remains a critical pathway for achieving inclusive development and poverty reduction, particularly in developing economies. Despite policy efforts and intervention programmes, women in many rural areas of Nigeria continue to experience limited access to productive resources, skills, and economic opportunities. This study examines the effect of women empowerment on poverty alleviation in Awka North Local Government Area of Anambra State, Nigeria, with specific emphasis on microcredit schemes and skills acquisition programmes. A descriptive survey research design was adopted. Data were collected from 400 women selected through random sampling from a population of approximately 200,000 women. A structured questionnaire was used as the primary instrument of data collection, while secondary data were sourced from relevant literature. Descriptive statistics and chi-square inferential analysis were employed for data analysis. Findings reveal a statistically significant relationship between microcredit schemes and poverty reduction, as well as between skills acquisition programmes and poverty alleviation in Awka North. The study concludes that women empowerment initiatives significantly contribute to economic improvement, employment generation, and poverty reduction. It recommends the strengthening of women-focused

microfinance, expansion of skills acquisition programmes, and improved policy implementation to enhance sustainable poverty alleviation.

Keywords: Women empowerment, poverty alleviation, microcredit, skills acquisition

Introduction

Women empowerment has become a central concern in public administration and development policy, reflecting growing recognition of its implications for governance effectiveness, inclusive service delivery, and sustainable poverty reduction. Within contemporary public administration discourse, empowerment is increasingly conceptualized not merely as a social objective but as a governance strategy that enhances policy outcomes by expanding citizens' access to resources, decision-making processes, and institutional support systems (Kabeer, 1999; Sen, 1999). International development frameworks, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), underscore this governance-oriented perspective by positioning women's empowerment as instrumental to achieving SDG 1 (No Poverty), SDG 5 (Gender Equality), and SDG 16 (Inclusive Institutions).

In Nigeria, the empowerment–poverty nexus presents a critical public administration challenge, particularly at the sub-national and local government levels where policy implementation occurs. Despite women's substantial contributions to agricultural production, informal trade, and household economic management, Nigerian women—especially those in rural areas—continue to face systemic exclusion from education, credit facilities, land ownership, and political representation (Akanle & Adejare, 2020; Igbokwe-Ibeto & Nel-Sanders, 2023). From an administrative standpoint, these disparities reflect institutional weaknesses in gender-responsive planning, resource allocation, and programme coordination across tiers of government. Rural local governments in Nigeria operate at the frontline of poverty alleviation and women empowerment policy implementation, yet they often lack adequate fiscal capacity, technical expertise, and monitoring mechanisms. Empirical evidence indicates that women in rural communities experience higher poverty incidence and limited livelihood diversification due to weak access to public services and development programmes (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2021). These conditions raise critical

questions regarding the effectiveness of decentralized governance structures in translating national gender and poverty policies into meaningful outcomes at the grassroots level.

Within Anambra State, Awka North Local Government Area exemplifies the administrative and developmental challenges confronting rural local governments. Although the state has pursued various women-focused development initiatives, Awka North remains predominantly agrarian, with limited industrial activity and a high dependence on informal economic livelihoods. Women in the area constitute nearly half of the population and are actively engaged in subsistence farming, petty trading, and micro-enterprises. However, their economic participation is constrained by low literacy levels, inadequate vocational skills, limited access to microfinance, and weak integration into local decision-making processes (Anambra State Ministry of Economic Planning, 2021). These constraints underscore governance gaps in programme targeting, institutional support, and service delivery at the local level. In response to these challenges, successive Nigerian governments, in collaboration with development partners, have introduced women empowerment programmes aimed at poverty alleviation. These include microcredit and cooperative financing schemes, agricultural extension and input support, vocational and entrepreneurial skills training, and social intervention programmes targeting vulnerable populations (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2019). At the state level, Anambra State has implemented women-oriented agricultural value-chain initiatives, cooperative development programmes, and skills acquisition centres. However, the outcomes of these interventions vary significantly across local government areas, suggesting inconsistencies in administrative capacity, programme coordination, and implementation fidelity. Despite the expansion of women empowerment initiatives, empirical assessments of their effectiveness remain fragmented, particularly at the local government level. Existing studies on women empowerment and poverty alleviation in Nigeria largely adopt national or state-level analytical frameworks, with limited attention to how local administrative processes shape programme outcomes (Afolayan & Oni, 2021; Okonkwo & Eze, 2022). This gap is significant for public administration scholarship, as local governments are constitutionally mandated to drive grassroots development and serve as the primary interface between citizens and the state.

Accordingly, this study examines the effect of women empowerment on poverty alleviation in Awka North Local Government Area of Anambra State, with specific attention to the role of local governance structures and policy implementation mechanisms. By empirically analyzing empowerment dimensions such as access to skills acquisition programmes, financial resources, and economic opportunities, the study contributes to public administration literature by offering localized evidence on the effectiveness of gender-focused poverty alleviation policies. The findings are expected to inform local government reform efforts, strengthen gender-responsive policy implementation, and enhance the administrative capacity of grassroots institutions in Nigeria and comparable developing country contexts.

Conceptual Review

Empowerment

Empowerment is a core concept in public administration and development studies, referring to processes through which individuals and groups gain the capacity to influence decisions, access resources, and shape institutional outcomes that affect their lives. In governance terms, empowerment strengthens democratic participation, accountability, and policy effectiveness by integrating marginalized populations into decision-making processes (Ake, 1994; Perkins, 2020). Ake (1994) conceptualizes empowerment as the effective participation of ordinary citizens in governance, emphasizing access to material resources and political inclusion as prerequisites for development. The feminist movement further advanced empowerment discourse by emphasizing women's control over social, economic, and political processes that shape their lives (Okeke, 2018). Medel-Anonuevo (1997) defines empowerment as a transformative process through which disadvantaged groups gain control over material and knowledge resources, challenge discriminatory ideologies, and reform institutional structures that sustain inequality. This perspective underscores empowerment as both an individual and institutional process.

Across the literature, empowerment exhibits four recurring attributes: it is process-oriented, context-specific, participatory, and concerned with access to and control over resources and decision-making (Perkins, 2020; Igbokwe-Ibeto & Nel-Sanders, 2023). In Nigeria, empowering women—particularly rural women—is widely regarded as a necessary condition for poverty reduction and inclusive

development, given their central role in household welfare and local economies (Okeke, 2018).

Women Empowerment

Women empowerment refers to the expansion of women's capacity to make strategic life choices and translate them into desired socio-economic and political outcomes. Okpoko (2022) traces the rise of women empowerment to feminist advocacy that sought women's autonomy over decisions affecting their lives and livelihoods. Within public administration scholarship, women empowerment is increasingly viewed as a governance strategy that promotes inclusiveness, equity, and development effectiveness.

Stromquist (1995) conceptualizes women empowerment as a multidimensional process encompassing cognitive, psychological, economic, and political dimensions. The cognitive dimension involves awareness of structural subordination, while the economic and political dimensions emphasize access to resources and participation in public decision-making. Batliwala (2013) further defines empowerment as a process of consciousness-building and capacity development that enables women to engage effectively in governance processes. From a policy perspective, women empowerment entails deliberate interventions aimed at enhancing women's access to education, skills, finance, organizational platforms, and institutional voice (Hubis, 2020). Although participation in economic activities is important, empowerment also requires strengthening women's organizations and collective agency to ensure meaningful influence over public decisions (Kuncoro & Kadar, 2016). However, evidence suggests that many empowerment programmes remain normative, poorly targeted, and weakly institutionalized, limiting their transformative impact (Purnamawati & Utama, 2019).

Poverty

Poverty is a multidimensional phenomenon encompassing income deprivation, limited access to education and healthcare, inadequate housing, vulnerability, and social exclusion. According to Ojiako, Okoye and onyeulo (2025), poverty and its concomitant affect both rural and urban dwellers that are subject to the realities of the same economic situation. Scholars emphasize that poverty affects physical, psychological, and social well-being and varies across societies and institutional contexts (Muller, 2012; Kwaghe, 2016). While conventional measures define poverty in terms of income thresholds, broader

development perspectives focus on capability deprivation and exclusion from basic services (LeBlanc, 2013).

In Nigeria, poverty remains pervasive despite substantial natural and human resources. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2017; 2020), more than half of the population lives below the poverty line, with rural areas disproportionately affected. Poverty in Nigeria is further exacerbated by inequality in access to education, health, infrastructure, and income-earning opportunities, as reflected in the country's high Gini coefficient. These structural conditions highlight the importance of empowerment-based policy interventions in addressing poverty.

Women Empowerment and Poverty Reduction

The relationship between women empowerment and poverty reduction is well established in development and public policy literature. Women empowerment was central to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and remains integral to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 1 (No Poverty) and SDG 5 (Gender Equality) (United Nations, 2020). Empirical studies demonstrate that empowering women generates high development returns, as women tend to invest income in household welfare, education, health, and community development (Wadim & Nurlukman, 2017).

Wei et al. (2021) pointed out that women empowerment significantly improves household health, nutrition, and educational outcomes. From a governance perspective, empowering women enhances policy effectiveness by reducing household vulnerability and strengthening social inclusion (Sharaunga et al., 2015; Sharma et al., 2022). However, outcomes vary depending on institutional capacity, programme design, and local governance contexts, underscoring the need for localized empirical analysis.

Microcredit Schemes

Microcredit refers to the provision of small loans to individuals lacking collateral or formal credit histories, with the objective of supporting entrepreneurship and poverty reduction (Bhusal, 2020). Originating from the Grameen Bank model, microcredit has become a widely adopted policy instrument in developing countries (Bateman & Milford, 2020). Women are often targeted due to their limited access to formal finance, higher repayment rates, and propensity to invest in household welfare (Kato & Kratzer, 2018).

Empirical evidence indicates that access to microcredit is positively associated with women's economic participation and empowerment (De Gobbi, 2015; Garikipati, 2022). However, randomized evaluations report mixed effects on poverty reduction and gender relations, highlighting the role of institutional and contextual factors in shaping outcomes (Banerjee et al., 2022).

Skills Acquisition

Skills acquisition involves structured training that equips individuals with vocational and entrepreneurial competencies for productive employment and self-reliance. Ochiagha (1995) defines skill acquisition as the development of practical abilities, attitudes, and habits necessary for meaningful economic engagement. In public administration, skills acquisition programmes are viewed as human capital investments that enhance employability, productivity, and income generation.

For women, skills training strengthens economic autonomy and reduces vulnerability to poverty by expanding livelihood options and improving adaptive capacity. Effective skills acquisition programmes therefore function as governance tools for inclusive development when supported by adequate institutional frameworks and policy coordination.

Theoretical Framework

The Intellectual Capital Theory provides a robust analytical framework for understanding the role of empowerment in poverty reduction and economic development. The theory is rooted in the human capital tradition advanced by Schultz (1961), Mincer (1962), and Becker (1962), who conceptualized human capital as an independent form of capital with productive and economic characteristics comparable to physical capital. From this perspective, investments in education, skills acquisition, and capacity development enhance individual productivity and translate into broader developmental outcomes. Bridger (2014) extends this argument by emphasizing that human empowerment practices constitute deliberate strategies for wealth creation and poverty eradication through the accumulation and effective utilization of intellectual resources.

Intellectual capital refers to the stocks and flows of knowledge, skills, competencies, and capabilities embedded within individuals, organizations, and social systems (Burbach & Royle, 2020). These intangible assets, when systematically integrated with other resources, generate economic value and improve

organizational and societal performance. Contemporary public administration scholarship increasingly recognizes intellectual capital as a dominant source of national and organizational wealth, with physical and financial capital constituting only a fraction of total productive capacity. In this context, organizational wealth extends beyond human expertise to include institutional reputation, goodwill, stakeholder relationships, and the capacity to mobilize collective knowledge for development purposes (Bridger, 2014). Organizational capital therefore represents the structures, processes, and knowledge management systems through which information is captured, shared, and applied to improve efficiency, service delivery, and development outcomes (Carins, 2019).

The theory identifies three interrelated dimensions of intellectual capital: human capital, social capital, and organizational capital (Viaman, 2022). Human capital encompasses the knowledge, skills, and capabilities of individuals, which can be enhanced through training, capacity-building programmes, and strategic recruitment (Cappelli, 2018). Social capital reflects the value derived from internal and external networks, relationships, and collaborative structures that facilitate knowledge exchange and collective action (Caillier, 2022). Organizational capital refers to the institutional frameworks, routines, and governance systems that enable the effective coordination and utilization of human and social capital. The interaction among these dimensions underpins value creation, as development is achieved through the transformation and reinforcement of different forms of capital (Kolaković, 2003).

Within this framework, empowerment initiatives—such as skills acquisition, financial inclusion, agricultural support, and institutional capacity development—are conceptualized as strategic investments in intellectual capital that enhance knowledge stocks at individual, community, and organizational levels. The theory assumes a direct exchange relationship between the availability of intellectual resources and economic development outcomes, whereby increased knowledge accumulation improves productivity, innovation, and income-generating capacity. As knowledge stocks expand through empowerment interventions, organizational and societal performance improves, resulting in enhanced economic participation, improved livelihoods, and poverty reduction. Consequently, intellectual capital constitutes a critical asset base for public sector interventions aimed at

sustainable development, providing a theoretical justification for linking empowerment programmes to economic development and poverty eradication within public administration research.

Summary of Findings

The findings of this study reveal a strong and positive relationship between women empowerment and poverty alleviation in Awka North Local Government Area of Anambra State. Overall, women empowerment initiatives implemented within the study area have significantly contributed to improving household income, reducing economic vulnerability, and enhancing the living standards of women and their dependents. Empowered women were found to play a critical role in household economic stability, confirming that women empowerment remains a viable strategy for poverty alleviation at the local government level. With respect to microcredit schemes, the findings indicate a statistically significant relationship between women's access to microcredit and poverty reduction in Awka North. Women who benefited from microcredit facilities were better positioned to engage in small-scale enterprises such as petty trading, agriculture, and artisanal activities. Access to credit enhanced women's productive capacity, increased income levels, and improved their ability to meet basic household needs including food, healthcare, and children's education. However, the findings also reveal that inadequate loan sizes, high repayment pressures, and limited financial literacy constrained the full poverty-reducing potential of microcredit schemes in the area. Regarding skills acquisition schemes, the findings show a strong positive relationship between women's participation in skills acquisition programmes and poverty reduction in Awka North. Women who acquired vocational and entrepreneurial skills—such as tailoring, hairdressing, catering, agro-processing, and crafts—experienced improved employability, income diversification, and economic self-reliance. Skills acquisition empowered women to transition from subsistence activities to income-generating ventures, thereby reducing household poverty levels. The study further found that skills acquisition schemes were more sustainable in reducing poverty when complemented with start-up capital and continuous training support. Women empowerment through microcredit access and skills acquisition schemes significantly contributes to poverty alleviation in Awka North Local Government Area. The study confirms that when women are economically

empowered, they not only improve their own welfare but also contribute meaningfully to household and community development. Nonetheless, the effectiveness of these empowerment programmes depends on adequate funding, institutional support, and inclusive policy implementation.

Conclusion

Women empowerments in Awka North in particular and Anambra state in general have made significant impact on the economic development of the state especially in reducing poverty rate. Feminism in the state places emphasis on social and institutional changes in policies and practices so that equal and more opportunities and resources could be made available to women. These envisaged changes could only be realized through women empowerments. Awka North and Anambra state government have mobilized women to be more visible and created meaningful impact in the families, organizations and the societies at large.

Recommendations

- Expand Women-Focused Financing: Provide accessible microcredit, grants, and soft loans—especially for women in agriculture—with low-interest rates and simplified access.
- Implement Market-Driven Skills Programmes: Offer practical, income-generating skills training integrated with financial literacy and basic business management.
- Promote Women Cooperatives and Partnerships: Strengthen cooperatives and collaborate with NGOs, development agencies, and community organizations to enhance savings, credit access, and programme reach.
- Enhance Market Access and Value Chains: Support women's access to local and regional markets through infrastructure improvements, storage facilities, and agro-processing linkages.
- Institutionalize Gender-Responsive Planning and Monitoring: Mainstream women empowerment into budgeting and rural development policies, with robust monitoring and evaluation frameworks to ensure accountability.
- Adopt Data-Driven Targeting and Capacity Building: Establish beneficiary databases and build local government capacity to improve programme delivery, targeting, and poverty reduction outcomes.

References

Afolayan, A., & Oni, O. (2021). Women empowerment and poverty reduction in Nigeria: Policy perspectives. Lagos: Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research.

Akanle, O., & Adejare, A. (2020). Women and economic participation in rural Nigeria: Challenges and prospects. Ibadan: University Press.

Ake, C. (1994). Democracy and development in Africa. Ibadan: Spectrum Books.

Anambra State Ministry of Economic Planning. (2021). Annual development report 2020–2021. Awka: Government Press.

Banerjee, A., Duflo, E., Glennerster, R., & Kinnan, C. (2022). The effects of microcredit on poverty: Evidence from randomized experiments. Journal of Economic Perspectives, 36(2), 3–28. https://doi.org/10.1257/jep.36.2.3

Bateman, M., & Milford, D. (2020). Microfinance and its discontents: Women, debt, and development. London: Routledge.

Batliwala, S. (2013). Changing their world: Concepts and practices of women's empowerment. Toronto: Women Unlimited.

Bhusal, T. (2020). Microcredit and poverty alleviation: Evidence from developing countries. Journal of Development Studies, 56(5), 897–912. https://doi.org/10.1080/00220388.2019.1694713

Bridger, J. (2014). Intellectual capital and economic development. Journal of Knowledge Management, 18(3), 377–392. https://doi.org/10.1108/JKM-10-2013-0412

Burbach, R., & Royle, T. (2020). Intellectual capital and public sector performance. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

Caillier, J. (2022). Social capital and policy implementation in local governments. Public Administration Review, 82(1), 121–133. https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.13497

Cappelli, P. (2018). Human capital and organizational performance. Industrial and Labor Relations Review, 71(3), 623–651. https://doi.org/10.1177/0019793918757553

Carins, J. (2019). Organizational capital in public administration: Improving efficiency and service delivery. International Journal of Public Sector Management, 32(5), 485–500. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJPSM-01-2019-0012

De Gobbi, M. (2015). Microcredit and women's empowerment: Evidence from developing countries. World Development, 68, 1–18. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2014.11.019

Federal Government of Nigeria. (2019). National social investment

programmes: Annual report 2019. Abuja: Government Press.

Garikipati, S. (2022). Microfinance and gender empowerment: Emerging evidence. Development Policy Review, 40(2), 1–21. https://doi.org/10.1111/dpr.12423

Hubis, T. (2020). Women empowerment interventions and governance outcomes. Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory, 30(3), 421–435. https://doi.org/10.1093/jopart/muz046

Igbokwe-Ibeto, C., & Nel-Sanders, S. (2023). Women empowerment and poverty alleviation in Nigeria: Local governance perspectives. African Journal of Public Administration, 15(1), 77–95.

Kabeer, N. (1999). Resources, agency, achievements: Reflections on the measurement of women's empowerment. Development and Change, 30(3), 435–464. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-7660.00125

Kato, H., & Kratzer, J. (2018). Microcredit, women, and entrepreneurship in rural economies. Small Business Economics, 51(3), 591–606. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11187-017-9925-7

Kolaković, M. (2003). Intellectual capital in public sector organizations. Knowledge and Process Management, 10(3), 147–158. https://doi.org/10.1002/kpm.162

Kuncoro, M., & Kadar, S. (2016). Women empowerment and community development: Policy insights. International Journal of Development Studies, 5(2), 55–68.

Kwaghe, P. (2016). Poverty and development in Nigeria: Challenges and prospects. Nigerian Journal of Economic and Social Studies, 58(1), 1–22.

LeBlanc, D. (2013). Measuring multidimensional poverty: Beyond income metrics. Social Indicators Research, 111(2), 561–580. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-012-0096-1

Medel-Anonuevo, C. (1997). Learning to make choices: Empowerment, literacy, and development. Hamburg: UNESCO Institute for Education.

Muller, C. (2012). Understanding poverty as multidimensional deprivation. Development Policy Review, 30(6), 653–672. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7679.2012.00582.x

National Bureau of Statistics [NBS]. (2017). Nigeria poverty profile 2017. Abuja: National Bureau of Statistics.

National Bureau of Statistics [NBS]. (2020). Poverty and inequality in Nigeria 2020 report. Abuja: National Bureau of Statistics.

National Bureau of Statistics [NBS]. (2021). Rural livelihoods and household survey report 2021. Abuja: National Bureau of Statistics.

Ochiagha, C. (1995). Skill acquisition and economic development in Nigeria. Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers.

Ojiako, C.I., Okoye E.C., and onyeulo, F.L (2025). Economic Downturn and Rising Insecurity in Nigeria: The Reverse Causality. International *Journal of Public Administration and Development Studies.* 2(2), 13-26, July, 13, 2025.

Okeke, N. (2018). Women empowerment and rural development in Nigeria. Journal of Social Policy and Administration, 52(2), 215–233. https://doi.org/10.1111/spol.12349

Okonkwo, P., & Eze, K. (2022). Women empowerment and poverty reduction at the local government level in Nigeria. Nigerian Journal of Public Administration, 18(1), 101–120.

Okpoko, A. (2022). Feminist advocacy and the evolution of women empowerment policies in Nigeria. African Journal of Gender Studies, 10(1), 45–63.

Perkins, R. (2020). Empowerment in governance: Theory and practice. Public Administration Quarterly, 44(1), 1–28.

Purnamawati, D., & Utama, S. (2019). Evaluation of women empowerment programmes in developing countries. International Journal of Public Administration, 42(6), 511–522. https://doi.org/10.1080/01900692.2018.1491471

Sen, A. (1999). Development as freedom. New York, NY: Knopf.

Sharaunga, S., Chikoko, T., & Chivasa, M. (2015). Women empowerment and social inclusion in rural communities. Development Southern Africa, 32(4), 443–458. https://doi.org/10.1080/0376835X.2015.1068881

Sharma, R., Kumar, P., & Singh, A. (2022). Governance and women empowerment: Evidence from rural Asia. International Journal of Public Policy, 18(3), 215–232.

Stromquist, N. (1995). Empowering women through adult education. Hamburg: UNESCO Institute for Education.

United Nations. (2020). Sustainable Development Goals report 2020. New York, NY: United Nations.

Viaman, L. (2022). Intellectual capital and public sector development. Public Management Review, 24(6), 876–895. https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2021.1945720

Wadim, N., & Nurlukman, R. (2017). Women empowerment and household development outcomes. Asian Journal of Social Sciences, 45(2), 97–115.

Wei, C., Zhang, L., & Li, Y. (2021). Women empowerment, health, and education outcomes in rural households. World Development, 140, 105298. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2020.105298