

An investigation of poor women's micropreneurship and their experiences of microfinance in rural south-east Nigeria.

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**AN INVESTIGATION OF POOR WOMEN'S MICROPRENEURSHIP AND
THEIR EXPERIENCES OF MICROFINANCE IN RURAL SOUTH-EAST
NIGERIA**

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University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

This study set out to understand how the poorest, most disadvantaged groups, rural African women, perceive and experience microfinance in the context of extreme poverty. The study employed a qualitative method and purposefully sampled thirty poor rural women entrepreneurs in five villages of South-East Nigeria. Data collected from participant observation, five focus groups and thirty interviews were analysed thematically using the Sustainable livelihoods framework (SLF) to develop insight about the many complexities of livelihoods of rural women entrepreneurs. The study thus contributes by improving our understanding the perceptions and experiences of rural women about microfinance.

The analyses demonstrated that poor women entrepreneurs rely on family to operate their microbusiness, and in return sustain the family from the business. The family, as an influential institution, with attendant norms and obligations, informs women's entrepreneurial response and family roles. For these poor women, their priorities revolve around providing necessities for their family, paying for their children's education and clearly a livelihood for survival, not economic maximisation. In their opinion, microcredit is debt and presents a great risk with terrible consequences. The practicalities of their reality means that the potential benefits that microcredit could present may be easily swallowed by the perceived dangers of microcredit. This is because the complexities introduced by vulnerability and basic consumption needs of the household can impact on the prompt repayment of loans.

Therefore, microfinance providers should understand that the very poor view microcredit differently and should endeavour to tailor microfinance in such a way that will support women to fulfil their family and business roles by reducing barriers affecting access to microfinance.

Keywords: Microfinance, perception and experience, poverty, micropreneurship, poor women entrepreneurs, familiness, sustainable livelihood strategy, South-East Nigeria.

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis,

An investigation of Poor women’s micropreneurship and their perceptions and experiences of microfinance in rural South-East Nigeria

To the best of my knowledge is entirely my work, and where any material points to the ideas of others, is thoroughly cited and referenced with appropriate acknowledgements given.

IRENE UKANWA

MARCH 2021

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to God Almighty for His faithfulness in seeing me through this long, lonely, but rewarding journey, my PhD. Please, take all the glory and praises my Father and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen!

And to my late loving and industrious mother, Mrs Roseline Emele, my three precious daughters (Princess, Favour and Blessing) and my dearest husband, Mr Ignatius Ifeanyichukwu Ukanwa. Thank you all for your prayers, encouragement and support. I love you all!

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

MFI s	Microfinance Institutions
MFB s	Microfinance Banks
CBN	Central Bank of Nigeria
LGA	Local Government Area
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
SLA	Sustainable Livelihood Approach
SLF	Sustainable Livelihood Framework
DFID	(British) Department for International Development
FCT	Federal Capital Territory
SW	South-West
SE	South-East
SS	South-South
NE	North-East
NW	North-West
NC	North-Central
CBs	Community Banks
NDIC	Nigeria Deposit Insurance Corporation
NACB	Nigerian Agricultural and Co-operative Bank
UNCDF	United Nations Capital Development
CARE	Christian Action Research and Education
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
SHGs	Self Help Groups
ROSCA	Rotating Credit and Savings Association

Table of Contents

ABSTRACT	i
DECLARATION.....	iii
DEDICATION.....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	v
LIST OF ACRONYMS	vii
LIST OF FIGURES	xv
LIST OF TABLES	xvi
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Statement of the Research Problem.....	4
1.3 Research Aim and Objectives.....	6
1.4 Research Question and Sub-questions.....	7
1.5 Research Conceptual Framework	8
1.6 Methodology Overview.....	10
1.7. The Originality of the Study.....	11
1.8 Structure of the Thesis.....	14
CHAPTER TWO: THE RESEARCH CONTEXT	17
2.1 Introduction	17
2.2 Nigeria in Brief.....	18
2.2.1 Nigerian Economy.....	19
2.2.2 Political System and Federal Ministries in Nigeria.....	21
2.3 South-East Nigeria in Focus.....	23
2.3.1 Location of South-East Nigeria.....	24
2.3.2 Culture of South-East Nigeria	25
i. Governance in Traditional Igbo culture.....	27
ii. Language in Traditional Igbo Culture.....	28
iii. Family in Traditional Igbo Culture	29
iv. Social Gathering in Traditional Igbo Culture	33
2.3.3 Enterprising as a Way of Life in South-East Nigeria	34
2.3.4 Rural Women Entrepreneurship in South-East Nigeria.....	35
2.3.5 Risks and challenges in South-East Nigeria.....	38
2.4 Chapter Summary	41
CHAPTER THREE: LITERATURE REVIEW: MICRO-ENTREPRENEURSHIP.....	43
3.1 Introduction	43

3.2 Micro-entrepreneurship: A Form of Entrepreneurship.....	44
3.3 Micro-entrepreneurship Under Extreme Poverty and Institutional Voids.....	45
3.4 Motivations and Necessity Entrepreneurship	46
3.5. Poor Women Entrepreneurship in Nigeria	50
3.6 Informal Institution and Its Influence on Rural Women’s Micro-Enterprises.....	52
3.6.1 Informal Institutions in Practice: Culture and Tradition	54
3.6.2 Patriarchal Society and Gender Disparities.....	55
3.7 Family and Rural Women Micro-enterprises.....	58
3.7.1 Typical Western View of Familiness.....	59
3.7.2 Familiness in poor Micro-enterprising.....	60
3.8 Chapter Summary	63
CHAPTER FOUR: MICROFINANCE IN RURAL NIGERIA.....	65
4.1 Introduction	65
4.2 Microfinance: Definition and Origin.....	65
4.3 Microfinance Development in Nigeria.....	66
4.4 What We Know About Microfinance In The Literature.....	69
4.4.1 As A Mechanism To Alleviate Poverty	70
4.4.2 Targets Poor Women	73
4.4.3 Women Empowerment.....	74
4.4.4 Evaluation of Microfinance.....	77
4.5 How Microfinance is Benefiting Rural Women’s Microbusinesses in Nigeria.....	80
4.6 Chapter Summary	82
CHAPTER 5: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE STUDY	84
5.1 Introduction	84
5.2 Theories considered in this study.....	84
5.2.1 Institutional theory.....	85
5.2.2 Sustainable Livelihoods Approach.....	87
5.2.2.1 Origins and Aims of SLA	89
5.2.2.2 Components of SLA	93
5.2.2.2.1 Vulnerability context.....	93
5.2.2.2.2 Livelihood Assets.....	94
i. Human Capital	94
ii. Social Capital	95
iii. Natural Capital	98
iv. Physical Capital.....	99

v. Financial Capital.....	100
5.2.2.2.3 Transforming Structures and Processes.....	100
5.2.2.2.4 Livelihood Strategies.....	101
5.2.2.2.5 Livelihood Outcomes	102
5.2.2.3 Limitations of SLA.....	102
5.2.2.4 Strengths of SLA	103
5.3 Chapter Summary	105
CHAPTER 6: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.....	107
6.1 Introduction	107
6.2 Research Paradigm (Philosophy).....	108
6.2.1 Philosophical Position	112
6.2.1.1 Ontological Position	113
6.2.1.2 Epistemological Position.....	115
6.2.2 Rationale for Philosophical Position of this Study.....	115
6.3 Research Approaches	118
6.3.1 Inductive Approach	119
6.3.2 Deductive Approach	120
6.4 Research Design.....	121
6.4.1 Quantitative	122
6.4.2 Qualitative	122
6.5 Research Strategy	124
6.6 Research Questions.....	126
6.7 Pilot Study Experience	128
6.7.1 Eligibility criteria.....	128
6.7.2 Lessons learned from the Pilot Study.....	129
i. On Sampling, Recruitment and Gaining Access.....	130
ii. Data Collection Instrument.....	130
iii. Refined Research Objectives/Scope	131
6.8 The Main Study	132
6.8.1 Sampling techniques	132
6.8.1.1 Eligibility Criteria for Selecting Participants	133
6.8.1.2 Eligibility Criteria for Selecting Villages	134
6.8.2 Selecting the villages and participants	134
6.8.3 Sample Size.....	135
6.9 Data Collection Techniques.....	136

6.9.1 Participants Observation.....	136
6.9.2 Focus Groups.....	140
6.9.3 In-depth Interviews.....	141
6.10 Data Analysis.....	144
6.11 Quality Assurance.....	150
6.12 Challenges experienced when conducting the research.....	152
6.13 Ethical Issues.....	153
6.14 Chapter Summary.....	155
CHAPTER SEVEN: FINDINGS - WOMEN'S MICROPRENEURSHIP IN RURAL NIGERIA	157
7.1 Introduction	157
7.2 Difficulties Rural Women Face	158
7.3 Socio-cultural Constraints Introduced by Informal Institutions.....	160
7.3.1 Business Stereotypes	161
7.3.2 Property/ Inheritance Rights	162
7.3.3 Formal Education	163
7.3.4 Gender Roles.....	164
7.4 Rural Women's Work	167
7.4.1 Domestic Duties	168
7.4.2 Providing for their Family.....	170
7.5 Rural Women's Livelihood Strategies (Microbusinesses)	172
7.5.1 Cooked Food/Canteen business	176
7.5.2 Raw Food Business	177
7.5.3 Fruits and vegetables	179
7.5.4 Non-Food Business	181
7.5.5 Mixed business	183
7.5.6 Outcomes	185
7.5.6.1 Put food on the table.....	185
7.5.6.2 Alleviate poverty through children's education – Long term goal.....	186
7.5.6.3 Employment for themselves and others	187
7.5.6.4 Empowerment.....	188
7.6. Livelihood assets and the place of family in rural women microbusinesses	189
7.6.1 Human Assets.....	190
7.6.2 Natural Assets	192
7.6.3 Physical Assets.....	194
7.6.4 Social Assets.....	198

7.6.5 Financial Assets.....	200
7.7 Vulnerability Context (Trends, Shocks and Seasonality): Influence on Microbusinesses	203
7.7.1 Trends	204
7.7.2 Shocks.....	205
7.7.3 Seasonality.....	207
7.8 Summary of Chapter Seven.....	209
CHAPTER EIGHT: FINDINGS – PERCEPTION AND EXPERIENCE OF MICROFINANCE.....	212
8.1 Introduction	212
8.2 Sources of Finance Available to Rural Women	212
8.2.1 Families and/or Friends	215
8.2.2 Self-Help Groups (SHGs).....	217
8.2.3 Rotating Credit and Savings Association (RoSCA).....	219
8.2.4 Moneylenders.....	221
8.2.5 Microfinance.....	222
8.3 The Perception of Microfinance by Poor Rural Women Entrepreneurs	223
8.3.1 Negative Perceptions	224
8.3.1.1 Microfinance perceived as not for the Poor	225
8.3.1.2 Microfinance perceived as out of reach	226
8.3.1.3 Microfinance perceived as not for the Illiterate	227
8.3.1.4 Microfinance Perceived as a scam and unreliable.....	228
8.3.1.5 Microfinance Perceived as a great risk	230
8.4.2 Positive Perceptions.....	231
8.4.2.1 Microfinance perceived as a pathway to improved wellbeing.....	232
8.4.2.2 easy to understand and use	233
8.4.2.3 Microfinance perceived as a reliable source of loans.....	234
8.5 Experiencing Microfinance	235
8.5.1 Positive Experiences	236
8.5.1.1 Repeated Borrowing.....	236
8.5.1.2 Encourage saving	238
8.5.2 Negative Experiences.....	240
8.5.2.1 Untimely Loan Disbursement	240
8.5.2.2 Indebtedness due to non-flexible loan repayment and compulsory savings.....	241
8.5.2.3 Uncompassionate Treatment and Harassment from MFI Staff.....	243
8.5.2.4 High Costs of Microfinance.....	244
8.5.2.5 Insufficient MFIs services in rural areas	248

8.6 Summary of Chapter Eight	252
Chapter Nine: Discussion of Findings	255
9.1 Introduction	255
9.2 The influence of the institution of culture and family on rural women’s entrepreneurship	257
9.2.1 Institutional voids in rural areas.....	257
9.2.2 Rural Women’s Family as a Socialised Business Entity	258
9.2.3 Gender roles and patriarchy	259
9.2.4 Limited Access to Formal Education	261
9.2.5 Lack of Access to property/inheritance rights.....	262
9.2.6 Business stereotypes.....	262
9.3 Livelihood Strategies of Rural Women, the Livelihood Assets they lack or have and their Livelihood Outcomes	263
9.4 Vulnerability; the fragile context of rural women entrepreneurs	266
9.5 Sources of Finance Available to Rural Women	268
9.5.1 Informal Sources.....	268
9.5.2 Formal Source of Finance - Microfinance	269
9.6 Rural Women’s Perception of Microfinance	270
9.6.1 Microfinance: Pathway to improved wellbeing	270
9.6.2 Microfinance: Easy to understand and Access	271
9.6.3 Microfinance: Reliable source of loans	272
9.6.4 Microfinance: Not for the poor.....	272
9.6.5 Microfinance: Issue of trust.....	273
9.6.6 Microfinance: Perceived Risks	274
9.6.7 Microfinance: Distant Location.....	275
9.7 Rural Women’s Experience of Microfinance.....	275
9.7.1 Repeated access to Microloans and Savings.....	276
9.7.2 Unpredictable loan disbursement	277
9.7.3 Unsuitable repayment terms	278
9.7.4 Unprofessional conduct of MFI Staff.....	279
9.7.5 Costs Associated with Microfinance	279
9.7.6 Insufficient MFI Services in Rural Areas	280
9.8 Why Rural Women Benefit Less from Microfinance	281
9.9 Summary of Chapter Nine	284
CHAPTER TEN: CONCLUSIONS, CONTRIBUTION AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	286
10.1 Introduction.....	286

10.2 Reflection on Objectives	288
10.3 Contribution to Knowledge	295
10.3.1 Methodological contributions.....	295
10.3.2 Contribution to Theory.....	297
10.3.3. Contribution to Practice.....	299
10.4 Recommendations	300
10.4.1 Government.....	300
10.4.2 Microfinance Institutions	302
10.4.3 Other Stakeholders.....	305
10.5 Limitations and opportunities for further study.....	305
10.6 Summary of the Study	307
Bibliography:.....	310
Appendices.....	337
Appendix 1: Participants Consent Form	337
Appendix 2: Interview Guide.....	339
Appendix 3: Focus Group Guide	342
Appendix 4: Ground Rule for Focus Group.....	344
Appendix 5: Information Sheet.....	345

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Thesis Structure.....	16
Figure 2: Map of Nigeria indicating the South-East. [Accessed 10th June 2018].....	25
Figure 3: The Researcher standing with a participant in front of her house.....	37
Figure 4: Different views of Familiness in practice	60
Figure 5: DFID Sustainable Livelihood Approach (SLA)	92
Figure 6: Ontology, epistemology, methodology, and methods of trunk metaphor	113
Figure 7: Conceptual representation of the research design (Author Generated).....	124
Figure 8: Stages of Pilot Study.....	132
Figure 9: Observation of a woman and her Mobile Poultry Business.....	138
Figure 10: Village Market in Abia State	138
Figure 11: Braun and Clarke's (2006) six stage thematic analysis.....	145
Figure 12: Categories and Themes	148
Figure 13: Rural Women's Work.....	167
Figure 14: A woman selling fresh fish with her apron.....	179
Figure 15: Participant in a Fruits and Vegetable Business.....	181
Figure 16: Participant in hairdressing business within her house.....	183
Figure 17: A rural market in South-East Nigeria.....	196
Figure 18: A rural village stream for drinking water.....	197
Figure 19: Rural Women's Perceptions of Microfinance	224
Figure 20: High Costs of Microfinance.....	244

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Categories of MFBs showing Review minimum capital requirement.....	23
Table 2: Summary of the paradigms explored during this study	111
Table 3: Attributes of Interpretive paradigm supporting the research objective of this study..	118
Table 4: Research Question and Influencing Literature.....	128
Table 5: Summary of Data Collection Methods Employed	144
Table 6: Summary of the Researcher's Methodological Choices	156
Table 7: Excerpts from participants regarding difficulties posed by extreme poverty in rural areas.....	159
Table 8: Excerpts from participants regarding institutional void in rural areas.....	160
Table 9: Excerpts on restricted opportunities for female businesses in rural South-East Nigeria	162
Table 10: Excerpts on low literacy of rural women as a result of socio-cultural arrangements in rural areas	164
Table 11: Excerpts regarding rural women's domestic work.....	168
Table 12: Excerpts on women being taught to keep the home but men sent to school.....	169
Table 13: Excerpts from participants regarding working to provide for the family	170
Table 14: Excerpts from participants regarding providing for their families alone	171
Table 15: Types of Microbusinesses ran by Rural Women Entrepreneurs and their profiles	174
Table 16: Excerpts on participants' choice for cooked food business.....	176
Table 17: Excerpts from participants' operational decisions in the cooked food business	177
Table 18: Excerpts on participants' choice for raw food business.....	178
Table 19: Excerpts on participants' operational decisions in the raw food business.....	178
Table 20: Excerpts on participants' choice for fruits and vegetables business	180
Table 21: Excerpts on participants' choice for non-food business	182
Table 22: Excerpts regarding participants' choice for mixed business	184
Table 23: Excerpts regarding putting food on the table as a livelihood outcome	185
Table 24: Excerpts regarding children's education as a livelihood outcome	186
Table 25: Excerpts regarding employment as a livelihood outcome c.....	187
Table 26: Excerpts regarding empowerment as a livelihood outcome.....	188
Table 27: Excerpts regarding entrepreneurial skills and financial literacy.....	191
Table 28: Excerpts regarding unpaid labour from family	191
Table 29: Excerpts regarding natural assets in rural women's business.....	192
Table 30: Excerpts regarding rural women's limited access to land	193
Table 31: Excerpts regarding physical assets used in rural women's business	194
Table 32: Excerpts regarding lack of infrastructure in rural areas	195
Table 33: Excerpts regarding benefits of social assets in rural women's business	199
Table 34: Excerpts regarding rural women's financial assets	201
Table 35: Excerpts regarding the role of family in financing rural women's business	202
Table 36: Excerpts regarding shocks on rural women's business	206
Table 37: Sources of Finance used by Rural Women Entrepreneurs	214
Table 38: Excerpts from participants regarding finance from family and/or friends.....	215
Table 39: Excerpts from participants regarding reasons for going to family and friends for financial help	216
Table 40: Excerpts from participants regarding reasons for using SHGs	217
Table 41: Excerpts from participants regarding the limitations of SHGs	218

Table 42: Excerpts from participants regarding challenges with RoSCA.....	220
Table 43: Excerpts from participants regarding reasons for using moneylenders	221
Table 44: Excerpts regarding perception of microfinance as not for the poor.....	225
Table 45: Excerpts regarding perception of microfinance as out of reach.....	226
Table 46: Excerpts regarding perception of microfinance as not for the illiterate.....	227
Table 47: Excerpts regarding perception of microfinance as a scam	228
Table 48: Excerpts regarding perception of microfinance as a great risk.....	230
Table 49: Excerpts regarding perception of microfinance as a pathway to improved wellbeing	232
Table 50: Excerpts regarding perception of microfinance as easy to understand and use.....	233
Table 51: Excerpts regarding perception of microfinance as a decent source of loans.....	234
Table 52: Excerpts regarding rural women’s experience of repeated borrowing	237
Table 53: Excerpts on how rural women utilised loans from microfinance.....	238
Table 54: Excerpts on rural women’s experience of saving with MFI.....	239
Table 55: Excerpts on MFI’s untimely loan disbursement.....	240
Table 56: Excerpts on MFI’s inflexible loan repayment	242
Table 57: Excerpts on MFI’s Interest Rate	245
Table 58: Excerpts on reasons for high interest rate.....	246
Table 59: Excerpts on joint liability in loan groups.....	247
Table 60: Excerpts on time and transportation cost to access microfinance	248
Table 61: Excerpts on lack of insurance services in rural areas.....	249
Table 62: Excerpts on lack of training for poor women in rural areas	250
Table 63: Excerpts on reasons for lack of training for poor rural women	251

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

In Nigeria, women make up a significant percentage of the population, and many reside in rural areas (Nwagwu and Ajama 2011). According to the United Nations Population Fund (2012), roughly fifty-four million of Nigeria's female population dwells in rural settings and constitute nearly 80 per cent of the rural workforce. These women do not just give birth and care for their children, but also supply their household's livelihoods such as food, clothing and education. Thus, women engage in entrepreneurial activities to carry out this role and augment their unreliable agricultural production to alleviate their poverty (Tajudeen and Adebayo, 2013). Scholars noted that the proportion of Nigeria's population living in poverty, or less than \$1 a day, exceeds 70% and is increasing (Abubakar, 2017; Mukhtar, Abdullahi and Murtala, 2021; Ozoh et al. 2020). Poverty has been made worse by the COVID-19 pandemic, insurgencies, religious and ethnic upheavals that result in death and property destruction.

Notably, poverty among women is alarming as they are the poorest of the poor (Abubakar 2017) and rural women are worst hit in Nigeria. Poverty among women especially in rural Nigeria is linked to lack of access to education and training, credit, savings and cultural orientation (Abubakar 2017; Ibru, 2009; Iganiga 2008; Matthew et al. 2019; Nwoye 2007; Ozoh et al. 2020). Lack of credit has profound effects on rural women, predominantly subsistence farmers and petty traders, and affects how they cope in times of financial difficulty. Poor rural women have to maintain themselves and provide for their households with meagre income (Amine and Staub 2009), so they resort to micro-entrepreneurial activities. Due to limited resources, they are constrained to activities that can barely meet their

subsistence needs. Previous literature has suggested that most rural women microbusinesses struggle to produce more than their basic needs because of inadequate financial services and support; thereby yielding limited productivity, low earnings and poor welfare (Boucher et al. 2008; Ssendi and Anderson 2009).

These difficulties are complicated by obstacles such as low literacy, roles ascribed to women in certain cultures and societal discriminations, which have further hindered their entrepreneurial activities (Akinbami et al. 2019; Ekpe et al. 2010; Ibru 2009; Okpukpara 2009). Akpan (2015) notes that rural women's micro-businesses' success is greatly hampered because of the limited resources for livelihood and poor infrastructure. In rural Nigeria, where these infrastructures are minimal, rural women and their micro-entrepreneurial activities are further limited by prevailing culture and traditions. For example, rural Nigerian women are not endowed land, and as a result, they seldom have any collateral (e.g., land) that can be used as a surety for loans. In general, women's access to land in rural Nigeria is limited as the male is given access to inheritance but not the female - usually from father to son.

Moreover, customary social arrangements in Nigeria generally accord men the powers to make decisions over their households (UKAID 2012). These constraints have plagued women and their socio-economic development, particularly in rural Nigeria (Abdulkadir et al. 2012; Igwe, Newbery and Icha-Ituma 2018). This remains a critical issue that requires constant review of policies, reassessment of priorities, and adequate resources, including finance and efficient planning of programmes mainly targeted at the rural poor (Sanusi 2012).

One dimension of this problem is that the Nigerian Government has recognised the importance of empowering women through microfinance to promote and

enhance their entrepreneurial activities (CBN 2005, 2019). Microfinance services include micro-insurance, micro-leasing, savings, credits (loans) and payment transfers to low-income households and economically active poor; for promoting economic empowerment amongst women (CBN 2019; Ogujiuba, Jumare and Stiegler 2013). Microfinance provision is believed to enable the poor to engage in income-generating activities or expand their businesses (Danson, Galloway and Sherif, 2021; Irobi 2008). Shane (2003) notes that microfinance can become a veritable engine in economic development as it creates an opportunity for entrepreneurial activities. Mohammed (2020) observed that credit and savings positively affect entrepreneurship opportunities in Nigeria.

Though the Government of Nigeria continues to design policies and implement programmes and interventions (e.g. microfinance) which could mobilise and provide credit facilities to rural dwellers (especially women), access constraint seems to be sustained (Ogujiuba, Jumare and Stiegler 2013; Ozoh et al. 2020). Microfinance institutions and services are widespread in urban settings where investors perceive higher profitability and business volumes; thus, resulting in biased neglect of the rural economy (Ihugba et al. 2013). There is a lack of microfinance institutions and services in Nigerian rural areas. Furthermore, microfinance services are not designed to address the core needs and challenges of poor rural women.

Several studies attempted to provide an understanding of microfinance services and their role in alleviating the poverty (Afolabi, Obamuyi and Egbetunde 2020; Ihuagba, Bankong and Ebomuiche 2014; Ekpe et al. 2010; Nelson and Iboro 2010), but their stance often projects the perspectives of the microfinance institution without clear reflections on the viewpoints of service users. Their focus

is on urban settings (see Afolabi, Obamuyi and Egbetunde 2020; Ihuagba, Bankong and Ebomuche 2014). There is limited research studying the perception and experience of rural women on microfinance. This study tries to fill in this gap by investigating how poor Nigerian women entrepreneurs in extreme deprivation and constrained resources perceive and experience microfinance services in rural Nigeria. It also seeks to understand why the poorest, most disadvantaged group rural Nigerian women benefit less from microfinance. The researcher believes that knowledge of poor rural women's perception and experience regarding microfinance will help Microfinance Institution (MFI) policymakers and related stakeholders deliver more responsive and targeted services to meet this most disadvantaged group's peculiar needs in future programmes.

This chapter is structured as follows. Section 1.2 puts forward the research problem. Section 1.3 presents the aims and objectives of the study. Section 1.4 poses the research questions and sub-questions. Section 1.5 presents the conceptual framework for the study. Section 1.6 offers an overview of the methodology for the study. Section 1.7 discusses the originality and contribution of the study. Section 1.8 presents the structure of the thesis.

1.2 Statement of the Research Problem

There is evidence that in Nigeria, women contribute substantially to national economic development by engaging in entrepreneurial activities (Mbah and Igbokwe 2015) despite the difficulties they face. These difficulties include lack of capital, inequality and "double burden" of all domestic activities and full-time economic engagements (Akinbami et al. 2019; Roland 2015). Rural Nigeria is characterised by limited infrastructural and social services, e.g. poor access to banks, functional healthcare facilities, good roads, well-equipped schools, decent

accommodation, electricity supply and portable water (Matthew et al. 2019; Nelson and Iboru 2010; Ozoh et al. 2020; Ozuru et al. 2016). Lack of capital has been identified as one of the most troublesome problems women micro-entrepreneurs face (Igwe, Newbery and Icha-Ituma 2018; Jack and Ronald 2016). Hence, to address this problem and enhance women micropreneurial activities, microfinance is viewed as a tool which offers accessible financial services to poor women (Longe and Salam 2014).

Previous studies revealed several research gaps that remain unfilled (Akinbami et al. 2019; Ekpe et al. 2010; Igwe, Newbery and Icha-Ituma 2018). Igwe, Newbery and Icha-Ituma (2018) revealed that women micropreneurs, especially in developing nations, do not have smooth access to microfinance to support their entrepreneurship. Still, the research did not explore further how these women cope in their entrepreneurship with limited resources. Specifically, what livelihood strategies do poor women entrepreneurs deploy in the face of little or no access to credit? How could the challenges by limited access to credit in resource-constrained settings be abated? These questions remain unanswered. A few studies focused on Nigeria. For example, Nelson and Iboru (2010) examined micro-loan schemes, an aspect of microfinance services, in Akwa Ibom Nigeria. They found that micro-loan programmes offer considerable opportunities to enhance households' living conditions, improve income generation, and reduce poverty in rural communities. However, the service users' perspectives were neglected as the previous work focused on what micro-lending could deliver from the service provider's point of view (Nelson and Iboru 2010). Neglecting service users has led to an incoherent account of how microfinance services are being perceived and experienced by them and effect on their participation in microfinance.

Many studies have evidenced that rural women in Nigeria continue to live in abject poverty (Idris 2015; Igwe, Newbery and Icha-Ituma 2018; Mbanasor et al. 2013; Oluyombo and Jallow 2013; Ozoh et al. 2020). Under extreme poverty, how do they cope with everyday life with limited resources available to hand? How do poor rural women engaging in entrepreneurial activities finance their microbusinesses? Is microfinance available to poor women in rural Nigeria; how is microfinance perceived among these women in rural Nigeria? Are poor rural women entrepreneurs able to take advantage of using microfinance services? What are the perception and experience of poor rural women on microfinance? This study aims to answer these questions. Addressing these questions may be the key to understand microfinance and women entrepreneurship amongst Africa's most impoverished.

The research problem addressed in this study is how poor women entrepreneurs perceive and experience microfinance services in rural Nigeria; why do this poorest, most disadvantaged group benefit less from microfinance?

1.3 Research Aim and Objectives

Microfinance is considered a solution for alleviating poverty and its related problems that characterise rural Nigeria and much of Africa (Igwe, Newbery and Icha-Ituma 2018; Umemezia and Osifo, 2018). However, evidence shows that it may not be a universal solution for all; the disadvantaged group, such as rural women benefit less from Microfinance (Kabeer, 2005; Van Rooyen et al. 2012). The existing literature typically focuses on the supply side of microfinancing, and the explanations are ambiguous (Afolabi, Obamuyi and Egbetunde 2020; Bandiera et al. 2013; Noruwa and Emeka 2012). This study aims to examine how poor women entrepreneurs perceive and experience microfinance and why the poorest,

most deprived rural Nigerian women benefit less from microfinance; the effects on their micropreneurship. The following objectives were developed to address the research aim:

1. To understand how the institutions of family and culture shape poor Nigerian rural women's micropreneurship and where family responsibility and economic activities are closely intertwined.
2. To examine the perception and experience of poor Nigerian rural entrepreneurial women on microfinance in a context of extreme poverty.
3. To understand why the poorest, most disadvantaged group – rural Nigerian women benefit less from microfinance.

1.4 Research Question and Sub-questions

The following research questions were investigated to achieve the research aim and objectives:

1. How does the institution of culture and family influence poor women's entrepreneurship in rural Nigeria? (Objective 1)
2. What are the livelihood strategies adopted by poor rural women, the livelihood assets they have or lack, and their outcomes? (Objective 1)
3. How do seasonality, trends and shocks affect poor women's micro-businesses in rural Nigeria? (Objective 1)
4. What are the sources of finance available to poor women in rural settings? (Objective 2)
5. How do poor rural women perceive microfinance? (Objective 2)
6. What are their experiences of microfinance in rural Nigeria? (Objective 2)

7. Do, and if so, why do the poorest, most disadvantaged group, i.e. poor women in rural Nigeria – benefit less from microfinance?
(Objective 3)

1.5 Research Conceptual Framework

In this study, sustainable Livelihood Approach (SLA) (DFID, 2000) served as the conceptual framework. SLA presents a reliable tool to examine people's livelihoods' complexity, particularly the poor (Serrat 2017). SLA aims to comprehend the different dimensions of an individual's livelihood (in this research, poor rural women); the strategies adopted, objectives pursued, accompanying constraints and attendant opportunities (Serrat 2017). SLA is a method used to improve the understanding of how institutions in a resource-scarce environment shape poor rural women entrepreneurs' livelihood and how they confront it. Sustainable Livelihood Framework (SLF) addresses the themes relevant to the context of this research as next described.

Poor rural women live in extreme poverty and struggle to meet basic family needs, such as providing food and paying for their children's education. With few alternatives, they take up micro-businesses as a livelihood strategy for survival. The hope is that their entrepreneurial response to the challenge of survival will enable them to meet their family's needs. For poor women, providing food and other necessities of life are the most critical outcomes. Poor rural women, with low income, are particularly disadvantaged and vulnerable. Hence, the vulnerability context of the poor is an important theme. It highlights the twists and turns that characterise the context of the poorest of the poor; emphasising that they have minimal resources available to respond to the slightest change in circumstances. It signifies the poor's burdens that further constrain them as the

poor at the base of the pyramid may be readily pushed into abject penury by uncertainties.

Similarly, livelihood assets such as human, physical, natural, financial and social capital, which they have or lack as they behave entrepreneurially to achieve livelihood objectives are critical to this research. The transforming structures and processes are crucial, as rural women and their microbusinesses are embedded in a formal institutional void that encourages informal institutions to step in. This institutional embeddedness imposes some form of institutional obligations and responsibilities which shape rural women's entrepreneurial practices. This theme enables the researcher to explore how rural women entrepreneurs immersed in this institutional arrangement perceive and experience microfinance and why they benefit less from microfinance.

In this study, SLA allows the researcher to understand the challenges poor rural women face in extreme poverty settings within a resource-constrained environment and how they respond entrepreneurially to survive. The framework provides a theoretical perspective to conceptualise how informal institutions of family and culture within a rural context influence poor rural women's microbusiness. SLF presents a comprehensive analytical tool to support a systematic and holistic appraisal of diverse factors which enable or constrain an individual's livelihood choices (DFID 2000). This tool is also able to capture the relationship between the myriad of factors that may be identified. More specifically, SLA centres on individuals and understands that poor people manoeuvre vulnerable and complicated livelihoods easily affected by the slightest changes in circumstances. This individual-focussed approach helps to understand poor rural women's perception and experience in extreme poverty and the effect

on their participation and usage of microfinance services in rural South-East Nigeria. This is because even though poor women's macro-level situational conditions are consistent in rural South-East Nigeria, each woman's reality at the micro-level is different. Exploring these individual perspectives can provide in-depth insight into how the poor perceive microfinance and what key factors affect their engagement with microfinance.

1.6 Methodology Overview

This section presents a brief overview of the methodology adopted in this study. Given the research context and research questions addressed are qualitative, this study adopts the interpretivist approach. Interpretivism believes that the social world's meaningful constructs are generated by social actors that operate therein (Bryman 2001; Chowdhury 2014). Interpretivists focus on how the social world is interpreted by those who live and interact with it. The interpretivists perspective accounts for how individuals involved in the same phenomenon (e.g. microfinance) can have varied views. The perceptions and experiences of poor rural women entrepreneurs in Nigeria vary from one woman to another. Therefore, this study considers the viewpoints of poor women microbusiness owners in rural South-East Nigeria, characterised by extreme marginalisation and deprivation. The qualitative method was deemed suitable for achieving the research aim and objectives by taking a phenomenological viewpoint that appreciates the challenges that poor Nigerian women face.

This study utilised purposive sampling (Merriam and Tisdell 2016; Creswell and Poth 2018) and snowballing techniques (Merriam and Tisdell 2016) to recruit respondents. The study also applied the techniques of observation, focus group, and semi-structured in-depth interviews (Yin 2018). Participant observation

allowed the researcher to set the scene and contextualise the findings and emergent themes. Focus group discussions informed the questions used for the individual interviews. Primary data were collected from thirty poor women entrepreneurs from five villages in rural Nigeria, one from each state (Anambra, Enugu, Imo, Abia and Ebonyi) in South-East Nigeria. The data was analysed using SL framework (DFID 2001) and thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006), which informed how patterns within data were identified, analysed and reported based on research objectives and questions. This study's unit of analysis is the individual poor rural woman entrepreneur who conducts her business within a rural setting. This includes women operating microbusiness enterprises in the local market or within their homes or farming as a business venture. The analysis of these accounts provides the basis to develop insight about how poor rural women perceive microfinance services, their concerns and the effects on their usage and participation.

1.7. The Originality of the Study

Microfinance has been suggested as a potential solution to alleviate poverty (Igwe, Newbery and Icha-Ituma 2018; Mohammed 2020; Umemezia and Osifo 2018). Microfinance programmes' growing popularity stems from the assumption that people in poverty can overturn their destitution through micro-enterprising if credit is made affordable and accessible. Moreover, microfinance presupposes the recipients have the required social capital, human capital, as well as other factors of production to develop and grow their micro-businesses; suggesting that the major obstacle confronting the poor is lack of credit (Igwe, Newbery and Icha-Ituma 2018; Jack and Ronald 2016; Taylor 2011). This viewpoint ignores the barriers presented by the prevailing environment in which the beneficiaries operate. Poor rural women entrepreneurs have restricted access to fixed capital

including land and machinery, do not control the household income, and have family obligations and responsibilities (Aliyu 2020; Ozoh et al. 2020); the institutions and environment dictate these obligations, duties and restricted access that they are immersed. The poorest of the poor at the base of the pyramid are confronted with unprecedented risks and massive uncertainties, which further exacerbates their vulnerability.

Many scholars have reported that the poorest of the poor are often excluded by microfinance interventions (Diochon et al. 2016; Mahmood et al. 2014). Operationally, it fails to target the very poor and keeps loans out of the most deprived individuals (Chemin 2008; Ozoh et al. 2020). Bradley et al. (2012) reported that microfinance programs neglect non-income dimensions of poverty including security, health and education. Nevertheless, poorer households who may have benefitted significantly from microfinance interventions have limited education (Umemezia and Osifo 2018; Shaw 2004), no business skills and few technical skills (Bandiera et al. 2013). Ordinarily, poor health could limit business productivity, and financial illiteracy due to limited education could mean that poor beneficiaries may struggle even to understand microfinance's workings.

Extant literature mostly concentrates on the evaluation of microfinance interventions (Afolabi, Obamuyi and Egbetunde 2020; Alatas et al. 2012; Khandker 2005; Shetty, 2008) and focuses on poor women's empowerment potential (Anyanwu, Ananwude and Nnoje 2018; Rai and Ravi 2011) and the borrowers' wellbeing (Chemin 2008; McIntosh et al. 2011). Though these assessments present contradictory conclusions, the lack of borrowers' accounts/perspectives regarding the effect of the loans on their lives was shared across the studies (Afolabi, Obamuyi and Egbetunde 2020; Anyanwu, Ananwude

and Nnoje, 2018). How microfinance is perceived by the poor is scarcely studied. More so, little is known about how entrepreneurship's "transformative" process impacts beneficiaries living in extreme penury (Tobias et al. 2013). In responding to this gap in the literature, this study examines the perceptions and experiences of poor, most deprived borrowers or prospective borrowers in deep-rooted poverty; in which entrepreneurial activities and family responsibility are knitted together. This study shows that poor rural Nigerian women engage in entrepreneurship for survival; the response of family-centred microbusinesses is influenced by the family relationships and informal institutions they are embedded in. Production and consumption in poor women's family microbusinesses are interwoven and should be considered as conceptually inseparable. This study contributes to understanding how family business activities in the context of poverty are influenced and shaped by family institutions. This understanding is central to supporting microbusinesses in resource-scarce environments and implementing poverty alleviation programmes (e.g. microfinance).

Additionally, there are limited studies on entrepreneurship and women perception of microfinance amongst poor women. This study facilitates a more in-depth insight into Africa's most impoverished microfinance experience and the risks and vulnerabilities that characterise their choices. The study has significant implications for researchers, organisations, MFIs, Nigerian Government and rural women themselves. This is because poor women's perception and experience of microfinance uncovers the depths of issues impacting poor women in rural Nigeria. If microfinance services are to be developed and implemented to assist and empower rural women to escape poverty, understanding the way they perceive and experience microfinance may help inform the key aspects of microfinance that best support women in poverty.

1.8 Structure of the Thesis

The thesis is divided into ten chapters:

Chapter one introduces the research background, aims and objectives, research questions, and this research's originality.

Chapter two captures the research context with a brief description of South-East Nigeria, including the population, occupation and the culture. It also provides an overview of Nigeria, the people and the economy.

Chapter three and four present critical reviews of the literature on entrepreneurship and microfinance respectively. Chapter three investigates the concept of entrepreneurship; in particular, women micropreneurship in the context of rural Nigeria. In contrast, Chapter four examines the concept of microfinance and what it means to rural women entrepreneurs.

Chapter five presents the theoretical framework of the study - the Sustainable Livelihood Approach (SLA). The chapter reviews related theories and critiques their relevance and limitations in the context of this study.

Chapter six discusses the methodology employed in this study. The rationale for the research method, sampling and data collection techniques, the thematic data analysis and ethical considerations were highlighted.

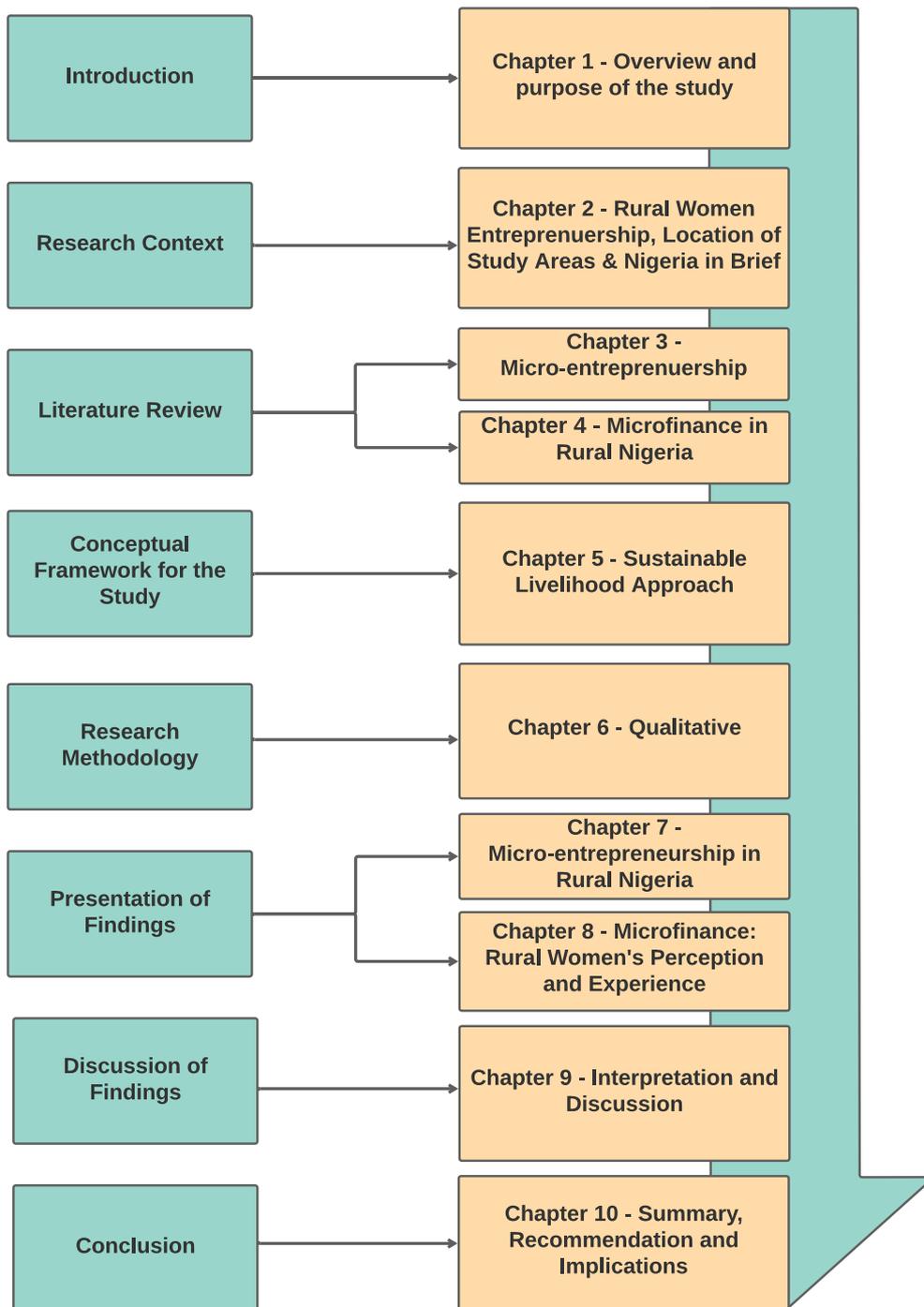
Chapter seven and eight present the research findings. Chapter seven covers the findings on rural women's livelihood strategies and factors that enhance or impede

their business activities. Chapter eight focuses on rural women's finance sources, particularly microfinance, their perceptions and experiences.

Chapter nine provides the researcher's interpretation or discussion of the key findings of the research. The emerging themes based on the participants' experience were identified to capture the SLA framework's components.

Chapter ten presents a reflection on the research objectives, key findings and the contribution that this thesis makes to knowledge. The chapter further offers recommendations based on the research findings. Lastly, the chapter provides areas for further study and conclusion. Figure 1 summarises the chapters in this thesis.

Figure 1: Thesis Structure



CHAPTER TWO: THE RESEARCH CONTEXT

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the research context and provides a rationale for choosing rural South-East Nigeria as a research context. As Gaddefors and Anderson (2019) argued, research context gives more than background and setting in which the study was carried out and provided the basis for examining the nature and extent of entrepreneurial engagement within that setting. In line with this argument, several development-focused studies have noted the significance of context in implementing interventions, including a deeper understanding of patterns of engagement that characterise the rural (Gaddefors and Anderson 2019) and empowerment pathways in rural settings (Huis et al. 2017). In fact, rural context shapes business as the remoteness of rural communities, distance from markets, and thinness of customer base have profound effects on the business in practice (Anderson, Osseichuk, and Illingworth 2010) and this help to explain why rural businesses are often small (Akinbami et al. 2019; Anderson and Ullah 2014). More specifically, the context in which rural women entrepreneurs in South-East Nigeria operate is characterised by extreme poverty, constrained resources and lack of formal institutional support among other barriers. An understanding of their context is important to examine the characteristics of their entrepreneurial engagement.

In particular, scholars agree that an awareness of the context in which entrepreneurship happens is crucial as some perceptions of the rural context may be misleading. Failure to acknowledge them may lead to misinterpretation of peculiar challenges prevailing in such context (Gaddefors and Anderson 2017; 2019). Thus, this chapter sets out to reveal critical issues that characterise rural South-East Nigeria to present the reader with an understanding of the context in

which rural women operate their microbusinesses. There is extreme poverty in rural South-East Nigeria with little or no infrastructure and absence of formal institutions, including banks and government agencies. Hence, many rural women operate micro-businesses to provide for their families (see Chapter 7 for detailed narrations). Additionally, lack of formal institutional support, patriarchy, tradition, family and culture play enormous roles in shaping how they behave and respond entrepreneurially.

This chapter is structured as follows: Section 2.2 briefly discusses Nigeria, including the Nigerian economy, the political system and federal ministries in Nigeria. Section 2.3 examines the South-East region of Nigeria, which is the focus of this research and emphasises the cultural context and occupations with a keen interest in rural women entrepreneurship in the region. Section 2.4 summarises the chapter.

2.2 Nigeria in Brief

Nigeria is a country in West Africa and occupies 910,768km² of land (World Factbook 2015). It is bordered by Cameroon and Chad to the east, Niger to the north, the Atlantic Ocean to the south, and Benin and the Gulf of Guinea to the West. Nigeria has a population of over 200 million people (50.6% males and 49.4% females). The forecast still indicates continuous growth; this explains why the nation is ranked as the most densely populated nation in Africa (Worldometer 2016). The nation comprises of thirty-six states and Abuja, which is the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). These states are subdivided into six geo-political zones, namely: North-Central (NC), North-West (NW), North-East (NE), South-South (SS), South-East (SE), South-West (SW), and the FCT.

Nigeria is a multi-ethnic republic with about three hundred ethnic groups (Erhagbe 2012), all with their cultural heritage, traditions and languages, making it a multicultural diverse nation (Chinenye and Ogbera 2013). Three of the main ethnic groups by population are the Igbos, Yorubas and Hausa-Fulanis. The South-East is home to the Igbos, South-West to the Yorubas and North to the Hausa-Fulanis. Religious beliefs are diverse and varied in Nigeria, but most practised are Christianity and Islam. The Igbos (SE) are predominantly Christians and so are the Efik, Ibibio and Annang people (SS) while the Hausa-Fulanis (NE, NW, NC) predominantly Muslims and the Yorubas (SW) are either Muslims or Christians. Traditional religious beliefs are upheld across Nigeria's ethnic settings, including the SE (Obinna 2012; Magesa 2014). Religion in Nigeria plays a significant role in the lives of people as it shapes people's behaviour, social and cultural beliefs (Udoh, Folarin and Isumonah 2020).

Nigeria boasts of over 500 languages and more than 1151 dialects across the ethnic groups. In addition to the Nigerian Languages, there are exogenous languages like English, French and Arabic (Ikegbunam 2010). English is the official language in Nigeria, used in business, academics and everyday activities, especially in the cities (Okudo 2013). However, given that a major cultural identity in a multicultural country is language, the various ethnicities in Nigeria communicate in their indigenous languages, like the SE (Igbos) communicate in Igbo language (Nnamdi-Eruchalu 2012).

2.2.1 Nigerian Economy

Nigeria is a developing economy with low per capita income (WorldBank 2018). The nation enjoys vast natural resources (e.g. petroleum, natural gas, water

bodies, arable land), and the most striking is oil and gas (Ihua et al. 2011). Nigeria has a teeming youthful population with over 200 million people with a median age of 18.1 years and is the world's sixth-largest oil producer and Africa's largest with proven reserves of 192 trillion of liquified gas and 37 billion barrels of crude oil (AfricanExponent 2020). At independence in 1960, the major occupation was agriculture and served as a primary source of export and public revenue - providing more than half of the nation's GDP (Izuchukwu 2011). However, at present, agricultural production in Nigeria has plummeted, and this is largely attributed to the heavy reliance on crude oil as the mainstay of the economy and the nonchalant attitude of the Government in funding the agricultural sector (Inusa, Daniel and Dayagal 2018). The Nigerian economy now overwhelmingly depends on the oil sector which supplies nearly 70 per cent of budgetary revenues, over 90 per cent of foreign exchange income and about 20 per cent of the GDP (Agbara 2016; Manasseh 2019). Nigeria remains one of the thriving economies in Africa, having surpassed South Africa in both GDP and population (McGann 2019). However, the GDP per capita of Nigeria has been on the decline since 2012 (World Bank, 2019).

Nigeria's economy is highly dependent on oil revenues, making the economy vulnerable to variation in crude oil prices and production levels. The sharp decline in oil prices from June 2014 destabilised the Nigerian economy as the nation depended heavily on revenue generated from oil for managing the affairs of the country (Abdulrahman and Ibrahim 2019). This meant that the nation struggled economically, and many households felt the grip of the downturn, especially the poor. According to Inusa, Daniel and Dayagal (2018 p. 1), "the economy drastically slowed down in 2015 as annual GDP growth plummeted from 6.2% in 2014 to 2.7%, and by 2016, the Nigerian economy registered its first recession

since 1991, after recording a growth of -1.5% as oil production shortage prolonged due to activities of Niger Delta militants and decline in oil price". Up till now, the level of unemployment is dangerously high, leaving many with difficulty to fend for their families (Fahm and Akinlaso 2019). The persisting hardship and deprivation in Nigeria remain a huge issue, and income inequality has skyrocketed (McGann 2019). This has resulted in problems such as increased crimes, ill-health (as a result of malnutrition, overstress and lack of rest), untimely deaths, and poor or lack of infrastructure (Asaju, Arome and Anyio 2014). Though poverty should not just be defined in the economic dimension, it is sad to note that according to CIA (2019), over 62% of Nigeria's population live in abject poverty. Further to that, the ongoing insurgencies like Boko Haram, militancy in the Delta region, and the rise in agitation in the South-East by pro-Biafra nationalists as well as the conflicts regarding Fulani herdsmen and land use leading to brutal killings and disruption of business activities in the SE region (Okereocha 2012; Anyandike and Nkechi (2013). As a result, many businesses may suffer losses (Adebayo 2014); rural women micro-businesses are the worst hit given their families' reliance on their businesses for survival.

2.2.2 Political System and Federal Ministries in Nigeria

Nigeria operates a democratic system of government, and the current elected president is Muhammed Buhari. There are three supporting arms in Nigeria's government structure, namely: the executive, the legislature and the judiciary. There are three administrative tiers of Government consisting of the federal, the state and the local governments. The local government is the closest to the grassroots and consist of the local government chairman, the councillors

and chiefs. Above the local Government is the state government, and the executive setting there includes the governor, deputy governor and the state executive council. The apex government is the federal government which regulates the ministries and commands the armed forces. At the federal level, the executive setup includes the president, the deputy and federal executive council (Lafenwa and Oluwalogbon 2014).

There are 26 federal ministries in Nigeria. The federal ministry of finance and economic development is the ministry in charge of all financial institutions, including Microfinance Institutions (Iganiga 2008). The ministry co-operates with the apex bank, which is the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) on monetary matters. The CBN is the regulatory authority of the financial system that promotes monetary stability and acts as banker and financial adviser to the Federal Government. The CBN regulates and oversees the banking sector and licensing financial institutions as well as establishes monetary policies that guide the delivery of financial services in Nigeria (CBN 2018). For instance, a minimum capital requirement policy that must be met before microfinance bank (MFB) can function (see Table 1) is done to enhance monetary stability and to meet the financial requirements of the Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) (CBN 2011). However, policy changes in the sector often mean that some MFIs are excluded or victimised. For example, increasing the minimum capital requirement for MFIs may be conceived as an attempt to favour some MFIs over others as failure to meet such requirements could lead to the withdrawal of operating licences of MFIs. This could yield huge losses for investors, shareholders, depositors and other stakeholders. Therefore, caution is required in pursuing the capitalisation policy to avoid chaos, particularly in rural areas. Evidently, rural

communities (especially in the South-Eastern part of Nigeria) do not have enough Microfinance institutions to adequately serve the rural population (Acha 2012).

Table 1: Categories of MFBs showing Review minimum capital requirement

MFBs Categories	Minimum capital requirement	Mode of Operation
Tier 1 Unit Microfinance bank	N20M (Twenty Million Naira)	Authorised to operate in one location in rural areas. Not allowed to open branches.
Tier 2 Unit Microfinance bank	N100M (One hundred Million Naira)	Authorised to operate in one Urban city, e.g. Lagos
State Microfinance Bank	N1B (One Billion Naira)	Authorised to operate in one State and can open branches.
National Microfinance Bank	N5 Billion (Five Billion Naira)	Authorised to operate in more than one State

Source: CBN 2018

2.3 South-East Nigeria in Focus

This section discusses the specific context of the region studied (South-East Nigeria) including the location, culture and traditions, poverty and dual roles of rural women in South-East and how these dimensions informed the research methodology that was adopted for this study (See Chapter 6 for more details). More specifically, this section details how women in traditional rural settings such as rural South-East respond in the face of extreme poverty, institutional voids, no infrastructural support, and obligations and responsibilities imposed by culture and tradition. The above dimensions were selected as they helped to capture the setting that rural women in South-East Nigeria operate in. For example, the

location helps to visualise the section of the country that the study focuses on and provides a basis for the political and economic narratives that characterise the region. Similarly, the culture and tradition prevalent in the region unpack the norms and unwritten codes that influence rural women in their daily dealings, while dual roles (often derived from the traditions and culture in the region) helps drive home the point about some of the peculiarities of rural women and their entrepreneurship.

2.3.1 Location of South-East Nigeria

The South-East is one of the six geo-political zones in Nigeria, as illustrated on the map of Nigeria (see Figure 2). The region consists of five states, namely Abia, Imo, Anambra, Enugu and Ebonyi. It is surrounded by the Niger River in the West and bordered by the Atlantic Ocean to the south and Cameroon to the east. It has an administrative and cultural border with the Northern region of Nigeria to the north.

The South-East of Nigeria is the home of the Igbos or Ibos and is also known as Igboland. It is a tropical evergreen rainforest region and typically humid all year round; with two seasons. The rainy season is usually between March and October and the dry season is between November and February/March. Politically, the South-East of Nigeria is arguably the most marginalised region out of the six geo-political regions (Shehu and Bello 2019; Duruji 2009). Prolonged and institutionalised marginalisation made the people of the South-East seek secession from the nation of Nigeria in the early 1960s (soon after Nigeria became a republic). The separatist ideology displeased the other geo-political regions (and the Government) as the newly discovered oil reserves were mostly situated within the South-East and South-South region. The agitation to break away from Nigeria

led to the 1967-1970 civil war, which as many commentators and historians recall was a genocide (Duruji 2009; Shehu and Bello 2019). The South-East region suffered great inhumane humiliation and alienation from the government forces (and their international allies), which has left the region impoverished, battered and in ruins. Even after the civil war to date, the region is still massively marginalised (Duruji 2009; Shehu and Bello 2019). The rural areas of the South-East are the worst hit by the systemic marginalisation of the South-East, as they lack basic amenities such as hospitals, electricity, drainage and good road network, and where they exist, they are poorly maintained and often non-functional. It is these rural societies that this study focuses on.

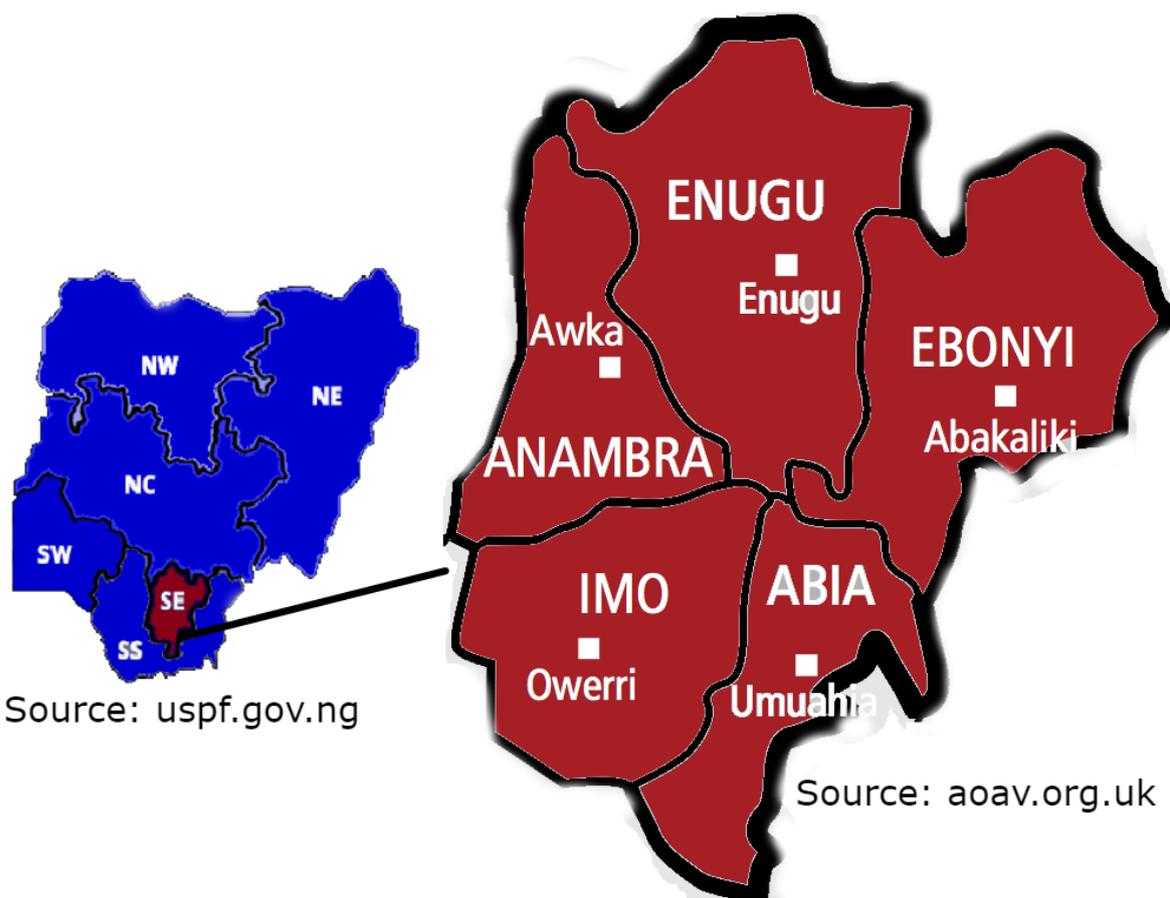


Figure 2: Map of Nigeria indicating the South-East. [Accessed 10th June 2018]

2.3.2 Culture of South-East Nigeria

Culture can be defined as a way of life of groups of people and how they do things as they endeavour to cope with the peculiarities of their surroundings (Nwaru 2015). Particularly, traditional cultural practices in patriarchal settings determine roles and responsibilities by gender. For example, in South-East Nigeria, the female gender is assigned care-giving roles, responsible for all domestic duties and generally subjugated to the males, while the males are allocated leadership roles, decision making and have access to property rights, ownership and inheritance. Traditionally, women in rural South-East Nigeria, do not have property rights and so do not inherit landed property. This is cultural and not legislative, albeit Khavul et al. (2013) noted that cultural factors and traditions change slowly over time.

This gender-based role allocation from the culture as well as high power distance (see Hofstede 1980; Hofstede and Hofstede 2005) and traditions of the South-East puts undue pressure on poor rural women. For example, the huge expectation for women to give birth to plenty of children and raise them to be responsible members of society increases women's family responsibilities and domestic duties. The latter is clearly the sole responsibility of women as socially prescribed by culture. Nevertheless, these women are still expected to support their husbands through engagement in entrepreneurial activities and/or farming in order to provide for their families. In fact, in the face of limited resources, rural women work extra hard in order to care for their families and put food on the table. In order to set the cultural context of rural South-East Nigeria, four key factors of the traditional Igbo culture are discussed below, and they include governance, language, family and social gathering.

i. Governance in Traditional Igbo culture

According to Nwaru (2015), the culture of the Igbos comprises a variety of traditions, practices and customs observed by the people and how they are governed. Rural people are governed by traditional rulers, and the Nigerian constitution recognises their authority and role (Tonwe and Osemwota 2013). Traditional rulers across South-East are called Obi, Eze, Igwe or Ohaneze and consist of chiefs or elders-in-council and village heads. Igboland is known for a decentralised system of Government at the local level, and each local kingdom manages its own affairs (Johnson and Olaniyan 2017; Osaghae 1994). Local affiliations, dialects, lineage and clans are organised into "kingdoms" in the South-East, and each kingdom within Igboland coronates their own traditional ruler. This rite to govern is inherited by birth (based on some ancient customs) and passed culturally from one generation to another (Egwemi and William 2007). For instance, the paramount ruler and overseer of the activities of all the 26 villages within the rural communities in the Ohafia Kingdom are the Udumeze of Ohafia (McCall 2000). Traditional rulers exercise some powers and are responsible for providing direction and leadership within the communities in their jurisdiction. For example, traditional rulers must permit the provision of various community services, including financial services before they can be allowed to operate within the community. Further to that, the rulers are responsible for promoting and approving or disapproving a community service, and villagers usually take the advice of traditional rulers very seriously out of respect and due to fear of consequences should they disobey.

According to Dodo (2013), traditional rulers are seen as the only agency that can convince residents of their communities to embrace new ideologies. Clearly, this

presents an opportunity for microfinance institutions to get a greater buy-in by introducing their services to traditional rulers and ensuring that they understand the benefits to the people. However, no studies have shown whether MFIs consider this aspect when delivering their services. Some indications regarding traditional rulers being aware of some MFI services were noted during the research, but the key point was that they often lacked a clear understanding of the benefits to the people. Arguably, if microfinance is known, understood and endorsed by these traditional rulers, rural women entrepreneurs could benefit from the service. Therefore, the benefit of reviewing this aspect of tradition is that it highlights the avenue for microfinance information to be shared and communicated to key stakeholders to increase understanding.

ii. Language in Traditional Igbo Culture

The native language (that is, Igbo) is the principal language used in everyday life and activities in rural South-East Nigeria even though English is Nigeria's official language. Nonetheless, other languages are minimally used, including Pidgin English - which is a mixture of English and Igbo. Approximately thirty million people speak Igbo, and though the language has many dialects, there is one "Central Igbo" which is widely spoken, written and understood by all Igbo people (Iheanetu and Oha 2017). According to Ebuziem (2011), one crucial cultural identity that nurtures unity among the people and promotes brotherhood in the region is the Igbo language. Gomwalk (2000) suggests that every human activity is influenced by culture and is embodied and controlled by language. Therefore, an understanding of the language of a culture is a necessary factor if one is to value and understand that culture. Language, according to Ezeudu (2013), is a means of preserving a people's culture.

However, all the MFIs in South-East Nigeria adopt the official language of Nigeria as their language for conducting business and delivering their services and mostly do not have a parallel service that could deliver such service in indigenous languages to cater for people that only understood their indigenous language (in this case, Igbo). As noted earlier, the Igbo community prefers communicating in the Igbo language in most of their activities and interactions. This is rampant in the rural areas as over 60% of the people have low literacy and communicate in their indigenous languages (Uguwu and Ogunremi 2019). For example, people in rural South-East communicate in Igbo by word of mouth and storytelling. As such, any use of other foreign methods or language may limit their understanding. According to Uguwu and Ogunremi (2019, p. 53), "meaningful development is not possible in Nigeria as long as the indigenous languages are left behind". Hence, the use of the English language by MFIs to design their products and services may exclude rural people such as rural women due to their low literacy.

Supporting this view, Umo (2001) in Ezeudu (2013) and Uguwu and Ogunremi (2019) insist that using another language other than the native language may hamper understanding of a given piece of information. Consequently, services that are rendered in a non-native language may not achieve its intended goal. This is because rural people (including women) may struggle to understand how such service works. This is particularly crucial for microfinance services in rural South-East Nigeria. Therefore, microfinance providers should design their products using the native language of the people the service is designed for.

iii. Family in Traditional Igbo Culture

From a socio-cultural standpoint, institutions (both formal and informal) present the context for exploring entrepreneurship (Boettke and Coyne 2009; Welter

2011). Following from Nooteboom's (2002) definition of institutions as artefacts which guide, sanction and constrain behaviour, it is obvious that there are formal institutional voids in South-East Nigeria (Sheu and Bello 2019). This is because formal institutions which ought to define property rights protection regimes, political and economic freedoms, and the rules of law are non-existent or non-functional. This concurs with the observation of Mair and Marti (2009) that formal institutions are often weak or absent in developing countries. In the absence of formal institutions, informal arrangements that are implicitly codified will serve as alternatives. With no institutions, regulations and norms to regulate the rural economy (Chakrabarty 2009), poor women are usually excluded from market participation (Mair et al. 2012). Unfortunately, poor rural women often find themselves in these settings where there are no institutional arrangements to offer a functional economy (Mair et al. 2012).

The foremost social setting to appreciate life in poverty and vulnerability is the family. Many sociologists conceive the family as an informal institution (Carney 2005). In South-East, the familial unit creates, maintains and sustain ancestral laws, beliefs and practices (Ezeakor 2013). In the face of formal institutional voids, the family (an informal institution) frames the responsibilities and roles of the members. In the South-East, the "rules of the game" is set by the traditions and cultural norms and the family unit is subject to them. More specifically, the way the family is viewed in traditional rural settings of the South-East is contrary to the "westernised" view. For instance, in the western view of the family, both the woman and the man have equal rights and equal access to the estates in the family, but in the South-East, the story is different. Although the Nigerian constitution embraces equality laws, the cultures and traditions of the South-East clearly deviate from these.

The traditional Igbo culture is gendered, ranging from the crops that men and women grow, to the characterisation of work and business (Adam 2018). In Igbo culture, the ideal roles for a man are to provide for his family materially and so the man is encouraged to engage in profitable business. In addition, the man is the head of the family, the spiritual leader and the family priest, and as such is the mouthpiece of the family and calls the shots in every sphere of life. He is responsible for creating wealth and making resources available to the household. On the other hand, women are solely responsible for all the domestic duties and are expected to give care to all members of the family. She is responsible for keeping the home and ensuring that all family members are adequately cared for. She is obliged to uphold high moral standards and purity. She is required to love her husband, be a "good wife" by cooking his meals, submitting to him in all things, providing pleasure and making him feel comfortable in the home. Also, women are not only caregivers and homemakers but also play a role in farming, business and handicrafts while being responsible for all the domestic duties at home. In some cases, women may be required to provide for their families with little or no support from their husbands.

Culturally, women in rural South-East are also expected to bear as many children as possible, including at least a male heir to retain the family name and inheritance (Wasim et al. 2018). This obligation means some women end up having more than ten children, especially if they have not managed to give birth to a male child. According to Ibrahim (2020), some of the other reasons for requiring the women to give birth to plenty of children include the expansion of the family lineage; increase the family labour force in the family micro-business and for glory. It is a common adage in Igboland that, 'onye nwere madu ka onye nwere ego'. This means that those who have people are better off than those who only have money

but lack people. Thus, nothing is comparable to childbirth in Igbo culture as it is believed that having many children is the most valuable resource over wealth (Nzegwu 2004; Ngwuchukwu and Nwachi 2020). Fertility is celebrated, especially when a woman gives birth to more than ten children, both male and female. This usually calls for a celebration called 'Igbu Ewu Ukwu' (slaughter of goat in celebration of fertility).

Though there is a celebration when a child is born, it is obvious that the ceremony is more striking if the child is male. (Ohagwu et al., 2014; Nnadi, 2013). This is because of the Igbo ideology that only male children inherit their father's properties, keep their father's name and increase the family lineage. This can lead to a man marrying many wives just to have male children (Urama 2019). The absence of a male child in a family often brings untold suffering (e.g. denial of love, care and resources) to the woman especially in rural areas where most women are illiterates, extremely poor and have no access to government support. Hence, many rural women, in order to mitigate the poor treatment from their husbands, continue to have more children despite their inability to adequately take care of them. As a result, rural women labour daily without rest just to cope with the immense family pressure of providing food for their households.

These obligations and responsibilities lead to poor women living in conservative rural societies to engage in microbusinesses. In order to supply the necessities, which remain largely unfulfilled by the government, families engage in entrepreneurship as resource-scarce settings encourage entrepreneurial behaviours (Seaman et al. 2017). In the case of many rural poor women in the South-East, family microbusiness is their entrepreneurial response to survive. And these entrepreneurial responses are shaped by informal institutions, family and

culture immersed in family ties because the microbusinesses are family centred (McMullen 2010; Xiong, Ukanwa and Anderson 2018). Rural poor women micropreneurs carry a dual burden of fulfilling traditional obligations (and family) whilst engaging in business activities and social groups.

iv. Social Gathering in Traditional Igbo Culture

Another tradition that is predominant in South-East is the social grouping or gathering of people of the same gender, age-mates, faith, or business primarily for mutual benefits and community development purposes. For example, the 'August Meeting' is a mandatory annual meeting of women which normally takes place in August. This gathering witness a massive homecoming of Igbo women across the globe to their matrimonial hometowns for the annual meeting. Every married Igbo woman is required to be in attendance at the women's 'August Meeting' as scheduled (Nwankwo 2010). Usually, the women in the urban cities organise and facilitate the women's group for the purpose of advocating the needs of the rural people to government agencies and other support services available to them.

In addition, the "August Meeting" forum fosters mentorship, networking, socialisation, information sharing and impartation of new skills relevant to the group. As opined by Nneoyi et al. (2008), social groupings are important tools utilised in development-oriented studies to understand the needs, desires and characteristics of the population they represent. Obinna and Chukwu (2013) noted that the well-being of a group overrides that of an individual and a group action achieves more than an individual acting alone. This tradition that proactively encourages the social gathering of people with similar interests or characteristics can be leveraged by microfinance institutions to share and communicate

microfinance information during such meetings. For example, educated women from urban areas can enlighten the illiterate women in the village and microfinance institutions can facilitate such interactions. By this, rural women can be motivated to engage, and any barriers to microfinance access can be discussed.

2.3.3 Enterprising as a Way of Life in South-East Nigeria

One of the major challenges that Nigeria is faced with as a nation is the rate of unemployment in the country. With a fast-growing population of youths (average age of the 200 million people in Nigeria is 18 years), the nation is plagued with unemployment as the number and capacity of companies and industries in the country are not increasing fast enough to cope with the growing youthful population. This epidemic has led to more crimes, corruption and insurgencies since "idle hands and minds often become the devil's workshop", as they say. Unfortunately, considering the volatile state of the nation and the increased rate of crime, investors are often sceptical about investing. Even though the country operates a democracy, it is still at its infancy and so not ripe enough for long term projections and stability, which are vital for investment. Insurgencies by Boko Haram and other terrorist groups are still frequent. Tribal and civil clashes are still commonplace in the country, and the government is not seen to be decisive in stabilising the country and the economy; hence the vicious cycle continues.

The people of the South-East are worst hit by this unemployment epidemic, as there is little or no development or industries set up in the South-East (Lady-Franca 2016; Maliga 2011). Where some exist, their survival as organisations is threatened by poor infrastructural support. With bad road network, poor infrastructure, high cost of production (e.g. additional cost of running diesel generators to power industry to produce in South-East because there is no

electricity supply to the area from the government electric grid) and insecurity (due to frequent attacks by insurgents and Fulani herdsmen) investors are reluctant to invest in the South-East (Obi 2016; Onwuka 2015; Orugun and Tunde 2014). This means the people need to find alternative means of survival as there are limited formal employment opportunities available to them. With just a handful of industries to serve the over 40 million people in the South-East, most of the people cannot have formal employment.

As a response to the marginalisation and the limited employment opportunities (Shehu and Bello 2019), many end up creating informal self-employment opportunities for themselves, some go into farming, while others set up microbusinesses. People of the South-East are traditionally subsistence farmers, craftsmen, and traders (Onwujekwe 2005). The main crops planted include plantain, vegetables, rice, cassava, yam, maize. They also keep livestock such as goats, pigs and sheep. Additionally, rural people in the South-East contribute to the rural and national economy as they grow major cash crops such as rubber, cocoa and palm oil. The people of South-East Nigeria are well-known for their entrepreneurial endeavours, both within Nigeria and around the world. Their entrepreneurial response remains the spine of Nigeria's economy (Lady-Franca 2016; Maliga 2011; Obi 2016; Onwuka 2015; Orugun and Tunde 2014).

2.3.4 Rural Women Entrepreneurship in South-East Nigeria

In South-East Nigeria, the main driver for setting up micro-businesses is the need to put food on the table. This burden largely falls on the shoulders of rural women. Hence many of them engage in one form of microbusiness or another, to fulfil this obligation. These rural women entrepreneurs have large families; up to 10 children per family (Igwe and Madichie 2019) and most of them live in mud houses,

uncompleted or poor accommodation (see Figure 3). They are mostly poor and illiterate with limited skills, and their primary and social roles include 'a good wife', carry out all domestic duties and childcare, among other duties. Due to extreme poverty in the region (Chukwu 2012), many rural women are both housewives and enterprising women by engaging in farming and entrepreneurial activities to augment the support they get from their husbands. Most working women in South-East Nigeria are predominantly self-employed in informal sectors due to the limited formal employment opportunities in rural South-East. As indicated by Ajani (2012), rural women earn income from microbusinesses, including petty trading, farming, catering services, tailoring, and making confectioneries. This has positive implications as it generates income for the women to meet their families' needs, create employment and contribute towards rural development and economic growth (Ajani and Igbokwe 2013).

Rural women entrepreneurs like other women are known to be innovative, hard-working, enterprising and multi-tasking. A typical rural woman juggles between being a businesswoman and the traditional roles of being a wife, mother and daughter (Ajani 2012; Mbah and Igbokwe 2015). Rural women engage in various kinds of business activities and in most cases, create something out of nothing to sustain their families. Many rural women entrepreneurs start their businesses as the only option to meet the basic needs of their families. These include the provision of food, clothing and education for their children as well as creating employment for themselves and others.



Figure 3: The Researcher standing with a participant in front of her house

Furthermore, rural women entrepreneurs operate small scale businesses with low capital and minimal risk (Buvinić and Furst-Nichols 2016; Fletschner and Kenney 2014). These businesses are mostly family microbusinesses, as the women rely on their family to operate their businesses and the income from these enterprises is used to meet the needs of the family. The relationship between women's businesses and their families are tightly interwoven and conceptually inseparable (Xiong, Ukanwa and Anderson 2018). Although, rural women often operate very small scale or microbusinesses that are non-scalable, "the totality of these businesses in a community is large" (Alvarez and Barney 2014 p. 162). It is therefore essential to understand the notion of microbusinesses in the context of rural South-East Nigeria and how it differs from the western context. Clearly, in the rural South-East where women are poor and marginalized, 'opportunity' is derived from the prospect of utilising microbusiness to deliver their necessities (Xiong, Ukanwa and Anderson 2018).

Certainly, micropreneurship could be conceived as a different form of entrepreneurship (Bögenhold and Fachinger 2007). More so, since their micro-businesses make up a sizeable chunk of the overall rural income and rural employment (Mbah and Igbokwe 2015). Although regular paid employment is scarce in rural microbusinesses, rural women entrepreneurs may employ a couple of workers, mostly family members, during peak seasons (World Bank 2007). However, family responsibilities, household chores, absence of infrastructures such as good roads, electricity and standard markets constrain their productivity and business growth. Micro-businesses run by rural women may be an indigent relation of western growth-orientated enterprise, but they fill a crucial and essential void. Considering the vital role of rural women entrepreneurs in home affairs and in the development of the rural economy through microbusinesses, one would expect that more attention would be paid to the welfare and well-being of rural women.

2.3.5 Risks and challenges in South-East Nigeria

In general, rural South-East Nigeria has high levels of poverty (Chukwu 2012), poor healthcare to combat widespread of diseases, poor living conditions, little or no infrastructural support (Onyeonoro et al. 2014), and these predispose them to unimaginable hardship and vulnerabilities. Additionally, the region is a rainforest zone and prone to heavy rain during the rainy season (i.e. March till the end of October). The heavy rainfall impacts on the farmlands and causes it to degrade and thereby result in poor yield of farm crops. Poor yield adversely affects consumption and business supplies, and ultimately leads to an increase in the price of food due to scarcity. Rural women entrepreneurs are worst hit because they depend on agriculture for their livelihoods (i.e. consumption, business and incomes). This increases the vulnerability of rural women to hunger, ill-health and

indebtedness, and affects their ability to cope with shocks or manage risks which can compound their poverty. Also, floods occur as a result of the heavy rainfall, which destroys roads due to lack of drainage facilities in most rural areas (Rocks et al. 2016). The gullies created render most roads inaccessible, and most transporters avoid travelling to rural areas while the few who embark on the journey charge premium prices. This limits connectivity between the urban and rural areas. People entering or leaving the villages to the neighbouring village, markets, MFIs offices, towns, and cities during the rainy season spend hours of travel time and pay exorbitant fares. Some rural women who cannot afford the high cost of transportation spend longer hours on foot. At such times, every journey to the market or neighbouring towns to engage in business activities becomes a challenge.

Another issue in the South-East is insecurity. There has been constant agitation for freedom and secession, which has led to unrest that interferes with livelihood and micro-business activities. This is attributed to the sustained marginalisation of the South-East, poor policy implementation and unfair resource allocation by the Federal Government of Nigeria (Johnson and Olaniyan 2017; Shehu and Bello 2019). More so, insurgencies such as Boko Haram lead to loss of human lives and properties, thereby forcing residents to relocate and their microbusinesses to shut down. Fulani herdsmen attacks on farmers cause destruction of farm crops and often result in loss of lives (Uzodinma 2018). There is also a high rate of abduction in the region for ransom. These challenges restrict people from going about their normal businesses as there is a constant fear of the loss of lives and property. These issues further accentuate the formal institutional voids in South-East Nigeria (as discussed earlier – see Section 2.3.2). The formal arrangements to enable, constrain and guide individuals by providing the 'rule of the game' are missing or

dormant in the region. This confirms the classic work by Baumol (1990) which claimed that people usually act in accordance with the soundness of the predominant legal, political and economic institutional arrangements available.

As previously discussed, the lack of social amenities and infrastructure compounds the problems in the South-East. For instance, electricity, hospitals, portable drinking water, good road network, and so on are lacking in rural South-East, and where they exist, they are in poor conditions. Shamefully, many cannot afford a decent shelter over their heads and often live in makeshift or mud houses with thatched roofs (see Figure 3). The absence of infrastructure and social amenities make life (and business) in rural areas difficult (Marrie et al. 2013). For instance, the few available microfinance institutions are often in the local government headquarters far away from most rural villages. Thus, rural women entrepreneurs would have to travel miles to reach them. Given that microfinance institutions are far from rural villages, they may lack adequate information about the conditions of rural microbusinesses. In the words of Riggins and Weber (2017, p. 107) "distant upstream lenders do not have adequate information about local businesses and loan conditions to make sound microfinance funding decisions; instead, they make decisions based on identification biases".

Rural main markets are open for business activities at different intervals which can be once a week or every four days. For instance, the Ania Market in Abia state opens every eight days. This poses a problem as people from various villages and towns who seek to attend this market are limited by the days the market operates. Moreover, any agricultural products left unsold may perish before the next market day. On the other hand, the village market which opens every day is poorly attended as customers from outside the village are limited due to the lack of

product variety and poor road network to access the market. This contributes to rural women entrepreneurs not being able to maximise their entrepreneurial potentials. This study is, therefore, crucial as it seeks to increase understanding of the perceptions and experiences of rural women regarding microfinance and challenges, they encounter that may constrain their microbusinesses.

2.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the research context of this study and gave as a background, a brief overview of the geography and history of Nigeria, emphasizing the political and economic situation of the country and how that impacts on the South-East. Key aspects that focused on the narratives of the South-East including the undue marginalisation of the region, as well as the untold hardship and depravity that characterise the rural South-East was briefly narrated as those, are necessary antecedents to some of the peculiarities of the South-East region. For example, due to marginalisation, the region is heavily underdeveloped, and there are limited formal employment opportunities. Furthermore, the absence of infrastructural support has meant that basic social amenities are lacking and the constant threat of insecurity due to insurgents and civil conflict is tangible (Rocks et al. 2016). Rural women in the South-East continually contend and are confronted with these issues in their day-to-day journey to survival. It was noted that the hardships in this region forced many rural women to undertake micro-businesses to augment the support that they get from their spouses in order to provide for their families. Thus, there has been a transformation of women's roles from being mere housewives responsible for home affairs to the additional role of business owners. Now the number of women in entrepreneurship has increased (Aderinto, David and Alabi 2018).

As if the above-stated issues are not enough to grapple with, rural women entrepreneurs also put up with obligations and responsibilities placed on them by culture and traditions in the area. As alluded to earlier, the absence of functional formal (or government) institutions in the South-East means informal institutions prevail, and that is the case with rural settings in the South-East. Patriarchy, tradition, family and culture present constraints and obligations that constrain and inform the way rural women engage in micro-entrepreneurship. Institutions (culture and family) play an important role in determining how family microbusinesses are conducted. The family is central in family micro-business as it provides both opportunity and means to fulfil the vision of the enterprise (which is solely to survive or cope in the face of vulnerabilities). Obviously, with little or no education, and in the face of extreme poverty and huge family responsibilities, rural women do not really have the luxury of choices, as the main objective is survival. This chapter emphasized the fact that the family as an institution provided direction and obligation for the family members, and rural women's microbusiness were often run by the family members to meet the needs of the family. The family microbusiness in traditional rural settings satisfies both opportunity and necessity enterprising.

In conclusion, in the face of limited resources, micro-businesses provide a route towards survival and female micropreneurs play an important role in sustaining the wellbeing of their families (and the community) through their micro-enterprise.

CHAPTER THREE: LITERATURE REVIEW: MICRO-ENTREPRENEURSHIP

3.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews extant literature in micro-entrepreneurship and examines theoretical models of entrepreneurship in rural settings, which provide the basis for theorising the research contained in this thesis. This research recognizes that the phenomenon of entrepreneurship amongst the worlds poorest is situated in a complex, resource-constrained and hostile environment with a set of constructs such as institutional and environmental factors which impact entrepreneurial behaviour. Particularly, poor rural women face a significant amount of challenges and constraints in their daily lives as they engage in their businesses (Akinbami et al. 2019; Mordi et al. 2010). The realities of rural women entrepreneurs in developing countries, characterised by poverty, huge responsibilities and obligations (Daspit and Long 2014), poverty and institutional voids differ significantly from what is being captured in the literature regarding more affluent circumstances.

This chapter is structured as follows: Section 3.2 discusses the concept of micro-entrepreneurship in the context of vulnerability and poverty, with a keen emphasis on rural women's entrepreneurial activities. Section 3.3 describes micro-entrepreneurship under extreme poverty and institutional voids. Section 3.4 explains the motivations and necessity entrepreneurship. Section 3.5 discusses poor women entrepreneurship in Nigeria. Section 3.6 highlights the institutional influence of culture and traditions in patriarchal settings. Section 3.7 discusses the concept of familiness in rural women's micro-enterprises. Section 3.8 summarizes the chapter.

3.2 Micro-entrepreneurship: A Form of Entrepreneurship

Engaging in entrepreneurship is vital for economic progress, especially in developing economies, with the potential to facilitate wealth and job creation (Okpara 2007). Enterprising is important in every economy because (a) it helps to improve the society's wellbeing; (b) it drives the economy forward and reduce poverty; (c) it creates new businesses and/or renew existing ones; and (d) it identifies, assesses and exploits new opportunities (Álvaro et al. 2008). This key role in economic development is reflected in its noticeable growth as a subject of interest in academic research, business planning and economic policies (Aliyu 2020; Chinedu et al. 2019; Emehelu and Oboreh 2020).

In the extant literature, one of the categorisations of entrepreneurship has focused on the size of the enterprise, thereby giving rise to three main classifications, namely: large corporations (250+ employees), small-to-medium-sized enterprises – otherwise called SMEs (with 10+ employees but less than 250) and micro-enterprises (with 0 – 9 employees) (Rhodes 2019). Other categorisations have considered various other characteristics of the business, including the growth plans of the business, the social impact amongst others. Businesses involving no employees or up to a maximum of 9 employees, otherwise referred to as micro-entrepreneurship could be formulated as a semblance of entrepreneurship (Bögenhold and Fachinger 2007). Micro-entrepreneurship is often considered as insignificant in the individual contributions to the economy, however, given their large proportion in the society (especially in the developing world) their impact can be huge (Lord Young 2013; Mbah and Igbokwe 2015). From a western viewpoint, enterprises are meant to generate profit and must be seen to be growing (Smallbone and Welter 2006; Williams and Williams 2014). Meanwhile, within the African context with limited government support, business practices are

negatively affected by institutional void. Clearly, these western-developed theories and profit maximising concepts are inadequate to explain the realities of entrepreneurs that operate outside western business environments, especially in rural settings characterised by enormous institutional voids and scarcity of resources. This study extends the understanding of how institutional contexts affect micro-enterprising. In other words, micro-enterprising in poverty and informal institutional arrangements may differ from western profit maximising enterprises but remain hugely relevant in enabling the entrepreneurs to meet their immediate needs and those of their families. This thesis focuses on micro-businesses with a keen interest in poor women micro-entrepreneurs in rural South-East Nigeria as there is insufficient knowledge about micro-entrepreneurship under extreme poverty in rural Nigeria. The terms micro-entrepreneurship, micro entrepreneurship, micropreneurship, microbusiness and micro-enterprise are used interchangeably in this study and refers to business setup with fewer than 10 employees.

3.3 Micro-entrepreneurship Under Extreme Poverty and Institutional Voids

Micro-entrepreneurship encompasses the process of starting, risking and managing a micro-enterprise in order to add value and meet the needs of people. This form of entrepreneurship mostly dominates developing countries where poverty persists (Smallbone and Welter 2006), and the micropreneurs are motivated by economic needs with a desire for self-realisation (Bogenhold 1987) in the presence of institutional void (Mair and Marti 2006). An institutional void has been described as the weakness or total absence of supportive institutions or institutional resources such as infrastructure (Mair and Marti 2006). On a positive side, Seaman et al. (2017) opine that institutional void often facilitates

entrepreneurial behaviour because resource-scarce environments are conducive for necessity entrepreneurship, especially in developing economies as people tend to respond entrepreneurially to survive.

However, even though there is an increase in the number of people involved in entrepreneurship in Sub-Saharan Africa, extreme poverty still persists (Bango et al. 2018) due to the presence of the institutional void (Estrin, Mickiewicz and Stephan 2013; Mair and Marti 2006). For instance, with little or no infrastructure, lack of access to affordable credit and lack of entrepreneurial training on business management, entrepreneurs would struggle to convert their skills to a substantial economic advantage (Galloway et al. 2005; Sherif, Galloway and Zarrouk 2019). Dacin, Dacin and Matear (2010) re-emphasised the impact associated with the lack of institutional resources (such as infrastructure) on the business environment. According to them, institutional voids can lead to low literacy and low levels of education will result in a shortage of skilled workers while poor transportation systems can lead to the inefficient and expensive distribution of goods and services within such a business environment. Bruton et al. (2013, p. 685) assert that “entrepreneurs in settings of poverty not only confront dramatic institutional voids but also lack any appreciable resources and face severe penalties for failure including not being able to appropriately support their families in terms of the basic needs.”

3.4 Motivations and Necessity Entrepreneurship

In the context of rural Nigeria characterised by lack of resources, institutional voids and poverty, poor women entrepreneurs take calculated risks while exploiting an opportunity to meet a need (Ihugba, Odii and Njoku 2013). These poor rural women entrepreneurs believe that any unnecessary risk could throw

the family in disarray as most of them make their livelihood from the business. As a result of this fear of losing their source of livelihood, they engage in micro-businesses with minimal risk even if it means not making a substantial profit (Buvinić and Furst-Nichols 2016; Fletschner and Kenney 2014) but adding value either by modifying an existing product or producing something new (Schumpeter 1951).

The engagement of women in micropreneurship is believed to have been driven by various motives. These motives, in general drive the development of entrepreneurship which can be divided into 'pull' and 'push' factors (Sexton and Vasper 1982; Shapero and Sokol 1982). Pull factors comprise those positive and desirable alternatives that attract the entrepreneur to the choice of engaging in one (Islam 2012). According to Islam (2012), the pull elements include personal ambition, a desire for independence-to be one's own boss, creativity, self-realization, to raise economic returns, and desire to improve the quality of working conditions and a desire for flexibility that caters for family responsibilities with gainful employment. However, certain unfavourable factors such as the death of a spouse or lack of employment can push people to start their own business (Islam 2012). It can be said that factors which force people to start business enterprises are push or compelling factors.

According to Moses, Olokundun and Mosunmola (2014), women reported pull factors such as the desire for work-life balance, independence and autonomy while men often cite the desire for greater independence, desire for power, authority, and improved financial opportunity as motivating factors to initiate business creation. Other motivational factors that were noted to have pushed women into entrepreneurship were the dual roles of women and their family responsibilities

and commitments (Islam 2012). The pressure of meeting family's needs with little or no spousal support causes many women to initiate the creation of micro-enterprises to fulfil their roles (Jennings and Brush 2013; Thébaud 2016).

According to Gilad and Levine (1986) 'push,' motivations arise due to negative situational factors which tend to activate the hidden talents of a person and nudge them towards business creation while the 'pull' motivations emerge when an individual becomes aware of promising and rewarding opportunities for business. Islam (2012) reported that it is very difficult to draw a dividing line between identifying entrepreneurs' ambitions and compulsions as what can be perceived as ambitions for one entrepreneur may be compulsions for another. For example, a harsh economic situation or rising unemployment often pushes individuals towards business creation. Additionally, positive economic situations and need for personal autonomy can also attract individuals into entrepreneurship.

Ekpe (2011) noted that entrepreneurial attributes such as motives for engaging in business are vital elements that inform what entrepreneurs consider as success and how they go about achieving it. The context of an entrepreneur is central to understanding the motive for business creation. Hence, this study contributes to the literature by increasing understanding on how the context of resource-scarce rural settings with institutional voids make meeting basic needs a priority for rural women entrepreneurs and a motivating factor for starting their micro-businesses. As stated earlier, the very poor people in rural areas of developing countries are left with little or no choice, which accounts for engagement in necessity entrepreneurship (Anderson and Lent 2017). In such an environment, necessity entrepreneurship is predominant emphasising exploration, search and innovation in an attempt to make ends meet. In rural South-East Nigeria, limited or lack of

formal employment leads many poor women to engage in a wide range of micro-businesses as their only option for survival. Most of the women are pushed into starting an enterprise in order to meet the basic needs of family members and other relatives (Ukanwa, Xiong and Anderson 2017).

Bögenhold (1987) reveals that entrepreneurship is driven by two significant drives: (1) the need to meet economic needs, and (2) desire for self-realisation. Reynolds et al. (2002) referred to them as “necessity-based” and “opportunity-based” entrepreneurship respectively and argued that they could serve as motivation depending on the context of interest. The ideologies of “opportunity” and “necessity” entrepreneurship are excessively simplistic, particularly in settings characterised by weak or absent institutions (Smallbone and Welter 2006). Williams and Williams (2014) argue that the simplistic duality view of necessity and opportunity entrepreneurship is based on marginality assumption that individuals who are socially marginalised will run marginal businesses. Certainly, this assumption is valid in many cases, especially in contexts where survival drives the business rather than growth (Loscocco and Bird 2012), which is typical of many poor rural women's entrepreneurship.

However, such causal effects are vital, but not enough for conceptualising how micro-businesses operate because they are not deterministic. Undeniably, regarding poor, marginalised rural women, ‘opportunity’ is rooted in the potential for them to meet their family needs through these micro-businesses. This contrast ‘demonstrates’ the divergent scope of entrepreneurship in underdeveloped economies. Hence, this study adds to the literature regarding the motivations that drive poor rural South-East women to engage in entrepreneurship.

3.5. Poor Women Entrepreneurship in Nigeria

Women entrepreneurs are women who take part in entrepreneurial activities, weigh the risks associated with running a business and aim to take advantage of the opportunities in their surroundings by delivering goods and services (Moses and Mordi 2010). Women's entrepreneurial activities, especially in Africa are mostly in micro, small and medium scale in nature and contribute towards economic growth and the social well-being of their families (Fulford and Lawan 2018; Kumbhar 2013; Muhammed et al. 2017; Stephen 2014; Umemezia and Osifo 2018).

Although extant studies report that women entrepreneurs can play an incredible role in economic growth and poverty reduction (Ekpe et al. 2010; Soni and Soni 2019), they still face enormous difficulties running their businesses (Akinbami et al. 2019; Egbo et al. 2020; Mordi et al. 2010). These difficulties largely emanate from the socio-cultural constraints introduced by informal institutional arrangements that are prevalent in rural areas. Some of the problems include factors such as the traditional views on the role of women in the society which often assign all the domestic responsibilities and caring duties to women (see Chapter 2, section 2.3.2 for more details). As a result, many poor rural women especially the married ones struggle to advance their businesses as marriage often restricts women's movement outwit the home due to family obligations (e.g. child-care, putting food on the table and domestic duties). These may explain why poor rural women businesses tend to be small or micro in the informal sector and concentrate on the service sectors and businesses with low start-up capital (Beqo and Gehrels 2014; Belwal et al. 2012).

Despite women-owned businesses being small and non-scalable, the totality of them in a community is large (Alvarez and Barney 2014). Nonetheless, Anderson et al. (2013) note that micropreneurship may be an indigent relation of western growth-inclined enterprise, yet it is pivotal to survival in the informal sector. In support of this view, literature shows that engaging in entrepreneurship empowers women to improve their livelihoods and families (Fulford and Lawan 2018; Zuzana and Thierry 2016). Alese (2013), cited in Sajuyigbe and Fadeyibi (2017), noted that many of the poor rural women micro-enterprises provide for a substantial portion of economic production, consumption and trade in rural Nigeria. This study aims to bridge this gap in the literature by providing an empirical understanding of women entrepreneurship, particularly poor rural women, micro-entrepreneurship in South-East Nigeria.

Entrepreneurial activities of poor rural women are primarily undertaken as a livelihood strategy to supplement their family's income (Halkias, Nwajiuba, Harkiolakis 2011). Indeed, the entrepreneurial engagement of women contributes significantly to economic development in terms of job creation, wealth creation and poverty reduction in Nigeria (Akpodono 2016). However, the extent of their contribution is unknown, given the prevailing poverty that still persists in Nigeria, especially among rural women (Chukwu 2012). The study by Akpodono (2016) only focused on women in urban areas and adopted a quantitative method. This study attempts to bridge the gap by adopting a qualitative method to provide in-depth knowledge about rural women micro-entrepreneurship and their contributions.

Evidence from previous studies shows the type of entrepreneurial activities rural women involved in such as farming, livestock management, hairdressing,

tailoring, canteen, trading, selling of agricultural commodities (Akinbami and Aransiola 2016; Ukanwa, Xiong and Anderson 2017). Similarly, other studies have outlined certain key contributions of rural women engagement in entrepreneurship. These include the provision of basic family needs such as food, clothing, education, medical care and sometimes shelter (Halkias, Nwajiuba, Harkiolakis 2011; Ukanwa, Xiong and Anderson 2017). Additionally, rural women microbusinesses create employment for themselves and others, pay taxes and levies, thereby contributing to the local economy (Ajike, Adekitan and Okoro 2016). As noted by Ajike, Adekitan and Okoro (2016), the impact of rural women's micro-businesses is great and if supported can have a more positive multiplying effect on the socio-economic well-being of the entire community, state and Nigeria as a whole.

Unfortunately, despite the immense economic and social contributions of rural women entrepreneurs, their businesses remain at subsistence level. More so, several studies report that women, particularly rural women entrepreneurs face diverse operational obstacles such as lack of capital, lack of modern infrastructure and poor skills (Ajike, Adekitan and Okoro 2016; Ibru 2009; Iganiga 2008). Additionally, in rural areas, it is believed that culture and socio-cultural constraints caused by institutional voids, patriarchy and traditional practices influence how most women exploit business opportunities or run them. Yet, there is limited study on the influence of informal institutions (culture) on rural women micro-businesses, hence the relevance of this study.

3.6 Informal Institution and Its Influence on Rural Women's Micro-Enterprises

Increasingly, scholars are appreciating the significance of institutions in understanding entrepreneurship (Baumol 1990; Harbi and Anderson 2010).

Specifically, institutions present an avenue for exploring context when viewing entrepreneurship from a socio-cultural perspective (Boettke and Coyne 2009; Welter 2011). The economic behaviour of a given society is guided by the prevailing institutions, which define terms of reference (Baumol 1990; North 1990). Baumol (1990) commented that entrepreneurs direct their energies to reflect the quality of predominant institutions. Scholars have contended that the standard of the institutions (legal, political, economic and social) an individual is immersed in determines how their efforts are channelled (Baumol 1990; Harbi and Anderson 2010). Institutions are categorised as formal, including laws and constitutions, and informal including codes of conduct, constraints and conventions (North 1990). Formal institutions generally deal with economic and political freedom, the rule of law, protection of property entitlement and human rights (Harbi and Anderson 2010) while informal institutions are the unspoken codified artefacts enshrined in the society which operate by providing prompts for moulding people's practices (North 1990).

Emphasizing on the influence of institutions on rural women enterprise, Nooteboom (2002, p. 34) defines institutions as 'things that constrain, enable and guide behaviour'. In other words, the practices of rural women enterprise are set within socially embeddedness institutions (Anderson and Ronteau 2017; McKeever et al. 2014) and rely on traditions, customs, cultural attitudes and norms (Pacheco et al. 2010). Family (a socially institutionalised entity that thrives on values and norms) can provide support to rural women entrepreneurs and also constrain their behaviour and alternatives.

3.6.1 Informal Institutions in Practice: Culture and Tradition

Culture embodies the philosophy, worldview, behaviour patterns, arts and institutions of a people (Pacheco et al. 2010). Culture, the way of life of a people, remains a very vital factor in shaping not only the day-to-day activities of the people but also their businesses. In Cahn's (2006) view, culture is considered an important asset for sustainable livelihoods, and sustaining the cultural essence of a people as well as the cultural relationship with their natural environment are as important as improving financial capital. The values in culture and social capital can also provide meaning to livelihood outcomes. For instance, some entrepreneurs have motivation for pursuing traditional livelihood strategies such as craft, pottery and local weaving as a means of earnings for survival whilst showcasing their traditional heritage. Studies such as Bango, Ndiweni and Galloway (2018) (which was based in Zimbabwe a similar resource-constrained business environment like Nigeria) confirm that apart from the motivation for income and survival, their respondents (entrepreneurs) expressed additional motivators connected with tradition and pride in engaging in traditional-based businesses and the dissemination of their culture and heritage. In the same manner, heritage, customs, and traditions can be drawn upon to provide economic livelihood strategies through tourism and sale of crafts or traditional artefacts (Daskon 2010).

It has been argued that entrepreneurs reflect the major values of their culture (Eroğlu and Picak, 2011). This suggests that cultural values significantly influence how people would respond to entrepreneurship. For example, in contending with the pressure from the institutions of family and culture, poor rural women are coerced to concentrate on subsistence because their ultimate objective is to provide today's meal for their family. This entrepreneurial objective, informed by

the interplay of both traditional and cultural expectations, highlights the practical realities confronting these women. Since formal institutional voids are prevalent in rural areas, informal institutions such as family often intervene. Family makes some resources available to poor rural women's micro-enterprises, including unpaid labour, initial finance for starting their business; and also introduce constraints which influence what they can do. As an informal institution, the family, incorporating norms, culture, patriarchy and responsibilities, largely shape women's entrepreneurial behaviour and determine their role (Eroğlu and Picak 2011; Ram and Holliday 1993). For example, entrepreneurs in the context of rural South-East Nigeria where traditions and customs are still practised to the core constrain enterprise, as people are compelled to adhere to cultural values of their societies, even at the detriment of their entrepreneurial development (Akinbami and Aransiola 2015).

Speaking about cultural influence, Makama (2013) and Clark (2002) argued that economic growth including cultural and social resources could be eroded and depleted with inappropriate adoption of interventions (e.g. microfinance) which undermines the cultural processes and institutions. In other words, any economic development strategy which fails to consider the social and cultural arrangements of the people may undermine them, especially when targeting the women in a patriarchal society.

3.6.2 Patriarchal Society and Gender Disparities

In patriarchal societies, including rural Nigeria, women are placed in a subordinate position as mere housewives responsible for domestic chores (Akinbami et al. 2019; Makama 2013; Roland 2015). These practices impact on women's rights within the home and in the society at large. Consequently, the social system

stratifies and differentiates individual roles and entitlements based on sex, and provide material advantages to the male while placing severe constraints or total denial on the females (Igwe, Newbery and Icha-Ituma 2018). The culture of patriarchy determines and justifies women's structural unequal position by condoning gender-differential terms in inheritance entitlement, education, economy, labour market, business and domestic matters (Akinbami et al. 2019; Makama 2013; Roland 2015) and entrepreneurship leadership (Galloway, Kapasi and Sang 2015). For instance, females in Igbo culture neither inherit land nor have equal access to education as their male counterparts. This practice of patriarchy avails men the privilege of being trained for leadership activities while women are relegated to domestic activities (Igwe et al. 2018). For instance, in rural settings of developing countries such as Nigeria, the informal institution determines the role of family members by gender and women are customarily assigned all the domestic duties including caring for their family members which constrain their entrepreneurial activities.

Women in such societies are discriminated against, maltreated and left with little or no support from their spouses and the traditional society (Amine and Staub 2009). This is worse for rural women in a patriarchal society where women are seen as inferior to men (that is, women subordination) in all aspects of social life. For instance, a married woman in rural South-East Nigeria cannot exploit business opportunities or travel far for business without her husband's permission according to Igbo culture. More specifically, poor rural women, particularly in South-East Nigeria, are expected to engage only in business activities which are approved by their husbands while performing their traditional roles (wife, mother and in some cases a provider) and upholding socio-cultural regulations so as to be accepted in the community (Essers and Benschop 2007; Khavul et al. 2009).

Furthermore, culture influences the choice of livelihood strategies that people choose by classifying them based on gender (by defining engagement to either men or women) or age (young or old) (Daskon 2010; Lin and Chang 2013). Cultural objections to women doing business or work reserved for men limit women from taking advantage of opportunities (Makama 2013). For example, in some regions such as rural South-East, women are discouraged from engaging in certain work such as bricklayer's work which is seen as men's work. Similarly, it is uncultured for women to be involved in climbing palm trees to harvest palm fruits even if it is profitable (Makama 2013). Typically, under patriarchy, these same cultural arrangements constrain gainful employment opportunities, as what women are allowed to do is constructed socially by these institutions. Poor rural women in South-East Nigeria give birth and care for the children, and also meet their survival needs (Amoako-Kwakye 2012; Azmat 2013). In countless rural settings, women are burdened with onerous family obligations to sponsor children's education, supply clothing, source and prepare meals for the family (Ahi 2006; Akinbami et al. 2019; Igwe et al. 2018).

Nigerian women's productivity as earlier mentioned is hindered by this widespread inequality and marginalisation in education, land inheritance, labour market, business and domestic matters as well as access to land and productive inputs (Makama 2013; Nwoye 2007). All these barriers and constraints have negative implications for the type of micro business that women are engaged in and the ability to access credit from microfinance. Hence, this study extends the work of Nwoye (2007) by increasing awareness of the institutional voids in rural settings and their implications on poor rural women and their micro-business. This study presents a deeper understanding of the challenges and barriers that poor rural women face in their day-to-day lives considering their dual roles as prescribed by

informal institutions like family, cultural practices and tradition. Ultimately, this insight will equip all the stakeholders to aim to mitigate the barriers faced by poor rural women through socio-cultural practices and norms. This will help to improve access to credit and assets for meaningful engagement in entrepreneurship leading to better wellbeing of women, their families and the rural economy. Aliyu (2020) even reckons that women's entrepreneurial activities will serve as a means of livelihood and survival for women and their families; this will, in turn, contribute to the growth of the economy.

3.7 Family and Rural Women Micro-enterprises

Several rural women living in poverty in rural areas run a micro family business (Kenny, 2019). Though these micro-enterprises are informal and non-scalable, they prevail in settings characterised by extreme poverty. The short-term goal of these entrepreneurial activities is to support the daily necessities of the family. There is hardly any potential to grow the business, maximise profit, generate job opportunities and increase economic impact, although it is not always an immediate target. This aligns with the report that nearly 30 years of support from donors and aid could not achieve the dream of upscaling these micro-enterprises to large corporations (Lupton 2011). Poverty remains an everyday reality in sub-Saharan Africa despite the staggering one trillion US Dollars that has been sunk in the form of donations and aid for nearly half a century (Lupton 2011). Little wonder, women entrepreneurs remain critical in upholding the welfare of their families and the rural economy (Ajani 2012).

In Africa, female micro-entrepreneurs cater to basic household needs. Undeniably, women's micro-enterprises make up a sizeable percentage of income and employment in rural areas (Mbah and Igbokwe 2015). Although the context of

rural micro-enterprises may be considered as residual or marginal by western scholars, they constitute a crucial and fundamental part in the survival and sustenance of the rural economy (Nagler and Naudé 2014). These family micro-enterprises present a way of surviving in the face of scarce resources. Therefore, a recognition of the characteristics and challenges of micro-enterprises where the family is critical.

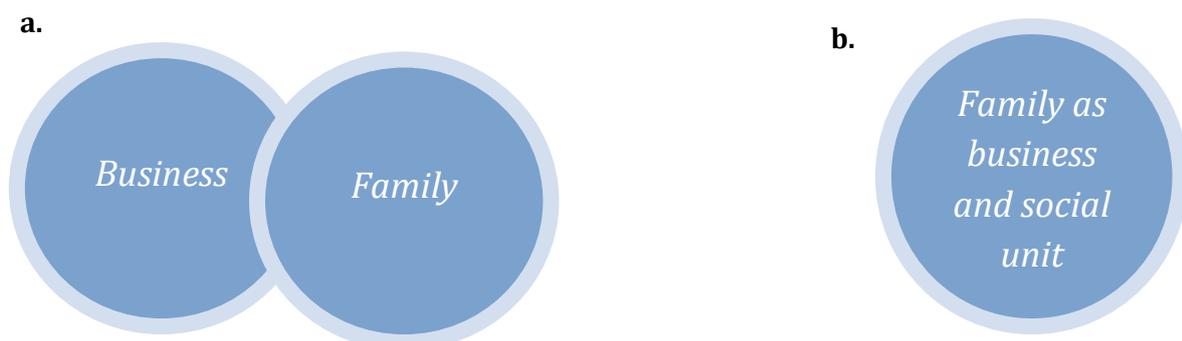
3.7.1 Typical Western View of Familiness

The long-established family business literature puts the functions of business and family in nearly opposing positions (Anderson et al. 2005; Whiteside and Brown 1991), or at best, as intersecting structures (Randerson et al. 2015). Scholars (Bettinelli et al. 2014; Collins et al. 2016; Habbershon et al. 2003; Olson et al. 2013) discuss the interplay between business and family, and Habbershon et al. (2003) note that family factors are often isolated, ignored or discounted in business literature. In fact, there is a controversial proposition that 'family' comprises the emotional component, while 'business' delivers the rational element in the family business (Olson et al. 2013). Collins et al. (2016) note that the demarcation of home and markets is blurred by the concept of family. From a social viewpoint, the family is further considered the social reproductive unit because families are viewed as the segment of the community that 'socialises' shared artefacts (Seaman et al. 2017). Similarly, following western categorisation on the basis of economics, the family is labelled either as the consumption unit or the production unit but not both.

The idiosyncratic enterprise-level pile of capabilities and resources generated from interconnections is termed the 'familiness' of the enterprise (Habbershon and Williams 1999). In western literature, the familiness of an enterprise is captured

as an intersection (Stafford et al. 1999) between business and the family, as indicated in Figure 4a (Bettinelli and Randerson 2015). Such frameworks fail to see the entire interaction between family and business as a self-existing unit, rather concentrates on managing the rigid cross-overs and their exchanges (Habbershon et al. 2003).

Figure 4: Different views of Familiness in practice



3.7.2 Familiness in poor Micro-enterprising

Whatmore et al. (2017) noted that family micro-businesses are crucial to the sustenance of the rural economy, and their economic and social importance needs to be rediscovered and reappraised. Against the residual curiosity of pre-industrial times, the authors pointed out that applying theoretical concepts that focus on developed economies to theorise the practices of family micro-enterprises in the face of poverty will pose a number of problems since such theories will be incapable of capturing the dynamics of institutional voids, such as extreme poverty. Additionally, the assertions of the traditional family business literature including clear-cut separation of concerns economically, socially and otherwise (as captured in Section 3.7.1) limit understanding of the reality of women's family business in extreme poverty. Contrary to those assertions in the literature, Xiong, Ukanwa and Anderson (2018) found familiness as one entity given the centrality of family in poor rural women's family business where family and business are not separable as indicated in Figure 4b above.

The family business literature usually portrays the business as a resource for the family, or the family as a resource (Alsos et al. 2014). Nevertheless, an alternative conceptualisation is required in settings such as rural Nigeria with large family sizes yet scanty resources. This is because, contrary to traditional family business viewpoints, the goal of familiness in such settings is far from solving optimisation problems or maximising profits but rather focuses on survival and making ends meet. Clearly, in the context of vulnerability and destitution, how microbusinesses work may be easily misunderstood if the unreasonable assumptions regarding the demarcation between family expenses and business, rationality and economies of scale are introduced. The entrepreneurial activities of rural women to generate income for survival (Ajani 2012; Aliyu 2020) crucially differ from the businesses in more affluent settings, which emphasize business growth and profit maximisation. Poor women's income-generating responses remain crucially different from profit maximising businesses. The poor have very limited resources but possess physical energy, family ties and emotional endurance to thrive (Sarasvathy 2004) in such hostile environments (Bettinelli et al. 2014). Their key objective is to ensure that their households are provided for; thus, their business is typically small, and its expansion is not automatically desirable.

Scholars theorise the family embeddedness as another important factor that can help in understanding family business (Aldrich and Cliff 2003). Family embeddedness is said to be when the entrepreneurs, their families and their businesses are interwoven (Jennings and McDougald 2007). Still, on family embeddedness, Alsos et al. (2014), elaborate the three perspectives. For the entrepreneur's perspective, achieving some sort of balance between the family and business spheres is important (Jennings and McDougald 2007), as they usually consider both spheres as important to them. From a business perspective,

the family sphere is often presented as a liability for the entrepreneur, for instance, by causing work-family conflicts (Jennings and McDougald 2007). Hence, the business may underperform in these circumstances as responsibilities in the family are claimed to limit the resources available to the business (Aliyu 2020; Rothausen 2009). However, the family can also serve as an asset for the business (Eddleston and Powell 2008), providing information, capital, moral support and other resources for the business (Alsos, Carter and Ljunggren 2015). The third viewpoint is from the family perspective, where the business sphere is often portrayed as an asset, providing training, mentorship even from a young age, supporting the family financially and creating wealth and jobs for the next generation (Alsos et al. 2014). However, Carter (2011) noted that family business does not always create wealth.

Again, the interaction between the family and business in western view differs from how the family business is viewed in settings of poverty, that is, as both a unit of consumption and production. In rural settings such as rural South-East Nigeria, the family business is often constituted by members and relatives resident in the location, and they are emotionally connected with the business (Dębski and Krawczyk 2017). An attempt to understand micro-entrepreneurial practices in rural communities requires knowledge of the functions of the family. Having this knowledge of the interaction between the family and the business is vital to expose the powerful role family plays in the management of enterprise-level resources (that is, access and allocation) and capabilities (Dębski and Krawczyk 2017).

Many poor rural women operate micro family businesses, and in the absence of functional formal institutional arrangements, informal institutions such as family and culture play vital roles in influencing their entrepreneurial behaviours. The

absence or weak institutional arrangements were noted by Mair and Marti (2009) as common in developing economies. Chakrabarty (2009) describes these institutional voids as the absence of institutional facilities which include property rights, economic and political freedoms and the rule of law for a well-functioning economy. These conditions trap people in poverty, especially rural women who are excluded from mainstream financial services and market participation (Mair et al. 2012); hence rural women utilise the resources at their disposal (Sarasvathy and Dew, 2005) - rely on their families for support and in return income generated from their businesses is used to support the family.

In a country that has failed to provide necessary basic infrastructure, social amenities and important means of livelihood, the centrality of family in poor rural women micro-business cannot be undermined. Hence, the interaction between family and business is such that the family is the consumption as well as the production unit (Xiong, Ukanwa and Anderson 2018). Albeit, this interaction comes with a heap of expectations and obligations (Daspit and Long 2014) such that poor rural women rely on family and on the flip side, the family on the business for survival. Yet, this relationship renders both the poor rural women and their businesses vulnerable (Mushongah 2009). Thus, rural women entrepreneurs exploit diverse sources of finance to sustain their family and businesses.

3.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter reviewed extant literature on entrepreneurship emphasizing micro-enterprises in rural settings. Under extreme poverty and institutional voids, poor women (particularly rural women entrepreneurs) are confronted with barriers and challenges which shape their entrepreneurial behaviour and orientation (Aliyu

2020; Galloway et al. 2005; Kenny 2019; Mair and Marti 2006; Sherif, Galloway and Zarrouk, 2019). In the face of these challenges, poor rural women engage in 'necessity entrepreneurship' to support their families in terms of basic needs (Moses, Olokundun and Mosunmola 2014). Necessity entrepreneurship is common in rural settings because the main goal of these women is survival as they do not have any real choices (Anderson and Lent 2017; Ukanwa, Xiong and Anderson 2017). However, these poor rural women find 'opportunity' in the possibility of them meeting their family needs through micro-enterprises. In fact, Anderson et al. (2013) noted that micropreneurship could be conceived as a poorer relation of western profit-inclined enterprise, yet it fills a vital void in resource-scarce environments.

Additionally, the influence of culture and socio-cultural factors on how poor women exploit business opportunities are of continued interest to researchers in the small business field (Kenny 2019; Aliyu 2020). Particularly, the traditional practices in patriarchal societies and the challenges they pose to poor rural women in micro-enterprising have been limited in number. Thus, research concentrating on the impact of socio-cultural factors, norms and traditional practices on the entrepreneurship behaviour of poor rural women remain relatively unknown; a gap in knowledge which this research seeks to address.

The next chapter discusses the concept of microfinance in rural Nigeria as one of the effective tools that target poor women for empowerment and poverty alleviation. It would explore how well this tool is being utilized as a source of finance for rural poor women's micro-enterprises.

CHAPTER FOUR: MICROFINANCE IN RURAL NIGERIA

4.1 Introduction

A key mechanism to aid development in third world countries is to engage and encourage more participation in entrepreneurial development. The previous chapter has reviewed how rural people in Nigeria are actively taking on the challenge and incorporating business into the family. One of the key factors of production that such micro-businesses (especially in rural areas) require is access to credit. This chapter discusses microfinance as a tool to enable the poor (especially rural women in South-East Nigeria) to access the factors of production, particularly credit. Firstly, the term microfinance is defined, and a brief history is presented. Next, the development of microfinance in Nigeria is reviewed. The following section discusses what we know about microfinance in the literature and how microfinance is reaching and benefiting rural micro-businesses. Lastly, a critical evaluation of microfinance is presented, highlighting gaps identified in extant literature.

4.2 Microfinance: Definition and Origin

Microfinance can be defined as the provision of financial services to poor and low-income households who have little or no access to formal financial institutions (Mohammed 2020). Microfinance is not a recent phenomenon, even though it has been acclaimed to have been invented in Bangladesh in the 1970s. According to Seibel (2004), the available evidence in the literature suggests that microfinance in Africa started many centuries ago among the Yorubas of Nigeria in the form of a rotating savings and credit association (RoSCA) named 'esusu'. In fact, Bascom (1952) noted that the concept of esusu was transported to the Caribbean Islands during the slave trade. The early days of the esusu as a financial self-help group probably involved rotating work associations, whereby labour as a scarce

resource, at the time, was accumulated and allocated to one member at a time. Over the years the scarce commodity has changed from labour to money, and now many variations and adaptations of informal financial institutions have emerged including cooperatives (Bascom 1952; Seibel and Marx 1984), non-rotating savings associations (Seibel and Massing 1974), contribution clubs (Ardener 1953) and daily deposit schemes (called 'Ajo' among the Yorubas in Nigeria), which enables the door-to-door collection of deposit (Adeyeye 1970).

Notably, in the 1970s, a paradigm shift towards the importance of Money and Capital in Economic Development initiated by Shaw and McKinnon (1973) at Stanford University stirred up new insights into financial systems, and research into microfinance has continued to gain ground. Following this ground-breaking work, Dale Adams (1984) and his colleagues at Ohio State University exposed the perils of Undermining Rural Development with Cheap Credit, and rural financial systems have continued to receive growing academic and government attention. In the early 1980s, the formal microfinance movement took off in Bangladesh, when the Grameen Bank provided approaches for a diversified financial landscape for the poor which made up for the inadequacies of conventional financial institutions (Hulme 2008; Yunus 1999). Today, with more than 7000 formal microfinance institutions serving over 25 million poor people worldwide, the microfinance landscape has spread across the world, Nigeria inclusive (Mohammed and Hasan 2008).

4.3 Microfinance Development in Nigeria

Originally founded on the cultural constructs of community financing, microfinance in Nigeria has come a long way. Informal microfinance practices thrived in Nigeria long before the proliferation of formal microfinance institutions. Informal

microfinance is culturally rooted in the Nigerian culture of collective actions (Iganiga 2008). It is typically arranged by local associations and targeted at their members for mutual benefits. These local associations operate a variety of traditional microfinance services such as credit and savings and are prevalent in the rural areas of the country, South-East inclusive (Amakom and Amagwu 2020).

According to a World Bank (2006) report, the formalisation of microfinance happened through an experimental programme in which poor women were provided with small loans to invest in micro-enterprises. The pioneer organisations for that were Grameen Bank of Bangladesh, ACCION International and Self-Employed Women's Association Bank in India. Although going back centuries, the formal setup of microfinancing arrived in Nigeria in 2005 (Mejaha and Nwachukwu 2008). Before that, community banks (CBs) served as financial entities providing financial services to the poor. Their services included savings and short-term loans. These financial outfits became popular in the 1990s and were 'grassroots', owned and managed generally by community associations (Ayadi, Hyman and Williams 2008).

Nigerians have always been involved in borrowing, lending and saving money using informal mechanisms or their own systems and methods to meet their financial needs without any external assistance (Nwanyanwu 2011). By the mid-2000s, there were more than 1,000 CBs operating in Nigeria (Ayadi, Hyman and Williams 2008). However, their weak financial and managerial performance led to the collapse of many CBs, and as a result, many people lost their savings and livelihoods since the deposits were not insured (Ulrich and Hoback 2014). Nigeria's inability to develop its financial sector led to frequent bank distress (Ifelunini and Wosowei 2013) and inefficiencies due to bureaucracies in its operations and

processes for credit (Chibundu et al. 2016). In a bid to reduce the inefficiencies and recurrent loss of savings by the poor who mainly had access to the informal financial institutions, brought about formalising microfinance. Considering the successes of formalised microfinance recorded in other nations as a tool to enable the poor to access credit (see Aslam, Kumar and Sorooshian 2020; Hulm 2009), the Nigerian government set out to formalise the practice of microfinance. First, to target rural entrepreneurs, including women, in order to improve their productive capacity (Iganiga 2008). Thus, the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) and Nigeria Deposit Insurance Corporation (NDIC) decided to step in and convert the CBs into formal, regulated microfinance institutions (MFIs) in 2005 (CBN 2005).

As reported by Anyebe (2014), Nigeria ranks third in the world regarding the number of poor people, and they predominantly live in rural areas. Their livelihoods often come from micro-businesses (Igwe, Madichie, and Newbery 2019). Shockingly, these poor micro-entrepreneurs in rural Nigeria are excluded from formal institutions, including formal financial institutions (Anyanwu 2014) as a result of the institutional void that is prevalent in rural areas in Nigeria (see Chapter 3 for details). Also, the inefficiencies in the government regarding rural development and the reluctance of conventional banks in providing accessible services to the poor limit their chances of being served (Akinlabi et al. 2011). This means that most poor women micro-entrepreneurs are not left with much option than to approach informal sources for finance (Amakom and Amagwu 2020; Ofoegbu 2013) such as "moneylenders", cooperatives, credit and savings associations. These are usually individuals or a group of people that lend out money to local people and allows flexible repayment (Imhonopi, Urim and Ajayi 2013; Ogujiuba, Jumare and Stiegler 2013) but some (e.g. moneylenders) charge at exorbitant interest rates (Eja and Bassey 2011). Although the demand for

exorbitant interest rates further compound the financial problems of the poor (rural women) as it can result in indebtedness.

It is globally acclaimed that MFIs are crucial in serving the poor who often has limited access to credit as well as core services, including healthcare and children's education (Idris and Agbim 2015). The survival toolkit of the rural poor typically has a shortfall of core skills for gainful employment. Sadly, most of these are women, without education yet carrying the double burden of caring for family members and providing for them (Kenny 2019; Aliyu 2020). These poor women are more vulnerable to the intimidations of marginalisation, discrimination, stress, and disease compared to others in the society (Nwoye 2007). Though MFIs cannot cure poverty, it is argued that it could support the poor with a variety of services which could help them enhance their individual prospects as well as their families' (Hulme 2000).

4.4 What We Know About Microfinance In The Literature

These microfinance services are aimed to address the economic and social problems by promoting a savings culture and providing working capital to economically active poor (rural women) in order to reduce poverty in the society (Danson, Galloway and Sherif, 2021; Mohammed 2020). However, Sanusi (2012) noted that the absence of credit histories due to the informal nature of many poor rural women microbusinesses and the fact that traditionally they are excluded from property rights (hence no collateral) contribute to the limited access to finance by women. Also, the lack of education can hinder women entrepreneurs from accessing loans (Umemezia and Osifo 2018). Consequently, a deeper understanding of microfinance with respect to the expectations and livelihood of

rural poor women entrepreneurs is relevant and are presented in the remainder of this section.

4.4.1 As A Mechanism To Alleviate Poverty

Though microfinance is flaunted as a viable tool to alleviate poverty, in the context of Nigeria, it is questionable. Studies such as Babajide (2011) and Ihuagba, Bankong and Ebomuche (2014) indicate that MFIs in Nigeria alleviate the financing constraints of entrepreneurs who patronise them and contribute to their innovative management and business strategies, but all concur that their impact in poverty alleviation is doubtful. The challenges of poverty and financial exclusion indicate that MFIs have not reached an appreciable level of performance and possibly exclude the poorest of the poor (Diochon et al. 2016; Mahmood et al. 2014). For instance, Efobi et al. (2014) report that access to financial services in Nigeria is generally low and hampered by factors such as income levels, age and inclination to ICT. Moreover, there are several considerations that are crucial to highlight in this study, such as socio-cultural factors. Microfinance interventions often see credit as the answer poor people need. Albeit, on top of money issues, limited education - including entrepreneurial education (Galloway, and Higgins 2017; Higgin et al. 2018), absence of core skills, constrained mobility, limited access to security and assets are some of the challenges that confront poor rural women. Additionally, most literature concentrates on the supply side of microfinance, which often emphasizes the fact that MFIs make credit accessible to the poor; hence the poor can borrow and utilise such credit to start or run an enterprise. They often assume that the poor would always welcome the opportunity to borrow (Claessens, 2006; Fowowe, 2017). For example, Fowowe (2017) argued that capital is significant to the success of any business as it forms the foundation of the business, while Claessens (2006) concluded that the utilisation of credit is

linked to the question of whether financial services are available and in what quantity (Odejimi and Edogiawerie 2019; Taiwo and Mike 2020). On the contrary, the vulnerability of poor women micro-entrepreneurs in rural Nigeria means that credit is seen as debt, which constitutes a great risk for them as that could lead to further debt and make them even more vulnerable (Ukanwa, Xiong and Anderson 2018).

Also, when assets required to support steady livelihoods is lacking, then uncertainties and risks could yield irrecoverable misfortunes including unprecedented destitution (Christiaensen and Subbarao 2005), malnutrition, interminable indebtedness and reduced human capital (Nwachukwu 2012). The poor may be unwilling to shoulder the risks associated with microfinance loans because of the awareness of the gravity of the hardship that may result. For these women, any loss could tip them overboard from which they may never return because they have no cushion for their loss. The effects of such shocks are not merely marginal (like having a little less money to spend) but could impact on survival. An individual's attitude towards financial services may impact on their decision to utilise such services or not (Caglayan et al. 2020; Roy, Kesharwani and Bisht 2012). Conversely, those in abject poverty may become hooked in indebtedness as they could utilise microfinance to attend to a pressing family need (Taylor 2011). These poor women see such risks as imminent and can be irreversible since they have very limited resources to fall back on when faced with risks and shocks.

Additionally, microfinance reckons that the greatest challenge in poverty is the lack of credit, and so assumes that the poor have sufficient social capital, human capital and other factors of production to run their microbusiness (Taylor 2011).

The main focus of microfinance is enterprise lending, and by doing so, it aims to empower the poor to engage in entrepreneurial activities so as to enable the poor to lift out of poverty themselves. It is possible that the immediate goal of the poorest of the poor may be to meet basic needs and so may desire the short-term fix of aid and charity. Though such short-term interventions can help resolve immediate challenges of the poor, it often does not empower the poor to meet future needs. It can be likened to 'giving one a fish to eat' rather than 'teaching them to fish'. Despite the creation of financial institutions to cater for this category of businesses, the existing microfinance institutions have failed to serve the poorest of the poor who need their services (e.g. training and insurance) most in Nigeria (Ike 2012; Mohammed 2020) among whom are rural women.

Furthermore, microfinance follows the neoliberal theory that the development process is fueled by the actions of evenly gifted, self-optimising individuals who subscribe to concepts of economic rationality (Rankin 2002; Risman and Ferree 1995). This viewpoint ignores the role that the context wherein these "entrepreneurs" operate may inform responses that may be seen as economically irrational (Anderson et al. 2013; Dacin et al. 1999). It also seems to fail to realise that the very poor families often have limited productivity and possess little or no formal education. More specifically, the poorest may struggle to appreciate how to secure microfinance loans because of inexistent or limited financial literacy. Also, microfinance interventions seem to ignore the practical realities of destitution which are mostly non-income related including security, health and education (Bradley et al. 2012). For example, low literacy means that the procedures and documentation required for borrowing are more challenging and crucially, difficult to comprehend. Hence, microfinance processes that do not consider and adapt to the literacy of the borrowers raise intimidating barriers for

the poorest (Ukanwa, Xiong and Anderson 2018). In addition to the sparsity of literature that focuses on the experiences of the borrower or potential users rather than the supply of MFIs, most studies do not consider the limited reach of microfinance programmes to the poor in remote/rural areas.

4.4.2 Targets Poor Women

Women are seen as a particularly disadvantaged group (Abbas et al. 2019), and microfinance is considered as one of the effective tools that target poor women. According to Anyanwu (2014), microfinance institutions could become the major source of funding for microbusinesses in Nigeria. Unlike the conventional financial institutions who consider women as risky service users and so marginalised them in terms of credit (Soludo 2008), microfinance clearly presents a potentially viable option to serve and support rural poor women in particular. Carefully designed women-focused microfinance interventions could help minimise female poverty. It is generally believed that microfinance programmes are central to tackling poverty (Mohammed, 2020). The United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) acknowledges that the establishment of microfinance institutions (MFIs) has presented a major stimulus for development in many Western countries and a powerful instrument for combating poverty in developing nations (UNDP 2007).

Many authors (Abdulkadir et al. 2012; Armendariz and Morduch 2005; Gbadebo et al. 2013; Idris and Agbim 2015; Sanusi 2012) have made comments regarding the significance of microfinance on rural women entrepreneurial development. For example, CBN (2005, 2011) submits that microfinance plays a vital role in providing credit facilities to the rural poor women and low-income earners and enables them to promote their entrepreneurial activities. Abdulkadir et al. (2012) argue that the untapped capacity of women for entrepreneurship can be

substantially boosted by providing microfinance services to them. They noted that the women entrepreneur would be able to identify entrepreneurial opportunities and take advantage of them to improve their household wellbeing. This concurs with other studies on microfinance which view the function of microfinance as one that improved women's access to credit (Idris and Agbim 2015). Idris and Agbim (2015) saw the provision of microfinance as an efficient intervention for enhancing women's status and a promising tool for poverty reduction. For Idris and Agbim (2015), making loans available to the poor and empowering them to start and run their microbusinesses could enable them to help themselves (United Nations 2015).

Based on the belief and existing studies (Ekpe, Mat and Razak 2010; World Bank 2007) that have shown that women invest loans in productive activities and improve family welfare more often than men, microfinance programmes need to consider the peculiarities of poor women. For instance, in the face of lean income, intimidating barriers to participating in microfinance could stem from the anxiety created by the rigid repayment regimes and exorbitant interest rates (Ukanwa, Xiong and Anderson 2018). Additionally, designing and implementing more suitable microfinance interventions can benefit from the appreciation of the hurdles that poor rural women are confronted with in accessing credit. Unless these barriers and constraints are carefully considered, the poorest may never benefit from microfinance interventions (Diochon et al. 2016; Mahmood et al. 2014). In fact, studies have shown that, in practice, microfinance shuts out the most deprived and precludes the most indigent individuals, which are usually women (Afrin and Ahmed 2019; Ayele 2015; Weiss et al. 2003).

4.4.3 Women Empowerment

Chibundu et al. (2016) described microfinance institutions as specialised institutions whose major business is the provision of microfinance services to the poor and the empowerment of entrepreneurs. They noted that MFIs perform these functions by floating programmes that provide training, loans, savings and other financial services to low-income and poor people for use in a micro or small business. Anyanwu, Ananwude and Nnoje (2018) quantitative study of financial inclusion of women entrepreneurs in the suburb area of Imo State Nigeria found that empowering women through microfinance tends to increase child education savings account, newborn account and daily saving account through their engagements in productive activities. Microfinance is paramount in that it has the potential to serve the financially neglected, poor and deprived people, most of whom are rural women and therefore plays a crucial role in combating the extremes of poverty. Microfinance, thus, serves as an indispensable catalyst to boost prosperity and lessen poverty.

Moreover, microfinance can be beneficial to women and empower them to engage in economic activities by providing financial assistance with less emphasis on asset-based collateral (Ihugba et al. 2014). Hence, women could acquire a loan for their businesses, make their own living and build their self-confidence, so they are able to have a say in their own families and communities (Mahoney 2014). However, microfinance and women's empowerment has been a contentious issue in the academic and the public domain (Awojobi 2014). For example, some scholars see microfinance as serving only one aspect, and that is, providing financial assistance that might give women some control but submits that empowerment for women is required in not just one dimension but across multiple dimensions (Malhotra et al. 2002). On the other hand, other scholars

noted that women might be empowered within one of the sub-dimensions, including economic and socio-cultural (Montgomery and Weiss 2005; Taha 2012).

These poor women in rural Nigeria neither have control over their household income nor possess key production assets including machinery and land; yet are burdened with unimaginable obligations towards their families. They juggle between household chores such as caregiving and running their microbusinesses. In their case, the priority revolves around survival and ensuring that their children do not go hungry is topmost on the list. Instead of pursuing how to maximise the profit, they just want to be able to get by each day. This pressure to provide for their families, pay for healthcare and sponsor the children's education puts poor African women on the verge of intolerable impoverishment, which may make loan repayment an impossible task. This is because these women's family situations are often dire, and any available fund (including loans) are easily used up in meeting daily survival needs. Hence, microfinance and their inflexible repayment plans put additional stress on poor women, particularly in the event of shocks, lean harvest and poor market performance. Arguably, microfinance can worsen poor women's circumstances as rural women may find regimented loan repayment, the attendant risk management, budgeting and cash flow issues very challenging. In the context of poverty, the most deprived people in society, usually rural women, tend to believe that the prospective benefits of microfinance are outweighed by the imminent dangers. Rather than see microfinance as a mechanism to aid survival, the poorest often see it as impending doom. A United Nations gender specialist, Isserles (2003) argues that microfinance should not be seen as a mere tool for empowering the poor but more about the introduction of contemporary economic artefacts into the most precarious parts of society, particularly rural. Additionally, Isserles (2003) calls for a restructuring of how rural

communities are organised, funded and managed, and suggests the rerouting of capital into rural settings from more affluent towns and cities. It is important, however, to point out that social norms and structures change very slowly over time (Khavul et al. 2013). While several scholars argue that microfinance alone is not enough to reduce poverty, empower the poor, improve the standard of living and promote entrepreneurship (Karnani 2007; Pollin 2007), Yunus (2003) posit that microfinance is an essential tool that can alleviate poverty for a sizeable proportion of the population and lessen its intensity for the remainder if accompanied by novel programs which can unlock the potentials of individuals. Armendariz and Morduch (2005) note that sustainable social change can be instituted to offer the poor an occasion to unlock their productivity; thereby reducing poverty. This, they argue, can be achieved through accessible financial services in the form of microfinance. Their report buttressed the need to make credit and financial services accessible to women, especially in rural Africa, as Eshete (1992) indicated that such access was not available to women in those settings. Sadly, nearly two decades after that report, poor women still face exclusion from financial services in most developing nations (Ayele 2015; Mohammed 2020). Little wonder, the galloping increase in extreme poverty in those economies.

4.4.4 Evaluation of Microfinance

The existing literature predominantly approaches microfinance studies from the position of evaluating the programmes (Afolabi, Obamuyi and Egbetunde 2020; Alatas et al. 2012; Khandker 2005; Shetty 2008), the potential to empower women (Rai and Ravi 2011) and borrowers' welfare (McIntosh et al. 2011). There is a paucity of insight about how the 'transformation' power of microfinance affects the entrepreneurial practices and decisions of entrepreneurs living in abject

poverty (Tobias et al. 2013). Extant literature describes contradictory findings as regards the evaluation of microfinance, and the studies are often based on the accounts of other actors rather than the poor women who are directly impacted (Kabeer 2001). Therefore, more remains to be known regarding how poor rural women micro-entrepreneurs perceive microfinance. Many studies (Ihugba et al. 2014; Omorodion 2007) concentrated on financial gains and income as a measure of the usefulness and impact of microfinance. The impact on poverty was mostly understood in economic terms which are straightforward and simple. The difficulty, however, is to assess the socio-cultural impact of the intervention as it relates to the norms, traditions, cultural implications and social responsibilities of rural women, especially in patriarchal rural societies. Though women are pushed into entrepreneurship, they often have to shuffle between business production, childcare and domestic duties. This means that instead of being enabled (Chant 2016), these poor women practically struggle to make a livelihood as they lack resources and knowledge. Additionally, poor rural women fear that credit obtained from microfinance may be spent to deal with unexpected expenditures which could trap them into indebtedness. Such risks perceived/experienced by poor rural women are profound as they may not have resources to fall back on.

Hence, poor rural women entrepreneurs in Nigeria do not have adequate income and assets that would guarantee their sustainable livelihoods and acquisition of necessities to move their businesses forward (Imhonopi, Urim and Ajayi 2013). Pandula (2011) confirmed that access to finance and financial resources by women-led businesses remains a major challenge in developing countries. Women's demography such as education, experience and type of businesses are common factors that determine the availability of credit to them (Pandula 2011). In other words, women with little or no education and entrepreneurial experience

who engage in micro-businesses face greater difficulty in accessing credit. Accessing finance by micro-enterprises is more limited compared to the small, medium and large enterprises (Fowowe 2017). Many scholars have noted that microfinance in rural Nigeria fails to provide relief to the most deprived people in deep-rooted poverty (including rural poor women) (Ike 2012; Fowowe 2017). It is important to evaluate why microfinance is not yielding the desired impact among these poor rural women. Some studies have attributed this failure to the difficulty in accessing credit (Ekpe, Mat and Razak 2010; Fowowe 2017; Sanusi 2012) as a result of no collateral (Sanusi 2012), risk of defaults in repayment (Armendariz and Morduch 2005; Fletschner 2009), educational pedigree (Egbo et al. 2020; Pandula 2011). These difficulties are large because of the extreme poverty prevalent among this disadvantaged group. However, the causes of rural women living in poverty are partly due to cultural and social arrangements. Surely, the causes of inequality are cultural, and this study "socially" explores the issues.

Literature suggests that rural women living in poverty are partly due to cultural and social arrangements that constrain their access to livelihood assets and opportunities (Xiong, Ukanwa and Anderson 2018). As a result, rural women entrepreneurs do not possess smooth access to credit for their micropreneurship responses; thereby still grappling with marginal productivity despite the fact that their involvement in the informal sector of the economy is higher than their male counterparts (Ekpe, Mat and Razak 2010). It is suggested that in their search for credit facilities, many poor rural women entrepreneurs may be open to utilise microfinance interventions. However, there is evidence in the literature that these needs are not being met because the credit evaluation procedures of microfinance institutions are often stricter than those of informal lenders, and therefore prevent borrowers from accessing credit (Amakom and Amagwu 2020; Arora and Meenu

2011). Consequently, microfinance is criticized as failing to serve the poorest of the poor (Afrin and Ahmed 2019; Ayele 2015; Weiss and Montgomery 2005). The failure of financial institutions to meet the needs of the rural poor, especially women entrepreneurs, remains an open question and could be because little is known about their perception and experience of microfinance services.

4.5 How Microfinance is Benefiting Rural Women's Microbusinesses in Nigeria

The deep-seated financial institutional void in rural areas makes informal sources the only real choice for the poorest of the poor. Lack of access to conventional banks forces many women to patronise the informal sources such as families and friends, local moneylenders, rotating savings and women's groups (Chibundu et al. 2016). Studies acknowledge that informal microfinance is predominant in rural areas (Amakom and Amagwu 2020). Literature suggests that informal sources represent the main sources of finance for rural entrepreneurs, especially poor women in rural developing economies (Ofoegbu 2013). For instance, rural women were found to access loans from Rotating Savings (RoSCA), local SHG groups (Iganiga 2008), and family members because they are easy to access, less bureaucratic, readily available and mostly interest-free (Amakom and Amagwu 2020; Collins et al. 2010).

Additionally, given that microfinance in rural Nigeria first existed in the shadows (see section 4.2), there has been great efforts to formalize it to the poor as they are very familiar with the informal sources of credit. One of such efforts is focusing on enterprise lending (Ofoegbu 2013). A study by Odejimi and Agbada (2014) acknowledges positive contributions that microfinance can make towards poverty reduction. They opined that microfinance could contribute to the welfare of the poor by providing financial services to enable poor (women) entrepreneurs to

start, expand and diversify economic activities to increase their incomes. During difficult times, the poor can turn to microfinance institutions for a loan which could be used to meet both economic and social needs (Gbadebo et al. 2013). For instance, access to microfinance can promote entrepreneurial activities, education, and health, raise the self-confidence of the poor as well as improve nutrition (Mohammed 2020). In support of this view, Thomas Dichter admits that microfinance can help the poor rural women to maintain steady consumption over periods of unexpected crises (including ill-health) or cyclical downturns such as lean seasons (Dichter 2006).

Furthermore, Omorodion's (2007) study of microfinance in Nigeria showed that microfinance loans have varying effects, one of which is a positive effect - microfinance loans can lead to an increase in household income (Raju 2020). This is because engaging in entrepreneurial activities or being employed (whether self-employed or by an employer) gives a person a significant boost to their sense of worth, dignity and a source of income (Taiwo et al. 2016). However, for the poorest of the poor, failure to repay a loan may lead to stress which may then result in poor health. Considering the fact that such women live in extreme poverty, the possibility of running into difficulty regarding the repayment of a loan is substantial. The worries associated with loan repayment in poverty are significant and sufficient to deter poor rural women from participating in microfinance. In response, this thesis aims to fill a void in extant literature by investigating how microfinance is perceived and experienced by the most deprived individuals in settings that are typified by deep-seated poverty. Consequently, the research question seeks to understand and appreciate how poor rural women entrepreneurs perceive and experience microfinance.

4.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter examined microfinance as an effective tool for poor rural women in their micro entrepreneurship. There is evidence that the poor, especially rural women, are confronted with survival battles, and they engage in micro-businesses to meet up. Their main objective is to provide 'daily bread' for their families and to hang in there, knowing that their survival is constantly bombarded with societal constraints, including economic and cultural. They are resolute about making ends meet and so not even traditional expectations, norms and responsibilities could dissuade them from contributing to the welfare of their families. Clearly, their microbusinesses enable them to put food on the table, and that is both critical and necessary.

This chapter contributes by offering a more robust way to appreciate and understand micropreneurship and microfinancing amongst the very poor groups in Africa. For example, the business strategies adopted (Rizzo and Fulford 2012) and the socialised objectives and outcomes that emerge when micropreneurship is immersed in different cultural contexts (Peredo and Anderson 2006) may record significant deviations from the traditional expectations. This is interesting because the historical assumptions and long-held views of entrepreneurship may be challenged by the outcomes from such social settings (Anderson and Geddefors 2016). This emphasizes the need for considering the context in understanding entrepreneurial practices because practices may be different from business 'ideals' in precarious settings such as extreme poverty (Cahn 2008). As an illustration, the poorest households believe that microcredit presents high risks which could

tip them over into irrecoverable indebtedness (Christiaens and Subbarao 2005) and permanent poverty, and so would not use microfinance. However, microfinance literature assumes that the poor will gladly welcome an opportunity to borrow, but in deep-rooted poverty, the reverse is more likely (Ukanwa, Xiong and Anderson 2018).

There is the scarcity of studies that have focused on how micropreneurship and microfinance are perceived and experienced by poor rural women, particularly in Africa. The investigation reported in this thesis has provided deeper insight and appreciation regarding how poor women perceive microfinance, the challenges they face, their risk profile and experiences. For example, evidence exists to suggest that poor rural women perceive that the prosperity promised by microfinancing is overshadowed by the potential doom that it may bring. This viewpoint and the attendant risks are informed by the practical realities of the poorest of the poor, even though microfinance has been proposed as a potential solution to living above the poverty line. Additionally, the findings reveal some of the practical realities that explain how and why the necessities of the family may lead to the diversion of loans meant for income-generation for meeting family obligations. This appreciation calls for a revision of microfinance programmes to tear down the blockades that exclude the poorest and mitigate the risks facing poor women micropreneurs. It is believed that the light shone by this study on the state-of-the-art as regards poor rural women and their entrepreneurial responses and decisions, with emphasis on their perception and experience of microfinance may be helpful in planning more effective microfinance services targeted at the poorest.

CHAPTER 5: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE STUDY

5.1 Introduction

In chapters 3 and 4, the relevant literature underpinning the study was reviewed. This chapter provides the conceptual framework for this study and discusses important concepts related to the research questions (Creswell and Creswell 2017). In order to understand the perception and experience of poor rural women about microfinance and its impact on their livelihood and entrepreneurial activities, the study adopts the sustainable livelihood approach (SLA). SLA has been widely employed in assessing the livelihood of the poor in resource-constrained environments (Malual and Mazur, 2017). SLA is particularly helpful in understanding how poor Nigerian women, who are often immersed in informal institutions survive. As argued earlier in this thesis (see Chapter 3), in rural African settings where formal institutions are absent or inactive, the influence of informal institutions expand, prescribe and shape the opportunities, obligations, and resources available to poor rural women and their microbusinesses.

This chapter is structured as follows: Section 5.1 first briefly discusses some of the theories that were explored in the course of this research. Section 5.2 examines the sustainable livelihood approach and details the key elements of the framework which guided the research conducted in this study. Section 5.3 summarizes the chapter.

5.2 Theories considered in this study

Institutional and Social capital theories were considered to analyse and explain the opportunities, obligations and resources entrenched in the informal institutions and social structures that poor rural women find themselves in, especially in the face of institutional voids. Exploring these theories helped to provide deep insight to explain the relationships and processes that characterise the struggles of poor rural women in South-East, Nigeria. However, when considered in the light of the data, they lacked the explanatory power afforded by livelihood theory.

5.2.1 Institutional theory

Institutional theory provides theoretical models that can be used to explain institutional phenomena, including the emergence of strategies as a result of social interactions (Selznick 1996). Examining the forces that emanate from informal institutions and how they shape the microbusinesses of poor rural women can provide theoretical insight to guide this research. This theory provides a broader view of entities that are outside the poor rural women's family business but exert institutional forces on it. Hence, strategies and processes emerge from the family business (or the individual involved) in response to these environmental or social pressures. Institutionalism presents two forms, namely: the "old" and the "new" institutional theory.

The "old" institutionalism targets the determined effort of actors responding to external pressures (e.g. the environment or social settings) in a manner that is compatible with the institution's formalities and values (Stinchcombe 1997), and the theories that are consistent with this perspective include resource dependence and contingency theory (Scott 1987). This viewpoint assumes that the coordination and control of activities are the critical dimensions on which businesses succeed (Meyer and Rowan 1997). The "new" institutional theory, on

the other hand, focuses on embeddedness and legitimacy through commonly used approaches and normative influences (Greenwood and Hinings 1996). The "new" perspective stresses the lack of adaptation but rather aims to obtain and maintain legitimacy and social acceptance through isomorphism (Meyer and Rowan 1997). This viewpoint is predicated on the premise that a business can increase its access to resources by "acting on collectively valued purposes in a proper and adequate manner" (Meyer and Rowan 1997, p.349).

It is clear, however, that both forms of institutional theory agree that there needs to be some form of response to mitigate the pressure from external entities on the survival of a business. On the one hand, they both make contributions to the success of a business either by achieving legitimacy through social acceptance or achieving economic optimisations of structure and processes. Hence, this thesis will not seek to pursue further distinction between both forms but will refer to the two forms interchangeably. According to North (1990), institutions (formal and informal) are the rules guiding the game - social interactions. Formal institutions concern themselves with regimes, securities, property ownership, legislation, political, legal and economic freedoms that are established by the government to regulate individuals' behaviour (North 1990). Meanwhile, informal institutions constitute societal attitudes that are implicitly codified and validated through cultural and community values (Puffer, McCarthy and Boisot 2010; North 1990).

Institutional theory provides an overarching theory to explain the macro conditions that influence poor rural women in their survival journey in resource-constrained environments. Arguably, resources or the lack of it is partially explained by both formal and informal institutions. In fact, formal institutions, law

and regulations can control access; likewise, informal institutions, such as customs and culture, can also do this. Irrespective of the structures and processes, the influence of institutions is evident, even in the circumstances of poverty. Hence, the institutional theory is deployed to provide a macro-level situational view of the critical issues, including survival in the context of extreme poverty and how rural women entrepreneurial activities are shaped by the institutions around them. While entrepreneurship is context-dependent (Bui, Kuan and Chu 2018; Yousafzai et al. 2019), the dependency of entrepreneurship on context means that women's interaction with the environment (or institutions) determines their entrepreneurial future (Yousafzai et al. 2019). Existence of formal institutional voids in rural context creates an environment in which rural women's entrepreneurship often rely on, and have to comply with, informal institutions (including family and culture) to function (Puffer, McCarthy and Boisot 2010). Moreover, the institutional theory provides some explanation of the conditions in which the rural poor operate. However, extreme poverty seems to be a special case. So, although institutional theory provides a good general overview (Harbi et al. 2009), it is not sufficiently nuanced to fully explain how things work in extreme situations of acute poverty (Andersen and Obeng 2017). Critical issues, such as surviving from day to day, are overwhelming. Accordingly, the vulnerability created by poverty (Sen 1981) means that institutional theory provides a good overview, but the practices of entrepreneurs in these very adverse conditions need a sharper theory of action (Andersen and Ronteau 2017). Livelihood theory seems to provide this behavioural focus.

5.2.2 Sustainable Livelihoods Approach

The concept of SLA concentrates on innovative and analytical reasoning regarding how the poorest and vulnerable (women) conduct their lives and captures the

variety of activities that the poor carry out, often in combination, to make a living (Hussein and Nelson 1998). It promotes deeper insight into the fundamental underpinnings of poverty through a careful analysis of the barriers that inform an individual's power to acquire and use certain resources. This approach goes deep, through several levels, and wide across various facets to assess the factors which hinder or enable access to factors of production (including microfinance), and therefore livelihood choices and outcomes. Frankenberger (1996) notes that these barriers could exist at the macro-level involving the legislative framework and economic policies which are out of the control of the individual or may occur at the micro-level such as social factors (informal or formal).

Sustainable livelihoods approach (SLA), as the conceptual framework, provides this study with the tools to increase understanding of the factors (e.g. vulnerability context and a lack of livelihood assets) affecting poor rural women in a resource-scarce environment, and how they respond entrepreneurially to survive. It also provides a valid theoretical lens for analysing how informal institutions, such as culture and family, shape how family-centred microbusinesses of poor rural women, respond.

Specifically, SLA is used to examine how "entrepreneurs in settings of poverty not only confront dramatic institutional voids but also lack any appreciable resources and face severe penalties for failure including not being able to appropriately support one's family in terms of the basic needs" (Bruton et al. 2013, p. 685). This study focuses on the extreme case, a context very different from western developed family business theories. The SLA framework is used to examine income-generating micro entrepreneurship led by poor women in rural Nigeria.

Moreover, arguments can be drawn that family and micropreneurship could be conceived operationally as one inseparable unit, which is tightly coupled in terms of production and consumption. This conceptualisation reflects more of the practical realities among poor rural women because their family is their business, and their business is the family. Social capital, land and financial capital are all from the family. The analyses presented in this study possess significant implications with reference to providing suitable support for poor women entrepreneurs in the context of extreme resource scarcity.

5.2.2.1 Origins and Aims of SLA

The term livelihoods encompass people, their capabilities, assets (such as social, physical, claims and access) and actions necessary to sustain life (Chambers and Conway 1992). Clearly, livelihood could span multiple activities and seldom refers to a solitary action. It involves “complex, contextual, diverse and dynamic strategies developed by households to meet their needs” (Gaillard et al. 2009, p. 121). For Scoones (2009), livelihood is an input-output process engaged by an individual in constant interaction with its surroundings. Livelihood thinking was much attributed to the early work of Sen (1981) on entitlements and the work of Robert Chambers in the mid-1980s (Chambers 1983, 1986). It was further expanded by Chambers and Conway and others in the early 1990s (Chambers and Conway 1992; Bernstein et al. 1992). Chambers (1983), recognising that traditional development ideologies failed to yield the desired effects because people were faced with enormous pressure from growing population, famine and food insecurity in the 1980s, designed the concept of sustainable livelihoods. The aim was to boost the effectiveness of development cooperation, and this formed the basis for the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (SLA) (DFID 2000). Since that time, the ideology of sustainable livelihood established the foundations of many

sustainable livelihood models and has been employed by various development agencies such as Christian Action Research and Education (CARE), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the British Department for International Development (DFID) (DFID 2000). While CARE, UNDP and DFID analyse family livelihood security principally at a communal level, DFID and UNDP emphasise that ensuring that legislation, macro-economic processes and policy environments are empowering, equally significant in facilitating efficient poverty alleviation.

For DFID, even though an individual's livelihoods are typically computed at a community (or household) level, the objective goes beyond just identifying opportunities or constraints. It includes an appreciation of additional institutional elements, procedures and policies that could influence their livelihoods at a micro-level (Enoch 2015). Thus, in development practice, the DFID Sustainable Livelihood Framework (SLF) is popular and widely used (Krantz 2001). According to Pain and Lautze (2002), SLF is 'conceptually sophisticated' and continues to prove influential in the study of rural people in developing countries. Hence, this current study adopts the DFID sustainable livelihood framework.

The sustainable livelihood approach adopted by DFID emphasises policies and their implications as well as best practice. The approach focuses on two main aspects, such as enabling the procedures and structures to operate optimally as well as supporting direct access to resources. To this end, DFID's major goal revolves around supporting policies as well as behaviours which encourage sustainable livelihoods with regards to accessing resources (e.g. Microfinance), good education, quality health care services, and more opportunities for the poor. Eliminating poverty and creating a suitable environment where they naturally

endowed resources are maintained is a key vision (DFID 2000). According to Geiser et al. (2011, p. 258), DFID explicitly aimed at “a refocus on assistance to the poor”. It is assumed that if people (including the deprived) possess enhanced access to resources, their ability and capacity to effect more responsive processes and structures towards their needs will be improved (Carney et al. 1999).

Moreover, considering the future transformation of systems, people can alter the way they respond to changing environmental factors, and this could lead to changes in livelihood strategies with time. Their livelihood strategies over time as they adapt in response to changes in their surroundings or as part of the future systemic restructuring. Indeed, rural households combine agricultural and entrepreneurial responses or migration to urban localities to sustain their livelihoods (Ellis 2006). This implies that people can rejig what their activity set includes as they attempt to secure their livelihood outcomes. This could entail moving to other services (e.g. MFI), or localities they perceive will offer opportunities for better livelihood outcomes. As individuals adapt their livelihood strategies to suit their circumstances, SLA usefully embraces the different aspects and facets of life. SLA reaches beyond the purely economic circumstances yet embeds the lived experiences of the poor. Similar to the concept of a way of life' in anthropology, SLA highlights the imperatives of a 'way of living'. The immediacy created by poverty is evident in the struggle for survival, as the poor have to deal with illness, hungry children and the anxieties they present.

However, poor rural women hope for a different and better life, a more sustainable livelihood, for their children through investment in schooling. Several scholars (Sneddon 2000; Deng, Li and Zhang 2020) have outlined certain key

characteristics that could help to assess whether a livelihood is sustainable or not. The following key features emerged from Sneddon's (2000) classification: livelihood is termed sustainable if (1) it copes with and recovers from uncertainties, shocks and stress; (2) it retains support for other people's livelihood choices without diminishing their alternatives; (3) it is capable of maintaining optimal yield from natural resources and does not depend on external support. A livelihood can be classified as sustainable when the assets and capabilities it provides avails the person and future generations enduring opportunities. In other words, it is sustainable if the natural base is not undermined while it offers overall benefits to others in the long and short-term and at the global and local (Chambers and Conway 1992). This viewpoint was further elaborated by positing that the ability to earn an enduring livelihood by a community (or individual) is determined by the prevailing institutions and social relations (Ellis 2000). These and other factors make up the components of the SLA framework (see Figure 5) and are discussed in the following subsections.

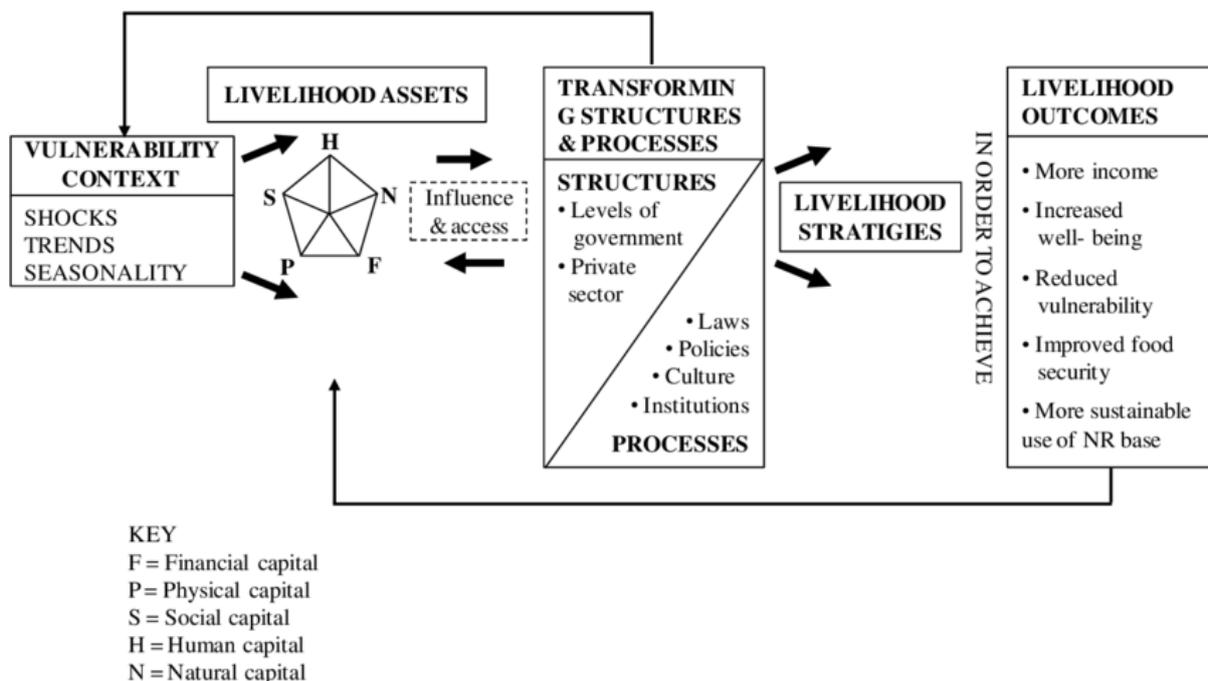


Figure 5: DFID Sustainable Livelihood Approach (SLA)

Source: Carney, 1999.

5.2.2.2 Components of SLA

Conceptually, the sustainable livelihoods framework provides five robust components upon which livelihoods are built, and they include vulnerability context, livelihood assets, transforming structures and processes, livelihood strategies and livelihood outcomes.

5.2.2.2.1 Vulnerability context

This describes the external environment in which people, such as rural women are embedded as well as the uncontrollable external factors that influence their assets and livelihood opportunities. Poor rural women's livelihoods, as well as access to resources, are impacted by shocks, trends and seasonality, and they cannot influence these. Though trends could potentially be predicted, they especially affect the chosen livelihood strategy by determining the rates of return (economic or otherwise). Shocks are often sudden and can be in the form of death in the family, ill-health (which can lead to an inability to pay back loans), droughts, floods, economic downturn, poor business turnover, conflict or war. Shocks have serious effects on the livelihood of rural women and on the wider availability of assets given the array of social, political, economic and natural disasters that destroy assets and make people more vulnerable (McDowell et al., 2016).

Similarly, seasonality has a significant influence on livelihood, especially since livelihoods in rural areas of developing countries revolves around agriculture (Amos, Akpan and Ogunjobi 2015). In Nigeria, for example, many rural households are dependent on agriculture (for consumption and for their micro-businesses), and their agricultural production is exclusively based on rainfall (as there are little or no modern-day irrigation systems in those areas (Amos, Akpan

and Ogunjobi 2015). Vulnerability may arise from fluctuating seasons, over-exploitation of assets or unsustainable use of assets, poverty, marginalisation and exclusion (McDowell et al. 2016).

5.2.2.2 Livelihood Assets

Livelihood assets refer to the resource base of the community and of different categories of households. According to McLeod (2001), these assets are required for production, and they include human, social, physical, financial and natural capital, and they support sustainable livelihoods (Chen et al. 2013; Paul and Vogl 2013). In the sustainable livelihood framework (see Figure 5), a pentagon is used to illustrate the different types of assets available to poor people, and this varies from one individual (or community) to another. This is important because all poverty is not always experienced similarly. Even in resource scarcity, different individuals will employ these limited resources in different ways.

Rural women entrepreneurs require a variety of assets to widen the range of options available to them in their pursuit to secure sustainable livelihoods. Unfortunately, most rural women in South-East Nigeria have limited access to assets given that the formal institutions which ought to define property rights protection regimes and the rule of law are inexistent or inactive, and so the informal institutions which uphold traditional patriarchal practices impose restrictions (as detailed in Chapter 3) on how much of the different livelihood assets these poor women can access. This leaves these women with no real options.

i. Human Capital

This represents assets such as health, nutrition, education, knowledge and skills, capacity to work and capacity to adapt (Serrat 2017). It helps to capture people's

competencies, knowledge, capabilities, employment and personality attributes as well as entrepreneurial skills. Galloway et al. (2005) and Sherif, Galloway and Zarrouk (2019) opine that entrepreneurial skills (e.g. how to identify opportunities and prepare to exploit and manage it) are an essential and obligatory necessity for an enterprise, and entrepreneurs should be equipped with these skills so as to afford them an economic advantage within their enterprises (Galloway and Higgins 2017; Higgin et al. 2018). Specifically, human capital aids the successful pursuit of different livelihood strategies and can help rural women entrepreneurs to maximise available opportunities. For instance, the level of skills and knowledge rural women entrepreneurs possess can influence their perception about microfinance and may inform participation and use. Likewise, having the relevant skills could help to broaden their human resource capital in their businesses (Godsey and Sebora 2010). Thus, human capital is crucial as it facilitates the acquisition and utilization of other assets for securing positive livelihood outcomes.

Abubakar (2017) notes that undernutrition, poor health, reduced productivity, lean income and low literacy characterise poor households. At the household level, human capital is concerned with the amount and quality of labour available; this depends on family size, skill levels, health status, among other factors. It is, therefore, necessary to support the accumulation of human capital, which can be both direct and indirect (DFID 2000). In this sense, SLA seeks to explain the need to support the poor to build their human capital.

ii. Social Capital

The concept of social capital has grown into a theory that has gained wide acceptance and recognition in social science (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 1993; Jones, 2010; Wolf et al., 2010; Clark and Semmahasak, 2013;

Jones and Clark, 2014) and entrepreneurship research (Wentink et al. 2019; Pramanik and Ingkadijaya, 2019). In Putnam's (1993) extension of Coleman's work, social capital is defined as the characteristics of a social entity that is composed of norms, networks, and social trust that facilitates co-operation between members for mutual benefit. Scholars (Jones and Clark, 2014; Putnam 1993) agree on the fundamental tenet of social capital as simply the interrelationship of social entities and the interaction of the benefits, and sometimes obligations that they accrue. The literature hints that different cultural and social settings influence the relationship choices and networks available to the entrepreneurs (Krishna 2001). Nevertheless, the extent to which an entrepreneur may develop a competitive edge using their business network resources is dependent on the characteristics of the network itself as social capital can be an asset as well as a liability. For instance, being a member of a family comes with a responsibility like paying the medical bills of other members of the family if they become ill. Manolova et al. (2007) suggest that since developing economies like Nigeria typically present contexts where financial and material assets can be constrained, having many business network resources is a good idea to enable the poor to combat limitations (Abreu et al., 2010; Bhagavatula et al., 2010; Kebede and Butterfield 2009).

Clearly, social capital theory is predicated on the realisation that social capital does not only serve as an exogenous force that leads to certain outcomes but more importantly is itself the consequence of other exogenous and dynamic forces. Specifically, these exogenous forces could come from structural features such as institutions (whether formal or informal), and the activities of individuals (Coleman 1988). Tsai (2014) notes that social capital concentrates on the capabilities of

individuals within a given setting to exploit opportunities specific to their local context, and their relationships with others. Membership of a network in rural communities with limited structures and resources to facilitate entrepreneurship can present one of the surest guarantees for the provision of safety and status credit. Hence, rural women in the communities tend to create and maintain bridging networks despite the male-controlled leadership structure and prevailing cultural practices in a bid to survive. Such relationships and membership create honour and reputation among its members and are, thus, cherished by the members (Bourdieu 1986). Especially in patriarchal societies, this desire for "social collateral" and sense of membership reinforce the existing relationships, which informal institutions like culture and family use to socially guarantee or institutionalise them. As a result, durable obligations and responsibilities are established that are felt by every subject (especially within families) or are institutionally guaranteed by laws, customs and traditional/cultural practices (Bourdieu 1986).

Accordingly, social capital, as a relationship-based capital, refers to resources embedded in networks which can be mobilised through social interactions and have the potential to provide useful support to players when it is needed. The dimensions of social capital relevant to this study include bonding, bridging and linking capital. Bonding capital focuses on the presence of family bond, and an attribute of the network that is homogenous (in socio-demographic backgrounds and identities) and inward-looking where members share similar interest (Lang and Fink 2019). In rural communities, bonding capital indicates the presence of family support, especially that of the spouse and children. Bridging capital, however, suggests an outward-looking and heterogeneous (in socio-demographic

backgrounds and identities) network. The bridging social capital gives women entrepreneurs power as a group to help each other in knowledge exchange, capacity development and to mediate access to resources. Moreover, linking social capital cuts across different groups but vertically connects them across different power levels (Lang and Fink 2019). According to Osborne, Baldwin and Thomsen (2016), exploring the dimensions of social capital (e.g. bonding, bridging and linking) can help provide a broad picture of the network configurations and the interplay of different forms of social capital. In the rural context, self-help groups often support their members by providing the three dimensions of social capital (Lang and Fink 2019). For example, a women group (bonding) can attract funding schemes from MFIs (or other actors) for the development of agricultural processing plant in a local community (linking and bridging). Primarily, in the context of the sustainable livelihood framework, social capital is established through networks and togetherness, which increase people's trust and ability to work together in the community. Just like human capital, social capital is essential as it facilitates innovation, the development and sharing of knowledge that is necessary for promoting business growth and opportunities for women entrepreneurs (Anis and Mohamed 2012).

iii. Natural Capital

Natural capital can be defined as natural assets such as land, water bodies, trees, wildlife, biodiversity and air. Humanity derives a wide range of resources from natural capital, including domestic water use and soil for planting (Norberg 1999). As discussed in previous chapters (see Chapter 2), the inequality in access to land and other productive inputs as a result of the culture and traditional practices in rural South-East Nigeria has profound limiting effects on rural women microentrepreneurs (Igwe et al. 2018). Also, inappropriate use of the land and

deforestation is a threat to the sustainability of natural assets because of its impact on climate, rainfall and other fluctuations which affects food production (Lawrence and Vandecar 2015; Chinago 2015).

iv. Physical Capital

According to Wooley (2013), the development of infrastructure for entrepreneurship remains neglected, a view which Audretsch et al. (2015) noted as a big omission in the literature. Physical capital is vital as it has the potential to increase business productivity, but when it lacks productivity can decrease (Audretsch et al. 2015). Physical capital entails infrastructure, tools and technology that are needed to support livelihoods. The infrastructure includes affordable transport, good roads, vehicles, banks, hospital, tap water and electricity. Without adequate physical assets such as good roads, businesses are impacted. For instance, the bad road can lead to the high cost of transportation, which affects people's movement and prices of goods (Jayne et al., 2010). More so, lack of physical assets can mean those non-productive activities (such as the collection of water and firewood used for cooking food which is typical of rural areas in South-East Nigeria) take up a substantial amount of time (Olawoye 2019; Akpan 2015). Moreover, poor access to electricity affects people and business activities in Nigeria (Igwe and Madichie, 2019; Igwe et al., 2013).

As discussed in Chapter 2, the lack of formal institutions takes its toll on rural South-East, and this means that micro-businesses run by poor rural women do not readily have access to infrastructure and basic amenities but have to provide them out-of-pocket due to government neglect (DeWachter et al., 2018; Harvey 2017; Ibok and Daniel, 2014). This means that these women are forced into providing these basic amenities (where they can) because it is their only option if

they are to engage such assets in their microbusinesses. Had the formal institutions been active and functioning, these services would have added to the physical assets readily available to these women entrepreneurs and open up new opportunities for them (Cecchini and Scott, 2003).

v. Financial Capital

Financial capital represents the financial resources which can be in the form of livestock, jewellery, bank deposits or cash. Financial capital can be built up from household income, or other inflow of money such as pensions, stocks and savings. It can also be obtained through credit-providing institutions such as MFIs. More specifically, financial capital is usually the least available livelihood asset to poor rural women entrepreneurs, especially in developing countries. Udoh et al. (2017) assert that financial capital is a serious constraint among the rural poor, particularly women. Poverty is often manifest as a lack of sufficient income. In turn, this means very limited possibilities to accrue capital to invest beyond the everyday necessities such as education, health; and importantly for entrepreneurship to acquire business assets.

5.2.2.2.3 Transforming Structures and Processes

Transforming structures and processes comprise institutions, organisations, policies and legislation which determine how individuals utilise the assets at their disposal to support their livelihood choices (DFID 2000). Structures in the framework denote the institutions (formal and informal) and organisations (public and private), while the processes capture how structures and people interact with one another and function within the community (DFID 2000). Organisations design policy and legislation provide services as well as play other roles which impact rural women's livelihoods. These exist at different levels, from the individual to the household to community to the national level. These processes

operate at different levels, which often overlap and sometimes conflict. These processes are crucial as they permit people to change one type of asset into another, influence interpersonal relations, provide incentives, and grant or deny an individual access to assets. Thus, rural women can experience vulnerability and extreme poverty if appropriate structures and processes that can empower the poorest of the poor are not in place (Obayelu and Chime, 2020). However, these transforming structures are complex and to a great degree, limit what poor rural women can do in terms of opportunities for their micropreneurship. In the face of institutional voids, these process and practices are very informal and could be at the family level or a wider community (or cultural) level.

5.2.2.2.4 Livelihood Strategies

Livelihood strategies describe an assorted collection of income sources and activities people undertake to achieve livelihood objectives. It also refers to the interplay of actions, choices and decisions that rural women entrepreneurs make to meet various needs at different times. This includes entrepreneurial activities, farming, investment strategies and reproductive choices. It has been argued that poor households in rural communities are presented with opportunities to engage in several income-generating ventures using the naturally occurring resources at their disposal (Brown et al. 2006). This practice is an alternative for survival which rural women adopt to reduce their vulnerability and increase incomes when crops fail (Ellis 1998; Olawoye 2019).

For poor rural women, one of the primary factors that determine their choice of livelihood strategies is the level of access to the required assets that they have (Eneyew, 2012). This is because different livelihood activities have different requirements in terms of skills and resources. It is believed that those who are

adequately empowered with assets are probably able to make positive livelihood choices. According to DFID (1999, pg.5), "the general principle is that those who are amply endowed with assets are more likely to be able to make positive livelihood choices ...they will be choosing from a range of options in order to maximise their achievement of positive livelihood outcomes, rather than being forced into any given strategy because it is their only option" (DFID 1999, pg.5). As highlighted in earlier sections of this thesis (from section 5.3.2.3), the latter is typically the case of most rural women entrepreneurs in Southeast Nigeria.

5.2.2.2.5 Livelihood Outcomes

Livelihood outcomes are the achievements or outputs of the strategies adopted by people to achieve a sustainable livelihood or to make a living as well as meet their livelihood needs (Olawoye 2019). However, an individual's outcomes may differ from another in any given situation. For example, in extreme poverty, being able to feed could be the major desired outcome, unlike scenarios where affluence exists, so that business expansion could be the case. Hence, it is important to understand rural women's key objectives, barriers and motivations. Unsurprisingly, assessing livelihood outcomes presents some interesting difficulties because they do not always appear logical. As an illustration, measuring the increase in income is significantly easier than measuring the relative change in well-being. Also, conflicts between livelihoods outcomes among family members or societies could occur.

5.2.2.3 Limitations of SLA

Despite the popularity of SLA, they have been criticised as an insufficiently developed framework (Baumann 2000; Carney 2003). Critics contend that the SLF diagram meant to promote livelihood assets and institutional design further makes

it a more “confusing diagram”, as the theory fails to realize that the work and interactions that happen in poor communities are not easily captured in a diagram. They claim that reducing the multidimensional reality of livelihoods to a mere set of diagrams is an unrealistic simplification (Hinshelwood 2003). However, the detailed and fine-grained analysis of this study will address the nuances of interaction and practices. The theory provides a suitable framework for studying the processes.

It is clear that the claim of being holistic unavoidably spews excessive information that is hardly possible to cope with. Additionally, seeing that extant research (Davies and Krantz 2001) sees poverty as a multi-dimensional phenomenon, SLA does not really deal with how to identify or categorise the poor but rather assumes that some other approaches such as 'wealth ranking' (Bradley et al. 2003) and 'poverty line' (Kenworthy, 1999) will help in that regard. Despite these limitations, the SLA in the context of this study provides a structure for thinking through the livelihoods of the poor whilst visualising the main factors that influence their livelihood strategies and outcomes.

5.2.2.4 Strengths of SLA

One of the strengths of the SLA model is that it recognises the role of context in understanding human livelihoods. It supports an open and flexible design which makes the model amenable to various local settings (DFID 2000), where it can be utilised to assess how socially constructed environment function (Ellis, 2000). In the extant literature, the context has been explored in terms of institutions to provide some socio-cultural perspectives of entrepreneurship (Gaddefors and Anderson 2019; Welter 2011; Boettke and Coyne 2009). Moreover, SLA focuses

on the way individuals respond to specific “vulnerability contexts” by choosing livelihood strategies that could help them to actualise their livelihood dream.

Additionally, SLA presents a framework that showcases how the very poor are not merely passive victims but actively take the driving seat in making decisions regarding their livelihoods. Realising the poor's strengths and taking that into account in planning interventions has important implications for all the stakeholders (DFID 2000). Specifically, DFID (1999, p.5) succinctly notes that the theory “...encourages users to take a broad and systematic view of the factors that cause poverty - whether these are shocks and adverse trends, poorly functioning institutions and policies, or a basic lack of assets”.

Clearly, SLA recognises that poverty has far-reaching dimensions that go beyond the low-income manifestations. It is familiar with other dimensions of poverty, including illiteracy. This is particularly important as an awareness of other manifestations of poverty helps to focus planned interventions on those underpinning factors while keeping an eye on the big picture. Indeed, SLA identifies the resources and assets available to an individual and highlights potential combinations that could be utilised in pursuit of their livelihood objectives (DFID 2000).

Given the strength of SLA, many scholars have conducted studies on diverse subjects using the theory including poverty alleviation (Erenstein 2009), rural development and livelihood diversity (Ellis 2000), climate change vulnerability assessment, and natural resource management (Pandey et al. 2017).

This study leverages the tools and opportunities presented by this theory to examine how poor women entrepreneurs perceive and experience microfinance, and to understand the effects on their micropreneurship. The theory provided a suitable background to investigate how poor rural entrepreneurial women perceive and experience microfinance in resource-scarce settings where economic responses and family obligations remain tightly coupled. SLA offers robust tools to capture the practical realities of the poor, as it is dubbed a "realistic framework for assessing the direct and indirect effects on people's living condition" (Davies and Krantz 2001, p.22). Using the framework provided by the theory, it is easier to understand why the poorest, most disadvantaged group - rural Nigerian women - benefit less from microfinance. And lastly, the theory afforded this study the opportunity to understand how the institutions of family and culture shape poor women's micropreneurship, as the institutional obligations of family mean that poor women's micropreneurship needs to be conceptualised as an entity. This study found that the centrality of the family in rural women's livelihood strategy is crucial to their pursuit of daily livelihood, and this is an area that SLF might be enhanced to capture the practical realities of the poor in extreme poverty.

5.3 Chapter Summary

This chapter discussed the theories that guided this study in developing understanding regarding how poor women entrepreneurs perceive and experience microfinance, and the effects on poor rural women's livelihood and entrepreneurial activities. In order to understand how the institutions of family and culture shape poor women's micropreneurship and their access to microfinance, the sustainable livelihood framework was utilised. Other theories such as institutionalism and social capital were explored to capture the macro-level conditions and situational account of the environment that poor rural women operated in while SLA focused

on the micro-level theory of action to provide explanations of actions in these extreme conditions - abject poverty and formal institutional void. Specifically, the sustainable livelihood approach provided robust tools to explore, capture and analyse the opportunities, obligations and resources entrenched in the social structure that poor rural women find themselves in.

The next chapter outlines the methodology adopted in this study. The discussion covers research design, research strategy and data collection methods and analysis.

CHAPTER 6: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

6.1 Introduction

In chapter three and four, the researcher presents a comprehensive review of relevant literature and highlights the gap that exists in the literature regarding how poor rural women entrepreneurs perceive and experience microfinance and the effects on their micropreneurship in South-East Nigeria. Having identified these gaps as well as the research questions needed to explore the current study, this chapter presents the research methodology employed to achieve the research aim. The process of formulating research problems, translating them into appropriate research design, strategy, approach and data collection methods and analysis does not happen in isolation. Greener (2008) and Havercamp and Young (2007) suggest that it involves understanding the different paradigms and how they impact on research design, including the research method adopted.

A chosen philosophical underpinning guides the choice of tools adopted to explore the phenomenon being studied and influences the nature of the research questions and the researcher's worldview (Greener 2008; Havercamp and Young 2007; Saunders et al. 2018). Havercamp and Young (2007) posit that a researcher's philosophical position and purpose for a specific investigation shape the study rationale. The purpose of this study is to illuminate specific problems and improve specific practices of microfinance and inform policymakers about how poor women entrepreneurs perceive and experience microfinance, and the effects on their micropreneurship. This involves providing detailed, elaborate descriptions of experiences and perceptions of poor women entrepreneurs in South-East Nigeria about microfinance. The resulting descriptions of their experiences and

perceptions are organised into themes and used to expand the livelihood framework model.

This chapter is designed to explain the research paradigm, emphasising on the ontological and epistemological positions, and present the methodological approaches and strategies that have shaped the remainder of the thesis and help to answer the research questions. The first section presents the philosophical position of the research. After this, research approaches and strategies are discussed. This is followed by a research design and an account of the fieldwork starting from the selection of the study area to the collection of the required data. Towards the end, the chapter also provides insights in data analysis and risk involved in the research.

6.2 Research Paradigm (Philosophy)

In this study, the terms research philosophy and research paradigm are used interchangeably to conceptualise the belief system or worldview of the researcher, which guides the research processes. Different authors have defined the research paradigm from different viewpoints around its philosophical position. Walliman (2017), Bryman (2012), Haverkamp and Young (2007) suggest that research paradigm is captured within epistemological considerations, whereas Killam (2013) reckons that research paradigm sits at a higher level and informs both ontological and epistemological considerations. Regardless of where the paradigm is placed, there is an agreement that paradigm is an array of beliefs that informs the ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions.

Bryman (2012) refers to a paradigm as a bunch of mindsets and beliefs which guide scientists in any field on the subject to be studied, how the research should

be conducted and what interpretations should be given to the results. Saunders et al. (2018) posit that research philosophy encompasses the way a researcher interprets the observations and decides which reality is valid and important in the study. Johannesson and Perjons (2014) argue that paradigm addresses questions about "the nature of reality, what entities exist and how they relate and interact with each other (ontology); ways in which we can gain knowledge about reality (epistemology) and the admissible approaches to investigate reality and how to confirm that the knowledge generated is valid (methodology)" (Johannesson and Perjons 2014, p. 167). Similarly, a paradigm is said to be a collection of essential beliefs and assumptions regarding the existence of the world and its perception (Jonker and Pennink, 2010; Wahyuni 2012). In contrast, Gilbert (2008) sees a paradigm as a set of assumptions about how we know the world and what we do when we conduct research. Johannesson and Perjons (2014) suggest that research paradigm establishes a mental model that influences research strategy and determines how researchers address methodological questions.

Other studies, such as Denzin and Lincoln (2013), Creswell (2018) and Saunders et al. (2018) argue that research philosophy determines the underpinning research strategy and methods. Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2018) allude that paradigm helps to clarify research design by defining the type of evidence required, ways to gather and interpret the evidence to achieve research credibility. For instance, positivism is an epistemological position that calls for the use of natural science techniques in studying social reality. This stance assumes that the researcher and their investigation will not interfere with the case being studied - "single reality". Positivists trust that the world is out there to be explored

and they uphold a realist position towards data, hinting that it can be objectively and definitively identified.

According to positivism, scholars should test their stated hypotheses and remain emotionally detached and uninvolved with the objects of study (Saunders et al., 2018). This philosophy is unsuitable for the study reported in this thesis because it is nearly infeasible to have a single, external and objective reality (Cresswell and Poth 2018) with regards to investigating the rich textures of human experience, perceptions and behaviour, which is the focus of this research.

Meanwhile, where the philosophical position supports that reality is multiple and cannot be observed directly but must be interpreted (interpretivist), the researcher's values play a central and directive role. This can influence the interpretation of meaning and methods that aid construction of meaning and researcher-participant relationships are required, and knowledge emerges through the interaction between persons (Havercamp and Young 2007).

While pragmatism sits in-between the two discussed paradigms as a compromise as it does not accept that truth or reality can be socially constructed out of nothing by people; nor the existence of predetermined frameworks or theories that mould truth or knowledge (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson 2018). In other words, every structure or meaning is a function of the lived experience of people. Pragmatism focuses on change, action as well as the interchange between action and knowledge; humans engaging with a space that is in a perpetual state of becoming (Goldkuhl 2012). In pragmatism, actions are at the core since the totality of society revolves in a constant process of action (or interaction). The

focus of this paradigm on cause and effect makes it inappropriate for this study. The current study aims to gain an in-depth understanding of poor rural women entrepreneurs' experiences and perception of microfinance and its effect on their microbusinesses.

Table 2 presents how research paradigm informs research strategy and research methods with the philosophical underpinning.

Paradigm	Features of the paradigm	Ontology (What is reality?)	Epistemology (How can reality be known?)	Theoretical Perspective (What approach?)	Methodology (How do we go about finding out?)	Methods (What technique can we use?)
Positivism (post-positivism)	Theory testing Reduction	Distinct or single reality	Reality is independent of human interaction. Reliable and valid tools to know the reality	Positivist or Post-Positivist	Scientific experimentation, Survey research	Often quantitative including probability sampling, statistical analysis, questionnaire
Constructivist or Interpretivist	Deep understanding / Exploratory, Interpretation, Model refinement	Multiple valid realities, No single reality	Reality interpreted from interaction to discover the underlying meaning of action/event.	Interpretivism including: Phenomenology, Hermeneutics, Symbolic Interactionism	Ethnography, Grounded theory, Phenomenology, Case study, Action research	Often qualitative including Non-probability sampling, Grounded Theory, Interviews, Observation
Pragmatism	Cause and Effect Problem-centred, Pluralistic	Reality is revised with new situations	Problem-solving by means of finding out. Change is the aim	Pragmatism	Mixed methods in Design-based research, Action research	Use of both qualitative and quantitative methods

Table 2: Summary of the paradigms explored during this study

Several factors such as researcher's belief, experience, values and culture influence the choice of research philosophy, and these signify the acceptance of the inherent assumptions (such as the nature of reality) the researcher conceives about the way to view the social world. These assumptions underpin the research

strategy and inform the methods chosen as part of the strategy (Saunders et al., 2018).

6.2.1 Philosophical Position

Burell and Morgan (2017) note that an understanding of the philosophical assumptions behind a study is paramount to ensure that appropriate procedures and techniques are adopted through which the research objectives are achieved. Understanding the researcher's philosophical position informs the selected methods and strategies, but also the explicit or implicit assumptions regarding the characteristics of the social world and how it may be examined (Burell and Morgan 2017). It provides the answer to such questions as, "what is reality, how can reality be known, what approach, procedure and tools can be used to acquire knowledge about that reality" (Hay 2002, p.64). Given that the aim of this study is to understand the perceptions and experiences of poor rural women entrepreneurs about microfinance, and to share their subjective experiences, a subjective, interpretive approach has been chosen.

Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2018) provide a metaphoric illustration of the research process indicating the four features of a research design (see Figure 6). In this analogy, the most visible part of the research includes the methods and techniques which are driven by the three inner rings of the trunk -ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions about the nature of reality. These inner rings - ontology, epistemology and methodology, add strength, vitality and coherence to the research project.

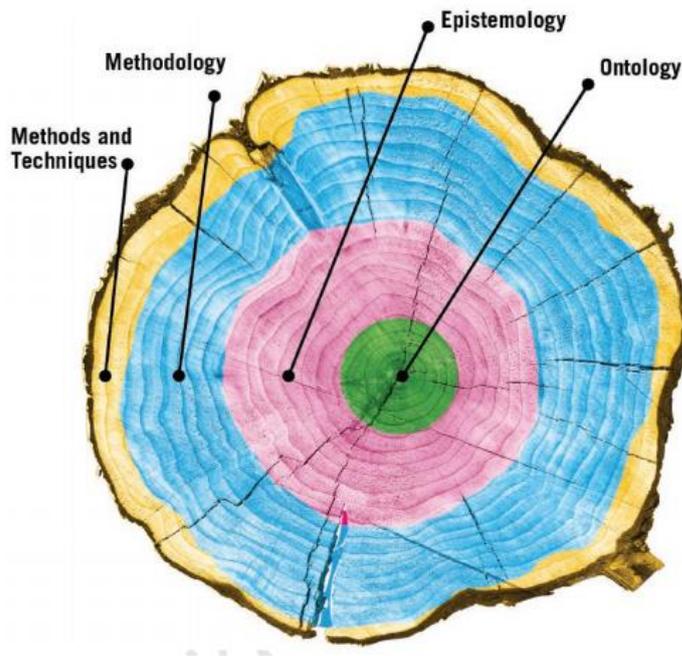


Figure 6: Ontology, epistemology, methodology, and methods of trunk metaphor

Adapted from Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson 2018

6.2.1.1 Ontological Position

Ontology relates to the assumptions about the nature of reality, its existence and its characteristics (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson 2018). However, the key concern of ontological assumptions is the characteristics of reality and whether social reality exists exclusive of human interpretations and conceptions (Ritchie and Lewis 2003). This position examines whether social entities can and should be viewed as independent, objective and separate entities with differentiable realities. Based on the scholar's view of the world, ontological assumptions can be grouped into two main categories. The first category views the world as external and objective (therefore, the scholar simply observes the world's reality). This objectivist view conceives social phenomena as independent of social actors. On the other hand, the second view often referred to as subjectivism, sees the world as socially constructed. As such, the researcher engages in social interaction with individuals to make sense of their world (Saunders et al., 2018). This subjectivist

view believes that it is the social interaction that yields social phenomena and is constantly being revised. In this study, a qualitative approach was adopted based on the ontological assumption that the reality of poor rural women entrepreneurs is presumed to be subjective based on their experiences and perceptions of microfinance, which may be changed in context depending on time and situation (Eriksson and Kovalainen 2016). As such, no observation by a researcher is definitive, rather “a specific version of social reality” (Bryman and Bell 2011 p. 22). Hence, utilising qualitative approach enables multiple versions of the subject's social reality to be captured, which offer a richer explanation of the interactions.

According to Creswell (2007), multiple versions of social reality is a function of human interactions from person to person depending on who is involved and the context under study thus reflecting the different perspectives held by different research subjects (or participants). Reality is biased because research subjects, researchers and the wider community of academia have different perspectives and embrace realities differently (Creswell 2011). Hence, Remenyi et al. (1998 p. 35) highlight the need to pick out “the details of the situation to understand the reality or perhaps a reality working behind the scene” to form a central insight into the multiple truths or realities that exist. Given the earlier arguments about the importance of context, Remenyi et al.’s comments signal the appropriateness of an interpretivist ontology. Moreover, participants’ views can and do, highlight the evidence of multiple realities/perspectives of a similar phenomenon. For instance, how the subjects involved in the study had different experiences.

6.2.1.2 Epistemological Position

Epistemological position focuses on what can and should be considered as acceptable knowledge in a given domain. The epistemological assumption borders on the interrelationship between the scholar and the subjects being studied and these are influenced by the ontological assumption. Havercamp and Young (2007) offer a valuable synopsis of different paradigms that inform what constitutes acceptable knowledge and how they are achieved. For example, a positivist paradigm believes that knowledge is gathered through facts and evidence and assessing a theory should involve hypothesis testing (deductivism), amongst other approaches such as correlation analysis (Bryman 2012). Easterby-Smith, Thorpe and Jackson (2018) believe that epistemology focuses on the best ways to inquire into the nature of reality with the participants being studied. Researchers conducting qualitative studies endeavour to get as close as possible to understand the participant's world (Ritchie and Lewis 2003). Knowledge is acquired from those interactions and gleaning the subjective experiences of those involved. For this research, the study will be conducted in the "field," where the subjects reside and do their businesses. This is important because the phenomenon under study could benefit more if the scholar tries to minimize the "objective separateness" or "distance" (Guba and Lincoln 1988, p. 94). The researcher believes that it is only in this context that participants' subjective experiences and perceptions about microfinance (i.e. knowledge) are created and known.

6.2.2 Rationale for Philosophical Position of this Study

The researcher concurs with the school of thought that reality does not exist independent of human interactions (or actions) rather constructed by individuals who engage in social actions and give meaning to them (Johannesson and Perjons 2014). The researcher took this position, believing that knowledge or meaning is

co-constructed and emerges through the interaction between individuals and cannot be observed directly but must be interpreted (Havercamp and Young 2007). Interpretivism, in the context of constructionism, believes that 'social actors' create meaningful constructs of the social world wherein they are embedded (Bryman (2001). Interpretivists focus on how the social world is interpreted by those involved in it. They assume that those living and operating in society would want to understand that world, and so generate personalised interpretations of their experiences. These meanings reflect varied and multiple perspectives. Interpretivist approach looks for the complexity of views rather than reducing the meanings to a few categories (Creswell 2009).

Since this study captures social reality in a non-definitive construction (Bryman and Bell 2011; Saunders et al. 2018) to understand how poor women entrepreneurs perceive and experience microfinance, and the effects on their micropreneurship, interpretivism was selected. The researcher believes that poor women entrepreneurs have varying perceptions and experiences with microfinance which have varying effects on their businesses corroborating with the concept of experienced multiple realities (Creswell 2009). So, being aware of their experience, perception, and cultural contexts help to recognise that poor rural women entrepreneurs in South-East Nigeria do not just potentially see the world differently but experience it differently too. Reality is said to be socially generated and inculcated with just inter-subjective meanings (Creswell and Cresswell 2017). Hence, the construction of the social world and the interactions is not fixed rather an attempt to understand and explain how poor rural women entrepreneurs perceive and experience microfinance and how it impacts on their businesses. This is because individuals residing and operating in the society create

the social world by the way they perceive the world, everyday interactions and the meanings they attach to their experiences.

The researcher provides a description of the social phenomenon to readers by integrating several quotes and comments from participants (Johannesson and Perjons 2014; Merriam and Tisdell 2016). This highlights the existence of multiple realities among poor rural women entrepreneurs and demonstrates how the individuals participating in the study viewed their experiences differently (Moustakas 1994). In order to construct the social world and the interactions, the research questions are congruent with the selected methodological approaches (for instance, open-ended to encourage in-depth understanding of meaning and experience) (Havercamp and Young 2007) and to capture their worldviews regarding their perception and experience of microfinance.

While positivism lays emphasis on careful numeric measures of observations of the objective reality that exists "out there", an interpretivist approach emphasises on understanding and interpreting the world of experience as it is lived and felt by people acting in a social context (Gichuru 2017). This is because interpretivists recognise that humans construct the social world, and there are several artefacts that are infeasible to quantify. In other words, shared meanings and experiences are some of the social constructs that link individuals to reality (Gichuru 2017). Thus, this study adopts an interpretivist position which aligns with the aim of this study (see Table 3), to explore, interpret and understand the experiences and perceptions of poor women entrepreneurs about microfinance and the effects on their micropreneurship in rural South-East Nigeria.

Table 3 highlights the features of the interpretive paradigm, which aligns with the objectives of this study.

Categories of the study	Interpretive Attributes Relevant for this study
Research aim	To examine how poor women entrepreneurs, perceive and experience microfinance; the effects on their micropreneurship.
Ontology:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. The multiplicity of poor women’s experiences and perception, coupled with the interactions and interpretations of their social world, mean that there is no single reality. ii. Poor women's experience or perception is their socially constructed reality, and better understood through interactions. iii. Make sense of and interpret poor women's social worlds in their natural environment by first ascertaining what meanings they attach to their experiences.
Epistemology:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Women’s behaviours (e.g. how they interpret, act or experience) are influenced by their culture, beliefs and values and best understood by analysing how they interact in their natural environment. ii. The research subjects are rural women in South-East Nigeria and their social context. iii. The researcher and women in rural South-East Nigeria engaged interactively, including verbal communication, participation in, and observation of events during the investigation to draw upon multiple interpretations.
Methodology	Qualitative methods and techniques, individual interview, focus group and participant observation. Sensemaking, Interpretation and understanding of social interaction to construct knowledge and meaning. Mainly words, discourse, experiences and reflectivity The research product hinges on the values of the researcher.

Table 3: Attributes of Interpretive paradigm supporting the research objective of this study

6.3 Research Approaches

In the previous section, the epistemological and ontological assumptions around what is (or should be) reality and how the researcher engages with the context to construct acceptable knowledge were reviewed within the different philosophical stances. This study adopts interpretivism and argues that truth and meaning are a result of the subject’s interaction with the world, and that reality does not exist in some external world (Gray 2013). This section discusses two research

approaches informed by the research philosophies earlier presented, namely inductive and deductive approaches. The research approaches are guided by the research paradigms. The choice of adopting an inductive or deductive method depends on the lens researcher is using to see the world. There are several factors that may determine which approach to adopt depending on how the researcher plans to investigate the phenomena and the researchers' position about the nature of the world (Ritchie et al. 2013). Hence, a thorough examination of the researcher's view of the world and the research objective is important to guide choosing the appropriate method (Mayer 2015).

6.3.1 Inductive Approach

This research follows an inductive logic, through the look into the 'insider' perspective, rather than handed down entirely from a theory or from the perspectives of the inquirer (outsider) to investigate the phenomenon under study. An inductive approach starts with the observations and theories are proposed towards the end of the research process and are based on observations (DeWalt and DeWalt 2011). This means that when an inductive approach is followed no theories or hypotheses are applied at the beginning of the research, unlike the deductive approach that starts with a theory and uses it to explain observations. Moreover, inductive approach favours qualitative research and is considered as "bottom-up" because the researcher could paint a picture of the event investigated or construct an abstraction from observations (Lodico et al. 2010).

Although purists such as Glasser and Strauss (1969) seem to imply that induction from data is sufficient, other arguments (Anderson and Stranawaska 2008) propose that a theoretical framework is needed to organise both collection and

analysis of data. In fact, Strauss and Corbin (1997) describe this as theoretical pre-sensitivity, and the key point is that theory is not used to determine, but to establish how and for what the researcher should look for in the data. One of the key reasons for choosing an inductive approach is that it offers the needed flexibility. This means that the researcher during the data collection process may alter or adapt the research questions to better reflect the kinds of questions required to address the research problem, which can be shaped by the researcher's understanding on the subject area and the experience in collecting and analysing the data. However, an inductive approach has its limitations. The main limitation of the inductive approach revolves around the use of inference; thus, the result is somewhat transient because any generalisation may be overturned by a contrary outcome (Cresswell and Poth 2018). Therefore, caution is required when findings are being generalised to ensure that it stays within the settings or cases described in the study.

6.3.2 Deductive Approach

The deductive approach is about testing a theory; the process involves the development of underlying theory first, which is then subjected to rigorous testing (Saunders et al. 2018). Rather than theory being the outcome, the deductive approach begins with a theory from which researchers formulate a set of hypotheses at the start of the research. Through the implementation of relevant research methods, developed hypotheses are tested to prove valid or otherwise. Typically, deductive methods lack clarity as to how the theory to be tested was selected.

The researcher approaches the fields with inflexible methods that seldom allow deep-rooted comprehension or proxy explanations (Saunders et al. 2018). The

ontological assumption behind deductive approach originates from positivism which suggests that reality exists whether we are aware of it or not, and this reality is separate, definite and objective (Johannesson and Perjons 2014). The epistemological assumption suggests that valid knowledge can be considered only for observables, given there is no interference from subjectivity (Johannesson and Perjons 2014).

This epistemological stance cannot support this work very well for the following reasons: First, the study explores the experiences of poor rural women entrepreneurs about microfinance in South-East Nigeria, and there are only a few pre-existing maps of this territory to test (Karatas-Ozkan et al. 2014). Moreover, the subject matter (that is, rural women and their social world) differs from the subject matter of the natural sciences, and the experiences and perceptions of poor women entrepreneurs about microfinance exist in a social context. Put differently, there are subjective, indeterminate, fluid and contextually formed (Anderson, Dodd and Jack 2012). Therefore, applying a deductive approach to observe and understand the phenomenon under study is inappropriate; hence this study adopts the inductive approach as better suited for qualitative research design.

6.4 Research Design

Previous section explored the research approaches and identified inductive as most appropriate for this study; this section sets out to discuss the research design. The research design consists of an extensive plan for collecting data for an empirical study (Bhattacharjee 2012). In other words, it helps the researcher to plan and explain how they hope to find answers to their research questions as well as how the research strategy will be put into action (Bryman and Bell

2015). Two types of research methods are briefly discussed, namely: (a) quantitative and (b) qualitative. Generally, the inductive approach lends itself to qualitative methods while the deductive approach is better tuned to quantitative methodologies.

6.4.1 Quantitative

Quantitative methods lay emphasis on objective measurements and or numerical analysis of data (Bell, Bryman and Harley, 2018). While quantitative data is more efficient at testing hypotheses, it may omit context-sensitive details as it utilises a fixed and rigid computational approach. Results provide less detail on experience, attitudes, perceptions and motivations. Thus, using quantitative methods was considered unsuitable as it will be unable to represent the perception and experiences of poor rural women entrepreneurs regarding microfinance.

6.4.2 Qualitative

Qualitative research is mainly exploratory in nature. The main advantage of the qualitative method stems from its ability to provide further details. It is flexible and adaptable to change (Saunders et al. 2018). It is effective in gaining deeper meaning and understanding of underlying reasons, opinions, and motivations of the research subjects (Denzin and Lincoln 2013). Typically, the aim of qualitative research revolves around seeing the bigger picture of the phenomenon under study, and not just counting or measuring some value numerically. The heart of qualitative research is the participants' subjective views and meanings, and as a result, the researcher attempts to evaluate the events, situations and experience that the participant is involved with.

Qualitative method is flexible and enables “the unexpected, unanticipated and unconventional,” knowledge to be discovered (Anderson and Starnawska 2008). Given that the context where poor rural women conduct their business is constantly changing and new meanings acquired, a rigid design like quantitative will undermine the findings. Hence, a qualitative method was considered suitable for this study. Though one of the weaknesses of qualitative research is the fact that findings are not generalizable given the use of small sample size, the goal of this study is to formulate consistent generalizations to a theoretical underpinning of related phenomena rather than probabilistic generalizations to a population (Robson 2011). This standpoint aligns with the focus of this study. Figure 7 illustrates the various stages in which the research was carried out.

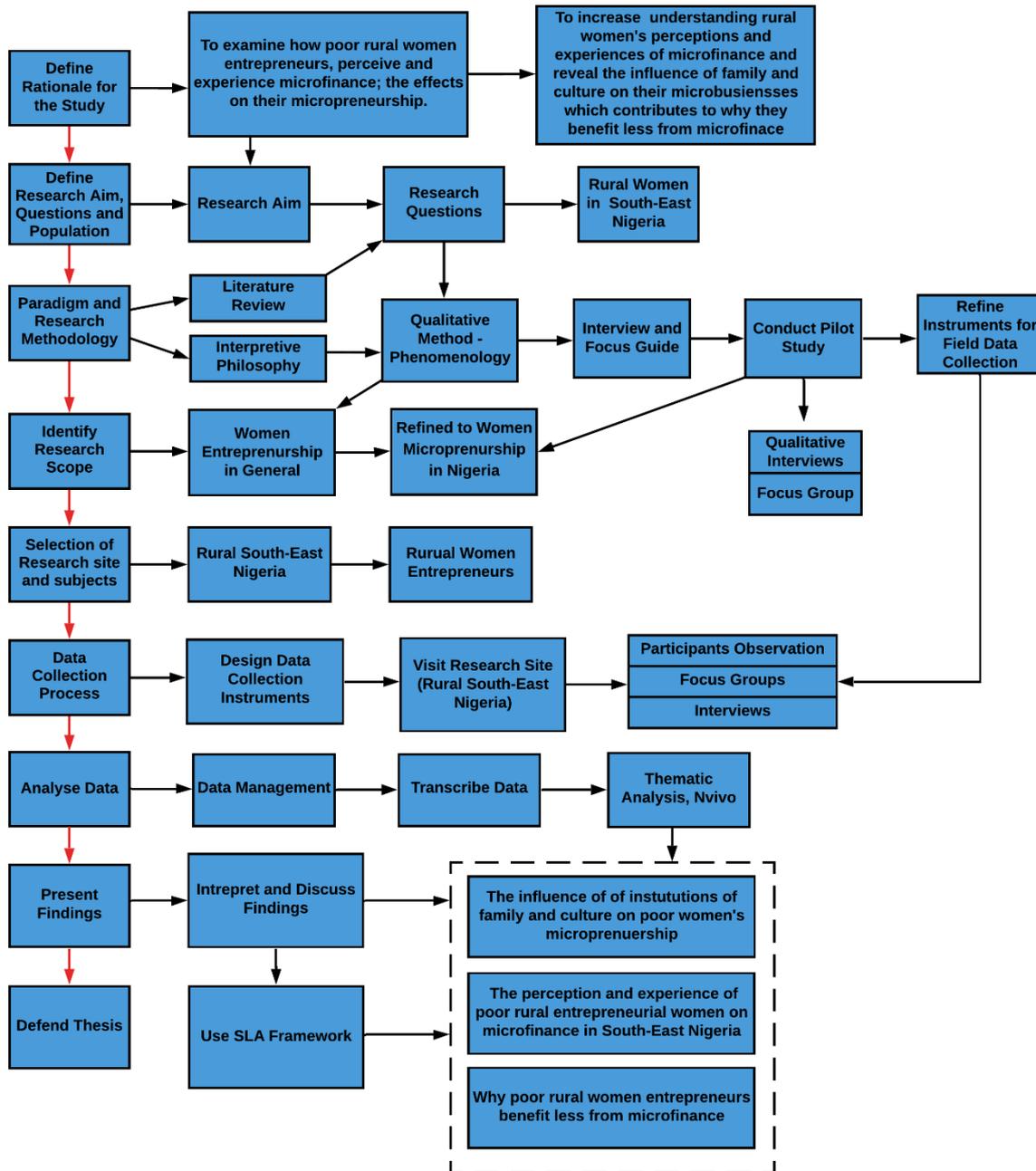


Figure 7: Conceptual representation of the research design (Author Generated)

Key: Broken lines were used to emphasize the research objectives

6.5 Research Strategy

This study aims to explore and examine the experience and perception of rural women entrepreneurs about microfinance in their natural context closely. Yin (2018) notes that an investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon

within its real-life context is a case study, especially where little is known about the situation as in this study where little is known about the perceptions and experiences of rural women entrepreneurs regarding microfinance. A case study is advantageous to gain an in-depth, holistic understanding of complex phenomena (Yin 2018). The use of multiple sources in the case study is beneficial as it enabled a broader range of views and issues and facilitated triangulation of sources to reveal as much depth as possible from the viewpoint of the participants while enhancing confirmation validity (Gaya et al. 2016).

According to Yin (2018), there are two approaches to consider when designing a case study, namely a single case and multiple case studies. It is advisable for researchers to decide before engaging in data collection the approach to adopt, that is single or multiple cases (Yin 2018). A single case is sufficient to "represent a unique or extreme case" (Yin 2003 p. 146). This implies that just one case may be utilised to study a single group, where there is little or no extant data or related cases to use to reproduce the outcome (Yin 2013). On the other hand, multiple case studies involve more than one case in a study. Through rigorous analysis, multiple cases may be utilised in evaluating and establishing the applicability of the findings from a case in another (Lazar et al. 2010).

In this study, a phenomenological single case study was employed as this study focused on a single case (group) (Yin 2018), that is, the rural women entrepreneurs' experiences and perceptions about microfinance in South-East Nigeria. This allowed the researcher to acquire an in-depth understanding of the complex phenomenon being studied. Therefore, the researcher could explain the interrelationship between parts of a whole instead of providing disjointed

information regarding the components of a structure (Stake 2005). More so, the case study availed the researcher the opportunity to make a reasonable 'dependability' of the results, in analytical terms by drawing from multiple sources of data to enrich the understanding of the phenomenon (Creswell 2007, p. 8). Moreover, a case study design was preferred given that it offers the much-needed flexibility to gain new insights and depth of understanding about the views and experiences of poor rural women entrepreneurs regarding microfinance than would be possible if a survey approach was employed with predetermined categories.

While a case study has become extremely popular as a research strategy (Yin 2014), it is often criticised for such things as lacking systematic handling of data and often impossible to generalise the findings (Yin 2013). However, Yin (2014) asserts that where rigour is maintained, the findings of a case study are rich in quality and can be generalised on a conceptual basis, which is the case in this study.

6.6 Research Questions

Based on the research aim and objectives highlighted in section 1.4 and 1.4.1, the following research questions were generated as presented in Table 4. These research questions through the thesis get developed and are aimed at providing in-depth knowledge as regards aspects of rural women that is not sufficiently researched to date. That is poor rural women entrepreneurs' perception and experiences of microfinance and why they benefit less from microfinance. It also highlights the informal institutional influence (family and culture) on their microbusinesses.

Research Questions	Relevant Literature(s)	The gap in Research (or Knowledge)
1. How does the institution of family and culture influence poor women's micropreneurship in rural Nigeria?	Ayele 2015; Ihugba et al. 2014; Awojobi 2014; Igwe et al. 2018; Efobi et al. 2014; Imhonopi, Urim and Ajayi 2013; Ekpe, Mat and Razak 2010; Afrin and Ahmed 2019	Little is known about the role institutions of family and culture play on poor rural women micropreneurship in rural South-East communities. The effect of family and culture on poor rural women's micropreneurship and their everyday life experience of microfinance in rural South-East is underexplored.
2. What are the livelihood strategies adopted by poor rural women, the livelihood assets they have or lack, and their outcomes?	Afrin and Ahmed 2019; Ayele 2015; Ihugba et al. 2014; Igwe et al. 2018; Efobi et al. 2014; Imhonopi, Urim and Ajayi 2013; Ekpe, Mat and Razak 2010; Awojobi 2014	There is less attention on the livelihood strategies adopted by poor rural women in the context of extreme poverty (rural South-East) and where family responsibility and economic activities are closely intertwined.
3. How do seasonality, trends and shocks affect poor women's micro-businesses in rural Nigeria?	Igwe et al 2018; Efobi et al. 2014; Imhonopi, Urim and Ajayi 2013; Ekpe, Mat and Razak 2010	The effect of seasonality, trends and shocks on poor rural women's micropreneurship in rural South-East is underexplored.
4. What are the sources of finance available to poor women in rural settings?	Ekpe, Mat and Razak 2010; Fowowe 2017; Nwoye 2007; Tobias et al. 2013; Afrin and Ahmed 2019; Ayele 2015	There is less attention on the sources of finance available to poor rural women micropreneurs in the context of extreme poverty (rural South-East) and where family responsibility and economic activities are closely intertwined.
5. How do poor rural women perceive microfinance?	Afrin and Ahmed 2019; Fowowe 2017; Ayele 2015; Ike 2012; Pandula 2011; Igwe et al. 2018; Ekpe, Mat and Razak 2010; Weiss and Montgomery 2005.	There is a paucity of research on the experiences and perceptions of rural women entrepreneurs about microfinance in rural South-East Nigeria.
6. What are their experiences of microfinance in rural Nigeria?	Afrin and Ahmed 2019; Fowowe 2017; Ayele 2015; Ike 2012; Pandula 2011; Igwe et al. 2018; Ekpe, Mat and Razak 2010; Weiss and Montgomery 2005.	Little is known about the experiences of poor rural women micropreneurs with respect to microfinance in rural South-East Nigeria.
7. Do, and if so, why do the poorest, most disadvantaged group, i.e., poor women in rural Nigeria – benefit less from microfinance?	Afrin and Ahmed 2019; Fowowe 2017; Chant 2016; Chibundu 2016; Ofoegbu 2013; Tobias et al. 2013; Imhonopi, Urim and Ajayi 2013; Omorodion 2007; Igwe et al. 2018	There is less attention in research on why rural women from south-east Nigeria benefit less from microfinance with a close consideration on the fact that family responsibilities and economic activities are closely intertwined.

6.7 Pilot Study Experience

A pilot study provides the opportunity for a researcher to test the questions with a small group of respondents with cultural backgrounds similar to those in the research's proposed sample who met the selection criteria set out in section 6.7.1.

In this study, a pilot study was carried out between 5th October and 20th November 2015 in Aberdeen, UK. Conducting the pilot study provided the researcher with the opportunity to learn about time and people management, and how to recruit and engage participants in an interview and how to refine data collection plans including the content and the procedures to be followed (Bryman 2012; Saunders et al., 2018). This pilot study used both one-to-one interview and face to face and focus groups as data collection tools.

6.7.1 Eligibility criteria

The eligibility criteria for recruiting Nigerian women in Aberdeen for the pilot study include:

1. Must be 18 years and above,
2. Resident in Aberdeen no later than two years at the time,
3. Owns or have owned business in South-East Nigeria.

Implementing the eligibility criteria in 6.7.1, a total of 13 women entrepreneurs were selected for the pilot study and the initial meeting for discussion was set up on 5th October 2015 based on participants' availability. The researcher sought verbal consent from participants. The pilot study was in two phases. The first phase started with focus group discussions, consisting of two focus groups with six (6) and seven (7) participants, respectively. The second phase was the

interview, and 13 of them volunteered for it. Both the focus groups and interviews took place at the community centres and church conference halls booked for this purpose to ensure reduced interference or distractions from non-participants. All sessions lasted for about an hour and were conducted in the English Language at participants' request, audio-taped and transcribed verbatim.

Piloting the study enabled the researcher to refine data collection techniques, estimate how much time and what resources will be required to complete the final study (Kinchin, Ismail and Edwards 2018). It also helped to identify the possible limitations, and problems that may arise in all aspects of the research process (Kim 2011; O'leary 2017), but most importantly it enabled the researcher to refine the interview questions to improve understanding of the research questions.

Interview question used when conducting the pilot study.

What is your perception and experience of microfinance?

The revised question following the feedback from participants.

1. *How do you perceive microfinance?*
2. *What is your experience of microfinance?*

6.7.2 Lessons learned from the Pilot Study

The researcher conducted the pilot study to test the research questions and check the suitability of the research instruments. Piloting the study was essential to achieve the research aims and objectives, and the following lessons were learnt:

i. On Sampling, Recruitment and Gaining Access

Since the study adopts qualitative design, sampling and recruitment of participants were purposive and non-probabilistic (Creswell 2013; Saunders et al. 2018; Bryman 2015). In this pilot study, identifying eligible participants proved the most important lesson learned as it took a substantial amount of time and was challenging to recruit volunteers as the researcher had to visit many of the communities (such as Nigerian Association Groups, Religious Places) where Nigerian women could congregate. The researcher learnt the importance of gatekeepers (Kinchin, Ismail and Edwards 2018) within the communities who helped to facilitate access to and identify eligible participants based on the eligibility criteria provided by the researcher (see section 6.7.1). Some of the participants were unable to meet face-to-face due to their tight schedule and preferred telephone interview as the date could not be shifted due to the timeline set for this study. Thus, for the main study, additional time was incorporated into the recruitment and data collection timeline to allow for any contingencies.

ii. Data Collection Instrument

The guide for the semi-structured interview was tested to establish how user-friendly the questions were and suitability in extracting responses, and whether rephrasing or additional questions and prompts were required. The researcher also used this process to enhance her ability to conduct qualitative interviewing. On listening to the interview recordings and examining the transcripts, the researcher realised that some of the questions asked were complex and needed to be specific to improve understanding and encourage discourse. As a result, the researcher learnt to use open-ended questions and appropriate prompts (or cues) to guide the responses around the research aim and objectives.

iii. Refined Research Objectives/Scope

Before the pilot study, the researcher had conceptualised the research objectives to focus on understanding the experience and perception of rural women entrepreneurs regarding microfinance and barriers that women face within rural settings. Based on reflection about issues raised during the pilot study and reviewed literature, the objectives of the present study were revised to include the influence of culture and family on poor rural women microbusinesses (see section 1.4.1) being one of the most significant factors that impact on their business.

Figure 8 represents the research design for the pilot study. This includes designing the pilot study plan and instrument, recruiting participants and assessment of the tools such as the interview questions. After the first two interviews, the process was adjusted to integrate some areas that required improvement such as eliminating inappropriate questions, add prompts and accommodate alternative interviewing methods (face-to-face and telephone interview at participants' request). The tools and techniques were re-assessed to examine how well they worked with respondents. To ensure they remain consistent with a qualitative approach. Finally, the lessons learnt through the pilot study exercise informed the data collection process in the main study. It was deemed necessary to include participants observation in the main study in order to gain first-hand information about their business contexts. During the pilot study, the researcher reflected on each stage to ensure they conformed to the research philosophy adopted in this study to achieve the research aim, as shown in the illustration in Figure 8.

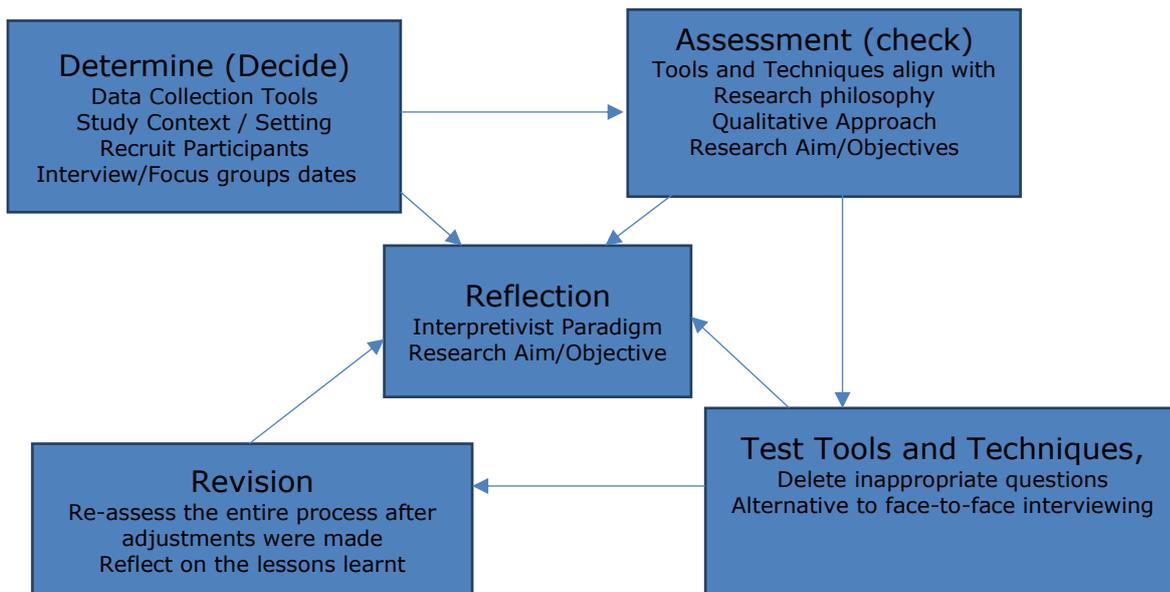


Figure 8: Stages of Pilot Study

6.8 The Main Study

6.8.1 Sampling techniques

The researcher examined the two main sampling techniques, namely: probabilistic (random) and non-probabilistic (purposive). According to Robson (2011), probabilistic sampling is where the likelihood of selecting each respondent is known. In order to protect against selection bias and generate representative sampling, the researcher must set up some random selection procedures that ensure that the different entities in the research population have equal chances of being selected. Thus, from the examination of this technique it became clear that this sampling technique requires that the 'sampling frame' is known, that is, the list of all the possible units to be sampled is identified (Uprichard 2013). This involves recruiting many participants (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 2003). This sampling technique was considered inappropriate for this study, given that the sampling frame for the population is not known; the researcher relies on referrals to reach the targeted population. Also, the nature of the study requires purposive

selection for an in-depth interview which aligns with the qualitative research method adopted in this study.

Alternatively, the non-probabilistic sampling technique does not give all the individuals in the population equal chances of being selected. In this way, purposive sampling, which allows the researcher to select people of interest and exclude those who do not suit the purpose of the study, was adopted. It is a method that is commonly used in qualitative research design (Merriam and Tisdell 2016; Creswell and Poth 2018). Although purposive sampling technique can be subject to bias and error, its inherent bias to include participants who are conversant and knowledgeable with the situation is able to provide rich information and appropriate well-suited data required in qualitative research (Creswell and Clark 2017). Thus, the use of purposive sampling technique is adopted as most appropriate for this study.

In order to select the right sample from the population, the researcher designed some selection criteria based on the purpose and objective of the study. These criteria include:

6.8.1.1 Eligibility Criteria for Selecting Participants

The eligibility criteria used to select the participants are as follows:

- i. A woman aged 18 years and above.
- ii. Resident in rural South-East Nigeria.
- iii. Run a business in rural South-East Nigeria.
- iv. Heard about microfinance.

6.8.1.2 Eligibility Criteria for Selecting Villages

Below are the eligibility criteria that were employed to select the villages:

- a. Remote from local government headquarters, by travel time up to 2 hours or more.
- b. No presence of Microfinance Institution in the village
- c. Where there are limited or no infrastructure and social amenities

6.8.2 Selecting the villages and participants

South-East Nigeria is made up of five states, namely: Anambra, Enugu, Imo, Abia and Ebonyi. Given that qualitative design is usually collected from a smaller sample that can represent the population of a study, a purposive sampling technique was employed in selecting the villages. The researcher selected villages that are hard to reach in terms of their remoteness (e.g., travel time up to 2 hours or more) from the local government headquarters and where there are limited or no social amenities and infrastructures such as hospital, electricity and microfinance institution. Based on these features one village (the farthest from one local government) from each of the five states (i.e. Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo) was selected to represent the other rural communities in South-East Nigeria.

As for the participants, this study adopted both the snowball (used where research participants recruit other participants, especially where potential participants are hard to find) and purposive sampling techniques. This helped to access hard-to-reach participants in the remote villages and to increase the demography of the participants who met the eligibility criteria (see Section 6.8.1.1). First, the researcher, on arrival at each village, visited the religious setting and met with

the leaders who assigned a gatekeeper to assist the researcher. The gatekeeper directed the researcher to the women's leader and the village head, and these leaders were informed of the aim of the study, and an announcement was made through their local channel (e.g. town crier/traditional messenger). This was done to break the barriers, avoid bias and encourages participation. The women who responded from the announcement were directed to the women's leader and the gatekeeper who introduced the researcher to the women. Some of the women also informed other women in their community about the study, and from there; the researcher recruited women who were interested and met the set criteria (see Section 6.8.1.1). These techniques helped to provide variations in terms of age, experience and knowledge, among other characteristics.

6.8.3 Sample Size

The sample size for this study was 30 in-depth interviews with rural women entrepreneurs, 5 focus group discussions comprising 6 rural women entrepreneurs in each focus group and 5 interviews with MFI staff. This sample size was adequate for holistic understanding and interpretation of the experiences and perceptions of rural women entrepreneurs regarding microfinance services as the study is exploratory and not focused on generalising findings to a larger population. Moreover, the sample size of this study is in line with the recommendation that a sample size of 25-30 participants can reach saturation and redundancy in qualitative studies that use in-depth interviews (Dworkin 2012). This implies that data saturation is not about the quantity, but about the depth of the data (Burmeister and Aitken 2012). The next section discusses the methods adopted for collecting data.

6.9 Data Collection Techniques

As this study uses a qualitative case study approach, data were collected using multiple sources such as participant observation, focus group and in-depth interview. This is because non-numeric information was the focus to gather quality data from participants (Fusch and Ness 2015).

The data collection was in three stages. The first stage was the participant observation, followed by the focus group, and the third stage was the individual in-depth interview. The reason for starting the data collection first with the participants' observation was to give the researcher first-hand information on the reality of rural women entrepreneurs with respect to their activities and business environment. Section 6.9.1 provides details of the participant observation (that is, how and what was observed, as well as how these data is used). While the second stage - focus group was done next because it enabled both the researcher and the participants to meet and familiarise with one another in a group setting. This helped to enhance discourse and allowed the researcher the opportunity to take notes of some ideas that needed to be explored further during the one-on-one interview. The third stage - the one-on-one in-depth interview was left till last to allow further clarification of issues raised during the focus group and to ascertain individual position about issues discussed and observed.

6.9.1 Participants Observation

Participant observation is the act of noting a phenomenon through the five senses of the observer, often with a note-taking instrument, and recording it for scientific purposes or photograph taking of the event for analysis (Creswell 2018). Prior to the actual observation, the researcher's first task was to develop an observational protocol which includes notes to be taken both descriptive and reflective notes

headed by date, place and time of observation, duration of observation and what is to be observed. Given that observation method was the first phase of the data collection method in this study, the researcher upon arrival met key informants and leaders who assigned gatekeepers that took the researcher round the study areas. Hence, it was not difficult to identify what to observe and the site because the researcher has gotten to know the village under study, the people and their activities.

The researcher began the observation by visiting the local markets where most rural women operated their micro-businesses as a non-participant observer and took notes of their business activities, including the business size, number of employees, type of business, interaction, transactions and behaviours in terms of participation/non-participation in Akawo.

During the individual observations of women in the marketplace, where consent was granted (e.g. the women at the mobile poultry stand), photographs were taken (see Figure 9). This further explained the situation of everyday life of the rural women entrepreneurs with regards to their business activities and the environment. It was found that most participants could not afford a shed for their microbusiness due to lack of funds. They had to move their goods from home to the market (see Figure 10) or display their goods by the roadside of the market.



Figure 9: Observation of a woman and her Mobile Poultry Business



Figure 10: Village Market in Abia State

Also, as a non-participant observer, the researcher visited MF Banks in South-East Nigeria, and found that most MF banks are located at the local government headquarters several miles away from the selected villages studied. The remote location of the bank highlights possible challenges rural women face such as high cost of transportation due to bad roads and travel time, inability to conduct their businesses on the day they visit the bank due to delays in the bank and long travel hours (approximately 3 hours to access the bank). On getting to the MF bank, the researcher introduced the aim of the study to the bank manager and obtained permission to observe the activities of the bank. However, confidential data such as bank transactions or lists of women served by the bank or taking pictures to show women's participation was not granted (for privacy and safety reasons). Nonetheless, the researcher found that customers at the time of the visit were mostly men, and this observation was mentioned to the bank staff, and verbal confirmation was that their clients were mostly males.

Observing women in the marketplace, inside microfinance bank buildings and during their group meetings provided the researcher with direct access to the social phenomena under investigation. Rather than relying only on individual self-report, the researcher was able to record participants' attitude and behaviour (such as frustration waiting for so long to be attended to by MFI staff) first-hand. However, one of the limitations of this method is that it can be time-consuming and resource-intensive, especially if the researcher did not prepare ahead of time, but this was mitigated as the researcher planned beforehand.

6.9.2 Focus Groups

Focus groups were used as the second stage of data collection. The focus groups were demographically heterogeneous with women of varying socioeconomic characteristics (e.g. education, age and income) to allow diversity in opinions on specific topics. According to Robson (2011), focus group discussion is directed on a specific topic organised for research purposes. Prior to the group discussion, the researcher developed a guide (see Appendix 3), which highlighted the main themes discussed. This guide was validated by literature and the supervisory team of the research, which was then tested during the focus group pilot study. A total of five (5) focus groups were conducted in Igbo with a group size of 6 participants per group, and each session lasted for about an hour. The discussion was guided, monitored and recorded by the researcher who acted as a facilitator (Robson 2011).

As earlier stated, the researcher combined multiple methods (focus group, interviews and participants observation) and data sources (participants, field notes) to develop a comprehensive understanding of the phenomena, enhance data richness and to test the validity of the various sources through the convergence of information. This process is known as triangulation (Korstjens and Moser 2018). Triangulation is the process of using multiple approaches or sources to enhance the process of qualitative research (Korstjens and Moser, 2018). For example, the focus groups were conducted to explore in detail some of the observations noted during the first stage of data collection. Additionally, ideas from field notes were explored further during the focus group and one-on-one interviews. These different observation points were used to collect slightly

different types of data, which helped to better contextualise the most important, probably primary data from the interviews.

6.9.3 In-depth Interviews

In-depth interviews were used as the third stage for data collection in this study. According to Brinkmann and Kvale (2015), an interview allows understanding to be developed as the interviewee interacts with the interviewer. More specifically, the adaptability of interviews makes it a collection method of choice properly suited to qualitative research (Bryman 2016). Furthermore, interviews in the qualitative study relate to efforts made “to understand the world from the subject’s point of view, to unfold the meaning of their experience, to uncover their lived world” (Brinkmann and Kvale 2015 p. 3).

Qualitative interviews can be structured, unstructured or semi-structured; verbal or non-verbal; in-depth or superficial. A structured interview (also known as a standardized interview or a researcher-administered survey) is a quantitative research method commonly employed in survey research. The aim of this approach is to ensure that each interview is presented with the same questions in the same order. Conversely, unstructured interview or non-directive interview is an interview in which questions are not prearranged, unlike the structured interview which offers a set amount of standardized questions. While the semi-structured interview is a qualitative method of inquiry that combines a predetermined set of open questions (questions that prompt discussion) with the opportunity for the interviewer to follow-up questions, explore themes or responses further.

In this study, semi-structured interviews were employed. A total of 30 in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted between April and May 2016 using purposive and snowball techniques to recruit participants from five selected villages in South-East Nigeria. The researcher developed several questions used as an interview guide (see Appendix 2) to follow up some of the issues explored during focus groups and employed a face-to-face, one-on-one method when administering the interviews. Again, the interview guide was informed by the literature and the researcher's supervisory team and was pretested during the pilot study. The criteria for the choice of participants and the five villages were discussed in detail in section 6.8.1.1 and section 6.8.1.2. Again, prior to the interview, the issue of confidentiality, anonymity and participant's freedom to quit the interview process if desired was explained and participant's consent was sought. The interviews took place in various places such as participant's stores, houses and local markets as considered suitable by the participants.

In conducting these interviews, the literacy level of the participants was taken into consideration both in the design and administering of the interview to ensure the validity of responses and to encourage participation (Korstjens and Moser 2018). This was necessary as rural residents in Africa are associated with limited literacy skills (Abubakar 2017). Given that most of the participants have little or no formal education, the researcher used the language that respondents were comfortable with, which was respondents' native dialect - Igbo Language during the interview sessions. This helped to aid interaction, understanding and provided a common ground for participants to share and tell stories about their experiences and perception of microfinance services in rural areas.

After the end of each interview session, the researcher summarised the key issues discussed and checked with participants if that conveyed all that they had said. This process proved useful as there were times that participants added to the researcher's interpretations or what may have been missed by the researcher, and at the end, participants concurred to the summary. This approach is referred to as "member checking" (Korstjens and Moser 2018; Robson 2011). According to Korstjens and Moser (2018), member checking involves checking with respondents or returning (literally or through correspondence, phone and email) to respondents and presenting to them material such as transcripts, accounts and interpretations of the interview responses. The approach can be a very valuable means of guarding against researcher bias. It also demonstrates to participants that the researcher values their perceptions and contributions. However, disagreements can usually be negotiated in a way which both respondents' concerns and the needs of the study (Robson 2011). It also allowed the respondents to reflect on what they had said and offered an opportunity to add points they thought important as well as correct any misunderstandings.

To reduce misinterpretations, the researcher set up meetings with those that had participated in the individual interviews to give them the opportunity to correct any misinterpretation of their testimony and to challenge any account they perceived to be unaccounted or wrongly accounted. These were done to ensure and promote the validity of the data. Again, the researcher ensured that data gathered from one source (e.g., participant observation) was validated by another source (e.g., in-depth interview) which helped to provide a clearer picture with respect to the research questions. With participants' consent, all sessions were

audio-taped, transcribed verbatim and translated into English. The overview of the data collection methods and sources are presented in Table 5.

Data Source	Type of Data	Utility of Data	Purpose of the Data
Participants Observation	-Textual data: - Researcher's Field Notes	-Provided contextual interpretations in the natural setting of activities around women, culture and business	-To gather in-depth data about rural women entrepreneurship, experience with microfinance, contextual and influencing factors
Focus Group Discussions	-Debriefings (clarify the effect of culture, cultural norms and interpretations) -Interaction data among participants. -Women perspectives on microfinance experience and effect on businesses -Characteristics and contextual information of women (demography, cultural norms)	-Knowledge about the influence of the institutions of family and culture in this context -Provided women perspectives about microfinance through interaction with one another, commenting on group members' experiences. -Indicated ideas to explore in other methods such as individual interviews	- To make sense of the meanings, and contexts around culture, family relationship with businesses and to interpret data collected through focus group and interview -Assisted in revealing experiences of women with microfinance, the effect on their businesses, and the influence of family and culture - Assisted in understanding the convergence of meaning, experiences and interpretations of the data -Supported triangulation - focus group data validated during individual interviews.
Individual Interviews	- Individual's account of experiences, barriers, perception, role of family and culture on their business - Contextual Information (demography, cultural norms)	-Provided detailed accounts of rural women's thoughts, experiences, perceptions and challenges regarding microfinance and their businesses -Allowed for in-depth exploration of rural women's contextual situations around accessing microfinance and managing their business.	-Assisted in identifying an individual's experiences and situations around access to microfinance, family and livelihood -Individual discourse enriched the interpretation of reality in rural South-East Nigeria regarding the subject area -Contribute to data triangulation and validation of findings from other methods (e.g. focus group and participants' observation).

Table 5: Summary of Data Collection Methods Employed

The next section will discuss the process employed in analysing the data.

6.10 Data Analysis

The qualitative data in this study was guided by interpretive approach through the adopted sustainable livelihood framework, which allowed the researcher to

examine the perception and experience of women regarding microfinance services in rural Nigeria. In this study, the unit of analysis was the individual women and respondents' narratives and experiences. The NVivo 12 data management tool was used in the analysis of the data. Specifically, the six stages of Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis was employed. Thematic analysis refers to a technique used to identify, analyse, and report patterns (themes) found in data (Braun and Clarke 2006). It helps to interpret different facets of the phenomenon being observed (Boyatzis 1998). The six thematic stages employed in this study are shown in Figure 11.

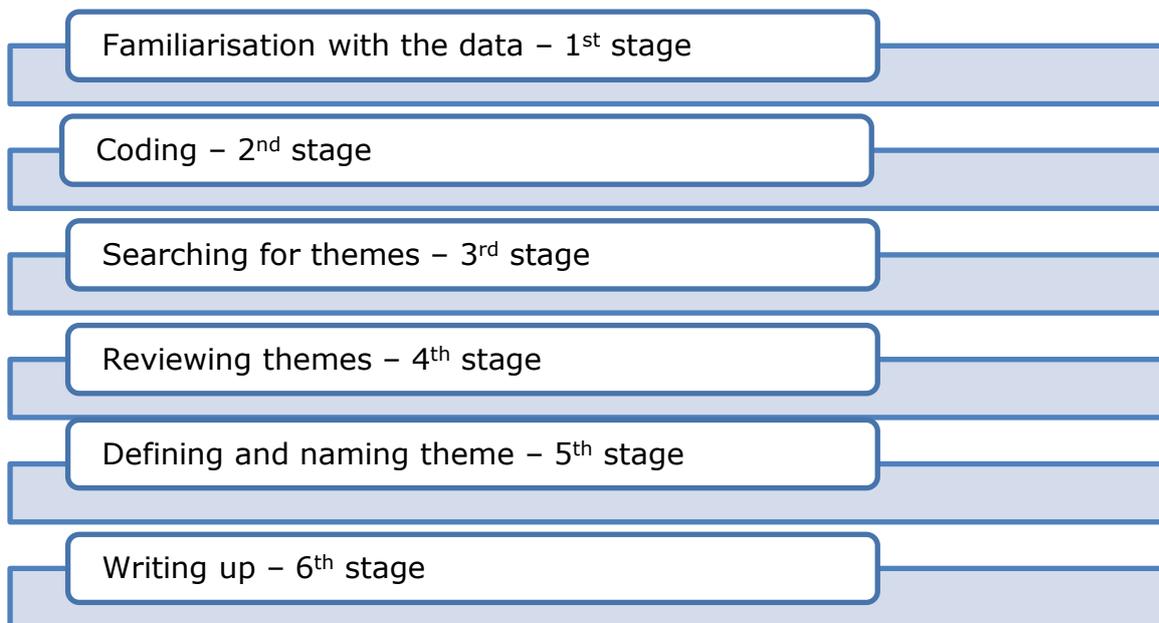


Figure 11: Braun and Clarke's (2006) six stage thematic analysis

The following stages reflect the sequence the researcher followed during the data analysis process.

Stage One: Familiarisation with Data

In the first stage, the researcher began by familiarising with the field notes from participants' observation, focus group and interview transcripts. At this stage, it

was essential for the researcher to be acquainted with the data to grasp the depth and breadth of the contents. This involved listening to the recordings repeatedly to increase familiarity with the terms used (in Igbo) which would enable the researcher to translate the data from the Igbo language into the exact or closest in meaning in English when transcribing the data. There were 30 transcripts from the interviews with rural women, 5 transcripts from the focus group discussions and 5 transcripts from the interview with MFI staff. The transcripts were printed off, and the researcher read it repeatedly along with the audio recording to crosscheck for any discrepancies and where noticed, the correction was made. This took the researcher months to complete the transcription as each transcript took about three days due to going back and forth in search of meaning since the translation was done alongside transcription. This process helped the researcher to get further immersed with the data and identified possible patterns and listed ideas as well as what was interesting about them, which helped in coding the data in the second stage.

Stage Two: Coding

The second stage involves the production of initial codes from the data. Here, the researcher built detailed descriptions of expressions, terms or events and highlighted significant phrases, sentences, comments, and NVivo software was used to enable easy allocation and organisation of codes. Codes identify a feature of the data that is, significant information in line with the research questions that appears interesting to the researcher, and refer to "the most basic segment, or element, of the raw data or information that can be assessed in a meaningful way regarding the phenomenon" (Boyatzis 1998 p. 63). Miles and Huberman (1994) defined codes as tags or labels used for assigning units of meaning to the

descriptive or inferential information compiled during the study. The identified codes (relevant information) are labelled and dropped in the nodes using NVivo software to organise the codes (data) into meaningful groups (Tuckett 2005). This coding process was driven by the collected data in which the codes were developed after reading through the data several times.

Stage Three: Searching for themes

After coding and collating all the data, the third stage, which entailed sorting the different codes into potential themes began. The coded data were grouped into emerging 'themes', patterns and structures. And then the themes were merged into categories with similar content. Essentially, the researcher started to analyse the codes and considered how an overarching theme could be formed by combining various codes. Making a note of the name of individual codes (with a brief synopsis) on a separate sheet was helpful. The next stage was to organise the sheets of paper into theme-piles while thinking about the interrelationship between codes, themes and different levels of themes. For example, when sorting the themes under microbusiness operated by rural women, agriculture was considered as the main theme comprising poultry farming and farming as sub-themes (see Figure 12). Some of the initial codes generated were used to form main themes and sub-themes, and others that did not seem to belong anywhere were called "miscellaneous". In this study, many of the themes (e.g., farming, poultry, gardening) that emerged (that is, came out during the interaction with participants) from the focus group discussions on the livelihood strategies rural women adopt, matched the thematic headings of the interview guide under the microbusinesses they do.

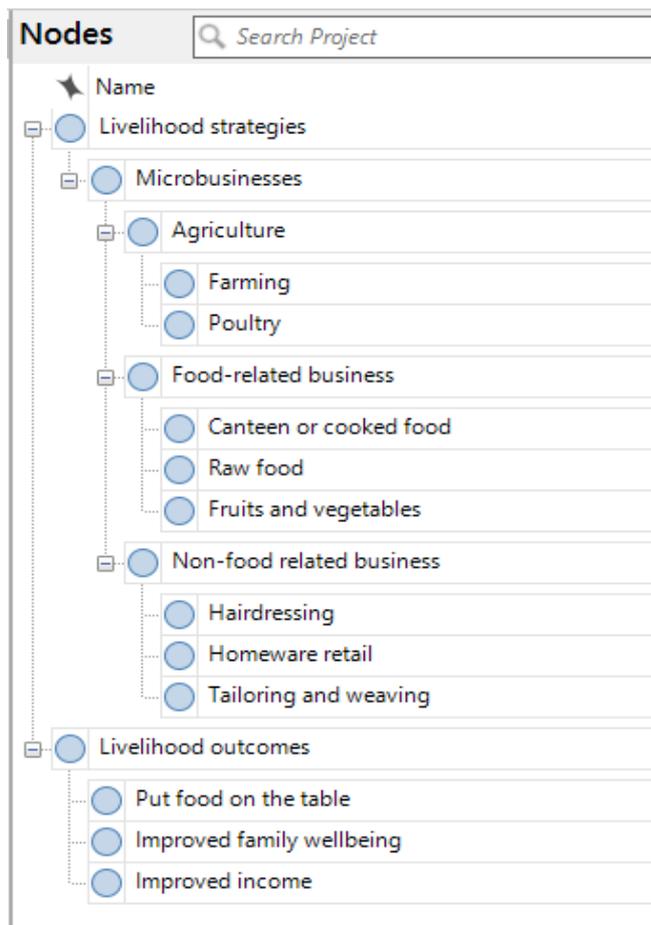


Figure 12: Categories and Themes

Stage Four: Reviewing Themes

The fourth stage involved the refinement of the themes. More specifically, the researcher reviewed the themes in relation to coded extracts and the dataset. This process of refinement enabled the researcher to read all the collated extracts for each theme and checked whether they formed a coherent pattern.

During this phase, it became apparent that some themes (e.g., expenditure) were not useful because there was not enough data to support the theme as the women had no record of their expenditure. While some of the themes were combined to form a more coherent theme, some others were broad and had to be broken down into separate and more concise themes. For example, the initial theme “perception and experience of rural women regarding microfinance” was separated into two

themes, namely: "Rural women perception of microfinance" and "Rural women experience microfinance". Separating the theme 'perception' from 'experience' provided the opportunity to conceptualise them and reflect on the effect each has on them. Many rural women's experience informed their perception; likewise, some women had perceived MFI as not for the poor even without having direct experience but based on the experiences of others that they heard through word of mouth. Determining what constitutes a theme was, therefore based on the research objectives. Essentially, the researcher ensured that data within themes were sufficiently meaningfully coherent and that there was a clear and identifiable distinction between themes. The themes were reviewed repeatedly until it became clear that further review and refinement would no longer add value. This process of iteration between data and themes is described as the constant comparative method (Anderson and Jack 2015).

Stage Five: Defining and Naming Themes

Stage five entailed returning to each theme's collated data extracts and arranging them into a logical and intrinsically harmonious account with attendant narratives. In other words, making out what was interesting about the theme and why (to ground the findings in data). At this point, the researcher defined the themes as guided by the research objectives and literature as provided by sustainable livelihood framework (SLF). The data within the themes were then analysed. While the adoption of themes was guided by the study focus, the researcher was opened to emerging themes which were not adequately conceptualised in SLF. Thus, two other emerging themes were captured in line with the study objectives: Perception and experience of rural women in microfinance services.

Stage Six: Writing Up

The sixth stage involved writing up the report from the study, providing evidence of the themes within the data and contextualising it in relation to existing literature to achieve internal consistency in the interpretations. The researcher used data collected from the field to discuss the themes. The interpretation of the participant's reality captured through the themes was used by the researcher to derive meaning as captured by the narratives. The approach adopted for the analysis was inductive, which involves the researcher methodically deriving models, concepts, themes and ideas from structured reading and collation of raw data (Thomas 2003). Furthermore, the researcher utilised quotations (i.e. participants' own words) side by side with descriptions and interpretations. Measures were adopted to ensure the reliability and credibility of findings (see details in the next section).

6.11 Quality Assurance

In order to ensure the quality of the findings from this study, methodological rigour was applied right from the study design and throughout the research process. This was necessary as qualitative studies, according to Robson (2011) are often subject to much debate with respect to validity, reliability and generalisability. Simply put, qualitative validity requires the researcher to employ robust processes to confirm that the findings are accurate. Creswell (2014) developed eight principles that can help and using any two of these principles can help increase the accuracy of findings. The eight principles are as follows - use peer debriefing, member checking, engage an external auditor, spend extended time in the field, disclose the negative information, be upfront about researcher's bias, employ thick description to convey the findings and diverse data sources to triangulate. He further emphasized the need to use at least two of the eight strategies to enhance

the accuracy of studies. The researcher was conscious of the quality of data and maintained sampling adequacy and appropriateness. This study adopted multiple data sources which facilitated the trustworthiness and credibility of the source and the accuracy of the findings through triangulation (Creswell 2014).

Similarly, the researcher's bias was mitigated through member checking as the researcher returned to participants in November 2016 and presented materials such as transcripts and interpretations made of the data. This helped to ensure that participants' views were accurately captured. Also, at the end of group sessions, the researcher used group debriefing (Onwuegbuzie and Leech 2007) to check bias and reflect on the knowledge and understanding of the data. For instance, the effect of institutions of family and culture on rural women's micropreneurship was examined, and the researcher realised that the business and the family is an indivisible entity. The interpretation of the data gathered was dependent on the interpretation of the meaning and perspectives of the participants.

Concerning reliability, proper and complete documentation of research activities cannot be over-emphasized (Yin 2018). This study maintained up-to-date documentation of steps undertaken during this study, including data sources and data collection strategies and analysis. Documenting the procedures, steps involved, and decisions made upholds accountability and transparency, and this ensures the research can be reproduced and the findings reviewed.

6.12 Challenges experienced when conducting the research

The data collection was not without challenges and risks, as Lee-Treweek and Linkogle (2000) noted that they are ever-present when conducting fieldwork. Risks in research related to the potential exposure of the researcher or researched to danger, hazard, hardship or harm. Given that the time of the data collection was during the festive period (Easter), many people usually travel from the city (and abroad) to the rural areas to celebrate the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ with their family members. As a result, hoodlums and armed robbers in certain parts of the rural area often seize the opportunity to rob and attack people suspected to be affluent as they think such people would have plenty of money and other valuables with them. Being a researcher from abroad (Scotland) posed a great risk of being their number one victim. Thus, the researcher's movement was restricted from certain notorious places. Also, the researcher did not disclose her full identity to strangers during data collection as a measure to mitigate the risk.

Additionally, the researcher was faced with other challenges such as getting a suitable time/place to conduct the interviews as the women in this context work almost round the clock. Hence, the researcher decided to work around the women and with their agreement interviews were conducted at a time and place that suited them. For example, some interviews took place at the business centre like stores, marketplaces and at home while the group interviews took place in church premises after their services as well as the women's meeting venues – depending on the participants' preference. Moreover, the researcher needed secondary data from Microfinance bank to substantiate the information gathered from the participants but unfortunately when the researcher visited some of the MFIs; she

was denied access to secondary data on women's participation in MFI services in rural Nigeria due to security and privacy reasons. Thus, the researcher relied only on data gathered from fieldwork and relevant literature in the field.

Finally, the lack of infrastructure was another issue. However, the researcher, having lived in the village for so long in time past, was aware of the situation. Therefore, with the help of the key informant, preparation was made to hire a room, portable generator, and local driver. Bottled drinking water was also acquired to minimise exposure to cholera, as there were reports of cholera cases in some of the villages in the area.

6.13 Ethical Issues

Ethics, as defined by Recker (2013) refers to the guidelines for conduct in a profession or community which helps to model wrong and right responses and aid individuals in deciding what to do and how to do it. In this view, the researcher in undertaking this study paid attention at every stage to ethical issues that may directly or indirectly impact the research process or the outcome of the research. To this end, the research was conducted in accordance with the Research Ethics Policy of Nigeria and The Robert Gordon University (RGU) such as confidentiality and anonymity, informed consent and special consideration on vulnerable respondents. Ethical approval was obtained from RGU before the fieldwork was conducted.

Gibb (2007) categorised the ethical issues into confidentiality towards colleagues, participants and sponsors; informed consent procedures; participants' requests; the benefit of research to participants compared to the risks; deceptive activities; and originality of transcript. Each participant and microfinance staff that

participated in this research were taken through the informed consent procedure, and they freely offered to become participants in the research. A copy of the consent form and information sheet, presented in Appendix 1 and 5 respectively, were read and interpreted to participants in the language that they understood (that is, Igbo Language) at the beginning of the data collection process. The researcher also informed participants of the purpose of the study and how the information will be used and disclosed, and that anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained so that no participant will be identified. For instance, the respondents agreed to have their photographs taken. However, the researcher covered their faces and used a name that is not their real names when reporting findings. Every effort was made to ensure the anonymity of participants, and as such, all the transcripts were transcribed by the researcher, with no external transcriber employed.

Perhaps the overriding ethical consideration for this study was in showing respect; respecting the respondent's views, life worlds and context; respect for the impact of penury and the effects of poverty. In all, treating the respondents as people and not merely research subjects.

6.14 Chapter Summary

This chapter constitutes the methodological framework of the study. It reviewed the underlying assumptions, research philosophy, research strategy, the sampling technique and sample size of the study as well as data collection methods. Table 6 presents a summary of the sections discussed in this chapter and highlights the various decisions made by the researcher throughout this research process.

This study agrees with the school of thought that there is no single reality and looks at rural women entrepreneurs in South-East Nigeria as active social actors who possess sufficient knowledge about the phenomena under study. The research is qualitative in nature and adopts interpretative methods and techniques during the data collection processes involving focus group, interview and participant observation (Saunders et al. 2018). Furthermore, thematic data analysis was employed following Braun and Clarke (2006) six-step guideline. The interview transcripts and field notes were coded to uncover meanings and interpretations and make sense of the experiences and perceptions of rural women against the subject area.

The researcher ensured the process followed quality assurance methods to achieve trustworthiness and reliability of the outcome. The challenges and how the researcher coped while conducting the research and ethical issues relating to the study were discussed.

Research Elements	Researcher's Choice
Philosophical Position	Interpretivist Paradigm
Research Method and Design	Qualitative Method – Phenomenology
Research Strategy	Case study
Research Techniques	Participant Observation, Individual interviews Focus Groups
Settings / Context	Rural South-East Nigeria
Units of Analysis	Rural Women Entrepreneurs Respondents' narratives and experiences
Data collection Timeline	March 2016 to May 2016, November 2016
Research Participants / Sample	Poor Women Entrepreneurs in Rural South-East Nigeria
Conceptual Framework	Sustainability Livelihoods Framework
Data Analysis	Thematic Analysis

Table 6: Summary of the Researcher's Methodological Choices

In the next chapter, the data collected will be analysed, and the findings of the study will be presented.

CHAPTER SEVEN: FINDINGS - WOMEN'S MICROPRENEURSHIP IN RURAL NIGERIA

7.1 Introduction

In chapter six, the research methodology and data collection methods adopted in this study were discussed. This study is guided by an interpretive paradigm, which aims to understand participants' narratives from their own contexts. Since the purpose of this study is to address the problem of why the poorest, most disadvantaged group, women micro-entrepreneurs in rural Nigeria appear to benefit less from microfinance, the study adopted the SLA framework and social capital constructs to understand how the informal institutions of culture and family shape the entrepreneurial activities of rural women microbusinesses. In order to address the research questions posed by this study, the data collected from rural women micro-entrepreneurs using observations, focus group and in-depth interviews were analysed.

The empirical results from the analysis provided insights, which are discussed in the remainder of this chapter and in the next chapter. Data collected from the various rural villages in the states that make up the South-East region of Nigeria were treated as one case study rather than as comparative cases. Themes, sub-themes and categories that emerged from the data are discussed, and the findings are supported through quotes from the participants (that is, rural women micro-entrepreneurs and the MFI staff). The rest of this chapter presents the findings from the analysis of the data collected.

This chapter is structured as follows: Section 7.2 tries to understand the difficulties encountered by these women microentrepreneurs in their daily lives. Section 7.3 concentrates the analysis of the difficulties introduced by informal institutions and

traditional practices and highlights how patriarchal settings influence what roles women play. Section 7.4 discusses rural women's work, and Section 7.5 discusses rural women's livelihood strategies, assets and outcomes. Section 7.6 discusses rural women's livelihood assets and the place of family in their microbusiness, and the chapter concludes in Section 7.7 with a summary of the findings.

7.2 Difficulties Rural Women Face

Given that this research sets out to address the problem of why the poorest, most disadvantaged group, women micro-entrepreneurs in rural Nigeria benefit less from microfinance, it is important to contextualise and understand the difficulties that rural women micro-entrepreneurs encounter in their daily lives as that can influence decisions relating to entrepreneurial activities and livelihood strategies. As a result, participants were asked questions relating to their livelihood and any challenges that they face. All participants noted a range of difficulties that they encountered daily, and these were largely related to (1) resource constraints, and (2) socio-cultural constraints.

The remainder of this section will analyse the data collected from the participants, which evidenced some of the difficulties that rural women encountered in their daily lives. Participants indicated that they lived in a resource-constrained environment with few income sources and how they struggled to meet their basic needs. For example, in Obioma's words, she noted: "... I struggle every day to meet my [children's] basic needs [of food] ...". Another participant (Uju) supported this by stating that "... I [daily] worry about where the next meal will come from ...".

The difficulties posed by the inability to meet daily needs can be a real concern as some of the women lost their health in the pursuit to provide for their families, as Table 7 highlights.

Table 7: Excerpts from participants regarding difficulties posed by extreme poverty in rural areas

Participants	Excerpt
<i>Nnenna</i>	<i>"... I work virtually round the clock due to persistent pressing family needs which affect[s] my health."</i>
<i>Chika</i>	<i>"... the stress [of providing for my family] is too much and is impacting my health ..."</i>
<i>Somto</i>	<i>"I work every day in order to provide for my children and my health is badly affected ..."</i>

Source: Author-generated

Microfinance is considered a potential solution to tackle challenges related to low incomes among rural women. The review of microfinance literature in chapter four shows that microfinance targets women because they are clearly marginalised and deprived (Branan 2013). The underlying reason is that there is a colossal need for microfinance among this group living under extreme poverty. However, poverty can be understood not only in economic terms but also in other dimensions, including low education. With respect to educational attainment, most of the participants (17) had little or no formal education. For example, Obioma noted that she only attended primary school, whereas Uju did not attend any formal education at all.

As evidenced by the participants (see Table 10), illiteracy posed a significant barrier to accessing markets and efficient business management. Other threats posed include the lack of entrepreneurial skills and knowledge to develop their microbusinesses. Specifically, they often lacked financial literacy and adopted

unsophisticated techniques to run their enterprises which affect their productivity. As Uju shared,

"I do not know how to manage my finances, and I am ignorant of how to package my goods to attract more customers. I use local skills to manage my business which affects my efficiency since I did not go to school." (Uju)

Unfortunately, the disadvantages of female poverty can be attributed to cultural institutions. All the participants interviewed noted a wide range of difficulties and challenges that emanated from socio-cultural constraints introduced by informal institutions. These will be discussed in greater detail in the next section.

7.3 Socio-cultural Constraints Introduced by Informal Institutions

As detailed in Chapter 2, one of the key characteristics of rural South-East Nigeria is the remoteness of the villages in the region. The respondents and their microbusinesses are far away from formal institutions; hence the practices of these microbusinesses depend on informal institutions. Participants explained that because they and their businesses are far from formal institutions (e.g. banks), traditional practices prevail, as shown in Table 8:

Table 8: Excerpts from participants regarding institutional void in rural areas

Participants	Excerpt
<i>Ebere</i>	<i>"There is no government support for us in this village. The local government headquarters where you can see government offices, banks and big markets are far away from my village..."</i>
<i>Helen</i>	<i>"If we have a government I do not know, as the government neglects the poor, we lack most of the opportunities people in the urban areas have".</i>
<i>Chika</i>	<i>"There is no life in this village, the government abandoned us. I have to depend on my family and obey my husband's instruction to do my business in line with our tradition".</i>

As can be seen in the quotes above, the participants lacked formal institutional support. With the absence of formal institutions, informal institutions arise to take on the role, but it is not without its constraints and disadvantages. It was important to find out how patriarchy and informal institutions constrained the way rural women went about their daily lives and livelihoods. The participants reported that these socio-cultural constraints introduced by informal institutions influenced their economic activities in different ways (see Tables 9,10,11,12), and have been categorised into four sub-themes, namely (1) business stereotypes; (2) property ownership/inheritance rights; (3) formal educational attainment; and (4) gender roles and rural women's work. Each of these constraints presented a unique nuance to the difficulties that rural women faced and are detailed in the rest of this section.

7.3.1 Business Stereotypes

All the participants reported that they were confined to the cultural expectations of female business in their culture and tradition. For example, one of the participants (Nnezi) noted that she had wanted to explore a more lucrative business (running a pub) but was considered a man's business and so she could not. In her words,

"... I started the cooked food business because ... [it is considered] ... the type of business [that] women can do. However, running a pub to sell alcohol is considered as men's business, and so any woman who does that kind of business is seen as promiscuous". (Nnezi)

Also, several participants maintained that the cultural practices put them at a disadvantage, as they were not free to exploit opportunities unless their spouses approved of it, as seen in Table 9.

Table 9: Excerpts on restricted opportunities for female businesses in rural South-East Nigeria

Participants	Excerpt
<i>Ogonna</i>	<i>"As a married woman, ... I can only do businesses that are approved for women, and my husband has to approve it as culturally suitable for me to do.</i>
<i>FGD2</i>	<i>"As tradition dictates, we [women] do virtually nothing without our spouse's permission ... we cannot decide alone. For example, we cannot travel on business activities to neighbouring villages or access microfinance unless we are permitted; otherwise, we could face rejection/abandonment which is a great shame to the woman and family. This affects our business progress".</i>

Respondents reported that in the face of institutional voids, family and culture played an influential role in their micro-businesses as these informal practices largely determined not just what kind of business they could run, but also how they ran them. Significant decisions regarding borrowing and market opportunities are somehow still linked to males because such settings still require a guarantor before they are approved.

7.3.2 Property/ Inheritance Rights

Considering that properties such as land are crucial factors of production and access to them is essential for meaningful business engagement, participants noted that cultural and traditional family arrangements often excluded women from property inheritance rights in rural South-East Nigeria. This raises various implications for rural women. For example, Obioma explains that,

"A woman in my culture does not inherit the land that could have been used to get a loan ... and my business is very small and no money to expand it" (Obioma).

Undoubtedly, these traditional practices discriminate against women and restrict them from inheriting land and other properties by inheritance from their fathers or spouses. This can be attributed to gender inequality in rural settings, which relies on traditions, customs, cultural factors and norms (Pacheco et al. 2010). Although there is an equality law in Nigeria that guarantees women's equal rights, this is not followed in most rural Nigeria where traditional practices dominate. This makes them rely on their husband to gain access to land for farming, for example. Thus, even if resources are present, culture may deny women access to these resources.

7.3.3 Formal Education

In traditional rural South-East Nigeria, female children benefit less from formal education due to cultural expectations. Many participants indicated that their low educational attainment was because their culture preferred females to learn home-keeping skills from their mothers instead of gaining formal education. The quote below is indicative:

"I was not sent to school as a female child unlike my brothers, but I was asked to learn from [my] mother how to be a good wife and manage a home..." (Somto).

This subordinate position that relegates female children to domestic chores and mere housewives leaves many of them as illiterates, who can barely write their names. This gender-differential attitude to education and entitlement has

implications on the lives and livelihood of rural women. For example, illiteracy among rural women places a cap on them and means they are unable to do certain things, and these often impact on their daily lives and livelihood, as are supported by the following participants' quotes listed in Table 10.

Table 10: Excerpts on low literacy of rural women as a result of socio-cultural arrangements in rural areas

Participants	Excerpt
<i>Nwakaego</i>	<i>"I cannot read or write because I have no formal education..."</i>
<i>Uju</i>	<i>"...never been to school and do not understand anything in non-native language..."</i>
<i>Nnezi</i>	<i>"... I was restricted from going to school because my culture does not value education for female children, and so I am an illiterate, and that limits what I can do ..."</i>
<i>Obioma</i>	<i>"I was sent to school up to primary but was pulled out for my brothers to continue while I was made to stay at home and learn home economics from my mother [supported by our culture] ..."</i>

Source: Author-generated

Culturally, when it comes to formal education in rural South-East, most parents prefer to train their male children while the females are asked to learn from their mothers' how to be a good wife' and skills to keep the home. While these cultural practices are slowly changing in Nigeria, it may take a long time to reflect in rural South-East Nigeria due to cultural stagnation and continuing dominance in these areas.

7.3.4 Gender Roles

In patriarchal rural societies (e.g. South-East Nigeria), the division of labour is determined by gender (see more details in chapter 2, section 2.3.2). In other words, roles are assigned based on gender rather than capability and availability.

In rural South-East Nigeria, certain roles are traditionally reserved for the males, while some others are prescribed for the females. These cultural expectations, gender role specifications and "unsaid rules" about who does what (though sometimes dictated) place a heavy burden on womenfolk, especially as the roles are insensitive to the circumstances of the individuals.

Participants commented that the culture they have found themselves in indiscreetly prescribes roles to them just because they are women, and they complained that such practices affect their microbusinesses. For example, all the participants who were married explained that they were not allowed to take certain decisions regarding their microbusinesses; that role was prescribed to the male gender (that is, their husbands). They indicated that the labelling of women as the primary caregiver and the attendant cultural expectations of that role constrained their microbusinesses. Some of the participants reported that the role allocation based on gender was biased against women because roles are not distributed fairly. In fact, one of the participants reinforced the above assertion by commenting as follows:

"it seems to me that whatever task the men find hard or inconvenient to do automatically becomes labelled as women's role. It is unfair" (Muna).

Another participant put it this way:

"This [primitive] system of allocating tasks and roles were forced on us by our culture and [unfortunately] we are not strong enough to fight it... Imagine, as a matured woman; I cannot make a decision about my microbusiness without getting my husband's approval as my head" (Grace).

The reason why the participant above cannot take a decision on her own (even though it relates to her business) is because the prevailing culture has bequeathed decision making powers to males (who are considered as the head of the home or the sole decision-makers over all that is in their household). Hence, culturally, women are expected to submit to their husbands, yield to the males in the household, care and support every member of the family (see section 7.4 for more detail). The males, on the other hand, are meant to provide for the family, protect and make decisions on behalf of the family. Sadly, in most cases, rural women assume both their roles and those of their husbands (or other males in the household), especially in providing for their families as discussed in the next section.

Some participants narrated difficulties they encountered in their daily lives, and each statement supported the assertion that socio-cultural arrangements interfered with their daily lives. They noted that those constraints presented bottlenecks, which hindered their entrepreneurial activities. As reflected in the foregoing assertions, the participants argued that the absence of functional formal institutions in rural areas has meant that they continued to suffer discrimination. This is because cultural practices in the South-East are strongly biased against women (as discussed earlier in Chapters 2 and 3).

As evidenced in this section, informal institutions (e.g. culture) impact on the practices of women-led microbusinesses and their daily lives. Ranging from property inheritance and entitlement, through formal education attainment, to the type of business that women can (and are expected to) do, the power of informal institutions in shaping rural women's livelihood and microbusinesses are evident.

The next sections are dedicated to a deeper exploration of the work that rural women do and what strategies they adopt to cope with their responsibilities and obligations.

7.4 Rural Women's Work

Assessing the work that rural women do is essential since what they can do has a bearing on their daily routines and micro-business activities. This explores one of the research questions of this study: What are the main roles of women in rural South-East? Participants were asked questions relating to their work. This approach allowed the study to include further questions to help fully understand the nature of work that women in rural South-East engage in. Answers drawn from participants can be grouped into two main streams of work that rural women were responsible for, namely: domestic duties and providing for their families (as illustrated in Figure 13).

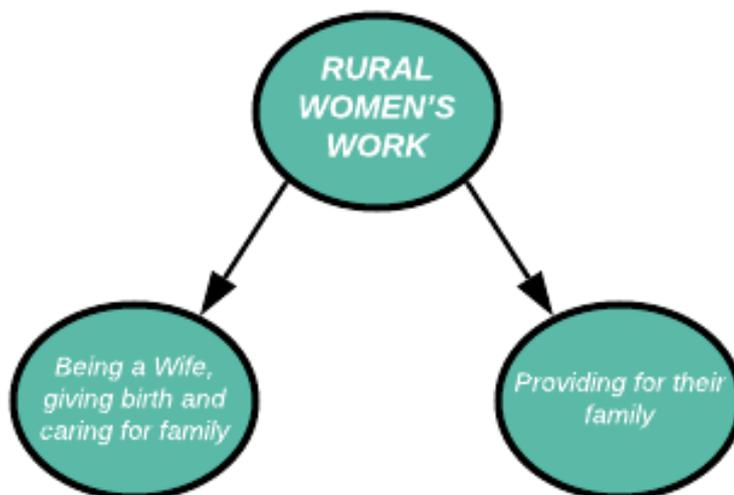


Figure 13: Rural Women's Work

Source: Author-generated

7.4.1 Domestic Duties

All the participants in this study, irrespective of their demographics were responsible for carrying out domestic duties as well as providing for the livelihoods of their families. The domestic duties ranged from caregiving, keeping the house tidy, procreation, being a “good wife”, and training the children as evidenced by the following participants’ quotes. Table 11 showcases relevant comments made by some participants concerning their domestic duties.

Table 11: Excerpts regarding rural women’s domestic work

Participants	Excerpt
<i>Chika</i>	<i>"I have 9 children, my old parents and in-laws as well as my husband to care for, which is a hard work... [and] ... I take care of domestic duties [with no help] ..."</i>
<i>Mary</i>	<i>"To become a good wife, a mother and daughter is a lot... I have to satisfy my husband, I cook for my family (8 children, husband and myself), and clean the house and raise [train] them [i.e. the children] well. I sometimes care for my old parents and in-laws especially when they are ill..."</i>
<i>Adaeze</i>	<i>"... I cannot as a woman wake up and go to the market without doing the house chores, caring and cooking for the entire family".</i>
<i>Ngozi</i>	<i>"Even when I am unwell, my husband still expects me to prepare his meal, and to wash up after him... He sees it as my job".</i>

Source: Author-generated

Participants noted that the domestic duties assigned to them because of their gender based on the patriarchal nature of their society are overwhelming and that they are often left with no help. In fact, one of the participants interviewed made the following assertion:

"... [as] "a good wife", I look after any family member in need of care and carry out all the domestic duties including cooking, fetching water and firewood

for cooking, doing the dishes and washing clothes [and] my husband does not help me with any of these ...” (Chinyere)

Other participants were also concerned about the obligations and responsibilities that they had towards their families. They argued that the prevailing cultural practices in the South-East discriminate against women and that the government is not actively intervening and so the informal institutions of family and culture dictate what roles they are assigned, and to be accepted in the society they succumb to them.

Considering the prevalence of these practices, girls in this context are generally taught, encultured, from a very young age to attend to things inside the house while the males are groomed for external affairs. In fact, the males are sent to school while the females are groomed to become a “good wife”. In other words, they are taught how to please their husbands, care for family members, train their children and keep the home. These processes are reflected in Table 12.

Table 12: Excerpts on women being taught to keep the home but men sent to school

Participants	Excerpt
<i>Nwakaego</i>	<i>“As a young girl, I was always given prep talks about making sure I grow up to become a good wife to my husband and not bring the family shame.”</i>
<i>Chioma</i>	<i>“While growing up, I was taught how to make delicious meals as my mother said it was one of the skills that would be required to keep a home...”</i>
<i>Chizara</i>	<i>“... I remember being asked to stay at home to look after my sick grandparents, while my brothers attended school...”</i>
<i>Ucha</i>	<i>“...My mother would often say a woman’s reward is in heaven...”</i>

Source: Author-generated

Most participants noted that they did not only handle domestic duties (including giving birth to children) but also had to care for the children and other family members as well as provide for their needs. The next section analyses some of the data relating to women providing for their families.

7.4.2 Providing for their Family

Like domestic duties, all the participants confirmed that they were responsible for putting food on the table for their families. Though in the rhetoric of patriarchal society, it is posited that the man provides for their families; in reality (particularly in South-East Nigeria), that responsibility in most cases is placed on the shoulders of rural women. Provision for the family included putting food on the table, healthcare, clothing, school fees, and this was largely borne by these poor rural women. These demands are reflected in Table 13.

Table 13: Excerpts from participants regarding working to provide for the family

Participants	Excerpt
<i>Uju</i>	<i>"... I work every day in order to provide for my children. I hardly rest because what my husband gives me is not sufficient. When I close from the market, I go to the farm..."</i>
<i>Nwakaego</i>	<i>"I have little or no rest from the farm and domestic work as well as my business just to make ends meet. The upkeep that I receive from my husband is never enough".</i>
<i>Muna</i>	<i>"... even though my husband is supposed to provide for the family in my tradition, I do make most of the provision... and still I attend to the domestic chores before I go to the market..."</i>

Source: Author-generated

In many cases, as evidenced in the comments of the participants in Table 13, what the men brought was never enough to meet the needs of their families, and so the woman had to work to augment it. Sadly, in some other cases, women bore the entire burden alone, and this was as a result of incapacitation, separation or

bereavement. The following participants' quotes listed in Table 14 demonstrate this obligation:

Table 14: Excerpts from participants regarding providing for their families alone

Participants	Excerpt
<i>Nnenna</i>	<i>"I spend a lot of money not only on food but on healthcare, clothing and school fees. My income is not enough, and there are no support services, hospital or free medical care in this village... Being a widow means I bear the burden alone, and that puts a lot of stress on me. For instance, I work virtually round the clock due to persistent pressing family needs which affect my health and business."</i>
<i>Somto</i>	<i>"My family welfare is my main worry, and some days I do not know where the next meal will come from for my 9 children and other family members (e.g. my old parents and in-law). I work so hard to provide for my family, there is no government support for the poor like me... My husband's prolonged illness makes it even harder as he is unable to work [to provide for the family] ..."</i>

Source: Author-generated

Undoubtedly, as evidenced in the data collected, the critical and primary priority of poor rural women was providing for their families. Despite the onerous task of giving care and delivering on domestic duties, the findings reveal that these women worked hard and long to ensure that their families were provided for. The big question is "Given the prevailing circumstances these poor women have found themselves in, how do they go about meeting these needs and providing for their families?" Answering this question is important as that will provide valuable insights into rural women's livelihood strategies and the place of microbusinesses in their survival. The next section will present the evidence gathered from data regarding the decisions that poor rural women made and the strategies they adopted to meet their livelihood challenges.

7.5 Rural Women's Livelihood Strategies (Microbusinesses)

As previously mentioned, poor rural women in South-East Nigeria do not only bear and look after children but are also expected to provide a livelihood for their families. In the absence of support from government and other formal institutions, one solution was to become micro-entrepreneurs. Hence, starting one's micro family business was considered the only viable option to meet the basic needs of the family. Specifically, respondents were pushed into micro entrepreneurship as a means of survival, and so their operations were geared towards putting food on the table.

Reinforcing the above assertion was Mary, who stated that:

"... I had to go into petty trading so as to ensure my children do not go to bed hungry for days."

Another respondent (Uju) highlighted the "never give up" spirit in rural women by stating:

"I know that myself [and other women in rural South-East] would rather die while trying to provide for our families than just fold our hands and watch them die of hunger."

The above quotes are central to why poor rural women adopt the strategy of micro entrepreneurship to tackle extreme poverty and their limited access to resources that they face in their daily lives. Particularly, the influence and impact of informal institutions increase because of remoteness.

As presented later in this section, many of them were exploiting a micro entrepreneurship strategy to position themselves on the path to a more prosperous and sustainable future. More specifically, they aimed to achieve sustainable livelihood outcomes such as improved wellbeing, hunger reduction, children education, improved income, reduced vulnerability and empowerment to have a voice in their home/community by engaging in micro entrepreneurship. The data analysed under this theme helped to elicit some of the enterprise activities that rural women engaged in and the circumstances that led to such directions.

Across the sample, the data collected evidence the fact that business growth was not considered as a motivation by most of the respondents, and for a handful, it was, at best, a secondary outcome. The priority for all the respondents was to provide basic sustenance for their families, and so the western view of enterprise as predicated on profit maximisation would fail to capture the nuances and realities of these women. In order to fully appreciate some of these realities and the decisions made by these entrepreneurs, an analysis of the business activities that these rural women engaged in is presented next. The findings from the data collected details the nature and operations of their micro-businesses as well as their profiles (see Table 15).

For easy analysis, the various micro-businesses that the respondents engaged in have been categorised into five groupings, namely: cooked food business, raw food business, fruits and vegetable business, non-food business and mixed business. Each of these categories is explored in detail to understand rural women's experiences.

Table 15: Types of Microbusinesses ran by Rural Women Entrepreneurs and their profiles

Respondent	State	Marital Status	Business	Age	Number of dependent Children & Adults	Education	Time in business	Business size	Time spent on business per day	Business income per]#'= (Naira)	Took out/had had/never had a microfinance loan.
Oluchi	Abia	Married	Poultry/Farming/Retail (Mixed)	50	4	Secondary	10 years	3	8-10 hours	200,000	Taking out a loan when interviewed.
Chinyere	Abia	Married	Retail shop selling assorted raw food and seasonal agricultural products (Raw)	35	4	Secondary	9 years	2	8-10 hours	50,000	Taking out a loan when interviewed.
Mary	Abia	Married	Farming and petty trading (Mixed)	40	8	Primary	23 years	Self	10 hours	45,000	Never
Favour	Abia	Married	Weaving and dressmaking (Non-Food)	28	4	Secondary	5 years	Self (4 unpaid apprentices)	8-10 hours	100,000	Had a loan when living in the city.
Nkechi	Abia	Married	Poultry/Retail business (Mixed)	33	6	Secondary	2 years	5	9 hours	150,000	Taking out a loan when interviewed
Nwakaego	Abia	Married	Retail/Farming (Mixed)	59	4	No formal education /evening classes	39 years	Self	8 hours	35,000	Never
Ogonna	Abia	Married	Canteen (Cooked)	50	7	Primary	20 years	Self (2 unpaid apprentice)	10 hours	30,000	Never
Grace	Anambra	Married	Canteen business (Cooked)	24	5	Secondary	4 years	2 (2 unpaid apprentices)	10-12 hours	110,000	Taking out a loan when interviewed.
Oby	Anambra	Married	Fruits & Vegetables	38	6	Secondary	18 years	Self	8-10 hours	95,000	Had had loan but Bank got liquidated.
Ogechi	Anambra	Married	Poultry/Farming/Retail (Mixed)	35	4	Secondary	7 years	2 (2 unpaid apprentices)	8-10 hours	200,000	Taking out a loan when interviewed
Ucha	Anambra	Widow	Raw Food business/Retail (Mixed)	28	4	Secondary	7 years	2	8-10 hours	120,000	Taking out a loan when interviewed
Uju	Anambra	Married	Petty trade/Farming (Mixed)	55	9	No formal education	35 years	Self	9-12 hours	45,000	Never
Chizara	Imo	Married	Canteen business (Cooked)	29	3	Secondary	4 years	3 (1 unpaid apprentice)	10-12 hours	130,000	Taking out a loan when interviewed
Muna	Imo	Married	Retail/farming (Mixed)	34	6	Primary	6 years	Self	8-10 hours	63,000	Had had a loan but stopped
Ndidi	Imo	Single	Hairdressing & Retails (Mixed)	35	2	Primary	5 years	Self (2 unpaid apprentice)	8-10 hours	103,000	Taking out a loan when interviewed
Somto	Imo	Married	Farming and Retail (Mixed)	59	9	No formal education	36 years	Self	8-10 hours	40,000	Never
Ijeoma	Imo	Married	Fruits & Vegetables	48	7	Primary	22 years	Self	8-12 hours	38,000	Never

Chioma	Enugu	Widow	Canteen (Cooked)	43	5	Primary	4 years	self (1 unpaid apprentice)	10-12 hours	50,000	Never
Helen	Enugu	Married	Home-wares retails (Non-Food)	32	4	Secondary	3 years	1 (1 unpaid apprentice)	8-10 hours	100,000	Taking out a loan when interviewed
Nnezi	Enugu	Married	Canteen business (Cooked)	53	8	No formal education	28 years	self (1 unpaid apprentice)	10-12 hours	45,000	Never
Love	Enugu	Widow	Foodstuff retail/Farming (Mixed)	41	6	Secondary	13 years	Self	10-12 hours	79,000	Taking out a loan when interviewed
Onye	Enugu	Single	Fruit/Vegetable business	47	2	Secondary	20 years	Self	8-10 hours	38,000	Never
Adaeze	Ebonyi	Married	Retail of raw foodstuff (Raw)	47	8	Primary	8 years	Self	9 hours	37,500	Never
Chika	Ebonyi	Married	Retail, selling assorted goods, and homewares (Mixed)	58	9	Primary	15 years	Self	10 hours	40,000	Never
Ezinne	Ebonyi	Married	Raw Food retail business (Raw)	57	7	Primary	10 years	Self	10 hours	30,000	Never
Ngozi	Ebonyi	Married	Selling agricultural raw food crops (Raw)	45	7	Secondary	18 years	Self	9 hours	50,000	Never
Nnenna	Ebonyi	Widow	Hairdressing (Non-Food)	55	8	Secondary, vocational certificate	10 years	1 (4 unpaid apprentices)	10 hours	100,000	Taking out a loan when interviewed.
Obioma	Ebonyi	Married	Processing and marketing of raw food (Raw)	64	6	Primary	30 years	Self	8-10 hours	51,000	Never
Ebere	Ebonyi	Married	Hairdressing (Non-Food)	26	3	Secondary, vocational certificate	5 years	1(1 unpaid apprentice)	8-10 hours	48,000	Taking out a loan when interviewed.
Kelechi	Ebonyi	Married	Palm Oil dealer (Raw)	30	3	Secondary	7 years	3	9 hours	125,000	Had had a loan but stopped

7.5.1 Cooked Food/Canteen business

As shown in Table 15, five participants operated a cooked food business. These respondents stated that the cooked food business was preferred because they had already acquired the skills of cooking from their adolescent years. They noted that the cooked food business was sure to be in high demand because they believed that people would prefer to spend a little money on food that was already prepared instead of going through the trouble of buying raw food items and spending time to cook them. Importantly, they all noted that their customers were mostly other traders in the market who may not have the time to go home and cook their meal. Table 16 showed some of the participants view for engaging in the cooked food business.

Table 16: Excerpts on participants' choice for cooked food business

Participants	Excerpt
Chizara	<i>"... I learnt how to cook at a very early age to enable me to fulfil the cooking roles as done in my culture. This helped me to possess the skills already. Cooked food is required by people in the market [since business activities can last up to 12 hours a day]"</i>
Grace	<i>"... [In our community] people will eat no matter what and that is why I am in this business. I know how to cook and [so] I use the [little] money that I borrowed to buy foodstuff and cook it for sale ... [and] that is how we have been surviving"</i>

The findings indicated that rural women made use of their basic skills in creating a livelihood for their families. Their willingness to work hard helped them to make the most of the opportunities around them despite the limited resources they had. Preparing the meals without modern facilities meant that some of the tasks that could have been taken for granted in more affluent settings could be cumbersome

here. For example, Table 17 highlights how two respondents narrated a typical day in a cooked food business in rural South-East Nigeria.

Table 17: Excerpts from participants' operational decisions in the cooked food business

Participants	Excerpt
<i>Ogonna</i>	<i>"I do not have modern equipment, and so I get my daughter and 2 apprentices to wash the beans by hand and pound it into a paste using the mortar. I then spice the paste and fry the 'akara' (bean cake), which is then served with bread... Leftover food is taken home for our own consumption".</i>
<i>Nnezi</i>	<i>"...I cook in small portions with 2 of my children. When food runs out, I cook another one to reduce wastage. Although it is costly, I do it because I lack the equipment to store food in bulk nor preserve any remnants".</i>

The above responses reveal the struggles and tedious processes involved when operating a cooked food business in remote rural areas. They combine family responsibilities and their microbusiness and still find a way to juggle both successfully.

7.5.2 Raw Food Business

The raw food business involves selling various types of uncooked food items such as rice, beans, cassava, garri, maize, palm oil, and fresh fish. Seven respondents engaged in this kind of business. The respondents reported varying reasons for choosing raw food business, and these include easy to run, high in demand and requires no special skills, as noted in Table 18.

Table 18: Excerpts on participants' choice for raw food business

Participants	Excerpt
<i>Ezinne</i>	<i>"... rice and garri being a staple food for villagers are in high demand... This business helps me to provide for my family. It is easy to manage [with my children who help me] ..."</i>
<i>Obioma</i>	<i>"My business is fresh fish retailing. I do this business as it offers me income to provide for my family and a job since it does not require special skill."</i>

All the participants in the raw food business submitted that the business required little or no skills and that it was well suited to their circumstances as they lacked specialised skills because of their low literacy. Excerpts from some of the participants regarding some of the operational decisions they made in their businesses are outlined in Table 19.

Table 19: Excerpts on participants' operational decisions in the raw food business

Participants	Excerpt
<i>Ezinne</i>	<i>"I buy in small quantities as that is what I can afford. [Due to high transport cost because of bad roads] I hardly access main markets [and so] I hawk my goods around my village on a wheelbarrow to look for customers. This helps me to improve my sales and interact with other women though it leaves me with a backache."</i>
<i>Obioma</i>	<i>"... I go to the fish dealer to buy fish in small quantities as I cannot buy in bulk. I spread it on the table on top of the cardboard. Sales are often poor, especially during rainy seasons as customers rarely come to the market. Leftover fish is taken home for consumption as I have no equipment to preserve them."</i>

Responses from these participants suggested that selling raw food was worthwhile as villagers prioritised essentials over luxury goods given their limited resources. They noted that the business afforded them the flexibility to move their goods around to seek for customers elsewhere when customer turnout at the village

market was low. The practice of hawking and street selling, though backbreaking as respondents reported, appeared to help rural women sell off their goods.



Figure 14: A woman selling fresh fish with her apron

7.5.3 Fruits and vegetables

Three respondents engaged in fruits and vegetable business (as shown in Table 15), and they noted that there is a market for their goods all year round as many villagers loved to eat fresh produce like banana, tomatoes, mango and other fruits. They also submitted that vegetables such as waterleaf, pepper and ugu leaves (see Figure 15) were popular and used for all manner of dishes in their culture. All the participants mentioned that they planted vegetables and harvested them for sales, but when the harvest is poor, then they buy from other farmers to sell. Table 20 presents some of the views of participants regarding their choice for engaging in fruits and vegetable business.

Table 20: Excerpts on participants' choice for fruits and vegetables business

Participants	Excerpt
<i>Onye</i>	<i>"I plant [the] vegetables [myself] and harvest for business and consumption, but sometimes I buy from other farmers. There is a market for it [as people consume them regularly]. I hawk my goods around to reduce spoilage when sales are slow... We depend on the income for survival."</i>
<i>Ijeoma</i>	<i>"I like selling fruits and vegetables because it is not too costly to run. People need fruits and vegetables to help them stay healthy [so that means one can be sure of some sales]."</i>
<i>Oby</i>	<i>"I sell all kinds of vegetables and seasonal fruits... To be honest, it is a steady business... I buy in bulk from other farmers when I have low yield... When sales are low, I reduce the price to attract customers or else they will perish, and that makes life more difficult for us."</i>

The findings indicated that all the participants in the fruits and vegetable business found it a good choice in their strategy to make a living for their families. As noted in their comments in Table 20, fruits and vegetable business is steady as villagers already know that fruit and vegetables help to keep sickness away. Considering the absence of affordable health services in the area, fruits and vegetables are regularly consumed by villagers in order to maintain good health and a balanced diet.

Additionally, the respondents reported that the business is less expensive to run, which seems to favour their limited resources. The view that the business is less expensive to run seem to suggest that these women are not regarding the time, energy and effort spent on the farm to plant, nourish and finally harvest the fruits and vegetables as those were discounted as activities that they would have done regardless. This viewpoint could be attributed to their low business and financial management skills as such inputs into production should be costed. What they really mean is that it does not take much capital. Their labour substitutes for

capital but is not valued very highly and certainly not 'cost'. Again, this is another aspect of rural women microbusiness that a western approach would be unable to represent.



Figure 15: Participant in a Fruits and Vegetable Business

7.5.4 Non-Food Business

Table 15 shows that three participants ran non-food businesses of hairdressing, tailoring/weaving and retailing homewares. Responses from participants showed that non-food business was considered a low-risk option, and this is large because the goods are usually non-perishable and therefore has a longer shelf life. However, they noted that it required some level of skills, especially for those providing services such as tailoring, and hairdressing as a requisite skill is needed to deliver such services. Further comments from respondents regarding their choice of business are captured in Table 21.

Table 21: Excerpts on participants' choice for non-food business

Participants	Excerpt
<i>Ebere</i>	<i>"I am into hairdressing business because I already learnt how to make hair as a young girl... It is cheaper for me, especially as I do it in my mud house and at the same time care for my baby, sick husband and other family members. This helps me to manage my business, family responsibilities and educate my children for a better tomorrow."</i>
<i>Helen</i>	<i>"I buy assorted homewares in bulk from wholesalers at the main market in town, and I retail them at our village market... I do this business because it is less risky as goods usually have a long shelf life and required by villagers"</i>

As indicated by the excerpts, women who engaged in non-food businesses did not tend to worry about the spoiling of their goods. This is because their goods usually have a longer shelf life than food items. Intuitively, the women are aware that some non-food items are non-essential; hence they only engage in basic items that are essential. This is because they understand that people are extremely poor and will be unable to afford luxury items when they are still struggling to get the necessities of life. However, two of the participants engaged in non-essential business such as hairdressing. The hairdresser noted that she already possessed the skills required and found the business cheaper to run. Though hairdressing is not essential for survival, rural women in South-East still get to make their hair as it is part of the cultural expectations for women to plait or weave their hair. Hence, the hairdressing business provides a crucial service to rural women.

Regarding some of the difficulties that the women had to outmanoeuvre, the data collected indicated that a couple of respondents had their businesses within their homes while others operated in the market. Though the rationale for the choice of the business location is not the focus of this

research, it was interesting to know that the respondents who situated their businesses at home had young children. One of the participants (Ebere) mentioned that her hairdressing business was in her mud house. Although the mud house had no walls and no secured doors, she could worry less about rent as her home offered a space for her business and a shelter for her family.



Figure 16: Participant in hairdressing business within her house

7.5.5 Mixed business

In this research, mixed business refers to the combination of two or more businesses to make a living. Mixed business was evidenced in the sample, as many respondents were found to engage in different kinds of businesses simultaneously such as hairdressing and retailing, dressmaking and farming, retailing and poultry

farming. Table 15 shows that twelve respondents engaged in mixed business. It was evidenced that one of the main motivations for the respondents who engaged in multiple businesses was to increase their chances of earning more. Some of the responses of the participants are noted in Table 22:

Table 22: Excerpts regarding participants' choice for mixed business

Participants	Excerpt
<i>Muna</i>	<i>"... it is difficult to cope in this village with farming alone... [Even] in our women's group we were encouraged to try different things... Hence, I run a farm and retail palm oil [too]. This makes me have a better chance of earning money daily... However, [running these businesses] require more money, time and skills to excel in them ..."</i>
<i>Ogechi</i>	<i>"I am a poultry farmer and a grocery retailer. I sell poultry products like eggs and other assorted goods... The good thing is that when I do not sell eggs or chicken, I can sell groceries. This helps me to earn more and provide for my family. I run the business with the help of my family [and other women [apprentices] who work for me]"</i>

It was evident that again, participants saw engaging in micro-business as a strategy to provide for their families and survive the hardship in rural areas. More specifically, several participants claimed that having multiple businesses was their option for survival as it increased their ability to meet the needs of their families. The findings suggest that rural women's engagement in multiple businesses serve as a coping strategy to poverty and market uncertainties in rural areas. However, running mixed businesses has potential pitfalls as it can divide rural women's focus and resources such that the businesses perform sub-optimally. This brings to mind the popular saying noted as "Jack of all trades but master of none". Rather than spreading the risk over different businesses, they may have increased the possibility of failing. Additionally, running multiple businesses require more resources, time and skills which some respondents found challenging to combine.

7.5.6 Outcomes

The findings revealed that contrary to western developed concepts which prioritised business growth and economic outcomes in terms of profits but neglected socially contextualised and socially realised benefits, rural women's micro entrepreneurship was driven towards the fulfilment of the latter. The socially contextualised "benefits" such as providing for the family, poverty alleviation was found to be the focus of rural women's microbusinesses. The various components of these socially aware microbusinesses are detailed in the following subsections. This is not to say they were not economically aware, far from it, but the micro-economics of the poor is very different from the economics of the affluent west.

7.5.6.1 Put food on the table

As previously indicated, poor rural women engaged in micro-enterprises to put food on the table for their families. Some of the comments that support this assertion are indicated in Table 23.

Table 23: Excerpts regarding putting food on the table as a livelihood outcome

Participants	Excerpt
<i>Somto</i>	<i>"Doing this business enables me to feed 8 children, and other family members as my husband's income is not sufficient".</i>
<i>Kelechi</i>	<i>"... it helps me to feed my family..."</i>
<i>Love</i>	<i>"With my business, I am able to put food on the table for my children even though I am a widow."</i>
<i>Nkechi</i>	<i>"My family gets fed from my business ..."</i>

It was evident that participants undertook micro entrepreneurship for survival, rather than an opportunity. Although providing for the family was tagged a man's role by the prevailing culture in South-East Nigeria (see section 7.2 about gender

roles), all the participants in this study bore that responsibility in addition to their obligations. It is worth noting that putting food on the table for their families presents a difficult challenge for many rural women given the prevailing poverty and absence of formal institutional support in the rural areas.

7.5.6.2 Alleviate poverty through children’s education – Long term goal

In addition to putting food on the table, participants narrated their desire to change the trajectory of their future through the education of their children, as indicated in Table 24.

Table 24: Excerpts regarding children’s education as a livelihood outcome

Participants	Excerpt
<i>Ucha</i>	<i>"This business helps me to support my husband in paying the children’s school fees ... with the hope that with the education they can escape poverty in future".</i>
<i>Helen</i>	<i>"With this business, I have been able to send my children to school because I do not want them to suffer poverty as I have."</i>
<i>Oluchi</i>	<i>"... this business also helps me to pay my children’s school fees. "</i>

Although many participants demonstrated their commitment in educating their children to improve their future wellbeing, some participants (especially those with a large family) commented on the difficulty to send all their children to school due to lack of funds. For example, Uju commented as follows:

"I work so hard to pay for my children's school fees as the support from my husband is too small. I find it hard to send all my 9 children to school for lack of money ... I send some to school so that they can get a good job in future and help the others and me too" (Uju).

It was noted from the data that most of the respondents were desperate to escape from poverty, although in the short term, it seemed like a distant hope. They, however, believed that by endeavouring to send their children to school to acquire skills, they could get good employment and have a better life. This long-term goal was evidenced across the sample.

7.5.6.3 Employment for themselves and others

Many participants noted that the lack of industries and formal institutions in rural areas and their limited education left them with no employment potential. As a result, they created employment for themselves by engaging in micro entrepreneurship, as indicated in Table 25.

Table 25: Excerpts regarding employment as a livelihood outcome

Participants	Excerpt
<i>Ogechi</i>	<i>"When I finished my secondary school, I could not find a job, but this business has provided me with something to do ... and my relatives work with me too ..."</i>
<i>Mary</i>	<i>"My business serves as an employment for me as I do not have any certificate from school ..."</i>
<i>Ndidi</i>	<i>With this business, I have a job and earn income from it.</i>
<i>Grace</i>	<i>There is no employment anywhere in this village. This canteen business does not only help me to have a job and earn a living but also allows others to earn small money.</i>

The data shows that rural women started their own businesses, notwithstanding the fact that many of them had limited skills and low literacy as none of them attended formal education beyond secondary school. For some, starting their own microenterprise did not only create employment for them but also made room for others. For example, Grace reiterated that through her business, she had provided

employment for her relatives and neighbours who help either as casual workers, or apprentices. Although it was very clear that the primary purpose of micropreneurship was to sustain the family, a secondary, longer-term aim was to enhance the family's potential. A spin-out benefit of micropreneurship was the possibility of enabling relatives to increase their income. It seems significant how micropreneurship was centred around the family, obligations and responsibilities, yet also the means to a desirable end.

7.5.6.4 Empowerment

The findings from the data revealed that poor rural women felt that their micro entrepreneurship empowered them as it meant that they could contribute to the livelihood of their families. Some of the respondents' comments on empowerment are shown in Table 26.

Table 26: Excerpts regarding empowerment as a livelihood outcome

Participants	Excerpt
<i>Oluchi</i>	<i>"I feel empowered as the income from my business... has helped me to send my children to school without waiting for my husband. I have a say in my home now for certain things ..."</i>
<i>Uju</i>	<i>"... running my own business has helped me to provide for my family, gain experience and confidence. I am able to talk to others ... [though] I still need money to expand my business".</i>

As captured in Table 26, it was evident that having and managing their own micro-businesses enabled the participants to improve their household income and to support their families. A few participants emphasised that their businesses had given them a say in their homes. This is clearly a significant outcome given that women in the traditional South-East culture are generally relegated to domestic

duties, which meant that they were only “seen but not heard”. Others commented that their confidence had grown and so can now hold conversations in matters that related to their family and business.

In sum, though the microbusinesses ran by rural women were tiny, very simple and mainly food-related businesses; they presented important and very significant outcomes that impacted positively on the women and their families. However, in the scheme of things, some of the impacts may have remained at the micro-level, but the cumulative effect reveals that these microbusinesses are the heart of the rural economy (Akiode 2013). Given the resource constraints and the extreme poverty in the area, these microbusinesses employ few and so rely hugely on the assets available within the family. As a survival strategy, they engaged in businesses that required little capital and a few specialised skills. It is, therefore, important to assess how these women view the relationship between their families and their microbusinesses. Hence, questions were posed, which helped shed more light on the interaction between rural women’s micro-businesses and their families. The data collected will be analysed in the next section.

7.6. Livelihood assets and the place of family in rural women microbusinesses

Earlier sections have evidenced the fact that female microentrepreneurs played a significant welfare role, and their microbusinesses offered a means of survival in poverty. This section sets out to analyse the data collected from participants regarding the livelihood assets available to them and the place of family in their microbusinesses. This contributes to the research question regarding “how the

informal institutions of culture and family shape the entrepreneurial activities of rural women”.

Responses from participants evidenced the limited supply of livelihood assets available to them and how the family was not just the consumption unit in their micro-businesses but also the production unit. These findings reveal that in the context of rural poverty and constrained resources, family and business is a single inseparable socio-economic entity. The focus of this section is that the family is the micro-entrepreneurial unit. The rest of the analysis in this section will be presented in the context of the livelihood assets such as human, natural, physical, social and financial assets.

7.6.1 Human Assets

Human capital in this study focussed on available skills and manpower that would enable rural women entrepreneurs to run their micro family businesses. Given the low literacy profile of the sample, the researcher investigated the skills and manpower available to the participants. Responses showed that majority of the participants (17) had little or no formal education (see Table 10 discussed earlier) and lacked modern or easily transferable skills. As evidenced in Table 27, it was indicated that many participants also lacked entrepreneurial skills and had very limited financial literacy and could not separate business expenses from family responsibilities. They also did not work with budgets or any other form of business planning.

Table 27: Excerpts regarding entrepreneurial skills and financial literacy

Participant	Excerpt
<i>Oluchi</i>	<i>"I ... use traditional methods to keep my chickens safe from disease, but sometimes it fails..."</i>
<i>Ebere</i>	<i>"I do not separate family use from business loans or income at all. I put them together..."</i>
<i>Ndidi</i>	<i>"I mix personal and business income together, and I do not record how much I sold or spend. Hence, I cannot say what my monthly income is ..."</i>
<i>Ucha</i>	<i>"I do not mix business loans with family use (money) together, and that help me to buy goods in bulk ..."</i>

The data showed that rural women microentrepreneurs depended on the support from their families to run their businesses, and similarly, they spent the income from their businesses on the family, as highlighted in Table 28.

Table 28: Excerpts regarding unpaid labour from family

Participants	Excerpts
<i>Somto</i>	<i>"... [After school,] my children come to the market to help me hawk my goods to help increase sales... [and] the business income is used to pay their school fees and provide for them."</i>
<i>Ogechi</i>	<i>"My children and husband support me in running my business, and I do not pay them, but my business income is used to meet our [family's] needs."</i>
<i>Nnezi</i>	<i>"My daughters help me to fetch water and assist in my canteen business for free..."</i>

Typically, rural women had large families who presented greater family responsibilities in terms of care and consumption. However, large family sizes also meant that the micro-businesses had more manpower available, and usually for free. For example, many participants noted that family members, especially children, contributed to the business effort and took on some unpaid responsibilities such as hawking goods, fetching water and preparing food items.

7.6.2 Natural Assets

Natural assets include water (seas, lakes and streams), land, rocks, forests (vegetation), living organisms, fossil fuels and minerals. They are essential for the sustainability of rural women’s businesses as they provide vital resources for their businesses. Some participants explained how their rivers, lakes and streams served as a source of entrepreneurial income for them. The following quotes are indicative:

"We are blessed with salt lakes where we produce salt, and my children support me as it involves a long process to produce manually" (Ezinne).

"The rivers are used for fishing, and we get our water from the streams" (Ndid).

The responses showed that rural women benefited from the rivers and streams as those constituted their main water supply. They noted that in the dry season, farmers used water from rivers to irrigate their farmlands. Also, participants stated that their rivers provided fish for consumption and sales. Some of the responses from participants are captured in Table 29.

Table 29: Excerpts regarding natural assets in rural women’s business

Participants	Excerpt
<i>Ngozi</i>	<i>"I farm on family land, and we get our food and business goods from it...but herdsmen are grazing on our farms which affects our crop yield."</i>
<i>Chika</i>	<i>"We get bush meat and firewood for cooking from the forest..."</i>
<i>Muna</i>	<i>"Fertile land is so important for cultivation. My husband's inherited land is where I plant my crops...flooding and intense farming is affecting the soil nutrients/land."</i>
<i>Obioma</i>	<i>"With no tap water, we fetch water for cooking and drinking from the streams ..."</i>

Responses from all the participants indicated that natural assets like land, water resources were vitally important to rural women as their businesses and livelihood depended on them. For example, Muna asserted that her business required fertile land for planting crops for food and business sales. Clearly, the value of land as far as rural women are concerned was linked to its agricultural productivity. Interestingly, participants reported that their lands, water resources and other natural assets were affected by climate change, harsh human activities and natural disasters including flooding, intensive farming, inappropriate grazing, deforestation and oil spillage.

Additionally, the women noted that their access to land was restricted as they had no entitlements to land ownership (due to cultural factors as discussed earlier in Section 7.3.2) because their culture excluded women from property inheritance rights. With limited access to land, they have no other choice but to exploit the ones they have access to. Hence, the land may be excessively cultivated without enough fallow periods, and this depletes the nutrients and fertility of the soil, which ultimately leads to reduced yield. The following quotes in Table 30 are indicative.

Table 30: Excerpts regarding rural women’s limited access to land

Participants	Excerpt
<i>Love</i>	<i>"I used to farm on my husband’s inherited land when he was alive, where we got our daily bread. But after his sudden death, his kinsmen repossessed all the land as I have no male child to inherit them. This has brought hardship..."</i>
<i>Uju</i>	<i>"I do not own any piece of land as a woman but farm on my family’s land through my husband. But I do not have a say on how to use it..."</i>

As evidenced by the data, rural women have no land of their own but rely on their family (e.g. husband) to access land. Unfortunately, rural women’s limited access to natural resources such as land has a direct impact on their microbusinesses.

7.6.3 Physical Assets

Physical assets include the necessary infrastructure that rural women need to engage in their business. It also covers tools and equipment that women micro-entrepreneurs would use to increase the efficiency and capacity of their business production. Availability of physical assets helps to reduce time, cost, energy and enhance rural women’s daily operations. Respondents indicated that there was a lack of infrastructure, basic amenities and modern equipment in their communities. Many of the participants narrated how they improvised by utilising mainly local equipment to support their business operations. Some of the comments are captured in Table 31.

Table 31: Excerpts regarding physical assets used in rural women’s business

Participant	Excerpt
<i>Mary</i>	<i>"I had to source local equipment like mortar, clay pots for my cooking business".</i>
<i>Favour</i>	<i>"I use a manual sewing machine, table, and local iron in my tailoring business as there is no electricity ... I cannot use an electric sewing machine or electric iron."</i>
<i>Grace</i>	<i>"...I have a fridge that I use to cool drinks for sale in my cooked food business... [Due to lack of electricity,] I got a loan and bought a generator, but I spend a lot of money on fueling the generator... [which affects my income]..."</i>

It is worth noting that it is quite difficult to run a business effectively without a good supply of physical assets. From the above quotes, it is evident that basic infrastructural support is lacking in these areas, and though the rural women are

utilising local alternatives, their productivity is impacted. Chioma reinforced the above statement by observing that:

"It takes a long time to grind the beans used in my cooked food business because local grindstone/mortar is used... [So, I need more hands to help with preparing the food] ... Thankfully, my children help me out." (Chioma).

Almost all the respondents noted that family played a huge role in supporting them with their daily business activities, as exemplified by Chioma's submission that her children help to prepare the bean cake for her cooked food business. More so, all the respondents noted the deplorable state of the roads in their area and complained that the free flow of goods and services was restricted. Table 32 highlights some of the comments noted by participants.

Table 32: Excerpts regarding lack of infrastructure in rural areas

Participants	Excerpt
<i>Love</i>	<i>"Our roads are bad, and that means the high cost of transportation to and from the bank and main market, for example. It also restricts buyers from other towns from visiting our rural market. All these affect the sales and prices of goods..."</i>
<i>Adaeze</i>	<i>"In our village, there are hardly any functional facilities: no shops/sheds, no bins to dump waste, no tap water and no electricity. I display my goods on the ground. But when it rains, business is disrupted which affects my sales..."</i>

As evidenced in the data, poor road networks and conditions affect women's entrepreneurship activities in rural South-East Nigeria as the movement of people and goods are limited, and transport costs are high. These affect the supply of goods and services as well as their prices and volume of sales. Hence, most rural women rely on their local market for selling their goods, but these markets lack

key facilities such as sheds, waste bins, toilets, electricity and drainage which can disrupt business activities (see Figure 17).

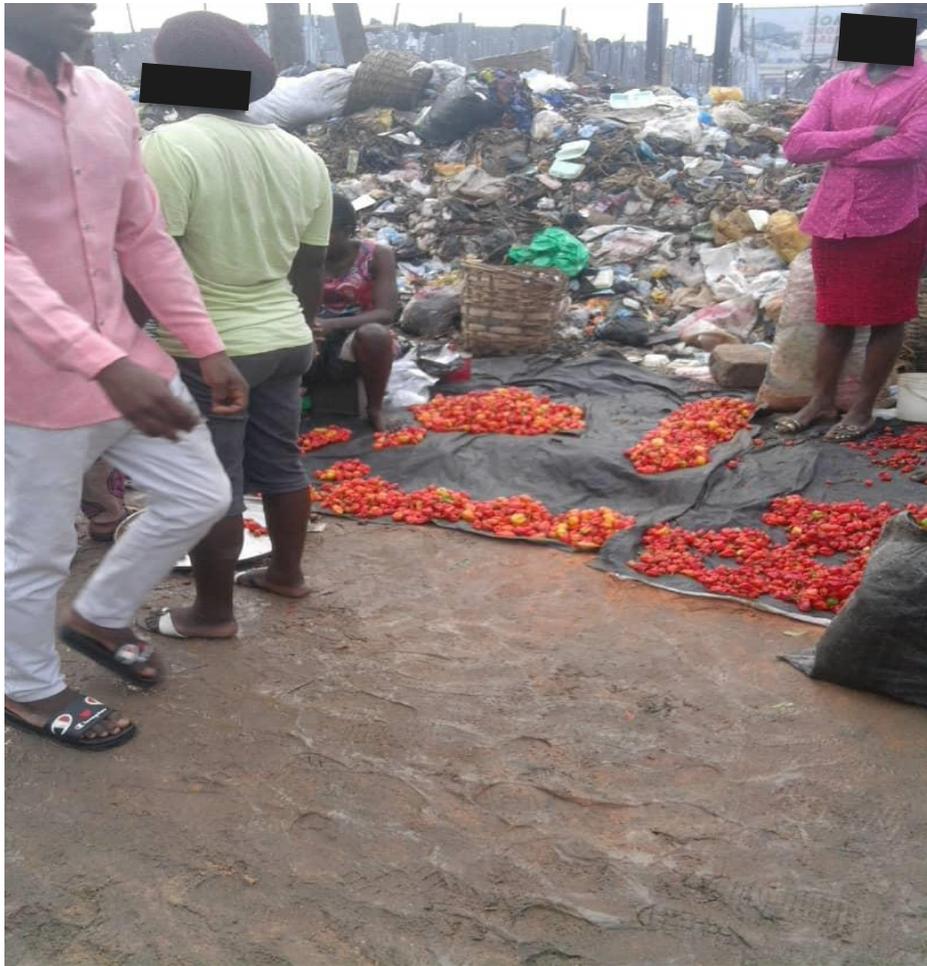


Figure 17: A rural market in South-East Nigeria

In terms of access to pipe-borne water, the data evidenced the lack of potable water in all the five villages, and so the women and their families fetched water from streams for their entire household and business needs (see Figure 18).

Ogonna's quote is indicative:

"Daily, I trek to the stream to fetch water for personal and business use... I had typhoid fever because of contaminated stream water which made me ill and cost me a lot of money to treat..." (Ogonna).



Figure 18: A rural village stream for drinking water

It is clear from the responses that the lack of infrastructure (e.g. piped water supply) in these rural communities has implications for rural women's health and entrepreneurship development. For example, drinking untreated water can cause women to fall ill. Additionally, the hours spent trekking to fetch water could have been spent on other parts of their business had there been tap water in their villages.

7.6.4 Social Assets

Social assets refer to the networks of relationships among people who live and work in a community, enabling them to function effectively. Embeddedness in family relations and participation in social networks has the potential to reduce vulnerability and strengthen the capability of rural women to cope with uncertainties. As mentioned by respondents, family relations helped them to access resources that they lacked on their own. In the context of rural women micro family business where resources are scarce, the family is not just the social unit but also economic unit. This inseparable combination means that the family is the business, and the business is the family.

As evidenced in the data, all the respondents indicated that they drew resources for their businesses mainly from their families. Family relationships were viewed as very important because they provided support (in cash and kind) and encouragement to the women in running their microbusiness and juggling family responsibilities. Ogechi's quote is indicative:

"I rely mainly on my family for support and encouragement in running my business. In fact, my husband stood for me to get microloans... and my children help to hawk the goods. Without great help from my family, it would have been very difficult to maintain the business" (Ogechi).

Additionally, respondents emphasised that social networks, social relations and associations within their local communities were essential assets in their pursuit of livelihood objectives as highlighted in Table 33.

Table 33: Excerpts regarding benefits of social assets in rural women's business

Participants	Excerpt
<i>Ucha</i>	<i>"My story changed when a friend invited me to join a women's group that is registered with MFI... I joined the group, and they helped me to open an account, start savings and acquire loans".</i>
<i>Helen</i>	<i>"Networking is extremely important for my business, through word of mouth from our fellowship leader in the church who got some training convinced me to participate in the MFI group that she belongs to. This helps me to access loans for my business".</i>

Participants further explained that participating in social groups like 'Women August Meeting' (see Chapter 2, section 2.3.2.iv) or religious gatherings (e.g. church fellowships) provided opportunities to meet and interact with other women. They noted that through such interactions, they met other entrepreneurs and compared notes, shared best practices and encouraged one another. Some rural women reported at the focus group discussion that they looked forward to the 'August meeting gathering' because of its usefulness:

"August meeting gives us a chance to meet other businesswomen from outside our community to share and obtain useful information (e.g. business ideas). Also, we discuss issues affecting us in the village (e.g. the herdsmen and their cows that are destroying our crops)" (FGD1-5).

As indicated by rural women, social gatherings were good sources of information and mutual support. This seems to suit rural women who have limited or no access to sources of information and communication facilities such as TV, internet and mobile phones. The responses also revealed that business ideas and experiences were shared among members during the social gatherings which encouraged and improved their business operations.

Other participants reported that they often joined more than one social group to increase their chances of getting resources. The reasons, as noted by these participants are because they believe a single network cannot satisfy their needs.

Below quotes are indicative:

"I belong to different groups within my community, and I combine them as much as I am able. This increases my chances of accessing resources".

(Chizara)

"I am a member of the women's group and 'Udu Akawo group' in my village. Though my culture supports social gathering and networks, my husband does not support me joining a group far away from home due to insecurities and domestic duties" (Ijeoma).

As suggested by a few participants, their cultural practices support the gathering together of people for mutual support and to proffer solutions to problems. However, Ijeoma's statement showed that in terms of networking, rural women were somewhat limited to their communities because of security issues and family responsibilities at home.

7.6.5 Financial Assets

Just like every other human endeavour, financial assets are hugely important in rural women's microbusiness. In this research, the financial assets explored include income, loans, cash and savings. Most respondents confirmed that their financial assets are limited, and incomes often insufficient to achieve sustainable livelihoods. Some of the views expressed by the respondents are captured in Table 34.

Table 34: Excerpts regarding rural women’s financial assets

Participants	Excerpt
<i>Chioma</i>	"This business is mostly where I generate my income, but the income is not enough, and I do not have all it takes to borrow a loan. My income is not certain as some days the sales are poor ..."
<i>Nnezi</i>	"My business income is too small. Hence, I cannot afford modern cooking equipment to expand my business ..."
<i>Nnenna</i>	"My family’s income is from my business which depends on how much I sell... It is our only option for survival."
<i>Uju</i>	"The family’s sustenance is majorly from my business, and it [the business] is barely coping. I have no money to buy goods in bulk ..."
<i>Chika</i>	"Running a business in this village is very hard because it requires a constant inflow of money... The little income I get from my business barely sustains us let alone saving for other things".
<i>Adaeze</i>	"One of the greatest challenges that I have running this business is lack of money. As I have no savings, it is hard to take advantage of business opportunities, especially during the festive season when there are more people in the village..."

The participants contended that they lacked access to tangible financial assets but rather operated with their meagre income just to keep the business going. As a result of the inadequate financial backing, they practically live from hand to mouth. In other words, they depend on their daily sales from the business, which they could not predict. For most participants, the lack of financial capital hindered them from buying goods in bulk, enjoying economies of scale and exploiting new opportunities.

Furthermore, some participants explained how the lack of finance meant that they relied on their spouses for their business supplies. Most of the participants noted that they sourced the finance to support their business from their families. The quotes in Table 35 are indicative.

Table 35: Excerpts regarding the role of family in financing rural women’s business

Participants	Excerpt
<i>Kelechi</i>	<i>"I usually get my palm oil supplies on credit from my husband, who is also a producer. But when he experiences poor yield, it is always a challenge as I struggle to access funds elsewhere to maintain the business and family".</i>
<i>Nwakaego</i>	<i>"My start-up capital was from my husband, and he still supports me although what I get is not always enough ..."</i>
<i>Helen</i>	<i>"...I get financial support from my husband, but sometimes he does not have".</i>

There is strong evidence regarding the role that family played in supporting rural women microbusiness. As indicated by some of the quotes in Table 35, family members provided financial assistance to rural women’s microenterprise. For instance, Nwakaego reported that she got her start-up money from her husband, who still supports her, and as such, she was able to start and continue to run the business. Others explained how their husbands supplied them with their business goods on credit, and they repaid when they sold the goods. However, due to poverty, the family may not always have enough money to give them. This is where other forms of financial arrangements and support become critical. Some respondents mentioned that they accessed financial services through microfinance and other informal sources such as local groups (see Chapter 8 for details). For example, Ogechi noted that she was able to sustain her business through difficult times by accessing microfinance as indicated in her quote:

"When my business went through a difficult financial crisis, I got a loan from MFI through the group with my husband’s support. This helped me to buy good feeds and equipment for my poultry business..."

As evidenced in the findings presented in this section, rural women have limited livelihood assets, and this makes it difficult to run their microbusiness effectively. Hence, they rely on their family to fulfil tasks required to operate their business. Family, however, provides rural women with tremendous support in the form of

labour, financial assistance, information and advice. This makes the family central to rural women's microbusiness. Similarly, the produce from the business is spent on the family, leading to a cyclic interconnectedness between the business and the family. Family, for these women, is not only the consumption and production unit but one inseparable socio-economic entity.

The interdependency between the family and the business is the only realistic option available to these women considering their extreme poverty. However, in such settings, their exposure to vulnerability tends to increase because they do not have any buffers for shock or risks, as every income is channelled towards survival. Therefore, the slightest change in circumstances could have an irreversible impact which could tip them over into destitution. The next section discusses some of the evidence that was gathered from the data, which increased the vulnerability of the rural women.

7.7 Vulnerability Context (Trends, Shocks and Seasonality): Influence on Microbusinesses

Previous sections have demonstrated that rural women microbusinesses are shaped by their culture and family arrangements. This section deals with the vulnerability context (trends, shocks and seasonality) which affects the livelihoods of poor rural women microentrepreneurs. One of the research questions of this study states: "How does seasonality, trends and shocks affect rural women's micro-businesses?" Poor rural women microentrepreneurs are particularly disadvantaged; they have little or no buffers or resources to cope with shocks or hazards. It is important to understand their vulnerability context because existing

literature presents a westernised view which does not capture the extreme poverty that exists in rural South-East.

As revealed by the data, the respondents are most vulnerable at the base of the pyramid as they face irreversible risks/shocks. They are significantly more likely to be affected by ill-health, sudden death, unemployment, trade shocks, regional conflict, adverse weather, or famine gave persistent poverty and lack of formal institutional support. Not only are they at greater personal risk from such calamities, but they are very vulnerable to the impact on others. In the following sections, the findings relating to the rural women's vulnerability context will be discussed.

7.7.1 Trends

Trends consist of macro-level manoeuvres that often impact on the livelihoods of individuals, households and communities. For example, national economic trends, infrastructural neglect in rural areas, climate change, migration and governance can impact on rural women's microbusiness of which they have no control over and may not even be aware of. Participants noted that climate change is having a noticeable impact on their crop yield and business performance. One participant (Somto) succinctly stated thus:

"... nowadays monsoon rain falls almost every time, and our crops are either washed away due to flood or barely grow because of the imbalance in the weather conditions... This reduces the yield" (Somto).

As evidenced by the participants, climate change has far-reaching implications for the rural poor who are already grappling with resource scarcity in their battle for survival. Poor crop yield leads to food scarcity and reduced goods for sale, which means lower-income, hence increased vulnerability. Unless these trends are

reversed or at least halted, the poor rural woman continues to wallow in poverty and lack.

Participants also noted that the internal movement of people (especially young people) out of the rural areas to urban settings in search of a better life is having a significant impact on their microbusinesses. For example, many of the participants stated that the migration of people out of their villages meant that they had lost some of their customers. In fact, one participant complained about the effect of migration, as highlighted in her quote below.

"I used to sell up to two coolers of rice when many people were still around in the village but now with fewer people, I sometimes hardly sell a cooler of cooked rice as my main customers have left the village in search of a better life... Hence, I sometimes struggle to meet family needs" (Nnezi).

It was clear from the data that people (especially youth) were leaving the villages in search of jobs, better education, and basic amenities in the hope of a better life. Some respondents seemed to suggest that the increase in rural-urban mobility impacted their microbusinesses negatively since the people relocating were their customers or potentially human capital (in the case of family members or neighbours) for their businesses. In addition to trends, shocks pose another set of vulnerability threat, as discussed in the next section.

7.7.2 Shocks

Shocks involve uncertainties and threatening situations that can hinder sustainable livelihood. They are often unpredictable and are usually the result of events thought to be beyond the scope of the entrepreneur or routine business transactions. Shocks have widespread and lasting effects on the business and can increase the vulnerability of poor rural women entrepreneurs. Respondents expressed varied experiences of shocks, but they all had negative effects on their

business. For some participants, the death of their spouses, ill health of a family or self and armed robbery were some of the shocks that adversely impacted their livelihoods and business given there is no formal institutional support. The quoted captured in Table 36 are indicative.

Table 36: Excerpts regarding shocks on rural women’s business

Participants	Excerpt
<i>Chioma</i>	<i>"The sudden death of my husband left me in hardship as I had to take care of our five children alone with no government support. My business income struggled to cope..."</i>
<i>Grace</i>	<i>"I suddenly took ill to a strange disease that weakened my body and increased my blood pressure. At first, I was unable to go to work due to its severity. Thankfully, I used the loan borrowed from MFI to access treatment at the City Hospital. I thank God for life and the grace to work again."</i>
<i>Muna</i>	<i>"... Our market got flooded, and most of my goods were destroyed. I did all manners of odd jobs to restock my goods."</i>
<i>Ijeoma</i>	<i>"I took ill and was unable to work for some months due to lack of money to access quick treatment at city hospital... meeting my 7 children’s basic needs was tough... but I thank God for life and the grace to work again."</i>
<i>Ucha</i>	<i>"... armed robbers broke in and carted away some of my goods. I went from pillar to post in search of money to replace the goods, and this left me in so much debt..."</i>

As can be inferred from the above responses, shocks are catastrophic repercussions among rural women that increase their vulnerability and leave them in terrible hardship. In the face of shocks like these, the already disadvantaged and vulnerable rural woman is often left hanging with no support from a formal institution. As Ucha noted in her comment, the effect of the armed robbery attack led her into so much debt as she had to borrow to replace the stolen goods. Similarly, ill-health in the family or death of a family member can deprive the

woman of access to assets (e.g. farmland), essential sources of income, and can push her into more hardship.

Just as trends and shock impact on rural women's microbusiness, the seasons also exert some pressure on the women as discussed in the next section.

7.7.3 Seasonality

Seasonality is a major issue in rural areas due to the reliance on agriculture for the supply of food and business goods (see section 7.2). There are two seasons in Nigeria, namely rainy and dry season. Typically, the rainy season is the planting season and starts around the middle of March and continues till late October, while the dry season is the harvesting season and starts in November and lasts until March. However, with climate change (as noted earlier in Section 7.6.1), the seasons are changing. Nevertheless, the rainy season is the season of heightened agricultural activities by farmers given the lack of irrigation facilities for dry season farming.

Respondents indicated that excess rainfall led to flooding which destroyed their crops and degraded the soil causing poor yield. They also commented that due to poor drainage in the rural area, when it rains heavily, the transportation of people and goods become problematic as the rural roads are rendered inaccessible. Mary's quote is indicative:

"... When it rains heavily it affects farming activities and destroys my crops. It also disrupts business activities due to the poor condition of our roads and market. Hence, it is difficult to make good sales in such weather conditions, but I manage the little income from my business and farm produce to sustain my family." (Mary)

Likewise, low rainfall during the rainy season will require irrigation for crops to flourish. However, irrigation would mean that the farmers would have to go to the streams, rivers and lakes to fetch water for irrigation. This is clearly challenging for farmers, and so under such harsh weather conditions, farming activities are usually limited, which leads to poor yield and increased vulnerability. Notably, adverse weather conditions pose a risk to agricultural production and supply.

On the other hand, harvesting season is generally a time of plenty (depending on the yield). Nonetheless, harvesting season has its own risks because many rural dwellers tend to be involved in farming and so most people would have something to harvest from their farms, hence there is often a crash in the prices as supply becomes more than demand. As Ndidi puts it:

“... During harvest, many will have their own crops to harvest, and that affects what we can charge. Also, sales [are] slow because others probably have what you have harvested and want to sell...”.

The analysis of the effect of seasonality seemed to suggest that seasonality increased the risks and uncertainties of these rural women microentrepreneurs who often are already in precarious conditions. The above findings revealed the influence of seasonality on women’s micro-businesses and noted that unfavourable seasonal conditions could lead to constrained consumption, price fluctuation, business disruptions and the difficulty in getting finance to cope with family needs. Clearly, the vulnerability context of rural women has an enormous impact on their livelihood and microbusinesses. Being at the base of the pyramid, with extreme poverty and resource constraints, the respondents are most vulnerable, facing irreversible risks/shocks.

7.8 Summary of Chapter Seven

This chapter presented an analysis of the findings gathered from data collected from poor rural women regarding their micro entrepreneurship. The analysis set out to present evidence and extracts new knowledge regarding how the informal institutions of culture and family shape the entrepreneurial activities of rural women microbusinesses. The difficulties faced by poor rural women were evidenced, and the findings revealed that these women had to grapple with resource constraints as well as socio-cultural constraints in their daily lives. The data collected highlighted that the socio-cultural constraints that the women confronted were as a result of informal institutions, given that they lived in remote rural villages out of reach of formal institutions. In such settings, traditional cultural practices prevailed, and women were discriminated against. The results noted that the economic activities of these poor women were impacted as they operated under constraints ranging from business stereotypes, property ownership/inheritance rights, restrictions on formal education and gender roles.

The chapter presented deeper insights regarding the work that rural women did, and how they went about, ensuring that their families were provided for. The findings revealed that they bore a huge burden to fulfil their traditional roles as wives, mothers and daughters in addition to carrying out domestic and caring responsibilities. On top of that, they found themselves working tirelessly to meet the basic needs of their families. The results showed that poor rural women engaged in microbusinesses as a means of survival, and so their main priority was to provide for their families, and not the western view of profit maximisation and business growth. They worked hard as they aspired to improve the wellbeing of their families, their communities and contribute to the local economy. Participants believed that by engaging in their micro-businesses, they could put food on the

table for their family, escape poverty in the future through children's education, create employment for themselves and become empowered.

Within the general scope of adopting micro enterprising as a livelihood strategy, these women have harnessed their local skills, peculiar circumstances and background/exposure to position themselves in a microbusiness that reflects their skills and personal circumstances. These livelihood strategies and decisions were evident in the data, and the findings show that most of the women were engaged in some form of food-related business that provided essentials such as food, clothing and so on. And the argument was that the level of poverty meant that the villagers only spent their money on essentials and no luxuries. Secondly, it was also inferred that the essentials (e.g. food) had low-risk profiles as their families could consume any item that they could not sell, and this minimises wastage of already meagre resources.

Given that rural women micro entrepreneurship operates in the condition of extreme poverty, it was essential to examine the livelihood assets that they had or lacked and how they managed to run their business. The analysis indicated that participants had limited access to livelihood assets which impacted on their microbusinesses. However, they coped by drawing mainly from their families, although these were often inadequate. As far as the poor rural women were concerned, their business and family formed an inseparable one socio-economic entity and not as an overlapping system.

Furthermore, the analysis highlighted that rural women were affected by the challenges posed by shocks, trends and seasonality. The vulnerability context of these women was such that certain risks and losses did not just have marginal effects but irreparable and irreversible consequences. In the literature,

microfinance was presented as a potential solution to help rural women build resilience and capacity in the face of vulnerability, but it is not clear how they will respond to the idea of borrowing. In the next chapter, this study will explore why the poorest, most disadvantaged group (rural women) benefit less from microfinance. The analysis will focus on rural women's perception and experience of microfinance.

CHAPTER EIGHT: FINDINGS – PERCEPTION AND EXPERIENCE OF MICROFINANCE

8.1 Introduction

In chapter seven, the finding from this research highlighted that the informal institutions of family and culture shape rural women's microentrepreneurial activities and livelihood strategies. Particularly, the analysis highlighted that rural women were confronted with considerable constraints ranging from illiteracy, social norms, traditional practices, gender roles, very limited resources which impacted on their microbusinesses and increased their vulnerability. Extant literature, as presented in chapter four, argued that microfinance could help improve the livelihood of this poor, disadvantaged group (Brana, 2013). The assumption is that the need for microfinance is high among this group. Why then do the most disadvantaged group (that is, poor rural women) benefit less from microfinance? In order to answer this research question, the study investigated rural women microentrepreneurs' perception and experience of microfinance.

This chapter is structured as follows: Section 8.2 discusses the sources of finance available to rural women entrepreneurs. Section 8.3 discusses the perception of microfinance by rural women entrepreneurs, while Section 8.4 focuses on rural women's experiences of microfinance. Section 8.5 summarises the chapter.

8.2 Sources of Finance Available to Rural Women

Considering that this study sets out to investigate the problem of why the poorest, most disadvantaged group, women micro-entrepreneurs in rural Nigeria benefits less from microfinance, it is important to understand what sources of finance are available to them. Extant literature notes that the deep-rooted financial

institutional void in rural areas often makes informal sources the only real choice for the poorest of the poor (Ofoegbu 2013). However, an understanding of the characteristics of these sources and the challenges they present can provide further insight into how rural women choose which source to use for what. Accordingly, participants were asked questions relating to the sources of finance they utilised for their livelihood and microbusiness. Table 37 presents the financial sources identified by the respondents. Each of the categories identified is discussed in detail in the following subsections.

Table 37: Sources of Finance used by Rural Women Entrepreneurs

SOURCES OF FINANCE AVAILABLE TO RURAL WOMEN FOR BUSINESS															
State	Family and/or Friends			Self- Help Groups			Rotating savings			Moneylenders			Microfinance		
	In use when interviewed	Used before but not anymore	Never Used	In use when interviewed	Used before but not anymore	Never Used	In use when interviewed	Used before but not anymore	Never Used	In use when interviewed	Used before but not anymore	Never Used	In use when interviewed	Used before but not anymore	Never Used
Abia	6	1	0	7	0	0	3	2	2	2	2	3	3	1	3
Anambra	5	0	0	5	0	0	4	1	0	1	2	2	3	1	1
Imo	4	1	0	4	1	0	2	2	1	1	2	2	2	1	2
Enugu	5	0	0	4	1	0	3	1	1	1	4	0	2	0	3
Ebonyi	8	0	0	7	1	0	5	2	1	2	3	3	2	1	5
Total	28	2	0	27	3	0	17	8	5	7	13	10	12	4	14

8.2.1 Families and/or Friends

As detailed in Chapter 7, most respondents explained that they relied on family for raising funds for their microbusinesses. Specifically, Table 37 indicates that 28 out of the 30 respondents consulted families and/or friends for financial assistance. Comments from some of the respondents in this regard are captured in Table 38.

Table 38: Excerpts from participants regarding finance from family and/or friends

Participants	Excerpt
<i>Nwakaego</i>	<i>"When in need of financial assistance, I first go to my husband. In fact, I got my start-up capital from him. But sometimes he does not have, and when he has it is usually not enough since the income from his farm is small..."</i>
<i>Nnezi</i>	<i>"I got part of my start-up capital from my husband, and anytime I need money, I contact him first, and if I need more, then I ask my friends. However, it is not all the time that they are able to support me financially due to other commitments and personal circumstances".</i>

As evidenced by the data, most participants stated that asking for help from their families and friends was their prime option for sourcing funds for their microbusiness. However, participants reported that the prevailing poverty in the family meant that the financial support available from family and friends was limited. Probing further, the participants were asked why family and friends were their first point of call for financial assistance. Some of their responses are highlighted in Table 39.

Table 39: Excerpts from participants regarding reasons for going to family and friends for financial help

Participants	Excerpt
<i>Adaeze</i>	<i>"When I get money from my family or friends, they do not ask me for interest".</i>
<i>Uju</i>	<i>"I go to my family or friends for financial support, and they support me without asking me to fill forms, bring land or guarantor..."</i>
<i>Nwakaego</i>	<i>"My husband understands, and so I get to repay him the start-up capital when I have it..."</i>

As evidenced by the data collected, rural women borrowed from their families and friends because such loans are interest-free and usually offered on flexible terms. They also required no collateral, as the social ties provided more than enough security for such loans. Furthermore, the respondents noted that borrowing from this source did not involve paperwork, which favoured their low literacy. However, great care is required as the lack of documentation could lead to undesirable outcomes as exemplified by Uju’s anecdote:

"I borrowed money from my friend to take my child to the hospital. I promised to pay it back in full within 3 months, and so I paid as I earned and completed the repayment. Six months later, my friend said I had not repaid the loan in full, but I was sure I paid back all the money. Sadly, I had no witness or document to prove it. So, we had a big fall out... Our friendship is strained because of this".

As noted in Uju’s comments, if disagreements over repayments and similar conflicts are not properly managed, then friendships and family relationships could

be strained, which may prevent further borrowing. It is also worth noting that it is often difficult to raise enough funds from these sources because of the prevalent poverty within the family and friend networks. Hence, rural women sometimes access other sources such as self-help groups (e.g. 'Akawo' group) to raise funds.

8.2.2 Self-Help Groups (SHGs)

SHGs in Nigeria are usually made up of about 5 to 10 people of similar characteristics and social status who come together and contribute for mutual purposes. They set out to solve a 'common problem' including finance, and so they pool resources together to lend to members with little or no interest. Table 37 showed that SHGs emerged as the second most used source by these rural women. Some of the reasons rural women use SHGs are captured in Table 40.

Table 40: Excerpts from participants regarding reasons for using SHGs

Participants	Excerpt
Somto	<i>"I am a member of 'Akawo' group... [Meetings are] conducted and done in the Igbo language. When I need money, information or other social support outside of my family, I approach Akawo as I understand how it works".</i>
FGD2	<i>"SHG 'Uto Umunwanyi Group' has been in service within our area for a very long time. This group is easy to join, and meetings are done in the Igbo language. We make contributions and access it when in need and we do not have to fill any form. We sometimes borrow money at short notice without collateral, and the interest on top is small... But [oftentimes] there is no money available to borrow".</i>

As evidenced in the data, SHGs in rural South-East operated using the native language (Igbo), which made it easier for rural women to participate because of their low literacy. The women reported that they found SHGs convenient as it involved less paperwork, and no collateral was required before members could borrow. Similarly, the interest charged on loans as low as the main ethos of the group is to provide mutual help for the members, and they understand the prevalent economic hardship in their communities. SHG seemed like a promising source of finance to help poor rural women, but the funds available for members to borrow was notably limited, as substantiated by the comments captured in Table 41.

Table 41: Excerpts from participants regarding the limitations of SHGs

Participants	Excerpt
<i>Helen</i>	<i>"The SHG is a good source, but there is usually limited fund each time I need to borrow... [Also, the] meetings are a must-attend, and they last for hours, and I struggle to manage with family responsibilities and business".</i>
<i>Grace</i>	<i>"One can only easily access what has been contributed, which is never enough, and there is hard money available for members to borrow."</i>

From the analysis, it is evident that limited fund available and the SHG cannot meet poor rural women's financial needs. Similarly, the duration and regularity of the 'must-attend' group meetings impact on the time available for rural women to attend to their business and family responsibilities.

8.2.3 Rotating Credit and Savings Association (RoSCA)

Another informal source of finance used by rural women is the Rotating Credit and Savings Association. RoSCA is an indigenous savings and credit institution, which is formed by a group of individuals who agree to meet on a regular basis and contribute some fixed amount of money, which is allocated to members in a round-robin fashion. Table 37 showed that RoSCA emerged as the third most used source of finance by rural women. The findings indicated that RoSCA helped rural women to raise lump sums for business and other significant events such as marriage and burial. One of the participants reinforced this assertion as follows:

"... As for me, RoSCA helped me to acquire a lump sum of money that I used to buy goods and accessories for my business" (Favour)

Another participant (Nwakaego) praised RoSCA and commented thus:

"I saved up much money through RoSCA which helped me to pay my dues for my mother's burial..." (Nwakaego)

Several respondents noted that RoSCA encouraged savings and protected them against over expenditure. This characteristic is particularly beneficial to rural women as they hardly save due to family responsibilities. One respondent narrated thus:

"We are 8 people in the group and contributed on a monthly basis... When it was my turn to take the group contribution, it seemed like I had saved so much money... I used the money to enhance my business... I would have struggled to save all that on my own..." (Uju)

Nevertheless, some participants noted that great care was needed to ascertain the integrity of the members in a RoSCA before joining. This stemmed from scenarios where certain group members absconded from the group just after their

turn of receiving the group contributions. Some participants shared their experiences, which are highlighted in Table 42.

Table 42: Excerpts from participants regarding challenges with RoSCA

Participants	Excerpt
<i>Onye</i>	<i>"I had used RoSCA before but stopped because the first recipient in our group took his turn and disappeared to the city, leaving us to suffer. It took us a long time to collect the money from his family... [For it to be worthwhile,] members must be honest and pay up as at when due".</i>
<i>Oluchi</i>	<i>"I do not use RoSCA because I hear the turns and amounts are agreed at the beginning, and the amount is fixed. The problem with this, for me, is that when it is my turn, the money may have lost value [due to inflation or seasonality]".</i>

From the analysis, it is evident that RoSCA thrives on trust and requires members to keep to their promise. In traditional settings such as rural Nigeria, where everybody knows everybody, a good name is worth more than gold; hence, many people tend to maintain their family dignity. However, being an informal source of finance, RoSCA is not regulated, and there are no formalized legal contracts binding the members; therefore, some odd behaviours can manifest from time to time. Additionally, since RoSCA distributed money by prior agreement, it is unlikely that the money will be available at the time when it is most needed for all the group members. Furthermore, because the amount is fixed, it may inadequately match individual women's investment plans.

8.2.4 Moneylenders

Moneylenders are individuals who typically offer small personal loans at a high-interest rate (usually up to 40% or more per month) to members of their communities. Table 37 showed that the moneylender option was not as popular as the family and friends, SHG and RoSCA options. The findings indicated that respondents had only used moneylenders as their last resort when other sources failed them or when they needed a quick loan. Specifically, participants noted that moneylenders were used because of the ease of access and the fact that money was readily available to attend to emergencies if the borrower was ready to pay the high-interest rate as reported in Table 43.

Table 43: Excerpts from participants regarding reasons for using moneylenders

Participants	Excerpt
Nwakaego	<i>"... In the past, I borrowed money from moneylenders to attend to an emergency as I could not access money anywhere else... I do not use them regularly due to high-interest rate".</i>
Onye	<i>"I borrow from moneylenders because it is quick, easy to use, and money is readily available. For instance, I used it when I needed money to pay for hospital bills.</i>

The findings noted that rural women accessed moneylenders only in desperate situations when other sources of finance failed. While some respondents reported that they had sourced funds from moneylenders in the past, just a handful were sourcing funds from them during this study. This finding corroborates the result noted in Table 37, which showed that moneylenders emerged as the least patronized. This is not unconnected with the high interest rate on loans: The following quote is indicative:

"I stopped using moneylenders because of the high-interest rate... I got into so much debt..." (Chizara).

One of the participants reinforced this assertion as follows:

"Moneylenders take advantage of us and charge any amount they like. I stopped using them, and I pray not to see what will make me use them again" (Somto).

Data from the analysis showed that moneylenders could make funds available to rural women for their businesses when they are in dire need, but the risks involved because of the high-interest rate make it unsustainable for the women. Hence, they were only used in emergencies when all else failed. Notably, however, the financial support available from moneylenders is limited due to the prevailing poverty in rural Nigeria. Additionally, one could argue that the moneylenders could take undue advantage of these women or at least could be perceived as such since they are not regulated.

8.2.5 Microfinance

As evidenced in the findings of this study, rural women patronised informal sources such as family and friends, rotating savings and women's groups when in need of financial support. This concurs with extant literature which noted that the lack of access to traditional banks in rural areas forces rural women to explore informal sources of finance (Chibundu 2016). Sadly, these sources are known to be inadequate in meeting the financial needs of rural women. This is where microfinance comes into the picture.

As defined in the literature, microfinance is a formal source of finance targeted at the poor and those considered 'unbankable' by the conventional banks. There is a handful of microfinance institutions scattered across rural Nigeria, even though they are far removed from the communities themselves. As described earlier in Chapter 2, these microfinance institutions are usually cited at the local government headquarters, which are tens of miles from each village in the study area.

Considering the characteristics of microfinance described earlier (in Chapter 4), one would expect that it can meet most of the financial needs of rural women. For example, microfinance is said to provide the poor with small loans, savings and other facilities with less emphasis on asset-based collateral (CBN 2005). If microfinance delivers all the benefits as described in the literature, then why are rural women not patronising it? The analysis revealed that at least 2 out of every 3 women were not using microfinance (see Table 37). Why is the poorest, most disadvantaged group, women micro-entrepreneurs in rural Nigeria benefiting less from microfinance? These questions will be explored in the remainder of this chapter, and the findings from the analysis will provide further insight in this regard.

8.3 The Perception of Microfinance by Poor Rural Women Entrepreneurs

Findings presented in the earlier sections of this chapter have revealed that rural women do require financial support in their daily lives and business but get little or no help from formal institutions. In fact, given the formal institutional void, rural women were found to have resorted to using informal sources of finance, although they noted that the informal sources were insufficient as the available

funds were at best limited. So, the question is “Do rural women see microfinance as a viable source of finance for their micro-businesses?” What is their perception and experience of Microfinance?

Questions were posed at participants to tease out how they perceived microfinance, and diverse responses were gathered. These responses have been analysed, and the findings are supported by quotes from the participants. For ease of presentation, the perceptions have been categorised into negative and positive perceptions, as shown in Figure 19.

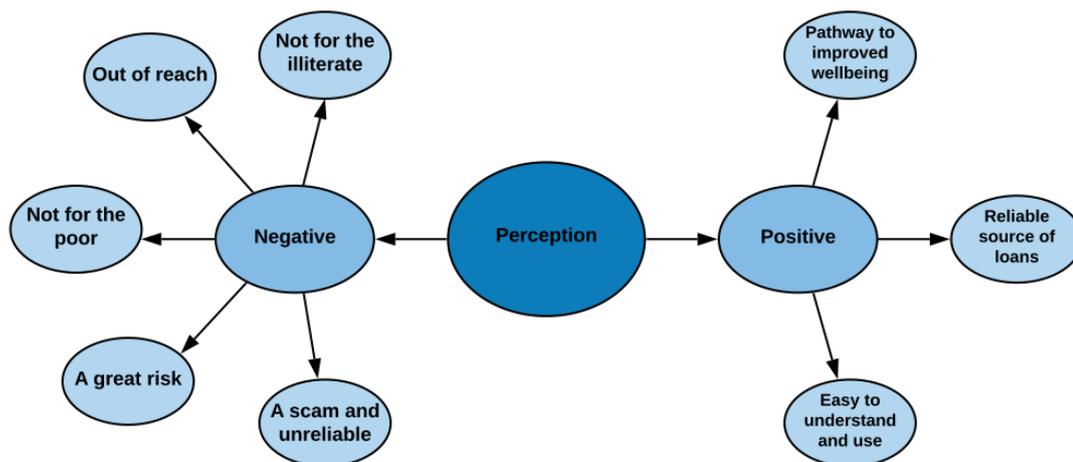


Figure 19: Rural Women's Perceptions of Microfinance

8.3.1 Negative Perceptions

Several participants had some negative dispositions toward microfinance, as they seemed to have one view or another that deterred them from its use. The focus of this analysis is not on the validity of their viewpoints rather an elicitation of potential reasons for the low patronage of rural women with regards to

microfinance. As evidenced in the data, the following are the perceptions that rural women have about microfinance: (1) Not for the poor (2) Out of reach (3) Not for the illiterate (4) Scam and unreliable (5) A great risk.

8.3.1.1 Microfinance perceived as not for the Poor

Some participants indicated that microfinance was not for the poor. They argued that the requirements for accessing finance from microfinance were not affordable for them. They highlighted the issue of land as collateral when borrowing from MFI, the repayment terms and conditions. Some of the views shared by the respondents are captured in Table 44.

Table 44: Excerpts regarding perception of microfinance as not for the poor

Participants	Excerpt
<i>Ijeoma</i>	<i>"Microfinance is not meant for the poor like me as I do not have their requirements... It is for those who have land and rich relatives to use as guarantors even when borrowing as a group or individual..."</i>
<i>Uju</i>	<i>"... If microfinance is truly for the poor like me, then they should stop asking for upfront deposits, rich guarantors or land from us. This is difficult for women to afford. In my culture, women do not own land, and poverty makes it hard to save upfront".</i>

The respondents who argued that microfinance was not for the poor submitted that microfinance did not consider the prevailing cultural practices (see Chapter 2, section 2.3.2 for details) which restrict women’s access to assets like land. They pointed out that they would be unable to meet the requirements for microfinance as culturally women do not inherit land and that their family responsibilities meant that they had no savings to make upfront deposits. Some of the participants were

of the view that finding a reputable guarantor in the village where poverty was prevalent was a difficult task. Given the extreme poverty amongst this group of women, demanding for collateral and these initial deposits could be easily perceived as not supportive at best.

8.3.1.2 Microfinance perceived as out of reach

Some participants labelled microfinance as out of reach because there is none located near them. They complained about the time and money (for transportation) that it would cost them to attend microfinance office, which is located over 20 miles from their villages. Given the bad roads, high transport cost, family caring responsibilities and the fact that there were no guarantees that they would get the loan; many women concluded that microfinance was out of reach for them as highlighted in Table 45.

Table 45: Excerpts regarding perception of microfinance as out of reach

Participants	Excerpt
<i>Mary</i>	"There is no MFI in my village. It costs a lot of money to transport to the location due to bad roads which makes the journey longer... Besides, travelling far affects my caring and domestic duties."
<i>Ijeoma</i>	"... Microfinance is far away from me and MFIs pay no attention to the fact that I have huge family responsibilities and cannot afford the high transport cost to their office..."

As evidenced by the quotes, microfinance offices were located far from the villages (where the rural women lived and ran their microbusiness). Hence, accessing them required travelling long distances. Given that rural roads are poorly maintained, motorists charge commuters higher to cover their repair costs and

profits. Additionally, time spent on the journey could have been used to engage in business activities which are where their income came from. Notably, rural women’s social role, including caring responsibilities and domestic duties makes it difficult to travel far.

8.3.1.3 Microfinance perceived as not for the Illiterate

Many participants with little or no formal education perceived microfinance as not for them due to the level of documentation involved, as it required clients to have at least basic literacy skills to enable them to perform tasks such as filling the forms and record keeping. Some of these viewpoints are substantiated in the quotes detailed in Table 46.

Table 46: Excerpts regarding perception of microfinance as not for the illiterate

Participants	Excerpt
<i>Somto</i>	<i>"Microfinance is not for the illiterate like me because I cannot speak or read the English language, let alone filling forms [which my friend told me]. As I did not go to school, I only speak my native language (Igbo)".</i>
<i>Uju</i>	<i>"Microfinance is not for people who cannot read and write in English; hence I do not use it... My native dialect (Igbo) is what I understand as I did not go to school".</i>

As evidenced in the data, women who have low levels of education seemed to benefit less from microfinance as they seemed to believe that they cannot understand how microfinance works. Understandably, since MFIs conducted their operations in the English language (which is alien to these poor women), the women could feel that they cannot cope. Given that most of the women barely

attained secondary school education (as shown in Table 15), providing a service that involved heavy paperwork can be perceived as unsuitable for these women.

8.3.1.4 Microfinance Perceived as a scam and unreliable

Some respondents have some serious reservations about microfinance, as they viewed it as a scam, and therefore unreliable due to two main reasons, as follows: (1) microfinance information was not disseminated by their village heads/religious leaders whom they trust, and (2) due to past experiences.

Some participants commented that they were concerned about the authenticity of microfinance because there were no announcements made by their religious leaders or village heads whom they trust. Hence, they perceived it as a scam as captured in Table 47.

Table 47: Excerpts regarding perception of microfinance as a scam

Participants	Excerpt
<i>Somto</i>	<i>"I have not heard any announcement in this village about any microfinance... not mentioned in church or in the town hall by our traditional ruler, where important information is shared... I only became aware of it from some people in the market, which made me doubt it".</i>
<i>Nnezi</i>	<i>"There has not been any announcement about microfinance from our leaders..."</i>

Given that rural women were unfamiliar with microfinance, they expected to receive such information from a source they trust (e.g. religious leaders/village heads). In rural Nigeria, important information or services passed through the village leaders and elders-in-council who examined their suitability before such information is endorsed and disseminated. The rural communities do this to

safeguard vulnerable villagers like rural women from harm and scams. However, this tradition could mean that many women may miss out on useful information which might come from other sources such as friends and their social groups.

Some other participants mentioned that they (or someone they knew) lost their savings in microfinance some years ago because the MFI they were using shutdown unannounced. One participant (Oby) reinforced this perception, and commented as follows:

"The MFI that I patronised in 2008 closed down without notice due to corruption and carted away all my savings. I did not receive any money back, not even from the government. Hence, I will never use it again nor encourage anyone to use it". (Oby).

Another participant (Onye) commented further:

"My friend suffered hardship when the MF Bank that she used was shut for operating under a fake license. She said they took away her hard-earned savings... [Thus,] I see MFI as unreliable" (Onye).

As reported in the literature, the MFIs in question came into administration because of corruption and poor management (Chibundu, 2016). The reputational damage that their actions created is still rippling; hence many people are still skeptical about the safety of their savings and the reliability of the service.

As evidenced in the quotes, some did not only stop using microfinance services but noted that they could not recommend it to anyone.

More specifically, one of the MFI staff confirmed that there had been such ugly cases in the distant past, especially during the early stages of microfinance banks in rural Nigeria where some MFIs were closed due to malpractices. However, MFI

staff noted that those practices were “pre-2011”, as the policy framework was reviewed in 2011 to monitor the practices of MFIs and prevent such ugly incidents by putting in place checks and balances in the sector:

“... Due to inconsistent policies and poor implementation at the early stages of microfinance, some MFIs were forced to close abruptly. The absence of consistent consumer protection meant that some customers lost their savings... However, it will be hard for that to happen now given the stricter measures in place and the revised policy framework of 2011” (MF Official 1).

No matter the prospects inherent in microfinance, if people do not see it as a safe and reliable alternative to informal sources, then they are not likely to patronize it.

8.3.1.5 Microfinance Perceived as a great risk

Many participants saw microfinance as a great risk. The risks noted by the participants varied from concerns regarding how they would repay the loan, avoid indebtedness and loss of livelihood, and dignity in the community should they default. The following quotes in Table 48 demonstrate their worries.

Table 48: Excerpts regarding perception of microfinance as a great risk

Participants	Excerpt
<i>Ngozi</i>	<i>“Microfinance is a great risk, as I may be unable to pay back... I cannot guarantee that I will not use the loan to feed my 7 children. This will mean losing everything.”</i>
<i>Chika</i>	<i>“Microfinance is too risky. I was told that any failure to repay loans could lead to loss of family land, and harassment from the bank staff. I do not want to bring shame to my family”.</i>
<i>Nnezi</i>	<i>“I am concerned about the risks of microfinance. I know someone who became worse off by borrowing from MFI... She lost family land and goods when she took ill and could not repay her loan”.</i>

As a result of the constrained resources available to rural women, they are reluctant to take any risks that could lead to the loss of their meagre income or strain their livelihood any further. As can be seen from the findings, the extreme poverty amongst this group of women made them highly vulnerable such that any shocks could reverse all the grounds that they had gained in terms of coping with their family responsibilities. Specifically, most respondents, instead of seeing microfinance as an opportunity to thrive, saw it as great risk as business finance is mixed with family use. This implies that they may struggle to repay the loan in a timely fashion. They saw this burden as enormous and had disastrous consequences which outweighed potential benefits.

For these women, meeting family needs was a priority, and so loans may be diverted for family use which meant defaulting was more likely. Thus, the fear of losing assets or social dignity and the thought of being worse off after engaging in microfinance greatly influenced the women's perceptions. Hence, this poorest and most disadvantaged group was most reluctant to participate in microfinance to avoid irreversible consequences. However, while many participants had negative perceptions of microfinance, some participants had positive perceptions as discussed in the next section.

8.4.2 Positive Perceptions

The previous section indicated that most of the participants perceived microfinance negatively. The findings showed that those views were largely informed by their level of education, past experiences (or word of mouth from contacts) and MFI requirements and terms. However, some other participants reported that they perceived microfinance as a pathway to improved wellbeing,

easy to use and a decent source of loans, as discussed in the remainder of this section.

8.4.2.1 Microfinance perceived as a pathway to improved wellbeing

Certain participants reported that they perceived microfinance as a pathway to achieve improved wellbeing. They noted that microfinance could help them network with other women with more experience in their trade who could share best practices and tips for excelling in their businesses. They also noted that microfinance would push them to save as they reckoned that the lifestyle of saving would mean that they will have enough money to respond to shocks and crises when they arise. Indeed, these participants showed commendable enthusiasm in their description of their optimism and hope in microfinance as showcased in Table 49.

Table 49: Excerpts regarding perception of microfinance as a pathway to improved wellbeing

Participants	Excerpt
<i>Chizara</i>	<i>"...I see microfinance as a helping hand to enable me to provide for my family and live a better life..."</i>
<i>Ogechi</i>	<i>"Though my family responsibilities are great, I believe microfinance will enable me to ensure that I put something aside every day as savings ... this [habit of saving] means I will have money for the rainy day..."</i>

The findings revealed that all the participants who perceived microfinance as a pathway to improved wellbeing were participating in microfinance at the time of this study. It is worth noting that these respondents believed that microfinance would give them the opportunity to explore new frontiers in their families and

businesses. For example, they believed it would present opportunities to develop a savings culture, network with other entrepreneurs that they can learn from, and possibly boost their businesses to provide a better standard of living for their families.

8.4.2.2 Easy to understand and Use

Some of the respondents with secondary education reported that microfinance services were easy to understand and use. They maintained that their basic literacy skills were enough to access the services, although some support may be needed to understand some technical concepts like budgeting. Some of their responses are presented in Table 50.

Table 50: Excerpts regarding perception of microfinance as easy to understand and use

Participants	Excerpt
Grace	<i>"Microfinance looks easy and straightforward, unlike the commercial banks. All I did was to locate a group (MFI); joined and paid my dues... since I can read, write and speak in English helps me to do my paperwork and access loans through the group without offering land as collateral ... I have secondary school education."</i>
Helen	<i>"I go to MFI through a group which enables me to acquire loans without collateral (e.g. land). As I can speak, read and write in English from my secondary school days, I can fill the forms and other record-keeping, although I may need support to understand some technical terms... I can communicate with microfinance officials."</i>

From the analysis of the data, some participants noted that they accessed loans through group lending without the need to present any collateral such as land. It seemed that participants with up to secondary school education were better

positioned to understand and use microfinance services more easily than those with lower literacy levels (see section 8.3.1.3). Specifically, they argued that the ability to read and write was all that was required to successfully operate a microfinance portfolio. In the context of rural women, the possession of basic literacy skills and general knowledge was a big deal, seeing that not many rural women were privileged to attend formal education. Those who had the opportunity to acquire such skills were better equipped for effective communication, comprehension and participation in microfinance services. In other words, what could have been a challenging task for rural women with low literacy (e.g. completing a loan form) is comprehensible for those with higher literacy skills, allowing them to make effective use of microfinance.

8.4.2.3 Microfinance perceived as a reliable source of loans

Some participants saw microfinance as a reliable source of credit facilities for poor women since the prevalent poverty in the area meant that their families, friends and SHGs struggle to raise meaningful fund when it is needed. Additionally, they noted that the interest rates charged by microfinance are satisfactory compared to what local moneylenders charged. Some of their viewpoints are showcased in Table 51.

Table 51: Excerpts regarding perception of microfinance as a decent source of loans

Participants	Excerpt
<i>Nnenna</i>	<i>"Microfinance, in my view, is reliable and poor women like me can access microloans, and the interest rate is lower than that of a moneylender. The loan from MFI helps me to buy equipment and goods for my business..."</i>

<i>Helen</i>	<i>"I see MFI as hope for poor women like me as it means I can access loans and my savings are safe because the government monitor their operations, unlike the local group... With microfinance, I do better in my business and improve our welfare".</i>
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As indicated from the findings, some participants saw microfinance as a reliable source of credit for their businesses. They believed that their savings were secured given that MFI is regulated by the government. More so, the possibility that (group) loans can be secured without the need for collateral formed a positive impression on those participants who were aware of that piece of information. They reported that microfinance was aimed at providing the poor with microloans to improve their livelihoods. Hence, they believed that the interest rates of microfinance are satisfactory when compared to the rate of interest on loans from moneylenders.

The analysis showed that most of those who perceived microfinance as a viable means to access loans were participating in MFI services. There seemed to be a correlation between a positive perception of microfinance and engaging in microfinance. The next section presents the finding regarding rural women's experience of microfinance.

8.5 Experiencing Microfinance

The analysis presented in the previous section revealed the varying perceptions that rural women had regarding microfinance. Could these perceptions have had implications for their participation in microfinance? Many of them noted perceptions that can seem negative while some reported perceptions that could be considered as positive. The findings seemed to suggest that women who had

negative perceptions about microfinance were not engaging in microfinance at the time of this study. However, those who were positively disposed to microfinance were found to be engaging in microfinance. This section now turns attention to how rural women experienced microfinance. It is believed that an insight into the experience of rural women in microfinance is important to address why the poorest, most disadvantaged group in rural Nigeria benefits less from microfinance?

To find answers to the research question, participants were asked how they experienced microfinance, and their responses were gathered and analysed. The findings from the analysis are supported by quotes from the participants, and these are presented in the rest of this section. For ease of presentation, the experiences have been classified into positive and negative experiences.

8.5.1 Positive Experiences

It was found from the data gathered that some respondents had positive experiences using microfinance services, including repeated borrowing and the ability to save. These will be detailed in the following sub-sections.

8.5.1.1 Repeated Borrowing

Many participants who were engaging in microfinance services noted that microfinance enabled them to borrow whenever they needed. They stated that it resulted in a continuous inflow of funds for their businesses and families, which was a struggle with the informal sources. The following quotes in Table 52 demonstrate some of their experiences.

Table 52: Excerpts regarding rural women’s experience of repeated borrowing

Participants	Excerpt
<i>Oluchi</i>	<i>"I have borrowed several times from the microfinance bank, which was not possible with the local RoSCA group because every member will have to take their turn before the cycle repeats... This enabled me to expand my poultry business."</i>
<i>Ucha</i>	<i>"... Once I keep repaying my microloans, I can borrow now and again. And MFI does not give the excuse of insufficient cash, which is often the case with the local SHG. The loans helped me to buy goods in bulk..."</i>

As can be seen from the quotes, some participants submitted that they had more reliable access to credit with MFI than the informal sources, which enabled them to expand their business. Albeit, they had to ensure that they remained creditworthy to be able to access further loans. They noted that, while their loans were being serviced, they could access top-up loans, though this depended on their performance on previous/current loans and their current circumstances.

Additionally, the participants narrated how they utilised the loans they borrowed from microfinance. Most participants stated that the microloans were used to address pressing business and family needs which would have been difficult without it. These claims are substantiated in the quotes captured in Table 53.

Table 53: Excerpts on how rural women utilised loans from microfinance

Participants	Excerpt
Nnenna	<i>"I used some of the loans borrowed to buy equipment (generator) to provide power for my hairdressing business, as there is little or no electricity supply in my village... and I used some to feed the family and pay school fees and health bills... these would have been difficult to achieve without the loans".</i>
Chinyere	<i>"Part of the loan I borrowed from MFI was used for my children's school fees and feeding, and I used the remaining to buy goods for my business, thanks to MFI".</i>

Responses indicated that microloans were used for business purposes and also for other purposes, such as meeting family needs. As far as poor rural women, entrepreneurs are concerned, family and business are intertwined. Any need in the family was conceived as a need for the business, and any income or loans were used for immediate family needs (in line with earlier findings in Chapter 7).

8.5.1.2 Encourage saving

Most respondents who participated in microfinance firmly believed that the experience has been beneficial to them, given that the strategy adopted by MFIs incorporates compulsory savings into the portfolio. In other words, before rural women could access loans, they would have to build up some savings in their microfinance account. Furthermore, while servicing existing loans, the repayment term has a savings component which served as a reserve for the woman. Hence, when a loan is completed, the woman would have built up some savings too. The quotes in Table 54 demonstrate some of their experiences of saving with microfinance.

Table 54: Excerpts on rural women's experience of saving with MFI

Participants	Excerpt
<i>Helen</i>	<i>"MFI makes saving compulsory. For example, I borrowed N30,000 and paid N1,500 weekly repayments for the loan plus N200 savings which came to N1,700 as my weekly repayment. I cannot access the savings till I complete my repayment, which usually lasts about 6 months. I use it to meet diverse needs".</i>
<i>Ogechi</i>	<i>"MFI's compulsory savings help me not to spend everything that I make on my family... [However,] I am not sure if MFI adds interest on my savings".</i>
<i>Ucha</i>	<i>"... I was happy when I requested for my savings at the end of my repayment (i.e. 6 months) and realized I had saved a huge sum. This method helps me to have something to fall back on as I struggle to save money on my own due to family commitments".</i>

From the excerpts, participants indicated that they put down some compulsory savings in addition to the weekly repayment. More specifically, most participants noted that they were able to accumulate huge sums while repaying a loan, which they could fall back on as the need arises. The analysis seemed to suggest that although poor rural women found it difficult to save on their own, they could save if they were encouraged (or maybe, mandated) to do so. It seems that the inclusion of a compulsory savings element offers and imposes 'budgeting' into the very informal practices of micropreneurship. It accommodates the lack of any division of family and business funds. Indeed, the savings pot is available for both uses.

8.5.2 Negative Experiences

Despite the positive experiences expressed by some participants, there were other respondents who had negative experiences regarding microfinance services. Negative experiences centred on loan disbursement, repayment issues, transaction costs, involuntary savings, lack of training and ill-treatment by MFI staff.

8.5.2.1 Untimely Loan Disbursement

Some participants expressed their dissatisfaction with the delay and bureaucracy in making the loan available. They noted that they were informed that loans could be disbursed after about 2 weeks from loan application depending on individual circumstances. However, they explained that loans were sometimes disbursed after a couple of weeks and sometimes months. These claims are evidenced in the quotes showcased in Table 55.

Table 55: Excerpts on MFI's untimely loan disbursement

Participants	Excerpt
<i>Chinyere</i>	<i>"... I got my loan late, which happened to be at the wrong time for the business that I wanted to pursue as the business in the village is seasonal."</i>
<i>Ucha</i>	<i>"I got my first loan on time, but the second loan came late, which I wanted to use to venture into the poultry business. When the loan came, there was not enough time to grow the chicken ready for Christmas sale... I had to use part of the loan to pay school fees and buy more goods for my retail shop and abandoned the poultry business ..."</i>

<i>Ogechi</i>	<i>"The time MF loan is disbursed is not certain, sometimes it comes on time (about 2 weeks period), and at the other times it takes up to a month or more. This hinders me a lot ..."</i>
<i>Kelechi</i>	<i>"I remembered when I applied for a loan that I wanted to use for business I did not get it within the 2-week period I was told. I had to borrow from moneylender as my business was going down at the time ..."</i>

As indicated by the quotes, they mentioned that it was usually difficult to ascertain when the loan will be disbursed. Although these participants noted that they were informed that a loan disbursement could take about 2 weeks based on individual circumstances, other bureaucratic issues (e.g. rigorous checking process on the recipient) may further delay when loans are received. With this sort of delay and uncertainty in the timing of the disbursement, rural women usually missed the opportunities that the loan was meant for. In case of emergencies, they could end up approaching local moneylenders which attracts much higher interests. In these situations, some participants noted that when the loan finally arrived, they often divert it to meet other financial needs, such as paying school fees. Crucially, if rural women are to take advantage of the market opportunities which are seasonal, then the timeliness of loan disbursement would need to be improved.

8.5.2.2 Indebtedness due to non-flexible loan repayment and compulsory savings

Many participants highlighted several issues regarding the repayment of loans and noted strong dissatisfaction with them. For example, some of them stated that the repayment period was too short, which meant that a sizeable amount was repaid weekly. Others commented that the repayment regime was too rigid, as that meant that payment must be made every week irrespective of the situation. Additionally, the compulsory savings built into the weekly repayment was seen by

some as an extra burden, as they were still grappling with repaying the loan. Some respondents shared some of the factors that made their repayment experience very challenging, and some of these are detailed in Table 56.

Table 56: Excerpts on MFI's inflexible loan repayment

Participants	Excerpt
FGD1,2,3,4 & 5	<i>"The repayment period does not give us time to sell our products where we obtain the money for the repayment. When a family member is ill, we have to stay home and look after them, which make it difficult to make enough money for repayment. Thus, we sometimes borrow from moneylenders at a higher interest to repay microloans just to maintain a good credit history, but this makes us incur more debts."</i>
Chinyere	<i>"... Sometimes I go to the market late as I have to complete house chores first before business which affects my sale. When the sale is poor, I borrow to make my weekly repayment, because MFI repayment period does not give me enough time to sell off my goods."</i>
Love	<i>"Even though the compulsory savings help me to have some money to use at the end of my repayment, it adds to my stress of meeting up with repayment. Particularly because the weekly repayment is too short and rigid as a business in the village is slow coupled with my family responsibilities which is not helping matter ..."</i>

The findings indicated that some participants struggle to raise the weekly repayment along with the compulsory savings. Considering the unpredictable markets and the pressing nature of family issues, rigid weekly repayment did not seem very supportive as it put the women under duress which often led to further indebtedness. While MFIs may have tight budgets, the lack of flexibility of repayments does not cater for contingencies and the interruptions that

characterise life in poverty. Perhaps, a softer regime that allowed say, two payment holidays might work as a compromise.

8.5.2.3 Uncompassionate Treatment and Harassment from MFI Staff

Some participants narrated their ordeal with some MFI staff when they faced challenges that hindered them from repaying their loans as at when due. The women noted that some MFI staff were uncompassionate and inhumane in their stance as they harassed, verbally abused, and wrote them threatening letters. One of the respondents reinforced this claim as she commented as follows:

"On one occasion, I had just collected a loan and was returning home when I ran into armed robbers who took all the money. I immediately informed my group leader who called the MFI and requested for a grace period in this unfortunate incident, but the MFI official refused rather issued us a red alert stating that if the loan was not paid as at when due that the entire group would be fined. He also noted that this incident would possibly affect our ability to borrow in the future. This incident made me incur more debts as I approached local moneylenders to borrow to repay the loan... The pressure from the group was unbearable." (Helen)

Another participant (Muna) recounted her experience and noted that she decided to stop participating in microfinance after an incident with one of the MFI staff. Her account of the incidence is evidenced in the following quote:

"One day, my shop was flooded, and all the goods were destroyed. I could not meet up with the weekly repayment as I had lost everything in the shop. I asked to be allowed some time to recover... [but it was declined] ... The officer in charge insulted me and was raising his voice at me in front of other customers. The news spread in the community, and I felt very ashamed. My husband was not happy either, or so I had to borrow from a moneylender to settle the loan..." (Muna)

These accounts evidenced the unprofessional and uncompassionate treatment by some MFI staff, which in the women's words were insensitive and embarrassing, to say the least. Obviously, the MFI officials need to be firm to ensure that the loans are recovered; however, the approach must be supportive and ethical.

Considering the context of poor rural women, where there are no buffers to respond to shocks, it should be expected that these women may miss some repayments. The analysis seemed to suggest that the MFI officers were so occupied by the thought of recovering the loan and possibly keeping their jobs that they crossed the line between firmness and unprofessionalism.

8.5.2.4 High Costs of Microfinance

In this study, the cost of microfinance is not limited to the interest rate on loan but includes joint liability cost, transportation cost and the times spent to access microfinance and attend meetings. These costs are presented in Figure 20. It is important to highlight these components as they reflect the way rural women consider the cost of microfinance. To discuss the findings, these components are presented in the following sub-sections.

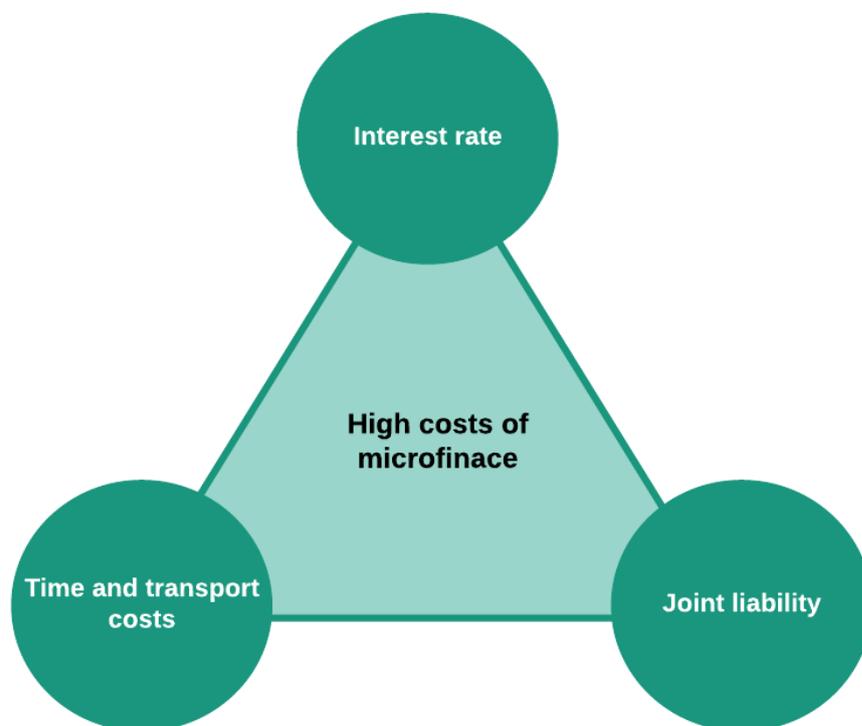


Figure 20: High Costs of Microfinance

Interest Rate

With regards to the interest rate charged on loans, many participants shared their experiences. Although most participants noted that they did not understand how the interest rate worked and could not ascertain exactly how much that meant given their low financial literacy, they believed that the rates were high because they were not making as much profit. Some of their views are captured in Table 57.

Table 57: Excerpts on MFI's Interest Rate

Participants	Excerpt
<i>Ebere</i>	<i>"... I struggle to make a profit as I am left with barely anything after paying back the loan... Whatever the interest rate is, must be high..."</i>
<i>Love</i>	<i>"Although I cannot precisely say the rate of interest charged on microloans, I can say that it is too much. This is because, after repayment, I hardly make profits... but when I borrow money from 'Akawo' group and use it in my business; I have good return after repaying the loan although money is not always available to members".</i>

As indicated from the quotes, though rural women did not fully understand how interest rate worked or how much it meant in monetary terms (for a given loan), they seemed to link it to the profit they made from their business. This is interesting as it is not clear how they calculate the profit when they hardly keep good financial records. Nevertheless, it appeared they compared the profits they made when they sourced money from other low-interest sources like SHGs and concluded that the interest rate microloans must be high. Analysing the data

collected from MFI staff suggested why the interest rate on microloans may be high. These submissions are captured in Table 58.

Table 58: Excerpts on reasons for high interest rate

Participants	Excerpt
<i>MFI Staff 1</i>	<i>"The MFI does not get adequate funding and support from the government, and so the MFI has to borrow money from other financial institutions which influences how much we charge on loans..."</i>
<i>MFB- staff 2</i>	<i>"The transaction cost of small loans involves a lot of physical interventions that are labour intensive. This affects interest charged on loan due to the administrative cost."</i>
<i>MFI Staff 5</i>	<i>"The cost of administering small loans is high... the cost of running the MFI in this area is at least twice as high as running it in the city. This affects the interest charged on loans".</i>

As evidenced in the quotes, the cost of running an MFI in rural South-East was high because the areas are remote and geographically dispersed with hardly any functioning infrastructure, which meant the MFI needed to provide these facilities for their offices in each location. Additionally, with poor funding support from the government, these MFIs had to borrow from other financial institutions, which added to the cost. These extra costs needed to be recouped, and the higher interest rate was one way of achieving that.

8.5.2.4.2 Joint Liability

Joint liability is a scheme used by MFIs when disbursing loans through group lending. It essentially means the MFI shifts the burden of monitoring and loan default to the groups. In other words, all the members of a group of borrowers

are liable for the loan that a member takes. Hence, all the members are seen to have defaulted if any member defaults in their loan repayment, making all of them jointly liable for one another's microloans. Some of their views are outlined in Table 59.

Table 59: Excerpts on joint liability in loan groups

Participants	Excerpt
<i>Grace</i>	<i>"I had to contribute to pay for another member's loan when they were unable to repay because we are jointly liable. This is frustrating, especially when I do all kinds of work just to repay mine... Also, monitoring group members is time-consuming".</i>
<i>Ndidi</i>	<i>"... It is painful when I struggle to get the money to repay my loan but have to join in paying someone else's. This also restricts me from borrowing future loans until all outstanding loans in the group are repaid".</i>

As evidenced in the data, the joint liability that came with microloans as members of a loan group did put some women under undue stress as they had to rally to ensure that the loan of a member was repaid. Given the prevalent resource constraints, the extra burden that joint liability introduces can be enormous because the women do not have any buffers to attend to unplanned events. Hence, rural women use peer monitoring and group meetings to ensure every group member is meeting up with their loan repayments. These efforts are often inconvenient and time-consuming but are necessary to avoid group penalties, which may affect future loans for group members.

8.5.2.4.3 Time and Transport Cost

Given that MFIs are located far away from the villages where the women live and run their business, they incur huge transport costs just to access the MFI office. Added to the cost of transportation is the time they spend travelling on those unsafe roads. Some of the comments are captured in Table 60.

Table 60: Excerpts on time and transportation cost to access microfinance

Participants	Excerpt
<i>Chizara</i>	<i>"I spend so much travelling to and from MFI office... In order to reduce transport cost, I sometimes trek halfway to pay less fare, but that wastes more time that would have been used on my business".</i>
<i>Nnenna</i>	<i>"Sometimes, I find it difficult to attend all the meetings with the MFI officials and the group due to my responsibilities and cost."</i>

As indicated in the accounts detailed in Table 60, the women noted that the time they spent travelling to access microfinance and to attend compulsory meetings with MFI officials and group members was sizeable. In fact, some women walked for tens of miles just to reduce the cost of transportation, and they noted that the time spent journeying to and from the MFI offices and meetings impacted on the time they could have spent on their business. These are additional costs that the women incur in participating in microfinance.

8.5.2.5 Insufficient MFIs services in rural areas

Though savings and loans appeared to be more popular in rural areas, some participants reported that other MFI services such as insurance and training were

hardly provided by the MFI. The quotes from some of the participants are presented in Table 61.

Table 61: Excerpts on lack of insurance services in rural areas

Participants	Excerpt
<i>Ndidi</i>	<i>"I have not heard about insurance since I have been borrowing from the MF Bank. I do not think they provide it"</i>
<i>Ogechi</i>	<i>"I did not know about insurance until my sister in the city advised me to get it for my poultry business against the outbreak of disease..."</i>
<i>Nkechi</i>	<i>"...I wish microfinance has Insurance services like their counterpart in the city."</i>

Considering the risks such as flooding, robbery attacks and an outbreak of diseases, insurance services could provide adequate protection and peace of mind. The above excerpts suggest that some of the microfinance banks in rural South-East did not provide their customers with information about insurance services. Unfortunately, with limited or no information about MFI insurance facilities in rural areas, poor rural women entrepreneurs lack adequate business protection which can increase their vulnerability. This is a disappointing discovery as one would expect that rural women entrepreneurs would be provided with business insurance because of the grave consequences of any shock or disaster, as that could easily wipe out their microbusinesses.

With regards to training/advisory services, many participants noted their displeasure regarding the lack of training from the MFI. They reported that they

did not receive any form of training/workshops while using their services. The responses gathered are evidenced in Table 62.

Table 62: Excerpts on lack of training for poor women in rural areas

Participants	Excerpt
<i>Nkechi</i>	<i>"I do not know about training from MFI as I have not been trained since I have been using the service. I only seek advice from my group leader when in doubt of anything".</i>
<i>Chizara</i>	<i>"The MF Bank that I use does not care if we understand how microfinance works as long as they get their repayment. All they want is to make the profit that is why they do not bother to train us".</i>

Sadly, these findings suggest that rural women were not offered training. Considering their low literacy of rural women, one would expect that the MFI would put support mechanism in place to build the capacity of these customers. Such training and exposure would help them to acquire necessary financial and business management skills, which would help them to manage their enterprise better and repay the loans in a timely fashion. Although they stated they could ask questions and seek advice/clarity, they noted that it was only useful to address their queries rather than develop their skills.

An interview with the MFI staff indicated that the poor funding from the government made it difficult for them to conduct training sessions for their customers. Their comments are presented in Table 63.

Table 63: Excerpts on reasons for lack of training for poor rural women

Participants	Excerpt
MFI Staff 1	<i>"Due to poor funding, we do not offer training to customers in this branch because of the high cost that is involved. However, we do provide advice to customers at the time of accessing the loan or when asked"</i>
MFI Staff 2	<i>"...We do not organise training due to the cost implications. However, we provide advice at the customer's request".</i>

The findings re-echoed that both MFI and the government need to do more by considering the needs of rural people concerning training and other facilities if poor rural women are to make the most of their services. With no training to upgrade the skills of rural women, it may be difficult for them to understand how to judiciously invest their loan and improve livelihood. This can lead to unpleasant outcomes from using microfinance.

8.6 Summary of Chapter Eight

The assumption in the literature is that rural women are among the most disadvantaged groups, and so their need for microfinance is ranked high. However, the findings showed that rural women entrepreneurs did not seem to embrace microfinance as much as one would expect. Why? One of the questions that this study sets out to address is why are rural women benefiting less from microfinance? In order to answer this research question, the study investigated rural women's sources of finance and tried to tease out why rural women patronised the sources that they used. The findings revealed the characteristics of the sources elicited and the challenges they posed to rural women. One common thread amongst all the informal sources investigated was the challenge of raising enough funds to meet their user's needs. All the participants noted that the funds available from those sources were limited, and this can be explained by the extreme poverty in the area. For example, SHGs are made up of poor rural people who attempt to pull their resources together to meet member's needs, but they are all poor and struggling to make ends meet. Hence, they often have little or nothing to spare.

The chapter then progressed to explore and analyse the data gathered from participants regarding their perception and experience of microfinance. The analysis of the data collected from participants revealed that most of the women had perceptions that were indisposed to microfinance as they recounted various fears and risks which they linked to microfinance. Some of those perceptions were derived from word of mouth from someone in their social network. Some other women seemed to evidence positive perceptions about microfinance, as they believed it presented a pathway to improved wellbeing and a decent source of finance for their microentrepreneurs. The findings also revealed that all the women

who perceived microfinance as an opportunity to improve livelihood and wellbeing were participating in microfinance at the time of this study.

Moreover, the chapter presented further insights into how rural women experienced microfinance. The findings revealed that some rural women seemed to suggest that microfinance afforded them the opportunity to expand their businesses, improve their family wellbeing, pay for children's education, encouraged saving and provided the chance for repeated borrowing. On the other hand, the analysis showed that several women did not have pleasant experiences. They complained about the short repayment period, unfriendly terms and conditions, rigid payment plans, involuntary savings, untimely disbursement and uncompassionate treatment by some MFI staff in the unlikely event of a default due to shocks and unplanned events. The findings also seemed to suggest that the cost of microfinance to an average rural woman outweighs the potential benefits, especially as some women reported greater indebtedness because of microfinance. Many of them noted that they had to approach local moneylenders just to be able to offset the microloans that they had.

Interestingly, the analysis showed that rural women's perception and experience of microfinance affected their decision of participating in microfinance. As was evidenced in the analysis, some women had to stop using microfinance because of the ugly experience they had with MFI staff, the undue exposure to greater indebtedness (for own loan or those of other group members), and inflexible loan repayment plan. Some other women did not even engage with microfinance in the first place as they perceived it as too great a risk or not designed for their

demographics (e.g. low literacy, poor) and out of reach as they feared that their livelihood would be spent on transportation to and from the microfinance office. Though the findings showed that there are some women who seemed to be engaging in microfinance, the analysis confirmed that they are the minority. In the next chapter, this study will discuss these findings in detail and seek to draw parallels with other findings in the literature and provide a robust discussion regarding why the poorest, most disadvantaged group (rural women) benefit less from microfinance.

Chapter Nine: Discussion of Findings

9.1 Introduction

Chapters 7 and 8 presented the major findings of this study. This chapter discusses the research findings to show how they address and answer the research questions and research objectives. The conceptual framework underpinning the study guided the discussion. This research aims to examine how poor women entrepreneurs in Nigerian rural settings perceive and experience microfinance and the effects on their micro entrepreneurship. To achieve the research aim, the following three main objectives were formulated as follows:

1. To understand how the institutions of family and culture shape Nigerian poor rural women's micro entrepreneurship (where family responsibilities and economic activities are closely intertwined).
2. To examine the perception and experience of poor rural entrepreneurial women on microfinance in a context of extreme poverty.
3. To understand why the poorest, most disadvantaged group – rural Nigerian women benefit less from microfinance.

In order to achieve these objectives, the following research questions were asked:

1. How do the institutions of culture and family influence Nigerian rural women's entrepreneurship? (Objective 1)
2. What are the livelihood strategies adopted by rural Nigerian women, the livelihood Assets they lack or have, and what are their livelihood outcomes? (Objective 1)
3. How do seasonality, trends and shocks affect Nigerian rural women's microbusinesses? (Objective 1)

4. What are the sources of finance available to poor women in Nigerian rural settings? (Objective 2)
5. How do rural Nigerian women perceive microfinance? (Objective 2)
6. What are their experiences of microfinance? (Objective 2)
7. Do, and if so, why do the poorest, the most disadvantaged group – rural Nigerian women benefit less from microfinance? (Objective 3)

The main findings of this research are discussed with regards to the research questions and compared and contrasted with reviewed literature in this chapter. The data analysis utilised the sustainable livelihood approach (SLA) and was presented using the five sustainable livelihood components. The sustainable livelihood framework provided a robust way to contextualise and understand the complex issues that influenced rural women's behaviour, perception, usage, the experience of microfinance, and how they impact on their livelihood strategies.

This chapter is structured as follows: Section 9.2 discusses the institutional influence on rural women's entrepreneurship. Section 9.3 presents the livelihood strategies of rural women, the livelihood assets they lack or have and their livelihood outcomes. Section 9.4 discusses the vulnerability context of rural women entrepreneurs. Section 9.5 explains the sources of finance available to rural women. Section 9.6 discusses rural women's perception of microfinance. Section 9.7 presents rural women's experience of microfinance. Section 9.8 explains why poor rural women benefit less from microfinance. Section 9.9 presents the chapter summary.

9.2 The influence of the institution of culture and family on rural women's entrepreneurship

This section summarises the findings on research question 1: How do the institutions of culture and family influence Nigerian rural women's entrepreneurship? Previous studies have focused on the role that institutions play in shaping entrepreneurship (Baumol, 1990; McMullen 2011). The significant impact of institutions on entrepreneurship has been recognised (Harbi and Anderson 2010). Such influence can be more detrimental to well-being in remote areas and resource-constrained settings. This study found that rural Nigerian women were forbidden from making decisions that pertain to their microbusiness because of cultural practices. Patriarchal rural societies determine the division of labour in rural South-East Nigeria, with South-East culture, sees the male figure (e.g., husband) portrayed as the head of decision making about the home in all things pertaining to the household. This discriminates against women and their rights (Igwe, Newbery and Icha-Ituma 2018). The findings of this study show that the institutions influence not only how poor rural women entrepreneurs undertake their businesses but also what they can do. It seems significant to recognise this double-edged disadvantage. On the one hand, culture dictates their responsibilities; yet on the other, their freedom to act, to make business decisions is culturally constrained. The outcome is responsibility without the authority to address the responsibility.

9.2.1 Institutional voids in rural areas

According to Welter (2011) and Boettke and Coyne (2009), institutions present the context through which the socio-cultural views of entrepreneurship is explored. However, Mair and Marti (2012) noted that formal institutions in

developing countries are often dysfunctional or absent; hence, the poor are often situated in institutional voids (Mair et al. 2012). Moreover, the options available to rural women are significantly limited if the necessary institutional support is missing. As identified by the findings of this study, formal institutions are largely absent in rural South-East Nigeria. Rural women and their microbusinesses are remote from formal institutional support. Rural women entrepreneurs lack government support and most of the opportunities and facilities (e.g., standard market, banks and good roads) that people in the urban areas enjoy. In the absence of formal institutions, informal institutions arise to take the role. In rural Nigeria, this study found that informal institutions of family determine the roles and of responsibilities of family members and sets out the “rules of games”. Hence, the family plays a crucial role in poor rural women's micropreneurship. This influence of the family on rural women’s microbusiness shapes how it is set up and run.

9.2.2 Rural Women’s Family as a Socialised Business Entity

Traditional family business literature (Collins et al. 2016) presents family from the perspective of the family in business or as a family in the business, where family interests may be contrary to the functions of the business. This viewpoint typically assumes a more affluent and westernised setting where there is a clear-cut separation of concerns such that the business deals with the economics and rationality while family deals with a more emotional and social aspect (Anderson et al. 2005; Bettinelli 2014; Olson et al. 2003; Whatmore et al. 2017). However, in resource-scarce environments, the divide between business and family is, at best, blurry (Randerson et al. 20015). Certainly, among the rural poor, there is no demarcation between family and business because these poor micro-entrepreneurs consider family as the business and the business as a family. The

findings of this study show that poor rural women do not consider the concept of business and family as two separate entities; rather, they see them as one unit. Hence, resources from the business are freely utilised in meeting the needs of the family while resources from the family (e.g., human capital) are expended on the business.

From the findings, all the participants recognised that their families played a central role in their entrepreneurship as they brought resources such as unpaid labour, start-up money, the supply of goods, advice and information. Seaman et al. (2017) suggest that the family throws its weight behind entrepreneurial initiatives just to meet basic needs in a resource-constrained environment. This study reveals that rural Nigerian women acknowledge that family imposes some form of institutional obligations and responsibilities. This makes the interaction between the microbusiness and family an inseparable entity, referred to by Habbershon and Williams (1999) as 'familiness'. Familiness embodies a bundle of responsibilities and obligations, particularly in abject poverty (Anderson and Obeng 2017; Daspit and Long 2014). As evidenced in the findings of this study, production of the microbusinesses and consumption of the household are knitted together in an indivisible bond in rural women's micro entrepreneurship. Specifically, rural women microbusinesses and families are closely intertwined, and so they hardly separate business income and microfinance loans from family use as they see it as one unit. However, it is the reality experienced by these poor, marginalised and resource-constrained women, whose priority is survival and meeting the family's needs.

9.2.3 Gender roles and patriarchy

Institutionally, the division of labour in patriarchal Nigerian communities is determined by gender (Rowland, Babajide and Ekundina 2019). Females are relegated to the domestic chores and treated as inferior and second-class citizens (Igwe et al. 2018; Ojediran and Anderson 2020) who are not fit for entrepreneurial leadership (Galloway, Kapasi and Sang 2015). This study demonstrates how the traditional roles of rural woman in South-East Nigeria include giving birth to children, caring for them and other family members, responsible for the household chores and also expected to provide for their family. Fulfilling these roles places a heavy burden on rural women because the roles are often insensitive to the circumstances of these women. While micro businesses that operate within the family (Welsh et al. 2003) may benefit from family support, it also comes with family obligations and responsibilities that constrain women's business activities (Ahl 2006).

This study shows how Nigerian rural women's traditional roles such as caregiving, putting food on the table and domestic duties limit their mobility and entrepreneurial activities. Furthermore, this study reveals that significant decisions regarding borrowing and market opportunities are inevitably somehow linked to male cultural power. Yet, when it comes to providing for the family which culturally is reserved for the men (Rowland, Babajide and Ekundina 2019), the findings show that most rural women play a significant welfare role in this regard. The study demonstrates how rural women entrepreneurs are doubly burdened as they juggle between caregiving and running their business. The pressure of cultural expectations, gender role specifications and "unsaid rules" about who does what (although dictated sometimes) constrains their microbusinesses.

9.2.4 Limited Access to Formal Education

The findings of this study reveal that rural women have low literacy due to limited access to formal education. It was found that traditional home training is preferred to formal education for females in rural South-East Nigeria. This absence of formal education could be seen to be part of the patriarchal culture. Thus, females are encouraged to learn how to be a good wife' from their mothers, while the males are sent to school. This is because gender discrimination is still prevalent in rural South-East, and females are seen as minors whose primary function is within the boundaries of the kitchen (Nwoye 2007; Ojinta and Halkias 2019). Remoteness plays a part too; rurality is manifest as distance; physical and cultural, from the formal institutions that might reduce discrimination and disadvantage. The study shows how informal cultural institutions work to build a vicious cycle that reproduces poverty and limits rural women's potential and their microenterprise. An example of how this operates as a cycle is how rural women's low literacy means that they prefer to speak in their local dialects (Uguwu and Ogunremi 2019; Nnamdi-Eruchalu 2012). Also, they are unable to understand and communicate effectively in the English Language used in formal services (e.g., MFI). Illiteracy among rural women places a cap on them and poses a significant barrier to their microfinance participation as they lack basic financial skills and adopt unsophisticated techniques in running their microenterprise. Lack of requisite skills (e.g. entrepreneurial skills) can have an adverse impact on entrepreneurial performance (Egbo et al. 2020; Galloway 2005; Godsey and Sebora 2010; Sherif, Galloway and Zarrouk, 2019; Zarrouk et al. 2020; Umemezia and Osifo 2018). Their microenterprises are found to be largely subsistence focused, which makes them small and non-scalable.

9.2.5 Lack of Access to property/inheritance rights

The institutional context influences everything from social expectations to resource access (Webb et al. 2015). The findings of this study explain how the culture of South-East Nigeria excludes females from land inheritance rights or tangible property from their fathers or husbands. Thus, rural women do not own land that could have been used as collateral for loans or for production. Women can only access family land with the permission of their husbands. However, this does not give women the right to use the family land as they please, but to submit to their husband's dictates as culturally expected even to the detriment of their entrepreneurial development (Akinbami and Aransiola 2015). In other words, women have been deprived of land inheritance rights which have disadvantaged them from accessing material resources like credit (Nwoye 2007). Notably, they, and their businesses, are marginalised by these exclusions.

9.2.6 Business stereotypes

The institution of family forms the social arrangements in which poor rural women conform to culture and traditions in their communities. Rural women not only conform to the culture and tradition but are left with no real choices (i.e. the opportunity to do the business of their choice) other than those presented by the culture and/or family. Eneyew (2012) posits that the strategies households adopt shape their (business) behaviour (Zizzo and Fulford, 2012) when choosing livelihood options are determined by a range of socio-economic factors. The findings of this study further add that rural Nigerian women cannot do any business unless it is culturally suitable for a woman to do and approved by a man figure in the family (e.g. a husband). Put differently; their businesses have to be socially legitimate. For instance, traditional customs in the rural villages only

permit women to engage in businesses perceived as women-oriented (e.g. farming, weaving, tailoring, hairdressing) and food-related businesses and approved by their spouses. However, this means that rural women cannot explore a potentially more profitable business (e.g. running a pub) that the prevailing institution considered as a man's business. Classifying businesses merely because of gender leaves rural women with limited options (Ukanwa, Xiong and Anderson 2017). These informal practices largely determine not just what kind of business rural women could run but also how they run it. This finding demonstrates the cultural roots of the poverty the respondents experienced and also signalled how one escape route from poverty, micro-entrepreneurs, is constrained by these same features.

9.3 Livelihood Strategies of Rural Women, the Livelihood Assets they lack or have and their Livelihood Outcomes

This section summarises the findings on research question 2: What are the livelihood strategies adopted by rural women, the livelihood assets they lack or have and what are their livelihood outcomes. In the absence of support from government and other formal institutions, this study found that rural Nigerian women resort to micro entrepreneurship as a livelihood strategy for survival. This is a response to the conditions they encounter. They not only have and take care of their children but are also expected to provide a livelihood for their families. This family responsibility and obligation practically pushed these women into micro business as the only viable option for meeting the basic needs of their families. Resource-constrained settings encourage entrepreneurship as households respond entrepreneurially for survival (Seaman et al. 2017).

Furthermore, this study shows that rural Nigerian women were not motivated by business growth or self-actualisation; their priority is the survival of their families, putting food on the table. These subsistence-focused microentrepreneurs make significant contributions to the rural economy because "while each of these businesses is small and non-scalable, the totality of these businesses in a community is large" (Alvarez and Barney 2014 p. 162). More specifically, the western view of enterprise as predicated on profit maximisation (Smallbone and Welter 2006; Williams and Williams 2014) would fail to appreciate the realities of poor women living in rural Nigeria. In theoretical terms, this study provides evidence of the inadequacy of much western derived theory of entrepreneurship to explain the entrepreneurial practices of the respondents in extreme poverty.

Critically, this study reveals that rural Nigerian women, while pursuing their goal of providing for their families utilised what is available to hand – effectuation as their everyday practice (Sarasvathy and Dew 2005). Since many of them could not go into a more profitable business (because of prevailing traditional practices and cultural constraints of business stereotypes), they resorted to female-oriented businesses. These include businesses like cooked food, raw food, farming, tailoring and hairdressing that they already had skills, domestic skills with little competitive advantage; but characterised by low capital requirement and low risks. This suited their limited resources (Ajike, Adekitan and Okoro 2016) and capabilities. For example, those in the cooked food business had to cook in small portions, and when their food runs out, they cook again to reduce wastage. This study demonstrates the tediousness of tasks. Yet there are few alternatives for rural women due to the lack of such infrastructure and equipment. It thus seems significant for any explanatory theory to take account of both the physical and the cultural constraints experienced in rural women's poverty. In essence, their

resourcefulness must be acknowledged, yet how this is directed to family survival rather than business development should be recognised.

Other forms of adaptation to the realities of these women's situations evidenced in the findings were that rural women were combining business activities that could increase their potential to earn more and meet their family's needs. Yet, it is important to note that running multiple businesses can potentially divide the focus and resources which their business needs to be productive. It could turn out to increase the possibility of the businesses failing rather than helping to spread the risk across different businesses. Spreading such limited resources thinly between businesses makes poor conventional economic sense, but in terms of livelihood, the theory is understandable. Regarding other coping mechanisms that rural women adopt, the findings reveal that when sales at the local market are low, they used hawking and street selling to push for more sales. This highlights the vulnerability constituted by poverty and again signals the limitations of the western-based theory. This study shows that rural women micropreneurship is actually a very appropriate response to the context, a practical manifestation of bricolage and effectuation.

In this study, all the research participants adopted microbusiness as a strategy for improving their welfare and achieving sustainable livelihood outcomes for their families. It is important to recognise that they pursue these survival goals with limited resources as they have constrained access to key factors of production. The constrained access to the livelihood assets means that rural women have to rely on and use every available asset at their disposal in their quest to reduce their vulnerabilities. This study shows that the provision of food and other necessities

of life are the most important outcomes for poor rural women and their families. Women entrepreneurship contributes immensely to the survival of their families (Gindling and Newhous, 2014). Furthermore, this study also shows how many rural women plan to bring about a difference in their lives and those of their children by educating them. Investing in their children's education was a strategy for improving their family's future livelihood. The rationale for this was that if their wards were educated, they would do better businesses or gain employment that would, in turn, give them a better chance to compete in society. Despite these women being illiterates, they have a long-term goal aimed at alleviating poverty in their families through education. Additionally, the findings show that rural women felt empowered by their micro-entrepreneurship as it gives them the voice in their homes and confidence. It also created employment for them and others, thereby contributing to the rural economy (Ajike, Adekitan and Okoro 2016; Kenny 2019). Though poor rural women through their microbusiness have achieved the outcomes (e.g. putting food on the table), the double burden of family responsibilities and low income make them vulnerable when faced with uncertainty.

9.4 Vulnerability; the fragile context of rural women entrepreneurs

This section addresses the research question 3: How do seasonality, trends and shocks affect rural women's microbusinesses? Acknowledging the vulnerability context of poor rural women is crucial. Rural women are particularly disadvantaged, poor and embedded in institutional voids (Mair and Marti 2009). They suffer the effects what Abbas et al. (2019) describe as intersectionality, the compounding effects a socially disadvantageous identity. This exacerbates family responsibilities and obligations that further constrain them. The westernised view of vulnerability fails to consider the context of the poorest of the poor, which

presents different twists and turns to the setting. For example, due to cultural expectations, patriarchy, illiteracy and poor healthcare, rural women have large families and providing for them is burdensome, which increases their vulnerability. As the findings of this study suggest, poor rural women (at the base of the pyramid) can be easily tipped over into destitution by the slightest change in circumstances because they do not have any buffers to deal with shocks or risks (Ukanwa, Xiong and Anderson 2017). Specifically, they are more likely to suffer irreversible losses under uncertainties.

The effect of trends, seasonality and shocks can be more extensive and far-reaching. This study showed how recent changes in climatic conditions have extensive implications on poor rural women as their crops are either washed away due to flood or barely grow because of the unpredictability of the weather. Rural women who are already grappling with resource scarcity become subject to further hardship, insecurities and uncertainties. Marchetta, Sahn and Tiberti (2018) note that poorer households are most affected by adverse weather conditions; the impact of this is compounded with poor rural women given their huge family responsibilities and limited resources. Given the institutional void and fragile conditions in rural South-East Nigeria, many rural dwellers migrate to urban areas in search of new opportunities (Ajaero and Onokala 2013). Though this migration may have positive effects, the findings of this study shed light on the negative impacts on poor rural women and their microbusinesses. The findings show that the migrants constitute part of their customer base and potential human capital for their business. From the findings of this study, rural women had one story or another to share regarding the shocks that have threatened their livelihood. The enduring and destructive effects of the shocks were consistent, albeit their individual experiences were different. Given the already dire situation of poor rural

women, the loss of a loved one, health or money aggravated their hardship and, in many cases, threatened their survival. Velazco and Ballester (2016) argue that shocks have a significant effect on rural household consumption (e.g., food access), this study tells that not only do shocks affect rural women's consumption but also affect their ability to engage in microfinance to do a meaningful business.

9.5 Sources of Finance Available to Rural Women

This section addresses the research question 4: What are the sources of finance available to women in rural settings? Poor rural women are classified as 'unbankable' (Demirgüç-Kunt, Jack and Roland 2016; Klapper and Singer 2013; Koch et al. 2014; Matthews 2016). There are no bank branches in rural villages. Microfinance is considered in this study. Microfinance is seen as a promising option for the active poor to access finance for entrepreneurship given that it offers the poor with no credit history, collateral, or steady income an opportunity to access microloans (Babajide 2011; Ihuagba, Bankong and Ebomuche 2014; Idris and Agbim 2015). In this section, informal and formal sources of finance available to poor women entrepreneurs in rural Nigeria are discussed.

9.5.1 Informal Sources

The findings of this study demonstrate that most rural women's financial capital was majorly from informal sources such as family/friends and local groups. The importance of informal finance has been identified in many previous studies (Agbo, Iroh and Ihemezie 2015; Amakom and Amagwu 2020; Igwe, Newbery and Icha-Ituma 2018). This study focuses on poor rural women in Nigeria and identifies the main reasons for the preference of informal sources: ease of use, flexible repayment terms, less paperwork, no collateral, interest-free or very low interest, quick responses and personal relationships. These conditions make borrowing

informal credit more attractive and give rural women peace of mind as it takes into account their vulnerability. However, as this study indicates, in extreme poverty, informal sources such as family and friends are not always able to help due to lack given that most families in this region are living in extreme poverty (Chukwu 2012). The informal sources of finance remain largely inadequate to finance the micro-businesses run by poor rural women (Kadiri 2012). This makes it difficult for poor rural women entrepreneurs to take advantage of business opportunities; in particular, most businesses in rural areas are seasonal. This finding suggests the need for a structured, targeted and regulated programme such as microfinance to meet rural women's need for finance.

9.5.2 Formal Source of Finance - Microfinance

Existing literature acknowledges the significant impact of microfinance on the income and economic security of women entrepreneurs (Afrin and Islam 2010; Idris and Agbim 2015). Microfinance has been found to support women's business start-up and productivity (Idris and Agbim, 2015). This research, however, suggests that the participation of poor rural women in microfinance is low. The low participation of rural women can be attributed to several factors including, MFIs terms and conditions, limited numbers of microfinance institutions and distant location from rural villages in South-East Nigeria. Importantly, the findings of this study show that many rural women entrepreneurs are reluctant to borrow from microfinance despite the potential usefulness of microfinance services in women's entrepreneurship. The reasons why the poorest, most disadvantaged group, women micropreneurs in rural Nigeria do not engage in microfinance seem to revolve around their perceptions and experiences and are discussed in the next section.

9.6 Rural Women's Perception of Microfinance

This section summarises the findings on research question 5: How do rural women perceive microfinance? The perceptions or attitudes of a person toward financial services can have a large influence on their decision to engage or not (Caglayan et al. 2020; Roy, Kesharwani and Bisht 2012). This current study reveals that perception remains a major issue influencing the participation of microfinance among rural women in South-East Nigeria. This study takes a phenomenological viewpoint to provide an understanding of how poor rural women perceive microfinance.

9.6.1 Microfinance: Pathway to improved wellbeing

In this study, several rural women entrepreneurs view microfinance as a pathway to improved wellbeing. Specifically, as they believe that accessing loans from microfinance affords them the opportunity to boost their business, pay school fees or health services and achieve economic stability. Accessing such loans was not possible with traditional banks because rural women were excluded from formal financial institutions (Anyanwu 2014; CBN 2019) and considered as 'unqualified' because they are low-income earners, lack collateral such as land, seek for microloans, have no credit history and uneducated to understand the bureaucratic system of traditional banks (Jack and Roland 2016).

Aslam, Kumar and Sorooshian (2020) found that participant borrowers with microfinance get enough funds and may not need to seek alternative sources as they have stable income-expenditure patterns. This study, however, finds that rural women who took out loans from microfinance had to rely on moneylenders when they struggled to meet microfinance repayments. Clearly, the study by Aslam, Kumar and Sorooshian (2020) did not consider the effect of extreme

poverty, institutional voids, and the attendant socio-cultural constraints that the poor rural women in this context encounter. Also, the respondents in the current study face seasonal fluctuations, trade shocks and market uncertainties which have devastating effects on their microbusinesses and income. Notwithstanding, the narratives of non-participant borrowers (i.e., those without access to microloans) appear to be worse than participant borrowers who engage in microfinance.

9.6.2 Microfinance: Easy to understand and Access

Literature has suggested that microfinance is simple in terms of its operations (CBN 2005, 2019; Iorchir 2006) and less bureaucratic (Chibundu, 2016). In the context of this study, the findings reveal that only 12 participants with some degree of education find microfinance easy to access and understand how microfinance works. This is because they were able to read, write and communicate in English, which is the official language used in microfinance operations. It seems their socio-economic status helped them to perform some basic tasks such as fill application forms, understand and communicate with MFI staff. On the contrary, most of the participants who cannot read or write as they have little or no formal education held a different view, and they were not able to and reluctant to participate in microfinance.

Given that the poor women did not have a property to use as collateral, they explored the option of joining an MFI accredited group so that they can access loans without requiring land as collateral. Despite the perception of ease of use by a few rural women, they need support to understand the technical terms and conditions (e.g. interest rate charged by microfinance).

9.6.3 Microfinance: Reliable source of loans

Poor financial and managerial performance contribute to the instability of some financial sources (Akinlabi et al. 2011; Ifelunini and Wosowei 2013), which led to customers losing their savings and livelihoods (Ulrich and Hoback 2014). Microfinance, as a regulated financial source, is considered more reliable (CBN 2005; 2019). This study notes how some rural women saw microfinance as a safe and secure source where they could save and borrow loans for their business. The perception of microfinance as a favourable intervention hinges on its ability to aid entrepreneurial activities and poverty alleviation (Aslam, Kumar and Sorooshian 2020). While access to microfinance by some rural women entrepreneurs has not translated into significant prosperity, they indicated that it had enabled them to support their business and attend to their family's needs. However, many rural women had a contrary view about microfinance, as discussed in the following section.

9.6.4 Microfinance: Not for the poor

The study shows that most of the rural women entrepreneurs viewed microfinance as an intervention for the rich and the educated. This perception stems from the requirements for accessing microfinance which does not consider rural women circumstances. These requirements include possession of assets such as land, established business up to a year, salaried employment, savings account in the bank, a suitable guarantor (usually male), and the ability to make weekly pre-loan deposits. Clearly, these demanding requirements are "out of reach" for most of the rural women given that they have large families with huge responsibilities, low incomes, very small-scale businesses, and low literacy. Hence, rural women entrepreneurs see themselves being excluded from microfinance as they are unable to meet the criteria for access. In addition, the language used for delivering

microfinance services and conducting transactions is non-indigenous to many rural women because of their low literacy, they perceive microfinance as not for them. Low literacy makes the process of borrowing a huge challenge (Bradley et al. 2012; Pandula 2011; Umemezia and Osifo 2018). The need for MFIs to deliver custom-tailored services that consider the literacy and capability of the target audience cannot be overemphasised. The most disadvantaged and impoverished groups such as rural women tend to benefit less from microfinance without such adaptations to the microfinance services in rural areas (Ukanwa, Xiong and Anderson 2017).

9.6.5 Microfinance: Issue of trust

The findings of this study revealed that some rural women perceived microfinance as untrustworthy because the microfinance information they received was not from the traditional sources (that is, the village rulers and religious leaders) which they (rural women) trust. Specifically, in rural areas, important information to rural dwellers is usually disseminated via traditional channels, which is aimed at safeguarding the community (especially rural women) from being exploited (see Long 2009). However, streamlining access to important information to traditional channels only could mean that rural women might be deprived of accessing useful information from other sources. Clearly, microfinance in rural Nigeria suffered from a bad reputation in the past, but that was before the microfinance policy framework in Nigeria was restructured. The restructuring of the framework in 2011 enacted stricter measures which include more rigorous monitoring, more frequent audit and credit control, and procedures to encourage more transparent services to limit malpractices (CBN 2011, 2019). However, if the service users are not reassured about the new measures put in place, they are unlikely to use it.

Furthermore, this study shows that some rural women are doubtful of MFI because of the loss of their savings when the MFI they patronised closed unannounced. The negative experience affected other rural women's perception of microfinance due to the hardship that these women suffered because of their loss.

9.6.6 Microfinance: Perceived Risks

Many rural women perceive microfinance as a great risk that can lead to irreversible loss. This perception stems from the fear of losing their livelihood in the event of default in repayment and the terms of service delivery in rural Nigeria. MFI does not allow additional time for the repayments even in the event of unforeseeable shocks like illness. This creates enormous fear of borrowing through Microfinance because the failure to repay can lead to confiscation of property, harassment, sanctions and stigmatisation. Thus, many rural women entrepreneurs feared that conflict could arise within the family when such penalties occur. Given that rural women cannot predict the future, the fear of losing everything should they default is real and one that many of them cannot set aside.

Women are more likely to forgo activities they perceive as risky even if such offer higher potentials (or returns) because they are risk-averse (Buvinić and Furst-Nichols 2016; Fletschner and Kenney 2014). The study shows that due to the huge family responsibilities, security challenges and the lack of welfare system most rural women fear that they may be unable to pay back the loan within the prescribed time as they cannot guarantee not diverting the money to meet other family needs. Rural women generally avoid taking micro-loans so that they do not spend it on family pressing needs and then get trapped in perpetual poverty (Christiaensen and Subbarao 2005) or indebtedness (Taylor 2011). This concern

is not baseless given the security issues in Nigeria (Uzodinma 2018), and the extreme poverty in the region. Taylor (2011) suggests that the poorest in society may utilise microfinance to tackle impromptu emergencies and could get stuck in indebtedness.

9.6.7 Microfinance: Distant Location

There is no doubt that MFIs are disproportionately concentrated in urban areas with limited branches located in rural areas (Acha 2012; Ihugba, Bankong and Ebomuche, 2013). MFI exists in some rural areas; they have usually sited far away from the remote rural communities where they are needed most. Therefore, MFIs remain scarce in rural areas (Ihugba, Bankong and Ebomuche, 2013). The location of microfinance outside the reach of rural women entrepreneurs negatively impacts their access to, and perception of microfinance services.

This study shows that rural women travel a minimum of two hours to access MFI services. This requires extra time and money to cover the transportation costs considering their financial vulnerability and large household responsibilities. Microfinance is generally regarded as one of the plausible engines of poverty reduction and development in rural areas (Ihugba, Bankong and Ebomuche, 2013; Mohammed 2020). However, this study suggests that microfinance is often outside the reach of poor women entrepreneurs in rural Nigeria.

9.7 Rural Women's Experience of Microfinance

This section summarises the findings on research question 6: What are the experiences of rural women about microfinance? Previous literature suggests that microfinancing is considered as a tool that can enhance women entrepreneurship

and offers a solution to alleviate poverty and its related problems (Bansal and Singh 2019; Umemezia and Osifo 2018). The literature emphasises the supply side; however, little is known about the experiences of poor rural women borrowers in deep-rooted poverty. This study bridges this gap and provides insight into how poor rural women in Nigeria experience microfinance.

9.7.1 Repeated access to Microloans and Savings

This study shows that some (12) rural women entrepreneurs were able to borrow repeatedly, which is not possible with other sources of finance, for example, the borrowing from local groups. Among rural women entrepreneurs, regular cash flow is vital to meet their business and family needs. Microfinance reduced the difficulty of insufficient cash they experienced using informal sources such as local group “Akawo”. However, repeated borrowing is only available on the condition that a borrower is consistent in repaying their microloans, given the restricted repayments and the penalties.

The inclusion of a compulsory savings element by the MFI accommodates the rural family business ideology where family and business funds are viewed as one pot. Clearly, even though the loan may be taken out to support the business, the repayment and the compulsory savings are treated as a lump sum which goes towards settling the loan component. Rural women entrepreneurs have to save on a weekly basis when using microfinance services. The compulsory saving method affords rural women the opportunity to cope with shocks, have savings to boost their business, build up assets, and for future consumption. Karlan (2014) indicates that the lack of savings or under-saving can have serious welfare consequences in low-income settings whereby families will be unable to cope with

shocks. Thus, saving is a useful element in situations of extreme poverty (Shenbhagavadivu and Sreenidhi, 2020).

While some rural Nigerian women found MFIs approach to saving helpful, others complained that the compulsory savings element in the MFI put a huge burden on them as they do not even have enough to deal with their daily pressing family demands, let alone to save for the rainy days. Nigerian rural women struggle to put aside something from their meagre income for the future when there are overwhelming and often urgent needs at hand.

9.7.2 Unpredictable loan disbursement

Nigerian rural women report the delay in granting loan and the uncertainty associated with loan disbursement from MFIs. This study shows that there is no clear timeline on when loans are approved and disbursed. Onuwa et al. (2020) argue that timeliness in the process of granting loans and disbursement will allow borrowers timely access to the loan. This study suggests that the uncertainty affects when, how and what rural women can use the loan for considering that their business opportunities are seasonal. When the business opportunities for which the loans are required lapses before the loan is disbursed, there is a greater possibility that the loan would be used for other purposes. In most cases, they divert these loans to resolve other issues that are not directly related to their business which often affects their ability to repay and could increase their indebtedness.

9.7.3 Unsuitable repayment terms

This study indicates that microfinance institutions required loans to be repaid in instalments with compulsory savings and interest rate inclusive over the repayment period. Poor rural women find the frequency (i.e., weekly) that they are required to repay microloan extremely daunting as it can cause them to incur debt because of having to borrow from other sources (e.g. moneylenders). The severity of the poverty and family responsibility that these women are faced with makes interest payments such extra burden unbearable for many. Although these rigid repayment schedules help to protect MFIs against defaults (Bauer, Chytilova and Morduch 2012), the context of these rural women (e.g. extreme poverty, market uncertainty and lack of support) makes it a difficult experience for them.

The first repayment after taking out the microfinance loans given to rural women entrepreneurs is just a week. This inflexibility is too stringent and unrealistic, given that rural microbusinesses are mostly seasonal, irregular incomes, and family responsibilities. Field et al. (2012) argue that rigid repayments limit the borrower's ability to deal with income shocks, especially where there is a high degree of the income variance.

Clearly, the lack of flexibility of repayment does not provide for contingencies and the interruptions that characterise life in poverty. In fact, some of the participants noted that allowing a couple of payment holidays or monthly repayment could make a tremendous impact on how they benefit from microfinance.

9.7.4 Unprofessional conduct of MFI Staff

The findings of this research show that poor rural women were ill-treated by the staff of MFIs when there is a delay in repayment, including verbal assault, threats and public humiliation deployed by MFIs to maximise loan repayment rates. Affected rural women were urged by their families to stop participating in MFI due to the unbearable humiliation and shame brought upon the family. While MFI officials may have to take a firm stand to recover their loans, they should do so with courtesy and professionalism (Engel and Pedersen 2019; Sunitha 2020). MFIs should be conscious of the hardship and the interruptions that these women may be exposed to, some of which they have little control over (e.g. adverse weather conditions) and should expect that a few payments may be missed.

9.7.5 Costs Associated with Microfinance

This research suggests that the costs associated with microfinance are not only the interests charged on loans but also the transportation, time spent in group meetings, visiting MFIs and monitoring group members (joint liability). The cost associated with engaging in microfinance is high and challenging, given their busy lives and limited financial resources. Lindvert et al. (2019) highlight that microfinance borrowers incur costs, including travelling to the MFI branch, time spent in meetings, and finding other group members. This cost (e.g. transportation) is deducted from the actual loan borrowed, which reduces the amount of loan they can invest in the business. The high cost of transportation in rural areas reflects the poor state of rural roads, especially during bad weather.

Also, financial services that encourage compulsory attendance to meetings are less suitable to women as it competes with their time for other family

responsibilities (Raju 2020). Some women walk for miles to reduce the cost of travel (but of course, the trade-off is the time spent on the journey). Additionally, joint liability adds to the costs of microfinance for users in a microfinance group as the time rural women spend monitoring members could have been used in their own business activity. Although group lending increases rural women's chance of securing microloans, additional costs may be incurred in the event of a default. Every group member is liable for their peers' loans. Thus, peer monitoring is used as it lowers the default risk and provides a means to assess loan utilisation and group cohesiveness (Sangwana, Nayaka and Samantab 2020). However, this study finds that participants complained that monitoring members of their group against loan defaults add additional stress to rural women.

Furthermore, this study discovered that most rural women who use microfinance do not understand how interest rate works. This is due to their low financial literacy. Nonetheless, they reported the interest charged on loans is high. The women compare the interest amount from MFIs with those from other sources (e.g. local group). The costs associated with microfinance ranging from transport costs, time spent on meetings/monitoring members, interests payable on loans, and joint liability create an additional burden to rural women and their microbusinesses.

9.7.6 Insufficient MFI Services in Rural Areas

The findings of this study indicate that the services provided by MFIs in Nigerian rural areas are minimal as they only offer savings and microloans. Other services that are available in urban settings such as micro-insurance, training and money

transfer (CBN 2019) are not available in rural settings. Insurance could be useful because rural women's micro-businesses are characterised by great risks and uncertainty. Thus, unexpected losses to their businesses and families can be grave and irreversible. Sinha et al. (2007) opine that insurance protects women and their families from being called upon to repay an outstanding debt in case of death or critical illness. Therefore, one would expect that microinsurance would be a major service that is available to rural women entrepreneurs. Additionally, this study shows that rural women entrepreneurs participating in microfinance do not receive the necessary training to equip them with skills such as loan management, business management and budgeting. Training helps entrepreneurs to acquire entrepreneurial skills and strategies that can enable them to be successful in their business (Galloway et al. 2005; Sherif, Galloway and Zarrouk 2019). The lack of any MFI provision for insurance and training services appears to reduce the benefits of microfinance.

9.8 Why Rural Women Benefit Less from Microfinance

This section summarises the findings related to the research question 7: Why do the poorest, most disadvantaged group – rural Nigerian women benefit less from microfinance? Previous studies evidenced that 54 million of Nigeria's females live in rural areas, and most of them live in poverty (Idris 2015; Mbanasor et al. 2013; Oluyombo and Jallow 2013; UNPF 2012). Nigerian rural women face a myriad of challenges in society, including limited access to resources, education and employment opportunities. These challenges become heightened by poverty. Having a larger family increases the pressure to provide and care, especially where the family is both the consumption and the production unit (Xiong, Ukanwa and

Anderson 2018). Combined with limited resources, few income sources and illiteracy, microfinance is unattractive to rural Nigerian women in this context.

The findings show that there is a lack of formal institutions and infrastructural facilities to support a well-functioning economy in rural areas. This institutional void further reduces rural women's ability to access microfinance, as there are limited MFIs in rural areas (Acha 2012). The absence of MFI branches in remote villages excludes the poorest of the poor (rural women) who are out of reach of formal institutions. Few MFIs are located far away from remote communities. Furthermore, this study shows that cultural discrimination with respect to property rights, education and decision making add to poor rural women's inability to benefit from microfinance. As discussed earlier, rural Nigerian women have limited possession of livelihood assets. With limited access to assets like land or education, utilising microfinance to support rural women's business becomes a challenge. Absence of resources to cope with uncertainties increases the vulnerability of rural women. Trends, seasonality, and shocks further constrain rural women and make engaging in microfinance difficult. Additionally, the study shows that the perception of rural women considerably impacts their participation in microfinance. Similarly, their experience of microfinance determines their continued participation or otherwise. It is clear that those rural Nigerian women with negative perceptions are reluctant to use microfinance, while those with negative experiences are more likely to discontinue their participation.

In sum, the study shows that poor rural women entrepreneurs benefit less from microfinance because they fear that borrowing from microfinance could get them trapped in irrecoverable indebtedness, which could mean that they lose everything. Being at the base of the pyramid, this fear is justified as their family

responsibilities in the face of extreme poverty means that loans may be diverted to meet other family needs. Furthermore, given their low and variable income and the rigid loan repayment terms, rural women may struggle to meet up with the repayments, which could lead to grave consequences, including the loss of their livelihood. It is worth noting that illiteracy, extreme poverty and socio-cultural constraints such as limited access to property rights partly contribute to why poor rural women entrepreneurs benefit less from microfinance.

9.9 Summary of Chapter Nine

The chapter discusses how informal institutions of culture and family shape the entrepreneurial activities of rural women microbusinesses and participation in microfinance. The chapter highlights the cultural barriers and constraints that rural women face in their day-to-day lives and in accessing microfinance. Rural women are living in remote villages which are out of reach of formal institutions. As a result of the absence or weakened formal institutions in rural areas, informal institutions step up to fill the void. Amongst these informal institutions, the family is paramount and so dictates the 'rule of the game'. Informal institutions dictate what type of business rural women could engage in and the markets they could access. The economic activities of these poor rural women were impacted, influenced and shaped by the institutions of culture and family considering the constraints it forces these women to operate under.

Poor rural women have constrained access to livelihood assets which has severe implications on their micro-enterprising. Following the socio-cultural constraints, poor rural women were denied access to formal education, thereby fanning the flame of female poverty through illiteracy. Rural women are not entitled to own property, as it is culturally conceived as a male privilege. The social arrangements in patriarchal rural societies determine women's roles and assign responsibilities and family obligations to them. Given the responsibilities and obligations (providing and caring for their family) of rural women, shocks, trends, and seasonality posed a considerable threat to their survival as their effects have a longer-lasting impact on them. The vulnerability context of rural women meant that some losses and risks exacerbate their already dire and irreversible consequences. The interlocked interaction between rural women's family and microbusinesses further buttress the inseparable nature of this socio-economic

unit. It is best seen as one entity (at least from the eyes of these women) than just as an overlapping system (involving two components).

Microfinance is seen as an effective tool for improving women's livelihoods (Bansal and Singh, 2019). However, rural women entrepreneurs have varying perceptions and experiences about it, and this hampers meaningful participation. Hence, there is still much to be done to encourage more rural women to participate and benefit from microfinance, as many of them saw it as a great risk that can lead to irreversible loss. Although microfinance provides them with the opportunity to save and repeatedly access loans, it is found that rural Nigerian women have negative experiences such as the inflexible repayment period and compulsory savings. Understanding the perceptions and experiences of rural women will enable MFIs to provide tailor-made services that better support them in their businesses and livelihoods. These factors contribute to why rural women benefit less from microfinance.

CHAPTER TEN: CONCLUSIONS, CONTRIBUTION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

10.1 Introduction

This chapter reflects on the research objectives and the major findings as presented in the preceding chapters. Also, the contributions, limitations, recommendations and suggestions for future research are presented. Before proceeding, a recap of the research problem that this study sets out to address is discussed.

This study sets out to investigate how poor rural women entrepreneurs perceive and experience microfinance services in rural Nigeria; and why this poorest, most disadvantaged group benefits less from microfinance. In addressing this problem, the study examines sources of finance available to poor women in Nigerian rural settings. Specifically, the study explores how the institution of culture and family influence rural women's entrepreneurship. It also seeks to identify the various livelihood strategies adopted by rural women, the livelihood assets they lack or have and their livelihood outcomes. Moreover, the study seeks to understand how seasonality, trends and shocks impact poor rural women's micro-businesses and how they survive in the context of extreme poverty and constrained resources.

It is estimated that about 54 million Nigerian women live in poverty, and that constitutes roughly a third of the Nigerian population (UNPF 2012). Recent research (Obayelu and Chime 2020) noted that more women lived in rural Nigeria than in the urban, and they were excluded financially due to economic negligence.

Although there have been many poverty alleviation initiatives such as National Poverty Programme (NAPEP), Youth Empowerment Scheme (YES) and Rural Infrastructural Development Scheme (RIDS) in Nigeria, most of these initiatives have failed to deliver the anticipated economic relief and empowerment for women in rural areas (Ihugba et al. 2013; Zaid and Popoola 2010). Previous studies suggest that much more investigation is required to develop an understanding of the socio-cultural elements and related factors that have made the poorest, disadvantaged group (the rural women) to benefit less from such interventions (Asogwa 2012; Ihugba et al. 2013; Obayelu and Chime 2020; Zaid and Popoola 2010). It has been widely recognised that the provision of microfinance can enable the poor to engage in income-generating activities or expand their microbusinesses (Awolabi 2019). Consequently, given the predominance of poverty in rural South-East Nigeria (Chukwu 2012) and the complex socio-cultural context of these women, this research sought to understand how informal institutions of culture and family influence rural women's entrepreneurship in extreme poverty. Additionally, the study sought to develop deeper insight into rural women's perception and experience of microfinance and the implications for their microbusinesses.

Existing literature largely focuses on the macro-level impact of microfinance in Nigeria and usually report their findings from the perspective of the microfinance institutions (Abubakar 2020; Acha 2012; Ogujiuba, Jumare and Stiegler 2013), this study leverages sustainable livelihood theory to understand the perception and experience of microfinance from poor rural women's account. It was considered crucial to utilise semi-structured interviews guided by sustainable

livelihood (SL) constructs. SL framework enables the study to identify the livelihood strategies and practices employed by poor rural women, their objectives and outcomes anticipated as well as the available assets deployed in responding entrepreneurially.

This chapter is structured as follows. Section 10.2 presents a reflection on objectives. Section 10.3 discusses the contribution to knowledge. Section 10.4 provides recommendations based on the findings of this study. Section 10.5 identifies limitations and areas for further research. Section 10.6 summarises the chapter.

10.2 Reflection on Objectives

This section reflects on how the objectives of the study have been achieved. This study interviewed thirty rural women entrepreneurs who respond entrepreneurially to survive in rural South-East Nigeria characterised with extreme poverty, limited infrastructural and institutional support. Using the sustainable livelihood theory, it employed an exploratory, qualitative in-depth interview-based approach that sought to identify the views of the poor women taking full account of socio-cultural factors like property ownership, access to education and gender roles. This enabled the researcher to understand and gather deeper insight into the context of rural women business owners, their perception and experience of microfinance and subsequent outcomes.

1) To understand how the institutions of family and culture shape poor women's micropreneurship and where family responsibility and economic activities are closely intertwined

This study found that rural women micropreneurs and their microbusinesses are remote, physically distant, from formal institutions. Given this remoteness and the prevalence of informal institutions, this institutional void is filled by informal institutions such as family and culture. Thus, the day-to-day activities and business operations of these women are hugely influenced (and in some cases, determined) by informal institutions. Traditional practices in rural areas restrict the ownership of land and access to property/inheritance rights to males. This means that rural women cannot inherit their family lands (Nadasen 2012) but can only access it with the permission of their husbands, which leaves them dependent on their husbands, regardless of the husband's behaviour. These practices have severe implications on rural women's access to collateral (for loans) and livelihood assets for their business operations.

Furthermore, culture and traditions not only determined what livelihood assets these women had access to but also dictated what livelihood strategies they could adopt in their struggle for survival. The stereotyping of businesses meant that women are limited to women-oriented businesses such as tailoring, hairdressing, farming and cooked food business, and must be approved by some male figure. In fact, entrepreneurial decisions like "What loan amount to apply for?" "Which markets to access?", must be made by the man even though the microbusiness is run by the woman. The findings of this study show that despite these oppressive

sets of rules, rural women remain committed to their dreams of 'not folding their hands to watch their children die of hunger'. This commitment propels them to keep going despite all the odds thrown at them.

This study revealed that culture did not only determine access to land but also apportioned roles based on gender. This method of allocating duties does not consider the capability and availability of women. The findings of this study confirmed that patriarchal practices not only assign roles based on gender but also dictated the way those roles were carried out. For example, domestic chores and caring for the members of the family are assigned to rural Nigerian women. Men are designated as the head of the home and so should provide for their families, yet this study found that putting food on the table was the responsibility of rural women. With all these cultural obligations and family responsibilities, they consider engaging in micro businesses to ensure that their family survives, and they provide for their families with very scarce resources. They wear these different hats of caring for the family, carrying out domestic chores and putting food on the table.

Traditional practices in rural settings discriminate against women, and these practices tend to value the education of male children over the females, and so many rural women are illiterate; the prevailing culture never gave them a chance to attend formal education. Rural women were encouraged to stay at home and learn how to be a good homemaker from their mothers so that they can become 'good wives' to their husbands. The limited education has negative effects on their micro business as most of them cannot read or write, have limited knowledge of financial and business management which place a cap on the heights they can

attain. Thankfully, as indicated by the findings of this work, these rural women are determined to ensure that their children get a good education as a long-term plan to improve future opportunities for their families.

Nevertheless, given that the women went into micro-businesses as a survival strategy, their primary focus is to provide for their families; hence, the family is central to their micro-business operations. The centrality of the family, also referred to as familiness means that the family is responsible for production as well as consumption - an inseparable unit. That is, on the one hand, the proceeds from the business are spent on the family, yet on the other hand, the family makes resources available and are also involved in running the business. The resources that family bring to rural women's microbusiness include unpaid labour, vital information, moral support (especially from the children), financial resources and access to family land. Conversely, some of the family responsibilities that the business helps to meet include children's school fees, healthcare and hospital bills, food and other basic needs.

Objective 2: To examine the perception and experience of poor rural entrepreneurial women on microfinance in a context of extreme poverty

This study showed that most poor rural women perceived microfinance negatively. These poor women believed that microfinance was not for the poor and illiterate; they narrated various fears and risks that they linked to microfinance, including the risk of slipping into irrecoverable indebtedness. In their view, the stringent repayment policies coupled with their persistent poverty and family responsibilities presented potential bottlenecks in the timely repayment of the loans. Some

perceptions were derived from word of mouth through their social network in the villages. For example, one microfinance participant recounted the pressure she felt when repaying microloans because of the inflexible repayment terms.

Several of the rural Nigerian women who considered microfinance as easy to understand, a reliable source of loans and a pathway to improved wellbeing had up to secondary school education. Those who perceived microfinance positively were found to be participating in microfinance (at least, at the time of the study) and gave positive testimony of their experience using microfinance. The ease of use of microfinance, simple saving techniques and repeated opportunity to borrow loans were identified as positive experiences. Microfinance participation appeared to have enabled these rural women to develop useful saving habits through the mandatory savings regime embedded into MFI's loan repayment, although some women felt this policy put more burdens on them considering their context of extreme poverty, seasonality, market uncertainty and huge family responsibilities. The possibility to take out multiple loans was reported to have a positive effect on the women as it afforded them the opportunity to expand their businesses, improve family wellbeing and make valuable contributions to their families and communities.

On the other hand, critical negative experiences that affected rural women were revealed, including delays in loan disbursement, indebtedness due to non-flexible loan repayment terms, uncompassionate-treatment from MFI staff and high transaction costs associated with microfinance in rural areas. These negative experiences impacted the women's microbusiness, for example, the delays and

unpredictability in loan disbursement meant that rural women ran the risk of not using the loan for the intended purpose as the opportunity they planned to seize may have expired before the fund is released. Therefore, the loan may get caught up in other family responsibilities which are not necessarily urgent or, if put into another income-generating activity, may not yield commensurate returns within the timeframe set for repayment. These situations were found to increase the worries and indebtedness of these women. In fact, the study suggests that the non-flexible loan repayment arrangement of microfinance forced some rural Nigerian women to borrow from other sources such as moneylenders to repay the loan and therefore resulted in the indebtedness.

3) To understand why the poorest, most disadvantaged group – rural Nigerian women – benefit less from microfinance

This research demonstrated that most rural women entrepreneurs in Nigeria had negative perceptions of microfinance as they described fears and great risks associated with microfinance. Rural women in Nigeria live in abject poverty (Idris 2015; Mbanasor et al. 2013; Okojie et al. 2009; Oluyombo and Jallow 2013; Ozoh et al. 2020) and the participants of microfinance believed that microfinance could worsen their poor state and cause indebtedness; hence, they were reluctant to participate. Some of these negative perceptions were reinforced by experience or the word of mouth of other rural women in their social circle.

The study suggests that cultural practices and primitive traditions hindered poor rural women from engaging in microfinance. For example, the culture in South-

East Nigeria meant that a woman could not decide that she needs a loan for her business and therefore stake a piece of land as collateral. As discussed in Chapter 9, rural women are forbidden from inheriting landed properties which can be used as collateral. The lack of any appreciable assets that are necessary for stable production and the absence of institutional support in the area contribute to why rural women entrepreneurs are benefiting less from microfinance. Additionally, the study revealed that institutional arrangements ranging from unfavourable MFI policies, terms and conditions for participating in microfinance, non-flexible repayment plans, lack of training and poor infrastructural support (e.g. road network) created barriers that hampered poor rural women from participating in microfinance.

This study suggests that most rural women had low literacy due to little or no formal education, and there were no opportunities for training in business and financial management. Besides, there were very few microfinance institutions in rural areas (Acha 2012), and these branches were mostly found at the local government headquarters far away from most villages in rural areas. Many rural women, therefore, were not aware of microfinance's existence and lacked the knowledge of how it worked. Most of the rural women patronised the informal sources of finance within their localities but reported the informal sources were inadequate. The findings of this study showed that there is poor access to microfinance services by rural women micro-entrepreneurs. Although there have been efforts to study the importance of microfinance on women entrepreneurship development (Anyanwu, Ananwude and Nnoje 2018; Fowowe 2017; Idris 2015; Sanusi 2012), little is known about rural women entrepreneurs' perception and experience of microfinance which plays a key role in microfinance participation.

10.3 Contribution to Knowledge

This study made three main contributions namely methodological, theoretical and practical and policy contributions as discussed below.

10.3.1 Methodological contributions.

This exploratory research employed qualitative methodology in investigating rural women's perceptions and experiences of microfinance in rural South-East Nigeria. This study presents a major advancement from previous efforts to investigate microfinance and women in Nigeria, especially in terms of the research methods adopted. Most of the previous studies have utilised quantitative methods (e.g. Anyanwu, Ananwude and Nnoje 2018; Taiwo and Mike 2020). As such, they lose the fine grain of individual experiences and details of context (Anderson and Gaddefors 2017). This study conducted focus groups with poor rural women entrepreneurs and followed on with in-depth interviews to explore the space further. This approach enriches the research with contextually embedded data. This context-aware exploratory investigation goes a step further from existing studies to explain how most disadvantaged rural women entrepreneurs themselves view microfinance and what their experiences are.

This study offered methodological contributions by establishing the fact that understanding an individual's perception and experience of microfinance must be from the viewpoint of that individual. This helps to increase understanding what they appreciate or are concerned about. For example, the study investigated the influence of informal institutions (family and culture) on poor rural women's

micropreneurship. This is an area that many studies have neglected despite the implications that informal institutions have on these women. The current study has not only investigated this niche but has carefully made informed recommendations to ameliorate it. Additionally, adopting an interpretive approach in this study ensured that the findings capture exactly what the women intended to convey. Hence, the researcher chose a study area that she had substantial knowledge of the context.

This study focuses on the perception and experience of poor women in rural Nigeria on microfinance. The exploration of microfinance services that rural women utilised resulted in understanding that many MFIs do not offer training and insurance services in their rural branches. When this question was posed to the MFI staff, it was indicated that the lack of infrastructure and poor government funding meant that they could not offer such services in rural settings. One would expect that services like training and insurance could be a game-changer for rural women entrepreneurs who mostly have little or no formal education and prone to irrevocable losses due to shocks, respectively. Unfortunately, such services are not in a place where they are most needed. Therefore, this study brings to the fore, blind spots of the microfinance intervention as it highlights the viewpoints of the users since most extant literature has focused on the microfinance institutions and the supply of microfinance services in general (Abubakar 2020; Acha 2012; Afolabi, Obamuyi and Egbetunde 2020; Ogujiuba, Jumare and Stiegler 2013).

10.3.2 Contribution to Theory

The major theoretical contribution of this study stems from the notion that in extremely resource-poor environments like rural Africa, family functions as a socialised and inseparable business unit. In such extreme settings, western theories about family business do not capture the complexities presented by extreme poverty; hence, their explanatory power is limited. This study examines the centrality of family and culture embedded in family relationships, and how that shapes the way family-centred microbusinesses respond. Specifically, this study develops a better understanding of how the institution of family and culture plays out in shaping the practices of family microbusinesses in resource-scarce settings. In the absence of formal institutions, poor women entrepreneurs cannot depend on support from the government; besides other formal institutions such as market and financial services are far removed from them. Hence, the family becomes an institutionalised artefact that subjects women's entrepreneurial practices to the family's norms.

This institutional arrangement has implications on the possibilities for rural women regarding livelihood choices and how their businesses are run. The family and allied cultural practices facilitate women's livelihood and constrains their entrepreneurship and the potential to transform it. The notion of a socialised family business entity does not consider business and family as two separate entities, rather sees them as one unit; the family is the business, and so brings resources such as unpaid labour and start-up money for the business, and conversely, the business is the family and so liberally provides for the needs of family members. In this sense, the family is both the production and the

consumption unit; hence, both the family and the business operate from one pot of funding, and their functions are intertwined and inseparable.

Though this theoretical perspective differs from the viewpoint of a conventional family business, it provides an alternative model for the family business which accounts for the reality experienced by poor, resource-constrained and marginalised women who prioritise survival and meeting family needs above business growth and profit maximisation. This theoretical stance emphasizes that it is possible and, in fact, important, to conceptualise family and business as one indivisible social-economic entity in the context of rural poverty and scarce resources. Hitherto, micro-entrepreneurship in poverty has not been well explained using traditional theories, particularly economical (Bruton et al. 2013; Kantor 2002); but the theoretical perspective presented in this study captures poor rural women's commitment to 'opportunities' that respond to uncertainties, vulnerabilities and 'realities'. Though poor women's entrepreneurial ambition is modest, it transforms their current realities into improved alternatives through effectuation (Sarasvathy 2001). Arguably, institutional arrangements that surround poor rural women entrepreneurs can remake and reshape their institutional environment through familiness. Hence, SLF might be enhanced in the future by taking into account the centrality of family in poor women's micropreneurship in the context of extreme poverty and limited resources.

10.3.3. Contribution to Practice

This study contributed to practice through the identification of the perceptions and experiences of rural women entrepreneurs about microfinance which shed light on key constraints/barriers rural women contend with. Highlighting these barriers that rural women face can be helpful in the planning and implementation of appropriate microfinance interventions, which are currently overlooked by microfinance programmes (Afrin and Ahmed 2019; Ayele 2015; Bradley et al. 2012; Ike 2012). For example, the repayment plan of MFIs was rigid as it puts significant pressure on rural women. This calls for a change of microfinance policy for a more flexible repayment method, at least in rural settings. There is evidence that one of the key difficulties that rural women experience in microfinance is the fact that repayment terms for microloans are insensitive to the uncertainties and shocks that vulnerable women face. Thus, it is believed that if repayment terms are relaxed to include repayment holidays, for example, then poor rural women may be more favourably disposed to microfinance as opposed to the fear that it could lead to irreparable loss. The awareness and understanding of rural women's perceptions and experiences of microfinance can inform the key aspect that should be addressed in future development and implementation of microfinance. The key to improved microfinance service delivery may thus revolve around knowing the customer (McCarter 2006). This study presented new insights that rural women entrepreneurs, policymakers, Nigerian Government, MFIs, organisations, and researchers would find important and useful. This is because it examined how poor rural women entrepreneurs perceive and experience microfinance and offered explanations into why they benefit less from microfinance. This study revealed that rural women's business production and consumption are intertwined and

conceptually indivisible. Therefore, any prospective support for poor women and their business must consider the centrality of family in their microbusinesses. This is because without accounting for the family in rural women's microbusinesses, any intervention from government or other institutional support such as microfinance may be inappropriately directed. The reason is rural women's microbusinesses are not only immersed in informal institutional arrangements, but their entrepreneurial activities are shaped and influenced by the family.

10.4 Recommendations

Following the main findings of this study, recommendations are put forward to the government, MFIs and other stakeholders.

10.4.1 Government

It is recommended that the government should provide a better operating environment for rural women and their microbusinesses. The provision and maintenance of basic social amenities and infrastructures such as banks, good roads, electricity supply, pipe-borne water, standard markets with modern facilities, good drainage would have a significantly positive impact on rural lives and their microbusinesses (Matthew et al. 2019; Nelson and Iboro 2010; Ozuru et al. 2016). South-East Nigeria is a rainforest zone with heavy rainfalls. Flooding due to inadequate drainage facility wreaks havoc on the farmlands, markets, and roads (Rocks et al. 2016), and this leads to poor yield, inaccessible markets, and high transport costs.

There is also an urgent need for the government to invest in education, especially in rural areas considering the low literacy among rural women. These should include building vocational centres for women to learn new skills in business management. The Nigerian government needs to initiate training courses to build women entrepreneurial skills which are essential for entrepreneurial advantage (Aliyu 2020; Galloway 2005; Sherif, Galloway and Zarrouk 2019). The government should also provide schools with qualified teachers and facilities such as libraries and laboratories at affordable fees. In this way, female children may no longer be asked to drop out for their brothers when parents are unable to afford the school fees of all their children. This will assist women in acquiring skills and knowledge that will empower them to effectively improve their lives and livelihood.

The government needs to pay attention to security, corruption, and law enforcement. For example, the government must invest in security to checkmate the killings, kidnappings and other hoodlums that are operating in Nigeria, especially the destruction of crops, properties and markets due to the activities of herdsmen in South-East (Uzodinma 2018). This will encourage women to go about their normal businesses without fear of being killed or harassed. The findings of this study also showed a lack of enforcement that has hindered implementation of policies that was developed to take care of women's needs, such as the equality policy. Sadly, women still lack equal opportunities in education, inheritance, and gender roles. Finally, this study has raised the awareness that the Nigerian government at all levels, that is, the local, state and federal government have a role to play. For instance, developing suitable policies specifically focussed on women's needs such as improved access to credit facilities, property ownership

and equal opportunities to education. The government needs to ensure its implementation through effective monitoring and enforcement agents.

10.4.2 Microfinance Institutions

MFIs fail to serve the poorest of the poor (Afrin and Ahmed 2019; Ayele 2015; Weiss and Montgomery 2005). Thus, this study sought to gain insight into how MFI services are perceived and experienced in rural settings and found that the poorest perceives microfinance loans as bait into irreversible indebtedness and perpetual poverty. The findings of this study serve as feedback from the service users (poor rural women) and could help them (MFIs) to tailor their services in a way that suits the needs of the people. For example, introducing repayment holidays which could help poor women to take some time off to respond to attendant shocks in their lives or families, and still, be able to repay their loans afterwards. MFI needs to know that women business and economic activities are closely intertwined and have an enormous impact on their microbusinesses and so training these women on financial matters and business management, especially in budgeting could help.

The modes of operation of MFIs in rural Nigeria were inflexible and unresponsive to the needs of poor rural women. For instance, loan disbursement and repayment patterns did not reflect seasonal fluctuations and market conditions. Therefore, rural women entrepreneurs were unable to benefit more from microfinance as they could not take advantage of the economic opportunities that need external finance. This study recommends a review of MFI operations in rural areas under extreme poverty with specific emphasis on the repayment interval. Other issues that should be considered by MFIs include the turnaround times between loan

application and the disbursement, access requirements in terms of collateral and high-interest rates. Informal lenders allow flexible repayment schedules in the rural areas (Collins et al. 2010; Imhonopi, Urim and Ajayi 2013; Ofoegbu 2013; Ogujiuba, Jumare and Stiegler 2013), and often permit repayment to coincide with periods when service users can raise the money to pay back, for example, harvest periods. This research identified that the flexibility and quick disbursement of loans by these local informal lenders are attractive to rural women although these lenders charge exorbitant interest rates (up to 40%) (Eja and Bassey 2011). The flexibility of repayments or the introduction of repayment holidays by MFIs could make a huge difference to poor rural women entrepreneurs, as the pressure posed by rigid repayment terms is abated.

Education and training are critical for women microentrepreneurs if they are to succeed. MFIs are recommended to organise frequent training for the rural community encouraging entrepreneurial thinking and development of transferable skills and strategies (Fulford and Lawan 2018; Galloway 2005; Sherif, Galloway and Zarrouk 2019). Topics such as record keeping, financial and business management can help rural women to acquire new skills and/or enhance existing ones. This research suggests that MFIs could use native dialect in providing their services to increase rural women's understanding and participation, given their limited formal education. It is also important to create more awareness in the rural areas about how microfinance works. This can be achieved through effective promo campaigns of MFI products to rural people using local channels such as going to the traditional rulers/village heads, attending churches and women groups to advertise their services. Most rural communities do not have functional amenities and infrastructure, utilising modern technology such as television,

internet and mobile devices to share such information would not reach rural women as most of them have no access to these. Another effective way to create awareness is by holding workshops or seminars during rural women's group meetings. MFIs could approach the village heads, and they can utilise appropriate means of information dissemination (like the town crier which is locally used to pass important information to rural dwellers).

MFIs are recommended to revisit some of their policies that are not favourable to women, for example, required collateral such as land which women do not have access to without a male figure. According to the information received from MFI staff, social collateral through group lending was accepted for registered group lending. However, most rural women were unaware of this and assumed that landed property was required as collateral, whether borrowing as a group or individual. Thus, awareness and clarification of the lending and borrowing requirements are important to increase participation. As noted by Riggins and Weber (2017) that distant lenders lack adequate information about their service users, MFIs need to be closer to the rural people in order to be aware of the culture and tradition of the people they are serving. This will enable MFI to provide a service that is tailored and fit for purpose. For instance, operating mobile banking could help to bring the service closer to the women and afford the MFI the chance to know the context of the people that they serve. Lastly, while MFI officials may need to be firm with their service users in order to limit loan default and encourage compliance, there is a need to adopt best practice and put an end to any kind of bullying, harassment or abuse. Therefore, MFIs should invest more in training their staff so that they are professional, courteous and follow best practice while delivering MFI services.

10.4.3 Other Stakeholders

Cultural factors and traditions change slowly over time (Khavul et al. 2013), but there is a need for a cultural change in South-East Nigeria beginning from the village/religious leaders down to the individual family units. Patriarchy and associated traditional practices which discriminate against women and relegate them to "legal minors" have negative implications on rural women's entrepreneurship, including restrictions to property ownership. Traditional practices and culture dictate the obligations and family responsibilities of rural women, prescribes who is allowed to attend formal education, and determines who makes business decisions. Sadly, all these delineations are biased against women. These deprivations limit the opportunities presented to poor women and requires collective effort to educate people on their consequences. It is important for rural women to have equal opportunities like their male counterparts, for example, on education. The leaders should also communicate the need for a shift from the old tradition to a civilised way of doing things where roles are shared evenly, and people get commensurate support to achieve them. Women make enormous contributions to the family, communities and society; it is only sensible and fair to support them.

10.5 Limitations and opportunities for further study

This study has increased the understanding of rural women's perceptions and experience of microfinance in rural Nigeria. It has illustrated how the poorest and disadvantaged group, rural women in South-East Nigeria perceive and experience

microfinance as debts and a great risk that could lead to irreversible losses. This study has established the importance of conducting context-specific studies which aim at improving the way microfinance services should be provided for people to improve their livelihood. The study also finds that the extreme poverty, vulnerability, formal institutional void and the deprivations presented by traditional cultural practices such as limited education, resulted in rural women entrepreneurs benefitting less from microfinance.

This study employed a qualitative approach and involved a relatively small sample of 30 rural women entrepreneurs in South-East, Nigeria. The findings presented here may not be statistically generalisable across the whole of Nigeria and further afield. This is because the sample is not necessarily representative of the views of the wider population outside the context of this study. As this is a purposive study, it is possible that some women may have been omitted due to constraints such as ill-health, even though every effort was made to include the right people in the study. Despite these limitations, this research has gathered rich data and reported extensive findings that have demonstrated the context-specific nature of perception and experience of microfinance. It has triggered more questions than answers and hence calls for more research in microfinance for the poorest of the poor. Future studies could investigate other cultural setups to explore how rural women business owners from those communities perceive and experience microfinance services.

10.6 Summary of the Study

This study has provided an understanding of the perceptions and experiences of rural women entrepreneurs on microfinance and how it impacts on their livelihood and daily entrepreneurial experiences. Negative perceptions such as unfavourable requirements to access microfinance (e.g. land as collateral), lack of awareness and understanding of microfinance services, hampered many Nigerian rural women from participating. The requirements to access microfinance include having an account with the bank, paying upfront deposits, land/guarantor as collateral for the loan, weekly repayment, and a basic understanding of the English language. These are not within reach of poor rural women in Nigeria. Additionally, cultural factors such as constrained access to tangible assets like land, limited opportunities for females to obtain a formal education, and culturally apportioned gender roles hinder many from participating in microfinance. It is believed that these inequalities and barriers put rural women at a disadvantaged position and contributed to their poor participation in microfinance services as echoed by many of the participants.

This study found that rural women mainly operated their micro-businesses at a subsistence level for maintenance of livelihoods and family wellbeing. Despite the challenges, these women entrepreneurs were enterprising, resilient, hardworking and determined to make a difference instead of making excuses. They actively engaged in microbusinesses to generate income for their families and themselves in their quest to secure a more stable livelihood. In return, their families provide

resources and support for rural women to run their microbusiness. In the context of poor rural Nigeria, women's micro-businesses and family are one inseparable socio-economic entity. Poor women's micro-businesses are located far away from formal institutional support, large market and rarely created paid employment, seldom achieved economies of scale, and hardly ever expanded as business expansion is not their priority. Their meagre income and livelihood circumstances make such goals as business expansion ambitious and implausible; hence they concentrate on providing for themselves and their families (Ajani 2012; Aliyu 2020). As pointed out by Whatmore et al. (2017), western theories will struggle to theorise such practices; hence this study contributed to theory by increasing understanding of the realities of rural women micropreneurship living under extreme poverty and formal institutional void.

Rural women could benefit from microfinance if MFIs make the access requirements and repayment modes more flexible to meet the need of poor rural women and their microbusinesses. Within the family, the domestic duties and chores should be the responsibility of everyone in the family (not just the women) such that women can have time to pursue their entrepreneurial aspirations accordingly. If rural women entrepreneurs are supported to acquire loans, learn skills, save time for business, receive business support services, they can achieve huge improvements in their entrepreneurship activities, which will have a direct influence on the economy (Aliyu 2020; Nyamrunda and Freeman 2021). Understanding the challenges that poor women face in their day-to-day lives, how institutions of family and culture influence their entrepreneurship activities, and how they perceive and experience microfinance may be a good

starting point in the journey to appreciate entrepreneurship in extreme poverty.
This study has made a start in that direction.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Participants Consent Form

I confirm that I have read the participants information sheet provided by the researcher and I am happy to participate in this research. I understand the purpose and the nature of the study as explained by the researcher.

The researcher has made it clear that I am free to withdraw or can refuse to respond to any question at any point in the study without any consequences. I reserve the right to withdraw permission on any information I might have provided up until the analysis of the data.

I consent to my responses being recorded, retained confidentially and used in this study without direct linkage to my identity. I understand that I can contact the researcher for further clarification and to access the information I have provided.

Igbo version of Participants Consent Form

Mu ekwenye na agụọla m akwụkwọ ozi ndị sonyere na nke onye nyocha ahu ma obi di mu uto isonye na nyocha a. Aghọtara m ebumnuche na ọdịdị ọmụmụ a dị ka onye nchọcha kọwara.

Onye nyocha ahụ emeela ka o doo anya na enwere m onwe m ịhapụ ma ọ bụ nwee ike ịjụ ịza ajụjụ ọ bụla n'oge ọ bụla na ọmụmụ ihe na-enweghị nsonaazụ ọ bụla. Enwere m ikike ịhapụ ikike na ozi ọ bụla m nwere ike ịnyela ruo mgbe nyocha data ahụ.

Ekwenyere m na ederede m, edere m ya ma jiri ya na ọmụmụ ihe a na-enweghị njikọ njikọta na njirimara m. Aghọtara m na m nwere ike ịkpọturụ onye nyocha ahụ maka ịmatakwa ihe na ịnweta ozi m nyere.

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Researcher's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Details of Researcher and Supervisors:

Irene Ukanwa (Researcher) Academic

Supervisors

Dr Lin Xiong

Distinguished Prof Alistair R Anderson

Aberdeen Business School

Robert Gordon University, Garthdee Road,

Aberdeen AB10 7QE.

Appendix 2: Interview Guide

1. What age group do you belong?

18 - 24 25 - 31 32 - 38 39 - 45 46 or above

2. What is your marital status?

Single Married Separated Widow

3. What is your highest level of formal education?

No formal education Primary Secondary Vocational Tertiary

Probe: Why did you not further your education?

4. Do you have dependent children and/or adults?

Probe: How many?

5. What type of business do you do?

Probe: How long have you been in this business?

6. What are the barriers you face running your business in this community?

Probe: Which do you consider as the most significant constraint? For example, finance, family responsibilities.

7. How much time do you spend on business per day?

8. Can you tell me what your average monthly income from this business is?

9. How do the institutions of culture and family influence your business?

Probe: Who decides the type of business you engage in and why? Who makes decisions in the operation of your business, like borrowing? How often do you apply for microloans? How does this affect you and your business?

10. Who determines the gender roles?

Probe: who is responsible for taking care of the children, family members in need of care, domestic chores and providing for the family? What does it mean for you and your business?

11. Can you tell me a little bit about the interaction between family and your business? For example, do you separate family income from business income?

12. How do you cope with everyday life with limited resources available to you?
Probe: What support do you receive from government/others (e.g. spouse)?
13. How do you deal with shocks and uncertainties? For example, ill-health, loss of goods or loved ones, adverse weather conditions, trade fluctuations and seasonality (i.e. festive seasons, rainy/dry season)?
14. What livelihood assets do you have or lack (e.g. modern equipment)?
Probe: Do you have people working for you in this business? Do you pay them or are they working as apprentices/unpaid family members?
15. Can you tell me a little bit about your social network/gathering/group?
16. Where do you go when seeking finance? Probe: Families and friends, local SHGs, local moneylenders or MFI, and why?
17. How do you perceive microfinance?
Probe: What is your understanding of how microfinance works? What are the risks you consider about microfinance?
18. What are the criteria for accessing microfinance?
Probe: Collateral, male guarantor required, open an account with MFI, join MFI accredited group or as an individual, and what are your concerns?
19. What MFI services do you use – savings, loans, insurance, and training? If not participating, why?
20. What are your experiences of microfinance?
Probe: Where is the nearest MFI located? How easy is it to use concerning the processes and the language used? What is your opinion on the availability and disbursement of microloans?
21. What are the costs associated with microfinance like the interest rate on loans?
22. Can you tell me a little bit about MFI compulsory savings and weekly repayment? Probe: What does it mean for your business and family?
23. How do you receive microfinance information? How is information shared in this community?
24. How do you think MFIs should deliver their services to encourage you and other women to benefit more from their (MFIs) services?

Thank you for your time and for sharing your experiences with me regarding microfinance and your microbusiness. Again, the researcher will maintain your confidentiality and anonymity.

Appendix 3: Focus Group Guide

1. What are the barriers you face running your business in this community?
Probe: Which do you consider as the most significant constraint? For example, finance.
2. How do the institutions of culture and family influence your business?
Probe: What type of business do you engage in and why? Who makes decisions about your business, like borrowing?
3. How are roles assigned?
Probe: Who is responsible for taking care of the children, family members in need of care, domestic chores and providing for the family?
4. Can you tell me a little bit about the interaction between family and your business? For example, do you separate family income from business income?
5. How do you cope with everyday life with limited resources available to you?
Probe: What support do you receive from the government or other sources (e.g. spouse)?
6. How do you deal with shocks and uncertainties? For example, ill-health, loss of goods or loved ones, adverse weather conditions, trade fluctuations and seasonality (i.e. festive seasons, rainy/dry season)?
7. What livelihood assets do you have or lack (e.g. modern equipment)?
Probe: Tell me how you run this business? Do you have people working for you in this business? Do you pay them or are they working as apprentices/unpaid family members?
8. Can you tell me a little bit about your social network/gathering/group?
9. Where do you go when seeking finance?
Probe: Families and friends, local SHGs, local moneylenders or MFI, and why?
10. How do you perceive microfinance?
Probe: What is your understanding of how microfinance works? What are the risks you consider about microfinance?
11. What are the criteria for accessing microfinance?
Probe: Collateral, male guarantor required, open an account with MFI, join MFI accredited group or as an individual, and what are your concerns?

12. What MFI services do you use – savings, loans, insurance or training? If not participating, why?
13. What are your experiences of microfinance?
Probe: Where is the nearest MFI located? How easy is it to use concerning the processes and the language used? What is your opinion on the availability and disbursement of microloans?
14. What are the costs associated with microfinance like the interest rate on loans?
15. Can you tell me a little bit about MFI compulsory savings and weekly repayment?
16. How do you receive microfinance information? How is information shared in this community?
17. How do you think microfinance institutions should deliver their services to encourage you and other women to benefit more from their (MFIs) services?

Thank you for your time and for sharing your experiences with me regarding microfinance and your microbusiness. Again, the researcher will maintain your confidentiality and anonymity.

Appendix 4: Ground Rule for Focus Group

In order to ensure that our discussion is meaningful, smooth and guided to respect everyone's opinion, the following guidelines is recommended.

The researcher will help to guide the communication in line with the research aims and help to establish cordiality among group members:

1. We are encouraged to give everyone the opportunity to express their opinion and narrate their experiences without being judgemental.
2. As much as possible, allow one person to talk at any given time.
3. We will keep whatever information shared in this group discussion confidential.
4. The researcher is not interested in what is right or wrong but in understanding individual experiences and ideas regarding the subject matter.
5. As much as you can, please give an honest and complete account of the situation or experiences you share both the negatives and the positives. It will help the researcher to understand the factors responsible for that kind of experience or situation.
6. Please do not feel obliged to comment on every topic. Please feel free to decline if you would prefer not to comment on any issue raised.

Thank you.

Appendix 5: Information Sheet

Project Title:

An Investigation of Poor Women's Micropreneurship And Their Experiences of Microfinance In Rural Southeast Nigeria

Purpose:

This study is undertaken to fulfil the primary requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. Also, to understand how the institutions of family and culture shape poor women's micropreneurship in rural Nigeria, where family responsibility and economic activities are closely intertwined.

What is this research project about?

This study is about understanding how poor women entrepreneurs perceive and experience microfinance and why the poorest, most disadvantaged rural Nigerian women benefit less from microfinance; the effects on their micropreneurship.

What will you have to do and how long will it take?

The researcher intends to interview you or involve you in a group discussion to explore how the institution of culture and family have shaped your entrepreneurial activities. Also, the researcher wishes to engage with you to develop in-depth understanding of your experience and perception about microfinance institutions and their services. The hope is to understand whether you engage (or not engage) with microfinance and how that has influenced your business.

The interview or focus group discussion is expected to take no more than an hour at your preferred location within the community (for safety and confidentiality). The researcher will record your responses to enable the use of the information you provide during data analysis. You will be given a consent form to indicate your willingness to participate in this study.

What will happen to the information collected?

The researcher will use the information you provide during the interview or focus group sections to critically analyse, understand, and draw inference on the true nature of situations regarding the project title. The responses will be transcribed and translated to English Language which will enable the researcher to complete the research process. The transcript notes, or recordings will only be accessed by the researcher and with the strictest confidentiality share the write up with the supervisory team. The identity of the participants will be disguised. At the end of the study, the transcript notes and the recordings will be destroyed and erased permanently.

Declaration to participants

If you take part in the study, you have the right to:

- Decline to answer any question, and to withdraw your permission for the information you have provided in the study at any time.
- Ask for clarification or more information on any aspect of the study at any point in the study.
- Access the information you have provided from the researcher.

Who's responsible?

Please, feel free to contact the researcher through the community gatekeeper or reach the researcher directly on:

The Researcher:

Irene Ukanwa
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Aberdeen Business School
Robert Gordon University, Garthdee Road,
Aberdeen AB10 7QE.