

**MEDIA, GENDER, AND INCLUSIVE ECONOMY: A PROSPECTIVE ANALYSIS OF
KNOWLEDGE OF WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT (WEE) AMONGST
MEDIA PRACTITIONERS IN NIGERIA**

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Abstract

This study delves into the intricate intersection of media, gender, and inclusive economic development in Nigeria. Its dual objectives are to assess the level of knowledge among Nigerian media practitioners regarding women's economic empowerment and to analyse the media's portrayal of pertinent issues in this domain. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the study incorporated qualitative design (Focus Group Discussions) and quantitative design (media content analysis) to gain comprehensive insights. Twenty participants (journalists specializing in women's affairs), were selected from prominent Nigerian media outlets. Discussions had during FGDs covered various aspects, including participants' knowledge, reporting experiences, challenges, and opportunities related to women's economic empowerment. Verbatim transcripts ensured data accuracy. Simultaneously, a systematic collection of newspaper articles from April to November 2022 formed the basis of the media content analysis. The study engaged a diverse selection of newspapers, guaranteeing a wide spectrum of perspectives. Rigorous trend analysis techniques identified significant patterns and trends in media coverage of Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE). Thematic data analysis was applied to FGD transcripts to unveil recurring themes and insightful findings. The media content analysis, in contrast, focused on a systematic trend analysis of selected newspaper articles, emphasizing key aspects of WEE. The study's findings highlight trends in WEE coverage, the roles of diverse stakeholders, and media perspectives in Nigeria. These insights underscore the need for sustained, consistent efforts in women's economic empowerment. Financial institutions, international organizations, local NGOs, and philanthropists play pivotal roles, necessitating collaborative efforts to ensure the sustainability of initiatives. Moreover, the study underscores the crucial role of the media in advancing the visibility of women's economic empowerment and suggests strategies for improved reporting and advocacy. The exclusion of women's co-operatives in COVID-19 palliative distribution emphasizes the urgency of inclusive government strategies to address poverty and economic exclusion among women. This research offers valuable insights to inform data-driven decisions and enhance women's economic empowerment in Nigeria.

Keywords: Empowerment, Gender, Inequality, Roles, Inclusive, Economy, Stereotypes

Introduction

In the ever-evolving landscape of media and its role in society, it is imperative to recognize the power it wields in shaping perceptions, influencing public discourse, and driving policy decisions (Unknown author, 2016). Nigeria, as one of the most populous countries in Africa and a diverse nation marked by significant gender disparities in economic participation and outcomes, presents a unique context for examining the intersection of media, gender, and inclusive economic development. The media in Nigeria, like in many other countries, serves as a mirror reflecting societal values and beliefs. It is a platform through which information is disseminated, discussions are initiated, and narratives are constructed (UN Africa Renewal, 2016).

However, the media's role in promoting gender equality and inclusive economic development is a complex one. The portrayal of gender-related issues, the extent of coverage, and the depth of analysis within media content can either challenge or reinforce existing gender norms and stereotypes. Media practitioners, including journalists and editors, are central figures in the dissemination of information and shaping public opinion. Their knowledge, attitudes, and perceptions regarding gender and inclusive economic issues can significantly impact the way these topics are covered in the media (UN Africa Renewal, 2016). Hence, understanding the knowledge level of media professionals in this regard is crucial for developing strategies to increase gender representation in the media, improve economic opportunities for women in the media, and use the media to promote an inclusive economy (Kruk, et. Al, 2018). The media plays a significant role in shaping public opinion and promoting social change. However, the media's influence is not limited to traditional forms of media, as social media platforms have become increasingly popular in Nigeria and other African countries (UN Africa Renewal, 2010).

Women constitute a significant portion of Nigeria's population and workforce, yet they face numerous barriers to economic empowerment and participation. These barriers range from limited access to financial resources and education to cultural norms that restrict their economic mobility. In a country striving for economic growth and sustainable development, it is essential to address these gender disparities to ensure that economic opportunities are accessible to all (Oyewole, 2023; Olonade, et. al, 2021). The Nigerian government has recognized the importance of women's economic empowerment and has implemented various policies and programs to address gender disparities in economic participation. However, there is a need to assess the effectiveness of these policies and programs in achieving their objectives (Oyinade, Daramola& Lamidi, 2013).

The issue of gender inequality in Nigeria is a critical concern that needs to be addressed to achieve sustainable development (dRPC, 2022). Women's economic empowerment is central to realizing women's rights and gender equality (ILO, 2010). However, gender gaps in the economy, such as unequal access to resources, education, and employment opportunities, undermine women's economic empowerment and hinder inclusive economic growth. The World Bank's diagnostic report highlights the sizable gender gaps in Nigeria that could yield additional gains of up to US22.9 billion dollars if closed (World Bank, 2021). Therefore, it is essential to invest in Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) programs to address these disparities (dRPC, 2022). Economic inclusivity, particularly with respect to gender, constitutes a fundamental pillar

of sustainable development (Okeke-Uzodike&Bilau, 2019). In Nigeria, a country in which women make up a substantial portion of the workforce, albeit with various impediments to full economic participation, media's role in either exacerbating these challenges or advocating for policy reforms that promote economic inclusivity becomes particularly significant (Adepoju, 2020).

Media practitioners in Nigeria play a crucial role in shaping public opinion and influencing policy decisions. Therefore, it is essential to increase their knowledge of gender issues and Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) programs. Bridging the digital gender divide can foster greater gender equality in the labour market, boost economic growth, and build a more inclusive digital world (dRPC, 2022). Gender mainstreaming, which involves making women's and men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of policies and programs, is a strategy that can help address gender disparities in Nigeria (Odugbemi, Oladele, & Owolabi, 2022). By addressing gender disparities in Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) programs, Nigeria can achieve sustainable development and contribute to global efforts to promote gender equality and inclusive economic growth.

The media's portrayal of gender roles has tangible implications for women's economic opportunities (Okafor & Ike, 2016; Daramola, 2020). Research by Okafor and Ike (2016) underscores significant gender disparities in access to economic resources and opportunities. The perpetuation of traditional gender norms through media content can hinder women's access to education, finance, and leadership positions, thereby perpetuating economic inequalities. Within Nigeria's context, where traditional gender norms often intersect with modern influences, the media's role in shaping and reflecting these dynamics becomes a critical subject of inquiry (Okolo & Nwagwu, 2018).The impact of media on societal attitudes, norms, and policies is widely acknowledged (Hall, 2016). Within Nigeria, where deeply rooted cultural norms and gender inequalities persist, the portrayal of gender-related issues by the media emerges as a pivotal factor (Mbamalu, 2019). This literature review recognizes the multidimensional ways in which media can impact and reflect complex gender dynamics (Adeyemi & Adeyemi, 2017).

Despite its potential to perpetuate gender disparities, media also holds transformative potential (Iorfa& Ogwuche, 2020). Scholars have explored the idea that media, if harnessed effectively, can act as a catalyst for challenging gender norms and advocating for greater gender inclusivity in the economy (Okeke-Uzodike&Bilau, 2019).

Challenging existing gender stereotypes has become a role undertaken by some Nigerian media outlets and journalists (Okeke-Uzodike&Bilau, 2019; Daramola, 2020). Through investigative reporting, feature stories, and opinion pieces, they have exposed gender-based discrimination and highlighted the achievements and contributions of women in various economic sectors (Mbamalu, 2019).Advocacy for policy changes related to gender-inclusive economic development has gained momentum through media (Iorfa& Ogwuche, 2020). The media's capacity to reach a broad audience makes it a powerful tool for raising awareness about gender disparities, influencing public opinion, and advocating for policy reforms aimed at enhancing women's economic opportunities (Hall, 2016).In the context of Nigeria, the intricate interplay between media, gender,

and inclusive economic development presents a multifaceted challenge. This research study is specifically tailored to explore the depth of understanding among Nigerian media professionals concerning gender-related economic matters and to assess how these issues are reflected in media content. This inquiry is poised to provide invaluable insights into fostering a more inclusive economy. By conducting a forward-looking analysis of the knowledge levels within this group, the study seeks to pinpoint both the obstacles and opportunities associated with addressing gender representation, enhancing economic prospects for women, and harnessing the media's potential to drive inclusive economic growth. Additionally, it acknowledges the proactive stance of the Nigerian government and international organizations in recognizing the importance of addressing gender disparities in economic participation, as evidenced by the implementation of various policies and programs. The research emphasizes the critical need to evaluate the effectiveness of these initiatives to ensure tangible progress towards a more equitable and inclusive economic landscape in Nigeria.

Existing literature primarily tends to focus either on media representation or economic disparities in isolation. A more comprehensive approach that examines the intricate interplay between media, gender, and economic inclusivity is necessary to provide a holistic understanding of the subject matter. For instance, a study by Mbamalu (2019) explored how media representation of gender roles reinforces gender-based discrimination in the workplace. This study highlights the importance of considering the intersectional nature of media representation and economic opportunities.

The extent to which media actively engages in policy advocacy in the context of gender-inclusive economic development in Nigeria remains a relatively uncharted territory. Investigating the influence of media on policy formulation and reform in this sphere holds the potential to unearth valuable insights. For instance, a study by Adepoju (2020) found that media advocacy campaigns have been effective in pressuring the Nigerian government to adopt policies that support women's economic empowerment. This literature review lays the foundation for our study, which endeavours to address these noted gaps by conducting a holistic assessment of media practitioners' knowledge levels and a meticulous analysis of media coverage concerning women's economic empowerment in Nigeria.

As a result of these, the primary objectives of the study are twofold: first, to determine the level of knowledge among media practitioners in Nigeria regarding women's economic empowerment and related issues, and second, to analyse the media's coverage of these issues. The research findings are expected to offer insights into the strengths and weaknesses of media engagement with gender and economic inclusivity, ultimately contributing to the discourse on gender-responsive reporting and policy advocacy.

In a rapidly changing global landscape, characterized by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and a growing focus on gender equality and economic inclusion, this research holds particular relevance. It seeks to inform stakeholders, including media organizations, policymakers, and civil society, about the current state of media coverage on these vital topics. By

identifying areas where improvements are needed, it aspires to foster positive changes in media practices and, consequently, contribute to more inclusive economic development in Nigeria.

To properly situate the study, Feminist Media Theory (FMT) is adopted as theoretical framework because it offers insights into the complex relationship between media, gender, and inclusive economic development as proposed by scholars such as Angela McRobbie, Ann Gill, Liesbet van Zoonen, and Kimberlé Crenshaw (Gill, 2007; van Zoonen, 1994). It recognizes that media plays a significant role in shaping societal norms and attitudes, including those related to gender (Gill, 2007). FMT can be used to analyse how media representations of gender may contribute to or mitigate gender disparities in economic opportunities, and to explore the potential for media to advocate for policy reforms that promote gender-inclusive economic development (McRobbie, 2009). In short, FMT is a valuable tool for understanding the complex relationship between media, gender, and inclusive economic development.

Methodology

Research Design

The study, which is a cross-sectional research, adopted a mixed-methods approach, incorporating qualitative design (Focus Group Discussions) and quantitative design (media content analysis) to comprehensively explore media practitioners' perspectives on women's economic empowerment in Nigeria. Our methodological choice was driven by the research objectives: first, to assess the knowledge and perspectives of media practitioners concerning women's economic empowerment, and second, to analyse the media's coverage of these issues.

Participants

For the FGDs, we carefully selected 20 participants, including 12 male and 8 female journalists specializing in women's affairs, from prominent Nigerian media outlets such as The Nation, The Guardian, Daily Trust, NTA, AIT, Arise TV, Leadership, Vanguard, Authority, Punch, Daily Independent, Daily Nigerian, Blueprint, 21st Century Chronicle, NAN, Premium Times, 213 news, and ICIR. This purposive sampling approach ensured diverse perspectives relevant to our research objectives. The data collection process for the FGDs was systematic. We organised three focus groups. The first group was made up of 6 participants (all male), the second had 6 participants (all male) and the third is made up of 8 participants (all female). The FGDs were conducted using self-designed focus group discussion guide covering a wide range of topics related to participants' knowledge, reporting experiences, challenges, and opportunities concerning women's economic empowerment. To maintain data accuracy, audio recordings were obtained during the FGDs, and verbatim transcripts were meticulously prepared.

Simultaneously, for the media content analysis, we collected data from newspaper articles published in Nigeria between April and November 2022. Our diverse selection of newspapers included well-recognized outlets. Articles were chosen based on their relevance to Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE). In the data collection process for media content analysis, we employed a systematic approach. Relevant articles were systematically selected, and the data source encompassed a broad range of newspapers, ensuring diversity in perspectives and

expertise. The collected data underwent a comprehensive trend analysis to identify key patterns and trends in media coverage of Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) during the specified timeframe. This approach enabled us to quantitatively analyse how these issues were presented and discussed in the media landscape of Nigeria.

Data Analysis

For both sets of data, the research implemented rigorous data analysis techniques. Thematic data analysis was conducted on the verbatim transcripts of the FGDs. This approach aimed to identify recurring themes, patterns, and insightful findings emerging from the discussions. It ensured the reliability and validity of our qualitative data. In the data analysis process for media content analysis, the study conducted a systematic trend analysis of the selected newspaper articles. This analysis focused on key aspects of Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) to identify trends and patterns in media coverage over the specified time frame. By applying these robust data analysis techniques to both the FGDs and the media content analysis, we aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of media practitioners' knowledge and the portrayal of women's economic empowerment in the Nigerian media landscape.

Results

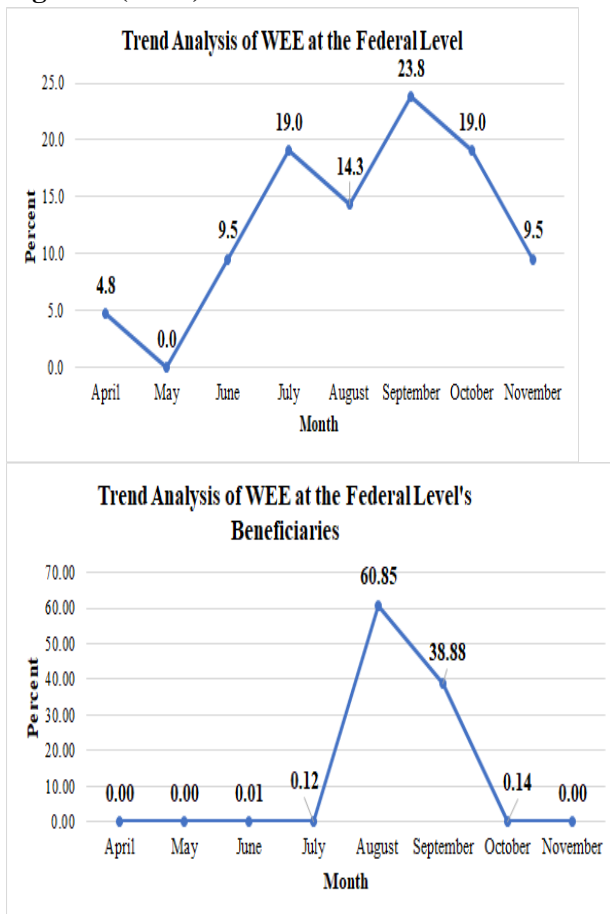
In this segment, we present the findings of the research on Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) in Nigeria, conducted between April, 2022 and March, 2023. The results are derived from two primary sources: media content analysis and focus group discussions (FGDs). These findings shed light on the trends in WEE coverage, media perspectives, and government involvement in WEE during the specified period. The research objectives were to assess the knowledge of Nigerian media practitioners concerning women's economic empowerment and related issues while also analysing the media's coverage of these subjects.

Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) Trends and Impact in Nigeria

Analysis of WEE at the Federal Level

Figure 1 (A&B) provides a critical analysis of Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) at the federal level in Nigeria. This section aims to assess the significance of this analysis in understanding WEE trends and their implications for policy and advocacy.

Figure 1 (A&B)



Source: Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

The data presented in Figure 1 (A&B) portrays a fluctuating pattern of WEE activities at the federal level in Nigeria within the period of the study. Notably, the highest recorded percentage of WEE activities occurred in September, reaching 23.8%. This suggests that there was a surge in initiatives or media coverage related to WEE during this period.

However, it is noteworthy that WEE activities remained consistently below 10% in the months of April, May, June, and November. This indicates a potential lack of sustained attention or coverage of WEE issues during these months. Furthermore, the absence of records for WEE beneficiaries in April, May, and November raises questions about the effectiveness of WEE programs or reporting during these periods.

The analysis of WEE beneficiaries during the same period indicates significant variations in impact. August and September stand out with the highest recorded percentages of WEE beneficiaries, at 60.9% and 38.9%, respectively. These months witnessed a substantial number of individuals benefiting from WEE initiatives or programs.

The fluctuation in WEE activities and beneficiaries suggests that policy advocacy efforts might need to be better coordinated and sustained throughout the year. Policymakers can use this information to target their initiatives during months when WEE activities are low, ensuring consistent support and resources.

The absence of WEE beneficiaries in April, May, and November indicates potential gaps in media coverage or reporting. Media practitioners can use this insight to improve their reporting strategies, ensuring that WEE issues are consistently covered throughout the year.

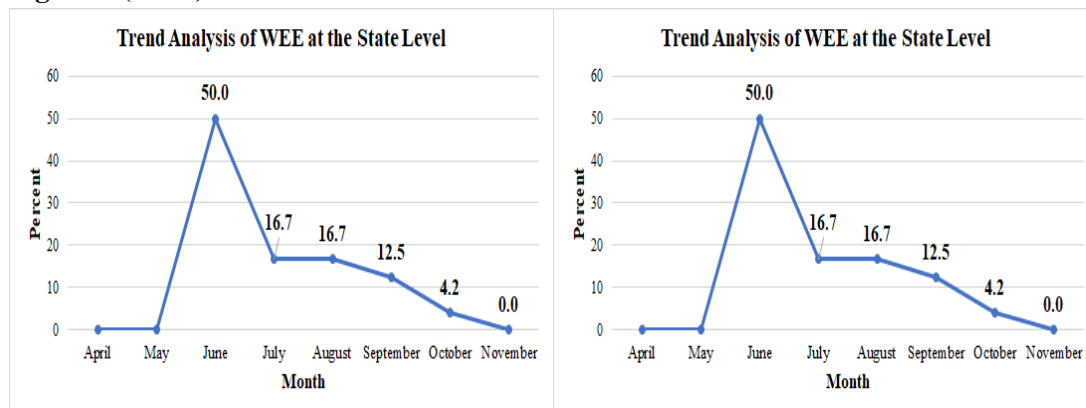
The significant variations in WEE beneficiaries' percentages highlight the need for program planners to assess the timing and effectiveness of their initiatives. August and September could be seen as opportune months for launching or intensifying WEE programs, as they coincide with periods of high impact.

Figure 1 (A&B) provides valuable insights into the trends and fluctuations in federal-level WEE activities and beneficiaries in Nigeria from April to November 2022. These findings underscore the importance of consistent and targeted efforts in policy advocacy, media engagement, and program planning to ensure sustained progress in women's economic empowerment throughout the year. The research's ultimate goal is to inform stakeholders, policymakers, and media practitioners about the effectiveness of WEE initiatives and coverage, enabling them to make data-driven decisions that positively impact women's economic empowerment in Nigeria

Analysis of WEE at the State Level

Figure 2 (A&B) is dedicated to analysing Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) at the state level in Nigeria. This section is crucial for understanding how WEE initiatives are performing at the sub-national level.

Figure 2 (A&B)



Source: Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

The data presented in Figure 2 (A&B) portrays a notable pattern in WEE activities across different states in Nigeria between April and November. It reveals that WEE activities peaked in

June, reaching 50%, indicating a concerted effort or media coverage during that month. However, it is concerning that these activities declined significantly to less than 1% in November.

The analysis of WEE beneficiaries during the same period indicates that June had the highest percentage of beneficiaries, at 75%, suggesting a significant impact of WEE initiatives in that month. However, this percentage also declined in November.

The fluctuation in WEE activities and beneficiaries at the state level implies that state governments and local policymakers need to consider more consistent and targeted approaches to support women's economic empowerment. June's peak in activities and beneficiaries can serve as a model for successful initiatives, encouraging states to replicate these efforts throughout the year.

While Figure 2 does not show variations across states, it highlights those certain states, such as Lagos, Delta, Osun, Enugu, Bauchi, Zamfara, and Gombe, experienced improvements in WEE activities and beneficiaries in June. This information is invaluable for identifying regions where WEE initiatives are performing well and can serve as case studies for others to follow.

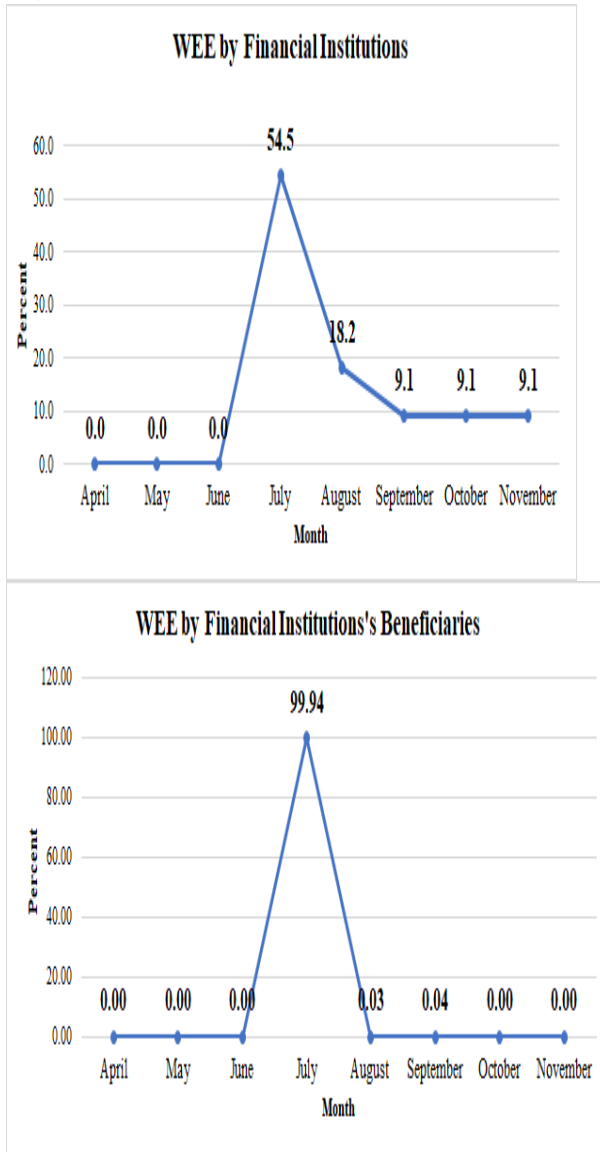
The decline in WEE activities and beneficiaries after June raises questions about the timing and sustainability of state-level programs. Policymakers and program planners should consider the factors that led to success in June and strive to replicate them in other months to ensure consistent progress.

Figure 2 (A&B) sheds light on the state-level dynamics of Women's Economic Empowerment in Nigeria. The data suggests that while there are fluctuations in WEE activities and beneficiaries, there is room for improvement in sustaining WEE efforts throughout the year. By studying the successful examples in June and the specific states that saw improvements, policymakers and program planners can develop more effective and targeted strategies to empower women economically at the state level. This analysis serves as a valuable resource for guiding state-level policy advocacy and program development.

Analysis of WEE by Financial Institutions

Figure 3 (A&B) focuses on the analysis of Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) in the context of financial institutions. This section explores the role of financial institutions in promoting WEE.

Figure 3 (A&B)



Source: Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

The data presented in Figure 3 reveals significant variations in WEE activities linked to financial institutions between April and November 2022. Notably, there is a complete absence of WEE activities and beneficiaries from April to June, indicating a lack of initiatives or media coverage during this period.

July stands out as a month with a substantial increase in WEE activities (54.5%) and beneficiaries (99.9%) related to financial institutions. This suggests a concerted effort or increased media attention during this period, resulting in a significant impact on WEE initiatives.

Despite the peak in July, there is a subsequent decline in WEE activities (9.1%) and beneficiaries (less than 1%) from August to November 2021. This decline raises questions about the sustainability and long-term impact of financial institution-led WEE initiatives.

The data suggests that financial institutions play a pivotal role in WEE, as evidenced by the peak in July. However, the absence of activities in the preceding months and the decline afterward indicate a need for consistent and sustained efforts by these institutions. Financial institutions should consider strategies to maintain or replicate the success seen in July throughout the year.

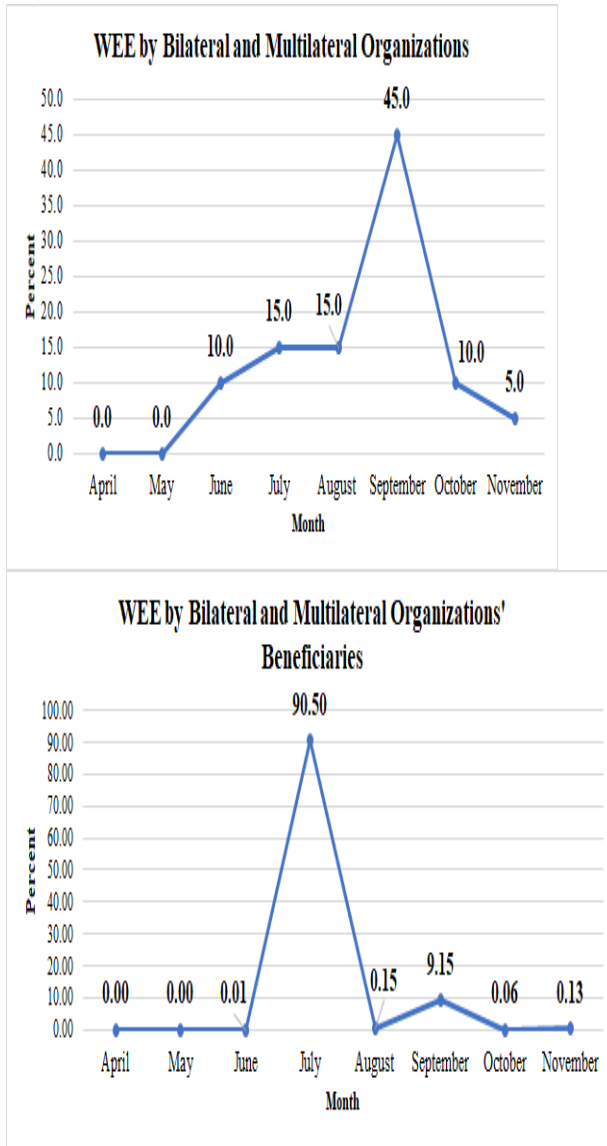
The poor records of WEE activities and beneficiaries in August to November highlight potential challenges or obstacles faced by financial institutions in advancing WEE. Identifying these challenges is crucial for improving the effectiveness of future initiatives.

Figure 3 (A&B) underscores the significant influence of financial institutions on WEE initiatives in Nigeria. While there is a notable peak in July, the absence of activities in preceding months and the subsequent decline emphasize the need for consistent efforts and sustained support. Financial institutions should reflect on the factors contributing to their success in July and work towards maintaining and expanding their impact. This analysis serves as a valuable resource for financial institutions aiming to enhance their role in promoting Women's Economic Empowerment and offers insights into areas where improvements are necessary.

Analysis of WEE by Bilateral and Multilateral Organizations

Figure 4 (A&B) dedicated to analysing Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) with a focus on support provided by bilateral and multilateral organizations. This section examines the role of international cooperation in promoting WEE.

Figure 4 (A&B)



Source: Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

The data presented in Figure 4 showcases the fluctuations in WEE activities associated with bilateral and multilateral organizations between the months of July and November 2022. September emerges as a significant month with a relatively high percentage of WEE activities (45%). This indicates a period of increased activity and attention directed towards WEE initiatives facilitated by these organizations. However, there is a noticeable decline in WEE activities to 5% in November, raising questions about the consistency and long-term impact of initiatives supported by these organizations.

The data also highlights fluctuations in the number of WEE beneficiaries linked to bilateral and multilateral organizations. July records the highest percentage of WEE beneficiaries (91%), suggesting a substantial impact during this period. However, there is a significant decline in the number of beneficiaries to less than 1% in November. This sharp decrease raises concerns about the sustainability and long-term benefits of WEE initiatives led by bilateral and multilateral organizations.

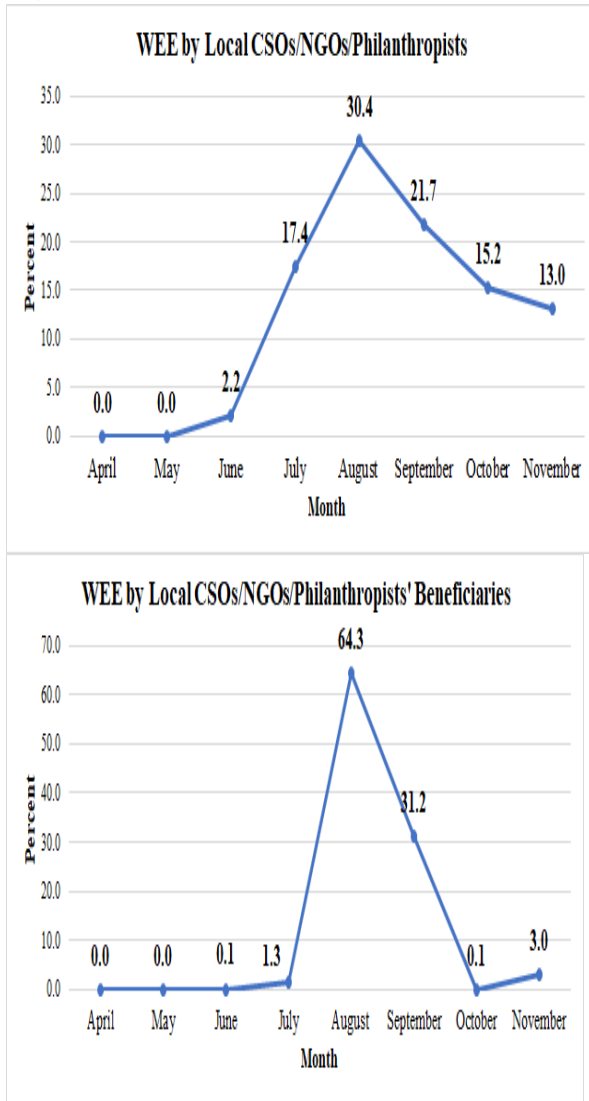
The analysis indicates that these organizations play a crucial role in advancing WEE in Nigeria, as seen in the peak activities and beneficiaries in July and September. However, the decline in subsequent months points to the need for sustained efforts and a more consistent approach to achieve lasting impact. The fluctuations in WEE activities and beneficiaries suggest challenges in maintaining the momentum and impact of initiatives. Identifying these challenges is essential for improving the effectiveness of future efforts.

Figure 4 (A&B) underscores the influence of bilateral and multilateral organizations in driving WEE initiatives. While there are notable peaks in July and September, the decline in subsequent months highlights the importance of consistent and sustained support. These organizations should consider strategies to maintain the positive impact observed during peak periods and address challenges that hinder long-term success. This analysis serves as a valuable resource for organizations aiming to enhance their role in promoting Women's Economic Empowerment and offers insights into areas where improvements are needed.

Analysis of WEE by Local CSOs/NGOs/Philanthropists

Figure 5 (A&B) provides insights into Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) efforts carried out by local Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), and philanthropists. This section examines the significance of their contributions and the variations in WEE activities and beneficiaries.

Figure 5 (A&B)



Source: Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)

The data presented in Figure 5 illustrates the fluctuations in WEE activities facilitated by local CSOs, NGOs, and philanthropists during the specified period. August emerges as a significant month with a relatively high percentage of WEE activities (30.4%). This suggests a period of heightened activity and attention focused on WEE initiatives led by these local entities. However, there is a noticeable decline in WEE activities to 13% in November. This fluctuation raises questions about the consistency and sustainability of WEE efforts conducted by local CSOs, NGOs, and philanthropists.

The data also highlights variations in the number of WEE beneficiaries associated with local CSOs, NGOs, and philanthropists. August records the highest percentage of WEE beneficiaries

(64.3%), indicating a significant impact during this period. However, there is a substantial decline in the number of beneficiaries to 3% in November. This decline suggests challenges in maintaining the reach and impact of WEE initiatives led by these local entities.

The analysis underscores the important role played by local CSOs, NGOs, and philanthropists in advancing WEE activities in Nigeria. While there are notable peaks in August, the decline in subsequent months highlights the need for consistent and sustained efforts to achieve lasting impact. The fluctuations in WEE activities and beneficiaries suggest challenges in maintaining the momentum and impact of initiatives. Identifying and addressing these challenges is essential for improving the effectiveness of future efforts.

Figure 5 (A&B) highlights the contributions of local CSOs, NGOs, and philanthropists in promoting Women's Economic Empowerment. While there are peaks in August, the decline in subsequent months indicates the importance of consistent support and efforts. These local entities should consider strategies to maintain the positive impact observed during peak periods and address challenges that hinder long-term success. This analysis serves as a valuable resource for organizations aiming to enhance their role in advancing Women's Economic Empowerment and offers insights into areas where improvements are needed.

Media Perspectives on Women's Economic Empowerment in Nigeria: Evidence from Focus Group Discussions

This section delves into the insights gathered during focus group discussions (FGD) held on November 26, 2022, at the Development Research and Projects Centre (dRPC) in Abuja, Nigeria. The FGD aimed to explore Media Perspectives on Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) in Nigeria and revealed essential aspects for policymaking. The discussions covered five key topics: a comparative analysis of WEE between 2021 and 2022, communication approaches to enhance WEE visibility, government involvement of women's co-operatives in COVID-19 palliative distribution, the role of media in improving WEE visibility, and perceptions regarding who invests more in WEE between government and the private sector.

i. Views on WEE Visibility between 2021 and 2022

During the FGD, participants expressed their views on WEE visibility between 2021 and 2022. A significant majority (86%) noted a notable improvement in WEE visibility in 2022 compared to the previous year. They observed an increase in conversations and advocacy related to WEE, reflecting a positive shift in the narrative.

Despite the observed improvement, participants stressed the importance of sustained advocacy and actions to further enhance WEE visibility. They emphasized that women's increased involvement in decision-making processes, particularly at the community level, is a testament to the positive impact of heightened visibility.

Several participants highlighted the need for data disaggregation specifically focused on women and girls. They argued that such data would provide a more accurate representation of WEE activities and their impact, enabling better reporting and evidence-based policy formulation.

ii. **Best Communication Approaches to Improve WEE Visibility**

A significant majority (71%) of participants identified social media as the most effective communication approach to enhance WEE visibility in Nigeria. They emphasized the widespread use of social media across various age groups and its potential to attract policymakers' attention through repeated exposure. The ability of social media to ignite conversations and garner attention was viewed as a powerful tool for advancing WEE.

While social media received strong support, some participants (15%) acknowledged the continued relevance of traditional media, including television, radio, and newspapers. They argued that policymakers often regard content from traditional media as more reliable and influential in shaping decisions. This suggests the importance of a multifaceted communication strategy to reach diverse audiences effectively.

A minority (14%) advocated for face-to-face engagement as a means to improve WEE visibility. They underscored the value of direct interactions with advocates and policymakers, providing firsthand information and opportunities for in-depth discussions. Face-to-face engagement was seen as a way to build personal connections and convey the importance of WEE effectively.

iii. **Government Involvement of Women Co-operatives in COVID-19 Palliative Distribution**

All participants unanimously expressed dissatisfaction with the government's exclusion of women's co-operatives in the distribution of COVID-19 palliatives in Nigeria. They argued that this exclusion was a major factor contributing to the failure of relief materials reaching those who needed them the most.

Participants pointed out that the distribution of palliatives by community leaders and individuals with no direct link to vulnerable populations led to inefficiencies and even diversion of relief items for personal use. They stressed that involving women co-operatives would have been a more effective strategy to empower women and address poverty and economic exclusion.

iv. **How Media Can Improve Visibility of WEE**

A significant portion (26%) of participants suggested engaging more media professionals in conversations about WEE issues. They recommended dedicating columns and social media interactions specifically for women's economic empowerment. This approach aims to increase the visibility of WEE by leveraging the influence and reach of media professionals.

Another group (17%) emphasized the importance of investigative reporters visiting the homes of indigent citizens to report on the economic situations of women. This approach aims to attract public and policymaker attention by highlighting the challenges and successes of women in economic endeavours.

The majority (57%) advocated for solution journalism focused on women's economic empowerment. This form of reporting highlights how women are proactively addressing their economic challenges. Participants believed that such reports would encourage government support and action.

v. **Sector with Higher Investment on WEE**

Participants were unanimous (100%) in their perception that the private sector invests more in WEE compared to government institutions. They cited the importance of accountability and effective monitoring and evaluation processes in private sector initiatives. Despite government announcements, participants believed that the private sector, including NGOs/CSOs and philanthropists, plays a more substantial role in advancing WEE in Nigeria.

The insights gathered from these focus group discussions highlight the pivotal role of media in advancing Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) in Nigeria's digitalized society. The increased visibility of WEE, facilitated by social media and traditional media, has positively influenced women's participation in economic activities and decision-making processes. However, participants emphasize the need for sustained advocacy, data accuracy, and diverse communication approaches.

The exclusion of women's co-operatives from the distribution of COVID-19 palliatives revealed significant flaws in government strategies, highlighting the importance of involving women's groups to address poverty and economic exclusion effectively.

Media can further improve WEE visibility by engaging more media professionals, utilizing investigative reporting, and promoting solution journalism. These approaches can attract public and policymaker attention, driving support and action for women's economic empowerment.

Lastly, participants perceive the private sector as the primary investor in WEE, emphasizing the importance of accountability and effective monitoring and evaluation processes in private sector initiatives. Despite government announcements, the private sector, including NGOs/CSOs and philanthropists, is seen as the driving force behind WEE advancements in Nigeria.

Discussion

Figure 1 (A&B) illustrates an examination of Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) activities at the federal level in Nigeria during the specified time frame. Notably, it unveils a fluctuating pattern of WEE activities, with the highest recorded percentage occurring in September, reaching 23.8%. This surge suggests increased initiatives or media coverage related to WEE during that month. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that WEE activities remained consistently below 10% in the months of April, May, June, and November. This pattern raises questions about the sustained attention and coverage of WEE issues during these months. Furthermore, the absence of records for WEE beneficiaries in April, May, and November suggests potential gaps in reporting and program effectiveness. These findings align with reports of Adepoju (2020) and Lewis et al (2019), which emphasized the importance of consistent and sustained efforts in policy advocacy and media engagement for WEE. Policymakers can utilize this information to better target their initiatives during months when WEE activities are low, ensuring consistent support and resources.

Figure 2 (A&B) shifts the focus to the analysis of Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) activities at the state level in Nigeria. It reveals a notable pattern of WEE activities across

different states, with a peak in June at 50% and a significant decline to less than 1% in November. The fluctuation in WEE activities and beneficiaries at the state level underscores the need for state governments and local policymakers to consider more consistent and targeted approaches to support women's economic empowerment. The success observed in June can serve as a model for effective initiatives, encouraging states to replicate these efforts throughout the year. The decline in WEE activities and beneficiaries after June raises questions about the timing and sustainability of state-level programs. This aligns with the literature's emphasis on the importance of sustained efforts in policy advocacy and program planning, as demonstrated by the studies of Iorfa and Ogwuche (2020). Policymakers and program planners should explore the factors that led to success in June and strive to replicate them in other months to ensure consistent progress.

Figure 3 (A&B) provides insights into the role of financial institutions in promoting Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE). It reveals significant variations in WEE activities linked to financial institutions during the specified period. July stands out with a substantial increase in WEE activities (54.5%) and beneficiaries (99.9%) related to financial institutions, suggesting a concerted effort or increased media attention during this period. However, the subsequent decline in WEE activities (9.1%) and beneficiaries (less than 1%) from August to November 2022 raises questions about the sustainability and long-term impact of financial institution-led WEE initiatives. This highlights the need for consistent and sustained efforts by these institutions. The insights from this analysis align with the literature's emphasis on the pivotal role of financial institutions in WEE, as indicated by the studies of Iorfa and Ogwuche (2020). The success observed in July should serve as a model for financial institutions, encouraging them to maintain or replicate such initiatives throughout the year. Additionally, the challenges faced in sustaining impact in the later months should be thoroughly examined to improve future initiatives.

Result from Figure 4 (A&B) focuses on the contributions of bilateral and multilateral organizations in promoting Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE). It reveals fluctuations in WEE activities associated with these organizations, with September emerging as a significant month with a relatively high percentage of WEE activities (45%). However, there is a noticeable decline in WEE activities to 5% in November, raising questions about the consistency and long-term impact of initiatives supported by these organizations. The analysis indicates that these organizations play a crucial role in advancing WEE in Nigeria, in line with the studies of Iorfa and Ogwuche (2020). The fluctuations in WEE activities and beneficiaries suggest challenges in maintaining the momentum and impact of initiatives, emphasizing the importance of sustained efforts and a more consistent approach.

Figure 5 (A&B) highlights the contributions of local Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), and philanthropists in promoting Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE). It reveals fluctuations in WEE activities facilitated by these local entities, with August standing out as a significant month with a relatively high percentage of WEE activities (30.4%). The insights gathered from focus group discussions (FGDs) align with the findings, emphasizing the important role played by local CSOs, NGOs, and philanthropists in advancing WEE in Nigeria, as found in the studies of Daramola (2020). The fluctuations in WEE

activities and beneficiaries suggest challenges in maintaining the momentum and impact of initiatives, underscoring the need for consistent and sustained efforts.

The FGDs provided valuable insights into media perspectives on WEE in Nigeria. Participants noted a notable improvement in WEE visibility in 2022 compared to the previous year, aligning with the findings of increased WEE activities in September. The role of media, especially social media, was highlighted as a powerful tool for advancing WEE visibility, as emphasized in the studies of Lewis et al. (2019). The exclusion of women's co-operatives in the distribution of COVID-19 palliatives was a significant concern, emphasizing the importance of involving women's groups to address poverty and economic exclusion, as highlighted in the studies of Okafor and Ike (2016). Participants recommended various communication approaches, including social media, traditional media, and face-to-face engagement, to improve WEE visibility. These suggestions align with the multifaceted communication strategy recommended in the literature, as demonstrated by the studies of Daramola (2020). The unanimous perception of participants that the private sector invests more in WEE compared to government institutions echoes the literature's emphasis on the private sector's significant role in WEE, as found in the studies of Okafor and Ike (2016).

Conclusion and Policy Implications

The findings of the research shed light on the trends in WEE coverage, the role of different stakeholders, and media perspectives in Nigeria. The fluctuations in WEE activities and beneficiaries highlight the need for sustained efforts and more consistent approaches to women's economic empowerment. Policymakers and program planners can utilize these insights to target their initiatives effectively. The role of financial institutions, bilateral and multilateral organizations, local CSOs, NGOs, and philanthropists in WEE was underscored, emphasizing the importance of their contributions. The research findings emphasize the necessity for sustained and consistent efforts in Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) in Nigeria, given the fluctuations in WEE activities and beneficiaries. Policymakers and program planners should leverage these insights to target their initiatives effectively, recognizing the pivotal roles of financial institutions, bilateral and multilateral organizations, local Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), and philanthropists in WEE. Policymakers must ensure the sustainability of these initiatives and collaborate with media practitioners to enhance WEE visibility through improved communication approaches. Furthermore, addressing the exclusion of women's co-operatives in COVID-19 palliative distribution underscores the imperative of more inclusive government strategies to combat poverty and economic exclusion among women. This research offers valuable guidance to stakeholders, policymakers, and media practitioners, enabling data-driven decisions that empower women economically in Nigeria.

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