

## **EMPOWERING WOMEN THROUGH MICROFINANCE: QUALITATIVE EVIDENCE**

**Emmanuel John Kaka**

Accounting Department, FAMSS, Federal University Gasua, Yobe State, Nigeria.  
Email: [youngkaka2002@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:youngkaka2002@yahoo.co.uk)

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### **ABSTRACT**

Women serve as a channel through which microfinance is provided in Nigeria. This is as a result of the disadvantaged position they found themselves, because they are culturally less recognized, don't have the right to make decisions and are economically vulnerable in society. Nonetheless, some studies in Nigeria and the world at large have shown that the status of women has improved greatly with the coming of microfinance. The aim of this study is to assess the impact of microfinance on woman's empowerment in Nigeria. The data used in this study was collected qualitatively using personal and in-depth interviews. A total of 10 samples of respondents were chosen purposively. The study discovered that microfinance has positively affected group solidarity and continuity in microfinance, decision making, business income as well as increased assets possession, children education, and expenditure of the women.

**Keywords:** Development Exchange Centre, Empowerment, Microfinance, Nigeria, Women.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The Nigerian Gross Domestic Product has been growing at a very slow rate nowadays, and the slow rate of growth has contributed to the neglect of the large section of people who are poor and underprivileged. Rao (2009) opined that inclusive growth has been much emphasized and so financial inclusion is one of the policy measures towards it. Thus, microfinance is one of the major and effective instruments towards financial inclusion which provides economic opportunities to weaker and poor people in the society by ensuring access to necessary financial services with the aim of poverty eradication and improvement in the living standard for the poor most especially women (Suprabha, 2014). However, studies have shown that nearly half of the Nigerian population consists of women who mainly remain marginalized because of their poor access to

employment, health, and education (Argiropoulos & Rajagopal, 2003). Increasing employment and income and economic empowerment of women are the immediate issues to bring women into the mainstream of economic development. Microfinance is an important tool to meet the financial needs of the poor especially women and reduce their dependence on formal sources of finance due to poor access to collateral and exorbitant interest rates charged by the mainstream banks. Due to the lack of repayment capacity of the poor, these banks generally are not ready to extend credit assistance to such people (Khandker, 2000).

Microfinance has also assisted in the upliftment of the living standard of women in society. Economic empowerment helps women by encouraging and enabling them to become entrepreneurs. The status of women in society is improving and microfinance has assisted in evoking confidence among women. Women empowerment helps in reducing the disparity between women and men on social and economic grounds and reduces poverty (Sukanya, 2019). In addition, Tarig and Sangmi (2018), in their study discovered that women's participation in microfinance most especially through Self Help Groups (SHGs) empowers them economically, socially, psychologically, and politically. Despite the benefits women derive from microfinance, there is evidence of women's disempowerment also, most especially in lack of control over income and assets, inability to take part in decision making, increased workload for women, and also a negative effect on the education of their children. Thus, whether microfinance disempowers or empowers women needs further empirical research and investigation, to trace out the fair linkage between microfinance and women empowerment and assign proper weights to various dimensions of women empowerment.

Moreover, Nahar *et al.* (2019) discoveries indicate that microcredit strengthens women's family standing as shown in the role they perform in the household decision making process and concluded that microcredit has a positive impact on women's empowerment within the household which is in line with the findings of Kabeer (2005), and concluded that further qualitative research needs to get serious attention. So for further study, these issues should be taken into consideration.

### **1.1. Implication and the Rational**

The exploratory is aimed to examine the impact of using microfinance in empowering women in terms of increase in income, assets, decision making in the households in Northeast Nigeria, and secondly, to know how microfinance

contributes to group solidarity and continuity in microcredit groups. Nonetheless, it is essential to know that the objective of the study is not to make generalized conclusions about the impact of microfinance on women's empowerment. Alternatively, the objective is to listen to a group of market women on how microfinance has helped in increasing their income, give them the opportunity to make decisions, and improve their group bonding, in order to establish whether we can learn from their experience toward improving women livelihood. To achieve this, a brief theoretical outline of the use concept of microfinance is given since it serves as a means of empowering women. In addition, this research aims to add to the body of knowledge and understanding of use of microfinance in empowering women, since it is built on previous studies in the field of microfinance and women empowerment (Nahar, et al., 2019; Sukanya, 2019; Tarig & Sangmi, 2018; Kesanta, 2015).

This paper is consists of five-section. Section one deals with the introduction, section two discusses the literature, and section three concentrates on the process used in carrying out the research. Section show explains in detail the discussion of the qualitative results obtained from the respondents and lastly, section five gives the conclusion and summary of the study.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

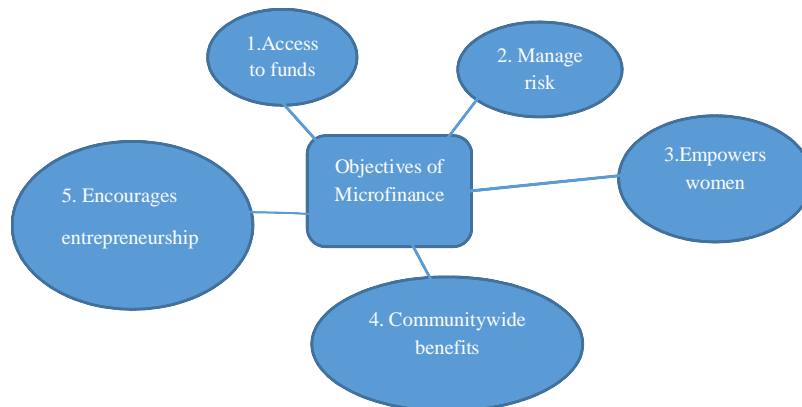
### **2.1. Microfinance**

Microfinance refers to microloans, insurance, transfer services, savings and other financial products targeted at low income earners (Tarig & Sangmi, 2018). Microfinance is a concept that incorporates the terms "micro" and "finance." Microfinance stands for a 'Small loan.' Poor entrepreneurs and low-income families who do not have collateral and do not have access to traditional bank loans are eligible for micro-finance. It is a type of joint lending liability that necessitates borrowing funds from a group of other borrowers. The primary benefits of a microfinance business are offered by low-income and underserved communities in society (Kaushal, et., 2021). This shows that microfinance provides financial services together with non-financial services such as training, supervision, marketing knowledge and awareness which are effective in showing significant positive effect on standard of living and poverty reduction of the weaker sections of the population. Thus, it is the micro-credit program together with non-microcredit aspects that are considered as a way of not only economic growth and development, but a tool for social development goals through to be the main roots of persistent women's under-development.

Microcredit is the small amount of loan that is provided for the upliftment of the weaker section in the society. The borrowers of the loan will consider the commitment seriously and will repay the money in order to be eligible for more amount of loans. There is no collateral security that will be demanded for providing the loan amount to the borrower. The concept of microcredit originated from the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh in the year 1983. Microcredit is an essential component of microfinance. There are many financial services provided to the poor in the form of microcredit. Grameen Bank in Bangladesh was founded by Muhammad Yunus. He started himself providing loans to the poor people from his own money without asking for any collateral security. Grameen Bank was followed by organizations such as BRAC in 1972 and ASA in 1978. Micro credit has played a vital role in the upliftment of the poor section of the society. Muhammed Yunus founded the Grameen bank which is popularly known as the first modern microcredit institution and was awarded the Noble peace prize in the year 2006.

### **2.1.1. Objectives of Microfinance**

The objectives of microfinance are depicted in the following figure 1



Source: Adopted from: Sukanya (2019)

- Microfinance institutions are key sources of credit for poor people as commercial banks are unwilling to extend credit to them because of high risk of default. Furthermore, money lenders charge exorbitant interest rates from them.
- Micro financial institutions offer financial assistance to the poor which enables them to manage the risk.

- Micro finance institutions are providing loans to women which has helped them to become self-dependent and earn money for their families. It is one of the ways to empower the women in the society.
- Microfinance is boon to the underprivileged people as they extend loans to them to start their own small businesses. This greatly helps in encouraging entrepreneurship at the local levels and also generates employment opportunities.

### **2.1.2. Difference between microfinance and formal banking**

There are a number of differences between microfinance institutions and formal banking. The following Table-1 differentiates between the both in terms of form of organizations, target groups for providing loan, period of loan, thrift, terms of loan repayment, and monitoring and screening of granting loan (see, Sukanya, 2019; Chetty, 2017; Khawari, 2004).

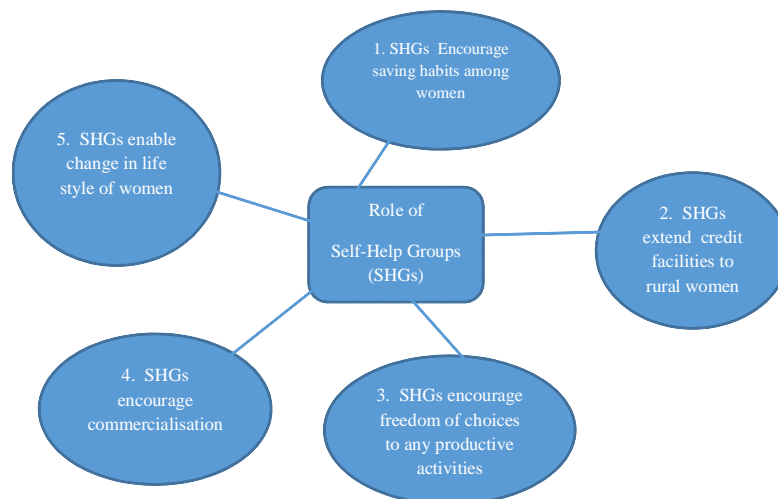
**Table 1**  
**Differences Between Microfinance Institutions and Formal Banking**

<i>Differences</i>	<i>Microfinance</i>	<i>Formal Banking</i>
Form of Organization	They are usually social organizations operating for the welfare of the people in the society.	They are commercial banks.
Target groups	Mainly rural areas	Urban and rural (both)
Period of loan	They cater to short term credit needs of the people.	They cater to medium and long term loan requirements of individuals and businesses.
Thrift	They concentrate on loans as well as saving habits of people .	They focus on the loan requirements.
Repayment terms	Peer pressure and weekly repayment of loans are concentrated more. The repayment of loans starts as soon as the loans are given out to the borrowers and proceed regularly thereafter.	They focus more on collateral and legal terms for loan repayment. The repayments is according to standard loan contract.
Monitoring and Screening	They follow more informal procedures for monitoring and screening of loans.	They adhere to more formal procedures of monitoring and screening.

## 2.2. Self Help Group

A self-help group is a voluntary association of people with alike socio- economic background to enable mutual help to all the members of the Self –Help group. Self Help Groups basically act as the intermediaries and primarily consist of 10-20 members working for mutual benefits. The members of the group bring in a small amount of money in the form of regular savings and contribute to a fund and this fund can be used to meet the emergency needs of the group members. The concept of collateral lending is absent and hence ensures peace of mind to the borrowing members of the group. Basically the Self-help groups are started by Government organizations. Self-help groups have been playing a vital role in transforming the life of needy people. These groups are empowering women through skill development activities. Women empowerment through SHG's will help in overcoming poverty and will ensure the economic development of the country (Sukanya, 2019).

Empowerment of women is very essential for the economic development of the country. Rural women should be provided financial assistance to instill confidence among them and to enable them to have a better standard of living in the society. Microcredit has helped in empowerment of women in India. SHG's have helped women by providing employment opportunities. Income and savings of women has increased hence empowering them economically and socially. The role of self-help groups is depicted in figure 2 as follows:



**Figure 2: Role of Self-Help Groups (SHGs)**

*Source:* Adopted from: Source: Adopted from: Sukanya (2019)

A perusal of the key role being played by SHGs (figure 2), it is clear that in addition to encouraging commercial activities, now women have been empowered socially, economically, culturally and politically in rural areas.

### 2.3. Empowerment

Women's empowerment is essential for socio-economic development as it is considered as one of the major factors for increasing worldwide development efforts. Wei *et al.* (2021) state that women's empowerment has a great influence on health, nutrition, education, and the overall well-being of societies as well as of the children and households. Also, the influence of microfinance on women's empowerment is a debatable topic, as past studies have documented. Some researchers claim that microfinance facilitates women to increase their earning capacity, leading to greater control to tackle cultural irregularities. Others contend that their spouses mostly control micro-loans provided to women, causing severe demotion of women (Khursheed *et al.*, 2021). Thus, empowerment' simply means a process through which people acquire more influence over factors that shape their lives. Tarig and Sangmi (2018) defines empowerment as a process that is difficult to measure as it affected by dynamic economic, political and social changes. The study further discovered that one set of empowerment indicator in one setting may be invalid in another setting. Afridi (2010) defined empowerment as autonomy with which one has the freedom to make own decisions, have access to resources and ability to exercise the degree of control over the use of such resources. Thus, empowerment can be said to be a complex and multi-faceted process which take place at individual level, household, community and organizational level. The empowerment process is fostered with knowledge, opportunities, sustainability, resources, capacity building and agency. The complete measurement of empowerment must be measured in a holistic way, for any empowerment that looks at a single domain is not enough for sustainability.

The World Bank (2009) defines empowerment as "the process of increasing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes. Central to this process is actions which both build individual and collective assets, and improve the efficiency and fairness of the organizational and institutional context which govern the use of these assets". Sen (1993) explained that the freedom to lead different types of life is reflected in a person's capability set. A person's capability depends on a variety of factors including social arrangements and personal characteristics.

However, the full accounting of individual freedom goes beyond the capabilities of personal living. For example, if a person does not have the courage to choose to live in a certain way, even though she could live that way if she chose to, can it be said that she had the freedom to live that way (Sen, 1993)? Nahar *et al.* (2019) mentioned that one way of thinking about power is the ability to make choices. To be disempowered means to be denied choice, while empowerment refers to the processes by which those who have been denied the ability to make choices acquire such ability. She also pointed that empowerment entails change. People who exercise a great deal of choice in their lives may be very powerful, but they are not empowered.

Hearth (2018) states that microfinance is regarded as one such policy that seeks to empower women and reduce income and consumption poverty, and socio-economic vulnerability. The concerns for gender equity and women's rights are now an integral part of pro-poor development planning. The "gender and poverty" debate has focused on a number of issues, within which women are seen to be disproportionately poor because they lack access to resources. Gender inequalities are particularly visible in resource-based entitlements (land titles, property rights, credit, etc.). Hence the rationale that access to credit will generate income and livelihood options, gives women more bargaining power within the household and contribute to family wellbeing (Sharma, 2011). Women's empowerment is defined as the process through which women acquire the ability to make strategic life choices in the context where this ability was previously denied (Kabeer, 1999). The ability to exercise individual choice is based on three interrelated factors, resources, achievement and agency.

Extensive empirical evidence confirms that women's access to microfinance has succeeded in increasing consumption and assets of poor households (Kabeer, 1999). In a recent study Gunathilake and de Silva (2010) in Sri Lanka, confirmed that ownership of a microfinance loan increases a women's control over the loan-assisted project, and through that, has a significant and positive impact on her level of empowerment. In particular, greater control over the project is found to increase her economic power and her involvement in major family decisions. However, de Mel *et al.* (2008) found that returns to capital were zero among female owned microenterprises but in excess of nine per cent per month for male-owned enterprises. However, returns to capital may be zero in financial terms but social and other related gains from the enterprise are positive. Therefore, if added women participation/empowerment and give them imputed value, result may be different. These findings have serious implications for



traditional microfinance practice and policy which concentrate on lending to women. So that impact of microfinance on women empowerment has mixed results. Based on these mixed and complex scenarios, this present study attempted to analyze empowerment ability of microfinance, using both quantitative and qualitative measures. The empowerment concept tends to be primarily applied to disadvantaged groups of people, and is usually linked to a vision of more equal living conditions in society. Mishra and Dale (1996) specify a set of variables and elements at four levels, of particular importance in these communities, for analysis of gender. The variables are: Access to resources (economic resources: different categories of land; political resources: political representation; cultural resources: formal and indigenous knowledge: role in rituals). Ownership of resources (land: of different categories; livestock; house).

Control over resources (land: different categories; livestock; house: by decision about building and repair; income; its use). Access to alternative opportunities (outside support: from NGOs and the Government; outside wage employment; product markets). Social decision-making power (regarding health care; in marriage: choice of partner, sexual freedom/ boundedness; opportunity for divorce).

Meanwhile, Elliot (2008) suggests three closely related dimensions of empowerment – individual capabilities such as health, education, knowledge, self-confidence, vision, etc., institutional, cultural and other resources that provide opportunities and constraints; and agency or processes through which choices are made and put into effect. Thus, it is clear that the concept of empowerment is being used increasingly as a tool for understanding what is needed to change the situation for women and other marginalized sections of society. The proponents of microfinance consider economic empowerment as an entry point and a road map towards overall empowerment. It is believed that non-economic benefits flow automatically as a consequence of this approach.

Giving women access to credit, it has been argued, is a means by which both their economic standing within the household and social position within society can be improved. This argument has been particularly significant in developing countries where women's position is so poor. Hulme and Mosley (1996) demonstrate that two forces have been particularly significant in increasing women's involvement in credit programs. The first relates to the financial viability of institutions. In many contexts it is revealed that female borrowers have proved more reliable than men borrowers: consequently, some lenders have found that

their financial performance can be improved by focusing on female borrowers. The second force stems from aid donors who 'discovered' women in the early 1980s and have subsequently encouraged recipient agencies to provide women with more assistance. Hossain *et al.* (2004) articulated the female participation in decision making in their day to day activities. Following this study Colombage *et al.* (2008) constructed a Women' Empowerment Index to examine the female participation in decision making as the proxy for agricultural and nonagricultural activities. They assumed that women's power in decision making in three domains, namely agricultural activities, domestic affairs, and business activities.

Determinants of empowerment by microfinance services are access, creation and control over private resources (credit, savings and assets), freedom of decision making at home, self-confidence on socioeconomic activities, and status in community and family (relationships, participation in village societies, social mobility).

### **2.3.1. How does microcredit lead to women's empowerment?**

Microcredit enables women empowerment by placing capital in their hands and allowing them to earn independent income and contribute economically to their households and communities (Nahar *et al.*, 2019). In theory, women invest the microcredit in their own income earning activity, either in the form of a microenterprise or agricultural production, and accordingly their income, which they themselves control, increases. In other words, involvement in a successful income generating activity should translate into greater control and economic empowerment. Women's economic empowerment is then expected lead to increased well-being for themselves and also their families. Furthermore, this economic empowerment is seen as enabling women to renegotiate changes in gender roles, which may lead to social empowerment (Mayoux, 2001). Microcredit may also lead to increased women empowerment through increased power in decision making. Show in their collective decision making model that if behavior in the household is Pareto efficient, the household's objective function takes the form of a weighted sum of individual utilities.

### **2.4. Empirical Analysis**

Microfinance is considered as an essential approach or tool to empower the poor especially women. It enables them to make-decisions independently and improves and enhances the quality of their life as well as their dignity (Haile *et al.*, 2015). In addition, it helps the women to increase their income generating

abilities, leading to greater confidence and ability to overcome cultural asymmetries and empowerment, most especially their role in decision-making, family-related decisions and ownership of assets. It also reduces domestic violence drastically (Al-mamun *et al.*, 2014; Hashemi *et al.*, 1996). Similarly, Niaz and Iqbal (2019), considered the impact of micro-credit on women empowerment in different regions of the world, where he assessed the effect of micro-credit on empowerment and reduction poverty in women living in Pakistan. The impact was analyzed with better empirical methodology (Ordinary Least Square – OLS and Propensity Score Matching – PSM) and comparatively a larger cross-sectional dataset of 670 respondents. From the values of the responses, multidimensional poverty index was developed to assess the multidimensional poverty levels of the respondents. The findings indicated that access to micro-credit has a positive effect on empowerment of women, poverty reduction, and social status of women by improving their level of income.

Khursheed *et al.* (2021) examined the findings of past studies through word cloud analysis to determine the influence of microfinance on the decision-making power of women and their social empowerment. Among the 54 studies reviewed in this paper, most research studies were found to conclude positive associations between microfinance and women's empowerment. In several studies, results varied due to the measure of empowerment applied gender or socio-political differences. Zaman (1999) observed that one of the impacts of micro-credit is a set of indicators connected to women's control over assets and knowledge of social issues. The researcher also found that loans provided to women have greater impact than those given to men in the household. Women who participated in micro-credit felt that their status had improved because they are being seen as income earners to the family in the household. The study concludes that women's participation in micro-credit gives them the ability to become more active in decision-making and control over income in the household.

Kumar *et al.* (2013) assessed the role of micro-credit as a means to economic empowerment of rural women. The study employed the use of exploratory research design, structured interview questionnaire and in-depth interview. Data were collected from a sample size of 100 beneficiaries of micro-credit. The study finds that women do participate in decision-making process in the household after receiving micro-credit. Similarly, Wattoo *et al.* (2015) examined the strategies for empowering women and gender equality through microfinance in Pakistan. The study finds micro-loans' accessibility to have a major impact

on women's empowerment and concludes that women's experience leads to increase in their household income level as well as the social, economic, political and household well-being. Kato and Kratzer (2013) concluded that women members of micro-credit institutions are more empowered than non-members. Women members of the micro-credit institutions have more control over income generated from business and savings, greater freedom of mobility, self-efficacy and self-esteem, greater role in decision-making and increased activities outside the household. While, Islam's (2020) study reveals that IMFS have led to structural transformation in the occupation dynamics of the respondents' families from agriculture to retail businesses. IMFS have had a significant positive impact on household income, savings and expenditure; have improved standard of living and human capital formation; and have enhanced all three dimensions of empowerment, namely, economic empowerment (ECEM), socio-cultural empowerment (SCEM) and familial empowerment (FLEM). Of them, ECEM and SCEM have positively contributed toward overall women's empowerment.

Electrin *et al.* (2013) considered the impact of microfinance services on reduction of poverty and used a causal study. A questionnaire was used in data collection on a sample of 200 beneficiaries only. The study finds that the four explanatory variables used are relevant to explain the impact of micro-credit institutions on poverty reduction. Furthermore, credit facilities are found to have the highest effect followed by savings, training and insurance. In addition, the study finds an improvement in income and women's empowerment in decision-making; the study concludes that microfinance institutions operating in the country should be motivated and empowered with the provision of finances which can be given to the poor as loans to expedite economic growth and development in Kenya. Similarly, Akter *et al.* (2021) investigated the viability and correlating women empowerment with micro finance in a small village in Bangladesh by using statistical methodology. With absolute number of 220 respondents, where, 100 was experienced micro credit program and another 120 respondents did not have any experience regarding the micro credit program. Stratified random sampling was used from Aatghar Union porishad under Shaltha Upozilla in Faridpur, Bangladesh and information has been gathered through face to face interview and personal meeting by utilizing overview strategy. By investigating five measurements; monetary decision making, household unit dynamic, physical movement freedom, property ownership and finally, responsibility for political and social awareness the women empowerment was estimated. The outcome demonstrated positive impact of micro credit program on women empowerment. Similarly, Das (2021) stated that empowerment

through education is the key issues considered in the recent years. Putting extra income before their hands makes their improvement in the standard of living too. Microfinance through SHGs is the only way to upgrade women's education by participating in different social and economic activities. An attempt has been made by the present study to know the women empowerment through education and Microfinance in Assam with particular reference to flood effected district like Lakhimpur. 40 SHGs have been randomly selected from four development blocks in Lakhimpur district having equal number of SHGs to each development blocks. Again five members were randomly selected from each sample SHGs. The study found that, after joining the groups most of the women have not only socially upgraded but also economically benefited and they now improved their reading and writing skills in the study area.

In trying to look at the contribution of savings to poverty alleviation, Keynes (1936) opined that savings is the surplus or residue of income over consumption expenditure. Dupas and Robinson (2013) assessed the effect of limited admission to formal saving services on the growth of business in countries that are poor and concluded that despite huge fees for withdrawal, many women using the account were able to save and increase their productive investment and personal expenditure.

Kesanta (2015) explored the effect of economic empowerment among women and the well-being of their households through a community savings and loan association in Tanzania. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected. The study finds positive effects of credit and savings of the savings group members on health, education and economic empowerment and enhanced marital relationships. The physical abuse of women has reduced drastically for the savings groups members. Tsai *et al.* (2015) tested the effect of micro-savings intervention decrease in economic dependence of sex workers' change in income. They found that women with microfinance and Human Immune Virus prevention disclosed a significant lower income from sex workers.

Tarig and Sangmi (2018), in their study attempts to assess the effect of microfinance on empowerment of marginalized women in poverty. The study was based on empirical findings of existing literature that are relevant in the world, the study discovered that women participation in microfinance most especially through Self Help Groups (SHGs) empowers them economically, socially, psychologically and politically. Despite the benefits women derive from microfinance, there are evidences of women disempowerment also, most especially in lack of control over income and assets, increased workload for

women, and also negative effect on education of their children. Thus, whether microfinance disempowers or empowers women needs further empirical research and investigation, to trace out the fair linkage between microfinance and women empowerment and assigning proper weights to various dimensions of women empowerment.

Nahar *et al.* (2019), in their study on empirically investigate the effect of microcredit on women's empowerment at Ishwarganj upazila, in Mymensingh, Bangladesh. The findings suggest that microcredit has a positive impact on women's empowerment. The discoveries indicate that microcredit strengthens women's family standing as shown in the role they perform in the household decision making process. Although our finding indicates that microcredit has a positive impact on women's empowerment within the household which is in line with the findings from Kabeer (2005), still further qualitative research needs to get serious attention. This study was conducted on very small scale and the sample size and respondent is not enough to represent the real picture of microcredit and the method of measuring women empowerment should be more broad. So for further study, these issues should be taken into consideration.

Wattoo *et al.* (2015) examined the strategies for empowering women and gender equality through microfinance in Pakistan. The study finds that micro-loans accessibility has a major impact on women empowerment and concludes that women have experienced an increase in their household income level. Thus, their social, economic, political and household well-being has also increased. Kato and Kratzer (2013) concluded that women members of micro-credit institutions are more empowered than non-members. Women members of the micro-credit institutions have more control over income generated from business and savings, greater freedom of mobility, self-efficacy and self-esteem, greater role in decision-making and increased activities outside their home.

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facilities are found to have the highest effect followed by savings, training and insurance. In addition, the study finds an improvement in income and women empowerment in decision-making.

In considering the methodology adopted in carrying out their research, some scholars have considered the use of quantitative method in assessing the performance of microfinance on women empowerment. Thus, this study is going to use qualitative method in order to know whether the result can change.

### **3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The study was conducted in two purposively selected villages of Tafawa Balewa and Bogoro district in Bauchi namely: Lere and Bombar. The reasons for selecting these areas for the present study are: availabilities of credit receiving people, well communicated for the researchers which helped in free movement and co-operation from the respondents. The sample survey for this study was conducted during June to August, 2017. Purposive sampling technique was applied for sample selection

In order to get a vivid understanding of the approach toward women empowerment by microfinance, a qualitative research, using in depth semi structured interviews has been used. Series of semi structured face to face interviews was conducted with the market women as microfinance beneficiaries. This approach allows to grasp with the group solidarity and continuity as well as the process of empowering the micro-credit beneficiaries in order to better their life by empowering their livelihood. Women micro-credit beneficiaries was selected in order to maintain certain internal homogeneity in the study. However, data for the study were collected over three month's period through in-depth interviews which was carried out in the respondent business premises, group monthly meeting point and at times in their houses. Purposeful stratified sampling method to overcome the problems connected with the different size of the women business or trade (kesenta, 2015). Each interview minutes was formal, which begins with general questions about age, nature of business, educational background, motivation for joining microfinance group and the possible reasons is to be empowered by owning a business to earn income and contribute in the decision making in the household.

However, despite the short coming of purposive sampling, this approach was selected because of the availability of the respondents and their willingness

to participate in the survey. The criteria set for the micro-credit women beneficiaries in purposive sampling was that only those women who have collected small loans and used it to start a small trading business and are self-employed, are between the age of 35 and 55 years and have attend at least a primary school in Bauchi, Nigeria where selected to collect the data because they have a large number of women micro-credit beneficiaries. Although, 35 respondents were qualified to fit into the criteria for the research, but only 10 respondents were granted the opportunity to participate in the survey for the collection of data. The choice of sample size in terms of qualitative interviews is guided by McCracken (1988) where the study suggests that, “less is more” in a qualitative study that relies or depends on in-depth interview. McCracken (1988) suggested eight as an ideal sample for most exploratory research or studies. This study however, selected ten in order to have more representatives.

The in-depth interview was conducted using a semi structured questionnaire method by the researcher and a research assistance who is a trained and experience interviewer.

Moreover, all interviews where documented and detailed through note taking, they were also recorded digitally for the accuracy of information and later transcribed for content analysis. The time taking to conduct interviews ranges from 35 to 75 minutes and were carried out over a period of 3 months. All information gathered was in connection to the respondent practical and actual experience in sing micro-credit to start a trade and earn income, help in contributing to decision making in the family. To formalize the data collection process, the respondents were asked to share their stories as to the reasons for joining micro-credit group, group solidary and bounding, improvement in income generation, education and participation in decision-making in the family.

Lastly, all the interviews were conducted on their business premises, some at home and at some times in their monthly group meetings, beginning with the general questions about the respondents and their micro-credit group. Interview questions was given to the respondents in advance to allow them enough time to study, consider and create an atmosphere of trust between the respondents and the researchers. The confidentiality of the respondent responses was guarantee.

The table 3.1 below shows the list of the respondents, their age, educational qualifications, villages and occupation.



**Table 3.1**  
**Details of respondents for in-depth interview**

<i>Informat No.</i>	<i>Name</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Education qualification</i>	<i>Village</i>	<i>Occupation</i>
1	Hannatu Z.	35	Primary school	Lere	Bean cake
2	Naomi	38	Diploma	Bombar	Vegetable
3	Victoria	36	Secondary school	Bombar	Local drink
4	Mary	48	Adult education	Bombar	Food vendor
5	Martina	55	Secondary school	Lere	Provision
6	Linda	42	Primary school	Bombar	Tailoring
7	Asabe	28	Secondary school	Lere	Fruits
8	Jamima	41	Primary school	Bombar	Local drink
9	Naira	50	Secondary school	Lere	Shoes/wears
10	Bilhatu	48	NCE	Lere	Vegetable

#### **4. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

The responses given by micro-credit beneficiaries are stated verbatim reinforce the results of the quantitative analysis in the previous sections. The opinions and experiences of the women benefiting from micro-credit are provided below:

The interviews were conducted in two stages. At the first stage, the interview was conducted to assess the performance of women in terms of group solidarity and continuation in the microfinance institution and the group. To measure group solidarity, the cooperation and togetherness of women members in meeting or solving their social, personal and financial troubles were the indicators.

The second stage was to assess and confirm the quantitative results as to whether micro-credit programs have improved the beneficiary business income and assets generation, decision making and household expenditure.

##### **Group solidarity and continuation in microfinance institutions**

The micro-credit groups act as solidarity groups where members in the groups support each other to address their social, personal and financial problems in their households. They promote welfare as well as encourage members to adopt measures to resolve their problems.

Thus, continuing participation of women in microfinance institution creates a relationship with individuals, organizations and institutions. Moreover, this relationship is essential for maintaining group solidarity as well as women empowerment. Some of the responses of the beneficiaries are as follows:

Informant 1, from Lere village is running bean cake business. Her educational qualification is primary school. She is married to her tribal man. This was her story.

“My husband, used to drink alcohol, every day he comes back home drunk and abused me verbally and physically all the times. I tolerate such abuses and I am very ashamed to inform others or my friends about him. One faithful day he beat and injured me. Seeing my situation at that time, one of my friend elder sister, asked me about what happened to me. I informed her about all that happened about my husband. My friends came and advised him, but he refused to listen. Three weeks later, he went out and did not come back or return home. Nobody knows his where about. I cried for many days starved living without food with my children. My friend sister who was a member of DEC micro-credit group introduced me, helps me and motivated me to leave a good life for the sake of my children. At that time I got a loan from DEC micro-credit bank from the help of my friend sister and her group. I started a bean cake business. Now I am getting nearly 300 naira to 500 naira every day with which I can manage my family or household. After joining micro-credit group, I really enjoy and feel the depth or bound of friendship among us, assuming if my friends have not assisted me to join the group I wouldn't have had any other source of help. Presently, I am independent, empowered and have the belief and confidence of feeding and bringing up my children. In addition, I take decisions on what happen in my family without any interference by relatives and even when my husband returned. This is happening because I am contributing greatly now to the upkeep of the family unlike before.”

In a similar vein, Informant 2, aged 38 years with a vegetable business, described her group solidarity and cooperation as follows:

“In our micro-credit group, we are like one family. The group is known in our village. We are united and do everything in common. We discuss all our businesses, finances and personal issues with our micro-credit group members. We help any member who is in problem or having an occasion in her house. We no longer feel the stress or burden of running our domestic and business works or activities. We manage time very well. Whenever we are free, we do visit each other's house and assist one another where necessary. Because of this unity and cooperation within us, every member is being motivated to do well in business and domestic affairs. Finally, I feel proud of my friends and myself.”

The above are responses from micro-credit beneficiaries giving their accounts of how micro-credit bank assisted in uniting and empowering women as well as helping them to become self-reliant.

Group solidarity seems to be crucial, most especially, when it involves financial matters. Some beneficiaries are asked questions in relation to this issue.

Informant 3 gave the report below about her friend, Rhoda:

“My friend Rhoda, had a difficulty in paying her loans. She incurred loss in her business and she was afraid to tell her husband. We decided to assist her, by sharing the loss in order to pay the loan installments on her behalf. We and the loan officer advice and encourage Rhoda to take another loan. She took it and continued with the business she was doing before. This time she was favored and did well. Presently, she is paying her debts gradually.”

Similarly, Informant 4, a foodstuff vendor. She gave her report about one group member as follows:

“Naomi Amos is one of our group members, she has 4 children, and she has a vegetable business. Her husband is incapacitated. As the bread winner, she suddenly felt sick and was taken to a nearby village for treatment. She stayed there for some days. The group members assisted in paying her medical bills. We took care of her children for the period she was down. Apart from that, every one of us took a turn to feed her household members and paid her share of loan installments jointly. When she recovered from the sickness, she continued with her business and paid her debts gradually. We supported because her relations refused to assist her. Because of the concern and help render or given to her when she was down, she become very helpful to all of us. I am very proud to say that, the group members are the first to come to our help or aid at all times whenever there is any emergencies before our relatives do”.

### **Continuity in the micro-credit group**

With regards to the wish of the micro-credit beneficiaries to continue, all the members who were interviewed agreed to continue to be members of the micro-credit group. Thus, the following responses were collected:

Informant 5, who is running a chemist business described her experiences:

“Before now, I was only bordered with myself and my family working from morning till evening. I only come back to eat dinner and sleep. I was running a kind of on- way routine life. Following the advice of one of my friends I join the micro-credit bank group. Immediately, I become a member of the group. I learn many good things from the group members of which ordinarily I wouldn't have known if I have not joined the micro-credit group. Then I understood the importance of uniting with others in a group. I wish to say that I am presently, very happy and excited to continue in our group.” This is because the group provides a sense of belonging.”

In addition, Informant 6 responded thus:

“Before joining the group I always to go to my neighbors, when the need arose to get money when there are urgent financial needs or emergency. At times it takes me some time to get it, even though, the amount is small, like 300 naira. Presently, I am more independent, since I start collecting loan from the micro-credit bank and used it to start my business; I have been generating and saving some little amount. Whenever, there is emergency I take money from my savings. When the amount is not enough I feel comfortable requesting credit from my group members at all times. Even if the amount is small like, 1,500 naira to 3,000 naira. I get it from them. Now I don't worry about any problem. So I wish to continue with the micro-credit group.”

The business of the micro-credit group has the capacity to be profitable. The present research observes also that the microfinance institutions do reach the poor groups with loans, and savings services that appear to provide socio-economic gains or benefits to the members of the group. This shows that the members of the groups could make profit and be sustainable.

### **Business income and assets accumulation of the beneficiaries of micro-credit**

When women do not have money, it slows down their economic growth. This research concludes that injection of loan will open doors for women to go into business, generate profit and improve income of the household. The quantitative analysis done earlier concludes that women's business income has improved after joining microfinance institutions. However, to verify the claim that their business income has improved, qualitative analysis was carried out. Majority of the respondents stated that their business income has improved after they joined DEC microfinance institution. For example:

Informant 7, who sells vegetables, gave her own experience as:

“Before, I work as a domestic servant. Later on, my friend joined a micro-credit group and asked me to join. At the first instance, I wasn't interested because I was told that, if I felt to pay the loan in time the micro-credit bank will arrest and jail me. But she and the loan officer convince me to join. It was after I might have joined, that I realized the gain or benefits. The micro-credit has assisted us to meet our financial needs. I collected a loan with which I started my vegetable business in my area I used to go to Dass village where I will buy at a wholesale price and sell them in my area. The business usually gives me a reasonable income. I do get an amount of 10,000 naira to 20,000 naira every month as income. We also use some of the vegetables in the house. The money generated from the business, has helped me to repair our house, purchased furniture and now we can sleep comfortably. Our life has changed now. I am grateful to my friend.”

Moreover, Informant 8 runs a local drink business. She has studied up to secondary school level before joining the micro-credit group. She was a full time house-wife, engaging in only domestic work or activities at home. During her free time, she does some small jobs for her neighbor. Immediately after joining the group and collecting her loan, her life changed from being a full-time house wife to an entrepreneur. She feels that DEC microfinance institution have brought great and remarkable changes in her life. She described her situation as follows:

“Before the family is being managed by the little money the husband generated. This is not always enough to meet our needs. Then, things were very difficult for us. Then I decided to join micro-credit group and collected loan and start my business. I started making a lot of profit, which gave me the opportunity to contribute to the family. The business has grown big and is generating more profit. Before, we leave in a room and parlor no toilet with a common bathroom. Presently, we have a new house with two rooms and a parlor and separate toilet and bathroom inside the house. The new house is more comfortable. I assist my husband in paying the rent through the money I generated from my business. The scenario took place as a result of the income I now realized from my business. Presently, I am planning to expand the business.”

Thus Informant 3 had this to say also:

“I was only a full house wife who was told that my main duties are cooking and taking care of the children in the house. One of my friends, told me to join their micro-credit group. I join and collected a loan from micro-credit bank. I started doing a small business, food vendor business and I sold it to people in my neighborhood. Now I make an income of between 8,000 naira to 18,000 naira from my business with which I used to support my family comfortably, unlike it was before. Joining micro-credit group has changed my life. I am very proud because I have a source that gives me income to support my family unlike it was before. Hence, my status has changed or improved.”

In another word, Informant 6 confesses as follows:

“I received training with an NGO. I collected a loan from micro-credit bank I began a tailoring business instead of working for another person. I felt it's better to be self-employed and so I took the decision to be a tailor. Later on, I invite one of my friends and taught her how to sew cloths. My income has increased more than how it was before I join the micro-credit bank group. I know earn good income four times than before joining the micro-credit group. Presently, I am very happy and proud about the way I am growing. At least, I can support my family and keep or save some part.”

### **Improvement in decision making.**

The amount usually collected as savings as well as loan repayment by each person is significant and the responses are positive. Improving the saving capability of the group is one of the core objectives of micro-credit institutions. The repayment of loans, saving capacity, discipline and group responsibility are vital for the smooth operations of micro-credit institutions and the group. Most of the women interviewed were very proud about their present savings.

Informant 9 gave her report:

“Since our earnings are very small, whatever we generate, we spend on our day-day expenses. Often it is very difficult or hard to manage our expenses during the month end. The time I first join the micro-credit bank group, I was afraid as how will I be able to manage to repay the savings and the loans. But after a while, I was determined, then, I managed my expenditure and paid my savings. Now our group savings kept with the micro-credit bank is 2,000 naira each month. This amount is being kept for us. The expectation is that after some time we will collect our savings and use it as capital to continue with our business without going back to collect loan again. So, you can see that we are relaxed. Because of the income I usually generated and the savings I have, I now participate in making decision in the household unlike before.”

### **Improvement in expenditure**

When women's income increases, the welfare of the family improves. This is because women are known to spend most of their income on the welfare of the household. Therefore, they need to be assisted or supported, since their success benefits many people. The income earned by the women beneficiaries of micro-credit is one of the important determining factors for the household's welfare. The income of the loan recipients has increased after joining the micro-credit group. Members of the micro-credit groups are presently more independent to take care of their personal needs and of the household.

Household expenditure in this study consists of expenses on food, education, clothing, health, buying of assets and others. The improvement in expenditure is a sign of improvement in welfare. The quantitative result above shows a significant improvement in the household expenditure.

Informant 2 had this to say:

“Before I was doing nothing, spend the whole day at home with neighbors talking. The money my husband usually generated is not enough to feed, pay school fees,

medical expenses and other expenses. When I got my loan from the micro-credit institution, I started selling vegetables in my neighborhood. Now we have food to eat every day. In addition, as I am speaking to you now I just paid a medical bill for my son who is sick. Apart from that next week my children school will open for another time, I have already sown new uniforms and bought books for them and I will also pay their school fees, all because of the money I generate from my business. Now I am doing well in my business and I am happy because I don't have to go borrowing to pay medical expense and other expenses as it used to be".

In terms of interest in providing better education for their children, the study finds that majority of the respondents are determined to educate their children. Nearly all the women send their daughters and sons to school. Formerly, the focus was to educate the sons only but this has changed immediately they made contact with the microfinance institution. Almost all the respondents report that they are very keen on providing good education for their children, most especially the daughters. When the beneficiaries were asked as to whether the loan from microfinance institution was useful to meet expenditure, like health and education, most of them responded positively.

Informant 8, a single mother reported:

"I had so much sorrow or sadness that I did not have any other good thoughts about my life. I wished to give my daughter the right education and to bring her up properly. I took my micro-credit loans and start a business from where I generate income to settle her school fees. I sent her to a good school. My daughter is presently in primary 2 and doing very well in her studying. I am trying to provide her with good education in spite of the suffering. Only my micro-credit group friends assisted me during the period of my needs."

Similarly, Informant 10 the vegetable seller had this to say:

"I don't know how to write and read. I have not at all gone to school anytime in my life. After joining the micro-credit group, I learned to write my signature. My only wish is that my daughters become DEC workers. I send them to a government school. It is very hard to manage with our income. Despite from that, I am determined to provide good education to them so that they will not face any difficulty in life. I have taken the micro-credit loan used it to do business in order to pay their school fees. Joining the DEC micro-credit bank has been of great assistance to us".

This shows that there has been a remarkable improvement in expenditures of the micro-credit beneficiaries as can be seen above. Lastly, the overall results of the qualitative analysis confirmed the results generated in the quantitative analysis

that micro-credit has had a positive impact on the business income and expenditure of the beneficiaries.

#### **4.1. Implications**

The research highlights the difficulty of the way and manner women microfinance beneficiaries who are trading with loan, use it to generate income, children education, and household expenditure, participate in decision making in the family, enhances group solidary and bonding. How it is important that they have taking a bold step to collect the loan in order to better their livelihood and that of their family. Although, microfinance beneficiaries lack knowledge on how to run their trade. Therefore, it is expected that the women micro-credit beneficiaries should be giving the opportunity to go for skill acquisition and training to improve their knowledge on how to run their business or trade. The microfinance institution should provide this kind of skill acquisition and training to enhance their innovation on what nature of trading they should go into that can generate more income to improve their livelihood.

#### **5. CONCLUSION**

The objective of this study was to assess the impact of microfinance on women empowerment most especially on their trade, participation in decision making in the family, children education, household expenditure, group bonding and solidarity. The research examined the impact on 10 microfinance beneficiaries located in Bogoro and Tafawa Balewa of Bauchi state who have been benefiting from the activities of the microfinance institution for quite some time now. The impact of microfinance on women empowerment were explored based on their willingness to participate in, and potentially benefit from this research. Throughout the discussion, this research tried to show the relationship between practice and theory on the use of credit by the women to establish a trade for empowerment purposes. In this regards, the study followed the views of (Niah & Igbal, 2019; Kesenta, 2015; Kato & Kratzer, 2013). The discoveries are consistent with the previous studies (Nahar *et al.*, 2019; Tarig, 2018; Wattoo *et al.*, 2015). With regard to the literature review and empirical analysis, the study gave an advance possible answers to the research questions of this paper: How microfinance is being used to as a strategy to empower poor women in our community. The overall results found that microfinance has impacted positively in empowering women most especially in terms of improved income and assets accumulation, participation in decision making at home, children education,



household expenditure and group bonding and solidarity. It is quiet logical if a woman collected micro loan and use it properly, it will empower her and lift her out of poverty. The findings of this study highlight the importance of collecting small loan from a microfinance institution, by the poor women who lack means of livelihood, so that does who do not joint the microfinance institution may realize the need to joint in order to be empowered and improve their livelihood.

Lastly, despite the great contribution of this study, there are some limitations that opens the door for future research. For instance, since this research uses qualitative method, in order to establish external reliability a large scale survey should be carried out using quantitative technique and or using mixed mode and comparative analysis. Future research should also consider factors like, social involvement of women in the community, freedom of movement in the study area. Conventional measures of poverty must also be incorporated to have a comparison with multidimensional poverty. As the females are considered to be more focused towards house and households so the particular impact on living standard and housing may also be tested. As the MFIs of all over the world are focusing.

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