



# Gender Roles and Inequalities in the Nigerian Labour Market

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## Question

What level of participation in both formal and informal labour markets are women across Nigeria able to attain? What are the barriers facing women in the Nigerian labour market? What evidence exists of effective women's economic empowerment (WEE) interventions?

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## 1. Summary

**45.5% of the Nigerian labour force is female** (World Bank, 2019). Women's participation in formal and informal labour markets is on a positive trajectory and has been rising in both rural and urban areas through the period 1990-2009 but remains lower than that of males (Olowa & Adeoti 2014:73). Women who can work away from the home – particularly in non-familial organisations; in remunerative jobs in the formal rather than in the informal economy; or regular and full-time jobs that are permanent and secure - are more likely to become empowered (Oluwagbemiga et al, 2016:76).

**Most Nigerians work:** with the largest population in Africa over 50% (87 million people) were of working age (between 15 and 64 years). In this group 53 million people were employed and less than 4 million (6%) of the active population were without a job and looking for work (World Bank, 2015:x). In Nigeria, **most employed individuals work for themselves, or their families or in informal conditions** close to home. Some work several jobs and despite this many do not earn enough to escape poverty. Marginal improvement in economic growth<sup>1</sup> has not yet delivered a positive impact on employment levels with just **8% of the adult population employed in the formal sector.**

Across the world, women juggle work with family and care responsibilities, and Nigeria is no exception. Early marriage and family formation play a critical role in women's access to jobs and it is a more significant issue for young women from poorer households than others. Although girls are more likely to leave school early than boys, they do not then get a job. Instead, young women are much more likely to marry early than men are. At age 20, less than 4% of men are married, compared to about 50% of women in rural areas. With early marriage comes early pregnancies and **household responsibilities that effectively remove women from labour market opportunities.** Women in Nigeria are less likely to be active in the labour market; **more likely to be in lower-earning opportunities like farming and informal jobs;** and earn less for a given level of education and experience than men of the same level.

There are barriers to entry into the labour market for women and to their successful participation within the labour market

- Girls entry into the workforce is conditioned by early marriage and starting a family
- A **gender gap in education** limits the choice of occupation for women (completion rates of primary education for boys is about 80% while only 66% for girls)
- High levels of **inequity** in human development indicators **between northern and southern states** accentuate educational barriers to employment (42% of adults in the north had no education compared to 13% in the south)
- Lack of education and marginalisation from schools and skills acquisition programmes make it especially difficult for women with disabilities to gain employment
- Muslim women are less able to participate in a visible work force when compared with women in other religions

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<sup>1</sup> 0.6% rise in GDP between Q3 2017 and Q3 2018

Women form the backbone of the agricultural sector, providing an estimated 60-80% of all labour but have less access to resources and limited decision-making power over their plots resulting in a gendered gap in harvest value. The high proportion of women involved in farming related activities (73.5%) thus holds most women in low-paid occupations. Women are more likely to be involved in small household enterprises and non-farm enterprises that show low productivity and dynamism (potential to grow, adapt and change).

Within the world of work women's success is limited by lower levels of education; barriers in access to finance and digital connectivity that would open their access to market information and mobile banking services. Women are more likely to become entrepreneurs than men out of economic necessity. But in business women make different strategic decisions since they are constrained by gender-specific factors (household related demands, the contexts in which they operate, their assets). These influence the decisions that female entrepreneurs make, choosing low risk sectors that can be entered with low level of investment. A **gender gap in profits as high as 39%** is found between male and female led small and medium enterprises In Nigeria.

Government policies are dominated by interest in the formal sector, although women are to be found in far greater number in agriculture, non-farm enterprises and the informal sector. This is another example of gender bias in Nigerian institutions where legal, political and cultural ceilings limit women's potential in the labour market. The net result is that almost **twice as many women as men live below the poverty line**.

A small number of pilots have been trialled in Nigeria and neighbouring countries of West Africa, to experiment with ways of supporting success for women in the labour market. These provide **promising practice** from examples of:

- Providing cash injections to women's businesses (through cash transfer or business plan competitions)
- Innovative saving schemes to allow women to retain a greater share of their earnings
- Training to foster personal initiative and build an entrepreneurial mindset, proved to be more successful than traditional business training
- A job specific training to dismantle women's internal biases and perceptions that certain sectors are not open or accessible to employing women

The literature makes frequent reference to the difficulty of gaining reliable statistical data from within Nigeria although several studies used in preparing this report compared panel data from studies repeated at intervals. It is assumed that the trends indicated are therefore reliable enough. A combination of published research by Nigerian authors and wider studies by teams from institutions (World Bank, ILO, FAO) informs the findings of this report.

## 2. Characteristics of the Nigerian Labour market

Nigerians rank unemployment as the most important challenge facing the country, well above poverty even though estimates are that one third of Nigerians live in poverty (World Bank, 2015:viii & ix). Although the country experienced quite high and stable economic growth in the years before 2015 this did not make a significant impact on poverty levels. Enhancing Financial Innovation & Access reports that Nigeria is now out of the recession that began in 2016 (EFInA,

2018:11). Marginal improvement in economic growth<sup>2</sup> has not yet delivered a positive impact on employment levels with just **8% of the adult population employed in the formal sector**<sup>3</sup>. 16.7% work in their own business (non-farming) 11.2% in their own business (farming related) and 23.4% rely mainly upon farming for income (EFInA, 2018:12).

ILO (2018) data shows that 51.9% of the population aged over 15 years is employed in some form but men are more likely to be employed (56.4%) than women (47.3%) (ILOSTAT:2018). Inadequate job opportunities are core to high levels of poverty, regional inequalities and social and political unrest. Economic growth has produced some more job and income opportunities, but this is outpaced by high growth in the working age population. Many workers are marginalised by low skills, with women especially trapped in low-productivity subsistence or low-paid activities (World Bank, 2015: viii).

**Most Nigerians work:** with the largest population in Africa (158 million estimate in 2011) over 50% 87 million people were of working age (between 15 and 64 years). In this group 53 million people were employed and less than 4 million (6%) of the active population were without a job and looking for work (World Bank, 2015:x). Having a job widely means receiving a wage, enjoying a minimum standard of living and even some social security but in Nigeria, **most employed individuals work for themselves, or their families or in informal conditions** close to home. Some work several jobs and despite this many do not earn enough to escape poverty.

There is an established middle class, but many Nigerians live in poverty. For this country to reach its potential given its natural and mineral resources and become a middle-class society, with economic growth transferring down and reducing poverty, Nigeria needs to ensure enough **opportunities for gainful employment in the private sector** among the rapidly growing population (World Bank SCD,2018: xiv). By 2050, Nigeria will have an estimated labour force of 240 million of both men and women mainly living in urban areas. Private sector development is constrained by administrative barriers and limited financial investment. Nigeria needs a private sector led growth strategy that will bank on the growing and youthful labour force. Sectors with the highest employment potential include light manufacturing, construction, ICT, wholesale and retail trade, meat and poultry, oil palm, and cocoa. (World Bank SCD,2018: xix).

“Improving key areas of the business environment and opening businesses up to foreign competition can also accelerate inclusive growth and job creation. Other major constraints are:

- (i) the ongoing significant oil dependency and associated economic instability, limited economic diversification, and low non-oil revenue;
- (ii) low human development indicators in health and education, particularly in the north and in rural areas;
- (iii) private sector development that is impeded by administrative barriers and limited financial intermediation; and
- (iv) continued internal conflicts, which undermine development and security.”

(World Bank SCD,2018: xvi).

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<sup>2</sup> 0.6% rise in GDP between Q3 2017 and Q3 2018

<sup>3</sup> Comparing poorly to South Africa (36%) and Kenya (14%)

## Women's Labour Market Participation

45.5% of the Nigerian labour force is female (World Bank, 2019). Women's participation in formal and informal labour markets is on a positive trajectory and has been rising in both rural and urban areas through the period 1990-2009 but remains lower than that of males (Olowa & Adeoti 2014:73). Women who can work away from the home – particularly in non-familial organisations; in remunerative jobs in the formal rather than in the informal economy; or regular and full-time jobs that are permanent and secure - are more likely to become empowered (Oluwagbemiga et al, 2016:76). Analysing the trends from three Demographic and Health Studies (DHS) studies<sup>4</sup> Oluwagbemiga et al (2016) find increased overall female participation in the labour force; from 39.3% in 1990 to 48.1% in 2011.

Olowa and Adeoti (2014) show that level of education significantly affects women's participation in the labour market. Women form more than half the rural population of Nigeria and women's labour market participation (WLMP) rises with increasing level of education. It also positively increases in relation to father's education, mother's education and marital status. For families with high numbers of children and low health status there is a negative effect on WLMP. Using source data from the Harmonized National Living Standard Survey (NLSS, 2010) Olowa and Adeoti (2014) identify the labour market activities of women in rural Nigeria; and determines the influence of education on women labour market participation. **73.15% of women are involved in farm activities, 26.85% are engaged in non-farm business activities.** These farm activities are primarily production in agriculture, forestry and fishing. The non-farm activities are in manufacturing, sales and services.

Educational qualification raises the job opportunities of women (Olowa & Adeoti,2014:78). Results revealed that married women are more likely to work than single women because they can secure capital through their husbands to start up small enterprises or use their husband's connections to obtain wage employment. (Olowa & Adeoti,2014:78). Parental education has a significant positive relationship with the WLMP. However, the education of the mother has more effect and significant association with WLMP showing that daughters of educated mothers are more likely to be educated and to participate in the labour market (Olowa & Adeoti , 2014:79).

Pathways in employment in Nigeria are largely determined by the circumstances in which people were born; where they live, gender, what their parents did for a living. For example, according to general Household Survey panel data half the children of agricultural workers are themselves working in agriculture. This means that variables which should normally determine job outcomes (talent, skill levels or effort) are often unrelated to individual opportunity and employment outcomes. (World Bank, 2015: xvi). "Women are penalised from all perspectives in labour markets. Compared to men they are less likely to be active; more likely to be in lower-earning opportunities like farming and informal jobs; and earn less for a given level of education and experience" (World Bank, 2015: xvi).

Being unemployed or holding a low-paying job, is not a problem *per se* if there are opportunities for a worker to progress, to increase their earnings and improve working conditions over their life cycle. However, if patterns of employment are determined early on, workers' options are unequal from the outset and many people are locked into low-income activities without any opportunity for

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<sup>4</sup> 2003, 2008 and 2013

change. Removing barriers to allow access good quality education and building skills is therefore essential to breaking the cycle of (intergenerational) poverty (World Bank, 2015: xvi).

Girls entry into the workforce is also conditioned by early marriage and starting a family. “The gender gap in schooling begins to widen more significantly from age 17 as from then on girls, especially those from poor families, are marrying, having children and entering into economic inactivity. The negative effects of leaving education early lasts throughout women’s working life.” (World Bank, 2015: xvii).

## Disability – an additional barrier to labour market participation

Very little data on participation of women with disabilities in the labour market or economic activity was found. One study conducted in Plateau State among 188 women, over 17 years of age, with mobility or sensory disabilities and their caregivers or family members, found that most respondents (54.1%) believed that women with disabilities have no source of income. 35.4% thought some women with disabilities were employed. Barriers to employment or labour market participation are:

- lack of education and marginalisation from schools and skills acquisition programmes make it difficult for women with disabilities to gain employment
- this is exacerbated by the misconception that women with disabilities have lower intellect
- potential employers judge applicants on their disabilities rather than their intellectual ability
- workplaces are not physically accessible, do not work in Braille and lack any provision for sign language interpreters
- skills acquisition programmes see women with disabilities as only capable of knitting, weaving mats and making soap
- these are not economically viable as there is little market for these items, and customers are reluctant to buy from women with disabilities
- deaf women involved in petty trading, reported being stigmatised and chased away by other market women (Jerry, G. et al, 2015:14)

## 3. Barriers facing women in the Nigerian labour market

### Gender inequalities in Nigeria

Almost **twice as many women as men live below the poverty line**. Between six and nineteen times more men than women either “holding managerial positions in firms, [or] possessing land or other properties disposable at will” (Egwurube 2016:139). This level of gender disparity is the result of an environment where numerous ceilings are placed on opportunities for women empowerment. These ceilings are legal, political and socio-cultural. Egwurube (2016:139-141) explains the reasons for high poverty levels for women, compared to men, as due to:

1. There are inter-state differences in **legal** dispositions concerning the rights, freedoms and duties of individuals and particularly of women; some states in the three zones in the North have the Sharia penal code, all the states in the southern zones have the criminal code (Egwurube, 2016:141). States also differ in terms of the rights of women to own

property. In some States<sup>5</sup>, all women can acquire, hold and dispose of property, while in northern states only married women have such rights<sup>6</sup> (Egwurube, 2016:141).

2. The number of women who hold important elected and administrative positions is extremely low making Nigerian women quite invisible on the **political** scene (Egwurube, 2016:141). Both self-imposed and systemic constraints combine in a mutually reinforcing manner, with violence and male domination of decision-making leading to a lack of willingness on the part of women to engage in politics.
3. The patriarchal system explains the relative disempowerment of Nigerian women and is accompanied by a collection of **cultural** and religious beliefs some of which are integrated into **customary law** and infringe on the rights of women (Egwurube, 2016:144). Such an overriding male decisional presence may lead to abuses, some of which are legally justified as for example violence against women or wife-beating, and female circumcision (Egwurube, 2016:144).

Egwurube (2016:138) defines “women empowerment in the Nigerian context as the relative ease with which women have access to decision making roles and can mobilize available legal, economic, social and political capital to make and take decisions that affect their lives and those of others around them” Even among the elite and in the public sphere, women trail behind men: only 6% of women hold seats in the national parliament, compared with the average of 24 percent in Sub-Saharan Africa. (World Bank SCD,2018:20).

Although Nigerian women have undergone some transformation towards empowerment how far such transformation has occurred is limited by all these constraints and restricted opportunities. This applies to where and how women can participate in the formal and informal labour markets.

In 2017, Nigeria had a working-age population of 110 million with 85 million active in the labour force - of which 45% were women (World Bank SCD,2018: ix). Although its citizens are an important productive asset, the quality of this labour force depends upon their health, education and skills. Low levels of investment in health, sanitation, clean water and education undermine human capital and the current and future value of this labour force. Gender inequity is high, especially in education with net primary enrolment rates of 70% and 58% respectively for boys and girls (World Bank SCD,2018: ix). Under investment in women restricts their entry level in the labour market, their ability to perform well, and to rise to more secure, well-paid occupations.

## North – South divide

Nigeria also has high levels of inequity in human development indicators between northern and southern states.

- 42% of adults in the north had no education compared to 13% in the south (World Bank SCD,2018: ix).
- emphasis placed on childbearing and child raising roles affects girls’ educational attainment, especially secondary school completion, and their level of human capital
- over two-thirds of girls in the north aged 15–19 are unable to read, compared with less than 10% in the south;
- in the north, only 3% of girls complete secondary school, and 76% are married by age 18 in the North West

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<sup>5</sup> For example Oyo in the South-West zone and in all the States in the South-East zone

<sup>6</sup> Kaduna, Sokoto and Zamfara,

- the problem of out of school children is prominent for the north and rural areas ( World Bank SCD,2018:20).

**Women and girls in the northern zones lag behind those in the south** in socio-economic status:

- women earn less than men for similar work (about 76 % of men's earnings)
- their estimated earned income is 65 % of men's due to lower wages and hours worked
- women in agriculture earn and produce less than men, and have limited access to land, inputs, labour, and extension services (World Bank SCD,2018:20).

## Education

Nigeria's population ranks poorly in terms of educational outcomes by international standards. Nigeria ranks 103 out of 113 countries in the UNESCO<sup>7</sup> Education for All Education Development Index (EDI) (2015). This index is based on four indicators: primary enrolment, adult literacy, gender inequality, and survival to grade 5. "Nigeria's structural peers (Algeria, Egypt, India, Indonesia, and Iran) have an average rank of about 80. Though indicators are difficult to interpret, they are useful in providing a snapshot of how Nigeria compares with other countries in key areas. Poor governance and underfunding of the education sector negatively affect education outcomes" (World Bank SCD,2018:71).

- The out-of-school rate is higher among girls (32%) than boys (28%)
- The completion rates of primary education for boys is about 80% while only 66% for girls
- Furthermore, while access to schooling increased among more affluent quintiles, it is declining among the bottom quintile, widening the gap and reducing the human capital of vulnerable groups. (all data World Bank SCD,2018:31).

The **gender imbalance in the area of educational level and qualifications** finds expression in the concentration of women in some career paths and their absence in others. Typical female professions are nurses/midwives, teachers in kindergartens and primary schools and secretaries while typical male professions are engineering, banking, veterinary medicine and university lecturers (World Bank, 2015:145). Though overall the literature repeatedly records that most women who work do so in farming, farming related or other small business activities.

## Religion

Religion has an impact on women's ability to assert their rights in relation to child bearing and child spacing (Oluwagbemiga et al, 2016:76) and this plays into the situation of most women in Nigeria, where access to employment is constrained by the opportunity cost of care and household responsibilities. Muslim women in Nigeria are more likely not to engage in any economic activities. The purdah system prohibits women from holding noticeable social roles and so **Muslim women are less able to participate in a visible work force** when compared with women in other religions. They are more likely to work at home and be involved in sales activities or petty trading. (Oluwagbemiga et al, 2016:81). Other Christians and Catholic women tend to engage more often in professional/ technical/managerial jobs when compared with other religions.

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<sup>7</sup> United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation

Religious beliefs that discourage women from standing up against their husbands, partners and in-laws do not allow them to assert their rights on sexual matters and to resist intimate partner violence. Gender based violence (GBV) can reduce women's ambitions in livelihood activities further limiting women's participation and roles in labour markets. Gender-based physical violence is highest in the South South zone and lowest in the North West zone. In addition, internally displaced women are especially vulnerable to gender-based violence due to their exposure to conflict, unplanned movements, and subsequent dislocation. (World Bank SCD,2018:20).

## Productivity from agriculture

Ekerebi & Adeola (2017) highlight the harvest value gap between male and female farmers. Women are the backbone of the agricultural sector, involved in a wide range of activities and providing an estimated 60-80% of all labour. Despite the importance of women's role, they have less access to resources and limited decision-making power over their plots, compared to male farmers (FAO,2011). A key finding across Southern and Northern regions is a **gendered harvest value gap**. Male farmers have higher household assets and higher harvest values; women use less fertiliser and are less involved in irrigation or mechanised farming. Different levels of education, wealth status and access to irrigation may account for part of the harvest value gap (Ekerebi & Adeola, 2017:2).

Household farming is by far the dominant mode of work in agriculture, and wage work is rare. Both agricultural or non-agricultural household enterprises without paid workers produce mostly for household consumption (subsistence), or for small profits from which households buy their consumption necessities. The high proportion of women involved in farming related activities (73.5% - see above) thus retains most women in low-paid occupations (World Bank SCD,2018:83).

## Prospects within other non-farm enterprises

The **prevalence of non-farm enterprises<sup>8</sup> is high, but only 10% employ paid labour**. In 2013, 63 % of all households were operating non-farm enterprises (NFE), including many rural households that were also otherwise engaged in agriculture. (World Bank SCD, 2018:83) This rate was particularly high in the South West (74%) and North West zones (67%).

Women lead the majority of NFEs, "bringing gender issues to the forefront of job creation and poverty reduction in Nigeria. NFEs appear to be a dual economy, with the majority operated by a single person (called household enterprises), and only a small fraction hiring workers who are not members of the household" (World Bank SCD, 2018:83). Prospects for job creation depend on the success and well-being of these micro enterprises. In turn this depends on the socio-economic characteristics of the owners. Given the high proportion of households engaged in agriculture and operating non-farm enterprises the fortunes of the agriculture sector have a direct

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<sup>8</sup> Business activity that is not related to agriculture operated to balance the seasonality of agriculture or to cope with climate shocks and poor harvests

bearing on the well-being of 40% of Nigeria's enterprises, and 50% percent of the labour force (World Bank SCD,2018:83).

Women are more likely to be involved in small household enterprises that show low productivity and dynamism (potential to grow, adapt and change). Medium enterprises seem to be better able to grow and then to create additional jobs. Men with higher educational attainment are more likely to operate this type of firm, which are larger than household enterprises in size, sales, and capital use.

## Difficulties for women entrepreneurs

In Africa men and women who might not otherwise be inclined to start a business are driven to become entrepreneurs because opportunities for waged jobs are limited (World Bank Group, 2019:7). Women are more likely to become entrepreneurs than men and do so out of economic necessity. But in business women make or are obliged to make, different decisions than men. They are constrained by gender-specific factors (household related factors, the contexts in which they operate, their assets). These influence the strategic decisions that female entrepreneurs make, hinder the growth of their businesses and lead to less productive outcomes.

World Bank (2019) finds that across 14 countries of Africa performance of female owned businesses consistently lags behind that of male owned businesses. They have fewer employees, lower average sales, and less value-added. Women often do not intend to build large and successful companies or have the skills to achieve this. "Women overwhelmingly choose to enter sectors with reduced opportunities for growth; they also have lower levels of available assets and capital to invest into their businesses; and they show less willingness to compete. They are more likely to operate in the informal economy and less likely to adopt advanced business practices." (World Bank Group, 2019:9)

Nigeria is found in the top ten countries of the Global Entrepreneurship Index (World Bank Group, 2019:27) with business incubator services, tech hubs and accelerator grants all supporting successful entrepreneurs. Women are much more likely than male entrepreneurs to employ other women and so catalyse women's entry and participation in the workforce (World Bank Group, 2019:47). However, the gender gap in profits is as high as 39% between male and female led small and medium enterprises in Nigeria. (World Bank Group, 2019:54) and this is linked to:

- Sector of choice (low investment, low risk areas chosen)
- Return on the entrepreneur's level of education
- Hours worked in the business activity
- Marital status of the entrepreneur, suggesting that family duties divert female entrepreneurs from their principal business activity.

## Digital connectivity

Nigeria is the third top country in the world in terms of number of people that are online for the first time since 2012 (+ 32 million people), though there is a large gender gap with women lagging. Recent estimates suggest that digital financial services alone could create as much as over 3 million new jobs over the next 10 years (McKinsey, 2016). Connectivity can also

be the launching pad for a new generation of digital entrepreneurs (World Bank SCD,2018:42). Lack of access to a mobile phone and being digitally connected acts as a barrier for some women to using mobile money or banking services and developing business activity.

## Financial Inclusion

Low incomes, the high cost of financial services, and long distances to financial access points are the top three barriers to financial inclusion. Financial inclusion rates have remained flat since 2014. Only 40 percent of adults have accounts, and only 6% have mobile money accounts, men are nearly twice as likely as women to have accounts (World Bank SCD,2018: xi).

Access to financial services in the adult population is skewed toward men, women tend to use more other formal and informal services (such as savings groups, rotational loan groups) than men as illustrated by the figures below:

Table 1: Access to Finance by Gender

<b>Total 99.6M Adults 18+yrs</b>	<b>Male 49.7M</b>	<b>Female 49.9M</b>
Users of formal banks	22.9M (46.1%)	16.6M (33.3%)
Users of other formal/informal services	10.6M (21.4%)	12.8M (25.8%)
Unbanked	16.2M (32.5%)	20.5M (40.9%)

Source: Adapted from data in Enhancing Financial Innovation & Access (2018, p. 37)

The most common obstacles to having a bank account are having an irregular income or no job (cited by 55% of the unbanked population) or banks being too far to access (23%) (EFInA, 2018:17). Women are less likely than men to use any form of financial service or products - because they are not aware of mobile money, or banking agents, or have no access to financial institutions. 36.6M adult Nigerians are financially excluded, the largest proportion (55.9%) is female (EFInA, 2018:47). Other characteristics of the financially excluded are:

- Rural inhabitants (78.5%) over urban inhabitants (21.5%)
- Those living in North West (38.4%) and North East regions (18.3%)
- Those involved in small scale farming (23.5%)
- Low income households; 63.5% of all those who are financially excluded have an annual income of less than N35,000

Not using any form of financial service or product does not necessarily mean the household is poor or economically inactive; 18.3% of this cohort received remittances from family or friends and 22.4% undertook some form of savings activity in the previous 12 months. (EFInA, 2018:48).

The potential female market for access to financial services stands at 49.9M women. Of this 29.4M (59%) can access some form of financial services; 21.5M (73%) are served by formal services with 8.5M only accessing informal finance. The largest proportion of this group fail to access formal financial services by default, not using any financial services although they do have proof of ID and access to a mobile phone and financial institution (EFInA, 2018:54). Another 20.5M women do not use any form of financial service or products with the largest

proportions excluded by design (lacking identity papers, or access to a financial institution to a mobile phone) or default (EFInA, 2018:54).

## **4. Evidence of effective Women’s Economic Empowerment (WEE) interventions**

“Nigerian government policies are lopsided in favour of the formal economy” but consistently weak growth in the formal economy<sup>9</sup> suggests that employment in this space will be inadequate to reduce poverty. Employment in Nigeria’s formal sector does not guarantee a break from extreme poverty (ProShare,2018). Measures to develop the informal economy, women’s education and skills and access to finance have the potential to contribute more rapidly to women’s economic empowerment. This part of the economy is particularly large in Nigeria, with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) estimating it constitutes about 60% of the entire Nigerian economy (ProShare,2018).

The following innovations or pilot programmes have been shown to be effective in contributing to women’s economic empowerment in Nigeria and West Africa.

### **Targeted training to overcome internal bias**

Where women are concentrated in low-paid or low-profit sectors this occupational segregation by gender is a significant contributor to the gender wage gap. Sometimes women’s own biases or lack of confidence keep them excluded from entry into certain professions. From an experiment in Nigeria, Croke, Goldstein and Holla (2018) find that there is potential for focused trainings to support the growth of emerging labour markets. When information communications technology (ICT) training was offered to female university graduates 26% were subsequently more likely to work in the ICT sector. The impact was most positive for those women who could not initially see themselves as likely to be successful in this sector (Croke et al, 2018:1). This Government of Nigeria and World Bank ACCESS (Assessment of Core Competency for Employability in the Service Sector) programme encouraged women to switch into this emerging service sector, despite early male dominance of the sector (67% of employees were male) (Croke et al, 2018:2).

### **Personal initiative training**

A psychology-based training programme to develop key behaviours associated with a proactive entrepreneurial mindset was shown to deliver lasting improvements for small business owners (Campos et al, 2017). Personal initiative is defined as a self-starting, future-oriented, and persistent proactive mindset. Rather than adopting the view that entrepreneurs are ‘born’ a randomised control trial in Togo tested whether they could be ‘made’. Comparison of microenterprise owners from a control group, a leading business training programme, and a personal initiative training programme showed that personal initiative training increased firm profits by 30%, compared with a statistically insignificant 11% for the traditional business training. The training was cost-effective, paying for itself within 1 year. Personal initiative training helps female- as well as male-owned businesses to grow, in contrast to the documented outcomes of many traditional training programmes (Campos et al, 2017:2).

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<sup>9</sup> The sector grew by 0.8% in 2017

## **Access to financial capital from other sources**

Unconditional cash transfers are an increasingly common way of injecting cash resources into the economy and contributing to economic development. Evidence shows that aspects of programme design (size, timing and frequency of payments and identity of the primary recipient) influence how the assets are used (ODI, 2016). The World Bank's Africa Gender Innovation Lab and Catholic Relief Services delivered unconditional cash transfers to female primary decision makers from ultra-poor households in Kebbi state, northwest Nigeria over a 15 month period. The project found that women worked more, particularly in their own businesses, and were 14% more likely to participate in the labour force than the control group, as measured a few months after the last payments were made. "Cash transfer recipients were not only more likely to be involved in their own non-farm business, but they also spent more on business inputs and increased their business profits. Their husbands remained active farmers and didn't change their business activities." (Bastian, Goldstein & Papineni. 2017:1). On average women retained 54% for their own use, dividing the rest between others in the household (husband and children) or outside it (friends and family).

By varying the size and frequency of transfers, the trial was able to compare women's control over the use of cash, and outcomes for household diet and assets. No difference in the amount retained under women's control was found;<sup>10</sup> nor any statistical difference in consumption, investment, labour force participation or other key outcomes. Quarterly transfers were however half as costly to administer and in focus group discussions monthly cash transfer recipients, alluded to needing more time to save enough to afford to buy assets while quarterly recipients were able to purchase assets immediately (Bastian, Goldstein & Papineni. 2017:4).

## **Securing savings through financial innovation**

As shown by the shared use of cash transfers in the example above, financial transfers within social and kin networks are ubiquitous and frequent in developing countries. Though these transfers have social benefits, the pressure to redistribute income can introduce a disincentive to work (reducing the payoff from effort). There is a potential cost for the overall efficiency of the business and economy. In a study in Ivory Coast a financial innovation was tested among workers in cashew-processing plants (Caranza et al, 2018). Direct-deposit savings accounts were offered to make it easier for workers to commit to making savings and convert productivity increases into long-term savings which cannot be accessed by others. Blocked savings accounts allowed women to increase their productivity at work and earnings by 18%. The reason for this increase was women's ability to keep their savings private from their husbands and other kin, thus reaping the full rewards of their effort. Previously 55% of those involved strongly agreed that they had difficulty making savings because if they put money aside someone else would ask for it.

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<sup>10</sup> Except in a few instances where slightly more was transferred to husbands who had migrated away for work

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