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Microfinance and Gender Development Policy: Implications for Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)

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Abstract

The increasing feminization of poverty in Africa as well as the appalling increase prevalence and incidence of degradation and marginalization of women has become a disturbing concern to the world at large. The challenges to women's full participation in the economic development of different economics is an indication that the potential contribution of the population of these countries is either unutilized or underutilized, signifying an economic loss to the economies. Upon this thrust, this study is aimed to examine the effects of microfinance and gender development policy on Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Both qualitative and quantitative research methods were employed to source the data required for this study. The model of regression analysis was adopted to analyze the data collected from the respondents. The results of the analysis revealed that positive relationships exist between microfinance, gender development policy and achievement of MDGs. Based on this finding, recommendations were made for policy implications.

Key Words: *Microfinance, Microfinance Institutions, Gender Development Policy and MDGs*

Introduction

Gender development consolidated by empowerment lies at the heart of every sustainable development. The globalization effect has opened up the entire world and provided no hidden place for poverty in terms of definition and experience. All nations aspire to develop and enjoy the benefits derivable from sustained growth however, the extent to which the introduction and management of microfinance has helped Nigerians

especially women has not been extensively researched. Thus, the preoccupation now is the reduction of poverty especially among the most vulnerable. Today, about six out of ten of world's poorest people are women and girls (Otiye-Igbuzor, 2006). The condition of underdevelopment and deprivation as experienced by women especially in transiting economies like Nigeria is an issue that calls for attention and concern.

Nigerian governments over the years have demonstrated commitment to become one of the world economic giants by the year 2020 and are struggling to meet up with the targets of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by the year 2015 especially Goal 3 which emphasizes the promotion of gender equality (UNIDO, 2008). It however, seemed impossible to effectively realize this developmental objective without accurate analysis of the nature and enormity of challenges inherent in most superfluous interventions programmes introduced among which is the microfinance system which has its focus on poverty reduction (Rugimbana and Spring, 2009).

Poverty represents the presence of needs and wants with less opportunity for survival and development. In this globalisation era, it is popularly believed to be a product of economic recession. Poverty effects could be seen in most households especially because of the gender differences in division of labour and women's dual responsibilities in household welfare (Ogunlela and Mukhtar, 2009). Poverty irrespective of the origin or causes, enhances loss of livelihood attenuated by low-wage workers, low economic status (Sen, 1982). In advanced economy, the poor are mostly outside the family support systems, social institutions and safety nets (Weiss, Montgomery and Hurmanahieva, 2003). Notwithstanding the nature of poverty, its pronounced feminization in Nigeria and other sub-Saharan Africa regions has become one of the economic and business chagrins (Mayoux, 2001, Onyejekwe, 2001; Thomson, 2002). The poor is the marginalized-living at the margin of subsistence on less than one USD (\$1) a day (Sen, 1982; Mayoux, 2001). Although, poverty has no respect for gender but the most vulnerable are women and who are usually regarded as the poorest of the poor which constitutes over 70% (World Bank, 2000, Mayoux, 2001; Iheduru, 2002). Women bear a disproportionate burden of household care; attempt to manage household consumption and production under conditions of increasing scarcity (United Nations, 1995; Phuong and Zaki, 2008).

In June 2007, the Federal Republic of Nigeria launched the National Gender Policy to promote gender equity and sustainable development (Ogunlela and Mukhtar, 2009). The policy derives essentially from the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 which guarantees the fundamental human rights of all its citizens and incorporates the principles of global and regional frameworks that support gender equity and women's empowerment (Nigerian Demographic Health Survey (NDHS) (2008). The concern of this paper centers on the impact of gender development policy on the vulnerable populations, especially women as well as their benefits (both short and long run) from the framework of microfinance, that seem to be the opium of poor women

This study is therefore focused to examine the effects of gender development policies and the instrument of microfinance system designed to alleviate poverty among women on the achievement of MDGs. To achieve this objective, the following research questions will be addressed. How can microfinance contribute positively to the improvement of the women condition? Does the development policies possess the capacity to deliver the basic public expectations and how can they help in building or sustaining the confidence in microfinance operation in Nigeria of today? This paper is structured into five sections. Section one is the introduction, section two is the literature review and conceptual framework, section three is the research methods and model specification, section four is the data analysis while section five is discussion, conclusion and recommendations.

Literature Review/Conceptual Framework

Conceptualizing Gender and Development

Gender comprises a range of differences between men and women, extending from the biological to the social. The biological difference necessitates differences in gender roles in society and identity, which has been defined as "an individual's self-conception as being male or female, as distinguished from actual biological sex (Ogunlela and Mukhtar, 2009). The term gender refers to a socially constructed and learned behaviours and expectations associated with females and males (Eva, Rathgebbar and Adera, 2000). All cultures interpret and elaborate the biological differences between women and men into a set of social expectations about what behaviours and activities are appropriate and what rights, resources, and power women and men possess (Ogunlela and Mukhtar, 2006). But like race, ethnicity and class, gender is a social category that largely establishes one's life chances. It shapes one's participation in society and in the economy (Eva, Rathgebbar and Adera, 2000; Okafor and Amoo, 2010). While the term gender refers to men and women, for the purpose of this study gender refers to the condition of women in the African societies and a gender policy is a public statement of a country's or an organization's commitment to taking gender issues seriously, and an outline of what this means in the context of the organization's work (Derbyshire, 2003).

Development on the other hand, is captured as a multidimensional process involving major changes in social structures, popular attitude and national institutions as well as the acceleration of economic growth. Development is perceived as a process that leads to increased capacity of people to have over material assets, intellectual resources and ideology and obtain physical necessities of life (food, clothing and shelter), equality in employment, participation in government, political and economic independence, adequate education, gender equality, sustainable development and peace (Otiye-Igbuzor, 2006). It involves reduction of inequality or eradication of absolute poverty among the citizenry and represents a continuous change involving re-organization, re-orientation of

the social, economy and the entire system(Ogunlela and Mukhtar, 2006). It cannot be completed without a colossal radical changes in institutions, social, administrative structures as well as potential attitude, customs and beliefs(Thomson, 2002). While development is usually defined in the national context, its widespread utilization may call for modification of international economy and social system, thus the issue of concern in this paper cannot be discussed exclusive of the entire continent of the world.

Microfinance and Gender Development

The emergence of Microfinance institutions in Nigerian financial institution just like in other developing nations gained prominence due to the applicability of the micro-credit programmes of the Grammen Bank in Bangladesh whose focus was on reduction of poverty among women and elimination of gender inequality that adversely affect developmental issues of these countries. This was necessitated since the feminine gender constitutes the majority of the poor populace and are usually denied access to finance and other resources (Cheston and Kuhn, 2002; Mayoux, 2002). Microfinance is therefore seen as a strategic move through which the economic and social development of a nation can be achieved via the enhancement of women's income generating capability and business performance (Sharma, 2004; Phuong and Zaki, 2008). However, the activities of the Microfinance institutions have severally been criticized to be gender biased. Although, researchers such as Mayoux (2001) and Derbyshire (2003) have disagreed with this, rather they see microfinance as a strategy to promote gender sensitivity and the empowerment of women so as to promote greater equality of influence, opportunity and benefits for women especially in Africa. In line with, Iheduru (2002) rightly argues that the Nigerian poverty stream has the female gender as majority at the bottom of the ladder irrespective of their active role and contributions to economic development and growth of the country.

To buttress this point, Otive-Igbuzor (2006); Ogunlela and Mukhtar (2009) further argue that the overall economic wellbeing of a nation should be measurable by how much goods and services are available for consumption and investment for the average citizens and this demands for the active participation of both men and women gender in the real sectors of the economy. The context information about women's and men's different experiences, problems and priorities has essentially resulted to effective movement towards gender mainstreaming through the gender development policy and microfinance system (Susan, 2009; Ram, 2009; Rugimbana and Spring, 2009). This is meant to support the activities of African Training and Research Centre for Women (ATRCW) that started in 1975, a unit within the Social Development Division of ECA whose major objectives were; (i) a home and family approach, which most often followed a Western, almost Victorian, home-economics model (ii) a social-welfare approach, which saw women as passive recipients of development benefits and emphasized family planning because of women's reproductive roles (United Nations, 1975; Snyder and

Tadesse, 1995). With the empowerment approach, ATRCW stressed the need for women's access to productive resources and took the view that women should have autonomy and authority in their continent and society (Hafkin and Bay, 1976). As a furtherance of gender development, microfinance emphasis is on advancement of women, gender equality, elimination of gender discrimination, integration and full participation of women in development and increased their contribution to enhance speedy economic growth of the nation (Onyejekwe, 2001; Dahiru and Zubair, 2008).

The Need for Gender-focused Development

The recent realization of the contribution of women in economic and social development, has made the Federal government to embark on the development of national gender policy in Nigeria (Otiye-Igbuzor, 2006). The bedrock of development in developing countries of sub-Saharan Africa is gender mainstreaming through women empowerment (Ogunlela and Mukhtar, 2009). The need for agitation of gender focused development was based on the benefits and gains derived from it. According to Derbyshire (2003) The benefits of investing in gender focused development may include the following (i) production of a healthier, better educated, and literate workforce, and provides a sound human resource foundation on which to build the economy. (ii) positive impacts on reducing the country's population growth rates, improving the health and welfare of children and families, reducing health costs, and contributing to poverty reduction. (iii) positive returns to the women and to the society at large (iv) enhanced future earning capacity, increased access and opportunities in the labor market, reduced health risks associated with pregnancy and childbirth, and often greater control over their personal lives.(v) Improving women's access to financial services contributes leading to poverty reduction and enhancing women contribution to household income and family welfare This can lead to good economic sense for financial intermediaries, as women have shown themselves to be better savers, leading to greater savings mobilization, and repayment, resulting in fewer bad debts.

Gender Development Policy and Millennium Development Goals

Development programs include measures to expand women's economic opportunities and increase their incomes, promote improvements in women's health and education, result in greater economic efficiency and decreased levels of poverty(Ogunlela and Mukhtar, 2009). Public policies to reduce gender inequality are essential for counteracting market failure and improving the well-being of all members of society (Derbyshire,2003). Discrimination against women in both the private and public realm of the household and market carries not only private costs for the individual, but social and economic costs for the overall society (Hafkin, 2000; Mayoux, 2001). Hence, it is in the interest of the country to promote, support, enhance, and ensure women's participation in

and more equitable sharing of the rewards of development (Iheduru, 2002). In order to assist the impoverished nation more aggressively, the UN member states adopted the eight international development goals encapsulated as the MDGs. All the eight MDGs touch essential aspects of women's well being and women's advancement and this in turn is critical for achieving the goals of development (Asian Development Bank, 2006; United Nations Development Programme, 2007).

The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) provided a shared vision of a much improved world by 2015. It is envisioned that by this target year, extreme poverty would have been cut (at least) by half, achieve universal education, promote gender equality coupled with empowerment of women, reduce child mortality, improve maternal, combat HIV/AIDS and other diseases, ensure environmental sustainability and develop a global partnership for development (United Nations, 2003; Asian Development Bank, 2006). Gender issues are highly relevant to achieving sustainable development and since the MDGs goals are mutually reinforcing, progress towards one goal will engender progress towards the others (UNIDO, 2008). This is to say that notwithstanding the importance of women in development, unalloyed commitment to MDGs can take the continent into the promise land. However, progress towards achieving these goals has been thwarted as a result of several challenges, especially in most transiting economies of Africa. The major challenge that has mostly affected the MDGs is the issue of gender disparity that has consistently been reoccurring in developmental issues such as education, politics, economic independence, and resources allocation among others (Asian Development Bank, 2006).

Research Methods

Research methods which includes quantitative and qualitative approaches were employed independently and complementarily. In both approaches, the study did not attempt to control or manipulate the sample objects and variables being studied. The survey data was collected through a carefully constructed and structured questionnaire interview. In the qualitative segment, data was gathered through in-depth interview from microfinance bank officials. The sample size covered three hundred and sixty five (365) respondents who were selected from Ikeja and Ado-Odo/Ota local government areas of both Lagos and Ogun states. Two hypotheses were formulated for the study and they include: there is significant relationship between microfinance institutions operations and achievement of gender equality of millennium development goals; and the perceived effects of gender development policy is significantly correlated with the attainment of MDG's target. The model of regression analysis was used in analyzing the data via Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS, Inc. (2003) software and by employing a combination of univariate, bivariate and multivariate statistical analysis. Descriptive statistics and standard multiple regression analyses were employed to examine the

prediction of the assumptions in the dependent variable and the various independent variables of the study.

Model Specification

The simple regression analysis used for this study can be depicted as $Y = \alpha + \beta_1 X_1 + \varepsilon$. Where Y is the credit policy designed by the MFIs to achieve MDGs (dependent variable). The X's represent the perceptions of respondents on microfinance operations, gender development policies and MDGs. These are regarded as the independent variables while ε is the unexplained variation (i.e. error term). The multiple regression model for the study is depicted as $Y = \alpha + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \dots + \beta_n X_n + \varepsilon$. Where α is the constant, X_1 represents years of existence of MFB, X_2 is the participation of women in MFIs, X_3 and X_4 stand for their educational attainment and age groups; $X_5 - X_9$ represent perception of women on government policies on MFIs, awareness of MDGs, access to MFI's credits, MFIs effects on women status, and prospect of MFIs in reducing gender inequality.

Data Analysis

Respondents' Profile

The average age group of the respondents interviewed is 35-44 years. This implies that most of the respondents are within the prime working age of Nigerians and other developing nations (NPC, 2010). cursory observation shows that common businesses identified among the respondents are manufacturing, agricultural, trading and service industries. Also, the average educational attainment among the sampled population is secondary level of education. About 45.2 percent of the respondents belong to this category and 17.3 percent of them have attained up to university level of education while 3 percent have second degree and other higher qualifications. It is also observed that 22.2 percent of the respondents had primary education while 12.3 percent of the respondents did not give information as regards their educational status (See Table 1). This implies a high literacy level among the women population in the location of the study compared favourably with NPC report of 2010 (NPC, 2010). Over two-third of the respondents were married and about one-third were still single as at the time of the survey. The average number of children per family among the sampled population is between three and four children as revealed in the in-depth interview. The discussion also revealed that an average family is burdened with at least three to four dependants which are either husband's or wife's relations that have come to live with them.

The banking consciousness index shows that only 44.1 percent of the respondents are the regular customers of the microfinance banks under our survey while about 204 women constituting 55.9 percent of the sampled population are not the regular customers

of the MFBs. Out of the total respondents, 38.4 percent (140) have accessed the loan, overdraft or other credit advances from the microfinance banks (MFBs) covered by our survey within the last 12 months. About 61.6 percent of them have never benefitted from the MFBs credit programmes. However, questions on the specific benefits or credit received and the proportion that received each of the facilities were completely missed out. This was considered as a great oversight, though it was not unconnected with the sensitive nature of the study. Most often, respondents usually consider the issue of finance and savings as personal and confidential.

Questions were asked as regards the accessibility and challenges experienced by the respondents in accessing the credit facility of MFIs. More than one-third of the respondents considered accessibility to MFIs' credits to be very difficult. About the same proportion also claimed that getting credit facility from these financial institutions is difficult. In addition, virtually all the respondents opined that MFIs loan has boosted their status as 67.4 percent agreed that they have benefitted extensively from the credit facility of the banks which helped in boosting their business performance while 32.6 percent of them were of contrary opinion. (Table1).

Table 1: Respondents' Profile and Banking consciousness

| Respondent Profile | Freq | % |
|--|-------------|--------------|
| Age group of respondents | | |
| 15-24 years | 27 | 7.4 |
| 24-34 years | 111 | 30.4 |
| 35-44 years | 112 | 30.7 |
| 45-54 years | 73 | 20.0 |
| 55-64 years | 38 | 10.4 |
| 65 yrs & above | 4 | 1.1 |
| Total | 365 | 100.0 |
| Mean = 2.99, Median = 3 | | |
| Educational attainment of respondents | | |
| No Education | 45 | 12.3 |
| Primary Education | 81 | 22.2 |
| Secondary Education | 165 | 45.2 |
| Tertiary Education | 63 | 17.3 |
| Other Advanced Education | 11 | 3.0 |
| Total | 365 | 100.0 |
| Do you save in Microfinance Bank | | |
| Yes | 161 | 44.1 |
| No | 204 | 55.9 |

| | | |
|-------------------------------------|------------|--------------|
| Ever collected loan from MFI | | |
| Yes | 140 | 38.4 |
| No | 225 | 61.6 |
| Loan enhanced my Business | | |
| Yes | 311 | 85.2 |
| No | 54 | 14.8 |
| Total | 365 | 100.0 |
| Loan boosted my status | 365 | 100.0 |
| Yes | 246 | 67.4 |
| No | 119 | 32.6 |
| Access to MFI Credit | | |
| Very Difficult | 131 | 35.9 |
| Difficult | 106 | 29.0 |
| Undecided | 30 | 8.2 |
| Not Difficult | 86 | 23.6 |
| Not Difficult at all | 12 | 3.3 |
| Total | 365 | 100.0 |

Source: Survey 2010

Information on Microfinance Banks' Operations

To obtain information on the operations of the MFIs, thirty one (31) microfinance banks were purposively sampled (Otokiti, Olateju, and Adejumo, 2007) in Ikeja and Ado Oda Ota Local Government Area of Lagos and Ogun State respectively. The adoption of purposive sample technique was due to the issues of proximity and inability of the researchers to access the authentic listed of registered Microfinance Banks with CBN. Their various years of existence varied. Table 2 shows that the mean length years of existence of these banks are between 5-9 years. Out of all these banks, it was discovered that only nine of them (27.9 percent) have credit policy that are designed purposely to achieve MDGs especially Goal 3 that relates to the elimination of financial imbalances between male and female in the country. This is in line with the report of United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) (2008).

As regards the awareness of MDGs, about 72.1 percent of the microfinance banks were not only aware of the goals but conduct their operations in line with the various segments of the goals that relates to gender inequality while 27.9 percent of them are not aware of MDGs (Table 2). In the same vein, 63 percent of the banks are aware of gender development policies but only 18.1 percent of them have special credit packages for women. This implies that that the awareness of MDGs and gender development policy has not been transmitted into practical initiatives in microfinance institutions' credit

administration. The finding here corroborate the earlier discovery that gender sensitivity in microfinance operation is abysmally low (Okafor and Amoo, 2010).

Table 2: Information on Microfinance Banks' operations

| Selected variables of operation | No | % |
|--|-----------|--------------|
| Years of Existence of MFI Sampled | | |
| 1-4 Years | 8 | 2.2 |
| 5-9 Years | 14 | 3.8 |
| 10 Year & above | 9 | 2.5 |
| Total No of Banks Sampled | 31 | 100.0 |
| Credit Policy designed to achieve MDGs | | |
| Yes | 9 | 27.9 |
| No | 22 | 72.1 |
| Total | 31 | 100.0 |
| MFBank's Awareness of MDGs (official) | | |
| Yes | 22 | 72.1 |
| No | 9 | 27.9 |
| Total | 31 | 100.0 |
| Awareness of Gender Development Policy in Nigeria | | |
| Yes | 20 | 63.0 |
| No | 11 | 37.0 |
| Have Special Credit Package for Women in your MFB | | |
| Yes | 6 | 18.1 |
| No | 25 | 81.9 |
| Total | 31 | 100.0 |

Source: Survey 2010

Perception of the Respondents on Gender Development Policy

Questions were asked on the perception of the respondents on the various issues relating to the gender development policy in Nigeria. Table 3 revealed that 43.8 percent of the respondents agreed that microfinance is capable of enhancing the achievement of Nigerian policy on gender development while 13.7 percent of them disagreed with the statement. Majority of the respondents rejected the assertion that MFIs cannot enhance MDGs in terms of women empowerment while 6.6 percent of them agreed with the statement (Table 3). This implies that microfinance institutions have the capability to reduce gender inequality in line with MDGs through their various credit programmes.

Table 3: Women's perception of MFIs and Gender Development Policies

| MFIs and MDGs | % | Strongly Disagreed | Disagreed | Indifference | Agreed | Strongly Agreed |
|---|----|--------------------|-----------|--------------|--------|-----------------|
| MFIs can enhance Nigeria Policy on Gender Development | No | 50 | 88 | 32 | 160 | 35 |
| | % | 13.7 | 21.1 | 8.8 | 43.8 | 9.6 |
| Perception about MFB Management | No | 21 | 13 | 115 | 168 | 48 |
| | % | 5.8 | 3.6 | 31.5 | 46 | 13.2 |
| Perception about government Policy on bank | No | 18 | 41 | 27 | 165 | 114 |
| | % | 4.9 | 11.2 | 7.4 | 45.2 | 31.2 |
| MFIs cannot enhance MDGs achievement | No | 93 | 181 | 42 | 25 | 24 |
| | % | 25.5 | 49.6 | 11.5 | 6.8 | 6.6 |
| Do you think Micro Credit can help achieve MDGs | No | 37 | 168 | 24 | 128 | 8 |
| | % | 10.1 | 46 | 6.6 | 35.1 | 2.2 |
| That the Repayment Period is favourable | No | 42 | 21 | 105 | 152 | 45 |
| | % | 11.5 | 5.8 | 28.8 | 41.6 | 12.3 |
| Loan helped reducing poverty in the family | No | 30 | 20 | 192 | 65 | 58 |
| | % | 8.2 | 5.5 | 52.6 | 17.8 | 15.9 |
| Access to micro credit is difficult | No | 17 | 19 | 31 | 174 | 124 |
| | % | 4.7 | 5.2 | 8.5 | 47.7 | 34 |
| MFIs help in reducing Gender Inequalities via Credit Policy | No | 36 | 136 | 38 | 141 | 14 |
| | % | 9.9 | 37.3 | 10.4 | 38.6 | 3.8 |
| MFB interest on loans is high | No | 57 | 114 | 55 | 63 | 76 |
| | % | 15.6 | 31.2 | 15.1 | 17.3 | 20.8 |

Source: Survey 2010

Regression Analysis - Results

The result of the analysis simple regression shows that there is a positive correlation between credit policy of MFIs and several indices tested in this study. Specifically, the result indicated positive relationships between age of MFI, microsavings, educational attainment, age group of the respondents, perception of government policy on banks, reduction of gender inequality and attainment of MGD targets. The positive Beta value of 0.056 and t-value of 2.753 with a p-value of 0.006 is an indication that there is a positive significant relationship between microfinance institutions and attainment of MDG targets. (See Table 4). This confirms the alternative hypothesis of this study which states that there is significant relationship between microfinance institutions' operations and the achievement of gender equality of Millennium Development Goals.

The result of the test of hypothesis two, in Table 4 shows a positive Beta value of 0.065 and t-value of 3.556 with a p-value of 0.000. This shows that there is a positive significant relationship between the perception of women on gender development policy

Correlation Between Dependent and Independent Variables **Coefficients (b)**

| | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | t | Sig. |
|---|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|--------|------------|
| | B | Std. Error | Beta | B | Std. Error |
| (Constant) | 1.303 | 0.187 | | 6.961 | 0.000 |
| Years of Existence | 0.001 | 0.001 | 0.078 | 1.705 | 0.089 |
| Do you save with any microsavings | 0.188 | 0.039 | 0.208 | 4.837 | 0.000 |
| Educational Attainment | 0.010 | 0.020 | 0.022 | 0.517 | 0.605 |
| Age group of Respondents | 0.057 | 0.018 | 0.145 | 3.232 | 0.001 |
| Perception about government Policy on bank | 0.065 | 0.018 | 0.162 | 3.556 | 0.000 |
| Perception on MFB interest on loans | -0.038 | 0.017 | -0.120 | -2.248 | 0.025 |
| Awareness about MDGs | -0.041 | 0.015 | -0.125 | -2.682 | 0.008 |
| Respondents' access to credit | -0.138 | 0.017 | -0.389 | -8.369 | 0.000 |
| Do you think Micro Credit can help achieve MDGs | 0.003 | 0.019 | 0.007 | 0.151 | 0.880 |
| Loan helped reducing poverty in the family | -0.016 | 0.020 | -0.039 | -0.825 | 0.410 |
| MFIs help in reducing Gender Inequalities via Credit Policy | 0.056 | 0.020 | 0.143 | 2.753 | 0.006 |

Source: Survey 2010

Model Summary (c)

| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate |
|-------|---------|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|
| 1 | .606(a) | .367 | .347 | .363 |

a Predictors: (Constant), MFIs help in reducing Gender Inequalities via Credit Policy, Do you save with any microsavings , Perception about government Policy on bank, Educational Attainment, Loan helped reducing poverty in the family, Age group of Respondents, Do you think Micro Credit can help achieve MDGs, Respondents' access to credit, Years of Existence, Awareness about MDGs, Perception on MFB interest on loans b. Dependent Variable: Credit Policy is designed to achieved MDGs.

Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations

Discussion

The direct links of expanded opportunities for women’s access to economic resources, especially through the efforts of microfinance institutions and gender development policy can result to improved education, income generation, environmental sustainability, poverty reduction, and sustainable development among women and to the

nation at large. However, the conditions and challenges facing women in their different fields of endeavour have portrayed them as the figure of fragility with weaknesses and failure in business and household issues. Development policies therefore represent a whole gamut of change by which women can turn their diverse basic needs and social desires into a satisfactory and attainable situation. The results of this study confirms the argument of several analysts who have argued that the awareness of the MDGs is not synonymous with the utilization of the MFB's credit and its capability in achieving the Millennium Development Targets by the year 2015 (United Nations, 2003;UNDP, 2007;UNIDO, 2008). As Snyder and Tadesse (1995) rightly emphasized that gender development is the ability of a nation to expand its women productivity at a rate faster than the growth rate of its population segment. The consistently pitiable condition of women points to the abysmal inability of the states and unwillingness on the part of government and other stakeholders to provide essential commitment in terms seemingly laudable intervention that is focused towards total elimination of gender inequality in our society. The results also revealed that although gender development policy is importance, its importance is hardly noticed especially, among women who are usually regarded as the most vulnerable group (Mayoux, 2001). This shows that the development policies have not been economically helpful perhaps as a result of their ambiguities or lack of objective pursuit (World Bank, 2000). This is in line with the Asian Development Bank (2006) report on women and development which expressly stated that no strategic development objectives (SDOs) such as economic growth, poverty reduction, human development including population planning, and sound management of natural resources can be fully achieved without increased investments in women development.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study has examined the relationships between microfinance, development policy and attainment of gender equality towards the achievement of MDGs. To achieve this objective, two hypotheses were formulated and tested with regression analysis model. The results of the analysis revealed a positive relationships between the dependent variable (credit policy designed by MFBS to achieve MDGs) and independent variables (perception of women on gender development policy and MFIs capability of reducing gender inequality). Based on these results, this study therefore recommends that;

- (i) Efforts should be made by governments to enforce better practices in the areas of health-care services, eradication of female genital mutilation and gender inequality. This will help in motivating more women to participate in developmental initiatives.
- (ii) The government should make efforts to ensure that public policies and investments are tailored towards promotion of the development of women and explore other opportunities that might exist in further integration of development

policy in microfinance operation in Nigeria. This will have economic payoffs in terms of higher economic growth rates, improved productivity, reduced health and welfare costs, low infant and mortality rates and increased life expectancy among women.

- (iii) Microfinance Institutions should design their credit facilities in such a way that the MDGs especially Goal 3 is put in view and endeavour to consider the effects of some of their credit policies on their women customers and find how to package special credit facility and formulate strategies in favour of women. This will help to reduce the incidence of gender disparity in bank credit operation and improve women borrowing pattern and business performance.
- (iv) Local and international non- governmental organizations (NGOs) that are involved in the fight against gender discrimination and disparity should ensure that gender development policies formulated by the governments are not just in mere paper but should ensure that mechanisms and strategies are put in place towards their actual implementation.
- (v) Women organizations should be active in organizing training programmes, workshops and seminars towards creating awareness of MDGs among themselves and intensify efforts to empower women for improved performance. This will help to build their capacity for poverty alleviation and enhance their contributions towards economic development and nation building.

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