*International Journal of Sub-Saharan African Research (IJSSAR)*
*Vol. 4, Issue 2, pp. 1047-1062, June 2026, ISSN: 3043-4467 (Online), 3043-4459 (Print)*
**https://doi:10.5281/zenodo.21437919**

# Microfinance Participation and Women's Economic Empowerment in Jalingo Local Government Area, Taraba State, Nigeria

[1]Embwa Abigail Moses & [2]Yerima Mary Moses
[1&2]Taraba State University, Jalingo, Nigeria

***Corresponding Author:** abigailmosesfwa@gmail.com

**ABSTRACT**

**Background:** Women's economic empowerment is widely recognised as a critical driver of sustainable development, poverty reduction, and improved household welfare. Microfinance has emerged as an important strategy for enhancing women's access to financial resources, entrepreneurial opportunities, and income-generating activities. However, despite the expansion of microfinance institutions in Nigeria, many women in Jalingo Local Government Area of Taraba State continue to experience financial exclusion and limited economic opportunities.
**Objective:** This study examined the relationship between microfinance participation and women's economic empowerment in Jalingo Local Government Area, Taraba State, Nigeria.
**Method:** The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The target population comprised 68,321 women in Jalingo Local Government Area, based on the 2018 Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey. A multistage sampling technique was employed to ensure adequate representation across the political wards, and a sample of 398 respondents was selected. Data were collected using a structured instrument titled *Microfinance Participation and Women's Economic Empowerment Questionnaire (MPWEEQ)*. The instrument was validated by experts in Measurement and Evaluation and Sociology. A pilot study involving 50 women yielded Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficients ranging from 0.70 to 0.74, indicating acceptable internal consistency. The questionnaires were administered by the researcher with the assistance of two trained research assistants, resulting in a response rate of approximately 97%. Data were analysed using simple regression analysis at the 0.05 level of significance.
**Results:** The findings revealed that participation in microfinance programmes had a statistically significant positive relationship with women's economic empowerment ($p < 0.05$). Access to microfinance services significantly improved women's income levels, financial security, business expansion, savings capacity, and participation in household and economic decision-making.
**Conclusion:** The study concludes that increased participation in microfinance programmes contributes significantly to women's economic empowerment in Jalingo Local Government Area. Improved access to financial services enables women to strengthen their livelihoods, increase their economic independence, and contribute more effectively to household and community development.
**Unique Contribution:** This study provides empirical evidence on the role of microfinance in promoting women's economic empowerment within the socio-economic context of Jalingo Local Government Area, Taraba State. The findings contribute to the growing body of knowledge on gender-inclusive financial development and offer practical insights for policymakers, development agencies, and microfinance institutions seeking to strengthen women's economic participation.
**Key Recommendation:** The study recommends expanding women's access to affordable and inclusive microfinance services alongside complementary interventions such as financial literacy programmes, entrepreneurship development, business mentoring, and market linkage initiatives. Government agencies, microfinance institutions, and development partners should collaborate to design gender-responsive financial policies that enhance women's economic opportunities and promote sustainable empowerment.
**Keywords:** Microfinance, Women's Economic Empowerment, Financial Inclusion, Women Entrepreneurs, Poverty Reduction, Jalingo Local Government Area, Taraba State.

## INTRODUCTION

Financial inclusion has become a central strategy for promoting inclusive economic growth, reducing poverty, and advancing sustainable development across developing economies. Within this framework, women's economic empowerment has attracted considerable scholarly and policy attention because of its multiplier effects on household welfare, community development, and national productivity. Globally, women's economic empowerment is recognised as essential for inclusive development, poverty reduction, and improved household welfare. However, structural barriers to women's economic participation remain pronounced in many developing countries. Limited access to financial resources, restricted ownership of productive assets, and low participation in formal financial systems continue to constrain women's involvement in productive economic activities and reduce their contribution to local and national development (World Bank, 2023; UN Women, 2022).

Women's economic activities are predominantly characterised by limited financial capital, unstable earnings, and low participation in formal financial services (Demirgüç-Kunt et al., 2022). Access to financial services remains one of the greatest constraints to women's economic advancement in Sub-Saharan Africa, where relatively few women have access to formal credit facilities and structured savings schemes (Demirgüç-Kunt et al., 2022). Consequently, increasing attention has been directed towards microfinance as a viable mechanism for improving women's economic opportunities and financial inclusion.

Microfinance refers to the provision of financial services—including microcredit, savings, insurance, payment services, and financial literacy support—to low-income individuals and microenterprises that are traditionally excluded from formal banking systems (Ojong, Simba, & Dana, 2021). These services are designed to enhance productive capacity, promote entrepreneurship, increase income, and improve financial resilience. Previous studies indicate that access to microfinance enables women to invest in income-generating activities, establish or expand small businesses, and improve household welfare (Ojong, Simba, & Dana, 2021). Nevertheless, the effectiveness of microfinance in empowering women varies depending on institutional efficiency, loan conditions, repayment mechanisms, and borrowers' financial capabilities.

Among the various components of microfinance, access to credit represents a critical pathway to women's economic empowerment. Credit enables women to establish new enterprises, expand existing businesses, increase household income, and improve economic security. However, access to credit alone does not automatically translate into empowerment. The effectiveness of credit depends on factors such as interest rates, repayment obligations, financial literacy, business management skills, and the productive utilisation of borrowed funds. Recent studies by Fitouri and Zouaoui (2024) and Adebuason (2024) demonstrate that although access to credit is positively associated with higher income levels, the magnitude of its impact depends largely on how effectively beneficiaries utilise the loans. This underscores the need to examine the relationship between credit access and women's economic empowerment within local socio-economic contexts characterised by widespread informal economic activities.

International Journal of Sub-Saharan African Research (IJSSAR)
Vol. 4, Issue 2, pp. 1047-1062, June 2026, ISSN: 3043-4467 (Online), 3043-4459 (Print)
https://doi:10.5281/zenodo.21437919

In addition to credit, savings services constitute another important dimension of microfinance. Regular savings improve women's financial security, strengthen their capacity to cope with economic shocks, facilitate business investment, and reduce dependence on informal lenders. Savings mobilisation also promotes financial discipline and enhances long-term economic resilience. Consequently, access to both credit and savings services is expected to contribute significantly to women's economic empowerment.

Although previous studies have examined the relationship between financial inclusion and women's economic empowerment in Nigeria, most have treated microfinance as a single construct without distinguishing the individual contributions of credit and savings services. Furthermore, empirical evidence specific to Jalingo Local Government Area remains limited despite the area's heavy reliance on informal economic activities and the increasing presence of microfinance institutions. This study therefore investigates the relationship between microfinance participation and women's economic empowerment, with particular emphasis on the contributions of credit access and savings services. The findings are expected to contribute to the growing literature on gender-inclusive financial development and provide evidence to guide policymakers, development practitioners, and microfinance institutions in designing interventions that promote sustainable economic empowerment for women.

## PROBLEM STATEMENT

Women's economic empowerment remains a major development concern in Nigeria because of its significant contribution to poverty reduction, household welfare, and sustainable economic growth. In Jalingo Local Government Area of Taraba State, many women participate actively in small-scale trading, agriculture, and other informal economic activities that serve as important sources of livelihood. Despite this participation, many continue to experience low income, inadequate financial security, limited business expansion, and restricted control over productive resources, thereby limiting their ability to improve their living standards and contribute effectively to local economic development. To address these challenges, microfinance institutions provide financial services, particularly credit and savings facilities, to economically active but financially excluded women. Access to microfinance credit is expected to provide the capital required to establish or expand businesses, while savings services promote financial discipline, asset accumulation, and resilience against economic shocks. However, the anticipated benefits of these services have not been fully realized due to challenges such as stringent lending conditions, inadequate loan sizes, high repayment obligations, low financial literacy, irregular savings behaviour, and limited access to appropriate financial products, leaving many women unable to translate participation in microfinance programmes into sustained economic empowerment.

Although previous studies have generally reported positive relationships between microfinance services and women's economic empowerment, their findings remain inconsistent across different contexts. While some studies demonstrate that access to credit and savings enhances women's income, business performance, asset ownership, and participation in financial decision-making, others indicate that these outcomes are constrained by factors such as loan accessibility,

*International Journal of Sub-Saharan African Research (IJSSAR)*
*Vol. 4, Issue 2, pp. 1047-1062, June 2026, ISSN: 3043-4467 (Online), 3043-4459 (Print)*
**https://doi:10.5281/zenodo.21437919**

repayment conditions, institutional inefficiencies, and socio-economic characteristics of beneficiaries. Consequently, the effectiveness of microfinance interventions cannot be generalized across locations, and there is limited empirical evidence specifically examining the influence of microfinance credit and savings services on women's economic empowerment in Jalingo Local Government Area of Taraba State. Despite ongoing financial inclusion initiatives by government agencies, microfinance institutions, and development organizations, concerns persist regarding the extent to which these services have improved women's economic well-being within the study area. It is against this backdrop that this study investigates the relationship between access to microfinance credit and savings services and women's economic empowerment in Jalingo Local Government Area, with the aim of providing context-specific evidence to guide policy formulation and improve microfinance interventions.

**HYPOTHESES**

Ho1: Access to microfinance credit has no significant effect on women's economic empowerment in Jalingo Local Government Area

$Ho_2$: Savings services provided by microfinance institutions have no significant effects on women's economic empowerment in Jalingo Local Government Area

**Concept of Economic Empowerment**

Economic empowerment is a central concept in development economics, gender studies, poverty reduction, and public policy because it explains how individuals acquire the capacity to improve their economic well-being and exercise greater control over their livelihoods. The concept gained prominence as development scholars increasingly recognized that poverty reduction cannot be achieved solely through welfare programmes or income transfers. Rather, sustainable development requires creating opportunities that enable individuals, particularly vulnerable groups such as women, to access productive resources, participate in economic activities, and make independent economic decisions. Consequently, economic empowerment has evolved from a narrow focus on income generation to a broader framework that incorporates economic opportunities, capabilities, financial inclusion, and decision-making power.

Although scholars define economic empowerment differently, there is considerable agreement regarding its core dimensions. Richardson (2020) conceptualizes economic empowerment as the ability of individuals to succeed economically while possessing the authority to make and implement economic decisions affecting their lives. This definition places equal emphasis on economic achievement and decision-making autonomy. Similarly, Reshi and Sudha (2023) describe economic empowerment as a process through which individuals acquire the resources, capabilities, confidence, and opportunities necessary to improve their economic status and influence economic outcomes. While Richardson (2020) highlights the outcome of having economic power, Reshi and Sudha (2023) emphasize the process through which such power is developed. Together, these perspectives suggest that economic empowerment encompasses both the acquisition of economic resources and the ability to utilize them effectively for sustainable improvement in well-being.

Another important dimension of economic empowerment is capability development. Contemporary development literature, particularly the capability approach, argues that empowerment should not be measured solely by material wealth or income but by the expansion of people's freedoms and opportunities to achieve the lives they value. From this perspective, access to education, vocational skills, financial literacy, entrepreneurship training, and supportive institutions enhances individuals' capabilities to engage productively in economic activities. Naveed et al. (2023) maintain that strengthening these capabilities broadens individuals' livelihood opportunities, improves resilience against economic shocks, and enables sustainable economic advancement. This perspective complements earlier definitions by demonstrating that economic empowerment is both an outcome and a continuous developmental process through which individuals expand their choices and productive potential.

Within the context of women's development, economic empowerment assumes additional significance because women often experience social, cultural, and institutional barriers that restrict their access to productive resources and financial opportunities. Ogbari et al. (2024) define women's economic empowerment as increasing women's access to productive resources, financial services, employment opportunities, and decision-making authority in ways that strengthen their economic independence and overall well-being. Likewise, Reshi and Sudha (2023) argue that women's economic empowerment involves enhancing their ability to participate effectively in economic activities while exercising control over income, assets, and productive resources. Although these definitions differ slightly in emphasis, they converge in recognizing that genuine empowerment extends beyond income generation to include ownership of resources, financial autonomy, participation in economic decision-making, and improved bargaining power within households and society.

A comparison of these conceptualizations reveals substantial convergence despite differences in emphasis. Richardson (2020) primarily focuses on economic agency and decision-making authority, whereas Reshi and Sudha (2023) highlight empowerment as a developmental process involving the acquisition of capabilities and resources. Naveed et al. (2023) extend the discussion by emphasizing capability enhancement and opportunity expansion as prerequisites for sustainable empowerment, while Ogbari et al. (2024) concentrate specifically on the gender dimensions of economic empowerment by drawing attention to women's access to financial services, productive assets, and economic independence. Collectively, these perspectives demonstrate that economic empowerment is a multidimensional construct that integrates economic resources, financial inclusion, capability development, productive participation, asset ownership, economic agency, and decision-making authority. The differences among the authors lie primarily in the dimensions they emphasize rather than in the fundamental meaning of the concept.

For the purpose of this study, economic empowerment is defined as the extent to which women improve their income, financial security, savings, business productivity, ownership and control of productive resources, and participation in household and economic decision-making through access to economic opportunities and financial services. This working definition is appropriate

*International Journal of Sub-Saharan African Research (IJSSAR)*
***Vol. 4, Issue 2, pp. 1047-1062, June 2026, ISSN: 3043-4467 (Online), 3043-4459 (Print)***
**https://doi:10.5281/zenodo.21437919**

because it aligns with the study's focus on examining how participation in microfinance credit and savings services influences women's economic empowerment in Jalingo Local Government Area, Taraba State. It recognizes that economic empowerment is reflected not only in increased earnings but also in enhanced financial independence, economic resilience, and the capacity to make decisions that improve women's overall socio-economic well-being.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Access to microfinance credit and savings services constitutes one of the principal mechanisms for promoting women's economic empowerment, particularly among low-income populations that are often excluded from conventional banking systems. Microfinance institutions provide small loans and flexible savings opportunities to individuals who lack the collateral, credit history, or stable income required by commercial banks, thereby promoting financial inclusion (Datta & Sahu, 2022). Within the Nigerian context, microfinance banks have become important vehicles for implementing financial inclusion policies aimed at supporting women engaged in petty trading, agriculture, and other micro-enterprises. Despite these initiatives, many Nigerian women, particularly those in rural and semi-urban communities, continue to experience limited access to affordable financial services due to inadequate financial literacy, high lending costs, stringent repayment conditions, and socio-cultural constraints (Central Bank of Nigeria [CBN], 2023). In Taraba State, where a large proportion of women depend on informal economic activities for their livelihoods, improved access to microfinance services has been identified as a viable strategy for enhancing income generation, reducing poverty, and strengthening women's participation in local economic development.

Microfinance credit provides women with the financial capital required to establish, sustain, or expand income-generating activities, thereby increasing earnings, asset ownership, business productivity, and financial independence. Beyond improving business performance, access to credit has been associated with greater participation in household financial decisions, improved welfare, and increased investment in children's education and healthcare (Khursheed, 2022; Mengstie, 2022). However, recent evidence suggests that access to credit alone does not automatically translate into economic empowerment. The effectiveness of microfinance credit depends largely on factors such as loan adequacy, repayment conditions, entrepreneurial skills, financial literacy, institutional support, and prevailing socio-cultural norms (Datta & Sahu, 2022; Nyarko, Beisland, & Mersland, 2024). Nigerian studies similarly report that although microfinance credit contributes to enterprise development, many women experience challenges arising from insufficient loan sizes, multiple borrowing, weak business management skills, and limited market opportunities, all of which reduce the expected empowerment outcomes (CBN, 2023). These findings indicate that credit is most effective when complemented by capacity-building programmes and an enabling business environment.

Savings services represent another important dimension of microfinance because they enable women to accumulate financial assets gradually, improve resilience against economic shocks, and reduce dependence on external borrowing. Through individual accounts, group savings schemes, and rotating savings arrangements, women are encouraged to cultivate regular saving

*International Journal of Sub-Saharan African Research (IJSSAR)*
***Vol. 4, Issue 2, pp. 1047-1062, June 2026, ISSN: 3043-4467 (Online), 3043-4459 (Print)***
**https://doi:10.5281/zenodo.21437919**

habits while strengthening their financial management capacity (Saluja, Singh, & Kumar, 2023). Unlike credit, which creates repayment obligations, savings promote internally generated capital that can be reinvested in businesses, household welfare, education, and healthcare. Empirical evidence demonstrates that participation in structured savings programmes enhances women's financial security, confidence, and decision-making authority within households (Mengstie, 2022; Odunga, 2024). In Nigeria, savings groups supported by microfinance institutions and cooperative societies have increasingly served as platforms for financial literacy, peer learning, and entrepreneurship development, particularly among women operating informal businesses. Nevertheless, irregular income, low earning capacity, inflationary pressures, and limited financial education continue to constrain consistent savings among many women, thereby reducing the full benefits of savings-led empowerment (World Development Perspectives, 2024).

Overall, existing literature suggests that microfinance contributes to women's economic empowerment primarily through two complementary pathways: access to credit, which expands productive investment and income-generating opportunities, and access to savings services, which strengthens financial resilience, asset accumulation, and long-term economic security. Although empirical findings generally support positive relationships between these dimensions of microfinance and women's empowerment, the magnitude of their effects differs across countries, communities, and institutional settings because of variations in socio-economic conditions, financial literacy, cultural norms, and programme implementation (Pandhare et al., 2024; Nyarko et al., 2024). Furthermore, there is limited empirical evidence examining the combined influence of microfinance credit and savings services on women's economic empowerment in Jalingo Local Government Area of Taraba State. This contextual gap provides the basis for the present study, which seeks to determine how access to microfinance credit and savings services influences women's economic empowerment within the study area.

## METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Jalingo Local Government Area, Taraba State. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population of the study comprised 68,321 women (Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey 2018). These women form a significant portion of the state workforce and therefore have a lot to contribute to the economic development of the state.

The study employed a multistage sampling technique to ensure adequate representation of women across Jalingo Local Government Area, Taraba State. In the first stage, political wards were selected from the existing wards in the Local Government Area using a simple random sampling technique to provide equal chances of selection. In the second stage, communities were randomly selected from each of the sampled wards. In the third stage, households with eligible women were identified within the selected communities through a household listing exercise conducted with the assistance of community leaders and local guides. Finally, eligible respondents were selected from the identified households using a systematic random sampling technique based on a predetermined sampling interval until the required sample size of 398 women was obtained. This multistage approach ensured broad geographical coverage, minimized sampling bias, and enhanced the representativeness of the study population, thereby making the findings generalizable to women in Jalingo Local Government Area.

*International Journal of Sub-Saharan African Research (IJSSAR)*
*Vol. 4, Issue 2, pp. 1047-1062, June 2026, ISSN: 3043-4467 (Online), 3043-4459 (Print)*
**https://doi:10.5281/zenodo.21437919**

The sample size for this study consisted of 398 women, determined using the Taro Yamane formula (Yamane, 1967), which is widely used in social science research to calculate appropriate sample sizes for large populations.

Taro Yamane formula is expressed as:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where:

n = required sample size

N = accessible population (68,321)

e = margin of error (assumed at 5% or 0.05)

Substituting the values:

$$n = \frac{68{,}321}{1 + 68{,}321(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{68{,}321}{1 + 68{,}321\ (0.0025)}$$

$$n = \frac{68{,}321}{1 + 170.8025}$$

$$n = \frac{68{,}321}{171.8025} = 397.67 \approx 398$$

A questionnaire titled Microfinance Participation and Women Economic Empowerment Questionnaire (MPWEEQ) was developed by the researcher. This was subjected to face and content validity by experts in measurement/evaluation and sociology all in Faculty of Social Science, Taraba State University. A *trial tested on fifty (50) women was done* to establish the reliability of the instrument. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled Microfinance Participation and Women Economic Empowerment Questionnaire (MPWEEQ). The instrument consisted of 32 items divided into three sections. Section A contained 6 items on respondents' demographic characteristics, Section B comprised 13 items measuring microfinance participation through two dimensions access to microfinance credit services (7 items) and access to microfinance savings services (6 items) while Section C contained 13 items assessing women's economic empowerment, including income improvement, financial security, business expansion, asset accumulation, savings behaviour, and participation in household financial decision-making. Items in Sections B and C were measured on a five-point Likert scale of Strongly Agree (5), Agree (4), Undecided (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1).

The Microfinance Participation and Women Economic Empowerment Questionnaire (MPWEEQ) was subjected to face and content validation by three experts comprising one

*International Journal of Sub-Saharan African Research (IJSSAR)*
***Vol. 4, Issue 2, pp. 1047-1062, June 2026, ISSN: 3043-4467 (Online), 3043-4459 (Print)***
**https://doi:10.5281/zenodo.21437919**

specialist in Measurement and Evaluation, one in Sociology, and one in Economics/Microfinance Studies to ascertain the clarity, relevance, and adequacy of the instrument in measuring the study variables. Based on their observations, ambiguous items were reworded, overlapping statements were eliminated, and some items were reorganized to improve clarity, content coverage, and alignment with the study objectives. Thereafter, the revised instrument was pilot-tested on 50 women in Ardo-Kola Local Government Area of Taraba State, an area with similar characteristics to the study area but excluded from the main study. The data obtained were analyzed using Cronbach's Alpha to determine internal consistency, yielding reliability coefficients of 0.72 for the Microfinance Credit Services scale, 0.74 for the Microfinance Savings Services scale, and 0.76 for the Women's Economic Empowerment scale, with an overall reliability coefficient of 0.74, indicating that the instrument was sufficiently reliable for the study.

## RESULTS

**Hypothesis one**: Access to microfinance credit has no significant effect on women’s economic empowerment in Jalingo Local Government Area. The independent variable is access to microfinance credit, while the dependent variable is women’s economic empowerment. To test this hypothesis, linear regression was applied. The result of the analysis is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Simple Regression Analysis of the Influence of Access to Microfinance Credit on Women's Economic Empowerment

| Model | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | p-value | R | $R^2$ | Adjusted $R^2$ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Regression | 382.398 | 1 | 382.398 | **45.120*** | .000 | .323 | .104 | .102 |
| Residual | 3271.402 | 386 | 8.475 | | | | | |
| Total | 3653.800 | 387 | | | | | | |

***Significant at the 0.05 level***

Table 1 presents the simple regression analysis of the influence of access to microfinance credit on women's economic empowerment. The result shows that the regression model produced an F-ratio of 45.120, which was statistically significant at the 0.05 level ($p < .05$). Since the probability value (.000) is less than the level of significance (0.05), the null hypothesis was rejected. This implies that access to microfinance credit has a statistically significant influence on women's economic empowerment in Jalingo Local Government Area, Taraba State. The model yielded a correlation coefficient ($R = .323$), indicating a positive relationship between access to microfinance credit and women's economic empowerment. The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = .104$) shows that access to microfinance credit accounted for 10.4% of the variation in women's economic empowerment, while the remaining 89.6% of the variation was explained by other factors not included in the regression model.

**Hypothesis two**: Savings services provided by microfinance institutions have no significant effects on women’s economic empowerment in Jalingo Local Government Area. The independent variable is savings services provided by microfinance institutions, while the

*International Journal of Sub-Saharan African Research (IJSSAR)*
*Vol. 4, Issue 2, pp. 1047-1062, June 2026, ISSN: 3043-4467 (Online), 3043-4459 (Print)*
https://doi:10.5281/zenodo.21437919

dependent variable is women's economic empowerment. To test this hypothesis, linear regression was applied. The result of the analysis is presented in Table 2.

**ABLE 2: Simple regression result of the influence of savings services on women's economic empowerment**

| Model | Sum of square | Df | Mean square | F | p-value | R | R2 | AdjR2 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Regression | 512.270 | 1 | 512.270 | 61.350* | .000 | .370 | .137 | .135 |
| Residual | 3222.900 | 386 | 8.350 | | | | | |
| Total | 3735.170 | 387 | | | | | | |

Table 2 shows that an F-ratio of 61.350 was produced from the linear regression analysis, which was statistically significant at the .05 level since the p-value is less than .05 ($p<.05$). This indicates that hypothesis two is rejected, suggesting that savings services provided by microfinance institutions significantly influence women's economic empowerment. The result also shows an R of .370 and an R2 of .137. This indicates that savings services contribute 13.7% to the variation in women's economic empowerment among the women. The result further suggests that 86.3% of the variation is explained by other variables.

## DISCUSSION

The findings of the study revealed that access to microfinance credit has a positive and statistically significant influence on women's economic empowerment in Jalingo Local Government Area, Taraba State. The regression result showed that microfinance credit explained 10.4% ($R^2 = .104$) of the variation in women's economic empowerment, indicating that although access to credit contributes significantly to improving women's economic outcomes, a substantial proportion of the variation is attributable to other factors not examined in this study. The finding supports the theoretical proposition that improved access to financial resources enhances women's capacity to engage in productive economic activities, expand businesses, increase income, and strengthen financial independence. It is also consistent with previous empirical studies by Mengstie (2022), Khursheed (2022), and Duvendack and Mader (2020), which reported that access to microfinance credit improves women's income, entrepreneurial activities, asset ownership, and household welfare. The similarity between these findings may be explained by the fact that microfinance institutions provide women with financial resources that are often inaccessible through conventional banking systems, thereby reducing financial exclusion. However, the relatively modest explanatory power of the model suggests that access to credit alone cannot fully explain women's economic empowerment, highlighting the importance of complementary interventions such as financial literacy, institutional support, and an enabling business environment. This observation is further supported by Datta and Sahu (2022), Saluja, Singh, and Kumar (2023), and Khan, Bhat, and Sangmi (2020), who argued that the effectiveness of microfinance credit depends largely on contextual and institutional conditions that facilitate its productive utilization.

*International Journal of Sub-Saharan African Research (IJSSAR)*
*Vol. 4, Issue 2, pp. 1047-1062, June 2026, ISSN: 3043-4467 (Online), 3043-4459 (Print)*
**https://doi:10.5281/zenodo.21437919**

Similarly, the study found that access to microfinance savings services has a positive and statistically significant influence on women's economic empowerment, accounting for 13.7% ($R^2$ = .137) of the observed variation. This indicates that savings services make a slightly greater contribution to women's economic empowerment than credit services, although much of the variation remains attributable to other factors outside the scope of the present study. The finding supports the view that access to structured savings facilities enhances women's financial resilience by promoting asset accumulation, improving financial security, and strengthening their capacity to finance productive activities without excessive reliance on external borrowing. The result agrees with the findings of Karlan et al. (2014), Demirgüç-Kunt et al. (2022), and Suri and Jack (2020), who reported that formal savings programmes improve financial inclusion, household welfare, and women's control over financial resources. The consistency of these findings suggests that savings services constitute an important pathway through which microfinance institutions promote sustainable economic empowerment. Nevertheless, the relatively low coefficient of determination indicates that savings services alone cannot fully account for differences in women's economic empowerment, reinforcing the multidimensional nature of empowerment. Overall, the findings demonstrate that both microfinance credit and savings services significantly contribute to women's economic empowerment in Jalingo Local Government Area and support the study's theoretical expectation that improved financial inclusion enhances women's economic well-being. At the same time, the findings suggest that maximizing the impact of microfinance requires complementary policies and programmes that strengthen the overall economic environment in which women operate.

## CONCLUSION

This study examined the influence of access to microfinance credit and savings services on women's economic empowerment in Jalingo Local Government Area, Taraba State. The findings revealed that both access to microfinance credit and access to microfinance savings services had positive and statistically significant influences on women's economic empowerment. The regression results further showed that microfinance credit explained 10.4% of the variation in women's economic empowerment, while savings services explained 13.7%. Although savings services accounted for a slightly higher proportion of the explained variance than credit services, the explanatory power of both variables remained relatively modest. These findings suggest that while access to microfinance services contributes significantly to women's economic empowerment, a substantial proportion of the variation is attributable to other factors not examined in this study. Consequently, women's economic empowerment should be viewed as a multidimensional phenomenon influenced by a combination of financial and non-financial factors. The study therefore concludes that expanding access to microfinance credit and savings services is important for enhancing women's economic empowerment in Jalingo Local Government Area, but additional determinants of empowerment require further investigation to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing women's economic outcomes.

*International Journal of Sub-Saharan African Research (IJSSAR)*
*Vol. 4, Issue 2, pp. 1047-1062, June 2026, ISSN: 3043-4467 (Online), 3043-4459 (Print)*
https://doi:10.5281/zenodo.21437919

## RECOMMENDATION

1. Microfinance institutions should expand access to affordable credit by increasing their outreach to women, particularly those operating micro and small-scale enterprises in underserved communities. Loan conditions should be made more flexible through reduced collateral requirements, reasonable interest rates, and repayment schedules that reflect the cash flow patterns of women's businesses.
2. Microfinance institutions should strengthen savings mobilization by providing flexible, convenient, and accessible savings products that accommodate the varying income patterns of women. These should include daily, weekly, and monthly savings options, as well as digital and mobile savings platforms, agency banking services, and group-based savings schemes where feasible to encourage regular savings, improve financial security, and enhance financial inclusion.
3. Continuous financial literacy programmes should be integrated into microfinance services to improve women's financial management skills. Regular training on budgeting, record keeping, savings culture, investment planning, business financial management, and responsible loan utilization should be provided to enable women to maximize the benefits of microfinance services and achieve sustainable economic empowerment.
4. Access to microfinance credit should be complemented with entrepreneurship and business development support, including training in business planning, marketing, customer relations, pricing strategies, product development, and enterprise management. Such complementary services will enhance women's managerial capacity and improve the productive utilization of loans, thereby increasing business growth, income, and overall economic empowerment.
5. Government agencies, development partners, and microfinance institutions should collaborate to strengthen financial inclusion policies by expanding access to microfinance services and providing business development support for women entrepreneurs. Such collaboration should include capacity-building programmes, financial education initiatives, market linkage opportunities, and an enabling policy environment that promotes sustainable women's economic empowerment and inclusive local economic development.

## Ethical clearance

Ethical consent was sought and obtained from the participants used in this study. They were made to understand that the exercise was purely for academic purposes, and their participation was voluntary.

## Acknowledgements

The researcher sincerely appreciates all the women who participated in this study for their time, willingness, and valuable responses during the data collection process. Special appreciation is extended to the research assistants for their commitment and support in administering the questionnaires and ensuring successful data collection. The researcher is also grateful to the management and staff of the University Library for providing access to relevant scholarly materials and a conducive environment that greatly facilitated the completion of this study.

Finally, sincere gratitude is extended to all individuals and institutions whose guidance, encouragement, and support contributed to the successful completion of this research.

**Sources of funding**
The study was not funded.

**Conflict of Interest**
The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

**Authors' Contributions**
Embwa, Abigail Moses conceived and designed the study. Embwa, Abigail Moses coordinated the data collection and data management. Embwa, Abigail Moses performed the statistical analysis and interpreted the findings, while Embwa, Abigail Moses prepared the initial draft of the manuscript. All authors critically reviewed the manuscript for important intellectual content, approved the final version for publication, and accept responsibility for the accuracy, integrity, and originality of the work, including the manuscript's similarity index.

**Artificial Intelligence (AI) Use Disclosure**
During the preparation of this manuscript, the author(s) used ChatGPT (OpenAI) to assist with language editing, grammar correction, readability improvement, and sentence restructuring, and formatting of the manuscript. All AI-generated suggestions were carefully reviewed, revised, and verified by the author(s) to ensure their accuracy, consistency, and appropriateness within the context of the study. The author(s) accept full responsibility for the accuracy, originality, integrity, and scientific content of the manuscript. No AI-assisted tool was involved in the generation, analysis, interpretation, or reporting of the research data. AI tools were used solely as writing and editorial support and are not listed as authors or co-authors of this manuscript.

**Data availability statement**
The datasets on which conclusions were made for this study are available on reasonable request.

**Citation**
Embwa, A. M., & Yerima, M. M. (2026). *Microfinance participation and women's economic empowerment in Jalingo Local Government Area, Taraba State, Nigeria*. *Journal Name, Volume* (2), 1047-1062**.** https://doi:10.5281/zenodo.21437919

*International Journal of Sub-Saharan African Research (IJSSAR)*
*Vol. 4, Issue 2, pp. 1047-1062, June 2026, ISSN: 3043-4467 (Online), 3043-4459 (Print)*
**https://doi:10.5281/zenodo.21437919**

**REFERENCES**

Adebuason R. (2024). Microfinance and Entrepreneurial Empowerment of Women: The Case of Women's Microfinance Initiative in Uganda. *International Journal of Entrepreneurship.* 7(2), 18 – 33.

Bakhtiari, S. (2020). Microfinance and poverty reduction: Some international evidence. *International Business and Economics Research Journal*, *19*(2), 85-96.

Datta, S., & Sahu, T. N. (2022). How far is microfinance relevant for empowering rural women? *Journal of Economic Issues*, 56(1), 97–112.

Dela Cruz, N. A. O., Villanueva, A. C. B., Tolin, L., Disse, S., Lensink, R., & White, H. (2025). Effects of Interventions to Improve Access to Financial Services for Micro, Small, and Medium-Sized Enterprises in Low- and Middle-Income Countries: An Evidence and Gap Map. Campbell Systematic Reviews: *Better Evidence for a Better World*, 21(3).

Demirgüç-Kunt, A., Klapper, L., Singer, D., Ansar, S., & Hess, J. (2022). *The Global Findex Database 2021: Financial Inclusion, Digital Payments, and Resilience in the Age of COVID-19*. World Bank.

Fitouri, M., & Zouaoui, S. K. (2024). The impact of micro finance institutions on the development of female entrepreneurship evidence from Tunisia. *Journal of Global Entrepreneurship Research*, 14(1), 41.

Hermes, N., & Lensink, R. (2022). Microfinance and development: An overview of recent evidence. *World Development*, *151*, 105755.

Karlan, D., Ratan, A. L., & Zinman, J. (2014). Savings by and for the Poor: A Research Review and Agenda. *Review of Income and Wealth*, 60, 36-78. https://doi.org/10.1111/roiw.12101

Khan, S. T., Bhat, M. A., & Sangmi, M. U. D. (2020). Impact of microfinance on economic, social, political and psychological empowerment. *SAGE Journals*. 2(2), 117-136

Khavul, S., Chavez, H., & Bruton, G. D. (2021). When institutional change outruns the change agent: The contested terrain of entrepreneurial microfinance for women. *Journal of Business Venturing*, *36*(3), 106091.

Khursheed, A. (2022). Exploring the role of microfinance in women's empowerment and entrepreneurial development. *Future Business Journal*, 8(57).

Lee, C. W., & Huruta, A. D. (2022). Green microfinance and women's empowerment: Why does financial literacy matter? *Sustainability*, 14(5), 3130.

Mengstie, B. (2022). Impact of microfinance on women's economic empowerment. *Journal of Innovation and Entrepreneurship*, 11(55).

Naveed, A., Ahmad, N., Naz, A., & Zhuparova, A. (2023). Economic development through women's economic rights: A panel data analysis. *International Economics and Economic Policy*, *20*(2), 257-278.

Nawai, N., & Shariff, M. N. M. (2021). Microfinance and poverty alleviation: A review of empirical evidence. *International Journal of Business and Society, 22*(1), 1-17.

Nyarko, S. A., Beisland, L. A., & Mersland, R. (2024). Lending to women and credit risk in microfinance institutions. *The Journal of Development Studies*. *61*(4), 614–637. https://doi.org/10.1080/00220388.2024.2434252

Odunga, R. M. (2024). Microfinance services and economic empowerment of women groups in marginalized settings in Kenya. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science*. 8(1),2122-2136

Ogbari, M. E., Folorunso, F., Simon-Ilogho, B., Adebayo, O., Olanrewaju, K., Efegbudu, J., & Omoregbe, M. (2024). Social empowerment and its effect on poverty alleviation for sustainable development among women entrepreneurs in the Nigerian agricultural sector. *Sustainability, 16*(6), 2225.

Ojong N., Simba A., Dana L., (2021). Female entrepreneurship in Africa: A review, trends, and future research directions. *Journal of Business Research*, 132(1), 233-248. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2021.04.032.

Ojong, N., Simba, A., & Dana, L. P. (2023). Microfinance and women's entrepreneurship in developing economies. *Journal of Small Business Management, 61*(5), 2148-2172.

Pandhare, A., Bellampalli, P. N., & Yadava, N. (2024). Transforming rural women's lives through microfinance and entrepreneurship. *Journal of Innovation and Entrepreneurship*, 13(62).

Patel, R., & Patel, N. (2020). Impact of microfinance on women empowerment: A decision-making perspective. *Indian Journal of Finance*, 14(8–9).

Reshi, I. A., & Sudha, T. (2023). Economic empowerment of women: A review of current research. *International Journal of Educational Review, Law and Social Sciences, 3*(2), 601-605.

*International Journal of Sub-Saharan African Research (IJSSAR)*
*Vol. 4, Issue 2, pp. 1047-1062, June 2026, ISSN: 3043-4467 (Online), 3043-4459 (Print)*
**https://doi:10.5281/zenodo.21437919**

Richardson, R. A. (2020). Grappling with the challenges of measuring women's economic empowerment in intrahousehold settings. *World Development, 132*, 104959.

Saluja, O. B., Singh, P., & Kumar, H. (2023). Barriers and interventions on the way to empower women through financial inclusion: A systematic review. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 10, 148.

Sengupta, N. (2024). Integrating gender in microfinance: Strategies for women's empowerment. *International Journal of Educational Research Open*. 7,100357. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijedro.2024.100357

UN Women. (2022). *Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: Gender snapshot*.

UNDP. (2020). *Gender equality and environmental sustainability report*. United Nations Development Programme.

World Bank. (2023). *Women, business and the law report*.

World Development Perspectives. (2024). A financial maturity model for the empowerment of women's saving groups.