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Social Empowerment and Its Effect on Poverty Alleviation for Sustainable Development among Women Entrepreneurs in the Nigerian Agricultural Sector

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Abstract: Despite the fact that the issue of female poverty is widespread, continuous attempts are made to combat it and advance women’s empowerment. To achieve the goals of sustainable development, such as eradicating poverty, attaining gender equality, promoting good jobs and economic growth, and eliminating inequities, creative strategies must be developed. This study focused on the Nigerian Youth and Women Farmers Association in order to examine the effect of social empowerment on alleviating poverty in Nigeria’s agricultural sector. Out of the 353 issued questionnaires, 335 were returned and used in this study’s investigation. The structural equation model with partial least squares (SEM-PLS) was used to analyse the acquired data. The results showed an important correlation between social empowerment and reductions in poverty among women working in the agricultural sector. This highlights how crucial it is to work together, provide resources, and extend support in order to empower women socially and foster an atmosphere that supports their social and economic advancement. This research recommends that lawmakers, organisations, and governmental entities actively support the empowerment of women in the agricultural sector in order to encourage sustainable farming practices among female entrepreneurs.

Keywords: social empowerment; poverty alleviation; women entrepreneurs; sustainable development



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1. Introduction

The process of empowerment involves granting individuals, particularly women, the autonomy to manage their lives and make decisions impacting their well-being. Women’s empowerment encompasses multifaceted dimensions—economic, social, and political [1]. The progression of society hinges on the empowerment of women, a concept endorsed by the UN through its 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Notably, the agenda’s fifth objective prioritizes “achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls” [2], underscoring the pivotal role of women’s empowerment in advancing sustainable development.

Empowered women tend to allocate resources towards their health, nutrition, and children’s education [3], thereby positively influencing the next generation’s development. Financially independent women are better positioned to support their families, amplifying the significance of promoting women’s empowerment in propelling sustainable development and mitigating poverty, particularly in developing nations where women grapple with multifaceted social, economic, and cultural challenges.

Women, especially in developing regions, disproportionately experience poverty, a complex global predicament. Addressing poverty, notably in nations like Nigeria, intertwines with empowering women who have historically encountered marginalization across

various societal domains, including politics, workforce participation, and education [4]. Despite recent advancements, gender disparities persist, hindering women's empowerment.

In sectors such as agriculture, foundational principles guide organizational choices and problem-solving approaches [5]. Access to markets, information, technology, and financial resources is imperative for women entrepreneurs, notably in fields like agriculture, pivotal to Nigeria's economy, contributing over 24% to the GDP [6]. Women constitute about 75% of Nigeria's farming population and significantly contribute to farm management and labour [7]. Empowering women in agriculture holds potential for bolstering productivity, enhancing family food security, and elevating income levels [8].

Empowerment of women, a cornerstone of social empowerment, necessitates granting them decision-making autonomy and fostering access to employment, healthcare, and other critical services. Achieving sustainable development and reducing poverty demand a strong emphasis on women's social empowerment. However, pervasive societal and cultural barriers impede women's equitable access to essential services like healthcare, education, and decision making [3], perpetuating cycles of inequality, social exclusion, and poverty. Policies and programs facilitating women's social empowerment are indispensable in combating this persistent challenge.

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The present paper fills in significant gaps in the literature by carefully examining the effect of social empowerment on poverty alleviation for sustainable development among women entrepreneurs in the agricultural sector. Additionally, most studies adopt correlation and regression analysis to analyse the collected data. However, in this article, variables were measured using structural equation modelling. The objective is to:

Examine the effect of social empowerment on poverty alleviation among women entrepreneurs.

This study is segmented into essential sections, each contributing significantly to its coherence and depth. The Introduction section succinctly outlines the study's scope while defining pivotal terminology. Following this, the Literature Review section delves into pertinent research, fortifying the study through diverse investigations and theoretical frameworks. Additionally, the Section 3 meticulously delineates the study's procedural aspects, detailing the methodologies and materials employed. Subsequently, the Data section presents a meticulous scientific analysis of the study. Concluding discussions augment the analytical depth, culminating in conclusive findings, recommendations, and an evaluation of study limitations in the Section 6.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Women Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship entails the ability and desire to plan, launch, and manage a commercial endeavour that includes taking risks in the pursuit of financial gain. It distinguishes itself by including a creative aspect and being open to taking chances [9]. Entrepreneurship has a significant impact on a nation's growth, and women's entrepreneurship has become increasingly important in transforming both the national economy and social roles. Nevertheless, prejudice, limited access to training programmes, and financial limitations are only a few of the difficulties faced by female company entrepreneurs [10].

The purpose of increasing women's labour force participation is to give them the resources and experience needed to launch their own businesses [11]. More women would be given the skills necessary to start their own businesses thanks to this campaign. However, there are a variety of commercial challenges that women entrepreneurs must overcome, including limited financial alternatives, a lack of social capital, and bias based on gender [12]. Studies have demonstrated that female entrepreneurs may nevertheless succeed to the same extent as their male counterparts despite these obstacles. Women's ability to capitalise on their distinctive talents and experiences is crucial to their success as company owners. It is noteworthy that women business owners frequently exhibit

skill in building relationships and networks, a trait that helps them secure finance and support [12].

2.1.1. Women Entrepreneurship in the United States of America (USA)

In recent times, technological advancements and the digital age have created new opportunities for women entrepreneurs and there has been an increased focus on women in innovation-driven ventures and technology [13]. Various government programs, non-profit organizations, and corporate diversity efforts have supported women entrepreneurs [14].

Women entrepreneurs in the United States have gained acknowledgement as they have effectively aligned with factors that have propelled the growth and success of female entrepreneurs in the country. They are, therefore, active in a wide range of industries, including technology, retail, healthcare, and professional services [15]. Women entrepreneurs also play a significant role in challenging gender norms, promoting diversity, and acting as role models [16]. Government policies and regulations that affect women's entrepreneurship in the United States through programs encouraging equality and removing obstacles based on gender have an additional effect.

Women are creating and running more businesses in the US than ever before, and this trend is known as the emergence of the female entrepreneur. American Express [15] reports that over the previous five years, the proportion of women-owned firms in the USA has climbed by 21%. By generating jobs and promoting economic growth, women-owned micro-companies support local economies, particularly in disadvantaged areas [14]. The report also emphasized the fact that companies run by women make trillions of dollars in revenue and have millions of employees. There are several programmes and organizations helping female entrepreneurs in the USA. For instance, the Women's Business Enterprise National Council (WBENC) and the National Association of Women Business Owners (NAWBO) offer tools, networking opportunities, and certification programmes for women-owned firms. Additionally accessible are mentorship programmes and financing access, which support women in overcoming obstacles and expanding their businesses.

Women-owned enterprises have played a significant role in boosting employment and lowering poverty in the US. In the USA, women-owned companies generated 1.8 million net new employment between 2007 and 2018, contributing to both economic development and poverty reduction, according to the National Women's Business Council [17]. The majority of the time, female business owners give priority to recruiting members of underrepresented groups, lifting them out of the shadows and fostering diversity. For budding entrepreneurs, especially women from underprivileged backgrounds, they act as mentors and role models by offering advice and encouragement [18].

Through a number of initiatives and programmes, the US Small Business Administration (SBA) has continually backed female entrepreneurs. According to the US Small Business Administration's "Women-Owned Small Business Federal Contracting Programme", these programmes, like the Women-Owned Small Business (WOSB) Federal Contracting Programme, have made it easier for women to access funding, training, and business development resources and, thus, help alleviate poverty. Additionally, women's entrepreneurship offers chances for financial independence by enabling them to make money to support their family and themselves [12].

2.1.2. Women Entrepreneurship in Asia

Asian women were influential in the economy in pre-modern periods, frequently in the framework of the household and society. They engaged in various entrepreneurial activities such as agricultural production, handicrafts, and trade. However, their participation was largely confined to informal and subsistence-level entrepreneurship due to societal norms and gendered divisions of labour [19].

During the colonial period, Asia underwent significant socioeconomic changes under the influence of colonial powers. Female entrepreneurship faced both challenges and opportunities. While some woman gained access to education and ventured into formal

entrepreneurship, many faced constraints due to colonial policies, patriarchal systems, and limited access to resources and markets [20].

Asian nations developed governmental changes and efforts to encourage women entrepreneurs after gaining independence. The government wanted to create an enabling climate because it saw the economic and social benefits of women participating in corporate life. To improve women's access to resources, financing, and business possibilities, Datta and Gailey [21] claim that women-specific programmes, skill development efforts, and supporting legislation were created.

Therefore, there are aspects of women's entrepreneurship in Asia that have aided the growth of female entrepreneurs there. The economic, social, and cultural aspects are a grouping of these aspects. In Asia, female entrepreneurship has an economic component that is significantly influenced by access to resources and markets. Women company owners frequently struggle to access funding, technology, and networking opportunities. To overcome these obstacles and improve women's access to resources and markets, efforts promoting financial inclusion, microfinance programmes, and women-centric business assistance organisations have evolved [22].

According to Kabeer [23], women's entrepreneurship in Asia has significant social implications, especially in relation to gender equality and empowerment. Women can defy gender norms, achieve independence, and exercise decision-making power through entrepreneurship. Women entrepreneurs are also contributing to changing societal attitudes and norms regarding women's roles in the business world. Moreover, women's entrepreneurship is associated with promoting gender equality by creating employment opportunities for women and fostering inclusive economic growth.

Cultural factors can both promote and hinder female entrepreneurship. Positive cultural norms, such as valuing women's skills and contributions and supportive family structures and role models, may encourage women to become entrepreneurs. Women's access to resources, networks, and commercial prospects, however, may be hampered by gender stereotypes, cultural expectations, and conventional gender roles [24].

Asia is a vast and diverse continent, comprising countries with varying levels of development and cultural contexts. Therefore, the landscape for women entrepreneurship in Asia can differ significantly across countries. However, in general, women in Asia have made notable strides in entrepreneurship. Countries like India, China, and Singapore have seen a significant increase in women entrepreneurs. India, for instance, has witnessed the emergence of successful women-led startups across various sectors, including technology, e-commerce, and social enterprises. In China, women's entrepreneurship has also seen remarkable growth, driven by factors such as increasing education levels and changing societal attitudes. Several initiatives and organizations in Asia focus on empowering women entrepreneurs. For instance, the Cherie Blair Foundation for Women collaborates with regional organizations in nations like Indonesia, Vietnam, and Myanmar to offer mentoring, education, and assistance to female business owners. The Asian Development Bank also runs several initiatives to advance women's economic empowerment and gender equality in the area.

Women entrepreneurs have been crucial in Asia in reducing poverty by empowering marginalized populations and generating job possibilities. For instance, modest loans have been made available to borrowers who are primarily women by microfinance organizations like Bangladesh's Grameen Bank, allowing them to launch and grow their enterprises. For many families, this has improved living circumstances and reduced poverty. In nations like China and India, women's business has also helped to reduce poverty. The International Labour Organization (ILO) claims that women-owned businesses in India have significantly contributed to the elimination of poverty by creating job possibilities, especially in rural regions [25].

Furthermore, women-owned businesses reduce unemployment and increase income by creating jobs not only for themselves but also for other members of the community. Women entrepreneurship in Asia has made significant contributions to poverty alleviation

through the generation of employment opportunities and fostering economic growth. According to United Nations Development Programme [26], women entrepreneurs help create jobs, especially in industries like micro-, small-, and medium-sized companies (MSMEs), which are crucial for employment and economic growth.

Inspiring other women and girls to follow their business dreams, female entrepreneurs also act as role models [14]. Women who start their own businesses defy gender conventions and prejudices while gaining financial freedom and decision-making authority. Women who pursue entrepreneurship have the chance to grow professionally, boost their self-esteem, and take charge of their own destiny. Welter and Xheneti [27] purported that women entrepreneurs, in turn, engage in social entrepreneurship, launching ventures that create social value and address pressing societal challenges. They invest their resources and profits back into the communities to support local economies and solve social problems. Women-owned businesses are more likely to prioritize social and environmental causes by promoting sustainable practices and meeting the needs of local communities.

2.1.3. Women Entrepreneurship in Africa

A number of socio-cultural, economic, and political variables have influenced the historical development of women entrepreneurs in Africa, creating a complex and varied narrative. Women in many African societies were engaged in entrepreneurial activities, primarily within the informal sector. Their economic roles included agricultural production, trading, craft-making, and other small-scale enterprises [28]. During the colonial era, women continued to engage in informal-sector entrepreneurship, often in subsistence agriculture and trading. With the wave of independence movements across Africa, women's economic empowerment gained attention. Government and development organizations started promoting women's entrepreneurship through training programs and financial support [28].

In the 1980s and 1990s, the implementation of structural adjustment measures had conflicting results for women's entrepreneurship. In addition to opening up new chances for women, economic liberalisation and market reforms also exposed them to more rivalry and difficulties [29]. The crucial role that women play in business and economic growth is becoming more widely acknowledged. According to AFDB, OECD, UNDP, and UN-ECA [30], efforts have been undertaken to eliminate gender-based hurdles, enhance access to capital, and promote the capacity building of women entrepreneurs.

According to the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations [31], women in rural parts of Africa play a crucial role in agricultural operations, agribusiness, and rural enterprises, contributing to food security, income production, and community development. According to the United Nations Development Programme [26], many female entrepreneurs in Africa work in the unorganised sector and run small-scale enterprises including street selling, food processing, and handicraft production. African women entrepreneurs often address social challenges through their businesses, focusing on areas such as healthcare, education, renewable energy, and environmental sustainability [32].

With increasing access to technology, African women entrepreneurs are leveraging digital platforms, e-commerce, mobile technology, and innovative solutions to create and scale their businesses [30]. An essential component of women's entrepreneurship in Africa is their access to resources, finance, and financial services. They face challenges in accessing funding, collateral requirements, and formal financial institutions [33]. Supportive networks, mentorship programs, and knowledge-sharing platforms are essential for women entrepreneurs in Africa, facilitating learning, business connections, and opportunities for growth [34]. In order to encourage and promote women's entrepreneurship in Africa, favourable policy conditions and institutional assistance are essential. Policies addressing gender equality, access to finance, business registration, and capacity-building programs are key dimensions [35].

2.1.4. Women Entrepreneurship in Nigeria

Nigeria has a population of 175 million people and the second-largest economy in Africa, just behind South Africa, with a USD 415 billion GDP. There are plenty of natural resources there, such as oil, gas, minerals, forests, arable land, water, and fisheries. However, the country has problems including insurgency, poverty, corruption, unemployment, a lack of accountability and transparency, and human rights violations [36]. Gender disparity in Nigeria is maintained by traditional cultural norms that prioritise women's roles as homemakers and protectors of family honour. Women's subjection to men is further reinforced through tribal movements that support patriarchal culture.

In Nigeria, women's entrepreneurship has become a significant force in the fight against poverty and for economic emancipation. Through entrepreneurship programmes that offer training, mentorship, and seed capital, organisations like the Tony Elumelu Foundation have been instrumental in assisting women entrepreneurs. According to the Tony Elumelu Foundation's "The Tony Elumelu Foundation Entrepreneurship Programme", these programmes have made it possible for women to launch and build their own enterprises, generating job opportunities and promoting economic progress.

Women entrepreneurs in Nigeria have additional difficulties as a result of their upbringing in a social milieu that significantly affects their entrepreneurial efforts. Family issues typically hinder women's business success, especially in a patriarchal nation like Nigeria. Despite these challenges, women are successful business owners in Nigeria's many industries. According to Mahadeo, Dusoye, and Aujayeb-Rogbeer [37], there is a gender disparity in entrepreneurship, with women having to overcome obstacles particular to their sector, geographic location, and company model. Women are at a disadvantage because of societal standards that prioritise their roles as mothers and housewives [38].

According to Epke, Alabo, and Egbe [39], the major reason why women-owned enterprises in Nigeria are not as economically developed as those owned by men is because of institutional barriers that impede women from fully engaging in initiatives for economic empowerment. Women are typically in charge of managing household responsibilities, which support the assumption that they are intimately related to domestic duties [40]. Gender stereotypes in Nigerian society discourage women from undertaking tough or risky work, which prohibits them from establishing, managing, and expanding successful enterprises. In Southwest Nigeria, social bias is acknowledged as a key barrier for women business owners [41]. Men are frequently seen as having a stronger risk-taking mindset than female entrepreneurs, which may affect women's engagement and success in entrepreneurial activities [42].

2.2. Women Empowerment

Women's empowerment is a complicated subject that has been characterised in a variety of ways by academics and researchers. Giving women access to life options that were previously out of reach is a key component of empowering them. Women's empowerment is an important idea that entails giving women the capacity, influence, and autonomy to make wise decisions and achieve their goals [43]. In order to achieve sustainability, women's empowerment must continue to advance.

Social Empowerment Support

The concept of providing assistance for social empowerment includes various aspects that revolve around enabling individuals or communities to take control of their social experiences and exercise independence when making choices that affect their overall well-being. The journey towards social empowerment is shaped by a variety of elements that cover social, economic, and political aspects. Arejiogbe, Moses, Salau, Onayemi, Agada, Dada, and Obisesan [44] point out that social influence can lead to positive or negative outcomes in economic, environmental, and social spheres. The term "positive social impact" encompasses a spectrum of favourable consequences, such as enhancing

social integration, reducing poverty, expanding healthcare and education accessibility, and facilitating improved healthcare availability.

Community-based organizations (CBOs) have been recognized as a practical avenue for fostering social empowerment. These organizations emerge at the grassroots level and are managed by local community members with the intention of addressing local issues and driving societal progress. Digital platforms can offer a medium for community members to gather, share personal stories, and collaboratively work towards common goals. Additionally, educational initiatives and awareness campaigns can serve as supplementary methods for promoting social empowerment. According to Arafat, Ali, Dwivedi, and Saleem [45], such programs hold the potential to enhance individuals' and communities' understanding of their rights, enable them to identify and challenge societal norms that perpetuate inequality, and equip them with the necessary skills and knowledge to participate in decision-making processes.

Social empowerment is the culmination of several factors that work together to improve community influence and individual agency. It includes having access to relevant training on women's rights as well as the community's support and validation of one's agricultural endeavours. Social empowerment also includes using one's business as a platform for mentoring other aspiring female entrepreneurs and building relationships with other women in agriculture. This intricate web of networking, mentoring, education, and support not only strengthens individual development but also advances the larger empowerment of women in the agriculture industry.

Enhancing social empowerment is a vital duty shared by governmental institutions and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) alike. These entities bear the responsibility of providing both financial support and technical guidance to community-based organizations (CBOs) and educational programs. Moreover, they can formulate strategies and projects that encourage social inclusivity and address long-standing barriers to empowerment. Self-help groups have emerged as a notable force in advancing social empowerment. The notion of women's empowerment encompasses diverse dimensions, including social, economic, cultural, legal, and political aspects, as highlighted by Mastur [46].

2.3. Sustainable Development Goals

Women's entrepreneurship is a potent weapon for sustainable development, according to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The involvement of women in business may significantly contribute to the fulfilment of many SDGs, including Goal 1 (No Poverty), Goal 5 (Gender Equality), Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), and Goal 10 (Reduced Inequalities). Women are financially, socially, and politically empowered through entrepreneurship, which is essential for gender equality and sustainable development. Entrepreneurial women promote variety, gender equality, and economic equality.

By taking this action, people and organisations significantly improve the chances of a sustainable economy, reduce the negative environmental effects of their operations, and aid in the transition to a world with low carbon emissions and effective resource use. The advancement of inclusive and resilient communities, a major goal of Sustainable Development Goal 11 (SDG 11), which relates to sustainable cities and communities, is dependent on the participation of women in entrepreneurship. Businesses run by women usually place a high priority on addressing local needs, combating social challenges, and fostering social cohesion. Participation of women in charitable and humanitarian endeavours promotes social capital development, community well-being, and the growth of strong local economies.

2.4. Poverty Alleviation

A socioeconomic state known as poverty is characterised by a lack of resources essential for either basic survival or to meet the quality of life in the area. From the viewpoint of social scientists, poverty is frequently seen as the lack of necessities like food, clothes, and shelter. According to the UNDP [26], "Poverty alleviation encompasses a spectrum of

initiatives, programmes, and policies designed to improve the living conditions of individuals and communities living in poverty-stricken circumstances". The overarching objective is to reduce poverty levels and promote an all-encompassing and sustainable development. Methods like improving work chances, healthcare access, and educational prospects are suggested by scholars like [47,48]. Numerous strategies are required due to poverty's complexity. Pathways for reducing poverty include strategies including integrating into the free market economy, adopting new economic paradigms, and achieving self-sustained development through solving the linked problems of poverty [44].

The targeted approach taken to combat poverty in line with the rural revitalization plan is essential [49]. Entrepreneurship and the creation of jobs are also major factors in reducing poverty. As it guarantees stable incomes and the capacity to make investments in the future, quality employment plays a critical role in eliminating poverty, according to the International Labour Organisation [25]. This shows that entrepreneurship may be one of the pillars of a strong economy and that it may also be a remedy for youth unemployment, poverty, insecurity, and restlessness [14]. Addressing issues with economic opportunity, healthcare, and education is essential to effective poverty reduction. By addressing these concerns, governments and development professionals will be better equipped to end poverty and promote sustainable development.

2.5. The Role of Social Empowerment in Poverty Alleviation

Social empowerment plays a pivotal role in enabling women to take control of their lives and drive societal change, ultimately aiding in the fight against poverty and advancing sustainable development. This empowerment, both on a national and global scale, encompasses women's ability to advocate for a fairer social and economic structure [26]. When women are empowered through equitable access to resources, opportunities, and active participation, the well-being and economic outcomes of individuals, families, and communities significantly improve.

Numerous discussions underscore the pivotal role of women's empowerment in alleviating poverty. Economic empowerment, encompassing income generation, entrepreneurship, and access to financial services, has proven to be a contributing factor to poverty reduction [50]. Investments in women's education and skill development not only broaden their economic prospects but also elevate their earning potential, subsequently leading to poverty reduction. Moreover, enhancing women's health, ensuring access to healthcare services, and advocating for reproductive rights positively influence poverty reduction by bolstering women's well-being and productivity.

Policies and programs aimed at combating poverty and fostering inclusive development are significantly impacted by women's involvement in decision making, leadership roles, and political representation. Enabling women to fully participate in society, exercise their rights, address gender disparities, prevent violence against women, and reshape gender norms is also crucial in reducing poverty [3]. These references highlight the multifaceted ways in which empowering women can lead to positive social and economic outcomes, offering a clearer understanding of how it contributes to poverty reduction. Empowering women enables societies to create more inclusive and fair environments where women have agency, contribute to economic growth, and play an instrumental role in building a sustainable future.

2.6. Challenges of Social Empowerment for Sustainability and Poverty Alleviation

Empowering women stands as a crucial driver for poverty reduction, economic growth, and sustainable development. Nonetheless, several challenges hinder this empowerment. Among them is the disconnect between global aspirations and localized grassroots issues. Additionally, the absence of a well-defined theory of empowerment often steers focus toward human agency rather than addressing the systemic and structural causes of disempowerment.

Numerous hurdles impede the realization of women's empowerment, including the disparity between overarching agendas and genuine concerns at the grassroots level. The sluggish pace of women's social empowerment negatively affects the prosperity and development of many nations. Solutions such as gender-focused poverty alleviation initiatives, empowerment models tailored for marginalized women, and legislation benefiting underdeveloped regions have all been proposed to address these challenges. Moreover, women's entrepreneurship, particularly in sustainable ventures, emerges as a powerful tool for achieving social empowerment, poverty reduction, job creation, and sustainable development.

Despite these impediments, a range of strategies have been proposed to aid in poverty alleviation, sustainable development, and economic growth. While empowering women is crucial for achieving sustainable development and reducing poverty, it is evident that this endeavour is not devoid of difficulties. After reviewing important concepts and variables, the hypothesis for the study is formulated as follows:

H0: *Social empowerment support has no significant effect on poverty alleviation among women entrepreneurs.*

This hypothesis consists of one exogenous variable (social empowerment Support) and one endogenous variable (poverty alleviation).

2.7. Theoretical Underpinnings

In line with sustainable development, social capital theory is in favour of empowering women via entrepreneurship. According to social capital theory, social networks, interactions, and connections can lead to the availability of resources, information, and support. These networks may provide business guidance, market insights, and collaboration opportunities to support the growth of female entrepreneurs and sustainable development [51].

According to social capital theory, trust and social norms encourage cooperation and collaboration. Women entrepreneurs may overcome obstacles, form partnerships, and obtain access to resources with the aid of trustworthy connections and shared standards, which empowers them and promotes sustainable growth [36]. Women are empowered through mentorship and social support. Strong social ties and mentoring may aid female company owners in overcoming challenges, gaining confidence, and growing their enterprises [12]. Social capital could support female business owners' efforts to promote gender-inclusive policies and practices. In order to improve the conditions for entrepreneurship and empowerment, women's networks and social capital may amplify their voices, mobilise resources, and influence decision making [52]. The idea also suggests that communities could be strengthened through women's entrepreneurship. Women entrepreneurs create enduring businesses that support local employment, economic growth, and social change by using their social capital [12]. Understanding entrepreneurship, sustainable development, and women's empowerment has benefited greatly from the use of social capital theory.

2.8. Empirical Review

The relationship between government expenditure and intergenerational income mobility in China is examined by Hisrich and Brush [53] in their study. The study provides important new information about how fiscal policies affect people's ability to improve their economic standing over time. For policymakers to create successful measures that promote upward mobility, reduce income gaps, and support long-term economic growth, they must have a solid understanding of this link.

Meanwhile, Li, Zhou, and Huang [54] focus on the management of skill certification through buyer-determined reverse auctions within online outsourcing platforms. The examination of certification mechanisms in digital labour markets provides valuable insights into influencing economic opportunities for workers. Improving the certification process can bolster employability, create fairer opportunities, and enhance economic empowerment

for individuals engaged in the digital economy, ultimately aiding poverty reduction and fostering economic growth.

In the domain of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) within the circular economy, Luo, Zhao, and Xu [55] delve into the optimal size, human resources, and governance quality. This study investigates how the size of NGOs influences their ability to promote sustainable entrepreneurship and practices. Understanding the organizational dynamics that facilitate sustainable economic activities is imperative for stakeholders and policymakers aiming to support initiatives that adhere to circular economy principles, thus contributing to economic growth and environmental sustainability.

Additionally, Zhao, Yang Zhou, and Chen [56] offer an in-depth analysis of the current status of and equity in human resources for health in China, utilizing five-year data. By assessing healthcare resource distribution and accessibility, their study identifies disparities and provides insights into designing more equitable healthcare policies, ultimately aiming to improve public health outcomes and mitigate healthcare inequalities.

These collective studies provide multifaceted perspectives and recent empirical evidence on critical socio-economic factors such as government spending, skill certification, NGO dynamics, foreign capital, crisis management strategies, and healthcare equity. Understanding these facets is pivotal in formulating inclusive policies and strategies for poverty alleviation, economic growth, and sustainable development on both national and international levels.

3. Materials and Methods

The effects of women's empowerment on eradicating poverty and promoting sustainable development were thoroughly examined in this study. The positivist ideology that emphasises learning via objective observation and assessment served as the foundation for our study. Only female business owners who were registered with an organisation recognised by the Federal Government of Nigeria made up the study's participants. The Yamane formula [57] was used to calculate the sample size, and 353 participants were chosen at random from the population of 3004 women entrepreneurs.

This study was based on two major variables, namely social empowerment and Poverty Alleviation for sustainable development, that is,

$$y = f(x)$$

where x = social empowerment support (independent variable); y = poverty alleviation (dependent variable).

Consequently, poverty alleviation was designed as "y" constructs, while social empowerment support was represented by "x" constructs. The constructs x and y are two latent variables (social empowerment support and poverty alleviation) measured with responses from a survey carried out with the use of questionnaires.

Both primary and secondary data were used in this study, which included non-probability convenience sampling techniques as well as deliberate sampling techniques. The research design used for this study was descriptive. This research presented a clear and simple analysis of the effects of social empowerment on poverty alleviation for the sustainable development of women entrepreneurs in the agricultural sector.

Choosing people with certain traits or attributes that are pertinent to the study topic is known as purposive sampling, often referred to as judgemental or selective sampling. This technique was used in this study to choose participants for the questionnaire. The target demographic for the study was purposefully limited to women entrepreneurs because of the researcher's particular interest in this group. On the other hand, convenience sampling entails choosing people who are easily accessible and available to take part in the study. This method was used by the researcher to disseminate questionnaires depending on the availability of female entrepreneurs. As it focuses on people who may easily be reached for participation, this technique offers pragmatism and convenience in data gathering. The researcher attempted to collect information from a particular group of

women entrepreneurs, taking into account their special traits and availability, by combining purposive and convenience sampling techniques. It is crucial to remember that the sample techniques utilised in this study could make it harder to generalise the results to a larger group of female entrepreneurs.

This study took place in Lagos State, Nigeria, chosen by the researcher due to their Nigerian background and Lagos' status as a bustling state, renowned as the "Centre of Excellence", housing thirty-seven Local Government Areas and previously serving as Nigeria's former Federal Capital Territory. The Nigerian Youth and Women Farmers Association (Lagos chapter) was the selected organization, operating within all 774 Local Governments across Nigeria, including Abuja, and boasting a presence in all 36 states. Registered under the Federal Government of Nigeria, the Association's Lagos chapter is situated at Number 32 Unity Estate, Ikorodu, Lagos State, with a membership of three thousand and four (3004) registered women entrepreneurs.

Through the use of a questionnaire, a survey was undertaken to gather quantitative data. The questionnaire was divided into three sections: Section A collected demographic data from respondents (marital status, age, education); Section B examined social empowerment support; and Section C concentrated on poverty alleviation. There was a five-point Likert scale used, with the options ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree". To verify its applicability, the research instrument underwent content validation and assessment. The researcher's supervisor and other pertinent professors were provided access to the questionnaire, the measuring tool, to check content validity.

The variables used in the questionnaire were adapted and modified from previous publications [8,36,44,58–61]. After the suggestions were put into practice and assessed in accordance with the feedback on the instrument's relevance, the research instrument was approved for use. For this study, the Cronbach's alpha test was used, and the rule is as follows:

Excellent = $\alpha \geq 0.9$ —Stake's testing is high;
Good = $0.7 \leq \alpha < 0.9$ —Stake's testing is low;
Acceptable = $0.6 \leq \alpha < 0.7$;
Unacceptable = $0.5 \leq \alpha < 0.6$;
Poor = $\alpha < 0.5$.

Both SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) and SEM-PLS (structural equation modelling with partial least squares) were used to analyse the data. Data classification, review, and coding were conducted using SPSS, and both descriptive and inferential analyses were run. Demographic information about respondents was summarised using descriptive statistics, and hypotheses were tested using inferential statistics. To investigate how the independent variable affected the dependent variable, structural equation modelling was utilised.

The study method was conducted with ethics in mind. Participants were made aware of their right to withdraw at any time and that participation was entirely voluntary. The privacy of the participant's information was guaranteed, and the dissemination of the questionnaire was authorised by the organization's executives before it was used. The Covenant University Health and Research Ethics Committee is the approving ethical body for this research with the ethical code number for this research being CHREC/280/2023.

4. Results

For this research, the structural and measurement models were adopted. Specifically, under the measurement model, all constructs and items are factor loading and reflective of a minimum acceptable value of 0.5 [62]. Interestingly, the constructs under all hypotheses have an acceptable value above 0.50. (Table 1).

Table 1. Distribution of biological data of the respondents (n = 335).

Construct	Frequency	Percentage
Marital Status		
Single	165	49.3
Married	150	44.8
Others	20	6
Age		
Under 20	29	8.7
21–30	146	43.6
31–40 years	76	22.7
41–50 years	42	12.5
Above 50 years	42	12.5
Education		
Primary	3	0.9
Secondary	28	8.4
Vocational	50	14.9
HND/Bachelors	167	49.9
Masters and above	87	26

Source: Researchers Field Survey Data (2023).

According to Hussain, Fang-Wei, and Ali [63], the structural model is the internal model used to compute numerical simulations; this is because it evaluates the R² which represents the path coefficients and significant values. The bootstrapping method, on the other hand, helps find the significance of the results [49]. The default bootstrapping in partial least squares methods is 5000 subsamples, increasing the significance of the results. However, the calculation of the 5000 research subsamples in bootstrapping achieves a higher rate of accurate results and path coefficient (β) values, which shows the relationship between social empowerment for poverty alleviation and sustainable development. The results showed that the respondents in the case study had similar opinions.

As shown in Figure 1, the analysis of the study required assessing a number of important statistical measures, including the path coefficient, coefficient of the t-statistic value, determination coefficient (r-squared), and effect size (f^2). The predictive significance of the framework and the predictor variable inside the model index served as the main assessment criterion for the structural model. A standardised questionnaire using a 5-point Likert scale was used to examine all research variables. Tables 2 and 3 show the responses of respondents in relation to the components of social empowerment support and poverty alleviation while Tables 4 and 5 offer information on the variable structure: A latent variable called “social empowerment support” had five components, whereas the endogenous variable also included five items.

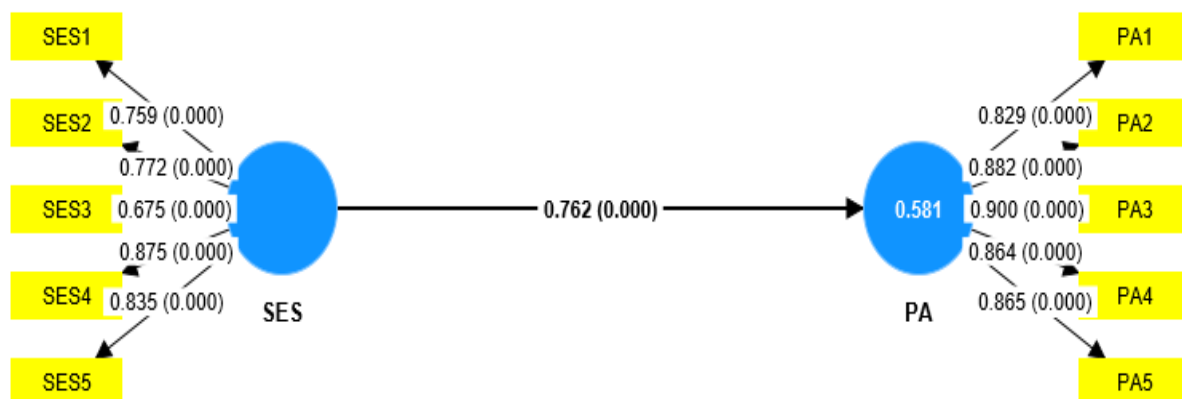
**Figure 1.** Path coefficient and *p*-values for social empowerment support and poverty alleviation.

Table 2. Frequency distribution for social empowerment support.

Items	SD	Frequency and Percentage				SA	Total
		D	U	A			
I have the support of my family on my agricultural business	30 9.00%	25 7.50%	55 16.40%	136 40.6%	89 26.6%	335 (100.0%)	
I have the support of my community on my agricultural business	35 10.40%	37 11.00%	104 31.00%	107 31.9%	52 15.5%	335 (100.0%)	
I have received training on women's right in my community	57 17.00%	66 19.70%	89 26.60%	74 22.1%	49 14.6%	335 (100.0%)	
I have been able to establish relationships with other women in agriculture	33 9.90%	40 11.90%	79 23.60%	121 36.1%	62 18.5%	335 (100.0%)	
My agricultural business has provided me with the opportunity to mentor other women entrepreneurs	41 12.20%	50 14.90%	74 22.10%	118 35.2%	52 15.5%	335 (100.0%)	

Table 3. Frequency distribution for poverty alleviation.

Items	SD	Frequency and Percentage				SA	Total
		D	U	A			
My agricultural business has helped me lift my family out of poverty	29 8.70%	41 12.20%	86 25.70%	114 34.00%	65 19.40%	335 (100.00%)	
My agricultural business has helped create job opportunities for people in my community	31 9.30%	39 11.60%	76 22.70%	131 39.10%	58 17.30%	335 (100.00%)	
My agricultural business has provided me with the opportunities to give back to my community	31 9.30%	38 11.30%	60 17.90%	121 36.10%	85 25.40%	335 (100.00%)	
I am able to make a positive impact on the environment through my agricultural business	27 8.10%	34 10.10%	65 19.40%	133 39.70%	76 22.70%	335 (100.00%)	
My agricultural business has contributed to the overall economic growth of my community	27 8.10%	44 13.10%	79 23.60%	118 35.20%	67 20.00%	335 (100.00%)	

Table 4. Factor loading for social empowerment support on poverty alleviation.

	Factor Loading	VIF	Composite Reliability	AVE	Cronbach Alpha	No. of Indicators
Indicators	>0.7	<5	≥0.8	≥0.5	≥0.7	
Social Empowerment Support			0.618	0.619	0.844	5
SES1	0.684	1.726				
SES2	0.826	1.831				
SES3	0.849	1.510				
SES4	0.782	2.898				
SES5	0.781	2.530				
Poverty Alleviation			0.754	0.754	0.918	5
PA1	0.834	2.319				
PA2	0.880	2.955				
PA3	0.899	3.361				
PA4	0.865	2.801				
PA5	0.863	2.627				

Table 5. Path coefficients for social empowerment support and poverty alleviation.

Variables and Cross Leading		Path Coefficient (O)	Std. Dev (STDEV)	t-Statistics (O/STDEV)	p-Values
Social Empowerment Support	→ Poverty Alleviation	0.762	0.035	21.577	0.000
		R-Square (R ²)	R2 Adjusted		
Social Empowerment Support	→ Poverty Alleviation	0.581	0.579		
		F ²			
Social Empowerment Support	→ Poverty Alleviation	1.385			

Source: Researcher’s Survey, 2023.

The frequency results represent the responses of participants regarding social empowerment support. In terms of having the support of their family for their agricultural business, 9.0% (30 respondents) strongly disagreed, while 7.5% (25 respondents) disagreed. Additionally, 16.4% (55 respondents) were undecided, 40.6% (136 respondents) agreed, and 26.6% (89 participants) strongly agreed. Similarly, regarding the support of their community for their agricultural business, 10.4% (35 respondents) strongly disagreed, while 11.4% (37 respondents) disagreed. Furthermore, 31.0% (104 respondents) were undecided, 31.9% (107 respondents) agreed, and 15.5% (52 participants) strongly agreed.

In relation to training on women’s rights in their community, 17.0% (57 respondents) strongly disagreed, with 19.7% (66 respondents) disagreeing. Additionally, 26.6% (89 respondents) were undecided, 22.1% (74 respondents) agreed, and 14.6% (49 participants) strongly agreed. Regarding establishing relationships with other women in agriculture, 9.9% (33 respondents) strongly disagreed, while 11.9% (40 respondents) disagreed. Furthermore, 23.6% (79 respondents) were undecided, 36.1% (121 respondents) agreed, and 18.5% (62 participants) strongly agreed. Finally, when it comes to the opportunity to mentor other women entrepreneurs through their agricultural business, 12.2% (41 respondents) strongly disagreed, while 14.9% (50 respondents) disagreed. Additionally, 22.1% (74 respondents) were undecided, 35.2% (118 respondents) agreed, and 15.5% (52 participants) strongly agreed.

When it comes to lifting their family out of poverty through their agricultural business, 8.7% (29 respondents) strongly disagreed, while 12.2% (41 respondents) disagreed. Additionally, 25.7% (86 respondents) were undecided, 34.0% (114 respondents) agreed, and 19.4% (65 participants) strongly agreed. Similarly, in terms of creating job opportunities for people in their community through their agricultural business, 9.3% (31 respondents) strongly disagreed, while 11.6% (39 respondents) disagreed. Furthermore, 22.7% (76 respondents) were undecided, 39.1% (131 respondents) agreed, and 17.3% (58 participants) strongly agreed.

Regarding providing opportunities to give back to their community through their agricultural business, 9.3% (31 respondents) strongly disagreed, while 11.3% (38 respondents) disagreed. Additionally, 17.9% (60 respondents) were undecided, 36.1% (121 respondents) agreed, and 25.4% (85 participants) strongly agreed. In terms of making a positive impact on the environment through their agricultural business, 8.1% (27 respondents) strongly disagreed, while 10.1% (34 respondents) disagreed. Furthermore, 19.4% (65 respondents) were undecided, 39.7% (133 respondents) agreed, and 22.7% (76 participants) strongly agreed. Finally, when it comes to contributing to the overall economic growth of their community through their agricultural business, 8.1% (27 respondents) strongly disagreed, while 13.1% (44 respondents) disagreed. Additionally, 23.6% (79 respondents) were undecided, 35.2% (118 respondents) agreed, and 20.0% (67 participants) strongly agreed.

From Table 4 above, SES signifies social empowerment support and PA stands for poverty alleviation. Social empowerment support (SES) is indicated by SES1 to SES5 which represent the questionnaire items in Table 2; poverty alleviation (PA) is indicated as PA1 to PA5 which represent the five questionnaire items in Table 3. All scales and measurement items were subjected to the Fornell and Lacker [62] recommended threshold criteria. First, the factor loading should be more than the advised cut-off point of 0.50. Second, the model’s overall dependability must be at least 0.80. Thirdly, the average extracted variance

should be more than 0.50. According to Chin [64], instruments should have a Cronbach's alpha of 0.70 or above to be considered dependable.

Taking Table 1 into consideration, it appears that all of the social empowerment support and poverty alleviation components have composite internal consistency values better than 0.60 and Cronbach's alpha reliability values greater than 0.80. For the particular construct measures, the loading coefficients varied from 0.684 to 0.899. The basic requirement for fitness was well satisfied, making the instrument genuine and trustworthy. The variable has a moderate influence on the factor, nonetheless, according to factor loadings of 0.7 and higher. Despite SES1 being less than 0.7, the remaining items had factor loadings of at least 0.7, and Figure 1 correspondingly depicts the inner structural model's results.

4.1. Evaluation of Inner Structural Model

In structural equation modelling, the inner structural model is known as the internal version. The importance and values of the route parameters may be utilised to produce the structural model. (R^2) [64]. Figure 1 shows that 58.1% of the variation in poverty alleviation may be attributed to social empowerment support. The link between the dependent variable (poverty alleviation) and the independent variable (social empowerment support) is shown by the R-value and variance. Therefore, there is a significant connection between social empowerment support and poverty alleviation. The relationship between the variables in Figure 1 demonstrated their capacity for prediction. A unit increase in social empowerment support will result in a 76.2% improvement in poverty alleviation when all other factors are maintained constant.

4.2. The Path Coefficients (β) and *t*-Statistics Estimation

The path coefficients and the standardized coefficient were calculated using partial least squares (PLS). The relevance of the proposition was assessed using the value. The more profound the impact on the endogenous component, the higher the value.

At 0.05, the path coefficient shows a direct and substantial relationship between social empowerment support and poverty alleviation. To put it simply, it was discovered that there was a direct, favourable, and notable effect on support of social empowerment and a reduction in poverty (i.e., $b = 0.762$, $t_{val} = 21.577$, $f_2 = 1.385$, $p < 0.05$). Finally, the beta values of the aforementioned constructs, which likewise show a strong degree of association, confirm the evident relevance of the link between social empowerment support and poverty alleviation. As less than 0.05 is considered significant, the null hypothesis must, thus, be refuted.

Structural equation modelling (SEM) is a robust statistical tool for examining complex variable relationships, yet it has inherent limitations. Firstly, model misspecification, arising from incorrect variable inclusion or path specification, can yield biased results. SEM also demands larger sample sizes than simpler methods, and inadequate samples may lead to unreliable estimates and inflated model fit, compromising validity. Identification issues, such as multicollinearity, can hinder parameter estimation accuracy, while SEM assumes data normality, potentially impacting parameter estimates and model validity upon violation.

Meanwhile, broader limitations in drawing conclusions from statistical methods exist. Statistical analyses often show correlations without proving causation, risking misleading causal inferences. Neglecting confounding variables can distort relationships between studied variables, affecting result accuracy. Sampling bias, where data fail to represent the entire population, leads to non-generalizable conclusions. Additionally, over-reliance on *p*-values for significance testing can misguide interpretation, and publication bias favouring positive results distorts the overall scientific understanding, creating an incomplete view of relationships in the literature. Acknowledging these limitations is crucial for cautious interpretation and consideration of broader contextual aspects when deriving conclusions from statistical analyses.

5. Discussion

The null hypothesis was rejected as a consequence of the final result being subjected to a statistical test, which showed that social empowerment support had a substantial impact on poverty alleviation with a significance level of 0.000. Similarly, the study findings demonstrate a significant direct correlation between social empowerment support and poverty alleviation among women in the selected agricultural organization. All path coefficients were statistically significant (below 0.05), indicating the practical relevance of the relationship.

The findings of this study are in line with those of Arafat, Ali, Dwuvedi, and Saleem [45] who assert that education and awareness initiatives may aid individuals and groups in realising their rights. Such initiatives enable people to recognise and challenge societal norms and practices that perpetuate inequality while also providing them with the knowledge and skills necessary to engage in decision-making processes. The idea that social empowerment is essential for eradicating poverty and promoting sustainable development is strengthened by this.

Mastur [46] emphasises once more that the word “women’s empowerment” encompasses a wide range of elements, such as social, economic, cultural, legal, and political empowerment. Women are given the tools they need to succeed in their entrepreneurial endeavours by developing a supportive network, providing mentorship programmes, and setting up forums for information sharing and networking. Promoting social empowerment is a shared responsibility of governmental and non-governmental entities (NGOs). These organisations play a crucial role in providing financial support and technical help to community-based organisations (CBOs) and educational projects. This is in line with this study’s findings, which highlight the importance of social empowerment support in lowering women’s poverty.

These assertions and this study’s findings make it clear that businesses, governments, and non-governmental organisations should give priority to the development of strong structures to support social empowerment at all tiers. By doing this, they may contribute to a decline in poverty and encourage the stable expansion of the agricultural industry. This highlights how important it is to collaborate, offer resources, and offer assistance in order to empower women socially and create an environment that encourages their economic and social development.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

This study has contributed valuable insights into the intricate relationship between women’s empowerment, poverty reduction, and sustainable development. The findings underscore the crucial role of social empowerment in addressing the issue of women’s poverty, aligning with prior research that has emphasized its significance in breaking the cycle of poverty. Of particular importance is the agricultural sector, where women’s empowerment emerges as a pivotal factor in fostering sustainable development and reducing poverty. These results offer valuable guidance for stakeholders, policymakers, and organizations seeking to design targeted strategies aimed at enhancing women’s empowerment, encouraging entrepreneurship, and promoting sustainable farming practices. We recommend the following:

1. To enhance social empowerment, several actionable strategies can be implemented. One approach is to establish women-led farmer organizations, providing a platform for women to actively participate in decision-making processes within the agricultural sector. Additionally, mentoring programs can be put into place to provide women with the necessary skills and knowledge to thrive in their roles. Simultaneously, advocating for gender-responsive legislation is crucial in addressing disparities within the agricultural industry, creating a more equitable environment for women’s participation and empowerment;
2. Promoting cooperation and resource mobilization is another key avenue to advance women’s empowerment and sustainable development. Collaboration between govern-

mental organizations, non-governmental organizations, global entities, and for-profit businesses can facilitate the pooling of resources, expertise, and funding. Actively seeking designated funding sources, participating in information exchange platforms, and resource sharing are essential steps in supporting initiatives aimed at empowering women and driving sustainable development;

3. Furthermore, there is a need to develop a comprehensive assessment system to measure the success of empowerment initiatives. Strengthening monitoring and evaluation efforts is essential, necessitating the collection of gender-specific data to quantitatively assess the outcomes of these efforts. An inclusive evaluation process involving a wide range of stakeholders will provide a more accurate picture of the impact of women's empowerment initiatives, guiding future actions and policies in this critical area. In conclusion, this study offers a valuable foundation for informed action and understanding, highlighting the importance of women's empowerment in the pursuit of sustainable development and poverty reduction.

7. Limitations of Study

It is vital to recognise that the researcher encountered several constraints when conducting this investigation. The geographical and sectoral emphasis was restricted to one agricultural organisation in Southwest Nigeria, which would have limited the application of findings to other varied businesses. For the purpose of gathering data, the study used a cross-sectional quantitative design. Like this subject, research is an ongoing process, and knowledge is limitless. Using the Nigerian Youth and Women Farmers Association of Nigeria as a case study, this research has investigated how social empowerment, poverty alleviation, and sustainable development interact. Future research can instead focus on sustainable development, poverty reduction, and economic empowerment in many Nigerian sectors. The scope might also be widened to include social empowerment within private institutions/organizations.

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Informed Consent Statement: All participants provided their informed permission.

Data Availability Statement: The information is available from the authors and is always accessible upon request. It is quantitative primary information that was gathered utilizing a structured questionnaire. Since the data are stored in Covenant University's private research repository rather than on a server that is accessible to the public, they are not publicly accessible.

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