

Young
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Works



Unmasking the Barriers to Women's Participation in Nigeria's Labour Market

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2022



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Who We Are

We are Nigeria's No. 1 Career Platform

Founded in 2009, Jobberman's services have grown over the years with an attendant success rate which has helped us to remain the No. 1 recruitment platform in Nigeria, with over 2 million candidates and 60,000+ employers.

We are part of the Ringier One Africa Media Group (ROAM). ROAM is one of Africa's largest digital publishers, allowing global brands to reach targeted audiences nationally, regionally, continentally and by each vertical in which we operate.

Jobberman leverages technology and data-driven recruitment solutions to work with employers to ensure that the right person is placed in the right job in the most efficient manner. Thus, resulting in increased workplace productivity.

Jobberman provides:

- Access to a large pool of candidates
- Excellent data on candidates to aid decision making
- An experienced team of professionals serving you
- Access to both local & international talent



Our Numbers



Seeker Profiles
+2,300,000



Registered Employers
+60,000



Applications per Job
+100



Job Applications Yearly
+950,000



Most represented age group

Millennials: 60% of our database is between 26-40 years

Fastest growing segment

Fresh graduates between 19-26 years account for ~50% of our joiners each year

Qualifications

60% of candidates in our database have a Bachelor's Degree & above



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About Young Africa Works (Nigeria)

Overview



In January 2020, Jobberman Nigeria partnered with the Mastercard Foundation with the goal **to tackle youth unemployment in Nigeria.**

The partnership, titled **'Young Africa Works'**, aims to **train 5 million young people in Nigeria (with 70% focus on women) and enable 3 million of them to secure dignified and fulfilling work by 2025.**

The project is being implemented in three states including:



The project is focused on the following target sectors:



Since inception of the project, we have achieved the following:





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Introduction

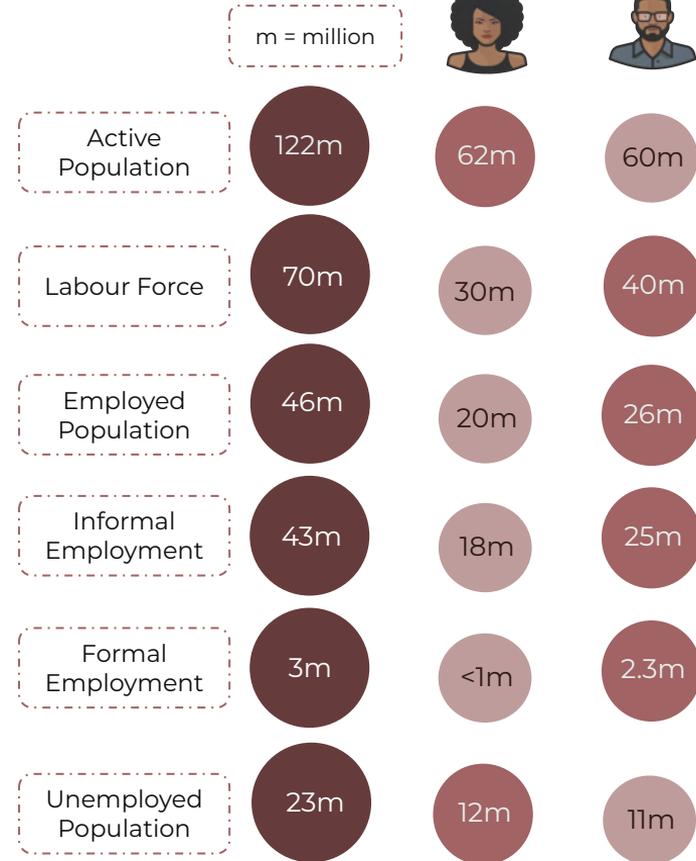


Programming that supports women's livelihoods and empowerment have shown significant progress in terms of economic outcomes in relation to financial inclusion, education for girls, entrepreneurship and delayed child bearing in the last decade. Yet, there are still significant gaps as women remain underrepresented in the labour force and find it more difficult to access formal jobs and economic opportunities, relegating them to the informal sector.

According to [NBS Q4 2020 data](#), women make up the larger amount of Nigeria's economically active population, with 61.3 million (50.5%). However, they are underrepresented in the labour force with a gap of 13.42% when compared to men. Beyond labour force participation, the gender gap continues to widen across the spectrum of the labour market. While only 20 million of the total employed population (46 million) are women, less than a million women are in formal employment while 95% are engaged within the informal sector. Moreso, female unemployment rate in Nigeria is 35.2%.

The underrepresentation of women in the labour force and their growing participation in the informal sector has largely been linked to patriarchy, as well as gaps in policy and education that prevents women from developing the skills and confidence to be employable. However, **it cannot be denied that the dominant position defining how we understand these barriers today is informed by a perspective that sees developing contexts like Nigeria from the lens of fragility.** This framing has an inherent illogicality that downplays women's lived experiences and primarily undermines any proof of their agency.

Although more recent literature has developed a reflective attitude and admits that there are gaps in how we understand gender barriers within the labour market, **policy and programming is perhaps missing out from a contextual understanding of how women are coping and adapting in the face of structural limitations.**



According to the World Bank Global Gender Gap Index 2021 report, the gender divide has come to stay for at least a century more and it may now take the world an additional 36 years to have a gender-balanced society. However, critical to realising the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030, is the need to unmask the barriers that affect women's transition into dignified and fulfilling work as well as the full maximization of their socio-economic potential.

Despite reports of increased female unemployment in OECD countries, evidence from the World Bank suggests an increase in work rates amongst women and the poor in Nigeria during the pandemic. While this remains a debate, how do we understand the constraints that underpin women's limited participation within the labour market today? Does technology hold any prospect of supporting women's transition into the workplace? How do we understand women's lived experiences and how it shapes their employment choices? These are questions suggesting numerous reactions, and while it is better understood than it was two or more decades ago they remain present issues whose discussion is embroiled in its own complexity and in the precariousness

Essentially, this research attempts to advance an understanding of the major barriers that affect women's participation and economic progress in Nigeria's labour market, across three focal states-Lagos, Kano and Kaduna in Agriculture, Creative and Digital sectors. It provides a comprehensive analytical framework of the multifaceted realities that shape women's lived experiences, its impact on their perception of work (formal and informal employment) and choice of labour market pathways.

This research acknowledges that the realities of the labour market may have changed significantly, as COVID-19 and technological disruptions may have combined to shift the dynamics within formal and informal employment. For instance, the pandemic may have expanded what it means to be employable. Hence, interrogating its implication for job opportunities especially for women, and its intersection with an increasingly digital work space forms a critical part of this research.

This research therefore seeks to address four Research Questions



What is the nature of the constraints to women's labour market participation and what are the implications for women's employment outcomes?



How do women perceive formal and informal employment?



What implication does technology have for women's transition into the workplace?



What strategies do women believe/recommend would advance their economic inclusion?

Approach and Methodology

This study relied on both primary and secondary data sources.

Primary Data

For the primary sources, we conducted interviews with Subject Matter Experts and deployed paper surveys and organized Focused Group Discussions across Lagos, Kano and Kaduna. A total of 45 interviews were conducted. The interviewed participants include policy actors, educators, researchers, religious leaders and experts from local and international women focused organizations. The interviewed professionals provided useful information around the barriers that affect women's participation in the labour market and shared valuable insights on the existing skills gap that affects women's employment outcomes in their industry and the role of women and various stakeholders in bridging it.

Surveys were targeted at employers as well as employed and unemployed men and women in Lagos, Kano and Kaduna in order to achieve a comprehensive and balanced perspective from all social actors. It was administered by a third party agent. A total of 1,585 participants and 492 employers took part in the survey. The population is predominantly (93.42%) made up of young people between ages 18 and 35, with 70% female and 30% male representation. Kano had the highest (37.65%) representation by state while Kaduna and Lagos had 31.3% and 31% representation respectively.

We also conducted Focused Group Discussions across the three focal states with a total of 122 women. Lagos had a representation of 41 women while Kano had 52, and Kaduna had 29.

Secondary Data

For secondary sources, we reviewed internal and external policy documents such as program reports, concept documents, published reports, journal publications, market relevant articles, blog posts, news articles and conference proceedings.

The use of both primary and secondary sources enriched the quality of data collected by providing relevant, context specific information on the barriers that limit women's participation in Nigeria's labour market across Lagos, Kano and Kaduna.

Limitations:

Due to the current state of insecurity in Kaduna state, the Focused Group Discussion was carried out online, on zoom. This unavoidably limited the range of participants to a tech savvy segment of the population and could have a considerable effect on the perspectives that were gathered. However, data from paper surveys and Key informant interviews provided the required balance around the data that was gathered in the state.

Conceptual clarification

According to National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), **The labour force population** covers all persons aged 15 to 64 years who are willing and able to work regardless of whether or not they have a job. Therefore, labour force participation statistics includes unemployed persons between ages 15-64 who during a reference period were willing to work, actively seeking for work but were without work. Consequently, unemployed women constitute a significant part of the labour force.

The labour market is an economic interaction space for workers/job seekers and employers. While employers compete to hire the best, workers/job seekers compete for the best satisfying job. It includes self-employment, entrepreneurship and wage work activities which could be formal or informal. Consequently, women have to be in the labour force to participate in the labour market.

The non-labour force includes population below 15 or older than 64, as well as those within the economically active population (15-64), who are unable to work, not actively seeking for work or choose not to work and/or are not available for work. Examples include, full time students, those in active military service, physically challenged and incapacitated persons whose incapacitation prevents them from working, as well as full time house wives.

Women -This research focuses on women between the ages of 18-35, in Lagos, Kano and Kaduna. However, the use of 'women' in this research does not assume that women are a homogenous group with similar aspirations, perspectives, attitudes and experiences. While the study seeks to advance an understanding of the barriers that women face in specific contexts, it takes cognisance of unique perspectives, and conflicting narratives among women within such contexts despite dominant social pressures.

The Labour Force Population

Labour force participation statistics includes unemployed persons between ages 15-64 who during a reference period were willing to work, actively seeking for work but were without work.

The Labour Market

The labour market is an economic interaction space for workers/job seekers and employers. While employers compete to hire the best, workers/job seekers compete for the best satisfying job.

The Non-Labour Force

The non-labour force includes population below 15 or older than 64, as well as those within the economically active population (15-64), who are unable to work, not actively seeking for work or choose not to work and/or are not available for work.

Although women constitute a significant part of the non-labour force, '**Gender barriers**' does not exclusively focus on the barriers that affect women's labour force participation.(i.e Why are women not willing to participate in the labour force?) the research digs deeper to examine the factors that hinder women's economic and employment outcomes in the labour market. It investigates the barriers that limit women's access to dignified employment/economic opportunities and the overall maximization of their economic potential. However, the study recognizes that the factors that affect women's labour market outcomes, may also constitute significant drivers of women's non-labour force participation.

Gender equality and the Labour Market: The aim of gender equality as it relates to employment, [economic structures](#) and organizational structures is not to 'develop' women to fit into a labour market construct that is inherently masculine, nor is it to design the labour market exclusively for women, but rather to adapt the labour market construct to incorporate the unique values and constraints of women and men. It is a structural arrangement that ensures that women who choose to engage in economic activities are able to find productive and decent work based on the criteria that recognizes their specific values and constraints ([ILO 2010](#)).

Measuring women's socio-economic progress: It may be misleading to predicate women's socio-economic progress on an equal representation of women and men in the labour market, but that women are empowered to choose their desired labour market paths, and given the necessary policy and organizational support that enables them improve their socio-economic welfare and that of their families.

Gender Barriers

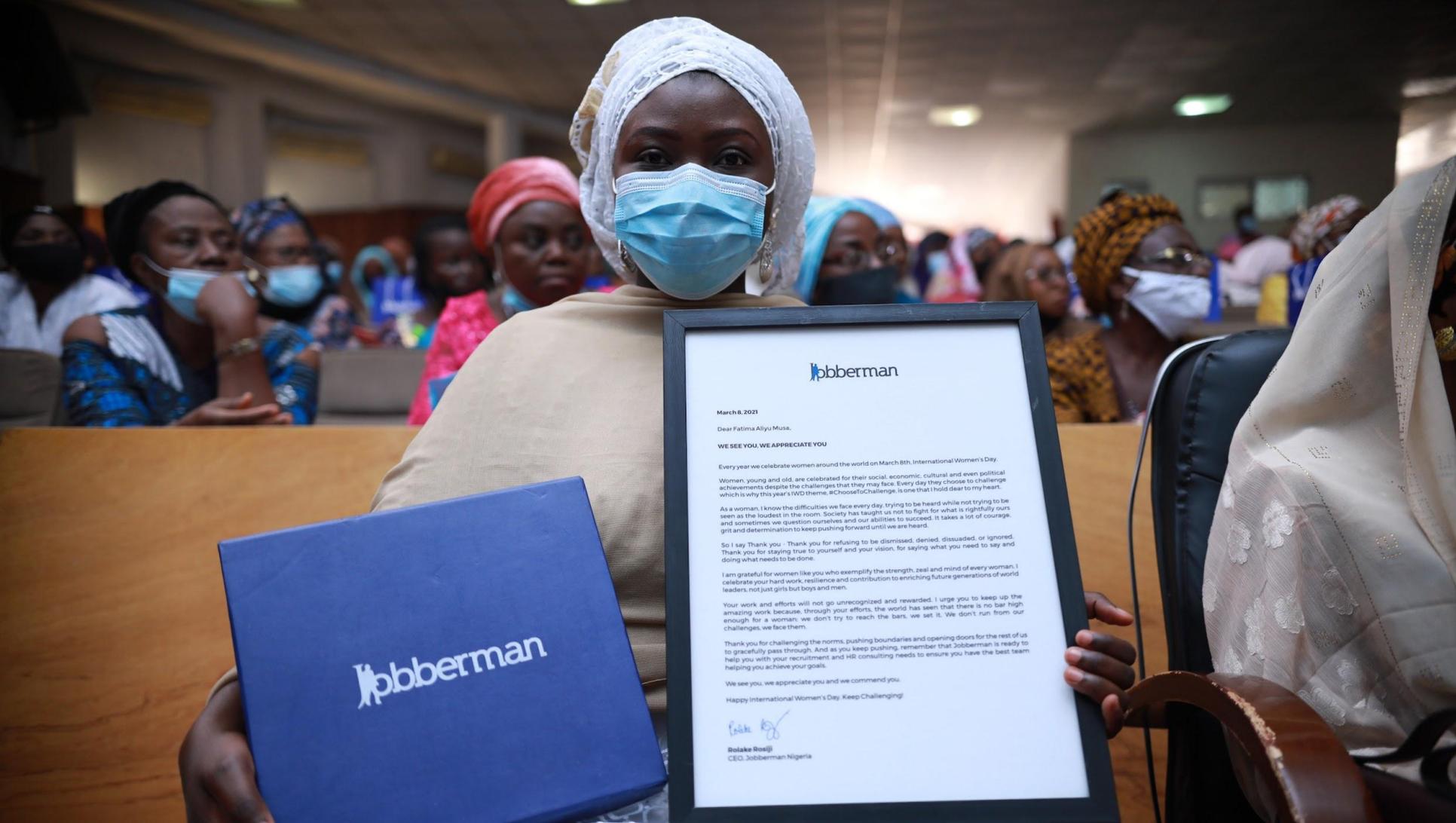
"Gender Barriers" does not exclusively focus on the barriers that affect women's labour force participation.(i.e Why are women not willing to participate in the labour force? It investigates the barriers that limit women's access to dignified employment/ economic opportunities and the overall maximization of their economic potential

Measuring women's socio-economic progress

It may be misleading to predicate women's socio-economic progress on an equal representation of men and women in the labour market, but rather that women are empowered to choose their desired labour market paths, and given the necessary organizational and policy support that enables them improve their socio-economic welfare and that of their families.

Gender Equality and the Labour Market

The aim of gender equality as it relates to employment and organizational structures is not to 'develop' women to fit into a labour market construct that is inherently male, nor is it to design the labour market exclusively for women, but rather to adapt the labour market construct to incorporate the unique values and constraints of men and women.



Jobberman

March 8, 2023

Dear Fatima Aliyu Musa,

WE SEE YOU. WE APPRECIATE YOU

Every year we celebrate women around the world on March 8th, International Women's Day. Women, young and old, are celebrated for their social, economic, cultural and even political achievements despite the challenges that they may face. Every day they choose to challenge which is why this year's IWD theme, #Choose2Challenge, is one that I hold dear to my heart.

As a woman, I know the difficulties we face every day, trying to be heard while not trying to be seen as the loudest in the room. Society has taught us not to fight for what is rightfully ours and sometimes we question ourselves and our abilities to succeed. It takes a lot of courage, grit and determination to keep pushing forward until we are heard.

So I say Thank you - Thank you for refusing to be dismissed, denied, dissuaded, or ignored. Thank you for staying true to yourself and your vision, for saying what you need to say and doing what needs to be done.

I am grateful for women like you who exemplify the strength, zeal and mind of every woman. I celebrate your hard work, resilience and contribution to enriching future generations of world leaders, not just girls but boys and men.

Your work and efforts will not go unrecognized and rewarded. I urge you to keep up the amazing work because, through your efforts, the world has seen that there is no bar high enough for a woman; we don't try to reach the bars, we set it. We don't run from our challenges, we face them.

Thank you for challenging the norms, pushing boundaries and opening doors for the rest of us to gracefully pass through. And as you keep pushing, remember that Jobberman is ready to help you with your recruitment and HR consulting needs to ensure you have the best team helping you achieve your goals.

We see you, we appreciate you and we commend you.

Happy International Women's Day. Keep Challenging!

Rolake Rosij

Rolake Rosij
CEO, Jobberman Nigeria

Jobberman

An Overview of Nigeria's Labour Market

Young people's ability to secure dignified employment remains the most significant challenge Nigeria will have to grapple with into the next decade.

Nigeria has the largest and most diverse pool of labour, compared to other African countries, owing to its vast and youthful population. With a 4.3% increase by Q4 2020, the number of Nigerians in the economically active or working age population (15 - 64 years of age) was 122 million. The labour force is estimated to be 69.7 million people and about 43.5% of this population are women.

The growth rate of Nigeria's labour force significantly outweighs the rate of job creation - a reality that is truer for women. For instance, in 2018, about 450,000 new jobs were created while over 5 million people joined the labour force. With a staggering unemployment rate of 33.3%, only 46.4 million of her population of 200 million people are in active employment. **Unfortunately, Nigeria only captures 51% of its full human capital potential with women mostly at the receiving end. In Q4 2020, the female unemployment rate stood at 35.2% compared to 31.5% for men. This implies that 7 in every 10 economically active women are unemployed.**

Nigeria's labour market dynamics have been further disrupted by the push into the 4th industrial revolution spurred by the COVID-19 pandemic and globalization policies. These have exposed the precariousness of the labour market and fueled the rage of unemployment. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), women are grappling with the negative impact of these realities and the implications have a far reaching effect on the outlook of both the formal and informal sectors of Nigeria's economy.



Nigeria has the largest and most diverse pool of labour, but only captures 51% of its full human capital potential



According to NBS, Nigeria has a staggering unemployment rate of 33.3%, and only 46.4 million people are in active employment.



7 in every 10 economically active women are unemployed.

Despite the structures that define formal employment, consolidated data across industries on the state of the sector in Nigeria remains scarce in literature. At base level, [formal employment](#) refers to jobs that are registered, remit taxes and contribute to the country's economy. They provide multiple levels of securities such as steady income, definite work hours, health insurance, pension systems, etc and are characterized by numerous barriers to entry - primary of which is educational qualification. This explains why only 3 million people are employed within the sector, of which less than 30% are women.

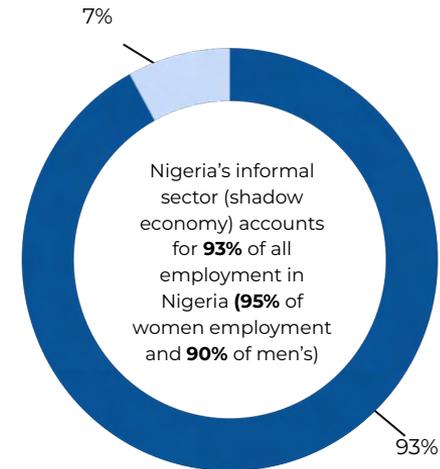
Conversely, Nigeria's informal sector thrives on the limited number of barriers to entry. This sector is a significant source of employment, production and income which are mostly undeclared and under captured within macroeconomic metrics. This can, in part, be attributed to the agility of workers within the sectors as well as several [digital and technological innovations](#) targeted at improving the business dynamics within the sector. **The surge in Nigeria's labour force has been primarily attributed to women taking on precarious work to cope with economic shocks.** Despite being framed with the lens of fragility, Nigeria's informal sector is vibrant and does not entirely conform to the classical definition of informality.

However, operations and growth trends of the informal sector are considered unsustainable due to weak regulation and accountability structures which are poorly understood. The informal sector is also typified by limited market scope and is less likely to have access to modern technology and managerial expertise. This may explain why the sector has been largely labelled as precarious.

Nevertheless, the informal sector still holds positive prospects in contributing to job creation and poverty reduction (like is seen in the [Igbo apprenticeship system \(IAS\)](#)). Its growth trends make it the most significant employment sector for youth and women in the country.



92% of workers in the informal sector earn a minimum of \$93 monthly which is \$16 more than the national minimum wage (\$77)



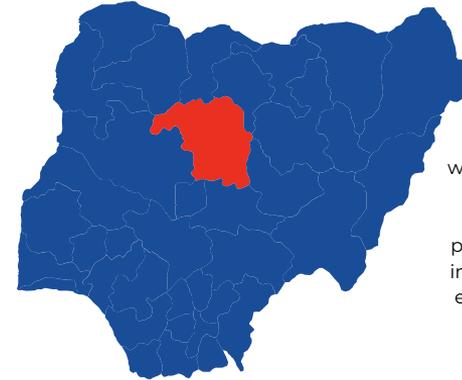
Women and the Labour Market in Kaduna State

Kaduna state is fast becoming one of the most attractive investment destinations in the country although insecurity remains the major inhibitor to its economic prospects.

Kaduna is largely cosmopolitan and its geographical positioning makes it attractive for several economic activities particularly in the agriculture and creative sectors. Agriculture contributes over 35% to the **state's GDP of N2.6 trillion and 42% of employment opportunities within the state.** Growing infrastructural and financial investment in the creative, mining, manufacturing and construction sectors hold significant prospects for women's economic outcomes in the state.

With a working population of over 5 million, only 46.6% are in the labour force; minority of which are women. Despite the low labour force participation, the state has one of the highest unemployment and underemployment rates in the country - standing at 44% and 22.65% respectively. Although the statistics around women's labour market outcomes within the state is unavailable, women have been reported to prefer employment opportunities in public sector organizations and self employment in the informal sector. Tackling security and infrastructure challenges remains crucial for a sustainable entrepreneurship ecosystem in the state.

Preference, family and patriarchy were recognized as major factors shaping women's labour market decisions in Kaduna state. Although women in Kaduna are expanding their labour market options through digital and entrepreneurship skills development, work flexibility is being prioritized in order to conform with family expectations and marital obligations.



Although the statistics around women's labour market outcomes within the state is unavailable, women have been reported to prefer employment opportunities in public sector organizations and entrepreneurship in the informal sector.



Agriculture contributes over 35% of Kaduna States' GDP worth \$8.7 billion.



Kaduna has a population of 8.2 million.



With a working population of over 5 million, only about 47% are in the labour force; minority of which are women.



Kaduna state has one of the highest unemployment and underemployment rates in the country - standing at 44% and 22.65% respectively

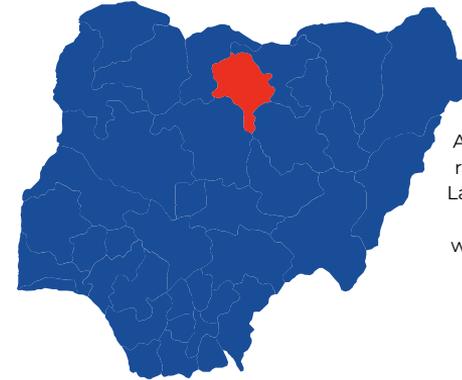
Women and the Labour Market in Kano State

Kano is the commercial hub of Northern Nigeria, the labour market outcomes is predominantly shaped by traditional and religious ideologies.

The Labour market dynamics in Kano is largely traditional with Agriculture engaging over 70% of the labour force within structures that are predominantly informal. Although the agriculture sector contributes more than 70% of the [state's GDP](#) of N2.68 trn, there are prospects for the hospitality, beauty and lifestyle industry, especially for women who are intrinsically entrepreneurial. This commercial prowess is attributed to its industrial heritage.

Although Kano's unemployment rate (25%) is relatively low compared to Lagos and Kaduna, its labour force participation (especially for women) is worrisome as less than 40% of its active population (7.2 million) is willing and able to work. There are stringent barriers that women in Kano face when making decisions about work, especially in formal employment. Women are the face of the informal sector in Kano since it is characterized by fewer barriers to entry.

Women's labour market reality in Kano can be largely attributed to patriarchal disposition to the girl-child education, early motherhood as well as traditional and religious tenets. These barriers inform, influence and impact women's decisions and priorities in the world of work. A labour market outlook that prioritizes work-life balance and has zero tolerance for sexual harrasment could significantly shape women and men's perspective about work while offering them the safety they require to thrive.



Although, Kano's unemployment rate is relatively low compared to Lagos and Kaduna, its labour force participation (especially for women) is worrisome as less than 40% of its active population is willing and able to work.



Agriculture contributes more than 70% of Kano states GDP of \$12 billion



Kano has a population of 13 million.



With a working population of over 7.2 million, only about 40% are in the labour force; minority of which are women.



Kano's labour market is largely traditional with over 70% of it's employed population engaged in the informal sector

Women and the Labour Market in Lagos State

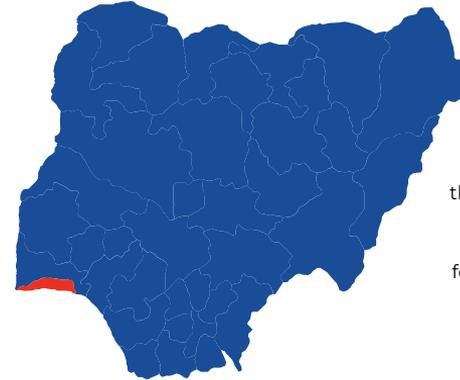
Lagos state is Nigeria's economic nerve centre, and the 7th fastest growing city in the world.

Lagos state is the major hub for a number of multinational companies, and an attractive spot for the myriads of start-ups across digital, creative and services sectors. Employment opportunities exist across formal and informal sectors. As a result, talents who peak or get frustrated with the challenges in other states, relocate to Lagos to maximize their economic potential making its labour market the most competitive across the country.

When compared to Kano and Kaduna, **Lagos has a more advanced and ready skills market - despite low and complex engagement realities.**

With the largest share of the country's working population due to urbanization, infrastructure deficit is a major contributor to Lagos' high unemployment rate of 35%. Women are significant contributors to the state's GDP through their engagement in the creative and digital sectors. **Despite vast opportunities in formal employment across these sectors, there is a strong entrepreneurial spirit among women in Lagos state.**

As one of the largest urban areas in the country, coupled with high cost of living, having a business which is termed 'side hustle' continues to improve women's income, livelihoods and their capacity to thrive in the commercial city. There is also a growing freelance and independent consultancy service community as young women would rather create better opportunities for themselves in entrepreneurship than settle for low wage jobs.



Women are significant contributors to the state's GDP through their engagement in the creative and digital sectors. Despite vast opportunities in formal employment across these sectors, there is a strong entrepreneurial spirit among women in Lagos state.



Lagos' economy thrives on contributions from diverse industry sector enabled by technology.



Lagos has a population of 17 million.



With a working population of over 9 million, only about 55% are in the labour force; with a significant share of women.



Lagos state has unemployment and underemployment rate of 37.2% and 4.52% respectively





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Mapping Barriers to Women Participation in Nigeria's Labour Market

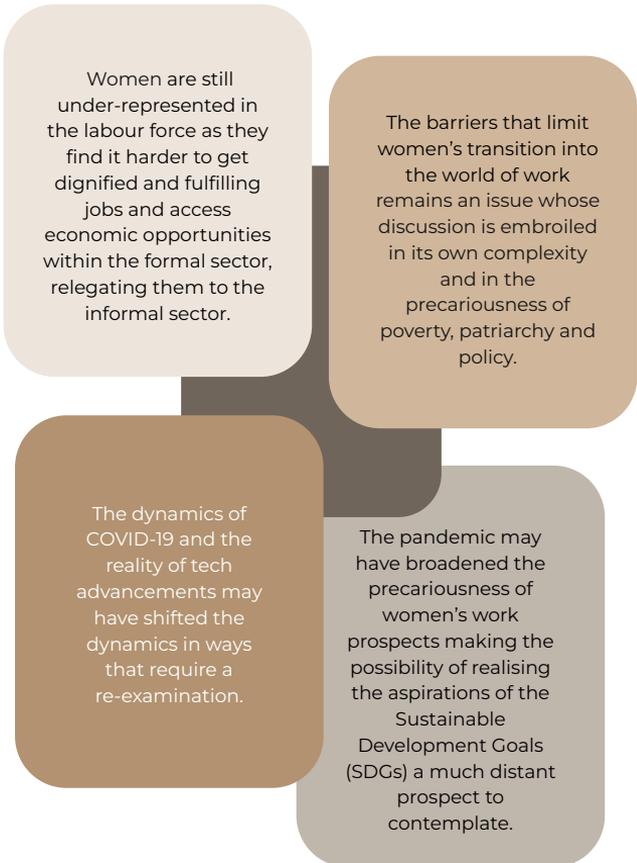


In the last decade, Nigeria has seen a growing number of women joining the labour force, both in rural and urban settings. This can, in part, be attributed to programme outcomes from initiatives anchored around financial inclusion, education for girls, entrepreneurship and delayed child bearing. Nevertheless, women are still under-represented in the labour force as they find it harder to get dignified and fulfilling jobs and access economic opportunities within the formal sector, relegating them to the informal sector.

Why have women remained under-represented in the labour force and what is the nature of the constraints to women's labour force participation and access to formal employment? Although it is better understood today than it was two or more decades ago, the barriers that limit women's transition into the world of work remains an issue whose discussion is embroiled in its own complexity and in the precariousness of poverty, patriarchy and policy.

While these barriers are well established within the literature, the dynamics of COVID-19 and the reality of tech advancements may have shifted the dynamics in ways that require a re-examination. Much of the literature that have dwelt on this subject have associated the barriers with a wide range of issues including access to education and training, sexual and reproductive health, teenage pregnancy, marriage, domestic responsibility and sexual harassment.

These barriers do not only have real meaning for women's livelihoods and employment choices, but also have implications on the efficiency and productivity of the labour market. At the same time the pandemic may have broadened the precariousness of these issues making the possibility of realising the aspirations of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) a much distant prospect to contemplate.



Women are still under-represented in the labour force as they find it harder to get dignified and fulfilling jobs and access economic opportunities within the formal sector, relegating them to the informal sector.

The barriers that limit women's transition into the world of work remains an issue whose discussion is embroiled in its own complexity and in the precariousness of poverty, patriarchy and policy.

The dynamics of COVID-19 and the reality of tech advancements may have shifted the dynamics in ways that require a re-examination.

The pandemic may have broadened the precariousness of women's work prospects making the possibility of realising the aspirations of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) a much distant prospect to contemplate.

Relying on the literature as well as primary data (interviews and surveys), this section tries to advance a contemporary understanding of the barriers that limit women's participation in Nigeria's labour market with data from 968 women across Lagos, Kano and Kaduna.

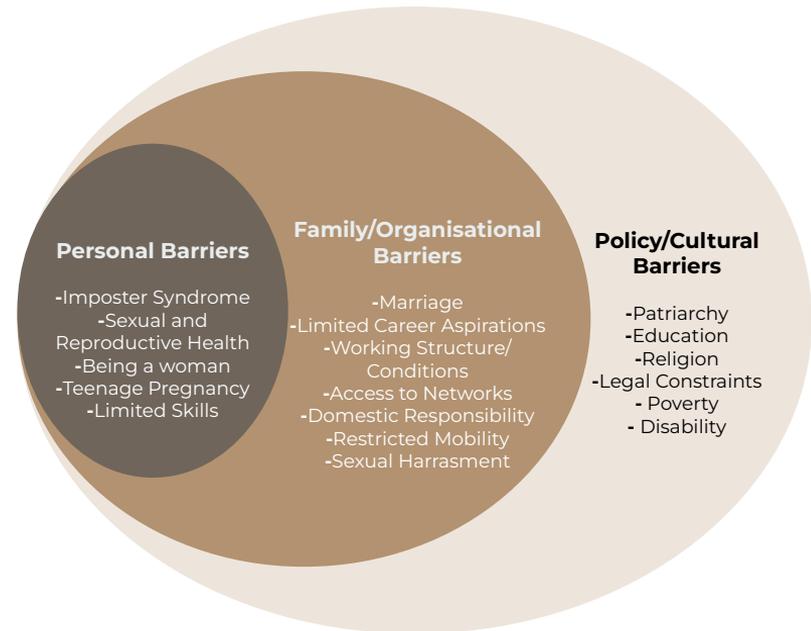
Fundamentally, the evidence emerging indicates a complex web of interrelated issues that are not mutually exclusive and in the attempt to enable a simplified understanding, the barriers identified are examined using three concentric circles. While the list may not be entirely exhaustive, the model places women at the center of three concentric circles each representing a layer of barriers. These three layers include:

1. Personal Barriers
2. Family/Organisational Barriers
3. Policy/Cultural Barriers

The first and internal circle is largely under the woman's control, the second is largely out of her control but within her influence and the third circle is largely out of her control or influence but has a huge impact on her labour market outcomes. This framework gives visibility to the personal and structural conditions that informs, influences and impacts women's perception and interaction with the labour market.

It helps to push the boundaries of how we understand women's lived experiences and their interaction with the labour market by moving away from narrow interpretations that focus just on women with less emphasis on their surrounding context. The challenge with this narrow view is the inherent assumption that merely directing a dart at women transform the structural conditions that limit them. Alternatively, this analysis suggests that personal barriers as well as the structural conditions around women, perhaps, should form the crux of research and interventions if real transformation is the intention.

Mapping Barriers to Women's Participation In Nigeria's Labour Market.





Personal Barriers

These are barriers that largely stem from cognitive, emotional and physical capabilities or personal circumstances which affect women's psyche in ways that inform their perception about life, identity, relationships and consequently their labour market choices.

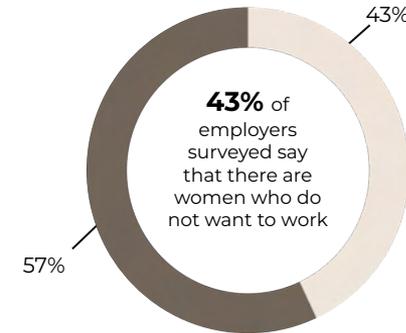
Some of these include; individual aspirations, values and preference, and 'being a woman'.

Individual aspirations, values and preference:

Personal barriers are exemplified by women's ability to take ownership of their decisions despite the possibility of being informed by socio-cultural pressures. For instance, women may choose to move out of formal employment into the informal sector based on interest as opposed to undereducation, limited opportunities or hindrances from family, organizational barriers or stereotypes. The implication is that programming and interventions that focus on eliminating biases but ignore women's agency in decision making will be limited in unmasking these barriers in ways that hold real potential for transforming women's livelihood.

Personal barriers are centered around how women choose to define and negotiate priorities in different seasons of their lives. From our findings, the dominant barrier emanating from women's personal decisions is not much about their unwillingness to engage in work, as only about 12% of women surveyed across Lagos, Kano and Kaduna are not willing to work. These barriers relate more to women's definition of success and what it means to them at different stages of their lives. This finding is, perhaps, in tandem with 43% of employers, who suggest that there are women who do not want to work. Employers attributed women's labour market apathy to preference, personal beliefs, relative definition of work, "being perfectly comfortable as housewives, and lack of interest.

Studies have debated the complexities on the cognitive process of preference formation and the self-reinforcing effects of systemic biases on women. For instance, the concept 'adaptive preference' suggests that women could adjust their preference in response to dominant socio-cultural pressures. Although the extent to which personality (cognitive, emotional and physical capabilities) shape women's perspectives and choices is unclear, insights from this research suggest that taking cognisance of what women consider as their personal aspirations and preference provides valuable insight into their definition of success in the world of work, the barriers that informs their labour market choices and its socio-economic implications.



Employers attributed women's labour market apathy to the following:



Preference



Personal beliefs



Relative definition of work



Lack of interest



Being perfectly comfortable as housewives

Being a Woman

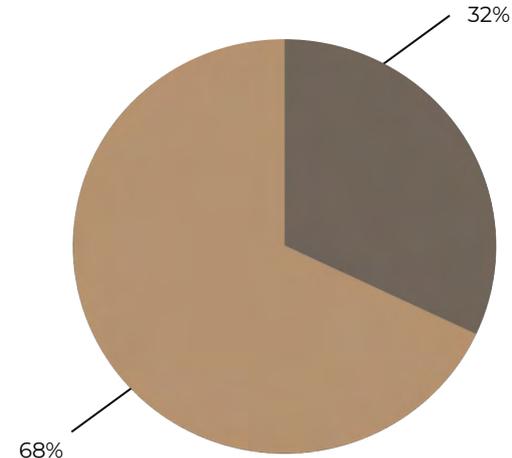
Historically, the perception of women's physiology and meanings ascribed to it has been **justification** for their exclusion from work, while In contemporary times, this bias is mainstreamed in the design of workplace norms and tools that are largely non-inclusive of women's biology and life stages. This explains why several women experience challenges in engaging the labour market and uptaking opportunities, especially in formal settings.

There are multiple realities that inform women's identity and choices. Quartz research on [biology and gender](#), suggests that there are complexities around distinguishing women's recognition of their roles based on biological sex functions, from their perception of femininity based on stereotypical gender norms. The term 'being a woman' refers to these biological sex functions, femininity and gender norms.

About **32%** of women surveyed say that “being a woman” is a major barrier to finding work and fully maximizing their economic potential in the labour market. Insights from the interviews suggest that this perspective largely stems from the difficulties that women face in managing physiological and socio-economic realities.

The realities of a woman include pregnancy, childbirth and physiological challenges such as, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), [pregnancy brain](#), among others. **These realities, in many cases, form entry level biases and create barriers that sometimes frustrate women into economic inactivity. It is acknowledged that women choose to manage these realities differently, however, for many, they significantly inform their preferences and choices of labour market pathways and the extent of socio-economic progress they are willing to commit to.**

“Gender may not be an entirely social construct, but the effect of biology do not confine us to traditional gender norms. And there is no science that counters the value of gender equality”



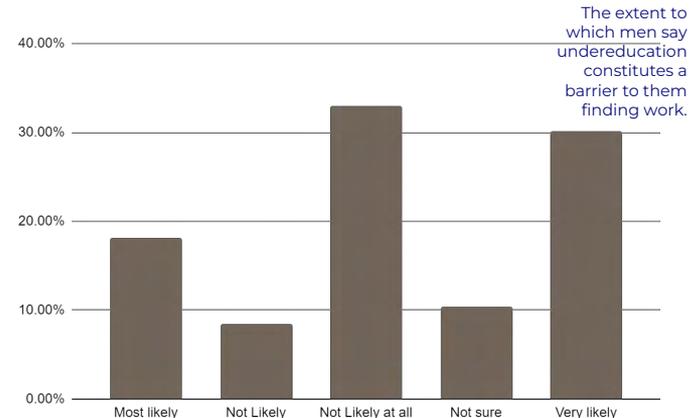
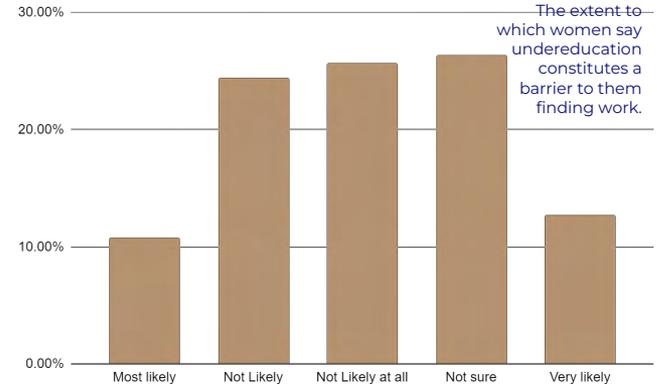
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Imposter Syndrome

'Men apply for jobs when they meet only 60% of the qualifications, but women apply only if they meet 100% of them'. This notion from a Hewlett Packard Internal Report is often interpreted in popular [literature](#) to mean imposter syndrome and suggests that many women struggle with confidence and express [self-doubt](#). In particular ways, imposter syndrome disproportionately impacts on women's perception of how the world of work operates, by downplaying their abilities to engage in informal alternatives with low wage and precarious working conditions.

From our findings, imposter syndrome is the product of stereotypes and socialisation that is underpinned by patriarchy as well as the fact that more women especially in Northern Nigeria are undereducated. Biases which suggest that women cannot do certain types of jobs and the limitedness of women's engagement with the world of work are views that are normalised and strongly held by men in the locations under study, but more pronounced in Kano.

Similarly, almost 48% of the 968 women and 23% of 492 men surveyed in Lagos, Kano and Kaduna say that undereducation (most likely and very likely) constitutes a significant barrier to women finding work. The tendency here is that limited education and patriarchy, in part, combine to reinforce imposter syndrome in women.





Family and Organizational Barriers

Institutional or family barriers are factors that influence women's labour market engagements and participation either based on their relationships or organizational frameworks/policies. They include the decisions that women 'have' to take due to conflicting priorities and involvements outside work or the dispositions of either family members or institutions they are interested in working with.

Some of these include: Marriage, Limited Aspirations, Sexual and Reproductive Health, Domestic Responsibility, Working Structure/Conditions, Access to Networks, Restricted Mobility and Sexual Based Violence/Harrasment.

Limited Aspirations

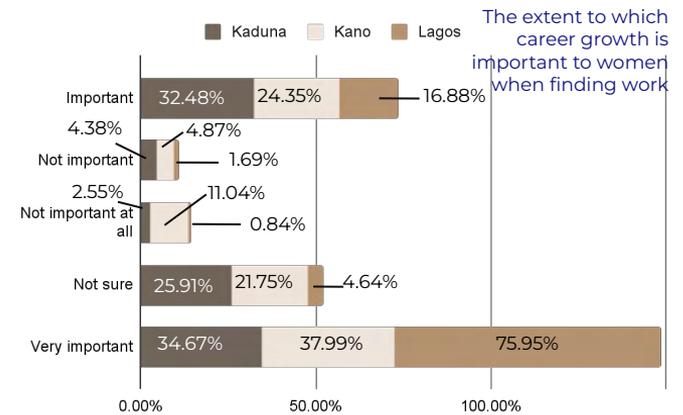
Despite the growing participation of women in the labour market and broadened career preferences in the last decade, young women tend to have [restricted career aspirations](#) than men. This is largely due to family and institutional constructs that either portray women's participation in the labour market as a distraction from prioritizing family responsibilities. While it is recognized that women have the agency to define what success means to them within the labour market, limited aspirations in this context, refers to women defining success in ways that are constructed by family and institutional expectations.

From our findings, limited aspiration is an outcome of a mindset which is deeply rooted in [family dynamics](#) as well as patriarchal cultural and religious orientations that undermines women's agency in decision making and sets marriage and childbearing as their highest accomplishment. These beliefs and practices, in many instances influence women's aspirations in ways that limit their definition of success in the world of work. Consequently, women are conflicted between family goals and career aspirations and in an attempt to strike a balance, they limit their aspirations on both ends. About 9% of employers noted traditional mindsets' have implications for women's work choices.

Although there is a sense from the interviews that the narrative is changing, limited aspirations remain a significant issue that hampers the quality of women's labour market participation and the extent of their socio-economic progress. **Only 4% of women surveyed in Lagos are not sure about the importance of career growth when searching for jobs, compared to 22% in Kano and 26% in Kaduna.** The disparity between Lagos and the other states is reflective of how rife culture and religion is in Kano and Kaduna This disparity is reflective of the impact of culture and religion on women's perception and engagement with work. Women in Lagos have greater freedom to make decisions due to the cosmopolitan nature of the city as opposed to Kano which is still largely traditional.



Our findings suggest that limited aspirations is an outcome of a mindset which is deeply rooted in the [dynamics of patriarchy and culture](#) in ways that has implications for women's agency and sets marriage and childbearing as their highest accomplishment.



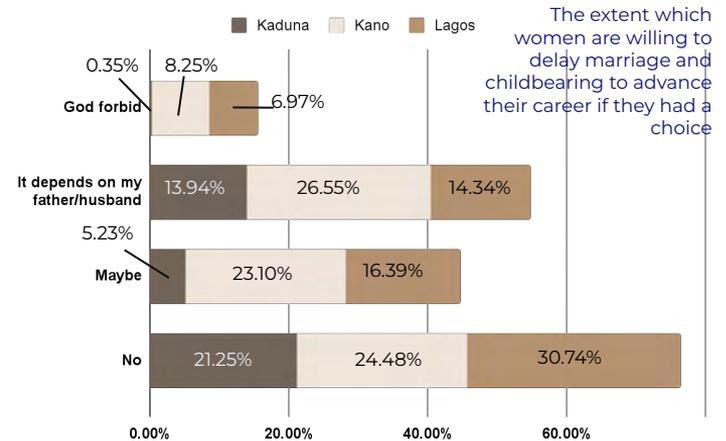
Sexual and Reproductive Health

Sound sexual and reproductive health is premised on the ability to have a satisfying and safe sex life, the capability to reproduce and the freedom to decide if, when, and how often to do so. Beyond the absence of disease and dysfunction or infirmity, sexual and reproductive health outcomes includes women's right to make decisions about their own bodies; right to enter into marriage with free and full consent, right to determine the number and spacing of children, and engage in respectful sexual relationships free of coercion, discrimination and violence, as well as access to reproductive healthcare and family planning which are all central to the achievement of [SDG 4](#) and [SDG 8](#).

From our findings, women's sexual and reproductive health (SRH) outcomes are closely linked to their educational levels, religion, and regional peculiarities. For instance, early marriage, both as a cause and consequence of undereducation significantly affects women's entry into the labour force and their labour market pathways. **According to Save the Children International (SCI) [State of the Nigerian Girl Report 2021](#) 78% of girls in Northern Nigeria get married before the age of 18 while about 48% are given out in marriage before the age of 15.** The implication is that they are forced into early childbearing with limited access to SRH services and economic opportunities outside the home.

Similarly, patriarchal family structures and limited family friendly policies in organizations impact women's rights to determine the spacing of their children and could expose them to devastating health outcomes. Data from the survey indicates that for women in Kano, decision about childbearing largely lies with the male authority figures in the home. About 15% of women surveyed across the three states are not sure about delaying marriage and childbirth for career purposes while 19% will make the decision based on their father/husband's opinion. However, 25% say they are not willing; (31%) in Lagos and (25%) in Kano, while 37% are willing with Kaduna making up (59%) and Kano recording the least figure at (17.59%).

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Marriage

Marriage plays a fundamental role in how women interact and make choices about the labour market. Marriage emphasizes long-established gender roles as women's labour force participation is largely shaped by household and nurturing responsibilities. Married women in Northern Nigeria especially, are restricted by the purdah, conditioning them to certain kinds of economic activities that are assumed to be in the eye of the public. In Kano for instance, we found such activities to include jobs in nursing, teaching (primary and secondary levels) as well as cooking and cleaning. The case is different in Lagos where women appear to be at liberty to define their employment choices to some degree, and with reasonable representation in professional, technical and managerial levels.

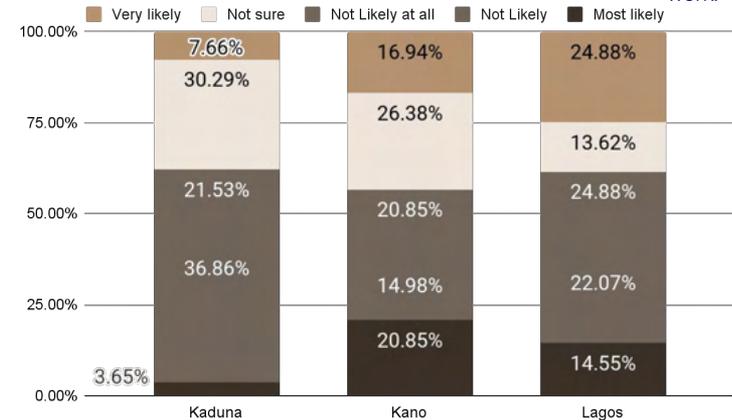
About 38% of women surveyed in Kano say that marriage is a barrier to them finding work. Interestingly, Kaduna state had the highest number of married women, yet only about 11% of women surveyed in Kaduna say marriage is a barrier to them finding work. This may be due to less stringent sociocultural pressures compared to Kano. Similarly, financial and structural demands of living in a mega city may be responsible for 39% of women surveyed in Lagos saying that marriage is a barrier to them finding work.

Our findings also suggest that women who have succeeded in building their careers largely attributed their progress to the support they received from their families (fathers and husbands especially). Support or lack of support from family continues to play a significant role in women's labour market choices and outcomes. While over 70% of men surveyed in each of the three states are willing to allow their wives engage in work, they noted that having kids and long working hours are factors that play a key role in men rethinking their wives engagement with work.



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The extent which women say that marriage is a barrier to them finding work.



Unpaid Care Work/ Domestic Responsibility

During the [pandemic](#), the increased burden of unpaid childcare borne by mothers and women raising children was a key driver of reduced labour market participation and worsened employment outcomes for women globally. Juggling paid work with domestic responsibility has been closely linked to high underemployment rates, slower career progression, and lower lifetime earnings among women. More so, most of this goes unpaid.

According to [Oxfam International](#), the monetary value of care work contributed daily by women and girls is put at \$10.8trillion annually. This triples the sum generated by the tech industry.

Although evidence from our research suggests that women's economic contribution to family survival is increasingly recognized, it has not necessarily translated into the redistribution of care responsibilities, as unpaid care and domestic work remains strongly feminized. On the contrary, more than 50% of women in Kaduna do not seem to find domestic responsibility as a major challenge. This may be due to the dominance of women in the public sector which affords them the flexibility for work-life balance, and a more liberal family system when compared to Kano. Yet, about 70% of employers surveyed in Lagos and 69% in Kano and 15% in Kaduna say domestic responsibility is a major barrier for women in the world of work.

Furthermore, 36% of women surveyed in Lagos note that they may be significantly hindered by domestic responsibility. This may be due to the difficulties in juggling family and career in an increasingly urbanising context where the cost of living is high and with limited support systems. Nevertheless, our findings suggest that more women in Lagos especially engage cleaners, nannies, laundres and cooks as a coping mechanism.

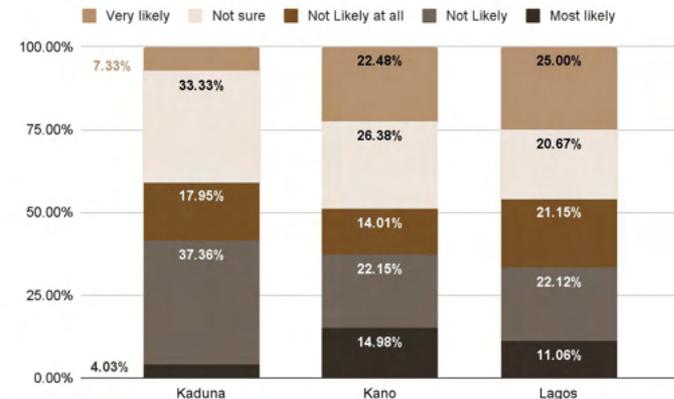


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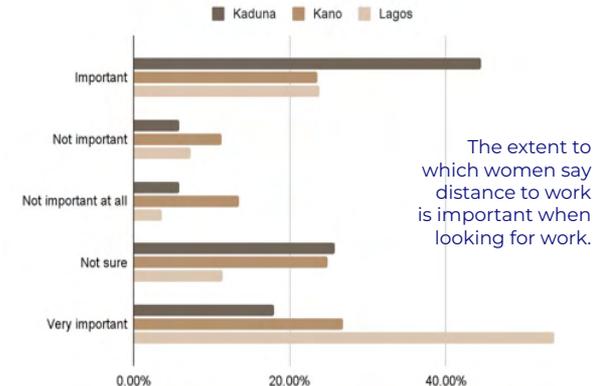
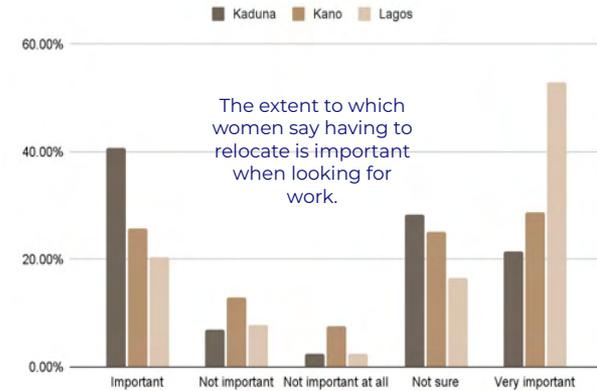
Restricted Mobility

Higher mobility has been closely linked to higher wages and lower risk of unemployment as job seekers who are willing to move are more likely to gain access to better employment opportunities. Evidence from literature suggests that women show a lower willingness to make a long distance move for a job because, unlike men, they have to reconcile family responsibilities and work choices.

Although the realities may be different amongst women, **relocation and work distance are crucial factors that shape women's labour market choices and outcomes. In more traditional contexts like Kano, women require the consent of family members, mostly fathers and husbands in situations where work requires them to travel to other locations outside their state.** While Kaduna is cosmopolitan, there are concerns around women's mobility stemming from insecurity and religious intolerance that characterizes the state.

On the other hand, women in Lagos appear to express autonomy around their mobility decisions with regards to the labour market as they are less constrained by cultural limitations and insurgency. Nevertheless, proximity in terms of distance to work is an important factor for women's labour market decisions in Lagos state as the traffic situation and high transportation cost still serve as deterring factors in engaging employment opportunities.

About 62% of women surveyed across the three states say that having to relocate is an important factor that they consider when looking for work. Feedback from the interviews suggest that more women in Kano and Kaduna are less open to relocating outside their states. They largely attributed their reasons to insecurity and mostly cultural norms which discourage unmarried women from choosing to live alone. However, they noted that women are more likely to move if they have their family's permission.



Sexual Harrassment

Research from the [International Labor Organization](#) describes sexual harassment as a reflection of unequal power relations between men and women. Perpetrators of sexual harassment in the work place either have actual or perceived superiority and access to employment or economic benefits by which they threaten to withhold or grant in exchange for a sexual relationship. Since women are [more likely to experience](#) sexual harassment in the work place than men, patriarchy provides an entry point into understanding why sexual harassment prevails

Feedback from women interviewed in Lagos strongly posits that sexual objectification “*using what you have to get what you want mentality*” remains prevalent, and constitutes a major barrier to finding work. About 55% of the men surveyed in Lagos hold similar views. Our findings interestingly mirrors similar **research which recently estimates that 76% of women working in Lagos have been sexually harassed.**

Furthermore, about **14% of employers surveyed say they do not have policies that protect women from sexual harassment.** In organizations where these policies exist, poor enforcement continues to leave devastating outcomes for women, ranging from low level of productivity, to stigma and eventual job loss. **From the research findings, over 60% of women surveyed across three states say they will report a case of sexual harassment at work. Specifically, about 90% of women in Kaduna say they will report an incident of sexual harassment, compared to 47% in Kano and 61% in Lagos.**

The disparity reflects the extent to which women feel supported by their families and their organizations in enforcing sexual protection policies. For instance, in advising women on how to address sexual harassment, while 58% of men say women should report the incidence, 11% opine that women should handle the situation themselves. It is, however, worrisome that 30% of these men recommend that women quitting their jobs is the preferred way out.



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60% of women surveyed across three states say they will report a case of sexual harassment at work. But men surveyed differ in how this should be handled, with about 30% suggest quitting.

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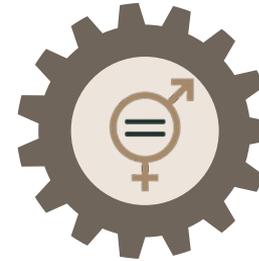
Poor Working Conditions

Workplace discrimination is central to understanding women's economic outcomes. Extant literature has established [strong links](#) between poor working conditions and gender pay gap; the dearth of women in leadership, longer time required for women vs men to advance their careers and overall poor socio-economic status of women.

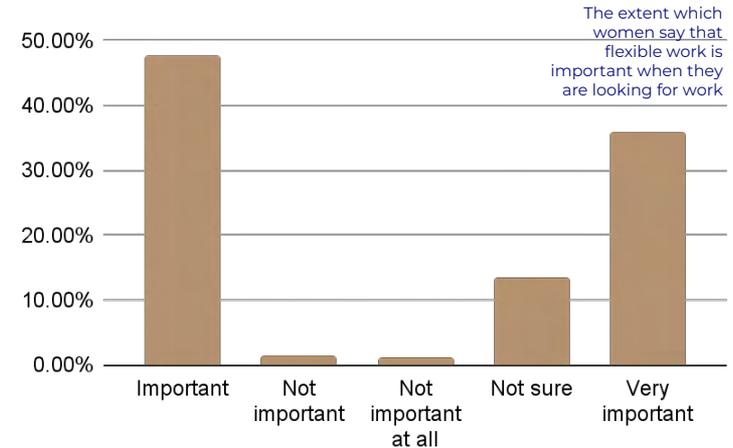
For instance, **in the informal sector, women's agency and contribution to economic growth remains hidden, unrecognized or downplayed. Although women constitute 70% of [agricultural](#) labour in Nigeria and produce 90% of food, they are more prone to lower wage due to limited access to land, skills, modern inputs, finance and low adoption of mechanization.**

Our findings indicate a relationship between poor working conditions and the construction of the workplace around men as well as the near absence of gender specific organizational policies. The implication is the exclusion of women in the design of workplace norms, processes and tools. More so, **issues that are peculiar to women are often treated as an afterthought which perpetuates discrimination in hiring, wages, and career progression especially in formal employment.**

Although a majority of the women surveyed across the three states are prioritizing flexibility and inclusive organizational culture when searching for jobs, women in formal and informal sectors continue to set up businesses and design work based on masculine constructions. This raises crucial questions around why women have perpetuated similar constructions rather than disrupting patriarchal structures.



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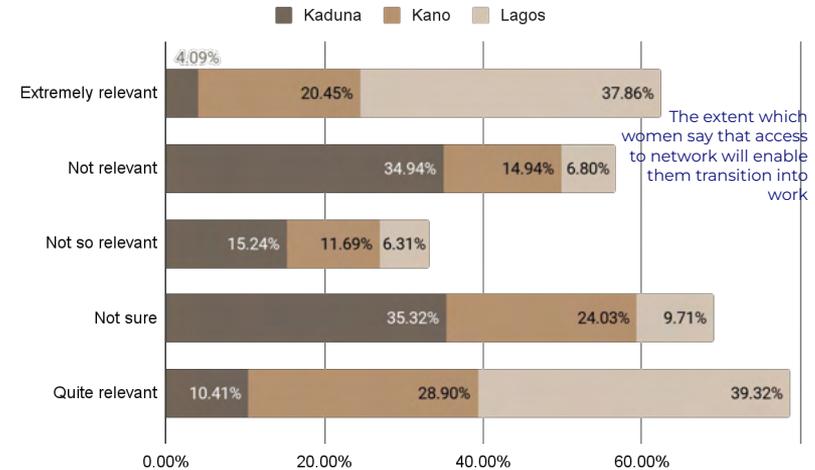


Access to Networks

Access to professional networks is crucial for women's career progression. However, due to unequal power relations in political and economic spheres, women find it difficult to engage or benefit from networks critical to women's advancement in the world of work. Male dominated networks are said to be overrepresented across various industries. Similarly, recruiters of top level jobs are more likely to hire employees with similar backgrounds, and recommendations from well respected gatekeepers in respective industries. Largely, these gatekeepers are men, which tend to reduce entry for women.

Similarly, **from the interviews conducted, women say they do not feel supported by other women.** The underlying frictions in female relationships in the workplace has serious implications for women's career progression as women, like men, require support in forms of mentorship, sponsorship, and support systems to better their labour market outcomes. Furthermore, conventional networking structures may not be as effective for women who tend to need sensitive, [gender-specific information](#), in addition to professional counsel, which only women can provide.

About 45% of women surveyed across the three states generally recognize the importance of networks in helping them access job opportunities and transition into dignified work. However, the complications around women's perception of other women at work raises disturbing questions about the far reaching consequences of patriarchy on women and its implications for women's ability to disrupt patriarchal structures in the world of work.



While male dominated networks are said to be overrepresented across various industries, women say they do not feel supported by other women.



Policy and Cultural Barriers

Cultural and policy Barriers are factors that impact women's labour market outcomes either through strongly held ideologies or written/unwritten societal constructs that systematically exclude women from the labour market. They include mainstream society constructs that privileges men over women in the world of work.

They Include Patriarchy, Religion, Education, Poverty, etc.

Patriarchy

Patriarchy is defined as a state of power relations; a social system of male exploitation of public and private spheres, including roles of political leadership, moral authority, social privilege, and control of property. This overarching systemic bias against women constitutes the most debilitating barrier to women's advancement in the world of work and society at large. From stereotypical gender roles, to non-inclusive laws and workplace policies, the impact of patriarchy is far reaching, affecting every facet of women's lives as they have to compete for resources in an increasingly unequal socio-economic landscape that privileges men at the expense of women.

Insights from this research is reflective of the downplayed impact of patriarchal work culture on women's psyche, and its potential to socialize women in ways that could make them instrumental to its continued dominance in the workplace especially. The masculine construction of the workplace socializes women to perceive their femininity as a weakness and conditions them to behave in ways more typical of men in order to prove their leadership capacity. This could limit women from developing strategic female networks required for career progression while also making them ill-fitted for driving inclusive work policies and culture.

There is a possibility that women may have been socialised to compete against each other in the workplace. Feedback from the interviews indicate that a majority of women do not feel supported by other women. Preferences exhibited by these women in their choice of bosses and colleagues suggested this. Perhaps the continued dominance of patriarchal work structures even in female-led organizations unveils its far reaching implications beyond structural biases to practices that are deeply rooted in organizational culture.



The masculine design of the workplace socializes women to perceive their femininity as a weakness and conditions them to behave in ways more typical of men in order to prove their leadership capacity.

Ways Patriarchy is expressed in the workplace



Gender Pay Gap



Exploitation



Unpaid work



Social Expectations



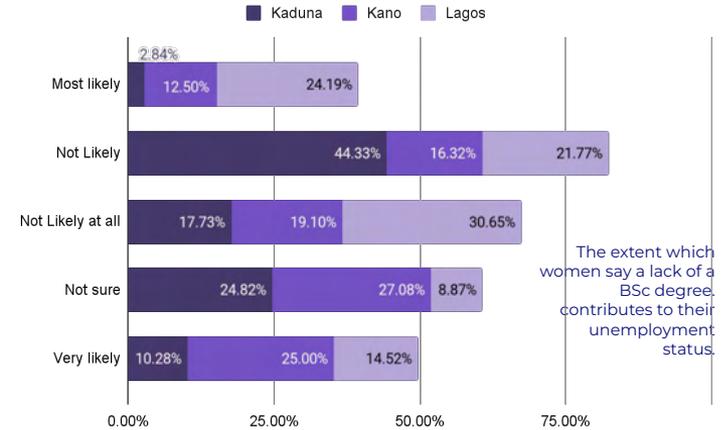
Gender Based Violence

Gaps in Education and Skills

Nigeria's female literacy rate is significantly lower at 53% compared to men at 71%. The 5th in Africa behind South Africa, Rwanda, Ghana and Ethiopia in terms of gender parity in enrolment rate. Educational attainment among women remains threatened by cultural norms, traditional practices, insecurity, poor infrastructure, and poverty. There are also significant gaps in education that makes it difficult for women to gain the required confidence, knowledge and skill to compete favourably in an increasingly competitive global economy. .

From our research findings, there is a growing and sustained interest among young women to further their education and attain the required technical and digital skills. However, this is usually subject to the moral and financial support they receive from their family and the availability of scholarships. **The perception that the return on investing in the education of a girl-child is unprofitable combined with cultural stereotypes is worsening educational outcomes for women, particularly in the North.** Insights from interviews conducted in Kano suggest families will consider giving out the female child early into marriage, because the gratification that education offers in the immediate term is low and there is little or no economic basis to make an investment in their education.

About 31% of employers surveyed say it is difficult to find qualified women during recruitment and 72% affirmed that women need more training to be effectively prepared for work. Insights from the survey also indicates that a majority of female job seekers are partly trained across their fields and only deploying skills at beginner level despite their digital exposure. Although only 14% of women surveyed do not hold a bachelor's degree, 24% of them recognize that limited education is a major barrier to their engagement in the labour market. These gaps are expressions of policy gaps and cultural norms that are mostly unscripted but subtly enforced.



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Poverty

According to the IMF, Women constitute about 60% of the poorest people in Nigeria. Poverty plays a critical role in shaping the mindset of girls and women especially in contexts where there are limited opportunities for them to be educated and acquire skills to live long and live well. Consequently, women are conditioned and socialised to normalise helplessness which makes poverty chronic because they are unable to aspire beyond marriage.

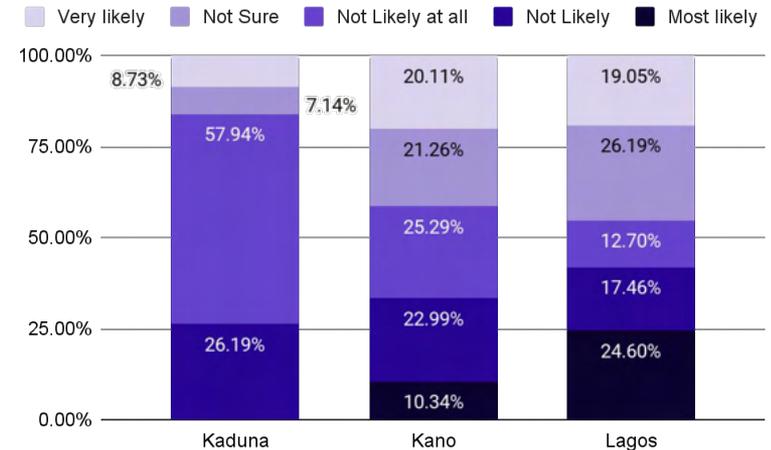
It is important to recognize that poverty is more than just limited income or the lack of a decent meal and drinking water. It is not just about not having decent accommodation or access to healthcare. It is not limited to accessing education and opportunities. Poverty is the lack of a future! Learned helplessness which is a cognitive effect of poverty refers to sets of self-defeating thoughts that inhibit the formation of a self-reliant mindset, and constructive behaviors required to overcome life challenges. Hence, poverty has a far reaching impact on women's labour market conditioning and eventual outcome.

55% of women surveyed across the three states earn at most N50, 000 monthly. while only 15% earn between N100, 000 to N150, 000 and only 7% earn above N200, 000. About 60% of women surveyed in Kaduna earn below N10, 000 The economic situation could further increase the chances of women being exposed to multiple forms of discrimination, poor nutrition, limited education and skills, and inadequate health and social services. In some cases of extreme poverty, young women may end up seeking marriage as an alternative income pathway, thereby fostering a complex dynamics between poverty, marriage and employment.



Poverty is more than just limited income or the lack of a decent meal and drinking water. It is not just about not having decent accommodation or access to healthcare. It is not limited to accessing education and opportunities. Poverty is the lack of a future!

The extent which employers say that poverty constitutes a barrier to women finding work.



Religion

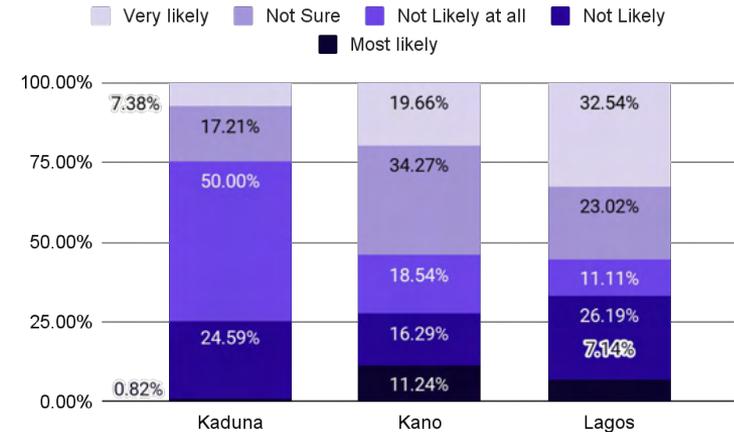
Religion has been [closely linked](#) to other dimensions of stratification and social economic inequality. Studies have drawn strong links between religion and traditional gender roles, higher fertility, lower female education, and lower female employment. Religion remains one of the most important factors that shape power relations in the family and how women perceive and engage in work.

While feminists continue to draw close links between religion and patriarchy, our findings suggests that religion in itself may not necessarily pose a barrier to women engaging with work, but its interpretation, and how this is subsequently mainstreamed and perceived in the society is what creates the barrier. During interviews, religious stakeholders emphasized that the reality of gender discrimination in northern Nigeria is anti-Islam. According to their claims, Islam amplifies the agency women as the Prophet Mohammed himself supported women engaging in work but men use religion as a tool to subjugate and exploit women.

For instance, the Purdah system which refers to the seclusion of women is largely cultural rather than religious in Kano. The direct translation of *Purdah* in Hausa is *Kule* which means putting women inside the home. This practice is also responsible for *Bashiga* (literally translated as “do not enter” which means men other than those of the family of that household are not allowed to enter the house). **Due to these power relations, women’s gender roles within family structures are mainstreamed into societal systems leading to biases and stereotypes that impedes women’s labour market outcomes.**

From an employers’ perspective, religion is less likely to pose a barrier for women’s employment outcomes in Kaduna while they say it is still much of an issue in Kano and Lagos

The extent which employers in Lagos, Kano and Kaduna say that religion constitutes a barrier to women finding work



During interviews, religious stakeholders emphasized that the reality of gender discrimination in Northern Nigeria is anti-Islam. According to their claims, the Prophet Mohammed himself supported women engaging in work, but men use religion as a tool to subjugate and exploit women.

Legal Barriers

Similar to other parts of the world, studies have emphasized the importance of 'protective laws' on women's economic outcomes in Nigeria. Nigeria ranks 87 out of 189 countries on World Bank's Women's Equality Index.

The country has several laws that make it harder for women to access dignified employment. For instance, [The Labour Act](#) prohibits employers from hiring women for night work in sectors, such as manufacturing, mining, quarries or extractive industries, construction, transportation or agriculture with the exception of female nurses, and women in management positions who are not engaged in manual labour.

While it is likely that these laws were designed with the intention of protecting women's health and family life, they are considered discriminatory today not only in Nigeria but in other parts of world. Preventing women from acquiring the same work experience as their male colleagues cuts their career development paths short. Women may be restricted to some sectors, since they are not likely to be perceived as equal workers and have little or no opportunity to get promoted into management position.

Inter-state differences also exist in legal dispositions concerning the rights, and constraints that prevent women from working in some industries, performing the same tasks at work as their male counterparts or working the same hours. While some states in the three zones in the North have the Sharia penal code, all the states in the southern zones have the criminal code. **From our findings these barriers are largely tied to patriarchy and the integration of cultural and religious beliefs into customary law which in most cases infringes on the rights of women and affects their mental and physical capacity to engage in work.**



Nigeria ranks 87 out of 189 countries on World Bank's Women's Equality Index.



Nigeria's labour law remains silent on equal pay for both gender on work of equal value and non-discrimination in employment based on gender.



While it is likely that these laws were designed with the intention of protecting women's health and family life, they are considered discriminatory today not only in Nigeria but in other parts of world.





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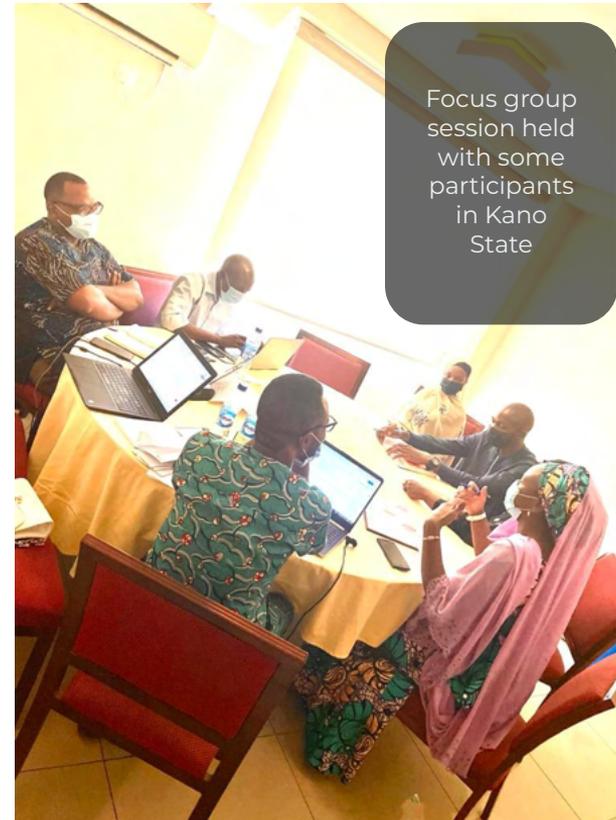
Women's Perception of Formal and Informal Employment

The previous chapter established that women's employment choices and outcomes are largely shaped by a complex web of physiological, family/organizational as well as policy/cultural factors. By situating these issues within urban and semi urban contexts, the previous chapter advances an appreciation of the underlying social and economic barriers that exclude women from accessing skills for employment and opportunities within the labour market.

In this section, we combine survey with interviews and FGDS to deepen the conversation by attempting to tease out the factors that shape the dominant perceptions women have about the labour market and how these perceptions inform their employment choices. Here we also attempt to determine the kind of jobs women are interested in and why; while also providing some explanation as to why women search for the kind of roles they search/apply for.

A quasi-experiment was also conducted to determine how communication framing on job listings inform women's employment choices. We tried to determine whether specific words, clauses or phrases influence the decisions women make about work, and how these manifests in different contexts - urban and semi urban.

In this regard, we took a sample of women across Lagos, Kano and Kaduna and asked them to look through selected job listings and explain the reasons for their choice. Here we try to understand what women prioritise when seeking work opportunities and why they will not take certain jobs.



Focus group session held with some participants in Kano State

A Contextual lens

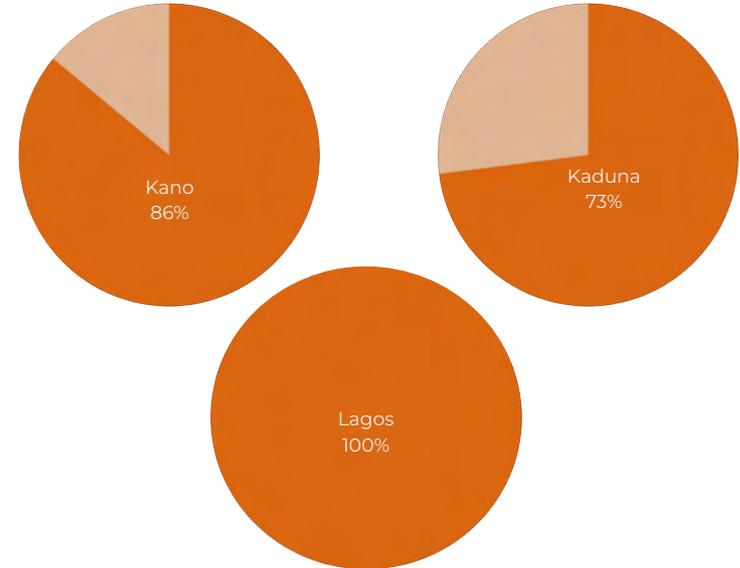
Lagos and Kaduna are metropolitan in nature and characterized by diverse economic and ethno-religious representations as well as less stringent socio-cultural barriers, unlike Kano which is largely traditional. This in itself, largely shapes women's perception about work, the kind of economic opportunities and career possibilities available to them and consequently, their labour market choices.

Entrepreneurship in the informal sector is increasingly becoming the economic haven for women primarily due to its low barrier to entry. For instance, women in Kano state consider entrepreneurship as a space that provides them with flexibility to deploy creativity in ways that are peculiar to them irrespective of their educational level or cultural limitations.

In more traditional contexts, women's increasing access to smartphones and engagement on social media is shaping their perception in ways that continues to push locally defined boundaries of work. This thinking is diversifying their scope of economic opportunities. For instance, **women in Kano are utilizing digital platforms like WhatsApp, Instagram and Facebook for their trade activities, cooking classes, marketing their products and engaging customers.**

Beyond the creative means of engaging work, more women are using technology to trigger cultural shifts on issues that affect women in their communities. Evidence from the surveys also suggests that men (100% in Lagos, 86% in Kano and 73% in Kaduna) are becoming supportive of their wives engagement with work, thereby limiting the effect of stereotypes on women's transition into formal work.

However, findings from the surveys suggest that **having kids and working long hours remain significant factors that make men reconsider their wives engagement with work.** This possibly explains why a majority of women interviewed in Kano and Kaduna prefer to work in the public sector as opposed to the private sector.



Evidence from the survey indicate that a growing generation of young males are becoming supportive of their wives engagement with work, thereby limiting the effect of stereotypes on women's transition into formal work. The data shows 100% in Lagos, 86% in Kano and 73% in Kaduna.

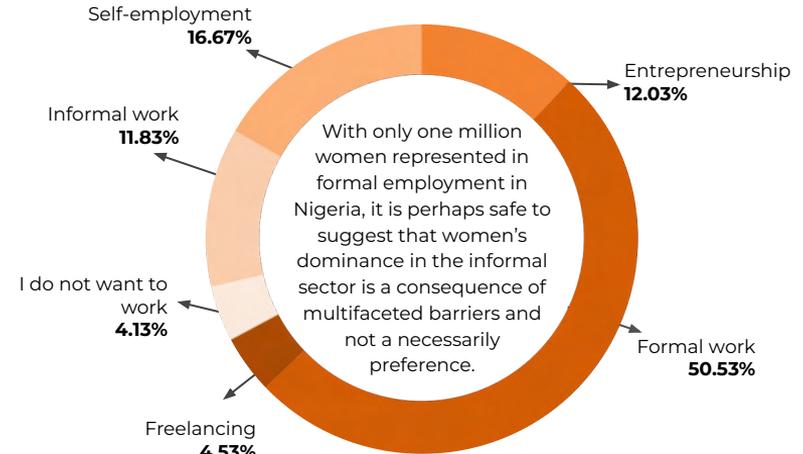
Women in the formal and informal Employment

About 51% of women surveyed across the three states indicated that they are more interested in formal work, compared to 17% who say they want to be self-employed and 12% who are interested in entrepreneurship. With only one million women represented in formal employment in Nigeria, it is perhaps safe to suggest that women's dominance in the informal sector is a consequence of multifaceted barriers and not a necessarily preference.

Beyond the gaps in education and skills which remains a significant barrier to formal employment, a common feedback from our interviews further posits that more women are moving into the informal sector due to unfavourable structural conditions and marginalization. **Women are creatively redefining work in ways that reinforce their identity, values, talent, and skills.**

For instance, women's increasing engagement in the creative sector, especially, beauty and lifestyle, tourism and hospitality, entertainment and performing arts have become the means by which they are expressing their agency and resilience in the face of structural limitations.

In essence, the progressive expansion of Nigeria's informal economy is reflective of the long ignored agency, creativity and resilience which women have continued to demonstrate despite unfavourable socio-economic conditions and limited policy attention. Women across Lagos, Kano and Kaduna are leveraging digital technology and are taking advantage of the opening in the e-commerce space and innovating with social media platforms to give visibility to their enterprises.



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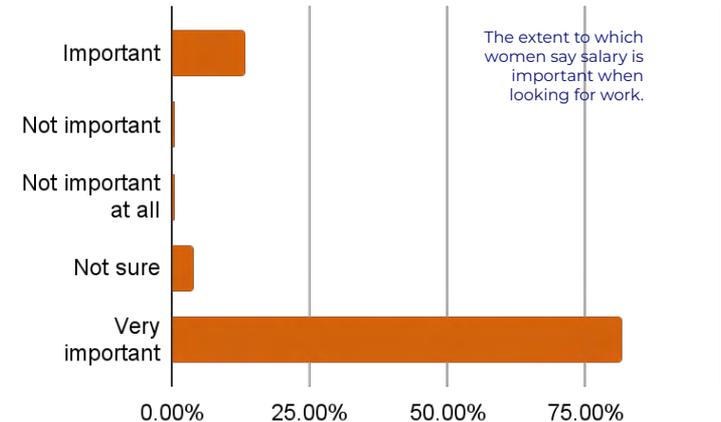
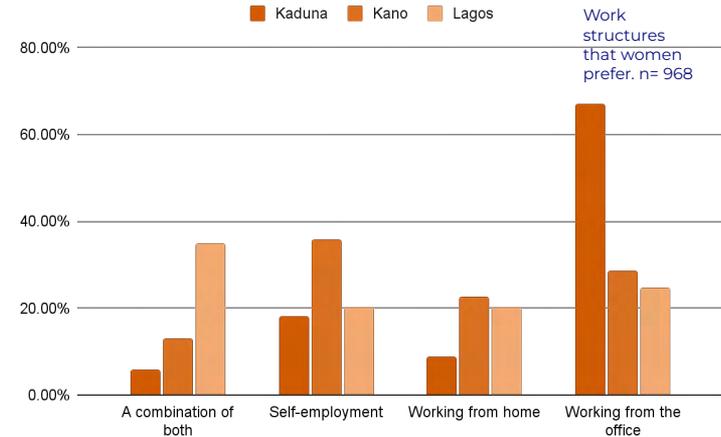
Factors that women consider when looking for work

Resulting from the pandemic, we are learning that flexible work and remuneration are fast becoming the basis of negotiation for women's employment choices due to the the need to manage responsibilities at home. Across the three states, women are excited about the idea of remote work, flexi hours, paid maternity, decent pay and paid leave. They are not excited about working weekends and commission-based kind of work, which they described as 'corporate slavery'. Salary and work flexibility emerged as the two most important factors that women consider when looking for work.

However for women surveyed in Kano, family approval remains the most significant factor that they consider when looking for work. Benefits of formal employment such as HMO and maternity leave have minimal influence and could be insignificant when they are making employment choices.

There is a growing mindshift among younger women in Kano as a significant number of young women are becoming keen on continuing their education and finding decent work. A few of them indicated that they are willing to negotiate issues around relocation and career opportunities with their families despising the push back from their parents or partners. This shift is reflective of the [rising divorce rates](#) among couples in Kano, with women taking preemptive steps in securing a prenuptial agreement before tying the knot to insure their learning and career futures.

An interesting twist among young women surveyed in Kaduna is that a majority would forfeit a private sector job that pays them higher salaries and accept a public sector job that offers them little pay but flexi work hours. Feedback from interviews suggest that women consider jobs in the public sector more secure than those of the private sector. This may be reflective of insecurity concerns which has led to loss of several private sector investments.



Impact of COVID-19 on Women's Work Interest

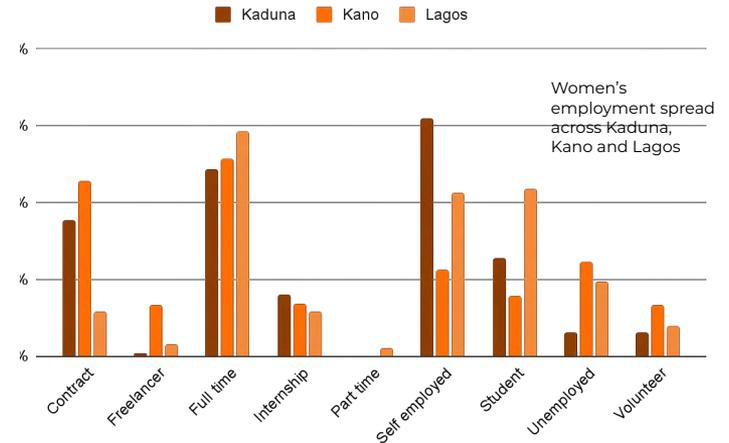
The combined effects of COVID-19, and insecurity may be responsible for a larger share of women seeking formal wage jobs. There is an evidence of heightened precariousness and huge economic losses especially in small businesses where women are largely dominated. For instance, businesses that involve physical contact and touch; such as cooks, masseuses, make up artists, have been exposed to huge economic losses, forcing women to consider searching for stable alternative income sources.

Insights from research suggests that there is likely to be a higher unemployment rate among women in regions where self-employment or entrepreneurship activities are low. For instance, Kano state recorded the highest number of unemployed women (12.23%) as well as the lowest number of women in self-employment (11.29%). Data from 968 women surveyed across Lagos, Kano and Kaduna shows that self-employment and contracts continue to serve as a critical buffer against high unemployment rates across the three states as only 26% of women surveyed across the three states are in full time employment.

Although, women's interest in formal employment is high, the barriers that characterizes the sector limits women's outcome within the sector. **Removing the structural barriers in formal employment is pertinent to improving women's transition into formal employment.** However in the face of limited opportunities in formal employment, creating an enabling business environment and a gender-responsive policy especially for women in the creative sector could be a game changer.



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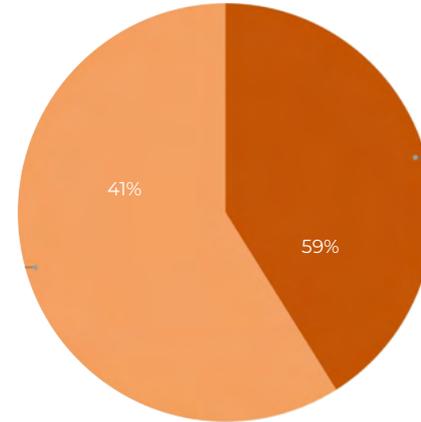
Negotiating the Future of Work for Women

Globally, extant literature establishes that women are less likely to be self-employed and more likely to be employees due to the greater difficulties that they face in accessing property, credit, skills, and networking opportunities and in reconciling business and family life. While structural limitations tend to frustrate women's progress in entrepreneurship spaces, it is also largely responsible for their limited access to and participation in formal employment.

Although plagued by multiple challenges, the informal sector remains the most significant source of employment for women in the country. Of the 56 million registered MSMEs in Nigeria, women account for over 23 million (41%) in terms of ownership. The overwhelming majority of informal economy workers work in vulnerable conditions, characterized by long working hours, low/inconsistent wage, inadequate job and social security, limited access to health insurance, inadequate legal representation and inadequate work tools and environment.

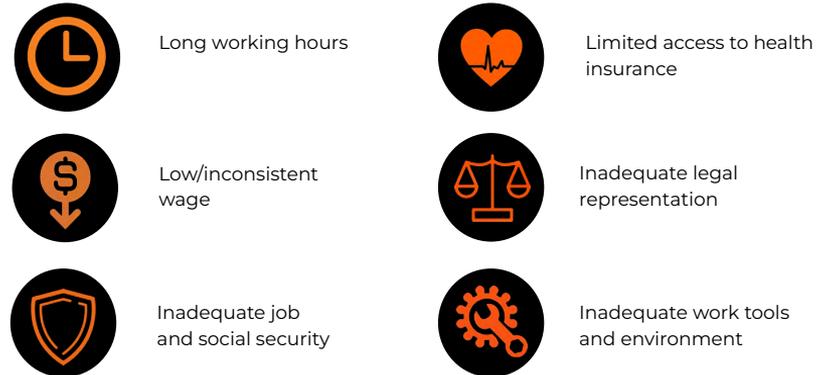
While formal work provides employees a secured wage and benefits which may not apply in an informal setting, [A majority of wage jobs](#) in the country lack the marks of formality. **Only 36.1% of waged workers in the working age population had jobs with a pension or health insurance, and this share was even smaller for young people, at just 8.1% of wage jobs.**

Furthermore, the Covid-19 pandemic significantly aggravated unemployment issues, while also triggering technological disruptions across industries and shaping the realities of work in formal and informal sectors. This trend raises important questions about the impact of these disruptions on women's employment outcomes and the extent to which women are positioned to leverage these emerging opportunities.

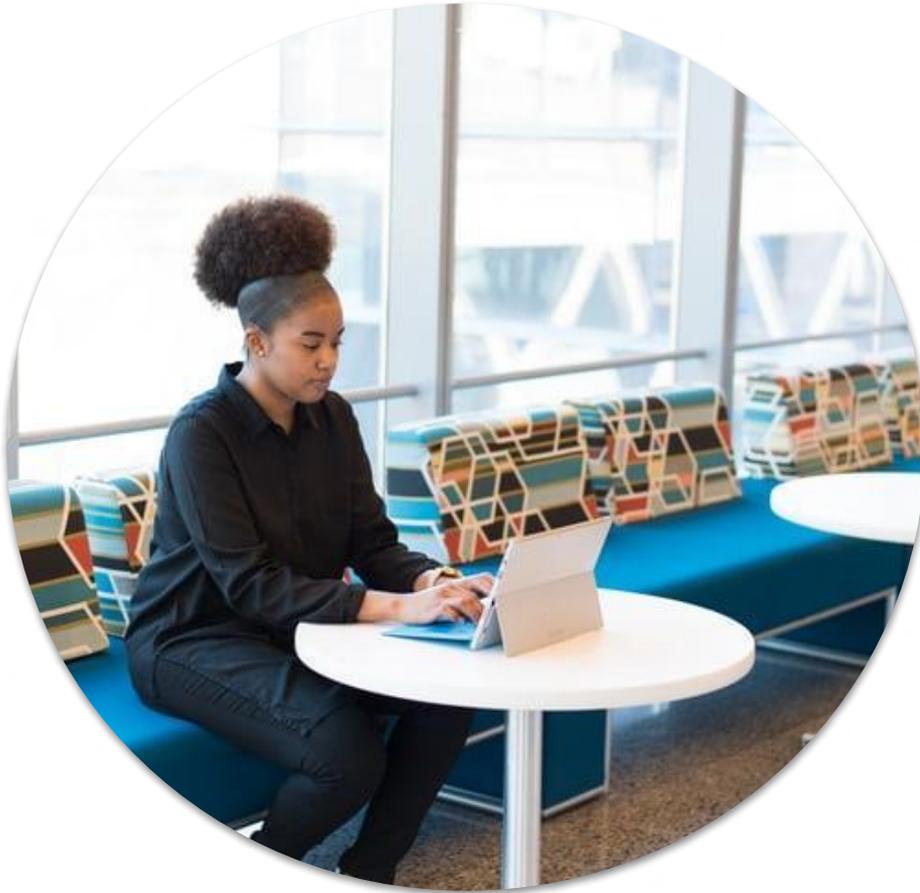


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Challenges Women Face in the Informal Sector







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Technology and women's Transition into Work



In this section we attempt to determine if technology holds any prospect of supporting women's transition into the workplace. Given that COVID-19 has accelerated the adoption of tech in the workplace, what does this mean for women's labour market prospects and how they are socialized into the world of work?

We also tried to understand how women engage online recruitment platforms using surveys and interviews. Here we interrogate if online job listings make it easy or difficult for women to access jobs and the extent to which women have access to technology compared to men.



Focus group session held with some participants in Lagos State

Women and Technology

Globally, some 327 million fewer women than men have smartphones and can access the mobile Internet ([OECD 2018](#)). However, our findings suggest that women's access to smartphone and internet is increasing, as 87% of women surveyed across the three states say that they have regular access to the internet and 91% have access to a smartphone, howbeit, the digital divide remains a gendered one and men are better positioned to maximize emerging opportunities within the digital sector.

A majority of women surveyed are using technology mostly to communicate but not necessarily to automate, as they continue to struggle with deploying tech tools in and out of the workplace. Across the three states, women are leveraging social media platforms especially Facebook and Instagram to expand business opportunities but our findings show that women are not fully maximizing emerging opportunities from the digital revolution. This gap in the use of technology holds serious implications for women's employment especially as we herald the 4th industrial revolution.

There is a growing Fintech start up ecosystem aimed at digitizing informal trade in Nigeria and across the African continent. **With technological disruptions transforming logistics, management and operations of MSMEs, these companies are defying the notions of precarity associated with the informal sector and challenging the idea that the sector needs to be formalized, but rather optimized.** For instance, according to the African Report, Sabi, a fintech startup in 2021 already achieved a milestone of over 150, 000 merchants who recorded \$1.2 billion in sales on its platform.

These emerging digital platforms hold the potential to change the narrative for the country's 41 million MSMEs, of which women account for over 23 million. **While the informal economy remains the most significant sector for women, the digital gap could significantly limit women from maximizing emerging opportunities and further deepen economic marginalization in the future of work.**



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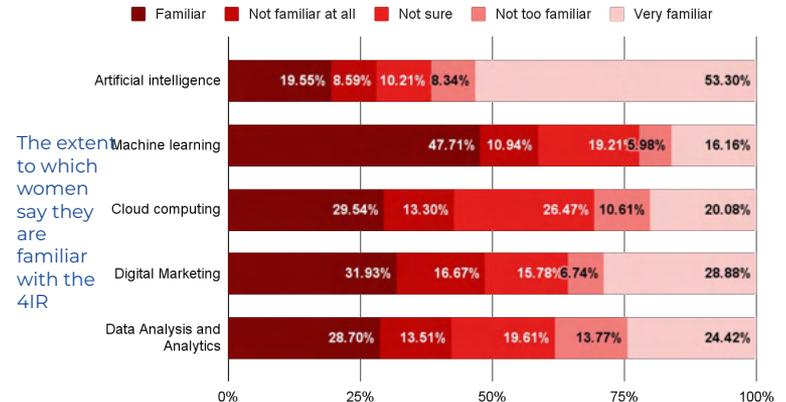
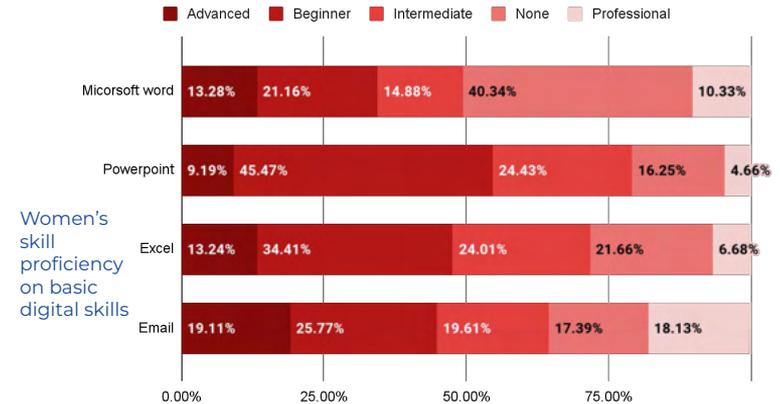
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The number of women in the tech space has increased in the last one year occasioned by interventions focused at improving women's outcome within the sector. It is now common to see women involved in roles like digital marketing, social media management, data analyst, social influencers, full stack developers, etc. Although women in tech are still greatly outnumbered, they are making global impacts in the world of innovation and technology. More women are leading [disruptions](#) in the digital space as seen in organizations like, [MainOne](#), [piggyvest](#), [Paystack](#), [Shuttlers](#), etc. This is building a vibrant ecosystem of women within the space.

However, gaps in digital skills is knocking many women out of the world of work both in the formal and informal sectors. According to NBS, women constitute only 22% of engineering and technology university graduates each year in Nigeria. **Feedback from the interviews suggests significant gaps in education which is largely driven by non-inclusive pedagogical approaches that make STEM courses unattractive to women.**

There is also a latent marginalization in the ways that work-based technology is designed. For instance, some equipment tend to be reflective of gender stereotypes. Spacesuit manufacturing plants, tractors, saws, and other machines were designed for men without consideration for women's physiology while domestic equipment such as vacuum cleaners, food processors were designed to be 'suitable' for women.

For women to be properly positioned to maximize emerging opportunities in formal and informal employment, it is pertinent for women to be socialized to move beyond using technology to communicate but to automate. More importantly, there must be a deliberate approach to design work-based technologies that are gender inclusive.



How women look for work

About 38% of women surveyed across the three states use a combination of all platforms to find work. However, a majority of women surveyed in Kaduna (58%) use Newspapers for job search. Issues around online fraud and insecurity have greatly impaired the trust women have in relation to finding work on the internet. [The recent rape and murder](#) of a young lady who had set out for a job interview which was found online have also made women more cautious of using online platforms. Similarly, they noted that many organizations like schools and health institutions are not committed to updating job vacancies online. This makes them prefer newspapers and a combination of other platforms as complementary tools.

Across the three states, only 4% of the women surveyed use recruitment platforms to search for jobs. **Despite the issues relating to insecurity and online fraud, recruitment is still largely done by word of mouth as employers are looking beyond competence for people that they can trust, this makes referral significant in employment processes and validates young people's claims about the need for 'connection' when looking for a job. Women also tend to feel safe with private information from their inner circle or social networks which could explain their use of social media.** However, the effort of Kaduna state government to route all public sector jobs online may cause a shift in culture of job search among women and could create the necessary conditions for the private sector to follow suit.

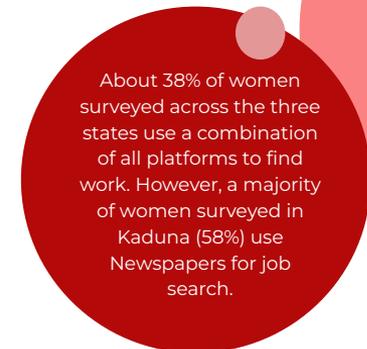
Similarly, women in the creative, digital and services sector will find alternative platforms like social media, Fiverr, Upwork, etc more instrumental to finding jobs than conventional online recruitment platforms due to the kind of jobs they engage in. Women in Lagos use LinkedIn compared to Kano and Kaduna. There is very little evidence to suggest that job listings in Kano are online. Although there is government effort towards the Kano job portal, the awareness around it is very little. However, among social media platforms, women use Whatsapp (18%), compared to other platforms; 6% Facebook (6%), Instagram (0%), LinkedIn (5%), 4% and Twitter (2%).



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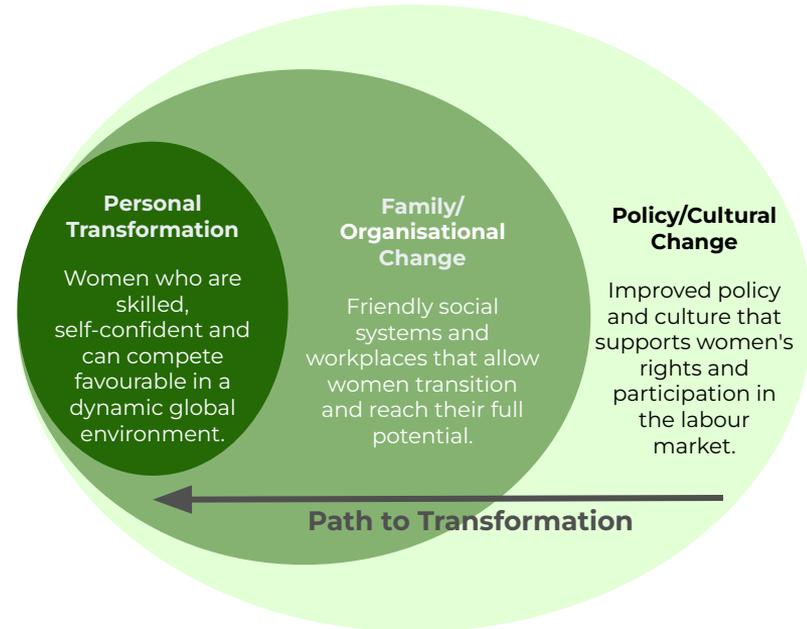
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Towards a Solution to Women's Employment Inclusion

Beyond the moral and legal obligation, lifting gender barriers in Nigeria's labour market has the potential to enhance the quality of women's labour market participation, boost GDP growth, and advance sustainable and inclusive development. While a lot of progress is being made, the country is yet to reach the desired goal of gender equity. As the country remains committed to reducing the gap in labour participation by at least 25% by 2025, [women are still more prone to be unemployed, receive lower wages, concentrate in less dynamic sectors and be under-represented at the top.](#)

As established by the framework of three concentric circles, women's perception, choices and socio-economic outcomes are informed by multifaceted realities that cut across personal, family, organizational and cultural or policy barriers. This analysis suggests that a failure to recognize the multifaceted realities that forms women's lived experiences and the dynamic ways in which women have chosen to manage conflicting priorities is unlikely to achieve sustainable transformation in women's lives.

Transforming women's labour market outcomes is hinged on improved policies and culture that supports women's right and participation in the labour market; friendly social systems and workplaces that allow women transition and reach their full potential so that women are skilled, self-confident and can compete favourable in a dynamic global environment. Interventions and initiatives that focus on dismantling patriarchal systems masked in culture and traditions, implementing policies that secure the education of the girl-child and enacting protective labour laws focused on women would be pivotal to shifting ideologies and shaping the structures that improve women's labour market outcomes in sustainable ways. This approach provides a premise for transforming the structural conditions in organizations and families thereby empowering women to freely engage in the labour market despite their physiological differences.





Policy Strategies to enhance women's inclusion

Remove legal barriers that affect women's participation in the labour market and the full maximization of their labour market potential.

Enact legislation to ensure women's equal access to assets and resources, including credit, land ownership, inheritance.

Promote laws that guarantee equal pay for equal work regardless of gender.

Reform inequitable laws and regulations and ensure legal protection and non-discrimination.

Promote equal women's access to justice and legal aid.

Introduce policies that prevent violence against women and girls in all contexts, including the workplace.

Foster initiatives that encourage women in STEM

Eliminate gender biases and stereotypes from schools' curricula and teachers' education and introduce counselling that challenge gender stereotypes among young women.

Support research initiatives to evaluate and monitor the effect of digitisation on women, especially in developing countries.

Implement vocational training and skills development in emerging fields and support women and girls' enrollment.

Encourage scholarships, mentorship and coaching programmes to attract women to STEM careers and other traditionally male-dominated fields.

Design public campaigns that challenge gender stereotypes in certain fields.

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Strategies to lift Family and Organizational Barriers:

Investment in care Economy to balance the burden of care and domestic work on women in order to enhance the quantity and quality of labour market participation:

Statewide Investment in the provision of affordable and dependable care services including childcare, people with disabilities and the elderly.

Invest in technology, infrastructure and public services that contributes to balance the burden of domestic work; e.g, stable electricity, access to clean and safe drinking water, structured market systems, effective waste management systems etc.

Foster more supportive social norms by designing public campaigns through LCDAs, the Media, religious and educational institutions to orientate men and women about paid and unpaid work and the impact of women alone bearing unpaid care work on their mental health and economic contribution to the family and the society at large.

Improve working conditions and promote work-life balance to enhance women's labour market participation and quicker career growth trajectory:

Drive favourable and inclusive organizational culture change through the commitment of female led organizations and female in management to design workspaces, norms, processes and tools in ways that prioritizes women

Foster family friendly policies; paid maternity, paternity and parental leave regimes that promote co-responsibility between mothers, fathers and the State.

Enact fiscal incentives for companies to implement family-friendly policies and flexible working arrangements for women and men.

Organisations should prioritise and entrench objective-based performance systems to reduce gender discrimination in work places.



Strategies to lift Personal Barriers:

Develop Soft skills training with modules that are women-focused and locally relevant

Expand programs that help women gain confidence to overcome cultural stereotypes. Negotiation skills, peacebuilding, conflict resolution, sexual and reproductive health, leadership skills, and entrepreneurial skills.

Initiatives should include interventions that help women appreciate the value of household management as transferable useful for the world of work.

Interventions should be deliberate about empowering women to overcome socio-cultural bias associated with informal employment.

Support women in building confidence to set well-defined career goals and better work-ethic that fosters progress and development.

Strengthen the enforcement of sexual and reproductive health rights of women in families and the workplace.

Scale interventions that aim at supporting women's sexual and reproductive health rights.

Intensify advocacy on women's rights to contraceptives, child spacing, marriage and most importantly their bodies.

Develop strong enforcement mechanisms that promotes zero tolerance for any form of discrimination against women based on their physiology including family barriers that restricts their right to make decision about their bodies, (access to contraceptives, child spacing, early/child marriage as well as stigma or loss of job opportunities based on pregnancy, childbirth, postpartum PTSD, etc.)

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Strategies to lift Personal Barriers (Cont'd):

Invest in human capital development to bridge the education and skills gap.

Provide scholarship targeted at women for continuous learning and female centered mentorship opportunities.

Scholarships interventions for girls should be incentivized, particularly in rural areas where poverty is rife.

To bridge socialization gaps in education, in more traditional landscapes, deploying an integrated approach that allows stakeholders co-create curriculum and pedagogy should be emphasized whether in skills development, soft skills development, vocational skills and digital skills programs.

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Young
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