

## RURAL WOMEN'S VOCATIONAL TRAINING PARTICIPATION FOR SUSTAINABLE POVERTY REDUCTION

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### **Abstract**

*Vocational training programmes hold great potential to empower rural women and can play a vital role in fostering sustainable poverty alleviation. It is against this backdrop that this study investigates the participation of rural women in vocational training programmes for sustainable poverty alleviation in Moro Local Government Area of Kwara State, Nigeria. The study has three specific objectives which are to examine rural women's participation, willingness to participate in vocational training willingness to be self-employed after the seminar. The study employed a mixed-method design, utilizing both quantitative and qualitative approaches. The population of the study was infinite. The adaptive sampling technique was used to select a sample of 121 rural women from five districts within Moro LGA. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire and focus group discussions. The instruments were duly validated. The questionnaire has a Cronbach reliability coefficient of 0.82. Mean and standard deviation were used to analyse the quantitative data while thematic analysis was employed for the qualitative data of the study. The findings reveal that the extent of rural women's participation in vocational training programmes is relatively low (mean = 1.48), rural women have a strong willingness to participate in vocational training programmes after the seminar. The study concludes that systemic barriers, not a lack of interest, are responsible for the current low participation of rural women in vocational training. The study recommends among others that governmental and non-governmental organizations should establish community-based vocational hubs with flexible, low-cost training modules tailored to rural women's schedules and socioeconomic conditions.*

**Keywords:** Rural women, vocational training, poverty reduction, sustainable development, Nigeria.

### **Introduction**

Skills and expertise serve as the lifeblood of economic advancement and societal progression across nations. A vocational education and training programme is a structured learning initiative designed to equip individuals with practical skills and hands-on experience tailored to specific trades,

occupations, or careers, empowering participants to enter the workforce with confidence and competence in their chosen field. Vocational Education and Training (VET), a cornerstone of development especially in industrialized countries, has profoundly bolstered their workforce by imparting industry-relevant proficiencies. Beyond merely addressing labour market demands, VET facilitates the seamless integration of diverse social demographics into the fabric of society. Vocational training programs are indispensable pillars of national advancement. With a well-structured policy framework, these initiatives possess the potential to yield unparalleled contributions toward fostering a more enduring and self-reliant global society. They are instrumental in cultivating employment avenues capable of accommodating the burgeoning needs of an ever-expanding global populace. However, such aspirations hinge on the active engagement of women, whose participation is pivotal to unlocking the transformative potential of these programmes.

When vocational Education and Training are aligned with the needs of the labour market, it can greatly contribute to the economic empowerment of women, which is essential for improving their status. Women have the potential to achieve sustainable development and enhance their quality of life through active participation in vocational programmes. The success of a country depends on the status and improvement of its women, not only because they represent nearly half of the population but also because they positively influence the progress of the entire population (Garces, 2019). A growing body of research indicates that women can significantly impact economic growth (Kelley et al., 2021; Hechevarría et al., 2022) and entrepreneurial activity (Noguera et al., 2021); they can boost GDP and generate new employment (Ayogu & Agu, 2020), both which favourably affect social exclusion and poverty reduction (Rae, 2021).

The empowerment of rural women through vocational education and training is a crucial element in the fight against poverty and the promotion of sustainable development. As the backbone of agricultural production and household management, rural women in Nigeria face significant socio-economic challenges that limit their potential and contributions to community development. In the Moro Local Government Area of Kwara State, where traditional gender roles often dictate economic participation, the need for targeted vocational training programmes has never been more pressing. By equipping women with skills relevant to the labour market, we can uplift individual households and stimulate broader economic growth and social progress (Adediran & Ogunleye, 2021).

Vocational education and training (VET) have proven to be effective tools for enhancing human capital and fostering economic resilience, particularly in rural contexts. Studies show that women who participate in vocational training are more likely to secure stable employment and improve their income levels, thus contributing to their families' well-being and fostering community development (Akinyemi et al., 2022). In the context of Moro, where agricultural practices dominate, vocational training in areas such as agro-processing, tailoring, and handicrafts can significantly enhance women's skills, enabling them to adapt to changing market demands and create sustainable livelihoods (Ogunyemi & Ibrahim, 2023). However, despite the evident benefits, participation rates among rural women in such programmes remain alarmingly low, highlighting the need for an in-depth investigation into the barriers they face.

Achieving sustainable development may be impossible without the active involvement of women in all spheres, including family, society, and the economy. Women's participation is essential for their

development (Reshadat et al., 2021). Empowering women enhances their decision-making capabilities and overall well-being (Rekha, 2020). The lifestyles of women in rural areas differ significantly from those of their urban counterparts, reflecting unique challenges and opportunities. The Global Conference on Women Empowerment (1988) underscored that empowerment is the most effective means of making women "partners in development." Empowerment allows women to assert their rights and claim their personal space within patriarchal societies (Malathi, 2023). Moreover, the issue of poverty among women has emerged as a critical concern, necessitating targeted interventions to address the systemic barriers they face.

In many developing countries, women face lower levels of economic and social empowerment, reduced investment in human capital, and greater restrictions on access to labour markets compared to their counterparts in developed nations. A rural woman typically experiences several distinct stages in her life. Before marriage, she is often seen primarily as a daughter; after marriage, she transitions into the role of a dependent housewife; and subsequently, she becomes a dependent mother, primarily responsible for household tasks such as cooking, child-rearing, and caring for her husband and other family members (Yasmin & Ikemoto, 2020).

Traditionally, women have been denied equal rights in matters of marriage, divorce, maintenance, and inheritance. They experience significant disadvantages in education, independence, asset control, and household decision-making (Sultana & Hossen, 2021). However, there is a growing awareness among rural women regarding their life choices, including their children's education, health, and financial well-being. Increasingly, rural women are becoming effective contributors to income generation and household management, actively working to improve their lifestyles and combat poverty. The past few decades have witnessed a massive increase in the number of different intervention programmes to eradicate poverty some of which typically targeted women in rural areas of Nigeria. Some of these interventions include family support programmes, better lives for rural women, youth empowerment schemes, and national poverty eradication programmes, among others (Saba, *et al*, 2020). These interventions have prioritized skills development as a crucial component for enhancing rural productivity, employability, and income-earning opportunities, while also promoting food security and environmentally sustainable rural development. Recent studies affirm that skill development is vital for improving rural productivity and driving economic growth (Kehinde & Adewuyi, 2021). Education and training are recognized as powerful tools in the fight against poverty and hunger. However, despite these efforts, the impact on the lives of rural women in Nigeria has been minimal(Saba, *et al*, 2020).

### **Theoretical Review**

The Social-democratic theory was used to underpin this study. The theory was advanced based on experiences in Britain in the 1920s. The theory assumes that poverty is a class-based concept. The Social-Democratic Theory, chiefly advanced by Karl Polanyi in 1944 through his seminal work *The Great Transformation*, presents a framework rooted in the belief that market forces alone cannot ensure social equity or protect the vulnerable from economic exploitation. Polanyi critiqued the self-regulating market system and argued that unfettered capitalism inevitably leads to social dislocation and deepened inequality. The theory champions the role of the state in correcting market imbalances

by instituting redistributive policies, public welfare systems, and labour protections to ensure a more equitable society. In relation to poverty, the Social-Democratic Theory underscores that poverty is not merely a result of individual failure but a structural issue embedded within capitalist systems. Therefore, it posits that social safety nets, access to education, healthcare, and employment policies that promote inclusion are essential tools in alleviating poverty and ensuring social cohesion. Elimination of poverty requires distributive justice to ensure that goods and services produced are equitably distributed to ensure that all classes of society are fairly involved in the enjoyment of these goods and services. The researchers found that the social democratic theory of poverty makes a lot of sense and is very relevant to this particular study of the impoverished rural communities of Moro Local Government Area of Kwara State. Addressing women's participation in vocational training requires some measures to be taken. Such measures as the creation of awareness through seminars.

### **Concept of Vocational Educational Training**

Vocational Educational Training (VET) refers to structured educational programs specifically designed to equip learners with practical skills, technical knowledge, and competencies that are directly related to specific trades, occupations, or careers in various sectors of the economy. Unlike general academic education, VET focuses on hands-on training and the application of knowledge to real-world work environments, making it a key pathway for workforce readiness and sustainable development (European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP, 2020). According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2015), vocational education plays a crucial role in addressing the skills gap in many developing countries, especially among disadvantaged populations. VET not only helps individuals secure employment but also enhances productivity, drives innovation, and promotes social inclusion.

### **Creation of Awareness through Seminars on Rural Women's Participation in Vocational Training**

Creating awareness refers to the process of informing and educating individuals or communities about a particular issue, topic, or cause to increase their understanding, knowledge, and consciousness about it. The aim is to make people more aware of the existence, importance, and potential impact of certain issues, such as social, environmental, health-related, or political matters. This awareness-building process often involves disseminating information through various channels, such as media, educational programs, campaigns, social media, and community outreach. The intention is to provoke thought, stimulate conversations, and motivate people to act or make informed decisions related to the specific issue at hand. Ultimately, the purpose of creating awareness is to bring about positive change, whether it be in individual behaviours, societal attitudes, or policies, by ensuring that people have the information they need to make informed choices and contribute to the betterment of the community or the world at large.

Raising awareness of an issue is often the first step in catalyzing change. Awareness messages provide a general background and can be used to reinforce the importance of informed action and behavioural change (George & Branchini, 2017). A historic document, a landmark event, an

engaging or powerful champion, and the persistence of many dedicated advocates can direct attention to an issue, raising both awareness and resources. A recent systematic review of efforts to raise awareness of TVET participation found that efforts that pursued multi-level, stakeholder and sectoral pathways were likely to build synergies that sustain the promotion of participation over the long term (Saba, Mamman, Saba, & Mustapha, 2020).

Self-employment refers to a working arrangement where an individual operates a business or provides services on their own, rather than being employed by an employer. In this case, the individual is both the employer and the employee. Self-employed individuals are often referred to as freelancers, independent contractors, sole proprietors, or entrepreneurs. Encouraging self-employment among rural women for sustainable economic empowerment involves addressing various factors such as education, skills training, access to resources, and creating a supportive environment.

Education plays a crucial role in empowering women. According to the World Bank, investing in girls' education has a multiplier effect on development, contributing to economic growth and poverty reduction (World Bank, 2018). Providing vocational and entrepreneurial training can enhance women's skills and equip them for self-employment. A study by Duflo, et al. (2012) found that vocational training programs can have positive effects on employment and income. Building a supportive community and network for women entrepreneurs can provide mentorship and shared resources. Community-based initiatives can be crucial in fostering entrepreneurship (Duflo, et al., 2012). Advocacy for gender-inclusive policies is essential. Empowering women requires addressing legal and social barriers. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 5 emphasizes gender equality and women's empowerment as a key aspect of sustainable development (UN, 2021).

### **Self-Employment among Rural Women for Sustainable Economic Empowerment**

Self-employment constitutes about 45 per cent of women's employment globally (International Labour Organization (ILO), 2020) and is an important source of livelihood for women in low-income households in developing countries across Latin America, Asia, and Africa. While self-employed workers form a heterogeneous group, ranging from street vendors and food-stall operators to home producers of goods like garments, bags, and baskets, self-employment, particularly home-based production, remains a precarious form of informal work. The role of vocational training in enhancing women's empowerment is also evident in the work of Gautam (2023), who emphasized that vocational training enables women to achieve financial independence and decision-making power within their families, contributing to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 5.

In light of the significance of self-employment in developing countries, identifying constraints and impediments that self-employed workers face in transforming into viable small entrepreneurs has assumed importance for development policy. An important constraint that is identified is the lack of access to credit. The promotion by the World Bank in the 1990s of the "financial systems approach" emphasizing financial viability (Grossman, 2018), followed by the adoption of "financial inclusion" as a developmental priority (and not simply a poverty alleviation strategy), most significantly after the Great Financial Crisis (World Bank, 2008), neoliberal policy prescriptions have focused on buttressing access to credit as the path to support and promote self-employment. Instead of state-

funded development-oriented policies that promote decent and stable wage employment, financial inclusion schemes such as microfinance have been held up as a kind of *deus-ex-machina* that would enable women to set up microenterprises that harness their entrepreneurial and productive capacities (dos Santos & Kvangraven 2017). However, the lack of clear evidence for the transformative effects of microfinance on poverty reduction or improvement in the standard of living (Karlan & Zinman, 2015) suggests that the success of microenterprises and self-employment strategies, in general, are not related simply to access to credit. This underscores the need to understand the key constraints that impede the mobilization of the productive capacities of women in low-income households in developing countries.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Women are a crucial force for change and serve as the backbone of rural development. Their involvement is essential for meaningful progress that can lead to national development. As Edu and Edu (2021) emphasize, any development plan that excludes women overlooks a vital component of the production process. Unfortunately, women often remain untapped resources that could significantly enhance the rural economy, boost growth rates, and increase food production. Many women are trapped in poverty due to limited resources, which contributes to malnutrition and poor health outcomes. The continued prevalence of poverty among women poses severe consequences for society, as it can lead to widespread social and economic instability. Women often have different training needs than men since they are more likely to work as contributing family workers, subsistence farmers, home-based micro-entrepreneurs, or low-paid seasonal labourers, in addition to handling their domestic work and care responsibilities.

In Nigeria, women from various communities are responding to their impoverished circumstances in diverse ways. For instance, in many northern regions where poverty is particularly acute, women often resort to petty trading, gathering firewood, or even begging to support their families (Usman, 2015). These strategies, while survival mechanisms highlight the urgent need for targeted interventions that empower women and address the root causes of their economic challenges. Despite the recognized potential of vocational training programmes to empower rural women and facilitate sustainable poverty alleviation, participation rates among women in Moro Local Government Area of Kwara State remain alarmingly low. This discrepancy raises critical questions about the underlying social, economic, and personal barriers that inhibit women's engagement in these programmes. While numerous studies have documented the benefits of vocational training for economic empowerment, there is a notable lack of comprehensive research specifically addressing this unique issue faced by rural women. Moreover, existing literature overlooks the intersectionality of gender, culture, and economic status, which plays a vital role in shaping women's access to vocational training opportunities.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The overarching objective of this study is to assess rural women's participation in vocational training programmes for sustainable poverty reduction in Kwara State. The specific objectives are to:

1. examine the extent of rural women's participation in vocational training programmes for sustainable poverty reduction in Kwara State.
2. determine the perception of rural women after the VET seminar in terms of willingness to participate in vocational training programmes for sustainable poverty reduction.
3. ascertain the willingness to be self-employed after the VET seminar among rural women for sustainable poverty reduction.

## **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the extent of rural women's participation in vocational training programmes for sustainable poverty reduction in Moro Local Government Area of Kwara State as perceived rural women?
2. What is the perception of rural women after the VET seminar in terms of willingness to participate in vocational training programmes for sustainable poverty reduction?
3. What is the perception of rural women after the VET seminar in terms of willingness to be self-employed for sustainable poverty reduction?

## **Methodology**

The study adopted an explanatory mixed-method research design. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used. This design helps the researchers triangulate the data gathered. The researchers were able to confirm and explain the information from the two methods. The population of the study comprises rural women in Moro Local Government Area of Kwara State. The population of the study was infinite. A total sample of 121 women was selected randomly from the population of the study. The breakdown of the sample according to the districts is as follows: Lanwa – 16, Ejidongari – 21, Oloru – 23, Malete – 32 and Ipaye – 29. The sample was selected using adaptive sampling technique. The instrument used for quantitative data collection was the Rural Women Participation in Vocational Training Questionnaire (RWPVTQ) designed by the researchers. The questionnaire consists of 30 items constructed after an extensive review of the literature. The questionnaire was administered before the seminar sessions. The items of the questionnaire were placed on Very High Extent (VHE), High Extent (HE), Low Extent (LE), and Very Low Extent (VLE). The items were scored using 4, 3, 2, and 1, respectively. The instrument used to gather qualitative data was a focus group discussion. The focus group discussion guide was designed by the researchers and is made up of nine open-ended questions. The instruments were duly validated by three experts. The questionnaire has the following Cronbach Alpha reliability coefficient for the three sections: Section A = 0.84, Section B = 0.81, Section C = 0.78, and 0.82 for the whole questionnaire. A total of 121 copies of RWPVTQ were administered and 118 were retrieved, representing a 98% return rate. The data collected through the questionnaire were analyzed using mean and standard deviation. The following boundary limits were used for item options of research the questionnaire: Very High Extent (3.25-4.00), High Extent (2.50-3.24), Low Extent (1.75 - 2.49), and Not Needed (1.00-1.74). The hypothesis was rejected when the observed p-value was less than the fixed p-value of 0.05. Seminars

were organized for the participants after collecting the quantitative data. The seminars were to train the participants on the benefits of vocational training and strategies for improving their participation. The quantitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis.

## Results

Research Question One: What is the extent of rural women's participation in vocational training programmes for sustainable poverty reduction in Moro Local Government Area of Kwara State as perceived rural women?

**Table 1: Mean of the extent of rural women's participation in vocational training programmes**

S/N	Item Statement	X	Remark
1	I have participated in vocational training programmes in the past.	0.81	Very Low Extent
2	The vocational training programmes offered are easily accessible to me.	1.95	Low Extent
3	I feel that the skills learned from vocational training programmes are useful.	1.30	Very Low Extent
4	The vocational training programmes are held at convenient times for me.	1.15	Very Low Extent
5	I am aware of the available vocational training programmes in my area.	1.01	Very Low Extent
6	There are financial support options available for women participating in training.	1.40	Very Low Extent
7	My family supports my participation in vocational training programmes.	1.10	Very Low Extent
8	I have the necessary resources (transport, materials) to attend the training.	1.05	Very Low Extent
9	I believe that vocational training can help reduce poverty in my community.	1.20	Very Low Extent
10	The training programmes address the specific needs of women in my community.	2.10	Low Extent
<b>Weighted Mean</b>		<b>1.48</b>	<b>Very Low Extent</b>

Table 1 reveals that all the items indicate a generally low level of participation and negative perceptions regarding the skills that can be acquired in vocational training programmes. This suggests that despite the potential of vocational training for personal and community development, rural women do not believe in it. The vocational training programmes offered are easily accessible to me (mean = 1.95), I feel that the skills learned from vocational training programmes are useful (mean = 1.30), The vocational training programmes are held at convenient times for me (mean = 1.15), I am aware of the available vocational training programmes in my area (mean = 1.01), there are financial



support options available for women participating in training (mean = 1.40), and the indicated that family supports my participation in vocational training programmes (mean = 1.10). These results suggest a perceived need for more awareness and community support.

Research Question Two: What is the position of rural women after the VET seminar in terms of willingness to participate in vocational training programmes for sustainable poverty reduction?

For research question two, five themes were identified from the responses of rural women after the seminar in terms of willingness to participate in vocational training programmes for sustainable poverty reduction.

#### *Empowerment and Self-Efficacy*

Many participants expressed a newfound sense of empowerment after the seminar. They reported feeling more confident in their abilities to pursue vocational training. The participants highlighted that acquiring new skills would enable them to take charge of their financial futures, thus reducing dependency on others. *I never thought I could learn new skills, but now I believe I can do anything* P45," *"After listening to the speakers, I feel strong enough to start my own business* P102". This theme underscores the importance of self-efficacy in motivating women to engage in training programmes.

#### *Recognition of Economic Opportunities*

The seminar highlighted various economic opportunities that vocational training could unlock. Participants shared their perceptions of how specific skills learned could directly enhance their income-generating potential. *"Learning skills like tailoring can help me earn more money for my family."* P112. *"I see now that if I learn to bake, I can sell goods at the market."* P76. This theme reflects a shift in mindset where women began to see vocational training not just as an educational pursuit but as a viable pathway to improved economic status and sustainable poverty reduction.

#### *Community Support and Networking*

A recurring theme was the importance of community and peer support in decision-making about vocational training. Women noted the value of sharing experiences with others who attended the seminar, fostering a sense of collective motivation. *"I want to join a group where we can learn together; it makes me feel less alone."* P64. *"Seeing my friends excited about the training motivates me even more."* P37. This theme emphasizes that social networks play a crucial role in encouraging participation and creating a supportive environment for women to pursue vocational training.

#### *Awareness of Sustainable Practices*

The seminar also focused on sustainable practices relevant to their local contexts, which resonated with many participants. Women expressed a desire to learn skills that not only improved their economic situation but also contributed to environmental sustainability. *"I want to learn how to farm in a way that protects our land for future generations."* P81. This theme illustrates an awareness of the interconnectedness of economic empowerment and sustainable living, motivating women to engage in training that aligns with these values.

#### *Barriers and Challenges*

While many women showed enthusiasm for vocational training, they also articulated concerns about potential barriers. Issues such as time constraints, family responsibilities, and financial limitations were frequently mentioned. *"I want to learn, but I have to take care of my children; I worry about finding time."* P23. *"The cost of training feels too high for my family right now."* P61. This theme highlights the need for programs that address these challenges, ensuring that training is accessible and accommodating to rural women's unique circumstances.

Research Question Three: What is the position of rural women after the VET seminar in terms of willingness to be self-employed for sustainable poverty reduction?

For research question three, four themes were identified from the responses of rural women after the VET seminar in terms of willingness to be self-employed for Sustainable Poverty Reduction.

#### *Empowerment and Confidence*

Many participants expressed that they have found confidence in their ability to pursue self-employment. The seminar seemed to have instilled a belief that they could take control of their financial futures. *"I never thought I could start my own business, but now I feel like I have the skills and courage to try."* P8. *"The stories of other women who succeeded inspired me. If they can do it, so can I."* P41. This theme highlights how the seminar helped participants overcome self-doubt and recognize their potential, which is a critical step toward self-employment.

#### *Awareness of Opportunities*

The seminar broadened participants' understanding of the opportunities available to them in their local contexts. Many women mentioned that they were previously unaware of the resources and markets they could tap into. *"I didn't know there were so many ways to make money from farming or crafts."* P6. *"The session on identifying local market needs opened my eyes to what people in my village want."* P12. This theme underscores the importance of knowledge-sharing in helping rural women identify viable self-employment opportunities.

#### *Desire for Skill Development*

Many women expressed a strong desire for further training and skill development. While the seminar provided a good starting point, participants felt they needed more hands-on experience and technical knowledge. P27 said, *"I learned a lot, but I still need to practice how to make better products to sell."* Also, Participant 80 stated that: *"If there were more workshops like this, I could learn how to manage money better."* This theme highlights the need for continuous capacity-building initiatives to support rural women in their entrepreneurial journeys.

#### *Commitment to Community Impact*

A significant number of participants expressed a desire to not only improve their own lives but also contribute to the well-being of their communities. They saw self-employment as a way to create jobs and reduce poverty locally. *"If my business grows, I can hire other women in the village."* P19. *"I want to teach other women what I've learned so we can all succeed together."* P32. This theme demonstrates the potential ripple effect of empowering rural women, as their success can lead to broader community development.

The seminar had a profound impact on the perceptions of rural women regarding self-employment. While it instilled confidence and awareness of opportunities, challenges such as access to resources and societal norms remain significant barriers. The participants' willingness to learn and their commitment to community impact suggests that with the right support systems, self-employment can be a sustainable strategy for poverty reduction.

## **Discussion**

The study found that rural women's participation in vocational training programmes is very low (mean = 1.48). This finding indicates a low mean score of 1.48 for rural women's participation in vocational training programmes which highlights a significant gap in efforts toward women's empowerment and poverty alleviation in rural Nigeria. This low participation rate is reflective of systemic barriers that hinder women's access to vocational education, which is crucial for enhancing their socio-economic status. This finding corroborates Nnamchi et al. (2024) who emphasized that vocational skills development is pivotal for the socio-economic well-being of rural women in Enugu State, Nigeria. However, the study notes that despite the availability of such programmes, participation remains low due to factors such as limited awareness, cultural constraints, and inadequate support systems. The finding is in line with the findings of Badaru and Adedoyin (2020) who found that in Northwest Nigeria, while there is a strong engagement in vocational training among women, significant barriers persist. These include high training costs, cultural perceptions that devalue women's participation in vocational activities, and accessibility issues related to the location and scheduling of training programmes.

The study also revealed that rural women have a strong willingness to participate in vocational training programmes after the seminar because they believe that participation in vocational training would lead to sustainable poverty reduction through empowerment and self-efficacy, recognition of economic opportunities, and community support and networking. The observed strong inclination among rural women to participate in vocational training programs following sensitization seminars underscores a shift towards self-empowerment and economic resilience. This enthusiasm is rooted in the recognition that such training can lead to sustainable poverty reduction through enhanced self-efficacy, identification of economic opportunities, and strengthened community networks. This finding supports the earlier finding of Badaru and Adedoyin (2020) who highlighted that vocational skill acquisition among women in Northwest Nigeria significantly promotes self-employment and entrepreneurship. Their study indicates that women engaged in vocational training, particularly in tailoring and culinary arts, exhibit increased economic participation despite facing barriers such as high training costs and cultural perceptions.

The study revealed that the seminar had caused a shift in the perceptions of rural women regarding their willingness to be self-employed for sustainable poverty reduction. The VET seminar sparked a real shift in how women viewed the idea of learning new skills and starting their small businesses. This new sense of confidence will play a big part in reducing poverty in the long term, by boosting belief in their abilities, helping them see new ways to earn, and building stronger support systems in their communities. This outcome reflects what the United Nations Office for Sustainable Development (2024) highlighted: that skill-based training can be life-changing for women who did

not go through regular schooling. These programmes give them a chance to take part in local economies in meaningful ways. Viewpoint Nigeria (2020) also reported similar success through the “Engaging Women as Agents of Change Against VAW and Poverty in Nigeria” project. This initiative gave rural women hands-on training in useful trades, helping them gain not just income, but respect and purpose. These women moved from being overlooked to becoming strong forces in their homes and communities, building a better future through skills and self-worth. These programs not only provide skills but also foster community support and networking, essential components for sustainable self-employment.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the findings of the study, the low level of rural women participation suggests that many rural women are still excluded from opportunities that could empower them economically and socially. The implication is that without strategic interventions to boost access, awareness, and support for vocational training, the cycle of poverty among rural women may persist. The finding that rural women developed a positive stance toward vocational training after the VET seminar carries strong implications for future poverty reduction efforts. Their increased willingness to participate signals a shift in mindset, one that opens the door to greater engagement, skill development, and long-term economic empowerment. The finding that rural women expressed a positive attitude toward self-employment after the VET seminar highlights a promising shift toward sustainable poverty reduction. Their increased willingness to pursue self-employment reflects a growing confidence in their ability to create income opportunities and break free from economic dependence. This shift in mindset implies that with the right exposure and encouragement, rural women can become proactive agents of change in their own lives and communities.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, in partnership with the National Orientation Agency (NOA), should initiate targeted sensitization seminars across rural communities to raise awareness about the value of vocational training for sustainable poverty reduction. These seminars should be designed to educate, motivate, and address cultural or informational barriers that hinder women's participation.
2. Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, in collaboration with the National Directorate of Employment (NDE), should build on the positive response of rural women by expanding access to vocational training opportunities. Since the VET seminar has already increased their willingness to participate, timely follow-up with well-organized and accessible training programmes is essential.
3. Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, in collaboration with the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN), should capitalize on the positive shift in rural women's willingness to pursue self-employment by providing structured support systems. This should include post-seminar follow-up programmes such as business development training, mentorship, start-up grants, and simplified access to microcredit.

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