

Women and the Informal Sector in Nigeria: Implications for Development

Tinuke. M. Fapohunda
Department of Industrial Relations and Public Administration
Lagos State University Ojo, Nigeria
e-mail : tkfap@yahoo.com
Tel : 234- 8037039273

Abstract

The paper explains the role of women in the informal sector in Nigeria, the constraints of women in the sector, and how the sector can be upgraded and progressively integrated into the development mainstream. Employment opportunities in the formal sector are often denied women because of family responsibilities, lack of skills, social and cultural barriers; the informal sector is often the only possibility for women to get access to employment and to earn an income. Consequently women dominate the informal sector. Policies and developments affecting the informal economy thus have a distinctly gendered effect. The informal sector has a high labour-absorption capacity and there is the need to increase the level of stimulation of employment opportunities.

This paper is based on a desk and literature review, a web-based research and a field survey using 150 women in the Mushin, Agege and Lagos Island Areas of Lagos Nigeria.

The paper concludes that although the informal sector has its challenges especially for women, such as inaccessibility of credit, the women's role in the informal finance sector is significant. Partnerships must be built with the emerging associations of women to create an enabling environment which should include making credit available to women at affordable rates, with the private sector assisting government efforts to get credit to women. A more enlightened, more participatory, and more equitable form of intervention that provides a more appropriate and flexible regulatory framework is needed.

Keywords: women, informal sector, development

I. Introduction

Nigeria is a country in West Africa sharing land borders with the Republic of Benin in the West, Chad and Cameroon in the east, and Niger in the North. Nigeria is the most populous country in sub-Saharan Africa and is also termed the ninth most populous country in the world. According to the 2006 National Census, Nigeria has a population of about 150 million almost 50% of which are women. The Federal Office of Statistics (2006) reports that 70% of this women population, reside and work in the rural areas. This implies that too many Nigerian women largely live in poverty, lacking access to basic education, decent nutrition, adequate health and social services which the development process is supposed to provide. The World Development Indicators puts the population growth for the country (annual %) at 2.4 while the GNI (current US\$) is 100.7 billion. The GNI per capita, atlas method (current US\$) is 620.00. Nigeria is a country endowed with abundant natural and material resources. In the last two decades however, a consciousness has been developing nationally that unless something is done to empower women, as an interest group, and to combat poverty amongst them by creating incomes and wealth, the entire development of the country stands mortgaged. The increasing visibility of women is partly an outcome of social and political movements that have championed women's rights. Feminist scholars have equally been in the forefront in making women's contribution to the political economy visible through related scholarship and research. Counting women into the big-picture, therefore, is a fundamental first-step in recognising their role in socio-economic structures. Along with women's increasing visibility, it is necessary to analyse the constraints and conditions within which women contribute to the economy. Employment opportunities available to women need to realise their potential capabilities. In other words, it is imperative that women have access to occupations that are non-segregated. Similarly the quality of women's employment - which is usually linked to the forms of employment -also has a bearing on women's wellbeing. High incidence of women's participation in the informal sector, part-time work, own-account work, and non-unionised labour is established, and these activities have a high probability of being low-quality employment. Women also need to realise their capabilities, and this is determined by a variety of socio-economic and political-economic factors. Clearly the types, forms and quality of employment factor into the socio-political institutions also bear upon the wellbeing of women.

The informal sector is the part of an economy that is not taxed, monitored by any form of government, or included in any gross national product (GNP), unlike the formal economy. In developing countries, some 60% of the potential working population earn their living in the informal sector. The sector is the only way to earn a living for people who are self-employed outside the formal economy and not on anyone's payroll. Most of them live and work in this sector not because it is their wish or choice, but because they have no chance to be hired by an employer from the formal sector. Informal economic activity is any exchange of goods or services involving economic value between people outside the scope of 'normal and formal' business. Although the informal economy is often associated with developing countries, all economic systems contain an informal economy in some proportion. Informal economic activity is a dynamic process which includes many aspects of economic and social theory. By its nature, it is necessarily difficult to observe study, define, and measure. Soyibo (1997) observes that informal sector activities are legal but unregulated. A report from World Bank estimates the average size of the informal economy, as a percentage of official GNI in the year 2000, in developing countries as 41%, in transition countries 38% and in OECD countries 18%.

The majority of informal economy workers are women. Policies and developments affecting the informal

economy consequently have a distinctly gendered effect. The informal sector in Nigeria employs about 46 per cent of the female labour force. With the contraction of formal sector jobs, the informal sector has become a "safe haven" for both men and women because of its low capital requirements and ease of entry. For the majority of women, participation in the informal sector is a survival strategy as they take over aspects of household maintenance that men can no longer afford, although they tend to face stiff

competition from new entrants, including men who have lost or cannot obtain formal sector employment. Women have limited access to critical resources like education, land, technology, and credit. Hence, they are often excluded from employment in the formal sector. Theoretically, the informal sector provides employment for the groups excluded from employment in the formal sector. The notion of the informal sector captures certain peculiarities, such as informality of business organization, use of rudimentary technology, lack of separation of consumption and production, ease of entry and exit, reliance on family labour and apprentices, and small requirements for capital. The Economic Commission for Africa ECA (2005) affirms that next to the agricultural sector, the informal sector is the largest employer of women in most African countries. The International Labour Organization ILO (2006) estimates 19.5 million women in sub-Saharan Africa engaged in the sector in 2005. However, as Berger and Byvinie (2003) asserts although the representation of women in the informal sector is higher than that of men, the participation of women is underestimated. This is because women's activities, which are often excluded from national census of production surveys and are unaccounted for in the calculation of the gross national product. Women's activities in the informal sector enable them to effectively combine their productive and reproductive roles because hours of work are flexible, permitting them to care for their children. Women's increasing participation in the informal sector is also due to the global recession, and the current economic hardship in Nigeria. More than before, women are under increasing pressure to contribute to household income; this is even truer of women whose husbands have been laid off by the formal sector as a result of rationalization, privatization of public enterprises, and cuts in government spending. The numbers of entrants to the informal sector have swelled because of unemployment, as well as those seeking part-time employment to augment their regular incomes.

II. The Problem

Women the labour force in Nigeria generally have low participation in the formal sector. Many of them take up self-employment in the informal sector. The women mostly operate in a hostile environment and are ignored as far as public policy is concerned. Often, they are seen as illegal traders to be harassed by law-enforcement agents. The women in the informal sector generally have limited access to start-up and working capital, and other resources, such as credit and technology. Hence, they use simple technology, requiring minimal capital investment. This study seeks to enhance the visibility of women's contribution to Nigeria's informal sector. It is important to address this issue because of the high labour-absorption capacity of the informal sector and the need to increase the level of stimulation of employment opportunities for women especially since Nigerian women still suffer a lot of constraints and inhibitions which militate against their personal and national development.

III. The Objectives

The aim of this study is to assess and bring to focus the contributions of women in the informal sector to national development. The study will inquire into the conditions under which the informal sector provides employment and generates income for women; identify the constraints faced by the women in the informal sector; and propose strategies to further enhance the accessibility of resources to women and improve their incomes.

IV. Literature

1. The Informal Sector in Nigeria

The concept of the informal sector was introduced into international usage in 1972 by the International Labour Organization (ILO) in its Kenya Mission Report, which defines informality as a 'way of doing things' characterized by ease of entry; reliance on indigenous resources; family ownership; small scale operations; labour intensive and adaptive technology; skills acquired outside of the formal sector; unregulated and competitive markets. The ILO (1999) proposed that the informal

sector workforce can be categorized into three broad groups: (i) owner-employers of micro enterprises, which employ a few paid workers, with or without apprentices; (ii) own-account workers, who own and operate one-person businesses, work alone or with the help of unpaid workers, generally family members and apprentices; and (iii) dependent workers, paid or unpaid, including wage workers in micro enterprises, unpaid family workers, apprentices, contract labour, homeworkers and paid domestic workers. Since its invention the concept of informal sector has attracted much interest, discussion and disagreement.

Farrel (2000) affirms that there are currently two approaches to defining informal sector activities. First is the definitional using which Farrel defines the informal sector as one which consists of economic activities which are not recorded in the gross domestic product (GDP) and or the national income accounts. Second is the behavioural which is at times referred to as the legalistic. This Feige (1990) says involves defining based on whether or not an activity complies with the established judicial, regulatory, and institutional framework. To Ojo (1981) the informal sector consists of small scale units engaged in production and distribution of goods and services with the primary objective of generating employment and income, notwithstanding the constraints on capital, both physical and human, and the technical-knowhow. Feige opines that the informal sector does not appear to have a meaning independent of the formal sector, as it only derives its meaning when contrasted with the formal sector. Ademu (2006) affirms that the informal sector comprises those employment generating activities undertaken for survival in the absence of formal employment. These activities are characterized by lack of regulations by institutions of society in a social and legal environment in which similar activities are regulated. As Todaro (1997) observes the massive additions to the labour force by this sector do not show up in formal modern sector unemployment statistics. The bulk of new entrants to the labour force create their own employment or work for small scale family owned enterprises. Haan (2006) contends that on average almost two-thirds of all informal sector enterprises are one-person businesses. Most of these enterprises are labelled as subsistence level firms with only a small likelihood of growing into larger enterprises. Earnings and profits in these small enterprises are low by comparison with larger enterprises that hire other workers. These small enterprises are sometimes referred to as the “working poor.” Akintoye (2006) asserts that the informal sector in Nigeria refers to economic activities in all sectors of the economy that are operated outside the purview of government regulation. This sector may be invisible, irregular, parallel, non-structured, backyard, underground, subterranean, unobserved or residual. Informal economic activities in Nigeria encompass a wide range of small-scale, largely self-employment activities. Most of the informal sector activities are traditional occupations and methods of production. Others include such financial and economic endeavours of subsistence nature as: retail trade, transport, restaurant, repair services, financial inter-mediation and household or other personal services. Activities in the informal sector in Nigeria are difficult to measure; they are highly dynamic and contribute substantially to the general growth of the economy and personal or household income. The non-agricultural informal sector employs about 35 per cent of the female labour force, mainly in petty trading and home-based processing and manufacturing, where they have little access to official sources of credit or information.

2. The Role of the Informal Sector in National Development

The informal sector has shown some dynamism in creating new jobs. The Federal Office of Statistics (FOS) estimates that job creation in the informal sector may average 25,000 to 35,000 a year. The sector also provides needed linkages among small-scale manufacturers, promotes labour-intensive production processes and integrates local and regional markets. The informal sector is unorganized, unregulated and mostly legal, but unregistered. The informal sector plays an important and controversial role. It provides jobs and reduces unemployment and underemployment, it also helps alleviate poverty but in many cases the jobs are low-paid and the job security is poor. It bolsters entrepreneurial activity, but at the detriment of compliance with state regulations particularly regarding tax and labour regulations. The size of the informal labour market varies from the estimated 4-6% in the high-income

countries to over 50% in the low-income countries. The size and role of the informal sector in an economy increases during economic downturns and periods of economic adjustment and transition. Prior to the 1970s in Nigeria, the informal sector was not considered as a separate sector. Their activities were classified variously as traditional crafts and petty trade in the subsistence sector, or as small-scale industries within the formal sector, and treated as such. With the expansion of the oil industry in the 1970s, after the disruptions of the civil war, the urban population expanded rapidly because of the increase in opportunities in administration, construction, commerce, and services, along with the gradual relegation of rural agriculture. The informal sector expanded correspondingly to meet the increased demand of low-income wage earners for moderately priced consumer goods and services. But the formal sector still monopolized much of the support that government provided, and little effort was made to foster linkages between the formal and informal sectors. The informal sector plays several roles in the growth and development of the Nigerian economy. It provides productive outlets for a large number of people who prefer or have to be self-employed consequently contributing to the national economy in terms of output and employment. It also provides competition in the economy. In addition, the informal sector in Nigeria provides outlets for experienced specialist human resources from the medium and large scale enterprises who wish to be self-employed using minimal capital. Again it reduces the level of unemployment though many such employed could be underemployed. The informal sector stimulates and enhances innovation and adaptation; and also helps in the mobilisation of capital and human resources which would otherwise have been laid waste and idle thereby increasing the utilisation of virgin re-useable materials.

3. Employment Pattern of Women in Nigeria

Analysis of women's employment in Africa is constrained by unreliable data, as well as by problems in defining what constitutes economic activity for women, particularly in the agricultural and informal sectors. Considerable prejudice affected the relatively few women who sought employment in the 1940's. The labour code then prescribed a lower salary for single women than men, and women had to resign their appointment on marriage. In some cases, the husband had to give his permission to allow his wife to continue in paid employment. Ighodalo, (1990) observes that women had to resign their appointment if they wanted to go on maternity leave. The global economic recession and the gulf between job creation and the growth in the numbers of job seekers have worsened the employment situation for women and men alike. But women face greater vulnerabilities in the labour market because of their relative lack of education and training, the tendency to channel women into certain occupations, and the continuous heavy burdens of unpaid domestic work, child-bearing and child-care, which restrict the time and energy available for income-earning activities. Women's participation in the formal sector employment in Nigeria is low. The pattern of relative distribution of the Nigerian modern sector workers by industrial sector shows that female participation is highest in the services sector and lowest in building and construction sector, more specifically, female empowerment is concentrated in the trades, restaurants and hostels sectors, and community social and personal services all of which fall under the informal sector. The Federal Office of Statistics (FOS) 2003 Annual Reports indicate that the informal sector employs about 46 per cent of the female labour force, mainly in petty trading and home-based processing and manufacturing, where they have little access to official sources of credit or information. Women's participation in the labour force in Nigeria can generally be discussed from three perspectives. First is agriculture the mainstay of the economies of most African countries in which a large number of women participate. An International Labour Organization (ILO) Report reveals that in 1996 in the African region, agriculture offered the highest employment opportunity for women (33 percent), services (27 percent) and industries (16.9 percent). The agricultural sector is further segmented into cash and subsistent cropping, the former dominated by men while a vast majority of women are found in the non-monetized sector. This indicates labour market segmentation. Ojo (1997) observes that Nigerian women have worked side by side with men in agriculture with some marked divisions of labour between them.

Second is the formal sector also known as the “modern” sector or the “organized” sector. It covers the public sector and medium /large private sector enterprises that recruit labour on a permanent and regular basis for fixed rewards. Its main features include difficult entry, large-scale operation, regulated market and possession of formal education. These features account for the predominance of women in the informal sector. According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), women are two-thirds less likely than men to get waged employment; only 3 out of 10 women in the labour force in sub-Saharan Africa are paid employees. The UNDP reports that in 2005, about 5 per cent of the female labour force worked in industry, 20 per cent in services, 23 per cent in sales, and only 6 per cent in professional, technical, administrative or managerial positions. Employees in both the public and private sectors earn steady, albeit low, incomes. They also work to predictable schedules, in contrast to the self-employed, who are more insecure and who often must make substantial investments in time and energy. The International Labour Organization ILO (2006) suggests that women's formal sector participation rates dropped from 57 per cent in 1980 to 53 per cent in 2006, with 2.5 million women losing their jobs between 1995 and 2000. In Nigeria, women accounted for 30 per cent of retrenched workers, although they were only 18 per cent of formal sector workers. This was due to the fact that women dominated the lower echelons of the social services sector, which faced the heaviest budget cuts. Many of such retrenched women have relocated to the informal sector.

Finally there is the informal sector. Because employment opportunities as wage-earning workers are often denied women as a result of family responsibilities, lack of skills, social and cultural barriers, self-employment or setting up of their own enterprise may be the only possibility for women to get access to employment and to earn an income. Consequently, in many countries, especially in developing and transition economies, women represent the majority of entrepreneurs in micro enterprises and the informal sector. In Nigeria the 2006 Census reveals that 67.6 percent of employed women in the country were enumerated as sales workers while 8.4 percent were craft and production workers, all in the informal sector. Women engage in informal finance activities to assist their families, businesses, their communities and nation in general. Women are regarded to be second-class citizens in Nigeria, but it is these same women that sustain their families in urban and rural cities. Their role in the informal sector today also can be seen in their engagement with some activities like petty trading, farming and others leading to positive changes towards their economies.

V. Methodology

This paper is based on a desk and literature review of relevant articles and publications as well as web-based research on the role of women in the informal sector to obtain a conceptual context for the analysis of the data collected. In addition, data was also collected from the federal office of statistics and a field survey using 150 women in the Mushin, Agege and Lagos Island Areas of Lagos Nigeria.

VI. Results and Discussions

Women in Nigeria's informal sector seem to be invisible, along with their contributions and needs. Competition in the informal sector has been heightened, thereby compounding the problems of women, who generally operate small-scale businesses with limited capital. In general, however, women's lack of access to affordable credit, information, technical advice and services prevents them from expanding their enterprises.

a. Access to resources

There are legal impediments and socio-cultural obstacles against women, especially in the rural areas where the majority of women live and are economically active. Informal sector workers most of whom are women do not benefit from minimum wage and social security provisions and have to provide for their own health and retirement needs. Many girls have been withdrawn from school to assist their mothers or guardians in informal sector activities. Many are subject to harassment and exploitation from local government and local council development authorities. A few of the women have crossed over into

the formal sector, in importing, manufacturing and commerce. Women in the informal sector have sometimes had to form associations to protect their interests and mobilized traditional savings and credit schemes to offer sources of capital for themselves. The lack of savings and capital makes it difficult for women in the informal sector to expand their businesses and undertake productive employment generating activities. Also, lack of capital makes it difficult for others to become self-employed. Consequently, the productive base of women who are predominant in the informal sector and their contributions are reduced due to inaccessibility to credit.

116(77.3%) of the respondents indicated that they have been unable to expand their businesses due to lack of finance. Women are hardly given the opportunity to access financial resources to expand their businesses or in case of misfortune like health care or family needs. The women do not have access to borrow from the banks and big financial institutions because they do not have landed properties to use as collaterals. The women have therefore had to form microfinance groups whose goal is to assist women in accessing micro credit and in so doing contribute towards nation building. 137(90.3%) of the respondents had to join such groups to be able to access the little capital they now use for their activities. Micro finance institutions in whatever social and economic climates can deliver credit to women in the informal sector who by making use of the borrowed funds profitably, reduce the level of unemployment in the country which has risen to a critical level. Microfinance especially for women in the informal sector therefore continues to assume increasing importance as a result of the foregoing. The emphasis on micro credit is based on the premise that if unemployment is reduced, the world would be a better place as there would be a reduction in poverty, improved living condition, increased productivity, and an overall resultant effect of an enhanced economic performance. Despite government programmes aimed at reaching small-scale entrepreneurs, women as a group are often not considered for assistance. A major reason for this is that most of the enterprises women engage in fall outside the Census of Production Surveys. These surveys normally include enterprises employing 10 or more people. It must be noted

however that smaller enterprises are crucial to the survival of women and their families.

b. Education and training

Lack of access to formal education and training has been identified as a key barrier to women's employment and advancement in society. In Nigeria, female illiteracy rates were over 32 per cent in 1996, compared to 21 per cent for men. Literacy classes for women appear to have limited impact, while programmes linked to income generating activities have been most successful. Some parents still prefer to send boys to school, seeing little need for education for girls. In addition, factors such as adolescent pregnancy, early marriage and girls' greater burden of household labour act as obstacles to their schooling. While most girls do not go beyond primary education, school curricula have not been guided by this reality and their content is not geared to helping girls acquire basic life skills. There have been improvements in the net enrolment of girls at primary levels, but disparities persist in comparison with the enrolment of boys. Female enrolment numbers decrease as girls move up the education ladder. Of the 150 respondents in this study, 17(11.3%) had no formal education at all, 62(41.3%) had only primary education, 49(32.7%) had secondary level education and only 22(14.7%) had any form of higher education. The education levels of women employed in the informal sector are generally lower than those in the formal sector. Fapohunda (1999) reports that about half of the informal sector workers have either no education or a primary education and less than eight per cent of them have a post-secondary education. This pattern is however changing as young workers are entering the informal sector with more education. Low education levels limit trainability and lead to modest skill levels. Prospects for increasing the access of women and girls to education have been undermined by economic crisis, budgetary cuts, and debt servicing burdens. The current economic and policy situations, combined with socio-cultural factors, threaten any real advances in the education of women and girls. New administrative arrangements and partners must be found to support their education and make it more consistent with the needs of women and girls. Gender biases in the educational system, training and

employment must be consistently attacked to give women new opportunities for achievement, while school curricula must incorporate concepts of gender equality and peace at all levels, so that students will incorporate them throughout their lives. Young women need role models to motivate them and they must be given usable education and skills to play meaningful roles in society and to safeguard them from harmful practices which mortgage their health and lives.

c. Leadership and organization

Since the start of the 1990s, many more women's associations in the country have been formed or revitalized, and the quality of their work has improved significantly. The groups operate, at both grassroots and national levels, and have taken advantage of new political openings to raise issues in new ways and to form alliances with other civil society groups to advance women's rights. While many of the associations receive external funding, a number seek to stress internal responsibility, African agenda-setting, and the development of organizational potential. African women and gender studies programmes also have been set up in many universities, both to teach and to engage in fundamental and applied research to improve the conditions of women in Africa. In contrast to the "development discourse" of the 1980s and 1990s, issues affecting women now are discussed most often within the framework of rights. Also, sub-regional and regional affiliations of women have emerged and have identified key areas for action. Some of them serve as pressure groups, network with each other, form regional and global alliances and aim to direct resources and attention to women and the issues that concern them. They address the lack of credit for women entrepreneurs by acting as collateral guarantors and providing matching funds to give poor women better credit access. They bring together influential women to work towards increasing girls' access to education. They also press for implementation at national level of the strategies for girls' education as a priority for development, outline a regional framework for action to improve girls' educational opportunities and seek to mobilize new resources and partners to support these goals. Women's commitment to their households, to local and national food security, local production and the environment should be reflected in equitable representation on all bodies that make decisions in these areas, as well as in broader economic programmes that affect women's lives. In addition, women's leadership skills in their communities, groups and associations need to be harnessed and formalized to give them political and decision-making power. Implementation mechanisms must harness women's own energies, through their associations.

d. Enhancing the Informal Sector

The Nigerian government at various levels has adopted policies aimed at enhancing the performance of the informal sector. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has also supported efforts to aid the informal sector. The aim is to harness potentials to establish viable enterprises and projects that would ensure economic empowerment. It is also aimed at capacity building and providing credit support. Informal sector policies in Nigeria in the 1980s were very repressive, while the response to the sector in the 1990s was much more pragmatic and promotional. Access to financial credit is important for small businesses aspiring to grow and become more profitable. Between 1990 and 1992 the Nigerian government established Community and Peoples Banks, on the principles of a traditional rotational credit system. These banks were to provide small loans and other forms of financial and business services for the poor and informal sector enterprises, with the whole community acting as guarantor for loan repayment. Unfortunately only about 10% of informal sector workers were aware of how to take advantage of the new facilities offered. Consequently civil servants, military officers' wives, and other well-connected persons hijacked the scheme, often getting loans far in excess of the approved official maximum. The trend has been the same for subsequent government efforts. With their diverse and widely dispersed enterprises and settlements, and their general orientation towards their rural hometowns, informal sector workers are usually more difficult to organize. But they need better organization and self-regulation to be able to engage more constructively with government

and other development partners, and to increase their power to lobby, negotiate, and influence public policy in favour of the sector.

VII. Recommendations

This paper recommends that policy-makers listen to and work with women in the informal sector to improve their positions and thereby accelerate national development. A comprehensive approach must be taken to remove the social, economic and legal constraints on women. National action plans must be designed in broad consultation with women's groups. Women's institutions in the community, market places and trades must be recognized and utilized to increase women's participation and decision-making in society. Most economic programmes in the country tend to overlook the unpaid economy, where women predominate. It therefore makes economic sense to take into account gender biases and tailor planned interventions to improve women's ability to take advantage of incentives, thus enhancing overall economic efficiency. The constraints on women's access to land, credit, extension services, and inputs must be removed, and opportunities should be created for their enterprise. Adequately funded and staffed technical units should be established to support actions on behalf of women. The viability of women's institutions and mechanisms for decision-making in the community, market places and trades must be recognized, and they should be utilized to increase women's participation and decision-making power in society. To develop the country women leadership must be developed. The informal sector is a medium of reducing unemployment in Nigeria and it should therefore be embraced in this task. Although the informal sector has its challenges especially for women, which revolves round the inaccessibility of credit to finance its activities, the women's role in the informal finance sector in Nigeria cannot be overemphasized. Governments must build partnerships with the emerging associations of women and entrepreneurs to create an enabling policy environment. This should include making credit available to women at affordable rates, with the private sector assisting government efforts to get credit to women.

VIII. Conclusion

This paper concludes that the contribution of the informal sector to the growth of the Nigerian economy is quite significant. It is better placed to absorb unutilised resources which the formal sector is unwilling or unable to use. The sector contributes significantly to national economy in terms of output and employment and the majority of informal sector workers are women. Policies and developments affecting the sector therefore have a gendered effect. Women make up majority of the informal sector because employment in the sector is the source of employment that is most readily available to them and a vast majority of women are employed from their homes. Furthermore, men tend to be overrepresented in the top segment of the sector and women overpopulate the bottom segment. The government must encourage and empower women in the informal sector through the provision of conducive policies and physical conditions. The informal sector in Nigeria has come to stay especially for women therefore it must be sustained for optimum contribution to the growth of the economy. The challenge is how to support and regulate the sector in order to promote employment, productivity, and income for the poor and women who obviously dominate the sector.

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Tinuke Fapohunda is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of Industrial Relations and Public Administration at the Lagos State University in Ojo, Lagos, Nigeria, Lagos State University Ojo, Nigeria.

E-mail: tkfap@yahoo.com

Tel : 234- 8037039273