



Strengthening gender equality in small business and achieving sustainable development goals (SDGs): Comparative analysis of Kenya and Nigeria

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Abstract: Purpose. Many small business owners and entrepreneurs in Africa still see sustainable development goals as a misery. The study investigates whether sustainable development goal number five (5) is being used to motivate gender equality among small and medium-sized enterprises in Africa, particularly in Kenya and Nigeria. The study focuses on female entrepreneurs and female-owned businesses. **Design/methodology/approach.** A qualitative approach involving semi-structured in-depth interviews was considered with a target population of 110 participants selected from businesses operating in Embakasi East constituency in the Embakasi ward in Nairobi County, Kenya, and in Ikeja Local Government in the Lagos Mainland of Lagos state Nigeria. The primary interview data was gathered from businesses in the manufacturing, services, information technology, transport, trading, and communications sectors. **Findings.** From the population of 110 participants, the response rate was 90.91%. Results demonstrated that a significant number of women working in SMEs are unaware of the sustainable development goal number five (5) in



the two countries despite the United Nations (UN) supporting gender equality globally. The research concludes that there is still a considerable difference between men and women in small and medium-sized SMEs in Africa, and the awareness of sustainable development goals is limited. **Research limitations/implications.** The restriction of the dataset from a small sample size of women-owned businesses operating in Embakasi East constituency in the Embakasi ward in Nairobi County, Kenya, and in Ikeja Local Government in the Lagos State Nigeria. The research criteria used to choose study participants were unique to the current research; future researchers may consider changing the research criteria and sample size to broaden the study's focus. **Practical implications.** The study advances empirical research on sustainable development goal number five (5) by offering evidence of its impact on women-owned businesses. Further, the study throws light on the need to the fact that gender equality is necessary and why women should receive funding and mentoring to help them succeed as business owners. **Originality/value.** The study provides a comparative study with evidence from two countries, Kenya and Nigeria, on sustainable development goal number five (5) and throws light on the relevance of gender equality on business performance as funding and mentoring will assist women-owned businesses. For Africa to flourish and grow economically, gender equality is crucial.

Keywords: Africa, development, entrepreneur, entrepreneurial gap, gender parity, poverty alleviation

1. Introduction

In recent years, the increase of female entrepreneurs and their involvement in economic development has been critical. The low rate of female business ownership is prevalent in developing countries like Kenya, Nigeria, and many other African countries (Yacus, Esposito, Yang, 2019). Women entrepreneurs in developing nations are more likely to emphasize concerns about survival, equality, improved nutrition, access to healthcare, and education for themselves, their families, and society at large than women in developed economies (Minniti, 2010). The novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has also exacerbated institutional impediments and gender inequality within the business ecosystem (OECD, 2021).

Women contribute significantly to the economic growth of their families and communities, but they face more obstacles than men do, including low-income households, poverty, unemployment, a lack of training, and discrimination. Women's engagement in small businesses may significantly impact many African countries' economic growth. Even in women-friendly countries or regions, females outnumber males as small business owners or operators (Laidoja, Li, Liu, & Ren, 2022). Although women contribute to the economy as business owners and entrepreneurs, gender is ignored in impoverished economies (Alon, Doepke, Olmstead-Rumsey, & Tertilt, 2020; Alsos, Isaksen, Ljunggren, 2006; Waring, 1988). Small businesses, whether nano, micro, small, or medium-sized, are crucial for various reasons. On the one hand, as a significant contributor to any economy and the foundation of many emerging and developing nations' economies, small businesses can be agents of poverty reduction, wealth creation, and income redistribution in many developing countries (Olubiyi, 2022). In developing countries, small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) make up most private-sector businesses and economic activity (Olubiyi, 2020).

For many African leaders, the desire for change and economic progress is a mission that must be completed because of the advent of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) and its severe consequences on business performance (Alon, Doepke, Olmstead-Rumsey, & Tertilt, 2020; Birhanu, Getachew, & Lashitew, 2022). Therefore, it is essential to pay attention to small businesses, particularly female-owned businesses, because of the disproportionately detrimental impact on females and to close the gender gap in the sector. It has been known for a long time that raising the status of women takes work and is not a simple process.

At its general assembly meeting in New York in September 2015, the UN established the 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs), which are intended to make the world a better place by 2030, focusing on eradicating poverty and preserving our precious planet. These SDGs, also known as global goals, were combined to acknowledge how actions in one area could impact other sectors' outcomes and the social, environmental, and economic sustainability that development must balance (UNDP, 2021). Nations have agreed to put developing countries at the top of their priority list (UNDP, 2021). The SDG objectives were therefore created to help these countries overcome the problems weighing them down. Goal five (5), which calls for gender equality, is the main objective of this study as it relates to business growth in Africa.

Therefore, for entrepreneurship and small enterprises to play a crucial role in nation-building and regional development on a global scale, adequate attention must be given to them (Ning, 2021; Dabić *et al.*, 2022; ACS & Szerb, 2007). According to Bolaji and Oluwaseun (2022), sustainable development goals matter and are necessary to close certain gaps in Africa's human development index. Policymakers, government representatives, and international organizations have used the role of entrepreneurship in enhancing economic development as a significant criterion globally (Babajide, Lawal, Asaleye, Okafor, & Osuma, 2020). So, entrepreneurship is no longer just a way to lower unemployment rates. Instead, it is a key tool for advancing national economic development and positively affects GDP per capita, leading to growth for everyone.

If given the proper attention, entrepreneurship would help accelerate the achievement of the sustainable development goal, with a special emphasis on training women and young girls in small business and entrepreneurship. Women are thought to have a lower propensity for entrepreneurship compared to their male counterparts, suggesting a significant gap or difference between men and women in entrepreneurship (Garba, 2011). This disparity results from cultural expectations in Nigeria that women should focus on raising children rather than pursuing other opportunities (Garba, 2011). Although the scarce data and literature from large samples of female-owned businesses, the few previous studies on the gender gap in business performance have yielded similar results (Chatjuthamard, Jiraporn, & Lee, 2021; Chen, Ni, & Tong, 2016; Post, Lokshin, & Boone, 2022; Yang, Riepe, Moser, & Pull, 2019). Furthermore, research on the significance of gender equality in small businesses and its impact on achieving sustainable development goals (SDGs) in developing countries is limited. There are few studies and comparisons of emerging countries, so it is important to look at this.

2. Literature review

The growth of the African business sector depends on the entrepreneurial sector. Many men and women have become known as employers, business owners, or entrepreneurs in various entrepreneurship fields. Equal entrepreneurship opportunities are a problem, especially for women, despite the sector's tremendous growth over the years (Yenilmez & Bingöl, 2020). Therefore, closing the gender gap in entrepreneurship is essential. Women should be inspired and given equal opportunities to grow and expand their small and medium-sized businesses. According to Biarritz (2019), entrepreneurial African women are important developers and drivers of the continent's broad economic growth and inclusive prosperity. This aspect prioritizes encouraging women's entrepreneurship because they contribute to increased economic growth and stability. This factor encourages additional female workers, creating more employment chances and closing the gender wage gap. However, achieving Sustainable Development Goal five (5) of gender parity and women empowerment is essential.

In addition, women are the entrepreneurs who are expanding the fastest globally (Sajjad *et al.*, 2020). According to this indicator, more significant efforts need to be directed at motivating and inspiring women. In African nations, female entrepreneurs play a crucial role in opening employment opportunities, producing money, promoting education and health, and mentoring young girls and other women. Their function cannot be compared to that of males, which necessitates gender equality and demands that more resources and efforts be directed toward ensuring their advancement in the entrepreneurial sector. The essential nature of women's responsibilities in economic growth is highlighted by Bradshaw *et al.* (2017). According to the paper, women's entrepreneurial potential is frequently underutilized as the only continent that fell short of meeting

the millennium development goals (MDG) for millennium development in 2015 Africa (Glazebrook & Opoku, 2020). Nevertheless, intervention is required in the twenty-first century to achieve SDG five (5). According to Sarkis (2019), female entrepreneurs face severe discrimination worldwide. Women are still seen as the weaker gender and are discouraged from participating in some entrepreneurial activities. African countries will experience economic prosperity due to the fight for gender equality.

The main driving elements behind advancing gender equality and entrepreneurship in African countries are the efforts made by men and women to inspire equality in both boy and girl children. Equal economic participation will close the entrepreneurial gap as more women join the workforce and boost the sector (Vracheva & Stoyneva, 2020; Onditi & Odera, 2017) state that efforts to address gender-sensitive issues as it relates to social exclusion, inequality, and resource distribution will have a positive bearing toward achieving sustainable development. Women, like men, are creative beings who can channel insights to bridge the entrepreneurial gap within their locations. They are seen as crucial to the growth of businesses and economic well-being. Therefore, improving gender equality is essential to achieving the basic development goal.

2.1. Women entrepreneurs

Women entrepreneurs can be characterized in various ways, such as finding, establishing, and running businesses (Belwal, Belwal, & Al Saidi, 2014; Ukwueze, 2022). Women entrepreneurs in the Middle East and North African (MENA) economies show the lowest proportion (less than one-third) of global women entrepreneurs, despite being one of the main drivers of economic growth, productivity, and development in both advanced and emerging countries (Belwal *et al.*, 2014; Boateng, 2014).

For instance, women produced 80% of the food in sub-Saharan Africa, 50% to 60% of the food in Asia, 26% of the food in the Caribbean, 34% of the food in the Middle East and North Africa, and more than 30% of the food in Latin America (Iyiola & Azuh, 2014). In addition to creating jobs and contributing to related businesses, women entrepreneurs also offer their various communities' ideas, energies, and financial resources (Iyiola & Azuh, 2014). However, advancing gender equality within their respective societies is necessary for women to contribute more (Atef & Al-Balushi, 2015; Boateng, 2014). To accomplish Sustainable Development Goal five (5) by 2030, African countries' strategies to advance gender equality need to be promoted, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in particular goal five (5).

2.2. Barriers to women entrepreneurs

Several barriers must be addressed to enable women entrepreneurs to rise to their rightful positions in Africa (Tajudeen & Adebayo, 2013; Ukwueze, 2022). For instance, women typically have a more challenging time juggling work and family obligations than men because of domestic duties like child care and other duties that may prevent women from advancing in their careers (Sumaira & Muhammad, 2012). The issues include work-life balance, a lack of appropriate information and training, and access to financial resources (Lawan, 2017). Additionally, the traditional gender roles that have greatly influenced families due to the belief that men should be the breadwinners and women should be the homemakers also impact women's careers (Sumaira & Muhammad, 2012).

African female entrepreneurs face several significant obstacles, including a lack of funding, an unfavorable business environment, subpar economic policies, cultural issues, a lack of technological and managerial skills, a lack of education, a concentration in low-income industries, a lack of a support network, and a high cost of transportation (Afolabi, 2015; Amaechi, 2016; Bioulac & Bouée, 2018). The high female poverty rate in Africa stems from race, religion, and sociopolitical background (Sumaira & Muhammad, 2012).

2.3. Theoretical background

Both Liberal Feminism theory and Workforce diversity theory guided the study. Liberal feminism theory, propagated by Kalleber and Leicht (1991), suggests that women and men differ inherently due to early and ongoing socialization differences. It is a theory that fueled women's rights movements in various settings and is still a well-known and popular school of feminist thought (Bailey, 2016). During the Enlightenment (the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries), liberal feminism emerged as a distinct political tradition, but its empowering conception of freedom and equality mostly applied to men.

The liberal feminist theory emphasizes women's autonomy rights and suggests ways to address gender inequities, such as by removing social and legal barriers or fostering environments that support women's equality. The workforce diversity theory explains the effect of marginalization of the feminine gender and their exclusion from mainstream economic activity, tantamount to the wastage of precious human resources (Ansari *et al.*, 2016). If managed properly and efficiently, it can extend to a valuable contribution to the world's overall economic and social well-being. This emphasizes the individual woman's rights and aims to grant access to equal rights and representation through inclusiveness. This further gives reason for the integration of women into the entrepreneurship structure. For Africa to succeed in meeting the SDG of 2030, as highlighted by the UN, there is a need to embrace gender equality giving room to women in the entrepreneurship space for economic growth in Africa.

2.4. Empirical review

In a study carried out in the North West Region of Cameroon, Abonge (2012) found that micro and small-scale businesses have grown to be the mainstay of disadvantaged women entrepreneurs forced to run these businesses for home provisioning and as a method of obtaining employment for themselves. The ability of women to manage a business is generally seen as having the most significant positive impact on their ability to provide for basic household necessities. Access to microcredit made possible by the Enterprise Support Program makes business capital available, enabling entrepreneurs to engage in income-generating activities and/or maintain their businesses.

According to the survey, running a micro business has changed the living standards of women entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurs reported using the money they made from their businesses to pay for necessities, including food, oil, salt, and soap, as well as other essential daily home needs. They also help cover their kids' medical care, tuition, books, and other school expenses. Women can significantly contribute to maintaining their family's standard of living by managing their micro businesses. The division of labor and the contribution of women in addressing home needs demonstrates how crucial it is for women entrepreneurs to raise the standard of life for all households and economic development. Anambane and Adom (2018) discovered that the expansion of female-owned enterprises in Ghana is constrained by cultural values and respect for tradition, which elevates men above women. The authors concluded that the typically poor performance of female entrepreneurs in the research area was due more to ingrained cultural ideas and practices than to managerial incompetence on the part of women.

3. Research methodology

The study aims to examine gender equality among small business owners. The study was conducted in Kenya and Nigeria. The study focuses on female entrepreneurship, and the population consists of selected female owners of small businesses willing to accept the questionnaire. However, a key requisite for inclusion is the adherence to the criteria established by UN Women (2017) for a women-owned business, which includes independence from non-women-owned businesses, at least 51 percent unconditional ownership by one or more women, and unconditional control over both long-term and day-to-day decision-making. A qualitative approach involving semi-structured in-depth interviews was considered with a target population of 110 participants selected from businesses operating in Embakasi East constituency in the Embakasi ward in Nairobi County, Kenya, and in Ikeja Local Government in the Lagos Mainland of Lagos state Nigeria.

These two locations were considered due to their significance, location influence, and the high level of women's economic activities in the two locations. A statistical sample is a subset of a population that represents approximately all of the population's characteristics (Olubiyi, Egwakhe, & Akinlabi, 2019). The sample selection criteria are consistent with the study (Akinbami & Aransiola, 2016). The primary interview data was gathered from businesses in the manufacturing, services, information technology, transport, trading, and communications sectors.

Judgmental sampling was decided to be adopted to arrive at the respondent from the population.

Due to time restrictions and the difficulties of evaluating the authorities' list of all SMEs, the judgmental procedure was used. However, the sample was drawn from non-overlapping groups within the population- size, region, and industry are the three levels of judgment used. The semi-structured in-depth interviews involved a conversation between the researchers and participants, guided by a flexible interview protocol and supplemented with follow-up questions, probes, and comments. The justification for this method is that it enables the researchers to collect open-ended data, explore participant thoughts, feelings, and beliefs regarding the Sustainable Development Goals

(SDGs), in particular, goal five (5), and delve deeply into personal business concerns as it relates to gender inequality in small business.

The researchers and research assistants could get more precise data on women's perspectives and attitudes toward sustainable development goals because of the choice of research design adopted. The respondents could express their thoughts on the set of predetermined open-ended questions and provide specific feedback on gender equality in their job as entrepreneurs, and the interviews proved fruitful. The study was carried out in Nairobi County, Embakasi East Constituency, Embakasi Ward, and Ikeja on the Lagos Mainland of Lagos state Nigeria, Africa. The interviews lasted an average of 9 to 12 minutes. During the interviews, confidentiality and anonymity were assured. Descriptive statistical analysis was employed to identify, analyze, and report common themes.

4. Data presentation and results

According to Mero-Jaffe, (2011) advice, all the transcripts were reviewed for accuracy and relevancy. The interview data were audio-recorded with the permission of respondents, and to gain insights into the data, the researchers produced the transcripts of the data gathered from the interviews. Transcripts were identified with a filename for convenience.

The response rate from the interview was 90.91% from the sample size of 110 female entrepreneurs and operators in Kenya and Nigeria. Because 100 interviews were found usable and 10 potential female entrepreneurs representing 9.09%, declined the interview- eight (8) were from Nigeria, and two (2) were from Kenya. Information gathered was investigated using expressive measurable apparatuses: frequencies and percentages. The study results are indicated in the figures below.

Table 1: Participants knowledge on the existence of Sustainable development goals

Occupation	Knowledge of SDG goals %	Unaware of SDG goals %
Employees		
Lagos (Nigeria)	8	12
Nairobi (Kenya)	0	20
Entrepreneurs		
Lagos (Nigeria)	11	16
Nairobi (Kenya)	6	12
Business persons		
Lagos (Nigeria)	3	0
Nairobi (Kenya)	9	3
	37%	63%

Source: Researchers' computation (2022)

Table 1 Illustrates the number of participants who were aware of the existence of the SDGs goals. Sixty-three percent (63%) out of the total participants were unaware of the goals, and just thirty-seven percent (37%) were aware of the goals. Only eight of employees from respondents are aware of the SDG with seventeen of the participants who are entrepreneurs, eleven of the interviewed who are aware of the 2030 UN are business owners.

Table 2: Participants with the knowledge of a special funding for women

Vote	Percentage
Yes	
Lagos (Nigeria)	75%
Nairobi (Kenya)	81%
No	
Lagos (Nigeria)	25%
Nairobi (Kenya)	19%

Source: Researchers' Computation (2022)

Table 2 indicates that more women in Nairobi have the knowledge of special finding for their gender in business with 81% of the respondents from Nairobi (Kenya) and while 25% of the interviewed in Lagos (Nigeria) have no knowledge.

Table 3: Percentage of participants who believe SDG is achievable by 2030

Occupation	Yes	No
Employees		
Lagos (Nigeria)	20%	12%
Nairobi (Kenya)	27%	18%
Entrepreneurs		
Lagos (Nigeria)	26%	15%
Nairobi (Kenya)	31%	10%
Business owners		
Lagos (Nigeria)	19%	8%
Nairobi (Kenya)	9%	5%

Source: Researchers' Computation (2022)

Table 3 illustrates the percentage of participants who believe the SDG goals are achievable by 2030. In Nigeria, 20% with 27% of the employee in Kenya, 31% are entrepreneurs in Nairobi, and 26% of the Lagos respondents trust the SDG is achievable; of business owners, 9% from Kenya and 19% from Lagos Nigeria agreed that the sustainable development goals will be achievable by 2030. 18% of employees, ten percent of entrepreneurs, and 5% of business owners noted that sustainable development goals were unachievable by 2030 in Kenya respondents while compared to 12% of employees, 15% of entrepreneurs, and 8% of business owners in Nigeria.

Table 4: Do know anything about the UN SDG 2030?

Vote	Percentage
Yes	
Lagos (Nigeria)	28%
Nairobi (Kenya)	14%
No	
Lagos (Nigeria)	72 %
Nairobi (Kenya)	86%

Source: Researchers' Computation (2022)

The result in Table 4 indicates that 86% of respondents from Kenya are fully aware of the UN 2030 sustainable development goals compared to 72% of their counterparts in Lagos, Nigeria. This explains that most interviewees do not recognize the need for the SDG.

Table 5: As a business owner do you enjoy any privilege as a woman /female entrepreneur?

Vote	Percentage %
Yes	
Lagos (Nigeria)	23
Nairobi (Kenya)	30
No	
Lagos (Nigeria)	77
Nairobi (Kenya)	70

Source: Researchers' Computation (2022)

In Table 5, the data from the interview signals that 77% of business owners in Lagos within the interview area do not in any form enjoy special privilege as Women, whereas 30% of respondents in Nairobi from the interviewed say they enjoy such privilege.

Table 6: Are you part of any business education/ mentoring group for females?

Vote	Percentage %
Yes	
Lagos (Nigeria)	43
Nairobi (Kenya)	38
No	
Lagos (Nigeria)	57
Nairobi (Kenya)	62

Source: Researchers' Computation (2022)

The 62% Kenyan respondents in Table 6 replied No to the question if they are part of a mentoring / education group in relative 43% of Lagos interviewee who gave Yes as an answer.

Table 7: Do you think African women requires special advantage in entrepreneurship and small business?

Vote	Percentage %
Yes	
Lagos (Nigeria)	91
Nairobi (Kenya)	89
No	
Lagos (Nigeria)	9
Nairobi (Kenya)	11

Source: Researchers' Computation (2022)

The totality of respondents from both interview locations agrees in unison that African women require special advantage, with 91% from Lagos and 89% from Kenya saying Yes to special advantage status for women.

Table 8: Is there a special funding for women in business that you are aware of?

Vote	Percentage %
Yes	
Lagos (Nigeria)	46
Nairobi (Kenya)	52
No	
Lagos (Nigeria)	54
Nairobi (Kenya)	48

The question on the existence of special funding for women in Table 8 returned with about an average of the interviewee acknowledging the existence of such, 52% from Nairobi compared to 46% from Ikeja Lagos state saying Yes.

Table 9: Should there be special attention for women to participate in entrepreneur development?

Vote	Percentage %
Yes	
Lagos (Nigeria)	95
Nairobi (Kenya)	93
No	
Lagos (Nigeria)	5
Nairobi (Kenya)	7

Source: Researchers' Computation (2022)

The question on the need for special attention for women to participate in entrepreneur development in Table 9 returned with about an average of the interviewee accepting the need for women to participate in entrepreneur development, 93 % from Nairobi and 95% from Ikeja Lagos saying Yes.

Table 10: Is there any gap between men and women in entrepreneurship and small business?

Vote	Percentage %
Yes	
Lagos (Nigeria)	88
Nairobi (Kenya)	86
No	
Lagos (Nigeria)	12
Nairobi (Kenya)	14

Source: Researchers' Computation (2022)

The voice of respondents was loud in Table 10 when asked about the existence of a gap between men and women in entrepreneurship and small business owners/operator. Here 88 and 86 % of respondents, respectively from Nigeria and Kenya.

Table 11: If the above is Yes, what is the reason for this gap?

Vote	Percentage %
Funding/ Financing	
Lagos (Nigeria)	45
Nairobi (Kenya)	42
Education	
Lagos (Nigeria)	38
Nairobi (Kenya)	33
Mentoring	
Lagos (Nigeria)	17
Nairobi (Kenya)	25

Source: Researchers' computation (2022)

Table 11 expose the fundamentals that funding is the top challenge confronting women in bridging the gap between men and women in business and entrepreneurship.

Table 12: Can the SDG agenda solve this funding gap?

Vote	Percentage %
Yes	
Lagos (Nigeria)	32
Nairobi (Kenya)	45
No	
Lagos (Nigeria)	58
Nairobi (Kenya)	55

Source: Researchers' computation (2022)

Kenyans 45% in Table 12 have shown more optimism than the Nigeria 32% about the SDG's ability to solve the gap between women and men in business

Table 13: Is the SDG achievable by 2030, just 8 years from now?

Vote	Percentage %
Yes	
Lagos (Nigeria)	20
Nairobi (Kenya)	35
No	
Lagos (Nigeria)	80
Nairobi (Kenya)	75

Source: Researchers' computation (2022)

The pessimism of Africans about the achievable status of the 2030 SDG in the next 8 years is stated in Table 13, where a high percentage of respondents indicated NO to the question from both interview locations.

6. Discussion and findings

According to the report, most participants were not familiar with the SDGs. According to the study sample, only 13% of the participants in the survey were aware of the SDGs. In contrast, 87% of the women in the research area were unfamiliar with UN SDG 2030. Nevertheless, 98% of participants knew about gender equality and entrepreneurial disparities. Business owners and staff members acknowledged that they receive and enjoy particular perks based on gender. For instance, males are more likely than women to be left working late because of the general lack of security in Nairobi's most populous areas and the fact that they are seen as the weaker gender. In addition, unlike males of the same status who may have work obligations that stretch until 10 pm and occasionally midnight, women with families work during more convenient hours, typically between 8 am and 6 pm. The survey found that none of the women interviewed were a part of any female mentorship groups.

Furthermore, they were unable to locate any organizations that mentored female groupings. The panelists also concluded that African women need unique entrepreneurship and small company advantages. They both agreed that women should be inspired and motivated to launch SMEs and enter the business field. The study's participants found a gender gap in small company ownership and entrepreneurship. This gap exists in funding, mentoring, and education. In African nations, men were found to have higher levels of education than women, which led to many of them engaging in entrepreneurial pursuits. In business launch situations, men and women both have access to more resources and financial options. According to the report, men create SMEs for women and hire them to run them, restricting women's participation and independence in business.

This element has impacted the advancement and motivation of African women. Additionally, because there are so many males in entrepreneurship, there are more mentors to guide men and serve as role models, which is lacking among women. Because there are not enough mentors and role models of the same gender to look up to and inspire women, it is challenging for them to advance in business. The funding gap can be closed by creating funding groups and programs to support and educate women on SMEs and how to be entrepreneurs. Mentored women will be motivated to pursue entrepreneurship and grow as individuals. According to the participants, the SDG may end the gender inequality that women entrepreneurs face. Some disagreed with the proposal, claiming a lack of sufficient understanding and awareness of the SDGs.

This obstacle prevents women from learning more about SDG five (5) and advancements in entrepreneurship. Despite having differing perspectives, participants overcame and disagreed, resulting in the SDGs being attainable by 2030—just eight years from now, they concurred that African women are aware of gender inequity and actively working to eradicate it. Only educated women and those who follow the business news throughout the world are aware of what is being done to promote gender equality, which is a fundamental problem in the field. Those who disagreed pointed to a lack of knowledge about the SDG objectives in African nations as a barrier to spreading the unknowable.

7. Conclusion and recommendations

The outcome of the investigation appears that the awareness and information about Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030 components, particularly goal five (5), is weak amongst female-owned businesses in Kenya and Nigeria. The study findings confirmed the results of other studies noted in the literature review that a significant portion of women is more exclusively inhibited than their male counterparts due to gender inequality (Aladejebi, 2020; Balakrishnan & Low, 2016; Sarkis, 2019; Ukwueze, 2022). Many of the respondents in Kenya and Nigeria women seem to have difficulty growing their businesses due to gender bias, lack of raising capital, and inadequate technical and managerial skills; having access to training would provide information such as the fundamental skills and experiences needed to launch the businesses.

The inquisition of women-owned businesses has become increasingly popular as the world community concentrates on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030 target; this also has to be the focus in Africa. Adopting the study's recommendations in light of the research's conclusions could highlight the necessity for the federal, state, or local governments of Kenya and Nigeria to concentrate on advocacy and policies that can boost the SDGs, particularly goal five (5) and also support small-scale women entrepreneurs in the country's economic development. Within the continent of Africa and in each country, there is growing recognition that as African women attain higher measures of economic and social well-being, benefits accrue to the society; despite this growing understanding, removing inequalities for women has not kept pace (Bolaji & Oluwaseun, 2022). More women should be educated, informed, and empowered by African governments, who should also engage in collaborative mentoring to spread knowledge about the need for gender neutrality in small businesses and entrepreneurship.

Despite the bleak outlook in Africa in respect of gender equality, it is believed that the post-COVID-19 consequences have the potential to bring about long-term improvements that might lessen gender disparity in small businesses in Africa, particularly in Kenya and Nigeria. According to the study, many African women are unaware of sustainable development goals. Therefore, there is a need for comprehensive advocacy and sensitization on sustainable development goals (SDGs) amongst business owners, operators, and citizens. This study also points to the fact that gender equality is necessary and why women should receive funding and mentoring to help them succeed as business owners. For Africa to flourish and grow economically, gender equality is crucial.

8. Research limitations

The study limitations may provide grounds for areas for further studies. However, a few obstacles had to be overcome to complete the study. First, it was challenging to persuade the participants to participate in the study since many said they were concerned about government supervision. Although we could gather the necessary data, several entrepreneurs would not accept our assurance that the research was independent of government-sponsored projects. Second, several participants joggled between doing their jobs and responding to the research questions; as a result, some questions went unanswered, and the interview process was disrupted while they concentrated on their clients. Thirdly, some participants had difficulty understanding the questions and contributing to the study since they did not speak English well. So, the interviewer had to result into

broken English to encourage their participation. This could further be why the SDGs are yet unknown to Africans, particularly to the female gender based on language communication.

In addition, the research criteria used to choose study participants were unique to the current research; future researchers may consider changing the research criteria and sample size to broaden the study's focus. Furthermore, it is vital to broaden the scope of the research context. Future researchers can use this study's framework to conduct further comparative analysis. Finally, future studies could investigate a longitudinal study over time or a cross-sectional study of this form which is comparative and can also be used to consider other key sustainable development goals (SDGs) to provide further valuable insights.

Authors' contributions

J.B., S.O.S., and N.R. were in charge of conceptualization, determining the research problem, formulating the research objective, the research design, execution of the research, and drafting the article. Then O.T.O. played a mentoring role and assisted with the project administration, critical review, editing for improvements, and validation, and guided the whole drafting of the article.

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