

# The Impact of Micro-Finance on Women Groups in Katsina-Ala, Benue State, Nigeria

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**Abstract:** Microfinance is hailed as a tool for poverty alleviation and is one of the major strategies to achieve poverty reduction especially among women. This is because access to financial services assist poor households in meeting their basic financial needs, protects them against risks, and reduces their vulnerability to shocks, by building assets. Prof Mohammed Yunus of Bangladesh developed a framework for Microfinance approach to community development with a pilot group lending scheme for the landless people and this later became the Grameen Bank which currently serves millions of clients out of which about 94% of them are women. This approach has become a model for many countries. The Central bank of Nigeria (CBN) views microfinance as a mechanism for providing financial services to the poor who are traditionally not served by the conventional financial institutions. This research examined the impact of micro finance on women in Katsina Ala Local Government Area of Benue state. This research was based on a primary source of data obtained from a survey using structured questionnaires administered to 200 women that were randomly selected through their various associations. An empirical review was done to establish the potency of microfinance in other societies. Secondary source of data obtained from previous similar studies was also used to strengthen the study. Descriptive statistics of simple percentages was adopted as the method of analysis to establish how micro finance impacted the socio-economic wellbeing of the women. The study revealed that women who had access to microfinance from Lift Above Poverty organization and Better Life microfinance institutions experienced significant growth in their businesses and improvements in their socio-economic wellbeing as compared to those that had no access. The study also established that the repayment process appeared too demanding for the women. The paper recommends that the repayment process should be made less demanding for the women by spreading the payments into a longer duration so as to reduce the pressure of repayment and massive sensitization should be carried out for more women to know of the availability and gains of the facility and its benefits to overcoming financial insecurity.

**Keywords:** Microfinance, Women, Socio-Economic, Wellbeing and Development.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Money provided by microfinance institutions (MFIs) is progressively being regarded as an important source of financing for people with inadequate income as well as those who do not have access to banking and other conventional financial services. More importantly, in developing countries such as Bangladesh and Nigeria, the financial services by

MFIs are considered not only beneficial to the poor people but also useful in terms of helping to eradicate poverty in these countries (Shukran & Rahman, 2011; Tadele & Rao, 2014; Yunus, 1998, 2007). It is recognized as an essential component of the financial environment in developing countries to assist women especially to have access to capital to startup businesses, save and build up funds to expand their capital base. (Kwon-Ndung, 2015) reports that microfinance is a mechanism for economic empowerment for women.

Microfinance banking in Nigeria was launched in December, 2005 (CBN, 2007; Olaitan, 2007 and Onwumere, 2008). At the period of the consolidation of the banking sector, the Federal Government of Nigeria adopted it as one of the main sources of poverty reduction strategy in Nigeria and mandated the Central Bank of Nigeria to develop appropriate policy and regulatory framework for the operations of Microfinance Institutions (Ogunrinola & Alege, 2007).

Microfinance lending refers to the provision of financial services for the poor who, conventionally, have been excluded from the formal banking sector or have no access to formal financial institutions. It is often described as banking for the poor (Yunus, 2003). Microfinance programs and services involve the provisions of loans, savings, and other financial services to low-income and poor people for use in small businesses. This also include credit, savings, and insurance. In other words, microfinance encompasses credit and savings in contrast with microcredit which is an extension of small loans to poor people for the purpose of investing in self-employment programs.

Prof Mohammed Yunus of Bangladesh developed a framework for Microfinance approach to community development with a pilot group lending scheme for the landless people and this later became the Grameen Bank which currently serves millions of clients out of which about 94% of them are women, The Grameen bank has become a model for many countries (Anon. 2011). Countries like Nigeria also adopted this approach. Indeed, according to the CBN (2005), "microfinance is about providing financial services to the poor who are traditionally not served by the conventional financial institutions." Microfinance has three distinguishing features from other formal financial products. These include: (1) the smallness of loans advanced and/or

savings collected, (2) the absence of asset-based collateral, and (3) simplicity of operations.

Microfinance is hailed as a tool for poverty alleviation and provides financial services to assist poor households in meeting their basic financial needs, protects them against risks, and reduces their vulnerability to shocks, by building assets. Ultimately, this access develops their social and economic empowerment. It is further argued that financial services for the poor can help them, to turn their savings into sums large enough to satisfy a wide range of business, consumption, personal, social, and asset-building needs (Project Parivartan, 2006). It also enables them to take advantage of economic opportunities, to build assets, and to reduce their vulnerability to external shocks that adversely affect their living standards, (Mejeha & Nwachukwu, 2008).

In Katsina-Ala local government area of Benue state some women have had access to micro finance loan from Lift Above Poverty Organization (LAPO) and better life micro finance institutions to startup businesses and expand already existing enterprises ranging from farming to other petty trades such as the sale of seasonal fruits, trading and other allied businesses to improve their livelihood and improve upon their socio economic and political status in their communities,

LAPO was initiated in the late 1980s as a pro poor development institution committed to the empowerment of low income Nigerians through the provision of responsive financial services and it gradually became a micro finance institution. It has served several poor in Nigeria by the provision of micro finance, In Katsina-ala, LAPO started its operations from 2015, and by their records as at 2019 they had serviced 718 while the Better Life micro finance started in 2018 and have serviced 563 clients.

This study seeks to establish the socio-economic impact of micro finance on women in Katsina –Ala local government of Benue with focus on women who have accessed microfinance from 2017 to 2019.

The study seeks to answer the following research questions: how potent is microfinance in improving the savings of women Katsina –Ala Local Government Area?

Can access to micro-finance help the women absorb shocks? What is the socio- economic status of women who had access to MI loan?

How can MF services be more effective Katsina LGA?

#### *Aim and Objectives of the Study.*

The aim of this study was to establish how micro-credit from MFIs can improve the socio-economic status of women in Katsina Ala LGA. The study specifically desired to

1. Determine the potency of Micro-credit in improving the savings of women in Katsina-Ala LGA,

2. Establish if access to micro-credit can help women absorb shocks in Katsina Ala LGA,
3. Ascertain the extent to which access to micro-credit can improve the socio-economic lives of women in Katsina –Ala LGA and provide strategies that enhance the effectiveness of MF activities.

## II. METHODOLOGY

The study which was a survey is qualitative in nature. The study population was 500 from the registers of women groups in the study location as at 2019. Questionnaires were administered to 200 randomly selected women and the data collected was analyzed. The study also sourced data from relevant literature as secondary sources.

### *Empirical Review*

Okeshola (2011), in a paper on “Poverty eradication efforts in Nigeria: The missing links” mentioned that despite its plentiful resources and oil wealth, poverty is widespread in Nigeria. The author further observed that over 70 per cent of the population is classified as poor, with 35 per cent living in absolute poverty and poverty is especially severe in rural areas, where social services and infrastructure are limited or non-existent. The great majority of those who live in rural areas are poor and depend on agriculture for food and income. About 90 per cent of the country's food is produced by small scale farmers cultivating tiny plots of land who depend on rainfall rather than irrigation systems. Other reports have shown that across the country 44 per cent of male farmers and 72 per of female farmers cultivate less than 1 hectare per household and women play a major role in the production, processing and marketing of food crops ( Okeshola 2011). The poverty situation has worsened to the extent that the country is now considered one of the 20 poorest countries in the world (Reference).

Osahon and Osarobo (2011) recommended that, for a sustainable improvement in the economy, the government at all levels should, amongst others, focus more on the development of essential social services for easier access to education, health, transportation and financial services. This should be complemented by executing relevant development programmes that will boost the income level of the poor, which is desirable for both income redistribution and poverty alleviation purposes.

Tela (2014) also reported that all over the world, poverty and inequality are twin plaques ravaging the lives and destroying the essence of living across races, gender, and status. The world leaders and policy makers are groping for answers as global social structures are depleted and mortality rates have soared and income distribution is a smeared rhetoric. Countries that have perceived these horrendous trends are devising strategies to combat the spurring menace while others heavily overwhelmed are finding it difficult to grasp the realities of these economic thunderbolts. While Africa is home to over One billion people and growing, almost half of

the population is poor and vulnerable. Nigeria with a teeming population is not only fighting poverty but also in combat with a myriad of challenges, ranging from a dearth of true leaders, to corruption, dilapidated infrastructure, health and nutritional issues.

Omotayo (2016) observed that the pervasive implication of environmental and socio-economic challenge (s) poses serious threat to nutritional health and agricultural sustainability in Nigeria. The study adopted the UNICEF's conceptual framework of undernutrition to investigate factors influencing farming households' nutrition and the determinants of health status in the Southwestern part of Nigeria. The results presented relied on data collected on households' environmental, socio-economic, nutrition and health profile through multistage random sampling of 450 households selected from the Southwest geopolitical zone of Nigeria using well-structured questionnaires, out of which 420 with complete information was carefully selected and used. Descriptive statistics (percentage, frequency, mean, anthropometric measure {Households' Dietary Diversity Scores {HDDS}} and inferential statistics {Poisson Regression and Logistic regression model} were used for the data analysis. The result showed that the farmers were ageing, given an average highest age of farmers in Oyo state ( $54.60 \pm 11.30$  years) with highest average years of farming experience ( $19.57 \pm 13.04$ ) in Osun state while the average years of schooling were highest in Ogun state ( $10.28 \pm 5.18$  years). No waste removal (27.86%), littering (21.90%) and land degradation (21.67%) were the most identified environmental problems by the farmers. Furthermore, Poisson regression model was fitted to determine factors influencing farming households' nutrition status and it produced a good fit while Logistic model indicates the determinants of health. It was concluded that socio economic and environmental factors contributes to households' nutrition and health status in the study area. Promotion of informal nutrition and environmental-health education among farmers for sustainable agricultural system was recommended among others.

Okunola (2016) espoused that Nigeria as nation has over the years engaged in lots of developmental activities without actions which make achievements to elude the people. He posited that development of societies doesn't happen in the vacuum. Thus, the adoption of Structural Adjustment Program, SAP, by Nigeria leading to the neglect of the customary periodic National Planning at a time when Nigeria had no structure for development was the beginning of a journey to widened inequality and large poverty incidence, depth and severity.

He observed that farming households and the general rural communities do not have access to clean water, quality education and health facilities, good feeder roads, affordable and safe energy as well as other socioeconomic and socio-infrastructure facilities that would ensure sustainable living for the people whose contribution to the national economy

cannot be overemphasized. This study looked at the structural actions the Nigeria government should embark upon to ensure that the rural dweller have access to life. As the government would be developing programs and policies to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals whose priority is the end poverty in all forms and everywhere by 2030, the study revealed how to position the rural economy for developmental attention from the policy makers.

Ajala (2016) in the study on social construction of gender roles and women's poverty in African societies reported that the societal perception of women as naturally unequal with men gave rise to arbitrary social construction of gender roles between men and women, in which men come first in the scheme of things. Men dominate the economic sphere and political positions of decision making while the role for women is believed to be in the domestic front, consisting mainly of menial endeavours that do not yield economic and political empowerment. The result of gender discrimination is therefore the unequal distribution of wealth in favour of men, hence the prevalence of women's poverty in Nigeria. The alternative hypothesis of the study was that women's poverty in Nigeria is caused by traditional beliefs, cultural norms and customary practices which underlie the social construction of discriminatory gender roles. The study adopted a qualitative research method informed by a social constructivist paradigm. The study confirmed the null hypothesis that gender discrimination is not the root cause of women poverty in Nigeria but existing traditional beliefs, cultural and customary practices in Nigerian communities. Consequently, the study recommended that efforts towards addressing women's poverty in Nigeria must be re-focused on eradicating existing traditional beliefs, cultural norms and customary practices which are responsible for gender discrimination and inequality in Nigeria.

Ajala (2017) in a similar study on gender discrimination in land ownership and the alleviation of women's poverty in Nigeria observed that in Nigeria, gender roles are manifested in social rights and entitlements in a form which denies women equal economic and political empowerment and, in particular, women right to own land. He suggested a land redistribution reform which can address the discrimination against women in land ownership and give women access to land for economic empowerment, thereby alleviating poverty among women in Nigeria.

Ucha (2010) in his study on poverty in Nigeria stated that unemployment, corruption, non-diversification of the economy, income inequality, laziness, and a poor education system can be considered to be some of the key factors contributing to poverty in Nigeria. The report analyzed these factors after reviewing some of the contributions to the literature and summarizing some of the key dimensions of poverty in Nigeria.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Impact Of Micro-Finance On Women Groups In Katsina-Ala, Benue State

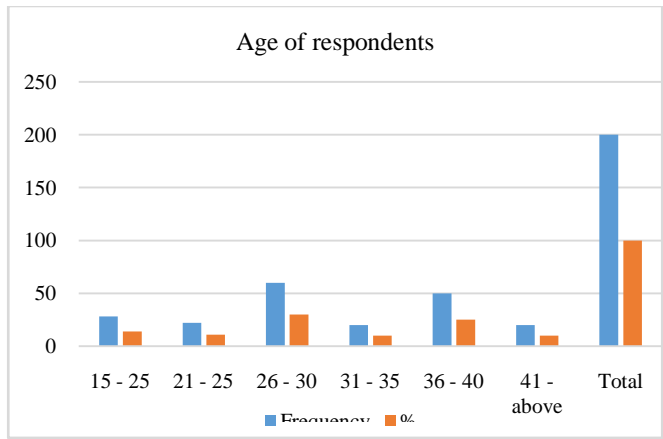


Table .1 Age of respondents

	Frequency	%
15 – 25	28	14
21 – 25	22	11
26 – 30	60	30
31 -35	20	10
36 – 40	50	25
41- above	20	10
Total	200	100

Source: Field Survey, 2019

Table 1.1 indicates that 14% of the respondents are between ages 15-25, while 11% of the women are between ages 21-25. Similarly, 30 % of the respondent are between ages 26-30. This category of women form the largest population of the study and implies that the women in this category are not just active but are more challenged by family burdens and the reality of meeting up with daily needs of self and family. 10% of the women are within the age brackets of 31- 35 while the reason for this drop is not clear but one can suggest that since the sampling technic was randomly done, it could inform the size of the women in this group. Women within ages 36-40 make up 25% of the population which indicates that as the women advance in age, with several increasing economic challenges they become increasingly willing to empower themselves. While women between ages 41 and above represent 10% of the population. The results clearly explain that because the women in Benue state marry early as customary in most part of the region, they however strive to empower themselves economically.

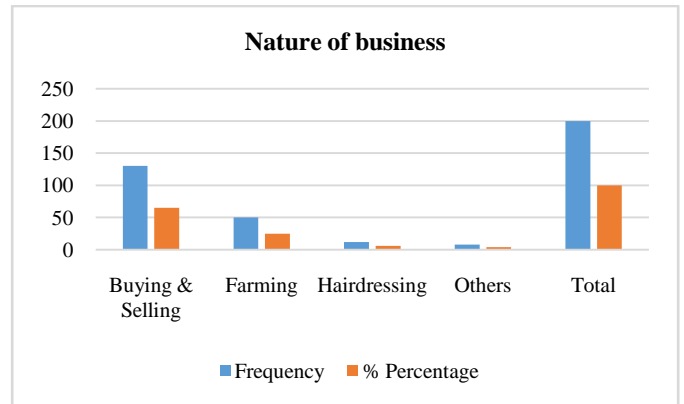


Table 1.2: Nature of business

Business Type	Frequency	%
Buying & selling	130	65
Farming	50	25
Hairdressing	12	6
Others	8	4
Total	200	100

Source: Field Survey, 2019

Table 1.2 show that 65% of the women are into buying and selling, majority of the women in this category buy and sell oranges which is a popularly produced fruit in Katsina-Ala. Infact the women involved in the retailing of oranges run regular shifts in order to provide opportunities for every woman to sell her oranges. They are so organized that they run morning, afternoon and night shifts just to sell their oranges.

Other women in this category are food vendors and others who sell water and food stuff. 25% of the women engage in farming, which is the predominant pre-occupation of the people of Benue state popularly known as the food basket of Nigeria. The results showed that 6% of the women provide hair dressing services while only 4% of the women engage in other types of petty business trades.

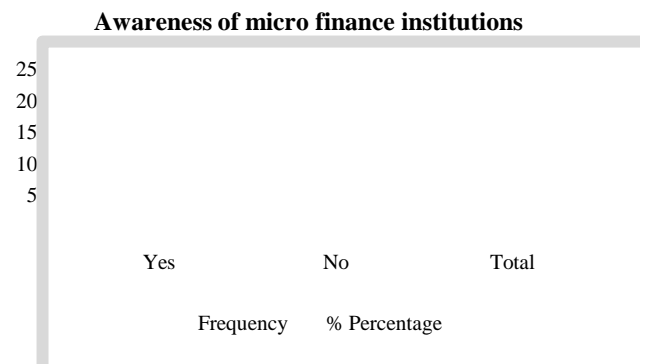


Table 1.3: Awareness of micro finance institutions

Responses	Frequency	%
Yes	176	88
No	24	12
Total	200	100

Source: Field Survey, 2019

Table 1.3 show the extent of awareness of the women to the existence of micro-finance institutions in Katsina-Ala. 88% of the women in Katsina-Ala are aware of the existence of micro finance institutions while 12 percent of women engaged in various trades are not aware that micro-finance institutions exist and can give loans to them.

The high percentage of women with knowledge of the existence of micro-finance in this locality means that the tendency for others to know of its existence is very high because the ones who are aware of its existence can easily share the information with others.

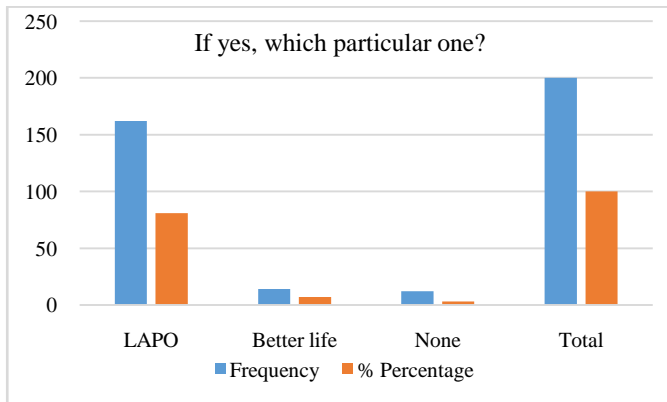


Table 1.4: Knowledge on different MFB Institutions by respondents

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
LAPO	162	81
Better life	14	07
None	12	6
Total	200	100

Source: Field Survey 2019

Table 1.4 presents the Percentage of women that know about the existence of the different micro finance institutions. 81 percent of the women know about LAPO, this can be adjudged to the LAPO was the first micro-finance institution that started in Katsina-Ala that exist in 2015 and had serviced over 817 women with micro-credits and provided opportunities for women to save. While 7 % of the women are aware of Better Life micro-finance institution, while 6% of the women were not aware of any micro-finance institution.

Table 1.5: Do you have access to Microfinance loan?

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	166	83
No	30	15
Indifferent	4	2
Total	200	100

Source Field Survey 2019

Table 1.6 showed that 83% of the respondents had access to micro finance at some point to enhance their trades or start up a trade. From a total sampled population of 200 women, 166 of them representing 83% of them is commendable knowing that access to micro- finance is an entry point to alleviate poverty and empower women economically.

However, 15% of the women representing 30 women from the sampled population have not enjoyed access to micro-finance from the formal institutions and only 2% of them reported they had no access to micro credit from any of the institutions.

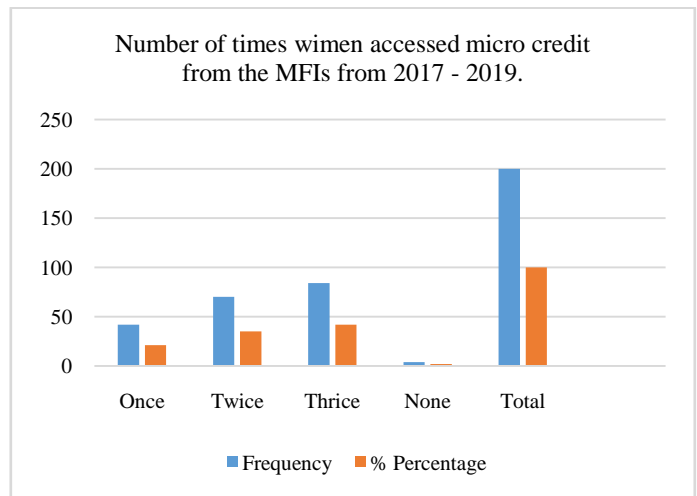


Table 1.6 Frequency of access to credit from MFIs by women from 2017-2019

Responses	Frequency	%
Once	42	21
Twice	70	35
Thrice	84	42
None	4	2
Total	200	100

Source: Field Survey, 2019

Table 1.6 shows the number of times women have accessed microcredit facilities from the two institutions within 2017-2019. The Table reveals that 21% of the women had access to the micro credit only once while 35% of the women had access to micro credit twice. 42% of the women had access



to the loan three times while 2% of the women didn't access the loan probably because they didn't apply for it or did not they fall in the category of women who are not aware of the existence of the loan

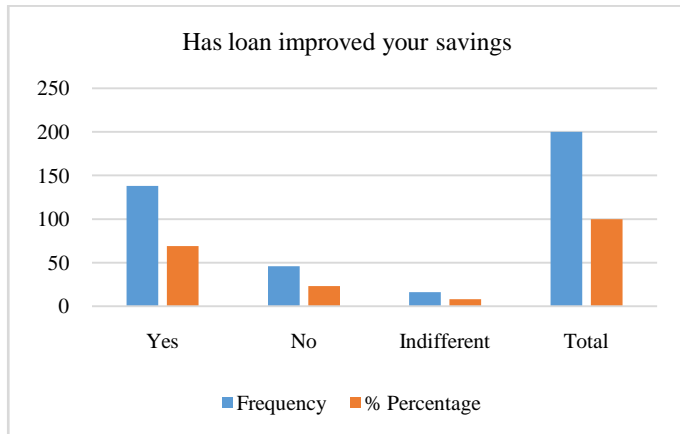


Table 1.7: Whether access to loans improved savings of respondents

Responses	Frequency	%
Yes	138	69
No	46	23
Indifferent	16	8
Total	200	100

Source: Field Survey, 2019

Table 1.7. Show that 69% of the women experienced increase in their savings, this probably justifies the impact of trainings usually done to help the women develop saving skills and the fact that they have increased trading activities in terms of turnover. However, 23% of the women did not notice any increase in their savings and it can be attributed to overwhelming family economic challenges, lack of self-discipline and at times poor turn over. 8% of the women were totally indifferent, they were not sure if any challenges occurred in their savings patterns

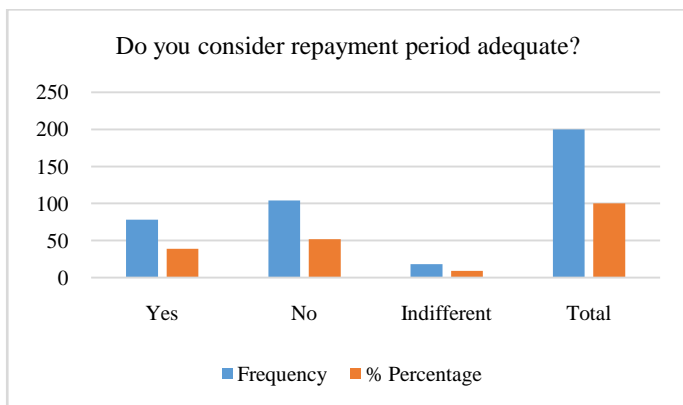


Table 1.8: Do you consider repayment period adequate?

Responses	Frequency	%
Yes	78	39
No	104	52
Indifferent	18	9
Total	200	100

Source: Field Survey, 2019

Table 1.8 shows that 39 % of the women consider that the repayment period of six months is fine by them. Which means the duration of six months repayment window is comfortable for them. 52% of the women representing 104 women feel that the repayment period is not good enough because it mounts so much pressure on them to repay which at times leads to some women develop health complications like high blood pressure.

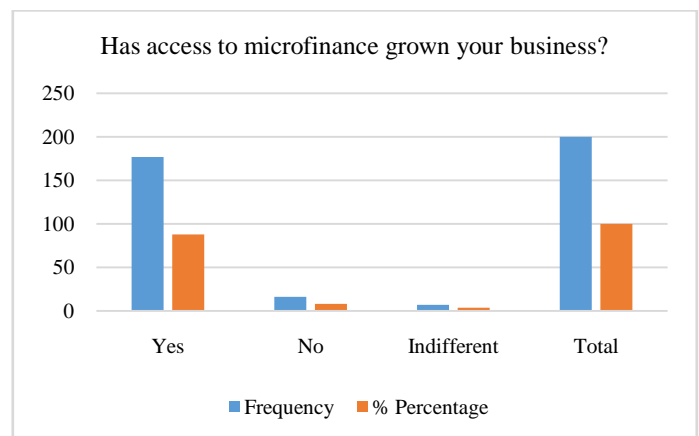


Table 1.9: Has access to microfinance expanded your business?

Responses	Frequency	%
Yes	177	88
No	16	8
Indifferent	7	3.5
Total	200	100

Source field survey 2019

Table 1.9 indicates that 88% of the women representing 177 women agree to growth in their businesses, this signifies that because they had access to micro-credit they expanded and witnessed increase in their business activities and therefore have improved upon their economic well-being. Growth in the business indicates an increase in income. However, 8 percent of the women reported that there was no growth in their businesses and 3.5 percent of the women were just indifferent..

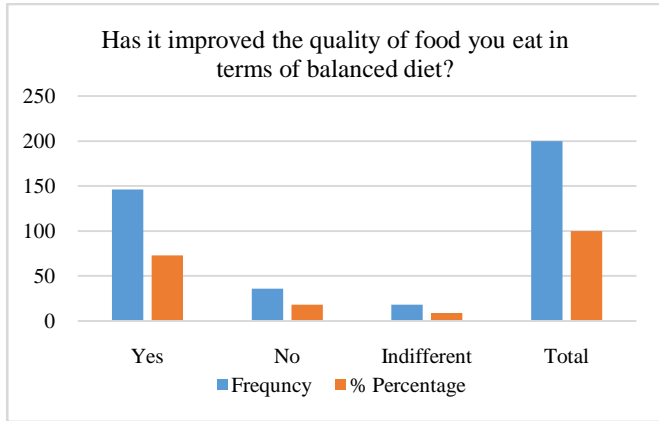


Table 1.10: Has it improved the quality of food you eat in terms of balanced diet?

Responses	Frequency	%
Yes	146	73
No	36	18
Indifferent	18	9
Total	200	100

Source: Field Survey, 2019

Table 1.10 revealed that 73 % of the women agree to an improvement in their diets while 18 % of the women said there was no improvement on their diets even when they acknowledge increase in their savings and growth of their businesses. one can imagine that some of the women place on value on the importance of a balanced diet . 9 % of the women were indifferent.

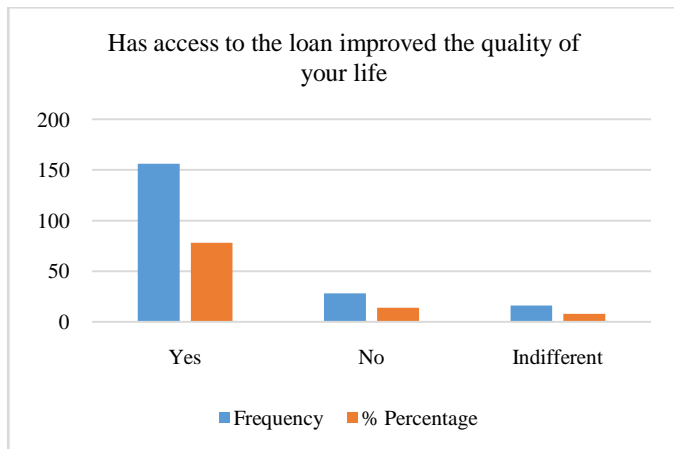


Table 1.11: Has access to the loan improved the quality of your life ?

Responses	Frequency	%
Yes	156	78
No	28	14
Indifferent	16	8

Source field survey 2019

Table 1.11 revealed that 78% of the women agree to an improved quality of life which can be attributed to the ability to make better choices and feel happy with self. 14 percent of the women said the quality of their lives have not improved while 8 % of the women were undeceive and felt indifferent.

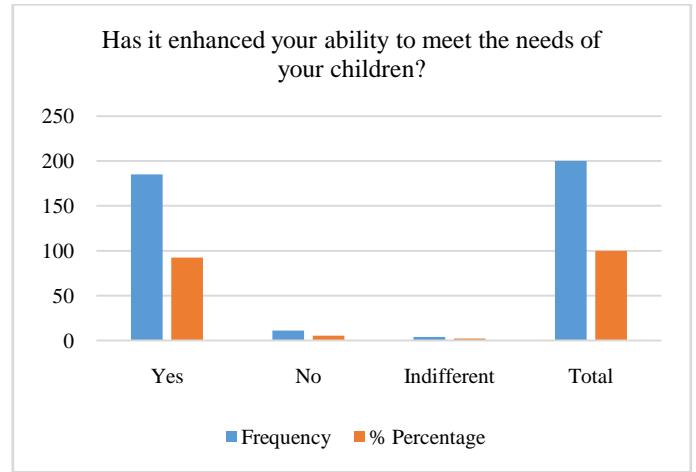


Table 1.12: Has it enhanced your ability to meet the needs of your children?

Responses	Frequency	%
Yes	185	92.5
No	11	5.5
Indifferent	04	2
Total	200	100

Source: Field Survey, 2019

Table 1.12 shows that 92.5 percent of the women agree that they are now able to meet up with the demands of their children which ranges from the provision of basic needs and the payment of school fees while 5.5 of the women said they are not able to meet up with the demands of their children. 2 % of the women felt indifferent on this account.

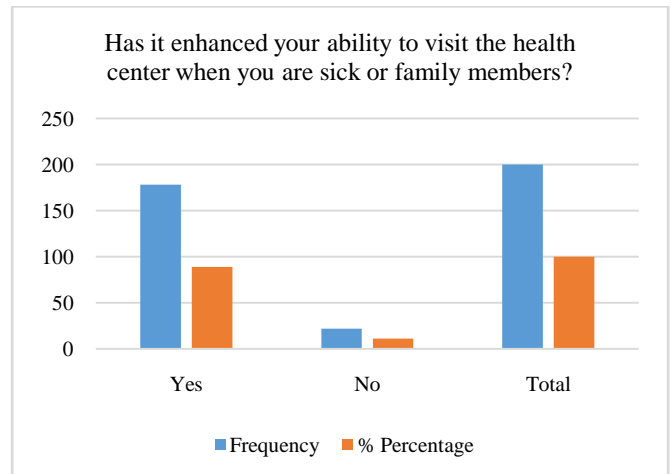


Table 1.13: Has it enhanced your ability to visit the health center when you are sick or family members?

Responses	Frequency	%
Yes	178	89
No	22	11
Total	200	100

Source: Field Survey, 2019

Table 1.13 demonstrates that 89% of the women agreed that they can easily visit the health facility when they have a health challenge, for ante-natal care as well as their family members without hesitation while 11% of the women feel that they cannot readily visit the health facility with ease because of lack of money to pay for their hospital bills.

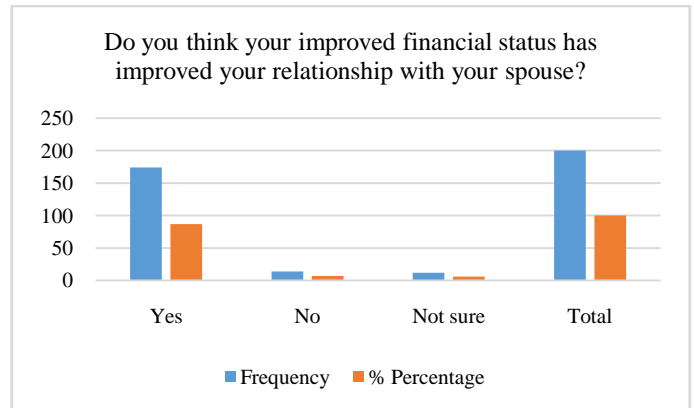


Table 1.15: Do you think your improved financial status has improved your relationship with your spouse?

Responses	Frequency	%
Yes	174	87
No	14	7
Not sure	12	6
Total	200	100

Source: Field Survey, 2019

Table 1.15 show that 87% of the women agreed that the relationship between them and their spouses have improved by reason of their current financial status. They now have less frictions and quarrels and disagreements. While 7% of the women feel that there is no improved relationship with their spouses and 6% of the women are not sure of any improved relationship

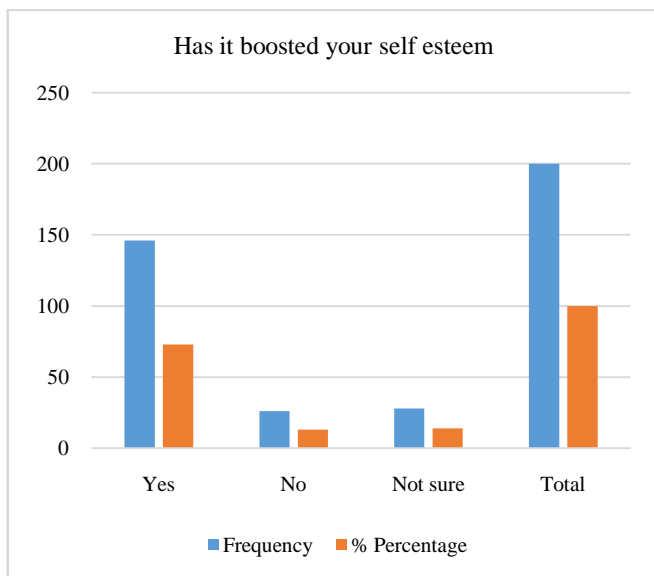


Table 1.14: Has it boosted your self esteem?

Responses	Frequency	%
Yes	146	73
No	26	13
Not sure	28	14
Total	200	100

Source: Field Survey, 2019

Table 1.14 displays that 146 women representing 73% of the sampled size agree that their self-esteem have been boosted with increased savings and enhanced economic status and therefore they have a sense of self worth and also believe in their ability to achieve tangible things for themselves and the society. However,13% of the women still feel a low self - esteem and 14% of the population are not even sure at all of any change in their self-esteem.

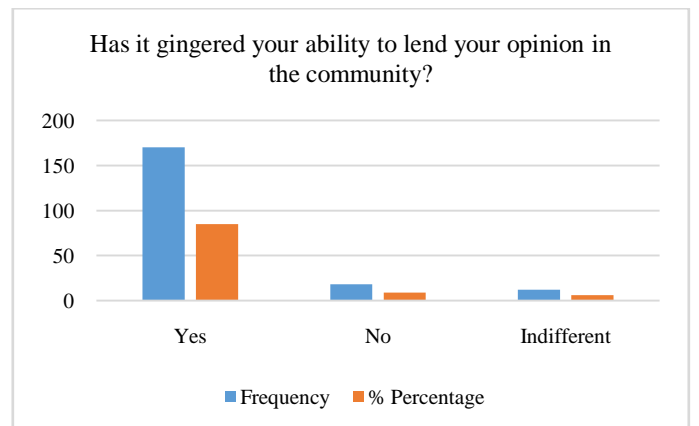


Table 1.16: Has it gingered your ability to lend your opinion in the community?

Responses	Frequency	%
Yes	170	85
No	18	9
Indifferent	12	6

Source: Field Survey, 2019



Table 1.16 shows 85% of the women can give their opinions on community issues and have become community mobilizers for community efforts geared towards the development of their communities .This indicates the women are fast becoming developing leadership skills in their own ways. However, 9% of the women representing 18 women opined that they are not able to lend their opinions in the community in the decision making process of the community while 12 women representing 6% of the women were indifferent and undecided .

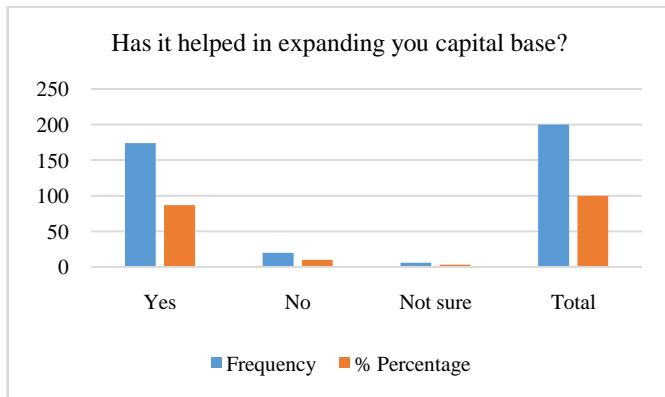


Table 1.17: Has it helped in expanding you capital base?

Responses	Frequency	%
Yes	174	87
No	20	10
Not sure	06	3
Total	200	100

Source: Field Survey, 2019

Table 1,17 show that 87% of the women representing 174 women agree that access to micro-credit expanded their capital base thereby boosting their businesses while ,20 women representing 10% of the women out rightly disagreed that that their capital base did not increase ,while 3% of the women representing 6 women are indifferent on their situation.

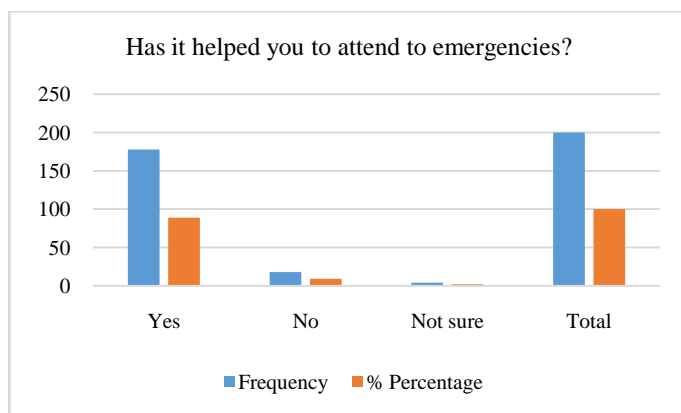


Table 1.18: Has it helped you to attend to emergencies?

Responses	Frequency	%
Yes	178	89
No	18	9
Not sure	4	2
Total	200	100

Source: Field Survey, 2019

Table 1.18 show that 89% of the women representing 178 women can attend to emergencies like unforeseen circumstances seamlessly while 9% of the women representing 18 women still attend to emergencies with great difficulties while 4 women representing 2% of the women are indifferent

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The study in Katsina Ala LGA of Benue state has proven that micro finance is indeed a ticket for entrance into the poverty alleviation status as indicated in the results from this study. There was a clear and visibly obvious improvements in savings, as 69% of the respondents agreed that their savings increased as a result of the micro finance loan access while 23% did not notice an increase in their savings.The 69% savings increment in majority of the women is substantial enough to infer an increase in the savings of the beneficiaries, Similarly, table 1,9 also indicates that 88% of the beneficiaries agreed their businesses thrived while 8% of them reported a non-increase in their businesses. The results also suggest a positive impact on the growth of the enterprises of the beneficiaries. The results revealed an increase in the capital base of 87%. Furthermore, on the improvements of the quality of life, the reults were very certain that 73% of the women agreed to an improvement in their diets while 18 % of them affirmed there was no improvement on their diets even when they acknowledged an increase in their savings and growth of their businesses. It seems to suggest what some of the women place as value on the significance of a balanced diet. However, the increase confirmed that 87% of the women representing 174 women sampled agree that access to micro-credit expanded their capital base and consequently boosting their businesses while 20 women representing 10% out rightly disagreed that their capital base did not increase, while 3% of the women representing 6 women are indifferent on their situation

Table 1.18 revealed that 89% of the women representing 178 women can attend to emergencies like unforeseen circumstances seamlessly while 9% of the women representing 18 women still attend to emergencies with great difficulties while 4 women representing 2% of the women are indifferent This means that 89% of the women can withstand shocks because they have adequate savings to help them attend to emergencies. From the findings of this study one can conclude that microfinance is an entry point for poverty

alleviation. Kwon-Ndung, 2016) also postulated that MF has the potential of alleviating poverty of the rural woman and has the capacity to serve as a roadmap of poverty reduction in Nigeria.

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