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# Entrepreneurial Ecosystem and Entrepreneurial Intention of Women Entrepreneurs in North Eastern Nigeria

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**Abstract:** *Women entrepreneurs encounter a variety of obstacles that prevent them from growing and succeeding, particularly in areas where societal and cultural norms prevent them from engaging in economic activity. This is especially true in Nigeria's north-eastern area, which is marked by extreme poverty, unpredictability, and unrest. Despite these obstacles, female business owners in the area have significantly boosted the local economy by establishing jobs and providing money for their households and communities. This study examined the relationship between entrepreneurial ecosystem and entrepreneurial intention of women entrepreneurs in the North Eastern region of Nigeria. The researchers adopted survey, descriptive and empirical methods while data was generated from primary sources. The instrument used was the questionnaire. The data collected were analyzed descriptively. The study's findings showed that the entrepreneurial ecosystem significantly influences the entrepreneurial intention of women in the north-eastern region of Nigeria. The study recommended that there is need for the development and promotion of microfinance programs specifically targeted at women entrepreneurs. These programs should provide low-interest loans, grants, and other financial products tailored to the needs of women in North Eastern Nigeria. Establish comprehensive mentorship and training programs that focus on equipping women with essential business skills and knowledge. These programs should include workshops, seminars, and one-on-one mentoring sessions with successful entrepreneurs and business professionals. Utilize both in-person and online platforms to ensure wide accessibility.*

**Key words:** *Entrepreneurial Ecosystem, Entrepreneurial Intention and Women Entrepreneurs.*

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## Introduction

A growing number of people believe that entrepreneurship can help them address some of the most urgent social and economic issues affecting their communities. A useful tool for analysing the connected elements that impact startup performance and pinpointing areas for development is the idea of a "entrepreneurial ecosystem" (Daniel, de Villiers Scheepers, Miles, & de Klerk, 2022). Women business owners have drawn more attention recently, according to Raman, Subramaniam, Nair, Shivdas, Achuthan, and Nedungadi (2022), because of their potential to advance social inclusion and gender equality while also fostering economic growth and development. However, there are still many challenges that women

business owners must overcome, such as a lack of opportunities and resources (Al-Qahtani, Fekih Zguir, Al-Fagih, & Koç, 2022).

It can be challenging to comprehend the complex web of variables that affect entrepreneurial success, but the entrepreneurial ecosystem approach offers a useful framework for doing so. According to Yamamura and Lassalle (2022), this approach to studying entrepreneurship considers both the entrepreneurs themselves and the larger environment in which they operate. The entrepreneurial ecosystem is composed of entrepreneurs, investors, academic institutions, governmental organisations, and supporting organisations like business incubators and accelerators. The interactions between various actors and institutions produce the entrepreneurial environment.

A critical component of the business environment is the legal and regulatory framework (Hosseinzadeh, Samadi Foroushani, & Sadraei, 2022). Nigeria's legal and regulatory environment for startups is characterised by an intricate web of laws, regulations, and policies (Molla & Biru, 2023). In order to promote business ownership, the government has established a number of initiatives, such as SMEDAN, the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEs). However, there are still many challenges, including limited access to capital and markets, complicated regulatory procedures, and inadequate physical facilities (Kuteyi & Winkler, 2022).

Northeastern Nigerian businesspeople have a very difficult time getting the funding they need. Many female business owners in the area do not have access to formal sources of finance like banks because of issues like a lack of collateral, a lack of financial literacy, and a high cost of borrowing (Umejiaku, 2020). As a result, more people rely on improvised, unstable sources of funding like their friends and family. Additionally, the lack of venture capital and angel investment in the area limits access to equity financing for startup companies with strong growth potential.

When trying to access markets, entrepreneurs in northeastern Nigeria face additional obstacles. The region is characterised by a fragmented market and a lack of infrastructure. This makes it challenging for startups to engage with customers and grow their businesses (Bizhanova, Mamyrbekov, Umarov, Orazymbetova, & Khairullaeva, 2019). Additionally, a lack of market data and research makes it difficult for business owners to identify new opportunities and develop winning strategies.

The networks and services that support entrepreneurs in their endeavours, according to Shwetzzer, Maritz, and Nguyen (2019), are essential to their success. Through these services and networks, entrepreneurs have access to information, training, mentoring, and other forms of support (Williams Middleton, Padilla-Melendez, Lockett, Quesada-Pallarès, & Jack, 2020). Northeastern Nigeria is home to a number of resources, including business incubators, incubation programmes, and development centres for entrepreneurs.

According to Echendu (2020), Nigeria has the largest economy on the continent due to its population of over 200 million. Nigeria's economy has been plagued by high unemployment, poverty, and inequality despite the nation's rich natural resources and sizable domestic market. The Nigerian government has worked hard recently to promote entrepreneurship as a crucial tool for the nation's economic growth (Adewumi & Keyser, 2020). North Eastern

Nigeria has long struggled with both economic hardship and security issues. Economic activity and investment have decreased as a result of the fighting, and infrastructure and social services have gotten worse. Despite these challenges, more and more locals believe that entrepreneurship can help them and their communities create better futures (Ratten & Usmanij, 2021).

This study aims to explore the entrepreneurial ecosystem and entrepreneurial intention of women entrepreneurs in North Eastern Nigeria. The study will examine the factors that shape the entrepreneurial environment in the region, including the legal and regulatory framework, access to finance and markets, and the availability of support services and networks. The study will also investigate the experiences of women entrepreneurs in the region, including the challenges they face and the strategies they use to overcome them.

### **Statement of the Research Problems/Justification**

In spite of their strong desire, women business owners in northern Nigeria have a difficult time getting the resources and support they need to launch and expand their enterprises. The region's entrepreneurial ecosystem is underdeveloped, with poor infrastructure, insufficient opportunities for training and education, and cultural barriers that prevent women from participating fully in economic activities (Shad, Kakakhel, & Shah, 2021). As a result, there are few people in the area who are interested in starting their own business, and there are many women-run companies that fail. The north-eastern Nigerian region's economic development is significantly impacted by the absence of an environment that supports female entrepreneurs. Women-owned businesses have the potential to increase employment, increase income, and help reduce poverty, but the lack of resources and support they have prevents them from expanding and succeeding (Tundui & Tundui, 2020).

In order to develop policies and programmes that can support their efforts and improve the entrepreneurial ecosystem in north-eastern Nigeria, it is essential to understand the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in the area and the factors that influence their entrepreneurial intentions. In addition to helping women business owners, addressing these issues will advance the region's economy as a whole. The entrepreneurial ecosystem is essential to the success of business owners. It offers entrepreneurs the tools, networks, and support they need to launch and expand their businesses. The entrepreneurial ecosystem in northeastern Nigeria is underdeveloped, particularly for women entrepreneurs, according to research. The region is characterised by poor infrastructure, insufficient opportunities for training and education, and cultural barriers that prevent women from participating fully in economic activities.

As a result, the lack of sufficient support and resources to launch and expand their businesses can be used to explain the low levels of entrepreneurial intention among women in north-eastern Nigeria. Due to their potential to generate income, create jobs, and lessen poverty, women-owned businesses have significant repercussions for the region's economic growth. To develop policies and programmes that can support their efforts and improve the region's entrepreneurial ecosystem, it is crucial to understand the challenges faced by women entrepreneurs in North Eastern Nigeria as well as the factors that influence their entrepreneurial intentions.

## **Literature Review**

### **Theoretical Review**

#### **The Resource-Based View (RBV) Theory**

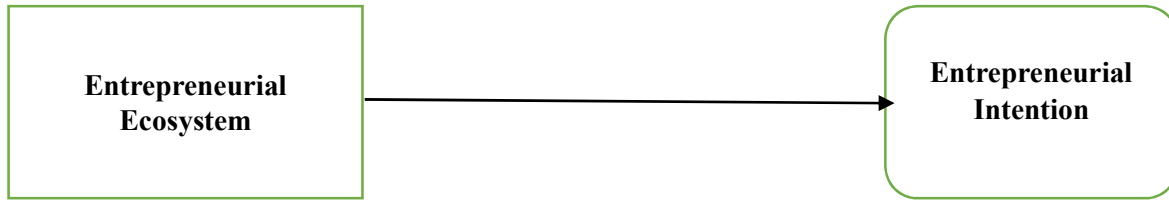
A firm's competitive edge, according to the resource-based view (RBV) theory, derives from its own special resources and capabilities rather than from external factors like the condition of the market or the makeup of the industry. (Grant, 1991). When used within the context of the ecosystem that encompasses them and their companies, the RBV theory can assist entrepreneurs in comprehending the significance of leveraging their special resources and skills to create a lasting competitive edge and thrive in the market. Entrepreneurs who work in an entrepreneurial setting must be able to identify and pick up the skills and tools they need in order to succeed. (Zahra & Nambisan, 2012). These skills and assets can range from money resources to human capital to intellectual property, network connections, and technical infrastructure, among many other resources.

The entrepreneurial ecosystem is also made up of a wide variety of actors, including organisations, the government, startups, financiers, and accelerators. The RBV theory can assist company owners in this scenario in determining how to establish connections with other ecosystem players and how to use those connections to gain access to resources and competencies that they might not otherwise have (Cai, Hughes, & Yin, 2014). An startup with a novel technology, for instance, might use connections with investors to secure funding for the advancement and commercialization of the technology. In a similar manner, a businessperson with a large network can take advantage of connections with other ecosystem participants to open doors to new marketplaces or clientele (Spigel & Harrison, 2018).

In general, the RBV theory provides entrepreneurs with a paradigm they can use to recognise and maximise their particular assets and competencies in order to obtain a competitive edge in the ecosystem of the entrepreneurial economy. If entrepreneurs use their resources and talents effectively, they can surmount the obstacles that the environment presents and succeed in the market.

#### **Conceptual Framework**

A conceptual framework is a type of survey instrument that can take on a variety of shapes and be used in several settings. Thoughts are organized and theoretical qualifications are determined with its assistance. A reasonable structure will make suggestions about the connections between the variables that are being considered and will graphically or diagrammatically demonstrate those suggestions. (Litster, Hurst, & Cardoso, 2023). Entrepreneurial intention is the dependent variable and entrepreneurial ecosystem is the independent variable.



**Fig.1 Conceptual framework showing the relationship between study variables**  
**Source: Desk Research, 2023.**

***H01: There is no significant relationship between entrepreneurial ecosystem and entrepreneurial intention among women entrepreneurs in DEC North Eastern States in Nigeria***

### **Concept of Entrepreneurial Intention**

Entrepreneurship intention, according to Astiana, Malinda, Nurbasari, and Margaretha (2022), refers to a person's propensity to launch a new business or participate in entrepreneurship activities. Given that it is regarded as an antecedent to real entrepreneurial behavior, it is an important idea in the subject of entrepreneurship. Numerous elements, such as personal traits, environmental variables, and societal norms, can have an impact on an entrepreneur's purpose. (Maheshwari, Kha, & Arokiasamy, 2022). For instance, a person's degree of schooling, personality characteristics (like their propensity for taking risks), and previous entrepreneurial experience can all have an impact on their entrepreneurial purpose. Similar to this, environmental variables like resource availability, group support, and governmental regulations can also be important.

Cultural standards also affect one's desire to start a business. Entrepreneurship may be seen as a risky or stigmatised career route in some societies, while it may be regarded as a desirable and rewarding career path in others (Pérez-Macas, Fernández-Fernández, & Vieites, 2022). An individual's view of entrepreneurship and their desire to participate in entrepreneurial activities can be influenced by these societal norms. Because it can forecast real entrepreneurial behavior, entrepreneurial purpose is crucial. People who have high levels of entrepreneurial intention are more likely than people who have low levels of intention to launch their own companies or participate in entrepreneurial activities. (Liao, Nguyen, Chi & Nguyen, 2022). Therefore, encouraging women entrepreneurship and fostering economic development may benefit from knowing the variables that affect entrepreneurial purpose (Adim, Tamunomiebi, Akintokunbo & Adubasim, 2018).

Being able to anticipate real entrepreneurial behaviour makes entrepreneurial intention a crucial idea in the area of entrepreneurship. Policymakers, educators, and other stakeholders can work to encourage entrepreneurship and support the expansion of new enterprises by having a better grasp of the variables that affect entrepreneurial purpose.

### **Concept of Entrepreneurial Ecosystem**

The phrase "entrepreneurial ecosystem" refers to the web of people, organisations, and resources that supports the emergence and growth of new businesses (Ianioglo, 2022). The entrepreneurial ecosystem, according to Ikechukwu, James, Usman, and Ekwutoziam (2021), is concerned with the setting in which entrepreneurship occurs and the function of

independent and interdependent variables that promote or restrict entrepreneurial activity. The entrepreneurship ecosystem is made up of many different players, including innovators, investors, government organisations, educational institutions, research organisations, and support organisations like incubators, accelerators, and mentoring programmes. Healthy entrepreneurial ecosystems offer an atmosphere where prospective company owners can access the tools, networks, and resources they need to succeed (Ianioglo, 2022). This includes getting financing, having a guide, learning how to run a company, doing research and development, and getting support for adhering to legal and regulation requirements.

A healthy business atmosphere can foster innovation, economic growth, and the creation of new employment, claim Henn, Terzidis, Kuschel, and Alsua (2022). In addition, by attracting and retaining people with creative aptitude, it has the potential to support the development of a flourishing and diverse business community. An entrepreneurial ecosystem can operate on many various levels, including the local, regional, national, and foreign levels, and is not limited by geographical boundaries. De Klerk, Miles, de Villiers Scheepers, & Daniel, (2022). Metrics like the number of new businesses that are launched, the growth of existing businesses, the amount of investment, and the calibre of the labour force that is readily accessible are frequently used to gauge the success of an entrepreneurial setting.

The various stakeholders in an entrepreneurship ecosystem need to work together and synchronise their efforts in order to foster the growth of new businesses. This will allow the ecosystem to become more robust. (Bertello, Battisti, De Bernardi & Bresciani, 2022). This can involve aligning policies, strategies, and programmes to create an environment that is conducive to entrepreneurship; fostering a culture that encourages creativity and risk-taking; and providing access to the necessary resources and support.

### **Relationship between Entrepreneurial ecosystem and Entrepreneurial Intention**

According to Gupta (2022), the entrepreneurial environment significantly influences a person's desire to become self-employed. The environment in which entrepreneurs function is known as the entrepreneurial ecosystem, and it consists of a network of institutions, organizations, people, and tools that support entrepreneurs. The entrepreneurial environment and entrepreneurial purpose are related in a mutual manner, with each having an impact on the other. (Maheshwari, Kha, & Arokiasamy, 2022).

On the one hand, a favourable business environment can raise the probability that someone will have entrepreneurial aspirations. (Krichen & Chaabouni, 2022). An individual's entrepreneurial self-efficacy and view of viability can be improved by access to resources such as funding, mentoring, training, and networking opportunities, which are all made available by the ecosystem. A robust entrepreneurial ecosystem, for instance, can offer a helpful network of peers and teachers who can direct and motivate people to follow their entrepreneurial ambitions. This can assist people in acquiring the abilities and information required to launch and manage a thriving company. (Anshari & Hamdan, 2022).

On the other side, strong business purpose can support the growth and improvement of the entrepreneurial environment. (Festa, Elbahri, Cuomo, Ossorio, & Rossi, 2022). There will probably be a rise in demand for resources like funding, mentoring, and training as more people declare an interest in beginning their own companies. As a result, new initiatives and

support groups may arise to address these requirements, aiding in the ecosystem's overall growth (Osorno-Hinojosa, Korla, & Ramirez-Vázquez, 2022).

Furthermore, the influence of a person's entrepreneurial goals can be multiplied by a powerful entrepreneurial ecosystem. (Raja, 2022). For instance, if someone has a strong desire to start their own company and the environment has the tools and support they need, they are more likely to do so. Positive effects for the person involved could include financial independence, employment creation, and economic progress. (Ozturk & Ullah, 2022).

According to Lara-Bocanegra, Garcia-Fernandez, Galvez-Ruiz, Grimaldi-Puyana, and Gómez-Millán (2002), the business environment and entrepreneurial purpose are inextricably connected and influence one another. High levels of entrepreneurial purpose can help the growth of a strong entrepreneurial ecosystem, while a helpful environment can increase the chance that an individual will develop entrepreneurial plans. Therefore, in order to promote entrepreneurship and fuel economic development, lawmakers and stakeholders must concentrate on creating a favourable entrepreneurial environment.

### **Methodology**

The study made use of cross sectional survey design and was carried out among women entrepreneurs who are under the Development Exchange Center, DEC through their North Eastern Zonal Office in Bauchi State, Nigeria. A sample size of three hundred and eighty four was arrived at using the Krejcie and Morgan table of sample determination. The convenient sampling technique was used. The information for this research was gathered using primary sources. The main sources of information involve collecting fresh information. Primary data were collected by distributing specifically designed surveys to the female business owners. The data analysis for this research employed inferential statistics to derive findings and inferences. The data that was gathered was examined using SPSS 23.0. The research employed Spearman Rank Order Correlation to examine the connection between the independent and dependent variables.

### **Data Analysis and Result Presentation**

The Spearman rank order correlation tool was used to analyze the primary data with a 95 percent confidence level. The tests specifically address the null forms of hypothesis  $H_{01}$  of which was bivariate. To conduct the analysis, we used the Spearman Rank ( $\rho$ ) statistic. The probability of accepting the null hypothesis at ( $p > 0.05$ ) or rejecting the null hypothesis at ( $p > 0.05$ ) is determined by the use of the 0.05 significance level as the criterion.

**Table 1 Correlation Matrix for Entrepreneurial Ecosystem and Entrepreneurial Intention**

			Entrepreneurial Intention	Entrepreneurial Ecosystem
Spearman's rho	Entrepreneurial Intention	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.878**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000
		N	148	148
		Entrepreneurial Ecosystem	Correlation Coefficient	.878**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.
		N	148	148

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

**Source: SPSS Output**

***H01: There is no significant relationship between entrepreneurial ecosystem and entrepreneurial intention among women entrepreneurs in DEC North Eastern States in Nigeria***

The correlation coefficient (r) shows that there is a significant and positive relationship between entrepreneurial ecosystem and entrepreneurial intention. The rho value 0.878 indicates this relationship and it is significant at  $p\ 0.000 < 0.05$ . The correlation coefficient represents a high correlation indicating a strong relationship. Therefore, based on empirical findings the null hypothesis earlier stated is hereby rejected and the alternate upheld. Thus, there is a significant relationship between entrepreneurial ecosystem and entrepreneurial intention among women entrepreneurs in DEC North Eastern States in Nigeria. The findings of the study were corroborated by that of Kakeesh, (2024) who show that supportive ecosystems, including access to finance, mentorship, and training, significantly influence women's entrepreneurial intentions. Similarly, Mouazen and Hernández-Lara, (2023) found that entrepreneurial ecosystems with robust support systems increase the likelihood of women pursuing entrepreneurial activities.

Furthermore, Badghish, Ali, Ali, Yaqub, and Dhir, (2023) highlighted the critical role of networks, financial access, and educational opportunities in enhancing women's entrepreneurial intentions. Another study by Kulturel-Konak, Konak and Leung, (2024) identified that strong entrepreneurial ecosystems help women overcome cultural and institutional barriers, thus fostering their entrepreneurial intentions. Lastly, the study by Raza, Yousafzai and Saeed, (2024) echoed similar findings, emphasizing the importance of institutional support and entrepreneurial networks in boosting women's entrepreneurial aspirations.

On the other hand, Naguib (2024) argued that even in the presence of supportive ecosystems, deeply ingrained cultural and societal norms can significantly hinder women's



entrepreneurial intentions. This study suggests that the effectiveness of entrepreneurial ecosystems may be overestimated if cultural barriers are not concurrently addressed. Similarly, Giacomini, Janssen, Shinnar, Gundolf and Shiri, (2023) found that while entrepreneurial ecosystems provide necessary resources and support, they do not uniformly translate into higher entrepreneurial intentions for women due to varying societal attitudes towards female entrepreneurship across different regions.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The study on the entrepreneurial ecosystem and entrepreneurial intention of women entrepreneurs in North Eastern Nigeria underscores the vital role that a supportive entrepreneurial ecosystem plays in fostering entrepreneurial intentions among women. The findings reveal that access to resources such as finance, mentorship, and training, along with robust networks and institutional support significantly enhances women's likelihood of pursuing entrepreneurial ventures. This study aligns with existing literature that highlights the importance of a conducive environment in empowering women entrepreneurs and overcoming barriers related to finance, knowledge, and social capital.

However, the study also acknowledges that the impact of these ecosystems is not uniform and can be significantly influenced by cultural and societal factors. Despite a well-established support system, deeply ingrained cultural norms and societal attitudes towards female entrepreneurship can still pose substantial obstacles. Therefore, while enhancing the entrepreneurial ecosystem is crucial, a holistic approach that also addresses cultural and societal barriers is essential for effectively promoting entrepreneurial intentions among women in North Eastern Nigeria. This comprehensive strategy will ensure that the benefits of a supportive ecosystem are fully realized, leading to a more inclusive and dynamic entrepreneurial landscape.

The study recommends that:

- i. There is need for the development and promotion of microfinance programs specifically targeted at women entrepreneurs. These programs should provide low-interest loans, grants, and other financial products tailored to the needs of women in North Eastern Nigeria.
- ii. Establish comprehensive mentorship and training programs that focus on equipping women with essential business skills and knowledge. These programs should include workshops, seminars, and one-on-one mentoring sessions with successful entrepreneurs and business professionals. Utilize both in-person and online platforms to ensure wide accessibility.
- iii. Conduct awareness campaigns and educational programs aimed at changing societal attitudes towards female entrepreneurship. Engage community leaders and influencers to champion the cause of women's entrepreneurship.

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