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THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN SUSTAINING FAMILY BUSINESSES IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper dwells on the role of women in sustaining family businesses in Nigeria. It x-rayed the significance of family business in Nigeria; the role of women in sustaining family business; family businesses and gender dynamics in Nigeria; the current landscape of family businesses in Nigeria; types of family businesses in Nigeria; contributions of family businesses to economic growth and development of Nigeria; challenges faced by women in business and women's role in business succession. The study is exploratory, experiences and personal observations. Based on our findings, we concluded that women have some critical roles to play in promoting family businesses in Nigeria as exposed in this work. The study, therefore, recommend the fostering of an inclusive business environment that promotes gender equality, foster innovation, economic growth, empowers women to thrive professionally for more inclusive future.

Keywords: Family Business, role of women, and sustainability

1. Introduction

Family businesses are the cornerstone of many economies around the world (Oudah, Jabeen & Dixon, 2018), and Nigeria is no exception. These enterprises are often deeply ingrained in the social and economic fabric of the country, contributing significantly to economic growth, job creation, and community development. Family business sustainability pose a big challenge because of their uniqueness. Studies have shown that

30% of family businesses survive the first generation while 10%-15 make it to the 3rd generation and about 3% go beyond the 4th generation (Porfírio, Felício & Carrilho, 2020). Family business success and sustainability refers to the conduct of business operations that considers the interest of future generations while attending to current needs. It is anchored on a tripod of economic, social and environmental factors.

In recent years, there has been a growing recognition of the vital role that women play in the family-owned businesses and their potential to drive sustainability and innovation within this sector. Literature indicate that women have made their mark in family businesses in the area of firm performance, innovation, management and leadership synergy. Others are succession processes, stewardship promotion, and the advancement of entrepreneurship (Trevinyo- Rodriquez & Gallo, 2022). To buttress this, the authors further stated that women and men differ in terms of their unique skills and resources. Women have been identified to exhibit characteristics such as communal attitude and behaviours, social sensitivity, intuition and empathy. Others are caring and cooperative stances, emotional expressiveness, and a desire for common ground. High communication skills, strong attention to details and adoption of a practice-oriented approach. Men on the other hand are more theory driven and oriented towards justice, dominant and competitive and exhibit higher spatial abilities. These differences should rather be complementary and be properly harnessed for effectiveness and sustainability of family businesses.

The sustainability of family businesses in Nigeria is a subject of paramount importance. These businesses face unique challenges and opportunities, and their capacity to endure and thrive is a critical factor in the nation's economic prosperity. Understanding the dynamics of family businesses and the specific contributions of women within this context is essential for shaping policies, strategies, and initiatives aimed at fostering sustainability and growth.

A family business is an enterprise that is primarily owned, controlled, and operated by members of a single family or multiple generations of a family. In a family business, the family's interests often extend beyond financial gain, encompassing personal values, heritage, and a shared vision for the future of the business. These businesses may range from small, local ventures to large, multinational corporations, but they share the distinctive feature of family involvement in ownership, management, or decision-making. Okonkwo (2015) defined it as an organization in which decision-making influence is concentrated in the hands of a family; it is controlled by the family and primarily serves the financial and personal objectives of family members. Chrisman, Chua, and Steier (2019) saw a family business as an organization characterized by a unique blend of family, ownership, and business systems, where family members influence the strategic direction of the firm and are committed to its continuity across generations. De Massis, Frattini, and Lichtenthaler (2013) also referred to family businesses as organizations that encompass a variety of forms, ranging from those influenced by the family to those owned, controlled, and managed by the family. These enterprises often prioritize long-term continuity and family values. Miller and Le Breton-Miller (2017) understood family businesses to be categorized as family- influenced, where family plays a significant role in ownership and governance, or family- controlled, where family members exercise substantial ownership and control, often with the aim of preserving family legacy.

The different perspectives by recent scholars have provided nuanced definitions that capture the essence of family businesses in the modern context. According to scholars (Chrisman, Chua, and Steier (2019), Elmo, Arcese, Valeri et al, 2020), a family business is an organization with such characteristics as: Ownership and Control, Management and Leadership, Transgenerational Orientation, Overlapping of Family and Business Systems, Influence of Family Values, and Emotional Attachment.

Family businesses hold a central and irreplaceable position within Nigeria's economic landscape, contributing to economic growth, job creation, and social stability. According to the Nigerian Association of Chambers of Commerce, Industry, Mines, and Agriculture (NACCIMA), family businesses constitute approximately 80% of all registered businesses in Nigeria and range from small-scale enterprises to large conglomerates, and they operate across diverse sectors, including agriculture, manufacturing, services, and retail. Their significance is underscored by several key factors:

- **Major Economic Contributors:** Family businesses constitute a substantial portion of Nigeria's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and form the backbone of the nation's economic activity. They span various sectors, including agriculture, manufacturing, services, and retail, contributing significantly to overall economic output.
- **Employment Generation:** Family businesses are prolific job creators, employing a vast segment of Nigeria's workforce. They provide opportunities for both skilled and unskilled labor, thereby reducing unemployment and underemployment rates.
- **Entrepreneurship and Innovation:** Family businesses often serve as incubators for entrepreneurship and innovation. They provide a fertile ground for the emergence of new business ideas, products, and services, driving economic diversification and competitiveness.
- **Wealth Distribution:** Family businesses play a crucial role in wealth distribution within Nigerian society. Profits and dividends generated by these enterprises contribute to the economic well-being of family members and, by extension, the broader community.
- **Preservation of Cultural Heritage:** Many family businesses in Nigeria are deeply rooted in cultural traditions and local values. They serve as custodians of cultural heritage, preserving traditional practices and indigenous knowledge.

- **Social Cohesion:** Family businesses foster social cohesion by promoting family values and unity. They often transcend economic objectives, emphasizing family bonds, shared values, and a sense of collective identity.

1.2 The role of women in Sustaining Family Business

Sustaining family businesses is not only a matter of economic significance but also a crucial aspect of preserving cultural heritage and promoting social stability. In Nigeria, family businesses are deeply intertwined with societal values, norms, and traditions. They serve as a source of livelihood, a means of wealth distribution, and a symbol of generational continuity. Moreover, the role of women within family businesses is a topic of growing importance. Historically, women have played substantial but often understated roles in the management and growth of family enterprises in Nigeria. Their contributions extend beyond conventional gender roles, encompassing decision-making, resource allocation, and business strategy. Recognizing and understanding the multifaceted roles of women within family businesses is pivotal for ensuring the resilience and longevity of these enterprises.

The importance of sustaining family businesses as well as the role of women within these enterprises in Nigeria cannot be overstated. Several justifications underscore the significance of this endeavor:

- **Gender Inclusivity:** Women's participation in family businesses is a critical aspect of economic empowerment and gender equality. In Nigeria, where gender disparities persist, studying the role of women in family businesses can provide insights into breaking down gender-related barriers and fostering women's economic independence. It is an avenue to

identify opportunities for women to excel as entrepreneurs and leaders within these enterprises.

- **Generational Continuity:** Family businesses often have a transgenerational orientation, aiming to pass the business from one generation to the next. Investigating their sustainability ensures the preservation of family legacies and the intergenerational transfer of wealth, knowledge, and values.
- **National Development:** The sustainability of family businesses aligns with broader national development goals. Thriving family enterprises contribute to economic stability, reduce income inequality, and promote economic resilience. This research can inform policy initiatives aimed at supporting family businesses and bolstering national development efforts.

1.3 Family Businesses and Gender Dynamics in Nigeria

Traditionally, family businesses in Nigeria, like in many other parts of the world, were often male-dominated. Men typically held leadership positions, made key decisions, and managed the day-to-day operations. However, societal changes, including increased awareness of gender equality and women empowerment, have challenged these traditional roles.

Today, women in Nigeria are breaking through traditional gender barriers in family businesses. They are assuming leadership roles, actively participating in strategic decision-making, and making significant contributions to the growth and sustainability of these enterprises. This shift is driven by several factors:

- **Education and Skills**: Women in Nigeria are increasingly pursuing higher

education and acquiring skills and expertise relevant to various industries. This educational empowerment is enabling them to take on leadership roles and contribute effectively to family businesses.

- **Legal and Cultural Changes**: Changes in laws and cultural norms are creating an environment that is more conducive to gender equality. Legal reforms are addressing gender discrimination, while societal attitudes are evolving to recognize the value of women's contributions.
- **Global Trends**: Nigeria is not isolated from global trends in gender equality and diversity. Family businesses are recognizing that diversity in leadership can enhance innovation and adaptability, making them more competitive in the global marketplace.

Significance of Women in Family Businesses

The increasing role of women in family businesses in Nigeria carries several significant implications:

1. **Enhanced Innovation**: Women often bring diverse perspectives and problem-solving approaches to businesses. Their inclusion can lead to increased innovation and creativity within family enterprises.
2. **Improved Governance**: Women's participation can lead to better corporate governance, transparency, and accountability within family businesses.
3. **Market Expansion**: Women entrepreneurs and leaders may bring insights into underserved markets and consumer segments, facilitating business expansion.
4. **Succession Planning**: Women's involvement in family businesses can also influence succession planning, ensuring continuity and sustainability.
5. **Community Impact**: Family businesses, led by women, often engage more

actively in community development and social responsibility initiatives, contributing positively to the society.

1.4 The Current Landscape of Family Businesses in Nigeria

Family businesses are not only prevalent but also a driving force in Nigeria's economy. They form the backbone of the country's private sector and play a critical role in economic growth, employment generation, and wealth creation. The current landscape of family businesses in Nigeria is characterized by its diversity, with a mix of traditional, long-standing enterprises and emerging start-ups spanning various sectors and sizes. Here's an overview of the prevailing characteristics:

1. **Dominance**: According to the Nigerian Association of Chambers of Commerce, Industry, Mines, and Agriculture (NACCIMA), family businesses make up over 80% of Nigerian enterprises. Prominent conglomerates like the Dangote Group, Adenuga Group, and Otedola Group are all family-owned businesses that dominate sectors like manufacturing, telecommunications, and energy.

2. **Numerous Small Enterprises**: While Nigeria is home to several large and well-known family-owned conglomerates, the majority of family businesses are small and medium- sized enterprises (SMEs). These SMEs are spread across urban and rural areas and contribute significantly to employment and local economies.

3. **Generational Continuity:** Many family businesses in Nigeria have endured for generations, passed down from grandparents to parents and children. This intergenerational continuity highlights their commitment to long-term sustainability and preserving family legacies.

Types of Family Business in Nigeria

1. **Traditional Family Businesses**: Traditional family businesses are privately-owned enterprises where ownership, control, and leadership are passed down within the same family over multiple generations. These businesses are typically deeply entrenched in their local or sectoral ecosystems, often focusing on industries that align with the family's historical strengths and expertise. Traditional family businesses in Nigeria are enterprises that have been passed down through generations within the same family. These businesses often reflect the rich cultural and economic heritage of Nigeria, with deep- rooted ties to specific industries and communities. They are characterized by a strong sense of tradition, commitment to long-term sustainability, and a focus on preserving family legacies. Examples of some prominent traditional family businesses in Nigeria are

    a. **Dangote Group**: Perhaps one of the most prominent examples of a traditional family business in Nigeria is the Dangote Group. Founded by Alhaji Aliko Dangote's grandfather in the early 20th century, the business initially started as a trading enterprise. Over the decades, it has expanded into various sectors, including cement manufacturing, sugar production, and oil refining. The Dangote Group is not only one of Nigeria's largest conglomerates but also one of Africa's most influential industrial players. The company's continued growth and diversification exemplify the endurance of traditional family businesses.
    b. **CFAO Group**: The CFAO Group is another notable family business in Nigeria. Founded by the Chambon family in the late 19th century, the company initially focused on trading activities. Over time, it diversified into various sectors, including automotive distribution and healthcare. The CFAO Group's long- standing presence in Nigeria demonstrates the

ability of traditional family businesses to adapt to changing market conditions.

c. **Leventis Group**: The Leventis Group, established by the Greek-Nigerian Leventis family in the 1930s, has been a key player in Nigeria's automotive and agricultural sectors. The family's commitment to these industries has contributed to the development of Nigeria's agriculture and transportation infrastructure.

d. **Chellarams PLC**: Chellarams PLC is a family business with a history dating back to the 1920s. Founded by the Chellaram family, the company has been involved in diverse sectors, including food and beverage distribution, real estate, and manufacturing. Chellarams PLC is recognized for its long-term commitment to Nigeria's economic development.

2. **Emerging Family Start-ups**: Emerging family start-ups in Nigeria represent a dynamic and innovative segment of family businesses. These enterprises are characterized by their relatively recent establishment, often by a new generation of family members, and a focus on sectors that align with modern trends and opportunities. They combine the traditional values and legacy of family businesses with a forward-looking approach to entrepreneurship. Emerging family start-ups are family-owned businesses that have been founded in recent years, typically by a younger generation of the family. These businesses are characterized by their entrepreneurial spirit, agility, and a desire to explore new sectors and technologies. They often embrace innovation and adapt to evolving market conditions. Examples of emerging family start-ups from Nigeria are:

a. **Flutterwave:** Flutterwave is a prominent fintech start-up co-founded by Nigerian entrepreneur Iyinoluwa Aboyeji. While not a traditional family business, it illustrates the emergence of new-generation family

entrepreneurs. Aboyeji, part of the Aboyeji family, has been instrumental in shaping Nigeria's fintech landscape. Flutterwave offers payment solutions that facilitate e-commerce and financial inclusion, contributing to the growth of Nigeria's digital economy.

b. **Andela:** Andela, a technology company co-founded by Iyinoluwa Aboyeji, is another example of an emerging family start-up. While not a traditional family business, Aboyeji's entrepreneurial journey reflects the new wave of family members venturing into innovative sectors. Andela focuses on software development and talent sourcing, connecting African developers with global tech companies.

c. **Paystack:** Paystack, a Nigerian fintech start-up, was co-founded by Shola Akinlade and Ezra Olubi. While not a traditional family business, the involvement of co-founder Shola Akinlade exemplifies the impact of younger generations in the start-up ecosystem. Paystack provides online payment solutions, addressing e- commerce and digital payment challenges in Nigeria.

d. **FarmCrowdy:** Founded by Onyeka Akumah, FarmCrowdy is an agritech start-up that allows individuals to sponsor farmers and share in the profits. Akumah's entrepreneurial journey is emblematic of the younger generation's interest in agribusiness and technology-driven solutions to address food security challenges in Nigeria.

1.5 Contributions of Family Businesses to Economic Development of Nigeria

Family businesses in Nigeria are versatile and multi-dimensional contributors to the nation's economic advancement. Their collective influence across diverse aspects emphasizes their central role in molding the country's economic terrain and promoting

growth and well-being.

Family businesses significantly contribute to Nigeria's economic development through job creation, economic growth, innovation, wealth generation, community support, entrepreneurship development, foreign exchange earnings, local sourcing, stability, corporate social responsibility, and sustainability initiatives. These businesses are essential drivers of economic prosperity in the country.

1.6 Challenges Faced by Women in Business

Women in business face numerous challenges that can hinder their personal and professional growth. These challenges arise from various socio-cultural, structural, and systemic factors. It is very obvious at present that gender inequality remains a pervasive issue in the business realm, with women encountering various hurdles throughout their professional career. These challenges encompass both external and internal factors, including but not limited to - societal norms, cultural biases, workplace discrimination, and limited access to resources and networks.

1. **Gender Bias and Stereotyping**: One of the primary challenges faced by women in business is gender bias and stereotyping, which can manifest in different forms such as prejudice, discrimination, and unconscious biases. These biases often perpetuate gender-based stereotypes, affecting women's career progression, opportunities for advancement, and access to resources (Kalev, Dobbin, & Kelly, 2006). Numerous studies have highlighted the prevalence of unconscious biases, which often result in women being overlooked for promotions, leadership positions, and important decision-making roles (Eagly & Carli, 2007; Heilman, 2012). These biases can manifest in subtle ways, such as micro aggressions and stereotype-based expectations, ultimately undermining women's confidence and hindering their professional advancement.

2. **Under Representation in Leadership Positions:** Women are still underrepresented in leadership roles across various industries and governments. The "glass ceiling" phenomenon refers to the invisible barriers that prevent women from advancing to top leadership positions. This lack of representation limits the visibility of female role models and perpetuates the notion

that women are less capable in leadership roles (Eagly & Carli, 2007). This depicts that women have no capacity to occupy leadership positions thereby limiting their roles towards making positive impacts to socio-economic growth and development.

3. **Paucity of Work-Life Balance and Care giving Responsibilities**:

Work-life balance remains a significant challenge for women in business. Balancing career aspirations with family responsibilities and societal expectations often places women in a precarious position, forcing them to make difficult choices that can impede their professional growth (Budig & England, 2001; Glass & Cook, 2016). The lack of supportive policies and flexible work arrangements further exacerbates this challenge, as women are frequently forced to choose between career progression and personal fulfillment. Balancing professional responsibilities with care giving and family obligations poses significant challenges for women in business. The societal expectation that women bear the primary responsibility for childcare often leads to work-life conflicts, making it difficult for women to fully commit to their careers (Blair-Loy, 2003).

4. **Paucity of Capital and Funding:** Access to capital and financial resources is another critical challenge faced by women entrepreneurs. Studies have consistently shown that women encounter greater difficulties in accessing funding for their businesses compared to their male counterparts (Brush et al., 2009; Coleman, 2012). This disparity can be attributed to a multitude of factors, including gender biases in venture capital funding

decisions, limited network connections, and the absence of female role models in entrepreneurship. Numerous studies have shown that venture capital investors are more likely to invest in male-led businesses compared to female-led ones, perpetuating gender disparities in entrepreneurial opportunities (Kanze et al., 2018).

5. **Inadequate Networking and Professional Support**:

It is categorically clear that building a professional network is crucial for career advancement. But today, women often encounter challenges in building professional networks and mentorship opportunities. The existence of a "boys' club" culture within many industries can impede women's access to valuable networks and connections, which are crucial for career advancement (Ibarra, 1993; Ely et al., 2011). Without adequate support and mentorship, women may face difficulties in acquiring the necessary skills, knowledge, accessing influential networks and mentorship opportunities due to gendered norms and exclusionary practices and guidance to navigate the complex landscape of business (Ibarra, 1993).

In recent decades, women have made significant strides in the business world, breaking barriers and shattering glass ceilings. However, despite these advancements, women continue to face numerous challenges in business, politics, academics that hinder their progress and limit their opportunities for success as they struggle to compete with their male counterparts. By understanding and addressing these challenges, it is possible to foster an inclusive and equitable business environment that empowers women to thrive and contribute to economic growth. These solutions include but limited to the following points:

1. **Implementing gender diversity and inclusion initiatives in organizations**: Implementing diversity and inclusion initiatives within organizations can help mitigate gender bias and stereotyping and at the same time provide an effective solution to address

the challenges faced by women in business. These initiatives include unconscious bias training, mentoring and sponsorship programs, and promoting a culture of inclusivity and equal opportunities (Ely & Thomas, 2001). Organizations can also establish policies and programs that promote gender diversity in leadership positions, create inclusive work environments, and address unconscious biases. (Catalyst, 2020).

2. **Providing mentorship and sponsorship programs**: Organizations can establish formal mentorship programs, women's networking groups, and industry-specific conferences that provide opportunities for women to network, seek guidance, and access professional support (Harrison & Mason, 2002). It is explicitly conspicuous that women can benefit from mentorship and sponsorship programs that connect them with experienced professionals who can offer guidance, support, and opportunities for advancement to willing and illustrious women (Ely et al., 2019).

3. **Encouraging networking and professional development opportunities**: Women can be encouraged to participate in networking events, conferences, and training programs that enhance their skills, expand their professional networks, and provide access to new opportunities (Hewlett et al., 2017).

4. **Promoting work-life balance and flexible work arrangements**: Organizations can adopt policies that promote work-life balance, such as flexible work hours, remote work options, and family-friendly benefits, which can help alleviate some of the challenges faced by women in managing career and family responsibilities (World Economic Forum, 2020). Concur with us that implementing family-friendly policies such as flexible work arrangements, affordable childcare options, and paid parental leave can support women in managing their work-life balance effectively (Kossek & Lambert, 2005).

5. **Advocating for policy changes and legal protections**: Governments and advocacy groups can work together to advocate for policy changes that promote gender equality in the workplace, such as pay equity laws, parental leave policies, and anti-discrimination

legislation (United Nations, 2020). All these are practiced in the developed countries of the world and the developing countries like Nigeria can borrow a leaf from them.

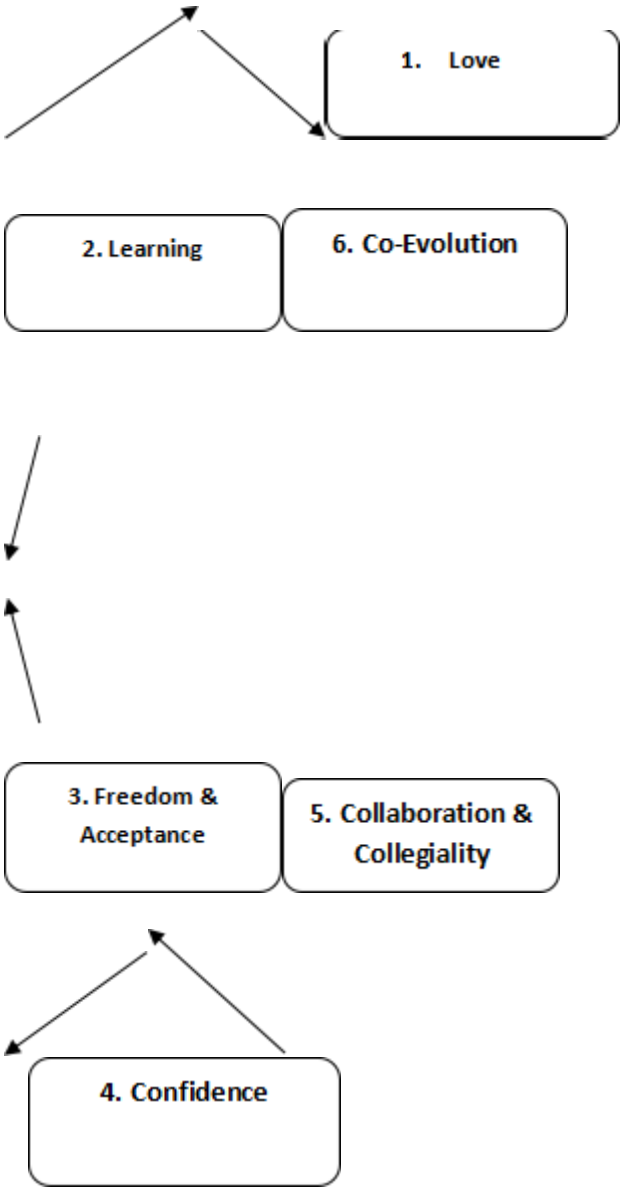
6. **Empowering and Encouraging Women for Leadership Position**: Organizations should prioritize initiatives aimed at increasing gender diversity in leadership positions. Implementing formal mentoring programs, establishing clear diversity goals, and ensuring transparency in promotion and hiring processes can help break the glass ceiling (Ibarra & Obodaru, 2016).

7. **Easy Access to Capital and Funding**: Encouraging and supporting women's entrepreneurship through specialized funding programs, grants, and mentorship networks can help bridge the gender gap in accessing capital and funding (Brush et al., 2009).

Women's role in Business Succession

One cannot talk about women's role in business succession without looking at their roles in the family, planning, and management of the business. Women play crucial roles in this process of nurturing their children's interest in the family business by harnessing their capabilities and strengths through involvement in the day-to-day operations, which translate to a sense of ownership. Genuine female inclusion is cultivated at home by ensuring an inclusive culture and environment that support gender diversity which ultimately translate into values and organizational culture (Trevinyo-Rodriquez & Gallo, 2022). Even if a daughter is older and more talented, she hardly takes full responsibility in the business affairs and do equally have limited opportunities as she is mostly permitted to work as a co-entrepreneur alongside her brothers; with them taking on the main leadership role when dealing with crucial stakeholders such as employees, customers, suppliers, and finance. Despite this traditional gap and constitutional neglect to women in business, family firms hardly succeed without the inputs from the women. While some women do lead family businesses or play significant roles in their

management, others may find themselves in marginal positions with limited responsibilities and decision- making power. The major challenge for business-owning family lies in their ability to manage, integrate and capitalize their family diversity (Trevinyo-Rodriquez & Gallo, 2022).



A women Inclusive Environment – Crucial Aspect

Adopted from: The Power of Inclusion in Family Business 1-8; Trevinyo-Rodruguez and Gallo (2022)

The dynamic nature of family businesses influences their outcomes in terms of performance, growth, change and transitioning. Family businesses have two main goals to achieve, namely: business performance and satisfaction of family interest (Olson, Zuiker, Dames et al, 2003). Therefore, for family businesses to realize the long-term health and sustainability objectives, it should have the ability to anticipate and respond to changes (Olson, Zuiker, Dames et al, 2003). Success factors in family businesses were identified by Elmo, Arcese, Valeri et al (2020) to include: succession planning, strategic planning, corporate governance, leadership, family business value, family capital and family firm advisors.

Conclusion

Women in business face a myriad of challenges that hinder their progress and limit their opportunities for success. These challenges are multifaceted and deeply rooted in societal norms and structures. Also, Gender bias and discrimination, work-life balance issues, limited access to capital, and inadequate networking opportunities are among the significant barriers that women encounter. Addressing these barriers require collective efforts from individuals, organizations, and policymakers. By implementing the suggested solutions, such as diversity initiatives, family- friendly policies, and targeted support programs, we can foster an inclusive business environment that promotes gender equality, foster innovation, economic growth, empowers women to thrive professionally for more inclusive future.

However, challenges persist, including the need for ongoing efforts to combat gender bias and ensure equal opportunities for women in family businesses. Nonetheless, the

changing gender dynamics in family businesses in Nigeria reflect a broader societal shift towards inclusivity, equality, and the recognition of the valuable contributions of women in all aspects of life, including the economic sphere.

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