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"GENDER AND SOCIO-POLITICAL DYNAMICS IN ONITSHA AND NKWO NNEWI MAIN MARKETS IN CONTEMPORARY TIMES."

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MARKETS IN CONTEMPORARY TIMES.**

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***Abstract***

*This article explores the intricate social and political dynamics shaping power relations between men and women traders in the vibrant commercial environments of Onitsha and Nkwo Nnewi Main Markets, two key economic hubs in south-eastern Nigeria. A historical glance at the political development in the two markets under review show that power structures and decision-making processes in these markets are often dominated by the male gender, especially in respect to leadership positions, leaving the female gender with limited opportunities for advancement in such spheres. Why? Through qualitative interviews and field observations, the study examines how gender influences access to resources, decision-making processes, and market opportunities within these trading spaces. It highlights the historical context of women's participation in trade, the challenges they face, including socio-cultural biases and economic disparities, and the strategies employed to navigate these barriers. The findings reveal a complex interplay of cooperation and competition between male and female traders, highlighting instances of solidarity as well as conflict. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of gendered power relations in informal economies, showcasing the resilience of women traders and their critical role in local economic development. The article ultimately calls for greater recognition of gender dynamics in policy formulation and market regulations to promote equity within the trading sector.*

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**Keywords:** Gender, Social, Political, Dynamics, and Markets.

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**Introduction**

The economic landscape of Nigeria is marked by vibrant marketplaces that serve not only as centres for trade but also as sites of intricate social and political interactions. Among these marketplaces, Onitsha and Nkwo Nnewi Main Markets stand out due to their historical significance and the dynamic role they play in the regional economy of south-eastern Nigeria. These markets embody the complexities of gender

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relations, particularly the power dynamics between male and female traders. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for grasping how gender influences economic participation and power structures in informal trading environments.

In Nigeria, women have increasingly taken on significant roles in trade, yet they often operate within a social framework that imposes particular constraints. While research indicates that women traders are pivotal to the country's informal economic growth (NANTS, 2024); nonetheless, these women face systemic barriers, including limited access to capital, discriminatory practices, and socio-cultural biases that marginalise their contributions (Ojinta, 2018, pp. 7-8), which has led to their zero representation in market union leadership positions within the period under review. Men predominantly dominate political positions in these markets and command higher social status within trading hierarchies. Women, on the other hand have created pathways to assert their agency in the marketplace (Afolabi, 2008), especially through organised protests and demonstrations. This duality of cooperation and competition between genders forms the crux of this investigation into the power relations within these markets.

Onitsha, with its bustling port and historic trading traditions, and Nkwo Nnewi, a market deeply embedded in community life, present unique contexts for examining these relationships. Both markets are characterized by a plurality of goods ranging from textiles to automotive parts, offering insight into the economic behaviours and strategies employed by traders. Observational studies indicate that while women often dominate in the sale of certain commodities, their economic prowess is frequently undermined by social expectations that confine them to traditional gender roles (Aliegba et al., 2025, p.439). Such constraints not only hinder women's access to broader market networks but also affect their bargaining power in financial transactions.

The social dynamics within these markets are also reflective of the broader political landscape in Nigeria, where gender inequities persist despite progressive frameworks aimed at fostering gender equality.

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Gender relations in the marketplace are influenced by cultural narratives that dictate the roles and responsibilities of men and women (Ojinta, 2018; Obienusi & Chikwendu, 2020, p.176). Women traders often find themselves navigating a dual reality—balancing their entrepreneurial endeavours with societal norms that discourage assertiveness and autonomy. This phenomenon fosters a unique form of negotiation where women traders must assert their demands while simultaneously engaging with the patriarchal structures that seek to limit their power (Banco et al., 2017).

However, the emergence of cooperative groups among women traders indicates a shift toward collective empowerment. These networks not only provide financial resources but also create platforms for sharing knowledge and strategies to effectively navigate the male-dominated marketplace (Nwankwo, 2017, p. 25). This evolution showcases resilience and adaptability among women traders in Onitsha and Nkwo Nnewi Main Markets, as they leverage their collective strength to challenge existing power dynamics. Despite the socio-political challenges, it is evident that female traders are redefining their roles and negotiating power within the market space.

The focus of this article, therefore, is to unpack the social and political dynamics that govern the relationships between male and female traders in Onitsha and Nkwo Nnewi Main Markets. By employing a qualitative approach that includes interviews, participant observations, and extant literature, this study seeks to illuminate the complexities of these interactions and provide a holistic understanding of gendered power relations. Furthermore, this research intends to highlight the implications of these dynamics for gender equality in Nigeria's informal economy, offering insights that can inform policies aimed at promoting equitable access to economic opportunities.

### **Social and Political Dynamics/Power Relations in the Markets, 1970 - 2022**

The social and political dynamics within Nkwo Nnewi and Onitsha Main Markets reflect the complex interplay of economic power, traditional hierarchies, and evolving political interests.

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These markets are not merely centres for trade; they are vibrant socio-political arenas where authority, identity, and influence intersect. At the heart of these dynamics are questions about who controls the space, who benefits from the institutional structures in place, and how decisions are made and contested. Power in these markets is not evenly distributed. It flows through networks of associations, traditional authorities, market unions, and local government structures. As such, the marketplaces become mirrors of the broader society—reflecting existing hierarchies, contestations, and aspirations for inclusion.

Having discussed the operational structure of the markets and established the existence of various market associations, other governing bodies including the local, state and federal governments, saw to the daily activities of the markets within the period under review, through the appointment of caretakers within the market unions (Innocent Ezeoha, personal communication, 2024). In Onitsha Main Market for instance, the Onitsha Main Market Amalgamated Trade Union (OMMATU) was the apex market organisation basically in charge of governing market activities and representing traders' interests. However, more often than not, this union was dissuaded from organising periodical elections, because of the State Government's interest in the market, thus, giving room for the appointment of male caretakers as union leaders, to serve the socio-political and economic interests of these state stakeholders/politicians (Henry Ogbalu, personal communication, 2024). As has been established in the study, OMMATU's influence extended to regulating trade practices, mediating disputes, and liaising with governmental authorities, thereby establishing a structured hierarchy within the market's socio-political framework. However, the leadership landscape has not been devoid of challenges and it is within these challenges that one can deduce the power relations in the

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leadership structure. Instances of internal discord have surfaced, exemplified by the crisis within the Onitsha Market in 2020. For example, the suspension of the Secretary-General by the President-General over constitutional amendments without due process highlighted tensions regarding governance and transparency within market unions (Ndukuba, 2020). Such conflicts underscore the complexities inherent in the power dynamics of market leadership, where authority is continually negotiated and contested.

There is also the question of gender roles in the power dynamics of Onitsha Main Market. Historically, men and women have been integral to Onitsha Market's socio-economic fabric, engaging actively in trade and contributing to the market's vibrancy. Traditional structures encourage men roles in market governance, including responsibilities such as regulating prices and settling disputes (Ciciliallo, personal communication, 2024). In Onitsha, the economic activities of female traders are vital to the local economy, yet they often face systemic barriers within a patriarchal framework (Uchenna Ogba, personal communication, 2024). A glance at table 1, for instance, affirms that male traders typically dominate the leadership positions in the market. They also occupy most of the higher-value trades and have greater access to capital, which reinforces their power in setting market prices and determining trade norms; unlike the female traders (Obiageri Echeke, personal communication, 2024). This disparity reflects broader societal norms that prioritise male authority and limit women's access to resources, despite both gender's contributions towards the development of the market. Thus, the power dynamics in Onitsha Main Market are influenced by cultural expectations surrounding gender roles; where women are often expected to fulfil traditional roles related to family and domestic responsibilities while simultaneously engaging in trade (Pierotti et al., 2022). A respondent

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asserted that the dual activity of domestic responsibility and trade often constrain women's economic opportunities and limit their visibility in market governance structures (Joseph Okeke, personal communication, 2024). Nevertheless, these female traders often engage in strategic protests to drive their points home, allowing for collective bargaining and increased visibility in decision-making processes within the marketplace (Chisom Ekwunife, personal communication, 2025). Contemporary developments indicate that indeed, women traders, particularly widows, have faced challenges concerning power dynamics and access to resources in the market. A good example can be seen in 2022, when over 500 women traders protested against their ejection from Pocket Layout Market, Woliwo, Onitsha, citing unauthorized demolitions and loss of livelihoods (Vanguard News, 2022). These incidents reflect ongoing struggles for equitable representation and rights within the market's socio-political landscape. More details on the place of women and their activities in the markets under study are presented in the preceding section of the chapter. Albeit these challenges, female traders have carved out significant roles in the market, often specialising in retailed fabric sales, perishable goods and consumer items where they can exert influence, contribute to the development of the State, and establish networks of support among their peers (Chidozie Okeke, personal communication, 2024). Such organised protests provide a platform through which women advocate for their interests and challenge the patriarchal structures that seek to marginalize them.

There are other areas of conflicts and disputes which mirror the social and political dynamics of the market and which underscore the power relations therein. Worthy to note is that the socio-political landscape in Onitsha Main Market is marked by both formal and informal power dynamics that emerge from the interactions between male and female traders. For example,

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while men may hold formal leadership roles, women often exert significant influence through informal networks and social capital, which in some cases subvert traditional power hierarchies (Kenneth Onyeka and Oby Ike, personal communications, 2024). During a personal interview with Kenneth Onyeka (one of the past caretakers at Onitsha main market), he hinted that although most private land spaces in the market are controlled by the men—in respect to space/shop allocation, women often take advantage of their social network with their fathers, uncles, husbands, or male political acquaintances; to acquire these spaces in the markets. The ability of female traders to mobilise resources and support from their networks has been crucial in negotiating better trading conditions and asserting their position within the market. Through such actions, they challenge oppressive norms and play a critical role in shaping the socio-economic cum political landscape of the market (Francis, 2022). This dynamic illustrates a nuanced interplay between gender and market politics, revealing that while patriarchal structures are pervasive, they are also contested and redefined through the actions and experiences of female traders. In fact, land ownership and infrastructural developments have been central to disputes within Onitsha Main Market. In 2022, for example, clashes between market women and the Ukwu family over land claims led to the destruction of goods and shops, highlighting the volatility of property rights and the impact on traders' livelihoods (Punch Newspapers, 2022). Similarly, tensions arose in 2023 when traders protested against planned demolitions by local government authorities, fearing displacement and loss of economic stability (Opinion Nigeria, 2023). These conflicts underscore the intricate power relations involving traders, traditional landowners, and governmental bodies, each vying for control and influence over the market space.

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Lastly, there is the link between political influence and market governance in the Onitsha Main Market. The market's governance has been subject to political influences, with leadership transitions often reflecting broader political dynamics. Innocent Ezeoha, the current caretaker at Onitsha main market, shared that the OMMATU constitution which allows for a 3 years tenureship has continued to be overridden by various State Government, with their constant appointment of Caretakers as leaders of the union to oversee market activities, rather than follow the electioneering process stipulated by the OMMATU constitution (Ezeoha, personal communication, 2024). In 2021, for instance, former market leaders and stakeholders called for elections to replace caretaker committees, emphasising the need for democratically elected representatives to enhance legitimacy and address traders' concerns effectively (Vanguard News, 2021). Such calls indicate a push towards more transparent and accountable governance structures within the market, aiming to balance power relations and ensure that leadership reflects the collective will of the traders.

In all, between 1970 and 2022, Onitsha Main Market has navigated a multifaceted socio-political terrain characterised by evolving leadership structures, gender dynamics, land disputes, and political interventions. The market's resilience and adaptability amidst these challenges underscore its significance as a commercial nucleus in West Africa. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for formulating policies and interventions that promote equitable governance, protect traders' rights, and sustain the market's economic vitality.

In Nkwo Nnewi Main Market, power relations are shaped by deeply entrenched social structures and trade-specific hierarchies. Leaders of trade associations such as the Agbo-Edo Motor Spare Parts Dealers Association (AMSPDA), the Agbo-Edo Timber Dealers Association, or the Nkwo



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Nnewi Butchers Union, among others, play significant roles in controlling access to trade stalls, mediating disputes, and liaising with governmental and non-governmental actors. By constitution, the leaders of these associations are typically elected in a two years non-renewable tenure, but in practice, while the few cases of elections in the market were mostly influenced by social capital, ethnic affiliations, and economic clout; the State government prefers to appoint male union leaders, just like in the case of Onitsha main market. A trader's rise to leadership within the period under review often depended not just on competence, but also on their ability to forge alliances across various socio-economic networks (Linus Odo, personal communication, 2025). For instance, chairmen/caretakers of associations leverage their relationships with local government officials or traditional rulers to consolidate their influence. In this way, political power is both formal—through elections and constitutional roles—and informal—through personal connections and clienteles relationships (Onuoha, 2014, p. 88).

The political character of these markets becomes particularly pronounced during election periods. Politicians, aware of the organisational strength and numerical size of market unions, often court their support in exchange for patronage or policy concessions. Leaders of major market associations are known to mobilise their members for political campaigns, essentially transforming the market into a voting bloc (Obiageri Ike, personal communication, 2024). In return, these leaders receive political appointments or enjoy preferential access to government contracts and influence over local policy decisions. This transactional relationship blurs the lines between commerce and politics, turning market leadership into a politically strategic role rather than merely an administrative one (Obiageri Ike, personal communication, 2024). In some instances, this has led to the politicisation of internal market elections, where aspiring leaders

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seek external political backing to secure positions—sometimes to the detriment of the market's cohesion and autonomy (Chukwu, 2019, p. 56). One notable instance occurred in 2018, when the New Auto Motorcycle Spare Parts (NASPA) market faced a protracted leadership crisis. The market had been without elected executives since August 2017, leading to growing discontent among traders. In response, members under the aegis of the Aspirants Forum of NASPA organized protests and submitted petitions to the Public Complaints Commission (PCC), accusing the Anambra State Ministry of Trade, Commerce and Wealth Creation of frustrating efforts to conduct elections (Ndukuba, 2018). They alleged that the caretaker committee chairman, Mr. Obinna Okechukwu, was paying substantial sums to the ministry to perpetuate his stay in office and avoid elections, thereby exploiting traders and undermining democratic processes within the market (Ndukuba, 2018).

This mobilisation was not merely about internal market leadership but also reflected broader political tensions. The traders' (men and women) actions highlighted their desire for transparent and democratic governance, both within the market and in the wider political landscape. By protesting and seeking intervention from the PCC, the traders demonstrated their agency and willingness to challenge perceived injustices, signalling the influential role market leaders and traders can play in shaping political discourse and action in Nkwo Nnewi Main Market.

Social stratification within the markets also reflects broader societal divisions. Class, gender, and generational differences play a central role in shaping the experience of traders and their access to opportunities. One key aspect of the socio-political dynamics in Nkwo Nnewi is the formation of women's associations/cooperatives, such as the Nnewi Market Women Association, through which they carry out such protests. The group, within the period under review, served as

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essential platforms for collective bargaining and negotiation. Female traders band together through such groups to address common issues such as market security, price regulation, and access to resources (Chinenye Ukpo, personal communication, 2024). These cooperative efforts empower women by amplifying their voices in market governance, especially through protests, allowing them to advocate for conditions that better serve their interests while challenging the patriarchal norms that tend to marginalise them. By fostering solidarity, these associations not only strengthen the economic bargaining power of female traders but also promote social cohesion among women, leading to an increased sense of community and mutual support (Krawczyk et al., 2023). Recent decades, have witnessed women traders in not just Onitsha, but also in Nnewi continue this legacy by organising protests against market levies, corruption in leadership elections, and exploitative regulations. These actions illustrate how social dynamics within the market can serve both to entrench inequality and to become sites of resistance and agency. Power is thus negotiated continuously, with subordinate groups asserting their rights through both formal mechanisms and informal strategies of influence and protest (Okeke, 2017, p. 43).

In addition, the markets are sites where traditional authority and modern governance coexist, sometimes harmoniously, other times contentiously. In Nnewi, the traditional ruler (Igwe) plays a cultural and symbolic role in market affairs, often consulted during major conflicts or infrastructural decisions. The involvement of traditional authorities in market governance helps to maintain social order, but it can also complicate administrative processes when traditional prerogatives clash with democratic market union policies or statutory governmental directives. This dual authority structure underscores the hybrid nature of power in Nigerian markets, where

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modern democratic forms of organization coexist with customary governance systems. The balance of power between these institutions is often fluid, negotiated through constant interaction and compromise (Ezeani, 2015, p. 112).

Another dimension of power relations in the markets is tied to spatial organization and access. Physical space in both Nkwo Nnewi and Onitsha Main Markets is a scarce and highly contested resource. The allocation of stalls and shops often reflects existing power dynamics. Wealthier traders with better political connections or long-standing tenure are more likely to occupy prime locations with higher foot traffic. Conversely, new entrants and smaller traders who are mostly the women are relegated to the peripheries or operate in temporary structures vulnerable to eviction. These spatial inequalities are further exacerbated by periodic demolitions and relocations, often justified in the name of modernisation or urban renewal but perceived by traders as punitive or exclusionary. Thus, the spatial politics of the market also becomes a means through which social hierarchies are reproduced (Nze, 2020, p. 74). Be that as it may, the informal networks that women create play a crucial role in shaping market dynamics. Through kinship ties and communal relationships, female traders leverage social capital to negotiate better prices and secure favourable trading conditions—practices often overlooked by male counterparts who dominate formal trade negotiations (Obi Ezigbogu, personal communication, 2024). This often include mutual support systems where traders share information about market trends, suppliers, and customer preferences, thereby enhancing their competitive edge and resilience against market fluctuations (Martha Chigbo, personal communication, 2024). Despite the challenges posed by male dominance in market governance, the presence and active engagement of women traders contribute to shifting power dynamics. Their growing visibility

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and assertiveness in decision-making arenas catalyze broader discussions about gender roles and economic participation. Both genders involvement in market politics, either formally or informally, challenges traditional norms or pushes for a re-evaluation of gendered expectations surrounding their contributions towards development. The study strongly posits that the growing recognition of women's roles in the market laid foundations for the gradual transformation of power relations, encouraging a more equitable distribution of authority and resources.

In a nutshell/conclusively, the informal power dynamics between male and female traders in Onitsha and Nkwo Nnewi Main Markets significantly influence market governance and decision-making processes. In this case where formal leadership structures are often male-dominated, female traders have developed nuanced strategies to exercise agency and influence within these frameworks. They often organise themselves into cooperatives/associations such as the Onitsha women group under the aegis of Onitsha Leadership and Entrepreneurship Centre - OLEC - (Oby Ike, personal communication, 2024), and also engage in protests against unfavourable policies within the markets, providing a collective voice that can challenge male dominance in market governance (Okon kwo, 2016). Such groups enable these women to pool resources, share knowledge, and negotiate better trading conditions collectively. This collective action enhances their visibility and power in decision-making processes rather than relying on individual capital or standing. Their organised efforts have been instrumental in advocating for policy changes that also benefit female traders, highlighting a structured form of informal influence that can counterbalance the dominating authority held by their male counter parts. Moreover, the informal networks that women establish play a pivotal role in influencing transaction dynamics within the market. Women frequently employ social capital, built through

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kinship ties and communal relationships, to negotiate better prices and secure favourable trading conditions (Ike Egbuna, personal communication, 2024). For instance, women often rely on relationships with male traders to access goods that are in high demand or negotiate prices in ways that undercut the competitive edge typically held by male traders (ChinyereIkpe, personal communication, 2024). This informal bargaining power is crucial, as it allows female traders to navigate the patriarchal structures that would otherwise limit their economic agency (ChinyereIkpe, personal communication, 2024). In respect to ownership of stalls/shops, the patriarchal nature of property or land ownership in most Igbo societies create male dominance of such structures in these markets. In fact, empirical data gotten from interviews and observation of sixty (60) randomly selected shops with female presence at both Onitsha and Nkwo Nnewi Main markets buttressed that there were comparatively a handful of women traders with ownership to stalls/shops, or engaged in medium and high level capital expenditure category of retail trading. The sample size consisted of a total of thirty (30) shops, each, in Onitsha and Nkwo Nnewi Main Markets, respectively. Among the thirty women interviewed in each of the shops at Onitsha main market, six of the women were female traders who claimed to have no level of financial ownership of their shops, which were just an extension of that of their husbands; thirteen of the women were sales girls who were either helping a male relative who owned the shop, or working to earn a living; eight of these women claimed part ownership with their husbands; two were widows who took control their husband's businesses; and only one claimed to have set up her fabrics business by herself and had full ownership, although she hinted that she got the shop through the help of a friend who is a government official. In Nkwo Nnewi Main Market on the other hand, the thirty (30) random shops which had female presence,

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had the following data below: four of the females interviewed, worked with their husbands and claimed part ownership; ten females manned the shops for their husbands with the assistance of an apprentice; six claimed part ownership of the shops with their husbands, however, they also admitted that major financial decisions were made in conjunction with her husband; six of the female traders hinted that their husbands set up the shop originally, but, no longer demanded that they give account of the shop to him; three gained ownership of their shops through their male acquaintances– who still disguise as owners of the shops; and one inherited the shop from her late husband. The backdrop intimates the power dynamics that take place amongst gender in stall/shop ownerships in these markets, with the men having major control of the outcomes. These markets are not only economic spaces but also arenas of political negotiation and social contestation. Power is exercised through formal institutions like market unions and informal networks based on kinship, patronage, and cultural authority. While these structures have enabled the markets to thrive and self-regulate, they have also generated exclusions and contestations that mirror the inequalities of the broader society. Understanding these dynamics is critical for any intervention aimed at improving governance, promoting inclusivity, or enhancing the efficiency of these vital economic institutions.

## **Conclusion**

The exploration of social and political dynamics between male and female traders in Onitsha and Nkwo Nnewi Main Markets reveals a multifaceted landscape marked by both collaborative enterprises and contentious power relations. This study has aimed to unpack the complexities inherent in these gender relationships, highlighting the plurality of experiences faced by women traders in a system that often privileges male actors. The intersection of gender, trade, and power

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within these marketplaces serves not only as a reflection of broader societal norms but also as a critical lens through which to analyse the dynamics of Nigeria's informal economy.

The findings of this research underscore the persistent challenges women traders face, including limited access to financial resources, meager participation in decision-making processes, and the burden of societal expectations (Ojinta, 2018). Yet, amidst these challenges, women demonstrate remarkable resilience and ingenuity, often creating alliances that allow for the negotiation of their roles within the market. This duality—of striving for empowerment while contending with entrenched gender norms—points to significant implications for the future of gender equality in Nigeria's economy.

One of the key implications of these dynamics is the urgent need to recognise and address the structural inequalities that inhibit women traders from fully participating in the economic landscape. The informal economy, which is a significant component of Nigeria's overall economic activity, is often overlooked in policy discussions. Yet, as evidenced by the experiences of traders in Onitsha and Nkwo Nnewi Main Market, this sector is crucial to understanding gender dynamics. Policymakers must therefore prioritise the informal economy in gender policy frameworks, not merely acknowledging women's contributions but actively facilitating their access to resources and networks.

To promote gender equality, policies must be tailored to dismantle barriers that women face in trading environments. It is essential to create more inclusive financial systems that recognise the unique situations of female traders (Banco et al., 2017). For instance, microfinance initiatives should prioritise women's access to credit and support services, offering tailored loan structures



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that consider the realities of their businesses. Moreover, providing training programs in financial literacy and business management would equip women with the necessary skills to navigate market dynamics effectively (Nwankwo, 2017). Initiatives that promote female entrepreneurship, such as incubation programs or grants targeted at women-owned businesses, could further bolster their financial independence.

Furthermore, it is imperative to foster collaborative approaches among female traders that can enhance their bargaining power and social networks. The emergence of cooperative societies among women traders is a vital step toward collective empowerment (Nwankwo, 2017). Policymakers and development practitioners should facilitate the establishment and sustenance of these cooperatives by providing training in cooperative management and advocacy, enabling women to articulate their collective needs in market negotiations more effectively. This could lead to more substantial impact in market policies that have historically favored male traders.

In addition to economic strategies, there is a pressing need for cultural shifts that challenge existing stereotypes and gender norms. Education plays a crucial role in this transformation. Awareness campaigns that address gender biases and highlight the contributions of women traders can change societal perceptions and encourage a more equitable treatment of female traders (Brendon et al., n.d.). Incorporating gender studies into educational curricula can equip future generations with a stronger understanding of equity and the value of inclusivity in economic participation.

Crucially, the involvement of male traders in discussions about gender equality in the market can facilitate a more balanced power dynamic. Creating forums where men and women traders can

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engage in dialogue about challenges and opportunities for collaboration can foster understanding and reduce competition based on gender (Ewell & Rietveld, 2025). By advocating for shared values of respect and equity, traders can work together to create an environment where all actors, regardless of gender, can thrive.

The Implications of these social and political dynamics extend beyond the immediate context of Onitsha and Nkwo Nnewi. They resonate throughout Nigeria's informal economy and inform the broader discourse on gender equality in Africa. As nations across the continent grapple with the need for economic development, acknowledging the contributions of women in informal markets is essential. Equitable access to economic opportunities not only empowers women but also catalyses overall economic growth.

In other words, the power relations between male and female traders in Onitsha and Nkwo Nnewi Main Markets serve as a microcosm of the broader gender dynamics within Nigeria's informal economy. The interplay of resistance and resilience exemplified by women traders is critical to the discourse on gender equality. As this study elucidates, addressing the systemic barriers women face, fostering collaborative networks, and encouraging cultural shifts are vital steps toward promoting equitable access to economic opportunities. A comprehensive approach that integrates policy initiatives, educational reforms, and community engagement can pave the way for a more inclusive economic future—one where the strengths of both male and female traders are recognised and valued in equal measure. Therefore, it is imperative that stakeholders—from policymakers to community leaders and traders themselves—commit to fostering an environment that embraces gender equity as a cornerstone of economic development in Nigeria.

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