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Microfinance without Banks: Women's Empowerment through Informal Savings Mechanisms in Kano State

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ABSTRACT

This research explores how informal savings methods serve as alternatives to traditional microfinance in enhancing women's empowerment in Kano State, Nigeria. A mixed-methods strategy was employed, collecting data from 250 women participating in adashe, ajo, and thrift savings groups spanning five local government areas, alongside six focus group discussions (FGDs). Quantitative results obtained through paired-sample t-tests showed notable increases in average monthly income—from ₦18,500 prior to joining to ₦28,700 post-participation ($p < 0.05$)—and in household decision-making independence (from 34% to 61%). Qualitative insights indicated advancements in self-esteem, negotiation capabilities for business, and the capacity to fund education without spousal consent. Nonetheless, issues such as financial mismanagement, loan defaults, exclusion of the most impoverished women, and susceptibility to inflation were also noted. Grounded in Social Capital Theory and Empowerment Theory, the study concludes that informal savings groups create a culturally relevant, trust-based avenue for financial inclusion and socio-economic empowerment. Suggestions include integrating these groups with formal financial institutions through adaptable partnerships, enhancing governance through training, offering microinsurance products, and utilising digital platforms to promote greater transparency and security.

1. INTRODUCTION

The availability of financial resources is widely recognised as a vital prerequisite for achieving gender equality, promoting inclusive economic development, and alleviating poverty (UN Women, 2023). The capability to save, borrow, and invest empowers women to engage more actively in economic activities, make informed decisions in their lives, and contribute to the development of families and communities (Magaji, 2002). In numerous low- and middle-income countries, significant gender inequalities persist in financial inclusion (Ismail, Musa, & Magaji, 2025). Women often face greater obstacles than men in accessing formal banking services (Magaji & Aliyu, 2002).

In Nigeria, an estimated 36% of adults remain without access to financial services, with women disproportionately represented in this demographic (EFInA, 2023). Obstacles to accessing finance include cultural norms that restrict women's mobility, educational challenges that diminish financial literacy, and infrastructural issues like sparse banking branches in rural regions (Magaji & Aliyu, 2007). The realities of poverty (Magaji, 2007), unemployment, and social inequalities exacerbate these difficulties (Magaji, 2008). For many women, especially in rural and peri-urban settings, formal microfinance institutions (MFIs)—which were designed to address the financial divide—are often unattainable due to collateral requirements, complex procedures, and high interest rates (Adebayo & Olofin, 2024).

Kano State, located in Northwestern Nigeria, serves as a key commercial centre with a vibrant informal economy. Women significantly contribute to petty trading, food selling, tailoring, and other small businesses; however, most operate outside the formal financial sector (Ahmed et al., 2024). State-level estimates indicate that over 60% of female business owners in Kano depend exclusively on personal savings and informal loans to fund their enterprises (Kano State Ministry of Commerce, 2024).

To address the constraints of formal finance, women in Kano have cultivated and maintained informal financial networks, which include adashe (rotating savings and credit associations), ajo, and thrift savings groups. These systems act as adaptive measures for income stabilisation, minor investments, and social support during crises. Operating without standard banking infrastructures, they rely on mutual trust, reciprocity, and community responsibility rather than legal agreements (Mohammed & Salisu, 2024).

Informal savings methods are standard not only in Nigeria but also throughout Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, and Latin America, where the reach of formal financial systems is limited (Abdullahi & Magaji, 2021). Worldwide, these systems are praised for their adaptability, minimal entry requirements, and ability to serve underrepresented populations (Anderson & Baland, 2022). Often, they serve as effective alternatives to traditional microfinance, enabling individuals to save for educational costs, business ventures, and emergencies (Magaji & Yahaya, 2005).

In Nigeria, adashe and related methods are deeply ingrained in local traditions. They provide women with financial resources as well as social capital—networks based on trust and mutual support that enhance resilience. These groups frequently serve as venues for information sharing, mobilising collective efforts, and offering mutual support during significant life events, such as weddings and childbirth (Isiyaka & Magaji, 2015).

Informal savings methods align with numerous Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):

i. SDG 1 (No Poverty) – by enabling women to save, invest, and raise household income.

ii. SDG 5 (Gender Equality) – by empowering women, enhancing their decision-making abilities, and increasing their participation in economic activities.

iii. SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) – by fostering small-scale entrepreneurship and productivity within the informal sector.

iv. SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) – by granting financial access to individuals excluded from formal financial systems.

This study primarily focuses on SDG 5 and SDG 8, emphasising community-led approaches to financial inclusion as a means to achieve sustainable and equitable economic growth.

Despite their potential advantages, informal savings systems in Kano State encounter numerous challenges. There has been limited systematic research that thoroughly investigates the actual effects of these initiatives on women's empowerment, the range of their economic benefits, and the associated risks of their operation. Most current studies concentrate either on the organisational framework of these groups or on microfinance institutions, overlooking the complex ways in which these informal systems affect women's financial independence, social standing, and decision-making authority. Moreover, while anecdotal evidence indicates that participation in these groups enhances women's income and autonomy, both quantitative and qualitative data remain disjointed.

This paper investigates the role of informal savings mechanisms as alternatives to microfinance for women in Kano State, Nigeria. It aims to explore:

1. The degree to which involvement in these schemes enhances women's economic well-being and social agency.
2. The internal dynamics of these groups encompass governance, trust-building, and fund management.
3. The challenges and risks that members confront and the strategies they use to address them.

By integrating survey data with focus group discussions, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of how these informal systems promote women's empowerment and financial inclusion.

The outcomes will add to the academic body of work on gender and development by:

I. Delivering empirical evidence regarding the empowerment impacts of informal savings schemes in northern Nigeria.

ii. Illustrating how social capital can serve as a substitute for formal collateral in community financing.

iii. Presenting policy recommendations for how governments and development organisations can incorporate informal groups into broader strategies for financial inclusion without compromising their autonomy.

In doing so, the research bridges the gap between development theory and grassroots financial practices, highlighting the crucial role of community-based finance in promoting inclusive growth.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Defining Women's Empowerment in Financial Contexts

Women's empowerment has been defined through multiple dimensions—economic, social, political, and psychological—all of which are interconnected and mutually supportive (Kabeer, 1999; Cornwall, 2016). In the financial domain, empowerment generally encompasses increased access to and command over economic resources, autonomy in decision-making, and the ability to affect household and community outcomes (Jafaru, Magaji, & Abdullahi, 2024). While empowerment is fundamentally a process rather than a result, measurable factors—such as changes in income, asset ownership, and spending independence—are commonly used to evaluate progress (Malhotra & Schuler, 2005).

Microfinance, both in its formal and informal forms, has been advocated as a means of empowerment, allowing women to access resources, invest in productive endeavours (Muhammed, Magaji, Ismail, 2025a), and attain a more significant voice in household and community issues (Muhammed, Magaji, Ismail, 2025b). However, the routes from financial access to empowerment are neither automatic nor consistent (Magaji & Haruna, 2012); they are influenced by cultural beliefs, family dynamics, and institutional frameworks (Sanyal, 2009).

2.2 Informal Savings Methods as Alternatives to Microfinance

Informal savings groups—often referred to as rotating savings and credit associations (ROSCAs), accumulating savings and credit associations (ASCAs), or thrift societies—are among the oldest and most prevalent forms of community-based finance worldwide. Unlike formal microfinance institutions, they do not necessitate collateral, formal documentation, or strict credit histories, making them accessible to women with limited formal education or income (Bouman, 1995).

Research globally indicates that involvement in ROSCAs fosters financial discipline by promoting regular savings, yielding lump-sum payments for investment, and encouraging mutual support networks that extend beyond economic interactions (Anderson & Baland, 2022). In regions such as Kenya, Ghana, and Bangladesh, these groups have been associated with increased small-business activity, enhanced household food security, and improved resilience to crises (Ksoll et al., 2016; Gugerty, 2007).

In Nigeria, the informal sector largely predominates in economic activities, with ROSCA-like groups significantly integrated into both urban and rural markets. Women-led variations, such as adashe in northern Nigeria, hold particular importance due to the area's restrictive gender norms and limited participation of women in the workforce (Mohammed & Salisu, 2024).

2.3 The Experience in Kano State

Adashe and thrift groups in Kano State are usually established among women who share pre-existing social connections, such as neighbours, coworkers, or market vendors. Members contribute funds on a regular schedule (daily, weekly, or monthly), with payouts rotated among participants. Aside from financial transactions, these groups serve as information centres, where members exchange business tips, market prices, and personal advice (Magaji, Musa, & Ahmad, 2024).

Small-scale studies in Kano provide empirical evidence suggesting that participation in adashe:

i. Increases the availability of capital for small-scale trading (Abdullahi & Musa, 2023).
ii. Boosts women's confidence in dealings with male suppliers and customers.
iii. Facilitates self-funded home improvements such as purchasing furniture or covering school fees without depending on spousal financial support.

Nonetheless, potential risks include mismanagement of funds, defaults, inflation reducing the value of savings, and the exclusion of the most disadvantaged women who cannot consistently meet contribution expectations.

2.4 Microfinance and Empowerment: Mixed Outcomes

While advocates claim that financial access enhances women's bargaining power and well-being (Musa, Ismail, & Magaji, 2024), critics urge caution against blanket generalisations. Formal microfinance initiatives have at times led to excessive indebtedness (Magaji & Yisa, 2023), reinforced loan appropriation by men, and resulted in conflicts within households (Goetz & Gupta, 1996; Bateman, 2010). Even in informal systems, the results of empowerment differ—some women utilise funds productively, while others feel pressured to allocate resources to immediate consumption needs.

Kabeer (2001) cautions that empowerment necessitates not solely resources but also the capacity to make choices, which is influenced by social norms and gender dynamics. In Kano, where patriarchal structures persist, financial progress for women does not consistently equate to increased decision-making power unless accompanied by changes in household and community perspectives.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

This research is grounded in Social Capital Theory (Coleman, 1988) and Empowerment Theory (Zimmerman, 2000), which together provide a deeper understanding of how informal savings groups facilitate women's economic and social progress in Kano State.

Social Capital Theory posits that resources within social networks—such as trust, reciprocity, and shared norms—are instrumental in fostering cooperation and collective action. In the realm of informal savings strategies, social capital transcends mere group membership; it is a vital asset that maintains these systems throughout time. Members depend on bonding social capital, which thrives in close-knit, homogeneous groups, to uphold repayment norms and ensure financial accountability. The mutual trust developed in these networks reduces transaction costs, mitigates the risks associated with lending without collateral, and enhances the flow of timely information, including market opportunities and innovative business ideas. By embedding financial transactions within social relationships, these groups leverage trust as a form of economic capital, enabling them to function effectively independent of formal banking constraints (Okoroafor, Magaji, & Eze, 2018).

Empowerment Theory represents the second foundation of this study's framework, focusing on the dynamic between individual agency and structural conditions that allow marginalised groups to exert more control over their circumstances. Zimmerman (2000) defines empowerment as a multi-layered process involving individual empowerment (gaining confidence, skills, and self-efficacy), organisational empowerment (participation in decision-making processes), and community empowerment (collective influence over larger socio-economic issues). Informal savings groups act as venues where women can exercise and enhance their agency by learning financial management, leading group activities, and engaging in collective economic decision-making. These experiences not only improve women's practical skills but also challenge restrictive gender norms by presenting them as active economic participants within their families and communities.

By combining Social Capital Theory and Empowerment Theory, this research recognises that financial mechanisms do not automatically ensure empowerment. Rather, empowerment arises when resources (like savings and access to credit) are integrated within trust-based social structures and converted into agency—the capacity to make and act on decisions that influence one's life. This theoretical integration highlights the dual function of informal savings groups: as economic entities rooted in social bonds and as transformative environments where women can develop the skills, confidence, and influence necessary for achieving socio-economic advancement.

2.3 Empirical Review

Empirical findings from various geographical and socio-economic settings highlight the capability of informal savings groups to function as inclusive, adaptable, and culturally aligned financial resources for women who are often excluded from formal microfinance institutions (MFIs).

Yusuf et al. (2023), in their research in Sokoto State, Nigeria, found that adashe groups enabled women to fund small trade businesses, acquire household essentials, and cover school fees without the procedural delays or collateral demands associated with formal loans. These advantages were especially notable among market vendors and home-based business owners, for whom the timing of cash flow is critical for business viability. Similarly, Mwakalobo and Nnko (2024), examining Tanzanian women in rotating savings and credit associations (ROSCAs), found that members not only achieved better income diversification but also exhibited increased resilience to challenges such as illness, market fluctuations, and climate-related disturbances—resilience that often led to decreased dependence on exploitative lenders.

In Kenya, Mbuthia and Muturi (2022) noted that merry-go-round savings schemes significantly boosted women's ability to invest in small-scale agriculture, expand market stalls, and enhance household nutrition. Their study identified a direct link between participation in these schemes and improved retention rates in schools for children, indicating broader effects on human capital.REWORDED_TEXT:

Similarly, Anyango et al. (2023) conducted research in Uganda, revealing that women's savings groups played a crucial role for their members in securing emergency funds rapidly, unlike the lengthy processing times of formal microfinance loans, which often led to lost business opportunities or worsened health emergencies. Findings from West Africa further support these conclusions. In Ghana, Anang et al. (2023) noted that village savings and loan associations (VSLAs) not only facilitated the growth of women's microenterprises but also empowered them in household decision-making, particularly in agricultural families where men typically held authority over production choices. In Cameroon, Anderson and Baland (2023) found that informal financial mechanisms helped stabilise income for participants; however, they also noted that women from lower socioeconomic groups frequently struggled to meet the minimum contribution requirements, thereby excluding them from these groups.

eDespite the benefits, obstacles remain. Adebayo and Olofin (2024) reported that in northern Nigeria, leadership roles within savings groups were often held by wealthier women, resulting in decision-making practices that marginalised poorer members and, at times, prevented them from accessing high-value investment opportunities. Mohammed and Salisu (2024) documented incidents of fund misappropriation in Kano State, which are often associated with inadequate record-keeping and a lack of formal contracts. Likewise, EFInA (2023) noted that although digital savings platforms are emerging in Nigeria, adoption rates among rural women in Kano remain low due to limited access to smartphones, low digital literacy, and concerns about fraud.

Other research also addresses concerns about systemic risks. Chikulo (2022), in a study of community-based savings in Zambia, found that inflation eroded the real value of lump-sum disbursements, diminishing long-term investment potential. In Ghana, Owusu and Boakye (2024) noted that defaults and loan delinquency were heightened by social obligations, making it challenging to recover debts when defaulters were family or close friends. This was echoed by Ncube and Mhlanga (2023) in Zimbabwe, where cultural norms of mutual support sometimes led to lax repayment discipline, particularly during economic crises affecting the community as a whole.

Collectively, the literature outlines a complex scenario: while informal savings systems are notably effective in enhancing financial inclusion, strengthening resilience, and promoting women's agency, they remain susceptible to governance issues, exclusionary practices, macroeconomic challenges, and technological limitations. This complexity suggests that future initiatives should aim to enhance transparency, encourage inclusive leadership, boost financial literacy, and investigate cost-effective digital tools that can complement, rather than replace, the trust-based social frameworks essential to the success of these groups.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This investigation employed a mixed-methods research design, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches to gain a comprehensive understanding of the impact of informal savings mechanisms on women's empowerment. The quantitative aspect allowed for statistical evaluation of alterations in income and decision-making independence, whereas the qualitative aspect provided detailed insights into participants' real-life experiences, perceptions, and group dynamics. This methodological triangulation enhanced the credibility of the results by facilitating cross-verification between numerical trends and narrative accounts (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

3.2 Population and Sampling

The focus population comprised women who were actively involved in informal savings schemes, including adashe (rotating savings and credit associations), ajo, and thrift savings groups, within five purposively chosen Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Kano State: Gwale, Dala, Tarauni, Kumbotso, and Nassarawa. These LGAs were selected to represent a blend of urban and peri-urban areas with high reported engagement in informal finance.

A two-stage sampling method was employed. In the initial stage, purposive sampling was used to identify active and reachable savings groups in the selected LGAs. In the second stage, simple random sampling was utilised to select 250 women participants for the survey, ensuring that each eligible member had an equal opportunity for inclusion. Moreover, a total of six Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted, each comprising 8 to 10 participants. Participants in the FGDs were selected to represent a diverse range of ages, marital statuses, and business types, thereby capturing a broad spectrum of perspectives from the community.

Data collection occurred from March to May 2025. A structured survey questionnaire was employed to gather quantitative data on:

i. Demographic and socio-economic attributes (age, marital status, education level, primary occupation)

ii. Savings behaviours (frequency, contribution amounts, cycle durations)

iii. Purposes for loan utilisation (business investment, education, healthcare, household needs)

iv. Changes in personal income before and after joining savings groups.

v. Household decision-making roles before and after participation

vi. Perceived challenges encountered in group operations

To enrich the survey findings, the FGDs investigated more in-depth themes such as:

i. The motivations for joining savings groups

ii. Experiences regarding group governance and accountability

iii. Social and cultural factors affecting participation

iv. Strategies employed to manage defaults, inflation, and fund mismanagement. Perceptions of empowerment and independence

Interviews and FGDs were conducted in Hausa, recorded (with the consent of participants), and subsequently transcribed and translated into English for analysis.

Quantitative data were entered into SPSS version 27 and analysed using descriptive statistics (means, frequencies, and percentages) to summarise socio-economic characteristics and savings behaviours. Paired-sample t-tests were utilised to evaluate the statistical significance of variations in average monthly income and decision-making autonomy before and after joining savings groups, with a significance level set at $p < 0.05$.

Considering your data and study design, the equation model for this research can be articulated as a paired-sample t-test framework, since you compared before-and-after indicators of empowerment for the same individuals. This can be articulated as:

Qualitative data from FGDs underwent thematic analysis according to Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step process. This process included familiarising oneself with the data, generating initial codes, identifying patterns, reviewing themes, defining and naming these themes, and synthesising the findings. Triangulation between survey results and qualitative narratives ensured that emerging themes were contextualised within the broader socio-economic and cultural landscape of Kano State.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Socioeconomic Characteristics of Respondents

Variable	Frequency (%)
Age (years)	
20–29	28
30–39	42
40–49	21
50+	9
Education	
No formal education	36
Primary	29
Secondary	23
Tertiary	12
Main occupation	
Petty trading	54

Variable	Frequency (%)
Tailoring	18
Food vending	14
Others	14

Most respondents were in the 30–39 age group, with petty trading as the predominant occupation. Education levels were generally low, reinforcing the relevance of non-formal financial mechanisms.

4.2 Impact on Women's Empowerment

Table 2: Changes in Key Empowerment Indicators Before and After Joining Informal Savings Groups (n = 250)

Indicator	Before Joining the Savings Group	After Joining the Savings Group	Change (%)	Statistical Significance (p-value)
Average Monthly Income (₦)	18,500	28,700	+55.1	0.000**
Women with Decision-Making Autonomy in Household Expenditure (%)	34	61	+27	0.001**
Women Able to Pay Children's School Fees Without External Assistance (%)	29	57	+28	0.002**
Women Owning Business Assets (e.g., sewing machine, grinding machine, stock) (%)	22	49	+27	0.003**
Women Reporting Confidence in Negotiating with Suppliers (%)	31	68	+37	0.000**
Women Participating in Community Development Meetings (%)	19	46	+27	0.005**

Note: $p < 0.05$ indicates statistically significant improvement.

Quantitative analysis reveals a significant economic benefit from participating in informal savings groups. The average monthly income rose by ₦10,200 (a 55.1% increase), reflecting enhanced ability to fulfil household requirements, reinvest in ventures, and handle emergencies.

The autonomy in decision-making, defined as the percentage of women able to make choices regarding household spending without consulting a male figure, increased notably from 34% to 61%. Focus group discussions attributed this change to increased personal income and a transformation in family power dynamics, with husbands increasingly acknowledging their wives' financial input.

The capacity to independently cover children's education expenses rose from 29% to 57%, indicating that informal savings allow women to support long-term human capital investments. Ownership of assets—particularly productive ones—more than doubled, as numerous women obtained tailoring machines, food vending supplies, and retail inventory.

Narratives from focus group discussions indicated that, in addition to financial benefits, women gained psychological empowerment:

i. One participant remarked, "Prior to joining the group, I was unable to speak in front of men at the market. Now I negotiate prices confidently."

ii. Another shared, "I no longer have to wait for my husband to send school fees. I can pay immediately from my savings account."

This evidence reinforces Empowerment Theory, demonstrating that access to finances boosts both economic self-sufficiency and self-efficacy.

4.3 Challenges in Informal Savings Mechanisms

Table 3: Reported Challenges by Respondents (Multiple Responses Allowed)

Challenge	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Mismanagement or Misappropriation of Funds	132	52.8
Default by Members in Loan Repayment	118	47.2
Exclusion of Very Poor Women (due to inability to contribute regularly)	104	41.6
Inflation Reducing Value of Lump-Sum Payouts	97	38.8
Conflict Among Members (e.g., leadership disputes)	89	35.6
Lack of Legal Protection for Savings	85	34.0
Lack of Record-Keeping Skills	73	29.2

While the advantages are evident, sustainability faces challenges from systemic issues:

i. Governance Challenges: Over half of the respondents (52.8%) mentioned fund mismanagement, primarily attributed to insufficient internal controls or excessive reliance on verbal agreements.

ii. Loan Recovery Issues: Almost half (47.2%) experienced trouble recovering loans from members who failed to repay, leading to potential group dissolution.

iii. Social Exclusion: 41.6% indicated that the poorest women were unable to participate due to fixed contribution requirements, which jeopardise the inclusivity objective.

iv. Economic Volatility: Inflationary concerns (reported by 38.8%) resulted in payouts occasionally losing value prior to investment, particularly during months of high inflation.

v. Conflicts and Leadership Problems: Disputes over turn-taking, interest rates, and penalties for tardiness were reported by 35.6% of respondents.

vi. Legal Weakness: Lack of formal registration left groups without legal options in cases of fraud or theft.

vii. Skill Deficiencies: 29.2% pointed out that inadequate record-keeping abilities diminished transparency and trust.

FGD accounts highlighted the emotional impact of these risks. One member recounted, "When our treasurer absconded with our money, some women were unable to repay loans they had taken. The group fell apart."

5. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The results of this study highlight the crucial role that informal savings mechanisms—such as adashe, ajo, and thrift groups—play in promoting women's economic and social empowerment in Kano State. These systems, founded on community trust and reciprocity, have enabled participants to secure credit without collateral, diversify their income streams, and gain increased autonomy in managing their household finances. Data from both surveys and focus group discussions indicate that women saw a statistically significant rise in average monthly income and a notable improvement in decision-making participation after joining savings groups. Moreover, alongside the economic benefits, women reported increased confidence, enhanced negotiation abilities, and a stronger sense of social belonging.

Nonetheless, the sustainability and inclusivity of informal savings groups are not assured. Ongoing governance-related issues, such as fund mismanagement and loan defaults, pose a threat to the long-term sustainability of these organisations. Economic fluctuations—especially inflation—diminish the value of pooled funds. At the same time, persistent social disparities can result in the exclusion of the most disadvantaged women, undermining the equity objectives of these initiatives. Without intentional strategies, these vulnerabilities may restrict the transformative capabilities of informal savings systems in alleviating poverty and promoting gender equality.

Suggestions

1. Integrate informal savings groups into formal microfinance systems through adaptable partnerships

Government bodies, NGOs, and microfinance organisations should adopt hybrid models that connect informal groups to formal credit channels while preserving their autonomy and culturally rooted governance frameworks. Such collaborations could enhance access to larger loan sums, financial services, and market networks without imposing cumbersome bureaucratic obstacles.

2. Offer targeted training in financial literacy, leadership, and record-keeping

Capacity-building programs should focus on improving skills in financial management, transparent record-keeping, and democratic leadership practices. This would strengthen governance, lower the risk of fund misappropriation, and ensure fair participation across various income levels.

3. Introduce cost-effective microinsurance options to alleviate default and shock risks

Affordable insurance products tailored to group savings situations could safeguard members against losses from defaults, illness, or unexpected emergencies, thereby enhancing resilience and lowering dropout rates.

4. Encourage inclusive digital savings platforms suited for users with low literacy and technological skills

Mobile-based savings applications featuring user-friendly, language-localised interfaces can enhance security, transparency, and record-keeping. Collaborations with telecom companies could ensure affordability while incorporating training components to boost digital literacy among rural women.

In summary, informal savings mechanisms continue to be an essential pathway for women's empowerment in environments where traditional financial services are scarce. Strengthening these systems through governance improvements and risk management strategies is critical, and digital innovations will not only enhance women's economic agency but also contribute to broader community resilience and inclusive economic growth in Kano State.

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