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The Nigerian Entrepreneurial Ecosystem: Understanding its Leverage and Exploits

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ABSTRACT

Despite the potential in entrepreneurship to drive economic growth and job creation, there exist some systematic barriers that hinder startup development and scalability, resulting from limited interactions among the components of the entrepreneurial ecosystem. This study examines the persistent challenges constraining Nigeria's entrepreneurial ecosystem in Nigeria. Through a rigorous desk review methodology analyzing secondary data from peer-reviewed journals (2019-2024), government reports (CBN, SMEDAN), and global databases (World Bank, NBS), this research proposed a tripartite framework identifying three interdependent ecosystem components: actors (entrepreneurs, investors, policymakers), factors (institutional frameworks, infrastructure, financing), and support systems (incubators, networks). This proposed novel tripartite framework is built on the existing literature by considering and harvesting all the scattered perspectives on the entrepreneurial ecosystem. The study reveals critical challenges including policy inconsistencies, infrastructural deficits costing businesses $29 billion annually, and financial exclusion affecting 80% of SMEs, alongside emerging opportunities in digital transformation and informal sector resilience. Key findings established that entrepreneurs employ adaptive strategies like fintech solutions and frugal innovation to navigate constraints, though these remain insufficient without structural reforms. The study concludes by recommending policy harmonization through centralized coordination, targeted infrastructure investment, hybrid financing models, ecosystem-aligned education reform, and decentralized support networks - providing stakeholders with a comprehensive framework for transforming Nigeria's entrepreneurial landscape into a catalyst for inclusive economic development.

Keywords: *Entrepreneurial ecosystem, Actors, Factors, Support systems*

Introduction

The Nigerian entrepreneurial ecosystem has emerged as a critical area of study, given its potential to drive economic growth, innovation, and job creation in Africa's largest economy. Defined as a dynamic network of actors, institutions, and processes that collectively foster entrepreneurial activity (Umar et al., 2022), this ecosystem is shaped by a complex interplay of enabling factors and systemic challenges. While Nigeria boasts a vibrant entrepreneurial culture, with startups and small and medium enterprises (SMEs) contributing significantly to GDP (Egere et al., 2022), the ecosystem remains constrained by infrastructural deficits, regulatory hurdles, and limited access to finance (Igwe et al., 2020). Understanding how entrepreneurs leverage opportunities and navigate these challenges is pivotal to unlocking the ecosystem's full potential.

Recent scholarship highlights the ecosystem's duality by looking at its potential as a catalyst for transformational entrepreneurship (Egere et al., 2022) and its susceptibility to gaps in policy implementation and resource allocation (Umar et al., 2022). For instance, while Nigeria's large consumer market and diaspora networks offer leverage (Fuller-Love & Akiode, 2020), exploits like inadequate infrastructure and bureaucratic inefficiencies persist (Igwe et al., 2020). This study contributes to the discourse by synthesizing these perspectives, offering a nuanced analysis of how Nigerian entrepreneurs harness opportunities while mitigating constraints.

The findings will inform policymakers, investors, and entrepreneurs seeking to strengthen the ecosystem's support structures. By adopting a mixed-methods approach, this paper bridges theoretical frameworks such as Isenberg's entrepreneurial ecosystem model (Umar et al., 2022) and empirical insights from Nigerian contexts, ultimately proposing actionable recommendations for ecosystem enhancement.

Statement of the Problem

The Nigerian entrepreneurial ecosystem, while vibrant and dynamic, faces significant structural and operational challenges that hinder its potential to drive sustainable economic growth. Despite the proliferation of startups and small and medium enterprises (SMEs), which contribute approximately 50% of Nigeria's GDP (SMEDAN, 2023), the ecosystem remains constrained by fragmented components that lack synergistic integration. Research indicates that key actors, including government agencies, private investors, and support institutions often operate in silos, limiting their collective impact on entrepreneurship development (Umar et al., 2022). This disconnection raises critical questions about how these components constitute the ecosystem.

A pressing issue within the ecosystem is the mismatch between its theoretical potential and practical outcomes. While Nigeria boasts Africa's largest consumer market and a youthful, innovative population (World Bank, 2023), entrepreneurs grapple with systemic challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, complex regulatory frameworks, and limited access to financing (Egere et al., 2022). For instance, only 15% of Nigerian SMEs secure formal bank loans (CBN, 2023), forcing many to rely on informal networks that may lack scalability. These challenges not only stifle business growth but also necessitate an examination of the specific barriers impeding ecosystem effectiveness.

The ecosystem's potential leverage points remain underexplored in current literature. While studies have documented individual success stories in sectors like fintech (Ovia, 2021), there is limited empirical research on how systemic factors such as policy environments, digital infrastructure, and cultural attitudes collectively enable or constrain entrepreneurial outcomes. This gap is particularly salient given Nigeria's unique context, where informal economies account for 65% of employment (ILO, 2023) and diaspora remittances ($20 billion annually) play a crucial role in venture funding (World Bank, 2023). Understanding these dynamics is essential to address component interactions and to develop context-specific solutions.

Research Questions

For the purpose of this study, the following research questions were formulated:

i. What are the key components constituting the Nigerian entrepreneurial ecosystem, and how do they influence entrepreneurship development?
ii. How do the Nigerian entrepreneurial ecosystem components interact?
iii. What are the critical challenges posed by the Nigerian entrepreneurial ecosystem that hinder entrepreneurship development?
iv. What adaptive strategies (e.g., technology adoption, informal networks, policy advocacy) do Nigerian entrepreneurs employ to overcome ecosystem challenges?

Research Objectives

The main objective of this study is to examine the Nigerian entrepreneurial ecosystem, leveraging its opportunities and exploits. The specific objectives were:

i. To identify and analyze the structural components of Nigeria's entrepreneurial ecosystem and their impact on venture creation and growth.
ii. To examine the patterns of interaction among ecosystem actors and institutions in facilitating or constraining entrepreneurial outcomes.
iii. To investigate systemic barriers (regulatory, financial, infrastructural) that limit entrepreneurial success in Nigeria.
iv. To document and evaluate innovative strategies entrepreneurs use to navigate ecosystem constraints and leverage opportunities.

Literature Review

Nigerian Entrepreneurial Ecosystem

The concept of entrepreneurial ecosystems has evolved as a critical framework for understanding the complex environments that foster entrepreneurship. Stam (2015) defines an entrepreneurial ecosystem as a set of interdependent actors and factors that enable productive entrepreneurship within a specific territory, emphasizing the systemic interactions that drive economic growth. Similarly, Isenberg (2011) conceptualizes it as a combination of cultural, social, and institutional elements that collectively support entrepreneurial activity, highlighting the role of policy, finance, and human capital. These foundational definitions provide a perspective through which the Nigerian entrepreneurial ecosystem can be examined, though its unique socio-economic context necessitates localized interpretations.

In the context of Nigeria as an emerging economy, Ajirowo (2024) define the entrepreneurial ecosystem as a dynamic network of social, economic, and institutional elements that collectively support innovation and business growth, particularly within the constraints of emerging economies. This definition underscores Nigeria's informal sector dominance, where adaptive strategies like frugal innovation and informal financing play pivotal roles. Expanding on this, Okafor et al. (2022) characterize the Nigerian ecosystem as a hybrid structure where formal institutions (e.g., government policies, venture capital) intersect with informal systems (e.g., kinship networks, local trade associations), creating a unique environment for entrepreneurial resilience. Their work highlights how entrepreneurs navigate bureaucratic inefficiencies by leveraging communal ties, a theme absent in Western-centric ecosystem models.

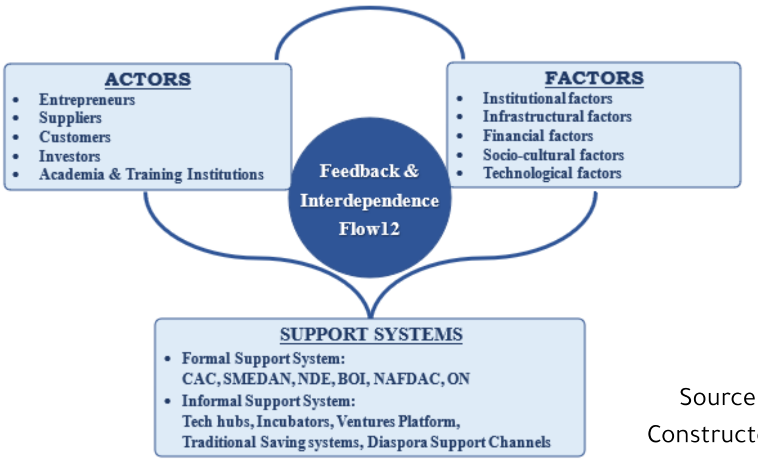
A more granular definition by Umar et al. (2023) positions the Nigerian entrepreneurial ecosystem as a geographically uneven landscape, where entrepreneurial activity clusters around urban hubs like Lagos and Abuja, while rural areas face systemic exclusion from resources. This spatial disparity, they argue, stems from infrastructural deficits and unequal access to digital technologies, reinforcing regional inequalities. Conversely, Adedeji et al. (2024) adopt a policy-oriented perspective, defining the ecosystem as a framework for public-private collaboration aimed at addressing youth unemployment through targeted interventions like incubators and SME financing. Their research critiques the government's ad hoc policy approach, advocating for integrated strategies that align education, infrastructure, and investment.

A synthesis of these definitions reveals three recurring themes: the duality of formal and informal systems, spatial disparities in resource distribution, and the centrality of adaptive entrepreneurship. While Audretsch et al. (2021) and Okafor et al. (2022) emphasize the ecosystem's hybridity, Umar et al. (2023) and Adedeji et al. (2024) foreground its structural imbalances and policy gaps. Collectively, these definitions challenge the universality of Western ecosystem models, advocating for context-specific frameworks that account for Nigeria's institutional voids and cultural resilience. This literature underscores the need for empirical research on how these defining characteristics influence entrepreneurial outcomes, particularly in sectors like agribusiness and fintech where informal and formal systems converge.

Components of Nigerian Entrepreneurial Ecosystem

Researchers have proposed varying dimensions for measuring the Nigerian entrepreneurial ecosystem. For instance, Oriolowo (2024) identified access to finance, entrepreneurial support infrastructure and talent and knowledge exchange as the major components of the Nigerian entrepreneurial ecosystem. Audretch and Belitski, (2017) identified actors and factors that enable productive entrepreneurship as the major dimensions of entrepreneurial ecosystem. In the view of Spigel (2017) the ecosystem comprises of 10 cultural, social, and material attributes that provides benefits and resources to entrepreneurs. This evidenced the lack of concession among management researchers on the components that constitute entrepreneurial ecosystem. To systematically analyze this ecosystem, this study relied on previous study to draw a tripartite framework focusing on actors, factors, and support systems considered as the three pillars that capture the human agency, environmental conditions, and institutional mechanisms driving entrepreneurship in Nigeria. This approach not only aligns with global entrepreneurial ecosystem models (Stam, 2015; Isenberg, 2011) but also accommodates Nigeria's unique socio-economic context, where formal institutions coexist with informal practices, and systemic challenges often spur innovative adaptations. By examining these components, we illuminate how their interactions create both opportunities and constraints for entrepreneurs in Africa's largest economy.

Figure 1: Tripartite Framework of The Nigerian Entrepreneurial Ecosystem



Source: Self-Constructed, 2025

Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Actors in Nigeria

Entrepreneurial ecosystem actors refer to the individuals, organizations, and institutions that actively participate in and influence the creation, development, and growth of entrepreneurial ventures within a specific economic environment (Stam & van de Ven, 2021). In Nigeria, these actors operate within a complex and dynamic ecosystem characterized by formal and informal interactions, where their roles and contributions shape the trajectory of entrepreneurship. The key actors in Nigeria's entrepreneurial ecosystem include entrepreneurs, government agencies, investors, educational institutions, and support organizations, each playing distinct yet interconnected roles in fostering entrepreneurial activity.

Entrepreneurs are the primary actors and driving force of the ecosystem, as they identify opportunities, innovate, and assume risks to establish and grow businesses. Nigerian entrepreneurs, particularly in sectors like fintech, agribusiness, and renewable energy, have demonstrated remarkable resilience and adaptability, often leveraging informal networks and digital tools to overcome systemic challenges (Okafor et al., 2023). Their ventures contribute to job creation, economic diversification, and local problem-solving, making them central to the ecosystem's vibrancy.

Government agencies, such as the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN) and the Bank of Industry (BOI), play a regulatory and facilitative role by formulating policies, providing funding, and creating enabling environments for business growth. However, inconsistent policy implementation and bureaucratic bottlenecks often limit their effectiveness, highlighting the need for stronger public-private collaboration (Adedeji et al., 2024).

Investors, including venture capitalists, angel investors, and diaspora financiers, provide critical financial resources and mentorship to startups and scaling ventures. Nigeria's fintech boom, for instance, has attracted significant local and international investment, with firms like Flutterwave and Paystack securing funding to expand their operations (Ekeocha et al., 2022). These investors not only inject capital but also bring expertise and global networks, enhancing the ecosystem's connectivity and competitiveness. Educational institutions, such as universities and vocational training centers, contribute by equipping future entrepreneurs with relevant skills and knowledge. Programs like entrepreneurship clinics and startup incubators at institutions such as the University of Lagos and Covenant University have fostered a culture of innovation and practical problem-solving among students (Adebayo et al., 2023).

These actors collectively create a web of relationships that, while sometimes fragmented, underpin the ecosystem's functionality. The interdependence of these actors is evident in how entrepreneurs rely on investors for funding, government agencies for infrastructure, and educational institutions for talent, while investors and policymakers depend on entrepreneurial success for economic returns and societal impact. Strengthening these linkages through coordinated policies and inclusive platforms could further enhance the ecosystem's capacity to drive sustainable development in Nigeria.

Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Factors in Nigeria

Entrepreneurial ecosystem factors refer to the environmental conditions and systemic elements that collectively influence the emergence, growth, and sustainability of entrepreneurial activities within a specific context (Stam & Van de Ven, 2021). In Nigeria, these factors create both opportunities and constraints for entrepreneurs, shaping the overall dynamics of the business landscape. The Nigerian entrepreneurial

ecosystem is characterized by a complex interplay of institutional, infrastructural, financial, socio-cultural, and technological factors that collectively determine entrepreneurial outcomes.
Institutional factors constitute a critical dimension of Nigeria's entrepreneurial ecosystem, encompassing government policies, regulatory frameworks, and legal systems. While Nigeria has implemented various entrepreneurship development programs through agencies like the SMEDAN and BOI, inconsistent policy implementation and bureaucratic bottlenecks continue to hinder entrepreneurial growth (Adeola et al., 2022). The frequent changes in fiscal and monetary policies create uncertainty for businesses, particularly in sectors like manufacturing and technology where long-term planning is essential. However, recent initiatives such as the Startup Act (2022) demonstrate efforts to create a more supportive institutional environment for tech entrepreneurs (Okafor & Ezeaku, 2023).

Infrastructural factors present both challenges and opportunities for Nigerian entrepreneurs. The persistent deficits in power supply, transportation networks, and digital infrastructure significantly increase operational costs for businesses. According to the World Bank (2023), Nigerian firms lose approximately $29 billion annually due to inadequate power supply, forcing many to rely on expensive alternative energy sources. However, these challenges have also spurred innovative solutions, with renewable energy startups like Lumos and Rensource developing solar-powered alternatives to the national grid (Ezeudu et al., 2023). The rapid expansion of mobile technology, with over 160 million internet users in Nigeria (NCC, 2023), has created new opportunities for digital entrepreneurship, particularly in fintech, e-commerce, and agritech sectors.

Financial factors remain a critical constraint for Nigerian entrepreneurs, with limited access to formal credit facilities and venture capital. Traditional financial institutions often perceive SMEs as high-risk, demanding collateral requirements that many entrepreneurs cannot meet (Okafor et al., 2022). This has led to the growth of alternative financing models, including crowdfunding platforms like Farmcrowdy and venture capital firms targeting tech startups. The Central Bank of Nigeria's intervention programs, such as the Creative Industry Financing Initiative and the Agribusiness/Small and Medium Enterprise Investment Scheme, have provided some relief, though challenges persist in equitable distribution and accessibility (CBN, 2023).

Socio-cultural factors significantly influence entrepreneurial behavior and outcomes in Nigeria. The country's strong communal traditions and extended family systems provide both support networks and obligations for entrepreneurs (Adebayo & Adeoye, 2023). While cultural values emphasizing self-reliance and wealth creation encourage entrepreneurship, societal attitudes sometimes stigmatize business failure, potentially discouraging risk-taking. Gender disparities also persist, with female entrepreneurs facing additional cultural and structural barriers, though initiatives like the Women Entrepreneurship Development Programme are working to address these imbalances (Adesina et al., 2023).

Technological factors have emerged as a transformative element in Nigeria's entrepreneurial ecosystem. The rapid adoption of digital technologies has lowered barriers to entry in many sectors, enabling innovative business models across fintech, healthtech, and edtech (Oyelaran-Oyeyinka et al., 2023). The success of Nigerian tech unicorns like Flutterwave and Interswitch demonstrates the potential of technology-driven entrepreneurship, though concerns remain about the digital divide between urban and rural areas (Adeleke & Ogunyemi, 2024).
These factors interact in complex ways to shape Nigeria's entrepreneurial ecosystem. While institutional weaknesses and infrastructural deficits create significant challenges, they have

also fostered adaptive resilience among Nigerian entrepreneurs. The emergence of innovative solutions to systemic problems demonstrates the ecosystem's dynamic nature, where constraints often spur creativity.

Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Support Systems in Nigeria

Entrepreneurial ecosystem support systems refer to the formal and informal institutions, programs, and networks that provide resources, knowledge, and services to entrepreneurs, facilitating business creation, growth, and sustainability (Stam & Van de Ven, 2021). In Nigeria, these support systems have evolved to address the unique challenges of the local business environment while leveraging emerging opportunities in sectors like technology, agriculture, and renewable energy. The Nigerian entrepreneurial ecosystem features diverse support mechanisms that collectively contribute to venture creation and scaling, though their effectiveness varies across regions and sectors.

Formal support systems include government-led initiatives such as the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN) and the Bank of Industry (BOI), which provide financing, training, and policy frameworks for entrepreneurs (Adeola & Evans, 2023).

Formal support systems like the National Directorate of Employment (NDE) established under the NDE's enabling Act, CAP 250 of the Laws of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, also promote entrepreneurship development by supporting relevant government agencies through the implementation of various programmes and relevant initiatives aimed at combating the high rate of unemployment in Nigeria.

These institutions have been instrumental in implementing programs like the National Enterprise Development Programme and the Youth Entrepreneurship Support scheme, though challenges persist in equitable access and implementation efficiency (CBN, 2023). Technology hubs and incubators like Co-Creation Hub (CcHub) and Ventures Platform have emerged as critical players, offering workspace, mentorship, and investor connections to tech startups (Oyelaran-Oyeyinka et al., 2023). These hubs have particularly facilitated the growth of Nigeria's fintech sector, which attracted over $1 billion in investment between 2019-2023 (Ekeocha et al., 2022). As part of the support system, the Lagos State Employment Trust Fund (LSETF) offer mentorship, workspace, and funding opportunities, enabling startups to navigate early-stage challenges (Umar et al., 2023). Academic institutions contribute through entrepreneurship education and incubation programs. Universities such as the University of Lagos and Covenant University have established innovation hubs that bridge the gap between academia and industry, though their impact remains limited by curriculum misalignment with market needs (Adebayo et al., 2023). Industry associations like the Nigerian Association of Small and Medium Enterprises (NASME) provide advocacy, networking, and capacity-building services, particularly for manufacturing and agricultural ventures (Adesina et al., 2024).

Informal support systems play an equally vital role in Nigeria's entrepreneurial landscape. Traditional savings systems like esusu and ajo provide alternative financing, especially for women and rural entrepreneurs excluded from formal banking (Adebayo & Adeoye, 2023). Trade associations and religious groups offer business networks and market access, while apprenticeship models in sectors like fashion and automotive repairs facilitate skills transfer (Umar et al., 2023). The diaspora community has become an important support channel, providing not only remittances but also knowledge transfer and international market linkages (Fuller-Love & Akiode, 2020).

Digital platforms have emerged as hybrid support systems, combining formal and informal elements. Startups like Farmcrowdy and

ThriveAgric use technology to connect smallholder farmers with investors and markets (Adesina et al., 2024), while fintech solutions from companies like Kuda Bank and Opay address financial inclusion challenges (Oyelaran-Oyeyinka et al., 2023). These digital systems are particularly valuable in reaching underserved populations and creating scalable solutions to ecosystem gaps.

The effectiveness of Nigeria's support systems is constrained by several factors, including geographic concentration in urban centers, inadequate funding, and weak coordination among stakeholders (Umar et al., 2023). While Lagos accounts for over 70% of startup support services, rural areas lack equivalent resources (World Bank, 2023). Nevertheless, these support systems collectively contribute to ecosystem resilience by providing adaptive solutions to systemic challenges, facilitating knowledge sharing, and creating networks that enhance resource mobility (Stam & Van de Ven, 2021).

Interdependence of Nigeria's Entrepreneurial Ecosystem Components

The Nigerian entrepreneurial ecosystem functions through dynamic interrelationships between its three core components: actors, factors, and support systems, which collectively determine entrepreneurial outcomes in a complex system of mutual influence. Actors, including entrepreneurs, investors, and policymakers, operate within the constraints and opportunities presented by environmental factors such as infrastructure, regulations, and market conditions, while simultaneously shaping these factors through their collective actions and innovations (Adeola & Evans, 2023). The support systems serve as critical mediators in this relationship, emerging to bridge gaps between actor needs and factor limitations, as evidenced by the rise of fintech solutions addressing Nigeria's banking infrastructure challenges (Oyelaran-Oyeyinka et al., 2023). This interdependence creates either virtuous or vicious cycles - when digital infrastructure (factor) improves through government policy (actor), it enables tech hubs (support system) to train more entrepreneurs (actor), who then advocate for better policies (actor influencing factor) (Umar et al., 2023).

The relationship manifests differently across sectors and regions, with Lagos' tech ecosystem demonstrating strong component alignment through coordinated actor networks, improving digital factors, and robust support systems, while rural areas suffer from weak connections between these elements (Adebayo et al., 2023). Entrepreneurs (actors) adapt to electricity deficits (factor) by utilizing solar solutions from renewable energy startups (support system), which in turn influences energy policy (factor) through demonstrated success (Ezeudu et al., 2023). Similarly, Nigeria's informal sector reveals how actors bypass weak formal factors by creating alternative support systems like esusu savings networks and trade associations (Adebayo & Adeoye, 2023). The components' interdependence explains ecosystem fragmentation - when policy instability (factor) discourages investor actors, it starves support systems of funding, further limiting entrepreneur access to resources (CBN, 2023). However, positive examples like the Startup Act 2022 show how policy improvements (factor) can stimulate support system development and attract investor actors (Okafor & Ezeaku, 2023), demonstrating that targeted interventions in one component can generate multiplier effects across the entire ecosystem when properly aligned with other elements.

Critical Challenges in Nigeria's Entrepreneurial Ecosystem

The Nigerian entrepreneurial ecosystem faces numerous systemic challenges that hinder the growth and sustainability of startups and SMEs. These obstacles span institutional, infrastructural, financial, and socio-cultural dimensions, creating a complex environment that entrepreneurs must navigate. Below are the key challenges, supported by recent empirical evidence:

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a) **Inconsistent Government Policies and Bureaucratic Bottlenecks:** Nigeria's entrepreneurial ecosystem suffers from frequent policy shifts, regulatory complexities, and poor implementation of business-friendly initiatives. While programs like the Startup Act (2022) aim to support tech entrepreneurs, inconsistent enforcement and overlapping regulations stifle growth (Okafor & Ezeaku, 2023). Corruption and administrative inefficiencies further delay business registration, licensing, and tax compliance, discouraging formal entrepreneurship (Adeola et al., 2022).

b) **Inadequate Infrastructure:** Poor power supply, dilapidated road networks, and limited digital connectivity significantly increase operational costs. The World Bank (2023) estimates that Nigerian businesses lose $29 billion annually due to unreliable electricity, forcing reliance on expensive alternatives like generators. In rural areas, weak internet penetration limits access to digital markets and fintech solutions, exacerbating regional disparities (Adeleke & Ogunyemi, 2024).

c) **Limited Access to Finance:** Over 80% of Nigerian SMEs lack access to formal credit due to high-interest rates, stringent collateral requirements, and risk-averse banking practices (CBN, 2023). Venture capital remains concentrated in tech hubs like Lagos, leaving other sectors and regions underserved. Even successful startups face funding gaps at growth stages, as investors prioritize early-stage ventures (Ekeocha et al., 2022).

d) **Skills and Education Mismatch:** Despite rising entrepreneurship education in universities, curricula often lack practical alignment with industry needs. A study by Adebayo et al. (2023) found that only 32% of Nigerian graduates possess skills relevant to launching scalable ventures. This gap perpetuates reliance on informal apprenticeships rather than innovation-driven entrepreneurship.

e) **Cultural and Gender Barriers:** Societal stigma around business failure discourages risk-taking, while gender biases limit female entrepreneurs' access to networks and capital. Women constitute only 20% of formal SME owners, facing additional hurdles in male-dominated sectors (Adesina et al., 2023). Cultural preferences for secure employment over entrepreneurship further constrain the talent pipeline (Adebayo & Adeoye, 2023).

f) **Weak Support Systems:** Incubators and accelerators are unevenly distributed, with over 70% located in Lagos and Abuja (Umar et al., 2023). Many lack funding, mentorship quality, and post-incubation support. Informal networks, though vital, cannot compensate for systemic gaps in business development services.

g) **Security and Macroeconomic Instability:** Rising insecurity disrupts supply chains, particularly in agriculture and manufacturing. Coupled with inflation (28.9% in 2024) and currency volatility, entrepreneurs face unpredictable costs and shrinking consumer purchasing power (NBS, 2024).

h) While Nigeria's entrepreneurial potential is vast, systemic barriers perpetuate informality and stagnation. Addressing them requires coordinated reforms—such as stabilizing policies, upgrading infrastructure, and expanding inclusive finance—to unlock the ecosystem's full potential.

Adaptive Strategies for Nigerian Entrepreneurs to Overcome Ecosystem Challenges

Nigerian entrepreneurs have demonstrated remarkable resilience by developing innovative strategies to navigate systemic challenges. Below are key adaptive approaches, supported by empirical evidence:

1. Leveraging Digital Technologies: Nigerian entrepreneurs are increasingly adopting digital tools to bypass infrastructural limitations. Fintech startups like Opay and Kuda Bank use mobile platforms to provide financial services to unbanked populations, overcoming traditional banking bottlenecks (Oyelaran-Oyeyinka et al., 2023). E-commerce platforms such as Jumia leverage digital marketing and logistics apps to mitigate poor transportation networks, reaching customers even in remote areas (Adeleke & Ogunyemi, 2024). The rise of coworking spaces and virtual offices also reduces overhead costs associated with unreliable infrastructure (Umar et al., 2023).

2. Utilizing Informal Networks and Collaborative Models: Entrepreneurs tap into communal systems like esusu (rotating savings schemes) and trade associations for capital and market access. A study by Adebayo and Adeoye (2023) found that 65% of Lagos-based SMEs rely on informal networks for startup funding. Collaborative models, such as farmer cooperatives and tech hubs, pool resources and share risks. For example, ThriveAgric's crowd-farming model connects smallholder farmers with urban investors, addressing both funding and market linkage gaps (Adesina et al., 2024).

3. Adopting Frugal Innovation: Resource constraints have spurred low-cost, high-impact solutions. Solar energy startups like Arnergy and Rensource design affordable pay-as-you-go systems to circumvent electricity deficits (Ezeudu et al., 2023). Similarly, healthcare ventures such as Helium Health use lightweight digital tools to streamline hospital management in low-resource settings (Okafor et al., 2022). These innovations prioritize scalability and affordability, aligning with local economic realities.

4. Diversifying Funding Sources: Entrepreneurs are exploring alternative financing beyond traditional banks. Crowdfunding platforms (e.g., Farmcrowdy), angel investor networks (e.g., Lagos Angel Network), and diaspora investment channels are gaining traction (Ekeocha et al., 2022). The Central Bank of Nigeria's intervention funds, though underutilized, offer low-interest loans for sectors like agriculture and creative industries (CBN, 2023).

5. Engaging in Policy Advocacy: Successful entrepreneurs are organizing to influence policymaking. The Nigerian Startup Act (2022), championed by tech leaders, provides tax incentives and regulatory support for innovation-driven enterprises (Okafor & Ezeaku, 2023). Collective action through groups like the Nigerian Association of Small and Medium Enterprises (NASME) amplifies voices for infrastructure and financial reforms (Adeola et al., 2022).
These strategies highlight Nigerian entrepreneurs' ability to turn constraints into opportunities. However, systemic change requires parallel efforts from policymakers to address root causes like infrastructure deficits and institutional inefficiencies.

Conclusion

This study has systematically examined the Nigerian entrepreneurial ecosystem by taking a critical look at its components (actors, factors, and support systems), challenges, and adaptive strategies, achieving its objectives of identifying leverage points and systemic exploits. The findings reveal that while institutional weaknesses, infrastructural deficits, and financing gaps persist, Nigerian entrepreneurs demonstrate remarkable resilience through digital adoption, informal networks, and frugal innovation—strategies that partially compensate for ecosystem deficiencies (Oyelaran-Oyeyinka et al., 2023; Adebayo & Adeoye, 2023). However, these adaptive measures alone cannot substitute for structural reforms; the ecosystem's full potential hinges on coordinated policy interventions to stabilize institutions, upgrade infrastructure, and expand inclusive finance (Adeola et al., 2022; CBN, 2023). By bridging these gaps, stakeholders can transform Nigeria's entrepreneurial landscape from one of constraints to one of sustainable opportunity, aligning with global benchmarks for emerging economies (Stam & Van de Ven, 2021).

Recommendations

Based on the above discussed, the following recommendations were made:

a) **Policy Harmonization and Implementation:** Address the challenge of inconsistent policies by establishing a centralized regulatory body to coordinate entrepreneurship initiatives across federal and state governments, ensuring effective implementation of programs like the Startup Act (2022) (Okafor & Ezeaku, 2023).
b) **Targeted Infrastructure Investment:** Prioritize public-private partnerships to upgrade critical infrastructure (e.g., renewable energy, broadband), reducing operational costs for entrepreneurs. Solar-powered industrial clusters and digital hubs could replicate the success of Lagos' tech corridor in underserved regions (Ezeudu et al., 2023; World Bank, 2023).
c) **Expansion of Inclusive Financing Mechanisms:** Develop hybrid funding models combining microfinance, crowdfunding, and diaspora investment channels, with risk-sharing frameworks to incentivize banks. The Central Bank of Nigeria should streamline access to intervention funds for SMEs in high-potential sectors like agritech (CBN, 2023; Ekeocha et al., 2022).
d) **Ecosystem-Based Entrepreneurship Education:** Reform tertiary curricula to integrate practical skills (e.g., digital literacy, lean startup methods) and foster university-industry partnerships. Scale successful models like Covenant University's incubator program to bridge the skills gap (Adebayo et al., 2023; Umar et al., 2023).
e) **Strengthening Grassroots Entrepreneurial Support Networks:** Establish community-based entrepreneurship centers across all geopolitical zones to provide localized mentorship, market linkages, and resource-sharing platforms. These hubs should integrate existing informal networks (e.g., trade associations, cooperatives) with formal support systems to address regional disparities in ecosystem access (Adesina et al., 2024; Umar et al., 2023).

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