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WORK WITHOUT PROTECTIONS: THE SOCIAL DIMENSIONS OF EXPLOITATION AND PRODUCTIVITY IN NIGERIA'S INFORMAL ECONOMY

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ABSTRACT: Nigeria's informal sector plays a vital role in sustaining livelihoods, providing employment for a large share of the population and contributing significantly to everyday economic survival. Yet, behind this importance lies a reality shaped by insecurity, weak protections, and difficult working conditions. Many informal workers operate without stable contracts, social security, or safe work environments, and these challenges often limit how productive they can be. This study adopts a qualitative documentary research design**,** relying on secondary data drawn from scholarly literature, policy documents, and institutional reports to examine how labour insecurity influences productivity in Nigeria's informal economy. Using Marxist Labour Theory as a guiding lens, it explains that issues such as low wages, job insecurity, lack of social protection, and unsafe workplaces are not random problems but part of a broader system that places workers in vulnerable positions. As a result, many workers struggle not because they are unwilling or unskilled, but because the conditions of their work reduce their capacity to perform effectively. The paper argues that improving productivity in the informal sector requires more than short-term or technical solutions. It calls for deeper reforms that prioritize fairness, protection, and inclusion in labour relations. In particular, it recommends expanding social protection coverage to informal workers through schemes such as the National Health Insurance Authority (NHIA), alongside simpler pathways for gradual formalization. Ultimately, the study highlights the need to recognize informal workers as essential contributors to Nigeria's economy who deserve dignity, protection, and support.

Keywords: Exploitation; Labour Productivity; Informal Sector; Social Protection; Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Informal employment constitutes a vital part of labour markets globally, particularly in developing countries where formal employment opportunities remain insufficient. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2018), more than 60% of the global workforce is engaged in informal economic activities, with the highest concentration found in Sub-Saharan Africa. These activities, which range from street vending and artisanal work to small-scale production and domestic services, often operate outside formal regulatory frameworks. While the informal sector is widely recognized for its role in reducing poverty and absorbing excess labour, it is also characterized by exploitative employment practices, limited legal protections, and the persistent marginalization of workers.

In Nigeria, the informal sector plays a pivotal role in employment generation and economic output. It is estimated to account for more than 80% of total employment and contributes substantially to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (NBS, 2020). The sector serves as a fallback source of livelihood for individuals excluded from formal employment, particularly women, young people, and the urban poor. However, workers in this sector are confronted with irregular wages, job insecurity, poor occupational health and safety standards, and limited access to social protection. These structural deficiencies not only undermine workers' welfare but also constrain labour productivity and weaken the sector's contribution to sustainable economic development. Despite its economic significance, the informal sector continues to receive limited policy attention regarding labour rights, workplace regulation, and institutional support.

Although a growing body of literature has examined the contribution of the informal sector to poverty reduction and economic resilience, comparatively less attention has been devoted to understanding how labour insecurity and exploitative working conditions influence productivity. Productivity in informal employment should not be viewed solely in terms of output per worker but also in relation to the broader socio-economic environment, workplace conditions, and the unequal power relations that shape labour processes. Without addressing these structural inequalities, efforts to improve productivity are unlikely to produce sustainable outcomes.

Against this background, the purpose of this paper is to critically examine how labour insecurity affects productivity in Nigeria's informal economy through the lenses of wage exploitation, inadequate social protection, precarious employment relations, and hazardous working conditions. The paper argues that the persistent productivity challenges experienced by informal workers are rooted primarily in structural labour insecurity rather than in workers' capabilities or motivation. By demonstrating this relationship, the study contributes to ongoing academic and policy debates on labour governance and emphasizes the need for inclusive labour policies that promote decent work, strengthen social protection, and enhance productivity within Nigeria's informal sector.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptual Clarifications

The informal sector encompasses economic activities conducted outside the formal regulatory framework of the state. These activities are typically unregistered, untaxed, and lack formal employment contracts, job security, and social protection (ILO, 2018). Common occupations include street vending, domestic work, small-scale manufacturing, and artisanal trades. According to the ILO (1993), the informal sector is defined by enterprise characteristics such as small size, lack of incorporation, non-registration, and limited employment. NBS (2020) notes that such enterprises typically do not formally report to state authorities. Scholars such as Fapohunda (2012, as cited in Fashola & Akano, 2005) and Fasanya & Onakoya (2012) highlight key features of the sector, including a low capital base, labour intensity, informal skill acquisition, and low productivity. It operates alongside the formal sector, often as a fallback for those excluded from it (Fajana, 2000; Ikeije, Omolafe & Onuba, 2016). Though spread across rural and urban areas, Nigeria's informal economy remains structurally marginalized. It is characterized by low wages, poor working conditions, inadequate access to finance, and weak institutional oversight (Adama, 2021; ILO, 2017). As such, it serves as both a livelihood source and a site of persistent labour exploitation.

Exploitation in labour relations refers to the unfair treatment of workers typically through excessive labour extraction, inadequate compensation, unsafe work environments, and absence of legal protections. Rooted in Marxist theory, exploitation occurs when employers appropriate surplus value from workers beyond what they are compensated in wages (Marx, 1867). This exploitation extends beyond wage theft to include job insecurity, sexual harassment, denial of social protections, and emotional and physical hazards. In the informal sector, these exploitative dynamics are intensified by institutional neglect, power asymmetries, and gender hierarchies, which leave informal workers particularly vulnerable to systemic abuse and low productivity outcomes.

Productivity, in its simplest form, measures the efficiency with which inputs such as labour, materials, and energy are converted into outputs. Ogunde, (2019) defines productivity as an index that reflects the ratio of goods and services produced relative to the inputs utilized. It serves as a comprehensive indicator of how effectively an organization or economy achieves core objectives, including efficiency, effectiveness, adaptability, and progressive development (Iwo, and Ihenetu, 2022)). According to Nzewata, Bimba, and Alhassan (2022), labour productivity specifically refers to the value added per unit of labour employed, and it is influenced by multiple socio-economic factors. Employee productivity is therefore the extent to which a worker efficiently and effectively carries out assigned tasks and contributes to overall economic output. In formal economies, it is typically measured through quantifiable indicators such as output per worker or per hour (Nzewata, Bimba & Alhassan, 2022). However, in the informal sector, productivity is more nuanced and less straightforward to assess. It is shaped by multiple interrelated factors, including access to productive resources, worker motivation, physical health, skill levels, and prevailing working conditions (ILO, 2018; Ogunde, 2019; Iwo and Ihenetu, 2022).

Patterns and Forms of Exploitation in Informal Work

Informal workers in Nigeria experience a spectrum of exploitative conditions that reflect both material deprivation and structural exclusion. These include:

Wage exploitation

In the Nigerian informal economy, wage exploitation is widespread due to a number of structural and institutional factors. The absence of formal contracts, weak enforcement of labour laws, and lack of union representation collectively create an environment where employers can exploit workers with impunity (Folawewo & Orija, 2023). For instance, many informal workers are paid based on daily agreements or verbal arrangements, making it difficult to demand fair wages or seek redress in cases of non-payment or wage cuts. Women and youth are disproportionately affected by wage exploitation in the informal sector. Due to gendered power imbalances and social norms, women remain overrepresented in informal employment worldwide and are more likely than men to experience lower earnings, insecure employment, and limited access to social protection (ILO, 2018; Nzewata, Bimba & Alhassan, 2022). This gender wage gap is further exacerbated by occupational segregation, limited access to credit and skills training, and the burden of unpaid care responsibilities. Additionally, wage exploitation in the informal sector negatively affects labour productivity. Recent empirical evidence from Nigeria indicates that informal workers continue to experience low and unstable earnings, with women and young workers disproportionately represented in poorly remunerated occupations. The National Bureau of Statistics (2023) reports that most workers outside formal employment have limited bargaining power, irregular income streams, and little access to employment benefits, conditions that reduce motivation and constrain labour productivity. Similarly, the International Labour Organization (2023) notes that persistent income insecurity and weak labour protection remain major barriers to achieving decent work and productive employment in Nigeria. Workers who are poorly paid and insecure about their incomes are less likely to be motivated, healthy, or committed to their jobs (Danquah, Schotte, &Kunal, 2019). This not only reinforces a cycle of poverty and marginalization but also undermines the overall economic contributions of the sector.

Absence of Social Protection:

There is little to no access to health insurance, pensions, unemployment benefits, or compensation for occupational injuries. In sectors like transportation and petty trading, workers face constant risks without any institutional safety net. The absence of social protection is one of the most defining vulnerabilities faced by workers in the informal sector, particularly in low- and middle-income countries like Nigeria. Social protection encompasses a range of public programs designed to provide income security, health coverage, and safeguard against life-cycle risks such as illness, unemployment, maternity, and old age (ILO, 2018). However, informal workers, who constitute over 80% of Nigeria's labour force (NBS, 2020), have little to no access to health insurance, pensions, unemployment benefits, or compensation for occupational injuries due to their unregistered status and the absence of employer contributions to social insurance systems (Folawewo & Orija, 2023). In sectors like transportation and petty trading, workers face constant risks without any institutional safety net. The International Labour Organization (ILO, 2017) emphasizes that the absence of social protection not only violates the principle of decent work but also weakens productivity. Workers who are not covered by health services or income support mechanisms are more likely to experience stress, fatigue, and diminished motivation, all of which negatively affect their output. Furthermore, the absence of maternity protection and child care support disproportionately affects women, who often face the dual burden of paid and unpaid labour, thereby limiting their ability to participate productively in the workforce (ILO, 2004; Nzewata, Bimba & Alhassan, 2022). Recent evidence further shows that access to social protection among informal workers in Nigeria remains extremely limited despite ongoing policy reforms. According to the National Health Insurance Authority (2023), enrolment of informal workers in health insurance and other contributory social protection schemes remains low because of irregular incomes, limited awareness, and administrative barriers. This exclusion exposes workers to catastrophic health expenditures and income shocks that adversely affect labour productivity and household welfare.

Precarious Employment Relations:

Informal workers are typically engaged without written contracts, making them susceptible to arbitrary dismissal, underpayment, and exploitation. This lack of formal engagement undermines job security and long-term livelihood planning. In Nigeria's informal economy, the scarcity of formal employment opportunities compels workers to accept degrading and precarious working conditions, often without protest. The absence of alternative job options gives informal employers significant leverage to exploit labour, knowing that workers have limited power to resist or negotiate fair treatment. Etim and Daramola (2020) observe that even minor mistakes by employees frequently provoke threats of termination, fostering a climate of fear and submission. This persistent job insecurity not only weakens employee morale but also undermines long-term commitment, creativity, and productivity. In the absence of legal frameworks, formal contracts, and institutional oversight (ILO, 2018). Workers in the informal economy are often engaged on a temporary, casual, or seasonal basis, without guaranteed hours, predictable income, or mechanisms for dispute resolution (Fashola & Akano, 2013). From a Marxist labour theory perspective, precarious employment is a modern manifestation of labour commodification, where human labour is treated as a flexible input to be deployed and discarded according to market demands. The lack of job security allows capitalists (or informal employers) to extract surplus value with minimal obligation toward the worker's long-term welfare (Marx, 1867). Recent labour market assessments also indicate that precarious employment remains widespread in Nigeria's informal economy. The National Bureau of Statistics (2023) observes that most informal workers continue to engage in casual or self-employment without written contracts, employment security, or legal protection, leaving them highly vulnerable to arbitrary income losses and workplace exploitation. These conditions discourage long-term investment in skills and reduce workers' capacity to sustain high productivity. Job insecurity thus becomes a tool of economic control, sustaining a labour force that is disciplined by fear and dependency rather than empowered by rights or protections.

Poor Working Conditions:

Working conditions in the informal sector are often characterized by hazardous environments, inadequate safety measures, long working hours, and poor access to health services. Unlike formal employment, where occupational standards are regulated and enforced, informal sector workers typically operate outside the scope of labour laws and institutional protections. As a result, they are more likely to face physical, psychological, and emotional stressors that significantly impact their well-being and productivity (ILO, 2018; Folawewo & Orija, 2023). Nwaka (2016) asserts that informal workers in Nigeria are often exposed to substandard working conditions. These include poorly ventilated workspaces, lack of protective equipment, exposure to hazardous substances, and unsanitary conditions (For instance, street vendors, waste pickers, mechanics, and market women often work in open, unsafe areas that expose them to environmental hazards such as pollution, extreme weather, and physical assault. Such conditions contribute to chronic health problems, including respiratory issues, musculoskeletal disorders, fatigue, and injury (ILO, 2017). The International Labour Organization (ILO, 2018) notes that poor working conditions in the informal sector are exacerbated by the lack of monitoring and enforcement mechanisms. Because most informal enterprises are unregistered and operate below the regulatory radar, they escape government oversight and are not held accountable for meeting occupational safety standards. This creates a culture of neglect where employers face little to no consequences for exposing workers to unsafe environments. Additionally, the nature of informal work often involves long hours with no overtime compensation or rest periods. Many workers operate beyond internationally recommended work limits, sometimes engaging in multiple jobs just to meet subsistence needs (Ogunde, 2019). These extended working hours, combined with nutritional deficits and psychological stress, further erode productivity and contribute to burnout and early health deterioration. Recent studies further reveal that occupational health and safety challenges remain pervasive within Nigeria's informal economy. The International Labour Organization (2023) reports that many informal enterprises continue to operate outside regulatory oversight, exposing workers to unsafe environments, excessive working hours, and limited access to occupational health services. These conditions contribute to work-related illnesses, absenteeism, and declining productivity, thereby reinforcing cycles of poverty and labour vulnerability.

From the foregoing, it is obvious that the informal sector in Nigeria is marked by deeply entrenched patterns of labour exploitation that collectively undermine worker productivity and perpetuate socioeconomic inequality. These patterns point to a systemic problem, not merely isolated cases of labour abuse. They underscore the structural character of informality, where exploitation is normalized, routinized, and made invisible. Together, these structural deficiencies constitute a system of exploitation that not only marginalizes informal labour but also constrains the sector's potential for inclusive economic growth.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts the Marxist Labour Theory of Value as its primary analytical framework to examine the exploitative dynamics that shape productivity outcomes in Nigeria's informal sector. Developed by Karl Marx (1867)**,** this theory asserts that the value of a commodity is fundamentally determined by the socially necessary labour time invested in its production. Central to the theory is the concept of surplus value, which is the difference between the value a worker produces and the wage they receive. In capitalist economies, this surplus is appropriated by capitalists as profit, resulting in the systemic exploitation of labour**.**

While Marx originally theorized in the context of industrial capitalism, his ideas remain deeply relevant to contemporary informal labour systems, particularly in developing countries like Nigeria. In the informal sector, where labour regulation is minimal or non-existent, surplus value extraction is even more pronounced Akinwale (2014). Employers pay workers significantly less than the value they create, and in the absence of institutional oversight, workers have little recourse against unjust practices. This structural arrangement reflects a form of economic marginalization where capital accumulation persists without institutional accountability, reinforcing the class-based inequalities Marx critiqued- unprotected labour, absence of collective bargaining, alienation from the product of one's labour, and work driven primarily by subsistence rather than accumulation (Chen, 2012; Standing, 2011). From a Marxist perspective, rather than attributing low productivity to worker inefficiency or lack of training, the theory points to broader systemic factors: poor wages, unsafe working conditions, job insecurity, and the commodification of labour as root causes. These conditions alienate workers from the labour process, reduce their commitment, and diminish their productive capacity. By applying Marxist Labour Theory, this study interrogates how informal workers are systematically disadvantaged and how these disadvantages directly impair their productivity, wellbeing, and prospects for upward mobility.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research design to examine the social dimensions of exploitation and productivity in Nigeria's informal economy. The qualitative approach is appropriate because it facilitates an in-depth understanding of the experiences, conditions, and structural factors that shape work relations within the informal sector. Rather than relying on numerical data, the study draws on existing scholarly and documentary sources to critically analyze patterns of labour exploitation, worker vulnerability, and productivity outcomes. Data for the study were obtained exclusively from secondary sources. These include peer-reviewed journal articles, books, government publications, policy documents, reports from international organizations such as the International Labour Organization (ILO) and the World Bank, as well as relevant online materials. The selection of these sources was guided by their relevance to informal employment, labour relations, social protection, and productivity in Nigeria and comparable developing economies.

The collected materials were subjected to qualitative content analysis. This involved a systematic review, interpretation and synthesis of existing literature to identify recurring themes, patterns, and perspectives relating to working conditions, labour rights, social exclusion, income insecurity, and productivity challenges in the informal economy. The analysis enabled researchers to draw meaningful connections between theoretical explanations and empirical findings from previous studies. The study is anchored on Marxist Labour Theory, which provides the analytical framework for understanding the relationship between labour and capital in the informal economy. The theory emphasizes how workers may be subjected to exploitation through unequal power relations, inadequate compensation, and limited access to social protections. By applying this theoretical lens, the study critically examines how structural economic conditions contribute to the persistence of precarious work arrangements and their implications for workers' welfare and productivity in Nigeria.

Inclusion criteria

The selection of secondary sources was guided by clearly defined inclusion criteria. Priority was given to peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, government publications, policy documents, and reports from reputable international organizations that addressed themes related to informal employment, labour exploitation, social protection, working conditions, and productivity. To ensure relevance and contemporary applicability, emphasis was placed on materials published between 2010 and 2025, although seminal theoretical works, particularly those relating to Marxist Labour Theory, were included regardless of publication date. Sources focusing on Nigeria and comparable developing economies were prioritized to provide contextually relevant insights.

Limitation of the Study

A key limitation of this study is its exclusive reliance on secondary data sources. While the use of existing literature and documentary evidence provides valuable insights into the nature of labour exploitation and productivity within Nigeria's informal economy, it limits the study's ability to capture the lived experiences and contemporary perspectives of informal workers directly. Consequently, the findings are dependent on the scope, quality, and availability of existing sources. Nevertheless, the diverse range of scholarly and institutional materials consulted enhances the credibility and comprehensiveness of the analysis.

DISCUSSION

The realities of work in Nigeria's informal economy reveal a paradox that lies at the heart of Marxist Labour Theory. Although millions of informal workers engage in productive activities that sustain households, communities, and local markets, many continue to experience poverty, insecurity, and social exclusion. This contradiction reflects what Marx (1867/1976) identified as the exploitative nature of labour relations under capitalism, where workers generate value through their labour but receive only a fraction of that value in return. The remainder, which Marx termed surplus value, is appropriated by those who control economic resources and means of production. While Marx developed this argument in relation to industrial capitalism, the conditions he described remain strikingly relevant to the experiences of informal workers in contemporary Nigeria. Across Nigerian cities and rural communities, informal workers can be found in markets, construction sites, transport services, workshops, farms, and small-scale enterprises. They work long hours under difficult conditions, often without written contracts, job security, health insurance, pension benefits, or legal protection. Despite their immense contribution to economic activity, many earn incomes that barely meet their daily needs. From a Marxist perspective, this situation represents more than individual hardship; it reflects a structural system in which labour is continuously utilized as a source of wealth creation while workers themselves remain economically vulnerable (Akinwale, 2014; Meagher, 2014). The productivity challenges associated with the informal sector therefore cannot be separated from the conditions under which labour is performed.

Existing literature suggests that the growth of informal employment in developing countries is closely linked to broader economic transformations, including unemployment, economic restructuring, population growth, and the inability of the formal sector to absorb available labour (Chen, 2012; Standing, 2011). In Nigeria, the informal economy has become a survival mechanism for millions of people who have limited access to formal employment opportunities. While participation in the sector provides an avenue for income generation, it also exposes workers to various forms of exploitation. Danquah, Schotte, andKunal (2019) observe, informal workers often face low and irregular earnings, unstable employment relationships, and limited opportunities for occupational advancement. These realities create a cycle in which workers remain trapped in vulnerable livelihoods despite their continuous economic contribution. Marxist Labour Theory challenges the tendency to explain low productivity solely in terms of worker inadequacies such as limited education, poor skills, or lack of entrepreneurial initiative. Instead, the theory directs attention to the social and economic conditions that shape workers' ability to perform effectively. When individuals are poorly paid, uncertain about their future, and constantly preoccupied with meeting basic needs, their capacity to remain motivated and productive is inevitably affected. Productivity is not simply a technical outcome; it is also a social outcome influenced by the quality of workers' lives. Studies have consistently shown that decent working conditions, fair remuneration, and employment security contribute significantly to worker commitment, morale, and efficiency (ILO, 2018). Consequently, productivity deficits within the informal sector must be understood within the broader context of labour exploitation and social vulnerability. The absence of social protection further deepens these challenges. For many informal workers, illness, injury, pregnancy, old age, or economic shocks can result in immediate financial hardship because there are no institutional mechanisms to cushion such risks. Unlike workers in the formal sector who may have access to health insurance or retirement benefits, informal workers often depend entirely on their daily earnings for survival. This reality forces many individuals to continue working under difficult circumstances, even when doing so threatens their health and wellbeing. Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler (2004) argue that social protection is not merely a welfare intervention but an important mechanism for enhancing human capability and economic productivity. Without such protections, workers become increasingly vulnerable to exploitation and less capable of sustaining productive engagement over time. The experiences of women in the informal economy further illustrate the social dimensions of labour exploitation. Women constitute a significant proportion of informal workers in Nigeria, yet they frequently occupy the least secure and least remunerative positions within the sector (Adama, 2021). Beyond their economic activities, many women also carry primary responsibility for childcare, household management, and other forms of unpaid domestic labour. This dual responsibility creates enormous physical and emotional pressures. Feminist scholars have long argued that the failure to recognize and value unpaid labour reinforces gender inequalities and limits women's economic opportunities (Benería, 2003). From a Marxist perspective, this invisible labour contributes to the reproduction of the workforce while remaining largely uncompensated, thereby extending the scope of exploitation beyond the workplace itself.

Marx's concept of alienation also provides valuable insight into the lived experiences of informal workers. Alienation occurs when workers become disconnected from the products they create, the labour process they engage in, and their own human potential (Marx, 1844/1978). In the informal economy, many workers have little control over their working conditions, earnings, or future prospects. Their work is often driven by immediate survival rather than personal fulfilment or professional growth. Over time, this can generate feelings of frustration, powerlessness, and disengagement. Studies have shown that such experiences negatively affect psychological wellbeing, job satisfaction, and productivity (Sayers, 2011; Nzewata, Bimba, &Alhassan, 2022). Workers who feel undervalued and insecure are less likely to be fully invested in their work, thereby affecting both individual and collective productivity. Equally important are the physical environments within which many informal workers operate. Markets, roadside workshops, construction sites, and small production centres often lack adequate sanitation facilities, protective equipment, proper ventilation, and occupational safety standards. These conditions expose workers to injuries, illnesses, stress, and fatigue, all of which undermine productivity and quality of life (Folawewo & Orija, 2023; Ikeije, Omolafe, & Onuba, 2016). Rather than viewing these challenges as isolated problems, Marxist Labour Theory interprets them as manifestations of broader structural inequalities that prioritize profit and survival over worker welfare.

Ultimately, the relevance of Marxist Labour Theory to this study lies in its capacity to connect individual experiences of hardship to larger systems of economic organization and power. The theory demonstrates that productivity challenges within Nigeria's informal economy cannot be understood solely through the lens of individual effort or technical capacity. Instead, they are deeply intertwined with exploitative labour relations, inadequate social protections, gendered inequalities, alienation, and unsafe working conditions. By illuminating these structural realities, Marxist Labour Theory provides a compelling framework for understanding why millions of hardworking Nigerians remain trapped in conditions that limit both their wellbeing and their productive potential.

Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated that labour insecurity is a fundamental structural constraint on productivity in Nigeria's informal economy rather than merely a consequence of individual or organizational shortcomings. Through the application of Marxist Labour Theory, the study has shown that exploitative labour relations, including low wages, inadequate social protection, precarious employment, and unsafe working conditions, reflect broader inequalities embedded within informal labour markets. These structural conditions diminish workers' welfare, reduce motivation and productivity, and limit the informal sector's capacity to contribute fully to inclusive and sustainable economic development.

Beyond explaining these challenges, the study contributes to the growing literature by emphasizing that productivity improvements in the informal economy cannot be achieved through technical interventions alone. Instead, sustainable gains depend on addressing the institutional and structural conditions that perpetuate labour insecurity. Recognizing informal workers as legitimate economic actors entitled to legal protection, social security, and decent working conditions is therefore essential to improving both worker welfare and national productivity.

Although this study provides important theoretical insights, its findings are based exclusively on secondary sources and therefore do not capture the lived experiences of informal workers across different sectors and regions of Nigeria. Future studies should employ primary empirical methods, including surveys, interviews, and case studies, to validate and extend the theoretical arguments presented in this paper.

Recommendations

Addressing labour insecurity in Nigeria's informal economy requires an integrated policy approach that combines labour market reforms with social protection and institutional support. The Federal Government should adopt a gradual, inclusive, and supportive formalization strategy that recognizes the economic contributions of informal enterprises while simplifying registration procedures and reducing compliance barriers. Such an approach would encourage greater participation in the formal economy without undermining the livelihoods of vulnerable workers.

In addition, informal workers should be progressively integrated into national social protection programmes, particularly the National Health Insurance Authority (NHIA) and other contributory social security schemes. Expanding access to health insurance, income security, and occupational injury protection would reduce workers' vulnerability to economic shocks and enhance their capacity to work productively.

Furthermore, labour legislation and regulatory enforcement should be strengthened to extend minimum labour standards including fair remuneration, occupational health and safety protections, and safeguards against unfair labour practices to workers in the informal economy. Government agencies should also collaborate with employers' associations, trade unions, and civil society organizations to promote awareness of labour rights, encourage the organization of informal workers, and strengthen mechanisms for social dialogue and collective representation. These measures would contribute to creating a more equitable, productive, and sustainable informal labour market capable of supporting Nigeria's long-term economic development.

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