

**RUNNING FOR COVER:
INFORMAL WORKERS AND THE PURSUIT OF
OLD-AGE SOCIAL PROTECTION
IN NORTHERN NIGERIA**

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at the London School of Economics and Political Science for the
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DECLARATION

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ABSTRACT

This thesis argues that Nigeria's reliance on market-based solutions such as micro pensions to provide social protection for elderly informal workers is fundamentally flawed. While these schemes claim to alleviate poverty, they fail to account for economic instability, mistrust in the state and financial institutions, and local realities of informal workers, who believe their needs are better served by informal support mechanisms such as family networks, community saving schemes, or tangible asset investments. However, the costs of ageing, particularly healthcare, far exceed what these informal strategies can sustainably cover, leaving many elderly workers vulnerable. Using ethnographic research, the study demonstrates that market-driven solutions exacerbate rather than resolve these challenges, necessitating a transformative approach to social protection.

Theoretically, the thesis mainly challenges Social Risk Management (SRM) and Rights-Based Approaches for their limited applicability in contexts of weak governance and systemic poverty. Transformative Social Policy (TSP) is proposed as a more robust alternative, offering a holistic framework for addressing structural inequalities.

The chapters collectively advance this argument. Chapters 1, 2, and 3 cover the introduction, literature review, and methodology. Chapter 4 situates the study within the historical context, demonstrating the gradual erosion of precolonial welfare systems dating back to the Sokoto Caliphate. Chapter 5 analyses the impact of neoliberal policies on formal social services and informal systems, arguing that the withdrawal from welfare responsibilities by state, market, and families leaves elderly informal workers increasingly vulnerable. Chapter 6 examines the historical development of pensions, showing how neoliberal reforms prioritised privatisation over protection, production, and redistribution. I expose the tensions between the state and market, highlighting their mutual failures to provide adequate support. Chapter 7 critiques financial inclusion strategies, revealing why micro pension schemes are unsuitable for informal workers, and how workers resist financialisation by relying on informal mechanisms. Finally, Chapter 8 consolidates the thesis contributions by grounding my findings in theories of social policy, microinsurance and micro pensions, proposing a transformative framework to address the systemic shortcomings identified.

This thesis contributes to debates on poverty and social policy by challenging the dominance of neoliberal solutions, concluding that only policies grounded in local realities and systemic equity can address the intersecting vulnerabilities of elderly informal workers in Nigeria.

To my father, who always believed in me. His absence is keenly felt as I reach this milestone.
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LIST OF ACRONYMS

AEPB	Abuja Environmental Protection Board
AFDB	African Development Bank
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BoP	Bottom-of-the-pyramid approach
CAC	Corporate Affairs Commission
CBN	Central Bank Nigeria
CCT	Conditional cash transfer
DB	Defined benefit pensions
DC	Defined contribution pensions
DG	Director General
EFCC	Economic and Financial Crimes Commission
EFInA	Enhancing Financial Innovation & Access
ERGP	Economic Recovery and Growth Plan
GDP	Gross domestic product
ICIR	International Centre for Investigative Reporting
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
LEAP	Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty
NAFDAC	National Agency for Food and Drug Administration
NAPEP	National Poverty Eradication Programme
NBS	National Bureau of Statistics
NEEDS	National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy
NHIS	National Health Insurance Scheme
NSC, NSCC	National Senior Citizen (Centre)
NSIO	National Social Investment Office
NSIP	National Social Investment Programme
OPEC	Organization of Oil Exporting Countries
PAWECA	Poverty Alleviation and Wealth Creation Agency
PAYG	Pay-as-you-go pensions
PenCom	National Pension Commission
PFA	Pension Fund Administrator
PFC	Pension Fund Custodian
POS	Point-of-sales machine
PRA	Pension Reform Act
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers

PwC	PricewaterhouseCoopers Ltd
ROI	Return on investment
RSA	Retirement Savings Account
SAP	Structural Adjustment Programme
SRM	Social risk management
TSP	Transformative social policy
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNRISD	United Nations Research Institute for Social Development
WASSCE	West African Senior School Certificate Examination
WHO	World Health Organization

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Adashe, esusu	Rotating savings group
Bandirabe	Extended family members (Fulfulde)
Derdirabe	Nuclear family members (Fulfulde)
Endam	Strong kinship bond, caregiving (Fulfulde)
Fisabilillah	Charity, for the sake of Allah (Arabic)
Gari, kunu	Beverage made with millet, peanut butter, tamarind
Kasar Hausa	Hausa land
Keke NAPEP	Tricycle rickshaw taxis
Kosam be chobbal, fura da nono	Snack: fermented cow milk and millet balls
Lenyol	Kinship group (Fulfulde)
Madrasa	Islamic school (Arabic)
Pulaaku	Fulani code of conduct (Fulfulde)
Rikon amana	Trustworthiness (Hausa)
Sadaqah	Alms, charity (Arabic)
Swallow	Starchy foods eaten with soups



Figure 1: Elderly man in his home in Yola

Source: Author

CHAPTER 1

Touch and Go: An Introduction to the Retirement Dilemma for Informal Workers

As I walk through the busy markets in Abuja and Yola and watch as goods change hands, I learn quickly that for many here, survival is a daily struggle. Each sale is a step towards earning enough to feed a family, to ensure another day's peace of mind. Behind every transaction lies the uncertain future of traders whose work lives have been spent in the informal economy, with little to no safety net to catch them as they age. This thesis unravels the complexities of social protection – or lack thereof – for elderly informal workers that leaves them exposed to the harsh realities of unstable retirements. While formal workers can anticipate relying on their pensions in old age, until recently, elderly informal workers were excluded from access to this instrument, leaving them to navigate a landscape with a disengaged state and unpredictable market forces, both contributing to the disintegration of kinship ties. Who bears the burden of care for informal workers as they age? The assumption that this is handled by family networks is increasingly misguided and outdated as financial pressures weigh on the support system.

In discussions about retirement, a Nigerian might tell you, 'Body no be firewood', meaning that bodies are not firewood designed to be burned out, so people who have dedicated their lives to hard work deserve proper rest and care. Yet, despite what they may feel entitled to, there has been a crisis of social protection in the country, with the state, market, and family failing in their responsibilities for old-age support. Informal workers typically work well into their later years and as the economy has deteriorated, they have become less confident in the capacities of all three systems to protect their livelihoods. This is urgent. In aviation circles, 'Touch and go', is a manoeuvre practiced under challenging landing conditions, including during adverse weather, when the likelihood of success or failure hinges on a knife-edge. The social protection landscape in Nigeria carries a similar sense of uncertainty, risk, and precarity, as well as the potential for structural transformation given a suitable policy context.

On a Monday in June 2021, I met with Safi, a petty trader, in front of her home in Karmo, Abuja. Her house, along with many others like it in the neighbourhood, was marked with red paint for demolition by the federal government so that they could build a new primary school, which she acknowledged would benefit the community, but the government had not shared any plans to rehouse the evicted residents. Safi cried as she described the circumstances which made her dread old age. She was forced into marriage in her adolescence and in the 25 years since, has had to work to support her eight children because her husband refuses to. Regardless of the sacrifices Safi made, her children grew to be a source of disappointment for her, and she was sure that when she is old and can no longer work, they would abandon her. Although she had other family that she left behind in her hometown of Maiduguri, Borno state, Safi worried about her safety in the Boko Haram stronghold should she decide to move back.

Safi concluded that she would never be able to retire. Outside observers might overestimate the centrality of kinship support for poor people in Nigeria, but she explained that she had lost touch with her siblings over the years and could not count on them to provide for her in her old age. To buttress her claims about her children, Safi told me that her daughter gave up custody of her own son who now lived in an orphanage. Recalling his story brought her to tears again as Safi expected that she might be subjected to a similar fate. Even now, the surge in food prices meant that they could not afford to eat twice a day. In addition, their meals consisted of watered-down soups lacking the usual accompaniments of a starchy *swallow* (made with yam, cassava, maize, or rice) and meat. While the government offers capacity building workshops intermittently to teach women sewing, hairdressing, or baking skills over a week-long period, they do not give the women capital to start businesses, only allowing them to keep the food they make during training. Safi encapsulated the inadequacy of this measure in one sentence: the government supposedly helps her and leaves, then the food finishes.

Over the next few months, I listened to one hundred other participants as they narrated stories mirroring the one above. What their cases illustrate is the starting point for my analysis. Safi's story in particular highlights the limitations of the market, state, and family in welfare provision. To those in the informal economy struggling to afford even basic nutrition, market-based tools are out of reach (Bateman 2010; Hu and Stewart 2009; Karnani 2007). The financial instability that renders market solutions inaccessible similarly destabilises family mechanisms (Lourenco-Lindell 2002; MacLean 2011, 2017; Mokomane 2013). Safi's estrangement from her siblings and concerns about her children's support challenges assumptions about the reliability of kin systems for financially strained households and exposes the underlying tensions which stem from unmet obligations. We also observe how the government's disregard for basic needs and reliance on sporadic or temporary solutions reflect its failure to deliver robust long-term impact.

Perhaps, when available resources allow, there is a potential for informal support to enhance the capacity for welfare provision. But the disappearance of this mechanism is often attributed to competing economic pressures that overshadow the traditional obligations (Devereux 1999). As individuals are increasingly stretched beyond their limits, this leads to a greater tendency to neglect duties to ageing relatives, since they reason that giving support is counterproductive if it jeopardises their own income security. Moreover, this thesis will explore the complexities paramount for informal workers in their pursuit of livelihood support amid a policy lacuna. In response to the welfare gap for elderly informal workers, the Nigerian government established a privatised contributory micro pensions scheme in 2019 (Premium Times 2019), promising financial inclusion to the informal economy and vast profits to the private sector. My task was to advance the debate about the role of this instrument, in combination with other tools for risk management, plays in improving retirement outcomes. In so doing, I argue that informal workers devise independent strategies to maintain their consumption levels, foregoing the commodified pension scheme for more viable informal savings alternatives.

My approach was informed by theories on: 1) how to organise social protection for the informal economy, namely, informal social protection, social risk management (SRM), and rights-based approaches; 2) commodified social services such as microinsurance as well as perspectives on this financialisation of poverty and social policy, and 3) strengthening the understanding of transformative approaches to social policy solutions for informal workers by engaging with the transformative social policy literature. Indeed, there is some room for more state intervention. As I will argue, social risk management falls short in this regard for failing to account for the specific needs of vulnerable groups (Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler 2004; McKinnon 2004), contrary to the rights-based approaches and transformative social policy which advocate for a more proactive state. Nevertheless, the state's retrenchment through privatisation creates the vacuum that then facilitates and permits the retreat of other welfare actors. This thesis contributes to the literature on transformative social policy by critiquing the fragmentation and compartmentalisation of social policy into narrow frameworks for social protection or poverty reduction. It argues for a holistic and comprehensive approach that reflects the lived realities of people at local level, who experience these socioeconomic challenges as interconnected and multifaceted rather than as isolated issues.

Focusing on informal workers rather than the non-working poor presents an intriguing outlook on old-age poverty, particularly given conservative ideals of deserving and undeserving poor. This false dichotomy which emphasises individual responsibility is evaluated against informal workers who contribute to the economy and at least attempt to pull themselves out of poverty.

Despite their productivity, their informality renders their employment unstable (Chen 2007), resulting in a lack of social protection and challenges in saving for retirement. My examination deepens insight on poverty in societies impacted by policies that promote individualism and privatisation, as well as the importance of considering broader social and economic structural transformation with the aim of upending systemic inequalities faced by vulnerable populations. I use a sociological and ethnographic lens to assess how the macro-level socioeconomic crisis in Nigeria manifests at micro-level. The prevailing theories on social protection for the informal economy do not thoroughly capture or explain how to structure social policies for elderly people within this group, considering the unique realities of their work lives and ageing processes.

1.1. Locating the Thesis: Theoretical Contributions and Inquiries

Many long-held practices and beliefs on social protection for informal workers in Africa place kinship networks as the primary and ultimate resource. In many cultures, poverty is identified not by the material deprivation alone, but as an experience that is deeply tied to isolation from social networks; in other words, “having no one”, since social capital offers people a support system (Calder and Tanhchareun 2014, p11). Traditionally, these interpersonal bonds bore the responsibility for elderly care in retirement by smoothing household consumption in parallel to or in the absence of formal state or market interventions (Devereux 1999; Morduch 1999). But while development practitioners and scholars focus on issues to do with the limited coverage, unequal power dynamics, and sustainability of this system (Adamchak 1996; Apt and Gricco 1994; Mokomane 2013; Saraceno 2010; Tungaraza 1993), some evidence suggests that more attention be paid to the external historical pressures undermining these processes (Wood and Gough 2006). This is crucial for several reasons. Firstly, by recognising these external factors, we can move beyond surface-level explanations and address the root causes of the disruption of old-age security. This helps to better appreciate the resilience and adaptability of the informal system. An enhanced understanding of how these factors have shaped current vulnerabilities is important for designing comprehensive policies.

Before colonial rule, northern Nigeria had well-established kinship systems embedded within hierarchical political structures (such as Emirs and chiefs) who played key roles in traditional social protection through extended family care, community solidarity, and religious obligations (Watts 1983). However, the British restructured these systems to fit their own administrative needs by co-opting traditional leaders and also stripping them of their powers, autonomy, and sources of revenue generation (Adebayo 1995; Smith 1970). Decades later, the post-colonial government adopted the structural adjustment programme (SAP) which put the livelihoods of informal workers, and their kinship support networks under intensifying strain (Babawale et al

1996; Dozie 2009; Meagher and Yunusa 1996). The immediate outcome of the SAP was a sharp decline in material wellbeing due to high unemployment, inflation, and the breakdown of social services (*ibid.*). The combined effect of colonialism and the SAP meant that kinship systems, which had once provided a reliable safety net for the elderly, had been reconfigured, underfunded, and weakened by harmful external factors which obstructed their capacity to respond to needs. This made older people vulnerable, as the willingness and ability of younger generations to support their elderly relatives declined given the scarcity of resources. These inefficiencies in informal mechanisms highlight the need for the state to step in to support the livelihoods of informal workers.

The Social Risk Management framework introduced by the World Bank highlights the market as the most efficient mechanism for welfare provision, particularly through financial products such as microfinance, and indicates that families and the state should fill in when the market leaves gaps in coverage for the informal economy (Holzmann and Jorgensen 1999). These three mechanisms – the state, market, and family – make up the welfare mix. However, Social Risk Management does not properly assess the extent to which the strengths and weaknesses of and interactions between the three systems directly impact welfare outcomes. For instance, the SAP of the 1980s ushered in neoliberal policies – including a privatisation of state services, reduction in social investments, currency devaluation, and trade liberalisation – which led to a decline in economic stability, thereby weakening the capacities of the state, market, and family to provide support to informal workers (Babawale et al 1996; Meagher and Yunusa 1996). For now, too many gaps remain in the welfare mix for comprehensive livelihood support.

Within the Social Risk Management framework, the state attempts to meet the welfare needs of vulnerable populations by identifying the limitations of market-based and informal support mechanisms, facilitating the development of and access to targeted programmes, as well as improving macroeconomic conditions (Holzmann and Jorgensen 1999). This can come in the form of public education and healthcare, or even infrastructure development and disaster relief safety nets available either universally or to targeted groups. However, developing countries such as Nigeria are limited in capacity to deliver such programmes due to the high prevalence of corruption, weak institutions, poor social infrastructure, weak fiscal capacity, debt servicing burdens, and other economic constraints (Adejumobi 2011; Adesina 2009, 2011; Amakom 2016; Hagen-Zankar and Holmes 2012; World Bank 2000). Yet, even though the government in Nigeria did not provide pensions for informal workers prior to the SAP, it delivered a range of social services, including healthcare and education (Babawale et al 1996) that were vital for supporting the informal economy. But the market-oriented policies for SAP eroded access to these essential social services, thereby exacerbating livelihood instability for informal workers.

Despite the initial results, Nigeria continued to implement neoliberal policies. Neoliberalism is defined as the promotion of a free market ideology, individualism, withdrawal of the state from and privatisation of social services, and a growing tendency to shift welfare responsibilities from the state onto poor individuals and households (Harrison 2005; Harvey 2005). President Olusegun Obasanjo's administration from 1999 to 2007 fervently pursued the privatisation of state enterprises (Olukoshi 2007) with the neoliberal reforms largely aligning with a model of government oversight and market-based delivery of essential services. By 2006, federal public pensions had been dismantled, unemployment and informalisation had increased, and corrupt practices compromised the privatisation objectives. The neoliberal doctrine instead served to entrench poverty, inequality, as well as a loss of civil liberties. Numerous economic crises have ensued from then given this unstable groundwork, and the struggle to recover has been worse still since the pandemic (Lain et al 2021; NBS 2022; World Bank 2020).

With family and state solutions faltering, attention has shifted to markets as a potential remedy for the decline in old-age support. Proponents of market-based solutions advocate for informal workers, among whom are some of the poorest and most vulnerable members of society, to enter financial arrangements with owners of capital, many of whom are at the top of the global financial system. This process is known as 'financial inclusion' and can be achieved through instruments such as microfinance or microinsurance. Microfinance and bottom-of-the-pyramid approaches stress the growth potential of large untapped informal economies in developing countries, with some forecasts suggesting that roughly 70% of Africa's one billion inhabitants are likely to be interested in microinsurance (Churchill 2006; Matul et al 2010; Prahalad 2004). The sheer size of this market is appealing to private sector actors who project that generating even small revenues from each customer could make it commercially feasible to target them, particularly in cases where the market for formal and/or high-income workers is oversaturated.

On the whole, this over-reliance on market solutions such as cheap microinsurance products is often inappropriate for attending to the challenges informal workers have, particularly with regards to affordability, coverage, and equitable access. Still, the market continues to show interest in this underserved population. The private sector expects to profit through scale, though the rate of extreme poverty in Nigeria (Kharas et al 2018) surely undermines whatever potential commercial feasibility they envision. Nevertheless, promoters of financial inclusion extol the benefits of access to financial services for the poor, believing that integrating poor people into global financial markets fosters economic growth (Beck and Demirguc-Kent 2008). Microfinance continues to be promoted as a universal cure despite the limited evidence of its success. It has seen a slow uptake due to financial illiteracy, poor product design that

prioritises profit over needs, and a deep popular scepticism of formal financial institutions (Kar 2018; Platteau et al 2017; Meagher 2018). Moreover, the failure to address the poor quality of employment in the informal economy prevents many from affording even low-cost financial products, further undermining the viability of these instruments. (Bernards 2018).

Critics of financial inclusion efforts examine how market-based solutions commodify labour, risks, and social services in a process that shifts responsibilities onto the poor, often leading to further marginalisation (Aitken 2013; Lavinas et al 2023). There is insufficient exploration of why informal workers reject market-based instruments, regardless of their promised benefits. Microinsurance tends to be narrowly focused, targeting specific risks or needs such as plans for health, funeral, pension, or crop-related expenses (Sirojedin and Midgley 2012), but a more holistic approach is needed, as informal workers are typically concerned with a range of issues simultaneously. So, they cannot solely focus efforts to rely exclusively on a tool designed for a single purpose, especially when their informal strategies are generally aimed at addressing multiple needs and objectives over the course of their lives. This critique can inform how such products neglect the sociocultural and financial logics influencing informal workers' decisions on what strategies are better suited to their lived realities.

The Rights-Based Approach to social protection that is associated with the International Labour Organization and Institute of Development Studies stresses the state's role in safeguarding vulnerable populations based on citizenship rights, rather than market-driven self-reliance and individual responsibility, particularly in developing countries (Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler 2004; Unni and Rani 2003). This approach recognises the market as a source of risk, not just another element of social protection. Even so, a Rights-Based agenda will only see widespread application in well-functioning states with healthy power dynamics that allow for contestation (Cousins 1997). Power, authority, abuse, and corruption issues are paramount, considering conflicts between different groups along the class hierarchy (Hickey and Mitlin 2009). Although the state has the duty to enact laws, raise awareness about rights, monitor progress, report on implementation, and enforce rights claims, this could be challenging for developing countries where state presence and effectiveness may be weakened by limited financial resources and insufficient institutional capacity (Broberg and Sano 2018). In Nigeria, where the government faces serious corruption and fiscal issues, compounded by decades of neoliberal policies, this has significantly reduced its capacity to meet demands posed by its large informal economy.

Concentrating only on how the state, market, and family can all bridge gaps is problematic given each system's flaws. Social welfare should involve more than merely offering protection, enabling market efficiency, or financial inclusion. But it is also about much more than just state

intervention. The challenge therefore lies in devising innovative solutions to transform old-age support for informal workers. Transformative Social Policy, as promoted by the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, reckons with the detrimental impacts of neoliberal reforms and therefore develops social and economic policies with an objective to target wider social policy objectives related to reproduction, production, and redistribution (in addition to protection), to create economic synergies and attain structural transformation (Adesina 2011; Mkandawire 2004). Achieving this transformation would require social policies to incorporate broad concerns for livelihoods, vulnerabilities, and public services, with particular emphasis on those who are most vulnerable (Koehler 2017). While Transformative Social Policy does not typically focus on the informal economy, it still brings attention to the urgent necessity for considering underlying causes, noting that social protection strategies are only one piece of the larger puzzle. The inquiries in this section led me to the following research questions:

Is social protection for elderly informal workers a transformative or merely a palliative mechanism for addressing old-age livelihood security?

- a) How effective has the state been in addressing informal workers' old age security needs?
- b) How do market-based solutions impact the risks faced by elderly informal workers?
- c) Why have informal support mechanisms failed to fill the welfare gap for elderly informal workers?
- d) How do informal workers adapt their approaches to old-age social protection when faced with deficiencies in state, market, and family provisions?

The research questions aim to explore the effectiveness of social protection mechanisms for the informal economy, specifically evaluating whether they promote transformation, merely maintain the stability of informal livelihoods, or perpetuate their social and economic risks. The investigation focuses on understanding how various social protection systems address the risks associated with informality and old-age poverty across different demographic groups and cultural contexts. The research also attempts to determine how informal social support might contribute to the transformation of risks related to informality and poverty in old age. I then examine if state-led social protection initiatives for informal workers support the reinforcement of poverty and informality or provide pathways for overcoming these challenges. Finally, by focusing on micro pensions, I explore how integrating the poor into financial markets affects their risk management, and whether it alleviates or intensifies their vulnerability, potentially entrenching social inequalities.

1.2. Framing the Context: The Empirical Setting

Nigeria has one of the highest poverty rates globally. In 2018 there were 87 million people in extreme poverty, and it was the country with the largest number of extreme poor in the world – with six Nigerians added to the total every minute (Kharas et al 2018). This situation is likely to worsen as the population gradually rises while the economy deteriorates. Over the past few decades, poverty statistics have escalated at an alarming rate, yet policymakers have failed to tackle the pressing issue of poverty reduction. By the Nigerian government's own count, 133 million people (representing 63% of the population) are living in multidimensional poverty, with 86 million among them residing in the north (NBS 2022). Crucially, both of my research sites are in the northern region, where poverty in the country is more pronounced. Additionally, it is noteworthy that Nigeria's informal economy comprises of up to 70% of the total workforce (Iwelumo and Olanipekun 2017), rendering it one of the largest informal economies in Africa. Many informal workers earn low, inconsistent incomes and are dependent on daily earnings (ILO 2018). These economic conditions make it hard for them to save for old age and magnify the risks of old-age and intergenerational poverty. Overall, the economic strain along with declining family support create the perfect storm, only made worse by the erosion of state-led social services amid ongoing market reforms.

As things stand, Nigeria already hosts the largest population of older people in Africa, with projections expecting an upward trend (Mbam et al 2022). Although Nigeria is still a young society, by 2018, the total elderly population was estimated at about six million (Tanyi et al 2018) and as life expectancy improves – increasing from 53.6 years in 2000 to 63.4 years in 2021 (WHO 2024a) – the demographic issue becomes more pertinent, since today's younger generation will eventually age. Population projections indicate that while the proportion of people over 65 is likely to remain steady for a while, their absolute numbers are expected to rise from about six million, as noted earlier, to 16 million by 2050, and the share is expected to multiply from 4% by 2050 to 10% after only 50 years (Mbam et al 2022). Assessments of the Nigerian government's capacity suggest that it is not prepared to meet this challenge, and rapid changes will make adaptation more difficult. This is especially significant since the elderly population will be facing ageing in a poor society, without adequate state or market provisions for social services. This poses a serious socioeconomic concern.

Despite the severity of this challenge, it does not receive the scrutiny it warrants in national discussions. Social protection policies and programmes in Nigeria tend to be centred around child education and youth 'empowerment', perhaps stemming from views that elderly people can no longer be as economically productive, despite having spent much of their lives in work,

contributing to the economy. Even with the attention paid to social assistance programmes in Nigeria, there is currently no national cash transfer programme for the elderly. Previously, cash transfers were available in two southwestern states – Ekiti and Osun – through the Ekiti State Social Security Scheme and the Osun State Elderly Persons Scheme, and a welfare programme for people over the age of 75 in Anambra state in the southeast (Aiyede et al 2015; NSIO 2018) but all three schemes have been dissolved. Nigeria faces significant economic constraints, including scarce resources for social investment and a high demand for state intervention from a largely impoverished population. In this context, social protection has been characterised by an ad hoc approach, limited scale, poor design, a lack of cohesive strategy and continuity across political administrations, all while being hindered by weak institutional capacity (Holmes et al 2012; Oduro 2010).

Development experts generally agree that poverty grows where social protection is absent, but these uncoordinated initiatives for poverty reduction, as well as the overall social policy landscape for health, education, and pensions that often exclude informal workers, leaves them vulnerable, particularly as they transition into old age. Without adequate social protection targeting old age, a significant number of elderly people, especially those who had worked in the informal economy, face the risk of poverty. Many older Nigerians depend on family support, but this system can be unreliable due to economic instability. Thus, older informal workers often continue working well into old age because they have no savings or investments to fall back on, which impacts their health, wellbeing, and general quality of life. Given that Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa, its experiences with poverty, informal economy, and demographic issues offer relevant insights, not only to its own policy context but also to other sub-Saharan African countries with similar concerns such as Ghana in the west, Kenya and Uganda in the east, and South Africa.

The extreme rates of poverty and informality, coupled with the decline of social services, are jeopardising the post-colonial social pact between Nigerian citizens and the state. While social protection was eroded, particularly in areas such as health and education, the pension system also faced challenges that impacted retirement security for formal workers in the private sector and civil service. Historically, the pension system been fraught with issues of corruption and mismanagement (Casey and Dostal 2008), nonetheless in Nigeria's Pension Reform Act 2014, there were provisions made for informal workers through a scheme they called micro pensions (PRA 2014). In March of 2019, the Nigerian government finally expanded the scope of private pensions in the country to accommodate informal workers as a solution to the retirement crisis. Prior to this, just over 10% of the workforce (with formal employment) had access to formal pensions, leaving the remaining majority without the income security needed to retire (EFInA

2019). For a country where the informal economy accounts for 70% of labour participation, this was a glaring oversight. The pandemic exacerbated these vulnerabilities by inflicting serious damage on informal businesses and personal savings due to lockdown restrictions (Human Rights Watch 2021; Onyekwena and Ekeruche 2020), which, by 2021 during my field work, many were still struggling with.

Although initial outlooks on Nigeria's micro pension scheme from both the pension industry and government regulators were optimistic, reception from informal workers has been tepid (Akwagyiram 2022; Iwelumo and Olanipekun 2017). Nigeria is one of the pioneers of micro pensions in Africa; however, Akwagyiram argued that the scheme's adoption was hampered by the ongoing economic crisis and a lingering track record of problematic pension systems. Of course, there is some curiosity regarding whether the optimism for the scheme is influenced by the potential for the growth of the pension sector – and by extension, the entire financial infrastructure – or by the stated objectives for poverty alleviation in old age. Industry experts emphasise the gap in the market and have promptly welcomed the micro pension scheme as the vehicle into this untapped growth potential given the need for old-age security among Nigeria's large informal workforce (EFInA 2019; Iwelumo and Olanipekun 2017). There are concerns about the state's capability to better handle this more intricate and sensitive type of pensions than it has with formal sector pensions, however.

The histories of the wider social protection landscape provide essential context for my thesis, but to understand Nigeria well is to recognise the underlying divisions across ethno-religious-regional lines. Nigeria is roughly partitioned into the northern region with a Hausa and Fulani Muslim majority, and the southeast and west that have a higher concentration of Christians and are dominated by Igbos and Yorubas respectively. The prevalence of internal migration has led to a blending of ethnic and religious groups (Ochonu 2015), with communities from both the north and south present in the capital city of Abuja (and even other parts of northern Nigeria to a lesser degree). Unfortunately, recent waves of insecurity due to Boko Haram terrorism, 'banditry', and the farmer-herdsman conflict have intensified existing tensions and divisions. Other factors such as the SAP and subsequently the COVID-19 pandemic, added even more to these complexities. Thus, northern Nigeria's informal population is tasked with navigating these tensions alongside the pursuit of old-age support.

1.3. Unveiling the Key Findings and Interpretive Lens

This thesis critically examines financial inclusion strategies aimed at elderly informal workers, highlighting a significant gap between superficial promises of poverty alleviation and the actual

needs of the target group. While these strategies appear beneficial on the surface, a closer look reveals that informal workers do not have a demand for such financial products. Instead, they rely on informal alternatives such as community saving schemes and asset accumulation that better align with their economic realities and cultural practices. This empirical argument undermines assumptions that financial inclusion effectively addresses the needs of informal workers, suggesting that these initiatives are largely irrelevant to their lived experiences. In Nigeria today, the costs associated with old age are increasingly unaffordable. Traditionally, these costs were mostly covered by informal systems, but such resources are no longer sufficient to meet the growing demands of elderly care. The instability of the macroeconomic environment, dwindling support from families, and insufficient responses from the state, all combine to intensify the burden of old age.

The World Bank's Social Risk Management perspective on social welfare for informal workers assumes that informal support mechanisms will be ever-present and effective at managing individual risks, thereby reducing the burden on the state for providing welfare (Holzmann and Jorgensen 1999). A historical perspective of northern Nigeria reveals that this does not always hold true. Granted, kinship groups have taken on the responsibility of elderly care for centuries. But the utility of this mechanism has fluctuated through the years and cannot be eternally relied upon to fill gaps in formal systems of social provisioning. Applying this kind of temporal analysis enriched my understanding and the interpretation of findings for my thesis. The trajectories of SAP, social investment, and pensions also give insight into how social protection for informal workers is designed in Nigeria today, and how historical pressures on informal livelihoods shape the relationship between the state and informal workers.

Furthermore, this thesis speaks to the vast literature on microfinance and the financialisation of poverty, looking beyond criticisms of microfinance not meeting social objectives (Bateman 2010), altering the dynamics between capital and labour (Mader 2015), and the unaffordability of microinsurance for informal workers, particularly given the casualisation of labour (Bernards 2018). There has been little research into informal workers' experiences and perspectives on the adequacy of micro pensions. This thesis aims to bridge this gap by offering ethnographic accounts of the financial calculus of informality. Many informal workers lack the means to save. But even those who have enough disposable income to accommodate pension savings choose not to invest in such schemes due to their rational considerations of the poor macroeconomic environment, and the lack of trust in the government and pension system. I use comparative analysis to inform this study.

The thesis contributes to the literature by arguing against the compartmentalisation of social policy into discrete categories such as social protection or poverty reduction. I emphasise the need to think comprehensively about social protection, considering the full spectrum of issues faced by informal workers. My main finding is that privatisation and individualism prompted the state, market, and family to withdraw welfare obligations, while simultaneously eroding the ability to meet the needs and concerns of informal workers. Rights-Based Social Protection (Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler 2004; Lund and Nicholson 2003; Unni and Rani 2003) can be useful for framing needs but misses the mark in a country like Nigeria where government is unreliable, and trust in formal state and financial institutions is weak. My analysis shares common ground with scholarly contributions made by Adesina (2009, 2011, 2015, 2020) and Mkandawire (2001, 2004, 2007, 2016) on Transformative Social Policy's core principle which advocates for expanding beyond social protection to encompass broader social and economic aims. Expanding on this foundation, this thesis seeks to critically evaluate, and perhaps even provide new empirical material to support these literatures with a sociological perspective on financialisation and transformation. Policies to advance protective, productive, reproductive, and redistributive objectives – such as through social investments in healthcare and education or fostering an enabling business environment rather than focusing on micro pensions alone, are not only what is required to transform old age security, but also what informal workers are calling for to enable them to make adequate provision for old age.

1.4. Mapping the Thesis: Chapter Overview

This thesis continues with seven more chapters, categorised into three overarching segments. The first set comprises of the literature review to evaluate existing research and identify gaps or trends in relevant theories, and a methodology chapter to outline the research design, as well its limitations and ethical considerations. Then the second set presents the core findings of my research through a narrative that spans four chapters. Finally, I conclude the thesis in Chapter 8, reiterating the main arguments of the thesis and its theoretical contributions.

In the next chapter, I establish the theoretical debates that underpin the thesis by reviewing 4 approaches to social protection for the informal economy, that is, Social Risk Management, microfinance, informal family and community support, and Rights-Based Social Protection. These theories frame welfare for informal workers around managing risks and vulnerabilities, with avenues for transformation ranging from using market-based tools to smooth consumption to positioning social welfare as a fundamental human right and promising universal access to services. I draw on the Transformative Social Policy literature to critique these frameworks and refine the grasp of transformation, and finally, I look at literature on financialisation of poverty

and social policy to challenge market-driven approaches and highlight the need for structural changes through policies that prioritise welfare needs and concerns over profitability for the private sector. This discussion explores the frameworks that best explain how social protection for the informal economy is organised, before ending with the critical issues that I address in the empirical chapters.

In Chapter 3, I delve into the qualitative methodology I adopted to answer my core empirical questions. I justify my choice to conduct focus groups and semi-structured interviews with an ethnographic lens, informed by arguments about the value ethnography adds to research on people's lived realities. I examine the challenges of conducting a study on elderly and working age informal workers (at various income levels) to understand their retirement strategies, as well as noting the ethical and positionality considerations for carrying out sensitive research on a marginalised group. I also interviewed senior officials in government and pension industry in Abuja and Yola. Due to these variations among the groups that I interviewed, I needed to tailor distinct data collection strategies for sampling, recruitment, and even phrasing for questions. For informal workers that I asked about personal finances and details about their retirement plans, I had to build rapport, whereas senior officials were quick to engage during interviews but obtaining their consent to participate was difficult. Though I conducted fieldwork in 2021 when the risk of COVID-19 remained high for older people, the adjustments I needed to make during the interview process were minimal.

The four empirical chapters examine the interplay between the state, market, and family, and the extent of support they offer. I began by putting a microscope on informal support networks, then assessed the impact of neoliberalism on the welfare mix, before broadening my analysis to the entire social protection landscape, then turning my focus on pensions. My findings reveal that all three systems are failing and abdicating their duties, leading informal workers to have to increasingly rely on self-sufficiency amid a retirement crisis.

Chapter 4 is largely historical, but it also marks the beginning of my empirical analysis. Here, I was most concerned with how informal social protection is situated within the broader welfare ecosystem, the evolution of this support mechanism and its resilience through colonialism – a major structural disruption that reconfigured and destabilised the system. I outlined linkages between formal and informal social protection mechanisms delivered by the state, market, family, and community. This welfare mix shapes the formulation of social policies in Nigeria, therefore I assessed whether state-led provision could displace informal support networks by considering perspectives from government officials, religious, and indigenous leaders. This is followed by a historical overview of informal institutions. I look through the lens of the ancient

Sokoto Caliphate to consider the pre-colonial structures for the facilitation of political, religious, social, cultural, and economic obligations that were modified after the arrival of the British. The networks of kinship support embedded within this hierarchy endured long after their departure, and extended families retained their cultural significance in elderly care. From the era of the Sokoto Caliphate, religion also played key roles in politics and social life in northern Nigeria. Despite modern limitations, it continues to do so to varying levels of effectiveness.

The devastating effects of neoliberal policies is a central theme for my thesis. Chapter 5 is interested in the history of these policies and their lasting impact on the material conditions of informal workers, kinship systems – showing that although neoliberalism did not reshape these mechanisms like colonialism did, it eroded them through economic pressures – and the state's diminished capacity to respond effectively to welfare needs. I start by dwelling on the history of SAP implementation, and the preservation of neoliberalism by Heads of State from the 1990s to the 2000s, even after international actors had revised their policy proposals regarding the state's welfare role. I then narrow the focus to my respondents and lay out a profile of the vulnerabilities they face within the current economic climate. I examine how kinship systems have declined due to income pressures, leading to a shrinking of depth and scale of extended family care. What was more concerning was that these pressures may already be causing relationship breakdown due to elderly people perceiving a shortfall in the level of support they expected. Lastly, I investigate how the state's interactions with informal workers deepens their marginalisation rather than ensuring their livelihood protection.

Chapter 6 sheds light on the existing state-led provisions available to informal workers. The chapter asks the extent to which the wider social protection agenda is effective in responding to the needs of informal workers, the challenges that have characterised the history of pensions in Nigeria, and how the introduction of the micro pension scheme in 2019 has impacted this landscape. The government's approach to social welfare continues to be guided by neoliberal ideology, and even key sectors such as education and healthcare are increasingly falling under the domain of the private sector. Though the government offers social assistance under limited conditions, they are better inclined towards promoting individualism and entrepreneurship for the informal economy. The focus then shifts to pension provision. The implementation of the micro pensions scheme is plagued by the troubled history of corruption and mismanagement of previous pension systems in the country. On top of that, the government's regulations and unwillingness to invest in the sector has led to tensions in the public-private partnership. The private sector is attracted to the idea of making profits, but they recognise that the costs for developing the market may not be worthwhile given the low purchasing power of a substantial

portion of the informal workforce. Instead, they look to the government to bear these costs while they wait to reap the financial rewards.

This discussion resumes in Chapter 7 from the perspective of informal workers. I addressed the disruption of financialisation from below through the rejection of micro pensions by informal workers. Although the pension industry attributes the lacklustre interest in micro pensions to financial illiteracy, informal workers demonstrate that is far from the case. Instead, they decide on what financial instruments to invest in based on rational financial logics that consider the viability of informal savings alternatives, impact of macroeconomic factors such as inflation and currency depreciation, durability of assets, as well as the reputation for corruption in the pension industry. I then draw on their interview responses to sketch out four vignettes on their retirement realities. The profiles range from more effective strategies employed by relatively successful traders on one end, to low-income workers struggling to achieve financial stability. To varying degrees, informal workers rely on incomes made from their labour efforts or small businesses and extended families to meet their needs for food, housing, and healthcare in old age. I evaluate their retirement preparedness before rounding out the chapter by delving into their visions for transformative social policies that they believe best serve their interests.

Finally, Chapter 8 concludes the thesis by summarising the empirical findings and linking the thesis contributions to the theoretical frameworks outlined in the literature review, with a focus on the significance of sociocultural and financial factors in designing effective instruments and the agency informal workers have to reject inapt, irrelevant options. I underline future policy recommendations, given the inappropriateness of the micro pensions plan. Informal workers themselves direct their demands from the government towards support for their businesses and structural social and economic development rather than pensions, as they view the former as more vital for enhancing their productivity so they can work to ensure their future livelihoods and security.

The central problem that this thesis addresses is the retirement crisis for informal workers in northern Nigeria, which stems from the failure of state, market, and family welfare systems to meet their old-age security needs. I analyse these issues alongside the pension planning and informal financial logics that informal workers employ to navigate their welfare concerns. In so doing, this thesis aims to provide new insights on the value of sociocultural as well as financial considerations on the design of social policies for informal workers. I also investigate whether pensions alone are enough to protect the elderly poor in the informal economy, or if it is more appropriate, relevant, and effective to take on lessons from Transformative Social Policy for a more transformative approach to old-age security for informal workers.

CHAPTER 2

Risk, Vulnerability, and Transformation: A Review of Existing Theoretical Debates

The main perspectives on informal workers view them either as burdens on development, as a vulnerable group requiring state protection, or as entrepreneurs to be supported through the market (Chen 2007). The reality is mixed, but even so many regard the informal economy as synonymous with precarious work or illegal activity though it is more appropriately generalised as simply existing ‘outside the law’ given the significant proportion of, for example, high-income actors who engage in lawful and lucrative enterprises (ILO 2000). In this vein, the approaches to social protection for informal workers – namely, social risk management (SRM), rights-based social protection, and microfinance – share a common goal of addressing the risks and vulnerabilities of informal workers, advocating for their inclusion in welfare provision to ensure that they are protected against various shocks. For SRM and microfinance, these risks are managed through market mechanisms, while rights-based social protection seeks to reassert a more central role for the state. However, by promoting individual responsibility and targeted interventions, all three approaches align with neoliberal principles to varying degrees, with SRM and microfinance being the most deeply entrenched in the ideology.

Neoliberalism is a form of social engineering which dominates all aspects of the economy, society, and politics (Harrison 2010). One understanding of neoliberalism is that it promotes a free market ideology, individual liberty, the privatisation of public assets, and the retrenchment of the state from social provision, thereby shifting the state’s role to ensuring the optimisation of a market economy (Harrison 2005; Harvey 2006). Although the neoliberal ideology promotes free markets and privatisation with the assumption that these policies would result in economic growth and hence poverty reduction, the policies have instead been linked to insecurity in livelihoods (Harrison 2010). In essence, neoliberalism says one thing but accomplishes another. Critics conclude that its principles of individualism and marketisation exacerbate poor

people's risks (Harvey 2006). SRM's emphasis on individual responsibility is inspired by neoliberalism and it allows for persistent poverty to be regarded as a failure on the part of the individual rather than the state. In short, neoliberalism created the conditions that generated income insecurity, rolled back social protection thereby amplifying vulnerabilities, then enhanced the scope for resource transfers from the vulnerable poor to the rich.

This review seeks to consolidate distinct yet related scholarly perspectives that contextualise key debates concerning informal workers and the arrangements they rely on for welfare in old age. I will present these debates under six broad sections: 1) informal mechanisms provided by families and communities; 2) social risk management; 3) rights-based social protection; 4) transformative social policy (TSP); 5) commodification of social protection using microfinance and microinsurance; and 6) financialisation of poverty and social policy. SRM and rights-based social protection offer distinct outlooks on how to address the challenges that informal workers face when seeking welfare. After I evaluate the debates in those literatures, I then bring in the perspective of transformative social policy (Adesina 2011; Mkandawire 2004) as a critique of both frameworks, and to identify pathways to social, political, and economic transformation, along with neoliberalism's role in disrupting that potential. I draw on each of these literatures, highlighting how the frameworks offer insights into the issues, while also revealing deficiencies when applied in isolation. I aim to open a new perspective on social protection for the informal economy, using TSP as a lens to explore opportunities for more systemic solutions.

Finally, I examine discussions about microinsurance: while some claim that financial inclusion through the sale of cheap financial products to the poor goes a long way in reducing the risks they face (Churchill 2006; Matul et al 2010), others demonstrate microinsurance's failure to meet these expectations due to issues of affordability or institutional incompatibility (Bateman 2010; Bernards 2018). Next, I engage with the literature on the financialisation of poverty and social policy (Kar 2018; Lavinas 2018; Mader 2015) to offer a robust critique of market-driven approaches (as opposed to de-commodified social services) and underline the importance of policies and structural changes that prioritise the needs and welfare of informal workers over the reach and profitability of formal financial instruments. These debates provide a framework for exploring the roles of risk, vulnerability, and transformation on the social welfare ecosystem for elderly informal workers in Nigeria.

2.1. Informal Mechanisms for Social Protection: Filial Responsibilities in Flux

Academics refer to different mechanisms when they write about informal insurance, reciprocal solidarity networks, or informal social protection. For this thesis, I will be limiting the scope to

family and community support systems that mobilise resources to help each other cope with hardship. This includes kinship care, community-based arrangements such as rotating saving schemes, and support from indigenous traditional institutions and faith-based organisations. For instance, *esusu* – or *adashe* as it is known in northern Nigeria – are voluntary group saving schemes that pool predetermined contributions at regular meetings where members take turns to collect the sums until the cycle is concluded and can then be restarted for as many times as the members wish. These clubs were observed a long time ago in Nigeria, first among the Yoruba people in the south, and the practice has since spread to the north, allowing people to provide makeshift informal financial services for themselves given that they face barriers in accessing formal savings instruments (Bascom 1952).

By the 1990s, literature on informal social protection mechanisms among the urban poor in Africa began to view it as a form of risk management through social insurance (Alderman and Paxson 1994; Apt and Gricco 1994; Morduch 1999; Tungaraza 1993). When poor individuals and households are exposed to minor shocks such as illnesses or temporary unemployment, they smooth consumption by relying on their social networks as a first and last resort. These systems served social, cultural and economic functions, and the social ties people formed with relatives, friends, neighbours, work associates, and community leaders were often the determining factor for resilience or income collapse. The degree of intimacy, proximity, and information asymmetry mattered for the effectiveness of transfers, as people with closer bonds and those with distant connections navigated the scope or extent of support differently.

Notably, researchers examined how communities and extended families took on the burden of care for people (including older relatives) who required coping strategies during retirement. The old-age security theory explained fertility rates among the poor in developing countries. The hypothesis is that poor people are motivated to reproduce as a means of insuring against uncertain incomes in old age (Morduch 1999). When children are young, resource transfers flow from parent to child, but this dependency can invert over time and parents come to expect income security as repayment for sacrifices made (Apt and Gricco 1994). The intergenerational bargain acts as a sort of informal pensions whereby the working generation cares for the elderly with an implicit agreement that the next generation will do the same for them when they can no longer work. To push this perspective further, Collard (2000) elucidated on the concept of a three-generational model, through which productive income-earners who own, control, and distribute most of the assets are tasked with dual roles of investing in their children's human capital while preserving consumption levels for their retired parents.

Behavioural psychologists and economic anthropologists demonstrated underlying rationales for informal transfers, believing that they can be guided by altruistic motives, reciprocity, and emotions such as guilt or shame (Cox and Fafchamps 2007; Fafchamps 2011; Plateau 1997). They found that the influence of these emotions is conditional on cultural or religious identity, the extent of familial pressure, their relationship with the person seeking support, and whether they get an emotional reward from providing assistance. Hebo (2013) theorised that “giving is saving” when it is grounded in reciprocity and solidarity. That is, transfers are quid pro quo arrangements or informal contracts that can be regarded as precautionary investments that are turned to as adversities arise. These safeguards can be redeemed in the short-term as people encounter unpredictable shocks, or with an expectation of reciprocity after an extended period as can happen in parent-child relationships. These rationales help to uncover the conceptual linkages between informal support systems and entitlements associated with rights, fulfilment of expectations, and flow of resources.

Accordingly, there is a broad approach to informal social protection which seeks to identify the relationship between formal and informal institutions. Esping-Anderson's (2000) typology of welfare regimes classified European welfare states by their social policy perspectives, arguing that traditional welfare models that were based on the assumption of male breadwinners were unsuitable for contemporary realities. His work continues to be influential in debates about the role of the state in welfare provision. For many people in developing countries, informal social protection is an avenue through which they are entitled to informal rights and obligations at a level exceeding what they might demand from their governments (Wood and Gough 2006). Wood and Gough expanded understanding of welfare regimes, applying it to poorer societies where wellbeing depends on the strength of informal relationships. Their analysis clarifies how sociocultural conditions, institutional performance, path dependence, and formalisation can shape welfare outcomes for different social groups.

With this in mind, institutional analysts examined the linkages between formal and informal systems to determine the significance of the interactions (Helmke and Levitsky 2004; Kpessa-Whyte 2018; Mohanty 2012; Stavropoulou et al 2017). The welfare mix – consisting of the state, market and family – establish norms and legitimacy, and govern the rules of social exchange. In Nigeria for example, faith-based organisations offer welfare protections although those benefits are often exclusively reserved for members of their congregation or adherents to their religion. They take on the task of risk management and provide worthwhile safety nets in contexts where state presence is often weak (Mumtaz 2023; Mumtaz and Whiteford 2021; Olarinmoye 2012). Moreover, Ferguson (1994) in his seminal book, *The Anti-Politics Machine*, highlights the importance of informal support networks, arguing that the disconnect between

development projects and local realities undermines the efficacy of the former. As a result, local populations resist top-down initiatives for not being properly integrated into their lived experiences.

A lot of the thinking on informal support in the 2000s was centred around ensuring that state interventions do not ‘crowd out’ informal measures (Cox and Fafchamps 2007; Du Toit and Neves 2009; Duflo 2003; Oduro 2010). The idea is that social pensions, for instance, which are received as cash transfers, can either complement efforts or reduce incentives for the provision of welfare services. Despite these studies, there is limited evidence that crowding out occurs to a significant degree. Du Toit and Neves found that, rather than displacing informal support, social pensions are reallocated within social networks, and by offering resources they previously did not have access to, they enabled marginalised individuals to participate in intra-family transfers. In this vein, Oduro argues that social policy alone is therefore ill-equipped to manage widespread impoverishment in Africa if it ignores the role of informal mechanisms.

Several studies have indicated that while informal social protection plays a crucial role, it is generally flawed and inadequate (Adamchak 1996; Apt and Gricco 1994; Mokomane 2013; Tungaraza 1993). For one thing, it is susceptible to covariant risks since when times are hard for informal workers, they are also hard for the people they know. Additionally, informal support has been under pressure due to migration, urbanisation, and poverty. As one might expect, these trends have serious implications for intergenerational obligations as younger, healthier family members move away from their hometowns in search for better livelihoods (Apt and Gricco 1994). This household separation isolates elderly people from familial exchanges and eliminates household budgetary efficiencies. In researching families in northwest England, Finch and Mason (1990) found that there are no defined parameters for acceptable levels of support in parent-child relationships. Instead, there is a hierarchy of obligations that forces the working generation to prioritise the needs of their children and spouses. When parents have multiple children with ample means, the siblings can negotiate their individual responsibilities between themselves, but these decisions tend to be gendered and sensitive to free-loading. Despite the geographical focus on England, Finch and Mason’s exploration of informal social protection addresses broader themes of the breakdown of intergeneration support, which are equally pertinent to Nigeria’s informal workers.

The breakdown of informal mechanisms since the 1990s has been attributed to neoliberalism (Lourenco-Lindell 2002; MacLean 2011, 2017). Advocates of neoliberalism push their policies on, assured that if their proposals fall short, informal support networks are in place to fill the gaps. However, Lourenco-Lindell asserts that many in the informal economy are marginalised

and thus unable to demand welfare from their families. Empirical research on these unequal power dynamics led to insights about the discriminatory practices inherent in vertical transfers from more privileged households to those less fortunate within their social networks (Devereux 1999; Oppel 2022; Saraceno 2010; Wall et al 2001). Informal mechanisms are not designed to enforce wealth redistribution from richer households to poorer households, and the minority of people with relatively sufficient means cannot handle the scale of requests from the majority who struggle to meet their needs, so, the poorest receive less support, thereby reproducing the pre-existing income inequalities. This eventually contributes to the disintegration of the networks, and the depth and breadth of welfare transfers shrink (MacLean 2011).

2.2. Social Risk Management: The Crucial Role of Risk and Vulnerability

The SRM framework emerged out of the World Bank's efforts to provide an answer to the question of how to resolve the escalating poverty and inequality crisis in the 1990s beyond a 'safety nets' agenda. SRM shifted the emphasis from relying on informal safety nets alone towards a more comprehensive risk management approach. Holzmann and Jorgensen (1999) presented SRM as a robust toolbox that refocused the traditional anti-poverty approach to emphasise income, consumption, and the dynamic nature of vulnerability to shocks. It is grounded in neoclassical principles regarding welfare-maximising individuals and households operating in contexts characterised by risk and asymmetric information. These concepts, as outlined by Holzmann and Jorgensen, enhance the understanding of poverty by factoring in the probability of variable conditions. Thus, poverty can be determined by estimating one's vulnerability to the risk of falling below what SRM considers to be an acceptable income or consumption threshold. It accounts for not only the state of being poor, but the risks of becoming poor, and the processes driving movement into and out of poverty. Therefore, risk management can be narrowed down to efforts to reduce the likelihood of or exposure to shocks.

To manage risks, SRM combines the state, market, and informal support into a synergistic framework which helps individuals in developing countries prevent, mitigate, and cope with risks in a manner that is compatible with the level of their country's institutional development (Holzmann and Jorgensen 1999). While the task of welfare provision may be viewed by others as the state's responsibility, for SRM, where there is perfect information, developed financial markets, and macroeconomic stability, the market is viewed as a positive mechanism that is best placed to manage vulnerability to risks. This may be in the form of contributory pensions or healthcare and education which require the payment of user fees, and financial institutions are trusted to provide access to insurance and savings instruments that carry a premium cost.

Informal support is not seen to be as durable as market-based instruments but due to the relatively small size of social networks, it can bypass most information asymmetries that make private markets subject to moral hazards and adverse selection.

Researchers broadly accepted the connections between risk, vulnerability, and poverty in low-income countries and stressed the importance of investing in instruments to protect vulnerable groups from succumbing to shocks (Alwang et al 2001; Canagarajah and Sethuraman 2001; Holzmann and Kozel 2007; Holzmann et al 2003; Kozel et al 2008). Hence, in an asset-based approach to SRM, risk attitudes depend on the availability of assets. Poorer households own or control fewer productive assets, so they are more likely to be risk averse and less likely to break out of their poverty traps, thereby remaining poor and vulnerable (Siegel and Alwang 1999). But even beyond paying attention to the immediate impacts of risk exposure, SRM addresses the individual capacity of poor people to use instruments and resources. Many poor people who have no savings or community to depend on make difficult decisions to trade long-term setbacks for immediate gains. This can look like reducing consumption by eating less nutritious food or fewer quantities of food less often; selling key productive assets; resorting to illegal activities; or even removing children from school and turning them to child labour so they bring in additional household income. However, these dysfunctional strategies are destructive for households and to economic growth in the long run (World Bank 2000).

Within the literature, there is a recognition that approaches to risk management may not be as straightforward. Dercon (2006) underscores the long-term costs of risk exposure for the poor, and points to the need to integrate micro-level risk analyses with macroeconomic growth considerations. On the other hand, Perry et al (2007) and Schmid (2006) focus on the labour market, arguing that policies fall short in addressing the risks confronting workers. The solution for them is not necessarily to protect the wellbeing of workers, but to develop policies that aim to 'empower' self-sufficient individuals who can take on the burden of pulling themselves out of poverty. But proponents of SRM acknowledge that the risks individuals face can be caused by market failures. Events such as the 2008 financial crisis or the 2020 global pandemic made people more susceptible to diverse risks while also having less capacity to deal with shocks. Thus making them more vulnerable and less resilient. SRM regards the incidence and severity of poverty as a result of markets not providing enough access to resources, employment, or financial services which would enable individuals to better manage risks and thereby benefit from and contribute to economic growth. But risk is not always seen as harmful. Proponents believe that there are risky activities which can be welfare-maximising.

In the years since the 1990s when SRM initially came to be, the need to bolster resilience by building up the capacities of individuals to recover quickly from shocks has increasingly been viewed as a useful perspective for long-term risk management (Jorgensen and Siegel 2019). By focusing on vulnerability and resilience, SRM promises to manifest risk-bearing individuals with defences robust enough to withstand both predictable and unexpected socioeconomic challenges. SRM, while maintaining the neoliberal view that limits the state's involvement in welfare, still recognises that the state must play a role, albeit a minimal one. The state is seen as vital for tackling the specific needs of the most vulnerable, filling gaps in risk management. This reflects the stance that certain groups, due to their heightened vulnerability, cannot rely solely on market mechanisms or informal networks and require targeted support to build the resilience needed to recover from shocks. It delegates the state to providing social assistance if or when the private sector fails, regulating commerce, and ensuring macroeconomic stability, which in turn will foster confidence in the market (World Bank 2013).

Pensions are an important tool for risk management under SRM. The framework recommends commodified pensions, for example, to meet the needs of informal workers who can engage with the market directly to enhance their income security. They are mostly designed as private contributory schemes which enable saving for retirement throughout an individual's productive years. Holzmann et al (2003, 2005) outline the World Bank's five pillar pension system that includes a zero pillar for social pensions for those individuals too poor to contribute to their retirement savings during their work lives; first and second pillars for mandatory contributory schemes for formal workers; a voluntary third pillar for informal workers who earn enough money to contribute but are excluded from the mandatory formal schemes and risk falling into poverty without pensions in old age; and a fourth pillar that accounts for informal support. The social pension pillar is necessary for individuals in extreme poverty because the immediate risks they face make them vulnerable and unable to meet basic needs. As a result, they are unlikely to prioritise distant risks of old-age poverty (Holzmann and Kozel 2007). Nevertheless, a non-contributory system can quickly become unsustainable for developing countries with limited facility for social expenditure.

However, several critiques have been laid against SRM. To start with, while some authors support the core tenets of the framework, they recognise the challenges that may arise during implementation when strategies are not participatory or fail to consider local realities (Moser 2001). Harsher critics recognise that insufficient consideration is given to sociopolitical factors that contribute to systemic inequalities and marginalisation (Kabeer 2002, 2008; Kabeer et al 2010). A disproportionate number of people who are poor and vulnerable belong to minority groups. Their social exclusion makes them more susceptible to economic exploitation, and

the risks of poverty are embedded in these social handicaps. These critics assert that in the wake of the condemnation of neoliberal policies pushed by SAP, the World Bank moved away from the discussions of the primary drivers of the poverty and inequality crisis and narrowly-focused their SRM framework to put the impetus on individuals who must now resolve their own poverty without ever acknowledging the core problem.

Prior to the introduction of SRM, Ulrich Beck had begun examining the notion of risk from a sociological perspective (Beck 1992). Drawing on a post-Marxist tradition, Beck developed the concept of a 'risk society', where, unlike earlier societies, risk operates on a global level, even cutting across class distinctions. Beck predicted that risk would become deeply integrated into social and political considerations, influencing public policies, and indeed how risk discourses can define, maintain, and reproduce the forces driving modernisation. Beck was instrumental in framing risks as a social, political, and institutional issue, and influencing wider discussions about institutional trust and the erosion of social contracts. Subsequently, Baker and Simon (2010) – drawing on Beck, Foucault, Marx, Weber, and Durkheim – expanded on historical and institutional risk analyses, particularly in how risk has been individualised, and the role of instruments such as insurance or pensions in shifting cultural approaches from avoiding risk to "embracing risk". Risk is thus reframed as a positive opportunity for the 'empowerment' of individuals, yet this increased autonomy also places greater responsibility on them to manage their own welfare challenges.

SRM has been criticised for embedding this flawed concept of risk. A power analysis shows that poverty cannot be eradicated simply by giving poor people risk management tools without ensuring that they are capable of using those tools to manage risks effectively, and asking questions about risk for whom, who is vulnerable, and who are the winners and losers of the existing arrangement (van Ginneken 2005). Taylor (2016) argues that risk is not distributed evenly, it is created and transferred from one individual to another based on the underlying social power. In a capitalist system, powerful actors produce risk and transfer it to others in a process that leads to bad outcomes for marginalised groups despite any improvements in figures for employment or economic growth. As a direct result of this misunderstanding of risk, poor people are constituted as risk-bearers who are responsible for their own wellbeing, and rigorous power analysis is not regarded as germane to SRM. This leads us to the verdict that principal issues of equity and solidarity are really only secondary, or 'positive externalities' as Holzmann and Jorgensen (1999) refer to them. Ergo, if any poor person does not succeed at graduating from poverty on their own it is regarded as an individual failure, and if they are seen to be deserving of their poverty, which already marginalises them, it only adds to the stigma they face (McKinnon 2002).

McKinnon (2004) argues that the minimal role of the state is dangerous because in developing countries where many people have limited access to the formal labour market and limited resources to mitigate risks, increasing numbers of people can only rely on state provisions to survive. Lund (2009, 2020) views employment itself as a source of risk. When workers are assumed to be self-governing, the human development costs linked to their productivity are neglected, typically when labour is not recognised as a core factor of production. Neoliberalism adapted to reach into the informal economy to make informal workers economically productive by recasting them as risk-bearing agents without necessarily improving their work conditions (Ferguson 2007). Individualised and commodified tools such as private pensions focus on market-based instruments over state-led social provision based on need. It holds poor people responsible for ameliorating their risks and for lifting themselves out of poverty by saving enough for retirement from their low incomes (McKinnon 2004). Building on this discourse, researchers demonstrate that policies promoting redistribution as well as economic growth are best for poverty reduction. The bridge between economic growth and the dissolution of social inequalities is occupied by state-led welfare and rights provision (van Ginneken 2005).

2.3. Rights-Based Approaches: Social Justice, Rights, and Realities Beyond Rhetoric

Contrary to SRM's focus on income and consumption, proponents of rights-based approaches to social protection highlighted other economic sources of vulnerability, especially within global supply chains, which disproportionately impact poor women (Barrientos and Barrientos 2002; Kabeer 2002; Lund and Nicholson 2003; Nadvi 2004; Raworth 2004). In spite of SRM viewing markets as the most optimal risk management solution, rights-based approaches argue that markets are actually a primary source of risk. Researchers made the connection between the state, capital, and informal workers in global supply chains, arguing that firms have a duty to contribute to the welfare of the workers whose labour generates their profits. In their view, the increasing casualisation of labour led to violations of their rights, worsening vulnerability and labour conditions. They advocated for state intervention (in collaboration with the private sector) through robust policies and labour rights enforcement.

The rights-based approach also expanded on SRM's concept of vulnerability by focusing on social and political rights, freedom from discrimination, equity, inclusion, beyond an economic bottom-line (Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler 2004; Lund and Srinivas 2000; Unni and Rani 2003). Part of what fosters inequality is bias against marginalised groups, and informal workers encounter discrimination based on their informality. To eliminate the structural causes of their vulnerability, a social justice perspective was put forward as a solution for developing countries

with vast informal workforces. This approach aims to ensure universal access to basic services and economic security to vulnerable people who are not part of the formal economy where they might find better employment and access to social services. The transformative element of the rights-based approach is the social justice component which attempts to correct power imbalances that exacerbate vulnerability. It is a concern for equity, rights, social injustice, and power relations, not just resource transfers for consumption smoothing.

Partly as a response to SRM, Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler (2004) established their rights-based approach to social protection which brings social justice objectives to the foreground of debates on risk and vulnerability. Their primary goal was to tackle structural root causes of vulnerability, making it fundamental to any mission which seeks to transform livelihood risks through social protection. The rights-based agenda posits that while economic measures can alleviate poverty, they cannot consistently *transform* risks without tackling underlying causes. Rather than limiting social protection measures to consumption smoothing, they aimed to alter the structural conditions in society that expose vulnerable groups to risk in the first place, arguing for policies that addressed social exclusion and unequal power dynamics. According to Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler, social protection must extend past including people within markets, to instead prioritise universal access to state-led social services, ensuring that all citizens are protected against both economic and social risks.

Rights are normative and legalised standards for fair treatment that impose a social contract between two parties, where one is entrusted with the obligation to accommodate the other's entitlements. For rights to be concrete, they must be defined within the law with clear roles for the duty-bearer that are justiciable. This perspective views informal workers as rights-holders as opposed to risk-bearing subjects and promises them social, cultural, political, and economic progress (Alemie and Scherrer 2018). Since social protection does not occur in a vacuum, no matter what policies governments opt for, they are more politically and fiscally viable if they are located within the social contract (Alfers and Moussie 2022; Alfers et al 2022; Devereux and McGregor 2014; Plagerson 2023; Ulkrisen and Plagerson 2014). The social contract perspective states that within state-citizen relations, social protection is a tool for governments to fulfil their welfare responsibilities to citizens in exchange for legitimacy, social cohesion, respect for the rule of law, political stability, and the reproduction of labour. This obligation on the state to provide social protection and fulfil rights claims is emphasised even for developing countries with high rates of poverty and informality.

Ferguson (2015) engages with the claims of unequal power relations between capital and labour, and the idea that capital holders should be held responsible for the welfare of those

who help them earn their profits. He deduces that capitalism today has been restructured to minimise the demand for low-wage low-skilled workers who are no longer central to wealth generation within industrialisation. That the marginalisation of individuals in labour reserves is not part of a strategy to exploit workers, but rather because capitalism has evolved to no longer have use for them so poor people do not have power as labour, only as citizens. According to Ferguson, if the justification for social protection is based on the productive capacity of informal workers, they would sooner be excluded entirely due to the low demand for the kind of labour they produce. He believes would be more effective to base their claims on their right to the redistribution of public resources based on citizenship.

On the other hand, Alfers et al (2017, 2018) argue that given that they currently exist in social protection lacunas, the mission to extend welfare universally in developing countries is fiscally ambitious. Informal workers might do better to highlight their contributions to the economy when making demands on the state especially considering that universal schemes which are underpinned by distributivism tend to offer inadequate benefits. By centring the responsibility for welfare on governments, the duty that capital and employers of informal workers have for welfare provision is then minimised. Ferguson's (2015) analysis does not take the process or reasoning behind the restructuring of global capitalism into account. Nilsen (2021) maintains that the relocation of production to the global south through global value chains has caused labour casualisation and commodification which forces poor people to sell their labour power for substandard working conditions just to meet their needs to survive in environments without adequate social protection.

The toolbox for rights-based approaches is varied. Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler's (2004) model outlines instruments for social protection: protective (social assistance e.g. cash or food transfers), preventive (social insurance e.g. pensions), and promotive (asset creation and capacity building measures e.g. microfinance). The fourth targets transformative instruments such as legislative change (minimum wage or affirmative action); universal schemes for social services; and organisation of labour in trade unions to enable rights claims. Instruments such as pensions are viewed as a way to promote equality by reducing elderly poverty (Bloom and McKinnon 2013). Koehler (2011) describes social transfers and affirmative action policies as palliative – as opposed to wealth distribution measures such as land reform – because they do not challenge unequal power relations and other underlying root causes of vulnerability. Rights claims based on deprivation and discrimination may be based on moral concerns, but when they seek to correct power imbalances, they become a sensitive political issue that can be undermined by those who wish to maintain the status quo. The discourse surrounding social protection provision then becomes coloured by neoliberal ideologies on the 'deserving'

or ‘undeserving’ poor who are framed as either self-reliant enough to fend for themselves, or lazy enough to expect handouts.

Proponents of the rights-based approach propose a universal social protection floor which aims to provide resources, skills training, access to basic services, and social insurance as a means of ensuring protection. The International Labour Organization (ILO) promoted a ‘decent work’ agenda that seeks to achieve employment rights and social protection (ILO 2002; Tipple 2006; Trebilcock 2005) while academics at the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) pushed for a universal social minimum that addresses vulnerability, exclusion, inequality, and human rights violations (Thomson 2007; van Ginneken 201). Thomson underlines that for the social minimum to be transformative, it must rectify social exclusion and human rights violations by tackling discrimination, commodification of social services, and political disenfranchisement. The human rights approach became a useful framework for addressing the tensions between providing for welfare needs and ensuring sustainable social expenditure since it confers on citizens the entitlement to make demands on their states.

Scott’s (1976) seminal work on the moral economy can be helpful for exploring the conditions that give rise to resistance against exploitation. For human rights perspectives to be in tune with local standards, they cannot be imposed on beneficiaries by external actors and would have to be rooted in grassroot community values and expectations for equity and social justice. Poor people who are dependent on their employment relationships take class alliances, the coercive power of the elite, and systemic factors into account to make assessments about what arrangements aid or hinder their income security. They define exploitation, not only by formalised standards for anti-discrimination, compensation, or ‘decent’ work conditions, but with complex analyses that factor in the costs of sacrificing their current, even if fragile, stability for the *potential* of long-term gains. It is not a matter of false consciousness as Marxists might believe. Scott asserts that poor people are aware of the economic injustices they are subjected to, and they make strategic choices to prolong their self-preservation until their livelihoods are threatened beyond the limits of any acceptable alternative. He observed that when low-income citizens rebelled, their objections were related to their status as consumers, that is, how rents and taxation squeezed their consumption.

Even beyond these trade-offs, the rights-based approach faces criticism due to its abstract nature (O’Neill 2005) and the challenges of enforcing rights in countries with weak institutions (Cousins 1997). Countries frequently guarantee rights to citizens in their Constitutions that they never enforce, even when they are justiciable. Yet, the poorest and most vulnerable who have the greatest need for these protections, are more likely to face barriers when seeking

legal remedies. The rhetoric of rights often loses sight of the tangible material deprivation that poor people contend with (Ferguson 2015). Ferguson asserts that the poor are less concerned with abstract ideals if they do not translate to practical solutions which increase supply and access. Issues of power, authority, abuse, and corruption are paramount considering the unavoidable need for confrontation between different groups along the spectrum of a class hierarchy. The rights-based approach is also subject to political economy constraints. The ILO recognises the problems with the global exploitation and commodification of labour but given that they do not have jurisdiction over countries which have not ratified their conventions, the ILO has no power to act if their labour standards recommendations are not accepted locally (Murray 2010).

Hickey (2014) and Hickey and Mitlin (2009) draw on insights from law, political science, and sociology to balance enthusiasm about the potential of the rights-based framework with an evaluation of its limitations. Firstly, even when citizens are entitled to decent work and social protection, they will need to have the capability, power, and access to demand their rights from the state through legitimate channels and the avenues for transformation within the rights-based approach rest on the results of contestation between powerful groups who may have opposing interests (Deneulin 2011; Piron 2004). Low-income workers who are likely unfamiliar with positive interactions with the state, are reconstructed as rights-holders who must now express their agency in opposition to authority (Duni et al 2009). They demonstrate that while rights-based approach pays special attention to the extent to which age, gender, ethnic, and religious characteristics magnify economic vulnerability, it does not do enough to show how these same constraints prevent people from making rights claims on an equal basis. Human rights discourse can stimulate progress, but Patel and Mitlin (2009) argue that centring the approach around contestation – instead of negotiation – acts as an obstacle that hinders success. According to them, the effectiveness of the rights framework would be optimised by leveraging relationships, common interests, and mutual needs to negotiate concerns.

Issues such as labour mobility, blurred boundaries between homes and workplaces, and dependence on daily incomes can make formal social protection inaccessible to informal workers (Lund 2012). For instance, the national health insurance in Ghana intended to include informal workers but was inaccessible to street traders due to long queues which led to them losing hours' worth of income. Much of the responsibility for passing laws, raising awareness of rights, making appropriate channels available for rights claims, monitoring and reporting on implementation, and enforcing rights claims is put on the state (Broberg and Sano 2018). This is an issue in developing countries where state presence and effectiveness can be weak enough to struggle with limited finances, ineffective law enforcement, political instability,

inefficient institutional capacity, and corruption. Additionally, these kinds of comprehensive measures are often mired in affordability concerns. Even so Kabeer et al (2010) dismiss these affordability concerns as pro-market bias and they assert that it is more important to consider each society's values, priorities, and fiscal limitations situationally.

Nonetheless, Ferguson (2007, 2010) contends that techniques guided by neoliberal reasoning can also be used in favour of pro-poor pro-welfare development. He examines the relationship between neoliberalism and poverty measures, determining that social assistance programmes developed within neoliberalism, rather than in opposition of it, can reduce the tension between formal and informal systems. In Ferguson (2010), he distinguishes between the policies which have the potential to be progressive and the social engineering project of neoliberalism, though emphasising that state involvement is crucial for efficient redistribution. The way Harris and Scully (2015) see it, since social assistance programmes existed in developing countries before the neoliberal era and are now demanded by vulnerable groups who identify the need for redistribution as a strategy for protection against commodification, it would be apolitical to dismiss them as neoliberal policies.

2.4. Advancing Equity and Sustainability through Transformative Social Policy

Transformative social policy (TSP) was devised by prominent scholars at the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) and influenced by Keynesian theories. Even though TSP is not typically centred around informality, it deepens the understanding of transformation given that SRM and right-based social protection fail to incorporate a remedy for the role that neoliberalism has played in generating the crisis that the frameworks address (Adesina 2011, 2020; Mkandawire 2001, 2004). One thing that is missing from much of the literature on SRM and rights-based social protection is the acknowledgment that labour is produced and reproduced by social investments in healthcare and education and other sound macroeconomic policies. As part of the neoliberal project, SRM anchors transformation on the alleviation of risk and vulnerability with market-based instruments that manage the flows of income and consumption. That said, the rights-based approach improves upon SRM's notion of transformation by acknowledging that markets are a primary source of risk and addressing the vulnerabilities they generate, while underscoring the role of the state in providing solutions.

To truly be transformative, social policy would have to acknowledge neoliberalism as a source of vulnerability, and integrate broad objectives for redistribution, reproduction, and production beyond just social protection, which often only serves to ameliorate poverty and vulnerability with safety nets (Adesina 2011, 2015, 2020; Mkandawire 2004, 2007). Effective redistribution

of wealth and resources with policies such as progressive taxation, land reform, and universal access to healthcare and education directly confronts systemic inequalities, minimising power asymmetries and structural disparities. Reproduction refers to the social and economic processes such as caregiving, education or healthcare that enable the workforce and families to function, thus ensuring the long-term stability of societies. Adesina and Mkandawire also emphasise the importance of a production dimension in social policy, involving the expansion of economic opportunities through employment generation, industrialisation, innovation, and investment in infrastructure such as roads, transport, and electricity.

Universally accessible social services – even pensions – are crucial for meeting these aims. According to Mkandawire (2007), social policies promote wellbeing; contribute to income and social equality; increase human capital creation; strengthen the labour market; address the structural factors that lead to exploitation; and foster political stability. Regardless of whether they are delivered by the public or private sector, pensions can fulfil protective, redistributive, and productive social policy objectives. Their intrinsic value is to provide retirement benefits, and they can be instrumental to economic growth by providing a pool of savings which are used to invest in financial markets, economic development, and industrialisation (Mkandawire 2007). Hujo (2014) argues that pensions need not only provide income for the elderly but can also contribute to broader economic development with a multi-pillar pension system. In her view, this would require strong state involvement to ensure equity and social inclusion, going beyond the idea that the market on its own can serve progressive ends.

TSP combines the productivism and distributivism goals of the market-based and rights-based perspectives and expands social policy to transcend neoliberal principles. Cook et al (2008) and Koehler (2011, 2017) argue that the rights-based approach can be transformative if it adequately tackles underlying power dynamics. Therefore, it must lead to equitable social and economic outcomes in healthcare, education, income and employment, and social inclusion, with special attention to systemic vulnerabilities induced by neoliberal policies. Mkandawire (2004) emphasises the importance of coordination between social and economic policies, and in his (2016) work, draws on Polanyi's concept from *The Great Transformation* and Keynesian welfare models to call for a new development agenda that coordinates social and economic policies, while shielding economies from global unpredictable market forces.

Furthermore, Adesina (2011) suggests moving away from a poverty reduction focus. Single-issue advocacy overlooks broader development goals and the interconnectedness of policy concerns. Instead, Adesina advocates for a social protection paradigm which strengthens the state's fiscal base, increases economic productivity, and ensures equitable redistribution.

Theoretically, the extension of social protection for equitable, sustainable, and progressive ends requires political support and the necessary economic conditions (Hujo and Gaia 2010) grounded in a mission for social justice that transcends palliative measures (UNRISD 2016; Utting 2006). Mainstream social protection approaches that address immediate needs without considering neoliberalism as a primary source of vulnerability tend to be palliative. The shift in perspective under TSP sees social policy as a strategic and proactive driver of progress, rather than simply responding with mere safeguards or relief programmes. In essence, TSP moves beyond the conventional tendency to restrict social protection to a risk management tool for poverty alleviation, and instead into a mechanism for structural overhaul.

A growing trend within the TSP literature has been the emphasis on contextually relevant social policies, grounded in specific socioeconomic and historical realities, arguing for a more localised approach (Meagher 2022; Phiri et al 2016). Firstly, empirical evidence on historical trajectories – in Phiri et al's case, apartheid leading to poverty and inequality – which have influenced South Africa's social policies, provide insight on which objectives to focus on, thereby demonstrating the framework's applicability and relevance. For Meagher, the COVID-19 crisis narratives that shaped social policy decisions in Africa were a one-size-fits-all solution that did not address the unique challenges of African informal economies, thereby highlighting the importance of promoting local needs and perspectives over global agendas. Therefore, TSP would need to not only address immediate social issues, but also systemic economic and social factors in order to ensure long-term inclusive development.

2.5. Commodification of Social Protection for the Poor: Deconstructing Microfinance Narratives

Microfinance refers to the provision of small-scale financial services such as loans or savings to underserved populations, particularly in low-income communities, with the goal of managing risks through the market (Fanconi and Scheurle 2017). Microfinance has been celebrated as a way to bridge the welfare gap and promises to uplift individuals who were formerly excluded by offering them affordable tailored products and services which 'empower' them to become independent enough to take on the risks of breaking free of their poverty (Mendoza and Thelen 2008). Although literature on microfinance is often associated with microcredit (small loans), it also includes microinsurance, which functions by means of pooling small amounts of money from low-income individuals in return for proportional insurance benefits covering risks to life, livelihood, health, and property. Early works on microinsurance framed it as a huge untapped market for delivering low-cost financial products to low-income earners, especially those in the informal economy (Churchill 2006; Cohen and Sebstad 2005; Siegel et al 2001).

Financial inclusion – as defined by the accessibility and use of cheaper financial services to cater to underserved populations – has been offered as a frontier of risk management and is delivered through products such as microfinance and microinsurance (Banerjee et al 2019; Beck and Demirguc-Kunt 2008; Malladi et al 2021; Lal 2018). Financial inclusion advocates preach the virtues of facilitating easy access to financial services for the poor, believing that incorporating poor people into global capitalist markets leads to pro-poor economic growth, and pointing out a correlation between financial development and improved socioeconomic outcomes. Their argument is that barriers to financial institutions hinder investments in human and physical capital thus deepening inequalities, and increased access boosts productivity leading to higher demand and wages, therefore financial inclusion is good for economic growth and poverty reduction. Accordingly, poor people who are overlooked either due to informality, low-incomes, financial illiteracy, or unavailable infrastructure can benefit from microfinance. Financial institutions did not typically find it profitable to handle numerous small transactions or expand to remote areas, but due to microfinance, these scalability issues can be overcome.

One microinsurance instrument that has been adopted by Nigerian government, suited to the third recommendation in the World Bank's five pillar pension model (Holzmann et al 2003), is the voluntary micro pension scheme for informal workers. Similar to other microfinance tools, micro pensions are small-scale pension schemes aimed at providing retirement savings and income security for individuals who lack access to traditional pension systems (Dorfman and Palacios 2012; Guven 2019). The view is that micro pensions are an effective way to expand social protection to the informal economy, preventing significant income and consumption loss as they age. This is because Bismarckian pensions systems which rely on defined employer-employee relationships are inappropriate for informal workers who require more flexibility with contribution rates, retirement ages, and bureaucratic procedures. By addressing these unique challenges, micro pensions hope to be a practical and inclusive way for informal workers to manage their retirements.

A substantial body of research has explored the role of micro pensions within social protection systems (Hu and Stewart 2009; Kwena and Turner 2013; Sane and Thomas 2015; Shankar and Asher 2011), viewing it as an essential tool for financial planning among people who do not have access to formal financial services for retirement, mainly focusing on design and implementation issues, and the likelihood of participation among low-income individuals who are expected to generate meagre retirement benefits at the end of their decades-long payment periods. SRM advocates concede that the poorest in society who contend with everyday risks that threaten their survival are unlikely to defer consumption by participating in contributory pensions (Holzmann et al 2005). They acknowledge that this can result in a palliative outcome

that offers consumption smoothing to informal workers but would not be sufficient to eliminate poverty, and thus would not be in the best interest of people in the informal economy.

Even proponents of microinsurance expressed its limitations, claiming that it is suitable only when it is affordable and appropriate, the target market is financially literate, it is included in a robust risk management strategy, and deployed in tandem with other state-led measures. The effectiveness of microinsurance depends on collaborative partnerships between government, international donors, and non-governmental organisations (Midgley 2012). In the face of such studies, Matul et al (2010) estimated that only 2.6% of a prospective market of 700 million people in Africa (representing a market value of \$25 billion) had been accessed. More recently, the Microinsurance Network highlighted a significant market growth potential for insurers, with estimates indicating that 85% of the target market are yet to receive access, and projections remaining optimistic despite the market slump during the 2020 pandemic (Merry and Calderon 2024). A substantial portion of this growth is forecasted to be heavily fuelled by the informal economy (Merry and Calderon 2023).

Much of the thinking behind commercialised microfinance and microinsurance was influenced by Prahalad's (2004) concept of the bottom-of-the-pyramid (BoP) which posits that businesses can achieve significant growth and profitability by targeting the world's poorest populations, viewing poor people as assets for wealth creation. Prahalad exposed a gap in the market for selling cheap products to a large segment of the population that had previously been neglected due to their low incomes. He claims that the interests of large corporate entities seeking profit are aligned enough with poor vulnerable individuals to allow the former to expand their pool of customers and include the poorest people at the bottom of the wealth pyramid. According to Prahalad, poor people are keen on boosting their entrepreneurial productivity to improve their economic standing. They just need the right opportunities. Prahalad predicts that shifting the perception of poor people from passive welfare recipients to empowered entrepreneurs and consumers would be transformative for their self-esteem and for poverty alleviation.

The discourses of financial inclusion, economic inclusion, and inclusive markets that drive the development and expansion of microfinance and microinsurance are deployed alongside the concept of the BoP (London and Hart 2011; Rivera-Santos and Rufin 2010; Webb et al 2009). More attention is given to claims of the positive impact of finance and business corporations on economic growth and poverty alleviation, thereby attracting BoP consumers and workers with narratives about the social and economic advantages of participating in global markets (Mair et al 2012). Microfinance endorsers, therefore, reposition social protection not just as a poverty reduction initiative, but as a mechanism enabling the poor to engage in, contribute to,

and gain from economic development. Advocates recognise that the demand for microfinance emerges largely due to the state's inability to fulfil productivity and redistribution objectives (de Haan 2015) and acknowledge that microfinance firms are motivated by financial prospects and opportunities for expansion (Webb et al 2009) but still press on with promises of mutual benefits in the business transaction between capital and the informal economy.

Regardless of the optimistic perspectives on microinsurance, studies show that microfinance in general has fallen short of expectation (Bateman 2010; Bateman and Chang 2012; Bernards 2018; Im and Sun 2015; Platteau et al 2017; Meagher 2018). Bateman (2010, p1) boldly states that "microfinance does not work". Replacing government-led interventions with microfinance reveals an ahistorical perspective on what yielded pro-poor development in the past. In most contexts, poor people's livelihoods are radically transformed by collective action strategies, wealth redistribution, employment, and need-based investments in social services. Microfinance assumes that poor people are resourceful and productive, and these skills can be harnessed in their bid to escape poverty. While there are those who say microfinance has led to increased incomes, employment, or access to social services, Kar (2018) demonstrates a weak positive relationship between the proliferation of microfinance initiatives and indicators of improved socioeconomic outcomes. Although individual success stories and participation rates are often used as evidence of microfinance success, Bateman (2010) criticises the methodological rigour of studies which adopt anecdotal instead of systematic evidence and reasons that in order to survive within a climate of inadequate support, poor people take advantage of any resources which help them cope with their poverty, even if those products do not deliver on the promise to eradicate it. Despite weak evidence, microfinance is continuously promoted as a panacea.

Microfinance sceptics allege that the tool merely provides the pretext needed for neoliberals to perpetuate individualised market-based policies without posing any substantial proposal for radical socio-political and economic transformation (Bateman and Chang 2012; Bernards 2018). Rather than seeing a demand for microfinance as an indictment on the state for failing to deliver social services and economic development, poor people are blamed for their poverty if they fail to eliminate it through entrepreneurship. Additionally, Karnani (2007) believes that reconceptualising the poor as producers not consumers will shift focus from selling *to* them to buying *from* them, thereby boosting their incomes rather than attempting to extract from their earnings. Albeit that Karnani is sympathetic to microfinance schemes as a means of increasing productivity, he did not find compelling empirical evidence of BoP's main proposition. Poor people at the BoP do not have sufficient purchasing power to justify the associated distribution and marketing costs that cannot be offset by economies of scale (due to geographical spread

and cultural diversity). The poorest people living in developing countries carry serious financial impediments and already consume most of their incomes so they cannot be expected to ramp up their consumption, only to divert spending from one need to another.

As an SRM instrument, microfinance places responsibility on vulnerable individuals to turn to the market to manage their own risks with assumptions of risk being neutral to unequal power dynamics and that individuals who are already at risk, can bear more risk to pursue some level of income security (Taylor 2016). The risk burden intensifies vulnerability more than if they had not taken on the insurance load (Johnson 2013). The broad perspective of the criticism of microfinance is that companies use it to exploit the informal economy to advance their own interests, often at the expense of their clients and partnerships. These companies are criticised for transferring market risks and development costs to external actors while keeping any realisable profits, thereby undermining their purported social objectives. Critics contend that microfinance not only legitimises neoliberal shortcomings but also contributes to the creation of poverty traps (Bateman and Chang 2012).

2.6. Financialisation of Precarity: Surrendering Poor People and Social Policy to Capital

Some perspectives from Hickey and Du Toit (2013), Meagher (2018), and Meagher and Lindell (2013) explore the concept of adverse incorporation resulting from the power asymmetries between poor people and corporate entities by questioning if financial inclusion initiatives are driven by grassroots efforts or top-down impositions. Their work exposes the convergence between initiatives designed to benefit the poor, and those that exploit them for business gains. Central to this analysis is the investigation of whose interests are prioritised in the dominant narratives about inclusion. Meagher argues that such perspectives fail to understand informal economies as heterogeneous with unique demands and marginalised groups, thus undermining prospects for empowerment and perpetuating the cycle of poverty and inequality. Critics of microfinance assert that they also lead to damaging consequences. By embedding financial products into poor people's lives, these measures may exacerbate vulnerability rather than mitigate it, creating more financial burdens and dependencies, and potentially leading to new forms of exploitation.

The process through which financial practices, motives, markets, and institutions increasingly dominate economic and social structures is known as financialisation. Martins (2002) wrote about the "financialisation of daily life" in which financial considerations – via instruments such as credit, investments, insurance, and pensions – penetrate all aspects of social relations and personal decision-making during everyday activities or even regarding social services such as

education, health, and housing. Leyshon and Thrift (2007) critiqued financialised capitalism by examining how an unrestrained financial system leads to economic volatility and increased risks, particularly for those who own less capital. They argue that financialisation has severe social, political, cultural, and economic consequences beyond what can be experienced in the market. Krippner (2011) focuses on how leveraging financialisation can inadvertently enable the state to sidestep fiscal, social, and political challenges with the objective of preserving the capitalist system. Skeggs (2014) takes this examination a step further by introducing a critical sociological perspective on the ethics of the financial logics that infiltrate personal values, shift welfare responsibilities away from the state, and permeate social relations to create avenues for financial gain. In her analysis of the elderly care sector, she explores the commodification of the vital social service that has resulted in the individualisation of risks for those who need care and the exploitation of care workers amid an unstable market, all while the private owners of capital make a lot of money.

As financial practices become entrenched in everyday life, this process also extends to how approaches to poverty itself are increasingly redefined and managed through the market, with profound implications for those in need. Using microfinance to centre their analyses, Kar (2013) and Mader (2013) study the costs of incorporating the poor into financial markets. Meanwhile, Hall et al (2012) use the BoP framework to demonstrate that individuals deemed unprofitable or problematic are still subject to exclusion from financial products. These papers underscore a critical paradox: while financialisation aims to provide solutions and integrate marginalised groups into financial systems, it frequently perpetuates the very exclusions and vulnerabilities it seeks to address. The focus on profitability often leaves the most marginalised groups in an even worse position, thereby deepening existing disparities rather than bridging them. Though Soederberg (2014) explicitly avoids the label of financialisation, her work on 'debtfare' and the 'poverty industry' set the stage for analyses of how the poor are exploited by integrating them into debt structures in a process that transforms them into an asset class for corporations.

Mader (2015) defines financialisation of poverty as the discursive process of turning poverty into a problem of individual access to finance by availing narratives of its empowering nature. One of the core tenets of microfinance is the premise that access to finance in and of itself is empowering since it gives poor people the freedom to take on risks. Thus, the framing of the transformative potential of microfinance, not evidence of its effectiveness, serves to sanction a profitmaking agenda (Taylor 2012). The concept of adverse incorporation – which extends beyond a binary of inclusion and exclusion – is helpful for understanding how poverty and inequality is reproduced when there are conflicts of interest which aim to keep marginalised groups at a disadvantage. This analysis of power relations allows us to explore how financial

markets can be exploitative when they grant access to the poorest of the poor. According to Mader (2013, 2015), rather than generating profit by employing people to produce physical commodities, owners of capital find that they extract even more surplus from financial services including through transactions with an oppressed underclass.

Financialisation intersects with the wider multifaceted issues of commercialisation of labour, risk, and social services (Aitken 2013; Lavinas et al 2023). The financialisation of microfinance exposed poor people to the most volatile facets of global financial systems, and this tethering of poverty outcomes to financial products turns social and economic risks into commodities guided by profit instead of need, solidarity, or redistribution. These accumulation practices are exploitative because they culminate in unidirectional resource flows from the poor to the rich in ways that reinforce economic inequalities and concentrate wealth and power in the hands of the elite. This perspective focuses on the negative impacts of financialisation and the limited potential for transformation. Using mixed empirical evidence, Duvendack and Mader (2020) underscore the relevance of contextual factors in determining the success or failure of financial inclusion initiatives, arguing that socioeconomic environments influence outcomes.

Kar (2017, 2018) focused attention on the intersection between financialisation, neoliberalism and austerity welfare. As a tradable product in financial markets, microfinance enables capital circulation as well as persistent quests for new asset streams for capital accumulation. Kar's approach looks at social policies holistically and examines how one component – such as austerity policies which reflect neoliberalism by prioritising fiscal austerity and market solutions – forces people to rely on tools like microfinance and further integrates them into debt cycles and financial exploitation. Beyond how financialisation shapes poverty, Kar also contributes to understanding of its relationship with kinship and micro-level issues such as disproportionate gendered impacts. Unlike studies that focus on contradictions within formal financial systems, Kar's analysis uses ethnography to look at how financialisation affects how risk is managed within kinship networks and provides insights into how the social mechanisms inform financial practices, including how they are used to cope with financial stress.

Just as the financialisation of poverty becomes more pronounced, it parallels a wider trend towards financialisation of social policy. While the financialisation of poverty literature focuses on how financial products are used to manage poverty on an individual level, discussions on the financialisation of social policy look at how financial logics reshape social services on a structural level. To illustrate, while Lavinas (2017, 2018), Lavinas et al (2023), and Neves (2018) align with the views of those who critique the neoliberal character and transformation of welfare, the problematic nature of financial inclusion, and pervasive scope of its influence

on social policies, Neves situated his work within the critical examination of the impact of financialisation on household debt and socioeconomic inequality, arguing that financialisation not only reflects historical inequalities but actively reproduces and amplifies them. On the other hand, Lavinas examines the shift from redistribution to recommodification, arguing that social policy now aims to use debt as a means of inclusion, thus exacerbating inequality. Despite the weakness of financial infrastructure in developing countries, the trend of financial deregulation and reinforced privatisation shifts the financial burden from states onto households and disciplines the poor by integrating them into the financial system. Hence, a conflict of interest arises between the government and private sector over which party should be responsible for welfare within the financialised system, and this instability is not a conducive environment for informal workers to make demands for robust protections.

Social capital is intertwined with financialisation and thus an examination of its influence on financial logics becomes pertinent. Elyachar's (2005) concept of 'relational value' refers to a form of social capital, that is, the value generated from interpersonal relationships and social networks. Under financialisation, this social capital – once based on mutual trust and solidarity – is commodified for financial gain. Within microfinance for instance, lenders leverage social capital as collateral for small loans (Maclean 2010), microinsurance adopts community-based risk pooling, and micro pensions rely on social networks such as labour unions or cooperatives to foster participation. In Elyachar's view, the commodification of relational value serves as a means of accumulation by dispossession, particularly in neoliberal contexts. Guermond (2020) builds on Elyachar's concept of relational value to explain how social networks uphold and reinforce the economics of remittances and mutual aid associations. Guermond found that these interpersonal relationships are not merely social but are also vital to microeconomics, challenging the business logic that seeks to channel resources away from communities.

Through these analyses, the literature highlights the limited market potential of microinsurance either based on the incongruity with social structures and local preferences (Guermond 2020, 2022) or the fact of the target market having incomes too low and irregular to afford financial products (Bernards 2018). Amid debates on capital accumulation facilitated by microfinance, Bernards draws from Polanyi, positing that microinsurance is bound to fail given its connection to neoliberalism and the commodification of labour. Labour commodification under capitalism coerces workers to sell their labour power cheaply to maintain an income and avoid the threat of starvation. Most of the time, this power imbalance serves business interests since it allows them to use and discard the captive pool of labour as they wish. But the deprivation that was initially the mechanism for commodifying labour emerges as the explanation for why financial instruments targeted to their segment of the market might fail to capture profits. If incomes

hardly meet immediate consumption needs, they cannot then be expected to be the engine of microinsurance market development. Even when microinsurance firms adapt to accommodate inconsistent incomes, profitability remains elusive. The flexibility offered is not enough to offset the scarcity of means sufficient to afford contributions and high premiums.

2.7. Unlocking Doors to Critical Inquiry

The issue of the rise of microinsurance as a remedy for a policy lacuna synthesises various literatures, which have been reviewed accordingly. Informal support mechanisms explored in this thesis highlight the resilience of families and communities in spite of market failures and limited state-led social protection. However, these social networks are increasingly challenged by negative externalities that undermine the organisational structures and usefulness of risk sharing. The insufficiency of available systems triggers a push within rights-based approaches and the transformative social policy literature to reinstate the state's role in social protection. However, there are concerns about how this may be an issue in developing countries where state presence and effectiveness is weak enough to struggle with limited financial resources, inefficient institutional capacity, ineffective law enforcement, and political instability.

Empirical evidence (Bateman 2010; Platteau et al 2017) demonstrates the unaffordability and unsuitability of microinsurance for the poorest members of the informal economy. Additionally, critical sociological perspectives highlight the social, cultural, and political dimensions of risk, emphasising how risk is influenced by institutional factors (Baker and Simon 2002; Beck 1992) and demonstrating that risk is unevenly distributed across social groups (Taylor 2016). For all the risks that microfinance might attempt to mitigate, the literature neglects the role it plays in reinforcing and reproducing risks by means of adverse inclusion (Kar 2013, 2017, 2018; Mader 2013, 2015; Meagher and Lindell 2013). The notion that microinsurance delivery automatically attracts eager consumers overlooks the reality of informal workers assessing their needs and devising independent strategies to manage their risks. It is not a matter of whether they can participate in these instruments, but if they are inclined to permit financial institutions to capture the efforts of their entrepreneurial activities and sustained long-term savings.

Given its focus on neoliberalism, the gap in the transformative social policy literature for the specific, unique needs of the informal economy is noteworthy. Neoliberal policies – such as deregulation, privatisation, and labour market flexibility – have casualised labour and driven informalisation (Meagher and Yunusa 1996), thereby amplifying labour market inequalities and heightening the vulnerability of workers. The effect of state retrenchment from provision of social services was the exclusion of informal workers from programmes that required formal

employment or unaffordable fees. The transformative approach offers an opportunity to really consider this large demographic of workers when thinking of how to revitalise all aspects of labour, economic, and social life, especially in developing countries such as Nigeria.

What can be made clearer in the literatures – which I attempt to do in my thesis – is a holistic understanding of how historical pressures disrupt all three systems in the welfare mix, the dynamics that drive interactions between formal and informal interventions, and how they shape the evolution of social protection mechanisms in contexts like Nigeria. While much is discussed about the limitations of market-based solutions like microinsurance, the role of the state is constrained by corruption and weak institutional capacity. How do these limitations impact the state's ability to engage with informal economies effectively? Another factor that remains underexplored is why informal workers may reject targeted instruments despite their supposed benefits. What sociocultural, financial logics drive their decision-making processes, and how might these factors influence the adoption or rejection of formal financial products? These questions could help uncover the nuances and deeper challenges in social protection systems, while opening avenues for new insights. I am particularly keen on exploring the paths to transformation within the transformative social policy literature, and how it can inform social protection for elderly informal workers in Nigeria.

CHAPTER 3

Insights on a Qualitative Research Methodology

In the previous chapter, I reviewed literatures on the dominant approaches to providing welfare security for the informal economy, with reference to the role of micro pensions. When doing the research for this thesis, I was interested in conducting an exploratory study that identifies the unique vulnerabilities of elderly informal workers in Nigeria according to their demographic characteristics, occupations, socioeconomic experiences, as well as their geographic regions. Even though the Nigerian informal economy comprises 70% of the workforce in a population estimated to be 200 million (Iwelumo and Olanipekun 2017), informal workers in Nigeria were not given access to pensions until 2019 through the micro pensions scheme (Premium Times 2019). I set out to investigate the degree to which social protection instruments and financial inclusion strategies either seek to address the needs of the elderly informal workers, serve the interests corporate profit and/or cash-strapped states. I also examined the entire welfare mix available to informal workers to determine the adequacy of the tools at their disposal.

The rest of this chapter will focus on outlining and justifying my research design as well as my experiences in the field, alongside the rationales, and reflections on my methodology. Section 1 provides justification for the relevance of a northern Nigerian case study in addressing the research objectives listed above. Section 3.2 delves into my research design, with discussions on data collection techniques, fieldwork challenges, and sampling. Lastly, I reflect on how my positionality may have impacted my research in Section 3.3, and the ethical considerations encountered in my study in the final section.

3.1. Case Rationale and Research Sites

In pursuit of rich, culturally relevant data, I opted for an immersive ethnographic approach to researching social protection for informal workers (Hausner 2006; Luttrell 2000). Additionally,

case studies are beneficial for exploratory research into diverse conditions since the in-depth data obtained contextualises the multivariate factors needed to enable understanding and the triangulation of evidence (Yin 1994). So, a thorough case study analysis is useful for exploring the complex nuances of the economic, social, and political dimensions of social protection for informal workers to shed light on their lived realities. The data I collected from the field allowed me to interpret narratives from varied perspectives on the design and implementation of social protection practices such as informal mechanisms or micro pensions, as well as the perceived effects of the pressures of unequal power relations, a neoliberal policy environment, and the commodification of welfare provision. This approach illuminates the experiences of ageing informal workers facing inadequate social services, their exposure to risk, the responsibility for their care, and their dependence on their kinship networks, the market, or the state.

There are several factors which make northern Nigeria an appropriate location for this kind of research. Nigeria was one trailblazer for micro pensions in Africa, but the economic instability and history of pensions fraught with failure hinder the acceptance of the scheme (Akwagyiram 2022). I consider this alongside a legacy of neoliberal policies, high rates of poverty, inequality, and informality, and the absolute number of elderly people – estimated at 6.7 million people (World Bank 2023). Northern Nigeria is also underrepresented in academic research when compared to the south, despite, or perhaps due to, the higher rate of poverty and vulnerability in the former. This disparity can be attributed to disproportionately low levels of educational attainment, security, and adoption of the English language. For this reason, I selected two research sites in northern Nigeria, namely the capital city of Abuja and the more peripheral city of Yola in Adamawa state. The informal economies in both Abuja and Yola are composed of a wide range of occupations that can offer insight into how socioeconomic factors influence retirement and pension dynamics.

As per some recent reports by the National Bureau of Statistics, the poverty headcounts in Abuja and Yola are 38.66% and 75.41% respectively (NBS 2020). Accounting for poverty rates allows me to observe how people with different socioeconomic circumstances navigate social protection systems, looking especially at the extent to which poverty may be influencing the decision to enrol in a contributory pension scheme. Abuja is more urban and culturally diverse than Yola. My research demonstrates how ethnic diversity has an impact on the formation of social networks, and different ethnicities show slight variations in cultural practices for elderly support. Urbanisation puts pressure on informal workers to satisfy their basic needs through the market, and this has implications for their consumption and ability to provide support to relatives who may be living in other geographical areas. Given that I grew up in Abuja and I am native to Yola, my sociocultural grounding affords me a level of familiarity that minimises

the potential negative effects of bias, mistrust, or misunderstanding that can arise from ethnic or poverty-related factors (more on my positionality in Section 3.3).

Although Nigeria is still an overwhelmingly young society (NBS 2022) it is home to the largest number of older people in Africa and projections indicate a continuous rise in figures (Mbam et al 2022). The absolute number of elderly people in Nigeria stands at roughly 6.7 million (World Bank 2023). Granted, it cannot be regarded as an ageing population, but researchers with a far-sighted outlook would recognise the importance of studying old-age poverty now for policy planning purposes given the reasonable assumption that most of the people who are currently young will someday grow old and need protection. Notwithstanding the relatively small percentage of elderly people in the country, based on the population figures and the proportion of the informal workforce, one can assume that most of them worked in the informal economy and are therefore excluded from formal instruments. Pension systems have long-run perspectives, and the state of the Nigerian economy poses an imminent problem. Even if one chooses to focus only on present-day concerns, the lack of welfare security for the aged puts the pressure of welfare provision onto the young within the same networks for informal support at a time of unprecedented economic pressure.

I carried out my research in Abuja and Yola from May 2021 – January 2022. In both locations, I met informal workers at their workplaces in the markets or out on the streets, but when I was interested in speaking to the elderly poor, I had to meet them at home or at their places of leisure. This approach granted me the opportunity to target participants within their integrated communities and take account of a holistic network of interactions. For instance, Utako in Abuja, and Utako market in particular, is a large hub for informal workers of both high and low incomes. As such, there is a concentration of microfinance banks in the area – all of which have field representatives that go around daily collecting savings contributions – as well as other amenities including street food stalls, places of worship, and an accessible and well-connected transportation infrastructure that attracts other itinerant informal activities such as hawking.



Figure 3.1: Map of Nigeria with Abuja and Yola marked

Source: Britannica 2024



Figure 3.2: Wuse Market, Abuja

Source: Author



Figure 3.3: Utako Modern Market, Abuja

Source: Author



Figure 3.4: Kubwa Market, Abuja

Source: Author



Figure 3.5: Jimeta Shopping Complex, Yola

Source: Author



Figure 3.6: Yola Market

Source: Author



Figure 3.7: Hawkers in Dei Dei, Abuja

Source: Author



Figure 3.8: Mosque in Yola

Source: Author

3.2. Research Design: Data Collection

I relied on interviews and focus groups for data collection. Semi-structured interviews offered the depth of probing and nuanced understanding I needed to explore my research questions and accommodated the level of flexibility required to delve more into themes of interest that emerged unexpectedly yet provided valuable insights (Silverman 2014). They also allowed me to adapt my questions, techniques, and communication style to each participant with the aim of eliciting more open responses. Both methods are accessible to marginalised groups – namely, poor elderly people and informal workers – who are the central focus of my research. I adopted a relational interviewing approach that assumes that there is not one truth to extract from qualitative research, but rather that knowledge is co-produced through a social interaction between the researcher and the participant (Baker and Edwards 2012; Fujii 2017). This was beneficial for inquiries on how people create meaning about issues as complex as cultural norms, risk, vulnerability, power dynamics, inequalities, and the politics of social protection for informal workers.

During the nine months between May 2021 – January 2022, I carried out 178 semi-structured interviews and five focus groups. All of these interviews and focus groups were conducted in three languages that I am fluent in: English (including pidgin and broken English), Hausa, and Fulfulde. The vast majority of the interviews were recorded for accuracy, except when the participants declined to give their permission. The durations for sessions ranged between 40 minutes and two and a half hours. Before each session began, I introduced myself, my project, and asked for verbal consent with assurances to safeguard their anonymity and confidentiality. I upheld this promise by assigning interview codes and using them to identify the participants I directly quoted throughout the thesis and used pseudonyms for the vignettes in Chapter 7.

Of the 178 interviews I conducted, 82 were with current informal workers; 20 were with elderly/retired informal workers; 35 with relevant government officials, community leaders, pension industry experts, and officials in microfinance institutions; and 41 were excluded from data analysis and categorised as background interviews. I decided to interview younger people still active in the informal economy to allow for a comparison with the older group. The focus was on 1) the arrangements people establish during their work lives to protect against old age risks and the rationales behind them, and 2) the level of support provided by the younger generation to the older one. The 41 interviews were excluded from my data analysis to standardise the number of interviews for each group and ensure that only the highest-quality interviews were factored in, with most of these exclusions being of interviews conducted during the pilot stage.

For the interviews with current informal workers, I covered a range of occupations for a representative picture of the informal economy across income groups, genders, and geographical regions. Given that informal actors are not usually direct or explicit about their finances, I depended on indicators to sort them into their income groups. These included their occupations, the type of goods they sold, whether they had a shop, the amount of total stock displayed in the shop or cart, size of the shops, if they owned the shops, average rent prices in the market, or how much they saved with microfinance banks or *adashe*. Sweepers who were placed on fixed wages were able to share the specifics of their monthly incomes, and load carriers divulged the standard payments received for each trip with a customer. For clarity, people who do their shopping in bulk in markets hire young men with wheelbarrows to carry their goods for them. The table below summarises the different actors represented in my research according to their occupations:

		Abuja	Yola
High-Income Informal Workers			
1	Male informal workers (textile traders, spare parts traders)	10	10
2	Female informal workers (boutique, salon, 'eating house' owners)	11	10
Low-Income Informal Workers			
3	Male informal workers (hawkers, load carriers)	10	10
4	Female informal workers (hawkers, street/ market sweepers)	10	11
Elderly/ Retired Informal Workers			
5	Elderly/ retired male informal workers	5	5
6	Elderly/ retired female informal workers	5	5
Elite Participants			
7	Savings associates e.g. microfinance bankers	2	1
8	Religious and traditional leaders	11	10
9	Government officials (local, state, and federal)	2	4
10	Pension industry experts (including government regulators)	5	0
Background Interviews			
11	Informal workers, elderly, and religious and traditional leaders	34	7
TOTAL		105	73

Table 3.1: Research respondents according to sample groups

Source: Author

My ability to hold interviews with the elderly in Abuja was restricted by lack of availability due to sociocultural realities. I quickly found that most low-income informal workers return to their hometowns in retirement (aside from those indigenous to Abuja who predominantly work as

farmers), so I had fewer opportunities to encounter them in the communities where informal workers cluster. Even though it would have been easier to find retired informal workers in Yola, in the interest of balance, I matched the number of interviews I could garner in Abuja with how many I organised in Yola. I set the age threshold for this group at 60 years, to ensure an adequate sample size and comply with the typical retirement age for formal workers in Nigeria.

Given what Baker and Edwards (2012) and Fujii (2017) have to say about the influence of positionality on data collection, I found it prudent to collect data on each informal worker's demographic characteristics. At the end of the interviews and focus groups, I noted down each person's age, gender, marital status, state of origin, geographical region, ethnicity, religion, occupation, level of education, as well as the occupations and educational levels of their parents. I refer to these details in my thesis when I observe that they inform my analysis. For example, when touching on the matter of good governance, the participant's age, ethnicity, and religion are all crucial to how they interpret their interactions with the government, their opinions on the role that it should play in provision of social services, and their feelings of entitlement to welfare provisions. The table below summarises the demographic composition of my interview sample (I included a more detailed table showing the rest of the most relevant demographic data in Appendix 3):

	Geographical Origin*		Religion		Gender	
	Northern	Southern	Muslim	Christian	Male	Female
Abuja	25	25	17	34	25	26
Yola	44	6	38	13	25	26
TOTAL	69	31	55	47	50	52

*1 Ethiopian in Abuja; 1 Nigerien in Yola

Table 3.2: Demographic composition (active/ retired informal workers) Source: Author

Between May and June 2021, I carried out a pilot study to test the feasibility of my methodology and subsequently refined it to address any potential issues. Some participants had difficulty understanding my questions, so I redesigned my interview guide to break down the prompts and make them more colloquial. I also readjusted my approach and focused more on building rapport and being more attuned to each participant's comfort level when discussing sensitive topics about their finances, their experiences of poverty, the amount of informal support they give or receive, and criticisms of the government. I relied on the support of two male research assistants, one each in Abuja and Yola, to bridge any familiarity gaps with my respondents.

The format of my interviews depended on whether the participant was classified as an informal worker or an official. I customised the interview guides and phrased questions differently for each category (all the interview guides can be found in Appendix 2). For informal workers and the elderly, I established rapport using humour and empathy. Gaining access to markets and their communities was not difficult, but I faced some cultural, ethnic, and class barriers when attempting to earn their trust. I started my interviews by asking low-income workers how they were doing and high-income workers about their career trajectories, before transitioning to other topics. I was particularly careful not to reveal any preconceived notions I might have had about the struggles they face or any experiences with the government. In order to grasp the full picture of the social protection paradigm, I needed the perspectives of officials – that is, senior government officials, microfinance bankers, representatives in the pension industry, and community leaders – on how they frame the role they play in design and delivery. Obtaining access to this group was slightly more challenging and therefore I was only able to access 35 of them for interviews, though I had hoped to interview more.

I initially wanted to moderate more focus groups for two main reasons. Firstly, since the micro pension scheme was only recently launched and is quite complex, a focus group environment might have allowed participants to engage in dialogue with each other, thereby giving me the opportunity to examine divergent insights that emerge from disagreements, consensus, and justifications of their opinions (Belzile and Oberg 2012). Secondly, since many participants find it sensitive to discuss issues of income security and dependence on kinship groups for support, I thought that they might feel less awkward about expressing themselves freely with their peers of the same age, gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic class. The grouping of participants with similar demographic characteristics presumably makes it less likely that there would be a power imbalance within the group that will silence some members and make them want to conform to a dominant participant's opinions (Lunt and Livingstone 1996). For instance, as someone who is familiar with the culture in northern Nigeria, I am aware that elderly women are less likely to share candid opinions in the presence of men from their age group, but they are much less inhibited when among other women.

However, after conducting a few focus groups and finding them to be less effective than I had anticipated, I decided that they were not worthwhile. People were not more inclined to discuss delicate subjects in front of an audience, so they were less vocal or used diplomatic language. In addition to this, dominant participants existed even within homogenous groups, and they pressured those with dissenting opinions to conform. During one focus group with elderly women in Abuja, when one of the participants started to go into more detail on the inadequacy of informal support, another participant interjected abruptly, advising her to refrain from further

remarks to avoid potentially embarrassing their children. Besides, the focus groups were logistically difficult to manage due to conflicting work schedules and lack of suitable venues. Hence, I opted to scale back my reliance on focus groups for data collection after I conducted five with elderly participants in Abuja and Yola.

I use the term informal workers throughout my study to refer to individuals engaged in informal enterprises, whether as informal employers, employees, or owner-operators. I decided to examine both high-income and low-income informal workers because of how the differences in their income and education levels impact their experiences of social protection systems. This dual focus allows for a more nuanced comparative analysis of how collapsing kinship arrangements and commodified pension systems affect informal workers across the economic spectrum. By including high-income informal workers, the analysis highlights that even those with greater financial resources and higher levels of education encounter similar obstacles, such as a lack of trust in formal systems, inadequate coverage, and cultural preferences for traditional forms of social protection. This broadens the scope beyond low-income workers and reveals that issues with pensions are not solely a matter of financial capacity but also tied to deep-rooted sociocultural and institutional factors.

Determining the criteria for informality was a significant challenge during field work. My primary indicator for informality was the nature of their activity. I sought to include participants across the income spectrum: traders, tailors, and shop owners on the higher end, as well as hawkers, street sweepers, and load carriers on the lower end. In selecting activities and participants, I considered these factors: their reliance mainly on cash transactions, their labour practices which offered no employment benefits or legal protections to staff, and their business premises (they worked in informal settings).

Secondly, I factored in the extent of their compliance with formal registration requirements as outlined by the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC). In Nigeria, capital-intensive informal businesses – such as in textile or auto parts trade – found it essential to have CAC registration so that they could open corporate bank accounts, and as a stipulation of this process they are also mandated to register with the Federal Internal Revenue Service, which they comply with (in terms of registration only, not tax payments). Enterprises that manage substantial funds regard it as poor practice to operate without formal banking arrangements even if they find CAC registration to be disadvantageous. Additionally, women who run salons or eating houses are required to apply for certification with NAFDAC. Nevertheless, even with 16 participants reporting that they had registered with CAC, the trend of formalisation was only partially realised. In effect, the informal actors I selected for interviews existed outside the regulatory

framework of the state. They admitted to their non-compliance with corporate tax filings, and I could observe first-hand that the eating houses did not adhere to health and safety standards. Informal actors had casualised registration and continued to operate their businesses outside of the government's regulatory umbrella.

For informal workers, I used stratified and snowball sampling. After determining my preferred strata – based on occupational or demographic characteristics – I drew from those populations. I applied a location-based rationale to target sub-groups where they were most concentrated. For instance, I went to traffic-congested areas to target hawkers, or specific markets known to host traders of certain ethnicities. I discovered that people who are older than 50 years of age and less educated were less likely to register with CAC, but I made a conscious effort to minimise this bias for age and educational attainment in my sampling. While snowball sampling is often criticised for selection bias, the danger of this being the case in my research was limited given that I relied on multiple diverse initial contacts (Biernacki and Waldorf 1981; Given 2008). I gave more weight to access and openness over the marginal risk of over-representation of some social groups. On occasion, I found that people I approached were less welcoming, but upon being introduced to people via a referral, their responses were more informative. To target the informal workers in these activities, I selected locations with a diverse range of ethnicities and genders within the urban hubs. The table below outlines the locations where I collected data from informal workers:

	Workplaces	Communities
Abuja	Apo Mechanic Village	Gwagwa Neighbourhood
	Dei Dei Roundabout	Idu Neighbourhood
	Garki Market	Kagini Village
	Kubwa Market	Karmo Neighbourhood
	Utako Modern Market	
	Wuse Market	
	Zuba Motor Park	
Yola	Jimeta Modern Market	Bamgel Neighbourhood
	Jimeta Shopping Complex	Damare Neighbourhood
	Yola Market	Mbamoi Community
		Shagari Neighbourhood
		Wuro Hausa Neighbourhood
		Yolde Pate Neighbourhood

Table 3.3: Data collection sites (workplaces and communities)

Source: Author

For officials, I relied on purposive sampling to ensure that I selected participants who are relevant to my research (Robinson 2014). I identified some private sector pension industry experts and government officials who held positions in the National Pension Commission prior to soliciting interviews from them. I also requested meetings with other public servants at local, state, and federal level, as well as community leaders. I leveraged my social connections to secure interviews with the elites, and in a few cases I employed snowball sampling when the participants nominated other experts who they believed could shed light on central issues. It was as a result of this kind of recommendation that I discovered the existence of a recently established government agency, the National Senior Citizens Centre and managed to secure an interview with a contact there who provided me with an overview perspective of social protection for elderly people in Nigeria.

I analysed my data using thematic analysis. Still, in the empirical chapters, I quantified certain findings by presenting them as percentages (e.g. x% of group y engaged in abc). While the approach to quantifying my qualitative data provides valuable insights into the characteristics and propensities of different groups, it should nonetheless be viewed as indicative rather than representative as it is not based on scientifically designed quantitative research.

3.3. Reflections on Positionality

Since knowledge co-construction emerges through the social dynamic between researcher and participant, I must be reflexive and transparent about any potential biases or culturally sensitive factors that might influence data collection, analysis, and interpretation. I am a young, unmarried, Fulani, Muslim woman who originates from and grew up in northern Nigeria. While my identity and personal background mean that I have the cultural fluency to conduct myself appropriately and respectfully during interactions with research participants, they also shape the perception of me within that society. Moreover, my accent and status as a PhD student at a UK university, in addition to some participants seeing me drive my car, introduced an added layer of complexity by inadvertently hinting at my social class. Researchers operating in their home countries navigate fluid boundaries between 'insider' and 'outsider' roles in relation to the social groups we study, and any power imbalance between researcher and participant is of ethical concern (Dwyer and Buckle 2009; Fujii 2012; Giwa 2015). Although informal workers, poor people, and the elderly can be classified as belonging to marginalised groups, this can be mitigated slightly by my religion, ethnicity, language skills, and experience living in the north. I critically examine my own positionality with hopes that this self-awareness allows me to conduct more rigorous, ethical and insightful qualitative research.

My age and gender made me more innocuous to elite participants, thus fostering a climate of authenticity (Edwards and Holland 2013). It was important for me to leverage my personal networks to secure access with elites who might exercise caution otherwise (Mikecz 2012). In the interest of maintaining ethical standards of integrity and transparency, I feel I must disclose that my father was a Co-Founder and the MD/CEO of a pension fund, Sigma Pensions Ltd, from 2005 – 2011, and was also well-known in Adamawa state politics. Given that my father was a former colleague in the pension industry, this gave me ‘insider’ status since participants assumed that we shared the same interests, ideologies, and politics. However, my research ultimately uncovered significant critiques of both the pension system and the political elite by virtue of my commitment to the principle of being guided by theory and empirical evidence.

I observed these ‘insider/ outsider’ complexities in my interactions with research participants. My encounters ranged from people in Yola who interrupted our sessions to inform me of their connections to my family – such as growing up alongside my mother, working for my father, or studying under my great grandfather – to a woman in Abuja whose demeanour changed upon learning of my religion and ethnicity (prompted by her inquiry), eventually leading to the abrupt termination our interview. Generally, participants in Abuja were friendly, but slightly less forthcoming when compared to participants in Yola. Yola is not as culturally diverse as Abuja and because of my positionality there, I did not have to build rapport as much. People were more receptive and invited me into their homes, resulting in me conducting a higher proportion of my interviews in residential settings rather than rowdy workplace environments. However, at times this familiarity was a disadvantage, as certain individuals were hesitant to delve into intimate details, given the lack of anonymity that would otherwise be afforded to researchers.

Going into the field, I was equipped with insights gleaned from other researchers who advised caution when engaging with poorer people regarding their personal finances (Scheyvens et al 2014). I found that many people in this category assumed that I had the authority or influence to effect policy-level changes, despite my efforts to convey the contrary. Even when this is not the case, some people who detect a power difference adopt a deferential or accommodating attitude to the researcher, rather than actively participating in knowledge co-creation (Fisher 2012). In Yola – on account of 40°C heat – I appealed to shopkeepers for consent to conduct prescheduled interviews on their shop premises. When the first load carrier walked into our appointment, he sat on the floor, kept his head down throughout the interview, and did not elaborate much. For the next interviews, I joined them on the floor, and this appeared to have a favourable impact. Some of this variance may well stem from personality differences, yet I perceived a diminished sense of hierarchy, even as they adhered to formal address.

For high-income women, my perceived class did not seem to factor into our interactions as much as my age or gender did. Not only were they harder to access than high-income men due to domestic responsibilities impinging on their presence at work, but they demonstrated more discretion in authorising interviews and divulging personal information. Some women agreed to interviews if my male research assistants initiated the requests, only to cancel upon my arrival. They were likely to be discreet and deferred to their husbands' preferences when asked about decision making processes. To counteract these biases, I held supplementary interviews with this demographic to augment data robustness. In contrast, high-income northern men adopted a paternal approach towards me and expressed their support of me pursuing higher education. Considering their positions as net providers of informal economic support (as opposed to recipients), they were less embarrassed about discussing those dynamics with me, as well as imparting their knowledge on other subjects.

I enlisted male research assistants in both sites with a deliberate attempt to compensate for perceived deficits associated with my positionality (such as gender, class, as well as religion or ethnicity). Their roles were limited to acting as intermediaries for participant recruitment. This required familiarity with the locality, acquaintance with low-income areas, and comfort with informal workers. Hanson in Abuja was helpful with offering nuanced interpretations and drawing my attention to implicit meanings behind responses from participants with cultural backgrounds that I am less familiar with, whereas Zayyad in Yola was adept at using his humour to put participants at ease if they had demonstrated some discomfort with my age, gender, or class. They were both knowledgeable about the communities we worked in and were primed to aid me in ascertaining proper settings for targeting informal workers of specific occupations or demographics. Whenever necessary, they took on more of an active role during interviews, posing warm-up or probing questions to facilitate participant engagement.

3.4. Ethical Considerations

I honoured LSE ethical guidelines throughout this project. Part of respecting the dignity of my participants is ensuring that they give informed consent. This means making sure that they have a full understanding of the topics that were covered in the interviews and focus groups (Kvale 2008). In Nigerian context, written consent formalises the dynamic between researcher and participant, thereby compromising the quality of the responses. Therefore, I opted for oral consent and recorded their agreement to participate on audio tape. Participants were made aware that I was only interested in information relevant to social protection for the purposes of my PhD research (a copy of the information sheet provided can be found in Appendix 1). I

ensured the dignity and confidentiality of my participants, and only made audio recordings when given consent. After each day in the field, I uploaded the recordings to the LSE OneDrive server and deleted them from my device. Focus group participants were strongly encouraged to keep discussions private, and any information that could be used to identify participants was stored in a separate secure location. While my research focused on vulnerable groups, the content does not present legal ramifications, and participation posed no danger. Because the research was conducted during the COVID-19 period, all COVID-19-related protocols for masking and social distancing were observed.

The main ethical dilemma that surfaced pertained to compensating low-income interviewees for their time. I found that most low-income informal workers were not willing to interrupt their workdays without assurances that their time investment would be justified. They were not open to interviews merely on the basis of me attempting to convince them of the relevance of my project to their welfare concerns. I did not explicitly negotiate terms, but I offered a small token of appreciation after the conclusion of the interviews in a culturally sensitive way that was not at all intended as an incentive to unduly influence their decision to participate or offer more candid responses. I was not sure that it would be more ethical to ask them to forfeit valuable work hours – that they could otherwise spend on income-generating activities – so I could extract data for my research in a one-way transaction. Moreover, the reimbursements I offered only amounted to N500 or approximately \$1 each (according to the exchange rates during that period). I believe that sum was not high enough to compromise the integrity of my research.

In conclusion, the semi-structured interviews, combined with an ethnographic approach, were used to explore the complexities of social protection for elderly informal workers. Stratifying participants by income and gender, while ensuring adequate representation across ethnicity, religion, and educational attainment, allowed for a nuanced, comparative analysis of how various socioeconomic characteristics influence experiences within the social protection landscape. While certain limitations such as difficulties in precisely identifying informality were acknowledged, careful sampling methods were employed to mitigate these limitations and ensure the validity of the findings. The upcoming chapter ushers in the starting point for my empirical analysis. I investigate the rich history of indigenous community traditions for welfare support in Nigeria and look at how they, along with religious institutions, have evolved over the past few centuries.

CHAPTER 4

Communities as the First Responders

Northern Nigeria is extremely culturally diverse. Home to hundreds of ethnic groups including the Hausas, Fulanis, Kanuris, Nupes, and Idomas, this heterogeneity has contributed to a rich tapestry of social norms and traditions which play central roles in the region's mechanisms for informal social protection. The conventional image of African societies which assumes that families and communities are the cornerstones of welfare support, particularly for the elderly, can be observed among northerners. Kinship groups there provide financial, emotional, and practical support to their members, the extent to which varies based on income, religious, or sub-cultural differences (Oke 1986; VerEecke 1999). These traditions have endured over time, dating back centuries, and in this chapter, I will be looking back at hierarchical structures set up during the Sokoto Caliphate which institutionalised much of the social norms that place the role of elderly care onto kinship groups. This chapter demonstrates how what we now refer to as informal social protection systems (such as family and community networks) have evolved throughout history to provide crucial welfare but have been undermined by external pressures. I argue that family, religious, and precolonial institutions, though vital, are not always durable or universally reliable, and their erosion has increasingly heightened vulnerability for informal workers.

The Sokoto Caliphate, established through trade and jihad, enforced a system of governance with jurisdiction over political, economic, religious, social, and cultural matters in the north, installing a class of nobility at the top of the leadership hierarchy and household heads at the bottom (Burnham and Last 1994; Watts 1983). At first, the values of the Caliphate permeated the social fabric in the region, with Islamic principles and teachings guiding community life and responsibilities, and then during British colonial rule, new administrative systems and policies that disrupted and undermined precolonial mechanisms were introduced (Eyoh 1997; Jumare 1998; Meagher 2018: Watts 1983). Opportunities for commerce in parts of northern Nigeria

drove migration to that region and eventually the ethnic heterogeneity that resulted facilitated the assimilation of external sociopolitical structures and cultural influences (Ochonu 2015). As Nigerians migrated from other parts of the country, they carried their kinship and community networks along with them. Nevertheless, the precolonial system persisted, though fractured, and to this day, religious and indigenous leaders maintain the reliance on community-based support in tandem with the prevailing system of formal governance.

With respect to welfare provision, it is noteworthy to informal workers that there are formal and informal welfare infrastructures which interact to either displace or complement each other (Helmke and Levitsky 2004). In the absence of equal access to adequate social services for elderly care, informal actors benefit more from whatever support they can receive within their communities. I start the chapter by examining the formal and informal welfare ecosystem to determine what forms of social protection are available to and appropriate for informal workers. Using the typology of welfare systems developed by Esping-Anderson (2000) and expanded by Wood and Gough (2006) as well as SRM's understanding of the welfare mix, I interrogate Nigeria's system for welfare provision, drawing out the roles and responsibilities for families and the government. I also reflect on how religious institutions step in to provide protection to their congregations in the absence of state services. While this support is crucial, I found it to not be universally reliable (when comparing the two religions and informal workers' incomes).

This chapter starts with an analysis of how the welfare mix in Nigeria (the state, market, and family) combined to deliver welfare to informal workers given the current level of development in the country, also asking the extent to which formal protections might be crowding out filial responsibilities. Next, I will conduct a brief historical overview of informal support networks starting from the era of the Sokoto Caliphate up until the encounter with colonialism. Lastly, given the importance of religion in local communities, I examine the duties and provisions by churches and mosques, as well as limitations for this kind of support.

4.1. The Welfare Ecosystem Between the Boundaries of Formality and Informality

The ecosystem of social welfare encompasses a spectrum of provisions, namely, formal state-led interventions, formal private-sector services, and informal support mechanisms. In my literature review, I outlined the SRM perspective on informal social protection as an essential means of filling the welfare gaps in developing countries. This is achieved by drawing on family or community risk-sharing arrangements which are not employment-based and therefore are available to individuals within both formal and informal economies. Holzmann and Jorgensen (1999) take it for granted that informal workers can avail themselves of traditional informal

support systems to manage their income risks when in need. Within SRM perspectives, state participation extends to implementing public policies aimed at bolstering informal and market-based instruments. There is still the question of how this welfare ecosystem – or ‘welfare mix’ according to Esping-Anderson (2000) – plays a role in securing people’s livelihoods. For the remainder of this section, I will explore theories on how informal support is to be organised in relation to formal social protection.

4.1.1. Exploring the Overlap of Initiatives

Obligations within intergenerational family networks are increasingly threatened by external economic pressures which ultimately re-transfigure the flows and depths of income transfers (Esping-Anderson 2000). Esping-Anderson shed light on social policy’s role in strengthening familialism. In his view, the structures of welfare states, in terms of the degree of support given to families, have the capacity to shape family solidarity, the emphasis placed on traditional values, gender roles, and even employment patterns. He examined the intersection between family policies and other social policies, such as those related to pensions, healthcare, and education, and how together they can provide comprehensive protection. This sentiment was expressed by a senior official at a government agency in Abuja when I interviewed her about the roles of the government and the family in elderly care:

Government is responsible in terms of laying the legal framework, the policy, and the institutions. The first line [of responsibility] is the family, but family will have to fall back on the provisions by the government. Families depend on a qualified caregiver, on good hospitals that are aligned to their needs, on primary care, and health insurance. Government, principally, has to make this available then families can find the ease to care. Everybody, all the stakeholders, work together.
– Interview #173.

She proposes a complementary pact whereby informal systems retain their role alongside formal provisions, and beneficiaries derive value from both arrangements in accordance with their needs or circumstances. Thus, welfare is not solely the responsibility of the government but depends on contributions from a defined combination of stakeholders including the family, labour market, traditional institutions, and religious organisations. Holzmann and Jorgensen (1999) underscore the limitations of a welfare structure that hinges on the state. In countries with underdeveloped economies and financial infrastructure, households and communities are ostensibly best-placed to harness their social capital for risk-sharing due to the presence of information symmetries within small networks. So informal mechanisms emerge as surrogates for deficient states and markets. But there is more than one viewpoint on the functionality of informal mechanisms. Even though the government official I spoke to recognises the pivotal

role of communities, she does not advocate for the withdrawal of the state. Rather, she would strive for collaboration between both apparatuses:

These are not sustainable programmes per se, but this shows you that as a matter of faith, and as a matter of tradition, they recognise the vulnerability of some members. We want to build on their capacities on those programmes, not necessarily to create a parallel network, but to see how we can leverage on those networks that are already in existence. – Interview #173

Her opinion raises valid concerns about the sustainability of informal mechanisms, though it may well be that community members are optimally positioned to assess people's financial stability and determine if they meet the threshold to qualify for aid grounded in altruism. The family's primary role is crucial, and it is unlikely that these traditional practices can be wholly replaced by a formal structure. The resolution, therefore, would have to be a recognition of the interplay of the three systems, allowing individuals to secure their livelihoods by selecting their preferences with regard to accessibility, contextual factors, and sociocultural influences. There may be potential for cooperation between the formal and informal spheres in Nigeria, albeit with scant empirical evidence indicating this. Indeed, even for the delivery of pensions, which this thesis focuses on, senior government officials and corporate executives within the pension industry admitted to me during our interviews that they did not prioritise engagement with the informal economy or informal support systems in designing and implementing micro pensions.

Nigerian government officials appear to be compatible with the agenda of the fundamental role of informal social protection for informal workers (given their lack of access to state and market-based services), with one local government representative in Yola stating, '*You cannot blame government for not being aware. The first responsibility is with the family*' (Interview #140 – Translated from Hausa). Despite waning aid from families and communities, social protection policies in sub-Saharan Africa remain stagnant in their inadequacy, leaving older people vulnerable (Aboderin 2006). Aboderin describes the position shared by Western institutions at the 1982 UN World Assembly on Aging, which forecasted that the traditional support systems in developing countries would gradually disintegrate with the modernisation of their societies and an expected drop in fertility rates. Yet, four decades later this has not occurred, or, perhaps more accurately, not for the reasons initially predicted. That being said, this does not preclude the possibility that it may be an objective which some aspire towards. One Muslim leader and one traditional leader that I spoke to in Abuja and Yola respectively, expressed an admiration for developed countries with more structured support for the elderly:

There are no institutions taking care of old people in the north. Developed countries are more organised than we are. From our orientation, we have a mindset here – that individuals within our society are the ones taking care of the less privileged and not the government. In advanced countries, you are taxed in order that the tax works for you. The government must do something

out of the taxes they pay. Here, most members of the society are not even considered. We are not organised. In most cases, it is the communities that take care of themselves. – Interview #053

Government should take responsibility because Nigeria is a very rich country, we have a lot of resources, it's just that we are not organised. There are many countries, especially in Europe, that have working welfare systems. There's an age bracket you reach that the government takes care of you until you die. That is, your healthcare, your feeding, and so on. National budgets take care of these welfare programmes. But Nigeria has hardly come close to that. – Interview #121

While commentators might contend that Nigeria has not yet attained the level of development necessary to afford robust social protection for all who are vulnerable, if one pays attention to current affairs in Europe, they will find that their long-established welfare systems are now also breaking down due to strains put on them by an ageing population, persistent economic downturns, commodification, and politically motivated starvation of funding (Borsch-Supan 2015; Hemerijck and Huguenot-Noel 2022; Taylor-Gooby et al 2017). Besides, the notion that Nigeria is a rich country is just a fanciful story embraced by many of its citizens, and perhaps reminiscent of the bygone era of the 1970s oil boom. There are many ideological, political, and social reasons why any country should provide for its populace and generally, I would be inclined towards those perspectives. But in the case of a country like Nigeria, given the sheer number of those living in extreme poverty, the matter of whether state-financed welfare can be financially sustainable is crucial. If it cannot be fiscally viable, and the people are too poor to access market-based instruments, communities become the *de facto* primary domain.

4.1.2. Shifting Landscapes: Adaptation or Displacement

If informal social protection functions to address gaps left by the state and the market, then a pertinent issue arises concerning whether its prominence declines with the growth of formal provision. This phenomenon is referred to as 'crowding out' (Cox and Fafchamps 2007). The worry is that if state-led interventions are too robust, then their expansion will duplicate efforts and eventually diminish the support networks that were already in place, thus hindering the distributive aims of poverty alleviation schemes as net-providers of informal support scale back their remittances. For instance, an informal worker who previously endeavoured to send his parents money regularly might reassess and curtail his contributions if the state begins to offer old-age grants, regardless of whether the grants are modest or substantial. Nevertheless, these concerns were dismissed a long time ago as inconsequential due to the limited value of the scant resources that circulate between poor people, as well as the enduring principles of familial obligation, which persist irrespective of formal arrangements (Daatland and Herlofsen 2003; Morduch 1999).

Du Toit and Neves (2009) conducted a study on the behaviour of recipients of old-age grants in South Africa and determined that while it is true that recipients share their stipends with other households, these decisions are strategic and serve to enable marginalised groups to participate in their informal support networks with the anticipation that their participation would qualify them for additional aid in the future. Though the architects of targeted social assistance programmes might prefer to adhere to strict criteria for the eligibility of beneficiaries and they may seek to restrict entitlements to those individuals, recipients themselves have communal values that they prioritise even at the expense of their short-term gains (Devereux et al 2010). Adesina (2011) asserts that these expectations for withholding resources – which could even be perceived as hoarding – violate community solidarity, and a departure from these cultural norms could come at a high social cost.

In developing societies where governments are deemed to be ineffectual, informal support mechanisms influence the way people navigate formal welfare provision, prompting them to elevate alternatives (Kpessa-Whyte 2018). The hybrid feature of African societies may be undermining their development when the objectives of traditional institutions do not align with modern development goals. The prevailing discourse within SRM literature is that informal networks are ever-present and inherently capable of assuming substantial welfare-oriented functions (Holzmann and Jorgensen 1999). Still, academics argue that path dependencies for institutional arrangements condition present-day social policy outcomes, making deviations from these established paths difficult (Wood and Gough 2006). Moreover, Kpessa-Whyte (2018) highlights debates between neo-traditionalists and modernists on the role of informal systems in sub-Saharan Africa, with opposing schools of thought viewing informal systems either as resilient structures to be integrated into governance, or as barriers to development given that they have been adulterated due to colonial imposition. Both theories reflect on the significance of contextual historical trajectories in offering insight into the efficacy of informal social welfare support. In Section 4.2, I examine the history of traditional institutions to help determine if they are integral to or incompatible with the functioning of welfare systems.

4.2. Tracing the Evolution of Informal Support: Ancestral Foundations and Colonial Encounter

In this section, my focus will be on providing an overview of the historical backdrop relevant to traditional institutions in northern Nigeria. The Sokoto Caliphate, as well as other Emirates that came before it, served religious, political, and social purposes for their subjects. The ruling authority used customary obligations such as taxes and patronage to develop a social contract with inhabitants and the legitimacy of their rule depended on the fulfilment of duties all along the established political hierarchy (Smith 1960; Watts 1983). These structures were modified

over time after contact with colonialism. It is therefore important to trace the history of these precolonial institutions and to examine any social and political consequences as they relate to informal social protection.

The involvement of the state in social protection has historically co-existed with the family's role in providing care, with the nature and extent of each shifting depending on the prominent or available systems in place. While the family has always had a primary function in caring for the elderly, its role is fluid and responsive to evolving formal systems, including those during precolonial and colonial periods. Rather than viewing the 'informal' as something distinct from formal mechanisms, it is more accurate to say that informal practices are integrated into formal frameworks, often to supplement or fill gaps left by the state. These dynamics are continuously renegotiated between formality and informality, and what might be considered informal today was perhaps once part of a formal state structure that adapted over time based on the political and economic context. For example, some practices, such as the hierarchical structure for indigenous rulers, have been partially re-formalised given that they receive state stipends and recognition, while others such as zakat, persisted as informal religious or cultural traditions, mostly outside the purview of the state (Meagher 2010).

4.2.1. Threads of Continuity in Indigenous Community Traditions

Many academic studies of precolonial African societies downplayed the sophistication of their governance systems (Kpessa-Whyte 2018). It may be true that early rural settlements in the area were decentralised, with household heads wielding control within their units of authority (Watts 1983). Yet, 15th Century historical accounts of the *Kasar Hausa* (Hausa land), which now forms part of northern Nigeria, demonstrate the influence that Islam had on the politics and governing of those ancient civilisations, and the ways in which the Emirates attempted to preserve their legitimacy with agrarian populations (Lubeck 1986; Naniya 1993). The Emirates fashioned their territories strictly according to Islamic models, but the conflict between Muslim tradition and pre-Islamic rituals ultimately prompted the jihad led by Usman dan Fodio in the 19th Century. The jihad that lasted between 1804 and 1808 established the Sokoto Caliphate, implemented a new aristocracy, and eliminated ancestral practices that did not adhere to Sharia law (Pierce 2005). This ideological influence on social norms maintained the vision of social justice outlined in the Quran which calls for the redistribution of resources from the rich to the poor through zakat (Watts 1983).

In this precolonial era, which was influenced by Islamic orthodoxy, households were largely self-sufficient, yet generated revenue for the state through zakat, labour rent, land taxes, and

taxes on grains, crops or craft goods (Adebayo 1995; Meagher 2018; Watts 1983). The levies were considered legitimate as they were underpinned by ideological grounds and took account of the needs and values of people who lived in those societies. Religious principles provided a justification for the collection of taxes (such as zakat) that sustained the state apparatus, thereby playing a key role in organising and redistributing economic resources and integrating family units into a state-society relationship. Zakat was levied on free persons with surplus wealth in grain, livestock, or precious metals to assist the poor, fund religious activities, and community projects (Jumare 1998). Moreover, political hierarchies at the time were sustained through informal tributes or gifts flowing from client to patron in exchange for political and economic security (Pierce 2005; Tibenderana 1989). Fulani pastoralists were expected to pay tribute, typically in cattle or livestock, to the local ruler; this being another key revenue source for the Sokoto Caliphate tied to reciprocal obligation and patronage, through which the state extracted the endowment required for social investments and military efforts (Adebayo 1995; Jumare 1998). This arrangement was seen as mutually beneficial, serving as the mechanism for upholding order, stability, and resource allocation (Smith 1960).

Though the Sokoto Caliphate spanned across most of what is now known as northern Nigeria, the political culture did not spread uniformly to the regions on the periphery such as Adamawa state, and notably not to territories which were not absorbed as core entities of the Caliphate, such as the Bornu Empire or parts of the Middle Belt (Adeleye 1971; Burnham and Last 1994; Eyoh 1997). The cultural diversity within the north has endured in contemporary times, and the interaction between ethnicities is reflected in the way that indigenous institutions are now reorganised. While the hierarchical political structure of the Sokoto Caliphate distributed power vertically from the Sultan and the Emirs, down to the district and village heads, and finally the household heads, the modernised hierarchical systems have accounted for ethnic pluralism at local level. This involves some sort of segregation by ethnicity, with tribal leaders cultivating social cohesion, fostering interpersonal connections, and mediating minor disputes within their social spheres. All these activities operate within the overarching framework of governance overseen by the Emirs. During my field work period, I pursued an explanation for how a multi-ethnic city such as Abuja has come to accommodate these differences in the maintenance of community relations, and the adaptation was expressed by a village head as follows:

It is very difficult [to come together] because they came to meet us, and we have our own culture. Everybody has their own culture and the way they do things. Every [tribe] has their own leaders. Anything that comes up, we invite the leader, and tell him what is going on. – Interview #054

Despite this institutional recognition, traditional structures are less relevant in modern contexts with only five respondents claiming they had received help from traditional leaders and 21%

stating explicitly that they do not interact with traditional leaders at all because the leaders do not provide aid since they themselves are poor.

Thereafter, the British arrived, and exerted their dominance over the people and their customs. The radical disruption of British colonialism weakened these systems first by destabilising the customary tax infrastructure and then the established patron-client linkages and obligations (Jumare 1998; Tibenderana 1989). They abolished the formal zakat practice, and in its place installed a foreign system, delivered in partnership with the native authority, in service of the colonial administration (Adebayo 1995). This strained alliance allowed the native authority to retain some semblance of power, while the British offloaded the costs of governance and state extraction onto Emirs and indigenous leaders (Smith 1970). In due course, the core rationale for taxes separated from prior justifications and this was interpreted as a breach of the social contract (Meagher 2018; Pierce 2005). For instance, despite the British claiming that there were benefits to Fulani pastoralists in exchange for taxes they charged them for free mobility to graze the savannah, Fulani taxpayers were dissatisfied by the incongruity with local customs (Adebayo 1995). The abrogation of zakat and promotion of colonial interest over redistribution or socioeconomic development heightened income pressures on the peasantry, amplifying their poverty (Tibenderana 1988). For the British, what was crucial was to propagate their own doctrines under a veneer of borrowed legitimacy, neglecting to account for how this fracture could reshape political authority and social dynamics in a manner that continues to reverberate today.

Through indirect rule, colonialism undermined the political role of indigenous institutions, albeit not the social role, but regardless, as the status of the Emirates eroded their capacity to govern or provide social support weakened (Adebayo 1995). The Emirs could no longer manage the patron-client system, and with an understanding that their authority had been subsumed under colonial rule, they redirected their loyalties to the British for the protection of their aristocracy (Tibenderana 1989). This dynamic has extended beyond colonialism, with modern-day rulers soliciting approval and resources from the Nigerian government for their grassroots initiatives or development concerns. A village elder I interviewed in Abuja conveyed the concerns they have in their community which are subject to state sanction and no longer within their control. He explained that elderly men rely on the farmlands in their rural communities for subsistence, yet the government allocates these resources to outsiders without adequate consultation. In his opinion:

Government is taking our land to give to illegal developers to vandalise. I carried this complaint to the Minister. They say that they want to build an estate, but it is community land that existed before the colonial regime. This is where our people settled before. Idu is about 819 years old,

and now developers have come and taken it. We're not happy. We're trying to see if government can give a contract for the building of classrooms. We want [the children] to have an education. We want a community hospital. – Interview #049

This narrative echoes the dynamic between the colonialists and the natives as described by Tibenderana (1988). The system of indirect rule ultimately led to the emergence of a bilateral arrangement, with the British and indigenous political institutions in a symbiotic relationship, deriving power and legitimacy from each other (Pierce 2005). During indirect rule, the Sultan in the north needed the authorisation of the colonial governor to implement development projects, but although he was interested in investing in education and healthcare funded by tax-generated revenue, these requests were denied. In contemporary contexts, traditional leaders remain in a subservient role and are unable to effectuate their community-centred objectives against a state not necessarily motivated by fulfilling local needs, concerns, and demands, but rather by other interests which may not take rural affairs into consideration. The restriction of the scope of Emirate powers which began under colonialism persisted up to a juncture characterised by indigenous systems that currently have been reduced to act as a vehicle for the state. An advisor to the Emirate Council in Yola outlined the framework of governance post-Independence:

The Emirate Council reports to the Chairman of the local government. In the past, it was not like that. The Emirate Council had a constitutional role. There were Emirs and traditional chiefs all over the country. Here we are, in a country where they have been excised from the constitution but the responsibility that they had, they are still expected to do it. They are still expected to play stabilising roles in ensuring security, stability, and peace in the country. We've bastardised them. We leave them with big turbans. Even in the budgets, we don't really care anymore about giving them what they need to really maintain law and order. The constitutional responsibility has been taken away but the public responsibility, the community responsibility, is still there with less funding and less reverence. – Interview #120

In the period after colonialism, and particularly after the civil war, local community issues were increasingly entrusted to the government and elected officials (Pierce 2005; Smith 1970). The 1979 constitution limited the functions of precolonial institutions but – as elucidated by the Emirate Council's advisor – informal rulers continue to play essential roles in preserving order, mobilising political support, or even facilitating state-led programmes and acting as an intermediary with beneficiaries (Opasina 2016). The history of these institutions gives insight into the determinants and processes of the erosion of informal support systems, and potential for comprehensive protection in the future. Therefore, the assumptions about the effectiveness or prevalence of informal mechanisms are contingent upon their adaptability and likelihood of addressing modern challenges.

4.2.2. Kinship Systems: The Cultural Pillar in Elderly Care

Kirk-Greene (1998) presented an anthropological study on Hausa people in northern Nigeria outlining the criteria for their standards of good behaviour. For a people who originated from agrarian societies shaped by communal relationships, Hausas demonstrated the value they place on *rikon amana* (trustworthiness): a prerequisite of mutual obligations, generosity to the poor and vulnerable on religious or compassionate grounds, and courteousness towards the elderly. African kinship systems serve a primary social function; the customs and traditions that are transmitted intergenerationally forge interpersonal bonds based on shared interests, and the social machinery is continuously modified, adapted, and refined until the resulting social order is viewed as optimal (Radcliffe-Brown and Forde 1950). The kin group in Nigeria was once exalted over the nuclear family and members were driven by obligation to ensure solidarity and maximise welfare provision (Oke 1986).

The household is the smallest unit in the indigenous political hierarchy and household heads are interconnected through patrilineal kinship ties, with the men exercising authority over the extended family (Cohen 1961). Elderly people who are infirm or otherwise no longer able to provide for themselves rely on their children, grandchildren, spouses, or siblings for the care that they need. While the family assumes most of this responsibility, there is also a recognition of the family's positioning within the historical framework of the political hierarchy established by longstanding indigenous institutions. Traditional leaders in the north profess a commitment to accessibility, inviting members of the public to air their grievances on instances of dereliction of duty in domestic matters. From their perspective, the onus of care is placed on household heads, but they acknowledge the potential contributions and complementary roles that other external actors can play. According to two ward heads in Yola:

In our culture, each household head takes care of his household, and when a problem affects the community, that's when they come to us. If it is a government concern, they go to the local government representative. Each old man leads his family. That's why when women are looking to get married, they want to join a large family. – Interview #147 (Translated from Fulfulde)

If the government is adequate, then it should help the head, while the head helps the rest [of the household]. But if you want to follow the traditional laws, the old rulers of the Caliphate used to go around house-by-house to find out who is sick and who is not eating well before they go home for the night. If they had complaints, they would go to him. The system was concentrated in one place back then. That's the leadership. Everyone knows who has responsibilities. The head of the household is responsible for his household. – Interview #149 (Translated from Fulfulde)

Fulani people abide by an unwritten code of conduct they refer to as *pulaaku*, which governs social interactions and relations for the continuity of cultural values and social reproduction (VerEecke 1999). Close relatives: *derdirabe* (nuclear), *bandirabe* (extended) and members of

the same *lenyol* (kinship group) share resources to build *endam* (strong kinship bond, denoting caregiving) under the guidance of their elders. Similar patterns are observed in other northern cultures as well. But one cannot assume the benevolence of these informal means of social protection – whether through kinship or patronage – because they are subject to patriarchy and class distinctions and can operate in ways that engender exclusion, exploitation, or the perpetuation of systemic inequalities (Oppel 2022). Furthermore, while traditional hierarchical structures served a key purpose in the past and they remain significant, they have struggled to adapt well to contemporary issues such as how to ensure social welfare in rapidly changing and ever more unstable socioeconomic contexts.

When formal support structures fail or are insufficient, people adapt by turning to alternative means of security, such as through marriage, which provide a safety net (Radcliffe-Brown and Forde 1950) especially in the absence of institutional backing from bodies like the Emirate Councils. In this way, informal mechanisms can continue to play a role in safeguarding social welfare on an intimate household level, even as limitations in the hierarchical structure become more apparent. The Emirate Council's advisor hinted at his insights on the function of marriage and the sociocultural significance of its preservation by expressing concern over the number of unmarried women, highlighting that marriage is viewed as a critical part of maintaining social order and security. In this context, the traditional system sees marriage not just as a personal arrangement but a strategic element in maintaining welfare, stability, and social reproduction:

I am worried about the volume of unmarried females in the community. The traditional system is worried. That is a very bad omen for any community. Strategic decisions need to be taken to address these issues. It is very worrisome because community stability is secured at the home front. – Interview #121

Through marriage, people strengthen ties between their kinship groups thereby expanding the network through which they consolidate and transfer resources. In their book, *African Systems of Kinship and Marriage*, Radcliffe-Brown and Forde (1950) assert that African marriages are established as alliances between kinship groups and not just two individuals. In Nigeria, the facilitation of courtship, marriage proposals, ceremonial arrangements, and negotiation of the dowry, as well as mediation for marital disputes are customarily under the purview of extended families (Oke 1986). It follows that the breadth of one's kinship network denotes their social, political, and economic status. Marriage then leads to children and thus the intergenerational line of support is created. The old-age security theory posits that individuals view children as a form of social insurance and expect financial and instrumental support from their offspring in retirement in the absence of formal provisions (Morduch 1999). This reproductive arrangement for intergenerational solidarity is reciprocal and elderly people stress their entitlements to these

transfers precisely because of the investments that they made in their children. I interviewed a female hawker and a pastor in Yola who both articulated this viewpoint:

My desire now is to help establish my children so they can be successful at something, and I can rest. I feel that if they are successful, they would take care of me, just like I took care of them too. Because of them I didn't remarry [after my husband died] so that I wouldn't have to leave them behind and risk them not being taken care of. I preferred to work hard to look after my children and make sure they could build something of their own. – Interview #122 (Translated from Hausa)

A good number of people help those who were there for them. That's why as you're growing old, you need to help the younger ones. Any old man who has no one to take care of him, it's because he has not cared for anybody. – Interview #148

The intergenerational model fosters filial obligations between adult children and their elderly parents, and though the mere presence of familial bonds was well-documented in my research sites, the adequacy remains in dispute. In this section, I have traced the history of traditional institutions and kinship ties and examined the influence of colonialism on their changing structures. In Chapter 5, I will extend my focus beyond the civil war period in the late 1960s to encompass the era of neoliberalism from the 1980s onwards, and this analysis will shed light on the resilience and capacity of informal systems in the context of decades of economic decay. Many academics contend that modernisation did not dismantle kinship systems, but rather that these systems have adapted. The inherent mechanisms of support within families reconfigured to either shrink the breadth and depth of transfers or adjusted the scope to meet changing needs, as both families and states increasingly take on joint responsibilities for providing welfare (Aboderin 2006; Oke 1986; Shanas 1979).

4.3. Christianity, Islam, and their Roles in Welfare Provision

As stated above, religion has been intertwined with politics and social assistance in northern Nigeria for centuries. Under the Islamic states of old, rulers built a *madrasa* system for Islamic education, and as Christianity became more popular, Christian missionaries built their own schools and hospitals (Bano 2009). Academics studying faith-based organisations in Nigeria suggest that they emerged, or had a resurgence, in the 1980s to offset the state's failure to engage in social transformation (Leurs 2012; Olarinmoye 2012; Weiss 2020). Both stances hold some merit. There is evidence that faith-based non-governmental organisations have occupied a more prominent role to fill the gap left by state retrenchment, and now account for the provision of a significant proportion of health services (Kagawa et al 2012). Conversely, a retrospective review of these religious institutions shows the impact of traditional practices, colonial legacies, and post-Independence dynamics on the part they continue to play in informal social protection, in addition to indicating any challenges or limitations they may have for addressing contemporary welfare needs in the country.

4.3.1. Christian Missionaries as Agents of Social Change

Christianity and British colonialism were concurrent forces. Certain perspectives contend that Christianity existed in some form in Nigeria as early as the 15th Century, but it was during the colonial era that Catholic, Protestant, and Pentecostal missions established themselves as prominent actors in social, economic, and religious spaces in the south (Odumosu et al 2009). It was through education that the Christian missionaries exercised most of their influence, with their activities serving as a means of cultural imperialism (Moynagh 1952). The 1930s saw a proliferation of Pentecostalism among the Yorubas, signifying a pivotal shift in the landscape of Christianity in the country (Fatokun 2009). This popularity surge was closely aligned with efforts to alleviate poverty as a strategy for proselytization (Oyelade and Omobowale 2019). The Yorubas, distinguished by their blended affiliation with both Islam and Christianity, were drawn to Christian missionaries for instrumental purposes since they delivered better access to modern social services than the Muslims (Peel 2015). However, the colonial administration imposed barriers on the spread of Christianity to the north to please the Muslim Emirs who sought to maintain their religious dominance under indirect rule (Odumosu et al 2009).

The lessons learned on the approaches to and organisation of missionary initiatives continued to shape welfare delivery at churches post-Independence (Leurs 2012). During the civil war under General Yakubu Gowon's leadership, the Biafran secessionist government received aid from Catholic institutions within their borders and abroad, including the Vatican (Nwaka 2015). In response to the Nigerian military blockade – aimed at causing starvation as a means of warfare – the Catholics distributed humanitarian relief as well as images of emaciated children, evoking the support of the international community against the Nigerian government. Even prior to the Biafra, Catholicism had its largest presence in the Igbo community, and some research indicates that the compassion extended by the church amid the war strengthened Igbo people's connection and dedication to the Church (Nwaka 2013)

At present, many informal workers rely on religious institutions for livelihood support. My field work revealed that churches are more active in this area than mosques, with better organised structures. 87.5% of the pastors I interviewed had welfare departments at their churches, as opposed to only 25% of mosques. My conversations with pastors revealed that there has been a shift in how/ why churches deliver welfare. Albeit that charity is typically intended to produce protective effects – enabled by wealthier donors contributing funds to the church, which in turn allocates the resources to the poor and needy – there is now a push towards enhancing self-sufficiency and productivity. According to a pastor in Yola and one in Abuja:

We have a programme where we get some of them into work so they can help the elderly ones. We have gotten jobs for a few of them. We teach them. You see, you can't give what you don't have. If the middle-aged man doesn't really have money to take care of himself, talk more of his parents... We see the possible ways to come in. We see the possible way of establishing them and then they can take care of the elderly ones. – Interview #154

We discovered that some of them in their youthful age, what they were supposed to do, they were not doing it. They didn't have focus, because if they had focus, they would think, "this work that I am doing, can it sustain me?". The little work they are doing cannot even sustain them. They have to learn other [lucrative] work [to increase their incomes]. We teach them how to fish, rather than giving them fish. – Interview #061

These quotes illustrate how churches are approaching welfare by focusing on 'empowering' individuals through entrepreneurship rather than direct aid. From their perspective, by helping people build self-sustaining businesses, the church creates a model which encourages long-term stability rather than short-term relief. Thus, church welfare is reimagined as a means to enhance productivity among congregants, with the goal of reducing reliance on the church – by enabling individuals to attain economic independence and be positioned to support others in their social networks. However, since not all individuals can thrive in entrepreneurship, this emphasis on pushing them to engage directly with the market risks weakening the collective and relational basis of support, if informal workers do not find it to be useful. The quotes from the pastors suggest that the shift is implicitly framed as a form of 'empowerment', but the underlying message is that of individual responsibility rather than a collective safety net, perhaps reflecting a broader societal reorientation towards the responsibilisation of the poor.

Regardless of whether the churches served poor or middle-class communities, they collected periodic contributions in the form of tithes or offerings and fundraised for emergencies. These funds were then kept under the supervision of the pastors or a welfare officer who handled requests and granted some financial support depending on recipient needs and budgetary availability. One church in Abuja took measures to monitor the progress of beneficiaries after the receipt of funding to ensure that the money was spent well. In contrast, in Yola, 75% had a screening process with stringent requirements for funding, as well as an investigation of requests to certify their legitimacy. One pastor in Yola described his church's protocol:

We look at what they can do after [we conduct] seminars and feasibility studies. [This is assessed] based on their [need] level and according to the market. We look at certain environments: what is sellable, what is obtainable, what is legal, what is viable. We also look at the timing. From time to time, we monitor their progress. They give us reports, and if there are challenges, we see what we can do to correct it. We attach them to professionals. It's their money, but we keep records to observe how they're doing. – Interview #154

There seems to be an attempt to formalise church welfare by mirroring the structure of means-tested and conditional cash transfer social programmes, and establishing the delivery of skills

development, market analysis, and professional support. Nevertheless, formalisation through means-testing and conditional access is likely to introduce exclusionary mechanisms, making access potentially restrictive. So instead of complementing or substituting the formal systems to fill gaps, these churches start to mimic them, risking the same exclusions that formal systems are often criticised for, and losing the flexibility and values of charity and social cohesion that once characterised them. In the interaction between formality and informality that involves an adoption of formal welfare logics, the implication then is that the ethos of one might displace the other. Besides, since the funds the churches provide to informal workers for starting their petty trades are typically transfers averaging around N50,000, there is little likelihood that this amount can establish businesses capable of granting them sustainable long-term economic independence or meeting all their needs comfortably.

The pastors claimed that they provide basic support in the form of cash or food transfers, zero-interest loans for businesses, skills training, employment recruitment, scholarships, medical aid, and housing. Informal workers confirm that churches do offer some help with priority to widows, but they did not admit to receiving this welfare assistance. 10% of respondents believed that the aid offered by their church was not sufficient to protect against income risks. Pastors promoted entrepreneurship and productivist ideologies because they felt that it is more useful to offer ways for people to fend for themselves. But aid extended by the churches often exceeded mere charitable contributions, embracing features of income generation, risk management, and human capital development. Only two churches (one each in Abuja and Yola) extended any special attention to the elderly. For the churches that do show concern towards the elderly, they limit it to their minor healthcare needs and assessments or giving advice for retirement preparation. The churches take the position that families are responsible for the care of their relatives, and the church only steps in if the elderly person is childless or has only poor family members. According to one pastor in Yola:

We give attention to elderly people. If we don't see you in one or two meetings, we send for you. We give you a call. Elderly people, today they will be fine, tomorrow they will not be fine. They need attention. We make sure they are living in good conditions. We are doing the best we can.
– Interview #153

Not only did the administrative arm of the church deliver aid, so did the congregation. When asked, roughly half of my respondents indicated that they received donations from fellow church members in times of illness, bereavement, or celebrations. One spare parts trader in Abuja noted that these contributions were even more functional given the bureaucratic delays he faced when claiming funeral support from the church after his brother's death. Churches maintain their role in administering welfare provisions to people in their congregation, but they also understand the importance of delegating some of that care to their congregation to lighten

their load. One pastor in a low-income neighbourhood in Abuja described to me his attempts to foster a sense of community between his parishioners so that they can take care of each other without needing church involvement. As he states:

To build a community, you must build up trust first. If there is no trust, love, and care you will find it difficult to do. It's very difficult because it demands a lot of sacrifice. When you're not ready to sacrifice it would be more difficult for you. The benefit I used tell them is, whenever you're in trouble this community will be the one to take care of you before any other person will come. Before even your father will come, your neighbours might have done something. So, they need to live in harmony and in unity. – Interview #056

The pastor expresses an ideal which may not be as straightforward as anticipated. Due to the locations of churches and the leaderships' ideologies, membership of churches in Nigeria are highly segregated by socioeconomic class (Adogame 2024; Asamoah-Gyadu 2019; Pogoson and Ogidi 2022). Poor people attend smaller churches in their communities with other people in similar financial circumstances, whereas Christians with higher incomes are more likely to belong to megachurches where most of the congregants have abundant resources to fund their needs. However, even within the low-income neighbourhoods there is some income differentiation, so some members could potentially make requests of others. But for those who are poor, this presents as an awkward situation. In response to prompts regarding the idea of soliciting aid from other members of the congregation, one female hawker in Abuja shook her head and repeated '*I don't like it*' five times before adding that she does not ask anyone for help and reiterating '*I don't like it*' three more times (Interview #047). She expressed that she had not experienced any adverse consequences when seeking aid yet still viewed it as burdensome to others. The efficacy of this support mechanism is constrained by its reliance on individual requests. Yet, people might feel uncomfortable expressing their needs if they find it degrading.

4.3.2. Islamic Authority Shaping Cultural Norms

The trajectories of Islam and Christianity differed fundamentally in the way the two religions interacted with the imperial power. Christianity connected through missionary efforts, while Islam continued to play a political role through the system of indirect rule (Bano 2009). In the early colonial period, Islamic organisations began to incorporate Western education into their curriculums at schools such as Ansar-ud-Deen – established in 1923 in Lagos – to counteract Christian dominance in that arena (Peel 2015). Though the Emirs in the north were wary of exposing their populace to Christian evangelism, in the 1930s they accepted charity from the missionaries with specialised medical expertise in the treatment of leprosy patients (Shankar

2007). This decision was driven by the same rationales that underpinned zakat: welfare support for the poor, and political responsibility for community development.

Mosques do not have as much of an opportunity to foster a community because of the way the religion functions. People go to mosques to pray for a few minutes and leave, and many do not always attend the same mosque for prayers unless it happens to be near their home or workplace. Given this constant fluctuation in the congregation, it might be difficult to provide a predictable means of welfare to the needy. According to my interview respondents (imams and informal workers), it is for this reason that the support provided at mosques tends to be infrequent and irregular except during Ramadan and Eid. The form of alms given is known as *sadaqah* to Muslims. They usually range between N10-N100 per gift – determined by the benevolence of the patron – and are given to beggars *fisabilillah* which means ‘for the sake of Allah’. At one mosque in a poor district named Karmo in Abuja, the imam shared with me that his congregation was poor and that hindered their ability to assist others, so they had to turn beggars away. However, leaders at larger mosques (in Yola and Abuja respectively) note the deficiency in support provided to Muslims:

The number of mosques that provide welfare isn't adequate. If someone says mosques don't provide welfare, they wouldn't necessarily be wrong. A few do, but not many. The church is like a ministry. They have a structure for welfare arrangements. [They are] able to make these arrangements because they make tithes compulsory. But there's no basis in Sharia to force Muslims to make a similar payment whenever they come to pray, so we became complacent and reluctant to the extent that even the little things we could offer, we cannot afford to. – Interview #152 (Translated from Hausa)

*If you want to go back to the origin of the [mosque], it is a centre where you pray, and you listen to people who have problems. Not the way we run them in Nigeria. Sometimes you see wealthy people, but they don't have provisions for the poor. It's wrong. Beyond *fisabilillah* each [mosque] must have a committee and donors that contribute money. That is what they do in churches. – Interview #051*

The Federation of Muslim Women Association in Nigeria (FOMWAN) is a faith-based non-profit with presence all over Nigeria that has mosques, schools, hospitals, and programmes in over 600 branches for the provision of social services (Berkley Center 2010). FOMWAN is an organised body that works at grassroots level to provide humanitarian help and promote social objectives. However, this kind of structure is rare for an Islamic organisation in northern Nigeria. In Yola, mosques are even less involved in social life, especially those serving low-income localities. This phenomenon perhaps stems from feelings of shame, derived from *pulaaku*, as respondents exhibited embarrassment when asked if they receive support from mosques, expressing beliefs that the alms should be reserved for people living in destitution.

A judgmental notion of ‘deserving’ or ‘undeserving’ poor was a common theme among Muslim respondents. One imam in Yola summarised their list of eligible recipients as follows: ‘*Mara lafiya. Marayu. Gajiyayyu*’ (Interview #155). Meaning the ill, the orphaned, and the retired (or disabled). That is, those impaired by illness who therefore cannot work, those who lost parents who used to work to provide for them, and those who are old or have disabilities that prevent them from working. By restricting aid only to those who are incapacitated, there is a potential disconnect between the support structures in place and a broader goal of meeting people’s economic and social needs. Individuals not categorised as ‘deserving’ under this system might miss out on resources and support that could help them secure their livelihoods, particularly for people who are on the cusp of being economically active but are currently facing hardship. This insistence on self-reliance is likely to isolate and further marginalise them.

One mosque, distinct from its counterparts, extended some targeted elderly support, focusing solely on providing food aid to them for Eid celebrations. The rest of the mosques understood that elderly people should be taken care of but did not regard the elderly as the most vulnerable group, either owing to assumptions that they already receive necessary aid from their families, or because older people occupy so little of public life and religious leaders did not hear their complaints directly. The aforementioned mosque in Yola also launched an Orphan Welfare Scheme which provided tuition, uniforms, books, healthcare, and food transfers to 95 means-tested beneficiaries with funds raised from pledges by donors. Additionally, they provided skills training workshops for the youth, advising them to procure start-up capital from microfinance banks to encourage self-reliance. The limited scope for elderly support and emphasis on entrepreneurial self-reliance, combined with the assumptions about familial care, indicates a gap in recognising the specific needs of informal workers, akin to the patterns with churches.

Churches provide transfers to earn some legitimacy in communities (Pavolini et al 2017) but mosques tend to push the responsibility off onto governments and wealthy people. In response to queries regarding responsibility for the elderly, the imams I spoke to asserted that wealthy people have a duty under Islam to redistribute their income to the poor through zakat. In certain Islamic nations such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan, or Sudan, zakat tax is mandated and regulated by the state (Weiss 2020) – similarly to how zakat was structured under the Sokoto Caliphate until the formalised system was abolished by the British. Currently, the twelve Sharia states in the north have zakat boards that collect voluntary zakat contributions. But as a result of the limited confidence in the integrity of these institutions, many northerners prefer to handle their disbursements independently (*ibid.*). After expounding on the original intent of mosques, the imam in Abuja proposed zakat as the chief solution for poverty alleviation, even venturing to portray it as a panacea:

Allah says the wealthy ones should give zakat. If our wealthy ones were distributing zakat as Allah instructed them, we wouldn't be facing this challenge of poor people and the hope will never sour. If you go to an Islamic State, they have a board or a council that collects zakat. It's an obligation. Not like the way we do it in Nigeria. – Interview #051

The imam points at a significant factor. When the state plays a central role in the collection, management, and allocation of zakat, it can be considered as a form of wealth redistribution (much like progressive tax). Regardless, even when the concept, implementation, and ideology underpinning zakat align with social justice objectives, Weiss (2020) argues that the traditional form of zakat is not feasible to eradicate modern forms of structural poverty due to its limited scope and scale, voluntary nature of participation, and fragmented institutional mechanisms. Furthermore, Kuran (2003) investigated the historical antecedents of zakat and the variety of applications over time before arriving at two conclusions. Zakat was applied unevenly across different places and times throughout its history, and Kuran found that any claims of its impact on poverty eradication lacks empirical validation. Weiss and Kuran's critiques of the limitations of zakat suggest that despite its historical significance, it cannot meet contemporary demands. In past centuries, state-controlled zakat systems in northern Nigeria might have had legitimacy and resource allocation due to the ways in which Islamic authority shaped their cultural norms (Meagher 2018; Watt 1983). But the inefficient integration with modern formal structures and lack of trust in zakat institutions fragments this approach, rendering it inadequate for welfare provision. Even so, Muslim leaders cling to zakat as the ideal fix for poverty, thereby causing, whether consciously or not, the effect of neglecting their core religious duties to the poor.

4.4. Concluding Thoughts

This chapter has highlighted the complex interplay between various forms of social protection in the Nigerian context, focusing on the critical role of informal support mechanisms within the broader welfare ecosystem, comprising families, religious institutions, traditional leaders, and market-based solutions. While familial support mechanisms remain a cornerstone of informal social protection, these traditional structures, influenced by precolonial, colonial, and post-colonial developments, have adapted over time, but the burden placed on families, especially household heads, risks becoming unstable. The repeal and underfunding of zakat systems under colonialism, coupled with the erosion of traditional hierarchies, diminished the legitimacy and capacity of these indigenous mechanisms to address modern welfare challenges. Despite their residual influence, these systems no longer possess the structural power or resources to meet the needs of the population effectively.

Religion plays a dual role in this welfare landscape. Churches are better organised in terms of welfare provision compared to mosques, making effort to foster community solidarity, but they, like mosques, largely defer the responsibility for elderly care to families. Mosques, in turn, tend to rely on the notion of zakat for wealth redistribution, but zakat alone has proven inadequate in addressing poverty and inequality on the scale required. The church actively promotes self-reliance, whereas the mosque primarily focuses on almsgiving – essentially leaving informal workers to navigate their issues on their own, amid their struggles with livelihood insecurity.

The overarching theme is that while informal support networks – rooted in religion, tradition, and family – remain vital, they are increasingly insufficient to address the growing complexity of social welfare. The interactions between formal and informal systems are fragmented, and without greater state involvement and structural reforms, informal systems will continue to struggle to provide comprehensive social protection. The welfare ecosystem in Nigeria is caught between tradition and modernity, and between formality and informality, but without cohesive strategies or resources to bridge these gaps, both spheres fall short in addressing the structural causes of poverty and vulnerability.

The chapter sets the stage for a deeper exploration into how these informal systems contribute to securing livelihoods and how historical contexts continue to influence contemporary social protection frameworks. In this chapter, I studied how these mechanisms gradually relinquished their welfare duties as time went on, and in the next chapter I analyse how the networks have deteriorated further due to economic pressures. Using more recent history – from the oil boom period in the 1970s through to more modern realities – I investigate the state's inadequacy in ensuring macroeconomic stability. I examine how market failures magnified economic and social vulnerabilities and weakened informal support mechanisms. Next, I consider how the state intervenes, not necessarily to improve livelihood security or wellbeing, but with actions that ultimately have the consequence amplifying the risks that informal workers face.

CHAPTER 5

Vulnerability to Risk Amid the Struggle for Survival

The previous chapter highlighted how colonialism and the post-Independence period eroded informal welfare systems for informal workers. In this chapter, I will now explore how neoliberal policies in general, and the structural adjustment programme in particular, affected both formal and informal support networks, with a focus on how these changes have impacted the elderly. After Nigeria's Independence from the British in October 1960, several Heads of State had trouble finding sure footing in achieving social and economic stability. These difficulties and poor outcomes eventually led to the implementation of the structural adjustment programme (SAP) in the 1980s, thus officially introducing and embedding neoliberalism into the country's paradigms. Due to the detrimental impacts of neoliberal policies over the past few decades, the capacities of the state, market, and family networks to provide welfare for informal workers have been depleted, and each system abandons the responsibility for welfare to the others. I critique the impacts of neoliberalism on social protection systems, arguing that it deteriorated the capacities of the state, market, and family, thereby exacerbating vulnerabilities of elderly informal workers. The chapter shows how these fragmented systems fail to address the root causes of poverty, to help make a case for a more transformative approach to social policy.

In this chapter, I critically engage with several theories that shape our understanding of social protection and vulnerability among informal workers. I start with a core limitation of SRM, which emphasises enhancing poor individuals' capacity to use welfare-maximising tools (Holzmann et al 2003; Siegel and Alwang 1999) while overlooking the weaknesses of those instruments amid the exacerbating effects of neoliberalism. Additionally, I explore the erosion of informal social protection, noting how the intergenerational model of family support is undermined when the working generation is under too much pressure (Collard 2000; Finch and Mason 1990) largely due to economic strain (Devereux 1999), and reflect on the impacts on power inequality in vertical transfers between wealthier and poorer relatives (Morduch 1999; Wall et al 2001).

Furthermore, I will engage with the rights-based approach, which positions the state as central to delivering social justice. While the approach recognises that the marginalisation of informal workers makes them more susceptible to social exclusion (Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler 2004; Unni and Rani 2003), and critics highlight that these social exclusions also make it hard for marginalised groups to access channels for rights claims (Duni et al 2009), I illustrate how these workers actually become targets for harassment by the very state meant to protect them. I engage with much of the thinking behind the concept of adverse incorporation, which argue that informal workers' visibility to the state can be detrimental, especially if they are included only to be exploited or taxed, rather than to reduce their risks (Meagher and Lindell 2013).

I explore these dynamics, starting with a historical overview of the SAP period, followed by an examination of risks and vulnerabilities as experienced by informal workers. Then the analysis shifts to the limitations of relying on informal support during the current context of widespread economic deterioration due to the impacts of neoliberalism. The chapter rounds off by looking at the state in more depth to see how it can be a source of vulnerability for informal workers when it acts to marginalise them further rather than protect their wellbeing. These analyses help me consider the implications for transformative social policy, by showing how neoliberal pressures diminished protective mechanisms (from families and the state) and impacted social reproduction and productivity.

5.1. In the Shadows of Neoliberalism

Since the 1980s, many Nigerian Heads of State have implemented their versions of neoliberal policies despite the persistent economic decline that has intensified people's pressures rather than equipping them with sufficient means to manage their risks (Herbst and Olukoshi 1994). In Section 5.1.1. I will conduct a brief historical overview of neoliberal policies in Nigeria to demonstrate how they worsened material conditions for informal workers, who were already struggling with the deterioration of informal mechanisms of social support. Yet, although risks associated with economic downturns are covariant, the Nigerian government seems to expect informal workers to fend for themselves, thereby compounding the challenge of preparing for the idiosyncratic risk that is old-age poverty. They are forced to address both their own needs and those of elderly relatives while navigating the decline of both informal and formal welfare support systems. Thus, in Section 5.1.2. I will perform an examination of the manifestations of vulnerability among informal workers.

5.1.1. Pulses of Fragility Across Decades of Underdevelopment

After the Biafra civil war of the late 1960s, the Nigerian economy experienced some temporary reprieve, and as investment in petroleum sectors became more prominent, this set the stage for the oil boom in the 1970s (Herbst and Olukoshi 1994). In parallel with Nigeria's expansion of oil production, the Organization of Oil Exporting Countries (OPEC), simultaneously raised oil prices, leading to a dramatic increase in Nigeria's exports from N510 million to N14.2 billion in the decade spanning 1970 to 1980 while government expenditures surged by over 3000% (ibid.). Throughout this period, the government, relying heavily on abundant oil revenues, took an active role in promoting social welfare by channelling substantial social investments into healthcare, education, infrastructure, food, and oil subsidies (Babawale et al 1996). The gains from the oil boom extended to various groups – including the business community, importers of commodities, government employees, and the urban working class – all of whom saw many advantages of the boost in government spending (Herbst and Olukoshi 1994). According to Babawale et al (1996), this social investment strategy constituted an integral component of the post-colonial social contract, enabling the nascent government to validate its legitimacy relative to the legacy of colonial rule.

By the early 1980s, global oil prices began to fall. The decline significantly impacted Nigeria's revenue, exposing the fragility of the underlying economic infrastructure (Herbst and Olukoshi 1996). The SAP in Nigeria was characterised by policies which sought to devalue the currency, liberalise trade, reduce social investments, and privatise as well as downsize the public sector (Adejumobi 2011; Herbst and Olukoshi 1994). Neoliberalism entails not only scaling back the state, but also the specific modalities of state intervention for the promotion of commodification and private sector hegemony (Kingfisher and Maskovsky 2008). This served to convert the state from a protective, promotive, or even paternalistic role, to one driven by the notion of the market as the most effective means of allocating resources for economic prosperity. In light of this, social services, public utilities, and public institutions were rolled back or commercialised. Austerity, anchored in a free-market ideology, was deemed as necessary to lessen the state's financial responsibilities rather than experimenting with any concrete initiative to build state capacity to meet the citizen's needs.

The World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) capitalised on exigent circumstances to coerce African governments into implementing SAP (Harrison 2010). In Nigeria's case, an overreliance on oil accelerated the emergency. Up until the 1970s, Nigeria's economy was primarily agrarian though investment in the sector after Independence was directed towards industrialisation at the expense of smallholder productivity (Mustapha 1993). The government

pivoted to petroleum and took advantage of oil revenues to fund imprudent expenditure (Odife 1989). They enjoyed reprieve temporarily, and as the oil boom sustained, they were more confident in its longevity and became complacent. At the time of the oil price collapse, the country derived over 90% of its foreign exchange receipts from oil revenues, became import-dependent, and shielded by an overvalued naira (Olukoshi 1993, 1996). By 1983, the crisis had reached a precipice, and the sitting President Shehu Shagari solicited the guidance of the IMF, which then preconditioned their SAP loans on trade liberalisation, currency devaluation, austerity, and mass privatisation (Herbst and Olukoshi 1994). The Shagari administration was hesitant to meet these conditions given that they were politically contentious.

A military coup on December 31st, 1983, installed General Muhammadu Buhari as Head of State and during this regime he implemented austerity and currency devaluation (Herbst and Olukoshi 1994). Still, the IMF determined that these measures were insufficient to address the underlying financial challenges and thus suspended Nigeria's borrowing capacity. Soon after, in 1985, General Ibrahim Babangida ousted Buhari, and due to the severity of the country's debt position, he strategically circumvented public opposition to usher in policies that met the IMF's conditions (Abdulraheem and Olukoshi 1986). Finally, the onset of SAP commenced in Nigeria. Although previous administrations resisted SAP implementation due to the political implications, and the World Bank and IMF were able to push it given the urgency involved, none prioritised restructuring the economy to address the underlying causes that precipitated the crisis; for instance, the heavy reliance on oil and mismanagement of resources (Olukoshi 1993, 1996).

Neoliberal policies did not resolve the economic crisis as promised. By the mid-1990s, poverty, unemployment, and inflation had ballooned; the financial, health, education, manufacturing, and oil sectors were failing; trade liberalisation had induced capital flight as opposed to foreign investment; non-oil exports shrank at the same time that petroleum revenues were declining; the accessibility and quality of urban housing and transportation degraded; the naira rate was volatile; and the government was unable to balance its budgets or repay its loans (Babawale et al 1996; Dozie 2009). One more ramification of the SAP was increased informalisation of labour. According to Meagher and Yunusa (1996), the proportion of informality within the urban workforce had risen from 50% in the late 1970s to 65% within the span of one decade. The International Labour Organization estimated that this number has now exceeded 70% (ILO 2018). More and more people turned to the informal economy to secure their livelihoods in the face of unemployment, income insecurity, the need for supplementary household income, and the absence of welfare, but the patterns of inclusion into the informal economy were uneven

(Meagher and Yunusa 1996). Most of the new entrants were absorbed into low-wage activities that were more precarious.

There were two dominant viewpoints put forward to shed light on why privatisation, currency devaluation, and withdrawal of the state from social service provision, were not the appropriate remedies needed to reduce vulnerability among Nigerians in the 1980s. The first was that the economic crisis was caused by the exogenous oil market disruption, while the second theory argued that the mismanagement of resources during the oil boom, and especially the Shagari administration, brought on the economic slump (Olukoshi 1993). Olukoshi posits that these factors both served to catalyse the emergency that was inevitable given the internal tensions and irregularities in Nigeria's pattern of economic development post-Independence. In the end, the World Bank accepted criticisms of SAP and at the start of the new millennium began to promote their Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP) and subsequently, the social risk management framework, though both approaches remain grounded in neoliberalism (Johnson 2005).

General Sani Abacha took over from Babangida in 1993, and the inauguration of President Olusegun Obasanjo in 1999 marked the end of 16 years of military rule. The new government adopted the PRSPs and established their domestic National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS), in compliance with the neoliberal agenda (Adejumobi 2011; Olukoshi 2007). For eight years, Obasanjo's government spearheaded neoliberal reform with the support of technocrats who were previously affiliated with the World Bank (Ekanade 2014). The government pursued privatisation – most notably of the telecommunications, power, and pensions industries – trading public ownership for a model which positioned the government in an oversight role with the private sector as executor. The government's privatisation project was shrouded in many allegations of corruption: neopatrimonialism, contentious valuations, and insider trading practices (Adejumobi 2011). The 2015 – 2023 Buhari administration also reinforced neoliberalism through initiatives such as the Economic Growth and Recovery Plan which continued to place an emphasis on the private sector as the engine of growth for the economy (Nigeria 2017).

The economy recovered as GDP grew steadily during the early 2000s and continued to for a while after thanks to telecommunications, construction, manufacturing, services, agriculture, banking, and entertainment (Adejumobi 2011; AFDB 2012; NBS 2010). As it turns out though, despite this sustained economic growth (measured with GDP), poverty and unemployment persisted, with figures reaching 35.2% and 23.9% respectively between 2009 and 2011 (World Bank 2014). The Nigerian economy receded again due to the oil crises in 2014 and 2016, as

well as the global pandemic in 2020 (Kuyoro and Twum 2023). For these reasons, Nigeria's economic performance fell short of the optimistic predictions that included the country as one of the 21st Century's top emerging economies, leading instead to the Brookings Institution branding it as the 'poverty capital of the world' given the rate of extreme poverty in the country (Kharas et al 2018). The COVID-19 pandemic was a massive shock to the system, with the National Bureau of Statistics estimating that 63% of Nigerians now meet the criteria for multidimensional poverty, and most of the poverty is concentrated in the north, especially within rural areas (NBS 2022). The World Bank predicts that this poverty trend will not stabilise until 2026 (World Bank 2024).

In September 1986 when the SAP was first implemented, the naira was N2.02 to the dollar. Within May 2021 when I started my fieldwork, both the apex and parallel rates hovered around N400-600 per dollar. 2023 saw the ascension of Bola Ahmed Tinubu to the presidency. He immediately carried out foreign exchange reforms to float the naira and unify the official and black-market rates. This action exploded the volatility of the currency, so that by the new year (January 2024) the naira had lost 98% of its value (after roughly 7 months of the new policy), and before the end of March 2024, buying only \$1 cost N1618. Though economists may feel confident that this new rate reflected the market better than when the Central Bank intervened to prop up its value, companies found it difficult to do business. Many multinationals exited the country, and foreign airlines suspended flights to Nigeria or adopted stringent payment policies until the \$700 million foreign exchange backlog was cleared (Bloomberg 2024; Punch 2024). The Daily Trust newspaper reported that President Buhari illegally borrowed N23 trillion (\$50 billion) from the Central Bank in January 2023, only months before stepping down from his eight-year regime, without disclosing details of how the money was spent (Daily Trust 2024). This fuelled the increase of consumer price index inflation, which was around 12% in 2012, 8% in 2014, 5% in 2019, rose to 22.4% in May 2023, and finally reached a rate of 31.7% in 2024 (World Bank 2014, 2023, 2024).

5.1.2. The Portrait of Vulnerability

The economic crises outlined in Section 5.1.1. were paralleled by insecurity crises in the north, which were intensified during the ethnic and religious tensions of the 1980s, that were further politicised by various administrations (Magbadelo 2003). Lately, insecurity in the region has taken the form of insurgency, terrorism, kidnapping for ransom, violence from herders against farmers, and establishment of the militant Islamist terror group known as Boko Haram. These have led to significant loss of life and livelihoods, and the displacement of entire communities. However, although 35% of informal workers cited insecurity as a concern, they were mostly

preoccupied with alleviating the economic strain it caused. They remarked on how the herdsmen crisis, for instance, impacted butchery businesses and people's ability to provide for themselves through subsistence farming. Many elderly people in the north are peasant farmers and their inability to farm on their land places their income and consumption at risk. These sentiments were communicated by an elderly butcher in Yola and one hawker in Abuja:

Butchers buy cows from herdsmen, but they aren't peaceful. Where would you meet with them to buy a cow? The herdsmen migrate seasonally now whereas they used to stay in the same place before. We already complain about the high prices for cows, and once they leave during harmattan the cows get even more expensive. – Interview #100 (Translated from Fulfulde)

You know what it's like in northern Nigeria. The insecurity crisis is serious. There are farms that people could combine efforts to farm on, but no one farms anymore. Most of our parents are farmers, not traders. But now they must stay home. – Interview #044 (Translated from Hausa)

A diminished pathway to formal employment forces many people into the informal economy. Albeit that there are those who willingly participate in informal work, respondents in the low-income group with less education stated that the lack of formal jobs was a deterrent to school attendance, and they were incentivised to join the informal economy early so that they could begin to contribute to their household incomes. In certain instances, even when they manage to attain university education, strained circumstances can turn them to the informal economy, as was the case with two male hawkers in Abuja – one, a chemistry graduate who sold liquid detergent at motor parks and markets, and a former schoolteacher who left his job due to inconsistent pay. This move into low-income activities, though they offer opportunities to earn a minimal wage, could be to the detriment of participants, making it harder to prepare for old age or cope with current economic conditions. Few people felt that they can manage their risks through hard work alone and 35% of low-income men noted that they earn inconsistent incomes during an inflationary period when goods are more expensive. One load carrier in Yola expressed how food inflation has impacted his earning capacity:

Only those who buy food in bulk have need for us, but people don't have enough money to do as much food shopping as they used to before. Back then, N1000 worth of red peppers filled at least 2 or 3 bags, but now N2000 worth barely fills a bag. – Interview #118 (Translated from Fulfulde)

He explained that fewer shoppers need him, and even among the shoppers who enlist his services, many pay less than they used to. According to his observations, more people are taking on load carrier work as they join the informal economy since it requires very little capital, but that means that his competition for jobs has increased. Up to 20% of the low-income group noted that their daily incomes often did not stretch far enough to cover daily food expenses. 10% mentioned that they had trouble with food costs during the pandemic lockdown, and over 30% still struggled with food expenses. Respondents in Abuja were 50% more likely to report on the impact that food inflation had on their standard of living, and it posed a more significant

challenge for women, with 45% of them identifying it as a key issue. A retired butcher in Yola spoke of how, for the first time in his life, he is no longer capable of providing suitable meals to his young children. I accepted his invitation to his home and arrived there in the morning to find each of his children drinking cups of a watered-down version of a hot beverage called *gari* in Fulfulde (or *kunu* in Hausa) – made using raw peanut butter, tamarind, and fermented millet flour – which he said they would have to manage until he found a way to feed them again in the evening so that they could go to sleep. He added:

There's nothing you can tell a child if they're hungry except to say, "Here, eat this". That's all they can understand. They don't know about endurance or poverty. – Interview #101 (Translated from Fulfulde)

Due to the proportion of their incomes that went towards feeding, low-income respondents fell short of meeting other expenses. 30% of female household heads in the low-income group found it difficult to pay rent, and one hawker in Yola disclosed that he lives in a room occupied by nine other tenants. Over 25% of low-income respondents and 20% of the elderly struggled to pay school fees for their children, and they revealed that their children were frequently sent away from school due to non-payment. Despite their recognition of the long-term effects of sporadic school attendance, they were at a loss as to what to do when their earnings barely covered food expenses. Elderly respondents also faced challenges with meeting their basic needs. The most common expense for that group was healthcare. 25% of elderly respondents encountered serious healthcare issues that jeopardised their financial stability. They worried about how they would continue to manage since they have no emergency funds.

Women engaged in food trade experienced setbacks in their businesses due to food inflation. Additionally, women encountered mounting pressures to supplement their household incomes or assume sole financial responsibility. Marital status differed between high-income and low-income women; 65% of the former were married, compared to 40% of the latter. Low-income women were disproportionately affected by household pressures. 65% of them headed single income households. In contrast with the 45% of high-income women who claimed they only joined the informal economy voluntarily to gain financial independence from their husbands, the married low-income workers stated that they needed to compensate for their husbands' meagre incomes – they contributed financially towards food, clothing, rent, school fees, utilities and other household expenses – while still bearing responsibility for social reproduction (care work and domestic duties). After enduring long workdays, they are denied rest as they must attend to cooking and childcare upon arriving home. Following her husband's retirement, one elderly petty trader in Yola found herself dependent on her trade, a sharp change from when her husband generated most of their income. She pointed that out that her burden is greater,

as she is taking on the added responsibility amid a harsher economic climate and at an older age.

Yet another troubling challenge faced by female informal workers pertains to their poor work conditions, particularly in interactions with customers. Despite the stigma and maltreatment that they endure, low-income women soldier on with their work out of necessity, as they rely on their incomes to secure their livelihoods. During our interview, a groundnut hawker in Yola outlined her experience with sexual harassment:

There are people who see you hawking and assume you're on the street for sex work. They insult us and steal from us. We face a lot of issues in this work. You could get raped or groped. It's difficult for women, especially Muslim women. They believe that hawking is inappropriate, so if you do it anyway, you get abused. – Interview #130 (Translated from Fulfulde)

To a lighter extent, respondents with high incomes also grappled with the impacts of inflation. Over 40% of high-income earners observed that it had become harder to do business as customers prioritise food, education, and healthcare over the goods and services they offer. They feel that they bear the burden of inflation given that profit margins set too high within the economic climate would stifle demand. The men in this group who sell imported textiles and car parts must also contend with the volatile foreign exchange rate and border tariffs. 60% of them mentioned that tariffs and the foreign exchange rate impact their profits, making it harder to import and more costly to restock. As stated by a textile trader in Yola:

We face challenges because of the rate of the dollar. When Goodluck Jonathan was [President], \$10 was about N3000 but now \$1 is N570 in the parallel market and even then, there is difficulty in accessing dollars unlike before. The margin [between the apex and parallel market] is very high. People are prioritising their needs. There has been no increment in their salaries but there has been a devaluation of the naira. When there is devaluation of the naira, indirectly there is going to be hardship in the economy. – Interview #142

He elaborated on the increasing complexities which come with the closure of the land borders and custom clearance bottlenecks at the Lagos border. Moreover, those who opt to purchase their goods domestically are at the mercy of their suppliers. Suppliers became cautious about extending credit for sales, compelling businessmen to adopt cash-based procurement of their entire inventories. Thus, given the need to restock in bulk and after long periods – to obtain the cash required by liquidating enough merchandise – and the rapid fluctuation of the naira, they cannot predict future naira rates or adjust their prices to account for the changes that occur in the interim between buying and restocking. Sometimes they choose to sell at a loss just to increase cash flow. As a result, three of the high-income respondents admitted that they had to downsize their businesses, two said they can no longer afford to employ others,

and one high-income woman in Yola had to share her shop in the market because she could no longer afford to pay the rent on her own.

Informal workers face extreme, diverse, and individualised risks. Given these conditions, they tend to adopt more conservative risk management strategies as they focus on survival. Those on the lower end of the income spectrum continue to work well into old age, select trades that require less capital, do odd jobs, or transition into different work seasonally depending on what is more productive – for example, a load carrier might choose to move into farm labour to take advantage of sowing or harvesting seasons. On the other hand, high-income respondents managed their risks by running multiple businesses or diversifying their income streams, such as through rental income. In some instances, they also chose to downsize, curtail costs, or sell cheaper products. By focusing on risk and resilience, welfare approaches can sometimes have a blind spot to the underlying factors which cause a differentiation in strategies. It is not higher competence that allows high earners to take on more risks or adopt less dysfunctional strategies. Even though they were much more educated – 43.9% had post-secondary school education, in contrast with only 9.75% in the low-income group – the techniques they adopted were more correlated with their incomes than their education level. For one load carrier in Yola, a sense of hopelessness was evident:

Every day, come health or illness, good or bad tidings, I work to make money to buy food. If I get some income today, I may not get any tomorrow. Life is too hard for me, and I have no control over it. I am waiting for Allah's will. Sometimes I leave home at 6am and my children have nothing to eat until I return with food at 6pm. They don't even have food to eat at home, talk more of going to school. My good health is our only asset. If I am not well and I can't come to work, everything will descend into chaos. – Interview #117 (Translated from Fulfulde).

Of course, it appears as though his attempts to fend for himself had already become chaotic. The less income people made, the more prone they were to engage in dysfunctional coping mechanisms. For instance, even though 23% of respondents across all categories indicated that they eat less frequently or changed their diets to less nutritious meals, those with lower incomes were nearly three times as likely to adapt using this approach. During the pandemic lockdown especially, many admitted to going hungry, resorting to spoiled food, or animal feed in lieu of suitable alternatives. A small subset of respondents chose to convert their capital to channel towards food-related expenses, though that created medium-term consequences that they were yet to recover from over a year later. Others pulled their children out of school or incurred debt to cope with financial obligations. The coping mechanisms that people turn to in crisis force them to compromise on nutrition, health, education, and income security, with potentially detrimental long-term effects. What is significant is not only their chosen course of action, but the tools at their disposal. That determined their abilities to be resilient enough to

cope in the short-term, mitigate old-age risks, and extend support to people in their social networks.

	% Low-Income	% High-Income	% Elderly
Highest Educational Attainment			
Secondary Education	46.34	41.46	15
Post-Secondary Education	9.75	43.9	10
Cite as a Key Concern			
Insecurity	46.34	12.5	60
Food Inflation	31.70	24.39	15
Basic Needs	56.09	9.75	40

Table 5.1: Breakdown of educational attainment and key concerns

Source: Author

5.2. The Hollowed Shield of Informal Social Protection

The metaphor of a hollowed shield captures the tension between the appearance of perceived security and the actual effectiveness of informal social protection. The shield is not gone, but it has been hollowed out – compromised, with reduced capacity to protect. While it still holds considerable value, it can no longer withstand the same level of strain as before. There is an expectation that informal social protection will fill the gaps left by the state and the market. People are supposed to fall back on their social networks in the event of state and market failure. Yet, in the face of neoliberal policies, state and market crises are undermining informal social protection mechanisms as well since people have fewer resources to share with family and community. The Nigerian government seems to take it for granted that kinship networks can continue to uphold welfare needs even as we see that neoliberal policies diminish their capacity to do so.

5.2.1. Deterioration in the Wake of Economic Pressures

As discussed in the previous chapter, care for the elderly in northern Nigeria traditionally fell within the extended family's purview. More recently, researchers have noted an evolution of these roles, with an emerging trend of a nuclearization of families thus undermining extended family systems and elderly support (Ani and Isiugo-Abanihe 2017; Gesinde et al 2012). This shift in obligations places the onus of care squarely on adult children of elderly parents, posing serious implications for a future where adult children are incapable of caring for their parents at a level on par with historical standards (Togonu-Bickersteth and Akinyemi 2014). Whereas

kinship systems in the past benefitted from wider networks, as families become more nuclear, there are fewer members available to provide quality care. When this occurs in tandem with significant economic pressures, providers quickly become squeezed beyond their limits.

Informal workers migrate to urban areas for work, leaving their families behind in villages, and the physical detachment is credited for weakened social ties (Akanle and Olutayo 2012; Ani and Isiugo-Abanibe 2017). Oppong (2006) posits that migration – alongside broader economic pressures and demographic shifts – contributed to cultural shifts that eroded the capacity to retain traditional values which elderly people relied upon for protection, now leaving them discarded. This notion of a cultural values shift was similarly articulated by Togonu-Bickersteth (1987, 1989) when she expressed shock at the appearance of old people's homes in urban areas, interpreting it as evidence of their waning status. On the other hand, there has been some evidence that when people migrate in search for work, they maintain their social bonds and continue to give bidirectional transfers (Chukwuezi 2001). Even amid hardship, parents were seldom left without any support (Peil 1991). What became common was the escalation of resource constraints due to inflation. Older people were increasingly compelled to postpone retirement and maintain assistance for their adult children (Ani and Isiugo-Abanibe 2017).

Migrants cultivate social connections at their new destinations and these commitments are based on mutual obligation (Akanle and Olutayo 2012; Apt and Gricco 1994). Akanle and Olutayo found that kinship systems did evolve. That is, they expanded to include friendships rooted in instrumental value rather than simply prioritising kinship ties. Migrants joined ethnic unions and attended village meetings where they offered financial support to each other – though SAP-induced economic crises weakened the potential of these efforts (Meagher and Yunusa 1996). Nigerians, women especially, place importance on socialising by engaging in ceremonial rituals including during weddings or after childbirth, care for each other's children, and aid in times of illness or bereavement (Ebimgbo et al 2021; Werthmann 2002).

Across all income groups, respondents agreed that people are no longer as generous as they used to be, and a small minority attribute this to a cultural shift. Community leaders – pastors in particular – claimed that people now abandon their responsibilities to their parents due to individualism and hedonism. Approximately half of respondents (regardless of income) do not support their parents regularly. There is some sense that their parents' needs are secondary to their plans to establish their livelihoods. Additionally, high earners tended to have parents who also enjoyed relatively successful careers, hence there was less requirement to allocate aid to them, and this behaviour is gradually becoming more socially acceptable. One spare parts trader in Abuja explained how culture has been reshaped to fit economic realities:

People created cultures according to what life they were living back in then. If you're applying old cultures to now, it would be off balance. You create your own culture, modify the old ones. The one that won't suit you, throw it away. Then, people were living within their villages with kin, so the relationships were close. You can't expect that it would work the same way. I have to question it. If it's going to pull me back, no way, I'm not doing it. – Interview #007

Half of each group, low-income workers and the elderly, receive no aid at all from extended family. Two elderly respondents, both from the southeastern region, implied that damaged relationships with their relatives over land disputes impede on their retirement plans. Elderly respondents with no children had little confidence in their access to kinship support, even from their siblings, and were anxious about their future prospects. Fewer than 35% of respondents extend aid to their siblings. This data underscores a large gap in informal social protection, and it highlights how the extent of support can be disrupted by fractured relationships. During our interview, a hawker in Abuja narrated that her siblings disowned her when she converted to Islam to marry her ex-husband. After her divorce, and since her parents had passed away, she was devoid of any concrete form of support and she worried that reverting to Christianity to reconcile with her siblings could result in her losing custody of her children.

The low-income participants highlighted the risks of maltreatment when turning to relatives for help. Roughly 25% of low-income respondents stated that they would never even ask. They expressed that relatives with some means distance themselves from those who are less fortunate, and there is limited scope for vertical transfers. Based on the account of a load carrier in Yola:

They don't ask me if I need anything. We only exchange greetings. They won't ask because they don't want me to make any requests. If you say you want to get married, they all contribute happily and it's a joyous occasion. But if you ask them to help you set up a business, they won't do it. – Interview #119 (Translated from Hausa)

Relatives seem to have redefined mutual obligation, confining it to prosocial practices such as condolence visits and gift sharing for ceremonies. While those gestures are welcomed, they may come across as superficial if the recipient in question requires robust welfare support. The low-income earners affirmed the concept of the nuclearization of families, remarking that extended family members give more substantial support to dependents living in the same households. This nuclearization exposes elderly people to more vulnerability if they do not share residences with other family members. According to a hawker in Yola:

Truthfully, my uncles don't help me. People used to help before, but not anymore. They only help people who live in the same compound. Your uncles don't care that you're poor. – Interview #133 (Translated from Fulfulde)

But low-income respondents also stated that they avoided interactions with their rich relatives. There is a risk of abuse of asymmetrical power dynamics present in vertical transfers (Morduch 1999). The history of patron-client relationships in the developing world creates the conditions for richer households to exploit the unpaid labour of the poor, in exchange for little protection during periods of adversity. Indeed, this pattern was noted among my respondents, a few of whom had experienced this kind of relationship on either side of the equation. But what was more common was that low-income informal workers detached from wealthier relatives in anticipation of rejection or maltreatment. Wood and Gough (2006) shed light on the distinction between rights and obligations people demand from their governments, and those they seek from their families. In this case, low-income informal workers did not expect rights fulfilment from the government or their families *per se* but seemed to have internalised the principles of human rights – including the vocabulary of dignity, freedom, and equality – and the discourse of individualism to express that they would rather fend for themselves through work, even at the cost of enduring hardship, than accept exploitation within their interpersonal relationships.

That said, high-income workers in Yola express feeling fatigued by the burden of care to their nuclear families, extended families, and in-laws. To cope with the demands, they choose to focus mostly on their spouses and children. Below is a quote from my interviews on this subject, from an auto parts trader in Abuja:

If my children have not eaten and somebody comes to me to say, “Please, we haven’t eaten”, do I carry the food my children are supposed to eat to give to that person? I would have to be mad. I am supposed to take care of myself and my children then any remainder can be used to help others. – Interview #091

Notwithstanding the trader’s use of hyperbole, the rationale for constricting kinship networks can be likened to a metaphor of putting your own oxygen mask on first before helping others. While it is unlikely that high earners are making decisions about whether to forego food, given that their finances are constrained, they must consider opportunity costs. Modern problems are different and kinship practices from the past are ill-equipped to handle them. Precolonial societies had simpler needs, primarily centred around sustenance. Today, people deploy their financial resources for expensive education, healthcare, housing, fuel, and electricity. The small fraction of people with ample means (who now live in a country that has been designated as the poverty capital of the world), isolate themselves or draw strict boundaries to cope with the scale of requests they receive.

65% of high earners cite finances as the reason why they restricted support to their extended family. People call asking for help, wrongly assuming their rich relatives have more disposable income than they truly possess. The people calling do not consider that their relatives may be

asset rich – owning businesses with millions of naira worth of inventory – but cash-strapped due to the experiences of slow sales and low demand. This misperception is also rooted in an incomplete view of the costs associated with maintaining a higher standard of living, including premium housing, education, and other services, suggesting that informal mechanisms do not always fully address information asymmetries, thus creating unrealistic expectations regarding the level of support that wealthier individuals can provide. The issue lies not in shifts in values or culture, but in economic realities. As stated by a tailor and a food shop owner in Yola:

There's no way you can help everyone. The person who your support doesn't extend to, no matter what, he'll say you don't help others. Some people assume you have enough money to help them, but you don't. If you fail to help, they're convinced you just refused to, when the truth is that you don't have the ability to. It doesn't feel good, but it's part of life. – Interview #166 (Translated from Hausa)

As long as you have family, they must call you. If you have N10 million, they will expect you to spend N9 million on them and they would still not be pleased. You can only do what you can do. You can't please people and displease yourself. You can't fix the problems of everybody in your family. They'll be telling you that you're stingy, meanwhile you've done more than enough for them. – Interview #158

In much of the literature on informal social protection, the assumption has been that wealthier people exploit their less affluent relatives by providing meagre financial support in exchange for loyalty, cheap labour, or other forms of dependence (Morduch 1999). But aside from the agency demonstrated by low-income workers rejecting vertical transfers, high-income workers seemed to perceive a potential inversion of the power dynamic, wherein their financial status made them vulnerable to manipulation, particularly by relatives who may impose emotional or moral obligations on them. This perceived threat shapes their interactions, encouraging them to adopt a more defensive posture by setting firm boundaries to protect themselves from what they deem to be excessive or unjustified support. If the calculus of what is 'owed' to family members changes, this can lead to an erosion of the core values of the traditional system. For elderly care, such shifts in reciprocity norms may undermine the assumed obligation younger people have towards older relatives. If both high and low-income groups are protecting against exploitation, they would be less willing to engage in kinship support, and elder care may suffer. Having said that, cultural changes are not the reason for the decline in support as people still feel that they owe that duty but there is a danger in this becoming the case if adversity persists. What is in dispute is how to negotiate when, to whom, how much, and how often to provide this support (or request it) given their financial pressures or whether there is emotional reward.

Informal social protection, already weakened under colonialism, has shrunk further in a context where people feel insecure in a declining economy without a social safety net. Although low-

income workers deeply mourned the absence of care, over 30% of them recognised that they were side-lined due to financial constraints. As illustrated by an elderly butcher in Yola:

People don't even need to ask. If I know they're in need and I can help, I will. Don't I want the good deeds? Isn't it good to help people? But I don't have the money, you don't have it, and the next person doesn't have it either. Who helps who? Everyone has to endure. – Interview #100 (Translated from Fulfulde)

Informal workers are mindful of the widespread adversity and acknowledged that people were much more inclined to lend a helping hand when times were better. They relate it to their own circumstances and recognise that it has also become more difficult for them to uphold their duties too. In contrast to high earners who maintain firm boundaries in their support, the low-income group were more willing to compromise their needs to enhance their family's comfort. As stated by a young hawker in Abuja: 'Yes, we all want to be successful, but I cannot watch my family suffer' (Interview #044 – Translated from Hausa). The resolve of poorer people who exhaust their incomes to improve their family's stability is generous. In situations where there are no other options, such sacrifices may even be necessary. However, it also poses a risk to their long-term livelihoods and perpetuates an intergenerational poverty trap if they cannot focus on maximising their productivity in their youth.

For all that kinship systems offer, the extent of effectiveness varies on a case-by-case basis. 35% of respondents still give to or receive support from relatives regularly. Responses in the affirmative were evenly distributed across age, gender, religion, and regional origin. For the low-income group, this flow of resources is directed primarily to siblings, whereas high earners give to their siblings and extended family alike. There is no set-up for distributing resources to elderly members of the family, and they also mainly receive assistance from their children or their siblings. As might be expected, high earners engage in two types of transfers, horizontal transfers with their peers or people with comparable finances, and vertical transfers to poorer people in their social networks. However, low-income workers interact with three categories: their peers, people of greater, as well as people of lesser financial means. Both altruistic and self-interested motives are present depending on the strength of the relationship and financial asymmetries between donor and recipient, but altruism diminishes more easily under financial strain. According to a textile trader in Abuja and a hawker in Yola:

I pay for food, clothing, healthcare, and school fees for orphans back home or relatives who are less privileged. I pay school fees for up to 13 children. Every month, I send about N150,000 to family members who need help. If I have the means, I pay. If I don't, I give what I can. – Interview #068 (Translated from Hausa)

I have an uncle who became a father figure in our household after my parents died. Whenever anything comes up, he takes care of us. So, while we don't have a father, we regard our uncle

as our father. He tells us to let him know if we have any problems instead of putting pressure on ourselves. – Interview #127 (Translated from Hausa)

Contrary to what researchers found in the past, migration no longer seems to have much of an impact on the stability of kinship bonds. Advancements in technology have facilitated much of bank transfers and communication, enabling people to maintain connections with their loved ones through phone calls. Migrants of southeastern origin above the age of 30 all had plans to return to their hometowns for retirement and thus were incentivised to nurture those bonds. Among them was one spare parts trader in Yola who was born in Adamawa state after his own father migrated there for work in the 1970s. Despite spending his whole life resident in the state, he viewed it as a temporary arrangement merely for income-generation purposes. When I asked what the difference was for him, he responded by simply saying: *'The difference is very clear. That is my fatherland'* (Interview #139). Male hawkers in both Abuja and Yola were mainly young men from the northwestern region between the ages of 18 and 27 (with the exceptions of the chemistry graduate and former schoolteacher who were 36 and 39 years old) indicating the short-term nature of the occupation. Their primary motivation for migration was to generate income sent as remittances to their families, and they continued to visit their families regularly, averaging between two to six trips annually.

For high-income respondents, especially those in Abuja, friendships play a more significant role in welfare than extended family. Over 40% of them said they give to or receive support from their friends, compared to only 22% of low-income workers. The latter group went to their friends less frequently, and even when they did, they reserved those requests for minor shocks and turned to family for anything severe. The behaviour of high-income women in Abuja made for an interesting study. They either had exceptionally close friendships or asserted that they were completely antisocial. Low-income women in Abuja also fostered friendships with people outside of their families, but unlike their more affluent counterparts who made friends at in the market, school, or during their childhoods, they were more likely to build relationships in their local communities. For those with active social lives, their friendships allowed them to express a desire for companionship. However, most respondents, even those who valued communal bonding rituals, opted not to harness those networks in difficult times to preserve their dignity and privacy.

Religious organisations also play their part. 70% of Christians confirmed that their churches offer some assistance to vulnerable groups though they concede that there is no dedicated support for the elderly. The elderly women receiving charity from church were identified as beneficiaries, not necessarily as a result of their age, but based on their status as widows.

During the pandemic lockdown, both churches and mosques ran food bank alternatives for the public. Still, low-income workers expressed that they would be too embarrassed to accept gifts from their places of worship, believing that donations should be directed towards the most impoverished people, particularly those with disabilities. Moreover, churches faced a decline in the capacity for welfare. Over 60% of churches reported feeling pressure as they contended with increasing reliance on their limited resources alongside dwindling donations. This strain underscores broader societal challenges outlined in Section 5.1.2. given that churches rely on donations from their members to fund their welfare departments.

	% Low-Income	% High-Income	% Elderly
Give Support to Relatives	14.63	19.51	25
Say Relatives Don't Support	51.22	-	50
Child → Parent Support	34.15	70.73	50
Support to Friends	21.95	41.46	10

Table 5.2: Breakdown of regular transfers to support groups

Source: Author

5.2.2. Cracks in the Foundation: The Threat to Intergenerational Bargains

As previously stated, roughly half of all informal workers maintain some level of either cash or food transfers to their parents, mostly based on requests. The benefits given by high earners were larger and they were twice as likely to offer support compared to the low-income group, yet the latter displayed more readiness to sacrifice a larger proportion of their wages. Transfers predominantly flowed from adult children to their parents but increasingly these stipends are deemed by elderly parents as insufficient to cater to their needs, and as a result 70% of elderly participants, aged 60 to 95, remained active in the informal economy to supplement their incomes. Over 20% of high-income respondents perceived their parents as financially secure through investment earnings. This group also showed a higher tendency to establish self-reliant financial strategies for their old-age protection – such as investing in land, property, or their businesses – beyond the anticipation of intergenerational obligations, and they vocalise this as a preference. Essentially, the dependence of older generations on younger generations is declining but elderly people recognise the impacts of the challenging economic climate on their children. According to one elderly woman in Abuja:

I can't sit and wait for my children [to support me]. I don't really expect much from them. When they bring anything, I thank God. If they don't, I thank God. Things are hard. What they give me is not enough, but I don't bother them. – Interview #031

Serious illness appears to be the condition driving people to overextend themselves to cater to their parents. When one elderly man in Abuja was forced into retirement due to an illness that made him immobile, his daughter arranged for him to relocate from Lagos to live with her in Abuja. His other children send money to her to contribute towards his food, accommodation, and healthcare costs, and whenever he needs extra funds, he makes personal requests. 20% of respondents said that they collaborated with their siblings in a similar fashion to share the responsibility for their parents. The extent of responsibility hinged on birth order, wealth, and geographical proximity to their parents, with the eldest sibling typically assuming the greatest load. Gender was once a determining factor in the type of care children offered to their parents – daughters did care work while sons provided finances – but increasingly informal workers in Yola observe that daughters now shoulder more of both. As articulated by a food shop owner in Yola:

It's not about who has more money, it's about who has more compassion. I have brothers, but since I am the one who actually helps the family, they call me. If my mother asks, I can't say no to her. These days, daughters do more for the extended family than sons. The men prioritise their wives and children. – Interview #167 (Translated from Fulfulde)

Finch and Mason (1990) indicated that these negotiations between siblings are influenced by gender norms and can be prone to unequal distribution. Almost 20% of informal workers and 35% of elderly respondents claimed that the working generation now prioritise their spouses and children over their parents. However, building on the previous metaphor, informal workers may simply put their oxygen masks on before they help their extended family, but from their perspective, they put their oxygen masks on first so *that* they can help their parents, believing that deferring their assistance enables them to strengthen its sustainability. Hence, parents are deprioritised, not necessarily because they are valued less or viewed as less important, but because the support directed to spouses and children is considered to be more urgent or geared towards long-term human capital investment. The plea for parents to be more patient may be rational, but it has the effect of making the parents feel as though they have been cast aside. This is what one elderly woman in Abuja had to say:

I can't retire because I have no one to take care of me. My daughters are with their husbands and my sons focus on their wives. It's not likely that they will be able to give me enough support. I'd rather avoid the conflict that will arise between my daughter-in-law and I if my son has to support me financially. There will come a time when I'd have no choice but to stop working and manage whatever I'm given, but for now, that doesn't work for me. – Interview #041 (Translated from Hausa)

Given the backdrop of Nigeria's decades-long economic deterioration, the absence of social services, and the mounting pressures on their incomes due to modern demands for expensive essentials such as food, housing, education, healthcare, and utilities, urban informal workers

find it increasingly challenging to manage these stresses. Unless a significant event, such as illness, elevates their parents' needs in the hierarchy of urgency, their only recourse is to let their parents continue to fend for themselves. But regardless of the rationale, it is hard for parents not to take it personally even if they try to understand. One elderly man in Yola spoke of the growing tension between him and his children:

I would rather not have to beg or wait for my children to support me. If they help, that's fine, but since they are also struggling to get by on their own, I can't then say that my son must support me knowing that he doesn't want to, and he'd be doing it angrily. What is the point of that? If I ask and he doesn't do it, I'd grow resentful. I don't like that. That's not good. It brings about problems and disrespect. – Interview #104 (Translated from Fulfulde)

It comes across that there already is some resentment among elderly respondents who feel cheated because they fulfilled their obligations to their parents and children during their work lives, only for their own expectations to not be met. The challenge of how to reconcile modern-day needs and stresses with traditional collectivist structures remains unresolved. Reciprocity is therefore undermined and given that filial obligations are passed on from one generation to the next, if today's working generation fails to care for their elders, it may result in their own children following suit, mirroring their actions towards their parents despite the provision for their children, and regardless of whether the economic crisis ameliorates. Although these transfers are often seen as motivated by altruism, guilt, or shame (Cox and Fafchamps 2007; Platteau 1997), it is important to note that they can affect broader family dynamics, altering relationships and introducing emotional distance between parents and children.

Be it through old age grants or kinship systems, elderly care relies on the next generation. Yet, Nigeria has a sizeable portion of the population that are born into poverty and lack the social investment required to develop their skills enough to increase the capacities to generate incomes. Additionally, there has been a gradual but steady decline of fertility rates in Nigeria meaning that working adults can anticipate that the burden on each of them to provide for their older relatives will increase (Feyisetan and Bankole 2009). To be clear, although birth rates are relatively high and the population continues to grow significantly, women are having their first children at later ages and are having fewer children overall – the total fertility rate declined from six children per woman in 1990 to 5.3 in 2018, though fertility rates in northern regions are up to twice as high as in the south (Nigeria 2018; Olowolafe et al 2023; The Economist 2023). Thus, as families have fewer children, the pool of younger, working-age adults who are traditionally expected to provide for ageing relatives shrinks, thereby heightening the financial and caregiving burden on each individual within the family.

Some elderly informal workers appear to expect support or retirement security based solely on age. This expectation aligns with the concept of retirement as a life stage, where individuals anticipate withdrawal from the workforce, perhaps supported by pensions or family systems. On the other hand, communities, particularly in lower-income contexts, may prioritise support for elderly individuals based on their immediate needs, such as frailty, illness, or destitution. This shifts the focus from age as the main criterion for support to the vulnerability that comes with economic precarity or physical decline. For low-income groups, older individuals may not necessarily expect to retire simply because they reach a certain age, but rather may hope for financial assistance only when they are no longer able to work or earn an income. As families and communities experience financial strain, the ability or willingness to provide support may diminish, which could increase the burden on elderly people who are already vulnerable.

5.3. When Inclusion Harms: State Interventions in Crisis

Sections 1 and 2 of this chapter delved into the economic and social risks confronting informal workers. What follows is an exploration of their political risks. Welfare approaches propose for states to offer protection against covariate risks such as economic recessions or pandemics, but the Nigerian government has not achieved this to any significant effect. On the other hand, the rights-based approach views the state as the most crucial and protective actor in ensuring welfare provision. But aside from the question of whether the Nigerian government can remedy the effects of neoliberalism, research indicates that it actively contributes to the marginalisation of informal workers, suppressing and harassing them instead of protecting their livelihoods. The analysis in this section will start here, before examining the conditions surrounding the disbursement of food transfers during the pandemic and determining that the history of welfare retrenchment impacted how the government responded to the crisis with palliative measures that were insufficient to limit the extent of the vulnerability of informal workers.

5.3.1. Informal Workers on the Margins

Chen (2007) elucidates the importance of recognising the contributions of informal workers to the economy when regulating their activities. Instead of regarding them as inherently illegal or as nuisances, she argues for formalisation, social protection, and workers' rights policies. In her paper, she gives the example of municipal governments that approach street trade with either neglect or harassment. The reality is that most African governments will face significant obstacles in making street trade invisible, yet they persist in this goal through violent measures (Ferguson 2007). In *Classify, Exclude, Police*, Fourchard (2021) traces the marginalisation of informal workers, as well as their perceived association with criminality, back to the colonial

era. Today, permission to use these spaces is negotiated between those in authority positions and disempowered actors. According to a load carrier in Wuse market, Abuja:

You run into issues with Task Force if you don't have enough money to rent a shop. The only thing we can do is hide from them when we know they're around. This is how we survive. They want us to either leave the market or rent shops so we can pay rent and a service charge. But rent can cost up to N1 million. If they're not benefitting from you, they harass you, arrest you, and take you to the police station. They don't investigate; they just label you as a tout and ask you to pay bail. – Interview #065 (Translated from Hausa)

In a bid to design a capital city aligned with urban planning principles of “aesthetics and spatial order”, the government established a Ministerial Task Force for the Environment in 2016 to amplify the efforts of the Abuja Environmental Protection Board (AEPB) Task Force, which by virtue of the AEPB Act had already been patrolling hubs in the city, scapegoating street traders for loitering, and prosecuting them under questionable legality (Adama 2021; Adisa et al 2023). Low-income informal workers in Abuja bemoaned the actions of the Task Force. Despite not being legally required to register their activities, street traders made an effort to abide by the spirit of the law. Their merchandise is lawful, and they strive to accumulate enough savings to set up larger businesses. Although they attempted to adapt to the circumstances, they were in a constant state of anxiety over the Task Force arresting them arbitrarily, confiscating, and destroying their goods. A load carrier in Wuse market who hawks part-time expressed:

I'm trying to find a lawful way to make money, but Task Force seized my goods. If I steal, they'll arrest me. If I beg, they'll arrest me. If I hawk, they'll arrest me. It's too much. What do they want me to do? My heart keeps telling me to go back to crime [because it is more worthwhile]. They should get out of my way and let me hustle. – Interview #066 (Translated from Hausa)

For high-income workers, government harassment manifests differently. Although they inform me that, even when registered with the Corporate Affairs Commission, they do not file federal corporate taxes, they fall under the jurisdiction of local governments which have the authority to tax informal businesses in their territories. These taxes are collected sporadically several times a year and are enforced through periodic inspections. Businesses found to be tax non-compliant are either temporarily shut down or have their goods seized. From the perspective of business owners, this constitutes harassment. They argue that there is no clear accessible framework outlining which taxes are levied against them, the amount they are required to pay, and the expected timing of these charges. One elderly participant who worked as a carpenter on a busy road in Idu, Abuja showed me an evacuation notice (see photo below) he was given by people who identified themselves as Abuja Municipal Area Council representatives. He was confused as he had settled that year's taxes, so he appealed to his union for intervention, but suspected that this was merely a ploy to extort bribes from them if they wished to continue

operating in the area. Over 20% of high-income workers felt that taxes were unjustified. One voice amid a chorus of similar complaints, a salon owner in Yola, emphasised:

This issue of [taxes] makes me consider closing shop because it is too much. Board of Internal Revenue, Commerce and Industry, Environmental, Fire Service, everyone comes to collect. We also have other costs [of business]. We buy stock and pay electricity. They didn't help us come up and they keep us down. If you don't pay, they close your shop. – Interview #161 (Translated from Hausa)

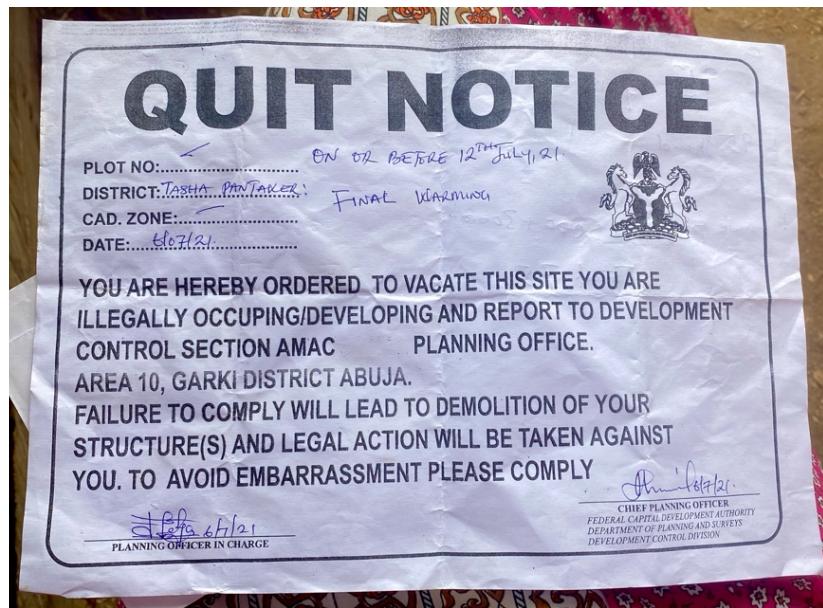


Figure 5.1: Quit notice for evacuation

Source: Author

While taxes are widely considered to be a means of building social contracts and establishing channels for state accountability, Meagher (2018) refuted this notion in Nigeria's case, arguing that the social contract in Nigeria is fragmented because informal workers recognise that paid taxes do not guarantee access to public services or protection. As a result, the perception of the government as inefficient and oppressive has been reinforced among informal workers. These tactics, directed towards both high and low-income workers, hinder their efforts to earn a living. The broader tension between informal activities and formal regulatory environments results in the alienation of informal actors and they increasingly view the state as the source of their problems, not the provider of solutions. As a result, they employ evasion strategies while addressing their own needs independently. As hinted at by the load carrier, this erosion of trust can lead to social unrest, but they also undermine the government's legitimacy.

5.3.2. Neoliberal Scars, Palliative Bandages

The pandemic lockdown presented an opportunity for the Nigerian government to mend the social contract. Globally, governments were extending social assistance to their citizens, and

given the size of Nigeria's informal economy, where many rely on daily incomes, there was a pressing need to provide benefits to support low-income informal workers if asking them to stay home. However, due to prolonged underfunding of state infrastructure for social welfare delivery, the country's response was found lacking. Only 4% of respondents acquired any food or cash transfers. When I asked about what she received from the government during the pandemic, a street sweeper in Yola offered a concise reply: 'Sai bone' meaning 'Only suffering' (Interview #112 – translated from Fulfulde). The government heightened their campaign to overregulate informality cloaked in the pretext of safeguarding public health. For a hawker in Abuja:

I was forced to return home to Katsina during lockdown. I had to. They were beating people to send them away from the streets. They weren't letting us hawk so we had to go back home and there too we couldn't buy or sell anything. I really suffered because I couldn't make an income and our food stores finished. Hawking is how we make the money we need to buy food so of course we suffered. – Interview #042 (Translated from Hausa)

As part of social protection efforts to address pandemic challenges, the government passed an Economic Stimulus Bill for businesses; promised N20,000 cash transfers to the 2.6 million households on the National Social Register; committed to distribute food transfers through the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management and Social Development; and offered interest-free loans through the Central Bank (Dixit et al 2020). There was no special pandemic relief programme for informal workers. Hence, the pandemic exposed the intrinsic vulnerability of informal workers in the context of their relationship with their governments. Gallien and van den Boogaard (2021) argue that the nature and effectiveness of social assistance designed to address the crisis showed the politics of the relationship between the informal economy and the state. They emphasise that informal workers remain invisible to the state because of the overlap between that group and marginalised, disenfranchised people. That the responsibility that the state feels towards its citizens is not a neutral concept, it depends on the political context of interactions they have with diverse populations.

The policies, at least, were consistent with those of other sub-Saharan African countries (Bamu et al 2022). Sadly, Nigeria did not deliver on these assurances. The breadth and depth of its response was weak, notwithstanding the allegations of corrupt practices (Gruzd et al 2020; Okolie et al 2022). News coverage during that period was inundated with stories of how the economic ramifications of lockdown overshadowed health effects (Busari and Salaudeen 2020; Human Rights Watch 2020; Onyekwena and Ekeruche 2020; Quartz Africa 2020). Moreover, there was scarce support for the elderly even though the virus disproportionately affects this demographic (Adedeji et al 2023). Then, unexpectedly, in October 2020 amid unrelated nationwide protests, it came to light that state governments 'hoarded' stockpiles of

so-called palliatives and thousands of young people around the country broke into warehouses to loot the food (The Guardian 2020). Commenting on the scandal, an elderly man and a high-income clothes shop owner remarked:

When they broke into the warehouse, they found many things. I was there. I also took some. We were hungry during the pandemic. They told us not to go out. If the government had shared it, people wouldn't have done something like this. – Interview #036

When people started breaking into warehouses to take palliatives, you couldn't blame them much because they were supposed to be shared. Some already spoiled. So why were they hoarding it when people were hungry and staying at home? – Interview #084

In an attempt to defend their actions, a senior official within the local government in Yola claimed that they intended to distribute the food supplies the day following the breach of the warehouse. However, no evidence was put forward to substantiate this assertion, and it does not explain why the food was discovered spoiled several months after lockdown had ended (Reuters 2020). The state governments tapped into their existing distribution channels for the disbursement of the palliatives. This entailed relying on traditional leaders and their proxies to share to targeted groups in public at food centres. Informal workers found the lack of privacy; disorderly distribution given that the centres were overcrowded, and fights were breaking out; disregard for social distancing protocols; and inadequacy and indignity – they reported that they would have had to stand all day in the sun to receive a cup of rice, instant noodles, and three stock cubes – to be wholly unacceptable. Once again the senior local government official endeavoured to defend the government. He insisted that the centres are a logistics cost-saving measure, emphasising the significant attendance from people who are poorer than informal workers owing to pervasive poverty levels in the community.

The analysis of Nigeria's pandemic response highlights critical issues about the country's approach to social protection and the broader implications for transforming social policy. The absence of a special relief programme for informal workers underscores how social protection systems often fail to meet the needs of the most vulnerable, thus reinforcing social inequalities. Furthermore, the way the state handled social protection during the pandemic also illustrates the limited responsibility the state feels towards informal workers, revealing deeper issues with the eroding social contract between citizens and the state, as well as the limited effectiveness of this kind of compartmentalisation of social policy. While emphasising the limited utility of cash transfers as a mechanism for development, Adesina (2020) also directs attention to the 'policy merchandising' of this instrument, explaining how foreign technocrats recommend it as a way to ensure political legitimacy and electability. Nonetheless, not even for this reason, did the Nigerian government mobilise to target low-income informal workers who rely on daily earnings and therefore struggled to scrape by during the state-enforced pandemic lockdown.

5.4. Concluding Thoughts

The analysis in this chapter underscores that neoliberalism has fallen short in addressing the deep-seated challenges facing low-income and elderly populations, particularly in the context of Nigeria's evolving socioeconomic dynamics. The legacy of neoliberalism in the country both catalysed and left it ill-prepared for the economic collapse that followed. Initially promoted as remedies for economic crises, neoliberal policies instead exacerbated poverty and inequality, undermining the capacity of the state, market, and family to provide adequate welfare. Despite the conventional expectation that informal social protection should compensate for state and market failures, the disintegration of kinship networks due to economic pressures has made this increasingly untenable. The government's persistent implementation of neoliberal policies has further eroded state support, leaving informal workers more exposed and less resilient. As the chapter transitioned to exploring political risks, I looked at how these policies have not only diminished the state's protective role but also led to exclusions and inadequate responses to crises, such as the pandemic, thereby deepening the vulnerabilities of informal workers.

Though neoliberalism did not overhaul informal systems as drastically as colonialism, it eroded the functionality through sustained economic pressures. There are desperate attempts to meet immediate needs through this mechanism, but some of its practices can have some negative effects, especially for poorer people. For instance, the nuclearization of families combined with a diminished capacity to provide support due to the poor economic climate has intensified pressure on close relatives, further constraining their livelihood stability. This emerges as a double-edged sword. High-income individuals, facing their own challenges, refined their scope of support and maintained firm boundaries. Low-income individuals on the other hand, are more willing to sacrifice their financial stability to provide support, which makes them more vulnerable. This frayed dynamic highlights a critical contribution to the literature on informal social protection by addressing the relational complexities that influence support systems.

In light of the challenges and limitations identified in the current chapter, the next chapter will shift focus to examine state-led welfare provisions and the history of Nigeria's pension system, primarily regarding how they frame the context of the development of micro pensions in the country. I examine how neoliberal ideologies continue to shape the state's approach to social welfare, with greater reliance on market solutions for fundamental services such as education, healthcare, or pensions. Next, I introduce the challenges with the implementation of the micro pensions scheme, revealing how it is influenced by the troubled history of pension corruption and mismanagement.

CHAPTER 6

The Gatekeepers of Pensions: A Public-Private Partnership for Welfare Provision

Chapter 5 painted a vivid picture of the mounting social and economic stress faced by informal workers as they grapple with demands for essentials like food, housing, education, healthcare, and utilities in a tough economic environment, compounded by diminishing kinship support. The chapter wrapped up with a discussion on interactions between the state and the informal economy, which reinforced perceptions of the state as inefficient and oppressive in the eyes of the latter.

This chapter helps shed light on critiques of SRM, which recommends social assistance for the extreme poor but fails to consider settings where most of the population live in extreme poverty. In such environments, informal workers cannot afford market-based solutions when the market itself is failing to provide quality employment or resources. Besides, I demonstrate how a dysfunctional financial infrastructure in Nigeria (with inflation, low returns on investment, and a volatile market) creates additional risks for informal workers. Conversely, although the rights-based approach assumes that the state can repair market-induced risks (Kabeer 2002), I examine how, in contexts like Nigeria, where corruption and scarce resources constrain the state's capacity for social investment, protection becomes a matter of targeting and prioritising (even when shaped more by electability or state legitimacy than by genuine social justice). But Adesina (2020) describes this version of development, with policies operating in silos, as unfit.

When social policies are not designed with a focus on synergies, they become fragmented. Mkandawire (2007) discusses how social policy can enhance productivity by concentrating on areas such as education (to create a skilled workforce), labour market policies (to counter employment risks), health (to maintain wellbeing), and the use of pension funds for productive investments like industrial development. In contrast, the Nigerian government gradually shifts

the responsibility for labour reproduction (health, education) to the private sector, offers social assistance only to select groups, promotes entrepreneurship (especially among the youth), drives informality, and introduced a privatised contributory pension scheme. However, this is done without adequately addressing the higher costs for informal workers due to the state's withdrawal from welfare duties or ensuring that informal workers operate in a macroeconomic environment that enables them to generate enough income to set aside savings for retirement.

I will critique the neoliberal rationales underpinning social protection policy in Nigeria, showing how the state and market prioritise privatisation and financialisation over social equity and fail to offer a sustainable solution for most informal workers. The chapter argues that financial inclusion through micro pensions worsens inequality and reveals the deeper systemic issues that require a more comprehensive, context-specific social policy approach.

This chapter starts by zooming out on the social policy landscape to ground the analysis of pensions in a state-led welfare framework that includes healthcare, education, and social assistance, to gain an understanding of how pensions fit into the national strategy for social policies. Next, I look at the history of pensions in the country post-Independence. Civil servants inherited a pension system left behind after British colonial rule and since then the pension infrastructure in the country has undergone several revisions, finally landing on a voluntary contributory model in 2004, which expanded to include the micro pension scheme in 2019. In Section 6.3, I examine the partnership between the state and the private sector for the delivery of this privatised micro pension scheme and expose the tensions that exist in the arrangement since both parties prioritise lowering their costs.

6.1. Contextualising Pensions: A Glimpse into the Social Policy Landscape

Pensions do not operate in isolation; instead, they are accommodated within a wider social policy agenda. This context provides insight into the government's overarching objectives, the strategies adopted to address issues of poverty reduction or the rights to education and healthcare, and how they influence the feasibility of pension policies in the country. It is crucial to ask how government delivers welfare and whether it is efficient and effective at responding to needs. In this section, I explore the adequacy of formal social protection for informal workers in Nigeria. Even when such measures exist, they often lack foundation in a rights-based or transformative approach and are more geared towards pushing responsibility onto the poor. Neoliberalism promotes state retrenchment rather than developing the state's capacity for welfare provision. Yet, though quality healthcare and education provision in Nigeria have been left to the market, the government continues to falter in areas where market interest is absent.

6.1.1. State Inefficiencies and Market Dynamics in Education and Healthcare Provision

Since the return to democracy at the beginning of the millennium, successive administrations have embraced private-sector-led growth through the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) established in 2004 under President Obasanjo, as well as the Economic Recovery and Growth Plan (ERGP) established in 2017 under President Buhari (Nigeria 2004, 2017). Both NEEDS and ERGP aimed to foster public-private partnerships, based on the premise that harnessing the presumed efficiency of the private sector, alongside government regulations, would be the optimal approach for protecting vulnerable groups. This new social policy framework contrasts with that of the period from Independence through to the SAP period. During the oil boom era in the late 1970s and early 1980s, substantial social expenditure was allocated to initiatives for poverty reduction, housing, healthcare, education, rural agricultural development, and food security (Asagwara 1995; Awotona 1990; Babawale et al 1996; Herbst and Olukoshi 1994). Respondents old enough to recall expressed their preferences for certain regimes and a clear timeline and consensus on the regimes emerged: Shagari's leadership after the oil boom of the 1970s was marked by prosperity, followed by a decline since Generals Buhari and Babangida. According to an elderly man in Yola and a sweeper in Abuja:

We enjoyed Shagari's government from 1979 to 1983. I used to have money. In 1984 things started getting more expensive and we had issues with food. At that time, Buhari was in uniform as Head of State. Only Yakubu Gowon was better than Shagari in my own experience. It was during his government that everything was abundant. – Interview #100 (Translated from Fulfulde)

Governments in the past used to help, but this government now doesn't help. For the past 5 years people have been suffering. People are dying. Everything costs too much. Everybody is just managing. – Interview #074

Respondents spoke fondly of policies for social housing, free basic education, free university tuition, school feeding, and food or fuel subsidies during earlier eras. Since the SAP era, social investment has been lacking (Herbst and Olukoshi 1994). In 2002, Nigeria spent only 1.2% of GDP on health, a figure that arrived at 7% of the budget a decade later with 12% dedicated to education, though these allocations remained notably lower than what other African countries spent on their social sectors (Adesina 2009; Hagen-Zankar and Holmes 2012). Since then, the government earmarked 4-8% of government expenditure on education and the budget hovered around 4-6% for healthcare during the 2015 – 2023 administration (ICIR 2021, 2023).

Allegations of corruption and mismanagement have continually surfaced, and according to the Ministry of Finance, the government uncovered that a substantial share of personnel costs –

N2.3 billion (\$11.5 million) – across sectors such as education and health were attributed to 45,000 ghost workers (Amakom 2016; Copley 2016). According to the World Bank (2000), governments can make the mistake of spending limited resources, not on social development, but on debt servicing or subsidies such as the long-running and controversial fuel subsidy in Nigeria. As of 2021, Nigeria had spent roughly \$3.9 billion on fuel subsidies, which doubled healthcare expenditure (McCulloch et al 2021). More recently with the 2023 administration, BudGIT – an organisation dedicated to government budget transparency – reported that N81.7 billion was designated for the construction of solar streetlights in the federal capital, a figure higher than that for schools (N77.9 billion) and hospitals (N32.5 billion) (BudGIT 2023).

UNICEF found that 20% of the world's out-of-school children live in Nigeria, and 3 in 4 children there between the ages of 7 and 14 cannot read a sentence in English or solve elementary mathematics (UNICEF 2022, 2023). Even those captured within school attendance statistics have had to contend with various scandals including non-payment of West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) fees pledged by state governments; the discovery that significant numbers of primary school teachers in several states were illiterate; persistent university staff strikes; and the high-profile abduction of female boarding school students in Chibok (BBC 2022; Guardian 2014; Oyedele 2022; Punch 2023a; Vanguard 2018). Nigerians do not have to pay tuition to attend government primary schools (Holmes et al 2012), but informal workers reported that they are held accountable for other related expenses such as Parent-Teacher Association fees, school uniforms, books, stationary, food, transport, and even security personnel salaries or cleaning equipment. Consequently, children are turned away from classes if their parents cannot afford these additional costs. On the other hand, there has been a proliferation of private education – spanning a wide spectrum in Nigeria that includes schools offering cheaper fees for people with relatively low incomes – with even the state endorsing market-based provision (Ogamba 2020). The opinions of my respondents are exemplified in the quotes below:

Now, we can't afford to pay school fees, but back then it was free. Now, your parents pay for your schooling and everything else, but they don't get any support. Even chalk, the government used to provide them, but now the Parents' Association pays for it. – Interview #100, elderly butcher in Yola (Translated from Fulfulde)

If you go and see primary and secondary schools in my area, they are all dilapidated. Children learning on bare floors. During our time, we had chairs, and government provided books and everything. When I was in boarding school, we were fed three times a day. This was back in the early 1980s during Shagari's regime. But if I go to my former school and see what is going on there, I feel like I would shed tears. – Interview #097, textile trader in Abuja

Government schools don't teach children well. If you want your child to learn and do well, you must take them to a fee-paying school. My whole life, I have never known someone who got an education that benefitted him from a government school. – Interview #065, load carrier in Abuja (Translated from Hausa)

The health sector tells a similar story. In 2005, the federal government established a National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS) (Adesina 2009). The scheme, mandatory for formal workers and accessible to the informal economy, strives to deliver affordable basic healthcare (NSIO 2018a). Nonetheless, fewer than 5% of the population are enrolled in the programme, and the NHIS underscored the barriers to extending coverage to poor informal workers, as well as staffing, budgetary, and infrastructural deficiencies (Nevine et al 2019). Unpaid salaries and substandard working conditions led to a substantial departure of healthcare professionals, resulting in over 75,000 nurses emigrating since 2017, and a ratio of one doctor for every 5000 patients (Guardian 2023). Even the government recognises this shortfall and the impact it has made on the country's average life expectancy, prevalence of infectious diseases, and child mortality (Nigeria 2017). Poor quality social services lead to rising costs for the poor. Low-income respondents, who were more likely to use government hospitals, spoke of the ill-treatment they received there, as well as the government's inadequacy in providing cheap medicines and immunisations. A few recognised the role played by limited access to clean drinking water, government disposal of refuse in their communities, and substandard nutrition in undermining their health. Their viewpoints are highlighted below:

They channelled sewage to our river and people have been dying of cholera because of that. We don't have good water to drink. We have a health centre, but there is no doctor that stays here at night. Before we take people to the nearest hospital, something bad might happen. Our health centre cannot take care of cholera the way private hospitals do. There are no beds for patients. It's just a dispensary. – Interview #054, traditional leader in Abuja

If you have someone who is sick and you want them well taken care of, and you have the money, you should go to a private hospital. If you go to a government hospital, they treat you badly. It's difficult to get the person admitted there and they might lose their life while waiting. When we took my nephew to the hospital, he kept fainting and he needed blood, but we were waiting until 3am to be admitted because they didn't have a free bed. At that point, we took him to a private hospital, and he immediately got treatment there, but we had to pay N30,000. – Interview #065, load carrier in Abuja (Translated from Hausa)

I am forced to go to private hospitals because the government ones aren't working. I might pay N40,000 at a government hospital, but end up paying N200,000 [at a private one]. Is that not my business money going into something that it's not supposed to be? – Interview #093, textile trader

Adesina (2009) asserts that this focus on privatisation is a marked difference from how the Nigerian government's policies in the 1960s and 1970s were ideologically driven by principles of solidarity and social cohesion, with social services acting as a means of eradicating poverty. Even the World Bank stated that progressive public expenditure on health and education can ensure redistribution by providing social services such as free primary education for the development of human capital (World Bank 2000). While the Nigerian government technically meets this recommendation, it has increasingly aligned with market-friendly principles, which serve to further undermine its own effectiveness in meeting the needs of the vulnerable. Given

the significant deficiencies in public health and education services, it is difficult to envision how informal support systems can address these gaps effectively. As a result, informal workers are increasingly pushed towards market solutions that they cannot easily afford, and gradually have to make difficult decisions to do without. One explanation for the lack of social investment was put forward by a senior government official who worked under the 2015 – 2023 regime:

So many things combined to get us to this sorry state. They are more interested in the brick and mortar. That is where you can say, "This is my legacy", because a lot of these education and health issues, you can't measure them easily in a 4-year term. It would be difficult to say, "This is how much I've done". It's not tangible like that brick and mortar. We must find a way of making it visible that this is just as critical. – Interview #172

The quote above offers valuable insight into the politics of social investment, particularly in the context of neoliberal governance where marketised and financialised responses are dominant. The official points to a tension between the state's visible, tangible outcomes in infrastructure projects – that provide an easily quantifiable legacy for administrations, making it easier for politicians to take credit for development – and the less visible but crucial social investments in education and health. The implicit critique in the statement is of how neoliberalism pushes state actors to prioritise short-term benefits over long-run investments but even beyond that it highlights how even as the state retreats from direct involvement in social services, politicians still need to present visible and easily communicable results to secure legitimacy and electoral support. The state is not dismantled. It makes attempts to maintain the appearance of activity and capacity, but its involvement is often symbolic or aligned with short-term interests. Yet, in response to rising vulnerability, the government has instead focused efforts on consumption smoothing through social assistance instruments which do not address underlying causes.

6.1.2. Unpacking Nigeria's Haphazard Social Assistance Focus

Governments are expected to intervene to protect the most vulnerable groups from the market (Perry et al 2007). This partially de-commodifies social protection, but only for those who are too poor to generate profit for the private sector. Such social assistance is offered to somewhat amend for the issues stemming from decades of neoliberalism. Since the 2000s, commodified conditional cash transfers (CCT) have become popular and absorbed substantial portions of social expenditure due to their political expediency, and advocates tout the slogan to "just give money to the poor" to enable them to resolve their poverty (Lavinas 2018). Nigeria increased spending on social assistance by over 40% from N7.86 trillion to N11.30 trillion between 2009 and 2013 (Aiyede et al 2015). However, given that the extreme poverty headcount exceeds 80 million (Kharas and Dooley 2022), the expenses rapidly escalate if the programmes are to fully encompass this target demographic. SRM may have special conditions for the extreme

poor, but the opportunity cost is that these large expenditures are thus diverted away from redistributive and reproductive investments in education and healthcare.

Until the initiation of the National Social Investment Programme (NSIP) in 2016, there was no overarching or coherent social assistance framework at federal level (Aiyede et al 2015; NSIO 2018a). The available programmes were limited in scale and scope, ad hoc, and fragmented, as each state pursued its own agenda, thereby raising the risk of redundancy (Nigeria 2004; NSIO 2018b). In northern Nigeria, Bauchi, Kano, and Katsina states implemented conditional cash transfer schemes to encourage school attendance for girls; Jigawa provided modest cash transfers to people with disabilities; and in Adamawa, primary school girls were entitled to free school uniforms from the state government (Holmes et al 2012). Jigawa state health ministry also provides free healthcare to children under the age of five, pregnant women, and accident victims, yet, even so, these measures are considered insufficient (Medecins Sans Frontieres 2024; WHO 2024b). In Yola, senior officials at the local government level and State House of Assembly listed ad hoc programmes targeted to several groups including farmers, women in the informal economy, students and school dropouts, children, and people living with extreme poverty. The state legislator claimed that he funded these projects from his own budget and offered them to his constituency (with the beneficiaries selected based on his patron-client relationships) to solidify his electability. In his words:

All these things are not my job, but when I go for [re-election] campaigns, they ask, "What have you done for us?", and you cannot tell them that you made laws for them. You'd be wasting your time. You have to have your own initiatives. – Interview #170

Neoliberalism reshaped the social contract between states and citizens (Hickey and Mitlin 2009). Hickey and Mitlin argue that cash transfers were not intended to transform livelihoods, but to stabilise tensions and increase the state's legitimacy. As politicians provide ameliorative programmes to ensure re-election, there is some optimism that this represents a constructive alternative to vote buying, one that has the potential to enhance the state-citizen relationship and alleviate poverty (Aiyede et al 2015). Informal workers find themselves excluded from social protection schemes tied to formal employment as well as those designed for people outside the labour market, necessitating demands for a new social contract between the state and capital that engages with modern realities (Alfers and Moussie 2022; Alfers et al 2022). Without this in place, the social contract will be compromised as social services are lost to commodification (Plagerson 2023). This seems to be the case for some of my respondents, with one elderly man in Yola stating: *'What has the government done for me? So, why do they get to rule over me?'* (Interview #100 – Translated from Fulfulde). Informal workers bemoaned the erosion of trust in the state. As a result of the government dumping sewage in their rivers

and refuse in their neighbourhoods, selling their farmland to developers, demolishing their homes, and harassing them to hinder street trade, they said they felt neglected, cheated, and discriminated against. Moreover, the case for restoring social contracts through patrimonialism is weak, and respondents easily discerned its shortcomings. According to a female hawker and an elderly man in Yola:

Politicians only want to help during elections. They give us soap or Maggi [stock cubes] and tell us to vote for them. We don't get anything else from the government. They make promises but we don't see them again until the next election. – Interview #114 (Translated from Fulfulde)

Once time passes and elections are over, the poor person becomes worse off than garbage. I go out to vote so that things can get better, but by the time they enter office, they become respectable people, and we become nobodies. – Interview #101 (Translated from Fulfulde)

Despite Nigeria's growing attention to social assistance, there has been no nationwide cash transfer programme for the elderly. It is noteworthy that by 2005, Nigeria was already home to half of the elderly people in West Africa, yet the government continued to deprioritise them (Asagba 2005; Ogwumike and Aboderin 2005). At state-level, Ekiti, Osun, and Anambra in the south implemented programmes for elderly people between 2011 – 2013, though the schemes have since been discontinued (Aiyede et al 2015; Dorfman 2015). In contrast, a government official in Yola pointed out that while the Chairman at the time always allocated a portion of food transfers designated for the local government to the elderly, welfare provisions for this demographic were unreliable and dependent upon the priorities of the government in power. Across Africa, there are a few countries that offer some degree of social pensions to retirees such as Botswana, Namibia, and South Africa (ILO 2014). Similar trends can be observed with the Livelihood Empowerment Against Poverty (LEAP) in Ghana, support grants in South Africa, and the Productivity Safety Net Programme (PSNP) in Ethiopia; each country's social assistance projects attending to their various needs for poverty, old age, or even HIV/ AIDS depending on colonial histories, institutional path dependence, and particular social issues (Holmes and Lwanga-Ntale 2012; Nino-Zarazua et al 2012).

6.1.3. Promoting Individualism, Youth Entrepreneurship, and Informality

In developing countries, most welfare support is directed towards young people with higher productive capacity with the assumption that they yield more social returns (Barrientos 2002b). Barrientos suggests that developing countries ought to recognise the economic contributions of older people. Such thinking drove the passing of the National Senior Citizen (NSC) Act in 2017, and the subsequent inauguration of the National Senior Citizens Centre by the federal government in 2021 (Premium Times 2021a) to focus on advocacy efforts to mainstream

programmes for the elderly and foster their engagement with economic activities (NSCC 2023). This is how a senior official at NSCC described the centre's role:

Most of them, up to the age of 79, they're still engaged [in the informal economy] because they cannot afford to retire. A lot of the entrepreneurship programmes we're developing target this group. There are public works programmes to help them earn money. We want to restore their dignity and respect, integrate them to earn livelihoods and supplement their income if they want to [so that] they can enhance their capacity to continue to do what they value. You're not going to force them, but they have options. When you say you have a right, it means you have options.
– Interview #173

She asserts that the Centre is guided by human rights principles which aim to foster inclusion, eradicate discrimination, and combat elder abuse, and they collaborate with organisations such as the Human Rights Commission and Legal Aid to advance these objectives. However, their role is restricted to advocacy due to the federal system in Nigeria, which prevents them from compelling states to take action. Instead, they partner with states to formulate policies that prioritise investment in the elderly. Still, the Centre operates within a neoliberal framework, advocating for financial inclusion, entrepreneurship, and encouraging the elderly to remain economically active during retirement. In 2023, newspapers told the news of the NSCC's plans to create a portal for retirees to advertise their skills and experience and access the labour market after retirement (Falaju 2023).

Neoliberal frameworks encourage self-sufficiency for individuals, and within the rights-based approach the promotive dimension aims to enhance incomes and capabilities with instruments such as youth employment and entrepreneurship schemes (Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler 2004; Holzmann and Jorgensen 1999). The World Bank considers boosting entrepreneurship and 'productive' opportunities for informal workers as part of comprehensive social protection (World Bank 2000, 2013). The rationale is that a focus on youth entrepreneurship programmes has useful implications for long-term stability so fostering economic independence in younger generations strengthens their future prospects. Still, it is a push towards individualisation and responsibilisation with the expectation that young people who successfully navigate these programmes to become financially self-reliant are less likely to depend heavily on government resources as they grow older, thereby reducing future demand on social protection systems.

Nigeria's foray into this area was institutionalised with the National Directorate of Employment in 1986, which had the primary objective of combatting youth unemployment by directing them towards both formal and informal activities (Holmes et al 2012). Since then, job creation has been facilitated through the establishment of the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) in 2001, National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) in 2004, Youth Enterprise with Innovation Programme in 2011, Economic Recovery and Growth

Plan (ERGP) in 2017, and National Social Investment Programme (NSIP) in 2017 (Holmes et al 2012; Meagher 2015; Nigeria 2004, 2017). Further, a Care of the People conditional cash transfer scheme was created in 2007, requiring beneficiaries to meet the following criteria: female-headed households with out-of-school children, where the mother is willing to undergo vocational training (Aiyede et al 2015). However, the cash transfers were unsatisfactory, the government did not provide the skills training, and participants were expected to graduate after only one year (Holmes et al 2012).

NAPEP was launched in 2001 to enable poverty reduction by providing vulnerable people with access to basic services, skills training, and entrepreneurship (Holmes et al 2012). One well-known strategy to realising this objective involved the distribution of tricycle rickshaw taxis, commonly referred to as *Keke NAPEP*, which provided a livelihood for informal workers and cheap transportation in cities. Nigeria continues to rely on these poverty reduction approaches. Recently, the Federal Minister for Women's Affairs launched a 'pink rider' pilot scheme where 30 tricycles were loaned to women in Abuja with a view of them eventually owning their own vehicles (Federal Ministry of Information 2023). In Adamawa state, the Poverty Alleviation and Wealth Creation Agency concentrates on skills training and entrepreneurship for people aged 18-35, with certain considerations for the elderly. When I questioned the agency's focus on preparing people for informal rather than formal employment, an official said that there are not enough jobs in the formal economy to accommodate all beneficiaries. But for formalisation to be transformative, it would not simply involve reconciling the demand and supply of formal jobs by providing one for each individual. It would be achieved by creating opportunities through industrialisation, or investments in sectoral development and inclusive labour market policies.

It is worth noting that this move towards empowerment, entrepreneurship, and self-sufficiency differs from how transformative social policy views the aim to boost productivity (Mkandawire 2007). Under neoliberalism, the emphasis is on individual responsibility and the objective is to foster more effective market participation instead of providing comprehensive social support. In contrast, transformative social policy sees production as an element to be supported by the state through collective and systemic change. This approach emphasises productivity, not just at an individual level, but by creating a more equitable economic system and ensuring broader access to structural transformation through infrastructure development, promoting inclusive labour markets, and building human capital. For neoliberalism, the market is central, whereas state-led initiatives are crucial to transformative social policy. For the Nigerian government to be transformative in this case, that would involve them going beyond pushing people towards entrepreneurship and leaving them to it, but rather, by fostering an enabling environment instead of the state avoiding their responsibilities and shifting risks to individuals.

Next, we consider NSIP, with programmes geared toward what they call youth empowerment. The NSIP portfolio consisted of a school feeding project; an N-Power scheme for skills training and youth employment; a CCT scheme which disbursed monthly payments of N5000 to means-tested beneficiaries; and a microcredit initiative for informal workers (NSIO 2018a). NSIP perpetuated the prioritisation of youth programmes to the exclusion of elderly people. With young people's avenues for retirement preparation confined to entrepreneurship, they effectively shoulder the government's responsibility, incurring significant costs for both parties. The government's cost is valued at about \$5 billion with unemployment and poverty statistics worsening since the commencement of the programme (Sahara Reporters 2021). Even at this, NSIP was plagued with allegations of corruption, discrimination, politicisation, and non-disbursement of payments (The Guardian 2019). Respondents across both research sites mentioned that they attempted to register for the microloans but never received any response and they also raised concerns about bribery. In the viewpoint of an elderly petty trader in Yola:

We go to fill out forms for loans and the officials claim they haven't received the funds. An official said he would write your name down to collect N50,000 if you agree to give him a N30,000 bribe. Some people were willing to accept this deal so they can have something to eat. – Interview #109 (Translated from Fulfulde)

Indeed, corruption in the disbursement of state funds is somewhat of a longstanding tradition in Nigeria. The National Social Investment Office also identified political interference as a key obstacle to the implementation of programmes (NSIO 2018a). Each new government brings its own social agenda, usually with little regard for the continuity of previously established ones. I spoke to a former senior official at NSIP who outlined the challenges encountered in dealing with politicians who asserted influence over the scheme's execution, including terms for the selection of beneficiaries and fund distribution. In their view, this impeded the capacity to faithfully execute programmes for the target demographic:

There is a culture that has existed that is quite endemic, about slots. So, they expect certain numbers to be given to them. You offend them if you don't say, "Take a certain number". People were coming to me to say these are the people that you should give to. I think the only thing that will resolve this is if we have more people who are focused on the larger picture, rather than vested interests. It was like swimming against the tide. – Interview #172

Since the 2000s, the state has offloaded more of its core responsibilities by transferring them to the market through privatisation and onto individuals by promoting entrepreneurship and informality. The less profitable aspects of social protection remain within the confines of the government, but they are expensive and marred by poor quality, insufficiency, and corruption. This background of privatisation, self-reliance initiatives, and deficient government provision provides a clear framework for how understanding Nigeria has chosen to approach retirement.

6.2. Pension Pathways and Predicaments

The history of pensions in Nigeria is fraught with mismanagement, corruption scandals, and failure to administer benefits. An overhaul was ushered in through the Pension Reform Act (PRA) 2004 – subsequently updated with the PRA 2014 – which introduced the contributory system that currently exists. Pensions in the global west emerged out of a need to protect the welfare of the working class in their old age. Industrialisation heightened job insecurity for the aged, prompting employers then to consider retirement schemes as a strategy to negotiate interests and enhance their competitive edge (Sass 1997). However, pensions arrangements have often encountered obstacles between state, capital, and labour, with smaller businesses objecting to mandatory schemes (Ebbinghaus 2006). Additionally, for most of their existence, pensions were tied to formal employment relationships. In Nigeria, the recent pension reforms came about as a solution to a pension payment crisis in the formal sector, which did not only arise from actuarial challenges but also due to widespread fraud and embezzlement. These developments paved the way for the introduction of pensions for informal workers in 2019.

Pensions are offered in a variety of typologies (Barrientos 2002a; Soede and Vrooman 2008). They can be public, private, or a blend of both. They are also contributory or non-contributory, depending on whether they require input from beneficiaries. For defined benefit (DB) plans, retirement payments are based on considerations such as final salary or years of service, with funding responsibility resting primarily with the provider. Conversely, defined contribution (DC) plans determine contribution rates without assurance of the size of future benefits, leaving the pensioner to bear the risks of investment performance. Financial arrangements are funded or unfunded. Funded pensions require allocations to be set aside and invested to ensure future retirement benefits. In contrast, unfunded plans – often referred to as pay-as-you-go (PAYG) schemes – rely on current revenues or taxes to pay pensions of retirees. The Beveridge model ensures universal coverage as a right that is independent of income or employment status, the Bismarckian model ties entitlements to an employment relationship, while provident funds function as retirement savings but can also be used to finance other social welfare initiatives. Rights-based approaches favour universal non-contributory pensions with social aims, while private contributory schemes are the market-friendly option (Johnson and Williamson 2006).

For formal pension systems, the dominant assumption is that workers save over their work lives for retirement. This model is future-oriented, focusing on long-term security where the individual is responsible for accumulating wealth or contributing to a pension scheme to ensure that they have resources in their later years. This system shifts the responsibility for retirement

planning and financial security to the individual, supported by state or employer-led schemes. In contrast, family systems do not necessarily prioritise saving for retirement over the course of one's work life. Instead, the focus is on meeting immediate needs as they arise, particularly as elderly individuals become frail, unable to work. They aim to sustain survival in the present, but not necessarily build a financial cushion for the future. The burden of care is distributed among family members or within community structures – contingent on their ability to provide – rather than being placed solely on individuals. This distinction highlights the need for policies that account for these immediate needs (such as healthcare, housing, and short-term financial assistance) and recognise that many informal workers will not have the capacity to save or have pension funds as expected in formal retirement systems.

6.2.1. The Troubled Legacy and Persistent Issues

In Chapter 4, I explored the history of informal welfare in northern Nigeria and explained that traditionally, elderly people relied on their kinship and community networks for protection from the risks of old-age poverty. Each generation cared for the preceding one, with the expectation that they too would receive similar care once they reached an age when they could no longer work. Then under colonial rule, the British established pensions for the colonial administrators in 1951 via the Pensions Ordinance Act (retroactive to 1946), providing them with guaranteed income in retirement (PwC 2015). This pattern was observed all over Anglophone Africa, and countries inherited schemes after Independence, initially limiting provision to workers in public service and the private sector (Kpessa 2011). Alongside these formal provisions, informal support endured, so formal employees could access multiple layers of protection, whereas informal actors depended solely on their families even as communal support systems withered (Kpessa 2010).

1951	Pensions Ordinance Act of 1951
1960	Nigeria's Independence
1961	National Provident Fund
1974	Consolidation of pensions
1979	Pensions Act of 1979
1980s	SAP, and the retrenchment of the state from social welfare provision
1990	Pensions Act of 1990
1991	Pensions Regulations of 1991
1994	National Social Insurance Trust Fund (NSITF)

Table 6.1: Pension history timeline

Source: Casey and Dostal 2008; PwC 2015

For over 40 years after Independence, pension implementation in Nigeria was fragmented. Federal, state, and local governments operated several schemes for public servants including provident funds or non-contributory unfunded plans, with different plans for the police, military, judiciary, ministries, politicians, immigration officers, teachers, and university staff (Idowu and Olanike 2010; IMF 2005; Kpessa 2009). Conversely, the private sector offered DB plans which were partially funded on a PAYG basis, largely unregulated for firms that offered their own occupational schemes and managed by the National Social Insurance Trust Fund otherwise (Casey and Dostal 2008). The post-Independence provident funds were not guaranteed as rights until 1974 when eligible civil servants became entitled to pensions from the government (Aborisade 2008; Ayorinde 2005).

By the early 2000s, it was clear that the pension system was in crisis. Two primary reasons are cited for the pension crisis in Nigeria: the actuarial challenge posed by generous benefits, and rampant corruption and mismanagement. Civil servants were, at a minimum, entitled to gratuities equivalent to 100% of their final remuneration – or 30% if after only 10 years of service – with maximum benefits extending to 300% gratuity, and pensions of up to 80% of final salaries after 35 years of service (Casey and Dostal 2008; IMF 2005). Then allegations surfaced regarding the inclusion of ghost pensioners in personnel records, embezzlement, fraud, and inefficient budget management (Ayorinde 2005; Casey and Dostal 2008). Given that PAYG DB schemes were funded by the government rather than individual beneficiaries, payments were withdrawn from the national budget, hence the whole country shouldered the civil service pension burden despite the civil service comprising only 2% of the total population (Uche and Uche 2002). This responsibility escalated as the civil service exploded, particularly following the impacts of SAP, subsequent oil crises, and naira depreciation (Aborisade 2008; Uche and Uche 2002). The government faced opportunity cost decisions, balancing between funding retirement benefits, or investing in vital sectors such as healthcare, education, and infrastructure (Kpessa 2011; Ubhenin 2012).

The government had accrued arrears totalling N2 trillion, with the pensions to salaries ratio rising from 16.7% in 1995 to 30% in 1999 (Binuomoyo 2010). The outstanding pension deficit exceeded 50% of the combined federal budgets for 1999 – 2001, far surpassing each year's allocation (Uche and Uche 2002). Pensioners were either owed their allowances for years or had their names excluded from retiree lists, and news reports depicted constant humiliations of pensioners, some dying while waiting in queues for benefits, without the wherewithal to afford household or medical expenses (Idowu and Olanike 2010; Kpessa 2011; Ubhenin 2012). Although the crisis that occurred was predictable, the pension system was left to

deteriorate for decades until it reached a climax where it could no longer be ignored, leading to cries for reform.

But Nigeria was not so unique in this. Around the same time, the western world grappled with their own pension crises. In the US and UK, low interest rates and the failure of global stock market investments exerted pressure on both DC and DB schemes, endangering 44 million Americans and 9 million Britons (Langley 2004). While both arrangements struggled, the crisis unfolded at time when the countries were embracing individualised and privatised retirement savings as a means of catering to their ageing populations (Davis 2004). This trend raised doubts about the financial sustainability of DB pensions, for which individuals bore no personal responsibility. However, Berry (2016, 2021) argued that the shift to a market-driven strategy of DC schemes was untenable, as it led to precarious pension outcomes which left retirees increasingly vulnerable, with a continued prioritisation of employer interests. Eligible retirees in the UK receive means-tested state pensions starting at £169.50 per week though this sum is deemed insufficient, and the retirement age is gradually rising (slated to reach 68 by 2028) with speculations of a further rise to 71 (Citizens Advice 2024; Guardian 2024).

Section 6.2.2. will address the Nigerian pension reforms of 2004 and 2014 but it is noteworthy that Nigeria continues to be plagued with DB pensions-related corruption scandals. Before the PRA 2004 came into effect, Nigeria had reportedly lost N5 trillion to pension embezzlement. In the three years following its enactment, the country incurred additional losses of up to N181 billion even as the federal government had not yet designated the necessary funds to address accrued liabilities (Ubhenin 2012). In 2012, the Nigerian anti-corruption agency, Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), initiated investigations into 23 pension administrators – among whom was the notorious ringleader, Abdulrasheed Maina – accused of channelling pension funds into their personal bank accounts, with the total amount reaching N60 billion (ICIR 2012). Despite receiving N5 billion monthly, only N825 million was paid to pensioners, while the perpetrators pocketed nearly N4.2 billion (*ibid.*). The EFCC uncovered yet another billion-naira fraud scandal with the police pension scheme, with both Maina's and the police pension fraud trials taking place in the past few years (Premium Times 2021b, 2023). Rumours of the federal government borrowing from pension funds and reports of pensioners not getting benefits exacerbate concerns for the pension system's reputation (BBC 2021; This Day 2022).

6.2.2. A New Era: The Pension Paradigm Shift from 2004 Onwards

In 2004, President Obasanjo launched a new pension scheme as part of his neoliberal reforms with the aim to address the issues of corruption, financial sustainability, and fragmentation.

The new scheme was applicable to federal government personnel – with state governments having the option to adopt it if they wished – along with the entire private sector (Casey and Dostal 2008). It is a private DC pensions model which makes it mandatory for both employees and employers to each contribute 7.5% of the employee's salary to their retirement savings account monthly. To ensure transparency and reduce risks of the misappropriation of funds, the National Pension Commission (PenCom) installed a tripartite arrangement for the pension system with PenCom as the regulators, pension fund administrators (PFAs) as the managers and investors, and pension fund custodians (PFCs) as the party entrusted with keeping the pool of pension funds in safe custody. As the scheme is fully funded, it reduces the likelihood of lacking finances to fulfil pension liabilities upon workers' retirement (IMF 2005).

Inspired by the Chile contributory pension system that was innovated by the Chicago Boys in the 1980s, Nigeria was the first African country to privatise pensions (Casey and Dostal 2008). But unlike the SAP, the adoption of contributory pensions was not driven by external actors. The government formed a pension reform committee and had drawn motivation to domesticate the Chilean model before they invited the IMF, the World Bank, and the ILO to advise them. Both the World Bank and ILO claimed to have discouraged Nigeria's adoption of the pension model for different reasons. While the World Bank did not believe Nigeria had the financial infrastructure to pull it off – considering that Chile was more developed at the time of their own reform – the ILO opposed the reform on ideological grounds and did not want workers to lose rights by joining a DC plan. Nigeria implemented the reform anyway, and recommendations made by international organisations were secondary to desires of Obasanjo's administration and the social policy priorities of that period that emphasised privatisation (Aborisade 2008).

Yet, as the Nigerian government was designing their new pensions, Chilean pensions were already in trouble. The Chilean government had been contemplating reform after recognising the limitations of their system, and the World Bank itself was underscoring the importance of social pensions for vulnerable groups (Casey and Dostal 2008). Private pensions did not fulfil promises to increase efficiency, investment returns, competition, coverage, or the strength of capital markets mainly because of administrative, marketing, and personnel costs (Huber and Stephens 2000; Ortiz et al 2018). Moreover, despite promoting contributory pensions as a preferable option for workers in the country, Obasanjo's administration concurrently designed a different attractive welfare package for those who held political office. Starting in 2005, each administration funded a retirement plan for former leaders, the total amount reaching N15.3 billion in 2018 (Idowu and Olanike 2010). Each recipient gets a monthly stipend for themselves and their staff, free medical treatment at home or abroad, allowances for their vehicles and

furnished homes, paid vacations, as well as payment for their children's education. The Buhari government even paid N63.45 billion in benefits to themselves and colleagues (Punch 2023b).

Holzmann (1999) published a recommendation for the reform of pension systems to diversify risks, reduce pension liabilities and make pensions fiscally sustainable. They recommended mandatory private DC pensions. Critics of this model pointed out that it undermined solidarity, the redistributive qualities of previous pension systems while rolling back the state, and they claimed that even low-income countries could provide some social assistance (Charlton and McKinnon 2000). Following this criticism of the model for its disregard of vulnerable income groups, the World Bank devised a five-pillar pension model that incorporates a zero-pillar component which concentrates on those least capable of contributing (Holzmann and Hinz 2005). Despite these caveats for social pensions and the Bank stating that countries must fulfil requirements of developed financial markets and regulatory capacity before establishing these pensions, countries have gone ahead to offload their obligations using the five-pillar model without even including a social pensions layer. Regardless, multi-pillar models have not delivered the performance levels anticipated by the Bank either (UNRISD 2015).

To be sure, the state of pensions in Nigeria was troubling and the country was in desperate need for reform. But rather than selecting from the numerous options for pension systems, or managing public pensions more equitably and effectively, the Obasanjo administration opted for a system aligned with neoliberal ideals. For instance, Singapore's Central Provident Fund has more avenues for transformation beyond pension provision. It operates as a mandatory savings scheme, collecting contributions from employees and employers to cover retirement, healthcare, education, and housing needs (Barrientos 2002a). On the other hand, South Africa expanded the pre-existing tax-financed old-age grants to include access to black people. The ILO believes that pensions should be based on values of solidarity and collectivism, and that they should be redistributive across generations and income groups (ILO 2022). In contrast, private contributory pensions push the burden of old-age support unto individuals. Nigeria has considered using pension reserves for investments to stimulate economic or infrastructural development, but those plans have not come to fruition (Aborisade 2008; Casey 2011).

The World Bank was right about the poor financial infrastructure in Nigeria. Capital markets in Nigeria were underdeveloped and could not have reasonably been expected to strengthen due to private pensions alone, even though the success of the pension system depended on a healthy financial infrastructure (Casey and Dostal 2008). The primary investment strategy favours government's bonds and securities over equities, posing a risk due to the country's economic instability and the nascent bond market, as demonstrated by the issuance of the

first 20-year federal government bonds in 2008 (Casey 2011). In Casey's words, "There is no certainty that pensioners under the new system will have a better experience than those under its predecessor" since the new system attended to payment non-compliance but not market risks (p.12). The underdevelopment of financial markets made the pension system vulnerable to economic shocks, poor investment returns, and inflation, all of which jeopardise the long-term sustainability of pensions. Besides, the government continues to grapple with funding challenges for the minimum pension guarantee outlined in the PRA 2004, as well as fulfilling accrued rights for formal workers who entered the workforce prior to its enactment (IMF 2005).

PRA 2004 was amended in 2014, and the new Act included a provision in Section 2(3) for a voluntary scheme (PRA 2014). Micro pensions for informal workers launched in 2019 and the informal economy was finally pensionable (Premium Times 2019). Other developing countries such as India, Ghana, Kenya, and Uganda have micro pension schemes structured according to different typologies. Prior to micro pensions implementation, Nigeria had one of the lowest pension coverage rates in sub-Saharan Africa, a region which itself had the lowest global pension coverage rate due to the size of its informal economy (Albouy and Nogues 2019). The goal to extend DC pension coverage is ambitious since many informal actors have incomes too low to allow for regular contributions, and they are inequitable since the absence of formal employment relationships means they must double the contribution rate of formal counterparts to enjoy the same protection (Bloom and McKinnon 2013; Hu and Stewart 2009).

6.3. Uncharted Territory: Exploring a New Financial Frontier with Micro Pensions

The micro pension scheme was viewed by the government and the private sector as a sound market opportunity given the size of the informal economy. The state pushed for this new system which turned pension provision into an avenue for capital accumulation. This was the business case. This section explores the complexities of the public-private partnership for micro pension provision in Nigeria. As with the frameworks set out in NEEDS and the ERGP, the government regulates, and the private sector assumes responsibility for service delivery. These regulations may support or hinder profit maximisation, in which case tensions rise within the alliance, resulting in both parties seeking ways to exploit the partnership to further their interests while attempting to shift risks onto one another, as well as onto informal beneficiaries.

6.3.1. Government Regulations, Private Sector Delivery, and the Potential Market Boom

The micro pensions framework aims to accommodate peculiarities of the informal economy by offering more flexibility in pension provision (PenCom 2018b). Contributions to micro pension

accounts are not obligatory on a monthly basis like for formal employees; instead, participants have the freedom to determine the amount and frequency of contributions. Recognising that many informal workers may be hesitant about committing to long-term retirement savings, the Act permits a 60% allocation to a Retirement Savings Account (RSA), with 40% designated to a regular savings account, allowing for contingent withdrawals. Finally, retirement eligibility is based on reaching 50 years or a requirement to retire for health reasons. Informality presents challenges in pension design which necessitate tailored solutions (Guven 2019). According to Hu and Stewart (2009), flexible voluntary contributions and contingent withdrawals encourage informal worker participation because they prioritise their emergency and household needs. However, given that state and capital do not contribute, the burden of participation rests with informal workers alone and this perpetuates socioeconomic inequalities (Bloom and McKinnon 2013).

Churchill (2006) suggests that there is market potential for microinsurance, provided that the product is affordable and accessible to the target market. Up to 70% of Nigeria workers are engaged in the informal economy, though upward estimates indicate that they may comprise 80% of the workforce (Bonnet et al 2018; ILO 2018). For this reason, PenCom set a bold target to register eight million micro pensions accounts by 2024 (Premium Times 2022). After the passage of PRA 2014, PwC published an optimistic report on the earning potential of micro pensions. They predicted that with modest contributions of N100 per week and a 4.5% annual rate, total micro pension investments in Nigeria could reach N1.7 trillion by 2020 (Iwelumo and Olanipekun 2017). A financial inclusion advocacy group called Enhancing Financial Innovation & Access (EFInA) shared the same optimism that the scheme could fill the gap in the country's low pension coverage – which they stated was crucial given the growing elderly population – believing that it would create a pool of savings to stimulate economic growth and development (EFInA 2019). When I spoke to pension industry officials, these were their perspectives on the opportunities offered by micro pensions:

Micro pensions is the new frontier. There are opportunities there. Any person that is interested [in investing] is going to get a return. The only constraint is whether PFAs are willing to look at the bigger picture. The only area you see growth is the informal sector. – Interview #171, senior official in the Micro Pensions department at PenCom

Micro pensions can support various sectors of the Nigerian economy. We already have some private equity pots that are focused on financing power projects and PFAs have invested. So far, we have invested almost N60 billion into the provision of power. Really, this is transformational. – Interview with a PenCom Commissioner

The whole idea is to mitigate, minimise, if possible, prevent old-age poverty. The informal sector is vulnerable. Maybe because of micro pensions people will have some sort of savings they can rely on. In many respects, people still rely on their children in old age. This is an attempt to get some kind of independence in the future. – Interview with a Director at a pension fund

Respondents in the pension industry emphasised that the pension system is geared towards growing the economy. They highlighted that micro pensions would achieve this by expanding coverage among the working population. Even though they stated aims to mitigate retirement risks associated with informality, when pushed, they inadvertently revealed that the scheme's success would be measured by the rate of participation and the pool of funds for investment, rather than effective protection against old-age poverty. The privatisation of risks relieves that burden on the state. As with microfinance, promoting the transformative potential of micro pensions, rather than demonstrating effectiveness, legitimises a profitmaking agenda (Taylor 2012). Bateman (2010) found that in circumstances where there is a conflict between the interests of labour and capital, commercial logics favour profitmaking over a social mission.

The Bank recommends a zero pillar to incorporate the poorest who are unable to contribute. Having said that, financial constraints in developing countries might hinder the viability of government support (Shankar and Asher 2011). The core rationale behind the pension reform was that the government had overextended itself in providing retirement benefits to a select minority, making it imprudent to replicate such an error to offer social assistance to the millions of people living in extreme poverty. As a reminder, cash transfers in Nigeria do not currently target the elderly population, and the NSCC – which has the mandate to ensure welfare for older persons – has limited influence and instead focuses on advocacy. This is what a senior official in the Micro Pensions department at PenCom had to say about social pensions:

Is the design adequate to address our concerns? Does it take into account the peculiarities of our country? If we look at the World Bank model, there is a zero pillar. A large number of people are on the poverty line, and they need support in the form of transfers, not them saving. Why is our own one-size-fits-all? You must have a surplus before you can invest. There are limitations in the Act itself, but you can only go so far. – Interview #171

PenCom seems to be preoccupied with enforcing stringent regulations to combat the history of corruption scandals (see table below). They made efforts to enhance transparency, erect procedural barriers to prevent embezzlement, and safeguard pension funds from volatility with conservative investments (PRA 2014). Scholars who appreciate the value of microinsurance argue that regulations reduce the risks of participation, particularly for informal workers with less risk-bearing capacity, and this fosters the growth of the sector (Matul et al 2010; Shankar and Asher 2011). What we observe is a shift away from ensuring universal welfare as social policies concentrate on regulating entry into financial markets, which, in turn, reshapes their objectives (Lavinas et al 2023). The government, while encouraging informal workers to adopt micro pensions, does not completely withdraw from social protection. Instead, it establishes a fiscal and regulatory environment that allows financial institutions to profit from social services like pensions. This aligns with critiques of financialisation, as discussed by scholars such as

Lavinas (2018) and Kar (2018), who argue that rather than diminishing state involvement, it redefines it to create markets in areas traditionally managed by the state.

Section	Summary of Legislation
Section 78	The appointment of a Risk Management Committee and Investment Strategy Committee to determine risk profiles of PFAs, maintain internal control measures, comply with investment guidelines, review performance of major securities.
Section 80	Every PFA and PFC to appoint a compliance officer responsible for, and liaising with, PenCom to ensure compliance with the Act.
Sections 85-87	Guidelines on investments which prioritise safe returns; restrictions on certain types of investments to ensure transparency and risk management.
Sections 88-90	Prohibitions barring PFAs from investing in securities issued by themselves, their shareholders, their employees, or spouses, to prevent conflicts of interest and ensure transparency.

Table 6.2: PRA 2014 anti-corruption legislation

Source: PRA 2014

Fund	Target Investment Group	Investment Risk Profile
Fund I	Active contributors below the age of 50	High risk. Up to 75% of funds may be invested in variable instruments
Fund II	Active contributors below the age of 50 (default fund)	Moderate risk. Up to 55% of funds may be invested in variable instruments
Fund III	Active contributors above the age of 50	Low risk. Up to 20% of funds may be invested in variable instruments
Fund IV	Retirees only	Low risk. Up to 10% of funds may be invested in variable instruments
Fund V	Micro pension scheme only	Very low risk. Up to 5% of funds may be invested in variable instruments
Fund VI	Contributors who prefer non-interest-bearing instruments	Moderate risk. Up to 55% of funds may be invested in variable instruments

Table 6.3: PenCom multi-fund structure

Source: ARM Pensions 2024; PenCom 2018a

Micro pensions are a cheap product and can also be regarded as inferior if they perpetuate income inequality. As Mader (2015) pointed out, people resort to using inferior microfinance products when they lack better options. For instance, since PenCom regulation segregates

funds from the mandatory and voluntary schemes, imposing separate investment regulations and barring cross-subsidisation across the formality divide (PRA 2014), the current pension system in Nigeria risks reproducing entrenched inequalities by focusing heavily on financial market integration while excluding the poorest, and creating further segmentation with the separation between mandatory and voluntary schemes.

Despite the lip service during the reform, there were significant conflicts of interest in the management of Nigeria's restructured pension industry. PFC directors were part of the closed-door reform committee, and officials moved between roles at PenCom, PFAs, or other private sector jobs related to the overarching neoliberal reforms (Casey and Dostal 2008). Additionally, in 2018, PenCom had to update protocols on the disbursement of death benefits after retirees alleged that PFAs had been processing claims for their survivor benefits while they were still alive (Esoimeme 2020). Still, PenCom remains steadfast in their confidence in private fund managers, as affirmed by a senior official in the Micro Pensions department who remarked that the new model: '*Takes management to the private sector instead of under the government where there is likelihood of mismanagement*' (Interview #171). Moreover, the Director General of PenCom, Aisha Dahir-Umar, wrote a book, *Fighting for the Future: Nigeria's Pension Reform Journey*, which offers some insight into the relationship between PenCom and the PFAs, as well as why the new system might be less prone to corruption in comparison to its predecessor (Dahir-Umar 2023). In her book, she talked about placing an administrative sanction on PFAs for not following guidelines, concerns such as lobbying and bribery, or other unethical activities. In her words:

This was a clear warning to the PFAs that we meant business. We showed them we were going to be strict with the enforcement of compliance in line with the laws, rules, and regulations guiding their operations. (Dahir-Umar p.114)

The tripartite system, with PenCom serving as the regulatory body, might be one of the most successful aspects of the micro pensions scheme. With the government supervising external parties, in doing so reducing conflicts of interest, the dynamics for oversight and enforcement change markedly. There is a clearer accountability structure, PFAs are held to higher standards of transparency, and government is more motivated to ensure compliance, thereby lessening opportunities for the embezzlement of large funds.

6.3.2. Leveraging the Poor for Profit?

The micro pension scheme has not performed as well as anticipated. As of December 2022, only 89,327 informal workers had registered for micro pensions, representing less than 2% of

PenCom's five-year target of eight million registered accounts (PenCom 2023). In retrospect, this goal was ambitious since it was not until 2018, 14 years after the launch of the mandatory scheme for formal workers, that they had reached eight million accounts (PenCom 2019). The micro pension fund stood at N368,034,392 (\$795,081.99) in December 2022, and contributors had already withdrawn N26,186,850 in this period (PenCom 2023). This performance paled in comparison to that of the DC scheme for formal workers, which, after 3 years of operation, had 2,543,178 accounts and a balance of N259.66 billion (approximately \$2 billion at that time) (PenCom 2008). Furthermore, market competition is sparse. Four out of the eighteen PFAs – Stanbic IBTC, ARM, Fidelity Pensions, and Premium Pensions – dominate the market, and collectively manage 75% of the total micro pension contributions (PenCom 2023).

PFA	Total Fund Amount (Naira)	Market Share (%)
1 Stanbic IBTC	160,278,158.77	43.55
2 ARM Pension Managers	50,231,013.09	13.65
3 Fidelity Pension Managers	39,493,887.14	10.73
4 Premium Pensions	26,584,263.14	7.22
TOTAL	276,587,322.14	75.15

Table 6.4: Market share analysis (as of December 2022)

Source: PenCom 2023

	Cumulative Registrations	Cumulative Contributions (Naira)	Average Contribution per Account (Naira)	Cumulative Withdrawal (Naira)
2019	39,686	17,359,808.74	437.43	–
2020	62,464	89,128,934.38	1426.88	2,287,759.88
2021	73,691	224,054,970.69	3040.47	17,776,596.04
2022	89,327	368,034,392.81	4120.08	26,186,850.22

Table 6.5: Micro pension registration and contribution metrics (2019 – 2022)

Source: PenCom 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023

Other contributing factors obstruct the financial success of the pension schemes in Nigeria, including micro pensions. Respondents within the pension industry acknowledged that returns on investment (ROI) were poor, but cited low interest rates and treasury bills yields, and an underdeveloped capital market, with inflation eroding gains, as key obstacles. From the outset, this DC scheme faced challenges linked to problems in the Nigerian financial system. Soon after its introduction in 2004, a global financial crisis that impacted Nigerian banks ensued (bearing in mind that PFCs responsible for safeguarding pension funds include many banks)

and the crisis spread to the pension system, causing ROI to plummet to 0.4% in 2008 (Casey 2011). Since then, underperformance has ebbed and flowed, caused by the deficient financial infrastructure and high inflation, hence undermining the core rationales of pension privatisation which promised financial sector development and economic growth (Dibal et al 2024; Zubair 2016). High inflation rates and currency devaluation continue to erode investment returns in Nigeria, causing a decline in pension asset values in the five years between 2018 and 2023 (Stears 2022). In agreement with these assessments, a Head of Strategy at a PFA remarked:

We are currently facing inflation issues, but that is beyond our control. Inflation is eating up the gains in whatever investment we make. The rate of return is now less than inflation on average. We will continue to deal with that until the economy decides to right itself and things take a better turn to allow opportunities for investment whereby returns surpass inflation. – Interview #176

The combination of financialisation and inflation risks is likely to have a disproportionate effect on individuals who earn low incomes in the informal economy, which is concerning. In a more traditional setting, informal workers and the poor would rely on non-market mechanisms for savings and risk management, such as rotating savings groups or keeping assets in cash or tangible goods. These options, while limited in returns, often insulate them from direct market volatility. However, with the push for financial inclusion and the expansion of micro pensions, these vulnerable groups are now more directly tied to financial markets, making them more susceptible to the risks that come with market fluctuations, inflation, and currency devaluation. For low-income earners, who already save marginal amounts, the erosion of their retirement benefits through inflation would be devastating. Any savings they manage to set aside for the future are diminished in real value over time, undermining the promise that micro pensions will offer financial security in old age. In essence, the move toward financial inclusion has brought the poor closer to the volatility of financial markets. While it theoretically offers them access to higher returns, in practice, it exposes them to risks that they may not fully understand or be prepared to bear.

But considering the sluggish rate at which informal workers are participating in the scheme, PFAs focus their concerns on avenues for capital accumulation. Respondents in PFAs voiced that the scheme is losing appeal due to unattractive fees and investment constraints, which, for instance, allow only 60% of contributions to be invested, while the other 40% is left to be accessible for contingent withdrawal. PFAs also operate on a commission basis so while they may profit more from pensions during favourable economic conditions, they also face losses in downturns. Even Stanbic IBTC, the top performing micro pensions provider, would have been constrained to levying a fee rate of 0.75% of assets under management (N160,278,158), as per the fee structure detailed in the table below. The conservative investment regulations, in line with government interests, and flexible voluntary arrangements, tailored to suit informal

workers' preferences, become problematic for PFAs. According to the Director of a pension fund:

Fees are determined by the National Pension Commission. As a PFA you cannot unilaterally charge. Because the amount of contributions is small, you cannot charge much. You have to charge as a percentage of the income you're making. The contributions are really minute. If you compute that and look at what you're committing to provide the service, is it worth it? Some PFAs might say they don't want to do [micro pensions] because of that. They are in business to make profit. – Interview #177

Total Value of Funds Under Fees Management	
Below N5 million	No fees
N5 million – N2 billion	Charge fees based on assets under management: PFA (0.75%), PFC (0.25%)
N2 billion – N4 billion	Charge fees based on assets under management: PFA (0.5%), PFC (0.1%)
Above N4 billion	Charge fees based on income generated: PFA (5%), PFC (1.5%), PenCom (1%)

Table 6.6: PenCom fee-based structure

Source: PenCom 2021b

Several PFAs choose not to participate in the micro pension scheme, and among those that do, only a few have dedicated departments. A Director at a non-participating PFA explained that their research indicated managing micro pensions likely incurs more costs than profits, and they believe that it would take too long to break even so they are hesitant to embrace the growth potential. All of the pension industry respondents agreed that PFAs have easier means of generating profits than targeting informal workers, though the PenCom officials maintained that significant gains could eventually be realised if only PFAs get the foresight to unlock the untapped potential of the sector, likening it to a latent 'gold mine'. For PFAs, micro pensions are not their main priority. As anticipated, any convictions they may hold regarding financial inclusion or poverty reduction take a backseat to considerations of financial bottom-lines. They conclude that the sector simply is not ready yet. These were their viewpoints:

No, and I think I can speak for the industry, not just us. If it wasn't a government agenda, I'm not sure anyone would have started it. So yes, the industry is not particularly excited about it. I can say that. We're keeping an eye on the ball, but we're not jumping in with two feet. Part of this is that PFAs are also businesses. At the end of the day, we earn income based on assets under management, not on the number of people registered. If I can get a million naira from two people who work in MTN or First Bank, why would I hassle to get a million naira from a hundred people given all the challenges of micro pensions? It's straightforward. It's still a business. I'll concentrate where my revenues are most likely to be enhanced. – Interview with MD of a pension fund

I won't say it's not worthwhile. What I will say is that we need to continue to rework it, to improve on the process, and make it more attractive. As it is, there are issues. But that does not mean that is not a desirable project. – Interview #176, Head of Strategy at a pension fund

It's not that we don't like MP, but operations are discouraging. We're more focused on the formal sector, but I'm sure once micro pensions stabilises, the amount amassed will overtake what is currently being managed under the mandatory scheme. – Interview #177, pension fund Director.

Micro pensions are profitable only with widespread adoption enabling the aggregation of the low fees. Critics of the bottom-of-the-pyramid (BoP) approach assert that it is bound to exclude the poorest who lack purchasing power (Karnani 2007). The pension industry officials echoed the same sentiments, stating that their strategies are to focus on those with high incomes who are more profitable. In the words of two Directors at pension funds:

At the moment, given the challenges, the wealth is not at the bottom but at the top. In the last couple of years, the Nigerian government itself has not been in good shape and there is a lot of poverty in the country. People are struggling to have their daily bread, so how are they going to save money for pensions? – Interview with MD of a pension fund

We don't want the aim to be defeated. It's not just for the top end. The masses are the ones who will constitute problems for the society if they're not served. They'll rely heavily on their relations or if they don't have anything to do, they begin to commit crimes to survive. We want to eliminate that. Once you stabilise and capture the high-income earners, you can move to the lower end and manage them too. – Interview #177

The government's approach of devising private pensions then handing off the responsibility for pension management – and supposedly for old-age welfare – to the private sector brings up questions of whether the government's primary objective is to address the vulnerability of the working poor. Additionally, their discourse on micro pensions as a new frontier, particularly with the formal sector nearing saturation, implies that impoverished pensioners are seen more as a means of surplus accumulation than a vulnerable demographic in need of protection. Using a definition of 'financial frontier' that deems it an opportunity for "theft and dispossession with the excesses of accumulation" (Ballester et al 2023, p311), we can see how the poor are commodified in new ways under conditions that are far from equal. Not only does the state neglect to support their livelihoods, but it also shifts more responsibility by encouraging them to become BoP consumers. Nevertheless, given the level of poverty in the country, there might be limited scope for exploitation and low-income groups might be entirely overlooked from pensions altogether. This, of course, still leaves them exposed to vulnerability. For the private sector, financialisation is about profitmaking but labour commodification (that limits purchasing power and microinsurance demand), macroeconomic challenges, and state regulations, curb potential gains. In this sense, when this causes the private sector to withdraw participation, financial inclusion becomes less about ensuring old-age security for the poorest and more about generating huge investment capital and expanding financial markets.

6.3.3. Tensions and Trade-Offs in the Public-Private Alliance

The execution of the scheme has encountered complications, leading to tension between the PFAs and PenCom, each blaming the other for reluctance to invest in developing the market. PFAs highlight supply-side challenges such as registration and withdrawal bottlenecks caused by PenCom bureaucratic inefficiencies. More importantly, they are conscious of insights from the literature which advise that expanding microinsurance markets involves large investments in product development, technological and administrative infrastructure, distribution channels, marketing, as well as incentives such as matching contribution (Matul et al 2010; Shankar and Asher 2011). Of all these initiatives, PenCom has only committed to financing public outreach, a minimum pension guarantee (with funds yet to be allocated), and provisions for PFAs to seek approval for any incentives they devise (PenCom 2018b). The success of micro pensions hinges on effective partnerships between the state and private sector. Nonetheless, there is a concern that businesses exploit partnerships to externalise risks and costs while retaining the bulk of profits for themselves (Bateman 2010; Midgley 2012). As reported by participants:

Private sector always tries to cash in on things. For me, it is an issue of how you manage your business. Do you want to develop [the market] so you cash in in the future, or do you want to leave the gold mine because you don't want to spend today? They just want to make money; they don't want any responsibility. Government wants to run hospitals, roads, better schools. Why should they give that money? – Interview #175, PenCom Commissioner

The government is doing nothing. All it has done is launch the scheme. They are not giving any incentive to anybody to save. As far as the government is concerned, they have launched the scheme, it is contributory, go and do it. – Interview with MD of a pension fund

From PenCom's perspective, they believe they already contribute more than their fair share. Even after twenty years of payments, they still hold pension liabilities for former public servants from the previous DB scheme for another 15 years. Further, though PenCom is yet to set the minimum pension guarantee figure and compliance with allocations for the Pension Protection Fund is pending, they anticipate major outlays in this regard as well. In short, the state desires to project proactivity without bearing too much of the financial burden, behaving akin to a pied piper luring private firms with promises of vast profits. They object to PFAs giving precedence to profits, a practice typically expected from the private sector. While the decision to opt for privatisation was primarily driven by its perceived efficiency, there seems to be a disparity in the understanding of efficiency between both parties. This dynamic highlights the fundamental contradictions within neoliberalism. The state's reliance on the market to fill gaps in protection backfires when private firms disengage due to low returns and other complications. Tensions emerge because private companies seek state resources to develop profitable markets, as observed by scholars such as Cordilha (2022) and Kar (2017), and both parties vie over who should bear the financial burden for social protection systems. As a result, both the state and

the market defer the responsibility for investing in the sector to each other, confining micro pension participation only to those who can afford to pay for premium services.

An effective incentive for micro pensions abroad has been matching contributions, which PFAs argue could boost participation. Micro pensions schemes in India effectively collaborate with the government to deliver the schemes, with the government occasionally subsidising savings with corresponding support (Midgley 2012; Shankar and Asher 2011). There are doubts that micro pensions can achieve mass engagement without proper incentives (Guven 2019). Some analysts suggest that non-financial strategies such as simplified enrolment can have a more pronounced impact than matching contributions (Kwena and Turner 2013). However, when I spoke to the Head of Strategy at a pension fund, he dismissed these claims, stating that while they might increase registrations, he believes that they may not necessarily translate to more contributions. To borrow a proverb, you can lead a horse to water, but you cannot force it to drink. If the micro pension sector is to thrive, then someone must fund its development. The PenCom spokespeople immediately rejected matching contributions. They said:

At the moment, we are relying on PFAs to provide the incentives. Matching contributions means there will be a commitment by the government. – Interview #171, official in the Micro Pensions department

The issue is who will pay? The only organ that can pay matching contributions is the government. For it to make meaning, it must be a reasonable percentage. We are talking of billions. – Interview #175, PenCom Commissioner

The Head of Strategy responded to these comments as well, insisting that: ‘*Government has to pay for the incentives*’ before laughing and adding ‘*Who else will pay?*’ (Interview #176). Even as the state reduces its direct involvement, it is still called upon to play a crucial role in supporting and sustaining market mechanisms, particularly when market falters, to ensure the viability of the private schemes. PFAs fail to generate profitability on their own, so they require state intervention that is selective only to shoring up the market, all while maintaining the terms of the tripartite arrangement by benefiting the most from gains. PenCom has been exploring channels for compromise. They have amplified their outreach efforts by meeting with religious leaders to drive participation among their congregations, presenting at the Lagos and Kwara trade fairs, and conducting workshops for a few trade associations in Lagos (PenCom 2022) – illustrating a strategy to draw on social capital to navigate the crisis of failed financialisation. During our interview in January 2022, the senior official from the Micro Pensions department disclosed that they were considering options to leverage relationships with stakeholders (such as the NHIS) that were open to structuring an incentive arrangement whereby the PFAs would cover upfront costs that they would later recoup from investment returns. The government has partnered with insurance firms such as AXA Mansard Health Insurance, Leadway Assurance

Company, and Tangerine Life Insurance to offer certain health insurance incentives (PenCom 2023).

6.4. Concluding Thoughts

This chapter has illuminated the intricate relationship between pensions and broader social protection policies within Nigeria, revealing how historical mismanagement and contemporary neoliberal practices have shaped the current pension landscape. The evolution of Nigeria's social policy landscape and pension system reflects the complex interplay between neoliberal market principles, state retrenchment, and efforts to maintain political legitimacy through social programmes. While private-sector-led growth has been embraced for its presumed efficiency, this has often come at the expense of the most vulnerable populations, especially those in the informal economy. Pension reforms, aimed at addressing the mismanagement and corruption that plagued the previous system, have similarly struggled under Nigeria's weak financial infrastructure and volatile economic environment. The shift to DC pensions reflects a broader neoliberal impulse but has undermined solidarity and redistribution.

The private sector's role in pension management illustrates how market-driven motivations and public-private partnerships have influenced pension provision, often at the expense of genuine social progress. The focus on profitability, combined with low returns due to inflation and weak capital markets, has marginalised informal workers who are now disproportionately exposed to volatile market risks without the support of employer contributions or adequate government backing. The chapter suggests that while the government and private sector view pensions as opportunities for capital accumulation, the wider context of social retrenchment and inadequate investment in social sectors compromises the efficacy and equity of welfare provision. The state and private sector's emphasis on pensions seems driven by a desire to access a potential resource pool, rather than by a genuine concern for the welfare of the poor. However, as the micro pension initiative demonstrates, the government's reluctance to bear the full cost of social protection – leaving it to private actors – has perpetuated inequality rather than alleviating it. The commodification of pensions has exposed low-income informal workers to the volatility of financial markets, with minimal profit being generated for the private sector anyway, further questioning the viability of a purely market-based model for old-age security.

Chapter 7 shifts focus to explore the perspectives and experiences of informal workers, exploring their views on pensions, their interest in the scheme, and the obstacles in adopting it. I also examine the alternative strategies they use to secure their livelihoods in the long term, as well as their development aspirations and the claims they make on the government.

CHAPTER 7

Financial Logics While Hustling for Retirement

In the previous chapter, I critically engaged with the supply-side challenges for the delivery of micro pensions in Nigeria. I now flip the coin to look at how informal workers are responding to this scheme, and the extent of the demand for it. I explore the competition between micro pensions and informal saving alternatives, noting that many people do not find micro pensions offerings compelling enough to shift their financial priorities. Their informal strategies emerge as the primary means through which informal workers resist the pressures of financialisation, as the market fails to provide optimal solutions. I consider that despite how neoliberal policies have eroded informal social protection, it still remains essential for parents seeking support in old age, and is in fact often the first, last, and only recourse. In this chapter, I contribute to the literatures on the financialisation of poverty and social policy by showing how informal workers resist formal systems they perceive as exploitative and ill-suited to their realities, and revealing how their financial practices offer more viable solutions than market-driven schemes.

Financial inclusion and financialisation have gained significant attention in policymaking and academic circles. However, while the focus has largely been on profitability, scalability, and addressing supply-side challenges, they often neglect the voices of the target population they claim to serve. A comprehensive understanding of financialisation requires qualitative insights into the financial logics of the target market – in this case both high and low-income informal workers – thus revealing deeper, context-specific needs and concerns that suit their cultural, social, and economic realities. Through my research, I found that the story of financialisation of poverty in Nigeria is not merely about resource allocation or even the reluctance of the state or private sector to invest in developing the market, but also highlights the capacity of informal workers to reject the scheme altogether based on their own financial logics as they attempt to cope with inadequate provision at the informal, state, and market spheres.

Through this analysis, I gain more understanding of the potentials for transformative social policy for the informal economy. I end this chapter by reviewing informal workers' desires for government intervention to enhance productivity (allowing for income-generation to reduce reliance on welfare) and promoting reproduction to lower costs for essential services. Scott (1976) argued that poor people may prioritise self-preservation over the *potential* of long-term gains, choosing instead to focus their demands on removing the obstacles constraining their consumption. But I found that many informal workers across income brackets are particularly concerned with their roles as productive members of society as well as implications of their status as economic agents. The view that informal workers have of themselves as either consumers or producers impacts when, how, why, and what claims they make on the state. It also raises crucial questions: if immediate consumption and survival is the first priority, what does that mean for protracted investments in instruments such as pensions? What else are informal workers concerned about that they believe are essential for sustaining the wellbeing of their families and communities?

When confronted with the slow uptake of the micro pension scheme that had initially generated great optimism among the pension industry, pension officials dismissed explanations for the lack of success, attributing it mainly to the financial illiteracy of informal actors. Using their responses and those from my interviews with microfinance savings associates, I will unpack the assumptions of financial illiteracy, before analysing the savings alternatives that informal workers have at their disposal and their rationales for rejecting micro pensions. I then present four vignettes on how informal workers organise or manage their retirements within the context of the commodification of risk, labour, and social services. I analyse the role of informal support mechanisms given formal social protection gaps, particularly given how much neoliberalism has notably impacted kinship systems and intergenerational retirement plans, diminishing the adequacy of support to elderly parents. Next, I describe the shifting old-age support strategies of informal workers, including investment in their children and postponing retirement. I round out the chapter by reviewing the development ambitions of informal workers.

7.1. The Paradox of Financial Illiteracy and Rationality

There is a common misconception that people who are 'financially illiterate' – meaning they do not fully embrace formal financial services or are not financially educated – are not capable of rational financial decisions. When interviewing officials in the pension industry, government, and local communities, they pointed to financial illiteracy as the explanation for the slow uptake of micro pensions. However, a closer examination of perspectives from the informal economy reveals that the lack of trust in government and the pension system, and ongoing casualisation

of labour play a bigger role in the fragility of micro pension schemes. The false dichotomy of financial literacy and the economic rationality of the poor serves to reinforce the idea that poor people are poor due to bad personal choices. Beginning with an analysis of this view, this section will then shift focus to challenge the assumptions that informal actors do not have a savings culture and explore the rationales behind their decision making. I found that pension providers had not taken proper account of the risk mitigation alternatives in the informal economy, such as rotating savings groups, which disrupt financialisation. The issue at hand is not whether they can save, but rather, whether they are willing to entrust their savings to the micro pension scheme.

7.1.1. Blaming Financial Illiteracy: Perceptions from the Pension Industry

Nigeria's initiative for financial inclusion, overseen by the Central Bank, defines the challenge in terms of ensuring access to formal financial services for adults, encapsulating the goal with the phrase 'banking the unbanked' (CBN 2018). CBN determined that over 40% of the adult population were unbanked, most of whom were women, young people between the ages of 18 and 35, and rural dwellers, especially those in the northwest and northeast. According to a 2012 EFInA survey, 23 million adults saved cash at home, indicating a missed opportunity to generate substantial deposits for capture by the formal finance sector (EFInA 2024). Since the 1990s, CBN has extended bank operations to rural areas to enhance the accessibility of credit, savings, insurance, payments, and now, pensions (CBN 2019; Nwosu et al 2020). By deferring to calls for financial inclusion, policymakers subsume wider development or poverty alleviation objectives into a matter of access to financial services, consumption of financial products, or some level of incorporation into the financial infrastructure, rather than an increase in welfare protections, believing that the latter naturally follows the former.

It is a known fact that there is a correlation between low poverty levels in developed nations and well-established financial services, and high poverty levels where a lot of people are outside the financial system. The more financially included a nation is, the less the poverty level is. – Interview with a former official in the Micro Pensions department at PenCom

For proponents of financial inclusion, one factor that justifies self-exclusion is low incomes. They acknowledge that the poorest in society tend to have the highest exposure to risk with less access to instruments to help manage them (Midgley 2012; World Bank 2013). Within the pension industry, there was an assumption that people at the BoP cannot afford to save enough for retirement through micro pensions. As discussed in Chapter 6, this understanding prompted PFAs to concentrate efforts on higher-income segments, where there is greater potential for profit extraction. I interviewed managers at a microfinance and a cooperative in Abuja who echoed similar sentiments:

When it comes to savings for people in the informal sector, to be honest, it has not been easy. There are a lot of factors that discourage people from saving. I'm talking of those at the bottom of the pyramid. The unbanked. It's difficult for them to save for a [long] period of time without touching it. – interview #070

People are crying that there is no money. It's because they don't have a savings culture, that is the reason why they always cry that things are hard. That is why we encourage them to start saving no matter how small it is, so that they can make investments. – Interview #062

Beck and Demirguc-Kunt (2008) contend that barriers to financial services worsen inequality, while expansion boosts productivity, economic growth, and poverty reduction. That is, they believe that the incorporation of the poor – those who require the most support – into financial markets enhances their socioeconomic outcomes. Conversely, for informal workers with some disposable income who opt out of banking with formal institutions or participating in pension schemes, there is some frustration at their minimal engagement, which is attributed to an absence of a 'savings culture' in northern Nigeria. One common criticism was that northerners have a 'misplaced' faith in God which hindered their adoption of insurance instruments, instead relying on divine intervention. Aisha Dahir-Umar, PenCom's DG, stated that opponents of the scheme "are not used to saving towards their own future", opining that the sociocultural issue would be resolved with time (Dahir-Umar 2023 p149). In agreement with their boss, a PenCom Commissioner and a senior official in the Micro Pensions department at PenCom added:

Anything that requires people to take away from their income, we're not fully prepared for that. We're not aware that such things need to be done. Our expectation is that our income is for consumption. No plan whatsoever. We're not people cultured in planning to take care of future responsibilities. We handle issues of spending money once it comes. If it doesn't come, we don't anticipate. This is the first time we're having a formal scheme that would want people to plan for the future and because people are not used to it, it is a bit difficult. That feeling of responsibility is not in us, and it is a culture that we need to develop. – Interview #175

How do you get people to come on board? Not just for the short-term, but for the long haul. It's about changing perceptions in the minds of people. We're very short-term in terms of perspective. People are trying to survive. They are not thinking of how to defer current consumption for future consumption – Interview #171

Beyond the assumption of deficient saving practices, there was also a perception that informal workers lacked discipline and a sense of responsibility. One Executive Director at a PFA went as far as to say that informal workers were more inclined to spend their disposable income on beer and recreational activities than pensions. In Chapter 6, I addressed the potential for the implementation of matching contributions incentives which might encourage the uptake of micro pensions. While discussing this option with the PenCom Commissioner, he expressed a preference for a minimum pension guarantee contingent on a certain amount of contribution or participation over a specified period of time. In his words, '*When you do that, you're making people responsible. You earn this money from the government, but only if you're responsible*

enough' (Interview #175). The minimum pension guarantee lends credence to the PenCom's avowed poverty alleviation objectives. Nevertheless, given that both matching contributions and a minimum pension guarantee would cost the government a considerable amount of money, it undermines their dismissal of matching contributions on the grounds of affordability. Rather, this demonstrates that it is based on an ideological bias about who informal workers are, how they operate, as well as whether or when to prioritise their welfare concerns.

Left to my respondents in the pension industry, if only informal workers understood pensions architecture and the benefits that they would enjoy by participating, they would embrace the new DC system. To them, this highlighted the necessity of financial education. Respondents outside of the pension industry also held similar beliefs about the need for financial education. According to a pastor and an agent for a savings cooperative in Yola:

On our end, we've been able to design a programme due to the challenges we see from older people when we ask them what they have done for themselves in preparing for old age. They never knew how tough that age was going to be. Last time we had the seminar, we were talking about how to save for the future. – Interview #154

The educated ones might do micro pensions, but those who are not educated will not accept it. They will think it is a scam. Even now, teaching them to join our modern savings plan is more difficult in rural areas. The educated ones who know what they are doing will want to plan for their future. – Interview #134 (Translated from Fulfulde)

Even among those who initially showed enthusiasm for micro pensions, the perception was that those concentrated in 'unorganised' low-income activities were not likely to comprehend the framework and significance of pensions, and thus they required "significant handholding" (Iwelumo and Olanipekun 2017). This financial education pertains to training on concepts such compound interest, inflation, and risk diversification, as well as advising informal workers on their incompetence in managing their own retirement savings. The Head of Strategy at a PFA asserted that despite the confidence that informal workers have in their long-term investments, in reality, most of them are bad investors. He claimed that: "*Most times the knowledge isn't there, time required to manage the investment isn't there*" (Interview #176) and they have weak understanding of the financial market. Therefore, they are doomed to fail. Yet, even with the PFAs' financial expertise, they have also struggled to achieve investment returns that outpace inflation. The focus on financial literacy assumes that it will enable informal workers to navigate market-based retirement solutions effectively and responsibilises them for their own retirement futures. But given that pension industry experts too face difficulty in ensuring the stability of pension investments, this indicates that market solutions and financialisation may not be the panacea for poverty alleviation or retirement security that they are purported to be.

There was also the matter of the lack of trust in a formal pension system due to the history of corruption scandals which continue to linger. All the respondents in the pension industry noted the importance of trust as a factor for participation in micro pensions. From the perspective of pension providers, the corruption problem was resolved in 2004, and the only lasting concern is a misperception of the current state of the system. They were aware that they faced a major public relations crisis, but severely underestimated the depth of informal workers' aversion. They believed the contributory scheme had proven its trustworthiness, and that raising public awareness to distinguish between the previous DB and current DC schemes would suffice. For example, a Commissioner at PenCom claimed that if only informal workers were informed that pensioners making news headlines for unpaid benefits were those owed accrued rights under the DB scheme, they would be more inclined to note the distinction, and their reluctance would soften eventually when those benefits were paid off. He added:

All the delays under the contributory pension scheme are based on legacy issues. In terms of people having trust in the system, if you pay people their entitlements, people would love the system. To be honest with you, you can build trust in one day. With time, when we are able to outlive the defined benefit aspect of pensions, I believe pensions will be seamless everywhere.
– Interview #175

Pension providers crafted their own explanations for the low traction of the scheme, concluding that micro pensions is failing due to financial illiteracy, the poverty level, the pandemic, and its voluntary nature. Firstly, although poverty determines the contribution amount a participant can afford, my findings show that low-income workers were 50% more likely to express enthusiasm for the scheme. The timing of the launch in 2019 might lead superficial observers to link the pandemic to the scheme's performance but it is hard to discern how typical hiccups brought on by the pandemic – necessitating measures such as lockdowns and social distancing – may have impacted the scheme's growth, especially considering the brief disruption in Nigeria, with lockdown only lasting a few weeks. Moreover, the scheme was introduced a year earlier in March 2019, and the performance, as measured by the number of newly registered accounts, has remained relatively consistent each year since then (See Table 6.5). Finally, while informal workers are indeed choosing to opt out of the scheme owing to its voluntary nature, it is worth noting that they choose to engage in informal savings and investments (as will be detailed in Section 7.1.2.), despite no formal obligation to do so. Yet, a Head of Strategy at a PFA insisted:

Why the other one is succeeding is because it is mandatory. It is deducted from your salary whether you like it or not. You don't have control over it. But this one that is voluntary is not going [well] because people have a choice and they're exercising their choice. – Interview #176

For the pension providers, the key strategy for encouraging participation in the scheme comes down to public awareness creation and marketing. However, a significant drawback of this communication plan was the arrangement of closed-door joint meetings exclusively between

PenCom and PFAs, without actively seeking to incorporate the viewpoints of informal workers and truly reckoning with the underlying reasons for their rejection of micro pensions. Instead, PenCom interacted with stakeholders such as trade union leaders or members of civil society and initiated a marketing campaign that utilised radio and social media, along with outdoor advertising methods such as billboards and posters on public transportation (PenCom 2023) – though given that PenCom shoulders the burden of public awareness, they noted the high cost of marketing efforts. The perspectives of the pension officials are highlighted below:

What we educate people on is the success of the formal pension scheme. It's unarguable that it has succeeded. It's been 15 years and we've got 10 million contributors and N10 trillion [in assets]. People have been paid their pensions as and when due, and there have been no incidents of any fraud, which is what makes people apprehensive. This is what we use to underpin the fact that it can be done and there are no issues so people shouldn't be sceptical of the scheme. – Interview with a director at a PFA

It's a tall order to sell it. What we're doing now is to ensure we do intensive awareness campaigns, reach out to a lot of stakeholders, do a lot of persuasion and education to let people know the benefits they stand to get. The numbers are not too encouraging at the moment partly because we haven't done much sensitisation, which we are currently trying to do. – Interview #171, a senior official in the Micro Pensions department at PenCom

To sensitise is costly. We have a very big communications budget. We came up with a budget of about N3.5 billion to sensitise. Tell me, you take N3.5 billion to run sensitisation programmes and that is not enough because you're not covering everything. Really, if you look at the budget of PenCom, that is just about 25% of our annual budget. If we spend that on sensitisation, then what of the other things we want to do? – Interview #175, Commissioner at PenCom

Few among them acknowledged the need for offshore investments to diversify portfolios and buffer against inflation risks and currency devaluation. Since the domestic economy is weak, PFAs can access foreign markets that are less affected by inflation or have different economic cycles. Investments denominated in other currencies also help retain the value of the savings better. Even so, guidelines under Section 87(2) of PRA 2014 state that offshore investments are subject to the Central Bank's foreign exchange rules and the approval of the President (PRA 2014). Two respondents, one a Director at a PFA advocating for the relaxation of the protocol and the other a PenCom Commissioner warning of the flaws of the strategy noted:

Those that are even under the mandatory scheme have that fear. They complain about it that they're not seeing real value because of inflation, but there is nothing they can do because it is compulsory. But I know PenCom is working on how PFAs can invest in dollar-denominated instruments. Unless that is done, the fear even under the mandatory scheme is there. We're in Nigeria. Nobody is giving you returns that are really above inflation. – Interview #177

Offshore investments come with their own risks as well. The Act made it a bit tight for us that we have to get the portfolio approved by the President. Okay, he approves the portfolio, but how do they invest? We need to get the custodial issues sorted out. Maybe they need to get some support from foreign asset managers who guide them as to which assets to buy and which to sell, and when to buy and when to sell. – Interview #175

While offshore investments potentially offer better returns and stability, they are yet another investment option subject to conservative regulatory and operational challenges that create barriers to viable investment management and diminish the capacity for realising gains. This highlights the interaction between regulatory frameworks and market practices, the challenges of weak financial infrastructure, the practical limitations of risk management instruments, and the impact of macroeconomic factors on market-based solutions. The applied restrictions of this risk management instrument do more to reveal how it constrains informal workers' ability to truly secure their futures.

7.1.2. Subverting the System and Defying Capture

By framing social protection as an opportunity for capital accumulation, financialisation projects often overlook the nuanced financial behaviours of informal workers. treating them as either financially illiterate or in need of formal financial services. Scholars like Dolan and Roll (2013) and Guermond (2020) argue that this perspective erases the sophisticated financial strategies that already exist within informal economies. These strategies may not align with market-based solutions but are nonetheless effective in managing risks and providing support. This section will demonstrate that the hesitation to adopt micro pensions is not due to ignorance but rather a rational response to the disconnect between formal pension schemes and economic realities of informal economies. Informal workers consider the impacts of an unpredictable economic environment as they employ tools to secure their livelihoods. The disregard of these concerns speaks to a critique of neoliberalism, which suggests that responsibilisation without adequate, accessible mechanisms leaves individuals in a precarious state.

A clear trend among respondents, even those with the lowest incomes, was their consistent saving habits. Contrary to claims that they lack a 'savings culture', they demonstrated robust personal financial management, with savings standing out as a cornerstone of their approach. The predominant savings instrument is rotating credit and savings groups, known as *adashe* to northerners. These are voluntary clubs that pool predetermined contributions at regular meetings where members take turns to collect the sums until the cycle is concluded and can then be restarted for as many times as the members wish (Kpessa-Whyte 2018). Participation in informal savings groups was widespread across all demographic categories including age, gender, education, and income levels. 85% of the informal workers interviewed save regularly (daily, weekly, or monthly), either independently, with *adashe*, or microfinance banks. While these savings are typically devoted to immediate needs such as rent payments (usually paid annually) or school fees, and not retirement, they reflect a steady pattern of saving behaviour and a dedication to building financial reserves. Evidently, informal workers can save. For micro

pension providers, the task lies not in teaching them how to save, but in convincing them to redirect their savings through formal channels for micro pensions.

There are many reasons why this might prove difficult for the pension industry. For one thing, while savings are an ex-ante risk mitigation measure for people who predict future risks and attempt to mitigate their exposure, they can also serve secondary purposes. Guermond (2020) found that savings and credit groups generate 'relational value', denoting a form of relationship currency within social networks that enhances their durability against financialisation. Informal workers who participate in savings groups view their finances as an expression of solidarity. They emphasise how much they trust the friends, neighbours, and colleagues they save with, in addition to the communal benefits *adashe* fosters. The officials at the savings cooperatives in Abuja and Yola described the programmes they deliver to their members, including food donation drives, fertilisers and seeds for farmers, gifts during weddings or naming ceremonies, and aid for those experiencing temporary crises. These schemes were essentially mirroring *adashe* practices. Two load carriers, the first in Abuja and the second in Yola, commented on this socialisation of risk:

I do adashe with people from my hometown. We help each other. If someone else from our town moves here and gets into any kind of trouble, maybe if they get arrested by the police [for street trading] and they don't know what to do, we contribute money from the adashe to help him. Some people visit and can't afford the transport back home. We come together to contribute money to help them. – Interview #065 (Translated from Hausa)

If you want to do adashe, you have to do it with people you're close to. We complete the adashe rounds successfully with no issues. Once, one of my friends, after collecting his adashe, had a crisis that stopped him from contributing. We let him owe us the money and the rest of us came together to cover the cost and put him on a payment plan. We were patient and we let him pay us little at a time. – interview #128 (Translated from Hausa)

The relational value offered by *adashe* makes it tough competition for micro pensions. Albeit that theoretically, microinsurance can reach into these systems to attempt to extract relational value to ensure profits (Dolan and Roll 2013; Guermond 2020), micro pensions providers may not be prepared to offer the same benefits and incentives. This is not the only challenge for the micro pension scheme. High-income informal workers did not view the naira to be a reliable store of value and so they prioritised short-term savings to avoid inflationary erosions of their long-term deposits. To reiterate, the naira has undergone a fourfold devaluation from N361 to N1618 to a dollar within the scheme's first five years. Thus, informal workers refrained from saving past twelve months, contrary to the premise of pension systems that mandate saving throughout one's working life. In this economic climate, they found it more prudent to spend now over saving for later, so they converted their surplus income into assets to preserve the value. Over 60% of them indicated that investment in additional stock, equipment, market

stalls, property, or other assets, were more reliable and preferable to long-term cash deposits. They added that they expected these investments would protect them during emergencies and generate passive income in their old age, with most of them regarding it as their retirement plan. Quoting directly from two textile traders in Abuja and one in Yola:

If, for example, you make N1 million in a year, you have to think about what to do with that money. I can buy an asset and keep it for the future, even for old age. In an emergency, I could sell the asset and use the money. An asset like land, property, farms, or anything like that. A woman can buy gold and keep it to sell when the need arises. – Interview 096 (Translated from Hausa)

We have ways of saving. We cannot go and save our money in the bank. If we have money, we go and buy stock at least. We can go and buy property. If you buy it, that one will keep on getting value by the day. If you have a house that people are using as tenants, they would pay you rent. – interview #097

A businessman prefers to save goods than to save money, especially in this era when the prices of goods are increasing unreasonably. Every day, there's a new price. So, it's better for you to have the goods than to keep the money. – Interview #142

Low-income respondents abided by similar principles, though their choices in assets differed according to their incomes. They converted their cash into assets, but they were less likely to invest in real estate, and more likely to accumulate livestock, jewellery, or cheap land in their hometowns. While both groups spent money on their children's education expecting returns, this expense absorbed a larger portion of their finances when compared to the high-income group. Lastly, although they also invested in stock and equipment, this often entailed buying goods for a few days' worth of hawking or wheelbarrows in the case of load carriers. They saved smaller sums of money for shorter durations and on less productive assets. For instance, as their high-income counterparts saved in groups that required contributions in the hundreds of thousands, they typically saved N500-1000 into each pot. Furthermore, they were hindered from saving due to financial constraints and did not anticipate that these assets would sustain them until retirement. A load carrier in Abuja and a hawker in Yola explained:

The adashe I do is such that every 10 days, someone collects N50,000. When I took my adashe and combined it with my other savings, I had about N160,000. I sent the money with instructions for them to go buy me two calves worth N70,000 each. Whenever I collect my adashe, I combine with my savings in the bank, and I send the money home. They use the money to buy me cows. Among my family whenever someone gets ill or anything happens, they sell those cows and pay for their healthcare. Among my siblings, some of them go to school. If I buy the cow for N70,000, after 5 months, it would be worth N100,000 and we can sell it. That money can then be used to pay for anyone's healthcare, schooling, and still buy a small calf with the rest of the money. If there's a naming ceremony or their food finishes when I don't have money to send them, they can sell the cows to raise some money. – Interview #065 (Translated from Hausa)

It is not like we have a lot of money. The cash does not even last long. If you get some, you go buy a chicken or a goat and keep it. You cannot keep money aside. There is always something to spend it on. You use it to buy food. – Interview #114 (Translated from Fulfulde)

Of those informal workers not currently saving, 75% had done so previously but stopped due to financial constraints. The pressures included inconsistent and unpredictable incomes, rising household expenses, and transfers to parents and family. As an elderly butcher in Yola noted: ‘*You only save when you have reserves. You have to satisfy your hunger first*’ (Interview #101 – Translated from Fulfulde). Some low-income workers voiced desires to save for retirement but found it necessary to focus on strengthening their operations with hopes of experiencing a significant upturn that enabled them to save in the future and invest in lucrative assets. This group felt that saving for retirement was important, but not yet urgent. In the words of a hawker in Abuja:

Saving is necessary, especially for [traders]. I'm still putting that into consideration, but I haven't started saving yet. The reason why is that I haven't gotten enough capital to boom the business. There is a point I want to boom the business to before I can start doing that. I'm not buoyant yet.
– Interview #043

Nevertheless, informal workers generally demonstrate a savings and investment culture that is adaptable to local economic realities. They were also relatively well-incorporated into the financial system. Apart from *adashe*, interviewees banked with microfinance institutions, which involved short-term savings not exceeding 12 months, with field agents collecting small regular contributions at their convenience in the market. Others deposited money directly into bank accounts, now easily accessible through intermediaries equipped with point-of-sales (POS) machines. Interestingly, I found that some low-income informal workers frequently shared bank accounts with close family and other proxies – actions not accounted for by simply tallying all active bank accounts – and just because they evade detection by the financial system does not mean that these transactions are not taking place.

Rather than saving or investing in formal pensions, informal workers choose to engage in savings practices such as *adashe* or the accumulation of assets that can be used or sold when they retire or reach old age. This strategy, similar in some sense to micro pensions, can be both flexible and future-oriented, and not only focused on meeting immediate needs. There is some expectation, particularly for the high-income group, that these resources might provide security once they are no longer able to work. It gives informal workers the ability to access cash when needed, while still aiming for long-term security.

The false bifurcation between financial literacy and behaviours that diverge from the pension industry’s norms is misleading. These qualities can and do co-exist. Even as informal workers emancipate themselves from capture by relying on more viable informal savings alternatives, they exhibited a remarkable level of adaptability in their financial practices, relying on various methods that align with their local economic conditions and constraints. Many transactions

and savings activities are conducted outside the formal financial system or in ways that are not fully recognised by it. The assumption that financial literacy should result in formal financial behaviours overlooks the fact that informal alternatives can be both effective and preferred. Informal savings alternatives are appreciated for their flexibility, trustworthiness, and rustic convenience – attributes that advocates (Churchill 2006; Cohen and Sebstad 2005) suggest microinsurance should tap into or replicate to capture savings from the informal economy. Nevertheless, informal workers view these products as irrelevant to their local needs, resulting in resistance to transitioning from a system that currently provides relational value and is also more amenable to their attempts to adapt to macroeconomic risks.

7.1.3. Rationales Behind the Rejection of Micro Pensions

Fewer than 20% of informal workers interviewed expressed enthusiasm for the micro pension scheme, and none of them had enrolled. While pension industry experts cite low incomes as a barrier to participation in contributory schemes, the proportion of low-income workers willing to entertain micro pensions exceeded that of high-income workers by 50%. Notably, 65% of the high-income group firmly and explicitly stated their refusal to register for the scheme. For them, it was a non-starter. Informal workers were not uniform in their responses; high earners articulated their reasons for opting out, spanning from a mistrust of the relevant institutions to the unsuitability of the scheme for their needs.

Scholars like Bernards (2018) and Guermond (2020) point out the ‘practical impossibility’ of converting precarious incomes into dependable revenue streams for financial investors, and the low-income group for whom micro pensions held greater appeal, acknowledged that their financial instability kept them from contributing. Nonetheless, they were emotionally attached to the mere idea of saving, albeit recognising it as an elusive goal due to their limited means. A hawker in Abuja encapsulated this desire perfectly in Hausa when he said: ‘*Wannan abun ya ba ni sha’awa. Shawara ne mai kyau amma ban da halin shi gaskiya*’ (Interview #042). For the benefit of readers who do not speak Hausa, I will translate and expand on his quote below, but it was important to present his original phrasing because the translation might not fully convey the intended meaning, since the word *sha’awa* in Hausa is often tinged with a sense of aspiration or yearning for something that feels out of reach.

This [scheme] piques my interest. It is a good recommendation, but honestly, I don’t have the means to participate. If I could, I would open an account. It’s good to save money for the future. If you spend the money and problems come up tomorrow, then what do you do?

A few people within the low-income group, particularly those who are illiterate and those whose appearance might not conform to formal standards, reported an aversion to interacting with formal financial institutions due to the ill-treatment they have come to expect. One hawker in Abuja recounted an incident when she was denied entry into her bank when she attempted to report the theft of funds from her account. Rather than addressing her concerns directly, the bank staff dismissed her and instructed her to discuss the matter with the security guard stationed outside. Another low-income worker, in this case a market sweeper, had a similar experience. When she lost her debit card along with all her bank savings, she requested an investigation into the theft, but the bank staff declined her request, rudely shrugging her off. These negative episodes introduce an additional layer of uncertainty into an already unfamiliar financial market within an unpredictable economic environment.

Nigeria's system for identity verification is complex and fragmented. Thirteen different federal government agencies duplicate efforts to collect biodata, at considerable costs to citizens and the government (Kolade and Onifade 2024). In recent years, Nigerians have faced numerous sporadic requests for IDs, including the National Identification Number and Bank Verification Number. The processes to acquire a voter's card, driver's license, and passport are equally demanding. Informal workers who lacked the proper paperwork were concerned about the documentation requirements for micro pensions and dreaded the thought of the time and effort it would cost to obtain them. They also harboured reservations about the bureaucratic red tape that might impinge on their access to their savings. Although the respondents at the PFAs maintained that withdrawal processes were completed within 48 hours, informal workers had a different expectation. A tailor in Abuja predicted:

How easy is it to collect it? You will go today, and they will ask you questions, and say come back tomorrow. For your own money! They will say your thumb print is not good, or your signature isn't the same. They will tell you to come back with witnesses. My dear, government isn't ready to help anybody. I'm not ready to put my 10 kobo for pensions. – Interview #081

There was some confusion about the pension redesign among those accustomed to the DB schemes. They were suspicious of DC pensions and this scepticism was exacerbated by a general lack of trust in the government, reflecting a broader erosion of the social contract, and a lack of confidence in pension systems. Informal workers stated that they were uncomfortable with the transition from guaranteed entitlements to defined incomes at retirement without any upfront payment, to now being required to pay into the scheme with no assurance of returns. Moreover, the 60:40 retirement benefits to contingency savings arrangement was perceived to be overly restrictive by 15% of high-income workers, given the possibilities of unforeseen emergencies that might incur substantial expenses. Having secure pension savings loses its significance when confronted with a health emergency, particularly when 60% of the savings

are inaccessible and only become available to one's family in the event of their death. In the view of an elderly butcher in Yola:

What you're describing... it's not the government that gave you a pension, you're the one leaving a pension for yourself. Rather than this pension, you can have your rams or your chickens, if any need arises, you can sell them and get the money to do what you need. If you die and there's anything left, your children can inherit it. If not, they can endure that. But if the government says they're giving you a pension, but you give them N1000 and then the government keeps N600 and leaves you N400 to spend... no. – Interview #100 (Translated from Fulfulde).

In Chapter 6, I elaborated on the troubled history of pension scandals in Nigeria, marked by corruption and mismanagement. While private pension schemes in other countries might gain some legitimacy from a partnership with the government, the opposite is the case in Nigeria. The moment I brought up the topic of pensions with high-income workers, they interjected to relay vivid first-hand or second-hand accounts of civil servants enduring the indignity of unpaid pensions, often under harsh conditions and in public view, with many pensioners denied their entitlements repeatedly until their eventual passing. According to them, pensions would be a good idea elsewhere, just not in Nigeria, and they were not convinced about the continuity of the changes implemented through the reform. The perspectives of three high-income informal workers in Abuja are highlighted below:

It boils down to the Nigerian system. Look at the Maina issue. Except if maybe tomorrow we have a better government. But as we speak now, the system we are running is not ok. The institutions that are supposed to be strengthened, they are not. I don't believe that the system we run now, this present system of government, is out to help anybody. – Interview #006, auto parts trader

Nigerian government, will you trust them? When the time comes, you will discover that it is not like what they said. We see what is happening in Nigeria. This person might come and be good, but another person that follows, you don't know how that person will behave. Another person may come and use that money for his personal [interests]. – Interview #009, female textile trader

As far as Nigeria is concerned, it's rubbish. If I was in Germany and they were telling me this, I would know it's good. As far as Nigeria is concerned, that system, somebody will corrupt it, and the money will disappear. – Interview #063, auto parts trader

For high-income traders: '*The business is the pension*' (Interview #007). The bold promises of returns derived from compound interest or speculative investments did not inspire confidence; quite the contrary, they felt more secure with tangible assets and commodities, as indicated in Section 7.1.2. Textile traders maintained that they trusted more in their investment potential:

Businesspeople will not welcome it. Businesspeople always prefer to do things by themselves. The business perspective is, 'If I do a business with the [money], how much will I gain?' so they don't care to retire. Some people, until their late 70s, they're in the market. – Interview #142

As a trader, you have nothing to do with pensions. You buy land, you build houses, and start more businesses. This is better. I only trust myself. – Interview #144 (Translated from Hausa)

I'm investing the money too. I trust myself more. Maybe if I had money that I didn't know what to do with. I'm not interested. I don't save cash long term. – Interview #145 (Translated from Hausa)

Given the fall of the naira between the launch of micro pensions in 2019 and its fifth-year anniversary, if informal workers had participated from the start, they would have lost value on their investment already. Clearly, they make rational, informed financial planning decisions by weighing short-term income and consumption stresses – from basic needs such as housing, electricity, food, water, and education – and macroeconomic risks such as inflation, currency devaluation, or shifts in public policies. In *Portfolios of the Poor*, Collins et al (2009) make the argument that poor people employ risk management strategies through savings and their informal social networks based on a robust understanding of their financial environment and economic realities, including the risks and returns associated with different options. Their focus lies in meeting immediate needs, not waiting decades for prospective benefits that may not materialise. As per a load carrier in Abuja: '*The money is not useful if they won't give it to me until I am 50. I have problems now*' (Interview #065 – Translated from Hausa). Encouraging them to defer consumption for micro pensions is impractical given the opacity of its processes, durability of informal savings and investment alternatives, risk diversification, associated opportunity costs, and unreliability of the formal economic and political systems.

In advancing micro pensions, the government acts as both a regulator and a partner with the private sector. However, the history of corruption, mistrust, and financial instability hampers the effectiveness of these schemes, highlighting how local politics and economic realities can undermine financialisation efforts (Bernards 2018). Unique political and economic conditions in Nigeria render the neoliberal experiment more problematic and less effective than intended. This scenario also prompts a consideration of alternative forms of social protection that might be more practical in such contexts, as evidenced by the local strategies employed by informal workers. As Harrison (2010) shows, a central contradiction of neoliberalism lies in its approach to state intervention. Rather than simply retreating from welfare, neoliberalism involves a form of social engineering. The introduction of micro pensions serves as a prime example of this phenomenon. Far from the façade of reduction in state involvement, the state, in collaboration with the private sector, seeks to embed financialisation into the everyday lives of individuals and restructure social protections and economic behaviours to fit a market-driven paradigm. What my research reveals is this process can be disrupted from below by informal workers.

7.2. Four Vignettes on the Realities of Ageing

In this section I will explore the dynamics of retirement planning through four profiles of elderly informal workers, taking their long-term savings and investments, financial capacity, access to welfare support, and retirement preparedness into account. These examples provide insight into the influence that factors such as educational attainment, gender, income-level, cultural background, and filial support have on old-age security. Policymakers and informal workers themselves continue to maintain the expectation that their children will assume responsibility for their old-age welfare. In Chapters 4 and 5, I examined the deterioration of kinship systems in northern Nigeria, emphasising the strains exerted by colonialism and neoliberalism on the functionality of kinship support systems and the market. Then in Chapter 6, I demonstrated the inadequacy of the social policy landscape in Nigeria, particularly regarding the privatisation of healthcare and education, fragmentation of social assistance programmes, as well as the individualisation of risk. This empirical context sheds light on the realities of ageing. In facing retirement, informal workers are confronted with the task of balancing their financial strain with that of their children who they hope would care for them. As they age, their precarious personal concerns about health, income, and housing – amplified by unpredictable economic conditions – persist, rendering it ever more difficult for them to live and retire comfortably.

The profiles range from more effective strategies adopted by successful traders to low-income workers struggling to make ends meet. Each profile uses pseudonyms to obscure the identities of respondents.

7.2.1. Alhaji Maishanu: Longevity and Intergenerational Stability

Alhaji Maishanu is a 95-year-old retired butcher in Yola who began to learn the trade from his father when he was 15 years old. When his father retired, he inherited the family business and went on to lead the local butcher's union. The business has endured. Following his father's example, Alhaji Maishanu trained his children and grandchildren in the same line of work to enable the succession of the family business, ensuring sustainable filial support. The strategy proved effective. His children assumed financial responsibility for his care upon his retirement, and now, in their retirement, his grandchildren have taken on that duty to meet his household's food needs. Unfortunately, he suffers from an unknown illness that leaves him bedridden. His health needs present a significant challenge, leaving him isolated and in pain, but he depends on his two wives to attend to his daily needs.

At the time when Alhaji Maishanu began his career, Nigeria was still under a colonial regime, and he was mid-career by the time the SAP was implemented. He achieved considerable success and attributed it to favourable timing, acknowledging that his generation found more prosperity in this business compared to his children and grandchildren. He remembered that at the peak of his career, he slaughtered between four to six cows daily in the market. On top of that, he had government contracts to supply beef to schools – back when they offered free school meals – as well as prisons and hospitals. He also sold to the Emir and other traditional leaders in his community. But things are no longer as they were. The government contracts dried up, and the cost-of-living crisis lowering the demand for beef means that business has slowed down. He understands his grandchildren's struggles and feels content with the level of care they have managed to provide.

Apart from the intergenerational and spousal support that sustain him, Alhaji Maishanu relied on additional risk mitigation measures. He had some long-term savings in a bank account and livestock which lasted decades, until he eventually sold the cows and exhausted the savings to afford his healthcare, household expenses, and other obligations such as school fees. Even though he was not necessarily saving for retirement, his savings were ample enough to last him well into old age. He invested into a few small businesses in the market prior to retirement that continue to yield dividends, and lived in his own home, separate from the extended family house. Alhaji Maishanu's main concerns were how his grandchildren could uphold his upkeep and healthcare costs alongside their mounting expenses, but they seem to have constructed a functioning system in their family because the burden of care did not rest on the shoulders of a few but was spread out among a number of grandsons.

7.2.2. Mr and Mrs Okoye: The Burden of Expectation

This married couple, aged 66 and 62 years old, migrated from the south-eastern region, and had been operating a small kiosk for two years. They both had bigger shops in Utako market – he sold frozen fish, and she sold provisions – and only downsized and combined efforts after they had put four of their children through university, at a time when the state of the economy made it more challenging to run a business in Abuja. They agreed that managing this shop was more feasible since they were only responsible for themselves and their youngest child who was in secondary school. Although their responsibilities had eased up, they still felt the weight of the load they carried. They did not make much money, but they made enough to feed themselves, pay their rent, and their child's school fees. This was a different experience than what they had as they brought up their other children in the 2010s when they generated more household income, and their financial constraints were not as restrictive.

The graduates among their children were all healthcare professionals, so Mr and Mrs Okoye received free medical advice, though luckily, they did not have any serious health concerns and therefore did not need to spend much on healthcare. The children gave Mr and Mrs Okoye small stipends and promised to give more once they were better established. They helped when they could, but it was not enough for their parents to survive on. The couple recognised the challenges their children faced due to the economic environment, particularly regarding the hardships endured by medical professionals who work for the government, often enduring prolonged salary delays, amid a context where they must also navigate career progression and starting new families. However, it was not easy for the parents either. Mr Okoye did not only want help when he was on his sick bed, he said he wants the help now. The pressure to provide for their children was difficult, and things were difficult for them again because they were not getting the old-age support that they expected from their children. Mrs Okoye added:

I don't need to hide my feelings. I don't see any help as it's supposed to be. I'm a shy person. I will not continue begging. They're supposed to do things for me with joy. I cannot beg, I'd rather struggle on my own.

She stated that her children were aware of their obligations to her and should empathise with her struggles as she empathises with theirs. She believed that they should carry everyone along despite their difficulties. However, they felt that adult children neglected their parents after getting married. The couple sounded quite sad as they explained that they tried very hard to send their children to high quality universities while they worked as traders. Because they prioritised their children's education, they could not save as much as their peers or make investments that might have been profitable by this stage of their lives. They did not regret their decision, and in fact were proud that four of their children were first-generation university graduates, but this is how they spent all their money since they wanted their children to have better outcomes than they did. They only regretted that things had not gone according to plan.

Mr Okoye clung onto the hope that his children will take care of him in the future. They felt ready to retire, but thought it premature until the children assure them that they could assume their financial responsibilities and voluntarily step in. They planned to move back home to the east eventually, knowing that there would come a time when they could no longer work and worried that this might happen before their children could supplement their income adequately and consistently. While the village might offer a simpler lifestyle with reduced expenses, the couple indicated that the decision to relocate might not be straightforward for one more reason: they anticipated that they might contend with land disputes with relatives, resulting in them not having a home of their own to live in.

7.2.3. Hajja Binta: Sacrifice and Strain

This case involves a 60-year-old widow. After losing her husband 22 years ago, Hajja Binta found employment as a domestic worker in Yola so she could take care of her only daughter. She worked for four to five households at a time and took on catering work for weddings when such jobs were available. When she started out, her monthly pay was N100-250 per household – around \$1 or \$2 at the time – and by the time she stopped working during the onset of the pandemic, her monthly salaries had reached N2500-3000 (approximately \$6-10), whereas her catering jobs paid up to N1000 per day. Throughout her work life as a maid, Hajja Binta never earned enough money to save for retirement.

Eventually, all that hard work caught up with her, and she succumbed to ulcer and arthritis, both of which resulted in frequent hospital visits and hampered her ability to walk more than a few feet unaided, necessitating her dependence on daily medication that amounted to N4000 per month. The severe illnesses forced her into retirement. Her daughter, a petty trader with a secondary school education, initially did her utmost within her means, shuttling between her marital home – where she lived with her child, her husband, and his other spouse – and her mother's residence in the daytime to manage some tasks and handle the bills she could afford. When Hajja Binta got so sick that she needed tending to at night, her daughter moved in. Her son-in-law and grandson, both carpenters, visit regularly, often with cash gifts of up to N500.

When my body starts to hurt, I can't walk without help. Sometimes I can't eat because of chest pains. When I was healthy, I worked hard. But now, my legs don't function properly. Nothing gets done except my daughter does it for me. Everything is on her now. (Translated from Fulfulde).

The care provided by her daughter, though deeply appreciated, demanded great sacrifice on her part. Hajja Binta felt bad for the burden she placed on her daughter but was embarrassed to ask for help from others. Although she lived in a bungalow she inherited from her husband in a compound with some of his relatives, they maintained independent living arrangements and did not expect each other to fulfil any cultural obligations. She was happy to accept any support she received from her in-laws but knew that they were poor and could barely afford to feed their families. To compensate for what he perceived as his shortcomings, her brother-in-law, a farmer, occasionally shared a little bit of his harvests. She mentioned that there was a neighbour who used to offer his assistance, but he died. All her own relatives were poor too. Those who had some money did not offer help unprompted, and even when asked, gifted little amounts instead of sustainable support.

7.2.4. Baba Umar: Navigating Precarious Circumstances

Baba Umar had been selling kolanut and limes on a bench in front of a busy public building in Abuja for three years. He was known by name by most of the children in the neighbourhood. At age 65, his eyesight was fading, yet he spent most of his day moving between the bench and the mosque nearby for prayers. If he retired completely from any work, he would not have been able to afford medication for his blood pressure and diabetes, which came to N15,000 (over \$30) every month. Despite his self-employment, it was challenging to meet those costs as he only earned N2500 in revenue on average for each day of work. Before transitioning to petty trade, Baba Umar was a subsistence farmer in Bauchi State. If he had adult children, they would have taken over the farming, but sadly, Baba Umar and his wife had lost both of their children to measles when they were young and the couple were unable to have any more.

We kept travelling between Bauchi and Jigawa for their healthcare. The transport cost too much. I couldn't afford it anymore. We left the matter to God and accepted their fate. By then, my wife was past her childbearing years. (Translated from Hausa)

When Baba Umar's strength waned and he could no longer cope with the farming workload, he left his wife behind and migrated to Abuja to start his petty trade. While he felt ashamed to sell kolanut around his family in Bauchi, he nevertheless recognised the need to take action. To him, engaging in this work preserved his dignity as opposed to asking for help. Strangers from a different ethnic group – whom he referred to as Good Samaritans – took pity on him and allowed him to live in their house rent-free, but only provided him with accommodation, leaving him to manage his food and medication costs. He sent his wife N3000-4000 regularly and travelled back home to visit his family whenever he saved enough. For the most part, his wife looked after herself through her own work as a petty food trader.

He helped raise his wife's nieces and paid for their weddings but because they are housewives and do not earn their own incomes, they cannot take care of him financially. He also could not rely on their husbands to take responsibility for his wellbeing and had no intention of asking them for support. His male siblings were dead, and although his sisters were alive, he was the one culturally expected to care for them. He did not have any other relatives with any means, and regardless, did not want to rely on others. He believed that the only sustainable way to maintain his livelihood was to work and it was an unviable option to continuously approach people requesting more help, as this would inevitably lead to rejection. Baba Umar had no retirement plan. Instead, he prayed for God's guidance when he could no longer persevere with his work, believing that if he fell sick at that point, he would be left to die with no healthcare.



Figure 7.1: Baba Umar's kolanut and limes

Source: Author

7.3. Life After Labour: A Closer Look at Retirement Attitudes and Preparedness

From the vignettes in the previous section, it is evident that there is indeed a retirement crisis for elderly informal workers. Even Alhaji Maishanu – a well-to-do retiree with ample resources whose care, food, and health needs have been sufficiently met – noted that his grandchildren grapple with the broader economic breakdown in the country. All of the examples reveal the extent of reliance on familial networks, especially along the intergenerational continuum, with Baba Umar facing the most exposure to risks as a result of not having children. For some, like Mr and Mrs Okoye, the intergenerational bargain might not be paying off in the manner that they had expected, thereby precluding them from retirement. Whereas others, as illustrated by Hajja Binta's story, might have children willing to overextend themselves to accommodate their care needs, but this degree of sacrifice is prompted by severe incapacitating illness. They all employed diverse retirement planning strategies, though the success and sophistication of the strategies stretched across a spectrum of income levels and the macroeconomic backdrop during their career progression. In short, their finances are drained by healthcare, food, and housing expenses, as well as the responsibilities of raising younger children, at the same time that their support systems are under pressure. The realities of their old-age experiences reveal the incompatibility of their needs with individualised long-term contributory pensions.

Among my respondents, there still exists a strong cultural norm around family and community responsibility for the elderly. The expectation may not always be articulated as a clear informal 'right' based on age, but more as a duty or obligation to care for those who have nurtured the younger generation. But in contexts where economic strain is significant, these expectations become conditional, and families might expect to support elderly relatives, but only if they themselves are not struggling financially. For elderly individuals, the expectation of support is tied to a sense of entitlement or belief that having worked hard during their lives, they deserve to rest in old age, supported by their children. This contrasts with younger generations who may feel burdened by the responsibility of care, particularly if their finances are precarious.

As people age, their health status and living standards decline. These factors are fundamental to retirement outcomes (Kpessa-Whyte and Tsekpo 2020). Despite being aware of potential challenges that elderly people encounter in their later years, especially if they were poor while they were working, over 15% of interviewees did not have any retirement plans. This group consisted of low-income earners, Yola residents, younger respondents (aged 35 and below with some even as young as 19), and those who were unmarried. Knoll et al (2012) noted that younger people often overlook saving for retirement due to the constraints of their modest incomes and the remote, abstract nature of old age as a distant risk. My research indicated that young people prioritised business success over retirement savings because they cannot allocate funds for both purposes simultaneously, believing that focusing solely on business growth would yield greater success than dividing their attention. They felt uncertain about their future prospects and hesitated to overly commit to securing those futures at the expense of their current survival needs.

Overwhelmingly, participants across both income groups determined that their children were the most viable option. This preference was more pronounced among women and northerners. Even those who were yet to have children planned to rely on them in the future. The distinction lay in the perception: respondents on the lower end saw it as a cultural duty, while their higher-income counterparts were more likely to feel entitled to support due to the investments they made in their children's education, as exemplified by Mr and Mrs Okoye. Inflationary pressures on precautionary savings mean that investments in children present a more reliable retirement strategy than contributing to micro pensions. Certain low-income respondents also expressed sentiments that their children were obligated to them due to sacrifices they made. According to a street sweeper in Yola and one in Abuja:

My desire now is to help establish my children so they can be successful at something, and I can rest. I feel that if they are successful, they would take care of me, just like I took care of them too. Because of them I didn't remarry [after my husband died] so that I wouldn't have to leave them

behind and risk them not being taken care of. I preferred to work hard to look after my children and make sure they could build something of their own. – Interview #122 (Translated from Hausa)

If not for [my children], I don't have hope. Unless God sends somebody. I struggle because of my children. If God helps them, that will be my time to rest. – Interview #073

But without formal old-age protection, the burden on adult children intensifies. 70% of low-income earners are counting on their children for support. But this expectation is risky, given that many cannot afford to provide their children with adequate education or nutrition, thereby perpetuating poverty traps. Owing to the factors explored in Chapters 4 and 5 regarding the decline of intergenerational support, there is a growing trend leaning towards self-insurance, especially among the more affluent, who now see children as the contingency plan. For higher earners, retirement plans were two-pronged. Children were welcome to contribute voluntarily, but they directed their efforts to establishing passive investments such as in real estate, or alternatively, the children could assume control of their parents' businesses with the parents transitioning to supervisory roles. Of course, these robust strategies are exclusive to high earners, who are the only ones with access to lucrative assets or businesses worth inheriting. For example, one hawker in Yola – a woman who sold a street snack made from cow milk and millet balls called *kosam be chobbal* in Fulfulde or *fura da nono* in Hausa – spoke about learning the trade from her mother-in-law, hoping to pass it on to her daughters as is tradition, but such labour did not produce sufficient income to maintain the elderly in retirement. On the other hand, this was how a tailor in Yola described her mindset:

I plan for old age because I know I cannot keep working forever. I want to make investments that will keep bringing in money. If I build a house, I know that every year, I will make money from the rent, which I can use to pay for what I need. It's good to have a plan for yourself without relying on your children. – Interview #169 (Translated from Hausa)

The labour force participation among elderly informal workers was high, with 70% of the elderly respondents still engaged in some form of work. This practice has been prevalent within rural areas in developing countries (and informal economies) for quite some time (Barrientos 2007). For informal workers in Africa, the duration of life after labour is brief, any concept of retirement is partial and sequential, and work is considered as an integral part of daily life (Kpessa 2010; Oteng et al 2022). Although the western concept of retirement is as a time to relax, pursue hobbies, and bond with family, many informal workers who may even crave rest and relaxation still viewed work as necessary for subsistence. An elderly fish trader in Abuja bemoaned the rigours of her work, pointing out: *'How will a person not want to rest? Everyone wants to rest, but I need to keep making money'* (Interview #031). In a similar vein, a 63-year-old butcher in Yola argued: *'Being idle at my age is for lazy people, unless they can't help it'* (Interview #104 – Translated from Fulfulde).

The ambition for low-income workers was to eventually transition to less stressful work. Load carriers, hawkers, and sweepers had dreams of one day starting their own businesses, or expanding operations to, for example, distribute food or snacks wholesale. Older respondents in the higher end shared accounts of their humbler beginnings. A few of them who started out as apprentices progressed to become spare parts traders and tailors, and two of the spare parts traders began their careers as mechanics. The high-income group perceived retirement as something preserved for those in formal employment. In the words of a spare parts trader in Abuja: *'How do I retire as a businessman? Business continues till you die'* (Interview #091). The pension industry relies on outdated assumptions on ageing. Formerly, shorter lifespans were the norm. But people now live longer and with longer life expectancy, so saving enough to cover retirement becomes more challenging, especially given increased medical expenses in old age. Moreover, macroeconomic conditions pose obstacles to financial plans, and there are limitations to how much children can offset the shortfall.

7.4. Between Needs and Neglect: Development Aspirations Beyond Pensions

This section attempts to move past criticisms of financialisation by focusing on the needs and concerns of informal workers. I explore their hopes for more meaningful social policies, aiming to move beyond reliance on palliative social protection measures or financialised approaches. Half of all respondents in the informal economy identified basic needs – food, fuel, insecurity, housing, and social amenities – as the most pressing matter for the government. The poorest among them felt that food inflation exerted the most pressure, and they proposed policies such as food transfers, price controls, farm subsidies, and support to cooperatives selling affordable goods. Their concerns about the price of fuel extended beyond those used for transportation or electricity, to include fuels such as kerosene which are commonly used as a substitute for firewood and charcoal for cooking, believing that cheaper fuel would have a cascading effect on their general consumption costs. Still, their demands encompassed more than protection.

A significant portion of respondents linked rising crime rates to unemployment. The obvious solution then was to provide poor people with jobs, even if menial – such as in construction or as street sweepers – or formal jobs to unemployed graduates. To them, poverty meant having no work to do, and if the youth were employed, it would take a load off of their elderly parents. 30% of low-income respondents presented employment as the means to ending insecurity (as well as income insecurity) so that people could provide for their families' needs. On the other hand, those with dreams of owning small businesses, including 35% of elderly respondents, advocated for the government to offer skills training programmes, grants to fund the required

capital, and business-friendly policies such as the reduction of electricity tariffs. According to a load carrier and an elderly respondent in Abuja:

What brings about the ills of society is unemployment. If people had menial jobs that they were working to earn low wages, they wouldn't go out of their way to become criminals. So, if the government cannot aid people to get work, then they should get out of the way so people can fend for themselves. – Interview #066 (Translated from Hausa)

There must be a way to help people. The government will not solve everybody's problem, but they can minimise it. If I have something reasonable doing, I can afford to buy my breakfast without hoping government will do it for me. If they reduce electricity to where it would be easy for me without too much tariff, I can buy water and load it in my fridge to sell and start making small money for myself. – Interview #033

The 65% of respondents on the higher end of the income spectrum who sought government measures to enhance the ease of doing business, suggested reducing corporate taxes and electricity tariffs, facilitating access to low-interest or interest-free loans, stabilising the foreign exchange rate, promoting open border policies, and stimulating local production. This group viewed their businesses as their pensions but claimed that the government was holding industrious Nigerians back from achieving their full potential. They were less interested in what pension providers were offering them, and more concerned about what the government could do to create an enabling environment for their businesses. They wanted to sell their goods, not buy pension products. One textile trader in Abuja explained that with cheap and stable electricity, the ability to import machinery, large factory spaces in rural areas that also provide affordable housing to workers, and reliable infrastructure for the transportation of goods, the costs of production will reduce. To high-income workers, these government policies aimed at boosting their businesses not only served their individual interests, but also enabled them to contribute to the economy by increasing the employment rate and the tax base for the country.

In their words:

I do buying and selling. Most of them are imported goods. If we had the means of producing those things here, I would be among the first people that would start. What government should do for businesspeople mainly is infrastructure. It would give us the power to do business in a better way. [Electricity], roads, and housing would help a business to be more efficient and make more profit at a lesser cost. – Interview #093, textile trader in Abuja

The government and the system don't encourage so many things. Somebody like me, what I should have thought of is going into fabrication and production. But the system doesn't allow it, so whatever I need, I import, because we can't go into production. We don't have power. The heavy taxation you pay on manufacturing is too high. You don't easily access bank loans. Bank loan in this part of the world is like a trap. Interest rates are too high and there are too many hidden charges. – Interview #006, spare parts trader in Abuja

If the government wants to help me, I'll employ like 20 people. Another person, a motor mechanic, employs 20 people. But instead of you to gain from government, government will demand money from you. It's not the best way. If government supports you, then you support others, and the government will be taking their percentage [in taxes]. – Interview #036, elderly carpenter in Abuja

Building infrastructure, particularly roads, electricity, and water supply, were viewed as tasks for the government, and aside from when they benefited businesses and satisfied essential needs, respondents expressly regarded the government's infrastructure priorities as illogical. In Yola where there is insufficient water infrastructure, low-income people instead rely on water vendors to provide water to their local communities. The vendors typically fill large jerrycans with water from a public tap then transport them on carts to sell to directly to households. This informal water distribution system supplements water supply needs, but they are an inferior alternative to government-run utilities. Additionally, despite that the peripheral roads which connect to other states or outlying areas of the town are dilapidated, resulting in accidents and vehicle damage, the state government instead emphasises development of the urban core. In his first term, the current governor, Fintiri, constructed flyover lanes connecting the local airport to the Government House, and plans for a highway and third flyover, amounting to N30 billion, were unveiled (The Guardian 2023). The size of Yola, with a population of 333,000 across 831 square kilometres, raises doubts about the necessity of erecting three flyovers within a single governor's tenure, especially given the high cost and the minimal traffic issues in the state. In the view of three respondents:

Even if the government improves the [infrastructure], if I don't have food to eat, it would not be beneficial to me. I don't have a car or a motor bike. I don't have electricity in my home. Helping me with food is what would make my life easier. If I don't have that, nothing else is useful. – Interview #117 (Translated from Fulfulde), load carrier in Yola

Fixing electricity is not the same thing as helping poor people. Poor people will benefit from it, but the present challenges for people are related to food. Someone who has not eaten wouldn't be happy because you've fixed roads. The first necessity is food. If people are still suffering to the extent that they can't afford food, then the government has priorities the wrong way round. – Interview #166 (Translated from Hausa), food joint owner in Yola

Our problem now in Adamawa is that when the government concentrates on capital projects like the road they are currently building, the money does not reach those of us in the market or the people in town, talk less of the poor. When they build roads, it's a contract between them and a big company. The flyover has beautified the town. I can't say it's not good. But if they gave contracts to locals to renovate schools, for example, they would hire labourers, they would buy tin, nails, cement, and sand from the market. The money circulates. – Interview #141 (Translated from Fulfulde), textile trader in Yola



Figure 7.2: Cart carrying jerrycans of water

Source: Author

One prevalent theme in the responses was the prioritisation of issues, with many participants giving consideration to the utmost significance of sustainability and addressing root causes. Their perspective reinforces Adesina's (2009) theory that excessive focus on policies centred solely on poverty reduction can be counterproductive. While the government primarily focuses on providing social assistance through food and cash transfers, and although many individuals are not opposed to receiving cash transfers as it boosts their spending power, they argue that it would be more sustainable for the government to concentrate on other objectives such as meeting basic needs, supporting businesses, or making social investments to benefit the wider populace. As an illustration, rather than simply distributing food transfers or cash transfers for individuals to purchase food, it might be preferable to enhance the macroeconomic landscape, eventually lowering the cost of living, reducing food inflation, and ensuring stable livelihoods that produce steady cash flows for individuals to adequately provide for themselves. According to low-income respondents:

For the poor man, the work of the government is to keep you safe, keep your home safe, keep you healthy. It is not to give you money. Giving you money is like buying you off. Now, they can do whatever they like. How many people can the government even give money to? – Interview #032 (Translated from Hausa), elderly petty trader in Abuja

It's better for the government to help you with your business, than give you food to eat. You eat the food for one day, and it's finished. We want something that will improve our lives. We want to be able to pay for our children to go to school. But if the government gives me food for one or two days, what does that do? Nothing. You eat for today, but what about tomorrow? Give capital

to start a business or a job. That's what will be useful. – Interview #118 (Translated from Fulfulde), load carrier in Yola

If they give me capital, that is only for me. If they develop hospitals, that would be helping the society. If they develop schools, many would benefit. Good roads, many would benefit. Instead of giving me money for capital, give it to the people in the hospitals so that they can get well and return to work like everyone else who is hustling. If they can work, they wouldn't lack something to eat. – Interview #127 (Translated from Hausa), sugarcane hawker in Yola

The quotes above highlight distinct perspectives on the role of the government in fostering productivity, redistribution, and reproduction in society. In the first account, the emphasis is on the state's core responsibility to ensure wellbeing, and not only providing temporary palliative measures which might enable the state's abdication of broader social and economic policies. The second speaker points out the need to foster productivity by enabling business success, which in turn contributes to people gaining the means to afford to pay for labour reproduction. The third respondent advocates for investment in public goods such as hospitals, schools, and infrastructure over individualised approaches. His argument is that social investment benefits society as a whole. If the government improves healthcare and education more people can earn incomes through work, hence redistributing benefits that extend past individualism and therefore support collective wellbeing.

These questions about sustainability lead to demands for transformative social policy, that is, the approach that acknowledges the relationship between social, economic, and political goals (Adesina 2011; Mkandawire 2004). Twice as many high-income than low-income respondents and 35% of elderly participants felt that investment in social development was crucial. They believed that investments in health and education not only improved their productivity in the workforce, but more importantly, if they were less burdened by these costs, they had more opportunities to pursue innovative business interests and allocate their incomes to long-term objectives such as pensions. To them, social development was foundational to transformative change since it not only tackled immediate challenges but also paved the way for long-term stability and growth. While it is true that proponents of transformative social policy (Adesina 2015; Mkandawire 2004) promote the value of social investments for protective, productive, reproductive, and redistributive objectives, my research found that it also happens to be what informal workers want for themselves. The informal workers represented in my research go beyond the survivalist orientation in Scott's (1976) findings. They highlight a forward-looking, and aspirational perspective to development whereby the state not only secures basic needs, but also creates an enabling environment to ensure that informal workers can attain, enhance, and/or maintain their capacity for labour reproduction and productivity, in many cases through redistributive means.

7.5. Concluding Thoughts

It is clear the conventional narratives around financial literacy, formal savings mechanisms, and retirement planning fall short of capturing the complex realities faced by informal workers. There is a disconnect between theoretical ideals of financial inclusion and lived experiences of those operating in informal economies. The prevailing assumptions – that financial illiteracy is the primary barrier to savings, that informal workers are incapable of managing their own retirement funds, and that financial products need only be made available to result in adoption – have been challenged by empirical evidence I presented. The data demonstrates a nuanced financial rationality. Informal workers exhibit a sophisticated understanding of their financial environment, making decisions based on their needs, concerns, and potential gains offered by informal savings mechanisms. These informal workers are not financially irrational; rather, they make cogent decisions based on risk assessment and immediate financial pressures influenced by a volatile economic environment marked by currency devaluation and inflation. The irony lies in how the push for pensions is what actually reveals a misunderstanding of financial pressures.

The reality is for informal workers, the concept of retirement is fundamentally different, shaped by a reliance on informal support networks and the practicalities of daily life. By analysing the experiences of informal workers and retirement planning, the chapter highlights the interplay of various factors – including educational background, gender, income, cultural norms, and familial support – that influence financial decisions and retirement readiness. The exploration underscores that while pension schemes are designed with the intention of addressing welfare needs, they fail to align with the real-world challenges faced by informal workers, particularly in contexts where kinship systems and social policies are strained. A key takeaway from this chapter is the profound influence of broader social and economic conditions. Informal workers view sustainable solutions that address underlying causes, including food security, affordable healthcare, and education, as prerequisites for considering pensions. The pathway to effective welfare inclusion lies in first addressing these fundamental social development needs. Only once informal workers are assured of stable and supportive living conditions will they be in a position to consider retirement savings with confidence.

CHAPTER 8

By Way of Conclusion: Is the Welfare Mix Passing the Buck?

This thesis examines the connection between informal workers and the risks of old age poverty. Because of the informal nature of their employment, informal actors lacked access to adequate state-led social protection measures. I explored the effectiveness of social protection (with a particular focus on micro pensions) in tackling risks faced by informal workers in old age, and whether these mechanisms merely stabilise their livelihoods, perpetuate their socioeconomic inequalities, or thoroughly attend to their concerns. I maintain that all three systems for social protection – namely, the state, market, and informal support – are failing. The state and market shift the responsibility for welfare onto one another, and the expectation that kinship support can fill the welfare gap is increasingly undermined by the unfavourable economic environment.

For the Nigerian government, passing the buck on old-age social protection entailed rolling out a financialised private pension plan that transferred the burden of welfare costs and duties to the private sector. This strategy has not been successful, as the private sector is reluctant to bear those costs either unless they can guarantee their financial bottom-lines. Additionally, the scheme has failed to pick up steam because of the rational financial logics shared by informal workers who determine that micro pensions do not adequately meet their needs or reflect local financial realities. As a result, informal workers are faced with a decision to forgo access to a formal social service and continue to resort to their local savings alternatives, even though the latter is best placed to attend to immediate concerns and not long-term retirement outcomes.

The rest of this chapter is split into four sections. To start, I will outline the empirical findings in Chapters 4 to 7, covering the decline and resilience of informal support during colonialism and the SAP, social protection retrenchment and fragmentation, the lacklustre market potential of micro pensions, as well as strategies informal workers use to address their current needs

and retirement plans in a context of intensifying failures of state, market, and kinship support mechanisms. Next is a section that connects my thesis contributions to preexisting literatures, highlighting the importance of tailoring social policy responses to the needs and realities of informal workers, particularly given the value placed on sociocultural factors, and their agency to reject unsuitable initiatives. The third section explores the potential for transformative social policies for old-age welfare support if pensions are not viable.

8.1. Weaving the Empirical Fabric: Old-Age Support, Micro Pensions, and Informal Workers

I started Chapter 4 with an overview of the evolution of indigenous welfare systems in northern Nigeria since the Sokoto Caliphate, particularly in how it responded to the social, economic, and political disruptions induced by colonial encounter. By abrogating the pre-colonial empire's regulations for zakat and dismantling the traditional institutional hierarchy to establish native authority under colonial governance, the indigenous welfare system was reorganised to serve new interests, and thereafter politically and functionally undermined and underfunded. In short, it was informalised. As a result, the influence, relevance, and legitimacy of these traditional structures declined. However, the expectation for them to maintain order and provide welfare somewhat remains, without the capacity to fulfil these duties adequately. In this contemporary context, religious institutions take on a more prominent role in safeguarding the livelihoods of the poor than traditional practices have, with churches being especially active in this regard. Yet, none have substantial support targeted to the elderly. Kinship mechanisms remain central for this group, though its effectiveness is highly dependent on how much it is bolstered by the wider institutional context and macroeconomic environment.

In Chapter 5, I demonstrated the limitations on the resilience of familial and community support systems against more modern challenges. It is indeed the case that these networks have been increasingly strained. Numerous studies since the late 1980s have highlighted how migration, urbanisation, economic pressures, and the nuclearization of families are eroding the potency of this form of social protection, leading to a gap in coverage for those who rely on them (Ani and Isiugo-Abanibe 2017; Chukwuezi 2001; Togonu-Bickersteth 1987, 1989). What I found in my research is that these patterns have varying effects depending on differences in culture, religion, gender, and income levels. Respondents across all groups observed that the flow of resource transfers between extended family members shrunk in scale, scope, frequency, and reach, yet women, hometown dwellers, and low-income earners were most committed to offering support even at the expense of their own savings and productivity. While researchers have long questioned the power asymmetries in vertical transfers (Devereux 1999; Morduch 1999), I found that it is not as simple as rich relatives exploiting these dynamics in exchange

for meagre benefits. In response the overwhelming demand to share their resources, wealthier relatives uphold firm boundaries to reject the burden placed on them as they also dealing with their own livelihood insecurities due to the collapse of social welfare systems. This becomes even harder to manage as the pool of individuals with relatively ample means contracts. On the other hand, poorer relatives are gradually withdrawing from vertical transfers, choosing to avoid these interactions altogether.

As it exists, informal support mechanisms are no longer as reliable or effective, leaving many, especially the elderly and those without strong family ties, extremely vulnerable. The elderly do not receive specialised support in familial networks either; they, like everyone else, mainly depend on their spouses, children, or siblings for support. Among my interview respondents, support from adult children to their parents is split, with approximately half offering assistance while the other half do not, and the transfers being largely contingent upon requests. In the case of intergenerational support, beyond the context-specific economic or social rationales for why transfers were insufficient, adult children believed that delaying aid contributed to the long-term sustainability of the support system. This action allowed them to keep investing in their (and their children's) human capital to better enable them to cater to their parents later. Thus, though there was an observed decrease in dependence in one direction, young children still in need of human capital development retained their entitlements and status. However, an exception arises during urgent health crises when resources are geared more towards elderly parents, compelling their families to take on more of the duty for their care.

The conditions that informal workers find themselves in drive them to devise weak ineffective arrangements to cope with immediate welfare concerns. To be clear, high-income informal workers generally had a greater capacity to establish more adequate strategies compared to their low-income counterparts, but they also faced challenges in keeping their businesses afloat given the effects on their profit margins due to inflation, currency devaluation, and tariffs. Because of these economic stresses during their work lives, those with low incomes took on extra petty jobs for additional income and delayed retirement, often working well into old age, whereas high-income earners diversified their businesses, made investments in market stalls, real estate and property, or downsized their operations to address financial pressures. Poorer women face a gender constraint in addition to their class burden, as they are expected to contribute to household income and shoulder domestic responsibilities, while contending with workplace discrimination such as sexual harassment. These challenges in achieving financial security, both in their working years and in retirement, underscores the precariousness of life for those outside the formal economy.

I also showed how the economic downturn, primarily caused by flawed underlying economic planning and exacerbated by the SAP, occurring alongside the erosion of informal support, has diminished the capacity of informal workers to secure their livelihoods through the state and market. I examined how some policies – such as overregulation of street traders and uncoordinated taxation – not only compromised the state's protective function but also intensified the marginalisation of informal workers thereby leaving them more vulnerable. Chapter 6 demonstrates that without proper state intervention – via macroeconomic policies and social welfare – to counteract an unfavourable economic climate, a core logic of individual responsibility under neoliberalism takes precedence over collectivism, even in cases where the risks are covariant. Instead, privatised instruments and entrepreneurship are emphasised over social investments in healthcare and education that are vital for maximising equity, efficiency, and fair resource allocation. Meanwhile, social assistance measures – namely, conditional cash transfers targeted towards raising school attendance or healthcare subsidies, largely with the aim of ensuring state legitimacy and electability – did not have special provisions for the elderly population and barely compensated for the welfare deficiency.

The social protection landscape is characterised by fragmentation and an emphasis on market solutions, individualisation of risks, and responsibilisation of the poor. Given the government's weakened fiscal capacity and social infrastructure after decades of implementing neoliberal policies, it increasingly outsources its welfare duties in healthcare and education to the private sector. This shift is also seen in the promotion of micro pensions and other market solutions that undermine the basis for redistribution and solidarity in favour of profitmaking motives. Alongside privatisation, there was also a pattern of neglect in public social spending, resulting in inadequate underfunded programmes and bad outcomes in poverty, health and education. This supports the thinking within the literature on transformative social policy (Adesina 2011; Mkandawire 2004) on the drawbacks of palliative social policy frameworks that do not integrate social protection into broader development goals that aim to address inequalities by building comprehensive, holistic, and proactive state responses. Historical and contemporary failures of the Nigerian government reveal a broader ideological shift that sidelines needs or concerns of its citizens often to the exclusion of the most vulnerable segments of the population.

It is not enough that techniques employed by the government impact the delivery and quality of social services, but the costs associated with schooling, for instance – that is, stationary, uniforms, or transportation – effectively excluded informal workers from access. Whether due to affordability, accessibility, or eligibility, market-friendly policies continuously failed to meet the needs of the vulnerable. Yet, wealthier individuals are better able to benefit from these privatised social services, leading to a disparity that contributed to socioeconomic inequality.

As those with more resources seek quality services privately and independently, the poor then become even more marginalised. This places additional strain on incomes of many informal workers, weakening their ability to meet their current consumption needs, save for old age, or support their elderly parents.

Where the government's efforts have been focused recently is on introducing a micro pension scheme for informal workers as part of a financial inclusion agenda. In designing the scheme, the government aimed to ensure flexible participation while also minimising opportunities for corruption and embezzlement. However, the micro pension scheme faces challenges due to a poor financial infrastructure that is ill-equipped to accommodate commodified pensions. Furthermore, the micro pension scheme is inherently inequitable given the absence of cross-subsidisation between that and the fund for formal workers, and because informal workers must bear the full burden of participation without any employer-matched contributions.

Diminished returns on investments driven by inflation, low interest rates, currency devaluation, an underdeveloped capital market, combined with a restrictive fee structure and a regulatory focus on investment in government bonds and securities within this unstable economic climate, complicate the profitability of the scheme. This profitability question highlights a risk associated with commodifying social protection, since the private sector is motivated by a financial bottom-line which limits the attempt to address social welfare needs effectively, as profit considerations take precedence (Bateman 2010). Lavinas (2018) captures this tension well by examining how privatisation reallocates the state's welfare responsibility. What was initially framed as a missed opportunity for capital accumulation then unfolds as a pretext for a government that wants to be perceived as proactive albeit without bearing financial responsibility. The government's conservative regulations on pension fund investments offer safeguards for the micro pension scheme, but this impedes efforts to maximise profitability, and therefore serves as a deterrent to private sector participation.

Even beyond these issues on the supply side, in many ways, the lack of consideration for the needs or local financial logics of the target population is ultimately what caused mass rejection of the scheme. Chapter 7 investigates the perspectives of informal workers on the viability of the micro pension scheme. The assumption that individuals at the BoP cannot afford to save led the private sector to anchor their growth strategies on the high-income segments of the informal economy where they believe profit potential is more easily extracted. This perspective also posits that informal workers are incapable of managing their retirement, underestimating their familiarity with financial concepts such as inflation or compound interest. Pension industry experts attributed financial illiteracy as an explanation for the slow uptake of micro pensions,

dismissing arguments about whether the scheme can satisfactorily address informal workers' concerns.

Contrary to assumptions within the pension industry, informal workers demonstrate consistent saving patterns with various instruments including *adashe* and microfinance banks. Still, they typically save for short or medium-term needs rather than for retirement, with saving behaviour determined by their objectives and the extent to which benefits can be liquidated when needed. Informal saving alternatives prove to be more viable and accessible, with strategies adaptable to macroeconomic conditions and low resources (such as by avoiding long-term cash savings and choosing assets more resistant to economic fluctuations). This reflects the practical value of informal techniques and is not indicative of financial illiteracy. Informal workers' scepticism of the pension system is not only rooted in a mismatch of financial logics, but also in its history of mismanagement that fosters an expectation of potential exploitation or financial loss. Thus, instead of the state promoting a financialisation agenda, the process is disrupted from below due to the durability of informal savings against such efforts. Despite attempts to bridge the social welfare gap for the informal economy, the misalignment of instruments to local realities, needs, and concerns reinforces the exclusion of both low and high-income informal workers, doing little to alter their socioeconomic inequalities or retirement outcomes.

So, informal workers are left to plan their retirements outside of the formal pension system. The vignettes in Chapter 7 outline four retirement strategies and their degrees of effectiveness, demonstrating that there is a retirement crisis for informal workers in Nigeria. Good health and successful business outcomes (that allow for asset accumulation) along with robust kinship support appears to be the most effective path for informal workers to attain a stable retirement. But the complex interplay between good health, family dynamics, personal success, and asset accumulation for retirement planning only underline how deficiencies in the welfare mix – when the state and the family fall short – can place retirees without these advantages in a precarious position. For informal actors, pensions are not so relevant, or at least, not its current iteration. Since micro pensions rely solely on personal savings, informal workers view business support (to boost informal incomes) and public assistance for health and education (to lower their expenses) as more crucial for supporting them in old age. That is, their attention was directed more towards government policies to enhance their productivity by bolstering their businesses or investing in sustainable labour reproduction, and they desired the opportunity to work hard to ensure stable livelihoods, while expecting the government to create an enabling environment rather than leaving them to rely solely on individual effort.

8.2. Grounding Thesis Contributions in the Theory

Informal Social Protection

The conceptualisation of the intergenerational model for elderly care within kinship systems positions it as the key source of protection for parents counting on their children for retirement security, viewing it as a return on a lifetime investment (Apt and Gricco 1994; Collard 2000). Embedded within these interactions are the notions of duty, obligation, and sacrifice, which can erode under external economic pressures. While these transfers are understood to be driven by altruism, guilt, or shame (Cox and Fafchamps 2007; Platteau 1997), it is noteworthy that this emotional experience also permeates, reconfiguring family relationships and creating emotional distance between parent and child. There is a dissonance: the reasons why informal mechanisms are weakening is clear – they are weighed down by financial constraints, which in turn leads to the nuclearization of families and the prioritisation of younger generations – but this does not necessarily stem from a shift in core values, thus leading to conflict. Broader neoliberal ideology, which includes promoting financialisation and entrepreneurship, gives rise to social norms that reflect the trend towards economic independence and the individualisation of risk. Hence, welfare concerns reorient from collective or needs-based entitlements to self-reliance, thereby enabling and facilitating the abdication of responsibility, even within families.

But how then can people resolve this tension? No matter what motivations govern this support system, it is fundamentally rooted in the capacity of informal mechanisms to provide sufficient care. This exposes a crucial limitation of informal social protection. As the economy declines, and the state fails to deliver on its duties, these informal systems are placed under increasing strain. If faith in the system is compromised – much like what we see with formal pensions – it can cause lasting damage, making future support less likely. As a result, elderly parents may become even more vulnerable, deprived of both financial support and emotional care. At the same time, the robustness of informal practices is what keeps the system resilient, enabling the poor to manage risks independent of the market and resist commodification. To the extent that the underlying principles for reciprocal exchange can sustain, resentment felt due to some unmet expectations does not completely erode its legitimacy.

Some of the analysis in this thesis diverges from established perspectives on power dynamics in vertical transfers (Morduch 1999; Wall et al 2001) that suggest that over time, they produce asymmetric relationships between richer and poorer relatives, reinforcing pre-existing income inequalities and facilitating opportunities for exploitation. Crucially, however, informal workers opted to disengage from this process, preferring to maintain their independence and preserve

their dignity, over negotiating the scope of assistance even when this came at the expense of their wellbeing. This quiet defiance is deeply intertwined with their understanding of rights and obligations, particularly within the framework of everyday interactions. They understand that preserving social ties is crucial to maintaining informal support systems, so 'begging' should be avoided, though social connections should not be severed either. From their perspective, dignity comes from having an entitlement to support, while 'begging' can be quite humiliating. When they redefine the terms of support to assert their agency, individuals place great value on the process over the outcomes. This approach can allow them to retain some control even when systemic change may not be achievable, thereby illustrating that the manner in which support is articulated can sometimes be as significant, if not more so, than the welfare effect.

Social Risk Management

The assumption within SRM of individuals and households as autonomous agents capable of navigating risks and maximising welfare by engaging directly with the market (Holzmann and Jorgensen 1999) is overly simplistic. This neoclassical welfare-maximising framework does not pay enough attention to the influence of sociocultural factors and local financial realities on risk management measures, particularly with regard to how they demonstrate that market-based solutions can often be neither optimal nor economically rational. This forces informal actors to rely on the support systems they have left, such as informal financial institutions like *adashe*. These systems are influenced by community expectations and family obligations, even though relying on them can cause a drain on limited resources and lead to detrimental outcomes. The consequence of neoliberal policies eroding state-led investments in social services, combined with inappropriate private instruments, is that informal systems for welfare are compelled to shoulder an overwhelming load. For instance, low-income informal workers are still expected to support their families even as they buckle under financial pressure, and even though the pressure to provide this support makes them poorer both now and in the future. What matters more is not financial inclusion, as measured by an uptake of formal services, or the education needed to employ market-based risk management, but rather the tools at their disposal.

Part of the SRM offer is targeted social assistance provision for the most vulnerable individuals living in extreme poverty. However, this does not fully account for the complexities of contexts where extreme poverty is so widespread that it constitutes the majority of the population. This shortfall in the framework can be interrogated alongside the premise that poverty stems from insufficient market provisions. The market's failure to deliver quality employment and ample resources consistently leads individuals to reject market solutions designed solely for profit. The issue is that vulnerable informal workers tend to face significant challenges in becoming

self-reliant and compliant with market demands. This lack of resources is particularly acute in old age, as the three systems in SRM's welfare mix are proving ineffective under the financial pressures imposed by neoliberal reforms. As previously noted, even within informal support networks, such as those involving close relatives, there is increasing strain. Family members are frequently unable or (to an extent) unwilling to meet their obligations, further exacerbating the vulnerability of the family members relying on them. So, the ability to prevent, mitigate, or cope effectively with pressure and uncertainty is greatly diminished, even, and especially for those living in extreme poverty.

On an institutional level, the collapse of a system in the welfare mix places more pressure on the others, which are already inadequate, further compounding the problem. A broader view of resilience would encompass the resilience of the instruments themselves, and the capacity of informal support, for instance, to maintain social cohesion and cultural practices even under economic stress caused by the weaknesses of the other systems. That is, resilience should be measured, not only by the efficacy of risk management mechanisms on an individual or household level, and the capacities of individuals to employ these tools to maximise their welfare, but also in terms of the robustness of social welfare mechanisms themselves. It must be viewed through a more comprehensive lens that includes the strength and stability of both formal and informal support instruments in addressing systemic challenges and meeting the social objectives that SRM purports to target.

The construction of the three systems within the framework sees them all playing critical roles in supporting or sustaining each other, while different agents negotiate how they are managed in practice. Yet, in Nigeria, the state's efforts to bolster the market are inconsistent and half-hearted, thereby compromising the same system it claims to uphold, and its collusion with the market simultaneously undermines the effectiveness of informal support in a context where that is the most viable tool in the toolbox for most people. The result is a fragmented and inadequate welfare mix where the market fails to include the most vulnerable, the state lacks the capacity and will to provide comprehensive support, and informal support is overstretched. As each system fails to fulfil its welfare responsibilities, a consensus forms that none are truly dependable for provision. As such, the duty for welfare is ultimately diffused, forcing people to be self-sufficient since all three systems are failing.

Rights-Based Social Protection

Rights-based approaches position the state as the principal mechanism through which socially marginalised groups attain social justice (Alfers et al 2022; Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler

2004; Unni and Rani 2003). But in Nigeria, by targeting street traders through harassment and the confiscation of their goods, as well as imposing multiple taxes on unregistered businesses, the state is perceived to be actively contributing to the marginalisation of informal workers. Instead of offering welfare or providing an enabling environment, these actions obstruct the capacity for self-reliance, and thus the state is reconfigured as the source of vulnerability and not the provider of solutions. The 2020 pandemic presented an opportunity to reform the social contract, but the government exploited the crisis to excessively regulate informal work. This further undermined its legitimacy. While mainstream frameworks are primarily concerned with recognition or social inclusion in and of itself as an end goal, adverse incorporation effectively facilitates bad outcomes – by including informal workers only to extract from or discipline them as opposed to reducing their vulnerabilities – thereby complicating the matter even more.

The needs and perspectives that informal workers express provide empirical backing for these theoretical arguments, underscoring the necessity for policies that address their immediate concerns and entitlements. Still, the rights-based approach falls short in failing to offer practical solutions for the rights that informal workers seek. In a political environment with authoritarian tendencies, there is a gap between marginalised groups who lack access to channels through which to voice their claims, and effective mechanisms to realise their aspirations. These human rights ideals therefore appear distant, disconnected, abstract, and unfeasible (Hickey and Mitlin 2009; O’Neill 2005). As a result, the rights-based approach becomes insufficiently responsive or relevant to day-to-day survival issues as it fails to translate into tangible improvements in livelihoods. Moreover, it is important to emphasise that by assigning welfare responsibilities to the state, the rights-based approach presupposes that the state can ameliorate risks created by market forces (Kabeer 2002). Yet, we see that amid neoliberal market reforms, the state itself has become an additional source of risk and has weak capacity for social investments.

Where fiscal constraints and corruption are prevalent, they impede the implementation of social protection programmes. In such environments, social protection is redefined in terms of access or priorities. Corruption worsens the resource constraint by diverting funds away from state-led social programmes, and privatisation contradicts core values of universal, equitable access and solidarity. Private companies focus on profitability, neglecting essential yet less lucrative areas of protection. Though the private sector’s role in welfare may have been envisioned as complementary, it ultimately occupies a contested space for the rights-based approaches that critique neoliberalism and the commodification of social services. It is problematic, and I would even argue untenable, to expect private firms to make a positive contribution to social justice goals given the fundamental conflicts of interest. In reality, as the state offloads responsibilities and risks to private firms, it effectively separates rights-based obligations from welfare services

because the private sector is not designed to uphold these standards. In the end, the state and market deflect the burden of social investments onto one another, limiting the micro pension scheme or high-quality social services (such as education or healthcare) only to those who can afford to pay for available private mechanisms.

Transformative Social Policy

As noted in the literature, transformative social policy is characterised by a holistic perspective that recognises the need to consider the interconnectedness of social, economic, and political factors (Adesina 2011; Mkandawire 2004). This thesis offers empirical data to validate how a multidimensional mission determines structural transformation. Each aspect of transformative social policy – protection, redistribution, production, and reproduction – connects to the current challenges faced by informal workers, particularly regarding old age security. They bring to light the important facets of the informal economy's welfare concerns which are insufficiently addressed within a compartmentalised approach to social policy.

To start with, the limitations of protective mechanisms make the other three elements more urgent. Neoliberal approaches focus on social protection as the pathway to livelihood stability, and among the informal economy in Nigeria, this is provided partly by the state through social assistance and informal support networks (including religious and traditional institutions). But I found that while informal support networks are essential, they are not universally reliable due to the strain from economic pressures. Churches are more organised than mosques at offering aid, yet informal workers still find this mechanism to be insufficient for meeting their needs, and many Muslims and Christians who might need help are too embarrassed to request for it from their places of worship. In spite of all this, the state fails to offer reliable, sustainable solutions. Even during the COVID-19 pandemic, when the state designed policies to provide immediate relief to business and one-off social assistance transfers to households on the National Social Register, it did not have any special provisions for the informal economy. Instead, the state concentrated efforts on overregulating and harassing informal workers. This fragmentation of social protection, with various mechanisms functioning in silos, undermines the potential for comprehensive social welfare.

Albeit that the privatisation of pensions, combined with the absence of matching contributions and cross-subsidisation of pension funds for formal and informal workers already minimise the scope for redistribution, this intensified by the deterioration of informal support, which further consolidates the burden of care among fewer individuals. Not only does the new DC pension system undermine solidarity and redistributive mechanisms, but so too do neoliberal reforms

which constrain social investment in housing, healthcare, education, and rural agriculture. This limitation in redistribution threatens the equity of social policy and impacts vulnerable groups disproportionately, but also influences production by shifting informal workers' attention from long-term productivity to immediate income-generation, and affects reproduction by limiting the ability to manage the costs of education and healthcare.

The gap in coverage threatens the reproduction of labour as well as social reproduction in light of education and healthcare costs alongside unpaid care duties. Without the added pressures, families could not only alleviate their present condition and pursue business expansion or even retirement savings, but could also secure futures for their children, who, in turn, might be better positioned to support their parents in old age. Education and healthcare investments are both regarded as reproduction since they contribute to the maintenance and regeneration of the labour force, but even when basic education and health are provided for free at public schools and hospitals, the costs associated with the services – including school uniforms, stationary, medicine, or transport – exclude low-income earners from access. Additionally, women who traditionally, have been expected to handle much of social reproduction through care work, now face a double burden in their households as they take up responsibilities for finances and domestic labour. Financial stress undermines the significance of old age in social reproduction as well, and as younger generations migrate to find greener pastures, older family members have fewer opportunities to provide caregiving to grandchildren, and as they age, they are less likely to become recipients of care themselves.

A historical lens on the Nigerian economy sheds light on reasons for diminished productivity. Informal workers focus their demands on ways to enhance their income-generation to reduce their dependence on insufficient welfare systems. However, the increasing fragmentation of social protection complicates efforts to enhance productive capacities. Programmes such as those offered by NDE, NAPEP, and NSIP are geared towards promoting entrepreneurship, but these measures do not address productivity on a structural level, particularly for the elderly, and instead shift risks from the state onto individuals. While people move into the informal economy to secure their livelihoods in the short-term, this action makes it harder for them to cope with old age risks in the long-term, and to a large extent, reduces resilience for coping with current conditions. Informal workers face a retirement crisis even among higher earners. Furthermore, for low-income workers without access to social services such as education, this poses a major threat to their long-term productivity.

Transformative social policy holds an interventionist state as an ideal, and the Nigerian context highlights what happens when states abandon public investments that accommodate social

welfare programmes and stabilise the economy for more opaque self-regulating markets – in this case, exposed to through the SAP, continued reliance on oil exports, privatisation of social services, and the financialisation of pensions. The history of neoliberal policies paired with the turbulent legacy of pensions made it difficult for the micro pension scheme to resonate with local realities of informal workers. Interventions for vulnerable groups are often shaped by top-down agendas rather than an understanding of the target population. For micro pensions in Nigeria, a discourse of financial inclusion was constructed to perpetuate a policy which served private sector and state interests more than the needs, concerns, and lived experiences of those in informal economies. On the other hand, transformative social policy advocates for a synergistic collaboration between the state, market, and society to tackle the root causes of vulnerability, rather than barely patching gaps left by the market.

Microinsurance, and the Financialisation of Poverty and Social Policy

Micro pensions, designed to enhance financial security for informal workers, faces significant competition from informal alternatives. The value of these local instruments lies in the flexibility, trustworthiness, and convenience – qualities that micro pensions aim to replicate in the bid to capture savings in the informal economy. Yet, informal workers find these products unsuited to their financial logics, leading to resistance against transitioning from a system that is more adaptable to an unstable macroeconomic context. The financialisation dynamic here is not that informal workers are pushed to their limits by participation; those with unpredictable, irregular incomes just opt out of the voluntary schemes. Rather, the rejection reflects the capacity and rationality of the workers excluding themselves from microinsurance since they perceive it as inadequate for addressing their specific risks, needs, and concerns, challenging the idea that microinsurance is inherently good for the informal economy or that it is even in demand.

With financial inclusion, formal financial institutions attempt to uproot informal workers away from the informal financial practices they are used to, thrusting them into a new and volatile global market. The outcome of this policy was ultimately curtailed by the history of pensions and socioeconomic development in the country, as well as the entrenched marginalisation of people within the informal economy. This financialisation enables the government to sidestep welfare responsibilities by offloading both the social goals and the associated costs of sector development onto private companies. It permits the government to paper over the welfare gap, while placing the blame on informal workers for not integrating into the system. The choice between formal or informal mechanisms is instrumental for informal workers who are not just passive recipients of the preferences of the formal sector, but active participants who evaluate whether financial products meet their practical requirements and align with their existing social

infrastructure. The disconnect between services provided and services required highlights a core limitation in top-down financialised solutions that bypass the influence of sociocultural dynamics, as well as the varying competencies of informal actors to engage with initiatives (Bernards 2018; Guermond 2020). For even well-designed financial policies to gain traction, they would need to resonate locally, ensuring that they are credible and relevant.

While the micro pension scheme is framed as a means for personal financial security, reflecting the view that the discourse of financialisation presents poverty as an issue of individual access to financial services (Mader 2015), it falls short of reducing structural inequalities. Real benefits to vulnerable groups are not derived from a rhetoric of empowerment or engagement with the formal financial system. Therefore informal workers' ability to disrupt, reject, or even define the financialisation process is crucial if they determine that the instruments offered do not meet local needs. Financialisation not only mirrors but reinforces and reproduces social inequalities (Neves 2018). Here, we see the key role of agency in analysing how popular resistance shapes financialisation outcomes. The prevailing critiques questioning whose interests are advanced or if financial inclusion has adverse effects remain pertinent, but it is particularly noteworthy how informal workers at local level can make strategic choices to preserve their livelihoods in a context where state, market, and family provisions have dwindled, retirement security is in crisis, and they are left with informal systems as the primary option within the welfare mix.

8.3. Calling the Idea of Pensions into Question: A View of the Forest, Not Just the Trees

If financialisation is not the answer, how can we achieve transformative change? The state is focused on partnering with the private sector to offload its responsibilities and neglecting what truly needs to be done. The market is weighing the profitmaking potential of stepping in, but these goals are misaligned with the social protection needs of informal workers. My research revealed that the wellbeing of informal workers is connected to a wide range of concerns that are not addressed satisfactorily by the compartmentalisation of social policies only to poverty alleviation objectives. Transformative social policy offers a new perspective that allows us to rethink these issues and consider how, for instance, the rising costs of education, health, and running a business intensify financial pressures and deplete the resources people need to save for their old age.

Pensions, even if they are not only geared towards poverty reduction, are just one piece of the puzzle. Development issues are interconnected – not discrete – and social policy can execute multidimensional objectives in a mission to counteract unregulated market forces (Adesina 2011; Hujo and Gaia 2010; Mkandawire 2007). Concerns weighed by informal workers – such

as access to basic amenities, economic development, and social transformation – contribute more significantly to incomes, investment security, as well as kinship networks for old age support. The transformative approach demonstrates that social policy is crucial for boosting productivity, reproduction, and redistribution so people lead secure, protected lives. Informal workers require support to attain economic stability before they can even consider deferring consumption to save for a pension. The potential for transformation lies in enabling informal workers with structural change, rather than merely providing them with income top-ups in the form of meagre and highly devalued pension benefits in their later years.

Throughout this thesis, I highlighted the persistent weaknesses in the Nigerian government's capacity marked by corruption, low fiscal resources, mismanagement, weak social investment, and ongoing efforts to shift the responsibility for welfare onto the private sector – largely shaped by decades of neoliberal policies. Be that as it may, transformative social policies require the state to take on a proactive role, instead of capitulating to market forces and responsibilisation. Even so, the value of such an approach cannot be overstated. Without it, informal workers will continue to be marginalised and vulnerable. While the challenges ahead are formidable, they are not insurmountable. African governments can be supported in their evolution, and with a long-term vision, such change is achievable. As the insecurity crisis for the informal economy reaches a critical point, the imperative to reimagine the purpose and scope of social policies is undeniably urgent, and more research needs to be done on how weak and fragile states can be imbued with, trusted, and equipped to execute this transformative perspective.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Participant Information Sheet

Department of International Development London School of Economics & Political Science

What is the study about?

The study explores how informal workers in Nigeria maintain their livelihoods in old age using both formal and informal arrangements, as well as the extent to which the government and the market protect them, and the role of their families or communities. I will be undertaking this study as part of the requirements for my PhD programme at the London School of Economics & Political Science.

What will taking part involve?

My methods of data collection are in-depth interviews and focus groups. Most of the interviews and focus groups will last for 45 minutes to an hour and would take place either at your workplace, a social gathering, or any other location where you would feel most comfortable.

I will be interested in discussing your experiences, values, and perspectives on issues around support systems for informal workers in old age, and the options or risks they face in ensuring economic security in retirement.

I plan to record the discussions, but I will not record without your consent, and you will be free to ask me to stop at any point during the interview.

Can I change my mind/ withdraw?

You are free to decide whether or not you want to take part in this study. If you consent to participate in this study, you would also be free to withdraw consent at any moment before February 1st, 2022. Your decision to withdraw will not have any negative consequence.

Will taking part be confidential?

The records from this study will be kept confidential. Any audio tapes and transcripts will be uploaded to a secure server immediately, where only I will have access to them. In addition to this, your data will be anonymised which means that your name will not appear in any publications resulting from the study. Any information you provide which may be used to identify you will be kept in a separate and secure location.

Data Protection Privacy Notice

All data is collected and stored in compliance with UK-EU data protection legislation. To request a copy of the data held about you please contact: glpd.info.rights@lse.ac.uk

What about Covid-19?

Due to coronavirus, I have masks and hand sanitisers for your protection if you would like to use them. I will also keep a proper distance to ensure your safety.

Who should you contact for further information?

If you have any further questions regarding the study please contact the researcher, Aisha Modibo, at a.modibo@lse.ac.uk. If you have any concerns or complaints regarding the conduct of the researcher, please contact the LSE Research Governance Manager via research.ethics@lse.ac.uk.

If you are happy to take part in this study, please provide verbal consent.

Appendix 2: Interview Guides for Semi-Structured Interviews

Interviews with Low-Income Informal Workers

1. Overview

- Can you tell me about the type of work you do?

(when they started, whether it was what they always wanted to do, career trajectory they envision, good income or not)

- How is everything going? Are times hard?

(ask about Covid lockdown: what their experience was, if they struggled, if they received any support, from whom)

- Have you started thinking about old age?

(risks they foresee, their options, plans: retirement home/ savings/ business/ family, whether plans are adequate, easy or hard)

2. Informal Social Protection

- Do you rely on family for support at all?

(all year or sometimes, from whom, those with high or similar income, monetary or not, is it sufficient, do they have to reciprocate)

- Given that times are hard, has it become more difficult to receive support?

- Do you provide support for older family or community members at all?

(who, when, monetary or not, how much, is it too much pressure, all year or certain times, do people do something in return)

- How do you feel about the responsibility of providing support?

(whether they are able to keep up with the responsibility, whether it has held them back in any way, has it become more difficult)

- Do you receive any support from traditional leaders or your church/ mosque?

(what role they play, when, all year or sometimes, whether it's sufficient, have they always done this, since when, why)

- Do you have a community here with people at your church/ mosque or from your hometown?

(who they choose to form communities with, how they build these communities, what support they offer each other, how effective)

- Can you remember what kind of support your parents provided to their parents while you were growing up?

(what has changed since then, whether government was more willing to intervene)

3. State-Led Social Protection

- What is the government doing to improve your livelihood?

(their experience, whether it has been effective/ sufficient, whether they feel state should play bigger role, any pension support)

- Do you feel like the government and family members/ community are doing their part to help the elderly?

(what could be done better, if it is better to rely on themselves/ their business)

- What do you believe is necessary to improve your livelihood?

(what role do you have to play, what role does the government have to play, Is experience of old age different for formal workers)

- What has been your experience of other government services?

(e.g. education, healthcare, infrastructure, etc)

- Do you believe it's your human right for the government to support you?

(what they believe they're entitled to, whether they have channels through which to demand their rights)

4. Micro Pensions

- Are you aware of the micro pensions scheme?

(what they think of the concept, whether they have/will sign up, why/ why not, if they believe it has minimal risk)

- How do you feel about the requirement for contributions from you for the micro pensions scheme?

(their experience, whether they can afford it, what expenses they're prioritising, whether it would be adequate, any challenges)

- Is this micro pensions better for you than support from family, government, church/ mosque?

(what institutions they believe would be most effective at protecting them from old age poverty)

- Who do you believe is benefitting the most from this micro pensions scheme (i.e. them, private PFA, or government)

5. Risk Management Strategies

- Do you save your money? How? (including microfinance savings and loans)

(how it works, what they save for, how they determine riskiness i.e. what they consider e.g. history, what other benefits they derive)

- How do you manage your expenses?

(key expenses, any strategies, whether they budget, if the expenses are seasonal, whether savings provide a safety net)

- Do you feel that your savings can make you more comfortable with growing your business/ making investments?

- Are there any events that make you more worried about your future

(e.g. rising food prices, unemployment, financial crisis, insecurity crisis vs. job loss, illness, death)

- Have these events impacted your livelihood?

(does it make them seek support more urgently, has it affected support they receive, do they have a plan to reduce the impact)

6. Visions for Transformation

- Do you feel that it's best to rely on what you can do for yourself through your work?

(whether they believe in individualism vs collectivism, what is more effective, whether they would rather rely on state/ family)

- Is it your responsibility to improve your circumstances or is it the government's responsibility?

- Are businesses more trustworthy than the government when it comes to protecting your livelihood/ future?

- Do you feel it's better for government to intervene to provide welfare, or make it easier to do business?

Interviews with High-Income Informal Workers

1. Overview

- Can you tell me about the type of work you do?

(when they started, whether it was what they always wanted to do, career trajectory they envision, whether they're satisfied)

- Have you started thinking about old age?

(risks they foresee, their options, plans: retirement home/ savings/ business/ family, whether plans are adequate, easy or hard)

2. Informal Social Protection

- Do you provide support for older family or community members at all?

(who, when, monetary or not, how much, is it too much pressure, all year or certain times, do people do something in return)

- How do you feel about the responsibility of providing support?

(whether they are able to keep up with the responsibility, whether it has held them back in any way, has it become more difficult)

- Do you rely on family for support at all?

(when, all year or certain times, from whom, monetary or not, is it sufficient, do they go to people with similar incomes/ live nearby)

- Do you receive any support from traditional leaders or your church/ mosque?

(what role they play, when, all year or sometimes, whether it's sufficient, have they always done this, since when, why)

- Do you have a community here with people at your church/ mosque or from your hometown?

(who they choose to form communities with, how they build these communities, what support they offer each other, how effective)

- Can you remember what kind of support your parents provided to their parents while you were growing up?

(what has changed since then, whether government was more willing to intervene)

3. State-Led Social Protection

- What is the government doing to improve your livelihood?

(their experience, whether it has been effective/ sufficient, whether they feel state should play bigger role, any pension support)

- Do you feel like the government and family members/ community are doing their part to help the elderly?

(what could be done better, if it is better to rely on themselves/ their business)

- What do you believe is necessary to improve your livelihood?

(what role do you have to play, what role does the government have to play, Is experience of old age different for formal workers)

- What has been your experience of other government services?

(e.g. education, healthcare, infrastructure, etc)

- Do you believe it's your human right for the government to support you?

(what they believe they're entitled to, whether they have channels through which to demand their rights)

4. Micro Pensions

- Are you aware of the micro pensions scheme?

(what they think of the concept, whether they have/will sign up, why/ why not, if they believe it has minimal risk)

- How do you feel about the requirement for contributions from you for the micro pensions scheme?

(their experience, whether they can afford it, what expenses they're prioritising, whether it would be adequate, any challenges)

- Is this micro pensions better for you than support from family, government, church/ mosque?

(what institutions they believe would be most effective at protecting them from old age poverty)

- Who do you believe is benefitting the most from this micro pensions scheme (i.e. them, private PFA, or government)

5. Risk Management Strategies

- Do you save your money? How? (including microfinance savings and loans)

(how it works, what they save for, how they determine riskiness i.e. what they consider e.g. history, what other benefits they derive)

- How do you manage your expenses?

(key expenses, any strategies, whether they budget, if the expenses are seasonal, whether savings provide a safety net)

- Do you feel that your savings can make you more comfortable with growing your business/ making investments?

- Are there any events that make you more worried about your future?

(e.g. rising food prices, unemployment, financial crisis, insecurity crisis vs. job loss, illness, death)

- Have these events impacted your livelihood?

(does it make them seek support more urgently, has it affected support they receive, do they have a plan to reduce the impact)

6. Visions for Transformation

- Do you feel that it's best to rely on what you can do for yourself through your work?

(whether they believe in individualism vs collectivism, what is more effective, whether they would rather rely on state/ family)

- Is it your responsibility to improve your circumstances or is it the government's responsibility?

- Are businesses more trustworthy than the government when it comes to protecting your livelihood/ future?

- Do you feel it's better for government to intervene to provide welfare, or make it easier to do business?

Interviews with Elderly Informal Workers

1. Overview

- Can you tell me about the type of work you did?

(when they started, whether it was what they always wanted to do, career trajectory they envision, good income or not)

- How is everything going? Are times hard?

(ask about Covid lockdown: what their experience was, if they struggled, if they received any support, from whom)

- What has old age been like so far?

(what needs they have, whether they struggle, if they prepared enough, what guided their decision on where they retired to)

- (If delaying retirement): What has it been like to continue working?

(if they feel bad: if they rather be resting vs. it keeps them occupied, is it bad for their health, is it how they imagined old age)

- While you were working, what type of plans did you have for old age?

(risks they foresaw, what their options were, plans they made, whether they followed through, how it all worked out)

2. Informal Social Protection

- Who provides for you? Do you rely on family for support at all?

(all year or sometimes, from whom, monetary or not, anything in return, is it sufficient, do they have to reciprocate)

- Given that times are hard, has it become more difficult to receive support?

- Do you provide support for older family or community members at all?

(who, when, monetary or not, how much, is it too much pressure, all year or certain times, do people do something in return)

- How do you feel about the responsibility of providing support?

(whether they are able to keep up with the responsibility, whether it has held them back in any way)

- Do you receive any support from traditional leaders or your church/ mosque?

(when they seek support, whether it's effective/ sufficient)

- Do you have a community here with people at your church/ mosque or from your hometown?

(who they choose to form communities with, how they build these communities, what support they offer each other, how effective)

- Can you remember what kind of support your parents provided to their parents while you were growing up?

(what has changed since then, whether government was more willing to intervene)

3. Formal Social Protection

- What is the government doing to improve your livelihood?

(what their experience has been like, whether it has been effective/ sufficient, whether they feel state should play bigger role)

- Do you feel like the government and your family members/ community are doing their part to help you?

(what could be done better, if it is better to rely on themselves/ their business)

- What do you believe is necessary to improve your livelihood?

(what role do you have to play, what role does the government have to play, Is experience of old age different for formal workers)

- What has been your experience of other government services?

(e.g. education, healthcare, infrastructure, etc)

- Do you believe it's your human right for the government to support you?

(what they believe they're entitled to, whether they have channels through which to demand their rights)

4. Micro Pensions

- Would pensions have been something you could have been interested in?
(whether they paid into any pension plans during their work life: private or government)

5. Risk Management Strategies

- Do you save your money? How? (including microfinance savings and loans)
(how it works, what they save for, how they determine riskiness i.e. what they consider e.g. history, what other benefits they derive)
- How do you manage your expenses?
(key expenses, any strategies, whether they budget, if the expenses are seasonal, whether savings provide a safety net)
- Do you feel that your savings can make you more comfortable with growing your business/ making investments?
- Are there any events that make you more worried about your future?
(e.g. rising food prices, unemployment, financial crisis, insecurity crisis vs. job loss, illness, death)
- Have these events impacted your livelihood?
(does it make them seek support more urgently, has it affected support they receive, do they have a plan to reduce the impact)

6. Visions for Transformation

- Do you feel that it's best to rely on what you can do for yourself through your work?
(whether they believe in individualism vs collectivism, what is more effective, whether they would rather rely on state/ family)
- Is it your responsibility to improve your circumstances or is it the government's responsibility?
- Are businesses more trustworthy than the government when it comes to protecting your livelihood/ future?
- Do you feel it's better for government to intervene to provide welfare, or make it easier to do business?

Interviews with Officials at Savings Associations

- Can you tell me about how your savings scheme works?

(which type of people use it, how much, what they save for, whether it's long term or short term, how they minimise risk)

- Have things changed recently now that times are harder?

(the effect of recent events such as Covid 19, financial crisis, rising food prices, etc)

- Is old age security an issue for your members?

(whether it's something their members show concern about, whether they feel pressure to help struggling retired members)

- Do you know of any retired informal workers using this service?

(whether people saved for retirement and collect their money now, or if people still save after retirement)

- Have you been approached by any private company to collaborate on a pension scheme?

- Are you aware of the micro pensions scheme?

(what they think of the concept, whether it would work for informal workers, if they've tried something similar, any challenges)

- Do you also provide loan or insurance services?

(how it works, who uses it, what they use it for, how much they borrow or insure, repayment rates, how they enforce repayment)

Interviews with Traditional and Religious Leaders

1. Overview

- What kind of risks do elderly people in your community face?

(what needs they have, whether they struggle, if they prepared enough, what factors could increase/ lessen impacts of risks)

- Do elderly informal workers face different risks than formal workers?

(whether there's a disparity in the risks they face, what factors led to that disparity)

- Who is responsible for taking care of the elderly?

(what role the elderly should play, whether they should seek support from family/ community, the state, or the market)

2. Informal Social Protection

- Does the community organise any scheme among themselves to provide welfare to poorer people?

(how it works, who administers it, how they select beneficiaries, how effective they are, whether they're used for old age support)

- Do you offer any schemes for income support at community level?

(since when, how it works, who administers it, selection of beneficiaries, if effective, whether they're used for old age support)

- Under what conditions do you offer income assistance?

(how they target beneficiaries, how much support, to how many, monetary or not, what circumstances make people ask for help)

- How do you feel about the responsibility of providing income support to your community?

(is it too much pressure, is it effective, how are they able to provide this help, has it become more difficult recently)

3. State-Led Social Protection

- Do you feel like the government and are doing their part to help the elderly?

(what could be done better, if it is better to rely on themselves/ their business)

- What welfare support from do the people in your community receive from the government?

(what their experience has been like, whether it has been effective/ sufficient, whether they feel state should play bigger role)

- What has been their experience of other government services?

(e.g. education, healthcare, infrastructure, etc)

- Do you believe it is their human right for the government to support them?

(what they believe they're entitled to, whether they have channels through which to demand their rights)

- Are there any other government programmes you would advise members of your community to join?

4. Micro Pensions

- Are you aware of the micro pensions scheme?

(what they think of the concept, whether they would advise informal workers to sign up, if they believe it is minimal risk)

- Would the micro pension plan be more effective than the government or kinship support?

5. Concerns for Community

- Are there any events that make you more worried about your community's future?

(e.g. rising food prices, unemployment, financial crisis, insecurity crisis vs. job loss, illness, death)

- Have these events impacted their livelihoods?

(does it make them seek support more urgently, has it affected support they receive, do they have a plan to reduce the impact)

- What was it like during the Covid-19 lockdown?

(how much people struggled, how they handled it/ what interventions, whether they were effective)

6. Visions for Transformation

- Do you feel that it's best for people to rely on what they can do for themselves through work?

(whether they believe in individualism vs collectivism, what is more effective, whether they would rather rely on state/ family)

- Is it their responsibility to improve their circumstances or is it the government's responsibility?
- Are businesses more trustworthy than the government when it comes to protecting livelihoods/ future?
- Do you feel it's better for government to intervene to provide welfare, or make it easier to do business?

Interviews with Local Government Officials

1. Overview

- What kind of risks do elderly informal workers face?

(what needs they have, whether they struggle, what factors could increase/ lessen impacts of risks)

- Have any efforts been made to improve the working condition of informal workers?

(e.g. formalising them, decent work hours, paid leave, enforcing minimum wage, empowering trade unions)

- Do elderly informal workers face different risks than formal workers?

(whether there's a disparity in the risks they face, what factors led to that disparity)

- Who is responsible for taking care of the elderly?

(what role the elderly should play, whether they should seek support from family/ community, the state, or the market)

2. Informal Social Protection

- Are you aware of any informal savings or loans schemes that informal workers rely on?

(monetary or not, how it works, whether it's effective, whether they're used for old age support)

3. State-Led Social Protection

- What is the role of the government in social protection provision?

(social assistance when market/ informal fail vs. first place to turn to for support, when intervention is necessary/ possible)

- Do you see social protection as something every Nigerian should be entitled to?

(if they're more focused on targeting, targeting criteria, barriers to universal social protection based on citizenship)

- What is your opinion on programmes that focus on social and political development?

(e.g. developing capabilities/ eliminating discrimination/ child labour/ gender issues/ conflict, not focusing on income security alone)

- What type of interventions are available for informal workers or the elderly poor?

(who is eligible, conditions for transfers, how it works, how much support, how they know if it's effective, how they provide this help)

- Are these interventions recent, or were they available in previous administrations?

- What does the government do to improve the livelihood of informal workers or the elderly poor?

(their experience, whether necessary, whether it has been effective/ sufficient, whether they feel state should play bigger role)

4. Micro Pensions

- Are you aware of the micro pensions scheme?

(what they think of the concept, if effective, whether they would advise informal workers to sign up, if they believe it is minimal risk)

- Are there any other government programmes you would advise members of your community to join?

5. Concerns for Constituents

- Are there any events that make you more worried about your community's future?

(e.g. rising food prices, unemployment, financial crisis, insecurity crisis vs. job loss, illness, death)

- Have these events impacted their livelihoods?

(does it make them seek support more urgently, has it affected support they receive, do they have a plan to reduce the impact)

- What was it like during the Covid-19 lockdown?

(how much people struggled, how they handled it/ what interventions, whether they were effective)

- How is government minimising the constraints informal workers face so they can better engage in the private market?
- What needs to happen to eliminate the root causes which cause the risk of old-age poverty?

(root causes e.g. informality – precarious work, indecent work conditions, inconsistent and inadequate pay)

6. Visions for Transformation

- What role should informal workers play in their own livelihood protection?

(individualism, if they prepare, how much government can provide, impact of conflict/ financial crisis/ insecure incomes/ Covid)

- Do you feel that it's best for people to rely on what they can do for themselves through work?

(whether they believe in individualism vs collectivism, what is more effective, whether they would rather rely on state/ family)

- Is it their responsibility to improve their circumstances or is it the government's responsibility?
- Do you feel it's better for government to intervene to provide welfare, or make it easier to do business?

Interviews with PenCom Officials

1. Micro Pensions

- What are you trying to achieve with the micro pensions scheme?

(whether it is necessary, how it will alleviate old-age poverty, is it effective, long term strategy)

- What lessons have you learned when designing the micro pensions?

(lessons from informal savings schemes + other micro pension plans i.e. why PenCom's is different from successful models)

- Is a contributory pensions scheme appropriate for informal workers who may already be poor?

(how it has been adapted for informal workers, retirement benefits they can expect, whether it would be significant/ transformative)

- What incentives are you offering to encourage informal workers to sign up?

(awareness of the scheme is low, what strategy for informal workers who don't like the concept e.g. contributions, 40%-60% RSA)

(e.g. of incentives: matching contributions in India, mobile money in Kenya)

2. State-Led Social Protection

The World Bank designed a five pillar pension framework which includes a pillar for social pensions for individuals who are too poor to pay insurance premiums.

- Why is there no social pensions for those who are too poor to contribute in Nigeria?

(whether they believe excluding social pensions will result in the same outcomes the World Bank intended)

3. Risk Management Considerations

- How can micro pensions minimise the constraints informal workers face?

(e.g. unreliable flow of resources)

- How do you convince informal workers of minimal risk in contributing to an RSA account?

(what the risks are e.g. opportunity cost, whether people are risk averse, how they have considered this in design)

- How do you feel about loss of faith in the pension system?

(e.g. recent reports by BBC of looting of public pensions, what they're doing to mitigate, are informal workers likely to sign up)

4. Financialization of Poverty

- Is financial inclusion an effective strategy for alleviating poverty?

(why, how they ensure financially illiterate are capable of using micro pensions to manage risks)

- What government agencies and private sector partners do you work with to deliver the micro pensions?

(how they work, roles PFAs and PenCom play, support PenCom offers PFAs, whose role it is to absorb costs)

- What revenues are derived from the micro pensions scheme?

(who has custody of it, what actors and sectors of the economy are supported through the scheme besides poor pensioners)

- Who invests the pension funds? i.e. PFAs or PFAs bringing in investors who expect returns

(who keeps the gains, who bears the losses, how government regulates this, if there's a guaranteed benefit for any of 3 parties)

- What are the positive impacts of the micro pensions you would like to see other than poverty alleviation?

(does it play a more significant role as welfare support/ attracting external investors/ source of revenue for investments)

- Are there any benefits to the PenCom within the privatised pensions system?
(i.e. as opposed to public pensions, financial benefits, whether it's better than a community-based approach)
 - What role does the pension industry have on the economy?
(state of pensions, impact of MP i.e. is it developing pension industry/ economy, how can MP be embedded in growth strategy)

Interviews with PFA Officials

1. Micro Pensions

- What are you trying to achieve with the micro pensions scheme?

(whether it is necessary, how it will alleviate old-age poverty, is it effective, long term strategy)

- Is a contributory pensions scheme appropriate for informal workers who may already be poor?

(how it has been adapted for informal workers, retirement benefits they can expect, whether it would be significant/ transformative)

- What incentives are you offering to encourage informal workers to sign up?

(awareness of the scheme is low, what strategy for informal workers who don't like the concept e.g. contributions, 40%-60% RSA)

(e.g. of incentives: matching contributions in India, mobile money in Kenya)

2. Risk Management Considerations

- How can micro pensions minimise the constraints informal workers face?

(e.g. unreliable flow of resources)

- How do you convince informal workers of minimal risk in contributing to an RSA account?

(what the risks are e.g. opportunity cost, whether people are risk averse, how they have considered this in design)

- How do you feel about loss of faith in the pension system?

(e.g. recent reports by BBC of looting of public pensions, what they're doing to mitigate, are informal workers likely to sign up)

3. Financialization of Poverty

- Is financial inclusion an effective strategy for alleviating poverty?

(why, how they ensure financially illiterate are capable of using micro pensions to manage risks)

- What government agencies and private sector partners do you work with to deliver the micro pensions?

(how they work, roles PFAs and PenCom play, support PenCom offers PFAs, whose role it is to absorb costs)

- What revenues are derived from the micro pensions scheme?

(who has custody of it, what actors and sectors of the economy are supported through the scheme besides poor pensioners)

- How do you develop a market to extract profit when informal workers have inconsistent/ insufficient incomes?

(whether profits are guaranteed, if profits are not guaranteed + retirement benefits are meagre then who is benefitting)

- Who invests the pension funds? i.e. PFAs or PFAs bringing in investors who expect returns

(who keeps the gains, who bears the losses, how government regulates this, if there's a guaranteed benefit for any of 3 parties)

- What kind of investments do you make with the pension funds?

(how risky they are, different strategies for different fund types, rate of growth for formal vs. if they can expect same for MP)

- How does the rate of inflation (10%) influence investment decisions?

(are savings losing value if investing in low yielding government securities, do they focus investments outside Nigeria)

- What actors have an input on what investments you make?

(i.e. other than government which has regulatory capacity, what informs their decisions)

- What are the positive impacts of the micro pensions you would like to see other than poverty alleviation?

(does it play a more significant role as welfare support/ attracting external investors/ source of revenue for investments)

- Are there any benefits to the PFAs or PenCom within the privatised pensions system?

(i.e. as opposed to public pensions, financial benefits, whether it's better than a community-based approach)

- What role does the pension industry have on the economy?

(state of pensions, impact of MP i.e. is it developing pension industry/ economy, how can MP be embedded in growth strategy)

Interviews with Federal Government Officials

1. Overview

- What kind of risks do elderly informal workers face?

(what needs they have, whether they struggle, what factors could increase/ lessen impacts of risks)

- Have any efforts been made to improve the working condition of informal workers?

(e.g. formalising them, decent work hours, paid leave, enforcing minimum wage, empowering trade unions)

- Who is responsible for taking care of the elderly?

(what role the elderly should play, whether they should seek support from family/ community, the state, or the market)

2. State-Led Social Protection

- What are the motivations and values underpinning social protection?

(what their strategy is, main purpose of social protection i.e. investments in the economy or human capital: health/ education, main objective i.e. poverty reduction, social cohesion, economic development)

- What is the role of the government in social protection provision?

(social assistance when market/ informal fail vs. first place to turn to for support, when intervention is necessary/ possible)

- Do you see social protection as something every Nigerian should be entitled to?

(if they're more focused on targeting, targeting criteria, barriers to universal social protection based on citizenship)

- Do you feel that government has a duty to protect the labour rights of informal workers?

(what they believe informal workers are entitled to, how they demand those entitlements e.g. protest)

- What type of labour rights issues do you fight the government to protect informal workers from?

(rights entitlements they demand from government e.g. minimum wage, what methods they use, how effective)

- What is your opinion on programmes that focus on social and political development?

(e.g. developing capabilities/ eliminating discrimination/ child labour/ gender issues/ conflict, not focusing on income security alone)

- What type of interventions are available for informal workers or the elderly poor?

(who is eligible, conditions for transfers, how it works, how much support, how they know if it's effective, how they provide this help)

- How is government minimising the constraints informal workers face so they can better engage in the private market?

- What needs to happen to eliminate the root causes which cause the risk of old-age poverty?

(root causes e.g. informality – precarious work, indecent work conditions, inconsistent and inadequate pay)

- Is there a general strategy for risk management for informal workers at policy level?

(if they are focused on micro pensions, is it mainly a financial inclusion agenda)

3. Micro Pensions

If the employers don't contribute to the micro pensions and the benefits informal workers can generate on their own is meagre, informal workers may need to rely on the government for support.

- What role will employers play in providing pensions for informal workers?

4. Risk Management Strategies

- What role should informal workers play in their own livelihood protection?
(*individualism, if they prepare, how much government can provide, impact of conflict/ financial crisis/ insecure incomes/ Covid*)
- Are there any events that make you more worried about your community's future?
(e.g. *rising food prices, unemployment, financial crisis, insecurity crisis vs. job loss, illness, death*)
- Have these events impacted their livelihoods?
(*does it make them seek support more urgently, has it affected support they receive, do they have a plan to reduce the impact*)

5. Neoliberalism

In the 1980s there was a move towards policies to cut social expenditure on education and health, privatisation, trade liberalisation, removal of food and fuel subsidies that were unpopular within Nigeria but supported by international organisations. However, the policies didn't lead to economic prosperity. Government still accumulated deficits and mismanaged the economy, leading to widespread impoverishment, unemployment, and informalisation of labour

- How did these policies affect informal workers and the ability of their families/ communities to support them?

(*role/ effect policies have today, did legacy of the policies compromise SP and create financial pressures for government/ the poor*)

- How did these policies change the way we think about or design welfare programmes in Nigeria?
- Were pensions for informal workers a serious concern before these policies?
- Do you feel that it's best for people to rely on what they can do for themselves through work?

(*whether they believe in individualism vs collectivism, what is more effective, whether they would rather rely on state/ family*)

- Is it their responsibility to improve their circumstances or is it the government's responsibility?
- Do you feel it's better for government to intervene to provide welfare, or make it easier to do business?

Appendix 3: Demographic Composition of Informal Workers

KEY:

Participant Identifier (ID)

COLOUR CODE:

Orange = elderly informal workers

Light blue = low-income women

Darker blue = high-income women

Light green = low-income men

Darker green = high-income men

Informal Workers in Abuja

S/N	ID	AGE	GENDER	MARITAL STATUS	GEO REGION	RELIGION	OCCUPATION	EDUCATION
1	006	48	Male	Married	Southwest	Christian	Auto parts trader	Secondary
2	007	35	Male	Married	Southeast	Christian	Auto parts trader	Secondary
3	009	58	Female	Married	Southeast	Christian	Textile trader	Secondary
4	028	63	Female	Widow	Southeast	Christian	Petty trader (kerosene)	Primary
5	029	60	Male	Widower	Southwest	Christian	Drycleaner	Secondary
6	030	70	Male	Widower	South-south	Christian	Business owner	Polytechnic
7	031	65	Female	Married	North central	Christian	Petty trader (fish)	None
8	032	65	Male	Married	Northeast	Muslim	Petty trader (kolanut, limes)	Islamic school
9	033	62	Female	Married	Southeast	Christian	Trader	Secondary
10	034	66	Male	Married	Southeast	Christian	Trader	Primary
11	036	62	Male	Married	Southeast	Christian	Carpenter	Primary
12	039	62	Female	Widow	Southeast	Christian	Trader (water)	Diploma
13	041	60	Female	Married	North central	Muslim	Maize grinder	Primary
14	042	27	Male	Married	Northwest	Muslim	Hawker (plantain chips)	Islamic school
15	043	39	Male	Married	North central	Christian	Hawker (air freshener)	Undergraduate
16	044	21	Male	Single	Northwest	Muslim	Hawker (bread)	None
17	045	20	Male	Single	Northwest	Muslim	Hawker (bread)	Primary
18	047	59	Female	Married	Southwest	Christian	Hawker (bread)	Primary
19	048	32	Female	Married	South-south	Christian	Hawker (peppered beef)	Secondary
20	050	30	Female	Divorced	North central	Muslim	Hawker (groundnut)	Primary
21	052	32	Female	Divorced	North central	Christian	Hawker (corn)	Secondary
22	063	42	Male	Married	Southeast	Christian	Auto parts trader	Secondary
23	065	25	Male	Married	Northwest	Muslim	Load carrier	Islamic school
24	066	23	Male	Single	Northwest	Muslim	Load carrier	Secondary
25	067	26	Male	Single	Northwest	Muslim	Load carrier	Secondary
26	068	18	Male	Single	Northwest	Muslim	Load carrier	Secondary
27	069	25	Male	Single	Northwest	Muslim	Load carrier	Secondary
28	072	46	Female	Married	South-south	Christian	Sweeper	Primary
29	073	47	Female	Married	Northwest	Christian	Sweeper	Secondary
30	074	40	Female	Widow	Northwest	Christian	Sweeper	Secondary

31	075	44	Female	Married	Northwest	Christian	Sweeper	Secondary
32	076	43	Female	Married	Northwest	Christian	Sweeper	Secondary
33	078	30	Female	Married	South-south	Christian	Business (beauty/ fashion)	Undergraduate
34	080	55	Female	Married	North central	Muslim	Trader (kitchen wares)	Secondary
35	081	43	Female	Married	North central	Muslim	Tailor	Primary
36	083	35	Female	Single	Southeast	Christian	Trader (used clothes)	Undergraduate
37	084	42	Female	Married	South-south	Christian	Trader (used clothes)	Undergraduate
38	085	30	Female	Single	Southeast	Christian	Tailor	Undergraduate
39	086	27	Female	Single	Southeast	Christian	Tailor	Undergraduate
40	088	39	Female	Married	-	Christian	Salon owner	Secondary
41	089	33	Female	Single	North central	Muslim	Tailor	Undergraduate
42	090	44	Female	Married	Southwest	Christian	Trader	Undergraduate
43	091	40	Male	Married	Southeast	Christian	Auto parts trader	Primary
44	092	59	Male	Married	Southeast	Christian	Auto parts trader	Primary
45	093	42	Male	Married	Southeast	Christian	Textile trader	Secondary
46	094	25	Male	Single	Southeast	Christian	Textile trader	Secondary
47	095	35	Female	Divorced	North central	Christian	Hawker (groundnut)	Secondary
48	096	32	Male	Married	Northwest	Muslim	Textile trader	HND
49	097	45	Male	Married	Northwest	Muslim	Textile trader	HND
50	098	33	Male	Married	Northwest	Muslim	Textile trader	Secondary
51	099	36	Male	Married	Southeast	Christian	Hawker (traditional medicine)	Undergraduate

Informal Workers in Yola

S/N	ID	AGE	GENDER	MARITAL STATUS	GEO REGION	RELIGION	OCCUPATION	EDUCATION
1	100	65	Male	Polygamy (4)	Northeast	Muslim	Butcher	Secondary
2	101	76	Male	Polygamy (3)	Northeast	Muslim	Butcher	Islamic school
3	102	95	Male	Polygamy (2)	Northeast	Muslim	Butcher	Islamic school
4	103	73	Male	Widower	Northeast	Muslim	Tailor	Primary
5	104	63	Male	Polygamy (3)	Northeast	Muslim	Butcher	Primary
6	108	61	Female	Married	Northeast	Muslim	Petty trader (groundnut)	Primary
7	109	60	Female	Widow	Northeast	Muslim	Domestic worker	None
8	110	60	Female	Married	Northeast	Muslim	Petty trader (groundnut)	None
9	111	60	Female	Married	Northeast	Muslim	Petty trader (groundnut)	Islamic school
10	112	45	Female	Widow	Northeast	Muslim	Sweeper	None
11	113	40	Female	Widow	Northeast	Muslim	Sweeper	Primary
12	114	40	Female	Married	Northeast	Muslim	Hawker (fura da nono)	None
13	115	35	Male	Married	Northeast	Muslim	Load carrier	Islamic school
14	116	35	Male	Widower	Northeast	Muslim	Load carrier	Secondary
15	117	35	Male	Married	Northeast	Muslim	Load carrier	None
16	118	23	Male	Married	Northeast	Muslim	Load carrier	Primary
17	119	21	Male	Single	Northeast	Muslim	Load carrier	Secondary
18	120	60	Female	Widow	Northeast	Muslim	Domestic worker	None
19	122	52	Female	Widow	Northeast	Muslim	Sweeper	Primary
20	123	42	Female	Married	Northeast	Muslim	Sweeper	Primary
21	124	42	Female	Married	Northeast	Christian	Sweeper	Primary
22	125	55	Female	Widow	Northwest	Muslim	Sweeper	None
23	126	25	Male	Married	Northwest	Muslim	Hawker (sugarcane)	Secondary
24	127	25	Male	Married	Northeast	Muslim	Hawker (sugarcane)	None
25	128	23	Male	Married	Northeast	Muslim	Hawker (kolanut)	Almajiri
26	129	27	Male	Married	Northwest	Muslim	Hawker (coconut, dates)	Secondary
27	130	23	Female	Single	Northeast	Muslim	Hawker (groundnut)	Diploma
28	131	19	Female	Single	Northeast	Muslim	Hawker (masa)	Secondary
29	132	20	Female	Single	Northeast	Muslim	Hawker (pepper soup)	Secondary
30	133	19	Female	Single	Northeast	Muslim	Hawker (snacks)	NCE
31	135	24	Male	Married	Northwest	Muslim	Hawker (watermelon)	Secondary

32	136	31	Male	Married	Southeast	Christian	Auto parts trader	Secondary
33	137	50	Male	Married	Southeast	Christian	Auto parts trader	Secondary
34	138	31	Male	Single	Southeast	Christian	Auto parts trader	Undergraduate
35	139	43	Male	Married	Southeast	Christian	Auto parts trader	Secondary
36	141	43	Male	Married	Northeast	Muslim	Textile trader	Undergraduate
37	142	35	Male	Married	Northeast	Muslim	Textile trader	Postgraduate
38	144	41	Male	Married	Northeast	Muslim	Textile trader	Primary
39	145	40	Male	Polygamy (2)	Northeast	Muslim	Textile trader	Primary
40	146	30	Male	Married	-	Muslim	Textile trader	Secondary
41	156	26	Male	Married	Northeast	Muslim	Auto parts trader	Secondary
42	158	36	Female	Married	South-south	Christian	Tailor	Undergraduate
43	159	40	Female	Single	Northeast	Christian	Tailor	Secondary
44	160	50	Female	Married	Southeast	Christian	Trader (used clothes)	Diploma
45	161	31	Female	Single	Northeast	Christian	Salon owner	Diploma
46	164	28	Female	Married	Northeast	Muslim	Business (eating house)	Secondary
47	165	35	Female	Single	Northeast	Christian	Business (eating house)	Undergraduate
48	166	39	Female	Single	Northeast	Christian	Business (eating house)	Undergraduate
49	167	43	Female	Married	Northeast	Muslim	Business (eating house)	Primary
50	168	49	Female	Married	Northeast	Christian	Tailor	Undergraduate
51	169	42	Female	Married	Northeast	Christian	Tailor	Secondday

Appendix 4: List of Expert Interviews (Government Officials, Pension Officials, Community Leaders, Savings Associates)

S/N	ID	ANONYMISED DESCRIPTION	INTERVIEW DATE	LOCATION
1	017	Traditional leader	17 Jun. 2021	Abuja
2	018	Muslim leader	17 Jun. 2021	Abuja
3	049	Traditional leader	15 Aug. 2021	Abuja
4	053	Muslim leader	20 Aug. 2021	Abuja
5	054	Traditional leader	21 Aug. 2021	Abuja
6	055	Traditional leader	21 Aug. 2021	Abuja
7	056	Christian leader	21 Aug. 2021	Abuja
8	057	Muslim leader	22 Aug. 2021	Abuja
9	058	Christian leader	25 Aug. 2021	Abuja
10	060	Christian leader	25 Aug. 2021	Abuja
11	061	Christian leader	30 Aug. 2021	Abuja
12	062	Savings associate	30 Aug. 2021	Abuja
13	070	Savings associate	9 Sep. 2021	Abuja
14	121	Traditional leader	21 Oct. 2021	Yola
15	134	Savings associate	4 Nov. 2021	Yola
16	140	Local government official	6 Nov. 2021	Yola
17	147	Traditional leader	20 Nov. 2021	Yola
18	148	Christian leader	20 Nov. 2021	Yola
19	149	Traditional leader	20 Nov. 2021	Yola
20	150	Christian leader	20 Nov. 2021	Yola
21	151	Muslim leader	23 Nov. 2021	Yola
22	152	Muslim leader	23 Nov. 2021	Yola
23	153	Muslim leader	23 Nov. 2021	Yola
24	154	Christian leader	23 Nov. 2021	Yola
25	155	Muslim leader	25 Nov. 2021	Yola
26	157	Muslim leader	26 Nov. 2021	Yola
27	162	State government official (PAWECA)	28 Nov. 2021	Yola
28	170	State legislator	2 Dec. 2021	Yola
29	171	PenCom official (Micro Pensions dept)	15 Dec. 2021	Abuja
30	172	Former senior official (NSIP)	20 Dec. 2021	Abuja
31	173	Senior official (NSCC)	23 Dec. 2021	Abuja
32	175	PenCom Commissioner	12 Jan. 2022	Abuja
33	176	Head of Strategy at PFA	13 Jan. 2022	Abuja
34	177	Director at a PFA	14 Jan. 2022	Abuja
35	178	Director at a PFA	19 Jan. 2022	Abuja
36	-	Director at a PFA	03 Jun. 2020	Abuja
37	-	PenCom official (Micro Pensions dept)	04 Jun. 2020	Abuja

Interviews S/N 36 and 37 above conducted as part of the Summative Assignment for MY521 Qualitative Research Methods.