

Sustainability and project management: A dual approach for women entrepreneurs in event management

Onyinye Gift Ejike ^{1,*} and Angela Omozele Abhulimen ²

¹ *The Velvet Expression, Lagos, Nigeria.*

² *Independent Researcher, UK.*

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Abstract

This review paper explores the integration of sustainability and project management in the event management industry, emphasizing the empowerment of women entrepreneurs. It highlights the importance of embedding sustainable practices in project management processes to enhance event quality and reduce environmental impact. The paper discusses the unique challenges faced by women entrepreneurs, such as gender bias and balancing personal and professional responsibilities, and examines support mechanisms, including networking, funding, and mentorship. Future directions for research and development focus on advanced technologies, long-term impact evaluation, and continued support to promote sustainability and gender equality in event management.

Keywords: Sustainable event management; Women entrepreneurs; Project management; Gender equality; Event planning

1 Introduction

Sustainability has emerged as a pivotal concern in contemporary business practices, emphasizing the need to balance economic growth, environmental protection, and social well-being (Sopiana & Harahap, 2023). In essence, sustainability in business involves adopting practices that meet present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs. This approach has become increasingly crucial as global environmental challenges such as climate change, resource depletion, and pollution continue to escalate. Companies recognize that sustainable practices enhance their brand reputation, ensure regulatory compliance, and lead to long-term cost savings and operational efficiency (Afum et al., 2020; Olutimehin, Ofodile, Ejibe, Odunaiya, & Soyombo, 2024a).

Parallel to the rise of sustainability, project management has established itself as a fundamental discipline in effectively executing business strategies. Project management encompasses principles and practices to ensure that projects are completed on time, within budget, and to the desired quality standards. It involves careful planning, execution, monitoring, and closure of projects, utilizing various tools and techniques to manage resources, risks, and stakeholder expectations. In event management, effective project management is essential to orchestrate complex activities, manage diverse teams, and deliver memorable experiences for attendees (Portny & Portny, 2022; Zid, Kasim, & Soomro, 2020).

Women entrepreneurs have increasingly made their mark in the event management industry, a sector known for its dynamic and multifaceted nature. Historically, event management was dominated by men, but over the past few decades, women have steadily gained prominence, bringing unique perspectives and creativity to the industry. Today, women entrepreneurs play a significant role in shaping the landscape of event management, from small-scale community events to large international conferences. Their contribution is invaluable in terms of the innovative events

* Corresponding author: Onyinye Gift Ejike

they produce and how they foster inclusivity and community engagement (Khattar & Agarwal, 2023). Despite their growing influence, women entrepreneurs in event management face distinct challenges. They must often navigate gender biases, secure funding, and balance professional responsibilities with personal commitments. Nevertheless, their resilience and determination have led to significant strides in the industry. Current trends indicate a shift towards more women-led businesses in event management, supported by increasing recognition of their capabilities and contributions.

This paper explores a dual approach that combines sustainability and project management principles to empower women entrepreneurs in the event management sector. By integrating these two critical aspects, the paper seeks to provide a comprehensive framework that enhances the operational efficiency and environmental responsibility of event management and supports the growth and success of women entrepreneurs. The focus will be on understanding how sustainable practices can be embedded in project management processes and how this integration can create a more inclusive and supportive environment for women in the industry.

The objective of this paper is threefold. First, it aims to elucidate the importance of sustainability in event management, highlighting the benefits and challenges associated with its implementation. Second, it outlines the fundamental project management principles for event planning and execution. Lastly, the paper aims to demonstrate how integrating sustainability and project management can provide a strategic advantage for women entrepreneurs, helping them overcome industry-specific challenges and achieve greater success.

Sustainability in event management involves adopting practices that minimize environmental impact, promote social equity, and ensure economic viability. This includes strategies such as reducing waste, sourcing local and eco-friendly materials, promoting energy efficiency, and engaging with community stakeholders. The benefits of such practices are manifold, ranging from cost savings and regulatory compliance to enhanced brand reputation and improved attendee satisfaction. However, implementing sustainable practices can be challenging, requiring a shift in mindset, investment in new technologies, and collaboration with various stakeholders (Nawarathna & Arachchi, 2021).

Project management, on the other hand, provides a structured approach to planning, executing, and closing projects. In event management, this involves defining project objectives, developing detailed plans, allocating resources, managing risks, and ensuring that all activities are completed within the set parameters of time, cost, and quality. Effective project management ensures that events run smoothly, meet client expectations, and deliver desired outcomes (Animashaun, FAMILONI, & Onyebuchi, 2024; Harold, 2021).

The intersection of sustainability and project management offers a powerful framework for enhancing event management practices. By integrating sustainable principles into project management processes, event managers can create more efficient, responsible, and successful events. This integrated approach addresses the growing demand for sustainable practices and provides a strategic advantage in an increasingly competitive market. For women entrepreneurs, this dual approach can be particularly empowering. It equips them with the tools and knowledge to implement sustainable practices effectively while managing projects efficiently. Furthermore, it aligns with the broader movement towards gender equality and women's empowerment, offering a supportive framework that addresses their unique challenges and fosters their growth and success in the industry.

In conclusion, this paper will explore the significance of sustainability and project management in event management, focusing on how their integration can support and empower women entrepreneurs. By providing a comprehensive analysis and practical insights, it aims to contribute to the ongoing dialogue on sustainable business practices and women's entrepreneurship in the dynamic field of event management.

2 The Role of Sustainability in Event Management

2.1 Definition and Key Concepts

Sustainability in event management refers to adopting practices that reduce negative environmental impacts, promote social responsibility, and ensure economic viability. This holistic approach aims to create events that are memorable and successful and contribute positively to the environment and society. Sustainable event management seeks to balance the triple bottom line—environmental, social, and economic factors (Nawarathna & Arachchi, 2021).

From an environmental perspective, sustainability in event management includes measures to reduce waste, conserve resources, and minimize carbon footprints. This involves using eco-friendly materials, promoting recycling, and selecting venues with sustainable practices. Social sustainability focuses on the well-being of all stakeholders involved

in the event, including attendees, employees, and the local community. It encompasses aspects like accessibility, diversity, and community engagement. Economic sustainability, meanwhile, ensures that events are financially viable and contribute to the local economy without causing harm. This includes supporting local businesses, creating job opportunities, and ensuring fair pricing (Ezeh, Ogbu, Ikevuje, & George, 2024; Li, Liu, & Solangi, 2024).

2.2 Benefits of Sustainable Practices

The benefits of integrating sustainability into event management are extensive and multifaceted. Firstly, sustainable practices often lead to long-term cost savings. While the initial investment in sustainable technologies or practices might be higher, reducing resource consumption and waste generation can significantly lower operational costs over time. For example, using energy-efficient lighting and equipment can reduce electricity bills, while digital ticketing and communication can save on printing and paper costs (Amaral et al., 2020).

Secondly, adopting sustainable practices can significantly enhance a brand's reputation. In an era where consumers are increasingly concerned about environmental and social issues, demonstrating a commitment to sustainability can differentiate a brand and foster loyalty among eco-conscious attendees. Events prioritizing sustainability can attract media attention, boost public relations, and create a lasting positive impression. Compliance with regulations and standards is another critical benefit. Many regions have stringent environmental regulations, and failure to comply can result in fines and legal issues. By adopting sustainable practices, event managers can ensure they meet or exceed these regulatory requirements, avoiding potential legal complications and promoting a culture of responsibility and compliance within the industry (Aragón-Correa, Marcus, & Vogel, 2020; Obiuto, Adebayo, Olajiga, & Clinton, 2023).

2.3 Challenges and Solutions

Despite the clear benefits, implementing sustainable practices in event management has challenges. One of the most common obstacles is the perceived high cost of sustainable solutions. Many event managers believe sustainable options are more expensive than traditional ones, which can be a significant deterrent, especially for events with tight budgets. However, this perception is gradually changing as the cost of sustainable technologies decreases and the long-term financial benefits become more apparent.

Another challenge is stakeholders' lack of awareness and understanding of sustainable practices. Event managers, suppliers, and attendees may not fully comprehend the importance of sustainability or how to implement it effectively. This lack of knowledge can lead to resistance to change and slow the adoption of sustainable practices. Addressing this challenge requires comprehensive education and training programs that highlight the benefits of sustainability and provide practical guidance on how to achieve it. Logistical challenges also pose a significant hurdle. Organizing sustainable events often requires meticulous planning and coordination, especially when sourcing eco-friendly materials, managing waste, and ensuring energy efficiency. These tasks can be complex and time-consuming, necessitating higher expertise and commitment from event managers (Adebayo, Paul, Jane Osareme, & Eyo-Udo, 2024; Eyo-Udo, 2024).

Innovative solutions and best practices can help overcome these challenges. For example, event managers can partner with sustainability consultants specializing in green event planning. These experts can provide valuable insights and support, helping to identify the most effective and feasible sustainable practices. Additionally, leveraging technology can streamline sustainable event management. Online platforms and apps can facilitate digital ticketing, virtual meetings, and paperless communication, reducing waste and enhancing efficiency (Subramanya, 2022). Engaging with stakeholders is another critical strategy. Event managers can work closely with suppliers to source sustainable products and services, ensuring sustainability is integrated throughout the supply chain. They can also involve attendees by promoting sustainable behaviors, such as encouraging public transportation, providing recycling stations, and offering incentives for eco-friendly actions (Erhun, Kraft, & Wijnsma, 2021).

3 Project Management Fundamentals for Event Planning

3.1 Core Principles of Project Management

Project management is essential in event planning, providing a structured approach to organizing and executing events effectively. The core principles of project management—planning, execution, monitoring, and closure—serve as the foundation for managing the myriad details involved in event management. Planning is the first and most crucial phase. It involves defining the event's objectives, scope, and deliverables and identifying the necessary resources and stakeholders. During this phase, event managers develop a detailed plan with a timeline, budget, and task assignments.

Tools such as Gantt charts, Work Breakdown Structures (WBS), and project management software like Microsoft Project or Asana are commonly used to map out the plan and ensure all aspects are covered (Gujar & Shafiqhi, 2023).

Execution follows planning and involves putting the plan into action. This phase requires meticulous coordination and communication to ensure that all tasks are carried out as planned. Event managers must oversee logistics, manage teams, and coordinate with vendors and stakeholders to ensure the smooth execution of the event. Effective execution relies heavily on collaboration tools like Slack or Trello, facilitating real-time communication and task tracking (Fuentes-Durá, Fillatreau, & Ashworth, 2022).

Monitoring runs concurrently with execution, tracking progress and performance against the plan. This involves regular status meetings, progress reports, and performance metrics to ensure the event stays on track. Key performance indicators (KPIs) such as budget adherence, timeline milestones, and attendee satisfaction are monitored closely. Tools like dashboards and analytics platforms provide real-time data and insights, enabling event managers to make informed decisions and adjustments as needed. Closure is the final phase, encompassing the wrap-up and evaluation of the event. This includes finalizing contracts, paying vendors, and conducting a post-event review to assess what went well and could be improved. A thorough debrief with the team and stakeholders is crucial to capture lessons learned and document best practices for future events (Afolabi, 2024; Dowson, Albert, & Lomax, 2022).

3.2 Project Lifecycle in Event Management

The project lifecycle in event management consists of several stages, from inception to post-event evaluation. Each stage requires careful attention and specific actions to ensure the event's success. Inception is the initial stage where the idea for the event is conceived, and its feasibility is assessed. This involves identifying the event's purpose, target audience, and key objectives. A preliminary budget and timeline are also established during this stage.

Planning and Design is the next stage, where detailed planning takes place. This includes selecting a venue, designing the event layout, and coordinating logistics such as catering, transportation, and accommodation. Marketing and promotional strategies are also developed to attract attendees and create buzz around the event. Implementation involves the actual execution of the event. This stage requires meticulous coordination to ensure that all elements come together seamlessly. Event managers oversee setup, manage on-site staff, and handle any issues. Real-time communication and problem-solving are critical to address any unexpected challenges and ensure a smooth experience for attendees.

The event is the culmination of all planning and preparation. The event takes place during this stage, and all activities and sessions are conducted as planned. Event managers must be vigilant, managing the flow of the event and ensuring that everything runs according to schedule. Post-event evaluation is the final stage, assessing the event's success. This involves gathering feedback from attendees, staff, and stakeholders through surveys, interviews, and debriefing meetings. Financial performance, attendee satisfaction, and achievement of objectives are analyzed to determine the event's overall success. Lessons learned and best practices are documented to inform future event planning (Ameyaw, Idemudia, & Iyelolu, 2024; Chodor, 2020; Dowson et al., 2022; Udeh, Amajuoyi, Adeusi, & Scott, 2024).

3.3 Risk Management and Contingency Planning

Risk management is a critical component of project management in event planning. It involves identifying potential risks, assessing their impact, and developing mitigation strategies. Identifying potential risks requires a thorough analysis of all aspects of the event, from logistics and vendor reliability to weather conditions and attendee safety. Common risks in event planning include technical failures, vendor no-shows, budget overruns, and health and safety incidents. A risk register often documents identified risks, their likelihood, and potential impact (Allen, Harris, & Jago, 2022).

Strategies for effective risk mitigation include both proactive and reactive measures. Proactive measures involve planning and preparation to prevent risks from occurring. This includes selecting reliable vendors, having backup plans for critical components, and securing appropriate insurance coverage. Reactive measures involve having contingency plans to address risks that do materialize. For example, having backup equipment and staff on standby and developing emergency response procedures for health and safety incidents (Hillson & Simon, 2020). Contingency planning is integral to risk management, ensuring that event managers are prepared to handle unexpected situations. This involves creating detailed contingency plans for high-priority risks outlining specific actions to take if the risk occurs. These plans should include communication protocols, resource allocation, and roles and responsibilities. Regularly reviewing and updating contingency plans is essential to ensure their effectiveness (Bello, Ige, & Ameyaw, 2024; Mancini, 2023; Suresh, Sanders, & Braunscheidel, 2020).

4 Intersection of Sustainability and Project Management

4.1 Integrated Approach

The integration of sustainability into project management processes represents a progressive step in the evolution of event management. Embedding sustainability within these processes ensures that environmental, social, and economic considerations are integral to the planning, execution, monitoring, and closure phases. This holistic approach enhances the quality and success of events and promotes long-term positive impacts on communities and the environment.

Embedding sustainability in project management begins at the planning stage. Event managers can start by setting clear sustainability objectives that align with the overall goals of the event. These objectives might include reducing waste, minimizing carbon emissions, and promoting social inclusion. A sustainability plan outlining specific actions and metrics for success is then developed. Tools such as sustainability checklists and guidelines can be incorporated into the project plan to ensure all team members are aware of and committed to sustainable practices (Allen et al., 2022; Wee, Mustapha, & Anas, 2021).

During the execution phase, sustainability can be maintained by selecting eco-friendly vendors and materials, using energy-efficient technologies, and implementing waste reduction strategies. For instance, digital ticketing and virtual event platforms can significantly reduce the need for paper and travel, thus lowering the event's carbon footprint. Event managers can also engage with attendees through educational campaigns and incentives to promote sustainable behavior, such as using public transportation or participating in recycling programs (Grilli & Curtis, 2021; Olutimehin, Ofodile, Ejibe, Odunaiya, & Soyombo, 2024b).

Monitoring sustainability efforts is crucial to ensure the event stays on track with its green goals. Regular progress reports, sustainability audits, and real-time data analysis can help identify areas for improvement and ensure compliance with sustainability standards. Post-event evaluations should include a review of sustainability metrics to measure the success of the initiatives and identify lessons learned for future events (Allen et al., 2022). Case examples of successful integration demonstrate the effectiveness of this approach. The Sydney Olympics in 2000, often referred to as the "Green Games," is a notable example. The event incorporated sustainable practices, from construction and energy use to waste management and transportation (Stevens, 2020). Another example is the Glastonbury Festival, which has implemented extensive sustainability measures, including renewable energy sources, waste reduction programs, and biodiversity conservation initiatives (Adesina, Iyelolu, & Paul, 2024; Mancini, 2023; Osasona et al., 2024). These cases highlight how integrating sustainability into project management enhances event quality and leaves a lasting positive legacy.

4.2 Frameworks and Models

Various frameworks and models support the integration of sustainability into project management, providing structured approaches and best practices for event managers to follow. One such framework is the ISO 20121 standard, which guides sustainable event management. This standard helps organizations improve their sustainability performance by focusing on key areas such as resource management, stakeholder engagement, and supply chain sustainability.

The Event Sustainability Management System (ESMS) is another valuable model. It offers a comprehensive approach to managing event sustainability, incorporating risk management, performance evaluation, and continuous improvement. By following the ESMS framework, event managers can systematically address sustainability issues and ensure their events are environmentally responsible and socially inclusive (Pauliková, Lestyánszka Škúrková, Kopilčáková, Zhelyazkova-Stoyanova, & Kirechev, 2021).

In event management, these frameworks can be applied in various ways. For example, the ISO 20121 standard can guide the development of an event's sustainability policy and objectives. It can also help set up monitoring and evaluation systems to track progress and report on sustainability performance. The ESMS model can identify and mitigate sustainability risks, engage stakeholders in sustainability initiatives, and implement best practices in waste management, energy use, and community engagement (Adelekan et al., 2024; Martin, Elbeltagy, Hasannudin, & Abe, 2021; Ogborigbo et al., 2024).

Using these frameworks facilitates the integration of sustainability into project management and enhances the credibility and transparency of sustainability efforts. By adhering to recognized standards and models, event managers

can demonstrate their commitment to sustainability to stakeholders, including attendees, sponsors, and regulatory authorities.

4.3 Impact on Event Outcomes

Integrating sustainability into project management processes significantly enhances event outcomes in terms of quality and participant experience. Sustainable events are often perceived as more responsible and innovative, attracting a broader and more engaged audience. By addressing environmental and social concerns, event managers can create a more inclusive and positive atmosphere, enhancing the overall experience for participants.

Sustainable practices can improve the quality of events by ensuring that resources are used efficiently and responsibly. For example, energy-efficient technologies and renewable energy sources can provide reliable power while reducing environmental impact. Sustainable sourcing of materials and services can ensure high quality and ethical standards, contributing to the event's overall success (Adelekan et al., 2024; Ekechukwu, 2024; Olutimehin et al., 2024b).

Furthermore, sustainable events often offer unique opportunities for participant engagement and education. Attendees can be encouraged to participate in sustainability initiatives, such as recycling programs or community service projects, enhancing their connection to the event and its mission. Educational campaigns and workshops on sustainability topics can also add value to the event, providing participants with valuable knowledge and skills (Ogborigbo et al., 2024).

Measuring and evaluating the impact of sustainability initiatives is crucial for continuous improvement. Key performance indicators (KPIs) such as waste reduction, carbon footprint, and attendee satisfaction with sustainability efforts can provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of the initiatives. Surveys, feedback forms, and sustainability reports can be used to gather data and assess the success of the event's sustainability efforts (Komolafe et al., 2024; Ogborigbo et al., 2024).

5 Empowering Women Entrepreneurs in Event Management

5.1 Challenges Faced by Women Entrepreneurs

Women entrepreneurs in event management face a unique set of challenges, many gender-specific. One of the most significant obstacles is the prevalence of gender bias and stereotypes within the industry. Despite progress toward gender equality, women often encounter preconceived notions that they are less capable or less serious about their business ventures compared to their male counterparts. This bias can manifest in various ways, such as difficulty securing funding, limited access to influential networks, and fewer opportunities for high-profile projects.

Another major challenge is the balancing act between personal and professional responsibilities. Many women entrepreneurs juggle the demands of business running with caregiving roles at home. The event management industry, known for its unpredictable hours and high-stress environment, can exacerbate these challenges. The pressure to perform well in both domains often leads to burnout and hinders the ability to scale their businesses effectively. The lack of flexible working arrangements and insufficient support systems compound these difficulties, making it challenging for women to sustain long-term success in the industry (Ekechukwu & Simpa, 2024).

5.2 Support Mechanisms and Resources

To address these challenges, various support mechanisms and resources have been developed to empower women entrepreneurs in event management. Networking opportunities are crucial, as they allow women to connect with peers, mentors, and industry leaders who can provide guidance, share experiences, and offer valuable business opportunities. Professional organizations such as the Women's Business Enterprise National Council (WBENC) and the International Association of Women (IAW) offer platforms for networking, professional development, and advocacy, helping women entrepreneurs build robust support systems (Medley-Cleveland, 2024; QUEK & CRAWFORD, 2020).

Funding remains a critical barrier for many women entrepreneurs. Access to capital is often limited due to biased lending practices and a lack of collateral. Several initiatives and programs focus on providing financial support for women-owned businesses to mitigate this. For instance, venture capital firms like the Female Founders Fund and grants from organizations such as the Amber Grant cater to women entrepreneurs, offering the financial backing necessary to start and grow their ventures (Singh & Dash, 2021). Mentorship programs also play a vital role in empowering women entrepreneurs. Mentors can provide invaluable advice, support, and encouragement, helping women navigate the complexities of the event management industry. Programs like SCORE and the Cherie Blair Foundation for Women offer

structured mentorship opportunities, connecting women with experienced professionals who can guide them through their entrepreneurial journey (Haddock-Millar & Clutterbuck).

Government and non-profit organizations also contribute significantly to the empowerment of women entrepreneurs. Many governments have introduced policies and initiatives to promote gender equality in entrepreneurship. For example, the Small Business Administration (SBA) in the United States offers resources, training, and financial assistance programs tailored for women entrepreneurs. Non-profits like SheEO and the Women's Global Empowerment Fund focus on providing support, education, and advocacy to foster an enabling environment for women in business (Handy, Kassam, & Renade, 2002; Lenka & Agarwal, 2017).

6 Conclusion

Integrating sustainability and project management presents a transformative approach to event management, offering numerous benefits for the industry. This dual approach ensures that events are successful, memorable, environmentally responsible, and socially inclusive. By embedding sustainability into the core principles of project management—planning, execution, monitoring, and closure—event managers can create a comprehensive framework that addresses environmental, social, and economic dimensions. This integration enhances event quality, improves participant experience, and promotes long-term positive impacts on communities and the environment.

The role of women entrepreneurs in event management is particularly significant. Despite facing gender-specific challenges such as bias and balancing personal and professional responsibilities, women have made substantial contributions to the industry. Support mechanisms, including networking opportunities, funding, mentorship programs, and government and non-profit initiatives, are crucial in empowering women entrepreneurs.

There are several potential areas for further research and development in sustainable event management and the empowerment of women entrepreneurs. One area of interest is the development of advanced technologies and tools that facilitate sustainable practices in event management. Innovations in virtual events, eco-friendly materials, and energy-efficient technologies can further reduce the environmental impact of events. Research into the effectiveness of these technologies and their adoption in the industry can provide valuable insights and drive further improvements.

Another important area for future research is the evaluation of the long-term impacts of sustainable event management practices. By conducting comprehensive studies on sustainable events' environmental, social, and economic outcomes, researchers can develop a deeper understanding of their benefits and identify best practices for maximizing positive impacts. This research can inform policy development and industry standards, promoting wider adoption of sustainable practices.

Continued support and innovation in the field are essential for sustainable event management's ongoing success and women entrepreneurs' empowerment. Governments, industry organizations, and non-profits must continue to provide resources, training, and advocacy to support these efforts. Collaboration between stakeholders is crucial for driving innovation and creating an enabling environment for sustainable practices and gender equality in entrepreneurship.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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