



ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS INFLUENCING WOMEN ENTREPRENEURIAL INTENTIONS: A CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

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Abstract:

Women entrepreneurs have become important players in the entrepreneurial landscape. In Africa, the equal right of women and their equal participation in the social, cultural, economic and political life have remained elusive. As such, they are still the main victims of poverty, social prejudice, lack of access to health services and education. African women entrepreneurship development is generally inadequate and beset with numerous constraints and challenges, which have to do with culture, religion, entrepreneurial behaviours such as lack of innovativeness, ability and willingness to take calculated risks, determination, and lack of economic independence and their total perceptions in entrepreneurship. The purpose of this paper is to examine the environmental factors influencing women entrepreneurial intentions. Based on extant literature, the study paper out women entrepreneurs operate in an unfavorable business environment, characterized by various challenges ranging from infrastructural deficiency, low access and high cost of finance, weak institutions and many barriers to formal economic participation. This abysmal performance could be traceable to limited education, rudimentary skills, low household and business income, lack of savings and social networks, not possessing the required professional relationships, lack of mentorship, inadequacy of relevant experience, Limited access to support services which includes loan levels suited to their business needs, technical and managerial training. These problems arise from limited capacity outreach of existing institutions as well as the inability of women entrepreneurs to pay for such services.

Keywords: women entrepreneurs, environmental factors

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1. Introduction

Women are the pillars of economic expansion in many developing states. Global entrepreneurship monitor (GEM) reports that women entrepreneurs generate jobs, wealth and innovation across 37 countries surveyed. In many of these countries the rate of growth of women creating new business is greater than the rate of growth for men entrepreneurs (Reynolds, Bygrave, Autio, Cox & Hay, 2002). Women constitute more than half of the total world population. While in the traditional societies, they were confined to performing household activities in modern societies, they have come out to participate in all sorts of activities. Women have ventured in different spheres of activities such as academics, politics, social work and they have started running their own enterprises. Therefore, it is appropriate to study the causes of poor performance among women entrepreneurs. Generally, women entrepreneurial ventures are smaller than that of their male counterparts in terms of sales, revenue and assets. Recent evidence from the United States suggests that on average men entrepreneurial ventures are twice as large as women entrepreneurial ventures in terms of both sales and assets (Coleman, 2007). It has also been shown that on average employer-firms owned by women generate only 78 percent of the profits generated by comparable male owned businesses (Robb & Wolken, 2002). Also, women have been found to generate less sales turnover relative to men, even in same industry comparisons (Loscocco & Robinson, 1991).

The level of business ownership by males is higher than that of females across all twenty-nine countries monitored in the G E M project including Australia (Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, 2001). Self-employment is associated with economic growth, and countries with low levels of female self-employment tend to have low levels of growth. It has been recommended that to encourage economic growth, efforts should be directed at encouraging females to start new businesses (Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, 2001). To develop effective policies and programs to increase the rate of business ownership by women, it is necessary to understand the processes leading to their self-employment.

For example in Nigeria in spite of the support and incentive programs to micro business, Akabueze (2002) briefly stated that it would seem reasonable to suppose that small businesses would grow and boom, but the speed of business breakdown continues to raise because of the shortcomings influencing business performance which are: inadequate financial resources, poor location, insufficient management experience, poor laws and regulations, general economic situation, together with critical factors such as poor infrastructure, little demand for products and services, corruption, and poverty. Others include: shortage of raw materials, handicap in obtaining finance, inadequate competent and motivated personnel, lack of ability to control costs and cheap foreign products dumped in the market Notwithstanding the intrinsic problems related to the growth of micro-scale businesses, women entrepreneurs are increasingly venturing into ownership of small-scale enterprises either on their own or in partnership with male entrepreneurs (ILO, 2005). This has been made possible primarily because of ease of

entry, limited access to other enterprises and lack of employment opportunities in formal sector of the economy. In addition, given the expansion of entrepreneurship amongst women, understanding the social, cultural and economic factors influencing their success is of vital importance. The purpose of this paper is to examine the environmental factors influencing women entrepreneurial intentions.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Women Entrepreneurial Ventures

Women entrepreneurs are vital to the economic development, poverty and unemployment reduction of a nation. They have roles to play in the social, economic, and political life of any nation. Moore and Buttner (1997) in Farr-Wharton and Brunetto (2007) defined women entrepreneurs as women who use their knowledge and resources to develop or create new business opportunities, who are actively involved in managing their businesses, and own at least 50 per cent of the business and have been in operation for longer than a year. Anwar and Rashid (2013) further extended this definition to explicitly include home-based female entrepreneurs they defined female entrepreneurs as those who use their knowledge and resources to develop or create new business opportunities – whether this be informally in a home environment without formally registering their business or formally via business registration, hiring office premises, etc. - who are actively involved in managing their businesses, are responsible in some way for the day-to-day running of the business, and have been in operation for longer than a year.

Mayoux (2004) noted that women entrepreneurs are simply women that participate in total entrepreneurial activities, who take the risks involved in combining resources together in a unique way so as to take advantages of the opportunity identified in their immediate environment through production of goods and services. Most of them are involved in Micro Small and Medium Scale Enterprises (MSMES) which contribute more than 97% of all enterprises, 60% of the nation's GDP and a 97% of the total share of the employment (Ndubusi, 2004). The spectrum of women in entrepreneurship often ranges from home based businesses (HBB) to micro, small and medium (MSEs) (ILO, 1998). Okafor and Mordi (2010) opined that women possess dual characteristic (For instance they are firstly women and secondly entrepreneurs). Therefore, women entrepreneurs possess characteristics which include adaptability (Killby, 1968), innovativeness/ creativity (Schumpeter, 1934, Drucker, 1985), strength and internal locus of control (Annenkova, 2001), ability to think and reason fast and endure (Mayoux, 2001), managerial skill, accountability and credit risk.

Women in traditional African economy form the primary producers especially in agriculture, food processing including both the preservation and storage of products and that of marketing and trading surpluses of vital household items. Women are also involved in activities such as weaving, spinning and several hand crafts (Kpelai, 2009). According to Jejenywa (1995), women are at the heart of economic development and

economic growth as they control most of the non-monetary economy (subsistence agriculture, bearing children, domestic labour and so on) and play an important role in the monetary economy as well as trading, wage, labour employment among others. UNESCO (2002) stated that women form high percentage of the population and they have come a long way in businesses, politics, education, sport and other profession.

Statistically, women constitute more than 50% of the Nigerian population and out of this; only about 35% of them are involved in entrepreneurship which can be under the form of micro, small, medium and large enterprises (Odoemene, 2003). Women entrepreneurship in Nigeria is common in the informal sector and activities in this sector seem to be invisible, along with their contributions and needs. Despite government programs aimed at reaching small scale entrepreneurs, women as a group are not considered for assistance. A major reason for this is that most of the enterprises women engage in, such as petty trading, dressmaking, hairdressing, food processing, and small-scale manufacturing, fall outside the Census of Production Surveys.

These enterprises usually tend to have the flexibility and innovativeness that are critical business issues in feminism (Kerka, 1993). In Nigeria, regardless of women's physical population, educational, economic and social status, they are not well represented in the policy making process, especially in issues of business and manpower development. However, given the dynamic nature of the Nigerian environment, a number of changes have emerged, including the recognition of the potential of women and their contribution to the economy. As Mordi, Simpson, Singh and Okafor (2010) observes that traditional roles occupied by the Nigerian woman in the family are changing as a result of changes in the family configuration and setting which has allowed women to undertake more practical and functional roles within the society. Changes in the family structure and functions which resulted from the process of rapid urbanization had brought women into the mainstream of the Nigerian economy and business world. There appears to be role reversal within traditional Nigerian societies where the man is seen as the provider and protector of the family. Most women are now operating as de-facto heads of households in settings and a number of these women are involved in entrepreneurship and business management in order to provide income for their family/home keeping. Considering women's multiple roles in our society (roles as mothers, wives, bread winners etc.) and the circumstances surrounding their peculiar nature which pose a constraint to their full involvement in business, there is a need to create conducive and enabling environment to encourage their participation in the economic development.

Women entrepreneurs face several challenges in their business operation as shown by various studies from time to time (Mattis, 2004, Nichter & Goldmart, 2009). Veena (2008) highlighted some of the challenges of women entrepreneurs to include: Problems at work, problems at home, and problems with husbands, socio-Economic challenges, personal challenges and other strategic challenges. ILO (2003) argued that the challenges of women entrepreneurs are government policies, lack access to appropriate business development support, financial constraints and family problems. According to

Yusuf (2013), women entrepreneurs are confronted with two key challenges gender and cultural beliefs. Agboola (2011) viewed gender and cultural beliefs among other factors that influences people's willingness and ability to venture into entrepreneurial activities, they continued that within the cultural context, there are sub culture like regional, ethnicity and religion that shapes individual's perception and value system. Harkiolakis and Caracatsams (2011) believed that gender and culture belief impede the economic potential of women as entrepreneurs and impact negatively on enterprise development productivity and competitiveness. Carter (2001) and Mordi *et al.* (2010) stated that lack of human and external resources for business start up, government policies, lack of assets, lack of information, lack of access to training, socio- cultural factors and low levels of education are several challenges facing women entrepreneurs.

Women entrepreneurs encounter several issues that further exacerbate the barriers between them and their successful entrepreneurial venture. These constraints may come from their personality, immediate family, or from the environment in which they exist and the societal expectations and perceptions of the people around them. Interestingly, recent studies reveal that psychological constraints play a big role in this context; the fear of failure impacts the performance of entrepreneurial females (Halkias, Nwajiuba, Harkiolakis & Caracatsanis, 2011).

Researchers consistently point to a lack of access to finance as the major barrier that female entrepreneurs face (Jamali, 2009, Roomi, Harrison & Beaumont-Kerridge, 2009). A majority of females rely on the family funding (Halkias, 2011) or personal saving (Itani, Sidani & Baalbaki, 2011). A study conducted in Nigeria discovered that after family funding, these female entrepreneurs rely on donations, bank loans, governmental schemes and charity by church (Halkias, Nwajiuba, Harkiolakis & Caracatsanis, 2011). In many societies in the developing world, women are generally not encouraged to take on leadership roles. They are perceived as being submissive and subservient to their male counterparts (Dzisi, 2008). This stereotyping poses barriers for females as in a male-dominated society, a female leader is discouraged. A study conducted in Lebanon blames cultural norms and stereotyping as one of the biggest constraints for these female entrepreneurs (Jamali, 2009). The traditional perception in Nigerian society is that the male is the primary breadwinner - outside the home - and the female is the primary caregiver - within the four walls of the home. This means that the female may be hesitant in becoming financially independent - whether as home-based worker or outside the home - as she may fear that it will lead to family discord and marital strife. This is an even more important consideration for females who are contemplating starting their own business due to the time investment and (very often) relatively considerable financial investment involved. There is also a perception about females being only housekeepers/homemakers (Itani *et al.*, 2011); such perceptions coupled with family responsibilities are big constraints. The support of the husband in fulfilling family responsibilities can be extremely helpful for these women. However, a study in UAE shows, husbands do not play an active role in the daily household responsibilities - the fact that females need to leave their children in order to pursue

entrepreneurial activities is not appreciated (Jamili, 2009). Male family members may even discourage female entrepreneurs. The need to complete all household work without any assistance from other family members leaves fewer working hours for these females, especially in rural areas. Large family size further exacerbates this issue (Tanbunan, 2009) and living in a joint (as opposed to a nuclear) family system may mean additional responsibility without additional assistance, although this is not always the case. Unmarried females are also facing similar problems (Mordi *et al.*, 2010) with parents being concerned for their daughters future marriage prospects if they are perceived independence and domineering in a society that values a female's shyness and "meekness" - in short, a society in which her submissive nature is seen as her biggest asset. Product marketing and promotion create further issues for female entrepreneurs, most of whom do not have any formal promotional plans available. They mostly rely on word-of-mouth (Halkias, *et al.*, 2011) to spread their message. A female entrepreneur also faces several societal issues; harassment is a major problem for them in many countries. Sexual harassment remains a common complaint (Mordi *et al.*, 2010).

2.2 Environmental Factors Militating against Women Entrepreneurial Intentions

An entrepreneurial process can be described independent when the results of the process are not predetermined by any initial conditions such as being highly educated or being a woman. This implies that there is no fixed outcome; instead the final result is dependent on the specific choices that are made in the process (Goldstone, 1998). Having this in mind, the process is not an independent process. Conditions such as availability of finance, decision making, business know-how, technology among others affect the outcome of the process. Recently, the subject of women entrepreneurship has attracted attention from a number of researchers. Attempts have been made to identify women's motivations, management styles, business performance, training needs, access to funding and participation in business networks as well as how they balance work and family (Aaltio & Kyrö & Sundin, 2008). Female entrepreneurs are faced with numerous constraints that obstruct the successful start-ups and growth of their entrepreneurial activities in spite of the economy they operate in. Regardless of gender, entrepreneurs face a variety of problems. Kantor (1999) argued that these constraints are often greater for women relative to men. Nonetheless, increasing numbers of women are discovering that the easiest way to break the glass ceiling is by establishing their own companies (Zimmerer & Scarborough, 2005).

Several studies about women entrepreneurship include a myriad of problems that women entrepreneurs encounter that impede a successful establishment or growth of their business ventures. For example, Proulx (1995) identified four principle types of obstacles relating to personal constraints, external funding, lack of physical, moral and psychological support and acknowledgement from the community, and the relative absence of women from business networks. The Groupe conseil sur l'entrepreneuriat féminin (2000) identified three major concerns for women entrepreneurs, namely access to funding, information and training and business networks. Légaré and St-Cyr (2000),

identified eight potential obstacles in the literature on women's entrepreneurship, namely discrimination in the granting of outside funding, concentration of women in low yield sectors, lack of relevant professional experience, shortage of support networks, lack of time and money for training, difficulty in balancing of work and family, lack of spousal support and poor financial performance.

The various problems women entrepreneurs encounter, as reported in literature, are categorized into four major headings, these categories are those also identified by (ILO 2004): access to finance; social and cultural constraints; educational and occupational; role and behavioral problems. These militating factors are discussed hereunder:

a. Access to Finance

The entrepreneurial process is dependent on resources. Financial capital is crucial to the establishment and expansion of a business. Access to finance is a recurring research topic in entrepreneurship literature and is considered as the leading obstacle facing women entrepreneurs (Hisrich *et al.* (1999); Van Steel and Thurik, 2004; Kantor, 2001; OECD 1997; O'Neill *et al.*, 2001:39). These studies have established that most of the women entrepreneurs face difficulties when it comes to obtaining adequate capital and at affordable rates to start new ventures or to expand their business. First of all, women have significantly less personal tangible and intangible assets in comparison to men. This implies that since women have less capital, they must seek extra resources compared to men in order to pursue a business opportunity.

In this context of finance for women entrepreneurs, Carter *et al.* (2001) identified other problems with regards to financing: a) Women are underprivileged when it comes to the ability of raising capital to start a business; b) The collateral needed to borrow capital from external sources exceeds the wealth scope of most women; c) Due to limited penetration into financial networks, finance for an operating business might be less available for women entrepreneurs; d) Gender stereotyping and sexual discrimination of women affects the relationships between women and financial institutions.

OECD (2004) noted that women still have negative perceptions of the financial institutions such as banks. Reasons for the negative attitudes as argued also in literature, are possibly due to the traditional attitudes of gender roles, women are not regarded as entrepreneurs. Plus, the sectors in which women mostly operate in are service sectors such as beauty salons, beauty clinics, personal services, care, etc., the financial institutions are not used in handling these sectors. In developing economies in particular, women still have major problems in accessing finance for their businesses simply because of their weak position in the society. In some countries, women have no rights to seek finance as individuals. The only solution is for their husbands, fathers, brothers or other male figures to seek finance in their place instead (Mayoux, 2001).

b. Social and Cultural Constraints

Throughout the globe, compared to men, women are considered as the weaker gender both physically and emotionally. Therefore, available prospects for the women to develop into business professionals are still quite unexplored and this area needs more attention (Wennekers, 1999). Crampton and Mishra (1999) stated that “the constraints imposed upon the women by society, the family, and women themselves pose as a major obstacle to women entrepreneurs. The authors further note that in societies where women are not accepted as powerful and influential business leaders, this poses lack of acceptance as a major obstacle to these women (Crampton & Mishra, 1999).

Relationships in the developing world are designed in a hierarchical manner. Women are subordinate to men; possess less power and they lack the opportunity to access resources. Relationships between men and women in the family, workplaces and in public circles are reflections of how the society perceives what is proper female and male characteristics and behaviour. Grove and Montgomery (2001) find that society’s perceptions and attitudes towards proper male and female roles is in itself an obstacle that brands women as not task-oriented enough and lacking independence. Hisrich and Brush (1986), noted that women feel discriminated against because they are not always “taken seriously” in the business world.

c. Lack of Specialized Educational Background in Business and Advances in Technology

Lack of education is another prime characteristic that discourages female entrepreneurs. Evidence from a study carried out in Nigeria declared this constraint to be high priority because it triggers further problems - lack of education seems to be the root cause due to which females have a greater fear of failure (Halkias, *et al.*, 2011) and lack knowledge regarding financial resources and information along with a lack of awareness regarding the different opportunities available. Even in developed countries such as Australia, females are unaware of the efforts of their government to facilitate them (Farr-Wharton & Brunetto, 2007).

Most studies indicate that education has positive effect on entrepreneurship (Bjerke, 2007). To launch a successful business venture, relevant knowledge is a requirement. Appropriate education is a necessity for bringing up the right perception and intention about entrepreneurship. Allen and Truman (1993) noted the existence of variances in the levels of education of entrepreneurs between developed and developing economies. In developed economies, levels of educational of the entrepreneurs are relatively high and the number of entrepreneurs without tertiary education is much lower, whilst in the developing world, entrepreneurs are often without adequate education and training base.

In general, women entrepreneurs are better educated in comparison to their male counterparts. They are more likely to have at the least high school diploma and attained some level of tertiary education. However, even though women entrepreneurs have a tendency to be better educated than their male counterpart, they often lack a background

in business studies, (Stevenson, 1986). Also, Cliff (1998) revealed that, women business owners were less likely than men to have degrees in business. Fabowale *et al.* (1995) suggested that this lack of business education may cause a red flag associated with women-owned businesses.

Technology is more than information technology, but this is technology which is most widely associated with our new entrepreneurial society. Information technology can be referred to as an infrastructure and knowledge necessary to make information quickly and easily accessible (Bjerke, 2007:8). With that in mind, women entrepreneurs were found to have difficulties accessing information related to technology and the economy. To ensure competitiveness and survival of the businesses, latest trends in technology and new information related to the economy is essential. Women entrepreneurs are not able to access this information perhaps due limitation of time and or specialist skills. Limited access to appropriate technologies and lack of technical know-how and have also been established as major obstacles facing women entrepreneurs in the small and medium sector in many developing countries (Baume, 2000: Steel and Webster, 1990).

Female entrepreneurs also lack managerial skills (Itani *et al.*, 2011). These females have less knowledge about market conditions and lack basic training to run a business venture (Roomi *et al.*, 2009). An Ethiopian study pointed out that although a government may devise different strategies and plans for female entrepreneurs, there is a gap between the announcement and the implementation of these plans (Singh & Belwal, 2008). The same study identified heavy tax rates, corrupt officials, bribery and slow official procedures as additional concerns. Even in developed countries, governments may not be very successful in properly advertising their plans to female entrepreneurs (Farr-Wharton & Brunetto, 2007).

c. Balancing Family Responsibility with Business

Another barrier recurring throughout the literature is stress that women face from their dual role. This refers to the anxieties that women business owners have regarding balancing work and family commitments. Universally, family responsibility falls largely on women, and this can occur even when women are involved in entrepreneurship. This results to allocation of time between family and business, leading to lesser chances of entrepreneurial success or general career advancement (Brush, 1997). In attempting to cope with both commercial and domestic work, women experience 'time poverty' which leads to greater stress and difficulty (Still, 1997). Women entrepreneurs, therefore, are faced with the problem of combining the businesses with family responsibilities. This can be overwhelming and quite stressful and end up affecting the performance and productivity of their businesses as well as the well-being of the women themselves.

Ylinenpaa and Chechurina (2000) noted that this 'double burden' that women bear performing both business and reproductive roles is also a typical feature of women in western economies. Also, a study by Belcourt *et al.* (1991) concluded that women being the main caregivers to children and their responsibility for management of the

household, when added to the role of entrepreneur and business woman meant 'role overload', a problem that their male counterparts hardly encountered.

d. Inexperience and Incompetence

The process of entrepreneurship that is, from perception of opportunities to the implementation of launching a business is dependent on the relevant experience. In agreement, Kuratko and Hodgetts (1998) concluded that one major challenge facing women starting new businesses is the lack of experience and lack of management skills prior to starting a business. Persons with more experience have a higher probability of discovering opportunities and are in a better position to exploit them. However, the rewards for taking the initiative and establishing a new venture may be inconsequential unless there is substantial value in the business opportunity. When this is the case, individuals with several other career options may not be inclined to pursue the business venture. This means that even though highly educated and skilled women have the potential of perceiving and exploiting business opportunities, incentives for doing so may be little if the potential value of the business prospect is significant.

Research from developed countries indicates that (OECD, 2012) women with higher education prefer other career options to entrepreneurship. Therefore, one can conclude that entrepreneurship is largely dominated by either inexperienced women or experienced wealthy women. Measures are needed in place, to encourage the educated women to become more attracted to entrepreneurship. If women are comparatively less skillful than their male counterparts, then firms created by these women will have a much lower likelihood of survival and growth than those established by men.

e. Limited Social and Business Networks

Networks play a multifaceted role for women entrepreneurship and business owners in general, by helping them access advice, form partnerships, and build value chain relationships (GEM, 2010). During the early stages of enterprise development, entrepreneurs depend heavily on informal networks comprised mainly of friends and family members. As the business grows, they rely more and more on professional networks made up of accountants, financial advisors, lawyers, consultants, suppliers, government agencies, etc. to have access to vital business information (Birley *et al.*, 1991:59). Evidence exists that indicates that women have less involvement in networks compared to men and that the nature of their network is quite different (GEM, 2010). (Aldrich & Zimmer, 1986) observes that it is vital for businesses to have weak networks and strong ties.

The functional roles of networks are: information provision, possibilities and support (Granovetter, 1985). Networks play an important role in influencing the entrepreneurial process such as opportunity recognition, resource mobilization or the creation of an organization and in getting results, such as the formation of a new venture or activities such as going public, acquisitions, mergers or alliances (Bjerke, 2007). Information networks that are effective enhance the entrepreneur's environment and

enrich the other processes and networks that the entrepreneur engages in (McAdam & McGowan, 2003).

Ramachandran and Rammarayan (1993), noted that social networks offer diverse valuable resources for both the would-be and entrepreneurs in operation. Resources such as business experience, expertise, encouragement, support, sources of funding and idea generation can be accessed through networks. In addition, networks are also used as platforms to test new ideas and as a medium through which entrepreneurs can gain access to resources to exploit discovered opportunities (Aldrich & Zimmer, 1986). Research has established the significance of the support of nascent entrepreneurs gained through role models and close relationships with people within the business community (Hansen, 1995; Matthews & Moser, 1995). Through case studies, research has attempted to define the role of networks in the process of new venture creation (Hansen, 1995; Larson *et al.*, 1993).

3. Conclusion

The findings in extant literature revealed that women entrepreneurs operate in an unfavourable business environment, characterized by various challenges ranging from infrastructural deficiency, low access and high cost of finance, weak institutions and many barriers to formal economic participation. This abysmal performance could be traceable to limited education, rudimentary skills, low household and business income, lack of savings and social networks, not possessing the required professional relationships, lack of mentorship, inadequacy of relevant experience, Limited access to support services which includes loan levels suited to their business needs, technical and managerial training. These problems arise from limited capacity outreach of existing institutions as well as the inability of women entrepreneurs to pay for such services.

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