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WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS, POVERTY ALLEVIATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the impact of women entrepreneurs in poverty alleviation and sustainable national development. The population of the study comprised selected women entrepreneurs in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria, totaling 1120. Stratified random sampling technique was employed in drawing a sample of 120 women entrepreneurs for the study. Two null hypotheses were formulated based on the role of women entrepreneurs in poverty alleviation and national development. Data collection was done using a structured questionnaire tagged Women Entrepreneurs and National Development (WEND). Independent t-test analysis was used in testing the hypotheses at 0.05 alpha level and 118 degrees of freedom. The results indicated significant contributions of women entrepreneurs to poverty alleviation and sustainable national development. Based on the findings, it was concluded that Nigerian women entrepreneur's impact significantly on sustainable development of the country. It was recommended, among others, that women in Nigeria should be encouraged to engage actively in entrepreneurial activities through enlightenment and empowerment.

Keywords: Women Entrepreneurs, Poverty Alleviation and Sustainable Development

INTRODUCTION

The Nigerian women entrepreneurs are unique in their contributions towards poverty alleviation and sustainable development of the country given their central roles both at home and the national economy. A woman entrepreneur is defined as "the female head of a business who has taken the initiative of launching a new venture, who is accepting the associated risks and the financial, administrative and social responsibilities, and who is effectively in-charge of its day-to day management" (Lavoie, 2005:17). She is an owner-manager of a business concern. Adeyemi (2007) found out in a study that most Nigerian women entrepreneurs are enthusiastic, well-educated and married with children. The Nigerian woman entrepreneur grows up in an entrepreneurial environment, has years previous business work experience of which she may likely be the sole or majority owner. She prefers to have her family members as partners or employees, at her first attempt at starting a business, using mostly her own savings as start-up capital. She is motivated by personal factors to become an entrepreneur and may face a start-up problem such as labour, financial and economic problems. Most Nigerian women entrepreneurs are moderately successful in business and this is attributed to quality of product/service offered by the women, quality of human resource management and her own personal qualities.

In the developing world, Women entrepreneurs tend to run small businesses in the retail and service sector and could eventually become big businesses, although they tend to have slow growth (Lee-Goselin, H. & Grise, J. 2000). Lappen (2002) reported that only 10% of women business owners ran their businesses for more than 12 years while Collette P. and Aubry, P.G. (2001) remarked that about half of the women entrepreneurs remain in business for less than 5 years. Hisrich (2001) confirmed that 60% of women entrepreneurs operate their businesses for 1 to 5 years. Most women entrepreneurs start their businesses from the scratch or create their businesses, gaining confidence and the businesses gradually becoming more firmly established (Collette et al, 2001). Start-up capital Collette et al further observed was from personal and family savings of the women, investors and partners and banks. Women-owned businesses tended to have their spouse as partner. Most do not have any paid employees or were less inclined to employ others. If they do, the numbers of employees are few; they also tend to employ their spouse and children and use more female labour than male to run their businesses (Nelton, 2009).

In Nigeria, 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-owned businesses are one of the fastest growing segments of small businesses in Nigeria, with an increase from approximately one million businesses in 1982 to 1.5 million in 1990. Before 1980, women owned about 6% of all Nigerian businesses. Today, women own nearly 30% of all businesses, 50% of all retail businesses, and 10% of all service companies (Kirkwood, 2009). These statistics, however, still indicate a relatively lower entrepreneurship rate amongst the female working population. Sharing this similar view were Scherer, Brodzinski and Wiebe (2010) whose finding revealed that males tended to have a higher preference for entrepreneurship than females. The difference in preference on entrepreneurship was attributed to one's self efficacy and expectation of entering an entrepreneurial career. The findings suggested that social learning differences could have a strong impact on shaping a person's preference for an entrepreneurial career. Many women lack experiences, either personal or vicarious, related to successful accomplishment of entrepreneurial tasks. This explains why women tended to have lower self-efficacy and career entry expectations for entrepreneurship. Thus, they might perceive the lack of the necessary personal and vocational resources to engage in the venture initiation process.

Some researchers have attempted to study the relationship between education and entrepreneurial success. According to Bates (2000), highly educated entrepreneurs were likely to create firms that remained in operation. Osirim (2000) cited similar results that high levels of educational attainment led to successful entrepreneurship. Educated women entrepreneurs record more successes than the uneducated class. Romano and Lourens (2002) reported that the duration and relevance of formal education was related to the firm's survival in that "owners/managers who had received formal education relating to the type of work in which the proposed business was engaged experienced greater growth than those without such education" and "completion of business/management courses by owners/managers was related to business success" (Williams, 2006). It was inferred in the paper that owner/managers with more education could be more highly entrepreneurial in future prospects and be more receptive to new managerial initiatives. Other studies also revealed that fast expanding firms had managers who had tertiary and professional qualifications (Gudgin, Brunskill and Forthergill, 2006), but this might not be a sufficient condition for success (Lloyd and Dicken, 2007). Romano et al' (2002) study of high and low growth firms concluded that formal education was not an important factor in small business success.

However, formal education made managers more receptive to business management (Johns, Dunlop and Sheehan, 2008).

Most entrepreneurial women had to make choices about child-bearing, child-raising and running a household (Noble, 2006). They must also assume the role of mother and family/household caregiver, which limits the time and energy that they have to give to their businesses (Stevenson, 2006). Collette et al. (2000) cited that about two-thirds of women entrepreneurs devoted more than ten hours a week to doing household chores while Hisrich (2001) reported that all the women entrepreneurs in China did almost all of the housework. In terms of family support, women were also less likely to have the full support of a marriage partner (Stevenson, 2006).

Business environment is highly dynamic and hence controls the operations and activities of business ventures. Kantor (1999) and Iheduru (2002) saw family influence as the antecedent of women entrepreneurial development. Morris and Lewis (1991) and ILO (1998) included infrastructure, legal, regulatory, economic and socio-cultural variables such as rapid and threatening change, one's family, school and work environment as the environmental factors that can affect women entrepreneurs.

Keeble and Walker (1994) looked at the environmental factors from the perspective of the developmental setting that stimulates local market. Several environmental indicators have been identified as the major factors that can either hinder or inhibit women entrepreneurs. Minniti and Arenius (2003) argued that these factors are the supportive services that enhance women entrepreneurial development. ILO (2003) regards environment factors as the external factors that include: (i) government policy (fiscal and legislative framework), (ii) access to appropriate business development support, (iii) access to finance and financial services and (iv) community and family. Mansor (2005) enumerated these factors, namely: venture capital availability, presence of experience, technical skilled labour force, accessibility of suppliers, customers, new markets, government influences, land, transportation, new technological development, supporting services and living condition.

Buttner, (2003) enumerated factors that affected women's entrepreneurial success to include, entrepreneurial experience (such as the number of previous ventures involvements), quality of products/services and the women's determination to succeed, communication skills, market opportunity, financial management skills, idea generation and motivation. High energy levels, skill in influencing others ambition, self-esteem, competitiveness, achievement, willingness to assume risk, support and understanding of family members, especially the spouse; length of time in business and developing network contacts are added factors for entrepreneurial success (Woodward, 2008)

The afore-mentioned limitations notwithstanding, this report was an indigenous investigation undertaken by the researchers with the aim to assess the contributions of Nigerian women entrepreneurs to poverty alleviation and sustainable national development and to examine those factors militating against the success of Nigerian women entrepreneurs. Research questions formulated to guide the study were 1.) What are the contributions of women entrepreneurs to poverty alleviation and sustainable national development in Nigeria? 2. What are the factors militating against the success of women entrepreneurs in Nigeria?

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated to direct the study.

1. There is no significant difference in the mean responses of experienced and inexperienced women entrepreneurs in their contributions to poverty alleviation and sustainable development of Nigeria.
2. There is no significant difference in the mean responses of experienced and inexperienced women entrepreneurs with regards to the problems militating against the success of women entrepreneurs in Nigeria.

METHODOLOGY

Survey research design was adopted for this study. The population consisted of 1120 women entrepreneurs in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. The stratified random sampling technique was used based on the six states in the region. A sample of 120 (67 experienced and 53 inexperienced) women entrepreneurs were used in the study. Two null hypotheses were formulated based on the variables in the study. Mean was used to answer the research questions and the hypotheses were tested at 0.05 alpha level, using t-test analysis. Data collection was done with the use of a structured questionnaire tagged "Women Entrepreneurs and National Development" (WEND). The instrument was duly validated and pilot-tested with a reliability coefficient of 0.73.

Data Analyses and Results

Research Question 1

What are the contributions of women entrepreneurs to poverty alleviation and sustainable national development in Nigeria?

Table 1:
Weighted Means and Ranking of the Contributions of Women Entrepreneurs to Poverty Alleviation and Sustainable Development in Nigeria.

S/N	Contributions of women entrepreneurs to poverty alleviation and sustainable national development	Experienced women entrepreneurs		Inexperienced women entrepreneurs	
		Means	Ranking	Means	Ranking
1.	Improved family income	3.7	2 nd	3.6	2 nd
2.	Improved standard of living	3.6	3 rd	3.5	3 rd
3.	Improved family health	3.5	4 th	3.4	4 th
4.	Improved family nutrition	3.2	6 th	3.2	6 th
5.	More employment opportunities	3.1	7 th	3.1	7 th
6.	Increased Gross Domestic product	2.7	8 th	2.9	8 th
7.	Availability of more goods and services	3.8	1 st	3.7	1 st
8.	Increased in internally generated revenue	2.6	9 th	2.7	9 th
9.	High level of patriotism	2.4	10 th	2.4	10 th
10.	Decrease in unemployment	3.3	5 th	3.3	5 th

Cut off point = 2.5

Table 1 indicates agreement between the experienced and inexperienced women entrepreneurs in their ranking of the contributions of women entrepreneurs to poverty alleviation and sustainable development of Nigeria. Availability of more goods and services ranked first by both followed by improved family income, improved standard of living, high level of patriotism is ranked last by the two groups of respondents with weighted means of 2.4.

Research Question 2

What are the factors militating against the success of women entrepreneurs in Nigeria?

The respondents in table 2 generally agree in their ranking of the factors militating against the success of women entrepreneurs in Nigeria poor finance/start-up capital is ranked first by both respondents followed by low career entry expectation, legal problems, high level of competition and lastly relations with clients and employees.

Table 2:

Weighted means and ranking of factors militating against the success of women entrepreneurs in Nigeria

S/N	Factors militating against the success of women entrepreneurs in Nigeria	Experienced women entrepreneurs		Inexperienced women entrepreneurs	
		Means	Ranking	Means	Ranking
1.	Poor finance/start-up capital	3.9	1 st	3.8	1 st
2.	Low career entry expectation	3.7	2 nd	3.7	2 nd
3.	Lack of entrepreneurial experience	3.3	6 th	3.2	6 th
4.	Poor education	2.8	7 th	2.6	8 th
5.	Legal problems	3.6	3 rd	3.5	3 rd
6.	Poor motivation	3.4	5 th	3.3	5 th
7.	Household chores	2.6	8 th	2.8	7 th
8.	High level of competition	3.5	4 th	3.4	4 th
9.	Relations with clients and employees	2.2	10 th	2.1	10 th
10.	Marketing problems	2.3	9 th	2.4	9 th

Cut off point = 2.5

Table 3:

Weighted means and t-test of the responses of experienced and inexperienced women entrepreneurs regarding their contributions to poverty alleviation and sustainable national development

S/N	Contributions of women entrepreneurs to poverty alleviation and sustainable national development	Means		t-value	Remarks
		Experienced	Inexperienced		
1.	Improved family income	3.7	3.6	0.97	NS
2.	Improved standard of living	3.6	3.5	1.52	NS
3.	Improved family health	3.5	3.4	1.01	NS
4.	Improved family nutrition	3.2	3.2	1.04	NS
5.	More employment opportunities	3.1	3.1	1.06	NS
6.	Increased Gross Domestic product	2.7	2.9	1.11	NS
7.	Availability of more goods and services	3.8	3.7	0.94	NS
8.	Increased in internally generated revenue	2.6	2.7	1.66	NS
9.	High level of patriotism	2.4	2.4	1.47	NS
10.	Decrease in unemployment	3.3	3.3	1.32	NS

$N_1 = 67$; $N_2 = 53$; $df = 118$; $t_{-cri} = 1.96$; Average $t_{-cal} = 1.21$; S = Significant; NS = Not Significant

Hypothesis 1

There is no significant difference in the mean responses of experienced and inexperienced women entrepreneurs regarding the contributions of women entrepreneurs to poverty alleviation and sustainable development in Nigeria.

Table 3 indicates no significant difference in the mean responses of the women entrepreneurs in all their identified contributions to poverty alleviation and sustainable development of Nigeria, with t-values less than the critical t-values of 1.96. The null hypothesis was therefore retained.

Table 4:
Weighted mean and t-test of the responses of experienced and inexperienced women entrepreneurs regarding factors militating against the success of women entrepreneurs in Nigeria

S/N	Factors militating against the success of women entrepreneurs in Nigeria	Means		t-value	Remarks
		Experienced	Inexperienced		
1.	Poor finance/start-up capital	3.9	3.8	0.99	NS
2.	Low career entry expectation	3.7	3.7	1.01	NS
3.	Lack of entrepreneurial experience	3.3	3.2	1.11	NS
4.	Poor education	2.8	2.6	1.21	NS
5.	Legal problems	3.6	3.5	1.06	NS
6.	Poor motivation	3.4	3.3	1.03	NS
7.	Household chores	2.6	2.8	1.19	NS
8.	High level of competition	3.5	3.4	1.01	NS
9.	Relations with clients and employees	2.2	2.1	1.51	NS
10.	Marketing problems	2.3	2.4	1.82	NS

$N_1 = 67$; $N_2 = 53$; $df = 118$; $t_{-cri} = 1.96$; Average $t_{-cal} = 1.19$; S = Significant; NS = Not Significant

Hypothesis 2

There is no significant difference in the mean responses of experienced and inexperienced women entrepreneurs regarding the problems militating against the success of women entrepreneurs in Nigeria.

Table 4 shows no significant difference in the mean responses of the experienced and inexperienced women entrepreneurs regarding problems militating against the success of women entrepreneurs in Nigeria. The t-values in all the identified items were less than the critical t-values leading to the retention of the null hypothesis.

Discussion of Findings

Data analysis in hypothesis one indicated no significant difference in the mean responses of both the experienced and inexperienced women entrepreneurs regarding the contributions of women entrepreneurs to poverty alleviation and sustainable development of Nigeria. The calculated t-values in all the identified contributions were less than the critical t-value of 1.96. This led to the retention of the null hypothesis. This implies that Nigerian women entrepreneurs contribute significantly to poverty alleviation and sustainable national development. This finding is confirmed in research question one with the mean values of the groups being above the cut-off point of 2.5.

The finding is supported by the works of other researchers. Adeyemi (2007) found out from a study that Nigerian women entrepreneurs are enthusiastic, hard working and contribute meaningfully to sustainable national development. The finding is also in line with Birley (2009) whose study revealed that Nigerian women entrepreneurs impact significantly on national development through their business contributions. The author concluded that women needed specific opportunities to develop their businesses in order to impact more on the national economy.

The analysis in hypothesis two revealed no significant difference in the mean responses of both the experienced and inexperienced women entrepreneurs regarding the problems faced by women entrepreneurs in Nigeria. The calculated t-values in all the identified contributions were less than the critical t-value of 1.96. This led to the retention of the null hypothesis. This implies that Nigerian women entrepreneurs are confronted with series of problem militating

against their entrepreneurial success. This finding is confirmed in research question two with the mean values of the two groups of respondent being above the cut-off point of 2.5.

The finding is in line with Leo-Gosselin and Grise (2000). The scholars discovered the problems facing women entrepreneurs in Nigeria to include lack of confidence by banks, marketing, problem with associates and clients. As observed by McGrath (2007), women have more difficulties in getting loans; hence have to finance their businesses with difficulties and prejudice. Besides financial problems, other problems faced by women entrepreneurs in Nigeria include poor education, family problems and lack of business experience (Thompson, 2007). These tend to slow down the rate of their entrepreneurial success and contributions to national development.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions have been drawn.

- Women entrepreneurs contribute significantly to poverty alleviation and sustainable development of Nigeria by creating employment and contributing to household and national income.
- A number of problems are encountered by Nigerian women entrepreneur. These include poor finance, low career entry, entry expectation, poor education, lack of entrepreneurial experience, poor motivation, high level of competition and family problems.

Recommendation

On the basis of the conclusions drawn, it is recommended that:

1. More Nigerian women should be encouraged to undertake entrepreneurial activities. They should be motivated through appropriate legislations, incentives and empowerment.
2. Nigerian women who have identified themselves in entrepreneurship should be given recognition and honoured in order to encourage others.
3. Appropriate legislations should be made to safeguard and protect women entrepreneurs in the country.
4. Problems militating against the success of women entrepreneurs in Nigeria should be given adequate attention with a view to reducing such problems.
5. Financial institutions should be made to develop confidence in women entrepreneurs and attend to their needs for credit facilities.

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