



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

## Challenges Facing Women Entrepreneurs in Africa -A Case of Kenyan Women Entrepreneurs

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### Abstract

Entrepreneurship is the engine of economic growth and wheel that pedal the vehicle of economic development and has been recognized for its importance in the area of job creation, revenue generation, poverty alleviation and wealth creation [1-3] Following this, it is now identified as the central element in the theory of economic development and it makes up the largest business sector in economies [4,5]. It involves a willingness to rejuvenate market offerings, innovate, risks taking, trying out of new and uncertain products, services and markets and being more proactive than competitors towards exploring new business opportunities [6, 7]. It attracts both men and women who are interested in profitable inter-industry relationship. Women account for significant percent of the operators of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) [5, 8]. Women entrepreneurs make a substantial contribution to national economies through their participation in start-ups and their growth in small and medium businesses [9]. This paper looks at the challenges facing women entrepreneurs in Africa as entrepreneurship is regarded to be a male activity [10]. The main variables investigated were: demographic factors such as personal background, education and experience; social networks; and access to finance. The exploratory and descriptive research designs were adopted. Questionnaires were used as a tool of data collection. Stratified sampling method was used to get 130 respondents from Kenya. Data was analyzed using the SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Studies). Chi-square, t-test and logistic regression were used. Findings of the study revealed that demographic factors and social networks were the main challenges facing women entrepreneurs. However, access to finance was found not a major challenge as women entrepreneurs were found to prefer internal sources of financing. Recommendations based on these findings were: women empowerment, training and sharing of information, provision of networks to enable marketing, provision of working areas near home location because of family reasons, building of self-confidence and esteem, risk taking training to improve formal market credits and thus grow their enterprises.

**Keywords:** *Woman entrepreneur, Demographic factors, Social networks, Access to finance.*

### Introduction

While women's entrepreneurship is a central aspect of economic development and public policy concern in most African countries, scholarly research about their entrepreneurial activities is comparatively scarce. Owing to its complexity, it is usually seen from the perspective of men driven therefore the role of women entrepreneurs has not been properly documented [5, 11]. Issues explored by women entrepreneurs as listed in previous studies include their socio-demographic and economic background, the factors that facilitated or inhibited their decisions to become entrepreneurs and their experiences in entrepreneurship [12]. Examining particular issues that affect and confront women in business is therefore very important [13, 14]. Consequently, their activities in the economy have received an outstanding interest of researchers. It is upon this premise that this research work was based.

Women-owned businesses are one of the fastest growing entrepreneurial populations in the world. They make significant contributions to innovation, employment and wealth creation in all economies [15]. Women are a readily available resource that countries at different stages of economic development may use to achieve economic progress [16]. Verheul et al., [17] found a positive correlation between women share in entrepreneurship and economic performance at both country and regional levels. Women are becoming increasingly important in the socio-economic development of both developed and developing economies as they account for a significant percentage of the operators of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) [8] and they make a substantial contribution to national economies through their participation in starting successful SMEs [9]. Global Entrepreneurship

Monitor (GEM) report, (2005) confirmed that women participate in a wide range of entrepreneurial activities across the 37 GEM countries and their activities in the different countries have paid off in form of many newly-established enterprises for job and wealth creation.

### **Study Objectives**

The general objective of this study is to reveal the challenges facing women entrepreneurs in Africa - a case of Kenya. The specific objectives will be to determine whether; (1) demographic factors, (2) social networks, and (3) access to finance; challenges women entrepreneurs in Africa.

### **Women Entrepreneurs' Personality**

Buttner & Rosen [18] states that women entrepreneurs often have a special personality. They value autonomy and independence; they possess energy and a high need for achievement and often have a strong internal locus of control. They also suggested that women entrepreneurs generally perceive change as opportunity and are willing to take careful risks. They usually have social skills and possess a balance between intuition and thinking. According to Gould & Perzen [19] women entrepreneurs generally have the same characteristics with men business owners. Their entrepreneurial characteristics as stated in literature include; adaptability, competitiveness, discipline, drive, honesty and organization, internal locus of control, skepticism, flexibility, impulsiveness and propensity to take risks, leadership, readiness for change, endurance and high tolerance for ambiguity [20-22].

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### **Social Network Theory**

This theory has its roots in the sociological world that speaks of one's social capital, which has been defined as the weaving of interpersonal relationships and values within families and their communities [23]. Information exchange and learning is said to take place in network structures [24]. It is also said to depend on people's ability to work together in groups through communication and cooperation and is determined by three key group influences: work, family and social life [25].

Buttner and Moore [26] assessed how women entrepreneurs developed and sustained networks as they moved from corporate environments to entrepreneurial ventures and established that social networks had an influence on the choice of

sectors they started enterprises. The authors borrowed from ideas proposed by others to define and assess the network structures of women entrepreneurs, identifying them as follows: The propensity to network (who connects with others), Network activity (number of people connected to and the time spent making contacts), Network density (degree to which an entrepreneur reaches beyond immediate friends and the actual size of their networks), Network intensity (number of years a member has known other members of their network and the frequency of their interaction).

#### **Human Capital Theory**

The term human capital was originally used by Nobel economist Gary Becker, to refer to the stored valued of knowledge or skills of members of the workforce. Human capital is critical to the formation of entrepreneurial ventures [27]. The term "human capital" has traditionally been applied to educational attainment and includes the knowledge and skills that the labor force accumulates through formal instruction, training and experience [28]. It has also been referred to in terms of the time, experience, knowledge and abilities of an individual household or a generation, which can be used in the production process [29]. Human capital theory proposes that the level of education, area of education, previous entrepreneurial experience, previous business experience and business skills influence the type of venture started.

#### **Financial Capital Theory**

There remains a definitive link between one's access to financial capital and the start-up and success of any business [30]. Studies have repeatedly shown that access to financial capital at the start-up stage and during the operation of a business is a key determinant to sustainability and consistency of its existence [31]. Possible sources of financial capital include, but are not limited to, the following: liquid assets, credit lines, loans, capital leases, financial management services, owner loans, credit cards and trade credits [32].

Financial capital is one of the key ingredients enabling businesses to start, expand, remain viable and to become sustainable with long-term goals. Discriminatory practices levied against women entrepreneurs seeking funds to start or continue the operation of their businesses has been documented by several authors as one of the biggest obstacles facing women entrepreneurs. [32-34].

## Empirical Evidence

### Demographic Factors Influence on Women Entrepreneurs

Literature supports that personal background factors such as age, education and work experience may contribute to women's entrepreneurship [35-37]. It has also been established that women are influenced by their background when they come from families where parents are highly educated [15].

A woman with higher level of education, more knowledge of the market and business practice is more likely to be able to identify an opportunity and engage in entrepreneurship [36]. Gatewood et al, [37] in Hisrich and Brush [38] reported that nearly 70% of all women entrepreneurs have a college education. Taylor [39] reported that half of the women entrepreneurs in his study had a high school education. Kent, Sexton, and Vesper [40] in the USA established that most women entrepreneurs who started high technology enterprises had tertiary education followed by high school education.

De Tienne and Chandler [41] found that previous experience is necessary to start a venture, thus the years of experience within a technological sector imply more technological business opportunities identified. They argued that women who have been trained in certain business areas are more likely to start a new ventures in the area of training and thus women who have been educated and trained in high technology and have received an additional business education are more likely to recognize business opportunities in the same areas of the economy. However, according to Kourilsky [42] women tend to train in areas like trade, tailoring, and services industries as opposed to technological fields, which is a pointer to why they mostly occupy small-based industries. This research aimed at establishing whether these demographic aspects have had any influence to women's entrepreneurship.

### Social Networks Influence on Women Entrepreneurs

Networks have been cited as having an influence on certain aspects of the venture creation process, for example, enabling access to finance, and relationships with financial backers [43]. The woman entrepreneur within her process of opportunity recognition requires to process information in order to accept or reject a potential business opportunity. Ozgen & Baron [44] identified three sources of information for the entrepreneur that influences their opportunity

recognition process: Mentors, informal networks within their industry, and family and close friends. Other researchers have found out that early socialization of the woman entrepreneur contributed to the type of enterprises they started. Women who start enterprises in male dominated sectors had more male playmates when young, they suggested that this helps women to learn male behaviors and this enables them to compete against men and it also influences their sector choice.

Brush et al [15] identified that social networks impact on the opportunity recognition process they established that women entrepreneurs' networks and the way that the contacts that women have may affect the recognition and enterprise creation process. Aldrich, [45] attested that there is evidence that women's networks are different than men's, as it is the way they are embedded to their networks. He further noted that there are three key life events that affect how women enter or construct a network [45] work, marriage and family and social life. Brush and Hirsrich [34] in their study found out that the inclusion of women within the group of venture capital investors would open the opportunity to other women entrepreneurs to obtain financing and this is motivating factor for women entrepreneurs to start enterprises which require a huge sum of money to start.

According to Aderemi [46] in his research on Nigeria women entrepreneurs in high technological enterprises established that being a woman does not represent a difference; being a married woman does. He further noted that single women behave in business more similar like men; their networks are diverse. Once women are married their networks are concentrated to family. Sometimes the access to informal groups is restricted to women and especially married women. After work there is an opportunity to share expectations with colleagues but different studies have demonstrated that women are disadvantaged in this area. Aldrich [45] proposed that women increase the diversity of their networks and the way they plan and monitor their networks, the diversity of women networks is likely to influence them to start enterprises.

As some studies have identified, the marital status is an element that may influence the type of entrepreneurial activities women engage in. Marriage has been considered a tie and a potential constraint. The potential constraint on economic activities within the spouse becomes due to the gender-based expectations that they have. Since single women are similar to married men

and unlike married women in their ability to allocate their time to business activities, it is more probable that single women are more likely to identify and start more technological businesses than married women.

The diversity of a network is important to an individual that is looking for new business opportunities [47]. There are two forces that promote homogeneity within a network: people tend to associate with similar people and people “tend toward emotional and personal balance across their social relations”. In this way the friends of our friends are not strangers to us. A network requires having strong and weak ties because each of them provides a different level of information to the entrepreneur. Women prefer social networks smaller than men, therefore, it can be argued that the larger and the more diverse the network a woman entrepreneur has, the larger the number of business opportunities.

Social ties have also been established as an influence for women choice of enterprises. Ties can be considered weak or strong based on the trust that exists among the elements of the network. It can be argued that weak ties are an important source of information for women entrepreneurs. However empirical studies have identified that women have a great cohesion to family networks, which makes them to hardly obtain as much information as men do. Women tend to have more strong ties than weak ties which may represent an obstacle to obtain richer information to identify a technological venture. The above information thus portrays that women with more weak ties within their networks are more likely to recognize and start high technological businesses.

### **Access to Finance Influence on Women Entrepreneurs**

Credit or loan is very necessary for start of new enterprises. Banks are inclined toward low-risk ventures. Credit provides the needed opportunity for entrepreneurs to start businesses. There is a positive relationship between credit and opportunity choice for women entrepreneurs as found out by scholars in different regions: USA [48], Nigeria [49] and France [50].

Several researchers examined the impact of human capital, risk preferences, and characteristics of the firm's operations on the capital structure of small firms, looking specifically at the ratio of debt to total capitalization. They postulated that lenders tend to discriminate on women entrepreneurs on the basis of firm size, preferring to lend to larger and

more established firms, thereby limiting their involvement with women-owned firms which were generally smaller. Women owners tended to prefer internal sources to external financing this internal financing is limited hence also limiting on the type of sector choice and enterprise to start [51].

Carter & Marlow [52] have suggested that it is both more difficult for women to raise start up and recurrent finance for business ownership and that women encounter credibility problems when dealing with bankers. They established four areas of the financing process that have been consistently posing particular problems for women. First, women may be disadvantaged in their ability to raise start up finance. Second, guarantees required for external financing may be beyond the scope of most women's personal assets and credit track record. Third, finance for the ongoing business may be less available due to women's inability to penetrate informal financial networks. Finally, female entrepreneurs' relationships with bankers may suffer because of sexual stereotyping and discrimination these findings have been supported by studies carried out by Hisrich & Brush, [38].

In Kenya, the 2004 investment climate survey found that 86% of loans required collateral and that the average value of the collateral, which in most cases is land with a registered title was nearly twice that of the loan. This requirement means that women are unable to move from MFIs and SACCOs to more formal collateral-based lending institutions GOK [53]. Often, Women do possess collateral in the form of movable property such as stock, machinery, however, these types of assets are not usually considered credible types of collateral. Women also face discriminatory treatment by bank officials who prefer dealing with husbands and do not take women seriously. At this point therefore it can be presumed that women who have access to financing are likely to start enterprises. These women have a credible education, and possess the collateral that they can use to secure loans from lending institutions.

In a study of NGOs and women small-scale entrepreneurs in the garment manufacturing sector of the textile industry in Nyeri and Nairobi by Macharia & Wanjiru [54], the factors that inhibit credit availability to women include: lack of start-up (seed) capital; lack of awareness of existing credit schemes; high interest rates; lengthy and vigorous procedures for loan applications; and, lack of collateral security for finance.

## Findings and Conclusions

### Demographic Factors

It was found that age, experience and marital status did not have a significant statistical influence on women entrepreneurs to start enterprises with Chi-square p-value of 0.775, 0.524 and 0.775 respectively. However, the study established that there was a significant association between education level and women entrepreneurs starting enterprises with the chi-square given as 24.719 with a p-value of 0.000. These findings agree with what most researchers in this field found out. Manolova et al, [35] and Alyward, [36] found out that education and work influence women entrepreneurs to start enterprises. Kourilsky [42], Blanchflower and Meyer, [55] all agree that education level, work experience and training influence women entrepreneurs to start enterprises. The findings are also in support of the Human capital theory which proposes that the level of education, area of education, previous entrepreneurial experience and business skills influence entrepreneurship.

### Social Networks

It was established that affiliation to social networks and presence of role models had no significant association with women starting enterprises with a chi-square p-value of 0.109 and 0.291 respectively. However, number of social networks, composition of social networks and composition of role models were found to have a significant association to women starting enterprises with p-values of 0.036, 0.025, and 0.002 respectively. These findings are in support of Manolova et al., [35] and Ardichvili et al, [56] who stated that social networks were very important for successful identification and development of business opportunities. Aderemi [46], Arenius and De Clerq, [57] also suggested that women entrepreneurship is influenced greatly by the composition of their social networks. These findings conform with the social network theory and what other researchers in this line of study found out. For example, Burt established that the larger and the more diverse the network a woman entrepreneur has, the larger the number of business opportunities and the greater the chance of starting an enterprise, Brush et al., (2006) found out that social networks and associations impact on the opportunity recognition process.

### Access to Finance

The study established that generally, 62.1% used equity sources of finance, that is, 35.9% used personal savings while 26.2% borrowed money and 37.9% used debt financing; 17.5% borrowed

money from the bank, 11.7% borrowed from SACCO and 8.7% borrowed from micro finance institutions. Access to finance and especially external sources of financing was found to be a problem with a great number of the respondents stating that they used equity financing to start their enterprises. The chi-square statistic is given as 1.020 with a p-value of 0.907.

Since the p-value is greater than 0.05, it is concluded there is no statistically significant association between women entrepreneurs starting enterprises and access to financing. The findings indicate that women entrepreneurs in general did not require high capital outlay to start their enterprises and that they relied mostly on personal savings and family to finance their business. The study also established that women entrepreneurs lacked collateral; this explains why majority of women entrepreneurs preferred internal sources of financing.

The findings corroborates those of Hirsrich and Brush [38]; Buttner and Rosen [18] and Carter and Marlow [52] who established that guarantees required for external financing may be beyond the scope of most women's personal assets and credit track record. Roslan and mohd, [58]; Salman, [59]; and Tata and Prasad, [60]; also established that women owners tended to prefer internal to external sources of finance, this internal financing is limited hence also limiting on the type and size of enterprise to start. The findings also support the pecking order theory [61], which is based on the notion of asymmetric information and the costs of financial distress, implies that SME owners will prefer to use internal sources of finance before external sources.

### Recommendations

From the above findings and conclusions on the three specific variables: demographic factors, social networks and access to finance; the following recommendations were found necessary to enable survival and growth of women entrepreneurs:

On demographic factors, concepts related to women entrepreneurship should be introduced in schools colleges and university curricula to demystify entrepreneurship as a male vocation. Secondly, there is need to develop women entrepreneurship centers which could have information for women entrepreneurs including databases of available opportunities and markets. Thirdly, firsthand experience centers or incubation centers need to be established in areas where women entrepreneurs tend to cluster to train and orient women entrepreneurs on the

actual functionality of the ventures they wish to establish.

On social networks, there is need to provide proper networking amongst women entrepreneurs with affiliations at national level for dissemination of information, financing and facilitating technology transfer and monitoring. Secondly, programmes for the development of women entrepreneurship should recognize the traditional gendered role of women that contributes to the double burden of responsibilities. Capacity building in entrepreneurship should be complemented by access to social programmes to relieve the burden of the woman entrepreneur and appreciate her role in the economic development of the country just as their male counterparts. This will encourage more women to venture in to areas of the economy that have been dominated by men.

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