

Towards a Favourable Legal Climate: Educating Women Entrepreneurs in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

*Published Online: 21 May 2022

The world has slowly awoken to the importance of women in the economy and polity of a growing economy. Women, often seen and openly referred to as “the weaker vessel” in different cultural climates, have eventually, out of the need to survive, stepped up their game in entrepreneurship. Women now sit at the head of business conglomerates all over the world. In Nigeria, the fog of women marginalization is just beginning to clear and policies which hitherto impeded their advancement are now being addressed to create a level playing field. Among policies being addressed are women inheritance rights and the right to obtain facilities to run their own legitimate business. The research, however, reveals continuous discrepancies between the female and their male counterparts in the limited available resources or opportunities. This paper will be relevant to women in business, policy makers and stakeholders in the Nigerian economy as a whole. In conclusion, women in business should have the support of their male counterparts, policy makers and all involved in business enterprises.

Keywords:

Favourable legal climate, women entrepreneurs

INTRODUCTION

All over the world there has been an increasing trend in women’s entrepreneurial activities. Women entrepreneurs have been said to account for a large number of enterprises which is creating employment for a great no of youths, both males and females. strengthening This enhances economic growth and social inclusion in the scheme of things. This article provides an indepth view of gender in Nigeria’s socio-economic context holding at par the women entrepreneurs who operate in this environment. Both Legal and business environment face challenges such as poor education and training in the projects they handle, poor or non existent infrasture, corruption, hurdles in accessing grants or financial relief as well as weak institutions to act as a catalyst in driving the much needed advancement. Achievement and success are couched in discriminatory choices due to the socio-cultural norm which perceives women as wives and mothers who should be seen and not heard.

An upsurge in the rate of abject poverty, unemployment, malnutrition, hunger, starvation, diseases and domestic violence as a result of unequal bargaining power between the male and female has led to the necessity of women's growing interest in sustainable entrepreneurial activities. This is based on the simple fact that entrepreneurial activities stimulate economic growth in societies as well as social and political development in the long term. It is argued and popularly too that entrepreneurs in most societies influences the sustainable development processes of both developed and developing countries due to their pivotal role in poverty alleviation, employment creation and innovation that drives positive change.

Globally, but especially in Nigeria, women continue to play highly sensitive roles, traditionally and contemporarily in ensuring the well being of their homes as well as the general well being and development of their countries whenever they are offered the opportunity to do so. In making this contribution, the make use of entrepreneur as a working tool towards achieving their objective.

The labour market has witnessed a high production in activities, especially in industrial landmark making women a force that cannot be ignored. There arises a dire need for women to be empowered empowered for the integral benefit

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**Cite this Article: Dr. Uduak Idoghor (2022). Towards a Favourable Legal Climate: Educating Women Entrepreneurs in Nigeria. International Journal of Social Science and Education Research Studies, 2(5), 104-106*

of socio-economic and political development of Nigeria. To facilitate this, the United Nations endorsed women's full participation in industrial growth for Nigeria through its agency on industrial development in 2001. The place of women whether in small or medium scale production or in informal sectors is transforming gender industrial landscape. Women entrepreneurs do not only see a means for economic survival but also have positive social repercussions for the women themselves and their social environment.

CHALLENGES TO WOMEN ENTREPRENEURIAL DEVELOPMENT

Despite the fact that women entrepreneurs have been recognized and often times extolled as an important source of economic growth in the progress of Nigeria, even globally, their beneficial potentials are yet to be optimized in the African continent due to traditional and religious factors. The level of gender disparity experienced by the African women is unprecedented even in these electronic age. She continues to experience challenges as a result of patriarchal showmanism which place women in subordinate roles to men.

Unarguable is the hard fact that African women operate in an environment where socio-cultural norms and perspectives play a huge role in determining the success of an entrepreneur, not necessarily merit. These socio-cultural conditions inhibit women from starting up their own businesses and thereby maintaining traditional women roles. Unfortunately this traditional attitude towards women entrepreneurs has gone a long way to undermine and discourage many fledging potential women entrepreneurs in the African continent and especially Nigeria in particular.

Similarly, access to equal opportunities between men and women are often times being hampered by socio-cultural constraints, such as poor family and educational background, religious beliefs, social status amongst others. These deprive them of innovations that could characterize the business climate and capacity to think and plan for their business ventures. Although, women's general experiences can be more or less similar in African and western countries; women entrepreneurs face growing social issues in the African continent and Nigeria in particular.

FACTORS THAT CAN MOTIVATE WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS IN NIGERIA

A common parlance in Nigeria's annang local dialect acknowledges that two heads are better than one. This leads to a consideration of the factors that motivates women entrepreneurs in Nigeria despite the unfavourable legal climate compounded with religion, socio-economic and traditional matters. These factors are as follows:

1. A planned program to alleviate Poverty
2. An opportunity to gain financial freedom and independence.
3. The need for self actualization.

4. The desire for self worth to gain self-satisfaction
5. flexible work hours and time management
6. Sustainable multiple streams of income.
7. The desire to support their family's progress.
8. Motivating force to be innovative
9. The need to be recognised in the socio-economic and political arena of Nigeria.
10. Equality via a level playing environment.

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF WOMEN ENTREPRENEURIAL FIRMS

It is on record that most women entrepreneur representing 91.4% started their businesses as a new venture. Many of these firms were in the informal sectors and operated as sole proprietorship representing approximately 63.1% percent. It is argued that 80 percent of new jobs in Africa are concentrated in the informal sector. The area of businesses that the women entrepreneurs operate in ranges from goods to services sector; where we have 48.5 percent wholesale and or retail trade 20.0 percent and manufacturing 14.6percent. the women entrepreneurs are mostly engaged or involved in trade such as plastic production or manufacturing, art and craft, leather goods, fabric and food produce, catering, while others provided services such as hairdressing, photography and restaurant and communication business etc.

Most women start up their businesses in the services sector because of the low capital requirement, lack of collateral to secure loan facility from financial institutions and low or lack of financial network or pool in which to tap the finance from. The time frame for most of the women entrepreneurs businesses ranges from age 6 to 10 years (32.6 percent (; 11 to 16 years (27.1 percent) and 3 to 5 years (23.3 percent). Furthermore, the size of the Nigerian women business ventures for most start –ups and ongoing businesses are small, which is similar to businesses of women entrepreneurs in other countries. This firm size was adjudged in terms of the number of full-time employees. A very good number of the businesses employed workers between 1-10; and 16.9 percent, employed between 11-15 employees. While those with more financial capital and better capacity employed over 50 employees (7.7 percent).

SECURING START-UP CAPITAL AS A WOMAN ENTREPRENEUR IN NIGERIA

Studies have revealed that about 89.1 percent of women entrepreneurs secures their start-up capital from their personal savings. Other sources include; family and friends 34.1 percent; bank loans 9.3 percent; money lenders 7.8 percent. In the aspect of current source of working capital, 94.6 percent of women entrepreneurs stated that they had to use their personal savings as start-up finance and retained profit.

It cannot be overemphasized the fact that most Nigerian women don't the assets to secure loan facility and in situations where they do, they are scared to risk it, based on

their previous experience with financial institution loans. The risk of rendering money from commercial banks is usually too great added to the high interest rates.

Inadequate financial capital for business startup and growth often results in women entrepreneurs being unable to be innovative by introducing new product and services or by developing to meet customers demand.

POLICIES THAT SUPPORT WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS AND THEIR FUNCTIONS/ IMPORTANCE

Despite the fact that legal provisions on gender as improved in the course of time over the world, there are still many setback and difficulties. Regrettable, many laws in Nigeria and globally still prevent women from improving their own well-being and that of their families by working or running a business.

Information gathered from organizations such as the World Bank group's enterprise surveys and doing business have given a lead on accessing information on the challenges confronting firms and entrepreneurs in starting and expanding their business and creating jobs.

The question has been raised on how and what government can do to improve on women's accepts to entrepreneurial and employment activities. In response therefore it has been generally agreed that elimination of gender discrimination is one of the key and or critical factor. Other factors are enabling unhindered access to education and healthcare, to social and cultural norms. Experience over the years has shown that laws regulations and institutions differentiate between women and men in ways that affect women's incentives or capacity to work or to set up and run a business.

Institutional legal gender differences are estimated to significantly decrease female labour force participation and undermine GDP growth. The world banks world development report on gender equality and development estimates that eliminating barriers discriminating against women working in certain sectors or occupations has the potential of increasing labour productivity by as much as 25% in some economics simply by increasing women's labour force participation. This if achieved would go a long way to contribute to higher GDP growth.

Investigation has revealed that gender gaps in women's entrepreneurship and labour force participation account for estimated income losses of 27% in the Middle East and North and West Africa and 19% in south Asia, 14% in Latin America and the Caribbean and 10% in Europe. Globally, if all women were executed from the labour force income per capital would be nearly 40% lower. Moreover, it is predicted that in Bangladesh increasing the female labour force participation rate over the next decade from 34% to 82% the current larger role than in other regions would bring about a significant improvement.

CONCLUSION

Despite the operation of extant laws on gender parity and elimination of all forms of discrimination, among others, focusing more on written legislations is not sufficient. This is because there is always an inherent lacuna between what the law is and what it ought to be. There is always a lacuna between the laws in the books and actual practice. Women do not always have access to the equality which formal laws stipulate, probably as a result of their ignorance of the law even though considered as an excuse. There is also hardship occasioned by poverty. A favourable legal climate for women entrepreneurs in Nigeria can only be maximally achieved when there is unity and harmony between the law in the books and its practice.

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