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AFRICAN WOMEN'S JOURNEY TOWARDS GENDER EQUALITY AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION:

AN OVERVIEW OF ROLE OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP ON WOMEN EMPOWERMENT, KENYA PERSPECTIVE

Juliah N Chege

Scholar, Doctor of Philosophy Degree, African Women Studies, African Women Study Centre, University of Nairobi [UoN], Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Women constitute at least 50% of the world population and have been making substantial contribution to socio-economic development. Unfortunately, their contribution largely remains unrecognized and unnoticed in most developing and least developed countries. Empowering women has become the key element in the development of an economy. Despite their potential, women-owned businesses in Kenya are less likely to grow, are smaller, and are twice as likely to be operating from home as male-owned businesses. Women-owned MSMEs report earning only 57% of income that male business owners earn. Thus, there is need to encourage entrepreneurship in women empowerment in efforts to eradicate unemployment and poverty in Africa continent.

This study looked at the African women's journey towards gender equality and social transformation; an overview role of entrepreneurship on women empowerment, a Kenyan perspective. Descriptive surveys were used as the study design. The study generated qualitative and quantitative results. Qualitative data was analyzed by use of content analysis while descriptive figures were used for quantitative analysis. From the results, the study concluded that women entrepreneurs should continue to find new ways to distinguish their companies from rivals to reduce the negative effect of intense competition on their businesses. The study recommended that the County governments should pay closer attention to women entrepreneurs in the extension of appropriate support services such as microcredits and training, based on the goal of skill-based training.

Key words: *Entrepreneurship, Empowerment, Equality, Gender, Socio-Economic Development, Global Market*

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BACKGROUND

Entrepreneurship is a significant engine of economic development, efficiency, creativity and employment. Entrepreneurship is regarded as an important factor in economic development and therefore has immense potential for empowering women and for the change in society. Competency-based formation, company infrastructure, consumer information and innovation in technology are key factors for entrepreneurship. It is also necessary to remember in the spirit of entrepreneurship that women are also important drivers of economic development. In the latter part of the 20th century, the introduction of women into the labor force led to driving the majority of industrialized economies in the world. In developed countries, women are now likely to have a similar effect on their countries, but that can only occur if they are trained, prepared and motivated (Women's Economic Opportunity 2012).

At the end of the 19th century, as living standards and women's literacy rate increased, women began increasingly reducing their dependency on male members by selling surplus domestic grains and vegetables in order to earn income. In the last few decades, the growth of the trade class in society has allowed women to learn basic business skills and formally acquire entrepreneurial knowledge in order to start a business. With the intention of sharing the financial burden of a family, a majority of women have been compelled to become entrepreneurs, but many women have opted to start their business as a career and to secure empowerment in society (Datta & Gailey 2012).

As the worldwide economic prospects have grown in the past three decades, more women workers have been drawn into the labor market, increasing the participation of women in the labor force. According to a World Bank study (2011), women accounted for more than 40 % of the world's labor force by 2008. However, despite the fact that women make a large proportion of the world's workforce, women work 66% of the world's work, generate 50 % of global food, but earn just 10% of their global income, while at the same time making up at least 2 percent of global property (UNICEF 2009). Differential patterns of access to property, resources and training for women and men tend to be affected by gender roles, expectations and prejudices within institutions. Discrimination towards women has been popular around the world and the lack of appreciation of the importance of their contribution to society. As legislation increased conventional prejudices, women had fewer access to wealth, credit, schooling, employment, decision-making roles and thus lower incomes (Véras, 2015).

Gender-based industry assumptions limit women's opportunities. Furthermore, the skills and ability of women are not adequately optimized so as to make their full contribution. In the workplace, there are many stereotypical views that pose an invisible danger to women leaders. When people generally speak of successful leadership, women are perceived as having no leadership qualities based on gender stereotypes (Catalyst 2005). In recent decades, however, women have changed their energies and begun to participate in entrepreneurial activities and have left organizations. One of the main reasons for this recent shift in women's employment is due to insufficient resources to support women in their workplace and unequal wage rates as compared with men. It is also true that women are more effective in managing independent care with greater versatility in a private sector (Furstinger, 2012). As a result, women do not leave their professional careers to stay at home and apply for their children, but instead give up their careers to participate in entrepreneurial activities.

New and small companies are rapidly known and recognized globally for their importance in the economy. The fact that women's entrepreneurs and new enterprises can be important drivers of social improvements is gaining attention among economists, academics and policymakers. The ILO (2009) recognizes women entrepreneurs as the focus group for specific policy initiatives, with women owned businesses being increasingly significant sources of economic growth and employment. However, according to Kelley et al., (2011), the participation of women in entrepreneurship varies widely across the world. While there are many economic opportunities for women on the market and in entrepreneurship, they still face many challenges.

Today, it is becoming abundantly apparent that women are strong drivers of economic growth and will continue to do so. Economies grow more quickly as women and men become more equal, less people stay in poverty and general well-being rises. Studies show that increasing female employment to male employment can affect GDP growth rates directly and increase it by up to 34% in some countries and that if discrimination against women is eliminated productivity can increase by up to 25% in countries. Women have been found to function positively in collective enterprises in emerging economies, such as India, to achieve financial and psychological empowerment (Datta & Gailey, 2012).

The earnings created by business ventures enable women to increase their negotiating power in family life, to make their personal choice and to take personal action to contribute to significant changes in their lives that help them to feel psychologically empowered. Conventionally, men have long been viewed as more entrepreneurial than women worldwide. According to the study conducted by Bosma & Harding (2006), entrepreneurial orientation among women in developing economies appears to be higher than in developed countries. Research has also shown that women are more likely than men to spend much of their household income in their children's education and well-being. By empowering women to gain, accumulate assets and improve economic security, they improve industrial capacities and boost economic growth by creating new employment, as well as expanding the pool of available human capital and talent in a country.

Currently, women entrepreneurs are rapidly known as modern engines of inclusive and sustainable economic development and as the emerging stars of economies in developing countries. In 2012, women entrepreneurs were described as the way forward by the World Economic Forum. Since the Beijing Forum for Action was introduced in 1995, Kenya has made recommendable strikes to empower women. 30% Affirmative Action Procurement Reservations and Priorities have ensured that at least 30% of all government contracts for women, youth and people with disabilities are awarded and set aside for women, youth and individuals with a disability. This move supports entrepreneurship that ultimately empowers women socially, economically and publicly. But women entrepreneurs still struggle in Kenya to take their proper place in economic life. Even if women are starting businesses in Kenya more and more, they are still managing fewer companies than men and running businesses which are less profitable and which are slower to grow and ultimately more likely to fail. The aim of this paper is, therefore, to determine how women can be empowered by entrepreneurship.

Problem Statement

Women's entrepreneurship has an immense potential to motivate women and transform society. Employers play a major role in economic development by being dynamic and innovative, finding opportunities and implementing useful ideas. Entrepreneurs are more effective and efficient in the usage of capital. The role of women in entrepreneurial activities can be seen as one of the main factors in economic growth. More female entrepreneurs are increasing economic diversity (Verheul et al., 2004). Women make up nearly 50 % of the world's population. Women's socioeconomic presence at the multinational, regional, national and local levels means that they make more efficient use of substantial potential capital. Women will benefit from the opportunities available worldwide by growing their potential. For the growth of Kenya's socio-economic climate, the contribution of women in the economy is very significant.

Due to the dynamics of the social and administrative contexts, women's entrepreneurship is more difficult in Kenya. Many social and operational restrictions continue to exclude women from companies that start and operate. However, the growth of entrepreneurship among women will provide excellent opportunities for one-half of the population and the overall social and economic advancement of the country. This study therefore aimed at filling the research gap through an analysis of the role of entrepreneurship in empowering women in Kenya.

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this study looked at African women's journey towards gender equality and social transformation by giving an overview of the role of entrepreneurship on women empowerment, Kenya's perspective. The study was guided by the following specific objectives;

- To establish the influence of skill based training on empowerment of women in Kenya.
- To establish the influence of business infrastructure on empowerment of women in Kenya
- To establish how financial system influence empowerment of women in Kenya
- To establish the influence of market information on the empowerment of women in Kenya.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Women Empowerment

The idea of women's empowerment is one of the social and political issues most intensely discussed. Even behavioral scientists have touched on the topic of women's advancement in recent decades. Empowerment is generally characterized as an intrinsic motivational mechanism that empowers an individual to feel. Therefore, empowerment is often synonymous with delegating the right to exercise personal discretion about one's own behaviour. Empowerment is usually treated as a method instead of a process (Akhter & Ward, 2009). Empowerment is generally linked to the essential human being. Empowerment is normally expended on government power from everyday life. i.e. every part of the human being is concerned with encouraging people to gain access, to study, to meet their needs and to take political decisions. Empowerment must be seen and realized in a critical, physical, psychological, economic and political phase. Paulo Freire, a Brazilian educator, innovated the idea of empowerment. While the word empowerment does not have a fixed meaning, it is often used to describe a mechanism that has more influence over resources and decision-making in weak or impotenced individuals.

The empowerment of women thus concerns the mechanism and the institution in which women play an important role. This is because if women are treated not simply as their recipients, but as agents of the transition, the overall process will not be treated or described as empowerment. In general, women are the most disempowered members of the oppressed classes and so their empowerment is defined as nursing, liberating, and energizing the unpowerful. Thus, it can be described as a process of acquiring greater control power in order to answer the question about established power and to control the power source. As a process, empowerment means consciousness and awareness about empowerment while at the same time being the product of sensitization. The empowerment of a person or group of individuals in a specific situation is to give them power and status.

One of the most important tools for empowering women is to allow them the dual access and oversight, without discrimination, to productive resources such as land, money, technology, credit and marketing facilities, information, education and training. Empowerment distributes power between the dominant and the weak. It does not only involve people in decision-making but also in the process, leading people to see themselves as competent and entitled to decide (Prasad & Sahay, 2000). Empowerment therefore needs to include the reverse of negative social buildings so that people can see themselves as having the potential, the right to act and influence decisions.

Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment

Gender is commonly treated as a social system. According to Mayoux & Mackie (2009), biological differences are not necessary to assess gender disparity because gender inequality is not defined by gender discrepancies. The fact that the forms and justifications for gender inequality differ depending on the context is that gender inequality is socially dependent on gender control. Moreover, gender is not only linked to women, but also to men and women. Both sexes are affected by discrimination based on gender. However,

most statistical statistics justify the fact that women are less advantaged and discriminated against. Sex varies in its willingness to make successful decisions around the world, but women continue to be marginalized.

Stearns (2010) notes that it is not easy to recognize which gender structure promotes women's status. The author argues, however, that the two sexes contributed valuable economic assets only during the hunting and the gathering time, and considerable gender equality existed. Nevertheless, this equality was unbalanced as the role of women in other structures became more decorative and domestic. The moment of history will carry women's economic involvement back to the acceptable level to carry men more balance and gender equality.

As social obstacles to women joining paid labour, their participation rates are declining. Nonetheless, improvement in women's education and wages reverts them to the labor force as countries grow. Over time, the improvements in education and family structure have also contributed to women's jobs. The lower fertility rates and gaps in the time of marriage and childbirth also brought more women into the labor force. Women are more involved than ever in the labor market. Much change for women has been driven by economic growth; higher household incomes, increased service delivery and modern labor markets. Women have remarkable rights advances, educational milestones, health results and labor force involvement in various countries but have not yet attained satisfactory levels.

Prince (2014) describes women's empowerment as the willingness of women to make strategic decisions in life while previously denied this willingness. Women in many countries are therefore economically and socially disadvantageous, so fostering equality and women's empowerment is one of the Millennium Development Goals of the United Nations. The World Bank (2011) also highlights the need to pursue equality between women and men, to boost competitiveness and development outcomes, to emphasize gender gaps in jobs, land and credit access, and networking access and its effect on enterprise. In order to deal with remaining economic and social disparities, a fundamental overhaul of policies at national and global levels is required.

Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship has been one of the most exciting management research areas in recent decades. Enterprise has been recognized as a justifiable way to expand work prospects for both developed and developing nations. Economists and policy planners are often inclined to believe that entrepreneurship is a vital tool for the economic development process and can be created or can boost its growth by initiating effective training programs and education. An individual's business potential consists of qualities of life: 1) the ability to sense and mobilize capital to succeed in his / her efforts; 2) the ability to make competent planning and to take rational, prompt decisions; 3) the ability to take measured moderate risks and to initiate new initiatives; 4) being creative, inventive, and risk-taking; 5) being intellectual and intellectual; Entrepreneurship is also generally regarded as a key factor in economic growth. Company is a significant driver of economic growth. Stevenson and Sahlman (1986) on the other hand, described entrepreneurship as an economic conduct characterized by a strategic emphasis, dedication to chances, resource provision and control, management and compensation policy concepts.

Gender and Entrepreneurship

A relatively new definition is the entrepreneurship identified as the tools and processes that people use by developing new businesses through opportunities in the market (Naudé 2010). In its review of research and theory on women entrepreneurs, Greene et al., (2003) point out that the first paper based on women entrepreneurs was published in 1976. A barrier to understanding women's entrepreneurship challenges and their effect on economic growth is still scarce in the domain of accurate and relevant data. Despite comprehensive studies on entrepreneurship and the gender structure, they were primarily studied separately. Women's entrepreneurial practices have been comparatively careless, but the gender structure plays a major role in shaping industry, economic development and all other aspects of society. It is therefore important to establish systematic awareness of women's entrepreneurship. Enterprise growth can contribute significantly to

women's empowerment and gender equality and has a central role to play in gender strategies. Three phases of business growth occur: micro – often not registered; Tiny, with a few workers, is typically registered; and medium, which is regarded as separately.

Lamy (2012) notes that women's access to more and better paid work will come as women's companies and employers increase their presence in the international economy. The achievement of gender equality brings positive benefits for growth. Women need to build more and more economic opportunities and make the most of their companies. By doing so, economies can be changed and women can play a more central role in the global economy. The ILO plays an active role in strategic matters, with an emphasis on cultivating decent jobs through entrepreneurship and designing strategies for the promotion of women's entrepreneurship. They believe female entrepreneurship will play a major role in the economic wellbeing of the family and communities, reducing poverty and empowering women.

The literature is primarily focused on knowledge on the similarities and differences between men and women, the behaviors, principles, beliefs, goals, motives for starting a company, business objectives, obstacles and difficulties, motivations and ambitions, management styles and stereotypes for entrepreneurship. Literature also mentions social attitudes and their effect on entrepreneurial practices in men and women. And also, how entrepreneurship is essentially viewed in two ways, that is to say by need or opportunity. According to the World Bank (2011), women entrepreneurs are more required and less opportunity entrepreneurs. However, you cannot neglect the fact that entrepreneurship requires finding and leveraging the potential available. If people believe they have the potential to take advantage of the opportunity, then entrepreneurship takes place. Academic studies draw distinctions from the inclination to start up a company, the lack of training or experience in business, the style of management and barriers to access to property and credit.

One major obstacle to women's enterprises is access to credit, and women prefer to obtain small personal loans because they start small enterprises. Since the profit margins are too slim, banks are unwilling to grant or sell micro-credits. Although entrepreneurship in women is growing as an important economic activity, some scholars argue that the reason why women leave the corporate world to set up their companies is obstacles such as the phenomenon of glass ceiling, lack of flexibility and power that do not fit in with corporate culture and discrimination. ILO (2009) stresses the importance of strategic objectives to encourage women's entrepreneurship. These include eliminating barriers to start-up and development, improving market access, improving access to services, enhancing social inclusion, and supporting an environment and culture of support. ILO (2009) emphasizes the business growth as an important contributor to women's empowerment and gender equality. In order to facilitate the growth of women's enterprises, cooperative efforts are necessary and greater cooperation is required. Weeks (2010) present the building blocks of a women's business environment and its core elements to accelerate the growth of women's companies. Companies have seen women's companies increasingly as a valuable market for consumers and connected to their supply chain. Therefore, it is important to preserve their exposure and build support. Littlejohn (2010) argues that the role played economically and socially must be strengthened by women's companies. Women entrepreneurs should also be known for who they are, what they do and how important they are in terms of the global economy.

The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) is a reference to the general definition of entrepreneurship and the particular process of entrepreneurship for women. Women's global influence on society today is due in part to their growing position as business owners, making them a critical economic force. In 2010, 104 million women in 59 nations representing 52 per cent of the world's population and 84 per cent of global GDP began and operated new companies, says Kelley et al. (2011). These women entrepreneurs represented between 1.5% and 45.4% of adult women in their respective economies. Another 83 million women in those regions ran companies at least three and a half years ago that they started. These 187 million together reflect women's contribution to global entrepreneurship and business ownership. While female entrepreneurs are the largest in

emerging economies, which stood at 45.5% by 2012, the proportion of all female entrepreneurs varies considerably across economies.

What is remarkable about women's enterprise is that they form modern management models, encounter particular methods, work values and family values and the personal complexities of change through the methods of business growth and management. These phenomena should be researched in order to establish new conceptual frames and even terminology for the naming of these changes as they occur. Female entrepreneurship is obviously seen as a subjective for most small business academics but the discipline is far from being ignored although the lack of cumulative expertise is still under-examined.

METHODOLOGY

Descriptive surveys were used for the study design. It involved data collection and analysis to answer questions about the current state of the study topic. Descriptive surveys were used because they are meant to provide educators with statistical information on discipline aspects. This research generated qualitative and quantitative results. Qualitative data were analyzed using content analysis based on the analysis of meanings and consequences resulting from information given by the respondents and recorded data. Descriptive figures were used for quantitative data analysis. Frequency figures, means and percentages were included in these descriptive statistics. A correlation analysis and regression analysis were used to draw statistical inferences. Qualitative data was analyzed according to research questions and goals by arranging answers.

FINDINGS

Research findings revealed that most of the respondents (36.8%) accepted that the training is effective in women empowerment while the minority of respondents (16.3%) strongly opposed to effectiveness of training. Women entrepreneurs are educationally and financially ill-equipped. Training involves the creation of priorities, budgets and market performance awareness. In certain ways, communications technology also leads to the negative or derogatory representation of women.

The findings showed that the relationship $r(239) = 0.746$, $p < 0.05$ between skills-based training and women's empowerment is strongly positive. We thus dismiss the hypothesis and concluded that there are important connections between training focused on skills and women's empowerment. This suggested that the more experience the more motivated women are. Consequently, there is a great need to continue teaching women to empower them.

The results of the research indicated that the majority of respondents (64%) accepted that the infrastructure available is adequately available while the minority (11, 7%) did not know if the infrastructure available was adequate. Research has shown that the majority of respondents (72.4%) are satisfied with financial access through microfinance and other lending institutions, while the minority (27.6%) of respondents have indicated that they are not satisfied with access offered through microfinance and others. $r(239) = 0.645$, $p < 0.05$ between business knowledge and empowerment of women. Therefore, we rejected the hypothesis and conclude that the relationship between market knowledge and women's empowerment is significant.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the objectives of the report, it was concluded that women entrepreneurs should continue to find new ways to distinguish their companies from rivals to reduce the negative effect of intense competition on their businesses. Those in the retail sector can do this by continually offering unique goods that they cannot find in other shops or stores and those in the service industry can continue to expand to provide their staff with up-to-date expertise, knowledge and ability, so that they are still able to deliver distinct services in line with their customers' needs. This would boost their competitive advantages over rivals and increase their market shares

and profits. Entry to capital, as one of the key challenges that entrepreneurs face is widely acknowledged and has negative effects on women's empowerment.

On economic opportunities of women, it is important to understand the social attitudes and customs of the country and not just the rules, because women's participation in the formal labor force is well below that of men. In industries with greater salary potential, such as technology and finance, men continue to dominate, whereas women are paid less than their male counterparts. Enterprise women are faced with gender specific barriers, such as access to finance and credit, business prospects, enterprise training and specific management training, and the ability, considering their tremendous capacity for growth, to be owners of the soil in both developing and developed countries.

Where entrepreneurship is important and there are ample opportunities, all members of society can benefit. Encouraging entrepreneurship in general is also essential to empowering women. The important role women entrepreneurs' play in the entrepreneurial economy depends on their ability to build jobs for themselves and others. Women's entrepreneurship concerns both the role of entrepreneurship in society and the place of women in society.

This can be seen to have a strong connection with women's entrepreneurship. As empowerment will expand, women should also aspire to increase their management skills to be able to implement new strategies in the management of their private companies. The empowerment of women leads to economic freedom, ownership of life, self-reliance, self-determination and a means of achieving their own. As such, women's self-employment empowerment can be said to be linked with the capacity of women to gain leverage over economic capital and be more actively active in the process of creating wealth. Self-fulfillment leads to understanding where women are headed. As females rise, women will be motivated more personally and economically by developing entrepreneurship.

The study suggested that bids should be reviewed and assessed effectively. It was recommended that the county governments should pay closer attention to women entrepreneurs in the extension of appropriate support services such as microcredits and training, based on the goal of skill-based training. Government and non-governmental organizations should start focusing on entrepreneurial cluster growth, based on the availability of natural resources. Better partnerships between different organizations working for entrepreneurship growth and women's empowerment should be created, rather than vying for annual goals. Banks must raise their funds in their self-help community and company so that women are empowered to do company and bring about change not just for themselves but also for the family and society.

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