

Enhancing Women Entrepreneurs, Entrepreneurial Innovations and Sustainability of Small Enterprises in Kenya

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Abstract

Women entrepreneurs are taking centre stage in their quest and resilience to contribute to the welfare of their families as well as the growth of small enterprises. Entrepreneurship accelerates the economic development process and technological advancement of nations and hence this study looked at enhancing women entrepreneurs through entrepreneurial innovations that foster sustainability of Kenya's small enterprises. This explanatory research design was adopted. The study population was 640 women owners with a sample size of 246 obtained using Yamane 1967 formula. Data was collected using questionnaires and its suitability done using factor analysis. The reliability test was carried out using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. Direct effect of women entrepreneurs on sustainability of small enterprises ($\beta = .550$) and indirect effect was ($\beta = .297$). The study recommended that women entrepreneurs should be enhanced through embracing technological innovations and support from the government and other entrepreneurs to foster growth and development for their well-being the family unit as well as economic growth for the nation.

Keywords: *Women entrepreneurs, Entrepreneurial Innovations Sustainability of Small Enterprises*

1.0 Introduction

Women entrepreneurship is delineated as an approach that allows women to manage all production factors and are prepared to take risks, participate in activities involving innovation and creation and generating employment (Sharma, 2013). Globalization and liberalization has contributed to the rise of women as force that is powerful and should not be ignored in policy making. The global economy has witnessed a contribution by men as well as women. Women are coming out strongly in the area of entrepreneurship to improve their welfare as well as their family, society and the nation. In this way, women play the role of creation, leading, innovation and risk taking in their entrepreneurial pursuits (Carter & Shaw, 2006).

Women entrepreneurs are perceived as new facilitators of development and growth, having a pertinent role especially in emerging nations. Research by authors such as Minniti (2010), Naude (2011) and World Economic Forum (2021) pinpoint women's pivotal role in business

environments, drawing attention to their “unexploited source” in terms of growth, innovation and expansion fostered by women. In addition, findings reveal that there is an association between high GDP per capita and low gender gaps in entrepreneurship, which highlights that women entrepreneurs have a significant impact. Women’s businesses are significantly few in number compared to the overall share of business activities and therefore, enhancement of women behavior in entrepreneurship is considered to be crucial in policies and programs in developing nations, with authorities and researchers both looking for solutions that are practical and can improve entrepreneurial gender equality. Ascher (2012) argues that enhancement of women entrepreneurship depends on the adoption of national policy measures, of which the most appropriate results are achieved through targeting creativity and innovation. Furthermore, high education levels, good connectivity to the internet as well as motivation of women towards becoming creative and independent may have an outcome of successful businesses being developed in increasing numbers.

The focus of this paper was on identifying external and internal factors enabling women’s engagement in sustainable entrepreneurship practices. According to Chatterjee and Ramu (2018), varied factors are identifiable that may hamper women’s opportunities in the innovative development of sustainable enterprises, for example low financial access and exchange of knowledge, which leads to low facilities and equipment and skill inadequacy in business teams, compared to business development capacity by men. Similarly, the European Commission (2017) pinpoints that women-led enterprises have a tendency of recording smaller rates of growth in terms of productivity compared to men-led enterprises. Coleman (2007) argues that enterprises owned by women are not sizeable, and are in highly competitive sectors albeit with small returns such as service and retail sectors. Further, they are highly active in industries characterized by low growth. In terms of profitability, experience and education have a great role for enterprises owned by women, whereas in enterprises owned by men, fiscal capital is considered to be more decisive.

A study by Omondi, Onono and Barasa (2022) indicated that women owned enterprises account for 31.4% but majority of these enterprises are unlicensed. Women-led small enterprises in Kenya face challenges in raising capital as a result of lacking collateral prerequisites demanded by financial institutions. Further, they are also challenged by inadequacies in entrepreneurial skill to enable them to run their enterprises successfully. Despite various interventions by both non-government and government agencies in addressing women’s entrepreneurial challenges, other impacts such as the COVID-19 pandemic may have contributed to poor women entrepreneurial enhancement. In order to mitigate the challenges women owned small enterprises in Kenya face, Open Capital Investments and Oxfam provide support in terms of funding together with local partners to implement projects such as the Impact Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) Development project that targets Kenya’s women-owned impact-driven small and medium enterprises.

The 2005 Kenya Sessional paper No. 2 provided recommendations to the government that it should enact policies facilitating the enhancement of women entrepreneurship and focused on increasing credit access through formation of savings and credit societies, promotion of networking with financial institutions, both MFIs and banking institutions so as to assist women’s entrepreneurial skill enhancement and economic development. In this regard, the Kenyan government initiated the Women Enterprise Fund purposed with empowering women to facilitate their further engagement in self-development and enhance Kenya’s economic development, wealth

distribution across different social strata, and allowing women to access credit for engagement in entrepreneurial pursuits at rational interest margins without guarantor and collateral restrictions. The Kenyan government envisaged that such an approach would lead to SME growth (WEF, 2009).

3. Literature Review

Novel methods in economic growth literature explore how enhancing women entrepreneurship leads to sustainable models of business being developed (Jamali, 2009; Langowitz & Minniti, 2007; Henry, Foss & Ahl, 2016). Various authors have argued that women's involvement in business is beneficial on the national economies of countries due to the fact that it plays a role in contributing to innovation, development, sustainable business, in the long run enhancing the value creation of countries' gross domestic product (Jamali, 2009; Lanowitz & Minniti, 2007; Henry, Foss & Ahl, 2016; Herrington, 2016; Neumeyer et al., 2019). However, Neumeyer et al. (2014) augur with Tsyganova and Shirokova (2010) stressing that entrepreneurial gender differences still prevail. According to Vossenbergh (2013), "gender bias" has a negative effect on entrepreneurship and it hinders the benefits that women SME owners can receive on a social and macroeconomic context. The gender gap on various issues such as economic, social and political spheres is still wide in the Kenyan context although attempts are being made to bridge the gap and facilitate women's capacity of being creative and exploiting opportunities of investment more so with regard to sustainable business (Duflo, 2012). Karlan and Valdivia (2011) add that the acquisition of entrepreneurial knowledge is quite significant in the stimulation of women's entrepreneurial empowerment.

The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (2019) posits that 5% more of women entrepreneurs are likely to report their involvement in innovative fields compared to men entrepreneurs. Whereas innovation is pivotal due to the fact that it facilitates women entrepreneurs' success (Mustar & Wright, 2010), entrepreneurial activity quality hinged on innovation leads to value creation (Ferraris et al., 2018; Saiz-Alvarez & Martinez, 2019), and entrepreneurial innovation aids in the development of knowledge to be utilized in cross-border entrepreneurship and creation of value (Saiz-Alvarez & Martinez, 2019). In addition, Ferraris et al. (2018) argues that innovation in businesses leads to challenges and opportunities in a flexible and active framework, with the capacity to lead to sustainable development.

The rise in women entrepreneurs' shows that the desire for women involvement in business management is increasing. Nonetheless, social factors for example concerns with segregation and stereotypes as well as psychological factors have a negative influence on women's involvement in business. According to Panda (2018), in a review of 35 papers dealing with the theme of women entrepreneurship focusing on 90 developing nations, it was established that there are seven constraints primarily hindering women's entrepreneurship development. These constraints include discrimination of women due to traditional roles diminishing their labour market credibility, family-work conflicts stemming from efforts to balance social and personal expectations, fiscal constraints due to limited or lack of access to credit since women are considered high-risk, inadequacies in infrastructural support that hampers access to ancilliary services and technology. These constraints have a greater effect on women compared to men. Further, unfavorable practices,

inadequacies in education and training, political and economic environments have a tendency of having a significant and negative impact on enterprises owned by women.

Empirical discussions on women entrepreneurship reveal that entrepreneurial decisions are hinged on various motivational variables. Furthermore, the motivational variables are related closely to professional and personal development opportunities. Therefore, some authors argue that the desire by women for independence, self-improvement and extra income (self-esteem and social status) seems to be a key reason for business development by women (Cho, Moon, Bounkhong, 2019; Tlaiss, 2015; Itani, Sidani & Baalbaki, 2011). Other authors posit that additionally to women's need for independence, they have a tendency of developing own businesses out of desire for ideal work (Kirkwood, 2009) and to have a family balance (Verheul et al., 2006). Poggesi et al. (2016) add that women are pushed towards development of businesses as a result of fiscal needs, unemployment or job dissatisfaction. Modarresi et al. (2017) aver that the greatest challenges encountered by women entrepreneurs especially in developing nations are associated with networks and connections and lack of fiscal resources or inadequacies in fiscal knowledge in terms of management and planning.

Entrepreneurial Innovation

In regard to entrepreneurship with innovation, it is observed that various nations, states, regions and universities have implemented policy aimed to spur innovation by entrepreneurial firms, and consequently, grow the economy. The policies include national, regional and local initiatives for promotion of university-based ventures (Grimaldi et al., 2011). The initiatives comprise economic development hinged on technology such as accelerators/incubators, and formal government initiatives for instance Small Business Innovation Research/Small Business Technology Transfer established in the United States, Science Enterprise Challenge established in the United Kingdom, "Law on Innovation and Research to Promote the Creation of Innovative Technology Companies" established in France, and Pro-Ton Europe, the European Knowledge Transfer Association established by the EU (Mustar & Wright, 2010). According to Bosma et al. (2009) and Reynolds et al. (2005), the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor survey's data collected from 80 nations establish that averagely, less than 30 percent of new start-ups reported new products to their customers. It is believed that stringent criteria that emphasize radical novelty has a high likelihood of having an even greater negative outcome. According to the data, it is also indicted that the percentage of new ventures in product innovation and technology vary immensely in different countries from below 10 percent to a 50 percent high.

According to Pantić (2014), there is an insufficiency in research focusing on innovativeness in women entrepreneurs. On the other hand, Ascher (2012) aver that challenges associated with women-owned ventures can be mitigated if policy making targets encouraging creativity, growth and innovation. Previous research by Liang et al. (2017) argue that there is a strong effect of stakeholders on the success of projects. Alternately, Ferraris et al. (2018) established that sustainable innovation requires greater engagement and integration of stakeholders. Burga and Rezanian (2016) argue that applying stakeholders' (management of social issues and salience) models facilitates integration of entrepreneurs' perception to various stakeholders at core points of decision making.

Sustainability of Small Enterprises

Debate on what constitutes sustainability has been intensive (Mani et al., 2020). The UN Bruntland Commission delineated sustainability as “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Bruntland, 1987). Nonetheless, authors such as Krauss et al. (2020), Lozano (2008) and Montiel (2014) conclude that regardless of efforts in arriving at a proper definition of the term, consensus still lacks on a delineation that is generally accepted in literature. Overall, the concept is contextual with regard to societal and temporal settings (Moon, 2007). Despite the difficulties in delineation, definitions in the corporate sustainability context have since been influential, such as Dyllick and Hockerts (2002) defining it as “meeting the needs of a company’s direct and indirect stakeholders (employees, clients, pressure groups, communities etc.), without compromising its ability to meet the needs of future stakeholders as well.” van Marrewijk (2003) argues that sustainability is perceived as addressing societal needs as well as facilitating value creation beyond the needs of stakeholders. The European Commission (2002) adds that there is an expectation of enterprises to achieve value generation through production of services and goods society demands while achieving profitability for stakeholders as well as upholding societal welfare. According to Wolf (2014), social pressures and new markets are progressive in expediting value transformation in entrepreneurial activity, including the expectation of organizations to be “good citizens”.

While sustainability is considered to be a concern, it covers a larger spectrum. The UN General Assembly in 2015 adopted formally the Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030). The EU published an action framework in 2016, “The European Consensus on Development” which aligned the EU’s development policy with the Agenda for Sustainable Development, indicating “poverty eradication is the primary objective of development policy” (European Commission, 2017). According to Kaplan (2020) and Qiu et al. (2021), the economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on a global scale pose a threat to the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals adopted by the UN within the predetermined timeframe. The United Nations emphasized the necessity of undertaking efforts towards building more inclusive and equal enterprises post-COVID 19, characterizing the enterprises with enhance resilience in the challenging environment prevailing with issues such as climate change and pandemics.

3.0 Hypothesis Development

According to Nxopo (2014), the role of women entrepreneurship is clear from the leadership growth, innovation, management, development effectiveness and research amongst other variables. Entrepreneurship uptake among women has rapidly increased and women’s start-ups are attributed to the need for control of both their professional and personal lives. It has further been asserted that women entrepreneurs’ role is significant in mitigation of unemployment and eradication of poverty. Hence, with the significance played by women, it is essential for research to be carried out on how women entrepreneurship’s can be developed to maximize on its contribution across all economic levels. This study hypothesized that:

H0₁: There is no significant effect on the link between Enhancement of women entrepreneurs and sustainability of small enterprises in Kenya.

H0₂: There is no significant effect on the link between enhancement of women entrepreneurs and entrepreneurial innovation in Kenya.

H0₃: There is no significant effect on the link between entrepreneurial innovation and sustainability of small enterprises in Kenya.

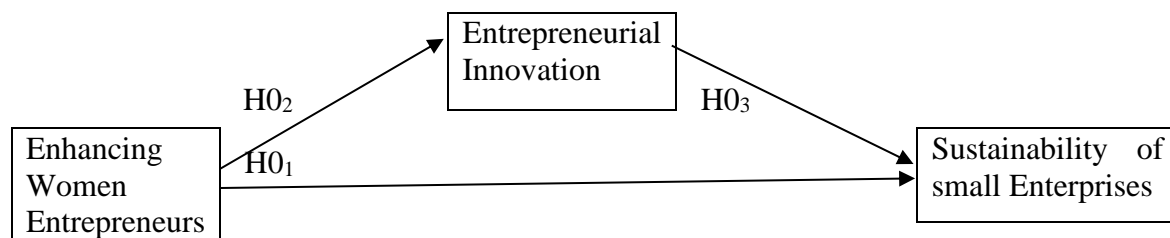
3.1 Theoretical Framework

Institutional theory as postulated in entrepreneurship literature is centered on the notion of entrepreneurs' conformity to prevailing institutions for purposes of gaining legitimacy, resources and endorsement from key stakeholders and networks (Munir, 2019). According to Eijdenberg et al. (2018), the principles of the theory are emphasized in their application to entrepreneurship, suggesting that it is essential for entrepreneurs to conform to institutions relevant to their scope and context of business. In addition, in Eijdenberg's argument, through the action and attention of other entrepreneurs, human resources considered to be important for business are gathered. Munir (2019) also posits that the institutional factors commonly influencing activities in entrepreneurship include but are not limited to property rights and prevailing conditions of the market, structure of the family, policy and capital availability. Inadequacies in institutional development disadvantages the development of new ventures and in instances where regulations are restrictive to institutional development, entrepreneurial activities are significantly hindered. Munir (2019) and Eijdenberg et al. (2019) also reveal the significance of informal relationships such as local networks and small associations to aid in filling the prevailing institutional gaps arising from inadequate infrastructure of formal institutions. The theory concerns interaction of organizations and groups with social structures, aimed at securing stability and legitimacy. Therefore, the theory was suitable for the study to establish the relationship between women entrepreneurs, entrepreneurship innovation and sustainability of the small enterprises.

3.1.1 Conceptual Framework

Independent Variable Mediator

Dependent Variable



4.0 Research Methodology

The study adopted the survey method in gathering on sustainability of small enterprises owned by women. Explanatory design was utilized in comprehending the population and factors affecting it. The adoption of explanatory design allowed for regressions to be used in determining correlations of variables in multivariate, univariate and bivariate analysis. The design also made testing of hypothesis possible through the use of inferential statistics in determining correlation

significance (Hair, 2010). Target women entrepreneurs were 640 and a random sample size of 246 women entrepreneurs who were selected using Yamane '(1967) formula. Questionnaires were used to collect primary data. Measures of women entrepreneurs were taken from (Wiedmann et al. 2011) and Tarker, et al. (2018). Entrepreneurship innovation and sustainability were taken from (Newbert, 2008). Pilot test was carried out to test the validity of the instruments. AMOS(V.25) software was used to test the hypotheses.

5.0 Analysis

The researcher used different statistical descriptive to evaluate the overall model. The results from table 1 below provide a summary of the goodness of fit.

Table 1

Model	NPAR	CMIN	DF	P	CMIN/DF
Default	8	.004	2	.000	.002
Saturated	12	.000	0		
Independence	6	169.31	4	.000	23.721

GFI was 0.91 compared to the advised value of over 0.90, however AGFI coefficient was 0.91 compared to recommended value of > 0.9. The coefficients were thus; 0.94, 0.93, 0.96, and 0.96 respectively. RMR was .006, significantly less than 0.02 guidelines, while the RMSEA was 0.02—much below the suggested limit of 0.05. Because of this, the model works well in general.

Table 2

Statistic	Fit	Result
χ^2	-	.004
Df	-	2
χ^2 significance	$p \leq .05$.000
χ^2/df	< 5.0	.002
GFI	> .90	0.91
AGFI	> .90	0.90
NFI	> .90	0.94
RFI	> .90	0.93
CFI	> .90	0.96
TLI	> .90	0.96
RMSEA	< .05	0.02
RMR	< .02	0.006

Maximum Likelihood

The hypotheses were looked at using the links between the latent variables and the results are shown in table 3 below. Entrepreneurship innovation is positively impacted by women entrepreneurs. The findings revealed a positive influence with a coefficient 0.684 and 0.000 P-value. H₀₂ was rejected. This shows the statistical necessity of the proposition. The Entrepreneurship innovation of small enterprises was positively and significantly impacted by women entrepreneurs.

Table 3 Maximum Likelihood

H0			Approximate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Determination	
Entrepreneurial innovation	<-	Women entrepreneurs	.684	.04	14.117	**	Supported & Significant	
Sustainability	<-	Women entrepreneurs	.550	.056	9.739	**	Supported & Significant	
Sustainability	<-	Entrepreneurial innovation	.297	.056	5.256	**	Supported & Significant	

There was a considerable direct impact of women entrepreneurs on the sustainability of small enterprises. Entrepreneurial innovation has a strong correlation with sustainability of small enterprises ($c' = .297$, $p = .000$). The H₀₃ was therefore rejected. Entrepreneurial innovation significantly impacted Kenyan small enterprises' ability to sustain viability. Taking women entrepreneurs into account, entrepreneurial innovation had a strong prediction of small enterprises' sustainability.

Entrepreneurial innovation has a long term positive outcome to competitiveness. The findings showed a coefficient of .297 and p-value of 0.000. Entrepreneurial innovation had a considerable and favourable impact on sustainability of small enterprises. Therefore, the results are an indication that the hypothesis is true, though the level of significance is high.

Conclusion

The findings indicate that enhancing women entrepreneurs significantly affect sustainability of small enterprises, which consequently impacts entrepreneurial innovation. Hence, entrepreneurial innovation of Kenya's small enterprises needs to be supported with enhancement of women entrepreneurs to achieve business sustainability. Further, the study concludes that women entrepreneurs can be empowered through support in technological innovations that boost their business ventures. These enhancements significantly and positively impact costs and efficiency, raising satisfaction of customers and in the long run increases the business' return on investment. Women entrepreneurs should embrace management strategies and views to allow small enterprises to realize growth despite Kenya's prevailing challenges that are a hurdle to the achievement of the 2030 vision, especially in the consideration that women entrepreneurship reflects the crucial sectors with a high potential for creating employment in Kenya.

Recommendations

In order to ensure sustainability of small enterprises that is run by women entrepreneurs, there is need for them to embrace entrepreneurial innovation so that technology is enhanced in their growth potential. Sustainability of small enterprises is imperative for the nation's growth and development. Women entrepreneurs should get updated with the latest technological innovations that encourage venture creation for women development and they should always persist in their struggle to excel inspite of the male dominated enterprises. Further women should also produce goods and services that cannot be matched with competition.

Study Implications

Women entrepreneurs should dedicate their efforts to improving their welfare as well as that of the society at large through advancements in technology and innovation that will assure them of competitive edge in the male dominated enterprises. The study findings will also encourage women to pursue entrepreneurship with vigor and determination to excel in spite of environmental as well as economic challenges being experienced globally. This study also has bearing on the societal demands since it is focused on entrepreneurial innovation hence the desire for new and better products from these small enterprises.

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