Review

Influence of gender and cultural beliefs on women entrepreneurs in developing economy

Lamidi Yusuf

College of Business, Universiti Utara Malaysia. E-mail: yusuflamid@gmail.com

Accepted 13 November, 2013

There is a limited study that specifically examines the extent to which gender and cultural beliefs have influence on women entrepreneurs. This study therefore attempts to link gender bias and sub culture like regional, ethnicity and religious practices within the context of national culture that affect women entrepreneurs in developing countries. Previous studies and other secondary sources were thoroughly reviewed and analyzed. Findings indicate gender, ethnicity and religion play important role in entrepreneurship development and how women entrepreneurs are perceived and valued. This paper therefore, suggests that government should make policies and create enabling environment that would boost female entrepreneurs in the generation of employment and wealth creation.

Key words: Gender, Culture, Women, Entrepreneurs, Developing Economy.

INTRODUCTION

Women all over the world play important roles in the social, economy and political life of any nation. Women entrepreneurs in both developed and developing nations of the world stimulate the economy and create new jobs. Entrepreneurship literatures have increasingly acknowledged the desire by women to be economically independent, their roles and contributions as women entrepreneurs in shaping labor market is continuously increasing (Mordi, Simpson, Satwinder and Okafor, 2010). Therefore, the involvement and ability of women entrepreneurs in organizing and combining the factors of production cannot be overemphasized. Generally women are known to be strong and confidence, resourceful and talented, creative and innovative, all these have made them to succeed despite daunting obstacles confronting them as entrepreneurs.

The women entrepreneurs are confronted with two key factors gender and cultural beliefs, Abimbola and Agboola (2011) view gender and cultural beliefs among other factors that influence people’s willingness and ability to venture into entrepreneurial activities, they continued that within the cultural context, there are sub culture like regional, ethnicity and religions that shapes individual’s perception and value system. For example, the pudah system, a strict enforcement of seclusion rules upon married women from the public (Hugo, 2012), is mostly in practice in Muslim world and South East Asia countries who form majority of developing countries, the women are not encourage to venture into entrepreneurship, few that does, faces patronage discrimination thus, affecting creativity, innovation and employment generation from potential women entrepreneurs.

People have different motives and intentions of going into entrepreneurship. The economic reform introduced by the various government in the developing countries that begins in the 1980s leading to loss of employment and reduction in income pushed many people to become entrepreneurs in developing countries. Eijdenberg and Masurel (2013) state that people in developing countries are more driven by poverty, survival, and lack job to become an entrepreneur while in the developed economy entrepreneurial activities stem out of desire to seize an opportunity and innovation to start a business. The prevailing harsh environmental factors couple with high poverty rate and unemployment propels a high rate of entrepreneurial activities in developing countries of world. Gender and cultural beliefs have indeed continued to hamper development and growth of women entrepreneurs in developing nation. Halkias, Nwajuba, Harkiolakis and Caracatsanis (2011) believes that gender and culture belief impede the economic potential of women as entrepreneurs and impact negatively on enterprise development, productivity, competitiveness.
and reduce the growth of the economy.
This study aims to address the problem of gender and cultural beliefs by exploring how they impede the growth of women entrepreneurs in developing countries and suggestions are made on how to overcome the problems.

Women entrepreneurs and gender factor

Entrepreneurial activities in most countries are known to be male dominated especially in the developing countries, the ratio of women entrepreneur to men entrepreneur varies considerably across the world. Women entrepreneur operate within gender bias among other constraint that can constitute a threat or create opportunity for women entrepreneurs (Eren, 2012). The women entrepreneurs are often marginalized to the informal sector, however, the ability of women entrepreneur to formalize and grow their business to create jobs and enhance productivity is hampered where barriers exist that affect men's and women entrepreneurs differently.

Gender discrimination against the women entrepreneur is usually exhibited in ethnic practices, for example, the Igbos of South East of Nigeria are known to be the foremost entrepreneurial group, when compared to other major ethnic groups in Nigeria. The entrepreneurial activities as practiced in the Igbo ethnic group of Nigeria give priority to the male child in nurturing for entrepreneurial activities. The male child as a custom is given entrepreneurial orientation and training right from the childhood, while the female child is seen to provide future supportive role to their husband or family business. This is evidence according Nworah (2011) at demise of an entrepreneur in Igbo ethnic group the practice is usually transfer of control to the eldest male child who may even be the least competent, this constitute a bias against women entrepreneur.

Abimbola and Agboola (2011) view gender as a force found to be capable of either impeding or facilitating entrepreneurial activities in any society. The issue of gender factor affect women entrepreneur positively and negatively, depending on the economy and nation. However, gender bias affect involvement of women in the formal sector of entrepreneurial activities this is evidence in Malaysia where the Malay constitute 70% of the population, however, only two (2) women entrepreneur are listed out of fourteen (14) most successful Malay entrepreneurs making waves in Asian economy, the report indicates fewer Malay women entrepreneur are involve in the formal economic sector, however, women entrepreneurship activities thrive better in a conducive atmosphere.

Prejudice against women entrepreneurs is experienced much more severely in Africa and indeed the developing countries than in developed countries due to oblivious cultural practices, religion bigotry, discrimination and tradition of patriarchal cultures (Thebaud, 2012). Naudé and Amininiti (2012) view that gender gaps in start-up are much larger in developing economy which is tending to be narrower in developed economy. They assert, this may be due to many women commences business out of necessity. However, Thebaud, observe that women have started business significantly in greater number over the past two decades, but gender inequality pronounced when compared to the traditional labour market.

Women entrepreneurs and cultural beliefs

Shinnar, Giacomin, and Janssen (2012) defines culture as “a collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people, they assert that cultures exhibit an unequal distribution of power, strong hierarchies, control mechanisms and an emphasis to and obeying those in position of power. The effect of culture on entrepreneurship was early emphasized by Max Weber at the beginning of the century. He argues that Protestantism encouraged a culture that emphasized the importance of cultural influences embedded in religion as a means for understanding the genesis of capitalism. This can be seen in his famous view on individualism, achievement motivation, and legitimating of entrepreneurial vocations, asceticism, rationality and self-reliance. Culture affects the perception and behavior of people which would invariably affect relationship between one another. In the Muslim world and most of the South East Asian countries, the women are expected to remain indoor according to Hugo, except in extreme cases, and need to be completely covered by hijab if they venture out, this practices is due to religious beliefs. This practice have negative tendency for the women entrepreneurs, the practice confines the few that venture into entrepreneurship to the informal sector of the economy.

Rauf and Mitra (2013) view that business growth depends mainly on entrepreneurial perception of business and these perceptions are shaped by social beliefs, values, cultural restrictions and religious values. In Northern Nigeria the Hausa / Fulani Ethnic groups who are the majority Ethnic groups in Nigeria, constitute 33% of Nigeria’s estimated 150 million populations, Hausa / Fulani women entrepreneurs can only be found in the informal sector of the economy this is due mainly to cultural and religious practices. Shinnar, Giacomin and Janssen (2012) observe that empirical evidence indicates that in spite of growth in women entrepreneurship, the male entrepreneurs are still almost twice the women entrepreneur due mainly to cultural perceptions and practices. Cultural beliefs impact negatively to the promotion and development of entrepreneurial activities in the developing economy.
CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Women entrepreneurs are the rising star of the economy, more and more women are starting new business, whether micro, medium or large scale, motivated by pure survival, self-fulfillment, and women entrepreneurs are creating employment opportunity and generating income (Eijdenberg and Masrel2013). The growing numbers of women entrepreneurs necessitate increase policy measures that would remove institutionalized gender discriminations and cultural practices that impede entrepreneurial activities of women entrepreneurs. The women entrepreneurs have been seen to be the new engine of development and economic growth of the developing economy, women entrepreneurs should therefore, be exposed to entrepreneurship orientation and training, modern technology, effort should be made to encourage entrepreneurial activities especially where it is restricted through religious and ethnic practices. Future research relating to cultural beliefs and women entrepreneurship provide a very fertile area of enquiry especially where sub cultural practices like religion and ethnicity impedes on women entrepreneurship.

REFERENCE


