
Strategic Modalities for Sustaining Entrepreneurship Activities of Rural Women for Economic Development in Abia State

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Abstract

The study identified the strategic modalities for sustaining entrepreneurial activities of rural women for economic development. The study was carried out in Abia State, Nigeria. A survey design method was adopted for study. One research question was raised. This was to identify the possible factors that can sustain the entrepreneurial activities of rural women for economic development. Multi stage cluster sampling technique was used to select 240 respondents for the study. A set of structured questionnaire was used with 17 items to collect the data required for the study. Descriptive statistics was used such as frequency count, percentage and mean to analyze the data collected. Result of the data showed that 92.2 percent of the women agreed that the various approaches on entrepreneurship activities of rural women should be sustained.

Keywords: Strategy, Sustainability, Entrepreneurship, Development and Economy

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Background to the Study

The need for strategizing modalities of sustaining women's involvement in entrepreneurship is a necessity and emergent issue for economic development. Entrepreneurship is exclusively a human characteristics and a major source of livelihood to so many families especially in the rural areas. Most women go into various entrepreneurial activities based on their different interest and reactions, among such are their environment, availability of funds, interest, demand, level of awareness, needs etc. But whichever way or whatever reasons, entrepreneurship when started should be sustained, especially when women are involved for a better result and development.

Globally, the concept of entrepreneurship development, and its sustenance has undergone some levels of metamorphosis from agriculture and mining to industrial information and technology development. Ordinarily the concept of entrepreneurship centers on experimentation, acquisition of potential skills and taking initiatives to accomplish a particular task. Anyadike, Eme and Ukah , (2012). noted that despite the level of development of any nation, entrepreneurship makes undisputable contributions in economic development which creates the need for its sustenance. They further reiterated that among other areas of the economy, entrepreneurship greatest contributions are in employment generation and empowerment of the disadvantaged segment of the population, especially the rural women who mostly are less privileged as a result of the environment they found themselves. Observations have shown that in the recent time, the number of women entrepreneurs has increased. Women entrepreneurs need to be encouraged, reinforced, motivated and empowered in their increased utilization of modern technology, increased investment, finding a niche in the export market, creating a sizable employment for others and setting the trend for other women entrepreneurs in the organized sector.

Turis (2009) writing on the Social and Economic contributions of women entrepreneurship noted that since half of the world is women, empowering a woman for entrepreneurship means empowering a family. She added that women are known to play incredible and soul-saving roles in difficult times including during wars and natural disasters. In times of penury, when children are hungry and the men lose their sources of livelihood, everyone turns to the wife and / or mother for support. In most cases, women provide most of the things required for the upkeep of the family. Women entrepreneurs have demonstrated their potentials in entrepreneurship development. However, Sathiabama (20010) insisted that they are capable of contributing much more than they are already doing. He affirmed that the activities and interest of women entrepreneurship need to be sustained. He also maintained that the reason being that women's entrepreneurship has been recognized during the last decade as an important untapped source of economic growth, mostly in Nigeria.

Parboteach (2000) defined entrepreneurship as encompassing acts of organizational creation, renewal, or innovation that occur within or outside an existing organization. In support of this definition, Ige (2007) conclude that entrepreneurship is a predisposition

towards the establishment and operation of business ventures by any one or group or person, including government for the sake of making profit or social surplus in order to accumulate wealth, social or real. The researcher sees entrepreneurship as the willingness to pursue investment opportunities and the willingness to successfully run an enterprise. An entrepreneur is somebody who has the ability to identify business opportunities where others would not notice. He has the ability to assemble the necessary resources to take advantage of such opportunities, and the ability to initiate the action necessary to ensure success which will bring about the development and sustenance of the business. Moreover, every developed or developing system, needs sustenance which if neglected brings about a collapse in the existing system. For a venture to be viable and permanent there is need for sustenance, which Shan (2005) implies to be a responsible and proactive decision making and innovation that minimizes negative impact and maintains balance.

Ukwe (2008) defined development as the improvement of people's lifestyle through improved education, incomes, skill development and employment. Ukwe (2008) stated that development should be viewed as a multi-dimensional process involving major changes, social structure, popular attitudes and a national condition of life from unsatisfactory to satisfactory. Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. Sustainability implies responsible and proactive decision making and innovation that minimizes negative impact and maintains balance between ecological resilience, economic prosperity, political justice and cultural vibrancy to ensure a desirable planet for all species now and in future.

Ndubuisi (2004) noted that for possible sustenance of women entrepreneurship to be effective, certain strategies has to be observed, which include the following.

- 1) Making gender equality and women empowerment as explicit objective of policies and programme, with associated resources and targets including a substantial increase in official development for gender equality and women empowerment, and ensure that poor women and men in rural areas benefits global trade.
- 2) Expanding women's access to finance by developing national level strategies involving governments, private sectors, banks and microfinance institutions to accelerate women's access to capital. Development of new instrument and delivery mechanism to address collateral requirements.
- 3) Prioritize domestic energy by investing in infrastructures and services to meet national energy requirement with particular focus on rural electrification, clean cooking fuels and household energy needs, as a catalytic contribution in alleviating the time burden imposed on women by domestic tasks.
- 4) Encouraging women to form public-private partnership for local service delivery, that is, creating enabling environment, including supporting policies and regulating frame work that provide women entrepreneurs with business opportunities and enable them to be contracted by local authorities to deliver basic services, such as water, waste management and provision of local infrastructure.

- 5) Strengthen women's legal status and rights by addressing issues of female land ownership and titles. Establishing a baseline on the status of women's land ownership and put in place mechanisms to expand women's rights. Support the implementation of the provision of the convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women, including its optional protocol. Formulate national laws of inheritance and succession to guarantee women their right to inheritance and ownership of land property.
- 6) Expand opportunities for women's voice, inclusion and participation.

There is no gainsaying that efforts are being made to enhance the entrepreneurship development of women. Nagging problem often is how to strategize actions towards sustaining these improvement programmes. It is only when improvement programmes are matched with well-defined sustenance strategies that Nigerian rural women will put on the next level of entrepreneurship development. This forms the basis of this study on the strategic modalities for sustaining the entrepreneurship development of rural women in Abia State.

United Nations (2006) classified entrepreneurs into six different types which include; (a) self-employed, (b) traditional self-employed, (c) growth-oriented, (d) leisure or subsistence and network entrepreneurs. In agreement with this classification of types of entrepreneurship by the (UN, 2006) these are types of entrepreneurial activities involved by rural women in Abia State mostly the self and traditional self-employed entrepreneur, which is as a result of situations they found themselves into eg, the environment, educational attainment and other socio-cultural factors. Women as a result of their traditional roles as wives, daughters and mothers, their participation as long as business and management of entrepreneurial initiatives are concerned is still very low (Adelelaja, 2005) and majority of the women typically operate micro and small sized enterprises (Thompson 2002). Based on observation, these are not as a result that women do not have the ability or capability of good management but mostly because of fear of uncertainties and the unknown which includes the level of risk involved, better business opportunities and basically the possibility of continuity which can only be achieved through sustenance of the business. There is no gainsaying that efforts are been made to enhance the entrepreneurship development of women. Nagging problem often is how to strategize actions towards sustaining these improvement programmes. It is only when improvement programmes are matched with well-defined sustenance strategies that Nigerian rural women will put on the next level of entrepreneurship development. This forms the basis of this study on strategies for sustaining entrepreneurial interest of Abia State rural women.

Objective of the Study

The objective of this study is to identify the strategic modalities for sustaining entrepreneurial activities of rural women for economic development in Abia State.

Statement of the Problem

Rural women entrepreneurs mostly in Abia State lack practicable strategies that can sustain their entrepreneurial activities which have affected their entrepreneurial development as well as the economy. These are mostly on the areas of fund raising, awareness, and lack of amenities. Among other factors include socio-cultural factors like cultural and traditional belief, inequality of gender/feminism.. Poor education and lack of exposure in the loan processes and banking knowledge also hinders them to move forward (Usman, 2008). Due to all these difficulties they have to fight against many problems which may hinder the sustenance of business and may also force them to stop their business activities in between. This aspect should also be resolved to enhance performance of rural women entrepreneurship development. (UN Women, 2012) observed that most rural women do not have the right to travel at their convenience as regards to the growth of their entrepreneurial activities, unless permitted by their spouse and other family members which go a long way to affect the sustenance of her entrepreneurial activities and development.

Various programs have been sponsored by either the national government or international agencies to improve the quality of life of the rural women as well as sustaining their entrepreneurial potentials. Most of such programs yield futile result. Such programs include the Better life for Rural Women (BLRW) of 1987 and the Family Economic Advancement Program (FEAP) of 1993. Failure of these programs was because the rural women for whom they were enunciated were not well targeted as such they were continuously hijacked by elites thereby frustrating the sustenance of the women purpose.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study was to find out the strategic modalities for sustaining entrepreneurship activities of rural women for economic development in Abia State, Nigeria.

Research Question

What are the possible strategic factors that can sustain entrepreneurship activities of rural women in Abia State?

Significance of the Study

The findings of this study will be of benefit to the following; women entrepreneurs, families and government. The findings of this study will assist rural women entrepreneurs in identifying different strategic modalities for sustaining of entrepreneurial activities available and affordable. Affordable in the sense that it might not be so much capital intensive yet very productive, adoptable and easy to manage. Due to the ever growing global market, a wide variety of entrepreneurial activities have become available even in the rural areas.

The findings will go a long way in helping the government have an insight on the need to expand women's access to finance, and also help the government to understand the need to prioritize domestic energy with particular focus on rural electrification which when

done will help to sustain the entrepreneurship interest of the women in those areas both in preservation of their goods and also fastening their domestic chores, like the use of gas cookers, blenders etc. to make work easier and faster and enable them face their entrepreneurial tasks. This information could be made possible by developing a manual, as well as organizing a conference or workshop, stating out the opportunities of women having access to capitals (loans) from banks as well as mechanism to address collateral requirements.

Methodology

Research Design

The design of this study was descriptive survey design. This was used because the study is describing and interpreting an existing conditions and ongoing processes.

Area of the Study

This study was carried out in Abia State. Abia State is in the south East geo-political zone of Nigeria. The state is composed of three senatorial zones and seventeen Local Government Areas. Abia state has a total female population of one million, five hundred and sixteen thousand four hundred and eight (1,516,408). People in the state are civil servants, public servants, farmers and artisans. (NPC 2008) projected population.

Population for the Study

The population for the study consists of all the rural women who are engaged in defined entrepreneurial activities from the three senatorial zones. This includes the married, unmarried, educated, uneducated (female adults), but has entrepreneurship as their only source of income. The sample areas were selected based on the level of entrepreneurial activities being carried out in those areas and the population of women being engaged solely on entrepreneurship.

Sampling and Sampling Techniques

The research was carried out using Multi-Stage Sampling Technique at the first stage, from the 3 senatorial zones namely Abia South with a total female population of (651,757), Abia North female population of (429,025) and Abia Central female population of (440,626). The three (3) senatorial zones of the state has a total of seventeen (17) local government areas (NPC 2008 projected population)

Second stage, out of the three (3) senatorial zones consisting of the seventeen (17) local government areas, two (2) Local Government Areas were randomly selected from each of the three (3) Senatorial zones given a total number of six (6) Local Government areas namely (1) Ohafia with total female population of 97,835. (2) Umunneochi total female population of 74,416 (3) Isialangwa South with total female population of 72,684 (4) Ikwuano total female population of 76,234 (5) Obingwa total female population of 90,835 (6) Ukwu East total female population of 131,413 of 2,398.

Third stage, four (4) autonomous communities were randomly selected from each of the selected local government areas giving a total of twenty four (24) autonomous communities with a total population of 2,398 women. (table 3.1)

Finally, from this population 2,398 women from the selected autonomous communities, the women who are engaged in a defined entrepreneurial activity of their own has a total population of 240 (table 3.1). The business activities were grouped as follows (1) services (Salon, business centres, tailoring etc) (2) Trading (food vendors, beer palor, shop owner etc). Agriculture (farming, fishery, poultry, piggery etc).

Instrument for Data Collection

A structured questionnaire was the main instrument used in collecting data for the study. Development of the questionnaire was guided by the stated research objectives. The questionnaire was categorized into two sub-sections. Section A of the questionnaire covered the demographic characteristics of the respondents, consisting of 8 items. Section B sought information on possible strategies of sustaining women entrepreneurial development with 9 items. The entire questionnaire comprised of a total number of 17 items.

Reliability of Instrument

The questionnaire items were subjected to trial testing using rural women entrepreneurs in Owerri Imo State. The subjects used for the trial testing did not take part in the study. The responses were analyzed to determine the degree of internal consistency of the questionnaire item using Cronbach Co-efficient Alpha with the reliability index of 0.5.

Method of Data Analysis

Different types of Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data collected for the study. Frequency tables were used to organize the data, and means were used to analyze the research question. The statistical technique used in analyzing the data was mean. Based on five [5] scale points namely 5,4,3,2,and 1 representing Strongly Agree [SA] =5, Agreed [A] =4, Undecided [U] =3, Disagree [D]=2, Strongly Disagree [SD]=1. A standard of 2.50 was taken as minimum acceptable value an item would score in order to be considered as important.

Research Question

What are the possible factors that can sustain entrepreneurship activities of rural women in Abia State?

Research question investigated on the ways of sustaining the entrepreneurship development of rural women in Abia State. Table 1.1 and Figure 1.1 provided answers to the research question under different items.

Table: Factors That Can Sustain rural Women Entrepreneurial Development.

Items	
provision of credit facilities and increase entrepreneurship education and training	4.13
government policies on women development	4.32
removal of discrimination against women	4.38
provision of support and assistance	4.27
provision of access to ICT	4.27
Removal of heavy taxes	4.25
legislation against sexual harassment	4.24
subsidy and improvement on energy and power	4.21

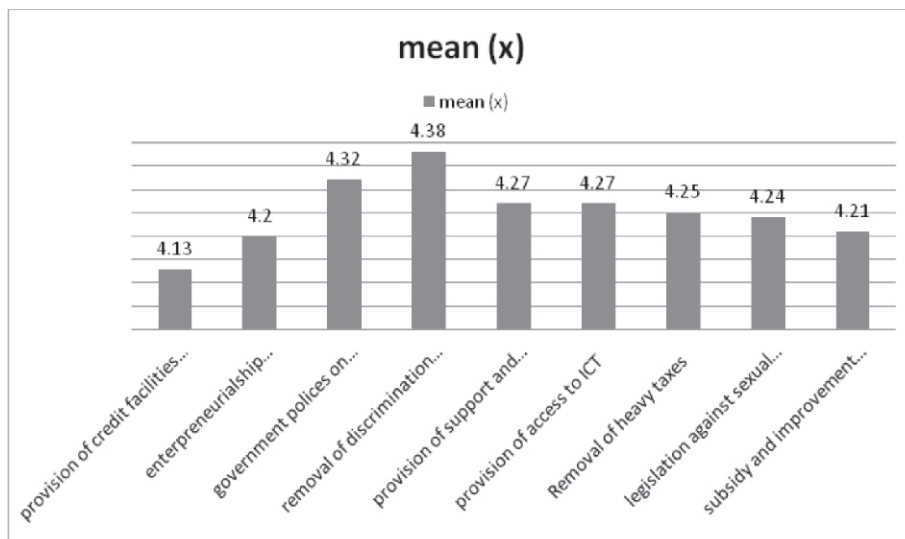


Figure 1.1 Factors That Can Sustain rural Women Entrepreneurial Development

Data presented in the figure above shows all the items (contents) on the factors that can sustain entrepreneurship development of rural women. This is shown by the mean scores of all the respondents which were quite above the acceptable mean score of 2.50. item No.4 on removal of discrimination against women had the highest mean score of 4.38.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of the study which is based on possible strategies of sustaining entrepreneurial development of the rural women, revealed that a greater sample of the respondents of the agreed that the entrepreneurship interest and development of rural women entrepreneurs would not only be improved but sustained through various means such as provision of credits and other incentives (4.13), provision of education and training (4.2), enunciation of better policies and programmes on gender issues (4.32),

removal and total abolition of all forms of discrimination, bias, and prejudice against female entrepreneurs (4.38), provision of various supports and assistance (4.27), provision of access to information and communication technology (4.27), removal of heavy taxes from women entrepreneurs (4.25), passing legislations against sexual harassment and abuse of female entrepreneurs by the opposite sex (4.24) and granting of subsidy and improvement on power and energy (4.21). This is a result of the mean scores of respondents on all factors being above the acceptable mean score of 2.50. The result demonstrates that the respondents recognized the importance of programmes of sustainability on the growth of entrepreneurship. This entails that without good and well-articulated programmes of sustainability, efforts to motivate and improve the entrepreneurial activities of rural women will not bear the expected fruits. This means that without such programmes enterprises may take off but are bound to collapse in no distant time. This thus agrees with Ebo (2011) which wrote that the problem of Nigerian economic development is not the articulation and enunciation of programmes aimed at the entrepreneurial development of rural women but the sustainability of such programmes. Ebo (2011) further illustrated that since the mid-1980s there has been increased commitment of government to entrepreneurship development through the establishment of the National Directorate of Employment (NDE), National Open Apprenticeship Scheme (NOAS), Small and Medium Enterprise Development Association of Nigeria (SMEDAN), SMEEIS etc. He decried that much of such programmes were short lived and never yielded the expected results.

Conclusion

The study utilized ex-post facto design using survey method of research. The group target was the rural women who are engaged in a defined entrepreneurial activity, the three senatorial zones of the state were represented, and the study adopted Multi-Stage Sampling Technique.

The study was carried out in stages, from the three senatorial zones of the state (Abia North, South and Central) to the seventeen (17) local government areas, which six (6) local government areas were randomly selected, two LGAS from each senatorial zones, then to the randomly selected twenty (24) autonomous communities. The state has a total female population one million five hundred and twelve thousand four hundred and eight (1,512,408) while the randomly selected local government areas has a total female population of two thousand three hundred and ninety eight (2,398) out of this population only two hundred and forty (240) women are engaged in a defined entrepreneurial activity. The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire which was based on the purpose of the study. Data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics.

Findings of the Study

Discrimination against women has the highest mean as a big problem that if handled well will help to be a good strategy in sustaining entrepreneurship development of women generally. As a matter of fact the issue of gender discrimination should be tackled at all levels from the family which is the grassroot and the smallest unit to the global height for

equal rights and opportunities to be given to enable all to achieve their desire and protect their different areas of interest in life, mostly in entrepreneurship.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. The rural women go for those businesses that do not require heavy financial investment and therefore do not have the need to employ much manpower. It is recommended that training and incentives be given to the women so that they would be able to sustain and increase the scope of their businesses and create more jobs for the people.
2. Most of the rural women are found in informal sectors of the economy with very minimal capital requirements. It is recommended that the government grants finance, credits and other forms of financial incentives to the farmers to enable them sustain and enlarge the businesses and produce more.

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