

Bridging the Gap of Economic Development Through Women Entrepreneurship in Bayelsa State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT This study investigates the influence of women entrepreneurship on economic development. The study adopts a survey design. Descriptive as well as inferential statistical tools were used. A structured questionnaire was used to elicit data. The population of the study comprises 250 businesses that are owned, managed and controlled by women. The businesses selected are firms who are registered with the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC). The population was infinite and not too large and therefore was adopted as the sample size. The research instrument was validated through experts' opinion and all errors were criticized and corrected. The consistency of the instrument was confirmed through test-retest method. The Pearson product moment correlation coefficient was used and the (SPSS) software was used to test the hypothesis. The findings revealed that women education, women access to finance and women access to information technology has a positive and strong relationship with economic development. Based on the findings, the paper recommends that a gender friendly and equal opportunity driven business environment should be created for women. It also suggests that women entrepreneurs should be given access to education, finance and information technology. Therefore, the study concludes that there is a strong positive relationship between women entrepreneurship and economic development.

Keywords: entrepreneurship, economic development, women education, access to finance, information technology

Introduction

Entrepreneurship, which is a key variable for economic growth and development, should be overlooked. Despite the important role that entrepreneurship plays in national development, the contributions of women entrepreneurs have been devalued (Ayogu and Agu, 2015; Love, Oladele, Oluwa Funmilayo, Ayo and Patrick, 2015; Naude, 2013; Tersoo, 2013). This seems to be the reason why most developing economies are not strategically utilising their overall human resource potentials. The paper contends that women have been neglected, despite their contributions towards national growth and development. Tersoo (2013) notes that the traditional economy of most developing nations were driven by women who through agricultural programmes and practices produced food as a means of improving the national economy. Tersoo also notes that women were involved in marketing their farm produce since most of them move from place to place to sell their goods. Several studies also reveal that women in the traditional societies were involved in other industrial activities such as weaving, spinning, and hawking while men were basically known for hunting and family protection (Tersoo, 2013; Kpelao, 2009; Fazabhoy, 2014). Although women make contribution to the growth of the economy, they are not empow-

ered to participate fully in nation building. They seem to be limited to child-rearing and home management activities.

Nigeria is highly populated and the country has an abundance of natural resources. Yet, it is described as one of the poorest nations in the world. The country is also known as the largest oil producer in Africa. It is endowed with human and non-human resources such as land, water, oil, gas, mineral and other natural resources that can stimulate economic development (Sajuyigbe and Fadeyibi, 2017). The availability of these resources have not helped Nigeria to grow above the world noted poverty level. The Nigerian economy and leadership is characterized by inefficiency and ineffectiveness, mismanagement, corruption, poverty, unemployment, insecurity and insurgency, lack of stewardship and accountability, most especially high level abuse of human rights. Several studies noted that the increase in poverty in the country is as a result of the unharnessed human potentials and the neglect of female entrepreneurs who constitute a large portion of the population (Brusha and Cooper, 2012; Abimbola, 2011; Alese, 2013; Amuchie and Asotibe, 2015). The women population in Nigeria is dramatically increasing but a male-dominated culture does not encourage their participation in nation building economic activities. Fadeyibi et al. (2017) opine that in Nigeria women constitute more than 50% of the total population; and although they represent a substantial part of the labour force, they are still being marginalized. Female entrepreneurs have not been offered the opportunity to exploit their talents and potentials because they are discriminated by a culture created by, and for men. Women entrepreneurs do not also enjoy the support from the government to showcase their potentials. The inequality between men and women in government both in elective and non-elective offices, is very high. In the private sector, women seem to participate and contribute more due to their enterprising behaviour in small and medium scale businesses. Several studies affirm that women drive the economy more than their men counterpart because a large number of the small and medium scale businesses are owned and managed by them (Najla, 2015; Cartel and Cannon, 2007; Adis, Welter, Smallborne and Isakova, 2005). This calls for the need to liberalize women entrepreneurs by offering them training programmes that will enhance their economic awareness (Robertson, 1987). Fadeyibi et al. (2017) opine that the poor representation of women in the economy and politics implies that women in Nigeria are suffering from gender bias, discrimination and stereotype. Other critical challenges faced by female entrepreneurs includes high educational inequality, family dependence, lack of access to finance, and lack of access to managed and control property. The neglect of women entrepreneurship, to a large extent, has slowed down economic growth and development (Tersoo, 2013). To achieve the sustainable development goals, women entrepreneurs need to be stimulated and encouraged to participate in new business ventures. Therefore, this study examines women entrepreneurship and economic development.

Objectives of the study

The main objective of this study is to examine the role of women entrepreneurship on economic development in Bayelsa State, Nigeria. Other specific objectives are:

1. To examine the relationship between women education and economic development.
2. To determine the relationship between women access to finance and economic development.
3. To ascertain the relationship between women access to information technology and economic development.

Research Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were stated to guide this study:

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between women education and economic development

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between women access to finance and economic development.

H₀₃: There is no significant relationship between women access to information technology and economic development.

Research Questions

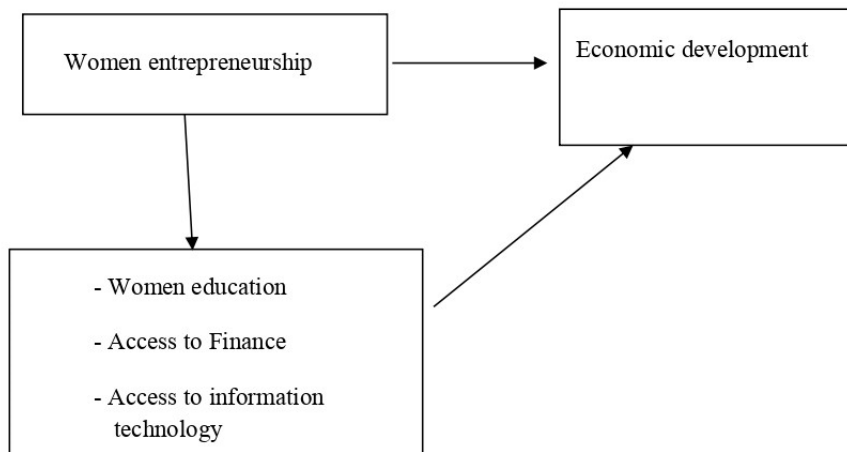
The following research questions were formulated:

1. To what extent does women education relate to economic development?
2. To what extent does women access to finance relates to economic development?
3. How does women access to information technology influence economic development?

Conceptual Framework

A critical study and analysis of the entrepreneurship literature indicate that there is a gap between men and women participation in business. The focal point of this study is on women entrepreneurship and economic development. Women entrepreneurship as the independent variable has been neglected for several decades, despite the fact that women in business also make significant contributions to economic development. Thus, economic development is the dependent variable. Most studies have advocated the structural parameters for economic development. However, this study is to investigate the influence of women entrepreneurship on economic development.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework



Source: Survey (2019)

Literature Review

Entrepreneurship is regarded as the catalyst that stimulates economic growth and development in both developing and developed economies. Several studies noted that entrepreneurial development is the most effective economic activity to end poverty. It is the process of maximizing wealth creation and distribution in every nation (Iyiola & Azuh, 2014; Tzeremes & Halkos, 2008; Kosempel, 2011). The importance of entrepreneurship in economic development has been largely discussed by scholars all over the world, but a clear distinction has not been made between men and women entrepreneurial tendencies and potentials regarding who contribute more to the economy. There is an ongoing debate about men and women entrepreneurs as drivers of the global economy (Iyiola et al., 2014; Tersoo, 2013; Smith & Lock, 2015; Fazaibhoy, 2015; Love et al., 2015; Paul, 2013). However, there is no agreement or consensus on whether men in business drive the economy more than women entrepreneurs. These very same authors have argued that women entrepreneurs are disadvantaged, and that they are dominated by their men counterparts. Their findings show that the African culture supports the men more than the women. They also show discrimination, domination and stereotype against women entrepreneurs. The culture devalues women participation in business and this had contributed to slow economic development. Women mostly influence the micro-economic variables of the economy in Nigeria.

World Bank (2013) notes that women entrepreneurs in small and medium scale enterprises (SMEs) are the drivers of economic development. Several authors also argue that both men and women have the potentials to facilitate economic development, but the factors count against the success of women entrepreneurs (Abimbola, 2011; Akpodono, 2016; Botha, Nieman & Yan, 2008). It was also argued that entrepreneurship has no respect for sex, colour, height, individuals, race or culture. This suggests that women entrepreneurs in most nations, like their male counterparts, can play a role in economic development (Fadeyibi et al., 2017; Akpodono, 2016). Despite the fact that women also struggle to balance work and family, their businesses seem to grow faster than the business owned and control by men (Brusha & Coper, 2012). Empirical evidence also demonstrate that female entrepreneurs contribute significantly to economic development in terms of wealth creation, poverty alleviation, job creation and economic freedom. (Kalpana, 2015; Nwoye, 2007; Cartel & Canno, 2007; Curli, 2002; Fazalbho, 2014). This is a clear indication that women entrepreneurial potentials are able to stimulate development in all economies. The private and public sectors should therefore empower and encourage women's superlative performance. However, paddling through the lens of entrepreneurial literature affirmed that women entrepreneurs face greater challenges than their male counterparts. The issues of gender inequality, discrimination, domination and stereotype are threats to economic development. In most parts of Nigeria, women entrepreneurs suffer sexual harassment and domestic violence. It gives women a psychological block about determining business start-ups and making in-roads to starting new ventures. Female entrepreneurs in most developing nations face the challenges shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Challenges of women entrepreneurs

Area of Challenge	Challenges
Access to finance	Condition attached to credit facility by micro finances and other lending institutions.
Access to market	Harassments in registering and operating business. Megatime attitudes of society towards products/services
Access to training	Poor financial management, lack of entrepreneurial, managerial and marketing skills.
Access to technology	Lack of accessibility to information and knowledge. Bias against women's involvement in technological education.
Access to policy making	The tax levied on the business. Gender inequalities and cultural influences.

Source: Fadeyibi & Sajuigbe (2017)

Theoretical Framework

Economists have contributed immensely towards entrepreneurial development in relation to sustainable economic growth and development. Schumpeter (1950) defined an entrepreneur as the coordinator of production and agent of change. However, scholars who share this view of entrepreneurship do not consider entrepreneurship as an important tool for earlier stages of economic development, where the economic indicators are driven by competition and knowledge (Nande, 2013). This study is anchored on the psychological entrepreneurship theory. The psychological entrepreneurship theory emphasizes the individual personal characteristic that defines entrepreneurial capabilities and potentials. The personality traits and the need for achievement stimulate entrepreneurial tendencies among people. The motivation to start new ventures or business is driven by the need for achievement theory of motivation. McClelland (1961) explained that human beings have a need to succeed, accomplish, excel or achieve. An entrepreneur whether male or female is driven by psychological motives. Over the past decades, the competitive tendencies in the market place and its environment have made women entrepreneurs to compete actively. The problems and challenges they face in business and work-life are discouraging.

Women entrepreneurship and economic development nexus

A woman who initiates, develops and control business and other economic activities to maximize wealth is known as woman entrepreneur. Women entrepreneurship is the process in which women are creating incremental wealth through economic and commercial activities. These economic activities range from buying, selling, food production, mining and artisan. The national bureau of statistics affirmed that women contribute 90% of food production and 70% of agricultural work in Nigerian economy (NBS, 2016). The Bayelsa state ministry of commerce also noted that 85% of the traders who venture into smaller and medium scale enterprises are women. Brush and Cooper (2012) support this argument and affirm that women-owned businesses are one of the fastest growing enterprises in the world. World Bank (2013)

also supported the notion that women performed 66% of the global economy and produced 50% of the food globally. Kalpna (2016) opines that women contribute to the economy in different ways by being employed in different sectors. Vassenberg (2013) argues that women have the capacity to turn a poverty-stricken nation into a prosperity-driven economy by way of their entrepreneurial ventures.

The term economic development in this context means improving the standard of living and quality of life in a nation. Economic development has suffered definitional set-back; therefore this paper limits its meaning to job creation, wealth creation, poverty alleviation and improvement of the quality of life. These macro-economic objectives that need the attention of men and women, as well as the private and public sectors (Table 2). Thus this study through critical review of the literature notes that women extensively contribute to the creation of jobs and wealth in the economy. Since women contribute more on food production and agricultural work, it is arguable to affirm that women also extensively contribute to the development of the economy.

Table 2: Gender Stratification with the Nigeria Economy

Economic indices	Men	Women
Below poverty level	35%	65%
Federal civil service	76%	24%
property disposable will	95%	5%
Informal sector	13%	87%
Medical doctors	76%	24%
Formal sector	89%	11%
Land ownership	90%	9010%
Agricultural work	30%	70%
Food production	10%	90%

Source: Faideyib and Sajuyigbe (2017)

In Bayelsa State, the majority of citizens are civil servants. They depend on the informal sector, agricultural work and food production. These economic indicators are basically driven by women entrepreneurs, hence women entrepreneurship is linked to economic development.

Methodology

The research design adopted in this study is a survey. This is relevant because it enables the researcher to assess the thoughts, opinions and feelings of the study participants through a structured questionnaire. A structured questionnaire was designed carefully to elicit data. The population of the study comprises 250 business firms owned, manage and control by women and have formally registered with the Corporate Affairs Commission. Since the population was not too large, the total population was adopted as the sample size. Validity of the instrument was achieved through expert opinion and was criticized and corrected. The consistency of the instrument

was confirmed through test-retest method. The Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used and the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software was also used to test the hypothesized statements.

Findings

Correlations

		Women Educa- tion	Economic Develop- ment
Women Education	Pearson Correlation	1	.958**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	250	250
Economic Development	Pearson Correlation	.958**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	250	250

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Correlations

		Women Access to Finance	Economic Develop- ment
Women Access to Finance	Pearson Correlation	1	.939**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	250	250
Economic Development	Pearson Correlation	.939**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	250	250

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Correlations			
		Women Access to Information Tech- nology	Economic Devel- opment
Women Access to Information Tech- nology	Pearson Correla- tion Sig. (2-tailed)	1	.938**
	N	250	250
Economic Develop- ment	Pearson Correla- tion Sig. (2-tailed)	.938**	1
	N	250	250

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Discussion of Findings

Economic development is a critical concern among national governments and other stakeholders. A productive nation is an indication of effective and efficient utilization of the human and non-human resources (Gries and Naude, 2010). Most developing economies have not effectively used their human resources, therefore they do not have the capacity to transform their material resources. For instance, Nigeria the most populated in the African sub-region has an abundance of resources but does not have the requisite technical know-how to transform its material resources (Tersoo, 2013, Singh et al., 2010; Nwoye, 2007, Sajuyigbe et al., 2017; Iyiola et al., 2014). Economic development is characterized most especially by an effective human capital, job creation, reduction of poverty, improved standard of living, quality of life, wealth creation and increasing national independence. Several studies argue that Nigeria has not achieved the best of its economic prosperity because of corruption, mismanagement and gender inequality (Ayogu et al., 2015; Botha, Nieman and Van, 2008; Abosede and Onkoyan, 2013; Abimbola, 2011; Kobeisisi, 2010; Kryova, 2016; Love et al., 2015). Kryova (2016) affirmed that corruption and gender inequality are major challenges to national economic development. However, this study examined the relationship between women entrepreneurship and economic development. The findings revealed that a strong relationship exist between women enterprise initiative and economic development. The findings of this study were also confirmed by several studies that have made similar assertions (Mohan et al, 2013; Paul, 2013; Malyadro, 2014; Adepelumi, 2011; Ahkpodomo, 2019; Ali and Ali, 2013; Brush and Cooper, 2012).

It was revealed that female entrepreneurs contribute extensively to economic growth and development. Most studies asserted that lack of education and training among women entrepreneurs is responsible to their failure in business. Women entrepreneurs who are educated seem to be successful in managing their business ventures (Garba, 2011; Fazalbhoy, 2014; Kalpana, 2016; and Curli, 2002). To confirm these assertions, this study examined the relationship between women education and economic development. It was revealed that women education has a strong positive relationship with economic development. The correlation is significant at the 0.01

level (2-tailed) with $r=.958$. Empirical evidence also support this finding as several studies note that women education is critical to economic development (Estrin and Mickiewicz, 2011; Curli, 2002; Gries et al, 2011; Tersoo, 2013; Malyadro, 2014; Love et al., 2015; Kalpana, 2016).

This study further noted that a stumbling block or challenge of women entrepreneurship is their inability to access financial resources. The test of hypothesis (H_{02}) indicated a strong positive relationship between women access to finance and economic development. The correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed) with $r=.939$ and the null hypothesis which says there is no relationship between women access to finance and economic development was rejected and the alternative which says that there is a strong relationship was accepted. Most empirical evidence in the women entrepreneurial development literature supports this finding (Tersoo, 2013; Kosempel, 2004; Kobeisis, 2010; Iyiola et al, 2014; Kalpana, 2016; Garga and Bagga, 2009). Empirical and conceptual review also revealed that women access to information technology relates to economic development. This assertion was confirmed with the test of hypothesis. The correlation indicated $r=.938$. It showed that a strong positive relationship exist between women access to information and economic development.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

- i. That a gender friendly and equal opportunity driven business environment should be encouraged by all stakeholders.
- ii. That women entrepreneur should be offered the opportunity to be educated through effective training and retraining programs to enable women compete in the market place to drive economic prosperity.
- iii. That both government and private individuals should empower women with business start-up grants or accessible loans to encourage them to participate in commercial activities.
- iv. That women access to information technology is a key to their effective performance, therefore government should create a business climate where women entrepreneurs could easily access information to facilitate their business success.
- v. That government should make prohibitions and laws in relation to sexual harassment and violence against women as a means of encouraging them to participate in business development and to facilitate women operational effectiveness in the business environment.

Conclusion

Women entrepreneurship is the process in which women create incremental wealth. Women participation in business is a catalyst for economic development. Economic development involves those economic activities that can lead to increasing job op-

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portunities, poverty reduction, wealth creation and improved standard of living, as well as enhanced quality of life. Therefore, based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that women entrepreneurship is strongly related to economic development. Women education, access to finance and access to information are positively related to economic education.

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