

## Women and Entrepreneurship: A Look at Bayelsa State, Nigeria

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**ABSTRACT** Over the past three decades or so, a growing body of literature acknowledges the relevance of entrepreneurial activities in terms stimulating economic growth. The evidence shows that financial gains have been experienced on personal, family, community, state and national levels. This paper explores the conceptual foundations that give contextual support to the big ideas that are associated with having an entrepreneurial spirit and contributing to economic growth. It is part of a much wider research investigation that examines the impact of women entrepreneurial activities on economic development in Bayelsa State, Nigeria, hence the focus on gender and development in this paper. The fallout of gender inequality is a variety of needs not just for women and girls, but for the entire family unit. These needs are especially acute when natural and man-made crises arise. Equally so during times of crisis, is the need for entrepreneurial activities among women whose many roles, especially as primary caretakers, are crucial in the maintenance of a safe, healthy and meaningful life. Against this backdrop, a discussion of concepts such as change, safety, leadership, gender inequality, entrepreneurship, social, economic and sustainable development and self-actualisation will form the main content for the paper. This forerunner paper concludes with the assertion that an assortment of factors and issues should be given serious consideration if success is to be realized from women and entrepreneurship in Bayelsa State, Nigeria.

*Keywords:* entrepreneurship, gender inequality, change, economic development, leadership

### Introduction

Particularly since the 1990s, the body of literature on entrepreneurial activities has been expanding. Before the close of that decade and beyond, the literature had been giving increased attention to the relationship between entrepreneurship and economic growth, as shown by researchers' reports on their findings from a number of empirical studies (Edobor, 2018; Fritsch, 2013; Acs et al, 2008; Agarwal et al, 2007; Ilmakunnas and Kanninen, 2001; Holcombe, 1998; Klepper, 1997). Clearly, there is no lack of evidence concerning how entrepreneurship can contribute to economic growth. Yet, some gaps in knowledge were noted for Savrul (2017, p.320) observed that the then studies focused on firm and industry level, rather than country level. To fill this gap, Savrul investigated "the impact of entrepreneurial activities on economic growth at

country level”. The study for which this paper is a precursor, takes the entrepreneurship and economic growth theme to another level by focusing on state level - Bayelsa State, Nigeria – with emphasis on how women entrepreneurs make meaningful contributions to Bayelsa’s economy. This paper will not report on that study, but will instead explore the conceptual foundations that give contextual support to the big ideas that are associated with having an entrepreneurial spirit and contributing to economic growth.

Research work carried out by Murphy et al (2006), acknowledges that the rise in the entrepreneurship field has much relevance in academic as well as practical settings. Their work offers “a lens for scholars as well as practitioners to interpret and explain their own entrepreneurial activity or research and formulate new questions”. This paper proposes a similar intention by examining the theoretical frameworks that aid understanding and shed conceptual light on various kinds of entrepreneurial activities.

The focus on gender and development is appropriate not least because *Gender Equality* is the 5<sup>th</sup> Millennium Goal, but more because of the realities and unreasonableness that prevail in today’s societies with reference to gender inequality (Diprete and Buchanan, 2013; Diprete and Buchanan, 2013; Duvvury et al, 2012; Ridgeway, 2011). This paper is part of a much wider research investigation that examines the impact of women entrepreneurial activities on economic development in Bayelsa State, Nigeria. The fallout of gender inequality is a variety of needs not just for women and girls, but for the entire family unit. These needs are especially acute when natural and man-made crises arise. Equally so during times of crisis, is the need for entrepreneurial activities among women whose many roles, especially as primary caretakers, are crucial in the maintenance of a safe, healthy and meaningful life. The paper will therefore explore the following concepts, which have a direct connection to the topic under discussion: change, safety, leadership, gender inequality, entrepreneurship, social, economic and sustainable development and self-actualisation. The paper concludes with the assertion that an assortment of factors and issues should be given serious consideration if success is to be realised from women and entrepreneurship in Bayelsa State, Nigeria.

## **Methodology**

The paper follows a conceptual approach. This method was specifically chosen because the purpose of this paper is to embark on an explanation of the notions and thoughts that underpin the discussion on the entrepreneurial experience on different levels and in different contexts. It is these very ideas that have assumed the boundaries that have framed the current status that entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship education have acquired. They lay the foundation for future conceptualisation, future research and hands-on entrepreneurial activities. It is the interrelationship of components of the topic under discussion (entrepreneurship) that helps to frame the discussion. This paper’s position falls into Bhat’s (2019) explanation of conceptual research: “a methodology wherein research is conducted by observing and analysing already present information on a given topic”. Bhat takes care to point out that this kind of research does not include conducting practical experiments, but is absorbed in ideas and abstractions. Engagement with these constructs can help researchers to look at existing theories in a new light.

Conceptual research sits in the qualitative camp. For this reason, a common limitation of this method is the subjective nature of qualitative research, which is an

interpretive approach that is concerned with multiple perspectives (Creswell, 2014; Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). Interestingly, it is this very interpretive feature that makes allowance for researchers to gain deeper and wider understandings of a range of issues, including human experience (Ritchie et al, 2013; Chalhoub-Deville and Deville, 2008). This suggests that it is advantageous to use the conceptual method for this paper since entrepreneurship is tied human experiences and their related issues.

### Conceptualising the 'Big Ideas'

The rest of the paper explores selected concepts that are considered as relevant foundation stones that are pivotal in understanding and buttressing the discussion on women and entrepreneurship in Bayelsa State, Nigeria. They are: entrepreneurship, change, safety, leadership, gender inequality, social, economic and sustainable development and self-actualisation.

#### *Entrepreneurship*

Creativity, opportunity, entrepreneurs, innovation, risks, success, profit and loss, business and independence are some of the words that immediately come to mind when at the mention of the word entrepreneurship. Two samples, innovation and risk, are selected as examples to show how each is linked to entrepreneurship: (1) Researchers in the business and management field see *innovation* as a key attribute of entrepreneurship (Mbhele, 2012, p.95) since it involves finding new and better ways of doing things (Rwigema and Venter, 2005, p.113); and (2) The element of *risk* is viewed as a core aspect of entrepreneurial projects (Filion, 2011, p.43). A popular expression that often accompanies these words in the context used is: *to have an entrepreneurial spirit*. But what really is an entrepreneurial spirit? How can one get it? Why should it be cultivated? The answers to these questions, however framed by whomever, are tied to what entrepreneurship entails.

Entrepreneurship is not an easy concept to explain, since it is characterised by a complex set of activities “with technical, human, managerial and entrepreneurial characteristics, the performance of which requires a diverse set of skills” (Filion, 2011, p.41). Yet, it can be understood by examining these very activities in detail, in the environments and circumstances within which they are outplayed. This is evident in the explanation that Insights Success (2019) gives for what is the entrepreneurial spirit: “characterized by innovation and risk taking and is an essential part of a nation’s ability to succeed in constantly changing and increasingly competitive global market place”. Another explanation views entrepreneurship as an activity that is connected to the discovery, appraisal and abuse of opportunities. This is with a view to proposing “new goods and services, ways of organising, markets, processes and raw materials through organising efforts” (Mbhele, 2012, p.94). It should be noted that whatever is proposed is new and had not existed until that time (Mbhele, 2012; Shane & Venkataraman, 2000).

It is within the foregoing rationalizations that the need for women’s involvement in entrepreneurial activities is obvious since it takes the participative contribution of all citizens to effect nation-building. The women in Bayelsa State, who utilize their entrepreneurial spirit to boost the Bayelsa economy, are ultimately helping the entire country, Nigeria, to compete in the global market. So Bayelsan women, as entrepreneurs, can identify and develop particular niches with a view to generating “surpluses and profits which can then be reinvested to achieve further development” (Filion,

2011, p.45). In so doing, it is possible for them to realise their dreams and aspirations, which can bring about positive changes in their lives.

### *Change*

The Greek philosopher Heraclitus' famous quote *change is the only constant in life*, is a stark reminder that change is inevitable. Another famous quote from Nelson Mandela - *Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world* – signals that for change to take place on a global level, both male and female should benefit from a sound education. For this to be fully realised, curriculum change is necessary. It is this kind of change that can bring about improvement in the quality of teacher professionalism, education and its outcomes (MCCulloch, 2005; Hopmann, 2003). In fact, it is generally accepted notion among educators that curriculum reform is “a key instrument of educational change” (Qoyyimah, 2018, p.571). But curriculum changes bring with them policy changes as well; and with the attention that governments around the world are giving to entrepreneurship, policy formulation and implementation are inevitable requirements. Little wonder that Hung et al (2017) emphasises that we are living in an era of connectivity and “societal and global *transformations* that are unfolding at an unprecedented pace”.

Universities too are carrying out reforms to accommodate these rapid changes. As the number of entrepreneurs increases and universities offer courses in entrepreneurship at undergraduate and post graduate levels, Narayan (2018) opines the notion of problem identification has become “pivotal in any entrepreneurial journey”. But this belief goes beyond problem identification. It is extended to view entrepreneurs as persistent “solution finders” and “solution providers”. Another view that Narayan (2018) offers is that entrepreneurs are proactive rather than routine job seekers. They actively seek to make changes and therefore have become central to traders and business personnel because of the constant demand to supply goods and services. The rapid advancement in Information Technology (IT) inspires entrepreneur's proactivity and passion for change. Narayan contends that the world owes “an unpayable debt to such innovators and thinkers”.

Among this group of innovators and thinkers, is a respectable number of women entrepreneurs, who also engage in business and system-changing activities (Brush and Cooper, 2012; Estrin and Mickiewicz, 2011). Therefore, changes to reflect a gender balance in entrepreneurship education are not only needed in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), but also at all levels of education. This suggests that education systems too must change how they operate (Watanabe-Crockett, 2018); and this further highlights that the link between entrepreneurship and change is quite clear.

### *Safety*

Safety is a big and important concept because it is everyone's concern. In the spirit of this paper, safety means “protection from physical hazards” (Guidotti, 2014). For entrepreneurs, who are at the forefront of change in the business world, being safety conscious is very desirable. Entrepreneurs' businesses thrive efficiently, minimize loss of best workers and are around for a reasonable length of time when owners create a safe and healthy environment for their workers. When safety is compromised, more people other than those in the work environment suffer. Guidotti (2014) explains it this way:

When an accident happens, production slows down and the worker usually cannot work, at least for a while. After a serious accident or death, the

worker's family can be in danger because of loss of income and support. When an accident happens, production slows down and the worker usually cannot work, at least for a while. After a serious accident or death, the worker's family can be in danger because of loss of income and support.

A variety of hazards such as fire, equipment and electricity, noise, heat, walking spaces and confined spaces, among others, can be found in workplaces. In the interest of space, the paper focuses on heat since Nigeria has a tropical climate with an average temperature of approximately 27.6 °C. It employs the International Commission on Occupational Health (ICOH) useful recommendations for workers to help them protect themselves from life-threatening heat:

- Allow and even encourage workers to slow down and to take rest periods more often. In the end, they will get as much work done as before.
- Provide clean water (just plain water is best) where workers can drink whenever they want and how much they need. Encourage them to drink a lot of water.
- Do not give workers salt tablets. It is unnecessary and can make people sick to their stomach.
- Provide shade in a safe place so that workers can cool down, especially during rest periods and if they feel sick, dizzy, or weak, or get a headache. This is called heat exhaustion. Workers who feel dizzy also sometimes faint but they should come around right away when they lie down. If the person does not wake up or if he vomits or acts confused, the condition is more serious, as in the next point.
- Educate supervisors that heat stress can kill people. A worker who vomits, acts confused, says he is not feeling hot or thirsty, gets a headache, has a convulsion, or loses consciousness and does not recover when they lie down is probably on his way to death from what is called heat stroke and needs emergency treatment and cooling down right away (Guidotti, 2014).

Guidotti describes heat as one of the most common and dangerous safety hazards. Overheating can even be fatal. It is therefore imperative for entrepreneurs to familiarize themselves with the instructions given by ICOH if they are to become and remain effective entrepreneurs.

### *Leadership*

There are different types of leadership styles. This paper is specifically concerned with one style - *entrepreneurial leadership*. Leadership approaches are placed under three categories – (1) Great Man Theory; (2) Traditional Leadership Theories; and (3) New Leadership Theories (Aksel, 2008, p. 34). Entrepreneurial leadership dwells under the third category. Let me hasten to add that entrepreneurial leadership is not equivalent to entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurs busy themselves with being creative and innovative with a view to pioneering new initiatives. By contrast, entrepreneurial leaders are looking for opportunities outside of their new ventures. They are seen as:

... individuals who, through an understanding of themselves and the contexts in which they work, act on and shape opportunities that create value for their organizations, their stakeholders, and the wider society. Entrepreneurial leaders are driven by their desire to consider how to simultaneously create social, environmental, and economic opportunities (Greenberg et al, 2011, p.2).

The above conceptualization is supported and extended by Esmer and Dayi (2018) who note that self-knowledge and knowledge of their environment, allow entrepreneurial leaders to discover new opportunities and create “value for businesses, stakeholders and society”. Esmer and Dayi further note that the main motivation of these leaders is their desire to create social, environmental and economic opportunities. In today’s world, business ventures are on the rise; and so is the need for both men and women to be entrepreneurial leaders if countries are to benefit from global market activities.

### *Gender Inequality*

The Tavistock Institute (2014) explains gender equality as all women and men having equal opportunities. This implies that gender inequality means that all women and men do not have equal opportunities. Natsvlshvili (2017) contends that such gender disparities have a negative impact on women, put constraints on their entrepreneurial activities and stifle economic growth.

Among the many reasons given why women are disadvantaged with regard to have equal opportunities for gaining employment and starting their own businesses is *culture orientation*. This holds true in Bayelsa State, Nigeria, where cultural traditions are greatly valued and expectations of women’s roles as mothers and care-takers of the family are clearly understood (Idang, 2015, pp.108 & 109). This is undoubtedly beneficial. However, Idang asserts that negative dimensions, including gender inequality should be “dropped in order to promote a more progressive and dynamic society” (p.98), which encourages social, economic and sustainable development.

### *Social, Economic and Sustainable Development*

The space that this paper allows is totally inadequate to fully delve into concepts as huge and complex as social, economic and sustainable development. However, these concepts are directly related to entrepreneurial activities. This subsection will therefore briefly highlight their explicit involvement in entrepreneurial activities and how each is interconnected. Zahra and Wright (2015) explain how entrepreneurship influences how communities operate, how societies develop and how humanity survives and progresses. They contend that entrepreneurs’ work deal with issues related to food, water shortages, environmental pollution, decay and sustainability via innovative and affordable technologies. These activities have the potential to engender economic growth and development. Kanu and Atimi-Yousuo (2018, p.56) identify Nigeria, where entrepreneurial activities are “extremely huge”, as an example of how this sector can inspire economic growth; and when entrepreneurs use natural resources effectively, sustainable development is made possible.

### *Self-actualisation*

Maslow's theory of self-actualisation is linked to a hierarchy of other needs. Self-actualisation is the need to pursue and fulfill one's unique potentials. It is positioned at the top of physiological, safety, love and belongingness and esteem needs (Vinney, 2018). D'Souza (2018) offers this explanation for self-actualisation: "... it simply means the realization of one's full potential. Self-actualization is synonymous with the terms self-realization, self-reflection, or self-exploration". This explanation suggests a degree of creativity. Runco's (2014) position on creativity bears this out for he sees a link between creativity, invention, innovation, imagination, and adaptability, although they are not the same. Galib (2018, p.28) sees a direct relationship between these features and entrepreneurship. Galib also notes that entrepreneurs demonstrate these traits in designing and directing sustainable change. A benefit of self-actualization is gaining the ability to understand internal values and characteristics. This understanding helps entrepreneurs to empower themselves to link their personal values to real-life situations and being able to deal with the problems that arise.

### **Conclusion**

This paper is part of a broader study that investigates how women entrepreneurs can make meaningful contribution to economic growth and development in Bayelsa State, Nigeria. It takes care to point out that this paper's focus is not on the broader study, but rather the conceptual foundations that provide a context for the discussion on entrepreneurship and its related activities. Entrepreneurship, change, safety, leadership, gender inequality, social, economic and sustainable development and self-actualisation are the concepts that are considered. The literature shows that gender disparities do have negative effects on women's entrepreneurial activities. These very constraints impede economic growth, hence the contention that women's full involvement in entrepreneurial activities will prevent the stagnation and/or retardation of economic progress. The paper therefore asserts that if women's involvement in entrepreneurship is to bring improvement to Bayelsa State, Nigeria, there is need for the appropriate authorities to give focused attention to all the situations and factors that can realise social, economic and sustainable development.

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