

GENDER ISSUES IN ENTREPRENEURIAL DEVELOPMENT IN BENUE STATE (NIGERIA) AND COUNSELING IMPLICATIONS

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Abstract. This paper investigates the impact of counselling on gender issues in entrepreneurial development in Benue State (Nigeria). Feminine or women constitute about 50 % of the population in Nigeria, and they make up 45% of the 70% unemployed population. In Benue State, there is low industrial and entrepreneurial skills development, so poverty and under-employment of the feminine gender is endemic. Hence, gender issues as relates to ‘the forgotten 50% of the world’s population’ or as the forgotten factor in economic development was studied using a random sample of fifty working class women. The study examines how this problem can be addressed through counselling. The descriptive survey design was used with one main research question guiding the study. The data was analysed using percentages. The results of the study revealed that forty (80%) of the respondents with entrepreneurship development were influenced through education and counseling.

Change in attitude of women as a result of education and their role in national development was investigated, and recommendations made on how to help women to fulfil their role by bridging the gender gap.

Keywords: counseling, gender, entrepreneur, development, entrepreneurship skills

Introduction

Gender issues as it relates to the fifty percent of the world's population is of concern in the entrepreneurial development. According to Orhungur et al. (2003) gender is the expectation a society has formed about someone simply because the person is a woman or man. The population census in Nigeria reveals that women make up about fifty percent of the 140 million people (Mang, 2001). These women constitute about 45% of the 70% unemployed population (Mundi, 2000). So the women play a key role in entrepreneurship for national development. In most of the developing world, women form the bed rock of the society because of their entrepreneurship. However, they are always at the receiving end of negative impact of any distressed economy being mothers as some of them have fatherless children as widows or single parents. Hence, they are saddled with the sole responsibility of bringing up these children. No wonder the women are adequately supported as single parents, widows or divorcees in the developed countries like Britain. But in Nigeria, and especially in Benue State, some married women still shoulder the responsibility of managing their homes acting as a support to their husband's success as the saying goes "that behind every successful man is a good woman". So, gender issues in entrepreneurial development needs investigation in view of the crucial role of women in the society.

Encarta Dictionary 2009¹⁾ defines an entrepreneur as a risk taking business person. An entrepreneur is somebody who initiates or finances new

commercial enterprise (Longenecker et al., 2000). He/she is somebody who has taken risks, an owner, or manager of a business. He/she contributes something and identifies business opportunity by starting new business she/he is innovative and provides job for others. They are founders of a business firm and always look for opportunities or market.

Women play a significant role in entrepreneurship development since they are the bedrock of the society. They need to be enterprising in order to cater for the needs of the family. Many women are involved in commerce which involves buying and selling of goods and services to satisfy human wants. These wants include food, clothing, and shelter, among others. This could be the reason why most working class women are involved in selling of goods.

Development is the process whereby an economy undergoes social and economic transformation towards an improvement in the quality of life of its citizen (Osuman, 1997). So women can help towards the production of the nation's wealth through economic activities in entrepreneurial development. Gender issues are being investigated since women cannot meet this requirement if they are not educated. Education is investment in human capital as a lasting legacy since it requires the individual with the knowledge and skills needed. Education makes an individual more productive in whatever economic activities he/she undertakes.

Tai Solarin posits that "education makes people easy to lead, but not easy to drive, easy to govern, but impossible to enslave" (Bola-Babs, 2001), so education of women has something to do in their entrepreneurial development. The issue of women population and illiteracy rate shows the contribution of fifty percent of the population is forgotten UNICEF & FOS (1997)' statistics shows that the illiteracy rate among them is higher than that of men.

The newly acquired attitude of women as a result of education is not totally strange for the root is old as seen from the Holy Scriptures which had

been written long ago. The gender issue in entrepreneurial development was described showing the woman as one who “seeketh wool, and flax and worketh willingly with her hands. She is like the merchants’ ship; she bringeth her food from afar. She riseth also while it is yet night, and giveth meat to her household, and a portion to her maidens, she considereth a field, and buyeth it: with the fruit of her hands she planteth a vineyard. She girdeth her loins with strength, and strenghteneth her arms. She maketh fine linen, and selleth it; and delivereth girdles unto the merchant. Strength and honour are her clothing; and she shall rejoice in the time to come.”²⁾

Education is no doubt contributing to the changing attitude of women as Agogo (2010) posits that relevant and functional education must be comprehensive and up to date. It is therefore important to equip the products of the educational system as to make them functional members of the society in which they find themselves. In entrepreneurial development, education is helpful as seen from the story of a lady who holds a National Diploma but had learnt how to ride ‘keke Maruwa’ (Tricycle) as a driver. The woman is the first child of seven children from the parent and does not want to be used by men or engage in illegitimate trade as others. She asserts that one should “think of what you can do within your environment, since everyone will not make it by working in a bank.”³⁾ Such attitude has inspired others, since other women have joined “keke driving” as a profession.

Counseling is a helping relationship which helps individuals to change their attitude or perspective for better achievements. Fuster (2000) posits that counseling is neither giving of advice nor offering solutions to problems, but helping counselees to change their attitude, perception of self or others or of habits. He further adds that there is no permanent solution to a problem without some change in the counselees. It is clear that one needs to sharpen entrepreneurial skills to succeed in today’s business world. Skills associated with entrepreneurship are technical skills, specific operation technology, communi-

cation and interpersonal relations. Entrepreneurship development of the female gender that is almost forgotten can curb unemployment, since women who acquire entrepreneurship skills can become entrepreneurs. According to Gibson (2001) entrepreneurship is the using of private initiative to transform a business concept into a new venture or to grow and diversify an existing venture or enterprise with high great potential. Henry (2003) views entrepreneurship as the engine driving the economy of nations, creating new industries, young entrepreneur, employment and wealth, so the need to study entrepreneurship development skills and career counselling of the female comes into focus. Drucker (2005) posits that entrepreneurship development is a process of enhancing entrepreneur skills and knowledge through structured training and institution building programmes.

As stated by Ikeanyionum (2006) these skills include human and public relations, accounting, students' self-esteem, communication and computer applications. The skills associated with entrepreneurship include technical skills, specific operation technology, communication, interpersonal relations, presentation and assertiveness.⁴⁾ Looking at the skills needed for entrepreneurship development, the importance of training is quite glaring. This training is a form of education, hence the need to study gender issues and entrepreneurship development skills. In order to develop the skills and characteristics of an entrepreneur especially women, the issue of gender and career counselling is crucial as seen from their definitions.

Problem of the study

The population of Nigeria reveals that the females constitute about 50% of the population; hence, the issue of gender in entrepreneurial development is a concern. If this is not neglected, but the population is taken care of they will contribute immensely to national development. According to Agbe & Agbe (1999) "the new system of education aims at making Nigerians find

more meaning in education and life. We will reach a stage, and very soon too, where our youth will create jobs for themselves and not necessarily roam government offices for which, probably, they were not trained.” It is obvious that when professionals become self-employed, they will in turn take the position of employers of labour, thereby contributing towards the effort of government at reducing unemployment to a tolerable level. The women need to be supported and encouraged to become entrepreneurs.

Sensitization could be done by professional career counsellors and institutional management through conferences, seminars and workshops (Ogah, 2000). Parents and teachers equally require much sensitization because, in most cases, they influence the choice of career of their wards for economic, social or political motives. They need to be encouraged to allow their wards especially the females to make independent choice of careers that may bring eternal satisfaction to them.

Therefore, this paper investigates gender issues in entrepreneurial development in Benue State using a randomly selected sample of fifty working class women. The newly acquired attitude of the women as a result of education and counselling entrepreneurial development was investigated.

Research question

This study addressed one main question: does counseling have any impact on women’s entrepreneurial development?

Methodology

Population and sample

The population for the study is the University of Agriculture, Makurdi community.

The participants of the study were fifty working class women randomly selected from the University of Agriculture community through purposive

sampling. Some of these women are students, visitors; others are academic and non-academic staff.

The instrument was designed by the researchers and the face and content validity was done by two experts in counselling psychology at the University of Agriculture, Makurdi. A questionnaire with 10 items was used for the study. The questionnaire was made up of two sections A and B. The study investigated the educational level of the women and all they do to earn a living.

Method of data collection and analysis

The questionnaires were randomly distributed to 50 working class women who completed them and they were collected there and then. Respondents were instructed on how to fill the questionnaires. The question of the research was answered using percentages.

Results and discussion

The results revealed that forty (80%) of the respondents have more than a first degree or Higher National Diploma (HND). Forty of the women (80 %) supports need to be enterprising, i.e., entrepreneurship development.

From the results in Table 1 it can be observed that 30 (60%) of the females received counseling on entrepreneurship skills. This finding corroborates with the position of Agbe & Agbe (1999) about the purpose of career counselling. It therefore follows that counseling plays a key role in entrepreneurial development. Agbe & Agbe (1999) in emphasizing the importance of education which involves counseling affirms this point.

Table 1. Data received

Item	number	%
Qualification HND, 1 st degree and above	40	80
I have received counseling from entrepreneurship	30	60
I support entrepreneurship	40	80

Career counseling actually helps individuals to make informed choices about their life long work. For this, an entrepreneur one needs certain skills and characteristics.

This study's main purpose was to investigate the new attitude of women as a result of education and counselling towards entrepreneurship development and hence national development. The results reveal that counselling and education has great impact in entrepreneurial development of the female gender. Since those who supported in entrepreneurial development are educated having a higher institution qualification. Agogo (2010) and Bola-Babs (2001) pointed to the role education can play in the life of an individual. So the education and counseling of women who constitute about half Nigerian's population cannot be overlooked. The forgotten 50% have to be remembered as revealed by this study by doing all possible to enhance the female folk educationally through counselling. Women's role has changed due to economy and the society should accommodate it since this changing role dates back to the scriptures long ago.²⁾

Counseling implications

Results from this study have implications for counsellors. Counselling is a helping relationship which helps individuals to change their attitude or perspective for better achievements. Fuster (2000) posits that counselling is neither giving of advice or offering solutions to problems, but helping counselees to change their attitude, perception of self or others or of habits. He

further adds that there is no permanent solution to a problem without some change in the counselees.

So counselors can help women in attitude change for entrepreneurial development. Gender issues in relation to the women needs the help of the counsellors. Women are the only ones who can handle their situation through proper self-assertion.

Conclusion

Gender is the expectation a society has formed about someone simply because the person is a woman or man. The population census in Nigeria reveals that women make up about fifty percent of the population in Nigeria, and they make up 45% of the 70% unemployed population. In Benue State there is low industrial and entrepreneurial skills development, so poverty and under-employment of the feminine gender is endemic. Hence, gender issues as relates to the women as a result of education and counselling including new role in national development was investigated and it was discovered that education and counselling is helpful in entrepreneurial development. The paper investigated gender issues in entrepreneurial development in Benue State using a randomly selected sample of fifty working class women. Henry (2003) views entrepreneurship as the engine driving the economy of nations, creating new industries, young entrepreneur, employment and wealth, so the need to study entrepreneurship development skills and career counselling of the female comes into focus for Drucker (2005) posits that entrepreneurship development is a process of enhancing entrepreneur skill and knowledge through structured training and institution building programmes. The results reveal that counselling and education has great impact in entrepreneurial development of the female gender. From the results in Table 1 it can be observed that 30 (60%) of the females received counselling on entrepreneurship skills. This finding corroborates with the position of Agbe & Agbe (1999) about the pur-

pose of career counselling. It therefore follows that counselling plays a key role in entrepreneurial development, since those who supported in entrepreneurial development are educated having a higher institution qualification. Therefore, it was recommended that all the stakeholders (parents, husbands, counselors, employers of labour, etc.) around the female gender should do their best to support strive of women into entrepreneurship.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made on the basis of the findings of the study: (1) Counseling psychologists should be available wherever women are working. They will be of help to the women in counselling with them for a change of attitude towards more entrepreneurial development; (2) Counselors should be involved in the lives of the females right from the crèche to nursery, primary school and all around. The female should be caught young with counseling; (3) In entrepreneurship development women should be given more support whenever they attempt to launch any enterprising project by giving them loans; (4) Women friendly environment should be created in working places or offices to enable children of working mothers to be well catered for, because that will take care of gender issues that may tend to slow the women in entrepreneurial development; (5) The population of women is significant so places like the market centres should have affordable crèches to give women traders opportunity of business uninterrupted. The crèches can be government supported to make them affordable to all categories of women.

NOTES

1. <http://en.softonic.com/s/download-encarta-dictionary-2009>
2. King James Holy Bible (2000). *Proverbs 3:13-17, 24-25*.
3. Ojo,T. (2010). *NTA Newslines*, Network News. 9:00 pm, Sunday, 25-07-10.
4. <http://www.edgegrowth.com/>

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