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WOMEN SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN GHANA AND THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

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Abstract

This chapter aims at advancing the empirical understanding about women social entrepreneurship in a developing economy context. The study shed light on the structural challenges these women social entrepreneurs encounter and how in spite of all these barriers their entrepreneurial activities are contributing significantly to the realization of Agenda 2030 in Ghana. The study also contributes to the ongoing dialogue on the removal of structural barriers that impede entrepreneurial activities of women in developing economies. Research into women social entrepreneurship in developing economies is scanty and very little empirical knowledge exists on their activities in the construction industry which is perceived as “masculine”. A qualitative research approach was employed to conduct interviews with ten women entrepreneurs in the construction industry in Ghana. The participants were purposively selected. The major challenges these women encounter include socio-cultural and sexual harassment. The results of the study draw attention to gender inequalities in access to land for construction work due to traditional beliefs. It was however evident from the study that these women social entrepreneurs’ activities have undoubtedly challenged gender inequality, contributed significantly to addressing societal problems and improving quality of lives in their communities. It was concluded that traditional beliefs especially on access to land that is detrimental to women progress should be abolished; the girl child should be encouraged to venture into male-dominated enterprises. The research work is important to the advancement of women social entrepreneurship in developing economies, shares best practices and ignites further research in the area.

INTRODUCTION

Globally, Social Entrepreneurs are increasingly becoming solutions to complex social problems in economies. The innovative enterprises they create are fast becoming a highly sought economic enterprise by many developing economies due to their numerous social and economic benefits. Women's participation in this sector has also attracted attention in recent times as it can potentially challenge gender norms and offer new role models. In a recent study by the British Council in Ghana (2021), 39% of women in entrepreneurship were identified to be social entrepreneurs. Social entrepreneurship has been defined as entrepreneurial activities that tackle social and environmental problems; create jobs and generate income like other businesses, but instead of channeling their profits to owners, they reinvest them to support their social mission, thereby improving people's lives in our communities and societies (British Council, 2021). Many of these women social entrepreneurs have been found to operate in the education sector in Ghana (36%) whilst only 1% operates in the construction industry of Ghana's economy.

The rather low proportion of women in social entrepreneurship produces a vicious cycle of gender equality. This is because the scenario tends to give men a significant household income urge, further widening the gap in decision-making power, including the decision to participate in social entrepreneurship (Bymolt et al, 2018). This, in turn, tends to further marginalize women and increase their vulnerabilities and disadvantage. Unless this patriarchal system is curbed, the achievement of the seventh target of the 5th Sustainable Development Goal (SDG 5.7) will be farfetched. SDG 5.7 enjoins nations to "undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national laws" (UNDP, 2021). The United Nations Development Report (2021) found that more females are in the labour market today than ever as compared with their male counterpart. It further recognizes that huge inequalities still exist in some geographies and industries, including the construction industry. In acts, the global picture of gender inequality in entrepreneurship is a fundamental cause of inequality in many other aspects of life (Price et al, 2019).

In 2015, all the United Nations Member States adopted the SDGs with the main objectives of ending poverty, protecting the planet and ensuring that everyone enjoy prosperity and peace by 2030 (UNDP, 2021). The SDG agenda articulated 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Gender equality (SDG 5) has the potential of achieving some of the other Sustainable Development Goals. Food security, for instance, is one target under the Sustainable Development Goal that Gender Equality has the potential of achieving (Agarwal, 2018). A goat rearing project by women in Zambia funded by the United Nations Development Program shows that such investments can turn poor, marginalized and malnourished women and their families into economically self-reliant, well-nourished, and resilient women while also improving food security in their communities (Zanga, 2021). This is proof that investments that aim at breaking the barriers that inhibit the progress of women towards their economic ambitions, which equip them with valuable skills for economic empowerment, can yield profitable results, not only for the women but also for the communities in which they live and grow.

The McKinsey Global Institute (2015) indicated that the potential gain for South-Saharan Africa in addressing the gender gap by 2025 is an estimated additional 12-27% of GDP. In sum, gender inequality will remain a great challenge for Africa, and the continent would benefit by focusing on the economic opportunities arising from improving parity between women and men (African Development Report, 2015). The question therefore is what Africa should do to rectify its development path and to make economic development more inclusive. The African development report (2015) concluded that a new development trajectory should enable Africa to provide decent jobs, including, in particular, to the majority of the youth and women,

Studies (Adeyemi et al 2006; Adogbo et al 2015) have identified barriers inhibiting women's entry into the construction industry in developing economies. These include mainly socio-cultural barriers. The lack of access to support and advisory services has also proven to be a challenge for women social entrepreneurs among numerous others such as obtaining grant funding, capital (debt equity), and the shortage of critical technical skills.

This chapter, therefore, explores women social entrepreneurship in the construction industry in Ghana focusing on four major areas: the background of these women, their achievements as well as the challenges encountered. It also proposes key areas scholarly and practitioners' discussion on women social entrepreneurship should focus on.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Entrepreneurship and Social Entrepreneurship

The relevance of entrepreneurship in the transformation of economies has been touted by researchers and practitioners. Entrepreneurs drive change with their innovative business enterprises, improve standard of living and create wealth. Buame (2012) explained that "Entrepreneurship is an innovative process where a prospective individual or group identifies and seizes the opportunity by organizing existing resources to convert those opportunities into workable/marketable products or services". Adom (2015) acknowledged that entrepreneurs are individuals with varied characteristics, which allow them to be different in their society. Quaye & Acheampong (2013) pointed out entrepreneurs are believed to be people who possess the three key unique features of innovativeness, proactiveness and risk-taking.

Entrepreneurship as hypothesized by Sullivan, Weerawardena, and Carnegie (2003) and Martin and Osberg (2007) forms the basis for Social Entrepreneurship hence Social Entrepreneurship is most often presented as an offshoot of the mainstream entrepreneurship literature. Invariably, theories and research into entrepreneurship offer one way of understanding what social entrepreneurship might be, what roles and what forms it takes, and how it is decreed (Martin & Osberg, 2007). Dacin et al. (2010) observed that much of the literature on social entrepreneurship centers on defining the concept. Currently, there is little agreement on the definition of social entrepreneurship in the literature. Although social entrepreneurship is gaining popularity, it still means different things to different scholars and practitioners. Social Entrepreneurship in the existing literature refer to "an ability to leverage resources that address social problems" (Dacin et al., 2010). Other scholars (Zahra et al., 2014) "classical economic

theory has long recognized social (societal) outcomes as key aims of entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurs spot opportunities to move the status quo to a new equilibrium and thus improve the standard of living for all through new products and services". Definitions and expectations regarding social wealth are changing rapidly, along with our understanding of the limitations of markets to achieve social wealth creation and distribution for all (Stiglitz, 2010). In contrast to a traditional nonprofit outlook, social entrepreneurship is about transformative social system change (Kania & Kramer, 2011). Social entrepreneurship can thus be defined through five criteria (Hulgård & Andersen, 2012). The first two are encountered in all analyses and representations of social entrepreneurship, regardless of the academic perspectives and traditions of the observer. Most studies (Dees, 1998; Austin, Stevenson, & Wei-Skillern 2008; Nicholls, 2008) also define social entrepreneurship as the creation of social value through innovation. It is the combination of an overarching social mission and entrepreneurial creativity that marks social entrepreneurship as distinct from other public, private and civil society activities (Nicholls, 2008).

Various economies in the world are facing myriads of problems, including financial crises making it impossible for the government alone to find solutions to these economic and societal problems. In an attempt to find solutions to these problems, Fayolle & Matlay (2010) suggest that social entrepreneurship may be the solution, "even though entrepreneurship plays a greater role in economic value creation, it could nevertheless be a greater contributor to social justice as well". Many individuals have responded positively to these challenges, with creativity, energy and optimism using business models in pursuing solutions (Bornstein & Davis, 2010). These new models and concepts used in addressing social problems are garnering interest in both theory and practice, hence the advent of a novel field of research known as "social entrepreneurship" (Fayolle & Matlay, 2010). Evidence from the literature indicates that the growing attention paid to social entrepreneurship recently can be attributed to several economic, social and political changes, as well as current difficulties that require novel tactics as well as developments that intensify the probabilities for these difficulties to be resolved (Kumar & Gupta, 2013)

METHODOLOGY

This study explores women social entrepreneurship in the construction industry in Ghana. The study focuses mainly on the background of these women, the challenges encountered, their success stories and the lessons learnt. Qualitative research approach was used to explore the world of women social entrepreneurs in Ghana. Ten (10) women social entrepreneurs were purposefully selected or sampled from the list of females in the Construction industry in Ghana. Interviews were conducted on these ten women social entrepreneurs to obtain in-depth and rich information. Research methodologists (Kumar 2005; Neuman 2006) recommend purposeful sampling in a situation where the researcher is able to identify participants that will be able to provide information to achieve the research objectives. Merriam and Tisdell's (2015) also approved this procedure pointing out that "it is not the number and representativeness of the sample that are the major considerations, but rather the potential of each person to contribute to the development of insight and understanding". Additionally, three (3) supervisors in the construction industry were also interviewed to ascertain and validate the 10 interviewees' responses. The interviews were transcribed and sent to the interviewees for confirmation of what transpired. Corrections were subsequently made before the contents were analyzed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

It is very important to know the various backgrounds of the women social entrepreneurs in Ghana. The variables investigated in the study include their age, educational background, the number of years they have been entrepreneurs, and whether they have a mentor.

Demographics

The findings reveal that the participating women social entrepreneurs' ages ranged from 42 to 56. All the women social entrepreneurs interviewed had high school or tertiary education (polytechnic or university) qualification. The study also revealed that the years these women have been in the construction industry range from 5 to 18, and their various enterprises in the construction industry comprised of road construction and real estate development. The result also indicated that most (70%) of the women had identifiable mentors, and interestingly some (45%) of the mentors are male social entrepreneurs while most (55%) of the mentors are females. They were all emphatic that these mentors played various key roles in the successful entry and retention in their business ventures.

Challenges

Information was sought on the various challenges these women encounter. The results from the interviews revealed that socio-cultural barriers have been ranked as the biggest challenges these women social entrepreneurs encounter in the construction industry in Ghana. It was found out that, customarily, women are forbidden from some parcels of land in all the regions in Ghana. This is premised on the fact that women are considered impure and forbidden from stepping on those lands. This implies that women are automatically disqualified from bidding for contracts on those lands. One of the contractors remarked sadly that *I lost a job to construct a Senior High School block because the traditional belief of the town in which the project was to be situated forbade a female to work on the land* Another woman social entrepreneur who also lost a road construction contract due to same customary ban on women working on a specified portion of land also stated that: *All my bidding documentation were completed and presented as requested in the invitation to bidding advert. My bid price was better than my competitors because I have done a similar job about five (5) months ago so I was very current with the quantities and price quotations. But I lost the contract because the custom of the area prevented females from doing men's job (as they put it)* Thus, both men and women do not have equal opportunities to access land for construction work.

The second challenge most of the participants lamented about is the societal stereotypes on the type of industries women can create business ventures in. All the women interviewed were emphatic that the Ghanaian society rarely endorses women that want to venture into the construction industry simply because it is perceived as a traditionally male industry. According to them, the disapproving comments that society normally makes that deter them from venturing into the construction sector includes: *A woman does not work or cannot work in the construction industry'....." go find some tomatoes to sell'..... A woman can never succeed in such a male-dominated industry.....'*

The women further explained that even when they mustered the courage to create successful business ventures, society perceived them as masculine and gave them nicknames. One of the women social entrepreneurs explained that *‘They have called me names, even my family members call me “obaa gyata” (translated to mean lion woman). I recalled a member of my church asked me if I do get marriage proposals from men because she thinks the kind of industry I find myself will scare men away from me.*

The study also found out that some (50%) of the women fall prey to sexual harassment in the process of tendering for contracts and mobilization of resources for their construction work. A road contractor interviewed remarked sadly that *I lost a contract because a big man wants to sleep with me before awarding me the contract’* Another woman also revealed that *I could not get the funding I needed to execute my work because I refused to sleep with the guy* Clearly, there have been attempts to take advantage of these women before approving projects they have tendered and duly qualified for.

Access to funds/finance was a common challenge among the respondents. They indicated that the issues of finances cut across timely availability of funds for projects, delays in payment of work done and the rising cost of interest rate. All respondents indicated that at the time of the interview they had at least an average of four (4) completed projects that were yet to be paid (most of them were government contracts). While the majority (70%) of respondents mentioned that they have to abandon some projects due to lack of funds.

The issue of lack of support services or business advisory centers was highlighted by all the respondents. The women social entrepreneurs indicated that one of their main challenges was to learn the hard way, simply because there were no support services for them especially during the setup stages of their business. They added that the situation is worse for those who did not have any mentors at their entry stage. Some (40%) of the respondents revealed that they have noticed that some women who have also found their ways into construction but their male bosses only assign them clerical duties; technical assignments are not given to them. This they wish was not the case.

Contributions to the realization of SDGs

Furthermore, the successes of these women social entrepreneurs were measured based on the extent to which they have contributed to addressing social problems and the realization of the Sustainable Development Goals. Questions were therefore asked to elicit responses to that effect. It was evident from the study that the achievement of these women contributed towards attaining the SDGs. These findings are in sync with the findings of a study by Plewnia and Guenther (2018) which indicated that social entrepreneurship is considered to be a contributor to sustainable development.

A common achievement among the respondents was their contribution to the reduction of unemployment in Ghana and their contribution to the national income. The study revealed that on average, each woman social entrepreneurs’ firm employs about 5 to 8 permanent workers and 40 – 65 casual workers. Their contribution to the national purse was very great through the regular payment of taxes by their companies and by their workers.

All the respondents interviewed had embarked on one to four socially driven projects, contributing to the transformation in their community. A respondent indicated that she dug eight (8) boreholes free to various communities in Ghana to solve water problems in those communities. Most (75%) of the respondents have instituted scholarships for brilliant but needy girls in the community. Some indicated that they have supported the education of family members and needy in the society, cutting across from the basic to the university level. Other respondents were also supporting others for apprenticeship training. A respondent indicated that she is supporting twelve (12) females in various male-dominated apprenticeship training. In her words she had this to say:

I currently have twelve ladies who are into apprenticeship training, four (4) are training in auto mechanic spraying, six (6) are learning auto mechanic and auto electronic while two are training in welding. I feel very excited anytime I send my car to the shop and I see these ladies come around to fix it.

Most (85%) of the respondents indicated that they have been mentoring many women in the construction industry. The interview revealed that the respondents have mentored and trained about 31 women to create various businesses in the construction industry, thus bridging the gender gap although still insignificant.

BEST PRACTICE

It was clear from the study that mentors were very helpful to the women entrepreneurs during all the phases of the business creation. Significantly, male mentors played a crucial role in motivating some of the women to venture into the construction business. They were instrumental in the acquisition of funds for their business and the identification of some of the projects these women embark on to solve societal problems in their communities.

Training and sensitization have also been identified to be indispensable requirements if women's participation in social entrepreneurship development is to make an impact and be sustainable. Many of the respondents were of the view that there was the need for a sustained effort in training and sensitizing females from basic and junior high schools before they make decisions about what to study at the senior high school level. This they believed would influence their interest and possibly get many females into the male-dominated profession. Their opinion was that if many females entered the profession and offered their services to employers or ventured into entrepreneurship, this could make it difficult for society to refuse them opportunities when the need arose. Training and sensitization, thus, are expected to cut across all facets of society from the schools to the homes to organizations and every possible nook and cranny to reduce the negative socio-cultural perception about women in the industry.

Clearly, structures are not in place to encourage women social entrepreneurs in Ghana. Generally, however, these structures do not appear to be in place for males also making it all the more difficult for it to be described as a gender inequality problem. These structures should cover necessities like support, advice, financing, markets, and information. The provision of these structures can create the needed ecosystem where women social entrepreneurs' contribution to the nation's development and attainment of the SDGs can be more easily facilitated and encouraged. This requires a conscious effort on the part of the government to

ensure the availability, effectiveness and sustainability of these structures. The private sector could be invited to assist the government in providing and institutionalizing these structures as it requires extensive funding and government may not be ready to fund this presently. The international donor community can also get involved if nothing, for the sake of the attainment of the SDGs. These structures coupled with efforts by society to eradicate the negative cultural influences will go a long way to get women to participate more in the construction industry, playing roles that can positively impact Ghana's housing deficit and encouraging more female youths to get involved in the activities of the industry.

Institutions involved in training in construction work have also been identified to play a critical role in realizing the involvement of more women in the construction industry. Considering the role the institutions play in shaping the minds and skills of the trainees, more efforts could be put into sensitizing male teachers and students about the importance of consciously making efforts to give females who are interested in the industry a chance to make their mark. Many of the challenges faced by women in the industry as the research revealed start from here and so creating this consciousness and the need on the part of the institutions and its machinery can go a long way to positively address the inequality and role women are capable of playing within the industry.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study attempts to provide more insight into women social entrepreneurship in a developing economy context. To achieve this objective, Ghanaian women social entrepreneurs in the construction industry were explored. Their background, challenges they encounter and their contributions to the realization of agenda 2030 in Ghana were the focus of the research. The study draws our attention to the fact that the number of women in the construction industry in Ghana is insignificant. They encounter varied challenges that deter them from engaging in construction work, chiefly among them being socio-cultural and sexual harassment. Also, the results indicate that women are prejudiced by society not to have the competency and tenacity to succeed in the industry. It was also evident from the study that, the challenges the women social entrepreneurs in Ghana encounter are similar to the one in the developed economies. The differences are the patriarchal system and customary beliefs in Africa which has worsen these challenges. However, it is noteworthy that, in spite of all these challenges the social women entrepreneurs have made a lot of gains. These women social entrepreneurs have provided innovative solutions to their complex pressing societal problems: from community development to social exclusion and poverty reduction. Significantly, it can be concluded that these women are contributing immensely to the realization of the sustainable development goals.

It is therefore recommended that:

- 1) Society, institutions and governments should play key roles in encouraging women to venture into male dominated sectors.
- 2) Professional bodies should organize periodic workshops and seminars to address issues in male dominated industries to encourage females. This will provide opportunities for mentoring, networking and professional development that would lead to the entry and retention of women in this male dominated industry.

- 3) Traditional beliefs especially on access to land that is detrimental to women should be abolished.
- 4) Structures that support, advice, finance, identify markets and provide information should also be considered and put in place. Providing these structures is capital intensive and time involving therefore difficult for private individuals to provide. It therefore the duty of the government to put in places their structures to make the transition easier and more enjoyable for women. These structures will also benefit women in other male-dominated sectors and encourage more women to become social entrepreneurs.
- 5) Incentives could also be considered to get more women to enter the construction industry. These incentives could be introduced from the basic levels of education up to the tertiary institutions and even into the industry. This could include scholarships, paid internships, payment of school and training fees, living support, free learning resources, mentorships, tax rebate etc. many of which have been identified to be needed by many brilliant but needy females with potentials.
- 6) Women, in general, could be encouraged to form groups and partnerships that would enter into the overly male-dominated profession and make their impact. A few women could therefore form a business that is all female-dominated to demonstrate what they can do. These partnerships can equally make a conscious effort to sensitize and encourage young females about the prospects and opportunities in the field while contributing their quota so social development.

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