

INFLUENCE OF BUSINESS NETWORKING STRATEGY ON GROWTH OF WOMEN GROUP BUSINESSES IN KIAMBU SUB COUNTY, KENYA

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ABSTRACT

Many women group enterprises are smaller, less profitable and start with little to no capital investment than those owned by men and many of them often face failures because they either fail to take off or never reach maturity. Further, enterprise survey reports indicate that more than half of women group enterprises in Kenya are known for their low start-up, low working capital, low growth rate and sometimes eminent collapse due to inadequate growth potential; a gap that motivated this study to examine the influence of business networking strategy on the growth of women group enterprises in Kiambu Sub County, Kenya. The study was guided by entrepreneurship theory and theory of social exclusion. The study adopted explanatory survey design and targeted mainly chairpersons of 350 registered and established women group enterprises in Kiambu Sub County, Kenya; where Taro Yamane's proportional sampling technique formula was used to get a sample size of 186 respondents who were selected through stratified random sampling technique. Primary data was collected using structured questionnaire. Collected data was coded for accuracy of information at the end of every field data collection day and stored both manually and electronically. Computer software- Statistical Package for Social Sciences version 24 was used in data analysis from where descriptive statistics which include percentages, frequencies,

mean, and standard deviations were computed, while linear regression analysis was computed to determine variable relationship. Data was presented in form of tables and graphs. Pilot testing was done where construct validity and Cronbach's alpha was used to test instrument validity and reliability respectively. A total of 186 questionnaires were sent to the Women Group Enterprises in Kiambu Sub-County for data collection and 129 questionnaires were returned completely filled, depicting a response rate of 69.3% which is good for generalizability of the research findings to a wider population. Both descriptive and inferential statistics showed that business networking had a linear relationship and significantly influenced growth of women group enterprises in Kiambu Sub County, Kenya. The study concluded that, women group enterprises that engage business networking tactics such as market access networking, knowledge exchange networks, and value chain network configurations can significantly boost growth of their businesses.

The study recommended that members of women group enterprises should engage in feasible business networking strategies so as to widen their market scope for their products and services.

KeyWords: Women group enterprises; business networking strategy; market access networking; knowledge exchange networks; value chain network.

INTRODUCTION

Background

Women entrepreneurs contribute ideas and invest a lot of energy and capital resources to their societies, since they create jobs as well as additional work for suppliers and other offshoot business linkages, thus need for support for growth of women owned enterprises (World Bank reports (2017). It is estimated that in developing countries, there are about 8 to 10 million formal SMEs with at least one woman owner in (Loisa et al, 2017).

Further, women owned enterprises are expanding around the world and women entrepreneurs are the potential emerging human resource in the 21st century to beat variety of economic challenges in the global perspective. For a woman, entrepreneurship is a route towards empowerment where she can contribute positively in a variety of dimensions and aspects in job creation and economic development (OECD, 2016). Economically empowered women are major catalysts for development, as they usually re-invest their money in their families' health, nutrition, and education (Loisa et al, 2017).

There is therefore need to boost women enterprise growth which will require business development support services to individual enterprises that improve their performance, access to markets, and ability to compete – both on day-to-day and strategic levels such as training, business advice, consulting, marketing support (trade focus), information technology development and transfer, business linkages promotion (OECD 2016).

In addition, to grow women entrepreneurs, European Commission (2012) suggested business development services such as professional information services (on legislation, markets, sources of financing, technical assistance), advisory services such as business planning, functional areas of business, mentoring, facilitating contacts, training on starting, managing and growing a business, and networks – clusters, supply chains, trade fairs among other business networks.

Centre for Women in Business (2010) also reported that though business development service exists, it was underdeveloped due to issues of reach, capacity and quality, no data on percentage of women clients/beneficiaries and lack of gender mainstreaming with business development services.

A study by the International Labour Organization (2011), found that currently the growth of Women led enterprises is restricted by inadequate access to training, as well as follow up to training inputs, and limited opportunity to avail themselves of external, formal managerial capacity-building support. Further, despite the considerable Kenyan government support and support of bodies interested in promoting gender equality in all areas (business included), many

female-owned businesses still fail. Various reports show that many women led businesses enter and exit these markets every year with a turnover rate of about 32% per annum (OECD, 2015). To address women owned enterprise growth issues some practitioners (OECD, 2015) suggested use of business development strategies such as business partnerships, market development, business expansions, making strategic business plans but lack adequate empirical backing. Further, other scholars (Abu,2016) emphasized on marketing focus, sales focus, product and service developments, strategic partnerships, outsourcing, market segmentation, business planning, but were criticized as overused business development initiatives, thus the need to adopt newer business development strategies such as business networking, business development support tactics, lobbying, business development training, and financial intermediation (Bulsard, 2017).

Globally, women are enhancing, directing, and changing the face of how business is done today, and therefore female business owners must be recognized for who they are, what they do, and how significantly they impact the world's global economy. For instance, emergence as well as development of women entrepreneurs is quite visible in India and their over-all contribution to Indian economy is also very significant (Sharma, 2017).

Rao (2013) summarized challenges facing growth of women owned enterprises as; lack of family support-sometimes the family may make the women feel guilty of neglecting the household duties in their pursuit of business obligations, lack of capital-traditional sources of finance like banks are reluctant to lend to women entrepreneurs especially if they do not have any male or family backing, lack of role models which undermines the self-confidence of women entrepreneurs and lack of business support services.

In Kenya, women owned businesses account for over 48% of all SMEs. The bulk of women entrepreneurs in Kenya operate enterprises associated with traditional women's roles such as, hairstyling, restaurants, hotels, retail and wholesale outlets. According to enterprise development surveys, women owned enterprises are making a significant contribution to the Kenyan economy, accounting for 20% of Kenya's GDP. Of the 462,000 jobs created annually since 2000 in Kenya, 445,000 jobs have emanated from the informal sector, where 85% of women's businesses are found (ILO, 2010).

Statement of the problem

Women owned business contribute significantly to the world economy, and their number has grown over time. These enterprises represent a significant share of employment generation and economic growth potential. Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (2016) comparative statistics across many countries revealed that the number of start-up women -

owned enterprises could be growing at a faster pace than that of male counterparts but interestingly the seemingly women-owned enterprises are failing at a faster rate OECD (2016). Researchers (Siwadi et al., 2015) have also reported that in undeveloped and developing countries, women owned enterprise are recognized for their low start-up capital, have low growth rate and inadequate potential partially due to the type of business activities they operate; their small businesses are also held back by stringent local policies and most of them do not have access to collaterals required by banks as a pre-requisite to securing business loans, thus the need for financial intermediation initiatives. Various reports also show that many women led businesses enter and exit these markets every year with a turnover rate of about 32% per annum (OECD, 2015).

In order to help solve women owned enterprise growth problems some practitioners (OECD, 2015) suggested use of business development strategies such as business partnerships, market development, business expansions, making strategic business plans but lack adequate empirical backing. Further, other scholars (Abu,2016) emphasized on marketing focus, sales focus, product and service developments, outsourcing from business development companies but were criticized as overused business development initiatives, thus the need to adopt newer business development strategies such as business networking to enable business developers to scan for new market opportunities through networking s (Bulsard, 2017).

In Kenya, Driemeier (2013) noted substantial differences in the performance of women's business enterprises as compared to those of Kenyan men. Women owned enterprises are smaller, less profitable and start with little to no capital investment than those owned by men and many of them often face failures because they either fail to take off or never reach maturity due to lack of suitable business development strategies.

Further, WEF (2016) survey reports indicate that more than 50% of women group enterprises in Kenya are known for their low start-up, low working capital, low growth rate and more often face eminent collapse due to inappropriate business development strategies; a gap that motivated this study to examine the influence of business networking strategies on the growth of women group enterprises in Kiambu Sub County, Kenya.

Objective

The objective of this study was to determine the Influence of business networking strategy on growth of women group businesses in Kiambu Sub County, Kenya

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Literature Review

Theory of Social Exclusion

The theory of social exclusion emanated from social exclusion model (Honneth, 1996) in France in 1970s where there was perceived breakdown in social cohesion following civil unrest in the 1960s due to growing unemployment and social economic inequalities. Social exclusion is the process in which individuals or entire communities of people are denied full access to various rights, opportunities and resources that are accessible to members of a different group, and which are essential to social integration within that particular group (Honneth, 1996).

Many theorists (Zororo 2011) thus adopted theory of social exclusion which arises at the individual or group level on four correlated extents: inadequate access to social rights, lack of material possessions, normative integration and partial social participation.

According to the theory, social exclusion has various contributors which include race, income, employment status, social class, geographic location, personal habits and appearance, education, religion and political affiliation. Feminists claimed that men and women should equally partake in the labour force, in the home environment and in the public and private sector. They concentrated on labour laws so as to increase access to employment and create awareness around child-rearing as a valuable form of labour. In certain circumstances women are still disregarded from executive positions and subsequently earn less than men in upper management position (Moosa- Mitha, 2005).

Social exclusion makes it hard for marginalized people to participate effectively in economic, social, political and cultural life and in some characteristics alienation and distance from mainstream society. In this regard, women entrepreneurs face social exclusion because of their gender, which makes it difficult for them to gain financial freedom and break away from traditional roles, thus financial break through has a bearing on their business enterprises.

Economic Model of Firm Performance

This study is based on economic model of firm performance by Santos and Brito (2012) where they posit that while there is a range of specific models, major determinants of firm-level performance include: (1) characteristic of the industry in which the firm competes; (2) the firm's position relative to its competitors; and (3) the quality or quantity of the firm's resources. These also depend on industry variables (growth, concentration, capital intensity and advertising intensity) and firm variables (firm size, diversification).

In this regard, the typical economic model of firm performance explains that firm performance or growth can be measured in terms of profitability, growth in market share/ value, customers' satisfaction, employee satisfaction, environmental and social performance. From the economic model of firm performance, this study will measure enterprise growth in terms of market share growth, financial growth, customer increase. Satisfied customers are assumed not to leave a particular business enterprise which has quality products and service that meets customer needs which consequently translates to overall growth of the women group enterprises in both financial and non-financial terms.

Emperical Literature Review

Business Networking and Growth of the Women Group Enterprises

Abu (2016) in his study on small firm entrepreneurs in Malaysia found that to have business networks was a challenging task for entrepreneurs especially when it comes to female entrepreneurs. Male entrepreneurs are more active in networking than females due to economic and cultural limitations and business networks are lower in female owned business entities and greater in male owned firms. In order to boost growth of firms owned by women, the study recommended that the networking and women participation is positively and significantly correlated and participation of women is found higher in those women who are engaged in networking because it persuades them in getting accessibility to resources for the enterprise.

Gartner (2015) study indicated that entrepreneurial network relationships are deeply embedded in the business context, exhibiting complex rationality of decision making and strategic choices. Thus, firm performance and growth in entrepreneurial networks is determined by the overall network performance, constraining firms to cooperate in response to their interdependencies.

Davidson,*et al.*,(2010) study in Pakistan also found that local development programs such as Women Business Development Centre and Women Chamber of Commerce and Industry for women entrepreneurs in Pakistan were helping women entrepreneurs in networking so as to growth their businesses. If a woman entrepreneur is registered to these networks, these orgaqnizations provide facilitation to her in terms of knowledge and experience.

Eileen et al., (2011) also studied on challenges facing growth of women entrepreneurs in Pakistan and found that Pakistan's environment of women entrepreneurship was turbulent and proposed the need to focus on the importance of women having formal networks and their impact on the performance of women entrepreneurs along with the culture of building such networks for the sale of business growth.

Todeva (2016) study further found that family business networks depend on how the business is embedded within the family and the household; and that business networks rely much more on resources outside of the family and they represent dispersed type of structural network configuration. Therefore, while small-business entrepreneurial networks are driven by self-employed agents, family business networks are based on family employment with all subsequent aspects of risk-taking, flexibility, self-financing, and control.

Methodology

Research Methods

The study employed the explanatory survey design. This study targeted mainly chairpersons of 350 registered and established women group enterprises in Kiambu Sub County, Kenya. All members of registered and established women group enterprises in Kiambu Sub County formed the sampling frame. The study's sample size was determined using Taro Yamane's proportional sampling technique formula to come up with a sample of 186. The study used stratified sampling technique (the strata of women group enterprises consist of general agriculture, crop production, livestock farming, trade, banking, furniture, clothing, household items, beauty products and real estate investment) followed by simple random sampling within the strata. Primary data was collected by means of self-administered structured questionnaires. The questionnaires were self-administered through delivering hard and soft copies of the questionnaires to the respondents and picking them.

Pilot Study

A pilot study was done to test the validity and reliability of data collection instruments. All components of the questionnaires were checked and coded to ensure clarity of words and the accuracy of the statements, then pretested in an established women group enterprises in Kiambu Sub County. Ten percent of sample size (Kothari, 2007) was calculated to get the number of respondents who were used for the pilot study.

Test of validity

Content method was applied to check validity, whereby copies of the instrument were used during pilot testing for validation. That is, pretesting of research instrument was used to confirm that questions are well written, meaningful plus having adequate content so as to ensure content validity. Construct validity was also used to test instrument validity because it is considered more scientific than content or face validity (Kothari, 2007)

Test of reliability

Pilot testing was done and a Cronbach alpha will be computed using SPSS version 24. A cronbach's alpha coefficient of at least 0.70 is was reached.

Data processing and analysis

All collected data was coded, cleaned, tabulated and analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics with the aid of specialized Statistical Package for Social Sciences, version 24. Descriptive analysis such as frequencies, means, standard deviation were utilized whereas analysed data was presented in tables and graphs. Further, linear regression assessed nature and the strength of the relationships.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Descriptive statistics

This assessed whether Business networking can influence growth of women group enterprises in Kiambu Sub County. The mean responses are summarized in the table below.

Statement	mean	Std.dev
1. There are structured market access networks for the business	3.53	0.987
2. There are configured value chains in our business	3.68	0.804
3. We always experience a good number of referral networks for the business	3.87	0.909
4. Most of our members are engaged in Knowledge exchange networks	3.47	0.861
5. We combine family and business networks to grow our business	3.62	0.834
6. Generally, business networking has really assisted us grow our business enterprise	3.72	0.883
Valid listwise 129	Grand mean = 3.648	

The grand mean of descriptive responses on business networking in table 4.2 is 3.648 which when rounded to 4 depicts 'agree' on likert scale of measurement used in the study. This means

that on average, most respondents perceived use of business networking as an effective strategy that can be adopted to enhance growth of women group enterprises in Kiambu Sub County.

The use of business networking strategy as a key factor in business growth is supported by Gartner (2015) assertion that entrepreneurial network relationships (both family and business networks) are deeply embedded in the business context, exhibiting complex rationality of decision making and strategic choices. Thus, firm performance and growth could be boosted by entrepreneurial networks which are determined by the overall network performance, constraining firms to cooperate in response to their interdependencies.

Linear influence of business networking on growth of women owned enterprises

This tested the direct influence of business networking on growth of women owned enterprises in Kiambu Sub County. The model summary showed $R^2 = 0.578$ which implies that 57.8% variation in the growth of Women Group Enterprises in Kiambu Sub County is explained by the group's business networking strategy while other factors not in the study model accounts for 42.2% variation in the growth of Women Group Enterprises in Kiambu Sub County. Further, coefficient analysis indicates that there is a positive significant linear influence of business networking strategy on growth of Women Group Enterprises in Kiambu Sub County ($\beta = 0.717(0.054)$; at $p < .01$).

The linear regression analysis results therefore imply that a single increase in effective business networking tactics by the owners of Women Group Enterprises will result to 0.717 unit growth of Women Group Enterprises in Kiambu Sub County; and the linear regression model equation is;

$$(i) \quad y = 1.212 + 0.717X_1$$

where;

y is growth of Women Group Enterprises in Kiambu Sub County

X_1 is Business networking

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Both descriptive and inferential statistics showed that Business networking significantly influenced the growth of women group enterprises in Kiambu Sub County.

In this regard, women group enterprises that embrace market access networking, knowledge exchange networks, value chain/referral networks can realize significant growth in their businesses in terms expanding market for their products/services and increase in their sales income. This is supported by prior researchers who asserted that entrepreneurial network relationships (both family and business networks) are deeply embedded in the business context, thus any enterprise growth could be boosted by entrepreneurial networks which are determined by the overall network performance due to cooperation in response to business links.

The study concludes that one, women group enterprises that engage business networking tactics such as market access networking, knowledge exchange networks, and value chain network configurations can significantly boost growth of their businesses.

The study recommends that members of women group enterprises should engage in feasible business networking strategies so as to widen their market scope for their products and services.

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