

Research article

# WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS AS SMALL-MEDIUM ENTERPRISE (SME) OPERATORS AND THEIR ROLES IN SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN OTA, NIGERIA

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## Abstract

This research study examined the impact of women entrepreneurs on the economy of Ota, Nigeria. It sought to find the roles and contributions of women small and medium scale enterprise (SME) operators to the development of the city. One hundred and fifty copies of questionnaire were administered out of which one hundred and forty six were retrieved for analysis. Data collected were analysed using simple frequency tables and regression analysis. The results revealed that the extent to which the variance in poverty level can be explained by the activities of women entrepreneurs is 32.3% i.e. ( $R^2 = .323$ ),  $F=16.790$ , and  $p \leq 0.001$ . This shows that the activities of women entrepreneurs have a significant effect on poverty level in Ota Ogun State Nigeria. Nevertheless, the paper also discovered that a lot of women are uneducated; as far as business technicalities are concerned. The authors recommend that State Government should encourage women in entrepreneurial activities and provide sound conducive business environment for women through provision of infrastructural facilities such as power supply, good roads, water and micro credit that will enhance women's participation in business.  
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**Keywords:** Entrepreneurship, Economic Development, SME, Nigeria.

## Introduction

The roles of entrepreneurship as the key to economic growth especially the small scale entrepreneurs who successfully exploit the industrial and commercial opportunities on a small scale cannot be under estimated and have long been recognized (Garga and Bagga, 2009). Women entrepreneurs in Nigeria are major contributors to economic growth because without any doubt, they are generating employment. The contributions of women are no longer debatable as numerous scholars have stated that African women provide some 60-80% of food for family consumption and that the economic growth of some nations is attributable to female entrepreneurs (Aina and Salau, 1992; Egunjobi, 1995). This trend has even enhanced in view of the global economic meltdown. The last official 2006 census showed that Nigeria had a population estimate of 140,431,790 million people (National Bureau of Statistics, 2008; National population Commission, 2009); however, as at 2013, population figure was estimated at 174 million (Population Reference Bureau, 2013). Statistics have shown that women constitute about 50% of the Nigerian population and out of this only about 35% of them are involved in any sort of entrepreneurial activity which can be under the form of micro, small, medium and large enterprises (Odoemene, 2003). Small scale enterprises and women empowerment are strong indicators of the growth of a place. In Nigeria, majority of women are engaged in agriculture and informal sectors of the economy; they constitute about 60 percentage of Nigeria's farm labour and produce over 90 percentage of the domestic food supply (Aina, 2001; Dankelman and Davidson, 1997). Consequently women are making significant contributions to their families and country at large particularly in this era of economic distress. Hence, this study is aimed to examine the various economic roles and contributions of female entrepreneurs towards economic growth. The paper has the following specific objectives:

1. To examine the impact of the activities of women on the poverty level in the study area.
2. To ascertain the impact of women entrepreneurs activities by way of job creation on the rate of crime in the study area.
3. To determine the impact of women entrepreneurs create on employment opportunities in the study area.
4. To determine the effect(s) of activities of women entrepreneurs on the standard of living in the study area.

The research tested, the following hypotheses (stated in null form) were tested.

- H<sub>01</sub>: Activities of women entrepreneurs do not have an impact on the poverty level in Ota?
- H<sub>02</sub>: The creations of jobs by women entrepreneurs have not reduce the rate of crime in Ota?
- H<sub>03</sub>: Women entrepreneurs have not affected the level of employment in Ota.
- H<sub>04</sub>: The activities of women entrepreneurs do not affect the living standard in Ota.

To realize the mentioned objectives, the following questions are posed "Is it logical to ignore the potential of half a whole and expect efficiency?" Can we say that present economic position of Nigeria is due to the fact that it has relegated half of its population to household affairs? Do the activities of women contribute to the economic development of a place? Do the activities of women entrepreneurs have an effect on the poverty level in study area? To what extent have women entrepreneurs helped reduce the rate of crime in Ota? Do women entrepreneurs aid employment creation?

In the study area, the extent of their contribution is less known and thus, this paper is posed to throw light to the above pertinent questions. The paper also examined some null hypotheses in order to support the findings of the paper.

## Literature Review

One of the most important issues of humanity is economic growth; both in national economies and world economy, recession and prosperity periods are regularly succeeding with different amplitudes (Ailenei and Mosora, 2011). From time immemorial, the issue of human progress has become the most important concern to economic growth. Nations of the World prosper when important performances in economic growth are achieved. Moreover, differences in worldwide power arise chiefly because of uneven worldwide economic growth. While growth has been rising over most of modern history, there are enormous differences in standards of living across parts of the world due to different economic development. For example, economist have seen average real incomes in countries

such as United States, France, and Germany appear to exceed those in countries such as Bangladesh, Nigeria, or Kenya by a factor of about 20 (Ailenei and Mosora, 2011).

It is however, important to note that there are significant differences between economic growth and economic development. Economic growth refers to the expansion of various aggregate macroeconomic indicators; while economic development involves much more cognitive dimensions. Moreover, it is worth noting that “development must be imagined as a multidimensional process that involves major changes in social structures, in people’s attitudes and in national institutions, by pursuing the acceleration of economic growth, the reduction of inequality and the eradication of poverty” (Ailenei and Mosora, 2011). From this perspective, therefore, failure of some of the first models of economic growth in explaining economic growth in developing countries is explained.

Entrepreneurial development is one of the most effective tools for ending poverty and achieving sustainable development; as observed by Mordi, Simpson, Singh, and Okafor (2010) the traditional roles played by a woman in a typical Nigerian family setting are changing as a result of changes in the family configuration and functional setting which has allowed women to undertake more practical and functional roles within the society. Despite the number of changes that have emerged, recognition of the potential of women and their contribution to the economy still remains unacknowledged. Scholars have researched to the roles of SMEs and considered it as one of the major engine driving national economic growth and women involvement in micro, small and medium scale enterprises (SMEs) which contribute more than 97% of all enterprises, 60% of the nation’s GDP and 94% of the total share of the employment (Mayoux, 2001; Udechukwu, 2003; Ndubusi, 2004). Women entrepreneurs have been known to be inclined towards business where they have most experience and knowledge (Goffie and Scase, 1985).

## **Theories of Economic Growth and Development**

Economic development has been examined distinctly by diverse individuals from time to time and there have been successions of economic development theories over time, each theory having its uniqueness. Researchers who have investigated the issues of economic growth paid close attention to factors of production affecting the development of national economies (e.g. Sarkar 2007; Bond, Leblebiciog, and Schiantarelli, 2010; Kosempel, 2004; Bricc and Cavaignac, 2007); fluctuations in the sectors of economy (Halkos and Tzeremes, 2008; Sonobe, Hu, and Otsuka, 2004; Jaimovich, 2011 ; Tanuwidjaja and Thangavelu, 2007). An ongoing debate generates how different factors affect economic growth, sustainable development and transformation of separate sectors of the economies ( Karnitis 2011; Stanczyk, 2011; Korsakiene, 2011; Tvaronavicienė and Lankauskienė, 2011; Tvaronavicienė 2012; Tvaronavicienė and Grybaite 2012). Ideas of economic development abound, varying in rudimentary, fundamental ways, and classes, interpret the development process distinctly, and suggest distinct principles. The theories developed by the theorists express, either specifically or discreetly, how these theorists understand economic development, the questions they ask, the method they use, the information they seek, and the approaches they adopted are pointers to the uniqueness and peculiarity.

Saharan Africa nations have experienced economic growth disasters. Growth disasters are evidence where a country’s growth falls far short of the world average. Countries in sub-Saharan Africa (including Nigeria, despite her huge endowment of natural resources especially crude oil and gas reserve), have been and have remained extremely poor, unable to jump-start the economic growth process. In Nigeria, the various differences in the standards of living compared to developed nations have had enormous implications on wealth, over time. These differences are associated with major disparities in education, nutrition, literacy, infant death, crime, life expectancy, corruption, high rate of unemployment, embezzlement of public funds, and lack of other wealth indicators.

The association between growth, production, and composition, in developing economies cannot be over emphasized. In economic environment like Nigeria, where growth is virtually grounded and the standard of living of the citizens depend on importation of virtually every goods (including toothpicks), growth will not occur. For Nigeria to come out of her economic distress she should seek to implement ‘business incubation programs’. While there are many definitions for business incubation; most scholars agreed that business incubations program “is an economic and social program which provides the intensive support to start-up companies, coach them to start and accelerate their development and success through business assistance program” (Al-Mubarak and Busler, 2013). The main

objective is to institute the successful start up companies that will leave the incubators financially feasible and self-supporting. In addition, the alumnae companies' outcomes are jobs creation, technology transfer, commercialize new technologies and create wealth for economies. According to Al-Mubarak and Busler (2013) business incubator offers an ultimate atmosphere for start-ups and entrepreneurs to change their ideas, patent and innovation into viable business ventures. Entrepreneurs and small businesses receive support and direction to be able to start up their business concepts, operate efficiently and keep up with the pace of change while remaining competitive. Adaptation of a Business Incubator Model leads to 1) the support of diverse economies, 2) the commercialization of new technologies, 3) job creation and 4) increases in wealth.

Scholars have proven the positive impact of business incubators goals in three dimensions:

1. It is supporting regional development through job creation (Thierstein and Wilhelm, 2001; Mian, 1997; Allen and Levine, 1986).
2. Incubator generally aids in the growth of new ventures (Petree et al., 1997; Campbell, 1989); and
3. Incubators fosters technological innovation and industrial renewal (Similor and Gill, 1986; Allen and Rahman, 1985; Mian, 1996; Allen and McCluskey, 1990).

Therefore, in view of the above, entrepreneurial development could be considered as one of the factors that can lead to economic development.

## **Entrepreneurship Theories**

The theories of entrepreneurship defend the idea of economic development coming as a result of the entrepreneurial activities of entrepreneurs. The works of Coase (1937) -"The Nature of the Firm" among others, theorized beyond the traditional theory of economics; which is price theory. Singularly, Coase moved the firm into the social realm and incorporated into our thinking a broader and comprehensive view of its essence and complexity. His groundbreaking works inclined other scholars to expand theoretical view of the firm including the theory of the growth of the firm, the resource based theory of the firm and the emergent theory of the entrepreneur.

The critical dynamic driving force is innovation. Innovation is perceived differently in numerous theories as inventions, new combination, or inventive risk taking. Entrepreneurship theory suggests that the people and what they do determine economic development. The study of entrepreneurs as personalities scrutinizes the variables that describe their appearance, such as the psychological profile (the need for achievement, the capacity to control, tolerance of ambiguity and a tendency to take risks) or non-psychological variables (education, experience, networks, the family, etc.), and personal characteristics. Entrepreneurship is vital for economic progress as it manifests its fundamental importance in different ways: i) by identifying, assessing and exploiting business opportunities; ii) by creating new businesses and/or renovating surviving ones by making them more dynamic; and iii) by motivating the economy innovation, competence, job creation- and by generally improving the welfare of society (Álvaro et al., 2008).

Entrepreneurs innovate and innovation is considered a critical driver of economic growth in the formulation of the endogenous growth theory (Abosede and Onakoya, 2013). Schumpeter (1934) also argued for the inclusion of the entrepreneurial function in the formulation of the modern theory of the firm.

## **Women as Entrepreneur**

Pareek (1992) define women entrepreneur as a female who plays a captivating part by repeatedly interacting and keenly adjusting herself with financial, socio-economic, and support spheres in society. Globally the impact of women entrepreneurs is gaining recognition intensely; worldwide, as the number of female business owners continues to increase steadily as women entrepreneurs and are making positive impact in the global economy. For instance, women produce over 80 percent of the food for sub Saharan Africa, 50-60 percent for Asia, 26 percent for the Caribbean, 34 percent for North Africa and the Middle East, and more than 30 percent for Latin America (Ali and Ali, 2013). Women entrepreneurs around the world are major contributors to the economy, as they are making a difference in the socio-economic arena. They contribute numerous ideas and a great deal of energy and capital resources to their communities, and generate jobs as well as create additional work for suppliers and other spin-off business linkages.

Despite these, there are major factors that constrained women from business venture; mostly gender-based discrimination, lack of shared support, limited or no access to information, not enough education & training facilities, lack of trust in one's capabilities and access to resources (Afza, Hassan, and Rashid, 2010).

## Methods

The major research instrument used in this work was questionnaires because of the nature of the study. The questionnaire was effectively designed to obtain information relevant for providing answers to research questions and hypotheses tested. The questionnaire was divided into sections. Section A contains information about respondent that their gender, marital status, years of experience and educational status. The section B consists of twenty five questions. The questionnaires were distributed to respondents in Ota, Ogun State. The questionnaire was in Likert-scale form. Its purpose was to rate the participants response using a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) – 5 (strongly agree).

One hundred and fifty (150) women entrepreneurs were randomly chosen from Ota; and were required to answer questions contained in the questionnaire. Questionnaires were administered by trained marketing students of Covenant University; who are familiar with the city. Criteria for administering the questionnaire are as follows: (i). Respondent must be an adult – (age: 18-65), must be able to read and fill the questionnaire without any assistance from a third party, (iii). Must have operated a small business successfully for more than three years and (iv). Respondent must be a decision maker or owner of such business. The responses were categorized, with the highest score indicating enhanced self-efficacy. The self-efficacy scale was internally consistent (standardized alpha coefficient) in our sample, Cronbach  $\alpha = 0.76$ . Out of the 150 questionnaires, 146 were deemed usable.

## Analysis

The survey research method was used to carry out this research. The data analysis was carried out with the aid of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The Pearson's product correlation method and multiple regressions were employed in data analysis. The correlation method serves as a statistical technique used to assess the extent to which two observations or series of data regarding a particular problem or situation can be regarded as positively or negatively related to each other by association. Correlation helps determining whether or not sets of observation vary. For the purpose of this research, the scale of measurement used was interval scale. This was used because it is very precise and presents no ambiguity in its presentation. In summary, the following statistical methods were utilized on the empirical data set: the Cronbach Alpha for carrying out the reliability test, Pearson's products-moment correlation and multiple regressions were used to test the hypothesis.

**Table 1:** Respondents Demographic Characteristics

Age	Frequency	Percentage
21 – 25 years	32	21.9%
26 – 35 years	44	30.1%
36 – 45 years	40	27.4%
46 – 55 years	22	15.1%
>56 years	08	5.5%
<i>Total:</i>	146	100.0%
<i>Education</i>		
SSCE/NCE/HS.	63	43.2%
BSc /OND/HND	62	42.5%
MSc/MBA	17	11.6%
Ph.D	4	2.7%
<i>Total:</i>	146	100.0%
<i>Marital Status</i>		
Single	28	19.2%
Married	104	71.2%
Divorce	4	2.8%
Widow	10	6.8%

Total:	146	100.0%
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Source: Field Survey 2013

**Table 2:** Summary of Findings.

Hypothesis	Sum of Squares	Degree of freq.	Mean Square	F-Value	R <sup>2</sup>	Sig. Value
1	22.427	4	5.607	16.790	.323	≤0.001
2	27.312	4	6.929	10.736	.233	≤0.000
3	16.952	4	4.238	5.531	.238	≤0.001
4	16.952	4	4.238	5.687	2.341	0.000

Source: From Analysis Results of Field Survey 2013

Table 2 above shows the summary of the findings. Regression analysis was used to test all the hypotheses.

H<sub>01</sub>: Activities of women entrepreneurs do not have an impact on the poverty level in Ota?

Women involved in entrepreneurship Women involved in entrepreneurship have improved the level of comfort of their families; enjoy better health care and skill acquisition. So encouraging women to start businesses would increase the level of educated children.

Interpretation of results-the results from the tables above revealed the extent to which the variance in popoverty level can explained by the activities of women entrepreneurs is 32.3% i.e. (R<sup>2</sup> sq=.323) at  $p \leq p < 0.001$ .

H<sub>02</sub>: The creations of jobs by women entrepreneurs have not reduce the rate of crime in Ota?

The results from the tables above revealed the extent to which the variance in crime rate can be explained by the activities of women entrepreneurs is 23.3% i.e. (R square =.233) at below 0.000 significance level. The significance level below 0.000 implies a statistical confidence of above 99% which implies that the activities of job creation by women entrepreneurs have a significant effect on crime reduction rate in Ota.

H<sub>03</sub>: Women entrepreneurs have not affected the level of employment in Ota?

The results from the tables above revealed the extent to which the variance in employment rate can be explained by the activities of women entrepreneurs is 23.8% i.e. (R square =.238) at below 0.001 significance level.

H<sub>04</sub>: The activities of women entrepreneurs do not affect the living standard in Ota.

The significance level 0.000 implies a statistical confidence of above 99%. This implies that the activities of women entrepreneurs have a significant effect on the living standards in the study area. Thus, the decision would be to reject the null hypothesis (H<sub>0</sub>), and accept the alternative hypothesis (H<sub>1</sub>).

Interpretation of results-The results from the tables above revealed that the extent to which the variance in the living standard in Ota can be explained by the activities of women entrepreneurs is 23.4% i.e. (R square =.234) at 0.00 significance level. Thus, the decision would be to reject the null hypothesis (H<sub>0</sub>), and accept the alternative hypothesis (H<sub>a</sub>).

## Discussion on Results and Findings

From the findings of the research work, questions 1-5 of the research questions were used to identify the impact of the activities of women entrepreneurs on the poverty level in Ota. The test for the hypotheses on using regression indicates that the activities of women entrepreneurs affect poverty level at 32.3% of variance and 0.001 significant

level. So therefore we accept the alternative hypothesis ( $H_a$ ) and reject the null hypotheses ( $H_0$ ). This means the more women engagement in entrepreneurial activities the greater the decrease in poverty level. This answers the research question one and is in line with the first objective of the study.

Questions 6-10 of the research questions were used to identify the impact of the activities of women entrepreneurs on the level of crime in Ota. The test for the hypotheses on using regression indicates that the activities of women entrepreneurs affect poverty level at 23.3% of variance and 0.000 significant levels. So therefore we accept the alternative hypothesis ( $H_a$ ) and reject the null hypotheses ( $H_0$ ). This means that the more women engagement in entrepreneurial activities the greater the decrease in crime rate. This answers the research question two and is in line with the second objective of the study.

Questions 11-15 of the research questions were used to identify the impact of the activities of women entrepreneurs on the level of employment in Ota. The test for the hypotheses on using regression indicates that the activities of women entrepreneurs affect employment rate at 23.8% of variance and 0.001 significant levels. So therefore we accept the alternative hypothesis ( $H_a$ ) and reject the null hypotheses ( $H_0$ ). This means the more women engagement in entrepreneurial activities the greater the level of employment available for the people. This answers the research question three and is in line with the third objective of the study.

Lastly, questions 16-20 of the research questions were used to identify the impact of the activities of women entrepreneurs on the living standard in Ota. The test for the hypotheses on using regression indicates that the activities of women entrepreneurs affect poverty level at 23.4% of variance and 0.000 significant levels. So therefore we accept the alternative hypothesis ( $H_a$ ) and reject the null hypotheses ( $H_0$ ). This means the more women engagement in entrepreneurial activities the greater the living standards of the people. This answers the research question four and is in line with the fourth objective of the study.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The objective of this research is to critically examine women entrepreneurship as an inventive approach to ensure a sustainable development in the Ota economy. Therefore, based on the data analyzed and results obtained, the conclusions of this study are discussed in succeeding paragraphs.

The future of Ota is in its women active involvement in entrepreneurship activities. Investing in women therefore, is a wise choice. Hence the government should lay a solid foundation by encouraging the education of female children, and reduce the stereotype bias against female children. The government can also establish more training centres including vocational centres for women to acquire skills. In order to enhance productivity and produce goods of global repute, the government must organize platforms that would sensitize women on the need for continuous self-development and capacity building.

## **Recommendations**

This study has fulfilled uprightness by identifying the roles women entrepreneurs play in the society. This supposedly implies that if only the necessary steps are taken to address the factors that prevent women from owning their own businesses, the economy of Ota and its environs will improve more than its present status. Since a woman not having transforming education, which is education beyond secondary level, is of substantial proportion (43.2%) in the study area, government should ensure that managerial lessons are accompanied with the skill acquisition programs in order for them to understand the rudiments of owning and sustaining a business. The authors also recommend that women entrepreneurs that have overcome the inertia of starting a business should come together to create platforms that can help those {these} women who are yet to take a step or kick-start such venture. Cooperation between relevant women entrepreneurs will be essential to fight for some necessary rights and privileges, and help women who aspire to be entrepreneurs to keep them afloat. With the increase in the nation's import, over dependence in one particular stream of revenue (petroleum), rapid emergence of dangerous hooligans and low employment rate, culminating in misery and low standard of living it has become expedient that we embrace women entrepreneurship and provide them assistance as well as support to run the race since SME accelerate the pace of economic growth and development.

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