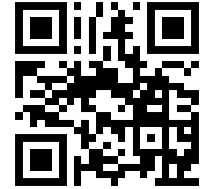


Women Entrepreneurship as A Response to Gender Discrimination



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ABSTRACT: Female entrepreneurship is an import factor not only in economic development but also in the realization of gender equality and social inclusion. This paper discusses women/female entrepreneurship, one of the most important socio-economic phenomena in the gender equality agenda.

Purpose

The purpose of the paper is to show cause for elevation of women entrepreneurship as an appropriate and effective response to gender discrimination more so considering the manner it empowers women and enhances social inclusion.

Approach

Through a desk-based approach, research has been conducted that entailed a strategy of searching some of the most common social and business databases using key words related to entrepreneurship in general and women entrepreneurship in specific.

Findings

Overall, it emerges (as presented herein) that women entrepreneurship is an appropriate and effective response to gender discrimination more so considering how it elevates women in society, empowers them economically, and ensures gender equality as well as broader social inclusion hence a more cohesive society.

Limitation

A notable limitation in the context of this paper is that most of the benefits uncovered (as contained in pertinent literature) mainly relate to the economic aspect, while it is known that there are other non-economic benefits of women entrepreneurship that deserve equal attention and discussion in the same respect.

Practical Implications

The paper gives insight as to what policymakers and other actors in the broader social movement need to do to empower women and improve their welfare in society, mainly by supporting and encouraging women entrepreneurship.

Value

The value of this piece is indisputable when the benefits of entrepreneurship are considered in unity.

KEYWORDS: Women entrepreneurship, gender disparities, economic empowerment, gender discrimination, social inclusion.

INTRODUCTION

There is increasing recognition that entrepreneurship occupies center stage in matters of economic growth and development. In fact, it is the backbone of many economies across the globe. Against the backdrop of this recognition, entrepreneurial initiatives are encouraged in a bid to empower people and reduce poverty (Li et al., 2019). More importantly, economic empowerment more so for women as spelt out in

Resolution 67/202 of the United Nations General Assembly just as in the Beijing Platform for Action elevates women entrepreneurship as it relates to gender equality as well as decent and productive work for everyone. Interestingly, policymakers and scholars have realized that entrepreneurship as an economic phenomenon is not gender-neutral, a fact that is evidenced by gender disparities in participation in entrepreneurial activity. Nevertheless, women's participation in entrepreneurship is one way their social inclusion and economic empowerment are addressed vis-à-vis the equality agenda. Exploring how female entrepreneurship impacts the life of women leaves no doubt that indeed this economic phenomenon is an appropriate and effective response to gender discrimination.

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Scholarly Interest

Women are a disadvantaged lot due to gender discrimination but through entrepreneurship they can better their lives and general standing in society. Appreciation of the role of women entrepreneurship in this regard is evidenced by the increasing interest over the years among scholars on this phenomenon as shown in the graph below (figure 1). While the reasons for female entrepreneurship have been explored differently in literature, the most common rationale that emerges is the enhancement of social inclusion, empowerment, and equality for women (Bastian et al., 2019). Pertinent literature shows that entrepreneurship contributes to different economic development aspects including job creation and general economic empowerment, with the latter being conceptualized and represented by four domains namely: 1) Agency, 2) "Institutional environment, norms, status, recognition", 3) "Social relations, accountability, networks, influence", and 4) Economic advancement (Wu, 2013: p. 1-2). Further exploration of these domains helps give a better glimpse as to how women entrepreneurship addresses gender discrimination. For instance, in relation to agency, female entrepreneurship gives women a platform and opportunity as well as the necessary skill sets and capabilities to pursue their individual goals while accessing various services and assets just as their male counterparts in society. Additionally, as regards the domain of social relations, accountability, networks, and influence, female entrepreneurship affords women the networks and power relations that help them achieve and maximize on their potential while also negotiating or bargaining for their interests and rights through collective action, collaboration, and other approaches (Wu, 2013).

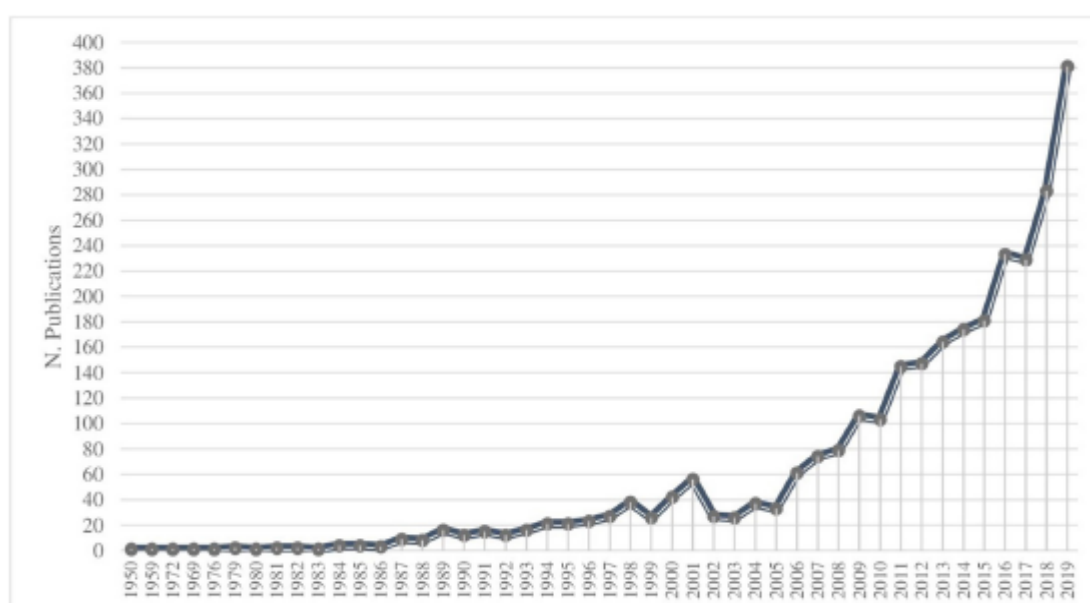


Figure 1: Scientific Publications on Women Entrepreneurship over the Years, Source: Cardella et al. (2020: p. 6).

In the current discussion, merit is found in looking at a conceptual model illustrated by Li et al. (2019), which helps understand gender specific causes and factors for female entrepreneurship. This model is presented in figure 2 below.

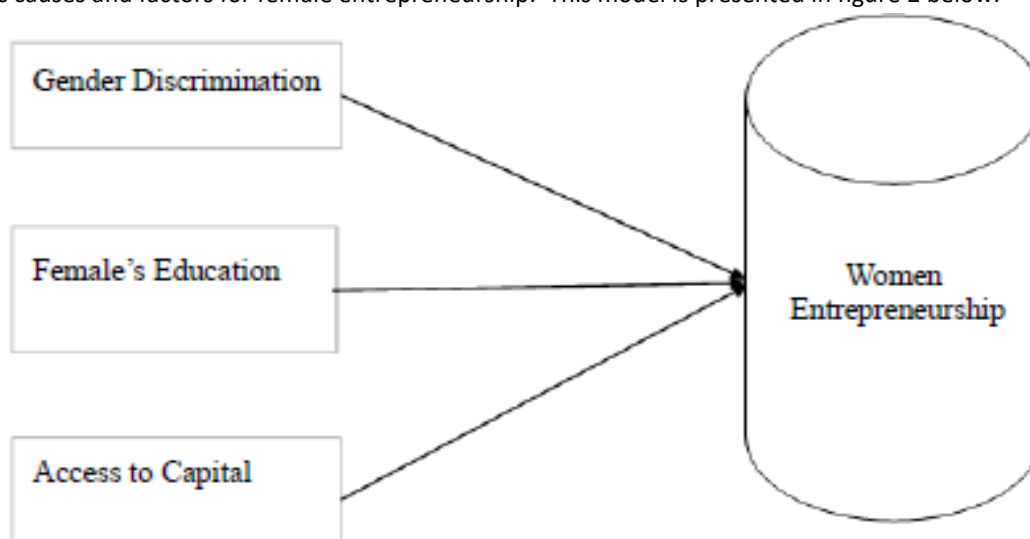


Figure 2: Gender Specific Factors/Causes for Female Entrepreneurship (Conceptual Model), Source: Li et al. (2019: p. 2).

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Economic Empowerment

From the above model, it becomes clear that the authors' viewpoint regarding the gender specific causes and factors for female entrepreneurship is congruent with what is captured by Wu (2013) in his presentation of the domains of economic empowerment of women through entrepreneurship. Li and colleagues (2019) make it clear that female education and contextual access to capital are fertile grounds for inequality, hence gender discrimination that potentially affects the participation of women in various societal (economic, political, and social) processes. Here, it goes without saying that if issues in the respective domains are tackled as to facilitate female entrepreneurship that would be a significant step towards addressing gender discrimination. Importantly, this is not to say that economic empowerment (through entrepreneurship) is the only measure of the impact of entrepreneurship in the lives of women. Rather, besides the fact that economic empowerment can be expanded to capture other aspects of life, there are other areas that are significantly impacted by this phenomenon. Thus, it is imperative that when exploring women entrepreneurship as an appropriate and, arguably, effective response to gender discrimination, factors inter-related to economic empowerment are also considered. Such may include the gender relations at the household and communal levels, which would also include the barriers and opportunities women encounter in the same respect and how such are impacted by entrepreneurship.

Gender Discrimination

Presently, it is imperative to appreciate that gender differences and contextual inequality impact women negatively, a good example being the hindering of economic growth. One root cause of such hindrance in the economic context is the gender inequality and discrimination that women encounter in the educational context. The negative link between educational inequality and economic growth, according to Ali (2015), is representative of the benefits that are missed in the absence of education, for instance as may relate to being skilled, knowledgeable and enlightened and making more informed decisions. With there being evidence that sometimes women can perform more exceptionally than men, educational inequality, hence the denying of educational opportunities to women can impact women negatively when they venture into entrepreneurial activities.

Research has shown that cultural values and practices inform and account for a great deal of the gender discrimination witnessed in society today (Choulhry et al., 2019). Instances of such discrimination include cases where women cannot receive their rightful inheritance, or where they cannot venture into meaningful economic activity because it is believed their place is at home...in the kitchen. In their attempt to uncover why men and women perform differently in the entrepreneurial field, Carranza et al. (2018) note that most differences in economic outcomes in the context of entrepreneurial activity arise from the choice of sectors and activities (that men and women venture into). According to the authors, women prefer hospitality, retail, and service sectors whose growth potential is significantly lower than sectors that are dominated by men.

Benefits of Women Entrepreneurship

To reemphasize the benefits of women entrepreneurship (as with entrepreneurship in general), most can be located within those motivational factors that encourage entrepreneurial activity. They include income generation, which is the main reason for venturing into entrepreneurship, and the need to achieve that which they are denied due to gender discrimination. Here, it emerges that the reasons for the two genders to venture into entrepreneurship may differ (Margoya et al., 2020). Indeed, through female entrepreneurship, economic empowerment is possible for women, hence economic growth both at individual as well as aggregate levels. Still, at the individual level, entrepreneurship enables women to achieve pride and a sense of personal achievement that also includes personal determination. A woman who has ventured into entrepreneurial activity can easily become successful and achieve their socio-economic aspirations, thus breaking away from societal norms, some of which may be discriminatory, offensive, and/or oppressive to women (and have even been institutionalized) (Durrani & Halai, 2018).

Examining gender discrimination against women, it emerges that much of it occurs because women lack independence and autonomy. In many patriarchal societies, there are gender roles clearly spelt out based on gender differences, and the result is that women are left depending on men. In the same vein, there are specific family obligations and responsibilities that must be fulfilled by both men and women, and women may be considered unhelpful in taking care of family needs if they have no source of income. Therefore, entrepreneurship helps women escape the blame of failure, even making them independent and autonomous. The benefits of entrepreneurship in this manner are more felt in single-parent households headed by mothers.

Entrepreneurship is an appropriate answer to gender discrimination, even that which has been institutionalized. There is evidence that most employees of financial institutions such as banks consider women to be less capable of succeeding in entrepreneurial activities (Kyalo & Kiganane, 2014). As such, women are less likely to secure external financing, for instance in form of loans. The scenario is the same in both developed and developing countries as women generally face more difficulties in assessing loans and other forms of financing than men. The stereotypical perceptions arise in part from women's inferior position in the society, which also explains why they face discrimination in many fronts (Pathak et al., 2013).

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The discrepancy in participation in entrepreneurial activity between women and men is worth mentioning. The gap in participation in entrepreneurial activity between men and women (in Latin America as is the case elsewhere in the world) has been illustrated by Mayorga et al. (2020) as in figure 3 below.

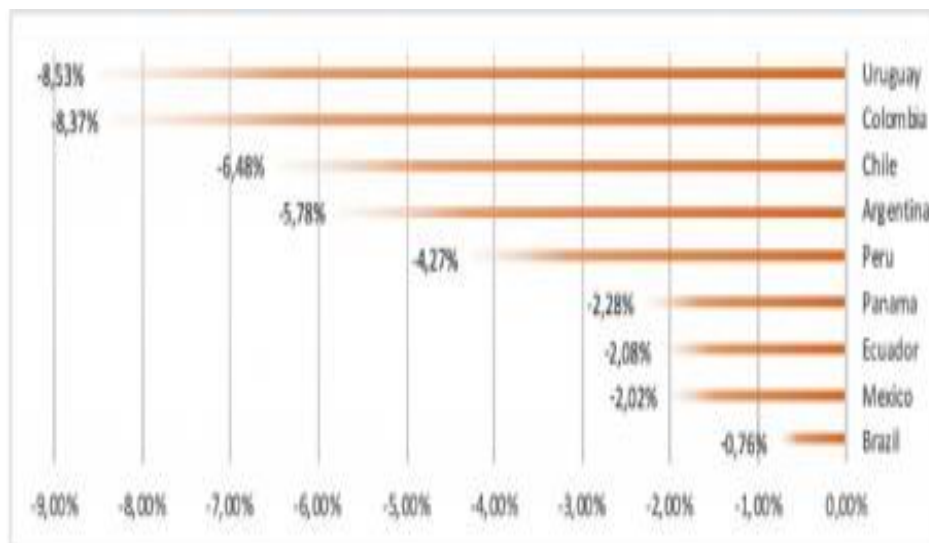


Figure 3: Gap in Entrepreneurship: Women vs. Men, 2008-2015, Source: Mayorga et al. (2020: p. 2)

While the current position is that women entrepreneurship is an appropriate and effective response to gender discrimination, it is worrying that broader societal inequality also permeates the economic arena where entrepreneurial activities take place (Welter et al., 2014). The number of men venturing into entrepreneurship is more than that of women, and it is not surprising that patriarchic tradition, cultures, and practices are visible in the economic stage (Bosman & Kelley, 2018).

CONCLUSION

In a word, female entrepreneurship should be prioritized by policymakers because it is not only an ingredient for economic growth, but it is also, undeniably, an appropriate and effective response to gender discrimination. Indeed, by empowering women economically, it gives them a place in society and moves them a step away from widespread gender discrimination that is usually informed by their lowly position in society. This economic phenomenon should be given bigger attention by governments, policymakers, and other actors in the broader social movement.

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