

CHALLENGES OF WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS IN NIGERIA

Ozuru, H. N.¹; Nwibere, B. M.² and Chikwe, J.E.²

¹Marketing Department, University of Port Harcourt, Choba

Phone: +234-803-668-5054; Email: oscap2003@yahoo.co.uk

²Department of Management, University of Port Harcourt, Choba

Abstract

This paper examines entrepreneurship in the light of the process, advantages and disadvantages, women involvement, and challenges, including micro-financing for sourcing capital, high cost of funds, weak Naira, political instability, unstable power supply, competition, advanced fee fraud, socially responsible marketing, balancing of the ecological systems, ethical and socio-cultural issues. The study also discusses the extent to which some development programmes will result in women's economic, social and political empowerment, since women are generally considered to be at the lowest rung of the poverty ladder in Nigeria. Finally, the study looks at the benefits derivable from the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency (SMEDAN) and the Microfinance Policy established under the auspices of the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN). The paper recommends that the government should address rural poverty by empowering women with access to material, human, and social resources necessary to make strategic choices in life, thereby becoming change agents to take advantage of abounding entrepreneurial opportunities.

Introduction

Robust economic growth cannot be achieved without putting in place well focused programmes to reduce poverty through empowering the people by increasing their access to factors of production, especially

credit. The latent capacity of the poor from entrepreneurship would be significantly enhanced through the provision of microfinance services to enable them engage in economic activities and be more self reliant, increase employment opportunities, enhance household income, and create wealth.

Most Nigerians earn money by working in business, which is the buying and selling of products or services in order to make a profit. An employee earns a living by working in someone else's business. Some people, who start their own businesses and work for themselves, are called entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurs are often both owners and employees.

Profit is money a company has left after expenses and taxes have been paid. As owners, entrepreneurs are in control of the profit made by them businesses. An entrepreneur is responsible for the success or failure of his or her business. A successful business sells products or services that customers need, at prices they willing to pay. The prices must be reasonable enough for the entrepreneur to be able to cover all costs of running the business, and have money left over as profit. Entrepreneurship is an approach to life that involves thinking of oneself as a "can-do" person.

According to Mariotti and Towle (2006), "Entrepreneurship is a way of thinking, reasoning, and acting, that is, opportunity observed holistically in approach and leadership balanced. The public often thinks of business only in terms of big businesses – companies, such as Coca-Cola (Nigeria) Plc., P. and Gamble (Nigeria) Plc., and Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC). A big business has more than 100 employees and sells more than 1 million worth of product or services in a year.

Most of the World's businesses are small businesses. A baby sitting service and a neighbourhood restaurant are examples of small businesses. The principles involved in running a large company and a small one are basically the same. In fact, most of the multimillion-Naira businesses in Nigeria today all started out as small entrepreneurial ventures. Many of the largest corporations, such as

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Dangote, Atlas Cement, and Eagle Cement, began as an idea thought up by one or two entrepreneurs.

For instance, in the United States of America, small business owners and their employees represent more than half the private work force. These entrepreneurs create more than 75 per cent of net new jobs nationwide and generate more than 50 per cent of the nation's gross domestic product (GDP). Therefore, the importance of entrepreneurship in Nigeria cannot be over emphasized.

One of the key things an entrepreneur must do is to learn to listen. By listening to others, entrepreneurs get ideas about improving a business or creating a new one. Again, entrepreneurs must observe. By constantly keeping their eyes open, entrepreneurs get ideas regarding how to help society, about businesses to start, and also what people need. Also, they must learn to think. By critical thinking, entrepreneurs are able to analyze problems, thereby thinking out solutions.

Noble Prize winner scientist Linus Paul pointed out that the best way to get good ideas is to have lots of them because successful entrepreneurs know it is important to capture creative ideal and thoughts. An entrepreneur must start an 'idea journal', involving:

- Carrying a pocket-sized notebook at all times;
- Making a habit of listening, observing and thinking and writing down entrepreneurial ideas regarding meeting consumer needs or solving business problems; and
- Describing briefly every positive encounter with a business.

Advantages of Entrepreneurship

There are both pros and cons of being an entrepreneur. The entrepreneur works for the following rewards:

Control over time

Significantly, entrepreneurs do not have to operate on anyone else's time clock. Once an entrepreneur starts his or her own business, he/she

can work flexible hours. An entrepreneur can hire other people to perform tasks that he does not want to do or not good at, and must focus on what he can do best.

A Creative Fulfilling Life

Successful entrepreneurs are passionate about their business. Entrepreneurs are almost never bored as they enjoy both the freedom as well as the responsibility of being the boss.

The Opportunity to Create Great Wealth

Ownership is the key to wealth. Working for someone else means selling one's time and effort in exchange for money. One is paid only for the work done. If one's work helps to make the company successful, the owner or the entrepreneur will receive the greatest rewards. Owners benefit from both higher profits earned as well as from increasing value of the business as it grows. Ownership is how great fortunes are made.

Control over Compensation

Entrepreneurs get to decide how they are paid. As owner of the business, one can decide to pay oneself a salary - a fixed payment made at regular intervals, such as every week or month. Pay yourself a wage - a fixed payment per hour. Take a dividend - as the owner you can choose to be paid as if you were an employee (salary or wage), or you can simply pay yourself a share of the business's profits. Take a commission - a percentage of the value of a sale. If you decide to pay yourself 10% commission and you sell an item for N1,000, your commission on the sale would be N100.00

Control over Working Conditions

As an entrepreneur, you can create a working environment that reflects your values.

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Self-Evaluation

Entrepreneurs evaluate their own performances. If you own a company, you cannot be hired or fixed by anyone. Some of the greatest entrepreneurs in Nigeria today might not have been able to succeed if they hadn't started working for themselves.

Participation in an International Community

The internet today enables entrepreneurs to compete and make deals all over the world. Institutions, like the World Entrepreneurs' Organization (WEO), provide grounds for networking and co-operation among members.

The opportunity to help one's Community

Entrepreneurs create jobs for people in their communities. In addition, many of the World's great museums, libraries, hospitals, as well as other important institutions and facilities have been founded and supported by entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurs give away many millions each year to help others and support the arts. Even if an entrepreneur's business never earns millions, he can still donate money and time to make your community a better place.

Disadvantages of Entrepreneurship

The cons of entrepreneurship include:

Sacrifices

Entrepreneurs often put more time into launching their own businesses than many people put into their jobs. While establishing a business, an entrepreneur may also invest a lot of money in the business. He or she may not be able to buy new cloths or a fancy car, or go on vacation. Other disadvantages are:

Business Failure

Many small businesses fail. Entrepreneurs risk losing not only their money, but also that of investors entrusted in their care.

Obstacles

An entrepreneur might run into unexpected problems that would have to be solved or face discouragement from family members and friends.

Loneliness

It can be lonely, and even a little scary to be completely responsible for the success or failure of a business.

Financial Insecurity

Entrepreneur's earnings may rise or fall, depending on how the business is faring, and he may not always have enough money to pay oneself.

Long hours/handwork

Entrepreneurs will have to work long hours in order to get their business off the ground. Some entrepreneurs work six or even seven days a week.

Women Entrepreneurship – Imperative for Sustainable Development

The Abuja Declaration on Participatory Development - the Role of Women in the 1990s, noted that sustainable development can only be achieved with full participation of women, who constitute approximately 50 percent of the population. In spite of this declaration, the role of women in development has gained little or no serious attention in the past years. The declaration further noted that women lacked access to resources, including credit and technology. Because of the deterioration of the economic situation since the 1980s, the condition of the Nigeria women entrepreneurs has been adversely affected.

The declaration urged African governments to initiate priority actions that would “substantially increase female extension agents and fully utilize them to establish co-operative and rural banks for

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women”. While African governments have made feeble attempts to address the issues raised by this conference, substantial progress still has not been made with respect to general welfare of African women. In the area of microfinance and women’s access to credit, most microfinance institutions in Nigeria systematically provide decreasing percentage of loans to women. In most cases, it has been found that Nigerian women have a smaller loan size ostensibly because women are considered to have a lower capital absorptive capacity than Nigerian men. Also, women in Nigeria are considered less capable to produce a bankable business plan for credit purposes. Consequently, the women’s loan packages, programmes and services are far smaller, thereby limiting the range of women’s economic activities and returns in the country.

Microfinance strategies have, therefore, been recognized by national governments, donor agencies and NGOs as strategies for gender equality and women empowerment. It must however be recognized that the setting up of these structures and placing the strategies in the hands of women does not go far in addressing their empowerment and economic welfare in society. These strategies must include adequate training, leadership training and involvement, ownership and control of credit institutions, and identifying the importance of women’s economic contribution to the family and to the community and what difference this make to the development of the community and the country at large.

Further, a World Bank research of 2001 clearly indicates that gender inequalities in developing countries inhibit economic growth. Nigeria is no exception with her gender attitude toward women. There is correlation between gender discrimination and greater poverty, slower economic growth, weaker governance, and a lower standard of living of the people. A United National Development Programme (UNDP) analysis confirmed a “very strong correlation between its (UNDP’s) gender empowerment measure and gender-related development indices and its Human Development Index”. The report also indicated that about 70% of the 1.3 billion people living on less

than 1 US\$ a day are women. At the centre of this inequality issue should be a gender consideration.

Women participation in development in Nigeria has been rated very low due to poor and inadequate provision of credit. For instance, the recent KEKE NAPEP programme (of the National Poverty Alleviation Programme, NAPEP) has been found to favour more men than women entrepreneurs. On a personal interview carried out on KEKE NAPEP owners, it was found out that 18 out of 20 are owned by men. This low participation has also been blamed for the less-than-satisfactory impact of public investments in development. Thus, there is an apparent feminization of poverty, calling for policies and measures through microfinance strategies that will specifically address these dire needs of Nigerian women entrepreneurs.

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Sourcing Capital - Microfinance

Microfinance is about providing financial services to the poor, who are traditionally not served by the conventional financial institutions. It has been estimated that women comprise nearly 74% of the 19.3 million of the world's poorest people served by micro financial institutions. According to the State of the Microcredit Summit Campaign 2001 Report, this equals 14.2 million of the world's poorest women and these have access to financial services through microfinance institutions, banks, NGO's and traditional or non-banking financial institutions. Also, a survey by the special unit on microfinance of the United Nations Capital Development Fund (SUM/UNCEF) of 29 microfinance institutions revealed that approximately 60% of these institutions' clients were women. Six of the 29 focused entirely on women. Of the other 23 mixed sex programmes, 52% of clients were women. However, the percentage of women clients substantially decreased when only individual loans or "relatively high minimum loan amounts" were offered.

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Some microfinance programmes, such as Country Women Association of Nigeria (COWAN) - an NGO, the Nigerian Agricultural, Co-operative and Rural Development Bank (NACRDB) - a federal government of Nigeria owned commercial-like bank with rural focus, and other similar programmes were all set up by the Nigerian government to fit into the microcredit model of microfinance institutions as presented by the Grameen Bank of Bangladesh founded by Professor Mohammed Yunus of Bangladesh.

However, an examination of these programmes will reveal that not much has been done to empower the Nigerian women in the entrepreneurial world. As such, women continue to face financial challenges in the country. Credit facilities play critical role in the lives of poor women. Extending credit to women involved in agricultural activities will enable them procure simple agricultural implements like hoes, knives, hiring and purchasing of tractors, and purchase of fertilizers. Also, women involved in cottage industries, such as palm oil extractions and palm kernel cracking and oil presses, need credit for economic development in the areas.

High Cost of Funds

All businesses need to raise funds at one point or the other. The cost at which these are available often determines whether an opportunity could be taken and/or threat warded off. The cost at which funds are available in Nigeria is indeed very high. This is slowing the growth of the nation's economy and adversely affecting the real sector. The bankers' argument was that they mobilize their funds at very high cost in the face of intense competition and liquidity squeeze. They also blamed the situation on the cost at which government itself places funds in banks. The double-digit interest rate is an obstacle to the entrepreneurs in the growth of business in Nigeria.

Weak Naira

Unless the business is such that no imported input is needed, which is very rare, only then would the almost daily depreciation of the Naira

not be a great concern. Entrepreneurs in the Information Technology (IT) and telecommunication business suffer this challenge. In the IT and Telecoms sector, a dominant percentage of the hardware and software needed for carrying on the business have to be imported. As such, the more the Naira depreciates, the more expensive these products become in terms of Naira value. In fact the heart of some incumbent operators in the sector, who were able to finance their equipment in terms of foreign currency denominated loans, skips a beat every time the national currency experiences major plunge.

In July 2002, the Central Bank introduced the Dutch Auction Exchange to replace the Interbank Foreign Exchange Market (IFEM) in a bid to stem the depreciation of the Naira. Till the present day, the Naira value continues to depreciate. The argument by some top bankers now is that the Naira has been kept relatively stable and that the challenge is to sustain this stability. Most entrepreneurs in it and telecom companies still face the challenges of getting their foreign currency needs at the official rate and usually have to turn to the parallel market because the requirement for participation appear skewed against them.

Unstable Power Supply

It is already common knowledge now, amongst international entrepreneurs that planning for businesses in Nigeria cannot be based on relying on public power supply. What some companies have resorted to for years now is operate on electric power generator, and put the public supply (from the Power Holding Company of Nigeria, PHCN) on stand-by. A lot has been done by this civilian administration to improve on the generation capacity of PHCN. Thousands of power transformers have also been imported and distributed. Independent Power Projects (IPPs) are not operational in most states. However, despite the epileptic nature of electricity in the country, PHCN have remarkably improved its electricity supply better than in the past several years.

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Political Instability

Another glaring challenge to women entrepreneurs in Nigeria is political instability, which has continually shaped the capacity of any direct government agency charged with extending credit facilities to women and the rural poor aimed at increasing economic activities and promoting rural economic development. That such an agency is always superintended by the first lady makes it subject to the vagaries of the rapid political changes that Nigeria went through between 1983 and 1998. In the case of family Economic Advancement Programme (FEAP) therefore, the attachment of this programme to the apron-strings of the first lady weakened this method of credit delivery.

Significantly, each abrupt change in government also alters the micro-credit programmatic arrangement. With the exit of the Abacha regime in 1998, the FEAP witnessed a gradual death. By 2001, mid-way into the Olusegun Obasanjo administration, his wife and the new first lady had charted a new programme, thus putting the FEAP to the grave sidelines. The government itself, under pressure from the civil society, set up its own poverty alleviation programmes that must succeed. Government must create a favourable policy milieu and revamp its regulatory framework that supports with rural financial markets and grassroots approach to financial intermediation rather than embark on service provision by itself.

One of the most dynamic areas for the major political parties when in power has been the introduction of legislation to protect consumers. This without doubt, provide external constraints to entrepreneurs, the most significant being that of the government policy itself. In this respect, the entrepreneurs have legal duties to consumers, and a number of consumer Bill of Rights have been promulgated by the Nigerian Communication Commission (NCC) over the years to protect the consumers. Notably, the Bill of Rights include:

- The right to be informed
- The right to safety
- The right to choice

- The Right to be heard

Competition

Technology represents the application to marketing of knowledge in science, invention and innovations. Technology leads to new goods and services for consumers. It also improves existing products, offers better customer service, and often reduces prices through new, cost efficient production and distribution methods. Entrepreneurs continue to face these challenges. The IT and telecoms sector in Nigeria is as competitive as it can get anywhere else. The rate at which rival products and services spring up is quite frightening.

As an example, a year ago, there were more than 10 companies in the business of providing VSAT solutions, usually the high-en Ku and C-band grades. They rarely advertised. Those who need the service would eventually get to know them. Then, knowledge about VSAT was esoteric, even among technology companies. But, within months of the emergence of lower cost VSATs on the global scene, the number of companies in this line of business has doubled several folds, while adverts on VSATs are as common in newspaper as those of laptops. Also, knowledge about satellites is more or less universal within the technology and business interest circles.

Advance Fee Fraud

As we all know, fraudsters are doing a lot of damage to the image of Nigeria and to Nigerian businesses that are increasingly finding it difficult to transact business with Europeans and Americans. Fraudsters send uniform letters, faxes or emails to several (usually thousands) foreigners listed in directories, claiming to be in position to transfer huge sums out of the country and offering the individual huge sum of money in exchange for the use of their accounts.

Nowadays, it is likely that an enquiry from a Nigerian company and even online order made to a European or American concern would be ignored because of fear of being scammed. Entrepreneurs, therefore,

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find it difficult to transact businesses in these countries for lack of trust due to the fraudsters' activities.

Despite national and international efforts, the practice seems not to be abating. The Nigerian government, through the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) and the organized private sector (OPS), are doing their best in addressing this issue more frontally so that entrepreneurs could have a conducive atmosphere in doing business with other countries. The advanced free fraud syndrome is apparently on the high side in Nigeria, considering her poor economic standard.

Most Nigerian youths are no more interested in hard work and in gradual accumulation of wealth. Rather, they want to make it quick. The internet is providing them with the opportunity to do this. In recent times, most youths patronize cyber cafes with the hope of getting connections that will enable them get rich quick.

Vandalization

Nigeria is one country where public facilities are vandalized. This practice, which started as far back as the 1980s, with the vandalization of the National Electric Power Authority (NEPA) and Nigerian Telecommunications (NITEL) equipment/cables, is still on, though on a lesser scale now. Private operators face much the same risk as these public companies especially in sparsely populated areas of the country.

Social Responsibility

Social responsibility demands that marketers accept an obligation to give equal performance. They must recognize the importance of relatively qualitative and quantitative consumer and social benefits as well as the quantitative measures of sales, revenue and profits by which firm have traditionally measured marketing performance. Government legislation can mandate socially responsible actions. The Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC), under its Bill of Rights - The Right to be informed - requires that consumer goods be clearly labeled in easy-to-understand terms by entrepreneurs. This provides

consumers more information regarding the products. The most far-reaching are based on the Nutrition Labeling and Education Act of the Commission, which requires entrepreneurs in food manufacturing to use a uniform format and disclose what is in their product. The idea is to allow consumers to compare the nutritional value of different products. This is a plus to consumers and may even lead to healthier diets.

The National Agency for Food and Drugs Administration and Control (NAFDAC) is empowered to control the socially responsible marketing. The functions and powers of NAFDAC to entrepreneurs include:

- To regulate and control importation, exportation, distribution, advertisement, sales and use of drugs, cosmetics, medical devices, and bottled and sachet (pure) water.
- To undertake appropriate investigation into production premises and raw materials for foods, drugs, cosmetics, medical devices, bottled water and chemical establishment, relevant quality assurance system, including certification of the production.
- To undertake inspection of important foods, drugs, cosmetics, etc. and establish quality relevant assurance systems, including certification of production sites of the regulated products.
- To compile standard specifications and guidelines for the production, importation, exportation sale and distribution of foods, drugs, cosmetics, medical devices, bottled and sachet (pure) water and chemicals.
- To conduct appropriate test and ensure compliance with standard specifications designed and approved by the council for effective devices of bottled water, chemical and their raw materials as well as their production processes in factories as well as other establishments.
- To liaise with relevant establishments within and outside Nigeria in pursuance of the functions of the Agency, and to

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carry out such activities as are necessary or expedient for the performance of its functions under the decree.

In general, NAFDAC requires all products either manufactured in Nigeria or imported into the country to be registered, and any unregistered product in circulation in Nigerian markets are considered illegal product. Failure to register any regulated product meant for human consumption may earn the owner of such product serious sanctions.

Balancing the Ecological System

Ecology - the relationship between organisms and their natural environments - has become a driving force in influencing the ways in which businesses operate. Many industrial and government leaders rank the pollution of the environment as the biggest challenge for today's corporations. From water pollution, garbage disposal, and acid rain to depletion of the ozone layer and global warming, environmental issues are global. They influence all areas of marketing decision making, from product planning to public relations, spanning such topics as planned obsolescence, pollution control, recycling waste materials, and resource conservation.

In Nigeria, government officials and environmental experts in recent times have introduced aggressive advertisement on televisions, radios and newspapers trying to educate the citizens to change their habits, else we be buried alive in our own garbage.

Entrepreneurs produce so-called disposable products that become indisposable garbage. Millions of diapers containing tons of excrement and urine are dumped each day into a dwindling number of landfills around the nation. Aside from the diapers, the modern throw-away products, such as satchet (pure) water bags, five alive containers, indomie packages, capricon juice drinks containers, etc., are becoming a bomb to the earth's garbage dumps. Also, no end insight for the life of discarded plastics produced by Nigerian entrepreneurs.

It is obvious that these million throw-away products Nigerians does not break down. Rather, they disappear in landfills even under tons of garbage for years. The plastic industries, pure water bags, shopping bags, plastic bottles and indomie packages unearthed in landfills after being buried for decades were as fresh as on the day they were produced. Plastic shopping bags, polystyrene cups, polystyrene containers that hold fast-foods from Mr. Biggs, Skippers, Kilimanjaro restaurant, De Promise, King fisher, Sublane, Emmanuel fast food, Kitching licking, tantalizer, Creek view, Hannah and Big Bite, etc., baby plastic milk bottles instead of glass, shoes of plastic instead of leather, all pose great nuisance to the environment, and on the other hand, a great challenge to entrepreneurs who produce these items. In the quest to market their products, entrepreneurs have ignored the importance of ecological system in our lives, and therefore, a great challenge to entrepreneurs.

Entrepreneurs are greatly challenged to respond to consumers' growing concern about ecological issues through Green Marketing - the production, promotion and reclamation of environmentally sensitive products. Entrepreneurs must be quick to tie their companies and products to economical themes. Industrial production, such as Petro Chemical in Eleme, Port-Harcourt, Nigeria disposes of dangerous and harmful wastes. This pollution cannot go on without altering nature's limits, and as such, are under heavy criticism by environmental groups as well as the press. In producing goods and services, waste and pollution must also be produced.

The social challenge to entrepreneurs (sub contractors) is to find a happy or acceptable medium between industrial production and nature's condition. Industrial production activities must be carried on in a way that minimizes waste/pollution and the burden on society. The ground must be dug to find minerals, but the waste must be adequately disposed of. The waters may be polluted, but the water must be clean for household use and consumption. Solid waste must be disposed of, but must not be allowed to take over the streets. They must be confined to particular areas and recycled. The air in industrial cities will be

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clouded with combustion by-products, but strategies for providing clean air must be sought and maintained.

The ecological imbalance caused by industrial activities must be addressed from time to time in order to minimize the impact of waste and pollution. This challenge underscores that the resultant burden of pollution and waste produced from industrial activities by entrepreneurs would no longer be tolerated by citizens as they threaten life.

Ethics

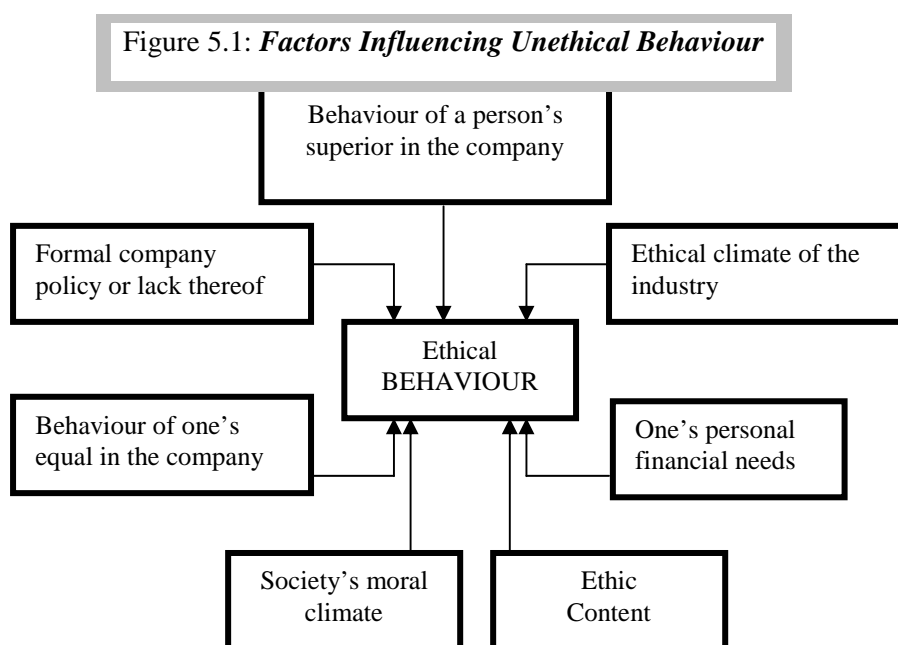
Today, one of the greatest challenges to businesses is finding a balance between economics and ethics. In as much as the society wants business to produce goods and services, it also expects the business to operate in an ethical manner.

Ethics can be described as the principles, values and standards of conduct considered appropriate for marketers (Groucutt *et al*, 2004). However, as the definition illustrates, entrepreneurs often struggle to find solutions to often complex ethical problems. The difficulty they face is that ethical standards vary from one person to another, from one region to another, and from one culture to another. What are considered acceptable practices in one country may be considered both illegal and unethical in another.

Furthermore, according to Boone and Kurtz (2004), marketing ethics is defined as the marketer's standards of conduct and moral values. Ethics concerns matter of right or wrong, the responsibility of individuals and firms to do what is morally right. The aim of ethics is to identify both the rules that should govern people's behaviour and the good that is worth seeking. All ethical decisions are guided by the underlying values of the individual, ethical climate in the industry, and the behaviour of management. Values are principles of conducts, such as caring, honesty, keeping promises, pursuits of excellence, loyalty, fairness, integrity, respect for others and responsible citizenship (Guy, 1990). Most people would agree that these values are admirable guidelines for behaviour. However, ethics becomes a more

complicated issue when situations dictate that one value overrule another.

Ethics is the system or rules that governs the ordering of values (Bateman and Snell, 1999). According to (Ferrell and Fraedrich, 1997), an ethical issue is a situation, problem or opportunity in which an individual must choose among several actions that must be evaluated as right or wrong. Ethical issues arise in every facet of life, but we concern ourselves here with business ethics in particular. Business ethics comprises the moral principles and standards that guide behaviour in the world of business.



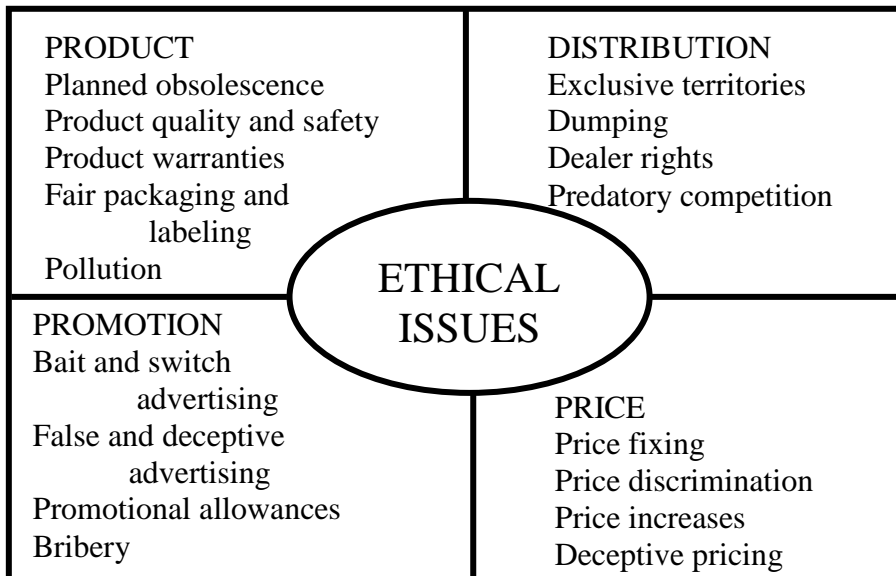
Source: Ferrell and Fraedrich, 1997

As can be seen from the Figure 5.1, ethics is not shaped only by society and by individual development and virtue, it may also be influenced by the company's work environment. The ethical climate of

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an organization refers to the process by which decisions are evaluated and made on the basis of right and wrong (De George, 1990). When people make decisions that are judged by ethical criteria, these questions always seem to get asked: why did he/she do it? Good motives or bad ones? His responsibility or someone else's? Who gets the credit or the blame? So often responsibility of unethical act is placed squarely on the individual who commits them, but the environment has a profound influence, as well.

Table 5.2: *Ethical Questions in Marketing*



Source: Adapted from Boone and Kurtz, 2004

As Table 5.2 indicates, each element of the marketing mix raises its own set of ethical questions. Before any improvements to the marketing system can be made, each of them must be properly evaluated. Ensuring ethical practices means promising customers and business partners not to sacrifice quality and fairness for profit. In

exchange, businesses hope for increased customer loyalty toward their brands. In globally operating economically and ethically, people are aware of what is right, fair, just, truthful, and expect or would like to receive these as against what becomes unfair, false and unjust.

In product strategy, product quality, planned obsolescence, brand similarity and packaging questions are of critical importance to the success of a brand. Competitive pressures have forced some entrepreneurs into packaging practices that may be considered misleading, deceptive, or unethical. Large packages help gain shelf space and consumer in the supermarket. Oddly sized packaging makes price comparisons difficult. Bottles with concave bottoms give impressions that they contain more liquid than they actually do.

Also, in distribution strategy, ethical issues influencing a firm's decision regarding channel strategy involves knowing what is the appropriate degree of control over the channel? And should a company distribute its products in marginally profitable outlets that have no alternative source of supply? The issue of channel control typically arises in relationship between manufacturers and franchise dealers. For instance, should an automobile dealership, a filling station (fuel), or a fast-food outlet be coerced to purchase parts, materials and supplementary services from parent organization? The second question concerns entrepreneur's responsibility to serve unsatisfied market segments, even if the profit potential is slight. Should entrepreneurs serve retail stores in low-income areas, serve users of limited amounts of the firm's product, or serve a declining market?

With regard to promoting strategy, promotion is the component of marketing mix that gives rise to the majority of ethical questions. Personal selling has always been a pot of criticism. Early traders, pack peddlers, drummers, and today's 'Tokunbo' or used-cars and refrigerators, sales people have all been accused of marketing malpractices that range from exaggerating product merits to outright deceit in the country.

Finally, pricing is probably the most regulated aspect of a firm's marketing strategy. Today in Nigeria, most of the entrepreneurs

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engage in unethical price behaviour that is illegal. For example, most imitation and refurbished products that look like new ones are priced equal with new products in an effort to cheat the customer in most Nigerian markets. Some customers also pay more for merchandise if distribution costs are higher in their areas. For instance, a product that costs ₦50.00 in Port Harcourt may cost ₦35.00 at Aba. All these concerns must be dealt with by entrepreneurs in developing professional ethics for pricing products. The challenge to entrepreneurs, therefore, is to balance economic performance with high ethical standards.

Socio-cultural

In this respect, women entrepreneurs in Nigeria face socio-cultural challenges as do Japanese women. Culture is the whole set of beliefs, attitudes and ways of doing things of a reasonably homogeneous set of people. The cultural and social environment affects how and why people live and behave as they do. Many variables make up cultural and social environment. Some examples are the languages people speak, the type of education they have, their religious beliefs, what type of food they eat, the style of clothing and housing, and how they view work, marriage and family.

From the inception of Nigeria to the present, most people still feel that a woman's role is in the home first and foremost as a wife and mother. Nigerian women, in struggling to achieve education, still have less opportunity for higher education, and as a result, are constantly shut out of the most interesting jobs and businesses that they could have been fully involved. Obviously, there are not changes in this stereotyped way of thinking. They marry early, with no hope of better job opportunities. And, once married, they are likely to stay at home and have more children. Over 70 per cent of Nigerian women work in their homes - ranging from family shopping, laundering to preparing meals and volunteer works.

Also, Nigerian women for those who perform little jobs outside the homes, customarily hand over their salaries to their husbands.

Hence, men control over 80 percent of household budgets which are increasingly being spent on household products. Even, most Nigerian men show dissatisfaction for wives allowed a few hours of work a day in corporations than their traditional home-based roles. Because women have generally not moved away from these stereotype of the 1950s, women are nowhere on the boards of major companies in the country. An increasing proportion of women as previously indicated still take greater responsibility around the homes.

Cultural factors in Nigeria may also be governed by religious beliefs, which also affect how women are perceived in the society. Most Muslim women are not even allowed formal education, let alone trying to establish a business outside the husband's home.

Finally, our attitudes towards women within the society have not significantly changed. Rather, it is a continued isolation, deprivation and passivity towards them. Most women have strong qualities and positive attitudes, just like the men, and one can easily notice the fueling energy in them to own businesses as entrepreneurs. These cultural values and beliefs strongly inhibit the Nigerian women from taking their positive roles as entrepreneurs. However, some women are struggling to break these challenges and work in a wider range of jobs and careers than in the 1950s. Giving more women opportunities in business participation will undoubtedly increase economic growth of the country.

Combating the Challenges of Women Entrepreneurs in Nigeria

The Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN)

In an effort to combat these challenges, the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria has been set up to provide business support services for small and medium enterprises (SMEs). In order to make bank loans more accessible to operators in the SMEs sub-sector in the country, SMEDAN has commenced strategic business

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support services to equip the entrepreneurs on effective means of preparing a successful and marketable business plan. The programme has started by organizing seminars in different parts of the country in an effort to train and adequately educate entrepreneurs on best ways of preparing bankable business plans, business management, book-keeping and accounts, marketing, writing feasibility reports as well as other business training areas. To achieve this purpose, SMEDAN from its inception, had set up business support centres in various states of the federation as part of major outreach stations for its information provision and business development services.

According to SMEDAN'S former Director General, Mrs. Modupe Adelaja, these centres are established in partnership with state governments or business membership organizations as the situation may be. Also, at the Matori business support centre seminar held in Lagos of recent, the senior programme officer, Mrs. Badunrin Dawodu, noted that the purpose of the seminar was to train entrepreneurs on how to start and run a successful business. Mrs. Dawodu pointed out that SMEDAN was primarily set up to promote SMEs in the country, and has taken bold and encouraging steps to partner with the federal government. Its training is available to entrepreneurs almost at no cost. In addition, aside the ₦2,500.00 fee of the seminar, entrepreneurs or any interested persons have the golden opportunity to visit any of the Agency's business support centres in the country and receive free counseling on the effective ways of running a business.

More generously, the centre is open throughout the week, operating business clinic on Tuesdays and Thursday, where the SMEs can conveniently come in and seek advice concerning any problem they encounter in business life. Entrepreneurs are also counseled on daily basis without a fee as well. Also, Mr. Tuned Adebowale, who is the incoming project co-ordinator of Technopol Consulting Firm appointed by SMEDAN to organize the Matori Seminar, disclosed that after the Matori Seminar, several entrepreneurs have had a good grip on the benefits of having a good business plan.

According to Mr. Adebowale, the seminar which started earlier with SMEs in the various associations, such as the National Association of Small Scale Industrialists (NASSI), Computer and Allied Sectors, etc., has trained over 100 participants so far. He further noted that the feedback from these participants has indicated that the impact is already being felt in their businesses. Therefore, operators in the SMEs sub-sector are encouraged to take advantage of the various seminars going on in the country in order to boost the image of their business (*The Guardian*, 2006).

Microfinance policy

The Microfinance Policy was prepared pursuant to the powers vested on the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) by the provisions of section 28, sub-section (1) (b) of the CBN Act 24 of 1991 (as amended) and in pursuance of the provisions of sections 56-60 (a) of the Bank and other Financial Institutions Act (BOFIA) 25 of 1991 (as amended). The policy recognizes the existing informal institutions and brings them within the supervisory purview of the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN). It would not only enhance monetary stability, but will also expand the financial infrastructure of the country to meet the financial requirements of the micro, small and medium enterprises. The policy would create vibrant microfinance sub-sector that would be adequately integrated into the mainstream of the national finance system and provide the stimulus for growth and development. It would also harmonize operating standards and provide a strategic platform for the evolution of microfinance institutions, promote appropriate regulation, supervision and adoption of best practices.

Furthermore, the policy presents a microfinance framework for Nigeria to enhance the provision of diversified microfinance services for the poor and low-income groups on a long term, sustainable basis. The policy creates a platform for the establishment of microfinance banks, improve the CBN'S regulatory/supervisory performance in monetary stability and liquidity management, and provide an appropriate machinery for tracking the activities of development

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partners in the microfinance sub-sector in Nigeria. In these instances, appropriate policy is necessary to develop a long term, sustainable microfinance sub-sector to help entrepreneurs in the growth and economic development of the country.

Improving on Entrepreneur's Ethical Behaviour

Questions of ethics in business and government have been prominent in the news in recent years. Inside trading, deceptive advertising, bribery and kickbacks, price discrimination, falsification of public statements, illegal campaign contributions, and other scandals have created a perception that Nigerian business managers use illegal means to gain competitive advantage, increase profits, or improve their personal positions. Most organizations lie to their customers in an attempt to gain competitive advantage. Most Nigerian managers believe that profits are more important than product safety. The shocking revelations by NAFDAC will buttress this point with regard to adulterated and expired drugs and other unethical practices.

Most often, someone has to bribe a cashier to get paid. One has to offer money to a file clerk to make sure that one's file is not wrongly filled. One has to bribe a doctor or nurse in a public hospital to receive timely treatment. The pump attendants at fuel stations have to be bribed to fill one's tank, etc. Most often, the demand for 10 per cent kickback or more of the contract sum is an accepted practice before a contract is awarded.

Many Nigerian entrepreneurs are known to have made decisions in order to enrich themselves, rather than to optimize government or enterprise interest. An executive in any decision to purchase an equipment for example, is supposed to take such factors as parts, cost, quality, delivery time, operating cost, etc., into consideration before a decision to purchase the equipment is reached. However, most Nigerian entrepreneurs are known to have ignored these important facts in order to receive kickbacks of 10 per cent or more of the cost of the equipment. Most others are also known to have awarded major contracts to themselves at exorbitant prices.

Often, entrepreneurs and employees alike are known to be the owners of companies that contract to construct roads, buildings, or offer any other services for their employers, government or organization have been awarded. To this end, they find it difficult to enforce quality or engage in hard bargain. They most often supply inside information to their companies on the lowest and highest bids already received as well as approved jobs that are overtly below specified standards.

Most entrepreneurs in the workplace in Nigeria are increasingly finding themselves facing ethical dilemmas, situations in which they are required to define right and wrong conducts. For example, should they blow the whistle if they uncover illegal activities taking place in their company? Should they follow orders with which they do not personally agree? Do they give an inflated performance evaluation to an employee who they like, knowing that such an evaluation could save that employee's job? Do they allow themselves to play politics or boot-lick in the organization if it will help their career advancement?

What constitutes good ethical behaviour has never been clearly defined. And in recent years, the line differentiating right from wrong has become even more blurred. Most Nigerian employees see people around them engaging in unethical practices. Elected officials are indicted in bribery scam. Companies and individuals evade taxes. Religious leaders are involved in unholy acts. Companies and individual trade on sub-standard and expired products for financial gains. Ritual killing and political assassinations are common. Cases of advanced fee fraud popularly are widespread, etc. etc.

They hear these people, when caught, although on very rare cases, giving excuses, such as "Everyone else does it", "Opportunity comes but once, hence, you have to take advantage of every opportunity nowadays", "It is my own share of the national cake", etc. In this kind of situation, even the few that were hitherto ethical in their behaviour are compelled to join the train, since they cannot beat them.

Because individuals have differing personal ethical codes, Nigerian entrepreneurs must be explicit regarding their corporate

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ethical standards and expectations. Some companies advocate the golden rule - do unto others as you would have them do unto you. However, others argue that current or accepted business practices should govern behaviour. A more extreme attitude in Nigeria is that some entrepreneurs seek every possible advantage without regards for tradition, social laws and customs - a "might equals right" philosophy. Finally, some believe that ethics should be determined by intuition, that is, by doing whatever one feels right?

Following from the above, it is an ongoing challenge to maintain consistent ethical behaviour by all entrepreneurs. Ethics code must be carefully written and tailored to individual company's philosophy. Most ethics codes address subjects, such as employee conduct, community and environment, shareholders, customers, suppliers and contractors, political activity, and technology. To make ethics code effective, Nigerian entrepreneurs must do the following (Farnham 1993):

- Involve everyone, meaning every person who has to live with it, in writing the statement.
- Have a corporate statement, but also allow separate statements by different units throughout the organization.
- Keep it short and therefore easily understood and remembered.
- Do not make it too corny-make it something important, that people really believe.
- Set the tone at the top, having executives talk about and live up to the statement.
- Environmental transportation concerns are considered; and
- A duty that products are available to all, on an equal cost basis.

Nigerian entrepreneurs can also improve ethical behaviours through ethics programmes. Ethics programmes can range from compliance-based to integrity-based. Compliance-based ethics programmes are designed by corporate counsel to prevent, detect and punish legal violations with regard to ethics. They increase

surveillance and control people and impose punishments or wrongdoers. Programme elements include establishing and communicating legal standards and procedures, assigning high-level managers to oversee compliance, auditing and monitoring compliance, reporting criminal misconduct, punishing wrongdoers, and taking steps to prevent offense in future. Such programmes should reduce illegal behaviour and help the entrepreneurs stay out of court.

Also, entrepreneurs should create a moral commitment to ethical conduct, rather than moral mediocrity. Furthermore, integrity-based ethics programmes go beyond the mere avoidance of illegality, and should be instituted as they are concerned with the Law and also with instilling in people a personal responsibility for ethical behaviour.

With these a programmes, entrepreneurs as well employees should be able to govern themselves through a set of guiding principles that they embrace in order to improve on the standards of ethical behaviour.

Nigerian entrepreneurs must ensure that advertising standards are upheld and not brought to disrepute. Safety standards of products must be met, dangerous products modified or removed and ethical issues relating to planned obsolescence must be considered.

Finally, today's Nigerian entrepreneurs should endeavour to create an ethically healthy climate for his or her employees, where they can do their work productively, and confront a minimal degree of ambiguity regarding what constitute right or wrong behaviour.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Women in Nigeria are considered to be the poorest of the poor, based on the definition of "poorest" as the bottom half of those living below their nation's poverty line. Rural poverty, especially as it affects Nigeria women, is a task the government needs to deal with. In this regard, microfinance policies are excellent microeconomic tools for effecting the required change. Microfinance programmes, when properly implemented, help not only reduce poverty but contribute to the empowerment of women. They help place vital resources in the

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hands of rural Nigerian women, which otherwise will not be available to them. This invariably will help them increase their standard of living.

Also, for a woman to be empowered, she needs access to the material, human, and social resources necessary to make strategic choices in her life. By many women being able to make their own choices, they become agents of change, who in turn are able not only to challenge, but also to organize other women to challenge the social, financial, economic, religious, ethical, and political structure of injustice that has continually kept them down. The empowerment that is provided by financial access creates further synergies that lead to the acquisition of education and literacy, business training and management, and access to information. Poverty and powerlessness are directly associated with these factors. However, the environment in Nigeria, where women are still expected to perform their social functions, sometimes detracts them from these achievements. In other words, women stereotypes and expectation remain mired in tradition and will require more action on the part of the society to break.

For the women entrepreneurs, opportunities abound. There are several virgin areas, incredibly high demand for existing and new products, and opportunities for huge revenues, despite the challenges addressed in this paper. How well the women entrepreneurs are able to tackle these challenges and take advantage of the opportunities provided by SMEDAN and the recent microfinance policy established by the CBN would determine whether their businesses would become classed as a reference point for success or failed businesses.

It is, therefore, recommended that the government should address rural poverty by empowering women with access to material, human, and social resources necessary to make strategic choices in life, thereby becoming change agents to take advantage of abounding entrepreneurial opportunities.

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