

FACTORS THAT CONSTRAIN THE GROWTH OF WOMEN'S SMALL AND MEDIUM BUSINESSES IN RURAL TANZANIA: A CASE STUDY OF UVINZA DISTRICT, KIGOMA REGION

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Abstract

Small and medium businesses (SMBs) are the main income generating activities for women in rural Tanzania. Rural development planners are supposed to integrate these businesses in their planning portfolios since they are central to economic growth and rural poverty reduction. Critical for sustainable growth of rural women SMBs is the provision of enabling institutional environment and technical support. However, this has never been the case as the rural women SMBs have been sidelined with limited attention. Research on the predicament of rural women SMBs has been too general, inadequate and unpalatable. In this paper we present an institutional analysis of a baseline study carried out from February to April 2016 in Uvinza District, Kigoma region. The study covered four villages in Ilagala Division: Nyanganga, Kazuramimba, Mwamila and Ilagala. Ten groups of women entrepreneurs with 270 members participated in the study through meetings and focus group discussions on the impact of regulative, normative, and cognitive factors on the growth of their SMBs. The objective of the study was to delineate factors that constrain the growth of women-owned SMBs. The analysis reveals that institutional factors constrain the growth of the SMBs and frustrates the women's entrepreneurship esteem and efforts to reduce rural poverty. A conducive and pro-gender intervention framework is recommended in order to enable sustainable growth of women-owned SMBs. The paper calls for multidisciplinary research that will disaggregate the constraints and highlight appropriate interventions.

Keywords: *small and medium business, women entrepreneurship esteem, institutional constraints*

1. Introduction

Women's small businesses are the backbone of the economy and job creation in urban and rural areas (Jalbert 2000; UNGA 2011). Throughout the world women entrepreneurship is visible in both informal and formal small businesses that provide employment, food security, health, economic growth and the vitality of their respective countries (FAO 2014; ILO 2014). In the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) women owned small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) account for 60 to 70 per cent of jobs with a particularly large share in Italy and Japan, and in the United States (OECD 1996; 2000). The situation in the EU shows that women-owned SMEs are increasing at a faster rate compared to male-owned SMEs (EU 2014).

Global trends indicate that women-owned SMEs accounts for disproportionately large shares of new jobs, especially in those countries which have displayed a strong employment record including the United States, Great Britain and the Netherlands (OECD 1995). In Great Britain business growth statistics show that women are one-fourth of the self-employed sector (Jalbert 2000). Recent studies in the United States indicate women-owned businesses are the fastest growing segment of active businesses (Becker-Blease & Sohl, 2007; SBA 2010). Studies commissioned by the US National Women's Business Council show that women-owned businesses account for nearly one-third of all privately held businesses, exceed the national average for business growth, and increase at twice the rate of all businesses in the U.S. (National Women's Business Council, 2007). As of 2007, over 10 million firms, or approximately 40% of all privately owned firms were women owned or woman managed businesses (Heffernan, 2007).

1.1 Women entrepreneurship in Africa

In Africa the growth of women entrepreneurship is also developing rapidly despite facing insurmountable challenges (ECA 2010). Informal and formal small businesses owned by women are mushrooming in urban and rural areas (AfDB 2014). As African countries strengthen the focus and implementation of CAADP, the need to expand support to women entrepreneurship is considered to be timely (CAADP 2003). However, the issues that arise in the development of women entrepreneurship in sub-Saharan Africa differ considerably between existing and new small businesses as well as between those which grow slowly and rapidly (ECA 2014). The development of women entrepreneurship in sub-Saharan Africa is largely accorded occasional lip-services (Richardson, Howarth & Finnegan 2004).

1.2 Women-owned businesses in Tanzania

Women in Tanzania are the backbone of the economy and are leading in the self-employed sector (FAWETA 2008). However, the growth of women-owned businesses in Tanzania is faced with gender stereotyping, marginalization from financial institutions and the fact that the government and donors investment focus in the development of women entrepreneurship is largely urban-based with women entrepreneurs in rural areas remaining marginalized (Makombe 2006). Research show that the government, chamber of commerce and donors have attempted to put in place policies that promote women entrepreneurship development (UNIDO 1999). These policies recognize the need to support women entrepreneurship to boost economic growth, job creation and the existing policy interventions and programmes (ILO 2003). The main focus has been on narrowing the urban-rural gap between the growth in women entrepreneurship in urban areas and investment in SMEs owned by rural women through skills training, financial support and markets (Stevenson & St-Onge 2005).

1.3 Problem Statement

Women entrepreneurs in Uvinza District experience difficulties in establishing and maintaining their micro, small and medium businesses. Although many of these difficulties are common to women and men, the reality is that those difficulties are more problematic to women entrepreneurs than men

entrepreneurs. In recent years, regional and district authorities as well as the Tanzanian Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture (TCCIA), SIDO and donors like Belgium-Tanzania Cooperation (BTC) and Local Investment Climate (LIC) have invested efforts to create an enabling environment and institutional framework to support entrepreneurship development. Together, they have provided different types of financial and non-financial support for micro-small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) throughout the region. Nevertheless, despite such encouraging efforts, the potential of female entrepreneurship remains underdeveloped and marginalized. Factors as to why this situation persists have not been explored. No comprehensive research has been undertaken to determine the impact of the challenges and recommend robust interventions to remove those constraints. Until that is done the growth of women-owned SMBs in Uvinza District Council will remain “a bridge too far” to cross.

1.4 Objective

1.4.1 Main Objective

The main objective of this study was to explore the factors that constrain the growth of women-owned businesses in Uvinza District in order to recommend appropriate interventions

1.4.2 Specific Objectives

- (a) assess and create an inventory of the current status of women-owned SMBs
- (b) determine the demographic characteristics of women entrepreneurs
- (c) outline challenges that impinge upon the growth and development of women entrepreneurship in Uvinza District
- (d) recommend appropriate intervention to address the existing challenges

1.5 Research Questions

- (a) What is the current status of women’s SMBs in Uvinza District Council?
- (b) What are the demographic characteristics of women entrepreneurs?
- (c) What challenges and opportunities are facing women’s SMBs in Uvinza District Council?
- (d) What type of intervention could be appropriate to spur the growth of women entrepreneurship?

2. Literature review

The literature review involved desk review and review of conceptual and methodological issues preceded data collection. This was done in order to have a broader perspective on the context in which the constraints that impede the growth of women-owned SMBs are rooted.

2.1 Desk Review

The desk review involved reading government and donor policies, regional and district profiles. The review of the literature focused on conceptual methodological approaches to the study of women entrepreneurship in rural areas. Also a review of similar cases undertaken elsewhere was also carried. The purpose was to have a broader perspective on key issues in women-owned SMBs in rural areas.

2.2 Conceptual and methodological approaches

The main focus here was on conceptual issues on what actually constitutes women-owned businesses, how different these businesses are, and what challenges they are facing. The review on methodological issues was intended to gain a better understanding on how an unbiased approach should be adopted when analyzing constraints that women-owned businesses experience.

2.3 The institutional analytical framework on growth of women-owned SMBs

The institutional analytical framework provides better understanding of the constraints facing the growth of women-owned SMBs. The main focus has been on the supporting environment that is given to the growth and development of women entrepreneurship (Amine & Staub 2009). According to the institutional analytical framework (see *Table 1* below), the growth of women-owned SMBs is facilitated by three debilitating factors: the nature of the regulatory regime, normative factors, and cultural-cognitive underpinnings (Scott 2001; Nawaz 2009).

Table 1: The institutional analytical framework

Constraints	Regulative	Normative	Cultural-cognitive
Basis of compliance	Expediency	Social obligation	Taken for grantedness, shared understanding
Basis of order	Regulative rules	Binding expectations	Constitutive schema
Mechanisms	Coercive	Normative	Mimetic
Logic	Instrumentality	Appropriateness	Orthodoxy
Indicators	Rules, laws, sanctions	Certification, accreditation	Common belief, shared logics of action
Basis of Legitimacy	Legally sanctioned	Morally governed	Comprehensible, recognizable, and culturally supported

Source: Scott, W. Richard (2001) *Institutions and Organizations*. Thousand Oak, CA: Sage

The regulative regime

This refers to policies and procedures of legal registration (coercive *force*) of the SMBs for tax collection purposes (*expediency*) and access to finance capital from banks (*instrumentality*). This factor is a serious constraint to women-owned SMB since most of them are informal, they are not registered and hence, they are not “legally recognized”. Such a situation subjects women entrepreneurs’ to favourable or unfavourable attitudes toward the future of their SMBs.

Studies in the developed and developing countries show that the political, legal and regulatory framework is mostly gender insensitive (Fischer, Reuber & Dyke 1993). Policies that have been designed to support women entrepreneurship have been extremely good on paper but ineffective when it comes to implementation (Khaire 2011). The tax regime is very complex and hostile to the growth and development of small and medium businesses especially in urban areas where women-owned business are constantly harassed municipal police. This has been particularly true in sub-Saharan Africa where women are largely marginalised even though their contribution towards economic growth is highly significant (Laframboise & Trumbic 2003).

There is lack of delivery and implementation of a wide range of government measures, regulations and programmes as well as ineffective support systems, all of which are critical to ensure an enabling environment for the development of women entrepreneurship (Fletschner & Kenney 2011). Aspects that contribute to such challenges include fragmentation of entrepreneurial supporting services, inadequate resources, weak governance and accountability as well as poor executive decisions and often long delays in taking decisions (Siringi 2011).

Normative factors

These refer to women’s entrepreneurial esteem (*motivation*) expressed by the desires and expectations (*behavioural beliefs*) to achieve a better life from their SMBs. To most women being owners of SMBs is self-actualization (*normative belief*) but this is conditioned by the presence of factors that may facilitate

or impede performance of their SMBs and the perceived power of these factors (*control beliefs*). Lack of the necessary resources for starting and developing own businesses is another key impediment to women entrepreneurship development (Ulusay de Groot 2001).

Research findings support the theory that women in developing countries have been impeded from acquiring adequate levels of human and financial capital because of social and cultural forces (Ufuk & Ozgen 2001). Lack of management skills and low levels of business management training are issues facing women's entrepreneurial ventures (Leitch & Hill 2006; Andersson et al 2007). Therefore resources critical for success are the assets that women bring with them to the entrepreneurial process in the form of human capital (formal and occupational experiences) and the entrepreneur's ability to access resources in the environment: capital, suppliers, customers.

Cultural-cognitive underpinnings

This refers to social, cultural and cognitive factors in stereotype formation towards women-owned SMBs (*absurd attitudes*). Women entrepreneurs are not a homogenous and as such they carry out their businesses under a host of pressure from men, religion, culture, society, government officers and institutions (*systematic prejudice*). Key cultural-cognitive underpinnings include gender-bias on access to capital, information, markets, networks and training (Chu, Kara & Benzing 2008). In the developed and developing countries women-owned businesses have specific needs that should be addressed in order to help them perform on par, if not better, than their male counterparts. Most often the perception of men, policy makers, community, and the facilitating institutions is predominantly negative (*stereotype*). Entrepreneurial businesses carried out by rural women are regarded as subsistence activities that are aimed at household food security.

Socio-cultural constraints have limited women's access to a meaningful business experience and led to careers interrupted by family obligations (Naidoo & Hilton 2006). Women are required to balance daily management of their businesses, family chores and community obligations (Chiloane 2010). Women are said to be natural nurturers and domestic labourers, while their male counterparts have been perceived to be natural leaders and decision-makers. These roles have been reinforced at home, school, work, and through the media. This restricted women's self-perceptions leads to the disempowering their social and economic potential and limits their future possibilities of success.

In many countries women entrepreneurs are sole-proprietors of their businesses that are supported by family members and house girls. Seed capital is raised from personal savings, friends and family contributions, loans from rich persons or SACCOS. Lack of the necessary collateral to qualify for loans from the banks is the main impediment to women access to finance capital. This makes women to be a kind of "minority", participating less in the country's economic life, since the business world is often regarded as a male-dominated (Gomez 2008).

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

Official permission for the research was accorded after consultations with the District Executive Director (DED) who allowed access to basic data such as the District Profile and data from the departments of Planning, Community Development, Agriculture and Livestock Development.

3.2 The Setting

Uvinza District Council is a new district among the eight districts of Kigoma Region that was established according to the Act No. 397 that was announced in the Government Gazette No. 287 issued on 9th September 2011. The District Council was officially inaugurated in July 2013.

3.2.3 Population

The 2012 National Census shows that Uvinza District Council had a population of 383,640 inhabitants among them 189,130 men and 194,510 women. This marked an annual increase of 4.4%. Most of the people in Uvinza District are basically poor in terms of level of education, low income earnings and employment.

3.2.4 Economic activities

The District is endowed with fertile 444,633 ha of arable land, good and reliable rains, forestry products, fisheries, and minerals (Uvinza District Profile 2015). Main economic activities are agriculture, livestock keeping, fishing, charcoal, and small and medium businesses. Men are involved in fishing, charcoal, herding and small and medium businesses while women dominate the sectors of agriculture and small and medium businesses.

3.2.5 Women entrepreneurship

Women-owned businesses in Uvinza District are a rapidly growing sector that create jobs, provide economic growth, and renew society. The creative and entrepreneurial potential of the women's risk-taking attitude is evidenced by the mushrooming of women-owned micro and small businesses. However, the growth pace of these businesses is stunted by a multitude of constraints in terms of the regulative, normative and cognitive factors.

3.2.6 Villages where women entrepreneurship was researched

Nyanganga

The village has a population of approximately 7500 people with women accounting 55% of the population. The village is located 20 kilometers from the Kigoma-Dar es Salaam highway this village is the among the district's bread basket as it is endowed with fertile land, climate and reliable rains. Organized in informal self-help and business groups women are the village's economic engine. They dominate agriculture and small and medium businesses of maize, vegetables and fruits.

Kazuramimba & Mwamila

The two villages are located along the Kigoma-Dar es Salaam highway. Kazuramimba has 10,000 inhabitants while Mwamila has approximately 3,000 inhabitants. In both villages women constitute more than half of the population and dominate small and medium business. The growth of these businesses is sluggish with most of the businesses concentrated around petty-businesses of selling fruits, bottled water, and vegetables to passer-by passengers.

Ilagala

Located along the shores of Lake Tanganyika in the South to Sigunga, Kandaga and Kyala, Ilagala is found about 120 km from the District's headquarters Lugufu. The village is located in marginal economic areas where fishing and subsistence farming are the main economic activities. As in other villages, women in Ilagala are at the forefront in carrying small businesses organized in self-help groups.

3.3 Methods

A mixed method approach was used to collect qualitative and quantitative data. This included a desk review, consultative meetings, structured interviews and focus group discussions. The data was later triangulated to facilitate validation of data through multiple sources.

3.4 Sample Size

About 100 women entrepreneurs were randomly selected for the case study. Sample participants were drawn from the 270 participants who came from the 10 groups that were surveyed. Most of

the participants were primary school leavers who could read and write. Some of them had previously attended seminars on women entrepreneurship organized by local NGOs in their respective villages.

3.5 Data Collection

3.5.1 Consultations

Preliminary consultations were held with a broad range of stakeholders in the development of women entrepreneurship in Uvinza District Council. The process involved mapping, selecting, and informing in advance the identified persons. Consultations were individual and group-based. The purpose of the consultations were threefold: (a) to collect differing perspectives and interests so as to make sure that the research design was based on the best available information (b) to establish the legitimacy and credibility of the study (c) to measure expectations and identify policy alternatives. The views of the participants were analyzed and feedback was communicated at the meetings with women entrepreneurship

3.5.2 Meetings with women entrepreneurship groups

Meetings with 10 groups with 270 members were held to discuss the challenges that women-owned SMBs were facing and the opportunities that were available. The meetings were organized in collaboration with the leaders of the groups who fixed the meetings date, time, and place. Most of the meetings were held in open public spaces or village warehouses built by the World Food Programme (WFP). The size of the meetings depended on factors such as the population in the village, time and location of the meetings as well as the interest of the target population. Approximately, about 100 women attended the meetings. The discussion at the meetings involved a structured meeting guide listing key issues of discussion. The meeting guide included a list of the main subtopics and issues to be covered during discussion. The sub-topics focused on demographic characteristics, educational level, type of business owned, access to finance capital, and markets. The language that was used was simple and questions on controversial issues were avoided.

3.5.3 Focus Group Discussions

The focus groups discussions were organized to explore the participants concern on the existence of constraining factors on the growth of their SMBs. The groups were “focused” in the sense that the discussions involved collective debating of the factors that affect the growth of their businesses and the way forward. The main objective was to explore their living experiences on the subject matter. We wanted to hear the participants’ expediencies of doing business in Uvinza District Council. This method was used as a convenient way to illustrate the institutional analytical framework as generated in other studies. As in the case of meetings we worked with the pre-existing 10 groups with 270 members because they provided the social contexts within which the ideas are formed and decisions are made.

4. Results

4.1 Demographics

4.1.1 Group heterogeneity

Women entrepreneurs in Uvinza District Council are organized in heterogeneous groups that cut across religion, tribe, and age. The coalescing of entrepreneurial interests and motivation are the main factors that bring together the women to form entrepreneurship groups. The glue that binds together these women is the “*tukundane spirit*” in *Kiha* which means love and togetherness or belongingness as postulated in Maslow’s hierarchy of human motivation ()

4.1.2 Age groups of participants

Age appears to be an important factor in the development of women entrepreneurship in Uvinza District. Most of the women entrepreneurs who participated in the survey were relatively young (Table 2 & Chart 1). Two groups of women entrepreneurs were identified: women entrepreneurs who were already in the business for a long time and those who wanted to start new businesses. The majority of the women were in their mid-twenties and thirties and also in their mid-thirties and forties. Those in age group range of 19-24 were 12 while those in the age range group of 25-34 were 50. Women in the age range groups of 35-44 were 26 while those above 45 were 12.

Table 2: Age Groups of Participants

Age groups	Number of respondents
Below 18	0
19 - 24	12
25 - 34	50
35 - 44	26
Above 45	12
Total	100

Source: Notes from Focus Group Discussions

The increased correlation between age and growth of women entrepreneurship is a key factor in economic empowerment and emancipation of women. It seems there a strong awareness among young women in Uvinza District Council. As shown in Table 1, female youth (19-34 years) participate in entrepreneurship at the same or similar rate as the older population (35-64 years). Entrepreneurship is therefore as popular among young women as it is for their older counterparts.

4.2 Pattern of entrepreneurship activities

The survey participants represented a variety of businesses throughout the selected villages. The research found that much needs to be done to help the women entrepreneurs develop their businesses. The majority of businesses in our sample were micro-businesses involved in petty and informal activities either of buying and selling goods to passer-by passengers along the highway or cultivating horticulture products and selling them to middlemen from Kigoma town. Almost all of the women entrepreneurs were sole proprietorships who were assisted in their businesses by their children or family members.

Table 2 shows the breakdown of business activities reported by survey participants. About 36 percent of small business owners in our survey are in commercial farming which includes cassava, rice, maize, sunflower, and palm oil. Twenty three percent are in horticulture which onions, tomato, garlic, Irish potatoes, vegetables, and fruits. Twenty one percent of the participants said they were engaged in poultry keeping mainly chicken, ducks, and pigeons. Ten percent of the participants are in dairy farming keeping cattle, goats, and sheep. The last ten percent are engaged in retail services which include small restaurants (Mama Ntilie), cafes, shops, kiosks, and soap making.

Table 2: Small businesses undertaken by women entrepreneurship in Ilagala Division

Entrepreneurship activities	Respondents (N=100)	Percent
Commercial Farming - Cassava, rice, maize, sunflower, palm oil	36	36%
Horticulture - Onions, tomato, garlic, Irish potatoes, vegetables, fruits	23	23%
Dairy Farming - Cattle, goats, sheep	10	10%
Poultry - Chicken, ducks, pigeons	21	21%
Retail/Services - Small restaurants, cafes, shops, kiosks, soap making	10	10%
Total	100	100%

Source: Fieldwork notes, February April 2016

4.2 Top sources of business financing

In discussing what their top sources of business financing are, respondents indicated that personal savings come in first with financing from “*Tufashanywe*” self-help groups coming second while family and friends coming third respectively. As explained below access to bank credit is not among the top sources of financing among women entrepreneurs in Uvinza District Council.

4.2.1 Personal Savings

Women-owned businesses in Uvinza District Council rely more on personal savings than credit from the banks and financial support from relatives or friends. Personal savings are funds saved by a woman through income generating activities such as petty businesses of selling *vitumbua*, *maandazi*, groundnuts, sweet potatoes, chips, tomatoes, fruits and vegetables. Narrating their stories most women explained how they “suffered” to reach where they are today. They achieved success through sheer determination and perseverance. This situation is similar to other studies and reports that have shown that women and minority business owners are more likely to use personal savings to grow their businesses, often due to fear they will be turned down due to lack of collateral qualifications.

4.2.2 Funds from *Tufashanywe*” self-help groups

The second source of seed capital is funds from self-help groups popularly known in *Kiha* as “*Tufashanywe*” self-help groups, literally meaning “self-help credit associations”. The word “*twifashanywe*” means “let us help each other”. The “*Tufashanywe*” self-help groups are informal and unregistered associations that operate along traditional organizational structures and values. These organizations provide small and medium loans to business starters with very low interest rates and flexible return periods. The women remarked that it is easy to secure loans from these groups than to apply for such funds from the banks.

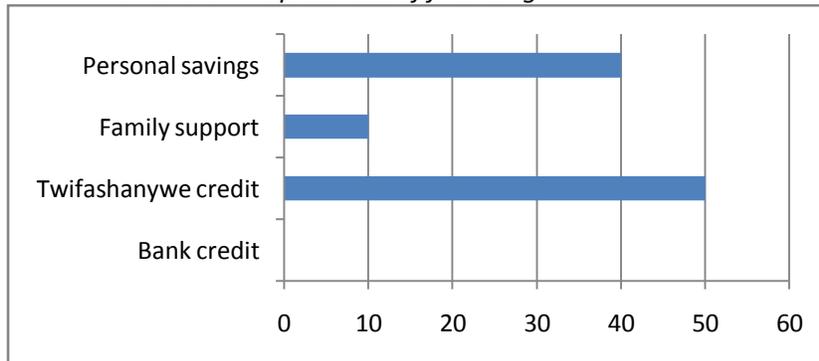
4.2.3 Funds from relatives and friends

This source of funding includes money from husbands, sons and daughters, relatives and close friends. But this is not a reliable source of seed capital this source of funding is frost with family problems, jealousy, conflicts, and hatred. Respondents talked of cases where successive women entrepreneurs were cut short of their businesses due to jealousy from the husband, relative and friends.

4.2.4 Bank credit

Asked why they did not solicit bank credit the women said the bank procedures were cumbersome, time consuming, require a lot of papers, and has no guarantee. The women said in general they were being underserved by the banks which, they argued, preferred urban women entrepreneurs than rural women entrepreneurs. Other factors included lack of collateral, distance from the village to town where the banks are located and lack of information about the type of credits provided and the repayment conditions.

Bar Chart 1: Top sources of financing



Source: Fieldwork notes, meetings and focus group discussions

4.3 Reasons for not taking Bank Credit

Our discussions with the banks in Kigoma town revealed that the banks have undertaken several outreach programmes to reach out to entrepreneurship groups in Uvinza District Council. Records show that the surveyed villages are among the areas where the banks have visited in recent months. Therefore we further explored reasons on why the women entrepreneurs in Uvinza District Council are not interested in taking bank credit (see Bar Chart No. 2).

4.3.1 Impossible Collateral Conditions

The women confirmed that the banks have visited them and organized public meetings to encouraged people to open accounts and take loans. However, they said the conditions of accessing seed capital were extremely unfriendly. They said conditions for collateral guarantee were simply impossible for them to meet. The legal documents required were too many and difficult for them to get.

4.3.2 High interest rates and default penalties

The women complained the banks interest rates were extremely high while default penalties were harsh and merciless. They narrated stories of their friends in Kigoma and Kasulu whose houses and other properties were confiscated by the banks when they defaulted. They said it appears that the banks were gender blind and have no special consideration for women entrepreneurs. This situation drives them away back to the "Twifishanywe" self-help credit associations which are flexible and friendly.

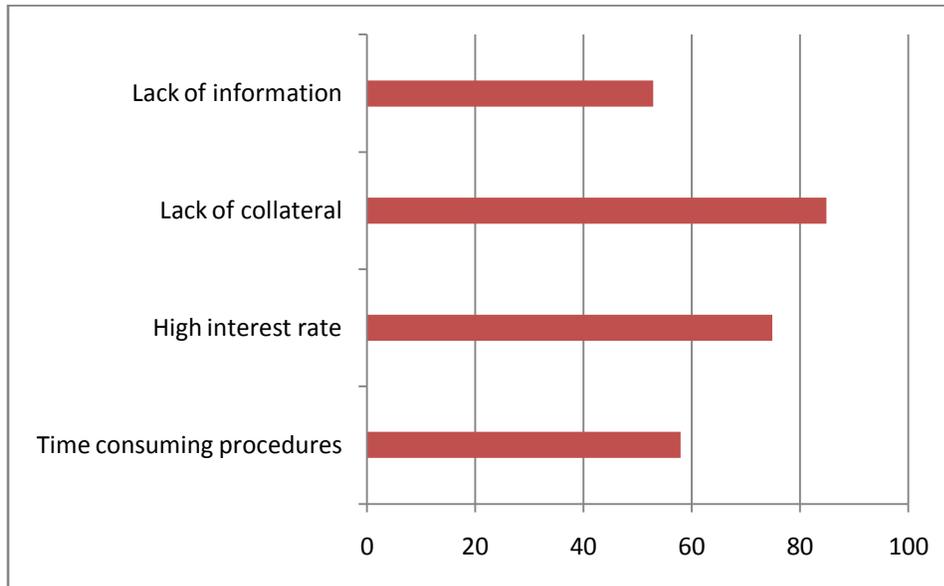
4.3.3 Time consuming procedures

The banks' long and bureaucratic procedures were cited as time consuming and tiresome processes. They said they have evidences from some of their colleagues who spent three to five days processing bank loans. Such processes were time wasting to them.

4.3.4 Lack of information

The meetings and focus group discussions revealed that availability of information from the banks is a serious problem in remote and marginal economic areas. CRDB is so far the only bank that operates in Uvinza District Council. However, the bank's offices are in Nguruka which very far from the surveyed villages.

Bar Chart: Reasons for not taking Bank Credit



Source: Focus Group Discussions Notes Feb - April 2016

5. Conclusions and recommendations

Small as they may be, women-owned businesses in Uvinza District are a rapidly growing sector that create jobs, provide economic growth, and societal renewal. The creative nature and entrepreneurial potential of women entrepreneurship continues to grow and is a latent source of economic growth in the district. Throughout the paper institutional factors have been found to be fetters to development of women entrepreneurship. Accessing seed capital for the women entrepreneurs is a "bridge too far" for many of them. Thanks to the presence of the traditional self-help credit associations like the "twifashanywe" that women entrepreneurs in Uvinza District Council and elsewhere in Kigoma region have somewhere to turn to. But the capital base of these associations is small and hence, only a few are served.

The daring risk-taking attitude of women entrepreneurs shows that the women have defied the institutional impediments as evidenced by the mushrooming of women-owned micro and small businesses that are being created daily in urban and rural areas. The steady growth of women-owned MSMEs has resulted in the increase of self-employment not only among women but also the youth. The high esteem and self-actualization are the basis through which women entrepreneurs in Uvinza District Council draw their determination and strength to survive. This is the right road toward women's social and economic emancipation and rural poverty alleviation.

Limitations

This study is limited by the dearth of data on the growth and development of women-owned SMEs in Uvinza District. No previous studies have been undertaken while the data that is available is dispersed and not readily accessible. Furthermore, this study has explored only ten groups of women

entrepreneurs in four villages of Ilagala Division. Therefore this study is by no means representative of the lived experiences of all the women entrepreneurs in Uvinza District. More in-depth studies are needed in order to shed more light on how to empower women entrepreneurs in Kigoma and other regions in the country.

Recommendations

This is a pioneer study that has attempted to unravel the conditions that women entrepreneurs in Kigoma region and especially in Uvinza District are going through. There are very few studies, if not none at all, which have been undertaken to assess the potential of women entrepreneurs in Uvinza District Council and Kigoma region in general. Funding for this study has come from the researchers own sources and support from the Special Seats Councilor for Ilagala Division Ms Salome Luhinguranya. The study is part of a three phase multi-disciplinary study that involves a baseline survey from which this paper is based, discussions with the Local Government Authorities to quantitatively assess the economic contribution of women-owned businesses, and finally collaborate with the donor agencies and banks to organize intervention programmes on training and provision of seed capital to women's traditional self-help credit associations, the "twifashanywes".

Despite being limited by the dearth of data especially quantitative data, this study has presented the case for women entrepreneurs in marginal economic areas. The study's thesis is that improving the economic growth of Uvinza District requires an enabling environment where women-owned SMBs thrive and prosper. The study shows that in order to strengthen and diversify the District's economy, policy makers, LGAs, TCCIA and donors need to know the characteristics of the business women, the challenges they encounter, and the support that is needed

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