



GENDER AND ENTERPRENEURSHIP: *EGBENDURU* PRODUCTION IN UMUDURUIRE, UMUEKEBI IN ISIALAMBANO L.G.A. IMO STATE

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Abstract

The act of developing an innovative idea within an organization is usually a very welcome one. *Egbenduru* or Palm candle is a native candle produced from the waste products after oil palm production. The study examines the production of this native candle in Umuduruire Umuekebi community in Isiala Mbanjo Local Government Area of Imo State, Nigeria. The study is anchored on two theories, Diffusion of innovation and Feminist theories. The objective of the study is to identify the gender who are the initiators and transmitters of the innovation. Data was collected using both qualitative and quantitative methods. The quantitative data were presented in simple frequency table while the qualitative data were analysis using the content analysis method. The study showed that palm oil production is the main occupation of the people of that area and that there is joint effort in the production of palm oil. However, after palm oil production, the women collect the waste products and use it to produce thenative candle. The study therefore recommended among others that the production of native candle should be upgraded and encouraged as it would serve as a major engine of economic growth.

Keywords: Economic growth, Entrepreneurship, Gender, Native candle, Waste products.

Introduction

An entrepreneur is an individual who creates a new business, bearing most of the risk and enjoying most of the rewards. Entrepreneurship is often cited as a major engine of economic growth particularly in developing countries like Nigeria (Seth, 2023). It is a general blank term related to starting a business.

Wharton (2012) viewed gender as a system of social practices. Wharton stated that this system crates and maintains gender distinctions and organizes relations of inequality on the basis of these distinctions. In this view, gender involves the creation of both differences and inequality. According to the Office of the Special Advisor on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women review of August 2001, gender refers to the social attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female and the relationships between women and men and girls and boys, as well as the relations between women and those between men. These attributes, opportunities and relationships are socially constructed and are learned through socialization processes. They are context/ time-specific and changeable. Alliyu (2013) refers gender to the different roles,



behaviours, expectations, and responsibilities that all men and women learn or require in their societies from infancy to adulthood. Alliyu (2013) further stated that in some countries, wearing make-up is associated with women and is seen as feminine. Elsewhere, men routinely wear make-up and it is seen as masculine. Across history in most parts of the world, women have been denied access to economic independence, legal and political rights more than men. This oppression is based on cultural understanding of women as the weaker sex. Gender determines what is expected, allowed and valued in a woman or a man in a given context (Gledhil 2008). In most societies there are differences and inequalities between women and men in responsibilities assigned, activities undertaken, access to and control over resources, as well as decision-making opportunities. In the case of palm oil production, the process shared between the two genders according to one's ability, capability and capacity. The palm oil production process involves, cutting of fresh fruit bunches from the plantations, threshing of the bunches to free the palm fruit, mashing the fruit and pressing out the crude palm oil. The crude oil is further treated to purify and dry it for storage and sales. All these activities are shared equitably among men and women. For instance, the males climb the tree to cut the bunches, while the females carry the bunches to the threshing floor, the males free the fruits and mash them while the females continue from there until the oil is ready for consumption. Thus, culturally, men cultivate or produce while women process and sell. Also traditionally, women decide the form in which the produce is to be traded and hence determine the degree of processing they are willing to undertake. These decisions form the basis of traditional technologies upon which innovations are derived (Gledhil 2008).

A candle is an ignitable wick embedded in wax, or another flammable solid substance such as tallow, that provides light. The earliest candles originated in China around 200 BC (Goldsmitt, 2023 & Yue, 2018). These candles were made from whale fat. However, by the 13th century, candle making became a craft in most European countries. A candle is usually made of wax that has been formed into a stick or another shape and has a string in the middle that can be burned. However, this native candle is made from the byproduct of palm oil. The producers gather the chaff and the drudgery from the mashing or pounding mortar and convert it to another useful/money yielding product. Candles are very important in the homes, churches as well as the society at large. They are used to light the homes, used during processions in the church and the streets. There are different types, colours and uses of candle (Li, 2018 & Oliver, 2017). The native candle is commonly used in the rural areas because it is easier to handle and burns longer than the conventional white wax candles. It is also accessible and affordable, therefore, the study examines the origin of the native candle and the gender who are the initiators and transmitters of the innovation.

Review of Relevant Literature

Gender

One inadvertent consequence of an individualistic view is that women and men are often portrayed as villains or victims- oppressing, exploiting or defending against each other (Wharton, 2012). Gender refers to the social attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female and the relationships between women and men and girls and boys, as well as the relations between women and those between men. These attributes, opportunities and relationships are socially constructed and are learned through socialization processes. They are context/ time-specific and changeable. Gender determines what is expected, allowed and valued in a woman or a man in a given context. In most societies there are differences and inequalities between women and men in



responsibilities assigned, activities undertaken, access to and control over resources, as well as decision-making opportunities. Gender equality on the other hand refers to the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men and girls and boys. Equality does not mean that women and men will become the same but that women's and men's rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female. Gender equality implies that the interests, needs and priorities of both women and men are taken into consideration – recognizing the diversity of different groups of women and men. Gender equality is not a 'women's issue' but should concern and fully engage men as well as women. Equality between women and men is seen both as a human rights issue and as a precondition for, and indicator of, sustainable people-centred development (Orser& Elliott 2015).

Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship is the ability and readiness to develop, organize and run a business enterprise, along with any of its uncertainties in order to make a profit. The most prominent example of entrepreneurship is the starting of new businesses. To the economist, entrepreneurship is connected with land, labour, natural resources and capital that can generate a profit. The entrepreneurial vision is defined by discovery and risk-taking and is an indispensable part of a nation's capacity to succeed in an ever-changing and more competitive global marketplace (Gumusay, 2018& Alina, Marzanna&Slawmir 2021).

The entrepreneur is defined as someone who has the ability and desire to establish, administer and succeed in a startup venture along with risk entitled to it, to make profits. The best example of entrepreneurship is the starting of a new business venture. The entrepreneurs are often known as a source of new ideas or innovators, and bring new ideas in the market by replacing old with a new invention (Gaddefors& Anderson, 2017).

Gaddefors and Anderson (2017) further classified entrepreneur into small or home business to multinational companies. According to them, the profits that an entrepreneur makes is with a combination of land, natural resources, labour and capital.

In a nutshell, anyone who has the will and determination to start a new company and deals with all the risks that go with it can become an Entrepreneur. They also identified the types of entrepreneurship as follows:

Small Business Entrepreneurship

These businesses are a hairdresser, grocery store, travel agent, consultant, carpenter, plumber, electrician, etc. These people run or own their own business and hire family members or local employee. For them, the profit would be able to feed their family and not making 100 million business or taking over an industry. They fund their business by taking small business loans or loans from friends and family.

Scalable Startup Entrepreneurship

This start-up entrepreneur starts a business knowing that their vision can change the world. They attract investors who think and encourage people who think out of the box. The research focuses on a scalable business and experimental models, so, they hire the best and the brightest employees. They require more venture capital to fuel and back their project or business.

Large Company Entrepreneurship



These huge companies have defined life-cycle. Most of these companies grow and sustain by offering new and innovative products that revolve around their main products. The change in technology, customer preferences, new competition, etc., build pressure for large companies to create an innovative product and sell it to the new set of customers in the new market. To cope with the rapid technological changes, the existing organizations either buy innovation enterprises or attempt to construct the product internally.

Social Entrepreneurship

This type of entrepreneurship focuses on producing product and services that resolve social needs and problems. Their only motto and goal is to work for society and not make any profits (Gaddefors & Anderson 2017).

Roos (2019) noted that not all entrepreneurs are successful; especially if it is a social entrepreneurship where the service is not to make profit. According to Roos, there are definite characteristics that make entrepreneurship successful. A few of them includes:

- Ability to take a risk- Starting any new venture involves a considerable amount of failure risk. Therefore, an entrepreneur needs to be courageous and able to evaluate and take risks, which is an essential part of being an entrepreneur.
- Innovation-It should be highly innovative to generate new ideas, start a company and earn profits out of it. Change can be the launching of a new product that is new to the market or a process that does the same thing but in a more efficient and economical way.
- Visionary and Leadership quality-To be successful, the entrepreneur should have a clear vision of his new venture. However, to turn the idea into reality, a lot of resources and employees are required. Here, leadership quality is paramount because leaders impart and guide their employees towards the right path of success.
- Open-Minded-In a business, every circumstance can be an opportunity and used for the benefit of a company. For example, Paytm recognized the gravity of demonetization and acknowledged the need for online transactions would be more, so it utilised the situation and expanded massively during this time.
- Flexible-An entrepreneur should be flexible and open to change according to the situation. To be on the top, a businessperson should be equipped to embrace change in a product and service, as and when needed.
- Know your Product-A company owner should know the product offerings and also be aware of the latest trend in the market. It is essential to know if the available product or service meets the demands of the current market, or whether it is time to tweak it a little. Being able to be accountable and then alter as needed is a vital part of entrepreneurship.

Gaddefors and Anderson (2017) outlined the followings as the importance of Entrepreneurship

- Creation of Employment- Entrepreneurship generates employment. It provides an entry-level job, required for gaining experience and training for unskilled workers.
- Innovation- It is the hub of innovation that provides new product ventures, market, technology and quality of goods, etc., and increase the standard of living of people.
- Impact on Society and Community Development- A society becomes greater if the employment base is large and diversified. It brings about changes in society and promotes facilities like higher expenditure on education, better sanitation, fewer slums, a higher level of homeownership. Therefore, entrepreneurship assists the organisation towards a more stable and high quality of community life.



- Increase Standard of Living- Entrepreneurship helps to improve the standard of living of a person by increasing the income. The standard of living means, increase in the consumption of various goods and services by a household for a particular period.
- Supports research and development- New products and services need to be researched and tested before launching in the market. Therefore, an entrepreneur also dispenses finance for research and development with research institutions and universities. This promotes research, general construction, and development in the economy.

Theoretical Orientation

The study adopted Diffusion of innovation and Feminist theories as its theoretical framework. Diffusion of innovations is a theory that seeks to explain how, why, and at what rate new ideas and technology spread. The theory was popularized by Everett Rogers in his book *Diffusion of Innovations*, first published in 1962 (Sherry & Gibson 2004). Rogers argues that diffusion is the process by which an innovation is communicated over time among the participants in a social system. The origins of the diffusion of innovations theory are varied and span multiple disciplines.

Rogers proposes that five main elements influence the spread of a new idea: the innovation itself, adopters, communication channels, time, and a social system. This process relies heavily on social capital. The innovation must be widely adopted in order to self-sustain. Within the rate of adoption, there is a point at which an innovation reaches critical mass (Rogers, 2003). According to Sahin(2006) Rogers' diffusion of innovations theory is the most appropriate for investigating the adoption of technology. Production of native candle is an innovation is widely adopted in the rural areas and has been transmitted from one generation to another. It has diffused into the society because it is accessible and affordable.

On the other hand, Feminist theory is not only about women; according to Ferguson (2017) it is about the world, engaged through critical intersectional perspectives. It developed from the activities of Mary Wollstonecraft: A vindication of the rights of men and a vindication of the rights of women and hints (Burkett, 2024). Despite many significant differences, most feminist theory is reliably suspicious of dualistic thinking, generally oriented toward fluid processes of emergence rather than static entities in one-way relationships, and committed to being a political as well as an intellectual enterprise. It is rooted in and responsible to movements for equality, freedom, and justice. Feminist theory is rooted in and responsible to movements for equality, freedom, and justice. Three important contemporary questions within feminist theory concern (a) subjectivity, narrative, and materiality; (b) global neoliberal geopolitics; and (c) global ecologies. Feminist theorists employ the tools of intersectionality, interdisciplinarity, and the intertwinings of scholarship and activism to address these questions. In relation to this study, The women in Umuduruire has contributed immensely to positive change by harnessing and sustaining an innovation with is very useful to the community.

Method of Data Collection

Data was collected using both qualitative and quantitative methods. The quantitative data was collected using a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was divided into two sections, section A which contained the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents and section B which is concerned with substantive issues of the research which included questions based on the objectives of the study. While the qualitative data was collected using in-depth interview IDI



guide. One hundred and eighty (180) questionnaire items were distributed to adult males and females aged 18 years and above in Umuduruire, Umuekebi in IsialaMbano LGA. While the IDI was conducted with six participants of the following category: two youths (male and female), two middle aged adults (male and female) and two elderly (male and female).

Area of the Study

This study was conducted at Umuduruire, Umuekebi in IsialaMbano Local Government Area of Imo State, Nigeria. Umuduruire, Umuekebi is one of the communities in IsialaMbano LGA of Imo State. IsialaMbano has 39 autonomous communities spread across 12 Political Wards with 196 polling stations. Its headquarters is in the town of Umuelemai. It has an area of 166 square km and a population of 198,736 (NPC, 2006). IsialaMbano is located in the north-eastern area of Imo State capital, Owerri. It is traversed by Owerri/Okigwe / Anara/Umuahia and Okigwe/Umuahia high ways. It is bounded in the north by Onuimo L.G.A. and some parts of Nwangele L.G.A, in the East by Ehime Mbano L.G.A. and in the south by Ikeduru and Mbaitolu L.G.As respectively. Their main occupation is farming and trading. The local Government plays host to lots of big and small businesses, schools, churches, hotels and the home of renowned Imo sons and daughters, prominent among them is Governor Ikedi Ohakim - former Governor of Imo State (Nwazonobi, 2013). Umuduruire, Umuekebi in IsialaMbano was chosen for this study because of the popularity of native candle in the community.

Findings

A total of one hundred and eighty (180) questionnaire items were distributed, but one hundred and seventy six were properly filled and returned. The other four were discarded based on major error in filling the forms. Findings showed that 100% of the respondents are from Imo State, 45.2% are male while 54.8 are female, 40.6% are within the age bracket of 18-29, 18.6% are within the age bracket of 30-52, 28.8% are within the age bracket of 53-65, while 12.0% are 66 years and above. A look at the marital status showed that 50.4% of the respondents are married, 42.9% are single, and 1.7% is divorced while 5.0% are widowed. We also observed that 37.9% of the respondents has no formal education, 25.3% are First School Leaving Certificate (FSLC) holders. 32.7% are Senior School Certificate (SSCE) holders and 2.6% are various degree holders. On the occupational status of the respondents, 55.9% are farmers, 23.7% are traders while 13.6% are public/civil servants. Most of the respondents do not know how much they earn annually, however 18.6% stated that they earn one hundred thousand naira (N100, 000.00) and above annually

Production of native candle is the main stay of the people of Umuduruire Umuekebi. This is because native candle is produced from the by-produce after oil palm production. A majority of the respondents (92.6%) noted that because oil production is the main occupation of the people of that area, after oil is extracted, the people collect the waste products and use it to produce the native candle. According to one of our participant:

‘Production of native candle is very common in this area because the raw material is readily available. We produce oil every day so there is raw material for production every day (21 year Unemployed, male)

Another participant noted that:

‘Instead of pouring away the stale oil which will further dirty our surroundings it is good to us the oil to produce the candle. You can also use it to make fire for cooking but it is



better used for candle. We produce oil every time so it easy to get the raw material' (89 years Native candle Producer, female)

The origin of the native candle is not known by the respondents. Majority of the respondents (72.5%) stated that they don't know the origin, (17.2%) stated that they saw it as they are growing up in the community. While (10.3%) stated that it has been passed down from one generation to another. According to an elderly participant:

'This thing was there before I was born. Nobody knows when or where it originated from' (89 years Native candle Producer, female)

Another participant noted that:

'Native candle is part of our tradition and tradition does not have origin. It is as old as when people started needing light to see in the night' (64 years farmer, male).

Another participant also noted that:

'Asking for the origin of native candle is like asking for the origin of man. It has been passed down from one generation to another' (45years Businessman, male).

Majority of the respondents noted that women (65.8%) are the most producers of native candle, 26.2% stated that men are more producers, 6.1% stated that youths are more producers while only 1.9% of the respondents stated that children are the most producers of the native candle. These findings collaborated with the data collected from the qualitative instrument. One of our IDI participant stated that:

'Production of native candle is a woman thing. They are the people who use it most, what is a man using fire to do at night? They go to work in town, or go to do business. Women do every other work in the house. The women use it to cook at night so they are the people who produce it' (46years trader, female).

Another participant stated that:

'Production of native candle needs patience and carefulness and women are more patient than men. Women can also be more careful to mould more than men' (25years Native candle Producer, female).

Another participant noted that:

'There is division of labour in life and this one is in the women's divide. I noticed even when they teach the younger generation, it is the girls who take interest in learning the skills. I have four children, three boys and a girl, my daughter who is the last born knows how to do it more than the boys (64 years farmer, male).

The respondents also noted that the native candle is durable and affordable and is preferred above the wax candle. Up to 46.3% of the respondents said that the native candle is durable, 42.2% said that the native candle is affordable and 11.5% said that they don't know about the native candle. These responses are also supported by the responses from our IDI participants.

According to one of our IDI participant:

'The native candle is cheaper than ordinary candle, the native candle is sold at two for fifty naira (NGN50.00) while the ordinary candle is sold for one for one hundred naira



(NGN100.00). Not only that the native candle last longer, It does not burn fast like the ordinary candle and it does not bring out smoke (25yearsNative candle Producer, female).

Another IDI participant stated that:

‘The native candle is very very good especially during this rainy season, you can use it under the rain without it going off. Even when it is wet, it still catches fire. It is also very cheap. Especially now that things are very expensive, I use it more than the wax candle (45years Businessman, male).



FIG 1: A woman preparing the native candle

Summary and Conclusion

Production of native candles in UmuduruireUmuekebi is an entrepreneurial business which has been with the people for a very long time. None of the participants or respondents knew when, where or how it originated. However, the use of the native candle has spread widely and accepted in most communities in south east Nigeria. According to EverettRogers, five main elements influence the spread of a new idea: the innovation itself, adopters, communication channels, time, and a social system.He further stated that diffusion is the process by which an innovation is communicated over time among the participants in a social system(Sherry & Gibson 2004). The native candle is native to UmuduruireUmuekebi because the raw materials for the production is readily available all year round. The technology is also transferred from one generation to another, as such, it will be difficult for it to go into extinction. Thus, it has easily spread to neighbouring communities Also more women engage in the native candle production than the men. This is another factor that helps to sustain the production and spread because the man is more likely to engage in white collar jobs, business, trading and plantain farming which normally take them out of town. Unlike the women who are more available because of their perceived caring role in the family. The native candle have come to stay in Umuduruire Umuekebi community because it is durable and affordable, the respondents stated that it is cheaper than the than the wax candles, it lasts longer than the wax candles and it is eco-friendly.

Recommendation

Based on the findings of this study, it was recommended that sons and daughters of UmuduruireUmuekebi in diaspora should come up with idea on how to upgrade the native technology. Which can lead to mass production andthen can be properly packaged and exported.

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