

Full Length Research Paper

Utilizing the participatory social learning theory as a new paradigm to evaluate the International Labour Organization (ILO) assessment of support for growth-oriented women entrepreneurs in Uganda

Ronya D. Foy

School of Social Work, Howard University, Washington, DC USA. 601 Howard Place NW, 3rd Floor.
Tel: (202) 239-7399; E-mail: RFoy@bison.howard.edu

Accepted 13 October, 2019

This manuscript highlights the participatory social learning theory (PSLT), an underutilized yet viable theory for assessing development initiatives. The PSLT is presented in this article as a means of analyzing the initiatives proposed and implemented for women's economic growth in Uganda. It specifically analyzes the International Labour Organizations (ILO) report on support for women entrepreneurs in Uganda utilizing the five development imperatives of institution building, human resources, natural and man-made resources, technology, and investment capital. This framework assists those interested in African development to assess the quality of this initiative and ultimately make recommendations as to whether the program has the intended effect on supporting women entrepreneurs in Uganda. It ensures that the future perspectives of African development includes growth as a participatory process with local participation as essential to sustainable growth.

Key words: Business growth, entrepreneurship, women, African development, Uganda, program evaluation.

INTRODUCTION

In 2005, the International Labour Organization (ILO) published a report titled "Support for Growth-oriented Women Entrepreneurs in Uganda" detailing an initiative to support women entrepreneurs in the country. The organizations and institutions involved in this project include the African Development Bank – Tunis, Office of Private Sector Department (AfDB/OPSD) and the International Labour Organizations' Programme on Boosting Employment through Small Enterprise Development (SEE) and Job Creation and Enterprise Development Department (EMP/ENT). In the foreword to the report the Director of the AfDB/OPSD, Luciano Borin, along with the Director of the ILO's EMP/ENT department, Michael Henriques, acknowledged that 2003 was the first time that the African Development Bank organized a special forum focusing on African Women in Business and specifically African Women Entrepreneurs. This concentrated focus on women was a reflection of current research literature indicating the "role of women entrepreneurs in private sector development, poverty

reduction, and sustainable growth and development" (Stevenson and St-Onge, 2005: 3). The aforementioned institutional organizations created a vision to identify the best ways of contributing to women entrepreneurs and creating an "enabling environment for women to start and grow their own enterprises" (Stevenson and St-Onge, 2005: 3). The information in the report seems to reflect a comprehensive and well developed program plan to support women entrepreneurs in Uganda. However, the integrated framework is based on a model from Canada and was adapted for other African countries including Ethiopia, Kenya and Tanzania, with Uganda as the most recent model. Additionally, the AfDB and ILO mention ensuring that the Ugandan model "reflect the core concerns of both the ILO and AfDB," and "indicates the next steps for the AfDB and ILO – as well as the Government of Uganda and other development partners..." (Stevenson and St-Onge, 2005: 3). This additional information implies that the development program to support women entrepreneurs in Uganda is

focused on meeting the needs of the ILO and AfDB measurements, in addition to providing recommendations for the Government of Uganda.

METHODOLOGY

By utilizing the participatory social learning theory and the five imperatives needed for comprehensive African Development, asserted by Zewde (2010), the author conducts a program evaluation to investigate the quality of this initiative and make recommendations as to whether the program has the stated intended effect on supporting women entrepreneurs in Uganda. In this paper, the program implemented within Uganda (as reported by the ILO) will be summarized and key points will be highlighted about its initiatives and outcomes utilizing the PSLT five development imperatives; the institutional imperative, the human resources imperative, the resource imperative, the technology imperative, and the investment capital imperative. By incorporating this theory and framework, the strengths and weaknesses will be highlighted from the perspective of African development as a participatory process that includes “goal-oriented, targeted, and unified mobilization of the five development imperatives...” (Zewde, 2010: 60).

PROJECT TO SUPPORT WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS IN UGANDA

The ILO and the AfDB initiative to support women entrepreneurs provides a detailed report on women entrepreneurs in the Ugandan economy, the environment for growth, current Ugandan government policies related to women's enterprise including gender policy, and recommendations to promote women's entrepreneurship. The goal of the ILO and AfDB report is to identify what structures and currently in place for entrepreneurs, how well they are producing the intended results, and what more should be implemented to support the environment of entrepreneurial growth. The intentions of this report follow an increasing recognition of and investment in the power and influence of women to create societal change. As the report mentions, 88.2% of economically active women are self-employed or unpaid family workers and are part of the nation's informal economy. This informal economy presents multiple constraints to economic growth including:

Insufficient infrastructure, legal and regulatory constraints, marketing problems, inadequate finance, poor coordination between business entities and policy levels, poor information flow, ease of entry and exit, and unorganized and un-mobilized workers, with little power for collective bargaining, all of which combine to hinder efficiency, productivity and income earning potential (Stevenson and St-Onge, 2005: 18).

Despite all of these barriers to successful business growth, especially in the agricultural sector, women are still roughly 91% of the agricultural labor force; the same percentage as in 1960. However, women have increased their presence in the industry labor force from 2% in 1960 to 6% in the year 2000, and are roughly 49% in the informal sector employment encompassing business ownership and entrepreneurial endeavors. In short, the ILO and AfDB report presents the case of why investment in women's businesses is important in Uganda's current economy. In 2003, roughly 1.4 million women either owned an enterprise or were in the process of starting one. Yet they are usually unable to grow their businesses because of the barriers mentioned earlier and what the report notes as “a range of impeding socio-economic and cultural factors that render it much more difficult for women

relative to men in Uganda” (Stevenson and St-Onge, 2005: 19). Also noted is that a “number of market, government, educational and systemic “failures”, deficiencies in institutional arrangements, and gender discrimination combine to adversely affect women's access to education, training, management development, credit, professional business development services (BDS), market information, representation, and other economic resources and opportunities” (Stevenson and St-Onge, 2005: 19).

The evaluation program that is initiated to alleviate this issue is timely and needed. However, the “outsider” approach that is taken can either be beneficial for exposing a new viewpoint toward changes within country that can improve the environment for women business owners, or can be harmful as international aid organizations evaluate what is not working, make recommendations for what can work, and then leave before empowering the communities to develop their own plans and own tools for assessment. This “outsider” approach can highlight the surface level issues hindering support for women's entrepreneurship and can also gauge beneath the surface in terms of cultural traditions and social barriers that block advancements of women in sectors that are traditionally considered male. This includes business ownership, land ownership, material resource ownership and substantial political and legal influence.

In the same regard, a simple “insider” approach can present strengths and weaknesses for policy recommendations. Having an intimate knowledge of the working environment in both positive and negative ways is only beneficial if these practices are not viewed as stagnant and antiquated, but as areas for potential change and progressive development. The “insiders” approach must also realize the usefulness in capitalizing on local capital and expertise in addition to international capital and expertise. In implementing comprehensive, lasting and sustainable development, it is a balance of the “outsider” and “insider” approach that is needed; accounting for development initiatives that combine institutional collaborations, human resource strengths, natural and man-made resources, technological advancements, and investment capital. Below is an analysis of the initiative to support growth-oriented women entrepreneurs in Uganda by analyzing the methods and procedures utilized by the ILO and AfDB in organizing their report and recommendations.

RESULTS

Analysis from the institutional imperative

The research portion of this project was supported by the AfDB, the ILO and three women from the locally-grown Entrepreneurship Centre at the Makerere University Business School (MUBS) in Kampala, Uganda. The report highlights that the individuals at MUBS assisted with providing information, fact-finding, organization of meetings and focus groups and scheduling for the international consultants. This reporting of the women's input does not acknowledge whether local women were part of the consultant or interview team as opposed to administrative players. Additionally, it is important to know whether local women were utilized for the focus groups and interview data collection process in conjunction with data analysis methods and interpretation. The institution of MUBS would be instrumental not only as a resource for gathering focus group participants but as an essential resource in handling the fact-finding and ultimate reporting. The information provided simply

acknowledges that MUBS researchers and staff were influential in the project.

Other institutions that were helpful in this project are the Private Sector Foundation Uganda (PSFU) and the Uganda Women Entrepreneurs' Association Limited (UWEAL). The organization acknowledges that PSFU hosted a roundtable of women entrepreneurs in the capital city, Kampala, to allow women to "share their experiences and views on the barriers to growth" (Stevenson and St-Onge, 2005: 9). UWEAL also hosted a focus group of its membership which provided "feedback to the international consultants on early observations and conclusions from the field visit" (Stevenson and St-Onge, 2005: 9). Overall, the program notes that over 90 Ugandans contributed to the report defining and analyzing the business environment and needed support for women entrepreneurs within the country. The representation included individual women entrepreneurs, entrepreneurial associations, government officials, banks, micro finance institutions, donors, non-governmental organizations, researchers and staff at MUBS, ILO and AfDB.

On the surface, this initiative seems inclusive since it allows for the voices of women entrepreneurs to be heard in terms of their successes and their challenges. There is also institutional representation from the private sector (PSFU), an educational institution (MUBS), a leading women's entrepreneurship organization within the country (UWEAL), and governmental representation, though the representation is not explained in terms of cabinet positions or specific ministry attendance. The overall institutional representation in this program seems to be diverse and representative of key stakeholders in the process of building support for women entrepreneurs. However, as Zewde (2010) notes in regards to institutions and their capabilities, institutional support and cooperation goes beyond simple representation of organizations in a programmatic effort. It is the "broad conceptions of ordered and structured arrangements and functional relationships to attain desired goals in the social, cultural, economic and political spheres" that is important to development (Zewde, 2010: 70).

In this scenario, the only concrete relationship that is detailed is the joint partnership between the African Development Bank and the International Labour Organization. The concept of supporting women's entrepreneurship is an initiative that is now taking place in a number of African countries. Previously Ethiopia, Kenya and Tanzania were mentioned. Uganda was an additional country that was added to the list of country initiatives in this area and the necessary resources found in MUBS, PSFU, UWEAL and others were utilized for the extent of the investigative research. The true test of whether this initiative created lasting collaborations devoted to this issue includes the joint partnerships that were formed within country to continue the focus on entrepreneurial support. This would include research partnerships

involving MUBS, the Government of Uganda and the entrepreneurial women's associations. By forming this partnership within country and continuing research, hands-on training, and influential involvement of local women entrepreneurs, this can help achieve institutional arrangements that focus on promoting the common good produced by women's developments in enterprise. Even though this analysis is initiated by AfDB and the ILO, it is believed that there should be some concrete initiatives spearheaded by the Government of Uganda concluding that women in enterprise and women entrepreneurs are an important element of the growth of the country. Instead, this report simply recommends policy leadership and coordination along with regulatory and legal environment improvements in order to foster support for women businesses. The analysis of institutional needs from the AfDB and the ILO are important but the true changes in policies and regulations should come from within the Ugandan institutional structures.

Analysis from the human resource imperative

The Human Resource imperative is given direct attention in this project but there are still areas for improvement. By holding focus groups and roundtables with women entrepreneurs and organizations catering to women business owners, the ILO and AfDB acknowledges the importance of hearing the voices of those women daily engaged in initiatives to operate their own businesses, or grow enterprises that they are interested in creating. However, the researchers utilized a measurement tool, or integrated framework, that was developed by the AfDB/ILO and only adapted for the particular environment in Uganda. The measurement tool assessing the human environment for women to work within society and grow their businesses includes a ten point core framework considering: 1) Policy leadership and coordination 2) The regulatory and legal environment 3) Promotion of women's entrepreneurship 4) Access to enterprise education and training 5) Access to credit and financial services 6) Access to BDS and information 7) Women Entrepreneurs' Associations (WEAs) and networks 8) Access to premises 9) Access of markets 10) the state of research on women and their enterprises. This framework seems comprehensive in analyzing the environment that can either promote or hinder women's entrepreneurial development.

It is noted that women entrepreneurs' associations are a viable support for women but their reach is limited to only a few women and notably those in urban areas as opposed to rural towns. However, those who are able to access these associations find significant resources in terms of mutual support and mentorship from other women interested in, or currently operating, enterprises. In this sense, women are utilized for their talents and knowledge but women in rural areas, who often times are

operating successful micro-enterprises, are not able to access these viable human resources. As Zewde (2010) mentions, "rural people and their economies are inevitably the sources of raw materials and human resource for the industrial sector and the foundation of national food security and food self-sufficiency- a strategic precondition for sustainable development" (Zewde, 2010: 100). In Uganda, the same holds true as rural women operate recycling programs, handicraft businesses, schools for neglected and handicapped children, and medical programs to avoid animal to human disease contraction (ILO Voice of Women, 2008; Conservation Through Public Health, 2010). They provide the education, food security and health needs that maintain the well-being of families in rural communities.

The ILO and AfDB recommend that women entrepreneurs' associations receive funding to build their capacity in order to reach more women in areas outside of the city. They also emphasize the need for training in governance and management, increasing their membership numbers and offering services that seek to benefit more members. These recommendations are helpful but they do not offer specific measures on how the capacity can be built with current resources available within the country. In order for development to occur utilizing the human resource imperative, the skills and training of women already in UWEAL or affiliated with another WEA must be capitalized upon. There is always a wealth of knowledge or innovation that can be implemented to create maximum benefits with what seems like little resources. If the promotion of women entrepreneurs is a priority for the country, there should be some government action that would support the influence of UWEAL or other WEA's to work alongside rural women in developing techniques and skills to grow their businesses. This includes providing educational opportunities for successful Ugandan women entrepreneurs to educate their counterparts in the science and art of entrepreneurial development.

Analysis from the resource imperative (natural and man-made)

Uganda is a land rich in natural resources with a unique blend of tropical rainforests, animal wildlife and water resources deriving from the Nile River which flows into Lake Victoria at the southeast of Uganda. The country is rich in naturally occurring minerals and elements including gold, copper, cobalt, limestone and salt (Central Intelligence Agency, 2010; myUganda Country Portal, 2010). The location of a number of lakes and rivers in Uganda provide the opportunity for seaside enterprises such as fishing, tourism and trading that can improve the social and economic conditions for women entrepreneurs. Utilizing these natural resources to develop enterprises would show support for the growth of women enterprises.

However, in Uganda, along with other African countries, land rights are not readily offered to women because of the barrier of gender and in some cases, culture. Uganda's land rights system still makes women dependent on male relatives in order to use land or achieve property rights for their businesses. Therefore, even though natural resources are abundant and available, the access that women have to these resources are limited. This access to land is also equated with the amount of money that an individual woman is allowed to borrow from the bank in order to run her business. Land is used as bank collateral in case the entrepreneurial venture does not succeed. Similar to this scenario is money as a form of man-made resources. In order to receive a loan from a bank, women have to file project documentations and files assessing their assets and liabilities. For most women entrepreneurs, lack of formal post-secondary education creates a barrier in filing forms and preparing a loan package that would be considered seriously by a reputable bank. In this case many women have to rely on consultants or experts in business to assist with document preparation, and often times cannot afford their fees. This use of alternative resources is a legal hindrance for women entrepreneurs and displays the need for man-made and human resources in addition to the natural environment.

The ILO and the AfDB did a good job of highlighting these constraints to women's business growth and recommending what areas of policy can be revamped to address these concerns. However, these recommendations are made within the context of what reforms would be needed in an ideal situation where those in power are in favor of changing or challenging the status quo. Yet the environment for women entrepreneurs still encompasses cultural and social constraints that question a women's access to the natural resources of land, water, and property rights. Making these recommendations is one step in creating equity and equality but the practicality of these recommendations changing the current conditions is still questionable. There is still a lack of government strategic focus in developing women entrepreneurs and their enterprises that is noted by the ILO and AfDB. The Government of Uganda is aware of increasing international focus on building the social, human and economic capital of women, but have not implemented concrete programming that seeks to change the social position of women and women's access to business resources whether natural or man-made. This report shows strength in concluding that policy leadership is essential in creating the environment to capitalize on all resources. They assert that inclusion of women must be an integral part of the government's national development plan to allocate resources to women entrepreneurs and specifically target them as a group for economic development policies. Additionally, gender mainstreaming policies must be advocated for and training workshops can take place across government agencies to ensure the resource

development of enterprising women (Stevenson and St-Onge, 2005: 56). Each of these recommendations and considerations display the importance of resource access and ownership in the development process.

Analysis from the technology imperative

Women's access to markets and the strategic focus on utilizing internet access for local training from urban areas to rural areas is one method of using technology for women's business growth. Capitalizing upon local entrepreneurial talents as opposed to training workshops that are operated halfway around the world develops local technological innovations for women enterprises and uses human resources and natural resources available in the immediate environment. Zewde (2010) mentions that, "Africa absolutely needs to mobilize every ounce of indigenously generated and imported, appropriate technology to push its development forward" (Zewde, 2010: 131). In utilizing local technological advances, Uganda misses out on the ingenuity of women entrepreneurs to not just make advancements in agriculture, education, tourism or the environment, but to create new knowledge in computer science, technological engineering and machine systems. Technological investment is not limited to purchasing interfaces of systems manufactured abroad and marketed throughout Africa; it is open to local or indigenous knowledge in some of the most basic improvements for development. For example, in Uganda there is a group of Women in Engineering and Technology that utilizes the combination of their institutional resources, human resources, natural and man-made resources to make advancements in the field of engineering and technology.

Within Uganda, women's access to up-to-date technologies and access to incubators for their business is still limited. However, the ILO and AfDB recommend that women entrepreneurs "approach local governments to construct common production facilities in sectors in which women are dominant" (Stevenson and St-Onge, 2005: 28). They include the specific production areas of textiles and agri-food processing. This suggestion is important in developing an efficient source of technological usage that always combines a central location for land and ownership rights for women businesses. This idea is also noble but it still faces the constraints of working within a government structure that questions the property rights of women, not to fail to mention the impact that technological access would have on their right to information and ability to gather knowledge on expanding their enterprises influence. This particular point is a combination of technological advancements and policy strategies that are highly relevant to women entrepreneurs. If a group of women advocates for technology and business express their vision for their businesses and technology usage, they will have to note the benefits and growth

prospects for entire communities and districts. In this case, the technological base can come from the resources within the country, such as women entrepreneurs themselves, or can be a by-product from innovations produced outside of the country and incorporated in the Ugandan environment as necessary. For African development, the point is that technology has to be incorporated within a framework highlighting a mission, value and goal. In this case, women entrepreneurs can identify their needs and what technological resources will allow them to accomplish growth either through increased access to markets or the ability to bridge the urban and rural gap for women's entrepreneurial skill training.

Analysis from the investment capital imperative

The final imperative used to analyze the ILO and AfDB's report on supporting growth-oriented women's entrepreneurship is the nature of investment capital. In the situation of women's entrepreneurship, capital is an important factor in growing a successful business. However, investment capital as a supplement to local capital and local support is an interesting portion of the equation. One of the phenomenon's of women's business ownership, micro-enterprise development and women's entrepreneurship in African nations and especially in rural districts, is the abundance of venture capital, small enterprise loans and seed money for women's business growth. This interest in women's economic development comes with benefits and costs. Zewde (2010) states that capital, also known as development finance, is needed to help with development efforts. Yet some interest in capital and international aid comes with costs to development such as debt and entangled alliances based on capital ownership through outstanding loans. Investment capital in women's entrepreneurship is essential to the growth and reputability of a business.

However, investment capital in the form of small loans or international aid is not the only source of economic resource development. Community support and unity are substantial areas yielding individual, group and community asset development. In the ILO and AfDB report, when interviewing women about their growth-oriented businesses, one woman noted that in Uganda there is no typical successful woman entrepreneur. Women can vary in terms of their educational backgrounds, assets and capital, marital status and family background. The key to success is the ability to rise up no matter what station in life; whether well-off or building up from the grass-roots (Stevenson and St-Onge, 2005: 47). They note that women with an entrepreneurial vision just need to have a start whether through taking advantage of community assets, receiving mentorship from another woman entrepreneur, or increasing capacity to use resources. Donors and international aid are important sources of capital for entrepreneurs, but it is not the only

capital available for those enterprising women. This statement is important to make in order to acknowledge the fact that women entrepreneurs are resourceful by their very nature of developing innovative pursuits and building up enterprises from merely a vision into a functioning organization. In the development equation, they understand that there is more than one way to develop economic resources.

The assessment reports on the results of the PSFU roundtable with current entrepreneurs and what they see as challenges to operating their enterprise. The section reflecting financing concerns highlighted ten barriers. They include: 1) limited flexibility in repayment schedules, 2) acquiring capital for equipment purchases, 3) gender discrimination in obtaining bank loans, 4) microfinance and bank limits based on gender and collateral status, 5) facing high interest rates, 6) difficulty in obtaining credit/working capital, 7) establishment of credit for young women, 8) financing issues for young businesses, 9) general problems with financing, and 10) slow business growth.

In short, roughly half of these complications in investment capital stems from gender bias and discrimination. Despite these barriers, women still find ways to fund their enterprises and consider diverse options in obtaining necessary funds. Though the investment capital portion is one imperative for development, this example shows that it is important but must be utilized in conjunction with the other imperatives of institutions, human resources, natural and man-made resources, and technological considerations. Ultimately the ILO and AfDB report expresses the need for development in all of these areas in order to advance the situation of women entrepreneurs in Uganda and their access to a multitude of resources to support the continued growth of their businesses.

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The evaluation results and recommendations offered in this report to support growth-oriented women entrepreneurs are inclusive of the five imperatives needed for development. However, the information provided is not detailed enough to ensure that participatory development is at the core of any initiative that will be made to further support women entrepreneurs. In reviewing and discussing each imperative of the PSLT, we see that in the area of institutional building, the ILO and AfDB involved key stakeholders in their assessment process. However, they do not detail to what extent these stakeholders were active in analysis of data and ultimate recommendations that were made for the development of women entrepreneurs. In regards to human resources, the report shows that women's organizations exist and are functioning to promote more women-owned businesses. However, there is still a barrier that prevents rural women from being included in the training and access to other women mentors who have access to capital and political

resources. The country of Uganda presents an almost ideal natural resource environment for women entrepreneurs who can develop seaside-based enterprises or businesses utilizing wildlife grounds. Yet the government is still not heavily involved in promoting women's land ownership or access to these natural resources. This, in turn, prohibits access that women have to both natural and man-made resources that can support their business growth. The technological environment for women's businesses is also limited and the suggestion from the ILO and AfDB for women's organizations to lobby government officials for their technological needs is a noteworthy initiative, but difficult in an environment that still presents as weary to the support of women's entrepreneurial growth. Lastly, investment capital is an essential source of economic assets for women business owners. Nevertheless, local and community aid provide capital that is often not given enough emphasis. Women in Uganda still face barriers in traditional banking institutions because of gender, and they have to rely on informal networks and support to keep their business in operation.

Overall, the development assessment conducted primarily by the ILO and AfDB considered each of the five development imperatives in its assessment of the business environment for growth-oriented women entrepreneurs. The imperatives were not stated explicitly, but the development environment was viewed as vast and diverse. It not only focused on economic measurements and indicators but considered the community environment, the opportunities for success, and the potential challenges in the political, social, economic and cultural realms. The participatory social learning theory provides a useful framework to help examine the programming methods and recommendations used by the ILO and AfDB, considering the unique circumstances of women and entrepreneurship in Uganda.

REFERENCES

- Central Intelligence Agency (2010, November 24). The World Factbook. Retrieved February 26, 2011, from CIA Library Publications: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ug.html#top>.
- Conservation Through Public Health. (2010). Mission. Retrieved February 26, 2011, from Conservation Through Public Health: http://www.ctph.org/about_method_ctph.php.
- International Labour Organization. (2008). Voices of Women Entrepreneurs in Uganda. Geneva: International Labour Office and Irish Aid.
- myUganda Country Portal. (2010). Resource navigation: About Uganda. Retrieved February 26, 2011, from myUganda: <http://www.myuganda.co.ug/about/population.php>.
- Stevenson L, St-Onge A (2005). Support for Growth-oriented Women Entrepreneurs in Uganda. Geneva: International Labour Organization.
- Zewde A (2010). Sorting Africa's Developmental Puzzle: The Participatory Social Learning Theory as an Alternative Approach. Lanham, MD: University Press of America, Inc.