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## **Women and Sustainable Development: A Study of Women Involvement in Small Scale Businesses in Uyo Local Government Area (LGA) of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria**

**Nseabasi Akpan**

### **Abstract**

This paper investigates women participation in the informal sector of Nigerian economy with emphasis on business. Its main objectives are: (a) identify the socio-economic characteristics of women in business; (b) highlight the types of business undertaken by women. Data were elicited from 300 out of 500 women with registered businesses in Uyo Local Government Area. The findings include: (i) middle-aged women with large families embark on business to supplement family incomes; (ii) Nigerian women are withdrawing from the formal sector into business; (iii) women engage in labour-intensive businesses; (iv) that abuses and misunderstandings they face does not deter them and (v) some women in business have provided some facilities to their communities.

### **Introduction**

In Nigeria today, a small scale business is an enterprise which has a capital investment not exceeding N60,000.00. It is an establishment which is wholly owned by Nigerians, employing fewer than fifty (50) full-time workers. Such an industrial establishment may or may not use machinery or motive power (Ile-Ife Industrial Research Unit, University of Ife, April, 1972:1). This definition covers employed blacksmiths, tailors, motor mechanics and weavers.

Small scale businesses are characterised by sole proprietorship in the structure of ownership. Personal savings constitute the main source of funds for running the business. Ayo (1986:203) explains that small scale businesses

are closely linked with agricultural production. Agricultural commodities dominate the production of these industrial establishments. Also, food processing is an important task of small-scale enterprises. These industries are integrated into, and meet the immediate needs of, the communities in which they are situated. They are supposed to be labour intensive and to absorb the manpower available at the grassroots since most of them are located in the rural areas where the raw materials are mostly produced.

In Akwa Ibom State, a small scale business is any form of enterprise that is involved in creating goods and services for consumption. It ranges from agriculture, weaving, hairdressing, food processing etc with about two (2) people (husband and wife) to as many as twenty five workers as may be the case in bakery or motor repairs shops (Ekong, 1997). Participation of Nigerian women in small scale business, especially in commercial activities, has for a long time been observed (Hodder, 1969). However, the greater interest shown by women and the increase in the number of women in private business have been a recent phenomenon.

Several factors have been attributed to the increase in participation by women in private business. These include limited employment opportunities for women in the public sector, the recent socio-economic and ideological changes in the world, for example, feminism and the emphasis on gender equality as well as greater enhancement of women's social position. Simmons (1993) has observed that in Zaria, in Northern Nigeria, women in Purdah have manifested a lot of zeal for economic independence by engaging themselves in economic ventures.

Ijere (1991) has identified other factors which favour women's participation in private business. They are: migration to the urban areas and women's inherent qualities of hard work and self-improvement efforts. Other factors include the activities of women associations and the development of such programmes as the "Better Life for Rural Women" and the "Family Support" which have led to the emergence of women groups engaged in various forms of business, such as farming, and cottage industries. Exposure to modern education and the adoption by women of the Euro-Centric model of equality have transformed women from the kitchen to the areas of business previously preserved for men. Uchendu (1993) has observed that women in the Northern States of Nigeria are kicking against the factors that confine women to the home as a result of their exposure to the Western type of education.

Boserup (1970), Ayesha (1985) and Erika (1991) have associated women's interest in private business with the state of global economy and the hardships it engenders in some countries, marital instability, rising social and economic expectation of women, increasing number of educated women, more efficient

birth control methods and the trend towards having fewer children per family. Amadi (1991), Awe (1990), Ekefor (1987) have noted three major constraints facing urban women in private business. These factors include, personal and family constraints. Objective constraints, according to him, relate to the limitation of adequate capital. They observed that women go into small-scale business owing to lack of sufficient capital to go into bigger ones.

Awe (1990), places emphasis on personal constraints e.g., the inferiority of women “which confers on the women the status of second-class citizen”, while Okafor stresses the constraints of family responsibilities of women. Although the role and extent of women involvement in the development processes of Akwa Ibom State cannot be overemphasised (women in most areas of the state have acted as vehicles of development as well as organisational media through positions of retail trading, fashion designing, hair dressing, hotels and restaurants, manufacturing, processing, etc) these same group of people have been looked down upon.

It is on record that much scholarly work has been done with regards to the identification of factors which motivate women into small scale businesses and some constraining factors as well, but not much attention has been focused on other important aspects, such as the type of businesses undertaken by women, consequences of women’s participation in business as well as the strategies adopted by women in business. This paper is therefore undertaken for the purposes of identifying the types of businesses undertaken by women in Uyo Local Government Area as well as highlighting the consequences of women’s participation in such businesses. It also intends to verify the strategies adopted by women in business.

### **Conceptual Clarification**

**The Role Concepts:** The concept of role and its other associated concepts are discussed here because of their importance in clarifying the problems arising from the participation of women (especially married ones) in business. Role can be defined as “a bundle of norms that defines the rights, obligations and privileges of a person who occupies a particular status” (Biesanz and Biesanz, 1974). The role is often attached to the status itself. Associated concepts of role include role expectation, role behaviour, role performance and role conflict and strain among others.

Role expectations may be prescriptive or preferred. On the one hand, members of different social groups may have in their minds conceptions about the behaviour of people who are members of their social group and, who may also have ideas and preferences regarding what they would like to do (Abande, 1988). In various societies people hold beliefs and expectations about behaviour

of mothers, wives, workers or business women.

Role behaviour is the actual enacted behaviour of the occupant of a social status in relation to the occupants of other statuses. These behaviours are the observed performances typical of the person or persons actually observed. It is role performance that makes up the ongoing social interaction of any group. According to Biesanz and Biesanz, "once we know the... network of statuses and their attached roles or norms, we can outline the general pattern of interaction within the group without reference to any specific people and their particular personalities."

**Role Performance: Multiple and Role Conflicts:** It has been observed that performance of a role is reinforced if a person's other roles are compatible with it. If a person assumes incompatible or conflicting roles, performance is often weakened. The mother/business woman, for example, may experience role conflict.

**Role Strain:** Gooves (1971) has defined role strain as "the felt difficulty in fulfilling role obligations" which may include mental and bodily problems.

**Sustainable Development:** This involves the exploitation of resources, the direction of investment, the orientation of technological development as well as institutional changes, both current and future, designed to meet the needs and aspirations of man. It recognises the needs of everyone for good health, happiness, prudent use of natural resources and maintenance of high and stable levels of economic growth and development.

### **Method of Study**

The main sources of data for this study are the women with registered business premises, as well as men whose wives are in business in Uyo Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State. The women were of the age range of 24-50 years. A list of registered business premises in Uyo Local Government was examined. With the use of a proportional stratified sampling technique, 300 respondents were chosen out of 500 business women.

The respondents were interviewed with a view to collecting appropriate data on the subject. However, where further explanations were required, the researcher used a pre-test questionnaire. Information mainly sought for in the questionnaire included the socio-economic characteristics of the business women, their problems in business, types of business, and the consequences of women participation in business.

**Data Presentation and Discussion*****Socio-economic Characteristics******Age of Respondents***

Women whose ages range from 30-44 are the most dominant participants in private businesses in Uyo Local Government Area. They make up 74% of the sample, with a mean age of 34. Women of about 45-54 years of age are less represented. This age structure has implications for the types and scale of the business undertaken.

At the age of 30-34 years most women are very active and can do “a lot of running-around”; a familiar feature which characterises modern businesses. Above all, at that age women have children who depend on them (dependant population) and thus have greater need for money to cater for these dependants. But by the age of forty five and above, the children are independent and thus the burden of dependency on parents is less.

**Table 1: Age of Respondents**

<b>Age</b>	<b>No. of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
20-24	30	10
25-29	30	10
30-34	90	30
35-39	72	24
40-44	66	22
45-49	6	2
50-54	6	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>100</b>

Mean Age = 34

Modal Age = 33

**Educational Levels**

As seen in the table below, the highest educational level attained by most of the women who are engaged in registered private business is the GCE (General Certificate of Education) attempted. People who have this educational qualification are those who have attended a full secondary school course but failed to pass the final examination with adequate number of subjects to qualify for employment in the public services or gain entry into institutions of higher learning. Women with higher educational levels (Higher National Diploma and First Degree), are also gaining access into private business. This confirms the popularity of private business in Uyo Local Government Area. It is interesting

to observe that some of the women had previous work experience in the public or private sector before they left for their own private businesses.

**Table 2: Education Levels of Women in Business**

Level of Education	No. of Respondents	Percentage
No formal education	30	10
Adult education	30	10
Primary education	20	6.7
GCE attempted	100	33.3
Teachers' education/GCE	30	10
NCE/Diploma	30	10
HND/First Degree	40	13
<b>Total</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>100</b>

### Marital Status

Most of the women (75.0%) are married. While there is a clear dominance of married women in the data, it must be observed that single women are also making inroads into private business.

**Table 3: Marital Status**

Marital Status	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Married	225	75
Single/Never married	40	13.3
Divorced	25	8.3
Separated	5	1.7
Widowed	5	1.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>100</b>

### Annual Income at initial Employment

Most of the women interviewed were of the opinion that government salary was not enough to sustain them and the members of their household. This was given as a reason why some respondents left the government service for private business and others managed to keep both. A mean annual income of N1677.00 was earned by fifteen percent of the respondents at their places of initial employment as against a mean monthly income of N4167.00 earned in private business.

**Table 4: Annual Income at Initial Employment**

<b>Income Distribution</b>	<b>No. of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
1000 and below	175	58.3
1001-2000	45	15.0
2001-3000	36	12.0
3001-4000	27	9.0
4001-5000	9	3.0
5001-6000	6	2.0
6001-7000	2	0.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>100</b>

**Table 5: Monthly Income in Business**

<b>Monthly Income</b>	<b>No. of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
500-1000	40	13.3
1001-5000	150	50.0
5000 and above	110	36.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>100</b>

It is important to note the difference in the income earning capacity of women who are engaged in private business of their own. From table 5 above, fifty percent respondents earn a mean monthly income of N4,167.00, a situation at variance with their annual income in their various place of work. In spite of this, many respondents still keep government employment because of what they described as 'risk in business.'

### **Number of Children/Respondents**

It was discovered that the number of children born by women is an important determinant of women's involvement in business. Women with many children showed less interest in business than others with fewer children. According to table 6 below, 71.1 percent of respondents involved in business had one to four children.

**Table 6: Number of Children/Respondents**

<b>No. of Children</b>	<b>No. of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
1-2	90	30
3-4	125	41.7
5-6	80	26.7
7+	5	1.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>100</b>



### Age of Children

Apart from the number of children owned by women, the ages of the children constitutes another determining factor for women's involvement in business. It was observed that women whose children's ages fell between 0-15 years (dependent population) were the most involved in business because of their greater need for income to cater for these dependents.

**Table 7: Age of Children**

Ages	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Below 5 years	64	21.3
5-10	90	30.0
11-15	74	24.7
15+	72	24.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>100</b>

From the table above, 76 percent of the respondents had children between the ages 0-15 years.

### Types of Business

Women cluster around businesses which respondents described as 'women areas.' These include the provision of food services in hotels, restaurants or 'Food is Ready' (30%), Fashion design and/or dress making (25%) and Hair dressing (27%). 'Food is Ready' refers generally to make-shift enclosures for serving food to lower class travelers, workers and students. These places are becoming more numerous than hotels and restaurants where high quality foods are served and are becoming more and more popular among a large number of Nigerians even of middle class status because of the relatively cheaper prices charged for services. Other areas of business which attract very few women are: manufacturing/cottage industries, wholesale trade and transport. Most women have cited the dearth of capital as a limiting factor in their choice of type of business.

**Table 8: Type of Business**

Nature of Business	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Manufacturing	6	2
Processing	4	1.3
Wholesale trade	10	3.3
Retail trade	24	8
Hotels/Restaurants/Food is ready	90	30
Fashion Design/Dress making	75	25
Hair dressing	81	27
Others (contract etc.)	10	3.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>100</b>

As can be observed from table 4, eighty-two percent of women in Uyo cluster around three main areas of business: food services, dress making and hair dressing. These business areas, according to the women, require less capital investment than others.

### Consequences of Women's Participation In Business

Participation of women in private business has some merits as well as demerits for the members of their households. It has improved the standard of living of the participating families. Families which hitherto did not have any savings, nor eat three square meals daily now do so because of women's involvement in private business. Most of them, according to the respondents, have bought radio and television sets, thereby raising their awareness. Some of the respondents even use the income accruing to them from business to boost community development, specifically drilling of boreholes and contributing towards community electrification projects.

**Table 9: Gains of Participating in Business**

New Things	No. of Respondents	Percentages
Opening of Family Savings Account	55	18.3
Taking Three Square Meals Daily	100	33.3
Purchase of TV/Radio Sets	45	15
Contributing to Community Development (Borehole Drilling and Electricity)	100	33.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>99.9</b>

As expected, women participation in private business has raised certain problems for the members of their households. Their services, at home, to

husbands and children have been disrupted by their involvement in business. Husbands complain that their wives are becoming more domineering at home and show less than adequate care for both husband and children. Sixty-two percent of the members of the household interviewed expressed concern about deterioration in the services at home owing to the women's participation in private business.

**Table 10: Household Problems Arising from Women's Participation in Business**

Type of Problem	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Domineering at home	80	26.7
Deterioration in household	185	61.6
Less frequent sex	15	5.0
Others	20	6.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>100</b>

Husbands in particular complain about their wives becoming too dominant in the home. They attributed this to their access to more money than hitherto. Some women in business have tended to stick to their business even more than their official employment. Ninety percent of the sampled women interviewed said they would continue in business even if their husbands were to give them enough money for housekeeping and other needs. According to the respondents, there was more to their participation in business than financial need satisfaction. According to them, the exposure they have as a result of participation in business was more than the financial satisfaction. Others mentioned that through their participation in business, they have had enough knowledge in managing small scale businesses as well as money. They now have access to the money they call their own, without relying on their husbands. Thus, they can as well help in developing the family without the husbands support.

### **Problems Confronting Women in Business**

It was noticed during the study that women in business were confronted with many socio-economic problems. These included:

- Men's attitudes toward women involved in business. To the women this attitudes were very unfavourable especially when business lasted till late hours.
- Spinsters complained about their parents negative attitudes to hawking of their wares.
- Procurement of loans. Respondent observed that it was very difficult for them to obtain loans.

Envy by family members. Respondents argued that they were envied and accused of domineering tendencies and inadequate care of husbands and children at home.

### Strategies Adopted by Women in Business

As mentioned above, women have experienced some problems that arise from their participation in business. These include both household and business related problems and these have subjected them to various stresses. They however have devised means of dealing with these stresses. The strategy often resorted to by most of them is the employment of paid house servants to take their places at home. Forty-two percent of the women resort to this strategy as may be found in table 11 below. Other strategies involve making use of the services of their own or relations' children, limiting their participation in church and in other organisational activities and absenteeism from their official duties.

**Table 11: Strategies of Women in Business**

Strategies	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Use of the services of own or relations' children	100	33.3
Use of paid servants	125	41.7
Others	75	25.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>300</b>	<b>100</b>

It must be observed that most of the women regarded their involvement in business as a "coping" strategy against the hard economic times which has befallen the country since the 1980s.

### Discussion and Conclusion

Most of the women who own and operate registered business in Uyo Local Government Area, Nigeria are married or previously married, of mean age of 34 years and have low educational qualification. Their businesses cluster around areas which need small capital to start with, such as selling food, dressmaking and hairdressing. Access to bigger capital has been mentioned as a limiting factor for entry into larger business ventures.

Women's participation in business has generated some problems in the home. Business women who have had some measure of fluidity tend to become domineering. Their participation in business has also affected their maternal and sexual roles. However, most women devise various ways of dealing with these problems by making use of paid servants, their grown up children, or relatives. Although most women in the study have regarded their participation

in business as a way of coping with the dwindling purchasing power of their household allowances, owing to the restructuring of the Nigerian economy, many have come to accept it as a way of life. Indeed, almost all the women said they would continue in business even if they were given house allowances enough for all their needs. This suggests that there is more to women's participation in business than financial need satisfaction.

### Conclusion

It is my view that women have been pushed into small-scale businesses because of the dwindling financial resources available to the family. The rate of inflation rates in the country, in recent times, have greatly affected household income necessitating the need for additional funds to cater for the sustenance of the family. Although the respondents have experienced tensions in the relationships between them and their family members, they have continued to invest in these businesses. The resultant effects have been the immense improvement in the conditions of their families in terms of additional income and concomitant rise in their standards of living. They have also used the excess income in providing some amenities in their localities. As observed in table 9, some of the respondents explained that they have used the excess money in support of community development projects. Specifically, that they have contributed to the establishment of boreholes in their localities as well as the provision of electricity.

From the responses, it was noticed that with the increase of income accruing to the family (income from private businesses) women have been able to perform their roles effectively. In spite of their role strain and conflict, they have adjusted their role obligations. They have combined their activities related to domestic work and household production, with managing their private businesses. What this means is that their roles are changing due to a number of factors, such as economic crisis, changes in production and consumption patterns, and re-positioning of their status within the civil society.

This work, basically then, supports the case for women empowerment as a vehicle for sustainable development. It advocates availability of increased development resources to women, specifically and separately as a group. It maintains that if women are empowered in income-generating schemes, their traditional roles and responsibilities would be reinforced.

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