

Factors Militating Against Entrepreneurial Engagement of Rural Women in Orlu Local Government Area in Imo State

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ABSTRACT

This study determined factors militating against entrepreneurial engagement of rural women in Orlu Local Government Area of Imo State. Three research questions guided the study. Descriptive survey research design was adopted in this study. The population of the study comprised 9,711 rural women of various communities in Orlu LGA. The Taro Yamane formula was used to arrive at a sample size of 357. The instrument used for data collection was a questionnaire developed by the researchers and structured on four points rating scale. The reliability of instrument was computed using Cronbach Alpha which yielded a co-efficient of 0.78. the instrument was therefore deemed reliable for the study. Arithmetic mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions. The finding drawn from the results reveals that economic and socio-cultural factors militated against entrepreneurial engagement of rural women in Orlu Local Government Area. The finding also reveals that psychological factors did not militate against entrepreneurial engagement of rural women in Orlu Local Government Area. Based on the findings, it was recommended among others that the government, financial institutions, and development partners should increase access to financial capital for rural women through the establishment of gender-sensitive microcredit schemes, cooperative societies, and grants tailored specifically to small-scale women entrepreneurs among others.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship, Engagement, Militating, Women, Rural Women

INTRODUCTION

Rural women play a critical role in the social and economic transformation of societies, especially in developing nations such as Nigeria. Despite their indispensable contributions, rural women often reside in remote, underserved parts of villages and communities, where they face persistent challenges such as low income, poverty, unemployment, gender inequality, and limited access to basic rights and services. These include limited access to education, credit facilities, healthcare services, political and social engagement, and other essential developmental resources (UN Women, 2022). These barriers not only diminish their quality of life but also contribute to widespread issues such as malnutrition, food insecurity, poor health, and environmental degradation in rural communities (FAO, 2021).

Nevertheless, rural women are pivotal actors in achieving economically viable societies and fostering sustainable development. Their empowerment is not only a matter of gender equity but also an essential strategy for economic growth, poverty reduction, and social progress (OECD, 2022). Studies show that rural women constitute a significant percentage of the agricultural workforce in sub-Saharan Africa, performing nearly 60–80% of food production activities, a figure that remains consistent in Nigeria (World Bank, 2020). This agricultural engagement is critical to family sustenance and income generation, funding education, healthcare, and community welfare initiatives (Adetunji & Aloba, 2021).

Nigeria's demographic profile further underlines the importance of empowering rural women. With an estimated population of over 213 million, women constitute approximately 49.4% of the population, and over 46% of these

women live in rural areas (National Bureau of Statistics [NBS], 2022). A considerable proportion of these rural women reside in northern Nigeria, where they face pronounced socio-economic constraints including poverty, early marriage, withdrawal of girls from school, and limited access to healthcare (UNICEF, 2023). According to Ekong (2013), rural women undertake numerous domestic and economic activities such as farming, water fetching, cooking, child-rearing, and animal husbandry. These roles, while traditionally seen as subsistence activities, present viable opportunities for income generation when strategically harnessed through entrepreneurship.

Entrepreneurship, defined as the process of creating value by assembling a unique combination of resources to exploit an opportunity, is a critical tool for empowering rural women (Stevenson & Jarillo, 2007). Entrepreneurship enhances self-reliance, financial independence, creativity, and a sense of control over one's life (Acs et al., 2018). Encouraging entrepreneurial culture among rural women can significantly foster inclusive economic growth at local, national, and global levels (Naudé, 2013). Evidence from global studies demonstrates that women are capable investors and resource managers when provided with equal opportunities. For instance, the National Association of Investors Corporation (2000) found that women investors in the United States consistently outperformed their male counterparts with an average return of 32% annually since 1951.

It is important to note that many factors militate against entrepreneurial engagements of women in rural areas, one of such factors is economic situation. Economic factors are those factors that help to determine the competitiveness of the environment in which the firm or business operates. The factors are determinants of an economy's performance that directly impacts an enterprise, firm or business and have a resonating long-term effects. Various economic factors militate against entrepreneurial engagement of women in rural area which include finance, competition in the market and poor infrastructural facilities.

The socio-economic factor militating against entrepreneurial engagement of women in rural areas means those cultural and social factors which hinder women in rural areas from entrepreneurial engagement. Businesses do not exist in a vacuum, even the most successful business must be aware of changes in the cultures of the societies in which the business is situated (Oluwaseun & Omodero, 2022). The authors further averred that as any society and its culture changes, businesses must adapt to stay ahead of their competitors and stay relevant in the minds of their consumers. Examples of socio-cultural factors that militates against women in rural areas in engagement in entrepreneurship include; dual roles women in rural areas play in the society, inadequate motivation and support, gender disparities.

Psychological factors refer to thought, feelings, and other cognitive characteristics that affects the attitude, behaviour and functions of the human mind. These factors can militate against how a person think and later affects his decision and relations in his/her daily life. Psychological factors lead to the dynamism of human mind and their behaviours (Jaiparkash, 2011). Women in rural areas are influenced by series of psychological factors which include fear of failure, lack of self-esteem, low ability to ear risk, lack of interaction with successful entrepreneurs.

Despite the vital role rural women play in the economic development of their communities, their entrepreneurial potential remains largely untapped due to various persistent challenges. In Orlu Local Government Area of Imo State, many women possess the skills, creativity, and resilience needed for entrepreneurship, yet they continue to face economic constraints, cultural expectations, and psychological limitations that suppress their aspirations. These barriers not only restrict their individual growth but also hinder community-wide progress, as rural women are central to family welfare, agricultural productivity, and local economic sustainability (Nwangwu, 2022)

The growing recognition of entrepreneurship as a driver of economic empowerment and poverty reduction makes it imperative to understand why rural women, especially in places like Orlu, are not actively participating or succeeding in entrepreneurial ventures. Previous research has focused broadly on women's empowerment in other communities (Ogundiwin, Akhiamiokhor, Nwankwere, Oduguwa & Olaniyan, 2018; Pham, Pham, Hang-Nga & Van Phuong, 2024;) and effects of transformation in Nigerian rural communities (Ogbunugwor & Ewelum, 2022), but there remains a gap in studies such as factors militating entrepreneurial engagement of rural women in Orlu Local Government Area of Imo State

Statement of the Problem

In Nigeria, rural women represent the most vulnerable demographic, with the highest rates of illiteracy, unemployment, and poverty. Despite their pivotal role in agriculture and community life, their economic contributions remain undervalued and unsupported. In response to this persistent gendered poverty, the Federal Government of Nigeria, over the years, has implemented various women empowerment initiatives aimed at fostering self-reliance through entrepreneurship. Notably, the Better Life for Rural Women (1987) and the Family Support Programme (1993), championed by former First Ladies Marian Babangida and Maryam Abacha respectively, were designed to improve the socio-economic conditions of rural women by promoting entrepreneurial development. However, despite these interventions, the level of rural women's participation in entrepreneurial activities remains critically low, raising concerns about the effectiveness and accessibility of such programmes.

Preliminary observations in Orlu Local Government Area of Imo State indicate that while many rural women express entrepreneurial interest and demonstrate practical skills, their active engagement in entrepreneurship remains minimal. This disconnect between entrepreneurial potential and participation suggests the presence of underlying constraints impeding their involvement. These may include socio-cultural norms, economic limitations, inadequate institutional support, and psychological barriers, among others. Given the strategic importance of women's entrepreneurship in driving rural development and reducing poverty, it becomes imperative to systematically investigate the specific factors militating against the entrepreneurial engagement of rural women in Orlu. Specifically, the study determined:

1. The economic factors militating against entrepreneurial engagement of rural women in Orlu Local Government Area.
2. The socio-cultural factors militating against entrepreneurial engagement of rural women in Orlu Local Government Area.
3. The psychological factors militating against entrepreneurial engagement of rural women in Orlu Local Government Area

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the economic factors militating against entrepreneurial engagement of rural women in Orlu Local Government Area?
2. What are the socio-cultural factors militating against entrepreneurial engagement of rural women in Orlu Local Government Area?
3. What are the psychological factors militating against entrepreneurial engagement of rural women in Orlu Local Government Area?

METHOD

The design adopted for this study was the descriptive survey design. The study was carried out in Orlu Local Government Area of Imo State. The population for the study comprised all the 9,711 rural women of 11 communities that made up Orlu L.G.A. The Taro Yamane formula was used to arrive at a sample size of 357. The instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire developed by the researcher titled ‘‘Factors Militating Against Entrepreneurial Engagement Questionnaire (FMAEEQ)’’ and was validated by two experts. The instrument was structured on a 4 point rating scale of Strongly Agree (4.00-3.50), Agree (3.49-3.00), Disagree (2.99-1.50), Strongly Disagree (1.49-1.00). The reliability of the instrument was computed using Cronbach Alpha and it yielded a co-efficient of 0.78. the instrument was therefore deemed reliable for the study. The researchers adopted direct approach in administering the questionnaire to the respondents. Arithmetic mean and standard deviation (SD) were used to answer the research questions.

RESULTS

Research Question 1: What are the economic factors militating against entrepreneurial engagement of rural women in Orlu Local Government Area?

Table 1: Respondent’s mean and SD scores on economic factors militating against entrepreneurial engagement of rural women in Orlu Local Government Area

S/N	Items	X	SD	Remarks
1	Poor infrastructure facilities like water supply, road networks, communication network militate against your entrepreneurial engagement	3.41	0.88	Agree
2	Lack of finance militate against your entrepreneurial engagement	2.68	0.96	Agree
3	Lack of adequate power supply militate against your entrepreneurial engagement	3.78	0.77	Agree
4	Poverty militate against your entrepreneurial engagement	3.51	0.81	Agree
	Cluster Mean	3.35		Agree

Data on Table 1 shows that rural women agreed that economic factors militates against their entrepreneurial engagement for all the items with mean scores of 3.41, 2.68, 3.78 and 3.51 respectively. The grand mean of 3,35 shows that economic factors militate against entrepreneurial engagement of rural women in Orlu Local Government Area. The SD scores from 0.77 to 0.96 indicated that the respondents were homogenous in the responses.

Research Question 2: What are the socio-cultural factors militating against entrepreneurial engagement of rural women in Orlu Local Government Area?

Table 2: Respondent’s mean and SD scores of socio-cultural factors militating against entrepreneurial engagement of rural women in Orlu Local Government Area

S/N	Items	X	SD	Remarks
5	Lack of motivation and support by family members militating against your entrepreneurial engagement	2.50	0.62	Agree
6	Family and societal roles of women militate against your entrepreneurial engagement	2.66	0.76	Agree
7	Gender disparities with regards to education, employment and decision making opportunities militate against entrepreneurial engagement	3.01	0.78	Agree
8	Your culture and beliefs such as women’s inability to own properties militate against your entrepreneurial engagement	3.47	0.51	Agree
	Grand Mean	2.91		Agree

Data in table 2 show that rural women in Orlu Local Government Area agreed on items 5, 6, 7 and 8 with mean scores of 2.50, 2.66, 3.01 and 3.47 respectively as socio-cultural factors that militate against their entrepreneurial engagement of rural women in Orlu Local Government Area. The cluster Mean of 2.91 shows that socio-cultural

factors militate against entrepreneurial engagement of women in Orlu Local Government Area. The SD scores ranging from 0.51 to 0.78 shows that the respondents were homogenous in their responses.

Research Question 3: What are the psychological factors militating against engagement of rural women in Orlu Local Government Area?

Table 3: Respondent's mean and SD scores on psychological factors militating against entrepreneurial engagement of rural women in Orlu Local Government Area

S/N	Items	X	SD	Remarks
9.	Fear of failure militate against your entrepreneurial engagement	3.01	0.76	Agreed
10.	Low self-esteem militate against entrepreneurial engagement	2.34	0.86	Disagree
11.	Lack of confidence militate against entrepreneurial engagement	2.49	1.01	Disagree
12.	Lack of courage to take risk militate against your entrepreneurial engagement	2.00	0.87	Disagree
	Grand Mean	2.46		Disagree

Data in Table 3 shows that rural women rated item 10 with mean score of 3.01 as psychological factor militating their entrepreneurial engagement. Items 11, 12 and 13 with mean scores of 2.34, 2.49, and 2.00 respectively were rated as factors that did not militate against their entrepreneurial engagement in Orlu Local Government Area. The cluster means of 2.46 shows that psychological factors dose not militate against their entrepreneurial engagement in Orlu Local Government Area. the SD scores ranges from 0.76 to 1.01 shows that the respondents were homogenous in their responses.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The finding in research question one reveals that findings were made on the factors militating against entrepreneurial engagement of rural women in Orlu Local Government Area in Imo State. Analysis of research question one reveals that economic factors militates against entrepreneurial engagement of rural women in Orlu Local Government Area. This finding agrees with the findings of Mahbib (2000) who reiterated that economic factors are the fastest way of improving entrepreneurship. This means that women's entrepreneurial engagement is adversely affected by lack of provision of infrastructural facilities, lack of finance and high rate of poverty.

The finding in research question two reveals that socio-cultural factors militated entrepreneurial engagement of rural woman in Orlu Local Government Area. This finding is in agreement with the finding of Storey (2003) who found that cultural view of women's participation in entrepreneurial activities is not gender biased and therefore receive support from families, non-governmental organizations and societal supports. Adebayo and Salawu (2016) reported that strong familial bonds and community-based networks not only mitigate traditional gender constraints but also offer the practical and motivational resources necessary for initiating and sustaining business ventures

The finding in research question three reveals that psychological factors did not militate entrepreneurial engagement of rural women in Orlu Local Government Area. This finding opposed the finding of Mahbib (2000), who noted that psychological factors influence women's engagement in entrepreneurship. This might be due to the fact that the present study investigated the perception of rural women as compared to the study of Mahbib who studied both urban and rural women as regards entrepreneurial engagement.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that women in rural areas engagement in entrepreneurship are militated against by economic and socio-cultural factors. On the other hand, their entrepreneurial engagement is not militated against by psychological factors.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the finding of the study, the following recommendation were made:

1. The government, financial institutions, and development partners should increase access to financial capital for rural women through the establishment of gender-sensitive microcredit schemes, cooperative societies, and grants tailored specifically to small-scale women entrepreneurs.
2. There is a need for sustained community sensitization and advocacy to challenge and transform cultural norms and traditional beliefs that restrict women's economic participation. Religious leaders, traditional rulers, and community heads should be engaged in promoting positive narratives around women's entrepreneurship, emphasizing its benefits to family and community development.
3. Although psychological factors did not significantly affect rural women's entrepreneurial engagement in this study, continuous empowerment, mentorship, and exposure to entrepreneurial success stories should be maintained. Rural women should be provided with ongoing entrepreneurship education and life-skills training that reinforces self-confidence, resilience, and business management skills.

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