



## Understanding Feminism Perspective on Informal Women Entrepreneurs in Kyengera Town Council

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**Abstract:** The process of marginalization and exclusion from intersectional and multilevel perspectives has much focus on intersectional of ethnic, gender and class background, which all vested in the feminism perspective of informal women entrepreneurs. The purpose of the paper is to examine the philosophical perspectives on informal women entrepreneurs in Uganda with a focus on how epistemological experiences and perspectives influence informal businesses and what the socio-cultural experiences of women entrepreneurs in Kyengera town council are. The paper is guided by a documentary-based review design using mixed methods, and data collected through on desk review from scholarly articles. The paper indicates various philosophical descriptions, epistemological experiences and perspectives and socio-cultural experiences of informal women entrepreneurs in Kyengera Town Council. The paper concludes that, feminist researchers need to focus on mixed methods research as means to address the knowledge, power and gender-gap among informal women entrepreneurs. This should include knowledge and science to constitute inclusion of women to eliminate male-biased ideologies.

**Keywords:** Epistemology, feminism, informal women entrepreneurs, socio-cultural, transformation

### 1. PURPOSE OF THE ESSAY

The purpose of the essay was to examine the philosophical perspectives on informal women entrepreneurs in Kyengera town council with a focus on the following research questions: How do epistemological experiences and perspectives influence informal businesses? What are the socio-cultural experiences of women entrepreneurs? The essay is positioned in the feminism perspective which looks into marginalization of women in entrepreneurial growth on gender. This is found in the feminist standpoint epistemology and provides a strong basis for thinking through feminist concerns about entrepreneurship promotion, and to be the most useful for putting feminist theory into practice (Vossenber, 2014) with a need to transform and empower the women. The essay was guided by mixed methods design with both qualitative and quantitative approaches as Brush and de Bruin (2014, as cited in Vossenber, 2014, p.9) note that feminist perspectives tend to be more implicitly than explicitly part of entrepreneurship research.

### 2. DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS

#### 2.1. Women Entrepreneurs as Marginalized

Women entrepreneurs are females involved in the informal businesses, sometimes referred to as informal female workers. Equity for Growth's (2009) report explains that these are women in business who are self-employed and operate their own venture unregistered under the formal process. However, for this essay, women entrepreneurs relate to those women who start their own informal businesses and sell home based merchandises such as foodstuffs, vegetables, spices and household support items. Since women entrepreneurs are part of the marginalized groups, marginalization relates to the process and actions that relegate an individual or group to a disadvantaged social position (Pihl, 2015, p.41). Although, researchers have explored the process of marginalization and exclusion from intersectional and multilevel perspectives, much focus has been intersectional of ethnic, gender and class background (Fangen *et al.*, 2012, as cited in Pihl, 2015, p. 41). Thus, much of their research focuses on the process, social systems (welfare regimes, migration policies and personal identities

conservative as well as social demographic policies), Europe only, and no any other Continent (Pihl, 2014).

It can be noted that marginalization is the deconstruction of inequality, rooted in the relationships that are defined by race, class, sexuality and gender related to positive social change. This implies that feminist researchers employ this perspective because of their belief in its radical potential to alter social practices to free individuals and social groups. Thus, they take this position with acknowledgement that is impossible to fully escape the normalizing confines of language because new relations of power/knowledge are continuously re-inscribed in new systems of classification. Knowing that gender blind or insensitive policies and development programmes lead to poor and ineffective outcomes, they rightfully point out that the effects or alleged benefits for women remain unclear and that it is unrealistic to seek for ‘miracle solutions’ to overcome gender inequality in policy efforts solely focused at economic development (Vossenbergh, 2014, p.9). Thus, for liberal feminism, the gender gap in entrepreneurship is due to the discrimination of women through structural barriers such as a lack of access to networks, unequal access to finance for start-up and business growth or unequal access to property rights (Ahl, 2006; Calas *et al.*, 2009, as cited in Vossenbergh, 2014, p.9).

Therefore, the gender-sex systems have contributed more to the oppression and exploitation of women entrepreneurs where their experiences are privatized exclusively from moral consideration (Benhabib, 1992, p.152). Amusingly, marginalization of women has continued. For example, the constitution of nature has banned women from the realm of nature, from light of the public to the interior of the household, from the civilizing effect of culture to the repetitious burden of nurture and reproduction (Benhabib, 1992, p.157). Up to the present day, women’s marginalization has been evident in areas of politics and power, business, inheritance and ownership of property and forced marriages. In families, for example men have left responsibilities to women including men leaving their wives to marry others.

### 2.2. Mixed Methods (Qualitative and Quantitative)

Johnson *et al.* (2007 as cited in Creswell, 2010, p.51) define mixed methods research as a type of research in which a researcher or team of researchers combines elements of qualitative and quantitative approaches (e.g., use of qualitative and quantitative viewpoints, data collection, interpretation, and analysis techniques) for the purposes of breadth and depth of understanding and corroboration.

*“Mixed methods research is a research design with philosophical assumptions as well as methods of inquiry. As a methodology, it involves philosophical assumptions that guide the direction of the collection and analysis of data and the mixture of qualitative and quantitative approaches in many phases in the research process. As a method, it focuses on collecting, analyzing, and mixing both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study or series of studies. Its central premise is that the use of qualitative and quantitative approaches in combination provides a better understanding of research problem than either approach alone”* (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007, p.5, as cited in Halla, 2017, Slide No.9).

Though, mixed methods research is incompatible, interestingly, Greene (2007 as cited in Creamer, 2016, p.9) coins an expression ‘mixed methods way of thinking’ to refer to a philosophical mindset that deliberately sets out to acknowledge complexity and to engage multiple viewpoints which inspires us to understand the complex social phenomenon by intentionally including multiple ways of knowing, valuing and by respectfully valuing differences (Greemer, 2007, as cited in Creamer, 2016, p.9). On that note, the choice of mixed methods comes with an expectation of methodological transparency that is not applied to work that is satisfied with a multi-method label. Thus, it is characterized by the belief that reality is multiple, constructed and ever changing, a respect for diverse viewpoints and ways of knowing, motivation to pursue unexpected results which are similar to an engagement with multiple, competing hypothesis that is so central to the scientific method.

It can be noted that qualitative and quantitative approaches are used to create more nuanced and comprehensive picture (Creamer, 2016) thus mixed methods enhance validity by triangulating results from more than one source of data for purposes of confirmation hence, a multiple way of knowing and valuing; and by respectfully valuing differences. For this reason, for better results from the use mixed methods research, the interference of the research process and mixed methods need to be addressed as this would help to assess design quality and interpretive rigor (Teddie&Tashakkori, 2009, as cited in Creswell, 2010, p.60).

Mixed methods research helps to understand the steps in data analysis especially how, when, why, and where the data are mixed. Despite the fact that it is a good research design, it has been more evident in the health sector research than in humanities and business and economics.

### 2.3. Feminist Epistemologies

It was Sandra Harding (1987:1991, as cited in Vossenber, 2014, p.3) who more than twenty-five years ago, distinguished three views that are still referred to as the 'feminist philosophy of science' namely, feminist empiricism, standpoint feminism and post-structural feminism. These feminist epistemologies share a common pro-women approach whereby they challenge traditional views of science and development by critiquing its tendency to be centered around male experiences and needs and to exclude or subordinate women's voices and experiences on multiple levels (Intemann, 2010; Racine, 2011; Alcoff & Potter, 2013, as cited in Vossenber, 2014, p.3). Instead, feminisms acknowledge the social, political and normative situatedness of 'the knower' which shapes experiences, knowledges and visions. Feminisms also advocate the inclusion of underrepresented and marginalized voices and experiences as valuable knowledge discourses and constructs of power. Lastly, they share a commitment to gender justice, suggesting the need for social change and advancing the feminist agenda for egalitarian and caring politics. However, there are important epistemological and ontological differences to be accounted for (Potter, 2006; Intemann, 2010; Alcoff and Potter, 2013, as cited in Vossenber, 2014, p.3).

Certainly, feminists of colour have been critical of a certain version of essentialism that has defined women as a single group, but virtually all feminists now share this crisis. This shows that Feminists of color have also rejected the individualistic projects of politics based on identification and opposition, as have poststructuralists. However, some have realized that such a position has made feminists of colour to realize that such a critique does not necessitate a total rejection of the social reality of categorization (McCall, 2005, p.1779). In contrast to empirical feminism, this epistemology is not so much focused on empirical 'men and women' but rather on gender relations as ongoing dynamic constructs of power that structure society. Through reproduction of these relations in ongoing processes of socialization, "women and men know different things in different ways" (Jackson, 2006, p.530).

On the other hand, feminist empiricism or liberal feminism found its origins in positivism and sets out from realist ontology of 'men and women and 'social structures'. Men and women are considered equally able but dissimilar, with different qualities and endowments that can be differently valued by society. Through empirical research it is assumed, we can describe and understand 'what is real' and 'why people act' (Vossenber, 2014, p.7).

### 3. THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL EXPERIENCES AND PERSPECTIVES ON INFORMAL WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS

Feminists have not succeeded in creating a mass movement against sexual oppression because the very foundation of women's liberation has, until now, not accounted for the complexity and diversity of female experiences. Similarly, but from a different theoretical perspective, Wendy Brown writes: 'we are not simply oppressed but produced through these discourses, a production that is historically complex, contingent, and occurs through formations that do not honour analytically distinct identity categories' (Brown, 1997, p.87, as cited in McCall, 2005, p.1772). This implies that although women are demoralized, they have continued to take a fight in the improvement of their entrepreneurial avenues so as to enhance their well-being. Their identity and distinctiveness have been observed on a number of platforms as they struggle to achieve their goals which conform to carrying the scorpion by its neck. It can be noted that if states can reflect on the feminist ideologies then, economic growth would be enhanced. Reid and Frisby (2008, p.95) explain that the growing array of feminist methodologies' distinctiveness has shaped the feminist theories, politics and ethics which are diverse women's experiences. The dramatic growth in feminist theoretical positions and experiences, methodological stances and research strategies is a healthy sign of the validity of feminist research. Consequently, feminist researchers are working across epistemologies and mixed methods to theorize how gender intersects with race, nation, sexuality, class, physical ability and other makers of difference in more complex ways. McCall (2005 as cited in Reid and Frisby, 2008, p.95) add that gender is a factor for shaping the society.

Feminist researchers need a focus on mixed methods which emphasizes qualitative and quantitative approaches as means to address the knowledge, power and gender-gaps among informal women entrepreneurs. As a way of addressing the gender gap, feminist empiricism suggests that knowledge and science is 'better' and more complete when it constitutes and is inclusive of women. Through the inclusion of women, the male bias can be eliminated and female characteristics such as women entrepreneurs are interpreted as benefits or underutilized advantages that society needs to utilize exploit and value more. This clarifies the idea that a more advanced society emerges when it recognizes women who have diversity of experiences to make valuable contributions to society. However, women may experience structural discriminating barriers and disadvantages, embedded in society and the economy that need to be identified, treated and eliminated. In relation to that, Intemann (2010 as cited in Vossenber, 2014, p.7) argues that empiricist or liberal feminism has evolved over the years into a more contextualized and normative driven approach to science and knowledge by recognizing that research contexts are not independent from social values but politically charged. Continuously, empiricists or liberal feminism are often criticized by other feminist scholars for reducing gender to sex, thereby reifying the gendered power structures in society that women and men alike are facing (Ahl, 2006; Calas *et al.*, 2009, as cited in Vossenber, 2014, p.7).

Despite such instances, majority of the women engage in informal businesses because of trivialization and marginalization (Reid and Frisby, 2008). The reality on gender is being ignored, pushing women into informal businesses and this is not highlighted in the definition of informal business (Reinharz, 1992; Mohanty, 2003 as cited in Reid & Frisby, 2008, p.96). Thus, women as the youth need access to critical theory and concepts with which to analyze experiences of marginalization and oppression that drive them into informal business (Pihl, 2005). "As the saying goes "experience is the best teacher". The same applies to informal businesses' management. Marx and Foucault (as cited in Pihl, 2005) continue to say that, the ruling ideas or knowledge/ power benefit the ruling/ governing class, and this produces knowledge and truth. Consequently, the analysis of Reid and Frisby (2008, p.97) indicate that defying 'patriarchal truths that women are naturally inferior to men and considering how women generally live in different material and social circumstances due to gendered power relations. It can be noted that the analysis situates women as inferior powerless victims who lack agent to interpret, resist, and subvert the contexts shaping their lives, though experience and power are key to women's transformation. Thus, patriarchy promotes the belief that women are innately inferior to men (Tyson, 2006, p.85). He therefore notes,

“...belief in the inborn inferiority of women is a form of what is called a biological essentialism because it is based on the biological differences between the sexes that are considered part of our unchanging essence as men and women....(Ibid, p.85)”

Seyla (1987) adds that gender-sex accelerates the oppression and exploitation of women and this extends to cultures and societies. However, Hartsock (1998; Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002 as cited in Reid and Frisby, 2008, p.97) asserts that such an analysis involves defying patriarchal truths that women are naturally inferior to men and considering how women generally live in different material and social circumstances due to gendered power relations and globalization. Thus, for example, the fundamental importance of women's empowerment in the process of changing the social relations of gender, the need to allow women control their bodies by decriminalizing abortion and the need to criminalize rape as a tool in civic conflict are all issues that have been brought to global discussions by women empowerment (Stromquist, 2015, p.120).

For Reid and Frisby's perspective (2008), the assertion presented is clear in Uganda's case; politics, power and class have continued to marginalize the women especially in the business and other sectors of the economy. It can be noted that men are considered superior to women, saying women cannot do the same work as men hence gender and power imbalances (Ibid). Interestingly, in this universe, the experience of modern women has no place (Seyla, 1987, p.154) and a woman is simply what a man is not; not autonomous, independent but by the same token nonaggressive but nurturant not competitive but giving not public but private, women are defined by luck (Benhabib, 1992). Such a statement continues to demise women's participation and performance in informal business sector. "Therefore, it could be better if obstacles to women's participation (i.e., division of labour, rules and regulations and entitlements to property ownership, and affirmative action for redressing injustices) were removed, injustices were removed, and women were able to have access to better income, property (Fraser and Honneth 2003 as cited in Stromquist, 2015, p.126)".

Interestingly, McCall (2005) affirms that to realize improved informal business growth, a prominent place for development of theoretical knowledge about observable phenomena needs to be maintained. This call improves the quality and quantity of informal businesses where women should be added to the leading research program. This is because women's distinctive experiences are important ingredients to set the record straight to informal businesses. Further, McCall (2005) observes that feminist of color, feminist use women and gender as uniting and homogenous categories reflecting the common sense of all women. This has been clarified by (Vossenber, 2014, p.7) according to feminist empiricism or liberal feminism found its origins in positivism and sets out from realist ontology of 'men and women and 'social structures'. Men and women are considered equally able but dissimilar, with different qualities and endowments that can be differently valued by society for example, through empirical research, researchers describe and understand 'what is real' and 'why people act.'

Though, feminism rejects the realist realism of *inter alia*, empiricist feminism argues that it reduces societies into 'individual and flat objects' which operate only at the level of the empirical (Intemann, 2005; 2010). This implies that people and reality cannot be reduced to simply 'act and experience'. In such a critical realist approach, the world is layered in the empirical, the actual and the real whereby the real includes historically determined mechanisms, events and experiences (Bhaskar, 2008). For this case, a standpoint feminist for that matter is interested in understanding which aspects of the real produce the "messy outcomes at the level of direct experiences in the everyday world of the empirical" (Clegg, 2006, P. 316). Thus, it starts from the assumption that people live multiple and layered identities that spring from the different social relations, history and the operation of structures of power one can experience (Collins, 2003; Symington, 2004). People are 'situated' members of more than one community at the same time and can simultaneously experience oppression and privilege. Thus, it implies that we can understand how informal women entrepreneurs set out to act and create conditions for transformative change.

#### 4. THE SOCIO-CULTURAL EXPERIENCES OF INFORMAL WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS

Women-owned businesses are mostly small, operated from homes (Ramani, Medovarszki, Chattopadhyay, and Ravichandran, 2013, p.4) and therefore informal in nature (Namatovu, Dawa, Katongole, and Mulira, 2012, p.6). They tend to be younger, smaller and created with fewer resources (Ramani *et al.*, 2013, p.4). Experiences show that women start and operate informal businesses that are legally unregistered (Neila, 2014, p.7). However, the nature and size does not guarantee persistence of the informal businesses. In some communities, the desire for social transformational change capitalize on the feminist goals and frameworks (Reid and Frisby, 2008, p.2). Although, this does not imply that all women are involved in informal businesses because of the low startup capital. As indicated by Neila (2014, p.8), women are taken less seriously in business than men, they face challenges and problems in obtaining funds from banks and lack business training. Accordingly, it can be noted that the diffusion of gender equality presents normative elements in that ideas of equality, democracy and autonomy resonate among the women themselves, ideas that are facilitated by assistance of transitional feminism (Stromquist, 2015, p.127).

In communities where culture and religious sects do not allow women to work; they stay home, bear and look after children as well as cook, thus limiting their political possibilities. Tyson (2006, p.83) adds that feminist like men think that women should be able to stay at home to raise children if they want and wear bras which affect them from practicing their businesses. A Roman Catholic emphasizes non material aspects of life such as free time for entertainment and family as opposed to hard work to accumulate material wealth (Neila, 2014); the protestant work ethics is glorification of God through handwork and wealth (Hill, 2008 as cited in Neila, 2014, p.9) the latter" or "the former" elevates entrepreneurship to a high class. However, some feminists have dismissed Muslim women's views as 'religious' and considered prevailing Muslim males' interpretations as representative of Islamic views (Barazangi, 2003 Reid and Frisby, 2008). Thus, the cultural contexts as related to religion, might pose a threat to the level of informal businesses. Ideologically, the domination of ideas taught in education, preached in churches and communicated through media have dialectic materialism. This holds that in the feminism perspective, ideas, knowledge, and culture are primary sources of perceptions, knowledge and consciousness, which are important ingredients for entrepreneurial activities (Pihl, 2015, p.45).

Furthermore, the study by Carswell and Rolland (2004 as cited in Neila, 2014, p.9) reveals that increasing ethnic diversity in today's societies and associated religious value system do reduce informal business level. In relation, feminist researchers argue that gender should be treated as a universal construct to empower the powerless as a way of shaping their lives (Mohanty, 2003, as cited in Reid and Frisby, 2008, p.97). On that note, the increasing knowledge and participation of women in politics is as a result of the circulation of new ideas, denials, learning, and reflective action, which comes from experience in everyday life (Stromquist, 2015) and the relationship between power/knowledge is a greater challenge to the research of mixed methods. However, while participation is infused with power relations, it can be maneuvered to challenge more domineering and destructive forms of power. This implies that power is not concentrated; nor is a commodity to be held, seized, divided or distributed by individuals. It is much more de-centered and ubiquitous force acting everywhere. "Neither power is inherently negative, limiting or repressive; rather it is inherently productive actions, effects, and subjects, even when most oppressive (Kesby, 2005, p.2040, as cited in Reid & Frisby, 2008, p.98)" thus, a gift from God.

More to that, as Tyson (2006, p.85) argues, gender roles have been used very successfully to justify inequalities, which still occur today, such as excluding women from equal access to leadership and decision making. He adds that men are paid higher wages than women who do the same job. On the other hand, the imposition of high taxes on small businesses push women into informal businesses, consequently, the incentive to evade taxes (Mohanty, 2004, as cited in Neila, 2014, p.8). Anderson (2008 as cited in Neila, 2014, p.2) clarifies that at the socio-cultural micro level, the motivation to become an entrepreneur is due to socio-cultural structures of certain nations which hinder which hinders female labor and the flexibility of work-life balance. To overcome this, feminist approach should be undertaken as stimuli for informal women entrepreneurs to remove the gender bias.

Ilie (2008, p.1) asserts that women entrepreneurs make significant contributions to innovation, employment and wealth creation in an economy and contribute to informal business growth (Nedje, Etzer, and Benedique, 2013, p.2). Vossenber (2014) continues to say that as a result, they have become an important focus in poverty reduction and private sector development programmes. He further argues that, even though resources are being directed to develop the entrepreneurial potential of women and support their micro and small businesses, little evidence is available on how entrepreneurship promotion in developing countries benefits women to reduce gender inequalities. Indeed, feminist researchers have been raising major concerns with the focus on private sector development as an important instrument to drive development processes (Vossenber, 2014). I note that, "...as we draw emphasis on private sector, we forget women's informal business in peripheries as a driving engine for community transformation..." This has been evident with increasing number of informal business as well as quality and quantity of merchandize dealt in. More to that, these women have also helped in community transformation through tax contribution to government, creation of employment and payment of school fees for their children.

The authors clarify, though, informal women entrepreneurs contribute a lot to the country's economy that is paying tax, employment and community transformation; they are marginalized, ignored, brutalized, and neglected by those with power and authority. Moreover, those who had informal business along streets and roads within city and towns have been evicted and their stalls demolished including vandalizing their merchandizes. Such issues are done by officials because of their power, influence and authority. During such instances, women are beaten, injured and some die.

Benhabib (1992) asserts that in most cases the women's voices are not heard, thus for better transformation emphasis should be made clear on women's involvement in planning, leadership and authority. Unfortunately, as people are evicted from such areas, buildings are coming up. Based on reality, therefore, the essay focuses on the philosophical perspective and experiences of informal women entrepreneurs and the knowledge gap. This implies that power, influence and authority should be used to effect social and gender policy changes that embrace women's work (Benhabib, 1992) and their contribution to societal transformation. Therefore, feminist researchers need to develop a perspective that promotes women emancipation, reflection and aids women in the struggle from oppression, exploitation and marginalization. When such elements are implemented, women entrepreneurs would be empowered and marginalization would no longer exist. Thus, contribution to the society's transformation will be felt among the community members and this is to be achieved through the use of mixed research.

## 5. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, reviewed literature hypothesizes that mixed methods research is a clear postmodernism design for studies which involve philosophical and epistemological foundations. It is thus a good design compared to only qualitative or quantitative. Therefore, feminist researchers need a focus on mixed methods research which emphasizes both qualitative and quantitative approaches as means to address the knowledge, power and gender-gap among informal women entrepreneurs. Thus, to address the gender gap, feminist empiricism should suggest knowledge and science as better and more complete when it constitutes and is inclusive of women. Through the inclusion of women, the male bias can be eliminated and female characteristics such as women entrepreneurs are interpreted as benefits or underutilized advantages that society needs to utilize and value more. This clarifies the idea, women who have diversity of experiences in making valuable contributions to society. However, women may experience structural discriminating barriers and disadvantages, embedded in society and the economy that need to be identified, treated and eliminated.

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