

MANAGING FOR GENDER EQUALITY IN WOMEN ENTREPRENEURSHIP : CASE STUDY OF NELLY NDAGUBA IN NIGERIA

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SYNOPSIS

The role of women entrepreneurs in increasing equality and promoting inclusive and sustainable economic growth cannot be overemphasized. Consequently, women have been encouraged to participate actively in both formal and informal sectors of the economy as a way of promoting, facilitating and supporting gender mainstreaming in Africa. This study employed a qualitative approach to narrate the achievement story of a successful Nigerian female entrepreneur, Mrs. Nelly Ndaguba in the area of agriculture-based business.

The study identified lack of access to credit from formal financial institutions, land, pure water for processing shea butter, competition from men, lack of aluminum utensils for butter processing and laboratory for testing and analyses to enhance quality control, as well as the Boko haram insurgency in the North-Eastern part of Nigeria as some of the challenges encountered in sheabutter production. Her success in surmounting these challenges arose from participation in credit and thrift cooperatives; standardization and participation in national and international capacity building training workshops among other factors.

As key lessons, the story of Nelly showed that being a woman should not prevent African women from developing their potential in business. It also revealed that success in the agribusiness sector requires patience and focus. Engagement in community activities and peer learning are also equally important.

This study recommends that African governments and development partners should promote gender balanced entrepreneurship through capacity building, gender-sensitive development assistance and equitable development policies. Furthermore, promoting women entrepreneurship and empowerment should therefore be an important integral of every African Union development programme. It is hoped that the results of this case study would aid national and international institutions in Africa in developmental decision-making in line with Managing for Development Results (MfDR).

Introduction

The Nigerian economy has benefitted from the activities of women in business. When women succeed in business, the economy grows and when they fail, there are negative consequences from the loss of profit on families and the society. Consequently, there are attempts on the side of government to encourage women to prevail in business. Many women have succeeded as

entrepreneurs despite the hard economic climate of Nigeria. Nwoye (2011) submits that women succeed as well as men in business and 'compete favourably' with men. It is therefore claimed that women take part in business on an equal footing with men. One of such women is Mrs. Nelly Osagie Ndaguba. Through her we see the need for more women entrepreneurs in Nigeria.

There is also need for women to function alongside men in the world of business. Many women suffer the gross lack of coordination by fellow women to address their peculiar needs as women entrepreneurs. They labour under the burden of patriarchy. Peter Custers observes that “given patriarchy, women’s relations to the means of production are different from men’s” (1997:24). Given the foregone highlights, it is necessary to identify and highlight the particularity of Mrs. Nelly Ndaguba as a successful woman in business. This results-based case study showcases a success story in entrepreneurship, production, marketing and exportation of sheabutter.

Born in Benin City, Nigeria in 1958, Mrs. Nelly Osagie Ndaguba is the leader of sheabutter processors in Nigeria. She leads men and women, in the sphere of sheabutter production in Abuja, from where she holds forth in the management of her other business of producing natural oils. She is an epitome of women who engage in small and medium scale businesses and make profit that continues to sustain their families and communities. However the experiences of women and men in business are not similar. Cultural barriers and patriarchal challenges often hinder the success of women in business, and have led to the failure of many businesses. While men have access to credit and support systems, it has not been easy for Nelly Ndaguba to enjoy these. (Interview, 24 April, 2016). Where a woman succeeds in business, it is clear that these and other challenges especially in the areas of decision-making and risk taking were faced and surmounted.

Methodology

This study focused on Mrs. Nelly Ndaguba as a result story for women entrepreneurs. The case study research employed qualitative approach to narrate her success story. Osuala (2005:189) view on qualitative research is that its charge is to “capture what people say and do as a product of how they interpret the complexity of their world to understand events from the viewpoints of the participants”. This method enables the researcher to

access outlooks of the field. The study employed the use of semi-structured interview, discussion and documentary evidence usual in case studies, to execute its concerns. The location of the study is Abuja in the Federal Capital Territory of Nigeria. Two major activities took place. The first was a discussion with the respondent via telephone calls and personal contact, and the second activity involved a semi-structured interview with the respondent in April, 2016.

NELLY NDAGUBA: A success story in shea butter business in Nigeria

Mrs. Nelly Ndaguba: Biography and Entrepreneurial Beginnings

Nelly Osagie Ndaguba is a Benin woman from Edo State, Nigeria. She has two children and attended Kaduna Polytechnic from where she obtained a National Diploma in Catering and Hotel Management. She had done a couple of businesses in Agricultural commodities when she was in Lagos and was also into marketing of clothing items, as well as buying and selling of goods. However, she came across a lady, also from Edo State, who talked about sheabutter. When she inquired further on what sheabutter was, she now translated it in Benin language as *Ori Oyo*. Mrs Ndaguba was surprised and doubted that nuts were used to process ‘Ori Oyo’. To satisfy her curiosity, she dropped all she was doing to follow her friend to the bushes and farms to collect sheanuts. Nelly became so interested and the passion grew each day as she visited the farms to see what it was actually like to gather the nuts and process sheabutter. When Nelly joined her newly-found friend, the Gbayi people were losing interest in the production of the butter because it was the elderly that were major participants in the business. They were getting old and the younger ones were not ready to learn the business because it was very tedious. Mrs Ndaguba started to encourage the youths to go into sheabutter processing, and started doing that. She attended events and training to learn the right process and all that it took to do the business. There she learnt that the business had a certain requirement for standards and quality of the

product for the market, especially the international markets. Hence she started by attending trainings in Uganda, Mali, Burkina-Faso and the USA, which today has brought her thus far. She underwent training and learned to attain all where she is today, both internationally and locally. Nelly then started the sheabutter business in 2002.



Figure 1: Shea nuts on a scale

Company and Investment

When Ndaguba launched her product ‘Kabusa Village Shea Butter’, there was none like it in the market. This was due to her exposure in the USA from where she learned packaging methodology. On her return, she used a packaging style that everyone appreciated and she was glad that people appreciated it and wanted to learn of it too. To her, “shea Butter is a blessing from God to the women; it is called ‘Women’s Gold’”. The product was well accepted and ever since the launch, people have appreciated Kabusa Village Shea Butter. There are two kinds of sheabutter, the grayish and the yellowish colour. The white colour is only got when the butter is refined and we do not have a refining machine here in Nigeria. Many sheabutter-producing African countries have only one type of sheabutter, unlike Nigeria with two types. Uganda for example, has one type which is soft and yellowish colour. They process theirs differently from ours hence it is soft. Most whitish butter seen in the

country is bad, and this can be perceived through the rancid smell.

Apart from Kabusa shea Butter, Mrs Ndaguba invested in natural oils production that is a byproduct from shea butter production. These oils are Neem Oil, Coconut Oil, Lemon Oil, Almond Oil, Sesame Oil, Cananium or black olive oil, all natural products that are good for the skin. Nelly also produces Baobab oil, as different skins need different oils. A variety of oils produced by Nelly include coconut oil mixed with sheabutter for the hair and skin, as it takes off dandruff and fights skin infection. Also, she uses palm kernel for the production of black soap. These products save cost, and are better on the skin than the oils and soaps that have harsh chemicals that result in several negative effects on the skin and damage health. As a consumer of beauty products, she prefers natural products as they improve a woman’s look better and are environmentally friendly. Nelly also engages in sensitization activities on the negative impact of using non-natural products for the skin and hair, and the benefits of using the sheabutter products in the hair dressing salons at the market.

Mrs Ndaguba believes her investment in the sheatree is very important as everything from it is very useful- from the bark to the nuts and leaves and the end product, the sheabutter, also known as Women’s Gold’.



Figure 2: Processed shea Butter

Work Experience

In Mrs Ndaguba's opinion, entrepreneurship empowers women; it is a woman's empowerment scheme and can assist women to be self-sustainable. Again, any woman can engage in business depending on what she desires to do. From cream production to selling of the sheaseeds, the business is profitable. Mrs. Ndaguba is now in partnership with other female sheabutter producers in Africa. Her business partners are in Ghana, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Uganda and more outside Africa in the USA. In 2015, at a conference, organized by the American shea Butter Institute in Atlanta, Georgia USA, she resolved to start the African Women Association of shea Butter Producers to connect women across the African Continent.

Her office space is in Area 1, Garki, Abuja where her products are displayed. Again, she also subscribed to a blog, an online marketing platform known as 'Natural Nigerian' where she gets most of her clientele and delivers her products to other states in Nigeria. Through the blog, clients read about the benefits of the products and contact her, from as far as the United States of America, to request for the product. Mrs Ndaguba had a shop at Garki Ultra-Modern market, but had to get another office at Area 1, Garki, not too distant from the Federal Secretariat. She is the Administrative Secretary of the National shea Butter Association of Nigeria. It was an encouraging experience though, when her shop was located in the Garki Ultra-Modern market, the market was not as recognized or fully occupied as it is today. It was her online presence, with the office details, that increased patronage from clientele who located the market through its online address and poster distribution. The production of sheabutter is intensive. Three tons of sheakernels or nuts often gathered during the rainy season will give one ton of sheabutter. This quantity of butter will fill forty thousand 250-grams containers per production. One 250-grams of sheabutter costs about USD 5 , equivalent to N 700 in Nigerian local currency. On the whole Mrs. Ndaguba's profit before

tax and deduction of production cost is 200,000 US Dollars. In Figure 3 below are some sample 250-grams sheabutter containers used.



Figure 3: Some Kabusa shea Butter containers

Contributions and Achievements

Mrs. Ndaguba deliberately empowers rural women by educating them on the need to conserve the sheakernels and seeds, instead of throwing them away. She travels to villages and encourages women to venture into sheabutter business instead of being economic liabilities to their families. Shea butter is produced in the rainy season, and rural women are often encouraged to take advantage of all the production processes and be industrious. Nelly started with Kabusa Village, Gengere Kwoita, Dako, and is now in Abaji. Her current plan is to set up an office in and collaborate with the management of Abaji Area Council, Abuja. Many women have been empowered in these villages. In Gengere Kwoita, there are about 40 women with 20 in Kabusa and these were the first focus groups of women to work with her. There are 10 women in Dako village, who serve as trainers in the training session. In these villages, the women were trained and they in-turn now serve as trainers to the trainees for other

organizations. It is at Kwoita Gangere that the fruits and kernels are processed and the packaging of the final product is in her house at Galadimawa area of Abuja. She engaged in skills improvement tasks because initially she learnt from the old village women, and because of her level of education and exposure, she is now teaching them improved processing that involve safety and health. The initial mentality and approach of the women encouraged her because they were selfless and provided information freely. Many of the young girls involved in butter production are now fully engaged in marketing the product. In the past, many girls had dropped out of school due to pregnancy. The incident of unwanted or adolescent pregnancy has reduced in Kwoita Gengere, Kabusa and Dako.

Another major achievement is the ability to package the product to meet international standards. Presently, she produces for most of her international clients based on order. She has been well recognized and awarded certificates in the USA, twice in 2014 and 2015 as Shea butter Trail Blazer, among the many other women who are in the business. She was the only African lady that had the award and it was well appreciated and outstanding. Her products come in transparent and solid packs and are all endorsed by the American Shea Butter Institute. Mrs. Ndaguba is the only certified Shea Butter Quality Assurance and Quality Control Technician in Nigeria. She exudes the confidence that she has established a connection between natural resource, her office, or selling or marketing area and the local and international shea butter industry. This connection between raw materials, the processing unit and the distribution channels prove the power of the Nigerian woman entrepreneur. A lot of shea butter is being consumed in Nigeria, since people are going the natural way. Currently, Nigeria is the largest producer of shea and in the world ranking, about 57% of the world consumption is produced here. Shea butter is a multi-billion dollar business. The chain of empowerment the industry commands ranges from children, youth, women, men, which will aid government's diversification project. The value chain

is enormous from food and drugs, and cosmetics production to soap production. To Ahmadu and Idisi, (2014) value chains constitute "vehicle by which new forms of production, technologies, logistics, labour processes and organizational relations and networks are introduced. It can be a very useful conceptual tool when trying to understand the factors that impact the long-term profitability of businesses.

Hopefully, the current political dispensation in Nigeria has promised to factor shea butter production in the budget and she believes the change promised will be actualized this time and yield greater economic dividends for women.

Nelly has five permanent members of staff, with close to 100 seasonal women working under her in the villages. Nelly started alone and later continued the work with 20 women at Kabusa village. Her work experience also includes working with The United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) The United Kingdom Department for International Development (DFID), Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). These members of staff engage in the production of shea butter and oils mentioned above. The market for oils is almost as economically viable as the one for shea butter. Below are some of the products of Nelly that currently contribute to her earnings.



Figure 4: Some of Mrs. Nelly Ndaguba's products

Challenges

There cannot be any business success story without challenges, especially when there are not enough finances to begin or even fully sustain such a venture. There are challenges that include: finance, unavailability of land for processing products, and lack of access to pure water to process the butter. Impurities in water reduce the grade of shea butter imported from Nigeria. Burkina Faso is the only country that has been able to produce the premium quality grade 'A' Shea Butter and they do not have the quantity produced in Nigeria, hence they come to Nigeria to buy nuts for processing the butter. At times, over 200 trailer loads of shea nut are transported out of Nigeria from the Borno State (Sambisa Forest) axis. In addition, the competition from men affects the business. Men wish to dominate the business without knowing the nitty-gritty of the production systems and business processes. They are often told to do the business right, then more money will be made by them. The governance structure in the Association often makes men want to take over the running of its affairs because they are more in number in the association than women. Nelly claims that because a female leader brings sanity and decorum into business and the society and also nurtures those around her as a leader, it is better for women to lead in the associations for shea butter production.

It is unfortunate that the government has paid little or no attention to shea butter production. There are no steel utensils to produce Grade 'A' shea butter. The International Shea Butter Institute supplies the equipment at a cost, and Mrs. Ndaguba believes that if this is taken care of, her business will get a boost.

There are also challenges relating to testing and analyses. The West African Trade Hub, a USAID project from Ghana came into Nigeria and taken to Nelly's processing sites. Samples of Kabusa Shea Butter were taken by them to Ghana for analysis. After the analysis, the product had Grade 'A' status and that surprised her counterparts. Thereafter, she contacted the American Shea Butter Institute, where her product was sent for analysis, and got Grade F.

She was surprised, because of her desire for a market in USA. The Americans insisted that all products must be analyzed to be sure that they had Grade 'A' status. This outcome disturbed her greatly and when she inquired further, it was discovered that Ghana just analyzed Free Fatty Acid (FFA), moisture content and the purity which erroneously gave Grade 'A' status to her products. However, the American Shea Butter Institute searched for lead, other impurities and contents. This lowered the product grading. This propelled her to attend more courses, training to improve herself with online information, even though they were expensive. She believes that whatever one finds to do, they should be done well. In 2015, Nelly was offered a scholarship to study Assurance and Quality Control in Shea Butter Production in the USA. She sent her products for analysis and got an improved grade B status from the grade 'F' previously obtained.

Other challenges are the banks that always demand collaterals for loans which Nelly and other women do not have. It is a fact that Mrs. Ndaguba has not benefited from bank loans since 2002 when she started the business. This challenge was noted by Jorge Saba Arbache, Alexandre Kolev and Ewa Filipiak (2010) in their study of gender disparity in labour markets in Africa. To them there are many drawbacks to women's business, evident in their inability to or provide collateral to obtain credit for business.

Some international Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) sometimes prefer to work with those who are not well versed in the business. When Japan External Trade Organization/Japan International Cooperation Agency (JETRO/JICA) came, and she asked them about funding, they replied they were going to contact her when ready. Unfortunately, somebody who just started the business was given N18 million, an equivalence of 90 Thousand US Dollars. She visited their office to express her displeasure because in most cases, it is her personal funds and resources that she spends to bring the women together for talks and trainings.

There are also challenges associated with insurgency. The Sambisa forest in Maduguri, Borno State accounts for a large amount of shea butter nuts, but due to the Boko Haram insurgency, it is difficult to access the area or venture to make orders from Borno State.

Government support still lags behind and there is no priority for women' groups like the Shea Butter Association. There are advocacies for the government to intervene and provide the women with a factory they can run and manage. That will stop illegal exportation; although there is no record on that yet. Sadly, there is no record on shea butter exportation either from Nigerian Customs or the Ministry of Trades and Investment. This has hampered the boom much expected in the industry. However, her association is currently working on ideas to facilitate and enlighten the officers in charge on the importance of having records on shea butter business. Indians and Chinese simply buy directly from the collectors in the bushes and there is no record of this. To Jorge Arbache et al, (2010) more is needed from governments in Africa to induce economic growth to facilitate job creation.

Lessons Learnt

The quick cash mentality has hampered the fast development of the industry. Most producers who think they have money export their products to countries like the USA, which end up in warehouses. More so, many investors just want immediate returns in the business. One must learn to be patient and focused in every business endeavour. Some women relocated to the US due to lack of patience in the business. The monetary returns are not immediate, but with patience, you can attain great heights. The process of shea butter production requires patience, hard-work and professionalism, and if one must be in the business, it must be done well. She remembers making presentations to Alhaji Modibo when he was the Minister for Trade and Investment. Experts were flown into the country, presentations were made and they impressed the Minister, but in the long run, shea Butter did not see the light of day, rather textile and garments making,

a fast commodity was used to replace shea butter. To her “we must not deceive ourselves, by hoping that an investment of 5 Million Naira will immediately yield more millions into your account”. What is needed in her opinion is to setup a factory for standardization, process shea butter and have it shipped to the US, which is the major market to avoid non patronage due to substandard processing.

Another lesson learnt is that a cooperative association is good. In the opinion of Kalima Rose (1992: 24) “Cooperatives can provide a structure for women to control their own assets and to come together on the basis of their work, where they are both the owners and workers”. Nelly belongs to the National Association of Shea Butter Producers; which has a cooperative. The association is under the Federal Ministry of Industry, Trades and Investment, and it is the office provided that she sometimes operates from. The cooperative is very useful because, Bank of Industry and other banks advised the association to establish a cooperative for easy access to funds without collateral. But the incentive they provide is not enough to setup a shea butter production factory. Another use of the cooperative is the occasional mentorship programmes that they benefit from. Mentors often talk to the group on the way forward and how to succeed in the business.

Nelly asserts that the visibility of women in the business and at different levels or scale of production has strengthened her resolve to succeed more. It is obvious that other jobs like printing, package production, and transportation are empowered. Furthermore, the business can easily facilitate succession planning and the successes that mentored women achieve. She declares:

I have mentored a lot of women in the industry and as the oldest in the industry, and having been a President of the association from 2012-2015, I believe I have a strong hold in the industry as an entrepreneur, an employer of labour. In the area of training, I have a strong hold, as most practitioners do not have the prerequisite for the business. I also retrain others after I have attended a

course or training. Recently I trained 70 women for Nation Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP) and they have been on their own, some others in Lagos, and Abuja. She has learnt to follow up these mentees who call her to intimate her of their successes, like Cocoterra. (Interview, April 24, 2016).

To the best of her knowledge, none has failed or dropped out of business. These testimonies are other lessons on results-based entrepreneurship by women. She also learnt that business and the market place are active platforms for the empowerment of women entrepreneurs and women can generate income to improve standard of living.

Support from other women is also vital as it can help to sustain a business. The capacity of women entrepreneurs can be built through support mechanisms by fellow women. Before Mrs. Aisha Abubakar became the Minister for State, Industry, Trades and Investment she gave them a talk, and so did Mrs. Titilayo Ojo. They also mentored the women's association and cooperative. Nelly's family also was supportive. Three years back, her older and younger sister saw how successful the business was, and they decided to support her with some money for the business.

In all, a sense of community results from the shea butter business. Nelly goes to Kabusa every Saturday, sits with the women, talks with them, and eats with them. Most times, she goes along with international collaborators to give talks and training to these women on best practices in production processes and how to run their businesses. This has also improved the women's self worth as co-contributors to the family income.

It is worthy of note that Mrs. Ndaguba has built sisterhood through business. The women's economic activities from the production of shea butter moved from non-waged, to waged activity, giving women some prestige via continuous means of income.

Conclusions and policy implications

Mrs. Nelly Ndaguba has been held up as a success story being a woman who worked her way to the top of her business, not owing any creditor. Mrs Ndaguba has moved from one level to another. She is indeed a success story. For a woman who started the Kabusa Shea Butter business alone, with close to nothing and has realized local and international accomplishment and recognition, her success can model other women to flourish in business. The woman that introduced her to the business dropped due to her political interest, but Nelly refused to drop, and moved from place to place, office to office to introduce and advertise herself and her business again and again. Her business put her sons through school, pay rent and meet the financial needs of her immediate and extended family. Today, in Nigeria, Nelly is a top personality in the shea butter industry. It is evident she has not attained the level she wishes to attain, but with the patience and determination exhibited it is possible to see Kabusa Shea Butter in all the shops and outlets in Nigeria and the world. Her aspiration for quality assurance and quest for improved product and a big factory are commendable. The improved quality of life of the Kabusa, Gengere Kwoita and Dako women and girls prove that women's income impact the community.

With time, such income will be committed to the educational pursuit of the children especially the girls in the communities. Educational empowerment is consequent upon other forms of women empowerment. Agribusiness entrepreneurship by women should be supported by government. Women in Agriculture programmes can be a tool to bridge the gender gap in Nigerian business terrain.

The participation of women in shea butter production and other agro-based businesses contributes to women and men's development and gender equality in terms of income generation for community growth and development. National governments and development partners, the African Union should facilitate sustainable livelihoods possible only with gender equality arising from the equal participation of women and men in business.

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