

Facilitating female entrepreneurship in rural Uganda

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1. INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship contributes to economic growth¹ and despite the significantly lower number of female entrepreneurs, the contribution of female entrepreneurship to poverty reduction is higher than that resulting from males². Reasons for this gender gap are not well understood, and some attribute them to perceptual variables linked to evolutionary differences³.

During previous engineering-related volunteer opportunities in rural Uganda, where I worked as part of a team to construct small scale hydropower schemes, I identified a need to identify barriers to female entrepreneurship in that region. I befriended a number of Ugandan ladies who have chosen to remain single and thus not conformed to social and cultural expectations. These ladies, together with widowed women are socially and financially disadvantaged and especially vulnerable to sexual exploitation. This interdisciplinary project seeks to share expertise between the School of Engineering and leading experts in entrepreneurship from Warwick Business School, to benefit a disadvantaged minority group. It consists of three strands:

1. Interviewing women in rural Uganda to identify and more fully understand the barriers to entrepreneurship
2. Delivering appropriate training sessions to local ladies to help overcome the barriers identified
3. Facilitating start-up of at least one project

2. METHODS

- Questionnaires designed and single women interviewed to identify barriers, motivation for starting own business and preferences for start-up businesses.
- Training sessions delivered to fill skills gaps
- One start-up business facilitated

4. CONCLUSION

- The questionnaire confirmed that the sample population realised the value and benefits of starting their own business such as improved standard of living, financial independence and helping their parents to pay school fees for younger siblings.
- The major barrier to entrepreneurship was found to be lack of start-up capital and ineligibility for commercial loans, due to cultural practises of patrilineal inheritance.
- Despite 100% of respondents feeling they were capable of starting their own business, training workshops were delivered to reinforce and remind the ladies about the importance of strategic business planning, budgeting and saving. In addition, interviews conveyed a strong sense of lack of self confidence and self esteem and these areas were also addressed during training sessions together with health and well being (nutrition, dental hygiene, malaria prevention, birth control, pregnancy, stress, alcohol, drugs, smoking and HIV. Networking enabled me to meet with the founder of the charity Two Sides of the Same Coin (<http://www.twosidesofthesamecoin.org>), an American charity with similar entrepreneurial objectives, allowing us to run some joint training and information sessions.
- One bar/restaurant project was initiated, run jointly by a cooperative formed of 3 ladies.

5. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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3. RESULTS

A total of 24 ladies were interviewed in the semi rural town of Fort Portal (Western Uganda) and their responses were analysed to identify the major barriers to be addressed during training sessions. The age range of respondents was between 18 and 26 years, mean= 22.2 years (Fig. 1).

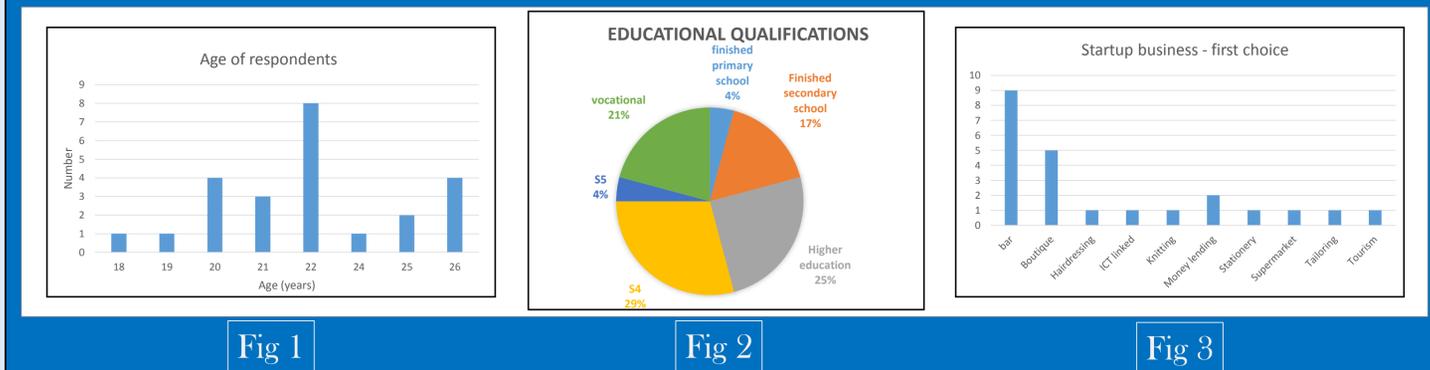
Educational qualifications ranged from completing primary school (P6) to higher education degrees (Fig. 2).

The major barrier was lack of start-up capital and ineligibility for commercial loans due to inadequate collateral to secure a bank loan. The 30% interest rate on bank loans was also considered to be a major barrier.

100% of respondents had considered starting their own business, felt they were capable of running a business and were creative. Although only 54% had previous business experience, 100% either had a family member or close friend with their own business.

The most popular choice for a business start-up was a bar/restaurant, followed by a boutique or clothing shop (Fig. 3).

All but one respondent (96%) felt their families would be supportive of them starting their own business.



6. REFERENCES

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