

Emergent Challenges Facing Women Entrepreneurs in Lusaka City, Zambia

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Abstract— Women entrepreneurs play an important role in the socio-economic development of the world, in general, and of Lusaka city, in particular. However, their contribution to socio-economic development, through job creation and other vehicles, is hampered by a host of challenges. The study aimed to establish emergent challenges that hinder women entrepreneurs in Lusaka city, Zambia, from attaining their entrepreneurial objectives. The study was anchored by Raewyn Connell's Patriarchal Dividend/Theory of Masculinity. The qualitative study adopted a descriptive survey research design and it employed a convenience sampling method in drawing a sample of 385 women participants. Data were collected using a survey questionnaire. Microsoft Excel, content analysis, and SPSS version 26 descriptive statistics were used to analyze data. The study established that women entrepreneurs from Lusaka city face many emergent challenges, chief among them were poor financial and economic performance; marketing, supply, and distribution related challenges; Covid-19 related challenges; expensive stock, implements, and other materials; and lack of equipment, and infrastructure. If these challenges are not addressed by relevant stakeholders, women entrepreneurs shall continue to struggle to achieve their business objectives. Consequently, some of them shall close their businesses. This has the potential to worsen the socio-economic challenges that Zambia faces and would want to lessen them quickly. Therefore, the study recommends that firstly, the Government of the Republic of Zambia (GRZ) and other relevant stakeholders should collaborate to ease access to finance to women entrepreneurs. Secondly, GRZ and other relevant stakeholders should collaborate to provide relevant entrepreneurship training to women entrepreneurs. Lastly, women entrepreneurs should purposely work together for their own good.

Keywords—Entrepreneurship: Challenges: Emergent: Women: Women entrepreneurs.

I. INTRODUCTION

Although females account for 50% of the global population, Bajpai (2014) observes that they own only 1% of the world's wealth. More particularly, women earn 10% of income for performing 66% of the world's work while own only 1% of world's property (Women, Business, and the Law, World Bank, 2011, as cited in Singh, 2012).

“Worldwide, 6.2% of women owned established businesses, compared to 9.5% of men” (Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, 2018 – 2019 Women's Report as cited in Lesonsky, 2020, para. 2) while in 2022, “in Africa, women operate[d] more than 40% of the small and medium-sized businesses but often lack[ed] sufficient funding or expertise to expand” (Laff, 2022, para. 2).

In 2020, females accounted for 51% of Zambia's 17.9 million population at a time when its national unemployment rate stood at 11.4% (Zambia Statistics Agency, 2020). Thus, being the majority sex, Zambian women entrepreneurs have the potential to reduce the unemployment level and mitigate the effects of other socio-economic challenges that face the country. Ironically, women entrepreneurs face many challenges as they carry out their entrepreneurial activities.

Despite Zambian women entrepreneurs' access to various interventions aimed at mitigating their business challenges, such as training (ILO, 2018), the percentage of women registering business names and companies remains much lower than that of men. PACRA (2019) reports that in 2019, 13.5% of women registered business names and companies against 47% by men, and 39.5% by mixed owners (men and women co-ownerships). This, arguably, signifies that Zambian women entrepreneurs still struggle to establish themselves as a strong entrepreneurial front that can surmount these challenges.

Recent studies have generally and repeatedly re-established similar challenges that women entrepreneurs face in their entrepreneurial journey. For instance, while Ngulube (2012) established that women are compelled to resort to village banking to circumvent hindrances to access finance, however, when they source funds, the women tend to overwork because they are also responsible for household chores. This acts as a hindrance to meaningful business success.

Lubinda *et al.* (2018) found that difficulties to access finance/capital, difficulties to access policy-makers, difficulties to access training, and discrimination against women entrepreneurs when accessing resources impeded the women from reaching their entrepreneurial potential.

Considering that, inevitably, the business environment keeps on evolving, chances are that the challenges that women entrepreneurs face are also changing. However, amidst this possibility, no known studies, regarding Lusaka city women entrepreneurs, have in a single study isolated and studied the common challenges that previous studies had established in order to offer the study participants latitude to state other challenges they encounter, if any, thereby help unearth emergent challenges they face, hence the present study.

1.1 Theoretical Framework

The study was anchored by the Patriarchal Dividend/Theory of Masculinity which was propounded by Australian sociologist, Raewyn Connell (Palustre *et al.*, 2022).

The theory states that, in general, males enjoy more advantages, benefits, status, and power, among other positive rewards, than do females (Griffin, 2017). For instance, in line with this theory, Nsengimana (2017) stated that Rwandese women are not legally allowed to own property, therefore, whenever they wanted to access collateralized loans, they depended on guarantees from property-owners, who were technically men. Tanzania has/had a similar legal stance on property ownership, and property-owners such as parents-in-law have been reported to discourage their daughters-in-law from using their (parents-in-law) property because they fear the consequences of loan repayment failures (ILO, 2014a). Consequently, women cannot freely expand their businesses through debt-financing the way their male-counterparts can, which prevents women from participating in business on an equal footing with men simply on grounds of gender.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section discusses the challenges/factors that hinder women entrepreneurs to conduct business successfully.

2.1 Factors/Challenges that Hinder Women Entrepreneurs' Success

2.1.1 Socio-cultural Factors/Challenges

Some societies and cultures bridle women with homemaker and care-giver responsibilities to an extent that these women fail to participate meaningfully in socio-economic development activities. Unfortunately, such societal and cultural dictates appear to be more like cast in stone, therefore, any deviations from the 'set-societal standards' have potential to subject women to ridicule and other types of negative consequences.

ILO (2018) reports that traditions and norms in Middle East and North Africa region confine women to the precincts of homes where they perform unpaid household and caregiving activities other than venturing into meaningful entrepreneurial enterprises. Thus, women are generally not free to maximize their business potential.

Similarly, Berg and Madeleine (2015) established, in their comparative study of challenges between female and male entrepreneurs in China, that failure to balance between business and family responsibilities hinder women from achieving their business ambitions.

While some cultures restrict the types of businesses that women entrepreneurs can participate in, as is the case in the Kingdom of Bahrain (Alqubaiti *et al.*, 2018) other cultures, for instance, Indian, project women as inferior to men hence women continue to bear the full responsibility of performing domestic duties, notwithstanding the fact that they have found a business venture (Amlathe and Mehrotra, 2017). Similarly, Ngulube (2012) established that Zambian women entrepreneurs were challenged to address home-work conflict as their spouses were not assisting them with domestic workload despite them starting business ventures.

2.1.2 Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Challenges

The advancement in ICT has completely changed the business terrain. Subsequently, businesses are investing a lot in ICT in order to reap the associated benefits that it brings. Arguably, in the modern world, almost every business person needs to have a certain level of knowledge in ICT, especially considering that its relevance was underscored at the height of Covid-19 pandemic as trade and even the delivery of social services hinged upon it. As observed by Bharthvajan (2014) "the lack of computer knowledge of employees is a major problem as computer skills are a key part of the business" (p. 16108).

However, socio-cultural dictates of some societies disadvantage women to access ICT. Aslam *et al.* (2013) as cited in Karasi *et al.* (2017) found that "women in highly patriarchal societies such as those in Muslim countries mostly suffer from inability to perform computer-related duties" (p. 196).

Some researchers suggest and/or found that women entrepreneurs face challenges to adopt ICT due to lack of training, expensive equipment and software packages (Vossenber, 2013, and Bardan, 2014 as cited in Isa *et al.*, 2021); and low education levels (Nsengimana, 2017). The challenges are exacerbated by poor infrastructure and network failures (Gilbert *et al.*, 2012 as cited in Isa *et al.*, 2021).

Despite these challenges, a study in Malaysia found that Malaysian women entrepreneurs have no choice but to adopt ICT (Isa *et al.*, 2021). This could be so because the internet has become a backbone for accessing business information, marketing, business networking, and it has also become an important front for gaining competitive advantage (United Nations, 2014 as cited in Nsengimana, 2017).

2.1.3 Lack of Access to Capital/Finance

The availability of meaningful capital is a key to the attainment of business objectives. However, evidence reveals that most women are constrained to access capital/finance due to various reasons. For instance, banks find women less reliable as compared to men as their business failure rate is higher than that of men-owned ventures (Watson, 2003 as cited in Sathiyabama and Velmurugan, 2019).

The high business failure rate of women-owned-business-ventures could, among other reasons, be attributed to lack of seriousness by women entrepreneurs when conducting businesses (Mathur, 2011 as cited in Amlathe and Mehrotra, 2017).

Whatever the cause of business failure among women entrepreneurs may be, difficulties to access capital/finance act as significant hindrances to the success of women entrepreneurs in Kabwe, Zambia (Lubinda *et al.*, 2018). This situation is worsened by women's lack of collateral as established in separate studies that were conducted in Kosovo (Haxhiu, 2015), and Zimbabwe (Mauchi *et al.*, 2014).

Underscoring this predicament, Wami and Duressa (2020) found that only 16.7% of women entrepreneurs in Ethiopia accessed capital from the banks and also that women who had collateral for credit were four times likely to participate in entrepreneurship than their counterparts who had none.

Much as their loan repayment rate is higher than that of their male counterparts (UNIDO, 2003 as cited in Mauchi *et al.*, 2014), women entrepreneurs in some jurisdictions, for example South Africa, are ironically denied access to loans on the presumption that they lack abilities to manage businesses (Chinomona and Maziriri, 2015).

In order to circumvent this challenge (ILO, 2014a) states that women entrepreneurs depended mostly on personal savings and assistance from family members to finance their start-up capital. Similarly, Kyalo and Kiganane (2014) established that 62.1% of women entrepreneurs used equity financing and only 37.9% used debt-financing. In addition, a 2004 study established that women entrepreneurs would source capital from small groups they belonged to where members would coalesce their savings and lend each other rotationally (Stevenson and St-Onge, 2005 as cited in ILO, 2014b).

2.1.4 Lack of Education, Skills, and Training

Women illiteracy is an obstacle to the success of women entrepreneurs as it acts as a natural selection tool against them in many fronts. For instance, they fail to withstand the pressure associated with the meticulous processes and paperwork that characterize formal money lending. Hence, women shun borrowing from banks and micro-financing institutions due to their low-literacy levels (ILO, 2014b). Similarly, Chinomona and Maziriri (2015) established that women’s deficiency in education and training was a barrier to their business success.

This challenge could, to a certain extent, be attributed to discrimination against females concerning access to education, especially when families invest more in their sons’ education and training than in their daughters’ (Kapur, 2019). Therefore women face a human capital limitation as they venture into entrepreneurship (Brush *et al.*, 2004 as cited in Carranza *et al.*, 2018).

There exists positive policy directions in various jurisdictions aimed at increasing the literacy levels amongst the female gender. For instance, while, on one hand, the girl-child was being denied access to education once she fell pregnant as was the case in Tanzania, on the other hand, Human Rights Watch (2018) observes that there was evidence that 26 African countries had “laws or policies that protect adolescent girls’ education during pregnancy and motherhood” (para. 10).

2.1.5 Psychological Factors

Psychology plays a vital role in business decision making. By their nature, entrepreneurs assume risks with an aim to earn a return. However, not all risks that they assume pay-off as planned. Notwithstanding that, the entrepreneurial terrain favors those that are not afraid to take risks as they succeed; those that fear to assume risks, fail (Zeidan and Bahrami, 2011 as cited in Taqi, 2016).

Two reasons behind high risk aversion are “lack of self-confidence and poor knowledge about business practices and markets” (p. 51). Cech *et al.* (2011) as cited in Carranza *et al.* (2018) established that women have low self-confidence regarding role fulfilment of their professional duties as compared to men. **Similarly, “Yueh (2009) found that in China**

lack of self-confidence is a significant constraint to women’s entrepreneurial entry” (ibid, p. 26).

On the contrary, Valla (2001) established that low self-confidence was not a significant challenge among South African women entrepreneurs as most of them rated themselves high in self-confidence.

2.1.6 Networking

Mauchi *et al.* (2014) established that networking was a significant challenge to women entrepreneurs because women do not travel a lot considering that they are mostly at home as they struggle to juggle the dual responsibility to look after their household alongside running businesses. This finding was consistent with the finding of Valla (2001), namely that more than 64 percent of women entrepreneurs did not join any network in the first six months of starting their business ventures. Women’s failure to network with other entrepreneurs disadvantages them because they miss out on the premium of coaching and mentoring that accrues to well-networked people.

2.1.7 Access to Markets and Competition

ILO (2014b) noted that lack of information constraints women from having meaningful access to profitable markets, be them local, regional, or international. This could explain why the majority of Ugandan women entrepreneurs ply their trade locally irrespective of the existence of National Export Policy aimed at opening opportunities to international markets (Mutwabule, n.d. as cited in ILO, 2014b). Oftentimes the products of women entrepreneurs are of compromised quality to compete effectively on the international market (ibid). Unsurprisingly, Wami and Duressa (2020) reported that 66.67 percent of women businesses failed due to lack of marketing and managerial skills.

In some cases where the women entrepreneurs manage to access markets, they face the challenge of inadequate selling space to an extent that some traders in Lusaka display their merchandise on the ground by the road-side (Kasonde, 2019).

2.1.8 Difficulties to Access Policy-makers

Policy-makers play an important role in whether to deepen or lessen the challenges that women entrepreneurs face. However, the latter can easily be achieved if these two parties have deliberate and meaningful interactions. Unfortunately, Lubinda *et al.* (2018) found that women entrepreneurs in Zambia find difficulties to access policy-makers. Women entrepreneurs in Jordan also face the same challenge to an extent that researchers recommended that “policymakers need to increase efforts to create an entrepreneur-friendly environment in Jordan” (UNCTAD, 2014, p.24).

III. METHODOLOGY

The qualitative study adopted a descriptive survey research design and it employed a convenience sampling method in drawing a sample of 385 women participants from Lusaka city. Data were collected using a survey questionnaire. Microsoft Excel, content analysis, and SPSS version 26 descriptive statistics were used to analyze data.

The sample size was calculated using the following formula:

$$n = (z^2 \times \hat{p} (1 - \hat{p})) / e^2 \quad (1)$$

Where: n is sample size;

z is the z-score;
 e is the margin of error; and
 p̂ is the population proportion (Sample Size Calculator, 2021).

This formula was adopted as the researcher had no definite figure of all women entrepreneurs operating in Lusaka city. Hence the following assumed figures: 95% confidence interval, 5% margin of error, and 0.5 population proportion were used.

$$n = \frac{(z^2 \times \hat{p} (1 - \hat{p}))}{e^2}$$

$$= \frac{(1.96^2 \times 0.5(1 - 0.5))}{0.05^2}$$

$$= 384.16 \text{ (Sample Size Calculator, 2021).}$$

Hence the sample size was 385 women entrepreneurs running 100% women-owned businesses within Lusaka city.

The study isolated the eight challenges/factors that have been discussed under literature review with an aim to unearth the emergent challenges that women entrepreneurs face. Unless the respondents had presented challenges in a worth-noting manner that needed to be highlighted, these challenges were excluded in the results and the subsequent discussion.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A total of 385 questionnaires (the whole sample) were administered and 370 were collected and used in data analysis. This represented a 96.1% response rate.

4.1 Business Sectors in which Women Entrepreneurs Operate in

Table 4.1 shows the business sectors that the respondents participate in. **Results show that 98.4% of the respondents indicated the business sector they operate in.**

Table IV.1: Business Sectors Women Entrepreneurs Operate in

	Business Sector	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Beauty, Cosmetics, Salon	87	23.5	23.9	23.9
	Wholesale/Retail	143	38.6	39.3	63.2
	Medical and Health	10	2.7	2.7	65.9
	Manufacturing	11	3	3	69
	Farming/Agriculture/Produce	50	13.5	13.7	82.7
	Advertising/Marketing/Sales	16	4.3	4.4	87.1
	Entertainment	6	1.6	1.6	88.7
	Other	41	11.1	11.3	100
	Total	364	98.4	100	
Missing	System	6	1.6		
Total		370	100		

Source: Authors (2023)

Results in Table 4.1, show that the majority of women entrepreneurs operate in wholesale/retail sector (39.3%), they are followed by those who operate in beauty/cosmetics/salon sector (23.5%). A minority number of them operate in the entertainment sector (1.6%).

The 'other' sector comprised women operating in education, art and craft, *Kalooba* (money shacks), among other sectors. This accounted for 11.3%.

According to the findings in Table 4.1, a total of 32.6% of women operated in the service industry, particularly beauty/cosmetics/salon, medical and health, advertising/marketing/sales, and entertainment. This finding supports the findings of Valla (2001) and Haxhiu (2015) who found that women entrepreneurs in Gauteng, South Africa, and Kosovo respectively predominantly operated in the service industry.

The findings indicate that 3% of women entrepreneurs operated in manufacturing sector. This corroborates the findings of other studies that established that women under-participate in the so-called male-dominated sectors like manufacturing and heavy industry, construction, freight and transport, finance and insurance, that need more external capital and high capital investment in tangible assets like machinery. For instance, Valla (2000) established that less women entrepreneurs in Gauteng, South Africa operated in these sectors. Similarly, Nsengimana (2017) reported that none of the women in Kigali, Rwanda operated in these sectors.

The results show that the majority of women (39.3%) operated in the wholesale/retail sector. Similarly, Nsengimana (2017) found that a majority of women in Kigali were in the retail sector. In contrast, Valla (2000) and Haxhiu (2015) established that a very few women operated in this sector. Notably, in their studies, both Valla (2000) and Haxhiu (2015) used an umbrella term called trade rather than retail/wholesale.

4.2 Emergent Challenges Faced by Women Entrepreneurs

Results in Table 4.2, show that 80.5% of the respondents face emergent challenges. Any challenge less than 5% was considered minor and those above it, major. Therefore women entrepreneurs in Lusaka city face five major challenges. The other challenges that they face contributed less than 5% each. As such, these challenges were just put together and were collectively referred to as 'other challenges'.

4.2.1 Financial and Economic Challenges

Table 4.2 shows that 28.5% of respondents faced financial and economic challenges. Women entrepreneurs pointed out that the economic challenges that Zambia faces affected their businesses negatively in various ways. For instance, they stated that the instability of the Zambia Kwacha coupled with its continuous depreciation triggered inflationary pressure that contributed highly to their failure to actualize their plans according to budget.

Consequently, women entrepreneurs stated that they failed to procure merchandize in bulk. Due to that, they could not enjoy the benefits of economies of scale which in turn affected their profit margins albeit low sales as customers shunned from purchasing from them due to high selling prices their

merchandise were fetching. This was so because the women entrepreneurs failed to pass the benefits of economies of scale to their customers through offering their stock at reasonable prices. As a result, the women entrepreneurs stated that they either made low profits or posted outright losses. Women entrepreneurs stated that this challenge posed a threat to business continuity as their capital was dwindling. Their fears were not unfounded as Kyalo and Kiganane (2014) established that the majority of women entrepreneurs depend highly on self-sponsorship as a source of capital than on debt. Therefore, if their businesses failed, they were less likely to revamp them through financial injections sourced from third parties.

Alternatively, women entrepreneurs depend on capital they source from group village savings and lending initiatives (Stevenson and St-Onge, 2005 as cited in ILO, 2014). Unfortunately, both sources of capital could not be dependable amidst poor financial performance of businesses that were operating in a struggling economy.

The prevalence of mobile money scammers was also reported to have had affected women entrepreneurs in general, and mobile money operators, in particular. Victims of mobile money scammers reported loss of finance/capital to the scammers which reduced their capacity to operate at a meaningful scale.

Table 4.2: Emergent Challenges Faced by Women Entrepreneurs

	Emergent Challenges Facing Women Entrepreneurs	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Financial and economic	85	23.0	28.5	28.5
	Covid-19 related	45	12.2	15.1	43.6
	Marketing, supply, and distribution	56	15.1	18.8	62.4
	Expensive stock, implements, and other materials	26	7.0	8.7	71.1
	Lack of equipment, and infrastructures	23	6.2	7.7	78.9
	Other	63	17.0	21.1	100.0
	Total	298	80.5	100.0	
Missing	System	72	19.5		
		370	100.0		

Source: Authors (2023)

4.2.2 Marketing, Supply, and Distribution-related Challenges

The results in Table 4.2 show that 18.8 percent of women entrepreneurs reported facing challenges to market, supply, and distribute their products. The women entrepreneurs expressed that failure to attract more customers and enjoy resultant high sales was due to their lack of marketing skills. This finding is consistent with Amlathe and Mehrotra (2017) who established that women entrepreneurs lacked marketing and sales skills which resulted in closure of their business. This could be attributed to women entrepreneurs' deficiency in education and training (Chinomona and Maziriri, 2015).

The women entrepreneurs also bemoaned delayed supply of merchandise from suppliers and the resultant delay in distribution of the same to their customers.

The advent of Covid-19 worsened this challenge as supply chains were heavily disrupted. Regarding distribution, Bala (2014) reported that in excess of 25% of purchases that are meant to be shipped are not shipped as scheduled. And women entrepreneurs in this study expressed concern that it took long for them to receive their stock from all over the world and they subsequently lost business.

Preference to stocking imported products to local ones by some stores was also reported by the women entrepreneurs. Women entrepreneurs stated that this tendency hits the local women producers/manufacturers economically as their produce/products ended up being stuck with them which effectively meant loss of business or produce going to waste. They stated that both of these situations affected the bottom-line.

4.2.3 Covid-19-related Challenges

The Covid-19 pandemic brought a plethora of business challenges as countries world-over struggled to contain the spread of the pandemic. As such, countries had to put in place health measures aimed at reducing the spread of the virus. These measures had serious business ramifications such as business slowdowns, and disruptions of supply chain which plunged women entrepreneurs in a quagmire of financial challenges.

According to Table 4.2, 15.1% of women entrepreneurs in this study reported to have encountered this challenge. **This corroborated the findings of Fairlie (2020) who attributed to the effect of coronavirus a 25% drop of active women business owners in the United States of America between February 2020 and April 2020.**

Some women entrepreneurs stated that they had to operate in what was christened 'new normal' business environment that answered to the health guidelines that were stipulated in the guiding Statutory Instruments that were crafted and highly enforced by the authorities. For instance, businesses that were not providing essential services were required to close for a particular period of time, yet, those that were still operating had to ensure strict adherence to the stipulated guidelines or risk their business licences being revoked. All these measures affected business profitability and continuity as business was very slow and expensive to conduct.

4.2.4 Expensive Stock, Implements, and Other Materials

This challenge was cited by 8.7% of the participants. They indicated that high prices of stock and implements hampered them from purchasing in bulk and consequently enjoy the benefits of economies of scale. Some women farmers stated that they could no longer afford fertilizer and other farming needs.

This challenge did not only affect farmers but also manufacturers and beauticians as they too struggled to stock materials for their businesses.

4.2.5 Lack of Equipment, and Infrastructures

The results in Table 4.2 show that 7.8% of the respondents indicated that lack of manufacturing equipment, and business-related infrastructure acted as a barrier to the women

entrepreneurs' business success. Consequently, they operated below capacity leading to dwindling incomes that, in some cases, culminated into losses.

Others, mostly those trading in perishables such as fruits and vegetables, indicated that lack of proper storage facilities resulted in losses of their stock. This effectively affected business profitability which consequently threatened business continuity.

4.2.6 Other Challenges

Results in Table 4.2 show that 21.1% of women entrepreneurs faced other challenges. These challenges included unavailability of proper and fairly charged means of transport, lack of/intermittent supply of potable water, and electricity at business premises/market, adverse weather conditions, insects, diseases, insecurity at business premises, political influence, partners pulling out of business, among others. Women entrepreneurs bemoaned that these challenges posed a threat to their businesses.

For instance, adverse weather conditions coupled with plant diseases, and insect infestation, on their farms lead to huge losses.

Similarly, when a partner pulled out of business, the women entrepreneurs struggled to continue running the businesses. This was so as the outgoing partners did not only take-out their share of capital from the business but also skills, professionalism, and other vital elements that contributed positively to the sustenance of the business.

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

The results show that women entrepreneurs from Lusaka city are hampered by various emergent challenges that affect their entrepreneurial endeavors and that the majority of them are concentrated in the wholesale/retail sector.

The biggest emergent challenge that women entrepreneurs from Lusaka city face, poor financial and economic performance, highlights the fact that modern women entrepreneurs, like their counterparts before them, are doomed to fail to achieve meaningful business success on the premise of lack of capital amidst a struggling economy that offers dwindling business opportunities albeit low demand for goods and services due to inflation.

However, results suggest that women entrepreneurs that persevere have to invest in marketing so that they could augment demand for their offerings amidst increased cost of doing business due to expensive stock, and lack of equipment.

Though Covid-19 would be viewed as a transitory challenge, the lessons that were learnt from the havoc that it wreaked in the business world have the potential to inform policy decisions that would insulate the Zambian economy from similar economic shocks should the world at large or Zambia in particular, face a similar pandemic in future.

If given a chance and necessary attention, women entrepreneurs have a high potential to achieve every entrepreneurial milestone that their male counterparts have achieved hitherto. Therefore, it would be erroneous and naive to frame them as a charity case with questionable business acumen. Thus why, notwithstanding the very many challenges

that hinder women entrepreneurs to achieve business success, reality continues to breed more tenacious women entrepreneurs who refuse to be cowed by these challenges and, therefore, forgo their quest to achieve financial independence and freedom, among other goals.

5.2 Recommendations

The study makes the following recommendations which the relevant stakeholders should consider as they work to incorporate women entrepreneurs as an important pillar in the quest to solve some of the socio-economic challenges that Zambia faces:

1. Government of the Republic of Zambia (GRZ) and other stakeholders should collaborate to ensure that women have easy access to finance/capital. Therefore, deliberate effort should be made to establish a bank or financial cooperative solely for women entrepreneurs. By dealing with the challenge of access to finance, Zambia would have consequently dealt with many other challenges that are linked to it such as business premises' insecurity, unspacious business premises, transportation, power outages, *et cetera*. This would be the case because the funding and the consequent income that the women entrepreneurs would have had would enable them to find and finance alternative solutions to these barriers on their own.
2. Government of the Republic of Zambia and other relevant stakeholders should work together to ensure that entrepreneurship training is offered to women entrepreneurs for free or at affordable fees. In addition, efforts should be made to come up with meaningful mentorship programmes that would expose women entrepreneurs to hands-on experience as they would work alongside other entrepreneurs that are well-versed in entrepreneurship. This would assist them to avoid and/or deal with potential business pitfalls that would threaten their businesses.
3. Women entrepreneurs should learn to work together in strategic business areas. Consequently, they would increase their capacity that would unlock almost all the challenges they face. They should, therefore, rise above toxic tendencies that disadvantage them such as 'pull-her-down-syndrome', and being 'lone-wolves' in everything they do because these tendencies are more costly than beneficial to them as they rob them of the premium of economies of scale and shared-risk.

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