



GENDER INEQUALITY VIS-À-VIS CULTURE AND THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

Gender inequality is a feature of social relations in most societies and is linked to poverty, violence, the labour market, health, housing, and education. Additionally, gender inequality has a role in structuring the relations of production and reproduction and is inextricably linked with knowledge construction and dissemination. Education institutions are key socializing structures that produce and reproduce the subordinate position of women in society. During colonial times in Zimbabwe, farm labour consisted of the local population, including women and children. For the purpose of this study, we observe that (black) women were forced into a farm labour function early in the colonial formation. This study set out to investigate the social and cultural factors that impact on the role of women in economic development with a view to finding solutions and a way forward that will help to enhance women's participation in Zimbabwe's economic development. A qualitative study approach was adopted, a descriptive research design was used, the population of the study consisted of Small to Medium Scale entrepreneurs (SME's). The sample size was 20 and purposive sampling technique was used to select informants, while interpretive content analysis was used for data analysis.

KEY TERMS: culture, women, economic development, gender inequality

INTRODUCTION

In Zimbabwe today, there are many small-to medium-scale enterprises (SMEs) ranging from sole proprietors, family owned, partnerships, cooperatives, communities owned and so forth. Because of the diversity of background in their formation and ownership, many small companies collapse within a short time of their formation. Those that survive the initial set-up and launch are faced with a myriad of challenges. Such challenges include but not limited to, lack of sufficient start-up capital, poor planning, marketing, human resources management, and innovation skills. Hence, such entrepreneurs fail to perceive such aspects that face their products as competition, branding, packaging, pricing, channels of distribution, perceptions of customers on the product etc. Many of their products fail to make it on the market, hence the collapse or poor performance of such enterprises. In the views of Dawson (2002), customers often suspect that the products from small-scale enterprises are of an inferior quality. Azam, et al. (1996), cite inconsistent quality, inferior packaging and labelling as challenges that affect SME's. Moreover, the products of SME's are often not guaranteed. Furthermore, SMEs in Zimbabwe are currently battling with a crippling financial crisis and are unable to import equipment. Additionally, they face challenges of poor infrastructure, unavailable factory shells, issues of legality etc.

This study set out to answer two main questions that is 1. What are the challenges experienced by women Small Scale Entrepreneurs which impact on their ability to participate in economic development as opposed to men? Secondly, how can these challenges be minimised in order for women to participate in economic development? The purposes of this study was to investigate the social and cultural factors that impact on the role of women in economic development with a view to finding solutions and a way forward that will help to enhance women's participation in Zimbabwe's economic development.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework used in this study is based on the 19th and 20th century concept of entrepreneurship in which an entrepreneur is described as someone who is an innovator for example Peter Drucker in Coulter (2001: 9) describes the entrepreneur as "someone who maximizes opportunity". Other scholars have described an entrepreneur as someone who takes risk. As such, the concept of SMEs is that they are creations of individuals who take risk with investment money in order to reap profits and grow the concerns into larger economically viable entities. In the process, such individuals meet challenges. These challenges are not without solution but can be overcome if researched on and known. Hisrich and Peters (2000: 9) using the 19th and 20th century definitions of entrepreneur say, "Entrepreneurs are not distinguished from managers and are viewed mostly from an economic perspective." They cite the following elements to go with the definition: personal gain, an innovator, initiative taking, and acceptance of risk or failure and value addition. The definition encompasses notions of newness, organizing, creating wealth, and risk taking. For me such a definition suits very well the owners of SMEs in Zimbabwe today. This research therefore helps to reduce risk by exposing the challenges currently experienced by SMEs.

A number of definitions have been advanced for the marketing mix. Most authorities in Marketing have tended to define the marketing mix in terms of the original 4 Ps of product, price, promotion and place (Kotler, 1972; Baker, 1988; Dalrymple and Parsons, 1995; Lovelock, 1984; Perreault and McCarthy, 1999). However, there is also the version of the extended marketing mix given by Hatton (1995:173). According to her, in addition to the original 4Ps of product, price, promotion and place, for services, there are the additional 3Ps of people, physical evidence and processes. In this study, the researcher will refer to the Marketing mix as the extended marketing mix of the 7Ps as covered above. An SME in this paper will be defined as a company that employees two or more employees up to 100 employees. Most definitions use some quantitative measure of the number of employees or annual sales (Coulter, 2001: 9). According to her, it depends on the industry. For example in the USA, the cut off point for a small business in the metal can fabrication industry is 1000 employees, whereas in the wholesale hardware industry, it's 100 employees. According to her, "a small business is one that is independently owned, operated, and financed; has fewer than 100 employees...". Mtigwe (2005:363) uses a cut -off of 120. In this study I will use a cut-off of 100.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Scholars have written on the challenges experienced by SME's in Zimbabwe, for example, Johnson and Bartlett (2002) identify as challenges: lack of access to markets, training, infrastructure, and technology and policy makers. In their view, these challenges affect women entrepreneurs in SMEs. Berger (1995) points out that for the very small and micro enterprises, the short-term working capital seems to be a major constraint in addition to difficulties in accessing reliable lenders. In that regard, SMEs are unable to take advantage of volume discounts

from wholesalers, provide credit to their clients, finance sufficient size inventories to support continuous production, or even benefit from the most favourable market prices, because the entrepreneurs often sell their output immediately in order to meet daily living expenses. Moreover, Berger (1995) mentions lack of access to credit and collateral for borrowing purposes as other challenges. Burns and Dewhurst (1996), in the U.K, point out the lack of skills due to a poor human resources base in SMEs. Dawson (2002), in Zimbabwe, points out to the unavailability of recipes for preparing food products. Hence the challenges posed by the unavailability of resources are quite daunting for the SMEs. It is therefore important to research into the challenges affecting the SME sector, particularly women run SME's so that they can play an important role in the country's economic development.

Johnson and Bartlett (2002:28) say that, "most women-owned enterprises are small-scale, hence have difficulty filling large orders and may not be able to implement quality control measures". They go further to identify the following challenges: Difficulty in meeting international standards, failure to supply products to order on a timely basis and failure to meet the required scale of production. Furthermore, they identify women's low levels of education, poor knowledge of WTO agreements and poor understanding of markets. In their view, the potential to benefit from globalisation depends on the ability to tap into new markets, which require expertise, knowledge and contacts. Additionally, Johnson and Bartlett (2002), say that women lack access to training on how to participate in the market place and are unable to market goods and services internationally. They also cite the inaccessibility of the technological equipment for communication in developing countries that hampers communication for business by SMEs. This lack of ICTs also leads to lack of communication skills using IT among the SMEs business sector. Hence, SMEs suffer from lack of skills in marketing, business planning and management, human resources management, computer skills etc. This lack of skills and innovation leads to poor product quality, poor decision-making etc. In the views of Coulter (2001:299), in the USA, "the main challenge these entrepreneurs encounter is getting the funding they need to start and continue their businesses. Access to capital is a serious issue for minority and women entrepreneurs." The scenario is similar for Zimbabwe's women entrepreneurs except that men SME entrepreneurs are similarly affected.

Another challenge for SME's is that of stiff competition from larger, more established companies. In Zimbabwe, the larger companies enjoy a large market share. Their large sizes accord them larger financial bases; hence they enjoy economies of scale. Small firms have to be price takers. Often the prices set by large firms are too good to compete with. Small firms are also unable to control their distribution channels. Often in Zimbabwe, larger firms use large retail outlets as distribution channels and they produce large quantities of the product to compete with small-scale enterprises who have to try and use the same channels or sell in the street. Sometimes SMEs compete for customers with importers of similar cheaper products from the region and abroad.

There are also the challenges of advertising, packaging, branding, quality assurance as well as guaranteeing of the product. Customers often prefer products that are professionally packaged and guaranteed by the producer. Customers often suspect the products from the SMEs to be of an inferior quality (Dawson, 2002). Sometimes customers have biases towards products from SMEs as being unhygienic and unsafe, in terms of food. This fact is sometimes bolstered by the manner in which some SMEs package their food products due to lack of knowledge on marketing, for example, the use of old plastic containers to package peanut butter. These old containers really look old and unappealing to the buyer although the product is priced lower than other brands. Azam et.al. (1996) cite inconsistent quality, inferior packaging and labeling (branding), poor marketing and selling, insufficient access to quality raw materials as some of the challenges faced by SMEs. Another challenge mentioned earlier is that of their inability to guarantee their products as opposed to their larger counterparts.

According to Burns and Dewhurst (1996) in the U.K. it is estimated that over two-thirds of SMEs consist of only one or two people and often the second person is the spouse. Such a scenario is not healthy for the continuity of the business should the entrepreneur die or the spouse or both die. According to Jan Sten (1998), small-scale entrepreneurs are mostly concerned about brothers, sisters and persons married into the family and their influence on the succession. Other issues raised are as follows: successor's interest in taking over the business, successor's lack of proper education, successor's inability to cope with the business cycles, successor's experience in the industry, taxes and financial issues. According to Coulter (2001:303) in the USA, "Studies of family firms have shown that, on average, only 30 percent of family businesses survive to the second generation, and only 10 percent make it to the third generation." It is therefore a serious challenge for SMEs if the owner dies. This has an immediate impact as there are no people trained to take over the business.

With the increase in population growth and migration to the cities (rural – urban drift) large firms have continuously failed to create enough jobs to absorb the rapidly increasing supply of labour. In Zimbabwe, this scenario has been exacerbated by the massive closure of large firms due to a liquidity crunch currently being experienced in the country. As a result, self-employment has become a major income-generating strategy for the urban poor. The same holds true for the rural areas. The landlessness among the poor and the need to earn cash income has forced many to create their own sources of off-farm or on the street employment. They have formed

unregistered and often unrecognized, manufacturing, service and petty trade activities. These activities are collectively referred to as the informal sector (Berger, 1995). The fact that they are often unregistered means that they often face the wrath of the law. Most fail to meet the stringent registration requirements due to the nature of their resource base.

Women operators of SMEs in many countries face unequal inheritance practices and laws (custom based) or culture related. There are also discriminatory laws on ownership of property and access to bank loans or discriminatory practices by banks. In some countries, banks continue to demand the husband's signature for loans to businesswomen even when the collateral is in the name of the woman (Johnson and Bartlett, 2002). Kao (1984) raises the following legal issues affecting SMEs: Business permits, land-use regulations, Business taxes, Property taxes, Building permits, Business registration, Minimum wages for employees, Minimum age for employment, Work hours, Maternity leave, Termination of employment, Payroll tax deductions, Export/import permits, Customs duties, Trademarks, Copyrights, Patents, Product safety etc., and False advertising.

In Zimbabwe, most small firms have a poor financial base, they are unable to keep and have a company lawyer. Lawyers are hired only when needed and only for specific issues. According to Hisrich et al. (2000: 219 and 220) "In some instances the lawyer may be hired for a one-time fee." and also "Other specialists for setting up the organization or for purchase of real estate may also be paid on a service-performed basis and yet a good working relationship with a lawyer will ease some of the risk in starting a new business". Apart from the above legal issues there are many more such issues impacting on SMEs and their operations which impact negatively on the role women can play in socio-economic development.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research methodology was used for the study. Triangulation was employed with respect to data analysis methods, particularly the analysis and presentation of the characteristics of informants in which figures and percentages were used for clarity purposes only. The use of figures and percentages was not intended for generalisation but to bring about clarity where qualitative research data analysis methods would not have been able to bring about such clarity. The population of the study was made up of small-scale entrepreneurs in Harare and Bulawayo. The SME population list was drawn from a list of SMEs registered by the Ministry of Small and Medium Enterprises. A purposive sample of 20 SMEs across a wide range of business activities in Zimbabwe was used. A quota of 10 SMEs was selected from Harare while another 10 SMEs was similarly selected in Bulawayo. Semi-structured face to face interview technique was used for data generation. Interviews were conducted with the informants at their work places. A semi-structured interview schedule was used. Interpretive content analysis was used for qualitative data analysis. Additionally, Triangulation was used in so far as the analysis and presentation of the characteristics of informants was concerned. The data was classified into emerging themes as well as the drawing up of tables of figures and percentages for clarity purposes. The interviewees were provided with false names/numbers to protect their identity. The next section presents the results and discussion emanating from the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Characteristics of informants

The informants of the study were distributed as shown by the following tables:

Table 1: *Distribution of informants by gender*

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	4	20
Female	16	80
Total	20	100

As shown by table 1 above, the majority of informants interviewed were female 80% (16) while only 20% (4) males were interviewed. From the interviews carried out, most of the female managers were either those that had inherited the business from their deceased husband or father or they were running the business as a partner with a husband. A quarter (4) were being sponsored by their husbands or were sponsoring themselves. The next table presents informants by age.

Table 2: *Distribution of informants by age*

Age (years)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
20 - 24	2	10
25- 29	5	25
30 - 34	8	40
35 and above	5	25

As shown by the above table 2, the majority of informants were in the age range 30 to 34 years. From the above distribution, most entrepreneurs who took part in this study were above 25 years of age with very few of them below this age range. Due to the difficult economic situation during the time of the study, most people of a younger age were struggling to get financing for projects. As such older and more established people were in a position to finance themselves or get help to start their own SME. The next table presents informants by the position which they held in the SME.

Table 3: *Distribution of informants by position held*

Position	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Manager	18	90
General Manager	1	5
Chief Executive Officer	1	5
Total	20	100

The distribution of informants as shown by Table 3 was composed of 18 managers (90%), one General Managers (5%) and one CEO (5%). This was mainly due to the fact that only top managers or owners of SMEs were interviewed in order to get the most accurate information. The above composition of informants more than justifies the trustworthiness/ validity of the information given. Table 4 presents informants by the type of business they operated. The informants for the study as came from a variety of SME's. The majority of informants 25% were in the manufacture of peanut butter and cooking oil. The next highest number 20% were in the manufacture of clothing. Others were in soap making, financial services, furniture, basketry and metal work, general dealerships, shoe making and repairs and stationary and binding services. The next section presents the themes that emerged from the study.

Table 4: *Distribution of informants by type of business*

Type of business	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Peanut butter and cooking oil manufacturing	5	25
General dealerships	2	10
Furniture, basketry and metal work shops	3	15
Clothing manufacturing	4	20
Shoe making and repairs	1	5
Financial Services	2	10
Stationary and Binding services	1	5
Soap making	2	10
Total	20	100

Themes emanating from the study

1. Availability of factory shells and other infrastructure

A major challenge faced by women SMEs in Zimbabwe is the lack of infrastructure in the form of buildings to operate from. The 20 SMEs involved in the study did not own their own buildings. Those interviewed pointed out that they struggle to get space to rent. There are not enough buildings or factory shells for them to rent. Because of the shortage of building space for SMEs, landlords are taking advantage by charging exorbitant rentals. According to an interviewee, E1, “*the rentals change every three months on a take it or leave it basis.*” Another interviewee, E15, said, “*There were no stalls left at the flea market, we have to rent at exorbitant rates per month from owners of buildings.*” Such a scenario has left the local SMEs struggling to get accommodation. Johnson and Bartlett (2002:30), referring to the Commonwealth point out that “Owners of SMEs may be hampered by lack of reliable physical infrastructure.”

Another informant, E9 said that, “*The tendency is to lease some space.*” At times they use dilapidated city council buildings/shells or work from some makeshift non-permanent structure often without water, electricity and telephones. Sometimes they lease excess space from larger, more established business counterparts, who sometimes charge exorbitant rentals. In the views of SME members, the challenge is that if you do not own the building, you cannot decorate it in your own colours to create your own environment suitable for attracting clients. You can also not change the car park layout, the sign-posting as well as the other structures in front of the building. Furthermore, the processes also suffer as you are not able to install permanent telephone links, internet links as well as pin yourself in one place as you are always on the move as leases expire. Moreover, if you do not own the building, you cannot do any alterations to suite your production type. Additionally, owners often resist any alterations to existing structures. This then means that your production cycles and promotion are affected by the lack of your own permanent infrastructure.

2. Issues of funding

Women SMEs are also challenged by meagre financial resources. The informants pointed out that their operations are affected by financial challenges. They pointed out that lenders of capital are often reluctant to lend money to SMEs due to limited liability as well as uncertainty of continuity in the event of the death of the owner. According to The Business Chronicle, 12 May 2006, “Lack of adequate capital has stifled the SME sector’s growth, now accounting for over 60 percent of Zimbabwe’s employed population.” In another article, the Minister of SMEs, mentions that “Prohibitive interest rates have been cited for contributing to the decline in the capacity of the manufacturing sector in Zimbabwe”. The majority of SMEs interviewed said that finance is a major challenge. They said that banks do not lend money to SMEs. They said that other sources of capital charge exorbitant rates of interest. Hence, SMEs struggle to raise capital for their operations.

Such a view is supported by international literature as Coulter (2001:299) in the USA, says that, “The main challenge these entrepreneurs encounter is getting the funding they need to start and continue their businesses. Access to capital is a serious issue for minority and women entrepreneurs.” It would appear that in the USA, this challenge is limited to minority/blacks etc and women. Furthermore, most women SMEs interviewed said that the banks demand collateral, which they do not have. Some pointed out to the non-existence of a bank for SMEs in Zimbabwe. This lack of funding affects the SMEs in the sense that they are not able to train their people or send them on courses. They are also not able to promote their products as they have no funds for promotion. The SMEs are also not able to package their products attractively. Apart from the above SMEs are not able to attract the best personnel due to poor salaries offered. People are very important in executing business transactions. They are also not able to compete for tenders on the open market as they cannot afford to produce the sample items required for the tenders. The lack of capital generally affects all the Ps of the marketing mix which would otherwise be controllable for competitive advantage.

3. Challenges of securing raw materials

Another major finding of the study was that SMEs struggle to get raw materials. Informants mentioned that raw materials and equipment are a problem for SMEs. Most of those interviewed say that their materials and equipment are imported, hence they are forced to hunt for scarce foreign currency. Also because of the lack of credit-worthiness, they are forced to operate on a cash basis. According to Berger (1995:189), “Programmes that are directed at SMEs have often focused on credit as a key constraint to enterprise stability and expansion.” According to her, for small firms the lack of working capital and long term financial investment in equipment and plant facilities are major obstacles to expansion, which for the very small and micro-enterprises, it is rather the short term, working capital that seems a main constraint (Leidholm and Mead,1987). Because of this and the difficult access to reliable lenders, according to her, SMEs cannot take advantage of volume discounts from

wholesalers, provide credit to their customers, finance sufficient-size inventories to support continuous production, or even benefit from the most favourable market prices, because the entrepreneurs often sell their output immediately in order to meet daily living expenses. Hence SMEs in Zimbabwe struggle to get raw materials and equipment. The raw materials challenge affects the product and price most. The supply of product depends on the availability of raw materials. A supplier of products needs to be reliable. Hence SMEs loose markets to bigger companies because of unreliability of supplies of product to the market. The price charged may also be uncompetitive as compared to larger companies who enjoy economies of scale.

4. *Competition with larger firms*

SMEs are also challenged by competition from larger firms for shelf space in channels of distribution. In this study, 95 percent of the informants point out to this problem. Those interviewed point out to the fact that larger firms are able to reduce their prices as well as provide a constant supply of products to the retailer. They are also able to give favourable terms of trade to the retailer such as trade discounts and short-term credit facilities. They are also able to advertise and promote their products on behalf of the retailer. They can also produce in bulk and package better. 80 percent of the informants point out to the fact that SMEs fail to compete with larger firms due to poor labelling as well as packaging (see Dawson, 2002). Azam et al (1996) cite inconsistent quality, inferior labelling, poor marketing and selling, and insufficient access to quality raw materials as some of the challenges faced by small-scale industry.

5. *Product guarantees*

As alluded to earlier, another challenge encountered by SME's is their inability to guarantee products (Dawson,2002). However, most of those interviewed, contrary to literature argue that they are producing goods of high quality. Some even went on to say that they can now also brand their products. In their view, the biggest challenge is that they cannot find markets for their products locally. This view is supported by the Minister of SMEs in the Business Chronicle, 7 July, 2006 when she says that, "The major problem they are facing is the unavailability of markets locally and that is why they are involved in cross-border trading to solicit for markets in the neighbouring countries." On the other hand, the findings of the study show that 80 percent (16) of the informants point out that patenting and branding is still a problem.

6. *Human resources*

One of the findings is that SMEs experience problems with human resources. 80 percent (16) of the study's informants express this view. From the interviews, it was revealed that usually the owner is highly qualified in an area of expertise. The owner then employs a number of semi-skilled as well as unskilled people who tend to train on the job. The SMEs cannot afford to send their employees on training courses. Highly trained people demand high salaries, hence they are beyond the reach of SMEs. Therefore, SMEs have a low skills base. Important decisions are therefore made by one or two people. Here 60 percent of the informants suggest that SMEs overwork and underpay their workers. The workforce is usually small and is kept small for reasons of affordability of salaries. Some interviewed SME managers however suggested that the human resources challenge is different from one SME to another. For some, it is not a problem at all. They can even afford to pay their workers well. One of the challenges mentioned by managers was that sometimes owners of SMEs employ unqualified relatives who tend to be difficult to work with and are poor performers. Burns and Dewhurst (1996) point out to a management and skills crisis at the small enterprise shop floor. According to them, "It is estimated that over two thirds of small businesses consist of only one or two people and often the second person is the spouse. Three quarters of the rest employ fewer than 20 people..." They go on to point out that decision making is done by one or two people and at times there are no trained people in areas such as marketing as well as in certain aspects of production. The small-scale industry sector has such problems of limited knowledge or know-how in technology and production. Technical and business skills are required. Coulter (2001:300) points out to the challenges of finding and keeping qualified employees as well as keeping up with technology for SMEs.

One of the major findings of the study, is that most SMEs do not pay government taxes as required by law. Here 80 percent (16) of the study's informants point out to this view. The problem is that most SME activities are not supervised by government. This finding probably points out to the current rampant corruption in the country and the SME sector is no exception.

7. *Continuity vis-à-vis culture*

SME's are also challenged by problems of continuity after the owner's death. Wives, sisters, brothers and children of owners of SMEs are often not well educated and lack skills to take over the business. From the

interviews, most managers 80 percent (16), mostly women, pointed out to the fact that after the owner's death, relatives start fighting for business assets or take over at the expense of the business. Most of these people have no business acumen. The wife is sometimes dislodged from the business by the husband's relatives, who may not have any resources of their own to continue in business. Culture is used as succession tool to take over from the wife. According to Coulter (2001:303), "Studies of family firms have shown that, on average, only 30 percent of family business survive to the second generation, and only 10 percent make it to the third generation." Most SMEs in experience a similar fate after the death of the owner. Women who inherited from husbands expressed the view that they were under constant harassment from relatives who want to take over the business. They had to resort to the courts to fight off relatives of the husband.

8. *Legality of SME's*

Finally on the legal front, as opposed to literature findings, most SMEs were of the view that they are aware of the rules governing imports and exports. Their main problem was that they could not afford lawyers for their legal requirements. While 60 percent of the informants are of the view that they are aware of legal requirements, some SMEs are not legally registered.

The major findings of the study as discussed above have been that SMEs, have problems with infrastructure. Most SMEs are forced by circumstances to rent the scarce accommodation at exorbitant rentals. Furthermore, SMEs have no capital for running their businesses. Banks do not easily lend money to SMEs. If they do, the interest rates are very high. SMEs are also forced to operate on a cash basis, as they have no credit facilities. This is a great challenge to most of them and some are faced with collapse. SMEs are also struggling to find local markets for their products. Most SMEs can also not afford highly skilled labour and technical equipment. Hence this impacts negatively on the quality of product/service provided by SMEs. Finally, SMEs are affected by challenges of continuity, legal issues as well as corruption for example, the majority of SMEs do not pay government taxes. In the case of women, cultural issues come into play on inheritance. This impacts negatively on women's chances of participating in economic development of the country. The next section will make conclusions and recommendations emanating from the study.

CONCLUSIONS

From the study, non-availability of funding for SMEs affect women more than men, hence impacts negatively on their role in socio-economic development. This is exacerbated by the fact that women do not have enough collateral to borrow from banks. Due to the patriarchal nature of the Zimbabwean society, property is often in the hands of men and controlled by them. Most banks in Zimbabwe, do not lend to SME's at all, hence SMEs are forced to operate on a cash basis. In Zimbabwe SMEs use imported raw materials, hence suffer from a shortage of raw materials due to non-availability of funding.

In other countries, high rentals for buildings are mentioned but there is no problem with availability of buildings to operate from. In Zimbabwe SMEs suffer from both high rentals as well as unavailability of space. There are no factory shells to operate from for SMEs (Dawson: 2002).

In Zimbabwe, while SMEs are owned and run by highly qualified individuals, the skills base is limited, as SMEs cannot afford the high salaries demanded by highly qualified staff. Hence they tend to employ untrained staff which affects the quality of their products/ service delivery.

In Zimbabwe, contrary to literature, (Dawson: 2002), SMEs are able to produce some of the most innovative products. The challenge is that some are still operating at the production era scenario where they just produce products that they hope to sell.

Due to competition from larger firms, in Zimbabwe SMEs do not have a sufficient market share locally, hence they try to export their products. This is a serious challenge as they face harassment and abuse in neighbouring countries at times.

In continuity and succession, while generally the heirs across the globe are portrayed as having no business acumen, leading to the demise of the business, in Zimbabwe, there is the added factor of polygamy in which the many spouses and their children fight over the business, literally destroying it. There is also the additional factor of relatives, who literally disinherit the heirs of the deceased and in the process destroy the business. They fight over the assets and share them amongst themselves. This usually happens in the case of minor children and female heirs including the wife of the deceased. There is also the additional factor of the employment of unqualified relatives who are not able to continue running the business after the death of the owner. They often do not have their own capital to continue in business.

On the legal front, most SMEs in Zimbabwe are not registered citing the non-affordability of high registration fees. Most SMEs do not pay government taxes, as required by law, hence are caught up in the current rampant corruption affecting the country. Their promotion suffers once they are caught up in shady deals. No same person wants to do business with a corrupt organization.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The Ministry of SMEs should move with speed to address the challenge of the shortage of accommodation for SMEs in terms of office space and factory shells to operate from. Other stakeholders could be involved as well. These include local authorities in urban areas, private construction companies, donors, banks and other investors as well as the Ministry of Local Government and Housing.

Funders of capital such as banks should be encouraged to lend to SMEs so that they are able to get a credit line. Alternatively, a bank for SMEs should be set up so that SME's are able to borrow funds for their operations on favourable terms for survival purposes. This idea has been mooted by government but nothing has been done to date. The establishment of such a bank will go a long way in alleviating the harsh borrowing conditions currently born by SME's from the established banking sector, albeit the current harsh economic conditions in Zimbabwe.

The Ministry of SMEs should come up with a strategy of helping and training SME stakeholders to get markets for their products. They should learn to produce goods that can be sold locally. Their products should be consumer oriented.

The government should try to get all SMEs to register so that they can collect a lot of taxes that go uncollected. There is a lot of revenue that can be collected and ploughed back for SME growth and development.

SMEs should be encouraged to produce products and services from locally available resources so that they save on the scarce foreign currency.

The Ministry of SMEs is encouraged to come up with a legal help office for SMEs seeing that most of them lack knowledge on legal issues and need help in this regard. Moreover, there should be a programme by government to educate women on their inheritance rights so that they are not disinherited through out of date cultural norms for their full participation in economic growth.

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