

## EXPLORING THE CHARACTERISTICS, MOTIVATION, CHALLENGES, AND SUPPORT SYSTEM OF FEMALE SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS IN NIGERIA

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**Purpose:** This study expands on existing literature by exploring characteristics of female social entrepreneurs, their motivational factors, the challenges they face, and the needed support system in the Nigerian context.

**Design/methodology/approach:** A purposive sampling technique was used to select 11 female social entrepreneurs for the qualitative case study design.

The respondents were interviewed, and the data was recorded and transcribed. A thematic analysis was carried out to reduce the responses into themes.

**Findings:** Female social entrepreneurs in Nigeria possess a combination of integrity, transparency, and entrepreneurial traits like knowledge, ambition, and leadership. Their motivations include a primary focus on income and financial stability, coupled with a strong desire to help others, drive societal and community change, and tackle issues like unemployment. Notably, many are motivated by empowering their families and fellow women. Independence plays a significant role in their motivation, manifesting as a desire for flexibility and control over their lives, particularly for mothers. They also draw motivation from societal acceptance, success, appreciation, and respect. Challenges they face include funding limitations, market dynamics, and infrastructure issues common to social entrepreneurs, alongside gender-specific obstacles like inequality and self-confidence issues. Desired support includes funding, improved infrastructure, and gender equality enforcement, with less emphasis on education and training, likely due to their existing entrepreneurial activities.

**Research limitations/implications:** The research has several limitations. Firstly, it is based on a small sample size of only 11 female social entrepreneurs in Nigeria, which may not fully capture the diversity of experiences in this field. Secondly, the findings are specific to the Nigerian context and may not be applicable to other regions or countries with different cultural and economic conditions. Thirdly, the qualitative nature of the research limits its generalizability, as it relies on subjective responses from interviewees. Additionally, the use of purposive sampling may introduce bias, and the cross-sectional data provides only a snapshot, lacking insights into how these entrepreneurs may change over time.

**Practical implications:** The study highlights the need to address gender-specific challenges faced by female social entrepreneurs in Nigeria, such as gender inequality and self-confidence issues. To address these challenges, policymakers, NGOs, and business associations should prioritize initiatives that challenge traditional norms and provide training programs.

**Social implications:** The research emphasizes the importance of addressing gender biases, promoting gender equality, and providing targeted support to empower women in entrepreneurship, which can have far-reaching positive social implications for Nigerian society.

**Originality/value:** This paper enhances our understanding of female social entrepreneurship in the Nigerian context and provides valuable insights into the interplay between entrepreneurship, social leadership, and gender-related obstacles. It also has implications for future research in social entrepreneurship, particularly regarding gender dynamics and socio-cultural influences in developing countries.

**Keywords:** Social Entrepreneur, Woman Social Entrepreneur, Female Entrepreneur, Motivation, Entrepreneurship.

**Category of the paper:** Empirical research paper.

## 1. Introduction

The participation of women in the developing economy is critical, especially in the aspect of entrepreneurship. Women in different countries play a crucial role in the political, social and economic development through social entrepreneurial activities to address socio-economic challenges. Some of the challenges include unemployment, poverty, teenage pregnancy, and gender-based violence (Etim, Iwu, 2018). Social enterprises are gradually becoming the catalyst for transforming society, improving quality of life and increasing human experiences (Zahra et al., 2008).

Lockyer and George (2012) state that women are driven by independence and the desire to contribute to the world's economy. Despite this, there are socio-cultural challenges that women from sub-Saharan Africa face that can deter them from contributing to the economy in a profound way. Literature has revealed that women from developing countries such as Nigeria are affected by poverty, the inability to get paid jobs, and family responsibilities (Ezeibe et al., 2013). Poverty has led female social entrepreneurs to reduce socio-economic differences by the establishment of a social enterprise.

Essentially, people in every country belong to a culture and belief system. These cultures and beliefs of the people decide the ways of living. In line with entrepreneurship, socio-cultural values are those qualities that consist of factors that can positively or negatively affect an entrepreneur. Therefore, the socio-cultural value in Nigeria is gender insensitive or bias. Nigerian culture restricts women from participating in economic activities. This restriction could reduce women's engagement in entrepreneurial activities in the country. Also, subcultural factors exist within the culture, such as region, family attitudes, ethnic groups, social status,

and religion. These factors can shape people's perception of being an entrepreneur (Mathew, Panchanatham, 2009).

Yusuf (2013) refers to gender bias and religious practices as factors within the culture that can affect women social entrepreneurs in Nigeria. This is similar to Hockerts' (2010) view that gender bias and socio-cultural belief could hinder women entrepreneurs' potential by negatively affecting competition, productivity, and economic growth. These problems are embedded in the patriarchal ideology that undermines or devalues women's efforts to grow their businesses (Nguyen, Frederick, Nguyen, 2014).

Besides, women face the challenge of sourcing capital to set up a business and a lack of competence for managing the business. Unlike the male who has the opportunity for promotion, competence to lead, and business participation, women have limited opportunity and power to influence decisions, given the notable socio-cultural challenges facing women in Sub-Saharan Africa. It is necessary to involve some transformation in the labour division and change the primitive mentality about women's roles and responsibilities in society (Martinez, Marlow, 2017)). The intervention of academics, government and other stakeholders is needed to initiate programmes for building women's entrepreneurial skills, growing their network, and providing finance and training for them. These initiatives are to promote women entrepreneurs in Nigeria.

Research on social entrepreneurship has grown over the years and has been recognised as an important field of study (Littlewood, Holt, 2015). Nonetheless, existing research has explored little on the question of female social entrepreneurs' characteristics and motivation in most developing countries (Germak, Robinson, 2014; Omorede, 2014). It is a fact that empirical research on social entrepreneurship is increasing, however, female social entrepreneurs' challenges and desired support have received little attention.

Previous studies in the aspect of personal characteristics and the motivation of social entrepreneurs lacked the challenges and desired support (Cohen, Kaspi-Baruch, Katz, 2019). This current study attempts to bridge that gap to contribute to the development of a more comprehensive profile of the social entrepreneur. Therefore, this study seeks to fill the gap by focusing on the unique characteristics, motivations, challenges and solutions of female social entrepreneurs across different social businesses in Nigeria.

## **2. Literature review**

### **2.1. Social Entrepreneurship in Sub-Saharan Africa and Nigeria**

Africa is a region that can impact social entrepreneurship business (Rivera-Santos et al., 2014) because it has a high level of poverty, while 14 African countries are marked as the most corrupt in the world (International Monetary Fund, 2015). The "doing business index" ranked

most of the Sub-Saharan Africa countries as the worst countries with which to partner in business because of the area's bad regulatory environment, which discourages business owners from running their business smoothly (World Bank, 2018).

Africa is also faced with poor infrastructure, poor governance, corruption lack of management tools and policies (Thorgren, Omorede, 2015; Skubis et al., 2023a), and issues stemming from overpopulation. It is a continent that has seen the fastest growth between 2010 and 2015. The world bank has predicted that Africa's growth will triple in the next 50 years (World Bank, 2018). Due to its level of poverty, Africa possesses an environment of adverse opportunities for the introduction of social enterprises.

Nigeria is a country within Africa with over 180 million people and over 500 different ethnic groups (UN, 2017). Nigeria is fast-growing and becoming overpopulated. The United Nations have predicted that the Nigerian population will surpass the American population before the year 2050. However, Nigeria is naturally endowed with natural resources despite being regarded as a developing country (Kanayo, 2014).

Poverty has taken a toll on Nigerians due to a lack of basic amenities (Kanayo, 2014). In recognition of this high level of poverty, the Nigerian government has given power to NGOs and entrepreneurs to implement policies to reduce poverty. On the verge of eliminating poverty, the Nigerian government has to take note of the overpopulation by creating social entrepreneurs' opportunities to promote their skills amid social and economic constraints (Rivera-Santos et al., 2014; Thorgren, Omorede, 2015).

## **2.2. The Nigerian Social Entrepreneur**

The business entrepreneur has improved over the years, which has resulted in employing the unemployed and making profit for stakeholders (Iwueke, Nwaiwu, 2014). Despite this, challenges in sustainable growth and development pervade the country's existence. If the country has a vibrant economy, it will be easy to solve most of its social problems. The problems are not solved by government or multinational companies alone (Oladejo, Erundu, 2015).

Generally, entrepreneurs are needed for creating value from ideas, opportunities, and driving the economy for the expansion of the social sector (Oghojafor et al., 2011). Unfortunately, the effort of female social entrepreneurs towards sustainable growth and development in Nigeria has been marginalized (Iwueke, Nwaiwu, 2014).

In the context of female social entrepreneurs in Nigeria, responsible leadership plays a crucial role in shaping various aspects of their ventures. A responsible leader within the domain of social entrepreneurship is not only instrumental in motivating employees but also holds the potential to ignite innovation and foster a sense of commitment and job satisfaction among the workforce. This, in turn, has a significant impact on the overall well-being of the business, its employees, and the broader societal context in which these female social entrepreneurs operate (Skubis et al., 2023b).

### **2.3. Social Feminism Theory**

This theory assumes that the male and female gender are notably different (Ahl, 2006). Social feminism recognizes a difference in men's and women's experiences through socialization that has existed since humanity's creation. Female socialization gives a different approach, goal and perspective peculiar to women alone (Brush, 2019). This theory is relevant in focusing on the specific approach that is different from the male perspective.

This approach does not imply that women are weak or ineffective in their position. It rather outlines the unique traits of the female gender. Female entrepreneurs' position is specific as they are complicated with different challenges and motivations (Sarri, Trihopoulou, 2005). Social feminism theory provides socio-cultural reasons for gender differences and the attributes, motivation and challenges they are exposed to (Cliff, 1998).

### **2.4. History and Definition of a Social Entrepreneur and Social Entrepreneurship**

The first usage of the word social entrepreneur was in the 60s and 70s and later gained popularity in the 80s and 90s. Bill Drayton, who founded Ashoka: public innovators, was recognized for using the term social entrepreneurship. There are definitions of a social entrepreneur. In 2007 the Ashoka organization defined a social entrepreneur as someone who has the idealistic solution to societal problems.

The social entrepreneur has the ambition and persistence to address social issues by providing creative ideas for social change. Dees (2001) defined a social entrepreneur as a person who plays a change agent's role by adopting a mission of sustainable social values and recognizing new opportunities to serve a mission by being involved in continuous innovation through learning and acting with the hindrance of limited resources.

Noruzi et al. (2010) define a social entrepreneur as a person, group or organization that seeks out a sustainable wide-scale innovative change by breaking patterned ideas in facing the government, nonprofit or businesses in addressing big social problems.

Social entrepreneurship is at the birth stage, where it consists of a short theory and definition but has a high motivational and passionate spirit. Individual scholars have given their definition of social entrepreneurship in literature (Kickul, Lyons, 2012; Germak, Robinson, 2014) because of the newness of this study field. Social entrepreneurship has a varied definition that ranges from being broad to narrow. These definitions focus on social change and innovative ideas to solve social issues rather than profit-making (Kong, 2010; Dees, Anderson, 2003).

Social entrepreneurship is creating innovation with a social cause, either for profit or not for profit goals (Sullivan Mort et al., 2003). Juneja (2019) defined social entrepreneurship as the identification of societal challenges by using entrepreneurial skills, processes or operations in resolving social challenges for social change. The main ingredient that makes an entrepreneur social is their drive for accomplishing sustainable projects for the empowerment of societies. When social goals are achieved beyond profit, it is known as social entrepreneurship. Social

entrepreneurship is viewed as a process, while an alternative perspective of social entrepreneurship is seen in relation to an individual who is a social entrepreneur.

Social entrepreneurship is a process by which social issues are located and resolved by social entrepreneurs who are social change agents who use innovative techniques to find solutions motivated by altruistic views rather than for profit-making.

## **2.5. The Historical Background Characteristics of a Social Entrepreneur**

There is limited research on a social entrepreneur (Van Ryzin et al., 2009). Levie, Hart (2011) appraised the history of social entrepreneurs in the UK and found out that social entrepreneurs are people who are young and highly educated. In America, a social entrepreneur is a young black woman with a high level of education and an average social and economic status. Yunus (2009) carried out a study on successful social entrepreneurs' biographies and found out that most of them come from minority ethnic and religious groups. Yunus also found out they come from an average socioeconomic status, and their ages are between 20-35, while few of these social entrepreneurs are over 55 years of age (Bosma, Levie, 2010; Gordon, 2005). The main component of social entrepreneurs is their training, experience and ideologies. Becoming a social entrepreneur relates to having social skills and intentions expressed at an entrepreneur's early age (Schoon, Duckworth, 2012).

## **2.6. The Characteristics of a Woman Social Entrepreneur**

The psychological aspect assumes a female social entrepreneur's characteristics that play a crucial role in shaping the behaviour, attitudes, perceptions, beliefs and intentions of these women social entrepreneurs in general (Llewellyn, Wilson, 2003; Frank, Lueger, Korunca, 2007). Costa and McCrea (1992) outlined five personality traits that give an individual the most daunting characteristics: receptivity to new ideas, behaviour, culture, environment and experiences, sociability, pleasantness, awareness and neuroticism.

Receptivity characterizes an individual who is open to investigate new ideas and discover new experiences. Zhao et al. (2005) did a meta-analysis study by comparing these five traits of entrepreneurs. They found a high level of receptivity with entrepreneurs. Shane & Venkataraman (2000) argued that receptivity is required to adopt new methods in dealing with social issues in innovating a social enterprise. A research study of entrepreneurial intention among students in Malaysia positively correlates with other aspects of social entrepreneurship, including social vision, social innovation and financial aspects in social services (Nga, Shamuganathan, 2010). Another study revealed that receptivity is correlated with social vision (Irengun, Arikbuga, 2015); social leadership (Judge, Bono, 2000), self-direction and value creation (Bargsted et al., 2013); and creativity (Ip et al., 2017; Kaspi-Baruch, 2017).

Sociability is expressed in positive emotions, confidence and being extroverted. These traits are usually associated with dominance and being emotionally expressive (Judge, Illies, 2002). Sociableness can create the power of conviction that is perceived as a positive tool to attract investors (McCarthy, 2003). Sociableness is associated with a forward-looking entrepreneurial personality (Rant, 1996; Steege, Stamm, 2014), entrepreneurial success and intentions (Rauch, Frese, 2007).

Social entrepreneurs are required to raise funds, reflecting their extroverted attitude and being seen as a social leader who interacts with policymakers, individuals and volunteers (Nga, Shamuganathan, 2010); social leadership is akin to sociableness (Judge, Bono, 2000). Pleasantness is a beneficial attribute that can contribute to the outcome by solving problems, clarifying issues, having peaceful negotiations, and holding a respectful attitude towards others.

These characteristics are compassion, trustworthiness and humility (Yunis et al., 2018). Awareness expresses persistence, reliability, practicality, motivation, and responsibility in achieving goals. Awareness is composed of 2 elements: reliability and achievement of a motivational goal (Mount, Barrick, 1995). Levander (2010) inferred that the root of awareness lies in responsibility, accountability, obligation, fervour and perseverance. In the spirit of awareness, an entrepreneur must learn to cope with ambiguity, resistance, challenges and issues that arise in business, creating a vision that helps with budgets, managing teams and establishing rules (Bar-Nir, 1999). Being perseverant is relevant to establishing social ventures. Awareness is associated with sustainability and financial consciousness (Nga, Shamuganathan, 2010), goal accomplishment (Yitshaki, Kropp, 2016) and steadfastness (Bussau, 2009).

Neuroticism is the psychological difference in emotional stability. Neurotic individual experiences are damaging trauma such as depression, impulsiveness, hostility, fear, anxiety and self-awareness (Zhao et al., 2005). Neuroticism has shown up in the entrepreneur's background, where he has some traumatic experiences which limit his ability to work productively (Cohen, Katz, 2016).

## **2.7. The Motivational Factor of a Woman Social Entrepreneur**

The motivation for a conventional business entrepreneur is quite similar to a social entrepreneur. However, business entrepreneurs' primary motive is for a financial purpose. (Wadhwa et al., 2009). Other motives of a business entrepreneur include gaining financial independence, breaking the labour market, putting an end to unemployment, and breaking the female gender glass ceiling (Kirkwood, 2009).

Social entrepreneurs are driven by identifying opportunities, exploring ideas and mobilizing resources for solving social problems (Dacin et al., 2010). That is to say that the social entrepreneur's motive is ideological, which means they have the desire to promote and produce social change by solving problems in society (Migliore et al., 2015). Social entrepreneurs work by promoting beneficial outcomes and awareness to change society's value (Stephan, Drencheva, 2017). Having a sense of vision to resolve social and environmental issues (Dees,

1998; Sastre-Castillo et al., 2015) suggests that social entrepreneurs have a long-term ideology of changing society for the better.

What is the driving force for a female social entrepreneur to create a vision and a meaningful and purposeful life? In response to the question, the existential theory of Frankl (1976) and Pines & Yanai (2001) claims that a meaningful life drives social entrepreneurs. Barendsen and Gardner (2004) evaluated social and business entrepreneurs. Barendsen and Gardner discovered that social entrepreneurs are motivated by meaningful actions that deal with healing and resolving difficult life challenges (Cohen, Katz, 2016). Boluk and Mottiar (2014) suggest that both social and business entrepreneurs are innovative, tenacious, resilient & committed.

Another difference between business and social entrepreneurs is that a business entrepreneur is driven by monetary gain while the social entrepreneur is philanthropic or charitable (Mair, Noboa, 2003). The business entrepreneur gains value, while social entrepreneurs create value (Santos, 2012).

## **2.8. Challenges of Women Social Entrepreneurs**

Women are confronted with many challenges when involved in social change. Although women entrepreneurs are sources of growth for a nation's economy, they are faced with serious challenges (Iliya et al., 2017). The lifestyle of the Nigerian social entrepreneur is viewed as domestic. They are generally seen as wives, mothers, and homemakers as prescribed by culture (Tlaiss, 2014). Otekunrin et al. (2013) summarized the challenges Nigerian women face as social entrepreneurs. They are constrained by time management, poor marketing skills, overburdened by family issues and have a lack of sufficient capital. Agboola et al. (2015) endorsed these and also included culture and family issues, lack of training and information about growing the business, etc. Nigeria is viewed as a patriarchal society where women are subjected to men, and men exert dominance and control (Yusuf, 2013). Nigerian women cannot carry out any form of business opportunity without consultation from their husbands (Ekpe et al., 2014). Women in the rural area of Nigeria are more affected than women in urban areas.

Lack of education is a constraint for women social entrepreneurs (Gayathridevi, 2014), while Tanusia et al. (2016) posit a lack of entrepreneurial skills in starting up a business. Women face a lack of family or government support and a lack of confidence, leading to low profit and business failure. Gender discrimination is also a challenge that can lead to women losing control over their properties or assets. This is a serious challenge that has affected women entrepreneurs in Nigeria because they do not enjoy equal opportunity like their male counterparts (Otunaiya et al., 2013). Women are discriminated against in the social, cultural, political, legal and other environments (Otunaiya et al., 2013).

Women are also faced with challenges of lack of support from the government to start businesses, lack of opportunity to receive educational training, and are bombarded with religious beliefs. These women are given away for early marriages due to the cultural ethnocentrism. Personal characteristics are specific to the physiological nature of women and



gender discrimination, cultural and social problems. A typical Nigerian woman's role is to be a wife and mother, but that has changed as numerous women are engaged in different businesses (Emmanuel, 2013). Women are not disposed to engage in businesses without their husbands' knowledge, which is one big challenge that women face.

Ayogu and Agu (2015) summarized other challenges as a lack of access to their property(ies). The Nigerian legal framework forbids women from officially owning land. The issue of inheriting land is biased as women cannot inherit land or property or business from their parents.

Garg and Agarwal (2017) stated that there are social barriers for women (gender discrimination, cultural expectations and family responsibilities). Financial insecurities (lack of funds, difficulty in obtaining a loan from government and banks), personal barriers (lack of confidence, lack of entrepreneurial skills or training and information), market-related barriers such as weak competition, poor marketing network, poor marketing sales strategy, change in technology, lack of available motivational factors, poor location of the business and legal formalities.

Lack of role models, corruption and technology advancement are a big challenge for female social entrepreneurs (Taqi, 2016). While digital technologies offer numerous advantages to female social entrepreneurs in Nigeria, the persistent challenges posed by poor infrastructure significantly impact their operations and the overall landscape of social entrepreneurship in the country. In this context, the limitations of the existing infrastructure have direct implications for the cost of conducting business activities and the broader socio-economic conditions in Nigeria (Skubis, Akahome, 2022). In general, women entrepreneurs face challenges that depend on their present life cycle stages in engaging in businesses (Adim, Tamunomiebi, 2018).

## **2.9. The Needed Support System for Nigerian Women Social Entrepreneurs**

Social entrepreneurship is basically about change or discovering a solution for social challenges. Noruzi et al. (2010) have summarized strategies through which social entrepreneurship can be supported:

- seeking the encouragement of social innovation,
- creating a viable environment where social entrepreneurship can thrive,
- giving accolades or recognition for social entrepreneurial initiatives,
- scaling successful approaches by expanding knowledge and getting people to accept it,
- producing knowledge.

Motilewa et al. (2015) advised that Nigerian women social entrepreneurs are open to available funds such as Coca-Cola women entrepreneurs, Shell Live Wire, Africa development bank, business development Fund for women, etc. With these support funds in place, women entrepreneurs require adequate skills, knowledge, and training to grow the business (Broto, 2014). Islam and Amin (2016) stated that it is relevant to acquire formal education to boost

Nigeria's entrepreneurship. Women social entrepreneurs should view their business as a way to solve social problems rather than profit-making. Empowering women and acting as a good role model to create profitable opportunities and scale-up businesses for societal good (Kraus et al., 2014).

### **3. Methodology**

This study addresses the previous limitations in understanding the personal characteristics and motivation of social entrepreneurs by aiming to create a more comprehensive profile of social entrepreneurs. It specifically focuses on female social entrepreneurs in various social businesses in Nigeria, aiming to uncover their distinctive qualities, motivations, challenges, and potential solutions.

Through the qualitative study, by investigating their characteristics and motivation, we hope to understand the power that female social entrepreneurs have to empower others and enable colleagues to earn and develop some talents and skills and by understanding the challenges and desired support will encourage more women to create social businesses, improving people's lives, supporting communities, helping the environment and fostering women's leadership in the social economy. In developing this research, it will serve as a foundation for further empirical studies.

This research addresses the literature gap by proposing a conceptual model from the empirical findings of female social entrepreneurs in Nigeria. In addition to this contribution, we seek to build a new profile of female social entrepreneurs. This can have a practical and managerial contribution for wealthy businessmen who are willing to invest in seeking innovation and skills in developing social businesses.

The objective of the study is to identify the characteristics, motivational factors, challenges, and solutions to problems for women social entrepreneurs in order to obtain a more comprehensive female social entrepreneur profile.

The objective of this study will expand on existing literature by investigating these research questions:

1. What are the characteristics of female social entrepreneurs?
2. What are the motivational factors of female social entrepreneurs?
3. What challenges do female social entrepreneurs face?
4. What is the needed support system for female social entrepreneurship?

### **3.1. Sampling Technique and Data Collection**

The study adopted a qualitative approach with an exploratory case study design involving eleven social entrepreneurs residing in Nigeria. A semi-structured interview was used to collect data.

A purposive sampling of eleven women social entrepreneurs from Nigeria was used to ensure that the study respondents had a common experience as social entrepreneurs. The goal of purposive sampling is to focus on a particular population of interest, who will answer the research question. The consent from the individual participants was obtained by having a face to face interview with participants. The audio-recorded interview was transcribed into textual format.

We performed member checking by allowing participants to review the transcript's summary to ensure the accuracy in interpretations and the meanings of participants' interview responses. We started by identifying eleven female social entrepreneurs through public directories in Nigeria.

We screened the individuals based on the mission of the organization, what inspired them, how well they demonstrated creativity and leadership in their business, how they were able to collect opportunities to start a social enterprise, and to understand if the social enterprise addresses the community social problems of inequality and poverty. In all these we chose female social entrepreneurs who represent different sectors, namely fashion, business consultants and importation of commodities.

A semi-structured interview was used to collect data and they were presented using themes. Key themes were identified from the data: their traits, driving force, challenges and desired support. Some expert interviewees were chosen based on their knowledge of Nigerian social enterprises.

The study used a face to face interview because of the nature of its authenticity and clarity. For our study, we held a 30 to 60 minutes' semi-structured interview with eleven female social entrepreneurs. The interviews were conducted in October 2020 by the authors. The expert interviews assisted in ensuring their reliability and validity. The interviews were recorded and later transcribed.

### **3.2. Data Coding Analysis and Presentation**

The analysis began by creating elements that led us to answer our research question. Thematic analysis was used on the data collected from the semi-structured interviews to classify, organize, and summarize the data, using Clarke, Braun, and Hayfield's six-step approach (a) Familiarize yourself with your data, (b) Assign preliminary codes to the data to describe the content, (c) Search for patterns or themes in your codes, (d) Review of themes, (e) Define and name themes, and (f) Produce report (Clarke et al., 2015).

A study was presented in the form of narrative themes. The transcribed data were analysed using the open coding procedure and were compared amongst the female social entrepreneurs. This process revealed some similar behaviour among each female social entrepreneur in their characteristics, motivation, challenges and solution.

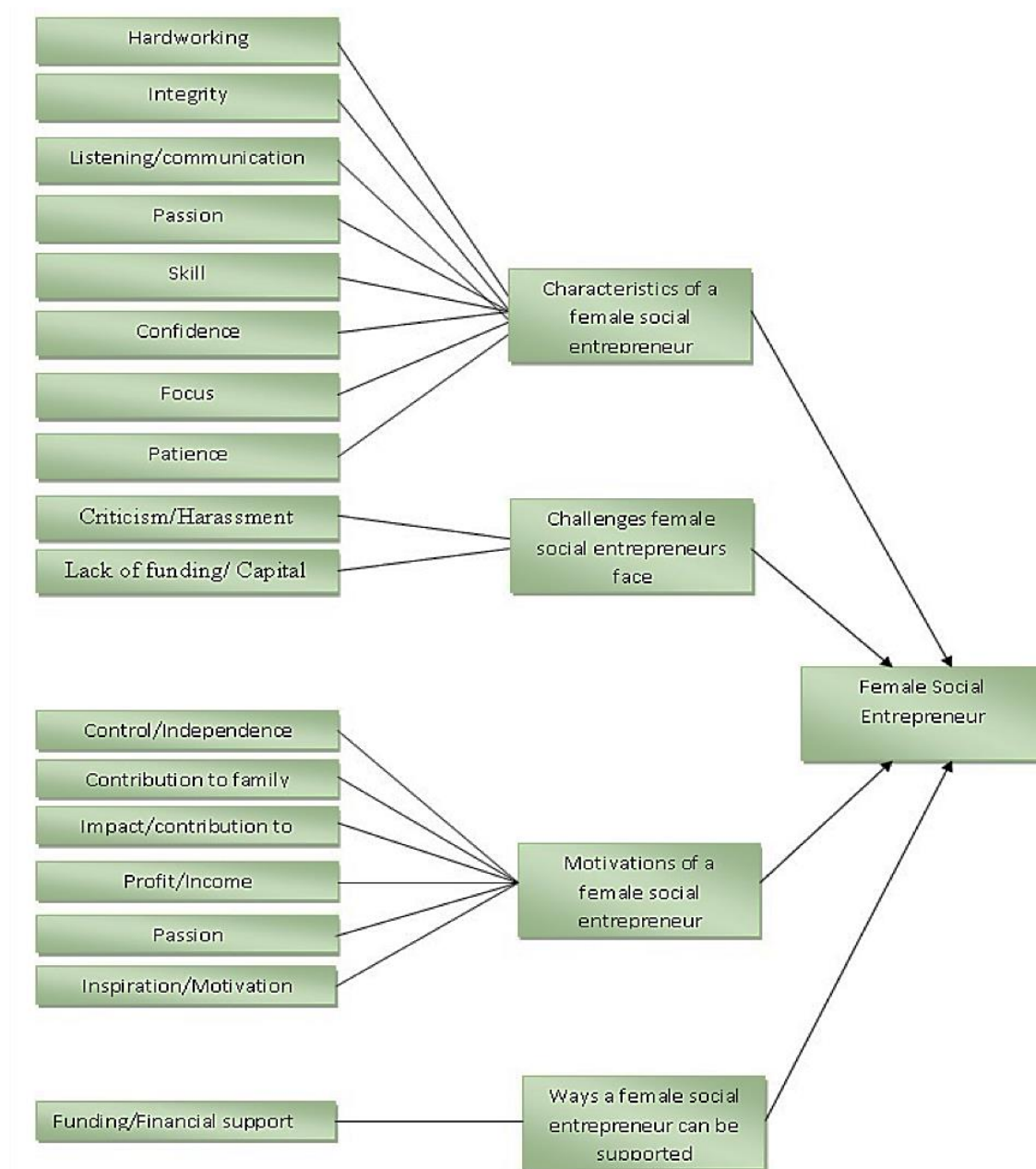
**Table 1.**

*Open-codes for the study*

Open-Ended Questions	Open-Codes	Ref
How long have you worked as a social entrepreneur?	More than 10 years	5
	Less than 10 years	6
What inspired you to become a social entrepreneur?	Employing or helping others	4
	Independence and control	4
	Income and Profit	2
What kind of business are you into?	Business and consulting	3
	Fashion Business	5
	Buying and selling commodities	3
What characteristics do you think a female social entrepreneur should have?	Hardworking	3
	Integrity	3
	Listening and communication	2
	Passion	2
	Skill	3
	Confidence	2
	Focus	2
	Patience	2
What motivates a female social entrepreneur?	Need for control and independence	7
	Contribution to family	2
	Make impact and contribute to society	7
	Profit and income	5
	Passion	2
	Inspiration and motivation	2
What challenges do you face as a female social entrepreneur?	Criticism and harassment	4
	Lack of funding or capital	6
What support system do you need as a female social entrepreneur?	Funding and financial support	9

Table 1 above describes the coding and categorization of the qualitative data based on the emerging and dominant views and ideas expressed. A total of 25 open codes were generated from the analysis and revealed evidence based on the subjective and individualized positions of respondents with regards to the interview questions posed in the research.

Figure 1 below demonstrates the link between concepts drawn from the positions and coded properties at the initial stage and the axial a priori themes (research questions) for the study.



**Figure 1.** Conceptual Model for Female Social Entrepreneurs in Nigeria.

#### 4. Findings

Our final sample contains eleven interviews with female social entrepreneurs. Three can be considered as nascent social entrepreneurs (with 1-5 years of experience). The other eight are mature social entrepreneurs (three with 5-10 years of experience and four with 15-20 years of experience). The social businesses they run are different, including agriculture (agricultural production), consulting (HR, business and management consulting), fashion (design, outlets), department stores, services (estate agency, car rental, event management), etc. Discovering the

characteristics of female social entrepreneurs, their motives, challenges and needed support were the core objectives of our interviews. The findings are presented below.

To find an answer to RQ1, we asked our respondents the following question: "What characteristics do you think a female social entrepreneur should have?"

Some answers were related to knowledge, education and training. Among the answers we also found some traditional characteristics of an entrepreneur as well as characteristics related to their emotional intelligence. Table 2 explains the characteristics of female social entrepreneurs with sample statements. In one particular line you can find expressions or phrases which are synonymous.

**Table 2.**

*The characteristics of female social entrepreneurs*

Characteristic	Illustrative quote
Traditional characteristics of entrepreneur	"Skillful" (was repeated twice). "She should have basic education." "Education." "Have the basic knowledge." "Knowledgeable." "Teachable (training)"
	"Integrity" (was repeated four times), "honesty", "honest", "transparency"
	"Passion" (for the business) (was repeated four times)
	"Ambitious" (twice)
	"Hardworking" (three times)
	"Confident" (twice) and "know their strength"
	"Innovative." "Resourcefulness"
	"Profit-oriented"
	"Service-oriented"
	"Focused" (twice), "consistent", "persistence"
	"Organized"
	"Endurance" (twice), "stand your ground", "strong", "don't give up", "patient" (twice)
	"Leadership style", "influencer"
	Emotional intelligence
"Empathy", "relational"	
"Good communication skills" (were mentioned twice), "a good listener"	
"Self-motivator", "inspiring"	
"Gratitude"	
"Positivity" and "good attitude"	

RQ2 is related to a female social entrepreneur's motives, so we asked the interviewees about their incentives and motives. Our questions were such as "What inspired you to become a social entrepreneur?" and "What motivates a female social entrepreneur?"

We considered the incentives of female social entrepreneurs. Table 3 expresses the incentives, including the income, independence, passion, and aspiration to help others. We note that these incentives are very interdependent.

**Table 3.**  
*Incentives of female social entrepreneurs*

Incentive	Illustrative quote
Money, income	"Having multiple streams of income." "Profit-making" "I need to make ends meet"
Changing society	"I wanted to give my family a better life" "Solving a need for the masses" "I wanted to create an impact" "The passion I'd always have for fashion and being an employer"
Independence	"Being in control of my time" "To be financially independent and then use some of the money for social activities that will benefit society at large"

Those who became social entrepreneurs also need motives to continue their hardworking. Table 4 shows the groups of factors that motivate female social entrepreneurs. It was also an open question, and the factors are grouped as a result of our analysis.

**Table 4.**  
*Motives of female social entrepreneurs*

Motive	Illustrative quote
Money, income	"To make money." "Money." "I could make and have my own money." "Be in control of your money" "Multiple streams of income" "Contribute to the family" "Profit." "Making profit." "Business expectations"
Changing society	"Passion." "Vision." "Vision of doing something you love." "Changing the world." "Solve a need." "Ability to raise others." "Create job opportunities." "Contribute to society (to help other girls stand too)." "Inspiration to solve social problems"
Independence	"Job flexibility." "Independence." "Freedom and flexibility." "Working according to your time." "To be independent." "More time for a family." "Be in control of your life." "Stability." "Be in control of things around you." "Ownership and responsibility"
Acceptance by society	"Having good customers." "Customers testifying well about the product." "Having the goods customers need." "Keeping good relationships and knowing people too." "Service." "Respect." "Honest feedback." "Acceptance." "Successful outcome on work done pushes one to do more." "Self-fulfilment and social status." "Being appreciated"

To contribute to RQ3, we asked interviewees, "What challenges do you face as a female social entrepreneur?" Table 5 represents four groups of challenges that we have identified.

**Table 5.**  
*Challenges that female social entrepreneurs face*

Challenge	Illustrative quote
Funding	"Money to invest." "Lack of funding." "Accessing funds." "Financial resources." "Lack of capital." "Lack of funds"
Demand and supply	"I'm still struggling to meet up with people's demand." "Oversaturation." "Underpricing of one's products/works." "High cost of production"
Infrastructure and management	"Unfavourable business environment." "Logistics." "Bad road (unable to get to where you can get the materials needed for your job)." "Getting things done on time"
Gender inequality and lack of self-confidence	"People trying to take undue advantage because one is a female in business." "Struggling to be taken seriously." "Defying social expectations." "Leak of power." "Fear of failure." "Destructive criticisms." "Discouragement." "Harassment"

And finally, our last question in the interview was based on RQ4 and related to the support system needed for female social entrepreneurs. We can see that the required support is connected with the challenges they meet. Table 6 shows the desired support for female social entrepreneurs.

**Table 6.**  
*Desired support for female social entrepreneurs*

Type of support	Illustrative quote
Funding	"I need money to invest in my business." "Access to funding." "I need financial support or access to credit." "Financial support for business." "Funds to enable me to get bigger equipment." "Finance." "Financial support (grant)". "Sponsorship." "Finds"
Infrastructure and management	"An enabling environment, for example: good and reliable logistic systems, good marketing/ promotion/ referrals." "Good collaboration." "Mobility"
Gender equality and self-confidence	"Respect." "Women economic empowerment." "Husband, children, family, staff, and friends." "Honesty"

## 5. Discussion of Findings

We can start our discussion with the characteristics of a female social entrepreneur. We may note that integrity, honesty and transparency as characteristics of female social entrepreneurs identified by our respondents are very close to the receptivity or openness to new ideas (Zhao et al., 2005; Shane, Venkataraman, 2000). In the case of social enterprise, we would say that receptivity requires integrity and honesty from its leader.

The main characteristics of a female social entrepreneur named by interviewees are related to sociability (Judge, Illies, 2002; McCarthy, 2003). Such characteristics as knowledge, ambitiousness, consistency, focus on success, endurance, hardworking, passion, and leadership are similar to a forward-looking entrepreneurial personality (Rant, 1996; Steege, Stamm, 2014), entrepreneurial success and intentions (Rauch, Frese, 2007). We consider these characteristics as those of an entrepreneur in general. At first glance, the classical entrepreneurial characteristics predominate among the identified characteristics of female social entrepreneurs.

Such characteristics like emotional intelligence, empathy, communicativeness, self-motivation, positivity, good attitude and gratitude correlate with a social entrepreneur's compassion, trustworthiness, and humility (Yunis et al., 2018), sociableness (Judge, Bono, 2000). These two sides of sociability are based on the two sides of social entrepreneurship: the entrepreneurial and the social (Leadbeater, 1997; Dees, 1998; Austin et al., 2006). We may say that if traditional entrepreneurial characteristics form the basis of female social entrepreneur personality, then emotional intelligence makes it specific and really social.

The second part of the interview was devoted to the incentives and motives of a female social entrepreneur. Income and money were mentioned as incentives as well as motives and are regarded as the primary motive of any entrepreneur (Wadhwa et al., 2009).



The next group of incentives as well as strong motives was related to the aspiration to help others and the passion to change society and community, including problem-solving, reducing unemployment and contributing to society. These factors are also well studied and discussed (Dacin et al., 2010; Kirkwood, 2009; Migliore et al., 2015; Pines, Yanai, 2001) and often considered as a response to the need to resolve difficult life challenges (Cohen, Katz, 2016) as many social entrepreneurs had a difficult life background. But what we shall note is that our interviewees repeatedly mentioned their aspiration to help the family or other women stand up for themselves and this is an important feature of female social entrepreneurship.

And the third group of incentives as well as motives can be described as motives of independence and also well known as a feature of female entrepreneurship (Lockyer, George, 2012; Kirkwood, 2009). We shall note that independence was discussed in a very feminine way – as more time for a family, flexible schedule for a mum, control of her own life, etc.

The three groups of incentives were quite the same as the first three groups of motives, but the acceptance by society was identified only as a motive (not as an incentive to start a social enterprise). The fourth group of motives is related to acceptance by society, including success, appreciation and respect. These motives are very close to motives of success (Sharir, Lerner, 2006; Roy et al., 2014).

The third part of the interview was done to answer RQ3: challenges that face female social entrepreneurs. Here we shall note that most of the challenges or barriers identified by our interviewees were typical barriers that face social entrepreneurs in many countries: these were lack of funding, market context (as demand and supply), and infrastructure that has also been well discussed in literature (Sharir, Lerner, 2006; Robinson, 2006). However, one group of challenges was quite specific in terms of entrepreneurship and related to gender inequality and lack of self-confidence (Otunaiya et al., 2013; Garg, Agarwal, 2017; Taqi, 2016).

And the final fourth part of the interview was devoted to RQ4: we asked our respondents about desired support for female social entrepreneurs. The requests for funding and better infrastructure and management were very predictable and can be considered typical for social entrepreneurs (Noruzi et al., 2010). Respondents did not discuss knowledge or training as a needed support, and it could be because they are acting social entrepreneurs. Respondents mentioned education as a key characteristic of a social entrepreneur in the first part of the interview, which indirectly proves the need for support for nascent social entrepreneurs and youth (Broto, 2014).

Finally, one more support for Nigerian female social entrepreneurs is the enforcement of gender equality and self-confidence. This particular need correlates to the challenge of gender inequality that they meet.

## 6. Conclusions

This study analyzes a female social entrepreneur's characteristics, motivating factors, challenges and desired support. In understanding the phenomenon of female social entrepreneurship in Nigeria, we conducted a qualitative research based on a series of interviews.

The answer for RQ1 – "What are the characteristics of female social entrepreneurs?" – is that female social entrepreneurs in Nigeria have the characteristics both of entrepreneur and social leader. We have identified the same characteristics as were described in the existing literature.

The answer for RQ2 – "What are the motivational factors of female social entrepreneurs?" – is that a female social entrepreneur in Nigeria has such incentives to start a social enterprise as 1) money, income, 2) passion to change society, 3) independence, and such motives to continue their social business as 1) money, income, 2) passion to change society, 3) independence, and 4) acceptance by society. From the first view, these are the classical motives of entrepreneurs, social entrepreneurs, or social leaders. Still, if we look in detail, we can see that some motives have a very feminine character. Especially the motives to be independent and to change society were described from a very female point of view (e.g., more time for a family, for children, for herself, and to help other women to stand up for themselves) and can be considered as unique motives of female social entrepreneurs.

The answer for RQ3 – "What challenges do female social entrepreneurs face?" – is that female social entrepreneurs face such challenges as 1) funding; 2) market context (as demand and supply); 3) infrastructure and management; 4) gender inequality and lack of self-confidence. We suppose the first three groups of challenges can be considered as typical challenges for entrepreneurs, including social entrepreneurs. In that case, the fourth challenge has a female face and is a unique challenge for female social entrepreneurs, at least in Nigeria.

The answer for RQ4 – "What is the needed support system for female social entrepreneurship?" - is that female social entrepreneurs desire such support as 1) funding; 2) better infrastructure and management; 3) gender equality and self-confidence. The first two groups of support are classic for all types of entrepreneurs. Still, the third group has feminine characteristics and is related to the challenges of gender inequality and lack of self-confidence.

To conclude, the main contribution of our paper is that we identified that some of the characteristics, motives, challenges and desired support for female social entrepreneurs in Nigeria are quite the same as for entrepreneurs, social entrepreneurs and social leaders. We have also found that independence and changing society are understood in a very feminine way. We also identified the challenge in gender inequality and lack of self-confidence and related request in support of gender equality and self-confidence that are unique features of female social entrepreneurship in Nigeria.

These findings offer a basis for policymakers to develop targeted policies and initiatives, facilitate education and training programs, and promote awareness and advocacy for female participation in social entrepreneurship, ultimately contributing to economic growth and social development in Nigeria.

## **7. Implications of the Study**

The study hopes to contribute to the managerial or entrepreneurial practice and academic research in social entrepreneurship. The characteristics of female social entrepreneurs in the Nigerian context in Africa will provide skills to new social enterprises. Their motivational factors could be discussed to enlighten and motivate other followers in their entrepreneurship footsteps.

The study helped to understand the socio-cultural challenges they face while setting up a social enterprise and the possible solutions that are expected to be actualized to make female social entrepreneurs thrive. Generally, the research will be relevant for present and future academics or scholars in social entrepreneurship. Within the field of social entrepreneurship, it is important to understand the situation of female social entrepreneurship within the emerging context as pointed in literature (Littlewood, Holt, 2015).

This research can assist in exploring and utilizing feminine innovative skills to accomplish social benefit in developing countries. The model will set the stage for potential studies by empirically testing factors that affect the success of social businesses in the context of other countries. It can open doors for cross country studies by supporting the contextualised differences between developed and developing countries and also countries within the developing economy.

It further assists in identifying other characteristics, motivational factors and environmental challenges and support that promote or hinder the successes of social businesses. Research in the theory of social feminism can enrich the examination of other social entrepreneurial activities by investigating socio-cultural reasons for gender differences and identifying the attributes, motivation and challenges they are exposed to.

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