

Article

Change Management as a Tool for Widow Entrepreneurs' Survival in a Knowledge-Based Economy

Dr. Annastecia Ugbaku Ejeka¹ Nwachukwu Chinwoke Maria Charles Ph.D²

1. Department Of Business Education, Alvan Ikoku Federal University Of Education, Owerri, Imo State

2. Department Of Business Administration, Imo State Polytechnic Omuma, Mbanjo Campus

*Correspondence: ekwutosiozims@gmail.com

Abstract: Over the years women are seen in Nigeria business ecosystem as an unequal gender with the cultural heritage of women are seen, not heard. Entrepreneurship is often considered as masculine connotations. Thus, Women entrepreneurs struggle with gender discrimination. However, their contributions to the economy have recently been realized. Widowhood in Southeast presents unique challenges for women due to cultural and social factors. These challenges negatively slack the profitability, growth and survival of widows-owned businesses. This study, was carried out in South-East of Nigeria, periscopes on Change Management as a Tool for Widow Entrepreneurs' Survival in a Knowledge-Based economy. A questionnaire comprising 16 questions was used. Two specific purpose and research questions guided the study which adopted a phenomenological technique for qualitative analysis and a descriptive method for quantitative analysis. The population comprised 120 entrepreneurs who are widows and are indigenes in the South East. Sample size of 100 was adopted by employing the purposive sampling technique. Data were presented in tables and analyzed using percentage and mean. Findings showed that widow entrepreneurs face challenges such as paucity, cumbersome loan processes, family structure, stigmatization in a knowledge-based economy, where emphasis include essential skills, innovation, information and technologies (ICT). Change management strategies include change readiness, innovation, digital adoption, cultural shift. Conclusion draws that application of change management through technology implementation, process redesign, training and development contribute to the overall success, growth and sustainability of the widow entrepreneurs' resilience and adaptability in the face of knowledge-based economy. It was recommended among others that Building a digital culture, improving access to education and economic opportunities, minimizing resistance to change, government provision of adequate infrastructure, assess loans, grants, enhancing agility that mirrors the technological demands of modern business environments to achieve business objectives, should be adopted

Citation: Ozims Ekwutosi Impact of Women Entrepreneurship on Economic Growth. A Study of Selected Sme's in Imo State International Journal of Business Diplomacy and Economy 2024, 3(5),212-225

Received: 9th Oct 2024

Revised: 10th Oct 2024

Accepted: 24th Oct 2024

Published: 20th Nov 2024



Copyright: © 2024 by the authors. Submitted for open access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>)

Keywords: Change Management, Widows Entrepreneurs and Knowledge-Based Economy.

Introduction

Historically, women play their roles as sisters, wives, mothers and aunties. They also have been at the forefront of movement for social change. Over the years women are seen in Nigeria business ecosystem as an unequal gender with the cultural heritage of women are seen, not heard. Entrepreneurship is often considered as masculine connotations. Thus, women entrepreneurs struggle with gender discrimination. Female entrepreneurship in Nigeria is driven by micro-financing as well as family dynamics that work to shape and influence the birth of a business. Women have always been pillars of strength, resilience and wisdom in our society. They embody a spectrum of experiences, from rural market women to the urban professional, from the traditional homemaker to the trailblazing

entrepreneur. Each of these women contributes uniquely to our society. Despite their undeniable contributions, their roles are underappreciated and undervalued. Widowhood in South-East presents unique challenges for women due to cultural and social factors. Many women in numerous Nigerian communities experience the horror of widowhood (Obioma, 2011). Widows in Nigeria more especially in the South-East have told bizarre stories of their experiences in the hands of deceased husbands' families and society at large. According to Idiala (2012), these stories often border on victimization and inhuman treatment which is traumatic, damaging to feminine psyche and could adversely affect their performances as entrepreneurs. These challenges may negatively slack the profitability, growth and survival of widows-owned businesses. This paper tends to ensure that widow entrepreneurs challenges are addressed, achievements celebrated, contributions and aspirations recognized and respected, their stories told, their voices heard and amplified at both national and global stages as well as to empower widows economically to reach their full potential through the mantra, 'train a woman, you have trained a nation'. It also views from change management, change management strategies, entrepreneurship, entrepreneurs, characteristics of entrepreneur, concept and meaning of widow/widowhood, widow entrepreneurs, challenges faced by widow entrepreneurs, coping strategies employed by widow entrepreneurs and Knowledge-Based Economy.

Materials and Methods

Change Management: is a systematic approach to transitioning individuals, teams and organizations from a current state to a desired future state, minimizing disruption and ensuring lasting adoption of the change. Change management is essential for organizations to adapt to changing markets, technologies and customer needs and to ensure that changes are implemented efficiently and effectively. It involves managing and supporting individuals and teams through the process of change including: preparing for change, managing the transition and sustaining the change. Effective change management involves: communicating the need for change, building a vision for the future, engaging stakeholders, assessing and addressing resistance, developing training and support plans, monitoring outcomes and celebrating successes and learning from setbacks.

Change management strategies: the following change management strategies can be tailored to suit specific needs and change initiatives: ADKAR: Awareness of the need for change; Desire to participate in the change; Knowledge of what to do; Ability to implement the change and Reinforcement to sustain the change. culture. Bridges' Transition Model: Ending (let go of the old); Neutral Zone (transition) and Beginning (embrace the new). Prosci 3-Phase Change Management Process: Phase 1: Prepare for Change; Phase 2: Manage the Change and Phase 3: Sustain the Change. Agile Change Management: Iterative and incremental approach; Flexibility and adaptability and continuous improvement. Lewin's 3-Step Change Model: Unfreezing (prepare for change); Changing (implement the change) and Refreezing (make the change permanent). Kotter's 8-steps Change Model: Establish a sense of urgency; Form a powerful coalition; Create a vision; Communicate the vision; Empower others to act; Plan for and create short-term wins and Consolidate improvements; keep the momentum going and Anchor new approaches in the change readiness, innovation, digital adoption, cultural shift.

According to Meta AI with Liama 3.2, McKinsey 7S Framework is a strategic management tool used to assess and improve organization's effectiveness. It focuses on seven key elements that must align for successful change management, they include Strategy: Overall plan and direction; Structure: Organization design and hierarchy; System: Progresses, technology and infrastructure; Skills: competencies and abilities of employees; Style: Leadership approach and management style; Staff: Human resources

and personnel and Shared value: Culture, values and guiding principles.

Entrepreneurship: is the dynamic process of creating something incremental with value to wealth by individuals who devote the necessary time, effort, summing the accompanying finance, psychic, social risks and career commitment providing value for some products or services, and receiving the resulting rewards of monetary and personal satisfaction. The production service may or may not be new or unique, but value must somehow be infused by the entrepreneur by receiving and allocating the necessary skills and resources (FMSUP, 2010). Entrepreneurship is the process of creating, organizing and running a business enterprise for profit or non-profit reason, which involves thinking of new ways to solve problems and create value, characterized by innovation, proactiveness and risk-taking (Ejeka, 2013). Entrepreneurship, therefore, is an instrument/technique for identifying, refining, creating and validating business idea for improving the quality of life for families, communities and for achieving economic and environmental sustainability.

Entrepreneurs: are frequently not distinguished from managers and should mainly be viewed from the economic perspective. An entrepreneur means different things when viewed from different disciplines and different perspectives. This is because entrepreneurs are found in all professions – education, research, law, architecture, engineering, social work, distribution and so on. FMSUP (2010), observed that “to the economist, an entrepreneur is one who brings resources, raw materials and other assets into combinations that make their value greater than before and also one who introduces changes, innovations, and a new order. To the psychologist, such a person is typically driven by certain forces-need to obtain or attain something, to experiment, to accomplish, or perhaps to escape. Whereas to a businessman, the same entrepreneur may be an ally, a source of supply, a customer or someone who invest in something, the same person is seen by the capitalist philosopher as one who creates wealth for others as well, who finds better ways to utilize resources, and reduce waste, and who produces jobs others are glad to get.” In almost all of the definitions from all the perspectives and discipline, an entrepreneur must be able to show: Initiative taking; The organizing and reorganizing of social economic; mechanisms to turn resources and situations to useable and profitable goods and services; The acceptance of risk or failure. Therefore, Ejeka, (2013) affirms that an entrepreneur must be a person who has the ability to see and evaluate business opportunities, gather the necessary resources to take advantage of the opportunities and initiate suitable action to ensure success. He/she is a person who is a risk taker, who braves uncertainties by lunching out on his/her own through natural wisdom, devotion to duty and singleness of purpose to create a business and industrial activity where none previously existed. This he/she can achieve through the introduction of new goods or services, new methods of production, introduction and distribution, opening a new market by using new sources of supply and raw materials.

Characteristics of Entrepreneur:

S/No	Characteristics	Traits
1.	Self-confidence	Confidence, independence, individuality, optimism
2.	Task-result-oriented	Need for achievement, profit-oriented persistence, perseverance, determination, hard work, drive, energy, initiative.
3.	Risk-taker	Risk-taking ability, likes challenge.
4.	Leadership	Leadership behaviour gets along with others, responsive to suggestions, criticisms.

5.	Originality	Innovative, creative, flexible (openness of mind), resourceful, versatile, and knowledgeable).
6.	Future-oriented	Foresight perceptive.

Source: FMSUP, 2010.

Concept and meaning of Widow/Widowhood: A widow is a person whose spouse has died and has usually not remarried. The state of having lost one's husband to death is termed widowhood (Wikipedia). George (2012) defines widows as essentially married women with or without children who lose their husbands as a result of death and have not remarried. Idiala, (2012) stated that each ethnic group has its own set of rules or behaviour which are considered culturally appropriate; however, they may be harmful to the widow's health, financial position, social status and creative/innovative abilities.

Widow entrepreneurs are women who have taken over and are running their late husbands' businesses or companies. This can be challenging with emotional experience, as they navigate the complexities of entrepreneurship while also dealing with their personal loss. Women entrepreneurship in Nigeria traditional culture are considered homemakers and custodians of family honour. The societal norms and conservative practices are widespread. The social setting is often affected by tribal trends that promote patriarchal culture, thus ensuring women are structurally under men. That notwithstanding, women entrepreneurship is a growing phenomenon (Martinez & Marlow, 2017; Zahra & Wright, 2016), they are successful in creating and managing small business ventures (Stevenson & St-Onge 2011). which promote economic growth, creates jobs (Global Entrepreneurship Monitor Report, 2017) and improve quality of life (Orhan & Scott, 2001; McMullan & Warrice, 2016). Literature on women entrepreneurship, the role of the institutional environment and gender is fast emerging in the literature (Yunis et al., 2019) which offers a strong theoretical foundation for examining women-owned enterprises, yet widow entrepreneurs and the challenges they face are yet to be recognized. Theories of gendering enlightens more on the above: The feminist theory describes the "position" role of widows in society. While Institutional theory explain how female entrepreneurs are hindered and enabled by the environment in which they live and work (Scott, 2008; Bruton & Ahlstrom, 2010). According to Hanson, (1992) Feminism suggests that gender is not limited to women or femaleness, but how gender is institutionalized. Arguably, the understanding of gender provides important insights into entrepreneurship research and practice (Henry et al., 2016; Stead, 2017). Though women's social environment has a significant influence on their entrepreneurial activities which present additional barriers for business growth, still the presence of women entrepreneur continues to be felt in every sector in Nigeria. Fielden and Davidson (2005) contend that family issues may hinder women entrepreneurs' success. This remains the greatest challenge, particularly for women in a patriarchal society like Nigeria.

Challenges faced by widows' entrepreneurs: These depend on sector, location and business model. Prior studies have examined the challenges encountered by women entrepreneurs in Africa (Aladejebi, 2020) and elsewhere (Terjesen & Elam, 2012; Thébaud, 2015). Specifically, challenges associated with widowhood include:

Loneliness is perhaps the biggest challenge for widows. As they move through their own experiences of grief, loss, or trauma after the death of a spouse, they may feel like no one understands what they are going through and that everyone is too busy to reach out to them. It can make it difficult for them to cope with the sadness and grief of losing a loved one which will invariably slack her business through decreased sales, disrupted supply chains, difficulty paying credit instalments, etc. Dube, (2023) stated that findings show that widows in Africa face multiple challenges, including limited access to healthcare, property rights, social support, and harmful practices.

Another major challenge facing widows' entrepreneurs in Nigeria is the need to balance household responsibilities as family caretakers and businesses owners. Work-Family Conflict is the "simultaneous occurrence of two or more sets of pressures such that compliance with one would make more difficult compliance with the other" Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn and Snock (1964) in Ejeka, 2017. Demands from the business may conflict with pressures from the woman to give attention to family affairs. Inter-role conflict is experienced when pressures arising in a role as an entrepreneur are incompatible with pressures arising in family role more especially as a widow. The role pressures from the business and family domains are mutually incompatible with consequences of low job satisfaction and performance, high absenteeism rates, poor organization, reduced career commitment and increased psychological distress. Fielden and Davidson (2005) contend that family issues may hinder widows' entrepreneurs' success. This remains the greatest challenge, particularly for women in a patriarchal society like Nigeria.

Patriarchy Barrier: Gender inequality is constraint for widows when it comes to creating their own businesses. This ideology portrays men as dominant in the business world as women are meant to take care of the home. It is important for a woman venturing into a business to strategize how to balance family and business so as to reduce the possibility of such issues erupting.

Generally, women, widows inclusive face the following challenges: Ever-increasing number of women in Nigeria have been choosing small business ownership in as apparent attempt to escape their well-documented inequality in the labour market. With the just-released data from NBS, it was estimated that the overall number of persons in labour force was 80 million out of which males were 41.6 million while females were 38.6 million. However, generally, there are some challenges faced by women who want to venture into SMEs in the South-East Nigeria. These challenges include:

Lack of finance has been a major issue hindering widows from starting a business. Women entrepreneurs tend to have lower levels of financial capital than men entrepreneurs, raise smaller amounts of capital in both debt and equity, and rely on the internal source of financing (family, friend and personal savings) (Adesua-Lincoln, 2012).

Discrimination: Mahadeo, Dusoeye and Aujayeb-Rogbeer (2015) observed that the case of disparity between men and women entrepreneurship was pronounced. It has been argued that women tend to be more in a disadvantaged position due to discriminatory sociocultural norm which sees them as wives and mothers (Adesua-Lincoln, 2012). In Nigeria, women-owned businesses are not economically developed compared to that of men (Ekpe, Alabo & Egbe, 2014). This is due to institutional barriers which do not allow women to fully take part in economic empowerment programmes (Ekpe et al., 2014). Women are considered to have strongly connected to the family, and most work of maintaining the house is assigned to them (Motilewa, Onakoya & Oke, 2015). The generalization of 'gender' in Nigerian suggest that women are not supposed to engage in stressful and high risk-taking ventures. This has discouraged many South East widows from developing, running, and growing successful business ventures.

Lack of knowledge: Thorough investigation, navigation, and knowledge of a business to go into is very vital, to prevent the issue of wasting resources and time. A lot of women make the mistake of not having a good knowledge of what they are going into, such businesses usually go down the drain within 6 months to one year. It is crucial to navigate and find out if the business is worth venturing into. Ask these salient questions; who has done it before? what are they doing right? what are they doing wrong and what can be done differently in order to excel? Can one embrace change in managing business if need be? If these questions are not answered, one might end up making the same mistakes every other person is making.

Lack of skills which imbibed inferiority complex, that they lack the capability to succeed. Nevertheless, such mindset must be altered as there is nothing unfeasible to

accomplish in life, all it entails is a positive mindset and determination. Everybody must not be naturally skillful, there are proficiencies needed to learn, such as pay to learn or enroll in free online courses to equip oneself. Some commercial banks like Zenith bank plc are offering free online training on business.

Social and Traditional constraints: Some traditions believe that a woman is meant to stay at home and take care of the children and the household, such norm has left a lot of women especially widows depressed and frustrated.

Not opened to critics: Business is not always rosy especially at inception, negative reviews might come in from customers. Such reviews should not bring dejection, rather it should inspire one to embrace change management strategy to re-strategize and reshape the business. Customer's review is important as their opinion matters for business owners. Once noticed that, customers are not patronizing like before or the business is facing customer retention issues, the first thing to do is to find out what their reasons are through a review. We are in a digital age and there are software and applications that enable one to determine customers' behaviour. Aside from that, one can put a call through or send messages across to customers and potential customers to find out ways to serve them better. Also, one can put a Question/Answer on the social media business pages to get customers' feedback as it will help you revamp the business.

Lack of humility: Some women have the mindset of having up to millions of naira before they can set up a business. Such mindset has kept a lot of women jobless. It is important to start with the little capital one has as it will be surprising how the business will surge and flourish in the years to come.

Fear of failing: This negative mindset is a factor that widows need to look out for when starting a business. They feel the business they want to venture into is an extensive one. One key thing to note is, there is no business without a competitor. Focus should be on how to revamp the business to stand out. For example, in a community where tailoring is everybody's business around that locality, the question should be what will be the unique point? Or in an environment where event planning is a lucrative business, and everybody is going into it, the question should be what can be done differently to stand out? Some of the people say, "if you are looking for an event planner, Event by Ugbaku is top-notch".

Fear of Unforeseen Circumstances has been affecting widows from owing businesses. A vivid example was what some businesses faced during the Covid-19 lockdown when so many goods expired and vandalization of some people's businesses by miscreants during the EndSARS protest and Nationwide hunger protest. These incidences left some business owners' bankrupt.

Poor Business Structure has led some women to close their businesses. It is essential to have a business module and hire competent hands to assist with the seamless running of the business to enable the business to flourish. An example is hiring a salesperson, logistic persons, an accountant, social media specialist, etc.

Coping Strategies for Widow Entrepreneurs. According to Nwachukwu, Chládková & Zufan, (2017), dynamic business environment in the West African region in general, Nigeria in particular and South East to be specific where economic participation is crucial in achieving a competitive environment to enable shared prosperity, is pushing widows' entrepreneurs to search for how to remain competitive and survive in the marketplace. The competitive strategies are essential for all visionary widow entrepreneurs of the twenty-first century by understanding market context. Entrepreneurs act within a context determined by formal and informal rules. These rules can either enable or hinder entrepreneurship (Yunis et al., 2019). In the area of finance, the good thing is that some banks are offering loans to women going into SMEs in Nigeria. Some of these banks have special loan packages with a very low-interest rate.

Their criteria are; Have a registered business, open a business account, and run it for 6 months to one year to be qualified for a business loan.

Knowledge-Based Economy: Meta AI sees knowledge-based economy as an economic system that values and relies on the creation, dissemination and utilization of knowledge as a key driver of new opportunities for economic growth, innovation and societal progress. In such an economy, the production and exchange of knowledge-intensive goods and services are prioritized over traditional physical goods and services. Some features of a knowledge-based economy include: Emphasis on innovation, research and development; Highly skilled and educated workforce. Information and communication technology (ICT) play crucial roles such as Knowledge-intensive industries like software, biotechnology and finance are prominent; Collaboration and networking are essential for knowledge sharing and creation; Continuous learning and professional development are encouraged. It has transformed the way people work, live and interact; build resilience and adaptability in the face of uncertainty, rapid change and access to networks.

Innovation: According to Ejeka, (2013), innovation is the introduction of something new at any point in time. She further stated that to be innovative is to break new grounds. It is controlling for productivity, social network, scientific field, and employer characteristics, idea generation and product improvement, differences in business survival and growth. Meaningful innovations are backed up by decisive policies which give the implementers of the programme the necessary backing and parameter with which to forge ahead.

Mentorship: is a relationship between an experienced person (the mentor) and a less experienced person (the mentee) where the mentor provides guidance and support to help the mentee develop their skills, knowledge and career. Mentorship can be formal (structured programs) or informal (organic relationships). Mentorship involves: Encouraging and motivating; fostering personal and professional growth; sharing experiences and expertise; Setting goals and objectives; networking and marketing connection and providing feedback and constructive criticism. Effective mentorship benefits both parties, as mentors can: develop leadership and coaching skills; enhance their own experience and legacy as well as reflect on their own experiences and gain new insights. Mentees can build confidence and self-esteem; develop a supportive network and connections; gain valuable knowledge and skills as well, advance their careers and achieve goals. Therefore, mentorship is essential for personal and professional development, knowledge transfer and success in various fields, including widows' entrepreneurship.

Results

The main aim of this study was to investigate into change management as a tool for widow entrepreneurs' survival in a knowledge-based economy. Specifically, the study tends to: Identify specific challenges faced by widow entrepreneurs in adapting to change management in a knowledge-based economy.

Ascertain how change management strategies can help widow entrepreneurs build resilience and adaptability in the face of uncertainty in a knowledge-based economy.

Research Questions

The following Research Questions were used to guide the study

What are the specific challenges faced by widow entrepreneurs in adapting to change management in a knowledge-based economy?

How can change management strategies help widow entrepreneurs build resilience and adaptability in the face of uncertainty in a knowledge-based economy?

Design and instrument

This study was carried out in South-East of Nigeria, which utilized a phenomenological technique for qualitative analysis and a descriptive method for quantitative analysis. The choice of the phenomenological method is due to the intention of the researchers to draw

out the live experiences of widow entrepreneurs within the South-East Nigerian business environment. The survey was divided into A and B. Section A contains questions that sought personal demographics, the entrepreneur's perceptions of the business environment and their venture, the motivations and drives that led to the birth of their business. while section B contains questions on the specific challenges faced by widow entrepreneurs in adapting to change management and strategies to build resilience and adaptability in the face of uncertainty in a knowledge-based economy. The challenges of women entrepreneurs have been a continuous occurrence, hence, its adoption within the current study. A questionnaire containing 16 questions was used. The population comprised 120 entrepreneurs who are widows and are indigenes of South-East. Sample size of 100 was adopted by employing the purposive sampling technique, which allows a researcher to select respondents who can provide reliable information on the phenomenon under study (Silverman & Marvasti, 2008). The research questionnaire titled "Change Management as a Tool for Widow Entrepreneurs' Survival in a Knowledge-Based economy" was used for data collection. The reliability of the instrument was established using the test-retest and Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) to determine the reliability coefficient.

Section A: Demographic information shows that widows between ages 30-39 contribute to approximately 53% of surveyed participants, representing the largest part of the sample; Educational level: Few have Primary and Master's degree certificates while majority have WAEC and GCE certificates, some NCE/OND and Bachelor/HND certificates; Years of existence of business: shows how long surveyed widow entrepreneurs have been in business. More than half have only been in business a few years. Whereas at least 20% have been in business for two decades; With regards to the type of business amongst the women, it was observed that provision stores and supermarkets were the most common. Women who sold foodstuffs and frozen foods were also well represented. Other business areas include piggery (agriculture), hairdressing, sales of shoes and clothes, electronics and building materials, as well as small restaurants and with regards to whether or not women entrepreneurial businesses have been registered with Nigeria's Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC). shows that only 40% of participants are yet to get their business registered while 60% have registered.

Section B: Content Analysis

Figure 5: Ordinance of responses provided by widow entrepreneurs

S/N	Question	Responses	Ordinance
1	Meaning of entrepreneurship	Personal business ownership	Basic understanding
2	Mode of entrepreneurial skill acquisition	Learning via apprenticeship, family businesses, and business schools	Mentorship
3	Motivation for entrepreneurship	Ability to meet personal needs	Financial security and Independence
4	Entrepreneurial challenges	Running capital and irregular power supply	Paucity of Funds and infrastructural deficit
5	Reason(s) for entrepreneurial challenges	Inaccessibility to bank loans; economic challenges exacerbated by pandemic; laissez faire attitude by government	Lack of opportunities for business growth
6	Strategy(ies) to surpass challenges	Sourcing for alternative loan routes Customer service Credit sales	Resilience
7	Impact of adopted strategy(ies) on business	Mostly negative, clumsy process by microfinance banks for little amount of money	Frustration funding processes

8	Common barriers of female entrepreneurs	Spouse unwillingness to help in chores and care of children	Family structure
9	Impact of barriers on entrepreneurial abilities	Hindering business growth and expansion	Inability to fulfil business potentials
10	Impact of change management strategies	Face uncertainty in a knowledge-based economy	Build resilience and adaptability through innovation
11	Specific needs and change initiatives for survival	Zero resistance	unfreezing, changing and refreezing

Discussion

This study has presented insight into change management as a tool for widow entrepreneurs' survival in a knowledge-based economy. The study captures the interpretive accounts of the challenges, enablers and ordinance strategies adopted by widow entrepreneurs. When asked about the concept of entrepreneurship, many widow entrepreneurs seem to demonstrate a clear understanding of its meaning without mincing words. Furthermore, it was observed that many of them have mostly attained entrepreneurial skills from family businesses or apprenticeship programs. A few respondents also attended business schools where the knowledge of entrepreneurship was imbibed. Entrepreneurs need skills and knowledge to achieve success. As such, financial and economic knowhow are important competencies that can enable entrepreneurs, especially widow entrepreneurs to improve profitability (Vu & Nwachukwu, 2021). All these training avenues ensured that participants are sufficiently skilled to succeed as entrepreneurs. It is important for widows to embrace entrepreneurship to gain financial freedom and some level of independence. This seemed like the most common motivation amongst the widows for starting their businesses. Concerning the challenges faced, the paucity of funds was the main problem, as widows mostly use their personal savings, support from friends and family as well as few bank loans as capital for entrepreneurship business.

Many widow entrepreneurs hold the opinion that the availability of funds would have a positive impact on how much their businesses could grow. Lack of finance has been a major issue hindering widows from starting a business. Women entrepreneurs tend to have lower levels of financial capital than men entrepreneurs, raise smaller amounts of capital in both debt and equity, and rely on the internal source of financing (family, friend and personal savings) (Adesua-Lincoln, 2012).

Government's attitude towards the funding of small-scale business in Nigeria, especially those run by widows has not been encouraging. Although there are quite a few structures in place to help SMEs, their effect has not been felt (Oboh & Nwachukwu, 2018). In many cases, the loans available are insignificant compared to the number of people that apply for them. Notwithstanding the regular negative responses when they apply for loans, many of the widow entrepreneurs continue to demonstrate resilience by seeking alternative routes to securing loans. Some of the them explained that micro-finance banks are sometimes helpful, but that the process to secure very little amounts of money can be frustrating. There were also very high-interest rates charged by some of these banks. As such, the government's negligence of entrepreneurial funding issue was greatly criticized by many participants. A respondent stated that: "I don't have adequate funds to support expansion, however, I am being creative/innovative with the small funds I have so that my business can grow". This implies that although finances remain a major barrier to the success of widow entrepreneurship, innovativeness in business can help widows grow their businesses as it can be adopted as a survival strategy. A typical way for a small business to innovate is for entrepreneurs to learn from the mentors' experiences, successes, as well as failures of other businesses (Akinwale et al., 2017). This is related to the adoption of outside knowledge to grow and is commonly referred to as "open innovation" (Akinwale, 2018). Organizations need to create and renew their capabilities

(Nwachukwu & Vu, 2020) and find new ways to deliver their products and services to remain competitive (Nwachukwu, Zufan & Chládková, 2020). Furthermore, some of the participants who are into sales of frozen foods lamented and stressed the need for constant power supply. "Lack of regular power supply is the main problem for business, even if we get loan today, will we use all to buy fuel to power generators? "Buying fuel to power generator will have a negative impact on our businesses". The above response shows another barrier to the sustainability of widow entrepreneurial businesses. The impact of infrastructural deficit on entrepreneurship businesses (e.g., Obokoh & Goldman, 2016) is well documented in the Nigerian business literature. This affects all businesses, whether controlled by widows, women or not. In the provision of infrastructure, many of the women noted that government is not doing enough to help them. This is where the role of government is crucial, as infrastructural deficits would imply that there is little or no opportunities to grow. Another identified barrier is the issue of family structure and widows' stigmatization. One widow stated that: "My inability to travel far away to buy goods is affecting my business" because there will be no one to take care of the children if I travel". Widow entrepreneurs tend to be more concerned with balancing work and family, thus, deliberately choosing to keep their businesses small and easily controllable. Ejeka, 2017 stated that another major challenge facing widows' entrepreneurs in Nigeria is the need to balance household responsibilities as family caretakers and businesses owners. From the impact of change management strategy in knowledge-based economy, building resilience and adaptability through innovation is the ordinance. According to Ejeka, (2013), innovation is the introduction of something new at any point in time. She further stated that to be innovative is to break new grounds. It is controlling for productivity, social network, scientific field, and employer characteristics, idea generation and product up grading, differences in business survival and growth. Meta AI sees knowledge-based economy as an economic system that values and relies on the creation, dissemination and utilization of knowledge as a key driver of new opportunities for economic growth, innovation and societal progress. AI also asserts that change management strategies can be tailored to suit specific needs and change initiatives such as Prosci 3-Phase Change Management Process: Phase 1: Prepare for Change; Phase 2: Manage the Change and Phase 3: Sustain the Change. Lewin's 3-Step Change Model: Unfreezing (prepare for change); Changing (implement the change) and Refreezing (make the change permanent), etc. Overall, widow entrepreneurs face competition for sales from their fellow women and male counterparts and are mostly disadvantaged. All of these challenges hinder widow entrepreneurs from fulfilling their business potentials. Resilience and the ability to innovate are important strength for widow entrepreneurs, even when they do not have access to enough funding opportunities, creative education and training can foster widow entrepreneurs' creativity. Widow entrepreneurs are finding ways of strength with the barriers they are facing. A widow, a building materials seller stated that: "I offer good customer service and sell on credit to encourage customers to buy from me" "Though selling on credit has its disadvantages; it is the method am using to survive". Organizations need a robust strategy to deal with challenges posed by environmental dynamism and competition (Nwachukwu, Chládková & Olatunji, 2018). Customer satisfaction is essential to sustain customer loyalty (Deng et al., 2009; Nwachukwu & Zufan, 2017; Sabir et al., 2014) to survive in the marketplace. Given that, a satisfied customer will make repeated purchases and inform other customers about a firm's product/service. It is important to note that a poorly managed customer experience may lead to loss of patronage and revenue.

Conclusion: Resistance to change, paucity of funds, cumbersome loan processes, inadequate infrastructure, family structure are some challenges encountered by widow entrepreneurs in the South-East. Comprehensive and coordinated strategies, such as legal reforms, economic empowerment, awareness campaigns, and the provision of essential resources are necessary to address these multifaceted challenges. Furthermore, collaborative implementation of these strategies can promote gender equality, reduce fear of change, and enhance the lives of widows in African countries, Nigeria and South-East. There is a need for the urgency of comprehensive interventions and support systems to

alleviate the hardships faced by widows in the South-East. This paper draws that application of change management through innovation, technology implementation, process redesign, mentorship, training and development contribute to the overall success, growth and sustainability of the widow entrepreneurs' resilience and adaptability in the face of knowledge-based economy. Furthermore, resilience, resourcefulness and commitment to justice and equity are the values that defined widows as a people, free from discrimination, where their wielding influence, wisdom, contributions are noticed, recognized and their uniqueness celebrated. They are beacons of hope, catalysts for change and celebrations of the indomitable spirit that embrace change management in the phase of knowledge-based economy.

Conclusion

The paper therefore, recommended that:

Building a digital culture, minimizing resistance to change, achieving business objectives, enhancing agility that mirrors the technological demands of modern business environments should be adopted. Government should provide adequate infrastructure to support widow entrepreneurs

Lending institutions should make it easy for widow entrepreneurs to assess loans for their businesses

Government agencies for example Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency (SMEDAN) must ensure that loans are granted according to laid down rules to favour widow entrepreneurs.

Widow entrepreneurs should register their businesses with the Corporate Affairs Commission and other relevant government agencies as this can facilitate easy access to funding and support.

Widow entrepreneurs can hire household helpers, seek support from friends and families, delegate business tasks, and prioritize tasks to avoid work-family conflict.

There is need to improving access to education and economic opportunities, and strengthening social protection systems that are crucial steps towards creating a more inclusive and equitable society for widows.

Change management is essential for widow entrepreneurs to adapt to changing markets, technologies and customer needs to ensure that changes are implemented efficiently and effectively.

When the change management is adapted, widow entrepreneurs can serve as inspiring role models for other women in business and demonstrate the importance of women empowerment and leadership; business succession planning; supporting women in entrepreneurship as well as embracing diversity and inclusion in business. Their stories and experiences, therefore, can help to motivate and encourage others to pursue their entrepreneurial dreams, even in the face of adversity as widows.

Shortcoming: This study has some shortcoming. Researchers used a qualitative and descriptive approach, with a non-probability sample which somewhat limits its generalizability beyond this context. Nonetheless, this study adds to the debate on change management and widow entrepreneurs in a knowledge-based economy.

REFERENCES

1. Adesua-Lincoln, (2012). Prospects and Challenges of Women Entrepreneurs in Nigeria,(November 28, 2012). Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2181943> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2181943>
2. Akinwale, Y. (2018). Empirical analysis of inbound open innovation and small and medium sized

- enterprises' performance: Evidence from oil and gas industry. *South African Journal of Economic and Management Sciences*, 21(1),1-9.
3. Akinwale Y., Adepoju, A. & Olomu, M. (2017). The impact of technological innovation on SMEs profitability in Nigeria. *International Journal of Research, Innovation and Commercialization*, 1(1), 74–92.
 4. Aladejebi, O. (2020). 21st Century Challenges Confronting Women Entrepreneurs in Southwest Nigeria. *Archives of Business Research*, 8(3), 261-280.
 5. Bokoh, L.O. & Goldman, G. (2016). Infrastructure deficiency and the performance of small and medium-sized enterprises in Nigeria's Liberalised Economy. *Acta Commer.*, 16(1), 1-10.
 6. Bruton, G. D., Ahlstrom, D. & Li, H. L. (2010). Institutional theory and entrepreneurship: Where are we now and where do we need to move in the future? *Entrep. Theory Pract.* 34, 421–440.
 7. Deng, Z., Lu, Y., Wei, K.K & Zhang, J. (2009). Understanding customer satisfaction and loyalty: An empirical study of mobile instant messages in China. *International Journal of Information Management*, 30(4), 289 – 300.
 8. Dube, M. (2022). Isolation and Its Impact on Widows: Insights from Low-Resourced Communities in Binga District, Zimbabwe. *Social Sciences*, 11: 298. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci11070298>. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci11070298>
 9. Ejeka, A. U. (2013). Business Opportunity Evaluation, *The Fundamentals of Entrepreneurship Introduction to Entrepreneurship and Innovation*, edited by B. N. Nwaiwu. Great Stars Publishers International Company, Owerri. 223-293
 10. Ejeka, A. U. (2013). Business Opportunity Evaluation, *The Fundamentals of Entrepreneurship Introduction to Entrepreneurship and Innovation*, edited by B. N. Nwaiwu. Great Stars Publishers International Company, Owerri. 223-293
 11. Ejeka, A. U. (2013). Elements of Marketing. *The Fundamentals of Entrepreneurship* edited by B. N. Nwaiwu 223 – 293. Great Stars Publishers International Company, Owerri.
 12. Ekpe, D.E Alabo, E. & Egbe, I.J. (2014). Women, gender equality in Nigeria: A critical analysis of socioeconomic and political (gender issues). *Journal Research in Peace Gender and Development*, 4(1), 15–20.
 13. Fielden, S. I. & Davidson J. M. (2005). The way forward for women small business owners', *International Handbook of Women and Small Business Entrepreneurship*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited.
 14. George, T. O. (2012). Policy response on widowhood rites among the Awori of Ogun State, Nigeria. *American International Journal of Contemporary Research*. 2(5): 187-193
 15. Global Entrepreneurship Research Association (GERAI. 2017). Global entrepreneurship monitors Global report 2016/17. Available from <https://www.gemconsortium.org/report>.
 16. Hanson, S. (1992). Geography and feminism: Worlds in collision? *Ann. Assoc. Am. Geogr.* 82, 569–586.

17. Henry, C., Foss, L & Ahl, H., (2016). Gender and entrepreneurship research: A review of methodological approaches. *Int. Small Bus. J.*, 34, 217–241.
18. Idiala, E. E. (2012). The inhuman treatment of widows in African communities. *Current Research Journal of Social Sciences*, 4(1): 6-11
19. Mahadeo, J. D., Dusoye I. C. Aujayeb-Rogbeer, A. (2015). Women and entrepreneurship: an alluring or luring option. *Int. J. Entrepreneurship and Small Business*, 25(3), 351–374.
20. Martinez Dy, A. & Marlow, S. (2017). *Women Entrepreneurs and Their Ventures: Complicating Categories and Contextualising Gender*. London, UK: Routledge
21. McMullan J.S. & Warnice, B.J. (2016). Should we require every new venture to be a hybrid organization? *J. Manag. Stud.* 53, 630–662.
22. Motilewa, B.D., Onakoya O. & Oke, A.D. (2015). ICT and gender specific challenges faced by female entrepreneurs in Nigeria. *International Journal of Business and Social Science*, 6(3), 97-105.
23. Nwachukwu, C. & Vu, M. H. (2020). Strategic flexibility, strategic leadership and business sustainability nexus. *International Journal of Business Environment*, 11(2), 125-143.
24. Nwachukwu, C., Žufan, P. & Chládková, H. (2020). Employee commitment to strategy implementation and strategic performance: Organizational Policy as Moderator. *International Journal of Business Excellence*, 20(3), 398-418
25. Nwachukwu, C., Chládková H. & Olatunji, F. (2018). Strategy formulation process and innovation performance nexus. *International Journal for Quality Research*, 12(1), 147–164.
26. Nwachukwu, C., Chládková H., & Zufan, P. (2017) 'The relationship between entrepreneurial orientation, entrepreneurial competencies, entrepreneurial leadership and firm performance: A proposed model. *Business Trends*, 7(1), 3-16
27. Obioma, F. (2011). "They sold everything" in the Vanguard Newspaper, (26th November)
28. Oboh, I. & Nwachukwu, C.E. (2018). Entrepreneurial support in Nigeria: A review paper. *Management Strategies*, 2(40), 45-51.
29. Orhan, M. & Scott, D. 2001. Why women enter into entrepreneurship: An explanatory model. *Women Manag. Rev.* 16, 232–247.
30. Sabir, R., Ghafoor, O., Hafeez, I., Akhtar, N. & Rehman, A. (2014). Factors affecting Customer Satisfaction in Restaurants industry in Pakistan. *International review of Management and Business Research*, 3(2), 869 – 876.
31. Scott, W. (2008). Approaching Adulthood: The Maturing of Institutional Theory. *Theory and Society*, 37(5), 427-442.
32. Silverman, D. & Marvasti, A. (2008). *Doing Qualitative Research: A Comprehensive Guide*. Thousand Oaks, CA, USA: Sage.
33. Stead, V. (2017). Belonging and women entrepreneurs: Women's navigation of gendered assumptions in entrepreneurial practice. *Int. Small Bus. J.* 35, 61–77.

34. Shumbamhini, M. (2020). Widowed women in Africa denied basic human rights. Global Sisters Report. Retrieved from: <https://www.globalsistersreport.org/social-justice/widowed-women-africa-denied-basic-human-rights>
35. Terjesen, S., & Elam, A. (2012). Women Entrepreneurship: A Force for Growth. *International Trade Forum*, 2, 16–18.
36. Thébaud, S. (2015). Business as plan B: institutional foundations of gender inequality in entrepreneurship across 24 industrialized countries. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 60(4), 671–711.
37. The Conversation Africa. (2023). Widows in Nigeria are sometimes treated badly: culture is no excuse to violate rights.
38. United Nations Human Rights. (2014). Women’s Rights are Human Rights. Retrieved from: <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Events/WHRD/WomenRightsAreHR.pdf>
39. Vu, H. M. & Nwachukwu, C. (2021). Influence of entrepreneur competencies on profitability and employee satisfaction. *International Journal of Management and Enterprise Development*, 20(1), 1-16.
40. Wikipedia). Wikipedia) (2022). <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/widow>
41. Yunis, M. S., Hashim, H. & Anderson, A. R. (2019). Enablers and constraints of female entrepreneurship in Khyber Pukhtunkhawa, Pakistan: Institutional and Feminist Perspectives, *Sustainability*, 11(27), 1-20.
42. Zahra, S. A. & Wright, M. (2016). Understanding the social role of entrepreneurship. *J. Manag. Stud.* 53, 610–629.