

PhD Dissemination Seminar

MAK, March 25, 2011

Presenter: Dr. Julius Kikooma

Discussant: Dr. Warren Byabashaija

Dissertation Title: **Doing Entrepreneurship in Uganda: The Social Construction of Gendered Identities of Male and Female Entrepreneurs**

Discussant's Comments

1. Thanks to the organizers for the invitation
2. My understanding of the purpose of the seminar series:
 - To nurture the next generation of academics
 - To raise issues that may be useful to Government in it's policy formulation

My comments will be guided by these broad objectives
3. Thank Dr. Kikooma for the excellent academic workmanship.
 - Work is articulate
 - More than adequate justification for the qualitative methodology
 - Very good philosophical arguments to drive the points home
4. Stated goals of the study:
 - Primary: To examine entrepreneur experiences of a set of Ugandan business owners and their firms in order to understand how societal and organizational life in a particular societal context reflects a process of "power-based" reality construction
 - Secondary: develop a conceptual and methodological framework for researching forms of entrepreneurship in developing societal settings (i.e. an approach flexible enough to accommodate the breadth and diversity of entrepreneurial experiences in developing economies).
5. Premises in the study that I believe merit comment and debate:
 - That extant research is personality (read masculine hero) based. May have been true up to 20 years ago. One would be hard pressed to find research in the last couple of years that focuses entirely on traits as a means of theorizing about the incidence or practice of entrepreneurship. Focus has since moved away from identifying the "ideal" entrepreneur

- The study adopts Chell's (2000) stance that entrepreneurial outcomes are a result of the interaction between the individual's psychodynamics and his/her social environment. More broadly, the institutional environment. This is spot on but as the citation suggests, it is not new. It is the basis of the contingency and competence "theories" of entrepreneurship. What the audience might want to debate is whether or not entrepreneurs constitute active agents that can create their own reality while simultaneously operating within societal reality which ostensibly draws the lines on what is and is not possible (see page 47). In other words:

- Is there a role for agency? To what extent can an individual firm influence meaning? Is there room for negotiation?
- Is the entrepreneur's personal world an ordering of his/her experiences or the entrepreneur's world constructed by society?
- To what extent is a woman's entrepreneurial choices cognitively ordered as opposed to socially constructed?

OR as Julius surmises on page 47

- Should we be looking for a balance between the cognitive and social dimensions? What role do entrepreneurial practices of improvisation and experimentation play?

Jepperson's (1991) and Kanungo's (1998) concepts of strategic adaptation and population ecology perspectives spring to mind.

- Related to the above the study adopts a perspective that frames entrepreneurship as being socially constructed. What I would ask this audience to debate is whether the Chell (2000) as well as other do not actually intimate that entrepreneurship is socially embedded rather than socially constructed. Or is there no difference? So, when we seek to understand entrepreneurship as sense making in action are we saying the entrepreneur's actions are constructed by society or are best understood "taking into consideration" societal mores? Isn't this what the author refers to on page 53 when he states that "entrepreneurship is a process in which focal individual's actions are

Indeed what I find spot on and very useful to academics and policy makers is the statement on page 55 that calls for the understanding of “doing business as a social practice and the sense making that is associated with it.”

BTW while it is true that the structure of the situation shapes the action possibility set of the entrepreneur, it is incorrect to claim that thus far research has treated contextual forces (e.g. culture) as endogenous (pg 53-54).

- Old debate on what constitutes entrepreneurship. Is there a distinction between a business person, a manager and an entrepreneur? In case 8 (Betty), who is the entrepreneur – Betty, the lawyer, or both? In Victoria’s case, does the entrepreneurial act lie in driving the taxi or starting the taxi business? Indeed on page 131, the thesis makes reference (albeit indirectly) to entrepreneurship being defined by new and innovative actions.
6. From the case stories, the researcher elicits three frames – narrative as language, knowledge, and metaphor that I found very enlightening in getting a deeper understanding of the practice of entrepreneurship and the social complexities that add or take away from its success.
 7. A few observations about the selected cases:
 - The author makes no claim about the generalizability of his findings. That notwithstanding, do the selected cases provide a general overview of “doing entrepreneurship in Uganda?”
 - Isn’t there obvious bias in the sense that literally all cases can be classified as successful? To what extent does social construction evoke, not just challenges but failure?
 - An average age of 55. Is that telling?
 - Some of the firms are quite large and date back to more than 20 years ago. Are they still entrepreneuring?
 8. Results:
 - Results classify the cases into “big-man-ship” “African woman” and “cultural entrepreneurship”

- Author states that case 1 appears to confirm traditional theories of heroism – thinking big or big dreams, (desire to) making an impact on society, taking measured risk. All true but:
 - Is there anything in the big-man dreams that is masculine? Is the heroism engendered by society i.e. where is the social construction in this? Could it be that the researcher’s “social construction” is playing a part in the analysis?
 - Don’t we need heroism to separate entrepreneurs from business people?
 - The African woman (case 10) – I do not think that in terms of dreams, risk taking, and impact on society this case differs materially from case 1. The same applies to authority, strength, and field work. Both entrepreneurs face and overcome challenges from the external environment. Plus case 10 refers to an “indomitable spirit” – just as masculine as the grandiose language of case 1 (the thesis more or less acknowledges this on page 98). Indeed later in the thesis, the author states that “women and men cross traditional gender boundaries that challenge [the social norm].”
 - The case for the third category does not come out as clearly as the other two. However, I see the term cultural entrepreneurship as a misnomer. I see cultural entrepreneurship as part of institutional entrepreneurship focused on innovatively reengineering the status of institutions in which entrepreneurship practice is embedded to make them more conducive to entrepreneurial activity.
 - Gender roles in society:
 - Author observes that they are at the heart of the type of businesses females are involved in. This may be true because that is where they have competences. The roles are certainly society dictated. However, is the “condemnation” universal i.e. women enterprise-wide?
 - Author also argues that imposing a new regime would “require inducing change in the context of female-male relationship.” Betty’s case is used to exemplify this. Isn’t the author reading too much in the Betty-male lawyer relationship – a parenting relationship as he calls it?
9. About entrepreneurial success: I concur with the author and with the narratives of cases 4 and 10 that (i) success is a moving target, and (ii) success should not always be measured in financial terms. It is multifaceted and with multiple access routes. I also see a strong case here for social construction in the sense making of what constitutes success.

10. Lamentations: lack of continuity of family businesses, knowledge not ploughed back, and work ethics Ugandan workers in it for themselves) are all germane concerns. They are not gendered but there may be truth in their originating from societal biases.

11. Conclusions of the study:

- The social construction of entrepreneurship – see as problematic theories steeped in masculinity. Long moved on as discussed earlier.
- Beyond dichotomies, dualities and so on – indeed the essay provides a new way the entrepreneurship phenomenon and practises in Uganda. We ought to concede that at the present time there is a dearth of female role models and as a consequence referents are more often than not male entrepreneurs.
- Context issues – as already discussed
- Cultural entrepreneurship – as discussed.

12. My take (what I believe would be of import to academics and policy)

- Entrepreneurship as a social construction of reality
- Examination of or understanding entrepreneurship practice in Uganda from a gendered perspective.
- Is there a prototypical profile that typifies the Ugandan entrepreneur? And, is this gendered? Sadly, the thesis concludes that there is none (page 114) which is in conformity with traits research elsewhere. What I believe research needs to profile are the institutional (including cultural) pillars that support the incidence and growth of entrepreneurship (and in so doing also profile the encumbrances) hinder

13. End by congratulating once again Dr Julius Kikooma of a mind provoking philosophical presentation that constitutes his doctoral dissertation. Well done sir!