

## **LIFE OF MARY NZIMIRO (1898 – 1993): LESSONS FOR THE FUTURE OF WOMEN ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN SOUTH EASTERN REGION, NIGERIA**

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### **Abstract**

The paper examines the business career and life history of Mary Nzimiro, who rose from petty trader to become a prominent merchant. She started her trading career in the 1920s in Oguta. By 1948 she had become the principal agent of the UAC for the entire Eastern Nigerian Region, and represented the Company in Ghana and Sierra Leone. With a monthly turnover of 6,000-8,000 pounds, she recruited, trained and financed other women traders and assisted other women to obtain credit from the European commercial firms. She invested her money in real estates, education, and philanthropy. She carved out a place for herself in the annals of South-Eastern Nigeria in the area of commerce, for which there are lessons to be learnt for the enhancement of the future of women entrepreneurship in the South Eastern Region of Nigeria. The data for the study were obtained from oral interviews and a variety of secondary sources.

**Keywords:** Women; Entrepreneurship; South Eastern region; Lessons learnt; Mary Nzimiro.

### **Introduction**

Entrepreneurs or managers of resources are vital to the growth of any economy. Ahmed (1998) defined an entrepreneur as one who provides the society with a product or service, bearing all the risks of success or failure (the owner being the manager and the proprietor). Therefore, entrepreneurship involves the willingness and ability of an individual to seek for investment opportunities and to establish and run an enterprise successfully. Micro and small enterprises are known to be the leading force in the development of African economies.

In private enterprise, entrepreneurs being the principal factor in private enterprise, determine the success or failure of the economy of any nation. Small and medium enterprises are engines that run an economy. The entrepreneurs, by the role they play, pilot the affairs and direction of an economic system. Entrepreneurship or investing is not an exclusive reserve of any gender. Many new enterprises are founded, owned and/or managed by women (Green & Cohen, 1995). Both women and men generate the same result provided they follow the principles of investment. There are even proofs that women are better investors than men. This is because they know how to handle money and can be greater

entrepreneurs. They are even perceived to be endowed with some exceptional abilities, a fact corroborated by Leith-Ross (1939).

While Nigerian men's motivation for business ownership stems from their need to obtain monetary rewards and profits and for personal liberty, Onyenechere (2008) revealed that their women counterpart engaged in business in order to reduce poverty. Most women in our environment today are homemakers, but a woman who is busy as an entrepreneur brings a balance to the home. South Eastern Nigerian men and women are reputed to possess extra ordinary enterprising spirit, and to value enterprise. Indeed, the number of the women entrepreneurs has increased significantly over the last two decades. While some are in manufacturing, most are engaged in bulk or retail trading ventures. In South Eastern Nigeria, women deal largely with agricultural commodities followed by manufactured goods. These women are confronted daily with particular challenges which border on gender issue, economic or socio-cultural barriers etc.

The literature on entrepreneurship in Nigeria is very limited and has tended to show a distinctly patriarchal bias. Their definitions of entrepreneur and entrepreneurship do not sufficiently reflect the experiences of Nigerian women, especially those in the South-east. This paper explores the life and times of Chief (Mrs.) Mary Nzimiro, to provide insight into the experiences of Eastern Nigeria women entrepreneurs in the colonial and early post-colonial periods. Building on the pioneering efforts of Ekejiuba (1967) and Chuku (1999) to study women entrepreneur(s), the paper offers some ideas on ways to address present and future issues of women entrepreneurship in South Eastern region of Nigeria. Regional development planning needs to be closely related to history, especially when one is studying economic transformation and overall development of regions and her people. According to Anyanwu (2006), a complete and balanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities of business enterprise can best be attained with historical insights.

### **Methodology**

The study adopted a multidisciplinary approach, and sought to draw from the experiences of Chief (Mrs.) Mary Nzimiro. It sought to establish some lessons for the present and the future of women entrepreneurship in South Eastern Nigeria. To achieve this, the paper analyzed her background, and the opportunities she explored on her way to success. It also examined factors that contributed to her business successes and how these factors can be harnessed for improving women entrepreneurship now and in the future. Results from this study hopefully can provide some helpful information to policy formulators/decision makers, women entrepreneurs, and others that have or are likely to have a role to play in creating conducive environment for the development of the private sector in South Eastern Region of Nigeria. Data for the study were both from primary and secondary sources, mainly oral sources from personal interviews, official records and private papers. The secondary sources were mainly works by early European writers, and works by indigenous historians, economists and sociologists found in books, journals, periodicals and in the internet. Direct observation was another technique which was adopted to bridge the gap in information and to illuminate the issues raised.

### **Findings and Discussion on the Background to the Life and Times of Mary Nzimiro**

There is a great deal of information on the economic activities of Eastern Nigerian women in the pre-colonial era (Ukwu, 1967; Hopkins, 1973; Amadiume, 1987). Chuku (1999) and Leith-Ross (1939) have reported the predominance of women entrepreneurs in Eastern Nigeria, describing those women entrepreneurs as shrewd business women. In the pre-colonial and colonial era, rural women were engaged in commercial activities for many reasons, mainly, supplementing family income. However, this involvement brought enormous wealth to a few of them, and made them very popular and powerful. Omu Okweio's wealth for instance, gave her a political position in her Ossomari community (Afigbo, 1991). South Eastern Nigerian women continued to dominate retail trade up to the colonial period. It was in the colonial period that a change in the trend was witnessed, due to the negative impact of colonial rule on the status of these women. Colonial administrators and missionaries introduced European patriarchal ideology in South Eastern Nigeria, which led to women being treated as subordinate to men. They undermined the already existing financial independence of the women (Abaraonye, 1997). It was an era that did not fetch wealth particularly to the generality of women in business ventures, in comparison to their male counterparts. This situation continued into the post-colonial period.

The early post colonial period not only scattered women entrepreneurs who hitherto had strong organizations such as women market traders association, it ushered in a shift in Nigeria's economic base from agriculture to oil (petroleum) exploitation and exportation. With the resultant oil boom and a redirection of government policy, the percentage of women entrepreneurs in the commercial sector decreased. The Nigerian civil war also took its toll on the business ventures of the women, many of whom had to start from the scratch in the face of fiscal crunch. It was just only in the last two decades that the number of female entrepreneurs in South Eastern Nigeria increased significantly, following the global oil glut of the eighties and subsequent depression of the economy. The Structural Adjustment Policies and Programmes introduced in Nigeria to aid the ailing economy led to job losses in the formal sector, as many women and men got retrenched from the civil service especially those from the South East. For the women to help support themselves and their families at that time, they resorted to various commercial activities. By the late 1980s and 1990s their numbers swelled in the informal sector.

With the current global economic meltdown of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the present macro-economic situation, women entrepreneurs need to invest more. There is every need for them to acquire relevant knowledge be it historical, technical or otherwise to be able to transform their economic fortunes and that of the South Eastern region. In this era, the women entrepreneurs of the South-east are contributing to the development of the region in the following areas and even more; contribution to self help development projects, enhancement of internally generated revenue through payment for stores, shops or factory premises to government, enhancement in the education of children, mobilization of fellow women to participate in politics, improvement in nutritional intake among households, mobilization and utilization of local resources, reduction in the incidence of poverty, creation of employment opportunities. All these are being achieved despite the incessant challenges confronting them, and constraints they face in a depressed economy. Challenges which emanate from an amalgamation of several factors such as social structure, evolution of custom and tradition, faulty government policies and a carryover of the patriarchal

philosophy entrenched in people from the period of colonial rule till date. This situation has led many to observe that the global economic development resources and property ownership are concentrated in the hands of more men than women. In the area of credit for instance, the women entrepreneurs rarely have property such as land which they can offer as collateral to secure bank loans, and this in turn makes their access to credit to be greatly restricted. The case is the same with the acquisition of other production inputs.

It is in the face of increased globalization, the burden of motherhood/care-giving entrenched in family life, and other challenges that a great number of enterprises owned and managed by the women are seemingly small and with low success. It is only a few notable women entrepreneurs that have pulled through in this era. The highpoints of this study are revealed in the following historical truths below, which are based to some extent on materials collected during several interviews with Oputa Onumonu, Okpara Frank Onumonu and wife, Samuel Nzimiro Anozie, Barr. Odochi and Anayo Orjiako in the months of November and December, 2010. In addition, I had access to Mary Nzimiro's burial brochure through the assistance of her brother, Okpara Frank Onumonu of Oguta.

### **Mary Nzimiro's Life and Times**

Trade occupies a central position in Eastern Nigeria business enterprise so much that among the people, business is easily interpreted as synonymous with trade (Anyanwu, 2006). No wonder Mary Nzimiro started out as a petty trader. Mba (1982) had observed that up to 1900 in some parts of Eastern Nigeria, particularly in the riverine areas, the men regarded trade as women's work. Mary is one of the shining examples of successful Igbo people who participated in the colonial trade. She is one of the women of Oguta community that Leith-Ross (1939) described as big traders, famous for their wealth and power. This subsection examines her background, motivation for business, and the opportunities she exploited to become famous in the business world of her time. Chief (Mrs.) Mary Nwametu Nzimiro was born on 16<sup>th</sup> October 1898 in Oguta community, South Eastern Nigeria. She was the daughter of Chief David Onumonu Uzoaru of Umutaogwuma village and Mrs. Ruth Nwanyiafor Onumonu (nee Okwuosha) of Umudei village, both in Oguta. Her parents were both produce merchants with the Royal Niger Company before they got married. Her father was appointed a Warrant Chief alongside Akpati Nzeribe by her Majesty the Queen of England. Her mother was the famous palm produce trader who opened bank accounts for herself and her two daughters in England in the 1930s. She had grown wealthy as a result of the middleman trade with the Europeans that had penetrated the interior (Nwabughuogu, 1982), and was widely recognized as the leading merchant in the old Owerri province (Leith-Ross, 1939). She provided the first foreign contacts that gave Mary a good start in her business career. Mary's parents were achievers, and were one of the first families to build a two storey building in the late 1910s. By 1921 they had bought a kitcar which was uncommon at that time. Her motivation for business derived from her family background, as well as her determination for success and self-fulfillment.

By 1914, she attended the first primary school in Oguta, the Sacred Heart Primary School. She was the only girl in the school at that time, and the man she later married was her classmate. Later, she attended St. Joseph's Girls' Convent in Asaba, and graduated in 1920. The same year she married Richard Okwosha Nzimiro of Umunsoha village who was an agent of United Africa Company (formerly Royal Niger Company). By 1921, she had started trading in palm oil, salt and European merchandise. During the early years of her

marriage, she lived with her husband at Aba, Illah, Onitsha, Opobo and finally Port Harcourt in 1945. She came from a religious background, a fact worthy of mention. Her parents were one of the first ardent supporters of òInaija Churchö headed by one Prophet Elijah (a migrant) in Oguta, established in 1916 in their compound. Dissatisfied with the management of that church, they asked for the establishment of the CMS School/Church in Oguta in 1918 (known today as St. Mary Magdalene Anglican Church). They got baptized and supported that church till their death. Chief Onumonu Uzoaru did not only bring the C.M.S. Church to Oguta community but believed in equal educational opportunities for his sons and daughters. In the early forties, he had five daughters and a son in England (Burial Brochure of Mama M. Onyenma, 2009).

Mary, as a young entrepreneur or business person saw many opportunities in the colonial period that could be harnessed for success, such as the introduction of a common currency, improved transportation system, peace and stability imposed by imperial government, and increased urbanization. For instance the facility of the river port and the establishment of several European trading firms and factories at the time in her home town of origin provided the incentive. These formed her stepping stones that placed her enterprise advantageously and strategically. Being a period in transition, nothing was static. According to Nwaka (1979) by 1945, the commercial dominance of Oguta, in relation to the rest of the other towns of the region began to decline. The existence of the railway line and seaport in Port Harcourt (the then headquarters of Owerri Province) pulled her budding enterprise there in search of new opportunities. Thus, their out-migration from Owerri Province was prompted by a decline in the total export of palm oil and kernel witnessed in 1945, largely caused by the presence of roads and rails, the establishment of new trading depots along the railway lines, and the introduction of produce inspectors (Nwabughuogu, 1982).

Her husband worked for UAC in Port Harcourt, first as a clerk, and later rose to become manager. From Port Harcourt he was transferred to Opobo, and then back to Port Harcourt after a short stay. With the support of the UAC while in Port Harcourt, Mary added textiles and cosmetics to her items of trade. She first engaged in distributive (retail) trade before graduating to wholesale trade and direct importation of goods. Her husband retired from his job with UAC when he found that trading was more lucrative, and joined her in her business. From then, she became the chief promoter of various commercial enterprises, and grew to become the principal agent of UAC. In 1950, during a routine sales probe, Madam Mary Nzimiro testified that her estimated monthly turnover was £6,000 - £8,000 (Mba, 1982; Chuku, 1999). With her controlling capital amounting to hundreds of thousands or indeed millions of pounds, she became associated and involved with banking and allied services in the 1940s and 1950s, when indigenous and non-indigenous banks sprang up and started attracting traders.

As principal factor of UAC in West Africa, she was synonymous with UAC, such that UAC was her. She represented the company in Ghana and Sierra Leone. When business in towns like Onitsha and Aba expanded in the late 1950s and the 1960s, retailers from these markets bought from her goods which she had gotten shipped for her from England. She was simply gifted in trade; and due to her flourishing business she owned shops in several places: Port Harcourt, Onitsha and Aba. Her major item of trade was textile, even though she also sold cosmetics. According to an interviewee, she had such people as Anumudu, Akwaiwu, Asinobi, Ihekwa, Orji Ogbu and countless others who

came to buy her goods for resale. She bought two barges that helped facilitate movement of her goods. While running her enterprise, then known as Priscilla and Brothers Company, she employed James Irono, had Augustine Azogu as salesman, and Francis Ezeobi as manager. To a large extent, the trade on real georges (Indian Madras), damask, velveteen, intorica, wax in the southeast was controlled by her. She was in-charge of òHollandø jarkelö as a major distributor. During this period she joined NCNC Party led by Nnamdi Azikiwe and became active in politics. She rose to the post of Vice President and member of some of the Partyø committees. She also contributed to Party finances (Mba, 1982).

Her fame and wealth led her to visit most parts of the world either on invitation or by simple personal desire to visit other parts of Europe, Africa and America. She even appeared on Life Magazine of May 4, 1953 page 66, in an article titled òMillion Dollar Operatorö as one who drinks champagne as morning appetizer. With the contacts she made locally and internationally, she diversified and expanded her business venture. With a staff of 20, she went into manufacturing of menø under shirts (singlets) which led to the birth of Nzimiro Industries Limited. From the profits made, she acquired property, mainly several plots of undeveloped land, built several houses and owned petrol/gas stations. She owned several Companiesø shares, stocks and bonds as well as vehicles such as Jaguar, BMW, Range Rover, Peugeot wagons, trucks, and tippers and also owned lots of gold trinkets, coral beads and clothes. Vauxhall with registration number P-1880 which is one of her cars is a relic that can still be found at Delta House in Oguta. As a politician, her influence helped her to acquire land in Lagos.

She was a philanthropist that supported many people in one way or the other. According to another interviewee, the beneficiaries include Martha Nwapa, Rosemary Inyama, Ikenna Nzimiro, Margaret Oputa, Hypolite Iyasara, Onyeka Onwenu, Obiaku Nwosu, Okwosa Onumonu, and Oputa Onumonu among others. For those she did not give money outright, she offered loans, and even cleared the debts of some family members and friends. When the Oguta studentsø union challenged the leaders of the town to build a secondary school for the boys in Oguta, Mary Nzimiro and her husband took up the challenge. In 1949, they established the first secondary school in Oguta known as òWilliam Wilberforce College.ö Later the school was renamed -Priscilla Memorial Grammar Schoolö (P.M.G.S.) in 1951, named after her late daughter Priscilla Ada Nzimiro. Today the school is known as òPriscilla Memorial Secondary School. Later, in 1966 she recognized the glaring neglect of secondary education for girls in Oguta, and founded Nzimiro Memorial Girls Secondary School, in honour of her late husband. She also awarded many scholarships to female and male students alike.

Her husband, Ogbuagu Richard Okwosha Nzimiro (Amadi-aso-onwu), was the son of Nzimiro Nwedo and Madonna Nhagide of Umunsoha village of Oguta. He taught at Uli, became a shop keeper at Illah, and later became an agent of UAC at Oguta; a clerk of UAC at Opobo and Port Harcourt before he fully joined business. He became the first Mayor of Port Harcourt in 1956, and was a philanthropist and co-proprietor of P.M.G.S. Many people in Oguta have fond memories of him as a generous man. Mary Nzimiro, was both a wife and a mother. Her first daughter was born at Illah in 1923 and died in Glasgow in 1951. She was the first Igbo lady medical doctor.

She, like other mortals, had some difficulties and trying moments in her life time. The Oguta chieftaincy dispute between Umudei and the rest of Oguta which commenced in 1958 strained her. The death of her first daughter proved to be devastating. In business, stiff

competition from the Syrian and Indian traders while at Port Harcourt was a major challenge. The three and half long years of the Nigeria civil war disrupted her business in Port Harcourt and brought her pain, as post war events proved to be very unfavourable for her business. She rather returned to Oguta community, when she found the Federal Government post civil war policies discriminatory, to continue doing business.

After the war, while finally staying at Oguta, she busied herself with her business there and community development activities. She was a key signatory to the letter sent to Gov. Sam Mbakwe protesting against the inclusion of Oguta II in proposed Ohaoma L.G.A. Her new business venture there was the marketing of bottled drinks. In her last years at Oguta community, her life centered round St. Mary's Church activities. She belonged to the pro-cathedral building committee constituted for coordinating fund raising for the local church. Based on her selfless efforts towards the upliftment of the church, she was honoured with the title 'Mother of the Church'. She was always a heavy donor in the annual harvest thanksgiving services. Ogbuefi which is the highest female title in Oguta was also conferred on her in her life time. She was a woman with many parts; she was the second woman to be initiated into the prestigious Ikwa-muo society, usually an exclusive title for men. Till her death in January 1993 at Oguta she was widely addressed by her greeting name 'Odoziaku'. As a woman entrepreneur from South Eastern Nigeria she lived an accomplished life and would be remembered as a forerunner.

The major purpose of the paper is to highlight the lessons learnt that can be usefully applied to other businesses in South Eastern Nigeria, especially for women. Nwosu (2006) has called for change in the way we do business in a rapidly globalizing economy. According to him, the generality of entrepreneurs (men and women alike) must be familiar with, and ready to adopt, adapt and apply the well known innovation adoption strategies. Entrepreneurial innovations usually involve systematic and analytical planning, mobilization and organization of resources, application of resources, implementation of planned processes and designs, provision of value to customers, system or networks development and applications and other related activities. Women in business enterprises engaged in economic activities such as animal or crop farming, production of indigenous and foreign products and local and international trade to embrace change and continuity when necessary.

### **Salient Entrepreneurial Features of Mary Nzimiro's Enterprise**

Mary Nzimiro's enterprise had the following salient features (strengths) that today's women entrepreneurs can emulate;

1. It was one that did not resist change. The entrepreneur herself being an Igbo from South Eastern Nigeria exemplified Igbo receptivity to new ideas and adaptability to change. For Mary Nzimiro, there was no fear of the unknown, fear of loss of control or dominance or even special benefits when she made the decision to leave the produce sales business and to venture into sales of manufactured goods.
2. It had a rich understanding and right perception of suggested or proposed new ideas and approaches of doing business.
3. It utilized the entrepreneur's background to its advantage; parental, educational, social and religious which served as catalysts. Most of them were made possible through western education and relationship with the missionaries. For instance, she was born by famous and wealthy parent and through the stimulus of Christianity and Western education brought by the Europeans, she was obsessed with the desire for

- self-improvement, modernity and success. Her background no doubt enabled her to acquire power and influence.
4. It leaned on the entrepreneur's innate qualities/characteristics as well as those acquired over time; hard work, foresight, experience, dedication to duty, shrewdness, courage, self-will, self confidence, competitive and enterprising spirit, tenacity/doggedness, resourcefulness, optimism, independence, intelligence, integrity, and lastly ample faith and belief in God. These were the core ingredients that provided a strong elevator to her business enterprise.
  5. It built and sustained useful business contacts and business relationships which started first with colonial/imperial masters, for her benefit. This was exemplified by her later role as the principal agent of the UAC, and finally when she became an independent entrepreneur. In order to reinforce those contacts and make more contacts she visited other places in the eastern region from time to time, and visited the UK and other parts of Europe severally in the late 1940s, 1950s, in the 1960s and -70s.
  6. It possessed ethical control and trust-building mechanisms which ensured the credit facilities that the Europeans especially UAC availed her for a long time.
  7. It utilized the unlimited opportunities that presented themselves. For instance, she was born and bred at a time palm oil and kernel were among major export products of Nigeria, and she traded in them and thrived. She largely retained her intermediary role in this business. She utilized her UAC contacts maximally that her name became synonymous with UAC. She utilized the influence of her mother in UAC as a major partner in British foreign trade with Nigeria as well as that of her husband's as clerk of UAC. With sustained determination to succeed, those opportunities became doors to her fortune each time she made appropriate business judgments and shifts.
  8. It established and used marketing networks. As UAC factor while representing the company in the West African sub-region, she handled transfer of goods from coordinators to retailers. Her good use of strategies for marketing products and services constituted a pillar in her success in business. Being very familiar with importation, up till the 1960s she had several distributors for her goods which were shipped in from abroad.
  9. It displayed enormous business acumen and strategy by expanding (it had branches), diversifying (property, shares and bonds acquisition) and re-investing (moving profits made to building and transforming Priscilla and Bros to Nzimiro Industries). Thus, it was competitive and technologically driven in the 1950s and -60s as well. She employed quite a number of workers who were capable e.g. sales officers, shop assistants and managers and even the services of lawyers when she felt she needed it.

There is however an observable weakness in Mary Nzimiro's enterprise that today and future women entrepreneurs must guard against. It is the individualism or family business strategy. It is a strategy which should be de-emphasized in women entrepreneurship in South Eastern Nigeria in order for us to meet up with the challenges of globalization. To safeguard the future of women entrepreneurship, there should be more emphasis on the collectivism or team business strategy. This is to say that for improved results in women's venture, emphasis should now be on the collectivistic, communalistic



and group approach to business and less on individual approach. Some scholars attest to the fact that entrepreneurial activities such as finding new opportunities, innovation, risk bearing, employment creation and the commercialization of the inventions of some inventors have all contributed to the prosperity of nearly all the regions of the world (Ukaegbu, 2003; Ogbuagu, 2006). In the long term, it will lead to the emergence of united and cooperative South Eastern Nigeria business women for greater effectiveness, efficiency and the overall development of South Eastern region as opined by Nwosu (2006). In so doing, it would lead to an extension of greater networking between those of them here in Nigeria and their counterparts in the Diaspora. With globalization and increasing use of ICTs, networking can be easily harnessed for business success.

### **Synergizing the Lessons Learnt for Future Women Entrepreneurs**

To stem the tide of unemployment in parts of South Eastern Nigeria, there is need for new groups of women entrepreneurs that possess innovation or the branching out of the old enterprises into new line of activities to help create new employment opportunities. Furthermore, present and future women enterprises should avoid being a response to European demands and interest. It has far reaching implications, the major one being that it helps to strengthen the foundations of European penetration of South Eastern Nigeria business laid during the colonial period. To allow foreign investors to continue to play a dominant role in the private sector and determine the trend suggests the presence of neo-colonialism with its attendant economic, social and political repercussions for national independence. The indigenization decree properly termed the first Nigerian Enterprises Promotion Decree was promulgated in 1972 and revised in 1977 to rectify this. It is meant to give Nigerian businessmen and women the leeway to determine the pace and tempo of investments and the exclusive right to the ownership of some enterprises and greater participation than hitherto in the equity ownership of others. Women entrepreneurs should integrate themselves into the mainstream politics of the nation as Mary Nzirimmo did. This will enable them be part of policy formulation and make the necessary business connections that will aid the southeast region.

Women entrepreneurs should go through formal apprenticeship training rather than depend on trading or manufacturing skills acquired through socialization within the family. Historically, apprenticeship has been a way of transferring entrepreneurial knowledge from one generation to another, from the entrepreneurial masters to the younger ones. The apprenticeship system in business enterprise has always been and should always be a veritable source of entrepreneurship. Even when bequeathing business empire to ones children some form of tutelage is required i.e. period of apprenticeship (on the job training), and this should not be brief. It will help teach the successor the ropes and practical knowledge of the rudiments of that business which classroom knowledge cannot replace. When the system of apprenticeship began in South Eastern Nigeria is not easy to say, but one may speculate that it is as old as the people themselves. It is one system that encourages industriousness and ensures that veneration comes when one reaches the point of perfection.

Some corporate businesses which are incorporated have the weakness of complacency. Any woman enterprise (present or future) which is a limited liability company or similar organizations should have obligation to all its stakeholders, not just its shareholders and meet those obligations. Accurate and timely decisions should be made. Decisions should be devoid of illegal activities. Good leadership is a critical factor. It

should provide the vision and get others to support and achieve it. This is called company culture. The company culture allows people to challenge ideas, suggestions, and plans. This way, it creates an organization of thinking, committed people capable of producing the kind of innovation and productivity required to succeed today and in the future. Not allowing appropriate dissent will kill the company.

Lastly, the women entrepreneur should endeavour to strike a balance between work and home/family life. The woman entrepreneur's role at home is equally important as she is the nurturer of the next generation of vibrant people of South Eastern Nigeria. She must demonstrate dexterity to combine business activities with child bearing and child rearing. She should solicit the support of her husband, children, other family members and even friends in order to build her business. She should manage her business in such a way as to avoid stress either at work or at home.

### **Conclusion**

The people of South Eastern Nigeria are said to be very enterprising and adventurous, yet the level of socio-economic transformation in the region is lower than desired. Therefore, there is need to seek for short term and long term strategies to enhance the present and reposition the future of its rural women entrepreneurship, such as those outlined below. There is a firm belief in South Eastern Nigeria that the future will definitely be better than the past or present.

The paper has discussed the life and times of Mary Nzimiro in relation to the lessons that can be drawn for the enhancement of the future of women entrepreneurship in South Eastern Nigeria. It has shown that generally the people, especially women are enterprising, and they inherited their enterprising spirit from their forefathers and have continuously displayed this even till date. Thus, history supports the fact that even with the advent of a borderless world, the people of the South Eastern Nigeria will do well as they did in socio-economic and political spheres of the pre-colonial, colonial and early post colonial periods. History also has it that the entrepreneurs in internal business ventures have the potential to do better than their indigenous and foreign competitors. Women entrepreneurs should be made to know the importance of economic history. Fafunwa (1974) noted that when people lack knowledge of their past, they are certain to grope blindly into the future without guideposts of precedence to shape their course.

### **Implications and Recommendations**

The implication of this study is that there is need for the continued encouragement of women in business enterprises in Igbo society of South Eastern Nigeria. It is to inculcate in them the fact that in an era of rapid change, with extraordinary challenges, one can transform the difficulties therein into opportunities just as Mary Nzimiro did. Lastly, since we are in a seemingly inevitable globalizing world, women enterprises should adopt the strategy of operating large scale corporate organizations, in addition to the other recommendations made in this paper to reduce the rising unemployment in South Eastern Nigeria amongst other benefits.

Recommendations are very necessary for future enhancement or modification of the present business practices. Some of the strengths of Mary Nzimiro's enterprise can be emulated and adopted by women for enhanced entrepreneurship today to complement the more modern approaches which did not exist in her time.

**For women entrepreneurs:**

- They should modernize their business practices, and establish business links with their counterparts nationally and internationally who use modern technology to promote their business.
- Despite existing shortcomings, they should employ the constant and effective use of the internet, especially for placing adverts.
- They should utilize the hosting of a website for their business enterprise for a better corporate image nationally and internationally.
- They should join the National Association of Women Entrepreneurs (NAWE) so as not to be disenfranchised. They should participate regularly in local, national and international business exhibitions and trade fairs.
- They should increase their networking activities, which entail constant sharing of technology/expertise, data/information and facilities among members of the business network in Nigeria and a greater sharing with those in the Diaspora.
- There should be a promotion of relevant knowledge and culture through a review of the educational system for them. Attendances of seminars, capacity building workshops, Igbo centric fora for purposes of skills/knowledge acquisition, interaction and application of public relations techniques would be necessary for rural businesswomen.
- There should be a modification of the *oisusuö* system for credit that can be easily accessed by all rural women in business to boost their enterprise. There should also be an espousing of cutting edge technology for them in areas where they have comparative advantage and in the production of high quality services and goods.
- They should locally organize themselves along trade groups and work with government, by eliciting their cooperation in the areas of sourcing for business information and the provision of enabling environment for their businesses.
- They should apply integrity and ethical standards, shed pre-liberalization thinking and acquire the latest entrepreneurial capabilities, latest managerial and organizational capabilities and latest best practices in technological application for business growth, through either formal or informal routes of knowledge acquisition and the media.
- There should be a promotion of federated assemblies in areas outside South Eastern Nigeria where women entrepreneurs reside in. This is because in such fora, challenges are accepted and business opportunities are discussed.

**For the State:**

The state has a major role to play in enhancing entrepreneurship in South Eastern Nigeria as in other parts of Nigeria. This is true especially in the area of security of life and property. There are a number of entrepreneurs that have been gruesomely murdered in the last 24 months, and a notable few of these are women entrepreneurs. Imo and Anambra are among the states of South Eastern Nigeria that top the list of violent crimes in the entire Nigeria according to statistics from Police headquarters at Abuja (Anaba, 2010). The government should rise up to its responsibility of safeguarding the lives of its citizens especially those of South Eastern Nigeria entrepreneurs (male and female alike).

South Eastern Nigerian people regard every part of the federation as home and invest heavily in all parts of Nigeria (whether urban or rural). However, in the past, in the

aftermath of the Nigeria civil war many of the people from South Eastern Nigeria lost their houses simply because the two states carved out of the old Eastern region then were allowed to declare the properties in their areas abandoned. This was not only wrong but a negation of the principle of federalism, a situation that government should not allow to repeat itself. It is the role of government to safeguard the hard earned property of women entrepreneurs in all parts of the nation whether it is their birthplace or not, in order to evolve a true federalism.

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