



## Butler Journal of Undergraduate Research

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Volume 3

Article 2

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2017

### Women's Work: Labor Market Outcomes and Female Entrepreneurship in Ghana

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#### Recommended Citation

Agyemang, Loretta (2017) "Women's Work: Labor Market Outcomes and Female Entrepreneurship in Ghana," *Butler Journal of Undergraduate Research*: Vol. 3 , Article 2.

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## Women's Work: Labor Market Outcomes and Female Entrepreneurship in Ghana

### Cover Page Footnote

I would like to thank my grandmothers (Adwoa Afrakoma and Maame) who were female entrepreneurs and inspired me to conduct this study.

## **WOMEN'S WORK: LABOR MARKET OUTCOMES AND FEMALE ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN GHANA**

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### **Abstract**

This paper is an investigation of female entrepreneurship in Ghana. It seeks to answer the following question: Why are Ghanaian women so heavily concentrated in microenterprise in the informal economy? The literature review explores labor market trends for women on three different scales including an overview of developing countries, Sub-Saharan Africa regional, and Ghana-specific analysis. After exploring issues women face in formal employment, the study delves into business operations of informal, urban-based market participants by analyzing data pertaining to Ghanaian microenterprise. Additionally, the paper details the experiences and views of female entrepreneurs through in-depth interviews and participant observations with thirty female textile traders conducted in Makola Market in Accra, Ghana during the summers of 2012 and 2014. This study will contribute to the growing body of work on female entrepreneurship in the West African region.

### **Introduction**

Women's work encompasses a broad range of occupations. From the traditional faculties of matriarch and caretaker in the home to negotiator and decision maker in public and private spheres, working women are invaluable to society and the economy. Much is known about the opportunities and challenges women in developed countries face as they navigate the labor market. Although research on female labor force participation and entrepreneurship in developing countries is growing, there is still unexplored territory—especially concerning the Sub-Saharan Africa region. As this part of the world continues its development path, it is important to understand the role women play as economic agents to maximize their contribution to economic growth and development as well as societal progress.

Currently, most Africans (irrespective of gender) seeking employment in the formal labor market in their countries face many obstacles. High levels of

unemployment and underemployment underscore systemic rigidities which stem from many factors including a weak private sector. Without a well-developed labor market to provide a living wage, operating a small business or hawking goods in public spaces becomes an alternative form of generating income. For many African women, societal views and pressures may further limit their career outcomes by preventing them from acquiring the skills and network necessary for employment in the formal labor market. Out of necessity, trading goods in the informal market becomes their primary occupation. This is the case throughout the West African region. In countries like Nigeria, Togo, and Liberia, “market women”, as they are called, are the faces of micro-enterprise.

This study is an assessment of the microeconomic activities of Ghana’s market women. It employs an interdisciplinary approach, combining quantitative and qualitative research methodologies, to shed light on the factors driving Ghanaian women to operate in informal markets as traders. The first section is an overview of female labor force participation in developing countries. It touches on opportunities and challenges in formal education and employment for women in low and middle income countries and assess commonalities for female labor market entrants in Sub-Saharan Africa. A detailed assessment of female economic participation in Ghana including the Global Gender Gap Index, an objective measure to evaluate national gaps in gender equality, concludes this section.

After exploring issues in the formal labor market that cause many women to turn to the informal sector, a rigorous study of microenterprise in Ghana constitutes the second section. An ordinary least squares (OLS) regression model was generated after cleaning data from a study where researchers gave cash and in-kind grants to male and female microenterprise owners in open-air markets in Accra and Tema, major urban centers in Ghana (Fafchamps et al 2014). This paper methodized data from that study to determine if female operated microenterprises outperformed their male counterparts. Once a big picture of microenterprise in Ghana’s informal economy is established through quantitative analysis, the third section uses a qualitative approach to delve into individual experiences of female microenterprise owners. After receiving IRB authorization, the primary investigator conducted semi-structured interviews and participant observations with a total of thirty female textile traders in Accra in July 2012 and August 2014. Once translated and transcribed, commonalities, viewpoints and experiences of Ghanaian market women gathered through recorded face-to-face inter-

views are presented in this section. The study ends with a conclusion consisting of key findings and a critical assessment of its strengths and weaknesses.

### **Gender-Based Market Trends in Developing Countries**

Employment and wage trends of female labor market participants in developed countries have been well studied. Although there is less research on the experiences of working women in developing countries, this is also a quickly growing field. Some global trends have emerged from the literature that can shed light on the conditions many women face as they operate in the formal labor market.

One important relationship that has been identified is that economic growth does not necessarily reduce gender-based employment and wage gaps. Although a country may be growing robustly, sectorial segregation, wage structures, labor market liberalization, and institutional networks may all be factors affecting the employment opportunities and wages for a woman relative to her male counterpart. Another similarity all regions share is the high rate of female participation in part-time work. This may serve as another contributor to the gender gap because this job type as well as low-skilled positions are characterized by higher gender-based disparities in wages (Ñopo 2012).

Compared to advanced markets, fewer studies on trends in gender-based discrimination have been conducted in developing countries and formerly socialist emerging markets partly because reliable and consistent longitudinal data on earnings is scant. Some ground-breaking studies, however, have materialized over the years. For example, a 1994 study concluded that, on average, women in developing countries are concentrated in low-wage labor in the formal and informal economy and experience larger wage gaps (Blau 2008). Just as female labor market participation rates fluctuate considerably (62% in the Sub-Saharan Africa region, 31% in South Asia, and 25% in the Middle East and North Africa region), trends in the gender-wage gap also vary (World Bank 2014). Some of the factors that determine female labor market outcomes include the structure of a country's labor market, attitudes and beliefs about a woman's role in society, and the attributes and experiences that make an individual labor market entrant competitive for hire.

In the case of labor markets, structural transformations may play a significant role in advancing employment opportunities for women, allowing them to earn higher wages. After studying trends in female labor force partic-

ipation and wages from 1987 to 2008 in Brazil, Mexico, India and Thailand, researchers concluded that increases in female employment and higher wages in these countries were the result of the labor market restructuring from high levels of physically demanding jobs like farming (brawn intensive) to jobs in the service sector that required more intellectual input (brain intensive). Women may now have more opportunities to participate in the labor market because there is less demand in brawn intensive jobs in which men have a comparative advantage. Improvements in women's human capital has also helped to increase their overall labor market participation rate and narrow the wage gap in these developing countries (Randall 2013).

Increased employment opportunities in skill-based labor is an encouraging trend; however, in many developing countries, the average woman has fewer years of formal education relative to her male counterpart. Using socio-demographic characteristics to match males and females and allowing gender disparities to be computed only among individuals with the same observable characteristics, researchers produced a study on gender disparities in labor earnings for sixty-four countries. In South Asia, they concluded that the highest earning gap was among individuals with little formal education, a large fraction of whom were women. High earning disparities along gender lines were also reported in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region in the case of younger women (ages 15-24), women with little formal education, and part-time or over-time employees (Ñopo et al 2012).

#### **GENDER-BASED LABOR MARKET TRENDS IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA**

In the Sub-Saharan Africa region, female labor force participation tends to be very high. Robust labor force participation, however, has not translated into higher female wage earnings. One factor preventing women from earning higher wages is human capital.

Despite improvements in literacy rates, there is still a large fraction of women with no or very little formal education and training. Low-skilled women are highly concentrated in informal and unpaid work in the service and agriculture sectors. In addition to receiving low wages to support themselves and their families, women who earn a subsistence wage through agriculture or in the informal service sector are at risk of considerable health issues because of the physically demanding nature of their work (Ñopo et al 2012).

For women with formal education and technical skills, labor market structures may impede them from advancing in their careers. Limited access

to global markets constrains capital flows in the region making it harder for entrepreneurs to start and grow businesses. A smaller number of medium-sized and large firms relative to other developing regions like Latin America means that access to employment opportunities is very constrained. Furthermore, African labor market entrants must rely more on their own familial and professional networks rather than skill-based merit in acquiring employment. Without a robust private sector to generate living wages, the only alternative for formal employment is the public sector. Employment opportunities in the public sector, however, have become increasingly scarce due to public sector spending cuts. A fragile private sector and a shrinking public sector constitute considerable obstacles for African female labor force participants (Overa 2007).

Widely held social views about what constitutes “women’s work” is another factor limiting employment and wage opportunities for African women. Several studies have concluded that African women, beginning in their girlhoods, are conditioned to view employment in the public sector as teachers and nurses as ideal career goals. Males, on the other hand, have more liberty when it comes to job aspirations (Appleton 1999). This social grooming contributes to gender-based segregation in professional fields. Self-selection into “traditionally” female professions may result in higher earning gaps between men and women because male-dominated professions generally have higher wages.

#### **CASE STUDY: GHANA**

In Ghana, economic participation has developed over time with historical changes in the structure of the economy. These factors include territorial expansion of European powers, the development of the commodity export market (i.e., the mining industry), infrastructural development and urbanization, the development and expansion of the national government, and developments in the education system (Overa 2007). Before delving into female economic participation in Ghana, it is important to note that the country is incredibly diverse. There exist about seventy different ethnic groups, each espousing different indigenous cosmologies, societal practices and gender norms. Although English is the national language, there are several dozen languages—the most widely spoken being Ewe, Ga and Twi. Colonial experiences also vary. In the northern regions of the country, trade and interaction with Arabs resulted in the transfer of Islamic religion and cultural practices.

The ethnic groups residing in the southern coast interacted more with Europeans and practice Christian traditions. Though there are nuances and a mixture of colonial and indigenous beliefs and practices, this layered identity has impacted gender norms among different groups throughout the country. In major cities, individuals from different ethnic, religious and linguistic backgrounds live side-by-side with foreign nationals. Living in metropolitan or rural areas also shape gender attitudes and beliefs. The qualitative portion of this study takes place in Accra, the country's capital on the southern coast, so the focus will be on the experience of women living in this southern coastal cosmopolitan center.

### **GENDER-BASED LABOR MARKET AND EDUCATION TRENDS IN CONTEMPORARY GHANA**

Much of Ghana's contemporary labor market structure has its origins in the colonial era. As a former colony of England, the Gold Coast, as Ghana was called from 1821 until 1957, existed to meet the economic needs of its colonizer. The extraction and export of natural resources like gold, cocoa, rubber and minerals was the principal form of production. To facilitate this system, the colonial administration employed local populations. Men who were formally educated by missionaries composed of the highest echelons as clerks and administrators. Few women could be employed in such positions because most were barred from receiving a formal education. The few privileged women who received a colonial education learned skills to keep house such as cleaning and cooking (Overa 2007).

During the post-World War I era, more women could receive a formal education to acquire the skills necessary for employment in the public sector. To a lesser extent, private sector firms also employed women in various capacities. Although the colonial administration perceived female participation in the formal labor market as incompatible with their duties as mothers and wives, the administration maintained an equal pay for equal work wage policy. Rather than manifesting itself in wage differentials, the perception that women were inefficient workers because of their biological differences and their socially assigned roles was articulated in terms of job security. Laws like the Pensions Ordinance of 1950 legalized the practice of forcing married and pregnant women to resign from their posts with some exceptions for nurses (Greenstreet 1971).

Since the colonial era, societal perceptions about Ghanaian women have changed. In most parts of the country, the exception being the northern re-



gion and other rural areas where poverty remains rampant and people adhere to conservative gender norms, young girls are encouraged to attend school just like their male counterparts. Per the United Nations Girls' Education Initiative, in 2005 Ghana's national primary gender parity index (GPI) improved from 0.93 to 0.95. This increase in girls' enrollment can be attributed to government policies like the national abolishment of school fees and the creation of a capitation grant for all basic schools. In rural areas of the country, poverty and deeply held biases against females still impair young girls from building the foundations they need to become efficiently productive economic agents (UNGEI 2006). Although the country has made considerable progress in achieving equality of opportunity for both males and females in terms of primary education, there is room for improvement in establishing parity in secondary and tertiary education.

### **MEASURING GHANA'S GENDER INEQUALITY IN THE LABOR MARKET**

Differences in outcome for men and women in the labor market have ripple effects in the overall economy. When there is unequal access to employment opportunities or unequal wage distributions, which negatively impact women, this results in women being less financially independent and having less access to resources to invest in themselves and in their children (especially the girl child). A pernicious cycle is created when a country's education system does not prioritize female skills acquisition and hiring firms practice discriminatory behavior that disfavors women. Often, this results in labor market segmentation with low-skilled women being concentrated in low-wage work. Although it may suffice to analyze literature on the overall level of gender-based inequality in Ghana, a more constructive means of detailing this information is to use an objective measure.

Created in 2006 by the World Economic Forum to estimate gender-based disparities and track their progress, the Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI) serves as an instrument to measure gender inequality across countries. Essentially, the GGGI evaluates countries based on what they have been able to achieve overall in regards to gender equality by adjusting for input differences. The Index is based on measures of educational attainment, health and survival, political empowerment and economic participation and opportunity. Measurements of gaps in gender equality are used instead of measuring countries based on levels of gender equality to account for differences in development levels between countries. In other words, the Index assesses out-

puts, not inputs, and judges a country's progress in gender equality based on the outcomes they have produced irrespective of that country's resources.

To remain impartial, the Index ranks countries based on their proximity to gender equality, not women's empowerment. The scale ranges from zero (completely unequal) to one (complete equality). In the 2014 GGGI country rankings, Ghana was ranked 101 with a total score of 0.6661 out of one or about 66.6 percent. During that year, 142 countries were assessed and although Ghana was placed at the lower end of the pool, it ranked ahead of industrialized countries like Japan and South Korea as well as developing countries like Nepal and Egypt.

The Economic Participation and Opportunity Gap, a sub-index of the GGGI measures gaps in participation, remuneration and advancement. This measure determined that the gap in labor force participation between Ghanaian men and women was very small. Throughout the time the data was collected, women were very active in the formal and informal labor markets, participating at an average rate of 96%. These findings are consistent with studies from the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the International Labor Organization which report female labor force participation rates as being consistently high in the Sub Saharan Africa region. A 2013 IMF study determined that while global female labor force participation had stagnated at around fifty percent, rates in Sub-Saharan Africa consistently hovered around sixty percent and, as of 2000, increased to rates of around of sixty-five percent (Elborgh-Woytek et al 2013). Although Ghanaian women are just as active as men in labor market participation, there exist considerable gaps between earned incomes. Despite the years when the gap lessened, the general trend appears to be that income disparities have grown incrementally over time.

In the case of gender-based discrimination, employer practices may favor or disfavor female candidates. An example of positive discrimination against females is an oil firm selecting women to work as fuel dispensers because they view them as being more honest and providing better customer service compared to male candidates. Although it qualifies as coercion on the part of the employer since he or she is in a higher position of power, positive discrimination may also come in the form of female candidates being expected to engage in relations (sexual or otherwise) in exchange for a job title. Few national laws address discriminatory practices in Ghana. Without effective laws to regulate employer behavior, labor market discrimination has remained a pervasive problem (Dwomoh et al 2015).

A 1999 World Bank report provides a detailed empirical analysis of gender-based labor market outcome discrepancies in Ghana. Using parsimonious regression analysis, the study measured the magnitude of gender-based discrimination and determined how union membership, the manufacturing sector and firm location affected labor market outcomes. Data for this study came from the 1994 Regional Enterprise Development (RPED) Survey which covers 215 manufacturing firms ranging from micro to large businesses with respondents from 1,200 employees from the metal, textiles, food, and wood industries. Female workers comprised about 17% of the sample. To provide additional detail on worker experience, ten randomly selected workers from different occupational categories were also interviewed. Most of the sampled firms came from two of Ghana's largest cities, Accra and Kumasi. Results from the study yielded mixed results.

Although estimates for the wage and productivity gaps were significant, the productivity gap was higher than the wage gap. On one hand, the regression analysis concluded that on average, women were paid statistically significantly less than men controlling for group level differences in qualifications and other characteristics. This wage gap was most notable in the manufacturing sector where female workers were paid 17% less than their male counterparts. Female productivity, on the other hand, was not on par with that of males. Accounting for differences in qualifications, occupation as well as sector of occupation, it was estimated that female workers were 37% less productive than their male counterparts. This could suggest that the lower pay for women is the result of their lower productivity, however; several other factors were tested and some were consistent with discrimination whereas others were not. Such mixed results may reflect the fact that women are usually employed in lower-paying occupations that are often less productive compared to jobs in which men are employed (Verner 1999).

### **Microenterprise as a Solution to Limited Formal Labor Market**

Despite constrained private markets which limit job opportunities as well as structural barriers to employment in the formal labor market, many Ghanaian women are proactive in generating income for themselves and supporting their families. A viable alternative for women who were squeezed out of the formal labor market and prevented them from receiving adequate formal education and training because of societal gender bias was to carve out space for themselves in the informal labor market through microenterprise. Often these businesses start and end as subsistence enterprises because female en-

trepreneurs lack capital from financial institutions to grow their businesses (Fafchamps et al 2014).

Trading goods and services in open-air markets was once considered a traditionally feminine occupation and has been historically documented. Although they existed before their arrival, as early as the seventeenth century, Europeans provided a written account of the sophisticated trade networks developed by Ghanaian women (Overa 2007). Since then, women have continued to be very visible in market trade; however, unemployment and underemployment following a debt crisis and structural adjustment policies in the 1980s and 90s have caused some Ghanaian men to turn to selling goods in the informal economy as well. Their growing presence constitutes increased competition in an already saturated market. Since informal trade is primarily a woman's domain and female traders have developed dynamic networks such as commodity associations, it is expected that female-owned firms will perform better than those owned by males. This assumption will be rigorously tested using a parsimonious regression model.

Data for this analysis comes from a randomized impact evaluation investigating microenterprises and the flypaper effect in Ghana (Fafchamps et al, 2014). The raw data from this randomized experiment consisted of responses from over 900 male and female microenterprise owners. Since the sample is so large and was generated randomly, it may be analyzed using the OLS regression model. After cleaning the baseline data, including removing outliers, the sample was reduced to a total 119 respondents, including 43 men (36.13% of the sample) and 76 women (63.87% of the sample). In comparing business performance between male and female microenterprise owners, ten variables were tested.

## VARIABLES USED IN MODEL

Variables used in the model pertain to two categories, business factors and demographics. Since this study seeks to determine whether being a male or female influences business performance as indicated by profits, gender is a primary variable included in the model and is expressed as **Fem**, a binomial variable with 1 indicating female and 0 indicating male. Age is also an important variable because it may serve as a proxy for experience. Marital status (**MarSta**) and completed years of education (**Educ**) constitute the other variables used to detail the characteristics and human capital attributes of microenterprise owners. The following variables were used to represent business factors: number of businesses owned by respondent (**Bus\_Count**), total

sales for September 2008 (**Mon\_sales**), association membership (**Assoc**), land or market space used by business was purchased by owner (**FixCap\_Land**), VAT registration (**VAT**) and cash on hand for business (**Cash**). Age, completed years of education, cash, number of businesses owned by respondent and September sales are all continuous variables. Association membership, whether the land or market space was purchased by owner and VAT registration are all represented as binomial variables with 1 indicating “Yes” and 0 indicating “No.” Lastly, marital status was expressed as a categorical variable with 1 representing married, 2 representing single/never married, 3 representing divorced, and 4 indicating that the respondent was widowed.

### **DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS AND CORRELATION**

The average ages for women and men were about 33 years and about 35 years respectively. In respects to education, female traders had an average of about 7 years of formal education whereas men had an average of about 9 years. It was expected that men would be, on average, more educated than women because social norms regarding education for this generation highly favored males. In regards to marital status, most women (about 61%) and men (about 60%) were married. This information shows that for most participants, profits earned were spread across other dependents, including their spouse, since child birth and rearing is the objective of most Ghanaian marriages.

When it came to business related variables, men and women had about the same amount of sales for the month of September (about 57 USD). Women however, had more cash on hand (about \$40.50) compared to their male counterparts (about \$32.58). For men and women, very low levels of association membership were recorded. About 90% of women and 93% of men did not affiliate with an association. With more and more traders entering the market, it appears that associations have less power when it comes to price setting and advocating for policies making them less useful therefore they are losing their relevance and credibility among traders, especially new market entrants.

### **MULTIVARIATE ANALYSIS OF FIRMS' PERFORMANCE**

A multivariate regression was used to examine firm performance using profit as a proxy. Although about only 15% of the variation in profit was explained by the model (as indicated by the adjusted R-squared), the model can still be

used to rigorously study the microeconomic activities of male and female business owners in Ghana. The low R-squared may be a result of numerous other factors affecting profit such as the strength of demand and the state of the economy. **Table 1** shows the regression results for all variables used in the model. Out of the ten variables, only two (Cash and Mon\_Sales) were statistically significant as depicted by **Table 2**. Although gender was not significant in determining microenterprise performance, it is included in the table below because the primary objective behind conducting this regression was to determine if gender had an effect on firm profit.

Business factors, not gender, appear to be the most important for determining profits. Surprisingly, there was a negative association between cash on hand and profit. In other words, a one dollar increase in cash on hand resulted in a decrease in profit of about .133. For September sales (Mon\_Sales), on the other hand, a one unit increase in sales for that month was associated with a .307 increase in profits.

The objective of carrying out this regression exercise was to determine if gender had an effect on profit. It was expected that because there are more female microenterprise owners who have more experience and deeper networks in the informal market, they would have more of an advantage when it comes to generating profits. This was not the case, as evident by the insignificance of the Fem variable. Although the results did not support the initial assumption, the statistical analysis helped to provide a more rigorous understanding of microenterprise in Ghana's informal economy.

### Qualitative Analysis: Methodological Approach

This portion of the study delves deeper into issues informal labor market participants face by investigating the motives and experiences of Ghanaian female business owners. A qualitative approach, including an analysis of interview responses and participant observations, is the primary mechanism of analysis. Prior to conducting these interviews, the primary investigator received IRB approval by acquired certification for Human Subjects Research in Social and Behavior Sciences from the University of Pittsburgh Center for Continuing Education in the Health Sciences in March 2012. To proceed with the next round in interviews in 2014, the researcher completed the CITI Program and received this license from the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative at the University of Miami in June 2014.

Source	SS	df	MS
Model	20082.5029	10	2008.25029
Residual	70716.6399	108	654.783703
Total	90799.1429	118	769.484262

# of observations = 119  
 F(10, 108) = 3.07  
 Prob > F = 0.0018  
 R-squared = 0.2212  
 Adjusted R-squared = 0.1491  
 Root MS = 25.589

Profit	Coefficient	Std. Err.	t	P >  t	[95% Conf. Interval]
Fem	-9.966646	5.490552	-1.82	0.072	-20.84987 0.9165812
Age	0.2455811	0.2500275	0.98	0.328	-0.2500168 0.7411789
MarSta	0.0016147	3.109993	0.00	1.000	-6.162932 6.166161
Educ	0.0809719	0.7733972	0.10	0.917	-1.452035 1.613979
Bus_ Count	-4.989054	13.8592	-0.36	0.720	-32.46039 22.48228
FixCap Land	-8.301788	12.20636	-0.68	0.498	-32.4969 15.89333
VAT	9.593117	30.43324	0.32	0.753	-50.73085 69.91709
Assoc	-14.44968	9.305365	-1.55	0.123	-32.89453 3.995165
Cash	-0.1327871	0.068202	-1.95	0.054	-0.2679752 0.002401
Mon_ Sales	0.3072713	0.0690132	4.45	0.000	-0.1704752 0.4440673
_cons	26.85706	22.22412	1.21	0.230	-17.195 70.90912

Fem: Female, 1 = female, 0 = male

MarSta: Marital status

Educ: Completed years of education

Bus\_Count: Number of businesses owned by respondent

FixCap\_Land: Owner purchased land/market space used by business

VAT: Value added tax registration

Assoc: Association membership

Cash: Cash on hand for business

Mon\_Sales: Total sales for September 2008

\_cons: Constant term

**Table 1.** Regression Model (all variables)

Independent Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	t	Sig
Constant	26.85706	22.22412	1.21	0.230
Fem	-9.966646	5.490552	-1.82	0.072
Cash	-0.1327871	0.068202	-1.95	0.054*
Mon_Sales	0.3072713	0.0690132	4.45	0.000**

F = 0.0018

Sig = 0.05

Adjusted R-Square = 0.149

**Table 2.** Statistically Significant Variables (\*excluding Fem)

An original, semi-structured interview script consists of the first phase of the field study conducted in July of 2012. Ten female textile traders specializing in the trade of African print fabrics were selected as case studies because they trade a non-perishable good that is often in demand. During August 2014, phase two of the study, an additional twenty female textile traders were interviewed. Cultural traditions like weddings, child naming ceremonies and funerals, and individual preferences for prints with distinct patterns with cultural relevance insure that there is year-long demand for textiles. Market women facilitate transactions between the textile producer and the customer after the product has been made by serving as middle persons.

To gage their experiences operating a business, fourteen open-ended questions were issued. In addition to gathering information on motives for



starting their businesses and their understanding operating in the market, their views about government policy and Ghana's future economic prospects were also discussed. Limited funding and time as well as expected higher rates of illiteracy among members of the targeted population made approaching potential participants at their work space and asking them to participate in the study themselves or to provide a referral the most effective recruitment method. Participants did not receive compensation for involvement in the study.

During the initial phase of the sample recruitment process, female traders were hesitant about participating. After thoroughly explaining research objectives while sharing professional credentials, potential participants felt more at ease with sharing their experiences. Since most of the women did not have adequate formal education which includes training in written English, an oral consent was administered, sometimes with the help of a translator. Participants were encouraged to answer with as much detail as possible. Interview questions were translated from English into Asante Twi or Ga, two of the most commonly languages spoken in Accra. Rather than asking participants directly how many years of formal education they received, since this question might make them uncomfortable, skill level could be gaged with mastery of the English language. This is because formal education is administered primarily in English. Of the thirty recorded interviews, only three were completely in advanced English and did not require any translation on the part of the primary investigator.

### **MAKOLA MARKET AS A WORK PLACE**

Located in the center of Ghana's capital, Accra, is Makola Market. Sprawling and bustling, this open-air market encompasses two commercial centers, Makola One and Makola Two, and can easily be mistaken for a city within the city. Although there are buildings in the vicinity, some of which are multistory department stores, crowds of shoppers spill onto the streets where they engage in transactions with sellers who are standing, sitting, or walking along the roadside. In parts of the open-air market, trucks and cars delivering goods pass along the same route. The space appears chaotic and disorganized, overrun with people and automobiles. The clusters of buildings and stalls are not in the best condition, many of them are dilapidated and in need of renovation. Makola and many other smaller commercial centers and open-air markets are in the jurisdiction of the Accra Metropolitan Assembly, the local governing body.

For many of the women interviewed, Makola has been their workspace for decades. The average number of years operating in the market for thirty interviewees was sixteen years. Many traders reported working twelve hour shifts or even longer hours. Several women described leaving their homes around 4 or 5 A.M. to travel to their workspace where they would stay until 5 or 6 P.M. This is how one respondent describe her work day:

“You wake up to go to the market at six you get off at four thirty or five. You sit down and you can’t get anything sold and you go.”

Depending on the specific good being sold (i.e., packets of water or food-stuffs), trading can be a laborious endeavor. For those who can afford it or through inheritance, one can acquire a designated stall or a room or space in a building, allowing for space to sit and wait for customers. Those without stalls may sit or stand in a designated area. However, many traders balance heavy loads on their heads and walk around in search of customers. They must endure the noise and congestion of the shopping area, the powerful heat of the tropical sun, and, depending on the weather, rain or gusts of wind carrying dust.

Over the past two decades, there have been many changes to the market’s structure and the overall nature of trading. The physical facade of the market has been affected by fires; the last major one occurred in 2014 leaving Makola Two badly damaged. Overcrowding and congestion have also become problematic as rapid urbanization has increased Accra’s population. For rural to urban migrants relocating for economic opportunities, limited formal employment options makes selling goods in nearby open-air markets the only viable alternative. Many respondents who have been trading for several decades noted that Accra’s booming population has resulted in a saturated market, further increasing competition and making it harder to generate profit.

## **REFLECTIONS ON ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL CLIMATES IN 2012 AND 2014**

Macroeconomic trends also directly impact conditions for retailers in this commerce zone. For example, although individual attitudes about future business prospects and trends in Ghana’s economy varied considerably, there was a palpable sense of optimism among women who were interviewed in

2012 when GDP was growing at a robust 8.8% and inflation (using consumer prices) was also at a low of around 9% (World Bank 2015). That year, President John Atta Mills suddenly died in the third year of his first term. Despite this unexpected loss, Ghanaians remained united and confident in their restored democratic system functioning effectively to replace top leadership. Robust growth and low inflation created a good business climate for female traders and resulted in many traders feeling optimistic about their short-term business prospects. As one respondent said:

“The nation is good; the government is good. The hand cannot cover all so they are doing their best.”

The sudden death of President Mills was seen optimistically by several traders. During this period of national mourning, traditional funeral cloth was in high demand and many textile traders expected sales increases. As one trader put it:

“Even the death of our president has given us some jobs. We are selling his cloth, we are selling trophies, everything. Both the members of the opposition and the ones in government, we are all making money. We have made money out of the funeral cloth. Everyone has made money out of it.”

As Ghana prepared for a change in leadership, with Vice President John Mahama temporarily taking over before another election was held, it was important to determine how female textile traders viewed the role of the national government in supporting their work. When asked about how they would manage the economy and the country if they were in a leadership position, responses ranged from the reduction of barriers to trade to the implementation of national policies that favored the advancement of women in governance such as a gender-based quota to improve female participation in parliament.

Several respondents felt strongly that maintaining high levels of economic growth would require reforms to trade policy that facilitated regional and international trade, fiscal policy that kept inflation in check, and reforms to the tax system. Many female textile traders advocated for community-specific reforms in the banking system, allowing the owners of microenterprises

to have greater access to financing at lower interest rates. Respondents also supported initiatives to make primary and secondary education free, since a considerable amount of traders' earnings who had young children went towards paying school fees.

The summer of 2014 in Ghana was less politically charged than 2012 because a contested election had been decided in John Mahama's favor and the opposition had conceded, but the country was experiencing considerable macroeconomic problems. The GDP growth rate (4.2%) was half of what it was two years prior and inflation climbed to around 15% (World Bank 2015). For many traders interviewed during that year, inflation was the primary concern. In addition to criticizing the national government for its failure to address volatile prices, some respondents reprimanded the local governing body (the Accra Metropolitan Assembly or AMA) for failing to meet their needs. Despite paying taxes, such as VAT, an annual income tax, and fees for operating in the market, traders felt they were not receiving adequate services. One respondent claimed that electricity had been out for the last four months and another asserted that the AMA had promised more accommodating facilities but had failed to carry through on renovations, including fans for market stalls.

## **MARKET ASSOCIATIONS AND COLLECTIVE ACTION EFFORTS**

Irrespective of their personal views on local and national policies, it appears that many market women are politically aware and engaged in the democratic process. In 2012, as groundwork for the upcoming election was put into place, many of the women interviewed voiced their enthusiasm for participating. Although they participated in the democratic system as voters, some even influencing the votes of other members in their household, market women also acted collectively to convince their political leaders to act in their interests. One instance that was cited several times among respondents was the national government's response to pressure from female trade groups by establishing a stronger security presence along the Ghana/Togo border to prevent illegal dumping of textiles. Additionally, a month or so before the field study was conducted in July 2014, there was a protest where many traders voiced their concern about Chinese nationals operating businesses in Makola Market. Traders who felt their dwindling profits were jeopardized by individuals selling Chinese goods at low prices could vent their concerns during this protest.

Collective action by market women has often been facilitated through market associations. Categorized by specific products (i.e. cloth and tomato sellers), market associations are well-structured entities that provide important services for their members. They manage their membership (estimates vary from several hundred to thousands) through sophisticated hierarchies including average traders and a counseling board with a president overseen by a queen of a specific product or commodity (i.e. Queen of the cloth sellers or Queen of the tomato sellers). Leadership ascension is merit-based and democratic, with lower level members voting long-term successful traders into positions of power.

In addition to serving as representative advocates to government leaders, associations and unions support their members by providing emergency finances (such as paying funeral expenses for a member's relative) and advertising government and private loans. Rapid urbanization has resulted in more and more people selling goods and services in the informal economy as an income-generating mechanism. This influx of traders in the market has weakened the ability of market associations and unions to set prices or to limit the volume of products sold to influence members' profits. For long-term union members, new traders who chose to forgo union membership are a major concern. As Mercy Djan, the leader of the cloth sellers (Queen of the Cloth Sellers) stated:

“Well the problem is...the problem is formally; we don't have a lot of people on the streets selling so the business was very good because the business was limited. But presently, we have a lot of people on the street also selling the same thing we are selling in the market so naturally, business will be low.”

### **Conclusions**

High female participation in labor markets should be received by economists and policy makers as a positive outcome. Theoretically, it means that working-age women seeking employment have found a means to generate an income. Trends in developing countries like Brazil and India show that labor markets are transitioning from physically demanding labor (brawn intensive) to work that requires more intellectual input and soft skills (brain intensive). This shift represents an opportunity for women to enter the market, compete with men, and earn their own income (Randall 2013). What appears to be a

robust labor market and an example of societal progress, upon closer inspection, may be an inefficient market for labor. In many developing countries, especially in the Sub-Saharan Africa region, high rates of female labor force participation are associated with a concentration of women in low-wage work in the formal economy or subsistence labor in the informal economy.

This appears to be the case for Ghana, an ethnically, religiously and linguistically diverse West African country with a British colonial legacy. In the post-colonial era, the country has made considerable progress in achieving gender parity in primary education but there is still room for growth in higher education. Females can now acquire the foundations for formal skills and training like their male counterparts but outcomes in the formal labor market are not the same. Inefficient firm behavior like gender-based discrimination remain pervasive because the legal system does not effectively address it. A gender wage gap, supported by a rigorous study that determined female workers in the manufacturing sector are paid 17% less than males (Verner 1999), may also be underreported nationally. Despite these obstacles, per the Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI), Ghanaian women exhibit high rates of economic participation. The informal labor market, not the formal one with higher wages and greater job security, may account for this.

Trading goods in the informal market is not a new development. For centuries, Ghanaian women have turned to enterprise in open air markets to generate income. In the last two or three decades, urbanization and the relocation of citizens from other regions (especially the Northern) to southern coastal urban centers like Accra has caused urban, informal markets to become saturated, further limiting profits for individual sellers. Since women have a rich legacy of being traders, this paper seeks to determine if gender influenced profits.

Using a multivariate OLS regression, the hypothesis tested is that female traders will outperform male traders because open-air market trade is “woman’s work.” Data came from a randomized experiment assessing behavioral outcomes of male and female microenterprise owners in Accra and Tema after they received either cash or an in-kind grant (Fafchamps et al 2014). After reducing the baseline data—consisting of responses from over 900 participants—to 199 respondents (43 men and 76 women), ten variables were tested on profit (a proxy for firm performance): gender (**Fem**), age (**Age**), marital status (**MarSta**); completed years of education (**Educ**); number of businesses owned (**Bus\_Count**); land/market space ownership (**FixCap\_Land**); VAT registration (**VAT**); association membership (**Assoc**); cash on hand (**Cash**); total sales for September 2008 (**Mon\_sales**).

Results show that gender did not have an effect on profit. Of the ten variables, only two business factors (**Cash** and **Mon\_Sales**) were statistically significant. Cash on hand had a negative relationship to profits, while sales in September 2008 had a positive relationship. Although the regression results did not support the hypothesis, this exercise was useful for analyzing demographic characteristics and factors affecting Ghana's microenterprise owners using concrete data and not just theory and antidotal evidence. The descriptive statistics are particularly insightful. As theorized, women in the sample had on average less years of formal education (7 years) relative to their male counterparts (9 years). Surprisingly, there were very low rates of market association membership. Ninety percent of women of the surveyed women and ninety-three percent of men were not affiliated with a market association.

After providing a broad view of the type of people who turn to microenterprise in the informal labor market to generate income, commonalities, experiences and viewpoints of female traders were presented. With IRB approval, the primary investigator conducted interviews and participant observations with 30 market women in Accra's Makola Market—one of the largest open air markets in the country. Using English language skills as a proxy for skill level, it was determined that most of the female traders (27 of the 30 interviewees) were low-skilled or had very few years of formal education. Despite their limited formal training, the participants were well-versed with contemporary macroeconomic issues and politically engaged citizens. They expressed their concerns about rising inflation and the failure of local and national government to provide them with services such as renovating Makola Market despite the payment of VAT and other taxes and fees. High-level market association leaders stress the importance of their organizations for collective action like lobbying government to address border control, providing funding in times of crises, and raising awareness about financing like microloans. They acknowledged that an influx of traders had made trade in the market more challenging and further reduced profits for members.

This study constitutes a detailed analysis of the opportunities, challenges and experiences of Ghanaian working-class women. Multidisciplinary research design combining quantitative and qualitative approaches offers a both a broad view using data and fine details using interviews. In the presentation of the study's process and findings, the quantitative overview is established first and is followed by the qualitative section. In conducting the study, interviews and participant observations were completed approximately one year before the quantitative analysis. Had the time frame been reversed,

questions used in the semi-structured script would have focused more on microeconomic issues, including details on individual profits and assets, financing and competition between more established traders, and recent market entrants. The study in its present form is a rigorous, detailed analysis of female economic agency in Ghana and provides insight into the challenges and experiences of working women in a developing, Sub-Saharan African country.

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