

Harmonizing Personal and Social Perspectives

Abstract

This paper attempts to present an alternative theoretical perspective, that is, the personal-social dynamic perspective to understand women entrepreneurship, especially in unconventional business sectors in Malaysia. Traditionally, women entrepreneurship is understood from the perspective of business start-up, sustenance and growth. This alternative approach serves to complement existing conventional understanding that normally explains women entrepreneurship from the psychological dimension of personal traits and concentrates on individual level analysis. According to this school of thought, the development of women's entrepreneurial traits occurs in an isolated and particularized manner independently of the wider social domain within which the entrepreneurs are situated in. In simple terms, the role of social actors for example, in birth and development of entrepreneurial traits at the individual level is negligible, if not invisible. The traits are argued as in-born. On the contrary, the alternative model we are suggesting integrates the dynamic component of personal characteristics with the wider social environment, embracing both economic and institutional social processes. This alternative perspective is an outcome of a research conducted by a group of researchers in the Centre for Gender Research (CGR), Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia on women entrepreneurs in unconventional business sectors in Malaysia. The research findings demonstrate that some women entrepreneurial traits have indeed been developed within the social-institutional context. It was also found that the women personal characteristics to a certain extent influenced their social context, e.g., social relations. As such, it appears that women entrepreneurship is in part formed by a process of harmonizing the personal and social domains.