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THE EFFECT OF ENTERPRISE POLICY ON FEMALE BUSINESS OWNERSHIP: AN INSTITUTIONAL PERSPECTIVE (SUMMARY)

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~~ SUMMARY ~~**THE EFFECT OF ENTERPRISE POLICY ON FEMALE BUSINESS OWNERSHIP: AN INSTITUTIONAL PERSPECTIVE**

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Principal Topic

Growing awareness of the economic potential of women entrepreneurs has led many governments to develop dedicated, gender-specific policies and programs to support female entrepreneurship. The extent to which these policies assist women to start and grow successful ventures is largely unknown. In many cases the provision may not be suitable for the women's requirements; in other cases women may be unaware that this policy provision exists to support their enterprises. The aims of this paper are (i) to explore in what ways and to what extent women utilize the availability of enterprise policies (ii) to investigate whether policy makers consider women to be relevant in the formulation of gender-specific enterprise policy (iii) and to contribute these findings to the enterprise policy formulation process.

Method

The research objectives are addressed through data collected by the use of individual in-depth semi-structured interviews with female entrepreneurs and senior policy-makers, and a period of participant observation working within a UK government department. The data analysis process was inductive allowing critical themes to emerge from the data. To analyze the data NVivo was used to structure and organize the data.

Results and Implications

The findings indicate that while some individuals involved in policy formulation believe in the importance of women's enterprise, female entrepreneurship lacks legitimacy within government. Female entrepreneurs play virtually no role in the formulation of gender-specific enterprise policies, and there was little recognition that women may have a role as co-producers of policies designed to assist the start-up and growth of their entrepreneurial ventures. The notion that female entrepreneurship requires a set of distinctive and gender specific policies also lacks legitimacy among many female entrepreneurs. Not only did few women entrepreneurs take advantage of gender-specific enterprise policies, few even realized their existence. Despite the importance of enterprise policies within the national economic policy framework, the findings draw attention to the importance of internal processes associated with the formulation of enterprise policy, and the lack of transparency and feasibility of enterprise policy when it considers female entrepreneurs. The study concludes by suggesting mechanisms to achieve superior performance from government to support female entrepreneurship.

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