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Chapter 12

**CULTURE AND BUSINESS IN SUB-SAHARAN
AFRICA: AN OUTLOOK ON KENYA**

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ABSTRACT

The culture of doing business in Sub-Saharan Africa involves the engagement of family members (Waweru, Mutuma & Chege, 2015) to participate in income generating activities. Each member of the family has a role towards sustenance of the family. This culture is “nurtured” at birth and passed on from one generation to another as traditions, customs, societal norms, unwritten codes of conduct and tend to be resistant to change (Bruton et al., 2008). Sub-Saharan African’s have a mixed way of engaging in business activities that ranges from the formal, the informal, and the indigenous (see Madichie et al., 2021; Madichie et al., 2020; Nkamnebe & Madichie, 2010; Madichie, 2005). The indigenous, informal and formal economic activities are best understood as social groupings whose industrious activities are subject to varying legal statuses, state intervention, and fabrication of relations rather than as dual sectors (Portes et al., 1986). The tradition in Kenya bestows on a father, as the head of the

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family, a major role of a bread winner in the family unit. As the patriarch, a father has a duty to provide for his family (Gupta et al., 2010). The mother's role is to supplement what the father brings home, while the role of the children is to assist the mother in supplementing family's sustenance through income generation. If a father is employed or engaged in a formal business, then other members of the family have an obligation to assist in income generation for family sustenance through indigenous methods that are perceived to have value in their own right (Blunt & Jones, 1997). These types of business activities include farming and raising livestock, maintaining indigenous retail shops (known as kiosks) and selling of food items. It is worthwhile to note that these activities are not restricted to urban areas, but are also carried out in rural areas. The current study adds to the limited literature on business activities and culture in sub-Saharan Africa which is currently largely concentrated on the formal sector (see for example Minnis, 2006; Pedersen & McCormick, 1999) and discusses the impact of the recent pandemic (COVID-19) on business activities of women and children who still had to generate income to either supplement father's income or to sustain the family.

Keywords: culture, indigenous business, Sub-Saharan Africa, Kenya, income generation and family sustenance

INTRODUCTION

Cultural practices of people have undergone changes due to such internal pressures as natural catastrophes, or growth and such external pressures and interactions as wars or externally-driven rapid economic growth (Gray et al., 2008). Given this natural order, it is not surprising that the Kenyan culture has also changed. However, globalization and the introduction of formal education have not erased certain practices that make up the core ideas on how to sustain the family unit. Family sustenance is at the forefront of every Kenyan family since it is critical to family lineage continuity. Sustenance of the family is a normal practice and an activity that is undertaken without a second thought, and even though culture is taken for granted; values, norms, beliefs, and symbols that have been acquired through socialization also shape behavior and conduct in a culture in predictable directions (Peterson, 1979; Wrong, 1961).

Countries that are rich in relevant cultural and socioeconomic diversities such as Kenya, Malaysia, and South Africa have many different ethno-cultural groups with varying views and values (Gray et al., 2008; Shrestha, Smith, & Gray, 2005). For this reason, these countries face great challenges in setting far-reaching goals for managing family resources, as such people from these countries have combined intuition, experiences, and trial-and-error methods to meet those challenges and accomplish their goals (Gray et al., 2008). Culture dictates in many sub-Saharan African countries, particularly in Kenya, require that family lines be continued, and continuation amongst other things requires sustenance and preservation of the family unit. However, family sustenance and continuity require economic activities to generate income that will provide for the livelihood of its members. The economic activity necessity of earning a living and supporting a family is therefore, in most cases, the underlying reason for starting and growing a business (Winter et al., 2016).

Business in this context therefore is a person's regular activity that meets the livelihood of individuals who matter in their lives such as the family unit (Blunt & Jones (1997). The livelihood of the family unit of the Kenyan people is built through the contribution of the various members of the family unit. By focusing on the family rather than on business shows that the underlying logics for family and business activities are not competing, rather families operate businesses through embedded social relationships that are internal (with family members) to access resources that are necessary for preserving the family (Murithi et al., 2020). Things needed to run the business are the perceived resources in a humanistic view (Jackson, 2004). As such a combination of ascription and achievement orientation in the overall spirit of humanistic orientation guide the indigenous African business activities (Gupta et al., 2010).

The family units in Kenya are patriarchal in nature, hence their sustenance falls squarely on the shoulders of the male who is also the head of family. The rights and duties of men in Sub-Saharan Africa, especially Kenya, entail the responsibilities and obligations to cater to the family unit. These obligations and the human relationships dictated by the culture often spill over into business environment (Matondo, 2012). Family units do

engage in business activities of various sorts that range from bartering to trading in order to improve on their livelihoods and ensure continuation of the family lineage. However, these practices also end up in preserving business activities that are considered indigenous.

This chapter emerges from author's own work as well as from previous limited studies on the culture of Sub-Saharan Africa that are specific to the East African Region (Kenya included). Studies directed to Africa and its people (e.g., Bernard et al., 2020; McCullough, 2017; Fuglie & Rada, 2013; Haddad et al., 1997 & Safilios-Rothschild, 1988) emphasize the importance of culture when undertaking economic activities especially indigenous businesses. The purpose of this chapter is to stimulate debate on indigenous business practices and their recognition as a normal means of livelihood for a group of people in Kenya.

Studies in Kenya on indigenous economic activities by Ondicho (2018) reported that the Maasai people participate in indigenous ecotourism through their community-based cultural boma tourism enterprises. This form of tourism utilizes locally available resources (culture), vests ownership and control firmly in local hands, as such the benefits are kept locally. Further, indigenous entrepreneurship, an economic activity act as a stimulus to struggling economies and a tool for rebuilding an economy as well as stimulating the private sector (King'ong'o et al., 2020). These practices cannot be compared to the orthodoxy in West or to the European-based perspective, since the practices in the Eastern region of Sub-Saharan Africa are unique to the region by virtue of the stages of evolution. For instance, in studies of family business in the western world, we might see the predominance of the business logic (business ownership and profitability) over the family logic (harmony and nurturing) (Sharma, 2004). In Sub-Saharan Africa in general and Kenya in particular, the informal sector has been constructed as opposite to the formal and the distinction between the two has been made with respect to informal vs. formal, labor vs. capital intensity, family owned vs. corporate, temporary vs. permanent structures, serving domestic vs. international markets, unregulated vs. regulated, ease of entry vs. entry constraints, and skill acquired in informal education vs. formal education such as apprenticeship (Yeboa, 1998; Sanyal, 1988).

The dimensions mentioned have no room for the indigenous business practices that have been engaged to earn livelihood to sustain the family units, and have been passed down from one generation to the next since human beings begun to settle in the Eastern part of the Sub-Saharan Africa. This chapter is about the sheer instinct of doing business to sustain family life. This culture of providing for the family goes hand-in-hand with indigenous business activities and it surpasses training from formal education since the indigenous African culture, ensures that the highest authority in the community is entrusted the function of the “guardian of tradition,” and that culture is handed over through generations (Gupta et al., 2010).

It is about survival and preservation of the family as well as the business of the family. The head of the family’s regular occupation is to ensure that family members are catered for and that their needs and wants are met. The members of the family take part in this business where their roles are merged into a collective income generation for the sustenance of the family. The roles of each member of the family is brought together to achieve a common purpose of supplementing efforts of head of the family as far as subsistence of the family is concerned. Business in this chapter is therefore conceptualized as an activity engaged in to sustain the family.

Even though there are thousands of ethnic groups in the region of Southeast Sub-Saharan Africa, all of them have a shared purpose of family sustenance through pooled income and resource generating activities in different capacities (Arthur-Holmes & Busia, 2020). For instance, when children are not in school, they assist their mothers in tilling land or are tasked with the care of livestock thus freeing their mothers to engage in other activities for improved and increased production. The Kenyan culture requires that family units work together for family livelihood since working together as a team ensures that majority of the needs and wants are met. Furthermore, it ensures that matters involving sustenance revolve around the team rather than individuals (Matondo, 2012).

There is an abundance of literature on the formal type of business in Africa, however, as indicated earlier there is paucity of academic literature on informal business activities. Ironically, the literature on indigenous

business activities is practically nonexistent, however, a considerable amount of research has emerged during the last decade several aspects of family life and on the social, economic, and health conditions of adults in Sub-Saharan Africa (e.g., Aboderin & Hoffman, 2015; Lloyd-Sherlock et al., 2014; Kohler et al., 2013 ; Lloyd-Sherlock et al., 2012; Chazan, 2008; Whyte et al., 2008; Cole & Durham, 2007; Aboderin, 2006; Posel et al., 2006 ; Therborn, 2006; Nxusani, 2004; Sotshongaye, 2002 ; Okumu, 2002; Kayongo-Male & Onyango, 1984).

This chapter recognizes three types of business practices: formal business, informal business and indigenous businesses. The chapter considers indigenous business to be the type of business undertaken by a family unit to generate income for the purpose of family sustenance. It is a common practice in Sub-Saharan Africa for the members of a family to contribute in income generating activities towards the livelihood of the family. It is indeed one of the most important traditional norms of preservation (Gupta et al., 2010; Goussikindey, 2006). Hence, culture and business in Sub-Saharan Africa, Kenya in particular, are intertwined to oversee continuity of family sustenance and preservation.

The Kenyan culture has it that, the head of the family goes out in search of sustenance for the family since the man has to act in accordance of his status as the main breadwinner and the head of the family (White, 2004). In the 19th and 20th century men would go to the forests to fulfill this need of sustenance through hunting and gathering. The supplies obtained in this activity were used for food and shelter (homes and body wear) by family units, thus family units were primarily self-sufficient (Bjornlund et al., 2020; Bohannan & Dalton, 1962). While the men were in the forests hunting and gathering, the women and children were left in the homesteads to engage in such other duties as processing and preserving food brought home from the previous hunt. Processing and preserving food were important because they ensured the family unit had something to eat and keep warm during periods when men came home empty handed.

Naturally, several traditional practices in Kenya changed during colonization period when the first settlers of European descent established themselves in 1903 as large-scale farmers in the highlands. With their lands

taken away from indigenous African groups, native Kenyans became subsistence farmers or laborers in the towns while Indian merchants moved inland from the coast and established small trade operations (Gray, 1996). Records indicate that those changes made native Kenyans alter their ways of living - from hunting and gathering to employment and subsistence farming. The “new ways” of living required Kenyans to adapt and learn skills necessary for employment and engagement in businesses, though, the propensity to engage in different forms of business was based on culturally influenced interpretation (Dana & Anderson, 2021; Helander, 1999). Native culture and “acquired” culture intertwined to form indigenous skills that were directed towards family sustenance and family unit preservation. Ochieng (1995) noted that indigenous skills have since the “interaction” undergone many adaptations and have also led largely to untapped resource. Changes have been attributed to globalization that changed the way of doing business as well as the culture.

Colonization and globalization have brought streams of cultural influences to Africa, including Kenya. The twin forces of colonization and globalization have led to cultural heterogeneity of a globalizing influence of pre-colonial foreign trade. They also created colonialism and neocolonialism of corporations that still today reflect their colonial inheritance (Gray et al., 2008; Dia, 1996; Jackson, 2004; Adi, 2005). According to Rothkop (1997) economic roots of globalization with native influences have brought into focus the power of cultural influences and the power to bind or to divide in a time when the tensions between integration and separation tug at every issue.

Kilby (1988) argues that a major source of difficulties in the enterprise was in the inhibitory social structure coupled with lack of continuity between the social structures associated with traditional means of production and those associated with capitalistic enterprises. This dilemma has called for an interrogation of adaptation to local cultural dynamics and socioeconomic conditions of business (Gray et al., 2008). At the current time, i.e., in the 21st century, hunting and gathering in the forest for family sustenance is near extinction. Sustaining the family unit in the current climate does not rely solely on hunting and gathering in the forest, but has extended to tilling of

land and domesticating animals. Transposing the ancient practices to the present still maintains at its core the duty of the patriarch to sustain the family unit. Even though most of the roles remain the same for many households, the formal and informal business activities have now replaced foraging in the forest (Ochieng', 1995).

In spite of the changes, the role of men as the head of family remains the same together with their primary responsibility of providing their family units with sustenance. To be able to discharge their obligations, i.e., to provide shelter, food, clothing, and education for their children in a "changed world", the majority of the men seek employment in formal or informal business sectors. Women and children help by engaging in agricultural activities - tilling and cultivating or keeping domesticated animals. The produce from these activities are used by the family, however the surpluses are sold to generate additional income for family sustenance. Bartering i.e., exchanging one form of agricultural produce, that a household has in abundance, for another, which it does not have much of is still a viable exchange mechanism in many parts of Sub-Saharan Africa, the Cameroons and Kenya included (Mbebeb, 2008).

Urbanization has become one of the most significant global social trends in the 21st century and Sub-Saharan Africa is no exception (NCPD, 2018). In fact, Africa is the most rapidly urbanizing continent with more than 50% of Sub-Saharan Africa's population estimated to be urbanized (Jelili, 2012). Kenya's statistics provide an interesting insight into the urbanization phenomenon in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The annual rate of urbanization in Kenya is about 4.3%, even though about 26% of the population in 2017 lived in urban centres compared to 7% in 1960 (Huho & Muriuki, 2021). The total population in 2019 according to Kenya National Bureau of Statistics based 2019 census survey is 47.5 million or 12.2 households (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2020). It was further reported that about 19.5 million of the population is considered poor, and of that number, 14 million live in rural areas. 1.3 million of the poor live in peri-urban/core-urban areas, and 4.2 million live in informal settlements (UNDP, 2020). For the families that live in urban and per-urban settings, the traditional means of earning sustenance is no longer available,

hence, over time most of these families have transitioned to rely on formal and informal business as a reliable source of employment in urban areas.

In Kenya and many other African countries, population growth in urban areas is said to be due to both natural increase and high rates of migration into the cities and large towns (Mungai et al., 2019). Often, men move away from their homes in search of employment, while women stay home to chip in income from whatever means is available in the homestead. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has changed the dynamic in the family unit in the Eastern Region of Sub-Saharan Africa as far as sustenance is concerned. In Kenya, the pandemic has caused many formal and informal business activities to shut down or, at the minimum, alter their ways of doing business such as operating at a lower level. This has resulted in major job losses (Ondicho, 2021). The impact of the shutdown or reduced operations has led to unemployment of a disproportionately large number of men (heads of families), hence the loss of a large source of income for sustenance for many families.

As the men try to pick up themselves and/or re-orient to how to cater for their families, the women and children seem to have stepped up their business activities by putting in more hours of business and producing more in order to make up for the lost income caused by the man's loss of income (Ogada et al., 2021). The men now being homebound (having been laid off from work) have freed the women to go out and engage in business for longer hours. Hence, notwithstanding the increased level of anxiety that the pandemic caused, women's participation in indigenous business activities in Kenya has witnessed an increase during the pandemic (Kaberia & Muathe, 2020). Resources for indigenous business activities are pooled when the need for supplemental income generation is required.

Resources for indigenous business activities such as cooking utensils may be used for both household and business needs (Gough, Tipple & Napier, 2003). These business activities do not generally require inventory or record-keeping, and inventory/stock is often exhausted at the end of the day, except for those who keep kiosks (mini stores). The income generated from each day's business activities is used to purchase input for the next day's business activity, and whatever excess money is left is used to

purchase other items that the family requires. Most of these local business activities have no standard way of “doing business”. The culture of doing business utilizes whatever the family has at its disposal, as such these business ventures have limited opportunities to go beyond the constraints of family resources (Gupta et al., 2010). Indigenous business sector remains significantly underdeveloped (Esuha & Fletcher, 2002) as business activities undertaken by indigenous people often focus on generating income for the benefit of their immediate communities (Peredo & Anderson, 2006). The indigenous business activities undertaken by women, assisted by children for sustenance (which are discussed below) include but are not limited to owning kiosks, hawking, vending and agricultural activities.

KIOSKS

These are shops found around the living quarters of the family. They are usually near the homestead. If the head of the family is not formerly employed, then this kiosk is their main source of income and is operated by the head of the family. On the other hand, if the head of the family is formerly employed, then the task of operating the kiosk as a source of generating supplementary income is left to the woman. Sometimes, this task is left to the children when they are not in school. The woman is thereby “freed” by the children to engage in other household chores such as selling produce from the farm (Kenya Financial Diaries, 2014).

Parents begin grooming children for their roles in the indigenous business at a young age (Gupta et al., 2010). Indigenous business activities such as kiosks attract about 70.0% of the Kenyan population who shop in these indigenous retail establishments (Cyttonn, 2018). Operating a kiosk is about family logic of harmony and nurturing. The average income per household per month is about US\$ 130 (one hundred, thirty dollars) nationally. This household income is the aggregate earnings of all household members and includes all forms of income arising from employment, household enterprises and selling of agricultural produce (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2016).

HAWKING

Hawking is a common indigenous business activity because very little start-up capital is needed. It is generally undertaken by women who sell agricultural produce such as maize (roast or boiled), ground nuts, sesame seeds, fruits, boiled eggs and many more. This type of business mostly involves ready-to-eat foods. It is typically done by women who walk from place to place with the wares in a container or a woven basket on their head. They continue their pedestrian selling until all their wares are sold out, have to attend to other duties, or until they are too exhausted to continue. Besides the low start-up capital requirement and the intense labor required, hawking is attractive to women because it is flexible (Bullock & Crane, 2021). Such other factors as economic downturn, redundancy, inability to find work, and the need to support the family with extra income push women to hawking (Ogada et al., 2021; Charles & Gherman, 2013; Yu & Yan, 2015). The task of hawking falls on the children, in the event that their mother, for any reason, is unable to do it, thus it is not uncommon to find children hawking after school hours (Emeri & Adelanwa, 2020). It is estimated that hawking generates an average income of US\$ 100 (one hundred dollars) per household per month (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2016).

VENDING

Women, according to last estimate, make-up about 50 percent of the agricultural labor force in Sub-Saharan Africa. This represents an increase of 5% in 20 years; from about 45 percent in 1980, however, this percent might be higher in Eastern Africa where women already made-up about 50% of the agricultural labor force in 1980 and evidence suggests that because of the economic conditions this number is increasing (FAO, 2011). Women participate in this mode of business by selling agricultural produce in a designated area established close to the homestead. Similar to hawking,

children also assist in this business when the women are not available or are away doing other chores. Although it has been argued that vending attracts those who have limited opportunities for obtaining formal employment and/or prestigious business, and minimizes chances of social exclusion and marginalization, vending is increasingly becoming a viable option to many women (Mitullah, 2003).

Vending is an important livelihood that generates income as well as demand for a wide range of services (Mungai et al., 2019). Further, Mungai et al., (2019) posited that vending as a mode of trade was initiated in the African indigenous market concept. Vending in Africa entails a designated open space, with no individually assigned personal space, where traders could come to sell whatever they have to sell. As an economic activity with flexible schedule, vending seems to be attractive to women who use the space to sell agricultural produce and foods to augment husband's income (Mitullah, 2003). Vending is sometimes blended with hawking with traders moving their goods from one household to the next. When funds are available, other items such as household utensils, soap, sweets, cigarettes and clothing are purchased as a part of the trade inventory and sold through vending and/or hawking. It is estimated that an average income generated from vending is about US\$ 9.25 per month (Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, 2016).

AGRICULTURAL ACTIVITIES

When the head of family is engaged in a formal employment with either the government or a private party, the women and children participate in growing crops that are used for consumption and commercial purposes. A wide array of crops and vegetables such as cereals, beans, green grams, maize, yams, cassava and sweet potatoes are produced from tilling. Women and children also engage in animal husbandry for family sustenance and trade to generate income. A wide variety of livestock is kept, but they typically include poultry, cows, goats and sheep. Some families even venture

into bee keeping (Tavener & Crane 2018, 2019) contribute to family unit sustenance.

Women and children tend to be very resourceful and creative. They try as much as possible to utilize things that are commonly found in nature as assets in discharging the day to day conventional housekeeping exercises and duties. For example, they make organic products from the regular habitat to grow vegetables and herbs and use wood for fuel (Andole et al., 2020). It should be noted though that while many households derive part of their livelihood from farming and literally “live on the land”, there are restrictions on the gathering and harvesting of plants and other natural and environmental resources are protected by customary and conventional laws (Njue, 2021; Olalo 2010).

There are regions such as the northern part of Kenya which are mainly arid and semi-arid land. These areas do not support large scale agricultural activities, as such millions of rural households who live in these parts rely on rain-fed small-scale subsistence agriculture (Kalungu et al., 2013). Women and children who live in these parts keep domesticated animals for their own use and commercial purposes. Small scale farming improves household food, nutritional security and possible positive income (Abel et al., 2019; Mayekiso et al., 2017; Olabode et al., 2017; Weinberger & Msuya, 2004). Take the case of poultry industry for example, where family members provide labor. Poultry production contributes 30% of the product in the agriculture sector in Kenya which is the equivalent of 55 % of to the livestock sector and 7.8% to the country’s GDP (Mango et al., 2018; Omiti, 2015; Sock et al., 2013). Noteworthy is the fact that raising indigenous chicken that is free from antibiotic and hormones is a key economic empowerment in Kenya because chicken farming is easy to implement and feeding of the birds is carried out by women and children (Ngeywo et al., 2021).

CONCLUSION

This chapter provides an insight into the culture and business in Kenya which resonates throughout Sub-Saharan Africa. This outlook provides a baseline on how to approach industrialization in this region through

understanding the importance of culture as part of the resources and how it goes hand-in-hand with business operations that require other resources. Culture and business activities are intertwined in the African context and conceptualized from the perspective of family sustenance which can be stretched and extended. Indigenous business activities such as trading (kiosks, hawking, vending) and agricultural activities (farming and animal husbandry) can be promoted to be more widely used in a country/region for the purposes of sustenance since it has been proven to be successful in sustaining family units in countries such as Kenya. Having considerable natural resources including fertile land and supportive tropical climate, it can be argued that Kenya has only minimally tapped its natural resources (Ondicho, 2018). For instance, even though cassava and sweet potato are major factors in providing food security in Sub-Saharan Africa and widely grown in the East Africa region, production of cassava in Kenya is low compared to other crops like maize, beans, and sorghum (Githunguri & Njiru, 2021).

Although this is an outlook of crop production in Kenya, the same underutilization of resources resonates across all other sectors including trading, farming, and animal husbandry. Based on the overview of the Kenya's resources and practices reported in this chapter, we argue that promoting indigenous business practices in Kenya has the potential to improve the quality of life not only in Kenya but also within the region. We argue further that the intersection between culture and business in Sub-Saharan Africa presents a unique context that warrants scholarly inquiry into how this confluence of modernity and tradition could be leveraged for further development of the region (Murithi et al., 2020). It is important to note that business in this chapter is not in the strict sense of business for economic gains but viewed rather broadly as a continuation of the family unit and preservation of family lineage. It is in this vein that we argue that the knowledge of culture and business can be used to successfully industrialize the sub-Saharan Africa region.

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