Female Social Entrepreneurship in Uganda: The Changing Face of Young Female Entrepreneurs in an Evolving Media Age

For years, women in Uganda have been recognized as the more entrepreneurial gender in the small business sector. The rise of the digital age has seen increasing accessibility to the Internet and simultaneous usage of different media platforms like social media. This evolution of media and its widespread use in Uganda’s capital of Kampala has influenced a steady rise of the young social entrepreneur. Ideas learned from a global platform are implemented and customized for the Ugandan consumer. In the form of a photojournalism project, I will make an audio-photo slideshow documentary portraying four young female social entrepreneurs in Kampala taking advantage of technological advancements in their businesses.

For three weeks, I will interview and shadow these socioeconomically diverse case studies, investigating how their unique enterprises fulfill their personal economic goals and contribute to their communities. Through these profiles, my documentary will provide insight into the increasing prevalence of women in Uganda’s socioeconomic sphere. I will focus on young women because they are part of a generation of ascending leaders in developing. I hope the visual format of my project will be more accessible and understood by a wide range of age groups – particularly my intended audience of young people aged 18-35 years.

Social entrepreneurs can be identified as individuals who use innovative solutions to solve personal and community challenges. Women’s influence in smaller communities has been on the rise. In Uganda’s most recent census in 2002, the population of women exceeded men by 2 percent at an annual growth rate of 3.2 percent. Even the private sector and government institutions recognize the potency of young entrepreneurs. Three major banks in Uganda together with the Ministry of Finance have set up an entrepreneurship project called the Youth Venture Capital Fund. The main objective of this fund is to give financial assistance and mentoring to youth with sustainable business ideas. Their support and encouragement will ensure that more young people are exposed to opportunities that not only advance their personal economic goals, but also in a way that benefits the country as a whole.

Scholarship about entrepreneurship opportunities about youth and women has been done by a number of academicians in Uganda. Laura Orobia, a lecturer in the Department of Leadership and Governance at Makerere University Business School studied four cases mainly in the form of non-governmental organizations that aim to tackle urban challenges like high numbers of orphans, slum development in Kampala and poverty eradication. I will differentiate my project by focusing on individuals whose businesses intend to capitalize on economic prospects. In his PhD dissemination series, Julius Kikooma found that social constructions of gendered identities of male and female entrepreneurs impact business progress. According to Kikooma, Ugandan women might be more entrepreneurial than men but cultural gender roles still affect women from progressing faster than men. Through the stories of my subjects, I will include whether they have had to overcome gender and cultural challenges to reach their levels of success.

In three weeks I hope to primarily learn how these advancing media platforms in Uganda have shaped the progression of their enterprises. Additionally, I would like to know how and what inspired these young women to start their enterprises. What significance do they intend to have in their community’s welfare? And, what kind of legacy do they hope to leave in the wake of Africa’s revival as an area of immense potential?

My sources include: Ngyenzi Mugyenyi and two other partners who own a new small boutique called Bold. They are recent college graduates who studied abroad in South Africa. They represent a fast-rising group of young Ugandans that are importing foreign enterprising
ideas and customizing them for a Ugandan market. **Bold** specifically sells clothes and accessories made by emerging young Ugandan designers. The shop’s Afrocentric agenda aims to celebrate Ugandan culture at home and abroad through fashionable wardrobe. **Amagara Skincare** is a female-owned company that manufactures Ugandan-made, high-end beauty products ranging from skin lotion, bath gels and soaps using raw materials grown in the country. I first spotted **Amagara Skincare** products at the **Bold** store. Adia Abdul is a sophomore at Makerere and the young editor-in-chief of **Vuvuzela**, a youth magazine that launched this past July targeting Ugandans between 18 and 35 years. Through the use of print journalism, I hope to learn from Abdul how **Vuvuzela** has been a transformative and educational platform to communicate with youth around the country. I will interview a street or market vendor who sells Fast Moving Consuming Goods (FMCGs) like newspapers, mobile airtime cards and market produce. They are usually found on the sidewalks of busy roads. I am familiar with three that work in my neighborhood and will reach out to one when I arrive. Their perspective is valuable because they have seen the city’s progression on the frontlines of the capital’s streets. By definition, they are a micro version of social entrepreneurs that dominate the rising low-income part of society.

I will set up two sit-down interviews with my subjects. The first will be introductory in order to gain my subject’s trust before I begin using my camera around them. The second will be at their workplaces. I will ask questions on their roles as social entrepreneurs, how new tech tools like social media and other platforms have shaped their enterprises and how their gender has affected their journeys. I plan to interview their co-workers and customers to assess a general attitude surrounding their businesses. In addition, I will shadow my subjects while capturing images at different intervals of the day depending on their availability. I will analyze interview responses and match photographs to accurately portray their journey as young social entrepreneurs. I will also interview two professionals from the media and entrepreneurship industry. Mr. Simon Kaheru is a lead market analyst at a leading mobile marketing service provider. His perspective adds background to the history and future projection of Uganda’s interaction with changing media forms. I will interview Ms. Laura Orobia to inquire about her academic perspectives on women’s role in development through their social enterprises.

I grew up in Uganda where the majority of my family lives including my mother. I will stay at our home located in central Kampala. I took an Anthropology and African Studies course on “Youth and Politics in Sub-Saharan Africa,” where we tracked the development of youth agency in Africa – and how it has shaped their contributions to society. Through my journalism classes and field experience, I have acquired interviewing skills that ensure the integrity of my sources is protected. For example in August 2011, a classmate and I travelled to India with the assistance of Medill’s Eric Lund Global Reporting Grant. We shot a documentary on young Tibetan refugees investigating youth perspectives and levels of activism regarding the Sino-Tibetan conflict.

I hope to use my data during my senior research class project next quarter. I will also present the documentary at an undergraduate research symposium in the spring. I plan to share the documentary on social media forums where more Ugandans can draw inspiration from these examples to realize their own entrepreneurial ideas. I eventually want to return and work on innovative and consumer-aware methods in advertising and marketing that accurately display Uganda and Africa’s potential. My initial focus on female entrepreneurs will give me a head-start in understanding what drives innovative solutions to society’s challenges in this fast-growing media age.
Bibliography

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