



ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF COVID 19 ON SMALL SCALE WOMEN ENTERPRENEOURS IN LILONGWE: A CASE STUDY OF AREA 23 MARKET

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Abstract

Social-distancing restrictions and health- and economic-driven demand shifts from COVID-19 are expected to shutter many small businesses and entrepreneurial ventures, but there is very little early evidence on impacts. This paper provides the first analysis of impacts of the pandemic on the number of active small scale women entrepreneurs in area 23 market T.A Tsabango in Lilongwe .the study population was 100 women, purposive sampling techniques was used to come up with the sample size, qualitative data was analyzed using content analysis and excel was used to come up with graphs, tables and chart for easy interpretation, the study find out that covid 19 affected women entrepreneurs negatively, this includes loss off business, low turnover and there was also an increase in issues of gender based violence.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This paper ought to find out the impact of covid-19 on small scale business women. The study had the evidence from Traditional Authority Tsabango in area 23 Lilongwe district. The study comprises several sections which include background, rationale, and justification, overall and specific objectives, project design and methodology.

1.1 NEED OF THE STUDY.

The information gathered in this study will assist government of Malawi and private sector players to understand problems women entrepreneurs are facing due to covid 19 and come up with better policies and interventions. Additionally, all stakeholders will be aware of roles that other key players and entrepreneurs are taking to address the situation hence no duplication of efforts. On the other hand, the researcher has gained knowledge and solutions to the impact of the pandemic through the gathered data. Lastly, the population under study, has benefited from this study since they were able to identify the challenges that are facing and devise mechanisms to deal with them.

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of literature about the impact of covid 19 on small scale women entrepreneurs as one of the problems that women are facing. The chapter also outlines the theoretical review and conceptual review.

2.1 To find out if entrepreneurs have any access to loans during the pandemic

According to recent World Bank-led research on the COVID-19 crisis, women entrepreneurs around the world suffered large setbacks. New data about the disproportionate effects of lockdown measures on women-led SMEs are emerging; in several Sub-

Saharan countries, about 60% of women-led small businesses have lost their sources of income, three times more than men-led businesses. Globally, women-owned SMEs are about 6 percent points more likely to close their business than male-owned businesses, The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) was granted \$7.36 million for its “Stepping Up for Women” Program which aims to rapidly respond to the disproportionate pressures WSMEs face in the context of the ongoing COVID-19 related crisis. The program deployed innovative solutions for WSMEs that contributed to improving access to markets through more inclusive supply chains; enhancing competitiveness, growth potential, and access to finance by strengthening their ability to leverage digital technologies and leveraging sex-disaggregated data to inform more effective public and private sector interventions.

Program activities implemented in Kyrgyz Republic, Mongolia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Egypt, and Morocco.

The Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) received \$14.71 million for its program to support access to finance, markets, skills and networks for women-led businesses primarily in technology and science-supported sectors. The program prioritized helping women entrepreneurs navigate the ongoing economic crisis, and to identify new business opportunities that may arise because of the pandemic. The program provided acceleration support as well as seed and venture capital to high-potential STEMwomen. World Bank Group (World Bank and IFC) received \$16.01 million for a digitally enabled access to finance and markets program for women-led business in the Sahel region and globally, and an early-stage finance program supporting women entrepreneurs in several regions. The first program will foster market linkages between suppliers and buyers across the Sahel. It will provide services and training to women-led butter cooperatives on know-how, managerial capacity, networks, and marketing tools as well as support the digitization of payment systems. The second program seeks to create an inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem, addresses financing gaps, and assists with skills-building and mentoring of women entrepreneurs.

2.2 To find out the roles of played by stakeholders on women entrepreneurs in dealing with the pandemic

Support provided to and received by W-MSMEs during the pandemic, the pandemic-related financial support offered by FIs and governments reached very few of the surveyed SMEs overall. Several FIs provided support, such as debt restructuring, but over 90 percent of SMEs reported not having received any such assistance. W-MSMEs and smaller businesses in general already experience lower financial inclusion, including lower uptake of debt and insurance products. The pandemic only exacerbated these trends by constraining lending overall, especially among businesses with already lower use of financial services and more limited access to collateral. Many traditional FIs such as banks, SACCOs, and MFIs took more cautious approaches to lending after suffering reduced revenue and greater burdens from non-performing loans. (world bank 2020)

As a result, new customers were less able to get credit, and could not access debt restructuring except in the form of collateralized loans. For example, in South Africa, private sector credit in September 2020 grew at 3.1 percent year-over-year, compared to 6.2 percent year-over-year in September 2019. In a survey conducted by the Central Bank of Kenya in December 2020, 34 percent of credit officers stated that they have tightened credit standards, compared with 17 percent who stated the same in December 2019.⁴¹ These risk-averse positions disproportionately excluded W-MSMEs, given their lower financial inclusion and lack of sufficient collateral. In contrast to banks, SACCOs, and MFIs, digitally-based FIs such as FinTechs and mobile money companies saw their businesses grow during the pandemic. The FinTech market in SSA grew by 21 percent over the year, with increases in transaction volumes and number of users for digital payments and InsurTech services. FIs offered financial support in the form of restructured loans and, where applicable, new loans to minimize the pandemic’s negative impact on their SME clients.

Loan restructuring efforts by FIs included deferred loan repayments, waived default charges, and in some cases, reduced interest rates. FIs also increased limits on and access to working capital loans to help SMEs meet day-to-day expenses during times of low

consumption. Furthermore, institutions participated in various other initiatives, including the provision of interest free loans to cover salaries, the extension of new loan offerings to businesses with high repayment histories, and the issuance of microcredit loans targeting micro-W-MSMEs. FIs also provided SMEs with several forms of nonfinancial support. Specifically, digital efforts included, among other things, the provision of mobile phones on credit and the establishment of online, phone-based, and app-based banking and financial transaction services. At the same time, FIs disseminated information about available support, conducted webinars to assist with risk management and share effective response measures, created online financial training programs and instructional videos, and offered technical assistance.

A higher proportion of SMEs reported accessing FI support than micro and very small enterprises. Overall, 9 percent of SMEs received restructured loans. Easing of prudential norms on capital (Botswana, Congo DRC, Guinea, Lesotho, São Tomé and Príncipe, South Africa, WAEMU). For example, the WAEMU authorities extended by one year the five-year period initiated in 2018 for the transition to Basel II/III bank prudential requirements. In Congo DRC, the central bank postponed the adoption of new minimum capital requirements. In Botswana, the adoption of the 25 percent single borrower limit and concentration risk limit was postponed. In South Africa, a temporary relief on bank capital requirements was put in place, while the liquidity coverage ratio was reduced from 100 to 80 percent to provide additional liquidity and counter financial system risks.

Credit support by encouraging banks to continue to lend to the private sector (through public guarantees on bank loans or the provision of term funding to banks that provide credit to businesses) and by allowing public institutions such as central banks or development banks to lend directly to the private sector (Angola, CEMAC, DRC, Kenya, Lesotho, Mauritius, Niger, Uganda, WAEMU, Zambia). In Lesotho, for example, the authorities have expanded their credit guarantee facilities during the crisis. In DRC, the Central Bank has created a new collateralized long-term funding facility for commercial banks to support the provision of new credit for import and production of food and other basic goods. The Development Bank of Mauritius provided Rs10.2 billion (percent of GDP) in credit to distressed enterprises and cooperative

2.3 to find Possible solutions to the challenged faced by entrepreneurs

Agnes Taiwo Kwara (2020) stated that lock down of people to stay at home from being infected with covid-19 pandemics is experienced to protecting the life of individual that has not been infected with the virus and also to quarantine the infected people for medical care and to prevent it from spreading. which resulted to decrease in social economic activities, increase in poverty level due to lack of finance, loss of jobs and so on. Therefore, effort should be put in place for better economic growth. It should be a collective effort to achieve a huge success. The acute shortage of finance of most women entrepreneurs and some private organizations can be solved by the government giving loans with specifications and directives through commercial banks and microfinance banks to encourage women entrepreneurs and some private organizations to have access to loans without collaterals and little interest rate for quick and better transactions of their businesses.

Workshops, Seminars and Trainings on small scale businesses that will not require huge capital and resources should be given to the public especially women entrepreneurs for quick turn out and success in their businesses. The training should include the technical-know-how of the business, where and the location of the business, methods of saving should also be involved for proper accountability. Federal Government of Nigeria should set up a committee that will help to work with the National Population Commission, Commercial Banks and Microfinance Banks so as to collate the name of the customers, account number and bank verification number of their clients. The location of other group of people that do not operate an account with the establishments mentioned above should be sought. Financial assistance and other palliatives that the government intends to provide so as to mitigate the economic meltdown caused by the lock down imposed by the government to curb the spread of the virus.

Kamal-Chaoui, L. (2020), find out that ensuring access to finance at adequate terms Context: SMEs tend to find it more difficult to obtain external financing compared to their larger peers, which helps to explain why they are typically more vulnerable in economic downturn. Notably, SMEs have traditionally relied heavily on bank lending, which in context of a crisis can become increasingly expensive and hard to access. They also have fewer possibilities to use equity or bond markets and are usually less informed about alternative financial sources. This is a concern as a lack of sufficient finance at adequate terms threatens to subdue the growth of

smaller firms and thereby undermines job creation and economic development. Financing constraints weigh on private investment, business and innovation capacity, and negatively impact on SMEs productivity. They may also amplify economic downturns such as the current Covid-19 1 Kamal-Chaoui, L. (2020). "Rescuing SMEs from the COVID storm: What's next?", OECD Forum. Business at OECD 3 crisis.

2.4 Theoretical frame work

This study used the Social Learning Theory of change. The Social Learning Theory was first introduced by Albert Bandura in 1971 under the organizational paradigm. Behaviorism is at the center of the theory. Bandura described a reciprocal determinism between the environment and a person's behavior such that they influence each other. He further mentioned that a behavior can be learned vicariously by observing others and seeing the consequences of these actions. Some of the key elements of the theory include: Attention (exposing people to models [people] to help guide their behavior is only useful if the individual pays attention to the model and people pay more attention to certain models than others such as those with desirable qualities).

Retention (the individual needs to have some memory of observing others to be influenced by their behavior in the future and such memories can be strengthened by rehearsing the sequence of behavior either mentally or behaviorally). Social Learning Theory also acknowledges that people can make use of their cognitive abilities – for instance they can foresee the probable consequences (good or bad) of different actions and use this to guide their behavior. They can also learn about behavioral consequences through verbal or other types of communication so they do not need to try everything for themselves first. Furthermore, people can self-regulate their behavior. They can do this, in keeping with Social Learning Theory, by trying to change or alter the stimuli or cues preceding behavior and/or the consequences of their behavior (Andrew 'et al.', 2018). In regard to the social learning theory, during the pandemic, entrepreneurs foresee that this pandemic is going to affect their business, in order to respond to this they adopted ways of surviving by introducing an online business and other ways of selling their products, on the other hand other entrepreneurs uses the same pandemic as a way of boosting their businesses by making more profits. That is why this study exist to test the asserted theory.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter describes the methodology that were used during the research, this includes: research design and methods, location of the study, target population, sampling technique, sample size, data collection tools, pilot study, validity of data collection tool, reliability of data collection tool, data analysis tool, ethical consideration and chapter summary.

3.1 Research Design

Research design is planning the whole research process which explains the arrangements of plans on how the whole project will be done (Monette, 2008). this study used descriptive research design because it helped the researcher to gather accurate, valid and relevant information based on how the participants performed.

3.1.1 Research Methodology

This study used qualitative research because the study required the views, perceptions and feelings and experiences of respondents. Qualitative research is a multi-perspective approach (Gravette 2003). Qualitative research focuses on and filters out results and help in realization of unbiased results (Patton.2002). This approach also assisted in establishing a cause-and-effect relationship between variables. Furthermore, the research method identifies whether the relationship between covid-19 and Women entrepreneurship was a positive or negative one and quantifies the degree of positivity or negativity of this relationship.

3.2 Population of the Study

Target population are the people that the study will focus on. Therefore, this study targeted 3,000 women who are doing smallscale business in area 23 market.

3.3 Sampling Procedure

Salazar (2009), defined Sampling as a technique of selecting individual members or a subset of the population to make statistical inferences from them and estimate characteristics of the whole population. There are two types of sample design, probability sampling and none probability sampling, but this study adopted none probability sampling which is judgmental sampling, because

it helped the researcher to choose participants who were helpful to the study and convenience sampling design because it helped the researcher to choose participants who were willing to participate (Strydom, 2005).

3.4 Sample Size

Sample size is the actual total number of items you want to study. This study sampled 100 women from the targeted population

3.5 Sampling Area

This study was conducted in area 23, T.A Tsabango Lilongwe because it is a place where most women are not on paid job they depend on daily piecework and small scale businesses.

3.6 Sources of Data

The study used primary data to make its inferences.

3.7 Methods of Data Collection

An interview guide was administered to the participants through focused group and the researcher was there to clarify on other areas to the participants. Additionally, individual interviews were conducted.

3.8 Tools for Data Collection

These are instruments for data collection. This study used interview guide to collect data. The benefits of using an interview guide is that it creates a structured process, it provides all applicants with the same candidate experience and it also makes it easier to assess every candidate in the same way, hence reducing the risk of bias in the interview process (Mason 2011).

3.9 Tools for Data Analysis

Qualitative data was analyzed using content analysis and MS Excel was used for data presentations.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.0 Introduction

In this chapter, results mean the technical and scientific knowledge derived from the implementation of the research projects. The purpose of this chapter is to share and discuss study results. This chapter focus on response rate, demographic information, and presentation of research findings.

Presentation of findings

4.1 To find out if entrepreneurs had access to loans during the pandemic

Figure below shows respondents' access to loans during the pandemic. From the results it has shown that fewer respondents had access to loans 31% compared to 69% of the respondents from the market who did not have any access to loans. This agree with World Bank report PAD3415 (2020), that financial inclusion and access to loans is a challenge in Malawi.

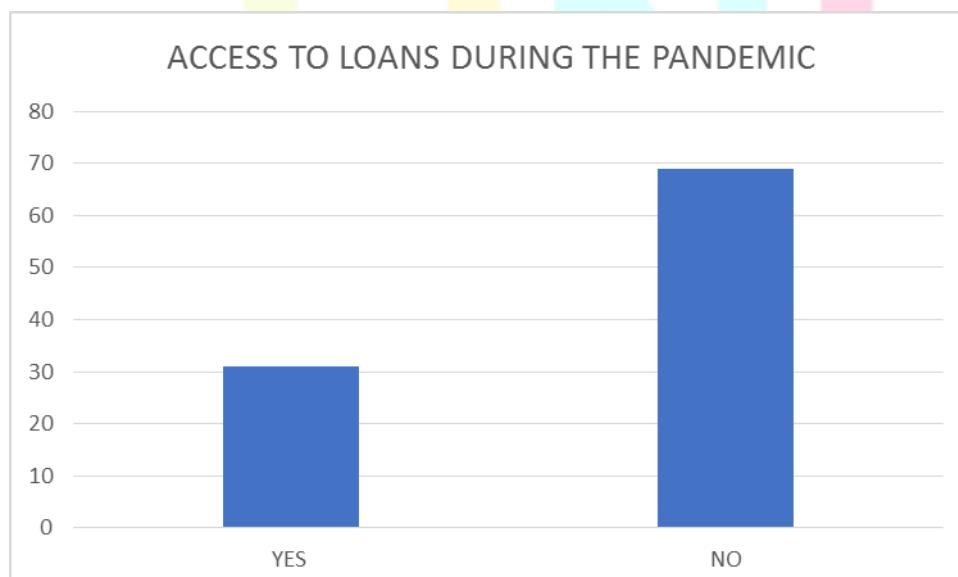


Figure 4.1, Showing households who had access to loans .

It has also been revealed by the study that of the respondents who got loans, 67.7% had acquired their loans from village savings and loans groups, 12.9% obtained from relatives, 19.4% had loan taken from friends while none had a loan from banks and microfinance

institution. I went to FDH bank to ask for a loan, they told me they cannot give me because without collateral and also they told me to follow some processes which were tiresome and not good for a small scale business woman like me as such I decided to get my savings group which did not require any collateral as long I had shares and a reasonable business narrated the respondent.

Figure below illustrates where loan was collected. This explains that most households prefer to borrow money from savings groups other than banks or microfinance institutions mainly due to need for collateral and slightly high interest rates. On average respondents had gotten two hundred and forty-three thousand and five hundred kwacha (**MK243,500**) with an average interest rate of 20%.

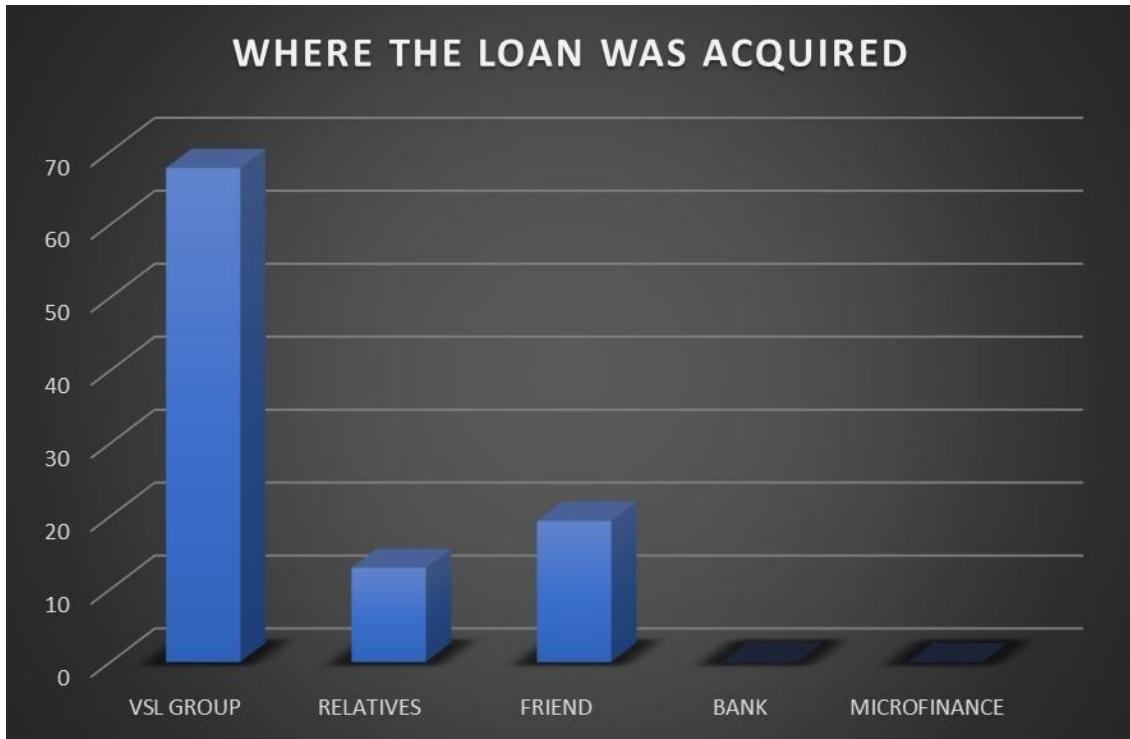


Figure 4.1.2 Showing where respondents acquired loans

Figure3 below illustrates that 87% of respondents, the loan they got did not suffice their business needs while 13% replied that it was enough. The earlier said that it could not meet their business needs because they needed to boost capital in order to order more goods once a chance to order had availed is businesses like clothes selling due to restrictions which were imposed. In my case I was selling ginger and lemons and these products were selling like hot cakes and the high demand resulted into supply gap which in turn increased the prices where we were getting the produce and that necessitated a bigger capital said one respondent. I ordered my clothes from Tunduma in Tanzania once the borders were closed, we had to bribe the policemen to pass and we needed covid PCR certificate which all needed extra money this meant us digging dipper in our pockets, said another respondent.

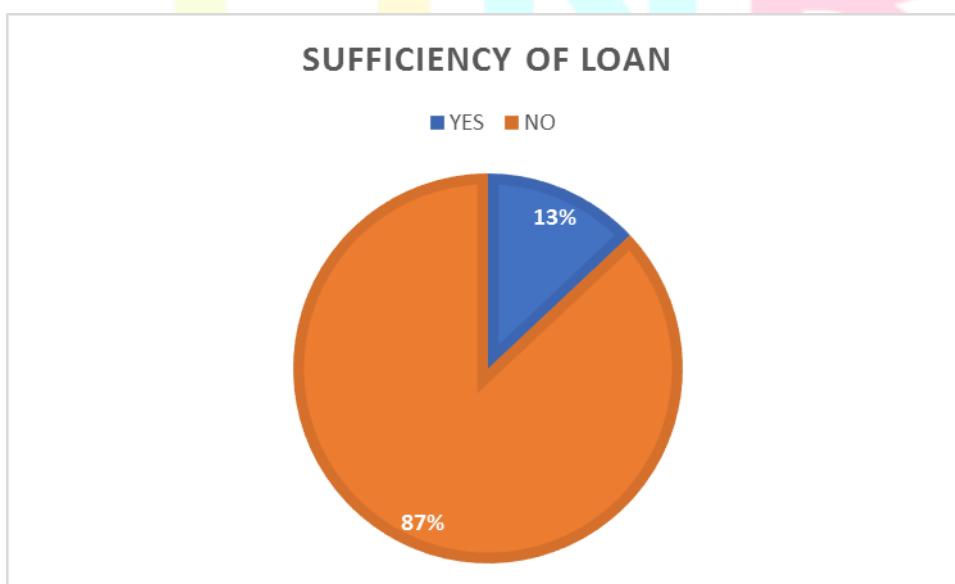


Figure 4.1.3 Sufficiency of loans acquired.

Results have shown that most respondents had a monthly payment plan for their loans which represents 65%, 20% were to pay back after every three and 15% had to pay once off in six months. Those who had to pay every month and every three months had acquired money from VSL groups and friends. While those who were given six months had taken the loan from relatives. “When I approached my uncle in Chilinde to help me with one hundred thousand kwacha he said I am going to give you but you have to reimburse after six months “am sure you will have made a little profit with that money explained the respondent. 95% of the respondents who were in debt had managed to pay back the loan with the agreed period. On the other hand only 5% failed to pay back mainly because the business which they were engaged did not make the desired profits and that due to the losses they were unable to recompose the debt.

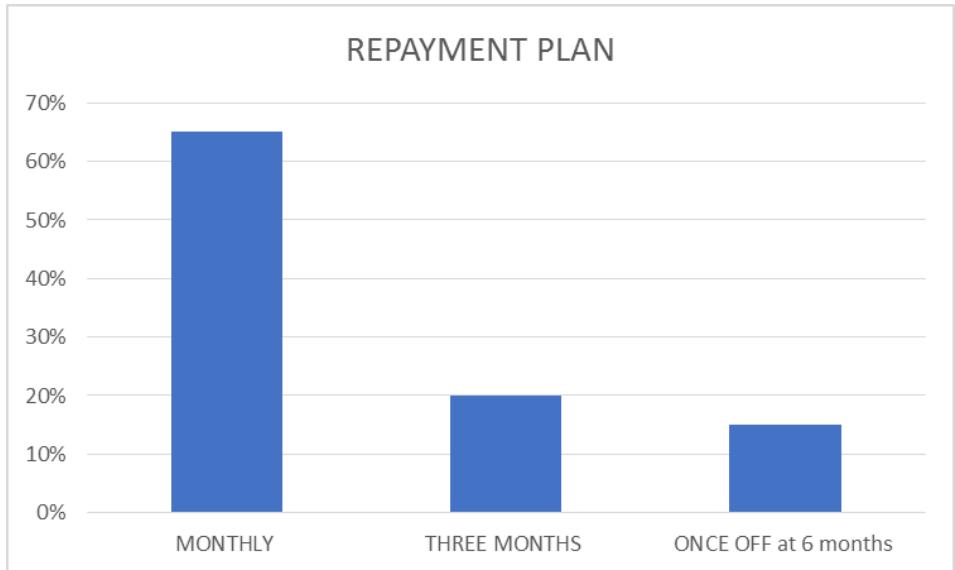


Figure 4.1. 4 showing repayment plan.

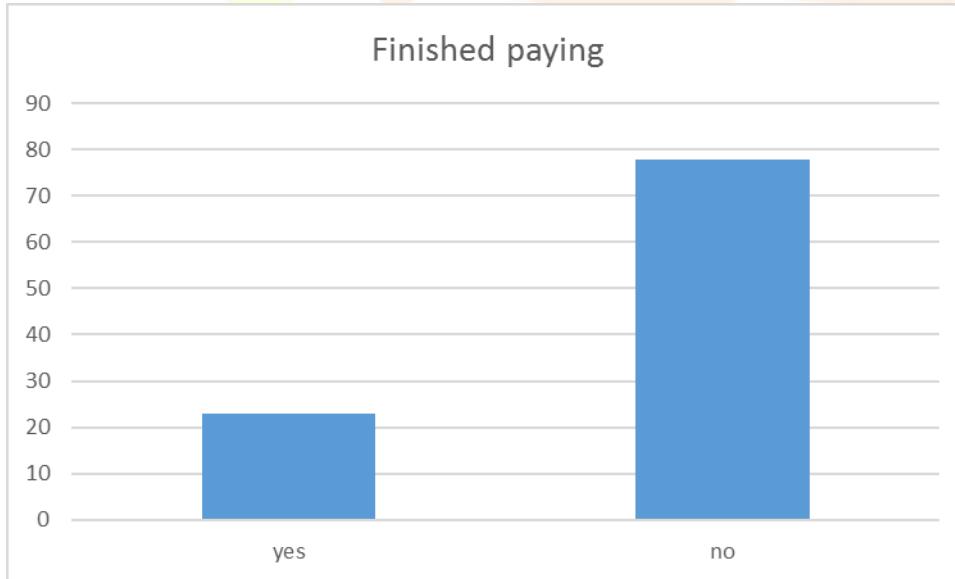


Figure 4.1. 5 Respondent who finished repaying loan

4.2 TO IDENTIFY CHALLENGES WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS ARE FACING DUE TO COVID 19

The challenges that covid 19 brought on entrepreneur's varied from one entrepreneur to another. This objective aimed at identifying the challenges that women entrepreneurs of area 23 market faced.

Low turn over

The respondents reported that the goods that they were ordering took time to be bought by customers, those operating tuck-shops explained that, sometimes they were even finding out that other products had reached their expiry dates which translated that such products would no longer be consumable at that led to losses.

Loss of business

Majority of the respondents reported that they had lost businesses because boarders were closed, they could not easily cross to get their customer's needs. In addition to that, it was mentioned that even from within local shops when they went to order things they were informed that the consignment had delayed, as such the seller could not meet the demand on the market.

Domestic violence

A lot of respondents reported that they experienced domestic violence, this is because of the lockdown measures that the government had put to control the spread of covid 19, this violence came in because they had no money to support the family, one of the respondent reported: "mostly, the money that is used in my house is generated from the business I am doing, so during covid 19, I

was just staying home, it was hard for me to do my business because of the lockdown measures, this made my husband to start abusing me verbally and physically as well."

No money to pay back the loans

Other respondents reported that they had no money to pay back the loans they got to boost their businesses during the pandemic, they complained that they were worried that their businesses were at risk since some of them used the same business items as a collate.

4.3 To find Solutions to the Problems faced by Entrepreneurs due to Covid 19

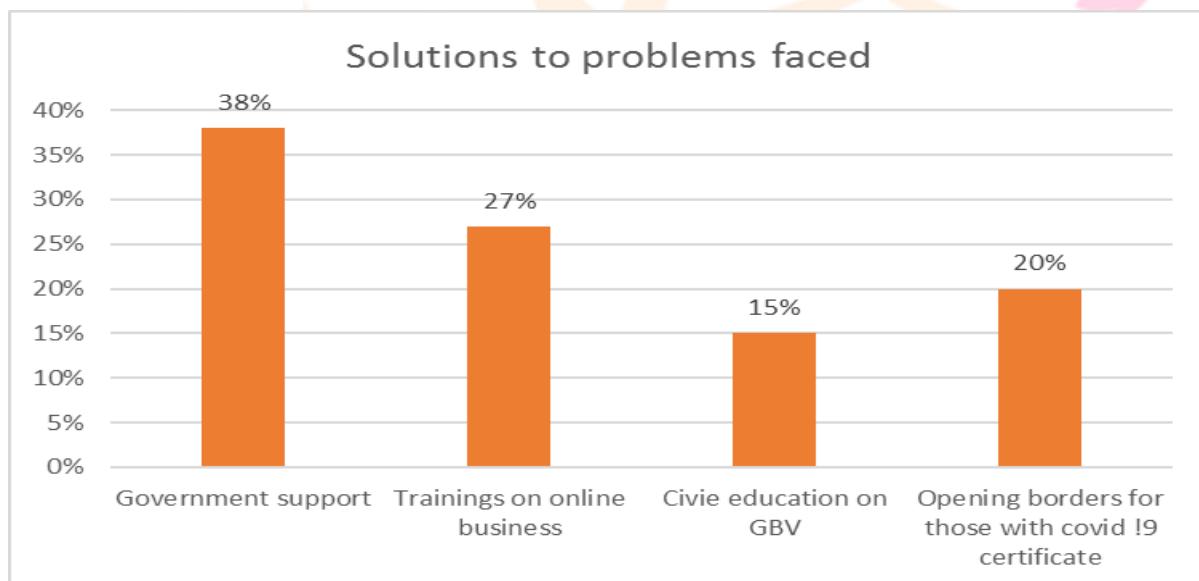


Figure 4.2 solution to the challenged entrepreneurs faced during the pandemic

The table above shows that 38% of women suggested that the government of Malawi should be supporting their business, they reported that the governments of neighboring countries like Zambia, Tanzania etc, were providing monetary support to business persons during the pandemic ,so they suggested the same support to happen here in Malawi, another woman reported that, it will be better to be getting business loans from government such as the National Economic Empowerment Fund (NEEF) than other stakeholders because with government interest rate is lower compared to microfinance institutions.

27% of respondents suggested that providing trainings on online business skills will help them solve the challenges that they met during the pandemic, they further reported that, the training will benefit them a lot because instead of them moving from one office to another to sell their goods, they would be advertising through their online shops. While 15% of the respondents reported that there is a need for civic education on the issues of Gender based violence, they reported that one of the challenges they encountered during the pandemic was violence from their spouses, this is so because 80 percent of the money these women get from their

businesses is used to run their homes and when their husbands saw that they are no longer supporting the families they started abusing them physically, verbally and emotionally, so to them civic education on GBV will solve this problem and lastly 20% reported that the only solution for the challenges was to open the borders and uplift the travel bans for them to do freely do cross border business such as ordering goods from outside countries to Malawi, they further narrated that, the measures could have been that only those who have received the Covid 19 vaccine and have a negative PCR certificate be allowed to leave the country, because the closing of boarders' made them to lose their businesses.

Discussion of Findings

5.0 Introduction

This section discusses the summary of the research findings, the conclusion and the recommendations, references, and areas for further studies.

5.1 Discussion of the findings

From the findings only few women had access to loans and majority of them had no access, those who had loans they were getting the loans a from village banks, friends and family, but they reported that the loans they got was not sufficient. On the repayment of the loan majority of entrepreneurs reported that the loan was paid on monthly basis, with an average interest of 20% while other few were paying after every 3 months and majority finished paying back their loans with a few who failed due to business collapse. The researcher also noted the following challenges that women entrepreneurs who are doing business in area 23 market faced: Low turnover. The researcher found out that the goods that were being ordered were taking time to be bought by customers, those operating tuck-shops reported that, sometimes they were even finding out that other products have reached expiry dates which led to loses. The other challenge is loss of business the closing of borders in different countries made those women who order their goods abroad to lose their businesses, this is so because it was hard for them to leave the country for business, hence this affected them, and others lost their business due to lack of measures to cushion their business during Covid 19.

Domestic violence is also one of the challenges that women entrepreneurs encountered during the pandemic, alot of respondents reported that they experienced domestic violence, this is because of the lockdown measures that the government put to control the spread of covid 19, this violence come in because they had no money to support the family, one of the respondent reported: "mostly, the money that is used in my house is generated from the business I am doing, so during Covid 19, I was just staying home, it was hard for me to do my business because of the lockdown measures, this made my husband to start abusing me verbally and physically as well."

Furthermore, the other challenge is that those women who took different loans had difficulties to pay back these loans because their businesses were operating on a minimum and others are still recovering from the losses they made and Covid 19 is still here and some of the measures are still being followed. Poverty is also one of the impacts that covid 19 left in the lives of these entrepreneurs this is so because the lock down measures stopped them from engaging into various income generating activities, they were using the little money they saved from the business, and at the same time they had no money to top up their businesses.

From the findings on the solution to the problems these entrepreneurs faced, they suggested that the government of Malawi should be supporting them financially, according to them they reported that the governments of neighboring countries like Zambia, Tanzania etc. they were proving monetary support to business persons during the pandemic ,so they wanted the same support to be given here in Malawi, a another woman reported that, it will be better to be getting the business loans from the government than other stakeholders because with government the interests is lower compared with other agents. Other women suggested that proving them with trainings on how to do business online will help them to solve the challenges that they meat during the pandemic, they further reported that, the training will benefit them a lot because instead of them moving from on office to another to sell their goods, they will just be advertising online. While other respondents reported that there is a need for civic education on the issues of Gender based violence, they reported that one of the challenges they encountered during the pandemic was violence from their spouses,80 percent of the money these women get from their businesses is used to run their homes and when their

husbands saw that they are no longer supporting the families they started abusing them physically and verbally and emotionally, so to them civiceducation on GBV will solve this problem and the last solution was to open the borders for them to be ordering goods from outside countries to Malawi, they explained that, the measures could have been that only those who have received the Covid vaccine could have been allowed to leave the country, because the closing of boarders' made them to lose their businesses.

5.2 Suggestions and Recommendations

The researcher is recommending the government of Malawi to be proving financial support to women who are doing small scale businesses so that they can be boosting their business, on the other hand, the ministry of health, should take part in supporting business women, this so because the ministry made the wearing of masks compulsory without proving the masks to the public forfree, for business women they were supposed to use the same little profits they were making to buy face masks .the researcher also recommend the community members of area 23 to be responsible for their health and the health of others, to the business women, the researcher is recommending them to continue working hard in their businesses for their success will have a greater impact on the Malawi's economy.

5.3 Areas for Further Research

The researcher is recommending other researchers to do further research in the following areas: The issues of mental health in relation to covid 19 pandemic, to find out how the youth respond to covid 19 in Malawi. The social economic development of the area of 23; Social work intervention on the issues of gender based violence.

5.4 conclusion

From the finding it can be concluded that Covid 19 affected the small scale business women of area 23 negatively, this is because the findings reviewed that some women lost their business during the pandemic, others reported that they were making loses, while others reported that they faced violence due to the lockdown measures.

5.5 ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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