

For the past three decades, there has been a need to rectify gender inequities and to bring women in the mainstream of development. It is a well acknowledged fact that women constitute a key-resource whose ideas, ability and creative solutions and concern for social cohesiveness can help bring social transformation. To do that, however, their equal access to, and control over resources is necessary. It is a fact that resource ownership patterns in most African countries is gendered to the disadvantage of women. This, according to Mbughuni (1994) has led to gendered poverty. It has been widely accepted that one of the ways to alleviate women's poverty and hence, societal poverty in Africa is their equal participation in entrepreneurship.

In the past two decades policy making bodies of developing countries have increasingly and explicitly recognized that small-scale enterprises have potential for contributing to economic and social development of their countries. Other studies show that women are increasingly becoming heads of families (Hulme 1991). The role of women outside domestic responsibilities has necessitated the need to identify ways in which women have contributed to various aspects of development. There are various reasons for women to go into self-employment and participate in entrepreneurial activities. There is need for personal contact, resulting from the social isolation of housewives in homes and the desire to put to use their abilities and talents, to as to improve the quality of their lives.

This research project was based on various constraints that do affect women entrepreneurs who are located in the informal sector or Mathare, Nairobi Province. The purpose of this study was to identify and examine economic, social, political and educational constraints that affect the women's performance in the informal sector. There has been a significant trend in development studies to see women as comprising an important category for political and socio-economic participants with a capability and potential for changing the course of development, especially in the informal sector (OOK 1988).

The general objective of this research study was, therefore, to establish the constraints that affect the performance of women entrepreneurs in the informal sector of Mathare. The study placed emphasis and examined certain characteristics of women in the informal sector enterprises. This allowed assessment of other constraints other than economic, social and political which play a major role in enhancing performance by women in the informal sector and entrepreneurship development.