Women Entrepreneurship Promotion in Developing Countries: What explains the gender gap in entrepreneurship and how to close it?

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Abstract - Despite the growing number of women-led business and a significant increase of initiatives, policies and resources designed to promote and develop women’s entrepreneurship, the gender gap in entrepreneurship persist. This paper addresses two questions: Why does the gender gap in entrepreneurship persist? And, what does the literature suggest to us about the best ways to promote women’s entrepreneurship? Based on a feminist perspective this paper argues that current women entrepreneurship promotion policies undoubtedly benefit individual women but when the gender bias in the context in which entrepreneurship is embedded, is left intact, efforts may remain in vain and without any significant macroeconomic or social impact.

1. Introduction

Women entrepreneurs have been designated as the new engines for growth and the rising stars of the economies in developing countries to bring prosperity and welfare. A variety of stakeholders has pointed at them as an important ‘untapped source’ of economic growth and development (Minniti and Naudé, 2010). The World Economic Forum identified women entrepreneurs as “the way forward” at their annual meeting in 2012 (WEF, 2012). Others speak of women entrepreneurs as if they are the ‘New Women’s Movement’. They state: “forget aid, focus on foreign investment in women entrepreneurs as key drivers for growth and development” (Forbes, 2011).

The growth of the proportion of women entrepreneurs in developing countries has drawn the attention of both the academic and the development sector. Donors, international public institutions, national and local governments, NGOs, private companies, charities, knowledge institutes and business associations have initiated programs or policies to promote and develop women’s entrepreneurship. They initiate programs for capacity-building of entrepreneurial skills, strengthening women’s networks, provide finance and trainings, or design policies that enable more and stronger start-ups and business growth. They all claim that women entrepreneurship is essential for growth and development. Some even argue that women entrepreneurs’ contribution tends to be higher than that resulting from entrepreneurial activity of men (Minniti, 2010). In recent years, the general attention to women and entrepreneurship in developing countries has increased to a great extent and the focus on this ‘untapped source’ of growth seems to be indispensable nowadays for development practitioners and policy makers (Minniti and Naudé, 2010). However, despite this growing number of initiatives and resources made available to promote and develop women’s entrepreneurship in developing countries, women still own and manage fewer businesses than men, they earn less money with their businesses that grow slower, are more likely to fail and women tend to be more necessity entrepreneurs.

This paper explores the questions: why does the gender gap in entrepreneurship persist? How to understand the differences between women and men entrepreneurs in developing countries and what do various analytical perspectives tell us about the best ways to promote women
entrepreneurship and closing the gender gap? What is known about the impact and effects of the practices and policies aimed at closing the gender gap in entrepreneurship? Section two describes the gender gap in entrepreneurship in terms of differences between men and women. Section three and four explore the various analytical perspectives explaining the proximate and ultimate determinants causing the gender gap. Section five extends these perspectives with a feminists critique and proposes a multi level framework of analysis that questions structural power structures and patriarchal societies, and challenges the gender bias in entrepreneurship promotion. Section six reviews the literature on critical conditions and key factors for successful women entrepreneurship promotion policies and what is known about their impact. Section seven and eight discuss gaps and implications for further research, addressing the need for a systematic impact assesment of women entrepreneurship promotion policies. Such an impact analysis entails a feminist multi-level framework that pays due regard to the extra-economic, legal-, normative- and cognitive context of entrepreneurship while considering the work-family interface. Women entrepreneurship promotion undoubtedly benefits individual women, but when the main problem for the persistence of the gender gap is left unchallenged—it which is that entrepreneurs, men and women alike, operate in patriarchal, gender biased economies and societies, efforts remain in vain and without any significant macroeconomic and social change.

2. The gender gap in entrepreneurship

The gender gap in entrepreneurship has been identified and studied by a growing number of scholars (Minniti, 2010). The gender gap is commonly defined as the difference between men and women in terms of numbers engaged in entrepreneurial activity, motives to start or run a business, industry choice and business performance and growth.

2.1 Women’s and men’s engagement in entrepreneurial activity

As compared to men, there is a slight lower number of women worldwide engaged in entrepreneurial activity. An important resource of data is the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor project, which estimates that more than 187 million women are engaged in entrepreneurial activity (GEM, 2012). On a global scale, the gender gap does not seem to be that alarming. GEM data (2012) demonstrates that men make up 52% of all entrepreneurial activity, compared to 48% of women entrepreneurs. In fact, some data suggest that women have outpaced men in the rate of new business they form (Minniti and Naudé, 2010). However, when studied more closely at country level, the gender gap varies greatly in size across the world. It ranges from 1.5% to 45.4% women of the adult population who actively operate a business as entrepreneurs or who are thinking about starting a business. In Panama, Venezuela, Jamaica, Guatemala, Brazil, Thailand, Switzerland and Singapore the rates of men and women engaged in starting a business are equal (GEM, 2012). The only economy with currently more female than male entrepreneurs is Ghana where 55 % of entrepreneurial activity is conducted by women (GEM, 2010).

Is the gender gap in entrepreneurship bigger in certain regions or countries? Here research is not conclusive and empirical evidence mixed (Minniti and Naudé, 2010). From the GEM 2012 survey, it is apparent that in Latin America and the Caribbean the overall level of entrepreneurship is high, including that of women. Generally, countries in the Middle East and North Africa have the fewest
women entrepreneurs. Iran and Pakistan for example have the lowest levels of all countries in the world. A relatively low rate of women entrepreneurs can also be found in Eastern Europe. The exception is Russia, where women represent 44% of total entrepreneurs, but overall in this region no more than 10% of women are starting or running new businesses. In contrast, in Sub-Saharan African economies women make up close to or more than half of entrepreneurs, whereas general levels of entrepreneurship are also high. Asia and Western Europe have both low and high relative levels of women’s participation. Singapore and Switzerland exhibit comparatively high levels, while France and the Republic of Korea report low rates - about one fourth of the entrepreneurs are women there (GEM, 2012).

When linked to GDP per capita, the gender gap in entrepreneurship is most visible in the middle-income and transitional countries where men are 75% more likely than women to start a business. In high income countries, the gender gap is relatively small and men are 33% more likely to start a business whereas in developing countries it is 41% (Minniti, 2009). However, a multi-year analysis (GEM, 2010) shows that even though the gender gap has persisted across most economies, changes are occurring and the gap, at least measured in terms of male to female ratio, may be closing.

2.2 Gender differences in motives: opportunity or necessity entrepreneurs
The gender gap becomes more apparent though when women’s motives to start or run a business are compared to men’s. Worldwide, women are much more likely to be driven by necessity than men when starting a business (GEM, 2010). In developing countries, the vast majority of women are engaged in entrepreneurial activity driven by pure survival - out of necessity rather than opportunity - because there are no jobs or any other options for income generation. This partly explains why globally women are overrepresented in the informal economy and own no more than 25% of formal sector businesses, and stands in contrast to the vast majority of women in high-income countries, where 2/3 of women start a business because they see opportunities or want to be independent (Minniti, 2009; GEM, 2010). However, the gender gap in entrepreneurship measured by motive may gradually disappear as recent data demonstrate that as economies develop and grow, and job opportunities become available, this gap may be closing with time (GEM, 2010). Thus, the proportion of women with necessity motivations declined in recent years, especially in Brazil and China and some of the countries in Eastern Europe, thereby contributing to a narrowing of the gender gap (GEM, 2012). In Western Europe however, many economies nowadays show an increase or no change in necessity motivated women entrepreneurs compared to men. A possible reason could be that the economic downturn affected both men and women with rising numbers of unemployment. Necessity-based entrepreneurship, then, substitute’s employment during economic crisis when there is less jobs available (GEM, 2012).

2.3 Industry choice and entrepreneurial orientation
The gender gap in entrepreneurship is most apparent when reviewed by industry choice and entrepreneurial orientation. Women seem to pursue certain businesses at the expense of others. For example, they are virtually absent from the manufacturing and construction sector while they are overrepresented in the consumer sector and mostly engaged in retail businesses (GEM, 2010). In Latin America, the Caribbean and Sub-Saharan Africa, women entrepreneurs dominate the consumer sector and retail business by more than 75%, compared to just 48% of men entrepreneurs. Men, on
the other hand, operate more frequently in manufacturing, construction and the business services sector, especially in the more developed and high income countries (GEM, 2010).

2.4 Business performance and growth expectations
The gender gap is also visible in business performance (GEM, 2010). As mentioned earlier, women are not only less likely than men to start a business, their businesses also tend to be smaller, have fewer staff and less growth expectations. Furthermore, women generate relatively lower revenues than men, and earn less income from entrepreneurial activity. Finally, maintaining and growing the business beyond start-up is a serious challenge for all women entrepreneurs, especially in developing countries. Even though the exit rate of new businesses is high everywhere (40 – 50 %), exit rates of women-owned businesses are even higher, especially in developing countries. Some reasons mentioned for high exit rates among women entrepreneurs are lack of financing, insufficient profitability, and family responsibilities. Improvement of macroeconomic conditions (higher wages, increase of available jobs, lower discrimination) is also a factor, and retirement. Often mentioned by female respondents - but largely unexplored or specifically identified by researchers as an explanation for high exit rates among women entrepreneurs - are ‘personal reasons’ (GEM, 2010).

3. Explaining the gender gap: proximate and ultimate determinants
Recent global surveys thus indicate that the gender gap in entrepreneurship persists albeit at different levels and varying widely across countries. Yet a quick scan of current research suggests that there are some commonalities as to the proximate and ultimate determinants of these differences.

3.1 Access to financial resources
Even though the literature is not conclusive, a common challenge for women to establish and run a business is access and control over finance (Minniti, 2009; Jamali, 2009). Women entrepreneurs appear to have less access to external sources of capital than men when securing finances.

3.2 Inadequate training and access to information
One challenge often mentioned in research on women entrepreneurs in developing countries is that they enjoy a relatively low level of education and skill training. This, combined with a lack of career guidance, generally seems to limit their access to various publically and privately offered support services including business development services and information on business growth (Kitching and Woldie, 2004; Davis, 2012). Others found that a lack of experience and skills also accounted for the fact that women entrepreneurs had a preference in industry orientation and thus were less well represented in industrial activities. For instance, Drine and Grach (2010) find that Tunisian women entrepreneurs experience challenges as they do not as yet benefit from existing entrepreneurship support. In particular, the authors claim that their results confirm that professional agencies have not been efficient in disseminating information to entrepreneurs, and that the training and assistance provided by support services do not meet the specific needs of women entrepreneurs.

Similar challenges identified in other developing countries are a lack of access to ICTs, insufficient entrepreneurial and management skills, together with problems in finding the markets and
distribution networks. For instance, in their study of women’s SMEs in Ethiopia, Gurmeet and Belwal (2008) mention that the absence of technological know-how and access to technology and ICTs poses a challenge for women entrepreneurs. Other studies (Gurmeet and Belwal, 2008) reveal that African women do not (yet) possess the necessary skills to adapt to the impact of globalization, evolving technologies and changing patterns of trade. However, to what extent this is the case compared to men in order to establish the gender gap more country and region specific research is needed.

3.3 Work-family interface
Another more recently frequent mentioned challenge is the combination of the business with family responsibilities, which may undermine the success of the business (Jennings and McDougald, 2007). Women entrepreneurs indicate that they deploy several strategies to cope with the double workload and challenges deriving from combining business with family. But while self-employment may provide flexibility, Williams (2004) found that (in Europe) the amount of time spent caring for children are negatively related to success (as measured by self-employment duration). Furthermore, the location of the business at home may also undermine the legitimacy of the business as perceived by customers and creditors (Marlow, 2002). Furthermore, some studies indicate that women strongly rely on support from husbands, partners, and relatives in order to successfully start and grow a business (Jennings and McDougald, 2007; Brush, de Bruin and Welter, 2009). Much more research is needed on the topic of coping strategies to combine business with family in general and specifically, on how to engage husbands and other family members in supporting women entrepreneurs in developing countries.

3.4 Women’s safety and gender based violence
Others identify the issue of safety and protection of women entrepreneurs, especially those operating in the informal economy. Even though less documented in academic research, there are numerous stories of killings, harassment and rape of female vendors and micro-business owners. This results in stress, constant fear and not having the opportunity to freely choose your business location and time of opening hours which seriously limits the chances and choices of becoming a successful entrepreneur for women in some developing countries (Chu et al, 2008; Rajender et al, 2012; Reeves, 2010). However, more research is needed on for example alternative coping strategies (besides policy frameworks) and how women that are facing these challenges can best be supported.

3.5 Lack of societal support
Furthermore, scholars point out that normative constraints and societal attitudes based on cultural and religious beliefs in some countries are not supportive of the work of women in general or that of women in entrepreneurship in particular (Jamali, 2009; Baughn et al, 2006). In a variety of countries, the perception is that entrepreneurship is an appropriate career choice for men and not women, or only for the poor and not the educated, which in most cases are women. These perceptions are mostly based on the association of entrepreneurship with traditional male stereotypes (Aidis et al., 2007; Bird and Brush, 2002).

3.6 Legal barriers and procedures
Varying across countries, the lack of government support in terms of policy, laws and services has been identified as a barrier for women entrepreneurs (Jamali, 2009). Even though this varies greatly
across countries, most research indicates that regulations, taxation and legal barriers can pose serious obstacles for running and starting a business. This may affect both men and women to a certain extent and more research is needed to identify country specific issues. Data from the annual report Women Business and the Law (World Bank, 2012) measured that in all Middle Eastern and North African countries, women have fewer inheritance rights than men and moreover, there are 1 or more legal differences between women and men that limit women’s economic opportunity in over 75% of the world’s economies. According to that same report, women only own 1% of the world’s property and in 2/3 of countries, legal rights of women decline with marriage, 44 countries restrict the number of hours women can work and 71 countries restrict the types of industries.

4. Explaining the gender gap: an overview of different analytical perspectives

Why do the differences between men and women in entrepreneurship persist? What conditions impact on women entrepreneurship? What determines the proportion of women entrepreneurs in a particular country and what explains the differences between countries and even within countries? Whereas it is widely agreed that there is still a lack of reliable and consistent data on women entrepreneurship to explain both commonalities and differences across and within countries, over the past few decades a whole host of authors has been trying to explain the gender gap in entrepreneurship. In the 1980s and ‘90s it was common to set out from micro-economic factors and characteristics to explain the gender gap in entrepreneurship (Minniti, 2009; Ahl, 2006). Some scholars even sought for answers in the psychological makeup of women. In 1989 Nelson for example argued that the gender gap is due to ‘irrational behavior’ of women entrepreneurs as they tend to turn to their unqualified family members for help, which, he observed, has consequences for business performance. Others have argued that women are less entrepreneurial because they are risk-averse and lack the necessary skills, attitude and education for entrepreneurship (Ahl, 2006). In an overview of the more micro-level approaches to the gender gap in entrepreneurship, Jamali (2009) lists a number of studies that identify differences between men and women entrepreneurs – e.g. with respect to self-perception (Anna et al., 2000), opportunity recognition (Eckhardt and Shane, 2003), decision-making styles (Baker and Nelson, 2005) and networking behavior (McManus, 2001). Perhaps these micro level explanations are best documented but, such studies do not account for the variety across and within countries found in global surveys of the gender gap in entrepreneurship. Therefore, it is now more and more accepted that micro-level explanations of the gender gap in entrepreneurship cannot stand on their own but need to take into account contextual factors at other levels of explanation (Brush et al., 2009).

4.1 From the gender neutral entrepreneur to gender sensitive analysis

Increasingly, then, it is recognized that the gender gap cannot be merely explained from individual choices and challenges but that the practices and orientations of entrepreneurs are shaped and determined by the macroeconomic and socioeconomic environment in which they operate, including deeply entrenched norms of behavior (Jamali, 2009; Baugh et al. 2006). This recognition is important because, as among others, Minniti (2009) and Brush, de Bruin and Welter (2009) point out, mainstream economic thinking tends to consider itself ‘gender neutral’, assuming that the entrepreneur is a rational, self-interested, money-driven and market-oriented individual who has no sex, no gender, no class, no age, no family, no religion or ethnicity, and who lives outside of any
specific historical, social or geographical context. Such an imaginary entrepreneur makes decisions unhindered by socioeconomic inequality, unequal distribution of power and income, and relieved of family obligations or care responsibilities.

As opposed to this imaginary ‘gender neutral’ entrepreneur Brush, de Bruin and Welter (2009) introduce a gender sensitive framework to explain and understand the gender gap in entrepreneurship that takes into account the socioeconomic and normative context in which they operate and behave. For instance, they propose to add ‘motherhood’ to research frameworks on entrepreneurship because they ignore family responsibilities and reproductive work as important determinants and are mostly focused on markets, money and management. Just as Minniti (2009) and Jennings and McDougald (2007), Brush, de Bruin and Welter (2009) argue that family responsibilities, such as child-rearing and caring for the sick and elderly (which in most cultures are assigned to women) define your chances of becoming a successful entrepreneur. They also point at the behavioral norms at the level of society, including media representations of entrepreneurs, and the adverse effects that norms of appropriate female behavior in social networking can bring to bear on the success of women entrepreneurs. Jamali (2009) highlights the usefulness of such a multi-level framework as it sheds light on the specific normative context of entrepreneurship. To illustrate this, Jamali’s applies the framework to highlight the salience of normative constraints encountered by Arab women in general, and women entrepreneurs in particular, something which is not addressed in mainstream, micro level studies relating to the topic.

4.2 Work-family interface: becoming super woman and other coping strategies
A gender sensitive, multi-level analysis along the lines proposed by Brush, de Bruin and Welter (2009) lends itself rather well to analyse the intrinsic relationships between business and the family that play an important role in business performance and growth. There is evidence that family support (both financial and emotional) is an important determinant of entrepreneurial behavior: it shapes the confidence of women entrepreneurs to achieve their ambitions, enhancing the chances for the growth of their business (Anna et al, 2000). More importantly, the division of work and care responsibilities within the household between husband and wife plays a vital role in the performance of entrepreneurs and the growth of their businesses (Jennings and McDougald, 2007; Aidis et al 2007).

Jennings and McDougald (2007) demonstrate that women entrepreneurs (in developed countries) are more likely to experience time conflict, stress spill-over due to incompatibility between the family domain and care responsibilities on one hand, and the business domain and work responsibilities on the other. Consequently, women are more likely to use coping strategies that (intentionally or unintentionally) limit rather than enhance the growth of their businesses. Among such coping strategies are ‘superwoman’ attempts to respond to all demands, career delay or lower career aspirations, reduction of working hours, turning down business, travel or relocation opportunities, and cutting back on community involvement or time spent with family. Other strategies are the ‘one-job/one-career strategy’ where one partner takes on a part-time or less demanding job so that the other can pursue a business or career. Very common, especially in upper class families is the phenomenon of ‘hiring a wife’, which in most countries is a female domestic helper - often underpaid and undocumented migrant - to assist with child care, household duties, meal preparation, etc.
Jamali (2009) observes that women entrepreneurs who struggle to reconcile work and family do so within largely internalized and taken-for-granted norms of appropriate female behavior in their society. She argues that the gendered ascription of women to family and childcare responsibilities creates tensions and negative feelings such as guilt that put pressure on women entrepreneurs to ‘conform with prevailing (un-codified) value standards’ (Jamali, 2009). This results in difficulties in managing their businesses next to their family responsibilities, a lack of mobility to pursue an optimal business location in terms of access to markets and services.

4.3 Powerless networks: a reflection of assigned gender roles
A gender sensitive, multi-level analysis of women entrepreneurship also sheds light on the importance of social networks. It is commonly agreed that both male and female entrepreneurs rely on role models and social networks for information and access to resources. A strong positive and significant correlation exists between knowledge of another entrepreneur and a person’s involvement in starting a new business (Minniti, 2010). However, there is evidence to suggest that women’s networks are important but often not (yet) very helpful for business growth or strong start-ups due to their limited size, accessibility and quality. According to Aidis, Welter, Smallbone and Isakova (2007), this is mainly the reflection of women’s assumed gender role in the household and society at large: because women hold a certain position in society, this affects a) their ability and willingness to use household resources for entrepreneurial activities; and b) their access to formal and informal networks compared to men.

Thus, Aidis, Welter, Smallbone and Isakova (2007) found evidence that access to finance is a huge struggle for women entrepreneurs in both Lithuania and Ukraine compared with their male counterparts, in part because women have fewer contacts from Soviet times. So besides the fact that women business networks or communities are still limited in size, these networks remain relatively powerless as women are underrepresented at higher levels where men tend to have more acquaintances and contacts. Women in general have less access to more powerful male networks which are more strongly rooted within society simply because of a longer historic tradition of male-networks. Therefore, the authors suggest that a good strategy for women entrepreneurs to pursue is to engage husbands, brothers or other male family members in paving the way into male networks, thereby improving their access to other entrepreneurs.

4.4 Institutional theory: understanding the context in which entrepreneurship is embedded
Another valuable attempt to answer the question as to why the gender gap in some countries is bigger or more persistent then in others is the institutional analysis of Baughn, Chua and Neupert (2006). Institutional theory focuses on the role of social, economic and political systems in which entrepreneurs operate and their choices and behavior is embedded. It departs from the position that these systems are deeply rooted and embedded within in the social fabric of societies which produce normative expectations that are gendered (Scott, 1995). Meaning: they prescribe appropriate attitudes and tell us (men and women) how to behave. “When such normative expectations and attitudes are wide spread, broadly diffused and deeply rooted: they take on a ‘rule-like’ status in social thought and action” (Baughn et al, 2006, p. 688).
Like the gender sensitive multi-level analysis, institutional analysis posits that the gender gap in entrepreneurship can neither be explained by micro-economic factors nor assumed to diminish when macroeconomic conditions, such as a country’s level of development or GDP, grow and improve. And like Brush et al (2009) institutionalists pay due regard to the normative context of entrepreneurial activity. Thus Baughn, Chua and Neupert (2006) found that the occurrence of women entrepreneurship itself appears embedded in ‘overall attitudes about entrepreneurship and levels of gender equality’. For example, Norway ranks in the top 3 of countries (Global Gender Gap Report, 2012) with the highest level of gender equality and have among the lowest rates (4%) of women who pursue entrepreneurship out of necessity. In other words: countries with high levels of support for entrepreneurship in general plus positive societal attitudes towards women in general, display higher levels of women’s participation in entrepreneurship as well.

In another example, Amine and Staub (2009) use an institutional theory-driven analysis to identify challenges and barriers affecting women entrepreneurs in Sub-Saharan Africa. They demonstrate that, while environmental barriers of many types impact the efforts of women entrepreneurs, it is the lack of social legitimacy of women as entrepreneurs that affects them in particular. Their study finds evidence that women entrepreneurs in Sub-Saharan Africa face an array of challenges arising from deeply entrenched normative expectations that constrains women’s entrepreneurship.

According to institutional theory, resilient normative expectations produce three levels of institutional context, consisting of rules, norms, regulations, values and routines that shape social behavior (Scott, 1995). First, the regulatory system, which refers to the legal and policy environment of entrepreneurs - for example inheritance laws and ownership of property, tax systems, access to capital, micro-credit and loans. Secondly, the normative system, which refers to societal views of male and female roles, family responsibility systems and gendered expectations, religion and belief systems, ethnicity and cultural factors. Thirdly, the cognitive system which refers to levels of, and access to, education, functional training and the use of (information) technology. On all levels, institutions can be formal or informal (or explicit or hidden) and shape not only individual choice and orientation but also the nature and actions of organizations and decision-making structures by assigning roles and norms that determine what is acceptable behavior or not for entrepreneurs in a given society.

It is these institutionalized systems that ‘grant legitimacy and define the available modes of action’ for the entrepreneur and when understood at the country level, can help explain the gender gap in entrepreneurship. For example, the lowest level of women entrepreneurs can be found in Pakistan (GEM, 2010). This country is also at the bottom of the Global Gender Gap Report (2012), which indicates that gender equality for women in Pakistan is low and that Pakistani women enjoy little to no education, are politically underrepresented and hardly have any power in decision-making at any level. Gender discrimination in Pakistan so to say is institutionalized in the legal system, resulting in discriminatory laws, rules and regulations for assets of goods and land that formalize unequal access and control over property rights and inheritance for women. Pakistani women for example are not even allowed to work in the type of industry of their choice, and the amount of hours they can work is restricted by law (World Bank, 2012). In such an institutional context, it should bear no surprise that women’s entrepreneurship is severely constrained, regardless of individual aspirations, favorable family support or economic circumstances.
4.5 Gender equality: push & pull factors

Baughn, Chua and Neupert (2006) describe how the institutional context produces gendered push & pull (defined by the levels of gender equality) that contribute to entrepreneurial activity. Their study finds evidence that gender inequality is an inhibitor for development & growth whereas negative gender attitudes in societies can restrain or hinder individual choices and chances. Gender inequality then functions as an inhibiting pull factor for entrepreneurship; a barrier for successful start-up as a result from lack of access to financial and social capital. Gender equality on the other hand functions as an enhancing pull factor that may increase the level of women’s participation in entrepreneurship. Other push factors that drives men or women into entrepreneurship are survival, unemployment (especially in transitional countries and emerging economies), the idea that self-employment provides flexibility and enables a good balance between work and family care responsibilities, dissatisfaction with current job, frustration with the ‘glass ceiling’ in salaried careers. Pull factors are mostly shaped around the pursuit for satisfaction and independence: autonomy, creativity, status attainment, financial gains, personal success.

Baughn, Chua and Neupert (2006) also find evidence that gender inequality leads to gender-based occupational segregation, which may help explain the gender gap in entrepreneurship, especially why women are absent in certain industries or earn less than their male counterparts. Based on the Model of Effectuation (Sarasvathy, 2001), both men and women start a business based and built upon existing skills, knowledge and networks usually acquired in a paid job or enjoyed education. Compared to men, the majority of women start a business while still employed in a paid job. This is both the case in low-income countries (74%), middle income countries (91%) and high-income countries (82%) (Minniti, 2010). Also, both men and women entrepreneurs rely on role models and social networks for information and access to resources. As said, a strong positive and significant correlation exists between acquainted with another entrepreneur and a person’s involvement with starting a new business (Minniti, 2010). When levels of gender equality are low, women are concentrated in the lowest and least valued positions. Women entrepreneurs ‘therefore may find themselves competing in segments that are cheaper to enter, but in which one must struggle to survive. To the extent that female self-employment simply connotes manual task labor as a means of subsistence, it may reinforce a negative image of such activity’ (Carter & Marlow, 2003).

Also Aidis, Welter, Smallbone and Isakova (2003) argue that on the one hand, formal institutions can play an important role in creating and providing opportunities for entrepreneurship while on the other hand, normative beliefs and attitudes in the institutional context can strongly diminish and inhibit opportunities for women entrepreneurs. This influence is visible not only in the occurrence of women’s entrepreneurship but especially evident in the nature and orientation of their businesses. Therefore taking on an institutional approach, the gender gap in entrepreneurship measured by industry choice can be very well explained from social norms as what kind of businesses are appropriate for either women or men to pursue - apart from the fact that consumer businesses typically have low entry barriers and require less capital investment at startup. Women are absent or under-represented in certain sectors and industries because society beliefs in certain masculine and feminine industries. These normative perceptions thus affect the types of enterprises in which women and men can engage. A society might perceive women as ‘better care takers’ or men as ‘physically stronger’, consequently support for women to undertake entrepreneurial activities in the
construction sector or men to start a nursery or day-care center will be low. In other words, when in a society entrepreneurship is largely saturated with traditional male stereotypes and attitudes, there is little space for encouragement from society for women to pursue such a career or compete on equal grounds with their male counterparts.

4.6 Do we need a separate theory on women and entrepreneurship?

The parsimony of institutional- and multi-level gender sensitive analysis, has led some scholars to raise the question if there is in fact a need for a separate theory on women and entrepreneurship. Among others, de Bruin, Brush and Welter (2007) propose that a separate theory may not be required to explain the gender gap in entrepreneurship. Institutionalism provides a substantial and sufficient theoretical conceptual framework that can uncover the ‘hidden’ and implicit, as well as the explicit institutional constraints to women entrepreneurs (Bruin, de, et al., 2007; Aidis et al, 2007; Baughn et al., 2006). These scholars argue that instead of searching for a separate theory on women entrepreneurship, there is need for adopting a more comprehensive research program than that offered by mainstream approaches, including country-specific studies of entrepreneurship in relation to a variety of institutional contexts, such as the family and the legal system especially in developing countries. Furthermore, there is need for much greater analysis of the ‘entrepreneur’, separate from the business unit, along with an appreciation of the institutionalized barriers that women entrepreneurs are facing (Sarasvathy, 2004).

5. Feminist critique: questioning the gender bias in entrepreneurship

While fully subscribing the need for understanding the institutionalized barriers, challenges and obstacles that women entrepreneurs are facing, it is important take note of a more feminist theory driven explanation of the gender gap in entrepreneurship in order to fully understand chances and choices of entrepreneurs in developing countries. A number of feminist scholars have raised concerns about the scope of research on women entrepreneurship. Calas, Smirich and Bourne (2009) for example, question the economist and individualistic premises of entrepreneurship research and call for new directions and alternative frameworks. Their contribution argues that the gender gap in entrepreneurship will persist as long as the dominant powers that shape the context of entrepreneurship are left unquestioned. Change will only occur when entrepreneurship is reframed, bringing to light its potential for real social change instead of merely economic growth.

5.1 The main problem is left intact

Here, a more feminist approach to gender provides important insights. Whereas the concept of gender was introduced by feminist scholars (‘70s) as a concept to distinguish between biological sex (male and female) and socially constructed sex (masculinity and femininity), in the majority of entrepreneurship research, gender usually refers merely to ‘male and female’ and not so much to socially constructed sex (Ahl, 2006). Feminist scholars consider this an undue perpetuation of a ‘liberal’ view of gender, which either tends to turn women’s disadvantages into advantages or frames women’s disadvantages as barriers that can be overcome with the right measures. Either way, the majority of entrepreneurship research leaves the gender gap unsettled and perhaps even for granted without challenging the main problem –which is that entrepreneurs, men and women alike, operate in patriarchal economies and societies that are biased towards women over men. This gender bias
can be subtle or explicit but in most cases will result in a context that values men over women, based on privileges and oppression, which may result in small or large consequences. Chances are that by ignoring this researchers reproduce existing systems and context, which affects not only research but holds great consequences for policy-making (Ahl, 2006). According to Ahl (2006) and Calas et al. (2009) this explains why serious change and real reform for women entrepreneurs has not yet occurred and the gender bias in entrepreneurship continues to persist.

In sum, feminists argue that most entrepreneurship research 1) share in a discourse of economic growth and individualism; 2) apply a liberal perspective of gender, leaving patriarchal society unquestioned, and; 3) do not question the power structures that set structural barriers to women’s entrepreneurship and therefore ignore other possible solutions, results and efforts to close the gender gap. Before discussing the possible implications for women’s entrepreneurship research and the design of promotion policies and support programs from a feminist perspective, below a more in depth description of these three arguments.

5.2 Discourse of growth and individualism
Ahl (2006) argues that entrepreneurship tends to be seen as a practice characterized by innovation, change, opportunity and economic growth. It is constructed as something positive, contributing to development, which unintentionally might exclude its potential for real social change. Based on a quick-scan of literature and materials, more and more studies, notably development studies as well as popular articles, frame entrepreneurs as an engine for growth and women entrepreneurs, in particular, as critical drivers of change. Indeed, much of the contemporary interest in the role of women as entrepreneurs is based on the expectation that they can contribute to economic growth and development. Because of their unique role in the household (Horrell and Krishnan, 2007), women are expected to contribute more than men in this regard, as they tend to invest more in the family, which has a positive impact on development indicators (Minitti, 2009; Minniti and Naudé, 2010). Women entrepreneurs are thus an ‘untapped source’ of economic growth, and their underperformance a problem that needs to be fixed. (Ahl, 2006; Pearson, 2007)

According to Ahl (2006), such expectations of women entrepreneurship fit in very well with the dominant discourse of modernity that considers advancement primarily in terms of economic growth and development. Ahl (2006) also criticizes the individualism in entrepreneurship research. She argues that as much of it is focused on the individual entrepreneur and her business (motives, behavior, challenges), while ignoring the historical context and extra-economic variables such as legislation, the role of the state, religion and culture. “It is as if the future of the business depends solely on the individual” (Ahl, 2006, p. 605). Even when more structural barriers, such as gender discrimination in access to business education or access to finance, are considered, solutions proposed to overcome these barriers are focus on the individual. In most cases Ahl (2006) argues, it is the individual women entrepreneur who is advised and supported through policies and programs to enhance her education, networking skills or leadership qualities, whereas her context is left intact and unaffected.

As a discursive practice, much entrepreneurship research may thus be seen to render the gender gap as an economic performance problem, the solution of which is assigned to individual women and not posed as a social or political issue, excluding the necessity or even the possibility of structural
changes towards gender equality or gender-just policy reforms. At best, the gender gap in entrepreneurship is rendered a matter of 'unequal opportunity' due to discriminatory barriers facing women entrepreneurs and their businesses. Once these barriers are removed, men and women are at equal grounds and entrepreneurship can flourish. For example, it is commonly agreed that low levels of education and access to finance partly explain why fewer women than men manage and own businesses. Subsequently, the majority of projects propose training and loans for uneducated and poor women as remedies for the gender gap (Win, 2007). But as we have seen from the above considerations, gender gaps in entrepreneurship do not merely depend on variables such as level of education and access to finance but are a product of more complex (power) relations and (governance) structures in the gendered environment of entrepreneurship (Ahl, 2006). In other words: entrepreneurship cannot be considered utterly an economic practice but as a practice that is embedded in a specific and gendered environment.

5.3 Perspectives on gender

Harding (1987) distinguishes between three different perspectives on gender used in entrepreneurship research. One perspective considers men and women similar and equally able and capable of rational thinking. In research that adopts this perspective, the gender gap in entrepreneurship is constituted by discrimination of women and male-dominated structural barriers, for example when it comes to unequal access to finance for start-up and business growth (Ahl, 2006; Calas et al., 2009). Here, the idea is that discrimination can and must be eliminated and barriers can and must be changed. In a second perspective, men and women are also considered equal but dissimilar, with different qualities and endowments that can be differently valued by society. In research that adopts this perspective, the female characteristics of women entrepreneurs are seen as benefits or underutilized advantages that society needs to exploit and value more (Harding, 1987).

Both gender perspectives on entrepreneurship have been criticized by feminist’s scholars for reducing gender to sex, thereby reifying the gender bias in society that women and men alike are facing. They propose a third perspective on gender: one that questions the social order as a whole and its gendered power structures, regardless of the question as to whether men or women are similar of different.

5.4 Beyond the gender gap in entrepreneurship

Using a designated ‘post structuralist’ perspective on gender, feminist researchers argue that every aspect of the social, political and economic order is ‘gendered’, including entrepreneurship (Calas et al., 2009; Ahl, 2007). But, gender is not the only dimension that defines chances and choices of becoming a successful entrepreneur. As suggested by Minniti and Naudé (2010) it is important to also take into account the relation between migration, gender and ethnicity. Here an intersectional perspective perhaps is more appropriate. Intersectionality is a feminist tool for analysis, advocacy and policy development that addresses multiple layers of discriminations (AWID, 2004). It can help understand how characteristics of constructed identities impact on one’s location in society and the economic, social and political rights and opportunities attached to it. Intersectionality provides a more comprehensive point to understand the ways in which gender intersects with other identities such as migrant status, sexual orientation, religious beliefs, cultural status, ethnicity, educational background, age, etc. and how these intersections contribute to unique experiences of oppression and privilege. These constructed identities feminist argue, are found in all societies; however the
mechanisms and extent of inclusion and exclusion that shape oppression and privilege for these constructed identities can vary across cultures, and can change over time. Feminist scholars so to say ‘invented’ the feminist concept of gender in the ‘70s (and the latter intersectionality in the ‘90s) to understand the effects of these constructed identities and how they impact on access to and control over rights and resources and representation (Harding, 1987; AWID, 2004). Feminist theory is thus concerned with the power relations and constructions of identities that determine one’s roles and responsibilities in society in which inequity can exists (Butler, 1990; Ahl, 2006). “Gender is something that is ‘done’, ‘accomplished’ or ‘performed’, rather than something that ‘is’” (Ahl, 2006, p. 597). In other words: while we grow up we learn the behaviors, attitudes, roles and activities that are appropriate to our constructed identities and how we should interact and relate to others.

Furthermore, feminists aim to propose alternative social orders, economies and policies. When used in the original sense of the concept (as socially constructed identities) gender is a ‘political’ concept: used for critique and call for change and thus a useful theoretical paradigm to study, understand and respond to the gender gap in entrepreneurship. For example, the family, divisions in the household and care responsibilities are still widely seen as an exclusive problem for women, illustrated by the fact these domains are absent from general research on entrepreneurship and only make an appearance in research in women’s entrepreneurship. This indicates that scholars tend to perceive family only as a problem for women entrepreneurs, as a responsibility that is part of her identity and not that of her male counterpart (Ahl, 2006), that has to be fixed in order to unleash the potential of women in business. What is ignored here is the question how women’s entrepreneurship can potentially challenge the male norm society, bringing social change and bend the equation of the female identity as care taker and the male as breadwinner.

Knowing that over the past thirty years the participation of women in economic activity has doubled worldwide (Pearson, 2007) and the rate of new businesses formed by women outpaced that of men (Minniti and Naudé, 2010), feminist critique points out that we need to be careful when assuming that women’s entrepreneurship, will automatically lead to more gender equality and women’s empowerment. In other words, when patriarch societies are left unchallenged, women entrepreneurs will most likely continue to experience difficulties to compete on equal footage with men and improve their business performance. As long as the gender bias in which entrepreneurship is embedded values men over women, her business will always be ‘different’ or some even argue, positioned secondary or complementary to that of man and her prime responsibility: the family (Ahl, 2006; Calas et al., 2009). Feminist scholars focus on a broader outcome: social societal change that benefits both men and women.

6. Closing the gender gap: what is the impact of women entrepreneurship promotion policies?

Successfully explaining the gender gap in entrepreneurship thus entails a multi-level framework of analysis based on consistent and reliable gender-segregated data, that pays due regard to the extra-economic, normative context of entrepreneurship, considers the work-family interface, and that takes on a feminist perspective on gender. By implication, it would seem that a potentially successful policy or support program that aims to address the gender gap in entrepreneurship would need to be based at least in part on such a framework. Hence the questions emerge as to what kind of policies
and support programs are currently conducted (and by whom), and what we know about their effects, results and impacts? What are the key factors and critical conditions for successful support programs and policies? The following section addresses the need for systematic impact assessment of women entrepreneurship promotion and development policies and support programs.

6.1 Women entrepreneurship promotion and development

Not only the research community has taken on the challenge to explain and close the gender gap in entrepreneurship, also the development community has embraced the promise of the women entrepreneur as a resource to achieve economic growth. Headlines such as ‘Forget Foreign Aid, Focus on Foreign Investment In Women Entrepreneurs’, ‘Entrepreneurship Is The New Women’s Movement’ or ‘The Rise of the Female Entrepreneur’ are paramount in the media, conferences, studies and materials that circulate in the development sector. A whole host of development practitioners, policy makers and stakeholders from private sector have initiated support programs to close the gender gap in entrepreneurship. Examples of such programs can be found in the offering of international (public) institutions, civil society organizations and NGO’s, charities, religious organizations, knowledge institutes, private companies, social entrepreneurs and public-private partnerships. May it be noted that the interest in women entrepreneurs goes hand in hand with a general interest in the role of entrepreneurship in economic growth and development. As discussed, though, women are often assigned a special role as drivers of development due to their expenditure patterns (Minniti and Naudé, 2010 and Horrell and Krishnan, 2007).

These organizations engaged in women entrepreneurship promotion are deploying a variety of instruments and methodologies, ranging from entrepreneurial skill training; business development services (BDS) and technical support, to capacity development, empowerment and the provision of credit and investment funding. Recent years have also seen a growing interest in corporate social responsibility (CSR) and public-private partnerships. A quick scan of current programs suggest that the majority of them set out from the premise that women entrepreneurs are an untapped resource for development and purport to contribute to economic growth, raise income levels of households, empower women economically and, to a much lesser extent, contribute to gender equality. USAID (2012) for example has just initiated a project in partnership with the Cherie Blair Foundation and Millicom International Cellular that offers trainings and business education to empower women economically in Tanzania, Rwanda and Ghana. The World Bank (2012) offers projects such as the Women Entrepreneurship Development Project for Ethiopia. Here the main objective is to increase the earnings and employment of women-led micro and small enterprises. The main instruments are credit provision and financial training, entrepreneurial and technical skills development, and technology and product development support for. The ILO is a particular important player in the field of Women entrepreneurship Development (WED) as it has developed an extensive range resources and instruments based on years of experience. The main goal of the ILO’s WED program is to create an enabling environment for women entrepreneurship development that generates quality jobs; build institutional capacity and development of tools and support services for women

1 UN Women, the World Bank, OECD, World Economic Forum, USAID, DFID, GTZ, EU, APEC, ILO, African Development Bank, alongside with international NGO’s like OXFAM, Hivos, CARE and the Cherie Blair Foundation and public private partnerships (for example The Third Billion Campaign) either have women entrepreneurship as an important priority, main strategy, special program, object of study or financial beneficiary of their programs. They all, to a greater or lesser extend focus on women and entrepreneurship in developing countries.
entrepreneurs’. The ILO explicitly mentions that gender equality is at the forefront of their policies and support programs. An example of a Public Private Partnership (PPP) is the Third Billion Campaign (2012), that is ‘preparing women to drive global economic growth’ and aims to unite governments, NGOs, corporations, youth and others to ensure access to the resources necessary for women ‘to reach their full economic potential’.

The above quick scan teaches that of the available gender perspectives on entrepreneurship – i.e. gender neutral, gender sensitive and feminist – the gender sensitive perspective is dominant in current support programs and policies. Only the ILO may be seen to adopt at least in part a feminist perspective as it specifically lists gender equality as a policy goal. The most commonly employed instruments are training, networking and financing mostly targeted at poor micro entrepreneurs who are driven by necessity motives. However, there is an emerging trend to target women entrepreneurs with more growth potential.

Many support programs aim to assist women in starting up new businesses through training, empowerment and the provision of resources. Some seek to support women entrepreneurs with more technical assistance, vocational training and business education to help achieve growth. There are also a few examples of initiatives aimed at promoting change in societal attitudes towards entrepreneurship, and in particular, women’s engagement in entrepreneurship (ILO, 2010). These initiatives use several intervention strategies, including empowerment trajectories, start-up support, growth support, credit and loans, building associations, strengthening networks, match making with investors, etc.

6.2 Assessing impact of women entrepreneurship promotion
There is a wide variety of studies and project evaluations available from public institutions and development agencies involved in women entrepreneurship promotion (ILO, EU, World Bank and OECD). Even though these studies bring valuable and useful information and conclusions, the validity of these studies are subject of debate². Also, a growing number of academic working papers using interesting research methods, such as field experiments and randomized trials, are becoming available. Some conclusions can be drawn from these studies. Randomized impact evaluations from for example Sri Lanka and Peru suggest that the effects of business skills trainings are quite limited as the authors found little to no evidence for the impact of these programs on women’s business performance (Karlan and Valdivia, 2011 and Mel, de e.a. 2012). This evidence is significant because many women entrepreneurship development programs seek to address a perceived knowledge gap by means of training.

Another randomized field experiment in Afghanistan found that obligatory women’s participation in development programs did positively impact on women’s involvement in income generation but did not change their position in the household nor the attitudes toward the general role of women in society at large. In other words, deeply rooted gender discrimination was left intact (Beath, e.a.,

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² Ravallion argues that development practitioners in their eagerness for impact and funding need data and conclusions to support their desired outcomes. They may overreach in their efforts which can be in tension with more reliable data, or even the absence of data (Ravallion, 2001; 2009). Another reason for the tension between academic research and development practice is that they operate in different time frames. Practitioners working on specific projects or policy reforms need rapid feedback. Researchers need time, both to collect the required data and to properly analyze it (Ravallion, 2009).
2012). Such findings underscore the need for a systematic effort to investigate the premises (and impact) of women entrepreneurship policies and support programs offered by public and private institutions and governments. Duflo (2011) also rightfully points out that is unrealistic to seek for ‘miracle solutions’ that can achieve gender equality in policy efforts focused at either economic development or women’s empowerment for that matter. Based on a literature review she finds evidence that women’s empowerment and economic development are closely interrelated and that “equity between men and women is only likely to be achieved by continuing policy actions that favor women at the expense of men, possibly for a very long time” (Duflo, 2011, p. 1076). This suggests that we need to temper our expectations of the impact of women entrepreneurship promotion as the new engine for growth to bring gender equality, social change and economic development for both men and women.

6.3 Lessons from assessing impact on gender equality
Thus the question remains: does women entrepreneurship promotion and development turn women into successful ventures with greater sales while creating employment opportunities, thus contributing to economic growth? Moreover, does it change the gender biased context in which entrepreneurship is embedded and create gender equality or social change? – And if so, how?

As part of a larger scholarly endeavor to address these questions, it would be worthwhile to create an overview and historic analysis on the stated and omitted rationale for these support programs and policies in developing countries. Furthermore, an inventory and critical analyses of the different policies and programs offered and enacted by international, regional and national institutions would help determine the coherency and impact of women entrepreneurship promotion and development in developing countries.

Pending such an endeavor, some observations and conclusions can be drawn from case studies and general evaluations of the impact of gender development programs that can serve to inform an analytical framework for a systematic impact assesment. For example, in a landmark collection of essays on the rise of gender in development, Pearson (2007) argues that the problem with a lot of programs and policies is that they are based on the assumption that market engagement and income generation will automatically lead to women’s economic empowerment, changing the gendered normative practices within the household and beyond. This is nowhere more widespread (but least theorized) then in literature and practice on micro-finance. Undoubtedly many individual women benefit from micro-credit loans even though systematic analysis is lacking and empirical evidence not conclusive (Minniti, 2010 and Pearson, 2007). Some argue that micro-finance schemes help women achieve autonomy and independence, while others claim that it only makes women responsible for credit while husbands remain in control of decision-making. The problem is that impact is usually measured in terms of economic indicators while other effects, such as social change are left ignored. Also, it remains unclear how individual gains and benefits contribute to macroeconomic change, let alone political decision-making and enhanced levels of gender equality in society. Depending on country context, virtually all the NGOs and international donors that promote microcredit as a policy for economic empowerment have left gender inequality and other structural conditions that cause and produce poverty among women, unchallenged and unchanged (Feldman, 2003).
In the same collection on the rise of gender in development, Win (2007) argues that while many ‘gender and development’ interventions are targeted at the same group, i.e. poor, powerless, pregnant and rural women (In: Cornwall, A. et al., 2007), other potentially important and strategically important groups are often forgotten or ignored. Also, Pearson (2007) found that most of the beneficiaries of micro-finance are women that operate in the informal economy, driven by necessity and at subsistence level trying to survive. They borrow credit and use it to facilitate their petty trading, micro businesses, that are usually home-based. The return of their activities is low and there is no systematic evidence that their economic activity besides the generation of cash, leads to economic growth, job creation or economic empowerment. Furthermore, there is little evidence that income generation or increased economic activity through entrepreneurship has led to a widespread re-negotiation of gendered family, reproductive and care-work and thus contributing to gender equality or social change. So far, there is little to no systemic evidence that economic development and entrepreneurship promotion programs changed the place of women in societies (Duflo, 2011). Here, an important area of impact might be overlooked. More research is needed to examine for example the role that successful women entrepreneurs’ (can) play in influencing and changing the normative, political and economic context of entrepreneurship.

6.4 Lessons from evaluating entrepreneurship development policies

Despite a growing number of contributions, the debate whether we can actually teach individuals to be entrepreneurs is still very much unsettled (Henry, 2005). Some argue for the need to distinguish between the ‘art of entrepreneurship’ and the ‘skill of entrepreneurship’, suggesting that some aspects of entrepreneurship can successfully be taught but that business education does not make a successful entrepreneur per se whereas other variables are at play. (Henry et al, 2005). More promising in this regard appears to be awareness-raising efforts aimed at perceptual variables – e.g. empowering the perception of possessing skills (Minniti, 2007). On that note, findings presented by Acs and Zerb (2006) point at the importance of starting enterprise development policies early because the main drivers are ‘perceptual variables’ that take a long time to change.

Likewise, promising evidence has been found for a group of policies that focuses on enduring local interventions (Storey, 2003). Here informal and formal support structures are created, for example by chambers of commerce, through trainings publicly sponsored incubators, research and development (Minniti, 2009). Minniti’s findings suggest that a diverse set of context-driven policies delivered at multiple levels (national, regional and local) are more conducive to entrepreneurship than single-issue policies (e.g. focused on access to financial resources).

A suitable framework for analysis that can measure impact and long-term change can also draw important lessons from the work of Minniti (2008) as she questions whether, and if so, governments are able to positively influence entrepreneurial activity. Even though Minniti focuses here on general policies and not those focused on women per se, some conclusions are of interest for WEP policy research. Concurring with Pearson (2007) Minniti also finds that there is inconclusive evidence for the impact of policies that are designed to enhance access to finance for entrepreneurs. Likewise, she finds little evidence for the positive effects of tax breaks for start-ups, export subsidies, credits and export guarantees and other national policies aimed at stimulating, regulating or restricting business movement.
Like Minniti, Green and et al (GEM 2010) conclude that policy frameworks must be diverse and address normative aspects of entrepreneurship. First, they observe that women entrepreneurship policies should assist women start-ups by making resources available to them. Secondly, their business growth must be supported by technical assistance and education and last but not least, they suggest that such a policy framework must promote societal attitudes conducive to women’s entrepreneurship and foster an enabling environment. In the eyes of the ILO (2010), women’s entrepreneurship is best promoted through comprehensive policy frameworks that protect, foster and regulate business start-up and development for women. In their opinion, policies to improve women’s access to markets, to improve women’s access to and control over (financial) resources and policies to strengthen social protection and that enhance social inclusion. Furthermore, they propose that such a policy framework should reduce the risks and vulnerabilities that women entrepreneurs face and create a more supportive enterprising culture and a more favorable business environment for women entrepreneurs, alongside with public support services and family policies.

While subscribing to the importance of creating enabling environments through policy frameworks that protect, nurture and regulate women’s entrepreneurship, with Pearson (2007) it is important to stress that the reality for most women in the world, and that of women in developing countries in particular, is that they have to do without any protection or regulation. Whether operating in the formal or informal economy, in large, family-operated or small scale businesses or even within the household, policy frameworks and their institutions tend to be absent, mal-functioning or lacking political teeth. Also, in most developing countries the informal economy is the norm and by all statistical accounts growing, while the formal economy becomes more and more informalized. And since women are more than twice as likely as men to be operating in the informal sector (Pearson, 2007; ILO, 2002) necessity-based entrepreneurship among women is bound vastly to grow and expand to meet the needs of poor households for cash (Pearson, 2007).

6.5 New inspiring directions in women entrepreneurship promotion practice
An alternative approach to close the gender gap in entrepreneurship is suggested by Amine and Staub (2009). Drawing on institutional theory, they propose to improve the legitimacy of women’s efforts to become entrepreneurs in sub-Saharan Africa, by means of social marketing. The concept of social marketing is defined as: ‘specifically selected communication goals and messages that are tailored to promote shifts in beliefs and related attitudes towards women, work and their enterprises’. These shifts in beliefs and attitudes are formulated at three related levels. First they propose actions in the regulatory environment consisting of promotional activities for women’s political leadership at the highest level to bring about changes in laws to improve the social status of women. These actions are set to enhance access to capital (microcredit loans) and ownership of land (to be used as collateral). Secondly, they propose a series of actions in the normative environment consisting of large-scale, regional, long-term advertising campaigns. Based on anti-smoking campaigns, they need to bring about attitude change among men towards their wives and daughters as individuals with the right of self-determination and as future business people. Thirdly, they suggest actions in the cognitive environment that entail adequate educational and training programs for girls and women. Amine and Staub (2009) here suggest instruments to use such as outdoor billboards and posters, mobile units equipped with video and sound equipment, radio advertising, promotional events, relationship marketing through peer-to-peer contacts, viral and buzz marketing
through the use of opinion leaders and word-of-mouth communications, celebrity endorsements: using artists, celebrities and political figures to spread the message. What these instruments have in common is that most of them are targeted at collective audiences instead of individuals, with high levels of reach and repetition, set out to change and challenge normative systems.

The proposed strategy from Amine and Staub (2009) is promising because its multi-level analysis clearly results in a coherent set of diverse instruments, targeted at different levels and groups, including collective powers and individual skill development. While grounded in institutional theory, they wield a gender perspective that goes further than the gender sensitive perspective adopted by most institutionalists. Indeed, their strategy may be seen to embrace a feminist perspective on gender, as it aims to address multiple discriminations and gendered intersections that contribute to experiences of oppression and challenging gendered beliefs in a patriarch society. However it remains to be seen whether this strategy is powerful enough to bring about tangible social change in a context that is gender biased and shaped by oppression of women and privilege for men. What remains unclear in their approach is an answer to the question as to who (or what collective power) is responsible for initiating and managing the proposed changes? Is it the role of the state or the private sector? Is it a matter for civil society at large or should the women’s movement lead in the effort?

7. **Addressing the analytical gaps in the women entrepreneurship literature**

When reviewing research on women’s entrepreneurship it becomes apparent that, even though the available data and studies on the topic is growing, there is lack of reliable and consistent data on women’s entrepreneurship particularly in developing countries and emerging economies (Minniti and Naudé, 2010; Jamali, 2009). Following from that, a main point of criticism is that most of the literature available on women entrepreneurship draws on experiences in developed economies and Western societies (Ahl, 2006). On the other hand, consistent country specific data on the scale and scope of the gender gap in entrepreneurship remains unclear, indicating a need for findings to be more frequently compared with the nature and challenges of men’s entrepreneurship instead of solely listing barriers and obstacles for women. Ahl (2006) for example argues that in women’s entrepreneurship research we tend to “make a mountain out of a molehill” (Ahl, 2006, p. 604). She finds evidence for when studying women entrepreneurs, scholars tend to overemphasize minor statistical differences while ignoring overlap and similarities.

In their overview on understanding motivations and challenges of women entrepreneurs across the world, Minniti and Naudé (2010) also identify a series of gaps in current research on the topic and propose an agenda for future research. They indicate for example that it remains unclear how, and if, entrepreneurial activity of women results in growth and to what extent. Minniti and Naudé (2010) argue that there is a great need for systematic analysis, especially in developing countries, that perhaps might result in a ‘solid understanding of how the distinctive characteristics of female entrepreneurship are accounted for by the existing models of growth’. Not much is known about the size and behavior of women’s businesses in the developing context and data related to the amplitude of micro, small and medium businesses and how they operate is lacking in most countries. Besides the need to further study the interface between work and family, particularly in developing
economies, they also identify the need to further study the relation between migration, gender and ethnicity. Also, they suggest to further explore why the gender gap in entrepreneurship is more significant in developing countries and how this can be related to gender discrimination and how this can be overcome. Finally, they suggest that, in light of its implications for policy and development practice, a study of the institutional support and how this might inhibit, advance or encourage entrepreneurship of women in developing countries.

8. Addressing the policy gap: Towards a systematic impact analysis of women entrepreneurship promotion

This paper aims to contribute to this emerging research agenda by pointing out the need for a systematic impact analysis of women entrepreneurship promotion policies and practices. There is a need to better understand and determine whether and if so, how support programs and policies can impact on economic growth and beyond that, generate the kind of social change required to change the gender bias in entrepreneurship. Such an impact analysis, entails a multi-level framework of analysis based on consistent and reliable gender-segregated data, that pays due regard to the extra-economic, legal-, normative- and cognitive context of entrepreneurship, considers the work-family interface, and that takes on a feminist perspective on gender. It needs to encompass both the short-term and long-term economic and social effects (positive and negative) a) at the level of the household as well as nationally; b) identify effects on the legal-, normative- and cognitive context of entrepreneurship; c) address the work-family interface; and, d) pay due regard to the gendered and biased intersections that contribute to experiences of oppression and privilege.

In order to establish an inventory of existing WEP policies the analysis at least the following questions need be addressed:

**On problem analysis:**
- What are the stated, as well as omitted, reasons for designing the policy or support program?
- Is the policy or support program based on a multi-level (micro-, meso- and macro) analysis?
- Was a gender-neutral, gender-sensitive or feminist perspective used?
- Are legal, normative and cognitive institutional barriers considered?
- Is the work-family interface analyzed and considered?
- On what data, research and other institutional support is the policy or support program based and what is their status (research centers, knowledge institutes, evaluating organizations, best practices, etc.)

**On the policy goal and program objectives:**
- What can be said about how women entrepreneurs are positioned, what are they compared with or contrasted from? What are the goals of the policy or support program? What is it aiming to achieve and what not?
- What are the indicators for success?
- What value will the policy or support program produce? Is this formulated in (collective or individual) economic terms, social terms or in combination?
On target groups:
- What likely areas, contexts or groups are targeted or excluded from the policy? What or who is not chosen as relevant?

On instruments and strategies:
- What can be said about the instruments chosen to implement the policy?
- Is there singular or a diversity of strategies to impact on all different levels? Are strategies to cope with work-family interface included?

The above questions will not only help to understand the coherence of goals, instruments, target groups and resources but also uncover causal claims and assumptions. Table 1 is a suggestion for a policy inventory that critically analyzes WEP policies and programs offered and implemented by agencies. It provides a typology of the policies according to the gender perspectives they adopt, and brings them into relation with policy goals and objectives, indicators, target groups, instruments and methods of assessment. The table is only partly filled as it serves here to illustrate what the proposed analysis would include.

Table 1

Typology of different gender perspectives in policies and support programs for entrepreneurship development and promotion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem analyses</th>
<th>Traditional / ‘gender neutral’ perspective</th>
<th>Gender sensitive perspective</th>
<th>Feminist perspective</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Entrepreneurship is money-, market- and management driven and results into growth and development when these areas are enhanced</td>
<td>Different obstacles and constraints at micro, meso and macro define business performance for men and women. Once barriers removed, men and women are on equal grounds to compete and increase business performance</td>
<td>The context of entrepreneurship is gendered in any society and leads to formal and informal institutionalized that are biased in favor of patriarch society and norms that both induce and restrict the proportion and level of women’s entrepreneurship and its potential impact on growth and social change</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>View on (role of) entrepreneurship</th>
<th>Traditional / ‘gender neutral’ perspective</th>
<th>Gender sensitive perspective</th>
<th>Feminist perspective</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Entrepreneurship as a gender-neutral economic activity, unrelated to gendered socio – and macroeconomic factors of power and income, and unrelated to family obligations or care responsibilities.</td>
<td>Entrepreneurship as a gender-neutral positive economic activity that may benefit women. Feminine traits and characteristics are a bonus and should be seen and used as a resource</td>
<td>Entrepreneurship as an embedded economic activity in a gendered context potential process for social change</td>
</tr>
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</table>

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Goal and main objectives</th>
<th>Traditional / ‘gender neutral’ perspective</th>
<th>Gender sensitive perspective</th>
<th>Feminist perspective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Economic growth and poverty alleviation</td>
<td>Economic growth, economic empowerment and poverty alleviation that may benefit women.</td>
<td>Social change in terms of re-negotiated work-life balance for both men and women, political and economic representation and decision-making.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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3 This framework is based and inspired on the ‘typology of different perspectives on entrepreneurship’ from Calas et al (2009) The typology of gender-perspectives is based on the typology of Harding (1987) but for the purpose of argument, my typology follows a more simplistic rendition and distinction between liberal, social and post-structural perspectives on gender.
The efforts of public and private institutions to promote or develop women’s entrepreneurship in developing countries will undoubtedly continue to benefit individual women entrepreneurs. But, as long as the gender bias in the context in which entrepreneurship is embedded is left intact, our efforts may remain in vain and without any significant macroeconomic and social impact. With all the money in the world, combined with an accumulation of ‘good intentions’ and ‘great ambitions’ perhaps not much will change as long as those that enjoy the powers and privileges of the gender biased context will either step aside, make room or engage in this endeavor for social change. Here, taking on a feminist perspective is promising due to its ‘political’ nature in the sense that it intrinsically calls for change and alternatives. Because like poverty, the gender bias in entrepreneurship is not inevitable: people have created it, and thus can be overcome.

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