

## ***Virtual Event WEIFORWARD & Global WEP Women's Entrepreneurship Policy Round Table Sessions***

**24 May 2022**

### **GENDER, DIVERSITY AND INNOVATION: WHY INCLUSIVITY MATTERS**

This international round table session explored the experiences of women entrepreneurs innovators in different geographical contexts.

The session was chaired by Professor Tim Vorley, Oxford Brookes University, UK. We heard from Dr Beldina Owalla, Portsmouth University, UK, Cynthia Forson, Lancaster University, Ghana, Simonetta Manfredi, Oxford Brookes University, UK and Wendy Cukier Canada. The panel drew on their chapters in *Gender, Diversity, and Innovation: Concepts, Policies and Practice* Edited by Beldina Owalla, Tim Vorley and Helen Lawton Smith (Edward Elgar).

The panel were asked to reflect on what their research experience had led them to conclude about challenges facing women entrepreneurs. Beldina Owalla set the science by highlighting three main areas covered in in the book. These are theoretical perspectives on how and why gender matters in innovation; entrepreneurship and innovation policy and intesectionality.

The last perspective stood out in the panel event: intersectionality is about the heterogeneity of women innovators and entrepreneurs – age, class, race, ethnicity and geographical context. All of these have implications for policy and that policy needs a holistic, systems rather than a piecemeal approach (Wendy Cukier).

There was also agreement from the speakers that policy needs an evidence base that identifies players and roles as well as counting entrepreneurs and innovators. This is true in Africa (Cynthia Forson) where there is commonly mis-representation of women entrepreneurs as street sellers rather than accomplished entrepreneurs working in mobile phone technology logistics and transport. Women entrepreneurs in Africa tend to out perform men when they compete directly.

In Canada (Wendy Cukier) there is a need for analysis of every step in the value chain of how it links to women whether it be universal child care or infrastructure issues so that social as well as economic impacts of entrepreneurship policy are factored into policy design. Simonetta Manfredi argued that the evidence base should include comparisons between women and men taking into account the additional challenges that women face, for example in raising finance, and that these are also affected by age and ethnicity.



A further important theme in this debate is that of what kind of innovation and what kinds of benefits to individuals and society does it bring. Wendy Cukier argued, and supported by the panel as a whole, that technological innovation is over-privileged at the expense of other kinds of innovation. What is needed are narratives about women's innovations – telling the story of what has happened to the entrepreneurs – making visible the invisible. Beldina Owalla echoed this theme in discussing her research on high growth participants in the innovation process when she talked about the need for longitudinal studies in order to be able to understand the innovation system in which they operate and where specific challenges for women come from. Policy can only work if it is evidence-based.

On a positive note from the UK, it was noted by the panel that UK policy innovations which address diversity are recognized as being important and provide good examples of practice for other countries.

A final point made by Beldina Owalla was that of recognizing who are the current decision makers – and from that point, there is a need to get more diversity at different levels of policy-making.

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