

## The Strategic Roles of Women in Small Family Businesses: Evidence from Two Emerging Economies in West Africa

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**Abstract :** Women play significant roles when it comes to the survival of family businesses; however, their efforts are less acknowledged across the developing world. In the case where these businesses are started by husbands, women in many instances work as hard as the men to build up the business. In spite of this, the benefits women receive are not equal to their inputs. For instance, the profits accruing from ownership of these businesses are mainly enjoyed by husbands, as they are deemed to be the legal owners of family businesses in most developing economies. Though the number of women involvement in the ownership, management, and direction of family businesses keeps increasing over the years, their efforts sometimes are 'invisible' and not rewarded. Using a phenomenological approach, this study purposively selected 20 businesswomen each from Ghana and Nigeria for in-depth interviews on the different roles they play in ensuring the success of their family businesses (FBs). This study also explored the challenges and opportunities that these women have within their family businesses. Among the major findings of this study is the important strategic direction that women give in terms of providing both tangible and intangible resources such as transfer of transit knowledge to the next generation. Women were also found to play a significant role in the implementation of entrepreneurial orientation within small family businesses in Ghana and Nigeria. However, the study revealed that women experience various challenges as stakeholders in family businesses, among which are: work-life balance issues, succession issues, and culture-related presuppositions about gender roles both within the business and in their families. In the light of the study's findings, critical recommendations made include encouraging founders and/or owners of family businesses to create a conducive and viable platform for women to grow into key leadership positions within Family businesses; doing this would impact strongly on the growth rate of these form of businesses within the African Region.

**Keywords :** emerging economies, control, management, resources, strategy, women

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