

Brazilian Women Entrepreneurs: Exploring Sustainability as a Strategy for Developing Resilient Business Organizations

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Brazilians create over 1.2 million new enterprises annually, yet the survival rate is low. Thirty percent of the new ventures are unable to survive the first year, and 58% go out of business after 5 years. Building upon the conceptual framework of sustainability principles in business, and applying a qualitative phenomenological study, we explored the perceptions of Brazilian women entrepreneurs concerning the approaches needed to build a sustainable business enterprise in Brazil. Data collected were via telephone interviews with 20 female entrepreneurs engaged in a range of micro and small businesses. Results revealed major factors fostering the creation and development of sustainable companies and factors hindering such development. Practical implications are that by learning and implementing best practices through economic, social, and environmental sustainability principles, novice entrepreneurs and small business owners could build a resilient company and extend its longevity.

Keywords: Women entrepreneurs; Brazil; sustainability

Entrepreneurship is fundamental for the economy of any nation due to its intrinsic potential for generating jobs and income through new ventures, consequently improving life in society (Global Entrepreneurship Monitor [GEM], 2013). Brazilians are a very entrepreneurial people (Lima, Lopes, Nassif, & Silva, 2015). Many consider entrepreneurship as an alternative to circumvent difficulties in times of economic crisis (GEM-Brazil, 2015). Every year, Brazilians create an average of 1.2 million new enterprises (SEBRAE, 2011). Of those, 99% are micro and small companies that generate 52% of employment and pay 40% of wages (GEM, 2012).

Despite their significance to the Brazilian economy, the percentage of early business termination amongst the new ventures is still unsettling. An average of 30% of the new enterprises is likely to close their doors within the first year of activities, and 58% fail before reaching 5 years of existence (SEBRAE, 2013). Most recently, a study conducted in 454 municipalities revealed that in 2016, the survival rate of enterprises with two years of existence was 77% to include all states of the union (SEBRAE, 2016). That indicates a 23% of early business termination. The premature dissolution of an enterprise due to failure can result in psychological, social, and financial devastation (Ucbasaran, Shepherd, & Lyon, 2013) and represents an unrecoverable waste of resources allocated. For the sake of the entrepreneurial population of Brazil, it is important that entrepreneurship research ask the right questions to find answers that might prevent the failure of new enterprises.

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Women entrepreneurship plays a substantial role in the economic development of countries. In the recent years, Brazil has witnessed an extraordinary economic phenomenon as the rate of new ventures started by women has gradually increased. In 2010, 45% of the entrepreneurs in the category of individual microentrepreneurs were women, increasing to 46% in 2012 (GEM, 2012). In 2014, 23 million new entrepreneurs entered the market, 51% of them were women-owned enterprises (GEM-Brazil, 2014). Women represent half of the world's population and execute most of the work in the informal sector (Gokus, Ozdemiray, & Goksel, 2013). As women position themselves as substantial players in national economic development, their participation as entrepreneurs is particularly relevant (De Vita, Mari, & Poggesi, 2014).

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to find out about the strategies entrepreneurs in Brazil need to build sustainable business enterprises. Sustainability herein refers to business longevity resulting from the implementation of the ethics of sustainability. Sustainability entrepreneurship is essential for the development of a strong Brazilian economy. Securing the continuity of a new venture for future generations seems to be the goal of small firms in Brazil. That entails careful planning based on the principles of economic, social, and environmental sustainability. These are important aspects to consider prior to investments in a startup. A sustainable business is socially desirable, culturally acceptable, and psychologically nurturing. It is economically sustainable, technologically feasible, and operationally viable. It is also environmentally robust, generationally sensitive, and capable of continuous learning (Hawken, Lovins, & Lovins, 2013).

Purposefully selected, the targeted population for the study consisted of women entrepreneurs from diverse regions of Brazil experimenting with the implementation of sustainability in their micro and small enterprises as they so comprehended it to be. The practical implications of the study were that by implementing best practices based on the ethics of environmental, social, and economic sustainability novice entrepreneurs and small business owners might be able to build a resilient business and extend the longevity of their company.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Brazil is an emerging market economy at the efficiency-driven stage of development with competences that include a large market with higher education and training, technological passion, and efficiencies in goods, labor, and financial markets (WEF, 2016). Over 1.2 million new startups enter the market every year (SEBRAE, 2011), these measures of efficiencies should prove favorable. Yet, 30% percent of the new enterprises close their doors within the first year of activities, and 58% fail before reaching five years of existence (SEBRAE, 2013). In recent years, that number has decreased as researchers attempt to capture from the perspective of the business owners, the conflicts that occurred within the enterprise prior to termination.

Research by Nascimento, Montenegro, Lima, and Ensslin (2013) revealed the major factors contributing to the early dissolution of the micro and small businesses of Florianópolis, Brazil. They sought to investigate the issue of failure from the perspective of accountants and collected data from 141 accounting firms. Results indicated that failure occurred because of the entrepreneur's (a) inadequate market knowledge; (b) insufficient working capital; (c)

inaccessibility to credit; (d) and operational ineffectiveness or bad management. Additionally, other factors contributing to business failure were (a) the inexistence of marketing, price, product, and distribution policies; (b) the issue of unqualified workers; and (c) an overall lack of strategic planning (Nascimento et al., 2013).

Similarly, Ferreira, Oliva, Santos, Grisi, and Lima (2012) used a quantitative and qualitative methodology to study the issues causing the premature dissolution of micro and small companies in the city of São Paulo. They collected and analyzed data from government reports on failed enterprises. Their findings indicated that the micro and small business entrepreneurs failed because they were ill prepared to compete. Data analysis pointed to major issues contributing to business dissolution. Those issues were (a) entrepreneur's difficulty in finding and keeping new customers; (b) lack of creativity or innovation; (c) inadequate management skills; and (d) low level of education. Additionally, results revealed that other major issues contributing to failure were (a) the existence of aggressive competitors, and (b) entrepreneur's lack of a business plan (Ferreira et al., 2012).

While these research findings revealed and explained some of the culprits in entrepreneurship failure, there is a gap in research on sustainability as a model and a possible tool against business failure. The sustainability thinking process forces careful consideration in the use of all the resources allocated to a business including natural, financial, capital, and human (Hawken, Lovins, & Lovins, 2013).

There is no way to circumventing sustainable development (Nidumolu, Prahalad, & Rangaswami, 2013), and business can offer solutions. Due to its ethical approach toward the environment and society, sustainability triggers an optimism and confidence in people around the world, where many can visualize an improved contemporary society and a better future for humankind (Moldan, Janoušková, & Hák, 2012). Social and environmental sustainability are now significant mechanisms by which companies evaluate their economic achievements (Koo, Chung, & Ryoo, 2014; McEwen, 2013). It has become part of policy goals in the agendas of leaders across the globes who are inspired to bring the future into the present shaping sustainability actions and directions (Nidumolu et al., 2013). From a business perspective, sustainability requires companies to develop new business processes for economic gain, which are intertwined with societal and environmental considerations, including the preservation of nature and life-sustaining communities (Shepherd & Patzelt, 2011). A sustainable business is economically viable, socially desirable, culturally acceptable, environmentally sustainable, and capable of continuous learning (Hawken, Lovins, & Lovins, 2013).

Sustainability is an evolving concept expanding within all types of organizations including business (Bateh, Heaton, Arbogast, and Broadbent (2013). Throughout the world organizations both small and large have developed their understanding of sustainability principles and have adapted the concept to their needs. Bateh et al., (2013) argued that sustainability might refer to the organization's longevity, guardianship of core principles, and accountability for the needs of stakeholders. The field of sustainability science and research poses a challenge to the business community who must shift from purely profit-seeking intentions to include people, their institutions, and the natural environment as in a larger system. In the pursuit of sustainability, management and academia ought to engage in a combined effort to merge their expectations of sustainability outcomes. A common platform could provide a clearer understanding of

sustainability that will satisfy workers, management, and stakeholders to support them in the creation of sustainability strategies (Bateh et al., 2013).

The term sustainability has denoted conflicting meanings amongst the business community worldwide (Bateh et al., 2013), and has elicited fear because of the lack of knowledge. Many believe that environmental sustainability will erode their competitiveness (Nidumolu, Prahalad, & Rangaswami, 2013). For example, McDonough and Braungart (2002) suggested that sustainability focuses on the negative aspects of the firm and neglect the positive. Vanclay (2004) claimed that the economic and environmental indicators are measurable, but the social sustainability indicators are hard to quantify. Additional criticism was that of Norman and MacDonald (2004) who questioned the need for extra bottom lines.

Yet, for Nidumolu, Prahalad, and Rangaswani (2013) sustainability is a rich source of both technological and organizational innovations. Their argument originated with a study on the sustainability of 30 large companies. They argued that business leaders could benefit from pursuing sustainability goals when they consider compliance as an opportunity, challenge the supply chain to become sustainable, archetype sustainable products and services, design innovative business models, and build new platforms for practice (Nidumolu et al., 2013).

Despite the complexity and scope of sustainability, companies can reap economic benefits from (1) cutting costs through recycling, reducing materials usage, and becoming energy efficient; (2) gaining competitive advantage by improving employee morale and retention; (3) improving business image by marketing volunteer hours and resources offered free of charge to local communities; (4) reducing the risk of costly imposed regulations by assessing environmental and social impacts of supply chain, in an effort to foresee future demands of customers and regulators; (5) being aware of pressures coming from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) including the International Labor Rights Forum; (6) becoming a credible supplier in a supply chain for large corporations; (7) developing the company's commitment to the environment, to fair labor practices, and human rights; and (8) building better partnerships for external stakeholders' engagement (Global Reporting Initiative [GRI], 2010). However, the goals of sustainable development or sustainability can only be achieved with equal and vigorous participation of women in all activities of social and economic development (Ki-moon, 2011).

Women's contributions to local economies are undeniable. Besides investing in the education of their children and the welfare of their communities, women pay back any assistance they receive by serving others (GEM, 2014). There's unequivocal evidence that women's entrepreneurship initiatives are fundamental for social development and prosperity (GEM, 2014). When combined with the environmental consideration, these become the goals of sustainability. Women entrepreneurs have the capacity to reconfigure, rejuvenate, redeploy, and innovate to keep their firms operational (Gundry, Kickul, Iakovleva, & Carsrud, 2014). Their leading personality traits such as creativity, self-motivation, courage, versatility, leadership, self-confidence, self-determination, competence, commitment, and focus (Damasceno, 2010; Sampaio, Fagundes, Sousa, Fonseca & Lara, 2013; Silveira et al., 2009) are the contributors to business success. The GEM (2014) reported that in nearly half of the economies they sampled (83) women entrepreneurs indicated high levels of innovation. And innovation is a prerequisite for the sustainable development of an economy in crisis (Nidumolu, Prahalad, & Rangaswami, 2013). Women can dissipate extreme poverty in their communities, and fulfill the goals of

sustainable development (United Nations Economic and Social Council [UNESCO], 2012), especially as sustainability-focused small business entrepreneurs. Women can contribute meaningfully to matters related to sustainability because they retain knowledge of local ecological, social, and political issues (Perkins, 2007; Figueiredo & Perkins, 2013). There is a gap in research on sustainability entrepreneurship by women.

RESEARCH QUESTION

In this study, I addressed the following research question: What strategies do women entrepreneurs in Brazil need to create sustainable business ventures?

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The concept informing the study was the sustainability model originated with the concept of sustainable development and applicable to business operations. Construed in the Brundtland Report of 1987 by the World Commission on Environment and Development [WCED], sustainable development is economic development that satisfies the necessities of modern societies considering that future generations will also need the planet's resources to fulfill their needs (WCED, 1987). Such a characterization set the stage for rationalizing its applicability from a microeconomic perspective of the firm. Sustainability thinking triggered an optimism and confidence around the world, where many can visualize an improved contemporary society and a better future for humankind (Moldan, Janoušková, & Hák, 2012). That is because sustainability requires organizations to develop new processes, intertwined with societal and environmental considerations, including the preservation of nature and life-sustaining communities (Shepherd & Patzelt, 2011). The implementation of sustainability ethics in a business venture will require a careful consideration of ecosystems, natural resources allocation and usage, practices of fair labor and decent work, compliance with human rights, and the production of quality products that are harmless to society (GRI, 2010). The conceptual framework of sustainability applied in business operations is herein explored through a qualitative research methodology.

METHODOLOGY

Using a qualitative research methodology, I sought to increase understanding of the strategies entrepreneurs need to build a sustainable business in Brazil. Unlike quantitative methods, qualitative research is an exploratory process. A qualitative methodology was appropriate for the study because of the newness and complexity of the topic, which extends into other fields beyond the business environment. Qualitative research focuses on the environmental context of the phenomenon, accommodates flexibility in its methodology, and underscores each problematic situation to answer key questions (Sallee & Flood, 2012). Qualitative inquiries do not require researchers to put forth a hypothesis since the study transitions from the literature review to the methodology.

The research design that I used was a qualitative phenomenological approach for studying the structures of experiences of research participants (Moustakas, 1994). Following the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval for the study, the selection of participants was next. I selected prospective participants from a list provided by SEBRAE, and sent each prospective a letter inviting them to participate in the study. Those who responded affirmatively were asked to sign a

letter of informed consent acknowledging that they had understood the purpose of the study. The informed consent letter clarified the purpose of the study, and explained they would be free to withdraw from the study at any time. There was no financial compensation offered for participation in this project. Instead, participants understood that upon study completion they would receive a small gift as a token of appreciation.

The target population group was women entrepreneurs operating micro and small ventures in Brazil. Within the targeted population, the selection made was a purposive sample of 20 participants who were implementing sustainability as per their understanding of the concept. The purposefully selected participants were representatives of each region of Brazil including South, Southeast, Central-West, Northeast, and North. Participants were of different ages, ethnicity, education levels, economic statuses, and levels of business experience. Their business activities encompassed different sectors and subsectors of the economy, including agriculture, manufacturing, commerce, and service. Their enterprises diverged in terms of industry type, structure, years in operation, and success level.

As the investigator in this qualitative research inquiry, I was the primary instrument in data collection. Primary data collection was through audio-recorded long-distance phone interviews with each participant at their place of business in Brazil. The questionnaire consisted of 10 semistructured, open-ended questions to which all participants responded elaborating freely about their daily experiences. During the interview process, I set aside any personal bias or feelings through the process of bracketing, to fully capture participants underlined comments regarding their business experiences. Being in the United States and doing phone interviews with participants in Brazil facilitated for bracketing because of the length of time I've been absent from the country. Adding to primary data, secondary data sources were news about participants' businesses published in online newspapers, news on legislation from government websites, NGOs websites, SEBRAE's online reports, participants' social media and company websites, and from field notes taken while visiting Brazil.

For data analysis, I followed Moustakas' (1994) modified seven steps by Adrian van Kaam. The Van Kaam's procedural steps consisted of (a) transcribing the interviews and other materials; (b) coding; (c) grouping themes; and (d) checking with participants for consistency. It also entailed (a) describing experiences; (b) recognizing common patterns in data; and (c) synthesizing the meaning of experiences participants. To prevent bias that could affect results, two trips to Brazil proved appropriate to examine and evaluate the environment in conjunction with the data collected.

Following the organization of the data, came the process of transcribing, and translating all primary and secondary data from Portuguese to English. Transcribing involved listening to the audio-recorded material and to type them up as raw data. The translation step consumed considerable time because of back translation, necessary to secure accuracy of meaning.

Upon transcribing and translating the material, a review of the literature on qualitative data analysis provided guidance for doing a hand-coded analysis. The hand-coding process involved reading all data to get a general sense, reflecting on possible interpretations, grouping similar topics, and coding the important ones. Once the coding process was complete, participants received a sample highlighting the most significant themes found in the data for their final

judgment and feedback. Upon receiving participants' insights, those new arguments had acceptance as the final themes of the study.

RESULTS

Results of data analysis revealed evolving factors supporting the creation and development of resilient companies, as well as obstacles hindering those efforts. The adverse factors consisted of (a) poor management skills; (b) shortage of suppliers and market data; (c) environmental unawareness; (d) the scarcity of skilled workers and professionals; and (e) inadequate public policies exacerbated by corrupt practices, and gender bias. The favorable emergent dynamics influencing participants' business startup and development included (a) the existence of institutional support; (b) the emerging sustainability trends (socio-economic anxiety, ecological-economic distress, and ecological health concern); and (c) the choice of a simplified business structure. Table 1 and Table 2 provide a quick summary of data. Table 1 displays some of the characteristics of participants' business including structure, years of operation, size, support received, and activity sector. To protect participants' identity, we refer to them as P1, P2, P3, and so on.

Factors Hindering the Creation and Development of a Sustainable Business

The dynamics affecting participants' business included (a) poor management skills, (b) shortage of suppliers and market data, (c) environmental unawareness, (d) the scarcity of skilled workers and professionals, and (e) inadequate public policies exacerbated by corrupt practices.

Poor management skills. Results from the analysis indicated that the financial administration of the business was the toughest challenge for most participants who expressed having insufficient knowledge for managing the financial aspects of their enterprise. Fifty-five percent indicated having issues of working capital and cash flow. P1, P3, P9, P10, P11, and P15 reported having started their ventures with one idea, few resources, great passion, and lots of courage. No one expressed having borrowed money at the startup phase. P1 attributed those issues to their lack of experience and knowledge dealing with finances but acknowledged that product improvement and diversification could solve cash flow concerns. P1 and P5 indicated that the economic return from their organizations had never been their priority. P5, who voiced her struggle with managing and improving her business finance, expressed a negative orientation toward profit. Conversely, P10 stated that profit or economic return was what led her to organize the business as a cooperative, offering a detailed account of how her workers cooperative solved cash flow problems at startup. Twenty-five percent protested unfair competition from both domestic and international markets.

Shortage of suppliers and market data. The scarcity of vendors of inputs for green business and the lack of organized industry data was indicated to be an issue for 65% of the participants. As stated by P8 her company needed fabrics made of natural fibers, and they were unable to locate certified companies offering the products. P10 indicated that not being able to find data on suppliers of irrigation equipment. P16 recounted to have found only one supplier of the machinery they needed in the whole country. P18 reported having difficulties locating resources and inputs for production. Forty-two percent had problems locating industrial vendors, and 30% expressed drawbacks with finding market information to facilitate the decision-making process

during startup. Some of the participants confessed having to improvise using similar equipment to do the job.

Table 1

General Characteristics of Participants' Ventures

No.	Structure	Years	Exporter	Size	Support	Activity sector
P1	Cooperative	13	No	Micro	SEBRAE	Recycled textile weaving Craftsmanship & retail
P2	Limited liability	5	No	Micro	SEBRAE	Organic vegetables Farming & retail
P3	Individual	7	No	Micro	SEBRAE	Recycled home décor Craftsmanship & retail
P4	Individual	13	No	Micro	CIESP	Business management consulting
P5	Limited liability	8	No	Micro	FINEP, FAPEG SEBRAE, FUNAPE	Organic fertilizers production & retail
P6	Individual	4	Yes	Micro	SEBRAE ADS-AM	Dietary food supplements manufacturing
P7	Individual	12	Yes	Micro	Local Government SEBRAE	Recycled biojewelry craftsmanship
P8	Limited liability	4	No	Micro	No support	Organic clothing manufacturing & retail
P9	Limited liability	7	No	Micro	SEBRAE	Ecological bags manufacturing & retail
P10	Cooperative	15	Yes	Micro	SEBRAE Paraíba Fed. Univ.	Organic floriculture farming
P11	Cooperative	5	No	Micro	SEBRAE	Recycled home décor craftsmanship
P12	Cooperative	12	No	Micro	SEBRAE	Culinary herbs cultivation & processing
P13	Limited liability	11	No	Micro	SEBRAE	Eco-bricks machinery manufacturing
P14	Cooperative	14	Yes	Micro	SEBRAE SENAI	Organic cotton cultivation & processing
P15	Individual	9	No	Micro	SEBRAE	Organic clothes manufacturing
P16	Limited liability	8	No	Small	No support	Recycled clothing manufacturing & retail
P17	Limited liability	20	Yes	Micro	SEBRAE, SETRAB SUFRAMA	Biojewelry craftsmanship
P18	Limited liability	10	No	Micro	No support	Custom-made uniforms manufacturing
P19	Limited liability	9	No	Micro	SEBRAE	Women attire design & manufacturing
P20	Limited liability	8	No	Micro	SEBRAE	Business management consulting

Environmental unawareness. Fifty-five percent of the participants expressed that public unawareness on the need to protect the natural environment has had an adverse impact on their company. Some of the businesses affected were those of P3 and P7 offering products made from recycled materials – specifically the artisans of home décor, and producers of women's accessories. Participants believe that because the population is uneducated on matters related to environmental degradation, they do not perceive the urgency in recycling and reusing. Many are resistant toward buying products from recycled materials. Participants involved in organic farming as P2 and P12 explained that organic farm products require a premium price to make a profit because of the high priced green seal certification. There is added value, P2 illustrated, but many still refuse to pay more for organics. P5 expressed her frustration having to compete with unprincipled competitors who deplete the environment to produce similar products, and without adding value sell those products at lower prices. P5 further added that competitor's misleading green marketing campaign affects her company's ability to become financially secure.

The scarcity of skilled workers and professionals. Analysis indicated that 74% of the participants' business experienced difficulties because of an overall deficiency of qualified employees and industry professionals. The scarcity of a skilled workforce has had an adverse impact on their company, especially those involved in organic farming, manufacturing, processing, and management consulting. P2 testified that their biggest challenge was to find qualified people to help us with organic vegetable production. Along the same line P17 testified having to qualify workers for the new emerging jewelry market. P19 stated that in her clothing manufacturing she still had difficulty finding skilled professionals. Similarly, P20 testified of her challenge in attempting to find qualified professionals on environmental, legal, and job safety laws for their consulting firm.

Inadequate public policies exacerbated by corrupt practices. Forty percent of the participants testified that some of the issues they encountered were due to inadequate government policies, lack of incentives for sustainability, and widespread corruption. P5 and P6, who depended on local public institutions for launching a green/sustainable venture, faced disappointment. P5 and P10 argued that ineffective bureaucratic regulations have caused delays in the processing of the documentation for licensing and formalizing their businesses. Macroeconomics related issues, and the high cost of doing business were also found to affect entrepreneurship initiatives and business development.

Factors Influencing the Creation and Development of a Sustainable Business

Despite the underlying negative forces affecting the development of startups in Brazil, results indicated the existence of dynamic forces, which positively influenced participants in the creation and development of their business. Those dynamics included: the presence of institutional support, the emergent sustainability trends (ecological-economic anxiety, socio-economic distress, ecological health concern), and choice of simplified business structures. These forces were the influential inspiration for participants to start and operate their small enterprises.

Institutional support. The existence of institutions offering business assistance and guidance was one of the most relevant factors influencing the development of micro and small companies as revealed in the analysis. Eighty percent of the women participants named SEBRAE as the

institution that offered the most support in the form of professional advice, seminars and workshops, expos and fairs, business plan guidelines, and project incubation. SEBRAE has agencies in the main cities across Brazil, and many are starting to provide courses on sustainable design to assist small businesses. Results of the analysis indicated that various other organizations across Brazil also offer business assistance to micro and small entrepreneurs. Participants named Agência de Desenvolvimento Sustentável da Amazônia (ADS-AM; Agência Nacional de Vigilância Sanitária (ANVISA); Universidade Federal do Amazonas (UFAM), and Superintendência de Desenvolvimento da Amazônia (SUFRAMA), and Serviço Nacional da Indústria (SENAI). Also, Universidade Federal de Goiás (UFG), Associação de Desenvolvimento Sustentável de Macacos e Furnas (ADESMAF), Empresa Brasileira de Pesquisa Agropecuária (EMBRAPA), and Universidade Federal da Paraíba (UFP) all provided business assistance to participants. Financiadora de Estudos e Projetos (FINEP) is a government organization that offers support to firms in all stages of scientific and technological development, basic research, applied research, innovation, the development of new products, processes, and services.

Data analysis indicated that participants learned about and took advantage of those free support services which kept their business in operation for over five years. Eighty percent of the women participants in this study indicated having pursued and received guidance from SEBRAE and other institutions. Most of them have built their website where they display their products/services for marketing and sales purposes. While the women participants sought and received various forms of assistance for their business, a survey by GEM (2012) revealed that over 82% of the entrepreneurs they surveyed did not seek guidance from support institutions such as SENAC, SEBRAE, SENAI, SENAR, or SENAT. That raises the question of whether the community, in general, is aware of these free services before starting a business – or if women entrepreneurs are more likely to seek assistance for their entrepreneurial business initiatives.

Sustainability trends. Analysis revealed that ninety percent of participants' business models included elements of ecological, health and socio-economic concerns. Sustainability trends taking place on a global scale inspired these participants to create a business to make money and concurrently minimize environmental degradation and social deterioration. Their business idea offered solutions for ecological-health issues, economic-ecological problems, and socio-economic ills. Those became opportunities.

Ecological-economic anxiety. Results from data analysis showed that in their quest for solving economic problems, participants helped to minimize an environmental problem in the process. P17's company uses organic materials from the Amazon rain forest and applies technology to produce biojewelry she sells in both the domestic and international markets. P1, P3, P16 looked at sustainability trends as an opportunity to care for the planet by preventing industrial textile waste from being tossed into landfills. P1 specified that their cooperative produces rugs from industrial textile waste. Likewise, P16 started a business with her husband to manufacture t-shirts and eco-friendly bags from industrial textile waste. In the same approach P3 makes and sells decorative household items from discarded PET materials not yet discarded in landfills. P11 explained that their cooperative of women artisans produces decorative household items from sugar cane bagasse. Likewise, P5 recounted that she started a business because of her concern over the accumulation of organic waste in city streets. She assembled ideas, market data, and sought business guidance from the local university research center. She then, started a business

that recycles organic municipal waste and transforms it into agricultural soil enhancers. Similarly, another ecological business solution was that of P7. Her awareness of sustainable development issues prompted her to start a business reusing cattle horns discarded by other artisans. After polishing the horns, she converts them into fashionable handcrafted women's accessories. Her startup challenges arose from her creativity, artisanship, sales, and marketing skills. P7 added that in her practice of social sustainability, she works in partnership with other artisans and indigenous people in her community. Likewise, P9 recounted that she noticed that in her place of work customers were bringing a large quantity of plastic bags to carry their purchases home. Her concern for the environment, and yearning for financial freedom prompted a business idea of producing eco-friendly bags. She transformed her home into an eco-bags production facility. She recounted that makes money selling her eco-friendly bags, and earns additional revenue from larger companies advertising on her eco-bags. Similarly, P17 recounted that the natural beauty of the forest inspired the idea of creating forest-inspired artisanal products. Today her customers are both domestic and international buyers. P4 started the business with her husband to coach managers on environmental regulations, and P20's company offers consulting services and training for the management of environmental laws, employees' health, and safety. P14 testified about starting her cooperative to produce garments and household items from naturally colored organic cotton.

Socio-economic distress. In their quest for solutions to unemployment, and economic hardships, a group of women assessed the availability of regional and local resources, and discovered streams of industrial waste. P1 recounted that they observed an old tradition of handcrafting products, practiced by city founders, and forgotten through the years, was casually returning to the local market. The group decided to transform that old tradition into a business. They structured their business as a cooperative that produces stylish, handcrafted rugs from discarded textile waste, selling them both in a store and online. Likewise, P10 recounted how a group of women solved a socio-economic distress situation. The group gathered, brainstormed ideas, and decided to start a cooperative to cultivate exotic flowers. P10 explained that the establishment of a women-owned flower production cooperative was a way to boost rural women's self-esteem, create employment, and prevent the community members from fleeing to large centers. Today they export their flowers to European markets, and have sales contract signed with multinational Walmart. On the same token, P19 related that she had accumulated tacit knowledge on garments production as an employee. Later, she decided to start her business designing and manufacturing women's undergarments, gowns, and pajamas. Despite their challenges in balancing cost and investment, they devote considerable time educating workers on matters related to the environment, and the reason behind the use of green packaging. P19 believes "women by their nature have a greater concern with issues of social responsibility and the environment." Such actions she hopes will help improve her company's brand image.

Ecological-health concern. The populations living in proximity to the rainforest ecosystem are knowledgeable of the wealth of medicinal herbs and grains nature provides free of charge. Analysis revealed that knowledge took P6 to begin her own home-based natural food supplement business after her success in using natural herbs to improve her health. Later, she shared the beneficial results with friends who asked to purchase some. She recognized a market niche and started a business from home. She later moved her business to a local university incubator for assistance in designing and trademarking her products. Similarly, P2 stated that the idea of cultivating organic vegetables – greens and legumes – as a business came because of her

personal health needs to consume natural products. When she could not find those products in local stores, she put together a business plan for starting the business. P2 started her business to produce organic vegetables including greens and legumes, which she sells to regular customers and local retailers. Today she provides and home-delivers fresh produce according to seasonal production, and can count on permanent regular clients who understand the idea behind her approach.

Choice of a simplified business structures. Evidence from the analysis showed that 45% of the participants structured their business as a Limited Liability Company, twenty-five percent as Individual Microentrepreneurs (MEI), and thirty percent decided for a Cooperative business structure. In Brazil, the limited liability business structure gives entrepreneurs a choice in selecting the types of taxes their company will pay (SEBRAE, 2015). Recent Brazilian laws (Lei nº 12.441/2011) allow for the formation of a limited liability company with one individual entrepreneur, guaranteeing the separation of rights and obligations of the individual entrepreneur from those of the business (SEBRAE, 2015). The Microempreendedor Individual [MEI] structure facilitates the legalization process before the law for those operating unofficially (SEBRAE, 2016). In Brazil, a cooperative is an organizational structure composed by members of a specific economic or social group who work together in the performance of activities for the benefit of its members (SEBRAE, 2010). Cooperatives are less likely to end operations unexpectedly, because control and decisions come from individuals working for collective prosperity (Ki-moon, 2012). Results of data analysis revealed that 25% of participants chose cooperative as a business structure to fulfill their socio-economic goals consistent with the notion of sustainability. Twenty percent are learning how to implement social sustainability. Eighty percent expressed having met their social sustainability goals through "respecting labor laws" "paying fair wages" "offering appropriate work conditions" "returning some of the profit to social needs in the community" "investing in social projects for employees" "donating to children's cancer treatment institutions" "training inmates, drug addicts, young offenders, and single mothers for work" "giving out scraps to small cooperatives and novice entrepreneurs" or "aligning Native Brazilian Indians as suppliers of raw materials". Table 2 shows that 80% of the participants believe their companies are working toward achieving environmental sustainability, illustrated in the types of activities they perform. Analysis revealed that 90% of them performed environmentally friendly activities including recycling and reusing materials, recycling and processing of decomposable waste, environmental management consulting services, and organic farming of vegetables, herbs, clothes, and other agricultural products. Their motivation was to build a lucrative business, generate jobs, cause no harm to the environment, and help their communities to grow.

Table 2

Participants' Perceptions of Sustainability Achievements

No.	Structure	Activity Sector	Years	Economic	Social	Environmental
P1	Cooperative	Recycled textile weaving craftsmanship	13	Yes	Yes	Yes
P2	Limited liability	Organic vegetables farming	5	Breakeven	Yes	Learning
P3	Individual	Recycled home décor craftsmanship	7	Yes	Yes	Yes
P4	Individual	Environmental management consulting	13	Yes	Learning	Learning
P5	Limited liability	Organic fertilizers manufacturing	8	Breakeven	Yes	Yes
P6	Individual	Dietary food supplements manufacturing & exports	4	Breakeven	Yes	Yes
P7	Individual	Biojewelry craftsmanship & exports	11	Yes	Yes	Yes
P8	Limited liability	Organic clothes manufacturing & retail	4	Yes	Yes	Yes
P9	Limited liability	Ecological bags manufacturing & retail	7	Breakeven	Yes	Yes
P10	Cooperative	Organic floriculture farming & exports	15	Yes	Yes	Yes
P11	Cooperative	Recycled home décor craftsmanship	5	Breakeven	Yes	Yes
P12	Cooperative	Herbs production & processing	12	Yes	Yes	Yes
P13	Limited liability	Ecological machinery manufacturing	11	Yes	Yes	Yes
P14	Cooperative	Organic agriculture processing & exports	14	Yes	Yes	Yes
P15	Individual	Organic clothes manufacturing	9	Yes	Yes	Yes
P16	Limited liability	Recycled clothing manufacturing & retail	8	Yes	Learning	Yes
P17	Limited liability	Biojewelry craftsmanship & exports	20	Yes	Yes	Yes
P18	Limited liability	Custom-made uniforms manufacturing	10	Yes	Learning	Learning
P19	Limited liability	Women attire design & manufacturing	9	Yes	Learning	Learning
P20	Limited liability	Environmental management consulting	8	Yes	Yes	Yes

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The conceptual framework informing the study was the sustainability model applied in business. Sustainability herein referred to business longevity resulting from the application of the economic, social, and environmental principles of sustainable development. Based on that concept, a sustainable business is economically viable, socially desirable, culturally acceptable, environmentally sustainable, and capable of continuous learning (Hawken, Lovins, & Lovins, 2013). Outcomes revealed that Brazil is fertile ground for the development of sustainable companies. Favorable factors influencing sustainable development of companies included the existence of institutions supporting recognition of business opportunities based on sustainability trends such as socio-economic-ecological anxiety and distress. Results indicated that despite issues with financial management being a setback for 55% of the participants, they have managed to keep their companies in operation for the longest time. This success might be due to seeking, and applying the suggestions offered to them free of charge. Eighty percent of the participants named SEBRAE as the institution that provided the most support in the form of professional advice, seminars and workshops, expos and fairs, business plan guidelines, and project incubation. Other institutions of support included state agencies of sustainable development, governmental regulatory bodies to protect health, government agencies for agricultural research and development, financial institutions, and university research centers. With guidance from all these organizations, participants chose a more simplified form of business in terms of management and tax responsibilities.

The development of a sustainable business requires daring entrepreneurs and skilled workers. As an efficiency-driven economy, Brazil benefits from centers of higher education and training equipped to provide a qualified workforce. However, the scarcity of skilled workers and professionals experienced by 74% of the participants represents a reality throughout Brazil. A survey of 1,761 companies of different sizes confirmed that 65% of those companies were unable to find qualified workers to fill job positions (National Confederation of Industry [CNI], 2013). Additionally, an untrained workforce has caused high rates of workplace accidents (Vilela, Almeida, & Mendes, 2012). Such occurrence delays the goal of sustainability. Education for sustainability will provide students with the skills they need to fulfill specific job positions increasingly required in the labor markets (Palma et al., 2013). Participants facing such challenge hired workers with similar skills having them adapt to their company's needs.

The lack of suppliers for the emerging green industry and the scarcity of available data on vendors was a problem for 65% of the participants who voiced being unable to find the appropriate machinery, equipment, and other resources of information for appropriately and timely developing their business. Their alternative was to use their creativity, and invest in research to figure out substitutes.

Public unawareness of issues related to environmental sustainability affected 55% of the participants' business. They managed to overcome that problem by having education campaigns to raise awareness on the reasons for recycling, reusing materials, and caring for the natural resources awareness for and training people in their communities for employment in their companies, while simultaneously raising environmental awareness by explaining the reasons for recycling, reusing materials, and taking care of Brazil's natural resources.

Financial management and working capital issues were factors affecting participants' business. However, 40% indicated having started their ventures with one idea, few resources, high passion, and lots of courage. No one expressed having borrowed money at the startup phase. A few recounted how they solved their cash flow problems by doing raffles, and asking suppliers for credit. Those in agriculture indicated they decided for planting short-cycle varieties for quick cash inflow. Although some still struggle with the issue of working capital, gradually they are advancing their financial knowledge and working toward business success. Participants' business models seemed to be consistent with sustainability principles – started up with their own cash, taking small steps continuously, learning, and applying new ideas with fiscal restraint.

The issue of inadequate government policies and unethical practices in all levels of government which evolved from the study is a reality that business leaders face in a daily basis. The democratically elected government of Brazil has abused the power entrusted to them for centuries. Corruption is a worldwide spread pestilence, very present in all levels of government in Brazil, but also in the private sector. It is imperative that business leaders fight any form of corruption, and conduct their activities in a conscientious manner through embodying high standards of ethics to improve the business environment to ultimately decrease risk because of increased trust. There can be no sustainability where unethical practices prevail and corruption abounds.

Concerning gender issues, while not all participants claimed to have undergone gender discrimination at the workplace as business owners, 25% of them indicated having experienced the phenomenon. Some lamented having faced harassment while working with men simply for being a woman. Whether those women worked in rural areas, held management positions, or attempted to argue a local environmental or social issue favoring their entrepreneurial initiatives, they had to endure disrespectful men. Such was the conclusion of P10 who declared "when we cannot face them, we circumvent them." An unfortunate reality. Women represent half of the world's population and execute most of the work in the informal sector (Gokus et al., 2013). The world can only achieve a fair, sustainable economy through women's full participation in all economic activities (Ki-moon, 2011). Participants didn't allow the issue of gender to deter them.

LIMITATIONS

One of the limitations of the study was having participants respond to an open-ended questionnaire conducted over long distance phone calls. That might limit the capture of truthful sharing of information that occurs in a face-to-face interview. Another limitation was that interviewing participants located in five distinct regions of Brazil, each region with specific geographical characteristics, climate system, natural resources endowment, demographics, infrastructure development, education system, and government commitment - making it unwise to generalize findings to all regions. There is the possibility of bias on the part of the researcher who is also a woman entrepreneur attempting to grow a sustainable company in the United States.

CONCLUSION

Early business dissolution due to failure is a concern for the highly entrepreneurial population of Brazil. The conceptual framework supporting the study was sustainability principles applied in

business including environmental and social considerations for economic success. Evidence showed that despite their adversity, the average survival rate for participants' business was nine and a half years with 80% of the enterprises active passed the first five critical years. This conclusion led to associate the survival rate of participants' companies to those factors positively influencing the creation and resilience of a business in Brazil including institutional support, sustainability trends opportunities, and the choice of a simplified business structure. Participants' needs to make a living, the environmental and social needs in their communities, and the resources available were all tools to help them build a sustainable business. The practical implications of the study were that by executing best practices based on the principles of economic, social, and environmental sustainability entrepreneurs might keep their company resilient and extend its longevity.

This was an attempt to explore sustainability applied in entrepreneurship as strategic tool entrepreneurs and small business owners can use to prevent premature dissolution. Due to scope and complexity of the topic, future studies could enrich the literature by focusing on exploring the economic, social, and environmental sustainability performance of individual firms.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. Could you please describe the types of products or services your company offers?
2. How were you able to identify this business opportunity?
3. What strategies did you apply for designing, producing, marketing, and selling your products or services?
4. What is the business structure in place to manage sustainability goals?
5. What difficulties arose for management because of the tripod of sustainability?
Prompting
 - i. Financial returns
 - ii. Ecofriendly practices
 - iii. Socially responsible actions
6. What obstacles did you come across (if any) when searching for materials, equipment, suppliers, office space or land, workers, information, financial capital?
2. What about green certification (if any), product demand, infrastructure for the flow of production, and any specific training for your business?
7. What are the most difficult challenges women must overcome to sustain their business ventures?
8. What kind of support did you receive and from which institutions?
9. What is it like for a woman to launch a business organization aiming to be financially profitable, environmentally, and socially responsible in a country rapidly mass-producing, and where profit seems to be the only focus?
10. How can business organizations have an impact on the quality of life on the planet?

Appendix B: Questionário da Entrevista

1. Poderia por favor descrever os tipos de produtos ou serviços que sua empresa oferece?
2. Como a sra. foi capaz de identificar essa oportunidade de negócio?
3. Quais estratégias a sra. utilizou na concepção, produção, comercialização e venda de seus produtos ou serviços?
4. Qual é a estrutura de negócio que a sra. estabeleceu para alcançar os goals da sustentabilidade?
5. Quais dificuldades surgiram quando da tentativa de aplicação do tripé da sustentabilidade?
 - a. Retorno financeiro
 - b. Boas práticas ambientais
 - c. Ações sociais responsáveis
6. Quais desafios encontrou (se algum) durante a abertura da empresa no sentido de localizar fornecedores, materiais, equipamentos, espaço ou terreno para estabelecer a empresa, mão de obra qualificada, informação, capital financeiro, certificado verde (se algum), infraestrutura para o escoamento da produção, aceitação do produto no mercado, oficinas de treinamento no seu campo de negócio?
7. Quais dificuldades mais desafiadoras as mulheres empreendedoras devem sobrepujar para manter suas empresas lucrativas e sustentáveis?
8. Que tipo de apoio a senhora recebeu e de quais instituições?
9. Como é a experiência de uma mulher empreendedora lançando um negócio sustentável num país que rapidamente se industrializa?
10. De que modo as organizações empresariais sustentáveis poderão afetar a qualidade de vida no planeta?

Limited info on raw materials Limited data on seeds and substrates Financial management challenges Market instability Must train own workers Need for continuous training Need for sustain. training for workers Need of professionals Need to teach sustainability Poor incentives and public policies Prejudice against female supervisor Prejudice against poor women Prejudice against women still exist Product acceptance challenge Product diversification challenge Public not used to green products Scarcity of machinery manufacturer Shortage of regional suppliers of inputs Skilled workers too expensive Unfair competition from abroad	Research Suppliers Management Macroeconomics Unskilled Unskilled Unawareness Unskilled Unawareness Government Gender issue Gender issue Gender issue Unawareness Innovation Unawareness Suppliers Suppliers Suppliers Macroeconomics		
What the data says	Categories	Total References	What the data mean
CODE NAME	FAVORABLE FACTORS		THEMES
The only support we received was from SEBRAE	SEBRAE Support	16 received business assistance 80 percent	Institutional Support
SEBRAE made possible the survival of our business	SEBRAE, CIESP guidance		Institutional Support
I have received various types of support from SEBRAE through their consultants	SEBRAE support		Institutional Support
We have always had the support of SEBRAE	SEBRAE assistance		Institutional Support
We received assistance from FINEP, FAPEG, FUNAPE, and SEBRAE-GO	Various org. of support		Institutional Support
Besides ANVISA, SEBRAE provided the most support	ANVISA, SEBRAE support		Institutional Support
We had support from the city and from SEBRAE	SEBRAE support		Institutional Support
Only after we visited SEBRAE, our business took off	SEBRAE Assistance		Institutional Support
SEBRAE offered support through training, workshops, and consulting. UFP provided greenhouses	SEBRAE, and UFP Support		Institutional Support
UFG guides us in everything about the	SEBRAE, and UFG Guidance		Institutional Support

product, SEBRAE, the overall organization and training, and Banco Brasil financial			
SEBRAE was and is very important for our growth	SEBRAE Support		Institutional Support
We received great support from institutions such as SEBRAE, SENAI	SEBRAE guidance		Institutional Support
SEBRAE support was essential for me to participate in fashion shows and fairs to promote and sell my products	SEBRAE Support		Institutional Support
I received training from SETRAB, SEBRAE, and SUFRAMA	SETRAB, SEBRAE, and SUFRAMA		Institutional Support
SEBRAE supported us from the beginning	SEBRAE Support		Institutional Support
Through SEBRAE we participated in incubation project with expert advice	SEBRAE Support		Institutional Support
What the data say	Categories	References	What the data mean
	FAVORABLE FACTORS	18 green startups 90 percent	THEMES
We weave recycled industrial textile	Environmental		Sustainability trends:
I needed to consume organic vegetables	Health-ecological		Ecological-economic anxiety
We produce home décor from recycled PET	Environmental		
We offer green management consulting	Environmental		
We produce organic fertilizers from waste	Environmental		
Health issues required supplemental diet	Health-ecological		
Biojewelry from polished bovine horns	Environmental		
Our floriculture keeps families together	Social issues		Socio-economic distress
We produce organic cotton and clothing	Environmental		
We manufacture ecological bags	Environmental		
Our cooperative is an organic floriculture	Ecological		
I make recycled household décor	Ecological		
Our herbs cooperative created local jobs	Social issues		
We produce ecological brick machinery	Ecological		
We cultivate organic agricultural products	Health-ecological		Ecological-health concern
I produce fashion from recycled clothing	Ecological		
We produce and sell organic clothing	Ecological		
Our cooperative makes biojewelry items	Ecological		
We produce custom-made uniforms	Green alert		
We design and produce women’s apparel	Green alert		
We help businesses with green management	Ecological		

What the data say	Categories	References	What the data mean
	BUSINESS STRUCTURE	Cooperative (6) Individual (5) Limited liability (9)	
Based on the Brazilian tax system, we opted for the formation of a simplified cooperative.	Cooperative		Thirty percent are cooperatives
Our company is a limited liability company	Limited liability		Twenty-five percent are individual entrepreneurs
Our business is structured as individual microentrepreneur	Individual		
I operate my business as an individual microentrepreneurs	Individual		Forty-five percent are limited liability companies
Our company is a limited liability company	Limited liability		
I started my business as a MEI	Individual		
We started our business with individual members structured under the Limited Partnership Co.	Limited liability		
My business was structured as an individual microentrepreneur	Individual		
I chose a limited liability company to be centralized in a single person	Limited liability		
The business is a Limited Liability Company comprised of one person	Limited liability		
The business structure chosen was cooperative	Cooperative		
It is a cooperative form of organization	Cooperative		
Our organization was created to work as a cooperative for agricultural production	Cooperative		
Our company is a Limited Liability Co. with two collaborators	Individual		
We decided that a cooperative structure would be the best	Cooperative		
We begin our business as a cooperative to meet legal requirements	Cooperative		
Our company is a limited liability co.	Limited liability		
A limited liability company fitted best for our business	Limited liability		
We are a limited liability business	Limited liability		
Our company was formed as a limited liability	Limited liability		