

**ENTREPRENEURIAL INNOVATIONS IN THE RURAL CONTEXT: CAPITALIZING ON RELATIONSHIPS
BETWEEN IMPLEMENTERS AND ADOPTERS OF INNOVATIONS**

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Abstract

Purpose-This paper studies the transfer and adoption of entrepreneurial innovations and the processual provisions for the implementation of innovation concepts among entrepreneurs in the rural areas capitalizing on the relationship between entrepreneurship actors.

Approach/Methodology-An ethnographic and Narrative Inquiry was carried out in a multi-culturally diverse locality in Niger State, Nigeria to explore the phenomenon.

Findings-The paper shows that, knowledge-sharing innovation structure determines learning dependency in the both localities where studies were conducted. Also, it showed how community implementers of new innovations relate with adopters of innovation using existing entrepreneurial structures with innovative concepts that cut across cultural beliefs.

Implications/Recommendation-Remarkably, the paper provides the direction at which adopters of innovation can show how supportive proclivity to innovate their entrepreneurial activities based on the knowledge acquired from the implementers of innovation.

Conclusion-The paper, therefore, concludes with the presentation of incongruities between indigenous innovative concepts and knowledge-sharing innovative concepts. This discrepancy consents for further research enquiries into expanses of transfer and adoption of innovations in rural entrepreneurship studies.

Keywords: *culture, knowledge-sharing, innovation, implementers of innovation, adopters of innovation.*

Introduction

Before 1960, rural communities in the entity later referred to as Nigeria have had commercial activities relationships based on entrepreneurial capabilities facilitated by opportunities, creativity and relocation within spatial spaces (Obi-ani & Isiai, 2020; Raheem W. M., Oyeleye, O. I., Adeniji, M. A., & Aladekoyi, O. C., 2014). The capability of rural communities to attract new entrepreneurs who are seeking for innovation and improvement in entrepreneurial livelihood practices has important implications on the skills entrepreneurs possess and subsequently their economic development. This is because implementers of innovation in most cases had gone beyond the indigenous knowledge they inherited and had improved on their skills through creativity and their capability in the aspect of network building with other entrepreneurs who are relatively into similar businesses. Availability of unsubstantiated market information slows down the quest of convincing new adopters of innovation in the developing countries (Narayanan & Baburaj, 2021) and even in some developed countries (Rusell, 2020).

More importantly, the involvement of rural entrepreneurs who are ready to adopt innovations extends beyond skills but their strength in creating market linkages for the implementers of innovation (Chatterjee. 2021). Even as, there is a growing body of evidence concerning the impact of innovation on the prevalence of entrepreneurial skills development in rural areas, there is dearth or valuable little research carried out on their contribution to innovative entrepreneurship and the formation of innovation systems within the rural context. This is regardless of the fact that there is an increasing appreciation of how entrepreneurs are using available resources within their end to come up with innovative concepts using less advanced knowledge system. To make innovative activities sustainable within the concept of innovation in the rural setting as well as to create networks and associations to facilitate uptakes, there is a need to develop researches that would serve as knowledge bank for practitioners of entrepreneurship (Bell, 2009; Kpessa-Whyte & Tsekpo, 2021).

Using the framework of this assertion, this paper therefore, sets out to explore the role of implementation, transfer and adoption of entrepreneurial innovations within the rural context as well as the formation of innovative ideas in the rural areas capitalizing on the entrepreneurial relationship between the implementers (defined in this paper as people from different communities who reside in the study community) and adopters (defined in this paper as the indigenous people of the study community) of new innovations. In achieving this, the paper deploys an ethnographic methodology that placed priority on observation and interviews that focuses on the relationships between the implementers and adopters of new innovative concepts. In exploring the relationship between implementers and adopters of innovation, dissimilarity of culture will be putting into consideration as well as the common entrepreneurial shared values that exist between the implementers and adopters shall be conceptualized. In theorizing this, the paper drew insights from studies of indigenous entrepreneurship as well as inter-cultural dependability of ideas. Pragmatically, the data utilized in this study are drawn from the short-term participant observation, narrative interviews, focused group discussion, storytelling collections, collection and analysis of documents and short survey carried out in Gwada village under Shiroro Local Government area of Niger State, Nigeria.

Conceptualizing rural entrepreneurship and innovations, rural entrepreneurship is touted to be one of the strategies or instruments developed to reduce poverty among the rural dwellers. Innovative rural entrepreneurship development is a micro-aspect of entrepreneurship, which has gained so much attention from international development agencies, government and institutions in the last two decades (Pato & Teixeira, 2013), it is that type of innovative entrepreneurship found in the rural areas, which involves range of activities from organizing, coordinating and mobilising resources to produce goods for the benefit of urban and rural dwellers (Simukoko, 2006). In the same view (Patel & Chavda, 2013) argued that to develop rural entrepreneurship is worthwhile and beneficial, not only to the people who live in the rural areas but, to all. Bahl (2012) suggests that the right definition that best

describes rural development are “efforts that puts together local resources to meet the un-met market demand”, “ the capability to create a new thing from practically nothing” (innovation) and “ the process of value creation through the harmonization of resources to exploit opportunity”.

The developing world is moving away from continuous dependency on entrepreneurial activities that would not benefit rural dweller to creating vibrant and beneficial entrepreneurship activities in the rural areas (Ferrão& Lopes 2014). Rural entrepreneurship provides benefits such as job creation within rural communities, creation of livelihood diversification using resources available in the rural areas and increases the income of rural entrepreneurs. (Patel & Chavda, 2013) further explained that rural entrepreneurship development is usually characterized by uneven development which is a development of one area at the detriment of other areas. This is quite descriptive; it is uncommon to find descriptive definitions of rural entrepreneurship in available literature. The role which rural entrepreneurship development play in bringing about innovation and reducing poverty within the rural setting is thus an important consideration, the majority of contributors to the rural entrepreneurship discourse argue that it is possible to promote innovation and have a better economic and social society by the use of entrepreneurship.

In the aspect of innovations and rural development, rural development can be seen as central to poverty reduction, Rural Entrepreneurship development is the process of providing infrastructure needed to meet the skill and resource gaps faced by rural entrepreneurs. It is evident that In the developing countries, more than 70% of extremely poor people reside in the rural areas (IFAD, 2011) usually the livelihood of the rural dwellers greatly depends on agriculture either directly or indirectly with the use of relationships and social capital, entrepreneurs are contributing largely to rural economic growth and development through their activities (FAO, 2011). Ozgen & Minsky (2007) made it clear that there is a change in entrepreneurial skills which is evident from various studies across the developing countries.

Even though Naude (2009) argued that in the developing countries literature on the relationship that exist between entrepreneurship and poverty are not exhaustively covered. Rural development is more than ever before, linked to entrepreneurship, which is considered as one of the instruments for poverty alleviation (Saxena, 2012). Institutions and individuals promoting rural development now see entrepreneurship as a strategic development intervention that could accelerate the rural development process (Ezeibe, Diogu, Eze, Chiahia, & Nwokenna, 2013).

Eduardo J. Gomez-Araujo (2012) wrote that when he talks about rural entrepreneurship with experts in rural development, he sometimes feels that people see entrepreneurship a bit skeptical. In his opinion, he saw the reason as because people relate entrepreneurship to the negative perception of the term capitalism, where money and profit is the most important, and not the development of people and their environment. In his view he argued that even though entrepreneurship is a part of capitalism dynamics, it would be unfair to perceive it negatively as a mere money- and profit-making affair. Kao (2012) critically discouraged the notion that entrepreneurship is directly associated with money making, they further explained that money or profit making is not the driving force of creativity and innovation claiming that the notion may increase the level of disorder in the already unclear definition of entrepreneurship.

The argument above has been taken up by Bahl (2012) in his view; entrepreneurship is significantly considered across the globe due to the fact that skills are needed to improve the quality of life of people to sustain a healthy economy and environment. He said In India shortly after independent there were a series of entrepreneurship development programs designed to develop the skills, knowledge and competence of rural entrepreneurs. It is however discovered that despite those programs, entrepreneurs still encountered challenges of establishing economically viable small-scale businesses. He concluded by advocating that instead of concentrating on the financial development of rural entrepreneurs, entrepreneurship training and sustainable support system should be the focus of the policy makers. Though human

capital development had surfaced in a good number of researches related to rural entrepreneurship such as rural tourism, forestry and ecosystem, regional entrepreneurship etc.

Furthermore, institutions and individuals seem to agree on the urgent need to promote rural enterprises (Petrin & Ganon in Simukoko, 2006) states that, development agencies see rural entrepreneurship as an enormous employment potentials, politicians sees it as the key strategy to prevent rural unrest, farmers see it as an instrument for improving farm earnings and rural entrepreneurs see it as an employment possibility near their homes which provides autonomy, independence and a reduced need for social support. The entrepreneurial interest towards rural development considers entrepreneurship as the central force of rural economic growth and development, without it, macro-economic problems would continue to increase. Benneth (2009) proffered an explanation as to the fact that entrepreneurship is a promising direction for people who may want to escape poverty. Singh (2009) argues that even if entrepreneurship is on a small scale, it requires innovation. Going by the available literature on rural entrepreneurship development, Dinis (2006) however, clearly pointed out that the acceptance of entrepreneurship without the creation of an enabling environment to bring together the efforts of various stakeholders within the rural location will not lead to rural development without innovation. To all these researchers, innovative entrepreneurship stands as a vehicle to improve the quality of life of individuals, families, communities and a tool to sustain a healthy economy and environment.

There is increasing recognition that rural entrepreneurs are the new engines for inclusive and sustainable industrial growth, and are the rising stars of economies in developing countries. In 2012, the World Economic Forum identified rural entrepreneurs as “the way forward”. Yet, despite this, rural entrepreneurs with innovative skills still struggle to take their rightful place in economic life. Even though more and more rural dwellers are starting businesses globally, they still manage fewer businesses than men, and run businesses that are in less profitable sectors, that grow more slowly and are ultimately more likely to fail. In

addition, what is needed is an enabling environment for entrepreneurship to thrive in rural areas. The existence of such an environment largely depends on policies promoting innovative rural entrepreneurship. The effectiveness of such policies in turn depends on a conceptual framework that will guide innovative entrepreneurship.

Research Question

- i. How have entrepreneurial relationships between the implementers and adopters of innovation impacted on the product, processing and marketing of cassava granules.

Methodology

Given the descriptive and exploratory nature of this study, two-fold qualitative research approaches were used (ethnographic and narrative approaches) over a period of 2 months (July-September, 2021). To achieve this, ethnographic research was used as the main research strategy supported by a narrative approach elements of narrative interview are usually inseparable from ethnographic research (Lawlor, 2000). In this study, an overview of the methodology that was used is discussed as well as the rationale behind the adoption of ethnographic qualitative research approach in the field of entrepreneurship. According to Winget (2005) before starting a research project the researcher needs to bear in mind that the methodology he or she chooses to work with, determines both the form that the research will take as well as the success of the final outcome. The objective of using ethnography alongside with narrative approach is to understand how transfer of innovation between implementers and adopters of innovative concepts is being facilitated using social capital and relationships. To understand rural entrepreneurship, the researcher needs to come in contact with the rural entrepreneurs in their natural setting.

Johnstone (2007) introduced ethnographic research strategy as a potential in providing insight into understanding entrepreneurship research. Though, ethnography has its origin rooted in anthropology, but has also become popular in the social sciences. It has been used in

sociology, cultural studies, economics, social work, education, ethnomusicology, folklore, religion studies, geography, history, linguistics, communication studies, performance studies, advertising, psychology, political science and criminology. While narrative inquiry is a way of understanding and inquiring into people's experiences through "collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Czarniawska in Dill (2014) defined narrative research as a written or spoken text given an account of an event/action or series of events/actions which are chronologically connected. Dezin and Lincoln (2003) argued that there is a revolution in qualitative research in the sense that social science and humanities have been strongly intertwined in a mutual focus on qualitative approaches to research and theory. In the light of this a consideration needs to be given to the argument of Bourdieu & Wacquant (1992) which states that when selecting a research methodology, we must ensure that the methodology fits the research questions.

In social science, qualitative research is basically dependent on watching people in their own territory and interacting with them in their local language, on their own term (Kirk and Miller 1986) and Looking generally at the empirical literature on cassava granules processing, there have been no published study that have explored the use of ethnography to understand the social-economic life of rural entrepreneurs. Therefore, an ethnographic and narrative qualitative research approach was used for the study. This is because an appropriate methodology needs to be used so as to get the information required. It should be noted that, it is not mandatory to use a single way to conduct ethnographic research (Dill, 2014) and that there are various forms of ethnography (Pink, 2012). Patton (2002) uphold to the fact that research questions should guide the methodology the researcher need to use. The populations interviewed were six entrepreneurs, two consumers and two buyers which comprise of the following sample: Cassava granules processors, local buying agents, consumers. To achieve the above stated objectives, the researcher first undertook a research tour to four rural communities surrounding Gwada Village under Shiroro Local Government Area of Niger state

where cassava granules is been processed, to closely interact with the rural entrepreneurs (Cassava granules producers) to ascertain the level at which local innovative initiatives have facilitated rural entrepreneurship development and the support the development agencies and government is rendering to promote local development initiatives and how it has promoted innovations within the rural context. Thereafter, the research was carried out in 2 close vicinities in GwadaVillage but divided by a main linear route. The researchers' interest in exploring Cassava granules production in Niger State is due to the fact that Niger state is blessed with fertile land, rich annual rainfall, availability of rural farmer entrepreneurs which includes cassava growers.

In collecting data, the researcher used overt (disclosure) method as a means of getting information for this ethnographic and narrative research. To get in-depth information from the participants, adequate time was spent in the research communities; therefore, a cyclical pattern of investigation was adopted for the purpose of flexibility unlike the linear pattern which allows structured style of data gathering (Johnstone, 2007). This is suggested by Spradley, (1980) that ethnographers hardly use the linear model. The linear model allows a clear and predetermined approach. The data gathering technique that was employed for this research work includes: Observation, Interviews and Journal keeping shall be used for the purpose of this research work to gain in-depth information. Going by the qualitative methodology and the two-fold research strategies (ethnography and narrative interviews), this study deployed the use of inductive thematic data analysis, which was guided by the views of the study participants i.e. by using inductive coding approach. Like many researchers have suggested that the method a researcher needs to use for analysing his/her data should be in line with the theoretical perspectives, methodology and focus of the research so as to give meaning to the research work. In ethnography, theme analysis of patterns or topics shows how cultural groups work and lives (Dill, 2014). Inductive thematic analysis is used to identify patterns or themes revealed and most glaring across the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In

essence thematic analysis needs more involvement of researcher and interpretation from the researcher.

Braun and Clarke (2006) maintained that thematic analysis is a foundational method for qualitative analysis. They emphasized that thematic analysis is a “method for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns (themes) within a set of data”. In the same vein Boyatzis (1998) also claimed that thematic analysis in its simplest form is about categorizing strategy for qualitative data in which Researchers review data collected, make notes and begin to sort the data into categories. Zorn (2001) suggests thematic analysis of ethnographic data as a means of interpreting the discourse participant’s use in conceptualizing their current, ongoing relational episodes. Furthermore, Lindlof and Taylor (2002) argued that in doing a thematic analysis, ethnography interpretive analysis is most required whereby data collected is organized into interpreted patterns, categories and sub-categories. Nothing that many qualitative researchers expressed how very tedious and challenging it could be to analyze qualitative data manually especially when the researcher is to analyze a huge number of data. Barry (1998) therefore suggests the use of software to assist in qualitative data analysis. For the purpose of convenience, the researcher utilized Atlas/ti a Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software for the purpose of classifying, sorting and analysing data.

The Research Locality

Linear localities in rural areas of Niger State are considered as very important for quick entrepreneurial innovation transfer because of the strategic economic advantage. Gwada is known for her production, processing and marketing of agricultural products. The locality accommodates people from the six geopolitical zones of Nigeria and it can be described as a multi-lingual settling community with people from different locations migrating to the village. It is located in a very strategic location, close to where hydro-electric power is situated and a rural livestock market referred to as Zumba. It has basic facilities such as primary healthcare centre, police station, schools, cottage industries, semi-modernized traditional market etc. the research

findings showed that the population keeps growing and the village has witnessed massive expansion in the last one decade. However, increase in the population made the location to be suitable for increase in innovative rural entrepreneurial activities. At the time of this research manufacturing activities is steadily ongoing, yam flour drying flaps and processing machines and cottage rice mill was seen in operation, cassava processing plants were also seen designed as cottage industries. The locality is a place where jobs are created for the populace through collaboration and social capital.

Findings

Innovations Regarding Production, Processing and Marketing

In the research locality innovation in the cassava industry includes the introduction of high yield cassava stem by the Federal Ministry of Agriculture in collaboration with the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA). Even though, these intervention was not directly targeted at the farmers in the study locality but relationships between the implementers and adopters facilitated this, in terms of knowledge sharing and information led to the achievement of high yielding varieties and example of such varieties are IBA961632 popularly referred to as 'farmer's pride' and IBA980505 also called "fine face' are already planted within the study locality and its environs. However, the level of versatility of innovation was reported as seen in the expansion of farmers who are plating the new and improved varieties on their farmlands. This is increasing farmer's income and creating transferrable knowledge along the nooks and crannies of the study community. Interestingly, in the study locality an approximate of 40 farmers are involved in these innovative practices in Gwada village, though, not all farmers are directly involved in business activities with the processor and markets. Typically, the services of the local buying agents are paramount here because they create the linkages and opportunities for the other rural entrepreneurs to participate in the supply chain. Though the total number of the rural entrepreneurs who engage in the supply chain cannot be ascertain but the ethnographic method deployed revealed that so many of them were seen engaging in one supply chain activities or the other.

In the aspect of processing cassava tuber into granules, in this research every process involved was putting into consideration as the period at which this study was conducted fell within a period when harvesting and processing is done. In this regard rural entrepreneurs are now putting into consideration environmental sustainability in the aspects of waste disposal and product handling. The implementers of innovation emphasized on the need to practice responsible and more environmentally friendly procedures. In these research five entrepreneurs were seen using a constructed drying flap to dry the unfried granules after dehydration. It was confirmed that this method was introduced by the implementers and its gradually gaining acceptance within and outside the study locality. It was also found that the use of mobile phone also facilitated the adoption of innovation in the processing aspect of cassava granules. The use of mobile phones for business activities in the rural communities is becoming widely accepted and very common especially in the traditional markets within the rural context. For the purpose of contextualization of outcomes, the processors are grouped into two; those who have completely adopted processing innovation and those who are still a bit skeptical about relinquishing their old processing method within the study locality. Evidence revealed that, those who have completely adopted innovation have better output than those who are still in the process of completely accepting the new innovation.

As regards marketing, not much innovation was observed because the rural entrepreneurs which include the adopters and implementers of innovation do not have ICT knowledge to drive their relationships, which means the use of E-commerce is out of the study settings. They mostly relied on the use of cell phones to get in touch with themselves and by extension the buyers of their product and that is when it becomes necessary. It was also revealed that no standard was required in the aspect of value chains and supply chain. Ideally the trend should be that the entrepreneurs had aligned with food safety standards but this

research revealed that the strategy deployed in the aspect of supply chain is that of direct purchasing and selling using the traditional marketing networks

Entrepreneurial Relationships and Innovations

The evidence obtainable from the research location revealed that there are similarities and sometimes differences in the innovation presented to the adopters by the implementers and as such, in rural Niger Localities entrepreneurs are seen to quickly share innovation whilst trying new things which enhances their entrepreneurial capabilities. Rural entrepreneurs who participate in cassava granule production using their indigenous knowledge together with the innovations adopted are always willing to share knowledge through the means of entrepreneurial relationships. However, the construction of network relationships between the adopters and implementers who are mostly women entrepreneurs, easily get acquainted to new innovations with the power of social capital. Also, symmetrical information flow played a major role in shaping the transfer of innovation. Evidently, the diffusion of innovation between implementers and adopters of information starts when there are new methods of production or processing. Sometimes the buyers of cassava granules from other villages and towns also bring information on new methods. This sends signal to the implementers and adopters in the aspect of decision making as to whether to accept or reject innovation. Knowing the fact that in the cassava industry, relationships can be complex due to differences in culture and beliefs, in this regard cultural beliefs could affect the use of technology and flow of information. However, in Gwada Village, there are adopters who still reserve Cassava granule procedure inherited from past generations. They give priority to what they believed to be indigenous and environmentally sustainable and traditional methods of processing.

Concluding Remarks

From the findings presented in this research, it is evident that entrepreneurial relationships exist between implementers and adopters of innovation. In the aspect of

production and processing innovation keeps taking place in stages while in the marketing aspect absence of knowledge of ICT posed a major challenge, though there is weak knowledge in the use of mobile phones to facilitate innovation but e-commerce and use of websites is still absolutely absent. However, relationships especially use of social capital in the aspect of knowledge sharing seems to stimulate adoption of innovation to a great extent. Thus, adopters of innovation also show supportive proclivity to innovate depending deeply on knowledge acquired from the implementers. The paper, therefore, concludes by presenting discrepancies and similarities between indigenous innovative concepts and knowledge-sharing innovative concepts. This discrepancy consents for further enquiries into transfer and adoption of innovations in rural entrepreneurship studies.

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