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COOPERATIVE ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT OF RURAL DWELLERS IN ANAMBRA STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated cooperative entrepreneurship and the social empowerment of rural dwellers in Anambra state, Nigeria. The objectives are to determine the nature of the relationship that exists between entrepreneurial orientation and self-actualization of rural dwellers and to ascertain the nature of the relationship between risk-taking and autonomy of rural dwellers in Anambra state. A descriptive survey research design was employed and data were analyzed with frequency distribution, mean, and standard deviation. Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) was used to test hypotheses at a 5 per cent level of significance. Findings revealed that there is a statistically significant relationship between entrepreneurial orientation as well as risk-taking and autonomy, the results of the findings showed that exploitation of new business opportunities by cooperative entrepreneurs contributes to the realization of their abilities. It was recommended among others that Cooperative Entrepreneurship should be encouraged at all levels (local, regional and national levels) because it remains a viable strategy in achieving self-actualization and reducing unemployment.

Keywords: Cooperative Entrepreneurship, Social Empowerment, Entrepreneurial Orientation, Anambra State.

INTRODUCTION

The notion behind every cooperative movement entails collectivism, togetherness and integration of possessions and resources to benefit every member of the association; individuals behind this movement consider mutual help and forfeit self-interest and desires (Ratner, 2009). Through the education and training of members, cooperatives promote group efforts to address individual and community needs (Majee & Hoyt, 2009). Socio-economic development is one of the clear social objectives of the cooperative movement besides from empowerment and self-sufficiency, these objectives were identified as the movement began in the 19th century (Yunus & Weber, 2010). Over the years, cooperative societies have practised solidarity economy, that is, an economy which is people-centred and shows concern for all, especially their most vulnerable members, to ensure their protection through the distribution of the surplus from their operations (Restakis, Majee & Hoyt, 2011).

Issues of social inequality, human poverty, and environmental challenges increasingly call for innovative solutions, these solutions are realizable when people come together to pull their resources and take risks collectively as entrepreneurs towards achieving their set goals. The practice of cooperative entrepreneurship has thus become pivotal towards issues of empowerment (Jos & Bart 2010). As buttressed by Karunakran (2004), Cooperative enterprises go beyond to cater for the economic, social and cultural needs of its members, this organization through its values and principles ensures oneness, commonality and freedom, it aims at building a social environment where there is a spirit of belongingness, individuals are willing to share among themselves. Ravensburg (2009) notes that when cooperative entrepreneurs provide mutual help among themselves, it goes a long way to ensure income enhancement, their businesses are stabilized because working conditions are favourable, these are major roles that bring about social empowerment especially for the vulnerable and those who do not have the power to make choices.

The importance of cooperative entrepreneurship is becoming more visible under the current challenging economic situation. Skurnik (2002) opines that through cooperative entrepreneurship, the level of social security has risen due to the increasing social role they play in building relationships. The entirety of community work and development principles covers the wide scope of social empowerment, it discusses several stages on which it can be realized. Individuals must first feel the need to change their situation by actively participating in activities with others within the family, society or at the community level, at this level of socialization, it results to the inclusion of all at the local and national level, when social policies are integrated.

Statement of the Problem

The way of life of people who reside in rural communities are highly characterized by insufficiency, these people who are perceived as rural dwellers sustain meagrely (Laah, Abba, Ishaya & Gana, 2013), they engage in peasant production for self-sufficiency and not for commercial purposes as a result of high production costs, which is compounded by high processing and transportation cost, the absence of tangible security, inability to pool resources collectively have resulted to lack of ownership of a productive asset.

Rural producers seem not to have the ability to take risks that can transform their businesses and gain a sustainable advantage. The level of investment among the rural people appear to be low, because they do not engage in democratic business decision making that can promote social dialogue, boost their confidence, and cause empowerment among them. The individual

farmers are powerless and cannot obtain economies of scale on their own as they have been unable to adopt improved farming technique. Hence, the intervention of cooperative entrepreneurship to remedy the situation, this is because it is an institutional framework recognized to encourage the vulnerable in the society to pursue their desires and interest, it also ensures that productive economic opportunities are identified and utilized by the poor, through collective risk-sharing (Wanyam, Develtere & Pollet, 2008).

Objectives of the Study

The broad objective of the study is to examine the nexus between cooperative entrepreneurship and social empowerment of rural dwellers in Anambra State, Nigeria. The specific objectives are to;

- a) Determine the nature of the relationship that exists between entrepreneurial orientation and self-actualization of rural dwellers in Anambra state
- b) Ascertain the nature of the relationship that exists between risk-taking and autonomy of rural dwellers in Anambra state.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Cooperative Entrepreneurship

The tenet of entrepreneurship denotes the principles of managing a business with its accompanying risks. Cooperative entrepreneurs are capacity builders with the urge to develop their venture. Izedonmi (2009) posits that the scope of entrepreneurship covers a wide range of economic, social and developmental dimensions. It is a continuum that is not limited to a particular dimension. Personal fulfilment and growth can be a force for one's involvement in entrepreneurship, an individual who begins a business venture can motivate others to do so, this single act can create jobs, cause competition which ultimately leads to social dialogue.

The high level of youth unemployment crisis in Europe led the European Commission to leverage the potentialities of cooperative entrepreneurship as a way forward, where young individuals can embark on modules that promote innovative training and work in the cooperative a well, this is an effective means of tackling the situation of which an action call for proposal was launched in 2016 (European commission, 2018). In today's world of work, unemployment, issues of inequality and consistent insecurity matters have beckoned on the significant need of the cooperative spirit and advantage, this is because in the spirit of togetherness, there is greater market accessibility and stronger bargaining power (CICOPA 2018). Arguably, this means that through cooperative, employment opportunities can be offered that presents value-based participation to eradicate income inequality that arises among the rural and urban areas.

Cooperative entrepreneurship involves a group of people that integrate their resources, either financial, manpower, material to achieve their objectives. It is known to operate in almost every area of economic and social activity. It is a form of collectivism and joint business venture that is created through integrating members skills and resources relevant to the business success. Through this form of business, relationships are built, members of like minds share opinions and ideas to meet their goals which are originally unmet by other firms (Cooperative Education Trust Scotland, 2012). The need for sustainable business in the face of rising unemployment among the youths has led to exploring the cooperative model, individuals pursue happiness at work and aspire for greater freedom than what is obtained in conventional business model (Monde, 2015). Society and international bodies have recognized the impact of cooperative

towards job creation, issues of low financial resources can be handled through proper training and knowledge impartation that ensures equality for all. (Como, Mathis, Tognetti, Rapisardi, 2016)

Social Empowerment

The word empowerment was first used as a concept to denote control of resources and power (Thakur, 2009). According to Czuba (1999), it is a power enabling process that gives people the power to control their lives and their community in a way they deem fit. Social empowerment gives people the ability to strive for a better position in social structures, factors such as ethnicity, age, gender that have stood as a basis for social discrimination will be addresses to foster better social relationships. When people are socially empowered, they act collectively to change the discourse that keeps people to remain in poverty, their self-confidence and sense of autonomy are developed through social relationships. Participation in activities at the community level will also help to improve people's knowledge and self-perception (Blomkvist, 2003).

Casey, Saunders and O'Hara (2010) opine that quality of life is achievable through social empowerment. It is a continuous process that develops as individuals work through by taking actionable steps to ensure independence and boost self-confidence. Social empowerment activities are targeted at strengthening development opportunities this is reflected in their decision-making ability in matters that concern the course of their lives, people now have freedom of choice as the whole process of empowerment have challenged the idea of helping others to achieve and sustain in their activities. It can be referred to as a process that is similar to a path or journey, one that develops as we work through it.

Entrepreneurial Orientation (EO)

Affendy, Abdul-Talib and Bakar (2015) affirm that for any successful business, proactiveness innovativeness, and flexibility are present factors. Entrepreneurial Orientation is a strategy-making process that helps to gain sustainable advantage for every business, this is attainable through adopting EO strategies, this means that such businesses are willing to take risks, be proactive and innovative in their every strategy (Stam & Elfring 2008). It is the willingness to create a new venture (Kumar, 2013). The concept of EO has been widely researched, each dimension has over the years been used among several scholars who include proactiveness, innovativeness and risk-taking, entrepreneurial orientation is highly entrepreneurial in nature, and is thus central on strategic level firms, whose behaviour and philosophies are part of the organization's strategy practices. Succinctly, entrepreneurial behaviour describes a distinction between one firm and another as it shows the entrepreneurial nature amongst firms, the sufficiency of this behaviour forms an attribute of which the organization will be characterized (Covin & Wales, 2019). One of the major characteristics of an entrepreneurial firm is the definite pattern of entry, firms level entrepreneurial orientation is a collective entity, this notion differentiates the conventional individual-level phenomenon that has been in practice (Wales, 2013).

Theoretically, the notion of EO is used to distinguish firms amongst themselves based on their entrepreneurial strategy process, this action will motivate organizations across to facilitate research into the entrepreneurial phenomenon (Wales 2013). The consistent view of EO among organizations is its entry into markets, with either new or existing goods & services the ability to accomplish is in determining the decision making styles, behaviours and practices being

adopted by the firms (Walter, Auer, Ritter & 2006). In today's dynamic environment, profit actualization are uncertain, (Wang, 2008). Firms have to continually seek opportunities that will aid this goal, the practice of EO, thus remains one of the significant approaches in achieving this goal (Zhou, Wu, Luo 2007).

Entrepreneurial Orientation remains the most highly recognized dimension in the field of entrepreneurship, through EO, key decision-makers of every firm will adopt entrepreneurial strategic processes to ensure that they create a competitive advantage and sustain the firm's vision (Frese & DeKruif, 2000; Lumpkin & Dess, 1996; Wiklund & Shepherd, 2003).

Self-Actualization

Self-actualization is described as a major motivator for humans that expresses fulfilment in contentment, creativity and awareness. As Abram Maslow, a psychologist in 1943 explains the concept of which he said that ultimate fulfilment in self-actualization is giving back to society. When people understand the purpose/meaning of their lives, they have the feeling of being the best version of themselves, this is a state of self-realization of which actualization is the ultimate form. People constantly feel the need to strive for growth, to be better individuals and to fulfil their potentials, there is a drive for self-actualization.

Empowerment in its own sense gives people the independence and freedom to make choices and take decisions, this is closely related to the premise of what self-actualization entails. Individually people differ, and so the concept of self-actualization as a psychological process can be different among people, although it should be aimed at making the best use of one's resources and abilities. In other words, self-actualization can be best described as an individual process where one's aims to reach full potential through leveraging his/her skills creatively and intellectually (Couture, Desrosiers & Leclerc, 2007).

Risk-Taking

Originally, the idea of risk-taking started when individuals took decisions regardless of the uncertain result concerning their business, work or any aspect of their lives, companies also started committing huge organizational resources towards activities or projects with a certain degree of uncertainty. It is a major feature of entrepreneurship and the ability to take risks portrays good entrepreneurial behaviour and attitude towards risk, this is essential when making decisions because it requires foresightedness and as such an entrepreneur should always adopt risk analysis tools or techniques Risk-taking is an ability that when carried out accurately such entrepreneur can build his reputation can his/her reputation and can move the business to a greater height, it is pivotal to every business venture when it is well informed, entrepreneurs can sight good opportunities, trends, avenues, competitions and adjust properly. Risk-taking explains the potential of harmful behaviour as there is some level of ignorance of what to expect, but if well calculated and informed, it provides an opportunity for a favourable outcome. Successful entrepreneurship involves taking risks (Harriet, 2017).

Autonomy

Autonomy describes self-reliance, it is a state of feeling independent, when individuals have to govern themselves, it increases the impression of independence (Van Petegem, Vansteenkiste, Soenens, Beyers, & Aelterman, 2015). In demonstrating risk-taking behaviour, the concept of autonomy can sometimes be used interchangeably with individual risk perception. Extant literature has examined the gaps between the two concepts, but this has not been widely researched to explain further the risk-taking behaviour of entrepreneurs. Behavioural autonomy

is a type of autonomy that allows people to ensure that they follow through on any decision they make and accept responsibility for such behaviour and the outcome. Generally, Autonomy speaks of respect of which every human is worthy, in the real sense, autonomous individuals can go about their daily lives based on their values and preferences.

Empirical Review

Lydia (2016) conducted a study in Kenya on the relationship between performance and entrepreneurial orientation of social enterprises. This study sought to identify the EO dimension(s) that is exhibited by social enterprises operating in Kenya, and the relationship between EO and financial performance among social enterprises operating in Kenya, the study surveyed data collected using a research questionnaire. The study findings established social enterprises operating in Kenya exhibited low levels of EO with risk-taking as the most dominant dimension and also with the highest volatility. The least demonstrated was proactivity, which indicated there was a concern with the timing of the action before similar social enterprises. The study also revealed a positive and significant relationship between EO and financial performance while social performance was positive but insignificant.

Innocent, Ehidihamhen and Chijioke (2018) conducted a study on the impact of entrepreneurial orientation on the performance of small and medium enterprises, in Abuja. The main objective of the paper was to examine the impact of EO on the performance of SMEs and to identify the EO dimensions exhibited by SMEs in FCT, Abuja. Multiple linear regression was used to analyze the data, and the study revealed that EO dimensions exhibited by firms in Abuja are autonomy, proactiveness, innovativeness, and risk-taking while competitiveness aggressiveness was not demonstrated.

Muzamil (2013) carried out a study on the impact of cooperative entrepreneurship on women's decision-making and social freedom in the Kashmir region of Jammu and Kashmir state in India. The broad objective was to find out the level of women's desire for social freedom and how entrepreneurial behaviour can influence their decision making power. Two research scales were used under the study namely "Decision Making Power" and "Women's Desire for Social Freedom". Findings from the study showed that women in cooperatives are more entrepreneurial in nature and are engaged in economic activities through which they enjoy egalitarian decision making than others.

Yong and Panikkos (2010) carried out a study on UK Family firms concerning entrepreneurial risk-taking. The purpose of the study was to determine the effects of risk-taking on the performance of a business, 236 family firms participated in the survey which was carried out with a quantitative survey. The results suggested that the ability to take risks is a *sin qua non* with business performance.

Existing literature continues to attract attention among entrepreneurship, this interest is not surprising since entrepreneurship has been described as the way forward, although overall understanding of how entrepreneurship manifests itself in the cooperative sector of the economy is still growing, several conceptual, theoretical and methodological challenges remain, and little is developed about how cooperative entrepreneurial forms offers advantages over conventional entrepreneurial forms with its social nature in relations to the dimensions of entrepreneurship. Thus, the need for further study.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Entrepreneurial Group Theory by Frank W Young (1982), the theory assumes that the true nature of entrepreneurial behaviour is exhibited by a group of people, as a group, there are different skill sets and capacities that will be pulled together than when acting individually. The chief aspect of this group definition of entrepreneurship is that the entrepreneur typically does not work single-handedly, that this solidarity of an entrepreneurial group avoids many problems that may crop up individually.

The conditions of this theory can be centred on when the group lacks access to social networks, low status, and resources etc. The position of Young (1982) expresses that entrepreneurship takes place at the group level, it already manifested from individuals in the group first, it is observed in different kind of clusters and group either based on occupational, social or political orientation. Individuals who are members of a group consider their background, values and exposure to their environment as factors that explain their entrepreneurial actions. Economic problems that individual entrepreneur face can be overcome through their membership or association with their group, this process encourages solidarity and build confidence in the group.

METHODOLOGY

Descriptive survey research design was adopted by the study. It was employed to obtain relevant information from selected respondents to determine the nature of relationships existing among the variables under investigation. The study was carried out in Anambra State, Nigeria. The population of the study comprises all active and registered cooperative societies in Anambra State, resulting in a total of 16,000 with an estimated membership strength of 24,556 (Department of Cooperatives, Awka, 2019). The study adopted the usage of multi-stage and systematic sampling techniques. In the first stage, the study area was selected based on three senatorial zones and their local government areas. In the second stage, communities were randomly selected from each local government giving a total of one hundred and Sixty-six communities. Thereafter, systematic sampling was adopted to select the cooperative societies to be studied. Questionnaires were employed to access the primary data, which was used for data analysis. The research instrument was validated through content validity. Internal consistency of the questionnaire was checked through Cronbach Alpha technique. Frequency distribution and Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMCC) were the tools for data analysis. One hundred and twenty-two copies of questionnaires were distributed and 80 copies were returned. PPMCC was adopted to determine the extent of the relationship existing among the variables of the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The mean and standard deviation were employed to analyze the data. The 5-point Likert scale was used to weigh the extent of agreement or disagreement with the questionnaire items. The response options and weights assigned were: Strongly agree (5 points), Agree (4 points), Undecided (3points), disagree (2 points), Strongly disagree (1 point). Table 1 provides the descriptive statistics of all variables from where results on analysis were obtained accordingly.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics on Demographic Data of Respondents.

	Frequency	Mean	Standard Deviation
Gender	80	1.5625	0.499208
Age	80	2.225	0.711123
Highest Educational Qualification	80	2.5375	0.992933896
Existence of Cooperative Society	80	2.6375	0.860435

Source: Field survey, 2021

Test of Hypotheses

There is a significant relationship that exists between entrepreneurial orientation and Self-actualization among rural dwellers in Anambra State

Hypothesis One

Table 2

Correlation Output for Entrepreneurial Orientation and Self-Actualization

		New business opportunities	Realization of abilities
New business opportunities	Pearson Correlation	1	.318**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.004
	N	80	80
Realization of abilities	Pearson Correlation	.318**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.004	
	N	80	80

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Field survey, 2021

Table 2 shows the details of the correlation carried out to determine the extent or relationship that exists between entrepreneurial orientation and self-actualization of rural dwellers in Anambra state. The result indicates the relationship between the variables is significant. This is because the correlation coefficient obtained was .318 while the p-value was .004 which is significant at 0.01 level (2 tailed). Hence the alternate hypothesis was accepted, which states that there is a significant relationship that exists between entrepreneurial orientation and self-actualization of rural dwellers in Anambra state, the implication is that as members continually engage in collective decision making and seek out new business opportunities, they will continually realize their abilities.

Hypothesis Two

There is a significant relationship that exists between risk-taking and autonomy of rural dwellers in Anambra State.

Table 3

Correlation Output for Risk-taking and Autonomy

		A risk-taking attitude opens up an opportunity	Increase in the level of confidence
A risk-taking attitude opens up an opportunity	Pearson Correlation	1	.315**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.004
	N	80	80
Increase in the level of confidence	Pearson Correlation	.315**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.004	
	N	80	80

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Field survey, 2021

Table 3 reveals the result of the correlation analysis of risk-taking and autonomy. The result indicates that there is a significant relationship between the variables. This is because the correlation coefficient obtained was .315 while the P-value was .004 which is significant at 0.01 level (2 tailed) hence the alternate hypothesis was accepted which states that there is a significant relationship that exists between risk-taking and autonomy of rural dwellers in Anambra State. The implication is that as risk-taking behaviour increases, member's autonomy increases.

Conclusion and Development Implication

It is evident from the results that Cooperative entrepreneurship continues to serve as agents of empowerment that enable members to gain control over their own lives and resources. Also, members will develop a sense of autonomy that will encourage their engagement in innovative activities, risk-taking behaviour that will create business/competitive advantage. In this study, cooperative entrepreneurship has a profound contribution to social empowerment through its economic activities; members can constantly strive for growth and contribute positively to the realization of abilities.

Recommendation

- a) Cooperative entrepreneurship should be encouraged at all levels (local, regional and national levels) because it remains a viable strategy in achieving self-actualization.
- b) Cooperative entrepreneurship promotes risk-taking behaviour that supports innovative practices and encourages independence in decision making. Hence, cooperative entrepreneurship should be encouraged.

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