

Full Length Research Paper

Impediments to youth entrepreneurship in rural areas of Zimbabwe

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The study investigated the impediments to youth entrepreneurship in Zimbabwe. The objectives of the study were to: identify challenges faced by Zimbabwean youths in rural areas; identify the benefits of entrepreneurship to Zimbabwean youths; discuss the challenges faced by the youths who want to start their own businesses and also their resource needs. Possible solutions to the challenges faced by Zimbabwean youths are suggested. Both primary and secondary data was used in this study. Triangulation research design was used. A structured questionnaire was used to gather data. Youths in Mhondoro, Mashonaland West Province were the target population. Purposive sampling technique was applied to select 200 respondents. It is suggested that Zimbabwean youths be equipped with entrepreneurial competencies.

Key words: Entrepreneurship, impediments, resources, youths, solutions, challenges.

INTRODUCTION

Entrepreneurship has taken a centre stage in the social and economic development of many nations (UNDP, 2000). In Zimbabwe, small and medium enterprises (SMEs) have long acted as engines of economic growth (Mudavanhu et al., 2011:82). Isaacs et al. (2007), Moore et al. (2008), Maseko and Manyani (2011), and Mudavanhu et al. (2011) agree that many countries consider entrepreneurship as a solution to unemployment and other socio-economic challenges like poverty. This makes entrepreneurship necessary in Zimbabwe, especially when one considers the economic challenges this nation has faced over the past years.

A situational analysis commissioned by the International Labour Organisation in Zimbabwe in 2010 showed that Zimbabwe faced economic challenges after independence. These economic challenges worsened around year 2000 which was evidenced by hyper-inflation, negative gross domestic product, low productive capacity, loss of jobs, food shortages and massive decent work deficits. Because of decent work deficits, students exiting education could not be absorbed in the

job market, as a result, youth unemployment became one of the most formidable problems facing the country (Mambo, 2010).

Youth unemployment is a challenge confronting many African countries, and Zimbabwe is not an exception. Chirisa and Muchini (2011) also point out that the past decades have seen a very uneven trend in the economic environment of Zimbabwe. This has been evidenced by the turnaround of fortunes from the halcyon days soon after the country's 1980 independence to an economic crisis that reached its climax between year 2006 and 2008. The 2006 to 2008 economic crisis can have far reaching consequences into almost every sector of the economy. This crisis also fuelled youth unemployment in Zimbabwe. Taking this into account, developing the small and medium enterprise sector can be regarded as the seedbed for the development of large companies, and probably the life blood of commerce and industry (Mudavanhu et al., 2011:82).

Chirisa and Muchini (2011) argue that although various age and social groups have been hit in varying scales

and degrees by the economic crisis in Zimbabwe, the unemployed youths are the most affected. Youth unemployment can be seen as a form of deprivation robbing youth of the benefits of work and represents a dark era in their personal and social development.

Considering the decrease in the employment capacity of businesses operating in Zimbabwe, it can be accepted that youth entrepreneurship can play a crucial role in reducing unemployment levels and improving economic growth.

Objectives

The primary objective of the study was to investigate the impediments to youth entrepreneurship in rural areas of Zimbabwe. This stems from the fact that although there is high youth unemployment rates in this country, very few youths actually take the initiative to start their own enterprises that will grow and employ others. The secondary objectives of the study were to:

1. Identify challenges faced by Zimbabwean youths in rural areas;
2. Identify the benefits of entrepreneurship to Zimbabwean youths;
3. Discuss the challenges and resource needs of youths who want to start their businesses;
4. Suggest possible solutions to the challenges faced by Zimbabwean youths.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Youth unemployment in Zimbabwe

It is an indisputable fact that Zimbabwe is one of the Sub-Saharan African countries with high levels of youth unemployment. According to Kanyenze et al. (2000), the problem of youth unemployment and under-employment in Africa poses complex economic, social and moral policy issues. These authors highlighted that supporting entrepreneurship through promoting the development of the small, micro and medium enterprises (SMME) sector can be a solution to reducing unemployment levels in most African countries.

Given that the majority of the African population is composed of the youth, this population group can be a potential resource for growth. Economic Commission for Africa (2002) argued that young people are a potential resource for growth and social development if gainfully and productively engaged. This implies that Zimbabwe can boast of this if there is ability and capacity to productively engage the youths. One form of engagement would be the encouragement and support for youths to start own enterprises. The fact that youth unemployment

is high in Zimbabwe is indisputable hence the debate must be on the best strategy to combat the problem. This paper proposes entrepreneurship as a solution to the challenge of unemployment.

The government of Zimbabwe has identified entrepreneurship as a major policy thrust to achieve economic growth (Maseko and Manyani, 2011). This is evidenced by a number of institutions that were established by the government to provide funding and improve operational efficiency in the small and medium enterprises sector (Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe (RBZ) 2009).

Zimbabwe Youth Council has reported some recent developments in funding, training and mentorship programmes targeting youth in business or those interested in starting own businesses. This would go a long way in tapping in the potential of the young population. Since the majority of African youths live in the rural areas, it is reasonable to argue that the youth programmes be concentrated also in rural areas.

Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship is considered the economic engine by many countries in the world. This is due to the fact that it involves the creation of new ventures that provide goods and services to people, creates jobs as well as enhancing the economic growth of any country. Entrepreneurship entails creation of ventures that will grow over time and thus will be able to present vast job opportunities to the youth and other categories of the population. Entrepreneurship also contributes to economic growth and development of many countries.

Involving youth in the formal sector through entrepreneurship is a way of gainfully engaging this population group. Furthermore, entrepreneurship help strengthen social contracts, giving a sense of belonging and opportunity to add value to the community and economy.

Successful youth entrepreneurship is possible if the youths possess the characteristics of entrepreneurs. These characteristics include a passion to start own business, readiness to take risks, commitment, dedication, perseverance, need for achievement, initiative and responsibility (Co et al., 2006). Creativity, innovation, a need to seek feedback and willingness to accept uncertainty are also known characteristics of entrepreneurs. The characteristics of entrepreneurs are closely related to the entrepreneurial skills, and it is accepted that entrepreneurship skills can be acquired through training.

Youths in Zimbabwe

Different countries and people define youths differently. For purposes of this study, a definition by Chirisa and

Muchini (2011) was adopted. According to these authors, youths in Zimbabwe are referred to as the population in the age of 14 to 30, usually unmarried, out of school and/or in search of employment. Youth can also be said to be a transitional phase of one's life cycle, between childhood and adulthood.

According to Panayiotopoulos and Gerry (1991), a discussion of youth unemployment can be premised upon three tendencies which are:

1. The tendency in the developing nations for the youth category to grow as the overall population;
2. The tendency for youth unemployment to double the correspondence adult rates; and
3. The tendency for youths to experience high levels of unemployment.

This in many cases will mean unemployment becomes a problem of youths and its effects are felt more by the youth as compared to other population categories. Unemployment can be described as a situation whereby those who are willing and able to work find themselves deprived of such opportunities in the job market.

Resources needed to support the youths who want to start businesses

Every business needs resources to function and operate successfully. Rwigema and Venter (2004), and Nieman and Nieuwenhuizen (2009), identified financial resources, physical assets, human resources and technological resources as some of the resources necessary for any business start up and growth.

Financial resources are needed for day to day operations of the business. These resources are needed to finance all other types of resources like physical resources, human resources and technological resources. Nieman and Nieuwenhuizen (2009) point out that many businesses fail because of lack of financial resources and also failure to manage these resources. This therefore means there is need to raise the finances and also to properly manage business funds.

Physical resources that are needed by businesses or by prospective entrepreneurs include buildings, equipment, raw materials and land. These resources are essential for production.

Human resources speak to the nature of people who are there to support in the running of the business. Their skills, knowledge and experience are very essential and can be developed through training and education.

Technological resources include intellectual property (copyrights, trademarks and patents) and these can be a source of competitive advantage. Reputation can also be a crucial resource. Reputation as a resource has more to do with the overall image of the business. It can also enhance brand loyalty and goodwill of a business

venture.

When looking at the impediments of youth entrepreneurship, it is very important to also look at the support structures that are set to promote youth entrepreneurship in Zimbabwe.

Support structures that promote youth entrepreneurship

Although there are support structures that promote youth entrepreneurship in Zimbabwe, there is still need to assess the extent to which their contribution can lead to sustainable entrepreneurship which creates jobs for the active population. The current structures that promote youth entrepreneurship in Zimbabwe include the Ministry of Small and Micro Enterprises, Ministry of youth, Zimbabwe Youth Council, vocational training centres and microfinance schemes. There are also other structures at Provincial levels and District levels.

METHODOLOGY

Research design and methods

Both primary and secondary data was used in this study. Although the results are more qualitative in nature, triangulation research design combining both qualitative and quantitative research methods was used. Qualitative research aims to gather an in-depth understanding of human behaviour and the reasons that govern such behaviour (Chisnall, 2005:18) while quantitative research is a systematic scientific investigation of quantitative properties and phenomena and their relationship (Cooper and Schindler, 2003:563). Triangulation research design combines several qualitative methods or qualitative with quantitative methods (Cooper and Schindler, 2006:764). According to Cooper and Schindler (2006) qualitative and quantitative studies can be conducted simultaneously, and this is referred to as triangulation.

Data collection

There are three primary data collection methods namely, observation, experiment and survey (Gerber-Nel et al., 2005). This study used survey research. Wheather and Cook (2000) state that survey research encompasses measurement procedures that involve asking questions to respondents. As pointed out by Gerber-Nel et al. (2005), personal interviews, telephone surveys, mail surveys and self-administered surveys are the four main types of surveys. Data for this study was gathered using self-administered questionnaires. A structured and pre-tested questionnaire with both open and closed questions was used to collect data from the youths in Mhondoro, Mashonaland West Province of Zimbabwe. Interviews were also conducted with the youths to obtain additional but necessary qualitative data.

Population and sampling

Youths in the Mhondoro, rural areas in the Mashonaland West Province in Zimbabwe were the targeted population. It was difficult

to find an up to date database with all the youths in Mhondoro that could be used as a sampling frame. A sample frame is a list of population units/elements (commonly known as sample members) from which to select units/elements to be sampled (Tustin et al., 2005:342).

Cooper and Schindler (2006:434) define sampling as a process of selecting some elements from a population to represent that target population in conducting a research survey. Thus, the ultimate purpose of sampling is to be able to draw general conclusions about the entire body of units known as the population.

Purposive sampling technique was applied to select 200 respondents from the target population. According to Zikmund and Babin (2010), purposive sampling which is also known as judgement sampling is a non-probability sampling technique in which an experienced individual selects the sample based on personal judgement about some appropriate characteristics of the sample element or member. When using purposive sampling technique, researchers choose participants arbitrarily for their unique characteristics or their experiences, attitudes or perceptions (Cooper and Schindler, 2006).

In this study, the researcher only selected sample elements that showed the desire and passion for entrepreneurship and those that started, or have tried to start their own business ventures. Respondents also had to be in the youth category as defined by the constitution of Zimbabwe; between childhood and adulthood, usually unmarried.

Data analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to analyse quantitative data while content analysis was used to analyse qualitative data.

Descriptive analysis collects, summarises and presents a set of data making it easy for researchers to conduct and users to understand (Kolb, 2008). Descriptive statistics help researchers to see pattern in the research data. Frequency is a basic concept that can be used to analyse the characteristics of respondents, and can help to identify how many participants' gave the same response (Kelemen and Rumens, 2008; Kolb, 2008). Mean, median, mode, range, variance and standard deviation can also provide useful descriptive statistics.

Content analysis is described as a basic approach used for analysing and interpreting narrative data (Taylor-Powell and Renner, 2003). Narrative data comes from different sources including brief responses to open ended questions and comments written on questionnaires, stories, case studies, interviews, observations and testimonials (Taylor-Powell and Renner, 2003).

RESULTS

Two hundred questionnaires were distributed and 149 questionnaires were completed and returned. This gave a response rate of 74.5% which is generally higher. Sixty percent (60%) of the respondents were male, and 40% were female. Seventy nine (39.5%) of the respondents agreed that unemployment had directly affected them, with all of the respondents indicating that unemployment was a real challenge confronting youths in both urban and rural areas. Only 30 (15%) of the respondents indicated that they believed that they had the necessary knowledge to start and run their own businesses.

Challenges faced by Zimbabwean youths seeking employment

The respondents mentioned lack of experience, corruption, nepotism, lack of training, lack of relevant skills needed in the job market, and failure to meet personal and family needs and expectations as the main challenges that are faced by the Zimbabwean youths seeking employment.

More than 90% of the interviewed youths that are seeking employment mentioned that they lacked experience for the jobs that they were seeking. They believed that they could not also establish their own businesses without experience in any industry.

Corruption and nepotism was also mentioned by the majority (60%) of the respondents as a challenge. This corruption is mainly by individuals serving in hiring organisations that have the tendency of accepting bribes from less qualified individuals, and also hiring their friends and relatives for positions that other youths are better qualified to occupy.

Close to 70% of the respondents indicated that lack of training was also a challenge. These individuals mentioned that they lacked knowledge and skills that are needed for most of the advertised job vacancies. Most of these respondents either dropped out of school, or failed to attain the required grades to enrol at any tertiary institution. This leaves them in a position where they can be exploited to work long hours yet they are underpaid. Lack of relevant skills needed in the job market can also lead to youths failing to meet their personal and family needs and expectations. This in most cases force people into desperation, where they can accept any job offer allowing employers to take advantage of them.

Impediments to youth entrepreneurship in Zimbabwe

Respondents mentioned lack of capital as one of the main impediments to youth entrepreneurship in rural areas of Zimbabwe. Some of the challenges mentioned would be discussed.

Corruption by local authorities was mentioned by 60% of the respondents. This was said to be affecting access to resources, especially those provided by the state to promote youth entrepreneurship.

Lack of capital was mentioned by all respondents as the main impediment to youth entrepreneurship in rural areas of Zimbabwe. This is mainly because most youths in rural areas lack proper skills to be employed in order to save for capital. Although there are banks offering loans in Zimbabwe, bank finance is not easily accessible to youths in rural areas for they, in most cases lack the required collateral security needed to obtain a bank loan. Inaccessibility of financial resources by youths in rural areas of Zimbabwe is also because of lack of

connections, lack of the needed financial deposit and lack of knowledge pertaining to the sources of financing available.

The unstable and unpredictable political and economic environment in Zimbabwe was mentioned by close to 25% of the respondents as another factor discouraging youths to start and grow their own businesses.

Insufficient and unreliable government support is said to be another impediment to youth entrepreneurship. Close to 50% of the respondents indicated that the government does not really support entrepreneurship as a career opportunity for youths. Respondents highlighted that the government encourage the youths to participate in other government programmes such as indigenisation and black empowerment as opposed to promoting real youth entrepreneurship.

Youths in business but operating in the rural areas indicated that poor location was a great challenge for it affected the sales and the performance of their businesses. Insufficient demand for the products and services offered on the market by most youths together with high production costs were also mentioned as an impediment to youth entrepreneurship.

Other challenges that were mentioned and explained by the respondents as the impediments to successful youth entrepreneurship in the rural areas include lack of information technology. High transport costs, unattractive business environment, lack of relevant experience, lack of and inaccessibility to skilled labour, high registration costs, high costs to obtain licences to operate formally, poor roads, unreliable electricity, unreliable communication services and lack of networking opportunities were also stated as the impediments to youth entrepreneurship.

Benefits of entrepreneurship to youths in Zimbabwe

Entrepreneurship is of benefit not only in creating wealth for individuals but also for the nation. Through entrepreneurship, Zimbabwe can eradicate poverty, reduce unemployment levels, and improve national propensity. Equipping youth in rural areas with entrepreneurial competencies can be a step forward towards self-reliance. The development of entrepreneurship, especially in the form of Small and Medium Enterprises can provide solutions to the problem of high unemployment facing the country. This can be possible because small, medium and micro enterprises usually have low start-up costs, low risk and can help exploit untapped knowledge and creativity (Maseko and Manyani, 2011).

The role of government in promoting entrepreneurship among youths in Zimbabwe

The Government of Zimbabwe still have a long way to go

on supporting youth entrepreneurship. The following was mentioned by the respondents as the roles of the government in promoting youth entrepreneurship in the rural areas of Zimbabwe.

1. The government should offer loans to the youths for sustainable economic projects that will help create employment for others as well as develop the rural communities.
2. Entrepreneurial training should be provided to the youths through entrepreneurship support structures that were established by the government. Entrepreneurial training can help improve the entrepreneurship competencies of the youth and possibly the desire to start own businesses.
3. There is need to monitor activities of the structures that are established to promote entrepreneurship.
4. The government should also allow for networking opportunities among Zimbabwean youths. This may help in increasing information sharing, especially on opportunities available.

DISCUSSION

This study managed to identify and discuss the impediments to youth entrepreneurship in Zimbabwe. The results reveal that the challenges faced by entrepreneurs in Zimbabwe can be compared to those faced by entrepreneurs in South Africa, which is considered the economic engine of Africa. This therefore means these challenges are not only limited to Zimbabwe.

A study conducted in South Africa by Fatoki and Garwe (2010) revealed that the problem of access and availability of finance to entrepreneurs in South Africa was ranked second after lack of entrepreneurial and management competencies in most aspiring and existing entrepreneurs (in the SMME sector) in South Africa. This is also supported by Herrington and Wood (2003), Herrington et al. (2009) and Cassar (2004) who also conducted their studies in South Africa. Mutezo (2005) also found similar challenges as hampering entrepreneurial activity in South Africa.

These results are also in line with the findings of Zim Trade (2011) which identified lack of collateral security resulting to inaccessibility to loans, lack of skills and difficulties in business registration as some of the challenges faced by both women and youths in business in Zimbabwe. The results are also supported by a study conducted in Ghana by Inkoun (2003) that found out that small business performance is closely linked to entrepreneurial skills of the owner or manager. Availability and accessibility to finance and skills development were also found to be crucial for entrepreneurial success by Mudavanhu et al. (2011).

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the aforementioned results, the following recommendations are suggested.

Relevant training

It is strategic that Zimbabwean youths be equipped with entrepreneurial knowledge and skills through entrepreneurial training. This is very important because as young people finish high school, some will not be able to proceed to tertiary institutions. On the other hand, not all those graduating from tertiary institutions are absorbed by the available employment opportunities.

Vocational Training Centres (VTCs) around Zimbabwe may have been set up with this in mind, but there is still need to investigate the extent to which they equip youths with entrepreneurial competencies. There is also need to assess the extent to which tertiary institutions equip youths with relevant entrepreneurial skills.

Research

The unavailability of relevant research into youth challenges like unemployment and possible solutions to this may be due to lack of data in Zimbabwe. Although data generation may be a costly process for most developing countries, it is very crucial for the effective implementation of policy. Without proper research and authentic data, policies passed may create unintended negative consequences. According to Curtin (2004) only a few developing countries have reliable data on youth unemployment rates. This study therefore proposes public-private partnerships in data generation and research in Zimbabwe to guide policy implementation.

This study also recommends that a more quantitative study that will be able to rank the impact of challenges identified to be conducted in Zimbabwe. This will help identify which impediment have more impact than the other and which area or problem needs to be addressed before the other.

Independence

The government should strive to promote entrepreneurship activities among the youths in a more sustainable way that will not encourage the youths to be dependent on the government. Only youths with the potential to grow their businesses need to be supported and provided with resources.

Youths in Zimbabwe should be encouraged to be independent and take responsibility for their success of failure. They need to seek the necessary skills that are

needed for the establishment and growth of their profitable businesses.

Resources

The government should invest in resources that will encourage youth entrepreneurship activities. Training and education on venture creation and management may be one such sustainable investment with possible future and long term benefits. The provision of other resources is also important.

Include entrepreneurship in the education curriculum

Since most respondents lacked skills to start their businesses, it will be strategic to Zimbabwe if entrepreneurship is included in the national school curriculum, especially at secondary school.

Local authorities

Local authorities should work to promote entrepreneurship in their respective areas for this also contributes to the development of the province or nation. Local authorities should work with government agencies and ministries that support youth entrepreneurship in a way that will benefit the youths in their respective provinces or districts. They should work with the youths to come up with real solutions to the challenges faced by youths.

Conclusion

The impediments to youth entrepreneurship in Zimbabwe were identified and discussed; and possible solutions to the challenges were suggested. The resources that are needed in the running of a business by youths were also discussed. This study concludes that entrepreneurship can be a solution to the challenges that are faced by the youth in Zimbabwe. There are also other roles that various stakeholders need to play if youth entrepreneurship is to be a success in this African country.

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