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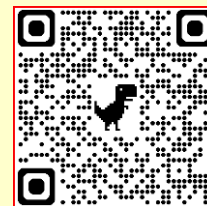
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AN EVALUATION OF ENTREPRENEURIAL SKILLS DEVELOPMENT PROJECT AND ITS IMPLICATION ON SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOOD ENHANCEMENT AMONG TONGA SPEAKING PEOPLE IN BINGA DISTRICT, ZIMBABWE.

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ABSTRACT

This paper evaluated the entrepreneurial skills development project and established its implication on the sustainable livelihoods among the Tonga people. The multi method approach was used where information was gathered through literature desk review and field assessments. Published and unpublished Ntengwe projects reports and newsletters were reviewed. A total of 18 enterprise groups were met for focus group discussions in 5 wards namely Lubanda, Muchesu, Siachilaba, Saba and Manjolo. Two face to face meetings with Ntengwe Project team were conducted to obtain in depth information about the project under study. Key informant interviews were conducted with the Ministries responsible for Small to Medium Enterprises Youth and Gender Affairs. The study found out that the entrepreneurs are getting technical and material support from the consortium and they were assisted to form enterprise groups which specialize in different areas such as carpentry, welding and building. The study noted that enterprise groups have limited access to bank loans and other credit facilities. The synergy between enterprise group and community leadership together with the government is limited which further compromise their growth. A case study to highlight how this project has impacted into the lives of the Tonga people was captured. Basing on these findings the following key recommendations were made; Ntengwe for Community Development and Silveira House consortium should continue with ILESEA project in which the second phase should focus on equipping enterprise groups with further skills and the consortium should change their strategy on allocating trades to beneficiaries where they are allowed to choose trades of their own choice to enhance sustainability of the project.

KEY WORDS: entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial skill development, implication, sustainable livelihood.

INTRODUCTION

Binga district which is located in the Matebeleland North Province of Zimbabwe is widely known for its poverty and isolation. Munsaka (2012) says that Binga district is one of the most remote and poorest districts in Zimbabwe. It is of the same author's view that the Tonga tribe suffered a long time of marginalization and exclusion from the main affairs of Zimbabwe (Munsaka, 2012). Save the Children (UK) (2004) reveals that 85 to 90 percent of Binga's population were trapped in absolute poverty and required permanent welfare support in the form of food assistance every year. The Tonga speaking people live along the shore of Zambezi River and their economic activities involve gardening, fishing, cropping, keeping cattle and using wild plants and hunting animals.

Binga district has attracted a number of developmental agencies because of its socio-economic and political background. Among these agencies is the Ntengwe for Community Development which is a civil society organization that is operating in five wards namely; Lubanda, Manjolo, Muchesu, Saba and Siachilaba. The organization is implementing Integrated Learning Skills and Entrepreneurship Advancement Initiative program (ILESEA). ILESEA program is being implemented in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to end poverty, fight inequality and injustice and tackle climate change by 2030 (Ntengwe for Community Development, 2017). Ntengwe for Community Development is working with children, families and communities to overcome poverty and injustice. One of the major aims of the program (ILESEA) is to enhance the technical, vocational and entrepreneurial skills for young men and women. This pillar formed the basis of this article to which the researcher evaluated the entrepreneurial skills development project and its implication on sustainable livelihood enhancement among the Tonga speaking people.

LITERATURE REVIEW

SADC (2010) observes that young men and women in Southern Africa are susceptible to poverty. A number of youth have limited skills training which further limits their access to employment resulting in them engaging in risky coping strategies to earn a living (see Government of Zimbabwe, 2014; SADC, 2010). Rusvingo (2014) found out that Zimbabwe has high unemployment rate of 85% against the average regional unemployment rate which is at 18%. Imparting entrepreneurial skills to the youth of Zimbabwe is an important prerequisite to leverage improvement in their lives. Entrepreneurial skills development does not increase job opportunities and earning potential. SADC (2010) argues that entrepreneurial skills development among the youths can also reduce their risk of HIV infection by increasing knowledge, awareness, skills and opportunities, enabling them to care for themselves better. This paper holds that youth entrepreneurship reduces the risks of engaging in risky or exploitative work.

Rusvingo (2014) and Government of Zimbabwe concurred that due to the country's economic meltdown which as crashed the job market young men and women are relegated to the informal sector where are now surviving on menial jobs such as crushing stones, vending, street type activities such as car washing and car watching, making and selling simple crafts, house work, herding cattle. It is the researcher's stand point that Zimbabwe celebrates high literacy rate in which education and training institutions are equipping learners with irrelevant and archaic skills which limit them access to employment. To augment this point, the Government of Zimbabwe (2014) noted that the learned youths are constrained because there is mismatch between the skills being developed by the training system

and what is needed in the labour market, the mismatch between the technology used in institutions of learning and industry and the general economic decline that has affected the labour absorption capacity of industry. Such a background has prompted the researcher to evaluate Entrepreneurial Skills Development project being implemented by Ntengwe for Community Development in Binga District and assess whether young men and women were empowered to be able to overcome poverty or not.

The researcher acknowledges that small to medium enterprises (SMEs) have a lot of opportunities for prosperity and development of the nation. SMEs help in the improvement of rural infrastructure, improved standards of living of both rural and dwellers through employment creation, enhancing utilization of indigenous technology and increasing the revenue base of the private individuals and the government (Wahaba and Ijaiya, 2006). Jide (2012) advocates that growing the small to medium enterprises (SMEs) sector helps in reducing insecurity, poverty, youth restiveness, unemployment and crime. The government of Zimbabwe has taken a number of ways towards promoting small to medium enterprise as well as empowering the young women and men. The adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals, adoption of the Zimbabwe Agenda for Sustainable Socio-Economic Transformation (2013-2018), creation of the Ministry of Small to medium Enterprises, adoption of the Indigenization and Economic Empowerment Act and ratification of the African Youth Charter by the government of Zimbabwe are great commitments among others towards alleviating poverty among the young men and women.

Conceptual Framework

This paper adopted the Sustainable livelihood approach. This approach is credited to works of Robert Chambers, Gordon Conway and others. Many agencies of development such as DFID and Oxfam adopted this approach and some of them have further developed it in their bid to explain transformation. Haidar (2010) captures Chambers and Gordon Conway's (1991) definition of livelihoods as; "A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets (including both material and social resources) and activities required for a means of living. A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks."

Livelihoods approach is a way of thinking about the objectives, scope and priorities for development. It places people and their priorities at the center of development. This approach focuses poverty reduction interventions on empowering the poor to build on their own opportunities, supporting their access to assets, and developing an enabling policy and institutional environment. Core to livelihoods approaches are a set of principles that underpin best practice in any development intervention: People-centered, responsive and participatory, multi-level, conducted in partnership, sustainable and dynamic

In addition to these principles, livelihoods approaches are based on a conceptual framework to aid analysis of the factors affecting peoples' livelihoods, including: the priorities that people define as their desired livelihood outcomes, their access to social, human, physical, financial and natural capital or assets, and their ability to put these to productive use the different strategies they adopt (and how they use their assets) in pursuit of their priorities; the policies, institutions and processes that shape their access to assets and opportunities and the context in which they live, and factors affecting vulnerability to shocks and stresses.

METHOD AND MATERIALS

The researchers adopted a multi method approach in which two qualitative approaches to research were used namely; desk literature review and field assessments. Literature and desk review included reviewing of identified organizational documents of Ntengwe ILESEA project including published and unpublished reports. Unpublished documents that were reviewed are; activity reports, community dialogue reports and monitoring reports. Bi-monthly newsletters were identified as published documents. Internet search was done using the following key terms; entrepreneurial skills, sustainable livelihood, youths. Field work assessments with groups of entrepreneurs were conducted in five wards (Lubanda, Muchesu, Siachilaba, Saba and Manjolo) of Binga District. Field work methodology included focus group discussions (FGDs), key informant interviews as well as meetings. These were conducted using focus group discussion guidelines and interview guides. Key informants were interviewed representing Ntengwe which is the leading implementing partner for the ILESEA project and government ministries responsible for Youths Empowerment, Small to Medium Enterprises, Gender and women’s Affairs. Two face to face meetings were conducted with the whole Ntengwe project team to solicit more information on the ILESEA project.

A total of eighteen entrepreneurship groups were met by the researcher in the above named wards. These groups were specializing in different fields which are building, carpentry, dress making, electronics, leather work and welding. The field work assessments were conducted between 25 June and 29 June 2018. Entrepreneurs were mobilized by Ntengwe Projects Officers. Research assistants were provided by Ntengwe for interpretation purposes as the researcher was not familiar with Tonga language. Entrepreneurs were appraised of the exercise before and after field work by Ntengwe Projects Officers. The researchers requested Ntengwe officials to organize debriefing meetings for all researchers, assistants and Project officers on the last day of the field at which researchers shared initial findings.

Limitations of the research

The research was undertaken as the impact assessment exercise to evaluate ILESEA project to which a large sample was mapped out within a short space of time. Researcher had difficulties to meet all the identified key informants from relevant line ministries and local authorities. This was mainly because the researchers arrived in town from filed work during late hours due to the bad terrains of which in most cases vehicle breakdowns were encountered. These challenges impede efforts of getting appointments with some key informants. However, phone numbers and email contacts were utilized with missed key informants during field work. In spite of the presented challenges, the researcher managed to collect and collate considerable amount of data from the field assessments. This allowed the researcher to verify and enrich findings of the literature and desk review with qualitative data from entrepreneurs and service providers.

FINDINGS

Support rendered to the young men and women by Ntengwe for Community Development and Silveira House consortium

The researcher learnt that Ntengwe for Community Development and Silveira House is a consortium that is providing vocational and entrepreneurial skills to the young men and women in Binga District. Their project is called Integrated Learning Skills and Entrepreneurship Advancement Initiative (ILESEA) and is based in five wards namely Manjolo, Muchesu, Lubanda, Saba and

Siachilaba.

Ntengwe for Community Development recruited young men and women to venture into entrepreneurship. Silveira House provided the technical support in training young men and women. These youths were trained in different trades before being equipped with entrepreneurial skills. These trades are as follows; carpentry, welding, building, dress making/ sewing, electronics and leather work. The researcher observed that young men and women were further equipped with entrepreneurship skills such as business management, record keeping, leadership, marketing for them to be able to fully run their enterprises. Basic training was offered to the youths because many of them have attained low education qualifications with some of them having Grade 5 and 7. Few of them attended Ordinary level. Ordinary level qualifications holders were seconded to various Vocational Training Institutions such as Mupfure and Westgate to further their studies.

Ntengwe for Community Development Project Officer disclosed that upon completion of both vocational and entrepreneurial skills training Silveira house provided machines, tools and materials to the trained youths for them to start different projects.

Selection of beneficiaries

The study learnt that the beneficiaries were not happy about the selection criteria used by Ntengwe for Community Development. One of the group members expressed that, “I ended up in dress making because my village was allocated this project but I wanted welding”. One of the project monitoring report documented where the community complained that the use of NO/ YES selection criteria should be revisited as it has left out potential entrepreneurs.

Entrepreneurs working in groups

The researcher met eighteen groups of entrepreneurs in five wards which Ntengwe and Silveira House are supporting.

Table 1: Entrepreneurs’ trades and ward operation

TRADES	WARDS OF OPERATION				
	Lubanda	Manjolo	Muchesu	Saba	Siachilaba
Building					
Carpentry					
Dress making					
Electronics					
Leather work					
Welding					

Entrepreneurs are working in groups. Different groups were identified such as Tulatebula Leather Work, Kujatana Leather work, Twimikile Welders, Bright Welders, Jataupone, Sonkola, Tuyozunda, Tjatileamwi, Tusumpuke Dress Making, Zilyabapoota Dress Making Group, Siankalibonene. Welding, carpentry and dress making are the most dominant trades in the ILESEA project. Building and electronics are less popular trades.

Entrepreneurs indicated that working in groups is highly beneficial when compared to working as an individual. Discussions held with different groups revealed that group work enabled sharing of skills and tasks which enable groups to finish their work in time. Further deliberations with groups of entrepreneurs revealed that group work enable group members to pull resources together through monthly

contributions to enhance projects.

The researcher noted that entrepreneurship groups are at different stages of development. Although most of the groups are at performing stage, some of them are still polishing up the norming stage. The study learnt that members of the groups ranged from 10 to 20 as the groups were formed. With time due to drop outs group membership is now ranging between 3 to 12.

CHALLENGES BEING FACED BY ENTERPRISE GROUPS

Although group work was highly appreciated by research participants, the researcher found out a number of challenges which are impeding success of these entrepreneurship groups.

- Drop outs of membership. Ntengwe Assistant Projects Officer remarked that, "Many young men and women joined enterprise groups with high expectations of quick returns before the business mature, but after realizing the other way round, they started pulling out of their groups." The study learnt that a number of groups decreased their membership when they agreed to share profits prematurely.
- Migration in search of greener pastures. One of the group indicated that the adventurous youths have left the group when they migrated to towns in search of better opportunities.
- Marriage. The study learnt that there are intricacies within marriage set ups which impede efforts of enterprise groups. The first one is that married women are not getting enough support from their husbands who in most instances deny them enough time to attend business meetings and work schedules. One of the female participant in a group discussion revealed that, "My husband is jealous of me when I am making more money than him that's why he denies me enough time to attend to our project especially during the times when our business is booming." The second one is that young women get married after training and in most cases dropped out of the group.
- Economic crisis in the country. The other group revealed that, "It is now difficult to operate our business as the economy is crumbling on daily basis. Our customers are failing to pay their debts. The use of plastic money has further crippled our project."
- There are numerous conflicts within enterprise groups as some members are breaching the groups' constitutions.
- Absenteeism is rife as many are giving trivial excuses of not attending group meetings and work schedules.
- The researcher also documented that some of the entrepreneurs who are in competitive business are facing stiff competition from the well-established experts. A focus group discussion with builders from Muchesu ward revealed that, "We are facing stiff competition from experts in the field. Our community prefers builders who have enough qualifications and they refer us to as Early Childhood Development, meaning we are inexperienced and young in the profession."
- Lack of suitable premises to operate business. One of the groups during the field assessment indicated that, "We are operating at this open space where we do not have storage facilities for our machines, tools, materials and products. We are very insecure!" The study learnt that due to lack of suitable infrastructure enterprise groups have limited access to basic facilities such as clean water, sanitation and electricity.

Access to bank loans and other financial services

Discussions conducted with groups of entrepreneurs revealed that Silveira House provided tools and materials to the entrepreneurs for them to be able to start their projects. This was confirmed by the Ntengwe official who disclosed that all the groups were given start up materials. Entrepreneurs indicated that besides the startup tools and materials which they received from Silveira House they make monthly contributions to support their projects. However, the entrepreneurs indicated that they require more capital injection for their projects to be more viable. One group revealed that they once received a loan through the proposal which they had written through technical support from Ntengwe for Community Development. A number of groups revealed that they were not aware of the credit facilities available and that they do not have bank accounts. This is in contrast to the claims made by the Ministry of Youths who claimed that they conducted sensitization meetings where they told the youths that they have loan facilities available for the youth entrepreneurs and taught them about business proposal writing and facilitate disbursement of loans.

Synergies between entrepreneurs and community leadership

The study learnt that very few of the enterprise groups are working closely with their community leadership. In wards where entrepreneurs are working closely with their community leaders, they are exceling well. During a discussion with one of the entrepreneurship group, members revealed that;

"We are getting support from our Village heads, Ward Councilor, Chief and Ward Youth Officers. Village heads assist us in resolving conflicts among us and those that involve our group with local authorities. Councilor, Village heads and the Chief collaborate in addressing our challenges. They are the ones who facilitated us to purchase our commercial stand from Binga Town Council and made sure that the Council has drawn our building plan."

Those enterprise groups that are not working with their community leadership are characterized with numerous problems such as dishonest among members where funds can be embezzled, lack of work spaces and lack of support.

Collaboration between entrepreneurs and the government

The researcher learnt that Ministry of Youths and Women's Affairs, Ministry of Small to Medium Enterprise, President's Office and Binga Town Council work Ntengwe for Community Development in empowering young men and women. Focus group discussions conducted by the researcher revealed that there are ward based Youth Officers who move around in their respective wards offering entrepreneurs with advices on how to maintain their businesses. One of the group members said, "There are two Ward Youth Officers who once visited us sometime long back. They only encourage us not to disband our groups and offer us some advices on how to keep in business." One of the female members of Tijatileamwi enterprise group disclosed that,

"As a woman in welding, Officers from the Ministry of Gender encouraged me to join this project which is viewed as men's job and they continuously encourage me not to drop as I am an exemplary woman in my ward who has challenged traditional misconceptions of gender roles"

Ntengwe for Community Development Project Officer who was interviewed said that;

"The Officers from the Ministry of Small to Medium

Enterprises collaborate with Ntengwe and Silveira House Consortium in training young men and women on forming enterprises and business management”.

The study learnt that Ministry of Small to medium Enterprise in conjunction with Town Council, President’s Office and Ministry of Youths conduct monitoring visits to the entrepreneurs. Monitoring and evaluation reports were availed by Project team to the researcher.

Networking opportunities

Some of the enterprise groups testified that they have once attended either a learning visit or an expo. One of the group members revealed that;

“My group visited Matobo in 2015 under an exchange visit organized by Ntengwe, then an Expo in Manjolo in 2016 and last year we attended another one in Binga centre.”

Exchange visits facilitated exchange of ideas as well as a learning platform for most of the entrepreneurs. In one of the focus group conducted one of the members has this to say,

“Our group benefited a lot from exchange visits programs as we managed to learn how to produce different kinds of products, where to purchase materials, marketing strategies.”

Case study 1 showing how Entrepreneurship skills development project has transformed young men and women’s lives in Binga District

Tijatileamwi Enterprise from Manjolo Ward indicating how the group was formed, successes, challenges and how entrepreneurship transformed their livelihoods.

Our group is called Tijatileamwi (meaning let’s work together). We started as eight members in May 2015 with seven males and one female. Four members have left as they went to town looking for better jobs. We produce quality wardrobes, chairs, tables and base beds from hard wood. Our products are on demand especially base beds; teachers from local schools they need them. We are the only coffin producers in our ward; at times we work during the night to meet demand. At one point we supplied a big order to one of the businessmen in Botswana who got attracted during his tour to our furniture that we produce using indigenous trees. This order boosted our business which enabled us to purchase more machinery needed in our project. In collaboration with other groups from our ward we purchased a commercial stand which we are planning to build our workshop. As of now we are operating at an open space. We bought livestock such as goats and chicken as part of investment. These days we are being affected by economic crisis which has negatively affected cash flow. We are using Ecocash for business transactions however, many of our customers are refusing additional charges. This has negatively affected our business as in other cases we end up having losses because our suppliers of materials from Bulawayo and Harare require hard cash, so in the process of buying cash from barons we are suffering great losses. Although we are facing numerous challenges, we are managing to have a cash flow of between 500 to 600 Us Dollars per month of which 250 to 350 Us dollars will be profit. We are sharing between 50 to 100 dollars every month. As individuals our lives have been transformed we are now able to send our children to school, access basic health facilities, purchase food stuffs of our own choice and enjoy balanced diet. Some of our group members have managed to acquire livestock and transform their homesteads through building modern day

houses. As Tijatileamwi, we would like to thank Ntengwe for their ILESEA project which has transformed our livelihoods!

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The study found out that Ntengwe for Community Development and Silveira House Consortium is offering two phase training to the young men and women in Binga. The first phase is basic vocational training followed by entrepreneurial skills development training. Government of Zimbabwe (2014) and SADC (2010) concur that equipping the youths with essential vocational and entrepreneurial skills increases their employment opportunities thereby uplifting their standards of living. Analysing through the lens of the livelihood approach it can be concluded that entrepreneurial skills development project implemented by Ntengwe for Community Development reduced poverty among the poor villagers in Binga. However, the selection of criteria used by the consortium in allocating beneficiaries projects is widely criticized due to its shortfalls in meeting the dictates of the livelihood approach which stipulates that development intervention should be people focused to ensure sustainability. Therefore given the selection criteria which more of imposition compromises the sustainability of the project as people would be trained in fields which they do not like resulting them leaving the enterprise groups and resorting to their traditional ways of livelihoods.

Ozor and Nwankwo (2008) noted that community leadership plays a pivotal role in community development through making decisions on different issues affecting the community that require integrated approach, acting as liaison between governmental and non-governmental agencies and the community for financial and technical assistance, monitoring and evaluation of projects for proper implementation, and raising funds through levies, donations, launchings, etc. to finance community development projects in the area. Given that most of the entrepreneurs in Binga district do not actively involve their community leadership in their projects means that they are tantamount to failure. As concluded by Edwards (1999), in order to make a difference in the livelihoods and capacities among poor people Ntengwe for Community Development must foster grassroots local institutions and link them with the markets and the political structures at the higher level. Linking the poor with the markets will provide the poor with more access to economic agencies in selling their products Suharko (2007) asserts that linkage with political institutions provides the poor more access to engage in decision-making process that in turn influence their life.

The study observed that enterprise groups have limited access to financial capital to boost their business. Studies conducted by Suharko (2007) in Indonesia and India found out that donors of the rural enterprise groups adopted microfinance approach in order to alleviate poverty. Microfinance is ideal because saving and credit activities are the alternatives for the poor in gaining capital because of their limited access to formal financial institutions. To do micro business, the people need an access to financial service institutions (Suharko, 2007).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Basing on the findings of this study as articulated above, the researcher therefore makes the following recommendations;

- Ntengwe for Community Development and Silveira House consortium should continue with ILESEA project. Second phase should focus on equipping enterprise groups with further skills such as truss making for those in carpentry

- The consortium should change their strategy on allocating trades to beneficiaries. Allowing young men and women to choose trades of their own choice will enhance sustainability of the project
- The facilitators of enterprise groups should teach entrepreneurs the importance and how to work closely with their community leadership and the government in order to widen up their opportunities.
- The consortium should introduce microfinance to the rural enterprise groups: Microfinance is an approach to empower the poor

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