ENTREPRENEURIAL INITIATIVES AND BUSINESS COMPETITIVENES AMONG AGRIBUSINESS CLUSTERS IN KWARA STATE NIGERIA

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Abstract

Entrepreneurial initiatives have increasingly become tools for fostering innovation and growth of agribusinesses in a developing economy. The sizes of agribusinesses have often hindered them from realizing economies of scale and compliance with international standards. The study thematically examined the relationship between entrepreneurial initiatives on profit maximization among selected agribusiness clusters in Kwara State. The study conducted a Focus Group Discussion among rice *farmers who are members of the rice clusters in Baccita, Lafiagi and Pada, all in Kwara North Senatorial zone to achieve the research objective. The study found that networking initiative, technological adoption and entrepreneurial orientation are essential elements in ensuring agribusiness competitiveness among the clusters. Collaboration with economic actors would enable the business enterprises gain access to resources and market which ensures that profits are maximized. Besides, collaboration also provides access to information, knowledge and capital. The study concluded that technology aids the knowledge into action which contributes to profit maximization and ultimately agribusiness competitiveness. Hence, the analysis revealed that entrepreneurial initiatives have significant positive relationship with agribusiness profit maximization. The study recommended the need for sensitization of investors to see agriculture as businesses that arise out of the willingness to takes risk and collaborate with research institutes to achieve agribusiness competitiveness.*

Keywords: Agribusiness competitiveness, Entrepreneurial initiatives, Networking, Profit Maximisation and Technology

Introduction

Entrepreneurial initiatives (EI) are conspicuous and universal features of today's economy; there are many incidents of successful initiatives from developed economies around the world. As a concept, EI has become framework of support within documents devoted to realizing the European Union (EU) coherent policy and EU structural funds. This is an indication that governments worldwide regarded entrepreneurship as potential drivers of development and innovation. Initiatives are also considered to be effective policy instruments which allow for concentration of resources and funding in targeted areas with a high growth and development potential that can

spread beyond the target locations (Pavelkova, Jircikova, Knapkova & Saha, 2011).

Farm produce in most states of Nigeria are very expensive and unable to compete with foreign products, forcing agribusiness investors to sell their products at a low margin or outright loss. The high cost had resulted to the rising population to opt for imported or smuggled alternatives which are often sold at lower prices. Although, the sizes of agribusinesses have often hindered them from realizing economies of scale, thus the businesses find it difficult to take advantage of market opportunities that require the delivery of large stocks of standardized products or compliance with international standards. Although Bamiduro and Gbadeyan (2011) affirm that agribusinesses in most developing countries have mainly been on subsistence, the bargaining powers to inputs purchase are also hampered. The thrust of entrepreneurial initiatives in this study were to resolve the issues of profit maximization in agricultural sector. Surprisingly, states like Lagos and Kebbi are revolutionizing agricultural business through entrepreneurial initiatives which had yielded the Labana rice and Lake rice. In the North central states, the "*Tapa rice*" is still been produced at higher cost. Hence, the study thematically examines the relationship between entrepreneurial initiatives and among selected agribusiness clusters in Kwara State.

Literature Review

Entrepreneurial Initiatives (EI)

Entrepreneurial is used to qualify a person, situation, an organization or a group of people who exhibits behaviors that are typical of entrepreneurs. In addition, Ogundele (2017) states that group of persons are said to posses' entrepreneurial outlook, when the perception and the characteristic of entrepreneurs are exhibited. Also, Mustapha and Yusuf (2017) conceive that the general misconception is that entrepreneurship is associated with Small and Medium Enterprises. The reality is that entrepreneurship can be found in different sizes of organizations, groups, ecosystem and clusters.

However, entrepreneurial initiatives are specific and actionable programs undertaken to achieve specific objectives in the near term, such objectives includes reduced cost, increased efficiency and improve performance among several others (Ogundele & Ijiya, 2017). Also, entrepreneurial initiatives when observed from integrated view requires an actionable steps that

enables the firms to get along with people, customers, employees, government and regulating officials (Sajuyigbe, Madu–Igwe, & Unachukwu, 2016). It involves the actionable programmes required for entrepreneurial success which enables the entrepreneurs to motivate and excite employees, investors, customers and other stakeholders about the business. Successful entrepreneurs are passionate about their underlying businesses as well as the abundant opportunities within the environments. Although, entrepreneurial initiatives inevitably involves risking resources in pursuance of an enterprise vision, successful entrepreneurs typically take calculated risks after considering all the pros and cons of the actions. Thus, successful entrepreneurial initiatives are able to minimize the risk inherent in the environment. Also, Sajuyigbe et. al. (2016) opines that entrepreneurs were only moderate risk takers, contrary to public opinion. As a result, entrepreneurs are driven by the need to succeed; they proactively research the environment to reduce any inherent risks confronting them.

Agribusiness Competitiveness

The two most widely referred view of competitiveness according to Hartono and Sobari (2016) Jose (2015) and Porter's (1980) taxonomies of competitive advantage. Although according to Jones (2003), there are many scholars who used the concept of competitiveness before Porter, however, Porter's work (2012) is still the starting point for any discussion of competitive advantage. Porter (2012) suggests that when a firm earns a higher rate of economic profit than the average rate of economic profit of other firms competing within the same market, then the firm has enjoyed competition in that market. A cluster of firms is in the same market if one firm's production, pricing, and marketing decisions materially affect the prices that others in the ecosystem can charge (Christopher, 2012). Therefore, competitiveness is seen as the ability to compete (Kristantiya, Iman & Panji, 2017; Hartono & Sobari, 2016). It is the ability to design, produce and market products superior to others offered by competitors, by considering price and non-price quality. The search to maintain and improve competitiveness in this 'slippery' world has increased in importance and receives much attention from political leaders, business people, and scholars (Ozorhon, Kus & Glayan, 2017). Many methods to improve competitiveness have been proposed and one that receives particular attention is the concept of a cluster of companies.

According to Kristantiya et al (2017), competitiveness is "a field of economic knowledge, which analyses the facts and policies that shape the ability of a nation to create and maintain an environment that sustains more value

creation for its enterprises and more prosperity for its people". An active entrepreneurial sector is one in which healthy completion exists as several individuals within the cluster produce similar goods and services through value addition. This can make informed choices about which products and service best meet the peculiar needs. This in turn forces competition within the cluster with each other for patronage of customers. All things being equal, it also reduces the prices of the products to customers. It also, all things being equal, reduces the prices of the products (Kristantiya et al, 2017),

Porter Competitive Theory

Porter (1990) conceptualized a 'competitive theory' popularly referred to as 'Diamond Model' of factors that, seemed, to influence a country's competitive performance in international markets. Porter (1990) afterward developed Porter's diamond model, arguing that the interactions in the competitive diamond are more intensive and therefore more effective when firms operate in close proximity (Porter, 1996; Porter, 1998). As evidence of this, Ketels (2015) points out that clusters of firms in similar industries are becoming popular around the world and that a country's most globally successful firms are likely to be clustered (Porter, 1990). Porter (2000), further argued that clusters of firms can generate competitive advantages of higher innovation, enhanced productivity levels, value added and new business formation (Babu & Shishodia, 2018). For government, understanding these factors is accomplished through cluster mapping exercises, which form the first stage of any cluster development strategy, and are intended to identify existing and potential clusters. The strengths and weaknesses of the cluster are determined once the cluster has been identified and subsequently tailored interventions are developed (Reguia, 2014).

Babu and Shishodia (2018) affirm that improvement of Porter's own ideas came later. His initial focal point was on the scale of the nation, but as interest in his cluster theory increased he modified the emphasis of clusters and competitive advantage to regions. Most recently, Dejan, Josip, and Bozidar (2015) adopt Porter's Diamond Model to develop potential factors formulating the competitiveness of the construction industry, and uncovered the factors that formulate the competitiveness of the chinese construction industry.

The literature explorations provided the study with little theoretical leads, clues and associations about the nature of entrepreneurial initiatives. Cluster and entrepreneurial initiatives are multi-faceted phenomenon, and partly because of this, the study did not find a single theory on which the construct could be operationalized. This was partly because the literature is not third world-oriented and makes reference to the realities facing small producers in developing countries. Also, point of critiques was the necessity of high market share in order to achieve cost leadership strategy, as mentioned by Porter.

Empirical Review

Cristian, Jorge, Christian, and Marcos (2017) report an evolving dimension of entrepreneurial research which reveals that entrepreneurial orientation and entrepreneurial networks were critical factors in fostering business competitiveness. The study revealed the lack of studies that examine the relationship between risk-taking dimension of entrepreneurial orientation and informal networks on SMEs competitiveness. The study examined the influence of risk-taking and informal networks on the competitiveness of selected small and medium enterprises in Nigeria. Descriptive research design in which questionnaire was used to collect data from 381 SMEs owner-managers guided the study. Correlation, multiple regression and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) were employed to test the hypotheses with Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) for measurement model validation. The results revealed that both risk-taking and informal networks have significant positive effect on SMEs competitiveness. The study recommends that SMEs managers should strive to embrace risk-taking as well as optimise the opportunities offered by informal networks potential towards expanding their contacts to enhance SMEs competitiveness. The study contributes to entrepreneurial orientation dimension and informal institutional framework through the integration of risk-taking and informal networks with SMEs competitiveness.

Lawal, Adegbuyi, Iyiola, Ayoade and Taiwo (2018) study the nexus between informal Networks and competitiveness in Nigeria. The study examined the influence of competitiveness and informal networks on the performance of selected small and medium enterprises in Nigeria. Descriptive research design in which questionnaire was used to collect data from 381 SMEs owner-managers guided the study. Correlation, multiple regression and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) were employed to test the hypotheses with Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) for measurement model validation.

Their results revealed that both risk-taking and informal networks have significant positive effect on SMEs performance. The study recommends that SMEs managers should strive to embrace risk-taking as well as optimize the opportunities offered by informal networks potential towards expanding their contacts and enhance SMEs performance. The study adds to entrepreneurial orientation dimension and informal institutional structure through the integration of competitiveness and informal networks with SMEs performance. The study also revealed that entrepreneurial orientation and entrepreneurial networks are critical factors in fostering performance outcomes.

In a related study, Pavelkova, Jircikova, Knapkova, Bialic-Davendra, and Saha (2011) examined the development of clusters as a major source of competitive advantages of plastic companies from USA, West and Central Europe and Asia. Structured interview was used to identify the critical factors of cluster performance management. The main objective of their study was to ascertain the factors responsible for a successful cluster. Cluster managers were of the opinion that professionalism, networking, communication and mutual trust among cluster members are of high importance to attain a high level of competitiveness in plastic industry.

Methodology

The study combined cross sectional survey and phenomenology, by analyzing empirical data without too much reliance on preconceived theories. Phenomenology involves the understanding about the essence and underlying structure of entrepreneurial initiatives through qualitative explorations (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2007). This approach lead the study to survey with the initial theoretical clues on the entrepreneurial initiative phenomenon, which the study used to structure the field work and the collection of case study based data. Through an iterative process of data collection and theory analysis, the study identified the patterns, relevant elements and key issues relating to entrepreneurial initiatives in Kwara State, Nigeria. The population of the study consisted 30 rice farmers who are members of the rice clusters in Bacitta, Lafiagi and Pada, all in Kwara North Senatorial zone. The clusters were created under the Off Taker Demand Driven Programme in 2011 to encourage clustering among farmers.

In practice, qualitative sampling requires a flexible, pragmatic approach. Consequently, Amugune (2014) suggests that sample size should be small to allow in-depth exploration and understanding of phenomena under

investigation. The researcher actively selected the most productive sample to answer the research focus group discussions.

Instrument for Data Collection

Focus group discussion (FGD) obtained data from a randomly selected group of discussants. Its suitability to circumstances is adjudged essential towards understanding the psychological and behavioural characteristics of stakeholders was taken into cognizance. It allowed ascertainment of ambivalence related to entrepreneurial initiatives and the agribusiness cluster performance in line with the submission of (Ochieng,et al., 2018). Participation in this FGD was restricted to task group of stakeholders whose opinions and ideas were considered germane. Participants, who are usually in groups of 3 to 10, were allowed to answer questions and responses to the questions others ask which stimulated discussions and comments. In line with established practice of FGDs as espoused by Yin (2006), the target groups of stakeholders were brought together to discuss the issues. Four thematic guidelines all tailored towards the study objectives were used.

Structure of Focus Group Discussions

The setting constituted was a roundtable discussion which was personally co-ordinate and moderated by the researcher who was helped by two research assistants. Recorders were used to record the voices of discussants and hand written notes were taken to authenticate the recordings. The time- range for each session was between forty minutes and two hours. Light refreshments were provided to create and sustain a relaxed atmosphere and elicit frank discussions. The researcher gave assurances that recorded voice data were meant strictly for the purpose of the research work and were to be handled with utmost confidentiality. To further strengthen the assurance of confidentiality of opinions expressed, names of participants were not requested for. However, the category or status of participants was identified to verify that appropriate stakeholders were selected to participate

Demographic Analysis of Focus Group Discussants

Demographic features of discussants were considered with the aim of ensuring that relevant stakeholders were identified and selected for the discourse, and these fell into five categories. The demographic features included: i) gender; ii) level of education; iii) years in farming business and iv) Experience in cluster;

Tables 1 Bio-data of Discussants

		Group A	Group B	Group C	Total
Gender	Male	3	2	4	9
	Female	1	2	0	3
Level Of Education	Graduates	1	2	3	6
	Postgraduates	3	2	1	6
Years In Agribusiness	20 to 29	0	1	0	1
	30 to 49	2	2	1	5
	50 to 59	2	1	2	5
	60 and above	0	0	1	1
Cluster Experience	5 to 10	3	4	2	9
	11 to 15	1	0	2	3

Source: Author's Field Survey (2019)

The discussions in qualitative research are conducted to describe, understand and clarify human experiences and therefore, the selection of the participants is an important component in obtaining the needed data. Since in the focus group discussion the study sought to gather and draw upon practical knowledge, participants with divergent forms of experiences and knowledge in cluster farming were selected. The "expert selection strategy" allowed for the creation of a diverse pool of participants who were selected for the discussion. From Table 1, three (3) focus group discussions comprising of four members each were conducted. The participants had average age between thirty four (34) and fifty nine (59) years. They had an average farming experience of eight years and their positions included key participants of the clusters. This is to ensure that only experienced farmers were assessed for the study this is supported by the study of Kirtti, R. P. & Phanindra, G. (2018) who found a positive relationship between experience, education and productivity among farmers.

Based on the Focus group discussions with the three groups of clustered agribusinesses in the selected locations, relevant entrepreneurial initiatives that relates to agribusiness cluster performance emerged in (figure 2) as ways in which the agribusiness competitiveness can be enhance in Kwara State, Nigeria.

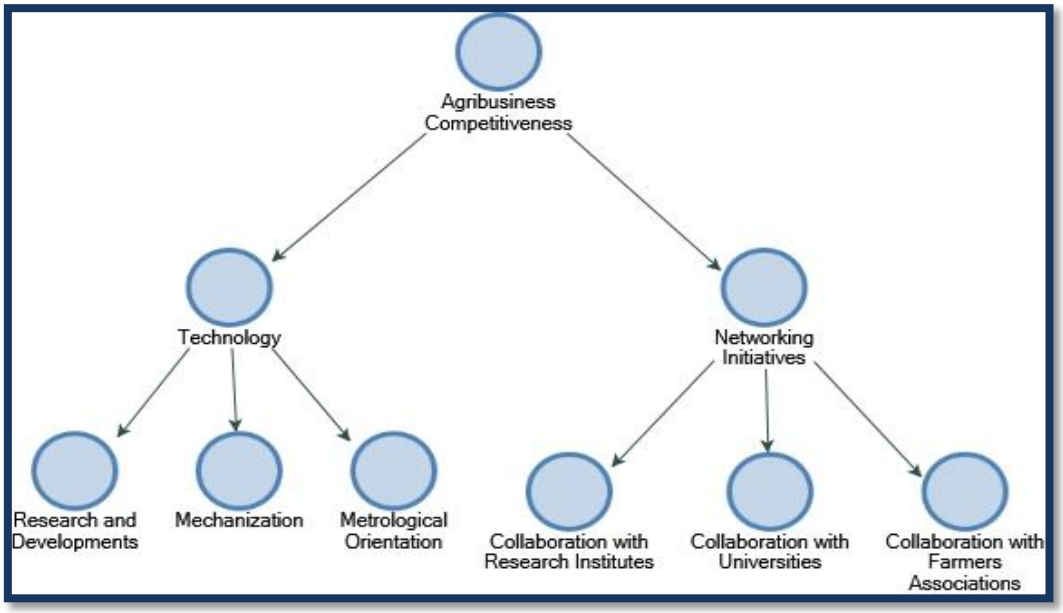

Figure 2 Thematic representation of agribusiness Competitiveness
Source: Author's Field Survey (2019)

Technology

The competitiveness of agribusiness clusters in Kwara State is conditioned on the level of technological adoption of the clusters. Technologically-oriented entrepreneurs devote their resources to acquiring new and advanced technologies and developing new processes, products and services, although, the rate of technological changes within an industry might affect their technological adoption and/or development. Technologically-oriented clusters that combine customer-value innovation with technological innovation have an increased chance of enjoying sustainable profit and performance (Ketels, 2015).

According to focus group discussant "A, B and C", three principal technological instrument are utilized to achieve agribusiness competitiveness. Research and development, mechanization and metrological orientation are essential components which aid agribusiness competitiveness. However, the dominance of mechanization applications was supported by Pat4FGD1, Pat4FGD2, Pat1FGD1, Pat2FGD2 and Pat3FGD1. Indicating that mechanization of agricultural processes is a key instrument in attaining business competition among the clusters in Kwara State, Nigeria. Also, Pat4FDG3 was of the opinion that metrological orientation among the agribusiness clusters ensures effective competitiveness in the sector.

Meanwhile,Pat1FGD3, Pat2FGD1, Pat4FGD1 and Pat1FGD1 emphasized the relevant of research and development in attempt to achieve agribusiness maximum profit.

Similarly, Klaus (2010) aver that technological knowledge into action in entrepreneurship contributes to profit maximization in developing economies. Therefore, the idea that technology leads to agribusiness competitiveness among clusters in Kwara, was expressed by the participants in the group discussion. For instance, participant **PAT1FGD1** expressed thus:

> *when we talk of initiatives that relates to competitiveness, we talk of technology through active research and development; systemic collaboration with relevant research institutes, these will ensure production is at optimal output and minimum cost* ***(PAT1FGD1*****).**

The above position is similar to the view of **PAT3FGD1** thus:

> *Our population is growing at geometric rate couple with issues such as global warming discuss and the advent of renewable energy. For the business to service, we must adopt technology. For substance issue of irrigation goes beyond waiting it require a great deal of technology. Technology is the only way agribusiness can service. In the modern days technology is perquisite to agribusiness sustainability with advent of equipments like planters, harvesters and others has enhance production process which has gone beyond* household consumption **(PAT3FGD1).**

Corroborating the view of **PAT3FGD1**'s perception, discussant **PAT1FGD1** affirmed:

> *Population of Nigeria as at today is about 200 million; as a result the use of hoes and cutlass is no longer seen as an option. The population explosion calls for mechanized farming to ensure sustainability of agribusiness. Technologies ensure that there is precision in agribusiness* (**PAT1FGD1).**

In another submission, Pat1FGD2 expressed:

> *There cannot be maximal profit in agriculture when we are technologically defective*.

These views as expressed by the various group discussions suggest that entrepreneurial technology has a strong relationship with agribusiness

competitiveness. This apparently coincide with the findings from the quantitative research and the findings of submission of Mitton et al (2007); Stough (2016) that technology allows an agribusiness clusters to be competitive The implication of these results is that of congruence among the various groups on how technology relates to profit maximization. The various groups did not differ in support of the prevalence of technology.

Networking

Network orientation within the cluster is considered as an important asset because it provides access to powerful information, knowledge, technologies, and capital. Collaborative Network sometimes referred to as 'Teamwork' is a key constituent of a local innovation system; Innovation increasingly relies on close interaction between the science base and the business sector, with the most effective communication of tacit information happening when the separate components of the cluster are near to each other. New products increasingly use different technologies, and technologies are increasingly based on different scientific principles. The degree of connectivity amongst knowledge agents, and between them and firms, is a key aspect of a cluster system.

FGD1 (Pat4FGD1), FGD2 (Pat4FGD2), FGD3 (Pat4FGD3;Pat1FGD3) expressed their perception on how networking can aid Profit maximization among the agribusiness clusters in Kwara State, Nigeria. For instance, **Pat1FGD3** suggests that

> Profit maximization can be achieved through symbiotic relationship between farmers and government agencies; it will go a long way in enhancing agribusiness in Nigeria (**Pat1FGD3).**

In a more robust contribution to networking initiatives as a concept that relates to agribusiness Profit maximization among the clusters, **Pat4FGD1** posits:

> Networking important aspect of agric because if people are not connected to each other, if people are not exchanging ideas or transferring ideas I don't think farmers can get modern tech in agric for example the issue of hybrid seed are functions of certa in institutions. With it helps to special

> information. Networking should be emphasized especially in the rural areas so the farmers will be given of modern farming techniques **(Pat4FGD1)**

Similarly, Pat4FGD2 states that:

> Nigeria has a lot of universities and research institutes and very few of these institutions really matter in the development of our agric policies that are implementable. Collaboration among these institutions can ensure agribusiness performance **(Pat4FGD2).**

Corroborating informant Pat4FGD1's perception, discussant Pat4FGD3 affirmed:

> *Networking between the farmers, research institutes and universities or even non Governmental agencies can enable the clusters to produce in large quantity. To cater for the population of the country, it is appropriate to imbibe this initiative as a way of meeting the demand and global competition. Also by improving quantity our local industries can begin to patronize our various agribusinesses* **(Pat4FGD3).**

One of the key success factors of the Silicon Valley and Cambridge is the on-going research and development activities led by not only the industry, but also collaborations with universities in the vicinity (Sturgeon, 2001). Similarly, Fatema (2017) highlights the important role of university in regional and innovation studies with the triple helix model. They both acknowledged the important role of collaborative relationship between university, industry and government through entrepreneurial and knowledge seeking activities while maintaining its common traditional role. This means universities involved in regional economic development by capitalizing their expertise and knowledge resources into something meaningful and lucrative. Also, Cristian, Jorge, Christian, and Marcos (2017) emphasizes the important role of firms in cluster studies in his Diamond model of competitiveness of nations. Porter expressed the inter-linkages among buyer and supplier benefits the access to specialized information and trust building.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The study examined the relationship between entrepreneurial initiatives and agribusiness cluster performance in Kwara State. From the study, it was established that networking initiative and technological adoption are essential elements in ensuring competitiveness among the agribusiness clusters. Collaboration with economic actors would enable the business enterprises gain access to resources and market which ensures that profits are maximized. Besides, collaboration also provides access to powerful information, knowledge and capital. The study also concludes that technology aids the knowledge into action which contributes to profit maximization and ultimately agribusiness competitiveness. The study of entrepreneurial initiatives and agribusiness cluster performance has open up several recommendations that can further enhance competitiveness.

i. Based on the findings, technological advancement through research and development and conscious collaboration with relevant institutions should be encouraged.
ii. Innovativeness, aggressiveness, technological orientation and the cultural frameworks should be considered to stimulate the development of the cluster.
iii. Also, provision of enabling environment, common facility centers and affiliation with research institutes, financial institutions and academic centers should be made available.

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