

Supporting rural entrepreneurship: Role and importance of rural entrepreneurship in Tunisia

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Abstract: *Tunisia is today in a critical place of transition after the revolution for it was at the origin of the Arab Spring which brought the country on the path of economic transformation. To succeed, Tunisia has to face bigger problems that are unemployment and poverty, which particularly affected the young woman in a country of the which population is relatively young; the Tunisian government must set up and reform programs to stimulate entrepreneurship to create rural areas through good management of local resources. This study aims to decide the perceptions of rural entrepreneurs about the nature and role of entrepreneurship in rural economic development. The study adopts an exploratory research design. We will discuss our results from 100 rural entrepreneurs in the Tunisian regime. However, rural entrepreneurs face some challenges such as insufficient funds and a lack of support from the government. On the basis of these results, the Tunisian government must give more importance to rural areas and create a favorable environment for rural entrepreneurs through their policies and other help intervening channels.*

Keywords: Rural entrepreneurship, economic development, Tunisia, empirical study

Introduction

Recently, entrepreneurship have become an important research domain (Nissan et al, 2012; Jennings and Brush, 2013; Carrasco, 2014; Welsh et al, 2016). In fact, entrepreneurship has become a central topic in entrepreneurship research, and the creation of companies has become a real engine of economic and social development and social. It is now a fundamental element of economic and social development as a key factor in both promoting economic growth and fighting against insecurity and poverty.

Actually, the entrepreneurship is regarded as a major determinant of economic performance particularly with regard associated with progress due to its structural role innovation and dynamism that are crystal clear in developed economies.

Rostow (1990) shows that rural areas in the developed world are often regarded as in need of development, a pre-industrial leftover in a linear process of progress. They hold many similarities with rural areas in the developing world. Both contexts have been defined through a peripherally from the centre, leading to uneven levels of development in terms of poverty, inequality and access to resources. Both contexts are often examined through the lenses of community and cultural distinctiveness. Both are the subject of an ongoing argument whether the rural environment represents a constraint to be removed or offers an opportunity to be celebrated.

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These contexts seem conceptually close and, as a result, one might expect significant theoretical crossover between research into rural entrepreneurship and into international development through entrepreneurship. Despite these clear commonalities, theoretical crossover between the 'developed' rural and the rural 'developing' context is limited. Conversely, entrepreneurship research shares an implicit and common scene in both the urban and the developed context. The rural and developing whirled contexts are poor cousins to the developed urban (Bosma and Sternberg, 2014; Nijkamp, 2003). They are used as passive recipients on which to test colonial theory established in mature, urbanized economies (Brunton et al., 2008). Nevertheless, rural entrepreneurship plays a key role in harnessing innovation, maintaining and developing communities, providing job opportunities and moderating the relationship between farming, land-use, community and economic development (Atterton et al., 2011; Newbery and Bosworth, 2014; Phillipson et al., 2011). Despite this importance, as an academic field, rural entrepreneurship is predominately focused on the developed world (Patoand Teixeira, 2014). In turn, the developing world is the territory of international development. The growth of the two fields has been historically separated in their own academic silos. To illustrate how peculiar this is, just 20% of the population in OECD countries lives in rural areas, because in Sub-Saharan Africa, this figure is 63% (OECD, 2015). From the point of view that this separation is an academic structural hole (being two networks with very little exchange between them), the Special Issue called for papers to span the gap and ease beneficial flows of knowledge between the silos (Burt, 2004).

Governments in developing countries have realized that no development will be meaningful except when the rural communities are also carried along. This realization is borne out of the reality that rural dwellers constitute a significant part of their population. Indeed, Onibokun (1987) in his policy paper revealed that the rural population is 70% – 80% of the entire population of most third world countries. The inhabitants of rural areas of Tunisia represent 53% of the total population of the country (World Bank 2015). The bulk of Tunisia's food and fiber supply comes from rural areas, including crop production, palm, livestock, and Crafts activities and so on. Has long been a major contributor to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP). However, poverty and infrastructure deficits are a common phenomenon in the Tunisian rural sector.

Egwemi and Odo (2013) note that developing countries are still far from the economic and social progress needed to undermine well-being, which of course suggests that rural areas need to be sustainably developed. Taking cognizance of the level of economic activities in rural development it becomes clear that action must be taken to make sure sustainable rural development. Rural development is a strategy designed to improve the economic and social life of the rural poor (Umembali and Akubuilu 2006).

Deji (2005) discern rural development as a way of restructuring the national economy to bring about improvement in the standard of living of people in rural areas. But rural development cannot be achieved unless certain strategies are used. Ebiriwa (2005) confines some approaches to rural development as modernization approach, transformation approach and demonstration approach, while Nwobi (2007) adds agricultural approach, internal combustion approach, basic resource approach, etc. to the list. Each of the listed strategies has contributed in one way or another to the development of rural areas. However, the inclusion of rural entrepreneurship as a strategy appears to be capable of contributing much more, rural entrepreneurship has the potential to drive innovations that can reduce poverty, increase access to food and create employment. For this to happen, actors in agrifood value chains need to trust each other.

The poor status of most rural economies is very devastating and pathetic. Rural areas have peculiar problems of low-income, low productivity, high degree of unemployment, high population rate, poor technological growth, low infrastructures, high illiteracy rate, malnutrition, etc.

Entrepreneurial orientation to rural development, in contrast to development bringing in human capital and investment from outside, is based on stimulating local entrepreneurial talent and the later growth of indigenous companies. This, in turn, would create jobs and add economic value to a region and community at the same time it keeps scarce resources within the community. To accelerate economic development in rural areas, it is necessary to increase the supply of entrepreneurs, thus building up the critical mass of first-generation entrepreneurs (Petrin 1992). But there are worries that progress in the promotion of rural entrepreneurship may be hindered by lack of or inadequate understanding of its concept as well as role in the rural sector. Institution of proper promotional policies cannot be guaranteed unless there is adequate knowledge of rural entrepreneurship (on the part of the people) and its potential in rural development. Therefore, the focus of this study was to investigate the perception of rural entrepreneurs on the nature and role of entrepreneurship in rural economic development.

Literature review

Tackling the next question in mind, what is Rural Entrepreneurship? Entrepreneurship based on the welfare and upbringing of the rural areas is rural entrepreneurship. It is a pretty straight forward definition. However, it has a deeper meaning to it.

Why Rural Entrepreneurship? One of the main goals of development policies in Tunisia is to give employment for millions of unemployed young people in rural areas. The main problem in countries such as Tunisia is the surplus agricultural labor force and the closure of traditional village industries, leading to increased unemployment in rural areas and the migration of rural youth to urban areas in search of desperate for jobs, putting more pressure on urban infrastructure and amenities. Many of the products and services available in rural areas can be exploited by entrepreneurs to create new and small micro-enterprises. In reality, entrepreneurship can be sought in almost every economic field.

The earliest definition of entrepreneurship sees it as an economic term which describes the process of bearing the risk of buying at certain prices and selling at uncertain prices (Di-Masi 2000). Later commentators, however, broadened this definition to include the concept of bringing together the factors of production. But this definition according to Di Masi (2008) led others to question whether there was any unique entrepreneurial function or whether it was simply a form of management. The concept of innovation was added to the definition of entrepreneurship by theorists in the early part of this century. This innovation could be process innovation, market innovation, product innovation, factor innovation, and even organizational innovation. Later definitions described entrepreneurship as involving the creation of new enterprises and that the entrepreneur is the founder.

On the role of rural entrepreneurship in the development process, Naudes (2008) states that an effective entrepreneurship venture fosters the production of wealth for a nation, creates jobs that use human resources and reduces economic waste.

Likewise, He asserted that a person's average income level and standard of living increases with every successful business venture. Nevertheless, entrepreneurship is born from barter. Ejiofor (1989) points out that entrepreneurship is the first step towards a self-reliant economy that can generate internal self-sustaining economic growth and development. In the

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same vein, Brain (2005) states that entrepreneurs occupy a central place in a market economy, and there are never enough of them. A society is adjudged prosperous only to the degree to which it rewards and encourages entrepreneurial activity. Entrepreneurial activities are the critical determinants of the level of success, prosperity, growth and opportunity in any country.

Onyekwelu, Uzor and Chiekezie (2008), citing Hisrich and Peters (2002) note that entrepreneurship though desirable is usually fraught with difficulties and risks. Entrepreneurship is the process of creating something different with values by devoting necessary time and effort, assuming the accompanying financial, psychological and social risks and receiving resulting rewards of monetary and personal satisfaction and independence. Nzelibé (1996) and Redmond (2008) see entrepreneurs as action-oriented, highly motivated individuals who take risks to achieve goals. Basically, entrepreneurs must possess distinctive qualities that will help them to excel. Gana (2001) reveals that every entrepreneur possesses positive and negative qualities. He therefore advises that the entrepreneur must effectively use his positive qualities like risk taking, decision making, planning, self-confidence, creativity, uniqueness, futuristic, drive and energy to overcome the negative qualities such as arrogance for business success. When entrepreneurs effectively combine these qualities they are able to perform useful functions.

Rural entrepreneurship, conceptually speaking, is not much different from entrepreneurship. Indeed, rural entrepreneurship could be seen as using the process and methods of entrepreneurship to exploit untapped potential of rural areas, to bring about growth and development. Petrin (1994) describes rural entrepreneurship as: a force that mobilizes other resources to meet unmet market demand, the ability to create and build something from practically nothing, the process of creating value by pulling together a unique package of resources to exploit an opportunity.

The strategic role rural entrepreneurship could play in rural development appears to have caught the attention of policymakers and development experts. Take note of Petrin (1994) that institutions and people promoting rural development now see entrepreneurship as a strategic development intervention that could accelerate the rural development process. In his words development agencies see rural entrepreneurship as an enormous employment potential, politician see it as the key strategy to prevent rural unrest, and farmers see it as an instrument for improving farm earnings while women see it as an employment possibility near their homes which offer autonomy, independence and a reduced need for social support. Clearly, entrepreneurship is seen as a vehicle for improving the quality of life for people, families and communities as well as to sustain a healthy economy and environment. He stresses that to accelerate economic development in rural areas, it is necessary to increase the supply of entrepreneurs who will take risks and engage in the uncertainties of new venture creation.

Methodology

We are interested in this empirical work to the study of rural entrepreneurship, the study adopts an exploratory research design. Data for the study were obtained from 100 rural entrepreneurs in the Tunisian regime. We used random sampling techniques to select 100 rural entrepreneurs; the main instrument for data collection was 24-item structured questionnaires that were administered to 100 respondents. The questionnaires were divided into five sections dealing with socioeconomic profiles of respondents, the meaning of entrepreneurship and the role of entrepreneurship in rural development, challenges of rural entrepreneurship and suggested solutions to the challenges.

Our work aims to provide a self-questionnaire with five separate sections, in the first questionnaire part (Section A), the information requested from respondents included age, sex, education, work experience, occupation and income. The second part (Sections B to E), are Likert-type scales comprising four response ratings of strongly agree (4), agree (3), disagree (2), and strongly disagree (1), which the respondents are requested to use to show their level of agreement with each of the items in 1 to 22. A theoretical mean value of 2.5 was taken as a criterion to judge the means for the items in the respective sections. Therefore, any item in the instrument that had a mean equal to or greater than 2.5 was regarded as agree; while items with less than 2.5 were regarded as disagree.

All 100 copies of the administered questionnaires were returned properly filled out, thus representing 100% return rate. The statistical tools used to analyze responses from the respondents were descriptive statistics such as frequency distributions tables, average, percentages, standard deviations, etc.

Results and interpretations

The responses of the rural entrepreneurs as shown in questionnaires are presented and discussed in Sections A to E below. Section A examines the socio economic characteristics of the respondents, while from sections B to E check the perceptions of the respondents with regard to meaning of entrepreneurship, the role of rural entrepreneurship, challenges and problems and suggested solutions. The first section (A) is devoted to the characteristics of the respondents.

Table 1, are presented and discussed the socio economic characteristics of the respondents are presented and discussed.

The socio economic characteristics of the respondents are presented and discussed in Table 1. Information in Table 1 reveals that the majority of the respondents were in the age range of 40– 49 years (50%), while 20% and 25%, respectively, were in the age range of 50 – 59 years and 30 – 39 years.

The table also shows that the majority of the respondents were male (60%). For the educational qualification, 50% of the respondents attended secondary school followed by 30% indicating having attended primary school. Only 20% of the respondents attended a tertiary institution.

This finding proves that rural entrepreneurs in the area are fairly educated and are expected to be fairly informed on the nature about entrepreneurship and its role in the development process. Concerning marital status, it was noticed that the majority of the respondents were married (60%). Most of the respondents have been in the business from 1 to 5 years.

The major entrepreneurial or occupational engagements of the respondents were agricultural production activities: crop production (cereals, cash crops, market gardening), which represent 40%, 25% livestock (large and small livestock, poultry, rabbits), Crafts activities: (weaving, dyeing, basketry...), 15% Crafts activities: (weaving, dyeing, basketry...), and 20% beekeeping. Also, the table shows that 30% of the respondents on average received a monthly income of between DT10 000 and DT40 000. The significance of the Second section (B) is devoted to the Awareness of the meaning of entrepreneurship.

Table 1: Socioeconomic profiles of the rural entrepreneurship in Tunisia

Item	Range	Frequency	Percentage
Age (years)	20-29	10	10
	30- 39	15	15
	40-49	50	50
	50- 59	20	20
	60 and above	5	5
Gender	Female	40	40
	Male	60	60
Educational qualification	Primary	30	30
	Secondary	50	50
	Tertiary	20	20
Marital status	Married	60	60
	Single	40	40
Experience in business	<1	20	20
	1-5	70	70
	6 and above	10	10
Entrepreneurial activity / occupation	Agricultural production activities: crop production (cereals, cash crops, market gardening)	40	40
	Livestock (large and small livestock, poultry, rabbits)	25	25
	Crafts activities: (weaving, dyeing, basketry...)	15	15
	Beekeeping	20	20
Monthly income (DT)	<10 000	30	30
	10 000- 40 000	50	50
	Above 40	20	20

Table 2, On the mean scores and standard deviations for all items on the meaning of entrepreneurship, shows that entrepreneurs Tunisians' are quite conversant with the meaning of entrepreneurship. They agreed that it is a process of creating something new, nurturing it to grow for the rewards of financial and personal satisfaction. They also agreed that it is a process for identifying an opportunity within an existing enterprise and creating a profitable reality for the enterprise from this opportunity. In the respondents agreed that rural entrepreneurship is the process of creating something new, seeing it grow for monetary and personal satisfaction and that entrepreneurship is a process of creating an entirely new venture by utilising local resources for the purpose of making profit.

Table 2: Understanding the meaning of entrepreneurship and rural entrepreneurship (n=100)

S/N	Item	Mean	Standard deviation	Decision
1	Process of creating something new, nurturing it to grow for the rewards of financial and personal satisfaction	3.1200	1.06007	Agree
2	Process for identifying an opportunity within an existing enterprise and creating a profitable reality for the enterprise from this opportunity	3.3900	0.87001	Agree
3	Rural entrepreneurship means the process of Creating something new, seeing it grow for monetary and personal satisfaction	3.8700	1.16909	Agree
4	Creating and building something of value from practically nothing	3.2500	0.89308	Agree
5	Process of identifying market gap in the rural areas and creating a profitable reality from the opportunity	3.1500	1.06717	Agree
6	Process of creating entirely new venture by utilizing local resources for the purpose of making profit	3.4600	1.1300	Disagree

The third section (C) is dedicated to the Role of rural entrepreneurship

One of the major objectives of developmental policies in Tunisia is to provide employment to millions of unemployed rural youth. The core of the problem in, countries like Tunisia is surplus agricultural labour and closure of traditional village industries, resulted in increasing unemployment in rural areas and migration of rural youth to urban areas in desperate search of jobs. In doing so, they put more pressure on the urban infrastructure and amenities.

Table 1 : The role of rural entrepreneurship in rural development (n=100)

S/N	Item	Mean	Standard deviation	Decision
1	Increasing output	2.6681	1.10917	Agree
2	Prevents rural unrest	2.4800	1.15609	Disagree
3	Creation of employment	2.9800	1.0792	Agree
4	Improving the standard of living of the rural dwellers	2.5100	1.09308	Agree
5	Creation of wealth and increase in income	2.8700	1.1271	Agree
6	Reduction of wastage of local resources	3.4600	1.1300	Agree

Indeed, Table 3 exhibits the main roles in the rural development, the mean scores indicate that the respondents agreed that it reduces wastage of rural resources, creates employment, reduces rural–urban migration, creates wealth and increases income, as well as improves the standard of living of the rural dwellers. The respondents however disagreed that rural entrepreneurship increases output and prevents rural unrest.

The rich and diverse African culture varies one country to another. Such as, Tunisia, as an example is one of the oldest, culturally richest and diverse country it is full of colours and boasts

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of civilization with rich flora and fauna. Our cuisine is mouthwatering, scenic beauty is breathtaking; our rural Tunisia is rich in crafts, performing arts, vibrant lifestyle and cultural diversity. Thus, rural entrepreneurship will further contribute to bridging this gap between rural and urban areas; the development of urban areas will not be to the detriment of our rural areas.

Likewise, Human resources are amongst the essential resources that are required for fostering rural entrepreneurship. The importance of human resources is not be overemphasized, for it is this resource alone that makes the greatest impact on socio-economic development of rural areas factors such as. Childhood reading, upbringing, exposure to challenging situations, self-study, apprenticeship, coaching and training contribute to achievement motivation, which is a key to entrepreneurship development. This helps us by putting a check on social evils (like poverty, the growth of slums, etc.), awakening the rural youth (to expose them to various avenues and adopt entrepreneurship and promote it as a career) and also improve the standard of living of the rural youth. What challenges are faced by rural entrepreneurship?.

The fourth section (D) presents the challenges of rural entrepreneurship

Respondents' perceptions of the challenges of rural entrepreneurship presented in Table 4, revealed that (based on average scores), government negligence, inadequate infrastructure, insufficient knowledge of emerging markets and corruption constituted the biggest challenges of rural entrepreneurship. Other problems included lack of facilities for workforce development and insufficient funding.

Table 2 : Challenges of rural entrepreneurship in Tunisia

S/N	Item	Mean	Standard deviation	Decision
1	Corruption	2.4150	1.0117	Agree
2	Inadequate infrastructure	3.1009	0.8560	Disagree
3	Poor knowledge about emerging markets	2.0799	1.0766	Agree
4	Neglect by the government	3.0150	0.9138	Agree
5	Lack of facilities for manpower development	2.6320	1.7211	Agree
6	Inadequate finance	2.6400	1.2230	Agree

Furthermore, a promoter of rural enterprise faces a plethora of problems, usually called teething troubles, when he sets up his enterprise. First, the financial problem. Arranging working capital becomes a major task as he could run out of money to buy raw materials though he may not yet have earned any reputation in the market to get raw materials on credit. Similarly, he makes several production trials, improves quality, etc. This is not it. There are also policy challenges faced by the enterprise. To top it all, there are marketing problems (competition, middlemen), management problems (legal formalities, low quality of products, procurement of raw materials, etc.), and human resources problems (low skill level of workers and negative attitude of rural folk towards the ideas of business). The changing global environment raises questions about the ability of traditional small businesses in rural areas to share the potential benefits of changing environments. Rapid (though decreasing) population growth, coupled with even faster urbanization, is creating increasing demand. In India, the urban population in general is growing about twice as fast as the total, and by 2020, it may exceed the size of the rural population. Such a demographic trend is testing the ability of some traditional small businesses to cope with the growing demand. That is why rural entrepreneurship is becoming more and more important in Tunisia and already the way things are happening is changing.

Table 5: Finally the last section (E) presents the main solutions of the problem

S/N	Item	Mean	Standard deviation	Decision
1	Identifying local resources and assets and converting them into entrepreneurial activity	3.1500	0.8767	Agree
2	Fostering grassroots innovation	3.008	0.9660	Agree
3	Making the communities attractive by establishing and updating infrastructure	3.1500	1.0766	Agree
4	Generating local community support for entrepreneurship to increase chances of a successful venture	3.1700	0.9138	Agree

Based on the mean scores of the responses in Table 5, we also sought to know the opinion of the respondents on how they think the challenges of entrepreneurs could be overcome. The respondents agreed that solutions could be found when local resources and assets are identified and converted to entrepreneurial activity. They also agreed that generating local community support for entrepreneurship would increase chances of a successful venture. The local communities should be made attractive by establishing and updating infrastructures. The respondents finally agreed that there is a need to foster grassroots innovation.

Conclusion

Entrepreneurship development is increasingly seen as a promising alternative to traditional economic development for it unlocks the potential of local citizens to create jobs and serve local tastes and markets. Rural entrepreneurship was seen from the findings to be very important because of their role in development of rural areas such as ability to cut rural–urban migration, waste of local resources, etc. However, they must have an enabling environment such as government support and provision of infrastructures.

We acknowledge that there have been arguments that policies and programs directed to the development of rural entrepreneurship are not necessary, as entrepreneurship are indifferent to location that the needs of a rural-based ‘would-be entrepreneur’ or an existing small business are rarely the same like those in an urban area. But access to entrepreneurial inputs (such as capital, management, technology, buildings, communications and transportation infrastructure, distribution channels and skilled labour) is much easier in the urban sector than in the rural areas (Petrin 1994). We believe that given the peculiar nature of the rural sector. Tunisian and its relative investment unattractiveness, much progress can be made when efforts are intensified to nurture and promote rural entrepreneurship.

Ultimately, governments need to adopt a policy to remove regulatory and administrative barriers that significantly impede the development of entrepreneurship they also need to combat all forms of corruption, lack of transparency and excessive bureaucracy. The application of financial and fiscal incentives accompanied with access to information by the public administration must contribute to the revitalization of the business climate to stimulate rural entrepreneurship.

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