

opción

Revista de Antropología, Ciencias de la Comunicación y de la Información, Filosofía,
Linguística y Semiótica, Problemas del Desarrollo, la Ciencia y la Tecnología

Año 35, 2019, Especial N°

19

Revista de Ciencias Humanas y Sociales
ISSN 1012-1537/ ISSNc: 2477-9385
Depósito Legal pp 198402ZU45



Universidad del Zulia
Facultad Experimental de Ciencias
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Maracaibo - Venezuela

Poverty alleviation strategy by small agri- businesses in the rural area of Malaysia

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Abstract

This paper examines the effectiveness of entrepreneurship development on increasing income and reducing poverty of smallholder farmers in Malaysian via comparative qualitative research methods. As a result, the level of support by members of the smallholder family is also not forthcoming to ensure the success of the entrepreneurship development programmes. Mostly, these smallholder farmers live in rural areas which often lack infrastructure and facilities. In conclusion, perspective and mental changes of the smallholder farmer communities to involve them in different areas of entrepreneurial development will be important to safeguard their wellbeing.

Keywords: Smallholders Entrepreneurship Development; Poverty Alleviation.

Estrategia de reducción de la pobreza por parte de pequeñas empresas agrícolas en el área rural de Malasia

Resumen

Este documento examina la efectividad del desarrollo de la iniciativa empresarial para aumentar los ingresos y reducir la pobreza de los pequeños

agricultores en Malasia mediante métodos de investigación cualitativa comparativa. Como resultado, el nivel de apoyo de los miembros de la familia de los pequeños agricultores tampoco está disponible para garantizar el éxito de los programas de desarrollo empresarial. En su mayoría, estos pequeños agricultores viven en áreas rurales que a menudo carecen de infraestructura e instalaciones. En conclusión, la perspectiva y los cambios mentales de las comunidades de pequeños agricultores para involucrarlos en diferentes áreas del desarrollo empresarial serán importantes para salvaguardar su bienestar.

Palabras clave: Desarrollo de la iniciativa empresarial de los pequeños agricultores; Mitigación de la pobreza.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Cambridge Dictionary defines smallholder as someone who owns a small plot of land. The Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries Department of the Republic of South Africa defines it as owning of small land plots with limited resource, grow subsistence crops and one or two cash crops. According to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, smallholders own small farms that are mostly family run. In the third world countries, smallholders are usually farmers who support their families with cash crops and subsistence farming. The agriculture farmer's population continue to rise in large parts of rural Africa, and parts of Asia and Latin America (Ajaegbu, 1970). About 2.2 billion people in 2015 (about a quarter of the world's population) were households in rural areas of developing countries who survived as smallholder farmers, operations lands that sized below one hectare. The agriculture sector had largely expanded in Europe since World War I and in North America with sharecroppers and tenant farmers. In the 1930s and the 1940s, at South America and Midwest farming became the main source of economic activity. In the 1950s, the growth of family farms was common in North

America and Europe that supplied the family's own food and clothes. Meanwhile, sales of some of the farm's production supplemented income to buy basic goods such as sugar, coffee, tea, kerosene, fuel oil, cloth, needles, medicines, and hardware products such as nails, screws, wire and books. Many of these items were traded using a barter system rather than using cash (Chisholm, 1962).

In Central and Eastern Europe, agriculture farmers returned into the transition economy since circa 1990 for their subsistence. The third world lacked innovation or had a limitation in the effectiveness of agricultural produce that stunted the economic and natural environment worsened. Bangladesh and Ganges plain of India introduced high yielding crop varieties using little innovation of seeds by importing grains from more developed countries. Therefore, third world countries were forced to make innovative changes on the land for improvements in the production of industrial crops, expanding the markets and depended heavily on more developed countries. Argentina, Australia and New Zealand absolutely depended on the tropics and sub-tropics terrains in their agriculture sector (Hayami & Ruttan, 1970). Peet summarized and develop dynamic ideas of a world scale agriculture zonal system. This system is applicable to the whole agricultural sector in terms of changes in internal supply, demand for a production system, simple structure of land farming and centralized economic market distributions in productivity. Ultimately, the products were for the farmers themselves. Increasing production through intensification and cultivating a wider area bring in the growth in the sector. Increasing the farm cultivation area on the production of higher yields varieties of wheat, rice and to a lesser extent, maize and sorghum plant was done in 1966. Introductions of new seeds intervened with the

environment (Hayami & Ruttan, 1970). Generally, low productivity level is still a serious issue in various parts of the world.

1.1. Poverty in Agriculture Sectors

The World Bank estimates more than 1.1 billion people in developing countries were poor and the majority of them live in rural areas. The agriculture sector can play a significant role in poverty alleviation since agriculture is the main source of employment and income. Interventions in agriculture policies indirectly eliminate poverty in rural areas. Agricultural can bring positive effect and economic growth to alleviate poverty when managed well. The role of government interventions to improve access to land, development in agricultural technology, improvement in rural finance, creates more employment and marketing systems in the 20th century. Table 1.1 shows the population of the poor by region for 2010 and 2014. The highest level of poverty is encountered in South Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa, whereby almost 50 percent of the population is categorized to be below the poverty line. According to the World Bank, although the poverty level declined in 2012, it did bring the desired impact as the number of the poor increased. Table 1.2 illustrates Asian countries such as Indonesia and Malaysia tend to have high rural poor population.

Table 1.1: Population of the Poor by Region and Gap in 2010 and 2014

Region	Number of poor (mil)		Household poor Index (%)		Poverty Gap Index (%)	
	2010	2014	2010	2014	2010	2014
East Asia and the Pacific	182	169	13.2	11.3	3.3	2.8
Eastern Europe	5	5	7.1	7.1	2.4	1.9
Latin America and the Caribbean	87	108	22.4	25.2	8.7	10.3
Middle East and North Africa	60	73	30.6	33.1	13.2	14.3
South Asia	532	562	51.8	49.0	16.2	13.7
Sub-Saharan Africa	184	216	47.6	47.8	18.1	19.1

Source: The World Bank (2014)

Table 1.2: Rural poverty in developing countries, 2014

Region and country	Rural population (%)	Rural poor (%)
<i>Sub-Saharan Africa</i>		
Cote d'Ivoire	57	86
Ghana	65	80
Kenya	80	96
<i>Asia</i>		
India	77	79
Indonesia	73	91
Malaysia	62	80
Philippines	60	67
Thailand	70	80
<i>Latin America</i>		
Guatemala	59	66
Mexico	31	37
Panama	50	59
Peru	44	52
Venezuela	15	20

Source: The World Bank (2014)

Poverty affects education, housing, sanitation, clean water and health services in rural areas. Policies are required to alleviate rural poverty by recognizing the characteristics of the population. Better poverty alleviation policies are designed to alleviate poverty in the agriculture sector. Different policy instruments and approaches are required to alleviate poverty by identifying different vulnerable by functional groups such as smallholder farmers, the landless, fishermen and the indigenous ethnics. Although few indicators are disaggregated by gender, the available data on literacy indicates wide gender disparities.

A few studies report on gender disparities and lack of literacy as hard factors that enhance poverty in the rural areas. The prevalence of underweight children caused by malnutrition from the seeds further confirms poverty as being entrenched in the agriculture sectors. However, public policy revisions that target and focus on nutrition, health, education and housing could improve this condition. Countries with low per capita incomes expose high rates of under-nutrition and illiteracy that increases the chances of poverty in rural areas.

1.2. The Agricultural and Economic Growth

Many studies showed that economic growth is directly influenced by the reduction of poverty rates in both the urban and rural population. Some argue that income distributions depend on economic growth which benefits the poor. The debate on difficulties to sustain economic growth and income distribution via systematic relationships with climate changes continues in the agriculture sector (Dollar & Kraay, 2002).

Changes in inequality associated with economic growth are likely to force comparative studies to offer better illustration in the agricultural fields. A study conducted at two countries finds positive growth in India and sub-saharan Africa affects poverty improvements through income redistribution. The empirical evidence supports the relationship between agricultural growth and rural poverty increases agricultural production through the distribution of benefits from access to inputs and services, and productive assets distribution by changes in the agricultural growth itself. Therefore, it is possible for agricultural growth to be associated with the normal distribution of high income. In Latin America, the size of the rural poor declined when the agricultural production increased 23 percent causing smallholder farmers to enjoy high earnings between 1980 and 1990.

The impacts of agricultural growth also depend on socioeconomic categories of rural laborers, the nature of the growth processes and the structure of the social organizations in rural areas. Most studies from India on the empirical knowledge, discuss situations in which rapid agricultural growth will result in the spread of the green revolution. Lyson (2012) indicated that introducing new technology on biochemical innovations will increase agriculture production. Unfortunately, this technology was very expensive that was not within arm's reach of the smallholder farmers. As a result, the poor became poorer and some were pushed below the poverty line index. Another study found inequality in access to land and monopoly of the selected rural population (Ellis & Mdoe, 2003). The smallholder farmers with small lands faced trouble on input supply problems, limited access to extension services, tenure insecurity, insufficient markets credit,

limited access to gain benefits of the new technology and high aversion risk compared with large landholders.

As a result, gross cropped area distribution was more unequal and landless households increased from 25 percent to 35 percent in rural India, Indonesia and Malaysia for 2000-2013. In the period 2010-2014, North Arcot, a small region in South India, reported that the small-scale smallholder owner farms benefited the poor due to credit and aggressive modern inputs in infrastructure by state and local governments on communities. The adoption of the modern varieties of high yield paddy planted on large scale in the Malaysian farms showed positive results in 2014. Loss of land by smallholder farmers and income of absolute poverty households declined due to technological adoption in rural agriculture. The sustainability issues related to agricultural growth contributed by population growth, inequality of access to land, and rural areas needed quick actions by the authorities to address the wellbeing issues of smallholder farmers.

Therefore, smallholder practices became more efficient as the country progresses. The estimated number of smallholder farms in the world is 500 million, which supports almost 2 billion people in employment. Linking smallholders to the global market, supporting and modernizing the extension services in the country will help promote smallholders' development (Ferris et al., 2014). The Malaysian agriculture sector has created more than 1.82 million employment opportunities in 2014 for local people, contributing more than 25 percent of export earnings on the country's Gross Domestic Product (Dardak, 2015). In the global agriculture scale, more than 84 percent of food produced by

smallholders in developing countries are based on agricultural consumption, and this contribution is extremely significant in raising the income and economic growth of rural communities.

1.3. Agriculture Entrepreneurship Development

There are over 570 million smallholder farmers worldwide. Sustainable agricultural development is supported by technology, supply of inputs, access to markets, policies and programmes that stimulate farmer communities. In Malaysia, poverty reduction is directed at specific target groups that comprise paddy farmers, agricultural labourers, fishermen, indigenous community groups, estate workers, coconut, rubber and oil palm smallholders. Price of imported basic goods, food, transportation, housing, and daily expenses are on the rise and add to the cost of living in Malaysia. The industry and smallholders faced challenges from numerous aspects such as ageing trees, planters' refusal to embrace innovation, latex production mills that operate at low capacity, high cost of replanting, fluctuating latex prices, farmers cultivating under two hectares against the recommendation by the authority contravening economies of scale, and inconsistent weather conditions. Indeed, the widespread adoption of doing business or project highlights the current and potential importance of entrepreneurship to all economic sectors.

The importance of entrepreneurship and development to support economic growth, has long been recognized (Baumol & Strom, 2007; Gregoire et al., 2011). Smallholders are very much involved in agriculture and the government finds them to be vulnerable to poverty despite many

attempts to get them out of it. Rubber Industry Smallholder Development Authority (RISDA), a governmental agency, has been given the task to develop this smallholder community and move them above the Poverty Line Index (PLI). Nevertheless, the lack of new ideas and innovative products have made it almost impossible for the entrepreneurial development of these smallholder communities. It is hardly possible for an agency to have enough resources to fulfill the needs of its clients. Optimum utilization of resources and talented farmers are most successful in this program. Basically, they typically possess many trade secrets and rushed by time-tested individuals, acquired through many years of fieldwork and challenging experiences. Most importantly, their products are essential and of quality as well.

1.4. The Youth Agriculture Entrepreneurship Transformation

The entrepreneurship and innovations in developing countries for young peoples' involvement in farming sectors have been discussed widely as agriculture contributed to economic growth. In Africa and the Netherlands, agriculture entrepreneurship has become professional careers reflecting policy and knowledge on economic growth aspects. There is a need for agricultural entrepreneurship fields to rope in ideas from young professionals on information and communication technology (ICT) to boost economic growth. The need for agri-entrepreneurship and farming innovations by the youth has always been disputed by scholars.

The Sub-Saharan Africa youth under the age of 25 have wide networks and good relationship with farmer cooperatives on

entrepreneurship development ideas. The youth businesses in Angola created 78 percent agriculture entrepreneurship product based on new technologies and procedures (Auld et al., 2009). However, the productivity of the agriculture sector still remains very low by smallholder farmers followed by the forestry and fishing at approximately 10 percent in Asian countries in the last 10 years. Furthermore, young women are less actively involved in any agriculture entrepreneurial activities as young men.

According to Hampwaye and Hapunda (2016), slow food network in South Africa requires grassroots initiatives from the government to involve youth in agriculture entrepreneurship. The small-scale smallholder farmer entrepreneurs in South Africa working in food indicated the importance of patience when engaged with the agriculture networks as it takes time to develop (Lyson, 2012). Some authors argued that agriculture networks can be built and organized the events with cultures and traditions being revived at the local level. Therefore, initiatives must be put to bring youth back to dominate a career in agriculture sectors and increase agricultural entrepreneurship at the international levels. The dairy company Friesland Campina's successful decision-making processes of the cooperative was influenced by young farmers' ideas. The programmes in Ghana and Uganda addressed cognitive constraints needed for engagement of the youth in agriculture entrepreneurship that brought changes in economic distribution.

The entrepreneurial attitudes and psychological stigmatization freedom is an important key requirement for success in agriculture sectors. Several stigmatizations of agriculture by rural youth are associated with poverty in rural areas. On the other hand, the agriculture sector required to

be more attractive to attract the youth to participate in these sectors, by modifying specific agriculture entrepreneurship programmes aimed at changing perspectives and their attitudes. The approach must be appropriate and suits youth to improve their psychological and cognitive status.

1.5. Technologies as an Opportunity

Being knowledgeable, resourceful, and talented smallholder farmers are mostly successful entrepreneurs. Basically, they typically possess many trade secrets and rushed by time-tested individuals, acquired through many years of fieldwork and precise through many challenging experiences. Most importantly, their products are essential and of quality as well. In general, Malaysian agriculture is divided into two categories which are industrial crops and food crops. Food crops refer to root crops, grain crops, fruits, vegetables, and refer to smallholder farmers who own lands. Another is industrial crops which refer to tea, palm oil, rubber and other crops that are associated with large estates managed by corporations in large scales.

ICT can offer big opportunities for job creations and improvement of agri-business value chains which directly attract youth into agropreneurs. Information sharing on farming entrepreneurship through social media can improve the skills and knowledge of young farmers (Cecchini & Scott, 2003). The knowledge exchange in social media has been positively welcomed by young professionals, especially among second-generation farmers. ICT provides opportunity as a medium to

connect buyers and smallholder farmers on social enterprise (Cecchini & Scott, 2003). There is thus a huge opportunity in ICT development for young people with an entrepreneurial spirit, particularly for those entrepreneurs who are not yet active in agriculture.

It is time young entrepreneurs start to show their potential added value to ICT startups in agricultural sectors. The e-agriculture entrepreneurship strategies based on ICT knowledge has become a new platform for smallholder farmers to shape their own small scale economies. The people from India, Kenya, Philippines, Uganda and Indonesia exchanged their strategies to attract young people in agriculture by investing more capital in new technology (Fan et al., 2011). There is a debate in the agro ecology whether ICT improves agricultural productivity and sustainability although it is costly (Muslim, 2019).

1.6. Multiple Fields in Entrepreneurship Development

The role of entrepreneurship and development for economic growth has long been recognized. Only in recent years, there have been numerous claims concerning the potential of entrepreneurship to act as a mechanism for growth and increased remarkably on economic perspectives (Chinomona & Maziriri, 2015; Cooper, 2017). It is argued that true integration of entrepreneurship into the discipline of development with particular reference to developing countries is not long-postponed. In terms of developing countries, a focus was initially placed on the relationship between entrepreneurship and economic development. During the post-war period, it was argued that the investment, innovation and

structural changes required to generate economic development in developing countries relied on the existence of entrepreneurship. At the same time, however, it was recognized that the institutional environment and related economic systems, typically in developing countries were often incomplete, ambiguous and difficult to maneuver and therefore, the high level of entrepreneurship is required to address the systems in comparison with those in developed countries. As such, entrepreneurship was often referred to as a problem or binding constraint on economic development. Leff (1979) argued this claim was much exaggerated. It may take many more years before entrepreneurship is seen in a positive light. As such, governments and policy makers have placed increased importance on the creation of an environment conducive to domestic and foreign business and investment (Acs & Szerb, 2007).

In recent years, researches related to poverty and entrepreneurship development by numerous authors have argued that most entrepreneurship creates employment (Evans & Leighton, 1990), prosperity and wealth. Entrepreneurship is an important driver of economic growth and development (Cooper, 2017). While the number of researches on entrepreneurship development has increased in recent years, a focus has been predominantly placed at national or regional levels on alleviating poverty. Indeed, a dearth of research has considered the relationship between entrepreneurship and individual or community development. As a matter of fact, less attention has been paid to particular mechanisms that make entrepreneurship a tool in the alleviation of poverty.

Where the link is made between entrepreneurship and a social objective, such as poverty reduction, is in the area of social business. To

date, social business, defined as a self-sustaining non-loss, Non-dividend Company with a social objective contributed less to this poverty alleviation, has been well researched (Choi & Majumdar, 2014). Examples of social businesses are common in literature and the media on corporate social responsibility. Again, the social business model and the focus on regional or national levels can be equated to the top-down approach to development that benefit the poor, and demonstrate such macro policies often fail to deliver to the bottom line.

Therefore, to better understand how entrepreneurship can address poverty issues, it is argued that entrepreneur scholars would be well served to pioneer the micro aspect of entrepreneurship (Bruton, 2010), to assess whether development economists are right in their considerations that entrepreneurship could act as a vehicle for endogenous transformation, with the entrepreneurs acting as agents of change. Indeed, Bruton (2010) argued in support of endogenous approaches to poverty alleviation, stating that business has the potential to do far more to solve the issues of poverty, than any number of government aid programs. Meanwhile, Glaeser et al. (2015) argued that despite being overlooked by researchers, entrepreneurship can aid in the pursuit of a myriad of goals, including social and economic equality.

2. CONCLUSION

The entrepreneurship development program has long been addressed as tools or right mechanisms for poverty alleviation in the country. The poorest people could be helped by giving them opportunities

to start a business in small scale with the guided support of the government. Consideration of well-being quality has also become an important part to highlight the seriousness of the poverty issue. Successful development of the nation can reduce poverty, increase income, and contribute to the positive effect in economy balance and satisfaction with life. In another word, rapid progress towards entrepreneurship development is account for the success in rural area sustainable boosting the production by smallholder farmers to efforts on tackling the climate change globally.

The entrepreneurship is fast growing and highly dynamic shifting from the conventional to intellectual technology-based approach. Entrepreneurial development foundations and its strong relationship with risk-taking, innovation, creativity, self-efficacy, behavioral, social network, uncertainty and opportunities led to economic growth. After a decade, entrepreneurship research finds the attributes of psychological traits momentum characteristics can predict entrepreneurship development on the person-centric approach. Therefore, the development of entrepreneurship move is not focused only on agriculture product. The smallholder farmers have diversified into multiple fields such as servicing, manufacturing, and food and beverage. Starting multiple businesses by these smallholder farmers requires more guarantees of financial security on them. The agricultural process of development needs changes from the conventional to the new ICT based approach. The smallholder farmers need modernization and adopt the changes to raise the standard of living, agricultural productivity and industrial growth. Attracting young labor, other resources and infrastructure play significant roles for higher productivity in the economy. Domination of market trading can increase

incentives to the smallholder farmers in rural areas. In other words, it can reduce the burdens of debt and taxation of the land.

The government's role in policymaking to attract the young into an agriculture enterprise requires some benefits. They must be assisted with services such as transport, marketing and the supply of tools, seeds, fertilizer, machines and information regards of agriculture sectors to encourage subsistence smallholder farmer increase production of new crops. Development must be aligned on I-city changes overtime because the smallholder farmers have a tendency to fail due to lack of knowledge. Rural and urban areas must have linkages to market their products. New technologies must be implemented by providing them with consist training and techniques as well. The systems designed must ensure and encourage the poor smallholder farmers to show interest in a new entrepreneurial development program to increase their income. The transformation from agriculture entrepreneurial to the multiple entrepreneurial diversifications will ensure the economic growth of this community. Therefore, perspective and mental changes of the smallholder farmer communities to involve them in different areas of entrepreneurial development will be important to safeguard their wellbeing.

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Revista de Ciencias Humanas y Sociales

Año 35, Especial N° 19, 2019

Esta revista fue editada en formato digital por el personal de la Oficina de Publicaciones Científicas de la Facultad Experimental de Ciencias, Universidad del Zulia.
Maracaibo - Venezuela

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