

Addressing Challenges and Seizing opportunities in Agripreneurship: Successful Stories of Women in East Region in Cameroon

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ABSTRACT

Due to growing of the agriculture market professionally and progressed economies worldwide, the world is treating farming differently. Farming has shifted from a passionate livelihood to a livelihood that needs the opportunity to be fostered by new added business incentives. As a result, many farmers developed their skills and competencies to fit in market-orient farming and value chain demand, so they become 'agripreneurs'. However, can every farmer become agripreneur? What does it take to be an agripreneur?

The purpose of this study is presenting common challenges and opportunities in agripreneurship supported by successful stories from East region Cameroon.

Keywords: Agripreneurship; Poverty Alleviation; Rural Advisory Services; Development.

INTRODUCTION

There is undeniable exertion to alleviate poverty and improve the standard of living for individuals in developing countries. However, the majority of the poor is located in rural areas (Mahmoud, 2017). The agriculture sector is facing several challenges from continued declining in fertile land to increased demand in feeding the world's population which expected to reach 9.8 billion in 2050 and 11.2 billion in 2100 respectively (AESA, 2016). Farmers also are required to maximize their production while comply with strict standards to minimize their environmental footprint. The agriculture environment has changed dramatically under emerging globalization, market liberalization and unprecedented increase of urban population. In addition, rural-urban migration has continued to occur which creates high pressure on urban cities in developing countries and in the same time decline the food supply production from rural areas to meet urban consumption. By moving through those changes, farmers are facing a great paradox to find creative ways to feed the future generation, to diminish carbon emissions and ditch the drawbacks of urbanization (FAO, 2011).

On the optimistic side of these changes, the agriculture market has grown professionally and progressed economy in urban cities creates high demand for good value agricultural products. Farmers are more integrated in formal markets and food supply chain (FAO, 2011). It has become common to see

farmers as input suppliers, agro-processing, delivering and customers. The growing economy also creates a new competitive environment for agriculture and food producers. As a result, most farmers are shifting into commercial agriculture and they become aware of market-orient farming. This modern environment invited different players such as private sectors, exporters, retailers and rural service providers. In this stage, the world is treating farming differently from passionate livelihood to a livelihood that needs the opportunity to be fostered by new added business incentives. Many farmers developed their skills and competencies to fit in market-oriented farming and value chain demand, so they become 'agripreneurs'. However, can every farmer become agripreneur? What does it take to be an agripreneur?

Terminology Related to Agripreneurship

A. Entrepreneur- Entrepreneur is a French word originated since the 17th century in 1723. It refers to a person who transforms ideas into profit and creates business opportunities yet it is broader term and has not been finalized (Carlen, 2016). Here an example from Hébert & Link who synthesized entrepreneur definition and function in the following 12 points:

1. The entrepreneur is the person who accepts the risk associated with uncertainty.
2. The entrepreneur is a supplier of financial capital.
3. The entrepreneur is an innovator.
4. The entrepreneur is a decision maker.
5. The entrepreneur is an industrial leader.
6. The entrepreneur is a manager or superintendent.
7. The entrepreneur is an organizer or coordinator of economic resources.
8. The entrepreneur is a proprietor of an enterprise.
9. The entrepreneur is an employer of factors of production.
10. The entrepreneur is a contractor.
11. The entrepreneur is an arbitrageur.
12. The entrepreneur is the person who allocates resources to alternative uses (Veciana, 1999).

B. Entrepreneurship- It is a concept that refers to embrace risks, or grasp opportunities for new or existing ideas in order to transform them into profitable

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Received July 26, 2018, Accepted September 13, 2018

business. This can be done whether individually or in a group of individuals or established business in order to make profit (AESAs, 2016).

C. Agribusiness- Agribusiness is a synonym for entrepreneur in agriculture.

D. Agripreneurship- Agripreneurship is also known as 'Farm Entrepreneurship' which is a profitable jointing between entrepreneurship. In other words, turning a farm or farm related activity to make more profit (LalBairwa et al, 2014).

E. Agripreneur- Agripreneur is a person who leads the process of entrepreneurship or agripreneurship.

Theoretical Framework

Research on Agripreneurship has often addressed the Agripreneurs as ambitious leaders who combine their farming experience and knowledge with their business skills to create entrepreneurship in the agriculture sector. They are often risk takers, innovators, ambitious about their career in farming and well aware of business needs and commitments. Agripreneurs are well informed of market changes and they produce mainly for market or profit. They go after opportunities, take well calculated possibilities and they have capacity to navigate their business through market fluctuations locally or internationally. The Agripreneurship environment is a dynamic and a complex of inherent risks as well as opportunities for greater profit should the ideas succeed (GFRAS, 2016). Agripreneurship can be at any stage of life; however, most agripreneurs are young farmers or farm related workers who wish to work individually or in groups along the supply chain to

bridge the gap in market and make profit (Kahan, 2012).

Consequently, most of the research in this area has shed the light on two different dimensions of agripreneurship; managerial skills, ability to run farm business and calculate risks and opportunities. In addition, the spirit of agripreneur which means the mindset of business and market oriented attitude (Kahan, 2012; GFRAS, 2016). This spirit cannot be taught or gained. While others see agripreneur is pure skills can be learnt and gained through training.

Therefore, the general design of the study reported here is based upon two theoretical frameworks and empirical findings dealing with the agripreneurship. The first framework is referring to agripreneurship as five steps process. Rudmann's theoretical and empirical work (Rudmann, 2008) on agripreneurship is very relevant to this study. He views agripreneurship as a learning process and it has five sets of skills groups.

1. Professional skills such as production and technical skills.
2. Management skills which include financial ability and administrative skills.
3. Opportunity skills which include acknowledge business opportunities and use them.
4. Strategic skills which include ongoing monitoring and evaluation enterprise progress.
5. Networking and outreaching skills to other enterprises to support and co-operation.

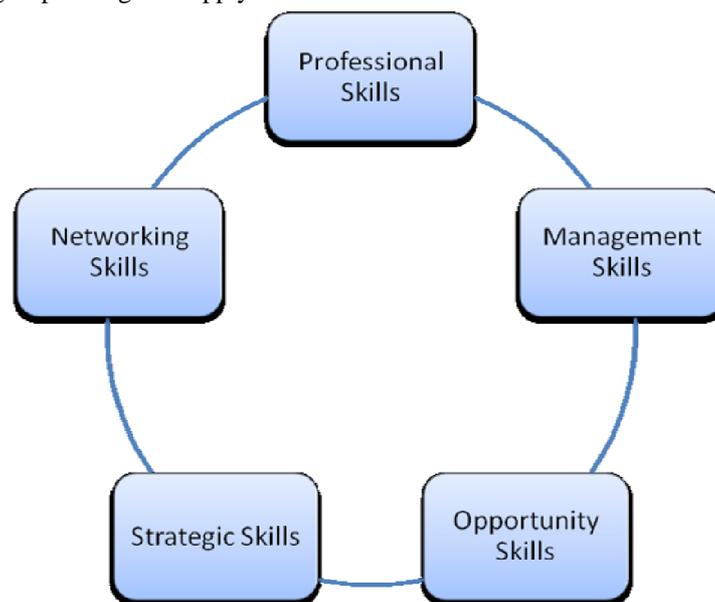


Figure 1. Agripreneurship Five sets of skills groups (Rudmann, 2008)



Figure 2. Ladder of Intension and Reasons for Farming (Kahan, 2012.P 5)

Although Agripreneurship is available for everyone, farms and farm workers are varied in their capacity to start or join agripreneurship. According to Kahan's theoretical framework in this study all farmers fit into a "Ladder of Intension and Reason" for farming which states four stages for farming practice (Kahan, 2012):

1. Exclusive for subsistence with rarely any surpluses produce.
2. Mostly for subsistence with intention of selling any surplus.
3. Partially for subsistence and partially for market.
4. Exclusively for the market.

The first group is referring to farmers who mainly farm for subsistence and rarely have surplus produce for market. This is group is far behind and they cannot commit to agripreneurship even if they have the skills or spirit to start. They usually suffer from poor infrastructure, lack of facilities and food insecurity. Subsistence farmers are almost always receives very minimum support by rural advisory services (RAS) and agricultural extension support (Leahy, 2011).

The second group on the ladder is farmers who produce for their household consumption and they often left with surplus to sell in market. This group of farmers has access to limited opportunities such as land and other resources which can be expanded through training or agricultural extension programs. They are often seen as a good potential agripreneurs; however, they lack the orientation and maybe some business skills.

The third group is very close to be agripreneurs but they lack the financial ability to make this transition. Those farmers value markets and wish to produce

exclusively commercial agriculture. In order for this group to become agripreneur they need market information, expanding labor and financial capacity.

The fourth group is market oriented producers and they have no interest to produce for household consumption. They are market driven and produce purely for profit. They have already what it takes to be agripreneur but it would be beneficial to include them in agriculture extension programs that support their managerial skills and discuss business innovation.

METHODOLOGY

Study Area:

A main concern of this research was to get information about promising opportunities and identifying challenges that hinder agripreneurship for women in East region in Cameroon. This case study was conducted in the Idenau town which is located in the South East region of Cameroon for the following reasons:

1. The women in this area were originally from Ghana and they do not have access to the government credit benefits.
2. Rural extension services were not forth coming within this region.
3. Women in this area were illegal immigrants.

In addition, this study presents a successful case of government funded projects in support of agripreneurship spirit.

Instrument:

This study was based on the responses of three researched group interviews. Each group consisted from

six middle aged women. And the data collection used the qualitative approach to gather information from the two groups. In addition, more interviews conducted with project managers and extension officers.



Project 1. The Idenau Smoked Fish Agripreneurship-Project Background

The success of the smoked fish women business groups in South East Region of Cameroon is a typical example for successful agripreneurship. As I approached the village with the agricultural extension officer who guided us through the village we observed several smokehouses within the village and we just visited three different fish smoking operations. We knew from the leader lady that most of the village residents are Ghanaian immigrants live in Cameroon for approximately 40 years. Women do not receive support from the Cameroonian government but they receive moderate support from the rural advisory services. Smoked fish is basically fish that has been cured by the process of smoking. The women who are involved in this business said they cannot fish as it is a man job so they wait for fish boats and buy the fish from men or get it for free if men are partner in the business. Although men are involved in the business, the women manage the finances, selling smoked fish and controlling the overall smoked process.



After entering the smoked house we saw small one floor building that has an old rusted metal roof, some windows for ventilation and a long table with wire bottom to let fire through. The fish gets placed in the table and get held between two long sticks. Under the table the women start a fire from local dried material from local trees. The fish must be turned around to assure best golden coloration. The whole smoking process takes around 4 days. The smoking fish agripreneur provide several values for the women in the

village. 1. They were able to increase the fish prices as they added value. 2. As explained by the women the fish is both for sale and for their own consumption. 3. The money earned is reinvested into their venture and also used to send their children to school. 4. Because the fish is smoked they have access to protein all year round. 5. The advantages of smoking fish are diverse: prolonging shelf life, enhancing flavor and increasing utilization. 6. The smoking process reduces waste at times of bumper catches and permits storage for seasons where fish catch is low.



Women in the village work in different groups or individually; however, they manage to hold a meeting monthly to support each other in business and most important to regulate the price between them. As a result they are able to make a reasonable profit for everyone in the business within the same village. The last note from women said before we left the side

“We wish to have more help from RAS to expand our business and need some medical help as we suffer from health complications from the smoke, particularly dry skin and burning eyes”.

The agricultural extension officer pointed out that residents of this village have some issue with the government as they are considered illegal immigrants. However, the government would not push them out the village but in the same time cannot provide a medical care for them without legal document. Although the situation is complicated as it involved legal status for women, the government provides a medium solution for the country as well for those women through rural advisory services without touching their legal stay.

Project 2. Cameroonian Government Initiation Transforming Training from a Fisherman to Agripreneur- Project Background



The Cameroonian Government funded an apprenticeship program for youth in different location to improve the fishery business. The program is sponsored by the French government in order to provide the country with agripreneur fishermen. 32 young men were selected through certain criteria to join the program for two years period. The program provides the trainee by all needed equipment along with personal stipend as incentives for them and their families. These young men are taught a wide range of skills from repairing nets to operating fishing boats. In the second year the young men were taught business plan and managerial skills. As a result the young men will become more than just mere fishermen but rather become master fishermen with entrepreneurial skills.

The Center Director comment on this program by saying: *“Cameroon imports a large portion of fish to satisfy domestic demand in the same time our local market lack manpower in this industry. Hence, the best way was to provide our labor market with well-trained fishermen to become independent agripreneurs which granted self-employment for those young men.”*

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Project 1. Participants identified key challenges and incentives involved in smoked fish project as followed:

Table 1. Challenges and factors hinder the women’s agripreneurship from progress in smoked fish project

1. Lack of rural advisory services in this area.
2. Fluctuation of fish prices due to weather changes.
3. Lack of technical facilities to ease their process of smoking fish such as ventilation fans and poor infrastructure inside the smoke house.
4. Lack of government support due to women’s illegal status.
5. Lack of medical awareness and support in dealing with dry skin problems and itching eyes in smoke houses.

Table 2. Successful factors that support the women’s agripreneurship in smoked fish project

1. Women were agripreneur in spirit and skilled at the same time.
2. All agripreneur in village work together and cooperate to control price and quality by forming women’s group for smoked fish producers.
3. The ‘enabling environment’ for agripreneur to work and nourish. In fact some women mention that they can adjust their illegal stay in Cameroon but they will plan it in future after earning some capital from current smoked fish agripreneur without risking their current business.

4. This business model has multiple benefits from food security to value add chain.
5. RAS did not invest in new culture and provide new innovation it rather works with existing environment for Ghanaian women who is already skillful in smoked fish business.

Project 2. Cameroonian Government Initiation “Transforming Training from a Fisherman to Agripreneur”

This project is an example of enabling environment through the government for future planning. The project is fully funded from the government and participants receive incentives along their practical knowledge acquired. In addition, graduates are connected to labor market which will remove the gap between education and labor markets in many traditional education systems.

Recommendation:

Participants in this study identified key recommendations for all actors and stakeholders involved in agriculture, rural development, and RAS to strive towards better support agripreneurship as followed:

1. A need to adopt policy frameworks and enabling environment in education systems including agripreneurship, value chain and commodity knowledge.
2. A need to enable financial insurance systems of grants, incentives and risk mitigation measures.
3. Establish agripreneurship-oriented governance that support and ensure more appropriate business-friendly infrastructure, fiscal and business policies.
4. Principles of action need to be developed regarding promoting both pro-active and reactive approaches to service provision such as tailoring RAS according to different needs of women, men, youth, smallholders, and vulnerable people
5. RAS needs to encourage innovation and creativeness in supporting sustainable and inclusive business model which serve sustainable production systems, profitable and equitable social standards.
6. A need for better coordination and complementarity between different RAS providers and actors along value chains, including support for new forms of public-private partnerships.
7. Ensuring enabling environment for agripreneurship to nourish and develop.

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الملخص العربي

تحديد بعض معوقات وعوامل نجاح مشاريع ريادة الأعمال الزراعية

قصص نجاح المرأة في الأقليم الشرقي في الكامبيرون

اميرة السيد عبدالله محمود

الزراعي الناجح؟. لذا تهدف هذه الدراسة لتحديد سمات رائد الأعمال الزراعي، معوقات رياده الاعمال الزراعية و تعزيز النتائج من خلال مبادرات ومشاريع ناجحة من الإقليم الشرقي في الكامبيرون.

الكلمات الافتتاحية: ريادة الأعمال الزراعية، الحد من الفقر، الارشاد الزراعي، التنمية.

أدت التكتلات الاقتصادية عالميا و نتيجة تطوير وتحديث الاسواق الزراعية إلى تطورهائل في الانتاج الزراعي. وعليه فقدت تحولت الزراعة من مهنة بسيطة الي مهنة معقدة تطبق مبادئ ريادة الاعمال وايضا تطورت الزراعة كى تواكب سلاسل الانتاج ومشاريع ريادة الاعمال الزراعية. و لكن يبقى السؤال هل كل المزارعين قادرين على مواكبه تلك التغيرات؟ وماهى سمات رائد الاعمال