

**ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF STRATEGIC ENTREPRENEURSHIP SKILLS
TRAINING WORKSHOPS ON SMALL-HOLDER FARMERS'
ENTREPRENEURIAL COMPETENCE AND CAPABILITIES: CASE STUDIES OF
DOTITO IRRIGATION SCHEME IN MASHONALAND CENTRAL PROVINCE
AND MITCHELL AND MITCHELL IN MASHONALAND EAST PROVINCE,
ZIMBABWE**

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ABSTRACT: *The study was aimed at assessing the entrepreneurial competence and capabilities of the local farmers after the government had introduced strategic entrepreneurship workshops to some parts of the rural areas such as Dotito Irrigation Scheme and Mitchell and Mitchell. Strategic entrepreneurship workshops were aimed at equipping farmers with skills that promote the sustenance of their agricultural businesses as well as increasing productivity. The study employed the mixed methodology to increase validity and credibility of the findings. The hypothesis of the study was that strategic entrepreneurship workshops would improve the entrepreneurial capability and competence of the rural farmers. The study found that strategic entrepreneurship workshops enabled the majority of the rural farmers to satisfy their customers, train their children in the farming business adapt to the environmental changes and to be able to successfully market their produce. Farmers in these areas had poor marketing and strategic skills which could enable them to increase productivity and earn more profits. This was because they did not have the basic strategic skills, since most of them were not highly educated. The research recommended that the Government of Zimbabwe should introduce strategic entrepreneurship training workshops as a policy to all farmers in the country.*

KEYWORDS: Entrepreneurial Competence, Entrepreneurial Capability, Agricultural Business, Strategic Entrepreneurship, Productivity.

INTRODUCTION

This study was aimed at assessing the entrepreneurial capability and competence of the local farmers at Dotito Irrigation Scheme in Mashonaland Central and Mitchell and Mitchell in Mashonaland East Provinces. The projects comprised of farmers who were in poverty stricken communities where the government introduced irrigation schemes to promote social development. Seeing that productivity in these areas remained stagnant, the government introduced strategic entrepreneurship training workshops to equip these local farmers with the skills which would enable them to increase productivity and be able to remain in farming business despite the fact that there were economic and environmental changes. Some of these local farmers ended up migrating to urban areas to look for employment so that they would be able to support their families. This was only because they farmers were losing interest in their agricultural activities, as they were not able to manage them strategically.

The concept of competence in entrepreneurship lies in making the potential small business owner aware of the importance of certain entrepreneurial skills. Best et al (2004) notes that limited entrepreneurial skills such as poor marketing skills constrained the rural farmers in Uganda. There is a relationship between agricultural entrepreneurship skills and economic

performance in the agricultural sector. Agricultural entrepreneurship skills necessary in the European Union were collected by the European Union Project and these included professional, information technology, reading, logical thinking, creativity, ability to solve problems and those that are relevant to the business. However, for this study entrepreneurial skills which were to be assessed included the ability to; market the produce, adapt to the environment and plan for the future. Even though there has been a shift in farmers' awareness in the agricultural business, among the researchers and within the government in the last few years towards entrepreneurial culture in the farming business, the expectation directed at farmers is still that they should become more entrepreneurial (Rudmann, 2008).

The environment in which agricultural entrepreneurs operate is changing constantly and this requires farmers to adapt to the vagaries of the market, changing consumer habits and enhanced environmental regulations McElwee (2004). Managing and running an enterprise successfully in this dynamic setting therefore requires substantial tangible resources such as physical and financial resources (Rudmann, 2008). It is recognised that in markets characterised by dynamic changes, some entrepreneurs become alert and develop knowledge, making information investments that others do not (Busenitz et al, 2004). This clearly explains that entrepreneurial capability and competence should be the main characteristics that are to be possessed by the farmers in the changing environment.

Background to the study

A large part of poverty reduction strategies in developing countries, particularly in Africa is predicated on expanding agricultural production and improving the output and capabilities of the small holder farmers (Mills,2010).The advent of black economic empowerment and the upliftment of previously disadvantaged groups have seen a number of new and emerging entrepreneurs come into lime light. Thus, the government introduced strategic entrepreneurship skills workshops to equip the small holder farmers with skills which would transform agriculture for the better. Henceforth, this research was aimed at assessing the entrepreneurial competence of small holder farmers.

Most of the farmers were losing interest in their farming business as a result lack of markets, failing to price their outputs in a way which would enable them make profit, failing to provide the much needed produce at the market as well as unable to produce quality products which would meet the market standards. Kawa and Kaitira (2007) explain that small-holder farmers face a variety of new challenges in coping with the requirements of a free market. They further explained that small-holder farmers are poorly prepared to respond to market mechanisms, they only partly understand (such as fluctuations in demand and prices) or to meet the demands of traders for specific product quality and quantity. As a consequence of this these farmers face some complications in developing realistic marketing challenges. Farmers in Dotito Irrigation Scheme and at Mitchell and Mitchell needed to be equipped with strategic entrepreneurship skills so that they would be able to deal realistically with changing market situations. Their linkages with the markets were tenuous.

Nieman et al (2004) note that successful entrepreneurs are known to have certain entrepreneurial skills those include the ability to solve business problems and to adapt to the changing environment. Entrepreneurial competence is referred to as a kind of human capital that is comprised of skills that are crucial for the realisation of their potentials. In rural areas, building community entrepreneurial capacity is indispensable for human development. Mills (2010) notes that without the existence of small business in poverty stricken communities,

joblessness and poverty would increase and therefore, these communities would not be able to meet the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as set out by the United Nations (Fete, 2012). Thus, irrigation schemes are also small businesses that require farmers to be entrepreneurially competent if their farming businesses are to survive sustainably and productively. Entrepreneurial capability can be explained as the ability of entrepreneurs to pursue entrepreneurial activities with success McKenzie (2007). Some of the determinations or indicators of entrepreneurial capabilities include the ability to market the produce successfully, adapting to environmental changes, satisfying customers, being committed, perseverance and being able to determine the prices of the products. A capable entrepreneur views his or her business as of a long term. Farmers at Dotito Irrigation scheme in Mashonaland Central and at Mitchell and Mitchell in Mashonaland East Provinces grew crops such as tomatoes, potatoes, leafy vegetables, green beans, green maize and chillies for sale and for family consumption. These crops require them to apply strategic entrepreneurship skills if they were to succeed. The study was therefore, aimed at assessing the entrepreneurial competence and capabilities of these small holder farmers after the introduction of strategic entrepreneurship skills workshops by the government. Agriculture is the mainstay of the country's economic growth yet farmers in rural areas are losing interest in the farming business as they are unable to take advantage of markets beyond their local communities. The Government of Zimbabwe introduced strategic entrepreneurship skills training workshops as a way of restoring farmers' confidence which was overthrown by the environmental changes and a way to increase agricultural productivity. It is from this background that the researcher seeks to assess the impact of these training workshops on the farmers' agricultural business and the farmers' level of entrepreneurship competence and capabilities as a result of attending strategic entrepreneurship skills training workshops.

Objectives

- to assess the impact of strategic entrepreneurship skills training workshops on farmers' entrepreneurial competence and capabilities;
- to evaluate the farmers' level of entrepreneurial competence and capability ;
- to document the farmer' perceptions and attitudes towards strategic entrepreneurship training workshops and
- to identify the challenges faced by the farmers in the strategic entrepreneurship training workshops.
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Research Questions

- 1) What are the impacts of strategic entrepreneurship on the farmers' entrepreneurial competence and capabilities?
- 2) What is the farmers 'level of entrepreneurial competence and capability?
- 3) What are the farmers' perceptions and attitudes towards the strategic entrepreneurship skills training workshops?
- 4) What are the challenges faced by the farmers in the strategic entrepreneurship training workshops?
- 5)

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted at Dotito Irrigation Scheme in Mashonaland Central and at Mitchell and Mitchell in Mashonaland East provinces. The former has 95 farmers and each farmer has 0, 6 hectares while the later has 300 farmers and each farmer has 1 to 2 hectares of land in the

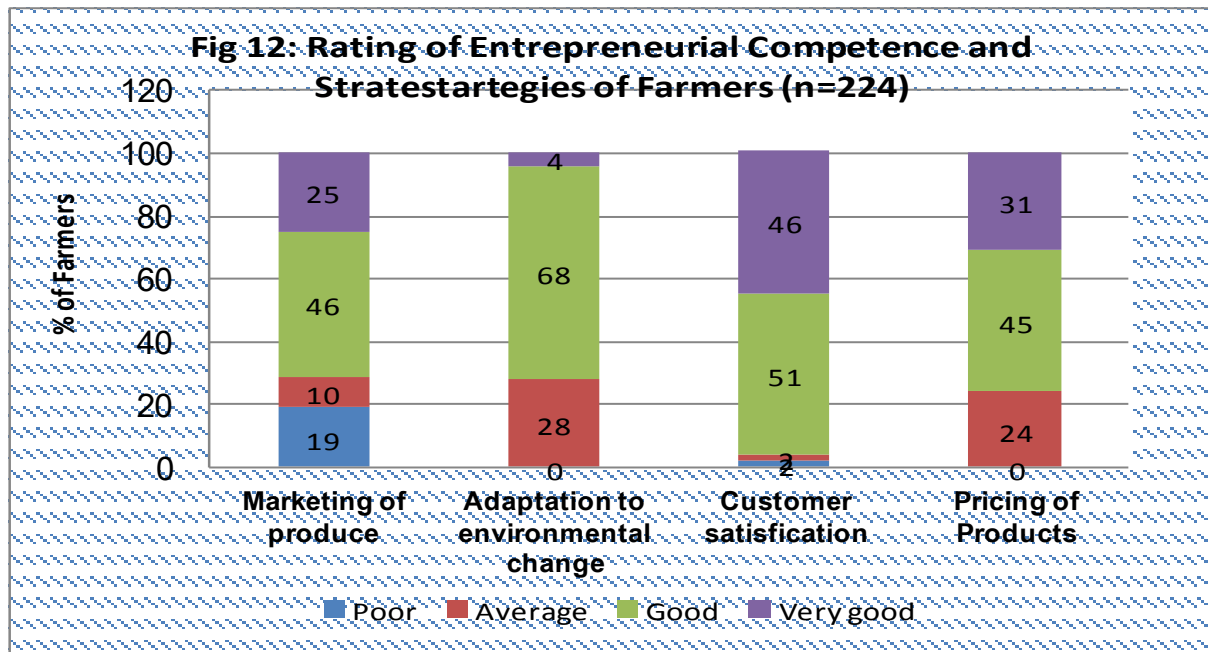
irrigation scheme. The researcher used both quantitative and qualitative approaches to increase validity, credibility and reliability of the research. The former is important as it quantifies the variable outcome, and the later being used in interpreting the results of the study. The researcher used the open ended questionnaire as the main data collection instrument. A representative sample of 67 at Dotito irrigation Scheme was selected and 169 were selected for the open ended questionnaires. Data from 224 respondents were presented since 3 questionnaires were spoiled. Simple random sampling was used in selecting the respondents in both provinces. The criterion for simple random sampling method was that sample members are chosen randomly for inclusion in the sample, with each population element having an equal chance of being selected (Diamantopoulos and Schlegelmilch, 2005). The researcher used content analysis to analyse qualitative data and Statistical Packaging for Social Sciences (SPSS) to analyse quantitative data. Bar graphs and pie charts were also used to present the findings of the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section demonstrates the results of the indicators or pointers of entrepreneurial capabilities and competence of the local farmers at Dotito Irrigation Scheme in Mashonaland Central Province and Mitchell and Mitchell in Mashonaland East Province. The indicators are as follows; entrepreneurial competence and strategies, entrepreneurial prospects in the farming business, training children for succession planning, commitment and perseverance.

Entrepreneurial competence and strategies

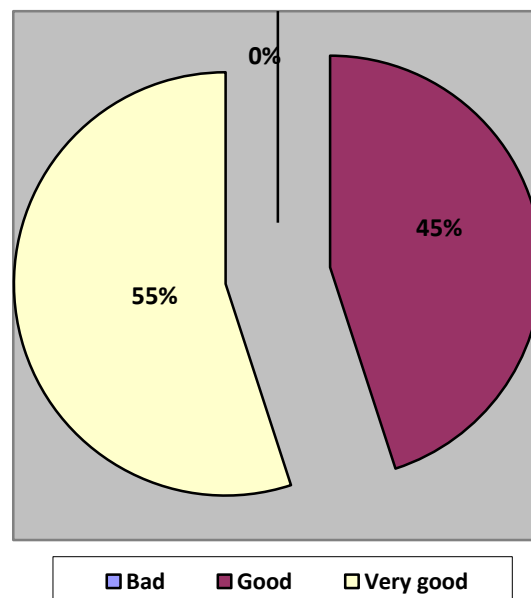
Findings had shown that 46% of the respondents were good at marketing their produce, 25% were very good, 10% were average and 19% were poor at marketing their produce. Findings also demonstrated that 68% of the respondents were good at adapting to environmental change, 28% were average and 4% were very good. 51% of the respondents said that they were good at satisfying their customers but 2 % were poor. 2% were average while 46 % said that they were very good at making their customers happy. In pricing the products, 45% said that they were good, 24% were average, and 31% were very good at pricing their products. Thus, the results confirm that the introduction of strategic entrepreneurship skills by the government improved the farmers' entrepreneurial competence and strategies. The majority of the respondents proved that they were now good at marketing their produce and few respondents were still poor at marketing their produce as has been shown by the findings. More so, the results appear to indicate that strategic entrepreneurship skills workshops improved the farmers' ability to adapt to environmental changes as well as the ability to satisfy their customers. Dollinger (2005) notes that a successful entrepreneur is able to satisfy clients. The fact that the respondents have good customer care is an indicator of entrepreneurial competence and capability. Further, the results show that majority of the respondents have improved in pricing their products and thus the local farmers in these study areas are becoming entrepreneurially capable and competent. Before they attended the strategic entrepreneurship workshops, majority of the respondents were poor at pricing their produce.



Respondents' Future prospects about the farming business

Research findings had shown that no one had a bad future prospect of the farming business as 45 % had indicated that they had good future prospects of the farming business and 55%

Fig 11: Future Prospects of Farming Business



indicated that they had very good future prospects in the farming business.

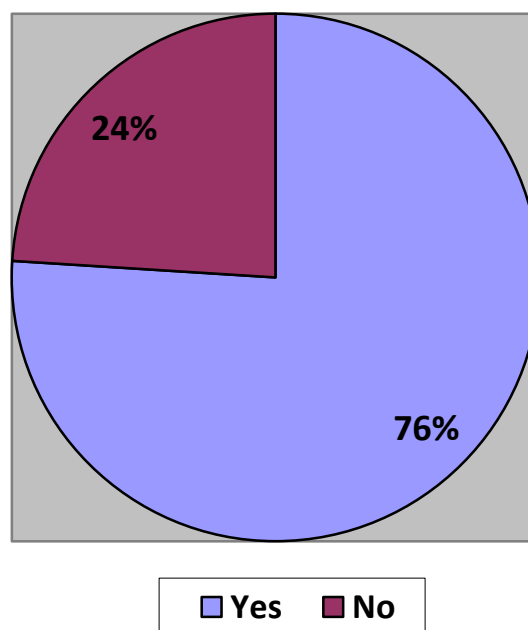
These results indicate that the respondents developed to be successful entrepreneurs. Majority of the respondents have shown that they have good future prospects of their businesses. This means that the respondents find their business interesting and fascinating. If an entrepreneur

has good future prospects in his or her business it means that he or she has passion in that business. Nieman et al (2004) note that passion is one of the key success factors in entrepreneurship. They also note that those entrepreneurs who have passion are more likely to succeed in their businesses.

Training of the family members in farming business

Findings had shown that 76% of the respondents trained their children in the farming business while 24% indicated that they did not train them.

Fig 2: Training of Family members about family business (n=224)



The above results show that the 76 % of the respondents have become entrepreneurially capable and competent as they are training their children on how to run the family business which is also an indicator of entrepreneurial competence when the entrepreneur is able to prepare for succession. Succession planning is one of the enablers of survival of the business for generations (Fete, 2012). A successful entrepreneur trains family members on how the business is run. This shows that respondents are becoming entrepreneurially competent and capable as the majority of them were able to plan for the future so that they could be able to withstand harsh conditions and be able to remain in business, despite the fact that there would be social, economic and environmental changes.

Respondents' view of their farming activity

Research findings had shown that 4% of the respondents viewed their farming activity as one of the short term, 9% viewed it as of medium term, and 86 % viewed it as of long term while 56% viewed it as viable as shown on the table below.

Viewing of the Farming Activity		
View	Frequency	Percentage
Short	8	4%
Medium	20	9%
Long	192	86%
Viable	126	56%
Other	3	1%

The results in this study indicated that majority of the respondents viewed their farming business as viable and of long term. This clearly shows that they were interested and satisfied with their farming activity. An entrepreneur cannot develop interest in the business if he or she is not able to solve problems. The fact that the majority of respondents view their farming as viable and of long term depicts that these respondents have developed successful entrepreneurship skills which enhance their entrepreneurial capabilities and competence.

Assessing the respondents' commitment and perseverance

Respondents reported that they were able to overcome problems in their day to day running of agricultural business. They reported that they were committed to their agricultural business activity because that was where their income to support their families was coming from. They also said that they were able to solve problems as they occur. In this study, entrepreneurs were assessed on how they managed to come up with solutions and their ability to manage their agricultural business strategically. The study has shown that majority of the respondents were committed and dedicated to their farming business. Thus, most of the respondents were found to be highly competent and persevering in solving problems. Timmons and Spenelli (2003) view successful entrepreneurs as those who seek to overcome hurdles, solve problems, complete jobs, disciplined and persistent in solving problems. This clearly shows that these respondents were becoming capable entrepreneurs in the farming business.

Farmers' Perceptions and Attitudes towards the strategic entrepreneurship skills training workshops.

The results from the findings have shown that farmers had positive attitude towards the strategic skills training workshops. 88% of the farmers strongly agreed that they wanted these workshops to be conducted thrice a week. 10% agreed that these workshops can be conducted thrice a week and 2% disagreed that these workshops be conducted thrice a week. This implies that the respondents found these workshops very useful and therefore had a positive attitude towards them. If the respondents had negative attitude towards these, they would not have agreed to attend these workshops several times. In addition to that, the respondents through interviews explained that they perceived these workshops as useful and relevant to their horticultural business. 100% of respondents indicated that they strongly liked to attend strategic entrepreneurship skills training workshops and none of them did not want to bunk these lessons. This indicates that they had a positive attitude towards these workshops and if they were bored by these workshops they would have indicated that they disliked attending them. Respondents also explained that they were feeling so cheerful, happy and blissful about these workshops. This indicates that these farmers had positive attitude towards these workshops.

Challenges faced by the farmers' in the training workshops

Respondents indicated that they would not understand some of the terms used by the trainers in explaining some of the issues. They reported that they would not understand English properly yet the trainer often used English when they were explaining. Respondents explained that they wanted trainers to use their mother language "shona". This implies that these respondents were not highly educated and they would not understand English. Respondents explained that shortage of time was a challenge to them. They said that the training would run for about four hours yet they would also want to work in their irrigation projects. This shows that respondents had positive attitudes towards these training workshops. Even though they wanted to work on their fields, they prioritised attending the workshop because they found them useful and relevant.

CONCLUSION

Findings from the study showed that most of entrepreneurial competence and capability indicators identified, were strongly represented by the majority of the respondents. This shows that farmers at Dotito Irrigation Scheme in Mashonaland Central Province and at Mitchell and Mitchell in Mashonaland East Province were entrepreneurially competent and capable. The study has shown that few farmers were entrepreneurially incompetent and incapable. The found that strategic entrepreneurship training workshops improved the farmers' entrepreneurial competence and capabilities in their horticultural business. The research found that training workshops enabled farmers to market their products effectively, adapt to the changing environment and price their products as a result of attending strategic entrepreneurship skills training workshops. The use of English by the trainers was a challenge to the trainees. The study therefore recommends that, to improve the entrepreneurial capability and competence of the small-holder farmers, strategic entrepreneurship workshops should be earnestly introduced as a policy to all farmers in rural areas in the country. The trainers are also recommended to use the language which is understood by the by the majority of the trainees.

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