



Tropentag, September 15-17, 2021, hybrid conference

“Towards shifting paradigms in agriculture
for a healthy and sustainable future”

System Approaches for Understanding Rural Women’s Agri-food Entrepreneurship in Oyo State Nigeria

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Abstract

Women in rural communities are at the forefront of harsh economic impacts. Women take care of the home and are entrusted with household food and nutrition requirements. If equipped with the right resources such as sufficient income, women work to make sure their families are food secure. To this end, rural women engage in entrepreneurial activities such as food processing and trade as a means of earning additional income.

Policies and intervention programs designed to enhance the entrepreneurial capacities of these rural women mostly take a reductionist approach and use standard recommendations and thereby fail to understand the full context and motivations behind these entrepreneurial decisions. This also leads to a lack of understanding of how the business functions under the prevailing and often adverse conditions.

This research was carried out with the Osanetu women’s group in Oyo State, Nigeria. The purpose of this research is to employ a systems approach for the analysis of rural small scale agri-food entrepreneurship including Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation (PME) to involve the women in analysis. The essence is to deeply understand the motivations behind their entrepreneurial engagement and how disturbances affecting their processing are managed. We used a qualitative research design incorporating participatory methods and tools. We employed adapted second-order cybernetics as a system approach to understand fully why these entrepreneurs do what they do.

Findings revealed that these rural women were extrinsically motivated, opportunity-, and socially-driven entrepreneurs. Through constant observation of their production system, these women entrepreneurs regulate/control their group business production processes, observed disturbances, and proffered context-specific solutions to counter these disturbances. PME proved valuable as a method that helped the women to systematically observe their production processes through monitoring and hence to gain better knowledge about them.

This research will help policymakers and change agents to better tailor their strategies to enhance the entrepreneurial capacities of rural women entrepreneurs. Using a systems approach to understand rural entrepreneurship can lead to the creation of more profitable and sustainable businesses in rural communities.

Keywords: Entrepreneurship, monitoring & evaluation, motivation, participatory, second-order cybernetics, systems approach