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Entrepreneurship Skills needed by Youths for Employment in Regulated Starch Production Occupations in Abia State

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Abstract

The Study focused on entrepreneurship skills needed by youths for employment in regulated starch production occupations in Abia state. The study adopted survey research design. Three research questions were answered and three hypotheses tested. The population was 127, made up of 45 registered women in starch production occupations and 82 extension agents. Questionnaire was used for data collection. Data were analyzed using mean, standard deviation and t-test. Findings include needed entrepreneurship skills in planning, production and marketing of starch to succeed in regulated starch production occupations. There was no significance difference in the mean ratings of the responses of the women and extension agents. It was recommended, among others, that, Abia State government will integrate the findings of the study into her Skill Acquisitions Centres.

Key words: Entrepreneurship, Skills, Youths, Employment, Regulated, Occupations.

Introduction

Starch is a whitish substance that forms an important part of foods especially cassava starch. The product can be classified into food and industrial types. According to Sanni, Maziya, Akanya & Okoro(2005), starch is of food grade when it is granular and free from objectionable odour and taste, while industrial starch is one, other than food grade, which may be modified. The production of industrial starch is of primary concern to this study. Production is explained by Orie & Ibekwe (2014), as the process by which resources or raw materials are transformed into forms capable of satisfying human wants. It is also viewed as a business venture that involves the efficient conversion of available inputs into useful products using factors of production such as

land, labour, capital and entrepreneur (Sharma, Tiwari & Sharma, 2010).

The industrial starch can be used to produce several industrial products, including adhesives, thickening agents, pharmaceutical products, textiles and paints (Sanni, *et al,* 2005). Production, therefore, involves activities to be performed towards generating money and materials for living. Production of starch can provide opportunities for people to earn a living.

Many people in Abia state engage in starch production occupation as a means of getting money to solve their economic problems. This will help to reduce social ills associated with unemployment (Nwobah, 2009). However, a study carried out by Sanni (1992) on food safety, reported cases of death attributed to poorly processed cassava products. The study further revealed that such products were low in quality. The situation may reduce the sale and consumption of cassava products, including starch (Food and Agricultural Organisation, 2013). The situation justifies quality regulation of starch.

Regulation is official instruction that states how activities must be carried out or what is allowed in an organization. In starch production, regulations are legal enactments made to ensure that starch conforms to prescribed levels of excellence in the area of production, distribution, storage, packaging and sales (Sanni *et al*, 2005). Regulated products are those that are in line with the guidelines of regulatory bodies. In Nigeria, the regulatory agency for starch is National Agency for Foods and Drugs Administration and Control (NAFDAC). Thus, NAFDAC regulates the production and sale of cassava products to ensure that they are qualitative, safe, hygienic and wholesome (Onuka, 2008). In this study, regulated starch production occupations are starch and allied businesses in the area of production, distribution, packaging and marketing which conform to NAFDAC quality standard. Starch is said to conform to regulated condition if it is white in colour and free from bad odour and taste (Sanni *et al*, 2005). Thus, the production of starch could be a source of employment and wealth creation (Manofede, 2017).

Employment is work that you do to earn money. According to Osinem and Nwoji (2005), it is the type of job, business, career or trade that individuals undertake to earn a living. Therefore, Nigeria can reduce the poverty level of her citizens through entrepreneurship programmes in starch production. Entrepreneurship is the investment of one's resources in worthwhile projects for generating wealth for one's economic survival (Onuka and Olaitan, 2007).Thus,

entrepreneurship has to do with making a living by working for oneself instead of looking for employment else way. Someone who owns and manages a business and accepts the risks and responsibilities of business ownership to gain profit and personal satisfaction is an entrepreneur (Orie and Ibekwe,2014). Entrepreneurship involves a number of non-sequential and often overlapping stages or process. The stages involve; the entrepreneur discovering a business, planning the business and implementing the business plans. Successful implementation of the business plans depends greatly on the possession of skills.

Skills are those special abilities required by individuals to perform certain activities (Abullah, 2012, Adoewu, 2008). In this study, one is skilled when he has the training and experience that is needed to perform starch production occupations effectively. Skills which are needed to plan and carry out enterprises are regarded as entrepreneurship skills. Onuka & Olaitan (2007), in their study on entrepreneurships skills, identified three entrepreneurship skills. They are planning, production (processing) and marketing skills. This study is delimited to these entrepreneurship skills.

Various stakeholders are involved in starch production and training. They include International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA) Ibadan, National Root Crop Research Institute (NRCRI) Umudike, starch production industries and Abia State Agricultural Extension Agents. Their opinions are necessary in determining the skill needs of those interested in starch production. It is therefore, worthwhile to compare the opinions of these bodies. This informs the comparisons of the opinions of agricultural extension agents and women in commercial starch production industries in the study.

For success in regulated starch production, planning is very important. Planning helps individuals to avoid losses and make effective use of production resources. Planning activities in starch production include: setting goals for the enterprise, deciding on suitable location, arranging for adequate supply of cassava roots in advance for processing into starch, incorporating the enterprise and starting-up cassava processing occupation (Patino, Okechukwu and Ezedinma, 2005).

The processing steps include procuring and storing low cyanide cassava roots in the store, peeling and grating cassava roots into mash, mixing the mash with water and filtering the mash according to NAFDAC guidelines (Patino *et al*, 2005). The processes should be completed within 24 hours to

eliminate odour and dirty colour. Thereafter, the starch is sent to the market. The starch producer should in the opinion of Brisibe (2003), be able to grade starch according to types, packages starch in good bags, identify customers and fix prices of starch. Crawens and Piercy (2013) on their part, submitted that entrepreneurs should sell directly to users, for instance textile industries, to avoid bottlenecks arising from the involvement of middlemen in the distribution chains and keep records of transaction especially accounting records. Cassava starch business could provide opportunity for people especially youths, to make money and change their mindset about working for others (Olokor, 2016). Youths refer to young adult between the age range of 12 and 25 years that have energy and vigour for work.

In Abia State, there are many youths who have no job to earn a living. These youths depend on their relations for their basic needs. A few others are into starch production but they lack knowledge and entrepreneurship skills to produce starch in line with NAFDAC standard (Onuka,2008). Consequently, they produce poor quality products with low patronage. These youths could be trained to acquire entrepreneurship skills in starch production. It is therefore necessary to identify entrepreneurship skills that could stimulate increased youth participation in starch production. With these skills, youths could be trained in regulated cassava starch production occupations for the purpose of earning sustainable living, increase the supply of cassava starch in the market and at the same time improve the economies of Abia State and those of individuals.

Purpose of study

This study focused on entrepreneurship skills required by youths for employment in regulated starch production occupations in Abia State. Specifically, the study identified entrepreneurships skills required for:

(1) planning regulated starch production business,
(2) producing starch in line with regulations, and
(3) marketing starch in line with NAFDAC guidelines.

Research questions

What are the entrepreneurships skills required for:

(1) planning regulated starch production occupations?
(2) producing starch in line with regulations?
(3) marketing starch in line with NAFDAC guidelines?

Hypotheses

There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of the responses of

registered starch producers and extension agents on the entrepreneurship skills required for planning, production and marketing of starch in line with NAFDAC guidelines.

Methodology

Area of the study: The area of the study is Abia State. Starch is in great demand in the state, yet only a few farmers are in commercial starch production. This informed the choice of the state for the study.

***Design of the study*:** The study adopted survey research design. In survey research, a population or a sample of it is asked a series of questions about their opinion or thought on a given subject (Feldman, 2013; Uzoagulu, 2011). The design is appropriate for the study as it sought information from registered starch producers and agricultural extension agents using questionnaire.

***Population for the study*:** The population for the study was 127, made up of 45 registered women in starch production (starch producers) and 82 agricultural extension agents in the same area of study. The two groups of respondents are major stakeholders in starch production whose opinions are necessary in determining the skill needs of starch producers. The population was small and therefore, the entire population constituted the sample size for the study.

***Instrument for data collection*:** The instrument for data collection was questionnaire developed from literature reviewed and information from starch production industries. Each entrepreneurship skill items has four point response scale of Highly Required (HR), Required (R), Required Little (RL), and Not Required (NR) with corresponding value 4, 3, 2 and 1. The respondents were requested to rank the response options to an item based on the level at which each item is required by youths for employment in regulated starch production occupation in Abia State. The instrument was validated by three experts and tested for reliability using Cronback Alpha method. Cronback Alpha coefficient of 0.85 was obtained for the instrument.

***Data collection and analysis techniques*:** Three research assistants were employed and given orientation on how to administer and retrieve the questionnaire from the respondents. One hundred and twenty seven (127) copies of the questionnaire were administered by the respondents using three trained research assistants who also retrieved them on completion. The data obtained were analyzed using mean and standard deviation to answer research questions and t-test statistics to test the hypotheses.

The value attached to the response options were Highly Required (HR) =4 points, Required (R) =3 points, Required Little (RL) = 2 Points and Not Required (NR) = 1 points. The cut-off point was calculated as follows: items with mean value 2.50 and above were accepted while those below were rejected. The hypotheses of no significant difference were upheld for items whose t-calculated value were less than t- table value and rejected if otherwise.

Results

Table 1: Mean and t–test results of the responses of registered starch producers and agricultural extension agents on the entrepreneurships skills required by youths for planning regulated starch production occupation (N=127)

S/N	Entrepreneurships skills: ability to:	$\_X_1$	SD_1	$\_X_2$	SD_2	t-cal	Remark
1.	set goals for starch production occupation.	3.93	0.56	3.06	0.58	0.81	R/NS
2.	identify major activities (unit operations) to be carried out to meet the starch production objectives.	2.83	0.57	8.80	0.58	0.10	R/NS
3.	source fund for the production and marketing of starch.	3.17	0.57	3.50	2.26	1.35	R/NS
4.	identify customers for starch to be produced.	3.00	0.80	3.13	0.60	-0.38	R/NS
5.	determine the scale of production.	3.33	0.27	3.20	0.58	0.41	R/NS
6.	locate NAFDAC approved site for building starch factory.	2.50	0.30	2.90	0.37	-0.49	R/NS
7.	select NAFDAC approved, tools and materials for production, packaging and storage of cassava starch.	3.50	0.70	2.73	0.49	2.40	R/NS
8.	arrange for sweet cassava roots for processing.	3.00	0.40	2.50	0.26	2.12	R/NS
9.	identify competent personnel to work in the starch enterprise and train them.	3.50	0.30	3.40	0.25	0.44	R/NS
10.	arrange for the registration of the starch production enterprise.	3.83	0.17	3.73	0.20	0.50	R/NS
11.	decide quality control activities to embark on	3.17	0.57	3.43	0.25	1.09	R/NS
12.	decide how to dispose-off cassava waste after production.	3.30	0.67	2.83	0.49	1.56	R/NS
13	budget for all the identified starch production ac'tivities.	2.67	1.07	2.60	0.32	0.23	R/NS

Key: X= mean, SD=standard deviation, NS= Not significant, R=Required, t-tab=2.02

Table 1 reveals that all the 13 planning skill items obtained mean score above the cut-off point of 2.50. This shows that all the entrepreneurship skills were required for planning regulated starch production occupation. The table also shows that all the 13 entrepreneurship skill items had their t-calculated values less than t-table values of 2.02 (two-tail). Therefore, there was no significance difference in the mean ratings of the responses of registered starch producers and agricultural extension agents.

Table 2: Mean and t-test results of registered starch producers and agricultural extension agents on the entrepreneurships skills for producing starch in line with regulations *(N=127)*

S/N	Entrepreneurship skills: ability to:	X_1	SD_1	X_2	SD_2	t-cal	Remark
1.	check whether facilities used in starch production are in good working condition.	3.50	0.52	2.70	0.29	0.80	R/NS
2.	measure tons of cassava roots for processing.	2.50	0.29	2.90	0.56	1.25	R/NS
3.	peel cassava with peeler and wash.	3.67	0.26	3.47	0.27	0.88	R/NS
4.	grate cassava roots to NAFDAC specifications.	3.31	0.66	3.40	0.24	-0.27	R/NS
5.	sieve cassava mash.	3.00	0.79	3.00	0.55	0.00	R/NS
6.	allow starch solution to settle in plastic drums overnight.	2.83	0.56	2.70	0.52	0.20	R/NS
7.	wash the starch severally to remove the coloured surface and allow the starch solution to settle again.	2.50	0.29	2.60	0.31	-0.40	R/NS
8.	dewater the mash (slurry) in clean bag by pressing using hydraulic press.	3.83	0.16	3.31	0.19	0.50	R/NS
9.	break starch cake into small particles (granules) and allow to settle again in plastic drums.	3.24	0.34	3.15	0.31	0.59	R/NS
10.	dry starch using rotary dryer.	3.00	0.80	2.87	0.67	0.36	R/NS
11.	mill and sieve starch again using very fine sieve.	2.67	0.27	3.03	0.52	-0.18	R/NS
12.	run out starch from the milling machine into polyethylene bags in 25kg weight and stitch.	2.67	0.67	2.96	0.59	-0.87	R/NS
13.	record the tonnage or number of bags of starch produced.	3.60	0.27	3.47	0.39	0.73	R/NS
14.	pack/store finished starch in the store.	2.67	0.27	2.97	0.31	1.22	R/NS

Key: X= Mean, SD=Standard deviation, NS=Not Significant, R=Required, t-tab=2.02

Table 2 indicates that all the entrepreneurship skill items were above the cut-off point of 2.05. Therefore, they are all required for

developing starch in line with regulations (NAFDAC standard). The table also revealed that the items had their t-calculated values less than t-table value. This implies, there was no significant difference in the mean ratings of the responses of registered starch producers and agricultural extension agents on the skills for producing starch to NAFDAC standard. Therefore, the null hypothesis of no significant difference is upheld.

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Table 3: Mean and t–test result of the responses of registered starch producers and agricultural extension agents on the entrepreneurships skills for marketing starch in line with NAFDAC guideline *(127).*

S/N	Entrepreneurship skills: ability to	X_1	SD_1	X_2	SD_2	t-cal	Remark
1.	package starch in polythene bags for sale and label correctly.	3.67	0.16	2.80	0.67	0.87	R/NS
2.	record tons or bags of starch produced for sale.	2.67	0.27	2.87	0.30	-0.55	R/NS
3.	fix prices of starch after assessing market situation.	3.35	0.27	3.27	0.27	0.29	R/NS
4.	notify consumers/customers about starch produced.	3.02	0.60	2.87	0.52	0.36	R/NS
5.	sell cassava starch to individuals and companies.	2.66	0.27	3.03	0.52	-0.18	R/NS
6.	collect and collate market information on starch.	2.67	0.67	2.96	0.59	-0.87	R/NS
7.	keep records of starch sold.	3.60	0.27	3.47	0.39	0.73	R/NS
8.	submit record of sales to account department.	3.31	0.67	3.00	0.34	1.19	R/NS

Remark: X=mean, SD=standard deviation, NS=Not Significant, R=Required, t-tab=2.02.

Table 3 reveals that all the items were above the cut- off point of 2.50. Therefore, they are all required for marketing starch in line with NAFDAC guide lines. The table also reveals that the items had their t-calculated values less than t-tab value of 2.02 (two-tail). Therefore, there was no significant difference in the mean rating of the opinions of the two groups of respondents on the entrepreneurships skills for marketing starch in line with NAFDAC guidelines.

Discussion of findings

The results in Table 1 show that 13 entrepreneurship skills were required for planning regulated starch

production occupations. They are ability to set goals for starch production occupations, identify major activities to be carried out to meet starch production objectives, sources fund for the production and marketing of starch, identify customers for starch to be produced, determine the scales of production, locate NAFDAC approved site for building starch factory and seven other items. These findings are in line with the opinions of Patino *et al* (2005), who stated that the entrepreneurs in starch production should be able to set goals and strategies to accomplish them, decide on suitable location for the starch production business and arrange for adequate supply of sweet cassava roots in advance for processing into starch. The results also validate the opinions of Onuka (2008), who said that the entrepreneurs should also be able to register the business prior to commencement of serious production activities and select appropriate production facilities.

Table 2 reveals 14 entrepreneurship skills items youths will require to be able to process starch in line with regulations. The items are: check whether facilities used in starch production are in good working condition, measure tons of cassava roots for processing, peel cassava with peeler and so on. The finding is in line with Patino et al (2005), who outlined starch production processes to include peeling cassava, washing cassava and grating cassava in line with NAFDAC specifications. They also posited that the farmer should ensure that facilities used in starch production are in good working condition.

Table 3 reveals eight items the youth will learn to market starch in line with NAFDAC guidelines. They include: Package starch in Polythene bag for sale and label correctly, record bags of starch produced for sale, fix prices of starch and notify customers about the existence of products, sell cassava starch to individuals and companies, collected and collate market information on starch, keep records of starch sold and submit records of sales to account department. These findings are in agreement with Crawens & Piercy (2013), who said that marketers must of necessity assemble products for sale, advertise products and market them.

It was also found that out that there was no significant difference in the mean ratings of the opinions of starch producers and agricultural extension agents on the entrepreneurship skills for planning, production and marketing of starch in line with NAFDAC guidelines. The opinions of the authors cited help to add credence to the validity of the study.

Conclusion

The study established that certain entrepreneurship skills were needed by youths for success in cassava starch production in Abia state. Youths need skills in planning, production and marketing of starch in line with NAFDAC standard. It is believed that the acquisition of these skills by youth could help them to own their cassava starch enterprises thereby desisting from social vices. But, Skills Acquisition Centres in Abia State lack starch production programmes. This development provided research opportunities in this direction. The study was therefore carried out to find out empirically, the stakeholders comments on entrepreneurship skills required by youths for running starch production business to regulated standard.

The study had therefore provided information on entrepreneurship skills required by youths for employment in regulated starch production occupation. It also provided information on skills needed for high level performance and improved quality of cassava starch.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made by researcher:

1. Abia state Government should integrate the identified entrepreneurship skills on starch production into her skills acquisition programmes to train their youths.
2. Employers of labour could use the identified entrepreneurial skills to recruit employees or in conducting job interviews.
3. Workers in starch production industries should be allowed to benefit from organized workshops on entrepreneurship skills for starch production to strengthen their skill base.

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