

Entrepreneurship amongst the Otjiherero people in Namibia

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Abstract: Entrepreneurship potential amongst indigenous groups (such as the Otjiherero people) should be considered a courageous idea to encouraged development in the community and the development of indigenous people within a particular economy. This paper explores the role of indigenous entrepreneurship as it pertains to a specific indigenous tribe (Otjiherero people) in Namibia. It is the argument of the researcher that the diverse Namibian culture could be a distinctive advantage for social and indigenous entrepreneurship, as it makes room for the essential traits of an entrepreneur, namely: innovation, creativity, perseverance and self-confidence. An empirical investigation guided by the following methods was conducted in Namibia amongst the Herero people in the eastern region of Namibia. These methods are storytelling, in-depth interviews. This paper reveals that Herero people in Namibia have the potential to be indigenous entrepreneurs.

Key words: Entrepreneurship, Namibia, and Otjiherero People.

1. Introduction

The greatest of human endowments as described by Ottih (2000) are intelligence and entrepreneurship because besides living things, every other thing in the world is a product of human intelligence and entrepreneurship. The concept of entrepreneurship has been defined by various scholars differently across multiple disciplines. However, the purpose of this paper is to look at entrepreneurship amongst a special and unique group of people in Namibia, who are the Otjiherero people.

The Republic of Namibia is situated in the south western corner of Africa, bordering South Africa, Botswana and Angola. Namibia is a vast country of 823 145 square kilometres, accommodating an estimated 2.3 million people. Namibia is one of the most sparsely populated regions in sub-Saharan Africa, and the rich variety of its people in culture, language and racial origin is hard to equal. The country has eleven (11) ethnic groups of people namely; Owambo, Okavango, Caprivians, Herero, Khoesan, Nama, Damara, Basters, Afrikaners, Germans and Coloured. Most of the ethnic groups have sub-tribes who speak local dialects. This paper will explore the entrepreneurial initiatives of the Herero people.

The paper is a result of ethnographic research conducted by the author's among the Ojherero people in Namibia in the Otjinene village. First the paper will give an account on the Western literature; thereafter a brief history about the Herero people in Namibia will be outlined. This will be followed by the context of indigenous enterprises in Namibia, methodology, discussion and conclusion.

2. Looking at the Western Literature

Entrepreneurship is of growing interest in both the developing and developed world. Nowadays the first people (as we also refer to them as indigenous people) talked about indigenous entrepreneurship. Numerous studies pertaining to issues related to indigenous entrepreneurship indicated that many countries on the African continent see development of entrepreneurship as the primary route to achieve industrialisation and economic development. According to Peredo et.al (2004) indigenous people from around the world have suffered greatly over the years, from chronic poverty, lower education and poor health. Given this background looking at entrepreneurial issues amongst Namibian Otjiherero people becomes critical to look into. The roots of the concept emerged in the thirteenth century, and originated from a French word, "enterprendre", which refers to taking one's own hand and do

something. Three centuries later the concept was introduced in the business context and Richard Cantillon, a French economist was the first to discuss entrepreneurs as risks takers. Other prominent scholars such as Say and Mill also linked entrepreneurship to risks. Cochran continued to view an entrepreneur as a risks taker. Shapero found that in most definitions of entrepreneurship, there is an agreement that we are talking about the kind of behaviour that includes the acceptance of risks.

It is the argument of Zaleznik and Kets de Vries that an entrepreneurial personality includes “the urge to take risks”, and the stubborn resistance to change. Except the risk component new views on entrepreneurship emerged in the nineteenth century where entrepreneurship is viewed as comprising of special skills and traits (Nieman et al. 2003). The growing interest of entrepreneurs as agents of change is bolstered by the theoretical work of Joseph Schumpeter in the twentieth century. This Austrian economist provides deeper insights by linking the theory of entrepreneurship to economic change (Schumpeter, 1954: 131-142). It was the notion of Schumpeter that economic growth does not necessarily arise from capital accumulation, but from innovation and creativity. He argued that equilibrium is predominant in an economic system. After realising that innovation is critical for growth Schumpeter realised that innovation has to be implemented by someone, and the ability to break with established practice was primarily related to individual entrepreneurs. A critical dimension of entrepreneurship in the Western literature is that it demands a specific type of personality, which can be viewed differently to that of an ordinary person. Exploratory ethnographic research such as this of this Herero people can add substantially to the academic literature on entrepreneurship. The next section of this paper will look into the history and cultural background of the Namibian Otjiherero people.

3. History and cultural background of the Namibian Otjiherero people

Hereroland with less than 50 000 inhabitants, covers an extensive area of 44 756 square kilometres. The area known as Herero land East (Otjinene, Otjozondjou and Omongwa) forms part of the present Omaheke region in central eastern part of the country. Topographically Hereroland forms part of the northern Kalahari zone, which is a flat, sandy region with permanent dunes in the eastern part. As nomadic pastoralists, the Ojjiherero people wandered across large tracts of land after embarking on their southerly migration from Kaokoland during the middle of the eighteenth century. Numerous wars against the Nama as well as the German forces, further contributed to the dispersal over a vast area stretching from Damaraland in the west to the Botswana border in the east, and even beyond. It is clear that these events

together with extensive acculturation caused by close with various other peoples have exerted tremendous influence on the lifestyle and the entrepreneurial culture on all spheres on national life (Malan, 1995).

After residing in Kaokoland and adjacent parts of the Republic of Angola for almost two decades, severe drought caused the Otjiherero people to migrate south. The marginal habitat of Kaokoland's semi-arid grasslands was such that a nature that it could not withstand the detrimental effects of overgrazing and overpopulation, thereby further necessitating the migration. As more and more Otjiherero people settled in the central parts of the country, conflict with the Oorlams from Vaalgras, who were moving in the northerly direction from the Cape Province, became inevitable (Malan, 1995). In 1830, the first clash between the Otjiherero and the Oorlam Chief Jonker Afrikaner occurred in the vicinity of the present Windhoek. Jonker's dream of a powerful empire north of Windhoek eventually induced him to break treaty which was earlier signed with Hugo Hahn under the influence of the missionaries. This was a fierce attack on the Otjiherero people of Okahandja, and many people lost lives and a large number of cattle were seized. The years which followed the raids had to be continued, because Jonker settled his heavy debts for liquor and merchandise with Herero cattle.

4. The context of enterprise of the Herero people

Traditionally the Herero pastoralists followed a nomadic lifestyle with their large herds of cattle, as some of their kinsmen in Kaokoland still do. Cattle especially the cow describes the Herero person and carries significant meaning. Nowadays, nomadic movement of the Herero people is restricted as most people have now erected permanent dwelling places. To cope with the limited availability of water and grazing they move to cattle posts as an alternative. Young men often have the tasks to move with the cattle to utilise seasonal grazing, but they always return to the main village after a few months when grazing conditions improve.

Since cattle can indeed be described as the life of the Herero people, strict control measures are enforced to protect the interest of all parties concerned. Large-scale estrangement of stock is usually not permitted because there are people whose material welfare is at stake, and others who live with the hope of inheriting enough cattle to enable them to make a living. The management of livestock is based on the principle that there is no private ownership of cattle in the true sense. The inheritance of livestock is an important and critical dimension in the lives of the Herero people. An external factor that is exerting a far-reaching influence on the economic life of the southern Herero is the high degree of acculturation to which they have been exposed. To a certain degree the whole technology has been extensively conformed to that of the European culture, with which

they have now contact for centuries. Most of the Herero women still wear the Victorian-style dresses introduced by the wives of the German missionaries, and furnishing and construction of their houses have undergone major changes.

Despite these significant changes offered through the modern technology, education and training, most Herero people still cherish far above anything else the idea of people cattle farmers. This is one of many reasons and some even unknown that they do not offer services on the labour market, but this does not mean that they are entrepreneurial. They have deeply inherent characteristics that could make them outstanding entrepreneurs.

5. Methodology

Although countless developing country perspectives on entrepreneurship has been written, this paper is unique in the sense that it looks into an ethnic community who make their livelihood from cattle. This paper aims to explore the entrepreneurial activities of the Herero people in Namibia. In order to contextualise and understand the entrepreneurial activities of the Namibian Herero people it was first critical to explore and understand the basic entrepreneurial concepts by means of literature. To ensure that validity is enhanced, triangulation of methods was deemed as essential. An in-depth literature review coupled by participant observation and in depth oral interviews was conducted with the Herero people in Otjinene. Participant observation was an effective method to carry out this research as significant meaning is carried by the Herero people through unspoken and written text. Oral interviews gave the researcher first-hand cultural experience about the spoken words of the Herero people. Oral interviews provided first hand and rich experiences about the Herero people.

6. Discussion

Entrepreneurship from its definition in the thirteenth century means, it is the process by which people take their hands to do something. As we scanned through the literature review of this paper it is clear that entrepreneurship has been associated with the risks component as was highlighted by Schumpeter. It is clear that the Namibian Herero people are cattle farmers, and are less concerned about selling their livestock on a flea market. However their entrepreneurial spirit and potential is evident through their determination to move around with livestock through severe drought conditions. In terms of entrepreneurial personality traits risk taking is also prominent. Strong traits of social

entrepreneurship is evident, in that their primary motive is not necessarily profit, but livestock has to be inherited and carried over across generations. Changes in technology and education have brought a number of changes to the lifestyle of the Otjiherero people, but they have a culture which is deeply embedded which at all times requires finding a balance between entrepreneurship and business. From the ethnographic study it is clear that the Herero people have deeply embedded entrepreneurial cultural traits.

7. Conclusion

In the absence of abundance resource, Namibia Herero people view entrepreneurship as the ability of a Herero men or women to own cattle (cows). Although not the entire community is highly educated in terms the Herero communities perform entrepreneurial functions guided by their culture. Although their do not perform the entrepreneurial functions in an open marketplace, they perform their entrepreneurial functions within they clan and extended family through inheritance. This explains the deeply cultural embedded entrepreneurial traits of the Herero people. Given their strong believe in cultural rituals they are one of the few ethnic groups that could succeed in business while maintaining their culture at the same time which could be carried over across generations.

8. References

