

## **CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS OF RURAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP: A DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF SELECTED LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREAS OF OSUN STATE, NIGERIA**

**Samson A. Adewumi**

TRADE, North-West University, South Africa  
Orcid ID: 0000-0003-4156-0971

**Elsabé Keyser**

TRADE, North-West University, South Africa  
Orcid ID: 0000-0003-4156-0971

### **Abstract**

Commenting on the significance of rural entrepreneurship is pivotal to the uncovering of economic development; there are commentaries in support of the laid-back attitude of government in identifying with the importance of rural entrepreneurship for economic sustenance. This statement reaffirms the challenges bedevilling the survival of rural entrepreneurship in Osun State, and the entirety of Nigeria. The paper assesses the challenges and prospects inherent in rural entrepreneurship in Osun State. The pool of entrepreneurship studies is largely focused on individual entrepreneurship, with a limited focus on its contribution to economic and social development. Particularly, understanding rural entrepreneurship through the lens of Osun State is supported with its large number of youths who depend on rural enterprise. The theory of planned behaviour was reviewed as the theoretical leaning. A total of 26 rural entrepreneurs were selected through snowballing and convenient methods for interviews. Findings reveal poor road networks, social unrest, low financial support, corruption and market size as challenges to rural entrepreneurship, while employment creation, reduced migration and poverty alleviation are benefits. The study takes the position that the Osun State government must show commitment and support for rural entrepreneurship, and ensure the state is safe from farmers-herders conflict for rural enterprise to flourish.

**Keywords: Rural entrepreneurship, entrepreneurs, economic growth, challenges, prospects**

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The focus of entrepreneurship literature has shifted from what is known about an individual entrepreneur to what should be known about the contributions of entrepreneurship to economic and social development. While a large piece of entrepreneurship studies has been occupied with large and small-scale industrial setups, the new trend of these studies is observed with artisans and farmers who form the major forces of rural entrepreneurship (Hudson, 2010; Koyana & Mason, 2017; Afolabi, 2016). The concept of rural entrepreneurship, in simple terms, implies the categorisation of all rural-inclined entrepreneurship with a focus on small business ventures, such as carpentry, tourism and other artisans (Ngugi, McOrege & Muiru, 2013). Rural entrepreneurship emphasises rural industrialisation with an emphasis on providing for the needs of the rural dwellers through employment generation and rural development (Ihejiamazu, 2019).

In Nigeria, sparse evidence is available to the credit of the government towards the development of rural entrepreneurship. The increasing rate of youth unemployment and the economic and social implications that come with rural migration to the urban centres for employment opportunities are important indicators that the developmental agenda of the country is yet to be reflected in rural entrepreneurship development. These situations reinforce many of the challenges affecting rural enterprises in Nigeria. For instance, available evidence reveals that the state of Nigeria's infrastructure and the sparse social amenities such as electricity and good network roads are important constraints to the growth of rural entrepreneurship (Osunde, 2016; Alabi, Famakinwa & Ogunjimi, 2017). Other commentaries have tended to eulogise rural entrepreneurship with the contention around the creation of employment opportunities, curbing migration and an agenda towards poverty alleviation (Okeke & Eme, 2014; Nwankwo & Francis, 2017). However, available evidence contrasts with these narratives, as unemployment, especially among the youth population, and poverty continue to swell in Nigeria (National Bureau of Statistics, 2018). Therefore, this argument reflects Nigeria's government's failure to support rural entrepreneurship through which unemployment and poverty can be addressed.

The case for this study is Osun State and this is validated on many grounds. Firstly, Osun State is one of Nigeria's South West states with high youth unemployment and rural dwellers, a part who is into rural enterprise (NBS, 2018). Secondly, the state is largely an agrarian state with the majority into farming and other small-scale agricultural ventures (NBS, 2018). Therefore, the justification for Osun State is laced with the need to understand the challenges and prospects of rural

entrepreneurship considering these indices with a particular emphasis on Ede South and Iwo Local Government, respectively<sup>1</sup>. The literature is replete with entrepreneurship studies (Imafidon, 2014; Afolabi, 2015; Osunde, 2016), with sparse focus on rural entrepreneurship, especially in Nigeria. In addition, other similar studies have investigated rural entrepreneurship in isolation of its contribution to economic and social development, while understanding the challenges and prospects inherent in rural enterprise (Olabisi & Olagbemi, 2012; Kolawole & Ajila, 2015). Overall, for studies conducted in Nigeria, the attention of Osun State has been greatly ignored considering the enormous number of youths who depend on rural enterprise for survival. Therefore, this position validates the motivation for Osun State in order to deeply understand the myriads of rural entrepreneurship challenges and its likely prospects. In a nutshell, this study seeks to understand the conundrums of rural entrepreneurship on the one hand, and how the prospects inherent in rural entrepreneurship on the other hand can be advanced as a tool for social and economic development, especially through employment creation within the rural setups.

The main contribution of this paper is to improve upon the sparse available scholarships in the rural entrepreneurship literature as a development instrument in Nigeria. Importantly, it is indubitable that existing scholarship is still under-represented in the broader reflection of Nigeria's response to rural entrepreneurship as a tool for economic development. Through this account, a clearer picture of rural entrepreneurship problems and its opportunities can be uncovered, and a possible channel for its role in upturning the economy development of the country can be quickly unravelled. After a conceptual narrative of rural entrepreneurship, the paper shifts to examine the challenges and prospects of rural entrepreneurship from a wide range of commentaries. In what follows, the Fishbein and Ajzen (1985) theory of planned behaviour was explicated as the theoretical leaning, while the different methodological approaches were clarified. The paper then turned to analyse and make meaning of the different themes that emerged from the transcript interviews and conclusions echoed from the implications of these findings.

## **2. CONCEPTUALISING RURAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP**

The development of the term rural entrepreneurship predates the 1980s; however, its usage and reference in the literature only became known in the 1980s (Boohene & Agyapong, 2017). In other words, the ascending awareness that entrepreneurship could ignite rural development on many fronts could have sprout the term rural

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<sup>1</sup> These local governments areas represent two of the largest with a good representation of the youth population.

entrepreneurship (Müller, 2016). In conceptualising rural entrepreneurship, different views and opinions have been chronicled in the entrepreneurship literature, with a seamless contention of depicting rural entrepreneurship as rural industrialisation.

Korsgaard, Muller and Tanving (2015) explain rural entrepreneurship as all types of entrepreneurial activity that are practised in areas characterised by big open space, but few population settlements in comparison to the urban context. The business of rural entrepreneurs is most likely tailored around activities such as tailoring, farming, catering and other essential business trade. Nevertheless, it is not entirely accurate to say that these ranges of business activities are not seen with the urban entrepreneur; however, the mode of production, target audience, consumption rate and turnover distinguish a rural entrepreneur from an urban entrepreneur in the real sense (Paul & Sharma, 2013).

The main focus of any entrepreneurial activity is the need to create employment for those at the rural scale of society. In other words, rural entrepreneurship is the execution of entrepreneurial activities by creating businesses and other rural jobs for the benefit of the rural dwellers, and the growth of the economy in general (Boateng, Bampoe & Boateng, 2014). These lines of argument support some of the popular commentaries that the development and growth of rural entrepreneurship possess significance towards addressing many of the economic development puzzles of African countries (Malebana & Swanepoel, 2015). However, while the importance of entrepreneurship has continued to surface in the development agenda plan of many economies, this importance has also been extended to entrepreneurs in rural communities (Nwankwo & Francis, 2017). Rural entrepreneurs can then be described as independent, adventurous, self-oriented, strong-willed and innovative individuals working on the creation of new employment in the rural settings.

Paul and Sharma's (2013) explanation embraces most of the previous perspectives given in this paper. For instance, the authors explain rural entrepreneurship as an endeavour taking place at the village or rural level in a range of occupations such as business, industry, the agricultural sector and other enterprises signposting as markers for economic development. This definition, no doubt, blends the question of opportunity, resources and the environment, which are sacrosanct in the conceptualisation and understanding of any entrepreneurial activity. This definition will therefore form the crux and meaning of rural entrepreneurship as broadly used in this paper.

### **3. CONUNDRUMS AND PROSPECTS OF RURAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP: THE NIGERIAN EXPERIENCE**

The conditions of most rural African economies, including Nigeria, are undoubtedly wretched. In Nigeria, most of the rural areas are characterised with low income earners, low productivity turnout, lack of infrastructure, high unemployment and high population density with approximately 50 percent of the population being rural dwellers (NBS, 2018). With this evidence, several commentaries have been cited in the entrepreneurship and economic literature that hardly any meaningful development will take place in developing countries, except for the rural communities that are carefully mapped along any economic developmental agenda. With the establishment of the National Enterprise Development Programme (NEDEP-hereafter) in Nigeria in 2013, for the promotion of rural entrepreneurship, it is not too problematic to decipher that rural entrepreneurship in Nigeria is still netted in a clog of challenges with consequences for the economic development of the country (Nwankwo & Francis, 2017).

To start with, the lack of support structures in terms of finance has been cited as a huge challenge hampering the growth of rural entrepreneurs (Sule, Alinno & Ikwegbe, 2013). For instance, not that many efforts have been offered to rural entrepreneurs by the Nigerian Bank of Industry (BOI-hereafter), it has especially been hijacked by political clout for the affluent in the society (Akhakpe, Fatile & Igbokwe-Ibeto, 2012). Similarly, the failure of successive government in Nigeria to invest immensely in her social and physical infrastructure has also remained a burning issue for the strife of rural entrepreneurship. Alabi, Famakinwa and Ogunjimi (2017) explains that the decades of poor infrastructure in Nigeria have collapsed many rural innovations such as those in the business of agricultural produce. In other words, the bulk of Nigeria's food production, such as cassava, palm oil and other agriculture produce coming from the rural communities, has wreaked havoc on the country's gross domestic product (GDP) due to bad transportation networks (Afolabi, 2016).

Unlike the urban dwellers, rural entrepreneurs have long been constrained with market size and penetration in Nigeria. With the outsized number of low income earners in the rural communities, research has shown that rural entrepreneurs are faced with the difficulty of increasing the demand for their produce (Olabisi & Olagbemi, 2012; Kumar, 2016). In any entrepreneurial venture, the place of technical and business skills remains sacrosanct. However, the structure and arrangement of Nigeria's education curriculum are lacking in the required technical, managerial and business training fundamentals to be successful in entrepreneurship.

Therefore, access to entrepreneurial and business training signposts one of the challenges to rural entrepreneurship in Nigeria (Kolawole & Ajila, 2015). The challenges of unemployment and poverty have also been marked as a constraint to rural entrepreneurship on many fronts. For instance, approximately 59.9 percent of youth rural unemployment, double the urban unemployment rate (NBS, 2019), have created a trend of increased competition among rural entrepreneurs who need to compete for scarce commodities for survival (Alabi, Famakinwa & Ogunjimi, 2017).

The snag of corruption and lack of political will to support and develop rural entrepreneurs by relevant government agencies and departments are rife in Nigeria. For instance, budgets meant for the revitalisation of rural communities for the growth of rural entrepreneurs have been embezzled on many occasions (Osunde, 2016). The neglects of these projects have continued to deprive Nigeria the desired economic growth through the contributions of the rural enterprise. On the other hand, entrepreneurship and development literature has reported the economic and social prospects of rural entrepreneurship. For instance, with evidence of poverty most seated in Nigeria's rural communities, rural entrepreneurship contributes significantly to poverty reduction through employment creation for new entrepreneurial businesses (Kolawole & Ajila, 2015). In terms of standard of living, rural entrepreneurship has the propensity of increasing the standard of living of rural dwellers through innovation (Ngugi, McOrege & Muiro, 2013). However, for the Nigeria case, there is little evidence to support the claim that the standard of living of rural dwellers has been improved through rural entrepreneurial activities.

Rural entrepreneurship discourages urban migration. Issues around this contention have been put forward as a critical component of rural entrepreneurship as a measure to reduce congestions in urban cities while creating employment for rural dwellers (Olabisi & Olagbemi, 2012; Mazzarol, 2015). Rural entrepreneurship provides a clear-cut solution to the mounting problem of large-scale unemployment and underemployment of rural communities (Kolawole & Ajila, 2015). In other words, the establishment of industrial units and other business hubs in rural areas through rural entrepreneurship innovations has high momentum for employment generation and revenue creation (Sykes, Gurbuzer & Principia, 2016). In Nigeria, however, there is not much evidence to substantiate this, as rural unemployment continues to soar (NBS, 2018).

#### **4. THEORY OF PLANNED BEHAVIOUR: A THEORETICAL INSIGHT**

This article follows from the theory of planned behaviour as a theoretical leaning to understand rural entrepreneurship, its challenges and inherent prospects. On the origin of the theory, the theory of planned behaviour was developed by Ajzen (1985) as a theoretical tool for the understanding of individuals' attitudes, behaviour and intentions. One of the central assumption in the theory of planned behaviour is the efficacy of an individual's intention towards performing a particular behaviour (Lackeus, 2014). Importantly, individual intentions are presumed to seize the stimulus that influences a behaviour, a reflection of how hard people are eager to try, the extent of exertion willing to dedicate, in order to accomplish the behaviour (Malebana, 2017). As a rule, therefore, the more robust the intention involved in a behaviour, the more probable would its presentation be. For the purpose of this study, intention as a component of the theory of planned behaviour is conceptualised as a motivation for rural entrepreneurs to understand the challenges and prospects in rural entrepreneurship for effective behavioural outcomes. In this sense, the intention and drive to understand the threats and opportunities inherent in rural entrepreneurship will likely engender an entrepreneurial behaviour and outcome that are socially satisfactory.

However, while intentions are a clear consequence of entrepreneurial behaviour, it is mainly determined by three distinct variables, namely attitude towards the precise behaviour (only precise attitudes towards the behaviour can be anticipated to predict that behaviour); subjective norms (these relate to the belief about the decision); and perceived behavioural control (explained by entrepreneurs' opinions about their capability to execute that given behaviour) (Ajzen, 2015). Entrepreneurial activity expressly represents a planned behaviour (an intentional act). In other words, intentionality remains a sacrosanct feature of an emerging entrepreneur; therefore, understanding the business environment and other conditions fundamental to entrepreneurship, including the resolution to begin an entrepreneurial business, remains important (Kirkwood, 2013). As for the case of rural entrepreneurship, intentions concerning a behaviour represent a critical component to understanding other precursors, such as the ensuing challenges (for example the availability of infrastructure to effectively strive at the rural level, purchasing power and availability of business and technical skills), and the final outcomes of that behaviour in terms of mitigating the effects of these challenges for a prosperous enterprise.

## 5. METHODOLOGY

The study employed the exploratory research design as a basis to understand and expand the sparse available knowledge on rural entrepreneurship in Nigeria. The qualitative research method was used to elicit data for the understanding of the suppositions raised in this study. The integration of the snowball and convenient sampling strategies was employed in the recruitment of respondents from Ede South and Iwo local government areas of Osun State, respectively. The population of the study comprised a total of 26 rural entrepreneurs with at least five years of being an entrepreneurs and not more than 40 years of age. Again, the need for these conditions was to justify the recruitment of rural entrepreneurs who are in their youthful age since a large portion of Nigeria's population are below the age of 40 years and constitute the largest cluster of the unemployed persons in Nigeria (NBS, 2018).

On the utility of the snowball recruitment strategy, it was ensured that only respondents who meet the criteria of at least five years of being an entrepreneur and not more than 40 years were recruited for the study. This was realised with referrals and identification of respondents who fall in these categories by identified rural dwellers from the two selected local government of study. However, with respect to the use of the convenient recruitment strategy, it was further ascertained that only identified entrepreneurs who are convenient with the timing and nature of the study were eventually recruited for the interviews (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009). In other words, the justification for the utility of the convenient sampling technique is to ensure an uninterrupted interview process (Sekeran & Bougie, 2016).

The different sets of rural entrepreneurs interviewed cover a variety of enterprises, including but not limited to those in the business of sales of household items such as furniture and electronics, essential merchandise such as grocery and other food items, sales of clothing, and others in the business of agricultural produce such as the sales of farm produce. The nub is to understand the challenges and prospects inherent in being an entrepreneur, particularly at the rural spectrum of the society. The semi-structured interview type was used to elicit qualitative data from respondents with the justification to provoke supplementary responses when the need arises. The study employed an interview guide to ensure consistency of questions posed to all the respondents. The data collection exercise commences with the introduction of the aim of the study to each identified respondent and all interviews were audio-recorded. The interviews lasted for a period of two months (between December, 2019 and January, 2020). Thereafter, the audio-recorded interviews were transcribed into text and the NVivo qualitative software was used

to categorise the data into different themes in tandem with the research aims. Consequently, the emergence of these themes allows for an in-depth analysis of the challenges and prospects central to rural entrepreneurship. In terms of ethics, the anonymity of respondents and confidentiality of information were all given strict protection.

## **6. ANALYSES AND RESULTS**

### **6.1. Understanding rural entrepreneurship challenges**

The Nigerian state no doubt has undergone several economic recessions both in the past and in recent times (Afolabi, 2016). Expectedly, many of these economic downturns have affected government's responsibilities of providing the necessary environment for the sustainability of entrepreneurial ventures. However, while the problem of economic recession cannot be entirely argued as the main factor, the scourge of corruption remains an important constraint to the realisation of a working society. The majority of the respondents shared sentiments on what constitutes challenges to the growth of rural entrepreneurship. Most of the perceptions shared captured the current reality of the Nigerian state. For instance, it was expressly narrated that the concerns of poor or dilapidated infrastructure and other essential amenities are critical to the poor development of rural entrepreneurship in Osun State. The narration of poor infrastructure is established with the poor state of Nigerian roads hindering the ability of many rural entrepreneurs' access to convey their finished produce to the urban centres for onward sales. In other words, the long-standing problem of infrastructural deficit in Nigeria has perpetually wrecked many rural entrepreneurial innovations. One of the respondents narrates this ordeal in the following lines:

I am a rural entrepreneur and I am into Agricultural and farming produce. My target market is concentrated in the urban centres, but we have been encountering a lot of challenges as to how to convey these produce to our target market. What I am saying is that the network roads here are in a state of dilapidation and this is really affecting our turnover return. Sometimes, we harvest our produce but the problem will then be how to take them out of here. Other times, because of the bad state of the road, our vehicle get knocked down and some of the perishable will get damaged. I cannot estimate the extent of these challenges. It is just enormous (IDI/19/2019).

The environmental and social contexts of many rural entrepreneurs have remained a consistent problem threatening the survival and development of this venture in many parts of the country. For the case of Osun State, the majority of the respondents affirm that the frequent social unrest between farmers (rural entrepreneurs) and the Fulani-Herders clearly signposts a development constraint to the growth of entrepreneurship ventures, specifically as much of the produce of

these farmers is left in destruction. One of the respondents recounts his losses as a rural entrepreneur as follows:

I can conveniently tell you the range of challenges we face as rural entrepreneurs, especially some of us who are into farm produce. You see these practice of pastoral nomadic have become a nightmare to us and the growth of our enterprise. Many a time they allow their cows to feed on our produce without leaving anything, and we are left in a state of confusion and sometimes it result to clashes between us and these people. We normally count our loss here (IDI/5/2019).

The challenges of financial support for enterprise expansion and growth on the part of relevant government agencies such as the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency (SMEDAN) and BOI were recalled by the majority of the respondents. These expressions clearly uncover the priority of Nigeria at the expense of local content development through the sustainability of its local entrepreneurs. A large number of the respondents decried how several of their applications for loans have been turned down by relevant agencies, even with evidence of budgets allocated to these agencies for the growth of entrepreneurial innovation in Nigeria. To be sure, one the respondents who deals in the sale of electrical/electronic gadgets recounted his disappointment.

I can tell you that we do not have a responsible government in this part of the world. Unlike other part of the world where entrepreneurship growths have been identified a critical component of economic growth, the case for us is different. You see those institutions established to see to the management and development of entrepreneurship are just there. They are doing absolutely nothing, especially with respect to assisting rural entrepreneurs like us. I can tell you the number of times I have written them applications for loans, but was turned down. I understand they only grant urban entrepreneurs. This is a challenge for us, as our enterprise can hardly be expanded without the needed support (IDI/5/2019).

Another respondent, an artisan in the enterprise of furniture and household items, adds to the challenge of finance. He, however, submitted his narration through the unceasing corruption being perpetuated by agencies saddled with the regulation and management of small and medium enterprises in Nigeria.

One thing I can say is that the fund is there. I mean the budget to support small businesses is with these government agencies, but the level of corruption going on there has hindered the release of these funds to these businesses, especially the rural enterprise. You will be surprised with the luxury some of these people are living. An insider once told me that what the management do is to fill several loan forms without giving any out, and report to the government that the beneficiaries have refused to return their loans. You can see how they are not helping us to grow at all? (IDI/12/2019).

The majority of the respondents also shared their concerns on the challenge of market size penetration at rural level. For instance, it was reaffirmed that rural

entrepreneurs are always constrained with the size of their immediate market due to the low income of its rural dwellers. The argument, in other words, is predicated on the sustenance and growth of a rural enterprise that, among other challenges, is also constrained with a sparse number of patronage. According to respondents, the market size conundrums have continued to discourage many rural entrepreneurs for continuity as a large number have relocated to the urban centres with large market size. This position is clearly a testament to many of the contention about the poor livelihoods that characterise many of Nigerian rural settlements. The challenges for entrepreneurs at the rural rung of the society include poor turnover, inconsistent business growth and extinction. One of the respondents reported as follows:

In my own opinion, the size of the market at the rural level is a great challenge for the growth and survival of rural entrepreneurs. When you hear about poor people in Nigeria, you have to come to the rural areas. So in a position where people are extremely poor, how do you expect them to patronize your enterprise either you have a grocery store or an artisan. Of course, people that hardly eat three square meals will find it difficult to patronize you, and in this way, the enterprise is gradually going into extinction (IDI/11/2019).

The technical and necessary business acumen has been a long-standing problem for many entrepreneurs, especially rural entrepreneurs. Anchored in this problem is the structure and content of Nigeria's educational curriculum lacking essential training on entrepreneurship skills. Research evidence has shown that many small enterprises liquidate in their first year of operation due to the lack of a wide range of business skills. Commenting on this evidence through the lens of rural entrepreneurial ventures, many respondents agreed to having insufficient technical and business skills before the commencement of their ventures.

I understand the importance of business education and relevant skills as necessary to the survival of any enterprise, but in my own case, and for most of the rural entrepreneurs, we really do not have those skills before we begin our enterprise. For instance, majority of the people I know are secondary school graduates, and I do not think we were thoughts anything that has to do with entrepreneurship throughout our high school days. So obviously, we are lacking in that aspect, and I would agree this is important to grow our business (IDI/10/2019).

## **6.2 Rural entrepreneurship: Perceived instrument of economic growth**

As the world economy shifts from a dependent to a self-sufficient economy, the contribution of entrepreneurial ventures as a fundamental and sacrosanct component for the realisation of this mandate cannot be downplayed. Several commentaries have been analysed on the importance of rural entrepreneurship as a critical component of economic growth. Anchored in these deliberations, the Nigerian government has frequently advised the massive growth of rural entrepreneurship, especially the production of agricultural and farming produce as

a sustenance measure to the dwindling economy. The majority of the respondents express how rural entrepreneurial ventures have been creating employment for the increasing number of unemployed youths. In a swift reaction, the majority of the respondents recounted many years of being unemployed before the commencement of their enterprise. In other words, for them creating a self-sufficient enterprise such as this will go a long way to reduce the unceasing rate of unemployment in Nigeria. One of the respondents in particular explains:

Even at the fact the we are operating this enterprise at the rural level, I can still tell you that it has created a sources of employment for majority of us and still creating for more. If we all agree that the government cannot do everything for us in terms of giving us employment, then there is a need to embrace this innovation and make a living from it. This will go a long in reducing the rate of unemployment among the youths. At least, I know few people who used to be unemployed, but since they started their enterprise, that problem is solved (IDI/3/2019).

The issue of migration from rural to urban centres has continued to pose serious economic constraints and other social implications to major cities in Nigeria. The crux of the influx of migration to urban cities cannot be distanced from the need to access employment and proper livelihoods. However, the invasion of people from the rural areas to urban centres cannot be entirely judged as a solution to these problems as more problems are being created from the increased population in these cities, wherein employment opportunities are now becoming sparse with increasing populations. Therefore, the position of this study is for the government to create more employment opportunities at the rural level towards discouraging the enormous number of migrants from the rural areas to the urban centres such that there will be a reduction in the social and health implications ensuing from too much concentration of people in the urban centres. One of the respondents shared her views:

In my opinion, I think one of the opportunities created by rural entrepreneurship is the fact that migration to the urban centres have been discouraged at least to an extent. Although, this could be a reflection of some people returning back to the rural areas after many years of being unable to secure jobs. But on the bright side, we know have more people back at the rural settings nourishing their own business and having had to do away with the idea that you must get to the city before you can have something to do. I think going-forward; we will see a sharp decrease in urban migration if rural entrepreneurship is more encouraged by the government (IDI/20/2019).

The number of persons living below the poverty line has escalated with Nigeria recently named the poverty capital of the world<sup>2</sup>. Drawing from this position, it is

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<sup>2</sup> The Global Poverty Ranking recently, in 2018, named Nigeria as the poverty capital of the world.

still not clear why, in the midst of opulence, the Nigerian state has continued to degenerate with increased hardship for her citizens. In contrast, however, the majority of the respondents relate with the option that embracing rural entrepreneurship has decreased the rate of poverty among the rural dwellers. Other opinions shared captured how people are now being able to afford at least a square meal from the proceeds of their rural enterprise. The caveat, however, was the need for government support and commitment for the growth of rural entrepreneurship in order to set standards of poverty reduction among rural dwellers. One of the respondents, an owner of a grocery store, recounts as follows:

I have to be honest, there is a way that this small enterprise that will be engaged in has really helped us out of poverty. I am not saying there is no poverty in Osun State, but what I am saying is that having a petty store such as this, even at the rural level has been of help, with at least the ability to feed myself and children, though not to the scale of what we would have desired. So in my mind, if government can support rural venture, I am sure that a lot of people will be help out of poverty going-forward (IDI/14/2019).

The various submissions revealed by the majority of the respondents explain that rural entrepreneurship possesses fundamental importance in terms of economic management, planning and mitigating increased urban congestion. Other views shared explained the importance of rural entrepreneurship as an instrument of poverty alleviation if effectively management by relevant government agencies. However, while instances of poverty reduction have been reported, it is still not clear if poverty has been addressed among the rural dwellers through small-scale enterprise, especially as many of the start-ups lack appropriate support measures for expansion.

## **7. CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND AREAS FOR FURTHER STUDY**

The emphasis of this study has been to understand the challenges and opportunities inherent in rural entrepreneurship as a tool for sustainable development. Importantly, the study dissects the discourse of rural entrepreneurship beyond the slim narrative of individual entrepreneurship to a more robust examination of how rural entrepreneurship can be positioned for economic development. As the paper showed, a number of survival challenges for rural entrepreneurs were unravelled, such that have incapacitated many rural entrepreneurs, while leading many into extinctions. These findings support research evidence from other climes (Boohene & Agyapong, 2017; Paul & Sharma, 2013). The array of these challenges reflects the poor response of the Osun State government, and the Nigerian government in general, to the plight of rural enterprise, whose activities no doubt remain fundamental to gauging any

economic development. These arguments support many of the misappropriations of the allocated budget to entrepreneurship development and the failed roles of relevant government agencies in the management and development of entrepreneurship in Nigeria, especially the owners of small businesses at the rural levels of the society. With this instance, the study concludes that the government must live up to its expectation with regard to employment creation by supporting the growth and development of rural entrepreneurship.

Furthermore, findings showed some important positive outlook of rural entrepreneurship (Ngugi, McOrege & Muiru, 2013; Kolawole & Ajila, 2015). However, the position of this finding remains contestable with evidence of rural entrepreneurship performance in Osun State, and Nigeria in particular. For instance, the position of employment creation and reduced migration from the rural to urban centres cannot be entirely justified, as Osun State remains one of the South Western states with high rates of youth unemployment and a continued influx of youths from the rural to urban centres (NBS, 2018). With the illustration of Osun State, it can be concluded that other states can take a leap from this case to understand rural entrepreneurship performance going forward. The insinuation is a call for other states and the country at large to take cognisance of the opportunity inherent in rural entrepreneurship for the overall social and economic development of the country.

Overall, the study recommends a robust investment in social infrastructure, especially the construction of roads and other amenities for rural entrepreneurship ease of doing business. The Osun State government must come to the realisation that supporting rural entrepreneurship possesses an important spotlight for the state's development, and therefore effort must be made such that rural enterprises are supported through loan facilitation. Lastly, the state must be willing to niche a safe environment for small-scale farmers who form an outsized number of rural enterprises by eradicating the consistent farmers-herders' clashes. While the study is limited with a focus on two local governments in Osun State, future studies can interrogate this discourse from the perspective of other local governments in the state for a clearer picture of the trends, challenges and prospects of rural entrepreneurship in Osun State, Nigeria.

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