FACTORS INFLUENCING THE OPPORTUNITY EXPLOITATION BY ENTREPRENEURIAL TREE FARMERS IN LARI DISTRICT OF KIAMBU COUNTY, KENYA

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ABSTRACT
Entrepreneurship contributes to improving the quality of life for individuals, families and communities and to sustain growth of the economy and livelihoods improvement. Farm-based entrepreneurship has been eclipsed by traditions and cultures as more a way of life rather than a business opportunity based on desired economic gains. It is driven by farmers who respond to new opportunities related to farm based activities such as commercial trees planting. This study to establish why some farmers planted novel improved tree varieties in Lari District, Central Kenya guided by the following objectives: to assess the entrepreneurial characteristics of small holder forest farmers, to determine the factors influencing the planting of improved eucalyptus trees and to analyze the influence of technological innovations on the intensity of opportunity exploitation by entrepreneurial tree farmers of improved eucalyptus trees. The study applied a survey design. The target population for this study comprised of 2,500 smallholder tree farmers in Lari District. The researcher applied the snowball sampling technique to select the respondents. The sample size was 385 farmers. Structured questionnaires were employed in obtaining primary data for this study. Data was analysed using descriptive statistics and inferential statistics in form of multiple regression. The findings indicated that 87.3% of the respondents were over 36 years old which is the age of investments in assets such as land. 66% of the forest growers were male dominated as compared with 32.5% females while 46.8% respondents were educated up to secondary school. 66% of the growers operated on less than 2 acres of land which fits in the definition of smallholder farmers. Probit analysis indicated there was no significant different between the number of trees planted and personality traits. Factor analysis indicates four factors had significant influence on the planting of the improved eucalyptus trees. These were prior knowledge in agro-forestry, skills that makes it work, passion for environmental conservation and availability of ready markets. The multiple regression analysis indicated that the focus on technology opportunities (p<0.05) also presents a new
perspective on how entrepreneurial tree farmers, with fewer cutting-edge technological innovations, can still discover technological opportunities. The study findings indicated that smallholder farmers are entrepreneurial but the exploitation of opportunities requires more than personality traits and environmental factors play a significant role in the process. The study established presence of opportunities in favourable entrepreneurial environment leads to exploitation of the opportunities. It is recommended that entrepreneurship training, dissemination of information and access to the improved varieties needs to be enhanced through policy and programmes interventions to accelerate planting of improved trees varieties. Further research is recommended in determining the influence of role models in triggering the entrepreneurial opportunity exploitation by tree farmers.