Youth Entrepreneurship and Structural Inequality in Southwest Nigeria: A Socioeconomic Analysis

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Abstract

Entrepreneurship among young people is a popular practice in Nigeria as one of the strategic solutions to unemployment, poverty, and social vulnerability. Nevertheless, there is an unbalanced distribution of the capacity of entrepreneurial activity to bring inclusive development in the social groups. The article explores the linkage between youth entrepreneurship and structural inequality in Southwest Nigeria where the gaps in access to education, finance, infrastructure, social capital, and institutional support are interrogated to determine how inequalities in access to education, finance, infrastructure, social capital, and institutional support influence business entry, performance, and socioeconomic outcomes. The paper also places youth enterprise in a wider context of social stratification and unequal opportunity structures instead of viewing entrepreneurship as a homogenous route to upward mobility. The study adopts a mixed-methods socioeconomic design, which involves the combination of cross-sectional surveys of youth-owned businesses in selected states in Southwest Nigeria and semi-structured interviews and secondary socioeconomic indicators. The level of background variables, including educational attainment, gender, urban-rural location, and family socioeconomic status, is used to predict the sustainability of their entrepreneurial lives and income returns through descriptive statistics and regression modelling of quantitative data. The qualitative results would give a contextual understanding of life experience of structural barriers, such as credit restriction, regulatory bottlenecks, and digital divides, and network exclusion. The results show that even though youth entrepreneurship helps to generate income and make the local economy dynamic, the effect of its development is highly mediated by structural inequalities. Availability of startup funds, good education, and networks is found to be highly correlated with surviving in business and making growth, thus replicating already existing socioeconomic inequalities. The researchers conclude that the failure of youth entrepreneurship to alleviate but instead enhance inequality can be mitigated only under specific institutional reforms and mechanisms of support that are sensitive to equity. It is recommended in the policies that there should be inclusive financing systems, capacity building founded on the skills, and capacity building that is regionally differentiated to strengthen the ecosystem and to promote equitable entrepreneurial outcomes.

Keywords

Youth entrepreneurship, Structural inequality, Socioeconomic mobility, Institutional barriers, Southwest Nigeria.