

## **ENTREPRENEURIAL ECOSYSTEM IN NORTH CENTRAL NIGERIA: A STRATEGY FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The concept of sustainable development via entrepreneurship ecosystem is an approach to understand every unit of an entrepreneurial ecosystem and its individual contributions to entrepreneurial sustainability within a particular territory. It is an approach that affects all spheres of life; social, economic and environment, connecting them within entrepreneurial processing to a sustainable societal development. Using content analysis and drawing out causal mechanisms with systematic evaluation, This study reveals the various dimensions of entrepreneurship ecosystem in the North Central Nigeria, breaking down its elements into systems as drawn from the existing entrepreneurship literature, and critically linking them to entrepreneurship, sustainable development, industrial and technological backwardness in North Central region. The study therefore revealed that every unit of entrepreneurial ecosystem should be viewed on a process-based criteria so as to have a better framework of understand the role of entrepreneurial ecosystem on entrepreneurship in its micro form, in order to effectively support entrepreneurship venture creation, growth process and the transformation. The study recommends a point clarification on entrepreneurial ecosystem structures and their abilities on entrepreneurship in the region, as this could capitalize on the opportunities available to systematically and objectively tackle the threats on entrepreneurship in North Central Region of Nigeria.

**KEY WORDS:** Entrepreneurship, Entrepreneurial Ecosystem and Sustainable Development

**JEL CLASSIFICATION:** L26, L29, O15

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Nigeria in the last three decades has struggled to stimulate economic and job growth via the application of entrepreneurship and innovation. Following the innovative insight of Schumpeter (1934) in entrepreneurship, the nation strived to obtain sustainable development by exercise its proficiency in terms of creating a meaningful employment, increase in wealth creation and eradicating poverty from the society. Sustainable development, an integral corporeal endeavor, and Nigeria faced with increasing population growth and the struggle in management of the available resources; human and material, the nation is in obligation to embark on a continuous and a sustained process of interaction between social, economic and institutional processes which must work together to satisfy the increasing needs of its Populace (SDGR, 2022; Singh, Singh, Alam, Agrawa, 2022).

Adopting entrepreneurship as a platform to achieve sustainable development is best impetus to the desired aim (Abah, Okwori and Abah, 2021). Entrepreneurship ecosystems, if properly coordinated and managed could have the ability to identify the opportunities amidst the endowed human and material resource and also could provoke the spirit to undertaking timely creation of new ideas in the utilization of the available resources, as a ways of tapping the unexplored regional environment for the demand of its people. Also, proper management of entrepreneurship ecosystem could further, fast track increase in the availability of the basic life sustaining goods, better standard of living as well as expanding the range to economic and social selections. It represent a combination of elements that are crucial to entrepreneurship growth and development. (Jones and Ratten, 2021)

This conviction has impelled Nigeria to adopt a number of policies measures and programs such as National Economic Reconstruction Fund (NERFUND), World Bank MSMEs 1 and 2 Loan scheme, People and Community Bank, National poverty Eradication, Nigeria Bank of Commerce and industry (NBCI) and Advisory Agencies to mention a few, originally aimed at implant entrepreneurship culture in order to turn her economies characterized by low productivity into a high technological advance and a high growth economy.

However, the concept of entrepreneurship majorly adopted in these policies revolves only on it as an innate skill of talent which must be impacted on the people and nurtured. Thus, most of the policy measure in Nigeria revolves around entrepreneurship education and financing; expending on different entrepreneurship set-up programmes and institution of entrepreneurship learning in the Universities and Polytechnics, and deliberately ignoring all other factors that could make entrepreneurship to strive successfully, such as the regulatory frame work, culture, entrepreneurship mentorship and support system, welfare of the entrepreneurship workforce, entrepreneurship markets both globe and local, and other entrepreneurship ecosystem.

This mental resolve informs the frequent set-ups of entrepreneurship and other poverty alleviation programmes in Nigeria, lead purposive habit of abandonment of the previous programs(Ejo-Orusa, 2019). Isenberg (2011) advised that what is important is not simply fostering more entrepreneurship set-ups but to grow enterprises with strong root systems that can sustain their own growth. Also, as the result of the mental resolve on concept of entrepreneurship in Nigeria, most entrepreneurship policies in Nigeria singly identify factors that are termed standardized for achieving entrepreneurial success anywhere and elsewhere in Nigeria, not minding the different dispositions of the various entrepreneurship environments(ecosystem) in the different spheres of Nigeria.

In the history of economic growth and development in the globe, the factor endowment has never been recorded the same in the globe. Drawing from the available entrepreneurship studies, it is confirmed that entrepreneurship environments/ecosystems are unique with no two ecosystem the same (Ejo-Orusa, 2019; Mason and Brown, 2014). Entrepreneurship ecosystem that works in one part of the country may fail terribly in other parts of the country. Thus, giving the fact that all entrepreneurs operate in micro environment with its own unique opportunity recognition, the pace of new innovation and the extent which the business will grow and flourish, or survive, or die and the entire entrepreneurship orientation and uptake depends on uniqueness of entrepreneurial ecosystem. Unless this is implanted in the mind-set of Nigerian financial prudence operators, there will always be a flippant attitude in the coordination and management of the other factors

paramount for the growth of entrepreneurship in Nigeria. The pragmatic consequence is unsustainable entrepreneurship development in the economic system in Nigeria.

Given the flaws of the of entrepreneurship policy implementation in Nigeria, a lot has been evidently wrong with other entrepreneurship factors necessary for the growth of entrepreneurship. Regulatory frame work, which happens within the setting of rules and regulatory outlines, has been weak. For example, administrative burden including administrative requirement, such as permit, regulation required by the government are mostly violated, leading to a high cost of starting and managing businesses, and the extent to which culture influences entrepreneurship in the beliefs, norms and values of the people is less emphasized. Furthermore, Entrepreneurship Mentorship and support system are not encouraged, the entrepreneurial markets, both region and local are not sturdily built and the general welfare of the entrepreneurship workforce are not accessed for further developmental adjustments.

Although Nigeria, naturally blessed with entrepreneurship opportunities to transform the country entrepreneurially, these opportunities are dampened by due process, a focus on entrepreneurship financing frame work which encourages misappropriation of entrepreneurial fund, and nepotism in the dispatching and dissemination of entrepreneurial incentives (Ejo-Orusa, (2019)). More often, Nigeria fails to embark on feedback mission on entrepreneurship through the study of entrepreneurship dynamism (Abah, Okwori and Abah, 2021). The implication often time could be a vicious circle of wrong logical perception of entrepreneurship and its policy formulation, failure to identify the true underlying causes of decrease or low performance of entrepreneurship.

The North Central region of Nigeria covers the north central part of Nigeria. It is situated geographically spanning from the west, around the confluence of the River Niger and Benue and it is comprised of six states namely; Benue, Nasarawa, Plateau, Kogi, Niger and kwara and Federal Capital Territory (FCT) states. These states have similar ethnic groups, and common political history. One common peril of the region like most African sub region is severe poverty prevalence, lingering unemployment, especially among the youth, and high-income inequality (Abah, 2019, Maikudi, 2014).

The menace is most life-threatening in the three states carved from the North province; Plateau, Nasarawa and Benue state, given the enormous human and natural resources endowed. For example, in Plateau State, about 1.68million people (61% of the entire population) are presently unemployed and poor, living below poverty line (Plateau state Bureau of statistics, PSBS 2018). 51.6% of them are poor and 26.9% are in severe poverty (Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative (OPHI, 2017)). Also, OPHI (2017) presented that 52.4% of the entire population in Nasarawa state are poor and about 60% of this population are youth. In Benue State, OPHI (2017) recorded the highest percentage of poverty among the study area of 59.2%, and 24.8% of this population are extremely poor with more than 50% the youth in this category. As a result of this, the region is identified for hunger, violence, youth restiveness. Thus, a sound entrepreneurship in the region cannot be over emphasized.

The mainstay in the North Central region is agriculture and the region is endowed with various untapped Mineral and energy resources that offer potential for economically viable industrial and agricultural development. Thus, it is expected that the entrepreneurial objective in this region is to realign, refocus, reframe and reinvent the factors behind the particular ecosystem in the region to ensure that they positively support entrepreneurship in the region.

It is on this note that the study aimed at accessing the entrepreneurial ecosystem in the North Central of Nigeria, with the intention of bringing out all the entrepreneurial arsenal factors that affect its developments, in other to implant strategies for economic and social sustainable development. The study used contextual analytical method to explore entrepreneurial ecosystem, in relation to entrepreneurial development and their disproportionately large contribution to job creation, poverty reduction and understanding factors that contribute to sustainable development as a whole.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL LITERATURE**

### **2.1 Conceptual Literature**

#### **2.1.1 Concept of Entrepreneurial Ecosystem and sustainable development**

The idea of entrepreneurship ecosystem is traced back to the study of industrial clustering and development of National Innovation System that took place in the 1990s. Since then, management writers have used the term 'ecosystem' to describe a perfect condition for a growth of an entity and a condition to foster economic prosperity and wealth creation. Entrepreneurship, like every entity cannot exist successfully without a complete systems working together. Purbasari, Myhyi and Sukoco (2020), describes entrepreneurial ecosystem from the concept of biology as natural environment and its element including organisms in the area as well as physical environment, which function together as a single unit. The entrepreneurial ecosystem is the entrepreneurial facilities, resource, people, and atmosphere necessary to help to establish entrepreneurship (Fuban and Moos, 2021; Herrington and Kew, 2011).

Prencipe, Corsi, Rodríguez-Gulías, Fernández-López., & Rodeiro-Pazos, (2020) described these elements as potential or existing entrepreneurs, organizations that support entrepreneurship, like venture capitalist, business angels and banks, as well as institutions like universities, public sector agencies, and the entrepreneurial processes that occur inside the ecosystem such as; the business birth rate, the number of high potential growth firms, the serial entrepreneurs and their entrepreneurial ambition.

The issue of sustainable development applies to all spheres of social life. It is an issue that creates a lasting solution to all kinds of problems ranging from economic, social to environmental in the local, region, national and in the globe. The concept of sustainable development was conceived in the publication of Brundtland Commission, titled "*our common future*" in 1987. This publication cautioned on the negative environmental consequences of economic growth and globalization, with the intent of finding the possible solutions to the problems caused by industrialization and population growth. Sustainable development according to Agu and Onah (2021), and United Nation Assembly (1987) is the development that satisfies the needs of the present without compromising the capacity of future generations, guaranteeing the balance between economic growth, care for the environment and social well-being. It means that it is the development that involves maintaining economic advancement and progress while protecting the long-term value of the environment. Baumgartner and Quaas (2009) define it as the vision of sustainability aimed at justice in the domain of individual-nature-relationship, in view of the long-term and uncertain future. The concept of conserving resources for future generation is a common feature found in the definitions above and it is for every aspects of life. Whichever, aspect of life, the overall goal

of sustainable development is to strategize for a long-term stability in the development of environment and the economy as a whole.

## **2.2. Theoretical Literature**

This study is guided by two entrepreneurial ecosystem theories; the Organizational Dependency theory by Johnson (1995) and the Clusters theory by Alfred Marshall in 1890. Johnson (1995) explained organizational theory as an inter-organization and organizational behaviour that concerns the critical resources that must be available for organization to survival. In agreement to this assertion, Claywell (2021) explained that the survival of any entity is depended on its surrounding environment and in most cases vis-vas.

The Clusters Theory was introduced by Alfred Marshal in his seminal works; Principles of Economics published in 1919 (Fuban and Moos, 2021). The theory explained that; the concentration of industries in a specific place provides a great economic advantage to the industries because of the mutual relationships and dependency. Fuban and Moos, (2021); Vicente, (2018) reported that the increase in return of specialized firms in a special location is explained by their socio-cultural relationships provided, resources and knowledge that increase firms 'abilities to compete and, as a result, yield high returns.

These two theories are relevant in understanding the entrepreneurial ecosystem because entrepreneurial ecosystem relies on resources for survival and majority of these resources are obtained through the mutual interactions of the ecosystem environmental components. Internal resources such as human capital, financial resources and assets are components of ecosystem in an organization (Claywell, 2021), while in Clusters Theory, the concentration of firms is the ecosystem itself and the companies and specialization are the entrepreneurial ecosystem components (Fuban and moos, 2021).

## **2 METHODOLOGY**

This research adopted a collaborative research method (Kansheba and Wald, 2020), and a systematic approach Belitski and Heron (2017) which incorporate varieties of content analysis, conversation analysis and possible discourse analysis by implementing a systematic literature review approach. This helps in integrating the overviews of the content of entrepreneurial ecosystem and sustainable development. The views from this content analysis was to help in describing and developing a theoretical understanding of responses of the literature reviewed. (Belitski and Heron 2017). First, a broad literature overview in the fields of entrepreneurship and sustainable development was conducted, and afterward allowing a link to entrepreneurship ecosystem, adopting an approach to the understanding of the dynamic interactions and processes of the entrepreneurship, entrepreneurship ecosystem and sustainable development.

Secondly, the systematic literature review was conducted to reveal the concept and theoretical evolution of the entrepreneurship ecosystems and sustainable development. Furthermore, the search main strategy included the search terms ' entrepreneurship ecosystem and sustainable development' in conjunction with ecosystem components and their contributions to entrepreneurship and the society at large. These include among others; Components of entrepreneurship ecosystem: Dimensions of the entrepreneurial ecosystem in the North Central region, Dimensions of the Entrepreneurial Ecosystem in the North Central of Nigeria, Government

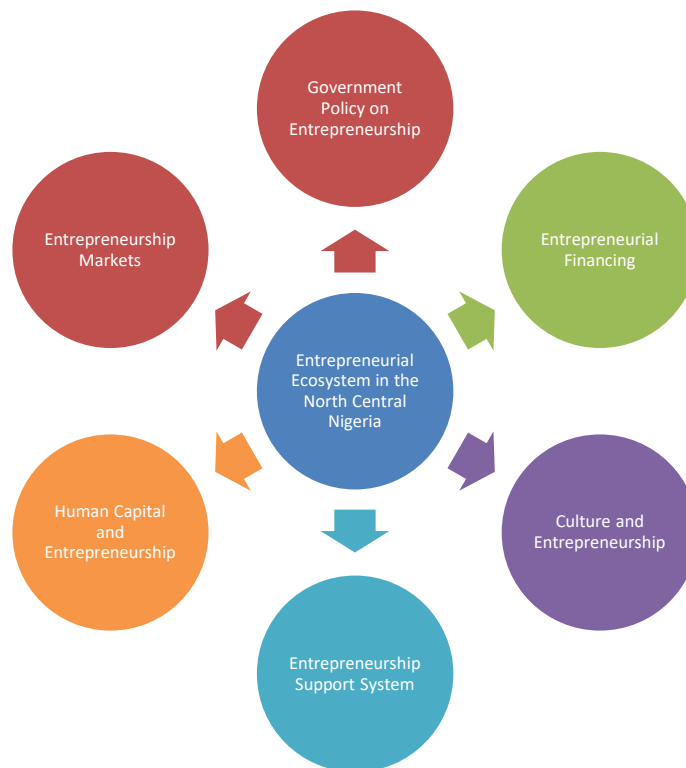
Policy on entrepreneurship. Also, a variety of sources were conducted in an attempt to source for information and insights from different perspectives. These sources include Journals, special issues, relevant reports and selected conference papers such Isenberg 2011.

#### **4. ENTREPRENEURIAL ECOSYSTEM AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

##### **4.1.1 Components of entrepreneurship ecosystem: Dimensions of the entrepreneurial ecosystem in the North Central region.**

Entrepreneurial ecosystem is a unit formed as a combination of social, political, economic and cultural elements within the region. This unity forms a system that functions together and interacts between subsystems to reach a specific purpose (mason and brown, 2014). Isenberg (2011) first listed the major six elements of entrepreneurial ecosystem.; Government Policy on entrepreneurship, Entrepreneurship Funding and Financing, Entrepreneurship Culture, Mentors and Supporting System, Human Capital development on entrepreneurship and Entrepreneurship Markets. In this study, these elements are broken down into systems, as drawn from the existing entrepreneurship literature, but are given critical link between entrepreneurship in Nigeria, in particular entrepreneurship in North Central region, economic sustainable development, and industrial and technological backwardness in the region. The idea here is for the policy makers in Nigeria to develop strategies on how to reduce the weaknesses and capitalize on the opportunities available to systematically and objectively tackle the threats to entrepreneurship in north central region of Nigeria. The dimensions of the entrepreneurial ecosystem in the North Central region is presented in figure 1

##### **Dimensions of the Entrepreneurial Ecosystem in the North Central of Nigeria**



Source: Isenberg 2011

**Figure 1.** Dimensions of Entrepreneurial Ecosystem in the North Central Nigeria

The lessons from the global health challenge of COVID Pandemic should put Nigerian to underscore the preparedness at every level to handle unpredicted economic task that could befall the nation. Although, the situation in Nigeria before the global health challenge that led to the global financial crisis was not any better; the intense poverty prevalence, the lingering unemployment, especially among the youth, and the high income-inequality, in the country by all means needs to be emancipated from this jams. To do this, priority is now shift on entrepreneurship and the maximum exploration of its domain.

**4.2.1 Government Policy on entrepreneurship.**

The regulatory mode of governments differs across the regions of the world. Although Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), has prescribed a specific entrepreneurship regulation framework, Ahmad and Hoffman (2007) advocated that the framework should be stringent on economic factor on which the region has a comparative advantage. This is to bring out the maximum benefit from the economic factors readily available. Within this domain, the component available in the North Central region are policies such as on the institution of entrepreneurship, financial support from the government, government regulatory framework on entrepreneurship, research institutes on entrepreneurship and venture friendly legislation.

The institution of entrepreneurship in the region deals with the ease of setting entrepreneurship business in the region. This requires full financial supports from the government, tax incentives and laws that could be business friendly. Also, business set-up required adequate physical infrastructure such as telecommunication, good transport system which has great impact on business. The regulatory framework is one of the most important government functions. In this, government forms policies on the operations of entrepreneurship to promote entrepreneurship venture and safeguard their interests such as patent policies, laws of taxation and other business-related regulations.

However, entrepreneurship in the region is institutionally weak. Abah and Adofo (2020), Eneji, Dalut and Odey (2017) recognized that frivolous attitude in the institution, coordination and management of entrepreneurship businesses in the region and the poor state of entrepreneurship infrastructure makes business set-up difficult in the region. Also, the states and local governments' officers do not carry out fair and just operations. For example corruption, tribalism, and nepotism have deluded entrepreneurial intentions.

**4.1.3 Entrepreneurial Financing Domain**

One of very crucial dimensions of entrepreneurial ecosystem in the North Central Nigeria is entrepreneurship financing. This is because, it is beneficial to a business to have financial reserves so as to maintain growth and acquire more resources. The financial options available to the North Central region are Government financing; through public capital and debt financing, private financing; through angle investors, private equity like banks, insurance, and families and friends, and venture capital or access to debt (Okhankhuele, 2021). Common to all region of Nigeria, entrepreneurship financing is one of the biggest challenges of entrepreneurship. The easily

accessible finance medium is the bank equity, however, accessibility is difficult because of bank requirements and protocols (World Bank, 2021; Balarabe, 2021). Free donations from the Federal Government are hijacked by its officers (Abah and Adofu, 2020)

#### **4.1.4 Culture domain**

This refers to entrepreneurship culture and culture of the people. Culture (social norms) of the people is all elements, conditions and influence which shape the personality of an individual and potentially affect his/her attitude, disposition, behaviour, decisions and activities (Ibeenwo, 2018). This could be the reason for the cross-national differences in levels of entrepreneurship activities and development. The question of how the role of culture affects the development of entrepreneurship should generate research interest in a traditional terrain like the West African region. The North Central region of Nigeria takes special value in the social norms; beliefs and religion and family. These cultural values systems greatly affect the entrepreneurial culture such as interest on how to acquire new knowledge or ambition driven hunger to search for business tolerance and risk taken, preference for self-employment, success stories and role models, research culture, positive image of entrepreneurship and celebration of innovation (Ibeenwo, 2018).

#### **4.1.5 Entrepreneurship support domain**

This domain refers to a well-organized mechanism through which assistance can be provided for promoting entrepreneurship venture. The assistance is found in variety of individuals, institutions and organizations that ease the business creation and their expansion. The assistance could also come from non-governmental organization actors such as business associates and non-governmental institutions. These actors could serve as mentors, advisers, professional services like accounting, human resources and legal. Mentorship, Incubatorship, accelerators services and entrepreneurial network are paramount in the region because of the prominence in the technicality of the types of entrepreneurship mostly found in the region. For example farming is technical and it requires educational institution that grooms young farmers in its technicality. Other support of interest that could need to be refurbish in the region is the physical infrastructures such transportation and logistics, energy, telecommunication.

#### **4.1.6 Human capital development on entrepreneurship domain**

Entrepreneurial human capital development is a planned initiatives aimed at enhancing entrepreneurial skills to boost their entrepreneurial ventures. According to Matanda (2014), developing entrepreneurship human capital enables the entrepreneurs to get new knowledge and identifies opportunities and challenges inside markets and workplace. The components of this domain are the management and technical talent, the entrepreneurial company experience, outsourcing availability and the access to immigrant workforce.

What is widely found in the North Central region are training centres on activities like on-the-job training, vocational training and industrial training, and thus, the human capital in the region is the form of know-how, skill labour, management expertise and general experience (Abah, Okwori and Abah, 2021). However, a teaching on job increase and expansion, the essences of entrepreneurship is neglected. Entrepreneurship in the region needs wide coverage with a distinctive definition to differentiate it from skill acquisition programmes. Abah (2019) affirmed that entrepreneurship education in the region is only given in the universities and Polytechnics on the part time bases not



as a full course and those outside these institutions are denied the opportunity to benefit from the program. Thus, this is a call on federal government to set up entrepreneurial schools and incubators centers in the region with government maximum entrepreneurship protectionism to provide disposition to physical and mental work, scientific and technological literacy, leadership, management capacity and intellectualism. Human capital is the pinnacle to economic development in Nigeria (Ojike, Ikpe, Nkechinyere, Uwajumogu, Odionye and Okwor. (2023).

#### **4.1.7 Markets Domain**

Schumpeter's theory on the pinnacle of economic development is centred on a continuous changing market system. According to him an innovator/entrepreneur must be able to launch a new product or new species product, apply new methods of production or sales of product not yet proven in the industry, open new markets, acquire new sources of supply of raw material or semi-finished goods. These could only be achieved by a large consumer market that is technologically sophisticated enough. Sophistication of the market depends on the level of education and skill acquired in the country which affects change in technology that result from research and development (R&D). Unfortunately, the standard of education in Nigeria is deteriorating. Educational system in Nigeria has been characterized by poor quality of teachers, poor infrastructural, ill-equipped vocational and technical educational training facilities (Anyanwu, 2015). An improvement in education especially and entrepreneurial education would mean enlarged market in the regions of Nigeria.

#### **4.2 Contributing Factors for sound exploration of Entrepreneurship Ecosystem in the North Central of Nigeria**

And effective entrepreneurial ecosystem must be a social and economic atmosphere/environment that affects the local or regional entrepreneurship positively. It is referred to as entrepreneurship environment which aids an entrepreneur with an in-built driving force to explore the opportunity available in the region. Entrepreneurs are heterogeneous in nature, thus they are being classified based on their features. Entrepreneurs mostly found in African continent and Nigeria in particular, are the necessary entrepreneurs or craftsmen entrepreneur, who are mostly less educated and have trouble in management ability. A sought for the good entrepreneurship ecosystem determinant therefore, should include exploring factors with intent of resolving all entrepreneurship hitches and provide a good platform for sustainable entrepreneurship development.

One of the most important determining factors is the individual's perception about the environment's feasibility and desirability to explore the environment. This largely depends on the individual's knowledge and understanding of the environment factors. According to Ogedenge, Okhakhu and Adekunle (2015), entrepreneurship is based on knowledge and understanding on the environment factors has a higher influence on the survivability, profitability and scalability of business. The habit in Nigeria is providing for skill acquisitions programs and less attention is given on the basic understanding of the necessary business principle on how to sustain the business exploring the environment. With the understanding of the entrepreneurship ecosystem, entrepreneurs would be able to craft a space and seek for opportunities in the environment that would match their personality traits. Thus, the north central needs a platform in addition to skill acquisition centres that would aid entrepreneurize the skill acquired and through this, the entrepreneurs in the region will effectively explore the entrepreneurial ecosystem available.

Effective exploration of entrepreneurial ecosystem is a largely dependent on policy and decision making on entrepreneurial ecosystem construct. This depends on the critical analysis of the macro entrepreneurship environment for proper construct of policy measure and decisions. Ejo-Orusa (2019) identifies three steps to critically analysis of the macro environment for policy making; understand the component of dimension of the ecosystem. This, he means not to only identifying the accepted pillars of entrepreneurship ecosystem, but a deep examination of entrepreneurial ecosystems that are most particular to the entrepreneurship in the region. For example, ecology of the terrain, information on the distribution of the produce or even the market middle men in the locality who capitalize on low price ranking and taking undue advantage of the producers. Secondly, assessing whether and how these component dimensions have impacted positively or negatively on entrepreneurship and lastly realign and reinvent the dimensions and embed the entrepreneurship culture and to promote entrepreneurship.

Embedding an appropriate entrepreneurship culture attract an ardent passionate enthusiasm in properly utilization of entrepreneurship environment. (Ajakwe 2016) said that social and cultural environment affect individual's attitudes, belief system, perception, relationships, and intentions of a good entrepreneurs. These social and cultural environments include; family background and tradition in self-employment, religion, and formal education could absorb entrepreneurship training. For example, the trait of entrepreneurship is shown in the family in its inculcation of business ideas, culture and provision of access to capital and information within the family is proven to have added values to family entrepreneurs and their societies.

Effective entrepreneurial players coupled with an effective interconnectivity of firm in the local, region and in the nation could be a condition necessary for a good entrepreneurship ecosystem. Since the entrepreneurial ecosystem is composed of human, entrepreneurship and society (Saeed, Mubarik and Naghavi, 2019), entrepreneurship growth in today intricate environment requires inter-connected supports within numerous entrepreneurship players active in the society. These integral players of entrepreneurship include; the individual (entrepreneurs), the government or the state men (local and state authority) who ideally should regulate and control the affairs of entrepreneurship, facilitate and support entrepreneurship development.

Compared to the nation such as China, Singapore, Australia and Europe where entrepreneurship is highly supported by their Government and State men, there exists a vast gap between them and the African nation. For example in Nigeria and in the North Central in particular, judging from literature, it is hard to pin point resultant effect of the contributions of these elements of entrepreneurial ecosystem. It is important however to analyse the relative contributions of these elements in other to devise the optical entrepreneurial promotion policies in the region.

Interconnectivity of the entrepreneurship firms and entrepreneurs of different kind is also a typical ecosystem that must be seriously encouraged in the region. This kind of entrepreneurship setting could ensure that the region is equipped with a structure to grow, compete and thrive in technology and in a long run, a fast changing globalized business environment; a pivotal role in equipping firms with a competitive advantage. Naturally, all entrepreneurship environments are bound to remains dormant if there are no combination of different ideas, and the use of available and obtainable resources, the entrepreneurial ability and the level of motivation and commitment. What this means is that the interwoven collaboration of these environment and synchronization of the markets in the North Central, of the primary-secondary producers of different entrepreneurship

firms and the consumer markets could led to a robust legal marked system, and a large consumer market that could be technologically laden.

#### **4.3 Entrepreneurship Ecosystem and Sustainable development: a focus on North Central Nigeria**

The study of entrepreneurship ecosystem in the North Central region is crucial because it could create the possibility of improving the society and environment through an overhauling of entrepreneurship in the region. Unifying economic, social, environment, and institution into one all-embracing unit indicates sustainability dimension for positive outcome. Scholars such as Mieszajkina (2016); Halla, Danekeb and Lenox (2016); and Ibeenwo (2018) confirm this by saying that the fusion of entrepreneurship ecosystem with major conduit for sustainable product and processes and new venture are being held up as a panacea for many social and environmental concerns. Each of these systems is an active, self-organising and evolving unit. For the sub-elements of these systems to work together effectively, they must maintain a capacity to survive and evolve, and their inter-connectivity must enable a permanent co-development. How are the roles of entrepreneurship and its ecosystem in sustainable development play out is our major concern in this sub-section.

According to Besler (2009), sustainability development is in triple folds and dimensions which must work in close relation to each other. These folds include economic sustainability, societal sustainability and environmental sustainability. However, Spangenberg (2002) in his work on institutional sustainability indicator, long showed that these three dimensions work only with the coordination of institution. Thus, figure 2 shows the four dimension of sustainability development.

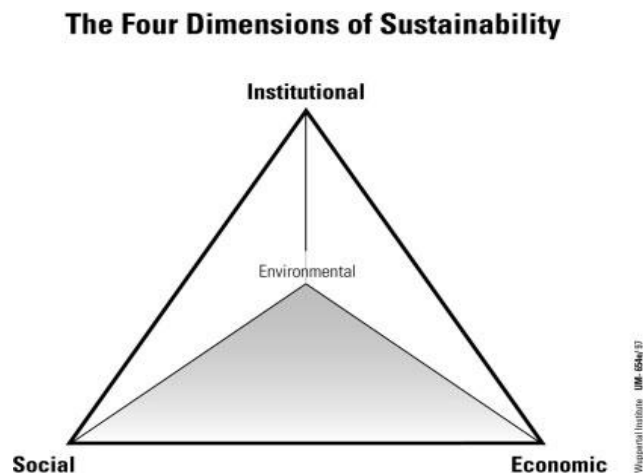


Figure 2. The prism of sustainability. Source: Joachim H. Spangenberg 2002

Economic sustainability refers to practices that support long-term economic growth without negatively impacting on social, environmental and cultural aspects of the society. This entails achieving a balance in the process of production of goods and services in all sectors of the economy; among others, agriculture, manufacturing, finance health, education. Relating to the North Central region, the intrinsic economic challenges in the North Central are inefficiency in the mobilization of the resources available for optimum productivity, over dependency on agricultural commodity and lack of diversification of economy lead low capital formation, unemployment and absolute poverty (Sofoluwe, 2014; Maikudi, (2014).

The region is endowed with various mineral resources; tin, Marble coal, Columbite, aquamarine in Nasarawa, Kogi, Plateau states, a lot of untapped energy and agricultural resources in Benue, Kwara and Kogi and Niger states offer prospects for economically viable industrial and agricultural development projects. Abuja the federal state capital is blessed with natural land feature with availability of land for future expansion, and Niger state with amazing National Park dotted with abundant tourist sites. Yet, the region suffers economically unspeakably high unemployment and an indescribable poverty level. Thus, it is in place if primacy is placed on building industries on inherent prime resources, such mineral extracting, animal husbandries and forestry, fishery, and tourism. The essence is job creation and social welfare. It also means that, problems such as socio-economic, political instability and religious intolerance especially with socio-economic and political, mixed up with political aberration in the happenings in the region and other states should be tackled (Ugwuoke, 2022).

The environmental sustainability refers to responsible connectivity and interactions with the environment which avoids degradation of the countries natural resources for a long term value. It is the share of technological advantage specifically in environmental management with the aim of avoiding stressing a valued ecosystem beyond the limits of its resilience, stability and carrying capacity (Oyeshola, 2008). The practice of environmental sustainability helps to ensure that the needs of today's population are met without jeopardizing the ability of future generations to meet their needs. However, the glaring environmental challenges in the North Central are environmental degradation in forest clearing, paving way for soil erosion; river pollution in the river coast of the region, posing danger for all living thing, new and in future. Also, gas flaring from waste and bush burning, containing toxins which exposes everyone to respiratory illness, cancer and death is a major setback in the region (Macaulay, 2014). There should be an articulated national environmental health policy and a national action health plan that could favour both the population and investors. Also, since the region's main stain is agriculture, a safe use of pesticides and other agrochemicals should be promoted to safeguard the environment.

Social sustainability is a preemptive way to achieve equity in social issue; rights of the people, issues such as education, health, social infrastructure among other. According to United Nation (UN, 2020), it is a proactive way of managing and identifying social business impacts on employees, workers in the value chain, customer, and local communities. Sustainability is achieved in this regard through the conglomeration of social efforts of the actors; the government, through their public policies among the provision of good education, health, and shelter, support social issues such; as women empowerment, gender equality, children, indigenous people, the disabled and through the private business owner who are responsible for the welfare of their employees.

Nigeria still falls short of the economic and social progress required to impact the wellbeing of the average of Nigerian. The resultant effect is the unleashed frustration of the Nigerians, especially the youth, and this intensified frustration fueled the "SAS must go crisis" in Eastern, Western and the Federal Central Territory of Nigeria that claimed the lives of about 70 youth in Ikeja Lagos in 2020. It is reaffirmed by studies such as Maikudi (2014) and Shaba, Yelwa, Obansa, and Magaji (2018) that the North Central region is challenged with issues on education, health facilities, shelter, unemployment and poverty. While it is the primary duty of the government to progressively realize the need to provide these basic needs in the region, the businesses owners

should do their part by diligently avoiding harming the rights of their employees and address any adverse impacts on the employees' right that may be related to their activities.

Institutional sustainability ensures that all systems, institutions, policies and procedures at the national to local levels of government and private are functional and meet. It is the formal and informal organizational rules and enforcement mechanism. It collate and co-ordinate the affairs of the system collaborate. However, corruption in Nigeria has ruled out institutional quality. Corruption is a damaging and most complicated feature in Nigeria which is openly acknowledged and yet ever-present in the functioning of the social and economic lives of the country. Orkar, shaminja and Tyolumun (2020) pointed out that corruption has crippled Nigeria's ability to deliver for its citizen the minimum social and economic rights.

Apart from corruption, there are other economic factors that affect entrepreneurial ecosystem and sustainable development in the region; banks and other financial organization prefer to do business with trusted customers and suppliers they have built a long-term relationship with over doing business with startups that are new to the market. Moreover the phobia of banks' request over bank loans is a threat for new and potential entrepreneurs to grow in their businesses (Adejo, 2021; Okhankhuele, 2021). Also the existence of large organizations, coupled with a large and well-established the state-owned enterprises prevents private sectors or entrepreneurs in the region from entering sector markets. For example rice farming in the region is crowded by rice companies such as Olam rice mill (Mama Rice) in Nasarawa, Onyx rice mill in Niger, Quarra rice mill in kwara thus, individual entrepreneur finds it difficult to survive.

The notion among the people in the region regarding starting business is that one can start a business and succeed if capital is provided. However, edification level says no to that. No entrepreneur, without entrepreneurial skill or education can handle risk in business, technology absorption, inflexibility in labour market, competition, and product and process innovation. In addition, the spread of entrepreneurship in the sub-region is trivial. Entrepreneurial network is stunted because of unavailability of entrepreneurship information technology, lead improper dissemination of entrepreneurship information and ideas.

For these reason, the growth of entrepreneurship in most of the urban areas in these states has not disseminated to the rural areas and has not provided opportunities for the emergence of entrepreneurship and competition in the states, nation, international market, and diaspora networks. Hence, the north central region needs a readily entrepreneurial skill developing institutions, robust entrepreneurship financing and market, worthwhile policy measure and supporting system such as non-governmental institution, social status entrepreneurs and private investors for a sustainable entrepreneurship and development.

## **5. POLICY RECOMMENDATION**

The Government of Nigeria should make the entrepreneurial activities a government priority by formulating effective policies for entrepreneurial ecosystems, involving its ministers with institutional entrepreneurs who understand what entrepreneurial ecosystem is and its limitations, in order to shape and empower ecosystem policies and program. Also policies formulated should be broadly focused; holistic and encompass all ecosystem and not attending only to special areas of interest. For example, Nigeria since two decades has prioritized high-tech ecosystem more than the other ecosystem (Ejo-Orusa, 2019).

## **6. CONCLUSION**

Creating entrepreneurship favourable environments for entrepreneurship set-ups is now a major policy focus in the developing nation. Entrepreneurial ecosystem approaches has emerged as the response to entrepreneurial growth blast. Specifically, the paper showed the opportunity of maximum utilization of entrepreneurial ecosystem, a strategy that creates supportive environments that foster innovation start-ups. This paper also explores entrepreneurial ecosystem in the North Central region of Nigeria; the dimensions of entrepreneurship ecosystem in the region and how they influence entrepreneurship processes for sustainable development. The aim is to bring out all entrepreneurship arsenal factors that affect its development.

Judging from entrepreneurship literature, the policy measure on entrepreneurial ecosystem in Nigeria is myopic in nature as it revolves around entrepreneurship education and financing; expending on different entrepreneurship set-up programmes and institution of entrepreneurship learning in the Universities and Polytechnics, and, deliberately ignoring all other factors, such as the regulatory frame work, culture, entrepreneurship mentorship and support system, welfare of the entrepreneurship workforce, entrepreneurship markets both globe and local that could make entrepreneurship to strive successfully. This measure informs purposive habit of embezzling entrepreneurship funds and abandoning previous programs by the leading officers. Also, the entrepreneurship measures taken in inconsideration of the different dispositions of the various entrepreneurship environments in the different spheres of Central Northern Nigeria, giving the fact that all entrepreneurs operate in micro environment with its own unique opportunity are not recognition and are not attended to underscores the low economic productivity and sustainable development in the country.

Drawing from the study, the region is endowed with a conducive entrepreneurial environment with economic resources and power that could offer prospects for economic feasible developments via industrial and agricultural projects. However these resources are cramped, untapped and are degenerating. This research paper therefore, strongly suggests that every unit of entrepreneurial ecosystem should be viewed on a process-based criterion so as to have a better framework of understand the role of entrepreneurial ecosystem in supporting entrepreneurship venture creation. This process-based view framework could also explain the growth process and transformation of the entrepreneurial ecosystems and could also create a clarification on types of different ecosystem structures and their abilities in the region.

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