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Characteristics of Family Business through the Eyes of the African Researchers

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Abstract— **As family businesses are in European market usually considered the private companies owned by one or more families and their members, who have a common history and, through the active cooperation of family members, form a future plan based on the long-term sustainability of the business. However, a uniform generally applicable definition has not been introduced, yet. Moreover, the specification of the family business could differ between the countries and continents. Therefore, if we want to deal with the family business issue, it is first necessary to determine how the term "family business" is understood in the given locations. Therefore, this work aims to present how family businesses are perceived in the least developed countries of the world in Africa and what are its most specific characteristics. Using data collected from a primary survey questionnaire in 20 African countries, we found the most important characteristics of the family businesses in Africa. They are similar to those presented in researches on family businesses in Europe; however, in contra to finding in the Europe, we found, that for African researchers, it is important, that the family business owners live the same permanent address as the place/address of the business is.**

Keywords- family business definition; family business characteristics; private-sector entrepreneurship; African countries; least developed countries;

I. INTRODUCTION

Family businesses (hereinafter also as FB) are set up with the goal of long-term sustainability and transmission to future generations [1], [2]. Their traditions give them a stronger position within the region, which makes it easier and more important for them to establish long-term strategic partnerships and gain a dominant position in negotiations with suppliers [2].

In general it is estimated that today almost 50% of all private-sector companies operating in the European market and 80% in Africa are family-type [3], [4]. However, a study published by IFERA, the International Family Enterprise Research Academy [5], states that in Europe, as in South America, the number of FB is not around 50%, but between 60-90% depending on the country. Moreover, some other studies report the figure as high as 96% [6]. Such different estimates may arise from the fact that individual studies differ depending on the period from which they come, the focus on different economic and the geographical area, and also from the different understanding of the family business term among the individual researchers or scientists as there is missing statistically workable definition of "family business" [7]. According to a study by the Austrian company KMU, there are more than 90 definitions of FB across European countries [8]. These differ mainly according to the degree of family influence on ownership, management and strategic control and according to the degree of family members' formal or informal involvement in the company's activities [8]. Some definitions consider 25% control to be a decisive family share [9], while other definitions are determined by a simple majority ownership of the capital of a company [9], [10]. Some studies link family businesses only to SMEs, while others include large companies in the definitions [8]. The reason for such a varying understanding of FB may be the fact that individual studies differ depending on the period from which they come, the geographical and economic areas studied and also due to the focus on different factors [11]. However, the definitions from other cultures may differ even more. Therefore, if we want to deal with FB issue, it is first necessary to determine how the term "family business" is understood in the given locations.

A. Research objective

The aim of this study is to present how family businesses are perceived in the least developed countries of the world, which are situated in Africa, and what are its most specific characteristics. Their specification can play a key role in creating the proper infrastructure to support their vitality and longevity.

II. FAMILY BUSINESS – LITERATURE REVIEW

Based on the study of the Scopus, Web of Science, Proquest, JSTOR and ScienceDirect database, the first mentions of family businesses marginally appear in the professional literature around 1930 in manuscripts written by e.g. Parker [12], Jevons [13] or Keane [14]. In the publication from Parker [12], the term family business is associated with a small or micro-enterprise, or more specifically only with a self-employed person, the store manager, who employs other family members either part-time or full-time. Other employees outside the family circle are excluded from this definition of a family business [12].

Scientific research in the field of FB subsequently intensified considerably, especially in the USA in the 1970s [10], [15]–[18]. In the publication from Calder [10], as well as in the one from Levinson [18], the introduction states that

family-owned companies form the backbone of American free enterprise. In their studies, both authors expand Parker's definition of the family business by stating that the term does not necessarily mean just micro-enterprises, but that a family business can be of any size and can operate in any industry. In addition, both authors admit the possibility of other employees who are non-family members. The key to determining the family's business is the majority ownership in the hands of the family, which ensures control over the operation of the business [10]. Because of their specific features, family businesses have to face obstacles that are not present in public companies, as claim in their studies both authors [10], [18].

In Europe, the rise in FB researches took place about twenty years later in the 1990s (e.g. [19], [20] and other), especially in countries such as Finland, France, Italy, Norway, Spain and the Netherlands. Gradually, other countries began to address the issue of FB [8]. Family businesses are in these publications usually defined as companies owned by one or more families and their members, who have a common history and, through the active cooperation of family members, form a future plan based on the long-term sustainability of the FB. Perret [21] considers family businesses to mean all businesses in which two or more family members of the same family participate in the management and administration of the business and own the majority of the company's shares. Also according to him, the FB is constituted by a close connection of the team through business activity and in accordance with common goals. One frequently mentioned characteristic of family businesses is the overlap between ownership and management of the company [6], [22].

In Africa, the first publications on FB appeared around 2010 (according to the databases mentioned above), e.g. in the manuscripts Khavul et al. [23], Visser and Chiloane Tsoka [24], Isaacs and Friedrich [25], Acquaah [26], Gupta et al. [27] and other and their number gradually rose mainly after 2015 (see [26], [28]–[31]). However, in all of them, the term "family business" is used without further specification.

III. Methods Used

As methodical tools for this study was used a methodological approach beginning with a research process and establishing research questions, to the execution and evaluation of a survey questionnaire. This chapter specifies the tools used for data collection. The questionnaire was available to the participants using the Survio online platform.

A. Selection of Respondents

The quantitative survey was conducted among representatives of the economics faculties of selected significant universities in Africa, where, according to OSN criteria, are most "LCD – Least developed countries"[32].

Universities were chosen as a place to find the respondents based on the assumption that they are the driving forces in new research and the associated introduction of the new knowledge into theory and practice and are generally considered reliable sources of information. The economics faculties were then selected based on a literature review and the resulting assumption that they would have a higher level of knowledge and orientation with regard to the issues pertaining to FB.

The primary data source for creating the own database of the African universities with economics faculty was the UniRank web portal [33]. The contact information of the faculty representatives was subsequently searched directly on the faculties' public websites.

We identified 481 economics faculties across the African continent which were currently active and had updated websites containing their contact details. We considered these faculties to be the population for this study. Most of the web pages were available in English, French or Arabic, and therefore the questionnaire was translated into that three language versions.

A random sample of 38 respondents from economics faculties was selected from the identified population of 481 faculties of economics. The respondents came from 20 African countries (Algeria, Benin (LDC), Burkina Faso (LDC), Burundi (LDC), Cameroon, Cape Verde, Democratic Republic of the Congo (LDC), Egypt, Ethiopia (LDC), Ghana, Kenya, Malawi (LDC), Nigeria (LDC), Rwanda (LDC), South Africa, United Republic of Tanzania (LDC), Tunisia, Uganda (LDC), Zambia (LDC) and Zimbabwe).

B. Research limitations

Just as with any other tool, the questionnaire surveys have specific limitations. The most frequent disadvantages are their slow response, low return rate and, due to maintaining anonymity, the inability to guarantee the truthfulness of individual answers.

Among other disadvantages, a possible error due to a different understanding of the meaning of individual questions, as well as the overall intent of the questionnaire caused by the accessibility of questionnaires in multiple language versions, may also be considered.

Naturally, another limitation is the selection of only the faculties of economics with the updated websites containing their contact details, which excludes the faculties without their web pages, which is not uncommon for Africa and also the selection of the suitable candidates' contacts within the faculty. The last limitation is connected to the random sample, which does not include the representatives of all African countries.

C. Research questions

To achieve the aim of this study, we set three research questions:

- RQ1: Do the African respondents consider most private-sector entrepreneurship in their countries family businesses?
- RQ2: Which family business attributes are the most important when deciding whether entrepreneurship is or is not considered a family business?
- RQ3: Does the evaluation of selected attributes differ between respondents from LCD and non-LCD countries in Africa?

All research questions were determined based on the claim by authors Fox and Sohnesen [4] or the World Bank [34] and their expectation that more than 80% of all private-sector companies are family businesses in African countries. On the other hand, according to the GUESSS study 2018, less than 50% of African students consider the parents' business a family business [35]. Therefore, we assume that the university representatives, who introduce the new knowledge into theory and practice, will also not consider most of the private-sector enterprises in Africa to be the family ones because of different understanding of the "family business" term.

IV. Analysis of Results

For the analysis of the results, we used 38 correctly filled questionnaires from the randomly selected respondents who are acting on behalf of the representatives of the economic faculties of African universities.

A. Respondent profile

More than half of the responses (exactly 52.6%) were obtained from the respondents who work at public universities. The rest (47.4%) of respondents operate at private universities. One third (31%) of the respondents work as lecturers and senior lecturers. A total of 23% of responses were obtained from deans of relevant faculties, 8% from assistant professors, professors and researchers and 6% from PhD students. The remaining respondents are from other positions within the faculties.

In total 17 of the respondents live in the LCD countries in Africa; however, 21 of them live in African non-LCD countries.

B. Term "family business"

The term "family business" is commonly used by 56% of respondents coming from Zimbabwe, Tunisia, United Republic of Tanzania (LDC), South Africa, Nigeria (LDC), Kenya, Ghana, Egypt, Democratic Republic of the Congo (LDC), Cape Verde, Cameroon, Burkina Faso (LDC) and Algeria. However, only 34% of respondents claimed that family businesses are considered a unique form of business in their country. This fact could also affect the results related to the respondent's opinion about the overall share of FB within private-sector enterprises.

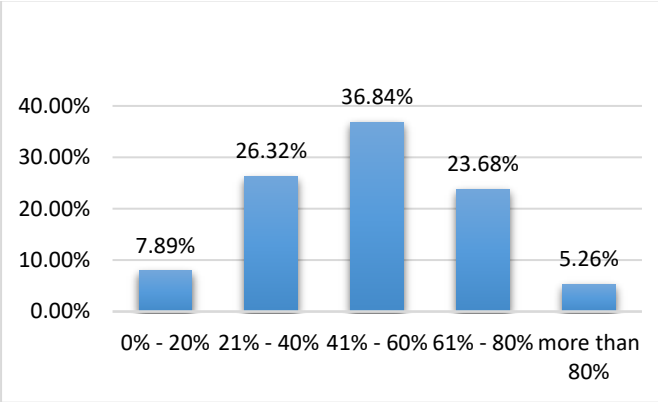

Figure 1. Respondents' opinion about the share of FB within the private-sector companies

According to the answers, less than 6% of the respondents think that FB creates more than 80% of the private-sector enterprises, which are the estimates reported by the World Bank [34], see Figure 1. Another 24% admit that the FB create between 61-80% of private-sector businesses, and 37% think that the family businesses create about half (41-60%) of the private-sector enterprises. Other 26 % of respondents believe that FB creates only 21-40%, and the rest, 8%, claim that there is less than 20% of FB within the private-sector enterprises.

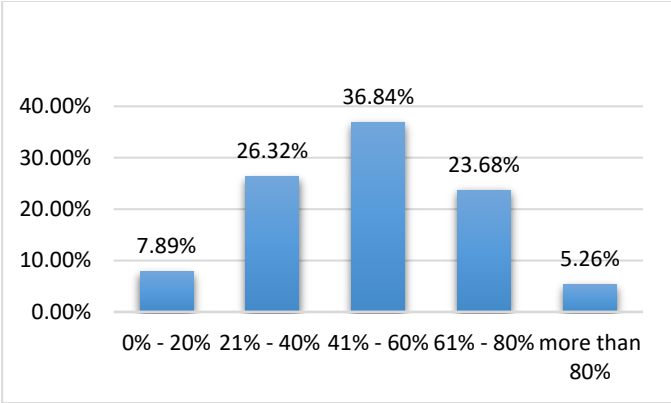

Figure 2. Respondents' opinion about the share of FB within the private-sector companies

C. Statements evaluation

Several selected parameters connected to the definitions of family businesses were determined on the basis of researching professional publications from Europe ([6], [8], [19]–[22]). Respondents were asked to evaluate each factor according to its importance in deciding whether the FB must meet it (1 = not important at all, 5 = very important). The evaluation of the selected attributes is shown in Table 1.

The statements are as follow:

- Statement 1: At least two family household members are involved in the administration and management of the business.
- Statement 2: In a family business, the family must own more than half of the stock.
- Statement 3: More than half of the employees in the family business are members of one family.
- Statement 4: Most of the household financial resources are generated by income from a given family business.
- Statement 5: Most family members are actively interested in what is happening in the company.
- Statement 6: Most family members are actively involved in decision-making in the company.
- Statement 7: Most of the company's decision-making rights are in the hands of family members, either indirectly or directly.
- Statement 8: More family generations are (or are planned to be) represented in the company.
- Statement 9: The intention of the family business is to pass the company to future family generations.

- Statement 10: Most of the family members identify their values with the values of the business.
- Statement 11: The family (business owner, the majority of the family, ...) has the same permanent address as the place/address of the business is.

Even though scale-based questions are quantities with a discrete probability distribution, in some specific cases, it is possible to approximate the total sum (in this case, the number of points), specifically the average, through normal distribution. For this reason, we chose a normal mean to compare the evaluations of attributes. The results are shown in Table 1.

TABLE I. ATRIBUTES EVALUATION

Attribute/ Statement	Normal Mean	Standart deviation	Median	Min	Max	Rating (according to normal mean)
1	3,97	1,052	4	2	5	3.-4.
2	4,26	1,083	5	1	5	1.
3	3,26	1,223	3	1	5	10.
4	3,58	1,222	4	1	5	8.
5	3,63	1,125	3,5	1	5	7.
6	3,21	1,166	3	1	5	11.
7	4,08	0,969	4	1	5	2.
8	3,53	1,156	4	1	5	9.
9	3,87	1,256	4	1	5	5.-6.
10	3,87	1,234	4	1	5	5.-6.
11	3,97	1,052	4	2	5	3.-4.

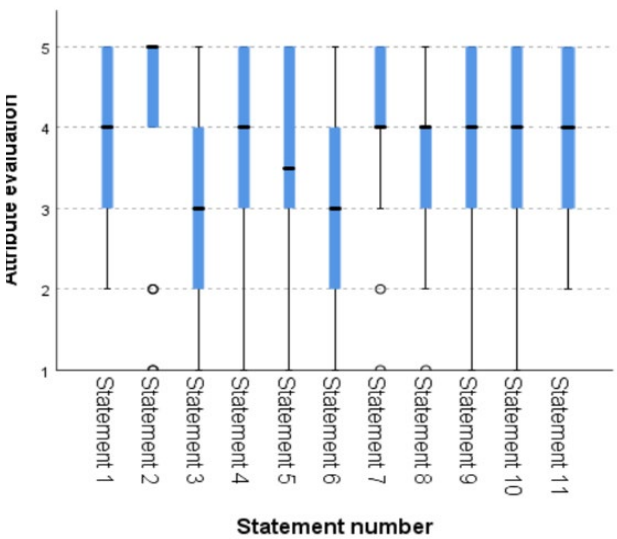

Figure 3. Independent-saples Kruskal-Wallis Test

From a statistical point of view, it must first be determined whether a statistically significant difference exists in evaluating the individual attributes. For this reason, the Kruskal-Wallis test was carried out, testing a zero hypothesis assuring that the distribution of the evaluated attributes is equal. The results of this test are shown in Table 2.

TABLE II. KRUSKAL-WALLIS TEST FOR ATRIBUT EVALUATION

Total N	418
Test Statistic	37,568[a]
Degree Of Freedom	10
Asymptotic Sig.(2-sided test)	,000

a. The test statistic is adjusted for ties.

Based on the Kruskal-Wallis test, it can be stated that a statistically significant difference in the distribution of the individual attributes exists at the level of 5% of the level of significance. The total distribution of the individual attributes is shown in Fig. 2.

D. LCD vs. non-LCD

Subsequently, research focused on whether there is a statistically significant difference in the evaluation between respondents from LCD countries and non-LCD countries from Africa. For this reason, median tests were carried out for each scaled question with a zero hypothesis, presuming that median evaluations of the given statement in both groups (meaning between respondents from LCD countries and non-LCD countries) are the same. Table 3 shows the evaluation of the median tests.

TABLE III. INDEPENDENT-SAMPLE MEDIAN TEST SUMMARY

Statement[b]		1	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Sample size		38	38	38	38	38	38	38	38	38	38
Median		4.0	3.0	4.0	3.5	3.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0	4.0
Test statistic		0.74	0.01	0.44	2.66	0.31	0.04	0.00	0.07	0.23	0.31
Degree Of Freedom		1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Asymptotic Sig.(2-sided test)		0.39	0.97	0.51	0.10	0.58	0.85	0.98	0.80	0.64	0.58
Yates's Continuity Correction	Chi-Square	0.28	0.09	0.09	1.70	0.05	0.02	0.13	0.01	0.02	0.05
	Asym. Sig.2s id.test	0.59	0.78	0.76	0.19	0.82	0.89	0.72	0.95	0.89	0.82
Reject H0		NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO

a. Statement 2 - unable to compute - all test field values are less than or equal to the median.

According to the results, in all cases, we do not reject the zero hypothesis regarding the equality of the medians between the groups at the significance level of 5%. No statistically significant difference in the evaluation of the importance of the attributes was proven between the medians of both groups.

V. DISCUSSION AND SUMMARY

This chapter summarizes the individual findings obtained from research publications and our primary research. The intent of the chapter is to answer the stipulated research questions.

A. Do the African respondents consider most private-sector entrepreneurship in their countries family businesses?

According to Fox and Sohnesen [4] or the World Bank [34] estimates, FB in African countries create more than 80% of the private-sector enterprises. However, according to our findings, only 6% of the respondents agree with this statement. On the other hand, 8% of respondents claim that there is less than 20% of FB within the private-sector enterprises. These findings could, in fact, imply our assumption that the understanding of the FB differs between the researchers.

B. Which family business attributes are the most important when deciding whether entrepreneurship is or is not considered a family business?

When making decisions, whether the enterprise is or not a FB, the attribute of the family share of the stock plays the most crucial role, according to our research within the African countries. Statement 2 that the family must own more than half of the stock was considered the most important attribute and was rated by number 5 in total by 53% of respondents. This point of view is shared by e.g. Calder [10]. However, other definitions consider as a determinative (for the decision making whether it could be a FB) only 25% share of the decision-making rights mandated by their share capital. However, this 25% must create the majority of the decision-making rights of the company at the same time [9], which was evaluated as the second most important factor, see statement 7.

The third/fourth highest rating achieved statement 1, saying that at least two family household members are involved in the administration and management of the business and with the same average rating also the statement 11 that the family (business owner, the majority of the family, ...) has the same permanent address as the place/address of the business is, or lives in its immediate vicinity (e.g. in the neighbour municipality). This statement was rated as the most important factor by 16% of the respondents, and another 26% rated it with 4 points. However, according to the findings of Žižka et al. [36], there was no statistically significant proof between the family and non-family businesses in the question of whether the family's residence must be in the same place (or within close proximity) of the place of business. Therefore, this characteristic cannot be, by Žižka et al. [36], classified as a typical FB feature.

The 5th-6th (from 11) most important evaluated characteristics of the family businesses was the statement 9, that the intention of the FB is to pass the company to future family generations, however the stament 8, that in the company, more family generations are (or are planned to be) represented, which is usually in the European publications consider as one of the most important characteristics of the FB [1], [2] was rated as 3th least important characteristic by only 3.53 points, which is just slightly higher than the middle rating.

The statement 9 had the same rating, 3.87 points, as got the statement 10, claiming that most of the family members identify their values with the values of the business.

Statement 5, saying that most family members are actively interested in what is happening in the company, was on average rated by 3,63 points and statement 4: "Most of the household financial resources are generated by income from a given family business." got 3,58 points. Statement 3 - that more than half of the employees in the family business are members of one family - was considered as the most important characteristic of FB by less than 16% of respondents, which is the same amount as by statement 6: "Most family members are actively involved in decision-making in the company.", which got the lowest average rating.

C. Does the evaluation of selected attributes differ between respondents from LCD and non-LCD countries in Africa?

Finally, the study focused on whether there is a statistically significant difference between the answers on the scale-based questions according to the respondents' country of origin, meaning whether the respondent lives in an LDC country or not. According to the results, we did not find any statistical significance in the evaluation of the attributes within the groups.

VI. Conclusion

As mentioned, a uniform and generally applicable definition of FB that would allow a comparison of individual surveys has not yet been introduced [8]. FB are usually defined as companies owned by one or more families and their members, who have a common history and, through the active cooperation of family members, form a future plan based on the long-term sustainability. One frequently mentioned characteristic of FB is the overlap between ownership and management of the company [6] where family members own the majority of the company's shares [9], which is considered the most important characteristic even by Africa's researchers.

The second and third most important characteristics of the FB in Africa are connected to the majority of decision-making rights in the company in the hands of the family and the minimal number of family members involved in the business's administration and management. These characteristics could be found in many foreign research defining the family business [6], [21], [22]. However, the same importance is attached in Africa to another characteristic, which is the requirement of the same permanent address as the place/address of the business, which is not typical for FB in the developed world.

Even though there are many similarities in considering the enterprises as a family business, there is still an expectation indicating the different understanding of the definition of family business between African and non-African researchers. Therefore, most of the respondents (almost 40%) consider FB only half of the all private-sector enterprises, which is in contrast to all foreign estimates (see [3], [4], [6]). So if we try to create a definition of a family business in the least developed countries in Africa using the highest rated statements (around 4 points), it could sound something like this: "*The family business is a business of at least two family household members living at the company address and being involved in the administration and management of the business, in which more than half of the stock and most of the company's decision-making rights are in the hands of family these members."*

To conclude, despite the limitations mentioned above, this study may be seen as a significant step toward determining the family business understanding in the African countries, which can help create the proper infrastructure to support the family business vitality and longevity.

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