

Introduction

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Introduction to Palgrave Handbook Of African Entrepreneurship

Oluwaseun Kolade, David Rae, Demola Obembe and Kassa Woldesenbet Beta

For a long time, the dominant narrative about the African continent was one associated with wars, poverty and underdevelopment. In the years immediately following independence from colonialism, a wave of nationalist fervour swept through sub-Saharan Africa. The new African governments embarked on big infrastructural projects and agrarian reforms aimed at linking remote rural areas with big urban centres and driving up agricultural production. Farm settlements were launched and smallholder rural farmers were organised into cooperatives. The agrarian reform, supported by newly established agricultural research institutes and extension agencies, sought to harness comparative advantage in the agricultural sector to shore up export and generate revenue that could be invested in public services and other sectors of the economy.

The modest gains of the agrarian reform, however, were limited, partly because of the unstable international market and volatility in commodity prices. In addition, the subsequent discovery of crude oil and the increasing dominance of the extractive sector as the principal source of foreign exchange in many countries contributed to reduced investment and attention on the agricultural sector. This precipitated the emergence of rent-seeking, resource conflicts and political upheavals across the continent. The continent also became caught up in the cold war, thereby exacerbating already volatile political conditions and institutional environments.

In the intervening years, bilateral organisations and multilateral agencies such as the IMF and World Bank spearheaded a range of free market economic reforms in the continent, supporting strategies such as structural adjustment programmes (SAP), privatisation schemes and, latterly, poverty reduction strategy papers. These interventions have had mixed impacts, and many stakeholders and scholars have argued that the top-down approach of international aid regime

has exacerbated, rather than mitigated, under-development and inequality in the continent (Riddell, 1992; Geo-JaJa and Mangum, 2001).

Since the turn of the millennium, many stakeholders, including African scholars and policy makers, have called for a paradigm shift in the model of international engagement with African countries. Specifically, there have been growing calls for a departure from a dependency-inducing, paternalistic aid model to a new era of partnership underpinned by the agency of African peoples. This new approach, it is argued, will be defined by ambitious, innovative entrepreneurs driving a new era of shared prosperity and inclusive development in the continent. However, while the vision of a new Africa led by ambitious entrepreneurs is compelling, questions and challenges remain on how these grand ideas can be operationalised in countries characterised by institutional volatility and political instability, cultural contexts with limited opportunities for women, and where entrepreneurs struggle to access funding.

Given the foregoing, this book brings together empirical insights and case studies from various countries across the sub-regions to illuminate contextual peculiarities and common theoretical and practical insights that can inform policy and practice. These are explored within the framework of the following thematic sections: institutional environments and entrepreneurial ecosystems; entrepreneurship education; technology entrepreneurship and innovation ecosystems; entrepreneurship in conflict zones; gender and diversity issues in African entrepreneurship; and methodological considerations for African entrepreneurship research.

The first section recognises that weak and unstable institutional environments pose a major obstacle to entrepreneurship in African countries. The business environment in African countries is typically characterised by institutional voids, volatile market environment, derelict infrastructure, and political instability, among others. Turbulent environments are generally characterised by high levels of inter-period change that creates uncertainty and

unpredictability, sharp discontinuities in supply and demand, and low barriers to entry and exit (Calantone, Garcia and Droge, 2003). Political instability is defined as “the propensity of change in the executive, either by constitutional or unconstitutional means” (Alesina & Perotti 1996, p.3). In a sense, entrepreneurs thrive in some forms of instability (Lechler, Edington and Gao, 2012). For example, profit opportunities are often associated with market disequilibrium, and the ability of entrepreneurs to identify and act on these opportunities to “equilibrate” the market (Holcombe, 2003). However, other forms of instability tend to have net negative impacts, precipitating more difficulties than they generate opportunities (Shumetie and Watabaji, 2019).

Furthermore, recent studies have also found that differences in the types and qualities of physical infrastructure, such as transport, energy, broadband, etc., account for differences in regional and national levels of entrepreneurial activity and productivity. While start-up activities were found to be positively associated with good infrastructure in general, some types of infrastructures, such as broadband, were found to have more significant impact (Audretsch, Heger and Veith, 2015). Many African countries face significant challenges with infrastructure, and these have had significant impacts especially on nascent entrepreneurs grappling with the liabilities of newness and smallness. Nevertheless, there are also country-specific peculiarities, unique sectoral challenges and regional differences in infrastructural development, and how these influence business activities in the continent (Igwe, Oyelola, Ajiboshin, *et al.* 2013; Agbemabiese, Nkomo & Sokona 2012; Aworemi 2013). Thus, the chapters in section A seeks to explore these institutional challenges, while exploring new models that can be used to help budding entrepreneurs overcome the challenges associated with doing business in turbulent environments. The six chapters in this section deal with the links between the institutional environment and entrepreneurship in Africa. Chapter 1 by Mustafa and Scholes, using the dynamic capabilities perspective, examined the key capabilities that are critical to the survival

of Zambian SME international ventures post North Africa market entry. Their chapter highlighted the importance of sensing and seizing capabilities to the post-entry performance and survival of Zambian SME international ventures. In Chapter 2, Ogunsade, Obembe and Woldesenbet Beta examined the impact of formal and informal institutional contexts on the emergence and success of nascent entrepreneurship in the context of Nigeria. The chapter provides judicious insights into the links between the entrepreneurial governance and public policy and a recursive relationship between the various dimensions of institutions (normative, regulative, and cultural-cognitive) and entrepreneurship-enabling ecosystem for fostering venture creation. This is followed by Chapter 3 where Murithi and Woldesenbet Beta analyse the mutual influence of institutional environment and family business in Africa. Drawing on institutional theory, institutional voids, social capital and family business literatures, the authors develop a conceptual model and advance several theoretically and contextually driven propositions to guide future research on the bi-directional relationship (positive or negative) between the entrepreneurial activities of family business and the institutional environment.

In Chapter 4, Olagboye and colleagues explore enterprise categorisations and the implications for survival and growth. They propose the establishment of a new Nano Enterprise classification to promote legitimisation and institutionalisation of hitherto informal enterprises, and consequently enable their survival and growth within the Sub-Saharan region. This resonates with Olaniyan's contribution in Chapter 5, which adopts a case approach to examine perceived debilitating impacts of institutional environments on community enterprises in a national context and proposes a diagnostic model for fostering favour interactions between the institutions and target entrepreneurial communities. Then, in Chapter 6, Salia and colleagues further examine the role of financial remittance from Africans in diaspora in facilitating entrepreneurial ecosystem development. They argue that diaspora will increase remittances in response to good entrepreneurship framework conditions created by home countries, to boost

enterprise development, and equally for the need to engage international finance and governance organisations in facilitating enabling institutional environments and identifying funding sources.

Section B follows on from this with its focus on entrepreneurship education. This is an area that has attracted increasing attention from scholars and practitioners within the last decade. It offers new paths for enquiries and opportunities to develop new research agendas in a continent where increasing population growth presents a unique set of challenges and opportunities for shaping the future of job opportunities and inclusive growth through entrepreneurial training. Entrepreneurship has a crucial role in generating future employment, prosperity and providing tradeable goods and vital services in a rapidly modernising and digitising context (Dana *et al.*, 2018). Youth unemployment and underemployment with undesirable social, economic and political consequences is the alternative which must be addressed and prevented through multiple approaches (British Council, 2018). There is increasing demand, even hunger for entrepreneurship from young people, and growing engagement and innovation from actors in technology, education, business and community activism.

The section explores the roles of entrepreneurship education and learning at a Pan-African level. Whilst there have been studies at national and sub-national scope, and at different levels of education, these have tended to be of limited applicability to the scale of the challenges which are faced. New approaches are required and are being developed, such as action-oriented ‘bootcamps’ for venture creation; enabling open access to education and learning for entrepreneurship (Rae, 2019), and innovation in terms of the curriculum, learning processes and effective support within the existing business ecosystems for start-ups. Thus, in Chapter 7, Mwila explores the gaps and opportunities for embedding entrepreneurship education in secondary school curricula in South Africa. This is against the backdrop of disproportionate focus on university undergraduates and the need to provide entrepreneurial training

opportunities for those “left behind”. Oladejo and Mafimisebi extend this conversation in Chapter 8, where they use a “risk society” framework to propose some new ideas to provide entrepreneurship education at basic education level in Nigeria. This approach, they argued, will promote inclusive entrepreneurship. It will help “bridge the gaps and challenges of risk society and connect them to sustainable enterprise solutions.” In Chapter 9, Alabi and colleagues take a new look at university-level entrepreneurship education. Using a community of practice approach, they discuss the importance of entrepreneurship training as a driver of increased competencies in, and uptake of digital technologies, and higher rates of successful new venture creation. Finally, in Chapter 10, Kolade and co-authors propose a new model of co-produced entrepreneurship education, based on the triple helix framework of university, industry and government collaboration. Using the empirical context of the Nigerian higher education sector and the single case study of a leading Nigerian university, the authors argued that the co-creation model can more effectively pool and integrate the best that all stakeholders can offer towards the design and delivery of entrepreneurship education programmes, not only in Nigeria but across the continent.

Section C addresses the theme of technology entrepreneurship. Many scholars and stakeholders have argued that recent developments in digital economies offers an auspicious opportunity for countries and regions at economic margins to “transcend spatial, organisational, social, and political constraints” (Graham, 2019, p.1) in the drive to launch themselves into the mainstream of global growth and prosperity. Digital technologies are already transforming African economies in terms of retail payment systems, financial inclusion, sustainable business models, and revenue administration (Ndung’u, 2018). Other scholars have argued that the fourth industrial revolution offers new and dynamic opportunities for Africa’s industrial strategy, with options in automation, additive manufacturing, and the industrial internet (Naudé, 2017; Ayentimi and Burgess, 2019). Chapters 11-14 explore this theme in different conceptual

directions and empirical contexts. In chapter 11, Rae and colleagues pose the question: “are African economies open for entrepreneurship?” To address this question, the authors selected five internationally recognised indices to develop a composite pan-African framework which maps and compares differences and similarities in economic openness and opportunities for digital and entrepreneurial learning across 54 African states. Winstead and Wells bring this conversation to the micro level in Chapter 12. There, they argued against the often-dominant narrative of gloom that the emergence and growth of youth-led digital entrepreneurship is setting a new and positive tone for the rising future of the continent. Adepoju brings us back to the present in Chapter 13, where he discusses the difficult realities of Nigerian digital entrepreneurs struggling to escape the proverbial “valley of death”. He provides practical and policy recommendations to support the development and resilience of the Nigerian innovation ecosystem. Finally, in Chapter 14, Rufai highlights location-specific factors that explain differences in levels of ICT uptake among SMEs across affluent and disadvantaged districts of Lagos. He proposes a new concept of “symbiotic interactionism” which, he argues, better explains and integrates the roles of social factors and technological determinism in shaping SMEs’ attitudes and responses to technology.

Section D focuses on entrepreneurship in conflict zones. Within the past decade, two important and related concepts have gained traction within the entrepreneurship literature. The first is the idea of emancipatory entrepreneurship, and the other is the better-developed theory of transformative entrepreneuring. Emancipatory entrepreneuring is linked more closely with Sen’s ideas around capabilities and functionings (Sen, 2008; Hick, 2012), and it has been explored in the contexts of poverty and forced displacement (Al-Dajani *et al.*, 2015). It emphasises the scope for the poor and the displaced to exercise their agency to beat the poverty trap and break “free from the authority of another”. Similarly, transformative entrepreneuring has been defined as “the process of addressing and ultimately transforming conditions of

protracted socio-economic constraint through entrepreneurship” (Tobias, Mair & Barbosa-Leiker 2013, p.728).

At the heart of most man-made conflicts is the over-arching question of resource struggle (Humphreys, 2005). This can be about the struggle for resources either in their primary or secondary forms, which may be related to greed over abundance or grievance induced by scarcity (Brunnschweiler and Bulte, 2009). Conflicts typically arise when resources are appropriated by dominant groups and distributed unequally. Poverty is often associated with lack of access to resources or the lack of capacity to transform resources and create value from them. The resource-scarcity-poverty-conflict nexus is exacerbated by population growth and density (Urdal, 2005; Magnus Theisen, 2008). The more people live in smaller areas of usable land, for example, the more likely there will be violent struggle for resources. Conflict and poverty induced by resource conflict are especially common in developing countries, where there is heavy reliance on natural resource rent. entrepreneurship can facilitate a positive change in a population’s interaction with resources (Hart, 1995). Instead of engaging in violent conflict over limited natural resources, citizens can be co-opted as co-creators of new resources for the benefit of all. The entrepreneurship process has several direct practical implications on the dynamics of poverty and conflict. Entrepreneurship can create new employment opportunities, and therefore raise household income and welfare. Furthermore, by creating new resources, entrepreneurship invariably make new resources available for the population, thereby reducing resource poverty.

Thus, the chapters in section D draw from different empirical contexts to explore strategies employed by entrepreneurs in conflict zones to overcome resource and institutional constraints, cope with danger, and recover their livelihoods in the aftermath of destruction and disruption precipitated by violent conflicts. Thus, in chapter 15, Kolade and colleagues explore the case of forcibly displaced households in Northeast Nigeria, where Boko Haram insurgency has

precipitated a severe humanitarian crisis. There, rather rely only on humanitarian aid, displaced peoples are drawing on bridging and linking networks to create and harness new entrepreneurial opportunities to recover their livelihoods. In Kenya, the contextual focus of Chapter 16, Luseno and Kolade discuss how refugees are drawing on their bridging and linking networks to overcome the strains and constraints of the host government's encampment policy. They are deploying these network resources access entrepreneurial opportunities for livelihood recovery and contribution to the host country's economic outcomes. In Chapter 17, Esaudi, and co-authors draw on historical and cultural evidence to discuss the special case of Libya, a country trapped in seemingly intractable internecine war, and where SME activities and entrepreneurial endeavour have suffered significant setbacks. Finally, in Chapter 18, Imoedemhe brings a legal perspective to analysis of the patterns of conflicts fuelled by internal and external forces in some African countries, and how they inhibit entrepreneurial development and SME growth.

Section E addresses live issues around diversity and gender in African entrepreneurship. Women make significant contributions to employment and wealth creation, innovation, uplifting of living standards, and reducing poverty in all economies (Brush et al., 2009; De Vita et al, 2014) not least in African countries (GEM, 2013). While an estimated 163 million women around the world are involved in new business ventures, a significant "gender gap" persists in entrepreneurship (Jennings and Brush 2013; Kelley et al. 2017) and creates challenges to women's entrepreneurship. However, the ability of women to start and grow their businesses and to achieve empowerment is hindered where legal, institutional and cultural barriers exist and combine with resource-constraints and domestic responsibilities that affect women's enterprises to a greater extent than men's (Carter et al. 2015; Jennings and Brush 2013).

Women's entrepreneurship research evidence indicates that 'entrepreneurship is a gendered and highly contextual phenomenon (Henry et al., 2016). While women entrepreneurs might

share similar motivations and hurdles, specific contexts, certain socio-economic and political geographies uniquely pattern issues and opportunities they experience. As such, women in developing countries suffer more from underdeveloped institutional, resource and family environments, whereas the women in Africa suffer less from internal family restrictions (Pand, 2008). The gendered assumptions also confer detriment upon women in terms of creating or growing new ventures (Marlow and McAdam, 2015). Gudeta and co-authors, in Chapter 19, offer theoretical and practical insights to the field of (women) entrepreneurship and the work-family literature by exploring the relationship between the work-family roles and business growth in a less researched Sub-Saharan African country, Ethiopia. Chapter 20 probes the challenges and opportunities associated with African women entrepreneurs' access to and use of enterprising resources. By undertaking the systematic review of studies undertaken from 1990-2020, Woldesenbet Beta and colleagues found that studies on African women's access to, and use of, resources have been a very recent phenomenon, were theoretically fragmented, mainly quantitative, and thus unable to develop a nuanced understanding of gender and entrepreneurship in Africa. Irene and co authors, in Chapter 21, provide judicious empirical insights into why women entrepreneurs in South Africa move back and forth from self-employment to paid employment. Their study illuminates the factors that influence South African women's' entrepreneurial venture on the one hand, and consequential impact on their reverting back to regular paid employment.

The final section, F, discusses methodological issues in African entrepreneurship research. African research in general, and African business research especially, is beset by a range of practical challenges associated with limited access to data (Klingebliel and Stadler, 2015), gaps in quality assurance mechanisms (Gimbel *et al.*, 2017), and difficulties and ambiguities often inherent in adopting operational variables and units of analyses from empirical studies carried out in western contexts (Fadahunsi, 2000; Kolk and Rivera-Santos, 2018). Thus, the chapters

in this section include reflective practitioner commentaries and practical suggestions that can be employed to deal with various field work challenges in African entrepreneurship research. Egbetokun, in Chapter 22, considers challenges and opportunities associated with conducting national surveys, drawing from the author's experience with the Nigerian Innovation Surveys. In Chapter 23, Mafimisebi and Nyame-Asiamah reflect on challenges of carrying out case study research in Africa, providing practical suggestions on data management and triangulation of data, among others.

Overall, the chapters across these six sections offer a unique insight into the often simplified but quite multi-layered, complex world of African entrepreneurship. As well as identifying threads of common challenges and practices, the book weaves an intricate tapestry around problems and prospects, cultures and contexts, and the features and future of entrepreneurship and innovation in the African continent.

We now offer some final thoughts on the future challenges and opportunities, as well as recommendations for future research.

First, we observe that the digital transformation of the global economic landscape offers an auspicious opportunity for African countries to chart a new course for inclusive development and shared prosperity in the continent. The advent of the 'fourth industrial revolution', driven by new technologies, has captured popular imagination and attracted significant scholarly interest. This new wave of disruptive technologies presents both significant risks as well as enormous opportunities for African countries. On the one hand, African countries face the risk of falling further behind in a fast-paced knowledge economy dominated by disruptive innovations. On the other hand, Africa is presented with enormous opportunities to catch up, or even leapfrog developed countries to play a leading role in the unfolding fourth industrial revolution.

Technology-based entrepreneurship is set to play a key role if African countries are to harness the opportunities of the fourth industrial revolution. The last five years has witnessed a rapid expansion of tech hubs in Africa. One report indicated that, as of 2015, there were 117 tech hubs in Africa. The vast majority of these were owned or led by the private sector, with only nine led by academic institutions and 10 of them government-owned (Kelly and Firestone, 2016). Between 2016 and 2019, African countries witnessed a significant expansion of tech hubs, from 314 in 2016 to 442 in 2018 and 643 as of October 2019 (Giuliani *et al.*, 2019). In other words, African tech hubs have more than doubled within the last three years leading to 2019.

One of the key areas in which disruptive technologies can have a major impact is entrepreneurial financing. While we have seen a lot of positive stories of development and progress over the last decade, a majority of African entrepreneurs continue to struggle with the big problem of funding. The formal finance institutions continue to operate under old models that shut scores of millions of entrepreneurs out of funding opportunities. New fin-tech organisations are now disrupting the sector with innovative models which expand access to small and micro enterprises and start-ups, while effectively controlling the risks. Crowd funding platforms are rapidly expanding across the continent, and e-money has taken hold in East African countries like Kenya. There is also a strong wave of interest in cryptocurrency and the opportunities it holds to drive enterprise growth, financial inclusion and better integration with the global market. These new opportunities are also fraught with risks for which there is a need for focused scholarly engagement. However, given that these disruptive innovations are happening despite static and often negative institutional environments, a new research agenda should interrogate the potential opportunities for technologies to drive institutional transformation on the continent.

Furthermore, for these promises to be realised, stakeholders and scholars need to give more attention to interrogating the facilities and opportunities for training and development of high-tech, high impact entrepreneurs in Africa. researchers have begun to investigate the impact of education policy on the supply of “high quality entrepreneurs” in Africa (Olofiyehun, Adelowo & Egbetokun, 2018). However, there are still significant gaps and opportunities to investigate innovative structures, approaches and programmes that higher education actors can deploy to support the development of home-grown entrepreneurs that are better equipped to take advantage of local contexts and peculiarities as well as compete on the global scale. There are numerous new initiatives bringing the triple helix of university, industry and government stakeholders to develop new models of entrepreneurship education and facilities for start-ups. There are rooms to generate new ideas and knowledge regarding the future of university education on the continent. Beyond this, there is much activity, yet little is known from a scholarly perspective, about opportunities and structures for entrepreneurial learning and development outside the university system. New spaces for entrepreneurial learning and peer mentoring include tech hubs, DIY labs, social media platforms, and other virtual spaces. There is a need for a new research agenda investigating the contributions and impacts of these channels in diffusing and nurturing new models of entrepreneurial activities on the continent. We have confidence that the capabilities of African entrepreneurs and researchers will rise to the challenges of achieving combined progress in both entrepreneurial innovation and in researching it.

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