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Entrepreneurial Education and Attitudes in Tanzania

WP # 03/2019

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**Series Editor 2019: Luca Righetti, Research Director (UK), CDI
Publisher: Cambridge Development Initiative, Cambridge, UK**

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Entrepreneurial Education and Attitudes in Tanzania

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I. Introduction

Stimulating private-sector growth in developing countries has recently come to the fore of the development agenda in many contexts. Elayah (2016) claims that the reasons for this could be found in government failure, corruption, and the low effectiveness of monetary aid in creating the necessary outcomes. As part of the drive towards supporting business development, entrepreneurial education has become a key pillar. It is theorised (Pittaway et al, 2007; Oosterbeek et al, 2010) to help budding business-owners understand the mechanics of business operation and make informed choices about business strategy, financing, marketing, and product placement. Unfortunately, entrepreneurial education suffers from important shortcomings in many developing contexts; in the case of Tanzania, the most pronounced difficulties stem from rote learning, lack of a more practical approach to entrepreneurial education, and a shortage of knowledge regarding sources of funding and support for people who opt to pursue the entrepreneurship path (Mwasalwiba, 2012; Kalimasi, 2018). Based on the discussion that follows below, this assessment paper would like to propose that reforming entrepreneurial education in Tanzania should involve a change in the philosophy of higher learning, a shift away from rote learning and towards encouraging more creative practices, and a strengthened emphasis on the practical sides of learning (Hytti and Gorman, 2004). This change is expected to increase the rates of business creation in Tanzania and contribute to solving some of the most pressing social problems the country faces, which government intervention alone would struggle to address (Kuratko, 2005).

II. Entrepreneurship education and private-sector development: theory and practice

As methodological approaches to stimulating private-sector growth in developing countries have shifted from state intervention to greater support for self-driven entrepreneurship, a number of studies have been conducted to assess the quality of entrepreneurial education in Tanzanian universities. Discrepancies with neighbouring countries and the needs of the Tanzanian economy have also been considered, in order to establish a context in which proposed intervention in Tanzanian education could produce the best results.

Hytti and O’Gorman (2004), in their assessment of entrepreneurship education and its role in

the development process, claim that entrepreneurship education, if viewed as an intervention, should seek to achieve three main goals. The first one is to create awareness of entrepreneurship, the opportunities for engaging and profitable work it offers, and the good it could do for society. Although it is often assumed that many young people would be attracted to the idea of starting their own business and working on their own terms, cultural barriers in that area are still substantial. Mwasalwiba (2012) shows that, in some cases, Tanzanian students are likely to be unaware of such opportunities, and that cultural norms might discourage even those who are seriously considering going that path. Such norms include ideas that equate entrepreneurship to unemployment, that view entrepreneurship as an unsavoury activity that is the preserve of conmen and swindlers, and that express concern as to the sustainability of entrepreneurship as a career and its ability to provide a stable living. Mwasalwiba

agrees that such attitude is not altogether void of rationale, as in many East African countries the state and large enterprises have traditionally been the main provider of stable, well-remunerated, and respectable employment. Given the insecurity involved in starting your own business, it is unsurprising that many young people would prefer to pursue a route that is seen as guarantor of their financial futures, especially amidst the lack of positive examples of successful entrepreneurship.

For the above reasons, addressing Hytti and O’Gorman’s (2004) first objective represents a challenge that goes beyond the classroom. A successful intervention to address this issue should include a concerted effort by the government and the entire education system to inform students of the immense opportunities opened by entrepreneurship, as well as to provide role models and examples with which young people could identify.

Hytti and O’Gorman’s (2004) second objective is equipping students with an entrepreneurial approach in their day-to-day work at university. This could be achieved by replacing rote learning and textbook memorisation with more project-based work that encourages finding original solutions through critical thinking, and not through copying what has already been done before. It is almost always the case that rote learning is cheaper from the viewpoint of the provider (the teachers and the state). Moreover, it has well-established traditions harking back to the needs of an industrial economy for workers who were disciplined in performing a repetitive task efficiently. Nonetheless, as the route to private-sector development of East African countries and Tanzania is likely to include the need for tailor-made solutions to their particular social and economic problems, a workforce that is composed of independent and

confident thinkers holds greater promise for sustaining high levels of economic growth than one which is skilled at following precise orders and shying away from novel approaches and solutions. Introducing teaching approaches aimed at developing entrepreneurship skills among students would require an overhaul of some components of the current curriculum, most likely the practical sides of business, economics, and mathematics education. However, as entrepreneurship education is a process that cuts across the entire curriculum, it should be mainstreamed across all subjects, even if some of them would receive more focus than others.

The third objective suggested by the authors is to allow students to simulate the entrepreneurial experience through class-based and extracurricular work that allows the setting up of small private ventures. These simulations could help support both Objective One and Objective Two above. Participation in them could help change student attitudes towards entrepreneurship as the preserve of the unemployed and the unambitious. It could also demonstrate the inherent creativity of entrepreneurial activities, as well as their potential to address concrete problems that plague communities. For example, in university-level Economics classes, entrepreneurship simulation software could be used to expose students to the decision-making process involved in a business. Real-world projects involving the successful marketing and selling of a simple commodity or service could also be encouraged. An important outcome that needs to be pursued is the benefit that entrepreneurship creates to both the entrepreneur and the community they serve. Entrepreneurship as a “positive sum-game” should be the core pedagogical component of such simulations.

III. The current state of entrepreneurial education in Tanzania

The needs for improvement in the design and delivery of entrepreneurship education in East Africa and in Tanzania has been recognised by both the local authorities and their international partners. Tanzania

has introduced a National Entrepreneurship Training Framework (NETF), directed by the National Economic Empowerment Council (NEEC) and supported by the International Labour Organisation (ILO). The NETF aims to improve the quality of entrepreneurial training across subject areas. Examples of such areas include accounting and personal finance management skills in the mathematics curriculum, persuasive writing and negotiation skills in the language curriculum, and negotiation and presentation skills in the

language or literature curriculum. The target institutions of the NETF are Tanzanian secondary schools and colleges.

Kalimasi's (2004, 2016) assessment of the current state of entrepreneurial education is that the actual curricula still fall short of the prescriptions of the Framework, which may take years to fully implement. A leading problem in the implementation of the guidelines is the tradition of rote learning in many Tanzanian colleges (Kalimasi and Herman, 2016). Gibb (2006) claims that rote learning is fundamentally at odds with building entrepreneurial attitudes among Tanzanian youth as it precludes the mastery of active engagement skills and assumes that independent thinking is inferior to absorbing already available information. This observation corresponds to Hytti and O'Gorman's (2004) second objective to improving entrepreneurship education and is one of the challenges the intervention they propose seeks to address. As Tanzania's economy is still dominated by the industry and construction sectors—22.2% of GDP come from these sectors (National Bureau of Statistics, 2013), this education strategy is a rational response to currently-dominant economic conditions. However, in the future it is likely that Tanzania will need to shift from its dependency on foreign investment in industry, especially in areas such as the provision of local services where such investment falls short of addressing pressing issues.

Mwasalwiba (2012), in his discussion of entrepreneurial attitudes in Tanzanian higher education, identifies the expectation placed by the system on graduates that the most prestigious and secure form of labour is salaried employment. Currently, a predominant cultural narrative is that being an entrepreneur equals not being able to find employment elsewhere. Salaried employment provides a relative measure of security of future income streams, which for many households, especially those who have invested substantial resources in the higher education of their children, is a priority. As discussed previously, changing such attitude would necessarily involve a more holistic effort that involves not only educational authorities and curriculum designers but also the government, the media, and other influencers of the public discourse.

IV. Proposed Solutions

Given the mismatch between the prescription on how entrepreneurship education should be conducted in developing countries and the number of areas where improvement is still necessary in the case of Tanzania, some solutions should be proposed here in order to engender a discussion on their appropriateness, practicality, efficiency, and implementation costs.

When it comes to the attitudes to entrepreneurship as a viable career choice after completion of higher education, Mwasalwiba (2012) suggests that the negativity towards entrepreneurship has not only social but also education foundations. If the secondary-school and higher- education curricula, as well as lecturers and student advisers, methodically instill a more positive attitude towards entrepreneurship and stress its substantial potential for success and personal enrichment, then greater graduate talent could be attracted there. Mwalawiba places great importance on the role of role models—local

entrepreneurs who have achieved success and have also helped their communities in the process. Such people could be brought into contact with students through talks, networking events, internships, or work shadowing opportunities.

Fishbein and Ajzen (2005) also support the view that negative attitudes towards the entrepreneurship could be changed through educational interventions. However, a significant issue with entrepreneurship is the lack of a commonly-agreed definition and clearly-delineated objectives. This problem is not only to do with the relative inability to measure the efficacy of undertaken interventions, but also lack of clarity as to what constitutes entrepreneurship itself. This report, however, would like to argue that the devout pursuit of definitional perfection misses the point: the skills and attitude to work that entrepreneurship education could instil are more important in the long-run compared to whether the students undergoing such training become founders of their own companies or not.

An important caveat that needs mentioning is the debate on the usefulness of short interventions, of the kind that have been the preferred tool for boosting the quality of entrepreneurial education in East African countries. The efficacy of time-limited interventions aimed at improving the quality of entrepreneurial education has already been questioned. A key issue has been the weakness of spill-over effects to the wider community and the short duration of positive effects after the conclusion of a project, documented by Kalimasi (2014). Semjaila (2016) provides an example of this by analysing UNIDO's Youth Employment and Employability project, directed at diploma-teachers schools and colleges. Due to coordination

problems with the National Council for Technical Education (NACTE), the effectiveness of the project was limited to a short period after its conclusion. This was not the intended consequence of this intervention and reveals a serious limitation in the design of such programmes. Semjaila suggests that strategies like the Tanzanian National Entrepreneurship Training Framework (NETF), which support incremental improvements to entrepreneurship education in all its multiple facets over a longer period might yield better results than short interventions spearheaded by international organisations or other outsiders. It would be beneficial to attempt to merge the two approaches, as international beneficiaries could provide the funding and example that is necessary to get the intervention going; however, the implementation and strategy development could be left to local stakeholders, who both possess a more intricate knowledge of the situation on the ground, the networks to increase the efficiency of implementation, and the incentive to produce more robust and long-lasting effects.

V. Conclusions and further questions

The theoretical literature widely supports the claim that entrepreneurship education is vital in spurring private-sector-driven growth, an approach to development that recognises the pitfalls of government failure and the coordination problems. Tanzania, notably through its National Entrepreneurship Training Framework (NETF), has taken positive steps in encouraging the teaching of critical thinking, financial management, and decision-making skills in its higher education institutions. However, important challenges to the full implementation of the NETF remain. These include traditional attitudes that see entrepreneurship as an undesirable occupation, rote learning in both school and university classrooms, inefficiencies in implementing government-mandated measures, and the short-term efficacy of third-party interventions.

The solutions proposed thus far include efforts to change perceptions of the personal and professional value of being an entrepreneur, providing role models for students who are considering this career path, exposing them to business simulations to experience the realities of conducting business. Redefining and streamlining entrepreneurship as a concept and a policy goal is also recommended.

The benefits of entrepreneurship education accrued by the students and their families are largely clear. Students equipped with a robust financial management, negotiation, and strategic thinking skillset should be able to start a successful small business (provided they have a profitable idea), as well as work in managerial positions of already established businesses. However, for an intervention to be fiscally-warranted from the viewpoint of the government or international stakeholders that fund it, its advantages to local and national communities should be clarified. Theoretically, a young workforce equipped with entrepreneurial acumen can play a dynamic role in supporting economic growth and solving social problems through market mechanisms.

Leibenstein (1968) and Kuratko (2005) lend credibility to this thesis through mainly theoretical arguments. Nonetheless, in order to warrant the investment of monetary and time resources into strengthening entrepreneurship education in Tanzania, an empirical study should be conducted in other nations of similar development levels which have already implemented such measures in order to demonstrate a causal link between investing into entrepreneurship education and possible spill-over effects into local and even national contexts.

In the context of the College of Business Education, with which the Cambridge Development Initiative is partnering, a question that could be investigated empirically is what the effects of the presence of the College of Business Education (CBE) are across its four campus communities in Dar es Salaam are, Dodoma, Mbeya, Mwanza. It would be useful to establish whether the presence of the College supports local economic development in an empirically-measurable way.

In the likely absence of detailed data on local economic development for these communities, a more qualitative approach could be adopted. This could include conducting surveys with the help of CDI's partners on the ground, with both students who have undergone the entrepreneurship courses and business leaders in Dar es Salaam, Dodoma, Mbeya, and Mwanza.

If direct empirical approaches prove inadequate in the case of CBE, a more comparative approach could be sought, which would focus on a meta-analysis of available empirical literature on the link between entrepreneurship education and economic outcomes in other East African countries. If this is not available or suitable, such studies for countries of similar development levels, for example in South Asia or Latin America, could be employed.

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Citation: Rusinov, G. (2019). Entrepreneurial Education and Attitudes in Tanzania. CDI Working Paper Series WP 03/2019, Cambridge: Cambridge Development Initiative.

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