

Facilitating Entrepreneurial Competence for the Informal Sector: Insights into the Cameroon Tertiary Sector

Fomba Emmanuel Mbebeb,
Psychology Unit,
University of Dschang, Cameroon

Email: fombaem@yahoo.com

Res : 237 3310 6580

Mob: 237 7777 2835

Sub-themes: Curriculum and teaching, Community engagement

Facilitating entrepreneurial competence for the informal sector: insights into the Cameroon tertiary sector

Summary

Despite recognition that sustainable human capital development strategies constitute an integral part of Higher Education policy, the Cameroon tertiary sector still experience relevance and quality crisis. While majority of graduates suffer from job-seeking syndrome, non-graduates and apprentices skilled in the informal sector dominate entrepreneurial ventures. Education offerings have instead been perceived as reinforcing white-collar mentality, dormant entrepreneurial culture and endemic psychological dependence. The major source of anxiety is whether traditional apprenticeship training through community engagement is more effective in entrepreneurial mindset priming than academic systems; raising a major concern about measures of sustainability in academic curricular. Operationalising entrepreneurial competence as a measure of sustainable education, the paper explores the link between existing education provisions and entrepreneurial competence. Despite ongoing policy efforts, the paper argues that current strategies cannot significantly constitute a sustainable platform for facilitating entrepreneurial personalities and informal sector development. Discussion is oriented towards University-wide and competence based approaches to entrepreneurial upskilling in responding to immediate and ultimate sustainability requirements of the informal sector.

Key words: Tertiary sector; sustainable development; sustainable education; entrepreneurial competence; informal sector development.

Introduction: Seven years after the adoption of the United Nations (UN) Decade for Education for Sustainable Development (UN, 2002), the future of young university graduates in Cameroon is still characterized by uncertainties due to perceived ineptitude of Higher Education (H.E.) institutions to effectively mainstream informal sector job entrants. This quagmire has also been reiterated by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) (2007), that the challenge of graduate employment in Africa has been the focus of high-level political attention in the recent past. Despite current debates and efforts towards Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) Sriram & Mersha (2006:137) regretted that despite the presence of great poverty in countries such as China and India their economies continue to grow rapidly, while the stark reality is that many African countries are slipping deeper into poverty". Although the issue of sustainable development in Africa is critical it is also paradoxical considering her abundant resources and development aids. Sustainable management of resources

resides in human capital base, which logically depends on education systems and learning strategies. While Brennam (2005) hailed education as a viable response to changing employment patterns, organization of work and skills requirements, Bloom et al (2006), emphasized the role of Higher Education in a knowledge-based competition within a globalizing economy in terms of innovation and performance across sectors. The indigenous sector of the African economy has become an element in the growth of national economies, and a source of growth and redistribution, job creation and household wealth (Katseli, 2005). Since the informal sector has become a survival sector, characterized by entrepreneurial activities, it is imperative for H.E. to facilitate graduates' competence to articulate growth strategies for the sector.

The sustainability of any society depends on sustainable thinking and behavior, which are products of education systems. This justifies emphasis of the UN (2002) to adopt new behaviors and practices to secure the future through value based learning, critical thinking and multi-method approaches. Since facilitating youth transition from school to work is seen as a major responsibility of educational systems (Atchoarena, 2000), ESD has become an essential part of human development strategy: upskilling demand-driven attitudes and skills. To Rohweder (2007) ESD starts with challenges related to societal condition and development opportunities. The timid entry of young graduates into the informal sector has embraced entrepreneurial competence priming as a viable measure of sustainable education in varsity programs. Since survival activities are characterized by informal entrepreneurial ventures, facilitating entrepreneurial skills becomes a necessary ingredient to survive and grow the sector; and also poses a major challenge to H.E training strategies as a lead manpower production industry.

The sustainability of entrepreneurial education: Strong links have been established between entrepreneurship and sustainable education, with regards to auto-employment and sustainable livelihood. Kafka & Stephenson (2005) explained that entrepreneurship education is needed to maximize returns to more technical training in the context of a dominant informal sector. To Ingrid and Yoshie (2006) sustainable education must begin in early childhood, as the values, attitudes, behaviors and skills acquired in this period may have a long-lasting impact in later life. If entrepreneurship education is a strategy to strengthen the individual's ability to see and exploit opportunities in an economic, social and cultural context (Inger, 2006), it therefore poses as a proactive strategy in building entrepreneurial personalities, organizations and societies. This implies that enterprise life skills transcend enterprise context to broad based life skills that ensure adaptability to non-enterprise ventures. Phoha (2008) also observed that entrepreneurship is a key engine for national economic development and competitiveness; and policy makers and academics have recognized the relationship between relevant innovation and business development in growth and sustainability of the informal sector. Developing productive competence through hands-on learning activities in H.E programs is therefore a prerequisite to informal sector development and sustainable growth of the macro economy.

Sector analysis: Since the economic crisis of the late 80s in Cameroon there has been squeeze in public service employment; expressing a dire need for private sector

development (PSD); and in particular the informal sector. In 1990 the Government advanced different strategies to liberalize the economy, with increasing role of the tertiary sector to mainstream graduates for sustainable employment in the private sector. The University Reforms (1993) was designed to decentralize State universities, enhance professional training and ensure sustainable development of the private sector. Fig. 1 shows rising student population after the reforms.

Fig. 1: Evolution of students enrolment in Cameroon University from 1998/99-2005/06

Years	Buea	Douala	Dschang	Ngaoundere	Yaounde 1	Yaounde 2	Total
1998/99	5052	11376	8776	3082	21257	10661	60214
1999/2000	5834	8847	10518	3424	19459	11198	59280
2000/2001	6112	10786	11291	4695	20167	10884	63135
2001/2002	6519	10326	11656	6938	22889	12763	71091
2002/2003/	7282	12316	10321	7407	22065	14714	74105
2003/2004	8978	15122	8868	8639	23731	15324	80662
2004/2005	8689	10650	9852	9774	25523	18816	91334
2005/2006	9668	20432	11436	11050	29752	22959	105297

Source: National Institute of Statistics 2006

The decree on the Orientation of Higher Education (2001) focused on professional orientations and increased role of the private sector in University Governance and workforce preparation. Despite the spirit of the 1993 Reforms and 2001 decree, graduate unemployment still ranked highest as seen in Fig. 2; questioning the provisions of sustainable education initiatives.

Fig. 2: Levels of education and unemployment rate

Level of education	Urban		Rural		Cameroon
	Male	Female	Male	Female	
Non schooling	3.60	2.30	0.30	0.20	0.50
Primary School	7.00	8.60	2.00	1.50	3.10
Secondary general education	9.80	17.2	1.30	4.40	7.30
High school general education	9.80	22.0	3.20	4.60	10.7
Secondary technical education	11.9	12.4	5.60	1.80	8.50
High school technical education	12.2	19.5	1.30	0.80	11.8
Higher education	12.2	19.4	11.5	40.4	13.4
Total	8.80	1.90	1.90	1.50	4.40

Source: INS/EESI 2005, Phase 2

Despite ongoing strategies unemployment rate increased from 08.10% (2001) to 10.70% (2005) Household survey. Job seeking dispositions and preferences were also analysed as follows: Indiscriminate job seekers (60%), Salary preference (22%), and Independent preference (18%). Independent preference ranked lowest, indicating unfavourable entrepreneurial attitudes, low drive and difficulties entering the informal sector. The adoption of the Bachelors, Masters and Doctorate (BMD) program is another landmark reform and according to the Ministry of Higher Education (MINESUP) (2007), it is destined to diversify professional training according to labor market needs: “opening

Universities to enterprises and opening enterprises to the Universities”. Such sustainable measures are hopeful and returns in investment expected to be high.

Problem background and objectives: Building on the premise that sustainable education is the ability of universities to ensure sustainable employment, there are indicators that Cameroon H.E is not producing required competence for the informal sector. While graduates suffer from endemic psychological dependence and distress, craving for white collar positions, non graduates and informal apprenticeship trainees dominate the entrepreneurial and informal sectors (Fomba, 2008. Unlike in Malaysia where Othman, Ghazali, & Sung (2006) found that majority of entrepreneurs (64.5%) had a tertiary education, the reverse is observed in Cameroon. H.E. Strategies have therefore been perceived as compromising the needs of both the present and future generations. With changing labor market requirement and pressure some graduates venture into the survival sector as “necessity entrepreneurs”, due to survival instinct. The specific objectives of the study are:

1. To examine if university curricular consider entrepreneurial education as a measure of sustainable education
2. To find out entrepreneurship education provisions in academic programs and correspondence with competence requirements of the informal sector.
3. To explore how competence based apprenticeship strategies can reinforce academic competence for the informal sector.
4. To suggest policy strategies to strengthen academic programs to train graduates with appropriate entrepreneurial competence for informal sector development

Perspectives and theoretical framework: Current understanding of entrepreneurship transcends traditional definition of business start-up to “mindset”. Entrepreneurship is an individual’s ability to turn ideas into action in a social, cultural or commercial activity the (European Union, 2006) and entrepreneurship education is considered a life long learning that promotes the development of personal qualities that are relevant to entrepreneurship (Rugtvedt, 2006). Since entrepreneurial competence has become a core competence in economic growth, it has also become a key issue in ESD in the tertiary sector. Competence is employed as “a specialized system of individual and/or collective abilities, proficiencies, or skills that are necessary or sufficient to reach a specific goal” (Weinet, 1999). Current trend shows that entrepreneurship education is best constructed on Active Participant Learning (APL), where practicing learners meet with actors in the field in order to develop a real company.

Ongoing debates on re-engineering entrepreneurial education frameworks have taken diverse positions with regards to labor market adaptability. According to Ras & Pretorius (2007), Van Vuuren and Nieman (1999) developed the Entrepreneurial Performance (E/P) Model to guide syllabi and curriculum development in South Africa and according to the linear model entrepreneurial performance is a function of motivation, entrepreneurial and business skills. The entrepreneurship education model of Ras & Pretorius (2007), transcends entrepreneurial education content to delivery context as well as approaches employed by facilitators. Building on system-wide education praxes, University-wide entrepreneurial education (Streeter, Jaquatte & Hovis, 2002), builds on

that of positively responding to existing academic paradigms. The provisions of the University Reforms (1993), decree on Orientation of Higher Education (2001), and the BMD program (2007) are sustainable platforms that run short of strategic operations. It is only through innovative and creative thinking that H.E will recognize the validity of African indigenous knowledge. This ascertains the relevance of indigenous technology in sustainable education, and a strong engagement with the society in priming entrepreneurial mindsets for the survival sector.

Serpell (2007:24) observed that “orthodox western higher education tends to decontextualize the learning process by extracting learners from everyday life into a detached mode of full-time reflection, with an emphasis on structured exercises and analytical review of authoritative disciplinary texts”. This is evident but instituting alternative strategies will bridge the knowledge-doing gaps and promote relevant competence for sustainable livelihood. Focused attention on the informal sector, building on existing entrepreneurial education provisions in Universities through project based activities will constitute a sustainable component. Recently a Competence Based Approach (CBA) was instituted in Cameroon in primary schools where pupils participate in accredited vocational activities. Apart from vocational competence the approach also facilitates entrepreneurial competence, and extension of such initiatives to the tertiary sector will constitute a viable strategy for promoting sustainable education.

Entrepreneurship education in Cameroon is truncated; being offered by families, the traditional sector, Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and some government departments and structures. A few institutions offer appropriate training on entrepreneurship as a measure of sustainable education in the Faculties of management. On the 8th of February 2009, the Rector of the University of Dschang, during the presentation of New Year wishes, declared a system-wide entrepreneurial education from the 2009/2010 academic year. This radical move builds on Higher Education policies for graduate’s inclusion into the informal sector with optimism.

Conclusion: According to Bloom et al (2006) education is widely accepted as a leading instrument for promoting economic growth, but for several decades development agencies have neglected tertiary education in sustainable economic development. This reflects the Cameroon situation where policies and strategies have been reduced to mere rhetoric and political propaganda. Sustainable development is a demanding educational challenge, notwithstanding current unsustainable strategies in educational offerings. One sure route is developing sustainable thinking and behaviors that will ensure economic and societal sustainability; and the challenges to Higher education are enormous as the lead industry in man power production. Current analysis identifies a crisis of relevance in tertiary sector training due to Eurocentric and homegrown strategies that instead reinforce psychological dependence, consumerist culture and low returns in Higher Education investment. It is therefore evident that sustainable education strategies through participatory and transformative pedagogy will promote exploration and discovery, which will facilitate entrepreneurial upskilling and informal sector growth. Such measures will process young graduates from job seekers into job creators, and also from psychological and social dependence to sustainable thinking and self-reliance (Fomba, 2008). It

addition, it will influence graduates' inclusion into a turbulent labor market and guarantee sustainable livelihood in a labor market full of uncertainties.

References

- Atchoerena, D. (2000). Introduction, In D. Atchoerena (Ed), *The transition of youths from school to work*, P. 1-12, Paris:IIEP/UNESCO
- Bloom, D., Canning, D. & Chan, K. (2006). *Higher Education and Economic Development in Africa*, World Bank: Human Development Sector Africa Region
- Brennan, L. (2005). *Integrating work based learning into higher education*, University Vocational Awards Council,
www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/recordDetail?accno=ED369316 - 22k
- Fomba, E. (2008). "Lost in school-to-work transition: psychosocial lost experiences of young graduates in Cameroon", International colloquium on Jeunesse Africaine: Hier, Aujourd'hui et Demain, University of Dschang, Cameroon, December 10-12
- Inger, K.I. (2006). Adopting a comprehensive strategy for entrepreneurship education. In European Union (Final Proceeding), *Entrepreneurship education in Europe: fostering entrepreneurial mindsets through education and learning*, Oslo, 26-27 October
- Ingrid, P. and Yoshie, K. (2008). Introduction. In Ingrid, P. and Yoshie, K. (Eds), *The contribution of early childhood education to a sustainable society* (9-17), Paris: UNESCO
- Kafka, N. Stephenson, J. (2005): *Self-Sufficient Schools: Fostering Entrepreneurship to Finance Sustainable Education*, Paper presented at the APEID conference on Learning for Sustainable Development, Bangkok, December
- Katseli L (2005). *Financing Africa's development*. Fifth International Forum on African Perspectives: 2005: What is New for Africa? organized by OECD on the 6th June at Bercy.
- Mesue, W. (2007). *The German Fachhochschulen and this Sector in the Cameroon Higher Education System, Non-University Higher Education*. Retrieved on 13/08/08 at <http://inparametric.com/bhinablog/archives/85>
- Ministry of Higher Education (MINESUP) (2007): "Pour comprendre le systeme Licence-Master-Doctorat (LMD), Inspection Generale des Affaires Academiques: Yaounde, Cameroon
- Othman, M., Ghazali, E. & Sung, Y. (2006). Graduate versus non-graduate entrepreneurs in urban Malaysia: some insights into entrepreneurial personality, company and family background differences, *Journal for International Business and Entrepreneurship Development*, Vol. 3, No. 1/2, pp.57-76.
- Phaho, D. (2008). *From silos to synergies: an institutional framework for growth and sustainability of innovative SMEs in South Africa, advancing small business and entrepreneurship: from research to results*, Halifax , Canada June 22-25
- Ras, P. & Pretorius, M. (2007). An entrepreneurial education model for the Namibian higher education system, *Acta Commercii*, PP. 327-336
- Rohweder, L. (2007). Education for sustainable development in business schools. In T. Kaivola & L. Rohweder (Eds). *Towards Sustainable Development in Higher Education – Reflections* (74-79), Publications of the Ministry of Education 2007:6: Finland

Serpell, R. (2007). Bridging between orthodox western higher educational practices and an African sociocultural context. *Comparative Education* Vol. 43, No. 1, February 2007, pp. 23–51

Sriram, V. and Mersha, T. (2006). Facilitating entrepreneurship in Sub-Saharan Africa, *Journal for International Business and Entrepreneurship Development*, Vol 3, Nos. 1/2, pp. 136-151

Streeter, D. & Jacquette, J. & Hovis, K. (2002). *University Wide entrepreneurship education: alternative models and current trend*, WP 2002-02, Department of Applied Economics and Management, Cornell University: New York

United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (2006). Youth and Economic Development in Africa, Fifth African Development Forum –*Youth and Leadership in the 21st Century*, Addis Ababa: 26th October.

United Nations (2002): UN Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014), Resolution 57/254. Retrieved on 10/01/09 at http://portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL_ID=23280&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

World Bank (2003). Cameroon: A higher education technical training project (LIL), Report No: 25659, *Human Development III*, African Region