



Nurturing, Entrepreneurship Education and Innovation in Fragile and Post-Conflict Countries: Case of A University of Makeni, Sierra Leone

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Abstract

This work is a critical study of how nurturing innovation, education and entrepreneurship in a fragile and post- conflict country can enhance economic growth, promote employment, and productivity, but also can be a driver to create peace and stability and produce democratic citizens. Much study has been done around entrepreneurial education in promoting economic growth and providing a platform for innovation, but few studies have explored in detail how entrepreneurial education can also promote peace and produce democratic citizens that will bring about peaceful and prosperous communities. The study utilized a case study research design to explore how university of Makeni in Sierra Leone is using entrepreneurial education to promote economic growth, bring about employment, peace and stability in a fragile and post – conflict country. The research design chosen is appropriate because it will help the researcher to gain concrete contextual in depth knowledge of the situation and issues in real life. It will help the researcher to see a relationship between phenomena, context and live reality of the participants. The researcher used purposeful sampling to select students, staff and other stakeholders who took part in the entrepreneurial programs and initiatives of the University. The data was collected and analyzed using diagnostic analysis to identify patterns to see how entrepreneurial programme and initiatives has promoted economic growth, produce democratic citizens and enhance peace and stability. Indeed, the study concluded that the entrepreneurial programmes at the University of Makeni empower students and the communities to promote economic growth through income generating enterprises nurturing the skills, competencies and values thus enhancing peace and stability. In addition, main findings of this study will enable educational practitioners to design better models, framework and best practices that will bring about growth, peace and stability in fragile and post-conflict country.

Keywords: Prosperity, Employment, Reconstruction of the Society, Transformation, Peace, Stability

INTRODUCTION

Background of the study

Fragile countries are searching for model that can help them address the pressing needs of their people after conflicts, create jobs, thereby bringing peace and stability. Encouraging innovative skills and entrepreneurship education in a post- conflict country has the potential to positively impact social, economic, and environmental suitability, peace and stability, improving the quality of life, empowerment and psychological well- being as well as reduction of dependency on welfare and foreign aids. The Republic of Sierra Leone suffered ten years of civil war. Pereira, (2012), in her work on entrepreneurship in fragile countries concludes that the typical aid approach had not succeeded so far in deploying a sustained development growth and

that the role of entrepreneurs in settling a more stable environment breeding socio-economic development was roundly neglected until recently. This paper therefore will contribute to understanding how entrepreneurial education can enhance peace and stability in a fragile country.

Objectives

The overall aim of this paper is to advance an understanding of how entrepreneurial education contributes towards prosperity, peace and stability in a fragile and post-conflict country.

The specific objectives were;

1. To describe the situation of entrepreneurial education in the University of Makeni
2. Evaluate the model, frame work, and theories around entrepreneurial education that will promote peace and produce democratic citizens.
3. Explore stakeholders' perspectives and practices in the entrepreneurial ecosystem.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Gilpin and Koltai (2012) in their work on using entrepreneurship to promote stability in fragile regions, affirmed that entrepreneurship, described as the productive combination of innovation, initiative, risk and capital, have four ways to promote stability in conflict-prone regions. Entrepreneurs can kick start sustainable economic, reduce aid dependency, develop capital skills, reduce poverty. Moreover, most conflict affected countries or post –crisis states suffer from a dearth of technical skills and administrative capacity. Promoting entrepreneurship could help spur job growth and increase the demand for skilled workers. It can also be seen as part of state building in the reconstruction process. Entrepreneurship is seen as part of state building initiatives and these can be seen as the platform for reconstruction after civil conflict. Entrepreneurship is often viewed as an ad hoc policy instrument and not as an integral part of state building, as part of security and political strategy.

Kick- start sustainable economic development Entrepreneurs can kick start sustainable economic development by creating jobs thus improving human security; especially when people have lost both income and asset, there is need for jobs to be created. It contrasts with aid-fueled economic growth common in most conflict-affected regions; entrepreneurship makes more use of domestic resources and could be more effective at spurring economic diversification. Reduce aid dependency Entrepreneurship reduces aid dependency in two important ways. First, it provides an alternative to employment and contracting directly tied to donor aid and projects (typical of many post conflict region) Secondly, entrepreneurship helps lay the foundation for sustained and diversified economic growth. Develop capital and skill most conflict- affected or post-crisis states suffer from a dearth of technical skills and administrative capacity. Promoting entrepreneurship could help spur job growth and increase the demand for skilled worker. Reduce poverty A significant proportion of existing and potential entrepreneurs in fragile and post- conflict affected regions are both income and asset-poor. In addition to losing their means of livelihood as a result of war, they have usually liquidated (lost) their assets (e.g homes tools, livestock, equipment) making them particularly vulnerable and severely disadvantaged. Support for entrepreneurship in neither a quick- fix nor a handout. It is an investment in risk- taking individual who will be able to overcome poverty by creating jobs and acquiring assets like equipment, services and property. However, Gilpin and Koltai (2012) proposed a Six-Six model

which offers a targeted and comprehensive strategy to promote entrepreneurship in conflict-affected states. In other words, any entrepreneurship strategy in a fragile and post- conflict country must be targeted and should know their offering programmes and initiative for entrepreneurship education should be comprehensive and holistic. Gilpin and Koltai for example propose six + six models which offers a targeted and comprehensive strategy to promote entrepreneurship in conflict affected countries. that are comprehensive Their model combines six interrelated parameters and six partners: *an ecosystem that Identifies, Train, Connect and Sustain, Fund, Enable and Celebrate and the involvement of government, corporations, universities, NGOs and investors.* Also, Hannon (2013) points out that entrepreneurship in higher education is also viewed as an appropriate response to succeeding in highly turbulent and unpredictable environments.

METHODOLOGY

This study explored a case study in the University of Makeni to see how this entrepreneurial university has used entrepreneurial education to promote prosperity, peace and stability. It will be discussed how the university has use entrepreneurial education to kick- start the economy after the war, creating jobs, building capacity and training skill set people thus using domestic resources, and building a strategy for peace and stability. This paper used in- depth case study approach to explore entrepreneurship education programmes, initiatives, practices and the outcomes of these programmes and practices in achieving economic growth, peace and producing democratic citizens.

Case Study:

The University of Makeni is a private university in Sierra Leone that was accredited in 2009. UNIMAK places ‘social development’ at the heart of everything it does. For this reason, UNIMAK has made great efforts to develop academic programme that are noted in the everyday reality of contemporary Africa. Currently there are approximately 5,000 students and 200 staff members. The University of Makeni came about as a response to the ten years civil war which devastated the entire country’s economic, social, and political fabric. The war claimed the lives of thousands of people, displaced many and thousands sought refuge in the neighboring countries.

The University of Makeni, under the leadership of the Catholic Diocese of Makeni, after the civil war, started a think-piece which was named Fatima Institute, in a bid to reflect on the causes of the war and find solutions. This Institute started the training of leaders in good governance and other social fields. It gradually became a University accredited to address the educational needs of the nation. Its ethos, right from the start, was to be a University addressing the problems and needs of the society. A university that it most relevant is focused on training leaders to build as stated in its motto, “a civilization of love”. The university’s vision is to aspire to be a world class university with excellence in education, research and public engagement where sustainable peace and social justice transcend boundaries. In addition to the university’s vision, her mission is informed by the catholic social teachings to promote sustainable, human, social, political and economic development in Sierra Leone and Africa as a whole, which at the same time respects the environment so that its resources are used for the benefits of all.

Today it has 8 faculties and 19 departments in addition to post- graduate programmes in MBA and PhDs as well; with the aim of training, research and public engagement. Its community engagement is one of its strongest pillars as a university. Hannon (2013)

clearly points out that if universities are to promote innovation then it is imperative for them to design learning environments and provide learning opportunities that stimulate entrepreneurial mindsets, thinking and action.

The entrepreneurial university is defined as: An organization taking an entrepreneurial response to addressing the pressures and challenges it faces; an organization that renews itself to better align with its environment; an institution that inculcates entrepreneurial thinking through its governance structures and managerial policies and practices. An institution that creates an environment, within which the development of entrepreneurial mindsets and behaviours are embedded, encouraged, supported and incentivized and rewarded.

1. University Business programmes at UNIMAK (Undergraduate and post graduate)

Our undergraduates' programmes are different from other programmes because they address societal needs rather than only maximizing profitability because they give the students experiential needs through incubators, business plans, and accelerators. Instead of the traditional theses writing, students are to have entrepreneurial skills in making business plans, they are trained to develop skills, to create jobs as well. They are connected with an ecosystem of entrepreneurial ecosystem ranging from Government, NGOs, cooperation, and investors. Their programme focuses on embedding entrepreneurship education through the development of curriculums for undergraduates in entrepreneurship and innovation, virtual entrepreneurship classroom, training of staff on entrepreneurship courses and pitch night competitions for undergraduates' students with potentially minimal start-up capital.

Workflow innovation Lab:

The university business programme have also established an incubator and accelerator called the work flow. The aim of this workflow is to connect graduates with investors, build capacity, and create jobs that will keep people busy not to think about violence. The outcome of this programme is to promote peace and stability. This is where students and other youths come with their business ideas, and they are helped with skills and knowledge about the businesses to come up with good business plan. This good business plan helps the start-up to incubate and look for funding. The lab and incubators for the work workflow give people hope and means of livelihood, creates jobs that takes them off from the street, redeem idleness because jobs are not really available in post- conflict country,

The MBA Impact entrepreneurship is a post- graduate programme that guides aspiring entrepreneurs to start-up and scale up businesses. This programme is designed by the Catholic university of Milan and partners with more than 24 universities in 20 African countries of which UNIMAK in Sierra Leone is a member. This programme is different from the traditional MBAs: It supports entrepreneurs in innovating their business model and expanding their activities through the use of innovative tools, training and coaching sessions, pitch competition and networking events with experts and investors. To put this knowledge into practice, UNIMAK has incubator, accelerators and boot camps; UNIMAK through E 4 Impact programme trains people who are job creators, people who are engaged in social entrepreneurship and can come up with social enterprise that will benefit the society. It trains people with entrepreneurial skills. The university has graduated about 500 students in this programme and has started the 7th cohort in 2023.

The Program Manager of the Impact entrepreneurship, Lansana Peter had these to say about the program:

The 4-impact business education is not the traditional business education which is too theoretical and academic with no inclusion of an ecosystem of investors, coaches, mentors, successful entrepreneurs. This program recruits would be entrepreneurs or people scaling up with a business idea and wants to test and build up their idea to become an efficient and effective plan. Seven of our graduates have set up their own businesses and becoming champions: Hospitality, brick and construction, green house producing vegetables, poultry and fruit and essences. These are small scale-medium enterprises and have the potential to scale up. Other graduates are formalizing their licenses and getting their documents ready for their projects. However, Lansana, admitted that one of the critical challenges of the program is financing business plans of the students. The banks have only now started financing small-medium enterprises.

More lecturers in the faculty of business education remarked that the blended approach of classroom, booth camps, incubators, investors ensured that the outcome was to create jobs, build the economy and the program relevant in a situation where there is widespread unemployment of graduates. There is clear mindset in the 4 impact program aim at enabling the student to know clearly what he or she wants and the outcomes can easily be relevant to the community and the students.

Isata Kabia is an alumna of the E4 impact programme. She is a passionate entrepreneur from Sierra Leone, very active in gender equality and equal opportunities. She grew up in a mining community where women didn't have many job opportunities, but she has always wanted to help them find their place in the world. Therefore, she came up with the idea of Afrilosophy, an initiative through which she trains women and youth to become self-sufficient entrepreneurs through manufacturing skills and financial literacy. After a few months, Isata felt that Afrilosophy could become more than a simple initiative. She wanted it to become a real, sustainable business. The problem was that she didn't have any experience in the field of entrepreneurship. That's why she decided to enroll in the Global MBA in Impact Entrepreneurship, offered at the University of Makeni.

How was your Business Idea born?

I lived in a mining community, where job opportunities mainly were for migrant men, and women and girls faced more and more social issues. We aimed to provide opportunities for women to create sustainable livelihoods especially after the 10 years of war. Being in a rural setting, I saw the need to provide skills to create rural enterprises.

Gender disparities institutionalized through social norms result in unequal access to education and resources for women. This, compounded by limited access to quality training opportunities, leads to women not earning a decent wage through decent jobs or sustainable businesses.

Many workforce training courses are long, stretching out through one year, and very expensive. Ours is short; the company subsidizes them locally, where the need actually exists, so they are less disruptive to daily lives.

As an internationally trained cosmetic chemist and processor, I wanted to pass on my knowledge to create jobs. I added other training opportunities for variation (bead slippers, jewelry making, tailoring, soap making, food processing) to give an opportunity to create value chains with local produce and to enable women to start their own businesses.

Could you tell us how the MBA has helped you and your business?

In her response to how the MBA programme has empowered her, Isata said

It's a very practical MBA, where the lessons apply to the business. Every homework session was not a theoretical question but an actual problem to be solved for my business or some innovative learning, which applied to my case. So, as I progressed through the classes, my company developed. With a sustainable business, people in less developed areas can also ensure that their idea of impacting their communities is an achievable dream.

Another student also shared his experience, Saticon Conteh is an entrepreneur from Sierra Leone and he is the Founder and CEO of Grace Farm, a commercial plantain farm established in 2017 and situated in Ropolon Village, approximately 20km from Makeni, the capital city of the Country. By providing affordable and high-quality plantain, Saticon's enterprise helps local communities to vary their eating habits and fight malnutrition. Grace Farm is equipped with qualified people with outstanding experience in both private and agricultural sector, which play the roles of Chief Executive Officer, Human Resource and Administrative Officer, Operation and Site Supervisor and Marketing Officer. Unskilled labour under contract is also an essential part of the workforce of the company with specific tasks to be performed. *"After the establishment of Grace Farm in the region, plantains have been provided in abundance in market stalls at affordable and fair price. We grow and sell fresh plantains in different forms such as boiled chips, fried, roasted, and snacks from plantain flower."* he explained.

How was your Business Idea born? The idea of establishing a commercial plantain farm was born out of two folds in mid-2017. The first was a recall of my childhood experience in the '80s. I grew up as a child in an extended and typical African family setting. Basically, because government wasn't fully monitoring imported goods, all sorts of rice – ranging from broken types to varieties full of weevils and impurities – was brought into Sierra Leone from Asian countries and sold at varied prices. This left consumers in the mercy of business people. Within the context I lived, I had to walk over 6 km a day in search of good quality rice at reasonable price for the family meal. This nightmare lasted for years. Secondly, the call by the former Minister of Agriculture and Food Security for Sierra Leoneans to diversify their eating habits caught my attention. The Minister emphasized that people should have changed their mindset of considering rice as staple food and said that the country should have grown other food items – like plantain, banana, sweet potatoes, cassava, etc. – which the population could feed on and live healthy as well. Hence, I decided to enroll into the E4Impact MBA Program to fine-tune my business idea in order to embark on commercial plantain farming.

Could you tell us how E4Impact program has helped you and your business? The introduction of the MBA program in Makeni was timely and it has given significant contribution in developing businesses around the country. Furthermore, the MBA should be popularized as a unique program across Sierra Leone, and not only in the sub-region of Makeni. That's the reason why I believe it would be great if some satellite stations, venues or lecture rooms could be opened both in Bo and Freetown.

Entrepreneurial programme is not just limited to business it is about finding ways to giving people lasting hope and improve standard of life and well-being. Entrepreneurship is not only about working toward creating economic growth; it is also about finding ways to lessening conflicts by providing jobs. It is also part of building state security, it is about training students to know that they are to take part in reconstruction of the state; Thus, university of Makeni partnering with the UNDP is training skilled workers, democratic citizens and reconstructing the region through various means of entrepreneurial education in the following aspects: mentorship, coaching, engaging entrepreneurial ecosystems, connecting with investors, and financing both start-ups and scale – up businesses. These are all aspects that will

contribute to the well-being of the citizens and help the country not to return back to civil conflict at any given time.

2. Social entrepreneurship initiative and practices at UNIMAK

A. The Ubuntu innovation tech hub: It is a partnership programme between UNIMAK and Spain: It is a project that empowers youths with effective use of information Technology to promote entrepreneurship and social development in Sierra Leone. It is one of the entrepreneurial projects in UNIMAK that takes students who have graduated from Information Technology (IT) together with some investors from Spain and giving them the skills digital entrepreneurship by training them on Web application and software engineering, to be able to find jobs both in Sierra Leone and abroad. This programme is bringing together students, investors, universities and our students now are working for tech for other people in other countries. The Ubuntu innovation technological lab in UNIMAK started in 2018; Three Cohorts of 27 students from different universities in Sierra Leone have graduated. 16 of out of the 27 students have been employed by the Ubuntu Africa foundation.

B. The Makeni Business Forum: This area tries to see how to identify businesses in Makeni, connect entrepreneurs and possible investors, mobilize resources and boost domestic markets. This programme brings together both small and middle scales businesses, have some discussions and look at possible areas of funding to accelerate their businesses. The Makeni Business Forum organized a business conference in 2015 after the Ebola disaster with the theme *“Building the entrepreneurial Ecosystem of Sierra Leone*. Martino Ghiemi, West African manager for E4 Impact program at UNIMKK has these to say: “UNIMAK is a great example of how a university can become a sound platform where investors, entrepreneurs and policy-makers find a common ground to collaborate”. Martino added “I’m glad to see how our entrepreneurs are longing to significantly contribute to the creation and development of a vibrant indigenous private sector in Sierra Leone.”

C. Skill development projects, a World Bank project:

Skill development programmes aim to acknowledge the ability of the youth and extend their support by serving them with the proper guidance, infrastructure, opportunities, and encouragement that help them achieve their ambitions. UNIMAK benefited from this World bank project of skill training to enable and improve employability of over 500 young men and women by expanding the agricultural sectors’ capacity building through training skills, techniques and competencies that can lead to employment in various agricultural sectors such as Animal production Technology, Animal health Technology, Soil Science Technology, Crop Production, Agro- tourism Technology and Mechanics.

D. Social Business Development Project: With the support of Saint Lawrence Foundation a partner and donor to the University, the university has taken steps to create the entrepreneurial spirit in the Faculty of Agriculture and have offered opportunity to its first graduates to support the development of an agribusiness in Makeni named *Social Business Development Company* and registered as a private company. Social Business Development assumes as its first strategic responsibility to work with the agriculture supply chain in order to develop local crops, local animal feeds and local poultry farming.

The social business development project has 67 staff operate in three capacities: egg production to boost the high deficiency of protein through in the country by producing

14,000 eggs daily; it cultivates of maize that is used for the production of chicken feeds. This project has provided more than 250 new jobs for petty traders due to the regular production of eggs. In fulfilling its mission of entrepreneurship and empowerment, the project has been supporting the local communities involved involving more than 500 rural farmers in the field. Over the years, more than 80% of chickens and eggs are imported from abroad to Sierra Leone, since the inception of this private company under UNIMAK, the citizens are Identifying, mobilizing and making good use of domestic resources and creating jobs as well.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The University of Makeni is strategically positioning herself as an entrepreneurial university with the aim of training our students to be entrepreneurial, giving them the skills, knowledge and competence to be job creators, promoting employments, thus enhancing prosperity, and at the same time constructing our communities and the nations after the 10 years of conflict. It is a university that is enhancing prosperity, peace and stability, by combining a portfolio that uses parameters and partners to create an ecosystem that identifies, train, connect and sustain, formed, enable and celebrate and involves the government, corporations, universities, NGOs, and investors. We have demonstrated this by exploring undergraduate and post- graduate programmes, business programmes, social entrepreneurship initiatives and practices at the university.

University Education in fragile countries has to build up the innovative approaches to address employment especially with small scale medium enterprises which can play a crucial role in promoting stability and avoid aid-dependency. There is every need to forge educational processes, products and programs that are relevant to the local entrepreneurs, national and global economies. Education in fragile countries cannot afford to separate the need for employability and the civic dimension of education. The entrepreneurial spirit has to be embedded in the processes, products and programs of the university. With funding for higher education becoming less of a priority, there is need to emphasize both core and specific programme skills for our students. The literature and our research point out that entrepreneurial education which is targeted and comprehensive has the capacity to promote employment and can enable innovation especially in fragile regions.

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