

# Entrepreneurship and Poverty Alleviation in Africa

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## Abstract

This article explored contemporary theories explaining the relationship between entrepreneurship and poverty reduction from various perspectives, such as remediation, reform, and social and plight perspectives. Moreover, the article presented the study concepts of poverty reduction and entrepreneurship in Africa and empirical studies concerned with investigating the current state of Poverty and entrepreneurship in Africa. Furthermore, a critical analysis of the reasons for the failures of poverty reduction programs in Africa is explored and explained. The study adopted a qualitative method and found that entrepreneurship development in Africa must ensure access to capital for the poor and be more focused on creating an enabling environment that aids individuals and groups in achieving significant entrepreneurship success. Finally, the study recommended that African leaders collaborate with local and international institutions and organizations to create and maintain enabling conditions that facilitate entrepreneurship growth.

## Article History

Received March 13, 2022

Revised May 11, 2022

Accepted May 18, 2022

## Keywords

Poverty alleviation, Entrepreneurship, Economic development, Standard of living, Africa.

## JEL Codes

I32, L31, F63, P36

## 1. Introduction

Entrepreneurship is considered one of the key contributors to economic development and poverty reduction in Africa. With the recent innovation of the last decades, companies like Apple, Amazon, Tesla, Huawei, and Alibaba have inspired many young people to start the entrepreneurship's pleasant and risky journey. We have recently seen new words emerging, such as Agripreneur to designate a person beginning an entrepreneurial journey in Agriculture or Afropreneur to indicate an entrepreneur of an African origin. Entrepreneurship is the capacity to see and seize new business opportunities and profit from the outcomes generated by providing solutions to existing problems of their society (Dialoke et al., n.d.).

Poverty alleviation in Africa is one of the significant issues faced by African leaders and their financial partners. Over the years, billions of U.S. dollars have been spent to assist African countries in tackling widespread Poverty. Despite efforts to implement reforms and promote growth strategies, it is obvious to acknowledge that expected results have not been

met yet. The United Nations, as one of the champions on the front line against Poverty, includes poverty reduction as one of their primary concerns, among others. As far as the World Bank is concerned, "Poverty is the economic condition in which people lack sufficient income to obtain certain minimal levels of health services, food, housing, clothing and education which are necessities for the standard of living" (Dialoke et al., n.d.).

According to the OECD (2022), at the end of 2021, the top ten poorest countries with associated high poverty levels include seven African countries.

These countries include South Sudan on top with a poverty rate of 82.30%; Equatorial Guinea with a poverty rate of 76.80%; Madagascar with a poverty rate of 70.70 percent; Guinea Bissau with a poverty rate of 69.30%; Eritrea at 69.00%; Sao Tome and Principe with a poverty rate of 66.70% among others.

The analyzed data showed that poverty reduction in Africa is still a challenge; and that the continuous progress chalked

over the years has been dilapidated by the covid 19 outbreak (KPMG, 2020).

They argued that an analysis of efforts made by leaders in Africa to alleviate poverty from the continent is poor and susceptible to global economic, political, and social threats. However, global Poverty has been reduced only in regions, most notably in South East Asia and South America, but not Africa (Vermeire & Bruton, 2016; Bhagwati & Srinivasan, 2002; Easterly, 2006). The reasons are that most social researchers and scholars have failed to look at its association with entrepreneurship over the past years in their study of poverty reduction in Africa in terms of the structural policies and programs (Sutter, Bruton, and Chen 2019; Dzingirai, 2021). The theorized argument that industrialization is the key to growth is overstated since the global conditions favoring Africa's development are facilitated by the informal sector, which has been created by the handwork of entrepreneurship (World Bank, 2001). According to the World Bank, entrepreneurship in Africa is on the ascendancy but poorly supported by stakeholders and governments as it is perceived as an individualized activity. Dzingirai (2021) explained that this low support was because most African entrepreneurs are individualistic, informal, un-resourceful, risk-takers, and short-term planners, making them unattractive to receive support technically and financially from public and private institutions. In addition, the informal sector in most African economies is characterized by individualized entrepreneurs who are described as uneducated and crude in terms of business practices. On the brighter side, entrepreneurship activities have increased employment opportunities for the unskilled and skilled and increased income of the poor. Thus, there is a need to investigate the efforts taken by government institutions and agencies and private sectors to increase entrepreneurship growth in Africa.

The research methodology of this article is qualitative. It is based on the consultation of scientific papers, books, and information from non-governmental organizations to have a deep dive into the linkage between Entrepreneurship and poverty reduction in Africa. The article aims to provide valuable insights into studying the close relationship between the concepts mentioned above.

The selection of this methodology sought to amass qualitative data as much as possible to shed light on the positive implications of startup-ups on economic development, reduction of unemployment, and, most importantly, poverty alleviation in Africa. According to Farr (2008:1), qualitative research is vital because it provides a broad range of portrayals of different individuals interpreting a specific investigation topic.

This article is outlined as follows. The second section covers the literature review and presents the current knowledge and understanding of the relationship between Entrepreneurship and Poverty reduction in general and in

Africa. The third section that covers the conceptual Framework provides details about Entrepreneurship, Poverty, and poverty reduction in Africa. The fourth section that represents the theoretical framework highlights the perspectives of poverty alleviation through Entrepreneurship support, including the remediation perspectives, the reform perspectives, and the social and plight perspectives.

The Conclusion representing the fifth and last section covers the study's primary aim, the findings, and the recommendations drawn from the research outcomes.

## 2. Literature Review

According to a study by Olayinka, Olusegun, and Babatunde the relationship between Entrepreneurship and Poverty reduction in Nigeria showed that Poverty is among the significant concerns of the Nigerian government. Despite the strong influence of the Boko Haram sect in the country with all its implications, the terrorist organization is not the foremost responsible for the Poverty widespread in the economic lungs of the African continent. They pointed out that constant looting of public funds through corruption constitutes one of the fundamental issues for much socio-economic unrest in the country and Poverty in particular. Additionally, they showed that the level of Poverty in Nigeria is among the highest globally, even though the country is among the primary producer and exporters of oil. Moreover, their research pointed out the lack of employment opportunities, lack of suitable markets for goods and services in the rural areas, sacred land and capital availability for the population, and scanty access to education, health, sanitation, and water, among the causes of Poverty in Nigeria (Olayinka, Olusegun, & Babatunde, 2015). Furthermore, they highlighted the positive and significant relationship between Entrepreneurship and poverty reduction in the state of Enugu in Nigeria. Finally, they concluded that entrepreneurship is a crucial driver of economic development and poverty alleviation. They recommended that a focus should be directed on entrepreneurial training both by the government and the private sector, cooperation between small company entrepreneurs and research institutions, well as necessary funding to achieve technological development and transfer of knowledge and skills between research centers and small businesses and vice-versa (Olayinka et al., 2015).

Another study conducted by Nashir and Khan regarding the nexus between Entrepreneurship and poverty reduction found that there is a positive and significant nexus between Entrepreneurship and poverty alleviation since entrepreneurship is proved to be one of the most relevant ingredients for economic development, social uplifting, and poverty reduction. Their paper revealed that the World Bank cited entrepreneurship as one of the tools through which those who live in Poverty or below the poverty line can use to get themselves out of the Poverty trap and achieve financial and

social stability without relying upon their levels of skills or education to challenge highly skilled or educated people for employment. Researchers also found that entrepreneurship drives competition, innovation, economic development, unemployment reduction, and significantly participate in the betterment of a country and emphasize the fact that entrepreneurs are the key drivers of the economy since they come up with new ideas, and new skills and stimulate the economic environment by creating small and medium businesses that employ about 45% of the workers in developing countries, thus giving them the chance to move from unemployed and poor people to significant contributors to the overall economy. More importantly, their study revealed that entrepreneurship has a significant and positive role in the improvement of the productivity of a nation and hence constitutes a key asset for governments to promote the performance of their economies by incentivizing entrepreneurs to energize the economy (Khan, Nashir, Submitted, & Policy, 2017). Kareem (2015), who conducted a study of the impact of entrepreneurship on poverty alleviation, found a significant relationship between entrepreneurship and poverty alleviation in the state of Ogun in particular and in Nigeria in general (Kareem, 2015).

Additionally, he found a correlation between the incomes generated through entrepreneurship and poverty alleviation. He then deduces that entrepreneurship has a significant and positive impact on income improvement and effectively addresses poverty reduction by improving the standard of living in Ogun state in particular and Nigeria as a whole. Moreover, the researcher noticed the complaints of the investigated people of the Ogun state on the tax burden that constitutes a break for small entrepreneurs, hence deducting that government should grant tax holidays to small entrepreneurs to encourage them to thrive in the entrepreneurial journey. He concluded that the Nigerian government should promote entrepreneurial education and give a certain level of tax relief to small and medium-size entrepreneurs to boost the economy, encourage job creation and poverty alleviation, and create a better standard of living for Nigerians (Kareem, 2015).

A study conducted by Teymorpor, Nazari & Emami (2012) in Mardan (district of Pakistan) found about a 60% relationship between social entrepreneurship and poverty alleviation. An econometric study ( $R=0.601$ ) highlighted that poverty reduction efforts positively impact social entrepreneurship's actions and that government intervention has a positive and significant effect on social entrepreneurship. Their study concluded that entrepreneurship constitutes a powerful engine for economic development and poverty reduction in the district of Mardan in particular and in Pakistan in general (Teymorpor, Nazari, & Emami, 2012).

A study conducted by Olson-Buchanan, Bryan, & Thompson (2013) showed that entrepreneurship is a

significant economic contributor both at the micro and macro levels. They explained that at the micro-level, entrepreneurship significantly improves the income of individuals, thus substantially improving their purchase power and hence their standard of living by allowing them to consume more and save more. Researchers found that entrepreneurship plays a significant role in job creation on the macro level compared to other private or public sectors. More importantly, their investigation sheds light on the importance of entrepreneurial activities as a vector of self-employment, thus a critical factor in lowering the unemployment rate by boosting productivity and growth within a country (Olson-Buchanan, Bryan, & Thompson, 2013). They emphasized that entrepreneurship contributes to the nominal gross domestic product. Thus, they suggested that entrepreneurial activities are crucial for economic development, job creation, and poverty reduction.

According to Lin & Khashru (2019), entrepreneurship has close ties with economic development, income improvement, and poverty reduction in the world field's poor areas (Lin & Khashru, 2019). In addition, their paper revealed the close link between entrepreneurial activities and improvement of living standards, thus concluding that new entrepreneurship initiatives can be a powerful engine for economic growth, job creation, and social and economic upliftment in Bangladesh (Lin & Khashru, 2019).

Asitik & al. (2016) found a strong relationship between entrepreneurship and poverty reduction in Ghana. Nevertheless, they pointed out that the lack of proper infrastructure is a significant obstacle to market access and recommended effectively addressing the issue for entrepreneurial activities to become a workable way for poverty alleviation in Ghana (Asitik, Sharpley, & Phelan, 2016).

Thus, all the reviewed perspectives are essential in explaining the relationship between entrepreneurship and poverty reduction. However, the literature on Poverty and entrepreneurship revealed failures in the positive and significant impacts of entrepreneurship on poverty alleviation.

Lack of entrepreneurial education, lack of proper infrastructure for market accessibility, scarcity of funds, and insufficient government incentives such as tax reliefs to encourage young entrepreneurs to start, thrive, and enjoy the entrepreneurial journey are among the significant causes. A call for research conducted in this direction must be researchers' new focus on Poverty and entrepreneurship through other angles, such as remediation and social and plight perspectives.

### 3. Conceptual Framework

#### 3.1 Entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship as a concept involves the creation of new institutions, employment, incomes, and resources with limited resources (Ali & Ali, 2013). Entrepreneurship can be viewed as an individual or group activity that aims to identify and seek a solution to a problem for business gains or societal survival (Kuratko & Hodgetts, 2004; Coulter, 2014; Bagheri & Pihie, 2010; Akhuemonkhan & Raimi, 2013).

#### 3.2 Poverty

Poverty refers to a low or lack of necessities at a low-income level (World Development Report, 1990). Poverty can be measured by assessing life expectancy, infant mortality rate, school enrolment, number of persons per physician, income level, malnutrition, access to social services, and social and political status (United Nations, 2004).

#### 3.3 Entrepreneurship in Africa

Entrepreneurship development in Africa is slow as most entrepreneurs are found in the informal sector with limited resources to make advancements or survival in their business (Hussain & Bakar, 2014). They claimed that most African entrepreneurs are presented with many hindrances in their quest to earn a living for themselves and their families. Furthermore, they explained that the lack of support from family and friends and governments is due to their activities being perceived as unregulated and unprofitable.

Moreover, most innovative African entrepreneurs give up creative business ideas to large corporate firms and focus on informal trade, which is attractive and requires fewer resources (Hussain & Bakar, 2014). Furthermore, entrepreneurship in Africa is seen as a less formal business activity that explores learned ideas to create wealth but is characterized by the poor who wallow in absolute poverty. Thus, Africa needs to create opportunities for the poor entrepreneurs to access capital, resources, knowledge, and freedom and support their businesses to create new jobs, opportunities, and initiatives that increase income and a higher standard of living.

#### 3.4 Poverty in Africa

Over the years, Africa's poverty level has increased due to certain defined factors. Besides low-income groups and poor living standards, Poverty in Africa is accompanied by a weak government and the inability of the poor to participate socio-economically and politically in the country's life.

Furthermore, systematic violations of human rights and freedoms granted by the constitution, restrictions on access to information and information technologies, and high

corruption levels in all power branches make an unattainable decent life for poor people.

### 4. Theoretical Framework

The most popular research topic reviewed in African literature today is the concept of poverty reduction, as various financial and economic indicators have been linked to its research. Unlike entrepreneurship, the practices have been advanced in the developed world and received support from the public and private sectors. However, entrepreneurship has been poorly practiced and supported in Africa. A literature review revealed five major theoretical perspectives explaining the relationship between entrepreneurship and poverty reduction (Si et al., 2020). These theoretical perspectives have looked at the various impediments responsible for Africa's lack of entrepreneurship initiatives.

#### 4.1 Remediation Perspective

This theoretical perspective argues that Poverty persists in communities due to a lack of capital or resources to fund the entrepreneurial activities of the poor (Sutter, Bruton, & Chen, 2019). This theory further explains that in most developing countries, the poor's capital resources are difficult to access as public and private institutions have put restrictions on capital access to frustrate the poor entrepreneurs seeking funds for their operations (Wu & Si, 2018). They recommended the need for foreign aid, grants, donations, and charities as a source of capital for poor entrepreneurs to embark on business initiatives to increase their income levels and alleviate Poverty. Nevertheless, this theory has been criticized as capital accessed from external sources is mostly misallocated to other private activities that do not financially empower the poor but worsen their poverty condition (McCloskey, 2017).

#### 4.2 Reform Perspective

According to Sutter and Chen (2019), the theoretical remediation perspective emphasizes that creating avenues for the poor to access capital resources is thus not sufficient to facilitate the growth of entrepreneurship in Africa. Sutter and Chen (2019) explained that restrictions and bureaucracies in most institutions and agencies established in Africa impede the growth of entrepreneurship in Africa. The reform perspective reinforces the restructuring of institutions to create and maintain a conducive business environment for entrepreneurship development (Sutter & Chen, 2019).

For example, they argued that the reforms made by institutions and agencies to address the increased cost of business, other payments, taxes, high tariffs, and high utilities constitute an obstacle to entrepreneurial activities. Moreover, land tenure systems, political instability, and a high rate of

corruption in public institutions are significant hindrances to Africa's entrepreneurship growth (Haugh, 2019).

#### 4.3 Social and Plight Perspective

The achievements of institutional reforms to promote entrepreneurship growth in Africa are equally essential but not similarly satisfactory as the psychological and mental upliftment of the perception of the plight of the poor to take advantage of entrepreneurship opportunities independently. Even though institutional enhancements are necessary for entrepreneurial growth, the difficulty of discrimination and abuse of fundamental rights and freedom are obstacles for poor people. Indeed, those barriers are significant factors that keep the poor and underprivileged suppressed in attaining their entrepreneurship dream (Sutter et al., 2017), as is the case of the abuse of females widowed in Africa. Their families stop embarking on entrepreneurs' activities, as is customary, not accepted, as they are perceived as properties gained after the death of their partners (Shaheen, 2016).

Other perspectives, such as learning and change perspective, subsistence, and innovation entrepreneurship, focus on developing the poor's entrepreneurial ability through learning and innovations to take advantage of market opportunities (Tomizawa et al., 2019). Entrepreneurial activities create new jobs and better income levels that enable the poor and deprived to satisfy their basic needs.

#### 5. Conclusion

This article aims to seek the Link between Entrepreneurship and poverty alleviation in Africa based on the aim of this article. The study found that Entrepreneurship has a positive and significant impact on poverty reduction; hence, governments in Africa must promote Entrepreneurship training and incentivize current start-ups to empower youths and women to tackle effectively and efficiently the widespread Poverty in the cradle of humanity. The paper suggests that with a favorable environment for Entrepreneurship, outstanding contributions can be made to effectively address the rampant Poverty by tremendously reducing the employment rate of youths and women across the African continent.

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