

Chapter 30

Ensuring Environmental Sustainability Through Sustainable Entrepreneurship

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ABSTRACT

Sustainability has become an important issue worldwide because of great concerns about the unintended social, environmental, and economic effects of increasing population and economic growth, as well as consumption of natural resources. One recent concept arising from sustainability issue is sustainable entrepreneurship which integrates both the social and environmental aspects, and linking them with entrepreneurial activities. This chapter therefore suggests that efforts of developing countries at promoting entrepreneurship should go beyond engaging in business enterprises but include encouraging the use of entrepreneurial values and approaches to solve sustainability problems. Hence, this chapter is an effort at developing a framework that can be used to influence sustainable entrepreneurship behaviour of the students in developing countries.

INTRODUCTION

As far back as 1970s there has been a great concern about environment and development. This is because of the considerable negative effects that industrialisation is having on the natural environment in term of diminishing the vitality and sustainability of economic systems (World Resource Institute, 2004 cited by Dean and McMullen, 2007). Apart from the problems that are peculiar to local environment like air pollution, surface-water degradation, and toxic wastes in groundwater, there are negative impacts of industrialisation that are of global concern. These, according to the report of United Nations (2004), include ozone depletion, climate change, and the worldwide destruction of ocean fisheries.

The first major international gathering to discuss sustainability was the United Nations conference on the Human Environment held in Stockholm in 1972. The conference led to the establishment of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) as well as the creation of numerous national envi-

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ronmental protection agencies at country level. It was during this period that the concept of sustainable development became popular. The concept was further popularised by the report of the World Commission on Environment and Development in 1987, titled 'Our Common Future' (or Brundtland Report). This report gave the classic definition of sustainable development as development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (World Commission on Environment and Development, 1987). Since then, sustainable development is accepted as a convergence between the three pillars of economic development, social equity, and environmental protection (United Nations, 2010).

The concern about sustainability has also opened new opportunities for entrepreneurship and introduced a new dimension to its study. This is because entrepreneurship is believed to have potential of resolving problems of market failure inherent in the economic system, especially environmental issues. Hence, sustainable entrepreneurship, which is a spin-off concept from sustainability development, integrates both the social and environmental aspects, and linking them with entrepreneurial activities. The strategy of achieving this is the encouragement of green enterprises, which required firms to reconcile sustainability aspects with profitability.

Over the past decade, African economies have experienced rapid advancement towards integration into the global economy. This can be seen from the efforts of many of the countries undertaken significant economic reforms such as improving macroeconomic management, providing conducive private investment climate, liberalising markets as well as widening the space for entrepreneurship to drive strong and inclusive growth (Ahmed & Nwankwo, 2013). These authors however noted that there is much at stake in continuing this process of scaling up entrepreneurship as a dynamic process towards sustainable economic development. One of such is how to ensure that entrepreneurship is able to create value which is economic, social, or ecological in nature.

While the efforts of various governments, especially in developing countries, at promoting entrepreneurship is laudable one, this should however go beyond encouraging business start up where people seek advantages only for themselves or unconsciously run their businesses in a destructive way that generates imbalances. Therefore, solution to unemployment must also consider sustainable entrepreneurship, which requires the use of entrepreneurial values and approaches to solve sustainability problems. That is, application of imagination to challenging problems by conceiving, prototyping and creating solutions that deliver environmental, social and economic value (Pascual, van Klink, & Grisales, 2011). Therefore, policies and programmes of African government on entrepreneurship should be long-term and take the future into account so as to be sustainable in nature.

Though the practice of sustainable entrepreneurship is not new in African countries when considering the waste-to-wealth initiative and recycling process, but a quick look at available literature shows that not many studies are addressing the concept of sustainability entrepreneurship in this continent. This chapter is therefore an effort to fill this gap by synthesising theories from the entrepreneurship, environmental and welfare economics literatures with the view to examine the potential of entrepreneurship to create value within the dimensions of sustainability in African countries. Moreover, the chapter develops a framework which is expected to provide direction for the development of entrepreneurship education that can create and develop sustainable entrepreneurial behaviour in students, especially those in tertiary institutions. The framework can also serve as input into the formulation of policies and programmes by the government of African countries to properly lay the foundation for effective delivery of education for sustainable entrepreneurship based on the best practices in developed countries.

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