

## Chapter 4

# Talent and Africa Standing on Its Own Feet: A Case Study of Alex Omwela Adala's Farming Enterprise

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The objective of this case study is to examine how a farmer, Mr. Alex Omwela Adala, has utilised his talent to create self-reinforcing agricultural enterprises to stand on his own feet. This study addresses a gap in past research on entrepreneurship which tended to focus on profiles of entrepreneurs as well as development and outcomes of investment in businesses. Starting literally from scratch, this farmer has currently nine self-reinforcing agricultural enterprises that have enabled him to cater for his family needs and provide technical support to other small-scale farmers. He has played a key role in founding and managing the Dairy Goat Association of Kenya, Western Kenya Branch. The contribution of this chapter is in using a case study method and a transformative story to learn about talent exploitation for individual and community development. The chapter does not only provide an approach of data collection but also experiential insights and wisdom of an entrepreneur who has travelled the path of investment for 30 years.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

*When the Kakamega High School Class of 1981 group visited one of our former classmates, Mr Alex Adala's home, what we found was totally unexpected. We knew that he was an astute farmer but the diversity in both animals and crops on his farm left us all in awe. It was hard to imagine that so many different animals can be made to coexist effectively within such a small enclosure. Back in high school we had all taken Agriculture lessons and it was satisfying to note that at least one of us was putting that knowledge to profitable use. Our high school Agriculture teacher, Mr Aggrey Luta, would certainly have*

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*been as proud as we were about our former classmate's enterprising venture. (Henry Were, Secretary, Kakamega High School Class of 1981).*

There are generally two contrasting views of Africa's development (Toulmin & Wisner, 2005). The first one is that of a continent that is locked in a never-ending cycle of crises and hopelessness, characterised by poverty, diseases and political instability (Meredith, 2003; Timberlake, 1988). It is within this view that the 1980s have been described as lost decades of development in Africa (Meredith, 2003). It is largely a pessimistic view of Africa and is challenged by those who argue that there are also positive and optimistic developments in Africa that the pessimistic view ignores. The second view is of an Africa that is taking steps to realize its development potential. Some authors have referred to this second view as Africa rising (Mahajan, 2011) or the emerging Africa (Radelet, 2010). Examples of positive micro and macro scale changes such as agricultural innovations, informal economy and democratic changes (Mahajan, 2011; Radelet, 2010) are provided to support the optimist view. These scholars identify the key assets of Africa to be its people and natural resources as well as the changing global geopolitical space, which if effectively managed, can lead to prosperity for the continent (Moyo, 2010). This author recognises that Africa has challenges but shows using the case study presented in this chapter that positive change is possible. Optimizing talent is one of the pathways that Africa can use to realise its development potential and partly contribute to turning around the pessimist narrative about the continent.

Past research on entrepreneurship tended to focus on profiles of entrepreneurs as well as development and outcomes of investment in businesses (Devine & Kiggundu, 2016), and not so much on the trajectory of how individuals exploit their talents to stand on their own feet. A few case studies on individual entrepreneurial journey are being developed and shared (Wilson & Wilson, 2012; Karume, 2010). Individual in-depth examples of transformation that can offer inspiration are also generally lacking in the development literature. What mainly exists are studies focusing on specific themes such as agriculture (Juma, 2011), manufacturing industry (Darkoh & Kinyanjui, 2015), growing influence of China in Africa (Kragelund, 2009; Mohan, 2008) and development policies and ideology (Mkandawire, 2001). A central development goal for African countries, communities and citizens is to be able to cater for their basic needs such as food, shelter, water, education, energy, health and accessibility (Wisner, 1989). This goal is essentially about self-reliance and enhanced capability to manage well-being and livelihood issues at both individual and societal levels (Sanga, 2016). Examples of how individuals or communities have pursued self-reliance through talent exploitation will bring insights and lessons to others. This gap in knowledge is addressed in this study. Generally, in-depth case studies of individuals and communities standing on their own feet need to be gathered and shared constantly for teaching, research and development programmes.

The objective of this study is to examine how a farmer, Mr. Alex Omwela Adala, has utilised his talent to create self-reinforcing and sustaining agricultural enterprises to stand on his own feet. This case study, that is presented in the form of a transformative story, is not necessarily about an individual farmer. It narrates the experience of using talent and networks to leverage opportunities in pursuit of self- and community- development in an effort to stand on one's own feet. It reflects the entrepreneurship idea of creating something out of nothing by identifying opportunities and utilising resources that are available to exploit these opportunities (Baker & Nelson, 2005; Shane, 2003). It provides an example of innovative thinking and approach that is needed for Africa to stand on its own feet in industrial and agricultural development. Such examples are necessary to provide not only inspiration to other individuals but also resource persons who can be contacted for guidance and contribution to decision-making.

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