

Entrepreneurship and Small Business Development Centres in African Universities: What should their Role be?

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Abstract

There has been a considerable growth in University Entrepreneurship and Small Business Centres worldwide, but less so in Africa. In fact only a handful of such Centres have been established in Africa. This may be linked to uncertainty on what the role of such a Centre should be, particularly when faced with an apparently well-developed supply of business support outside the University sector. This article critically reviews the traditional role of such centres in building national capacity in entrepreneurship and small business. Research increasingly is questioning the simple relationship between entrepreneurship and economic development, and suggests more critical thinking towards enhancing enterprise solutions in Africa. The article argues that African centres need to promote capacity building in a more sophisticated and critical manner, in which research and the involvement of stakeholder knowledge should be a central part of their mission. This is part of a new realisation that Africans need to address and find solutions themselves for intractable socio-economic challenges facing the continent. These reflections have led to some institutionalized effort that has been made at some universities which will be show-cased in this paper. These include the Entrepreneurship and Business Development Centre established in 2009 within the University of Swaziland, the Graduate Enterprise Academy (GEA) at Mount Kenya University and the fast spreading Student Training on Entrepreneurial Promotion (STEP).

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