

## Entrepreneurship Education and Rwanda's Vision of Development

*A Policy Briefing Paper based on research conducted in Rwanda in 2008 and used as a reference document for interactions with Rwanda's National Curriculum Development Centre*

In preliminary research for a doctoral dissertation in international education policy, I explored two fundamental questions regarding entrepreneurship education, a strategy for social and economic development that is becoming increasingly popular both in Rwanda and around the world. I asked:

1. What [actors and institutions](#) have played a role historically in the diffusion of entrepreneurship education programs, and how did this policy idea come to be seen as a strategy for economic development in Rwanda?
2. What [kinds of cultural changes](#) have been promoted through entrepreneurship education, and would these changes support other aspects of Rwanda's development goals?

Gaining insight into these questions can help policy makers think about [how to design an entrepreneurship education policy that will serve the best interests of their own society](#).

My research shows that a variety of different actors with diverse motivations have promoted entrepreneurship education over the past century (see the third page of this summary for details). Their efforts in entrepreneurship education have emphasized different kinds of educational and social goals:

- ❖ Some of these efforts have focused primarily on the [individual, competing against other enterprises, and earning a profit](#).
- ❖ Others have focused on cultivating individual qualities such as [creativity, a sense of self-responsibility, and the capacity to take independent initiative](#).
- ❖ More recent entrepreneurship education programs being used internationally also spend time helping students think about the [social and environmental implications](#) of their economic activities.

The first kind of program, with its focus on the individual, competition, and profit, is the approach still emphasized in many university programs in business and economics, with the result that many policy-makers are most familiar with these ideas. The second page of this summary shows how the initial discussions about entrepreneurship education in Rwanda have also tended to emphasize these issues, despite efforts to discuss environmental implications.

However, [teaching students about entrepreneurship through a focus only on the individual, competition, and profit, may actually conflict with several aspects of Rwanda's broader development vision](#), particularly its interest in ensuring environmental sustainability, reducing wealth inequalities, and promoting social cohesion.

The second and third approaches – [cultivating creativity and initiative](#), and [focusing on the social and environmental implications of economic activity](#) – help to create a more balanced understanding of entrepreneurship. Including these in an educational program requires [innovative pedagogy](#) and [more attention to curriculum content](#). As I continue my research, I will be focusing on these aspects of Rwanda's entrepreneurship education program.

## Objectives for Entrepreneurship Education in Rwanda

In interviews for this research, many policy-makers and leaders of organizations mentioned the following reasons for wanting to introduce entrepreneurship education in Rwanda:

- ❖ The importance of [self-employment](#) and the hope that students would develop a greater interest in, and respect for, this path to earning a livelihood.
- ❖ The belief that [anyone who acts in an entrepreneurial way should be able to change his or her own circumstances](#), no matter how difficult they are. This was coupled with a perception that Rwandans should [become more self-reliant and reduce their dependence](#) on others. To some, this implied transforming family and social networks of assistance, into more formal economic arrangements of payment for services rendered.
- ❖ The perception that young Rwandans are not sufficiently interested in [putting effort into earning money and gaining a profit](#); therefore, they wanted to increase young people's sense of competition and appreciation of the value of money.
- ❖ The hope that entrepreneurship education will convince Rwandans to be more [willing to take on debt](#) in order to grow their businesses, as well as teach potential entrepreneurs how to manage debt responsibly.
- ❖ The need to educate young people about [obeying laws, respecting contracts, and paying taxes](#), although otherwise they saw [economic activity as essentially an individual matter](#) of an entrepreneur exploiting opportunities to earn a profit.

Entrepreneurship education policies and programs can teach about different aspects of entrepreneurship and its significance in society. The approach still emphasized in many university programs in business and economics [focuses on the individual, competition, and profit](#), with the result that many university-educated policy-makers are most familiar with these ideas. This approach is reflected in many of the comments listed above. However, [these stated objectives for entrepreneurship education do not address some other important aspects of entrepreneurship](#) that are gaining increasing attention around the world:

- ❖ Entrepreneurship requires [cultivating creativity, initiative, and an attitude of learning](#).
- ❖ Entrepreneurship education offers an opportunity to [discuss ethical treatment of clients, employees, and others linked to the enterprise](#). These ethical issues are about more than just attracting clients or retaining employees – they also require thinking with students about fairness, honesty, generosity, and other fundamental ethical principles.
- ❖ Entrepreneurship takes place in a [social and environmental context](#). Business decisions can have negative social and environmental consequences, and students should discuss how to reduce these problems, rather than focusing only on increasing their profits. It is also possible to help students think about consciously orienting their business activities so that they actually make *positive* social and environmental contributions.
- ❖ Entrepreneurs need [access to resources](#) in order to put their ideas into action – without those resources, “entrepreneurship” may really mean “barely surviving”. Loans also have to be approached with great caution, since those living in precarious conditions are often confronted with emergencies that can cause them to fall behind on their debts.

Rwanda's entrepreneurship education policy can better support Vision 2020 and Rwanda's development goals if it takes these four important issues into account.

## Promoters of Entrepreneurship Education Globally and in Rwanda

[The Pre-History](#) of entrepreneurship education can be traced to the rise of formalized education in business and commerce, beginning in the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century in Western Europe. The United States was the first country to offer extensive access to such courses within its public school system; however, the focus was on management rather than entrepreneurship.

[Junior Achievement](#) was started by a group of businesspeople in the U.S. in 1919 as a network of youth clubs creating and running small enterprises. By the late 1960s, the program began to take on a greater presence within formal schools and spread internationally.

[Psychologist David McClelland](#) of Harvard University wrote a well-known book called *The Achieving Society* in 1961, arguing that the desire for achievement and the entrepreneurial activities of individuals were the main factors influencing economic development. He tested his theories through trainings to develop achievement motivation and entrepreneurship in India, where entrepreneurship training efforts received government support by the 1970s.

[Neo-Liberal Economic Ideas](#), emphasizing the primary importance of entrepreneurship, as well as individual liberties, the free market, and limited government, began to gain greater influence in the 1970s through the efforts of economists in the *Mont Pelerin Society*.

[The East-West Center at the University of Hawaii \(USA\)](#) held a series of seminars on entrepreneurship education in 1976 in South-East Asia, prompting President Marcos of the Philippines to support the first government-sponsored entrepreneurship education courses in public schools, and also raising the interest of the International Labor Organization (ILO).

[Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan](#) promoted neo-liberal government policies in the United Kingdom and the United States. The United Kingdom introduced several government-sponsored entrepreneurship education programs in its own schools in the 1980s.

[The Grameen Bank in Bangladesh](#) began to receive international attention for its innovative micro-credit support to rural entrepreneurs in the mid-1980s. This approach was in line with neo-liberal economic ideas and was perceived as a new and promising development strategy.

[International Organizations](#) became involved as the German government's technical cooperation agency, GTZ, created *Competency-based Economies Formation of Enterprise* (CEFE) in the early 1990s and the International Labor Organization (ILO) created *Know About Business* (KAB) in 1996 for Kenya's technical and vocational training institutions. Both programs were funded for implementation in an increasing range of countries.

[Rwanda](#)'s first entrepreneurship education efforts began just before the year 2000 with GTZ's CEFE program, which was included in the Promotion of Rural Small and Micro Enterprises (PPPMER) project and also adapted for use within Rwanda's technical schools. The United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) assisted the Center for Support to Small and Medium Enterprises (CAPMER) in its entrepreneurship training efforts, and a 2005 regional UNIDO seminar on entrepreneurship education coincided with growing interest among Rwandan policy-makers in various branches of the government. In 2008, the Ministry of Education began preparing an entrepreneurship curriculum for Rwanda's secondary schools, intended to cultivate an entrepreneurial culture among young Rwandans.