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Capabilities, innovation and entrepreneurship in sub-Saharan Africa

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Abstract

This paper takes a capability approach to analyze the role of entrepreneurship in the socio-economic development of present-day Sub Saharan Africa. The paper zooms in on the nature of the capabilities that are built through the development of entrepreneurship; the key challenges to the development of such capabilities in a Sub Saharan African context; and the question to what extent successful entrepreneurship in Africa entails the development of a specifically African version of such capabilities. The analysis is based on in-depth case studies of entrepreneurship and capability formation in different African countries, which offer complementary insights. The most successful cases exhibit a highly creative management strategy that is neither completely western, nor solely wedded to African traditions and values. Rather, it revolves around negotiating the interface between these socio-cultural spheres by forging new, creative mixtures in which the strengths of both are combined and conflicts and trade-offs are managed more or less successfully. In the context of the socio-cultural transformation that Africa is currently undergoing in a fast globalizing world, the mastery of this complex art by local entrepreneurs is identified as the most fundamental capability for fostering business success, human development and increased societal wellbeing.

Key words

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Entrepreneurship, values, capabilities, Africa

1. Introduction

In recent academic discourse, capability-inspired approaches are increasingly adopted to deal with complex questions of development and wellbeing. This paper aims to contribute to this field with an application to entrepreneurship in the socio-economic development of Sub Saharan Africa. Entrepreneurs are widely considered to be a key engine of social change. Meanwhile, an apparent scarcity of indigenous dynamic entrepreneurship in Sub Saharan Africa has been repeatedly flagged as an issue of major concern among scholars and policy makers (Liedholm 2002, Samli 2009). Many 'survival' entrepreneurs do not even have the intention to grow (Berner 2011, Cotter 1996). Some of them are also opportunity driven (Mead & Liedholm 1998), but by far the minority.

When we cast these issues into a capabilities perspective, we are led to ask the following questions: Which valuable individual and social human capabilities can entrepreneurship foster? What are the key challenges to the development of such capabilities? In answering that question we need to take into account that capabilities can be culturally specific. That leads to a third question: does successful entrepreneurship in Africa require the development of capabilities geared to the diverse African contexts?

We investigate these questions through several case studies of entrepreneurship and capability formation in different African settings which offer complementary insights. The case studies are based on collaborative assistance projects involving the authors and their students at the Technical Universities of Delft and Eindhoven, spanning a long period of time.

In section 2, we briefly discuss the swelling societal attention for entrepreneurship in society within the development research and policy community. Then we delve into the reasons for the adoption of a capability perspective in section 3. In section 4 follows a discussion about the different ways in which entrepreneurship can foster capabilities for increased human wellbeing in an African setting. In section 5 we take a closer look at the predicament of sub-Saharan Africa at the interface of traditional and modern values. In section 6 we present three cases, each at the interface of these different value sets. The key findings from the different cases are woven together and reflected upon in section 7. Here, the authors will also go into the question whether the capabilities that we identify in the cases might give rise to the need for a re-appraisal of the capabilities framework as elaborated by, e.g., Nussbaum (Nussbaum 2006) as an appropriate guiding frame. Final conclusions are offered in section 8.

2. The return of "the entrepreneurship question" in the development arena

Studies of entrepreneurship in development have old roots, including studies on African entrepreneurhip (Beveridge and Obershall 1979, Dinwiddy 1974, Marris and Somerset 1971, Nafziger, 1971). However, the topic completely disappeared in the following decades. This was due to an overriding importance attached to, at first, state-led development approaches that discounted the value of private initiative, only to be replaced in due time by overly market-driven approaches dominated by concerns over "getting the market fundamentals right" through "good governance". In these mostly neoliberal approaches entrepreneurship was understood within the framework of the free-market discourse that is supposed to solve all societal problems through the interaction of private initiatives. However, in more recent writings entrepreneurship is seen to have a more pro-active developmental role. Entrepreneurship as a development theme re-emerged strongly in the early 21st century, as there is increasing awareness that the provision of a "level playing field" in the neoclassical sense has not delivered development by itself (Chang 2007). Retreating states have failed in providing their citizens with the capabilities required for increased human wellbeing, and powerful private (often foreign) actors do not have the incentives to reach out to the poor. Many of them have aims that are much more geared towards profitable resource exploitation and even with the best of intentions privatization in the context of weak governance has often proved to be counterproductive (Nwankwo & Darlington 2001). In this setting, private sector initiatives, including home grown small and medium enterprises (SME), are once again looked upon as possibly having potential to somehow fill the gap in achieving inclusive growth through socially responsible business models (Samli 2009, Anderson, 2014, Hamann et al. 2015). The recent Base of the Pyramid movement reinforced this trend by targeting the billions of customers at the bottom of society and creating bottom-up ventures between rich and poor countries, calling for "co-creation" of socially inclusive innovations by foreign investors in partnership with local actors (e.g., Simanis and Hart 2008; Seelos and Mair, 2006). Moreover, society itself is changing. Nowadays many young people consider entrepreneurship as a way to make a difference without being dependent on large-scale slow institutions – a trend that is noticeable not only in the West but increasingly across continents (Valerio e.a. 2014). In addition, NGOs and development agencies, pressurized by structural funding cut-backs, increasingly focus on kick-starting effective, privately profitable, and widely scalable development "solutions" through capacity building of local parties, withdrawing from extensive involvement in project implementation (Smedley, 2014).

3. Taking a capabilities perspective

The capabilities approach has its origin in a feeling of discomfort about the practical use of human rights-based approaches to development (Nussbaum 2006, Sen 1999). Even if everybody endorses basic human rights in a broad, abstract sense, human rights need not necessarily bring a change in existing practices because they do not provide any concrete yardstick for evaluating success. It is the ambition of the capability approach to indicate concretely not only what people are entitled to, but also identify the concrete institutions and practices that turn these entitlements into actual "functionings". The capability approach uses the term "conversion" (Robeyns 2006) to refer to this bridging between abstract moral entitlement and actual delivery. Capabilities should offer more concrete yardsticks to assess whether governments and development agencies do their work properly.

At the same time, representatives of the capabilities approach also look beyond economic utilitarian welfare or basic needs oriented approaches (Oosterlaken 2013, Alkire 2005). Welfare approaches equate wellbeing with a vague notion of utility that has always defied operationalization and suffers from a short term focus: material welfare is seen to result from an optimal allocation of a *given* set of resources. This is out of step with the concern with the need and possibilities for *development* of those (in particular, human) resources. Basic needs approaches, e.g., as operationalized in the UN Millennium Development Goals project, do go beyond abstract utility, focusing more directly on the quality of life of the poor (Des Gasper 2004, Oosterlaken 2013), but they share the material focus of the utilitarian welfare approaches in their emphasis on provision of goods and services. However, as Sen pointed out, this still does not tell us what people can actually be and do with those goods and services that they gain access to. For that purpose we need more qualitative criteria and these are offered by the capability approach. Using the famous example of Sen himself, if a woman can go to the market, that event is not only instrumental to economic development, but it is itself an instance of freedom (Sen 1999). She already exercises a capability by going to the market. Such a capability, in addition, does not only require an enabling environment (she is allowed to go to the market) but also an inner capacity, or what Nussbaum (2006) calls an "inner capability": she has the courage and self-assurance and negotiating capacity to do so. Such capabilities therefore also entail attitudes and values, cultural codes that have an impact on performance. Without going into a precise definition of entrepreneurship, at least three aspects need to be mentioned that relate entrepreneurship to capabilities. 1. An entrepreneurial attitude in itself already entails the ability and attitude of taking *initiative* and seeing opportunities where others only see a deadlock. 2. Entrepreneurship also means taking a *risk*, the readiness to go out of one's comfort zone. This is not only a character trait but also an enactment of a capability just like

Sen's example of the woman going to the market. 3. Finally entrepreneurship also implies an *innovative* attitude, seeking for new products, new markets etc. With such an understanding of entrepreneurship in relation to capabilities we enter the sphere of cultural differences and value traditions.

4. The promise of entrepreneurship for development of capabilities

Can entrepreneurship foster the growth of such capabilities? In answering that question first it needs to be established that a lot of small business activities in Africa do not deserve the label of entrepreneurship as characterized above. Many businesses are survival businesses, often owned by women who, by copying each other's activities, generate a little income to supplement the main income of their husbands (Ndegwah & Kroesen 2014, Liedholm 2002, Berner 2012). These activities are aimed at household risk diversification, not innovation. Entrepreneurs in Africa often tend to maintain several small businesses as a livelihood strategy, so that, if the one is not successful, the other one can compensate. However, inasmuch as entrepreneurship implies opening new markets by adding new value propositions, increase of productive employment (Naudé 2013), and taking risk by means of innovation, it evidently could offer multiple opportunities for an increase in capabilities. First of all, it can lead to the emancipation of enterprising individuals themselves, through the expansion of their resource base, capacities, skills, and knowledge (Ziegler 2010), in analogy with Sen's example of women going to the market. It can become a force for the formation of a social middle class with the capabilities to exercise influence on the political process and key aspects of public governance, even if in turn the lack of enabling conditions of governance and conducive regulations can hamper the impact of such entrepreneurship (Naudé and Gries 2010, Naudé and Szirmai 2013). A stronger economic position will empower groups and individuals to enact their rights in terms of education, healthcare etc., precisely what the capability approach envisages. In the most basic manner, innovative products and services themselves can also have an 'empowering' effect on their users by improving access, affordability and availability (Oosterlaken 2013; Prahalad, 2004).

Additionally, dynamic enterprises generate productive linkage effects which serve as innovation impulses to others (Hirschman, 1958), for instance suppliers. This economic view on the role of entrepreneurship underlies Jeffrey Sachs' "The End of Poverty" (2005) and the Millennium Development Goals program: Communities should be assisted to get over the poverty line through the provision of a critical mass of support. After this initial kick start, the process of economic development is expected to gain internal momentum through mutually reinforcing effects.

Furthermore, through their own business processes and dealings, entrepreneurs exert all kinds of influences on their workforce and their business partners. This contributes fundamentally to professionalization and capability formation by people on the job (Kroesen 2013). This is where we can witness a close interfacing of different values and cultures.

5. **Sub-Saharan Africa at the interface of cultures**

Africans operate on the interface of these different cultural value sets (Jackson 2014, 2011). That means that exchange and dialogue between so-called modern values like instrumental management, individualism versus group orientation etc. is already part of African culture itself. The ability of entrepreneurs to somehow negotiate these divides successfully is crucial for business operation and growth. The capabilities built at this interface thus also underlie success in the other spheres discussed above: in societal and political arenas, in fostering economic linkages, and through improved products. The argument in this paper is therefore that, for large numbers of small and medium entrepreneurship initiatives to be successful they need to master a management style, *that works well at that interface of different cultures at a particular moment in time.* Such a management style creates bridges between more hierarchical/paternalistic or dialogical and egalitarian values, between group orientation or individual orientation, risk avoidance and risk taking, and competitive or stakeholder-involving approaches. Capabilities can be fostered not by taking an either-or approach, but precisely by negotiating that interface. This point is brought home by our case studies. Without the acquisition of capacity to create a balance the interface of cultures there can be no development of productive entrepreneurship and related capabilities. The concept of an 'economic culture' (Porter 2000) is relevant in this regard, meaning that a well-functioning economy or enterprise cannot do without a particular set of values, maintained in its business culture, and underpinning its success. But that management style isn't necessarily the Western, maybe even merely North American, styled set of values proposed by Porter himself as a viable 'economic culture'.

What specific values, social codes and institutions are at stake, then? Lack of equality before the law and lack of sufficient trust in a society composed of many subgroups has been identified repeatedly as impediments for economic development (Noorderhaven and Tidjani 2001, Kennedy 1988, Rowley 2000). Others mention risk aversion and lack of initiative as decisive characteristics against entrepreneurship (Mungai and Ogot 2012). One example of complex interfacing of cultures is shown by a study of paternalism in six Kenyan and Asian/Kenyan companies by Jackson et al. (2008). Paternalism as a management style is a control mechanism that seeks compliance by providing protection or favors, requiring obedience and conformity in return (Jackson et al. 2008). In Kenyan companies with Asian

management (many Indians migrated to Kenya during the British colonial period) the black Kenyans typically appear to have a secondary status as compared to the Asian in-group. Jackson leaves it undecided whether individualism or collectivism advances entrepreneurial success. Individual traits like taking initiative are important, but so are collectivist traits, but as he emphasizes, this is only the case when energies are directed towards a common goal. In the absence of team spirit as a bridge between different in-groups, collectivism may function in a divisive way, as mentioned above. Generally typical African attitudes and values of collective solidarity, time for socialization, empathy for personal wellbeing of others, reciprocity, differentiation between in-groups and out-groups, and strong hierarchy, encounter 'modern' western values of time-is-money, planning, pressure to be efficient, meeting deadlines, demands for consistent high quality, operating in expanded business circles, merit-based rather than kinship-based treatment of people, and the need to engage in competition.

The coordination of these different values and cultural differences is not only a matter of respect and mutual understanding, but also of direction-seeking deliberation, setting priorities and making choices. Three questions should be answered to find that direction: (i) Where are we going? (ii) Is this desirable? (iii) What should be done? (Jackson 2011: 547). The search should not so much be directed towards specific forms of African indigenous management -- a matter that is further complicated by the fact that it is not so easy to determine what is indigenous (Jackson 2013). The challenge is to seek a way forward that takes into account the traditional cultural identities and power dynamics, but at the same time more instrumental, result-oriented policies.

In Kroesen (2014) it is elaborated that the search for this way forward should respond to the four perspectives of *future imperatives*, *past traditions*, *outward effectiveness* and *inner agreement*. A company as well as a living organism cannot survive if it cannot solve the tensions between these four perspectives simultaneously. The future makes change imperative. But change cannot succeed without a translation of long-established values towards the new situation. This mix of old and new values is still not sufficient if the company adopting them cannot survive in the market *(the outer dimension)*. It cannot survive either if it cannot find agreement within the company on these issues *(the inner dimension)*. This requires continuous readjustment and the tensions between these four dimensions can be solved satisfactorily in more than just one way. Deliberation is required on the question which further steps at any time are possible on the basis of former achievements, institutions and capabilities (Deneulin 2006). To negotiate such value trade-offs and alternation in concrete day-to-day management is a fitting task for intercultural management (Jackson 2011). In responding to such imperatives also the inspiration should be taken into account that makes particular values work at a particular time. In that sense Franke (et al. 1991) in

his interpretation of Chinese dynamism may be right, that collectivism in China is a positive force *at this moment in time*. If the inspiration ("dynamism"!) is there to push the economy forward by a collectivist effort, it may work as long as the spirit breathes. It may not be accidental that in South Korea and in Japan the economic development took off after so much destruction by war. In the same vein in the United States the economy was thriving during the second world war in a common effort and inspiration to oppose the German Nazi-regime. But the spirit can only move if there is a shared feeling of urgency, a shared imperative.

Normally, a culture of strong collectivism and strict hierarchy does not promote individual initiative and can stifle wider cooperation beyond clan or tribal boundaries. An important reason that small and medium enterprises in Africa have problems in expanding consists of this same family solidarity. This can suck resources away from the enterprise, preventing investments and growth. The closed in-group mentality of collectivist groups often stands in the way of open cooperation and the development of a civil society (OSSREA 2009). Perhaps such a culture is an obstacle for economic development, but still, Africa will not shed paternalistic management styles in the short run, and the spirit of communalism will remain strong, even if often in the breach (Jackson et. al. 2008). In metropolitan slums and in rural areas the system of lifelong solidarity is life-saving for many individuals on the brink of survival.

It is clear, however, that Africa is undergoing a socio-cultural transition. In this transition the cardinal values of the African traditional values are at stake, particularly those related to hierarchy, communalism and lifelong solidarity. "These values, attitudes and reflexes are largely inspired by some old continental civilizations that slavery and colonization have no doubt strongly shaken but hardly replaced. The reasons for existence and action have not yet completely lost their roots in the pre-capitalist system; but they are not yet entrenched in the capitalist system. The old framework of lifelong solidarity has not disintegrated completely: the new framework of capitalist individualism has not completely moved in" (Tshikuku 2001, p 2).Tshikuku describes the competing demands posed by these contrasting values in Africa as a deep moral and spiritual crisis, of which we do not know how it will be resolved. Yet the future of Africa is at stake: "…as the crisis has reached its own critical mass at that point, all adventures are possible: collective suicide in an endless war among starving people or a vigorous recovery of destiny by a judicious exploitation of this uncontrollable energy of despair" (2001). As already noted, crisis and inspiration are close to each other (Rosenstock-Huessy 1981).

6. Case studies

The authors first present one example that illustrates a relatively unsuccessful encounter at the interface of cultural value sets as discussed above, and then move to two more successful cases. These cases are not only examples of the conceptual distinctions made above, they also give more detailed content and understanding of these conceptual distinctions. Discussions on the capability approach generally suffer from a proliferation of conceptual distinctions and refinements, proposals and counterproposals, which often lack a clear experiential base. The cases in this paper are based on students internship and/or master thesis projects and over the years a continuous long-term involvement of the authors in these projects in cooperation with teachers and NGO staff abroad. These projects in general target the poor sections of the population, where skills, education and as a consequence capabilities are poorly developed. Especially in these situations the issue of development at the interface of cultures provides us with important experiences and insights.

   After presenting the individual cases we return to the question what management style in contexts like this might be preferable and what this may mean for the conversion of human rights into implementable capabilities, and how specifically all this might be, or become geared towards African contexts,.

Case 1: Solid waste management in Nairobi

In Nairobi students from the Technical University Delft studied the business model of different solid waste recycling companies (Alberts e.a., 2010). It appears that a business in the recycling of solid waste has to operate in a challenging and complex environment. The Nairobi City Council (NCC) charges every area in Nairobi for waste collection. But NCC does not have enough equipment itself to pick up all the waste. For that reason 80% of all the waste is picked up by either community-based organizations or small and medium enterprises.

   Although there are many laws and regulations in place related to solid waste management, actually and effectively a broader policy framework is lacking. NCC has divided Nairobi into a number of zones for waste collection. Officially the collectors can only pick up waste in the zones that are assigned to them, but due to lack of law enforcement in practice the collectors can collect wherever they want. Most collectors, especially the smaller ones, collect waste only in their neighborhood. Plastic is the most valuable product to be recycled. Occasionally it occurs that the competition has already picked up all the plastic and the collectors have to go elsewhere. A lot of areas in Nairobi are partially or completely not served by the NCC or any other collection company. Nevertheless competition in the solid

waste sector is really stiff, exactly because it is not regulated at all. Illegal dumping is not prevented and not controlled by NCC, although it is one of the causes of unfair competition. Companies are sometimes afraid to invest also because of the uncertain future in view of the legislation on waste collection companies and truck requirements. Other complaints about NCC are that sometimes plastic recyclers have to pay a corruption fee, that NCC makes top-down decisions without consultation of collecting companies, which leads to legislation and statistics based on theory instead of practice and experience. There is no cooperation between the collection companies and the NCC. There is also no cooperation between the different collection companies themselves.

Many companies are cooperating with community-based organizations, which collect the waste and bring it to the collection place. Most of the companies also have as a goal to help the community and create jobs. For this reason they employ street boys. One of the biggest challenges for solid waste management is insufficient organization so that waste is piling up at the source. In addition there are other challenges for small companies, like pay delay of customers, the high cost of the operations, poor infrastructure, harassment by NCC, high costs of operation licenses, obstacles to recycling and the insecurity of the dump site. Then there is lack of protective gear as well as equipment and limited space. The business environment as a whole is too uncertain for larger scale investments and innovation.

During their research projects the students came up with some suggestions for a start-up company. Their advisory business plan proposed to start on a small scale, not to buy land and to sort the waste in the truck by which it is collected. To that end a truck should be bought (cheaper than hiring) and besides the manager and the driver two sorters should be hired. With a number of 85 residential and commercial clients such a company would be able to realize a modest positive revenue. Included in their final advice was a small amount of payment to the street boys in the neighborhood in order to prevent the truck from being damaged and also such provisions as buying not worn out but secondhand tires for the truck, because that would be less expensive and more reliable than buying new ones, of which the quality is not guaranteed.

The requirement of balancing at the interface of cultural value sets presents big problems in this case. A number of values and traditional habits constitute obstacles for an effective and innovative entrepreneurial approach: The traditional in-group collectivism stands in the way of any form of cooperation with competitors. No company restricts itself to the allotted zone. There is no cooperation for investment in more sophisticated equipment to go beyond the recovery of plastics, due to uncertainty and due to arbitrary policies from the side of the NCC, but also due to an attitude of uncertainty avoidance. The same in-group mentality explains why positive customer relations are not well maintained. Skills and capacities of workers in the sector of waste management are very low. There apparently is no

entrepreneurial inspiration to go beyond the existing practices. The existing framework of governance is also not conducive to an increase of capabilities, due to lack of, or arbitrary law enforcement, corruption fees, and lack of infrastructure.

Lack of capacity and lack of an enabling environment are the causes that once more capabilities cannot be institutionalized. A viable trade-off, borrowing from traditional and modern values in the management of the company and of the sector has not been created. The lack of regulation, law enforcement and supportive policies reinforces and continues this cycle of distrust, competition, dependency and taking a free ride on each other. Even the first requirement of innovation, niche management through network formation, cannot be fulfilled under such circumstances (Jacobson and Bergek 2006).

Case 2: Ecosandals Company

Ecosandals started in 1995 as a Self Help Group. A master thesis student visited the company and participated in the company life for several days (de Vlieger 2013). In this master thesis the impact of cultural values on the management style and business success in general has been studied, using the framework of cultural values provided by Hofstede (1997) and Trompenaars (1997) as its conceptual approach. The student interviewed and visited some 40 small and medium-sized companies and among those Ecosandals Company stands out as a very positive and successful example.

It started when a number of friends decided to serve the community in the poor neighborhood of Kariobangi, a slum in the east of Nairobi. The group developed into a company in 2007 when an American financier passed by and decided to support the project. He gathered equity partners in the US that are not involved in the daily business, but have an interest to see the company grow. In the meantime it has developed into a socially responsible and viable commercial company. This company is operating very explicitly at the interface of different cultural value sets, creating an interesting equilibrium and alternation between tradition and modernity.

The company structure is not very hierarchical. There is a coordinating team consisting of four persons. They have meetings to discuss the week targets for each one of them and together they give feedback on the previous week's results. Then the coordinating team separates and collects their team of manufacturers to discuss the new targets and to make a planning. All members of the manufacturing team are allowed to give their input. In this way a new equilibrium is created at the interface of hierarchy and egalitarianism. The goal is to share and learn from each other to improve the production process.

New employees are trained for six months during which time they are paid a fixed salary per day. The timeslots for their education are very flexible as they are not obliged to be

present for the whole week. The newcomers do not need any qualification; all they need is interest to work in the company. After the training the participants are allowed to leave the company. It is considered part of the social responsibility of the firm to provide this education, sometimes the company does not benefit from it at all. Once employees are in, they become part of the team and the production methods are taught by the whole group of manufacturers.

During training the casual workers are paid per product. This is a stimulant to work when they are around and not just sit in the work place and waste time. They can come whenever they want, but because many of the employees like the work they come in time almost every day. Punctuality is desired, which is why lateness is sanctioned with a reprimand. On the other hand, the level of production receives more emphasis. The permanent employees are paid on the last Friday of each month. In this way an equilibrium is created at the interface of long-term planning and the traditional synchronic attitude of the workers (as described by Trompenaars 1997).

Team spirit is a key issue in the way the company works. Every worker with a fixed contract is a business owner. This means when the business grows, he or she gets a larger income, in terms of dividends, because the share is translated into income. When employees want to become shareholders they have to buy themselves into the company with money or by offering expertise and skills they own. In this way an equilibrium is created at the interface of communalism and individual initiative (Hofstede 1997).

The company is subdivided into segments, the local market, the international market and the production department. All workers are allowed to come up with new designs, but the coordinating team has to approve them in the weekly meetings. Sometimes they try new designs by making a few products and showing the new model to some customers. The company is also constantly improving the catalogue. It is allowed to introduce relatives into the company, but the coordinating team makes sure that there is no complacency when one of the team leaders has his or her family member working in the same team. With putting relatives into different teams this difficulty is solved. There is no differentiation in tribes, no tribal language is allowed and there is no team formation according to tribe. This policy too strikes a balance between communalism and individualism.

The company is much focused on high-quality customer relations, thereby leaving behind the usual in-group attitude. People around the world can find Ecosandals and audit their product via the website. There is also a Facebook page with pictures of the products and information on developments in the company, like new products, new people, vacancies, and other news. Furthermore people do find the company through mouth to mouth marketing, because others recommend Ecosandals. There are 30 different designs or SKUs (standard selling units), but every design a customer can think of and explain is possible to

retrieve here. One of the qualities of Ecosandals is the personalized services they offer. The quality of the products is good and this gives the customer confidence in the company and builds up trust to order more products. Ecosandals makes use of the feel good aspect that comes when they follow up with their customers. That is why they call to receive feedback and use that to improve the business process. In short, a closed in-group mentality is left behind by an open team spirit and by maintaining high-quality customer relations.

The company has also adopted a modern type of time management. When the company has to deliver an order the time span to produce the order is well planned and the technologies and capacity are taken into consideration before the customer is told when the delivery can be made. They even build in a margin of one week allowance, because shipping can sometimes take longer. This is more cost efficient and keeps the customers satisfied. Ecosandals does not have fixed partners for delivering, since the market is dynamic and the best option in price differs from time to time. Ecosandals has a few partners for materials and a few regular customers. The products are sold in different places in and around the city. There is an agreement on the price the businesses have to pay for the sandals, but they can sell them at any price they want, depending on logistics like transportation, the people they have employed and government levies they have to pay.

Summarizing, Ecosandals is a company that consciously operates at the interface of different cultural value sets and thereby serves the community. The firm takes care of many different kinds of people and makes no distinction. When a family member comes into the business there are arrangements to make sure that the whole team is treated equally. The company holds the middle ground between a communitarian and individualistic type of management and between hierarchy and egalitarianism. The people are all different, but because of the team spirit that prevails there is still a kind of solidarity to one another and a unity of purpose that fits the Kenyan community culture. The way this company functions shows an initiative taking atmosphere to change things in society from within the people. It cultivates open and reliable customer relations and precise planning. The entrepreneurial success of Ecosandals is to a large extent derived from this capacity to strike a balance between traditional value sets and modern ones, keeping the good things from both sides. By this innovative strategy Ecosandals contributes to the increase of capabilities for its workers and its social environment. This is not only the case in terms of objective facts like job creation and income assurance. Of course this is important, because it makes it possible for the workers to participate in their societies and exercise their rights in terms of education, health, self-realization, but there is also a subjective side to it which is as important. One may think of development of social skills, self-confidence, capacities in dealing with modern life in all its aspects. Especially since the company itself exercises such capacities and values, it contributes to the enactment of such capabilities in other spheres of life as well.

Case 3: SEIDET

The final case is closely connected to the sense of crisis in African society that Tshikuku mentioned in his citation above, while it also draws inspiration and courage from this crisis. This opens up new possibilities for creatively bridging the gap between tradition and modernity. Over the years one of the authors has been involved in this project and followed its development, failures and successes.

The Siyabuswa Educational Improvement & Development Trust (SEIDET) is a community-based remedial education project for black secondary school children in Siyabuswa, a rural town about 130 km Northeast of Pretoria, South Africa. It was started in 1992. During Apartheid, many secondary school teachers in the Bantu school system had received inadequate little training, especially for teaching science subjects. Unsurprisingly, almost no black students managed to enroll in – let alone graduate from – universities and "technikons" (polytechnics), especially in science fields. This situation still continued in the post-Apartheid years. SEIDET was initiated in order to address this problem. SEIDET was studied by an MSc student from Eindhoven University of Technology (Siebeling 2004; Siebeling and Romijn, 2008).

SEIDET is run entirely by volunteers who teach remedial classes on Saturdays, in spite of their busy regular jobs. It has achieved spectacular success and exhibited steady growth. Ten years after its start, about 150 former SEIDET learners had graduated from universities or technikons, and another 400 former SEIDET learners were studying at various tertiary institutions. By 2002, SEIDET owned a community education center in Siyabuswa, while two other branches of the project were hosted at other institutions. The main center in Siyabuswa had grown into a multi-purpose facility providing a great variety of educational services and developmental programs to the local community in association with several other institutions.

All of this was achieved through local community volunteering without any external support to start with. The tuition is entirely provided by volunteer teachers, public servants, entrepreneurs and people working in the private sector from within the community. None of these volunteers had any relevant prior experience. The project had to develop from scratch through prolonged trial and error.

What made this happen? As often in crisis situations, first there was the inspiration, and only later growing competence took over. Just after the demise of Apartheid, a few ambitious black students managed to get into Zulu University, and the luckiest of those received an MSc scholarship to study information systems at Dalhousie University, Canada. After returning home, important community members and friends challenged him to do something

about their community's situation, in the spirit of African 'Ubuntu'. Ubuntu is based on the notion that "I am, because you are", a communal way of living.

The Dalhousie graduate gathered a small group of people from the community around him, having the diverse knowledge needed to set up a project like this. They then embarked on extensive consultations with the community, with only a vague outline of the concept. The feedback they received gave them a keen insight into community problems and also served to build a social support base for the task ahead. A Board of Trustees was established to represent the community during the subsequent stages of project development, after the broad popular consultations ended after two years.

Soon after the idea for SEIDET was formed, meetings were arranged with a few universities and technikons. This step was vital, because after students would successfully graduate from secondary school in Siyabuswa as a result of SEIDET's remedial education programme, they would need to be placed in tertiary institutions. The universities thus became aware of what SEIDET was doing, and it was possible to convince them to help enroll SEIDET learners. It helped that the project was initiated at a time when there was public pressure on traditional white educational institutions to enroll more black students. This was a unique, temporary opportunity that came with high expectations of what a post-apartheid society could bring. Later projects that tried to replicate SEIDET did not find it quite as easy.

The establishment of linkages with academic institutions also acted as a catalyst for action within the project, by generating time-pressure to set up the project quickly so as to be able to show concrete results to visiting university delegations who might also bring some financial and material support. A Canadian delegation from Dalhousie University in particular galvanized the project into action. The University of Pretoria (UP) also helped SEIDET to search for funds.

The project leader is a child of his own culture, but at the same time he had been exposed to, and internalized western ways. In his own words, "I am down to earth, and I lead from the back seat. I lead from the front only when it is necessary, which is unusual. I am not the type of [African] leader who wants his presence to be felt, or wants to be seen as the leader. I am more a facilitator, leading by giving ideas, through encouragement, by being critical, giving criticism and by checking if everyone is still on the right track … We promote a challenging atmosphere in which everybody can challenge everybody". But at the same time: "I am a pushy guy when it comes to deliverables. My informal, un-hierarchical style should not be confused with weak leadership. When it comes to meeting targets and obligations, I am a stickler, uncompromising. We must deliver, and strive for excellence." In this attitude a mutual interpenetration of opposites takes place: hierarchical leadership and bottom-up democratic management with an open ear. The inspiration and aspiration to get

out of the crisis opened up new opportunities at the interface of cultural value sets. A new and inspirational imperative opened a cycle of change (Kroesen 2014).

The SEIDET leadership also believes that leading positions should not become entrenched with particular individuals, as often happens in Africa. They explain that if one stays in the same position longer than is necessary, ideas stagnate, thought patterns get entrenched and innovation becomes impossible. After ten years, the first executive committee therefore handed over its duties. "Our role is to support the new generation of leaders and to encourage them", the original project initiator commented.

In a University of Pretoria Working Paper (Snyman and Phahlamohlaka, 2002) the executive committee as a group is characterized as "a composite social entrepreneur […], e.g., building something out of nothing based on a desire to improve conditions in their community" (p. 18). The executive committee members are described as "extremely committed, sacrificing their own needs for the greater need of the community and expecting the same from others". In this inspiration the traditional compartmentalization of African agencies, whether companies, NGOs or state institutions, is replaced by a cohesive modern civil society exhibiting team spirit for the common good.

After the establishment of the computer center an important six-month action-research project took place, named "Computer Ndaba". Ndaba roughly translates from Zulu into "a topic of conversation, or affair" (Scheepers, 1999). In traditional society, Ndaba is the term for the lengthy conversations of the (male) community members to discuss the affairs of village, clan and tribe (the word *Nd*aba is related to Ubu*nt*u, and the root 'nd' means speech). These conversations took a lot of time in order to get everybody on board and create a support base for decisions to be taken. In similar vein, in the SEIDET Ndaba the teachers came together to discuss, formulate and plan ideas on how to use the new IT facilities. The goal was to help the forty SEIDET tutors identify what they could do with the computers, how they wanted to use and manage the computer laboratory, and at the same time become computer literate. Emphasis was placed on the teachers' and community's own needs and opinions. By referring to this process as Ndaba, the traditional community spirit was evoked and translated to a society that is no longer confined to members of one specific tribe, thereby creating a bridge between traditional customs based on ethnicity and cooperative functioning in a more modern civil society setting.

A key management principle at SEIDET is that positive things are emphasized while negative ones are not dwelled on. This helps to maintain the motivation of the volunteer teachers. Blame games must be avoided at all cost. Focus on positive performance also manifests itself through positive incentives. Certificates are handed out from time to time. Good catering is always there during the board meetings. People are also rewarded through recognition and a feeling of belonging. Experimentation in teaching methods is

actively encouraged. SEIDET thus became a platform for creative innovation, in which people were encouraged to take initiative and responsibility. This is quite atypical in African-run organizations, in which strong traditionalism is reinforced by risk-avoiding behavior of employees for fear of losing face and suffering reprisals.

SEIDET learnt to operate successfully at the interface of different cultural value sets, bridging tradition and modernity. This case also brings out the connection between crisis and inspiration, which is less evident in the other cases. When historical developments are in a deadlock, a new inspiration is imperative (Kroesen 2014) and is in turn the source of creative solutions that incorporate the good things of the past in groundbreaking new initiatives (Tshikuku 2001). Doing so it contributes to the growth of capabilities in much the same way as in the Ecosandals case. It confirms that successful entrepreneurship or project management and increase of capabilities is possible if it is done precisely at the interface of cultural values, finding a middle way between Western styles of management and older traditions from Africa. The reader should be constantly aware that these Western-style management approaches themselves are already indigenous in Africa as well. They are not just Western import products but find their advocates within African civil societies themselves.

7. Discussion

The first case, on solid waste management in Nairobi, shows the consequences of the acceptance of a neoliberal policy combined with weak state institutions. The Kenyan solid waste sector is rather like a patch of wild west, in complete lack of law enforcement. No capacities are trained to make the street boys part of a modern economy, no cooperation is exercised between closed in-groups. No interface or bridge is created between different cultural value sets. It is highly symbolic that in such a setting technological innovation does not work due to lack of an enabling environment.

The final two cases appear the most promising. Both show a management strategy that focuses precisely on the interface between cultures. In the case of Ecosandals consciously and deliberately, trade-offs are managed and synergies produced, and a process of continuous learning-driven change is introduced into procedures, organization and management style. Values are adopted like nurturing of individual initiative, equal treatment, low hierarchy, and sound time planning to meet deadlines. In the case of SEIDET deliberately traditional values like "Ubuntu", and "Ndaba", consultative community practices, are taken up, and *translated* into the new situation.

This process leads to the creation of capacity – skills, knowledge, attitudes, and values. In these two cases it is this capacity and the concomitant management style which create a

sustained provision of capabilities to the workers involved and to the social environment of the organizations. A bridge between tradition and modernity is created in this way. Western modernity is not copied wholesale. Instead, a new creative path is forged with its own unique version of modernity. Precisely this unique context-tailored version of modernity, taking on board old time traditions, creates capabilities and the concomitant empowerment. As pointed out, this does not only refer to objective and measurable facts, like job creation and income generation, but also to the subjective side in terms of self-consciousness, self-assertion, social skills, a feeling of social responsibility and courage to take initiative. These human qualities make it possible not only to have but also to enact one's human rights in many concrete ways, like the capability approach proposes.

The cases bring out the importance of this very point, that Africa cannot progress by merely copying the Western entrepreneurial heritage in terms of values and procedures; rather, it must create a specifically African version or twist of these (Nyasani 2010), in which the communitarian spirit of Africa is not suppressed or eliminated, but is expanded to include egalitarianism, individual judgment, innovative experiments and initiatives, in a process in which external actors that are not part of local community are embraced in an open team spirit.

Historically, Western nations also took over innovations from one another through a similar process of creative translation and re-innovation (Rosenstock-Huessy 1993). Each of the European nation states going through a revolution started from a position of backwardness (Landes 1998). Different values were cultivated by these different national traditions. To mention but one example, creative genius is valued in France where the state bureaucracy is in the hand of the intellectual elite. Team spirit and public spirit is valued in Great Britain and in the USA where civil society institutions often take the lead instead of the state authorities.

The process of these revolutionary changes in Western history is reflected in the growth of the human rights tradition. Freedom of life, liberty and security is one of the oldest rights, securing civility against torture and arbitrary rule already in the Middle Ages. Freedom of conscience follows suit, reflecting the religious struggles of the Reformation. The right of protection of property (especially heritage) was established in Great Britain to secure the property of the Commons (the lower nobility, now having power in Parliament) in order to prevent interventions of the King. Civil rights and the rights of nationality of course were the product of the French Revolution. After the French Revolution during the 19th century increasingly emphasis was put on social rights like a reasonable standard of living, health and well-being (Nickel 1987, Stackhouse 1984, Berman 1983).

These insights can be used to reflect back on the capability approach and its relevance to African development. Capabilities are sometimes portrayed in a timeless and static way, as

given universals. Nussbaum connects her list of capabilities immediately to Aristotle, as if there were no history in between. If capabilities are understood in a static way they are not open for context-specific development. That would not leave Africa with the room it needs to develop a set of context specific capabilities. If we understand the capabilities listed by Nussbaum in a more historically contextualized manner, in analogy with the *long process of emergence* of the list of human rights culminating in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, then the problem at hand can be approached in a more open and flexible way. In this view, there is space to recognize the specific history of Africa, to recognize the value of African communalism and traditionalism in its context, and room for a specifically African path into modernity. The cases described in this contribution provide an illustration, if not evidence, that such a specifically African version of and path into modernity more successfully leads to an increase in capabilities and operational freedoms.

8. Conclusion

We set out to investigate whether entrepreneurship can contribute to the realization of capabilities. We immediately linked that question to another one, namely whether a specific African set of capabilities or at least an African version of capabilities might be mandatory in that regard. In this final section we reflect on why that link was necessary. Entrepreneurship can surely contribute meaningfully to the development of human capabilities in sub-Saharan Africa. But it cannot do so as long as it merely means copying Western practices into a different cultural and institutional context. In other words, a viable response to the second question (a specifically African set of capabilities) is the condition for a positive answer to the first (whether entrepreneurship can contribute to the growth of capabilities in Africa). Only if a bridge is established between traditional African values and institutions and western-style modernity (that has become already indigenous in African contexts), only if a trade-off is allowed at the interface of cultures, an interpenetration and transition, will a viable form of values, capabilities and entrepreneurial practices be able to grow on African soil. This might lead, even should lead, to a specifically African twist to the existing lists of capabilities and rights that have been elaborated in capabilities research. This is done by negotiating the interface between African and western values, and somehow recombining these into a new management style that suits the timeframe and context. Modern instrumental management procedures will not be acceptable probably for African contexts, if human values and solidarity and the involvement of a broad stakeholder base are not made part of them (Jackson 2004). Religious practices and rites, praying and dancing, may in any form of modernity be part of African societies also in the future, because Africans are deeply religious in general. Who can predict how the future of Africa will look like? Many times in

history, the most lagging country took a leap forward in social, moral and institutional innovation through such processes of creative recombination and re-creation. If this is a continuous process in which different countries and regions get their window of opportunity to catch up and forge ahead when the time is right, then why shouldn't that happen once more, with Africa?

Acknowledgements

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