
Editorial: Entrepreneurial internationalisation in, from and to Africa – perspectives and insights

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1 Introduction

Africa is a demanding entrepreneurial context with great potential. However, this potential suffers from diverse impediments and problems. Recently, millions of micro and small businesses have become the most vulnerable to the COVID-19 pandemic and have been the most badly hit by the lockdown. The pandemic has disturbed global value chains and increased divides between regions, severely influencing business contexts like those in many African countries. Many African countries have yet underperforming or inadequate institutions. Especially, small businesses have lower capacities and fewer financial resources to cope with the abrupt economic shocks. Thus, small business tends to suffer from the lack of supportive structures and ecosystems. Access to markets, finance, supply chains and other external resources is harder for small businesses than big firms and many African business and entrepreneurial ventures are deeply linked in a more local or regional context than in global business (e.g., Degbey et al., 2021). Hence, there are structural and institutional features keeping entrepreneurial internationalisation struggling, which requires research, managerial and policy attention. This special issue points out these particular, contextual features that shape the way African business and entrepreneurship is perceived and carried out; but also, and most importantly, how African business firms deal with entrepreneurial internationalisation in, from, and to the continent. No need to say that for the last few decades the African continent has witnessed a sustained economic rise for which the entrepreneurial internationalisation of African companies represents a critical component. This economic trend is expected to remain despite the inflexion of the economic growth due to the pandemic of COVID-19 during the last two years. Before this pandemic of COVID-19, several African countries such as Rwanda, Ghana, Senegal, Ivory Coast, and Kenya were among the countries with the highest economic rates in the world. The recent development of information and communication technologies (ICTs) has significantly contributed to make entrepreneurial internationalisation at reach for many African businesses, no matter their size, although access to a reliable internet connection remains a non-negligible issue in some African countries. Hence, while entrepreneurial internationalisation has been an important tool for growth for companies of a significant size like Mara Phone, the first African smartphone (Android) manufacturer in Rwanda, or Jumia, the African Amazon in Nigeria, it has also

been perceived as important by many African small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) that look at internationalisation with great interest.

Africa is a continent that deserves special attention due to its inherent human capital. With a population of 1.3 billion inhabitants in 2020, Africa is the region that is expected to have the largest population of the world with 2.5 billion inhabitants in 2050. Moreover, Africa has the youngest population in the world and it is growing fast. It is expected to reach over 830 million by 2050. While it is an asset for the African continent, it is also a challenge as economic growth has to keep up with demographic pressure. Each year 10 to 12 million enters the workforce, but only 3.1 million jobs are created.¹ Such young population and its entrepreneurial energy result in multiple forms of entrepreneurship that emerge and develop, regardless of the institutional voids. Entrepreneurship education and programs do exist, supporting development of internationalisation related to African countries. Although there are signs that entrepreneurship education is bearing fruit in the continent – the Mara Phone manufactured entirely in Africa with African parts has been released in Rwanda recently and Jumia, the African Amazon was listed on the New York Stock Exchange (Pilling, 2019) – the need to empower youth and create new opportunities for the next generation of entrepreneurs cannot be clearer. Better understanding and connecting the potential towards entrepreneurial results is required on multiple levels.

Entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial ecosystems are instruments that provide jobs, innovation, economic development as well as human and economic stickiness. African outmigration is largely taking place for economic reasons and lack of future perspective, but also due to head hunting intermediaries pulling highly skilled and educated African talent to contribute abroad. The linkage of entrepreneurial, talented individuals and economic development is strong, but especially the migration policies tend to be handled by different governance organs leaving the talent leakages without adequate attention. The sustainability of the African migratory patterns needs intersectional examination. Some contexts export their most important future talent and lack policies for human and entrepreneurial talent retention (Emmanuel et al., 2019). Nevertheless, it should be mentioned that the brain drain that was denounced for many years has been partly transformed in a brain circulation that benefits Africa in various ways including diaspora entrepreneurship and different forms of remittances. In this regard, recent research has shed light on the role of the ecosystems on entrepreneurial internationalisation and how such ecosystems can support not only entrepreneurial internationalisation from Africa, but also transnational diaspora entrepreneurship to developing home country. Entrepreneurial inclusion and mobility allowing diverse entrepreneurs and entrepreneurial forms to settle, evolve and develop locally legitimate and innovative practices gain interest particularly in border crossings.

Yet, we need to know more about African entrepreneurs' daily challenges, how they cope with rising risks and uncertainties and restructure their businesses. Most importantly, we need to know how they handle the internationalisation of their entrepreneurial activities or why they decide to remain locally active. This special issue aims to provide relevant viewpoints addressing the entrepreneurial internationalisation processes, motivations, structures and outcomes. It contributes with various perspectives on diverse types of entrepreneurial firms and addresses the potential of African entrepreneurial inward-outward internationalisation. It examines entrepreneurial operations that happen informally, even in cross-border settings. Moreover, the special

issue offers perspectives from incoming and outgoing business strategies and operations that may assist in understanding notions of light, parallel, and multiple forms of entrepreneurship.

Therefore, this special issue contributes to advance our understanding of entrepreneurship that links to Africa, how its internationalisation processes and contexts take place and evolve. This special issue and the papers that it proposes address themes that foster holistic understanding and may assist global-local policymakers, investor and start-up support systems and ecosystems, import-export business organisations, migrant business associations, entrepreneurial education systems, entrepreneurs, scholars and students.

2 Sustainable entrepreneurship – challenges and agendas

There are complex contextual realities for doing business in Africa. Entrepreneurship often takes informal or light parallel forms in African countries. However, the business is not limited to these forms, as there are also vibrant registered companies. Both informal and formal businesses generate employment and income, especially self-employment is a typical phenomenon in the African business and entrepreneurial landscape (Naudé and Havenga, 2005). Micro and small and medium sized enterprises (MSMEs) employ the majority of the global population and their economic and social role in developed and developing economies are fundamental. Their importance, in the face of this current crisis, has been underlined by the United Nations call to respond to the ‘socio-economic impact of COVID-19’² and is particularly visible in Africa, where the economy is now projected to contract by 3.2% according to new IMF projection (Regional Economic Outlook: Sub-Saharan Africa, 2020). MSME are major creators of jobs and their role in poverty reduction is crucial. This is particularly true in rural areas and amongst women and other socially disadvantaged groups. MSMEs are therefore crucial to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agenda and its principle of ‘leaving no one behind’.³ The UN has responded to this unprecedented situation and this opportunity with an urgent socio-economic support to countries and societies in the face of COVID-19, which puts in practice the UN Secretary-General’s Shared Responsibility, Global Solidarity Report. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), UN regional commissions and other agencies have already started to implement programs and technical support on a global scale to support MSMEs and entrepreneurship.

According to the World Bank, the African continent consists of low, lower-middle, upper-middle and high-income countries.⁴ However, many African countries are in the category of developing countries and emerging markets, which also highlights issues of fragility, inadequate, non-competitive infrastructure or even being conflict-affected. Affordable access to technologies, most notably the internet, is still low in comparison to other regions⁵ and the digital divide between Sub-Saharan Africa and the developed economies will only become greater after the COVID-19 crisis, due to multi-faceted governance issues and weak infrastructure. Only 20% were online in least developed countries before the pandemic and that fault line of inequality that COVID-19 has exposed will grow. Indeed, the ‘COVID-driven digitalisation’ is uneven both across and within countries. The least developed countries and the economically backward areas of many developing countries, especially rural areas, do not have such an infrastructure,

ecosystem and network. Many obstacles continue to hamper greater participation in e-commerce activities by small businesses and consumers. As a new pattern of digitalised economic system is taking shape in rather advanced economies, the pre-existing 'digital divide' risks being widened, and a 'new digital divide' may emerge. This requires a significant adaptation of policy measures for entrepreneurs and programs on capacity building in the MSME sector (UNCTAD, 2018). Various structural and macro-economic reforms are discussed for development and more sustainable outcomes.

Entrepreneurial internationalisation across African states is a common option, but internationalisation connecting African businesses and markets with non-African countries has faced particular problems during the COVID-19 pandemic, in addition to the extant problems related to fair global trade and competitive logistics solutions. Importantly, not all entrepreneurial firms have aspirations to internationalise, especially those firms that are in service business or in agricultural business may not have such an orientation. On the other hand, entrepreneurial firms with digital capabilities can contribute beyond country boundaries. Soluk et al. (2021) see that digital technologies foster family businesses through community support and suggest that entrepreneurship in emerging markets differs considerably from developed markets. In terms of digitalisation, their recent study suggests that digital technologies provide special entrepreneurial opportunities and instruments to overcome diverse challenges of poverty in emerging markets (Soluk et al., 2021). This is particularly true for immigrant and diaspora entrepreneurs as recent research has found that using digital platforms can allow necessity immigrant entrepreneurs to become transnational opportunity immigrant entrepreneurs. Such social mobility was very rare a few years ago and as such contradicts the recent understanding of most of international entrepreneurship scholars about the dichotomy of necessity immigrant entrepreneur versus opportunity immigrant entrepreneur (Chrysostome, 2010).

Informal institutions and social norms are very different in different African countries, partly due to the cultural diversity across African societies. Interestingly, African countries present significant ethnic diversity referring to different ethnic groups among country populations, but this does not mean that their cultural diversity follows the same logic (Fearon, 2003). Africa as a continent is superdiverse in terms of languages and ethnicities, employing a range of languages (Dimmendaal, 2008). This creates challenges and opportunities for entrepreneurs and businesses. Furthermore, religion differs across different populations in African countries illustrating notable notions of religious diversity, practices, and behaviours, but also underlying commonalities related to heritage (Mbiti, 1990). Religious frameworks influence firms, organisations and companies regarding the way business is carried out, perceived and lived, even if the business actor is of secular character as such values are present in the society as a whole (Emmanuel et al., 2019; Barnard and Mamabolo, 2022). Krueger et al. (2021) call for a shift from classical contextualising to context theorising and advocate for using context-sensitive approaches, especially underlining the special characteristics of Arab world family businesses.

Participation of different actors in business, entrepreneurial activity and investments is culturally related due to social and economic norms and even regulations. Mobile entrepreneurs and entrepreneurial migration are also regulated in developing countries in terms of migration, establishment of new business and investments, additionally, social inclusion of incoming foreign entrepreneurs may pose further challenges. Women, youth

or elderly typically have behavioural patterns and norms set by the surrounding society that addresses their inclusion in entrepreneurship and doing business. These can be empowering or impeding. Often, the gender parity remains a concern for capacity building and economic development. Additionally, stigmas and discrimination against women prevent them from fully entering the labour market, which, according to the African Development Bank⁶, translate into lower productivity gains for countries with higher rates of discrimination. Inequitable access to agricultural inputs in Ethiopia, Malawi, Rwanda, Uganda, and Tanzania lower women's productivity in the countries' agricultural sector, which could gain 19% in crop production otherwise.⁷

Beyond informal institutions, the formal institutions and international rules of the game make a big difference for entrepreneurial activity and internationalisation. The shaping institutions exist not only between the Global North and the Global South, but also in inter-African context. The African Union is an example of the African focus in institutional governance. Such institutions address special features like Pan-Africanism, peacebuilding and development in African countries (Murithi, 2017). The African Continental Free Trade Area which entered into force in 2021 created a massive market – the world largest single market – and eliminated 905 tariffs. Yet without a generation of entrepreneurs fully able to reap the benefit of that market, this agreement will fail to deliver its promises.

The United Nation SDGs 2030 represent the highest level of the discussions pulling the great majority of the global concerns under one umbrella. African countries are directly or indirectly subjects in many of the related targets. The link between entrepreneurship and the achievement of the SDGs is clear. The SDGs refer directly to entrepreneurship twice. Under Goal 4, dealing with quality education, Indicator 4.4 states: “By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship.” This is a call for entrepreneurial education and related technical and vocational training, which can be provided by schools and other educational institutions. These trainings need to be relevant for students and employers and the broader business community which collaboration and partnership between the private sector and public institutions can ensure. Africa-focused management training is called for, specifically, addressing institutions and resources, but also knowledge management (e.g., Zoogah et al., 2015, 2020).

Under Goal 8, related to decent work and economic growth, mentions the promotion of “development-oriented policies that support productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation, and encourage the formalization and growth of micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises, including through access to financial services.” This refers specifically to the role governments and the various stakeholder of entrepreneurial ecosystem play in developing entrepreneurship policies.

But there are indirect connections between several other SDGs because of the actions entrepreneurs have on sustainable development. Women entrepreneurs promote inclusion and redress inequality and green entrepreneurs can help achieve environmental sustainability. The private sector is therefore seen as a key partner to implement sustainable development and mentioned as such numerous times in key international agreements. The Addis Ababa Action Agenda of the Third International Conference on Financing for Development (United Nations, 2015, Para. 35), for example, calls “on all businesses to apply their creativity and innovation to solving sustainable development challenges” and invites business to “engage as partners in the development process, to

invest in areas critical to sustainable development, and to shift to more sustainable consumption and production patterns.”

Against this background, it is not a surprise to see entrepreneurship at the top of African government agenda. In the wake of Tunisia that passed a landmark Start-up Act Bill in 2018, Senegal has done the same in 2019 and discussion are being held in Mali and Ghana to issue similar support packages for innovative entrepreneurs.

3 Development of African entrepreneurship and business

The editorial aims to provide a multi and interdisciplinary discussion around entrepreneurship and internationalisation that offers a range of perspectives about the concerns on African business, and all directions of it; inward, outward and intra-African internationalisation (Welch and Luostarinen, 1993; Ngwu et al., 2014).

Although less visible in the global media and research, the African continent represents a highly entrepreneurial context in terms of everyday life, from the smallest transaction to large infrastructure issues (e.g., Dana et al., 2018). This is partly caused by the developing nature of many African economies that are populous and rich in natural resources. It is partly so because entrepreneurship provides livelihood, is socially legitimate, and may leverage diverse opportunities better than other options, such as employment (Bolzani et al., 2020). Entrepreneurship is not necessarily divided into mental spaces around ‘necessity’ and ‘opportunity’; these dimensions may be mixed and change over time. There are numerous layers of continuously evolving marketplaces, both physical and virtual, that enable entrepreneurial activities and foster entrepreneurial learning and knowledge sharing across ethnicities, locations and types of businesses. These generate novel opportunities and change ways business can be carried out.

Women in entrepreneurship have long been under-represented in research, although some of the business is deeply embedded in the female everyday life (Hattab, 2012). Yet, women represent a critical component of the business community in Africa. In West Africa for instance, the great majority of the businesses that operate in the largest market of the region in Benin are SMEs owned by female entrepreneurs. Given the remarkable success of these female entrepreneurs in their businesses and their very affluent lifestyle during the 1980s, they were called ‘Nana Benz’ in reference to Mercedes Benz, the very expensive car that they used in general. The use of this pseudonym has remained today a usual practice in West Africa and in particular in Benin and Togo. The entrepreneurial internationalisation of these African businesswomen is on the rise and deserves an appropriate institutional support, but also the attention of researchers in order to study and understand this phenomenon better. Such SMEs are subjects to various programs and policies, e.g., based on gender, size or business. They may also benefit from import and export activities as imports are significant businesses too (Dana, 2007).

Framings such as gender or ethnicity are typically used in making sense of particular features in entrepreneurship. Yet, framing African entrepreneurship as a whole into discussions around poverty or being recipients of foreign aid and support or representing irregular/informal entrepreneurship or micro-entrepreneurship provides a biased view, as those represent only one side of the coin (e.g., Fatoki and Patswawairi, 2012; Webb et al., 2013; Ojo et al., 2013). This necessity lens on entrepreneurship or entrepreneurship of the

more vulnerable people may offer rich perspectives for understanding demanding conditions, e.g., in rural areas or issues like resilience (Khavul et al., 2009). However, the dichotomy between the necessity lens and opportunity lens is oversimplistic or even inadequate to explain the phenomenon of African entrepreneurial activity and internationalisation (Beeka and Rimmington, 2011). The opportunity entrepreneurship and related internationalisation processes and dynamics deserve broader and deeper analytical attention, beyond any dichotomic framings. Entrepreneurial mobility and resilience have become a crucial topic in the COVID-19 pandemic as the world has experienced massive reductions of travelling, migration, and entrepreneurial interaction in person. Abilities to deal with such grand challenges are often manifested in contexts that are suffering from institutional and infrastructure-related problems, as they may represent daily issues that need to be overcome. Furthermore, the entrepreneurial aspirations can be deeper rooted and connected to larger contexts (Decker et al., 2020). Interestingly, the resilience and innovative capabilities of entrepreneurs in Africa and their bricolage strategies may outperform more developed firms or influence internationalisation intrapreneurially (e.g., Halme et al., 2012). Moreover, even informal businesses in grey markets may develop into formal ones over time and become notable socio-economic contributors. Hence, negative framings in research can be particularly siloed and may leave out important aspects and experiences that could produce managerial and policymaking implications.

The processes through which entrepreneurs in, to and from Africa do business are of great theoretical and analytical interest. SMEs emerge continuously and have started to compete in international arenas (Kujala and Törnroos, 2018). African firms are participating in internationalisation, they are executing cross-border merger and acquisitions within and beyond Africa (e.g., Degbey et al., 2021). Developing and emerging economies offer insights and dynamics that can be fruitful to understand and employ across contexts, as studies on emerging market multinationals and African business have pointed out (Ramamurti and Singh, 2009; Barnard et al., 2017). Furthermore, as Africa is subject to major challenges related to its demographics, migration, climate change, natural catastrophes, global inequality and regionally uneven progress (United Nations, 2019; World Bank, 2019), it poses a highly relevant context for addressing the dynamic nature of entrepreneurship that survives, adapts and expands in and from that setting. Entrepreneurial and societal aspirations that link to Agenda 2063 for prosperous, inclusive and sustainable Africa and Africa's Renaissance underline positive drivers and dynamics (United Nations, 2019). These dynamics have inherent features, but are not only indigenous as Africa hosts many populations. This international dimension in entrepreneurial activities and their ownership evolves rapidly with the increasing globalisation of Africa (Degbey and Ellis, 2019).

Emerging market multinationals have gained notable attention in research (Ramamurti and Singh, 2009; Ramamurti, 2012), but less attention has been directed to diverse emerging and developing market mini-multinationals that operate below the radar of mainstream interest (Elo, 2017). The role of multinational enterprises operating and investing in Africa has gained research attention (e.g., Garrone et al., 2019), but little is known from those African firms that are yet on their pathway to becoming multinational enterprises. In African entrepreneurship-related systems, start-up scenes, incubators and ecosystems, there are several highly relevant and interesting developments providing novel perspectives for entrepreneurial internationalisation and international

entrepreneurship that connect distant contexts as well as for internationalisation strategies with resource constraints (Levin and Barnard, 2013; Desa and Basu, 2013).

Additionally, actor networks such as the global African diaspora are an underestimated resource for internationalisation and global expansion (Newland and Tanaka, 2010; Nkongolo-Bakenda and Chrysostome, 2013). The role of diasporas, migrants and international entrepreneurs is broader than just that of the African diaspora abroad. Due to colonial history, there are several waves of migration out and inward. This includes entrepreneurial migration into Africa that aims to exploit the rich resources and opportunities of the African continent and markets (Mung, 2008). However, Africa is also the context of vast displaced populations and refugee camps, many of them with limited prospects for developing entrepreneurial livelihoods and progress. Institutional issues such as uncertainty in land rights or land grabbing may further delimit positive development and create different connection to a locus than in Western countries. As the scholarly world is largely Western-oriented, many inherently African processes for entrepreneurship forms, international entrepreneurship, transnational investments and migrant entrepreneurship have remained underexplored despite their meaningful role in economic development and balancing global inequalities (e.g., Nielsen and Riddle, 2009; Nduom, 2018).

Streams of research addressing the developing and the least developed countries and their markets have emerged in recent decades. The bottom of the pyramid research is often addressing the differences in business on marketing or product policy level. Importantly, this lens is relevant beyond its market notion also in the actual research approach, acknowledging the emic, local voices. Rich qualitative research and broadened lenses may contribute and discover theoretically and managerially interesting roles and dynamics of entrepreneurship in Africa (Dana and Dumez, 2015; Dana and Dana, 2005; Kujala and Törnroos, 2018).

4 Research on African context and international business: what do we know and theory-related limitations

Theoretically, there are several disciplines and research streams that provide frameworks, concepts and ideas that are highly relevant for the research discussions around African entrepreneurship and internationalisation. International business as a theory field has addressed Africa as one of the important contexts. International business has been interested in Chinese investments in Africa, in foreign multinational enterprises operating in Africa and diverse issues from political risks to natural resources (e.g., Garrone et al., 2019; Hu et al., 2021). These discussions on theory tend to have a macroeconomic twist or serve a larger firm size or particular foreign origin of interest. As a result, the theoretical frameworks have been often somewhat one-sided. Africa as a continent is often addressed in as a destination of foreign investments, but not as the origin of international business actors, i.e., investors, in comparison to other regions in the world. This is especially so regarding African businesses internationalising beyond their national boundaries. Yet, as recent research illustrates, there are reasons to reconsider the lenses through which African business and entrepreneurship are examined (Barnard et al., 2017). African companies are becoming recognised as business actors operating across international borders (Kujala and Törnroos, 2018). Shedding light on these issues around

representation and perspectives has notable potential. The direction of international business activities through the lens of inward-outward or cooperation perspective (Welch and Luostarinen, 1993) can show different flows and activities, especially if attention is also turned to intra-African business and trade, and different units of analysis, such as family or transnational migrant businesses (Ngwu et al., 2014; Khavul et al., 2009; Kujala and Törnroos, 2018; Ndoro et al., 2019).

The issue of different forms of distance, such as psychic, business, cultural, religious, institutional, geographic, and other distances, offers a variety of theoretical concepts to understand differences between country or business settings (e.g., Barnard and Mamabolo, 2022). These are often explained with diverse indexes and models, such as CAGE (Ghemawat, 2001, see more in Zaheer et al., 2012). Most importantly, international management theory considers international management as management of distance (Zaheer et al., 2012). However, the distance also influences the perceptions on legitimacy and participation (Bolzani et al., 2020).

As a huge continent, Africa provides geographic contexts that differ greatly. The periphery vs. centre issues and the particularities of the urban and non-urban spaces are not similar to those elsewhere, e.g., in Europe (Elo et al., 2019). Beyond the geographic spatiality and logistic particularities of Africa, the other distance concepts can be alleviated in multiple ways. The African diasporas, global migration and historical colonial ties makes many African countries particularly connected across the world (Lituchy, 2019). The networks of entrepreneurial people and their families do not exist only as a result of African outmigration but have a very diverse nature due to the African history. This continent has been an arena for many countries, ethnicities and tribes to do business. This includes many generations of transnational, diaspora and international entrepreneurs of a variety of origins inside and outside Africa.

In terms of international entrepreneurship, the African setting can be indeed seen as a laboratory for theory-building. There are entrepreneurial networks of ethnic minority businesses between and across African countries that are of African native origin, but also entrepreneurial networks that have historical, political and trade-driven linkages and origins related to the UK, India, China, Portugal, Spain, France, Italy, Germany, the Netherlands, Greece and other countries. The degree of the local legitimacy of these largely colonial histories differs. Some groups represent victimised populations, e.g., indentured diasporas and their descendants while others are results of imperial diasporas (Cohen, 2008). These complicated ethnic formations that also bring up political questions and tensions can be unique in specific settings, representing mosaics of entrepreneurial origins and heritages and their melting pots. Yet, there is limited research on foreign origin entrepreneurs or born globals that enter and expand in African countries. The African country set with its heterogeneous context provides materials for many angles from which to address issues such as entrepreneurial aspirations, motivation, innovation, homeland investment, growth, internationalisation and others (e.g., Nielsen and Riddle, 2009; Nduom, 2018; Lituchy, 2019).

Social contexts and norms, families and tribes represent elements shaping informal institutions that may even foster human stickiness and altruistic behaviours for individuals (Emmanuel et al., 2019). Due to the phenomenon of brain drain, the social and economic inequalities may be further amplified, as Africa is serving as a source of human capital for developed economies (*ibid.*). There are several discussions about attractive spaces, for entrepreneurs and talent. Other discussions focus on developing suitable ecosystems and policies. Such discussions on international entrepreneurship,

particularly on born globals refer to institutional configurations that involve international transaction facilitators, entrepreneurial educational capital, and entrepreneurial norms that foster the formation of that kind of entrepreneurship (Fainshmidt et al., 2021). They suggest that this entrepreneurship type can be pushed by escapism from low-quality public governance institutions or by immigrant entrepreneurship (*ibid.*). Immigrant entrepreneurs may not be automatically privileged entrepreneurs, but vulnerable ones who rely on different coping practices to overcome difficulties (Ndoro et al., 2019). Hence, the question of sustainable and fair entrepreneurial inclusion and mobility may be particularly relevant for the African countries and their inherent business potential. In addition to migration related policy and practical challenges, the mobilities of entrepreneurs across African countries are institutionally demanding and illustrate numerous bottlenecks that may have a protective purpose but entrepreneurially hindering outcomes (UNCTAD, 2018). For example, despite the formation of the African Union, entrepreneurial individuals are not yet similarly free to venture in different African countries as their counterparts in the European Union. These formal institutional structures and policies require more detailed research attention to explore such impediments for sustainable growth of transnational and diaspora entrepreneurship.

As discussed, Africa as a developing context has a very different positioning in many research streams than its developed counterparts. These positionings may also represent outdated or biased perceptions, especially when there is a lack of adequate research. The developing nature attracts interests from the social entrepreneurship and social innovation research domains. These are often Western companies that attempt to create social ventures for Africa, which highlights the lack of research on social ventures that are African for Africa. In other disciplines, positions from the Global North supporting the Global South are also criticised as representing white saviour – logics and framings that are not socially or otherwise fruitful or sustainable, and ignore dynamics related to each other (Gómez, 2021). These concerns and sensitivities call for further attention as entrepreneurship and internationalisation also contain aspects of intersectionality. Greenwashing or insensitive practices can become impediments and problems for entrepreneurial internationalisation, especially for incoming foreign entrepreneurs, while updated mindsets can open doors to developing new business opportunities also in challenging contexts and fields of businesses.

Most of the different points addressed above yield an important fact, namely the limitations of some of the well-established international business theories to capture adequately the African context and some of its realities. A phenomenon that illustrates this very well is the phenomenon of African diaspora entrepreneurship (Newland and Tanaka, 2010; Ojo et al., 2013). While the Uppsala theory suggests a gradual internationalisation process in order to handle effectively the challenges related to liability of foreignness, African diaspora entrepreneurs do not need to go through such gradual process to extend their business in their home country because many of them are very familiar with their home country environment and do not face any serious liability of foreignness (Chrysostome and Nkongolo, 2018). Likewise, African diaspora entrepreneurs do not need innovative products to quickly internationalise their business in their home country as suggested by the born global theory. Many African diaspora entrepreneurs send to their home country a wide range of second-hand products such as cars, auto parts, motorcycles, computers, clothes, etc. and their businesses survive well, even though these products are not innovative products. Moreover, many African

diaspora entrepreneurs do not absolutely need any particular networks to internationalise their business in their home countries as they know how to deal with the business environment challenges of their home countries (Chrysostome and Nkongolo, 2018). This example of African diaspora entrepreneurship is just one of the cases related to the African context and raises the necessity of an adjustment of the existing international business theories or the development of new international business or international entrepreneurship theories that take in consideration the specificities of the African context.

In the next section, the papers contributing theoretically and practically to this special issue are presented.

5 Entrepreneurial internationalisation in Africa: from a novel theoretical perspective and informal born regional enterprises to international social ventures and supportive institutional policy

We introduce a wide range of perspectives through the papers that have been selected to this special issue. These shed light on the kaleidoscope of African business and entrepreneurship in multiple directions and layers. They advance our understanding of theories and concepts, but also of managerial and policymaking aspects.

Informal business is a highly relevant theme in developing and emerging economies; however, it has yet attracted little interest in the context of internationalisation. Christopher Boafo and Utz Dornberger take the challenge and discuss this gap in their paper titled 'Informal born regional enterprises in Ghana: an extension of internationalisation theories'. The majority of textbooks, journal articles, case studies and other exercises that are typically employed for business education and teaching international business focus on legitimate formal business. Hence, the actor is a registered company that appears in statistics and reports. The internationalisation theories explaining internationalisation of firms typically focus on questions such as why, when, where and how these businesses get involved in international operations from that particular registered, and hence, legal angle. This, however, does not mean that there is no international business that is below the radar. The authors attempt to fill this gap by assessing informal enterprises and their internationalisation degree. Here, they use data from 125 randomly selected respondents located in two major clusters in Ghana. Interestingly, although being informal businesses these firms serve around 20 foreign markets. They are able to internationalise as they capitalise on the resources of the overall cluster, including joint infrastructure as well as different actors' perspectives, networks, agents, and linkages. In terms of the process, they employ a stage-approach and remain within the African context in the early internationalisation. The authors coin this type of an internationalising company as "Informal born regional enterprise" linking it with the terminology around born regional companies. This internationalisation does not comply with the previous, commonly accepted models of internationalisation as the firms become impeded by their informality. The authors suggest that efforts should be taken to address diverse collective actors and associations to shift companies towards the formal status to be able to grow beyond the regional context. They also illuminate the nature of informal that is not necessarily perceived as illegal in the regional context. As Webb, Tihanyi, Ireland and Sirmon (2009) note these firms employ illegal but legitimate factors and processes of production to produce legal and legitimate goods, as it is perceived. In short,

this paper discusses the challenges as the transition benefits towards the formal economy might not be perceived as necessary or adequately enabling, despite the inherent impediments for further internationalisation. That leaves an important question in the room; how can the SDGs and policymaking turn such implicit bottlenecks into realised potential and international growth beyond regional informal business?

Our second paper touches upon and introduces one concern of our special issue, namely internationalisation of informal entrepreneurial enterprises. This paper by Nathalie N. Larsen titled 'International social ventures' resource mobilisation in Sub-Saharan Africa: a case study on effectual networking and knowledge mobilisation' illuminates the internationalisation difficulties that are often neglected in social entrepreneurship literature, focusing more on the social aspects. However, there are particular opportunities that are distinctly contextual in terms of social venturing, and the author brings in the need to understand the ways how local resources can be mobilised for realising the business and sheds light on the inherent solutions. She highlights the challenges that these foreign firms, here specifically Danish social enterprises, face in such high-distance contexts. Her research shows a multitude of difficulties that stem from various reasons (e.g., interaction, cultural, technical and resources) and hinder smooth resource allocation, the high-distance between the country of origin of the firm and the host country being one of the complications. These are smaller enterprises without formal sales offices or such institutionalised functioning structures that are typical for larger multinational companies. The difficulties in interaction link to time-place related gaps and create managerial challenges for the social entrepreneurs. This article stresses the importance of how ventures interact with foreign stakeholders and effectual stakeholder members. Functioning interaction on developing these social ventures became a pain point for the business. The entrepreneurs were struggling with issues such as language, technological infrastructure, product usage and even disengagement. As contemporary technologies enable communication across multiple geographical locations, her study suggests that solely relying on technological means of communication threatened the ventures' maintenance of stakeholder commitment and interpretation of foreign knowledge.

Her study points to similar discussion as Ghemawat (2001) on differences and distances; these do matter. The key findings of this study illustrate that proximal interaction strengthens stakeholder commitment and facilitates ventures to appreciate context-specific knowledge differently. This study provides material for rethinking the ways social ventures may operate and the importance of bottom-up strategies in a culturally and linguistically highly diverse African continent. It provides a viewpoint on entrepreneurial internationalisation to Africa.

The next paper illustrates the case of internationalisation in and from Africa. This paper titled 'Institutional actors, policy and internationalisation of emerging market SMEs: lessons from AGOA and the Ghanaian textile industry' is written by Irene Kujala and Richard Afriyie Owusu. This paper focuses on the internationalisation from Africa, especially focusing on the roles of institutional actors and policymaking in promoting firm internationalisation. The study examines a case of a Ghanaian textile firm using a longitudinal research method over a period of 13 years. It addresses the evolution of interrelationships between the Ghanaian context, the internationalisation process and actors involved with reference to their activities and resources, and illustrate how these interrelations explain the SME and its internationalisation. The paper points out the

significant role of institutional actors in shaping the setting, both Ghanaian and foreign institutions and their policymaking. These institutional frameworks and settings are influential and may positively contribute through the business networks that the SMEs operate in.

Interestingly, the paper brings up political-contextual concerns, such as political will and relations, that are often excluded in the research on firm internationalisation. It provides insights to the special characteristics of African SME internationalisation. It differs from that of developed country SME internationalisation due to its developing-emerging country setting that has deep influences on the respective SME. The crucial role of domestic institutions in creating a suitable business environment for international business development and business networking illustrate that internationalisation is not only a firm-level resource and competence, but a contextually embedded activity that is framed and shaped by a variety of policies.

Theoretically, the paper offers insights to institutions, policies, networks and most importantly, to theories of firm internationalisation with its developing-emerging market lens. The key findings suggest that policy makers need to carefully consider the SMEs' needs for support, on all levels from international trade deals to local level networks. The African firms' managers face particular challenges, e.g., sectoral and business related, but they can also seek support through networks, politics and policy programs that support the internationalisation of African SMEs.

This paper illustrates entrepreneurial and business activities during an internationalisation journey from Africa to foreign markets, enabled through particular support by diverse institutions, like Ghana Bank and USAID-WATH.

The final paper of the special issue bridges the internationalisation pressures of human capital, i.e., migration, and forms of entrepreneurial activities that can be perceived as an alternative to entrepreneurial mobility and internationalisation. This paper illustrates a connection of entrepreneurship that is not the primary career or income to the main concept of livelihood that relies on important employment. The paper 'Light entrepreneurship as a parallel staying strategy – insights from Tanzanian medical doctors' by Maria Elo and David Ndikumana Emmanuel investigates entrepreneurial strategising on the individual level next to other professional activities. In the era of global mobility, African countries form a source of human capital and talent triggered by the lower income levels compared to developed countries. Hence, development of formal entrepreneurship and retention of needed talent, such as medical doctors, becomes particularly challenging in non-urban, less competitive contexts that offer limited opportunities for prosperity development. The phenomenon of global migration is connected to the global competition for scarce resources and the related pull and push forces. International opportunities for global careers and resulting prosperity, especially in large organisations and healthcare businesses, pull African medical doctors abroad. However, while not all medical doctors migrate, little is known about their intra or entrepreneurial strategies employed in orchestrating their resources locally for staying (Emmanuel et al., 2019). This paper examines forms of entrepreneurship that emerge to supplement primary careers, as a means to stay. When the formal remuneration does not provide adequate and competitive income, these medical doctors develop entrepreneurial parallel activities to be able to maintain their primary profession. These represent strategies for staying and generating adequate income, not strategies for growth entrepreneurship. Hence, it is coined as light entrepreneurship. These light entrepreneurs with a primary professional calling (cf. purpose) are voluntary non-migrants who develop

their entrepreneurial resources through dual practices as bricolage-style local strategies that represent both professionally relevant and irrelevant business activities.

This paper offers insights into entrepreneurship that is typical in emerging or developing context, and as income portfolio solutions being parallel to other professional activity. This form of entrepreneurship is unlikely to internationalise but represents important entrepreneurial learning and capacity building. The findings call for understanding the local systemic viability and the entrepreneurial dimensions linked to strategies addressing African brain drain. Additionally, this paper supports Barnard et al. (2017) and underlines the importance of understanding the contextual settings, the entrepreneurial ecosystems, opportunities for income generation, and the particularities of the local informal and formal institutions.

6 Conclusions

The special issue calls for broader and multidisciplinary lenses on MSMEs and Africa-specific contextualisation. It illustrates empirical research and theorising that may illuminate several entrepreneurial types, activities and directions. The papers indicate that there are significant concerns and implications for policymaking from the global to the very local level, from trade agreements to the village and its missing language education. They pinpoint the role of informal and parallel entrepreneurship forms that have a positive influence on prosperity and income creation, which is not yet fully understood theoretically, practically and policy-wise. The discussions imply that policymaking needs to connect the big picture of global business and the microlevel of the entrepreneurial activities with frameworks, programs and policies that generate more socially, environmentally and economically sustainable entrepreneurship and more inclusive and empowering entrepreneurial ecosystems (e.g., UNCTAD, 2012, 2018).

Internationalisation is more than its parts, like products and services moving across national borders. These papers highlight that focus on products or operations is not adequate alone, as deeper, more local understanding of the way of doing business in Africa is needed for successful outcomes. As discussed, Africa and research on it illustrate multiple paradoxes and challenges to consider (Zoogah et al., 2020). Yet, there is a notable potential in the population that is diverse, younger and entrepreneurially more active than in many other contexts. Entrepreneurs in Africa and abroad possess competences, learning abilities and aspirations that allow them to develop strategies and orchestrate resources for local and international business. African entrepreneurial mobility programs need to rethink optimal ways of supporting sustainable business and entrepreneurship that is locally legitimate. Improvements in trade agreements, institutions and technology employment foster business and digital solutions and application. Theoretically, we argue that the dichotomic lens of necessity vs. opportunity needs reorientation as a situational setting in a continuum, without creating rigid categories. Instead, the antecedents and determinants that create pathways for successful, fair, and sustainable outcomes of entrepreneurship and its internationalisation represent theoretical interest. Managerially, beyond these factors, distance and local contextual understanding also do matter, even tribal-linguistic differences and lifestyles matter in African business management. The cultural diversity requires inter-cultural communication capabilities and bridge-building capacity. Especially transnational and diaspora entrepreneurs can

leverage their resources and learnings, but also those of their diasporas, communities and families, especially when spanning boundaries beyond the everyday life.

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Notes

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