

African Entrepreneurs: From Micro to Global

ANITA SPRING

Dr. Anita Spring has been researching African entrepreneurs from micro to global and now has carried out research in ten countries on the subject, adding countries annually but analyzing data already collected. For the study, she went once each to Botswana, Kenya, Mozambique, Senegal, and Tanzania; twice to Eritrea, Ethiopia, Ghana, and Uganda; and three times to South Africa. She also interviewed global entrepreneurs from Swaziland, Zambia, and Zimbabwe outside their countries. She mapped out the entrepreneurial landscape in the formal and informal sectors in a variety of publications. The landscape consists of micro to large informal-sector vendors and traders; formal-sector small to medium to large companies; and global businesspersons who refer to themselves as the “new generation of African entrepreneurs (NGAEs).”

Some of her findings are: (1) informal sector and more traditional formal-sector entrepreneurs have more enterprise diversification than NGAEs to protect against risk; (2) women in both the informal and formal sectors have more kin than men in their business networks, but also utilize business associations effectively; (3) there is upward mobility between sector categories for men and women

entrepreneurs due to the requirements of education, capital, and networks to move upward; (4) there are few gender differences for the globalists who have similar education, formal-sector work experience, types of enterprises, and association memberships; and (5) entrepreneurial women and men differ from salaried personnel because they have taken risks and created businesses while others “only dream of doing so.”



In one case study, Spring detailed two-fold data from South Africa to show an end-point of success for the inclusion of female and black entrepreneurs and businesspersons in the formal sector in decision-making capacities. The Business Women’s Association became multi-racial and gained support from the Johannesburg Stock Exchange, major corporations, Business Partners, Inc., banks, and state-owned enterprises (SOEs). Its annual census of women in the work force (especially managers and company board members and directors) has become a powerful indicator in the country (“what gets measured gets done”). The South African government’s Black Economic Empowerment program requires and measures advances for blacks and women in formal-sector private companies and SOEs, and results show widespread compliance and inclusion.

Starting in 2007, Spring also began researching Chinese entrepreneurs in Africa focusing on Ghana, Mozambique, and Tanzania, while considering trends in other countries in terms of Chinese central-government funded development assistance projects, Chinese provincial contracts and for-profit endeavors, and individual/family Chinese private-sector entrepreneurs (many of whom believe “the continent presents opportunities”). China’s non-interference in African politics, construction of large and small infrastructures (railways, roads, dams, government buildings, stadium, hospitals), and exports of inexpensive manufactured products have found favor with governments and local people. However, Chinese entrepreneurial activities generate direct competition with African businesses and entrepreneurs, and Spring’s current research focuses on the reality of Chinese-African business interactions, competition strategies, and outcomes.

Dr. Spring is Professor Emerita in the Department of Anthropology and affiliate faculty in the Center for African Studies. Funding for these activities came from an Opportunity Research Grant, UF’s Center for International Business & Education Research, the Center for African Studies, and USAID.