

Mentoring and support: A key element in the sustainability of SMEs.

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While there is a need for more research in the area of entrepreneur mentoring in Africa, the existing research shows a return on mentoring investment (ROMI) in the form of economic growth through revenue generation and job creation. This confirms that mentoring is an effective way of achieving development on the continent. Many credible mentoring programmes, in existence for several years, are supporting thousands of young African entrepreneurs, many of whom cite mentoring as a key contributor to their success.

PS&D

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In today's world, the concept of business mentoring has been widely embraced by the private and public sectors. Companies and organisations have implemented in-house mentoring schemes to support women and people from socially and economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Additionally, many successful entrepreneurs attribute their achievements to the support and guidance they received from a mentor.

Mentoring is not a new concept. In Homer's *Odyssey*, Odysseus leaves his son and his entire estate - before going to fight in the Trojan war - in the care of his friend, Mentor. Mentoring is fundamental to the personal and professional growth of individuals in every society.

.Many successful people attribute at least part of their success to a mentor. Tony O. Elumelu attributes his success to his mentor, Chief Banigo, who recognised his potential and guided him as he learned his trade as a banker; Google's Larry Page and Sergey Brin were mentored by Eric Schmidt; Mark Zuckerberg was mentored by Steve Jobs; and Steve Jobs was mentored by Mike Markkula, an early investor and executive at Apple; while Richard Branson cites Sir Freddy Laker as being one of the key drivers behind his success within the airline industry.

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MENRTORING IN THE AFRICAN ECOSYSTEM

Literature reviews on mentoring in Africa provide evidence that mentoring programmes have benefits – economic growth, job creation, and sustainable business and personal growth. Yet in-depth evidence-based research is still needed.

In 2012, EPS-PEAKS produced Literature Review on Enterprise Mentoring, with a focus on the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. .It cites evidence of business mentoring having benefits for entrepreneurs and highlights key factors to be considered in designing mentoring programmes. These include balancing formal and informal approaches and appropriately matching mentors and mentees. The report lists programmes such as Mowgli, Techwadi, Oasis 500 and Badar Young Entrepreneurs Programme as examples of mentoring. Most of these have been established for several years and have a well-thought-out mentoring framework, with clear processes and stages. Mowgli is noted as having developed a series of case studies. Interestingly, Egypt is the country with the most developed entrepreneurship ecosystem. The report emphasises that more in-depth research on impact, success rates and factors and lessons learnt from the region were not available. It is difficult to evaluate mentoring projects because often they are not standalone projects, but form part of more complex support programmes.

Ayodele Ibrahim Shittu's Promoting Youth Entrepreneurship: The Role of Mentoring¹ examined entrepreneurship mentoring for young people. It shows that there has been a surge in entrepreneurship programmes. Shittu concludes that "... lack of clarity is a major constraint to policy and programmes promoting youth entrepreneurship".

The Bank of Industry endorses mentoring as a way of promoting aspiring, nascent young entrepreneurs (Punch Newspaper 2016), and the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) has stated that mentoring can strategically help the nation to harness its youthful resources for its economic development agenda. The Lagos Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI) has also argued that mentoring is a means of investing in the future of Nigerian youths.

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THE MENTORING EFFECT ON ECONOMIC GROWTH

The Mowgli Foundation is one of the few organisations which has monitored its mentoring programmes since 2008. Set up in 2008 by Tony Bury, it is a not-for-profit mentoring organisation operating in the Middle East and Africa, founded on the premise that mentoring is a highly effective way to improve personal growth and leadership. Tony Bury credits his business success to the mentors who encouraged his development, and he wanted others to benefit in the same way through the Foundation. He believes that developing leaders and supporting entrepreneurship ecosystems could be a solution to the region's economic challenges, such as youth unemployment.

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Mowgli has trained over 900 mentors and matched them with over 780 entrepreneurs. It has a network of 1680 alumni members spanning 14 countries, 13 of which are in the Middle East and North Africa. Over the past decade, they have collected data on three key impact areas: 1. economic growth, job creation and safeguarding; 2. business growth, sustainability, and success; 3. personal growth and strengthening leadership.

With this data, they have been able to show the return on mentoring investment (ROMI) in the form of economic growth through job creation. The results² confirm that mentoring is an effective way to encourage growth and advancement.

The findings support Mowgli's holistic mentoring programme, confirming that it is key to ensuring ROMI from other support initiatives such as skills training and financial training. Thus, mentoring needs to be the cornerstone of any entrepreneur-serving ecosystem or support initiative.

BENEFITS OF MENTORING

There are numerous benefits to working with the right business mentor. Yet many African SMEs need to develop an understanding of what entrepreneur mentoring involves. Entrepreneurial mentors perform several functions. They provide the much-needed role models for those embarking on an entrepreneurial journey; they provide guidance, counselling, motivation, exposure, and visibility to their networks. They help you see the big picture, develop a road map, set goals, and follow-up on their attainment. They hold you accountable, offer ideas, push you and challenge you. They act as a sounding board, ask difficult questions and guide you in finding the answers. And they teach the value of networks and networking.

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Mentoring is a critical tool for developing entrepreneurship across Africa. Many entrepreneurs nowadays acknowledge the role of mentorship in their journey, often citing it is as a key success factor. This is backed up by research - albeit limited - which has been carried out on this topic in Africa. Many established programmes, comprising clear processes and stages, are providing effective mentoring in Africa and the Middle East.



Tony Elumelu Foundation Entrepreneurship Programme

The goal of the TEF Entrepreneurship Programme was to enable entrepreneurs to create one million jobs and contribute \$10 billion in revenue to the African economy. Parminder Vir joined the Foundation in April 2014 at the invitation of the founder to design the TEF Entrepreneurship Programme.

Parminder Vir placed entrepreneurial mentorship at the heart of the Programme, building it into the Seven Pillars framework, which comprises holistic technical and financial support. The Seven Pillars are business skills training, mentoring, seed capital funding, a resource library, online and offline networking, an entrepreneurship forum and membership of an alumni network.

Since its launch in 2015, over 3000 mentors worldwide have participated in the programme. They have provided guidance to over 4000 entrepreneurs. The model provides a technology-enabled platform for access to world-class mentors from all over the world.

The annual TEF Entrepreneurship Forum takes place in Lagos, Nigeria, and every year, the 1000 start-ups selected from across Africa are invited to attend as part of the 7 Pillars of the Programme.

¹ Read the full article on the Institute of Development Studies (IDS) website: <https://bulletin.ids.ac.uk/idsbo/article/view/2875/ONLINE%20ARTICLE>

² <https://www.mowgli.org.uk/our-impact>