“The right skill set for a globally competitive and innovative enterprise”

Ms. Jacqui KEW  
Associate Professor  
College of Accounting, University of Cape Town  
South Africa

Youth and innovation in sub-Saharan Africa

Sub-Saharan Africa has experienced more than a decade of consistently high growth. However, to lift general living standards to a more acceptable level and have a broad impact on the continent, the current growth rate will need to be sustained or increased¹. More critically, there is a need to focus on the quality of growth. There is growing evidence that the benefits of high growth have not been shared by all, and inclusive growth – which reduces poverty through opening up new and better job opportunities for all segments of the population – should be an urgent policy focus.

The majority of the youth population in sub-Saharan Africa, except South Africa, shows entrepreneurial propensity or are actively pursuing an entrepreneurial opportunity. However, much of the entrepreneurial activity in sub-Saharan Africa is currently concentrated in over-traded sectors such as retail offering jobs to relatively low numbers of employees, with low-growth expectations and low levels of innovation. With respect to entrepreneurial activity, the issue in much of sub-Saharan Africa seems to be less about developing entrepreneurial activity but recognising that, due to the low level of innovation and global reach, much of the current entrepreneurial activity within the region is not leading to sustainable livelihoods.

Policies that focus on key factors required to increase innovation levels and globalisation of business within sub-Saharan Africa will be required, rather than a continued focus on the increasing entrepreneurial quantity without reviewing the quality of the entrepreneurial activity being promoted.