Stakeholder Management Challenges and The Complexities of Promoting Sustainable Entrepreneurship in Africa

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Abstract

In recent years, there has been significant attention given to stakeholder management, which involves the intricate interaction between organisations and individuals, as well as diverse groups that can significantly affect or shape an organisation's decisions. While progress has been made, African countries are seen as the next promising frontier for progress and advancement. Nevertheless, there remains a lack of understanding of this concept, as the continent is undergoing remarkable economic growth. Entrepreneurs operating in such environments face intricate landscapes when it comes to stakeholder management. Consequently, understanding how stakeholders contribute to the growth of entrepreneurial ventures in Africa is crucial to promote sustainable and responsible business practices. This chapter presents insights that can stimulate future research on stakeholder management within the intricate and diverse African setting. The chapter conceptualises the relationship between stakeholders and entrepreneurship in Africa and shows how entrepreneurial firms navigate the challenges associated with weak institutional environments.

Keywords: Stakeholder management; African countries; weak institutional environments; entrepreneurship; SMEs.

1. Introduction

In recent years, stakeholder management has gained significant importance as a field of study and practice, focusing on the intricate connections between organizations and the individuals and groups who possess the ability to greatly influence their actions or be influenced by them. Although there has been notable progress in stakeholder management literature, our understanding of the concept remains relatively limited, particularly in African contexts. Despite being recognised as the next frontier for development and growth, with some of the world's fastest-growing economies located on the continent, Africa still lacks comprehensive research on stakeholder management. Additionally, evidence indicates that entrepreneurship plays a vital role in propelling economic growth in African countries. Despite significant progress in stakeholder management, African countries are recognized as the next frontier for growth and development. However, there is still a limited understanding of the phenomenon as the continent is experiencing remarkable economic growth (Brown, & Huang, 2020). According to Adusei (2016), entrepreneurship also plays a key role in spurring economic growth in African nations.

Due to weak institutional environments, African countries face significant challenges in managing stakeholder relationships (Ahsan et al., 2020; Adomako et al., 2021). As a result of weak institutional environments, entrepreneurs face complex stakeholder management landscapes. In such a context, stakeholder management becomes even more important. As part of stakeholder management in Africa, a wide range of stakeholders participate, including employees, local communities, government officials, politicians, chiefs, religious leaders, customers, nongovernmental/nonprofit organisations, civil society organizations, and suppliers. Entrepreneurship or firm actions can impact or be influenced by each stakeholder (Leonidou, Christofi, Vrontis, & Thrassou, 2020). Understanding how stakeholders contribute to the growth of entrepreneurial ventures in Africa is imperative to sustainable and responsible business practices.

Therefore, this chapter aims to provide unique insights that can spur future research into stakeholder management in the complex and heterogeneous African context. Case studies discussion is employed in this chapter to provide an in-depth understanding of the relationship between stakeholders and entrepreneurship in Africa. It will address questions related to 'How do entrepreneurial firms overcome challenges associated with weak institutional environments' in Africa? And 'Which stakeholders are critical for developing and growing entrepreneurial firms?' Africa is widely regarded as the next frontier for development and growth and is home to some of the world's fastest-growing economies (Brookings Institute, 2019). The stakeholder management literature has made considerable progress, but its understanding remains relatively limited in the African context. Furthermore, evidence indicates that entrepreneurship plays a crucial role in driving economic growth in African countries (Adusei, 2016). This chapter, therefore, addresses the following questions: What pressures do entrepreneurial firms in Africa experience from various stakeholders when operating in an institutionally weak framework? How do they effectively manage their network of stakeholders to maximize outcomes for the SMEs as well as the various stakeholders?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Entrepreneurship from a network perspective

Stakeholders' groups and individuals in this chapter can be defined as those who can influence a firm's strategic outcomes (Freeman, 1984; Jones & Wicks, 1999). The stakeholder concept can be rendered meaningless (Donaldson & Preston, 1995; Phillips, 2003), as it can be interpreted in such a broad way. As a result, several studies have taken a network perspective on stakeholder management (Rowley, 1997). Thus, the classical hub model, which emphasizes dyadic stakeholder relationships and the firm as a nexus of contracts, has been abandoned (Vandekerckhove, & Dentchev, 2005). Rawley (1997) pioneered the use of social network analysis in the development of stakeholder theory influence beyond the dyadic relationships between an organisation and its stakeholders. Because stakeholder interactions are interdependent, there is a need to be incorporated into the theory to reflect how stakeholders interact not just with the firm, but also with one another. Freedman and Evan (1990) originally argued for this in their statement that stakeholder relationships are based on multilateral agreements between stakeholders. As a result, firms do not simply respond to each stakeholder individually; they respond to the interactions between multiple stakeholders' influences Rawley (1997). It represented a shift in perspective from the hub-model that Freedman (1984) presented initially.

The focal organisation goes further, claiming it is not only the central point of its stakeholders, but also all the other focal points in the relevant social system in which it operates (Rawley, 1997). This means that stakeholders have second-order shareholders as well, and integrating these third-order shareholders more completely represents the value chain of entrepreneurship (Freeman, & Liedtka, 1997). In our view, such a complex representation of the entrepreneurial environment cannot be achieved due to the 'need for independence' and 'locus of control' personal qualities. A person who places a lot of importance on achievement might also question the relevance of second-order stakeholders in terms of recognition on a personal or professional level. entrepreneurship will no longer serve as an interconnecting hub for all stakeholders in a graphical representation of a firm's stakeholder network. As a result, instead of envisioning entrepreneurship as the focal organisation, the 'stakeholder environment' depicts both direct and indirect stakeholders.

2.2 The different network characteristics of entrepreneurship

Using network theory, Rawley (1997) examined how stakeholder relationships influence an entrepreneur's behaviour in a stakeholder environment. Based on network characteristics: *density and centrality*, Rowley suggested that strategies to manage direct and indirect entrepreneurial stakeholders should be based on the stakeholder's environment. An environment's interconnectedness can be measured by network density, which is the proportion of ties linking actors in the network. This is calculated by multiplying the number of relationships in the network by the number of potential ties of every network member connected to every other member of the network (Rowley, 1997). *A higher density* results in more efficient communication across the network and the production of shared behavioural expectations. In this sense, the entrepreneurial 'need for independence' characteristic would not lead to communicative isolation from other stakeholders. Network centrality refers to an individual stakeholder actor's power in a network deriving from their position relative to others.

Rowley, (1997) defines three types of centralities. The first definition is the *degree of centrality* of an actor in a network. The second definition is the degree centrality of an actor in a network based on the *number of ties* it has with other actors in the network. In addition, *betweenness centrality* describes the degree to which the focal actor acts as an intermediary between other actors. Entrepreneurs that are positioned as the focal point of a network are more likely to resist stakeholder pressures due to their centrality. Despite the notion that entrepreneurs should pursue high centrality, this does not imply that entrepreneurs should be solely responsible or dominant. A network that has a *lower density* and a higher centrality is more similar to Freeman's hub model. This would make an ideal situation for an entrepreneur who would have the power to resist stakeholder influences. Instructively, we argue, however, that a network environment with optimal density and high centrality would most benefit entrepreneurs given the problematic implications of that model, such as conflicting interests and unrealistic entrepreneurial responsibilities. Figure 1 presents the entrepreneurial network characteristics and how the degree of density could influence the approach needed to influence and manage them.

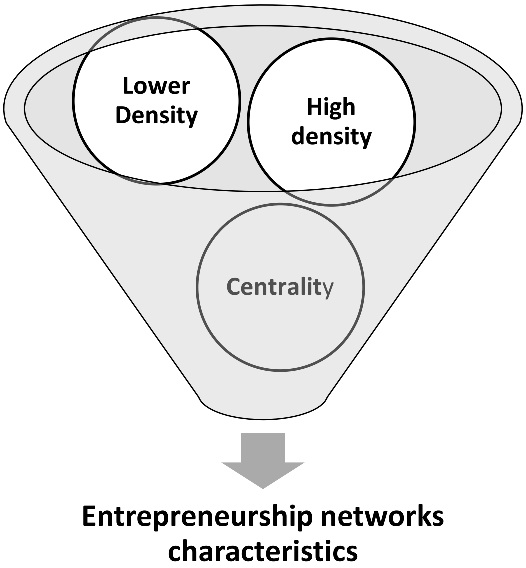

Figure 1 Entrepreneurship networks characteristics

The stakeholder communication structure in a high-density network is efficient, and the behavioural expectations are similar. Having a high centrality within a network allows a firm to influence information flows, giving it a prominent position. A focal organization can influence the creation of expectations, and stakeholders can coordinate their efforts to monitor and punish it (Rowley, 1997, p. 901). Whilst this section, sought to explain how entrepreneurs can identify their constituencies by using a network-based approach, the next section examines the prospects for developing networks.

2.3 Prospects for network building: Opportunities discovery perspectives

Entrepreneurs' personal limitations in consulting and analysing information in their environments constrain their ability to discover opportunities. In addition, it is argued that entrepreneurs identify with a hub model of their stakeholder environments based on their personal characteristics and how they perceive their relationships with the environment (Vandekerckhove, & Dentchev, 2005). It is important, however, to understand how entrepreneurs interact with their stakeholder environment which plays an important role in finding opportunities. Consequently, we argue that since the network perspective is more realistic than the hub model, it is possible to discover new business opportunities by changing one's stakeholder relationships through network engineering. To find 'network opportunities,' entrepreneurs must first determine in what specific ways stakeholder relationships should be altered; or what changes need to be made to stakeholder relationships. When new relationships are formed, network opportunities emerge, because these increase the network density.

Nevertheless, Hart and Sharma (2004) suggest that closer involvement is intended to provide a new perspective on stakeholders' activities, resulting in the identification of new business opportunities. Engaging stakeholders in a multi-stakeholder dialogue leads to the second type of entrepreneurial opportunity. Multi-stakeholder roundtables create opportunities because they allow diverse stakeholders to realize their claims may not be compatible so as to adjust them. Although this process may result in a favourable outcome, it cannot be based on individual judgement and thus contradicts entrepreneurial notions of 'locus of control' and independence. The purpose is to stimulate creative learning by giving access to different impressions of the interests at play. This process can help stakeholder claims become more stable and viable if it reduces the cognitive limitations of all parties and recasts interpretations of information signals into mutually reinforcing expectations, engagements, and considerations. A second type of opportunity can be identified more effectively if inclusion is enhanced in this sense. To create opportunities for collaborative stakeholder interactions and feasible joint behavioural expectations, stakeholders' selection for inclusion in multistakeholder dialogues cannot be determined by their salience (Mitchell et al., 1997). Rather, creative learning will be instigated by selecting stakeholders with incompatible or unfeasible claims on the firm.

3. Discussion

3.1 Managing Stakeholders' Legitimate Interest

For stakeholder management to serve the narrower interests of legitimate stakeholders, the broad concept of stakeholder management must be further defined,' (Mitchell, Agle, and Wood, 1997). In such cases, influencing groups with power over the firm may disrupt operations so severely that legitimate claims cannot be met, and new start-ups may not survive' (Mitchell et al., 1997). This conceptualisation includes stakeholders most closely associated with the company's operations and objectives considering our interest in competitive performance. Our discussion focuses on stakeholders with interests that are likely to be of high salience practically to firms. Consequently, stakeholders whose objectives are unrelated to the firm's operations (Hillman & Keim, 2001) has not been considered in our discussion. A firm is seen as being at the centre of a complex system of stakeholders (Barringer and Harrison, 2000; Rowley, 1997) that exchanges goods and services, information, technology, talent, influence, money, and other resources (Freeman, 1984). Thus, the stakeholder theory developed by Freeman (1984) and subsequent authors (Phillips, 2003) is based on the idea that the market is efficient, while the welfare of the firm takes precedence. It is unlikely that for-profit small businesses that serve stakeholder groups purely for altruistic purposes will prosper or even survive in an efficient market. Stakeholder theory holds that firms maximise their welfare by meeting the needs of their most important stakeholders in a win-win manner (Harrison and St. John, 1996).

A major characteristic of stakeholder management is that firms distribute both value and decision-making authority among a broad spectrum of their primary stakeholders (Freeman et al., 2007). A firm's interest in legitimate stakeholders is always considered at least moderately important (Jones, Felps, and Bigley, 2007). Hence, entrepreneurs may disregard their standards for handling stakeholders 'whenever it is economically advantageous to do so' (Jones et al., 2007) or they may violate those standards whenever it is economically advantageous to do so. As we describe in this chapter, firms tend to treat stakeholders consistently. This may be due to (a) a belief that it is the best way to treat stakeholders, (b) an economic advantage, or (c) a combination of the two. In this chapter, we do not intend to suggest that motivational differences are trivial; however, we intend to examine the possible outcomes of specific types of behaviours rather than their motivations.

As a result, we assume that companies managing stakeholders have fairly accurate information about the minimum requirements for stakeholder participation. Entrepreneurs that know their services are unique to the industry can provide more accurate information, as in our example of a company that provides benefits that are not typically provided. The stakeholder management approach is expected to be more favourable, however, in relation to understanding stakeholder utility functions, as we discuss in a later section. A stakeholder's minimum requirements can then be better understood with this information. In contrast to an arms-length stakeholder management approach, this approach allows for a better understanding of stakeholder needs. A stakeholder is considered an interchangeable economic actor from an arms-length perspective, and power is the primary criterion for determining influence over firm decisions as well as value distribution. Therefore, stakeholder participation is only allowed if it is clearly in the best interests of the firm, and value is allocated following negotiations in which each stakeholder tries to protect their interest

Table 1: Stakeholder Dynamics in African Industries

Authors	**Industries**	**Illustrations**
Mair, J., & Marti, I. (2006). Social entrepreneurship research: A source of explanation, prediction, and delight	Stakeholder Management in Agribusiness	The agricultural sector involves various stakeholders, including farmers, suppliers, distributors, consumers, government agencies, and local communities. Effective stakeholder engagement is crucial for addressing the diverse interests and needs of these stakeholders. For example, in Ghana, the Cocoa Abrabopa Association works closely with cocoa farmers, empowering them through training programs, access to finance, and market linkages
Abe, O. (2022). Between control and confrontation: The pitfalls and potential of corporate-community participatory development in Africa's energy and extractive industries	Stakeholder Management in the Extractive Industries	Stakeholders in the extractive industries encompass local communities, indigenous groups, environmental activists, government agencies, and investors. In South Africa, the mining company Anglo American has implemented stakeholder engagement initiatives to address social and environmental issues. Through collaboration with local communities and environmental organizations, the company has established programs for community development, environmental conservation, and sustainable mining practices.
Ajide, F. M. (2020). Financial inclusion in Africa: does it promote entrepreneurship?	Stakeholder Management in the Financial Sector	The financial sector plays a crucial role in supporting entrepreneurial growth and economic development in Africa. Stakeholders in this sector include banks, microfinance institutions, investors, regulators, and entrepreneurs themselves. In Kenya, the mobile banking platform M-Pesa has revolutionized financial services, providing access to banking services for the unbanked population. By engaging with regulators, telecom companies, and customers, M-Pesa has successfully built trust and created financial inclusion opportunities for millions of people.
Maseno, M., & Wanyoike, C. (2022). Social Entrepreneurship as mechanisms for social transformation and social impact in East Africa an exploratory case study perspective	Stakeholder Engagement in Social Enterprises	Social enterprises are emerging as transformative ventures in Africa, combining social impact with sustainable business models. These enterprises operate across sectors such as education, healthcare, and renewable energy, with stakeholders including beneficiaries, investors, government agencies, and nonprofit organizations. For instance, Bridge International Academies, a social enterprise operating in several African countries, engages with local communities, parents, and governments to provide affordable and quality education.

3.2 Influence of Non-market Strategies on Stakeholders Management of Entrepreneurial SMEs

The literature has shown that nonmarket strategies (NMS) have a significant impact on both developed and developing market contexts (Adomako, Abdelgawad, Ahsan, Amankwah-Amoah, & Liedong, 2023; Lawton, McGuire et al., 2013; Lawton, Rajwani et al., 2013; Rodgers et al., 2019). Although large firms and multinational companies have been analysed, SMEs have received less attention. A growing body of research has revealed that firms use strategies and relationships that go beyond conventional competitive strategies, such as lobbying and other forms of cooperative relationship-building with institutional actors (Rodgers et al., 2019). There has been an increase in research on NMS in emerging markets in recent years (Shirodkar, McGuire, & Strange, 2020; Liedong, Rajwani, & Lawton, 2020). According to Rajwani and Liedong (2015), relational strategies can be used to deal effectively with shifting political environments in emerging market economies, and we need to do more studies focusing on development.

Nevertheless, informal institutions can also have an impact on business activity in emerging market contexts alongside formal institutions. According to North (2005), formal institutions consist of written or officially accepted rules and regulations which guide broader society. The informal institutions, on the other hand, encompass traditions, customs, social norms, culture, and unwritten codes of conduct. The norms and values that are passed on from generation to generation may be resistant to change (Bruton et al., 2008). Developing networks and relational strategies is essential for firms in emerging market contexts where informal institutions are more prevalent and dominant. A firm's non-market strategies are used to fill institutional voids in emerging markets where institutions are unstable, underdeveloped, or lacking (Marquis & Raynard, 2015; Sun, Mellahi, & Wright, 2012). The illicit and corrupt behaviour of many NMS has been identified (Doh et al., 2012; Lawton, McGuire, et al., 2013; Lawton, Rajwani et al., 2013).

In the context of institutional constraints, as described above, large firms have employed strategies such as CPA and/or CSR as a way to navigate them (Doh et al., 2012; Rodgers et al., 2019). However, to date, relatively little is known about how resource-constrained SMEs respond to predatory behaviour by implementing NMS (Marquis & Raynard, 2015; Wickert, 2016). SMEs are often unable to engage in mechanisms like lobbying, which are commonly used by multinational corporations. Several factors, including the liabilities of their 'newness' and their 'smallness', contribute to their lack of capacity to build NMS resources, which stem from the wider set of issues that typically affect SMEs. Aside from this, SMEs are often resource-deprived (Spence, 2007), which can severely hamper the development of NMS. To influence policymakers, large firms possess the necessary non-market capabilities and infrastructure, but they lack the necessary non-market capabilities and infrastructure. In addition, they lack market power and are often dependent on large firms' supply bases to survive (Street & Cameron, 2007).

Although SMEs are subject to the above constraints, they are still regarded as economic engines in emerging markets (Filatotchev, Liu, Buck, & Wright, 2009). Although they make up over 96 per cent of private firms in emerging markets, they are not exempt from exchanges with state actors and institutions despite their 'smallness'. In emerging markets, few studies focus on the direct exchange of SMEs and states. A few studies discuss non-market political strategies rather than social strategies. As an example, Soundararajan, Spence, and colleagues (2018) examined small garment exporters in India and found that these exporters engaged in mundane evasion work to circumvent and evade the demands for improved working conditions imposed by the state and private sectors. A similar study by Jamali, Lund-Thomsen, and Jeppesen (2017) shows SMEs in India selectively couple with institutional demands and decouple from them. Studies like these suggest that the relationship between SMEs and states in emerging markets is more micro than macro since informal social networks and everyday practices play a larger role. Currently, however, most studies (Jamali et al., 2017; Pastrana & Sriramesh, 2014) focus primarily on CSR practices of small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) rather than predatory behaviour by state actors and how SMEs respond to it through the establishment of non-profit management systems.

3.3 Understanding the Dynamics of Managing Stakeholder Relationships in African Contexts

Africa is a diverse continent with a rich tapestry of cultural traditions and practices. These cultural influences significantly impact stakeholder dynamics and require organisations to adapt their approaches accordingly. For example, in many African societies, communal values and collective decision-making are highly valued (Sambala, Cooper, & Manderson, 2020). This places importance on engaging with community leaders, chiefs, and elders as key stakeholders in business ventures. Failure to recognise and respect these cultural norms may result in strained relationships and hinder business success. Conversely, organizations that embrace and align with cultural values can build strong partnerships, gain social acceptance, and leverage local knowledge and networks. Understanding cultural nuances and adapting stakeholder management strategies accordingly can enhance trust and facilitate collaboration with diverse stakeholders.

Social structures and power dynamics play a significant role in stakeholder management in Africa. Traditional hierarchies, social inequalities, and power imbalances can influence stakeholder interactions. For instance, in some African countries, traditional authorities wield considerable influence and are important stakeholders in decision-making processes. Engaging with chiefs, religious leaders, and community elders becomes crucial for navigating social structures and gaining legitimacy (Leonidou, Christofi, Vrontis, & Thrassou, 2020). Furthermore, social inequalities and disparities may require organizations to consider inclusive approaches that address the needs of marginalized groups.

The institutional context in Africa significantly influences stakeholder management practices. Weak institutional environments, characterised by limited regulatory frameworks, corruption, and bureaucratic hurdles, pose challenges for organisations (Adams et al., 2019; Adeleye, Luiz, Muthuri, & Amaeshi, 2020). However, they also create opportunities for entrepreneurial solutions and innovative stakeholder engagement approaches. Organisations operating in such contexts may need to navigate complex regulatory landscapes, build relationships with government officials, and establish collaborative partnerships with civil society organizations. By proactively engaging with institutions and shaping the institutional environment, organizations can drive positive change and foster an enabling environment for stakeholder management.

4. Implications

4.1 Institutional Constraints and Weak Governance in the African Context

One of the primary challenges in stakeholder management in Africa is the presence of institutional constraints and weak governance. Weak regulatory frameworks, corruption, and bureaucratic inefficiencies can hinder effective stakeholder engagement and create barriers for organisations seeking to establish transparent and accountable relationships. To address this challenge, it is crucial to advocate for stronger governance mechanisms, promote transparency and accountability, and foster collaborations between the public and private sectors. SMEs can work towards building partnerships with local governments, civil society organisations, and international institutions to strengthen institutional frameworks and create an enabling environment for stakeholder engagement (Ahsan et al., 2020; Adomako et al., 2021).

Africa is a diverse continent with a wide range of cultural, social, and linguistic dynamics. Managing stakeholders in such diverse contexts requires sensitivity and understanding of the local cultures, norms, and values. Different stakeholders may have varying expectations, priorities, and ways of engagement. Organisations need to adopt context-specific approaches and tailor their stakeholder management strategies accordingly. This may involve engaging community leaders, religious institutions, and cultural influencers to bridge cultural gaps and foster meaningful relationships.

Limited resources and infrastructure pose significant challenges for stakeholder management in Africa. Organisations often face constraints in terms of financial resources, human capital, and technological infrastructure. These limitations can impact the ability to effectively engage stakeholders and implement comprehensive stakeholder management strategies. African SMEs need to prioritize resource allocation and seek innovative solutions to overcome these limitations. Collaboration and partnerships with other organisations, leveraging technology and digital platforms, and exploring alternative funding models can help address resource constraints and enhance stakeholder engagement efforts (Kolk & Lenfant, 2017, Kimani et al., 2020).

5. Conclusion

The chapter adopts an interdisciplinary approach, drawing on theories and concepts from stakeholder theory, entrepreneurship, management, and African studies. By including diverse examples, empirical evidence, and theoretical frameworks, the chapter presents a holistic understanding of stakeholder management dynamics in the African context. In addition, this chapter not only contribute to the existing body of knowledge on stakeholder management but also has practical implications for entrepreneurs, policymakers, and organizations operating in Africa. By recognizing the importance of stakeholder relationships, understanding the unique challenges and opportunities in African contexts, and adopting context-specific strategies, organizations can navigate the complex stakeholder landscape and contribute to the sustainable development and well-being of African societies. As we conclude this chapter, it is important to acknowledge that stakeholder management is an ongoing process, requiring continuous learning, adaptation, and engagement with stakeholders. The African context is dynamic and evolving, presenting both opportunities and challenges for stakeholder management. Therefore, further research and exploration of stakeholder management in Africa in relation to entrepreneurship are needed to deepen our understanding and inform future practices.

We hope that this chapter inspires researchers, practitioners, and policymakers to explore stakeholder management in African contexts further and contribute to the positive transformation of African economies and societies.

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