

Youth Entrepreneurial Skills Training as a Source of Employment in the North-eastern Part of Botswana

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ABSTRACT This case study was conducted in Tutume, north-eastern district of Botswana. The study sought to investigate the extent to which youth Entrepreneurial Skills Training acts a source of employment in Botswana. The specific objectives of the research were to establish: the benefits the youth gain from entrepreneurial skills acquired at vocational training centres; the limitations experienced by the youth who complete their studies at entrepreneurial vocational training centres; and the strategies to mitigate these challenges and expand the current level of employment opportunities. A qualitative method was used for the study. Snowball non-probability sampling was used to identify 20 respondents (who happened to receive this entrepreneurial training) for the study. Brigade coordinators, who constituted part of the study, were selected through purposive sampling. In-depth interviews were used to collect data. The findings noted that, the Brigades' vocational training has led to job creation in the Tutume district. The training also contributed to increased profit-making capacity of youth-owned enterprises. The challenges included, limited domestic market, shortage of subsidies, high production costs, shortage of staff, lack of commitment by some youth entrepreneurs, and low income. The study recommends a refocus on the training towards creativity and innovative thinking; peer assistance; the establishment of retail co-operatives; and target setting and monitoring of projects.

INTRODUCTION

Unemployment has become one of the biggest problems affecting the standard of living of the citizens of Botswana. The economic system of Botswana comprises both the private and the public sectors. In the past the public sector absorbed all the school-leavers and provided employment for them. More recently it has become difficult for the public sector to offer full employment to all school-leavers, hence the need for the private sector to support these youth with employment opportunities. The Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) asserts that employment is the basis for any region's prosperity and continued improvement in the welfare of its people (ECA 2007). For most regions in the world, the goal of job creation has not been achieved. Many countries today are struggling with high unemployment rates (UN News Centre 2011). To combat unemployment, central and local governments in Botswana have adopted varied approaches to stimulate job creation. These have included, amongst others, community action programs and the investments of capital by local government. The Government of Botswana spent about P421373.00 for enrol-

ment of 211 trainees over a period of three months (Table 1); and for the entire financial year of 1 April 2007 to 31 March 2008, the government spent P1685492.00 in just one Brigade centre.

Table 1: Budget allocations for vocational training centres

Period (Financial year)	Budget for vocational training centres	Budget for education depart- ments	Percentage of vocation over edu- cation
2006-2007	P318.09 m	P4 842.15 m	6.57%
2007-2008	P445.76 m	P6 239.97 m	7.14%
2008-2009	P657.61 m	P7 169.55 m	9.72%

The financial year for the Government of Botswana is from 1 April to 31 March. Table 1 shows the budget allocations of the Government of Botswana on Vocational Training Centres. The figures show that the budget rises every year.

The Government of Botswana further helps the youth through the Brigades – which are responsible for the development of youth – to acquire the entrepreneurial skills for addressing the levels of unemployment. According to Lindhard and Tlale (1997), the Brigades started operating

in Botswana in 1965. To date there has never been much research done to determine the extent to which the Brigades are assisting in addressing the levels of unemployment. Additional to this, the Business Studies subjects at school level, which offer entrepreneurial skills, are relatively new. These subjects were piloted in 1996 then formally introduced to all schools in Botswana in 1999. Since then the extent to which the subjects are addressing the levels of unemployment has never been reviewed.

Table 2 shows the extent to which the Government of Botswana has supported the promotion of entrepreneurial skills through the Tutume Brigades. The information shows a total expenditure of about P421373.00 for an enrolment of 211 trainees within three months. With the budget rising every year it is expected that the youth would benefit from the skills they are provided with.

The Government of Botswana also provides some financial resources for the youth at senior education level and then continues to provide finance to the Brigades for entrepreneurial training with the hope of combating unemployment. For example in 2007, the Government of Botswana awarded P28 million to 424 youth in a Youth Grant Implementation Programme (Department of Youth and Culture 2007).

Literature Review

This section explains and analyses the theoretical framework that underlies this study. It focuses specifically on issues relating to entrepreneurship, employment, vocationalism and other documented skills training initiatives, such as the Brigades, as well as institutions provided by the Government of Botswana that offer skills training.

Entrepreneurship

The main challenge for youth entrepreneurial skills in pursuit of Botswana's Vision 2016, is to make entrepreneurship productive, profitable and sustainable in order to contribute efficiently and effectively to the economy of the country (Ministry of Finance and Development Planning 2003). This can be achieved if all citizens of Botswana, especially the young people, would realise the value of entrepreneurship. According to Cronje (2000), the word entrepreneur is derived from the French word 'entreprendre', which means to 'undertake'. Cronje (2000) defines the phrase "entrepreneurial skills" as the skills provided to someone that will enable them to understand the process of identifying opportunities in the market place and then marshalling the resources necessary to pursue those opportunities for personal gain. This means that without entrepreneurship, the availability of natural resources, labour and capital is not sufficient to ensure economic growth. These factors of production have to be combined and organised by people who see opportunities and are willing to take risks by providing goods and services in the expectation that they will be sold. These people are called entrepreneurs. The Curriculum Development and Evaluation (2000) states that: "you may have land, labour and capital, but unless you also have someone with a business idea, with energy, with the ability to plan and motivate, and the willingness to take risks to see the business idea become a reality, all the other factors of production are useless".

Entrepreneurship is an important factor of production. A lot of research has been done to identify the characteristics of an entrepreneur and to answer the questions, such as: What is an entrepreneur?; What drives an entrepreneur? and; What makes the entrepreneur different from

Table 2: Budget allocation for Tutume brigades

<i>Name of course</i>	<i>2007-2008 enrolment</i>	<i>Allocated amount per student</i>	<i>Period</i>	<i>Total amount per period</i>
Brick layering	77	P1 743.00	3 months	P134 211.00
Carpentry	76	P1 909.00	3 months	P145 084.00
Auto mechanics	36	P2 780.00	3 months	P100 080.00
Business	22	P1 909.00	3 months	P41 998.00
Total	211			P421 373.00

Source: T25 Botswana Department of Vocational Education and Training 2007

other people? The attitudes that entrepreneurs display are the driving force for such a person to become a prosperous business person. Most countries are trying to help their citizens by teaching entrepreneurial skills to students while they are still at schools in the hope of them becoming entrepreneurs in the future. The youth in Botswana also undergo vocational training to gain a better understanding of the importance of entrepreneurial skills in addressing the issue of unemployment. The challenge that remains is placing emphasis on technical and practical subjects, as well as business skills. Karen and Peter (2002) state that these skills are most needed for the survival of the nation. It is essential that Botswana meets this challenge and avoids a culture of dependency in the coming years. Wokorach (2001) states that the stability and success of the economy will depend on the emergence of small- and medium-size enterprises in which people take risks and generate employment for others. If the environment is conducive, then more entrepreneurs will emerge; if not there will be less people starting their own businesses. The more businesses are started, the more jobs are created for the citizens of the country. This in turn will mean less unemployment, and all social ills such as ignorance, crime, diseases, common suicide cases, family break ups and so on, will be reduced or eliminated (Cronje 2000).

Unemployment

After gaining independence from the colonial rule around the 1960s and beyond, most African people, particularly men, have been engaged in formal wage employment either within their countries of birth, or in the neighbouring countries. The main employer in these countries has been, and still is to a larger extent, the government. Duncan (1996) however, states that with many challenges facing the African continent today such as drought, floods, food shortages, disease and rapid changes in the world economic system and structural adjustments often dictated by countries of the North to the South, African Governments have found themselves unable to provide employment opportunities for most of their people. According to Zeleza (1994), unemployment levels have escalated, thus forcing governments to develop policies and programmes that will resolve this problem. From the time of independence in 1966, most employment

opportunities in Botswana were in the public sector because the Government was establishing many public institutions such as schools, hospitals, and improved infrastructure such as roads (Central Statistics Office 2008). It is also assumed that mining played a significant role in being a major source of employment growth since the early 1980s (Ministry of Finance and Development Planning 1997).

According to the 2007 Budget speech (Ministry of Finance and Development Planning 2007), the national unemployment level was reported to have fallen from 23.8 percent to 17.6 percent. Even though there was a decrease, the figure was still high. The financial crisis that beset the world in 2008 also led to a fall in employment levels in many countries, including Botswana.

Vocationalism

Fransoza (1997) says that it is right to believe that there must be some relationship between education and the world of work. There is the necessity that these immature members of society are not merely physically preserved in adequate numbers, but that they are initiated into the interests, purposes, information, skills and practices of mature members. Schools and training centres are necessary for this education to take place. According to the United Nations (2006), a young person leaving secondary school for whatever destination, confronts a world about which they have definite ideas. By the time they reach their final year of secondary education, they have developed a fairly coherent set of expectations about their future, which is based on the level of education they have achieved and the prospects they believe this offers them. Education has become so academic that youth are no longer adequately prepared for the world in which they have to meaningfully exist. It is therefore imperative that the academic and working world recognise the necessity for the youth to acquire life skills such as youth entrepreneurial skills.

Lindhard and Tlale (1997) contend that a specific complaint about academic education is that it is completely separated from the working world. The curriculum is overloaded with subject matter that does not contribute directly to the school leaver's readiness for the labour market. Relevant education can therefore be regarded as vo-

cationalised education that equips students with all the necessary life skills. Lindhard and Tlale (1997) state that introducing a stronger vocational component into the academic curriculum will improve the quality of education. To further help the youth with vocational skills, the Government of Botswana has vocational training institutions all over the country. Magalakwe (2000) adds that the Government of Botswana views vocational training centres as very important for the future of the country. They believe that individuals must have a set of employable skills and an understanding of the importance of work if they are to have successful lives and be productive members of an industrial society. Vocational training of youth is gaining prestige within the whole country of Botswana. As the nation industrialises, many youths are recognising the value of vocational training. After obtaining their formal education from senior secondary schools they then enroll in the Brigades for entrepreneurial training.

The Brigades Movement and Other Entrepreneurial Initiatives in Botswana

The Brigades are independent organisations that offer training opportunities for school-leavers. Certificates are awarded to students who successfully complete their courses. In addition, the Botswana Brigades play an important role in the provision of entrepreneurial skills to the youths. The concept of Brigades as used in Botswana, refers to a cluster of trainees (for example, builders, carpenters, auto-mechanics, farmers, and so on) engaged in over 16 different trades and organised under a single local governing authority in a single locality. Botswana inaugurated its Brigades Movement in 1963. This was a programme of training, teaching and productive work. In 1965, a group of school-leavers were recruited into the first Brigade, Swaneng Brigade in Palapye in the Central part of Botswana. To date, the Brigade institutions have risen to over thirty-two with average intake of 106 trainees in each centre. The movement has evolved and changed considerably in the last decade. Magalakwe (2000), mentions that Botswana turned to vocational training as a means of solving the problem of unemployed school-leavers. They also do their best to help those youth who do not qualify for admissions to universities by offering them the entrepreneurial skills training

that will enable them to start their own businesses once they have completed the programme (UNEVOC 1998). Statistically, the Brigades in Botswana are doing well in providing youth entrepreneurial skills. For example, the Brigades in Nkange, Tutume, Marobela, Marapong, Zwenshambe, and so on, have shown that the number of youth that have enrolled for entrepreneurial skills training have been increasing at a constant rate. They have kept the records of the outgoing youth who have successfully completed the programme to verify that the provision of these skills addresses the issue of unemployment in Botswana.

Apart from the Brigades, Botswana also has other entrepreneurial initiatives, such as the Junior Achievement Botswana (JAB) Institute. JAB is a non-profit organisation that runs business, economics and Entrepreneurship Education (EE) programs. It was initially funded in April 1994 with seed money from USAID under an agreement with the Government of Botswana. Its mission is to empower young Botswana with entrepreneurial skills in order to succeed in the world of work through a dynamic business, economic and EE program; and thereby cultivate and energise the spirit of free enterprise and self-reliance (Swartland 2008). Junior Achievement Botswana (JAB) (2003) states, that through the assistance of the Government of Botswana, it provides business skills to the youth so that they may start and run their own businesses. Learners at secondary schools who opt for Business Studies start mini-enterprise projects that are spread out over a given period in preparation for entrepreneurship. Learners are required to develop business ideas, plan, organise, operate, and evaluate the enterprise. They are further expected to run the business as they would in a real life situation.

Since 2008, the Government of Botswana has also – through the International Labour Organisation (ILO) – implemented the Know About Business (KAB) programme in schools. KAB is an entrepreneurship program that includes both content and methodology. Its intention is to offer learners the option of finding self-employment as an alternative to formal employment. The aim of KAB is to cultivate business skills in young people and to make them business wise (Lute 2007). The intention for the Government of Botswana in providing these entrepreneurial skills is to offer an alternative to those youth

who would possibly not be accepted at tertiary institutions. They would then have the necessary skills to start their own businesses and would be able to survive in the real world.

To support these entrepreneurial initiatives, the Government of Botswana, through the Department of Youth and Culture, has set up financial aid systems known as Youth Grants. According to Department of Youth and Culture (2001) through the Youth Grants system, the Department identifies the needs of the youth and provides financial aid in the form of monetary grants. The Department also allows youth to form groups that are able to represent the interests of the youth at the Ministry of Education, and furthermore issues grants to individuals who have the intention of hiring other youth.

The youth will be required to prepare a business plan and submit it to the Department of Youth and Culture for assessment. After assessment, the grants will be approved or disapproved by the Department. The grant may be disapproved because of lack of business skills or because the business already exists. If the reason of disapproval is lack of business skills, the Government would select the youth for a training program. The Government expects that the youth would attend the courses and gain knowledge which would help them in running a business. The Government therefore invests a lot of money to train the youth and in the provision of grants. These grants are non-refundable by the youth (Department of Youth and Culture 2001).

According to Swartland (2008), the Botswana Government has set up the Citizen Entrepreneurship Development Agency (CEDA), which focuses specifically on the development of 'viable, sustainable, citizen-owned business enterprises', through the development of and access to entrepreneurial and management skills training, monitoring and mentoring, the provision of finance and the sharing of risks. Under CEDA Young Farmers Fund Guidelines, specific training is considered critical for the success of the Project. CEDA training is followed by financial assistance provided in the form of loans at subsidized interest rates, as opposed to outright grants. This form of loan is different from the Youth Grant discussed above, which is a grant and non-refundable. CEDA loans are however regarded as a soft window for citizens wishing to start or expand business operations, and to buy into existing businesses.

Objectives of the Study

Studies to assess the performance of the various intervention programmes to combat unemployment are thus a step in the right direction. With specific reference to the Tutume District, the site of the study, existing evidence shows that during pre-colonial times, the town was occupied by self-supporting villagers who were stock breeders, and were not affected by unemployment. Now that farming is no longer practised by many people in this region, different forms of employment needs to be created. The main objectives of the study were to establish how youth benefit from entrepreneurial skills acquired at vocational training centres, identify the limitations experienced by the youths who complete entrepreneurial vocational training and develop strategies to mitigate these challenges.

Research Problem

This study aimed at establishing the extent to which youth entrepreneurial skills are addressing the unemployment issues in Botswana, by reviewing all youth entrepreneurial skills initiatives that are made available by the Government of Botswana. Even though these entrepreneurial skills are taught at both an academic and a vocational level, the study only focussed on the vocational training that is provided by the Brigades and by the Department of Youth and Culture. The youth undergo the vocational training are those who are at the Brigades and school leavers who join the youth and culture. The following specific questions served as basis to address the aim of the study:

- ♦ In which ways do youth benefit from entrepreneurial skills acquired at vocational training centres?
- ♦ What are the limitations experienced by the youths who complete entrepreneurial vocational training?
- ♦ What are the strategies to mitigate these challenges and to expand the current level of entrepreneurs emerging from the vocational training centres?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study was undertaken using the qualitative case study approach. This enabled the

researcher to systematically gather in-depth information from respondents about their social and economic settings, and their activities; and to effectively understand how the respondents operate or functions (Berg 2004). The study was carried out using a snowball research system until enough information was gathered. The snowball research system is a method of research that can be used when the population cannot be easily located. The first individual interviewed assisted in locating a second person, and so on, thus causing a snowball effect. This continued until a reasonable number of respondents were interviewed. This study was carried out in the Tutume Sub-district. The Tutume Sub-district comprises more than ten (10) villages, starting from Mathangwane down to Maitengwe and up to Nata in the northern part of Francistown, Botswana. The population comprised the young people who studied for their entrepreneurial skills in the Tutume and Nswazwi Brigades. The sample size was chosen using the non-probability sampling methods as this enabled the researcher not to request a list of all the young people trained at the Brigades because they could not be traced. The researcher requested two Brigades to provide a few names of the youth who completed the studies during the five-year-period from 2003 to 2008. The study interviewed a total of 20 out of 22 respondents identified. The two remaining respondents could not be reached because they had relocated from the study site.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research findings were categorised into the research problem themes:

Research Problem 1: Benefits of Entrepreneurial Skills Training

Respondents commented that they had benefited from the skills training because most of them were earning a living wage either through the running of their own enterprises or through earning wages and salaries. Through the Brigades System they were able to become self-reliant and some remained self-employed and even provided employment for other youth.

One of the respondents commented as follows:

I am dependant on building people's houses for a living.

Another youth said:

People also depend on us to build their houses.

Eight (8) of the twenty (20) young entrepreneurs interviewed rated the vocational training received as an excellent services to the youth in skill development; eight others rated this training as good; and the remaining eight (8) interviewees rated this training as satisfactory. It was also established that there were constant visits by the training officials to these graduates to assess and provide feedback. Thus, the skills development programmes provide after training mentoring that supports the youth practise their skills as employers or employees. An official from the training centre made this comment regarding the nature of service offered to the graduates:

The services offered by the programme are of good quality because when our students graduate, they are able to face life using these skills.

The graduates may also receive government grants after their enterprises are assessed and evaluated. The programme officials believe that their graduates have about a 90% chance of receiving these grants because of the quality of service offered at these skill development centres.

Another benefit enjoyed by the youth trained at the these skills development centres, is sponsorship in the form of financial assistance, training, monitoring and mentoring, by the Government of Botswana through the Department of Youth and Culture. The Government provides loans to small- and medium-sized enterprises. These range from fifty thousand to one million pula, at an interest rate of between five percent and seven percent, over a seven to twenty-year term. This support assists job creation and provision for the youth. This loan scheme caters for all kinds of businesses including commerce, agriculture and retailing with business viability being the main criterion for selection. The youth are able to access these loans through the entrepreneurship training scheme. Most of the respondents commented as follows:

We also get youth grants to start our businesses and these grants are very important to us.

Another initiative that the Government of Botswana has in place is the Youth Programme Fund (available for 18-to-35 year-olds) that grants loans of between 5000 to 50,000 pula for entrepreneurial projects that includes dry land farm-

ing (which includes livestock rearing and horticulture practices). These recipients – who also formed part of this study – indicated that these loans had been used to purchase fixed assets such as equipment, trucks and to cover other running expenses. The Government also provides funding through the Development Agency for in-service training, monitoring and evaluation to support sustainability and viability of these enterprises. According to Harvey (2001) employability skills are only partially contingent on what is provided by the institution.

Research Problem 2: Limitations Experienced by the Youth

There are challenges which these graduates face despite the benefits experienced. One of the biggest challenges indicated by respondents relate to the functional structure of the Department of Youth and Culture, which is centralised in Gaborone. According to the respondents there are only 12 officers from this department that cover a vast country like Botswana (Fig. 1). Because of time constraints placed on these officers because of their limited number, the graduates have to travel to the main office in Gaborone

one to get support. For them this is quite costly and time consuming.

Another challenge identified from the study was the commitment of those receiving sponsorship from the government through grants and loans. These youth are sometimes employed by external companies, while they are still registered as entrepreneurs. According to the respondents, this then affects the productivity and cost effectiveness of the enterprises and impacts negatively on sustainability and viability of the enterprise.

The respondents also indicated the availability of serviced land for the aspirant entrepreneurs as a challenge. Delays by the Botswana Department of Land Board in allocating land to potential entrepreneurs mitigate entrepreneurship ventures because most of them then forfeit opportunities of getting assistance from the Government. One youth said this about the challenge:

They take too long to make allocations for business plots and we don't know what to do because we cannot start businesses without a business plot.

The implication of this delay is that the youth remain unemployed and even with start-up capital; they cannot continue their ventures as they cannot do much without access to land.



Fig. 1. Map of Botswana

Competition in the market was also cited as a challenge facing these new graduates. According to the interviewees, the government expects them to compete in the same league with other entrepreneurs or businesses, including those that are well-established. This makes it difficult for the youth to penetrate the market. For example, one respondent commented that there are already five competitors for the same product and target market. The study also established that foreign businesses compete with these emerging entrepreneurs for government tenders. Many consider the size of the population in Botswana and its market as too small for such competition. The following comment was made:

Why is it that foreigners see Batswana as the cream of the continent while Batswana do not see it that way?

Respondents were also concerned that government does not subsidise small to medium contractors whilst the large contractors receive subsidies in the form of, as Botswana Government calls, “mobilisation funds”. Lack of these funds leads small and medium enterprises to forfeit government tenders. This metaphor was put forward by one affected respondent:

If your baby is still crawling you cannot say he/she must run with those who are already walking!

Other challenges cited include low prices because income levels are generally low, drought conditions which result in high chicken feed prices, high fuel prices, low sales and low profits. Some devastating effects of drought like drying boreholes, and a drop in chicken and maize output was also noted. High fuel prices and delays in issuing licences are also taking their toll on the morale and growth of small to medium enterprises.

Research Problem 3: Strategies to Mitigate Challenges and Expand Entrepreneurial Ventures

The results from this study suggest the following strategies to mitigate the challenges experienced by emerging entrepreneurs:

- ♦ Government-funded businesses should be provided with additional support in many ways to alleviate major challenges as outlined above. Delays in allocating plots and renewal of licensing for emerging entrepreneurs need to be investigated and eliminated as soon as possible. Government departments responsible should be up-

skilled to ensure an effective and efficient management of this system so that the frustrations and loss of income among these emerging entrepreneurs can be alleviated. Government should improve the cash flow by extending mobilisations funds to cover these emerging entrepreneurs. Respondents suggested that government should provide fixed subsidies on certain goods such as seeds and insecticides/pesticides at certain percentages, particularly during drought periods. There is a definite need for the Government of Botswana to strengthening capacity to develop, implement and review policies affecting small to medium size enterprises.

- ♦ Emerging entrepreneurs were also advised to expand on their local markets by venturing into other surrounding targets market. It was suggested that these entrepreneurs form co-operatives where they could transport their products in bulk to reduce cost and improve market share. For example, instead of each of them having a loading machine at one site, they could use one loading machine at a time to transport goods to and from the suppliers and the market.
- ♦ It was found that the use of mentoring by the skills training centres was a very important strategy to address most of the challenges that these emerging entrepreneurs experience. The mentors can provide support such as how to run a business, how to penetrate the market and how to combat market competition. Mentors should constantly run workshops to address these issues.
- ♦ Another strategy that can be used by these entrepreneurs in order to move away from problems such as drought and high production costs is diversification. For example, poultry production may replace vegetable cropping when the climate is unfavourable to support the latter. The emerging entrepreneurs should be innovative in using funds to the best advantage and to realise great financial economies of scale.
- ♦ Government tender system should be evaluated and redesigned to offer priority to emerging entrepreneurs. The study established most projects are important for entrepreneurs, but suggests that the recipients of these tenders should be encour-

aged and monitored to sub-contract or sublet to the emerging entrepreneurs. This system should apply to both local and international investors. The mobilisation fund could be used to improve cash flow problems of these small to medium enterprises so that they could execute their obligations effectively and efficiently.

- Emerging markets could also rely on peer assistance. The study established that entrepreneurs who do not have the necessary skills and time to appoint managers to run their businesses, could use emerging entrepreneurs to run their businesses effectively and efficiently. In this way, the system can be strengthened in that these managers receive training and support just like the entrepreneurs to run these businesses effectively and efficiently. It is important that researchers are engaged to investigate and report on these entrepreneurial training centres as well as the success or failures of this programme. Evidence from research reports would provide the policy-makers with the way forwards as Botswana strives to achieve its long-term Vision 2016. Tom and Gary (1996) suggest that learning principles through practice is the corner stone of good teaching, and that vocational education provides valuable lessons for all people regardless of gender.

CONCLUSION

The findings from this study indicate that the entrepreneurial skills provided to the youth in Botswana has, to some extent, provided employment opportunities and assistance in alleviating the pressure of unemployment. These vocational centres, for example, help the young people acquire practical skills that prepare them for adult life. The results also showed that both males and females aged between 18 and 39 have created or are engaged in job creating ventures. This is encouraging because studies have shown that small to medium enterprises are those enterprises that accelerate and sustain economic growth of every country.

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