

Abstract

The tourism industry is increasingly important in the global economy and is expected to grow by 4.2% per annum to US\$ 278 billion by 2028, creating over 235 million jobs globally. In Africa, tourism export revenues have risen threefold and have a unique potential to create over 12 million jobs by 2028. Despite the opportunities the tourism sector offers to create jobs for the youth in Africa, highly skilled tourism graduates are still disadvantaged in securing employment in an industry that appears to prefer a less skilled workforce. In Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), there is a need to expand entrepreneurship opportunities in tourism by creating innovative ecosystems and networks as a remedy to address highly skilled youth unemployment and underemployment in the region. The purpose of this chapter is to share critical reflections on the co-creation process and practices of a British Council — Innovation for African Universities (IAU036) programme, aimed at accelerating entrepreneurship and innovation for sustainable tourism in Africa that led to the formation of a youth-centred ecosystem for sustainable tourism development SSA. Framed by Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Open Innovation (OI) thinking, the project employed a hybrid methodology drawing upon the Rapid Situation Analysis (RSA) and the Peer-to-Peer co-constructed and participatory research techniques involving 45 tourism bachelors students registered in Higher Education Institutions (HEI) in Kenya, Ghana, and South Africa and critical knowledge exchanges between partners from Kenya, Ghana, and the UK. While the research identified key challenges and opportunities associated with entrepreneurship in tourism in Kenya, Ghana, and South Africa, a co-created youth-centred ecosystem was the main outcome of the active engagement of tourism, innovation, and entrepreneurship researchers and industry players, offering knowledge exchange, mentorship, and coaching. The project led to new critical understandings of the complexity of operating in a challenging SSA tourism business environment and an ad hoc review of the tourism curricula delivered at the 3 SSA HEIs involved in the project. A training and impact evaluation toolkit and establishing digitally interconnected Sustainable Tourism Innovation Hubs and a more comprehensive industry network are proposed as possible ways forward.