

Ethnic and Indigenous Business Studies

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Ethnicity and Entrepreneurship in Namibia

Past, Present, and Future



Springer

Ethnic and Indigenous Business Studies

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In mainstream society, an automobile is understood to be a personally owned asset. In parts of New Caledonia, a private vehicle has a cultural liability in that it is socially incorrect to use a car solely for personal benefit. This is somewhat like the situation in Lesotho where a privately-owned cow cannot be sold nor killed by its owner. Among Indigenous Basuto people, the proprietor of cattle has the obligation to allow others to use cows for transport or other uses.

Cultural assumptions, whether explicit or implicit, are often ignored or misunderstood, yet central to understanding business. The purpose of this series is to bring light to business as conducted by ethnic minorities and indigenous peoples, with an emphasis on understanding the cultural behaviors that shape specific economic structures. This is an interdisciplinary book series welcoming all approaches to research on ethnic and indigenous business origins, practices, history, evolution, demographics, and challenges. Academic monographs, edited volumes, and case studies are welcome. Ultimately, the series aims to provide a nuanced perspective of mainstream business thought, and usher in a spirit of inclusion to a mature understanding of business philosophies.

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Editors

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*May you all for the power of faith; rise
above your challenges*

*This book is dedicated to Naomi Dana and
Naledi Hindi (Granddaughter of Levi and
Elisabeth April) and the International
University of Management (IUM) Namibia
MBA Class of 2026.*

Foreword

Namibia (formerly known as Southwest Africa), located in the Southwestern corner of Africa, is a country like no other. It is a vibrant nation deeply rooted in culture and tradition. As the founder of the premier private university in Namibia, International University of Management, it is with a great sense of pride and responsibility that I present this book on ethnicity and entrepreneurship in Namibia. I strongly believe that the advancement of knowledge, fostering creativity and innovation, is very critical for academic scholarship, and it also shapes the national discourse now, and for generations unborn.

The diverse ethnic groups of Namibia give the nation its strength, resilience and uniqueness. However, the complexity which is brought about by its dynamics has an impact on the way power is distributed (especially amongst indigenous communities), opportunities are afforded to each citizen and how enterprises operate. This book offers a timely and relevant exploration of the role indigenous entrepreneurs can play in the mainstream economy, and how they can act as drivers of social transformation not only within their communities but also as an inspiration for our country and the global village.

Through this book the authors explored specifically five (5) ethnic groups in Namibia, namely Aawambo (Ovambadja), San, Nama/Damara, Basters and the Kavango people. These ethnic groups were deliberately chosen, given the distinctive characteristics they have to offer in terms of entrepreneurship. It was crucial for the authors to discuss the historical context, social capital (impact) and the disparities of these ethnic groups which occur in terms of structure across different ethnic groups in Namibia. In doing so, the authors enable the reader to better understand the realities of ethnic groups in Namibia being confronted with daily challenges/realities, but necessity gives them dignity and hope for a better tomorrow.

Additionally, this book will enable students, scholars, government officials and scholars not only to do an analysis at face value but also to bring about the desired change. Bringing indigenous literature into Namibia's national debate will indeed encourage the advancement of entrepreneurial ecosystems which look at equitability and inclusiveness. Regardless of ethnicity, talent and ambition should be celebrated for the nation to progress.

IUM's theme this year (2026) is "*Fostering purpose driven service for national development and international engagement*"—we believe that knowledge should transcend both across national and international borders—in ensuring that chances reach all segments of society. This book is aligned with IUM's theme for 2026. I hope that this book will foster more dialogue and practical interventions and educate and support more ethnic entrepreneurs in Namibia.

I commend the authors for their contributions to knowledge creation and hope that the readers will support these thought-provoking ideas with constructive criticism. Building the Namibian economy is truly a team effort and the role of the indigenous communities can never be underestimated.

International University of Management
Windhoek, Namibia

David Richard Namwandi

Praise for Ethnicity and Entrepreneurship in Namibia

As a young Namibian—I strongly support this book on ethnicity and Entrepreneurship because, culture depicts ones origin. Entrepreneurship means, using your hands to make something that creates tangible and/or non-tangible value. Culture plays a significant role in sustainable entrepreneurship. The respect for elders and a people, human life, as well as the appreciation of nature, the environment and space the Namibian soil provides freely is greatly emphasized in Ethnicity.

A minuscule seemingly trivial thing like culturally depicted morals or ways of doing things can impact entrepreneurial activities prudently, with a stronghold on contingency.

Entrepreneurship that makes a lasting impact and generates lasting revenues. For instance, "you cannot give an elder something with your left hand", "you don't eat meat before you finish your starch"... giving with the accurate hand if implemented in your business activities, shows a level of seriousness and respect for your audience/customers. Not eating meat before finishing your starch, this shows strategic discipline, whatever you make from your entrepreneurial exploits will be properly utilized and tactically devoured (ate in the correct way).

Nothing goes to waste in Ethnical approach as culture is rooted in making sure the entire village or community gets at least a slice of what's available. Ethnicity and Entrepreneurship, a respect and appreciation for sustainable impact and income. You treasure who and what you respect always.

—Gerson Fudheni Fellip Asheelo, *MBA Finance (Student) (IUM),
Bachelors of Commerce in Accounting and Finance (Honors) Triumphant
College (2025)*

Preface

On the coast of Africa lies the smile of Africa, the Republic of Namibia (formerly known as Southwest Africa in English and Süd West Africa in German), a developing country with its youthful population. According to April (2025), Africa's biggest asset is its people and many of them have the potential to become entrepreneurs who are self-sufficient. The drive and the determination of the African communities are unmatched when it comes to self-reliance and self-determination.

With the abundant natural resources, such as copper, diamonds and gold to name a few, the continent has a lot of potential to enable most people to be self-reliant. As a catalyst for growth, entrepreneurship can be seen as a driver to economic growth and development as there is a huge potential for innovation, creativity, employment creation and exports (Dana, 2007). Looking back into the history of Africa, we are able to notice that the Century Atlas map of the world (Exhibit 1) clearly shows that Africa was divided into British, French, German, Italian, Portuguese and Spanish portions, as well as the “Kongo Free State” which at some time was personally owned by Belgian King Leopold II (Smith, 1897).

European powers were enacted by borders and were concerned neither with trading patterns which were traditional nor with cultural considerations which were ethnic; however, through all its tribulations one thing is certain—the vibrant cultures of the continent's people cannot be ignored. Looking at the map of Süd West Africa in Exhibit 2 the various regions are divided into Bantustans very similar to the Century Atlas, as can be seen in (Exhibit 1). These regions are divided according to the various tribes (clans), such as Damaraland, Ovamboland and Namaland. This map also depicts borders which are similar and today these borders are according to regions, and each tribe can be traced within each region, showcasing their unique yet vibrant culture, which is the cornerstone of their entrepreneurial drive and spirit. It is noteworthy to mention that there are certain borders amongst the clans themselves, which are not only physical but created by cultural differences and the belief systems under which each of these tribes behaves.

The European and South African powers also instilled apartheid that separated and downgraded the human worth, free movement and class amongst the different races.

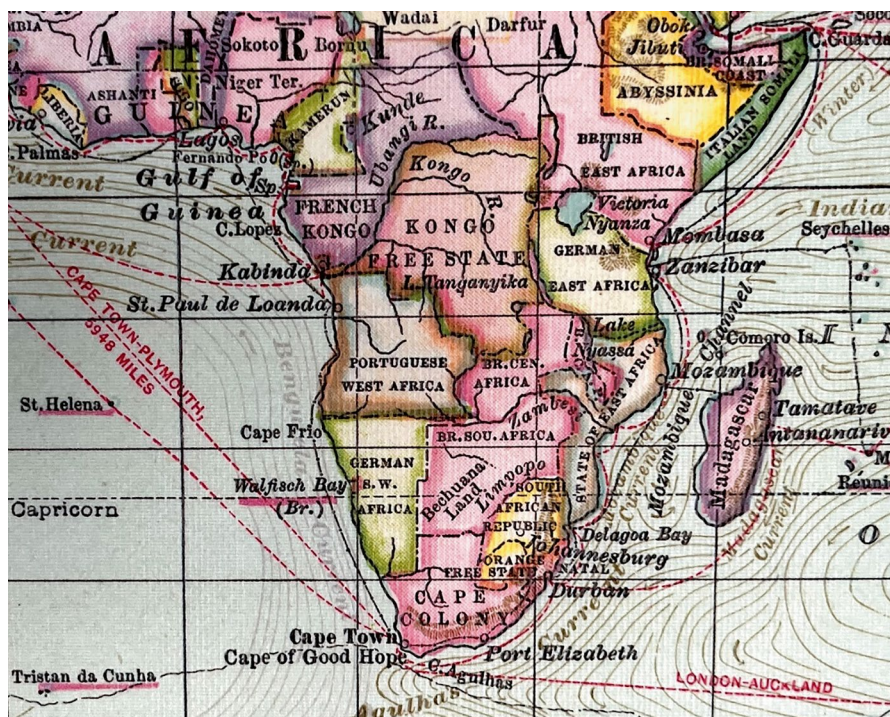


Exhibit 1 The Century Atlas (Photograph by: © Leo-Paul Dana)

It was in 1998 when I first moved to the capital city of Namibia (Windhoek), to pursue my university education. I made this journey by train (Exhibit 3). This adventure of the train describes the reliable form of transport, which was used in the past, which is almost non-existent today. Moving goods from one point to another is an essential form of entrepreneurial activity. Trains were also a reliable means of transport for most ethnic groups in Namibia.

As a railroad customer, the compartments of the train were divided into classes (1st, 2nd and 3rd class). The favourite delicacy on the train was fish and chips (Exhibit 4). I can recall this was an extremely long journey for more than eleven (11) hours for only 260 kilometres. The train at that time was mostly operated by men; a lot has changed since Namibian independence on 21st March 1990. Nowadays, women are also afforded the opportunity to be the conductors of the train, as part of the women empowerment initiatives—which have been taking place in the country lately. Sadly, some of these initiatives have failed dismally, as some citizens are of the opinion that women in leadership are not on a par with male leadership. The destination of this journey is the Bahnhof station in Windhoek (Exhibit 5), although the arrival was late seeing clock in Exhibit 6.



Exhibit 2 Map of Southwest Africa (Photograph by: © Michael Mulondo)



Exhibit 3 The Train locomotive (Photograph by: © Michael Mulondo)

Exhibit 4 Fish and chips delicacy (Photograph by: © Michael Mulondo)





Exhibit 5 Main train station (Photograph by: © Michael Mulondo)

Departure				Arrival			
To	Days	Platform	Times	From	Days	Platform	Times
Tsumeb	Mon. Wed.	1		Tsumeb	Tues. Thur.	1	
Reetmanshoop	Mon. Wed. Thur. Fri. Sat.	1		Reetmanshoop	Mon. Tues. Wed. Thur. Fri. Sat.	1	
Walvis Bay	Mon. Tues. Wed. Thur. Fri. Sat.	1		Walvis Bay	Mon. Tues. Wed. Thur. Fri. Sat.	1	
Gobabis	Tues. Thur. Sat.	1		Gobabis	Tues. Thur. Sat.	1	

Exhibit 6 Clock for arrivals and departures at main train station (Photograph by: © Michael Mulondo)

All over Namibia various ethnic groups engage in small and medium enterprises or vendor trading, which is in most instances informal. The script below portrays the experiences of one of the authors of this manuscript (J. Husselman, personal communication, 20 December 2025).

The Baster and Aawambo people and some other ethnic groups have several small businesses, most of them are one man business operations, such as roosterbrood, barber shops, and these self-employed owners call themselves entrepreneurs. This made me go back to the initial definition of “entrepreneurship” in the 12th century from the French verb “entreprendre” which means to take your hands and do something.

I recall some even have their own business cards (hand crafted), while others have no addresses where they operate their businesses from. Various children who call themselves Angolan kids roam around the streets, while a Nama boy try to sell his handcrafted key-holders to tourist. Indigenous women from the Ovahimba sells various traditional items near the famous Hilton hotel (its as if the area illustrates where modernity meets culture). Aawambo housewives sell chips, snacks and grandpa powders (pain killers) along the main street of independence avenue in Windhoek. Communities are usually transported, to and from various neighbourhoods in public buses. On the municipality buses somebody hop on to the bus as a priest who claims to heal those who are sick. Some community members can be seen praying on these buses. Some passengers responded “Hallelujah”. As you get off the bus the lady sells heads of goats – which is a delicacy often known as smiley.

I noticed in Windhoek that the Kristuskirche (Exhibit 7) overarched the city with German colonial architecture and just behind this historical church is the famous Tintenpalast (today known as the Parliament of the Republic of Namibia—Exhibit 8). This church is known as the Evangelical Lutheran Church and was brought about



Exhibit 7 Kristuskirche: (Photograph by: © Michael Mulondo)