Entrepreneurship development has become recognized as a functional means of tackling South Africa’s socioeconomic challenges of slow growth rate, rapidly increasing unemployment, and racially inequitable distribution of income. However, current policies and programs ignore the potential input of the female gender. Yet, females are proven to be capable of using their peculiar gender dispositions effectively as small and micro entrepreneurs. The article examines the socioeconomic outcomes of South Africa’s systemic crisis, gender-specific influences on entrepreneurial supply and alternative women-in-entrepreneurship programs that could be implemented with sensitivity to that country’s sociocultural diversity.

ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN THE DEVELOPMENT CONTEXT

There are perhaps as many definitions of entrepreneurship as there are entrepreneurs. For the purpose of this article, however, we adopt the functional view of entrepreneurship as a type of activity or practice with implications for generating jobs, fostering innovation and increasing productivity by means of which the creation of incomes and wealth is enhanced.

The capacity for innovation is manifested in the ability to shift resources from an area of lower productivity into one of higher productivity and yield. Regarding the supply of entrepreneurs who are the actors behind this activity, we take the view that they do not belong to any narrow group in society. They are potentially everywhere. They could be young or old, black or white, professionals or unskilled workers, males
or females, and may be found in the rural or metropolitan areas. Any group difference, therefore, is attributable largely to the extent to which they are affected by the institutional setting, the state of the economy, and their differential access to such entrepreneurial resources as business education and training, information and capital.

Finally, entrepreneurial initiative and innovation may occur not only in private commercial ventures, but also in public, social or community ventures.

**THE ENTREPRENEURIAL PROBLEM IN THE GENDER CONTEXT**

Women in South Africa today constitute another population group largely dislocated from the mainstream of the national economy, which in recent years has become crisis-infested. This situation has attracted an overwhelming public appeal for the promotion of the entrepreneurship climate and culture. However, government response so far has failed to meet the mounting challenge to match the people's expectation for involvement. The crusade for an entrepreneurial revolution in South Africa has not yet taken off!

In this article, it is argued that the present state of women in the country provides a mixture of paradoxes and opportunities which could be availed as a basis for a grand take-off into a sustainable entrepreneurial society.

The following propositions provide the framework for analysis:

1. Entrepreneurs frequently emerge from a process of negative displacement. Therefore, entrepreneurial pushes, particularly in women among population groups facing the prospects of socio-economic transformation, are in abundance.

2. The relevance of the push factors (as much as pull factors) is a function of the type of enterprise. Small and micro enterprises offer the most adaptable alternative choices for women.

3. As women decide to take a leap into the entrepreneurial role after calculating both real and perceived risks and rewards, these women, who for generations were dependent on traditional sources of income are apt to have low perception and hope in their environments.

4. Concerted public and private investment in entrepreneurial support for women are necessary to promote both their psychology