From Entrepreneurship Scholarship to Development Practice:

The Impact of WBS Research into Entrepreneurship on the Development and Career of Dr Radomalala Ratsimanetrimanana

Abstract

This single-case impact study examines how Professor Boris Urban's entrepreneurship research and research-led teaching at Wits Business School (WBS) supported Dr Radomalala Ratsimanetrimanana's development as a scholar-practitioner. The strongest evidence is not the acquisition of credentials alone, but a change in the level and character of his work: from project and venture execution to the design of multi-actor ecosystems, opportunity and resource development, evidence-informed programme innovation, knowledge transfer and postgraduate teaching. He now applies these capabilities in a United Nations role spanning Madagascar, Comoros, Mauritius and Seychelles. Organisational results cannot be attributed to one professional; however, triangulated documentary evidence and leadership testimony support the conclusion that the Master of Management in Entrepreneurship and New Venture Creation (MMENVC) – PhD in Management pathway materially strengthened the mindset, analytical tools and professional legitimacy through which he contributes to those results.

1. Approach and evidence base

The paper adopts a qualitative single-case design informed by contribution analysis. It triangulates the WBS entrepreneurship programme and research theme; Professor Boris Urban's research profile on Google Scholar and ORCID; Dr Ratsimanetrimanana's academic records, pre- and post-programme CVs, principal publication and job description; United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) annual reporting for the Southwestern Indian Ocean subregion; and senior leadership testimony relating to his current role as a UN official. The design identifies plausible mechanisms and observable changes without attributing the career outcomes solely to a single intervention.

2. Research translated into education

Professor Boris Urban, the inaugural Chair in Entrepreneurship at the WBS, University of the Witwatersrand, is a prolific NRF-rated researcher and author of over 250 journal articles, case studies and book chapters in the field. His research agenda aims to deepen understanding of entrepreneurial behaviour in emerging market contexts at individual, organisational and societal levels. Under his disciplinary leadership, the WBS Entrepreneurship Research Theme positions entrepreneurship as a multidisciplinary field that brings together innovation, strategy, finance, digital business, philanthropy and sustainable development.

Institutionalised at WBS in 2010, the MMENVC is a research-focused programme that develops an entrepreneurial mindset, venture creation capability and a pathway to doctoral inquiry. Pioneering research that relies on theoretical, evidence-based models and tractable multidimensional measures deepens understanding of the dynamic nature of entrepreneurship and its resultant impact. The MMENVC is broad in scope and reflects the shift in entrepreneurship education away from focusing only on start-ups towards highlighting the

range of careers associated with economic and social outcomes. The defining proposition of the MMENVC is translational: rigorous research should address practitioner problems and generate economic and societal value (Cosa and Urban, 2025).

Figure 1 synthesises this research–teaching–impact pathway in Dr Ratsimanetrimanana's case, showing how research-led formation contributed to capabilities he subsequently applied in practice to generate organisational and societal contributions.

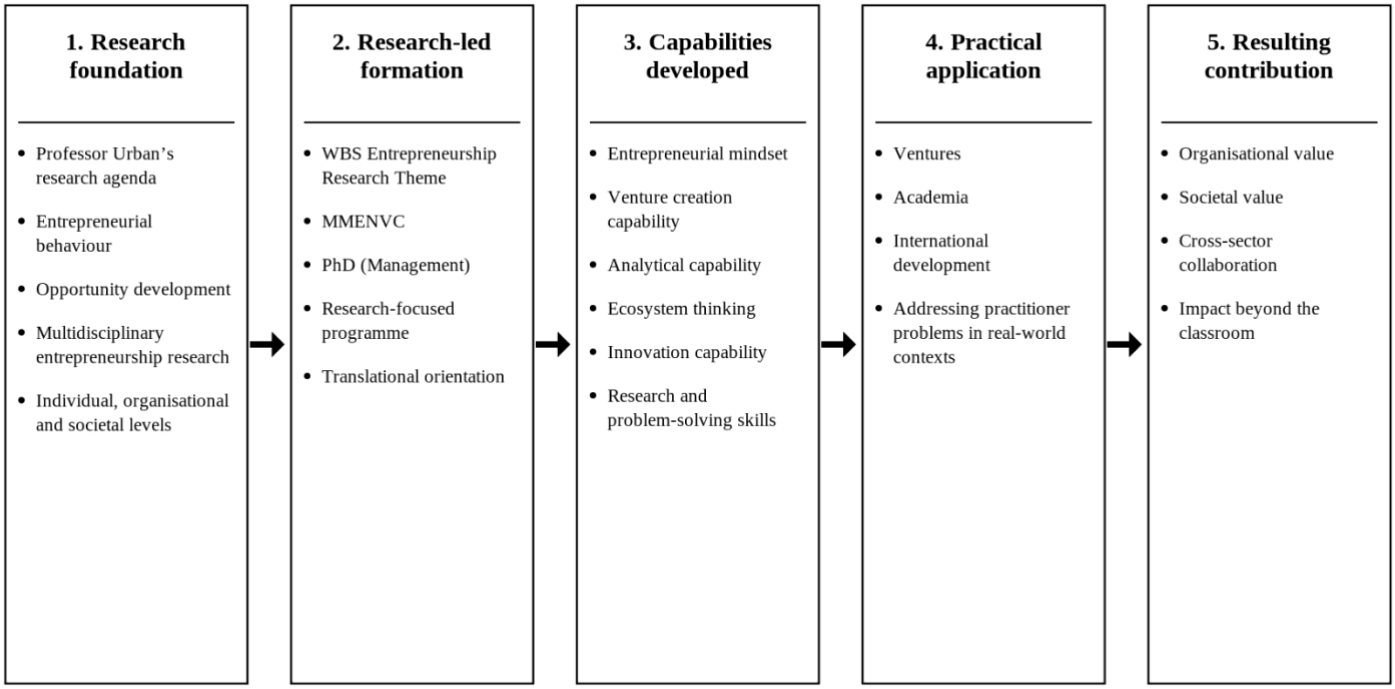


Figure 1: Research–teaching–impact pathway in the case of Dr Ratsimanetrimanana

Several complementary strands of entrepreneurship scholarship underpin this architecture. Scientifically grounded scholarship explains the complex relationships within the entrepreneurial ecosystem and identifies the heterogeneity and variation inherent in entrepreneurship and the impacts of entrepreneurial actions (Audretsch et al., 2024; Wurth et al., 2022). Entrepreneurship studies can achieve greater practical relevance without sacrificing academic rigour by engaging with 'contemporary theorisations of practice'. Such translational entrepreneurship research moves academic inquiry towards practitioner engagement through framing, experimentation and interaction with practice (Muñoz and Dimov, 2023). Validated learning further shows how practitioners test hypotheses through external engagement and refine them iteratively in practice. Scholars can strengthen their academic studies by drawing on novel insights from entrepreneurial practitioners (Shepherd and Gruber, 2021). Such an impact-oriented approach seeks to ensure that entrepreneurial ventures not only generate profit but also drive positive societal change, with a focus on the Sustainable Development Goals (Vogel et al., 2025).

From student to scholar-practitioner

Before the MMENVC, Ratsimanetrimanana's profile combined landscape education, design achievement, youth leadership and emerging management experience. His Wits trajectory progressed from a Postgraduate Diploma in Management, to the MMENVC and then to a PhD in Management in Entrepreneurship and New Venture Creation. After completing the

programme, his work expanded to include postgraduate teaching and assessment, peer-reviewed publication, applied research in Madagascar, programme and partnership leadership, resource mobilisation, business model innovation and multi-country institutional work.

Supervised by Urban, his doctoral research examined how human capital knowledge relates to performance through perceived behavioural control and transaction costs among Malagasy business owners, with education level as a critical boundary condition. The research also yielded a peer-reviewed journal article. The study found that transaction costs translated human capital knowledge into stronger performance only among entrepreneurs with tertiary qualifications. Among entrepreneurs without formal qualifications, perceived behavioural control moderated the relationship between human capital knowledge and transaction costs. The study has two practical implications: expanding equitable access to advanced education and providing targeted, beneficiary-centred business training for entrepreneurs with limited formal schooling.

Taken together, these academic and professional developments suggest that the principal capability gained was not a set of discrete entrepreneurship concepts, but a research-informed way of thinking that applies across scholarly, organisational and development contexts. This strengthened his capacity to diagnose context, construct and test explanations, identify opportunities within institutional constraints, mobilise resources, design value propositions, learn from evidence and translate findings into implementable recommendations.

3. **Application across the professional journey**

Ratsimanetrimanana's career shows how he progressively applied his entrepreneurial knowledge and experience. At Mustardtree Landscapes (2015–2020), he helped establish networks, mobilise resources for geographic expansion, digitalise service delivery and create monitoring systems. At IntelliSkills Consulting (2020–2021), he redirected services towards sustainable development priorities, integrated Design Thinking into capacity development and supported funding for reproductive health supply chain training across 20 African countries. At the Centre Humanitaire des Métiers de la Pharmacie (2021–2025), his responsibilities expanded to include end-to-end project management, donor-aligned design, resource mobilisation, partner development, innovation, knowledge transfer and international positioning. In parallel, as a PhD merit award recipient and guest lecturer at WBS, he converted his learning into teaching, assessment and research support.

Figure 2 illustrates how this cumulative transfer may be understood. The 4D framework links Ratsimanetrimanana's initial *Desire* to *"do well by doing good"* to the *Determination* to undertake and complete the MMENVC and PhD. These programmes then provided *Direction* through academic formation and capability development, while *Discipline* reflects the sustained application of that learning across the professional roles described above. The framework does not provide independent causal evidence, but it is consistent with the documented continuity between his academic choices, capability development and professional practice.



Figure 2: 4D interpretive framework linking aspiration, academic commitment and professional practice

Capabilities carried into practice

Across the evidence base, five capability clusters distinguish his post-programme profile from his pre-MMENVC baseline (**Table 1**):

Table 1: Capability clusters developed through the MMENVC and PhD pathway

Capability cluster	Evidence of capability development and application
Creating and disseminating higher-level entrepreneurial knowledge	Advanced research design, empirical analysis of Malagasy entrepreneurs, creation of higher-level entrepreneurial knowledge and peer-reviewed dissemination.
Opportunity and ecosystem analysis	Ability to read institutional contexts, identify resource gaps and assemble actors around a credible value proposition.
Innovation and model design	Use of Design Thinking, digitalisation and iterative programme development to align solutions with user and stakeholder needs.
Resource orchestration	Progression from venture financing and donor proposals to co-financing, blended-finance concepts and multi-country pipelines.
Knowledge translation and leadership	Bilingual reporting, postgraduate teaching, assessment, knowledge products and the transfer of learning across teams and countries.

4. Research-informed practice at UNFPA

Since February 2025, Ratsimanetrimanana has served as UNFPA Programme Specialist for Partnerships and Resource Mobilisation in Madagascar, with technical support responsibilities for Comoros, Mauritius and Seychelles. The formal role requires strategic partnership building with governments, civil society, the private sector, philanthropic organisations, academia and development financing institutions. It also includes opportunity and donor mapping, co-financing and blended finance development, proposal coordination, innovation and knowledge management, and support to United Nations country cooperation mechanisms. **Table 2** translates selected entrepreneurship principles from WBS teaching and research into their application within Ratsimanetrimanana's UNFPA role and identifies their observable expressions in practice.

Table 2: Application of WBS entrepreneurship principles in Dr Ratsimanetrimanana's UNFPA role

WBS principle	Application in the UNFPA role	Observable expression
Ecosystem thinking	Convening actors across sectors and countries around shared development outcomes	Partnership mapping; non-traditional alliances; national, regional and global networks
Opportunity development	Developing evidence-informed and fundable initiatives by connecting unmet needs with available resources and stakeholder priorities	Donor positioning, proposal pipelines, co-financing arrangements and innovative finance concepts
Translational and validated learning	Iterating programme models through evidence, beneficiary needs and stakeholder feedback	Design Thinking, adaptive concept development, lessons learned and knowledge products
Entrepreneurial leadership	Anticipating constraints, maintaining flexibility and mobilising others to implement change	Strategic advocacy, programme innovation and cross-country coordination

Leadership testimony

"Rado joined UNFPA in 2025, at a pivotal moment when the development financing landscape, particularly the United Nations, faced increasing constraints and competition. His extensive background in business, entrepreneurship and innovation has equipped him with a unique perspective that enhances our strategic approach."

Josiane Yaguibou, UNFPA Representative for Madagascar and Country Director for Comoros, Mauritius and Seychelles (2023–2026)

Her full testimony identifies four domains of contribution: innovative programme design; non-traditional strategic partnerships; innovative resource mobilisation; and empowerment through innovation. It locates Ratsimanetrimanana's academically developed capabilities within

observable organisational practice, linking his entrepreneurial formation to a more agile approach to financing and programme development, including participatory innovation with UNFPA's priority populations, particularly women and young people.

5. Outcomes and wider impact

The documentary record shows that the partnership and resource mobilisation function contributed to institutional and portfolio-level outcomes across the four countries. In Madagascar, the office exceeded its annual mobilisation target despite a deteriorating financing environment, renewed established funding relationships, strengthened engagement with multilateral institutions and opened new financing opportunities, including support for drone-enabled last-mile delivery. In Comoros, an earmarked bilateral grant entered implementation, while additional proposals advanced across climate resilience, inclusive health services and data for development. In Mauritius and Seychelles, a stronger country presence enabled closer alignment with national priorities and deeper engagement with local institutions and the private sector. In Mauritius, this included national reproductive health research and stronger private sector action on workplace gender-based violence (GBV). In Seychelles, youth-focused initiatives engaged parents, strengthened frontline capacity and promoted more responsible reporting on GBV.

Table 3 summarises selected programme and institutional results recorded across the four countries in 2025, illustrating the wider reach of the partnership and resource mobilisation function.

Table 3: Selected 2025 results across Madagascar, Comoros, Mauritius and Seychelles

Madagascar | 2025 ● 50 000+ km covered through 424 drone flights, supplying 37 remote health centres. ● 47 437 adolescents and young people reached with life, health and relationship education. ● 1 063 young people strengthened in leadership, advocacy and peacebuilding, including 300 in digital and entrepreneurial skills. ● 13 531 GBV survivors received integrated support.	**Comoros | 2025** ● 21 767 adolescents and young people accessed integrated youth-friendly services. ● 3 574 women received prenatal consultations through mobile clinics. ● 2 298 ultrasounds were performed. ● 85% of the 2027 census budget was mobilised.
Mauritius | 2025 ● A national contraceptive prevalence survey and complementary research on women aged over 35 were launched. ● 40 private-sector companies developed action plans to address workplace GBV risks. ● 30 educators were trained to support out-of-school young people.	**Seychelles | 2025** ● The Youth Education for Success campaign engaged 115 parents. ● 15 nurses and midwives were trained to deliver age-appropriate health education in schools. ● 17 journalists were trained in ethical reporting on GBV.

These financing and partnership outcomes help sustain programmes with observable reach across four country contexts. The wider impact is therefore systemic and extends beyond the boundaries of a single job description. The applied entrepreneurial approach strengthens a development organisation's ability to identify opportunities, build coalitions, mobilise and deploy resources, adapt programme models and transfer knowledge across countries. It also reconnects practice to academia through teaching and publications grounded in African entrepreneurial realities.

Evidence of change at four levels

Table 4 synthesises the WBS programmes' contribution pathway in Ratsimanetrimanana's development, showing how he applied the learning and research undertaken through the MMENVC and PhD across four interconnected levels: individual development, organisational capability, interorganisational collaboration and programme and societal outcomes.

Table 4: WBS programmes' contribution pathway in Dr Ratsimanetrimanana's development across four levels of change

Level	Observed change
Individual	A shift from emerging management practice to scholar-practitioner identity, doctoral-level inquiry, publication and teaching.
Organisational	Greater capacity for evidence-informed programme design, innovation, donor positioning, resource mobilisation and knowledge management.
Inter-organisational	Expanded collaboration across government, business, philanthropy, academia, development agencies and United Nations mechanisms.
Programme and societal	Financing and coalitions that support health, protection, data and youth programmes with reach across four national contexts.

Contribution, not sole attribution

The reported funding and programme results are collective UNFPA and partner achievements. The available evidence does not isolate Ratsimanetrimanana's individual effect statistically, nor compare his trajectory with a matched non-participant. The defensible conclusion is one of material contribution: academic formation supplied capabilities and legitimacy that he visibly deploys in his roles, plausibly strengthening organisational strategy and programme reach.

6. Conclusion

This case demonstrates a complete research-impact chain. A research-led programme translates Professor Urban's entrepreneurship scholarship into practice; the programme develops a graduate's capacity to investigate context, recognise and shape opportunities, work across institutional boundaries and convert evidence into action. The graduate applies these capabilities in ventures, academic teaching and international development. The resulting contribution is visible in organisational innovation, partnership ecosystems, financing pipelines and programmes affecting women and young people across four countries.

The MMENVC and PhD did not replace prior talent, experience or motivation. They provided direction, method and scholarly discipline, turning an established commitment to *"doing well by doing good"* into a more systematic capacity to create and transmit knowledge and to mobilise it for public value. On the available evidence, this is a compelling example of WBS research and teaching achieving impact through the career of a scholar-practitioner.

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