



**Ilmiy amaliy
jurnal
№ 4 (6)
2026**

**YANGI
O'ZBEKISTON
IQTISODIYOTI**

“YANGI O‘ZBEKISTON IQTISODIYOTI” *jurnali* 4-son 2026 yil

**O‘ZBEKISTON RESPUBLIKASI
OLIY TA’LIM, FAN VA INNOVATSIYALAR VAZIRLIGI**

**MIRZO ULUG‘BEK NOMIDAGI
O‘ZBEKISTON MILLIY UNIVERSITETI**

YANGI O‘ZBEKISTON IQTISODIYOTI

4

ISBN 978-9943-5256-3-4

Toshkent – 2026

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Foydalanilgan adabiyotlar ro‘yxati:

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UDK 334.7

**BRIDGING THE INNOVATION GAP: DEVELOPMENT-FOCUSED
ENTREPRENEURSHIP SUPPORT AND INTERNATIONAL INTERMEDIARIES**

**INNOVATSIYALARDAGI TAFOVUTNI BARTARAF ETISH: RIVOJLANISHGA
YO‘NALTIRILGAN TADBIRKORLIKNI QO‘LLAB-QUVVATLASH VA XALQARO
VOSITACHILAR**

**ПРЕОДОЛЕНИЕ ИННОВАЦИОННОГО РАЗРЫВА: ПОДДЕРЖКА
ПРЕДПРИНИМАТЕЛЬСТВА, ОРИЕНТИРОВАННАЯ НА РАЗВИТИЕ И
МЕЖДУНАРОДНЫЕ ПОСРЕДНИКИ.**

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Abstract

The present study examines the phenomenon of development-focused entrepreneurship support (DFES) a distinct and emerging set of organizational practices oriented toward facilitating the founding and scaling of innovative startups in developing economies, with particular emphasis on generating positive developmental impact alongside commercial viability. The paper further situates DFES within the broader entrepreneurial turn in international development a paradigmatic shift away from traditional top-down aid models toward more flexible, bottom-up, and locally responsive strategies. The analysis demonstrates that iDFESOs occupy a distinctive position within global aid chains, integrating sustainable development and social impact agendas into entrepreneurial support processes. The findings contribute to the growing literature on social entrepreneurship, development-oriented innovation, and the institutionalization of ES in emerging economies, while offering practical implications for policymakers, development agencies, and support organizations seeking to foster impactful entrepreneurship in resource-constrained environments.

Keywords: development-focused entrepreneurship support (DFES), international dfes organizations (iDFESOs), social impact entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial ecosystems, developing economies, aid chains, bottom-up development, sustainable development goals (SDGs), incubators and accelerators, transnational support infrastructures.

Ushbu tadqiqot rivojlanishga yo‘naltirilgan tadbirkorlikni qo‘llab-quvvatlash (development-focused entrepreneurship support, DFES) fenomenini tahlil qiladi. Mazkur tushuncha rivojlanayotgan iqtisodiyotlarda innovatsion startaplarni tashkil etish va ularni kengaytirishga ko‘maklashishga qaratilgan, shakllanib borayotgan o‘ziga xos tashkiliy amaliyotlar majmuasini anglatadi. Bunda tijorat barqarorligi bilan bir qatorda ijobiy ijtimoiy-iqtisodiy ta’sirni ta’minlashga alohida e’tibor qaratiladi.

Shuningdek, maqolada DFES xalqaro rivojlanish sohasidagi kengroq “tadbirkorlik burilishi” doirasida ko‘rib chiqiladi, ya’ni an’anaviy yuqoridan pastga yo‘naltirilgan yordam modellaridan ko‘ra moslashuvchan, pastdan yuqoriga va mahalliy ehtiyojlarga moslashgan strategiyalarga o‘tish jarayoni tahlil qilinadi. Tahlil natijalari shuni ko‘rsatadiki, DFES bo‘yicha xalqaro tashkilotlar (iDFESOs) global yordam zanjirlarida alohida o‘rin egallab, barqaror rivojlanish va ijtimoiy ta’sir kun tartibini tadbirkorlikni qo‘llab-quvvatlash jarayonlariga integratsiya qiladi. Olingan natijalar ijtimoiy tadbirkorlik, rivojlanishga yo‘naltirilgan innovatsiyalar hamda rivojlanayotgan iqtisodiyotlarda tadbirkorlikni qo‘llab-quvvatlashning institutsionallashuvi bo‘yicha ilmiy adabiyotlarni boyitadi, shuningdek, resurslari cheklangan muhitlarda yuqori ijtimoiy ta’sirga ega tadbirkorlikni rivojlantirishga intilayotgan siyosatchilar, rivojlanish agentliklari va qo‘llab-quvvatlovchi tashkilotlar uchun amaliy tavsiyalar beradi.

Kalit so‘zlar: rivojlanishga yo‘naltirilgan tadbirkorlikni qo‘llab-quvvatlash (DFES); DFES bo‘yicha xalqaro tashkilotlar (iDFESOs); ijtimoiy ta’sirga yo‘naltirilgan tadbirkorlik; tadbirkorlik ekotizimlari; rivojlanayotgan iqtisodiyotlar; yordam zanjirlari; pastdan yuqoriga rivojlanish; barqaror rivojlanish maqsadlari (BRM); inkubatorlar va akseleratorlar; transmilliy qo‘llab-quvvatlash infratuzilmalari.

В настоящем исследовании рассматривается феномен поддержки предпринимательства, ориентированной на развитие (development-focused entrepreneurship support, DFES) — специфического и формирующегося комплекса организационных практик, направленных на содействие созданию и масштабированию инновационных стартапов в развивающихся экономиках, с особым акцентом на достижении позитивного социально-экономического эффекта наряду с коммерческой устойчивостью. В работе также определяется место DFES в более широком контексте «предпринимательского поворота» в международном развитии — парадигмального сдвига от традиционных нисходящих моделей помощи к более гибким, восходящим и локально ориентированным стратегиям. Проведённый анализ показывает, что международные организации поддержки DFES (iDFESOs) занимают особое положение в глобальных цепочках оказания помощи, интегрируя повестки устойчивого развития и социального воздействия в процессы поддержки предпринимательства. Полученные результаты вносят вклад в развивающуюся научную литературу по социальному предпринимательству, инновациям, ориентированным на развитие, а также институционализации предпринимательской поддержки в странах с формирующейся экономикой, одновременно предлагая практические рекомендации для политиков, агентств развития и организаций поддержки, стремящихся стимулировать предпринимательство с высоким социальным эффектом в условиях ограниченных ресурсов.

Ключевые слова: поддержка предпринимательства, ориентированная на развитие (DFES); международные организации DFES (iDFESOs); социально-ориентированное предпринимательство; предпринимательские экосистемы; развивающиеся экономики; цепочки оказания помощи; восходящее развитие; цели устойчивого развития (ЦУР); бизнес-инкубаторы и акселераторы; транснациональные инфраструктуры поддержки.

Fostering entrepreneurial innovation and promoting the success of innovative startups have become subjects of considerable scholarly interest. In recent decades, a new generation of entrepreneurship support (ES) entities has emerged, encompassing university-based centers, business angels, accelerators, incubators, and venture capital funds. These organizations provide support to innovative startups through financing, training, network development, and the provision of physical space. Given the growing role of entrepreneurship in advancing innovation, both scholars and practitioners converge on the view that ES organizations serve as pivotal intermediaries in the transformation of nascent ideas into widely adopted solutions.

Research in the field of ES has been predominantly concentrated on developed economies, where highly skilled entrepreneurs develop new technologies, products, and services, and obtain resources from ES organizations within the local ecosystems in which they operate. However, entrepreneurs also drive innovation across a variety of other domains, including such complex sectors as healthcare, education, and energy in developing economies. Innovations in these sectors particularly in developing countries hold significant potential for generating local economic, social, and environmental value in alignment with sustainable development goals [1]. For instance, research demonstrates that entrepreneurial efforts to develop and disseminate energy-efficient cookstoves as replacements for open-fire combustion have contributed to reductions in deforestation and to more efficient patterns of energy consumption.

Nevertheless, developing countries are frequently characterized by severe resource and institutional constraints, including inadequate financing, low levels of technological development, and the absence of effective policy support. These conditions generate substantial barriers for entrepreneurs seeking to access the critical resources necessary to transform ideas into viable business models [2]. A paradox thus emerges: while the demand for innovation is particularly acute in regions facing pressing social and environmental challenges, these same regions are often poorly equipped to effectively support those capable of addressing such challenges. In the present study, we argue that such support organizations constitute key drivers of a new model of support, which we term *development-focused entrepreneurship support* (DFES), and which we examine in detail throughout this article. We define DFES as a set of support practices oriented toward facilitating the creation process and enhancing the quality of innovative startups, with particular emphasis on their capacity to generate positive developmental impact while maintaining commercial viability. Prior research on DFES has largely examined this phenomenon at the local level for instance, through the work of locally embedded tech hubs with a social impact orientation [3]. However, the activities of such local providers are frequently supported and complemented by international DFES organizations (iDFESOs), which function as intermediaries connecting entrepreneurs and local DFES providers with global sources of financing through a range of programs, events, and other support infrastructures, while simultaneously integrating a sustainable development and social impact agenda into the entrepreneurial support process.

These organizations engage in what is commonly referred to as *scaffolding* — that is, the process of constructing socio-material infrastructures that sustain organizational and systemic transformations. We seek to develop a deeper understanding of how such organizations function, and in particular, how they construct support infrastructures to advance entrepreneurship with social impact. Our research question is formulated as follows: *How do international DFES organizations support entrepreneurs in developing countries, and what infrastructures do they create to facilitate social impact-oriented entrepreneurship?*

Developing economies present a wide range of opportunities for innovation and entrepreneurship, particularly in such domains as energy, food security, education, vocational training, employment, and healthcare. These opportunities arise, in large part, from the limited capacity of both the state and incumbent businesses to deliver adequate services in these areas. For instance, the exclusion of youth residing in slums and rural areas of sub-Saharan Africa from formal education and employment systems prompts entrepreneurs to engage in *impact sourcing* — that is, recruiting and training such youth for employment in business services. More broadly, socially oriented entrepreneurship is regarded as one potential response to extreme poverty, insofar as the introduction

of new goods, services, markets, and practices can contribute to the mobilization of financial resources, job creation, and the stimulation of innovation with positive social, economic, and environmental outcomes.

Research indicates that such opportunities frequently attract diaspora entrepreneurs returning to their home countries to launch new ventures, as well as foreign entrepreneurs developing business models to serve *base-of-the-pyramid* markets [4]. However, these entrepreneurs commonly encounter a fundamental challenge namely, the absence of access to capital, technology, and other resources required to bring business ideas to fruition. In sub-Saharan Africa, for example, domestic public programs frequently prove ineffective in allocating financing, organizing training, or facilitating the scaling of entrepreneurial ventures.

The purpose of ES is to equip new and early-stage companies with valuable resources that enhance their prospects for survival and growth. ES support is provided in the form of financial capital, business and technological expertise, and access to markets. ES organizations often small and agile perform two key functions: *bridging*, whereby they connect entrepreneurs with necessary resources, and *buffering*, whereby they shield entrepreneurs from external threats by conferring legitimacy and social capital. Such support addresses a fundamental challenge, namely that entrepreneurial opportunities are not directly *accessible* and require a certain degree of institutional accompaniment. ES, therefore, serves as an institutional facilitator of this process.

ES providers are primarily oriented toward commercial entrepreneurship in developed economies. These include government agencies, entrepreneurship centers, business incubators, venture capitalists, business angels, universities, and science parks. Incubators, for instance, support new companies over a period of several years, thereby shielding them from hostile competitive environments. Accelerators, in turn, offer mentorship programs, peer-to-peer learning, and investment facilitation. Such organizations are frequently co-located and interconnected within what are commonly referred to as *entrepreneurial ecosystems* — structures that have traditionally supported commercial entrepreneurs operating within these ecosystems and oriented toward local and regional markets.

In developing economies, such as those of sub-Saharan Africa, ES is considerably less developed. Some scholars have gone so far as to argue that institutionalized entrepreneurship and innovation support is an inherently *Global North* concept with limited direct applicability to the *Global South*. Within the Global South, family and kinship networks are widely regarded as the primary mechanisms of entrepreneurial support [5]. Nevertheless, there is evidence of a gradual diffusion of institutional ES support in developing countries — manifested, for example, in the proliferation of technology and innovation hubs across sub-Saharan Africa and the emergence of accelerators in India. However, effective local support encompassing access to capital and training is frequently absent, constituting one of the principal drivers of brain drain. Even where financing is available, it is often misallocated away from high-growth-potential ventures due to corruption and nepotism. Furthermore, with few exceptions, support for the scaling of entrepreneurial ideas remains largely unavailable. In many developing countries, an entrepreneurial career is not regarded as prestigious particularly in comparison to public sector employment which serves as an additional source of demotivation for prospective entrepreneurs.

These challenges are especially acute for entrepreneurs engaged in development-oriented innovation. Research indicates that raising capital for social impact ventures is particularly difficult in developing economies [6]. As a result, entrepreneurs in developing countries especially those with a social impact orientation are compelled to seek resources and support beyond the boundaries of their local ecosystems and target markets. Against this backdrop, a new community of globally distributed ES providers is taking shape, comprising foundations, university centers, and fellowship organizations with the capacity to support entrepreneurs in developing countries. These structures represent a new variant of what we term *development-focused entrepreneurship support* (DFES), the properties and mechanisms of emergence of which are examined in the sections that follow.

We define development-focused entrepreneurship support (DFES) as a set of practices aimed at facilitating the founding process and enhancing the quality of new ventures, particularly by

promoting their capacity to generate positive developmental impact while simultaneously achieving commercial viability. The growth of DFES has been noted across a number of contemporary studies. Lall et al. (2020), for instance, observe that entrepreneurship support (ES) programs are increasingly oriented toward social impact and are concentrating on marginalized sectors and regions. Nicolopoulou (2014) notes that new innovative companies are progressively expected to address social challenges, while development initiatives are making increasing use of incubator and accelerator programs.

A prominent example of DFES is the organization Ashoka a so-called *social accelerator* which provides fellowships to selected entrepreneurs, known as *Ashoka Fellows*, who are developing solutions across a range of development domains, including education, healthcare, and poverty alleviation. Ashoka operates in more than 70 countries and is oriented toward supporting socially impactful startups. Accordingly, DFES is increasingly provided, on the one hand, by *traditional* ES organizations such as technology hubs that integrate classical functions of knowledge transfer and collaboration development with a sustainable development and social impact agenda. A significant role in this process is played by the diffusion of such concepts as "social impact" and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). On the other hand, DFES is delivered by development organizations that were previously focused on development assistance, technology transfer, and capacity building [7]. These include multilateral and bilateral agencies, foundations, venture philanthropy organizations, and university centers in emerging economies, which are increasingly incorporating incubators and accelerators into their development initiatives.

The growing nexus between ES and international development constitutes a key factor in understanding the emergence of DFES, particularly in the context of developing regions. While the diffusion of a social impact agenda within ES has been partially examined in the existing literature, the expanding role of entrepreneurship in international development remains considerably less explored. Traditionally, development assistance has been conceptualized as a top-down process, whereby governments of wealthy nations transferred technologies and economic practices to poorer countries [8]. However, the efficacy of such approaches has been subject to increasing scrutiny, as many development projects failed to account for local needs or to reach their intended beneficiaries. One recent illustration of this tendency is the proliferation of donor-driven initiatives aimed at expanding internet coverage across sub-Saharan Africa as a universal solution to unemployment.

In recent years, international organizations and development agencies have moved away from this approach in part due to budgetary constraints and have begun engaging a broader and more diverse range of actors in the design and implementation of development initiatives [9]. This process has come to involve not only non-governmental organizations (NGOs), but also private sector companies, which have emerged as partners, contractors, and beneficiaries of development programs. Over time, so-called *aid chains* and transnational actor networks have taken shape, comprising global donors that support various international organizations, which in turn collaborate with private and public partners at the national and local levels.

Within this broader developmental trend, an *entrepreneurial turn* has occurred a shift away from the top-down model of foreign aid toward more bottom-up initiatives promoting entrepreneurial solutions to development challenges [10]. In other words, entrepreneurship is increasingly conceptualized by development organizations as an effective instrument for the on-the-ground implementation of innovations, particularly in regions such as sub-Saharan Africa. Consequently, heightened attention has been directed toward the potential of entrepreneurs to generate innovations with significant socioeconomic impact. Furthermore, as technology entrepreneurs have become more extensively involved in philanthropy, venture capital practices have been adapted to this new domain, giving rise to what is referred to as *transformational philanthropy* an approach that supports startups in developing countries with the aim of achieving meaningful developmental outcomes.

The analysis presented in this paper leads to the conclusion that development-focused entrepreneurship support (DFES) is acquiring strategic significance as an institutional instrument for addressing the socioeconomic and environmental challenges characteristic of developing economies. In contrast to traditional models of entrepreneurship support prevalent in developed countries and

concentrated primarily on commercial viability DFES integrates market mechanisms with sustainable development objectives, thereby generating value not only in the economic dimension, but also in the social and environmental ones. Developing economies face profound systemic constraints, including deficits of capital, technology, skilled human resources, effective institutions, and policy support. These barriers impede the local realization of innovative ideas and stimulate the pursuit of external resources and knowledge. In response to this structural gap, a community of international DFES organizations (iDFESOs) is emerging, constructing multi-tiered support infrastructures that encompass individual resource channels, the strengthening of local ecosystems, and the formation of transnational linkages.

Of particular theoretical and practical significance is the identified tendency of the entrepreneurial turn in international development a transition from traditional top-down approaches to foreign aid toward more flexible, locally responsive, and bottom-up strategies that promote entrepreneurial solutions to development challenges. Entrepreneurship is increasingly conceptualized as a key driver of innovation and transformational change, particularly in such critical domains as education, healthcare, energy, and poverty alleviation.

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