

Entrepreneurship Incubator programme to promote student start ups at universities across Sierra Leone

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A lack of jobs, income and perspective for students with secondary and tertiary education is a challenging task for the next government administration. Since few employers offer attractive chances for young graduates in the country, starting their own enterprise is an alternative for some of them. Existing institutions of higher education, however, do not prepare students sufficiently for such an endeavor. Making it urgent and timely to start business incubators at universities across the country. This will stimulate employment and wealth creation.

The University Incubator programme offers an incubator programme combined with an individual coaching trajectory for university students that are interested in starting a business, find a market niche, formulate realistic plans, and develop a small or medium sized business that will not only create sufficient income for themselves, but also offer employment to others and eventually contribute to the country's economy. The involvement of experienced migrant entrepreneurs alongside with local trainers will assure that potential startup are fully integrate into global value chains through using sustainable technologies and formulating sound business models.

Establishing University incubators across universities in the country is urgent for job creation and fits also into the current debate on the effectivity of Development aid in eradicating poverty in the developing countries. In Netherlands for example the debate as been a battle between the political 'left' and 'right', For the political 'left', aid was criticized because it was perceived to be a (successful) tool in expanding market forces into the developing world, an effective weapon in advancing imperialist aims (wrr rapport, 2010) and the economics of gate keeping, that is putting conditions on the receiver to spend money provided on what donors will tell them to do. (Youth Symposium 2009) For the political 'right', development aid was criticized because it was assessed as (successful) impediment in the expansion of market, and because it formed part of a system which encouraged laziness in the mindset of people in the developing countries and free revenue for budgetary support for governments, a process perceived as causing

dependence on foreign aid and slower growth rates and development.

It is easy to see why the question on the effectiveness of aid has become so central to the discourse. especially when people are still poor and the decrease in public opinion in donor countries that the money given is not directed to poverty elevation in poor countries. If aid can be shown to result directly in or to contribute indirectly, to tangible and identifiable benefits for those receiving it, then this would provides sufficient justification for providing it, and continuing to provide more of it. If, on the other hand, no direct or clearly identifiable indirect benefits from providing it are evident, then – it is argued and widely assumed – the case for providing aid falls away (Riddell, 2007). In this case entrepreneurship should be the best and most suitable alternative to economic independence.

Mayo (2009) postulated that aid would not help increase economic growth in Africa. It is a myth according to her to assume that it will. It is time according to her to stop pretending that aid-based developments models correctly in place in Africa will generate sustain economic growth and elevate poverty. It will not. With trade and entrepreneurship it is more likely that economic life for the majority of Africans might actually improve, that corruption would fell, women empowered, enterprising ventures would increase and African growth engine would start chugging. If other countries (Asian tigers) have done it why not Africa. She reminded us that thirty years ago Malawi, Burundi and Burkina Faso were economically ahead of China, through trade and innovation and not aid. And China is now climbing the economic development ladder. What Africa now need is fair trade and investment.

Given the current rates of development in sub-Saharan Africa, it will be a challenge for the continent to meet the targets set for 2035 under SDGs. If Africa is to accelerate progress towards the SDGs, a high sustainable economic growth rate will be essential. Here the private sector through promoting entrepreneurship has a crucial role to play. UNIDO's Former Director-General, Dr Kandeh K. Yumkella, now presidential aspirant in Sierra Leone, has pointed out, that "the private sector is the driving force behind industrial development in almost all countries. If the economic growth is grounded by a more sustainable mentality and way of thinking and doing things will lead to direct poverty alleviation. Broad agreement exists on its crucial role in economic and industrial development, and particularly in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)." It is clear that making students more productive and competitive through business should be an overarching goal is the new government. Entrepreneurship education gives students the tools, skills, education and infrastructure to pull themselves out of poverty and create sustainable livelihoods. This would minimise dependence on foreign aid and increase the potential to self-reliance, self respect and empowerment.

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The establishment of UBI-SL is premised on the fact that Entrepreneurship education is taken to cover all educational activities that seek to prepare people to be responsible, enterprising individuals who have the skills, knowledge and attitudes needed to prepare them to achieve the goals they set for themselves to live fulfilled lives. From Evidences collected in Holland and else were, entrepreneurship education works. Students that do participate in entrepreneurship education are more likely to start their own business and their companies tend to be more innovative and more successful than those led by persons without entrepreneurship educational background

The emergence of the discipline reflects the broader recognition towards employment and wealth creation in the country. Not only has demand for entrepreneurship knowledge increased but it appears that the focus of this demand is towards a greater balance between theory and praxis. This has further resulted in an increase demand for relevant entrepreneurship education in the country.

Generally, Universities have to play a key role in the valorization agenda of their country. Despite some encouraging data and the recognized function of education in entrepreneurship to create jobs, competitiveness and sustainability, the uptake and the effectiveness of entrepreneurship education in Universities and vocational schools is still lacking behind. Much of the traditional entrepreneurship programme in the Sierra Leone University systems is based upon delivering input into the entrepreneurship process. There is often much emphasis upon the business plan, abstract business concepts, outdated teaching methodologies, weak collaboration between lecturers of business students, the practical element of entrepreneurship is missing; entrepreneurship is not linked to specific training subjects; business people are not involved. and a major absence of a concept relating to the entrepreneurial person which in turn lends itself to production that will support the concept. This means that new enterprises are started by young people but the creation of new enterprises is not having the pace in order to stimulate sustainable growth.

Against this backdrop the UBI-SL seek to develop a minor programme on entrepreneurs and innovation focusing on emerging sectors. This will require collaboration with Government agencies and departments, the private sector and lecturers from higher learning institutions in Sierra Leone to develop and build a practical foundation for addressing the question of “How to teach Entrepreneurship for national development” and “what to teach” to translate concepts, theories and practise of entrepreneurship that will create profitable businesses in Sierra Leone for national development. The active cooperation between government, educational institutions and private sector is also known as “Triple Helix” an important ingredient for sustainable development.

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The programme will also seek cooperation with entrepreneurship related universities in The Netherlands.

The university business incubator network (UBI-SL) is targeted to meet the needs of higher institutions of Learning in Sierra Leone and will also seek cooperation with entrepreneurship related universities in The Netherlands. The programme will focus on the premier universities that are part of Connecting Diaspora 4 Development (CD4D) programme, implemented by the IOM and funded by Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. CD4D is a diaspora oriented programme that focuses on knowledge transfer of high potential Sierra Leonean diaspora in The Netherlands to selected educational institutions in Sierra Leone. These institutions are:

- University of Sierra Leone (USL)
- The Institute of Advance Management and Technology (IAMTECH)
- Milton Margai College of Education and Technology
- Ernest Bai Koroma University (EBK)
- University of Makeni (UNIMAK)

The first incubator is expected to open at IAMTECH in May this year. The Business Incubator initiative for university students started as an off shoot of the Student Entrepreneurship Programme (SEP) <http://www.sep-sl.org> at the Institute of Advance Management and Technology (IAMTECH). The programme attracted 80 students with innovative ideas that aim at scaling them up to new business ventures and those with existing businesses seeking growth. Visit the following weblink for a documentary about the programme. The project was piloted at IAMTECH under the guidance and supervision of Abubakarr Bangura, CD4D participant, The Network university The Netherlands, lecturers of IAMTECH and with guidance from the Private sector unit of the Office of Diaspora Affairs (ODA), Office of the President.

University Business Incubator (UBI) programme is initiated by Abubakarr Bangura, a Sierra Leonean diaspora resident in Holland. The project supports the government of Sierra Leone and other stakeholders in bolstering a more robust engagement of Diaspora with the economic development of Sierra Leone as envisaged in the Agenda for Prosperity, launched by president Ernest Bai Koroma (see <http://www.mofed.gov.sl>).

Interested institutions are request to contact Abubakarr Bangura at:

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What the press is saying....

