

Training a New Generation of African Entrepreneurs – ALTIS and E4Impact

11 July 2016 by [Giselle Weybrecht](#)



Sub-Saharan Africa is a region with enormous growth potential, but there are significant challenges to assure this growth is inclusive. In Africa, SMEs generate only 17% of the GDP and 30% of employment, while in OECD countries figures ram up to 50% and 60%, respectively. The «migration phenomenon» from the African continent is, in part, a consequence of the lack of local businesses able to generate sustainable employment opportunities and wealth for communities.

In response to this, [ALTIS Postgraduate School of Business and Society](#) launched E4Impact, a special MBA programme aimed at training a new class of African leaders who will be able to create jobs in the sustainable private sector in their countries. This perfectly fits ALTIS' mission to foster impact entrepreneurship and management for sustainable development. I recently spoke with Jessica Vaghi, Communications Manager at E4Impact Foundation, about the impacts of this initiative.

What is the E4Impact MBA

[E4Impact](#), launched in 2010, became a Foundation spin-off of Università Cattolica (ALTIS) in 2015 with the contribution of Securfin, Mapei, Salini-Impregilo, Always Africa Association, ENI and Bracco. The Foundation offers the [Global MBA in Impact Entrepreneurship](#) in collaboration with Università Cattolica and a local university from the host country. The first MBA was offered in Kenya in 2010; now it's also offered in Ghana, Sierra Leone, Uganda, Ivory Coast, Senegal and Ethiopia.

The MBA is a unique 12-16 month executive program that guides active and aspiring entrepreneurs in starting or scaling their businesses, providing them simultaneously with an academic and business acceleration experience. It is comprised of a flexible blend of class lessons, distance learning, mentoring and networking events. Furthermore, participants are supported by a Business Coach: a dedicated business consultant that assists them in developing their business plan and establishing an industry network. There are also several occasions for participants to pitch their project to investors and the financial community in order to foster relationships of trust with these actors.

How did it come about?

Would-be entrepreneurs, owners of existing SMEs and successful impact entrepreneurs are hindered in various ways in Sub-Saharan Africa. They lack the business acumen necessary to have dialogue with financial institutions and struggle to find the structure and guidance to systematically test their ideas in the marketplace. Most MBA programs for African people are not aimed at entrepreneurs and focus more on theory than on practice. African universities need to enhance their ability to offer educational programs for entrepreneurs, thus becoming a long-term driver of change.

The E4Impact MBA helps attenuate these problems and weakens the probability of collapse of new enterprises. It supports local universities in offering action-oriented entrepreneurial education and in becoming part of a pan-African system. The MBA is not an academic exercise, but applied learning, where entrepreneurs are guided in verifying the feasibility of their business project and in drafting an investor-ready business plan. The program is built around entrepreneurs' business ideas and each academic module works on a particular aspect of running a business (Strategy, Marketing, Accounting & Finance, Operations, HR).

The first iteration of this course was set in Italy. In 2005, ALTIS launched an MBA program for African entrepreneurs. However, many students remained in Europe after the course instead of going back to their countries. Therefore, the program was moved to Sub-Saharan African countries and E4Impact was born with the goal of becoming the leading Pan-African university alliance for training and coaching a new generation of impact entrepreneurs capable of combining economic success with positive social impact.

What have been some of the challenges of E4Impact MBA?

The biggest challenge has been finding an academic formula that suits not only to country's context, but also to the entrepreneurs' needs. The first two MBA editions in Kenya had a full-time formula. Although entrepreneurs liked the programme, it was soon clear that this wasn't the right formula because they had no time to work on their businesses.

Moreover, the old editions followed a continental approach in the sense that people from all over Africa moved to Kenya to attend the MBA. However, creating a network around the entrepreneur and his/her business was not easy if he/she was out of the country.

In its third edition, E4Impact implemented its current academic formula: always aiming to assure students have an African CV that meets International standards.

The current formula is part-time (39 working days in class and distance learning modules) and has a country approach (participants are residents in the country where they attend the MBA). It enables entrepreneurs to keep on with their daily jobs while working on their business projects and helps

establish a solid network of partners that are useful for business development, model testing and validation.

What about some of the successes?

E4Impact counts 196 impact entrepreneurs under training and 185 already trained, 35% of which are women. We calculated that the 73% of alumni have a business in place and they provide 497 jobs.

There are seven local university partners: [Tangaza University College](#) (Nairobi), [Catholic Institute of Business and Technology](#) (Accra), [University of Makeni](#), [Uganda Martyrs University](#) (Kampala), [Centre de Recherche et d'Action pour la Paix](#) (Abidjan), [Saint Augustine University of Tanzania](#) (Mwanza) and [Institute Supérieur the Management](#) (Dakar). E4Impact has trained 35 people among local university staff and professors; in 2017 this figure will rise to at least 63.

In 2012, E4Impact was the first non-American program awarded with the Ashoka Innovation University Award.

E4Impact's greatest success, though, is represented by its entrepreneurs and their impact businesses. For example, Jacqueline Kiage, entrepreneur from the 2nd edition of the MBA in Kenya is the co-Founder of Innovation Eye Centre, a health social enterprise that offers high quality, affordable and accessible eye care services to the community in the South Western Region of Kenya and beyond. Osei Bobie, entrepreneur from the 2nd edition of the MBA in Ghana, is Chief Operation Officer & Founder of Farmers' Hope, a Ghanaian enterprise that produces a potent and affordable organic fertilizer with local raw materials that improves the soil structure over long period of time. Similarly, Jody Ogana, entrepreneur from the 4th edition of the MBA in Kenya, is General Manager of The GoDown Arts Centre, a non-profit enterprise that provides the first Kenyan multi-disciplinary platform for arts, and there are many more.

How are these shared in Italy with students as well?

In 2012, E4Impact launched an internship program for students of the Università Cattolica in Milan to take part in the E4Impact programme. Twenty-four Italian students have already been sent to different African partner universities during the MBA academic year. They have assisted business coaches in his/her job and helped the African entrepreneurs transform their business ideas into bankable business plans. Some of the students also worked on their theses, developing case studies based on successful businesses of E4Impact impact entrepreneurs.

Given the relevance of the experience, E4Impact aims at extending the internship programme to students of other universities focused on sustainability and sustainable development.

What's next for the initiative?

E4Impact aims to offer the MBA in at least 15 African countries by 2020. The final objective is to become the leading Pan-African alliance of universities focused on sustainability, able to support a growing basin of African impact entrepreneurs. In 2017, E4Impact MBA will be offered also in Ethiopia, Rwanda and South Africa; by 2020, in Zambia, Zimbabwe, Nigeria, Congo DR and Angola.

Thanks to its MBA, E4Impact facilitates the expansion of African and International SMEs oriented to sustainability in the sub-Saharan area. By matching them with reliable local entrepreneurs,

E4Impact offers small businesses a low cost, low risk opportunity to enter African markets in countries where the MBA is offered.

E4Impact launched the first pilot project, “First-Step Africa,” in the 2014/2015 academic year with the Italian enterprise, SIPA, which is interested in exploring Ghana’s market of plastic containers. They are currently working with 5 companies and there are already 20 interested companies for the upcoming academic year.

