

African Academic Association on Entrepreneurship formed by six top business schools

Six of Africa's top business schools have formed a new academic association, the African Academic Association on Entrepreneurship (AAAE), to boost entrepreneurship and job creation on the continent.



The consortium from five major countries have signed a novel partnership agreement, which commits them to sharing resources, expertise and research to give a much-needed boost to economic development.

The AAAE will promote and develop academic cooperation - particularly in the areas of entrepreneurship, small business development, innovation and start-ups - through research, case study development, the academic exchange of students and faculty, as well as academic materials and publications, professional internships and technical cooperation.

"AAAE will play a key role in leading the continent towards stronger linkages among African business schools focusing on teaching and research in the areas of entrepreneurship and family business, as well as further global collaboration," said Professor Karim Elseghir, Dean of School of Business of the American University in Cairo, Egypt (AUC).

The AUC will serve as the coordinator of the collaboration until a structured steering committee has been appointed. The other five participating business schools are the University of Cape Town Graduate School of Business (UCT GSB), University of Stellenbosch Business School (USB), Esca Maroc Ecole De Management of Casablanca, (ESCA), The Lagos Business School (LBS) and Strathmore Business School of Nairobi (SBS).

Youth unemployment, education are pressing challenges

According to Elseghir, youth unemployment and education are the most pressing challenges facing the African continent. The most recent International Labour Organisation Global Employment Trends report indicates that paid employment opportunities in Sub-Saharan Africa are scarce and the vulnerable employment rate, at 77.4% in 2013 is the highest in the world.

Entrepreneurship and innovation are widely regarded as key mechanisms to address chronic unemployment and poverty and the inception of the AAAE is an important step towards enhancing entrepreneurship across the continent.

"A sustainable solution to unemployment is a well-directed entrepreneurship ecosystem and a more effective educational system. I am positive that AAAE will lead to the enhancement of all aspects of entrepreneurship and family business and will catalyse the development of the continent as a whole," Elseghir said.

Idea exchange critical

Sarah-Anne Arnold, manager of the MTN Solution Space at the UCT GSB who will represent the UCT GSB in the AAAE, said promoting the exchange of ideas, experiences and skills is core to building an entrepreneurship ecosystem on the continent.

"If we want to build our continent then we need to invest in building networks that are broader than any one single institution. The fuel to innovate is created when people with different experiences, realities, passions and ideas come together with the mandate and support structures to develop new possibilities.

"Our work in the MTN Solution Space at the UCT GSB is very much geared in this direction and we are excited to be able

to share what we are learning through the AAAE."

Association to enrich education

Other AAAE partners are also enthusiastic about the association, saying it will enrich the entrepreneurship education at all partner schools, and will help students and faculty to expand their understanding of what is happening in Africa.

"The research and intellectual collaboration in the African entrepreneurship space will enable the exploration of the wealth of our diversity and contribution to sustainable development in Africa. This takes cognizance of Africa's special place in the international community," said David Wangombe, Dean, Strathmore School of Management and Commerce.

Thami Ghorfi, president of ESCA School of Management said, "This is the first time that we have set this type of joint ambition for African business schools, each one of them being a leading academic institution in its region. Regardless our locations, we all share the same belief in the importance of management education, and the need to gather efforts for a continental approach to support entrepreneurship and entrepreneurs."

Samantha Walbrugh-Parsadh, of Stellenbosch Business School said, "This unique consortium will enhance the exchange of knowledge, research collaboration and promote entrepreneurial activities that will drive sustainable, social and economic development across the African continent."

The association will seek to expand over the coming months to include more African business schools. There is also an explicit objective to invite collaboration between global business schools in the academic study of entrepreneurship. The AAAE will also seek to build bridges between academic and industry knowledge.

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