The Global MBA in Impact Entrepreneurship: a successful partnership program
Case Study
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Executive Summary

E4Impact Foundation is a social change organization committed to training a new generation of African entrepreneurs to make a positive social, environmental, and economic impact in their communities. The Foundation partners with the Università del Sacro Cuore of Milano (co-provider) and the Uganda Martyrs University (client), as representative of the E4Impact University Alliance, to unleash and accelerate entrepreneurial development in Africa. In fact, the African continent has a great development potential:

- A growing population, that is expected to overcome 1.1 billion by 2050\(^1\);
- A rapidly increasing GDP, diversified by country, but continuing until Covid-19;
- The AfCFTA\(^2\) agreement signed by 53 African countries, which will lead to the progressive elimination of tariffs (timeframe 5-13 years), and the increased intra-African trade which will favour the “Made in Africa” and reduce dependence on the rest of the World.

In this context, the need for managerial skills and access to the market and funding on the part of African entrepreneurs has become high. Faithful to its motto “We do not teach entrepreneurship, we train impact entrepreneurs”, since 2010 E4Impact has placed itself at the service of start-up companies in Africa with its unique Global MBA in Impact Entrepreneurship, developed in partnership with the Università Cattolica of Milan and local African Universities. From the first successful MBA that was offered with the Tangaza University College in Nairobi, Kenya, the program has been replicated in other 14 African countries over the years with great results.

The program’s innovative approach stands on its partnership model, based on the involvement of 24 African Universities that brought in 2019 to the establishment of the E4Impact University Alliance. There is no other European organization that gathers so many African Universities with the aim of enhancing the capabilities of the local faculties on impact entrepreneurship and offering a course that embeds academic rigor and a process of acceleration for the companies. Another key element of the MBA concerns its target, as it is not addressed to job seekers but to jobs creators. The program supports business owners or potential entrepreneurs in transforming a business idea into a successful business model and plan; developing the skills necessary to lead a new business or grow an existing one and in joining a network of partners and investors.

Through an impact measurement system based on the development of the Theory of Change, E4Impact is able to understand the impact generated by the MBA and therefore increase the effectiveness of the program. Since the first edition:

- 1321 entrepreneurs have been trained, of which 33% are women;
- 6 average jobs per entrepreneur were created;
- 57% of entrepreneurs started successfully a new business;
- 41% of entrepreneurs accessed financing.

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\(^1\) EU stable - source Eurostat
\(^2\) African Continental Free Trade Area
Introduction

E4Impact Foundation (Provider)
E4Impact is a young and dynamic organization that was born in 2010 as an initiative of ALTIS, the Graduate School Business and Society of the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore of Milan. In 2015, it was spun off to set up a Foundation dedicated exclusively to training entrepreneurs in Africa with the aim of creating a new generation of impact entrepreneurs offering sustainable and decent jobs.

E4Impact, currently, is present in 20 African Countries and has established 9 country offices in: Cameroon, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Rwanda, Senegal, Tunisia, Uganda, Zimbabwe.
The Foundation intends to establish itself as a point of reference for impact entrepreneurship in Africa.

E4Impact’s operational commitment is placed at the service of research, which, in return, redirects the organization’s strategy and operativity. The virtuous circuit between research and training related project activities defines the competitive advantage of E4Impact.

Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore (Provider)
The Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore UCSC is the largest private University in Europe, which was founded in 1921 by Father Agostino Gemelli together with a group of Catholic intellectuals. Today it has 12 Faculties, 4 campuses across Italy (Milan, Rome, Piacenza-Cremona and Brescia), 80 specialized research labs, 2000 faculty members, and about 40.000 students of which nearly 3.000 are international students.
The goal is to provide students not only with solid cultural preparation and indispensable professional skills, but also with a clear educational proposal. In fact, the well-articulated educational offer is multidisciplinary and devotes special attention to postgraduate education, while creating close ties with the world of work and professions. Thanks to its scientific research, publications and reputation, UCSC is accredited among the most prestigious universities in Europe and the world.

E4Impact African University Alliance - Uganda Martyrs University (Client)
Uganda Martyrs University (UMU) is a faith-based private University owned by the Episcopal Conference of the Catholic Bishops of Uganda. Opened in 1993 with 84 students and 2 academic departments, currently it has 7 Faculties, 1 Institute, 3 Schools, 3 Directorates, and about 5,000 students, of whom about 1,500 are full-time residents on campus. The UMU is a member of the E4Impact African University Alliance, launched by the Foundation in 2019. Prof. Patrick Edrin Kyamanywa, Vice-Chancellor of UMU, is one of the two elected Alliance members that are part of the E4Impact’s Steering Board.
The Alliance currently counts 24 members, which can decide to offer partnership entrepreneurial programs, such as the MBA, and have a privileged access to the Ph.D. programs in Management of innovation and Agrisystems of the UCSC of Milan in collaboration with the UMU and E4Impact Foundation.
1. The Challenge

Africa is a continent with high opportunities that are still undervalued today. It is the place with the highest rate of entrepreneurship in the world (22%) and has a rapidly growing new generation of potential African workers (population of 1.2 billion). Despite such a thriving environment, more than 56% are subsistence entrepreneurs struggling to scale, formalize and create employment for the local community. As a result, the business mortality rate is extremely high (around 80%), and this is partly due to the lack of managerial and financial planning skills.

The premise of this partnership between the E4Impact Foundation, the Università Cattolica of Milan, and the Uganda Martyrs University lies in the common will to respond effectively to this challenge.

The start of E4Impact training activities in Africa is closely linked to the work of ALTIS, the Graduate School of Business and Society launched in 2004 at the UCSC of Milan under the direction of Prof. Mario Molteni. The theme inherent in the school is all contained in its very name, “Enterprise and Society”: to highlight how companies – small, large, profit or non-profit – can and must be a key factor in promoting the social and environmental dimensions in the context in which they operate.

Shortly thereafter, ALTIS was assigned by the Rector of the UCSC the task of carrying out a project requested by the Vatican Congregation Propaganda Fide: the realization of a full-time master’s degree in Castel Gandolfo (Rome) aimed at future managers from Africa. The first edition served as a real experimental laboratory and achieved good results. However, due to the need for a location change, the Master was transferred to Milan at ALTIS, and it was opened to the participation of both men and women coming from other emerging countries. After a few editions were held in Milan, the so-called brain drain effect problem arose as, at the end of the Master, many African students highly qualified did not return to their countries for creating local development.

This was the turning point for the decision of overturning the method: it had to be ALTIS to go to Africa to offer an equally prestigious onsite Executive Education Course. The idea was to create a partnership with local universities for the co-design and co-development of a program that could promote local innovative solutions, instead of imposing a predetermined model.

The first MBA was launched in collaboration with the Tangaza University College in Nairobi, Kenya, in 2010 with the vision of implementing a program aimed at entrepreneurs attentive to the social impact of their action. The program was therefore presented as a new and innovative proposal, which did not compete with the existing educational products: an MBA designed for job creators and not job seekers. The MBA was to be conceived and obtained in Kenya and offered a certificate of attendance from an Italian University.

The peculiarity of this approach is that even if the business challenge is owned by UCSC and E4Impact, it is largely shared with the local universities as key stakeholder. This scheme aims to create a partnership between the client and the provider. In fact, UCSC provides the Executive Education Course and 33% of the professors and part of the academic programs delivery, while African universities arrange the business learning and provide 67% of the professors. This allows for constant updating of the academic system, and capacity development at the African partner universities.
The link between the business challenge and the business strategy was split on two levels:

- The expertise of ALTIS graduate school on the themes of sustainability and entrepreneurship, which have been the pillars of its strategy and a competitive advantage.
- The mission of the UCSC to act as a comprehensive university that combines scientific research, higher education and third mission activities.

In 2010, in order to handle the increasingly demands of its partner universities, ALTIS set up a business unit called E4Impact to deal exclusively with training activities in Africa. It included two key figures, both under the guidance of the Director Mario Molteni:

- Professor expert in entrepreneurship, Benedetto Cannatelli;
- Head of the practical implementation of training activities, Fabio Petroni.

The desired impact of the MBA was foster the creation of decent jobs in Africa, in order to increase the local population income thus reducing the need to migrate. The initial goals set for 2020 were as follows:

- reach at least 20 African countries;
- support African universities in formulating entrepreneurship programs;
- train entrepreneurs and make their business as sustainable as possible;
- create jobs.

Figure 1: The students of the Global MBA in Impact Entrepreneurship in Zimbabwe.
2. The Commitment

Since the first onsite MBA edition in Kenya, there have been some key moments that led to fundamental changes in the program to achieve the desired impact.

In 2010, the first problems emerged from the local university and the participants:

- Pan-African full-time recruitment was forcing entrepreneurs to move to Kenya, causing loss of contact with their business and high costs;
- The full-time formula led entrepreneurs be in the classroom a lot, taking them away from their companies.

The response to these initial difficulties was to turn the full-time formula into an executive one by removing limits on participation. Subsequently, recruitment was on a national basis, solving all the problems related to transport and costs in another country.

The consequence of this action was to replicate the MBA around Africa, which allowed a fast growth in few years.

In 2015, it was realised that managing such a volume of activities had become very expensive for ALTIS, so E4Impact became a spin-off of UCSC in order to act as an independent organisation. This allowed the Foundation to further boost growth.

In 2018, in response to the increasing interest of African universities in the program and the consequence need for higher local resources, E4Impact took two strategic decisions:

- The opening of other 5 offices, in addition to the one in Kenya, which brought to the widespread and organized presence on the Foundation in the African continent;
- The foundation of the E4Impact University Alliance in 2019, based on a partnership among 21 African universities that share the ambitious vision of “being the largest pan-African community of internationally recognized universities that promotes entrepreneurship with a strong social and environmental impact in the African continent and beyond”.

In few years, the initial commitment of training about 40 high-impact entrepreneurs per year to reduce the mortality rate of small and medium enterprises and create at least 2 jobs for each surviving enterprise was achieved and exceeded. Up to date the MBA has been conducted in 15 African countries, 1321 entrepreneurs have been trained, and an average of 6 jobs have been created per entrepreneur.
From an initial formulation, the MBA has moved on. The content of the training has changed with several improvements and also the formula, which today entails 280 hours of teaching in presence and 222 hours of distance learning.

A first important confirmation of the success of the program came in 2012 when the program received the University Innovation Award by Ashoka, a prestigious international organization for the development of social entrepreneurship. In addition the innovative methodology was recognized by the “Innovation and Entrepreneurship Program of the Year Award”, during the Triple E Awards 2022.

The program laid the foundation for closer cooperation with partner universities also in the field of research. Over the years, the E4Impact and UCSC research team of 6 persons, committed on the themes of sustainability and entrepreneurship in Africa, published 31 scientific articles based on field research and the involvement of professors of the Alliance.

Moreover, new partnership programs were designed and launched with a resulting improvement of the teaching. This is the case of the Ph.D. in "Management and Innovation" and in "Agro-Food Systems" for 90 African professors who will receive the Ph.D. certificate from Cattolica.

In line with these assets, the MBA avails itself of an international faculty composed of professors from the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, international professors who collaborate with E4Impact, and professors of the Partner Universities in Africa. The faculty presents a mix of academia and professionals with high business experience. In 2022, 67 local Professors and 25 International Professors, mainly specialized in Strategy and Finance, were involved.
Through this dense network of activities, African universities have been able to enrich their skills. In fact, Tangaza University College has developed a Bachelor’s Degree in Entrepreneurship based on knowledge learned in the Ph.D. in Management and Innovation.

The aim of the MBA is to create social and environmental impact through an **economically sustainable model**. To make the program accessible, the average fee was set in agreement with the local universities to an amount equivalent to 3,000 Euros.

If at the beginning the MBA was partially funded by grants of international foundations, such as Metfund, today it is self-sustained. Thanks to the development of a large network of MBAs, the concept of economic sustainability has progressively passed from a single program to a continental network. This system has allowed reaching the balance between revenues and expenses of all the programs.

*Figure 3: Meeting among the Italian and African faculty in one of the Alliance countries.*
3. The Learning & Development Initiative

The MBA initiative is a practical entrepreneurial training program aimed at African entrepreneurs who are eager to build on the skills, knowledge, and relationships necessary to start or grow a business with a high social and environmental impact.

The program supports participants in the transformation of a business idea into a business model and into a business plan, developing skills necessary to lead a growing company, and introducing them into a network of potential partners and investors. The approach combines academic rigor with a process of acceleration of the enterprise: each formation module provides tools that are immediately applicable in reality. In addition to contributing to the growth and solidity of the business, the MBA also aids in strengthening the socio-environmental impact of the company.

The program’s most distinguishing characteristics include:

- Blended formula of delivery, which includes classroom periods (for a total of 36 days), interspersed with periods dedicated to distance learning and the application of the concepts learned to one’s business;
- 4 weeks of intensive training, Boot Camps, which are spaced apart and take the names of: Business Model Boot Camp; Go to Market; Finance Boot Camp; Investor Boot Camp. They include: lessons and workshops where students work in groups; seminars with high-profile guests (entrepreneurs, professionals, investors); coaching activities by experts; student pitches with feedback from faculty, Alumni and experts;
- Full-time business coach who is at disposition for each entrepreneur for the duration of the program. The coach provides clarification and guidance in applying the notions acquired in the classroom, introduces the entrepreneur to potential suppliers and/or customers and presents to investors those companies that are judged investment ready;
- E-learning platform designed for African entrepreneurs and accessible in areas where the bandwidth is weak. The platform is a source of resources, examples and business cases linked to African experiences developed by both the MBA faculty and Alumni.
Upon completion of the MBA, participants acquire the technical and management skills necessary to develop a refined Business model, a Business Plan useful to be presented to investors, an effective presentation, and to build a network of local and international investors and partners. Moreover, they can join the E4Impact Digital Entrepreneurship Ecosystem, which includes integrated digital platforms designed to enable entrepreneurs to create business opportunities locally and globally, make online sales, and better manage their companies. Specifically, they have the opportunity to communicate with a pan-African community of 6000 entrepreneurs through lifetime access to a B2B digital platform and restructure their internal system with digital blockchain technologies.

Figure 4: The formula of the Global MBA in Impact Entrepreneurship.

The MBA relies on two key figures to ensure the functional development of the course and adequate support to students:

- the Program Leader (PL), who is responsible for promotion, marketing, administration, development of partnerships with local authorities, and quality control;
- the Business Coach (BC), who supports the Program Leader in the management of the MBA and provides entrepreneurial one-to-one support in the growth of the business.
The selection methodology is managed by the partner African universities and includes the following agreed candidate requirements in order to meet the training learning objectives:

- have a business idea, a start-up or an existing business;
- have a three-year bachelor’s degree from an accredited institution;
- be a citizen or resident in the country where the MBA is offered.

The MBA team will give preference to candidates who have 2-3 years of relevant work experience, and can demonstrate a strong commitment to their business project and to sustainable development.

The MBA Program Leader (PL) leads the selection process consisting of 3 phases:

- Evaluation of the business idea to assess the viability of the project;
- Evaluation of the CV to assess a candidate’s capability of managing the business project;
- Interview to assess the candidate’s entrepreneurial attitude and ability to participate in the MBA.

Once the Board confirms their selection, applicants become admitted students.

At the end of the Executive Education Course, a final evaluation is carried out to understand the participants’ satisfaction with teaching, ecosystem, course management, and the level of the learning objectives achieved. In particular, these are the process indicators set by the partners:

- At least 80% of participants successfully concluded the MBA;
- At least 70% of improvement in business modeling skills, financial-economic planning and accountability, and pitching;
- At least 70% of increase in the entrepreneurial mindset, orientation and impact approach;
- At least 70% of improvement in impact measurement skills.

The tool used to collect all this information is an in-house impact platform. Each participant is asked to complete questionnaires throughout the lifespan of the MBA program.
4. The Impact

E4Impact is the partner responsible for measuring the impact of the MBA initiative. The Foundation has equipped itself with an internal impact monitoring system based on the development of the Theory of Change (ToC), which represents a causal structure of how and why a process of change occurs in a particular context. The E4Impact ToC frames a model in which practical business education and support for entrepreneurship help to create decent jobs and alleviate poverty in Africa.

Figure 5: The E4Impact Theory of Change used as starting point to measure the impact of the MBA.

The impact measurement started as direct observations and strict relationships with the first groups of beneficiaries of its MBA and has evolved over the years into a structured system that embraces a broad collection and management of high-quality data to make data-driven strategic decisions. According to the following ToC chart, the MBA generates social value through four main avenues:

1. **Encouraging the development of high-potential start-ups** that can withstand competitive pressure;
2. **Supporting the development and scale-up of existing companies**;
3. **Removing the main obstacles that entrepreneurs face**, such as access to financing and global markets;
4. **Contributing to job creation** as well as decent and equal work.
To support the impact measurement process, a customized internal platform was developed by the Foundation. It improves internal data collection and analysis while offering to entrepreneurs the opportunity to track the impact of their business for achieving even greater results and communicating them to potential funders or investors.

The following indicators are broken down by the level of impact generated on the entrepreneur, his business, and the community:

- **On the entrepreneur (short-term outcomes):**
  - Level of improvement in business modeling skills, financial-economic planning and accountability, pitching, impact measurement;
  - Level of increase of the entrepreneurial mindset, orientation, and impact approach;
  - % of entrepreneurs that expanded their network.

- **On the business (mid-term outcomes):**
  - % of entrepreneurs that somehow improved the measurement of impact;
  - % of entrepreneurs that raised external funding;
  - % of entrepreneurs that closed trade agreements with other African or European companies;
  - % Entrepreneurs that start successfully a new business activity;
  - % entrepreneurs that had scaled up their business.

- **On the community (impact):**
  - Average number of decent jobs created;
  - Decrease of the unemployment rate in the Region.

These are the MBA key impact results achieved over the years:

- 57% ENTREPRENEURS THAT STARTED A NEW BUSINESS
- 98% ENTREPRENEURS THAT INCREASED THEIR REVENUE
- 41% ENTREPRENEURS THAT ACCESSED FINANCING
- 22% ENTREPRENEURS THAT OPENED NEW BRANCHES
- 6 AVERAGE JOBS CREATED PER ENTREPRENEUR
- 80% ENTREPRENEURS THAT EXPANDED THEIR SUPPLIER AND PARTNER NETWORK

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*These data refer to the impact study conducted in 2022 from a sample of 109 interviewees of different countries and MBA’s editions. The research was carried out through the distribution of an online survey based on a previously phase of stakeholder engagement which allowed the identification of the main outcomes.*
Figure 6: Mohammed Sameer Hussein, MBA participant and Founder of AL-Shehab Factory, a company that manufactures electric tricycles chassis⁴.

5. Concluding Remarks

The partnership between E4Impact and African universities continues to strengthen. The constant dialogue between the parties allows for the progressive development of the MBA program. Through this mutual relationship, it has been possible to expand our reach to several countries. Despite continuous business support for companies, the Foundation does not overlook its origins and its academic mission. Following the launch of the E4Impact Alliance, E4Impact intends to strengthen this relationship through the direct engagement of some representative members of the Alliance into the governing body, and with the intensification of exchanges of best practices, creation of innovative projects, and the launch of new entrepreneurial programs.

⁴ As a mechanical engineer concerned with these issues, Mohammed Sameer decided to do his part to reduce the air pollution by setting up his own business. Having no experience in the entrepreneurship field, he decided to enroll in the MBA at the University of Medical Sciences & Technology of Khartoum, Sudan, to acquire the right skills and knowledge to run a business. He said “I needed help to build my business and E4Impact Global MBA in Impact Entrepreneurship, which is very practical, gave me the necessary skills. I’ve learned how to manage costs and how to make the best decisions for my company. This made me able to start my business”.
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