



18th October 2016

## E4Impact: An MBA for African Impact Entrepreneurs

Africa needs more successful entrepreneurs that understand how to create positive impact in their communities, countries and on our continent.

As you probably know creating a sustainable impact business is really, really hard.

As in one of the hardest things you can do with your life.

Yet Africa is a highly entrepreneurial continent full of people that either due to socio-economic circumstances, a vision to improve the state of affairs or passion start and run their own businesses.

But as World Economic Forum Young Global Leader and Harvard alumni **Ndidi Nwuneli** points out in her newest book "**Social Innovation in Africa**" many social enterprises or innovations never scale across the continent, let alone the world. Too many, impact businesses stay small and thus their impact limited.

For this reason it is important that social entrepreneurs and innovators equip themselves with the necessary skills, experiences and networks to give themselves the best chance at scaling their impact to reach millions of people on the continent instead of a few thousand or less.

This is where the **E4Impact** foundation comes into play. The objective of the Italian foundation is to equip African entrepreneurs with the necessary skills, expertise and networks to successfully overcome the challenge outlined in Ndidi Nwuneli's book and scale their impact across the continent.

In conjunction with various universities across Africa they offer a very practical MBA geared towards impact entrepreneurs.

We wanted to find out more and interviewed **Martino Ghielmi** the E4Impact Manager for West Africa about the MBA and what makes it different from other similar programmes offered.

Should you be an impact entrepreneur considering doing an MBA geared towards impact entrepreneurship in Africa you will find the information provided in this interview very valuable.

**1. E4Impact's vision is to offer the MBA in 15 African countries by 2020. Which countries are those and how are they selected?**

The **E4Impact Foundation** is an initiative born in **ALTIS – Graduate School Business & Society** of Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore of Milan that aims at enhancing the sustainable development of fast growing African economies by favoring the formation of impact entrepreneurs and the growth of their businesses.

The goals of the Foundation are:

- To train a new generation of entrepreneurs capable of combining economic success with social impact;
- To support the formation within local universities of faculty and staff capable of teaching, managing and delivering a unique, results oriented entrepreneurship program;
- To facilitate the international development of European and African companies attentive to social and environmental impact.

To achieve its objectives the Foundation, in collaboration with **ALTIS - Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore** of Milan and a local university from the host country, offers the **Global MBA in Impact Entrepreneurship**.

The **MBA program** guides active and aspiring entrepreneurs to start or scale their business, giving them simultaneously an academic and business acceleration experience.

As a result, we select new countries combining their development potential with the presence of a committed and reliable local university partner

By now the MBA is offered in the following countries:

- Kenya – Nairobi: **Tangaza University College**
- Ghana – Accra: **Catholic Institute of Business and Technology**
- Sierra Leone – Makeni: **University of Makeni**
- Uganda – Kampala: **Uganda Martyrs University**
- Ivory Coast – Abidjan: **Centre de Recherche et d'Action pour la Paix**
- Senegal – Dakar: **Institut Supérieur de Management**

Next year E4Impact will offer it also in:

- Tanzania
- Ethiopia
- Rwanda
- South Africa

Other countries E4Impact is planning to operate in by 2020 are:

- Mozambique
- Angola

- Zimbabwe
- Zambia
- Cameroon

## **2. How are the students selected?**

We select participants according to their business idea; candidates go through a business idea competition before the programme starts. Since the MBA is for entrepreneurs it's necessary that they wish to establish or grow their own venture, and that their background (either in terms of former work experience or passions/interests) matches with their business project.

## **3. What are the profiles of your students?**

Our students generally have a three-year University degree and an age that goes from 24 to 50 years old. One third of our Alumni are women, with the latest MBA editions in some countries (e.g. Kenya) who reached complete gender balance (50% women). Their business ideas regards several industries, with a prevalence of agro-food and business services. We encourage applications from social entrepreneurs willing to disrupt the status quo in health, education and other social services.

## **4. How does the financing of the MBA work?**

We have a different policy in each country. According to the number of sponsors that the local University is able to collect, the number of scholarship offered to the top entrepreneurs changes. The winner of the Business Idea Competition is always getting a scholarship. On average other 2/3 entrepreneurs won a partial one. There could be also some special scholarship for peculiar categories of entrepreneurs (e.g. disabled, young, women, ICT....).

## **5. What are your top 3 tips for getting the most out of the E4Impact MBA?**

1. You have a Business and Finance coach at your disposal for one year: use it!
2. Boot Camps are the greatest moment of learning and sharing, so as the competitions are the best one to network, don't miss them and listen carefully to the others: their mistakes could prevent you to do the same.
3. Never lose contacts with the E4Impact staff and your fellow entrepreneurs mate, the community you've been inserted in, it's precious and could be of help in the future.

**7. The MBA involves distance learning. What does that translate too? Is it similar to Massive Open Online Courses (Moocs) where students access online lectures? How does it differ?**

The distance learning part is strictly connected to the in presence part. Distance learning prepares and complete issues discussed or to be discussed in class. This is something Moocs don't have, since they are only online. .

**8. What do you think sets the E4Impact MBA apart from other similar programmes offered on the continent?**

Most MBA programs for African people addresses targets which are not entrepreneurs. There are lots of Entrepreneurship Educations Programs in Africa that train "entrepreneurial facilitators" to work in NGOs or Government, but this is different from training someone with his/her own enterprise or business. Recently, also international Business Schools have established post-graduate entrepreneurial programs in Africa but their alumni are typically managers for multi-national firms rather than entrepreneurs.

In general, a problem of these kind of MBAs is also that they rely too much on the theoretical aspect of entrepreneurship forgetting about the importance of the action. We tried to create a mix of essential academic aspects and practical exercises and what we got at the end was an MBA that was half-way between a university experience and an incubator one.

**9. Where do you see the biggest opportunity for E4Impact to further enhance the value of its MBA?**

We do believe that, if our program is successful, our Alumni would be entrepreneurs who need further coaching, investment and partnerships. The opportunity we envision is achieving sustainability and accessibility of our MBA by offering high value-added services to our Alumni.

**10. What are the biggest successes the students experience post MBA?**

Great part of them see their business data improve. They have developed entrepreneurial abilities, established important networks and learnt to get out of the building and validate assumptions into the reality. This has important consequence on the business, weather is a start-up or a scale-up. Self-confidence and risk-aptitude are also key competences that our Alumni recognize as improved after the program and that we believe are crucial both in their professional and personal lives.

In general, we measured that 75% of our Alumni has at least a business in place 12 months after completing the program.

### **11. What are the biggest challenges students experience post MBA?**

Finance might be a challenge for some projects, but not as severe as people thought. There are huge capitals looking for the right opportunities as well as donors and competitions were strong plans can get seed funding.

### **12. How does E4Impact support students post MBA?**

We have a special newsletter for our Alumni and a special group on FB where we sort out for them opportunities (such as competitions or financing awards) from around the globe and from around Africa. The FB group is also a platform for them to get and keep in touch with fellow Alumni from other African countries, to exchange knowledge and offers.

We keep on supporting them with our communication channels (FB, Twitter, website blog) to offer them visibility and the opportunity to promote their businesses. Besides, we involve them every time we organize some events around the globe or in Africa that deal with entrepreneurship and even in the new edition of the MBAs: we invite them as speaker, exhibitors, mentors etc.

We monitor their improvements with a regular evaluation and always try to create links with other entrepreneurs, distributors, suppliers, potential customers or other Alumni.

### **13. Amongst your alumni, do you see any particular business models as having a great track record in achieving positive impact?**

There are plenty of our Alumni that received local or global awards and recognition thanks to the positive impact of their businesses. A fresh example is our woman entrepreneur from the 5th edition of the MBA in Kenya, Rita Kimani, she has been selected to be one of the **United Nations'** first Young Leaders for the Sustainable Development Goals, in this days.

She's only 25, but has great potential. She is the co-founder of **FarmDrive**, a social enterprise that connects unbanked and underserved smallholder farmers to credit. She will be working with the Office of the UN Secretary General's Envoy on Youth on efforts to engage young people in the realization of the Global Goals.

**14. What role do you see emerging technologies (e.g. drones, fintech, internet of things etc) play in Africa? Have you seen an increase in students that are building their businesses around leveraging one of the emerging technologies?**

Emerging technologies (will) have a key role in adapting innovation to Africa. We are experiencing a slow but steady increase of tech students despite, for the moment, this trend is more visible in Nairobi than anywhere else. However it's just a time issue and in few years technology will play a key role everywhere. At the same we also believe that in Africa there is space to build successful building even without massive use of technology. Solve long-standing social and environmental problems, adding value to local products, valorizing local skills could also be the drivers of a successful entrepreneurial adventure in the continent.

**15. Where do you see the biggest opportunities and challenges for Africa in the next 20 years?**

The biggest challenge AND opportunity for Africa is its unique demography. Its population, already the youngest of the planet, will double by 2050 from 1.2 of today to 2.4 billion. It's like a ticking demographic time bomb if Africa doesn't create decent jobs for these youths. It's like a unique dividend capable of bringing energy and innovation to the entire continent once the power of entrepreneurship is unleashed.

Thank you Martino for sharing your insights with us and telling our community more about the E4Impact MBA.

If you want to find out more you can connect with [Martino on twitter](#) or directly with the foundation here:

- [www.e4impact.org](http://www.e4impact.org)
- [info@e4impact.org](mailto:info@e4impact.org)
- [FB: E4Impact](#)
- [Twitter: @E4Impact](#)
- [Youtube: E4Impact](#)