

Business schools are key to achieving development goals in Africa and they are starting to take a growing interest in the continent says **Guy Pfeffermann**

This year IT group IBM showcased new business opportunities in Africa, making the continent the focus of its Global Innovation Opportunities initiative. According to the company, “Africa, and its population of over 900 million, has worked its way into the global dialogue on economic opportunity. And while there are still many obstacles to be overcome, Africa is fast becoming a legitimate force in the global economy, thanks in part to an abundance of natural resources, a steadily growing economy, and some long-awaited political stability.”

“I think the climate for business in Africa has never been better than it is right now,” adds Dr Tukur, Chairman of Nigeria-based NEPAD Business Group. “We are witnessing many opportunities for productive long-term investment and public-private partnerships that will facilitate and sustain economic growth and development. Africa is now being taken seriously within the global economic community and it won’t be disappointed.”

Business is waking up to Africa and multinational corporations are moving in. Last year Nairobi, Kenya became the regional HQ for General Electric, Young & Rubicam, Google, Coca Cola and Celtel. Goldman Sachs’ recently launched 10,000 Women initiative (www.10000women.org) focused its initial partnerships in Africa.

Into

Africa



Yet many of the world's leading business schools continue to focus their international activities on the BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India and China) and not Africa. While many individual faculty are involved in Africa, only a few leading schools devote institutional resources to the continent.

This is beginning to change. INSEAD's Africa Initiative is one indication of this recent shift. The purpose is to increase the school's presence and relevance in Africa, so as to be a catalyst for development in Africa while leveraging the knowledge gained there to promote effective business practices in other regions.

INSEAD is not alone. Growing interest in Africa reflects a number of factors: the region's rapid economic growth and the rise of an African private sector and of a middle class, increasing internationalisation of the business school student body, which compels schools to step up their activities in many countries, and increasing awareness of entrepreneurship. One of the major drivers, in recent years, has been students' growing interest in engaging in developmental activities in emerging markets. The best and brightest will pick a business school that offers such opportunities – and this is equally true for top-of-the-line company recruitment. Hence the degree of business school engagement in Africa and other developing regions has become an increasingly important competitive offering.

This interest is embedded in part in the growing attention paid to entrepreneurship and “social entrepreneurship” by major schools. In order to offer world-class courses in emerging

markets, faculty needs to research how business is conducted by local firms. This has given rise to increasing collaboration between faculty of well-established leading business schools and emerging African schools. A new institutional framework has developed in recent years, which facilitates collaboration between these schools.

In 2002 the Global Business School Network (GBSN) was created to provide a framework for leading business schools wanting to contribute to capacity building in under-served parts of the world, first and foremost in Sub-Saharan Africa. Currently, faculty from 30 top schools are participating in GBSN. Originally housed within the International Finance Corporation, the private sector arm of the World Bank Group, GBSN is now run by the Management Education & Research Consortium (MERC) (www.mercnetwork.org), a non profit organisation based in Washington DC. GBSN members come together every year at an annual meeting hosted by one of the schools. This gives members a chance to meet with each other as well as representatives from the private sector, government, and civil society to discuss best practices in management education and its role in promoting economic growth and development. This year's meeting will be held at the United States International University (USIU) in Nairobi on July 9-10.

MERC has worked with several business schools across Africa to strengthen their ability to adopt best practice in pedagogy, develop and integrate local business case studies into their

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Schools participating in GBSN

[BI Norwegian School of Management](#)

[Chicago Graduate School of Business](#)

[Columbia Business School](#)

[Copenhagen Business School](#)

[Darden Graduate School
of Business Administration](#)

[Fuqua School of Business,
Duke University](#)

[Gordon Institute of Business Science](#)

[Haas School of Business](#)

[Harvard Business School](#)

[HEC Paris School of Management](#)

[IESE Business School](#)

[IMD Business School](#)

[Indian Institute of Management,
Ahmedabad](#)

[INSEAD](#)

[Kellogg School of Business,
Northwestern University](#)

[Lagos Business School](#)

[Lahore University of Management
Sciences \(Pakistan\)](#)

[London Business School](#)

[MIT Sloan School of Management](#)

[Ross School of Business,
University of Michigan](#)

[Stanford Graduate School of Business](#)

[SDA Bocconi](#)

[Stern School of Business](#)

[Stockholm School of Economics](#)

[Tuck School of Business](#)

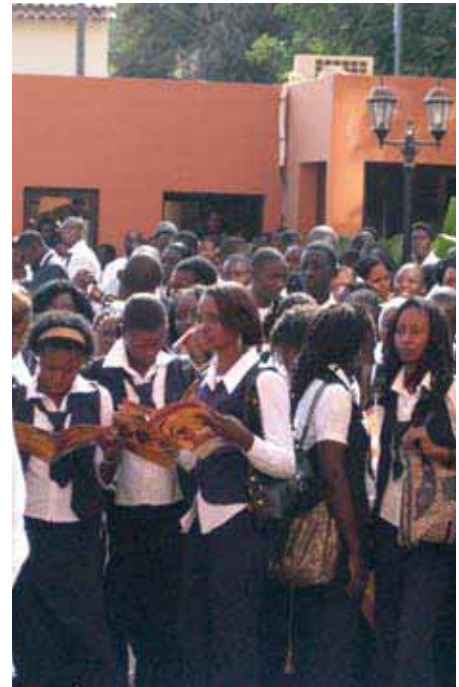
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curricula, and engage in dialogue with the private sector to ensure the supply and demand of management skills are aligned. MERC has a strong partnership with the Association of African Business Schools (AABS), an organisation MERC helped to create.

The Association of African Business Schools (AABS) was established in 2005 (www.aabschools.com) with a mission to promote excellence in business and management education in Africa by supporting graduate business schools through capacity building, collaboration and quality improvement. Headquartered in Johannesburg, AABS has set tough admission criteria and its growing membership is testimony to the rise in high-quality business education in Africa. AABS membership includes business schools in Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal, Tanzania and South Africa (see GBSN and AABS schools in the boxes).

One of the weaknesses of business education in Africa has been outdated teaching methods and irrelevant materials, a particular difficulty being the scarcity of local teaching cases. Under co-operative programmes involving faculty from a number of GBSN schools, a large number of African faculty have, over the past few years, been working on case writing and case teaching.

For example, four business schools in Nairobi (USIU, Strathmore, Kenyatta and Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology) have worked with a number of GBSN mentors to produce more than 120 teaching cases based on local company research. They include many micro and small company cases as

well as large corporation such as Kenya Airways and Safaricom. Additionally, mentors worked with ISM, a business school in Dakar, Senegal to create the first 10 case studies based on local firms which will be available in both French and English.

Another GBSN initiative, now run by AABS, called “Teaching the Practice of Management” brings together faculty from many African countries for an intensive, week-long faculty development program co-taught by African and international professors. The focus is on case teaching and requires that each participating school send a number of professors to ensure a critical mass of faculty at each institution receiving training.

In addition to upgrading teaching methods and materials for traditional business education, African business schools are creating new sector-specific programmes, for example in health. Despite huge amounts of money spent on health care, results fail to match expectations, owing in part to poor management. Business schools can play an enormously important role in strengthening health systems. In 2007 Nairobi’s Strathmore Business School launched the first Advanced Health Management programmes to be offered in the region. This programme addresses the critical shortage of qualified managers in the health sector.

Beyond health, local business schools can become powerful tools for national development, training not only businessmen and women but also leaders and managers of non-governmental organisations, education institutions, and the public-sector. Unlike traditional schools, modern business schools



encourage interactive participatory pedagogy, hone problem-solving skills and strengthen key functional proficiency as well as strategic decision making.

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Some major schools have been stepping up their African activities in order to remain at the leading edge of global competitiveness. As noted, Goldman Sachs’s initiative, is harnessing top business schools with MERC’s advice, to enhance the capacity of business schools in Africa and other under-served parts of the world in support of local business and entrepreneurship education for women. Many of its initial academic partnerships involve GBSN and AABS business schools. For example, the William Davidson Institute of the University of Michigan is working with the School of Finance and Banking in Kigali (Rwanda); Columbia Business School is engaging in joint activities with USIU (Kenya) and the University of Dar es Salaam (Tanzania); Brown University is teaming up with the University of Cape Town’s business school; the Wharton School is working closely with the American University Cairo; and Thunderbird School of Global Management is working with the American University of Afghanistan. Other programmes involve Pan African University’s Entrepreneurship Development Services in Lagos, Nigeria; and the Indian School of Business. Over the next five years, other business schools will be invited to become engaged.

In sum, as part of their competitive strategies, leading business schools are becoming increasingly engaged in low-income countries. By engaging in collaborative activities with leaders and faculty of business schools in these countries, they are building capacity and increasing the number of “problem solvers” trained in the practice of management while increasing their own global reach and reputation. This is absolutely key to the success of development efforts as well as the continued success of globally competitive business schools.

Association of African Business Schools Membership

- Gordon Institute of Business Science (South Africa)
- Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration
- Institut Africain de Management (Senegal)
- Institut Supérieur de Management (Senegal)
- Lagos Business School (Nigeria)
- Obafemi Awolowo University, Ife (Nigeria)
- University of Cape Town (South Africa)
- UNISA Graduate School of Business Leadership (South Africa)
- University of Dar es Salaam Faculty of Commerce & Management (Tanzania)
- University of Nairobi School of Business (Kenya)
- University of Stellenbosch Business School (South Africa)
- United States International University (Kenya)
- Strathmore Business School (Kenya)
- Wits Business School (South Africa)
- University of Botswana
- Catholic University of Eastern Africa, Kenya (provisional institutional membership)
- Turfloop Graduate School of Leadership, South Africa (associate membership)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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