



YOUNG TECH-ENTREPRENEURS DRIVE SOCIAL CHANGE IN AFRICA

A NEW GENERATION OF AFRICAN TECH-ENTREPRENEURS ARE CREATING SOLUTIONS WITH THE POTENTIAL TO SHAPE THE FUTURE OF THE ENTIRE CONTINENT. KBFUS SPOTLIGHTS THESE LOCAL LEADERS AND CHANGE MAKERS, IN AN EFFORT TO CONNECT THEM TO OPPORTUNITIES IN THE UNITED STATES AND ELSEWHERE.

Across the African continent, the use of smartphones is increasing and the cost of high-speed internet is decreasing. Young innovators have grasped hold of these opportunities and are changing the economic and social landscape. By developing leading-edge technology applications, these creative thinkers are proving to the world that Africa can generate technology rather than just adopt it.

"Africa is experiencing an incredible revolution of entrepreneurship," says Frannie Léautier, former Senior Vice President of the African Development Bank and a KBFUS board member.

"The fastest growing small companies are successful because of the way they leverage new technologies and business models."



INVESTING IN LOCAL CHANGE MAKERS

In 2017, KBFUS' Brussels-based parent foundation awarded its prestigious King Baudouin African Development Prize to three young African entrepreneurs who use technology to connect people with essential knowledge and information. The three winners are excellent examples of Africa's transformation, says Léautier. "The amount of creativity here is unbelievable. Africa is a youthful continent and young people bring unique and fresh ideas. The work of BarefootLaw, Farmerline and Kytabu demonstrates this. Africa is at a special time in history, and at a special time for philanthropy and social enterprises."

KBFUS' Jean Paul Warmoes adds that local entrepreneurs hold the key to developing sustainable solutions for social change. "If we are truly interested in supporting development in Africa, our best bet is to invest in local leaders," he says. "Africa has plenty of talented, hard-working social entrepreneurs who are determined to take their future into their own hands."



TECH BOOM HELPS PROMOTE FAIR AND EQUAL ACCESS TO JUSTICE

BarefootLaw, the first online legal service in East Africa, is a free platform that provides legal advice to those who need it most. "In 2013 we set out with the goal to demystify the law and empower people to understand their rights," says Gerald Abila, BarefootLaw's founder and Executive Director. "People need knowledge and understanding of the law to give them equal and fair access to justice. Those living under the poverty line cannot afford to hire a lawyer."

Today, with a staff of 27 lawyers and technology experts, BarefootLaw reaches 400,000 people a month on social media platforms, using simple, accessible language. The company offers legal advice on everything, from criminal court procedures to property law.

"TECHNOLOGY IS A GREAT ENABLER. WE WERE ABLE TO BUILD ON THIS BOOM TO INCREASE ACCESS TO JUSTICE." GERALD ABILA

"Technology is a great enabler," Abila says. "In 2012, only 8 percent of Uganda's population had access to the internet, and 30 percent to mobile phones. In 2018, those numbers are 50 and 70 percent respectively. We were able to build on this boom to increase access to justice and change people's lives."

Abila sees BarefootLaw's future well beyond Uganda's borders. "In two years from now we believe we will be able to expand into other eastern and southern African countries. Our ultimate goal is to enable access to justice for 50 million people across Africa by 2030.



AGRICULTURAL REVOLUTION STARTS WITH INFORMATION

About 80 percent of total agricultural production in Ghana is attributed to smallholder farmers, who face serious challenges, including limited access to credit, information, technology and markets.

Since 2013, Farmerline, a social enterprise based in Accra, has been working to change that. “We want to revolutionize the way farmers access the information and the resources they need to produce and sell food,” says CEO and co-founder Alloysius Attah. “People living in rural areas in Ghana have poor internet access and bad roads. Most of them cannot read or write English. These obstacles mean they are excluded from the marketplace. Our job is to put them in a position of power. And we are doing that using modern technologies.”

Farmerline provides smallholder farmers across West Africa with daily weather forecasts, pest and disease reports and market information, using text and voice messages in local languages. With partners in 11 African countries, it has reached 200,000 farmers and profiled 700,000 acres of farmland.

“THIS IS A MOVEMENT LED BY YOUNG AFRICANS REVOLUTIONIZING AGRICULTURE ACROSS THE CONTINENT.” ALLOYSIUS ATTAH

Using data on farmers’ activities, crop yields and farm size, Farmerline aggregates demand and negotiates better prices for the services farmers require.

Attah says Farmerline is planning to have the most active database and metrics on smallholder farmers on the continent. Their system will help governments and companies streamline the way they work with farmers. “This is a movement led by young Africans revolutionizing agriculture across the continent.”

DEMOCRATIZING EDUCATION, TRANSFORMING COMMUNITIES

When Tonee Ndungu’s father started a community school in Nairobi, he discovered that too many students had no access to textbooks, which were either unaffordable or unavailable. The younger Ndungu looked for a solution to help more children study. The answer was leasing out digital content.

In 2012, Ndungu founded Kytabu, the Swahili word for book, to bring value-added, low-cost technology to classrooms. The application enables teachers and students to rent curriculum-required textbooks on demand, for a day, a week, a month or a school term, using a mobile money payment system.

“The availability of mobile devices in Kenya far outweighs the availability of textbooks,” Ndungu says. “Somewhere between 84 and 87 percent of people in Kenya have smartphones. That’s where our opportunity lies - we

provide easy access at an affordable price." While a standard textbook costs about US\$ 6 to buy, millions of students now use Kytabu's digital version for just US\$ 0.18 a week.

**"THE WAY EDUCATIONAL CONTENT IS PRESENTED
MUST CHANGE AS SOCIETY EVOLVES."
TONEE NDUNGU**

Through Kytabu, students can also access audiobooks and videos, which provide similar content in a more elaborate, fun and engaging manner. "Younger generations are moving from book-size learning to byte-size learning," says Ndungu. "It's how we are evolving as a human race. Our concentration time is lower. The way educational content is presented must change as society evolves, or chances are people will not have enough time or capacity to focus and learn."

**CHAMPIONING AFRICA'S ENTREPRENEURS -
A FROM SILICON VALLEY TO OXFORD**

KBFUS invited the three tech-entrepreneurs to celebrate their shared win during a 10-day 'roadshow' in the United States last November. They met with technology companies and international organizations in Washington DC, New York City and the San Francisco Bay Area.

In April 2018, they joined KBFUS in Oxford, United Kingdom, for the Skoll World Forum on Social Entrepreneurship. "And in October, the winners will travel with KBFUS to Mexico for Opportunities Collaboration, a collaborative summit focused on solutions to global poverty and injustice," says Warmoes. "Our objective is to put a spotlight on their inspirational stories and offer them unique opportunities to promote their cause."

RECOGNITION, EXPOSURE AND CREDIBILITY

While the cash award allowed BarefootLaw to hire additional staff members and upgrade its platform, Abila says the most important result of winning the prize was the recognition and exposure. "We met with like-minded social entrepreneurs, investors and philanthropists. We adopted many of the lessons we learned from those meetings. One of them is 'Do what you do, do it well, and do it on time.' That has become our mantra."

"It's very hard for a small start-up to get international exposure, let alone a start-up from Ghana," adds Farmerline's Attah. "What the King Baudouin Prize gave us is credibility. We no longer think of ourselves as a start-up from Ghana or Africa. We think of ourselves as a global social enterprise."

Kytabu's Ndungu echoes the sentiments of his fellow prize winners. "There's a lot of power in spotlighting," he says. "One of the biggest challenges of being an African start-up is validation. That's why the King Baudouin Prize has been a life-changer. It's given credibility not only to Kytabu, but also to the broader field of start-ups in this part of the world."

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