



STARTUP CAMEROON

CREATION OF AN ITALIAN-AFRICAN BUSINESS INCUBATOR IN DOUALA

PRESENTATION

CONTEXT

Economy

Cameroon covers an area of 475,440 km² in the Gulf of Guinea. The country has a GDP per capita income of US\$ 2.366¹, one of the ten highest in Sub-Saharan African, thanks to a decade of strong economic performance, with GDP growing at an average of 4% per year. On the other hand, it is the 150th Country in the Human Development Index and the literacy rate is 67.9%². Corruption is still considered endemic; however, the last four years have shown that political will and decisive action could turn things around.



Demography and education

Each year, thousands of the African young are educated in the European and Italian universities, but the number of skilled people going back to their home country is less than 10%. At the same time, the continent is affected by the loss of "brain" phenomenon, due to the lack of job opportunity and career development in Africa. The population growth rate is close to 2.8%, which explains the population's age structure (63% under 25, of whom 47% are between 5 and 24 years old). Conscious of the potential labor force this represents, the government intends to improve its efforts to implement training and develop a high-quality education system. Much of the new and emerging technological advancements are a preserve of universities and mid-level colleges, such as University of Yaoundé, University of Douala, University of Dschang, University of Bamenda and University of Buea. More so, the young talents who develop innovations in these universities and colleges often do not have a platform where following up their projects after graduation. They cannot get the continue guidance to achieve growth and gain presence in the market once they go out of the university. A certain number of programs have been set up to promote the socio-economic integration of young people such as incubation spaces, following the example of countries like Kenya and Uganda, pioneers of the implementation of technological innovation hubs. Nonetheless, much has to be done to promote innovation and to improve equal opportunities to business startup.

¹ 2012

² 2001



PARTNERS

Founders

Centro per le Relazioni con l'Africa (CRA-SGI) is a centre of relations with Africa instituted in April 2013 by the Società Geografica Italiana, a scientific society born in 1867 with the aim of increasing the research in the field of geography and environment. It promotes scientific knowledge both at a national and an international level, in fields like economics, culture, politics, environmental and social awareness, education, rural development and sustainability ([here the video of the latest conference](#)). CRA-SGI founders are Italian and African personalities (ambassadors, researchers and professors, and former members of Parliaments) with long-lasting direct experiences in Africa. Among them there are Prof. Vittorio Colizzi, director of the UNESCO chair in Interdisciplinary Biotechnology at the University of Rome Tor Vergata and Prof. Carlo Alberto Pratesi (University of Roma Tre), who are the contact persons for this project.

The European Group of Biotechnology Science Park Tor Vergata (EUROBIOPARK) is a means to interface between different individual figures who bring their Professional and Scientific contributions to biotechnology applied to Biomedical areas, Bioinformatics, Agro-food and Environmental aspects within their personal capacity or as a members of the organization. With the aim to broaden the University research and higher education in industrial development within the Municipality of Rome, The University of Tor Vergata in Rome was identified as the main site for the development of specific settlements and an "incubator" for start-ups and young companies with a high content of innovative research.

The 5th Urban Council of the City of Douala is the local and institutional partner. The Major of the City is M.me Francois Foning, member of the Advisory Board of the CRA/SGI and the contact person is the city councilman Dr. Martin Sanou Sobze. The City Council of Douala has already made a physical space available to create a new incubator in the city center ([here the signature of the agreement](#)) addressed to both the selected Italian-Cameroonian startups and other ones with a positive impact on the society.



The above mentioned organizations will be supported by a network of associations, experts, incubators, universities and press. The following organizations have already confirmed their involvement in the project:

Italy based

Micro Progress Onlus is an Italian non-profit association born in 2004, which deals with training and consulting with regards to social business startup. Micro Progress Onlus will take care of the third phase (Training young African talents to start up social businesses in Cameroon)

Luiss EnLabs is an accelerator based in Rome, which helps the growth of startups and develop them into successful enterprises. Luiss EnLabs will manage the training for the incubator managers in the second phase of the project.

Impact Hub is an innovation lab, a business incubator and a social enterprise community center, which offers an ecosystem of resources, inspiration, and collaboration opportunities to grow the positive impact of the work of its members. Impact Hub Roma is interested in collaborating with the project and it will monitor the evolution of the stakeholder analysis.

University of Tor Vergata (Roma 2) and **University of Roma Tre**, two of the three public universities in Rome, represented respectively by Prof. Colizzi and Prof. Pratesi, will facilitate the collaboration and the exchange of information among Italian and Cameroonian Universities

Cameroon based

University of Dschang, will support the field research in the first phase of the project, as well as promote the activities of the incubator, as soon as it will be operative

Canal 2 International, one of the major Cameroonian television, has [signed an agreement](#) with CRA –SGL, with the aim of promoting the all project through its channels. The promotional [video spot](#) for the second phase is currently broadcasted daily.



AIM

The general aim is to foster the development of a breeding ground for Cameroonian social innovators, through:

1. Understanding the needs and the potential of the business startup community in Douala and promoting a collective answer;
2. Identify an incubation model fitting the needs of the community
3. Setting up a new business incubator in Douala with the aim of strengthening the business models of the disruptive social ideas raised in Cameroon and help them to be innovative and financially sustainable;
4. Training African educated young in African and Italian Universities in the field of science, economy and industrial development in order to transfer the *knowhow* on the management of an incubator/accelerator;
5. Training young African talents to start up social businesses in Cameroon, in order to have a positive and sustainable impact on employment and on the local community; boosting private and public investments in social startups in Cameroon;
6. Incubation of at least 10 startups in the first 18 months of activity of the incubator (September 2014 – March 2016).

Each specific aim responds to a specific part or phase of the project. Currently, the first two phases have collected funds, respectively by the Nando Peretti Foundation and by the Municipality of Douala. The financial request for the third phase has already been sent out to the Waldesian Church of Italy, and this phase will start as soon as new funds will be raised (expected month: October 2014).



MAIN ACTIVITIES

Phase 1: February – June 2014

1. **Stakeholder map:** the relevant local and international players active in the city of Douala ascribable to the Cameroonian startup ecosystem will be identified and categorized.
2. **Stakeholder engagement:** diffusion of the present document among the identified stakeholders, open discussion and preparation of a final document containing a need assessment and a collection of feedbacks.
3. **Field work in Cameroon** (March 13th – Aprile 11th 2014), with the aim of:
 - a. Identify a physical **space** for the incubator and start setting it up
 - b. Identifying the most pressing **needs** of the business startup local community;
 - c. Identifying an emerging national **sector of specialization** that will be proposed as focus of the Incubator;
 - d. Arranging the **roles** of each participant player;
 - e. Signing an agreement between Eurobiopark Cameroun and Douala City Council, in order to fix the organizational details, as well as the financial support to the incubator.

The activities listed under point three will be carried out through both face to face meetings and focus groups with the relevant local players

4. **Students and recent graduates from Cameroon** who live in Italy and want to go back to their country to start their own activity will be identified, thanks to a TV spot broadcasted by Canal 2 International. CRA-SGI and Eurobiopark will also collect adhesions by candidates who are intentioned either to become the manager of the incubator in Douala or to boost social innovation locally. CRA-SGI is addressing them to startup competitions and entrepreneurship labs all around Italy in order to anticipate their entrance in the startup ecosystem and provide them with the bases of building up a startup.



Phase 2: September – December 2014

Selection and training of two managers of the Incubator. The training could consist in an intensive course offered (and hosted) by the main private incubators/accelerators/social innovation networks in Rome, as well as in an internship among one of them (or an equivalent in another Italian city, under request of the participants). Professional coaches, mentors, entrepreneurs and business angels will follow interns in order to acquire practical skills and establish linkages useful for the future development of the project. Some of the selection criteria are entrepreneurial and managerial attitude, problem solving, technical competence, and involvement in social initiative/social issues, willingness to live and work in Cameroon. The promotional video spot by Canal 2 International is collecting interest and subscriptions from young Africans who would like to join the project.

Phase 3: October 2014 – June 2015

Training young African talents to start up social businesses in Cameroon, in order to have a positive and sustainable impact on employment and on the local community; boosting private and public investments in social startups in Cameroon.

Empowerment of the local startup ecosystem through startup competitions/further training sessions/capital attraction or any other initiative that could emerge from the analysis conducted during Phase 1.

Phase 4: September 2014 - February 2016

Incubation of at least 10 startups in the first 18 months of activity of the incubator. Although this activity has still to be organized and there is no promotion about it, the project has already received several candidacies from few startups and some individuals who are interested in being incubated in order to grow up their business. However, selection criteria will be set later on, together with the other stakeholders, with particular regards to venture capital funds and the Municipality of Douala.



SUSTAINABILITY

The overall project has both a high sustainable impact on the target group and a multiplier effect:

1. Social businesses are enterprises that pursue social impact without depending on donations: since they follow market rules, they have to be financially autonomous. So the new born startups will benefit the community with no (or little) need of being subsidized.
2. The new incubator will remain active and available for new companies that will be born in Cameroon and in the neighboring countries, helping them set up their own new social business.
3. The newborn companies will help attract new social private capitals, needed for the enterprises to grow.

FUNDS

Incubator Startup Cameroon is financed by the Nando Peretti Foundation and the City Council of Douala – Douala 5th Urban Council



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