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## African business schools united in developing continent's leadership

*A strong private sector is the key to driving economic growth and development on the African continent - and can also play a vital role in holding governments to account and promoting political stability.*

Association of African Business Schools



African business schools need to take the lead in ensuring the continent's

managers have the necessary skills and knowledge to drive this much-needed economic and democratic expansion.

This is the view of Jonathan Cook - Board Member of the Association of African Business Schools (AABS) and Director of its flagship programme: Teaching the Practice of Management.

According to Cook, there is a dire need for more management expertise at all levels on the continent and business schools can fill the critical gap that exists between the management theory found in textbooks and the real business world.

“Business schools are essential to driving economic growth and promoting democracy in Africa and thus contribute to the international



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competitiveness of African businesses," said Cook, who is also a senior lecturer at the Gordon Institute of Business Science.

"The globalised world is becoming increasingly competitive and Africa has fallen behind on many levels. This can only be addressed through cutting-edge, proficient management, and business schools are playing their part in this regard by developing current and future leaders for the continent.

"A strong private sector can also contribute to creating a culture of respect and performance thus leading to greater political stability and regard for democratic processes," Cook added.

The Association of African Business Schools (AABS) is a non-profit organisation that was established to promote excellence in business and management education in Africa by supporting graduate business schools through capacity building, collaboration and quality improvement.

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One way in which it does this is through specialised programmes such as Teaching the Practice of Management (TPM).

Now in its fourth year, the programme recently took place at the United States International University (USIU) in Nairobi, Kenya. More than 50 delegates from ten African countries converged on the Kenyan business school from 18 - 23 May to brush up on their practice-based teaching and learning methodologies.

The course was co-designed by faculty from the Gordon Institute of Business Science in South Africa and the Lagos Business School - with additional input from top international institutions like the Harvard Business School, Columbia Business School as well as the IESE Business School in Spain.

"Over the week participants were exposed to cutting-edge practice-based teaching methods that make extensive use of classroom debate and real-life case studies. This approach to management education helps to develop leaders and managers who can effectively apply management theory to the workplace," said Cook. "Honing real business acumen and managerial skills is what will drive the growth and success of the private sector."

Fatima Hamdulay, senior lecturer in Operations Management at the UCT Graduate School of Business in Cape Town who attended the programme agreed that it was highly valuable as a means of brushing up on practice-based teaching

methods.

“It was great to once again take the role of student and get exposure to these particular teaching methods and different teaching styles. As a relatively new teacher I found the training and experience of participant-centred and case study teaching practices to be extremely useful. When participating in lectures instead of facilitating them oneself, you get a real feel for what works and what doesn't work in this type of adult classroom situation,” said Hamdulay.

In addition to gaining new skills, the event also provides African business academics with an unprecedented opportunity to forge links with their counterparts in other universities on the continent.

“The course is a fantastic networking opportunity and allows faculty from all over Africa to touch base and make contact,” said Cook. “What's more, it is an opportunity for self-regeneration, with many delegates commenting on how the experience rejuvenated their idealism and enthusiasm for teaching.”

This kind of encouragement is particularly important as many African business schools suffer resource constraints and need help in developing the value of their educational offerings.

This is where the AABS and courses like TPM can make a major impact. According to Cook, the organisation is helping many new business schools to reach a commendable level of quality.

“The standard of business schools on the continent is very varied - ranging from true centres of excellence to the markedly below-average. Unfortunately, there are only a small handful of world-class business schools in Africa.

“The African business community is definitely under-served in terms of quality business schools and the AABS strives to address this need,” said Cook.

The often-lamented African skills crisis can only be tackled through increased training and education of a quality that is comparable to what is offered in the rest of the world as well as through the development of a strong private sector to help keep talent from seeking greener pastures in the developed world.

Cook said that political stability is another factor that can keep talent on the continent and the private sector plays a crucial role in promoting democracy.

“Governments are more accountable where there are strong institutions in society - including the private sector and non-governmental organisations - and where leaders in business work with government to protect the key economic and legal institutions of society,” said Cook.

Another delegate on the latest TPM programme Michael Frimpon, lecturer in Operations Management at the Business School at GIMPA in Ghana, agreed that courses like TPM were “critical if Africa is to make headway in the race to speed up the transformation of the economies of sub-Saharan Africa”.

“Workshops such as TPM4 are key to changing the style as well as the mindsets of people tasked with the mandate of educating Africa's new business class,” said Frimpon.

Frimpon's resident business school is set to host the fifth TPM programme next year.

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