

South African student-team wins top international case competition with sustainable food production project

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A team of MBA students from the UCT Graduate School of Business (GSB) has been announced as the overall winner of the 2015 Global Business Challenge - one of the world's most prestigious graduate business case competitions - in Brisbane, Australia.

With more than R2m in prize-money and judged by a panel of global CEOs and leaders from government and industry, the Global Business Challenge invites participants to design implementable and practical solutions to the world's biggest challenges.

This year's focus was on aiding the achievement of global food security through business ventures that seek to double food production by 2040.

The GSB team was made of four students from the 2014 and 2015 MBA full-time and modular classes: Ralph Thomas, Caryn Jeenes, Christopher Human, Robyn Fox, and was coached by senior lecturer Johannes Schüler. It won out against 69 other universities from 27 countries. In the final round it competed against five other teams representing Canada, Australia, India, Australia, Poland and Indonesia.

The team presented a fresh-water aquaculture production system called Fish4Africa that disrupts Africa's current protein supply shortages by offering a sustainably produced, market-accepted catfish product based on a scale-efficient, replicable medium-scale model that requires low capital investment and can generally be located in close proximity to demand.

A medium-scale project was chosen because of the high risk of doing business in Africa, which could potentially jeopardise a large-scale agricultural project.

Team member Ralph Thomas says the idea was inspired by an initiative in Graaff-Reinet called The Blue Karoo, which is also a catfish aquaculture project.

"They have been very helpful in providing us with information. The Blue Karoo initiative follows a well-designed, sustainable approach and achieves high socio-economic impact in the surrounding communities. Our model is based on their model, with a range of innovative modifications and adaptations that achieve replicability of the model," Thomas said.

He said the major advantages are that Fish4Africa is a medium-sized aquaculture farm and the capex requirements are much less than setting up a large farm; the model is replicable across the continent; it creates an affordable, protein-rich product, which is accepted by the market; and finally, the farms are sustainable in nature, making use of various innovations and relying less on third-party inputs.

"The Global Business Challenge is a wonderful opportunity for South African students to showcase their academic abilities on a global platform, while finding practical and commercially viable answers to real-world issues."

"Competitions such as this help foster the GSB's reputation as a global thought leader for innovative, sustainable solutions for emerging markets," Schüler said.

This is the second time that the current team has worked together. In January this year they competed as the UCT GSB case competition team at the John Molson MBA International Competition in Montreal, Canada, where they reached the

semi-finals and won the 2015 Richard Outcault Team Spirit Award.

"I am extremely proud of the GSB team and am glad that the smart thinking and hard work paid off," Schüler said.

The Global Business Challenge is a partnership between the Queensland University of Technology (QUT) and Griffith University, and is supported by both government and industry in Australia. It was born in the lead-up to the G-20 (Group of 20) summit held in Brisbane in 2014 to addresses issues of global concern.

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