

## Unlocking opportunity in Africa

ACCRA, Ghana - The Africa Internship Academy plans to set up a continental-wide certification assist the youth of Africa with honing their skills and encouraging entrepreneurship.



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The [Africa Internship Academy](#) (AIA) is a successful youth employment accelerator in Ghana that provides work readiness and entrepreneurship programs for secondary and higher education students; as well as graduates to gain entrepreneurial and employability skills.

It assigns mentors to them, and either connects them to employers looking for entry-level talents, or incubates them to launch their ideas through the AIA Business Starter Pack Program.

Its ideas and methods have won the Social Enterprise Award in 2017, as well as the recognition of the African Union as one of Africa's best tools for youth development.

Africa holds a very high rate of youth unemployment. In Ghana, about 120,000 young people graduate from various institutions with only about 10% getting employed after the first year of completion. Over 16% will never work in their lifetime, yet every year, thousands of job vacancies go unfilled. Employers have trouble finding people who are 'ready for work'.

"Youth unemployment in Ghana is basically not because there are no jobs in Ghana," says Emmanuel Les Addae, co-founder of AIA. "There is a mismatch between the jobs available in the country and the young people who are desperately searching for work. The gap is in creativity and innovation skills, poor social networks, limited resources to look for work, poor attitudes of graduates towards job opportunities, and unavailability of funding capital for entrepreneurship."

Training, internships and mentorships have been identified as ideal tools to bridge the gap between unemployment and employment in Africa.

### **Mentorship**

To make change happen, Addae and his co-founders decided to launch AIA in 2016, with a combination of work training, internships and mentorship. They decided to implement a program called *Work Integrated Learning Program (WILP)*, a practical and effective way of providing relevant and progressive skills to young people.

According to Addae, the ultimate goal of the program was to make youths, especially to be work-ready. “The goal is to make them work-ready. We teach them about design thinking, emotional intelligence in the workplace, financial literacy skills, entrepreneurial skills, presentation/communication skills and organisational skills. The training is then complemented with internship placements in companies with active mentoring, offered by 50 companies and 150 experienced mentors.”

This was a golden combination - training, followed by internships and mentoring. According to Addae, the results of the students they worked with have been remarkable. Out of the 195 fellows who have graduated from the program, over 32% have moved into self-employment, 28% are now full-time working staff in various corporate organisations, 11% are working part-time, 9% are volunteers, 15% are working on contracts and 5% still in school. This is an incredible impact.

As a youth impact social enterprise, entrepreneurial and employable skills, are the perfect keys to unlock job opportunities in Africa, and as such, all their programs are tailored to shape and develop these skills in people.

Addae reported that they usually give more attention to the 21<sup>st</sup> century skill-set. “There are several, such as communication skills, networking skills, research skills and team work skills. Teamwork forms an integral part of life. One must be taught how to integrate properly with people of different background and orientation. Interaction, collaboration, negotiation and compromise are some essentials of an excellent teamwork.”

## **Creativity**

Addae stresses that AIA programs also teach young people organisational skills, to properly plan tasks and to learn time management. “We also hope to spark creativity. We believe a creative mind triggers success and excellence.” He said.

Since the academy was founded, its programs have been very consistent in the years. According to Addae, sponsorships are the main source of survival over the years. “Finding partners and sponsors have not been easy. The first partner we had for the AIA internship program was Ecobank, they agreed to host our fellows after the four-week integrated learning program.

“We have about 50 organisations that host our fellows for additional one month internships at their various organisations. Apart from training young people, the other major task is to find partners who will fund, as well as host, the interns after the program. We leverage on our relationships with corporate companies to support the program. With regards to finding mentors, we normally do ‘mentors call’, where we get people to volunteer to mentor fellows.”

## **Talent**

“We observed that training and equipping people with skills was very good, but we needed an additional platform that could connect these people with active recruiters across Africa. Since we have direct contact with active entry talent recruiters across Africa, we decided that, after training people, we will give them the

opportunity to sign on a platform that could connect them directly to these recruiters in Africa. This was how TalentsinAfrica.com came about.

“We launched the platform in Ghana, Rwanda, Kenya, Nigeria, Tanzania, Senegal and Cote D'ivoire. We believe that a workable solution in Ghana can easily work in other part of Africa since we share similar problems. It is our aim to have presence in every part of this continent, but we want to pilot it in these six countries first.”

The academy's major plan this year is to set up an 'Africa Youth Skills & Data Badge' across the continent, where young people will be required to undergo a particular training to get certification. This initiative sought to create a skillset mindset and attitude among higher education students in Africa.

“This is an important motto of AIA: 'Skills have become the global currency of the 21st century!'”

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