Westminster University in UK and University of Rwanda are developing a National Center for Social Entrepreneurship

Written by Andrè Gakwaya
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Prof. Darrell Kofkin, Project Director: Social Enterprise Rwanda

Kigali: Prof. Darrell Kofkin of Westminster University in UK has launched an original program to develop in five years a National Center for Social Entrepreneurship at University of Rwanda. In this first year, 20 students from University of Rwanda and 20 students from Westminster University in UK will follow this program by exchanging ideas on how to lead a prosperous business. Prof Cotton has given an exclusive interview to André Gakwaya from RNA on that initiative. Read below:

Professor Darrell Kofkin: University of Westminster is one of the most diverse universities in the UK. And it is one of our visions to encourage our students to be global citizens. Student from Westminster come from all over the world to study in London. What we want to do is to provide them with a global view of the world. What we did last year was a developed proposal where by undergraduate students of Westminster University could potentially work with University of Rwanda undergraduate students to develop social enterprises for Rwanda. So early in 2017, the project won a funding from universities charity to kick the start of that program.

We saw it as an opportunity for students from Westminster University who tend to come from Europe had done tents there for engage much with the continent of Africa. And what we thought to do was to establish a partnership with University of Rwanda where by students from University of Rwanda can engage with students from Westminster into university teams to develop business ideas for Rwanda.

So there is a number of opportunities that come out of that. It will develop new capabilities. They will become more global. They will understand how to communicate in different cultures. They will understand how to work as a team, when half the team is in London, half the team is in Rwanda. They will learn how to communicate, present their ideas, and develop a business mentality where they can hopefully create some sustainable business ideas for Rwanda.
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We are going to launch this program in October; both universities will be applying to join the program. Out of their applications 20 students from Westminster University, 20 students from Rwanda will be selected to be part of this 10 months program. We will then announce the students in November and they will have initial meetings and discussions. We just had an important meeting with BDF which is an investment partner to provide training in developing ideas to students. We are talking to other partners like Bank of Kigali. We are talking to number of partners who will come on board to provide the skills, experience and ideas to support the students.

But also during that period, we will look on how we can get more funding; so that in future years, the project does not just take 20 students from both universities, it takes more students and we build a bigger pipeline of ideas that are coming out of university of Rwanda that might be successful businesses in the future.

Around Easter next year, the students from Westminster University will come to meet their colleagues at University of Rwanda for a one week program. They will develop their business ideas through a series of workshop, visits and seminars. Then June next year, they will submit their business plans, around July time we will then announce the winning teams. The winning teams will obtain funding to kick start their projects.

Another part of the memorandum, is that both universities will work together to develop new programs, new masters programs and there might be opportunities for University of Rwanda to come and study at University of Westminster.

It is a fabulous opportunity for our students of both Universities, to learn about different cultures, to exchange ideas, and for both Universities provides an opportunity to reach our ultimate goal, which is maybe in 5 years time is to develop a national center for social entrepreneurship at University of Rwanda.

As a message, we have hope and aspiration to be successful, so far we have had positive responses from the private sector and we truly hope that this program is going to be successful. (End)