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Business Schools for Impact

By
James Zhan
Director
Division on Investment and Enterprise
UNCTAD

The views expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of UNCTAD.

Distinguished participants,

It is my pleasure to welcome you to the "Business Schools for Impact" session. The session will examine how business schools can contribute to sustainable development by changing the mindset of business graduates and teaching the skills required to invest and operate in the world's poorest countries and achieve positive social and environmental impact.

I am extremely pleased to note the number of professors and representatives of the academic community from around the world, who are here today and who are strongly involved in the "Business Schools for Impact" initiative, launched by UNCTAD.

Allow me, first of all, to provide some background to this event. In 2010, at a High-level Plenary Meeting of the United Nations General Assembly on the Millennium Development Goals, Heads of State and Government called upon the private sector to further contribute to poverty eradication, including by adapting its business models to the needs of the poor. In the same year, at the World Investment Forum 2010, in the meeting of the Investment Advisory Council (IAC), participating government ministers and business executives strongly felt the need to change the business mindset in order to promote investment in sustainable development in the poorest countries. They felt that business schools would be an effective entry point to start this mindset change. These declarations represent the origins of our Business Schools for Impact initiative.

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Let me give my perspective. Here at UNCTAD we aim to promote responsible *investment in the poorest areas* in the world, in products and services that are *accessible and affordable to the poor*, and in projects that generate *jobs for local workers* and business opportunities for local entrepreneurs in low-income economies. These aims can be summarised by the slogan, "Investment in the poor, for the poor and with the poor".

My Division already does much to stimulate investment and entrepreneurship in developing countries: we provide policy advice, technical assistance, business facilitation, and the training of local entrepreneurs, as well as unique data services, and research and analysis, such as our World Investment Report series. Nevertheless, we felt that low-income countries are often not on the radar screen of investors and business leaders. We noticed that in business linkages projects, where we support the linking up of international firms with local SMEs in supplier development programmes, the big business managers often have as much to learn as the small local entrepreneur. It is our view that what is needed is both to bring about a change in the *mindset* of global investors, business leaders and entrepreneurs, and to provide them with the *skills* needed to operate in unfamiliar environments. To achieve this, we need to literally go back to school and work with management education and business schools.

Business students should be taught about opportunities in low-income countries and how to increase the positive impact of business decisions and investments. But it is not only about making students aware of business opportunities in the poorest countries or of different business models. It is essential for them to acquire the competencies that they need to operate in a challenging environment, build partnerships with local organizations, use unconventional distribution channels, or deliver basic services in the remotest places.

In our preparatory work for this initiative, we have seen many encouraging signs. Teachers, students and also the firms that eventually hire business school graduates agree with us that innovation in business school curricula to help promote sustainable development in low-income regions is important. Some schools are already leading the way: they offer alternative courses, more diversified case studies, internship opportunities in poor countries, and innovative teaching methods. We are lucky to have some representatives from these schools here with us today.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Next year, the international community will define and agree a new development agenda - the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In the *World Investment Report 2014*, we proposed an *Action Plan for Investment in the SDGs*. The initiative that you discuss today, the Business Schools for Impact project, is a key component of our proposed Action Plan and, we hope, will make a concrete contribution to the achievement of the SDGs in the future.

I hope that the insights you generate today, and your continued engagement with and contribution to the project, will make Business Schools for Impact a lasting success, giving it the place it deserves as a key feature of the long-term strategy to achieve the SDGs.

I wish you a constructive discussion.
Thank you.