

ARCHIMEDES ENTREPRENEURS: THE KEY TO AFRICA'S PROSPERITY

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Around 200 BC, Archimedes issued a formidable dare: “*Give me a lever long enough and a fulcrum on which to place it and I shall move the world*”. Archimedes remains unchallenged.

Two thousands years later, Poverty has become Africa and the world's most formidable dare. For most Africans, poverty is a daily experience which robs them of their dignity and freedom. An experience so painful they want it to end at once.

There are many more ideas on the solutions to Africa's poverty than practical solutions aimed at creating prosperity in Africa. In short, the world is still searching for the lever and the fulcrum to lift Africa out of poverty.

A new breed of African entrepreneurs is emerging. What is so special about these business leaders? Archimedes Entrepreneurs epitomize the role of business in the Africa of tomorrow. Africa's new economic agenda should focus on *finding* and *unleashing* these forces of prosperity creation.

First, every African nation needs to find its Archimedes Entrepreneurs. What sets this group of innovators apart? The answer lies in the four letter acronym: COWF.

This new breed of entrepreneurs uses a breakthrough business model which benefits their Customers, Owners, Workers and the Future.

Consider Emmanuel, the founder of COOPAC, Rwanda's largest coffee cooperative. I first met Emmanuel in September 2001 in Gisenyi, Rwanda. Gisenyi is a tropical French Riviera at the northern most tip of Lake Kivu at the border with Congo. There is something different about Emmanuel. Besides the unusual spark in his eyes, Emmanuel combines obsession to succeed and moral purpose.

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Customers are at the forefront of his mind when he wakes up at four every morning. As he tours the farms and washing stations, Emmanuel painstakingly monitors the many steps required to turn his Rwandan bourbon Arabica into one of the world's finest coffees. This coffee is destined for sophisticated patrons of cafes across the world's major cities. Interested customers can also learn more about COOPAC on the cooperative's website.

Emmanuel does not think *only* of his customers: he ensures that the *Owners* and *Workers* of COOPAC prosper. As a fair-trade cooperative, COOPAC benefits 2,200 families. Cooperative members receive 110 Rwandan francs (US\$ 0.20) per kilo of cherries (three times their 2001 price) plus their share of profits. Most importantly, COOPAC members have the pride of being involved in Rwanda's transformation.

A better *Future* for his community sums up Emmanuel's intrinsic motivation. This moral purpose shines through cooperative operations. The washing stations boast a state of the art system to recycle water, protecting the environment. COOPAC is also a landmark on how reconciliation can bring prosperity through collaboration. COOPAC inaugurated a self-financed school two months ago, an investment in future generations.

Emmanuel is not an isolated case. Beatrice in flowers, John in tourism and Jeanette in handicraft are other successful Archimedes Entrepreneurs in Rwanda. Rwanda is not an abnormality. Such business innovators abound in Africa.

How can African countries *unleash* these entrepreneurs? Strategy, Capital and Support are the three ingredients required.

Firstly, it is often difficult for Archimedes Entrepreneurs to garner the strategic insights required to identify and select the most promising products or services. African government and development partners can play an important role in facilitating and financing strategy upgrade processes. Private sector, government and development partners must jointly define problems and implement innovative solutions.

Secondly, African countries must *co-invest* with Archimedes Entrepreneurs. They compete in a global economy where access to abundant resources is not enough. Such investments are not limited to money. Specialized infrastructure, human capital and knowledge are often even more important. Our entrepreneurs also need business development services (BDS) including training, technical assistance and information.

Lastly, African countries must *support* and *invest* in their Archimedes Entrepreneurs. Government officials may not see why they should help entrepreneurs who make more money than they do. Development partners often feel like entrepreneurs are wealthier than rural farmers. Both stances translate into a strong belief that Archimedes Entrepreneurs should fend for themselves. This mindset must be upgraded into one which recognizes the importance of supporting entrepreneurs.

The rewards are great for nations able to unleash Archimedes Entrepreneurs. These leaders can not only help grow exports but also become outstanding ambassadors.

Rwanda is a good example. Rwanda's goods exports reached \$126 millions in 2005 double the 2003 exports. Emmanuel, Jeanette, Beatrice, John, Gerard and others are the invisible artisans behind this transformation. Their collaboration with government and partners is paying off. Starbucks now sells bourbon coffee from Rwandan cooperatives in its US shops. Women under Jeanette's leadership offer Rwandan handicraft at Macy's in New York. Beatrice's innovative Merci rose is a sensation at the Amsterdam flower auction. Gerard's Agashya passion fruit juice sells in Belgium.

Archimedes Entrepreneurs have mastered the holy grail of economics: simultaneous wealth creation and redistribution. As such, they hold the key to prosperity in Africa.

Archimedes Entrepreneurs are the *fulcrum* needed to lift Africa out of poverty. African governments and development partners must now provide them with the required *levers*—Strategy, Capital and Support.