The Development of an African Entrepreneurial and Startup 'Hub'
A Case Study at Impact Hub Accra

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Abstract

The past few years has seen the exponential rise of ‘hubs’, ‘incubators’ and ‘accelerators’ globally, as new working practices are adopted and their accompanying entrepreneurial initiatives and ‘startups’ garner much attention. This hype can also be found across the African continent, where as of August 2016 it was predicted that there were 314 ‘tech hubs’ and counting. To date, studies and articles have been written with an African lens tend to focus on these entrepreneurial centres on a macro level, comparing their success factors and output (in the form of number of ‘successful’ startups and entrepreneurs they create). In this thesis, I use the opportunity I had in spending 3 months working and conducting research at Impact Hub Accra to consider a ‘hub’ from a bottom-up, business development perspective. What is the vision of an ‘African hub’, and what are the business development issues which stand in the way of achieving these goals? Through interviews, observations and participation I am able to critically establish that three core business development issues exist in this instance: financial sustainability, integration in the wider community and collaboration. These findings are presented as part of ethnographic research which was conducted at the hub and its environs, resulting in a unique case study of a hub in the African context.

Keywords: African hubs, startups, entrepreneurs, tech hubs, business development, case study, Accra, Impact Hub Accra

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4th of July 2017

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Chapter 1
Introduction
Ghana: 60 years of independence, a new government and Impact Hub Accra

On the 13th of March 2017, Impact Hub Accra, a coworking 'hub' for budding entrepreneurs, was visited by the eminent Tony Elumelu. Elumelu (born Nigeria, 1963), an economist, entrepreneur and philanthropist (with an estimated net worth of $1bn as of November 2014. Forbes.com, 2017), secured his fame and fortune through strategic investments and his controlling interest in a Nigerian conglomerate. Along with figures such as the Nigerian tycoons Aliko Dangote and Mike Adenuga, Elumelu has come to represent a new wave of 'African' entrepreneurs who have have been compared to the likes of Mark Zuckerberg and are urging youth across the continent to embrace entrepreneurship (proshareng.com, 2016; Nwachukwu, 2017). His visit to the hub[1] had been anticipated for weeks, following careful planning by the hub's CEO and cofounder, William Edem Senyo (born Ghana, 1987). On the day of Elumelu's arrival, the hub was scrubbed with glee and as the clock ticked, present members of the hub (perhaps 70 in total), were instructed by the management team to "get ready" for Elumelu's arrival. When Elumelu finally arrived, flanked by an entourage of assistants, United Bank of Africa representatives and reporters, he addressed the burgeoning crowd with a short, but evocative, speech[2]. Elumelu urged hub members that "the future of Africa belongs to people like you" and stated that he hoped to see "the next Steve Jobs or Bill Gates come out of this centre". Before a final photoshoot at the entrance of the hub, Elumelu signed a wall with an inspiring message; "your success means so much to Africa"[3]. Afterwards, Elumelu travelled to the opulence of Accra's 5 star Kempinski Hotel, eagerly flanked by a majority of the hub's community, in order to address an ecosystem of Ghanaian entrepreneurs, influencers and key industry stakeholders amidst his visit to the country.

[1] Throughout this thesis, Impact Hub Accra with be defined by it's full nomenclature as well as 'the hub' interchangeably

[2] All in all, his visit to the hub lasted under 10 minutes

[3] A video capturing the entirety of Elumelu's visit to the hub can be found on Impact Hub Accra's Facebook page (https://www.facebook.com/impacthubaccra/videos/1124213564390596/?hc_ref=PAGES_TIMELINE).

Figure 1. Tony Elumelu visits the hub. 13th March, 2017. Source: Impact Hub Accra, 2017. Tony (red tie) is joined by the hub's CEO William Edem Senyo (immediately to his right) and members of the hub, including myself on the right.

On Monday, March 13, 2017, many of you were around to welcome the renowned business leader and philanthropist, Mr Tony Elumelu during his visit to Impact Hub Accra. In a number of ways, Mr Tony's visit validates the countless hardwork you and other community members has put into building the ecosystem we have today. Thank you for coming out in show of support, yedaase!.

As the elements of space and time join forces to create amazing opportunities and events in the ecosystem, we'll do our best to keep you updated.

-Best,
Kelechi Victor Ofoegbu | Community Manager

Figure 2. An excerpt from a newsletter sent to the member community of Impact Hub Accra. Source: Impact Hub Accra, 2017

In many ways, Elumelu's visit to the hub is symbolic of what Impact Hub Accra stands for and what it aims to help its members achieve. The hub nurtures a community of budding entrepreneurs, startups, freelancers and 'doers', who all wish to see business success. At its core, Impact Hub Accra aims to create an enabling environment- a growing ecosystem- for the next wave of successful (West) African entrepreneurs. Elumelu's visit thus stood testament to the type of fame and fortune the members might too one day like to acquire.

Yet in order for the hub to support and facilitate the trajectory of its member community (who use the space and services of the hub), the hub itself must have a firm footing and solid foundation in its context of Accra, Ghana. At present, Impact Hub Accra faces an assortment of daily business development issues, each hindering the hub's development plans to a greater or lesser extent.

Figure 3. Working from the hub's coworking space. Source: personal records, March 2017.

When I arrived at the hub at the beginning of January 2017, a garage at the back of the property was being converted into a Makerspace; a lab with workbenches for design prototyping, knowledge sharing and high quality technological equipment. Made possible through an initial funding from a foreign organisation, the Makerspace was due for completion in early 2017. However, by the time I left in mid April 2017 the Makerspace was not yet complete. Beset by funding, project management and organisational problems, the Makerspace project had faced considerable delays.

This example illustrates much of the uncertainty and 'pressure' which lies behind the nascent phenomenon of 'hubs' across the African continent. This 'new' craze of hubs popping up across the continent has led to accompanying hype, speculation and attention. As of the end of 2016, it

was estimated that there were over 314 active 'tech hubs' in Africa (in over 42 countries), with an average age of just 4.3 years and 12% of which are pure coworking spaces and 60% are incubators or accelerators (GSMA, 2016). While literature, blog posts, podcasts and discussions can be found on the success factors, 'births' and trends of these hubs, their futures and subsequent challenges still remain a speculative mystery, on account of the neoteric nature of this phenomenon.

During my 3 months working and conducting research at Impact Hub Accra, I found myself wondering more and more about what the long term vision- the strategic goals- of an African hub are and what stands in the way of achieving these goals on a daily basis. Whilst I was based in Accra, my time framed against a backdrop of a new Governmental cabinet and 60 years of independence, the energy around innovation, entrepreneurship and private sector development was palpable. At any moment, an event or venue could be found somewhere in the city which aimed to somehow fuel progression for a new generation of Ghanaian youth. Impact Hub Accra has a role to play in fostering, facilitating and supporting this new generation of aspiring Ghanaian youth, in essence by creating an enabling environment. The question remains, however, as to what its exact plans for development are and the business development issues the hub faces on a daily basis in achieving these.

In this thesis, I intend to examine the long-term visions within African hubs by using Impact Hub Accra as a case study example, and on the basis of my own observations, reflections and research conducted at the hub. In terms of the structure of this thesis, this introduction is followed by a literature review, which analyses literature on the phenomenon of 'hubs' in the African context. Thereafter, I will outline my research problem and questions, followed by details on my research methodology and the data I was able to collect. A context chapter is subsequent, which highlights the contextual environment of the hub, including details on youth unemployment, the presence of informal market activity and the role of the government in supporting entrepreneurs and SMEs[4]. Furthermore, the role that hubs can play in Ghana will be elucidated considering the above.

The subsequent 3 chapters will allow me to bring this unique case-study to fruition. The first, a descriptive chapter, will outline Impact Hub Accra as it currently stands, tracing it's history, current operation and future trajectory. The second chapter uses the output of my fieldwork to explore what the long-term goals of the hub are and what the business development issues thereof might be. The third, analytical chapter, analyses core developmental issues which the hub faces in realising its goals.

This thesis is only able to offer a glimpse into all that I experienced, observed and learnt while I spent time in Accra. However, it is my hope, that the chapters below will go some way to elucidating the vision of an 'African' hub and the business development issues it faces accordingly.

[4] Small and medium enterprises

Chapter 2
Literature Review
What is a Hub and the Hub Phenomenon in Africa

What makes a hub, a hub?

In writing any thesis on a “hub”, it is imperative to first try and untangle the myriad of definitions, buzzwords and nomenclatures surrounding a new wave of entrepreneurial and startup focal points, both globally as in the African context. When we speak of ‘hubs’, what do we mean? Furthermore, what is the difference between a “hub” and other categories including “incubators”, “accelerators” or “innovation parks”? In many cases, the term “hub” seems to have become trendy jargon for a “coworking space”. This theory has been addressed in several publications, both in more abstract terms as in the more physical, concrete factors (including the differentiation in services) that each type of entity might provide.

The aptly titled “Time to define what a “Hub” really is” (Friederici and Toivonen, 2017) argues that without a definition of hubs, it becomes impossible to gauge their performance. In striving for a definition around hubs, the Entrepreneurial Spaces and Collectivities research group (2014) consulted the accumulated insights of a vast array of social scientists and concluded that hubs can be characterized by four core features: collaborative communities with entrepreneurial individuals at the centre, an assimilation of diverse members with heterogeneous knowledge, the facilitation of creativity and collaboration in the digital and physical space, and the localization of global entrepreneurial culture. This article is an elaboration on previous work by Friderici, in which he states that the idealized attributes of a hub include that it is communal, self-organizing and adaptive, an enabler of innovators (instead of being innovative itself) and a “serendipitous” combination of heterogeneous knowledge (Friederici, 2014). Many of these sentiments have been echoed by the Impact Hub network in Africa itself, stating that the “space” which Impact Hub provides (“both physical and virtual”) ensures entrepreneurs have “adequate backing when it comes to accelerating their ideas into viable, scalable businesses” (Jackson, 2015).

In terms of differences between “hubs” and other entrepreneurial intermediaries, we might refer to a 2015 report by Unitus Seed Fund. Here, co-working spaces are defined as those which include open-plan spaces, shared desks and in essence “provide the real estate and community for entrepreneurs to independently develop their ideas and work on their startups”. As the diagram below indicates (fig. 1), each successive “type” of entrepreneurial intermediary has a progressively sophisticated focus as well as service offering.

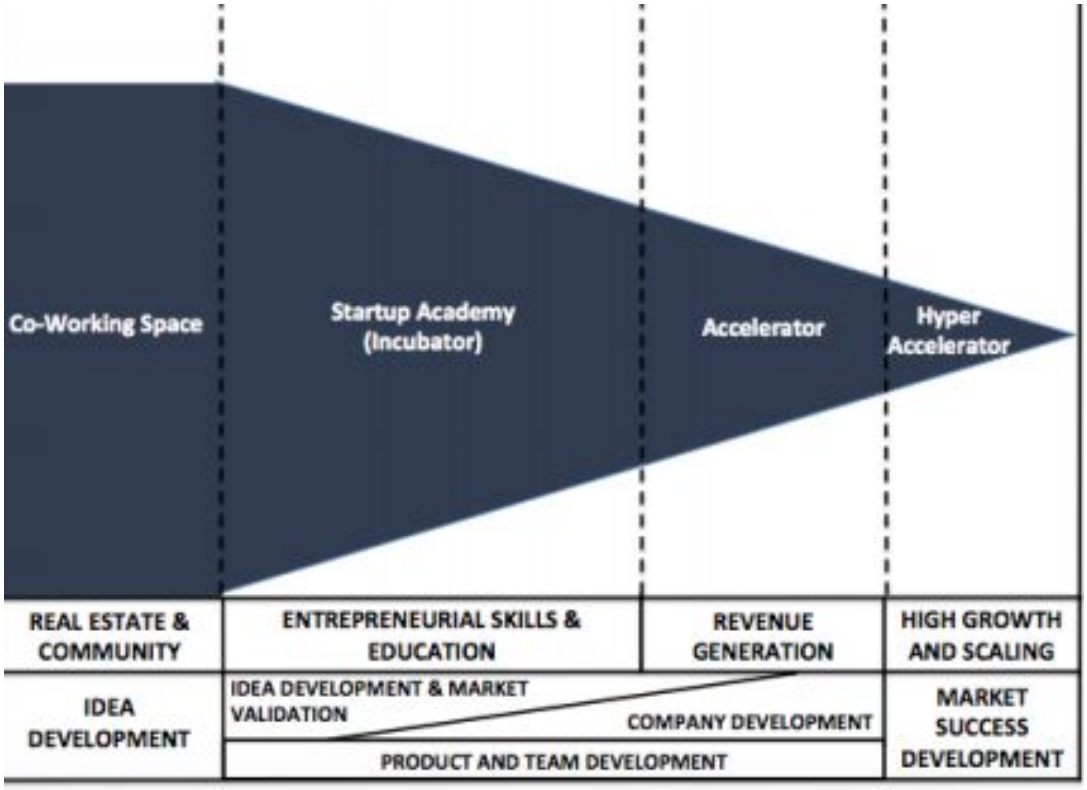


Figure 1. Types of entrepreneurial intermediaries. Source: Key Trends and Analysis of the 2015 Incubation and Acceleration Ecosystem, Unitus Seed Fund, 2015.

Turning to more nuanced, specific examples of differing types of entities in Accra, Friederici examines MEST, Impact Hub Accra and iSpace[5] in an attempt to distinguish between hubs and incubators. Here, Friederici argues that while MEST clearly falls into the incubator bracket on account of its "selectivity, structured process and standardization and startup focus", Impact Hub Accra and iSpace are deemed as meeting hub criteria due to their "breadth and openness, community and networking and fluidity" models (Friederici, 2015).

While we might be swept up in theories, debate and critique around what really constitutes a "hub", an "incubator" or an "accelerator", the reality is that lines can be blurred and definitions transmuted into new variants of buzzwords. For the purpose of this thesis, I assert that Impact Hub Accra is a "hub" or "coworking" space, and it might be referred to as either interchangeably. Not only does it fulfill many of the criteria as listed above (and as shall be discussed more extensively in chapter 6), but also as the hub calls itself a coworking space

[5] MEST (The Meltwater School of Technology) is a "school and incubator" in Accra. It first opened its doors in 2008 and is a nonprofit arm of the San Francisco based Meltwater Group, a media intelligence company (Adegoke, 2016). iSpace is an "innovation hub" in Accra which first opened in January 2014 (Venture Capital for Africa, 2016). I visited both MEST and iSpace during my research period in Accra and interviewed key management thereof.
In the referenced article, Impact Hub Accra is referred to as "Hub Accra", it's original name before becoming part of the global Impact Hub network in 2015. The transition thereof will be described in chapter 6.

(Accra.impacthub.net, 2017). Furthermore, in terms of physical attributes, coworking spaces are often described as those which offer "space...and coffee" or "wooden furniture, large desks, brick walls, whiteboards, a foosball table, at least some artwork, shared kitchen spaces, a coffee bar, meeting rooms, and bean bags" (Akinyemi, 2015 & Friederici and Toivonen, 2017). My 3 months spent at Impact Hub Accra confirmed that the hub offered all of these, as corroborated by an avid member whose testimony on the hub's own website states "our prospects love to visit us at Impact Hub Accra: we have the best coffee in town"[6].

Hubs in the African context

The narrative around "defining" hubs has been fuelled by the exponential rise in their numbers across the globe, let alone on the African continent. While it is difficult (and perhaps futile) to ascertain the definitive number of hubs on the continent, recent estimates from GSMA suggest that as of August 2016, there were 314 "active tech hubs" in Africa (GSMA, 2016). This stands in stark contrast to the estimate by the World Bank of 120 tech hubs in Africa in 2015, leading to the suggestion that the number had more than doubled (Dahir, 2016). Coupled with theories that new hubs are popping up "every 2 weeks" (Kalan 2014; Africa at LSE, 2014), it is clear that the trend of hub openings shows no current sign of abating (although it must be noted that a high failure rate is evident (Firestone & Kelly, 2016)).

To date, literature on hubs in the African context- whether of academic, media or consultancy origin - has tended to focus on trends and factors thereof on a macro level. Kenya's much celebrated iHub released a research thesis which compared 7 hubs in Africa in 2013[7] (Moraa and Gathege, 2013). The report surmises, amongst other findings, that both internal and external factors affect hub models. Internal factors include management and sustainability principles, whilst external factors include the country's infrastructure, levels of corruption and ICT budgetary allocation. Similarities and differences between the hubs were investigated, and key challenges within the African hub sphere were proposed as inadequate funding, quality assurance of services and limited staff capacity (amongst others). All in all, it is stated that hubs are "most effective when they harness the idea of openness and community-driven approaches". A 2016 report, "How Tech Hubs are helping to drive economic growth across Africa" (Firestone & Kelly, 2016), tracked 117 hubs across the continent in order to examine the "patterns of origin by which tech hubs are created, why they have a high failure rate and what makes for success". Described as a "very specific interaction between digital investments and analogue complements", the development of hubs is analysed as per public, academic or private partnership backing and any differentiation in funding and business models (citing, for example, a difference in "community centred tech hub development" versus "real estate centred

[6] Furthermore, while literature varies in terms of addressing hubs as "tech hubs", "innovation hubs" or purely "hubs", for the purpose of this thesis I have adopted the principle that any 'hub-related' literature (predominantly focused in the African context) might be used to analyse Impact Hub Accra. While Impact Hub Accra does not explicitly label itself as a "tech" or "innovation" hub, these two buzzwords are often found in its own narrative and guiding principles. As such, it seems apt to assess literature on this topic as being relevant to this cause.

[7] iHub-Kenya; Activspaces–Cameroon; Hive Colab–Uganda; KLab-Rwanda; MEST-Ghana, BongoHivehub-Zambia and KINUhub-Tanzania).

ICT park development"). The thesis concludes that "Inclusion, efficiency, innovation are the main instruments spreading development gains from digital technologies, and the African tech hubs and incubator entities, across a wide range, aim to maximize all three in different ways". Marchant, meanwhile, stresses the role the hubs and incubators play in the African context in providing physical spaces, bringing together the relevant actors who felt "disjointed" in the "existing ecosystem". Furthermore, the casual encounters they facilitate (or the geographical proximity they increase) lead to hubs, such as Ihub in Kenya, being perceived as the "unofficial Headquarters of Kenya's tech movement" (Marchant, 2015).

Returning to the aforementioned debates on definitions of hubs, accelerators and incubators also points us to discussion on the hub narrative in Africa, in the form of a wealth of blog posts and articles by key stakeholders in African entrepreneurial ecosystems.

Once more, these articles are often macro in scope, analysing and comparing 'hubs', 'incubators' and 'accelerators' as a whole and looking for trends and patterns across the hub phenomenon. Examples include "Hubs vs. Incubators: what are the pain points for impact and efficiency" (Friederici, 2015), "11 key lessons for innovation hubs in Africa" (Akinyemi, 2015), "Innovation hubs drive development in Africa" (Schäfer, 2013) and "Tech hubs across Africa: which will be the legacy makers?" (Kelly, 2014), which all reflect on trends in the African hub sphere and portray the views and reflections of those who are ingrained in the ecosystems.

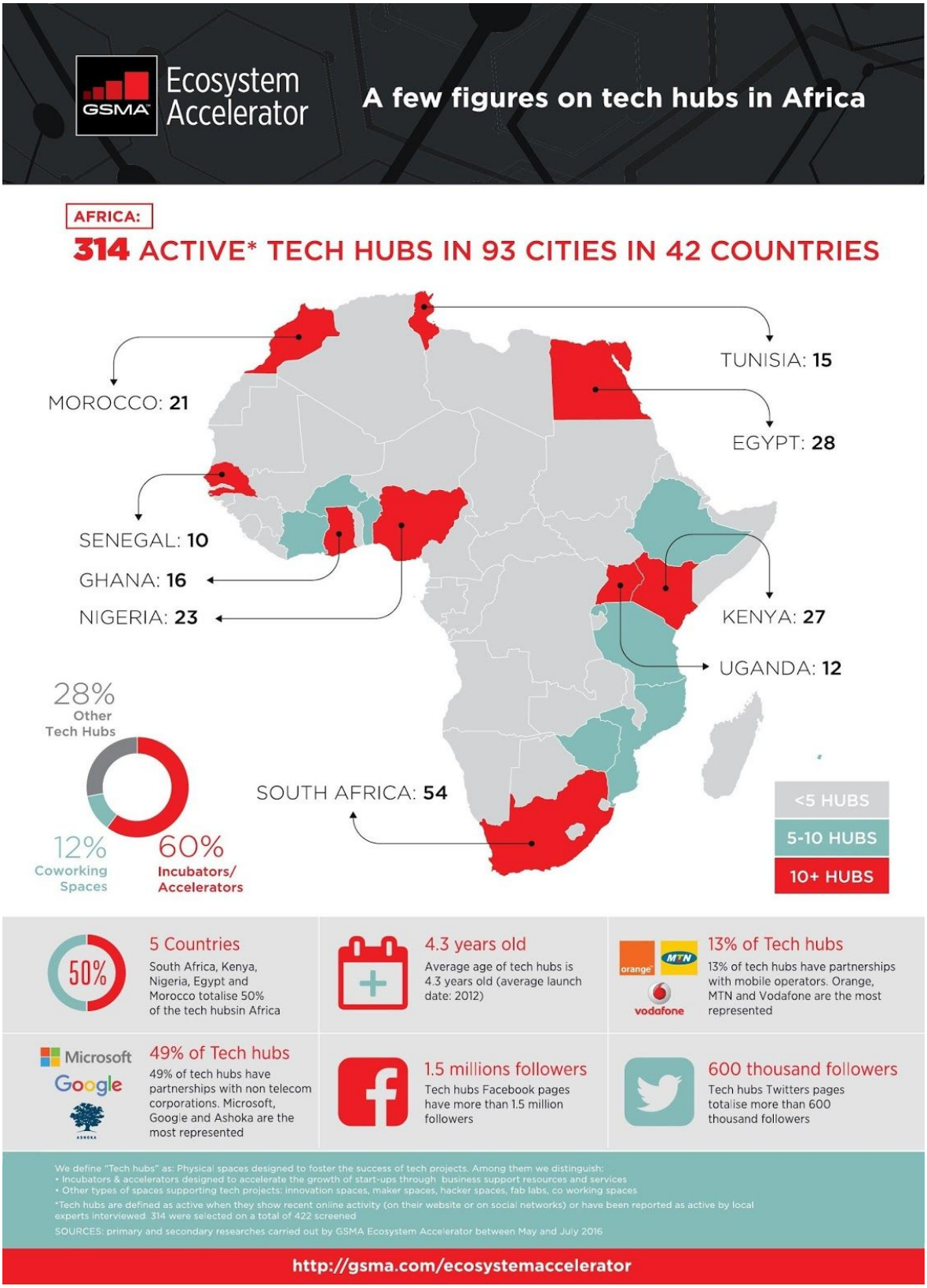


Figure 2. “A few figures on tech hubs in Africa”. Source: GSMA, 2016

The explosion of hubs across the continent has also been confronted with criticism. Mark Essien, himself a "startup" founder of a successful Nigerian hotel booking platform, wrote a controversial post in 2015 entitled "Startup incubators in Africa and why they don't work" (Essien, 2015). Essien laments the culture which is developed at hubs and incubators across the African continent, stating that "incubation attracts the wrong kind of founder. The type of founder who wants to be 'taught' how to build a startup, and who is willing to show up daily at the incubation center to be 'incubated', is someone that is far away from the grit and problem-solving ability necessary to build a startup that works". This criticism was echoed in a subsequent podcast episode of *African Tech Round-Up (*African Tech Round-Up, 2015), in which the discussants argued that hubs on the continent are "not that effective at the moment", that they create "a slacker community" with no clear process or methodology and that hubs attract swathes of entrepreneurs without the right skill sets. A more nuanced critique of hubs can be found in an article entitled "Africa's tech hubs: are they producing success stories?". Here, a member of the management team at Egyptian tech hub ICE Cairo suggests that it is ""dangerous" to view hubs just in terms whether they produce commercial or "for social good" projects" (Mohapi, 2013). Furthermore, he argues that hub sustainability is a key issue, with "tech hubs that will succeed in the long term are those that not only focus on and promote innovation, but those that focus on generating revenues on a long-term scale".

Having examined some of the literature on hubs on the African continent in general, we might turn to more specific literature which delves into both the Ghanaian entrepreneurial ecosystem (and thus the setting of Impact Hub Accra) as well as literary evaluations on the wider Impact Hub global network[8]. The "Ghana Entrepreneurship Ecosystem Analysis" (2013) evaluates the extent to which Ghana delivers on the "6 pillars essential to a successful entrepreneurial ecosystem: identify, train, connect & sustain, fund, enable public policy and celebrate" (Mallet and Koltai, 2013). While Ghana is lauded for its apparent ease of doing business ("very few entrepreneurs in the study reported encountering regulatory barriers") and its celebration' of entrepreneurship ("the general attitude towards entrepreneurship as a career path was positive"), several hubs[9] - including Impact Hub Accra - are critiqued for their lack of "comprehensive depth of services" which are "fragmented and ad hoc". Furthermore, the analysis concludes by lamenting that there is "no centre of gravity for entrepreneurship in Ghana", leading to "no information sharing" and the lack of the emergence of a "major role model".

[8] At the time of writing, Impact Hub has 80 open hubs globally and 26 in the making. The first Impact Hub opened in London in 2005. The Impact Hub IP and Brand is owned by the "Impact Hub Association", a collective of all Impact Hubs. The Association is the sole owner of "HUB GmbH (Impact Hub Company)", a charitable company with the mandate to manage global operations and facilitate the development of the network as a whole, similar to hosting a local Impact Hub community. Impact Hub Company is currently run by a dispersed global team, several of which are local Impact Hub founders (impacthub.net, 2017).
[9] Within the study, many of Ghana's hubs and incubators are listed as falling under several of the "6 pillars" (see figure 4). Impact Hub Accra (referred to in the study as "Hub Accra" due to the date of publication) is listed as one of the ecosystem "top 20".

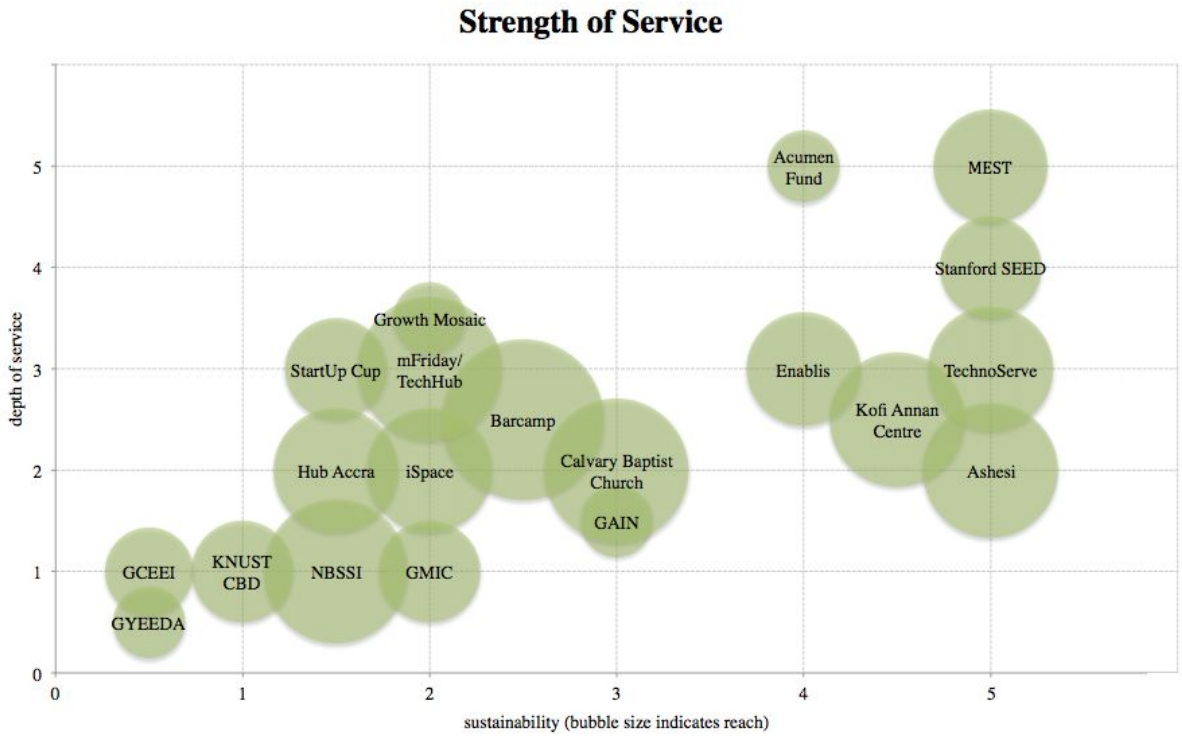


Figure 3. "Strength of service", key players in the Ghanaian entrepreneurial ecosystem. Hub Accra ranks low for depth of services, sustainability and reach. Source: Mallet and Koltai, 2013.

The article "Transformative social innovation narrative on the Impact Hub: a summary" (Afonso, Wittmayer and Avelino, 2015), embeds the success story of Impact Hub amidst global shifts from individual "social entrepreneurs and their (social) innovations" towards the "creation of 'ecosystems' as enabling the environments for entrepreneurial action". The authors identify "five shades of change and innovation across the Impact Hub Network". These are listed as follows:

1) Social innovations: innovations by the Impact Hub itself, by the individual entrepreneurs based at the hub and explicit discourses on social innovation at individual Impact Hubs
2) Co-shaping 'narratives of change'; discourses on social entrepreneurship, 'changemakers' etc. on a global basis
3) Impact Hub as a macro-level 'game changer', due its position in facilitating global conservations and networks
4) System innovations, the creation of "local (urban) innovation systems and new (co-) working environments"
5) Societal transformation, in its vision in striving towards a "social impact economy"

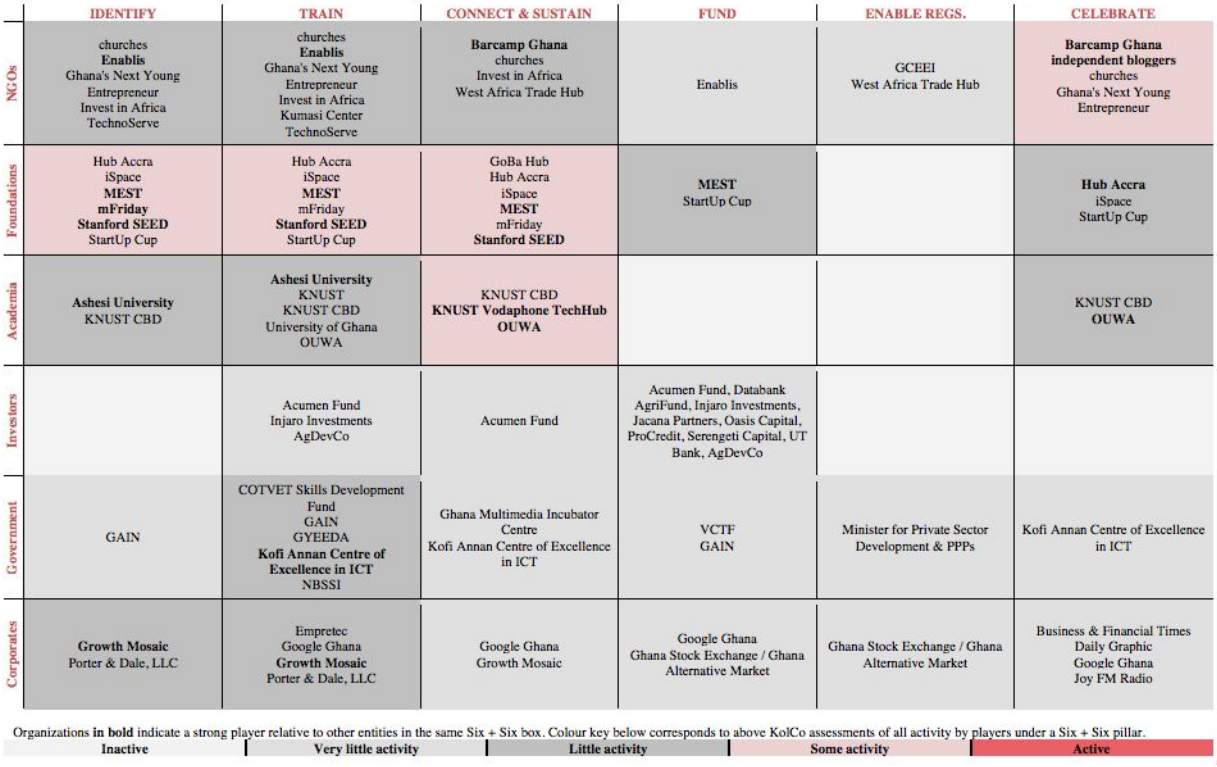
Amidst further observations on the Impact Hub phenomenon, two key possible points of 'tension' are brought to light. While the hub experience in itself is described as "empowering", "disempowering effects and unintended consequences" are also discussed. It is noted as

follows:

"Another issue of (dis)empowerment lies in the observation that the diversity of socio-economic backgrounds of the Impact Hub members is limited, and that the co-working environments are primarily attended by a certain type of highly educated and/or highly skilled people. This is related to the business models of most Impact Hubs which rely partly on membership fees, as well as to the skills required for operating as an independent social entrepreneur. Although the Impact Hub network and the enterprises of its members include programmes and initiatives that explicitly aim to increase opportunities for disadvantaged groups, the extent to which such groups are included 'inside' the existing Impact Hub spaces is limited. A critical question thus remains for whom vibrant communities of trust and collaboration are (not) available and to what extent such accessibility could be (further) increased".

In this literature review, I have attempted to shed some light on the narrative and discourse currently surrounding the 'hub' phenomenon within the African context. The fast-paced development of hubs across the continent has been bestowed with much attention, but due to the as of yet short lifespan of these hubs (as per figure 2, the average age of tech hubs in Africa is around 4.3 years), little investigation has been done yet as to the longer term vision and goals of these hubs. Furthermore, research and observations to date have tended to focus on comparisons, trends and questions surrounding hubs on the continent on a macro level.

This leads to a possible area of investigation. It appears that no in-depth, observational and participatory case study has been conducted to date as per the inner workings of an African hub. On a day to day basis, how is it to be in a hub on the African continent? What are the goals of the management team, and what are the struggles and successes they encounter in realising these goals? Ethnographic observations, formulating a narrative documentary, might lead us to better understand why a hub exits and its development plans, leading to the overall capabilities of African hubs as examined elsewhere on a macro level.



	IDENTIFY	TRAIN	CONNECT & SUSTAIN	FUND	ENABLE REGS.	CELEBRATE
NGOs	churches **Enablis** Ghana's Next Young Entrepreneur Invest in Africa TechnoServe	churches **Enablis** Ghana's Next Young Entrepreneur Invest in Africa Kumasi Center TechnoServe	**Barcamp Ghana** churches Invest in Africa West Africa Trade Hub	Enablis	GCEEI West Africa Trade Hub	**Barcamp Ghana** **independent bloggers** churches Ghana's Next Young Entrepreneur
Foundations	Hub Accra iSpace **MEST** **mFriday** **Stanford SEED** StartUp Cup	Hub Accra iSpace **MEST** mFriday **Stanford SEED** StartUp Cup	GoBa Hub Hub Accra iSpace **MEST** mFriday **Stanford SEED**	**MEST** StartUp Cup		**Hub Accra** iSpace StartUp Cup
Academia	**Ashesi University** KNUST CBD	**Ashesi University** KNUST KNUST CBD University of Ghana OUWA	KNUST CBD **KNUST Vodaphone TechHub** **OUWA**			KNUST CBD **OUWA**
Investors		Acumen Fund Injaro Investments AgDevCo	Acumen Fund	Acumen Fund, Databank AgriFund, Injaro Investments, Jacana Partners, Oasis Capital, ProCredit, Serengeti Capital, UT Bank, AgDevCo		
Government	GAIN	COTVET Skills Development Fund GAIN GYEEDA **Kofi Annan Centre of Excellence in ICT** NBSSI	Ghana Multimedia Incubator Centre Kofi Annan Centre of Excellence in ICT	VCTF GAIN	Minister for Private Sector Development & PPPs	Kofi Annan Centre of Excellence in ICT
Corporates	**Growth Mosaic** Porter & Dale, LLC	Empretec Google Ghana **Growth Mosaic** Porter & Dale, LLC	Google Ghana Growth Mosaic	Google Ghana Ghana Stock Exchange / Ghana Alternative Market	Ghana Stock Exchange / Ghana Alternative Market	Business & Financial Times Daily Graphic Google Ghana Joy FM Radio

Organizations **in bold** indicate a strong player relative to other entities in the same Six + Six box. Colour key below corresponds to above KolCo assessments of all activity by players under a Six + Six pillar.

Inactive | **Very little activity** | **Little activity** | **Some activity** | **Active**

Figure 4. Key players in the Ghanaian entrepreneurial ecosystem, as framed against the “6 pillars”. Source: Mallet & Koltai (2013)

Chapter 3
Research Problem
The Development of an African Hub and Accompanying business development issues

Working towards a research problem

As addressed in the previous literature review chapter, literature to date on African hubs tends to focus on hubs with a comparative, trend-seeking angle and thereby elucidates findings on a macro level. With only a considerably short time-frame with which to conduct research and my internship (3 months total), I decided to take the opportunity to conduct research at one hub alone, thereby inducing a unique case study on the basis of my daily immersion in the hub.

When drafting and formulating my research problem and questions in late 2016, I initially approached my subject from a viewpoint of interest in the role that hubs play in fuelling the trajectory of African entrepreneurs and startups. Inspired by my wider interest in new 'working practices' and my belief in inclusive development through private sector expansion- particularly through the work of entrepreneurs- I decided to take a closer look at hubs on the African continent. Furthermore, my interest was fuelled by the increasing trend (perhaps "hype") of "hubs" not just globally, but across the African continent. As I followed the announcements of more and more hubs opening (GSMA, 2016), I found myself wondering what actually occurred at these hubs. After coming into contact with the Impact Hub Global Network and its Africa Lead, I was led to the opportunity to conduct my internship and research at Impact Hub Accra.

My forthcoming placement at Impact Hub Accra and literature I had encountered allowed me to formulate my original research problem. I wanted to use my time at Impact Hub Accra as a unique case study with which to examine the 'hubs phenomenon', from a bottom- up perspective. While much media (and some academic) attention has been bestowed upon the number of hubs dotted across the continent, I was curious to experience, hear and observe what it is *actually* like to be part of a hub community, as seen in the eyes of the entrepreneurs themselves. Economic impact analyses are associated with an examination of the effect of an event (policy, project, organisation etc.) on the economy in a specified area, usually measuring changes through variables such as sales volume and gross regional product etc. Yet these analyses do not reflect on individual user benefits nor broader social impacts (Weisbrod and Weisbrod, 1997). Due to the lack of time and resources available, as well as the relatively short existence of the hub, I realised it would be extremely challenging to conduct an economic impact analysis of the hub. As such, I decided instead to focus on the day to day, 'user experience' of the hub. Secondly, as the Impact Hub Network seemed to have such a close link to the concept of social entrepreneurialism - in itself a 'buzzing' topic as of late - I was keen to explore the dynamic between Impact Hub Accra and social entrepreneurs. This motive was fuelled by statements such as these:

"Globally connected, locally rooted. In each one of our Impact Hubs in Africa exists a powerful combination of community and space that create game-changing ideas for social impact". (About impact HUB-Africa impact hub, 2013)

I was subsequently led to the development of the following research problem and question:

Original research problem and question

"Often, studies of hubs (and any relation to or influence they might have on social entrepreneurialism) are confined to comparative and 'helicopter-view' papers, analysing the hubs from a top-down approach. A case-study thesis is needed in order to examine the more intricate relations between social entrepreneurs and the 'social hub' they are affiliated with. This will then also allow us to examine whether the particular hub is effective in realising its vision and mission statements with a much more nuanced and evidence-based argument".

Main research question
What 'role' does Impact Hub, Accra play in the trajectory of social entrepreneurs, as seen in the eyes of the entrepreneurs themselves?

A shift in focus

As I travelled to Accra and began my internship responsibilities and my unique immersion into the hub, I gradually - but significantly- found my interests in my research shifting over time. On the basis my daily interaction with the management team, I noticed that my interest was piqued in understanding the vision the hub had and the business development issues it faced in achieving these goals. As I spent the majority of my time with the management team of the hub, I became engrossed in the development of the hub, and approached a more "business development" perspective accordingly. Furthermore, I realised that the concept of 'social entrepreneurship' was not a decisive factor the hub's management team toyed with on a daily basis. Rather, it was whether they could overcome a daily myriad of challenges, consistently acquire funding for hub developments and projects and work towards their development.

As a result of the above, I revised my research problem and questions as follows upon completion of my internship and research period in Ghana:

Revised research problem and question

Impact Hub Accra, one of many 'hubs' or coworking spaces which has sprung up across Africa, prides itself on supporting and facilitating the trajectories of local entrepreneurs and startups. While studies have been done comparing African hubs, a thorough case study which examines the vision and strategic goals - and accompanying business development issues- of a hub is lacking.

Main research question

"What are the long term strategic goals and development plans of an African entrepreneurial hub, and what are the constraints to these on a day to day basis?"
A unique case-study at Impact Hub Accra

Research sub-questions

1) How does a hub develop? Impact Hub Accra's past, present and future

- How was Impact Hub Accra launched and what have been key milestones of its existence?
- In what capacity does the hub currently operate? Who is the member community and management team? What services does the hub offer?
- How does the hub seek to scale in the future?

2) What are the development plans of African hub? Impact Hub Accra's role and vision

- What is the role of Impact Hub Accra?
- What is the vision of Impact Hub Accra, as viewed by the management team, members and key industry stakeholders?
- What are potential business development issues faced by Impact Hub Accra, as viewed by the management team, members and key industry stakeholders?

3) What business development issues exist for Impact Hub Accra in realising its goals?

- What issues exist in the daily management, operation and financial sustainability of the hub?
- What issues exist between the management and the member community?
- What issues exist between the hub and external parties?

In answering the above research question and subquestions, I hope to critically examine and reflect on the strategic goals of Impact Hub Accra, offering a unique opportunity to assess any business development issues a hub in Africa faces.

The above 3 sets of sub-questions will be addressed in chapters 6, 7 and 8 respectively, following on from the next chapters on research methodology and the data collected.

Chapter 4
Research Methodology and Data
Collecting Data at Impact Hub Accra

Research methodology: prior to Ghana

While I was still based in the Netherlands in late 2016, I began assessing the best ways to conduct research during my forthcoming placement in Accra. As explained in the previous chapter, my initial research problem was focussed on exploring the hub phenomenon at a micro level as well as examining the dynamic of Impact Hub Accra and 'social entrepreneurs'. As such, I prepared by formulating semi-structured interview questions and a questionnaire, with the intention of acquiring a significant level of input from entrepreneurs at the hub, and thereby focussing on this segment of the membership community. As per my research proposal, I envisaged using the following research methodologies:

Quantitative data

Data type	Focus of data	Methodology	Applicability to research questions
Primary	Background information on entrepreneurs/founders (size of business, years of education etc.) and hub.	Questionnaire to be distributed on site to selected sample groups.	To frame and contextualize my 'bottom-up' research, providing data on the entrepreneurs and their ventures as well as the hub.
Secondary	Background information on hub (financials, set-up etc). Industry knowledge (hubs, social entrepreneurship etc)	Literature review: articles, reports (both external and internal), company website, company documentation	To frame the context of my research and provide a deeper understanding thereof. Compare 'hub's' view on entrepreneurs to those of entrepreneurs themselves.

Qualitative data

Data type	Focus of data	Methodology	Applicability to research questions
Primary	Opinions, thoughts and views on the role of the hub in fulfilling its mission and	Semi-structured interviews and focus groups	Core research question of how the entrepreneurs themselves view the

	vision.		hub and their relationship with it.
Secondary	Background information on the hub - opinions of management etc.	Review of company reports, articles published on the hub's outlook etc.	Compare viewpoints of entrepreneurs to those of Impact Hub (Global and Accra).

Research methodologies: in the field

Upon my arrival in Accra and after an adjustment period, I began to realise that my research methods would have to be adapted, not only on account of the shifting interests of my research areas but also due to unprecedented opportunities and challenges in acquiring data.

The longer I spent at the hub, and the more I realised I had a very unique opportunity to align myself with the management team, the more I began to shift away from a focus on conducting semi-structured interviews with the member community and approaching my research from a 'bottom-up', member community perspective. Instead, I began focussing on participating in as many hub events as possible, as well as taking detailed notes on my observations and reflections on the day to day activities and business development issues of the hub (in essence, observing the organisation itself). I also focussed much more heavily on daily informal and formal conversations with the management team, as well as interviews conducted with key industry players who I met while in Accra. This was also, to some extent, influenced by my own career experience to date. Having worked in finance and a tech startup (in London and Amsterdam respectively), I was intrigued by business development issues and organisational behaviours in differing business environments[10]. As such, a significant amount of my research was underlined by a consultancy focus approach. The output thereof can be found in a separate 'Findings and Recommendations Report[11]' I wrote for the management team of the hub.

I still intended to conduct interviews with the member community. I had initially drafted semi-structured interview questions, following close discussions with my thesis supervisors, to conduct with entrepreneurs at the hub. The first challenge, however, lay in asserting the population size of entrepreneurs based at the hub. Prior to my arrival at the hub, I was informed by William Senyo (CEO & Cofounder) that the hub had a total of "300+ members, with about 90-100 consistently work in the space daily (sic)" (W Senyo, personal communication, 14 December 2016). However, on the ground I found that the realities of these figures were complex and subject to interpretation. During my stay in Accra, an interview was conducted with Mr. Senyo by a local newspaper, *The Chronicle.* In this article, the author stated that the hub

[10] My experience of working in finance, for example, led to my interest in assessing the financial sustainability of the the hub. This will be explored further in chapter xxx, as well being published in a blog post which I wrote for the VC4A (Venture Capital 4 Africa) website.

[11] https://docs.google.com/document/d/1bl3wT9qyK3uxmFhVmTo0OBCH-aoLOYURWd7hl6BnS04/edit?usp=sharing

had “over 200 paying members, 70% from all over Africa and 30% expats” (Liebman, 2017). When discussing my research methods with Mr. Senyo during my first weeks at the hub, it was suggested that I work with a total population size of 180, reflecting a more accurate reality of the number of entrepreneurs based at the hub on a consistent basis.

However, as the weeks progressed, I soon realised that even this figure of 180 was somewhat ambitious. The estimated population size was ultimately further revised downwards following discussions with the hub’s Finance director. The Finance Director stated that in order to capture the number of members, “we categorise a company as ‘one’ and not by the number of workers” (personal communication, 5th April 2017). This meant, for example, that a company based as the hub with 5 employees would in reality be listed as one paying member. This resulted in an average of “about 124 members paying in January-April”. This was not only a significant downward revision from the 300 members previously stated, but also highlighted a potentially complex issue within the (global) hub sphere; determining a definition and size of the “member community”[12]. Furthermore, I was also confronted by the stark reality of how many members *actually* visited the hub on a daily basis. Not only were there variations on daily basis, but also on a weekly and even monthly basis.

To conclude, I ultimately decided to conduct 20 illustrative semi-structured interviews with members of the hub, together with a questionnaire sent out to the hub member community mailing list. These 20 participants were chosen as they seemed to form an integral part of the “core” member community, meaning that they could be found in the hub most days of the week. They were individuals who I built up trust and a relationship with over the course of my time working at the hub. With time, I thus felt that these individuals could provide valuable insights into the ‘inner workings’ of the hub and that their views on the hub would be significant. This was corroborated further, as many of these individuals were put forward by Mr. Senyo as being appropriate and illustrative (but by no means fully representative) of the hub member population.

My focus on qualitative, observational research is in line with theories that it allows to “preserve chronological flow, assess local causality, and derive fruitful explanations” (Miles & Huberman, 1984). Qualitative research of the type I undertook- a case study analysis with an ethnographic focus- allows for the opportunity to understand the “meaning behind actions” (Hammersley, 1992) , an important component of my research as I intend to explore *why* a hub such as Impact Hub Accra exists and its subsequent development. It is by being fully immersed in the environment- by getting your “hands dirty” (Dacin, Ventresca and Beal, 1999), that I could eventually analyse business development issues the hub faced. Furthermore, a case-study is also highly applicable when the research question(s) asks for a detailed ‘in-depth’ answer (Creswell, 2017). Because the third research question asks for a context specific analysis within this environment, a single case study is the preferred method; a single case study helps to give

[12] An attempt at definition and discussion around Impact Hub Accra’s member community will be further discussed in chapter 6

a detailed picture of the matter which is needed to capture the 'range' in different attitudes (Yin, 2003). A focus on interviews with the management team was used, as "interviews are generally used in conducting qualitative research, in which the researcher is interested in collecting "facts", or gaining insights into or understanding of opinions, attitudes, experiences, processes, behaviors, or predictions" (Rowley, 2012). The interviews were semi-structured with main themes distilled from the theoretical framework and literature review. This with an aim to have an overall guideline in leading questions but still retain enough room for flexibility (Rowley, 2012).

Data collected

My ultimate findings were based on my 3 month stint at the hub and multimethod data collection, both during the course of internship responsibilities as during periods of research conducted. These include, but are not limited to, participatory observations, informal conversations and remarks, recorded and planned interviews with members and management of the hub and interviews with parties external to the hub environment.

This resulted in the following data output[13]:

- Semi-structured interviews conducted with 20 members of the hub community, each approximately 1 hour in length, transcribed in Google sheets.
- 21 responses to research survey by member community, conducted via Google forms
- 7 responses to management team research survey, conducted via SurveyMonkey.
- 6 interviews conducted with management team staff, each approximately 30 minutes in length, recorded.
- Detailed written notes on informal observations, remarks, conversations etc.
- Participatory observation throughout 3 month period. Involvement in hub events and programmes.
- 3 structured interviews conducted with entrepreneurs not affiliated with Impact Hub or any other 'hub'/coworking space in Accra.
- 4 interviews conducted with key external industry stakeholders: Emmanuel Quartey (Flint), Celine Duros (MEST), Ashwin Ravichandran (MEST), Josiah Eyison (Ispace). Each approximately 1.5 hours in length, transcribed in journal.
- Visits to Ispace and MEST.
- Informal discussions with key stakeholders in the Impact Hub Global Management team via Skype/email.
- Access to data from 2017 Impact Hub Global Member Survey conducted at Accra hub.

[13] The data can be viewed via Google Drive. In all instances, the participants gave permission for their views to be published. Interviews with the member community were done on an anonymous basis, as were the memer surveys.

"What are the long term strategic goals and development plans of an African entrepreneurial hub, and what are the constraints to these on a day to day basis?" *A unique case-study at Impact Hub Accra*	**Research area***	**Research subquestion**	**Data collected**
	Descriptive	*How does a hub develop? Impact Hub Accra's past, present and future*	-Review of online, internal and external documentation on Impact Hub Accra -Interviews with management team -Discussions with members of Impact Hub Global Management team
	Fieldwork output	*What are the development plans of African hub? Impact Hub Accra's role and vision*	-20 semi-structured interviews with member community -21 responses to survey by member community -6 recorded interviews with management team -Interviews with external stakeholders and visits to iSpace and MEST
	Analytical	*What business development issues exist for Impact Hub Accra in realising its goals?*	See above, analysis of relevant data

*N.b., the above is supplemented by observations, participations and informal discussions across all areas. Records of these were kept in my personal research journal.

Figure 1. Excerpt from a monthly newsletter, sent by Impact Hub Accra's community manager to the member community. This excerpt indicates a request to the community to fill out my Google forms survey. Sent in late March 2017. Source: personal records, 2017.

Observations during data collection

When conducting my data collection, several key observations (highlighting both challenges and successes themselves) were made. First, as discussed above, determining the population size of the member community proved problematic, as was encouraging the member community to participate in surveys, questionnaires and interviews. This was not only evidenced during my own data collection periods, but also when I assisted the management team in facilitating member input for the 2016 Impact Hub Global Member Survey. The annual *Global Maker and Member Surveys* (sent via an email link and completed online) are "Impact Hub's main impact & performance measurement tool, collecting information on demographics, ventures, impact and more of Impact Hubs and their members" (Vandor, 2015). For the 2016 member survey, it was stipulated that the Accra hub complete 54 member surveys in order for a tailored local report and Africa regional report to be generated (management team, personal communication, March 2017).

In the run up to the deadline for this data collection, I assisted the management team in encouraging members of the community to submit their responses. This proved challenging not only as there seemed to be a lack of direct incentive for the members and it was perceived to be time consuming, but also on account of the general preference for face-to-face interviews and questionnaires/surveys as opposed to those conducted online (William Senyo, personal communication, 13 January 2017). The irony can certainly be noted that that whilst Impact Hub Accra in many ways embodies new technological advances and a generation of "digital natives", it simultaneously appears that for any collection of concrete, substantial data - or the building of a relationship and trust- there was a clear preference for face to face communication. The

dynamic between this trend can further be embellished by my own observation with regards to planning data collection. In nearly all instances, interviews or requests for questionnaire completions were conducted through an array of social media channels, whether it be Facebook, Whatsapp or Slack. Despite being heavily embedded and based on the 'digital' and 'technology world', it appears that many of the communication pathways used by hub focus on bridging the digital world -the community, the space, the technologies -with the physical. Whilst internet and mobile means are used to alert and announce get togethers for the hub 'community', ultimately the physical meetups are the most crucial component of this process. Facebook updates, Tweets and newsletters are all used to increase the chance of face to face meetings, whether it be in the form of initial invitations or follow up 'reminders'.

Other challenges included communication *around* facilitating the dissemination of questionnaires and time management. Occasionally, a breakdown in communication between myself and members of the management team lead to difficulties - and lengthy delays- in having my questionnaire link sent out to the hub member community via the internal mailing list. However, with time this challenge was alleviated not only because the management team eventually helped encourage members to complete my survey, but I was also able to send direct messages to the member community via the designated Whatsapp group.

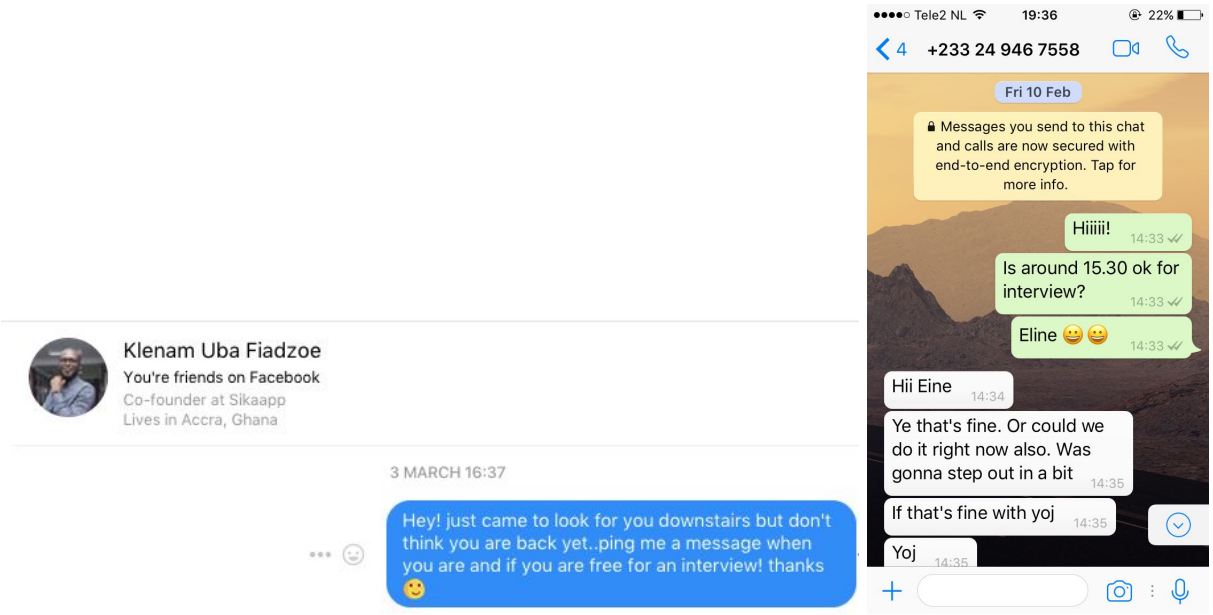


Figure 2. Examples of planning and organising interviews via social media channels, in this instance through Facebook and Whatsapp. Source: personal records, 2017

Chapter 5
Context
Ghana 'rising', Youth Unemployment and a Need for Hubs[14]

Africa and Ghana 'rising'

Amongst a backdrop of the 'Africa Rising' narrative which dominated the earlier part of this past decade (The Economist, 2011; Akwagyiram, 2013), the past few years has seen a more subdued, nuanced and realistic reflection of economic growth across sub Saharan Africa (Gettleman 2016; Fick, 2016). This stark reality has become evident in Ghana (Dzawu, 2016), fuelled by a continued reliance on commodity export driven growth, persistently high inflation rates and falling exchange rates. The high public sector salaries of past election cycles have all but drained state coffers (Boah-Mensah, 2016. Public wages and salaries in 2016 amounted to 44% of tax revenues and 7.9% of GDP). Furthermore, allegations of state corruption continue to blight efforts to improve economic outlooks and stability. In January 2017, $1.6 billion in previously undisclosed expenditure was discovered, eluding three previous reviews by the IMF. Ghana is currently one of Africa's most indebted countries (debt to GDP ratio of over 70%) and it's GDP growth rate of 3.6% in 2016 was its lowest in 20 years. (Saigal, 2017). The country's annual GDP growth rate has come crashing down since it's peak of 14.05% in 2011. Amongst other ramifications, a steep hike in utility prices and recurring blackouts has impacted both individuals and businesses alike (Matthews, 2016), while costs of living have soared across the country. The bustling metropolis of Accra is often seen as being one of the most expensive cities on the continent (numbeo.com, 2017; AfricaBusiness.com, 2017).

Yet amongst the apparent economic stagnation and malaise, a thread of optimism and hope is palpable. On the 7th of January 2017, Nana Akufo-Addo was sworn in as Ghana's new president, his NPP party replacing the 8 year tenure of the NDC party and its leader John Mahama. Akufo-Addo's manifesto was centred around "economic opportunities for all" (Finnan, 2016). The NPP has vowed to eradicate corruption, cut taxes, introduce free secondary level education and an ambitious "one district one factory" initiative for job creation, whereby it is hoped that private investment will "support local authorities, infrastructure and industry while the government cleans up the public purse" (Saigal, 2016). The recent peaceful election and transition of power stand testament to Ghana's continued stability and peaceful prosperity. Ghana attained middle income country status in 2010 and its national level of poverty halved between 1992 and 2013 (Cooke, Hague and McKay, 2016), thereby completing MDG target 1A. Ghana also reached its targets in halving the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water (MDG 7B), universal primary education (MDG 2A) and gender parity in primary schools (MDG 3) (UNDP in Ghana, 2015).

[14] Much of this chapter is based on a previous essay I wrote: "Youth Unemployment in Ghana: a 'Ticking Time Bomb' and its Impact on Inclusive Development" (Sleurink, 2016)

Youth unemployment: ‘a ticking time bomb’?

From the little analysis we have done so far, we might rightly say that despite current economic woes, Ghana is a country with much potential and opportunity. Its 60 years of independence have enabled a trajectory towards sustainable, inclusive development, if gradually. Yet the potential for the opportunity and development of Ghana is largely crystallised and encapsulated in one crucial element: the labour market. Significantly, when surveying the successes of the MDGs, it is notable that only slow progress was made on reaching the target of full and productive employment (UNDP in Ghana, 2015). In particular, the problem of youth unemployment is severe enough that it has oft been labelled a ‘ticking time bomb’, with this hyperbolic euphemism not just bestowed upon Ghana but across the African continent as a whole (Asante-Antwi, 2016; Ighobor, 2013). The issue of youth unemployment has become a global phenomenon. Goal 8 of the SDGs (Decent Work and Economic Growth) specifies amongst its targets to substantially the global proportion of youth not in employment, education or training by 2020 (United Nations Sustainable Development, 2017). Globally, the 2015 rate of youth unemployment stood at 13.1%, three times the adult rate (Office of the Secretary-General’s Envoy on Youth, 2017), with the current outlook suggesting that this trend is set to continue (ilo.org, 2016). As the world’s “youngest region”, with a youth population expected to hit 830 million by 2050, the African continent is expected to endure worsening youth unemployment trends unless fundamental and structural changes are made (ilo.org, 2016).

Ghana’s total population stood at approximately 27.4 million as per 2015 data (Data.worldbank.org, 2017). The United Nations define ‘youth’ as those falling in the 15 - 24 age bracket (Definition of Youth, 2013). Approximately 19% of the population fall within this category (2016 estimates) and the median age of the population is 21 (CIA.gov, 2017). Ghana is thus an extremely ‘youthful’ nation,as further evidenced by the population pyramid (and more aptly, future bulge) as shown below.

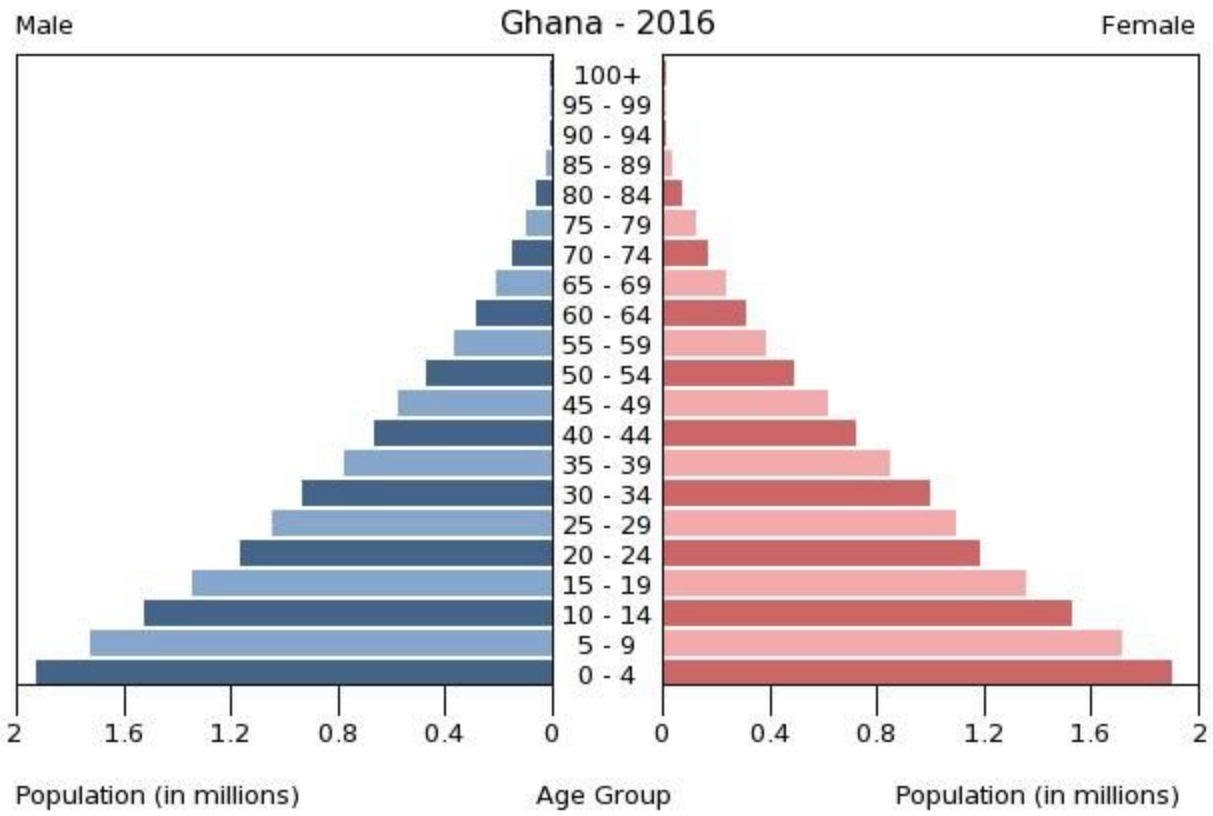


Figure 1. Population age distribution pyramid, 2016 estimates Source: The World Factbook-CIA, 2017

While official youth unemployment figures for Ghana suggest that around 12.5% of youth are unemployed (ilo.org, 2016), there have been (unverified) suggestions that Ghana's youth unemployment rate is the "highest in the world" (Abelyire, 2016) and that official figures portray a "masked reality" in the Ghanaian context (Ighobor, 2016; Afrane and Poku-Boansi, 2011). By some accounts, 48% of Ghanaian youth have been deemed "jobless" (Allotey, 2016; Ofori-Mensah, 2016). Conflicting estimates and differing calculation methodologies might suggest that we cannot accurately quantify the number of unemployed youth in Ghana. This has (apparently) been corroborated by the outgoing president himself, who stated that the percentage of unemployed youth in the country is simply 'not known' (Ackaah-Kwarteng, 2016). In fact, calculating the true value of youth unemployment in a country such as Ghana might be simply impossible (Poku-Boansi and Afrane, 2011). This as a result of a devastatingly influential key factor within not only the Ghanaian but the entire African context: informal market activity and levels of underemployment.

Measuring the size of the informal market in Ghana has always been problematic. In 2014, it was estimated that 86.1% of all 'employment' in Ghana was to be found in the informal market (Haug, 2014). Those youth who are unable to find formal employment do not register with their labour department, and as such are not included in unemployment statistics (Poku- Boansi and

Afrane, 2011). It has been estimated that the formal economy is only able to offer employment to 2% of the youth who enter the labour market every year. A recent PwC survey suggests that only half of African CEOs surveyed are planning to hire more people- while a quarter plan to cut staff- as a result of increased technological efficiencies (Quartz Africa Weekly Brief, 2017). Informal sector workers are largely self employed farmers, producers and traders, amongst many other classifications. (Osei- Boateng and Ampratwum, 2011). As such, it may be argued that that in reality, the level of entrepreneurship in Ghana is exceptionally high. Yet as long as these entrepreneurs are not formally registered, they are unable to be included in statistics, taxed or benefit from social security networks. Furthermore, they are unable to contribute to GDP calculations through job creation.

The low productivity and income rates of those youth who are underemployed contributes to the impediment of inclusive and sustainable economic growth (Poku-Boansi and Afrane, 2011). Within the realm of underemployment, little transparency exists as to which sectors are most actively engaged in, the roles of employment, the poverty level of those involved and whether they are working on purely a subsistence basis (Osei-Boateng and Ampratwum, 2011). As such, official unemployment statistics do anything but illustrate the full reality. Furthermore, Ghana, like many other African nations, is experiencing an uptake in urbanization levels, at an estimated rate of 3.4% between 2000 and 2015 (CIA.gov, 2017). Urban settings, such as Accra, are thus increasingly harbouring scores of youth who either increase official unemployment figures, are underemployed, turn to informal activity and thus are not recorded at all or, perhaps most worryingly, are left with nothing but a sense of extreme frustration, despair and hopelessness. In extreme cases, they might even turn to criminal activity in the hope of generating an income (Poku-Boansi and Afrane, 2011).

The link between levels of youth unemployment and it detrimental impact on sustainable, inclusive growth has been widely cited (see for example, reports from the ILO). Youth unemployment can lead to a country missing out on its future ‘demographic dividend’. Furthermore, a delay in entering employment in the crucial first years of working age can lead to a “scarring effect”, whereby longer-term employment and income prospects are impacted. This ‘cost’ therefore not only impacts the individual, but the economy and society at large due to lost revenues, taxes and productivity (Islam and Islam, 2015).

Entrepreneurship and hubs: a solution?

Amongst a myriad of ‘solutions’ proposed to counter the problem of youth unemployment, the promotion of entrepreneurial activity has gained increasing coverage (Ighobor, 2016). On both an African as a global scale, entrepreneurship is seen as a viable solution as entrepreneurs are likely to have “hiring plans that outpace the rest” (Glencorse, 2016). Furthermore, in developing countries, entrepreneurship can lead to economic wealth and national development (Robson, Haugh and Obeng, 2008). It has even been argued that entrepreneurship development in Ghana is ‘critical’ to addressing (youth) unemployment (Frimpong, 2015). Yet, for youth entrepreneurship to be fully leveraged and developed, the environment and context must be supportive. Governments play a crucial role in creating such enabling environments (Glencore,

2016). The former Ghanaian government of Mahama initiated numerous actions in an attempt to invoke such an environment. These included the Youth Enterprise Support (YES) initiative (2015)- a 10 million Ghana Cedi fund which would "provide an opportunity for the creation of jobs, for and by the youth of Ghana). Yet this initiative, along with others, was received with scepticism and mistrust- even shunned- by aspiring entrepreneurs as a result of (numerous) past failures of similar government interventions (Adjase Kodjo, 2015; Mulligan, 2015). Furthermore, often when such interventions could feasibly offer some initial support, the "implementation bottlenecks" found in the business environment thereafter - including unreliable infrastructure, lack of tax incentives and debilitating regulatory frameworks- all hinder a successful growth trajectory for entrepreneurship (Frimpong, 2015).

It is here that one of the key roles of hubs in the (West) African (and more particularly, Ghanaian) context comes to light. Hubs, co-working spaces, accelerators and incubators often strive to offer an enabling environment for a myriad of entrepreneurs and startups. Despite the NPP's promise to create "opportunities for entrepreneurship", as outlined in the pre-election party manifesto[15] "Change- An Agenda for Jobs" (New Patriotic Party 2016), Ghana still currently holds a 2017 GEDI[16] ranking of 86 (Thegedi.org, 2017) while the most recent (2013) data available on Ghana from the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor suggests that on all core factors which create a conducive entrepreneurial ecosystem (including Government policies, commercial & legal infrastructure and physical infrastructure), Ghana scores below 3 (on a scale of 1 to 5. GEM, 2017). Ease of business registration, access to capital and conducive policies are lacking in Ghana, just as they are in many other African nations. As of June 2016, Ghana ranked 110 (out of 119 comparable economies) in terms of the World Bank "Starting a Business" rank. The average time for "starting a business" is currently listed at 14 days (although this goes against the verdicts I was able to collect during my data collection) and at an average cost of 19.7% of income per capita (doingbusiness.org, 2017). While these are factors which hubs can not alleviate (at least, not directly or in the short-term), hubs can attempt to boost entrepreneurship opportunities through offering core services such as internet access, a community (in differing forms and intent) and perhaps most simply -but crucially- a place to work. While hubs no doubt play a key role in facilitating a "strong community of entrepreneurs" (Lukstins, 2016; Moraa and Gathege, 2013), amidst soaring real estate prices and situations where up to two years' rent is asked in advance (News Ghana, 2016), any locality where aspiring entrepreneurs can 'hustle' or dedicate their time to their project is immensely valuable.

[15] Excerpt from the NPP manifesto, page 83: "*Create opportunities for entrepreneurship* - we shall develop ICT Incubator Hubs in various regional capitals to create business opportunities in the private sector. We recognise the huge opportunities in investing in the nascent but active app and software development ecosystem in Ghana. We plan, through Government procurement processes, and as part of our efforts to digitize access to social and public services, to invest in growing start-ups in the area. We will invest, in partnership with the private sector, in world standard Incubator Hubs, including workspaces and app development resources, to support the sector".

[16] Global Entrepreneurship and Development Index.

As of August 2016, there were an estimated 16 ‘tech’ hubs in Ghana, as per GSMA research. These included incubators, accelerators, maker spaces, coworking spaces etc., (GSMA, 2016). While no ‘list’ is available of the total number and details of these ‘tech hubs’, while I was based in Accra I became aware of the existence of at least 8 in the capital alone, with one (“Workshed”) opening in the period that I was there.

A myriad of (economic) challenges continue to exist in Ghana. Three core themes stand out as being of relevance to this thesis: youth unemployment, the dominance of the informal market and the support of the government - or any role it plays- in facilitating the pathways of entrepreneurs and startups. Having examined the current status quo of these elements, I am able to examine the role and vision of Impact Hub Accra in a contextualized framework.

Chapter 6
Impact Hub Accra: Past, Present and Future

In this chapter, I intend to answer research sub question 1:

1) How does a hub develop? Impact Hub Accra's past, present and future

- How was Impact Hub Accra launched and what have been key milestones of its existence?
- In what capacity does the hub currently operate? Who is the member community and management team? What services does the hub offer?
- How does the hub seek to scale in the future?

This descriptive chapter has been built upon internal documentation I was able to access while based at Impact Hub Accra, informal conversations with the management team and conversations with the management team of Impact Hub Global.

Impact Hub Accra: past[17]

On the 8th of April 2013, Accra's budding, but struggling, entrepreneurial ecosystem saw a new addition in the form of "Hub Accra". Nestled in the city's bustling "Osu" area- flanked by schools, businesses, residential properties, a large methodist church and the nearby organised chaos of "Oxford Street', Hub Accra was launched on the back of a Open University of West Africa (OUWA) programme; the "Certificate in Entrepreneurship". Upon completion of this programme, many of the students found that they lacked the space, internet and guidance needed to continue with their ventures and business ideas. A single room within the OUWA facility was kept as an incubator space, however with time this was clearly over capacity. As such, several leaders of the OUWA programme, as well as of an already established startup "Slicebiz", decided to start a hub and opened Hub Accra in a larger building shortly thereafter[18].

In essence, the launch of Hub Accra epitomises many of the shortcomings- and opportunities- that the ecosystem faced. As also discussed in the context chapter, Ghana faced (and unfortunately continues to face) high levels of youth unemployment, a lack of support system for entrepreneurs, lack of affordable infrastructure (workspace, internet etc.) and little curation of the ecosystem (many of these sentiments are further corroborated by Mallet & Koltai, 2013).

[17] Much of the information on Accra's founding and past has come from an internal Impact Hub Accra document and informal conversations with the hub's management team, unless stated otherwise. As such, while I can refer to these documents and conversations I can not explicitly make reference to them as external sources.

[18] The original founders of Hub Accra were William Senyo (Ghana), John-Paul Parmigiani (USA), John Roberts (USA) and an additional silent partner. William Senyo was also the co-founder of Slicebiz, a "mobile & web crowdfunding investment platform that provides early-stage funding for startups in Africa by leveraging the disposable income of the rapidly growing African middle class (both domestic and in the diaspora)" (VC4A, 2017).

Furthermore, there was a distinct “need for programs to teach entrepreneurs key skills and encourage them to think innovatively and a need <for> a place to bring together dynamic thinkers, inspire people, and incubate the best ideas”. This nascent “innovation ecosystem” thus had “a lot of gaps to be filled”, creating opportunities which the founders of Hub Accra could seize (Impact Hub Accra internal documents, 2015). This corroborates sentiments that in many cases, hubs have opened across Africa as “many African countries lack conventional structures for creating links between universities and businesses, providing young people with access to sponsorship opportunities and assisting these young people in getting startups off the ground” (Schäfer, 2013).

Prior to becoming a part of the global Impact Hub Network, Hub Accra saw several key events and milestones which catapulted it into prominence. As well as increasing the size of the space available, the hub received substantial grants, launched a “Digital Innovation Lab” and hosted “the largest ever hackathon in (West) Africa” in February 2014 (Adogla-Bessa, 2017) which “brought four hundred plus young innovators from across the region to Accra for 3 days of brainstorming and prototyping sessions to solve some of the region’s biggest problems”.

In 2014, Hub Accra began its journey towards becoming part of the global Impact Hub family. The hub was incubated by the “Impact Hub Africa Seed” programme, which was focused on “helping local entrepreneurs open Impact Hubs across Africa” (Africa.impacthub.net, 2017)[19]. As well as doubling its capacity by moving to a larger property (around the corner), the hub submitted its feasibility study to the global network and officially launched (or, reopened) as Impact Hub Accra on August 22nd, 2015 as part of Impact Hub’s global licensing agreements[20] (Nduati, 2015; Jackson, 2015). In so doing, the hub fulfilled its founding dream of becoming part of the Impact Hub global network, as they had intentionally chosen the name “Hub Accra” to facilitate an easy transition to *Impact* Hub Accra.

[19] At the time of writing, there were 6 Impact Hubs open in Africa (Bamako, Accra, Khartoum, Kigali, Bujumbura, Harare and Joburg) with 2 expected to open before the end of 2017 (Lagos and Nairobi)
[20] The management, organization and structure of the Impact Hub Network is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, reference can be made to Stanford Social Innovation Review’s “How the Hub found its centre”, which explains the transitions (and periods of crisis) of Impact Hub and portrays how it is “partly a movement, partly a business and partly a network” (Bachmann, 2014).

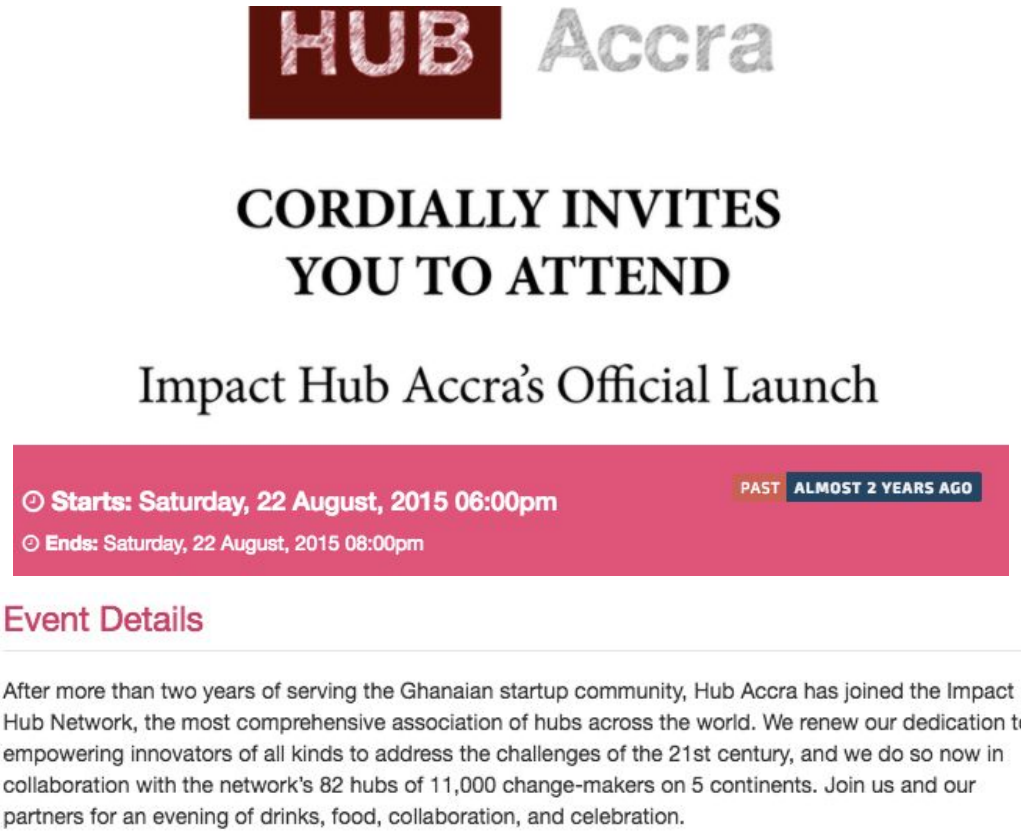


Figure 1. An excerpt from the invite to Impact Hub Accra's launch. Source: Egotickets,com, 2017.

Impact Hub Accra: present day

Impact Hub Accra is registered as a non-profit entity in Ghana and covers a total land area of 1074 sqm. Within this space, the hub rents two properties. The 'main', multi-storey building comprises of a large coworking space,meeting rooms and kitchen on the first floor, while 'Dedicated Desks' and standalone office rooms can be found on the second floor, as well as the management team office. Outside the main building, a garden can be found with an array of tables and chairs, an outdoor cafe, space for outdoor events and a ping pong table. A recently opened 'Makerspace' can be found behind the main building, with workbenches and opportunities for design prototyping. The second, adjacent building also hosts smaller coworking space and private offices. The complex also has its own generator to ensure adequate power supply.

Impact Hub Accra currently employs 9 full time staff and has 6 members on its board. Amongst the full time employees, a core team of 6 can be found daily in the management office, consisting of William Senyo (Co-founder & CEO, Ghana), Priscilla Adjubel (Finance Director, Ghana), Kafui Anson-Yevu (Programmes Manager, Ghana), Kelechi Ofeogbu (Community Manager, Nigeria), Looh-Ndi Sondo (Accountant, Cameroon) and Emily Sheldon (Health Innovation Director, USA). Along with the additional team members who oversee the facility and

building services, collectively this cohort embraces daily successes, challenges and opportunities as they come. The hub also regularly hosts summer interns (whether from local universities or abroad) and seeks to scale the size of its team in the mid term.

Whilst based at the hub, I sat with the core management team on a daily basis in the dedicated office space. During my time there, I conducted informal (recorded) interviews with core members of the team as well as distributing online surveys. Both series of datas highlighted views of the management team. The former focussed on their views of Ghana's development, the hub and the entrepreneurial ecosystem in Accra, whilst the latter survey focused on their views on social entrepreneurship (as this was created at the stage when I was still focussing on my original research problem)[21].

The core team is youthful, highly educated and ambitious. Within the core team, the average length of employment at Impact Hub Accra is 1.8 years, with William Senyo and Kelechi Ofoegbu having been present at the hub since its original foundation as Hub Accra, while the remainder of the joined (much) more recently (Finance Director, personal communication, June 2017). All of the core team members are under 35 years of age as of April 2017 and all have completed secondary education at a minimum. Many have completed tertiary education and gone onto achieve other professional qualifications and accolades.

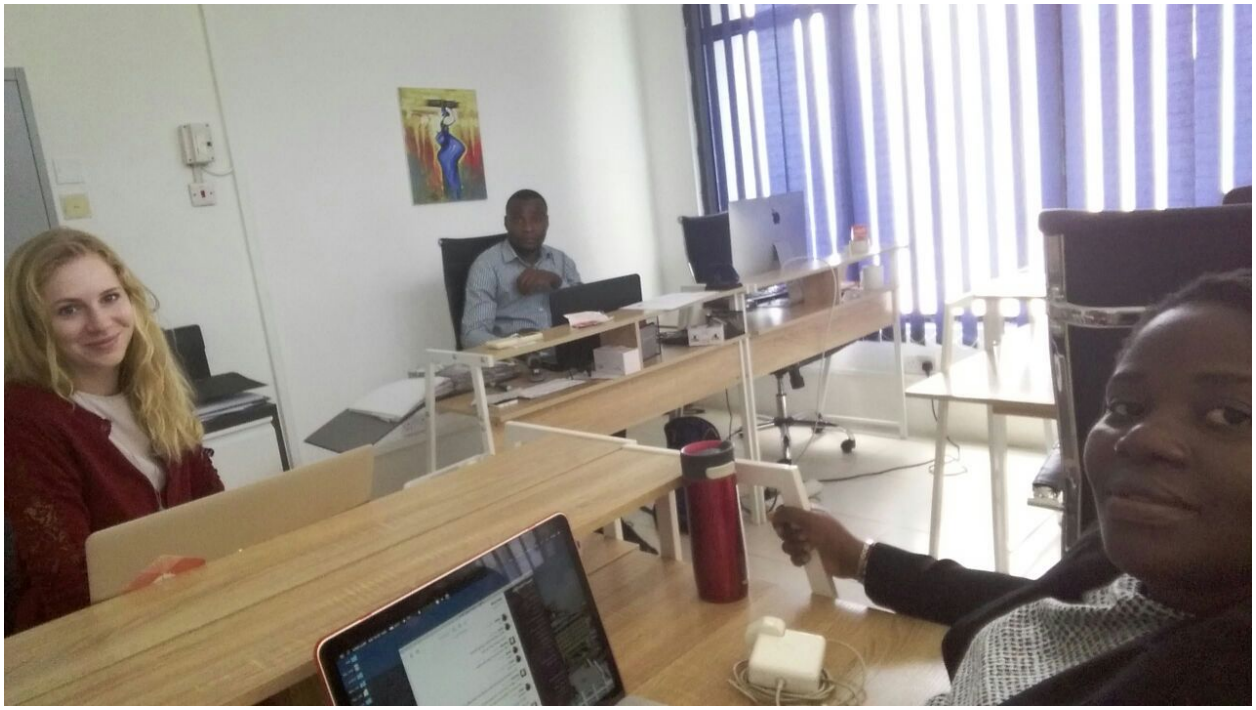


Figure 2. Myself, the hub's Accountant its Programmes Manager in the management team office at Impact Hub Accra. Source: personal records, 2017.

[21] The output of both these surveys and interviews will be discussed in subsequent chapters

On the basis of 2015 and 2016 data collected by the Impact Hub Global member surveys, we are able to ascertain key metrics and statistics about the Accra member community, thereby painting an illustrative picture of who the members of an African hub 'are'. On the basis of 31 responses (out of a population n=120), key highlights out of the local Impact Hub Accra report were as follows (Impact Hub Accra Member Survey Report, 2015)[22]:

Member demographics

- 50/50 split of male to female members
- 48.5% of respondents were in age cohort 26-35, 30.1% were less than 26 years of age
- Average member had 5.2 years of work experience, with a significant emphasis on work experience in the private sector
- 67.7% of respondents have obtained an undergraduate degree, 12.9% a graduate degree
- 66% had less than 3 years of entrepreneurial experience
- 47.6% were either a founder or cofounder of an organisation
- 74.2% had been a member of the hub for less than a year

'Impact' of the hub

- 28 new start-ups founded
- 38 new jobs (FTEs) created (137 FTEs employed by IHA members in total)
- 70% of member ventures saw double-digit growth in 2015
- 33% of member ventures received external financial support
- 80.6% of members say that IHA membership is important or very important for their success

During my time at Impact Hub Accra I assisted the management team in encouraging members to complete the 2016 Impact Hub Member Survey. The data was collected in March 2017, and the below key statistics on the member community are highlighted to compliment the 2015 data and reflect any 'changes' in the member community (52 respondents in total)[23]:

- 95.8% of respondents were under the age of 35
- 40.4% of respondents labelled themselves 'social entrepreneurs', 50.0% entrepreneurs
- 46.2% worked from a fixed desk or private office in the hub (i.e. on the 'second floor')
- 61.9% of respondents worked with or for "for-profit" or commercial initiatives, 19.0% for or with "non-profit" initiatives

[22] Data for the annual Global Member Survey is collected by each respective Impact Hub through links sent to members. Collected data is then collated and analysed by the Vienna University of Economics and Business. The data for the 2015 report was collected online between 22nd February and 25th March 2016. Globally, 2,560 valid responses from all over the network were received. In 35 Impact Hubs, response rates were above 15% of total membership.

[23] My thanks go out to the kind permission of the Impact Hub Global team in allowing me to use excerpts of the 2016 Member Survey data, despite not being fully published in report format yet. As such, external references to this data can not be made at this stage.

In terms of focus areas, Impact Hub Accra does not explicitly align with one (or more) sector i.e. by calling itself a 'tech' hub, as often seen across the continent. The hub is not fully sector agnostic, however, as they have found that the activities of its members can be focussed into 5 key 'verticals': renewable energies, healthcare, education, financial inclusion and agriculture (William Senyo, personal communication, January- April 2017). At present, the healthcare vertical initiatives have been 'spun-off' into a programme at the hub, run by Emily Sheldon (Health Innovation Director). At the time of writing there were plans to spin-off a separate financial inclusion vertical programme too.

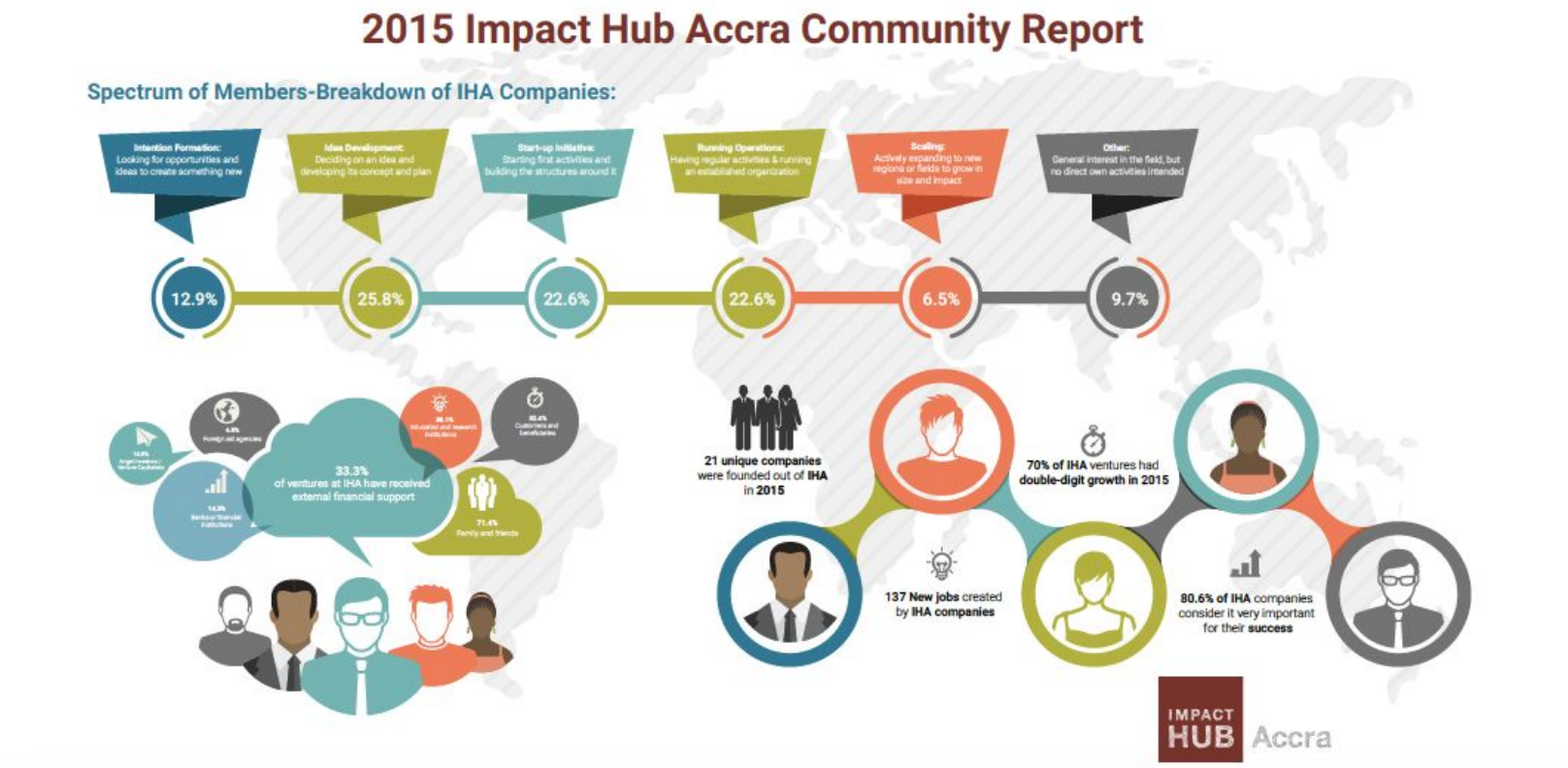


Figure 3. Infographic created by Impact Hub Accra on the basis of 2015 member survey data. Source: Impact Hub Accra, 2016

During the course of my own research I conducted 19 semi-structured interviews, forming illustrative case studies of members. Key, additional demographic statistics not yet covered by the Global Member Survey on the basis of these interviews are as follows:

- 63.16% of respondents were Ghanaian, 36.84% were non Ghanaian
- 73.68% had travelled outside of Ghana
- 31.58% had worked outside of Ghana
- 26.32% had received education outside of Ghana

Impact Hub Accra currently offers 5 types of memberships, 3 of which grant access to the co-working space alone. These packages are listed on their website as follows:

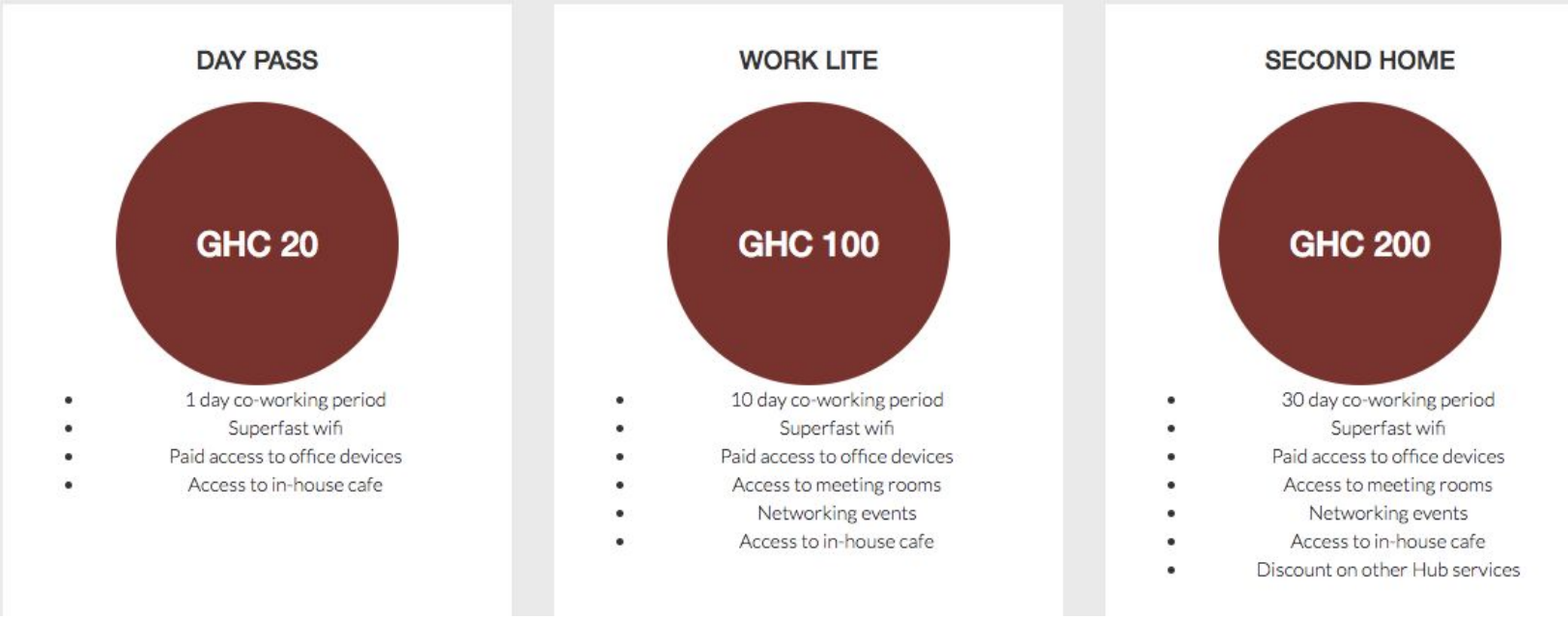


Figure 4. Membership packages at Impact Hub Accra. Source: Impact Hub Accra website, 2017. Prices quoted are in Ghana Cedis. As of 15 June 2017: 1 USD= 4.39 GHC, 1 EUR= 4.90 GHC (xe.com, 15 June 2017).

In addition to the above, Impact Hub Accra also offers 'Dedicated Desk' and 'Office' membership packages, when available. The Dedicated Desk allows a member to 'hire' a fixed desk in one of the Impact Hub Accra buildings, thereby alleviating any issues of securing a spot. The Office package, meanwhile, allows an organisation to hire separate rooms within the complex and establish these as 'permanent' bases. At present, several organisations have hired 'permanent' office space within the complex.

As previously discussed in chapter 4, defining the size of the member community is complex on account of several factors:

1) First and foremost, while there are mailing lists available which are specifically used to distribute content to the member community, subscription is not automatic and as such, members need to sign up to this service themselves. Furthermore, a 'member' who perhaps signed up in the past and no longer uses the hub, or is no longer in the country, might still be receiving newsletters, thereby artificially inflating the 'size' of the recipient pool.
2) As portrayed above, one type of membership package is the 'day pass', which allows 'visiting' or 'temporary' members to make use of the Impact Hub Accra facilities. As such, there are members who might be pay for the services and space one day and be gone the next. This brings into question how we might 'define' a member, whether it be

through frequency of attendance, type of membership, level of payment or some other variable.

3) On a day to day, weekly and monthly basis much variation can be found in terms of the level of activity and attendance at the hub. During my own stay in Accra, for example, the initial few weeks in January saw relatively “low” levels of attendance as members gradually returned from the ‘seasonal’ break. Furthermore, it soon became apparent that Mondays and Tuesdays were much busier than,say, Fridays. While the hub was often at over capacity in the beginning of the week, on some Fridays the complex could be eerily quiet.
4) In light of the above, confirming a definitive size of the member community at any one time at Impact Hub Accra remains complex and problematic. During my own time based at the hub, I was pointed towards figures from as ‘low’ as 80 to as ‘high’ as 300. Based on an average that the hub had 124 paying members between the period January-April 2017, we might assert that at present, the member community ranges between 100 to 140 members, of which a distinction can be made between ‘core’ members (who visit the hub on a frequent basis, perhaps multiple times per week) and other members who attend less frequently yet still pay for membership.

As of early 2017, the partners of Impact Hub Accra are BBG (Broadcasting Board of Governors, United States Government), Merck, Unreasonable Institute, Hack for Big Choices, GAIN (Ghana Angel and Investor Network) and United States of America Embassy at Riga, Latvia. These partners assist and support the activities of the hub through various means, including funding programmes and facilitating industry connections and knowledge sharing.

In terms of services other than the physical space, Impact Hub Accra offers high-speed internet (provided by Google), a coffee shop, printing facilities and networking events. Members may also attend external events which are hosted at the hub, and can use the Impact Hub Global network to connect with other hubs and members.

<u>Impact Hub Accra: the future</u>

As per its own website, Impact Hub Accra’s mission and vision are as follows (accra.impacthub.net, 2017):

Mission

“To support inclusive growth in Ghana through the creation of a resilient and dynamic social innovation ecosystem by developing programs, providing workspace, access to capital and connecting entrepreneurs focused on creating sustainable solutions to regional challenges in employment, financial inclusion, agriculture, health and education”

Vision

"A globally integrated entrepreneurial community that promotes high-impact development in West Africa in a responsible, sustainable and equitable way"

As Impact Hub Accra's exposure and activities continue to increase, it is looking towards the future in multiple ways. The hub is seeking to expand in terms of size by renting other, neighbouring properties, in response to several indications that the current complex is at over capacity. The CEO is also keen to implement strategies which will lead to further financial sustainability for the hub, thereby hoping to de risk its current business model[24]. Alongside this, the hub is seeking to increase the number on partnerships it currently has, as was evidenced during my own responsibilities as Business Development & Partnerships Assistant.

Perhaps most ambitiously, the hub's CEO is starting to (and seeking funding for) take steps which will scale and grow Impact Hub Accra into a fully-fledged entrepreneurial and innovation ecosystem; the "Osu Innovation Enclave". As announced in an interview with *The Chronicle* while I was based in Accra, the hub is seeking to expand in size, capacity and (international) exposure (Liebman, 2017), in order to create West Africa's focal point for the development and facilitation of entrepreneurial initiatives by a "new generation of Ghanaian youth"[25]

Within this vision, the hub seeks to create a veritable "innovation park", in order to "share our success with the local community and (international) visitors by bridging the benefits of the hub". This innovation park will include, amongst other components, makerspaces, co working spaces, platforms for discussion and classrooms. The hub endeavours that this will result in "an environment which is safe and accessible to all, utilising renewable energy sources to create a sustainable and thriving innovation ecosystem" (Impact Hub Accra internal documentation, January 2017).

[24] The hub's financial sustainability will be discussed further in chapters 7 and 8

[25] While the concept behind the Osu Innovation Enclave was announced publicly to *The Chronicle* in February 2017, official communication surrounding this development, or forthcoming plans, have not yet been released by the hub. As such, I am limited to disclosing snippets of information from my own knowledge I acquired whilst based at the hub and working on business development projects, whilst remaining privy to certain levels of confidentiality.

Chapter 7
Data from the hub: key findings and themes

In this chapter, I will present findings from the data I collected during my 3 months spent at Impact Hub Accra, namely those which relate to the main topics addressed in the thesis. I have distilled these findings into 6 core topics. On the basis of my close involvement with the management team, I found myself acquiring key insights into the daily management of an 'African hub'. In particular, I became privy to the thoughts of the management team with regards to the business development issues and the role that the hub plays. As such, a large part of this chapter is based on information I collected from interviews conducted with the 6 core members of the management team[26]. This is supplemented by interviews and surveys with hub members [27], as well as interviews I conducted with four key external ecosystem stakeholders[28]. In total, 19 interviews were conducted with members of Impact Hub Accra (acting as illustrative case studies, as explained in the research methodology chapter). 21 completions of an online survey were also collated[29]. All of the above is embellished by my own participatory observations and informal conversations I had during 3 months spent at the hub[30].

In this chapter, I intend to answer research sub question 2:

What are the development plans of African hub? Impact Hub Accra's role and vision

- What is the role of Impact Hub Accra?
- What is the vision of Impact Hub Accra, as viewed by the management team, members and key industry stakeholders?
- What are potential business development issues faced by Impact Hub Accra, as viewed by the management team, members and key industry stakeholders?

On the basis of the data I collected, I have been able to condense, summarize and present key highlights into 6 core themes. Illustrative examples of questions I asked in collecting these strands of data can be found in the accompanying parentheses.

1) The role of hub (*what does the hub offer?*)
2) The vision of the hub (*what do you think the mission and vision of the hub is?*)
3) The financial sustainability of the hub (*is access to capital a problem for the hub?*)
4) The level of embeddedness or integration within the local, wider (external) community

[26] Each of the interviews with the management team was recorded and subsequently transcribed. The audio files and transcriptions can be found in my online data depository. The interviews were semi-structured, with questions tailored as per the role of each staff member and on the basis of their answers to questions. The management team gave consent for their names and opinions to be used.
[27] The views and opinions of the member community, both through interviews as through surveys, were collected anonymously.
[28] The participants gave permission for their names and views to be used.
[29] The surveys were distributed to the member community through the dedicated mailing list database. The survey was thus completed at random and anonymously.
[30] The data presented in this chapter is by no means exhaustive of all the data I was able to collect in the field. The full data output can be accessed and viewed in the relevant online Google Drive depository.

(*do you think that people outside know what we do at the hub?)*
5) The level of collaboration between the management team and member community (*what could be improved at the hub?*)
6) The level of collaboration between the hub and government (*have you received any support from the government?*)

1) The role of the hub

In asking questions regarding what the hub offers, the value it adds and why people 'come to the hub', I was able to explore what the role of Impact Hub Accra really is. While varying narratives might be created -both internally as externally- as to the role the hub plays (or what it 'would' or 'should' like to play), it is through collecting data from the hub's management team and its member community that I was able to deduce a more realistic image.

In investigating this matter, the role of the community as being highly valuable was stressed, both by the hub's management team as by the member community. The hub's Community Manager noted, for example, that the collective community and social capital of the hub creates "one of the biggest advantages that we have". When the members, in turn, were asked what 'the best thing' was about being a member of the hub, an overwhelming 74% made reference to the community of the hub and the network they were able to develop.These networks were stated to offer cross sector knowledge, expertise and skills sets. Other answers included the conducive working atmosphere and being part of a larger movement. Furthermore, 74% of respondents knew someone at the hub prior to becoming a member, highlighting the breadth of the community. Given the question: "If you had to choose one, which is more important to you at Impact Hub Accra?", 52.4% stated "an open, inspiring and supportive community of like-minded people" whilst 33.3% opted for "fast internet, good electricity and backup, infrastructural services".

Despite the overwhelming expressed belief in the value of the community, an overriding trend could also be found in the value given to the infrastructural support (particularly, the internet) and real estate the hub is able to offer. The 'space' which the hub can provide- which is "integral to the social element" was described as "very intentional, it looks at the needs of the community. Without this space, it's chicken versus egg" (Community Manager, personal communication, March 2017). This sentiment was echoed by many member of the hub's community, one of whom stated that they came to the hub purely because "the internet is better than at iSpace". Several other members of the management team also stressed that the internet and real estate of the hub were the "core services" that it was able to provide. An external stakeholder noted that the role of hubs in Accra in general lies in 'obvious' roles of providing high speed internet and working space, as well as 'less obvious nodes' of legitimising entrepreneurs and providing anchors in the ecosystem.

2) The vision of the hub

As with the 'role' of Impact Hub Accra, the vision of the hub can easily be sourced from, for example, the hub's website or its CEO. However, whilst conducting my research it became

apparent that interesting observations could be made in asking both the management team, the member community and external stakeholders what *they* thought the vision and development plans of the hub are.

When asked what the members themselves thought that the 'mission' and 'vision' or 'objectives' of Impact Hub Accra are, notable responses were as follows:

- "Promote entrepreneurial growth, provide resources, boost startups in Accra, create community. Get things moving through networking"
- "Make an innovation district, with lots of facets: space, food, internet, makerspace, coworking. There's also a networking element, relationship building"
- "I think the long-term vision is to create a community of coworkers, a strong base"
- "I think it's about bringing people together to achieve and solve problems we have as individuals. The startup ecosystem in Accra is really growing, they really want to make their mark in that system. They give people skills, train them, give them events that will boost them"

Within the management team, reference was often made to the hub's plans in developing the "Osu Innovation Enclave". However, this was often accompanied by nuanced, subtle differences in opinion. The hub's Finance Director, for example, envisages growth both in terms of community and real estate as being the key drivers of the hub's development over the next few decades: "In 5 years I foresee the community growing, I foresee the real estate growing, I foresee our programmes expanding. That translates to our revenues, to our staff building, to our capacity and developments". The hub's Accountant, meanwhile, stated "in 5 years time, I think the hub will become a place where you will find more activities that will benefit others in the society in which it operates. Right now Will (CEO) is trying to make people understand that we are out to help things the government can't solve for them". The hub's Programmes Manager hopes to see the benefits of Impact Hub Accra extend to other regions of the country, through the opening of more hubs across the country; "then we can bring the 'goodness' of Accra to other regions".

3) The financial sustainability of the hub

While this is something I was not expecting to focus on, the hub's financial sustainability became a topic that was mentioned frequently throughout discussions and interviews with the management team[31]. It's frequency in conversation thus reflected a desire and need in acquiring and maintaining an adequate level thereof, and therefore seemed a valuable topic to investigate.

William Senyo, the hub's CEO and cofounder, stressed that "partnerships and capital" are currently his biggest focus, crucial to improving "our stability over the long term.. As financial sustainability is still a bit tricky". He also noted that "there is a lot that needs to happen: both in

[31] This subsequently led me to publishing a blog post on the topic: https://vc4a.com/blog/2017/06/19/how-african-hubs-can-reach-financial-sustainability/

the space expansion and community side, but capital sits firmly in the middle of both". This was echoed by another external key industry stakeholder, who stated that "the lack of capital and searching for suitable investors and mentors overrides everything".

Much of the conversation I had with the Finance Director of the hub also centred around assessing the hub's financial sustainability, both currently as in projections for the future. "Financial sustainability is key. I think the hub can still operate and do well, if we can get solid foundations in terms of financial sustainability. ...We need context sensitive goals".

Figure 1. The second floor at Impact Hub Accra's main building, showing members at 'dedicated desks' and doors to private offices. Source: personal records, April 2017.

While based at the hub, I learned that Impact Hub Accra currently finances its operation through a combination of internally generated revenue and external funding sources[32]. Internally generated revenues include fees paid by members, renting out the space for events, partnerships with organisations and any consultancy services which the hub offers. Collectively, internally generated revenues amount to roughly 20% of the hub's revenue today, with each above mentioned subcategory being responsible for approximately 5% thereof. In terms of fundraising, to date the US government (U.S. Broadcasting Board of Governors) has played a pivotal role in supporting the hub since its launch, as have other leading partners including Siemens Stiftung and Merck.

[32] Much of this section uses wording I used in my published blog post.

Any surplus revenue that is generated goes back into development of the hub, whether it be programming, staff costs or paying bills. The hub's biggest expenses include providing internet (in the form of Google Fiber) and real estate costs. Ideally, the hub would seek to cover many of these costs through the fees which its members pay. But one of the core values of the hub lies in offering accessible and affordable rates to the local entrepreneurial ecosystem. Hub membership rates are subsidised to ensure that Impact Hub Accra can continue to attract local talent.

The hub is actively working towards a target of increasing revenue from internally generated sources up to 60% from 20%. To achieve this, the hub is seeking to continue its success in hosting high-quality and impactful events. Further down the line, the hub hopes to adopt a hybrid profit/non-profit operational model in order to monetize more services.

4) The level of embeddedness or integration within the local, wider (external) community
The extent to which the hub was 'embedded' or integrated within the local, external community was another topic I did not foresee focussing on, but which piqued my interest as a result of its frequent mention by members of the management team. Furthermore, I was led to curiosity surrounding this concept following on from the notion by Afonso, Wittmayer and Avelino (2015) that Impact Hubs could perhaps do more to further their 'reach'.

Some members of the management team clearly expressed that they felt that, at present, there is not enough integration between the hub and the outside community: "at the moment there is too much of a boundary between the hub and the local community. I think we are seen as elite...But that's not the case, we are here and are trying to attract them (the local community)". This was echoed further, by statements such as that the hub could "make much of an impact if at least all the people on the street know what we stand for". It was felt that this 'disconnect' should be corrected as "we need real estate, so we need to get the landlords on our side". This sentiment was echoed by an external industry player, who also noted that that one of the core motives of hubs and entrepreneurial intermediaries in Ghana and beyond should be to "create value for the local community".

On the other hand, the current 'lack' of embeddedness of the hub is complex, and more questioning and probing revealed further interesting insights: "we are trying to create an ecosystem for local entrepreneurs. If you can bring the people in the local community here, you are creating social impact". It thus also became apparent that, although it was nascent, the attraction of local entrepreneurs to the hub was allowing for the breaking down of barriers between the hub and it's environment. Furthermore, it was noted that any (temporary) creation of a 'bubble' is *intentional*, a "bubble which isolates the hustling Ghanaian, allowing them to focus on their deliverables..without being blocked by bottlenecks and everyday hassle". It is being in this bubble which allows entrepreneurs to build businesses and skillsets which can then be "plugged into the wider community", a move which it is hoped will be further facilitated by the development of the 'Osu Innovation Enclave'. "For us, creating a bubble where people can get things done, building resilience, building an ecosystem, is the first step to the much wider impact

that we speak of" (Community Manager, March 2017). This sentiment was echoed numerous times by the hub's CEO and Cofounder, highlighting the complexity behind critically evaluating or 'judging' the level of embeddedness a hub might have.

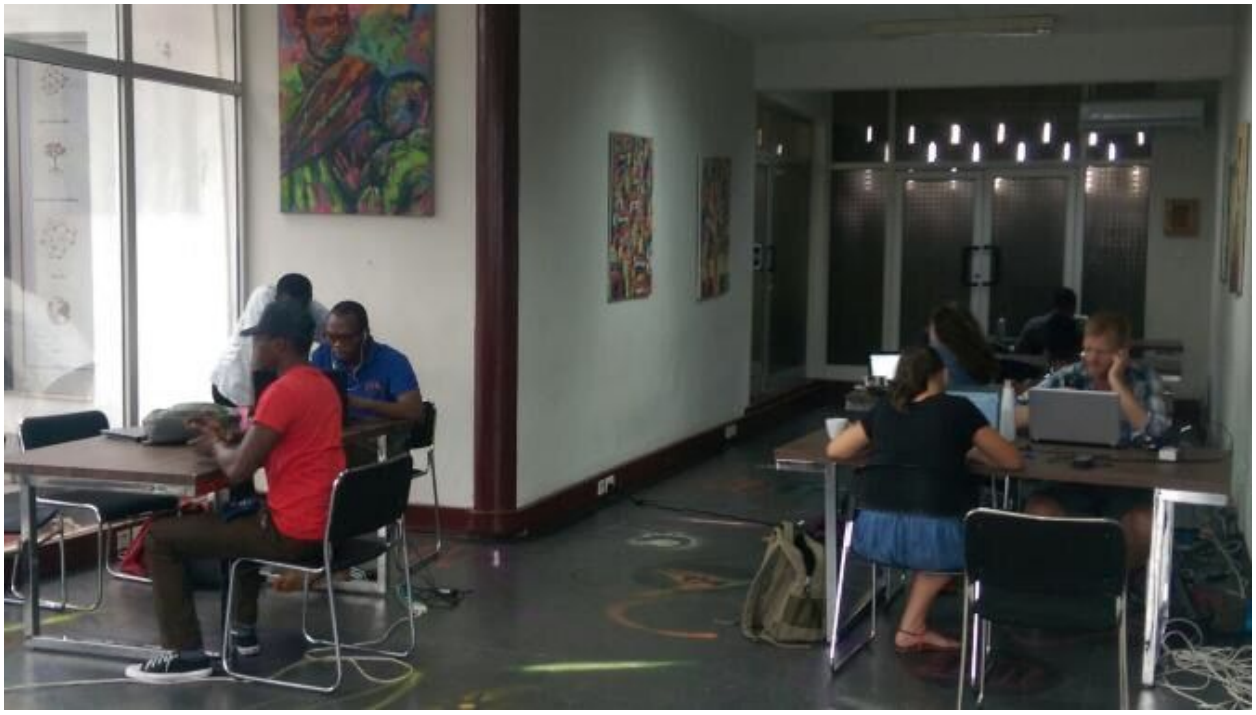


Figure 2. A short of the first floor, coworking space at Impact Hub Accra. Source: personal records, April 2017.

5) The level of collaboration between the management team and member community
While based at the hub, I took the opportunity to ask the member community what could be improved at the hub in terms of services and operation, or whether there were particular facets of the hub they particularly appreciated.

When collating the results of my member survey, for example, in response to the question "do you feel that the hub has provided you with enough support and advice for your business plan/venture/project?", 76.2% stated yes. It was also interesting to note that the hub can also play a role in developing the entrepreneurial ventures of the management team themselves, thereby purporting to create a level of interwovenness between the management team and member community. This was evidenced, for example, by the hub's Accountant own 'side hustle' as a freelance accountant- as working at the hub allowed him to "pitch my services" and "build up my skillset". Furthermore, an embedded interwovenness between the member community and its management could also be observed by the pure fact that the members were friends with many of the management team, and vice versa. Numerous members had heard of the hub or had become a member of the hub on account as having a member of the management team as a personal friend.

When I asked the member community what services or aspects of the hub could be improved, notable responses included a need for more member community events, more collaboration between entrepreneurs at the hub and more opportunities for members to find out "what other members are working on, it would be great to have some kind of directory of 'who's who'".

These remarks seem to suggest that members lacked opportunities to meet as members through community events and raised a need for more collaboration. This was further embellished by suggestions that the "hub should have a who's who board" as it was often stated "I don't know who all the member are, particularly the new members". This could lead, for example, to a potential loss of opportunities to develop instances of skill-sharing, cross-sectoral knowledge transfer and productive synergies. When asked whether members felt comfortable approaching each other in the space (for help and advice, or purely for a chat, for example), results were mixed and some individuals expressed a need for more 'openness'.

6) The level of collaboration between the hub and government

The relationship of the hub with the government is as complex as it is ultimately desirable, but was something I was curious to explore considering the role that Impact Hub Accra - and other entrepreneurial intermediaries across the city- seemed to want to play in "filling in the gaps" that the current ecosystem could not offer.

The hub is - to some extent- 'present' in government through William Senyo's current active involvement of the creation of the national Social Enterprise policy[33]- which will enable "broader conversations" and will be "a huge win". Furthermore, William Senyo was excited about the prospect of the new government, who "have a pulse on what it is that Ghanaian wants and the innovative spirit that exists now". While at present there is still "zero engagement" with the hub, Mr. Senyo hoped that this would shift in the near future.

Another member of the management team lamented the role of governments across Africa in facilitating the trajectories of entrepreneurs ("how can people get funds to start up businesses? Right now the system is so corrupt"). He duly noted, however, that there are more opportunities for young entrepreneurs in Ghana than in other West African countries ("Ghana is far more advanced") and that the hub played a further, crucial role in this, filling the gaps where the government was not able to offer support to entrepreneurs.

This sentiment was developed further by the Director of Health Innovation and Africa Lead for the Impact Hub Global Network. A key distinction was expressed between Impact Hubs in the 'west' versus Impact Hubs on the African continent: "in the U.S. and in Europe, Impact Hubs are primarily a social impact focussed coworking space. In Africa, Impact Hubs are social innovation and entrepreneurship centres which offer coworking. The role of coworking in comparison to programmes and events varies between Africa and the rest of the world". This highlights that

[33] More information about the development of the Social Enterprise Policy can be found here: http://www.seghana.net/what-we-do.html

hubs in Africa need to ‘do more’ and become fully-fledged ‘centres’, in light of the lack of the support entrepreneurs receive in the external environment.
In terms of the hubs phenomenon in general, it is believed that its ‘success’ in Africa is due to a combination of factors, including the high prices of office real estate in urban centres (whereby a monthly membership fee at hubs avoids high sunk costs), the incidence of many individuals becoming entrepreneurs ‘on the side’ (and thereby needing a space where they can ‘focus’ on their entrepreneurial ventures), and the ability of hubs to offer training, mentoring and international exposure (which they can not get elsewhere).

The cofounder and CEO of iSpace- a hub which launched in Accra and currently has between 50-58 “paying members”- was able to give further insight into the nascent entrepreneurial ecosystem in Accra and Ghana and its dynamic with the government: “you can’t solve the problems of a community without being part of the community...ultimately, we want to create jobs and not rely so much on the government. We are more than just a hub, we are trying to change the mindsets of people in that entrepreneurship is not just for politicians”.

Responses from member community corroborated the lack of support that existed from government. Not a single respondent stated they had received support - in any way or form- from the government. When asked whether they had or were registering their businesses in Ghana, many had opted not to or lamented the time-consuming and … process in trying to do so: “Compared to the U.K., getting companies registered is time-consuming and the process can be described as laborious. It took a day in U.K., taken 3 months so far here and still not finished. They keep asking for more information”.

Chapter 8
Analysis of key business development issues at Impact Hub Accra

In this chapter, I intend to answer research sub question 3:

3) What business development issues exist for Impact Hub Accra in realising its goals?

- What issues exist with regards to the financial sustainability of the hub?
- What issues exist between the management and the member community?
- What issues exist between the hub and external parties?

I intend to answer this question through analysis of what I deem are three core 'business development issues' which impede the hub's scaling. These three issues are ascertained through the distillation of the themes presented as data highlights in the previous chapter.

As explored in the previous chapters, the long term vision of Impact Hub Accra has nuanced forms and slight variations, depending on whether we ask the management team, its members or external affiliates. At its core, however, the sentiment is perhaps best encapsulated in the words of Impact Hub Accra's CEO:

"When you come back in 5 years, you will find a microcity- a microcosm- here in the form of a thriving district. It will be a launch pad for much bigger visions. It should be owned by the city of Accra, including the government. The resulting 'innovation enclave' will use community and infrastructure solutions to address the challenges of early stage entrepreneurship"
(William Senyo, personal communication, 15th of February 2017)

This vision feeds into the wider strategic goals of Impact Hubs across Africa, as they are centred on the creation of "a platform to connect and share resources that 'inspire, energise and catalyse entrepreneurial communities that create value and opportunities for the wider population". Furthermore, the support structure and access to mentorship they hope to provide can lead to the "creation of an ecosystem for entrepreneurs" whilst building a "financially viable local Impact Hub as a sustainable business" (Jackson, 2015).

The 'hubs' phenomenon across the continent is nascent, and each hub faces its own business development issues in realising its respective goals and visions. Priorities and constraints come into play, altering these development plans accordingly.

On the basis of my time spent at Impact Hub Accra, the data collected and first-hand observations and conversations (in essence, being fully embedded in the hub on a daily basis), I believe that the core issues facing the hub in realising its visions are threefold, each of which shall be discussed in turn.

- Business development issue 1: The financial sustainability of the hub
- Business development issue 2: Integration & embeddedness in the local community

- Business development issue 3: Collaboration with member community and government

Business development issue 1: The financial sustainability of the hub

At the time of writing, Impact Hub Accra has just started an online crowdfunding campaign through the popular modern platform Kiva. It is anticipated that a loan of $50,000 will help "purchase a generator for stable electricity, improve the hub's space to make better working conditions for entrepreneurs, and attract and retain top talent to achieve the hub's vision (Kiva, 2017).

The need for capital to alleviate a lack of consistent and reliable electricity supplies was evidenced during my own observations while based at the hub, as well as echoing data collected through interviews. It was, unfortunately, rare to have a fortnight pass without at least a partial or total loss of electricity to the hub. This would result in a switch to the generator supply, which would at least maintain the supply of the hub's 'lifeline' (the internet) whilst forsaking air conditioning. From time to time, even the generator would be unable to be relied on - as a result of high fuel costs and usage- resulting in a total 'blackout' of the hub. In these instances, the crucial necessity of providing internet and a functioning 'space' was evident. Initially, the hub would briefly 'come to life' on account of the community now being left with no other option but to interact with each other and not their screens ("People should talk to each other more!" (Programmes Manager, personal communication, 1st February 2017). Soon thereafter, however, the hub would turn into somewhat of a ghost town when it became apparent that the internet and backup supplies would not return, and members left in the hope of finding alternative sources of internet at neighbouring cafes such as Vida e Caffe or Cafe Kwae[34].

[34] Vida e Caffe- a chain of coffee shops across the capital- and Cafe Kwae are seen by some as the 'true' entrepreneurial hotspots of the city ("this is where the *actual* entrepreneurs go". Emmanuel Quartey and Ashwin Ravichandran, personal communications, 2017) .Before the arrival of the 'hubs' in Accra, these establishments started plugging in the needs of the entrepreneurs in providing a 'space' and 'internet', with an accompanying 'membership fee' in the form of being obliged to buy (numerous) refreshments. It is interesting to note that in submitting their feasibility study to the Impact Hub Global team in 2005, Hub Accra acknowledges certain cafes and hotels in Accra within their competitive analysis. While it is ascertained that these venues do offer "internet" and "workspace", they do not offer "events", "networking", "mentoring" and "access to investors". The inclusion of cafes and hotels in a competitive analysis as entrepreneurial 'centres' is reflective of the demand and subsequent lack of supply of basic resources for aspiring entrepreneurs in the city.

Figure 1. A message sent to the Impact Hub Accra member whatsapp group by one of its member, lamenting the (temporary) loss of internet at the hub. Source: personal records, 28th February 2017

Figure 2. A 'meme' sent by the Community Manager of Impact Hub Accra to its members through the Whatsapp group and to a wider audience through its Facebook page. Source: personal records, 8th February 2017.

As corroborated in interviews conducted, in many instances the 'value' or 'role' of Impact Hub Accra is currently viewed in terms of the space (real estate) and internet (infrastructural support) it provides. We might subsequently view this framed against 'Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs', whereby the hub fulfills crucial, first steps within the growing (formalised) entrepreneurial ecosystem in Accra:

"I think that entrepreneurship in Accra is still at a Maslow Hierarchy of Needs level"
(Community Manager, 28th of March 2017).

"Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs applies: reliable infrastructure is the bottom rung...
The upper rungs of an enthusiastic community, cross-learning, venture building, cannot happen without the basics. In Accra, it's really really tough to get the basics"
(A response to online survey completed by a member on 6th of April 2017).

We might also refer to literature on the development of hubs and incubators when assessing the 'life cycle' of the hub in light of its service offering. According to Allen (1988), a three stage life cycle can be assumed for business incubators. In the first stage (the "start-up stage") the development is real estate driven, with emphasis on locating and preparing space for tenants. The subsequent "business development" stage focuses on managing or further supporting the tenants, with the incubator having secured its own "financial footing". The final stage ("incubator maturation") is achieved when the enterprise support network can be scaled and further space for future tenants is required. Whilst the work of Allen focuses initially on incubators - and not hubs[35] - we might nevertheless be able to transfer this to our localized context. In so doing, it seems apt to deduce that Impact Hub Accra is - at present- firmly caught between the "startup" and "business development" stage. Whilst the hub and its management have voiced the intention in scaling its reach and activities, they are nevertheless constrained by their lack of capital.

This challenge is not unique to Impact Hub Accra, but rather to entrepreneurial intermediaries across the continent as a whole. With a vast majority of hubs still being donor-dependent and driven, the question of a hub's financial sustainability is increasingly being voiced in articles and blog posts[36] (see, for example, Akinyemi 2014 and 2015). This is also evidenced by high levels of discussion (and praise) surrounding iHub's (Kenya) recent move towards a commercial - as opposed to nonprofit- model (Stevis, 2017). When questioning *why* the financial sustainability of Impact Hub Accra has arisen, we might simply ascertain that the nascent hub phenomenon - particularly in the African context- has not yet been able to establish those long-term operational models which will secure financial sustainability. A demand-driven, needs-based market -where entrepreneurs sought basic resources and infrastructure to facilitate their ventures- led to the

[35] Furthermore, it must be noted that this article focuses on the Western hemisphere and not an emerging market context and is relatively outdated.
[36] While the exact details of Impact Hub Accra's financial sustainability progress go beyond the scope of this thesis, further information can be found in a blog post I wrote for VC4A, based on an interview conducted with the Finance Director

'supply' of hubs- often quickly- but without a sound financial footing. At present, Impact Hub Accra alleviates components of its financial insecurity through a price differentiation model via its tiered membership structure. During my time at the hub, I learned that while the ground floor, co-working space was "loss-making", the second floor- with its private offices and Dedicated Desks- allowed the management team to collect fees which went towards covering the costs of the hub. In essence, those who use the facilities on the second floor are able to subsidize those on the ground floor, thereby allowing Impact Hub Accra to keep membership fees for the coworking space low and attracting a larger customer base.

The Kiva campaign thus not only highlights the lack of sound infrastructure in a country such as Ghana, but also masks a fundamental, wider issue of lack of access to capital and financial sustainability for these hubs. While Impact Hub Accra voices grand visions and has much potential, it will not reach the "business development" stage, let alone scale into an "innovation enclave", unless it secures sound financial "footing".

Business development issue 2: Integration and embeddedness within the local community

The second challenge we might consider when assessing Impact Hub Accra's constraints in realising its longer-term, strategic goals is its 'integration' or 'embeddedness' within the wider, local community of Osu, Accra and beyond. Whilst based at the hub, I observed a mixed picture of how 'embedded' the hub really was.

On the one hand, it seemed that the hub had integration at its core. As stated on its own website, the hub's mission is to support "inclusive growth in Ghana" whilst its vision includes a "globally integrated entrepreneurial community" (accra.impacthub.net, 2017). This is echoed in numerous other instances, including statements from Impact Hub global as follows:

> *"There is an incredible opportunity in identifying a context appropriate and financially sustainable way to support entrepreneurship for impact in Africa. There are opportunities to drive change in areas such as education, health, agriculture and ICT, and Africa has the resources to create this transformation. The Impact Hub's role through local Impact Hubs is to catalyse and support this."*
> (Jackson, 2015)

Furthermore, while I was based at the hub I noticed that in an indirect manner individuals from the local community, just outside the boundaries of the hub, were benefitting from the hub's presence in the development of their own (both informal and formal) entrepreneurial activities. This was evidenced, for example, by the success of the 'breakfast lady' who served a stream of customers from the hub on a daily basis from her stall, as well as a strategic group of taxi drivers who had formed an official looking 'taxi rank' on the hub's doorsteps, capitalising on the presence of the hub and its visitors. A more 'sophisticated' example could be found in the presence of 'Tee Baa', a bar and restaurant around the corner from the hub, popular with hub members, expats and 'repats' alike[37].

[37] Tea Baa itself was set up by a Canadian repat,

On the other hand, some instances led to suggest that not enough was being done to support and enable local entrepreneurs who were, in some cases, extremely local. A case in point can be found in reference to an employee at Impact Hub Accra. Formally, this individual works at Kawa Moka (the hub's inhouse catering service and cafe) as a kitchen boy. Informally, he creates unique, custom accessories and shoes, bedecked with Kente and other African cloth, for a limited market. Without a secure business plan, capital or marketing capabilities, he is only able to market his goods through word of mouth and by displaying sample stock at the entrance to the hub. As such, although he 'works' at the hub, he does not seem to benefit from the hub directly nor does he 'fit in' with the rest of the clientele. This 'entrepreneur' epitomises the activity of thousands of informal entrepreneurs who can be found in Accra and whose prospects appear limited. He can be found in the hub on a day to day basis, but he is not able to access all the same benefits which others enjoy.

Figure 3. Sample product cabinet at Impact Hub Accra. Source: personal records, 7 April 2017. A cabinet at the entrance of Impact Hub Accra, showcasing sample products from members of the hub community. The bottom shelf showcases two pairs of shoes created by the entrepreneur in question.

The suggestion that Impact Hub Accra is not fully embedded in the wider community was voiced multiple times in interviews with members of the management team as with external stakeholders alike, as discussed in the previous chapter.

This lack of integration in the local, wider community seems problematic on account of the size and ‘strength’ of the informal market in Ghana. In 1973, Hart already noted the importance of informal market participants in Accra being able to look upon ‘successful’ entrepreneurs as ‘role

models': "The 'way out' of this persistent dilemma for urban workers is seen by many to lie in emulating the role of the small-scale entrepreneur, as exemplified by the success of some of their fellows who started off with similar life-chances" (Hart, 1973). Furthermore, if we refer back to the work of Afonso, Wittmayer and Avelino (2015), we might critically question to whom the benefits of the hub are not extended and "to what extent such accessibility could be (further) increased".

If we are to question *why* the there is an apparent lack of integration in the local, wider community, we might consider whether the number of expats who work from the hub is a factor. From my first weeks onwards at the hub, I noticed that there were a considerable amount of 'expats' working on their projects and startups from the hub. While it is not possible to ascertain exactly how many there were or what percentage they constitute of the entire member community, it has been suggested that they account for around 30% (Liebman, 2017). The presence of expats- from the U.S., Europe and elsewhere- undoubtedly brings exposure and potential avenues to resources and perhaps even investors. These expats themselves most likely are familiar with the hub on account of the global Impact Hub brand and the foreign stakeholder model of Impact Hub Accra. Nonetheless, we might consider whether the presence of expats leads to issues of integration and embeddedness in the wider, local community. It was noted, for example, by the management team of the hub that there is a risk of attracting the expat community to such an extent that a narrative is built up at the hub of "*obruni and non obruni*". While it was noted that a diverse member community leads to knowledge sharing, open mindedness and international opportunities, a potential risk is created in no longer being fully inclusive to the local Ghanaian community.

The level of integration into the wider community a hub such as Impact Hub Accra remains contentious , not only account of *how* it could be achieved, but also on *whether* it should be achieved; at least for now. As noted in the previous chapter, to some extent the management of Impact Hub Accra is trying to "create a bubble" which in many ways 'protects' its entrepreneurs from the daily hassle and obstacles of conducting business in Ghana. On the other hand, we might argue that in doing so, further scaling is inhabited as not enough awareness, and therefore perhaps funding, can be sought. Furthermore, we might consider whether the hub's future success is dependent on its ability to "anchor" the innovation and change it creates, whereby it is crucial that "innovations are embedded in and attached to what is (perceived as) older, traditional or known" (Sluiter, 2017). In this instance, we might question whether the idea and concept of Impact Hub Accra might not be fruitful unless it is fully embedded in its wider community and the more traditional practices of local entrepreneurs[38].

Business development issue 3: Collaboration

The third issue which appears to impede Impact Hub Accra in moving towards its longer term goals lies in leveraging collaborations, both internally as externally. By internally, I refer to the collaboration- through communication and the hosting of community events- that the management team has with its own member community. With externally, I refer to collaboration (or, more aptly, lack thereof) the hub has with government.

[38] It is beyond the scope of this thesis, but interesting to consider, whether *other* hubs and entrepreneurial centres in Accra or Ghana are more or less 'embedded' within their local, wider communities. Is iSpace, for example, more embedded on account of its lack of international exposure and network?

Whilst writing this thesis, the 'new' government of Ghana announced the launch of a $100 million entrepreneurial initiative (Mutari, 2017). The National Entrepreneurship and Innovation Plan (NEIP) will "begin with a $10 million seed fund to be provided by government but will be scaled up to $100 million through the private sector and development partners". With longer term vision of curbing unemployment and rendering Ghana "an entrepreneurial nation", the initiative will include 10% of funding which will be "directed to start-ups", whilst there will also be tax relieves for start-ups.

Despite these promises, we might consider the efficacy- and acceptance- of such initiatives. As previously noted in this thesis, in the past government initiatives aimed at helping entrepreneurial activity in Ghana have often been shunned by entrepreneurs themselves due to a general lack of trust. At the end of 2015, the Registrar General of Ghana facilitated online business registration and fee payments to "make business registration services less cumbersome" (Rgd.gov.gh, 2015). Yet during the course of research conducted, almost all respondents from the member community had not chosen to register in Ghana as of yet. While some had chosen to register their businesses abroad, others had been 'stuck' in business registration procedures for months on end and had become increasingly frustrated. More often than not, the concept of business registration in Ghana elicited chuckling responses:

- "Already registered in the U.K., waiting for approval of registration here in Ghana. Annoying experience, which has been ongoing since December. Delays, more waiting, official on holiday, very time consuming. Not expensive but cumbersome".
- "Compared to the U.K., getting companies registered is time-consuming and the process can be described as laborious. It took a day in U.K., taken 3 months so far here and still not finished. They keep asking for more information".
- "Registered in Ghana. Disadvantage: we were told we were tax exempt at Registrar General office, turns out there is nothing like that in reality. We were working for a year, on the basis of pro bono services, later found out that we had to pay taxes. Given false info upon registering. Advantage: formalise the company, so we could open bank accounts, set up websites and do other things we wanted to do".

In summary, there seems to be room for improvement in terms of the intermediary role that the hub could play in facilitating discussion and support between Ghanaian entrepreneurs and the government. While it is easy to perhaps lament the hub's effort in doing so, in the past the hub has actively reached out to government counterparts in an effort to open conversation, with little or any warm reciprocation. In light of the new NEIP initiative, the hub's CEO stated "I have very little info regarding that programme and I've approached it like I do every gov't programme ;-), but I intend to poke it a lil' to see if it's worth exploring some partnership" (Personal communication, 26th June 2017). All in all, it seems ironic that the government of Ghana would not reach out to growing entrepreneurial intermediaries- whether it be Impact Hub Accra, MEST, iSpace or elsewhere, to further the successful implementations of such initiatives as well as respond to difficulties which entrepreneurs are facing.

In terms of internal collaboration, at times it appeared that a ‘disconnect’ existed between the management team of the hub and its member community. This was evidence, for example, through the lack of communication around external events and the inconsistency in hosting member ‘get-togethers’.

Prior to my arrival at the hub, I was informed that member get togethers happened on a monthly basis, in the form of communal lunches in the hub’s garden area. These informal meetings (“huddles”) offered the opportunity for hub members to mingle, share ideas and hear updates from the management team. Unfortunately, whilst based at the hub for 3 months only 1 huddle was hosted. This resulted in insufficient opportunity for hub members to express their feedback on the hub’s services and progresses, as well as for them to hear updates from the management team.

Figure 4. Community huddle in the garden of Impact Hub Accra. The Community Manager updates the community with hub news. Source: personal records, 29th of March 2017.

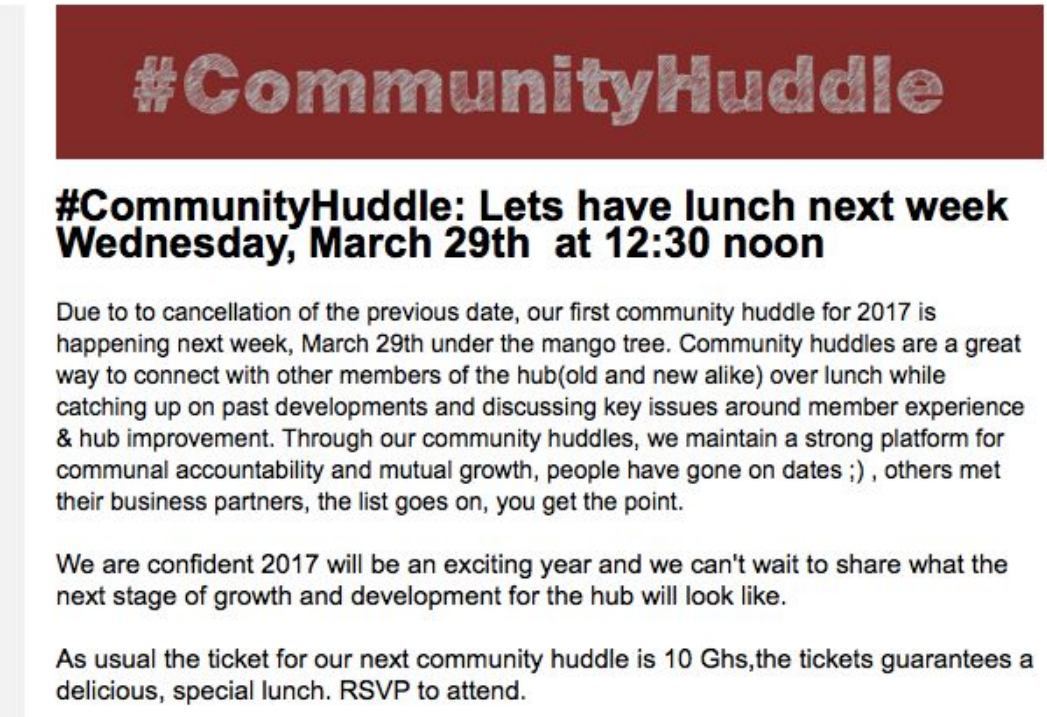


Figure 5. Excerpt from member community newsletter announcing huddle. Source: personal records, March 2017.

While based at the hub, I had the pleasure of attending numerous external events which were hosted at the hub. These included hackathons, workshops and mini-conferences hosted by range of organisations, businesses and various consortia. The content of these events aligned with the mission and vision of the hub (in having a (social) entrepreneurial focus) and subsequently are rightly seen as unique chance to develop the exposure and reputation of the hub[39]. Furthermore, at present the hosting of external events is a crucial and viable revenue stream for the hub. Simultaneously, the booking of events at the hub often led to situations where the coworking space would need to be used as a venue, and as such hub members would be "pushed out" of their working space. It appears that initially, the hub tried to limit the hosting of larger events to weekends and evenings, so as to limit any disruption to hub members. However, as time has progressed and the hub has had to increase its revenue-seeking capacity, the incidence of larger events during working hours has increased.

This issue naturally ties back to the pertinent issue discussed earlier of the financial sustainability of the hub. With increasing reliance on external events to fund the biggest operating costs of the hub, there is a risk of affecting the coworking space in a detrimental

[39] Examples of events hosted while I was at the hub include a 'Chocathon' (a 5 day conference and hackathon (led by Google and the International Trade Centre amongst other partners) which hosted stakeholders, businesses, individuals and hackers to build sustainable solutions to cocoa supply chains) and "Plastic Waste Management in Ghana" (A stakeholder workshop / Hackathon, co hosted by UNDP Ghana, Diageo Plc/Guinness Ghana Breweries Ltd and Impact Hub Accra).

manner. Furthermore, it is my belief that increased collaboration with hub members - and not any increasing lack of addressing their needs- can ultimately improve pathways to increased funding opportunities.

When considering *why* the hub lacks collaboration- both internally and externally as outlined above- we might consider other areas as discussed in this thesis. Firstly, the present lack of full collaboration within the hub (between the management team and the member community and within the member community itself) might stem from the hub's current focus on growth and its trajectory towards financial sustainability. While the hub explores different funding avenues and attempts to find its footing -crucial in light of the financial insecurity it faces today- it might be the case that, for now, other areas of the hubs operation, such as a focus on member collaboration, are sidelined to some extent as other priorities take hold. As such, this suggests that the business development issues of the hub are inextricably linked. Secondly, it appears that the lack of collaboration between the hub and government is very much a result of the traditional patterns of governmental policies and actions shunning entrepreneurial initiatives in Ghana. While as of late more encouraging signs are apparent with regards to government assistance for entrepreneurs[40], it remains to be seen to what extent this and future governments of Ghana are willing to collaborate with entrepreneurial intermediaries such as Impact Hub Accra so as to leverage a symbiotic and fruitful relationship for all parties concerned.

Figure 6. Excerpt from newsletter sent to the community. Source: personal records, 2017.

[40] At the end of April 2017, for example, the new NPP government of Ghana announced a "tax free holiday policy for startups" (Arthur, 2017).

Chapter 9
Conclusion

In several of his articles, Friederici critically examines the value and positioning of hubs and incubators in Ghana as well as across the continent as a whole. For starters, he raises the valid point that perhaps we should not apply “old” or “Western-orientated” funding and evaluation models to the African sphere (Friederici, 2015). He stresses that hubs, when compared to incubators, have much less prescriptive approaches, instead “leaving some of the shaping and governance of the organization to its members”, thereby creating a “collection of changemakers”, which we can deduce both internally (the ‘change’ that Impact Hub Accra is creating by enabling entrepreneurs) and externally (the ventures that the entrepreneurs launch from within Impact Hub Accra and the wider changes - in creating an entrepreneurial ‘ecosystem’- that Impact Hub Accra is able to support). Impact Hub Accra’s mission and vision to “accelerate” and engineer an enabling environment for a new generation of Ghanaian entrepreneurs is evidenced, amongst others, through its “open participation model, multi stakeholder and multi sectoral approach”. Furthermore, we are reminded that “(direct) startup creation and development is mostly beside the point of the ‘pure’ hub model”. Instead, hubs aim to “affect cultures and conditions for startup creation and success systemically in the long run (Friederici, 2015).

They don’t “create” startups” (Friederici, 2015). Instead, hubs in Africa have an inherent focus to accelerate the African startup ecosystem. This does lead to conflicting issues on hubs; while hubs are (generally) much cheaper to run that incubators, it is very hard to “pinpoint their effectiveness”. It has been suggested that hubs create on a “very small *direct* contribution to startup creation and success”. Furthermore, entrepreneurs would not “attribute tangibles like revenue increases or better survival chances to hubs”, instead leveraging the fact that hubs “tended to generate leads and contacts, which can have important *indirect* effects”. Hubs thus play a crucial role in amplifying intangibles of entrepreneurs - motivation, exposure and self-belief (amongst others)- factors which are near to impossible to measure or estimate (Friederici, 2015).

The purpose of this thesis was not to study the effectiveness of Impact Hub Accra, of hubs in Ghana and (West) Africa or hubs in general. The hub phenomenon is nascent on the continent and too little is known, for the time being, on any measurable changes or output they create. Rather, it is their role in creating enabling ecosystems which seems most impactful and valuable. Impact Hub Accra has a clear vision in wishing to scale its capacity to currently enable and support entrepreneurs through offering a space, internet and community. “For those who want to be entrepreneurs, it provides a workspace that has like minded individuals, who contribute to the idea that starting a business venture is possible, and that there are no clear cut rules as to how to go about it (Impact Hub Accra internal documentation, 2015). By moving towards the creation of the “Osu Innovation Enclave”, Impact Hub Accra hopes to ultimately fill the gaps in the current ecosystem and accelerate the trajectories of many more entrepreneurs to come.

But in so doing, Impact Hub Accra faces its own business development issues, as I was able to explore and determine during my 3 months spent at the hub. The financial sustainability of the hub, its integration into the wider, local community and its collaboration both internally (with its own member community) as externally (with government) seem to all be factors which could impede its scaling if not addressed in the (near) future. Interestingly, these factors differ from those cited in other publications as being impediments to scaling for accelerators and incubators (Poole, 2017), purporting that each entrepreneurial intermediary, each context and each environment might bring its own challenges.

As a result, further areas of study and research can be considered. We might wish to investigate the uniqueness of these business development issues. Are they particular to one hub and its past trajectory, might a hub launched at the same time have differing issues? Are these issues confined to entrepreneurial intermediaries in Africa alone? Or do these trends manifest themselves in other emerging market contexts? Furthermore, how can the context and (foreign) stakeholder influence of a hub influence its business development issues?

In any thesis, it is crucial to consider limitations and biases which may have occurred. First and foremost, the type of hub I investigated was ‘special’ in the sense that although it was locally owned and run autonomously, it does have foreign stakeholders and is part of a foreign network. As such, it will be different to a hub which has no ‘foreign’ influence. Furthermore, there is a risk that I brought a biased viewpoint from the outset, having previously been familiar with the Impact Hub ‘brand’ and ‘message’. This, coupled with my increasing affinity and ‘loyalty’ to the management team, means that I might have had difficulty in assessing certain components objectively. Above all, it is imperative to announce that I investigated one hub alone. Impact Hub Accra is just one hub out of the many which has sprung up across the continent. As such, its story will be different in many ways to other hubs, even to those which might be - in geographical terms- very close by. Furthermore, there might have been biases in the data I collected. Answers can be biased by cultural and social differences in how to respond to questionnaires and interviews. Also, some responses are probably influenced by fundamental characteristics of the economic and social environment. As a final point, it is also worth considering that I only spent 3 months at Impact Hub Accra. As such, I have only been able to scratch the surface in what I believe the core business development issues are, on the basis of the relatively short time-frame I had.

Nevertheless, I believe that my 3 months working and conducting research at Impact Hub Accra proved invaluable to investigating business development issues and bringing these to light. I was able to immerse myself into this exciting world of startups, entrepreneurs and their ‘accelerators’, whilst critically assessing what was ‘going on’ in the ecosystem. My objective and independent stance has endeavoured to deliver a constructive analysis through a unique case study whilst answering academic research questions.

While it might be easy at times to become overly ‘critical’ of hubs (a phenomenon which I too experienced from time to time. See also TMS Ruge, 2017), at its core I believe it is important to remember that hubs, such as Impact Hub Accra, are simply trying to ‘fill the gaps’ and ‘plug the system’ which the government and state will not - or cannot- provide for entrepreneurs. While we might become critical in terms of assessing, for example, whether Impact Hub Accra is embedded ‘enough’ within the local wider community, it is sometimes easy to forget that ultimately, the hub *is* run, owned and managed locally, despite being part of a global network.

In light of the core business development issues outlined towards the end of this thesis, we might consider possible suggestions to ‘alleviate’ these. In terms of the financial sustainability of the hub, perhaps more could be done through targeting the burgeoning ‘impact investor’ sector globally or leveraging the skills, expertise and capital of increasing numbers of ‘repats’ to Ghana and the continent[41]. In terms of the integration within the wider, local community and the hub, perhaps this is a phenomenon whose ‘bubble’ will naturally dissipate over time as the hub scales and can be amplified through hosting community events. Perhaps the hub can increase its collaboration with the government through more open and direct communication with relevant members of parliament, showcasing the success (and struggles) of the hub. Yet, these suggestions are all ‘what if’ situations and speculative. In reality, as with hubs across the continent, each hub must figure out its own path to addressing its business development issues.

As mentioned in the opening to this thesis, the visit of Tony Elumelu to the hub is in many way an embodiment of the vision of the hub, as it endeavours to enable an environment which one day might develop hundreds of such successful entrepreneurs. During the course of my research and stay at Impact Hub Accra, I learned that while the vision of the hub is ambitious, it faces business development issues- some more obvious than others- which currently stand in the way of creating this environment and ecosystem, in so doing answering my research questions.

All in all, I believe that the business development issues highlighted in this thesis are just several of more factors which stand in the way of further scaling in the entrepreneurial ecosystem as a whole in Ghana, let alone any other (West) African country. However, the overriding determination and sense of optimism which can be found at Impact Hub Accra suggest no lack of trying. Towards the end of my stay in Accra I attended, and helped host an event at, the inaugural Enterprise Africa Summit. This 5 day event, with close to 600 attendees

[41] The 2016 Global Impact Investing Network (GIIN) survey presented the respondents of individuals who manage up to “USD 114 billion in impact assets”, highlighting the size of this growing industry (2016 GIIN impact investor survey, 2016). The trend of ‘repats’ to the continent and the role they can play in boosting private sector and entrepreneurial initiatives across the continent has also been chronicled (see, for example, Ozoigbo, 2016).

and a host of influential speakers, centred around “establishing the need to explore innovative pathways in connecting entrepreneurship to resilient development in Africa” (Britishcouncil.org.gh, 2017). William Senyo, CEO and cofounder of Impact Hub Accra, stated that the summit “stands testament to everything that we have achieved and what we do,what is happening in this space” (Personal communication, 19th March 2017). This, if anything, proves the resilience and optimism surrounding this ecosystem.

While the hub phenomenon across the continent is new, and we do not know yet how it will develop, awareness and addressing business development issues such as examined in this thesis might allow for a successful continuation of their development.

Link to online data depository

All the available data I collected during January and April 2017 can be found in the following Google Drive:
https://drive.google.com/open?id=0B6faOxuqNtxbV3FfNTQxY0xPOWM

In publishing this data I would like to thank all respondents and participants for their time and input.

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