

Scaling Innovations: From Ideas to Marketplace Impact-making Products and Services

Context

Rural areas have several challenges that are a bottleneck to sustainable development. There is a need for locally grown solutions to solve these problems. Rural-based innovation hubs can be a catalyst for solutions to: accelerate full exploitation of agricultural value chains; identify alternative financing options that are accessible to youth and women entrepreneurs; educate local businesspersons on entrepreneurship, business acumen and fund management; produce local technologies including machinery for agriculture, fishing and artisanal and small-scale mining; as well as to catalyze the invention, innovation, and design of medical devices and other solutions for improving health and economic outcomes in their locales and beyond.

About Ifakara Innovation Hub

Ifakara Innovation Hub (IIH) is a community of inspiration, ideation and collaboration for solution development. It expands the innovation ecosystem to rural Tanzania by looking realistically at the trade-offs between knowledge exploration i.e. research and exploitation of technological innovation (development and testing products) and establishing innovations compatible with the existing social, economic and administrative systems.

Vision



To become the leading initiative that empowers entrepreneurs and innovators to develop solutions to societal challenges, create growth and skilled jobs.

Mission



To contribute to the development of entrepreneurship and a sustainable ecosystem in Tanzania by empowering youth innovators and entrepreneurs to develop solutions to pressing issues and transform these ideas into marketable products.

Governance

The IIH is governed by an Executive Committee (ExCo) that provides oversight to the Hub, including strategic guidance, promotion of its work, as well as administrative approvals. The IIH ExCo is composed of a maximum of six members including innovation hub registered users, proven startup entrepreneurs, funding partners, programme implementers, and the host organisation.

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Strategic Areas

In the 2023 - 2028 strategic period, the IIH seeks to:

1. Support innovators/entrepreneurs to transform innovative ideas (innovations for livelihoods and health) into marketplace impact-making products and services.
2. Strengthen IIH's institutional capacity development and sustainability.
3. Strengthen innovation ecosystem to ensure innovation and social entrepreneurship flourish.

Facilities and Infrastructure

IIH has multipurpose facilities that serves as:

- Co-working spaces
- Improved fabrication labs (through partners)
- Independent state-of-the-art design studios
- Training and meeting venues

Implementing Partners

The Hub leverages knowledge as part of a rural cluster of organisations on education, research, and health. It has also established partnerships with ecosystem stakeholders like accelerators, incubators, think tanks, venture capital markets, and academic institutions such as Ifakara Health Institute (IHI), EPFL (Swiss Federal Institute of Technology) EssentialTech Centre, Villgro Africa, Robotech Labs, Bongo Tech & Research Labs, Jenga Hub, HDIF (Human Development Innovation Fund), COSTECH (Tanzania Commission for Science and Technology), AfriLabs, TASUWORI (Tanzania Support for Women Rights), and USAID Feed the Future.

Supported Startups by mid-2023

Rural Livelihood Portfolio: Dada Lead Enterprise, Mama's Uyoga, Mbasa Industries, Mkaa Safi Enterprises, NovFeed, Pace Initiative for Smallholders, Tan-Feed, Ponicks Tanzania, Winfin App

Product Development Partnership (PDP) portfolio: Ifakara Health Tool Manufacturing, LabX Technologies, MBC Landbrug, Neohealth Innovations, New Born Thermal Control, Plus Life CPAP

Funders

The IIH was established with financial support from:



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra

Embassy of Switzerland in Tanzania

fondation
BOTNAR



Enhancing Tanzania's Capability to Innovate its Own Products to the Commercialization Stage

About Product Development Partnership

The Product Development Partnership (PDP) Forum is a virtual centre established as part of an initiative to foster innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystem in Tanzania. It is one of the technical arms of IIH, funded by Embassy of Switzerland in Tanzania and Fondation Botnar.

The PDP Forum is driven by the energy of enhancing Tanzania's capability to innovate its own products up to the commercialization stage. It aims to create a broad pipeline of innovators and entrepreneurs to invent affordable technologies and use the design studios and makerspaces currently existing in the PDP consortium.

Challenges Identified:

- Commercializing local innovations due to lack of guidance, financial and support to back these promising products/services
- Development and strengthening of local innovation ecosystem via partnerships and collaborations in areas/field of expertise
- Lack of local and international collaboration and partnerships allowing skill and knowledge exchange for greater exposure

Mission

- To develop a sustainable ecosystem for innovation and entrepreneurship that fosters the innovation that is crucial to improve health, create wealth and reduce poverty in sub-Saharan Africa.
- To enhance Tanzania's capability to innovate its own products towards commercialization

Structure

Collaboration of like-minded organisations including BongoTech, Robotech Labs, EPFL, Villgro Africa on mutual terms in creating a virtual organisation hosted under IIH. The vision is to have a sustainable entity, whose shareholders will be the founding members together.

Approach

Partnership & Collaboration

The PDP Forum enhances collaboration between the innovation ecosystem players through joint projects in the pipeline of innovators, and a process to support translation of their innovations into products.

Concretely, by:

- Specifying pre-defined roles and responsibilities for all founding members towards the facilitation of the PDP
- Equipping and providing relevant sources, both financial and equipment to founding member spaces allowing access to innovators with relevant tools and sources that will aid them along the journey
- Providing access to innovators to the PDP members' resources and skillsets to ensure they are supported thoroughly in their journey

Current PDP Forum programmes and services

1. PDP Student Innovation Outreach

Identifies and supports student entrepreneurs and innovators from technical and health universities and colleges with the aim to establish a sustainable pipeline of innovation driven by market needs. Selected innovations get non-equity funds, incubation and mentorship opportunities from the PDP partners.

2. Design and Product Development

Adopts a global health technology curriculum incorporating problem-based learning, real-world design experiences, scoping new product development opportunities and launching new products. Also, supports equipment expansion of Engineering Design Studios at Robotech Labs, IIH, and Bongo Tech & Research Labs for product designing, prototyping, validation and manufacturing.

3. Technical Trainings and Support

Based on partners' areas of strength including expertise in technologies for engineering, life science and biomedical, technical consulting, programming, systems maintenance and repair (Bongo Tech & Research Labs, Robotech Labs, IIH); design studio to foster early-stage innovations (IIH); and incubation tracking and learning system, hand-holding for incubator managers (Villgro Africa).

4. Entrepreneurship in Residence (EiR) Programme

Allows selected candidates from the project pipeline to benefit from a three-month stay in Switzerland via the EPFL EssentialTech Centre, network partners for training; meeting local entrepreneurs, coaches and mentors; and working business and product development aspects.

5. PDP Business Modelling and Incubation

Offers up to three years incubation to start-ups and early-stage ventures to enable them to develop and improve their product or service for entry into the manufacturing ready product, with the priority to innovative businesses in ICT, healthcare and life sciences. PDP also hosts entrepreneurship bootcamps and training in partnership with Villgro Africa's experience as a Pan-African early-stage business incubator and impact investor that supports health and life science start-ups on the African continent.

Implementing Partners

