

# FOR PEOPLE ON THEIR WAY UP Executives

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[Executives](#)

## Lesson plans

*Tomorrow's managers will have the opportunity to learn from their predecessors at Kenyan companies while still in business school. Anthony Ngare reports on efforts to create local business case studies.*

Learning at university is just about to get "local" if an ambitious project at a private university grows to fruition. Instead of having to cram ventures of foreign entrepreneurs of the past eras with distant names, business students would be quoting our very own Chandarias, Kirubis, Shaha and Mbarus of the Kenyan corporate scene.

The United States International University (USIU) School of Business is running a case development project that is primarily intended to come up with management training programmes relevant to the needs of local businesses, organisations and entrepreneurs. This shall be achieved through the development of local case studies that addresses actual issues that Kenyan companies (and other developing nations) experience.

The effort to establish case studies for companies in Kenya and the wider East African region started in January when USIU hosted a Business Leaders Roundtable for CEOs of leading companies in Nairobi. The theme was; "Managing change and growth in turbulent times: Lessons from experience."

Twenty CEOs from leading manufacturing and service companies like Bidco Oil Refineries, Athi River Mining, Alexander Forbes, Cadbury Kenya, Avenue Healthcare, AAR Health Services, Safaricom Ltd, Standard Group and GlaxoSmithKline attended the meeting. Others were from Agro Chemical and Food Co. Ltd, Standard Chartered, Dyer & Blair Investment Bank, British American Insurance, Software Technologies Ltd, General Motors E.A Ltd, Kenya Commercial Bank, Kabage & Mwirigi Insurance Brokers and Magadi Soda.

The project, funded by the International Finance Corporation (IFC), is a joint venture with top business schools in the world, according to Dr Meoli Kashorda, Dean, School of Business at USIU. IFC is the private sector investment arm of the World Bank Group.

The initiative, referred to as the Global Business School Network (GBSN), teams top business schools globally, among them the Harvard Business School, MIT-Sloan, Stanford, Kellogg, Wharton, London and Columbia business schools, with their counterparts in the developing world. The GBSN programme has three main goals.

First is to enhance the capacity of schools to provide high-quality, sustainable programmes in management and leadership training; sharing best practices and building transferable models in management education and training, and; creating a network between business schools and the surrounding business community to maximise the impact of skills and knowledge available at the local level.

Dr Kashorda says this will improve the quality of business



**Dr Meoli Kashorda, Associate Professor of Information Systems and Dean, School of Business at the United States International University.**

graduates since they will be trained on real life cases. The programme gives students the opportunity to play manager and make decisions just as they would if they were employed.

Eight companies are taking part in the first phase of the project. They include Safaricom Ltd, Kenya Airways, Mabati Rolling Mills, Alpha Medical Ltd, Bidco Oil Refineries, Firestone (EA) Ltd, Commercial Bank of Africa and the Kenya Tea Development Authority.

Dr Kashorda says the university has signed a confidentiality agreement with the companies taking part in the case studies. This is because the students will access confidential records at the companies they will be seconded to.

The IFC says while sub-Saharan African countries have made substantial progress in economic and political stabilisation, the region faces major challenges in attracting global private investment and building strong companies, both of which are critical for sustainable economic and job growth. The GBSN addresses this challenge by focusing on one of the root causes — lack of adequate management education and training.

GBSN seeks to create a public-private partnership to strengthen the skills of managers in emerging markets by expanding and enhancing opportunities for management education and training in developing countries.

Kenya lags in case development and the university hopes to pioneer the trend in the country.

"We want to be a case developing centre in East Africa," says Dr Kashorda.

The data will be synthesised and packaged into comprehensive case studies before being shared with the collaborating schools for peer review.

Students in Kenyan universities, London, Harvard or Columbia business schools will be quoting Kenyan companies in their thesis or dissertations once the cases are published.

"This will greatly improve the quality of learning since the business cases — with local content and context — shall be the 'laboratory' for business students to practice theories they learn, just as medical students dissect cadavers at Chiromo mortuary," says Dr Kashorda.

Though learning using case studies is fun and gives students a touch of reality, it's expensive.

Dr Kashorda says acquiring one case from Harvard, Stanford or any other top-notch business school costs about \$3 (Sh230).

"In order to teach effectively, a lecturer requires no less than 10 cases," Dr Kashorda. And since developing cases is a taxing exercise, once it's completed it acquires Intellectual Property (IP) rights and therefore a fee has to be charged for access. This ensures sustainability for the continued provision of the information. This would probably explain why the use of cases in teaching business in Kenya as well as Africa is not prevalent.

Cases encourage interaction between the lecturer and students, enabling them explore numerous angles to a specific situation. Running a large and successful business conglomerate is rarely a one man-feat. It involves synchronised teamwork, which the students achieve when they discuss and ponder major decisions in

a classroom set-up.

"A case is usually half the story, the student is expected to fill in the other half. It's while filling in the missing half that the learning process takes place. The recurrent issue is what one would have done given the predicament and the options of the manager or the CEO at that particular time of making a decision," says Dr Kashorda.

Dr Kashorda is working with Prof John Mullins of London Business School and Prof Murray Low of Columbia Business School based in New York on this project. Kenyan-based members of the team include experts in marketing, information system, entrepreneurship and strategic management. Prof Charles Mayaka, an associate professor of marketing, is heading the group poring over Safaricom Ltd and Bidco Oil Refineries management practices, Dr Gerald Chege, an associate professor of information systems, is leading the team working on KTDA and Commercial Bank of Africa, while Mabati Rolling Mills and Alpha Medical cases are being headed by Dr George Kaol, an associate professor in management with a bias in entrepreneurship. Dr Peter Lewa, an associate professor of strategic management, is spearheading the Kenya Airways and Firestone EA cases.

Dr Kashorda says the first cases would be published for public circulation by June this year.

"This is a three-year project and we hope to be generating eight business case studies each year," he added.

How did they pick the eight companies for the first phase? Dr Kashorda says all the participating companies have sound management and internal decision-making processes that are worth emulating.

"We want to tell the world that people still do business in Kenya and in Africa regardless of the other ills that may be reported about the continent," he says.

Despite the otherwise lackadaisical treatment of investment opportunities in Kenya by the western media, the scholar feels that the case studies, once concluded will greatly benefit the Kenyan entrepreneurs.

The other African schools participating in the GBSN initiative are Lagos Business School in Nigeria, Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration (GIMPA) in Ghana and Gordon Institute of Business in South Africa.

A similar project funded by the World Bank is in the offing. It will be implemented at the Strathmore, Jomo Kenyatta and Kenyatta universities with bias for entrepreneurship.

[Home](#)

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