

Olivia Mogaka

**Graduation Year:** Senior

**College:** Business

**Major(s):** Management Consulting & Peace Studies

**Minors(s):** None

**Scholar Group Membership:** Hesburgh-Yusko

**Did you received other funding for this project?:** Yes, from Mendoza

**Could you have completed this project without CUSE funding?** No

**More details on CUSE funding assistance?**

**Project Title:** Harvard Africa Business Conference

**Project Location:** Harvard Business School, Boston, Massachusetts, United States.

**ND Faculty Mentor:** Professor Joseph Buttigieg

**Project Type:** Conference - Attendance

**Why did you undertake this project/experience?** Deepen your knowledge of a topic or issue, Career discernment and/or preparation, Internationalize your Notre Dame experience

**Did your funded experience help you:**

**[Deepen your understanding of your coursework or field of study]:** Very Much

**[Discern your interests and post-bac goals]:** Very Much

**[Become confident in your ability to set and achieve your goals]:** Not Applicable

**[Gain a more nuanced view of local, national, or global communities]:** Very Much

**[Improve your written and verbal communications skills]:** Yes

**Tell us about your experience.**

At the conference, I had the opportunity to hear from various speakers and panelists on different topics relating to development on the African continent. The first speaker, Euvin Naidoo spoke of the anticipated rise of Africa. Specifically, he stated that this rise will be bolstered by the growing middle class, political stability, improving governance, availability of skilled labor, access to information, and improving infrastructure.

Besides Naidoo, speakers from a wide range of industries and roles gave their opinions regarding the most discussed topics regarding development of the continent such as ICT, Private Partner Partnerships, brain drain, good governance, and finding creative solutions to some of Africa's key challenges. For instance, one panelist spoke of the need for better infrastructure within Africa. He lamented that it costs more to send goods between some African countries than it is to send them abroad. Another speaker stated that shadow economies comprise up to 70% of the GDP for some African countries, and the tax implications associated with such an informal economy. With regards to doing business as a foreigner, one speaker spoke of how he suffered from challenges of miscommunication given he was used to a more direct system of communication. He claimed that he learned that for some Africans there is no direct "no," rather a prolonged "yes." Failing to understand this difference in communication, he claimed, cost him both

time and money.

Through examples such as the above mentioned, I was able to form strong opinions on some of the most controversial yet important topics regarding development in Africa while

**Describe the impact this project had, both on you as a student-scholar and on the people you worked with.**

As a student-scholar, I felt better positioned to understand the intricacies that pertain to development on the African continent, and the differentiating factors of doing business in Africa versus in North America or Europe. I was able to listen to the questions and comments that judges left a group of about ten different entrepreneurs at a startup competition. It was quite interesting to hear one judge constantly question one of the competitors regarding his overpriced model. It seems clear that the competitor had made a his pricing model based off American standards, ignoring the substantial difference in purchasing powers between the average African and American consumer. Seeing these differences in practice helped supplement my classrooms learning of the same quite neatly.

**Describe how this experience is connected to your plans as a student or future professional.**

This opportunity will be great for my career for two key reasons. First, it enabled me to develop a broader perspective on business. Most of my classes at Mendoza have focused on doing business in North America and from these classes I have had great opportunities to understand the skillset I need to succeed in the US. This conference began to assist me to develop a stronger idea of how best to succeed on the African continent. A lot of panelists were accomplished leaders from various industries and sectors but that had a business interest in common. Second, it allowed me a chance to network with peers who are interested in doing business in African countries. By the end of the conference, I felt that I had made a few new acquaintances that worked in different locations and industries.

**What advice would you give other students who are planning to pursue similar projects?**

I highly recommend this conference to anyone, especially those who are seeking to be international businessmen/women, social entrepreneurs, or investors. The various panelists, through anecdotes, spoke of the multiple challenges and opportunities they face when doing business in African countries, most of which are quite unique to the continent. It is only through exposing oneself in an environment such as the Africa Business Conference that anyone can truly learn what it takes to succeed in business in such foreign economies.

I would encourage any entrepreneur to sign up for the startup competition and stand a chance of winning a substantial grant and credibility that could assist with their operations.

Lastly, I would encourage students who attend the conference to be prepared to network extensively. Feel free to carry business cards.