Coworking And Innovation Hub: iCampus Liberia Model.

The last few decades could be regarded as a digital dispensation of innovation and cutting-edge technologies in Africa. Africa's tech growth is inching north because professionals are not only attempting to learn and adopt new ideas on a rolling basis, but are also finding intelligent ways to integrate those creative ideas across Africa, creating a platform for youths on the continent to learn and apply modern information, communication technologies (ICT) to drive creativity and development.

Africa's ICT innovation hubs, however, differ in perspectives from their global mates. For instance, African innovation tech-hubs basically tend to boost collective impact and professionalism by establishing communities of practice to host professionals and solicit collaboration across the 'brightest minds' in Africa. Also, innovation hubs in Africa are the best places for decentralizing innovation and creativity, as well as building upon existing development concepts from a more creative standpoint. Therefore, the appropriate application of creativity in spinning novelties with the yarns of fossil ideas is held as key to success in any given social intervention task.

Africa has over forty ICT innovation hubs that have emerged over the last decade. Some of the continent's leading innovation hubs are located in Nigeria, Tunisia, Ethiopia, Cape Town (South Africa), Nairobi, Uganda, and Ghana. A common characteristic of African hubs is that they collectively seek to foster innovation across countries by sharing ICT resources and providing a context-based approach to social change and economic growth.

About the same time that the " CoLab" tech and innovation hub of Nigeria was established, Liberia's first coworking and innovation hub, known as the "Innovation Campus" (iCampus) was born. The establishment of iCampus was fostered by Accountability Lab Liberia and iLab Liberia as part of a USAID Liberia Accountability and Voice Initiative program that tends to inform decisions around policy reform through advocacy.

As a clone of the influential "Open Gov Hub" of Washington D.C., iCampus was established in 2016 as a shared innovation, coworking and community space for organizations focusing on the intersection of technology, accountability and social change in Liberia. Besides being a networking and innovation hub as well as a focal point for elections and open governance work, iCampus operates as a physical and virtual space for youth-focused ICT and governance training.

Following the emergence of iCampus and tech institutions like the BlueCrest University and Starz College of Science and Technology, the nation's tech scene seems to be on an upswing. Considering the professional lacks such as training resources and facilities, internet services and supply, all of which hinder development organizations from growing their ideas, the iCampus innovative community presents an opportunity for local professionals to incubate knowledge and build a creative ecosystem that institutionalizes collaboration. iCampus says it aspires to serve as a "gathering point for networking, collaboration, learning and innovation for change makers, helping them to be more effective and have greater (collective) impact". Thus, some of Liberia's best tech professionals and social innovators have in some ways been impacted by iCampus.

The innovation hub is changing the way change happens in Liberia.
However, re-engineering creative change is not the only impact of iCampus in Liberia. The Innovation Hub is also changing the way professionals learn to create the change they hope to see. iCampus modern facility in Liberia's capital Monrovia is a home to over ten organizations that are key players in Liberia's development such as the Election Coordinating Committee of USAID Liberia. Its affordable workspaces allow organizations including start-ups to run smoothly on low budgets, as well as attend free-skill building trainings and networking events.

The space broadly provides an avenue where professionals can build a connection by, says iCampus, "sharing workplaces, attending public events, creating spaces to smartly experiment, learn and improve together". Moreover, the community is noted for building partnership by opening networking avenues through events, including panel events, ted talks, workshops, conferences, hackathons, book/report launches, brown bag launches, and other social events. Since 2016, the community has achieved great impact across its works. It has influenced a new generation of engaged young people, working together for the change they want to see.. and enhanced new initiatives led by young people pushing for change. Also, it has promoted new ways of learning and teaching the kind of skills young Liberians need".

As Liberia strives to take its place in the global community of information communication technology, iCampus will remain an essential catalyst required to speed up the nation's march towards the global innovation hall of fame.