



ICAMPUS

PROSPECTS-IV



QUARTERLY

ENTREPRENEURSHIP JOURNAL



ICAMPUS



PROSPECTS
Promoting Sustainable Partnerships For Economic Transformation



Sweden
Sverige

FOREWORD

By Luther D. Jeke

Dear Readers,

It is with great pleasure and excitement that I present to you the first edition of the iCampus Liberia PROSPECT-IV Quarterly Entrepreneurship Journal. As we journey through the pages of this journal, we will be celebrating the spirit of entrepreneurship in Montserrado County and Liberia as a whole. Within these pages are stories of tenacity, determination, and innovation—accounts that represent the never-ending pursuit of turning ideas into a reality.

Montserrado County, with its vibrant communities and varied range of enterprises, has long been a center of economic activity in Liberia. As CEO of iCampus Liberia, an innovation and coworking space focused on entrepreneurship, technology, and inclusion, I am convinced that entrepreneurship is critical to generating economic growth, creating jobs, and promoting innovation. This journal demonstrates our dedication to cultivating a thriving entrepreneurial ecosystem that promotes local enterprises toward economic prosperity.

Our collaboration with Mercy Corps Liberia through the PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE PARTNERSHIPS FOR ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION (PROSPECTS IV) Programme shines a light on the path to economic empowerment. It's a journey that unites us in a shared vision—a vision where young minds blossom into visionary entrepreneurs and where collaborations sow the seeds of prosperity.

Through these pages, we spotlight the stories of eight extraordinary Liberian-owned businesses and the visionary entrepreneurs behind them. Not only are their success stories motivating, but they also exemplify a spirit of perseverance that captures the essence of Liberia's entrepreneurial environment.

As we unveil this journal, we extend our heartfelt gratitude to the contributors, editors, and readers who have made this endeavor possible. Together, let's continue to champion innovation, celebrate success, and pave the way for a flourishing entrepreneurial community in Montserrado County and beyond.

Let this journal serve as a testament to the remarkable potential within our entrepreneurial ecosystem. I invite you to immerse yourself in these stories, embrace the insights, and join us in celebrating the remarkable journey of entrepreneurship in Liberia.

Sincerely,



Chief Executive Officer, iCampus Liberia

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I Editorial Message:

Greetings and welcome to the inaugural issue of the iCampus Liberia PROSPECTS-IV Entrepreneurship Journal: Spotlight on Local Business Success!

In this edition, we are pleased to present captivating narratives of eight businesses owned by Liberian entrepreneurs and two innovation campuses that have worked tirelessly to support these entrepreneurs within Montserrado County. Whether you're an aspiring business owner, a seasoned entrepreneur, or just an enthusiast, we invite you to immerse yourself in these stories of innovation, leadership, and resilience.

This quarterly journal is a collaborative effort between iCampus Liberia and Mercy Corps Liberia, made possible by the Swedish International Development Agency's (SIDA) Promoting Sustainable Partnerships for Economic Transformation (PROSPECTS IV) Program. This partnership aims to reshape norms and attitudes, fostering positive change by connecting enterprising young citizens with opportunities that align with iCampus' objectives.

We got to explore the Montserrado County entrepreneurial ecosystem as part of the PROSPECT-IV initiative, identifying obstacles experienced by local entrepreneurs ranging from restricted access to funding and networking limits to uneven policy implementation, market access impediments, and skill inadequacies.

Despite these difficulties, we also identified enormous potential. The enthusiasm of a young population, combined with the government's support for entrepreneurship, creates the foundation for innovative enterprises. Mentorship programs aimed at developing entrepreneurial spirit amongst the youth, government efforts, NGO interventions along with development partners, investments in agriculture and vocational training, and an array of support services all help paint a picture of hope.

In response to these observations, we brainstormed and created a roadmap to help us navigate the maze of challenges and seize the exciting prospects. We discovered that the following will help address these challenges: better finance accessibility for entrepreneurs; a simpler business registration process; improved information dissemination; training in entrepreneurial capabilities; collaborative platforms to support entrepreneurs; guaranteeing policy enforcement; mentoring; utilizing technological leverage; policy impact assessments; and a simplified tax compliance system.

By implementing the recommended actions, stakeholders in Montserrado County, Liberia, may work together to improve the ecosystem's supporting infrastructure by putting the suggested steps into practice. This would eventually promote innovation, economic growth, and the sustainable development of local businesses.

Our mission with this journal is to spotlight and celebrate entrepreneurial accomplishments, share valuable insights, and ignite inspiration within the entrepreneurial community. We express gratitude to our contributors, editors, and readers for being integral to this thrilling journey. We eagerly anticipate your ongoing support and involvement. Stay connected with us via our website (www.iCampus.io), social media platforms, and through our future issues as we continue to celebrate the spirit of entrepreneurship and business success in Montserrado County and Liberia at large.

**With warm regards,
The Editorial Team**



Message From Mercycorps

At Mercy Corps, we believe that markets should work for the benefit of the poorest. When markets fail, it is often the most marginalized who suffer. By working alongside farmers, entrepreneurs, businesses, the government, and financial service providers, we ensure that individuals and businesses have sustained capacity to capitalize on economic opportunities. Underpinning this work is a systems approach that fosters sustainability and scale. Mercy Corps' market systems development (MSD) approach focuses on understanding the role of the poor within market systems, addressing underlying causes of market dysfunction, and supporting systemic change.

We aim to remove the constraints that impede the poor from participating in markets. Key to our MSD approach is developing partnerships with a diverse range of public and private-sector actors, where together we can create the most meaningful systemic transformation.

PROSPECTS (Promoting Sustainable Partnership for Economic Transformation) funded by the Embassy of Sweden in Liberia is a youth employment program with three iterations from 2012 until 2020 using the direct delivery Approach and moving away from the direct delivery approach to the Market System Development approach and adopt MSD4Employment' approach that catalyzes systematic change from its fourth Phase- under PROSPECTS-IV from 2021 -2025. The program utilizes a Market Systems Development for Employment (MSD4E) approach to increase incomes, job quality, and job security for urban female and male youth. PROSPECTS-IV aims to directly benefit 16,400 young people (18 to 35-year-olds) in four defined urban and peri-urban areas – Monrovia (Montserrado County), Ganta (Nimba County), Buchanan (Grand Bassa County), and Gbarnga (Bong County) – with the potential for expansion into other counties.

Under PROSPECTS-IV the sector selection research conducted used a set of criteria to prioritize sectors for the relevance of our target group, the opportunities they present for improving employment outcomes, and the feasibility of achieving sustainable change at scale. We concluded that our initial portfolio will be built around the following sectors, cross-cutting sectors and cross-cutting supporting functions, Poultry, FMCG Retail, Micro- Enterprise Service, Agro Processed Goods, Finance, and Informal Norms.

The Informal Norms Sector, where we partnered with iCampus to Shift norms around a culture of entrepreneurship, networking, business acceleration, and perception of youth to induce better job matching and enterprise creation resulting in more and better job creation, through a Culture of Entrepreneurship that foster and improve stronger networks within the entrepreneurial ecosystem to accelerate the development of small business support and growth, as well as Shift mindset regarding entrepreneurship and youth, Building Entrepreneurship Centric Network- Build desirability for growth entrepreneurship to ignite policy changes, improve access to investor funding, and increase the quality of youth entrepreneurs with a special focus on female youth and Incubation and Acceleration Support Increase fit for small businesses and sustainability of innovation and incubation spaces to ensure long-term Viability outside of donor priorities.

The Norm Shifting Intervention has seen significant progress in igniting transformative change through shifting norms activities and youth embracing the entrepreneurial spirit, challenging the status quo, and fostering innovation to becoming successful entrepreneurs resulting in several promising partnerships and alliances, emerging business opportunities from increased networking /learning events.



DEERAH B. MANSAH

FOUNDER OF DEE DETERGENTS



Dee Detergents – From Iron Soap to Liquid Detergents: A Liberian Entrepreneur Soapy Story

DEE DETERGENTS



Both of Deerah's parents live and work in separate walks of life; her mother is employed on a full-time job, while her father is a traditional business person. Deerah is filled with admiration for her father; he leads, trains, mentors, and empowers a circle of individuals in his service and beyond.

"Whenever I had the time to imagine and structure my life for the future, I would see no other example but the life of my father; I love to solve problems, take on challenges, and lead." Deerah B. Mansah

The desire to solve problems from the examples of her father influenced Deerah's passion for entrepreneurship, coupled with the business lessons she learned from Robert Kiyosaki in his book, "Rich Dad, Poor Dad." She chose entrepreneurship and has demonstrated strong commitment and willingness to carve her own path.

In 2019, the story begins with 19-year-old Deerah being a participant in the three-week Merci Corps Prospect I entrepreneurship training. The program armed her with knowledge in soap science and a seed grant of \$750 USD.

Deerah began making soap manually, starting out with the local kind nicknamed "Iron Soap" due to its solid nature. This venture served as the cradle of what would later become "Dee Detergent."

Entrepreneurship is a journey riddled with demands and challenges, as Deerah attests. To navigate this path, she emphasizes managing expectations, conducting thorough research, observing competitors, seeking guidance from mentors, and adapting swiftly to changes. These strategies helped her overcome hurdles and gain prominence among her peers. Her tenacity led her to seek advanced soap-making training from the Soap and Cosmetic Lab in neighboring Ghana. With her new skills, she diversified her product line, introducing air fresheners, sanitizers, liquid soap, and an array of detergents. Enhancing quality and packaging, she transitioned from reusing old water bottles to importing standardized ones, elevating her brand's appeal and pricing.

In 2023, Deerah reached another milestone in her entrepreneurial journey by participating in the iCampus Liberia Entrepreneur Pitch Battle. Her dedication and innovative ideas caught the attention of the judges, leading to a significant achievement: she emerged triumphant as one of the four winners of the Mercy Corps PROSPECT-IV sponsored initiative. This recognition not only validated Deerah's hard work and vision but also provided her with additional support to continue growing Dee Detergent and making a lasting impact in the business landscape. From "iron soap" to an industry of detergents, Dee Detergents has now become an eminent name in the market, with her products being visible at five different stores with a growing sales team. She plans to have a one-stop shop for detergents in Liberia where we can purchase a wide range of high-quality cleaning products to compete with international products and subsequently dominate the local market.

Deerah envisions a future where Dee Detergent expands its operations, and her ambitious plans include the establishment of a factory on a recently acquired acre of land. With determination as her driving force, Deerah is poised to turn this vision into reality as she remains committed to the growth and enhancement of her business. The acquisition of land for the factory marks a significant step forward in her entrepreneurial journey, setting the stage for a new chapter of success and influence in the local market.



MARIAM MEIPLAY

FOUNDER OF MAKO'S FRUIT



Mako's Fruit: *From fruit bowls door to door to inspiring Liberians to nutritional wellness—the journey of Mako's fruit*

Mako's Fruit

Fruit Cake



Fruit Bowls and Cups



Mariam Meiplay's journey from rural Tapita, Bong County, to the busy urban landscape of Monrovia was not without its challenges. Born into a farming family, she witnessed the struggles her parents faced, which fueled her determination to break free from the cycle of adversity. Her resilience was seen when, at the age of 10, she began her educational journey.

Later in 2007, Mariam ventured into various petty trading businesses as a means to sustain herself financially. From selling milk candy at an early age to peddling fruits door to door in plastic bowls, she navigated the intricate world of entrepreneurship. The seeds of "Mako's Fruit" were sown in a simple yet impactful moment - a visit to a restaurant where she was astounded by exorbitant fruit prices. That moment ignited her entrepreneurial spark, the vision to add value to the fruit business she had already begun.

A turning point came when Mariam, then working for a company, shared her business aspirations with her boss. To her surprise, he not only supported her dreams but also offered to invest the initial capital needed to kickstart Mako's Fruit. The business took root in 2020 but faced the unexpected challenge of the COVID-19 pandemic. Undeterred, Mariam pivoted her strategy.

Mako's Fruit found its competitive edge by offering natural juices and smoothies without added sugars or preservatives. In addition, Mariam's carved fruit art became a signature touch, setting her brand apart. By leveraging social media and prioritizing customer service, she retained a loyal clientele even during challenging times.

The turning point came in 2021, when Mariam received a \$15,000 USD grant from the Tony Elumelu Foundation, which kept Mako's Fruit afloat. Subsequently, in 2023, she won the Growth Accelerator Liberia Grant, which provided a \$40,000 USD boost along with technical training and mentorship, taking the company to new heights. From its humble beginnings, Mako's Fruit now boasts four locations and eight dedicated employees. Mariam attributes part of her success to being part of the iCampus network of entrepreneurs, an influential factor in the business's growth.

However, success did not shelter Mako's Fruit from new obstacles. Mariam has encountered and steered through numerous challenges, including having to encourage clients to eat a balanced diet, as well as financial management issues, power outages, and increasing fruit costs. Her soft leadership style, while promoting a friendly environment, made garnering the respect of her employees challenging.

Undaunted, Mariam plans to expand further, opening two more facilities in Montserrado and expanding into adjacent counties. She intends to work with smallholder farmers to overcome seasonal fruit shortages while also contributing to local economies. The future promises big aspirations, such as the establishment of a fruit supermarket, the development of skill programs, and the provision of work possibilities for Liberian youth.

Beyond the business world, Mariam's advice to fellow entrepreneurs echoes her journey: stay consistent. Her story is not just one of business triumph but also of personal achievement, as she is also a distinguished athlete who has represented Liberia on the tracks.

The story of Mako's Fruit continues to evolve—a testament to resilience, vision, and the unwavering spirit of an entrepreneur who dared to dream and transform those dreams into reality.

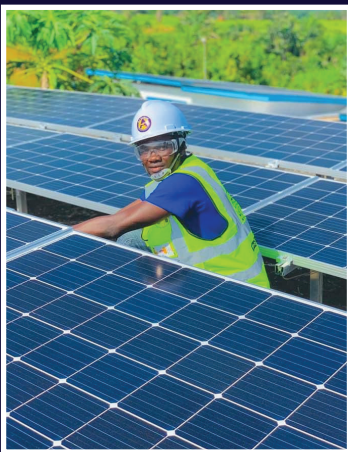


DANIEL PADMORE

FOUNDER OF A1 TECHNICAL ENGINEERING SOLUTIONS

A1 Technical Engineering Solutions: *Grease, Grit, and Growth: Daniel's Journey from a Workshop Apprentice to Entrepreneurial Impact*

A1 Technical Engineering Solutions



Electrical Installation



Amidst the clattering sounds of tools and the scent of grease in his father's workshop, a young Daniel Padmore discovered more than the nuts and bolts of machines; he found his calling. Those early moments, seemingly mundane, laid the foundation for what would become a transformative journey from garage apprentice to impactful entrepreneur.

Growing up under his father's mechanical expertise, Daniel initially saw labor with his father as a home task, an obligation. He had no clue, however, that those grease-stained days would influence his future. Daniel's involvement generated a realization: there is a significant skill gap among his fellow Liberians, particularly the youth. This discovery sparked his concept for a training program in which young minds might come together to master hands-on mechanical engineering skills.

Daniel, now the CEO and Founder of A1 Technical Engineering Solutions, seamlessly blended the lessons from his days at his father's workshop with a drive to impact society and contribute to Liberia's entrepreneurial ecosystem.

In 2021, A1 Technical Engineering Solutions emerged with a resolute mission: to be the preferred destination for technical support. The goal was clear: deliver innovative solutions, durable products, and an unmatched customer experience at a competitive price. Beyond automobile mechanics, A1 diversified its services, offering expertise in DSTV installation, solar power installation, industrial wiring, and CCTV installation.

Yet Daniel's entrepreneurial journey wasn't a smooth ride; it was a constant battle with numerous trials. For him, entrepreneurship wasn't just a hobby anymore; it was an ordeal of endless challenges. From dealing with an initial team that was uncommitted to the goal and hindered growth to dwindling finances, Daniel was faced with the decision of quitting or pushing forward.

With unwavering courage, Daniel chose to press on. The journey, however, continued to be knotty. Contracts worth thousands slipped away, and failures seemed to repeat themselves. During this period, he discovered a lot about himself and the unforgiving world of business. Daniel's story is one of resilience and consistency. With each setback, he redefined challenges as opportunities to learn and grow.

Daniel's tenacity paid off, and A1 Technical Solutions evolved into a recognizable brand in the technical space. In 2023, Daniel and his team at A1 were awarded the UNDP's Growth Accelerator Liberia grant of \$40,000 United States dollars. A1 also experienced a significant revenue surge, reliability improved, and customer service became their hallmark, propelling them from a break-even stage to a profitable enterprise.

As the journey unfolds, Daniel envisions the next three to five years being marked by a new mission: importing customized solar equipment, CCTV cameras, and modern electronic appliances. A1 also has a revenue target of two million United States dollars in the next five years. A1 Technical Solutions, under Daniel's leadership, stands as a testament to the transformative power of passion, courage, and an unyielding commitment to turn dreams into reality.

As the journey progresses, Daniel anticipates a new goal: importing specialized solar equipment, CCTV cameras, and sophisticated electrical appliances over the next three to five years. A1 also plans to generate two million US dollars in revenue over the next five years. The conclusion of this chapter only marks the beginning of a story that continues to shape the future—a future where A1 Technical Engineering Solutions becomes synonymous with innovation, reliability, and unwavering commitment to customer service.



SANDRA PERKINS-LIGHE

FOUNDER OF ZAAG NATURALS



Zaag Naturals: *From postpartum obesity to a natural wellness brand Sandra Perkins-Lighe's journey with Zaag Naturals*

Zaag Naturals

Moringa Tea



Moringa Leaf Powder



In the calm neighborhoods of Monrovia, Liberia, a mother of four embarked on a journey that would not only transform her life but also the lives of many.

Sandra Perkins-Lighe, after the birth of her third son, found herself struggling with postpartum obesity and the ensuing mental toll it took. Depression cast a shadow on her well-being until, in the pursuit of a natural remedy, she discovered the wonders of the Moringa plant.

As Sandra incorporated Moringa into her exercise routine, the transformation was profound. Not only did she witness a positive shift in her weight, but she also noticed a remarkable improvement in her son's overall health. **The realization dawned that Moringa wasn't just a remedy; it was a powerhouse of nutrition and well-being.**

What began as a personal remedy soon evolved into a mission. Sandra, driven by the desire to help others access nutrition through the power of Moringa, **founded Zaag Naturals**, a subsidiary of "Sandy Group of Companies." Starting small, she produced for friends and family, and soon the word spread about the medicinal properties of Moringa.

Zaag Naturals ventured into growing, processing, and packaging Moringa into powder. The business now has an active customer base and supplies five supermarkets in Montserrado and Nimba counties. Despite challenges, including financial constraints and agricultural setbacks that led to the loss of 90% of the Moringa trees she planted, Sandra persevered.

A success story came when an emergency call was placed to Sandra in the middle of the night. She answered the phone and said hello. "It's me," said the voice. "I've just been rushed to the hospital." It was Caroline Nah, a longtime friend who had a history of high sugar, who called to tell her that she had been taken to the hospital and was frightened for her life. "Take care of my daughter," she pleaded. She begged Sandra to keep an eye on her child in case something bad were to happen.

Caroline, thankfully, escaped the worst and was able to leave the hospital. She immediately began using moringa to treat her ailments, following Sandra's suggestion. Caroline has not had a sugar spike since, and her health has improved significantly. Caroline's story has been a testament to the therapeutic powers it has.

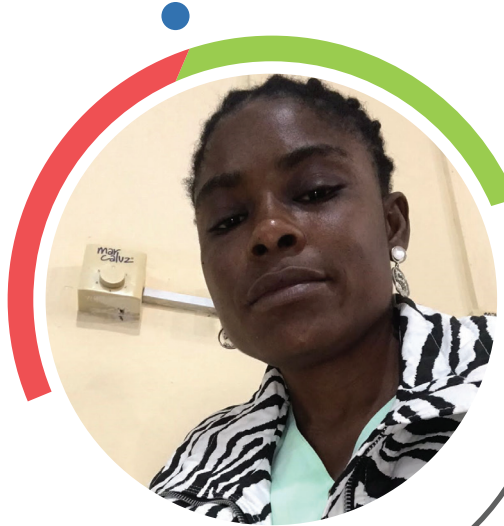
Sandra's vision for Zaag Naturals extends beyond the present. She plans to expand the product line, adding two new items in the short term and elevating awareness about the nutritional benefits of Moringa. The financial goal of reaching 500 thousand United States dollars within the next 5 years reflects her commitment to sustainable growth.

Financial discipline and honesty serve as Sandra's guiding lights. Her charismatic and selfless leadership style creates an inclusive environment where every team member feels integral to the journey.

Sandra has a BBA degree in Business Administration and shares her entrepreneurial journey with a simple yet profound lesson: "Giving up isn't an option." She believes in continuous learning, adapting, and facing challenges head-on, armed with research and a resilient spirit. Her interest in entrepreneurship is deeply rooted in her dream of empowering others, especially women. Her mission extends beyond business; it's about creating solutions that genuinely help people.

When asked about advice for emerging entrepreneurs, Sandra's words were, "Entrepreneurship is a journey, not an event." She encourages aspiring entrepreneurs to embrace failure, learn, and adapt. As the visionary, she emphasizes the importance of carrying the dream with unwavering dedication.

The story of Zaag Naturals is more than just a business story; it is a tribute to the meaningful journey of a mother and the nourishing essence of Moringa.



VERA WHITE

FOUNDER, LIBERIAN BEST ENTERPRISE

**LIBERIAN
BEST
ENTERPRISE.**

Liberia's Best Enterprise: From Adversity to Enterprise
Here is the inspirational journey of Vera White and Liberia Best Enterprise.

Liberian Best Enterprise



Vera was born and reared in an underprivileged family where she had limited access to quality education, skills training, and exposure to opportunities. Amidst the challenges that shaped her childhood, Vera White was resilient and displayed a true entrepreneurial spirit.

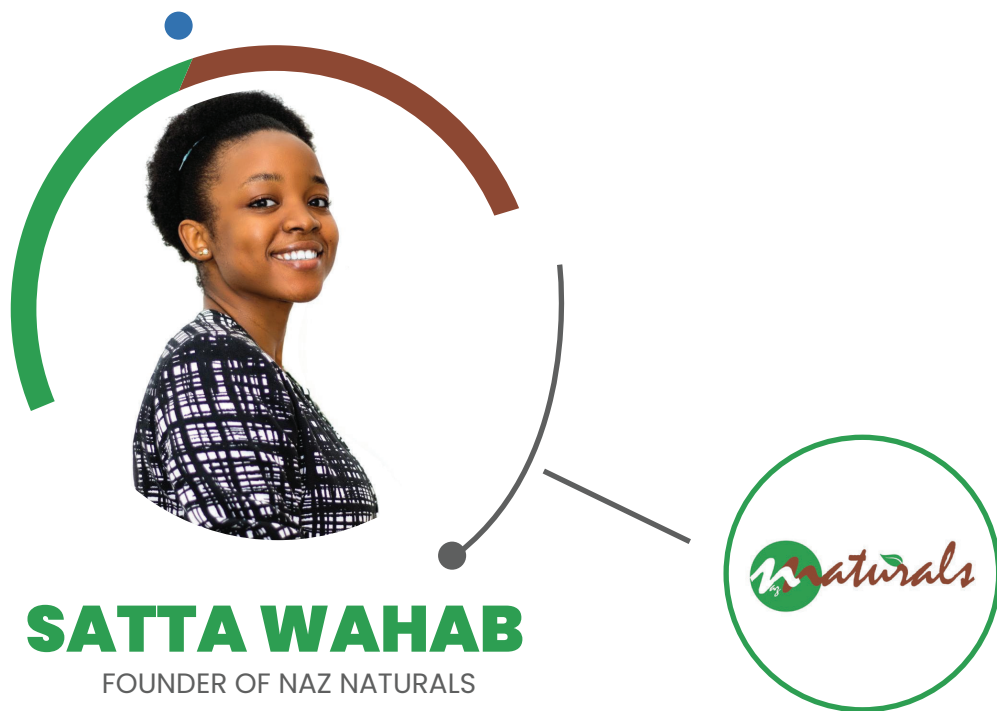
Growing up in the midst of adversity, she took on the responsibility of assisting her parents, leaving little room for formal education. However, her unwavering determination would soon spark a venture that would redefine her purpose.

Faced with the harsh reality of limited job opportunities due to an incomplete education, Vera embarked on a journey with only 2,500 Liberian dollars in hand, roughly equivalent to \$15 USD today. In the heart of her ambition, she founded Liberia Best Enterprise, a humble but promising petty trading business specializing in organic products like jelly, peanut butter, spices, ginger powder, seasoning, and ginger candy.

Vera's inspirational journey gained momentum through the PROSPECT-IV project, where she received invaluable training in entrepreneurship, financial management, and small business strategies. This newfound knowledge became the catalyst for growth. With sheer determination, Vera expanded her enterprise, acquiring land, constructing an office space, and investing in machinery to increase production capacity.

From its modest beginnings, Liberia Best Enterprise has evolved into a business with a valuation surpassing \$15,000 USD. However, the path to success was not without hurdles. Challenges such as securing packaging materials, acquiring clients, and navigating budgetary constraints tested Vera's resolve. Yet, undeterred, she overcame each obstacle, turning setbacks into stepping stones.

Looking ahead, Vera aspires to elevate her production capacity, setting her sights on producing up to 400 jars per week. Her vision goes beyond the confines of challenges, driven by the conviction that perseverance and continuous improvement will pave the way for a brighter future for Liberia Best Enterprise.



SATTA WAHAB

FOUNDER OF NAZ NATURALS

Naz Naturals: *Satta's journey to redefine the standards of beauty in Liberia with natural hair products*

Naz Naturals Products



Black Soap



Growing up in Liberia, the landscape of the beauty industry puzzled **Satta Wahab, the founder of Naz Naturals**. She saw first-hand how women's reality—especially that of embracing their natural hair—often clashed with standards of beauty.

The scarcity of appropriate products locally and the exorbitant prices of imported ones flagged the need for a change. Satta, fueled by her own journey into embracing natural beauty, embarked on a mission. She envisioned a brand that not only offered safe and affordable products but also redefined beauty standards for Liberian women.

Naz Naturals faced hurdles right from its inception. Convincing a society obsessed with conventional beauty norms to embrace natural hair was no easy feat. Funding and sourcing quality ingredients posed constant challenges. Despite this, the team persisted because they were committed to their goal. They started small with a single product and, within six years, expanded to 19 products tailored to diverse hair care needs.

The UNDP Growth Accelerator Grant marked a pivotal milestone for Naz Naturals. It wasn't just about the financial support; it was the gateway to impacting more lives. This grant unlocked avenues to reach women in low-income communities, ensuring safer and certified products and paving the way for expansion and greater accessibility.

Naz Naturals envisions expanding their reach across borders, aiming to establish a presence in two more African countries within the next three years. Their current focus is on penetrating rural areas and low-income communities, ensuring that natural, safe, and affordable beauty products are accessible to every woman.

Satta's journey into entrepreneurship wasn't a predetermined path. With a background in economics and procurement, she didn't foretell her entrepreneurial leap. Her desire to impact women's lives drove her towards creating Naz Naturals. She learned the art of calculated risk-taking, understanding that while risks are necessary, preparation is key.

As a leader, Satta embodies proactive support for her team. Her personal and professional goals align, and she is aspiring to impact women's lives across Africa. She learned that facing challenges, especially as a female entrepreneur, demands that she adopt a growth mindset and seek support from mentors and loved ones. Failures taught her resilience, reinforcing her belief in her purpose.

Her advice to potential entrepreneurs sprung from her own journey—believe in yourself and start what you're passionate about. Through failures, she found growth and resilience—crucial lessons that shaped her into the entrepreneur she is today.

Naz Naturals, as a brand, has grown into a beacon of empowerment, reshaping beauty standards and touching the lives of women across Liberia and soon beyond its borders.



MOHAMMED KERKULAH

FOUNDER & CEO, GONETAFRICA ACADEMY



Gonet Academy: *Bridging Skills, Building Hope; Gonet's Academy Journey from Growth to Impact*

GonetAfrica Academy



Graduation



In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2019, the world shifted, impacting lives and economies worldwide. Amid this crisis, a **young entrepreneur named Mohammed Kerkulah** found an opportunity to make a difference. In 2021, he launched a venture focused on soft skills and personal development training.

As the pandemic subsided, Mohammed observed that most secondary school graduates and undergraduate candidates lacked the requisite skills needed to thrive in the job market. His mission was to offer training programs that help people acquire new skills or enhance their current knowledge, skills, and competencies because he had a strong passion for education.

With persistent unemployment and a growing demand for soft skills in a competitive labor market, Mohammed sought to address the current need for entrepreneurial solutions in education. Mohammed put his desire into action when he initially signed a collaboration agreement with the A.M. Kyne Resource Center to use their facilities as a training center for his newly discovered venture.

Entrepreneurship, however, proved to be far from a walk in the park. Like any determined entrepreneur, Mohammed faced extreme challenges and encountered failure on multiple occasions. Yet, undeterred, he pressed on, learning and adapting with each setback.

When it comes to managing risks, Mohammed adopted a data-based decision-making approach. Collaborative leadership became the cornerstone of his strategy. "When it is time to make an important decision, I do as much as I can to have my team included; we dialogue, evaluate the decision, and then decide in consultation with the available data on the subject." – Mohammed. By involving his team in crucial decisions, Mohammed fostered a sense of ownership and engagement within his team.

Since its inception in 2021, Gonet Academy has risen as a prominent name in the realm of professional development, experiencing substantial growth. Mohammed proudly reflected on the "3Es" that defined their trajectory: establishment, enhancement, and enlargement.

Establishment: Gonet secured a spacious, comfortable property, boasting over ten training rooms and official accreditation from the Ministry of Education, solidifying its foundation in under three years.

Enhancement: Gonet's professional development programs have reached thirteen out of sixteen counties in Liberia, training over 500 professionals from nearly 200 institutions and corporate entities. Grants from Orange Liberia (\$2,500) and effective social media branding further underscored its impact.

Enlargement: Gonet's expansion was fueled by its reputation and an efficient customer service management system, both of which contributed to student trust. Gonet has evolved as an industry leader in personal and professional development, currently offering nine professional development courses, launching a new online learning system, boosting enrollment, increasing revenue, and contracting expert trainers.

Mohammed's commitment to addressing the pressing need for enhanced skills in the job market, especially among recent graduates, showcases the profound impact that a single visionary can have on a community. The "3Es" of establishment, enhancement, and enlargement represent Gonet Academy's growth, which exemplifies flexibility, tenacity, and an unwavering pursuit of excellence.



STEPHEN APOAJAI DORSUE

FOUNDER OF EASY RIDE



Easy Ride: *After seven failures, here's how Stephen is leading Easy ride to success*

EASY RIDE FLEET



Easy Ride is a transportation service designed to help ease the constraints students, parents, and schools go through daily with transportation. Before establishing Easy Ride,

Stephen Apoajai Dorsue, a professional school administrator, a motivational speaker, a creative writer, and an undergraduate candidate at the University of Liberia, had already ventured into seven different product and service-based businesses; though they failed, he did not give up; he continued investing in new concepts, expanding his entrepreneurial horizons, and identifying new problems that he could provide business solutions for.

"It has been a matter of consistency and my relentless desire to solve problems, even if the solution is grim, that led me on the path of establishing eight different businesses. I do not solely believe the other businesses I initiated failed; what I believe is that the shattered pieces of those businesses were reassembled into this new concept, which is now succeeding gradually yet steadily." [Stephen Apoajai Dorsue](#)

When Stephen was just thirteen years old, he was hawking sachet water between cars on Broad Street. This makes his path fascinating and inspiring, with an unparalleled degree of devotion and a heightened feeling of unadulterated love for entrepreneurship. This is a journey he has been treading for over twenty years, where he uses resilience and determination to keep his pace even in the face of countless failures.

After his seventh failure, the obvious route would have been to just give up entrepreneurship and embark on a whole new quest; however, he didn't. "This is where I got to understand the impact of passion: there were some points when I felt the urge to give up; I even told myself to quit; I got tired, frustrated, and disappointed, but what kept me alive was the belief that just someday, dawn would come." I identified the transportation problem, which had three unsuccessful business models, while praying to God and being constantly hopeful.

Easy Ride began with the popular Uber concept, a business model that would help commercial drivers, car owners, and day-to-day passengers with easy and accessible transportation services. That did not work! With the same value proposition, they shifted to another module. Easy Ride observed that thousands of children and parents had challenges obtaining transportation to school. Their new model aimed to tackle the problem by creating a unique and secure network of drivers who would drive to kids' homes and transport them to and from school for a monthly fee." Their innovation has attracted a small investment from shareholders in the USA and Liberia.

Stephen anticipates that his transportation service can help alleviate the various challenges that parents face with their kids getting to school. He has envisioned a two-year goal to increase his revenue from \$5,000 annually to \$30,000 annually.

Currently, Easy Ride has a combined internal and external workforce of nine people. Hopefully, the workforce can increase to 20+ in the next two years.

Stephen's advice to emerging entrepreneurs: "Success in entrepreneurship is factored by uncompromising discipline, grit, and a flaring quest to succeed; you MUST be intentional and passionate about your reason to solve a problem—let that reason be the catalyst that drives you deep into the future while you are still in the present. Above all, don't give up!"



WAINRIGHT ACQUOI

FOUNDER OF TRIBE LIBERIA



Tribe Liberia: *Renovating Futures: A Story of How Tribe is Getting It Done*

Tribe Liberia



Wainright Acquoi, a dynamic entrepreneur, planted the seeds of Tribe, an innovation campus in Liberia. His vision was clear: to bridge the gap between classroom learning and the real challenges of life, thereby addressing youth unemployment. Tribe, a non-profit venture, embarked on a journey to provide skill training at the intersection of education and entrepreneurship.

Their founder's journey into entrepreneurship was inspired by a desire for self-reliance. A fascination with computers and a knack for identifying opportunities led him to his first venture in high school, typing assignments for classmates.

Tribe took a unique approach, effectively fusing education and entrepreneurship to create an environment that provides skill development and creativity. Renovate, Tribe's flagship program, is at the forefront of this innovative journey. Since its inception, Renovate has guided forty-two (42) high school students through thorough skill training, coordinating internships that not only provide hands-on experience but also offer the opportunity to earn, strategically preparing these students for the job market.



Tribe grew from a small band of six volunteers working from their bags and cafes throughout the city to a force with 11 full-time staff members and an innovation campus accessible to young change-makers. They have not only expanded their numbers but also their offerings, creating Ideas, a new incubation program for startups.

Design thinking is how Tribe distinguishes itself and shapes its initiatives. They emphasize an integrated strategy for skill development and believe in the power of impact over numerical measures.

Challenges have always existed. Funding has been a constant struggle, pushing volunteers and friends to dip into their personal funds to sustain the vision. The hunt for talent proved to be another hurdle, and communicating the essence of Tribe often clashed with the numerical expectations of donors. Despite these adversities, Tribe stood resilient.

Success stories emerged—in 2021, they won the Samuel Huntington Prize, which saved their mission. Tribe has formed a dedicated team of professionals, established a recognizable brand, and navigated the entrepreneurial ecosystem with effective programs. Also, they successfully created a business consulting arm to assist in the financial sustainability of their activities.

"Tribe" dreams big! They envision incorporating entrepreneurship into secondary education in Liberia, sparking policy discussions, and developing a model that could potentially be adopted nationally to address the skill gap. Over the next three years, Tribe plans to directly impact the lives of over 300 individuals through their programs.

His experiences working with J-palm Liberia and Mahmud Johnson refined his entrepreneurial spirit. Inspired by ideas such as "you have to be, then become" and "everything worthwhile has to be earned," Wainwright bases his decisions on reason and data and is open to change when new information becomes available.

Wainwright's leadership style is democratic, and he is always ready to change his opinion when presented with new evidence. He sometimes struggles with projecting his high work ethic onto his team. In order to be relevant, he emphasizes getting things done, knowing your field, and having unflinching faith in your objective. His advice to other entrepreneurs is straightforward yet profound: "Get shit done; know your shit; believe in your shit; relevance is earned."

Tribe Liberia is now a movement with the goal of nurturing dreams and paving the way for a future where education and entrepreneurship entwine.

Fun fact:

Wain loves adrenaline-fueled escapades and has jumped out of an airplane.



LUTHER JEKE

FOUNDER, ICAMPUS LIBERIA



INNOVATION CAMPUS

iCampus Liberia



In the aftermath of war-torn Liberia, a group of innovative individuals aspired to change the country's narrative for its youth. In an environment where young people were frequently classified as troublemakers, the necessity for a space where young people could assemble and interact creatively became clear. Thus, the inception of ***iCampus began in 2016, and by 2018, this unique center had officially opened its doors to the public.***

iCampus has evolved into more than simply a co-working space—it has become a hub for sustainability, knowledge, community, and ecosystems. It's critical that the next generation of Liberians has the knowledge, resources, and networks necessary to drive change and create the Liberia they see for the future. iCampus through accessible computer labs, including online and offline courses, and practical mentoring. iCampus has created a secure environment for cooperation and idea generation by offering reasonably priced shared workplaces, organizing open events, and promoting offline networks.

Beyond being a physical space, iCampus has explored issues such as entrepreneurship, accountability, and technology. It has incubated organizations and entrepreneurs and served as a hub for financial and intellectual resources. The model extends beyond a mere co-working space, positioning itself as a collective effort to support the next generation of Liberian change-makers over the long term.

Officially launched on July 5, 2018, iCampus quickly became a milestone as the first innovation campus in Liberia, adopting a hybrid model for sustainability. Through partnerships like the one with Mercy Corps PROSPECT IV, which established the iCampus Business Clinic, and collaborations with the USAID Agribusiness Incubator, iCampus actively contributed to the growth of businesses and agriculture cooperatives.

As an implementing partner of UNDP programs like Livelihood and Employment Creation and MSME Growth Accelerator Liberia, iCampus has directly injected up to \$1.5 million into 38 Liberian businesses. The innovation campus has welcomed 13,000 users through its doors, growing its team from a humble three to a robust twelve full-time staff.

Yet, the journey was not without challenges. Financial struggles and the reliance on donor funding proved to be persistent hurdles. However, iCampus navigated this by transitioning from a grant-based budget to an annual one and developing a fund with the aim of becoming fully self-sustaining by 2029.

One shining success story amidst challenges was the mentorship and funding provided by iCampus through the Growth Accelerator Liberia program for the Nimba Women Agriculture Venture. From a small cassava farm, this venture blossomed into a cooperative with over 100 women, equipped with a modern cassava processing plant.

Looking to the future, iCampus envisions becoming a self-sustaining innovation space, establishing its dream property by 2029, and opening two regional offices in rural Liberian counties. The driving force behind this vision is the CEO of iCampus, Luther Jeke. Luther's guiding principles lie in the clear articulation of iCampus's vision and mission, coupled with strong leadership and teamwork.

Luther, a computer science enthusiast since his early days, fused his tech knowledge with a degree in sociology. This unique blend allowed him to understand human interactions deeply, leading to effective social change strategies for marginalized groups. Luther's comprehensive thought process, combined with his experience and data-driven decision-making, enables him to approach risk-taking and decision-making with clarity.

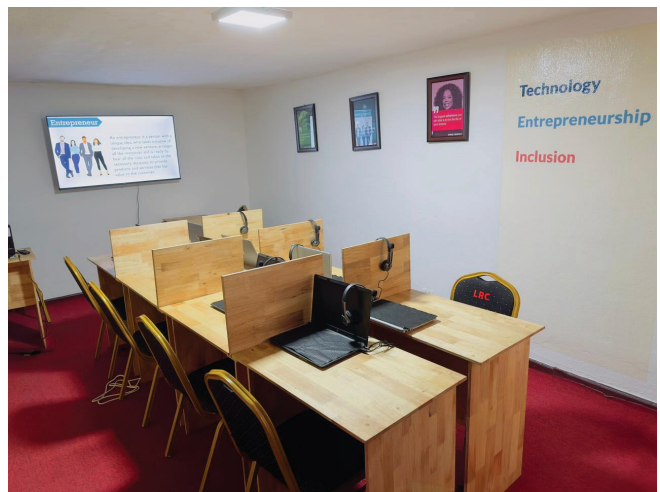
One valuable lesson Luther learned echoed through his career: "You can't save the world in a day." It taught him to address challenges one step at a time. Luther's advice for emerging entrepreneurs resonates with this philosophy: follow a path you're passionate about; it makes navigating challenges more manageable. iCampus stands not just as a physical space but as a testament to the power of passion, collaboration, and a relentless pursuit of positive change.

iCampus PROSPECTS-IV

Entrepreneurship Business Clinic

The iCampus Entrepreneurs Business Clinic, operating under the PROSPECTS-IV project, stands as an initiative aimed at nurturing and fortifying the entrepreneurial landscape in Liberia. Functioning as a supportive and growth-oriented space, the Business Clinic provides a platform for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to receive mentorship, organizational incubation, and access to financial and intellectual resources.

Through strategic partnerships and collaborations, the clinic propels the success of Liberian businesses, contributing significantly to livelihood and employment creation. As an integral component of iCampus Liberia, the Business Clinic not only addresses the immediate challenges faced by SMEs but also contributes to the long-term goal of fostering a self-sustaining entrepreneurial ecosystem in Liberia.



iCampus PROSPECTS-IV

Highlights of 2023

Montserrado County Entrepreneurship Ecosystem Study –

Under the PROSPECTS-IV project iCampus Liberia commissioned an Entrepreneurship Ecosystem Study in Greater Monrovia, Montserrado County, Liberia, aimed at fostering entrepreneurship within the youth and middle-age population of the region. The study, driven by the goal of promoting economic growth and innovation, employed a mixed-method approach to scrutinize the entrepreneurship landscape. It focuses on critical facets, including financing accessibility, business support services, talent and skills, and the policy and regulatory environment. Additionally, it outlines the key challenges identified in the Montserrado entrepreneurial landscape, opportunities for entrepreneurs, and strategic recommendations for enhancing the local entrepreneurial ecosystem.

The study also pinpoints critical challenges hindering entrepreneurial growth in Greater Monrovia. Which include a significant lack of access to financing, inconsistent policy implementation, a skills gap among entrepreneurs, limited networking opportunities, regulatory hurdles, a restricted access to markets, and the shadow of political instability, especially with upcoming elections.

In contrast to the challenges, the assessment highlights numerous opportunities for entrepreneurs in the region. These opportunities arise from a youthful population, a supportive government, mentorship and capacity-building programs, a strong entrepreneurial willingness among the youth, government initiatives, interventions by non-governmental organizations (NGOs), investments in agribusiness and vocational training, and a range of support services provided by various organizations.

To address the identified challenges and capitalize on opportunities, the study proposes strategic recommendations. These include enhancing finance access, streamlining business registration processes, promoting information dissemination, strengthening entrepreneurial skills, fostering collaboration, improving policy enforcement, providing incubation and mentorship, leveraging technology, assessing policy impact, and simplifying tax compliance.

iCampus Liberia Entrepreneur Pitch Battle:

As part of the PROSPECTS-IV initiative, iCampus Liberia organized an Entrepreneur Pitch Battle, which provided the platform for small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) to present their business ideas. With 106 applications, a careful screening procedure resulted in the involvement of ten intriguing initiatives in the pitch battle. Lorpu Fruit Business took first place in the competition, followed by Ell's Natural in second place, Dee Detergent in third place, and Womleh Business Center in fourth place. The winners shared a \$2,000 USD prize pool, marking an important milestone for these aspiring businesses. The event allowed SMEs to not only showcase their company ideas, but also to attract possible investors, get publicity, and acquire funding.

iCampus PROSPECTS-IV Investors Ignite Talk:

The iCampus Ignite Talks, a dynamic platform within the PROSPECTS-IV project, served as a symbol for innovation in Liberia's entrepreneurial landscape. These brief but impactful presentations provide a special forum for entrepreneurs to discuss their experiences, challenges, and triumphs. The presentations follow an established pattern of 20 slides that advance automatically every 15 seconds. The discussions revolve around the principles of welcoming change, encouraging diversity, and instilling a development mentality. These Ignite Talks, which mandated audience involvement, promoted a spirit of mutual learning and solidarity while recognizing the weaknesses that come with being an entrepreneur. In addition to pushing limits, driving innovation, and redefining possibilities as they dive into their projects, speakers encourage other business owners to challenge norms, welcome change, and see setbacks as necessary for growth.

iCampus Youth Radio Talk Shows on Entrepreneurship:

The PROSPECTS-IV Radio Talk Shows were a pivotal initiative within the PROSPECTS-IV project, designed to stimulate a mindset shift towards entrepreneurial empowerment in Liberia. This five-part series served to spotlight startup founders, seasoned entrepreneurs, and industry leaders to engage and inspire local business owners and potential entrepreneurs. By embracing interruption, adopting diversity, and promoting social responsibility, these discussions ignited positive change. These radio broadcasts also acted as a driving force, sowing seeds of innovation and empowerment that resonated with our society and inspired individuals.

iCampus SME's Fail Faire

The iCampus SME's Fail-faire was an evening of honoring failure as a symbol of creativity and risk-taking. Speakers at the event were Christolle Ade Suah, the CEO of LunchBox; Jarius Andrew Greaves, the CEO of Yoner Liberia; and Mawuna Augustt, the managing partner and lead consultant at Talentia Africa Ltd. They shared their failures in an engaging, quick-fire, and Ignite-style presentation. The presenters shared their experiences of failure and assisted aspiring business owners in using the knowledge they gained to further their own endeavors, making the evening a stimulating educational experience.

CONCLUSION:

As we conclude this inaugural issue of the **iCampus Liberia PROSPECTS-IV** Quarterly Entrepreneurship Journal, we express our deep gratitude to our readers and contributors. The stories shared here encapsulate the spirit of innovation, determination, and success that defines entrepreneurship in Montserrado County. Through the partnership with Mercy Corps Liberia under the PROSPECTS IV Programme, we strive to foster positive change, creating a ripple effect that transcends traditional norms and mindsets.

The entrepreneurial journey is one of continuous learning, resilience, and growth, and we are thrilled to play a role in showcasing and celebrating the achievements of Liberian-owned businesses. Each story is a testament to the vibrant entrepreneurial ecosystem in Montserrado, and we hope these narratives serve as a source of inspiration for aspiring and seasoned entrepreneurs alike.

We extend our heartfelt appreciation to the entrepreneurs who shared their experiences, the dedicated editorial team, and, most importantly, our readers. Your support fuels our mission to promote entrepreneurship, youth empowerment, and economic transformation in Liberia.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT:

We sincerely thank the innovative entrepreneurs whose stories appear in this journal. Their passion and business drive have truly made this issue a celebration of achievement and inspiration.

Special thanks to the Lorlar Incorporated for their diligence in curating and publishing these stories, and to iCampus Liberia for their commitment to fostering a thriving entrepreneurial community.

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Social Media: Follow us on Facebook ([iCampus Liberia](#)) and Twitter ([@iCampuslib](#)) for the latest updates and entrepreneurial insights.

Thank you for joining us on this exciting journey of entrepreneurship and business success in Montserrado County. Stay connected, stay inspired!

iCampus PROSPECTS-IV

150 Carey Street, Monrovia, Liberia
