



Break-out session rapporteur summary

Virtual Incubation Panel

Speakers:

Ina Gagauz, Kharkov Technologies, Ukraine

Jay Bal, International Digital Laboratory, University of Warwick, UK

Michi Barcelon, Ayala Foundation, Philippines

John Dada, Fantsuam Foundation, Nigeria

When we talk about traditional incubation and networking we think about “physical interactions” or the use of “physical facilities”. Traditional networks, like traditional incubation, have supported face to face communication, participation and community but we find ourselves increasingly living in a virtual world. Can we achieve the same level of success in networking and incubation in this virtual space? If so, how do we do this?

The panel introduced solutions to issues facing incubators and entrepreneurs – the lack of affordable or available physical facilities; the problems facing entrepreneurs in linking with markets; supporting entrepreneurs across vast regions; and the need to involve and manage an ever increasing circle of support.

In the Ukraine, reliance is placed on a portal to overcome large distances and a lack of premises for entrepreneurs. The success of the approach has now attracted academic, business and investor communities to use the portal and has extended the reach of the incubator past what physical interaction could have achieved.

In the UK, a collaborative commerce marketplace has been established to facilitate new market offers, form better linkages and to share resources and infrastructure. The approach relies on a mix of physical assessments, looking at both the present capability of each company and its future potential, and virtual linkages. With 9000 companies already on the system, this is an example of the market of the future.

Building on the need for a mix of physical and virtual approaches, the Ayala Foundation in the Philippines uses virtual networks to leverage the diaspora, market linkages, financing and other business incubators. Ultimately though, even these have a physical component that strengthens the virtual component.

From a social perspective, the need to support resource poor entrepreneurs in deep rural areas has received a massive boost in Nigeria from the use of cellular technologies. Virtual support in health, education and entrepreneurship has been achieved by innovative use of a different technology to that used in the Philippines, Ukraine and the UK.

The panel concluded that virtual approaches are vital to increase reach and efficiencies while reducing the costs of interactions. However, in all cases, there still needs to be a mix of physical and virtual interactions. The use of different channels, that are context sensitive, also needs to be considered in the selection of virtual incubation. With this in mind, the success rate for virtual entrepreneurial interventions is no different from purely physical interactions, and in fact, often has a more positive benefit:cost ratio. More sharing of approaches is needed to capitalise on the learning and successes.