The African continent is seeing its strongest economic growth since the 1970s. In 2008, 15 African countries entered a second decade in which they posted strong annual economic growth rates of 5.3 percent. Despite strong economic performance, Sub-Saharan Africa remains the only region not on track for achieving the Millennium Development Goals by 2015.

In some Sub-Saharan countries, poverty rates still exceed 70%. According to the World Bank Doing Business Report 2008, Africa fell from third place to fifth in ranking by region on the pace of business regulation reforms. Recent estimates place Sub-Saharan Africa as the region with the second highest rate of unemployment, at 9.1%. Almost half of the world’s unemployed are young people aged 15 to 24. African policymakers increasingly view business incubation as an important tool to unleash human ingenuity, enable competitive enterprises and create sustainable jobs. Business incubators can also be instrumental in developing new economic sectors. Business incubators in Africa provide support for small enterprises to overcome business skills, infrastructure, market linkage, financing and “people connectivity” constraints, and expose entrepreneurs to information and communication technologies (ICTs) that help increase the productivity and market reach of enterprises across sectors.

infoDev provides financial and technical support to 24 business incubators in 10 African countries, with sub-regions in South, East and West Africa. Initiated by infoDev and launched in Ghana in 2006, the African Incubator Network (AIN) is a peer-to-peer network for African incubators managers. AIN is currently coordinated by one of AIN’s members, Softstart BTI in South Africa, and receives financial support from infoDev as well as the Small Enterprise Development Authority (SEDA) of South Africa. infoDev also supports training and capacity-building sessions for incubator managers. Within the Africa Incubator Network, business incubators primarily focus on developing women and young people’s entrepreneurship skills and opportunities, as well as high growth business development.
African Incubator Network

Initiated by infodev and launched in 2006, the goal of AIN is to develop a collaborative network of African incubators and other business development service providers, and to facilitate the provision of appropriate knowledge to support the development of innovative small enterprises. Members of AIN are active members of the infoDev Global Network of Business Incubators, which is a virtual networking and knowledge-sharing platform (www.idisc.net) for infoDev’s regional incubation networks that members can use to showcase their activities, use online learning materials, share success stories and best practices, as well as connect with like-minded incubation practitioners and experts.

Feature Business Incubators

South Africa
South Africa’s has over 20 incubators supporting entrepreneurs in sectors as diverse as horticulture, construction, chemicals, ICT, biotechnology, metal fabrication, furniture manufacturing and platinum beneficiation. While there are a few private sector-led incubators, most are supported by the national government and to a lesser extent by provincial and local governments. The South African Business and Technology Incubator Association (SABTIA) was formed by incubator professionals and has since become an organization representing incubators in southern Africa.

Ghana
BusyInternet, an urban business incubator founded around an internet café, provides business services and office space rentals to local entrepreneurs. In a country where business premises require a three-year up-front rental payment, BusyInternet enables entrepreneurs to start businesses with minimal financial resources and reduced risk. Access to facilities, connectivity, and support services, as well as the possibility to interact with other entrepreneurs, are some of the basic obstacles that business incubators help fledgling entrepreneurs overcome.

Angola
Initiated in 2005 by the National Institute for Employment and Vocational Training (INEFOP), the incubator serves as a one-stop business service center with offerings such as training workshops in entrepreneurship, business advisory and consulting services, credit facilitation, linkage and referrals. This incubator focuses particularly on youth in the context of a post-conflict environment.

Rwanda
Established by the Kigali Institute of Science and Technology, the Technology and Business Incubation Facility (TBIF) provides office space, shared resources and a seed-financing scheme to 20 incubatees, many of whom are young students from its academic community. The overall objective of TBIF is to integrate ICT across incubator and incubatee business processes in order to enhance the outcomes, impact and outreach of TBIF to the target community of graduates from...