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Issa Baluch and the African Agribusiness Knowledge and Innovation Leadership Initiative (AKILI)

In the summer of 2015, Issa Baluch's vision of a practical learning institute for African agriculture workers finally found its footing as the African Agribusiness Knowledge and Innovation Leadership Initiative (AKILI – the Swahili word for wisdom, and the Initiative's ultimate mission). Four years earlier, Baluch would not have imagined his progress. When he became a Fellow in the Advanced Leadership Initiative (ALI) at Harvard University in 2011 and a Senior Fellow in 2012, he thought it sounded like the perfect opportunity to learn and grow. He was bored playing golf every day in North Carolina, after having moved there only six months prior from the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Baluch, a 37-year veteran of the freight forwarding industry, left in 2008 after selling his company, Swift Group. He helped pioneer the thriving sea-air multimodal transport model with Swift Group and as the founding President of the first Freight Logistics Association formed on the Arabian Gulf Peninsula in Dubai, the National Association of Freight Logistics (NAFL).

With guidance from ALI Chair and Director Rosabeth Moss Kanter and Harvard Kennedy School (HKS) Professor Calestous Juma, and inspiration from his business partners Jon Vandenheuvel and Kris Klokkenga at Africa Atlantic Holdings, Ltd., Baluch began developing a social impact project to help transform the education space in Africa by introducing hands-on practical teaching in agriculture and agribusiness.

In 2015, after pilot programs were completed at the Africa Atlantic farm in Ghana, AKILI took on a more permanent shape. AKILI's idea to train small-scale farmers for commercial success had excited representatives from several African countries, who attempted to persuade Baluch to establish an AKILI division in their country. But Baluch and his team were still working hard to design a concrete model for AKILI. Baluch also knew that he needed to bring on board long-term investors, but without specific programs, would Baluch be able to convince investors to sign on? Would AKILI be in danger of establishing itself across Africa too quickly? Or would excitement wane if he delayed expansion to focus on proving success in one location first? Baluch and his AKILI team were feeling the pressure to do many things at once given the agricultural needs in Africa.

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Agriculture in Africa

The Green Revolution brought modernized agriculture systems to Latin America, China, and South Asia at the mid-point of the 20th century, helping to bring famine and poverty under control. Improved productivity of farms led to profitable investments in rural infrastructure and technology, which served to compound early gains experienced from new farm management practices. Crop production per ton tripled in developing areas like China, South Korea, and Southeast Asia.[1]

Meanwhile, sub-Saharan Africa – the area south of the Sahara encompassing all or part of 48 African countries with varying histories (colonial origins), languages, and ethnicities - made little progress (see **Exhibit 1** for map of sub-Saharan African countries). Economists and social scientists have cited many reasons for this failure ranging from poor market infrastructure, scattered population densities, and dependency on smaller crops than the main staple crops – rice, wheat, and maize.[2] Problems of soil fertility, lack of investment capital, access to markets, modern technology, and secure land tenure also threatened growth. Growth generally came through cultivating more land and mobilizing a larger portion of the labor force, not through efficiency gains. Although half of all employment growth in Africa between 1999 and 2009 was in agriculture, Africa was still a net importer of cereal crops.[3] Total agricultural imports outweighed exports by a factor of 1.7 times in 2013, with net exports falling steadily since the mid-1990s.[4]

Still, sub-Saharan Africa had great agricultural potential. It had vast areas with good soil, plentiful water, and a climate that supported double or triple cropping (growing two or three crops on the same piece of land during a single year). Of the 400 million acres suitable for agriculture, only 10 percent were under cultivation in 2011.[5] While less than US$40 billion of foreign direct investment filtered into sub-Saharan Africa in 2009 (compared to over US$700 billion in developed economies[6]), the rate of return of foreign investment in agriculture in Africa was higher than any other developing region.[7] Improvements were made in farmers' access to inputs like seeds and fertilizer, and infrastructure elements like roads, electricity, storage facilities, and ports. But challenges still existed related to soil fertility, lack of investment capital, access to markets, modern technology, and secure land tenure. African farmers needed access to the best education and technology in order to combat these challenges. Sub-Saharan Africa's smallholder farmers, who grew crops on less than two hectares of land (1 hectare = 2.47 acres), were in most need of help as they provided up to 80 percent of the food supply in Africa.[8]

Multilateral organizations such as the United Nations and World Bank, international development agencies such as the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as Oxfam International and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation were intent on improving the food system by working with African governments and farmers to improve agriculture systems. Increasingly, the private sector was factored into that equation. With the population in Africa expected to double from 800 million in 2015 to 1.5 billion by 2030, and one in four undernourished people in the world living in Africa, the challenge of food security was paramount.[9]

Baluch's Ties to Africa

Baluch was born in 1952 in East Africa. Ethnically an Omani and African mix, Baluch left East Africa in the 1970s and took up residency in Dubai, where he began his career as a tally clerk at the Swedish-owned Gulf Agency Company in 1973. He learned the ropes of transport logistics, quickly working his

way up to general manager of the supply chain department before he left the company seventeen years later to establish his own business.

Baluch helped initiate sea-air multimodal transport between Asia, Europe, and North America during his time at Gulf Agency Company. This idea became the basis for his own freight-forwarding company, Swift Group, established in 1989 in Dubai. At a time when businesses were rushing to the former Soviet Union after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, Baluch choose to go South instead of North. His vision was to take advantage of the African market – a place he still considered home – and his position in Dubai gave Baluch a great advantage positioning his firm at the midway point between Asia and Africa.

The sea-air multimodal transportation method was designed so that goods from Asia could be shipped by sea to Dubai, and then transferred by air to West African countries, saving time and money. Business grew very fast in part due to Dubai's pro-business government, free seaports, and open skies. Over time, Baluch began adding value through light assembly and packaging. By 2008, when Baluch retired, Swift Group had expanded to 24 countries – 16 in Africa – and 49 branches. Baluch sold Swift Group to South African-owned Barloworld Logistics in April 2008.

During his career, Baluch served as founding President of the first Freight Logistics Association formed on the Arabian Gulf Peninsula in Dubai, the National Association of Freight Logistics (NAFL). He went on to become President of FIATA (International Association of Freight Forwarders Associations), based in Zurich, Switzerland, and served on the Board of the International Cargo Association (TIACA), based in Miami, USA. For his outstanding services to the international logistics transport industry, Baluch received a Lifetime Achievement award in 2006 from Air Cargo News UK, and another in 2013 from STAT Trade Times.

The Ties Strengthen: Africa Atlantic Franchise Farms, Ltd. Pilot Project

In 2008, through the urging of friends, Baluch met American entrepreneur Jon Vandenheuvel, and about a year later Kris Klokkenga. Vandenheuvel traveled to Africa for the first time in 2001 as the Executive Director of the Republican Conference in the U.S. House of Representatives. African American Congressman J. C. Watts of Oklahoma was Chair of the House Republican Conference at the time and took great interest in U.S. policy toward Africa. He arranged a congressional delegation to Ghana, Nigeria, and Senegal which Vandenheuvel participated in. Vandenheuvel's eyes opened to the tremendous opportunity in Africa. So in 2008, he decided to take a gamble on African development, moving his family to Ghana and enrolling in the Ghana Institute of Management. His wife gave him one year to figure out what came next.

Klokkenga moved to Ghana after traveling there on a mission trip with his church in 2007. He grew up on a farm in central Illinois and worked for seven years in commodity trading and logistics with the Archer Daniels Midland Company (ADM), one of the world's largest agricultural processors and ingredient providers. After the mission trip, Klokkenga asked to be transferred to Ghana, where he became General Manager for ADM's shea nut processing factory.

As two U.S. expats, Klokkenga and Vandenheuvel were quickly introduced to each other. Conversation naturally gravitated toward agriculture, and both men recognized that Ghana was a net importer of staple foods when they could be producing their own. There were few organizations working directly with farmers. With wheels beginning to turn, Vandenheuvel's family friend told him, "If you're going to focus on Africa development, you should meet Issa Baluch. He's in Dubai, and he knows a lot about Africa." So Vandenheuvel booked a ticket to Dubai in 2008, met Baluch, and the two entrepreneurs started discussing opportunities to pursue together in Africa.

Even though Baluch was not a farmer who understood agronomy, he knew that farming had a big logistics component – how to move a good from producer to consumer in the most efficient way. Baluch took a great interest in Vandenheuvel and Klokkenga's partnership while in the process of selling his own company. The three came together to support the development of a pilot commercial farm in Ghana, Africa Atlantic Franchise Farms, Ltd. (AAFF), financed through a holding company, Africa Atlantic Holdings, Ltd (AAH) that they formed.

With Baluch as Chairman and Vandenheuvel as CEO of the holding company, Klokkenga as Managing Director of the AAFF pilot farm, and with the help of their local partner in the farming enterprise, Dr. Edward Appah, Africa Atlantic acquired rights to a 25,927 acre (10,497 ha) site in 2010. The site was located on the Afram Plains in Ghana on the shoreline of Lake Volta, the world's largest reservoir. Dr. Appah, who was born in Ghana and had returned home to retire after a career as a medical doctor in Germany, was instrumental in securing land from the Kwahu Traditional Area. The farm began producing maize on an experimental basis for the domestic Ghanaian market (see **Exhibit 2).** Lake Volta had the potential to become the supply chain centerpiece for Ghanaian agriculture – similar to the function of the Mississippi River in U.S. agriculture. Using a smallholder franchise model with coordinated central functions, the goal of Africa Atlantic was to identify, test, and mitigate the major risks associated with building and executing scaled farming enterprise in Ghana, and Africa at large.

Discovering Twenty-Five Risks

As the team began working through the details of establishing a large-scale farm, they soon encountered major risks involved in entering the agriculture industry in Africa. Unlike in Western agriculture, the existence of even one of these risks likely spelled absolute disaster. "If you just tackle a few of them and you leave out the others, you are going to sink. If you tackle the majority of them and leave out a few, you're going to drown. It's that kind of situation," explained Baluch. The team identified 25 risks in all, boiling them down into five areas: legal, financial, operational, social, and environmental. Vandenheuvel elaborated upon each of the five areas:

> Area number one is legal risk, things like land title, political stability, and sanctity of contracts. Second is financial risks: the banking system, access to markets, and insurance. Third is operational risk, a very long list of issues: everything in the supply chain; everything involving technology and distribution. There are roads in Ghana, there just aren't enough roads. The fourth area is social risk: relationships with villages, chiefs, local people, government, and culture; social empowerment, health, education, equality, and empowerment of women. And the fifth area is environmental risk: the appropriate use of inputs, conservation of water and resources, and preventing runoff and contamination of water.

The Africa Atlantic team worked hard to condense these risks into a Risk Dashboard (see **Exhibit 3**). They hoped the Dashboard could be used to raise awareness, develop mitigation opportunities, and ultimately help farmers realize success. But they also realized that information was not enough on its own; they wanted to help people to *use* the Risk Dashboard to develop their own successful agricultural enterprises.

Next Steps: Conceiving of AKILI at Harvard

By 2010, Africa Atlantic had developed into a functioning laboratory commercial farming operation and Baluch had moved from the UAE to North Carolina to enjoy a slower paced life. This was short-

lived: Veronica Biggins – 2010 Advanced Leadership (AL) Fellow – ran into Baluch's longtime friend and AAH business partner, John Dragonetti in Gulf Shores, Alabama, and enticed him to introduce her to Baluch. This encounter led to another two months later with the then-Managing Director of Harvard's Advanced Leadership Initiative (ALI) program. Baluch listened to the Managing Director's description of the AL Fellowship, a unique year-long program that helped experienced leaders to solve large-scale complex problems in poverty, health, education, the environment, and more. These problems required more than a one-off approach because authority was typically divided, with many people responsible for parts, with no one owning the whole. Multiple stakeholders with divergent interests made outcomes difficult to measure. The ALI program provides Fellows with the tools and skills to succeed in these challenging environments. Fellows have a dedicated core course, course audits of their choosing, think tanks, field experiences, and access to the university's resources as well as a network of current and past Fellows. Baluch thought that ALI would be the perfect opportunity to build a project using Africa Atlantic's Risk Dashboard. After an extensive selection process, Baluch was invited to be a 2011 AL Fellow. Although hesitant to return to "school", he was excited and grateful for the diversion. "Playing golf every day is not for me," asserted Baluch.

A few months into his 2011 Fellowship, Harvard Business School Professor and ALI Chair and Director Rosabeth Moss Kanter surprised Baluch by asking him about his social impact project. Baluch was worried he misunderstood the goal of the program. He recalled hearing a direct message: "you have been a leader. You have done many things. Now leave a legacy for the next generation." Baluch interrupted this to mean he had to start a nonprofit but ALI faculty explained that a commercial venture can also be socially impactful.

With the help of Calestous Juma, Harvard John F. Kennedy School of Government Professor of the Practice of International Development, Baluch saw the potential for Africa Atlantic Farms to incorporate an agricultural knowledge center or university on its 10,000 acres. Baluch took Juma's class on social impact, "Innovation for Global Development", and learned about a similar international agriculture knowledge center, the EARTH University in Costa Rica.[10]

When Vandenheuvel and Klokkenga visited the U.S. in the fall of 2011, the three men, along with AAH corporate attorney and board member, Jack Greenwald, decided to visit the Costa Rican agricultural college. EARTH University sat on 8,000 acres in the heart of the tropical rainforest. With only one degree program – agricultural sciences and natural resource management – the training students received was extremely hands-on. Each academic year incorporated classroom learning and field experience, culminating in the professional management of a small enterprise. Baluch admired the school's student body from 42 countries. Eighty-three percent hailed from rural communities.

An EARTH University equivalent did not exist in Africa. So Baluch returned to Harvard and began brainstorming. He had shifted gears and embraced social impact projects. "Having gone to Harvard has actually opened up so many opportunities; had I not gone to Harvard, we would have just had a commercial farm," Baluch confessed.

Developing AKILI

Professor Juma continued to encourage Baluch and his colleagues as they thought through their initiative. The idea of uniting agriculture and education was appealing to each in a different way. Professor Juma knew of the need for new institutions in Africa to train and support farmers as entrepreneurs. Baluch hoped to involve private investors and management professionals in African agriculture. And Vandenheuvel saw a school as the perfect place to develop best practices and

solutions in conjunction with Africa Atlantic's Risk Dashboard. They just needed to weave these parts into something coherent.

The first problem the team encountered was what to call their project. According to Baluch:

> When you talk of anything to do with knowledge or training – forget the word university, because it will take a few years to get permission. They are highly regulated. If you talk of specific universities – in this case, agribusiness – the local universities will fight you to death. They say, 'we already have a wing at our university. Why do you want to create another?' Our argument would be that we want hands-on; we want people to be trained on the farm. Let them feel the soil. Let them touch the seeds. Let them see the difficulty. That's where the lessons are. We want more practice, less theory.

The whole team felt strongly about this philosophy of finding an innovative approach to training farmers and developing leaders, and thus the African Agribusiness Knowledge & Innovation Leadership Initiative, or AKILI, was born, *Akili* is the general term for wisdom and knowledge in Swahili and other Bantu languages in Africa. Baluch was selected to remain at Harvard as a Senior Advanced Leadership Fellow for 2012. During Baluch's second year at Harvard, Vandenheuvel and Klokkenga began testing the concept of a knowledge transfer project at the African Atlantic farm in Ghana. Their first pilot was in partnership with a local 4-H chapter and the South African-based humanitarian organization Joint Aid Management. Children from surrounding villages developed and cared for school gardens using modern farming techniques, eventually harvesting and selling their produce (see **Exhibit 4**). But it was not until after Baluch's second year as an AL Fellow that the AKILI team endeavored to build something larger.

Goalsetting at the 2013 Charrette

In early 2013, Baluch was asked to join Professor Juma for tea with MIT Associate Provost Wesley Harris. Harris, then teaching a course entitled "Topics in International Development," asked Baluch to speak to his class about his career trajectory and AKILI. The next thing Baluch knew, Harris was asking what he could do to help. Baluch replied, "Lots!"

The team thought it would be wise to arrange a charrette, or a field workshop, to involve internal and external stakeholders in the design and planning process. Held in Accra, Ghana in late 2013, the charrette attracted over 100 agriculture professionals from private investment firms such as Vital Capital Fund, Jacana Partners, and Injaro Holdings; major multinational corporations like Valmont Irrigation, Supermaritime, Archer Daniels Midland, and Unilever; Ghanaian agencies such as the Ministry of Food and Agriculture, National Lands Commission, and the Electricity Company of Ghana; and academics from Harvard, MIT School of Architecture and Planning, Stanford Business School, Stanford Institute for Innovation in Developing Economies, and Masdar Institute of Science and Technology in Abu Dhabi. After meeting in Accra, the group visited the Africa Atlantic pilot farm on Lake Volta to hold a session with the local villagers and farm employees, sketching a blueprint for what a knowledge initiative could look like in five and ten years.

The group settled on one overarching goal of AKILI:

> To provide entrepreneurial and technical training of youth and professionals in Ghana, and eventually other parts of Africa, on the principles of modern farming to advance a financially, socially, and environmentally sustainable agribusiness system that is scalable, bankable, and globally competitive.

In order to achieve this goal, AKILI would ground its programs in five pillars of positive impact: financial sustainability, upward mobility, professionalism, effective metrics, and environmental safety (see **Exhibit 5**). Baluch saw two different, yet symbiotic, approaches to achieving this goal. The first was through applied on-farm training. The second was aimed at the "middle management" level: molding farmers into business professionals through improved farm operations, logistics, value addition, marketing, and distribution. This was Baluch's area of expertise, but he would need additional help to succeed at both.

Bringing on New Partners

Holding a charrette with over 100 people demonstrated the power of collaboration, a key theme emphasized in the ALI curriculum. Baluch was determined to bring in partners from all over the world, weaving them into a diverse and influential web of partners.

In Cambridge, Harris involved students and scholars through the MIT Africa Initiative. According to Harris, "MIT identified the Agribusiness Knowledge Initiative at Africa Atlantic Farms in Ghana as a critical laboratory in Africa to advance its mission of applied research and technological innovation in the advancement of humanity." Students found opportunities with AKILI in both Ghana and Cambridge to practice their skills in agribusiness investment research, master site planning, economic development design, and systems and process engineering to enhance the environmental and social impact standards in agribusiness. At Harvard, Professor Juma asked the Harvard Kennedy School's Science, Technology, and Globalization Project to assist with AKILI's policy framework and strategy.

In Africa, Africa Atlantic Franchise Farms provided land and facilities, as well as a laboratory for testing new ideas. Baluch formed an alliance with the Corporate Council on Africa (CCA), a nonprofit organization whose members promoted business and investment between the U.S. and African nations, in order to promote AKILI's approach to agribusiness innovation to the U.S. business and investment community. Baluch also developed a partnership with The Masdar Institute of Science and Technology in Abu Dhabi, with the hope of building AKILI into a place where The Masdar Institute could continue its work on renewable energy in off-grid locations. Finally, the international law firm of Sidley Austin, with expertise in agribusiness in emerging markets, signed on AKILI as a pro bono legal client, part of the Africa-Asia Agricultural Enterprise Pro Bono program.

Together, this widespread alliance seemed ready to advance agribusiness in Africa, but the group stalled under the uncertainty of what that would actually look like on the ground.

AKILI Programming

Around the time of the charrette in Ghana, in early 2013, Vandenheuvel participated in an executive program for investor-operators of large scale commercial farming projects hosted by Syngenta, a leading global agriculture company, in Nairobi, Kenya. There, he met Willem Meyer. Meyer spent nine years as an investment analyst for Zeder Investments, one of South Africa's leading agricultural private equity firms, but at the time of the program he was the operational CEO of Zeder's first venture into farming – a US$106 million, 10,000 acre irrigated farm and flour mill in Zambia. Perhaps it was because both Meyer and Vandenheuvel had grappled with the challenges of building a commercial farm in Africa, but they soon discovered that both had identified the same five risks of African agribusiness summarized in Africa Atlantic's Risk Dashboard.

Vandenheuvel was drawn to Meyer's pragmatism and wanted to bring him onto the AKILI team. After meeting Baluch at the World Economic Forum's Grow Africa Conference in Cape Town, South

Africa in May 2013, Meyer was asked to become an advisor of AKILI. That day finally came in January 2015, when Meyer moved to Cambridge and set up shop at MIT.

As a strategic advisor, Meyer was tasked with fleshing out the future of AKILI; not a small feat for an initiative that had, up until that point, been focused on ad hoc sessions at MIT and the Africa Atlantic farm in Ghana. But Meyer's impartiality and fresh set of eyes were perfect for the job at hand:

> What is not sustainable is having experts from abroad running large projects. It is very expensive to keep them there and when they want to go home in two or three years' time, you have to start all over again. The development of local talent is paramount to the success. The natural resources are there in Africa. The future market is there, with population growth and export potential. The capital is available in the world and it's being allocated in Africa. The natural resource, the market, the capital. The fourth element is people. Right now we focus on all these other things, but we don't focus on developing the local talent, but without that, all of our efforts will be in vain.

By the summer of 2015, AKILI began considering three potential focuses that aligned with their agribusiness goals and expertise: mobile knowledge centers, model cities, and finance labs.

Mobile Agribusiness Knowledge Centers While Africa Atlantic was willing to donate land to build a physical research and training center, the team did not think that a brick and mortar institution would be able to reach farmers in rural areas. "Knowledge really isn't bound to a physical space. In 2015, really, a knowledge 'center' can be a website, a portal," explains Vandenheuvel. An online portal would be one aspect of AKILI's training program, with seminars on topics such as environmental and social sustainability, women in agribusiness, law and public policy, banking and finance, and logistics. And a mobile training unit would provide the other topic-driven programing.

With transportation being a widespread challenge in Africa, Meyer thought "why not have a mobile training unit that drives from one farm or village to another, providing multi-purpose training?" The idea of a multi-purpose center gained traction as the team envisioned other services that could be provided with a mobile unit. Along with workshops, training sessions, demonstrations, and other agricultural development programs, the vehicle could also be outfitted for medical care, health-related crisis management, soil quality tests, and other practical experiments.

Model Agribusiness Cities Also in collaboration with MIT, but through the School of Architecture and Planning, AKILI wanted to bring greater focus to the concept of agribusiness cities and economic zones. To harness Africa's enormous agribusiness potential, sizable development was required alongside farm operations; rural cities needed to be built around agriculture production. AKILI envisioned agribusiness cities with stores, schools, a health clinic, public spaces, and other community-building essentials similar to rural towns in South Africa and the United States. According to Baluch, "any time you are thinking of investing in a large-scale farm, you're actually creating a future city. There will be a pull effect towards a small little town which will grow into a city. There are this influx of people who come looking for jobs, looking for a better life."

AKILI had already begun highlighting this idea in workshops in Ghana and at MIT and Harvard, but the team was keen to build a framework for new small- and medium-sized Model Agribusiness Cities to present to global fora and investment conferences.

Agribusiness Finance Labs Small-scale farmers had difficulty receiving low-interest loans from banks and financial institutions. In order for small farms to grow into medium farms, and medium farms to grow into large farms, a novel approach to investing was essential. Baluch envisioned

that AKILI could develop a platform, or laboratory, through which it could engage financial stakeholders, including developmental finance institutions such as the World Bank, commercial banks, and social impact investors, in a discussion of the challenges each had faced that must be overcome in order to invest successfully in Africa in the future. AKILI initiated formal discussion with GLOBALG.A.P. (Global Good Agricultural Practices), a non-profit organization based in Cologne, Germany which set voluntary quality standards for the certification of agricultural products around the globe, to establish Good Financial Practice (G.F.P.) standards for the African farmer. The team believed that financial standards and best practices would reduce financial risk for investors and help unlock public and private financing for African agribusiness enterprises. AKILI was just getting started on this initiative in mid-2015, but they soon hoped to actively engage financial stakeholders.

Future of AKILI

With these three programmatic goals, Baluch and the rest of the AKILI team were able to think about long-term strategy. They decided it was time to pursue the sale of their majority interest in AAFF to new investors after five years of experimental commercial operations. They proved the viability of crops and basic operations and desired the freedom to concentrate on AKILI and the private investment models required to support both local and international funding of commercial farming projects in Africa. The next step in their advancement of shared learning and innovation from the farming era was the publication of a book based on their Risk Dashboard. All of their lessons learned through their commercial farming venture would be summarized in a manuscript. In October 2015, the team was finalizing content and formatting the book for print publication and to use as a tool for a global online course taught through the AKILI platform.

Finding Investment Partners

The businessman in Baluch was feeling the constraint of limited capital resources, but he knew that five years of planning led them to this moment; they built a very strong farm development program to take to potential funders. "We actually have something to put on the table. We don't just have ideas. We have a team of people. We have a large group of best practices and talent that are just ready," explains Meyer. But finding like-minded, long-term investment partners might not be simple. The AKILI team was ready to start having discussions with potential funders in September 2015, but they were not sure how their vision would be perceived. According to Meyer, it was natural that they had not yet run into unexpected challenges or criticism, but "as soon as we venture out and actually go on the road to meet funders, I think we'll experience some uncertainties, some gaps in the knowledge." Meyer hoped his work on programming (Mobile Agribusiness Knowledge Cities, Model Agribusiness Cities, and Agribusiness Finance Labs) would bring much-needed financial backing and the AKILI team would not be forced to go back to the drawing board.

Baluch began to focus on the establishment of a new investment company, First Hectares Capital. This company would bring together lessons learned from all across Africa, and globally, to build a new portfolio of early stage "greenfield" – building from the ground up instead of purchasing preexisting infrastructure – commercial agricultural projects in Africa, with a special focus on the inclusion of small farmers in "agribusiness economic zones" to make them efficient and competitive to global standards. This vehicle would also integrate AKILI as a critical non-profit vehicle to ensure the transfer of knowledge and best practices to small farmers in their communities.

Growing Demand for AKILI

For Baluch, the big unanswered question was "where and when are we striking first?" The answer to the latter half of that question was "as soon as possible," but the former was uncertain. Baluch recalled conversations he had at the World Economic Forum conference in Cape Town in 2013. After only five minutes of presenting about AKILI, Baluch was approached by the Rwandan, South Sudanese, and Ugandan Ministers of Agriculture. They wanted to know when AKILI would be arriving in their country. Opportunities through Meyer's connections in Zambia and Baluch's other projects in Mozambique also could not be taken off the table. Baluch was thinking beyond Ghana.

Would it be impractical for AKILI to expand before demonstrating the success of its three programs? Would expansion even be feasible to bring on investors and funders without first growing Baluch's new investment company First Hectares Capital? Did Baluch and his team take the right actions to positively advance Africa's farming industry and ultimately improve the well-being of everyone involved in agribusiness? What steps should Baluch and his team take next? After five years of hard-earned acclaim, Baluch was ready to see how far AKILI could go. After all, an eternal businessman had been transformed through ALI: "Now I'm an expert on social impact," Baluch pronounced.

Exhibit 1 Map of Sub-Saharan Africa

Source: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/b/b9/Subsaharanafrica.jpg, accessed November 2015.

Exhibit 2 Aerial view of farm site on Lake Volta in Ghana

Source: Company documents.

Exhibit 3 African Agribusiness Risk Dashboard

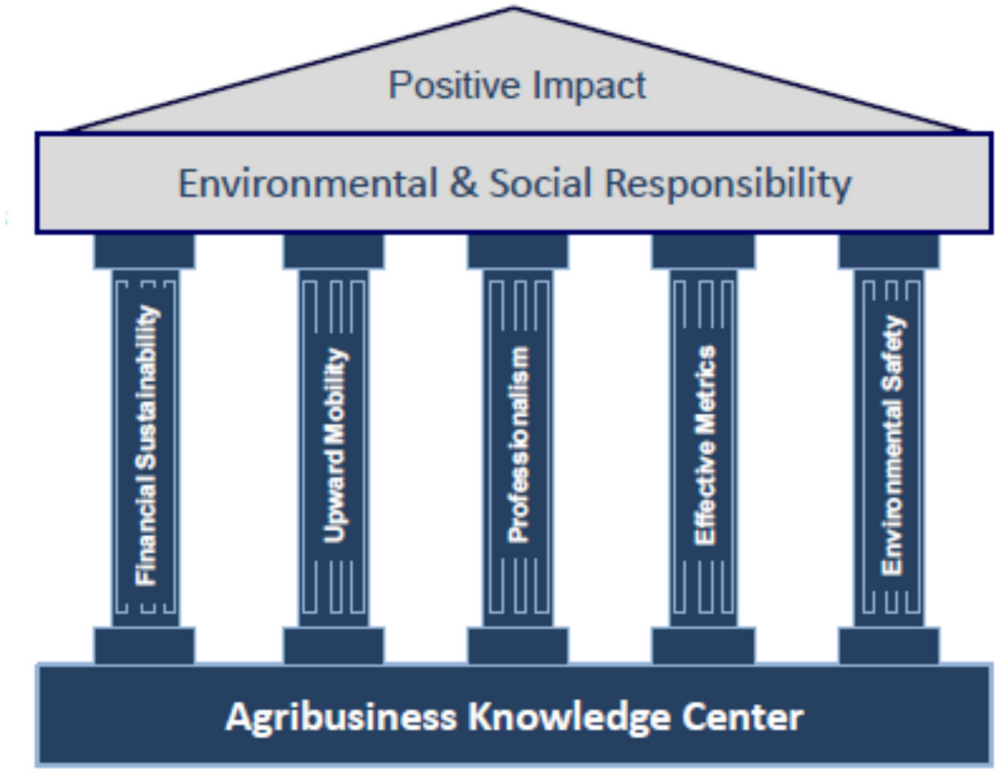
Legal Risks	Financial Risks	Operational Risks	Social Risks	Environmental Risks
Corporate governance	Accounting	Logistics	Local relationships	Sanitation
Land title	Banking	Human resources	Economic empowerment	Soil conservation
Political stability	Insurance	Agronomy	Education	Water conservation
Contracts	Project finance	Inputs	Health	Energy consumption
	Markets	Climate/water	Security	
		Electricity		
		Communications		

Source: Company documents.

Exhibit 4 AKILI pilot project: school garden at Africa Atlantic Franchise Farms in Ghana

Source: Company documents.

Exhibit 5 AKILI Five Pillars of Positive Impact



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[8] NEPAD (New Partnership for African Development), "African agriculture, transformation and outlook" November 2013, p. 8.

[9] Ibid., p. 10.

[10] EARTH University was developed in 1986 through a partnership between the Costa Rican government, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the W.K. Kellogg Foundation with the mission of providing a rigorous four-year undergraduate program in agricultural sciences and natural resource management to young people from Latin America, the Caribbean, Africa, and Asia. http://www.earth.ac.cr/en/about-earth/earth-facts/