



## The Ubuntu Leaders Academy: Building Social Entrepreneurial Skills

### What?

The Ubuntu Leaders Academy is a non-formal educational project of Institute Père Antonio Vieira (IPAV) in Portugal targeting young people from vulnerable groups in order to provide them with training on servant leadership<sup>1</sup>, ethics of care (caring for oneself, caring for the community and looking after the planet). The Academy is based on the community approach and Ubuntu means “*I am because you are*”. The Ubuntu method leads to the core development of the main competencies basic to human development: building personal, social and relational skills, crucial for global citizenship.

This case study is especially interesting as an example of how peer learning can be supporting social entrepreneurship in an environment with limited financial resources.

*1 Servant leadership theory was first introduced by Greenleaf. It relates to servant leaders as individuals concerned with building better societies and institutions by addressing contemporary problems from the fundamental predisposition of concern for the growth, well being, and benefits of the led.*

### Why?

It is difficult for young people coming from the vulnerable backgrounds to access the necessary skills and institutions that offer them. Ubuntu is characterised by values of benevolence, reciprocity and promotes values such as sharing, solidarity and responsiveness among others (Du Toit, 2021). That is why the philosophy of Ubuntu can contribute to a broader understanding of the value that social entrepreneurship can create for individuals and their communities. The Ubuntu Leaders Academy has created multidisciplinary teams of trainers and external consultants that include youth workers but also people with more business related skills and inspirational guests. The non-formal education pedagogical strategies are built around the development of essential individual competencies in self-knowledge, self-confidence, resilience, and empathy, thus instilling in the youth leaders the drive to become agents of change, creating service models targeting the common good of their respective communities.

The training helps develop sustainable activities internationally. For example, the Padaria Social is a social entrepreneurship project in Guinea-Bissau. Launched in 2014 as an outcome of Ubuntu training, it is still active and continues to work with the target local community. The Guinean Ubuntu leaders set up a community bakery

in a socially disadvantaged district of Bissau, the capital city, providing bread at lower cost to very vulnerable pockets of the population yet ensuring financially sustainable operations.

The Ubuntu Leaders Academy has received substantial funding from the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation (Portugal), the Montepio Foundation (Spain), the Serralves Foundation (Portugal), and European grants.

## Key Activities

The Ubuntu Leaders Academy was launched in 2010 to undertake informal educational activities aimed at young people with leadership profiles from disadvantaged backgrounds. Young people aged 18 to 35 are selected based on their cover letter and recommendation letters, and after an interview with the Academy team.

The Academy has developed different training formats based on the target audience. For school drop-outs in Portugal aged between 16-18, there is an intensive weekly format, the Ubuntu Week, developing the core competencies essential in global citizenship with focus on core competencies self-knowledge and self-confidence, resilience, empathy and service. After the training week, the Ubuntu trainees establish an Ubuntu Club that aims to help create projects and initiatives addressing social challenges of the community young people live in.

The Academy uses different “out-of-the-box” experiences and experiential learning opportunities to develop critical thinking and competences among participants including on how to overcome obstacles (e.g. activities linking sports with leadership).

The Ubuntu leaders program started its internationalization in 2014, having, so far, reached youth from 190 countries around the world. The Ubuntu Global Network is currently composed of hundreds of stakeholders who launched the Middle East and North Africa chapter, the Africa chapter and the Latin America chapter. These chapters are useful for the sharing of knowledge, social entrepreneurship case studies and models, setting up of partnerships with relevant organizations, sharing of information regarding resources, tools and donor institutions.

## Impact

An impact assessment, conducted by the Portuguese Catholic University, concluded the activities offered had a positive impact on the development of participants’ soft skills, management skills, mediation skills, as well as on their knowledge and attitudes related to leadership.

Evaluation and participants’ self- assessment is an integral part of training. The Ubuntu trainee self-assesses at the beginning and at the end of the training period. Training increases the level of self-confidence (+34%), personal and professional fulfilment (+28%), self-esteem (+24%) and self-awareness (+22%) in the participants.

In Portugal, by 2022, the Ubuntu Leaders Academy training has become an integral component of the education system under the Portuguese Department of Education. It is offered to 377 schools. The training is focused on the youth aged 16-18 who are proposed a 5-day intensive training.

The Academy is present through its network in 190 countries, and has been formally established in 16 countries. It has engaged with over 1812 facilitators and provided training to over 10 425 participants. It has proven to be an internationally renowned example.

## References

- Du Toit, A. (2021). Ubuntu for Social Entrepreneurship Education  
DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.5701655: RAIS.
- <https://www.academialideresubuntu.org/en/> [1]
- [https://issuu.com/ipav/docs/manual\\_final\\_v1\\_en.pptx](https://issuu.com/ipav/docs/manual_final_v1_en.pptx) [2]

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