

Global Immersion: Lessons from Rwanda on Conflict, Leadership, Change, and Business Opportunities

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Professor

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Office Hours: By Appointment

Course Assistant

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Course Description

Parts of Africa are now some of the most exciting regions of the world for business. A growing number of African countries have achieved steady, high growth rates during the last few decades. A wide range of sectors in these “lion” economies – commodities, tourism, agribusiness, eCommerce, oil and gas, retail, etc – are buzzing with activity and attention from foreign investors and multinationals.

But how can companies and investors enter and operate efficiently in African countries? What challenges characterize the private sector in Africa, how do they vary with context, and what strategies can firms and organizations adopt to overcome them? Where can new MBAs interested in Africa add the most value?

Rwanda is a wonderful country to explore and address these questions. In 1994, Rwanda suffered a brutal genocide in which nearly 1 million people were killed in a 3-month period. In the years since the genocide, the country has rebuilt with remarkable results. Rwanda is now one of the safest countries in Africa. Rwandans now live side by side in peace, the country's [economy continues to grow](#) rapidly, and Rwanda has made great strides in reducing poverty and increasing entrepreneurship, education, and access to health care. Further, the country has been [praised for its handling](#) of the COVID pandemic. Armed with frameworks and analytical tools from management and economics, we will meet with executives in Rwanda to understand the leadership practices, processes, and structures that have led to Rwanda's remarkable recovery, reconciliation, current peace, and economic growth.

About the Global Immersion Program

Global Immersion Program classes bridge classroom lessons and business practices in another country. These three credit classes meet for half a term in New York prior to a one week visit to the country of focus where students will meet with business executives and government officials while working on team projects. Upon return from the travel portion of the class, students may have one wrap up meeting at Columbia Business School. The 2022-2023 Global Immersion

Program fee for most classes is \$1950 and provides students with double occupancy lodging, ground transportation and some meals; unless an increased fee is otherwise specified in the course description. It does not cover round-trip international airfare. Attendance both in New York and in-country and regular participation are a crucial part of the learning experience and as such attendance is mandatory. Students who miss the first class meeting may be removed from the course. Additionally, no program fee refunds will be given after the add/drop period has closed. Please visit the Chazen Institute website to learn more about the Global Immersion Program, and visit the Global Immersion Policies page to review policies affecting these courses.

Course Requirements

Participation in Class Sessions and During In-Country Visit (40% of final grade)

There will be seven 90-minute class sessions between January and March. Classes will include discussion of business and policy issues in Rwanda, student presentations, and guest speakers. You are expected to be on time and present for the entire class session. Missing class sessions will adversely affect your grade in the course. In order to promote a consistent classroom environment of mutual respect, preparation and engagement, no electronic devices such as laptops, tablet computers, or smartphones should be used during class. The same expectations apply to our time in Rwanda with regard to attending all meetings, engaging in discussions, asking thoughtful questions, and providing insights from your own experiences. It is important to bear in mind that our guests and companies we meet both in New York and Rwanda are doing us a tremendous favor by hosting and speaking to us, warranting respectful behavior in return.

Group Written Assignments (30% of final grade)

The final project will be a report written in 3-person groups. Your final project is due on Tuesday, April 4, 2023 (strictly no extensions) and should not exceed 2,000 words (double spaced with reasonable margins). You have three broad options for the final project which are noted below. If neither of these options interest you, please email Professor Akinola with an alternative proposal. You will need to email the CA with your group names by Friday, February 3, 2023. All groups should email Professor Akinola by Friday, February 17, 2023 with a short paragraph describing your proposed final project.

Final Report Option 1

The first option entails analyzing the role Rwanda's senior leadership and/or culture has played in the country's recovery since the 1994 genocide. Based on your current understanding of Rwanda, the assigned readings and other reading and studying you have done regarding organizational leadership and culture, what do you regard as the biggest strengths and advantages and the greatest weaknesses and disadvantages of Rwanda's leadership and/or culture for the next 20 years?

Final Report Option 2

The second project option entails analyzing how a particular company, either Rwandan, East African or other, will be affected by the increasing integration of Africa into the global economy. If you pursue this topic, you should discuss what the Africa opportunity means for the company, why is an important part of their overall business strategy, and what challenges/risk they face.

Final Report Option 3

The third project option examines the role "home grown solutions" (such as Vision 2020, Vision 2050, umuganda, imihigo, umwiherero, the gacaca trials) have played in Rwanda's recovery and progress. How aligned are these practices and systems aligned with management theory and research? What lessons could and should other countries (or organizations) learn from

Rwanda's example? In answering this question, we recommend you focus on just 1 – 3 of these "homegrown solutions."

Group Presentations (30% of final grade)

Each group should pick one of the questions below to discuss in class for 10 minutes followed by 5 minutes of question and answer. The presentations will be dispersed across the different class sessions and should involve PowerPoint slides which must be emailed to Professor Akinola and the CA before 8 AM on the day of class. If you would like to pursue a different question, please email Professor Akinola. Finally, do not pick a question that is directly related to the topic you pick for your final project.

Questions for Group Presentations

Rwanda Focused

1. What historical, organizational, and psychological processes led to the 1994 genocide and what has allowed Rwanda to overcome its divisions and horrors to the extent that it has? What lessons could and should other countries (or organizations) learn from Rwanda's example?
2. How did Rwanda's colonial history lead to the genocide?
3. Paul Kagame has been criticized for authoritarian tactics and violence against opposing voices. However, he has argued that given Rwanda's history, stability and longevity are more important than democracy. How has the international community dealt with this tension?
4. Suppose Paul Kagame had lost the presidential election in Rwanda in 2017. How would this have affected the country's economy?
5. What role have women played in government in Rwanda and what has the impact of women's participation in the political landscape been on the country?
6. Rwanda plans to become an international finance center. What roadblocks might the country face in achieving this goal?
7. How has Rwanda spurred tourism and what more can it do to be a top destination for tourists hoping to visit East Africa?
8. Which industry in Rwanda do you think is most attractive for foreign PE/VC investors, and why?

East Africa Focused

9. What is mobile money and what future opportunities does it raise for the region?
10. What opportunities and risks do sales, or long-term leasing out, of large land areas to richer countries present for the region?
11. Why do East African countries stick to their guns in refusing further imports of used clothing from the U.S., despite the American government's threatened retaliation? Should they continue to do so?
12. Is East Africa a future destination for BPO from rich countries? Why/why not?
13. What will it take for H&M and other major clothing companies to move production from Asia to East Africa as wages in Asia rise?
14. To what extent is migration from East Africa to Europe and the U.S. permanent vs circular, what are the costs, benefits, and policy challenges of each?
15. You are an advisor to Tanzania's National Competitiveness council. What specific sectors would you advise them to focus on as they develop their growth strategy?
16. What are the environmental challenges facing East Africa and how can they be addressed?

17. Should East African countries allow increased privatization of their primary and secondary schools, as other developing countries (e.g. Liberia and Pakistan) have recently done?
18. In which technological areas can East Africa leap-frog in the coming decade?
19. How can the region's tourism sector improve its performance?
20. What tensions are there between corporate social responsibility obligations and rapid foreign investment in East Africa? How can corporations best manage these?
21. What kind of projects have foreign aid to East Africa traditionally funded? How will the quantity and composition of foreign aid change over time?
22. Are more sophisticated capital markets in the region a prerequisite for East African businesses to enjoy rapid growth?
23. How competitive is East Africa's workforce relative to other developing regions? What implications does this have on the country's prospects for foreign investment?

Course Outline: In-Class Sessions

Tuesday January 24th

Session 1: Introduction

This session will serve as an introduction to the course, the African continent, its landscape, and Rwanda's role within the continent. We will also review the in-country travel component of the course (covered by Chazen).

Tuesday January 30th

Session 2: History of Rwanda

This session will include an overview of the history of Rwanda, the colonial period, and a look at the Genocide and how the history influenced where the country is today.

Tuesday February 7th

Session 3: Business and the Economic Climate

Many countries have social/political issues that affect the economic environment. In this session we will discuss the business and economic climate in Rwanda.

Tuesday February 14th

Session 4: The Political Landscape

This session will review Rwanda's political landscape, including the policies and practices that have shaped its development. This session may also include student-led class discussions (10-minutes each).

Tuesday February 21st

Session 5: Industry/sector overviews

This session will highlight the important industries in Rwanda, particularly those we will interact most closely with in-country. This session may also include student-led class discussions (10-minutes each).

Tuesday February 28th

Session 6: Predeparture

This session will include a review of the agenda and the companies we will visit. Chazen will review logistics, safety, any other predeparture information. This session may also include student-led class discussions (10-minutes each).

Tuesday April 4th

Session 7: Post-Travel Reflection

In this session, Students will discuss their experiences and lessons learned, complete evaluations, and offer additional final thoughts. Lessons learned will include each presentation group of 3 spending a few minutes discussing what they learned during the trip regarding the question they addressed prior to the in-country visit.

Required Readings -TBD

You are expected to read all the required readings *before the course begins in Rwanda*. The readings will increase what researchers call your “absorptive capacity,” allowing you to maximize your learning from the complexity and richness of Rwanda. Your preparation is also a sign of respect for the many Rwandans – from subsistence farmers to high-level government officials – who will meet with us.