



SUCCESS STORY

KOSOVO SCHOLAR PROMOTES STARTUPS THROUGH ALMA MATER

Former students helps establish business incubator at university



Implementation of great ideas is not easy. Venera and co-founders had to use other premises to further develop their concept.

Photo by: USAID Transformational Leadership Program

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June 2017—Venera Fusha’s passion is entrepreneurship. Her dream is to make entrepreneurship a viable possibility for everyone at her alma mater, the University of Prishtina.

Fusha is one of 185 Kosovars to win a scholarship for Master’s Degree study in the United States under USAID’s Transformational Leadership Program—Scholarships and Partnerships. Her time at Colorado State University studying in its Global Social and Sustainable Enterprise MBA program helped to transform her, both personally and professionally.

“I was challenged to deal with world wicked problems and critically think about solutions and how to solve them. This gave me more professional skills in terms of thinking about business and social responsibility as a solution for world challenges but also more personal skills in terms of relating business and the social aspect of being aware of people’s sufferings and lack of opportunities towards education, health and income,” she says.

The three-semester program is constructed around students establishing a real-life, sustainable venture focused on solving a problem in emerging and developing countries.

Since returning to Kosovo, Fusha has acted on her passion, working with the University of Prishtina to establish a groundbreaking new venture incubator called VentureUP.

“Currently, VentureUP is in the process of registering as a foundation,” Fusha states confidently. “VentureUP will offer two types of services to University of Prishtina students. First, students can use the business incubator as a resource center for mentoring, networking and reaching out to business angels. Second, students and staff, whose research leads to ideas that could be commercialized, can use the incubator as a tech-transfer that helps handle intellectual property rights and patents.”

Fusha co-founded the incubator along with a group of professors from the university—including Kreshnik Hoti, Besnik Krasniqi, Skender Kaciu and Mentor Thaci—and Vice Rector Faton Berisha. However, the idea resulted from a white paper published in February 2016 by the advisory committee of the Transformational Leadership

Program—Scholarships and Partnerships. The advisory committee provides policy recommendations for higher education institutions in Kosovo. The paper made its way up to university faculty and leadership, resulting in the exciting possibilities that Fusha now promotes and supports.

The availability of a venture incubator in Kosovo's largest public higher education institution has the potential to significantly impact Kosovo youth and the future of both the university and the country. VentureUP is expected to begin operating in September 2017.

“We want to encourage a shift in mindset, and we want to have people thinking about entrepreneurship,” says Fusha. “I’ve had the chance to witness how my father helped others through developing their business ideas and inspiring them into entrepreneurship from a very young age.” She describes in exuberant detail how developing and growing VentureUP as a center for entrepreneurship at the University of Prishtina will help graduates who had a previously undefined career path to start their own enterprise—for profit or social venture—and create their own livelihoods.

“I really believe VentureUP has the potential to dramatically impact the future for Kosovo's youth. We want to help create and support startups, which in turn will lead to more jobs and even a change in thinking for people whose ventures may not succeed,” explains Fusha.

USAID's five-year Transformational Leadership Program—Scholarships and Partnerships, which runs from 2014 to 2019, strives to develop a cadre of leaders that will drive change in priority economic, political and social areas in Kosovo. To date, in addition to 185 Master Degree scholarships, 102 professional certificate scholarships have been awarded, and four university partnerships have been established.