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SA students win international competition for job-seekers' app

A team of South African students has won the 2017 Geneva Challenge (GC) by developing Umvozu – a mobile application that links job-seekers with employers, allowing job-seekers to upskill themselves through training modules delivered in a gamified process.

The app also allows employers to access the job characteristics of the app users in order to make better judgements about who to employ.

The GC: Advancing Development International Student Competition, was launched in 2014 with the generous support of Ambassador Jenö Staehelin, the first Swiss envoy to the United Nations when the alpine country joined in 2002. It encourages interdisciplinary teams of Master's students to propose solutions to the world's development problems. This year, the challenge was to explore employment's role in fostering social and economic development.

The SA winning team was assembled by Sakhe Mkosi. It comprised Mkosi, Fuaad Coovadia and Boitumelo Dikoko, who all studied their undergraduate degrees at UCT while another member of the team, Kabelo-Keitumetse Murray, studied at the Witwatersrand University. Currently Murray, Fuaad and Mkosi are studying at Oxford University while Dikoko is pursuing his Master's degree in Mechatronics at UCT.

Says Dikoko: "As we were all in different parts of the world most of the time – at a certain point one of our team members was in Asia – we had to work remotely and delegate tasks as we moved along with the project. Geneva was the very first time we were all in one physical space at the same time.

"The whole team is very honoured to have even made it to the finals, so winning was an even greater honour. Even before finding out that we would be going to the finals, we spent time planning the implementation process by creating partnership and planning out the platform. We all know that unemployment, which is closely linked to skill deficiency, is a serious issue in South Africa, so we are now continuing to work on the project as we have an opportunity to change someone's life forever."

Coovadia says the problem with job seeking in South Africa is that it is time-consuming, costly and inefficient.

A total of 135 projects from around the world were submitted, with three making it to the final. These were Umvuzo, a skills-centred mobile application for the South African labour market; Delala, an online job-matching system to mitigate urban youth unemployment in Colombia; and NetworkEffect, a solution to connect small businesses and freelance service providers in Pacific Island communities.

Monetary awards of 10 000 Swiss francs (about R1.4 million), 5 000 francs (about R71 000) and 2 500 francs (almost R36 000) were presented to the three teams by Kofi Annan, High Patron of the Geneva Challenge.

Graduate Institute's Professor Martina Viarengo, who is the President of the Geneva Challenge Academic Steering Committee, announced that the theme for the 2018 Geneva Challenge would be climate change.

ENDS

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