

## **Connected African Women Tech Founders (Tech Africa Women – TAW)**



**Concept note - Building a Strong Women Co-founded Tech Startup Pipeline and Community in Africa**

**Initiative by ECA - Technology, Climate Change and Natural Resource Management Division – Technology and Innovation Section**

**Program 2022 (TAW 1.0)**

### **I. Background**

The COVID-19 has exacerbated existing inequalities and vulnerabilities, raising renewed concerns about the gender digital divide. In Africa, women researchers account for only 30% of the entire tertiary education sector. The gender parity in professional and technical jobs is high at 0.68, like the global average. However, women and girls across the continent continue to be under-represented in Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics (STEAM) sectors. With the lowest Internet penetration rate, the African region has the widest digital gender gap globally, with only 22.5 percent of women using the Internet, compared with 33.8 percent of men.

ECA recognizes the need to implore digital technologies in a holistic manner that encompasses social and economic benefits of greater equality, promoting positive outcomes. To build awareness about the gender digital divide, including the gap in digital skills, and to facilitate discussions among policymakers and stakeholders to break down barriers towards empowering girls and young women to become computer programmers actively, creators, and designers, ECA is planning to launch the “Connected African Women Tech Founders (Tech Africa Women – TAW)” initiative to place young women on track to create and grow their tech businesses.

Empowering, connecting, and supporting women to lead impactful tech startups and businesses is the core of this program. As the gender gap is alarming due to the lack of women’s presence in the African tech entrepreneurial ecosystem from the startup playground to the investment industry to innovative corporations, this initiative is designed to advocate and promote female

tech startup founders. Women founders tend to hire more diverse teams that are indispensable for a stronger bottom line of startups, fostering therefore value creation for the economy and society.

Building a cohort of quality startups, ready to go to market and seed funding, and this through a smart collaboration scheme of relevant stakeholders for very early-stage startups is one of the key components of this program. Building a sustainable network and connecting our founders with existing networks will create synergies and connect ecosystems.

## **II. Objective**

The potential of female founders is massive and far away from being fulfilled. This concept combines ecosystem exploration, incubation, tech development, and market and investment readiness.

This program endeavors to place a strong emphasis on community and network building, connecting female founders for synergies and learning as well as connecting them with relevant stakeholders of the African startup ecosystem.

**UNECA:** United Nations Economic Commission for Africa's mission is to deliver ideas and actions for an empowered and transformed Africa; informed by the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063. The mission is guided by ECA's five new strategic directions which are:

- (a) Advancing ECA's position as a premier knowledge institution that builds on its unique position and privilege to bring global solutions to the continent's problems and take the local solution to the continent; Goal 4
- (b) Developing macroeconomic and structural policy options to accelerate economic diversification and job creation;
- (c) Designing and implementing innovative financing models for infrastructure, and for human, physical and social assets for a transforming Africa;
- (d) Contributing solutions to regional and transboundary challenges, with a focus on peace security, and social inclusion as an important development nexus;
- (e) Advocating Africa's position at the global level and developing regional responses as a contribution to global governance issues.

Therefore, ECA by closely collaborating with corporations for implementing the three pillars of this initiative aims to accelerate the transformation of project ideas and prototypes into validated business models, ready for market and ready for investment. It will build communities and alliances to aggregate opportunities for women entrepreneurs and maximize impact by focusing on the below objectives:

- Empower female entrepreneurs to leverage their skills to build strong tech startups
- Provide the proper foundation to find long-term success through entrepreneurship
- Create an environment that builds meaningful partnerships for improvement to inspire, establish synergies, and build confidence.

- Promote entrepreneurship through digital technology (encourage leadership and confidence).
- Promote development of tech solution, solving the continents problems
- Monitor, measure, map the innovative climate for young women in the region.
- Establishing factors inhibiting the young women entrepreneurial environment in the area and what can be done to improve.
- Consolidate a better understanding and mapping of the diverse startup ecosystems in the targeted countries and create sustainable linkages

### **III. Program Scope:**

This is a five-month program incorporating boot camp training and competition of idea stage startups per country that will be organized in 4 African countries (Tunisia, Senegal, Tanzania, and Ethiopia) and will have winners that will be awarded for performing best on the per country competitions; an incubation program of 8 startups for the country competition winners (12 participants); and demo day event following the incubation program to recognize the progress of the country winners and pitch their advanced startup project for the winners of winners award.

The main pillars will be as follows:

#### **1. Pillar 1: Boot Camp (Exploring Founders, Training, Pitching Competition, and Selecting of Best Performers)**

A series of startup boot camps and pitching competitions will be organized in the agreed 4 cities. An exploration of the ecosystem and mapping of key actors will be delivered in preparation for every pitching competition to serve the objective of pillar 4 (African tech community building). Bootcamps and pitch coaching will be offered to participating female entrepreneurs in preparation for the country pitching competition. The competition will have first and second place winners where the best pitch (first runner) in each one of the 4 selected cities will access a \$2000 grant to build their Minimum Viable Product (MVP).

#### **2. Pillar 2: Incubation**

The selected startups (best performers of each country) will be supported in an incubation program with a focus on Tech readiness of the MVP, Investment Readiness to raise the first round (fundraising) and, Go to market readiness. Startups will access mutualized resources to accelerate their growth (Tech developers, Marketing, UX, Entrepreneurs in Residence, etc). The women participants will be virtually following the support through assigned trainers/experts and feasible platforms (the best tools and services founders need in the early days of building their product).

#### **3. Pillar 3: Demo Day**

Startups get to showcase the projects to which they're dedicating their time and effort. It's designed to put the founders in their best light and is released on a specific day. This event will be taking place in the UNECA Conference Center in Addis Ababa. National

investors, partners, and key players in the Ethiopian ecosystem will be mobilized for this demo day including the four country best performers (12 participants) who were supported on the incubation program. A jury will select the best team which will get a \$ 7000 grant.

#### **4. Pillar 4: Community Development Activities:**

A series of activities will be delivered to connect women entrepreneurs on the continent and startup support organizations concerned by the development of female entrepreneurship to create Pan African female founders community:

- Mobilization of successful large African startups as well as big techs to build an alliance for women entrepreneurship. Contribution of large startups could vary from availing their infrastructure as a platform for relevant startups, mentoring, opening networks, etc.
- Networking events, in partnership with existing women leaders' communities
- Entrepreneur secondment/ shadowing
- Startup talks
- Startup ecosystem connection events
- Training/ mentoring sessions, Masterclasses, open events

#### **IV. Role of Stakeholders**

**ECA in partnership with Betacube** (Betacube an implementing partner is a venture builder created in 2019, co-creating tech Startups with exceptional founders. Betacube focused so far on fintech and mobility. Betacube collaborates closely with corporations as development partners for its startups as well as for corporate innovation programs. Betacube's core business is the creation of quality startups and securing their growth and funding path. This setup allows Betacube to create startups that are connected with key VC players and create an incentive for Startups to move faster and focus on their product and market. We work with exceptional individuals, experienced business people, and technologists to support young entrepreneurs and leading companies to turn big challenges into successful startups.

- Identifies partners and ambassadors in the four selected cities, maps key stakeholders per country, prepares and delivers pitching competition, including communication and reach out
- Provides a full incubation and coaching program for selected startups with tech support, business model and market validation, administrative and legal support, organizational support, preparation for fundraising, access to partners and network
- Build a network of women founder in Africa and connect with existing relevant networks for joint initiatives and actions
- Invests in the delivery of program
- Supports with facilitating contacts and access to partners in countries and internationally
- Estimated budget of \$ 221, 000 USD for the program implementation including the winners' grant per country and for demo day.

## **V. Expected impact:**

This program combines two components that are essential to the success of startups in the pre-seed stage: incubation and networking. This program also creates an innovation ecosystem round the supported startups, including development partners, experts, potential customers. Potential investors will find this setup attractive since they can access a quality, supported pipeline. Connections between African female co-founded startups, international partners and ecosystem players will be built.

Creating a community of female leaders is extremely relevant not only to our continental agenda to push forward toward innovation, digital transformation and empowering women leaders to be at the decision making avenue but also to close the gender gap using technology and promoting African female talents as role models to inspire our younger generations and build a strong community of women leaders and female-led ventures who can grow the tech-industry in Africa and beyond.

The successful implementation of this program and its completion is a direct contribution to the policy recommendations stipulated within the continental Digital Transformation Strategy that had been endorsed for implementation by the AU heads of States summit in February 2020 and 'The Africa we want' 2060 agenda. These strategies have crafted digital skills, the entrepreneurial mindset and investment in technology as well as the gender aspect of the digital divide as a core area for sustainable continental development that seeks extensive intervention and commitment. As a result, the expected outcomes from participation in the "Connected African Women Tech Founders (Tech Africa Women -TAW)" program are:

- Support young women founders to create and grow tech businesses
- Expose women founders to innovation and training through a professional customized incubation program.
- Map and assess the challenges, innovation and key actors of the entrepreneurial ecosystem in Africa
- Prepare and support women founders' entry into the market.
- Connect women founders to key stakeholders, investors and potential partners
- Explore and map 6 startup ecosystems in Africa and animate them through a pitching competition and build sustainable connections between these ecosystems.
- Showcase and promote tech-innovations and startups led by these female leaders.
- Stimulate more job creation for young people through supporting women founders launch their startups
- Create a community of African female leaders to share collective knowledge, resources and funding opportunities
- Encourage leadership and confidence in female-led startups
- Create regional attention on successful women led startups through media

TAW initiative aims to train young African females with idea-stage tech startups and provide an incubation program that supports the transformation of their idea and prototypes into validated business models, ready for market and ready for investment products. Through this human capital-focused initiative, ECA can advance its position as a premier knowledge institution by motivating creativity on local solutions to tackle the continents' problems; initiating macroeconomic and structural policy development options to accelerate economic diversification and job creation; designing and implementing innovative financing models for infrastructure, and for human, physical and social assets; and advocating Africa's position at the global level and developing regional responses as a contribution to global governance issues.

Tech African Women (TAW) is a 5 months intensive female entrepreneurial development program that offers you and your team an exclusive opportunity to transform your community, acquire new skills, increase business visibility, access funds and connect with other brilliant African female entrepreneurs. It provides solutions to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by increasing the human capacity of female entrepreneurs who desire to understand how to play a role in the continent's development and want to deep dive into building thriving socially impactful startups. Participants are selected from diverse sectors in development from different countries: Tunisia, Tanzania, Senegal & Ethiopia and encouraged to commit to this African Elevator for an impactful entrepreneurial journey. In this journey, we will enable female entrepreneurs through an immersive learning experience, fostering collaborations and co-creation while learning from sector experts and peers.