

Strategies arising from AWIEF Conference to impact African business landscape

Issued by [ICO Conferences & Events](#)

23 Oct 2017

The prestigious conference of the Africa Women Innovation and Entrepreneurship Forum (AWIEF) held in Cape Town on 5 and 6 October has resulted in numerous strategies which could have a dramatic impact on the influence of African businesswomen and entrepreneurs in the continent's socio-economic environment. Over 500 delegates, 60 speakers and 40 exhibitors took part.



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Irene Ochem, AWIEF Founder and Chief Executive Officer described it as “an awesome convocation of people for a specific purpose. And not just any people, and not an insignificant purpose.”

The conference theme was: "Equity, impact and inclusive growth towards Agenda 2030 and a sustainable African future." Stakeholders from the entire entrepreneurship ecosystem from government to business and investors gathered to find means of addressing roadblocks to the development of women-led businesses which are poised to affect Africa's future. Among these hurdles were gender stereotypes and difficulties in gaining access to finance, education and training, and markets.

Participants included African women entrepreneurs from across the continent, ministers from numerous African governments, ambassadors and diplomats, stakeholders from several prestigious financial institutions, UN Women, multinational corporates, small start-ups and aspiring women entrepreneurs as well as many illustrious guests, such as Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu and his wife, and the Executive Mayor of Cape Town, Patricia de Lille.

Executive Mayor de Lille pointed out that women make up more than 50% of Africa's population. She said that in connecting and strengthening partnerships with stakeholders across Africa, women's economic empowerment, organisation and business networks would accelerate the continent's socio-economic progress.

Vanessa Mounkar, Director of gender, women and civil society at the African Development Bank, Côte d'Ivoire, emphasised the need for governments to develop good regulatory frameworks that would create appropriate environments for women entrepreneurs. Zizipho Nyanga, CEO of Old Mutual's Masisizane Fund added that women entrepreneurs should benefit from both social and financial returns, becoming credible mentors and role models who could inspire and motivate others.

AWIEF's flagship Growth Accelerator Programme was magnificently showcased as 10 South African women entrepreneurs

who had previously participated in the programme pitched their businesses to the audience of business leaders, investors and governments. The Programme supports women-owned enterprises with business modelling and growth strategy needed to scale up, become investment ready and develop entrepreneurship leadership. It will be replicated across several African countries.

A highlight of the 2017 conference was the recognition and celebration of outstanding female entrepreneurs in seven different categories during the inaugural AWIEF Awards.

These were Deola Sagoe, House of Deola (Nigeria): Global Brand Award; Hyacintha Ntuyeko, Kasole Secrets Company Ltd (Tanzania): Young Entrepreneur Award; Temie Giwa-Tubosun, Lifebank (Nigeria): Tech Entrepreneur Award; Sonia Paiva, Woman Farmer Foundation (Swaziland): Agri Entrepreneur Award; Sabetha Mwambenja, Covenant Bank for Women Tanzania Ltd (Tanzania): Empowerment Award; Ndidi Nwuneli, LEAP Africa (Nigeria): Social Entrepreneur Award; Stella Okoli, Emzor Pharmaceutical Industries Limited (Nigeria): Lifetime Achievement Award.

Ochem is confident that the networks and connections established and reinforced at the conference will accelerate the momentum for transformation in Africa's socio-economic environment.

"There was active and energetic participation at each session, with positive and constructive contributions from delegates from every facet of business and government. Among initiatives already in the pipeline are a continent-wide business directory with a database of African women entrepreneurs, and plans for a digital community of women entrepreneurs, an online resource for e-learning and capacity building, providing comprehensive support and business models to help young entrepreneurs.

"We are all positive about events and initiatives to come. All I can say is, 'Watch this space!'"

For further information and to make reservations for AWIEF 2018, email info@awieforum.org or phone +27 21 826 8878.

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