

Application for the SAIS Gender Competition 2024

Who are we?

SAIS – Scaling digital Agriculture Innovations through Start-ups is a global project implemented by GIZ and funded by BMZ, BMGF and the Bayer Cares Foundation. It offers a company development and accelerator programme for African tech start-ups in the agriculture, food and livestock sectors. Through our one-year Investment Readiness Programme (IRP), we aim to improve the “investment readiness” of the start-ups so that they become more attractive for business partners and investors and in the end are able to raise funds for scaling. The start-ups supported must offer a digital product that provides a positive impact for its users in the fields of income, good nutrition or adaption to climate change. So far, SAIS has been working with close to 70 start-ups from over 20 African countries. The start-ups supported have acquired more than 500.000 new customers of which about 45% are women. Of these customers, close to 80% reported an increase in income (at least +50% income). In addition, more than half the start-ups have raised follow-on investments, in total about 37 million USD, of which more than 75% is private and venture capital. Given the fact that private funding for ag- and food tech start-ups in Africa is low (around 120 million USD in total in 2022 accordingly to Disrupt Africa, 2022), SAIS is an important supporter for the ag- and food tech vertical in Africa.

Why should we win this competition?

African agriculture is predominantly female. About 60% of the work in African agriculture is done by women. These women suffer from hardship and disadvantages. The digital innovations of the start-ups that SAIS is working with are developing and deploying help to improve the lives of women in agriculture in Africa. SAIS is combining technology, private capital and the creativity of young entrepreneurs into an innovative approach to foster agricultural and rural development and benefiting women. In addition, SAIS puts special emphasis on supporting female founders and female start-up managers to succeed in the still largely male-dominated start-up and tech scene. Start-ups have the potential to change the world and improve the lives of women. SAIS is contributing to this and therefore should be part of the GIZ Gender Competition.

What is driving our female initiative engagement?

Women are central to African agriculture. At the same time, they are confronted with many challenges: First, limited access to finance, technical training and market opportunities: The general access of women to technology and training and women's financial inclusion is low in many African countries (Mastercard, 2022). Second, low participation of women in the innovation process: Women's participation in designing and using innovation to improve their economic state is low in Africa (World Intellectual Property Organization, 2019). Third, the work of women – be it in the field or at home – is often not paid for, putting them further at disadvantage. Fourth, women face more difficulties than men to raise investment in order to improve their productive opportunities. Different studies have shown that the gender gap, especially the investment gender gap, in Africa is one of the highest globally (Global Entrepreneurship Monitor, 2020). In the context of start-ups, investment raising is crucial and especially in this area male-led start-ups raised three times as much in total investments than female-led start-ups (Briter Bridges & World Bank, 2021). This discrepancy can be attributed to distinct framings within the fundraising process (Kanze et al., 2018) and skepticism regarding the capabilities of female entrepreneurs.

SAIS considers these issues as key factors to be addressed to embrace gender equality. Of the 67 start-ups supported so far, 70% have a female founder or co-founder or a female-led management team. We believe that female founders and managers are essential to develop and deploy solutions and

products that matter for women in the diverse agricultural value chains, give them more opportunities and improve their livelihoods.

What are we doing to counteract this gender gap?

Our ambition is two-fold. On the one hand side, our aim is to enable women entrepreneurs, particularly in the agriculture, food and livestock sectors to feel powerful and legitimate and to have concrete and effective tools to tackle the systemic discrimination they face in the ecosystem. On the other hand side, we support start-ups in developing, deploying and scaling solutions that matter for women in African agriculture and help to make their lives easier. In order to do so, we use several approaches: In the selection of the start-ups, we put special emphasis on female-run ventures as well as ventures that offer solutions dedicated to female actors of the value chains. Once a start-up is taking part in our IRPs, there are specialized support options for female founders and female management staff, like the Female Leader Circle (FLC), which offers female entrepreneurs a safe space to exchange and learn in dialogue with experienced female coaches and mentors, or the Female Founder Award (FFA), an award to honor and support new female start-up ideas and potentials. Moreover, the female-run start-ups receive a row of supporting services to improve their product, manage their teams, or raise investments.

So far, we have worked with many amazing female founders, three of them we would like to introduce in the following, so that they can share their stories for changing African agriculture:

I, Ms. Dee Punungwe, co-founded GGEM Farming in 2018. The commitment to promoting gender equality is reflected in the composition of its board, which boasts a remarkable 5 out of 7 highly qualified women members. This diversity has resulted in a more inclusive decision-making process that considers the unique needs and perspectives of women farmers.

Through its programming, we empower women farmers by providing them with access to quality inputs at 0% interest, extension services and a fair marketplace which all were historically less available to women, due to patriarchal structure dominance in rural Malawi. The family-focused financial literacy training offered by us, equips women with essential skills to better plan, save, and diversify their income streams while prioritizing their vital needs as women and mothers. By doing so, we lay the groundwork for the financial inclusion of rural populations in the broader economy, while championing that women can and do lead the fight against hunger.

*Through these initiatives women farmers have seen significant improvements in their income, access to healthcare services, education, and food security for their families. **Our work is a testament to how dismantling patriarchal structures can lead to greater gender equality, inclusive economic growth and in Malawi's case, food security from household to national level.***



Dee Punungwe
Co-Founder of GGEM Farming



Amira Cheniour
Co- Founder & CEO

I, Amira Cheniour, founded Seabex in 2020. The strong commitment to gender diversity is reflected by 60% of female team members. I've tailored our workplace to support the professional and family lives of our employees, offering a special corner for mothers who do not have childcare options and granting leave during menstruation to respect women's health needs. As a woman leading in the AgTech industry, I serve as an example, encouraging other women to reach their potential in a typically male-dominated field.

Our diverse initiatives demonstrate our ethos of adaptability and support. Firstly, Seabex is deploying a project in Benin that will empower 400 female farmers. Secondly, flexible remote work policies for parents especially for our team members juggling their

seabex

career with young children. My own experience, recognized through the Star Female Entrepreneur award in Berlin and among the 30 remarkable personalities changing the food scene in Africa in 2023, serves as a testament to the success women can achieve when they gain the support needed.

At Seabex, we're not just advocating for equality but actively implementing changes that ensure every woman in our team feels valued, supported, and equipped to succeed. My involvement in female empowerment programs like SheStarts Africa and Women in ClimateTech amplifies our impact, helping us build a strong support network for women to overcome professional challenges.

I, Eburn Feludu, founded Kokari Coconuts in 2016 and with a team made up of 80% of talented and dedicated women. Kokari Coconuts is an integrated coconut production and processing company offering a diverse range of premium coconut-based wholesome foods, personal care, and lifestyle products.

More recently, I have established Africa's first-of-a-kind coconut-themed experience center, Kokari Café. With support from the SAIS Programme, we are launching 20 outlets in 2024. The Kokari Café Minis are built and branded by our company, we screen the women who will co-own the outlets, we supply them finished products from our factory at wholesale price, and they sell through the KC minis at retail price. **These mini Kokari Cafe outlets will therefore be an income-generating sales outlet for women via our branches.** Our vision is to use this empowerment scheme to create a distribution platform for our company, fostering a mutually beneficial relationship between People and Profits, in alignment with the SDG goals.

Furthermore, I have trained 40 women in value addition and entrepreneurship on behalf of the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture (IITA) in 2022. At the end of the training, I created an online community platform where the women could continue to share resources and support each other after the training workshop. Acknowledged for my dedication to sustainable entrepreneurship, I served as the inaugural Chairperson of ALL Nigeria at the 2019 Women Economic Forum and received recognition as an outstanding entrepreneur at UNITAR's 60th Anniversary Exhibition in Geneva.



Eburn Feludu

Founder of Kokari Coconuts & Company



Literature Index

Global Entrepreneurship Monitor 2021/22 Women's Entrepreneurship Report (GEM 2022).

<https://www.gemconsortium.org/reports/womens-entrepreneurship>

Kanze et al. (2018). We Ask Men to Win and Women Not to Lose: Closing the Gender Gap in Startup Funding. The Academy of Management Journal.

The African Tech Startups Funding Report 2022 (Disrupt Africa 2022). <https://disrupt-africa.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/The-African-Tech-Startups-Funding-Report-2022.pdf>

The Mastercard Index of Women Entrepreneurs 2021 (Mastercard, 2022). <https://www.mastercard.com/news/media/phwevxcc/the-mastercard-index-of-women-entrepreneurs.pdf>

Venture Capital and the Gender Financing Gap: The Role of Accelerators (International Finance Corporation, 2020).

https://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/topics_ext_content/ifc_external_corporate_site/venture+capital/vc-resources/vc-gender-financing

World Intellectual Property Organization, 2019. [Gender equality in African agriculture: An innovation imperative* \(wipo.int\)](https://www.wipo.int)

In Search Of Equity: Exploring Africa's Gender Gap in Startup Finance (Briter Bridges & World Bank, 2021).

<https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/297001633493250648/pdf/In-Search-Of-Equity-Exploring-Africa-s-Gender-Gap-in-Startup-Finance.pdf>