

Women entrepreneurs pitch innovation for Africa to UK investors

Secretary of State for International Trade, Elizabeth Truss, and Her Majesty's Trade Commissioner for Africa, Emma Wade-Smith OBE, spoke about investment opportunities in women-led businesses in Africa at a business event in London on 16 January.

11 women entrepreneurs pitched their businesses to UK investors at Start-up Night Africa, ahead of the UK-Africa Investment Summit next week. Founders, CEOs and entrepreneurs from a range of sectors, including new technology and sustainable fashion, were represented at the event.

The Department for International Trade (DIT) and the Department for International Development (DfID) hosted the women's event in partnership with Lionesses of Africa (the fastest growing network of women entrepreneurs in Africa) with the support of the Secretary of State for International Trade, Elizabeth Truss MP, and Her Majesty's Trade Commissioner for Africa, Emma Wade-Smith OBE.

Her Majesty's Trade Commissioner for Africa, Emma Wade-Smith OBE said:

The key to making a positive, lasting difference and creating more jobs on the African continent through investment is addressing the current gender imbalance for men and women business leaders seeking investment.

Events such as 'Start-Up Night Africa' demonstrate the impact we can have by connecting Africa's entrepreneurs with the UK's business community; creating spaces and places where businesspeople can connect and find new partners, buyers or investors.

The entrepreneurs showcased here today demonstrate just a fraction of the scale and range of opportunities that exist in Africa for UK investors and exporters.

The entrepreneurs taking part came from a range of sectors including technology, manufacturing, food and drink. Common to all the businesses is a strong focus on sustainability. The event connected the women-owned businesses to new markets, funding and partnerships in the UK.

[Lionesses of Africa](#) is a social enterprise supporting Africa's women entrepreneurs by building and delivering development programmes, business tools and a range of other resources to help them share, connect, and ultimately grow their businesses.

At the event Lionesses of Africa Founder and CEO, Melanie Hawken announced that they have met their initial target of 1 million women entrepreneurs in their community. Big initiatives to be launched in the first quarter of 2020 will be the Lionesses of Africa Foundation, which will have its new global headquarters in London.

Speaking about the decision to make London the home of the new foundation, Melanie Hawken said:

At Lionesses of Africa, we understand the power of partnerships to make big things happen for women entrepreneurs. The UK is already a strong strategic partner for our organisation, and this is an important marketplace for Africa's high growth potential women entrepreneurs to access. Making the UK the home for our Foundation was a simple decision for us to make.

A panel of entrepreneurs discussed the challenges of brand building, opportunities for Africa's women entrepreneurs to break into global marketplaces, the current interest from global markets in women-owned brands with a strong backstory, and the investment climate for Africa's women-owned businesses looking to grow.

The three panellists were women entrepreneurs that had built successful and growing African businesses and brands. They were Monica Musonda, Founder of Zambian-based food processing company, Java Foods; Adenike Ogunlesi, founder of Ruff N Tumble; and Suzie Wokabi, founder of Suzie Beauty.

Secretary of State for International Trade, Elizabeth Truss MP said:

We want to partner with more women to enable them to innovate, grow their businesses and reach their potential.

It's exciting to see such a range of sectors represented and such innovative ideas being presented and brought to life.

This event was not only an incredible opportunity for women entrepreneurs, but also a chance to harness the benefits of growing these hubs in Africa.

I look forward to seeing how their businesses grow as they take advantage of opportunities in the UK.

Many of the entrepreneurs showcased at this event are building successful businesses in traditionally male-dominated sectors such engineering, power generation, and water processing and drilling. In the process they are breaking gender stereotypes and perceptions that exist around the types of businesses women entrepreneurs are building and at the event included

founders such as Pumza Ndlotyeni, co-founder of Gebane Engineering Services, Carmen Williams, founder of Trecento, and Christelle Kwizera, Founder of Water Access Rwanda.

Fashion, beauty and wellness, and sustainability were other sectors showcased at the event, and are big employers on the African continent. High growth women entrepreneurs presenting their businesses from these sectors include Mariam Hazem, Co-founder of Reform Studio, who has identified the UK as a new and important market, and Nicola Luther, CEO & Creative director of Lunar an established and growing sustainable fashion brand who announced her new collection at the event.

The event builds on the successful Gender-Lens Investing breakfast event hosted by Emma Wade-Smith in Johannesburg on 13 November last year, in the margins of the [African Development Bank's Africa Investment Forum](#) and the Royal visit to Johannesburg on 2 October when Emma Wade-Smith hosted the Duke and Duchess of Sussex and the Lionesses of Africa.

Following the event there will also be a roadshow in the UK focusing on women entrepreneurs from the African diaspora in London, Birmingham, Glasgow and Manchester.

The entrepreneurs include:

- Kerryne Krause, Founder of [eyeSlices](#)
- Brenda Katwesigye, Founder of [Wazi Vision](#)
- Adenike Ogunlesi, founder of [Ruff N Tumble](#)
- Carmen Williams, Founder of [Trecento](#)
- Monica Musonda, Founder and CEO of [Java Foods](#)
- Temi Giwa Tubosun, Founder and CEO of [Lifebank](#)
- Suzie Wokabi, founder of [Suzie Beauty](#)
- Eugenia Langa, Founder and CEO of [Nweba](#)
- Flora Mutahi, Founder and CEO of [Melvin Marsh International](#)
- Christelle Kwizera, Founder of [Water Access Rwanda](#)

- Pumza Ndlotyeni, Co-founder of [Gebane Engineering Services](#)
- Mariam Hazem, Co-founder of [Reform Studio](#)
- Nicola Luther, CEO and Creative Director, [Lunar](#)

NOTES TO EDITORS

- For details on the UK-Africa Investment summit click [here](#).
- This event came ahead of the UK-Africa Investment Summit next Monday (20th January), which will create new lasting partnerships to deliver more investment, jobs and growth, benefiting both Africa and the UK. Photos available on request