

Women and Girls Startup Challenge launched

ABIDJAN, Ivory Coast - The Women and Girls Startup Challenge aims to give aspiring female entrepreneurs the opportunity to submit their projects online and to make a 10-minute presentation before a jury composed of seasoned professionals.



Vera Songwe.

The Executive Secretary of the UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), Vera Songwe has called on countries to give female creativity and innovation, “all the opportunities required in order to bear fruits and achieve sustainable and inclusive development”.

She made the statement at the launch of the *Women and Girls Startup Challenge*, in Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire, which took place at a meeting themed: *Attempting innovative and inclusive female transformation*.

The initiative is aimed at promoting female digital entrepreneurship, economic empowerment and business projects. It will also help to marshal funds for young female digital entrepreneurs.

Songwe, who serves as sponsor of the initiative, stressed that through collective commitment, girls and women should be supported to become what she termed as, “key, dynamic and strategic digital stakeholders”, through boosting their creativity.

She promised the young entrepreneurs that she would “leave no stone unturned” in bringing together the private sector,

policy-makers and associations to support the initiative.

"Your success could trigger the launch of a larger continent-wide movement," she said.

The Women and Girls Startup Challenge aims to give aspiring female entrepreneurs the opportunity to submit their projects online and to make a 10-minute presentation before a jury composed of seasoned professionals. Follow-up through mentorship or access to funding is also included.

In addition to the launch of the initiative, the executive secretary delivered remarks at the meeting, speaking on the sub-theme: *Contributing more efficiently to the sustainable development Agenda for girls and women through digitalisation.*

"While digital evolution is not a panacea, its opportunities for an effective participation of women in sustainable development and the benefits that they can derive from this process are immeasurable," she stated.

She noted that access and control of information on products, as well as the composition and other types of variables that are essential for the processing of these products, play a role in determining women's participation in value chains - from production to market sales. "This is essential, not only for the structural transformation of the African economy, but also for return on investment," she said.

The launch of the Women and Girls Startup Challenge falls within the context of the First Edition, of the *Femme, Numérique et Développement (Woman, Digitilisation and Development)*, also known as FENUD, which is the biggest event dedicated to girls and women in the digital space in Francophone Africa. The event was held in Abidjan from November 16 to 17, 2017.

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