Catalyzing Innovation and Entrepreneurship Ecosystems to Enhance Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment

CONTEXT

The Global Cleantech Innovation Programme (GCIP) for SMEs leverages the power of innovation and entrepreneurship to find solutions to the most pressing environmental problems while promoting economic growth. In addition to fostering an enabling policy and regulatory environment for innovation and entrepreneurship in the cleantech sector, GCIP enhances competitiveness of local start-ups and SMEs to develop and commercialise innovative solutions with high-impact potential for environmental and economic benefits.

A guiding principle of GCIP is that of equal opportunity for women and men to equally lead, participate in, and benefit from GCIP interventions.

The importance of gender equality and women’s empowerment – particularly women’s economic empowerment – is at the core of UNIDO’s mandate. UNIDO’s focus includes enhancing the role of women as drivers of poverty reduction and climate action, promoting women entrepreneurs and investors, and recognising the link between gender equality and safeguarding the environment, ultimately resulting in inclusive and sustainable industrialisation.

Since 2013, GCIP has demonstrated higher levels of women’s participation than other accelerator and incubator programmes, with approximately 25% of the 1,000 alumni supported-to-date being woman-led enterprises. Through targeted efforts, GCIP will continue to emphasise gender equality between 2021 and 2025.

From 2013 to 2019, UNIDO implemented GCIP in nine countries. GCIP II saw the expansion of the programme to 10 countries in 2021, including Cambodia, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Moldova, Morocco, Nigeria, South Africa, Turkey, Ukraine and Uruguay.

PROGRAMME OBJECTIVES AND APPROACH

GCIP seeks to foster private-sector initiative, entrepreneurship, and engagement, to accelerate the uptake of – and investment in – innovative cleantech solutions at scale. GCIP’s unique approach is in building the capacity of the private sector to deliver environmental benefits through transforming early-stage cleantech companies into fast-growing enterprises, while simultaneously developing cleantech innovation and entrepreneurship ecosystems in partner countries.

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COUNTRY EXPERIENCES FROM GCIP PHASE I


The programme adopted an active gender-mainstreaming strategy in 2015, which involved:
• The inclusion of a Most Promising Women Led Award, special women-only seminars, awareness campaigns, and gender sensitisation for all project partners, among others;
• 600 women entrepreneurs and 50 women mentors trained;
• Women comprised 25–40% of alumni team-leader positions;
• Women applications increased from 6% in 2014 to 15% in 2016; women-led semi-finalists increased from 7% to 28% of the total semi-finalists with 23 women-led teams represented in 2016;
• Three Women Business Growth centres established to promote women’s entrepreneurship;
• Advocacy campaign conducted to support women entrepreneurs embracing clean technology products.


• Women held 18–32% of team-leader positions;
• Social inclusiveness was bolstered through the delivery of a Women-Led Entrepreneur Award and a Youth-Led Entrepreneur Award in the 2015 cycle.


In 2017, a more tailored approach and broadened outreach was introduced to include more women, young and black entrepreneurs (aligned with national imperatives). This included strategic outreach and the use of special awards for women:
• Women semi-finalists increased from 4% in 2014 to 32% in 2017;
• 18 women-led entrepreneurial teams trained;
• 13 women trained as mentors, representing 22% of all mentors;
• 44% of GCIP judges were women;
• Media opportunities optimised to encourage women to consider entrepreneurship and cleantech careers.

UKRAINE (2016-2021)

GCIP Ukraine actively seeks to drive engagement of women entrepreneurship by inviting women to participate in the acceleration programme. In 2019, GCIP Ukraine achieved:
• 30% of GCIP Acceleration programme benefitting businesses and teams are led by women or with their active participation;
• 45% of mentors are women;
• 17% of judges are women;
• 60% of the PMU are women;
• In November 2019, GCIP Ukraine held an expert discussion on women empowerment, bringing together female representatives of business accelerators, coordinators of business schools for women, business founders and owners, and entrepreneurs.

GCIP PHASE II

GCIP II will place a strong focus on promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment through strategic gender-responsive action. Separate gender analyses and action plans will be developed for each GCIP partner country, customised to reflect the national contexts and priorities. Based on this, the project interventions will be gender-responsive to allow both women and men to equally lead, participate in, and benefit from GCIP.