



**EAST AFRICAN SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY COMMISSION
(EASTECO)**



CALL FOR PROPOSALS-Youth and Women Innovation and Entrepreneurship Challenge

Under the Creation of Opportunities for Youth and Women in Africa (COYWA) Programme

1. Background and Rationale

The East African Science and Technology Commission in partnership with the African Union Development Agency-New Partnership for Africa's Development (AUDA-NEPAD), is implementing the "Creating Opportunities for Youth and Women in Africa" (COYWA) Programme. This initiative aims to empower women and youth entrepreneurs across the eight EAC Partner States through ecosystem development, capacity building, and innovation support.

The East African Community (EAC) is home to a rapidly growing youth population and a dynamic cohort of women entrepreneurs who represent a critical driver of innovation, job creation, and inclusive economic growth. However, women and youth across the region continue to face persistent and interconnected challenges, including limited access to

finance, inadequate business development support, weak market linkages, skills gaps, and underdeveloped innovation ecosystems.

The Creation of Opportunities for Youth and Women in Africa (COYWA) Programme, implemented in partnership with AUDA-NEPAD and regional institutions, seeks to address these structural constraints by empowering women and youth as economic actors, innovators, and job creators. Within this framework, the Youth and Women Entrepreneurship Challenge is designed as a flagship competitive mechanism to identify, incubate, and support high-potential, scalable enterprises led by women and young people across the EAC Partner States.

The Challenge will combine grant financing, capacity building, mentorship, incubation, and regional exposure to accelerate innovative business solutions that address socio-economic and environmental challenges while contributing to sustainable development, regional integration, and employment creation.

2. Objectives of the Call

2.1 Overall Objective

To promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth in the EAC region by supporting innovative, scalable, and impact-driven enterprises led by youth and women, while strengthening youth leadership, employability, and economic participation across East Africa.

2.2 Specific Objectives

This Call for Proposals aims to:

- i. Identify and support high-potential youth- and women-led enterprises with innovative and scalable business models that demonstrate strong potential for sustainable growth and measurable social or environmental impact.
- ii. Enhance entrepreneurial, innovation, and business management capacities of selected beneficiaries by enhancing enterprise models that create employment, income opportunities, and skills pathways for youth and women.
- iii. Facilitate access to seed financing, mentorship, and incubation support for women and youth entrepreneurs.
- iv. Promote solutions that address priority social, economic, and environmental challenges in the EAC region.
- v. Strengthen regional entrepreneurship ecosystems and cross-border collaboration among innovators and start-ups by fostering collaboration between youth organisations, private sector actors, public institutions, and community stakeholders.

3. Scope and Priority Thematic Areas

The Entrepreneurship and innovation grants support small- to medium-scale, action-oriented initiatives implemented by eligible youth and women-led organisations. Funded projects should clearly demonstrate innovation, scalability, and measurable impact, and how proposed activities will contribute to the growth, sustainability, and impact of an existing social enterprise model.

Priority will be given to enterprise innovations operating in, but not limited to, the following thematic areas:

- i) Agriculture,
- ii) Health,
- iii) Education,
- iv) Environment Management,
- v) Digital innovation and ICT-enabled solutions
- vi) Energy and Infrastructure,
- vii) Industrialization and Trade,

The innovation projects are expected to contribute to one or more of the following strategic priority areas:

- i. **Enterprise Growth and Sustainability:** Strengthening the viability, scalability, and financial resilience of youth and women-led social enterprises, including improved business models, diversification of revenue streams, and access to markets.
- ii. **Skills Development and Employability:** Supporting demand-driven skills development aligned with labour market needs, entrepreneurship pathways, and the future of work, particularly for youth and women and marginalized groups.
- iii. **Ecosystem Enabling and Partnerships:** Building stronger linkages between youth and women-led enterprises, business support organisations, investors, public institutions, and community actors to create enabling environments for youth entrepreneurship.

4. Eligibility Criteria

4.1 Eligible Applicants

Applicants must meet all of the following criteria:

- i. Be youth-led, with young people aged 18–35 holding a majority role in governance and decision-making, and leading project implementation.
- ii. Be legally registered as a Start-up, MSME, cooperative, social enterprise, or innovation-driven enterprise.

- iii. Be registered and operating in one of the EAC Partner States: Burundi, DR Congo, Kenya, Rwanda, Somalia, South Sudan, Uganda, or Tanzania.
- iv. Have a business or innovation at minimum product design or prototype stage.
- v. Have an established revenue-generating activity that contributes meaningfully to organizational sustainability and mission delivery.
- vi. Have been operational for at least 12 months, with basic governance, financial management, banking, and results-tracking systems in place.
- vii. Demonstrate clear potential for scalability, sustainability, and job creation.

4.2 Ineligible Applicants

The following are not eligible:

- i. Individuals applying in their personal capacity.
- ii. Enterprises that are not youth- or women-led.
- iii. Political parties or partisan organisations.
- iv. Entities engaged in illegal or environmentally harmful activities.

5. Funding Modality and Support Package

5.1 Grant Size

- i. Up to USD 10,000 per selected enterprise.
- ii. A total of 16 youth- and women-led enterprises will be supported.

5.2 Duration

- Selected projects will be supported over a maximum period of 12 months, including incubation and post-award mentoring.

5.3 Non-Financial Support

In addition to grant funding, selected beneficiaries will receive:

- i. Participation in a 5-day regional entrepreneurship bootcamp.
- ii. A 2-month structured incubation programme.
- iii. Tailored mentorship and coaching from industry experts.
- iv. Access to EAC regional incubation facilities and networks.
- v. Opportunity to pitch at the EAC Regional Women and Youth Entrepreneurship & Innovation Conference.

6. Application and Selection Process

6.1 Application Procedure

Applicants must submit:

1. A completed Grant Application Form (as per COYWA template).
2. A brief business proposal, including:
 - Problem statement and solution
 - Market opportunity
 - Business model
 - Innovation and scalability
 - Social, economic, or environmental impact
3. A simplified budget and use of funds.
4. Proof of legal registration.
5. Selection and submission criteria are available on the 4th STI Conference website: <https://sti.easteco.org/>
6. The applications should be submitted not later than the 30th January 2026, by completing the online application form from website <https://sti.easteco.org/>
7. Selected applicants will be notified by 15th of February 2026. For more information contact: easteco@eachq.org of fmuyambi@eachq.org

6.2 Selection Criteria

Proposals will be assessed based on:

- i. Relevance to the objectives of the COYWA Programme
- ii. Degree of innovation and uniqueness
- iii. Scalability and sustainability of the business model
- iv. Potential for job creation and impact
- v. Capacity and commitment of the founding team
- vi. Gender and youth responsiveness

A regional evaluation committee comprising entrepreneurship, innovation, and industry experts will conduct the assessment.

7. Reporting and Accountability

Selected beneficiaries will be required to:

- i. Participate fully in capacity-building and incubation activities.
- ii. Submit brief progress and financial reports.
- iii. Demonstrate responsible use of grant funds.
- iv. Participate in monitoring, evaluation, and learning activities under the COYWA Programme.

8. Expected Results

Through this Call for Proposals, the Youth and Women Entrepreneurship Challenge is expected to achieve:

- i. Strengthened capacity of youth and women entrepreneurs in the EAC.
- ii. Incubation and acceleration of at least 16 high-potential enterprises (2 from each partner states)
- iii. Increased access to finance, mentorship, and regional markets.
- iv. Creation of new jobs and income opportunities.
- v. Enhanced visibility and participation of women and youth in regional innovation ecosystems.

9. Contacts

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