

PROGRAMME AIMS AT EMPOWERING WOMEN-LED ENTERPRISES WITH ESSENTIAL SKILLS



L-R: Mukembo from FutureLab Studio, Kigozi from Stanchart and Nalukwago from the ICT ministry with some of the winners recently at the Kampala Serena Hotel

BY SIMON OKITELA

In a significant boost for women in technology, five start-ups have each been awarded \$10,000 (about sh37m) in catalytic funding after emerging winners of the inaugural Futuremakers Women in Tech programme Uganda.

The awards ceremony also marked the graduation of 10 founders from the first cohort of the Women in Tech Accelerator Programme. The event was held recently at the Kampala Serena Hotel.

The programme, implemented by Standard Chartered Bank Uganda in partnership with The Innovation Village and FutureLab, is part of a three-year initiative aimed at empowering women-led enterprises with essential skills, financing and networks needed for sustainable growth.

Japheth Kawanguzi, the team lead at The Innovation Village, said the project has lived up to its expectations of strategically transforming the entrepreneurship landscape by intentionally positioning women in tech at the centre of Uganda's innovation agenda.

He said the judging panel evaluated each business based on profitability and sustainability, originality of technology and its contribution to social, economic

START-UPS WIN \$10,000 EACH IN FUTUREMAKERS WOMEN IN TECH

and environmental transformation.

"Beyond the idea, we also assessed the leadership team's vision, execution capacity and the entrepreneur's ability to deliver a confident and compelling pitch."

Speaking on behalf of Dr Aminah Zawedde, the permanent secretary at the Ministry of ICT and National Guidance, Lailah Nalukwago commended the programme for advancing Uganda's innovation agenda.

"I congratulate the graduates of the first cohort and the benefactors of the grant. Initiatives like this play a vital role in equipping women entrepreneurs with the skills and resources they need to access capital and markets," she said.

Nalukwago emphasised the importance of public-private partnerships in unlocking opportunities for women innovators, further noting that the initiative

aligns with the Government's tenfold agenda to grow Uganda's GDP to \$500b by 2040.

Margaret Kigozi, the head of corporate affairs, brand and marketing at Standard Chartered Bank, celebrated the achievement and the transformative power of women in technology.

"Today, we celebrate courage, innovation and the belief that when women lead in technology, they don't just change their own lives, but transform entire communities, entire economies, and our shared future," she said.

Kigozi called on stakeholders to work collaboratively to build a robust pipeline of investable women-led enterprises.

Standard Chartered Bank CEO Sanjay Rughani highlighted the urgent need for gender-responsive financing to address gaps in entrepreneurship.

"Most women-led start-ups in Uganda face a significant

funding gap. They receive just 1% of government contracts and generate 30% lower profits than their male counterparts due to lower capital usage and sector-based segregation," Rughani said.

He stressed that providing women with access to resources, mentorship and markets is essential for empowering communities and driving inclusive economic growth.

Arthur Mukembo, the head of FutureLab Studio at the Innovation Village, recently highlighted the programme's commitment to nurturing tech-enabled, impact-driven enterprise.

"With a focus on businesses that are revenue positive, the Women in Tech programme will offer a comprehensive platform for growth. These female entrepreneurs have undergone coaching and mentorship focusing on market validation, digital integration, investment readiness, and growth strategies. This experience is designed to enhance their business acumen, improve financial literacy and strengthen leadership capabilities," Mukembo said.



Rughani

■ WOMEN IN TECH

First launched in April 2025, the Women in Tech programme is part of Standard Chartered's global Futuremakers initiative.

It is specifically designed to support women-led micro and early-stage businesses by equipping them with the tools, resources, and networks needed to scale.

The programme addresses systemic challenges such as limited access to finance, mentorship, technical support, and markets that disproportionately affect female entrepreneurs, particularly in underserved communities.

Over the next three years, the programme will support up to 42 women-led businesses, preparing them to thrive in Uganda's rapidly evolving digital economy. By fostering long-term collaboration through the community of practice, the initiative encourages ongoing mentorship, shared learning and peer networking across all participating cohorts.

The Women in Tech programme reflects a broader commitment by Standard Chartered and its partners to address gender disparities in business leadership and innovation.

While women make up a significant portion of Africa's informal and micro-enterprise sector, they remain under-represented in formalised, tech-driven environments.