

AAIN targets 25,000 women in new incubation programme



'Anchor incubators' drawn from Central, Eastern, Northern, Western and the Islands region after the training. PHOTO/TREVOR LUTALO

The programme will combine technical training with mentorship, coaching and competitive business booster packages, alongside linkages with selected financial institutions.

BY TREVOR LUTALO

The African Agribusiness Incubators Network (AAIN) has launched a nationwide effort to support 25,000 young women, including refugees and women with disabilities, through a new capacity-building drive under the Sustainable Inclusive Youth Employment Pathways (SIYEP) programme.

AAIN, a member of the consortium led by the Agency for Accelerated Regional Development (AFARD) with support from the Mastercard Foundation, says the intervention is aimed at strengthening the country's business incubation system to help young women transition into dignified and sustainable work.

According to AAIN, SIYEP targets women aged 15 to 35, with 7 per cent reserved for refugee youth and 5 per cent for young women with disabilities. The consortium aims to transition at least 17,500 participants into decent employment across the country's five regions.

Speaking during a training session for partner incubators in Kampala on Friday, Mr Enock Ampumuza, the Business Incubation Management Specialist at AAIN, said the initiative marks a deliberate shift towards structured support for marginalised young women.

"Our target in the entire country is 25,000 young women between the age of 15 to 35," he said. "Out of the 25,000, 7 per cent should be refugees and 5 per cent young women living

with disabilities. We are targeting the marginalised, the underserved young women in our communities."

The training brought together 25 "anchor incubators" drawn from Central, Eastern, Northern, Western and the Islands region. They are reviewing a new Business Incubation Management (BIM) curriculum, developed by experts from Uganda and across Africa, which is expected to guide how incubators train and mentor participants.

"The intention of the curriculum is to strengthen the capacity of the business incubators in the entire country. The ultimate is to cascade down the incubation curriculum to the young people, to the young women entrepreneurs," Mr Ampumuza said.

He said the programme will combine technical training with mentorship, coaching and competitive business booster packages, alongside linkages with selected financial institutions.

"We have MOUs with some of the financial institutions in Uganda. We want to make sure they reach out to the young women, so that they are able to get credit facilities that are friendly to the young women," he said.

Market access, long cited as a barrier for young rural entrepreneurs, will be addressed through product aggregation by the incubators.

"The young women are not able to access the market on their own. If they have these mentors they will be able to penetrate into the market because their products will

THE PLAN

According to AAIN, the curriculum is expected to be rolled out across partner incubators once the review process is completed.

be aggregated with the anchor incubators."

Civil society groups working in refugee settlements say the support is timely. Ms Sandra Ajolorwot, the Monitoring and Evaluation specialist at Women and Rural Development Network (WORUDET), said conditions in Lamwo Refugee Settlement have deteriorated after food rations were cut.

"At the settlement currently, the refugees are facing different challenges because they have cut the food. Men are moving back to South Sudan to look for food, leaving young women with children to take care of and these are disadvantaged persons that cannot even afford the basic needs."

She said the programme will help WORUDET "fish those disadvantaged young women and uplift them so that they can have a start-up," adding that the inclusion of women with disabilities is critical.

"Persons with disabilities are left behind. This will be a great opportunity to pick them and uplift them so that they can survive on their own financially," she said.

Mr Apollo Segawa, Executive Director at CURAD Agribusiness Incubation Centre, said the curriculum will help correct gaps among institutions offering youth entrepreneurship training.

"There's a lot of training centres across the country, but they don't know exactly how to nurture and support young people to start a business," he noted.

He said incubation must ensure that ideas can become sustainable enterprises.

"The key skill is to ensure that the idea you have can make money and pay you as the entrepreneur an income before you employ others," he added.