Advancing Women’s Empowerment Fund | Call for Concept Notes

Issuance date: Monday, February 8, 2021
Deadline for submission of Concept Notes: Friday, March 5, 2021
Awards announced: By end of May 2021
Funding Type: Grant
Project Size: $50,000-$150,000

ANDE Challenge Funds
The Aspen Network of Development Entrepreneurs (ANDE) has run Catalyst and Challenge Funds since 2009 with the purpose of fueling initiatives poised to improve the capacity of organizations within the small and growing business (SGB) sector. These funds have taken many forms and addressed various sector challenges since then, but their core function remains constant – to award SGB support service providers with the risk-tolerant capital they need to test or pilot innovative approaches to SGB sector challenges and distribute learnings within the ANDE community and SGB sector at large. The Advancing Women’s Empowerment Fund (AWEF) was established as part of ANDE’s Gender Equality Initiative to use grant capital to test models for increasing investment into women-led SGBs in emerging markets. AWEF’s first round, launched in 2019, funded eight projects in South and Southeast Asia markets. The second round will award projects in eastern, western, and southern Africa.

The Advancing Women’s Empowerment Fund
The International Finance Corporation (IFC) estimates a $320 billion financing gap for women-led businesses in emerging markets. One of the most common methods of increasing access to finance is through business accelerator programs. ANDE’s Global Accelerator Learning Initiative (GALI) has found that on the whole acceleration helps boost financing, but not as much for women participants. A recent GALI report examined the trajectory of 14,000 ventures from over 160 countries to ask why accelerators are less effective in driving capital to women entrepreneurs. When comparing the experiences of women-led to male-led and mixed-gender led ventures, it was found that women-led ventures are underrepresented in acceleration programs, have less investment at application, and raise less in equity and new debt after acceleration.

1 Small and Growing Businesses (SGBs) are defined by ANDE as commercially viable businesses with five to 250 employees that have significant potential, and ambition, for growth. Typically, SGBs seek growth capital from $20,000 to $2 million USD.
2 SGB Service Providers are organizations that provide critical financial, educational, and business support services to small and growing businesses (SGBs) based on the conviction that SGBs will create jobs, stimulate long-term economic growth, and produce environmental and social benefits.
3 Women-Led SGBs or Women-Led Businesses are defined by ANDE for the Advancing Women’s Empowerment Fund as companies that have a woman in a leadership position with strategic decision-making authority and meet at least one of the following criteria, prioritizing companies founded and led by all-women teams: 1) founded and led by a team of at least 50% women; 2) have a woman currently serving in a top leadership role (CEO or other C-Suite, Executive Director, etc.) for at least one year; 3) 51% or more women ownership of the business.
5 GALI website.
There are supply and demand components to this financing gap. On the demand side, women often experience fear in sharing control of their business and struggle to navigate the investment landscape with lower levels of confidence, and lack of adequate financial literacy. On the supply side, accelerator programs fail to attract and select women applicants without representations in existing programs, and investment networks see lower numbers of women participants given male dominance. This is compounded by the fact that acceleration programs are often not designed to fit the unique needs of women entrepreneurs (such as care burdens and education gaps) and investors often leverage financial instruments (such as equity) and target sectors (such as ICT) that are less desirable for women. Both of these phenomena lead to differential investment outcomes. Finally, indirect and direct bias on the part of accelerators and investors creates a barrier to entry for women entrepreneurs.6

It is clear that acceleration and investment services as commonly delivered are not sufficient to close the financing gap for women-led businesses. The Aspen Network of Development Entrepreneurs (ANDE), with support from a U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) women’s economic empowerment fund, invites applications that address this gap by piloting, testing, or scaling models to catalyze private investment for women-led SGBs and strengthening gender-smart business practices in eastern, western, and southern Africa.

Regional Context: eastern Africa, western Africa, and southern Africa

While significant efforts have been made to channel venture and traditional lending capital to SMEs in eastern, western, and southern Africa, there is a lack of right-sized financing and capacity-building for SGBs. Without stronger coordination across SGB ecosystems, increased efficiency of local capital markets, and more tailored capacity-building services for SGBs, the financing and services gap will persist.7 These challenges are compounded for the women-led SGBs as the African Development Bank estimates a $42 billion financing gap for African women across sectors and value chains.8

Eastern, western, and southern Africa SGB markets have seen an increase in private and public capital earmarked for financial intermediaries and women entrepreneur customers, yet there exists a significant gender imbalance in who is allocating and receiving the capital. As capital providers, women are significantly underrepresented in the leadership of investment firms in comparison to male counterparts and even experienced women fund managers face additional challenges when branching off on their own. Research shows that greater representation of women on investment teams brings greater access to capital for women entrepreneurs.9 As capital recipients, women founders encounter unequal access to financing and capacity-building services. Women are often underrepresented among those applying to accelerators and those that do apply often don’t see the benefits. When they pursue financing, barriers like bias, confidence, communication, and education often keep women

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entrepreneurs disconnected from much-needed growth capital, even though women-owned businesses frequently outperform those led only by men.

In eastern, western, and southern Africa AWEF projects will fill critical gaps in funding for SGB intermediaries to unlock more capital for women-led SGBs and increase knowledge to improve the SGB ecosystems in the Africa region and globally.

**Guidelines**

**Intervention**
ANDE seeks concept notes to pilot, test, or expand scalable solutions that tackle the financing gap for women-led SGBs in eastern, western, and southern Africa to generate knowledge and proven solutions that can be replicated and scaled by the broader SGB sector. ANDE is specifically focused on submissions catalyzing early-stage, growth-oriented capital. We encourage submissions employing creative solutions to both supply and demand components of the gender financing gap and that fit any of the following categories:

- Gender transformative approaches to delivering acceleration services including recruitment, selection, cohort and program design, or other elements seen as constraints to the success of women entrepreneurs.
- Supplemental services delivered independently or in coordination with traditional accelerator programs, including tailored consulting services, bespoke matchmaking, investment facilitation, mentorship, or other approaches to address gender deficits in traditional acceleration.
- Novel approaches to catalyzing investment into the hands of women fund managers to address the systemic finance constraints that women entrepreneurs encounter.
- Innovative methods for sensitizing and influencing SGB support providers around the fundamental challenges (family life, social norms, talent opportunities) that women entrepreneurs face.

In its initial round, AWEF funded the following types of interventions to close the financing gap for women-led SGBs in East and Southeast Asia:

- A participatory design accelerator model
- A virtual mentorship program
- A women-only accelerator model
- A pathway to success report
- An equity-upside financing pilot
- A training program for angel investors

The full list of AWEF South and Southeast Asia winners can be found [here](link). ANDE encourages concept notes that build on or learn from these interventions, rather than replicating them. Proposed activities should also, when possible, build the capacity of implementing organizations to continue to expand access to financing for women-led SGBs after the funding has ended.

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10 [Accelerating Women-led Startups](link). Global Accelerator Learning Initiative.
11 [Gender Lens Investing: In Numbers](link). Gender Smart.
Qualifying Criteria

Geographic
SGB service providers with proposed projects in only the following eligible countries will be considered:

**Western Africa**  
Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte D'Ivoire, Ghana, Mali, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo

**Eastern Africa**  
Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda

**Southern Africa**  
Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland, Zambia, and Zimbabwe

Projects implemented in multiple countries within one region will be accepted. Applicants must justify projects implemented in multiple regions.

Unfortunately, projects taking place outside of these countries will not be considered. ANDE will award a minimum of one project per region with a total funding pool of $150,000 per region.

Organizational
Non-profit entrepreneur support organizations, such as incubators, accelerators, investors, capacity development providers, non-governmental organizations, operating (non-grantmaking) foundations, and research and advisory service providers, are qualified to apply. Government donor agencies, donor finance institutions, grantmaking foundations, and for-profit entities are not qualified to apply.

Given AWEF’s intention to tackle the gender financing gap in eastern, western, and southern Africa markets, non-profit organizations headquartered locally in these regions are strongly encouraged to apply. Additionally, consortiums involving locally-headquartered organizations and/or finance providers (banks, investors, corporations, etc.) are also encouraged to apply. Note, however, that AWEF funding cannot be used to support the contributions of for-profit consortium members. While partnerships and consortiums are advised, it is highly encouraged that a lead organization applies for the funding directly.

Qualified applicants may submit or be an implementing partner for up to two concept notes applications, but an organization can only either lead or co-implement one winning project. Applicants must submit the required documents by organization type and location listed in the AWEF Application Checklist in Appendix 1.

Financial
ANDE intends to fund a minimum of three projects for this round, from a total funding pool of USD $450,000. Submissions should be for activities of up to 12 months with a minimum total request of $50,000 and a maximum total request of US $150,000. This funding has been made possible with generous support from a U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) women’s economic empowerment fund, thus concept notes will be required to complete a subrecipient questionnaire, which is linked in the AWEF Application Checklist in Appendix 1.
The questionnaire is intended to evaluate if applicant organizations have measures in place to receive a subaward funded by the United States Government. Applicants will also need to be able to pass The Office of Foreign Asset Control (OFAC) clearance issued by the Aspen Institute.

**Language**

Applications submitted in English are strongly preferred; however, we will also accept them in French.

**Application Timeline**

**PHASE 1: CONCEPT NOTE**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Details</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monday, February 8, 2021</td>
<td>Issuance date</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tuesday, February 16, 2021</td>
<td>Office hours for applicant questions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wednesday, February 24, 2021</td>
<td>Office hours for applicant questions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monday, March 1, 2021</td>
<td>Deadline to submit questions (as needed)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Friday, March 5, 2021</td>
<td>Deadline to submit concept note</td>
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**PHASE 2: REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS (RFP)**

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<th>Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>Friday, March 19, 2021</td>
<td>Shortlisted applicants are notified to submit full proposal</td>
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<tr>
<td>Friday, April 16, 2021</td>
<td>Proposals due</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End of May 2021</td>
<td>Winners announced</td>
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**Concept Note Requirements**

To apply for an Advancing Women’s Empowerment Fund grant, please submit a concept note as a maximum 3-page written document, a 10-slide PowerPoint presentation, or a 3-5 minute video. Applications should include the below information and follow specific guidance depending on the chosen medium.

**Concept Notes Should Include:**

**General Overview**

- Title of project
- Identify lead organization and list partner organizations applying.
- Identify lead contact and list contact name, phone number, and email information
- Amount of request (USD$50,000 - $150,000 maximum)
- Timeframe of proposed project or program (12 months maximum)
- 1-4 sentence brief description of the request
Organizational Overview/Information
- A brief description of your organization(s) and why you are well-suited to carry out the proposed project.

Narrative Description
- A detailed description of the proposed project including overarching goals. Clearly explain the targeted results, and how they will be measured.
- The key elements of the approach that will tackle the financing gap for women-led SGBs
- How the project fits the Advancing Women’s Empowerment Fund’s priorities
- A clearly articulated key learning question(s) that you aim to answer through implementing the project.
- A prospective list of learning outputs you hope to publish or implement at the completion of your project.

Budget: Please include a total proposed project budget, with a line-item breakout. If your application is selected to prepare a full proposal, you will be asked to submit a budget narrative.
- If funding request is for entire budget, please indicate.
- If not, include total projected cost of project and indicate which portion this grant would support.

Format Guidelines by Medium: templates can be found here

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Text-Based Document</th>
<th>PowerPoint</th>
<th>Video</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>● Page Limit: 3 pages</td>
<td>● Slide Limit: 10 slides</td>
<td>● Time Limit: 3-5 minutes</td>
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<tr>
<td>● Format: PDF</td>
<td>● Format: PDF</td>
<td>● Format: YouTube or Vimeo Link</td>
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Evaluation Criteria

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<tr>
<th>Clarity</th>
<th>Is there a clear understanding of the problem this fund seeks to address? Are solution objectives, as well as justification of the proposed solution, clearly articulated?</th>
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<tr>
<td>Feasibility and Internal Capacity</td>
<td>How is feasibility articulated for the objectives outlined? Has the organization demonstrated its ability to achieve the milestones laid out in the concept note?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Impact</td>
<td>Does the proposed model clearly address a barrier to the financing gap for women-led SGBs in eastern Africa, western Africa, or southern Africa? Does the concept note present a credible rationale for why this model is likely to be successful?</td>
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Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning

| Is the key learning question(s) clearly articulated? |
| Are prospective plans for learning dissemination articulated? |
| To what extent will lessons on what works well from this project inform the work of SGB service providers and investors? |

Please submit completed concept note via [this link](#) no later than 11:59pm ET on **Friday, March 5, 2021**. For questions, contact Carlson Giddings at [ande.membership@aspeninstitute.org](mailto:ande.membership@aspeninstitute.org).

**Special Thanks to Our Sponsor:**

[USAID Logo]
Appendix 1: AWEF Application Checklist

All Applicants:
- Complete and submit application form

US-Based Organizations:
- All: Must complete and upload the domestic subrecipient questionnaire
- All: Must upload their approved NICRA with the application
- All: Must upload their W9
- Universities: Must upload their approved F&A

Organizations Based Outside the US:
- All: Must complete and upload the foreign subrecipient questionnaire
- All: Must provide their W8BEN

- All: Must complete and upload your overhead policy. If the applicant organization does not have one, must provide an explanation.