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F-LANE: Accelerating Female Empowerment globally in times of Covid-19 / Nine start-ups graduate from the first virtual edition of the Vodafone Institutes accelerator programme for female empowerment

Berlin (ots) -

- A record number of 455 start-ups from 84 countries worldwide applied for the Vodafone Institute's global F-LANE Accelerator programme

- 9 women-led social ventures from 8 countries were selected, resulting in a highly diverse cohort while doubling the number of participating startups:

- Successful pilot of virtual acceleration programme with positive feedback from participating start-ups regarding the value of the programme: unique setup with over 130 international mentors, supporting the startups in more than 440 combined programme hours.

Many researches show that COVID-19 has an enormous impact especially on women: reports of domestic violence increased, for example France reported an increase of 30% in reported cases within the first week of lockdown. Women's jobs are estimated to be 1.8 times more vulnerable to the COVID-19 crisis than men's jobs, women in tech are nearly 1.5 times as likely as men to report feeling a greater childcare burden due to COVID-19 (72% vs. 53%). This is precisely why the Vodafone Institute decided to implement F-LANE despite COVID-19, with a first virtual edition of F-LANE, to great effect: this year's edition had an increased regional scope and a greater diversity of social businesses participating, strengthening the social impact on women and girls worldwide.

From domestic violence, to harassment on public transport, to ovarian cancer, the female founders taking part in F-LANE tackle the issues affecting women's lives worldwide, combining entrepreneurship with social impact. The founders appreciate especially the flexibility and high quality the programme offered, as Inas Ismail, founder of Autsera (UK) says: *"I had taken part in several accelerators before - what's really outstanding about F-LANE is how much value they offer for the start-ups although this year's program is running completely virtually."*

The start-ups received virtual training, personalised support based on a strong mentor-based approach, networking and access to an impact investor network. So Sofie Blakstad, founder of hiveonline (based in Sweden, Denmark, Ruanda) comments: *"F-LANE has been the most useful accelerator we have done so far. My favourite part of F-LANE has been the amazing mentors we've met who understand the market we're in, our business and the challenges we're facing - that has been fantastic."*

Inger Paus, Managing Director of the Vodafone Institute, adds on the challenges of female founders: *"Our research has shown just how enormous the underrepresentation of female founders is in the tech sector worldwide and their lack of access to venture capital. Only 2.8% of venture capital invested globally goes to women-led companies"* (source: the 2019 State of European Tech Report by Atomico). Graduating from F-LANE, the female founders are prepared to take the next step in their business and offer their meaningful products and services to an even wider audience.

Background information

F-LANE is Europe's first accelerator programme supporting early-stage businesses using technology to empower women. The programme is initiated and funded by the Vodafone Institute, and implemented this year by Yunus Social Business, the organisation of Nobel Peace Prize winner Muhammad Yunus. Further cooperation partners are Social Entrepreneurship Academy, Impact Hub Berlin and WLOUNGE.

The F-LANE 2020 participants:

1. Mete a Colher

Brazil, founded in 2016 by Renata Albertim

<https://meteacolher.org/>

Brazil ranks as the 5th worst country in the world in terms of gender violence. Mete a Colher supports Brazilian women facing domestic violence. Their Tina app is a service bought by corporates who want to provide their female employees with a way of accessing guidance and professional support when they experience any kind of violence at home. Through an anonymous chat, an employee can have a conversation with specialized social workers and psychologists. Whenever necessary, they forward it to the relevant support centres or police departments. Tina professionals oversee the evolution of the case with the victim as well as the support networks. It is their goal to eradicate violence towards women and to achieve equality for them.

2. SheKab

Pakistan, founded in 2015 by Hira Rizvi

<https://www.shekab.com/>

SheKab is a monthly carpooling app carefully designed for women in Pakistan to travel freely on fixed schedules. The app uses intelligent clustering and route optimisation while being 4x cheaper than other ride-hailing services, due to carpooling. It is the first of its kind that is female focused. Harassment on public transport is a major issue in Pakistan and limits women's mobility and freedom. This subscription-based service is a safe, reliable and affordable way for women to move freely while the cab drivers earn a stable monthly income with just a few hours of driving a day. The drivers are trained and interviewed to ensure safety. It is SheKab's goal to help 17 million Pakistani women struggling every day with finding safe transportation.

3. Autsera

United Kingdom, founded in 2019 by Inas Ismail and Omar Massoud

<https://www.autsera.com/>

Autistic children often can't unlock their full potential. Autsera wants to help them integrate in the community and allow them to fully embrace themselves. Using Virtual Reality technology to deliver social and communication training to autistic children hindered by social communication barriers, Autsera helps autistic children integrate and communicate, become more independent and less vulnerable. This effective, accessible and affordable solution relieves a lot of stress and difficulty for the individuals as well as their families - especially mothers who are often responsible for a bigger share of the care responsibilities. Autsera is an effective, engaging, accessible and affordable solution for children in need. The founder Inas Ismail holds a PhD in Engineering from Berkeley and developed the technology with a team of experts. Autsera is helping autistic children worldwide, giving them the tools for a better perspective in life.

4. Nabta Health

United Arab Emirates, founded in 2017 by Sophie Smith and Saba Alzabin

<https://nabtahealth.com/>

Nabta Health is a hybrid healthcare company combining digital and traditional methods to improve the health outcomes for women and to prevent, identify and manage Non- Communicable Diseases (NCDs), which represent 71% of deaths globally each year. Nabta's first care pathway supports women in identifying and managing Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (a hormonal disorder responsible for 70% of female fertility issues) through fertility tracking and monitoring, at-home testing, virtual consultations and a machine- learning driven personal assistant named Aya. Their healthcare is private, autonomous and convenient, is built around pivotal stages in a woman's life, and is developed by and for the women of the MENA region.

5. Zoora

Uganda, founded in 2019 by Sarah Atuhairwe Baryajja

<https://www.facebook.com/Zoora-Uganda-588324118520567/>

Zoora is a digital platform for accessing digital education in finance, enterprise development, smart agriculture, climate change, gender dynamics and proper record keeping, developed for members of VSLAs (Village Savings and Loan Association). The platform works as a Digital Data Management System that enables rural women farmers in groups capture savings, farm records and get access to agricultural inputs for farming. Educating women on how to self-tutor using mobile phones, Zoora provides people with skills and helps them store their data. The platform improves the productivity of women and their savings, which creates economic sustainability of communities.

6. Bidhaa Sasa

Kenya, founded in 2015 by Rocio Perez Ochoa and David Disch

<https://bidhaa.co.ke/>

Bidhaa Sasa is a finance and last-mile distribution company offering a range of household goods that improve the quality of life of rural families in Western Kenya. The products, including solar lamps, efficient stoves and water tanks, are chosen to save the users time, money and physical effort. To make these products more affordable, Bidhaa Sasa offers a credit system backed on group liability so that clients can pay in instalments and goods are delivered directly to the customers door. They increase the accessibility of their products by harnessing the local networks of women's lending groups to commercialise their products and spread the word. Their main goal is to fix the poor quality of life in rural areas, which often impacts the women of the household in particular. Bidhaa Sasa wants to make them aware of how their quality could improve, then provide them access to the needed products and most importantly also make those affordable.

7. Proyecto Moms

Chile, founded in 2018 by Cristina Muñoz and María Belén Muñoz

<https://proyectomoms.com/>

In Chile 43% of women drop their career once they become a mother. Proyecto Moms wants to change that with an online platform and community that connects professional women to companies that are hiring, enabling moms to find an easy way back into working again, and allowing the women to become financially independent. They are helping companies create a flexible work culture to be able to hire women that do not want to choose between their families and their careers. The companies get access to skilled workers and can provide them with a schedule that works for both employer and employed.

8. Hiveonline

Sweden, Denmark, Rwanda, founded in 2017 by Sofie Blakstad and Matthew Mims

<https://www.hivenetwork.online/>

Hiveonline is a distributed community finance platform that enables financially excluded entrepreneurs in rural Africa to gain access to credit and new markets. Built with blockchain technology, their solution provides a financial trust history based on facts and business actions. This reputation-based platform builds confidence for businesses, NGOs, merchants and financial institutions

to support small business ecosystems and offer them an alternative to the exorbitant prices of local lenders. They are addressing sustainable development goals, such as working towards gender equality.

9. Akojo Market

United Kingdom, founded in 2018 by Natasha Buchler and Annie Rudnick

<https://akojomarket.com/>

Akojo Market is an e-commerce platform and marketplace championing independent (mostly female-founded) brands operating sustainable and ethical manufacturing processes and business models. By giving their brands a route to market via an online platform, they provide opportunities and a dignified income for artisans and their families. They work alongside their brands by providing resources and guidance to help them grow their business, for example by improving their working conditions and financial viability. Products on Akojo Market are made by African designers that, through online sales, can reach the UK and beyond. Their main goals are to promote talent and to encourage and endorse good business ethics.

Further information can be found at:

www.f-lane.com

www.facebook.com/flaneaccelerator/

www.twitter.com/vf_institute

www.instagram.com/flaneaccelerator/

www.linkedin.com/company/f-lane-accelerator-for-female-empowerment

Cooperation partner of the Vodafone Institute:

Yunus Social Business <https://www.yunussb.com/>

Impact Hub Berlin <https://berlin.impacthub.net/>

Social Entrepreneurship Akademie <https://seakademie.org/en/>

WLOUNGE <https://www.wlounge.de/>

About the Vodafone Institute for Society and Communications

The institute is Vodafone's European think tank. We analyze the potential of digital technologies and their responsible use for innovation, growth and sustainable social impact. With the help of studies and events, we offer a platform for dialogue between progressive thinkers from science, business and politics.

It is our aim to facilitate better access to technology for all sectors of society. That is why we develop and support projects to empower women in the digital economy.

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instagram.com/flaneaccelerator/

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