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## The 2023 Awa Prize puts women's entrepreneurship in Africa and the Middle East in the spotlight

For Belgian international cooperation, women's entrepreneurship is an important lever for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. In 2022, Enabel launched the Awa Prize, an initiative of Belgium's Minister of Development Cooperation and of Major Cities. This international competition, organised in collaboration with the Belgian Investment Company for Developing countries BIO, aims to highlight the talent and leadership of women entrepreneurs in Africa and the Middle East.

Now, in its second year, the Awa Prize rewards entrepreneurship in the green and circular economy who have a positive impact on communities and the environment. 1,647 women from the 18 Belgian international cooperation partner countries tried their luck by entering the competition with four categories: start-up, scale-up, innovation and People's Choice Award. Twelve of them, three in each category, are elected winners in the competition. On 28 November 2023, the four first prize winners will receive their awards in Brussels from the Minister of Development Cooperation, Caroline Gennez, at a ceremony attended by Axelle Red and Youssou N'dour.



*"Once again this year, the winners of the Awa Prize are all impressive role models. They will inspire countless girls and women in their own communities to follow in their footsteps,"* said Minister of Development Cooperation Caroline Gennez. *"With the Awa Prize we want to highlight and further*

*encourage the talent, creativity and perseverance of women entrepreneurs in Africa and the Middle East. Because where women benefit, everyone benefits. Women invest more than 90% of the income generate from their businesses back into their families, their communities and thus into society as a whole. Everyone wins."*

## Women with impact

Adétola Danielle Adanlawo from Benin wins first prize in the Start-up category. She is the founder and director of Ilewa, which manufactures and distributes washable and reusable baby nappies made from banana fibres. With her company, born of personal experience, Adétola aims at waste reduction (351,000 tonnes of waste per year worldwide) and offers a sustainable, economical and allergen-free alternative. As well as selling products, Adétola organises campaigns to raise awareness about environmental protection and the importance of menstrual hygiene.

Mariama Diallo of Guinea wins the first price in the scale-up category. With Bilinda SARL, the company she founded and runs, she offers environmentally-friendly cleaning products and a professional cleaning service. With over 28 employees, the company provides decent jobs and ongoing training. In the aftermath of the Covid 19 pandemic Bilinda SARL began marketing cleaning products, responding both to the need for cleaning solutions and to the lack of environmentally friendly products on the market.

Edith Kouassi of Côte d'Ivoire wins first prize in the innovation category. She founded Ecoplast Innov with the aim of taking action for the environment by recycling waste that all too often ends up in the environment: plastic and tyres. The company collects waste and transforms it into a range of clean surfacing products: paving slabs and decorative wall plaques, playing field coverings and so on. This led to more than 130 tonnes of tyres and 360 tonnes of plastic waste reused since the company was created.

Dative Uwimana of Burundi wins the People's Choice Award. She founded Ikaze Ventures and offers tourists from all over the world the chance to discover the still little-known wonders of Burundi. The company made an impact at several levels. For example, part of the profits from the tourist tours is donated to environmental conservation, waste collection and tree-planting activities are organised and capacity-building is offered to local communities.

## Entrepreneurship, driver of empowerment

Worldwide, one in three companies is owned by a woman. In sub-Saharan Africa, most self-employed workers are women. In societies where the prospects of salaried employment are limited or non-existent, entrepreneurship is often the main means of subsistence for men and women. For women, it is a lever for financial empowerment, the positive effects of which are also felt within the family. Indeed, when a woman has access to entrepreneurship, she generates additional income for her household and strengthens her position within the family.

However, women who want to start their own business are hindered by more and more restrictive obstacles than men. This includes difficult access to finance and training, social norms, constraints linked to caring for the family and economic exploitation of women. In other words, the path of a woman entrepreneur is challenging.

The Awa Prize puts women entrepreneurs with inspiring backgrounds in the spotlight. That way, they can serve as role models for many other young girls and women around the world. Through many awareness-

raising events organised in the participating countries, the project aims to show women and men that entrepreneurship can go hand in hand with social success, personal development and a positive impact on communities, while preserving family balance..

### Customised support

Like last year, the winners of the Awa Prize will take part in a week of capacity-building activities, networking and business meeting in Belgium, before receiving customised support in their home countries to help them develop their businesses further.

At the 2022 event, twelve women entrepreneurs were rewarded for their impact. Internships with companies in other African countries, participation in international trade fairs, training. The support offered matched the needs of their companies and teams. The impact of this support, which will continue until 2026, is already being felt in the form of new partnerships, a broader range of services and increased visibility for their companies.

[Read all about the Awa Prize](#)

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