

'empower' India's 1st Accelerator Programme For Women Entrepreneurs



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Flourishing entrepreneurial ecosystem of the country post the startup and stand up India campaign is yet to offer equal opportunities of networking with peer group of entrepreneurs, mentors, investors and the large corporate to the women entrepreneurs compared to men.

Investors are still wary of funding women-led ventures or questions sustainability of these ventures over the concerns of changing priorities from managing venture to post marriage responsibilities. There isn't a huge funnel of women entrepreneurs that can be evaluated and funded.

Thus, realising that there is a need of having a dedicated accelerator program for women entrepreneurs, Zone startups India, Mumbai-based leading technology startup accelerator has launched a structured programme called 'empower' which will be complete with mentoring, workshops, case studies of successful women led startups, industry connect, peer network, investor connect and business development opportunities in partnership with Department of Science and Technology, GIZ, Vodafone India, Google, Nishith Desai Associates, She The People TV, and SheEO- a Toronto-based women entrepreneur support organization.

"Through our accelerator program, and various bootcamps, workshops, demo days hosted by us we realized the need for having a focused program that works with women entrepreneurs in tech businesses", said Ajay Ramasubramaniam, Director, Zone Startups India.

This will be a 6 week module programme wherein 12 chapters will be run through 15 entrepreneurs who are selected through applications sought through road shows across Mumbai, Bangalore and NCR. Initially, the programme will have 35 onboard mentors including successful entrepreneurs, corporate leaders, investors and subject matter expert.

And among the investors, which will be present at the demo day held at the conclusion of the programme, will include of HNIs, angels, seed funds, structured venture capital funds and the corporate institutional investors.

"People talking of women entrepreneurs are not getting funded that is possible because there isn't a huge funnel of women entrepreneurs which can be evaluated and funded through programmes like these.

Our objective is to create a very strong funnel of women entrepreneurs building a tech ventures and put them out in-front of investors, and partners and customers so that more and more women entrepreneurs can build bigger businesses and eventually few of them can get funded", added Ramasubramaniam.

The Dept of science and technology will help these women entrepreneurs through its incubators programme run in different parts of the country, Google will support through their initiatives like Launch Pad, the Google

cloud platform and through providing the access to network that they have built, Nishith Desai Associates, a law firm will help with legal knowhow or legal knowledge, Vodafone with more than 200 million customers in India will give access to its network and GIZ the German govt run Private Sector Development firm will leverage its personal network it has in India.

"As a part of National initiatives on Start up India and Stand up India, Department of Science and Technology, Government of India is supporting "empower ", which is designed to equip women entrepreneurs with knowledge, skills and networks required to navigate and scale up their startups", said Dr Anita Gupta, Associate Head - NSTEDB.

“Gender Diversity, Startups, Digital Technologies, Customer Experience and Empowering Employees – are the key topics discussed in Vodafone India. Working with empower startups, gives Vodafone India a unique opportunity to support women entrepreneurship and be part of the start-up inception journey”, said Sarin Thampy, Vice President - Strategy & Innovation, Vodafone.

“In addition to empowering 15 selected women entrepreneurs; we believe that ‘empower – Accelerating Women Entrepreneurship’ would demonstrate a successful replicable model of harnessing the potential of innovative women enterprises. GIZ is happy to be associated with empower and support these innovative women business leaders to establish critical research and technology linkages and convert their ideas into action; complementing our efforts in the field of “Promotion of Innovation and Women Entrepreneurship”, said Wolfgang Leidig, Programme Director - Private Sector Development, GIZ.

Once this six week programme is over each of the 15 entrepreneurs will get three months worth of free equity acceleration at Zone startups India and beyond that zone startup will continue to monitor them and work closely with them for the next one year. The success of this program will see a regular rollout of similar high-impact, short term accelerator programs.

“Once this programme ends in July and if we will have a funnel of applications which have come in and we see that we have been doing a good job of working with these women entrepreneurs then may be by the end of this year we might do a empower version 2”, concluded Ramasubramaniam.

The country is in growing need of more such accelerator programmes with the rising number of women entrepreneurs joining the bandwagon of flourishing entrepreneurial ecosystem in the country amid encouraging

support from policy and the finance side. There are very few women entrepreneurs role model who have built large sustainable companies in the country.

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