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THE TIMES OF INDIA

Zone Startups India launches empower accelerator programme for women entrepreneurs

TNN | Apr 29, 2016, 04:55 PM IST

CHENNAI: Zone Startups India, a technology startup accelerator based in Mumbai, on Friday launched an accelerator programme -- empower -- for supporting women entrepreneurs building technology ventures.

Set up as an international footprint of the Toronto-based Ryerson University and the BSE Institute at the Bombay Stock Exchange, Zone Startups India is supported by Department of Science & Technology, Government of India.

Over its 26 months operations, Zone Startups India has accelerated the growth of 72 startups, 11 being co-founded by women entrepreneurs. Three of these women entrepreneurs have gone on to raise in excess of Rs 30 crore.

"Through our accelerator programme, and various bootcamps, workshops, demo days hosted by us we realised the need for having a focused programme that works with women entrepreneurs in tech businesses. The problems faced by a lot of women entrepreneurs is unique, and we feel that there is a case for having a dedicated accelerator program for women entrepreneurs", said Ajay Ramasubramaniam, director, Zone Startups India.

The 'empower' initiative is backed by 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).

As many as 15 women entrepreneurs (or co-founders) will be shortlisted for the six-week bespoke programme. The programme participants will get access to mentoring, workshops, case studies of successful women led startups, industry connect, peer network, investor connect and business development opportunities.

Top three entrepreneurs chosen at the end of the programme will get free seed funding of Rs 10 Lakh, Rs 7 Lakh and Rs 5 Lakh respectively. They also earn three-month equity free acceleration at Zone Startups India including all perks valued at \$300k. Winners also get to soft land at DMZ, Toronto for a 1 week programme.

"As a part of National initiatives on Startup 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." Anita Gupta, associate head, NSTEDB, said.

Sarin Thampy, vice president, strategy & innovation, Vodafone, a sponsor partner of the empower initiative, said: "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 startup inception journey."