CHAPTER 6

Challenges and Opportunities for Women Entrepreneurs

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1 Introduction

The pay-offs for promoting female entrepreneurs in the developing world are very high. Supporting women to start and grow their own businesses enables progress on many essential fronts including promoting economic development and household welfare, championing diversity, and promoting the goal of women's empowerment globally.

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However, for women to launch and successfully sustain entrepreneurial activities remains a daunting challenge, even in the fashion sector. There is ample statistical evidence to show that of all small businesses in the world, only one-third are run and owned by women.

Theoretical and empirical evidence clearly points to the challenges facing female entrepreneurs in accessing capital (Moreno-Gavara and Jiménez-Zarco 2015; Joireman 2008). Funding is, of course, a very significant challenge; a staggering 70% of female-owned small enterprises in developing countries do not have access to financial institutions (Dary and Haruna 2013). Although this is a universal issue in the context of the promotion of and support for female entrepreneurship, it is of particular concern in Africa where women entrepreneurs traditionally have little or reduced access to financial markets, due in part to their traditional engagement in survivalist activities such as sewing cooperatives and ateliers, chicken farming, candle-making, gardening, or arts and crafts.

However, despite women entrepreneurs' strong contribution to the rural economy, according to the GEM report (Monitor 2015), Africa leads the world in the number of women starting businesses. Women entrepreneurs make a great contribution towards economic development, and their small businesses play an important role in stimulating economic activity, creating jobs, alleviating poverty, uplifting living standards and promoting sustainable livelihoods (Van Vuuren and Groenewald 2007). There is a general belief that the twenty-first century is Africa's century of growth and that its economic future will be underpinned by the extent of the role and the success of women entrepreneurs in the continent's economy (Maleko 2008).

According to some experts at the World Economic Forum and the World Bank, there is evidence to suggest that the future successess expected from African women entrepreneurs could be at risk if the current known challenges remain unresolved, and this in turn could threaten to stifle innovation and slow the growth needed to propel their businesses and local economies. Botha (2006) shows that in addition to financial problems, African women face other critical obstacles which inhibit entrepreneurial efforts. Frequently, women do not have the same developed networks of business partners, they do not have access to customers, and in some cases there are instances of legal discrimination (Chinonye et al. 2015). Women also have unequal access to business education and management training, with the consequential lack of relevant small-business management skills (Botha 2006). Furthermore, they carry the additional burdens of unpaid work looking after children and providing care for elderly family members, making maintaining a healthy work–life balance rather daunting. Garba (2011) shows that in many developing countries, the loss of jobs for the menfolk resulting from the increasing economic downturn makes women assume the responsibility of keeping the family through the development of small-business activity.

Public and private organizations, both local and international, have become aware of the challenging situation faced by female entrepreneurship in Africa. There has been a recent focus on making additional business support initiatives available to enable women to overcome these difficulties and undertake successful business activities. But above all, these programs seek to give African women increased visibility in their chosen areas of enterprise, to empower and endow them with autonomy and decision-making capacity.

In this chapter, we will endeavor to highlight the main challenges which the literature observes concerning entrepreneurship by women in Africa. We review how some local and international initiatives can help address these challenges and support female entrepreneurs in African countries, with a particular focus on the fashion industry, an economic sector that has grown intensively in recent years.

2 Challenges for Women's Entrepreneurship

Nowadays women undertake enormous range of tasks, roles and responsibilities in contemporary families, societies and national affairs. Although they represent about 50% of the world population, in many places they are excluded from opportunities to grow and develop, socially or economically.

If in developed countries there is talk of "gender inequality", of the wage gap between men and women, or of the "glass ceiling" in the case of barriers for female entrepreneurs, the situation is much worse for women in Africa, who have little involvement in key decision-making—a role that is traditionally assumed by men. Millions of African women today still face multiple barriers simply for being a woman: social norms, beliefs, laws and different types of discrimination that must be overcome at every stage of their lives, and that prevent them from advancing, developing and participating in society, as well as enjoying their rights as citizens. For women who also live in situations of poverty, vulnerability and social exclusion, the list of obstacles is worse, and greater efforts must be made to overcome them.

Reports by international institutions such as the United Nations Development Program have revealed this situation. The Human Development Report (HDR) prepared by the UNDP introduced three new indicators: the Human Development Index adjusted for inequality (IDH-D), the Gender Development Index (GDI) and the Gender Inequality Index (GII). According to data from the HDR (2018), the world Human Development Index (HDI) has dropped from 0.68 to 0.52, that is, globally HDI has changed from high to medium. The losses are more pronounced in countries with greater inequality such as Mozambique (45%), Namibia (44%) and Central African Republic (42%). Women also have a lower HDI value than men across regions and face particular barriers to empowerment throughout their lives. The GII is a parameter that measures the differences in the distribution of achievements between men and women. According to this report, of the ten least equal countries in terms of gender, eight belong to the African continent. Finally, GII captures the inequalities women face in reproductive health, education, political representation and the labor market. The higher the GII value, the greater the gender inequality—and this is seen in all countries. In 2017, the value of GII was 0.441. Among developing regions, the GII value ranges from 0.270 for Europe and Central Asia to 0.531 for the Arab States to 0.569 for sub-Saharan Africa (United Nations Development Programme 2018).

This reality is more than evident at the business level where women experience various barriers to starting up a business. Curiously, however, international organizations recognize that women's situations have changed and they increasingly contributing to their communities' economic and business sustainability. According to Iyiola and Azhu (2014), "women entrepreneurs contribute numerous ideas and a great deal of energy and capital resources to their communities and generate jobs as well as create additional work for suppliers and other spin-off business linkages". In recent years, their contributions have been even higher. The economic downturn has resulted in the loss of jobs for the men and women have assumed the responsibility of maintaining family stability through the development of a small professional or business activity (Garba 2011).

The main barriers to female entrepreneurs are observed in aspects such as the lack of professional qualifications and business skills, access to funding, or difficulties accessing professional networks. Finally, some authors like Chinonye et al. (2015) point out the existence of other barriers of a cultural or social nature, legal discrimination (e.g., lack of rights of access to or ownership of land), and the role that women occupy at the family level in terms of their responsibility for the care of children and the elderly.

2.1 Problems of Access to Education and Training

Education is an essential tool in the fight against poverty. It has been shown that societies with higher education indices are more prosperous economically. Despite significant improvements in education during the present century, Africa has one of the highest illiteracy rates in the world.

This situation is due to low levels of school enrolment, high rates of school drop-out and barriers hindering women's access to secondary and university studies. According to data provided by UNICEF (2013), there are 49 million school-age girls in Africa not attending primary and secondary school. It has also been observed that only 34% of girls finish high school. On the other hand, it has been proved that when the mother has access to education and is literate, her children are more likely to complete their education. The lack of training raises female unemployment rates in the population, and relegates them to low-skilled jobs, without adequate security or formally recognized labor rights.

But this lack of training also hinders the development of future learning processes, in such a way that the acquisition of knowledge related to training in different professional and business areas becomes more expensive. Thus, simple but essential tasks in the development of business activity, such as the use of a mobile phone, access to the internet or preparation of a budget become challenging for these women.

2.2 Difficulty in Accessing Finance

The wage gap between men and women is a reality in developed countries, but this phenomenon increases significantly in African countries. The report presented by Ipsos (2016) notes that the gap between men and women is widening and, for example in countries like South Africa, a woman earns half as much as a man.

But financial problems also affect women entrepreneurs in the countries of the African continent. Access to funding sources is a constant problem among women entrepreneurs. According to the magazine *Forbes* (2017), "female entrepreneurs receive less than 3% of all venture capital funding", and in some countries, this gap is widening (Witbooi and Ukpere 2011).

It is difficult to find Africa-specific explanations for this, but it is true that some of the causes identified for developed countries can equally apply. Thus, the absence of training or the supposed lack of commitment that a woman has with regard to a business project, generates distrust among investors. To this, we must add the legal obstacles that African women face when developing financial arrangements (such as the lack of collateral or other assets), making it practically impossible to access specific sources of financing.

Finally, both Witbooi and Ukpere (2011), have pointed out that women show greater risk aversion than men, which makes them more conservative than men when it comes to seeking financing. However, it should be noted that the type of company that women entrepreneurs create is small and that they usually develop activities with low added value, so that the company's profitability is low, and therefore has little attraction for potential investors.

2.3 Social and Cultural Traditions as Barriers to Women's Entrepreneurship

Among the obstacles to female entrepreneurship are the lack of access to networking, legal discrimination and the role of women in the family. But, although these may seem unconnected, it is true that they have a common bond, the social and cultural traditions that prevail in Africa.

In a society where women have traditionally occupied a secondary position, it is normal that there are laws discriminating against them and limiting their rights. It is common to find situations where women need permission from their husbands to (a) sign a contract, as in Guinea, Niger or Mauritania; (b) open a bank account, like Chad or Congo; (c) apply for a passport, as in Egypt, Sudan or Cameroon; (d) run a business, as in the Congo; or even (e) leave the country, such as in Sudan. In other countries, it is also impossible for a woman to be the head of a family, as in Chad, Morocco, Rwanda or Senegal. In some cases, they cannot choose where to live, as in Rwanda, Senegal, Niger or Mauritania.

Lack of access to services and the lack of decision-making power within their homes and communities appear to limit their capacity for action. It is evident, then, that opening a business can be a challenge for an African woman, since, in addition to the lack of guarantees, a national identity card, access to specialized training in many countries, and the support and approval of their husbands are required. This fact explains why women in Africa receive less than 10% of credit. Lack of access to financial services prevents them from applying for a loan to create their own businesses, which severely limits their social and economic development. Finally, it should be noted that restrictive legislation limits the ability of women to establish relationships with people outside their environment, so in practice to improving their business networking skills is challenging.

3 Domestic and International Support for Women's Entrepreneurship in the Fashion Sector

In global economic terms, the importance of women's entrepreneurship is high. However, the implementation of programs and initiatives aimed at promoting their activity is quite a recent phenomenon. An essential part of these initiatives is aimed at favoring the empowerment of women in the field of the company in general, and the fashion sector in particular.

However, women entrepreneurs can reinforce and improve their position in the African fashion sector by taking advantage of other initiatives, although they are not defined as "gender issues". Africa's current situation makes it necessary to rethink its growth strategies and find ways and means to make them more compatible with the object of sustainable development. As we saw in Chapter 2, companies' sustainable orientation favors the economic, social and environmental development of the territory. But it also offers them the bases of competitive advantage due to increased consumer value delivery.

This is why, alongside actions aimed at empowering women and encouraging entrepreneurship in the fashion sector, Africa must also consider those that favor the development of sustainable processes and products in the industry's companies. Sustainability is a source of competitive advantage, offering extraordinary opportunities for improvement in a sector where an important part of the activity is developed by women. An essential part of these initiatives is developed directly by supranational organizations, such as the United Nations (UN) or the World Bank. Using their contribution, mainly financial, these organizations support initiatives by governments, organizations and companies destined to favor start-ups and new entrepreneurial activities promoting the economic and socially sustainable development of the region.

At a slow but steady pace, domestic public and private organizations have become aware of the need to undertake significant economic and social reforms to achieve sustainable growth over time.

African countries have grown at a very rapid rate since 2000, which has allowed them to achieve improvements in several areas such as international trade and investment, mobilization of government revenue, infrastructure development and the provision of social services. However, despite the progress that has been made by the region over the last eighteen years, the current pattern of growth is neither inclusive nor sustainable.

At the economic level, there are some reasons for this situation An UNCTAD (2012) report suggests that the current pattern of African countries' growth is not correct. First, they are heavily dependent on natural resources as drivers of their economic growth. But most of these resources—fossil fuels, metallic and non-metallic minerals—are non-renewable and are being depleted at a very rapid rate, and with negative consequences for future growth and sustainability. Second, their economic growth has been accompanied by deindustrialization and the five-point fall of manufacturing's share in Africa's gross domestic product (GDP) in 2008. Third, Africa has experienced rapid urban growth, without industrialization supported by industry-led agricultural transformation. Cities can absorb labor force moving from rural to modern urban sectors of the economy. But agricultural output and productivity per capita in the region are still low compared to the global average, which has dire consequences for food security and social stability.

The current pattern of Africa's economic growth is particularly worrying considering its social implications. The region has a young and growing population that, according to United Nations Population Division, will account for about 29% of the world's population aged 15–24 by 2050. An abundant labor supply with much creative potential presents significant opportunities. However, the current growth model is forcing African countries to look at engagement with other new growth paths that can generate quality jobs and absorb the entire labor force on a large scale. In particular, they will need to move away from jobless growth strategies, and towards inclusive growth paths that are labor-intensive and create learning opportunities for young people, and other socially excluded collectives such as women.

Women have an essential contribution to make economic growth, especially in sectors such as agriculture, or textiles and fashion; hence their latent interest in promoting a number of key initiatives aimed at developing and supporting their local business financing space—albeit with international financing support—which are intended to encourage the formation and development of entrepreneurial activities among women.

Participation in the African fashion industry[1] has traditionally attracted the most significant number of women entrepreneurs. However, in light of the data that is available, it seems to be a sector in which women entrepreneurs receive less attention from governments and local organizations. It is relatively complicated to find domestic initiatives that encourage training or fund the start-up of small businesses or women's cooperatives in this activity. As can be seen, most of the efforts of local entities and organizations focus on the training and development of tech entrepreneurship, since to a large extent it is one of the activities that provide the most significant economic value to the countries on this continent.

In previous chapters, we saw that currently the leading companies in the world of fashion are concentrated in Europe, the USA and China. Following a decentralization strategy, they have specialized in value-added activities, such as design and marketing, and have outsourced those other productive activities with lower added value, such as manufacturing. Many of these companies have found reliable, credible and good-quality sources of raw materials as well as a cheap labor force in several African countries, in such a way that for their own economic interests, they have favored the development of the flourishing and productive industry of the fashion on the continent. It is equally true that the activities developed in these countries provide low value added; therefore, it is understood that the interest shown by governments and local organizations is at a low level; in other words, the African fashion industry is not perceived as a potentially high growth sector. But we must also consider that this industry employs mainly female labor, so it not only: (a) favors women's employment and entrepreneurship, contributing to the insertion of an important and, until recently, forgotten part of the population, but also (b) contributes significantly to the social and economic development of some rural regions of the continent.

[1] In this manual, the Fashion sector is understood in broad terms and includes activities developed in the textile, accessories, footwear, and even crafts.

Perhaps this fact explains why an essential part of the programs and initiatives aimed at the development and empowerment of the fashion industry in Africa are international. It is understandable that fashion companies invest resources in promoting the development of companies led by women in Africa since the investment in training and machinery guarantees both an improvement in the quality of the final product, and a reduction in costs, by achieving economies of scale and experience. But it is understood that the development of an industrial fabric in the fashion sector, not only contributes to the economic and social improvement of African countries but also contributes to achieving the third objective set by the UN about promoting equality between the sexes and the empowerment of women.

As can be seen in the following section, since the end of the last century, international support for women's entrepreneurship in Africa has been elevated. Supranational organizations such as the UN or the World Bank finance projects aimed at the integration of women into the economic, social and political spheres of their countries. Other social actors such as governments, NGOs, companies and academic institutions have also begun to develop actions aimed at supporting female entrepreneurship, especially in sectors such as fashion.

3.1 Domestic Support for Women's Entrepreneurship in the Sustainable Fashion Sector

The critical role of female entrepreneurs in economic development has made domestic governments aware of obstacles women face when it comes to starting, growing and sustaining enterprises. That is because local governments, together with other social agents, such as private organizations and universities, promote initiatives and programs that proactively support female entrepreneurial activities, through womens' capacity building in skills, access to ICT or financial resources (Mumba 2014). It should be noted that an important number of these initiatives seek to promote women's entrepreneurship in sectors like fashion, agriculture, retailing or tourism where they can make sustainability a competitive advantage, maintainable internationally (Leke et al. 2010).

One element to be highlighted is that the initiatives developed are aimed at different stages of the life cycle of the entrepreneur project. Thus, some of them are aimed at women who have not yet started their business, while others seek to support those women who are in the early stages of the life of the company. On the other hand, it is worth pointing out that among the initiatives and programs developed, very few are especially aimed at female entrepreneurship in the fashion sector, especially as regards higher education training programs.

The education and training of entrepreneurs are one of the main objectives of the programs and initiatives developed to promote women's entrepreneurship, especially in sustainable production activities. Botha et al. (2006) provide evidence that "one way to enhance the entrepreneurial activity in a country is by providing entrepreneurial training and education to potential and existing entrepreneurs". Mostly, these initiatives seek to professionally train women in the sustainable development of specific tasks such as sewing, gardening, crafts or food processing. Despite being traditional activities in the area and usually developed by women, these programs intend to increase women's autonomy and independence. By providing them with skills and resources, the initiatives aim to improve their professional expectations, but also favor inclusive growth and poverty reduction in their environment, since they will have some of the resources needed to deal with complicated family and social situations.

Sometimes, training initiatives are accompanied by other support programs, which at the same time provide new resources for women and the community in general, relieving them of part of their family, economic or social burden (Garba 2011). I An example is the initiative developed in 2011 by **NGO** Kelele Africa in the Kasenda and Kimya areas of Uganda.

The project began in 2011 with the construction of a sewing atelier equipped with 15 sewing machines, a monitor, and the necessary tools and fabrics for the start-up of the workshop. To provide the economic and material resources required to develop the activity, the NGO launched a six-month training course 12 students. On completion of the programme participation, the best student is given a sewing machine and the opportunity to join the sewing workshop professional team which has been created with the best students from each course group (Kelele Africa 2018). Complementing the project is a programme at the school next to the sewing workshop, where the NGO volunteers work with children, teaching them English, painting during the mornings and doing crafts and games in the afternoons. Currently, the project is self-sustainable, and a total of 76 women and two men have completed the training cycle.

Training in aspects related to entrepreneurship and business management is another goal to which a large number of public and private organizations devote significant efforts. Carter (2000) suggests that widening access to business start-up and growth training and advice in business subjects, is the only way to encourage a more significant number of women into self-employment. However, entrepreneurship and business training are in demand not only by potential entrepreneurs, but also by women who have already started in business.

Nowadays, many women entrepreneurs lack management experience and access to networks. And, although education is not mandatory for new venture creation, they have a greater need for ongoing support, so providing them with skills, contacts and opportunities is vital for most successful businesses. Henry et al. (2005) and Botha et al. (2006) show that "entrepreneurship training can complement the early stage awareness-raising function of entrepreneurship education, as it provides the more practical skills that entrepreneurs require when they are ready to set up their business".

Among the many programs implemented by public and private organizations are the Soronko Academy experience in Ghana in 2015, and the Women Entrepreneurship Programme (WEP) of the University of Pretoria (UP) in 2006. Since 2015, the Soronko Academy has run the Tech Needs Girls project in eight regions in Ghana. This mentoring program was initially intended to teach young girls (from 6 to 18 years) to code and create technology. But the initiative has now been extended to adult women and would-be entrepreneurs, to ensure the sustainability of the coding skills, but also foster the acquisition of other skills such as creativity, problem solving and critical thinking.

According to Botha et al. (2006), the WEP is a training intervention specifically designed and delivered for women, by women. The program has focused on the training needs of potential, start-up and already established women entrepreneurs, and it was designed after a study conducted by the UP between 2002 and 2003 on the constraints on women entrepreneurs' access to finance. Analyzing the conclusions of the study, the author suggests that: "women-owned businesses were generally less competitive and less equipped to present convincing business proposals to the financial institutions. But also, the growth of these businesses was very limited and failure rates high".

Further, this author notes that South African women in particular, experience real difficulty gaining access to financial markets. In a discussion about gender discrimination, y he states: “the barriers to accessing finance could all be related to the patriarchal South African legal framework, the socialization process that is limiting in scope.” The WEP offers a one-stop solution that seeks to improve financial service delivery and access to markets for growth-orientated women-owned small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). This training program promotes integral women’s participation in the economy, especially in those activities that can facilitate the sustainable growth of the country (Bridget 2017). Integrating personality profiling, business planning training, coaching, access to business networks and finally, access to markets and finance shows that women entrepreneurs can conduct business on their own and become financially independent.

Mumba (2014) shows how the government of Zambia has introduced some programs to increase women’s economic empowerment. The first, The Women’s Empowerment Program,—supported by the Ministry of Community Development, Mother and Child Health—attempted to facilitate the provision of energy-saving technology, training for women entrepreneurs and start-up capital. The program was implemented in 2010 in all the districts of Zambia, but was poorly received, and in the three years following its introduction, only 2528 women out of the entire female population of the country received support (Ministry of Community Development, Mother and Child Health 2014).

Another initiative introduced by the Ministry of Community Development, Mother and Child Health, was the Women’s Clubs. This project also aimed to support women forming businesses and accessing technological resources. The women’s clubs were involved in various income-generating activities, some of which related to fashion: dressmaking and design, trading (buying and selling) and handicrafts. And according to official data collected by the government in 2010, there were 1279 funded clubs, with about 25,920 beneficiaries (Ministry of Community Development, Mother and Child Health 2014). However, the program results were not as positive as the Zambian government had hoped.

On the one hand, access to that kind of support and the resources available are not sufficient to cater to the needs of a large number of existing women entrepreneurs, as well as prospective entrepreneurs. On the other, many women have complained about the lack of transparency in the way the clubs were managed. These results showed the need for increased funding and a more efficient management system to achieve the objectives.

Another obstacle that women find when it comes to entrepreneurship is the lack of contacts. According to Chinonye et al. (2015) regular access to networks provides business information vital to the success of the entrepreneur. Women entrepreneurs need to have a vast network of contacts, but unfortunately, in some African countries women's social circle is restricted and they only maintain relations with their family members. To favor networking, and at the same time gain access to certain resources such as infrastructure, technology and training, certain institutions, both public and private, have opted for the creation of different incubation spaces. Hackett and Dilts (2004) classify the different types of incubators as the business incubator, the business accelerator, co-working spaces or technology hubs, while Barbero et al. (2012) offer an alternative classification, according to who the owner is, of basic research, university, economic development and private incubator.

The European Union defines a business incubator as "an organization that accelerates and systematizes the process of creating successful companies by providing them with a comprehensive and integrated range of support, including incubator space, business support services, clustering, and networking opportunities" (Al-Mubaraki and Bluster 2011). They are often a route to capital from angel investors, state governments, economic development coalitions and other investors. Barbero et al. (2012) show that incubators have a positive effect on company performance indicators such as: (a) firm growth; (b) participation in R&D programs; (c) input R&D; (d) output R&D; and (e) employment generation cost.

Some of the models identified above can be found in Africa (Bertenbreiter 2013; Masutha and Rogerson 2014). According to Bertenbreiter (2013), technology labs are the model of incubation space most commonly found in sub-Saharan countries. Very close to the original incubator model, technology labs provide entrepreneurs with shared office facilities and business assistance. Sometimes they are designed as co-working spaces, facilitating collaboration and the creation of entrepreneur networks. BongoHive in Zambia, which offers both start-ups programs and accelerator launches, is an excellent example of the technology lab. It has supported social entrepreneurship projects, especially in the field of green fashion based on the development of energy-saving techniques. The importance of the fashion sector in Zambia has also led BongoHive to organize meetings between local young entrepreneurs and some of the most important designers in the country, such as

KC Vaghela.[2] The objective of these meetings is for entrepreneurs to get to know the fashion industry and to learn how to take advantage of a market opportunity like that offered by traditional African designs.

Other kinds of business incubators are for-profit incubators, such as Seed Engine in South Africa, which offers specialized training programs for women entrepreneurs. This is a new model of incubator space specializing in providing support for high-potential entrepreneurs. Their three-month program guarantees the company's acceleration, providing them with seed funding, top-quality advisors and a network willing to fund their business projects. Their concern for the development of the country is underscored by the long-standing relationship between WDB (WDB Investment Holdings) and Seed Engine, and their joint commitment to the transformation of the South African economy through the development of young women entrepreneurs. Seed Engine incorporates Seed Academy, an entrepreneur activation business, as well as the WDB Seed Fund, which focus on funding business project leads for African women.

Similar to the technology labs in terms of primary objectives, but different regarding management structure, guiding principles and sustainability models, is the hub. This model has proliferated across the African continent, with examples to be found in Kenya (IHub), Cameroon (Activspaces), Uganda (Hive Colab), Tanzania (KINU Hub) and Botswana (Botswana Innovation Hub). The hub is a co-working space, aimed at technological entrepreneurs who operate in open spaces and meet daily to participate in talks, meetings and seminars of interest to the community of programmers, investors, students and entrepreneurs within a specific sector.

Non-profit incubators are the third type of incubator space that can be found in some parts of Africa. As university incubators, they merge two incubation concepts into one: a training programme and other relevant business development services (BDSs), as well as physical incubation workspaces for the participating enterprises. Note also that these incubators are specially designed for non-technological entrepreneurs. An excellent example of a non-profit incubator is the Meltwater Entrepreneurial School of Technology (or MEST) in Ghana. The MEST Incubator Program (launched in 2008) provides training, investment, mentoring and networking for aspiring sustainable technology women entrepreneurs.

[2] Videos of the meetings can be found on BongoHive's YouTube channel. For the meeting with KC Vaghela, see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Y7NoPZO5iI.

The last type of incubator to consider is the university incubator. This kind of incubator usually belongs to a university technology park, and their mission is the commercialization of university projects especially in technology, natural sciences and medicine. The university typically finances the business project, while the incubator offers the infrastructure, training and the necessary networking to get it going. Some university incubators allow entrepreneurs who are not enrolled in a university to access the academic knowledge which they would otherwise lack, at the same time giving academic researchers prime access to the study of entrepreneurial behavior and best practices.

According to the *Disrupt-Africa.com* website in 2016, the University of Nairobi and Stellenbosch University (South Africa) were among the seven best African universities to ensure students had all the tools to launch and grow successful businesses. The C4DLab is an incubator-cum-accelerator that belongs to the University of Nairobi. It has run many critical initiatives and events, and among its partners are UNICEF and Intel. The LaunchLab at Stellenbosch University in South Africa incubates start-ups run by female students and faculty members. It also runs competitions, such as the Ideas Programme or the Pitching Platform (Disrupt-Africa.com 2016). It is currently preparing to launch the latest round of its global pitching roadshow to attract potential investors, collaborators and partners, and in which selected African tech start-ups are encouraged to participate.

Non-profit incubators can also be found in universities. One example is AfricaCentre in South Africa, a non-profit multi-disciplinary management consulting firm working towards a green economy and offering incubation programs targeting grassroots communities. They support projects led by social entrepreneurs to accelerate local companies' activities, create jobs and activate the local economy. Although the nature of their interventions varies depending on the area of operations, currently they are focused on building sustainable agribusiness, fighting energy poverty and promoting access to sustainable water supplies for rural communities.

Domestic government initiatives have driven several support services for women entrepreneurs. For instance, Technology for Women in Business (TWIB), the South African Women Entrepreneurs Network (SAWEN) and the Women's Fund have been established in South Africa (Witbooi and Ukpere 2011). TWIB was created by the government's Department of Trade and Industry in 1998 to help advance women in business, with a particular emphasis on the application of science and technology to achieve business growth in women-led sustainable enterprises, particularly within the micro, small and medium enterprises (MSME) segments. The SAWEN initiative provides specifically targeted support to women entrepreneurs who operate within South Africa's MSME sector, offers events such as seminars, training and capacity building, and, organizes international educational and empowerment trade missions to Beijing, Morocco, India and New York. Another programme is the Lagos State Employment Trust Fund (LSETF) in Nigeria, a multi-million dollar initiative by the Lagos state government supporting skills for employability and, at the same time promoting entrepreneurship and new start-up projects in sectors that favor sustainable economic growth, and that are led by women and young people—also offering heavily subsidized loans and a range of BDSs.

Finally, there are other local initiatives in the private sector, where local brands have started to support women's empowerment, favoring entrepreneurship in the fashion sector. For instance, in Rwanda, Indego Africa is working to promote women through economic empowerment and education. Indego is a non-profit social enterprise, founded in 2007, that partners with female artisans in Rwanda and sells their handcrafted products worldwide, pooling the profits, along with grants and donations, to fund education for them in business management, entrepreneurship, literacy and technology. It has taken the work of its artisans to a global level by partnering with the likes of J. Crew, Eileen Fisher, TOMS and Nicole Miller. In mid-2007, Indego Africa began its first partnership with a cooperative of 30 female artisans in Kigali called Cocoki. In 2014, it partnered with over 600 women across 18 cooperatives, selling their products through its website, in boutiques worldwide and in collaboration with major designers and brands including Anthropologie, DANNIJO and J. Crew. In 2014 Indego Africa also launched a Leadership Academy in Kigali, Rwanda to provide advanced business education for those of its artisan partners who had mastered its basic education programs.

3.2 External Support for Female Entrepreneurs

Since the end of the last century, awareness has been raised at international level of the need to enhance the role of women in different aspects of life. For instance, the Beijing Platform for Action, which emerged from the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995, reinforced the various efforts previously undertaken and established gender mainstreaming as a global strategy for the promotion of gender equality. As Hannan (2000) demonstrates, one of the main conclusions was the recognition that much progress has been made towards an understanding of the negative impact of gender inequalities in some areas of economic development, particularly those concerning obstacles to the economic empowerment of women and the elimination of poverty.

International institutions such as the UN and the World Bank have long adopted a gender-sensitive approach in their policies and programs. Other institutions, however, still have a way to go addressing gender mainstreaming to achieve the primary goal of eradicating poverty and promoting sustainable, people-centered development (Maleko 2008).

The UN and the World Bank have been addressing issues relating to the advancement of women, gender equality and sustainable development since the early 1970s. UN actions have led to greater international recognition of the importance of incorporating a gender perspective in all its goals (political, economic and social), including poverty eradication, human rights, good governance and environmentally sustainable development. Meanwhile, the World Bank, having published reports about women's position regarding economic growth and their relatively low participation or non-inclusion in national economic development programs, recognizes the need for "engendering" macroeconomic policy. It recommends that macroeconomic frameworks sensitive to gender be developed in order to serve as guides to understanding the gender implications of different economic restructuring packages.

It is important to highlight the significant work of the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) in promoting female entrepreneurship in Africa. The organization, which was formed in 1966, encourages cooperation between industrialized countries and developing nations. Its objective is to accelerate industrial development, stimulating activities to promote investment and technology transfer.

UNIDO collaborates with organizations and local governments in Africa on several levels. An example is the "Action Plan for the Accelerated Industrial Sustainable Development of Africa", developed in collaboration with the African Union Commission with the aim of increasing Africa's competitiveness with the rest of the world. One of its main activities is to add value to goods for export and develop local production capacity, undertaking a range of activities to upgrade value chains and taking a product through various phases of processing to its final market destinations.

Other activities are based on collaboration with companies and individuals. An example is the Ethical Fashion Initiative (EFI) created in 2009 by Simone Cipriani with the help of UNIDO. This initiative sees fashion as *a vector of sustainable development* with mutually beneficial collaboration between local producers and the fashion industry. The idea is that local artisans can manufacture ethical fashion products that also have significant added value for international designers. According to Castro (2018), the project began in 2003 with the creation of a cooperative in the slums of Korogocho, Kenya for a group of micro-producers under the direction of Gino Filippini (1939–2008), who was working with the NGO Servizio Volontario Internazionale (SVI). Progressively, the project expanded to Burkina Faso, Mali, Ghana, Haiti, the West Bank, Ethiopia and Cambodia. Through the EFI, Simone Cipriani has now become the spokesperson for sustainable fashion in the growing movement for ethical supply chains in the fashion industry.

Further examples of international organizations' involvement in mainstreaming gender participation in economic development can be found in a 2009 project supported by the UN through the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNTACD), and operating in Zambia in collaboration with the Zambia Development Agency. The National Business Linkages Program provided incentives for small businesses led by women in particular to transact business with large companies, both transnational and indigenous firms (Green Jobs Program 2018). The primary goal was to facilitate the creation and deepening of business linkages between the companies to stimulate the development of sustainable markets in which small local companies could actively participate.

According to Mumba (2014), this kind of initiative allows three different types of relationships to be established: (a) backward linkages with suppliers, where large companies source parts, components, raw materials, inputs or services from the small suppliers; (b) forward linkages with the intermediary small company, where large companies outsource the distribution of their products to a small company; and (c) linkages with technology partners, where large corporations initiate collaboration with small local partners in the form of joint ventures, licensing agreements or other strategic alliances. This author also recognizes that the last relationship (c), represents the best form of alliance, stimulating increased economic activity between established larger firms and MSME operators and female-led enterprises. It creates a win–win situation with both parties identifying and utilizing a number of complementary strengths to their mutual benefit. Not only do the partners obtain business benefits, but this type of action can also have a positive impact on the nation.

Furthermore, the World Bank's financial assistance program has helped immensely in supporting the socio-economic growth of key sectors in Africa: examples include the financing of projects mainly aimed at the creation of infrastructures, or the development of strategic sectors such as agriculture, and public goods and social services. An essential part of such projects, as implemented in sub-Saharan Africa, has been to elevate the region's status to one of the regions of the world with the greatest potential for growth, achieving 4.1% growth in 2015.

In 2015, the Bank approved US$11.6 billion in total for 103 projects in the region. The support program included US$1.2 billion in IBRD[3] (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development) loans and US$10.4 billion in IDA commitments (World Bank 2018).

Among the key objectives of the World Bank is the provision of an incremental and comprehensive support package for female entrepreneurs globally. In July 2017 the World Bank announced the Women Entrepreneurship Financial Initiative (We-Fi).[4] These tools act as a financial intermediation instrument managed by the World Bank that seeks to promote the entrepreneurial spirit of women "in developing countries by offering them greater access to finances, markets, and networks that are essential to starting and running a company" (We-Fi 2018).

The We-Fi initiative has the support of some EU governments as well as those of the USA, Canada, China, Russia and Saudi Arabia. The fund has raised more than US$1.6 billion for programs designed to break down the barriers faced by women in business in developing countries. The initiative has received strong support and has extended to support

[3] According to the World Bank website the IBRD is "a global development cooperative owned by 189 member countries. It provides loan, guarantees, risk management products, and advisory services to middle-income and creditworthy low-income countries, as well as by coordinating responses to regional and global challenges."

[4] Wi-Fi It is popularly known as "Ivanka Fund", because of the involvement of Ivanka Trump, daughter of US President Donald Trump, selected several projects of the Islamic Development Bank to complement and expand successful businesses led by women in Yemen, Mali and Nigeria, and the Asian Development Bank to improve the female business environment in Sri Lanka.

women-led businesses at the earlier stages of growth, also unlocking access to equity and insurance services. We-Fi is a platform that enables country-level reforms to be aligned with private investment, with the aim of favoring female entrepreneurship in certain sectors strategic for the country's economy. To achieve their objective, they collect critical data from the public and private sectors on female entrepreneurs and their firms, and support innovation and learning for results at scale.

The resultant training programs include infoDev's Mobile Startup Camp (Infodev 2018). With the support of a network of incubators, this initiative has formed and financed technology projects led by women. One of the most successful projects has been *ShopSoko.com*, a mobile and web platform that connects Kenya's artisans with online shoppers (Shopsoko 2018). The platform promotes the artisans' products to a global marketplace. Some 70% of Soko artisans are women whose products use sustainable and ethically sourced materials like bone or cow horn. The artisans use a mobile app to register their products and upload descriptions and photos. The Soko team does the rest of the marketing and promotion on the web platform, and handles the sales transactions. The sellers determine the price of the product and the shipping costs, which ensures that the majority of the profits remain with the artisans. Soko adds a small mark-up to cover the additional operations costs on the platform, ensuring the artisans receive customers' international payments via their mobile app.

Another international organization that promotes economic development and social progress in African countries is the African Development Bank (AfDB). This financial institution, created in 1964, draws its membership from 53 African countries and is funded by 24 European, American and Asian countries. Among its support programs is the African Women in Business Initiative (AWIB). Aimed at promoting women's entrepreneurship, the initiative has the following objectives: (1) to conduct studies that assess the constraints and conditions for creating an enabling environment and promoting women's entrepreneurial development in Africa to develop new and innovative approaches to address these constraints; (2) to reinforce business support provision and strengthen the institutional and technical capacity of national businesswomen's associations; and (3) to develop concrete forms of support for enterprise education and entrepreneurship development. They mainly promote investments in the fashion sector, increasing access to finance for women entrepreneurs, and incubating and accelerating start-ups.

Other international organizations and governments have also favored the development of female entrepreneurship in the fashion sector in Africa. For example, in 2017 the European Union and the International Trade Center launched a €10 million project in Burkina Faso and Mali to support job creation in fashion and interior furniture in West Africa. As two of the most important cotton producers in Africa, the artisanal cotton and sustainable fashion sector of these countries has high growth potential. Increasing activity in the transformation of cotton, providing added value, is expected to create numerous employment opportunities for young people from marginalized communities (Castro 2018). Among the collaborators are Vivienne Westwood, Camper, the Fashion Film Festival, Karen Walker, Lancaster, Marni, Mimco, Noir Tribe, Stella McCartney and United Arrows. In the case of the Camper Company, the long-term goal is to produce a limited edition shoe collection every year.

Another example is the US government, which funds the African Women's Entrepreneurship Program (AWEP), mainly addressed to women entrepreneurs across sub-Saharan Africa. Through the Department of State's International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP), approximately 30 African women entrepreneurs arrive in the United States each year to attend professional development meetings and network with policymakers, companies, industry associations, non-profit groups and multilateral development organizations (US Department of State 2018).

A final example of international support for female entrepreneurship comes from the Japanese government, via the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA). The agency promotes livelihood, employment, entrepreneurship and sustainable business development, as well as microfinance for women's economic empowerment in Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Latin America. In Africa, JICA mainly supports businesswomen who run their own specialist businesses, while another program provides support to women in rural and agrarian communities. Among the initiatives developed is the Africa–Japan Business Women Exchange Seminar, which started in 2013; seminars have taken place in Japan every year to date. The seminars have three major purposes: developing leadership and capacity of African businesswomen; promoting understanding of government and private-sector efforts to support businesswomen in Japan and African countries; and networking among African and Japanese business women.

Some companies in the fashion sector have launched initiatives to promote women's entrepreneurship in sustainable fashion, with countries like Ethiopia becoming a focal point of interest for large companies such as H&M, Primark, Ayka, Arvind and DBL. In 2017, the Bengali group DBL invested US$100 million in the creation of a textile factory, while H&M and Primark have opted for joint ventures with local manufacturers to train workers and mentor factory managers (Modaes 2017). The attractiveness of Ethiopia lies in its free trade agreements with the EU and the USA, and the strong support of the local government, which has led to textile exports in recent years amounting to 6% of GDP.

Another important source of aid for women entrepreneurship comes from NGOs in many African countries. Examples include the African Women's Development Fund (AWDF) and the Center for Global Enterprise (CGE). AWDF is a grant-making foundation that supports local, national and regional women's organizations. Its programs provide technical skills and training for women aimed at developing and strengthening grantee organizations and their work (AWDF 2018).

The CGE is a private, non-profit, non-partisan research institution based in New York. CGE sponsors the African Women Entrepreneurship Cooperative (AWEC), a 12-month management training program for African women entrepreneurs and business owners. The training program is online, with live teaching by world-class business experts and academics delivered via video conference. Course activities are delivered through a highly interactive online learning platform. The program specializes in leadership and business management, but also offers women training in the application of technology in business, as well as soft skills such as teamwork and critical thinking (CGE 2018).

Taking advantage of their proximity to the African continent, some European NGOs offer training courses in collaboration with universities. Such is the case with the Women for Africa Foundation, which, in collaboration with the University of Granada, offered a course entitled "Creating opportunities for African women entrepreneurs in Spain" in March 2017. The objective of the course was to promote the role of female entrepreneurs, increase their level of.

Finally, the most critical challenge faced by most business start-ups in Africa is perhaps funding. Seed capital, the initial capital used to start a business or to allow the take-off and/or consolidation of existing business activity, often comes from the company founders' personal assets or from friends and family. Venture capital is a type of financial operation in which capital is contributed to start-ups and companies with high growth potential and high levels of risk in exchange for a percentage of the company. It is one of the main forms of financing for early-stage start-ups, those that are in their growth phase and those that have already used other funding sources such as family or friends. Alternative financial sources to banks, however, increase social entrepreneurship opportunities for women and this is where Angel Business in Africa comes in. Business angels or angel investors are individuals who inject capital into start-ups in exchange for ownership equity or convertible debt.

In developed countries, business angels or angel investors are becoming one of the more important sources of finance for entrepreneurs. According to Macht and Robinson (2009), they provide a wide range of financial and non-financial benefits to their investee companies. These authors found that business angels are generally helpful in overcoming funding gaps for fast-growing small firms. They can assist the management of such firms with knowledge and experience by providing time on the firm's board. They can also help widen the range of contacts and networks that the firm needs to secure additional capital and follow-on financing. Business angel support is especially important for women entrepreneurs since one of the main problems they encounter is the lack of funding and access to a network of contacts. Occasionally, business angels are the only source of financing if a business project is very attractive, but the fact of it being led by a woman means not finding alternative funding.

Entrepreneurs seeking to impress a business angel investor should do their homework on the people they hope to pitch to, and should seek to inject a sense of passion into their presentations and show the benefits the investment will offer to the business angels. They also need to look for cues suggesting a favorable response (Hill and Power 2002). Aspects of the potential entrepreneurial fashion project that may influence the investment decision include:

- Attractiveness of the project
- Company size
- Strong team of founders
- Good growth prospects
- Clear exit strategy (3–7 years)
- Attractive financial returns (>30% return on equity)
- Microfinance

Business angels are a relatively recent phenomenon in Africa, although their growth has accelerated in line with the growth potential of the continent (Jenkins and Edwards 2006). The African Private Equity and Venture Capital Association (AVCA) is one of the more prominent African Business Angels. The AfDB also invests in the sector through Private Equity firms such as Africinvest, a Tunisian PE house with investments in retail companies including Maille Club Group (Algeria, Tunisia), Folly Fashion (Morocco) and Société Industrielle de Lingerie (Tunisia).

Venture Capital for Africa is the largest online community of venture capitalists, angels and entrepreneurs dedicated to building businesses on the African continent. According to Tomi Davies, president of the African Business Angels Network and co-founder of the Lagos Angels Network (LAN), there are now 63 such groups across the continent, a sure sign that access to capital for start-ups is rising (Davies 2018). Introducing the event, Davies stressed the importance of "hunting in packs" and creating angel investment networks so people can co-invest and learn from their peers. Finally, Davis notes that "there is a need to ensure a more coherent interface between investment sources from start-up to scale-up, and for this angels, venture capitalists and impact investors need to get along". The event provided across-the-board opportunities to discuss issues and build relationships, and also saw key funding developments with the launch of the Rising Tide Africa fund. Focused on female-run businesses, the fund is attempting to put together a group of female angel investors for the continent who will invest jointly, and help train others on how to get involved with investing. This significant achievement is expected to make a serious impact.

The key takeaway from the African Angel Investor Summit was that there is an investment scene in Africa, and it is growing. With increasing coherence and more investors joining the party, it is a scene that can only continue to grow, to the benefit of African start-ups everywhere, especially in sectors such as fashion, which shows a high potential for growth for an important part of the continent.

According to the AfDB Group, the fusion of tech and fashion—"fashiontech"—could make Africa more competitive in the sustainable fashion industry. The fashion technology practitioner creates and/or sells garments. The technical skills involved include not only sustainable design, pattern construction, cutting and garment manufacture, but also online retailing and advertising. The design of a garment requires innovation, creativity, and artistic and design talents that combine aesthetics and practicality. But even its online communication and distribution require innovation and creativity as there are many kinds of consumers, and they can be found on different online social networks. The website Ventureburn (2018) focuses on world start-up news and telling tech entrepreneurs' stories from emerging markets, covering everything from innovative new businesses and developments in e-commerce to helpful tips for entrepreneurs starting out.

In recent years one of the main sources of financing for women entrepreneurs in Africa has been microcredits. Fuertes and Chowdhury (2009) define microcredits as "programs of granting small credits to the neediest among the poor so that they can start up small businesses that generate income with which to improve their standard of living and that of their families". The main characteristic of microcredit is that it generally involves small amounts, which in African countries is around US$1000, compared to other continents such as Asia or Latin America, where the amount varies between US$100 and US$200 (Maes and Reed 2012). According to Lacalle (2008), the management of the loans is very simple and the associated bureaucracy very limited, the total repayment time of the loan is short (usually a year or even less) and small, frequent, disbursements are generally administered on a weekly or monthly basis.

A large proportion of the microcredits go to African women, not only because they are a disadvantaged group, but also because it has been proved that women can derive more significant economic benefits for members of their families than men (Maes and Reed 2012). Work such as Maringanti's (2009) reports that women from rural economies contribute more to household well-being with their income than men and that they are more likely to repay their loans, so microfinance initiatives everywhere prefer lending money to women. Microcredits are usually granted by NGOs, as in the case of the Spanish NGO Africa Directo and its PrestAD program which subsidizes business initiatives developed by women in Tunisia's textile sector (Prestad 2018). The UN created a special microcredit unit in 1997 to support projects in countries as diverse as Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Madagascar, Togo and Zimbabwe (Ghatak 2000).

4 The Future for African Female Entrepreneurship in the Sustainable Fashion Sector

Our analysis has shown that the current business environment promoting and encouraging increased participation by women in the entrepreneurship ecosystem still leaves much scope for improvement.

African countries stand to benefit from the huge potential economic power base that women on the continent represent. However, so far women are still in the main a low-skilled workforce, working for international fashion companies whose interest in the economic and social development of the country is low.

It is encouraging that many African governments, with the continuing support of the international organizations and the international community, are making bold commitments to mainstream gender-oriented business and economic policies via the implementation of a range of segment-focused business support services to address many of the critical challenges inhibiting the growth of women-owned/women-led MSMEs, including opening up more space for access to finance for women entrepreneurs, as well as the provision of core small-business management skills. However, these efforts still need to be aimed at fostering the creation of value-generating activities, also favoring sustainable development over time.

One sector where female entrepreneurship has a more significant presence is fashion. The contribution of the African fashion industry to economic growth is widely recognized both locally and beyond. According to Leke et al. (2010), wholesale fashion activities represent 13% of African countries' exports. Among the key drivers of this growth are the resurgence of interest in fashion among young Africans and the middle class as a way of expressing their cultural identity, spurred on by the creative fusing of African-inspired designs with Western styles that suit different environments—whether formal or social.

The emergence, the role and the increasing interest of many household international labels and fashion designers in African fashion, coupled with a genuine approach to inculcating ethical practices right across the supply chain to promote sustainability within the sector cannot be understated, as has been illustrated by the work of Stella McCartney, Vivienne Westwood, Jacqueline Brown and many other specialist African fashion consultants and designers operating on- and offline.

But beyond the interest that African designs raise among Western consumers, the real competitive advantage of the African fashion sector lies in its capacity to add value by being economical, environmentally and socially sustainable. Traditional design and sustainability are the perfect combinations that a large number of African entrepreneurs are using to conquer local markets. Added to the internationalization opportunities offered by technologies, success is guaranteed.

Many of the current participants in the African fashion scene are a new breed of mainly young women entrepreneurs, many of whose collections are retailed through online platforms and social media, with many creating and exploiting new niche marketing opportunities, including the latest trend in the "stoning" of traditional outfits for women's social engagements, as well as the production of a wide range of complementary clothing and accessories. And, with the UN recognizing the twenty-first century as Africa's period of growth, there is no doubt that its fashion industry will continue to excel, supported by the increase in popularity of African fashion amongst its influential personalities and public figures—from Hollywood movie stars to sports, music, TV, entertainment and media personalities—as well as the seemingly unabated rise in the influence of key markets such as Nigeria, Ghana, South Africa, Kenya and Ethiopia.

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