

Bank and Development Partners Support Europe-based African Diaspora Business Ventures

The first Development Marketplace for the African Diaspora in Europe (D-MADE) has ended in Brussels with a total jury award of close to a million dollars for sixteen investment projects in Africa. The winning projects will be implemented in 11 African countries, including Mali (4), Cote d'Ivoire (2) Benin (2) and one each for Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Madagascar, Malawi, Sierra Leone, and Togo.

The winners were selected from a group of 68 finalists who presented projects that a 24-person jury deemed innovative, sustainable, replicable and based on sound business principles. The sixteen winners currently live in seven European countries: Belgium, France, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.

The D-MADE initiative was launched in 2007 to allow entrepreneurs from the African diaspora in Europe to participate in the development of their countries. Over 500 business proposals were submitted for consideration, with sixty-eight of them shortlisted for the second round of assessment.

A knowledge exchange forum which preceded the awards event provided a platform for D-MADE promoters, financial institutions and business development service providers to explore partnerships and business opportunities for the D-MADE finalists.

The projects ranged from the processing of raw cashew nuts for export in Ghana to introducing new technologies to remote rural areas for use in medical situations in the Democratic Republic of Congo. "The fantastic energy and drive generated by this diaspora has to be tapped and supported," said Michel Wormser, Africa Region Director on behalf of Vice-President Obiageli Ezekwesili. "We need to partner with these communities to learn from their expertise and to encourage the entrepreneurship and creativity of their members."

Rome-based Gary Mamadou Tounkara of Mali presented a winning project to transform and develop a range of products from shea butter. "We will work to improve the economic conditions of rural women in the Sahel region who heavily rely on the extraction of shea butter as a source of revenue," he said. "Kariplus will help in the production and marketing of a variety of shea butter products in the local and global markets.

Building on their experiences in the Netherlands, Ethiopian brothers Redwan and Elias Haroon developed a project to cultivate and market vegetables in the Greta Rift Valley, using production and irrigation technologies that are still unused in that region.

A second winning proposal from the Netherlands also focused on agriculture and came from Cameroonian-born Charles Zama who plans to work with a network of five thousand households to cultivate the jatropa plant from which oils will be extracted and bio-fuels produced. "Cameroon was one of the countries with the highest number of shortlisted projects. I am glad I won this one for my country," he said, beaming with satisfaction.

France-based Dr. Marianne Branco of Benin won for a project on hospital hygiene and the treatment of biomedical waste while her Switzerland-based countryman, Zinde Charles Zannou got the nod from the jury for his mobile "Toi Toi" toilets project which, he believes, will transform hygienic conditions in one of West Africa's largest open markets, the Dantokpa market in Cotonou.

In expressing their gratitude to the D-MADE promoters, the participants expressed hope for more development marketplaces for the African diaspora in Europe, emphasizing the difficulties entrepreneurs have in accessing financing, advice and technical assistance for micro and small projects in Africa.

Support for D-MADE came from the Belgian Development Cooperation, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the French Ministry of Immigration and Development Partnership, the French Development Agency, the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development and Brussels Airlines, which sponsored the travel of the finalists and jurors. Their representatives underscored the fact that D-MADE had unleashed an innovative way to dialogue with a group of migrants who genuinely care about Africa and who are willing to put their personal time, money and energy into supporting the continent's development.