TECH FOUND HER AFRICA CHALLENGE

NASPERS | prosus



INSIGHT REPORT · 2026

Backing the women building Africa's technology future

What the Naspers & Prosus Tech FoundHER Africa Challenge reveals about AI, jobs and the case for gender-lens investing in African tech.

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH

Lionesses of Africa

What's inside

An evidence-led read of the full applicant dataset and the winners' own accounts — where Africa's women-led tech is heading, what holds it back, and why backing these founders matters.

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A shared commitment to women-led tech



Prajna Khanna

CHIEF SUSTAINABILITY OFFICER & VICE PRESIDENT, PROSUS GROUP AND NASPERS LIMITED

Africa's women tech founders have never lacked passion and vision; what they have needed is a fair chance and open arms. The Tech FoundHER Africa Challenge welcomed stories from 43 countries, with 99 percent of ventures shaped by women and nearly three in four born since 2021. Close to half were already breathing life and revenue into their dreams before we met. Set against a $49 billion funding gap facing women entrepreneurs—within a digital economy reaching $712 billion by 2050—this journey matters deeply. Delivered by Naspers and Prosus alongside Lionesses of Africa, we awarded $140,000 in equity-free grants to these remarkable founders.

> *"Ninety-nine percent of our applicants were woman-founded or co-founded. Nearly half were already earning revenue, persevering against a staggering $49 billion funding gap for women entrepreneurs. This was never a question of talent, but of opening doors; equity-free grants are one gentle step toward embracing these incredible women and ensuring their dreams have every possible chance to thrive."*



Melanie Hawken

FOUNDER & CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, LIONESSES OF AFRICA

For twelve years, Lionesses of Africa has worked towards one goal: to grow the pride of Africa's women entrepreneurs. Our community of 1.8 million rests on a simple belief — when women can reach knowledge, markets, funding and networks, they build businesses that change their communities. This report puts numbers to that belief. The founders who answered the Challenge already employ more than 12,000 people, most of them women, and they build in the sectors development depends on — food, health, education and climate. This is our Theory of Change in action: women-led technology that creates quality jobs and social returns, especially for women.

> *"Investors often tell us they struggle to find a pipeline of investor-ready women founders in African tech. This cohort is the answer: 1,163 applications in a single month, from founders building real businesses that already employ thousands of people and serve the communities that need them most. Back these founders and you back jobs, ownership and opportunity for women right across the continent."*

> *"Back Africa's women founders, and the return compounds — into jobs, into ownership, into stronger communities.*

1,163 founders. One month. 43 countries.

In September 2025, the Prosus & Naspers Tech FoundHER Africa Challenge — delivered with Lionesses of Africa — opened for a single month and attracted 1,163 completed applications from women founders building real technology businesses. That volume, in that window, is the first finding of this report: the pipeline of investable women-led ventures in Africa is far deeper than the funding flowing to it. The numbers below reflect the shape of that demand.

1,163 COMPLETED APPLICATIONS	**43** COUNTRIES REPRESENTED	**99%** WOMAN-FOUNDED OR CO-FOUNDED	**47%** ALREADY EARNING REVENUE ($10K+)
32 MEDIAN FOUNDER AGE (YEARS)	**85%** ACTIVELY FUNDRAISING	**74%** FOUNDED SINCE 2021	**$140K** EQUITY-FREE GRANTS AWARDED

Ten finalists from South Africa, Nigeria, Kenya, Ghana and the Democratic Republic of Congo pitched live at the Johannesburg finale on 19 November 2025 — Global Women's Entrepreneurship Day, and Lionesses of Africa's 11th birthday.

Percentages are of applicants answering each question; the response base varies by question.

An equity-free platform for women founders

The scale of the response to the Tech FoundHER Africa Challenge is no accident — it is what happens when capital is offered on terms women founders can actually access. The Challenge identifies and supports exceptional women founders solving African problems with technology, closing the distance between the quality of the founders and the capital reaching them.

THE GENDER-LENS CASE

$49bn*
Funding gap facing Africa's women entrepreneurs

$712bn**
Projected size of Africa's digital economy by 2050

1.8m
Women in the Lionesses of Africa network

Gender-lens investing means intentionally directing capital to women founders. It is both a fairness argument and a returns argument: women-led ventures are capital-efficient and solve high-impact problems, yet remain systematically underfunded.

THE TEN FINALISTS REPRESENTED

South Africa · Nigeria · Kenya · Ghana · Democratic Republic of Congo

Finalists operate across agritech, healthtech, climate tech, fintech, AI and sustainable manufacturing — a cross-section of the sectors where African women founders are concentrating.



Challenge winner, Farmer Lifeline, builds solar-powered, AI-enabled devices and services that detect crop pests and diseases early, helping smallholder farmers reduce yield and post-harvest losses.

*Source: Affirmative Finance Action for Women in Africa (AFAWA), African Development Bank.
**Source: A 2020 study by Google and the International Finance Corporation (IFC).

A young, pan-African cohort

So who answered the call? The 2025 cohort reaches right across the continent but concentrates in three markets, and it is young: a median age of 32. This is a generation that decided to build rather than wait.

58%
IN THE TOP-3 MARKETS

40
FURTHER COUNTRIES

53%
DEVELOPMENT SECTORS

29
TECHNOLOGY SECTORS REPRESENTED

Geographic concentration

Nigeria, South Africa and Kenya account for 58% of applicants; 40 further countries make up the rest.

Impact-first building

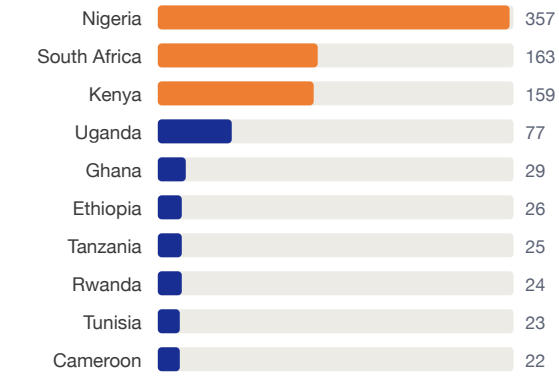
Agritech is the largest sector and leads in every region. Development sectors are 53% of the cohort.

Strong mandate fit

99% are woman-founded or co-founded — the depth of women's ownership and leadership is set out in The Impact Case.

Top 10 countries of residence

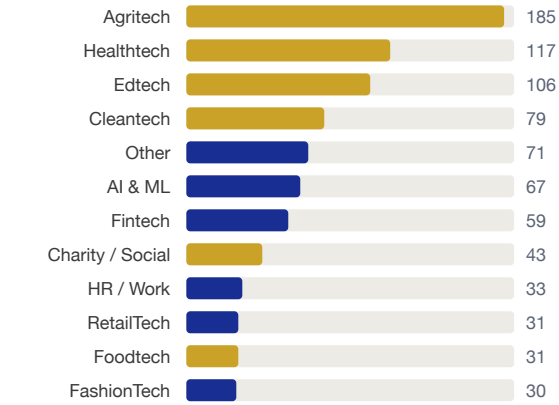
Completed applications



Continental reach: 1,163 founders across 43 countries and 144 nationalities.

Primary technology sector — top 12

Gold = impact / development sectors



Impact-first: agritech, health and edtech lead — 53% build in development sectors.

THE SIGNAL

A continental, impact-first pipeline. Founders span 43 countries, but three markets — Nigeria, South Africa and Kenya — account for 58% of applicants. They build where the need is greatest: agritech, health and education lead in every region, and **53% work in development sectors.**

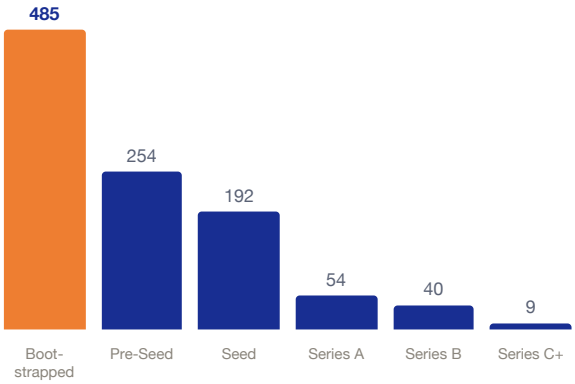
Source: application export, n = 1,163. Top three markets = 58% of cohort.
Percentages are of applicants answering each question; the response base varies by question.

Early-stage, and seeking their first cheque

That youth comes with a defining constraint. The same founders are decisively early-stage: 80% are at seed stage or earlier — 42% fully bootstrapped — and most are looking for their first institutional cheque, which sets up the funding story at the heart of this report.

Current funding stage

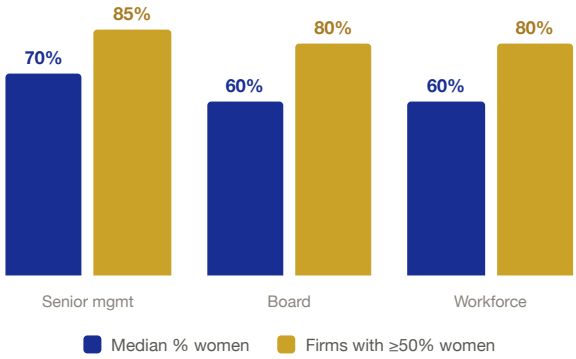
80% seed-stage or earlier



Under-capitalised by stage: 80% are seed-stage or earlier.

Women run deep

Beyond founding ownership



Women-led in substance: majority women ownership, management and workforce.

ALSO IN THE DATA

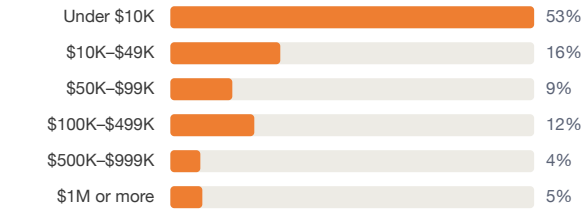
$100K median raise sought.

80% are registered legal entities.

91% are confident pitching in English.

Real traction: nearly half are already earning

Revenue since inception · n = 988 answering



47% have earned $10K+ and 21% have passed $100K — on lean, mostly bootstrapped teams.

Percentages are of applicants answering each question; the response base varies by question.

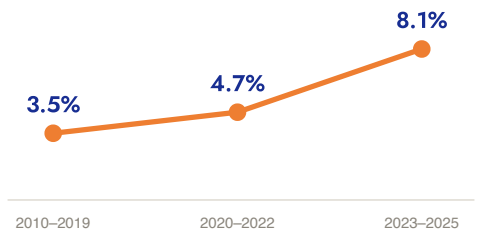
Where women-led tech is heading

Step back from the individual numbers and a pattern emerges: a maturing but under-capitalised generation of founders, solving concrete African problems with increasingly capable tools. Six trends stand out.

1 **Impact-first building** 53% build in development sectors; agritech is #1 in every region.	**2** **AI goes mainstream** AI/ML as a primary sector more than doubled to 8% among 2023–25 founders; 43% reference AI.	**3** **Adaptive innovation** 43% adapt or improve existing solutions; only 11% claim a global first — frugal, locally-grounded innovation.
4 **Traction, but early** 47% have earned $10K+ and 21% have passed $100K since inception — yet most remain capital-constrained.	**5** **The grant economy** Non-dilutive funding reaches more founders than equity and debt — ahead of equity by nearly two to one.	**6** **Women run deep** Median 70% women in senior management, 60% on boards and in the workforce.

AI/ML as primary sector

% selecting AI/ML, by founding cohort



AI is mainstreaming fast: AI/ML primary share rose from 3.5% to 8.1%.

THE HEADLINE SIGNAL

Fintech — long the headline of African tech investment — sits **sixth** here, behind agritech, health, education, clean energy and AI. This generation of women founders is building in the real economy and essential services, not the consumer-finance categories that have dominated continental venture funding to date.

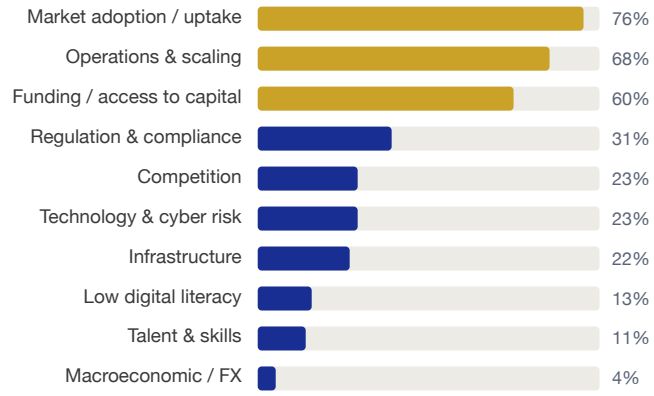
Percentages are of applicants answering each question; the response base varies by question.

Capital is the binding constraint

If the trends show how far these founders have come, their own words show what is holding them back. Asked to name the two main risks to their business, 955 founders answered unprompted — and capital, not capability, dominated every other concern.

Challenges founders cite as threats

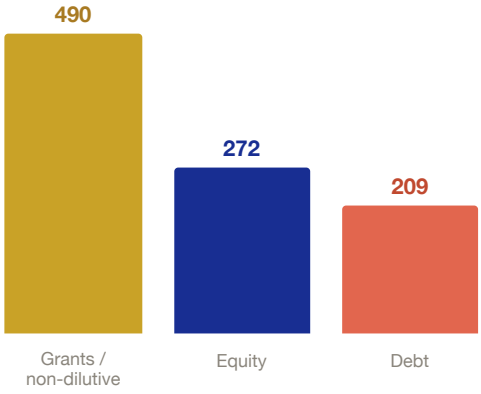
Coded from 955 open-text responses · gold = top three



In their own words, 955 founders name capital — not capability — as the risk.

Founders raising capital, by channel

Last 12 months · grants outpace equity ~2:1



Equity is largely out of reach

72% raised no equity in the last 12 months; just three founders in the entire cohort raised $1M or more.

A grant-dependent ecosystem

Grants reach about half of founders — ahead of equity and debt — but are small and episodic, funding survival and pilots rather than scale.

Stuck in the 'missing middle'

The median raise sought is $100,000; most seek $50K–$1M — too large for micro-grants, too small for most institutional venture funds.



The Tech FoundHER Africa Challenge finale on 19 November 2025 at the Johannesburg Stock Exchange in South Africa.

Percentages are of applicants answering each question; the response base varies by question.

07 FOR INVESTORS

The investment case

The funding gap and the investment opportunity are the same picture seen from two sides. Most of these companies are young and already earning revenue, yet the market still treats them as too risky to back. The evidence points the other way. For investors prepared to look where others haven't, that is where the return is. The returns argument comes with a measurable impact dividend — set out in The Impact Case.



1,163

A de-risked pipeline

Screened, women-led tech ventures — five winners already validated through live pitch and due diligence.

21%

Capital-efficient & proven

Have passed $100K in revenue (47% past $10K) on lean teams — evidence of strong unit economics.

$50K–$1M

The missing-middle edge

Where most founders are raising — a structurally underserved ticket size, so attractive entry points.

43%

AI-literate & impact-aligned

Reference AI in their product, and 53% build in development sectors — real, large-market demand.

$49bn

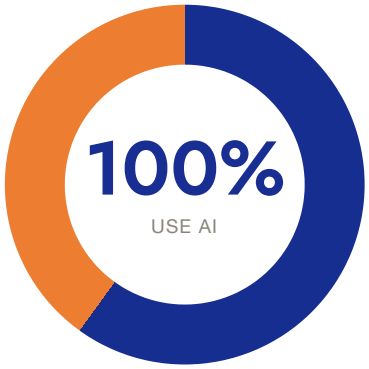
The funding gap facing Africa's women entrepreneurs — the size of the opportunity to close.

HOW INVESTORS CAN ENGAGE

- Co-invest alongside the programme
- Access the finalist & applicant pipeline
- Join the mentor & investor network

AI goes mainstream

One trend here is big enough to warrant its own examination, and the next four sections give it that. Across this cohort, AI has moved from a niche specialism to standard practice — and these founders are not waiting for permission to use it.



All five winners use AI

AI-native (3) AI-leveraged (2)

The shift is complete at the top: all five winners use AI.

HOW THE COHORT USES AI

AI-native 3 of 5 winners

AI is core to the product and business model — Farmer Lifeline, Neotex, GRIT.

AI-leveraged 2 of 5 winners

AI tools enhance the product or operations — Tix Africa, Pollen Patrollers.

The applicant signal wider pool

43% of applicants reference AI; AI/ML primary share doubled to 8.1% among the newest ventures.

THE SIGNAL

This generation arrives AI-literate. The opportunity is not to introduce AI but to help founders apply it responsibly to local data realities — and to clear the practical barriers set out overleaf.



Joint third-placed Pollen Patrollers have developed smart-hive IoT and AI to protect pollinator health and boost yields.

09 AI BARRIERS & AREAS OF ACTION

What founders tell us is hard about AI

Adoption, though, is not the same as ease. This section sets out — directly from the winners' interviews and the applicant data — the barriers founders face in deploying, integrating, resourcing and building capability in AI.

CAPABILITIES · DATA

Local-language, high-quality data is scarce

Founders need clean, structured, locally relevant data to train models for African contexts. Folayemi Agusto (Tix) names accessing "clean, structured, localised data" as her main challenge; Jenny Onya (Neotex) cites "data quality and availability in low-data environments."

CAPABILITIES · TALENT

Specialised AI talent is hard to hire and keep

Founders compete with larger, better-paid employers for ML engineers and data scientists. Margaret Wanjiku (Pollen Patrollers) cites "recruiting specialized AI talent"; 11% of all applicants flag talent as a binding constraint.

CAPABILITIES · RESPONSIBLE AI

Building safe, unbiased AI is resource-intensive

Mainstream models centre men and the Global North. GRIT operates in a high-stakes trauma context where a wrong output "isn't a bad user experience, it's a real risk to someone's safety" — demanding safeguarding and trauma-informed design.

INTEGRATION

Stitching AI into products and legacy systems

The hardest builds span several domains at once. Neotex describes the "intersection of AI, climate data and financial-systems integration"; GRIT has had to build systems that keep its AI grounded in vetted information and continuously test its answers for safety. Integration is frequently the real bottleneck.

DEPLOYMENT

Deploying AI where power and connectivity fail

Unreliable electricity, patchy connectivity and end-user data costs shape every design choice. All five winners engineer around these limits — solar and GSM, low-power IoT, WhatsApp on low-end phones. 22% of applicants name infrastructure as a threat.

COST & FINANCING

Recurring AI costs outpace grant-by-grant funding

Compute, data, responsible-AI practice and specialist salaries are recurring costs that episodic grants rarely cover. Founders point to the need for sustained investment so solutions stay "accessible, accurate, and relevant."

Tangible areas of action — next steps

The barriers are specific, so the responses can be too. Five interventions, drawn from what founders themselves describe, would move the most ground for the least friction.

01

Back shared, local-language data

Fund or broker access to clean, consented, local-language training data so founders aren't each solving data scarcity alone.

02

Subsidise AI talent and training

Co-fund ML hires, fellowships and structured upskilling to close the specialist-skills gap.

03

Resource responsible-AI practice

Make safety evaluation, bias testing and trauma-informed design fundable line items, not founder overhead.

04

Fund integration and resilient infrastructure

Back the systems-integration and low-power, offline-first engineering that makes AI usable in the field.

05

Provide patient, AI-aware capital

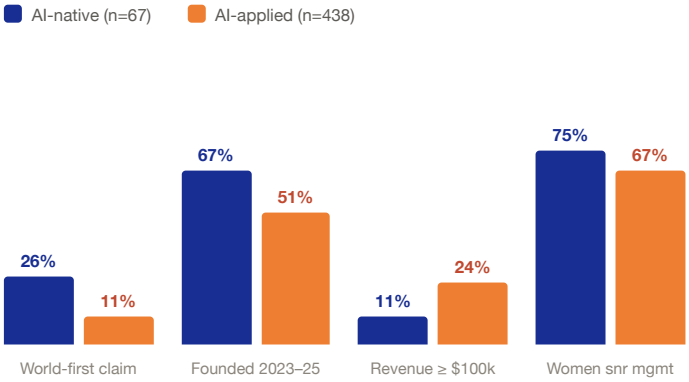
Offer financing that covers the recurring cost of running AI — beyond one-off grants — so capability compounds.

"The opportunity is not to introduce AI, but to help founders apply it responsibly to local data realities — funding data, safe-AI practice and specialised talent."

Building AI, or building with it?

Beneath the headline adoption rate sits a more revealing question: are these founders building AI, or building with it? A closer read of the signal separates the AI-native ventures from the much larger group applying AI to existing problems — and shows where each is concentrated.

AI-native vs AI-applied



Most apply AI; a committed core build it — the AI-native edge.

AI-NATIVE SPOTLIGHT

1 in 4

Claim a world-first — about 3× the rest of the cohort.

30

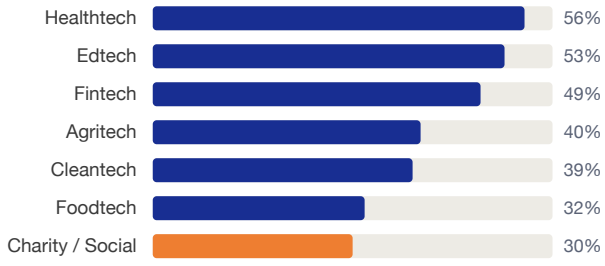
Median founder age — the youngest group in the dataset.

75%

Median share of senior-management roles held by women.

AI adoption by sector

% of sector referencing AI · cohort average 43%



A DEVELOPMENT TOOL — WITH ONE GAP

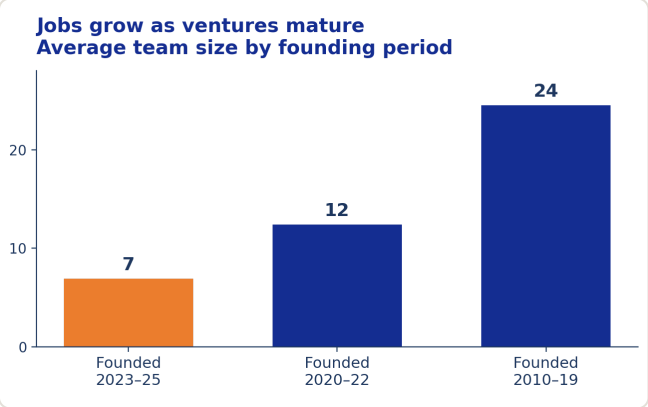
Half of all AI-referencing founders build in development sectors, led by healthtech (56%) and edtech (53%). The exception is explicit social-impact tech (30%) — the clearest opportunity for targeted, responsible-AI support. GRIT, the AI for Good winner, shows how high that ceiling can be.

Method: 'AI-native' = primary sector AI & Machine Learning (67 ventures); 'AI-applied' = AI referenced with a different primary sector (438). Recomputed from the application export; directional given the AI-native sample size.

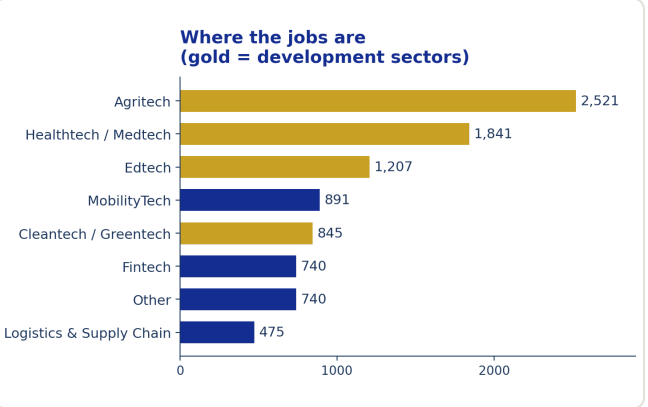
A women-led jobs engine

If AI is the cohort's defining tool, jobs are its defining outcome. Behind every venture here is the result development finance cares about most: work. Together these founders already employ thousands of people, and most of those jobs are held by women. This is where funding women-led tech shows up as social return.

12,366	~7,300	60%	6
JOBS REPORTED ACROSS THE COHORT	OF THOSE JOBS HELD BY WOMEN (≈59%)	MEDIAN WOMEN SHARE OF WORKFORCE	MEDIAN TEAM SIZE



Backing founders early is backing future jobs — teams grow from ~7 to ~24 as ventures mature.



Most jobs sit in development sectors — agritech, health and education lead.

AUGMENTATION, NOT AUTOMATION

AI-using ventures employ at the same median rate as everyone else, so there is no sign of automation displacing workers here. Where AI is applied to development-sector problems, teams are in fact the largest in the cohort. Farmer Lifeline is the clearest example: an AI product that created 121 rural field-agent jobs for women.

Employment and gender figures are self-reported by applicants; the response base varies by question. A small number of clearly erroneous headcount entries were excluded.

Investable and impactful

Jobs are one return among several. Measured against the frameworks development finance already uses, the cohort performs strongly on gender, on sector, and on the populations it sets out to serve.

ALIGNED WITH THE 2X CRITERIA FOR GENDER-LENS INVESTMENT

90%	85%	89%	80%
MAJORITY WOMEN-OWNED (≥50%)	≥50% WOMEN IN SENIOR MANAGEMENT	≥30% WOMEN ON THEIR BOARDS	MAJORITY-WOMEN WORKFORCE

MAPPED TO THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

2 — Food security & agriculture
216 ventures

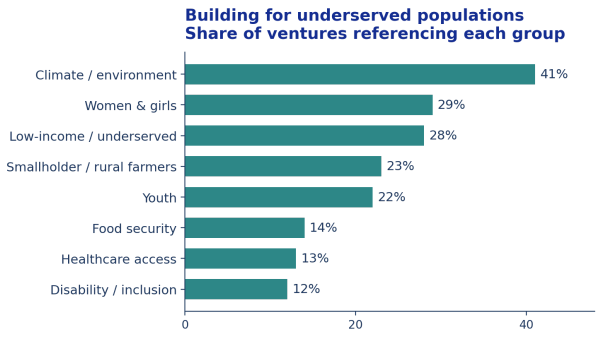
3 — Health & wellbeing
117 ventures

4 — Education & skills
106 ventures

7 13 — Climate & clean energy
79 ventures

8 10 — Financial inclusion
59 ventures

5 8 — Gender equality & decent work
Cross-cutting, whole cohort



Indicative: groups named in founders' own problem and business descriptions.

> "Capital into women-led tech compounds. It becomes ownership, leadership, jobs and reach — the quality jobs created and sustained by women, which sit at the heart of our Theory of Change."
>
> Melanie Hawken
> Founder & CEO, Lionesses of Africa

The winners make it concrete: **Farmer Lifeline** employs rural women as field agents, **GRIT** reaches survivors of gender-based violence, and **Pollen Patrollers** trains women and youth in climate-smart beekeeping.

Beneficiary groups are derived from applicants' own descriptions and are indicative. Gender figures are self-reported; the response base varies by question.

Meet the winners

Everything to this point is the pattern; these five founders are the proof. Each was chosen from 1,163 applicants, and each embodies a different thread of this report — patient capital for climate hardware, applied AI with commercial traction, AI-native infrastructure, and responsible AI for social impact. Their stories show what a single, well-placed cheque unlocks.

01	**Esther Kimani** Farmer Lifeline Technologies · Kenya · Agritech	First place Overall winner	AI-NATIVE
02	**Folayemi Agusto** Tix · Nigeria · Event-tech	Second place	AI-LEVERAGED
03	**Margaret Wanjiku** Pollen Patrollers · Kenya · Agritech & climate	Joint third place	AI-LEVERAGED
04	**Jenny Ambukiyenyi Onya** Neotex (Halisi Livestock) · DRC · Agritech & fintech	Joint third place	AI-NATIVE
05	**Leonora Tima** Gender Rights in Tech (GRIT) · South Africa · Safety-tech	AI for Good Category winner	AI-NATIVE



Winners, finalists and partners at the Johannesburg finale, with Prajna Khanna (bottom far right) and Phuthi Mahanyele-Dabengwa (top far right).



FIRST PLACE · OVERALL WINNER

Esther Kimani

Farmer Lifeline Technologies

Kenya · Agritech · AI & Machine Learning

AI-NATIVE

Esther's mission is personal. She grew up farming with her father on the slopes of the Aberdare Mountains, where each season they lost more than a third of the harvest to pests and disease, and where she was the only girl from her village to attend university. Farmer Lifeline turns that loss into a product: solar-powered, AI-driven pest and disease detection that gives smallholder farmers an early warning they never had. Since the Challenge, she has scaled across Kenya's arid and semi-arid lands — reaching 7,000+ more farmers, 70% of them women, and employing 121 women as field agents through her Tech4Her programme.



17 EMPLOYEES (75% WOMEN)	**33,500+** CUSTOMERS SERVED
$100K–$499K REVENUE TO DATE	**$25K–$99K** FOLLOW-ON (GRANT)

AI IN PRACTICE

AI-native. The company invented the world's first solar-powered, autonomous agricultural AI scanners, which use machine learning to detect crop pests and pathogens and provide real-time, local-language guidance to smallholder farmers.

BIGGEST FUNDING CHALLENGE

Raising growth capital for a hardware-plus-software model that requires significant upfront investment in manufacturing, deployment and farmer training before revenue catches up — unlike pure-software startups, which scale on low fixed costs.

IMPACT SINCE THE CHALLENGE

Reached 7,000+ additional smallholder farmers — 70% of whom were women — and employed 121 additional women as field agents through its Tech4Her programme, creating green rural jobs.

> *"Being part of the Tech FoundHER Africa Challenge strengthened our belief that African women-led innovation can transform agriculture and improve the livelihoods of millions of smallholder farmers."*
>
> — Esther Kimani, Farmer Lifeline Technologies

THE THREAD

Esther is the patient-capital case made human — hardware-plus-AI that needed someone to fund the long build.



SECOND PLACE

Folayemi Agusto

Tix Africa

Nigeria · Event-tech · Ticketing

AI-LEVERAGED

Folayemi built Tix because she needed it. While running her own food festival, she could not find ticketing infrastructure that worked for African events — so she built it, bringing a sociology degree and a background in finance and tech to the problem. Tix is now the rails under live events across the continent. Navigating a macro downturn and investor bias, she led with unit economics rather than hype — and the discipline shows: revenue grew 143% year on year to $269K in 2025, with the core Nigeria and Ghana markets now profitable.



28 EMPLOYEES	**50,000+** CUSTOMERS SERVED
$500K–$999K REVENUE TO DATE	**AI-leveraged** AI STATUS

AI IN PRACTICE

AI-leveraged. Tix uses AI tools to sharpen operations and give event creators insight into their audiences, lowering operating costs and strengthening its competitive edge.

BIGGEST FUNDING CHALLENGE

Navigating a macroeconomic downturn and investor bias against the sector. The team responded by leading with unit economics, clear traction and profitability, and by seeking investors who understand the market.

IMPACT SINCE THE CHALLENGE

The Challenge connected Folayemi to a high-calibre community of founders and industry leaders, providing strategic insight and a peer support system as Tix scales.

> *"When the judges described the exceptional pitch they selected for second place, I knew it was me. This validation means everything for what we're building."*
>
> — Folayemi Agusto, Tix Africa

THE THREAD

Folayemi is applied AI with the numbers to match — the commercial traction investors say they want but overlook.



JOINT THIRD PLACE

Margaret Wanjiku

Pollen Patrollers

Kenya · Agritech · Climate · IoT

AI-LEVERAGED

Margaret was raised by grandparents who kept bees and struggled to make it pay — a childhood memory she turned into a company. Working in rural communities, she watched farmers pour time and money into their crops yet harvest poorly, with failing pollination at the root of the problem. Pollen Patrollers answers with smart-hive IoT and AI that protect pollinator health and lift yields. The Challenge sharpened her strategy and widened her network, helping her grow her Patrollers4Her initiative and bring more women and youth into climate-smart technology.



21 EMPLOYEES	**20,140** CUSTOMERS SERVED
$100K–$499K REVENUE TO DATE	**$25K–$99K** FOLLOW-ON FUNDING

AI IN PRACTICE

AI-leveraged. The venture is expanding its use of AI to predict colony health, detect pests and diseases earlier, optimise pollination strategies and tailor recommendations for farmers and beekeepers.

BIGGEST FUNDING CHALLENGE

Accessing patient capital for hardware development and manufacturing. Investors favour software with shorter cycles, whereas climate hardware needs heavy upfront investment. The team combined grants, partnerships and earned revenue to bridge the gap.

IMPACT SINCE THE CHALLENGE

The Challenge's visibility and mentorship sharpened the company's thinking on intellectual property, commercialisation and scaling — supporting its expansion from Kenya towards Tanzania and Ethiopia.

> *"The Tech FoundHER Africa Challenge gave us more than recognition. It strengthened our confidence, expanded our network, and accelerated our vision of building Africa's leading pollinator intelligence platform."*
>
> — Margaret Wanjiku, Pollen Patrollers

THE THREAD

Margaret shows why climate hardware needs patient capital — the impact is real, but it does not arrive on a software timeline.



JOINT THIRD PLACE

Jenny Ambukiyenyi Onya

Neotex (Halisi Livestock)

Democratic Republic of Congo · Agritech · Livestock · Fintech

AI-NATIVE

After more than a decade at the intersection of business and technology, Jenny wanted to stop optimising other people's products and start building from the ground up. Halisi is the result: AI-powered infrastructure built for African markets, designed where the problems actually live. Her hardest battle was perception — investors who read "AI" as polished software and underpriced the infrastructure beneath it. Since the Challenge she has accelerated Halisi's expansion beyond its first market into new high-impact regions, growing it into shared infrastructure rather than a single product.



3 EMPLOYEES	**5** INSTITUTIONAL CLIENTS (B2B)
$1M+ REVENUE TO DATE	**<$25K** FOLLOW-ON FUNDING

AI IN PRACTICE

AI-native. Halisi's architecture is built to run in low-connectivity, low-data environments, applying AI across livestock, climate data and financial-systems integration.

BIGGEST FUNDING CHALLENGE

Bridging the gap between how investors perceive AI — often as a software product — and how Halisi operates, as systemic infrastructure. The team refined its positioning to convey the scale of the opportunity.

IMPACT SINCE THE CHALLENGE

The Challenge raised Neotex's visibility across AI, impact-investing and development-finance ecosystems, opening doors to institutional stakeholders it could not easily have reached.

> *"Tech FoundHER didn't just accelerate our growth — it redefined how we position ourselves as a scalable infrastructure for impact."*
>
> — Jenny Ambukiyenyi Onya, Neotex (Halisi Livestock)

THE THREAD

Jenny is the AI-native founder the deep dive describes — and the clearest example of AI being misread as risk.



AI FOR GOOD · CATEGORY WINNER

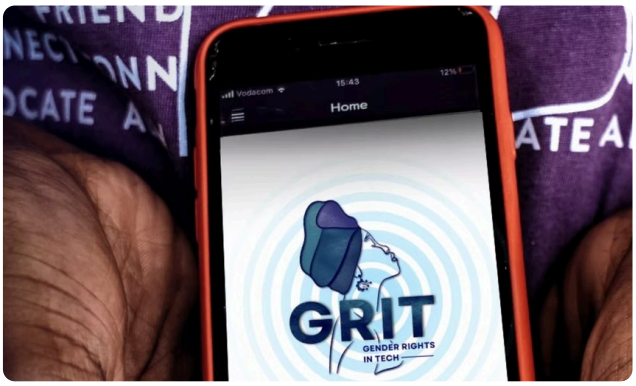
Leonora Tima

Gender Rights in Tech (GRIT)

South Africa · Safety-tech · GBV support · AI

AI-NATIVE

Leonora's company was born from loss. In 2020 a member of her extended family — 19 years old and nine months pregnant — was murdered outside Cape Town, and the silence around the death struck her as deeply as the violence; cases like it rarely make the news. After years in youth and development work and a fellowship in ethical AI, she built GRIT, where survivors of gender-based violence reach support through Zuzi over WhatsApp — meeting people where they already are. She has since convened the AI for Sexual and Reproductive Health Summit in Kigali, putting African practitioners in the room rather than making them the subject of it.



9 EMPLOYEES	**25,000** PEOPLE SUPPORTED
$500K–$999K REVENUE TO DATE	**$500K–$999K** FOLLOW-ON FUNDING (GRANT / NON-DILUTIVE)

AI IN PRACTICE

AI-native. GRIT operates AI in a high-stakes, trauma context, building safe, trauma-informed systems that work for African women in their own languages.

BIGGEST FUNDING CHALLENGE

Raising funding for feminist and GBV work at a moment when that funding is contracting — more organisations competing for a shrinking pool of short-term, restricted grants that rarely match the cost of building responsible AI.

IMPACT SINCE THE CHALLENGE

Recognition put GRIT in front of funders, partners and peers that are hard for a women-led African tech organisation to reach alone, and supported a major follow-on raise.

> *"Women from the global south remain some of the least-funded, least-visible founders in tech — not for lack of ideas, but because capital follows familiar networks. Programmes like the Tech FoundHER Africa Challenge matter because they interrupt that."*
>
> — Leonora Tima, Gender Rights in Tech (GRIT)

THE THREAD

Leonora is the responsible-AI, social-impact case — building for a problem that funding is contracting away from, not toward.

13 RECOMMENDATIONS

How to build on what works

If this cohort is the opportunity and these winners are the proof, the final question is how to scale the model. Drawn from the winners' own recommendations and the patterns in the applicant data, five actions would widen the path the Challenge has opened.

01

Extend structured post-programme support

The single most consistent request from winners. Carry the momentum of the Challenge into investor-readiness support, market-expansion help and active alumni engagement well beyond the award.

02

Build for the financing 'missing middle'

With a median raise sought of $100,000 and most founders seeking $50K–$1M, the highest-leverage intervention is bridging founders into early-stage equity and blended finance at the missing middle.

03

Back patient capital for hardware and deep-tech

Hardware, climate and deep-tech ventures need patient capital that matches their longer build cycles. Several winners struggled precisely because investors favour quick-scaling software.

04

Support responsible, locally-grounded AI

This cohort arrives AI-literate. The opportunity is not to introduce AI but to help founders apply it responsibly to local data realities — funding data, safe-AI practice and specialised talent.

05

Pair capital with market access

Adoption, distribution, regulation and infrastructure are navigated through networks. Curated market access and policy guidance multiply the value of any capital raised.

IN CLOSING

The opportunity is capital, not pipeline.

The evidence is consistent. This cohort is AI-literate, building for impact, and already earning revenue — and still badly under-funded. That is not a pipeline problem; it is an opportunity waiting on capital. The Tech FoundHER Africa Challenge is how we answer it: equity-free funding, mentorship, and the networks women-led ventures need to scale. We intend to keep going, and to reach further.

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH

Lionesses of Africa

Source: Tech FoundHER Africa Challenge application export (1,163 completed responses, September 2025) and winner impact interviews (2026). All figures self-reported; percentages calculated against valid responses to each question.