Early Stage Support for Entrepreneurs –
Westerwelle Startup Haus Kigali Entrepreneurship Program 2019 (WSHKEP19)

About the Program

The Westerwelle Startup Haus Kigali Entrepreneurship Program 2019 (WSHKEP19) is designed to support early stage entrepreneurs and start-ups in Rwanda to create scalable businesses and integrate them deeply within the existing local start-up ecosystem to facilitate knowledge sharing and peer learning. The program runs from March 2019 to February 2020 and provides two six months cohorts (10 start-ups each).

Applicants are selected through partnerships with organisations such as GIZ, DigiCenter, Women in ICT, and others. Applicants have to complete an online application form to introduce themselves and their business venture. The WSHKEP19 team subsequently selects the top 10 candidates who will get to benefit from the following:

1. Professional Workspace

Selected participants of the WSHKEP19 receive fully equipped workspaces at the Westerwelle Startup Haus Kigali (WSHK) including desks, chairs, electricity, high-speed fiber-optic broadband internet, meeting rooms, printers/scanners, projectors, and kitchen/bathroom facilities.

2. Community Access & Mentor Pairing

The WSHK community has grown strongly encompassing over 80 local entrepreneurs and a social media following of over 10,000 people. Events such as the Seedstars Pitch Competition, the official opening ceremony and a two-day Young Founders Conference were a great success. Among other things, such events connect the participants of WSHKEP19 with the community of established entrepreneurs of the start-up ecosystem in Kigali.

After a needs assessment they are paired with existing members of the ecosystem, who take on mentorship roles to advise the participants’ businesses and share their own experience with them. Additionally, the start-ups benefit from opportunities to meet and network with stakeholders such as corporates, investors and partners of the WSHK during events, workshops, competitions, etc. Together, these interactions advance their knowledge and skillset and increase their visibility in Rwanda.
3. Advisory Services

Participants will be provided access to financial, legal and business advisors. Depending on their needs they will receive advice on their initial financial accounting and legal setup. This knowledge will be shared in workshops, which will also be open to existing members of the WSHK, thus further supporting knowledge sharing among the group. Additionally, they will be able to individually discuss their businesses directly with the advisors.

4. Makerspace Access & Training

WSHKEP19 participants will be able to use the Makerspace, which is equipped with machines ranging from hand tools to 3D printers, laser cutters, sewing machines and other equipment with very limited or no availability in Rwanda. A qualified Makerspace Manager will provide an introduction to the machines and teach participants on how to operate them safely. In addition, workshops around more advanced usage of the machines as well as design thinking will be available to further develop and refine existing product prototypes.

About the Westerwelle Foundation

The Westerwelle Foundation for International Understanding with headquarters in Berlin, Germany is a non-profit organization and was established in 2013 by Dr. Guido Westerwelle, former German Minister for Foreign Affairs, and Ralph Dommermuth, CEO and Founder of United Internet AG. By supporting entrepreneurship the foundation wants to create more opportunities for more people around the world. The Westerwelle Startup Haus Programme establishes entrepreneurship centres called “Westerwelle Startup Haus” in selected locations to support start-up ecosystems and entrepreneurs through an offering of office space, advisory services, events and workshop which are tailored to the local needs of entrepreneurs.

About Make-IT in Africa

The Tech Entrepreneurship Initiative ‘Make-IT in Africa’ promotes digital innovation for sustainable and inclusive development in Africa. Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) implements this project on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), as part of BMZ’s Digital Africa Initiative.

In close collaboration with more than 30 corporate and finance partners, social enterprises, hubs, and networks, ‘Make-IT in Africa’ supports an enabling environment for young entrepreneurs – to enable better access to finance, markets and skills.