Volume 185

CONTENTS

WASME SME UPDATE

FORTNIGHTLY E- BULLETIN FOR GLOBAL UPDATE ON SME NEWS, EVENTS, & PROGRAMS

ISSUE: 16-30 June 2023

Angola

Liquid Dataport and Angola Telecom Improve Connectivity between Angola and Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa

Liquid Dataport and Angola Telecom have allowed organisations and people in Angola access to high speed connectivity, offering numerous advantages and fostering direct commerce corridors

Liquid Dataport, a business of Liquid Intelligent Technologies (Liquid) (www.Liquid.Tech), a pan-African technology group, and Angola Telecom, the leading fixed network operator in Angola, announces a new terrestrial fibre route between Luanda, Angola to Johannesburg, South Africa, via DRC, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The addition of this route to Liquid's regional fibre backbone is a significant addition to its existing 110,000 km network, providing its regional customers' access to high-speed connectivity at affordable costs.

Hon. Mário Oliveira, Minister of Telecommunications, Information Technologies and Social Communication, said, *"We have made significant investments in our telecommunications sector over the last 25 years, which includes terrestrial, submarine and even satellite connectivity. We understand the crucial role played by Public-Private Partnerships, and that is why we have new laws in place that support and offer attractive incentives for international players like Liquid Dataport that help drive our national focus towards the IT-driven modernisation of Angola. The partnership between Angola Telecom and Liquid Dataport has also allowed us to enjoy seamless connectivity with other countries in COMESA and South Africa, supporting long-term growth in our economies".*

With this investment, Liquid Dataport and Angola Telecom have allowed organisations and people in Angola access to high-speed connectivity, offering numerous advantages and fostering direct commerce corridors. This route traverses through Angola, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DR Congo), Zimbabwe, Zambia, and South Africa.

While the route caters to the high demand from wholesale customers, Liquid Dataport has partnered with Angola Telecom to provide enterprises and SMEs in the country with access to high-speed connectivity and even direct connectivity to data centres in Johannesburg.

Adilson Dos Santos, CEO of Angola Telecom, says, *"There is a conscious drive towards making the internet more popular, as currently, the internet penetration in Angola is only 5 million people. Angola Telecom and Liquid Dataport have been able to work seamlessly for over two years with each other as we are working towards a common goal. Through our National Rural Telecommunication Plan, we want to ensure that connectivity is available to citizens in the remotest parts of the country. We are excited to see the fruits of this partnership lead to increased contribution of the ICT sector to national GDP".*

Liquid Dataport's investment in this cutting-edge route aligns with its broader vision of establishing an extensive network of fibre routes throughout Africa. With an impressive network spanning multiple countries, including South Africa, Kenya, Zimbabwe, and Nigeria, the company is working towards a connected Africa that fuels innovation, drives economic growth, and fosters socio-economic development that leaves no one behind.

The investment in infrastructure and strategic alliances ensures that Liquid remains at the forefront of driving technological advancement and innovation across the African continent. "Our continuous investment into our 'One Africa Digital Network' provides customers with access to major data centres in South Africa, Kenya, Nigeria and now Angola, ensuring that African data never has to leave our shores. Our unwavering dedication to expanding the horizons of connectivity in Africa will empower businesses to unlock unprecedented opportunities for growth, collaborate on a global scale, and harness the immense potential of digital technologies," concluded David Eurin, CEO of Liquid Dataport.

Read More

Burundi

EAC rolls out campaign to grow agri-export trade

East African Community Headquarters, Arusha, Tanzania, 15th June, 2023: The East African Community (EAC) has launched a campaign aimed at creating awareness on the agri-export trade opportunities that have been created through the EU-EAC Market Access Upgrade Programme (MARKUP).

Through the campaign, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the agricultural value chain, co-operatives and farmers, as well as government entities in the EAC will access information and tools on agri-export trade.

Speaking at the 14th June, 2023 launch of the campaign, Ms. Flavia Busingye, the Acting Director of Customs at the EAC Secretariat, said that MARKUP had created numerous trade opportunities for agri-SMEs in the region. *"The campaign 'MARKUP: Growing agri-export markets' aims to raise awareness of the opportunities in agricultural trade, and to demonstrate that international markets are within reach of East African exporters,"* said Ms. Busingye.

Ms. Busingye that since its inception in 2018, MARKUP had generated useful resources for growth of agri-exports in five EAC Partner States, namely Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, Uganda and Tanzania. She said that the programme, which is a collaborative initiative of the EAC, the EU, the German government and other development partners, has generated resources such as the EAC Quality Portal, the Financing Gateway and the Burundi Trade Information Portal.

Market studies, practical guides and handbooks as well as policy briefs have also been produced in the EAC-EU initiative, she said, and added, "*MARKUP has contributed to stronger quality infrastructure in the region, including harmonization of standards and frameworks for intra-regional trade in food products." "I urge you to actively participate in the campaign through the various channels and platforms*," she said.

She said that SMEs in the agriculture sector face numerous constraints in trading within the EAC region.

She highlighted constraints such as lack of access to market information, including on standards and quality requirements; cumbersome and sometimes costly customs procedures; poor connectivity, among other things. *"The scale and impact of these challenges rises exponentially when it comes to accessing markets outside the EAC. This is one of the reasons that we at the EAC Secretariat worked in partnership with the EU to design and roll out MARKUP*," she said.

Also working on the programme which is being implemented by GIZ are the International Trade Centre, United Nations Industrial Development Organisation, Uganda Coffee Development Authority, Solidaridad East Africa, Oxfam and the Institute for University Co-operation.

Mr. Max Middeke, the Deputy Programme Manager at German Development Cooperation (GIZ) – EAC Programme said that the MARKUP campaign comes at a time when the bulk of activities of the program are drawing to a close.

Read More

Costa Rica

The World Bank to support inclusive and sustainable economic recovery in Costa Rica

he World Bank Board of Executive Directors today approved a loan to support Costa Rica's post-pandemic recovery program, with special emphasis on protecting family incomes, strengthening small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and boosting fiscal sustainability based on green and low-carbon growth.

"This new budget support loan demonstrates the World Bank's confidence in the government's commitment to inclusive and sustainable economic growth. The Costa Rican economy is emerging from the severe impact of the pandemic, but adverse external conditions have presented us with new challenges that we must address in terms of economic reactivation and fiscal consolidation," said Minister of Finance, Nogui Acosta Jaén.

The series of credits supports three mutually reinforcing pro-development pillars:

Protect people's jobs and incomes from the impact of COVID-19 and foster the recovery of small and medium-sized businesses. This will contribute to achieving a combination of international shock response measures and reforms leading towards more efficient and resilient social protection.

Reinforce the sustainability of public finances through improved tax collection, more efficient spending and better management of public debt.
Promote green growth and low-carbon development that is resilient, equitable, climate-smart and sustainable, and that makes greater use of clean technologies.
“While Costa Rica has made much progress in the environmental, economic, and social spheres, the reduction of poverty and inequality remains an ongoing challenge,” said Carine Clert, World Bank country manager for El Salvador and Costa Rica.“With this operation we seek to underpin the Government of Costa Rica’s efforts to progress towards fiscal consolidation and investment in more ecological production systems, as well as helping to strengthen basic protective measures for the most vulnerable members of the population, especially women.”

The US$500 million loan, financed by the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), is based on the SOFR interest rate plus a variable spread in a single currency in US dollars, with a final maturity of 19.5 years, including a four-year grace period.

Read More

Egypt

Federation of Egyptian Banks and the Agency for the Development of Medium, Small and Micro Enterprises signed a joint memorandum of understanding with the aim of supporting Projects

The Federation of Banks of Egypt and the Agency for the Development of Medium, Small and Micro Enterprises signed a joint memorandum of understanding with the aim of supporting SME 's projects in various sectors.

The signing was attended by Mohamed El-Atreby, Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Federation of Banks of Egypt, Basil Rahmy, CEO of the Medium, Small and Micro Enterprise Development Agency, and Sherif Lokman, Deputy Governor of the Central Bank for Financial Inclusion. and Medium Enterprises in the Federation, and Tariq Shash, Executive Vice President of the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency. The memorandum of understanding aims to provide financial and non-financial services and to provide the benefits, facilities and incentives stipulated in the Small, Medium and Micro Enterprise Development Law No. 152 of 2020 to the owners of these projects and entrepreneurs, while merging the informal sector with the formal sector in the various governorates of the Republic.

In this regard; Mohamed El-Atreby, Chairman of the Federation of Egyptian Banks, said that the Federation's Board of Directors adopts work to expand the scope of financing small and medium enterprises and considers it a national project for the advancement of the national economy, and works to enhance cooperation with the relevant authorities, foremost of which is the Agency for the Development of Medium, Small and Micro Enterprises, which is considered supportive of small projects. medium in Egypt.

He explained that they had previously discussed joint cooperation between the two parties through the Federation's Small and Medium Enterprises Committee, which stressed the importance of working to strengthen relations between banks and the agency, to strengthen the bonds of cooperation and coordination between them, in a way that helps achieve further growth and support economic and social development efforts. On his part; Basil Rahmi, CEO of the Small, Medium and Micro Enterprises Development Authority, affirmed the agency's keenness to activate various aspects of cooperation with the Federation of Egyptian Banks to provide and facilitate various financing and technical services for owners of small projects, in a way that helps the stability and growth of their businesses and enhances their ability to absorb more job opportunities.

He explained that the two sides will work to hold workshops for owners of small projects to introduce the benefits and facilitations provided for in Enterprise Development Law No. 152 and their effectiveness in creating an environment conducive to the growth of small projects in Egypt, in addition to holding seminars and introductory meetings on all services provided by the Enterprise Development Agency, and how customers benefit. One-stop service. The CEO of the MSMEDA indicated that, according to the memorandum of understanding, networking will be made between the entrepreneurs of the MSMEDA clients and the entrepreneurs affiliated with the Nile Pioneers initiative to exchange experiences and share experiences in the field of entrepreneurship to spread benefit, and work on developing entrepreneurial projects and start-ups in Egypt.

Read More

France

The Île-de-France Region confirms its goal to be the first Smart Region in Europe

On the occasion of VivaTech, Valérie Pécresse, President of the Île-de-France Region, announced several measures to confirm its status as Europe's first Smart Region.

New measures to support the innovation in the Île-de-France Region ecosystem:

- The Île-de-France Region announces the launch of a "Small industrial startups" PM'UP to encourage the establishment of the first production lines in Île-de-France. The regional support for these SMEs and startups wishing to implement a new production unit will be 1 million euros. Submission of applications is open until August 28, and the winners will be announced before the end of the year.
- The Île-de-France Region has decided to experiment with the use of artificial intelligence in its administration to improve the quality of tomorrow's public service. It will launch around 10 innovation markets for a total amount of approximately 1 million euros to improve internal administrative management, information or service to users: a ChatGPT of regional aid to help Île-de-France residents identify the support device according to their needs, a solution to heat and cool secondary high schools from the reuse of waste water heat, etc.
- The Île-de-France Region is launching a finalized version of the regional territory's 3D digital twin. The goal is to help Île-de-France residents find the 40 regional digital services of the "Île-de-France Smart Services Region" program, customized according to their location, directly online at www.iledefrance.fr: search for a co-working space, a charging station for your electric vehicle, a waste disposal site, a producer of local agricultural products, etc.
- The Île-de-France Region strengthens the cybersecurity of Île-de-France Region companies by offering a "cyber diagnostic" cheque (max. 5,000 euros) and a "cyber equipment" cheque (max. 10,000 euros) to SMEs with more than 10 employees.

The Île-de-France Region is an innovation leader in France and the European Union thanks to one of the world's most efficient ecosystems: Europe's leading economic region, the largest hub of startups in the European Union with 8,000 of them representing 40% of French startups, 80% of funds raised and almost all unicorns valued at more than 1 billion euros.

Read More

Italy

EIF provides €50 million to illimity Bank to promote Italian SMEs' green and digital transition

The European Investment Fund (EIF), part of the EIB Group, is providing two guarantees totaling €50 million to illimity Bank to improve access to finance small and medium-sized businesses (SMEs) in Italy. These SMEs primarily focus on sustainability, innovation and digitalisation. The EIF transactions are backed by the InvestEU programme.

Thanks to the InvestEU Innovation and Digitalisation guarantee of €25 million, illimity Bank will be able to further support innovation and digitalisation-driven enterprises. This support will enhance access to finance for research and innovation intensive SMEs and small mid-caps, as well as supporting the uptake of digital technologies and the digital transformation of enterprises. On the other hand, the InvestEU Sustainability guarantee of €25 million will enable illimity Bank to boost the green and sustainable transition of the economy, encouraging environmentally friendly, green, and inclusive Investments of the target final recipients.

The transaction announced today will empower small and medium businesses to secure vital financing, enabling them to expand their operations, invest in innovation, and create new job opportunities. With a long-standing commitment to supporting small and medium businesses, illimity Bank continues its collaboration with EIF, which started in December 2021, to leverage these funds effectively and drive economic growth in Italy.

EIF Chair Gelsomina Vigliotti said: "We are pleased to partner with illimity Bank in providing substantial support to Italian small and medium businesses. Through this collaboration, we aim to address the financing challenges faced by smaller businesses and stimulate their growth. The EIF €50 million investment guarantees, backed by InvestEU, will significantly contribute to enhancing access to credit and fostering economic development in Italy."

European Commissioner for Economy Paolo Gentiloni said: "These two guarantees are part of the InvestEU programme, which aims to encourage sustainable, digital, innovative and inclusive investments across Europe. InvestEU is playing an important role in helping small and medium-sized companies gain access to the finance they need to grow and create jobs. Thanks to this agreement, an increasing number of Italian small and medium businesses will be able to secure crucial financing to do so and drive the green and digital transitions."

CEO and Founder of illimity Corrado Passera stated: "illimity was born out of a commitment to support and bolster the entrepreneurial landscape in Italy. Our dedication to small and medium businesses is underscored by this agreement, which facilitates not only the provision of fresh liquidity during a challenging period, but also supports the funding of research, sustainable and inclusive projects, and the digitalisation of businesses. By partnering with the EIF, we can further empower companies with high-growth potential to boost their own growth and contribute to a positive transformation at an economic, social and environmental level across the country.

Read More

Kazakhstan

UAE, Kazakhstan sign deal to boost trade ties

Exporters from the UAE and Kazakhstan will have better access to Shariah-compliant insurance and trade credit after both countries signed an agreement to protect companies from potential commercial risks in international dealings.

The UAE export credit company Etihad Credit Insurance signed a memorandum of understanding with Kazakhstan's export insurance firm KazakhExport to enhance trade and support sustainable economic growth between the two countries.

Under the terms of the agreement, both parties will organize workshops aimed at educating small and medium-sized enterprises on the gains of using trade protection solutions to mitigate the risks of nonpayment resulting from several commercial and geopolitical factors.

The MoU falls in line with the "We the UAE 2031" vision which aims to further strengthen bilateral economic relations between both countries, according to a statement.

The two sides are also expected to form a task force to explore more opportunities for cooperation, with a special focus on seven strategic areas including insurance, trade promotion, programs for supporting SMEs, among others.

The MoU was signed by ECI CEO Raja Al-Mazrouei and KazakhExport chairman Aslan Kaligazin at the 13th annual Aman Union General Meeting in Dubai.

"By entering into this agreement with KazakhExport, we are strengthening our dedication to enhancing the global competitiveness of businesses within the UAE and Kazakhstan," Al-Mazrouei said,

"This vital partnership directly aligns with ECI's mission to boost non-oil exports, simultaneously extending comprehensive protection to SMEs, thereby enriching the UAE's economic diversification," the CEO added. He went on to say that as ECI amplifies the global footprint of SMEs, it also seeks to bolster the UAE's economic aspirations. "Ultimately, this agreement not only fortifies our commitment to enhancing economic and trade relationships with Kazakhstan but also paves the way for sustainable economic growth, reflecting our mutual objectives," Al-Mazrouei said.

The agreement bolsters the UAE's constant efforts to position itself as a global hub for trade and finance as well as to elevate its role as an attractive market for global firms.
In January, UAE-based port developer and regulator AD Ports Group also signed deals with Kazakhstan's national oil company and government to develop shipping fleets and facilities on the Caspian and Black Seas to aid growing exports.

Read More

Maldives

World Bank Provides US$67.8 million to Accelerate Fiscal Reforms, Boost Private Sector and Fisheries Competitiveness in Maldives

The Government of Maldives and the World Bank today signed two agreements totalling US$67.8 million (approximately MVR1 billion) to support critical reforms to state-owned enterprises (SOEs), and to strengthen competitiveness of small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and the fisheries sector in Maldives.

The agreements were signed at the Ministry of Finance in Male’ by Honorable Ibrahim Ameer, Minister of Finance, and Faris H. Hadad-Zervos, World Bank Country Director for Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka.

“The Maldivian government is working on a comprehensive plan to improve the functioning of state-owned enterprises and diversify our economy,” said Hon. Ibrahim Ameer, Minister of Finance of Maldives. “These two projects will help create more opportunities for businesses, strengthen our successful fisheries industry, and bring about important reforms that ensure our long-term financial and economic stability.”

The Transforming Fisheries Sector Management in South-West Indian Ocean Region and Maldives Project (TransFORM) project is a $64.8 million initiative, out of which $52.8 million is allocated to Maldives, aimed at improving fisheries management in the South-West Indian Ocean (SWIO) Region. Fisheries, especially small-scale fisheries, play a significant role for the livelihoods of an estimated 35 million people in the SWIO countries of whom 14.3 million people live in low elevation coastal areas, and 3.3 million are directly employed in marine fishing. The project focuses on sharing knowledge and data to make better decisions and strengthening the country's ability to govern and protect the fisheries sector. It aims to support other SWIO island nations and make Maldives a regional leader by providing knowledge and assistance. Promoting sustainable and inclusive practices to expand and diversify the fisheries industry, removing barriers to business competition, and training at least 40,000 people from the coastal communities with a special focus on encouraging more women to participate in fisheries management are also proposed interventions.

The $15 million Maldives Competitiveness and Growth Project (MCGP) aims to assist in encouraging greater private sector participation in the economy and in enhancing the management and operation of specific SOEs. The MCGP aims to make the 40,000 registered SMEs in Maldives more competitive by improving digital financial systems to make it easier for them to access loans. It will also provide support to selected innovative SMEs to help them grow and develop new environmentally friendly products that can compete in emerging markets, encouraging other existing small businesses and potential entrepreneurs to develop and contribute to a vibrant SME ecosystem.

“Over the years, Maldives has leveraged its beauty and natural assets to drive its impressive growth primarily through tourism,” said Faris. H. Hadad-Zervos, the World Bank Country Director for Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka. “The country's aim moving forward is to evolve this growth through greater diversification, transformation within

sectors, and resilience against climactic and fiscal shocks. These projects will contribute to that aim." The TransFORM project will be implemented by the regional Indian Ocean Commission and Maldives' Ministry of Fisheries, Marine Resources and Agriculture. The MCGP project will be implemented by the Ministry of Finance.

Read More

Rwanda

Monetary Authority of Singapore and National Bank of Rwanda Collaborate on the Rwanda Imbaraga SME Ecosystem

The Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS) and the National Bank of Rwanda (NBR), in partnership with the Business Development Fund of Rwanda (BDF) and Proxtera Pte Ltd [1] , today announced the official launch of the Rwanda Imbaraga SME Ecosystem (RISE) programme. A Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the two central banks, BDF and Proxtera. This collaborative initiative aims to foster stronger connections between financial institutions and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in both Rwanda and Singapore.

RISE aims to equip SMEs in Rwanda with better capabilities to participate in domestic and cross-border trade opportunities, as well as enhanced access to trade financing. The programme components include:

- Financial literacy and capacity building: Provide SMEs with access to financial literacy courses and digital services.
- Access to financing: Extend the data sets and credentials that micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) can use to secure funding.
- Expanded trade opportunities: Create new and expanded trade opportunities within Rwanda, as well as between Rwanda and international markets, including Singapore, through business to business (B2B) marketplaces.

MAS and NBR will provide strategic direction and support for the RISE programme, including providing policy guidance on cross-border financial engagements and digital financial credentials building. BDF and Proxtera will play key roles in operationalising the RISE programme and infrastructure, in collaboration with Rwandan financial institutions, government entities and trusted data partners.

John Rwangombwa, Governor, BNR, said, "We are glad for this great partnership with Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS) in leveraging technology to support our financial sector. The RISE project will solve data unavailability through collecting alternative data to create trusted credentials that financial institutions can rely on to lend to SMEs. This will eventually bridge the gap of SME financing and expose Rwandan SMEs to international markets, through the digital marketplace."

Sopnendu Mohanty, Chief FinTech Officer, MAS, said, "*SMEs are important building blocks in economic development, while financial digital infrastructure is essential to a successful digital economy. With RISE, we are confident of driving enhanced financial services, developing stronger trusted credentials and creating greater business opportunities for the Rwanda SMEs and the Rwanda financial ecosystem. RISE is a major milestone that builds on our strong Singapore-Rwanda ties and we look forward to this public-private sector collaboration."*

Vincent Munyeshyaka, Chief Executive Officer, BDF, said, "*BDF already recognises the strategic importance of the SME sector as a driving force behind economic growth, and within the context of addressing issues on SME access to finance, this partnership is pertinent and timely especially in the post Covid-19 pandemic, as it introduces a new SME financing approach and access to markets."*

Commenting on the partnership, Saurav Bhattacharyya, Chief Executive Officer of Proxtera said, "*Proxtera is proud to be working with National Bank of Rwanda, Business Development Fund and the Monetary Authority of Singapore to build and operationalise RISE. This partnership cements our commitment to uplifting SMEs as they embark on their cross-border trade journey. SMEs begin their journey through the SME Financial Empowerment Programme (SFE), and are able to equip themselves with the necessary financial and digital literacy skills to thrive in today's rapidly evolving business landscape. We are excited to work with our partners to foster an ecosystem that supports SMEs and strengthens the econom*y."

Read More

Tanzania

UBA Partners AfCFTA to invest US$6bn into SMEs in Africa

Africa's Global Bank, United Bank for Africa (UBA) Plc, on Monday, signed an agreement with the Africa Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) Secretariat to invest $6billion as funding for African Small and Medium Enterprises within the next three years.

A breakdown of the $6bn investment shows that a total of $1.2bn has been budgeted for the year 2023; $1.9bn for 2024 and $2.88bn for 2025. UBA signed the agreement with AfCFTA on the sidelines of the opening ceremony of the 30thAfreximbank Annual Meeting (AAM) which was held in Accra, Ghana on Monday.

By this agreement, UBA with the aim of boosting intra-Africa trade, will provide financial services in four main areas which are agro-processing, automotive,

pharmaceuticals, and transport and logistics, to small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in all the 20 African countries where UBA operates.

These countries are Nigeria, Benin, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Cote D'Ivoire, Senegal, Mali, Burkina Faso, Guinea, Zambia, Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda, Mozambique, Gabon, Congo Brazzaville, Congo DRC, Chad and Cameroon. One of the key initiatives of the

AfCFTA Agreement focuses on improving access to finance and markets for SMEs to encourage their growth and contribution to the socio-economic development of Africa.

UBA Group's Deputy Managing Director, Muyiwa Akinyemi, who signed the agreement on behalf of the UBA Group, noted that as Africa's global bank, UBA remains committed towards supporting SMEs in Africa, especially given its robust network, which is spread across the 20 countries.

He said, "We entered into this partnership because we see the future of intra-African payments developed by AfCFTA, which will ease payment constraints across 54 countries in Africa (with about 40 different currencies) powered by Pan-African Payment and Settlement System (PAPSS)."Continuing, Akinyemi said, "However, we need to develop these businesses before we can talk about helping them trade, which is the strength of UBA, as we are vital in supporting SMEs, and with our presence in 20 African countries, we say your small business is big business."

On his part, the Secretary-General of the AfCFTA Secretariat, H.E. Wamkele Mene, who spoke on the agreement with UBA, emphasized the need to catalyze Africa's industrialization and boost intra-Africa trade to improve the socio-economic well-being of the continent and its people, which he noted was a key factor behind the partnership.

Mene said, "The Secretariat is committed to supporting SMEs as critical drivers of African economies. We recognize the financing gap SMEs face on the continent and intend to mitigate this gap through this important partnership. The four identified areas of support which UBA will provide will enable SMEs to achieve industrial-driven growth and export development in Africa, which in turn aligns with the objectives of the AfCFTA."

United Bank for Africa is one of the largest employers in the financial sector on the African continent, with 25,000 employees group wide and serving over 35 million customers globally. Operating in 20 African countries and in the United Kingdom, the United States of America, France and the United Arab Emirates, UBA provides retail, commercial and institutional banking services, leading financial inclusion and implementing cutting edge technology.

Read More

Saudi Arabia

Silicon Valley-based tech accelerator Plug and Play to invest $100 million fund in Saudi startups

For decades, Saudi Arabia has been known for its traditional reliance on the oil-dependent economy as a major source of revenue. As of December 2022, the country generated $326 billion in the sector only despite the global price slide in crude oil. But, with the recent digital transformation, the Kingdom is now embarking on an ambitious journey to diversify its economic landscape by pushing for entrepreneurship and venture capital. Vision 2030 is one of the strategies being explored.

The Kingdom is implementing these strategic initiatives to promote the sectors, with the aim of creating private sector jobs and reducing dependence on oil revenues after recognizing and seeing it significant in other countries of the world, particularly in Europe and Asia.

As one of the pioneers of the initiative, a renowned Silicon Valley-based tech accelerator, Plug and Play Tech Center, has now unveiled its plan to establish a $100 million fund dedicated to investing in Saudi tech startups. This strategic move has the potential to receive support from a unit of the Saudi sovereign wealth fund, the Jada Fund of Funds. Just recently, Jada Fund of Funds, a subsidiary of Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund, committed to investing in Investcorp's $500 million Saudi pre-initial public offering growth fund.

The fund is set to be launched in January 2024, with Plug and Play contributing as much as 10% of the total and the rest raised from Saudi funds and family offices. The Silicon Valley-based tech accelerator is starting the fund because the quality of Saudi startups has improved over the past few years. Plug and Play currently oversees five funds with a combined $500 million under management and has plans to launch five more

Read More

Europe

European companies claim the EU's AI Act could 'jeopardise technological sovereignty'

Over 150 executives from companies like Renault, Heineken, Airbus, and Siemens have signed an open letter urging the EU to rethink its plans to regulate AI.

Some of the biggest companies in Europe have taken collective action to criticize the European Union's recently approved artificial intelligence regulations, claiming that the Artificial Intelligence Act is ineffective and could negatively impact competition. In an open letter sent to the European Parliament, Commission, and member states on Friday, and first seen by the Financial Times, over 150 executives from companies like Renault, Heineken, Airbus, and Siemens slammed the AI Act for its potential to "jeopardise Europe's competitiveness and technological sovereignty."

The signatories of the open letter claim that the AI Act in its current state may suppress the opportunity AI technology provides for Europe to "rejoin the technological avant-garde." They argue that the approved rules are too extreme, and risk undermining the bloc's technological ambitions instead of providing a suitable environment for AI innovation.

One of the major concerns flagged by the companies involve the legislation's strict rules specifically targeting generative AI systems, a subset of AI models that typically fall under the "foundation model" designation. Under the AI Act, providers of foundation AI models — regardless of their intended application — will have to register their product with the EU, undergo risk assessments, and meet transparency requirements, such as having to publicly disclose any copyrighted data used to train their models.

The open letter claims that the companies developing these foundation AI systems would be subject to disproportionate compliance costs and liability risks, which may encourage AI providers to withdraw from the European market entirely. "Europe cannot afford to stay on the sidelines," the letter said, encouraging EU lawmakers to drop its rigid compliance obligations for generative AI models and instead focus on those that can accommodate "broad principles in a risk-based approach."

"The EU AI Act, in its current form, has catastrophic implications for European competitiveness"

"*We have come to the conclusion that the EU AI Act, in its current form, has catastrophic implications for European competitiveness," said Jeannette zu Fürstenberg, founding partner of La Famiglia VC, and one of the signatories on the letter. "There is a strong spirit of innovation that is being unlocked in Europe right now, with key European talent leaving US companies to develop technology in Europe. Regulation that unfairly burdens young, innovative companies puts this spirit of innovation in jeopardy."*

The companies also called for the EU to form a regulatory body of experts within the AI industry to monitor how the AI Act can be applied as the technology continues to develop.

"*It is a pity that the aggressive lobby of a few are capturing other serious companies," said Dragoș Tudorache, a Member of the European Parliament who led the development of the AI Act, in response to the letter. Tudorache claims that the companies who have signed the letter are reacting "on the stimulus of a few," and that the draft EU legislation provides "an industry-led process for defining standards, governance with industry at the table, and a light regulatory regime that asks for transparency. Nothing else."*

OpenAI, the company behind ChatGPT and Dall-E, lobbied the EU to change an earlier draft of the AI Act in 2022, requesting that lawmakers scrap a proposed amendment that would have subjected all providers of general-purpose AI systems — a vague, expansive category of AI that LLMs and foundation models can fall under — to the AI Act's toughest restrictions. The amendment was ultimately never incorporated into the approved legislation.

OpenAI's CEO Sam Altman, who himself signed an open letter warning of the potential dangers that future AI systems could pose, previously warned that the company could pull out of the European market if it was unable to comply with EU regulations. Altman later backtracked and said that OpenAI has "no plans to leave.

Read More

Australia

Startup Year legislation passes Parliament

More Australians will have the opportunity to bring their startup ideas to life following the passage of legislation.

The Education Legislation Amendment (Startup Year and Other Measures) Bill 2023 delivers on an election commitment to support up-and-coming Australian entrepreneurs. In a first-year pilot, up to 1,000 eligible students will be able to access a new form of Higher Education Loan Program assistance, STARTUP-HELP and participate in a higher education-based accelerator program.

This will be expanded to benefit up to 2,000 students a year in subsequent years. The Startup Year will support skills development and give recipients access to mentors and facilities to help them commercialize good ideas and create new jobs.

This includes supporting under-represented groups such as female entrepreneurs, as well as Indigenous Australians, people with disability and community-based startups working on regional and rural issues.

The Government will work closely with universities and industry to implement Startup Year programs from early 2024. "The Startup Year means more Australians will have the opportunity to turn their ideas into businesses. "The Government will work closely with the higher education community and industry to implement the program from early 2024. Minister for Education Jason Clare.

Read More

EVENTS UPDATE

8th Print Pack Sign Expo

Date: 12 - 14 September 2023
Venue: Kenya
Details: https://tashikka.com/index.php

For best price for stall booking, please write to dg@wasmeinfo.org

SOUTH ASIA Trade Fair 2023

Date: 12 - 16 October 2023
Venue: Bhrikutimandap, Exhibition Hall, Kathmandu
Details: https://www.facebook.com/southasiatrade/

Membership

WASME has members in different countries across the world. Member constituents represent industrial promotional organizations of various types and come from highly industrialized, developing and transition economies, as well as least developed countries. WASME has a broad membership spectrum that includes:

Categories

General Members

- Ministries/ Government Departments
- Public Sector Undertakings/Semi Government Organization
- Export Promotion Councils/ Trade Councils
- Financial Institutions/ Banks/ NBFCs
- SME Promotion Organization/ Enterprise Development Organization

Chambers/ Industry Associations/ SME Associations

International & Regional Federations/ Associations

Associate Members

- Corporations, Consulting Firms
- Partnership/ Proprietorship/ LLP etc
- Research Institutes/ Technical Institutes/ Universities
- Individual Consultants/ Experts/ Students
- NGOs/ SMEs etc.

Permanent Members

- Any General Member or Associate Member who is willing to be Permanent Member of WASME

Benefits to Members

Collaborating with other members on issues of common interest to enable local SMEs gain access to a variety of advantages, such as:

- Making advantage of a vast network of WASME to create new alliances
- Building a global network and making your voice heard
- Globally promoting your company using WASME marketing platforms
- Possessing the chance to organise or present at WASME Global Conferences, Seminars, Exhibitions, events, and programmes
- Having your interests represented at multilateral organizations including UN organizations, national and international forums etc.
- Sharing your opinions and ideas in WASME publications
- Get access to WASME Resource Centre of Knowledge, Experts, Technology, Trade Facilitation, Financial Assistance, Market Linkage etc.
- Get tailor made services and support

For any query related to membership write to **membership@wasmeinfo.org**

WORLD ASSOCIATION FOR SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES (WASME),

WASME is an International Non-Governmental Organization that has observer and consultative status with many UN agencies, such as UNIDO, UNCTAD, UNICITRAL, WIPO, ILO, ECOSOC, UNESCAP, ITC, and UNESCO. Additionally, WASME has several inter-governmental and international organization affiliations. It has been striving to stimulate, foster, promote, and coordinate international cooperation for the growth & development of MSMEs.

WASME was founded in 1980 with the goal of supporting MSMEs in member countries. We have achieved this through our strong association with local government bodies, regional authorities, international linkages, civil societies, SMEs, etc. We are continuously working to improve our innovative and sustainable framework so that we can better serve MSMEs around the world.

WASME's fortnightly SME e-Bulletin "WORLD SME UPDATE" aims to keep its readers abreast of latest information on various developments taking place in the SME sector around the globe. If you have any news/information on the issues related to Government policies & programmers and latest developments in the SME sector i.e. technology and innovations, success stories, case studies, research and methods, planning and programs, training and developments, finance and management, and marketing that you would like to share with the world SME community, please do send them to us at editor@wasmeinfo.org

We always welcome your valuable feedback/comments on the SME e-Bulletin to further enhance our services on information dissemination. Hence, please send us your valuable guidance as well as meaningful articles as a regular contribution to SME e-Bulletin and our website in the larger interests and benefits of SMEs the world over.

Editor, World SME Update
World Association for Small and Medium Enterprises
Plot No. 4, Institutional Area, Sector – 16 A,
Noida, GautamBudh Nagar – 201301, Uttar Pradesh, India
Tel: +91-120- 4216283, Fax: +91-120- 4216284
Mobile: +91 9560685555
Email: editor@wasmeinfo.org , wasme@wasmeinfo.org
Website: http://www.wasmeinfo.org,