

Winners of Africa innovation challenge

The winners of the first Africa Innovation Challenge at the Global Entrepreneurship Congress, launched by Johnson & Johnson, have been announced. The initiative, which received nearly 500 submissions from innovators and entrepreneurs across the continent, sought the best idea for new, sustainable health solutions that will benefit African communities.



©Jim Vallee via [123RF](#)

The Johnson & Johnson family of companies comprises the world's largest healthcare business and its presence in Africa dates back to 1930, including business operations, public health programs and corporate citizenship. The Africa Innovation Challenge is part of the company's comprehensive approach to collaborate with and support Africa's vibrant innovation, education and health systems institutions.

In addition to the Africa Innovation Challenge winners, the company also announced today that it is a major partner of Women in Innovation and the Alliance for Accelerating Excellence in Science in Africa - program that seek to substantially increase the number of women on the continent working in the sciences.

These announcements follow the prior week's opening of two new Johnson & Johnson regional offices in Ghana and Kenya, which along with its South Africa-based global public health headquarters, will support health system strengthening and public health programs.

"Africa is one of the fastest growing regions of the world, and Johnson & Johnson is proud to support this growth through strong collaborations that encourage innovation and accelerate advancements in the continent's health systems," said Paul Stoffels, chief scientific officer, Johnson & Johnson. "We are seeing a surge of activity among entrepreneurs and health system leaders to develop important solutions that overcome longstanding health and societal challenges.

"By working together, we hope to bring meaningful solutions to patients and consumers more rapidly, to help cultivate the next generation of scientists, and to support Africa's entrepreneurial base."

Africa innovation challenge

The Africa Innovation Challenge, launched in November 2016, solicited novel ideas with a focus on three critical health areas: promoting early child development and maternal health; empowering young women; and improving family well-being. The three winning concepts embraced these themes as well as the goal of creating ongoing, sustainable businesses:

- **Project Agateka, Burundi.** The development of a sustainable solution to support girls who are unable to afford menstrual pads and underwear is an important need for young women. Project Agateka will provide a direct health solution as well as the opportunity for women and girls to generate income in Burundi. With the inclusion of health information, the initiative also provides health education to support improved sexual and reproductive health.
- **Project Kernel Fresh, Liberia.** Project Kernel Fresh sources natural palm kernels from smallholder women farmers, increasing their income. The entrepreneur cold presses the palm kernel oil to be used in organic cosmetics. The project will also create jobs for young women by training them to sell the products throughout Liberia.
- **Project Pedal Tap, Uganda.** Seeking to prevent disease transmission, and a reduction of water use Project Pedal Tap will develop hands-free solutions for hand water taps in Uganda. The entrepreneur will create manufacturing capabilities, using mostly recycled materials, which will lead to an ongoing business.

“This was an extremely difficult competition to judge as there were many terrific ideas,” said Josh Ghaim, chief technology officer, Johnson & Johnson Consumer Inc. “The three winning projects demonstrated a strong benefit to local communities and the ability to empower young women, and they also have the potential to deliver ongoing economic support. We look forward to working with these entrepreneurs over the course of the next year to help them build sustainable operations.”

Each of the three winning recipients will receive funding as well as mentorship from scientists, engineers, and operations members from the Johnson & Johnson Consumer Research & Development organisation and other areas of the company.

Globally there is significant gender inequality in the sciences. To help address this, Johnson & Johnson has made a strong commitment to increase the number of Women in Science, Technology, Engineering, Manufacturing and Design (WISTEM2D) careers. Last year, the company entered into 10 partnerships with institutions around the world to accelerate the development of WISTEM2D careers and supported other STEM initiatives globally.

“African millennials and entrepreneurs represent some of the best talent in the world. Our presence at the Global Entrepreneurs Congress here in Johannesburg and other Africa based conferences like the Next Einstein Forum, programs like the Africa Innovation Challenge, and partnerships with organisations like Women in Innovation and the Alliance for Accelerating Excellence in Science in Africa, reflect our confidence in Africa’s women and men and their potential to change the world through innovation,” said Seema Kumar, vice president, innovation, global health, and policy communication, Johnson & Johnson.