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Call for Application

**The Role of Technology
and Innovation for
African Businesses
in Addressing
the Impact of
COVID-19**



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On-line Training

The Role of Technology and Innovation for African Businesses in Addressing the Impact of COVID-19

CALL FOR APPLICATIONS AND NOMINATIONS ¹

Announcement in Brief

Course Type : Online Course

Programme Area : Technology and Innovation

Date : July 12 – 12 August 2021

Duration : 4 Weeks

Language : English

Application Deadline: June 25th, 2021

¹ IDEP - UNECA strongly encourage and supports the participation of suitably qualified female officials in its capacity development and training programme.

PROGRAM RATIONALE

Covid-19 has had adverse effects on the African continent and in particular businesses and Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) in association with a private consulting company, International Economics Consulting Limited, conducted the first online survey among businesses in Africa to assess the impact of Covid-19 on African businesses. A second-round survey, that also involved ECA Subregional office for Southern Africa (SRO-SA) was conducted in June 2020.

Challenges discovered as a result of both surveys included - but were not limited to - operational issues such as the “lack of cash flow”, “reduction of opportunities to meet new customers”, and “changing business strategies and offering alternative products/services”. Survey results also indicated areas of improvement on government responses to Covid-19. Proposed government interventions by businesses include “postponed tax payments”, “providing working capital to firms”, “subsidising wages”, “access to low interest loans”, and “assistance to workers from the informal sector”.

Conclusively, both surveys confirmed the role of technology and innovation as a strategy used by businesses to address the impact of Covid-19. For example, digital technologies allowed employees to remain in employment and allowed firms to maintain continuity in their business activities, therefore avoiding drastic reduction in capacity utilization by having their employees work remotely.

Technology and innovation can be critical drivers for enhancing workers' and factor productivity and firm's competitiveness at a micro-level while enhancing economic growth through total factor productivity growth at a macro-level.

In order to support member states in addressing the impacts of Covid-19 on micro, small and medium sized enterprises (MSMEs), the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa UNECA, through its Sub-regional office for Southern Africa (SRO-SA) is implementing jointly with other United Nations agencies a UN Development Account-funded project titled "Global initiative towards post-Covid-19 MSME sector".

The objective of the project is to develop and implement capacity building tools for governments and MSMEs to facilitate resurgence and strengthen resilience of MSMEs in developing countries and economies in transition to mitigate the economic and social impact of the global Covid-19 crisis and to facilitate the contribution of MSMEs to the implementation of SDGs.

The project is structured in five clusters addressing most critical areas of the MSME recovery:

1. Mobilize entrepreneurial ecosystem and strengthen business skills
2. Simplify business registration and facilitate formalization
3. Improve access to finance/financial literacy
4. Increase access to technology and innovation
5. Enhance access to markets

OBJECTIVES

The overarching objective of this course, as a deliverable under the “Global initiative towards post-Covid-19 MSME sector” project, is to build awareness and capacities of entrepreneurs, businesses and policy makers in Africa on the role that technology and innovation can play in assisting businesses address the impacts of economic shocks such as Covid-19 and build resilience against future shocks.

CONTENT

The course is intended to be practical rather than academic in content and to make use of case examples to highlight how technology-based and innovative applications can help firms in Africa survive, grow and remain competitive in times of crisis and be better prepared at addressing the impacts of future economic shocks. The course will endeavor to showcase best practices from other regions that can have useful applications for African businesses. Challenges that firms can face to access technology and engage in innovation will be discussed, while recognizing that technology and innovation on their own are not panaceas to addressing firms' problems in times of crisis and should be complemented by other policy tools.

The structure of the course is as follows:

- Module 1 (1st week – whole or partial): Introduction to Technology & Innovation and Concepts of Relevance for SMEs, including Entrepreneurship;
- Module 2 (1st week – whole or partial): COVID-19 and its implications on MSMEs with a focus on Africa;
- Module 3 (2nd week – whole or partial): The State of Technology and Innovation in the World;
- Module 4 (3rd week – whole or partial): Technology and Innovation to Mitigate the Impacts of Covid-19 on African MSMEs;
- Module 5 (4th week – whole or partial): Barriers to Access to Technology and Innovation in Africa and Policy Recommendations for Improving Access of African MSMEs to Technology and Innovation.

SKILLS TO BE IMPARTED

At the end of the course, participants will have:

- (a) An enhanced understanding of concepts related to technology and innovation as they apply to businesses;
- (b) An increased awareness on the role of technology and innovation in helping MSMEs stay competitive and build resilience to shocks and increased capacity to apply technology and innovation in their business context;
- (c) A strengthened knowledge of the potential that technology and innovation can offer to MSMEs to build back better post-Covid19.

PEDAGOGICAL APPROACH & MODE OF DELIVERY

The course will be delivered for one month including one week for the final evaluation, starting from July 12 to 12 August 2021. The course will be moderated asynchronously on a weekly basis and participants are required to participate in the weekly on-line discussions. The lessons are designed in a way that learners are also able to self-assess their understanding through practical exercises which will be in the form of case studies that will support active learning. Additional resources such as bibliographies, web links and optional readings are provided for participants who wish to deepen their knowledge of the course topic.

The course will be delivered in English. The course is structured to run over a period of four weeks. The following fifth week will be dedicated to the final evaluation. The pedagogical team will consist of a Course Director. In line with the IDEP pedagogical philosophy, the presentation of the course modules will combine a knowledge-building component with experience-sharing among participants.

CERTIFICATE OF COMPLETION

A Certificate of Completion will be issued by IDEP and SRO-SA to all participants who successfully complete the course-related self-assessments presented for each module.

TARGET AUDIENCE

The target participants are as follows:

- Enterprise owners, businessmen and employees of MSMEs in Africa as well as members of MSME and business associations;
- Government policy officials and, practitioners directly connected with technology, innovation, entrepreneurship, MSMEs and private sector development issues;
- Officials of national agencies and non-state actors with a professional interest in technology, innovation, entrepreneurship and MSME related issues.

ACCEPTANCE TO THE COURSE

Until the registration deadline, participants are accepted to the course on a rolling basis and subject to availability of slots. Please refer to the paragraph below to see priority target group. Applications must be completed exclusively on IDEP online application platform at <https://www.unidep.org/?apply>

TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS

Access to internet is an essential condition for participation. The following specifications, as a minimum in terms of hardware and software, are required to take this e-Learning course, please consult your Network Administrator or Systems person to ensure that you have the following:

- Platform: Windows 95, 98, 2000, NT, ME, XP or superior; Mac OS 9 or Mac OS X; Linux
- Hardware: 64 MB of RAM, 1 GB of free disk space
- Software:
 - Adobe Acrobat Reader
 - Adobe Flash Player
 - Microsoft Office (Windows or Mac) or Open Office
 - Browser: Internet Explorer 7 or higher or Firefox 36 or higher
- Modem: 56 K
- Note that JavaScript, Cookies and Pop-ups must be enabled

IMPORTANT DATES

- Deadline for Applications and Nominations: **June 25th, 2021.**
- Course Period: **12th July - 12th August, 2021.**

CONTACT INFORMATION

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N.B.: IDEP-UNECA strongly encourages and supports the participation of suitably qualified female officials in its capacity development and training programme.

