



Positioning to Scale: Innovations to Empower Women and Girls Concept Note

Background

The COVID-19 pandemic has reversed at least twenty years of progress for women and girls. The pandemic has overwhelmed health systems and supply chains across the globe and has derailed progress in sustainable development. In parallel, the pandemic has also catalyzed the acceleration of innovation, including in the booming health technology market. The world is emerging with more women-centered solutions than ever before.

Purpose of Challenge

In this context, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and the International Trade Centre (ITC) are launching the *Innovations to Empower Women and Girls Challenge* (the Challenge) to further develop and position to scale innovative solutions that can help disrupt inequalities and advance the empowerment of women and girls in all their diversity.

The Challenge will support women-centered innovations, including those that i) provide affordable and sustainable access to essential reproductive health commodities, services, and information, with a focus on hard-to-reach areas and humanitarian settings, and ii) scale up prevention and response to gender-based violence and harmful practices.

The Challenge aims to support social enterprises¹ (the Companies) registered in UNFPA programme countries² to pivot from grant-making models to self-sustaining financial models, and from “doing innovation” to managing it. Thus, positioning innovation projects to scale through social enterprises facilitates that step towards self-sustaining solutions. The Challenge will provide a mentorship scheme to increase the potential/capabilities of the awardees to scale up innovations across developing countries. It will thus create and nurture an ecosystem of innovators, mentors, and key stakeholders who will then, in turn, support the solutions and their sustainability models.

¹ Social entrepreneurship defined as a form of entrepreneurship which predominantly focuses on social benefits rather than solely financial ones, and which seeks to address societal, cultural or environmental issues, often in an innovative manner (Source: <https://www.un.org/development/desa/youth/world-youth-report/wyr2020.html>)

² List of UNFPA Programme Countries (please refer to Country and territory offices): <https://www.unfpa.org/worldwide>

Format of Challenge

UNFPA, in partnership with WIPO, ITU and ITC, will implement this joint Challenge. The partners will select up to 10 winning proposals from the applying Companies, and provide grants of up to \$60,000³ per award to position to scale. After the selection of awardees, winning Companies will sign a 9-month **contract** during which the awardees will fully develop and start implementing their plans to transition to scale, and will receive technical assistance in key focus areas, including intellectual property (IP) management and business modeling. WIPO will provide IP management support through a tailored workshop, including the use of WIPO IP Diagnostics. ITU will provide the bootcamp for winners, support mentorship, and support scale-up using its ecosystem development, initiatives sustainability, and scale-up frameworks. ITC will support the winners with training on business competitiveness, capacity building on gender mainstreaming within business practices, and capacity building on design thinking as a tool to develop innovative and client-centered solutions.

At the end of the Challenge, Companies will report on their results and submit their plans and business model reflecting the next steps to scale up the innovative solution.

The Challenge will be open to all Companies registered and operating in UNFPA programme countries who are working on solutions within the mandate areas of UNFPA.

Role of Partners

As this will be a joint Challenge between four entities (UNFPA, WIPO, ITU and ITC) each bringing their comparative advantages to support the implementation of this Challenge, the primary roles of each entity are as follows:

- **UNFPA:** UNFPA will finance and co-design the joint Challenge (with inputs from the three partners) and provide oversight and management in the announcement of the call, selection of finalists, and overall implementation of the Challenge. UNFPA Country Offices (COs) will support the Challenge with screening the proposals, helping to monitor progress of awardees, and provide technical assistance and capacity building as well.
- **WIPO:** WIPO will provide support to awardees in the form of an IP management workshop which will cover the general principles of IP management, followed by a more tailored discussion on the IP issues of relevance to each of the awardees, based on the use of WIPO IP Diagnostics.
- **ITU:** ITU will organize a bootcamp and facilitate the mentorship to awardees on business modeling and financial sustainability during the “position to scale” phase, given its expertise in technology, ICT policy and regulatory environments, global standards, best practices, digital innovation ecosystems, ITU innovation challenges, Equals Partnership (the Global Partnership for Gender Equality in the Digital Age), and public-private partnerships. ITU and Equals will also provide the online course on “Management Skills for Women Entrepreneurs in Tech” to the awardees, where

³ Final amount at sole discretion of the organizer

relevant.

- **ITC:** will provide support to awardees in the form of 1) Training on business competitiveness, 2) Capacity building on gender mainstreaming within business practices, given its expertise in women's economic empowerment, as well as 3) Capacity building on Design Thinking as a tool to develop innovative and client-centered solutions. For this, ITC will leverage on support from ITC's Innovation Lab and ITC' SheTrades Hubs. Additionally, throughout the Challenge duration, ITC will support increased visibility and global promotion of the Challenge via ITC and ITC SheTrades corporate media platforms.

Areas of Emphasis

We welcome innovative solutions that promote the empowerment of women and girls, focusing on ending unmet need for family planning, preventable maternal deaths, and gender-based violence and harmful practices. Companies interested in the Challenge must demonstrate that they are addressing an area of great need, and that their solutions are designed with the users.

Eligibility Criteria

The following criteria will be used in assessing eligibility of proposals submitted for consideration:

1. The Company must be registered as a company/organization in a UNFPA programme country⁴.
2. At the time of application, the Company, including any JV/Consortium members and any of its individual members, is not under procurement prohibitions derived from the **Compendium of United Nations Security Council Sanctions Lists** and has not been suspended, debarred, sanctioned or otherwise identified as ineligible by any **UN Organization** or the **World Bank Group**.
3. The innovation must be implemented in the UNFPA programme country in which the Company is registered in.
4. The proposed innovation should be contributing to one of the following challenges: ending unmet need for family planning, ending preventable maternal deaths, or ending gender-based violence and harmful practices (see descriptions [here](#)).
5. The Company must have already tested a prototype, proof of concept, and have a minimum viable product⁵ (MVP) which has been piloted and is ready to be positioned to scale. The MVP must belong to the submitting organization.
6. The innovative solution must have a viable pathway to scale and sustainability via the market or public sector (definition as per UN Innovation Toolkit: driving adoption beyond the initial pilot's target population).
7. There must be either no similar solution to the one being proposed, or the proposed solution delivers more development impact per dollar, or is more cost-effective, than other ways of achieving the same objectives. There must be evidence to support this

⁴ <https://www.unfpa.org/executive-board/cpd-map>

⁵ An MVP (minimum viable product) is a product with enough features that can be used by early customers and receive feedback for future development.

claim.

8. Proposals must offer innovative solutions that promote the empowerment of women and girls, focusing on ending unmet need for family planning, preventable maternal deaths, or gender based violence.

In addition to the eligibility criteria, priority will be given to solutions submitted by women-led enterprises⁶. However, this call is open for all social enterprises working on solutions that address issues within the focus areas (ending unmet need for family planning, ending preventable maternal deaths, and ending gender-based violence and harmful practices).

Only one submission per applying Company is permitted. All submissions must be made in the English language only. Applying Companies will be required to submit proof of their legal registration and proof of initial customers using their solution.

Timeline

The detailed timeline for the implementation of the Challenge is as follows:

1. March 2022:

- The call for Expressions of Interest (EOIs) is launched, with the FAQ and parameters issued along with the call (March 1).
- Questions submitted by Companies (March 17).
- Answers to submitted questions posted (March 24).

2. April 2022:

- Deadline for EOI submission (April 15).
- Applications are evaluated by the selection committee, using the provided [scoring criteria](#).
- Candidates long-listed (up to 40 top-scoring proposals). Relevant COs will be asked to review the long-list to provide their feedback and recommendations.
- Request for Proposals (RFPs) distributed to long-listed candidates, and webinar conducted by UNFPA Supply Chain Management Unit (SCMU).

3. May 2022:

- Deadline for RFP submission (by May 21).

4. June 2022:

- First phase of the technical evaluation of proposals (specific evaluation criteria can be found in the section below on [Evaluation Scoring Shortlisting - Request for Proposals](#)).
- Notification sent to the top 20 highest scoring proposals that have been shortlisted, as per the published evaluation criteria, and shortlisted teams are invited to the Live Pitch Event.

5. June 2022: Live Pitch Event

⁶ Women-led business - business that is at least 25 % owned by one or more women, whose management and control lie with one or more women, which has at least one third of the board of directors comprised of women, where a board exists, where a woman is a signatory of the business's legal documents and financial accounts, and which is operated independently from businesses that are neither led nor owned by women. IWA 34:2021. Women's entrepreneurship — Key definitions and general criteria. <https://www.iso.org/obp/ui/#iso:std:iso:iwa:34:ed-1:v1:en>

- Up to 20 Companies give a live pitch to the selection committee. Each Company will have 3 minutes to pitch their project, followed by up to 7 minutes of questions and answers (Q&A) led by the selection committee.
 - Final phase of the evaluation process. Specific evaluation criteria for the Pitch can be found in the section on [**Evaluation Scoring Pitch.**](#)
 - Notification of Awards are issued to awardees.
 - Call for Mentorship to support the winners.
6. **July 2022:**
- Virtual bootcamp with awardees and mentors.
7. **July 2022 - March 2023:**
- “Position to scale” phase. Payments to awardees will be made in two tranches (one at the beginning and one after 4 months of implementation, based on performance). Awardees will be supported by mentors during this phase.
8. **End of March 2023:**
- End-of-Challenge reporting to be completed by awardees, including the submission of revised business plans reflecting next steps on reaching scale.

Submission of Expression of Interest (EOI)

Interested Companies that meet the eligibility criteria are required to complete and submit their response before the EOI submission deadline: **15 April 2022, 15.00 hours Copenhagen time.** If any doubts exist as to the time zone, please refer to [World Clock Copenhagen Time](#).

Submission of EOIs should be done through the following site:

<https://unfpa.brightidea.com/InnovationsToEmpowerWomenAndGirls>

A response to this EOI does not automatically ensure that submitting Companies will be selected to participate in the subsequent RFP. UNFPA reserves the right to change or cancel the requirement at any time during the EOI and/or solicitation process. UNFPA also reserves the right to require compliance with additional conditions as and when issuing the final tender/RFP document. Any additional questions about this EOI should be submitted in writing to the contact person below:

Name of EOI contact person at UNFPA:	<i>Diego Bragado Zapatero</i>
Email address of contact person:	<i>bragado@unfpa.org</i>

The deadline for submission of additional questions is **17 March 2022, 13:00 Copenhagen time.** Questions will be answered in writing and shared with parties by **24 March 2022, 13:00 Copenhagen time.**

Evaluation of Applications / Proposals

The evaluation of the applications/proposals will be carried out in a structured process consisting of the following steps:

1. Prior to the submission of the EOI, all applications will undergo a pass/fail assessment as per the mandatory criteria for eligibility, as published below.
2. All applications that fulfill the mandatory requirements for eligibility will be able to submit an EOI. This EOI submission will then be evaluated on the basis of its responsiveness to the Concept Note and the evaluation criteria published below to reach a long list of EOI proposals.
3. Up to 40 top-scoring proposals will be included in the long list of EOIs, and will then be invited by UNFPA's SCMU to participate in the RFP stage. All proposals that have been submitted through the solicitation process, within the required timeframe, and are considered compliant will then be evaluated on the basis of their responsiveness to the solicitation documents and evaluation criteria published below for selecting the top 20 highest scoring submissions.
4. The top 20 submissions will then be invited to pitch their solutions to the selection committee at the Live Pitch Event, which will take place in June 2022. Each participating Company will have 3 minutes to pitch their project, followed by up to 7 minutes of Q&A. The pitches will be evaluated by the selection committee on the basis of their proposal, pitch, answers to questions, and the evaluation criteria published below for selecting the awardees.

Long-listing (Expression of Interest/EOI)

Prior to submitting an EOI through the [submission portal](#), each applicant must declare the status of their Company and proposal against the below mandatory Eligibility Criteria:

- The Company must be registered as a company/organization in a UNFPA programme country.
- At the time of application, the Company, including any JV/Consortium members and any of its individual members, is not under procurement prohibitions derived from the [Compendium of United Nations Security Council Sanctions Lists](#) and has not been suspended, debarred, sanctioned or otherwise identified as ineligible by any [UN Organization](#) or the [World Bank Group](#).
- The solution must be implemented in the UNFPA programme country in which the Company is registered in.
- The solution should be contributing to one of the following mandate areas of UNFPA: ending unmet need for family planning, ending preventable maternal deaths, or ending gender-based violence and harmful practices (descriptions [here](#)).
- The Company must have already tested a prototype, have proof of concept, and have a minimum viable product (MVP) which has been piloted and is ready to be positioned to scale.
- The solution must have a viable pathway to scale and sustainability via the market or public sector (definition as per UN Innovation Toolkit: driving adoption beyond the initial pilot's target population).
- There must be either no similar solution to the one being proposed, or the proposed solution delivers more development impact per dollar, or is more cost-effective, than other ways of achieving the same objectives. There must be evidence to support this

claim.

Evaluation Scoring - Longlisting (Expression of Interest)

25%: Relevance and alignment of the solution (How relevant is the solution for solving the most pressing challenges for women and girls, especially the most marginalized, in the areas of family planning, maternal health, and/or gender-based violence? What is the size of the market/reach opportunity and relevance across geographic locations, with potential for application at global scale?)

25%: Novelty of the project and desired stage of development (How novel is the solution (new, new application of a existing solution, or scaling existing initial pilot to new areas), aligned with UN Innovation Principles, and how robust are its results of initial prototyping/piloting/past data collection and projected milestones? What ownership or rights does the Company have over the solution?)

25%: Sustainability and scalability (Does the solution have a viable pathway to scale and sustainability via the market or public sector? Does the Company engage with local partners and users/beneficiaries to assure viability in local conditions, and promote sustainability and scalability of the solution within the target community? Does the solution demonstrate potential for scalability in-country?)

25%: Project budget (Does the [proposed budget](#) remain within the innovation award limit and are the outlined costs reasonable? Does the Company indicate other sources of income to support their operations?)

For equally scored proposals, priority will be given to female-led companies.

Evaluation scoring - Shortlisting (Request for Proposal)

20%: Potential impact on accelerating results for women and girls (What is the number of women and girls this could potentially impact? What is the effect on closing gaps? Will the solution or its outcomes be visible/accessible to communities (is it accessible to those who need it)? Does the solution improve the quality, speed, cost, feasibility, effectiveness, and/or efficiency of services? Has the solution been developed with involvement of the intended users?)

20%: Scalability (Does the solution follow an exponential scale strategy? Does it address a problem/need common enough to be relevant enough across contexts and other locations? Can the approach be translated for other groups in different contexts? Is the solution able to use existing infrastructure and/or facilities? Is the solution designed in such a way that its core components could be easily replicated?)

20%: Process and indicators to determine success/failure (Are the KPIs selected by the applicant SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-Bound), as per their outlined milestones? Is the methodology proposed for data collection and the feedback loop to adapt the project plan well-defined and realistic? Is there a real-time data collection plan presented, taking into account possible constraints? Does the team present means of collecting verifiable feedback from users of the solution?)

20%: Team and key personnel (Does the Company demonstrate an absence of criminal record? Does the Company have strong connections with local stakeholders, including the UNFPA Country Office? Does the Company demonstrate diversity in gender and expertise? Does the Company demonstrate clear division of roles and responsibilities?)

20%: Budget (Is there an alignment of costs and overall budget with milestones outlined in the technical proposal? Are the cost estimates realistic, based on local context and competitive prices/rates? To what extent is the team leveraging existing and supplementary resources/assets/financing/funding? Does the Company have sufficient resources to sustain its operations, beyond the innovation award duration? Does the innovation investment fit within the Company's overall strategy and financial approach?)

Final selection (Pitch Stage)

25%: Concept and Solution (Does the Company clearly describe the concept/idea on what the challenge is and their proposed solution? Scores from EOI and RFP are also considered here.)

30%: MVP and Results (Does the Company demonstrate evidence of the functional MVP/prototype and results of the solution?)

30%: Potential to Scale (Does the Company demonstrate a clear vision to scale, and a pathway to realize this vision?)

15%: Communication (Does the Company effectively communicate and present their solution and pathway to scale?)

Evaluation criteria for each of the three stages can be found [here](#).

Selection Committee

- A selection committee of experts from UNFPA, ITU, WIPO and ITC will be convened to shortlist up to 20 top EOI submissions, and the awardees from among RFP respondents.
- The committee will select a chairperson who will steer the deliberation for selecting the awardees.
- UNFPA will provide the secretariat for the committee.
- The committee will first examine all eligible submitted applications to establish a long-list, and then shortlist candidates based on the strength of their application and the selection criteria.
- The selection committee will then convene to select up to 10 awardees based on overall performance and the evaluation criteria during a live pitching event.

Awards

In case of a satisfactory result from the evaluation process, the UNFPA-WIPO-ITU-ITC Joint Innovation Challenge intends to award the proposals that have obtained the top 10 highest scores. The awards will be made through their appointed representatives and consist of:

1. An invitation to participate in a virtual bootcamp to further refine their plans and their milestones in the project design plan (e.g., market entry, deployment, impact traction).
2. Seed funding up to USD 60,000 USD⁷, provided in two tranches, to position to scale their proposed solution, in accordance with the project design plan agreed upon with organizers during the bootcamp, including a sound budget and workplan with clear milestones and budget allocation. The second tranche of the award will be given based on demonstrated progress of implementation and achievement of milestones. The awards will be provided by UNFPA subject to the terms and conditions of the funding agreement signed between UNFPA and each awardee Company. A template of the contract can be [found here](#).
3. Mentorship and training support through the end of December 2022.

Expected Results and Way Forward

Through this Challenge, UNFPA intends to partner with and support social enterprises and the ecosystems in which they operate. The Challenge will broaden UNFPA's experience and portfolio in positioning innovations to scale. In addition, by blending financial investment with business mentoring, this Challenge is another step in pivoting from strictly grant-making models to self-sustaining financial models through the support provided by mentorship and coaching, and from "doing innovation" to managing it. Our journey with the Challenge awardees will not end at the conclusion of the 9-month support phase. We intend to encourage and support the Companies in continuing their partnerships with UNFPA Country Offices, track progress as they continue their transition to scale, and nurture the Companies as thought-partners and innovators in their ecosystems who can share best practices and lessons learned moving forward.

Additional Terms and Conditions for Participation in the Innovation Challenge

1. The *Innovations to Empower Women and Girls Challenge* is organized by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) and the International Trade Centre (ITC) (collectively, the "Organizers" and each, an "Organizer"). By submitting your EOI and/or RFP for participation in the Challenge, you accept the present terms and conditions on behalf of your Company.
2. The applicant hereby warrants that all information submitted is true, complete, and up-to-date and that you are authorized to participate in the Challenge on behalf of your Company. The Organizers reserve the right to verify your eligibility for participation in the Challenge, as well as the accuracy of your submitted information. You confirm that none of your relatives (up to the third degree) are employed by the Organizers.
3. All applicants will retain all intellectual property rights in the content of their submissions. However, the subject of intellectual property and other proprietary rights with respect to an awardee Company's participation in the Challenge will be addressed as provided for in the [contract](#).
4. The Organizers reserve the right to disqualify you if they reasonably consider that the information you have provided and/or your submissions do not comply with the terms, instructions, and guidelines provided in the [Challenge website](#), the Challenge EOI and RFP, as well as the present terms and conditions. By way of example, submissions

⁷ Final amount at sole discretion of the organizer

which are not in English or which the Organizers consider to be off topic, advertisements for unrelated projects, or otherwise not in accordance with the nature of the Challenge or the mission of the Organizers are subject to disqualification.

5. If your submission is among those that are selected as an awardee by the selection committee, your Company will be eligible to receive seed funding up to USD 60,000 for the purpose of positioning to scale your solution. Notwithstanding the terms of the [contract](#), you will be required to provide updates on the progress of your implementation of your proposal, as per the project design plan that will be agreed between the Organizers and you, over the course of the year and up to three years. You understand and agree that the Organizers may create content based on your updates, such as success stories, blog posts, photos, or social media posts which may be published on the Organizers' websites, the Challenge website, as well as other communication channels and made available to the public, at the Organizers' discretion.
6. If selected as an awardee by the selection committee, and if you decide to move forward and participate in the Challenge, then you will be required to sign a contract for funding support from the Innovation Fund and adhere to its provisions. A template of the contract can be [found here](#).
7. You are not allowed to use the Organizers' emblems or the logos of any of their events in any online or offline communication, without the prior written permission of the respective Organizer.
8. All submissions must not:
 - a. Violate the intellectual property rights of third parties;
 - b. Be illegal under applicable national laws and international law;
 - c. Depict or incite hatred, defame, abuse, harass, stalk, threaten a specific person or social group, incite violence or conflict or otherwise violate the legal rights of third parties (including those of privacy and publicity); or
 - d. Violate the terms of use of any social media service, website, mobile application, or any other platform used in connection with your submission.
9. The Company or any of its individual members must not:
 - a. Appear on the United Nations Security Council Consolidated List nor on the United Nations Global Marketplace Ineligible Vendor List;
 - b. Be complicit in human rights abuses, use or toleration of forced or compulsory labor and/or child labor;
 - c. Be involved in the manufacture, sale, or distribution of anti-personnel mines, cluster bombs, biological or chemical or nuclear weapons and armaments;
 - d. Be involved in the manufacture, sale, or distribution of tobacco and alcohol products;
 - e. Be involved in the manufacture of infant formula whose marketing practices violate the International Code for the Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes;
 - f. Be involved in gambling, pornography, exploitative and/or corrupt practice, including sexual exploitation and abuse;
 - g. Violate United Nations Sanctions; or
 - h. Severely violate the environment.
10. You agree to release and hold harmless the Organizers from and against any and all

claims, expenses, and liability arising out of or relating to your (and your Company's) participation in the Challenge and the content of your submissions.

11. You acknowledge and agree that your participation in the Challenge is free of charge but does not entail any right to compensation of any kind or reimbursement of any expenses incurred from such participation.
12. The Organizers are not responsible for any lost, late, corrupted, mutilated, or misdirected submissions.
13. You acknowledge and agree that the Organizers are entitled to modify the content of the Challenge website and/or the present terms and conditions and to abbreviate, modify, suspend, cancel, or terminate the Challenge (partially or in its entirety) without any obligation (present or future), by notifying you via an announcement at the [Challenge website](#).
14. The Organizers reserve the right to make all final decisions regarding the Challenge. Nothing herein shall be considered to be a limitation or a waiver of the privileges and immunities of the Organizers, which are specifically reserved.

Contact

Should any of the links in this Concept Note be unavailable or inaccessible for any reason, applicants can contact innovation@unfpa.org to request a PDF version of such document(s). In addition, a list of FAQs regarding the Innovation Challenge can be [found here](#).