

# An Opportunity to Harness Youth Creativity for Economic Growth

## Introduction

The median age in Africa is 18.8 years, with 70% of sub-Saharan Africa under 30. By 2050, Africa's population is projected to reach 2.5 billion, a quarter of the world's population. This demographic dividend offers a unique opportunity for development partners, private foundations, and other stakeholders to collaborate with African youth to harness their creativity, innovation, energy, and commitment to drive the continent's growth.

## YALI RLC West Africa Accra

The Accra RLC trains young people from Burkina Faso, Cameroun, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Liberia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, The Gambia, and Togo, with particular attention to youth from marginalised and vulnerable populations. USAID is the key development partner, and the Ghana Institute of Management and Public Administration (GIMPA) is the implementing partner.

The YALI West Africa Accra RLC has trained over 7,800 young Africans across the nine countries above, including up to 1,600 young people from Ghana. Across the nine countries, alumni of the YALI program have gone on to impact their communities with their business and civic initiatives, carrying with them the drive to give back to their communities and lead transformational change, which the YALI program builds in them.

YALI alumni entrepreneurs are active in business sectors, including agriculture, aquaculture, manufacturing, cosmetics, agribusiness, climate technology and the green economy, entertainment, education, and sports. YALI alumni collaborate with other alumni and young

people in their initiatives and provide formal and informal employment to disadvantaged populations, including youth and women.

A key challenge for YALI alumni in this regard is access to business development support and small grants as they ideate, initiate, and grow their businesses and social enterprises within the economic and social contexts of their countries, which are, for the most part, not designed to provide the nurturing environment for their creative ideas and fledgling enterprises.

According to Statista, a global research hub, Africa's average startup failure rate stood at 54 per cent as of 2020. Also, estimates, according to AUStartups, a platform that provides news coverage on the African tech startup ecosystem, suggest that 70-80% of African startups fail within their first five years due to limited access to funding.

Youth-owned initiatives, however, hold much potential for social and economic growth in the sub-region. Africa's successful entrepreneurs are getting younger and younger, which is not surprising for a continent with the world's largest youth population. Statistically, while 46% of entrepreneurs in West Africa are between 25-34 years old (AFDB, 2020), 72% of these entrepreneurs are under 35 in Nigeria (PWC, 2019), and 63% are entrepreneurs under 35 in Ghana (Mastercard Foundation, 2019).

Several alumni of YALI have built successful enterprises. This includes Agro-Fish Farm by Aminata Kandeh, a YALI RLC Accra Alumni, 2017, a UNDP youth Ambassador 2020 and a Mandela Washington Fellow, 2022. Aminata's Agro-Fish provides full-time and casual employment to Bo City, Sierra Leone women. She set up the farm in Bo with one pond. With her training in the YALI program in 2017, she has grown her fish farm to 6 ponds.

Makafui Awuku is Ghana's wastepreneur, a social entrepreneur who sees the beauty in waste, having suffered hardship and struggled to survive in the streets of Accra. As part of his training at YALI, Makafui worked with the One Ghana Movement on one of its sanitation programs. That was when he realised that he could turn trash into art. He then started his company, "Mckingtorch Creatives", in January 2018. Today, his company has engaged over 200 volunteers, collected and worked with over 120,000 plastics and exported some of its products to countries like the UK, Germany and France.

Kotta Biagui is a visionary poultry farmer who, under 40, left behind a thriving career as a corporate marketing executive to pursue his dream of being an entrepreneur. Today, Biagui owns a large poultry farm off the outskirts of Abidjan and is revolutionising the poultry industry in his locality. His premium eggs and chicken are found on the shelves of renowned supermarkets in Cote d'Ivoire.

## The Kwanda & Yali Partnership

Kwanda and YALI recognise the vital role emerging young African leaders will play in this growth and are partnering to empower these youth with catalytic investments that lead to more jobs and improved livelihoods. This partnership will build upon the foundation already laid by the Accra RLC.

Kwanda and RLC West Africa will contribute to reversing this trend by increasing opportunities for emerging young leaders from traditionally marginalised and underserved communities and regions in the YALI program. The grants link alumni to resources to scale and deepen their initiatives and better advocate for their communities.

The specific activities are as outlined below:

1. Provide small catalytic grants/ seed funds and organisational capacity building to competitively selected alumni-led enterprises: Alumni will be invited to propose their ideas to a panel of assessors, with winning ideas receiving funding ranging from USD 500 to USD 2,000 to implement their initiatives. Kwanda will use its networks to garner support from other partners, including the private sector, to create a pool of funds for these grants.
2. Tell the Stories: Develop effective media campaigns that tell the story of the grants' impact and the work of the alumni to increase funding commitments.

## Structures for Management of Grant

The YALI RLC brings experience, structures, and processes for small grant-making. Over the past four years, the RLC has disbursed small grants to alumni. These include the YALI Alumni Innovation Fund (YAIF), which was first disbursed in 2020, and the YALI Community Engagement Fund (CEF), which has been disbursed annually since 2022.

YAIF: The YALI Alumni Innovation Fund (YAIF) provided funding of up to USD 10,000 to YALI alumni entrepreneurs. About 20 YALI Alumni have so far benefitted from the YAIF.

CEF: The CEF provides funding of up to USD 2,000 to YALI alumni with YALI alumni for community development projects.

These grant grants have been disbursed through the following structures and processes within the Accra RLC.

- The Alumni Funding Opportunities Review Committee: This committee comprises a member of the RLC Governing Council, who serves as chair of the committee; a faculty member of the GIMPA Consultancy department; the RLC Project Director and RLC Finance manager. The committee plays the following role:
  - Approves criteria for award of grant
  - Receives, reviews, and shortlists proposals for grant
  - Interviews shortlisted applicants
  - Awards grant to successful applicants
  
- The Accra RLC: The RLC plays the following roles for each grant-making cycle:
  - Proposes criteria for award of grant
  - Provides alumni with orientation on the award
  - Provides alumni with capacity-building tailored to the grant to strengthen their chances of success

- Provides feedback to unsuccessful applicants to strengthen their chances of success in future grants
  - Allocates staff and alumni to successful applicants to serve as their critical friends in the implementation of their funded projects
  - Monitoring – Pays visits to funded projects where possible.
- The RLC further provides visibility to funded alumni projects through publicity on the Center’s website and social media platforms. The Center’s social media posts are regularly tagged and projected further by the Center’s key stakeholders, USAID West Africa and USAID Washington, as well as alumni.
  - GIMPA Finance Directorate: Grants are disbursed through the GIMPA finance processes, using GIMPA’s approval and internal audit processes, culminating in final approval by the GIMPA Rector before disbursement. The RLC’s annual external auditing processes further ensure robust grant-making procedure.
  - YALI Alumni: The RLC has recently introduced a system in which YALI alumni serve as Monitoring and mentoring friends (M&M friends) to grant recipients. As critical friends, they regularly check up on recipients to support them and ensure accountability in their projects and grant management.

## Monitoring. Evaluation and Learning

Kwanda and the RLC will review and update existing YALI Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) plans to enable a robust process of assessing progress, documenting success stories, identifying lessons, and disseminating these to inform course corrections and future programming. The RLCs will pay attention to efforts to collate and document lessons on locally and youth-led development.

The following are the indicators and expected results of the grant program:

- Number of grants funded

- Number of small business ventures funded
- Number of small business ventures going to scale
- Number of incubator activities spawned
- Number of new YALI alumni networks and partnerships formed
- Number of communities benefiting from grant activities

## Project Duration

The proposed project duration from grant-making through reporting is November 2024 to March 2025.

## Budget

Activities	YALI RLC Accra Contribution (in-kind)	Kwanda Contribution (USD)
Catalytic grants for alumni-led enterprises.	-	5,360
Administrative processes	2000	-
TOTAL	2000	5,360

Exchange rate: British Pounds / USD at 1.34; Source: Google Finance as of 26 Sept 2024

## Conclusion

Kwanda and the YALI RLC anticipate a fruitful pilot and further collaboration grounded in lessons learnt.