

## JACK MA FOUNDATION'S AFRICA NETPRENEUR PRIZE INITIATIVE (ANPI) SELECTS TOP 50 FINALISTS OF 2020 "AFRICA'S BUSINESS HEROES" COMPETITION

- *Top 50 finalists were selected from over 22,000 applications across all 54 African nations*
- *The finalists represent 21 African countries, half are female, and work in 18 sectors like agriculture, AI, e-commerce, fashion, healthcare, renewable energy and ICT*
- *Finalists will advance to the next round of selection and will participate in an exclusive virtual boot camp on July 28*



**London, 27<sup>th</sup> July 2020** – The 2020 [Africa's Business Heroes \(ABH\)](#) prize competition, a flagship philanthropic program established by the Jack Ma Foundation's Africa Netpreneur Prize Initiative (ANPI), **has shortlisted the [top 50 finalists from stage one of the selection process](#)**. The fifty entrepreneurs will continue their journey in the competition, for a chance to become one of the ten entrepreneurs that will compete in the grand finale later this year.

The top 50 finalists were selected from a pool of over 22,000 applications received from all 54 African nations. The diversity of the finalist roster reflects the aim of Africa's Business Heroes to be inclusive and grassroots, providing entrepreneurs from all over Africa with a platform to showcase their talent and business ideas, regardless of nationality, industry, age or gender. The 2020 top fifty finalists come from **twenty-one countries (Algeria, Benin, Botswana, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Liberia, Morocco, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, Tunisia, Uganda, Zimbabwe)** and **eighteen sectors**, such as: agriculture, AI, Big Data, business services, construction, education, engineering, e-commerce, fashion, financial services, healthcare, ICT, logistics, manufacturing, management services, retail, renewable energy, and transportation.

The average age of the cohort is **37** with the youngest candidate aged 22 and the eldest aged 64. **50% of the candidates are female** – a 24% increase from the debut competition last year, and **32% are francophone**, reflecting this year's competition opening applications in French for the first time.

Over the past month, a panel of 140 highly skilled and experienced judges reviewed the submissions, evaluating applicants' leadership and vision, their ability to translate their innovations and ideas into sustainable and robust business models, and their commitment to create positive impact to uplift their communities. Judges, whose unrivalled knowledge and industry expertise has brought immense added value to the selection process, represented a variety of key sectors in Africa, such as agriculture, tech, retail and e-commerce, education, healthcare, finance, logistics, and tourism.

Before stepping into the second round of selection, which will determine the top 20 finalists, the fifty selected entrepreneurs will be invited to join an **exclusive virtual boot camp** hosted by the Africa's Business Heroes team on July 28<sup>th</sup>. The boot camp represents a further opportunity for aspiring candidates to access unparalleled knowledge and insights from across the ABH network. It also aims to build up finalists' management and leadership capabilities and ultimately increase not only their chance of progressing to the next stages of the competition but to further develop as entrepreneurs.

During the boot camp, they will have the chance to receive feedback from round 1 judges such as **Rafeh Saleh, Director of the Founder Institute** and **Omolara Awoyemi, Senior Program Manager at Facebook**. Participants will also have the opportunity to attend interactive workshops with industry and business leaders, who have been partnering with ABH this year, including **Abdelhameed Sharara, Founder & CEO of RiseUp; Patrick Awuah, Founder & President of Ashesi University, and Sebastien Nony, General Partner of Janngo Capital**. It will also feature a few of the 2019 finalists who will provide advice and insights on their own journeys.

The selection process to spotlight the 2020 Africa's Business Heroes finalists will continue throughout the summer. Following round 2 interviews and the semi-finale pitch, the top 20 and top 10 finalists will be announced in August and September respectively. ABH will culminate in a grand finale show later this year, where the top 10 finalists will take the stage to pitch business legends – including Jack Ma – for a chance to win their share of a US\$1.5 million prize pool.

A number of round 1 judges commented on their experience with Africa's Business Heroes, noting:

*"I am thrilled to have served as a judge for the Africa's Business Heroes competition. It's been an honour to help identify business heroes from Africa that are genuinely committed to changing the game in their respective industries. In these challenging times, getting to discover how the ABH applicants manage to turn challenges into opportunities, with a real sense of purpose and dedication to improve the conditions of people in their communities strengthens my belief in the promise of entrepreneurship in Africa."* said **Isadora Bigourdan Bryden, Team Lead at Agence Française de Développement**.

*"Driven by the spirit of entrepreneurship, the tangible benefits of social good, and a strong sense of community pride, this startup competition is special - showcasing many promising ideas and a diverse group of African startups. It's been inspirational to see these founders, deeply rooted and passionate, create change in their world."* commented **Triane Chang, Silicon Valley Startup Advisor**.

*"It is truly heartwarming to see that so many young entrepreneurs are working passionately to drive high-impact social projects across the African continent. The judging process was not an easy task as all participants submitted very high-quality applications with compelling business propositions. As the competition progresses, I look forward to following the finalists' journey and how they will use their talent and skills to generate positive change in their communities and beyond."* added **Firas Ezzeddine, Manager, Group Strategy at Philips**.

To follow the latest updates on the Prize, please visit: [africabusinessheroes.org](http://africabusinessheroes.org) and follow [@africa\\_heroes](https://twitter.com/africa_heroes) on Twitter. To watch a documentary featuring the inspiring journeys of the 2019 ABH finalists, please visit [YouTube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...).

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#### **About ANPI**

The ANPI is the flagship philanthropic initiative spearheaded by the Jack Ma Foundation aimed at supporting and inspiring the next generation of African entrepreneurs across all sectors, who are building a more sustainable and inclusive economy for the future of the continent. Over a ten-year period, ANPI will recognize 100 African entrepreneurs and commit to allocating US\$100 million in grant funding, training programs, and support for the development of an entrepreneurial ecosystem. The ANPI organizes the “Africa's Business Heroes” prize competition and show, in which ten finalists have the opportunity to pitch their business to win a share of \$1.5 million in grant money. Jack Ma, Founder of Alibaba Group and the Jack Ma Foundation, first created the prize after he made his first trip to Africa in July 2017 and was inspired by the energy and entrepreneurial potential of the young people he met with.

#### **About Jack Ma Foundation**

Established by Jack Ma, the founder of Alibaba Group, the Jack Ma Foundation was founded on 15 December 2014 and has been focusing on education, entrepreneurship, women’s leadership, and the environment. The Foundation aspires to be a reliable, participative, and sustainable philanthropic organisation. The Jack Ma Foundation has so far supported projects worldwide including the Jack Ma Rural Education Program, the Africa Netpreneur Prize Initiative, the Ma & Morley Scholarship Program, and Jordan's Queen Rania Foundation. Additionally, the Foundation has also funded a number of projects in its priority areas. The Jack Ma Foundation is committed to empowering rural educators, entrepreneurs, rural children, young start-ups, and women to equip them for the future and to help build a happier, healthier, more sustainable and more inclusive society.

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