

# WOMEN ENERGIZE WOMEN

## Blog Article

# Your experiences on starting a business as a female founder

Three Interviews

If you are a young female engineer and you want to contribute to the energy transition to renewables, what are your options? Of course, you can work for a well-established company that embraces the Sustainable Development Goals. But what if your country is still at the beginning of the energy transition and you don't have many options to choose from? Starting your own business sounds easy enough, but we already looked on the obstacles and opportunities women have to face when founding. Nonetheless, these were theories, studies and statistics. The last month we asked three female entrepreneurs from different countries on how they experienced their first steps into the business world in the renewable energy sector.

## Three women with their own businesses

Yolanda Mabuto is a female entrepreneur and gender mainstreaming advocate from South Africa. She founded Divaine Growth Solutions in 2016 to facilitate and implement 2063 sustainable development goals, particularly clean and affordable energy and gender inclusion and equality. Her business offers solutions for renewable energy projects, water desalination and provides smart advice and expert end-to-end support.

With "adaa, Sustainable Development Consultants", Maysoon Al-Khuraissat established herself as a green building and sustainability consultant and educator in Jordan. Her company is a specialised consultancy firm providing technical support for architects, engineers and building owners in green building designs and related certifications.

Judith Marera is empowering women to have access to clean and affordable energy and becoming financial independent. Her company Lanforce Energy, founded in 2010, constructs fixed dome biogas digesters for farms, households, hotels and institutions.

## The best and the worst

When starting a business, the process is very complex and not easily comparable. So we asked our female founders what they experienced as the best and the worst part of the whole enterprise.

For Maysoon, the best part was waking up every morning with big hope and determination to make the world a better place. It was a feeling that you are in control of your life and decisions. In contrast, the worst part was facing many obstacles that she never thought existed, so surprises were always there and you had to deal with them. One of the first obstacles Maysoon remembers, was to understand and deal with governmental regulations for starting a business and all the follow-ups with registration, licensing or taxes, that could be very confusing and frustrating.

The worst part for Yolanda was market penetration and access to financial resources, her sector is very capital intensive and therefore large numbers of investments are needed. As a female founder it's been difficult to get access to funding so that she could drive productivity and innovation in her company. But also Yolanda describes a sensation of empowerment when starting her business. For her, the ability to be flexible, create job opportunities, thus growing the economy and the ability to innovate and create more diversity were the best parts of her step into entrepreneurship.

Having to keep the company up with the little resources available was one of the challenging tasks to Judith, but once she started, Judith says, it's like giving birth to a baby you need to nurse to grow up which is the best experience.

### **Financing is the challenge**

An often discussed topic and challenge is the financing of a newly founded female lead business. We remember the panel discussions (online and offline) about how to get investment ready and what are the differences between female founders and their male peers. That is why we wanted to know from our three interviewees if they can relate to those difficulties.

One of Yolanda's first challenges was actually market access. Yolanda faced the obstacle by collaborating with both public and private sector in order for her organization to be relevant and known in the sector. Here she sees an area where female founders should be supported: in market access as well as financial and digital inclusion across sectors. Companies cannot scale if they don't have access to market and access to available investment.

Judith used personal savings and mostly bootstrapping to sustain the business. Later she got seed funding from the Tony Elumelu Foundation and a loan from SIMA. But there lies her wish for future female founders: women should be provided with technical support as well as funding to sustain their business.

Maysoon was determined to participate in a competition for startups called "Women Innovators in Charge". She won the 1st prize in the GreenTech category and the prize had a monetary amount that allowed her to start her business.

## Some words of advice

To wrap the interviews up, we offered the three inspiring women entrepreneurs the space to express their learnings and wishes for the future. And we all can learn from that, too.

One of the main learnings Judith came up with is networking: “Networking helps grow a business as you get to learn from others.”

“I would tell my past self to have more courage and to make more connections,” says Maysoon looking back on her career as a business owner.

Yolandas plan for the future is to create more employment for women and young people through driving innovative and sustainable projects in the renewable sector. “I want to include females in manufacturing of solar panels, electric vehicles as well as driving investment in the sector so that we ease up access to funding as female founders.”

We are thankful for these interviews and the insights they provided in the process of starting a business as a female founder worldwide and wish these courageous, smart and inspiring women all the best for their future.

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