

## Startup Savanna Phase I Lessons Learnt

Implementation of the International Acceleration Process (IAccP), known as Startup Savanna, is a sub-component under component 1 of the Kenya Industry and Entrepreneurship Project (KIEP) funded by the World Bank Group and implemented by the Ministry of Investments, Trade and Industry (MITI). The platform has been implemented in the 1<sup>st</sup> phase which has resulted into various lessons learnt. Learning as a cyclical process, KIEP expected to review these insights during implementation before inferring them as conclusions. These have thus been edited as insights from scenario planning as opposed to conclusions. IAccP harnessed lessons 2 and 4 from feedback received during the initial stakeholder engagement stage.

### **Lesson 1: A strong project proposal and a detailed inception report are necessary foundations for a robust project.**

The IAccP technical proposal's translation into an inception report revealed the inherent differences in style and degree of detail on specific activities during project design and planning phases. The team gathered that a strong project proposal (project idea) is not a guarantee for a detailed inception report (project plan). On the other hand, a good inception report is no guarantee for a robust project. However, a project which builds on both a strong project proposal and a detailed inception report can be a foundation for achieving a robust project towards the achievement of set development objectives. However, it should be stressed that project proposals and inception reports are necessary, but not sufficient factors for project success. The link that ties all these factors together is a consistent focus on results, impact, and sustainability.



### **Lesson 2: Effect of entrepreneurial ecosystem integration on venture growth.**

In quarter one, the team mapped IAccP stakeholders and identified their needs according to IAccP objectives. The mapping and needs assessment exercise shifted the focus away from the firms' internal operations to the broader entrepreneurial ecosystems, offering a holistic understanding of how economic activity clusters come into being and strongly mediate firm performance<sup>1</sup>. While cognisant that small businesses form and grow within complex, interconnected networks, the team observed significant entrepreneurial ecosystem fragmentation levels. Based on feedback received, we hypothesize that through integration, i.e., strengthened coordination, engagement, and inclusive information sharing, further opportunities exist to ensure that ecosystem players benefit from more organised alignment to international acceleration support. *Result:* Opportunity for entrepreneurial ecosystem integration to spur ecosystem robustness<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Feld, B. (2012), *Startup Communities: Building an Entrepreneurial Ecosystem in Your City*, John Wiley & Sons, New York, NY.

<sup>2</sup> Colin, N. (2015), "What makes an entrepreneurial ecosystem?", available at: <https://salon.thefamily.co/what-makes-an-entrepreneurial-ecosystem-815f4e049804>

### ***Lesson 3: There is value in co-creating an IAccP value proposition.***

A core component of the communication and branding strategy contributing to building the Kenyan ecosystem's reputation was establishing a value proposition for IAccP. We noted the dependencies between entrepreneurial ecosystem players and the need to capture and co-create value through ecosystem mapping and defining the entrepreneur journey.

While appreciating that IAccP's value is direct and indirect to different ecosystem players, the team adopted a consultative approach that ensured that the value proposition was co-created by IAccP and her partners' target beneficiaries. Co-creation is anticipated to lead to joint ownership of the potential to create the international acceleration process's collective value.



### ***Lesson 4: Complementing international resources with local mentors and investors.***

IAccP received feedback from local and international organisations supporting Startups with mentorship and investment. This feedback revealed that a mentor or investor's geographic proximity to his/ her investee company is considered crucial for identifying investment opportunities, monitoring, adding value, and achieving higher performance.

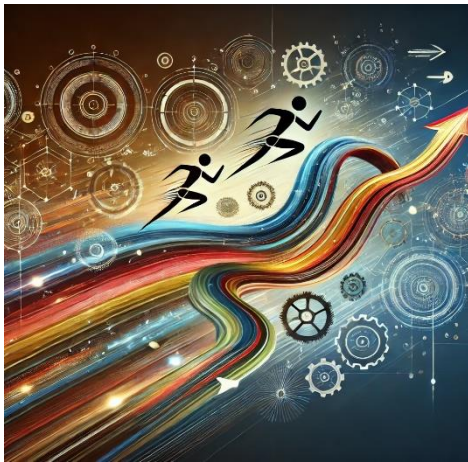
Early bird ventures, a local entrepreneur support organisation (ESO), shared their experience and learnings from supported entrepreneurs. Though having benefited from international mentors, Early bird ventures found an imminent need for local mentors' support to contextualise international mentors' global understandings to practical on-ground strategies and solutions.

International Capital Network, a group of over 900 global investors, has within their criteria the need for a locally based investor to be part of the investment round. Similar perspectives on the need to complement international resources with local mentors and investors were shared by individual investors who seem to trust a local investor's due diligence and ability to manage the investment in their capacity as board members or advisors to the startup. With the local-international approach, the project team anticipates meeting the beneficiary companies' desired growth objectives. Local incubators and accelerators can be involved mainly in the mentorship and investment process to support learning for sustainable activities beyond the project. Potential local mentors and investors include Viktoria Business Angels Network (VBAN) and Early Bird ventures.

Thus, the team hypothesises that if we complement international resources with local mentors and investors, then there is a higher likelihood towards the success of the process, especially where these resources are lacking or in developmental stages within the local ecosystem.

## Lesson 5: Fuse and pivot various registration processes to expand the Startup Savanna beneficiary database.

During phase I, Startup Savanna ran two parallel registration drives. One registration drive was to enlist startups to the international acceleration process database. The other registration drive was to enlist startups to the Startup Savanna suite of activities. The Startup Savanna team observed disproportionate numbers of completed registrations between the two separate registration drives. The team noted that the Startup Savanna suite of activities attracted more registrants than the general database. The team concluded that the length of the registration form, the criteria for participation and the nature of the derived benefits, play a role in attracting registrations. The team ended up fusing and pivoting various registration processes that expanded the Startup Savanna beneficiary database.



## Lesson 6: Dynamism and agility in program delivery

The Startup Savanna project operated in three distinct phases: pre-COVID-19, during COVID-19, and post-COVID-19. The three dispensations required different approaches to engage and deliver an impactful suite of activities that resonated with the entrepreneurs and were a value add to international resources.

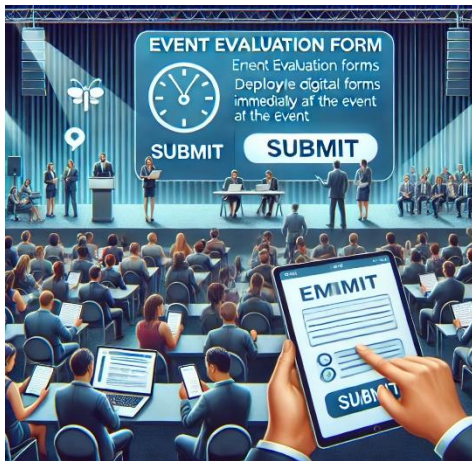
The mode of delivery had to also shift from hybrid to purely virtual back to hybrid but with a bias for in-person events. COVID-19 challenges people's attention span and this had to be factored during the post-COVID-19 dispensation.

## Lesson 7: Adapt a consultative process and secure stakeholder buy-in when planning and executing launch events

The successful launch was a result of the Startup Savanna team incrementally engaged in consultative discussions with the Kenya ESOs ecosystem, local and international media, APN, PIU, and offered input towards an inclusive launch event. The consultative process provided a robust foundation for the actual delivery of several interventions thereafter.

It has been evident too that there is power in the social media, where Startup Savanna has supported other management firms in spreading word on upcoming events and vice versa, hence benefiting from each other's networks.





**Lesson 8: Ensure event evaluation forms are deployed immediately at the end of the event to increase the participant response rate**

Startup Savanna administered an online post-event evaluation form targeting all 325 participants who attended the launch event to assess the adequacy of the session content and delivery and how appropriate the session was. A total of twelve (12) out of three hundred and twenty-five (325) participants responded to the event evaluation representing a three per cent (3%) response rate. Startup Savanna largely attributed the low response rate to delays in administering the evaluation form due to the limited capabilities of the Zoom platform to deploy surveys and auto-responses immediately post-event. Startup Savanna will make sure event evaluation forms are deployed during

the question-and-answer session or immediately at the end of the event to increase the participant response rate. Startup Savanna has instituted measures to deploy the post-session evaluation feedback during the Question-and-Answer sessions of online sessions to increase participation and response rate. Besides, Startup Savanna will communicate to participants the importance of evaluations to increase the response rates by sharing the link during the session and reminding participants to fill it up.

**Lesson 9: Storytelling and entrepreneur’s feature stories**

The Startup Savanna team did several entrepreneurs’ feature stories on social media and other platforms in a bid to broadcast the various beneficiaries of Startup Savanna. The exercise provided free marketing for the businesses but also an opportunity for the entrepreneurs to learn to tell their stories boldly. The entrepreneurs also had a window to capture their lessons and experiences on video during the two physical events in the quarter which provided rich marketing content for their businesses while boosting Startup Savanna’s overall brand visibility.



The storytelling and feature stories went a long way in increasing Startup Savanna’s brand visibility and solidifying the value proposition for the entrepreneurs. The exercise also made it easier to prove the attribution of Startup Savanna’s input and efforts to the entrepreneurs’ success. The brand visibility also attracted top-notch international resources along the way leading to high calibre and impactful activities.



**Lesson 10: Partnerships and value addition activities to boost international resources engagement**

One of the biggest challenges with engaging international resources was a compelling value proposition for them that led them to make Startup Savanna the partner of choice. The Startup Savanna team had gone ahead and made introductions to other KIEP components such as KIRDI to financiers, provided free marketing through videos and features on social media, and followed up on the resources' behalf.

This approach saw some international resources willing to do repeat activities and invite Startup Savanna beneficiaries to events targeted at the entrepreneurs’ needs.

The value proposition differed from one international resource to another, while investors preferred a ready pipeline, other experts appreciated free marketing, and mentors craved exposure opportunities.

### **Lesson 11: Targeted approach to reach relevant segment of startups**

The Startup Savanna team observed that open calls, social media, and circulation of fliers via ESOs platforms were not sufficient to attract high-calibre/potential Startups for last-mile match-making activities.

The team deployed a more strategic and structured approach for collaborating with ESOs and usage of social media to deliver impactful sessions. The team incorporated a funnel approach where certain webinars such as marketplace series commenced with a general overview that graduated to sector-specific opportunities for participating Startups in subsequent webinars. The team would then draw numbers from the first webinar but also source for additional entrepreneurs within the ecosystem.



Having a generic webinar throughout proved counterproductive as the international resource ended up being a presenter rather than a trainer/expert in a bid to satisfy all attendees. The team was cognizant that early-stage, growth, and mature Startups have different needs in the growth trajectory which can be difficult to meet in one session. Different selection criteria applied for in-person curated sessions that tended to have fewer entrepreneurs in the room. This enhanced better matching and linkages which translated to impactful connections.

The Growth stage and mature startups needed a completely different approach and a more compelling value proposition to both on-board and engage them. This trend has continued throughout the programme implementation and hence it is advisable to deploy feedback forms immediately after the event or even as the event is going on just before it has been wound up.



### **Lesson 12: The need to change tact to attract and on-board ESOs**

The general assumption was a properly articulated value proposition for ESOs would lead to a seamless collaborative approach yielding optimal results of tapping into their databases for Startup Savanna events.

The Startup Savanna team observed a more strategic approach with Entrepreneur Support Organisations (ESOs) for a more fruitful collaboration is required. This consisted of a one-on-one approach, a better articulated and packaged value proposition for the ESOs pertaining to their cohorts of entrepreneurs, and a follow-up mechanism that tracked the participation and progress of onboarded entrepreneurs. The team saw slightly better results with this change of tact in the latter period of the project.

### **Lesson 13: Engage international partners and resources/engagement beyond mapping**

The Startup Savanna team made great progress with new partners and resources, as it was easier and faster to align with the project's ongoing dynamics. This entailed onboarding and working with the partners as soon as possible.

The team's revamped approach of seeking partners based on events/webinars yielded better results rather than continual mapping followed by onboarding on an ad-hoc basis. International or local resources proved to be limited and under intense competition and the program/intervention that had a better value proposition, and dynamic offering but also action-oriented took the lion's share of these resources.

Older unutilized mapped-out resources quickly migrated their attention to more pressing value-adding events and activities. This had been the case for Startup Savanna and as such a valuable lesson to keep in mind for future implementations.



### Lesson 14: Capitalise on international conferences happening locally

In many ways, from budget to logistics and co-planning with organizers, local international conferences were low-hanging fruits for interested and deserving entrepreneurs.

The key was to identify these events early on and get in touch with the organizers to be part of the conference planning team. This gave Startup Savanna team time to mobilize, budget, and facilitate the attendance of willing entrepreneurs.

However, even with an adequate budget, the scale and impact of exposing Startup Savanna entrepreneurs to international events and conferences outside the country was quite limited. By carefully mapping out repeat locally held international events and conferences, the team would likely have increased the participation of entrepreneurs in those events, translating to impact for them in phase II.

### Lesson 15: Smarter ways to keep entrepreneurs engaged

The Startup Savanna team embraced the fact that entrepreneurs are generally short on time and have a myriad of activities calling for their attention. The Startup team was required to deploy smarter and more attractive tactics to draw and re-engage the entrepreneurs to participate in the activities of Startup Savanna in the latter stages of phase I.

Some of these included calling the entrepreneurs to check on their status, bulk SMS and Mailchimp/newsletter to better reach them, and a general follow-up that kept Startup Savanna on top of the entrepreneurs' minds.





## Lesson 16: Capitalise on third-party events

The Startup Savanna team realized that impactful events were better tackled through collaborations with like-minded partners where possible. This approach comprised of scouting for partnership events that met the objectives of Startup Savanna which the organizers were willing to endorse to give those events merit and credibility. The endorsement saw more entrepreneurs attracted to the platform and willing to participate in events and other match-making efforts.

This also increased opportunities for networking, collaboration, and growth that arise from engaging with and leveraging third-party events.

## Lesson 17: Factor in summer holidays effect on availability of international resources

Being in a tropical climate kind of setting sometimes blinds delivery teams to the effect of the season regarding global resources. Europe which contributed the bulk of the international resources went on holiday and engaging international resources then proved to be a futile attempt hence greatly impacting the availability of international resources during the summer holidays.

The key takeaway for the project team was working with Europe earlier and later in the year and looking for alternative partners during the summer break in Europe and the US and emphasizing the need to consider this factor when planning for the activities and events.



## Lesson 18: Need to lower entrepreneurs' fatigue in data collection.

Lowering entrepreneur fatigue in data collection was crucial for Startup Savanna to maintain active and meaningful engagement with its community. Entrepreneurs often felt inundated with requests for information, which could have led to frustration and disengagement. However, this was effectively managed by streamlining data collection processes by combining the required data and using automated tools, as well as providing clear value for the information gathered.

The Startup Savanna team ensured that entrepreneurs remained motivated and responsive. This not only improved the quality of data collected but also fostered a more supportive and productive ecosystem, where entrepreneurs felt valued and their time respected.

