

Time for Women to Start Up as Accelerator & Tech Initia

Zone Startups, Dentsu Aegis Network and Nasscom roll out programmes for women entrepreneurs to help them raise seed funding for

Shashwati.Shankar
@timesgroup.com

Bengaluru: Dearth of women entrepreneurs in the startup ecosystem has resulted in Zone Startups India, Dentsu Aegis Network and Nasscom increasingly focusing on launching women driven accelerator programmes and similar initiatives.

The programs focus on long term prospects for the entrepreneurs to raise seed rounds for research and creating prototypes within tech and finance oriented domains.

"Networking is one of the major hurdles we face as women entrepreneurs, accelerator programs can especially help with that.

Some of the people we met through Zone Startup's accelerator programmes are individuals we are currently forging partners-

hips with, it also helps to raise seed rounds to sustain operations or develop prototypes," said Shivani Mohan, co founder of Saral Designs. Her startup has created a proprietary tech enabled machine that can produce up to 15,000 sanitary napkins a day, largely catering to women in rural India. Saral Designs won first place at Zone Startup's women accelerator programme Empower.

Zone Startup India's accelerator programme Empower is considered to be the first of its kind in the country, along with Google and the Department of Science and Technology partnering with the organisation.

The six-week program received about 180 applications, a majority of which came from women with business and technology backgrounds. The top 15 were selected, out of which 8 managed to raise seed rounds ranging from

₹5 to ₹10 lakh.

"A six weeks programme is not long enough, so we provide the top 15 one year long support including

provision of office space if they plan to be headquartered out of Mumbai, in addition to any required mentorship or networking," said Ajay Ramasubramaniam, director of Zone Startups India. Majority of the applications they received included women in business or

finance, many of whom had up to 10 years of work experience. "There are difficulties prevalent in the startup ecosystem too,

there were many whom we wanted to put in the top 15 but we could not find appropriate mentors for them in terms of their domain expertise or knowledge they possessed within deep technology and other such areas," added Ramasubramaniam.

According to a Nasscom report, the number of women entrepreneurs in India has gone up to 9% in 2015 from 6% in 2014.

"We will be coming out with another report in October to see what kind of growth has happened in 2016, we have the Women-Techship programme that enables women entrepreneurs to make use of the Nasscom warehouse facilities for highly subsidised rates, as well as connect them to mentors besides conducting coding meetups and hackathons. The end result is for them to network well and raise seed rounds. However, more compre-



hensive women centered accelerator programmes like Zone Startups are needed," said Rajat Tandon, senior director at Nas-

scom. Nasscom with BlackB Google to focus on entrepreneur orie