

"Never been a better time to launch a startup as a female founder"

 By [Tom Jackson](#)

2 Jul 2018

"There's never been a better time than now to start a business as a female founder, there is a lot of support there and a lot of women that serve as good examples."



That is the view of Aisha Pandor, chief executive officer (CEO) of South African startup SweepSouth, speaking on a panel about female entrepreneurship at the recent Mest Africa Summit in Cape Town.

She said more and more support was becoming available for female entrepreneurs in Africa.

"There are great supportive ecosystems that exist, and both from the public and private sector a recognition that women need to be supported," said Pandor.



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This was a view shared by GirlHype CEO Baratang Miya, who said female-led innovation was beginning to be taken seriously.

“Especially for black women, governments are beginning to come up with policies. If you don’t take up the opportunity now it is going to fly. There’s more money in the market,” she said.

“The space is beginning to accept us, and that anti-women culture is gone. There are so many programmes available to accelerate women, it is just amazing.”

However, challenges do remain for women within the African tech startup scene. Pandor said it had been tough to penetrate in the first place as a female founder.

“Initially entering into the tech space it was difficult not feeling like there were other women there, not because I was actively excluded, but by virtue of the fact there weren’t other people, other founders, investors, who looked like me. It took me a while to feel like I belonged and it took me a little longer than I think it would a male founder to find his feet,” she said.



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“You are constantly being assessed and any room I walk into that doesn’t know SweepSouth or hasn’t seen my picture will automatically assume that any male I’m with is the founder. There’s still stereotypes like that that you have to fight against and it doesn’t do a lot for your confidence.

A lack of female investors in the tech space is also a factor.

“I can probably count on one hand the amount of female South African investors in tech. It is sometimes difficult to explain a product that is empowering women, where women are the end users. You have to do a lot of mental and emotional gymnastics on investors,” Pandor said.

Lexi Novitske, principal investment officer at Singularity Investments, agreed there is a perception that the investment industry is male-dominated, and changing that would be a start.

“In the venture capital space, I think the best investors are men or women that have been operators. I would encourage a lot of entrepreneurs to go into this space. But it is also important more women get involved,” she said.

ABOUT TOM JACKSON

Co-founder @DisruptAfrica. Tech and business journalist in Africa. Passionate about the vibrant tech startups scene in Africa, Tom can usually be found sniffing out the continent’s most exciting new companies and entrepreneurs, funding rounds and any other developments within the growing ecosystem.

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