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UNDP and EBN partner to strengthen quality standards for Africa's incubators

Brussels and New York, 27 October 2026 - The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the European Business and Innovation Centre Network (EBN) have entered into a strategic partnership to develop certification and benchmarking frameworks tailored to the needs of African incubators. The collaboration will draw on EBN's internationally recognized quality standards and benchmarking approaches to support participating incubators across the network.

Quality standards work best when the people who run incubators help shape them and continue to use them beyond the life of a funded project. We look forward to working with UNDP on timbuktoo and the incubators in its network to build an approach they can sustain," - Laura Lecci, CEO, EBN

The cooperation will also support policy dialogue informed by benchmarking data and, where feasible, facilitate peer learning and exchanges with European incubators and other innovation support organisations.

"Africa's entrepreneurs need strong innovation ecosystems that can help turn bold ideas into viable businesses. Through this partnership with EBN, we are looking forward to scaling lessons from Europe through the Pan-African Incubation Network, equipping incubators with the quality standards they need to better support innovators and entrepreneurs across the continent", Aissata De, Officer-in-Charge and Regional Director for Africa, UNDP.

Launched by UNDP in January 2024, timbuktoo works to strengthen Africa's innovation ecosystem through a network of thematic Hubs, University Innovation Pods (UniPods), and policy support for entrepreneurs and startups across the continent. The Pan-African Incubation Network aims to strengthen the capacity of entrepreneurship support organisations under the timbuktoo initiative.

EBN manages the European Business and Innovation Centre (EU|BIC) certification, a quality standard for business and innovation centres in Europe. Its experience will inform the development and adaptation of approaches for participating incubators in the timbuktoo network.

The partners will work with participating incubators to design a governance and sustainability model for the Network, giving incubators a role in shaping its future and a stake in its continued operation.

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About UNDP

UNDP is the leading United Nations agency fighting to end the injustice of poverty, inequality, and climate change. Working with our broad network of experts and partners in 170 countries, we help nations to build integrated, lasting solutions for people and planet.

Learn more at undp.org/ http://www.undp.org/africa or follow @UNDP and @UNDPAfrica.

timbuktoo is UNDP's flagship initiative working to strengthen Africa's innovation ecosystem. With thematic Hubs and UniPods across the continent, timbuktoo provides support to young entrepreneurs to accelerate their impact. Guided by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), timbuktoo's vision is to empower Africa's youth to lead the next wave of global innovation in sectors such as HealthTech, MineTech, AgriTech, FinTech, GreenTech, ManuTech, and more. For more information, visit timbuktoo Africa.

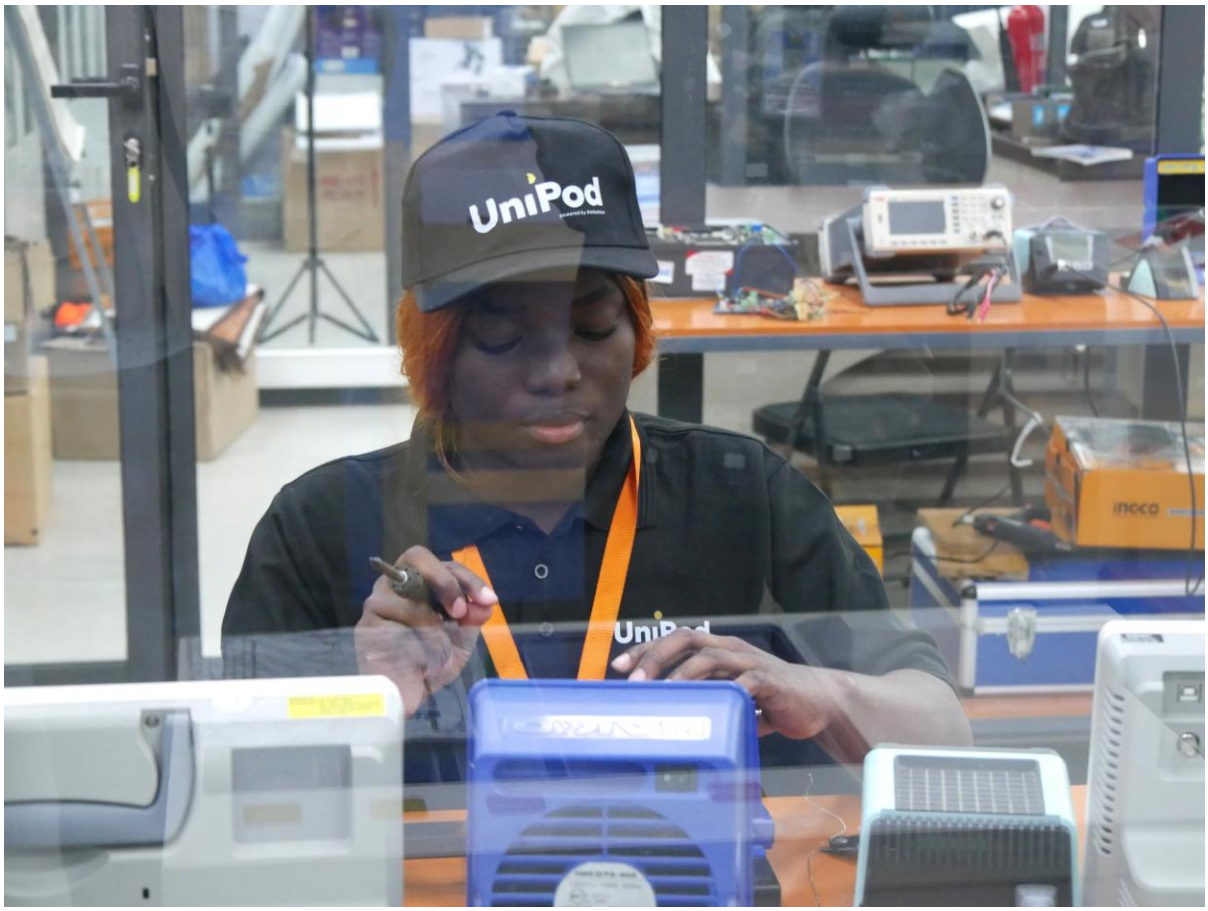
About EBN

EBN (European Business and Innovation Centre Network) is a Brussels-based not-for-profit that grants and manages EU|BIC certification, the quality label for business and innovation centres. Founded in 1984, EBN connects more than 180 certified EU|BIC and Associate Members in 24 countries and runs international projects that transfer the EU|BIC methodology to new regions.

EU|BICs work regionally with companies from the first idea to international expansion. In 2025 they supported 66,758 companies. 85% of those companies were still operating after three years, against an EU average of around 58%. EU|BIC clients raised more than €1 billion, and 1,439 companies crossed a border with structured EU|BIC support. More: www.ebn.eu

Media contacts

- Praise Nutakor, Partnerships and Communications Specialist, UNDP, New York, praise.nutakor@undp.org
- Bram Pauwels, Chief Strategy Officer, EBN, Brussels, bram.pauwels@ebn.eu



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