

Kenya, Uganda teams chosen for start-up AI investment

Merck, a leading science and technology company, has announced the participants for its Accelerator Programs in Darmstadt and Nairobi. Almost 200 highly competitive applications from 47 countries were submitted for consideration.



Nairobi start-up garage

With its selection, Merck sets the agenda with topics from Malaria diagnosis to identification of plant diseases using artificial intelligence.

Michael Gamber, head of the Merck Innovation Centre, is looking forward to what these teams can create: “With our selection for the Darmstadt and Nairobi Accelerator Program we set the agenda with topics of global importance, living up to the program’s international orientation.”

The 10 most promising ideas for the Darmstadt Accelerator were invited to a pitch day. This was an opportunity for them to present their ideas before a selection of judges.

The jury was made up of Merck employees, external venture capitalists and experts in start-up development. The selected teams addressed topics from mobile malaria diagnosis, to waiting time in emergency rooms.

At the same time, the start-up-companies for the Nairobi program were selected by Merck’s local team in Africa. The Nairobi program is focused on digital health and the winning teams aim to add efficiency to healthcare in Africa. The topics

range from maternal and infant mortality to the transportation of emergency patients.

Both accelerator rounds started in April and will end in July this year.

Start-up companies at the Nairobi Accelerator

[Flare](#), led by Caitlin Dolkart and Maria Rabinovich, is a Transportation Network Company, like Uber, that makes ambulances more readily accessible in Nairobi. As there is no centralised phone number to call in case of emergency, the team developed a technical infrastructure that organises the transportation of emergency patients considering available ambulances and hospital capacities.

[Miti Health](#), led by Jessica Vernon and Jennifer Stutsman, improves the supply chain of medication. Currently owners of private chemist shops have inefficient supply chains because they cannot efficiently predict demand or react to higher orders. Miti Health sets up a technological infrastructure to optimize this process from inventory management to quality certification.

[Totohealth](#), led by Felix Kimaru, utilises messaging and voice technology to help reduce maternal mortality, child mortality and detect developmental abnormalities in early stages. The start-up enables mothers and fathers to receive personalised messages timed at their child's age or stage of pregnancy. These messages are able to highlight possible warning signs, equip parents with knowledge on nutrition, reproductive health, parenting and developmental stimulation.

Start-ups at the Darmstadt Accelerator

[Matibabu](#), led by Josiah Kavuma and Shafik Sekitto, provides an app that is able to diagnose malaria without a blood sample. The program instead uses a mobile phone's camera. It can tell if a person has malaria by measuring light absorption when pressed to the fingertip. The start-up-company is based in Kampala, Uganda.

[Check-ER](#), led by Leon Hulli and Rachel Bodkier from Tel Aviv, Israel, is a mobile app aimed at optimising wait time in Emergency Rooms. By connecting to a hospital's administrative data, Check-ER would be able to calculate patient wait time and organise the queue based on a preliminary diagnosis, with more urgent care issues prioritised.

[PEAT](#), led by Simone Strey and Alexander Kenneopohl from Hannover, Germany, is a software start-up company employing Artificial Intelligence (AI) to detect plant diseases via image recognition. The system is not only able to diagnose plants from their pictures, it is also designed to learn from new submissions for more precise recognition as it develops.

Merck is a leading science and technology company in healthcare, life science and performance materials. Around 50,000 employees work to further develop technologies that improve and enhance life – from biopharmaceutical therapies to treat cancer or multiple sclerosis, cutting-edge systems for scientific research and production, to liquid crystals for smartphones and LCD televisions.

Founded in 1668, Merck is the world's oldest pharmaceutical and chemical company.