

Ghana's Swoove set to deliver growth after startup contest

As a pair of motorcyclists from Ghanaian startup Swoove zipped along Accra's back streets with deliveries last week, a team of software engineers tracked their progress on screens.



Workers of Ghanaian courier logistics startup Swoove ride on motorbikes to deliver packages to customers, in Accra, Ghana, on 25 November 2022. Reuters/Francis Kokoroko

Swoove's founders say because it started out during tough times, the firm is well-placed to weather the economic fallout of the Covid-19 pandemic and the effects of conflict in Ukraine.

"Businesses who can survive within this particular time frame will do even better when times get better," Kwaku Tabiri said of Swoove, which makes more than 5,000 deliveries per week.

Swoove was one of five finalists from South Africa, Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal and Ghana selected from a pool of more than 500 applicants in last week's annual MEST Africa Challenge, which offers a grand prize of \$50,000 in funding.

It was the first in-person competition at the Silicon Valley-style Accra campus of the Africa-wide technology entrepreneur training programme and seed fund since the coronavirus pandemic forced it online in 2020.

This year's finalists developed their businesses in a downturn that has disproportionately affected emerging markets, making their journey to success much harder, MEST's portfolio director Melissa Nsiah said.

"It's like walking into a gold store and buying a nice bracelet, versus having to actually mine and refine the gold and design the piece before you can present it to the customer," Nsiah said. "That's a huge feat."

The competition was won by Senegalese e-commerce platform Kwely, which focuses on African-made products. All five finalists will receive coaching from MEST throughout the life of the companies.

Although Swoove did not win, Tabiri took comfort in the outlook for African innovation.

"We're going to see a lot of startups coming up that are actually going to solve our problems, and now they have the money to do it," he said.

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