

SOUTHERN AFRICA
EDITION

2026

SME ENTREPRENEUR
M A G A Z I N E

SME ENTREPRENEUR
Club

AWARDS FRAMEWORK · 2026 EDITION

Women of Worth

AWARDS 2026

The reference document setting out the eight bundles and fifty-seven categories of the 2026 programme —
Categories, Eligibility & Judging Framework.

POWERED BY

Teluka Mzuri Agency

**EIGHT BUNDLES · FIFTY-SEVEN
CATEGORIES**

Recognising the women building what comes next.



CONTENTS

The Women of Worth Awards 2026 — framework, section by section.

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01 – Entrepreneurial Excellence

Recognising the founders, builders and rising stars powering the next generation of woman-led enterprise in South Africa.

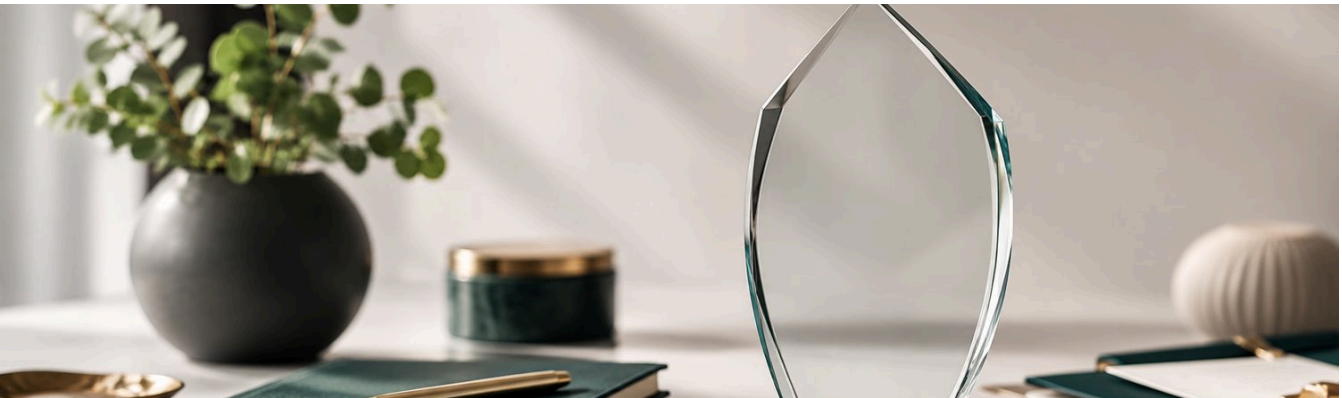
Bundle 01 celebrates the entrepreneurial journey across seven distinct categories. Emerging founders, young leaders under thirty-five, township and rural entrepreneurs, family-owned enterprises, disruptive startups and high-growth SMEs each have a dedicated award that honours their stage, context and contribution.

Together, these seven categories capture the full sweep of what it means to build a business from the ground up as a woman entrepreneur in South Africa today.

07	3–5	SA	B01
Categories in this bundle	Years typical trading window	South Africa based	Bundle reference

Categories in This Bundle

- 1.1Emerging Woman Entrepreneur of the Year
- 1.2Young Woman Entrepreneur (Under 35)
- 1.3Township Entrepreneur of the Year
- 1.4Rural Entrepreneur of the Year
- 1.5Family Business of the Year
- 1.6Startup of the Year
- 1.7High Growth SME of the Year



1.1

Emerging Woman Entrepreneur of the Year

PURPOSE

Recognises an emerging woman entrepreneur who has established a promising business within the last three to five years and demonstrated exceptional innovation, resilience, and growth potential.

WHO CAN ENTER

- Woman-owned, 3–5 years operating
- Registered, compliant, South African-based SME

JUDGING CRITERIA

- Business growth · Innovation · Leadership
- Financial sustainability · Future potential

1.3

Township Entrepreneur of the Year

PURPOSE

Celebrates entrepreneurs driving economic development, job creation, and innovation within township communities.

WHO CAN ENTER

- Business primarily operating in a township
- Woman-owned SME, registered and compliant

JUDGING CRITERIA

- Community impact · Employment creation
- Business growth · Innovation · Sustainability

1.2

Young Woman Entrepreneur (Under 35)

PURPOSE

Recognises an outstanding entrepreneur under the age of 35 who has built a successful and impactful business while demonstrating exceptional leadership and innovation.

WHO CAN ENTER

- Female founder under 35, majority ownership
- Minimum two years in business, registered and compliant

JUDGING CRITERIA

- Entrepreneurial vision · Business performance
- Innovation · Leadership · Community impact

1.4

Rural Entrepreneur of the Year

PURPOSE

Recognises entrepreneurs creating sustainable businesses and economic opportunities in rural South Africa.

WHO CAN ENTER

- Rural-based business, registered and compliant
- Woman-owned enterprise

JUDGING CRITERIA

- Economic contribution · Community empowerment
- Innovation · Sustainability · Growth

1.5

Family Business of the Year

PURPOSE

Celebrates successful family-owned businesses demonstrating strong governance, succession planning, and sustainable growth.

WHO CAN ENTER

- Family-owned SME, registered and compliant
- Minimum five years in operation

JUDGING CRITERIA

- Business performance · Governance
- Sustainability · Family leadership · Innovation

1.7

High Growth SME of the Year

PURPOSE

Recognises SMEs demonstrating exceptional revenue growth, employment creation, and market expansion.

WHO CAN ENTER

- Operating for at least three years
- Registered and compliant SME

JUDGING CRITERIA

- Revenue growth · Job creation
- Market expansion · Innovation · Sustainability

1.6

Startup of the Year

PURPOSE

Recognises an innovative startup disrupting its industry through creativity, technology, or unique business models.

WHO CAN ENTER

- Business operating less than three years
- Woman founder, registered and compliant

JUDGING CRITERIA

- Innovation · Market opportunity
- Growth · Business model · Scalability

BUNDLE TWO — NEXT

Leadership & Impact

Six categories recognising women whose leadership shapes communities, workplaces and the wider entrepreneurial ecosystem.

- Social Impact Entrepreneur
- Community Development
- Inclusive Employer
- Women Empowerment Champion
- Mentor of the Year
- Business Coach of the Year

BUNDLE TWO · LEADERSHIP & IMPACT

Leadership that lifts others.

Six categories recognising the women whose influence extends beyond their own enterprise and into the wider entrepreneurial ecosystem.

02 – LEADERSHIP & IMPACT

Leadership & Impact

Recognising the women whose leadership shapes communities, workplaces and the wider entrepreneurial ecosystem.

Bundle 02 honours six categories of leadership beyond the balance sheet: social impact, community development, inclusive employment, women's empowerment, mentorship and business coaching. Each category recognises a different form of influence — but all share a common thread of leadership expressed through service to others.

Every Bundle 02 award follows a common judging framework: **Leadership, Innovation, Impact, Sustainability, Measurable Outcomes.**

Categories in This Bundle

- | | |
|-----|--|
| 2.1 | Social Impact Entrepreneur of the Year |
| 2.2 | Community Development Award |
| 2.3 | Inclusive Employer Award |
| 2.4 | Women Empowerment Champion Award |
| 2.5 | Mentor of the Year |
| 2.6 | Business Coach of the Year |

2.1

Social Impact Entrepreneur of the Year

PURPOSE

Recognises a woman entrepreneur creating measurable social impact through business.

WHO CAN ENTER

- Registered woman-owned business or individual as applicable

JUDGING CRITERIA

- Leadership · Innovation · Impact
- Sustainability · Measurable outcomes

2.3

Inclusive Employer Award

PURPOSE

Recognises organisations championing diversity, equity and inclusion.

WHO CAN ENTER

- Registered and compliant woman-owned business or individual as applicable
- Eligible entrant

JUDGING CRITERIA

- Leadership · Innovation · Impact
- Sustainability · Measurable outcomes

2.2

Community Development Award

PURPOSE

Recognises outstanding contribution to community upliftment.

WHO CAN ENTER

- Registered woman-owned business or individual as applicable
- Eligible entrant, registered and compliant

JUDGING CRITERIA

- Leadership · Innovation · Impact
- Sustainability · Measurable outcomes

2.4

Women Empowerment Champion Award

PURPOSE

Recognises champions advancing women's economic empowerment.

WHO CAN ENTER

- Registered and compliant woman-owned business or individual as applicable
- Eligible entrant

JUDGING CRITERIA

- Leadership · Innovation · Impact
- Sustainability · Measurable outcomes

Mentor of the Year

PURPOSE

Recognises an exceptional mentor supporting women entrepreneurs.

WHO CAN ENTER

- Registered and compliant woman-owned business or individual as applicable
- Eligible entrant

JUDGING CRITERIA

- Leadership
- Innovation
- Impact
- Sustainability
- Measurable outcomes

Business Coach of the Year

PURPOSE

Recognises an outstanding business coach driving SME success.

WHO CAN ENTER

- Registered and compliant woman-owned business or individual as applicable
- Eligible entrant

JUDGING CRITERIA

- Leadership
- Innovation
- Impact
- Sustainability
- Measurable outcomes



BUNDLE 02 · JUDGING FRAMEWORK

One framework applied across all six leadership categories.

Leadership · Innovation · Impact · Sustainability · Measurable outcomes — the shared judging lens of Bundle 02.

03 – Business Performance

Recognising operational excellence across the disciplines that define modern SME success.

Bundle 03 celebrates the businesses whose day-to-day discipline and strategic execution set them apart. Seven categories cover innovation, exports, digital transformation, customer experience, financial excellence, employee experience and brand building.

The *Innovation Excellence Award* is fully defined overleaf. The remaining six categories follow the same structural template – the source framework states “the same format would apply” to each – and are listed here without invented content, pending final wording from the awards steering committee.

07	01	06	B03
Categories in this bundle	Fully defined in source	Shared-format categories	Bundle reference

Categories in This Bundle

3.1 Innovation Excellence Award

3.2 Export Excellence Award

3.3 Digital Transformation Award

3.4 Customer Excellence Award

3.5 Financial Excellence Award

3.6 Employer of Choice Award

3.7 SME Brand of the Year



3.1

Innovation Excellence Award

PURPOSE

Recognises SMEs that have introduced innovative products, services or business models that transform their industry and open new pathways for growth.

WHO CAN ENTER

- Registered and compliant SMEs demonstrating measurable innovation across product, service or process

JUDGING CRITERIA

- Innovation · Commercial success · Market impact
- Sustainability · Scalability

3.3

Digital Transformation Award

PURPOSE

Recognises SMEs leveraging digital technologies to modernise operations, unlock new revenue streams and future-proof their business.

WHO CAN ENTER

- Registered and compliant SMEs that have implemented digital solutions with measurable business impact

JUDGING CRITERIA

- Technology adoption · Operational impact · Customer experience
- Data usage · Business outcomes

3.2

Export Excellence Award

PURPOSE

Recognises SMEs demonstrating exceptional export performance, market expansion and international competitiveness across their sector.

WHO CAN ENTER

- Registered and compliant SMEs with an active export programme and international clients or distribution

JUDGING CRITERIA

- Export growth · Market reach · Product quality
- Foreign revenue · Global competitiveness

3.4

Customer Excellence Award

PURPOSE

Recognises SMEs delivering outstanding customer experience through service design, responsiveness and long-term customer relationships.

WHO CAN ENTER

- Registered and compliant SMEs with demonstrable customer satisfaction results and clear service standards

JUDGING CRITERIA

- Customer satisfaction · Service innovation · Retention
- Support quality · Brand loyalty

3.5

Financial Excellence Award

PURPOSE

Recognises SMEs demonstrating exceptional financial management, sustainable growth and strong return on investment for shareholders and stakeholders.

WHO CAN ENTER

- Registered and compliant SMEs with audited financials showing consistent performance

JUDGING CRITERIA

- Revenue growth · Profitability · Cash discipline
- Financial governance · Investor confidence

3.6

Employer of Choice Award

PURPOSE

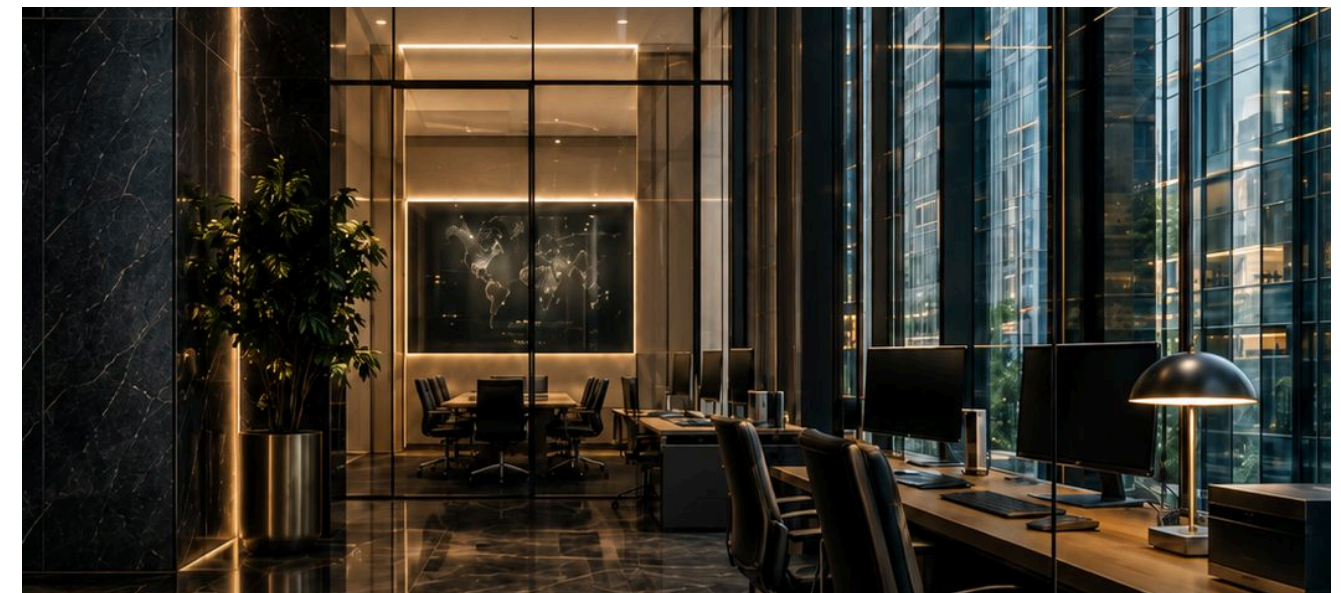
Recognises SMEs building outstanding workplaces through people development, inclusive culture and employee wellbeing.

WHO CAN ENTER

- Registered and compliant SMEs with clear people practices and demonstrable employee retention

JUDGING CRITERIA

- Employee engagement · Culture · Retention
- Learning & development · Wellbeing



3.7

SME Brand of the Year

PURPOSE

Recognises SMEs that have built distinctive, resilient brands with strong market presence and emotional resonance with their customers.

WHO CAN ENTER

- Registered and compliant SMEs with a consistent brand identity and measurable brand equity

JUDGING CRITERIA

- Brand strategy · Visual identity · Market presence
- Customer perception · Brand growth

BUNDLE FOUR - SOUTHERN AFRICA

Regional excellence across eight nations.

A dedicated award for the woman-owned or woman-led SME that best represents business excellence within each Southern African market.

04 - SOUTHERN AFRICA SME EXCELLENCE

Southern Africa SME Excellence.

Dedicated regional awards recognising top SMEs across Southern Africa.

Bundle 04 extends the Women of Worth programme across eight Southern African countries, honouring the woman-owned or woman-led SME that best represents business excellence within each national market. The awards share a common structure recognising outstanding growth, innovation, leadership and contribution to economic development.

Every regional award follows the same judging framework: **Business growth and performance, Leadership excellence, Innovation, Sustainability, Job creation and economic impact.**

Countries in This Bundle

4.1 SME Entrepreneur of the Year – Botswana

4.2 SME Entrepreneur of the Year – Zambia

4.3 SME Entrepreneur of the Year – Namibia

4.4 SME Entrepreneur of the Year – Zimbabwe

4.5 SME Entrepreneur of the Year – Eswatini

4.6 SME Entrepreneur of the Year – Lesotho

4.7 SME Entrepreneur of the Year – Malawi

4.8 SME Entrepreneur of the Year – Mozambique

4.1

SME Entrepreneur of the Year — Botswana

PURPOSE

Recognises an outstanding SME that has demonstrated exceptional business growth, innovation, leadership and contribution to economic development within Botswana.

WHO CAN ENTER

- Registered and compliant SMEs that are woman-owned or woman-led and operating in Botswana

JUDGING CRITERIA

- Business growth and performance · Leadership excellence
- Innovation · Sustainability · Job creation and economic impact

4.3

SME Entrepreneur of the Year — Namibia

PURPOSE

Recognises an outstanding SME that has demonstrated exceptional business growth, innovation, leadership and contribution to economic development within Namibia.

WHO CAN ENTER

- Registered and compliant SMEs that are woman-owned or woman-led and operating in Namibia

JUDGING CRITERIA

- Business growth and performance · Leadership excellence
- Innovation · Sustainability · Job creation and economic impact

4.2

SME Entrepreneur of the Year — Zambia

PURPOSE

Recognises an outstanding SME that has demonstrated exceptional business growth, innovation, leadership and contribution to economic development within Zambia.

WHO CAN ENTER

- Registered and compliant SMEs that are woman-owned or woman-led and operating in Zambia

JUDGING CRITERIA

- Business growth and performance · Leadership excellence
- Innovation · Sustainability · Job creation and economic impact

4.4

SME Entrepreneur of the Year — Zimbabwe

PURPOSE

Recognises an outstanding SME that has demonstrated exceptional business growth, innovation, leadership and contribution to economic development within Zimbabwe.

WHO CAN ENTER

- Registered and compliant SMEs that are woman-owned or woman-led and operating in Zimbabwe

JUDGING CRITERIA

- Business growth and performance · Leadership excellence
- Innovation · Sustainability · Job creation and economic impact

4.5

SME Entrepreneur of the Year — Eswatini

PURPOSE

Recognises an outstanding SME that has demonstrated exceptional business growth, innovation, leadership and contribution to economic development within Eswatini.

WHO CAN ENTER

- Registered and compliant SMEs that are woman-owned or woman-led and operating in Eswatini

JUDGING CRITERIA

- Business growth and performance · Leadership excellence
- Innovation · Sustainability

4.7

SME Entrepreneur of the Year — Malawi

PURPOSE

Recognises an outstanding SME that has demonstrated exceptional business growth, innovation, leadership and contribution to economic development within Malawi.

WHO CAN ENTER

- Registered and compliant SMEs that are woman-owned or woman-led and operating in Malawi

JUDGING CRITERIA

- Business growth and performance · Leadership excellence
- Innovation · Sustainability · Job creation and economic impact

4.6

SME Entrepreneur of the Year — Lesotho

PURPOSE

Recognises an outstanding SME that has demonstrated exceptional business growth, innovation, leadership and contribution to economic development within Lesotho.

WHO CAN ENTER

- Registered and compliant SMEs that are woman-owned or woman-led and operating in Lesotho

JUDGING CRITERIA

- Business growth and performance · Leadership excellence
- Innovation · Sustainability · Job creation and economic impact

4.8

SME Entrepreneur of the Year — Mozambique

PURPOSE

Recognises an outstanding SME that has demonstrated exceptional business growth, innovation, leadership and contribution to economic development within Mozambique.

WHO CAN ENTER

- Registered and compliant SMEs that are woman-owned or woman-led and operating in Mozambique

JUDGING CRITERIA

- Business growth and performance · Leadership excellence
- Innovation · Sustainability · Job creation and economic impact

05 – Industry Excellence Awards

Sector-specific recognition for the woman-owned and woman-led SMEs shaping South Africa’s core industries.

Bundle 05 is the largest section of the Women of Worth Awards 2026 framework. It sets out sector-specific awards across seventeen industry verticals, from agriculture and manufacturing to technology, healthcare, media and trade. Each award recognises leadership, innovation and sustainable business excellence within its industry.

SOURCE NUMBERING

The source framework numbers these categories 1–15, then 17 and 18. There is no category 16. Numbering preserved exactly. Confirm with the awards committee whether the gap is intentional or represents a missing category to be added.

INDUSTRIES IN THIS BUNDLE	
5.1	Agriculture, Food & Agribusiness
5.2	Manufacturing & Industrial
5.3	Construction & Built Environment
5.4	Mining, Energy & Utilities
5.5	Science, Technology & Innovation
5.6	Finance & Professional Services
5.7	Healthcare & Life Sciences
5.8	Education & Skills Development
5.9	Retail, Consumer & E-commerce
5.10	Tourism, Hospitality & Events
5.11	Transport, Logistics & Automotive
5.12	Media, Marketing & Communications
5.13	Creative & Cultural Industries
5.14	Environmental & Sustainability
5.15	ICT & Telecommunications
5.17	Public Sector & Social Impact
5.18	Trade & Export Excellence

17

Industry categories

1–18

Source range, 16 omitted

ALL

Woman-owned or led

B05

Bundle reference

5.1

Agriculture, Food & Agribusiness

PURPOSE

Recognises an outstanding woman-owned or woman-led SME demonstrating exceptional leadership, innovation, sustainability and business excellence across the agriculture, food production or agribusiness value chain.

WHO CAN ENTER

- Women-owned or women-led SMEs, registered and compliant, operating in Agriculture, Agribusiness or Food Processing

JUDGING CRITERIA

- Business growth & sustainability · Innovation
- Leadership · Economic contribution · Job creation
- Environmental sustainability · Community impact

5.3

Construction & Built Environment

PURPOSE

Recognises outstanding leadership and business excellence within the construction and built environment sector.

WHO CAN ENTER

- Women-owned or women-led SMEs, registered and compliant, operating in Construction, Property & Real Estate, or Infrastructure

JUDGING CRITERIA

- Project excellence · Innovation · Sustainability
- Industry contribution · Business growth · Leadership

5.2

Manufacturing & Industrial

PURPOSE

Recognises a woman-owned or woman-led SME demonstrating excellence in manufacturing, industrial production or engineering through innovation, operational excellence and sustainable growth.

WHO CAN ENTER

- Women-owned or women-led SMEs registered and compliant, operating in Manufacturing, Industrial Innovation or Engineering

JUDGING CRITERIA

- Manufacturing excellence · Industrial innovation
- Product quality · Business growth
- Engineering leadership · Industry impact

5.4

Mining, Energy & Utilities

PURPOSE

Recognises women-owned or women-led SMEs, registered and compliant, driving innovation, sustainability and operational excellence within mining, energy and utility sectors.

WHO CAN ENTER

- Women-owned or women-led SMEs operating in Mining, Energy or Renewable Energy

JUDGING CRITERIA

- Innovation · Safety and compliance · Sustainability
- Business performance · Industry contribution · Leadership

5.5

Science, Technology & Innovation

PURPOSE

Recognises exceptional women-owned or women-led SMEs using technology and innovation to transform industries and create economic value.

WHO CAN ENTER

- Women-owned or women-led SMEs, registered and compliant, operating in Technology, STEM, Artificial Intelligence, Cybersecurity or FinTech

JUDGING CRITERIA

- Technological innovation · Business performance
- Industry impact · Scalability · Leadership · Future readiness

5.7

Healthcare & Life Sciences

PURPOSE

Recognises women-owned or women-led SMEs improving healthcare outcomes through innovation, quality service and scientific advancement.

WHO CAN ENTER

- Women-owned or women-led SMEs, registered and compliant, operating in Healthcare, Medical Innovation or Pharmaceuticals

JUDGING CRITERIA

- Innovation · Quality of service · Patient or community impact
- Leadership · Sustainability · Business performance

5.6

Finance & Professional Services

PURPOSE

Recognises outstanding women-owned or women-led SMEs delivering excellence across financial and professional services.

WHO CAN ENTER

- Women-owned or women-led SMEs registered and compliant, operating in Financial Services, Accounting & Audit, Legal Services or Business Consulting

JUDGING CRITERIA

- Professional excellence · Client impact · Innovation
- Business growth · Leadership · Governance

5.8

Education & Skills Development

PURPOSE

Recognises women-owned or women-led SMEs making significant contributions to education, training and skills development.

WHO CAN ENTER

- Women-owned or women-led SMEs, registered and compliant, operating in Education, Skills Development or EdTech

JUDGING CRITERIA

- Learning impact · Innovation · Accessibility
- Leadership · Business sustainability · Industry contribution

5.9

Retail, Consumer & E-commerce

PURPOSE

Recognises women-owned or women-led SMEs achieving excellence in retail, consumer products and digital commerce.

WHO CAN ENTER

- Women-owned or women-led SMEs registered and compliant, operating in Retail, Consumer Business or E-commerce

JUDGING CRITERIA

- Customer experience · Innovation · Market growth
- Brand strength · Leadership · Business performance

5.11

Transport, Logistics & Automotive

PURPOSE

Recognises women-owned or women-led SMEs driving excellence across transport, logistics and automotive industries.

WHO CAN ENTER

- Women-owned or women-led SMEs registered and compliant, operating in Transport & Logistics, Automotive or Supply Chain

JUDGING CRITERIA

- Operational excellence · Innovation · Efficiency
- Leadership · Business growth · Industry impact

5.10

Tourism, Hospitality & Events

PURPOSE

Recognises outstanding women-owned or women-led SMEs contributing to tourism, hospitality and the events industry through service excellence and innovation.

WHO CAN ENTER

- Women-owned or women-led SMEs registered and compliant, operating in Tourism, Hospitality or Events & Entertainment

JUDGING CRITERIA

- Service excellence · Customer satisfaction · Innovation
- Industry contribution · Sustainability · Leadership

5.12

Media, Marketing & Communications

PURPOSE

Recognises women-owned or women-led SMEs demonstrating creativity, strategic excellence and measurable impact in media, marketing and communications.

WHO CAN ENTER

- Women-owned or women-led SMEs, registered and compliant, operating in Media, Marketing or Public Relations & Communications

JUDGING CRITERIA

- Creativity · Innovation · Campaign effectiveness
- Industry leadership · Business growth · Client impact

5.13

Creative & Cultural Industries

PURPOSE

Recognises outstanding women-owned or women-led SMEs shaping the creative economy through innovation, artistic excellence and commercial success.

WHO CAN ENTER

- Women-owned or women-led SMEs, registered and compliant, operating in Fashion, Creative Industries or Design & Innovation

JUDGING CRITERIA

- Creativity and originality · Innovation · Commercial success
- Industry influence · Leadership · Cultural impact

5.15

ICT & Telecommunications

PURPOSE

Recognises women-owned or women-led SMEs driving innovation and digital connectivity within the ICT and telecommunications sector.

WHO CAN ENTER

- Women-owned or women-led SMEs registered and compliant, operating in ICT or Telecommunications

JUDGING CRITERIA

- Digital innovation · Service excellence · Business growth
- Technology adoption · Leadership · Industry contribution

5.14

Environmental & Sustainability

PURPOSE

Recognises women-owned or women-led SMEs championing environmental stewardship and sustainable business practices.

WHO CAN ENTER

- Women-owned or women-led SMEs registered and compliant, operating in Sustainability, Green Business or Circular Economy

JUDGING CRITERIA

- Environmental impact · Innovation · Sustainability practices
- Business performance · Leadership · Climate resilience

5.17

Public Sector & Social Impact

PURPOSE

Recognises women-owned or women-led organisations and enterprises delivering exceptional public value and social impact through leadership, innovation and community development.

WHO CAN ENTER

- Women-owned or women-led organisations, registered and compliant, operating in Public Service, Social Enterprise, Community Development or NGOs

JUDGING CRITERIA

- Public or social impact · Leadership · Innovation
- Community empowerment · Sustainability · Measurable outcomes

Trade & Export Excellence

PURPOSE

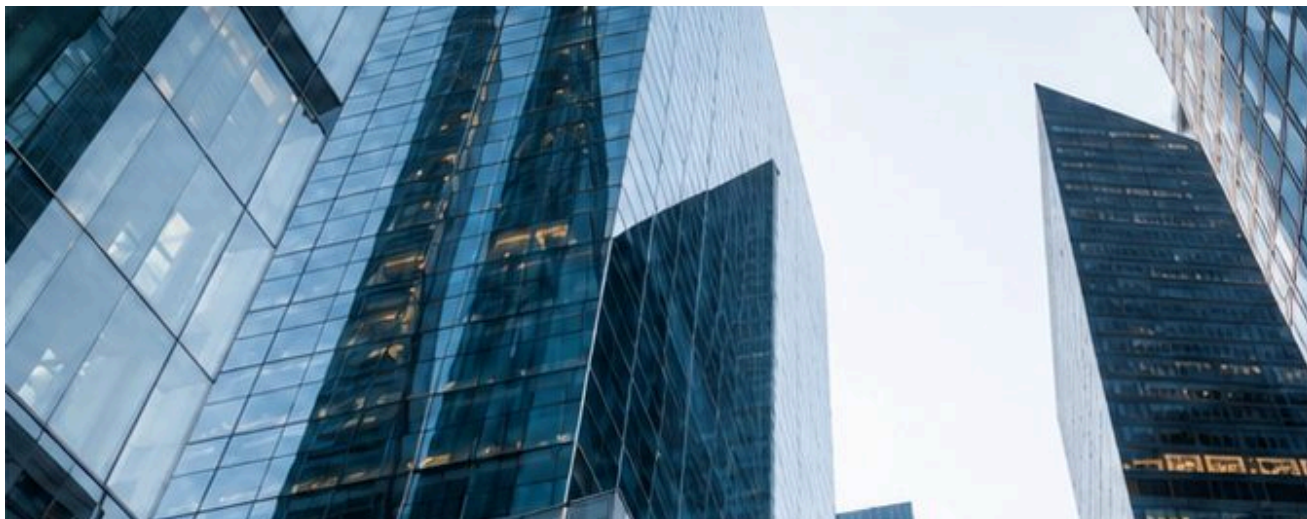
Recognises women-owned or women-led SMEs achieving outstanding success in export markets and international trade.

WHO CAN ENTER

- Women-owned or women-led SMEs, registered and compliant, operating in Export or International Trade

JUDGING CRITERIA

- Export growth
- International market expansion
- Innovation
- Business sustainability
- Leadership
- Economic contribution



The pinnacle categories.

Bundle 06 comprises two categories, each with its own distinct pathway. The **SME Woman Entrepreneur of the Year** is a competitive award open to previous finalists or direct nominations; the **Lifetime Achievement Award** is presented by invitation only, selected by the Awards Steering Committee.

Together, these awards close the ceremony and represent the deepest form of recognition that the Women of Worth programme confers.

CATEGORIES IN THIS BUNDLE

6.1 SME Woman Entrepreneur of the Year

6.2 Lifetime Achievement Award

6.1 SME Woman Entrepreneur of the Year

“The highest honour of the evening.”

PURPOSE

Recognising an exceptional woman entrepreneur who has demonstrated excellence in leadership, innovation, business performance and social impact.

WHO CAN ENTER

- Previous finalist or direct nomination
- Minimum five years in business
- Woman-owned SME, registered and compliant

JUDGING CRITERIA

- Outstanding leadership · Business growth
- Financial performance · Innovation
- Industry influence · Community impact
- Sustainability

6.2 Lifetime Achievement Award

Presented by invitation only, selected by the Awards Steering Committee.

PURPOSE

Presented to an exceptional woman whose decades of dedication, leadership and contribution have transformed South Africa’s SME ecosystem.

SELECTION PROCESS

- By invitation only
- Selected by the Awards Steering Committee

ASSESSMENT

- Lifetime contribution · Legacy
- Leadership · National influence
- Mentorship · Industry impact

BUNDLE SEVEN

07 – Corporate & Ecosystem Awards

Recognising the funders, procurers, incubators and institutions enabling the success of women-owned SMEs.

Shared Purpose & Judging Framework

Bundle 07 categories share a common purpose: to recognise organisations making outstanding contributions to entrepreneurship development through funding, procurement, mentorship, capacity building or ecosystem support.

#	CATEGORY	PRIMARY FOCUS
7.1	Financial Institution Supporting Women Entrepreneurs	Accessible financial products, SME financing, financial inclusion.
7.2	Corporate Supplier Development Partner of the Year	Impact through supplier development programmes.
7.3	Enterprise & Supplier Development Excellence	Outstanding ESD initiatives aligned with business growth.
7.4	Government Agency Supporting SMEs	Effective public-sector support and policy implementation.
7.5	Incubator / Accelerator of the Year	Measurable success in developing startups and SMEs.
7.6	Investment Partner of the Year	Access to funding and investment for women-led businesses.
7.7	Business Association of the Year	Advocacy, networking, and support for entrepreneurs.

The programme's highest honours.

Three curated recognitions closing the Women of Worth Awards 2026 framework — the year, the horizon, and the legacy.

08 – SPECIAL RECOGNITION AWARDS

Honour-based recognitions.

Honour-based recognitions rather than competitive categories.

Bundle 08 closes the Women of Worth Awards 2026 framework with three honour-based recognitions. These are not open competitive categories — they are curated by the awards steering committee to recognise the individuals and businesses whose contributions define the year, the horizon and the legacy of women in enterprise.

The three recognitions rise in weight from broadest recognition (Top 50) to most-specific promise (Top 10 to Watch) and finally to the programme's highest honorary distinction (Icon Award).

Recognitions in This Bundle

8.1 Top 50 Women in Business 2026

8.2 Top 10 Women-Owned SMEs to Watch

8.3 Icon of Women Entrepreneurship Award

RECOGNITION 8.1

Top 50 Women in Business 2026

PURPOSE

Recognises 50 exceptional women who have made significant contributions to business, leadership, innovation, and economic development during the year.

FORMAT

Honour-based curation by the awards steering committee. No open competitive nomination category.

RECOGNITION 8.2

Top 10 Women-Owned SMEs to Watch

PURPOSE

Highlights ten high-potential women-owned businesses demonstrating strong growth, innovation, and future leadership within the SME sector.

FORMAT

Honour-based curation by the awards steering committee. Recognises businesses whose trajectory is expected to define the year ahead.



RECOGNITION 8.3 • HIGHEST HONORARY

Icon of Women Entrepreneurship Award

PURPOSE

The highest honorary recognition presented to a distinguished woman whose exceptional vision, leadership, and lifelong contribution have profoundly shaped entrepreneurship and inspired generations of business leaders.

FORMAT

Presented at the discretion of the awards steering committee — a legacy recognition made only when a fitting recipient is identified.



SME ENTREPRENEUR MAGAZINE

Women of Worth Awards 2026

FRAMEWORK

*Recognising the vision, resilience and brilliance of women
entrepreneurs across Southern Africa.*

END OF FRAMEWORK DOCUMENT