Kigali: The Africa’s Business Heroes (ABH) Prize Competition, a flagship philanthropic program established by the Jack Ma Foundation to spotlight and support African entrepreneurs, has announced the top 50 finalists for its 2022 edition. This year, the competition received more than 21,000 applications and saw applicants from across all 54 African countries.

There was a 20% increase in applications from Central Africa, accounting for 9% of the total applications received. Southern Africa accounted for 17%, while East Africa and West Africa accounted for 17% and 43% of all applications respectively. Additionally, there was a 26% increase in applications from North Africa compared to last year, accounting for 7% of the total applications received. This year, the number of applications from 34 countries rose by more than 50%. Countries such as Egypt, Burkina Faso, Malawi and Burundi especially saw a tremendous growth in applications, further strengthening ABH’s position as a truly Pan-African initiative.

Women entrepreneurs were well-represented amongst the pool of applicants, making up 31% of applications. The participants also ranged in age from 19 to 72, a demonstration that there is no age limit on being an entrepreneur. Entering its fourth edition, ABH has become a well-recognized philanthropic program in Africa. Most applicants learned about the competition through word of mouth.

A pool of over 60 judges will now interview the top 50 candidates who come from a wide variety of industries, including agriculture, energy, healthcare, retail and manufacturing. Among the top 50, 10% are Francophone, 42% are female and 60% operate in rural areas. For the first time, applicants from Burkina Faso, Somalia, Guinea, and Burundi are represented in the top 50.

“We are thrilled to see that all of the countries and regions of Africa are represented in this year’s competition and to have a more diverse pool of applicants than ever,” said **Zahra Baitie-Boateng, Head of Partnerships & Programs, Africa’s Business Heroes**. “It is encouraging to see more than 21,000 entrepreneurs throw their hats into the ring from a wide spectrum of industries, regardless of their gender and age.”

“The top 50 finalists of the ABH 2022 competition show what great potential and talent exists in Africa. We are looking forward to spotlighting them and giving them the support they need to grow and generate a positive impact for both their businesses and the communities they serve,” she added.

The top 50 finalists of ABH 2022 recently participated in a virtual boot camp in preparation for their next round of interviews with judges. The boot camp featured sessions led by partners and judges alike. Topics included using data to better understand markets, identifying opportunities to scale, running effective digital marketing campaigns and selling in the digital age.

In late August, the top 20 will be identified and announced. The top 10 will be announced in October, before they go on to the grand finale where they will pitch live to global business legends and secure their share of the US$1.5 million prize pool. The official slogan of the competition this year, “**It’s African Time**,” is a bold call to action to all talented African entrepreneurs who are challenging stereotypes associated with “African time” – by creating local impact and building a better, more inclusive future through their businesses.