

Principles of Responsible Management Education (PRME) Students Innovation Studio

Executive Summary

With only five years remaining, the world is on track to achieve just 17 percent of the 2030 Agenda targets, according to the 2024 UN Sustainable Development Report. As the private sector plays a pivotal role in driving global progress, deeper engagement with business and management education is essential to accelerate action on the SDGs. In response to this gap, the UN Global Compact's higher education initiative, the Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME), is launching a new flagship programme: the **PRME Students Innovation Studio**. Operating across more than 90 countries and reaching over four million students, PRME will empower interdisciplinary teams of university entrepreneurs who are actively developing SDG-aligned ventures. Through tailored mentorship, seed funding and access to global funder networks, the Innovation Studio will help young people refine and scale their solutions, from prototypes into fundable, scalable impact enterprises, unlocking the potential of the next generation of responsible innovators.

Background and Overall Programmatic Objectives

Despite growing awareness and momentum, progress on the SDGs has stalled in many areas, and while young people are increasingly motivated to address global issues, the majority of youth-led ventures struggle to survive. According to Startup Genome (2023), over 90% of early-stage startups fail, with lack of mentorship, insufficient support systems, and limited access to networks cited as top reasons. Endeavor Insight (2021) found that ventures supported by strong mentorship are 3.5 times more likely to grow significantly than those without and are 1.7 more likely to raise funding. Meanwhile, less than 2% of global venture capital funding reaches women-led startups, highlighting persistent gender disparities in access to finance and entrepreneurial support (VC Corner, 2025).

In this context, the PRME Students Innovation Studio aims to:

- Accelerate the growth of youth-led ventures that directly advance one or more SDGs.
- Bridge the gap between young female innovators and the resources, mentorship, and visibility they need to scale their impact, addressing the persistent gender disparities in entrepreneurship and access to capital.
- Bridge the gap between early-stage ideation and real-world implementation by providing strategic support that includes personalized mentorship from industry experts, access to a global network of impact investors, and seed funding opportunities for selected finalists.

The studio is designed to meet students at different stages of development, offering **two dedicated tracks**:

- **Seed Track - Idea Development & Early Prototyping:** For student teams at earlier stages of venture creation, beyond ideation but pre-launch or pilot.
 - ◆ **Support:** Mentorship on business model design, market validation, and prototype development.
 - ◆ **Deliverable:** A viable early-stage concept or prototype, with opportunities for pilot-targeted seed funding and continued mentorship.
- **Catalyst Track - Venture Acceleration & Funding Readiness:** For student teams with piloted ventures who have already demonstrated proof of concept and measurable traction.

- ◆ **Support:** Mentorship on scaling, fundraising, financial modeling, and impact measurement. Access to a network of VC, impact investors, and accelerators.
- ◆ **Deliverable:** Strengthened capacity to lead and grow sustainable ventures beyond the program's final stage, with direct connections to long-term advisory, funding, and partnership opportunities.

Programme Structure and Approach

The Innovation Studio spans approximately three months, culminating in a final in-person pitch competition held at the **2026 PRME Global Forum in Cairo, Egypt:**

1. **Mentorship & Venture Support (Stage 1):** Participants are matched with mentors aligned to their SDG track and industry focus. They take part in expert-led sessions on scaling, fundraising, impact measurement, and partnership building, while receiving personalized feedback on their venture's progress.
2. **Pitch Preparation & Semi Finals (Stage 2):** During this phase, teams intensify their pitch readiness with the support of storytelling coaches and business model advisors. The stage concludes with a **semi-final pitch round**. Finalists are then chosen to advance to the global competition.
3. **Global Pitch Competition (Stage 3):** Finalist teams present their ventures at a high-level global event, gaining invaluable exposure to academia, UN partners and business leaders. Winners are awarded seed funding and receive ongoing mentorship to accelerate their venture's growth and impact.

Mentorship and Metrics

- We offer a tiered mentorship model:
 - ◆ Stage 1 - Skills mentors (design thinking, market validation)
 - ◆ Stage 2 - Sector mentors (energy, circular economy, financial inclusion)
- Target: Engage 150+ mentors globally over 3 years.
- Each mentor supports 2 teams, fostering cross-cultural exchange and domain-specific expertise.

Outcomes and Sustainability

- Scale 100+ student-led ventures across 30+ countries by 2030.
- Build a lifelong alumni network of student founders and sustainability-minded professionals.