

Smart Lady and Cherie Blair discussed the future of sustainable business

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Participants in Fibank's Smart Lady program and Mentorite BG met the founder of the Cherie Blair Foundation for Women

Ms Cherie Blair, founder of the Cherie Blair Foundation for Women, CEO Dhivya O'Connor and Ivaylo Dimitrov, senior partner at Lady Blair's law firm Omnia Strategy LLP, were special guests at a working lunch hosted by Smart Lady, Fibank's program in support of women entrepreneurs in Bulgaria. The event took place at the Residence Exclusive Club in Sofia and brought together Smart Lady business customers and participants in Mentorite BG program for women entrepreneurs. The topic discussed was "Encouraging women to develop sustainable business".

"It was a great pleasure to meet the Smart Lady community and learn about their amazing stories. I congratulate First Investment Bank for this wonderful initiative driven by innovative thinking," said Lady Blair, an internationally renowned lawyer and social entrepreneur.

An acclaimed human rights defender, she launched her foundation in 2008 and since then, together with partners, it has changed the future of over 250,000 women from over 100 low- and middle-income countries. Through its global mentoring platform, the HerVenture business skills app and the training programs for women, the Cherie Blair Foundation has driven women's success in business and has had positive impact on local communities, economies and the environment.

Its mission to develop the potential of female entrepreneurs through access to funding, technology and know-how brings it as close as possible to the philosophy of Smart Lady, whose community already includes more than 1100 Bulgarian business women. Fibank, one of Bulgarian largest banks, is majority owned by Ivaylo Mutafchiev and Tseko Minev. It has invested over BGN 120 million in the Smart Lady program focusing on startups or existing businesses owned or managed by women. In addition to tailored banking products and services, the program also provides access to mentoring sessions and training. Supporting sustainable entrepreneurship is another value that connects Smart Lady and the Cherie Blair Foundation for Women. Back in 2021, First Investment Bank launched its Sustainable Lady Fund which provided instrumental support to a dozen projects ranging from aviation and trade to social services, agriculture and eco-livestock.

"The goal of the Smart Lady program has been to become a trusted business partner for women entrepreneurs. In the early years, we focused on encouraging women to start and develop their businesses, on providing them not only with perfect banking, but also with the support they needed in the form of a women's business community, education and training. More recently, we have also sought to stimulate a sustainable transition to a circular economy by increasing the digital and environmental skills of female entrepreneurs", commented Ilona Staneva, Marketing and Advertising director at Fibank.

The Mentorite BG national mentoring program, supported by Smart Lady, also provides services with the environmental footprint of business in mind. Since its inception in 2023, it has become a training hub for more than 110 female participants, including three ladies from Yemen, Afghanistan and Ukraine selected to join the program by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Bulgaria.

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