



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **FundRiseHER™, The First Commonwealth Crowdfunding Initiative, To Target Caribbean Women Entrepreneurs Announced in Jamaica**

*KINGSTON, Jamaica (28 July, 2016)....* Women entrepreneurs in Jamaica and across the Caribbean will now have a new way to raise much needed capital for their ventures. **FundRiseHER™**, the first ever Commonwealth-wide crowdfunding initiative will have its Jamaica launch on July 29th, after having been first introduced alongside the CARICOM Heads of Government Meeting, that took place in Guyana from 4 - 6 July, 2016.

**FundRiseHER™** is the flagship initiative of Valrie Grant, Founder of GeoTechVision and the Commonwealth Woman Entrepreneur of the Year. It is being hosted on [pitchandchoose.com](http://pitchandchoose.com) the Caribbean's crowdfunding platform which was founded by A. Cecile Watson with a vision of leveraging crowdfunding to attract new flows of capital to the region, and ultimately to create new jobs and drive economic growth.

"We're truly encouraged by the early support for **FundRiseHER™** and we're fully anticipating a successful roll out that will resonate with the Caribbean crowd wherever they are in the world. The Pay It Forward ideal behind **FundRiseHER™** is taking form with several entrepreneurs already stepping forward to contribute by being part of our core team and also through their contribution of time, talent and/or treasure to the launch event" said Watson of [pitchandchoose.com](http://pitchandchoose.com)

Since its regional launch, **FundRiseHER™** has already attracted several key and strategic partnerships.

Partners in Jamaica include Development Bank of Jamaica the main sponsor of the launch cocktail event. Managing Director of DBJ Milverton Reynolds said: "We're very happy to be a partner in introducing **FundRiseHER™** to Jamaica, the Caribbean and the Commonwealth. It's such a worthwhile initiative that's fully aligned with DBJ's strategic focus on MSME's and in particular women entrepreneurship. We too are keen to see its success because it also opens the way to integrate alternative financing into the options now available to entrepreneurs to fund their businesses."

Flow Jamaica is also throwing their regional support behind the initiative and they have come on board to manage and take text donations in denominations of \$20, \$50 and \$100.

Grant remarked, "Having Flow onboard with text donations is aligned to our core value of inclusion because it provides a practical way to facilitate inclusiveness for all layers of our society to contribute to **FundRiseHER™**. Those who may want to contribute to building our national economies through entrepreneurship, but are unbanked or have no credit cards, can still participate in growing our pool of grant funds that will be available through **FundRiseHER™**."

The game changing **FundRiseHER™** initiative, led by the two Caribbean women entrepreneurs, has been developed with input from the Commonwealth Businesswomen's Network. **FundRiseHER™**, which has been launched to be a proof of concept for crowdfunding as a vehicle of economic development in the Commonwealth, is being piloted in the Caribbean with crowdfunding campaigns starting in September. The initiative will be spearheaded out of Jamaica by Gr8Way Consulting Ltd. also owned by Watson, and which will lead the charge throughout the region to deliver on the initiative's **1:10:50 goal**: \$1 million grant funding target to be raised through global rewards-based crowdfunding campaigns initiated by 10 participating Caribbean countries/territories including Commonwealth member states for the benefit of 50 women entrepreneurs. The size of grants will be between USD\$10,000 and USD\$25,000.

The comments made at the Guyana regional launch by the core team of professionals spearheading the organization and management of this innovative initiative included:

**Valrie Grant**, Founder of GeoTechVision and Commonwealth Businesswomen Ambassador said: "As a Caribbean woman who has been named as the Commonwealth Woman Entrepreneur of the Year, I feel obliged to drive an initiative that will not only foster the growth of women entrepreneurs throughout the Commonwealth but one that will also elevate the impact of Caribbean based women entrepreneurs on the world stage. **FundRiseHER™** will do this and we will all benefit."

**A. Cecile Watson**, Founder and CEO, pitchandchoose.com and the Caribbean Regional Ambassador for Women's Entrepreneurship Day said: "The potential impact of **FundRiseHER™** goes way beyond our aspiration to offer grants to 50 women entrepreneurs in the Caribbean. The outcome of this Caribbean lead initiative will inform its roll out throughout the Commonwealth. That's huge. So I am inviting the Caribbean community globally to rally behind **FundRiseHER™**, to engage with us, and to provide robust tangible support in talent, time and/or treasure, to help us collectively create successful campaigns throughout the region."

**Arif Zaman**, Executive Director, Commonwealth Businesswomen's Network said "this provides a major opportunity to join the dots between women's economic empowerment, technology and innovative financing to support SMEs with high growth potential. It also translates calls from Commonwealth governments into practical action that women entrepreneurs are taking forward. **FundRiseHER™** as a crowdfunding initiative will be extended to Asia, Africa and the rest of the Commonwealth by 2019 in sync with rising levels of intra-Commonwealth trade."

The core team has also attracted key professional resources, including: PRfect Green Belize (Daedra Haylock) as our Branding, Communications & PR partner and Southpaw Grafic from Barbados (Kathie Daniel), our graphics partner.

The initiative also foresees engaging entrepreneurs to support entrepreneurs. In the spirit of that type of collaboration, the **FundRiseHER™** logo was conceptualised by Cecile, and designed through services contributed by iPrint Digital, a woman owned business in Kingston, Jamaica. It has also been animated through the services provided by Kenia Mattis of ListenMi who was competitively selected in June as the Spark the Fire Startup Winner at the Global Entrepreneurship Summit in Silicon Valley.

**FundRiseHER™** is created and powered by pitchandchoose.com.

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### **Background Information:**

In 2013 Commonwealth Heads of Government “called for innovative, inclusive and accessible financing mechanisms as well as capacity building to advance women’s entrepreneurship.’ In May 2016 in the Seychelles, Small States across the Commonwealth (home to 31 such states), specifically said that they ‘should also explore the potential of crowdfunding for accessing smaller scale financing for development’ and only in June in London, Commonwealth ICT Ministers committed to ‘continue to build capacity, paying particular attention to the emerging and over-the-horizon technologies and taking into account the needs of women.”

There is an urgent need to tap into new sources of finance and to find ways of delivering finance more effectively. The search for innovative finance is even more urgent given an ambitious Post-2015 development framework and a lacklustre global economy that has led to a dwindling of development finance. With support from governments and development organizations, crowdfunding has an exciting potential to support sustained and inclusive growth. It improves access to capital, helps better manage the supply and demand for capital, drives innovation and efficiency and funds new markets. It also offers an innovative mechanism which has significant potential to further operationalize the untapped potential of diaspora investment.

### **Commonwealth Businesswomen's Network**

As an accredited organisation focused on women’s economic empowerment recognised by 53 governments across five continents, the **Commonwealth Businesswomen’s Network** (CBW) encourages, enables and embeds economic empowerment through outcomes across the ‘3 Ts’ of trade, talent and training that are measureable, impactful and - crucially for a community of a billion women - scalable. It is responsible for the Women in Business Programme of the Commonwealth Enterprise and Investment Council (CWEIC) and works closely with the Commonwealth Secretariat. It operates through partners across all regions.

### **Valrie Grant: Founder, GeoTechVision and Commonwealth Woman Entrepreneur of the Year**

Valrie Grant is the Managing Director of GeoTechVision Enterprises Ltd. (Jamaica) and GeoTechVision Guyana Inc. (Guyana) a leader in the Geospatial Industry in the Caribbean with experienced professionals committed to offering ICT and Spatial Technology solutions and products. She is a trained Geologist and a GIS professional who is a member of the Board of Directors for URISA International, the President of URISA Caribbean and a certified World Bank Facilitator for infoDev (a member of the World Bank Group) Accelerator Program in the Caribbean. Valrie is also the President of WENC (Women Entrepreneurs Network of the Caribbean) Guyana Chapter and is the 2015 WED Ambassador for Guyana.

### **Pitch & Choose Ltd.**

**Pitch & Choose** is the regional crowdfunding platform for the Caribbean, which has set its sight on being the #1 online fundraising gateway for the Caribbean community, globally. Accommodating general fundraising for entrepreneurs, non profits, alumni associations and facilitating campaigns initiated by individuals for causes of interest, the company is founded by **A. Cecile Watson**, a former senior Caribbean regional banker and a former public sector head in Jamaica. Pitch & Choose provides an online marketplace where local and diaspora communities can build the Caribbean together with crowdfunding and create opportunities for the “Rise of the Rest”. **FundRiseHER™** is hosted on pitchandchoose.com and powered by Gr8way Consulting Ltd., also owned by Watson.

## CONTACT DETAILS

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