

TEFORCIRCLE

JANUARY 2026



EMPOWERING A NEW
GENERATION
of African Entrepreneurs

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TEFCircle is the Tony Elumelu Foundation's proprietary publication, providing updates on our alumni, partners, mentor network, and activities across the global entrepreneurship ecosystem.

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EDITOR'S NOTE



Welcome to the January edition of TEFCircle.

This month's edition is anchored by our biggest milestone of the year: the launch of the 2026 Tony Elumelu Foundation (TEF) Entrepreneurship Programme. From 1 January to 1 March 2026, ambitious men and women founders across all 54 African countries can apply via TEFConnect.com for the opportunity to receive US\$5,000 non-refundable seed capital, world-class business training, dedicated mentorship, and access to Africa's largest entrepreneurial network.

Since our launch in 2010, TEF has empowered over 2.5 million young Africans with access to business management training on our proprietary digital hub, TEFConnect, and disbursed over US\$100 million in seed capital to more than 24,000 selected entrepreneurs on the TEF Entrepreneurship Programme. Collectively, these entrepreneurs have generated \$4.2 billion in revenue and

created more than 1.5 million direct and indirect jobs. Through our support for African entrepreneurs, TEF has lifted 2.1 million Africans above the poverty line, and positively impacted more than 4 million African households, with 46% of supported entrepreneurs being African women. We also celebrate a proud leadership moment for our community: the appointment of our Co-Founder, Dr. Awele Vivian Elumelu, OFR, as Chairperson of Transcorp Hotels Plc. Her journey of purpose-driven leadership remains a powerful reflection of the values TEF stands for; excellence, execution and enterprise.

Beyond these headlines, you will find highlights from our strategic engagements, including the visits by the MIT Foundry Fellows and Executive MBA students, our CEO's engagement at Lagos Business School, and a high-level dialogue with British International Investment (BII) as we continue to strengthen partnerships that expand opportunity for African entrepreneurs. We also shine a light on Sèmè City, a model public-sector partner helping to deepen entrepreneurship infrastructure in Benin, and we bring you inspiring updates from TEF alumni making waves across sectors.

As you read this edition, we invite you to share it widely, particularly with young aspiring entrepreneurs in your network. The next great African enterprise could begin with a single application. Thank you for being part of our journey, and for championing entrepreneurship as Africa's pathway to inclusive prosperity.

Happy reading!

Moyo Awotile
Editor-in-Chief, TEFCircle



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AFRICA DOES NOT NEED AID; AFRICA NEEDS INVESTMENT, IN INFRASTRUCTURE, IN INSTITUTIONS, BUT MOST CRITICALLY IN OUR YOUNG.

- Tony O. Elumelu, CFR

THE BIG STORY

Tony Elumelu Foundation Opens 2026 Entrepreneurship Programme

Africa's Leading Entrepreneurship Philanthropy Catalyses Next Generation of African Entrepreneurs

- US\$5,000 non-refundable seed capital, world-class training, and mentorship for Africa's boldest founders
- 24,000+ entrepreneurs funded, 2.5 million trained, 1.5 million jobs created, US\$4.2 billion in revenue generated since 2015

The Tony Elumelu Foundation (TEF) has opened applications for the 2026 TEF Entrepreneurship Programme, calling ambitious young founders from all 54 African countries to apply now on TEFConnect. Successful applicants receive US\$5,000 in non-refundable seed capital, intensive business training, mentorship, and direct access to Africa's largest entrepreneurship network.

Since 2015, the Programme has funded over 24,000 entrepreneurs, trained 2.5 million Africans, created more than 1.5 million jobs, and generated over US\$4.2 billion in revenue, proving that African entrepreneurs can transform the continent. The Programme is also driving inclusive growth, with women now making up 46% of TEF entrepreneurs – the highest female participation rate

recorded by a programme of this scale. Speaking on the 2026 launch, TEF Founder and Heirs Holdings Group Chairman, Tony O. Elumelu, CFR, said:

“Africa's greatest asset is our people. Africa does not need aid; Africa needs investment, in infrastructure, in institutions, but most critically in our young. Through the Tony Elumelu Foundation, we show that when entrepreneurs are empowered, they create jobs, drive growth, and transform communities. Entrepreneurs are the future of Africa.”

Applications for the 2026 TEF Entrepreneurship Programme are open from 1 January to 1 March 2026 on www.TEFConnect.com.



Celebrating a New Chapter of Leadership: Dr. Awele Elumelu Appointed Chairperson of Transcorp Hotels Plc

A proud moment for the Tony Elumelu Foundation. We celebrate our Co-Founder, Dr. Awele Vivian Elumelu, OFR, on her appointment as Chairperson of Transcorp Hotels Plc, a milestone that reflects a career defined by excellence, purpose-driven leadership, and an unwavering commitment to Africa's transformation.

Dr. Elumelu's journey has always transcended titles. As a business leader, philanthropist, and advocate for inclusive growth, she has consistently championed initiatives that place people, opportunity, and impact at the centre of enterprise. Her appointment to lead the Board of one of Africa's foremost hospitality companies is a powerful

affirmation of her vision and the values she represents. Beyond the boardroom, Dr. Elumelu remains a driving force behind the Tony Elumelu Foundation's mission to empower young African entrepreneurs. Through her leadership, millions of young people across the continent continue to gain access to skills, capital, mentorship, and networks that enable them to build sustainable businesses and create jobs in their communities.

We are immensely proud of this well-deserved appointment and confident that Transcorp Hotels Plc will continue to thrive under her chairmanship.



Read the full press release below:

Transcorp Hotels Plc Announces the Appointment of Dr. Awele Elumelu as Chair of the Board

Transcorp Hotels Plc ("Transcorp Hotels" or "the Company") (NGX: TRANSCOHOT), the hospitality subsidiary of Transnational Corporation Plc ("Transcorp Group"), has announced the appointment of Dr. (Mrs.) Awele Vivien Elumelu, OFR, as Chair of the Company, effective January 01, 2026.

Dr. Elumelu's appointment follows the retirement of current Chair, Mr. Emmanuel N. Nnorom, with effect from January 01, 2026.

Dr. Elumelu brings exceptional leadership experience across healthcare, insurance, corporate governance, and philanthropy.

She is the Chair of Avon Healthcare Limited (Avon HMO), Nigeria's leading health insurance provider, and Avon Medical Practice, a fast-growing network of hospitals and clinics. She also chairs Heirs Insurance Brokers and is a founding Director of Heirs Holdings Limited. She is a medical doctor, with an MBBS from the University of Benin and clinical experience in Nigeria and the United Kingdom. Dr Elumelu's medical training has been complemented with world-class executive education from institutions including Harvard Business School, IMD Switzerland, and the London School of Economics.

Dr. Elumelu's commitment to social impact is demonstrated through her role as Trustee and Co-Founder of the Tony Elumelu Foundation, Africa's leading philanthropy empowering young entrepreneurs. Through the Foundation, she has been instrumental in driving gender inclusion and supporting over 24,000 young African men and women with seed capital, training, and mentorship.

Commenting, Group Chair of Transcorp Group, Mr. Tony O. Elumelu, CFR stated:

"We are delighted to welcome Dr. Awele Elumelu as the Board Chair of Transcorp Hotels. Her distinguished track record perfectly aligns with our ambition to redefine hospitality through innovation, wellness integration, and responsible business practices. Her strategic insight will be invaluable, as we continue to elevate guest experiences and deliver sustainable value to all stakeholders."



AT THE TONY ELUMELU FOUNDATION, WE REMAIN STEADFAST IN OUR MISSION TO EMPOWER THE NEXT GENERATION OF AFRICAN ENTREPRENEURS

STRATEGIC ENGAGEMENTS

The Tony Elumelu Foundation Hosts MIT Foundry Fellows and Executive MBA Students on Africa Trek

This January, the Tony Elumelu Foundation recently welcomed fellows from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) Kuo Sharper Foundry.

This follows the December 2025 visit by the MIT Executive MBA, when they were hosted by our Founder, Tony O. Elumelu, CFR, and our CEO, Somachi Chris-Asoluka during their Africa Trek, reaffirming the TEF's position as a global

destination for learning, exchange, and engagement on African entrepreneurship. This latest visit deepened an ongoing relationship rooted in shared commitment to innovation, enterprise development, and inclusive growth.

At these sessions, our CEO, Somachi Chris-Asoluka, highlighted how the TEF Entrepreneurship Programme is unlocking African potential by combining capital, training, mentorship, and access to markets, while creating a pipeline of entrepreneurs who are driving economic transformation across the continent. A key part of these gatherings are the dynamic cross-section of Tony Elumelu Entrepreneurs, also known as TEF Alumni, who shared compelling stories and practical insights on building and scaling businesses in diverse African

contexts, offering the MIT delegation a firsthand understanding of the opportunities, challenges, and resilience that define entrepreneurship in Africa. The conversations spanned topics including access to capital, talent development, market expansion, and the role of entrepreneurship in job creation and community upliftment.

Beyond dialogue, the TEF Alumni connected directly with the MIT Foundry fellows and MBA students to explore potential collaboration opportunities, illustrating one of the many benefits of remaining actively engaged within the TEF Alumni community and the strength of TEF's global network. These engagements further underscore the Tony Elumelu Foundation's growing recognition as a global epicentre for African entrepreneurship. MIT is now among a



small group of internationally renowned universities to include TEF as a strategic stop on their Africa Trek, a testament to the Foundation's unmatched impact, credibility, and leadership in shaping Africa's entrepreneurship narrative.

At the Tony Elumelu Foundation, we remain steadfast in our mission to empower the next generation of African entrepreneurs across all 54 African countries, while amplifying the impact of their work on the continent and beyond.

TEF CEO Somachi Chris-Asoluka Facilitates Session at Lagos Business School's Sustainable Impact Philanthropy Programme

The Tony Elumelu Foundation (TEF) CEO, Somachi Chris-Asoluka, delivered a lecture at Lagos Business School (LBS) for the Sustainable Impact Philanthropy Programme, further reinforcing TEF's leadership and credibility in shaping effective, large-scale philanthropic practice across Africa.

Convened by Lagos Business School in collaboration with the Ford Foundation and PwC, the programme brings together leaders and practitioners within the development and social impact ecosystem to examine how philanthropy can be structured for long-term, measurable impact. During the programme, our CEO facilitated a highly interactive and practical session on "Structural Partnerships in Sustainable Philanthropy," drawing on real-world case studies and The Tony Elumelu Foundation's extensive experience building multi-stakeholder partnerships that mobilise capital, expertise, and institutions around entrepreneurship-led development.

In recognition of the Foundation's sustained impact and thought leadership, she also



led an additional session on "Managing Philanthropic Fatigue," sharing TEF's perspectives on sustaining momentum, innovation, and organisational resilience in long-term social investment initiatives.

At the Tony Elumelu Foundation, we remain committed to advancing knowledge, partnerships, and practices that enable philanthropy to deliver lasting, system-level change across Africa.

Watch the full lecture here: <https://youtu.be/RVO94zeUFDC?si=cLX-2AI2pXGZI3pC>

Deepening Global Investment Partnerships for African Enterprise



support early-stage entrepreneurs while strengthening the wider ecosystem in which they operate. The exchange underscored the importance of aligning development finance with grassroots innovation, ensuring that capital reaches entrepreneurs who are solving real economic challenges within their communities.

The meeting also explored how blended finance models and long-term institutional partnerships can accelerate enterprise-led development — particularly in sectors where young African founders are creating solutions in energy, technology, agriculture, and digital infrastructure. Emphasis was placed on the role of women entrepreneurs as drivers of economic resilience and the importance of intentional capital allocation to close opportunity gaps.

In continued pursuit of global partnerships that translate capital into measurable impact, the Tony Elumelu Foundation's Chief Executive Officer, Somachi Chris-Asoluka, convened a high-level strategic meeting with the leadership of British International Investment (BII), the United Kingdom's development finance institution dedicated to supporting private sector growth in emerging economies.

The session brought together BII's senior executives: Leslie Maasdorp, Chief Executive Officer and Executive Director; Chris Chijitomi, Managing Director and Head of Africa; Srinivasan Nagarajan, Managing Director and Head of Asia; and Benson Adenuga, Head of Office and Coverage Director for Nigeria. The dialogue focused on strengthening institutional collaboration to expand investment in Africa's next generation of entrepreneurs — particularly ventures capable of driving job creation, women's economic empowerment, and inclusive market growth. Central to the discussion was a shared belief that entrepreneurship represents one of Africa's most scalable engines of transformation. Both organisations examined pathways for mobilising patient capital, structuring catalytic partnerships, and building investment frameworks that



PARTNER SPOTLIGHT

International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) Redefining Humanitarian Impact Through Entrepreneurship

The partnership between the Tony Elumelu Foundation (TEF) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) represents a bold reimagining of how humanitarian action and economic empowerment can intersect to deliver lasting impact in Africa's most fragile regions. Launched in 2018, the collaboration was built on a shared conviction: that entrepreneurship is not only a development tool, but a pathway to dignity, independence,

and long-term stability, particularly in conflict-affected communities. Through this partnership, TEF and ICRC pioneered a private-sector-led approach to humanitarian development — one that moves beyond short-term relief to enable sustainable livelihoods.

Speaking at the ICRC Forum in Lagos, Peter Maurer, then President of the ICRC, described the Foundation's model as a gold standard for humanitarian development in Africa, noting that prolonged conflict demands solutions that restore economic independence early. "We need to show pathways to dignity and self-reliance through income-generating activities and small businesses. This is why we partnered with the Tony Elumelu Foundation." Through the partnership, 200 entrepreneurs from

Nigeria's North East and Niger Delta regions — areas deeply affected by conflict and violence — were supported under TEF's flagship Entrepreneurship Programme. This intervention complemented the Tony Elumelu Foundation's historic US\$100 million commitment to empower African entrepreneurs and demonstrated how bottom-up enterprise development can reduce fragility, create jobs, and rebuild communities.

The results have been tangible. Entrepreneurs supported through the TEF-ICRC collaboration have gone on to establish businesses, create employment, and provide essential services within their communities, often becoming anchors of resilience in regions where opportunity is scarce. From education and agriculture

AFRICA'S PRIVATE SECTOR, AND ESPECIALLY ITS ENTREPRENEURS, ARE THE ENGINES OF THE CONTINENT'S SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION.



to manufacturing and aquaculture, these enterprises illustrate how economic hope can counter cycles of instability. For Tony O. Elumelu CFR, Founder of the Tony Elumelu Foundation, the partnership underscored a broader vision of Africapitalism, the belief that Africa's private sector, especially its entrepreneurs, must lead the continent's transformation: "The most important thing is that we give economic hope and opportunity to our people and reduce the fragility we see across the continent."

Beyond funding, the collaboration demonstrated the power of aligning humanitarian reach with entrepreneurial capacity. ICRC's access to hard-to-reach communities, combined with TEF's proven entrepreneurship model, ensured that individuals often excluded from traditional development pipelines could participate meaningfully in economic life.

Today, the TEF-ICRC partnership stands as a compelling case study in humanitarian-

development integration — proving that when humanitarian organisations and the private sector work together, they can move communities from survival to stability, and from vulnerability to opportunity.

It is a partnership rooted in shared values, practical action, and a firm belief that economic empowerment is one of the most powerful tools for peace, resilience, and inclusive prosperity in Africa.

— ARE YOU
THE NEXT
TONY ELUMELU
ENTREPRENEUR? —

APPLY NOW
www.TEFConnect.com

\$5,000 SEED CAPITAL | TRAINING | MENTORSHIP | ACCESS TO NETWORKS



“

INTAOPS HAS THE POTENTIAL TO BECOME THE STANDARD FOR HOW NIGERIANS—AND ULTIMATELY AFRICANS—CARRY THEIR DATA ACROSS INSTITUTIONS.

— TechCabal

TEF IN THE NEWS

2025 TEF Alumni, Azeez Bayo Nojeemdeen, is Reimagining Patient Data Across Africa with IntaOps

Across Africa, fragmented databases and paper-based systems continue to hinder the movement of patient information between healthcare providers. But one Nigerian entrepreneur—2025 Tony Elumelu Foundation Alumni, Azeez Bayo Nojeemdeen—is leading a bold intervention that could redefine how Africans own, manage, and share their medical records.

His innovation, IntaOps, is a decentralised data-interoperability platform designed to solve one of the continent's most persistent digital challenges: the inability of institutions to seamlessly exchange and validate data.

Starting with healthcare, IntaOps allows individuals to securely carry their medical history across hospitals through a unique IntaOps Digital ID. Whether a patient moves from one hospital to another within Lagos—or from Nigeria to a foreign medical facility—their records can be accessed instantly and securely, with their explicit consent. Currently, IntaOps is piloting with six hospitals in Lagos, enabling providers to query patient information, manage appointments, and create or update medical records within a shared ecosystem. Patients, on the other hand, manage access rights directly through



the mobile app, approving or declining requests in real time.

TechCabal, in its feature on African startups to watch, notes that IntaOps has the potential to become the standard for how Nigerians—and ultimately Africans—carry their data across institutions. If the platform

successfully converts its pilot hospitals into paying users, it could usher in a new model of patient-centred data ownership.

The company is expected to begin full monetisation by February 2026, using a mix of subscription and pay-per-query models. This growth is fuelled by grant support from the Tony Elumelu Foundation and an ongoing fundraising effort of \$300,000 to accelerate expansion and commercialisation. From its

origins as "Verificare" to its transformation into IntaOps, the platform represents a powerful example of how Africapitalism inspires local innovators to build solutions that respond to Africa's most urgent developmental challenges.

IntaOps is not just improving healthcare it is redefining digital trust, access, and user empowerment across Africa.

2023 TEF Alumna, Rose Danjuma, is reimagining how young Africans learn mathematics

In a continent where millions of young learners struggle with outdated, rigid approaches to mathematics, 2023 TEF Alumna, Rose Danjuma, is rewriting the narrative with a bold, homegrown solution. Founded in 2021, the School of Mathematics Nigeria (SMN) is an edtech platform transforming how mathematics is taught and understood—using real-life African contexts to make complex concepts simple, relevant, and engaging. What began as a series of free YouTube lessons has rapidly evolved into a continent-wide movement, reaching over 150,000 learners across Nigeria, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Canada, all through organic growth and without paid advertising. Backed by the Tony Elumelu Foundation, SMN is now entering a new phase of expansion. In response to overwhelming demand, the organisation is set to launch a full Learning Management System (LMS) in April 2026, built on five specialised learning tracks and designed to offer affordable, high-quality STEM education accessible to every African child, regardless of income or background.

Rose's work has also gained the attention of major institutions. In 2024, MTN Nigeria approached SMN to integrate its content into their digital platforms—an opportunity that underscored the need for deeper infrastructure and catalysed the

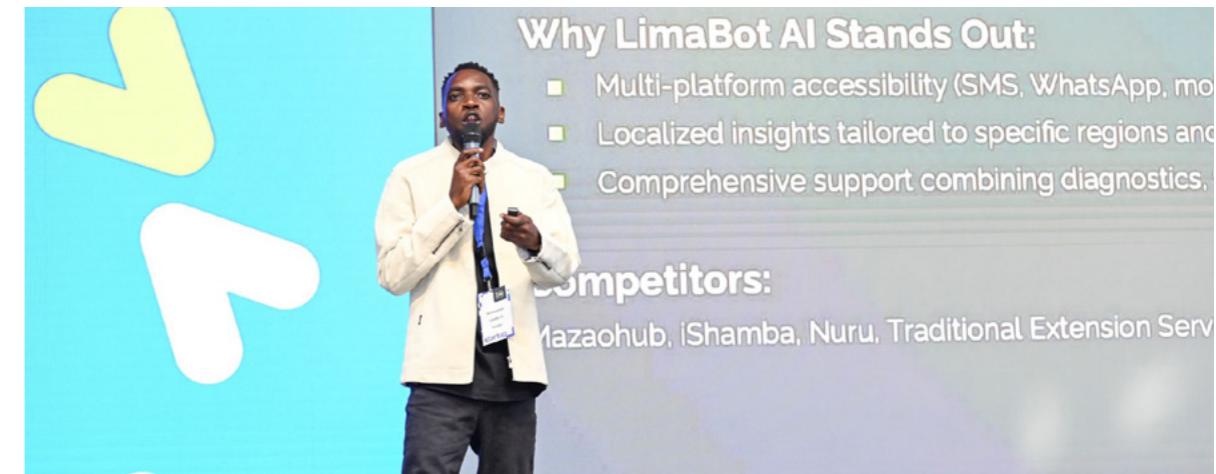


development of the upcoming LMS. Beyond digital lessons, SMN is shaping the wider ecosystem:

- collaborating with NGOs, schools, and organisations to design curricula;
- training teachers across multiple regions;
- speaking at conferences, podcasts, and global forums;
- and building a mission-driven team dedicated to improving STEM access across Africa.

With a goal to impact 10,000 new young people in 2026 alone, Rose continues to champion a new generation of confident, curious, STEM-driven young Africans. For Rose, mathematics has always been more than numbers—it is a language of patterns, possibility, and power. And through the School of Mathematics Nigeria, she is ensuring that young Africans see it the same way.

2025 TEF Alumni, Godfrey Kilimwomeshi, is transforming smallholder farming in East Africa with LimaBot AI



In East Africa's rapidly evolving agricultural landscape, 2025 Tony Elumelu Foundation alumnus Godfrey Kilimwomeshi is pioneering a new frontier—where artificial intelligence meets smallholder farming.

Kilimwomeshi is the founder of LimaBot AI, an intelligent agricultural platform providing farmers with real-time, localised support for crop health monitoring, pest and disease diagnosis, and agronomic guidance. Through simple channels such as WhatsApp, farmers can access instant, data-driven advisory services tailored to their specific field conditions. Building on this agritech foundation, Kilimwomeshi has extended his innovation to LimaPay, a complementary financial service that transforms real farm activity into trusted credit assessments. By analysing crop health data, input usage, and productivity trends, LimaPay enables farmers to access loans and high-quality, sustainable agricultural inputs without the need for traditional collateral—a breakthrough for financially excluded smallholders across the region.

Today, LimaBot supports over 12,000 farmers across Tanzania and Kenya, demonstrating strong demand for fast, reliable agronomic

support and credit linked to real farm performance. Backed by grant funding from partners including the Tony Elumelu Foundation, the African Union, and the Africa Sustainable Farming Initiative, the company has already generated more than US\$40,000 in early revenue and is preparing for commercial expansion.

LimaBot is now gearing up to launch LimaPay commercially in Tanzania and scale its integrated AI-and-finance model across East Africa and other markets with similar farming systems. With a pre-seed round of US\$250,000 currently underway, the startup is poised to accelerate product refinement, deepen market penetration, and extend its impact to thousands more farmers.

By translating crop-level insights into economic opportunity, Godfrey Kilimwomeshi is not only reshaping access to agronomic information—he is redefining what financial inclusion looks like for Africa's smallholder farmers. A powerful example of Africapitalism in action: technology solving real challenges, driving sustainable livelihoods, and empowering Africa's agricultural backbone.

2024 TEF Alumna, Viola Nakadama, is providing smallholder farmers with a full suite of tech solutions to boost productivity through Essymart



— using WebApp, SMS, voice calls and community engagement to reach farmers even in remote rural areas. Viola's mission is profoundly human-centred: to reduce hunger, lift farming households out of extreme poverty, and restore dignity to thousands of small-scale farmers. Her work is rooted in the belief that with the right tools, finance, and knowledge, African farmers can feed their families, support their communities, and build generational prosperity.

Her journey from a young visionary entrepreneur to the co-founder of one of Uganda's fastest-growing agri-tech solutions reflects the extraordinary power of youth-driven innovation. Supported by the Tony Elumelu Foundation, Essymart has expanded rapidly since its launch, attracting additional backing from the Sahara Impact Fund, AGRA, and other development partners.

At just 22 years old, Viola Nakadama is demonstrating, with admirable clarity, that Africa's young innovators are not merely participating in the continent's economic transformation — they are leading it.

A 2024 Tony Elumelu Foundation alumna from Uganda, Viola is the co-founder of Essymart, an agri-tech enterprise equipping smallholder farmers with the essential tools they need to thrive. Through a seamless blend of technology and on-the-ground support, Essymart delivers a complete suite of farmer-centred products and services from high-quality seeds and inputs, to crop-health support, digital advisory tools, financing, and post-harvest market access.

Working with over 5,000 farmers across Eastern Uganda, Essymart has already recorded transformative results: farmers in the programme typically see a 40–45% increase in income, alongside significant improvements in crop yield, resilience, and access to reliable agricultural information. These gains have been made possible through Essymart's multi-channel model

SCALED PROGRAMME OUTCOME

 **over 150,000**
jobs created & nearly
\$200million

in revenue generated
by Tony Elumelu
Foundation beneficiaries
living with disabilities

80%

of Tony Elumelu
Foundation beneficiaries
are currently making
revenue, up from only
40% of business owners
at the time of applying to
the TEF Entrepreneurship
Programme

 **4million+**
African households
positively impacted

 **over 2.1million**
Africans lifted above
poverty line

 **23%**
of Tony Elumelu
Foundation
beneficiaries report
living with a
disability

45%
of Tony Elumelu Foundation
funded businesses owned
by women

500,000+
jobs created and
\$320million
approximately generated
by Tony Elumelu
Foundation women
beneficiaries

65%
of Tony Elumelu Foundation
beneficiaries' empowered
are from fragile states.

CLIMATE RESILIENCE AND SUSTAINABILITY

83%

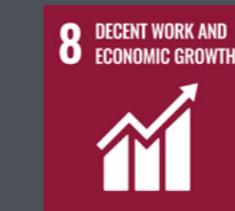
of beneficiaries are
contributing to
minimisation of
carbon footprints

72.3%

of beneficiaries are ready
to receive support as green
entrepreneurs.

62.2%

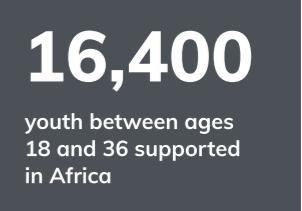
of beneficiaries are
implementing innovative
practices for environmental
sustainability



**8 DECENT WORK AND
ECONOMIC GROWTH**
74%
contribution to SDG
8: Decent work and
Economic Growth



**2 ZERO
HUNGER**
76%
contribution to
SDG 2: Zero
Hunger



16,400
youth between ages
18 and 36 supported
in Africa



ENTREPRENEURSHIP AT SCALE DOES NOT HAPPEN BY CHANCE; IT REQUIRES LEADERSHIP: DISCIPLINED, VALUES-LED, PEOPLE-CENTRED LEADERSHIP THAT TRANSLATES AMBITION INTO RESULTS.

THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

Leadership, Relationships, and the Culture of Execution: Lessons from Tony O. Elumelu on Leading with Trust

Why Leadership Must Evolve in a Changing World

Africa is building in real time. Markets are shifting, customer expectations are rising, technologies are reshaping industries, and the pace of change continues to test the resilience of institutions and enterprises alike. In such an environment, leadership cannot be passive. It cannot be complacent. It cannot be distant. The quality of

leadership, how leaders think, communicate, and build people, has become a defining factor in whether organisations and businesses merely survive change or shape it. At The Tony Elumelu Foundation, we have long held that entrepreneurship is the most powerful pathway to Africa's inclusive growth. Entrepreneurs create jobs, expand opportunity, solve local problems, and strengthen communities. However, entrepreneurship at scale does not happen by chance; it requires leadership: disciplined, values-led, people-centred leadership that translates ambition into results.

In a recent reflection on leadership, our Founder, Tony O. Elumelu, CFR, offered a timeless insight: leadership is profoundly shaped by relationships. Beyond strategies, hierarchies, and formal authority, the most

sustainable performance is often built on trust, empathy, and the deliberate investment leaders make in the people they lead. These are not sentimental ideas. They are operational realities. They influence accountability, productivity, execution, and ultimately outcomes.

This article draws lessons from that reflection and expands them into a practical leadership framework for entrepreneurs, managers, and organisations committed to building enduring impact, across Africa and beyond.

Leadership is Often Simplicity: Clarity, Discipline, and Authenticity

In an era where leadership is sometimes presented as a complex science of



frameworks and jargon, one of the most compelling truths is that effective leadership is often simple. It begins with clarity of objective, knowing what must be achieved and why it matters. It is sustained by discipline of execution, doing the work consistently, even when conditions are imperfect. And it is strengthened by authenticity, leading in a way that is aligned with values, not performance. This simplicity is not naïve. It is strategic. Complexity is often the enemy of progress, particularly in high-growth environments where entrepreneurs and teams must make decisions quickly, learn fast, and adapt without losing direction.

Clarity creates alignment. Discipline creates momentum. Authenticity creates trust. When these three exist, teams move with purpose. When they are absent, even the most talented teams become fragmented.

At The Tony Elumelu Foundation, we see this repeatedly across the entrepreneurial journeys we support. A business does not fail only because of capital constraints or market challenges. Often, businesses struggle because leadership lacks clarity, because execution is inconsistent, or because trust within the team has been weakened. Leadership, therefore, is not an abstract ideal. It is a daily practice.

The Power of Relationships: Trust as the Engine of High Performance

The central lesson from Tony O. Elumelu's reflection is clear: relationships matter. More precisely, the relationship between leaders and teams has measurable influence on performance.

The old model of leadership, command and control, assumes that authority alone is enough to drive results. In reality, authority may drive compliance, but it rarely drives excellence. People do not do their best work because they are monitored; they do their best work because they feel trusted, respected, challenged, and valued. In strong leader-team relationships, accountability becomes personal, not in a pressurising sense, but in a dignifying one. People want to deliver because they feel connected to the mission and to those leading them. They want to uphold standards because those standards are meaningful, and because the relationship they have with leadership is built on mutual respect.

Trust is a form of capital. When leaders build trust, teams move faster, communicate more honestly, and solve problems earlier. When leaders fail to build trust, small issues grow into major crises because people hide

mistakes, avoid responsibility, or disengage quietly. This is why relationship-led leadership is not "soft". It is one of the strongest drivers of execution.

Respect, Not Fear: How Leaders Inspire Higher Standards

One of the most striking leadership lessons in Tony O. Elumelu's reflection is the idea of striving not to disappoint a leader, not out of fear, but out of respect for the relationship built. This difference is critical.

Fear-based leadership may produce short-term results, but it often damages long-term performance. It creates environments where people focus on avoiding blame rather than pursuing excellence. It discourages honest feedback and suppresses innovation. Over time, it weakens initiative, because people become reluctant to take risks or make decisions.

Respect-based leadership, however, builds an internal motivation to perform. It encourages people to rise to standards because they feel seen and invested in. It builds pride in quality. It strengthens loyalty to mission and team. For entrepreneurs, this lesson is especially important. Many founders begin by doing everything themselves. As the business grows, success depends on building a team that can take ownership. Ownership cannot be forced. It must be cultivated through trust, clarity, and relationship.

Exposure as Leadership: Developing People Beyond the Job Description

Leadership is not only about directing tasks. It is also about developing people. One of the most memorable elements of Tony O. Elumelu's reflection is a story from early in his career: a leader who intentionally created moments of exposure beyond the office, moments that stretched comfort, expanded experience, and reinforced connection.

LEADERSHIP IS NOT ONLY ABOUT DIRECTING TASKS. IT IS ALSO ABOUT DEVELOPING PEOPLE.

The story is simple, yet revealing: being taken to a restaurant and confronted with unfamiliar norms, learning not just through instruction, but through experience. It may seem minor, but it reflects a powerful truth: leaders who invest in people do not only increase performance; they expand capacity. Exposure matters because growth is often limited by what people have not yet seen. Many high-potential professionals underperform not because they lack talent, but because they lack confidence, context, or experience beyond their current environment. Leaders can change this by:

- Introducing team members to new spaces, standards, and ways of thinking
- Encouraging them to engage beyond immediate responsibilities
- Providing stretch opportunities that develop judgement and confidence
- Offering feedback that is candid, supportive, and growth-oriented

For entrepreneurs, exposure might look like inviting a team member to a high-stakes client meeting, involving them in strategic planning, or letting them lead a project that matters. For organisations, exposure might look like cross-functional collaboration, learning sessions, mentorship structures, or engagement with external partners. In all cases, the principle is the same: leaders build stronger outcomes by building stronger people.

The Leader as an Enabler: Creating Conditions for Others to Succeed

A defining leadership mindset is this: leadership is not only about authority; it is about enabling. An enabling leader removes obstacles. They do not merely assign tasks; they create the conditions in which those tasks can be done well. This requires a leader who can “look up and look down”, who understands strategic direction while remaining attentive to operational realities. In practical terms, enabling leadership means asking questions such as:

- What is preventing my team from delivering at their best?
- Where are decisions delayed unnecessarily?
- What tools, information, or approvals are missing?
- What processes create friction rather than clarity?
- Which constraints are structural, and which are cultural?

When leaders practise obstacle removal consistently, execution improves. Productivity increases. Frustration reduces. Teams become more proactive because they trust that leadership will support delivery rather than punish imperfection.

For African entrepreneurs, this lesson carries particular relevance. Many businesses operate in environments where infrastructure and systems are imperfect. Teams must navigate constraints that go beyond their control, connectivity challenges, market volatility, regulatory complexity. In such contexts, enabling leadership becomes a competitive advantage because it helps teams remain focused, adaptable, and solution-oriented.

Accessibility and Engagement: Leadership is Not a Distance Sport

The strongest teams are often built around

a simple reality: people perform better when leaders are accessible. Accessibility does not mean over-involvement or lack of boundaries. It means presence. It means communication that is open and predictable. It means creating a culture where people can raise issues early and share ideas without fear of being dismissed.

When leaders are inaccessible, organisations drift. People make assumptions. Problems are escalated late. Opportunities are missed because no one feels confident enough to propose them. Conversely, when leaders are engaged, feedback flows faster and decision-making improves.

Accessible leadership includes:

- Regular check-ins that focus on progress and blockers, not only updates
- Clear expectations about priorities and standards
- Openness to feedback, including uncomfortable truths
- Visible commitment to learning and improvement
- A consistent tone: firm on standards, respectful with people

In entrepreneurial teams, this approach is particularly valuable because start-ups and SMEs rely heavily on speed, adaptability, and strong internal communication. The less bureaucracy a team has, the more leadership behaviour shapes culture.

Ownership Culture: Accountability Without Micromanagement

The goal of leadership is not dependence; it is ownership. Ownership is what allows businesses and institutions to scale. However, ownership does not grow in environments where people feel controlled. Micromanagement may feel like quality control, but over time it produces a team that cannot act without approval. That is not scale; it is stagnation.

Ownership culture is built through three essentials:

1. **Clear objectives:** People must know what success looks like.
2. **Authority with responsibility:** People must have space to decide, not only deliver.
3. **Supportive accountability:** Leaders must correct without humiliation and praise without exaggeration.

When these exist, people take pride in delivery. They anticipate problems. They act with initiative. And the business grows beyond the founder's capacity. At The Tony Elumelu Foundation, we see that entrepreneurs who scale sustainably are not always the ones with the loudest ambition. They are often the ones who build teams that can take ownership, because leadership was intentional about trust and structure.

Doing Things Differently: The Discipline of Adaptation

Another powerful lesson in Tony O. Elumelu's reflection is the call to remain open to doing things differently. This is not motivational language; it is strategic direction. Markets evolve. Customer behaviour changes. Technology shifts competitive advantage. A leadership style that worked in one season may fail in another. The discipline of adaptation is therefore essential, especially for entrepreneurs building in dynamic environments. Adaptation requires:

- Willingness to learn continuously
- Humility to accept that a previous approach may no longer fit
- Courage to change processes, roles, or priorities when necessary
- Commitment to results over ego

This mindset protects organisations from complacency and positions them to lead through uncertainty rather than be shaped by it.

Leading by Design, Not by Chance

Leadership is not an event. It is a set of choices repeated daily; choices about how objectives are set, how people are treated, how problems are solved, and how standards are upheld.

The lessons from Tony O. Elumelu's reflection are clear and timely: leadership is not defined by hierarchy, but by engagement. It is strengthened through relationships built on trust, respect, and development. It is expressed through enabling environments where obstacles are removed and ownership is cultivated. And it is sustained through openness to change, executed with discipline and conviction.

As Africa continues its transformation, driven by entrepreneurs, innovators, and builders, leadership will remain a decisive multiplier. Capital will matter. Technology will matter. Policy will matter. Yet leadership will determine whether these inputs produce lasting impact.

At The Tony Elumelu Foundation, we remain committed to empowering entrepreneurs not only to start businesses, but to build institutions, enterprises that endure, create jobs, and strengthen communities. That future will be shaped by leaders who are accessible, authentic, and intentional; leaders who build trust and clear roadblocks; leaders who execute without excuses.

When leadership is rooted in relationships and designed for enabling others, results do not follow by chance. They follow by design.

Reframing Africa as an Investment Destination for Jobs, Infrastructure, and Shared Prosperity



Africa's development story is increasingly being rewritten, not as a narrative of need, but as a narrative of opportunity. Across the continent, entrepreneurs are building solutions that create jobs, strengthen local value chains, and expand access to essential services. This shift requires a corresponding change in how Africa is engaged globally: not through the narrow lens of charity, but through a strategic lens of investment, innovation, and enterprise.

That argument was recently articulated with clarity by Chiugo Ndubisi, Executive Director at Heirs Holdings, reflecting on our Founder Tony O. Elumelu's call for partners to stop viewing Africa through the prism of aid and instead engage the continent as a place of investment and entrepreneurship, particularly in sectors such as agriculture, trade, energy, and infrastructure.

At The Tony Elumelu Foundation, this is not merely a compelling idea; it is the operating philosophy behind our work. We are guided by a simple, proven thesis: entrepreneurship is Africa's most reliable pathway to inclusive prosperity. When

entrepreneurs are empowered, they do not only build companies, they create jobs, raise household incomes, deepen resilience, and expand opportunity across communities and countries.

From charity to enterprise: the strategic pivot that delivers results

Charity can be essential in moments of crisis, but it cannot substitute for productive systems. Sustainable prosperity is built through enterprise: businesses that employ people, pay taxes, drive innovation, and build services that communities can rely on. Put plainly, relief may soften hardship; enterprise reduces it by creating long-term economic capacity.

This is why the "investment destination" framing matters. Investment is not only about capital flowing into large projects; it is also about investing in people and institutions, especially the entrepreneurs who operate at the frontlines of Africa's economies. They are the ones building the SMEs that supply markets, deliver services, and absorb labour at scale.

The Tony Elumelu Foundation's model: making entrepreneurs investable

The Tony Elumelu Foundation's mission is to catalyse Africa's economic transformation by empowering entrepreneurs across all 54 African countries. Our approach is deliberately practical: we support entrepreneurs with training, mentorship, networks, and catalytic seed capital, creating a pipeline of founders equipped to build sustainable businesses. This is not empowerment as rhetoric. The Foundation's published impact reporting highlights the scale of outcomes driven by supported entrepreneurs, such as revenue generation and job creation, demonstrating what becomes possible when entrepreneurship support is structured and consistent.

The logic is straightforward: investors follow confidence, and confidence follows systems. When entrepreneurs can demonstrate clearer business fundamentals, planning, operations, customer insight, and financial discipline, they become more investable. In that sense, entrepreneurship support becomes a form of "market infrastructure": it improves readiness, reduces early-stage fragility, and increases the probability of sustainable growth.

Why jobs and infrastructure are linked to entrepreneurship

Africa's infrastructure needs are widely acknowledged as energy, logistics, connectivity, and enabling institutions. Yet infrastructure is only as valuable as the economic activity it enables. Entrepreneurs are the bridge between infrastructure and inclusive prosperity, because they convert improved access into real outcomes: employment, services, and productivity.

Consider how entrepreneurship drives development outcomes in everyday terms:

- **Agriculture and food systems:** SMEs reduce post-harvest losses, improve aggregation and distribution, and expand market access, creating jobs in processing, logistics, and trade.
- **Logistics and commerce:** small businesses make markets more efficient by solving "last mile" friction that blocks trade and customer access.
- **Health and education services:** entrepreneurs expand access through affordable services and innovations that raise human capital and productivity.
- **Creative and digital industries:** youth-led enterprises convert culture and creativity into income, exports, and employment, often with fast scaling potential.

These are not side stories. They are the operating reality of inclusive prosperity: when SMEs grow, jobs grow; when jobs grow, stability improves; when stability improves, investment becomes more attractive.

Digital enablement: scaling access to opportunity

Inclusive investment requires scale, and scale requires access. This is why digital enablement sits at the centre of modern entrepreneurship ecosystems. The Tony Elumelu Foundation's digital infrastructure, including its TEFConnect platform, has expanded access to training and networks for millions of Africans, strengthening the pipeline of capable entrepreneurs across geographies. This matters for the investment narrative because it improves three things investors care about:

- **Deal flow:** a broader pipeline of founders building real ventures.
- **Capability:** entrepreneurs with stronger fundamentals and execution discipline.
- **Visibility and networks:** greater connection to markets, peers, and partners.



In short, digital access not only democratise learning; it increases the investability of ecosystems.

What must happen next: turning narrative into momentum

Reframing Africa as an investment destination is only credible when it is matched by practical action. To sustain momentum, four priorities stand out:

- **Stronger enabling environments for SMEs:** less friction, clearer processes, and predictable frameworks that reduce uncertainty.
- **Continued investment in infrastructure:** especially power and connectivity, which directly influence productivity and competitiveness.
- **Skills and capacity-building at scale:** practical training that strengthens execution, not just awareness.
- **Partnership models that build local capacity:** collaborations that treat Africa as a partner in shared value, not a project of benevolence.

The Tony Elumelu Foundation's work aligns directly with this agenda: building a pan-African entrepreneurship pipeline, proving

outcomes through impact reporting, and reinforcing a continent-wide message that investment in entrepreneurs is investment in Africa's future.

Africa is investable because Africa is building

Africa's future will not be secured by sympathy; it will be secured by builders. Entrepreneurs are building the businesses that create jobs, strengthen supply chains, and expand services across communities. When the world shifts from charity to enterprise, when partnership replaces patronage, shared prosperity becomes more achievable and more durable. The Tony Elumelu Foundation remains committed to making that future tangible: equipping entrepreneurs with the tools, knowledge, and networks to build sustainable enterprises that transform communities across all 54 African countries. In that work lies a simple proof-point for the global investment community: Africa is not waiting to be described as investable, Africa is already demonstrating it, business by business, job by job, and opportunity by opportunity.

Catalysing Africa's Transformation: How The Tony Elumelu Foundation and Google Are Empowering Entrepreneurs Through Responsible AI



Across Africa, a quiet revolution is underway, one powered not by a single invention, but by millions of decisions made daily by citizens, small businesses, and innovators who are increasingly choosing digital tools to build, sell, learn, and grow. From mobile money kiosks in bustling markets to logistics platforms coordinating last-mile delivery, and from online learning communities to virtual storefronts that reach customers beyond national borders, Africa's digital transformation is accelerating fast, unevenly, and with extraordinary potential.

Within this transformation, Artificial Intelligence (AI) has emerged as the next frontier: a set of technologies capable of amplifying productivity, unlocking new forms of innovation, and reshaping how value is created across sectors. For

entrepreneurs, AI can mean faster research, smarter operations, sharper marketing, improved customer experiences, and more resilient decision-making. For economies, it can support more efficient public services, stronger supply chains, more inclusive financial systems, and expanded participation in global digital markets. Yet AI is not inherently inclusive. Without deliberate design, investment, and capacity-building, it can widen existing divides between those with access to digital infrastructure and those without; between those with specialised skills and those excluded from them; between large firms that can integrate AI and smaller enterprises that cannot.

Africa's AI moment therefore demands not only ambition, but responsibility: a commitment to ensuring that the benefits of

AI reach entrepreneurs at the grassroots and strengthen communities across the continent. This is the mission that The Tony Elumelu Foundation advances with conviction: empowering African entrepreneurs across all 54 African countries, because entrepreneurship remains the most reliable pathway to inclusive prosperity. The Tony Elumelu Foundation's approach has always been grounded in practical empowerment, training, mentorship, networks, and catalytic support, designed to help entrepreneurs move from ideas to sustainable businesses that create jobs and opportunity. In this context, the partnership between The Tony Elumelu Foundation and Google stands out as a catalyst for inclusive AI adoption and entrepreneurial growth. It brings together The Tony Elumelu Foundation's pan-African reach and entrepreneur pipeline with Google's expertise in digital skills, AI tools, and training capabilities. Together, The Tony Elumelu Foundation and Google are enabling African entrepreneurs, particularly alumni of The Tony Elumelu Foundation, to understand AI, apply it responsibly, and use it to accelerate business growth in ways that are ethical, practical, and impactful.

Opportunities and Global Shifts

Globally, AI is moving from novelty to necessity. Across industries, organisations are adopting AI to improve productivity, automate repetitive tasks, personalise customer experiences, and make faster decisions based on data. This shift is changing what it means to compete, and who gets to participate in modern economies. Businesses that understand AI are not simply gaining a tool; they are gaining leverage. For emerging markets, AI presents a particularly powerful opportunity. When deployed responsibly, AI can help leapfrog constraints that have historically slowed growth: limited access to specialised expertise, fragmented markets, slow manual processes, and high transaction costs. AI can support entrepreneurs to do more

with less, strengthening efficiency without requiring large teams, improving customer support without costly infrastructure, and enabling better planning without expensive consultants. Africa's potential is unique. The continent's youthful population brings energy, creativity, and a strong appetite for learning. Mobile penetration has already changed how Africans transact, communicate, and build communities—creating a foundation upon which digital innovation continues to expand. Most importantly, Africa's entrepreneurs are problem-solvers by necessity: they innovate close to real needs, often building solutions that are frugal, scalable, and grounded in lived realities.

However, turning potential into widespread prosperity requires addressing barriers that can slow inclusive AI adoption. Digital literacy remains uneven, particularly across rural communities and underserved populations. Skills gaps, especially in data thinking, business analytics, and responsible use of AI tools, can limit meaningful adoption. Infrastructure constraints, including connectivity and device access, can reduce the ability of small businesses to experiment and integrate new technologies. There is also the challenge of trust: entrepreneurs and customers must feel confident that AI tools are reliable, safe, and aligned with human values. Africa's AI moment is therefore both an opportunity and a responsibility. If the continent builds capacity at scale, AI can become a bridge to inclusion. If it does not, AI risks becoming another layer of inequality.

Democratising Technology for African Entrepreneurs

The Tony Elumelu Foundation's work is anchored in a clear belief: entrepreneurship is the engine of Africa's development. Sustainable job creation, resilient communities, and inclusive prosperity depend on entrepreneurs who can build real businesses, businesses that generate income,

AFRICA'S POTENTIAL IS UNIQUE. THE CONTINENT'S YOUTHFUL POPULATION BRINGS ENERGY, CREATIVITY, AND A STRONG APPETITE FOR LEARNING.

solve problems, and expand opportunity. This belief has shaped The Tony Elumelu Foundation's long-standing commitment to equipping entrepreneurs with practical tools for growth. Over the years, the Tony Elumelu Foundation has consistently advanced digital empowerment as a critical component of entrepreneurial success. Through digital platforms that expand access to training, resources, networks, and opportunities, The Tony Elumelu Foundation has helped entrepreneurs overcome geographic and structural limitations, ensuring that a founder's location does not determine the size of their ambition. At the centre of The Tony Elumelu Foundation's vision is inclusion. Empowerment must be accessible to entrepreneurs across regions, languages, sectors, and backgrounds, especially women, youth, and founders operating at the grassroots. The Tony Elumelu Foundation's model is designed to democratise opportunity, building confidence and competence through structured learning and support.

AI, in this context, is not a trend to observe from a distance. It is a strategic capability that can increase competitiveness, strengthen decision-making, and unlock new business models. If The Tony Elumelu

Foundation's mission is to equip African entrepreneurs with the tools to thrive, then enabling AI adoption, responsibly and at scale, becomes not optional, but essential.

Expanding the Frontiers of Entrepreneurial Empowerment

The partnership between The Tony Elumelu Foundation and Google matters because it combines complementary strengths in a way that directly serves African entrepreneurs. Google brings expertise in digital skills development and AI capabilities, along with training approaches that translate complex technology into practical use-cases for everyday business challenges. It provides entrepreneurs with exposure to AI productivity tools, digital marketing techniques enhanced by data, automation methods that reduce manual workload, and responsible AI principles that guide ethical adoption. The Tony Elumelu Foundation brings something equally powerful: trust, reach, and a robust pipeline of entrepreneurs across Africa. The Tony Elumelu Foundation's community is more than a network; it is an ecosystem of builders who have already demonstrated commitment to enterprise and community impact. The Tony Elumelu Foundation's credibility ensures that training is not merely available; it is adopted with seriousness, relevance, and a clear link to entrepreneurial realities.

Together, the partnership represents a model for public-private collaboration that is outcomes-driven. It demonstrates what becomes possible when a philanthropic institution with pan-African reach works with a global technology leader committed to expanding digital inclusion: entrepreneurs gain access to knowledge and tools that can reshape their productivity and competitiveness, while the broader ecosystem benefits from more digitally capable SMEs. This partnership does not position AI as an abstract future. It positions AI as a present-day enabler for entrepreneurs

who are building solutions in agriculture, finance, health, creative industries, logistics, retail, and services, often under constraints that demand efficiency and ingenuity.

AI Training for Alumni of The Tony Elumelu Foundation: A New Toolkit for the African Entrepreneur

A central element of this collaboration is AI training for alumni of The Tony Elumelu Foundation, designed to be practical, business-oriented, and grounded in responsible use. The curriculum equips entrepreneurs with skills that can be applied immediately, including:

- **AI productivity tools**

Entrepreneurs learn how to use AI to speed up research, summarise information, draft business documents, refine proposals, develop customer communication, and organise ideas into actionable plans. This is not about replacing thinking; it is about reducing time spent on repetitive tasks so entrepreneurs can focus on strategy, relationships, and execution.

- **Advanced digital marketing**

Entrepreneurs explore how AI can support content planning, audience insight, campaign iteration, and brand consistency. For small businesses, marketing is often limited by time and resources. AI-supported workflows can help entrepreneurs produce stronger messaging, test variations quickly, and engage customers more effectively.

- **Automation for business management**

From customer enquiries to inventory notes and scheduling, entrepreneurs learn how automation can reduce manual workload. For many SMEs, operational inefficiency is not a minor inconvenience; it is a growth ceiling. Automation helps entrepreneurs build systems that can scale.

- **Responsible AI principles**

Perhaps most critically, entrepreneurs learn how to use AI responsibly: understanding limitations, avoiding harmful bias, protecting customer privacy, verifying outputs, and ensuring that human judgement remains central. Responsible AI is not a compliance checkbox; it is how trust is built with customers and communities.

When these skills come together, they translate into real business transformation. Entrepreneurs become faster, more structured, and more confident in decision-making. They improve customer experiences, build stronger brands, and reduce operational chaos, creating space for strategic growth.

Accelerating Digital Inclusion: Why This Partnership Matters for Africa's Future

For Africa, the question is not whether AI will shape the future, but whether Africa's entrepreneurs will help shape how AI is used, ethically, inclusively, and for shared prosperity. This partnership positions AI as a bridge, not a barrier. It helps ensure that small businesses and informal enterprises, often the backbone of African economies, are not left behind as technology advances. By equipping entrepreneurs with practical AI skills, the partnership between The Tony Elumelu Foundation and Google helps level the playing field, strengthening competitiveness for SMEs that may not have access to large technical teams.

The broader implications are significant. When SMEs improve efficiency, they can grow and hire. When they strengthen marketing and customer experience, they build resilience. When they adopt responsible AI practices, they increase trust and protect communities. AI becomes part of job creation, not by replacing people, but by strengthening the businesses that employ

them. This aligns with The Tony Elumelu Foundation's philosophy of compassionate capitalism: the belief that economic progress and social impact are not opposing forces, but mutually reinforcing goals. Responsible technology adoption reflects this philosophy in practice. It ensures that innovation is not extractive, but empowering; not exclusive, but inclusive; not reckless, but principled.

Building Sustainable Pathways for Long-Term Growth

If AI skills are to create lasting impact, they must be embedded into continuous learning and ecosystem development. The pace of technological change demands that entrepreneurs keep up, not through occasional exposure, but through ongoing upskilling and community support. This calls for sustained action across multiple levels:

- Continuous AI upskilling for entrepreneurs, ensuring that learning remains relevant and practical.
- Ecosystem collaboration between philanthropic institutions, corporates, educators, and governments to expand access to training and tools.
- Policies that support inclusion, including investments in digital infrastructure, entrepreneurship support systems, and responsible innovation frameworks.
- Corporate leadership, where partners like Google continue to make AI literacy more accessible and aligned with real-world small business needs.

The Tony Elumelu Foundation's long-term vision is clear: a digitally confident generation of African entrepreneurs, equipped not only to survive change, but to lead it. AI-driven economic resilience is not built through technology alone—it is built through opportunity, knowledge, and consistent support. The goal is not merely

adoption, but empowerment: entrepreneurs who understand AI well enough to use it responsibly, creatively, and competitively. The Tony Elumelu Foundation's commitment has always been future-facing: empowering African entrepreneurs with the tools, knowledge, networks, and confidence to build sustainable enterprises that transform communities. In the age of AI, that mission expands naturally into a new arena, one where digital capability is increasingly tied to economic participation and competitiveness. AI should be understood not as a replacement for human ingenuity, but as a catalyst for it. It can accelerate research, streamline operations, improve customer engagement, and expand access to knowledge, but only when guided by human judgement, ethical principles, and a clear commitment to inclusive prosperity.

Through the partnership between The Tony Elumelu Foundation and Google, African entrepreneurs are gaining a new toolkit; one that helps them build stronger businesses and contribute more powerfully to the continent's transformation. Together, The Tony Elumelu Foundation and Google are nurturing a future where Africa's next wave of innovators is not only entrepreneurial and ambitious, but technologically enabled and responsibly equipped. Africa's future is being written daily—in farms, studios, clinics, market stalls, and start-ups. With the right support, African entrepreneurs will not merely adapt to the AI era. They will lead within it, building solutions that reflect Africa's realities and amplify Africa's possibilities.



ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

Faithful Edozie 2024 TEF Alumni and Co-founder, Fenn Luxury Rentals is Reimagining Access to Luxury Across Nigeria

For Faithful Edozie, entrepreneurship began with a simple but compelling insight: luxury should not be a distant aspiration, reserved only for the few who can afford outright ownership. It should be an experience, accessible, enjoyable, and within reach for those who desire it.

This vision gave birth to Fenn Luxury Rentals, a fast-growing enterprise offering clients the opportunity to experience premium living

through short- and long-term rentals of luxury vehicles, high-end apartments, yachts, and private jets. The model is elegantly straightforward: rent the life you aspire to, even if only for a moment.

Faithful first learnt about the Tony Elumelu Foundation through colleagues who were past beneficiaries. Inspired by their success and driven by the urgency of his own entrepreneurial ambitions, he applied in 2024; the very year he launched his business. As a brand-new company facing the realities of limited capital and an expanding market demand, the TEF seed funding arrived at a critical moment. According to Faithful, the funding "helped us expand... to afford things we naturally couldn't, and to hire a couple of people." With disciplined financial management, saving aggressively and

reinvesting strategically, the business moved from early fragility to rapid growth. The impact was immediate and measurable.

What began as a Lagos-only venture now operates across Port Harcourt, Abuja, Enugu, and Imo State, with new partnerships, increased asset capacity, and a strengthened operational footprint. The company has also built a lean but effective team of 10 employees, 70 per cent of whom are women, a deliberate choice grounded in Faithful's conviction that women bring unmatched versatility, attention to detail, and operational excellence to the workplace. Beyond the numbers lies a story of gratitude. Faithful recalls meeting Tony O. Elumelu at the AICL Investment event in Abuja, an encounter that, for him, symbolised the transformative power

FAITHFUL STANDS AS A TESTAMENT TO WHAT BECOMES POSSIBLE WHEN AMBITION MEETS OPPORTUNITY AND WHEN CATALYTIC CAPITAL IS PLACED IN THE HANDS OF DISCIPLINED, DETERMINED YOUNG AFRICANS.

of accessible philanthropy. Surrounded by officials and protocol, he seized the moment simply to say thank you. "Thank you for creating this Foundation. Thank you for funding people. Thank you for thinking that you could empower entrepreneurs, create jobs, and help people actualise their dreams," he reflects. Today, Faithful stands as a testament to what becomes possible when ambition meets opportunity and when

catalytic capital is placed in the hands of disciplined, determined young Africans. Through the Tony Elumelu Foundation, he has not only built a thriving business but also expanded employment, deepened inclusion, and created new pathways for luxury mobility across Nigeria.

Oluwayemisi Orilowo, 2024 TEF Alumni Founder, Coco Sweets is Reinventing Thoughtful Gifting for a New Generation



For Yemisi, the visionary founder of Coco Sweets, gifting is far more than a gesture; it is a language of love, memory, and intentionality. Her business has become one of Lagos's most recognisable personalised gifting brands, curating thoughtful, custom-made packages designed to help people celebrate life's most meaningful moments. Central to her innovation is Coco Buzz, an automated reminder system that ensures customers never forget a birthday, anniversary, or special occasion again. By combining creativity with technology, she is redefining the gifting experience for a modern, fast-paced world.

Yemisi first engaged with the Tony Elumelu Foundation during the lockdown period,

beginning the entrepreneurship training long before she felt ready to apply. The rigorous learning modules, she says, "opened my eyes to the possibilities of my business," enabling her to apply real-world tools and frameworks to refine her idea. In 2024, she finally submitted her application, and was selected for the TEF Entrepreneurship Programme. The grant marked a turning point. With new capital and a deeper understanding of operational discipline, Yemisi transformed Coco Sweets from a solo venture into a structured, scalable business. The impact has been remarkable.

Coco Sweets now serves over 1,500 clients across Lagos and has grown its revenue from N7 million to over N30 million in just two years. More importantly, the business has become a platform for women's economic empowerment: from one founder to an all-women team of eight, each equipped with income, skills, and the confidence to dream bigger. Reflecting on her journey, Yemisi credits TEF for igniting a level of belief she did not always have in herself: "You took the dream of a young lady and transformed it into a fully functioning business. Every day, I achieve more than I ever imagined possible." Her message to young women is clear: "stay consistent, stay committed, and

never stop pushing, even on the days when progress feels invisible." Through the Tony Elumelu Foundation, Yemisi has turned passion into purpose, purpose into enterprise, and enterprise into impact, proving once again that when African women rise, communities rise with them.

Kwera Faith 2019 TEF Alumni is Building Brands, Expanding Possibility in East Africa

When Kwera Faith speaks about entrepreneurship, she does not begin with profit or scale. She begins with belief — the kind of belief that arrives when no one else is willing to take a chance on your vision. Today, Kwera Faith is the founder of Quera Innovations, a fast-growing East African marketing and advertising agency helping brands achieve strong visibility through strategic design, creative communication, and cost-efficient marketing solutions. But her journey began with uncertainty, risk, and a bold digital idea ahead of its time.

Before receiving funding, Kwera's entrepreneurial ambition took the form of Quera Tickets, an online ticketing platform created to improve access to sports and entertainment events in Uganda. The platform gained early traction through partnerships with sports federations and event promoters, yet growth was constrained by capital limitations and the absence of early-stage backing. At the time, Kwera was working as a banker. Despite her clarity of vision, securing financial support proved nearly impossible. Building a digital enterprise was seen as too risky — too unfamiliar — for those around her to invest in. To sustain the ticketing platform's growth, she created an internal marketing arm. That arm would evolve into Quera Innovations — and soon surpass its original purpose. Demand for branding, advertising, and digital marketing services surged from external clients. What began as a support structure transformed into a standalone enterprise with its own identity and momentum.



The turning point came with the support of the Tony Elumelu Foundation. Beyond the seed capital, TEF provided something more profound: credibility, mentorship, and institutional belief. That validation unlocked partnerships, additional grants, and new opportunities. It enabled Kwera to formalise operations, build internal systems, and expand sustainably. Today, Quera Innovations serves SMEs, corporates, and institutions across East Africa, delivering integrated branding, digital campaigns, and production services designed to maximise impact while minimising cost.

Its model focuses on leveraging in-house capabilities and innovative production methods to make high-quality marketing accessible to growing businesses. From a lean startup operation, Quera Innovations

has grown into a structured organisation employing 10 staff — six permanent employees and four contract creatives — creating meaningful opportunities for young professionals in the region's creative economy. The company continues to expand its footprint while maintaining its founding principle: providing powerful brand visibility without excessive expenditure. Kwera's expansion strategy is ambitious yet deliberate. Quera Innovations plans to scale across Uganda and the wider East African market by strengthening in-house production capabilities and investing in branding equipment that reduces operational costs. The company is targeting partnerships in sectors such as construction, finance, telecommunications, sports, and development organisations, while deepening its expertise in data-driven digital marketing and integrated brand management. Equally important is human capital. Kwera aims to grow her team, formalise systems, and create structured employment pathways for young creatives — positioning Quera Innovations as a leading, cost-efficient marketing agency driving entrepreneurship and innovation across East Africa.

A Message to Tony Elumelu

Kwera's gratitude toward the Foundation is deeply personal: "I often get emotional when I speak about a stranger who did not know my story, my background, or my struggles, yet chose to believe blindly in my dream and vision. At a time when I had no one willing to take that chance on me, the Tony Elumelu Foundation did — and that belief changed the course of my life forever. Beyond building businesses, TEF opened doors to leadership. In 2019, I became TEF Hub Lead for Uganda, a responsibility that shaped my confidence, self-esteem, and purpose. I began to see myself not only as an entrepreneur, but as a leader capable of creating cross-border impact. In 2021, I was honoured as a Woman Ambassador for the

East African Community for the change I created during the pandemic. Through TEF, I have won scholarships, fellowships, and met people around the world who share this mission.

Most importantly, Tony Elumelu gave me faith and hope to rise each day — especially coming from a background where women's dreams were not supported beyond marriage. I see him as my true godfather, one who saved me from limiting societal expectations. Today, I can proudly say: the Kwera Faith of 2019 would be proud of who I am now. And I am proud of myself too — for achievements that once felt impossible."

—

TEF Impact On Job Creation

13 Average Jobs

Created per beneficiaries with an active business.

3X Avg Per Capita

Full time employees of TEF beneficiaries are on average earning over 3X the average annual per capita income in their countries.

52%

Of the TEF beneficiaries' current employees are made up of women.

46%

Of TEF beneficiaries' current employees are aged 18-24.

Increased Revenue Generation

TEF Entrepreneurship Programme gives new entrepreneurs a jump start, such that they are able to start earning revenue and profits more quickly than they otherwise would. By supporting beneficiaries to develop successful, profitable businesses, the TEF Entrepreneurship Programme has helped keep its beneficiaries and their employees out of poverty.

80%

Of TEF beneficiaries currently make revenue, which is 40% more from the point of funding

22X

Annual profits were on average over 22X the average annual income per capita in the corresponding countries.

+40% increase in monthly turnover

An average monthly turnover of \$5,461 in the typical month in 2022

64%

Serve as a supplier or vendor to other businesses and use other businesses as a supplier.



MENTOR SPOTLIGHT

Driving Inclusion: How TEF Mentor, Adejoke Ogungbire, is Opening Doors for Deaf Entrepreneurs

Entrepreneurship thrives when opportunity is accessible when ambition is not limited by gender, geography, or disability. At the Tony Elumelu Foundation, this belief is foundational. Since 2015, the Programme has championed inclusive entrepreneurship across Africa, ensuring that women, young people, and underrepresented groups have a clear pathway into the entrepreneurial ecosystem. In this spirit, TEF Mentor Adejoke Ogungbire exemplifies

what it means to expand the boundaries of access. A Public Health Specialist with more than a decade of experience, Adejoke's commitment to inclusion is deeply personal. Two of her siblings became deaf in childhood, opening her eyes to the lived realities and structural barriers faced by persons with hearing impairments. She learnt sign language to communicate more fully with them, and what began as a family necessity evolved into a lifelong mission to support deaf communities.

"I saw their real needs, far beyond the disability itself," she recalls. *"There were socio-economic gaps, opportunities inaccessible to them, and limited support structures. I wanted to help change that."* This conviction led her to establish DESIRE Health Inclusive Organisation (DHIO), an evolution

of her earlier consultancy, grounded in the vision of empowering persons with disabilities through socio-economic inclusion, skills, and enterprise development.

Championing Access Through TEF

When Adejoke encountered the Tony Elumelu Foundation Entrepreneurship Programme, she immediately recognised its potential to transform the lives of deaf entrepreneurs. She reached out to executive members of deaf associations, introduced them to the Programme, and began hosting a series of virtual workshops she called e-Seminars, training sessions delivered via mobile applications and WhatsApp.

Through the EARnpreneurs WhatsApp group, she guided dozens of hearing-impaired

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entrepreneurs through the TEF application process, answering questions, reviewing drafts, and ensuring that every participant understood how to present their ideas effectively. "The energy in the group was incredible," she says. "Their willingness to learn, share knowledge, and build their businesses was inspiring. They just needed someone to bridge the gap."

A Mentor Driven by Purpose

For Adejoke, mentoring with TEF has been as transformative for her as it has been for the entrepreneurs she supports. "The Programme has broadened my network and therefore my net worth," she reflects. "It has strengthened my belief in Africa and in Africapitalism. It has also reshaped my approach to non-profit work, prompting me to integrate social entrepreneurship models that provide sustainability, rather than relying solely on donor funding."

Her first formal mentoring year in 2017 was a turning point. She learnt alongside her mentees, championed their innovations, and found deep fulfilment in guiding them through challenges. The annual TEF Forum, she recalls, was particularly influential, offering wisdom from continental leaders, including Alhaji Aliko Dangote's famous reminder that failure is part of the journey.

A Vision for the Future

Adejoke remains hopeful and determined that deaf entrepreneurs will continue to thrive within the TEF network. "I believe they will become successful business owners regardless of their hearing disability. All they need is opportunity, and TEF provides exactly that."

Her work stands as a powerful reminder that inclusion is not an act of charity, but a strategic imperative: when all voices are heard, Africa rises stronger.



A decade of impact

2.5 million+
Africans granted access to training

24,000+
Beneficiaries across 54 African countries

\$100 million+
Disbursed Seed Capital

1.5 million+
Jobs created by Tony Elumelu Foundation funded businesses

\$4.2 billion+
generated in revenue by Tony Elumelu Foundation funded businesses since 2015

Over 2.1 million
Africans lifted above poverty line

Over 4 million
African households positively impacted



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- Alumni & Mentorship Officer
 - Research Manager
 - Brand Officer
- Internal Audit Officer
- Partnerships Officer
- Entrepreneurship Programme Officer

***Fluency in French, Portuguese, or Arabic is an added advantage**





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