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TEF  IRCLE



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Dear Reader,

Given the recent ratification and subsequent attention on the AFTCA, business agility has never been more critical for young entrepreneurs across Africa. Implementing fresh solutions, thinking outside the box and identifying gaps in business sustainability have been at the core of conversations around African entrepreneurship, especially in light of changes created by Covid-19.

For the September issue of TEF Circle, we unpack how entrepreneurs are challenging traditional operational models, and overcoming barriers by imbibing the resilience of Africapitalism, the teachings of Shared Value, and improved adaptability mindsets.

Our cover story is on TEF Partner, Claude Borna, CEO of Seme City Development Agency (Sèmè City), who delves deeper into the impact of the Tony Elumelu Foundation partnership to empower hundreds of additional Beninese entrepreneurs, and how the Republic of Benin is building a vibrant knowledge-based economy that can stimulate economic growth, increase employment opportunities, and improve the country's competitiveness.

“The truth is that there is no manual for what we do!”

Meanwhile, TEF Founder, Tony O. Elumelu expands impact actualization in the Republic of Benin as he pays a courtesy visit to the President of Benin, Patrice Talon, also stopping over to see the First Lady of Benin, Her Excellency, Claudine Talon, to discuss ways to support her foundation that works to improve the lives of the most vulnerable women and children in Western Africa.

NOTE



From high level panel sessions with lively discussions, to delivering a keynote speech emphasising the Foundation's commitment to fostering gender inclusion, our CEO joined salient conversations that echoed across regional and global ecosystems on empowering the African Entrepreneur.

In spotlighting some of our entrepreneurs in this issue, we realized once again that above all, to be innovative and adaptable remains at the core of African entrepreneurs and their "hustle".

We hope you enjoy reading! ●



STORY OF THE MONTH



DREAMS OF AFRICA: ON KNOWLEDGE- BASED ECONOMIES

with Claude Borna, CEO of Seme City Development Agency

In this interview, Claude echoes the need to support more African entrepreneurs to develop a growth-oriented mindset and delves deeper on how entrepreneurship culture continues to gain momentum in Africa because of the Tony Elumelu Foundation and Seme City's ambitious determination to uphold a knowledge-based economy. Complementing the Entrepreneurship Programme on a national level is the Republic of Benin's commitment to restructure its education system to prioritize vocational and technical branches and student-entrepreneurship.

It is good to catch up with you. How have you been and how has Sèmè City advanced its mission to promote a knowledge-based economy since it launched in 2016?

Great to catch up indeed. I am doing well. Thank you so much for this opportunity! Sèmè City's mission is simple yet ambitious: empower our youth with the skills and competencies to thrive in fast-changing and dynamic African work environments. Unfortunately, like many other African countries, the Republic of Benin is experiencing severe human capital shortages in booming areas such as energy, infrastructure, agro-tech, health-tech, and digital transformation. The challenges to improve access to quality education and enable greater production of knowledge, technology, and creative outputs are significant. Since 2017, Sèmè City has deployed numerous initiatives that support youth skills development and accelerate the growth of innovative enterprises. We have launched the following world-class education, research and entrepreneurial programs:

Epitech Benin, the reference school in innovation and IT expertise, offers Bachelor's and Master's degrees in computer science, as well as a Coding Academy attractive to a diverse pool of professional learners. Three years after their opening, Epitech Benin has already helped hundreds of students acquire the expertise needed to work in fast-growing digital-related jobs and projects.

Africa Design School offers Bachelor's degrees in digital design, graphic design, and space design

The programs are developed in collaboration with Ecole de Design Nantes Atlantique, one of the most renowned academic design institutions with footprints in France, India, Brazil, China, and Canada.

X-TechLab is the first platform in Sub-Saharan Africa that is dedicated to using X-ray techniques and their applications to find innovative solutions in agriculture, health, environment, infrastructure and energy. X-TechLab trains researchers locally and through international collaborations.

In 2019, Sèmè City set up its first incubator called Incub'IMA in partnership with PwC. Incub'IMA offers various programs for entrepreneurs with a focus on market-disruptive strategies. Entrepreneurs benefit from Sèmè City's co-working facilities and coaching by world-class international experts and mentors.

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The Tony Elumelu Foundation is an incredibly effective partner for improving the capabilities and skills of aspiring and existing entrepreneurs in the Republic of Benin ●

Fascinating, and such remarkable work you have done. How has the last year been and are there current plans you could share with us?

A year ago, we opened "Sèmè One," our first modern and intelligent campus developed to meet international standards. Our brand-new facilities have modular classrooms, co-working spaces, research areas, a language center, meeting rooms, offices, a rooftop food area, and our own data center.

We are now preparing the launch of the Sèmè City Open Innovation Park (SCOP) in December this year. This unique place will provide unprecedented opportunities for learning, designing, making, and co-creating. The SCOP will be opened to all students, researchers, entrepreneurs, businesses, artisans, and makers who want to train in the latest design and manufacturing software, learn how to use rapid prototyping tools in electronics, plastics, textiles, and wood, or manufacture parts using 3D printers. Our passionate and hard-working team is very excited to contribute to building a vibrant knowledge-based economy that can stimulate economic growth, increase employment opportunities, and improve the country's competitiveness.



Claude Borna, CEO of Seme City Development Agency for the TEF Circle

What role has the Tony Elumelu Foundation played in this strategy and what were some of the expectations from the partnership?

One of Sèmè City's main strategy pillars is strengthening the entrepreneur ecosystem and entrepreneurial capabilities. With the Tony Elumelu Foundation's position as Africa's foremost organization supporting entrepreneurship, this collaboration is vital in our quest to develop and empower youth in the Republic of Benin. Our partnership with the Tony Elumelu Foundation started three years ago. Sèmè City was the first government structure in Africa to fund additional entrepreneurs. Other institutions funding Beninese entrepreneurs included the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), and the African Development Bank (AfDB). With this additional funding, the total number of Beninese award recipients rose from 32 in 2018 to 156 in 2019 with 35% women-led projects. Additional funding is only one part of our efforts. During the 2020-2021 TEF program, Sèmè City hosted a national roadshow in 11 cities across the country. This enabled us to not only maximize the program's reach and diversity, but equally to give all Beninese entrepreneurs the opportunity to participate. We even provided internet access for those who needed it to follow the sessions and complete their application online. The Tony Elumelu Foundation is an incredibly effective partner for improving the capabilities and skills of aspiring and existing entrepreneurs in the Republic of Benin, and for encouraging women-owned businesses' participation.

What are some of the unique TEF value-adds that Sèmè City benefits from?

Obviously, first is TEF Connect. TEF Connect continuously adds new content and provides highly relevant insights for entrepreneurs. This platform has now become a goldmine of resources for Beninese entrepreneurs. The second one is networking opportunities. TEF alumni, a network of already 9000 today, represents a pan-African force that is redefining how entrepreneurs interact and support each other across the continent. Finally, TEF allows us to see role models for African entrepreneurs. There is a consensus that observing role models empowers individuals to discover and learn specific skills and gain the knowledge required to be an entrepreneur.

“*TEFConnect.com continuously adds new content and provides highly relevant insights for entrepreneurs. This platform has now become a goldmine of resources for Beninese entrepreneurs* ●

The founder, Mr. Tony Elumelu himself, is followed by millions of entrepreneurs on social media. His advice on hard work, discipline, focus, and a healthy lifestyle is exactly what's needed to set a winning mind-set for our African entrepreneurs. We also read and watch all the interviews of the CEO, Mrs. Ifeyinwa Ugochukwu. I am personally inspired by the clarity and strength of her vision. The entrepreneurs from various African countries and sectors spotlighted on TEF platforms are great role models as well. The candid stories about their businesses, their struggles, and how they thrive despite all challenges demonstrate that entrepreneurship can be an extremely fulfilling career for young Africans. I salute TEF for changing the narrative on African entrepreneurs.

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People are now looking at what is happening with innovation in Africa, and how resilient, competitive, and value-creating Africa's entrepreneurs can be. The case for investing in African SMEs is now stronger than ever. ●

How do you think the current trends, especially the pandemic, have impacted knowledge, innovation, and entrepreneurship in Africa?

I am amazed by how the pandemic continues to be a demonstration of the resilience of our African entrepreneurs! Entrepreneurs have, in little to no time, successfully created and deployed solutions which include handwashing systems, 3D printed face shields, patient tracking devices, medical professional support applications, food and essential needs delivery applications, educative content for children, and much more. Some are now assisting the public sector in rolling out large-scale digital solutions against COVID-19. People are now looking at what is happening with innovation in Africa, and how resilient, competitive, and value-creating Africa's entrepreneurs can be. One thing is clear: the case for investing in African SMEs is now stronger than ever. I hope this translates into more effective ways – like the TEF programme – of deploying additional capital to help small businesses.

What are some of the cultural challenges faced by African entrepreneurs and what solutions can you provide to help them mitigate?

I think our biggest challenge is how we can support more African entrepreneurs to develop a growth-oriented mindset. For entrepreneurs in Africa, success can mainly depend on mindset and culture. In the Republic of Benin, the Government has engaged a vast program to restructure the education system by prioritizing vocational and technical branches. In addition, better support for student entrepreneurship has become a priority to facilitate the integration of young graduate professionals and support high-growth entrepreneurs.



We need to promote a culture of leadership, risk-taking, and entrepreneurship if we want young people to become job creators, not job seekers. To address this challenge, Sèmè City and the National Agency for the Development of Youth Entrepreneurship are collaborating on a joint program rolled out in phases: 2021 – First, raise awareness of entrepreneurship among TVET and university students. We rely on innovative gamification tools and immersion programs to provide aspiring entrepreneurs with practical learning on how to become an entrepreneur; 2022-2023 – Enable students to take entrepreneurship courses within their curriculum, regardless of their specialization; in fact, this could lead to establishing a national "Student-Entrepreneur" status. The objective is to value entrepreneurial projects during academic studies rather than treating them as an obstacle or an alternative. We can see how countries that make efforts to promote the entrepreneurial culture in formal education produce remarkable results.

Sèmè City has an objective to create 190 000 new jobs by 2030 including at least 40% by women and 30% self-employed; how is that goal looking currently?

Sèmè City is the symbol of President Patrice Talon's determination to position the Republic of Benin on the world map of the knowledge economy. The Government is making significant investments to create an innovation hub of international standards and attract world-class partners. The goal may seem ambitious to some, but we are confident that it is attainable. For us, achieving this goal is a combination of hard work and a steep learning curve – how to be more effective at what we do, develop winning partnerships, build smart and sustainable infrastructure, collect the data to accurately measure performances.... the list goes on. The truth is there is no manual for what we do! Our performances are on track; however, we also know that we are at the beginning of the journey. As Jeff Bezos famously said, "it's still Day 1!". Adopting a Day 1 mentality means always having the excitement and ambition to fight challenges, embrace change, accept failures, plant seeds, and most importantly, be obsessed with delivering the best customer experience.

Sèmè City had a solid start, so we are very excited about the future. We have begun the planning work to build infrastructures on 300 hectares to accommodate more world-class academic institutions, research centers, incubators, and residential facilities for hundreds of thousands of students, researchers, entrepreneurs, companies, and staff. We hope many of them will come from Nigeria!

Looking ahead, what are some of the areas of collaboration between The Tony Elumelu Foundation and Sèmè City and other players like the Claudine Talon Foundation to further create socio-economic impact?

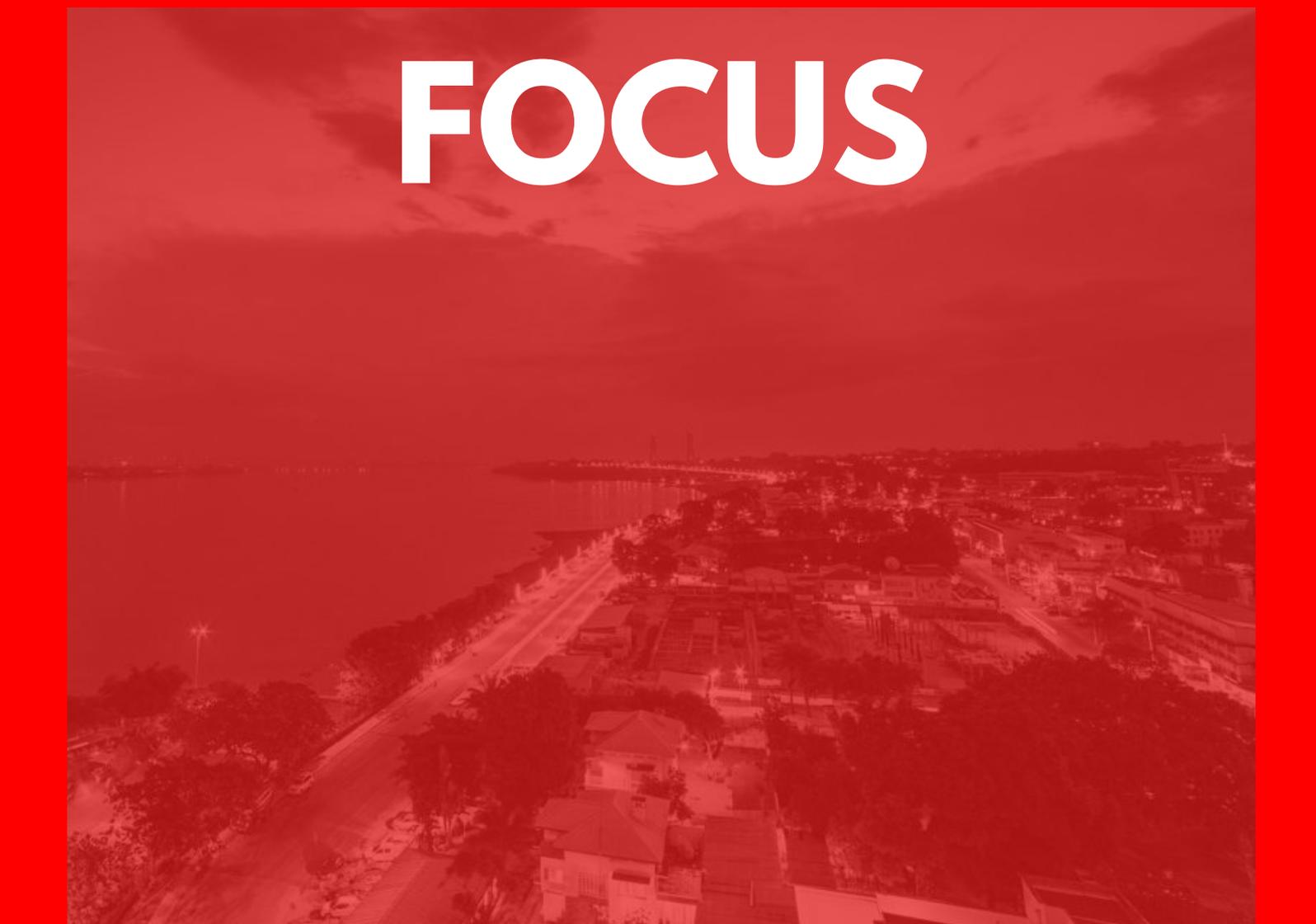
The Tony Elumelu Foundation, Sèmè City and other players like the Claudine Talon Foundation and the UBA Foundation share similar values of inclusivity, education excellence and economic empowerment. From scholarships based on academic excellence to special educational projects and entrepreneurship training programs for young women in rural areas, we are exploring several areas of collaboration to create more opportunities for the youth and underprivileged.

Can you shed light on the value of sustainable, economical, and innovative solutions by Africans for Africa's development?

The value of sustainable, economical, and innovative solutions by Africans for Africa can be nicely summarized by Sèmè City's mantra: "Innovation Made in Africa". We strongly believe that with a new mindset, and technology becoming more accessible and more affordable for young people across Africa, "Innovation Made in Africa" creates value by: Making use of local resources, overcoming economic and social barriers, integrating cultural realities, evolving the collaboration between the public and private sectors, and at the core, enabling young local talents. ●



ECOSYSTEM



FOCUS



Ruth Kabochi, Founder of Mimi Africana Kenya

"TRADE WILL REDUCE POVERTY AND ENSURE ECONOMIC GROWTH ACROSS LOCAL COMMUNITIES. "

Kenyan Entrepreneur Ruth Kabochi launched Mimi Africana to help small business men and women in Kenya's Arts and Crafts industry by linking them with markets within and beyond their operational communities. In this interview, 2018 TEF Alumni, Ruth, credits the Tony Elumelu Foundation Entrepreneurship Programme impacted her overall mindset on entrepreneurship and how her enterprise continues to create jobs and trade opportunities for local communities in Nairobi.

"EVERY MOMENT IS MEMORABLE BECAUSE IT COMES WITH A LESSON TO LEARN"

Ruth Kabochi, Founder of Mimi Africana, Kenya

Hello Ruth. What inspired you to launch this business, Mimi Africana?

Hello and thank you for giving me this opportunity to share my business on this platform. Mimi Africana Accessories limited was an initiative inspired out of the need to link local female artisans with market opportunities locally and abroad.

When you applied for the Tony Elumelu Foundation Entrepreneurship, what support did you require the most?

When I joined Tony Elumelu Foundation, I wanted the financial support to take my business to the next level. We needed finances to recruit and train more women on different skills. We needed to market our products more and work on our packaging, increase productivity and build an online shop/Website.

How did the programme impact your overall mindset on entrepreneurship?

The programme impacted my overall mindset on entrepreneurship in so many ways because before the programme, the business was running without any clear guidance. I learnt that as an entrepreneur, I have to remain curious, always remain open to learning and implementing new ideas. To always be informed on what is going around me and what my competitors are doing just to have a competitive edge. That as an entrepreneur I must be able to communicate well without fear, accepting that there will be more rejections than success, but that we still must keep pushing to succeed. I learnt that as an entrepreneur, setting clear goals and following those goals is very important so that you stay on course and not be derailed on why you started in the first place. I also learnt that I have to work smart by outsourcing for professional services where required; writing down contracts with clients and suppliers to avoid misunderstandings and keeping promises – and if required that agreement will help in the court of law.

Following the TEF entrepreneurship programme, how has the TEF and the programme's alumni network been an important resource to you?

Both have been very helpful because it keeps me updated on information on programmes available, funding opportunities that I can apply for, and providing other relevant information concerning the business world overall.

Your business is focused on linking African artisans to local and global markets. Tell us more about the socio-economic impact it has across communities?

We have managed to create jobs for women and improve their living standards. Because of us, these women can take care of their homes, send their children to school and engage in social activities with others. We have also managed to train women on business skills and now they know the importance of saving with the banks as opposed to keeping money they make at home. Indeed, these women are making informed decisions when it comes to money. We have gotten interest from women and even men wanting to learn a skill or more. This means that the whole community is improving. More children are allowed education and families are learning how to make decisions about income generating projects that bring in more money.

What are some of the memorable highlights of your business journey?

Every moment is memorable because it comes with a lesson to learn. However, getting an online shop where we can market our products globally is a memorable highlight for the business because it means more orders and more women get to join the programme. Hearing success stories from women is a memorable highlight as is experiencing the Tony Elumelu Foundation Programme. The training was great; it gave me the chance to learn and improve on as an entrepreneur, which has reflected positively on the business.



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How do you think trade in Africa can be better improved?

Boosting trade among African countries by allowing product movements between countries and making it easy to ship products cost effectively. Another area of improvement is funding opportunities for local manufacturers both small and large to enable them to grow their businesses.

What are some of the transformative benefits of trade in Africa?

There are a lot of positives to trade, but I believe it will reduce poverty and ensure economic growth across local communities.



FROM THE

TEF NETWORK



TEF & SEME CITY ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT



Steve Hoda: Steve is a 2017 TEF alumni and the Founder of AfriCereal Group, is committed to revolutionizing cereal harvesting and threshing processes in Africa with locally developed mechanical tools. He was selected by the United States African Development Foundation (USADF) and the Ministry of Small and Medium Enterprises to provide comprehensive services and technical assistance to rice and soybean farmers.



Sevean Afoutou: This TEF 2019 alumni is the Founder of Espace Ashaki, a company operating in the crowded beauty and wellness industry. Beyond just offering afro hairstyles, relaxing massages, and a range of home-grown natural products in their newly opened salon, Sevean and her team focus on ensuring that every client feels confident, good about themselves, and empowered. Their personalized service is much appreciated and gives them a unique competitive advantage.

TEF & SEME CITY ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT



Natacha Agbahoungba: This TEF 2017 alumni is the CEO of Moringa Social Ventures. Her company offers moringa seed-based products such as moringa powder, moringa oil, and moringa tea. Natacha has started expanding her retail footprint and is currently preparing her Series A fundraising with the help of international VC firms to take her business to the next level.

Arielle Ahouansou: TEF 2018 alumni is the Founder of Kea Medical. Her company was initially focused on promoting a connected bracelet for universal medical ID and connecting hospitals. Last year, she introduced new services such as the electronic patient record and a digitized platform of patient care sheets for insurance companies. Arielle is contributing to the important task of building a resilient health system in the Republic of Benin.



HOW TO LEVERAGE GLOBAL FINANCING FOR AFRICA: TEF CEO, IFEYINWA UGOCHUKWU

Funding grassroots African Entrepreneurs who do not have access to institutional loans can improve their performance, which will directly impact the socio-economic conditions on the continent. Read more [here](#).



"If you don't love it, you're going to fail."

STEVE JOBS



INFRASTRUCTURE PLAYS A FUNDAMENTAL ROLE IN ECONOMIC GROWTH.

As the Founder of TEF and Group Chairman of United Bank for Africa (UBA) – a business that was catalysed in Nigeria and today operates in 20 African countries servicing over 25 million customers, Tony O. Elumelu outlines a number of factors that are critical to actualising the potential of any country. Read [more](#).

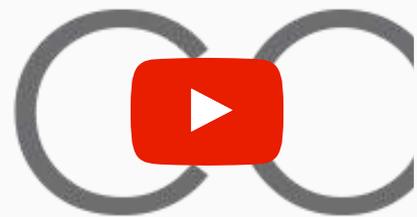
A close-up photograph of Tony Elumelu, a Black man with a shaved head, wearing a dark blue suit, white shirt, and red tie. He is clapping his hands together in front of his face, smiling broadly with his eyes closed, conveying a sense of joy and accomplishment. The background is blurred, showing a crowd of people in a warm, orange-toned setting.

“**PEOPLE MANAGEMENT IS KEY. LEARN HOW TO MOTIVATE YOUR PEOPLE. BE PAINSTAKING IN CHOOSING THE RIGHT PEOPLE.**”

Tony Elumelu

FROM THE FOUNDATION

CIRCLE WATCH



WATCH THE 2021 TEF
ENTREPRENEURSHIP
PROGRAMME INFORMATION
SESSION ON PITCHING

CIRCLE READ

"Africa's socio-economic transformation agenda is impossible without youth, without entrepreneurship, and without women"

CEO of Tony Elumelu Foundation, Ifeyinwa Ugochukwu, delivered the keynote speech at The West African Business Forum: Empowering Women and Youths to Spur Africa's Transformation Agenda.

The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) convened sector champions in various industries to be a part of a Regional Business Forum in Lagos structured around high-level meetings and consultations with youth and women in the West African business ecosystems.

In her keynote address, Ifeyinwa emphasised the Foundation's commitment to foster gender inclusion, through the gender mix of our workforce, mentors, and TEF alumni. Read more [here](#).



TEF Circle is the Tony Elumelu Foundation's monthly publication sharing updates on our alumni, our TEF Network and the global economy.

www.tonyelumelufoundation.org

