

TEF-Google Fellows Share
Their Experiences As The
Fellowship Comes To A
Successful End.

Douglas Kendyson

2018 TEF Entrepreneur and founder of the tech company, Selar, opens up about his awe-inspiring entrepreneurial journey.

TALKING TECH

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Editor's Note

Nelson C.J, Communications Executive,
Tony Elumelu Foundation

Africa's tech ecosystem has seen an enormous boom over the past five years. This is a redundant statement by many measures, I know. Still, it doesn't negate that young Africans across the continent have been paving the way for a vibrant tech economy. Founders, young and old, but mostly, excitingly young, are building the most daring products. They are constantly reimagining our ideas of how life is and what it can come to be.

From apps offering simplified payment processes to those facilitating decentralised financial systems. Domestic automotons are also not left untapped, from ride-hailing services to food delivery options. There are also software products zeroing in on the creator market, providing the tools and services necessary for building the continent's next content creators. In this issue of TEF Circle, we take a look at some of these products and people, particularly tech founders and entrepreneurs who are also esteemed members of our alumni and whose businesses were duly supported or were even able to see the light of day from the funding and mentorship provided by the Tony Elumelu Foundation. We also explore the place of remote work in Africa today, speaking with a few young Africans working in tech on navigating the reality of working for companies outside their home countries; what are the challenges, what are the upsides, and what does this mean for local industry players, we ask.

Also in this issue, we bring you closer to our TEF-Google fellows who have spent the past six months working tirelessly to improve our proprietary site for entrepreneurs, TEFConnect. We also bring you interesting insight from African tech talents working remotely for tech companies while still living in their home countries.

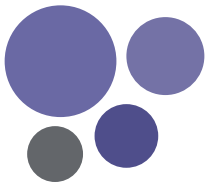
Editor's Note

I hope you enjoy reading this issue, it was worked on with a lot of love and passion.

-Nelson C.J



*The Tech Founder
Bootstrapping A
Future-Forward
Company.*



This is how a typical Monday unfolds for Douglas Kendyson: his first order of business is to coordinate his company-wide- team meetings which begin at 10 am. In these meetings, his team looks over the activities of the previous week, focusing on their growth trajectory, assessing impact, gauging successes and developing processes to fix areas of neglect or failures.

These meetings often end with the team discussing “high-level plans for the coming week.” Since the 25-year-old Tony Elumelu Foundation entrepreneur founded his tech company Selar - an online store builder empowering content creators with the ability to monetize their skills and knowledge - he has led his team remotely, developing processes that allow for seamless workflows and optimal productivity.

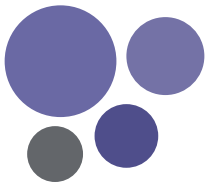
Kendyson also spends a better part of the day getting in and out of meetings, some of which are with his developers, others with his marketing and sales team as well as the customer support department. This thoroughness enables Kendyson to be abreast of all activities in his company while providing his team the support and leadership presence they need to thrive.

As one of Africa's very young and very innovative tech entrepreneurs, Kendyson's journey is a testament to the power of committed support and a clear example of the dynamic changes happening in Africa's tech ecosystem today.

Below, Kendyson discusses his entrepreneurial journey so far, his TEF experience, the intricacies of scaling his business through TEF's support and other insights.

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.





Tell us a bit about your company.

Douglas Kendyson (DK):

Selar is an online store builder that enables anyone to monetise their knowledge, skill, or audience through digital products. Creators on Selar sell products like ebooks, courses, training, memberships, event tickets and so much more. As of June 2022, Selar boasts over 42,000 creators and over 250,000 registered users and actively operating in 11 African countries.

Fascinating, walk us through the inspiration behind starting Selar? What did you find missing in the market?

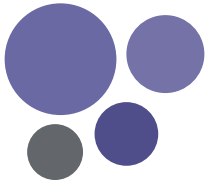
DK:

We wanted to make it easy for anyone to sell a digital product online without having the experience or expensive cost of setting up a website. In 2016 when we started, making a simple site to sell your products online would've not cost less than NGN 150k - 200k

How would you describe Africa's current creator economy, and how is Selar playing a role in it?

DK:

While we were late to the party, the African creator economy is booming now. The internet is the bedrock of the creator economy; creators are being connected to their audience online, and as smartphones and internet access have grown more people are now a part of the creator economy. With Selar, we're keen on making it easy for anyone to monetise their knowledge via digital products and cross-border trade in Africa. In the last 2 years, we've paid over \$4 million dollars to creators in Africa selling digital products.



When was the first time you heard about The Tony Elumelu Foundation?

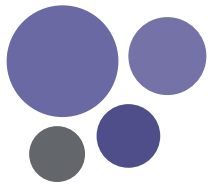
DK:

I heard about the programme from [someone] sometime in 2015/2016. I remember them raving about how they applied and got it for their business. They talked about how easy and smooth the process was, and I'm glad to see how much more people have gotten the funding and that the application process remains easy.

Walk me through your TEF experience, and what would you say is the biggest thing you left that experience with?

DK:

It was pretty smooth; I remember the email saying we got into the programme. We took the programme and got the money by the end of the year. There were so many valuable modules in the programme that were really insightful to us. Before online startup programmes [became popular], there was TEF and I remember seeing so many valuable documents that helped us along the way.



Talk us through Selar's journey so far; what did the early days look like and how did the TEF programme contribute to where you are now?

DK:

Selar started as a side project for my friends and me, and that significantly impacted how I approached our burn rate/expenses. Because it was a 'side project', we were always looking to spend the smallest amount of money on it and just tried to keep things simple. We got cloud credits for our servers; we did everything else ourselves. We got the TEF grant by the end of 2018.

A lot of our growth at the beginning was very slow. But in that time we still spent a lot of time building the product and taking a lot of customer feedback to refine the product to be better.

To take a peek behind the curtains, this is what our creators/merchants count grew to over the last 5 years since we received the TEF grant in December 2018:

EOY 2018: 0.7k creators

EOY 2019: 1.3k+

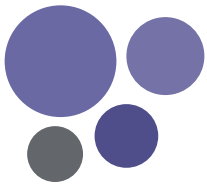
EOY 2020: 3k+

EOY 2021: 21k+

June 2022: 43k+

While we kept our costs low, the grant enabled us hire a few more team members to take on some extra work, explore features and ideas that could grow the product, and more. We really just spent money on only what was necessary. The weird ideology I had that still stays with me today is, "this is an internet company, you shouldn't be spending too much money". Of course, that ideology has been modified by the realities of building a big startup but we still try to stick to it as much as we can.





What does the future look like for Selar?

DK:

We're in about 11 African countries today and support creators in Europe and the Americas. We want to grow our reach across Africa and make it easy for creators worldwide. Besides from reach, we'd still love to deepen our impact in every market we serve today. Despite our numbers, we're still barely covering the target audience for Nigeria, let alone other countries.

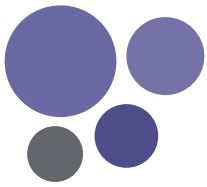
What are some of the fears you have as an African tech entrepreneur currently bootstrapping? And what are the upsides vs the downsides?

DK:

At this stage of our bootstrapping – a slightly more financially stable place where Selar's profit covers all of its expenses with more to keep on the side – I don't have a lot of fears of bootstrapping. My most significant upside with bootstrapping today is peace. The nature of startups is that they're meant to be moving and growing very fast, so when they're not, it typically means something is wrong, and that can be super stressful to worry about because of all the people that are waiting for their ROI. However, bootstrapping just lets you grow with time - if it's meant to happen.

If you look at the stats I shared above, we began in 2016 and didn't see a significant uptick until 2020, but after that, we shot like a bamboo tree. So provided you're not out of cash; time and consistent work and dedication could really move the needle and that's not something VC-backed startups can do a lot of the time. With VC culture, once the money is in, you're on a treadmill, and you have to keep running, and that's tough.





No one is chasing us today at Selar; we can do things at a pace we can sustain. With growth, some things don't happen instantly. Sometimes it takes a considerable investment in foundational work, and VC culture doesn't always allow for that.

What does the future look like for tech on the continent?

DK:

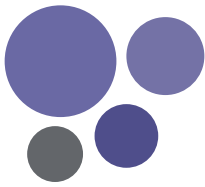
I'm proud of how far tech has grown in Africa in the last 5 - 10 years. I think the work done in the previous 5 - 10 years has been so foundational and beneficial. I'm more excited because many more companies are making building blocks that more companies will stand on for years to come.





*The Reality Of
Africans In Tech
Working Abroad
While Residing In
Their Home Countries.*

Chegbe Michael & Taje Kene-Okafor.



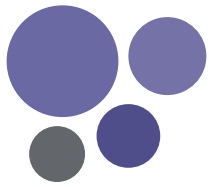
For many Africans living in Africa, working remotely for companies outside the country, with higher-paying power is undoubtedly alluring. With remote work and work from home (WFH) becoming a mainstay in the way work is conducted today, hiring talent across borders has become for many businesses, a smart business move and for the remote employees, an entry into a world that has begun to look at work very differently. Below, two Nigerian tech employees working for tech companies outside the country, share their firsthand experience of being in the middle of this dynamic trend.

Chegbe Michael, 31, Risk Operations:

Working for a tech company abroad while living in Nigeria is a whole new world, literally, and the most glaring difference is the diversity - of both your colleagues and the kind of problems you work on. After spending a couple of years in one of Nigeria's best fintech startups, and helping it scale in other African countries, it's fair to say I've seen things right? But working for a tech company abroad (at least in my experience) takes a notch higher.

Now, I have to solve problems across 65+ countries and I have colleagues from every continent across the globe. So, in a nutshell, the obvious upsides for me would be better pay, exposure, a strong network, off-sites in foreign countries, and you get to learn from some of the best talents out there. Regarding the downsides, there are a few. I love diversity, but you sometimes miss your community, that is, people that are like you. For example, in my previous company, I could easily make jokes in pidgin on random Slack channels and people will get but I can't do that anymore.

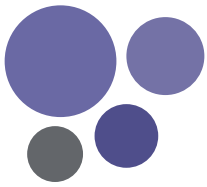




Another downside is that time zones can be a pain at times. If you have a team with folks in EMEA, AMER and APAC regions, there's no way you can schedule a meeting for a time that works for everyone. It will definitely be someone's evening or morning so someone has to always sacrifice. And there will always be meetings you have to attend (personally, I hate having to rewatch meetings). Then the last downside is the growing dollar scarcity in banks so withdrawals are getting difficult as the days pass. This has also been a pain since the election primaries started in Nigeria. These days, I have to visit at least three bank branches before I can withdraw a quarter of the sum I really need. Tech in slums, man!

This balance of working in tech companies outside the country is heavily skewed against Nigerian tech companies at the moment. Every young tech talent in my circle is optimising their career for a move to a foreign company and this is not just because people want better pay but also because people want to escape Nigeria both economically and geographically. From traditional banks to startups, people are upping and leaving and it's affecting the quality of services we get; most banks are marginally worse now in terms of services than say five years ago because their best engineers are all now in Canada or UK or Germany. Those who can't leave yet are doing their best to wrap themselves in a bubble made out of foreign currencies and insulate themselves from the mess that Nigeria is, so they take offers from foreign companies and work remotely.

Typically, top talent takes time to refine so it's not easy to replace the type of talent our companies are losing to foreign companies. But, I'm not so worried about our tech ecosystem. I believe we have the ability to churn out world-class tech talents consistently because we have the numbers and the drive so we just really need our country to be a little sane and create an environment



that will allow the talents to germinate. And in terms of acquisitions or funding, I don't really think this is under threat as well for now. So far, funding is mostly via your network (or as we say, who you know) so as long as hungry founders are still around and the hype for African tech is still hot (and macroeconomics is fine), we should be fine.

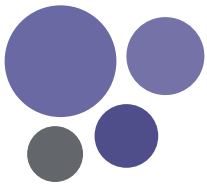
Tage Kene-Okafor, 25, Tech reporter.:

I've been writing for TechCrunch, a US-based publication, for 18 months now. The upsides surpass the downsides. On the upside, working for one of the biggest tech publications and interviewing some of the best minds on the planet can be fulfilling—and rewarding (the pay is good). People respect TechCrunch reporters and working for the company helps your career a lot.

You learn tons of stuff by writing and that's exactly how my experience has been. Timezone differences are one of the downsides; having to stay up at odd hours to complete a piece can be tiring. Another downside is the mode of payment. Local talent receives money via different channels and for most, it can take days or a few weeks to receive your money. Also, since companies abroad have this mindset of getting cheap labour by hiring from Africa, local talent might be underpaid compared to global standards.

This balance of working on tech companies outside the country affects local companies a lot. Most of them can't keep up with the pace of their abroad counterparts and this is why they're encouraged to raise large amounts of funding to stand a chance. However, this isn't enough—even the well-funded local companies still lose talent to FAANG and similar-sized companies due to pay disparity. Also the deplorable physical and economical state of Nigeria doesn't help matters.





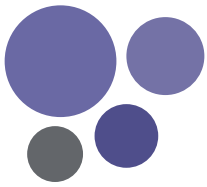
Also the deplorable physical and economical state of Nigeria doesn't help matters.

Working for international companies presents an opportunity to move out of the country and in cases where talent is forced to choose between a local company that pays better than an abroad company, they might prefer to go for the latter. It's not all doom and gloom for local companies though. Some are fighting this by positioning themselves as international companies and hiring from other countries too.





*TEF Tech-prenuers Share
Snapshots Of Their
Journey So Far.*

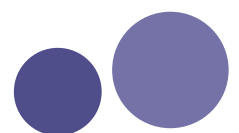


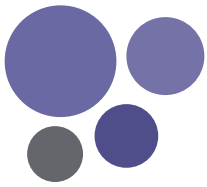
My name is Dogara Iliya, I am an entrepreneur and the Founder of Breeliyanth Computers. Breeliyanth Computers is an organization incorporated to solve ICT-related problems and training of youth and women in digital skills. I can say that TEF has been the backbone of my business since 2019 when I was selected as a beneficiary of the \$5000 grant to support my business. This made it possible to bring my goal to life and set up a standard ICT centre in my community. In early 2020 when the coronavirus hit and affected almost all businesses because of the lockdown, restriction of movement, jobs were automated and the need for digital skills began to thrive. We saw the opportunity to train young people in digital literacy but we lacked conducive space and equipment for the training. Nevertheless, we have begun training with the little resources at our disposal and have fostered other partnerships that have helped us train over 100 youths and women. The lessons I picked up from the TEF training are resilience, discipline, action-oriented and dedication.

-Dogara Iliya.

My name is Ikechukwu Arua Uka, CEO of Apuca Ventures Enterprises Nig. Apuca Ventures Enterprises Nig is an ICT establishment that deals with Computer sales and services, we provide sales of all kinds of Desktop and Laptop sales and repairs, Training, and Computer services, and Media/Event Consultancy Services. TEF's journey in its totality has remained the most valued and robust experience anyone could have. Although my business has seen a number of domestic challenges, from robberies to covid-19/lockdown-related challenges, I have been able to persevere through the training and skills garnered during the TEF programme.

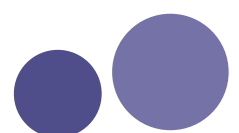
-Ikechukwu Uka.





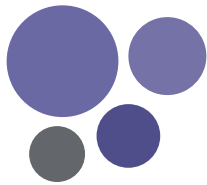
My name is Komakechi Denis Don. I run Komax Consult, a company that offers Digital, Construction and Technologies services. TEF helped with training and brought me closer to a global network of business professionals.

-Komakechi Denis Don.





A Landmark Fellowship Programme Draws Its Curtains.



Six months ago, more than 10 people from the Tony Elumelu Foundation and Google.org came together to answer one question; how do you utilise tech to advance the work of developing African entrepreneurs?

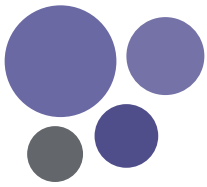
The answer they came up with, to further develop and optimise a tech product already serving African entrepreneurs, zeroed in on TEFConnect.net, the Tony Elumelu Foundation's proprietary social platform for entrepreneurs to connect, work, and network.

The team, comprising of TEF and Google employees who are UI/UX designers, policy experts, designers, engineers, software developers and others, soon got to work and for the past six months have been hard at work revamping the platform with the goal of making it accessible for even more 1 million Africans than those who currently use the platform. Below, some members of the team share what they've been up to and their experience so far.

Jakub Adámek, *Frontend Engineer at Google.*

I am happy that I could participate in the Fellowship and help a great African philanthropy grow. I led the frontend engineering part of the Fellowship work. It was challenging to never meet in person and we had to work through cultural and work style differences. I am glad for all the reliability and training improvements we achieved. I hope we sowed seeds for more productive software development with Jira tickets, code reviews and automated tests which can elevate TEF's software cycle in the coming years.

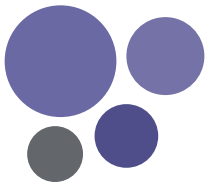




Fabienne Brookman-Amisshah, *Head of Ads Commercialization, Global Business Strategy & Operations at Google.*

The Fellowship was an opportunity for me to do something I've been wanting to do - give back in a meaningful way. Being from Ghana, and having a business background, I've been in search of the right opportunity to use my skills to advance economic development on the continent. So, when I stumbled upon the Fellowship, I was excited to get to work. What I learned is that the same three things lend themselves to having an impact. You need a great team, which we had in the Google Fellows group and in our TEF partners. You need open communication, which is evidenced in my almost daily touchpoints with someone on the TEF team. You need a strong reason why; and, we all had the collective goal of helping the next 1 million African entrepreneurs. And while there's much more work to do, I'm happy with the progress we made together.





Joshua Praise, Website Officer at the Tony Elumelu Foundation.

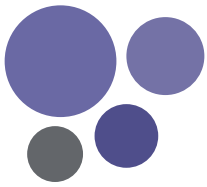
The Foundation recently partnered with Google to launch the first-of-its-kind African Fellowship Programme and I was privileged to be a part of the technical team of the project. By working closely with the Google experts, we were able to upscale the functionalities of the Foundation's proprietary digital platform, TEFCConnect to meet the project's objective of training 1 million Africans. At the end of the 6-month project, we were able to remodel our Learning Management System and I got to use my UI/UX skills to contribute to the enhancement of the overall user experience on TEFCConnect. I really look forward to working with the Google team on more exciting and impactful projects in the future.



Myroslava Dzikovska, Backend Engineer at Google.

I viewed this fellowship as a way to give back because, as a very young student in Ukraine, I received a start up grant from George Soros Foundation. I used it to pay for the entrance tests for graduate school in the US, something that would have been impossible when my mother's salary was \$20 per month. Helping young people achieve their dreams is a worthwhile endeavor. I have worked on improving the reliability of the TEFCConnect back end, though it required touching all parts of the code and infrastructure. I gained new technical insight by comparing the technologies used at Google and TEF, that was a great learning experience for me. I hope TEF continues with the technology we developed for a greater impact in the coming years.





Sebastien Floodpage, Program Manager at Google.

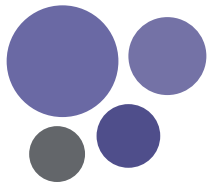
As Google.org, we decided to launch this Fellowship with the Tony Elumelu Foundation because of the incredible impact TEF already has on hundreds of thousands of entrepreneurs across the African continent. Our 8 Google.org Fellows (Etem, Fabienne, Kai, Jakub, Magali, Sharif, Myroslava & Essien) left their day jobs at Google to work full-time pro-bono for 6 months with the Foundation. Together, they built the future of TEFConnect.net, with a reliable platform to reach the next 1 million African entrepreneurs, free mobile-friendly courses to learn business skills, and an enhanced community experience to connect African entrepreneurs more seamlessly. We're delighted about the impact that was achieved in six months, and can't wait to see all the most promising African entrepreneurs grow their skills, access training and financing, and build their businesses as well as the future of Africa.



Oniye Okolo, Policy and Partnerships at the Tony Elumelu Foundation.



It's been amazing working on this fellowship from its inception and thinking creatively around how both organizations could work together to create this wonderful opportunity for all of us to learn! As the project manager leading this for the Foundation, it gave me an opportunity to learn, explore and really think about the future of our platform TEFConnect. From the planning, and design sprint, to the announcement event in March as well as the many brainstorming sessions; this



experience has taught us a lot. Most importantly, on the need for collaboration, sharing ideas and resources and committing to supporting African entrepreneurs. While the fellowship lasted 6 months, all the efforts, time, and resources to make this happen took a whole lot more than 6 months. I am immensely grateful to have been a part of this project, to our continuous work with Google and to the future of our platform, TEFCConnect, and more importantly for the opportunity to grow!

Magali Boizot-Roche, Senior Software Engineer at Google.

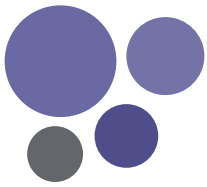
At Google, I always ask myself: how can we have a more positive impact on the world? How can we leverage technology for worthwhile causes? It's been an honour to be given this chance through Google's partnership with TEF, to make a small impact on the lives of African entrepreneurs. I strongly believe that the new training



platform will benefit TEF's users in unforeseen ways. We already see people interacting in forums in ways they couldn't before. More people connecting means more ideas firing, and more opportunities for growth and change across the continent. I'm also very hopeful about the impact of the Google Primer bite-sized courses that we've

incorporated into TEFCConnect: these are free, so they don't depend on funding and anyone can take them. The new platform and additional content will enable TEF to scale and grow and empower even more entrepreneurs.





Kai Johnson, Tech lead for the TEF-Google fellowship.

I joined the fellowship with TEF to learn about cloud development, help solve technical problems, and share best practices gleaned from my career so far. I had more startling insights than I expected, though - I underestimated the size of the program, the challenges of network connectivity, and the language barriers in Africa (this is where my English-speaking privilege glares brightest). The TEF team themselves wear more hats than I imagined, doing fundraising, public policy, and outreach, along with program support.

The most meaningful moments, though, were in the conversations where I saw the pieces connect - the entrepreneurs who secured funding and who now employ dozens, who took their own ideas into a democratised marketplace previously out of reach, or who addressed needs in their communities overlooked by others. All the

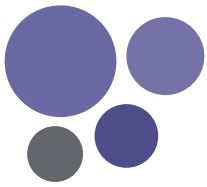


effort and resources that go into the Tony Elumelu Foundation culminate in the success stories of those entrepreneurs. I am proud and humbled to have been a part of it, and I look forward to what more comes out of the work of TEF in the years to come.

Destiny Akabuogu, IT Support at the Tony Elumelu Foundation.



I was first of all excited because of the novelty of this partnership between The Tony Elumelu Foundation and Google.org – which is the first of its kind in Africa. We had an opportunity to work on Africa’s largest digital platform for entrepreneurs to scale social impact and level the playing field for SMEs. While working with the team, I learned how to scale platforms as subscribers grow, proactive monitoring and evaluation of digital systems, code



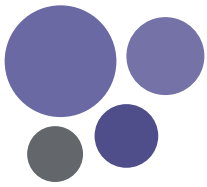
optimisation and system integration. Looking back at the last six months, there's a clear story of growth, resilience and most importantly, impact. It's been a great pleasure working with the Google fellows and I'm proud of all the milestones we have reached as a team.

Etem Bate Agborsangaya, Senior Technical Program Manager at Google.

I have always been interested in working with Google.org on a project that will have a real impact on people's livelihoods. When the opportunity with TEF came along, I was incredibly thrilled to join the first Google-sponsored fellowship with an African-based organization.

Particularly one focused on growing entrepreneurship across the continent and did not perpetuate the usual narrative of war and poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa. Being Cameroonian, this was something that really appealed to me. I'm proud of our team and proud of the work that we did in these short 6 months and the impact that we had and will continue to have. I'm proud of TEF for the role the foundation is playing in transforming the continent into a global powerhouse. Because of this fellowship I've been inspired to get more involved in projects back home and join forces with my almost 80-year-old mother, a veteran educator and entrepreneur making a difference in Cameroon.





Olalekan Wahab, IT & Software Development at The Tony Elumelu Foundation.

It has been a fascinating experience working with the google team to build a TEFConnect platform that can truly empower African entrepreneurs and scale their businesses. I worked in the capacity of Tech Lead on the TEF's side and in collaboration with google team worked on improving the platforms reliability and stability, improving security, enhancing implementing new

processes and establishing quality TEF Development Team that would carry on the vision of improving African entrepreneurship. Working with talented individuals from google provided the opportunities in enhancing my inherent abilities and also picking up new ones, irrespective of diverse set of technologies used in the two partnering organisations. It was a great experience and I believe the TEF team would be able to carry on the vision from where the fellowship stopped.



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*Only entrepreneurship can
create opportunity where
none seemingly exists.*

- Tony O. Elumelu, CON



Keep Up With TEF



The TEF X Google Fellowship on June 30, which brings an end to a successful six-month programme focused on optimising the Foundation's platform where African entrepreneurs can connect, learn, and network with other like-minded business people.

1

Our Founder Tony O. Elumelu was a panellist at the 2022 29th Afreximbank Annual Meeting where he spoke passionately on the state of entrepreneurship on the continent and reiterated the need for a more Africapiralist approach to developing the African continent.

2

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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

