

SOCIAL INNOVATORS PROGRAMME AND AWARDS



THEME:

AFRICA AS THE SECTOR

Maximising Possibilities through Technology,
Finance and Policy



CONFERENCE | 20
REPORT | 25



Disclaimer

This conference report provides an account of the events and activities that took place during the 2025 Social Innovators Programme and Awards (SIPA). The team apologises for any errors or unintentional omissions and would appreciate being informed of any corrections that should be incorporated.

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Proposed citation: LEAP Africa (2025). Social Innovators Programme and Awards (SIPA) 2025 report: Africa as THE sector – Maximising possibilities through technology, finance and policy

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



Acknowledgements



It is with deep pride and gratitude that we present the 2025 Social Innovators Programme and Awards report. This convening reflects LEAP Africa's continued evolution as a pan-African institution and the expanding mandate of the directorates encompassing Programmes, MERL & Impact, Innovation & Technology, and Policy Advocacy. Our theme, Africa as THE Sector: Maximising Possibilities through Technology, Finance and Policy, could not have been more timely. It captures the urgency and opportunity before us as we reimagine how technology, finance, and policy together shape a future where African ingenuity is fully recognised, resourced, and scaled.

I extend my sincere appreciation to our Board, led by Mrs Clare Omatseye, whose guidance and belief in youth-led transformation remain foundational. I am equally grateful to our partners and collaborators including UNDP Nigeria, ANDE West Africa, Africa Venture Philanthropy Alliance, Impact Investors Foundation, Impact Amplifier, the Nigeria Youth Futures Fund, Enterprise Development Centre, Kenya Climate Ventures, Ashoka Africa, Dalberg, Deloitte, William Davidson Institute of the University of Michigan, and many others; whose contributions enriched both the dialogue and outcomes of this convening.

My heartfelt thanks go to the distinguished speakers, moderators, and facilitators whose insights elevated the discourse, including Hon. Michael Onyango, Dr. Nneka Okekearu, Karina Karunwi, Marie-Noelle Nwokolo, Tunde Onakoya, Prof. Val Okaru-Bisant, and all contributors who challenged us to think boldly. I also honour the exceptional young innovators, founders, and pitchers whose courage, creativity, and conviction are the true heartbeat of SIPA.

We remain profoundly grateful to our media partners, whose commitment and professionalism ensured that the message and momentum of SIPA 2025 reached far beyond the room.

Finally, I celebrate the extraordinary LEAP Africa team whose brilliance, discipline, and relentless commitment made this convening possible. Thank you for embodying the spirit of excellence, innovation, and leadership that defines our work.

As we look ahead, may this report serve not only as a record of what was achieved but as a call to continue building the systems, partnerships, and imagination required to unlock Africa's full potential.

D. Amabelle Nwakanma

Director of Programmes & Partnerships, LEAP Africa

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



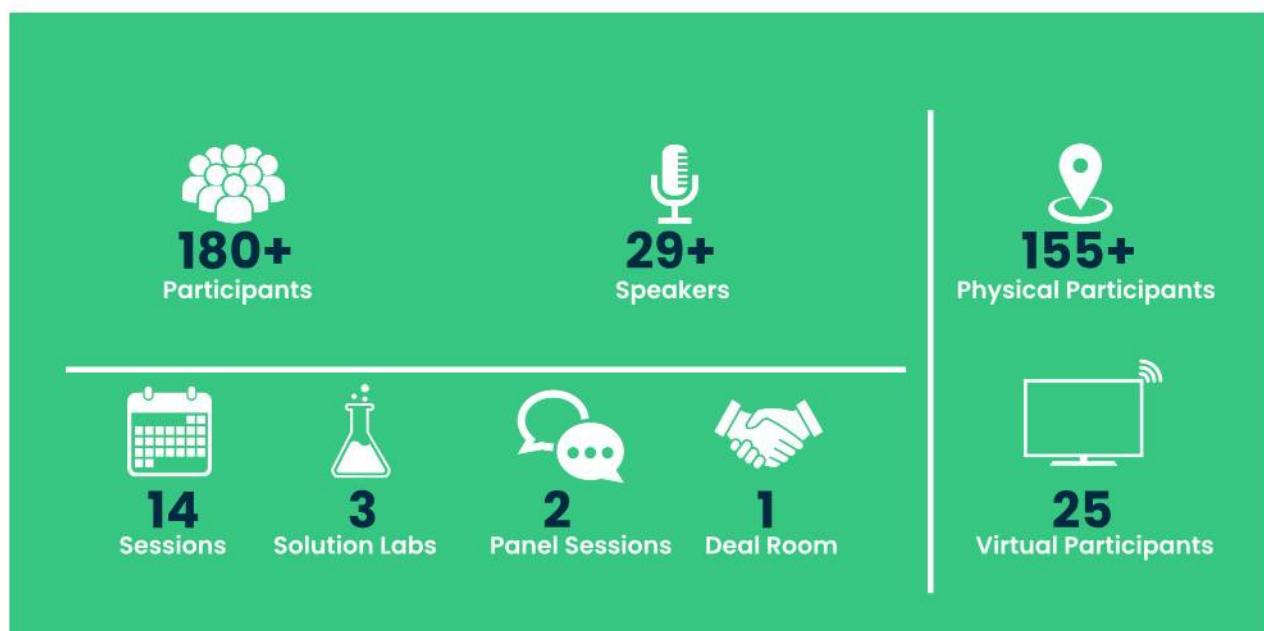
Executive Summary

The 12th edition of the Social Innovators Programme and Awards (SIPA), convened annually by LEAP Africa, was held on 25 November 2025 and brought together more than 180 participants. This included over 155 physical attendees and 25 virtual participants. As one of the continent's longest-standing platforms for advancing youth-led social innovation, SIPA 2025 reaffirmed LEAP Africa's commitment to nurturing changemakers and strengthening Africa's innovation ecosystems.

The conference, themed Africa as THE Sector: Maximising Possibilities through Technology, Finance and Policy, featured 29 speakers and 14 sessions, including two panel discussions, three Solution Labs, one deal room and a breakfast session. Collectively, these sessions created a rich environment for engagement, learning, and action. They enabled policymakers, innovators, funders, Entrepreneur Support Organisations (ESOs), and young leaders to explore the intersections of technology, policy, finance, and community-led innovation while surfacing new opportunities for collaboration and sector-level transformation.

SIPA 2025 aimed to deepen understanding of Africa's innovation potential, strengthen the support infrastructure for entrepreneurs, and celebrate excellence in social impact. The event served as both a reflection of LEAP Africa's enduring influence and a springboard for emerging perspectives, solutions, and partnerships that continue to shape the continent's future.

Overview of Conference Participants



Key Outcomes

SIPA 2025 generated a range of high-level insights and collaborative outcomes that underline the evolving nature of Africa's development and innovation landscape. The key outcomes include:

► **Strengthened appreciation of Africa as an integrated innovation space**

Speakers highlighted the need to reframe Africa as a cohesive sector filled with opportunity, rather than a fragmented set of markets. Conversations emphasised the importance of regional collaboration, shared data, and cross-border policies that enable scalable solutions.

► **Increased recognition of the role of technology in driving inclusion**

Panel discussions underscored how artificial intelligence, digital infrastructure, and sector-specific innovation can expand access to services in agriculture, education, health, governance, and finance. Participants explored how technology can bridge divides rather than widen them when guided by responsible policy and equitable investment.

► **Commitment to community-centered and locally driven approaches**

Both panelists and Solution Lab participants stressed that Africa's innovations must grow from local context. Creative expression, storytelling, and cultural intelligence were identified as powerful vehicles for community engagement and solution design.

► **Enhanced collaboration among ESOs**

The ESO Working Session surfaced shared challenges such as ecosystem fragmentation, funding constraints, and duplication of efforts. Participants committed to coordinated mapping, stronger partnerships, and clearer sustainability pathways for social enterprises.

► **Youth-led innovation showcased through Speed Talks and Solution Labs**

Through the Speed Talks and Solution Labs, young entrepreneurs presented practical, high-potential solutions across civic-tech, agriculture, circular economy, energy, health, and digital learning. The NYFF Hackathon (Solution Lab 1) revealed the strong potential of youth innovators, while also highlighting the need for better storytelling and business model development.

► **Celebration of excellence through inaugural awards**

SIPA 2025 introduced two new awards: the Social Impact Award and the Outstanding Innovator Award, to honour outstanding innovators and social impact leaders, reinforcing the conference's role in recognising and elevating Africa's changemakers.

Recommendations

Drawing from the discussions and collaborative sessions, the following recommendations outline practical steps for strengthening Africa's innovation ecosystem.

For Policy Makers

- Improve regulatory clarity to support early-stage innovators and creative practitioners.
- Prioritise digital inclusion by investing in broadband infrastructure, public access points, and digital literacy programmes.
- Encourage regionally harmonised policies that enable cross-border scaling of African innovations.
- Integrate creative economy strategies into national and urban development plans.

For Entrepreneur Support Organisations (ESOs)

- Strengthen ecosystem mapping to reduce duplication and identify complementary services.
- Develop sustainable operating models that reduce reliance on external grants.
- Provide founders with capability-building in storytelling, pitching, financial literacy, and investment readiness.
- Foster cross-ESO collaborations, including consortia and shared measurement frameworks.

For Innovators and Entrepreneurs

- Prioritise user-centred solutions grounded in local contexts and realities.
- Distinguish between grants as catalytic capital and revenue models needed for long-term sustainability.
- Adopt low-code and no-code tools to accelerate prototyping and early testing.
- Build strong teams with clearly defined expertise to strengthen investor confidence.

For Donors and Funders

- Support blended finance mechanisms that meet innovators at different stages of growth.
- Invest in digital public infrastructure and community technology hubs.
- Back ecosystem-strengthening initiatives that improve trust, transparency, and data-sharing across stakeholders.
- Showcase successful collaborations to model what effective partnership can achieve and encourage further investment.

The SIPA 2025 Conference reinforced the understanding that Africa's innovation landscape is rich with potential. By combining creative capability, technological advancement, thoughtful policy, and sustained collaboration, stakeholders can accelerate inclusive development across the continent. SIPA 2025 has set the tone for deeper partnerships, clearer commitments, and renewed energy for building an Africa where innovation thrives and impact is amplified.

SOCIAL INNOVATORS PROGRAMME AND AWARDS 2025

Give every child
across the world class
education

Make Africa a
fully empowered &
inclusive, self-sufficient
Continent

A continent
that is
innovative,
inclusive
and
collaborative

Develop
4WD

IS YOUR
MENT

?



Introduction

The Social Innovators Programme and Awards (SIPA) 2025 brought together one of Africa's most diverse communities of social entrepreneurs, investors, policymakers, and ecosystem builders. Held in Lagos in November 2025, the convening created a space for learning, co-creation, and celebration. This report presents a synthesis of the key conversations, insights, and outcomes from the event. It documents the ideas, innovations, and partnerships that emerged, and provides a record that can guide continued collaboration beyond the conference.

Now in its second decade, SIPA has become a continental platform for surfacing bold ideas and supporting enterprises that respond to Africa's most complex challenges. From poverty and inequality to digital exclusion, environmental fragility, and limited access to essential services, social innovators across the continent continue to respond with resilience and creativity. SIPA 2025, the 12th edition of this convening, affirmed this momentum and invited leaders from across sectors to shape a stronger and more connected innovation ecosystem for Africa.

Theme Overview: Africa as THE Sector

The theme for SIPA 2025, Africa as THE Sector: Maximising Possibilities through Technology, Finance and Policy, challenged participants to rethink the continent's role in the global economy. Rather than positioning Africa as a passive market, the theme framed it as a dynamic sector in its own right, defined by fast-moving demographic growth, deep cultural creativity, rising technology adoption, and an expanding social innovation space.

The framing of Africa as the sector emphasises that the continent is not only a destination for solutions but a generator of them. It reflects the growing intersection of policy, finance, and technology as engines that can unlock new value. During the conference, discussions explored how closing the digital divide, strengthening sector-specific innovation, agricultural innovation, and enabling smart regulation can shift Africa from the margins of innovation to the centre of global opportunity. The theme underscored the importance of building systems that position African enterprises to lead, influence policy, and create solutions with global relevance.

Conference Objectives and Expected Outcomes

SIPA 2025 was designed as a working convening that blended co-creation, strategic dialogue, and public celebration. The central objective was to catalyse partnerships, strategies, and investments that would accelerate the growth and sustainability of social enterprises across Africa.

The conference pursued three core goals:

• CO-CREATING PRACTICAL ROADMAPS

to address the finance, policy, capacity, and technology barriers that limit the scale of social enterprises. Through solution labs and design-thinking sessions, multidisciplinary teams generated ideas and prototypes aimed at becoming investable pilots.

• STRENGTHENING AND EXPANDING RELATIONSHIPS

among social entrepreneurs, impact investors, policymakers, corporates, and enterprise support organisations. By combining roundtables, deal rooms, and networking sessions, the event created opportunities for collaboration and long-term commitment.

• SHOWCASING AND CELEBRATING PIONEERING INNOVATIONS

that demonstrate what is possible when African talent, capital, and policy work together. The Innovation Showcase and Awards presentations highlighted enterprises with strong models and measurable impact, inspiring broader adoption and investment.

INTRODUCTION



Introduction

The expected outcomes included the emergence of a set of co-designed pilot initiatives, new partnerships and investment commitments, and greater visibility for innovators and their solutions. SIPA 2025 also aimed to produce a communiqué that reflected shared policy priorities and investment needs across the ecosystem.

Together, these elements positioned SIPA 2025 as a catalyst for the next generation of social enterprise growth in Africa and a platform that reaffirms Africa's place as the sector for innovation, influence, and inclusive development.





“

Young people are leading change efforts and transforming the lives of people in their communities despite daunting challenges. This is the premise of our platform.

”

The conference opened with welcoming remarks from Kehinde Ayeni, Executive Director, LEAP Africa, who set the tone for the day by recognising the distinguished guests, partners, and the long-standing community supporting the Social Innovators Programme & Awards (SIPA). She reaffirmed LEAP Africa's mission as a youth-focused organisation committed to developing ethical, innovative young leaders capable of driving transformation across the continent.

Ms. Ayeni emphasised the global recognition of young people as vital contributors to national development, noting that their creativity, resilience, and increasing engagement in social issues have positioned them as key changemakers. She highlighted that SIPA was intentionally designed to support these emerging leaders through a year-long accelerator that strengthens their capacity, sustainability, and investment readiness across the Sustainable Development Goals.

Framing the purpose of the convening, she outlined three expected outcomes for the day:

- cultivating stronger commitments to the social entrepreneurship ecosystem in Nigeria and beyond,
- facilitating open conversations on ecosystem-strengthening approaches, and
- expanding access to resources for innovators and the communities they serve.

She concluded by expressing confidence in the day's agenda and the insights expected from speakers across Africa, Europe, and the Americas.

Kehinde Ayeni
Executive Director, LEAP Africa



In her vibrant and energetic welcome address, Clare Omatseye, Board Chair of LEAP Africa, opened the 12th edition of SIPA with a powerful call to action. She began by acknowledging the excitement in the room and celebrating the remarkable learning already unfolding from the morning's Breakfast Session, reminding participants that "learning is a continuum." Speaking on behalf of the Board of LEAP Africa, she formally welcomed delegates and noted the significance of convening innovators, policymakers, funders, and ecosystem builders who are collectively shaping the continent's future.

Reflecting on LEAP Africa's 12-year journey, Ms. Omatseye affirmed that the organisation's impact has been made possible through the commitment of visionary partners who have believed in and supported the aspirations of young innovators across Africa. She emphasised that SIPA is not simply an awards platform, but a movement powered by collaboration, shared purpose, and bold thinking.

Turning to the 2025 theme; Africa as THE Sector: Maximising Possibilities through Technology, Finance and Policy, she urged participants to imagine an Africa that works as "one unified sector," not a patchwork of fragmented markets operating in silos. This vision, she noted, requires a paradigm shift, a rethinking of how transformative change is enabled and sustained across the continent.

Omatseye highlighted **three critical drivers** for unlocking Africa's future:

- **Technology**, to break barriers and scale solutions beyond borders;
- **Finance**, as "the blood" that fuels sustainable innovation beyond philanthropy;
- **Policy**, which must become flexible, inclusive, and trackable to create an enabling environment for innovation and entrepreneurship.

She stressed that Africa's growth demands a deeper alignment between private sector ambition and public good, calling the audience to move "from success to significance." Collaboration, she declared, is now a strategic requirement: "**Collaboration is the new innovation.**"

Reaffirming that Africa's greatest resource is its people, Ms. Omatseye encouraged participants to engage boldly throughout the day—ask questions, challenge perspectives, and immerse themselves in the learning opportunities. She charged the audience to embrace SIPA 2025 as both a continuation of LEAP Africa's journey and the beginning of a new chapter for every innovator in the room.

She closed with an uplifting reminder of the continent's promise: "The time is now for Africa... We can do it. Yes, we can?"

Clare Omatseye
Board Chair, LEAP Africa

“

The African continent is rising. You in this room are going to make it rise even further.

”

BREAKFAST SESSION



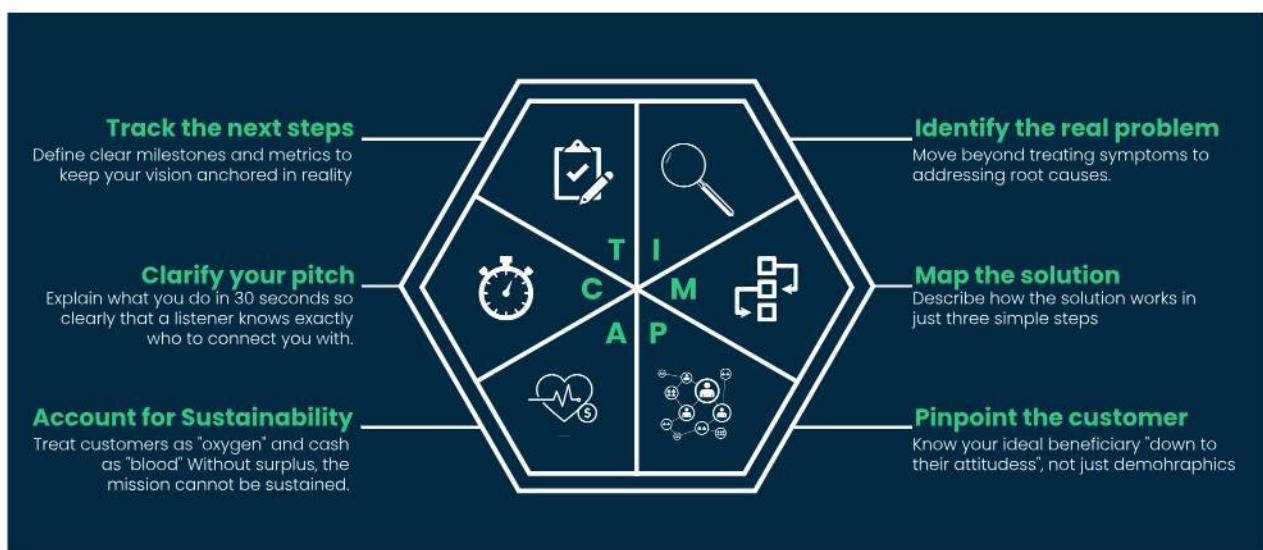
Breakfast Session

The SIPA day actually opened with a practical, hands-on Breakfast Session led by Dr. Nneka Okekear, Director, Enterprise Development Centre. Rather than a lecture, the session was a workshop: no slides, lots of conversation, and a focus on simple frameworks that founders, social innovators and social entrepreneurs can use immediately. Dr. Okekear invited participants to stop firefighting for a moment and “think,” to test assumptions, reframe problems and tighten their models. The session was brisk, interactive and intentionally tactical: it provided a compact toolkit for the participants to sharpen what they do before the formal panels began.

The session was aimed at helping participants create focused clarity, supporting social entrepreneurs to identify the real problem they are solving, map a compact solution, and ensure their model is sustainable, targeted, and trackable.

The IMPACT framework

Dr. Okekear presented a six-part “Impact” framework as the backbone of the workshop. She asked everyone to have notebooks and to work through the elements quickly and honestly. The framework, which participants used as a guide for rapid diagnosis and refinement, was outlined as follows:



IMPACT

I: Identify the real problem

Dr. Okekearu opened with a sharp point: founders often treat symptoms, not root causes. Using the analogy of treating a headache with painkillers when the underlying issue is dehydration, she said participants must ask: "Are we really solving the problem we think we are?" She pressed entrepreneurs to surface the underlying condition behind the problem they address.

To reinforce this point, participants completed an exercise: drafting one sentence that identifies the real underlying problem their venture is tackling, expressed plainly and without narrative. One participant working with teenage girls, for example, initially framed their work as bridging a mentoring gap, but through guided questioning reframed the core problem as "reorientation and values," with mentorship and skills development as tools rather than ends in themselves. This shift illustrated the facilitator's central message: solving symptoms can keep organisations busy, but only addressing the real problem leads to meaningful, scalable impact.

M: Map the solution (in three steps)

solution works in just three steps and within about one minute. Dr. Okekearu argued that if a solution cannot be expressed simply, as "step one, step two, step three," there is likely excess complexity and "weight" in the model that undermines efficiency.

Participants attempted live three-step descriptions of their models, such as an educator matching service that recruits, vets, trains and deploys teachers, prompting a critical question: should the process start with recruiting teachers or mapping community needs first? This led to a powerful insight that many social enterprises instinctively design from a supply perspective ("what we have and want to give") rather than a demand perspective ("what the community actually needs"), risking misalignment, rework and wasted resources.

P: Pinpoint the customer or beneficiary

The third component asked participants to "pinpoint the customer or the beneficiary," borrowing from for-profit practice by insisting on detailed personas rather than vague target groups. Dr. Okekearu emphasised that social innovators must know their ideal beneficiary "down to their attitudes," including language, trauma history, aspirations and sensitivity to teaching or service styles.

Examples shared in the room included a housing tech venture mapping tenants, landlords, agents and artisans, and then being pushed to clarify which specific tenant segments (e.g., students, young professionals in particular cities) they truly serve. Through these exchanges, participants saw that impact work often involves serving multiple "customers" (beneficiaries, funders, institutional partners), but clarity about the primary beneficiary is essential to designing services, training and partnerships that truly work.

A: Account sustainability

The discussion then turned to sustainability, focusing on revenue streams and cost discipline as non-negotiable elements of mission-driven work. Dr. Okekearu drew a vivid analogy between a business and a human body: customers or beneficiaries are "oxygen," and cash is "blood"; without the right customers or sufficient cash flow, even the most inspiring enterprise becomes weak, anaemic and eventually collapses.

Key sustainability lessons included:

- Social enterprises must avoid "customers from hell," clients whose demands, discount expectations or payment delays contaminate the business system, even if they pay.
- Non-profits should think in terms of surplus rather than "profit," but the principle is the same: without surplus, they cannot meet obligations, pay staff, maintain tools or deliver consistent programmes.
- Cross-subsidy models, "taking from the rich to subsidise for the poor," allow organisations to charge symbolic or reduced fees in low-income communities while maintaining viability.

IMPACT

C: Clarify your pitch

A distinctive and engaging part of the session was a live exercise on 30-second pitches, framed as a practical test of clarity. Dr. Okekearu argued that a strong social entrepreneur should be able to explain what they do in 30 seconds so clearly that the listener immediately knows whom to connect them with, even if no direct funding is available.

Volunteers were invited to the front to deliver their pitches in 30 seconds. The room then reflected on which pitches were instantly understandable and why, highlighting brevity, focus and concrete outcomes as hallmarks of effective communication.

T: Take or track next steps

Towards the close of the framework, Dr. Okekearu spoke about the "T" as both "taking or tracking the next steps," recognising that social entrepreneurs and their ecosystems are constantly evolving. Participants were encouraged to define clear "promised lands," milestones and metrics, for example, a target of 1,000 verified rentals a year or including one million new female farmers within 24 months, then break these into monthly and weekly targets that make progress or gaps visible.

The facilitator challenged overly ambitious or vague aspirations by asking practical follow-up questions such as "What does success look like?" and "How many do you need to do every month?", demonstrating how numeric discipline keeps visions anchored in reality.

PEER LEARNING AND MENTORING OFFERS

The session maintained a high level of interaction, with participants frequently engaging in back-and-forth exchanges about customer definitions, failed assumptions and operational challenges. Questions ranged from how to distinguish between customers and beneficiaries in multi-stakeholder models, to whether resilience alone should guarantee entrepreneurial success, to how early-stage non-profits can move beyond dependence on donations.

In response, Dr. Okekearu reinforced the importance of moderating expectations, managing perceptions, and acknowledging that many strong founders still fail when sustainability, cash flow, governance or team capacity are neglected. She closed the session by offering a limited number of free mentoring slots to help selected participants unpack their models in greater depth, underscoring the session's commitment to practical follow-through beyond the conference room. As a result, the mentoring group has been created, highlighting the continued support for participants.



Goodwill Remarks

GOODWILL REMARKS

SIPA 2025 also featured a series of goodwill messages delivered by four ecosystem leaders whose organisations span philanthropy, enterprise support, impact investing, and climate-focused venture capital across Africa and beyond. Their remarks reinforced the conference theme, Africa as THE Sector, by underscoring the urgency, opportunity, and shared responsibility required to strengthen the continent's innovation landscape. Collectively, their messages highlighted the importance of collaboration, capital mobilisation, evidence-driven practice, and ecosystem partnerships in unlocking scalable social impact.

ANDE WEST AFRICA



“

We work in adult matchmaking. What do you think? That doesn't end in a dinner date, it ends more in ecosystem building and more access to finance.

”

Karina Karunwi, Chapter Head of ANDE West Africa, opened the goodwill messages with an energetic acknowledgment of the diverse community gathered and commended LEAP Africa's intentional convening design. Connecting her remarks to the theme Africa as THE Sector, she underscored the need for the continent to be viewed through a unified lens where technology, finance, and policy work together rather than in isolation. She highlighted ANDE's role in strengthening entrepreneur-support organisations across Africa and other regions through research, capacity building, impact measurement, and investor-focused training. With characteristic humour, she described ANDE's work as "adult matchmaking," focused on building meaningful, long-term partnerships that expand access to catalytic finance. She encouraged participants to be intentional about forming connections throughout the convening and to translate those interactions into sustained collaboration.

Karina Karunwi
Chapter Head, ANDE West Africa

Goodwill Remarks

AFRICA VENTURE

PHILANTHROPY ALLIANCE (AVPA)



“

Africa has a GDP of 2.8 trillion dollars... The market capitalisation of Nvidia is 4.8 trillion dollars. This is nearly double the GDP of Africa

”

Tochukwu Ezeukwu, Regional Director of AVPA West Africa, framed AVPA as a pan-African network building investor capacity to unlock capital for social investment and sustainable development goals. He shared striking statistics: Africa's \$2.8 trillion GDP lags behind Nvidia's \$4.8 trillion market cap, Apple's \$4 trillion, and Microsoft's \$3.8 trillion, signalling vast room for innovation, productivity, technology, and capital deployment. Marking SIPA's 12th edition, he drew playful parallels to universal "12s" like zodiac signs and apostles, congratulating the event as a milestone for ecosystem redemption.

Tochukwu Ezeukwu

Regional Director, AVPA West Africa

IMPACT INVESTORS FOUNDATION (IIF)



“

Passion is the spark, capital is the fuel, accountability is the engine, data is the compass.

”

On her first SIPA attendance, Chizoba Ada Emmanuel-Awakessien, Chief Operating Officer, IIF, represented CEO Etemore Glover, honouring the platform's legacy of courage, creativity, and change. She declared Africa's true wealth in its resilient young innovators who design solutions, rewrite narratives, and prove impact as a scalable engine, with SIPA uniquely nurturing talent through skills, networks, and strategic clarity. Candidly, she stressed that innovation requires capital, accountability, data, and long-term support from partners, not charity, but nation-building, to finance, de-risk, and enable systemic change.

Chizoba Ada Emmanuel-Awakessien

Chief Operating Officer, IIF.



Goodwill Remarks

KENYA CLIMATE VENTURES



“

Africa is getting ready, Africa, we are the future. I say we are ready, and that future is now.

”

Victor Ndiege, CEO of KCV, joining virtually, encouraged participants as a climate investor fostering inclusive enterprises amid evolving challenges from social entrepreneurship to climate action. He highlighted persistent barriers like finance access, governance, and talent gaps, urging Africans to serve unique African markets with the data, goodwill, and energy already present. SIPA offered a platform to showcase track records, drive market progress, and actualise visions for community upliftment, affirming that Africa's future is now.

Victor Ndiege
CEO, KCV



The Pan-African Frontier: Unlocking Value at the Intersection of AI, Finance, and Policy

Positioned at the heart of SIPA 2025's theme, Africa as THE Sector, the Catalyst Speech delivered by Hon. Michael Onyango offered a compelling, unfiltered reflection on the continent's next frontier: capturing value from artificial intelligence and emerging technologies through smart investment, policy reform, and intentional data governance. Speaking virtually, Hon. Onyango challenged participants to rethink the foundations of Africa's digital economy, framing technology not as a distant abstraction but as a lived, daily force already transforming communities at scale.

Technology as Lived Experience, Not Future Promise

Hon. Onyango framed technology as a present reality rather than a distant aspiration, drawing on his experience leading The Forgotten Bottom Millions (4BM). The initiative reaches over half a million people weekly in Kenya via WhatsApp, connecting users to a wide range of opportunities at no cost. What began unintentionally has evolved into a form of social infrastructure, enabling access to jobs, scholarships, and learning resources.

For Hon. Onyango, this was evidence of technology's power to democratise opportunity when designed around real needs, not theory. As he noted, "This is to show you what technology is doing, not what it can do." He reinforced this perspective with insights from his role as Vice Chair of Kenya's first national task force on Artificial Intelligence and Distributed Ledgers, underscoring the importance of Africans actively shaping emerging technologies rather than consuming them passively.

What Value Are We Really Unlocking?

Transitioning to the core of his message, Hon. Onyango provoked the audience with a foundational question: Before we talk about unlocking value, do we understand the value we are trying to unlock?

He illustrated the scale of the opportunity by highlighting the \$4.5 billion in AI-driven economic value created in Africa in 2025, projected to grow to over \$16 billion within five years. Yet even this figure represents only 0.03% of global AI value. This disparity, he emphasised, should not dishearten Africa but galvanise it: there is a vast frontier of economic potential the continent has yet to access.

However, unlocking this value requires addressing foundational constraints: reliable and affordable power, data infrastructure, and governance. Without these enablers, Africa will remain at the margins of the global AI economy.

Data: Africa's Untapped Gold Rush

Data featured as a central pillar of Hon. Onyango's argument. Africans generate vast amounts of data that power global platforms, yet little of the resulting value returns to the continent. These platforms, he stressed, are not free out of generosity but because African data holds immense economic worth.

He reframed Africa's constraints, including low internet penetration and power limitations, as strategic openings rather than setbacks: "It is the gold rush right now for data... but Africa cannot continue being displaced in this gold rush." The implication was clear. Africa must invest in data centres, governance frameworks, and systems that ensure value remains within the continent.



CATALYST SPEECH

Challenging Imported Policies and Mindsets

Hon. Onyango also challenged the financial policy frameworks that shape African economies. He argued that many such policies, designed externally by institutions such as the IMF and World Bank, were never intended to position Africans as value owners or innovation leaders. Instead, they have historically maintained Africa as a source of cheap labour.

He urged the audience to critically evaluate not only the technologies they adopt, but the architectures, incentives, and power structures behind them. Similarly, he cautioned against over-celebration of individual certifications or achievements that do not translate into improved livelihoods. His message was sharp: Africa must prioritise real economic outcomes over symbolic progress.

Decentralising Opportunity: Beyond Lagos-Centric Thinking

Returning to the central theme of Africa as THE Sector, Hon. Onyango reminded the audience that true value creation will not emerge solely from major urban hubs. "Lagos will never be Nigeria, and Nigeria will never be Lagos... The true unlocking of value will come from Borno, from Cross River, if we invest properly."

A Call to Reclaim Africa's Digital Future

Closing his address, Hon. Onyango called on Africans to reclaim authorship of Africa's digital future. He urged that:

- **Own and localise data infrastructure.**
- **Understand who designs the technologies we use, and why.**
- **Invest in systems that serve African realities, not external agendas.**
- **Prioritise economic value creation over symbolic achievement.**
- **Let history inform, but never limit, the continent's future.**

His closing message was both caution and possibility. Without deliberate action, Africa risks remaining peripheral in the global technology economy. With intentional alignment of policy, investment, and AI around African interests, however, the continent can unlock a new phase of economic power and self-determined growth.

Hon Michael Inyango

PANEL SESSIONS

United Nations
Global Compact

#UnitingBusiness for a better world



Panel Sessions

One of the major highlights of SIPA 2025 was the Panel Sessions, two focused and insight-rich conversations examining the forces shaping Africa's digital and innovation landscape. Together, they explored how policy, technology, finance, and social innovation intersect to influence development outcomes across the continent. The first panel addressed the challenge of closing Africa's digital divide, while the second examined how sector-tech innovation can be cultivated and scaled sustainably. Building on the theme Africa as THE Sector, the discussions reinforced the idea that Africa is not a peripheral participant in global innovation, but a domain of opportunity whose scale and diversity demand intentional investment and strategic policy alignment. Across both sessions, a consistent message emerged: Africa's future competitiveness depends as much on inclusion, governance, and community agency as it does on infrastructure and capital.

PANEL SESSION 1:

From Village to Virtual: Closing Africa's Digital Divide with Smart Policy and Investment

The first panel session was moderated by Chimdindu Onwudiegbu, Associate Partner at Dalberg, and featured panelists Angelou Ezeilo (Co-President, Ashoka Africa), Abimbola Ogundare (Lead, Deloitte's West Africa Strategy and Transactions), Elhadji Malick Soumare (Deputy Chief of Party, Entrepreneuriat & Investissement, Senegal), and Naomi Emeka Nwokolo (Executive Director, UN Global Compact Network Nigeria). The discussion examined affordability, infrastructure, skills, governance, and financing, with a particular focus on how last-mile communities can be meaningfully included in Africa's digital economy. Ms. Onwudiegbu framed the session as both urgent and forward-looking, centred on closing the gap between connected urban centres and underserved communities.

Defining the Digital Divide: People, Skills, and Mindsets

Setting the tone, Ms. Ezeilo reframed the digital divide not as an abstract metric but as a human reality: "Who is not connected to the internet? Who are these people?" She highlighted that nearly 40% of Africa's population remains unconnected, particularly in rural areas. However, she stressed that access alone is insufficient. As the future of work shifts towards digitally enabled roles, equitable outcomes depend on skills development and mindset change.

Drawing on Ashoka Africa's work, she emphasised the importance of change-making skills, problem-solving, collaboration, and local innovation. Without these, she cautioned, "we're creating an even bigger divide when we say certain people have skills and others don't." Sustained policy support and investment in social innovators, she argued, are essential to prevent digital access from deepening inequality.

Micro-Change Driving Macro Impact

Abimbola Ogundare reinforced the idea that large-scale reform must be complemented by individual and organisational action. While infrastructure and policy matter, she argued that progress is often driven by "micro-changes", everyday decisions that build confidence, learning, and adaptability over time.

She stressed that technology should be embedded at the core of national and organisational strategies rather than treated as an add-on. True digital inclusion, she noted, requires governance structures that combine experience with emerging digital expertise, enabling institutions to anticipate and respond to new opportunities.

Regulatory Predictability and Investment Climate

Naomi Emeka Nwokolo highlighted regulatory unpredictability as a major inhibitor of investment. She described how shifting taxes, inconsistent rules, and opaque approval processes inflate deployment costs and deter private capital. Ms. Nwokolo explained that her organisation works to convene dialogue between private actors and policymakers to demonstrate how these bottlenecks hamper productivity, and to promote harmonised, investment-friendly frameworks that support last-mile deployment.

Financing Last-Mile Connectivity: Revenue Models and Blended Capital

From an investment perspective, Elhadji Malick Soumara emphasised the importance of viable revenue models in rural connectivity projects. Investors, he explained, assess income sustainability, demonstrated demand, and whether projects include training and demand-building. Citing an example from Senegal, he illustrated how household-level connectivity can create local revenue streams by enabling shared access within communities. Such models, he argued, often require blended finance and targeted support to reach viability.

Community Ownership and Multi-Stakeholder Models

Across the discussion, panellists converged on the importance of community ownership. Ms. Ogundare referenced models where local governance structures and youth play stewardship roles, improving maintenance and long-term value. She also pointed to low-cost, energy-efficient technologies as practical solutions in high-cost operating environments.

Ms. Ezeilo cautioned against top-down interventions that overlook community voice, stating, "Don't waste your money by picking a location on the map, talk to the people on the ground." She framed engagement as both an ethical obligation and a practical strategy for improving adoption and sustainability.

Policy Transparency and Capacity Building

Audience reflections reinforced concerns about policy clarity and institutional capacity. The panellists emphasised the need for honest assessment of past investments and clearer decision-making processes. Ms. Ezeilo called for transparency around failures and greater diversification of funding sources, while Ms. Ogundare highlighted the need to translate technical solutions into accessible language so institutions can better evaluate and support innovation.

Key Takeaways

Closing the session, Ms. Onwudiegbu synthesised five priorities that emerged from the discussion:

- Regulatory clarity and experimentation, including sandboxes, to reduce investment risk.
- Locally grounded business models that balance affordability with community-level revenue generation.
- Blended finance and digital instruments to address viability gaps in last-mile projects.
- Meaningful community engagement and ownership to ensure use and stewardship.
- Capacity building and mindset shifts across individuals and institutions to support innovation.

PANEL SESSIONS



PANEL SESSION 2:

Seeds & Servers: Cultivating Sector-Tech Innovation in Africa

Moderated by Amabelle Nwakanma, Director of Programmes & Partnerships at LEAP Africa, the session brought together perspectives from impact investing, startup acceleration, and corporate strategy. Panelists Oguche Agudah (HRISP Partners), Henry Ukoha (Future Studio, Benin Republic), and Adeolu Adewumi-Zer (ZER Consulting Africa) examined what it takes to cultivate and scale sector-tech innovation across Africa, moving beyond pilots to sustainable, system-wide impact.

Technology as the Lifeblood of Sector Transformation

Setting the tone, Ms. Nwakanma emphasised that Africa cannot meaningfully position itself as “a sector” of global relevance if digital infrastructure, adoption, and strategic alignment remain weak. Technology, she argued, must shift from being an incidental tool to becoming “the lifeblood of the work we do.” With internet penetration still around 40%, digital gaps continue to constrain Africa’s ability to scale solutions, compete globally, and unlock new markets. The discussion focused on how collaboration across sectors can address these constraints and enable the continent’s next phase of growth.

Aligning Technology with Real-World Needs: Tech Should Simplify, Not Complicate

Oguche Agudah stressed that technology must simplify processes rather than complicate them. Drawing from his experience in impact and alternative investment, he highlighted a persistent disconnect between technological innovation and real user needs, where novelty often takes precedence over practicality. This misalignment, he argued, limits technology’s ability to drive scale and inclusion.

He also pointed to a structural gap between Africa’s tech ecosystem and its fund management industry. Many pension and asset managers remain detached from venture investment, partly due to generational divides. As he observed, “Those seeking funding and those managing the funds often come from different eras.” Bridging this gap will require deliberate engagement, skills transfer, and collaboration between financial institutions and emerging tech ecosystems.

Bridging Ecosystems: The Francophone Example

Henry Ukoha offered a regional perspective informed by his work across Francophone West Africa. He highlighted the under-representation of Francophone markets in continental funding flows despite shared currency and regulatory frameworks, noting, “The Francophone market is like the Eurozone, one currency, similar cultures, one regulation across many countries.”

To reduce entry barriers, his team developed a startup sandbox allowing founders to test products quickly in Benin, focusing on product-market fit as a core investor metric. This approach enables startups to validate locally before scaling regionally. Mr. Ukoha noted that improving infrastructure, policy conditions, and talent pipelines signal an inflection point for Francophone ecosystems. With the right mix of technical and commercial capability, he argued, Africa can build globally competitive solutions: “Combine strong technical skills with strong business mindset, and you can make magic.”

Strategy Before Technology: Building Trust and Governance

Joining virtually, Adeolu Adewumi-Zer shifted the focus from technology to strategy and governance. While acknowledging innovation’s potential, she argued that Africa’s main constraints lie in weak structures and limited trust. “Innovation is great, but without the right strategies, structures, and governance, those innovations will take us nowhere.”

She described her firm’s work supporting SMEs to scale through integrated frameworks that prioritise leadership, governance, and impact. A recurring barrier, she noted, is the lack of trust between startups and corporates. “Corporates won’t work with companies they don’t trust, and money follows trust.” For her, corporate–startup partnerships offer a critical pathway for scale, combining innovation with established infrastructure and credibility.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

The moderator synthesised the discussion into a set of strategic priorities:

- Collaboration as core infrastructure, across sectors, generations, and markets.
- Technology must be useful, not just novel, addressing real-world sectoral needs.
- Governance and strategy drive scale, enabling innovation to cross borders and sectors.
- Ecosystem connectivity matters, including regional integration and sandbox approaches.
- Capital must be diverse and catalytic, with grants complementing, not replacing, commercial finance.
- Trust is the currency of innovation, shaping partnerships, investment, and long-term impact.







Speed Talks

An elegant part of SIPA 2025 was the Speed Talk sessions. The Speed Talks offered high-energy bursts of insight from innovators, researchers, and practitioners working at the frontlines of Africa's development. These rapid presentations cut across data sovereignty, investment strategy, narrative power, and innovation ecosystems, reinforcing Africa as THE Sector as a lived reality shaped by people, evidence, and creativity. Together, the talks underscored how Africa's future will be driven not only by policy and capital, but by how value is measured, stories are told, and systems are built.

SAMUEL EFOSA-AUSTIN (ECO AFRICA)



“

The future is not waiting to be discovered. It's waiting to be measured and acquired

”

Samuel Efosa-Austin challenged dominant development metrics, questioning GDP as a meaningful measure of African progress. GDP, he argued, captures "transactions, not transformation," overlooking the informal, communal, and creative economies where much of Africa's value is generated. "What is unmeasured is always undervalued," he noted, urging a rethinking of how African economies are seen and assessed.

He highlighted how fragmented and unreliable data systems leave policymakers and investors "planning in the dark," rendering African innovation abundant yet invisible. To address this, he introduced ECO Africa's ECO framework, Environment, Community, Organisation, as a way to map how value is created within community ecosystems. Building on this, he described the ECO Platform, a citizen-powered intelligence system that converts community-level data into verified insights for decision-makers, culminating in the ECO Index as an alternative to GDP.

He closed with a call for data sovereignty, framing data as a renewable resource that can reposition communities as investable assets rather than overlooked participants.

Samuel Efosa-Austin

Speed Talks

MARIE-NOELLE NWOKOLO

(AFRICAN CENTER FOR ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATION)



“

Africa won't rise because we say we have potential. Everyone has potential... Africa will rise because we build systems that learn... Systems that share, systems that collaborate, systems that ask better questions. This is what turns an idea into a sector, what turns a country into a hub.

”

Marie-Noelle Nwokolo offered an evidence-driven perspective on unlocking investment and translating potential into performance. Drawing on her work supporting the G20 Compact with Africa, she highlighted peer learning as a powerful yet underutilised driver of reform, enabling countries to share insights that accelerate policy and investment outcomes.

She illustrated this with a global example where Ireland secured a major manufacturing investment by identifying and evidencing its “match factor,” a decisive insight that changed the outcome. The lesson for Africa, she argued, is that progress often hinges on timely evidence rather than expansive strategies.

She introduced the Notch Factor Test, encouraging innovators and policymakers to ask sharper questions:

- 1. What invisible advantage do I have?**
- 2. What evidence can I generate today?**
- 3. What new question could change everything?**

As she noted, “Innovation is not purely just about having new answers. It also can be about asking new questions.” Africa’s rise, she concluded, will depend on learning systems that collaborate, share, and convert insight into action.

Marie-Noelle Nwokolo

Speed Talks

TUNDE ONAKOYA (CHESS IN SLUMS AFRICA)



“

It is not enough to be consumed by passion, you must communicate your reason so people can feel something

”

In one of the most emotionally resonant sessions, social innovator and chess master, Tunde Onakoya spoke about the transformative power of narrative, dignity, and empathy. Self-described as a dreamer, he reflected on why many individuals underestimate the significance of their work, believing their contributions are small compared to the forces shaping capital markets or national economies. Yet, he argued, the power of the narrative is one of Africa's most potent tools.

Mr. Onakoya illustrated this through a moving story about two boys: Yusuf, a child surviving on Lagos streets, and Jaden, a privileged child with every opportunity ahead of him. A chance encounter between them at a shopping mall exposed the “tragedy of the lottery of birth,” the structural inequities that shape who survives and who thrives. Their lives would never naturally intersect again. For Mr. Onakoya, this is precisely why initiatives like Chess in Slums exist: to create moments where society sees children like Yusuf clearly, not through pity, but through possibility.

Chess, he explained, is “data with soul,” offering structure, confidence, and visibility, one child at a time. As communities witness what these children can achieve, assumptions shift and imagination expands. He urged the audience to hold onto their “reason,” the deeply personal why behind their work, because it fuels persistence, clarity, and impact. Dreamers, he said, build worlds that give others a sense of belonging.

Tunde Onakoya

Speed Talks

PROF. VAL OKARU-BISANT (AFROCOSMO DEVELOPMENT IMPACT)



“

Data is the starting point, without it, innovation remains invisible

”

Professor Val Okaru-Bisant focused on the systems needed to unlock Africa's innovation potential, particularly among youth and women. While acknowledging growing momentum across continental and national programmes, she stressed that progress must be underpinned by strong data and enabling environments.

She argued that thousands of young African innovators remain invisible due to fragmented or absent data, limiting their access to finance and policy support. For her, accurate data is foundational to effective investment and decision-making. She also highlighted structural challenges, including high interest rates, currency volatility, and inconsistent SME definitions, which complicate scaling across markets.

Her proposed solutions included improving regulatory frameworks, developing blended finance pathways, strengthening intellectual property systems, and mobilising domestic investment and philanthropy. She closed by pointing to young African inventors whose ingenuity, often developed with limited resources, reflects the continent's untapped potential.

Prof. Val Okaru-Bisant

Speed Talks

AMY GILLETT

(WILLIAM DAVIDSON INSTITUTE (WDI),
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN, USA)



“

Great things happen when people with purpose decide that challenges are simply the starting point.

”

Joining virtually from Ann Arbor, Amy Gillett, Vice President, Education, WDI, conveyed optimism about Africa's innovations in health, education, clean energy, and finance, praising participants' creativity and purpose. She detailed WDI's deepened partnership with LEAP Africa, including joint learning, co-created curricula adapted to local realities, and a new education-focused initiative with pilots, feedback loops, certification badges, and blended financing. On the theme, she viewed technology, finance, and policy as levers for entrepreneurs to shape, urging resilience to turn challenges into momentum

Amy Gillett



Solution Labs

Three Solution Labs were held as part of SIPA 2025. Designed as participatory breakout sessions, the Labs brought together innovators, ecosystem leaders, and policymakers to interrogate real-world challenges and co-create actionable pathways. Across all three Labs, the emphasis was on grounded problem-solving, collaboration, and solutions capable of driving systems-level change.

SOLUTION LAB 1: NYFF HACKATHON

Solution Lab 1 brought together young innovators, early-stage founders, and ecosystem supporters for a dynamic hackathon-style session focused on developing scalable, context-driven solutions for the future of work in Nigeria. Hosted by the Nigeria Youth Future Fund (NYFF) and moderated by Dr. Elisabeth Agbiti-Douglas, Director, NYFF, the session combined hands-on coaching with rapid elevator pitches, prioritising clarity of problem definition, storytelling, and market relevance over polished presentation.

Showcasing Emerging Solutions

A diverse range of founders presented concise elevator pitches reflecting creativity, grit, and deep engagement with community needs. Solutions spanned multiple sectors:

- **Policy Reform Lab:** training civic innovators to turn research insights into practical, low-code public sector tools.
- **Plastic Build:** enabling local artisans to create functional plastic products through circular economy practices.
- **Centiiv:** a decentralised protocol solving liquidity challenges for African merchants through aggregated cross-border settlement.
- **FirstResponse AI:** a patient-centered platform improving early symptom reporting and linking users to immediate medical assistance.
- **Game-Based Learning Solutions:** embedding educational content into games to improve learning outcomes.
- **Lawdemy: an AI-enabled legal education platform for SMEs.**
- **Motiva:** building learner support systems to strengthen digital education accessibility and completion rates.
- **Metallic Care Foundation:** training inmates in agricultural production to reduce recidivism and improve income pathways
- **GAUGE:** an AI-driven system enabling businesses to track and optimise energy consumption.
- **House Mata:** a real estate platform tackling fraud and inefficiencies in Nigeria's rental market.
- **NITON:** a marketplace enabling African agricultural manufacturers to access global markets and Sharia-compliant financing.
- **Spark Academy:** connecting real-world problems to academic learning to improve employability.

Core Insights and Outcomes

The Lab reinforced that many development challenges cannot be solved by government alone and require active citizenship and cross-sector collaboration. Founders were encouraged to ground innovation in community realities, recognising that locally rooted solutions are often more viable and scalable. A recurring insight was that investors prioritise teams and credibility as much as ideas, with clear articulation of market scope and a defined "ask" seen as essential.

Practical guidance on effective pitching highlighted the importance of brevity, narrative coherence, and a strong opening frame. Participants were challenged to move beyond describing products to demonstrating market understanding, cost structures, and pathways to sustainability.

Common Challenges Identified

- Weak storytelling and unclear communication from many founders.
- Poor understanding of the purpose and structure of an elevator pitch.
- Limited access to mentorship for refining solution design and pitching.

Actionable Takeaways

The Hackathon concluded with a clear set of priorities for strengthening Nigeria's youth innovation pipeline:

- Structured mentorship in storytelling, pitching, and business model development
- Greater exposure to low-code and no-code tools for rapid prototyping
- Improved founder understanding of investor expectations, market sizing, and team composition
- Stronger linkages to investors, partners, and ecosystem support

SOLUTION LAB 2: UNDP

Hosted by UNDP Nigeria, this Solution Lab examined the theme Creative Expressions as Catalysts for Location-Specific Progress, positioning creativity as a strategic instrument for development rather than a peripheral cultural activity. Anchored in the SIPA 2025 theme, Africa as THE Sector, the session explored how arts, culture, design, and digital storytelling contribute to identity, social cohesion, and community-led solutions. Through two breakout groups, Finance & Policy and Technology, participants identified practical levers for strengthening local creative ecosystems.

Core Outcomes and Cross-Cutting Insights

Across both groups, participants agreed that creative industries are both economic drivers and powerful tools for building trust, participation, and local problem-solving capacity. However, their impact is shaped by regulatory environments, access to finance, and the availability of enabling digital infrastructure. Unlocking the full potential of creativity requires intentional policy alignment, targeted investment, and accessible technology.

Finance & Policy: Key Insights and Actions

Participants highlighted that rigid regulatory systems often prevent creative practitioners from formalising or scaling their work. Many policies continue to treat creativity narrowly, overlooking its broader contributions to urban development, place-making, and community identity. Limited access to financing further constrains growth, particularly for early-stage creatives operating informally.

Priority actions identified included:

- Developing flexible, fit-for-purpose regulatory frameworks that reflect the diversity of creative work.
- Creating specialised financing options, such as micro-grants, blended finance, and flexible loans, tailored to creative enterprises.
- Embedding creativity within urban development and innovation policies, with city governments actively supporting creative clusters and cultural commons
- Strengthening capacity-building pipelines in financial literacy, enterprise development, intellectual property awareness, and community organising.

Technology: Key Insights and Actions

While creative talent is abundant, participants noted that many practitioners are not using technology effectively to scale distribution, monetisation, or impact. Barriers include high costs, limited training, and restricted access to digital platforms. At the same time, digital tools were seen as critical enablers for storytelling, audience-building, and market access.

Priority actions identified included:

- Expanding access to low-code and no-code tools that allow creators to build digital products and platforms without advanced technical skills.
- Establishing community-based creative tech hubs to provide shared access to equipment, mentorship, and collaborative spaces.
- Providing training on digital rights, data governance, and online safety to protect creators and build trust in digital environments.
- Encouraging partnerships between technologists and creatives to co-design community-based solutions.

The Lab reinforced a shared conclusion: creativity is a strategic asset for local development, not an optional add-on. When supported by enabling policies, innovative financing, and accessible technology, creative expressions can drive inclusive growth, strengthen social fabric, and shape more responsive city and community futures. Participants called for creativity to be intentionally embedded within development planning, with ecosystems designed to help creative actors thrive and scale their impact.

Solution Labs



Solution Labs

SOLUTION LAB 3: ESOS COLLABORATIVE WORKING SESSION

This Solution Lab brought together Entrepreneur Support Organisations (ESOs) from across Nigeria's and Africa's innovation and impact ecosystem to strengthen collaboration and collective effectiveness. Moderated by Karina Karunwi of ANDE West Africa, the session convened accelerators, funders, development finance actors, and enterprise-support leaders to reflect on ecosystem shifts, identify duplication, and co-design practical strategies for supporting SMEs and social entrepreneurs more sustainably.

Core Insights

Participants agreed that ecosystem fragmentation remains a major constraint, with overlapping interventions and weak visibility across venture pathways. Shifts in the funding landscape, particularly reductions in USAID support, are forcing ESOs to rethink sustainability and diversify revenue models. A recurring challenge is that many social entrepreneurs struggle to distinguish between grants as catalytic capital and grants as operating revenue, undermining long-term viability. Trust deficits among ecosystem actors also limit collaboration, highlighting the importance of transparency and positive storytelling.

Key Outcomes and Recommendations

1. Strengthening Ecosystem Coordination

- Expand and regularly update ESO and SME ecosystem mapping to reduce duplication and improve referral pathways, building on LEAP Africa's existing mapping resource.
- Improve information-sharing across ESOs to help ventures navigate support more clearly from ideation to scale.

2. Advancing the Localisation Agenda

- Deepen partnerships with local institutions and community-based organisations to reduce reliance on external funding
- Prioritise locally grounded capacity-building approaches that reflect contextual realities.

3. Collaborative Frameworks and Consortia

- Form ESO consortia to pool expertise, distribute risk, and strengthen impact tracking.
- Use coordinated approaches to support high-performing businesses more consistently, from acceleration through investment readiness.

4. Sustainability Pathways for Social Entrepreneurs

- Support founders to develop clear revenue models and understand the distinction between grants and earned income
- Strengthen links to investors, mentors, and peer networks to provide support beyond programme cycles.

5. Building Trust and Visibility

- Invest in positive storytelling that highlights successful collaborations and ventures to build confidence and attract new resources, including crowdfunding.
- Explore verification and transparency tools to strengthen trust between ESOs, funders, and social innovators.

The session concluded with commitments to continue networking throughout SIPA, deepen collaboration across linguistic and regional divides, and translate shared insights into sustained ecosystem action. Overall, the ESOs Collaborative Working Session reinforced that stronger coordination, local ownership, and trust-based partnerships are essential for building a more resilient and effective entrepreneurship ecosystem.

DEAL ROOM

A Deal Room was held as part of SIPA 2025, during the breakout sessions for the Solution Labs. It provided social innovators and entrepreneurs with opportunities to connect with investors, spark meaningful conversations, and potentially secure deals to grow their innovations. The session featured eight entrepreneurs from sectors including the green economy, edu-tech, health technology, and sustainable systems.

Each innovator was given three minutes to pitch their solution to a panel of expert judges. The session was led by two experienced investors and ecosystem leaders: Nnamdi Ehirim, representing Impact Amplifier, and Farida Yahya, Founder of The Brief Academy. They offered practical and constructive feedback that helped the innovators sharpen their articulation of value, refine their business models, and clarify the investment case behind their solutions.

Key Outcomes and Support for Innovators

Across the pitches, innovators demonstrated a strong understanding of the problems they were addressing and presented solutions that reflected sector knowledge, technical ingenuity, and social impact ambition. The judges noted that the group was distinctly more advanced than those typically encountered in youth pitching competitions. The ideas presented were more mature, with clearer business models and stronger potential for scale.

However, the session also revealed areas where further refinement would be beneficial, particularly in

- **investor readiness,**
- **explanation of market opportunities, and**
- **development of financing strategies**

A key success of the Deal Room was the actionable commitment secured for all participating innovators. Recognising the potential within the cohort and the need for specialised capability-building, Impact Amplifier offered to provide free Investor Readiness training to the eight innovators. The training will

- **strengthen their understanding of what investors look for,**
- **how to articulate their funding needs confidently, and**
- **how to design sustainability pathways that appeal to different classes of capital.**

This support is expected to enhance the quality of their future engagements with investors and improve their long-term prospects for investment.

In addition to the training opportunity, the session also opened pathways for continued engagement. SIPA will facilitate access to future deal rooms where innovators can deepen their understanding of financing models, strengthen the commercial aspects of their ventures, and increase their chances of connecting with suitable investors. These subsequent deal rooms will serve as platforms for testing investor pitches, refining sustainability frameworks, and mapping out tailored growth strategies.



AWARDS PRESENTATION

As SIPA 2025 drew to a close, the conference took a moment to celebrate the excellence, resilience, and innovation driving Africa's social impact and enterprise ecosystem. This year, SIPA introduced two new award categories, the Social Impact Award and the Outstanding Innovator Award, adding to the longstanding tradition of recognising outstanding individuals and organisations within the ecosystem. These awards were created to acknowledge the trailblazers whose work embodies the conference theme, "Africa as THE Sector." The awards ceremony was a fitting highlight, honouring those whose contributions are transforming the African landscape.

The awards presentation was anchored by Chukwuemeka Okeke, Senior Programmes Coordinator at LEAP Africa, and presented by two distinguished guests: Clare Omatseye, Board Chair of LEAP Africa and Mrs. Josephine Effah-Chukwuma, widow of the late Innocent Chukwuma and representative of the Innocent Chukwuemeka Chukwuma Empowerment Foundation (ICCEF). Mrs. Effah-Chukwuma also took a moment to honour her late husband's legacy by presenting a recently published biography of Innocent Chukwuma, a visionary leader whose life story, "Against All Odds," continues to inspire many.

Outstanding Innovator Award

The Outstanding Innovator Award celebrated individuals who are leveraging creativity and technology to address Africa's most pressing challenges. The top honour was awarded to Samuel Folorunsho, the visionary behind Legis360 Nigeria, an AI-driven legislative intelligence platform that enhances transparency and public engagement in Nigeria's lawmaking processes. As highlighted during the announcement, Legis360 has made the Nigerian lawmaking process "transparent, accessible, and trackable," empowering citizens, journalists, researchers, and policymakers with real-time insights into bills and motions.

Other finalists in the Outstanding Innovator Award category included:

- **2nd:** Samuel Efosa-Austin, founder of Tech 4 Good Africa, for his work in harnessing technology to drive social impact across various sectors.
- **3rd:** Paul Adedoyin, founder of Penner Paul Foundation, recognised for his innovative initiatives aimed at improving access to education and healthcare.

Social Impact Award

The Social Impact Award was introduced to recognise organisations that have demonstrated transformative impact at scale. This year's top honour went to Nafarm Foods Ltd., represented by Abdulateef Olaosebikan, for its pioneering work integrating solar-powered technology into agriculture to improve food security. Nafarm foods was commended for "leveraging solar power technology, fusing innovation and agriculture to strengthen food security," and for demonstrating how grassroots enterprises can create lasting, sector-wide impact.

Other finalists in the Social Impact Award category included:

- **2nd:** Vet. Konect Ltd., led by Dr. Akpem Terese Shadrack, for its innovative work in veterinary services and supporting livestock farming across rural communities.
- **3rd:** Freedom Hive Uganda, represented by Kirya Samson, for its outstanding work in empowering youth and fostering entrepreneurship.
- **3rd:** Gowasteline Companies, led by Bright Lemchi Nonso, for its efforts in supporting sustainable agricultural practices and improving livelihoods for smallholder farmers across the continent.

Each of these organisations was recognised for advancing youth development, agricultural inclusion, education, and entrepreneurship, making an indelible impact on diverse regions of Africa.



CLOSING REMARKS



CLOSING REMARKS



The conference concluded with heartfelt Closing Remarks delivered by Kehinde Ayeni, Executive Director of LEAP Africa. She began by expressing profound appreciation to the speakers, moderators, partners, ESOs, and participants who contributed to making SIPA 2025 a dynamic and impactful convening. Ms. Ayeni tied together the day's discussions on technology, finance, and policy, emphasising the collective responsibility to transform the insights from the conference into sustained action.

Reflecting on the day's sessions, Ms. Ayeni noted that the discussions had been both "insightful" and "provocative," with speakers challenging participants to "think differently, ask questions, query the data, measure what we have, and really dream." One of the key impressions from the conference was the power of dreaming big and acting boldly to unlock Africa's full potential. She further highlighted the importance of policy in advancing entrepreneurial ecosystems: "We should not forget the commitment we started with this morning... what the role of policy can really do to advance our cause."

Ms. Ayeni extended special thanks to LEAP Africa's Board, represented by Clare Omatseye; to all speakers, panelists, moderators, and facilitators; and to the partners and sponsors, including ESOs and ecosystem collaborators. She also acknowledged the hard work and dedication of the LEAP Africa team, who ensured the seamless execution of the conference. Lastly, she expressed gratitude to the participants for dedicating their time and energy, encouraging them to follow through on the commitments they had made throughout the day.

With optimism, she invited all participants to carry forward the momentum of SIPA 2025 by sustaining the collaborations formed during the conference, deepening cross-sector engagement, and upholding the commitments made to build a vibrant African ecosystem. "Keep dreaming, with clarity and courage," she concluded.

With these words, the SIPA 2025 conference was officially brought to a close.

APPENDICES

A. CONFERENCE AGENDA

The event agenda is accessible via the following [LINK](#) and QR code



B. STATE OF SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN AFRICA REPORT

The LEAP Africa's State of Social Entrepreneurship in Africa Report presented during the event is accessible via the following [LINK](#) and QR code



Appendices

C. LIST OF PARTICIPATING ORGANISATIONS

Africa Venture Philanthropy Alliance (AVPA)
Aspen Network of Development Entrepreneurs (ANDE)
United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Nigeria
Enterprise Development Centre
Kenya Climate Ventures (KCV)
William Davidson Institute (WDI), University of Michigan, USA
Impact Investors Foundation (IIF)
Deloitte
Ashoka Africa
The Forgotten Bottom Millions (4BM)
Nigeria Youth Futures Fund (NYFF)
Impact Amplifier
Chess in Slums Africa
Zer Consulting Africa
Future Studio
HRISP Partners
UN Global Compact Network Nigeria
Dalberg
ECO Africa
African Center for Economic Transformation
Afrocosmo Development Impact
Nest Innovation Lab
The Brief Academy
Budgit Foundation
Innocent Chukwuemeka Chukwuma Empowerment Foundation
8th Gear Hub & Venture Studio



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