

# Enabling Social Innovation in Nigeria

## Country Snapshot

**Social innovation: "the processes and outcomes of developing novel approaches to address societal challenges facing people and planet." <sup>1</sup>**

This snapshot represents a descriptive, non-exhaustive overview of key highlights from Nigeria's social innovation ecosystem.

✓ Direct focus on social innovation    🔗 Connected but indirect focus on social innovation    ✗ No focus on social innovation

## INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

### Official Definition of Social Innovation 🔗

No single formal legal definition of "social innovation" is established in Nigerian primary law. The concept is embedded in the operational frameworks of key agencies such as the Co-Creation Hub (CchUB), the Innovation Support Network (ISN Hubs) and various state-level innovation councils. Government discourse increasingly uses "social entrepreneurship", "impact innovation" and "digital innovation" as primary framing. <sup>2 3</sup>

### Government Body for Social Innovation ✓

Multiple agencies address aspects of social innovation, reflecting Nigeria's federal structure:<sup>4</sup>

- Federal Ministry of Innovation, Science and Technology (FMIST): The lead federal ministry for innovation policy; coordinates with TETFund and sector research agencies. <sup>4</sup>
- National Centre for Technology Management (NACETEM): Supports technology commercialisation and innovation capacity-building. <sup>4</sup>
- National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA): Oversees the National Digital Economy Policy and digital innovation frameworks. <sup>5</sup>
- Lagos State Research and Innovation Council (LASRIC): A state-level body providing grants and support to Lagos-based innovators across health, education, agriculture and other sectors. <sup>2</sup>
- National Social Investment Programme (NSIP): Administers federal social protection and enterprise support programmes including the Government Enterprise and Empowerment Programme (GEEP), N-Power and school feeding. <sup>6</sup>
- Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN): Provides MSME support, policy advocacy and enterprise development. <sup>6</sup>

### Government Strategy for Social Innovation ✓

Nigeria's social innovation ecosystem is guided by a suite of interconnected strategies:

- National Digital Economy Policy and Strategy 2020–2030: Reorients the Nigerian economy toward digital innovation, encompassing digital infrastructure, skills, entrepreneurship, digital services and governance. <sup>5</sup>
- National Science, Technology and Innovation Policy 2011 (under revision): Establishes the governance framework for R&D and STI, including the NCSTI coordination structure. <sup>4</sup>
- National Artificial Intelligence Strategy (NAIS) 2024 (draft): Aims to achieve ethical use of AI for national development across agriculture, public health, fintech and beyond. <sup>5</sup>
- MSME Survival Fund and YouWin! Connect: Federal enterprise support initiatives targeting social entrepreneurs and small businesses. <sup>6</sup>

## Policies, Laws & Regulations

Directly or closely linked:

- Nigeria Data Protection Regulation (NDPR) 2019: Governs data privacy; foundational for ethical digital social innovation. <sup>5</sup>
- Companies and Allied Matters Act (CAMA) 2020: Updated corporate law creating easier pathways for social enterprise incorporation. <sup>6</sup>
- National Social Investment Act: Formalises NSIP social protection programming. <sup>6</sup>

Broader enabling (CSOs, environment):

- NGO and CSO regulatory framework: Social innovators operating as NGOs are governed by the Companies and Allied Matters Act and state-level regulatory bodies. <sup>6</sup>
- National Environmental Standards and Regulation Enforcement Agency (NESREA) Act: Governs environmental compliance for innovations with community or environmental impact. <sup>7</sup>

## Official Statistics

No official cross-cutting statistics specific to "social innovation" were found. Key available indicators:

- **200+** entrepreneurship, innovation and technology hubs united under the Innovation Support Network (ISN Hubs) across Nigeria. <sup>2</sup>
- **USD 400 million** raised by Nigerian tech startups in 2023; with 5 of Africa's 7 tech unicorns based in Lagos. <sup>5</sup>
- **ICT ~20%** contribution to Nigeria's real GDP in Q2 2024, reflecting the growing primacy of digital innovation. <sup>5</sup>
- **113th/133** GII 2024 ranking with a score of 17.1; Nigeria has 4 top African S&T clusters (Ibadan, Nsukka, Lagos, Abuja). <sup>10</sup>
- **0.13%** of GDP invested in R&D — far below the African Union's 1% target, constraining innovation capacity. <sup>4</sup>

## Government Programs

- N-Power and GEEP (Government Enterprise and Empowerment Programme): Federal social protection and enterprise support targeting youth and MSMEs with skills training, grants and conditional cash transfers. <sup>6</sup>
- National Social Investment Programme (NSIP): Encompasses school feeding, conditional cash transfers and youth employment, reaching millions of Nigerians. <sup>6</sup>
- EU-Nigeria Digital Economy Package (2021–2024): EUR 820 million EU-supported investment in digital infrastructure, skills, entrepreneurship and governance. <sup>5</sup>
- Ekiti Knowledge Zone (EKZ): A USD 80 million African Development Bank-supported project in Ekiti State to establish a digital innovation and knowledge economy epicentre. <sup>5</sup>
- GATEWAY Programme: A 5-year CcHUB initiative to equip youth — particularly women, PWDs and marginalised groups — with skills and digital tools. <sup>3</sup>

# ECOSYSTEM

## Stakeholders

Nigeria has one of Africa's largest and most dynamic social innovation ecosystems:

- Co-Creation Hub (CcHUB): Africa's leading innovation enabler; delivers EdTech, health innovation, democracy and civic tech programmes; operates in multiple African countries. <sup>3</sup>
- Innovation Support Network (ISN Hubs): Unites 200+ hubs across Nigeria, providing policy advocacy, linkages and capacity building. <sup>2</sup>
- Impact Hub Lagos: Collaborative workspace and accelerator for mission-driven ventures. <sup>5</sup>
- Ventures Platform, Microtraction and other impact VCs: Provide early-stage capital and mentoring to social impact startups. <sup>5</sup>
- UNDP Nigeria Accelerator Lab: Focuses on community-driven innovation and problem-solving at scale. <sup>8</sup>
- Sterling One Foundation, Tony Elumelu Foundation: Major domestic philanthropic actors funding social entrepreneurs and MSMEs. <sup>6</sup>



### Support Initiatives



Common support modalities include incubation, acceleration, challenge funds, hackathons and applied research. The GCIP (Global Cleantech Innovation Programme) Nigeria, CcHUB EdTech Fellowship and various international programmes provide structured support. The Innovation Summit Nigeria brings government, hubs and private sector together annually. <sup>3 2</sup>

### Collaboration



Nigeria's ecosystem features high levels of hub-to-hub and public-private collaboration, though coordination between the 200+ hubs remains a challenge. ISN Hubs serves as a coordination body. State-level innovation councils (e.g., LASRIC) complement federal initiatives. International collaboration through EU, US tech firms (Google, Microsoft, Meta) and African Development Bank is active. <sup>2 5</sup>

## FINANCE

### Financing Schemes



Nigeria's social innovation financing landscape is diverse:

- Federal government: NSIP, GEEP, SMEDAN grants and programmes. <sup>6</sup>
- International development finance: EU Digital Economy Package, AfDB Ekiti Knowledge Zone, World Bank support. <sup>5</sup>
- Impact investment and VC: Growing ecosystem with 5 unicorns, USD 400 million raised in 2023; fintech is dominant. <sup>5</sup>
- Domestic philanthropy: Tony Elumelu Foundation, Sterling One Foundation and others fund social entrepreneurs. <sup>6</sup>
- TETFund: Provides government funding to tertiary education institutions for research and innovation. <sup>4</sup>

### Financing Inclusivity



Despite a large and active ecosystem, financing gaps remain for non-tech, community-based and rural social innovations. Women, persons with disabilities and non-Lagos-based innovators face disproportionate barriers. ISN Hubs' "Meet the Funders" sessions and CcHUB's GATEWAY programme directly target these inclusion gaps. <sup>2 3</sup>

## SOCIETY

### Public Awareness of Social Innovation



Public awareness of social innovation in Nigeria is among the highest in Sub-Saharan Africa, driven by a vibrant tech ecosystem, social enterprise culture and active media coverage. Lagos is widely recognised as "Africa's Silicon Valley." Social enterprise, impact startups and community innovation are well-understood concepts. The Nigeria Innovation Summit and AfriLabs network amplify ecosystem visibility. <sup>2 3</sup>

### Research



Nigeria has 4 top African S&T clusters (Ibadan, Nsukka, Lagos, Abuja) identified in the GII 2024, driven predominantly by scientific publications. Research on social innovation is growing in universities and think tanks, but weak industry-academic linkages and underfunded research institutions limit commercialisation. The 2025 ATPS/SGCI policy brief proposes a National Research and Innovation Council (NRIC) and Fund to coordinate fragmented R&D. <sup>4 10</sup>

## Education & Human Capital



Nigeria has a large and growing educated workforce. Social entrepreneurship is increasingly included in university curricula, with Ashesi, Lagos Business School and others offering programmes. CcHUB, ISN Hubs and dozens of innovation accelerators provide practical training. The GATEWAY Programme targets 20,000+ marginalised youth with digital skills. <sup>3 6</sup>

## Entrepreneurship



Enabling conditions for business



**113<sup>th</sup>** GII 2024 (score: 17.1); strengths in Human Capital (78<sup>th</sup>) and Creative Outputs (87<sup>th</sup>); weaknesses in Infrastructure (127<sup>th</sup>) and Market Sophistication (121<sup>st</sup>). <sup>10</sup>

Global Innovation Index 2019.



**5/7** African tech unicorns are Nigeria-based (Moniepoint joined in Oct 2024 as the 6<sup>th</sup> Nigerian unicorn). <sup>5</sup>

## Social & Environmental Consciousness



**Solidarity**



**Participation**

**2.83%** of personal income donated — the highest among lower-middle-income countries surveyed in the 2025 CAFWorld Giving Report. <sup>11</sup>

CAFWorld Giving Index 2025

**86%** population

**Volunteering**

**5<sup>th</sup>** CAFWorld Giving Index 2024 — score: 60 (helped a stranger: 81%, donated: 45%, volunteered: 53%). <sup>11</sup>

CAFWorld Giving Index 2024



**Sustainability**

Nigeria-specific EPI climate rank was not publicly available at time of publication. <sup>12</sup>

Environmental Performance Index (EPI)2024