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Case Study

Ekiti Ecosystem Development

Innovate UK Global Alliance Africa collaborates with the Ekiti State Knowledge Zone (EKZ) to strengthen and enhance the innovation ecosystem in Ekiti State, Nigeria.

iuk-business-connect.org.uk/global-alliance



Global Alliance Africa in Ekiti State, Nigeria

The Innovate UK [Global Alliance Africa](#) project has been actively engaged in strengthening and enhancing the innovation ecosystem in Ekiti State, Nigeria, since 2021.

Through its [Place-Based Innovation](#) (PBI) intervention, Global Alliance Africa aims to build innovation capability, foster collaboration and facilitate new opportunities for funding and investment that drive positive change through innovation in Ekiti State, delivering against the FCDO's Africa Technology and Innovation Partnership Programme (ATIP)¹ ambition in stimulating inclusive economic growth through stronger local innovation ecosystems in Africa.

Focusing on 'Place' to drive innovation development through Global Alliance Africa also complements a core strategy of Innovate UK, which clearly states that "places are both an enabler and a driver for innovation.

The (UK) Levelling Up White Paper² makes clear the importance of place and place-based initiatives in delivering economic, environmental, and societal benefits across the UK and we are committed to connecting national and regional innovation to enable these benefits"³.



Building on the experience from the UK, Global Alliance Africa's PBI intervention focuses on delivering self-sustaining economic growth by working in partnership with local businesses, government agencies and experts from emerging innovation regions or hubs in Africa, such as Nigeria's Ekiti State. The co-created [Innovation Audit](#) and [Innovation Action Plan](#) created the springboard for PBI activities in Ekiti State, with an Innovation Advisory Group established in 2021 to ensure that the input and expertise of local stakeholders across academia, industry and public authorities was captured across programme activities.

1. devtracker.fcdo.gov.uk/programme/GB-GOV-1-300704/summary
2. gov.uk/government/publications/levelling-up-the-united-kingdom
3. iuk.ktn-uk.org/place

“The flexibility and adaptability to refine and pilot activities and to align with local needs is very different than the typical model of working with preordained programmes. This kind of support is important for testing ideas, [and now] we see the tech ecosystem that is building up and the green shoots of innovative ideas [emerging].”

Akin Oyebo, Honourable Commissioner for Finance and Economic Development, Ekiti State.

In partnership with the recently established Ekiti State Ministry of Innovation, Science and Digital Economy (MISDE), Innovate UK Global Alliance Africa also supported with the launch of the first **Ekiti State Innovation Summit** bringing together regional, national and global stakeholders, as well as developing the **Innovation Ecosystem Map** and creating the **Ekiti Investment Guide**, to encourage ongoing collaboration and investment in the State.

“Innovate UK is a worthy supporter of the work that [the Ministry] is doing in the ecosystem. Even before we had deployed our resources, [Innovate UK] had gone ahead to deliver programmes that were really encouraging and showed the promise in the ecosystem.”

Seun Fakuade, Honorable Commissioner for Innovation, Science and Digital Economy, Ekiti State



The Global Alliance Africa project has also delivered targeted initiatives that speak to specific challenges and opportunities within the local innovation ecosystem. The 2023 **Young Innovators Award** showcased the skills and potential of Ekiti-based youth entrepreneurs, providing three finalists with capacity building and funding awards to support ongoing business development.

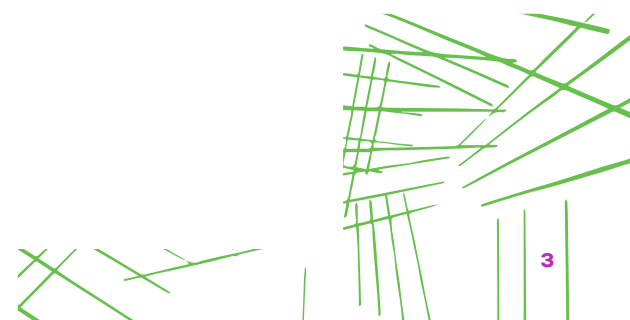


2023 also saw the delivery of the **Global Aquaculture Knowledge Exchange and Showcase** which led to the publication of two **Knowledge Briefs** which distilled key insights and learning from the event to support further development of Ekiti’s aquaculture industry. The showcase also created the opportunity for a collaborative project between MISDE, Ekiti State University and FlyBox – a UK based SME – to explore the opportunity for adapting insect-based protein technologies for animal and fish feed locally.

The team has also been active behind the scenes, facilitating introductions and setting up potential collaboration and funding opportunities for local stakeholders. These activities have directly helped contribute to two of the five new innovation hubs that have been established in Ekiti State since the Global Alliance Africa project started its activities in 2021, as well as supporting the development of the ecosystem more broadly.

“Programmes like this galvanise the local community, especially local innovators... and help in convincing people to make that investment of their time, their resources and, most importantly, their decision to localise themselves in a jurisdiction.”

Akin Oyebo, Honourable Commissioner for Finance and Economic Development, Ekiti State



The Ekiti Knowledge Zone (EKZ)

All of the above activities have focused on unlocking local potential and stimulating investment within the local ecosystem. This work, alongside the work of MISDE and other local actors, have created a favourable climate for Ekiti State government to secure an US\$80 million investment from the African Development Bank (AfDB) alongside US\$14.8 million co-funding from Ekiti State government to establish the Ekiti Knowledge Zone (EKZ).

These additional investments highlight the importance of 'place' and why investing in innovation outside of secondary cities is becoming increasingly attractive to a range of international stakeholders.

Innovate UK and FCDO-funded projects in Ekiti State were referenced in the AfDB [Project Appraisal Report](#) and representatives of both Ekiti State Government and AfDB cited Innovate UK Global Alliance activities and knowledge outputs as having a positive impact on assessments of the potential of the innovation ecosystem in Ekiti.

"The FCDO collaboration with UK KTN 's innovations activities in Ekiti State including Ekiti Innovation audit, and Ekiti innovation ecosystem map findings has also informed the design of this project. The Bank is in current discussions with UK KTN for joint collaboration on EKZ soft interventions. Other development partners including the IsDB, EU, and JICA have been approached on possibility for supporting the EKZ."

"In terms of what [Innovate UK Global Alliance Africa] is doing in mobilising and sensitising the ecosystem and bringing [stakeholders] together to exchange knowledge, this is critical because it helps orient minds in terms of not just communications... but as a signal to the private sector, if I should put it that way, to say that within the state, there's a strong drive to push the agenda of innovation."

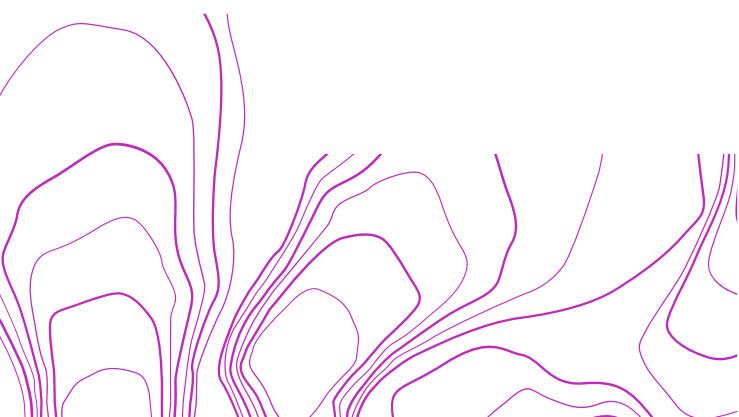
Rosemund Offei-Awuku, Chief Development Economist, African Development Bank (AfDB).

The EKZ is set to be a 20-hectare green technology park and special economic "free zone" offering infrastructure, connectivity and fiscal incentives to attract established innovation and technology partners; provide seed funding for start-ups; and offer skills training and employment opportunities for the local population, especially young people.

It is anticipated that the EKZ will generate 26,000 new jobs and deliver US\$14 million annually in economic benefits for Ekiti State.

"Imagine what we've been able to do so far [with Innovate UK Global Alliance Africa]. Imagine what we are able to do now we have funding... We are going to maximise every opportunity that we have."

Seun Fakuade, Honorable Commissioner for Innovation, Science and Digital Economy, Ekiti State.



Investment in the Future Innovators

Honourable Commissioner for Finance and Economic Development, Akin Oyebo, cites the Young Innovators programme as an example of how Global Alliance Africa has contributed to creating positive conditions and a future platform within the State's ecosystem to secure additional EKZ funding.

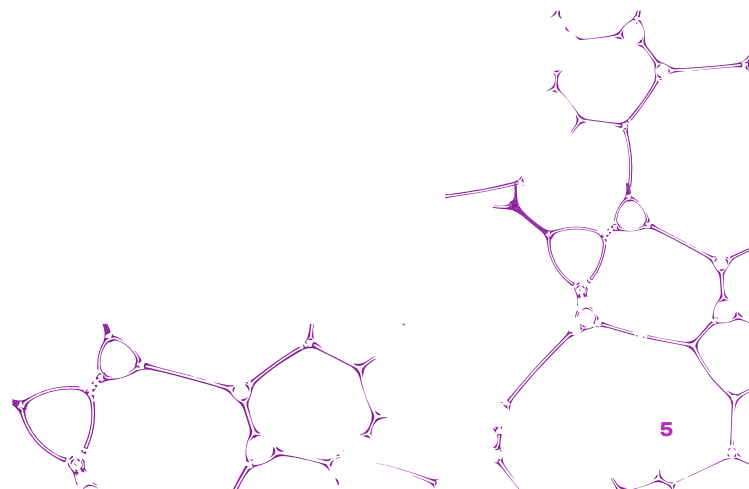
This feeds directly into EKZ programme aspirations, generating a talent pipeline which can benefit from its planned funding programme for innovation start-ups.

The Global Alliance Africa team are continuing to work closely with Ekiti State to support the delivery of the EKZ through further partnership building and knowledge transfer opportunities.



“Hope is a bet on the future. It is effectively building a road where there are no cars and saying, if we build the road, people will buy cars. Right now [that bet] is looking very promising.”

Honourable Commissioner for Finance and Economic Development, Akin Oyebo





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