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Case Study

# Young Innovators Finalists 2023

An update with the three finalists from 2023

[iuk-business-connect.org.uk/global-alliance](http://iuk-business-connect.org.uk/global-alliance)



# Introduction



Over a year on from the Young Innovators Award Ceremony, held on International Youth Day in August 2023, we have been catching up with the three finalists to hear more about what they've been up to since taking part in the Young Innovators Programme (YIP).

The 2023 Young Innovators Programme was a new initiative launched as part of Innovate UK's **Global Alliance Africa** project to provide training, mentorship and pitching opportunities to a cohort of **ten young innovators** based in Ekiti State with innovation awards disbursed to **three finalists**.

As part of the Global Alliance Africa project, Innovate UK has been delivering a Place-Based Innovation intervention in Ekiti State to support the development of the local innovation ecosystem by leveraging both local and UK technical expertise, knowledge transfer, partnership and networking brokerage, and funding opportunities.

Supported by the Ministry of Innovation, Science and Digital Economy (MISDE) in Ekiti State, the Young Innovators Programme was a targeted initiative to build capacity and open up new opportunities that would enable emerging entrepreneurs to strengthen their business model and scale operations.

As well as contributing to the talent pipeline and ecosystem strengthening objectives of Innovate UK's Place-Based Innovation, the programme was also designed to help combat the persistent challenge of "brain drain" to large urban centres that the Ekiti State government has put at the heart of its **economic growth plans**. Ekiti State's Commissioner for Innovation, Science and Digital Economy, Seun Fakuade, recently championed the "tremendous success" of the 2023 Young Innovators programme by committing to a scaled up **2024 programme**, with MISDE working in collaboration with Innovate UK.



*"YIP represents an opportunity for young innovators to secure non-dilutive seed funding – in the form of an innovation award – and expert training for their businesses. Youth led businesses are a critical part of any innovation ecosystem. GAA is very proud to have led this initiative in 2023 in partnership with MISDE, and we are excited to continue this impactful collaboration in the second iteration of the programme in 2024"*

Regional Lead – Africa, Jon Waboso Barrow

The Young Innovators Programme has been a catalyst for the three finalists to arrive at longer-term objectives more quickly through a combination of training, mentoring and innovation awards. As Dr Odunola Olabintan, Co-Founder and CEO of The Health City, explains: *"we were really excited to take part in the training because we knew that it would help us make informed business decisions. Fast forward to when we got the funding award and, without that training, I feel like we might not have known the best way to optimize the money"*.



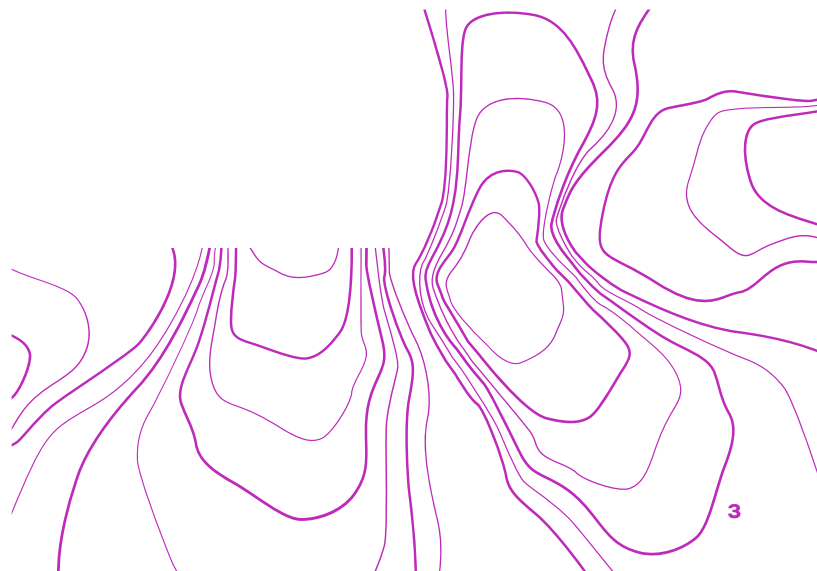
Since taking part in the programme, all three finalists are actively pursuing further funding opportunities, with networking support from Innovate UK Business Connect proving an invaluable resource in helping these young innovators take the next steps towards growing their business and expanding into new markets.

*“The Young Innovators Programme is discovering existing talent, it is inspiring people to pursue an area of innovation that they can be successful at and it is [creating] a talent pipeline in Ekiti.”*

Honourable Commissioner for Finance and Economic Development, Akin Oyebo

Supporting young entrepreneurs is at the heart of Innovate UK’s mandate with a similar **UK-based Young Innovators Programme** available to support young people and businesses in the UK. This is part of Innovate UK’s commitment to changing the world by investing in young people with big environmental, societal and economic ambitions.<sup>1</sup>

1. [iuk.ktn-uk.org/programme/young-innovators](http://iuk.ktn-uk.org/programme/young-innovators)



# Spotlight 1: The Health City



**The Health City** provides an interactive, digital platform for young people to access sexual and reproductive health services and support including remote text-based consultations with a doctor.

Co-Founder and CEO, Dr Odunola Olabintan, describes how her business has developed from being “unstructured” to “thriving” as a result of the training and mentorship by offering her the chance to learn a “new and better way of doing things” from a business development perspective.

One of the key takeaways from the training for The Health City team was the value of building professional networks and securing opportunities for collaboration, including a recent collaboration with **She Writes Woman** – a rights based advocacy group – that has enabled The Health City team to expand their knowledge and understanding of best practice in providing mental health services to young people, a new area for development within their current offering.

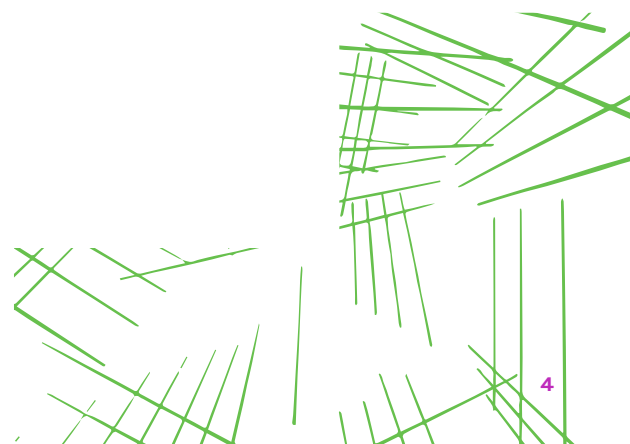
The programme has also helped The Health City to develop a much clearer business strategy, as well as the knowledge and confidence to pitch their business when applying for new funding opportunities. The Health City have used the funding award to build a new product, “AsktheDoc”. AsktheDoc is a robust platform which integrates all their healthcare services to provide a bespoke telemedicine service.

This, in turn, has allowed them to generate ongoing income, thus creating greater sustainability as an emerging social enterprise. The Health City hope to secure additional funding in the near future in order to put into practice current expansion plans:



*“The Young Innovators [Programme] award was a good start up fund but we still need to push [for more funding] to get to where we want to be. The Young Innovators Programme is a programme that I would encourage any young innovator to be a part of... It has been a catalyst to get us to where we are now.”*

Dr Odunola Olabintan, Co-Founder and CEO,  
The Health City.





## Spotlight 2: RISE



**The Rice Inventory Storage Exchange (RISE)** provides a digital solution for commodity storage, buying and selling for farmers and traders, which along with access to improved storage facilities, means that farmers are able to store their produce for longer and thus secure the better prices for their goods.

Adetunji Abayomi, Co-Founder of RISE, describes the Young Innovators programme as “fantastic” and credits the knowledge and skills acquired through the programme with helping him to transform “an idea [into] an accelerating start-up”. Abayomi highlights how the programme increased his understanding of the innovation ecosystem with the mentorship providing tailored one-to-one support from a successful innovator within the same sector: *“the mentorship session that we had [helped us to] realise that even as a start up, you need a strategy...that there’s a difference between owning a business and running a business”*.

As a result of the innovation award, RISE have been able to conduct a successful field pilot of their product and currently have multiple funding applications in place with the intention of securing funds to scale up their operations following the pilot.

Alongside the investment in business development generated by the innovation award, RISE have also been busy building new collaborations across the supply chain including establishing a partnership with **Remote Sensing Application Consultant (RSAC)**, UK-based specialists in remote sensing, to further strengthen their business model.



*“My biggest achievement since taking part in the Young Innovators programme is forming partnerships with different stakeholders. Without the Young Innovators Programme, we wouldn’t have had this acceleration to the proof of concept phase that we’ve reached presently. We would probably still just be thinking: how do we do this? how do we do that?”*

Adetunji Abayomi, Co-Founder, RISE.

## Spotlight 3: Motivar



**Motivar** is a digital platform that creates a community for young learners to access and complete digital education courses. For Mayowa Olajide Akinleye, Co-Founder of Motivar, the Young Innovators Programme helped him to take his “project with grassroots social impact” and transform it into a registered business that has invested resources into developing and launching a new digital education tool.

Akinleye emphasises how the training and mentoring has been just as important for him as the innovation award in getting to this point:

*“The training helped me rigorously sift through my thoughts and prioritise what was most important to building Motiva at this time.”*

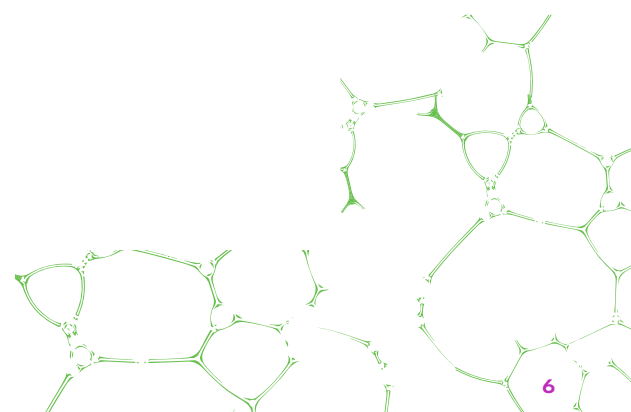
The new digital education tool that they are currently piloting is a key part of Motivar’s “core value proposition” to create lasting social and economic impact for learners from marginalised communities. The tool has involved developing a new platform that enables private and public sponsors to fund learners course costs, which in turn will help learners with limited resources upskill and improve their long-term economic outlook.

Once the pilot phase is successfully completed, the Motivar team intend to continue building new partnerships, including those facilitated by Innovate UK, as well as activity pursuing follow-on funding to roll out the platform.



*“The Young Innovators programme has strengthened my faith that what we are trying to do might actually matter.”*

Mayowa Olajide Akinleye, Co-Founder, Motivar.





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