

RLABS COMES HOME

I consider myself especially privileged to be a part of this epoch-making event by RLabs, a non-profit established in South Africa that has continued to make a huge impact in Africa and across 5 continents, and particularly on our youth and women; our greatest resource! Over the past 14 years, RLabs has, through several projects and initiatives, empowered and transformed the lives of millions of young people and women through technology and innovation, and specifically in training and economic empowerment programmes.

2. Before now, RLabs has set up offices in 23 countries across 5 continents. Today, RLabs has arrived at our shores, opening their office and launching their presence in the Nigerian space! I am excited and encouraged by the diverse awards, recognitions and achievements already recorded by RLabs and look forward to witnessing the social impact, especially on the more marginalized and vulnerable, in our own country. By providing access to innovative educational and training programmes, research, ideation, design, SME support, mentorship, accelerating high-impact scalable businesses, as well as driving social enterprise & innovative business models, RLabs has created a niche for itself.

3. Innovation, technology, and social impact are potent forces that have the potential to shape and revolutionize our world. Innovation drives progress by challenging the status quo, fostering creativity, and inspiring new solutions to complex problems. Whether it's in the realm of science, business, or social issues, innovative ideas pave the way for transformative change. Technological advancements, in particular, have been instrumental in driving this progress forward. From the invention of the internet, which has connected people from all over the world, to breakthroughs in medical science that have improved healthcare and increased life expectancy, technology empowers us to achieve feats previously thought impossible. Furthermore, the interplay of innovation and technology with social impact creates a unique synergy, as it opens up avenues to address pressing societal challenges, such as poverty, inequality, and environmental degradation. By

harnessing these powerful tools, individuals and organizations can create positive change and foster a more inclusive and sustainable future for all.

4. The power of innovation, technology, and social impact lies in their ability to amplify each other's effects. Innovation sparks the development of cutting-edge technologies that not only improve efficiency and productivity but also bring about transformative social change. For instance, technology has democratized access to education, healthcare, and information, providing marginalized communities with greater opportunities for socio-economic advancement. Social impact drives innovation and technology towards solving human-centric challenges. By understanding the needs and aspirations of communities, innovators and technology, pioneers like RLabs have been able to develop solutions that have a direct, positive impact on people's lives. This virtuous cycle has the potential to create a ripple effect, spurring further innovations and leading to a snowball effect of positive change across society.

5. Technology, innovation and social change organizations play a vital role in transforming ecosystems in several ways. Ecosystems refer not only to natural environments but also to the complex systems and networks that exist within societies. By leveraging technology, organizations like RLabs continue to have a substantial impact on various aspects of social change and environmental transformation. Innovation and technology can contribute to ecosystem transformation in the following ways:

- a) **Data Collection and Analysis:** Technology enables the efficient gathering and analysis of data related to environmental and social issues. With the help of sensors, satellites, drones, and various monitoring tools, organizations can collect real-time data on climate, human capital & social-economic indices, and other critical indicators. This data provides a comprehensive understanding of the ecosystem, thereby helping to identify areas that require urgent intervention.
- b) **Awareness and Education:** Social change organizations can utilize technology to raise awareness, open minds beyond our imagination and educate the public. Social media, online platforms, and interactive apps can be employed to disseminate information, engage audiences, and promote sustainable

practices. Technology-driven campaigns can effectively reach and mobilize large numbers of people in an objective manner, encouraging them to take positive actions for social issues.

- c) **Advocacy and Policy Influence:** Technology facilitates communication and collaboration among social change organizations, enabling them to amplify their advocacy efforts. Through online platforms and virtual meetings, they can collaborate with stakeholders, policymakers, and governments to influence policies and regulations that support sustainable practices and protect ecosystems.
- d) **Crowdsourcing:** Technology allows social change organizations to harness the power of crowdsourcing. They can engage individuals and communities in data collection and analysis processes, enabling a more decentralized approach to understanding ecosystem challenges. This participatory approach fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility, leading to more effective and sustainable solutions.
- e) **Innovation and Solutions:** Technology-driven innovation, such as artificial intelligence, machine learning, and blockchain, can be applied to develop new solutions for environmental and socio-economic challenges. For example, AI can optimize resource management, while blockchain can enhance transparency in supply chains, ensuring sustainable sourcing of materials.
- f) **Fundraising and Resource Mobilization:** Technology has revolutionized fundraising and resource mobilization efforts for social change organizations. Online crowdfunding platforms and digital payment methods allow these organizations to reach a global audience and secure financial support for their projects and initiatives.
- g) **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Technology assists in monitoring the impact of social change initiatives and measuring progress over time. It enables organizations to assess the effectiveness of their interventions and make data-driven decisions to improve future strategies.

h) **Capacity Building and Skill Development:** Technology enables organizations to provide online training and capacity-building programs to individuals and communities. By empowering people with relevant skills, they can actively participate in ecosystem conservation and transformation.

6. Having been in the social sector space for over 4 decades now, I cannot overemphasize just how critical these existing and emerging opportunities are for us, as Nigerians. Given our population, estimated currently at about 223 million, with a 53% youth unemployment rate (*Spectator Index, 2023*), RLabs has arrived at THE destination, for desired impact. Since technology empowers social change organizations to scale their efforts, optimize resource utilization, and collaborate across borders to create meaningful and lasting transformations within ecosystems, Nigeria welcomes and embraces your efforts.

7. Ultimately, the combined force of innovation, technology, and social impact empowers humanity to address global challenges, achieve sustainable development goals, and build a more equitable and prosperous world for all. By leveraging innovation and technology's potential, RLabs is definitely poised to contribute significantly to building a more secure and stable society, renewing hope and supporting a productive Nigerian population. Our teeming youth are eager to have their potential unlocked, to be ethically mentored, and trained. Their skills need to be honed, their businesses and start-ups structured and supported; their social consciousness needs to be awakened. Millions of women in our rural communities await your economic opportunities in terms of mentorship, resources and training. The small business and job markets await them all, through your support and guidance. My dear friend, Renee, there is so much that can be done in our country. We look forward to partnering with you, for the greater good of all. Thank you so much... RLabs, welcome to Nigeria!

Maryam Uwais OON

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