

The Nigerian Tech Ecosystem: A Call for Authentic Innovation

The Problem of Superficial Engagement

Beyond serving the conventional conversations that happen in the tech community, we must acknowledge a troubling trend: many people engage in tech discussions not out of genuine interest or deep connection, but merely to belong to an elite squad of recognizable techies in Nigeria or Africa. They lack the authentic value and results to match their reputation. People need to wake up from this deluded slumber that has caught up with nearly everyone in the tech ecosystem.

Genuine innovation has been replaced by performance. No one is matching value with results nor results with reputation; instead, they're equating value with whoever can shout the loudest or knows the next big tech personality. The Nigerian tech community has hit a ceiling—a cap in having authentic individuals willing to do what it takes to create genuine innovations rather than just the next investable but ultimately hollow tech solution.

For example, we see countless startups launching "revolutionary" fintech apps that are merely repackaged versions of existing payment systems, distinguished only by different color schemes and marketing campaigns. These founders appear on tech panels speaking eloquently about "disruption" while their products offer nothing substantially new to users.

The Path to Reorientation

The reorientation starts with exposing the uncomfortable truth about what's happening and the schemes people employ to distribute products without true value. Consider how many incubators and accelerators in Lagos and Abuja graduate dozens of startups annually, yet only a tiny fraction create solutions that address fundamental problems unique to the African context.

Next, we must focus on guiding innovators toward creating genuine innovations capable of transforming the world. This includes:

1. Developing the right mindset that prioritizes solving real problems over chasing investment
2. Identifying key areas that genuinely need technological solutions in our local context
3. Conducting thorough research to identify problems and solutions in any field, rather than merely employing every thought that comes to mind

This approach prevents us from copying and pasting each other's ideas with different brand names and marketing strategies. Take healthcare technology in Nigeria, for instance. Instead of creating another doctor appointment app (which fails to address the fundamental shortage of healthcare professionals), innovative founders could develop AI-powered diagnostic tools specifically designed for low-resource settings or create logistics systems that ensure medicines reach remote areas.

The Current Reality

The truth is evident to everyone hearing it—examples come to mind whenever these issues are raised. The point is not to call out names but to communicate the true nature of a catalytic cancer vigorously eating deep into the wounds of the Nigerian tech ecosystem and exploiting the rest of Nigerians and Africans who use these technological innovations. If we do not combat this trend, we will be exchanging value for mediocrity and innovation for conventionality or unoriginality.

Have you ever wondered why certain Nigerian tech products have done well over the years and are leading in Africa? Is it by chance or by design? I'll let you answer and find a way to align yourselves with the truth, reject the falsehoods within you, and do better as innovators, technologists, and business owners.

Consider Paystack's success story—their payment infrastructure was built with a deep understanding of the unique challenges of Nigerian internet connectivity and banking systems. They didn't simply copy Stripe; they created a solution specifically addressing local constraints and opportunities.

Breaking Free from Dependency

Moving beyond this foundational truth, we must address another problematic mindset: the belief that we are incapable of creating genuine innovations like Western innovators. This leads us to wait year after year for the next big tech trend, jumping on it because it's trending and investors are flocking to it.

The majority of African technologists wait to consume foreign technologies without considering how to build or collaborate on tech products that could transform the world. We are the first to try out the newest AI product, blockchain solution, or management tool. When we do try these technologies, we initiate unhealthy conversations meant to stroke our egos or mask our ignorance and inadequacies, attempting to prove to others that we are current and relevant.

For instance, when ChatGPT was released, Nigerian tech communities buzzed with endless discussions about using it—but how many initiatives focused on creating large language models trained on Nigerian languages or addressing uniquely African use cases? Very few, because we've been conditioned to be consumers rather than creators.

The Path Forward

Using technological products developed in the West is not inherently problematic. What this conversation opposes is the outcome of that usage, which often yields little of substantial value. It keeps us in a constant loop of jumping from one new release to another. Our minds have been saturated with the idea that we don't have what it takes to build what Western innovators are building. Even more disheartening, we have been mentally conditioned to believe we are not smart enough to create technologies like them or innovate as they do.

I strongly doubt this narrative. Being innovative and creative with original ideas does not depend on the environment unless you allow the environment to affect you. What it depends on is the mindset of the thinker and the knowledge they have exposed themselves to.

However, I do agree that one's environment may affect the implementation of groundbreaking ideas and therefore stagnate the progress or adoption of a technology. This is where understanding the systems that run the environment and the importance of collaboration come into play. Fusing the understanding of these two elements with your original idea will leave you far better positioned than trying to figure everything out yourself.

Consider how SystemSpecs developed Remita, which has become central to Nigeria's Treasury Single Account policy. They understood both the technological requirements and the complex governmental systems they needed to navigate. This wasn't just about technical innovation but about creating a solution that worked within Nigeria's specific regulatory and operational environment.

Conclusion

It is therefore necessary to develop a creator's mindset for all forms of ideas that come to you. Research them thoroughly, create genuine innovations, and find collaborators who will help bring your ideas to life.

We are capable of transforming the world with genuine innovations from Nigeria and Africa if we accept the truth and live by it, rather than embracing comfortable lies that lead to mediocrity and conventionality. We are not meant to merely consume technologies but to create new innovations that transform the world. This requires developing a creator's mindset that allows us to see possibilities in all things and cultivate a keen interest in research.

The next Flutterwave, Andela, or Paystack could emerge from this mindset shift—not as imitations of Western companies, but as uniquely African solutions that address both local challenges and global opportunities. The potential is there; what's needed is the courage to pursue authentic innovation rather than the safety of imitation.