



## How to build community.

# How to turn rubbish into money: The story of Nigeria's eco-entrepreneurs

### Summary keywords

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### Speakers

Jake Lloyd, Fwangmun Oscar Danladi

## Episode 2, How to turn rubbish into money: The story of Nigeria's eco-entrepreneurs

### Jake Lloyd 0:15

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Hello, I'm Jake Lloyd and welcome to you. How to build community, a podcast and a radio show brought to you by Tearfund's *Footsteps* magazine and Arukah Network. In this episode, I've been speaking to the man behind a training hub for eco entrepreneurs in Nigeria, and he's been telling me how the young local people he works with attending the country's huge problem of rubbish into a thriving and sustainable business.

### Fwangmun Oscar Danladi 0:53

We were amazed to discover that there were young people who could take these electronic waste and convert them into an entire system of solar energy.

## **Jake Lloyd 1:05**

That's the voice of Fwangmun Oscar Danladi who, as well as being a pastor and an environmental activist, also runs the Justice Green Center in central Nigeria. He describes this center as a movement of young people, and his job is to inspire them to see opportunities to create jobs and businesses as they care for the environment. And in this episode, he tells me how big a problem waste is in his country. He explains why there's no concept of waste in his indigenous language. He talks about why electronic waste in particular, like mobile phones and other devices, are a goldmine. He explains how young people are using this goldmine to build eco businesses. He talks about how these businesses are solving other problems in the country. Until share some tips for how you can start to similar projects where you live. So let's get into the interview. I had a fantastic time chatting with Oscar in fact, listen to this clip. This is what I told Oscar after we had finished recording the interview. You're a fantastic speaker. You're so articulate and inspiring. I was in I was in a bit of a bad mood before this morning, before we started speaking. And now I'm in a good mood. So, you know. But let's start at the beginning. I began by asking Oscar just how big a problem is waste in Nigeria.

## **Fwangmun Oscar Danladi 2:04**

Waste is probably one of the biggest environmental problems we face in Nigeria. Describing your house to someone you would tell him when you get to this particular dumpsite, you just turn left or something. So it's almost like with this something that is with us somewhere with waste. So it's a big, huge problem and I don't see really because people don't want to care for their environment, but because people know what the best way to do to manage their waste is to dump it. So you have this huge environmental menace, you have health issues all resulting from lack of proper waste management. You have a whole lot that connects climate change. It connects with the issues are just so enormous that you related to lack of proper waste. Money to waste is a big problem that the government still struggling with how to manage it. Communities are struggling on how to manage it. Individuals are struggling on how to manage. So waste is just a big problem that has several strands of impact health impacts, economic impact, environmental impact. So with the huge problem in Nigeria.

## **Jake Lloyd 4:07**

And what kind of waste are we talking about?

## **Fwangmun Oscar Danladi 4:10**

So plastic waste is top on the list, but we have this huge and I call it the gold mine because it is often not spoken about, which is electronic waste. Nigeria is one of the big importers of electronics, if not in Africa, in the world. So we have a huge waste problem in the electronics sector. We also have organic waste coming largely from the agricultural sector. Why? Because quite a number of people around here are farmers. So they generate a lot of waste. Households generate a lot of ways. But then in terms of hierarchy, the plastic waste is number one, largely because of the culture that we have embraced, which is to buy used and DOM culture. But then so you have three categories of waste. I mean, we can go deeper to break down the

plastics, but we have huge plastic problems, we have huge electronic waste problems and we have huge organic waste problem all lumped together.

### **Jake Lloyd 5:21**

And you use the term goldmine to describe the e-waste in particular. And that that brings me on to this idea of the circular economy. Now, I think some people listening to this will know what the circular economy is and some won't. Could you describe it to us?

### **Fwangmun Oscar Danladi 5:41**

Contrast for me is like the best way to understand stuff. When I make sense of things within the context of contrast to I must think about the linear economy, which is simply the economy where you buy things you use and you don't. But then we have the recycling economy, which is when you buy things and you use and you try as much as possible to reuse them and repurpose them and recycle them. But then the recycling economy, you still have some parts of the waste that goes back to the dump site. Boys in Sex Economy. Mike The picture for me here is almost like that of the natural environment where nothing goes into with the things that just re channelled into what is considered to be a waste in this sector is a raw material for another sector. So there's just this cycle of how things are used and we use are we directed. So at the long run you don't have anything called when I'm really for me that that is as an African or someone that comes from the Global South. I, I see our traditional world view to be secular in nature because when we started our journey of understanding with, we had a training with aid on how to manage with and the dynamics of waste and all of that opportunities in with. And one question that came quite strongly to us was the question of what is with indigenous languages? And we were shocked to discover that there is no concept, there's no word for with in indigenous languages. Rather you, you, you either consider something to be not the usable noun or something to be kept for later use, or something to be given to someone who needs it so that concept for me now gives me an idea of settler economy, where the resources are used in different sectors, and you eventually don't have anything going into the like. So thus for me, the idea of settler economy, where resources are just moved around different economy sectors and different industries and different hands and different people, people just how they just use resources differently. And at the long run you don't have anything called with that.

### **Jake Lloyd 8:17**

That's so interesting. So tell us how the just screen center, how you're supporting young people to develop eco enterprises using this the circular economy idea.

### **Fwangmun Oscar Danladi 8:31**

Okay, we started largely as a movement and because our context is one with young people usually marginalised and not considered or taken seriously. So we have our context. This is one that you describe the young people as nerd, not educated or not employed, not trained, or do not have access to training. We

looked at that context and we look at the vast opportunity of young people and huge environmental, like I mentioned earlier, waste is a huge problem. But we discovered that the area of environmental sustainability, issues around equal jobs are things that are seldom spoken about. People are not, government is not interested. Very few are people, as of 2015, were interested in that conversation and because our journey started from this place of reflection, how do we engage this massive youth population in Nigeria into problem solving? And we discover that one area that is ignored is the area of environment. And we said, but young people have huge potentials to think creatively and to be able to innovate and to be problem solvers. And it was in that state of thinking that we saw opportunities in identifying young people who have great potentials to problem solve. And we just simply brought them into the center and carried trainings like value orientation, because values is very important in running with project is very important in sustaining project. So we did a lot of training in value orientation. But beyond that, we thought that helping them to re-imagine Nigeria and to see how their skills can be useful and because we desire to also deal with social issues around unemployment, young people engage in vices and all of that. The project specific project we did was what we call the rethinking for urban community, where we looked at this huge goldmine of e-waste and we brought in young people and say, What can we do with this? And because some of our communities have huge problem of access to energy, we were amazed to discover that there were young people who could take this electronic waste and convert them into by taking out components of this electronic waste, like the transformers, the resistors and all sorts of elements from this being set up to be with and put them together in to invite us into solar charge controllers and eventually build an entire system of solar energy. The only thing we bought in that project was we bought panel, solar panel, because again, we that can be made locally for obvious reasons of lack of resources and all of that. But this young people could mind improve. And that's why I said electronic waste is such a huge goldmine, because, again, we have a lot of, you know, this young people, but particularly one of them that we worked with. And we believe that there are so many young people that we can identify locally that have this potential and this skill. And we trained them and we brought them in, enabling them to see this crucial issue of people living in having energy poverty and enabling them to see how do we solve this problem. And through some funding, particularly working with Tearfund, Nigeria, Tearfund, UK, we got some funding to support the project and about 50 people were trained on how to provide a build solar system and install them in their homes. And that is the story of how the journey began for us, particularly in the area of mining into electronic with and the project has continued to amaze and dozens of people. Dave was a pilot project. We had some few challenges, but then the resolve was phenomenal and a lot of people have shown in prison and right now we're seeing how do we build such training, build a curriculum around with innovation and integrated into our learning institutions where it's about solving problems and seeing opportunities in with, hmm.

## **Jake Lloyd 13:14**

I don't know how electronics really work and I imagine a lot of people listening to this we won't know much about how their electronic devices work. What advice would you give for people listening to this who might want to explore how they can use e-waste and convert it, but don't have the necessary skills. Like it sounds like this young person who did have these skills must have been particularly gifted in this area of electronics.

## **Fwangmun Oscar Danladi 13:38**

It's interesting to mention that this young person, I think, really went through what we call primary school. That's elementary school. Right. He only had an elementary school education. But Google is one great teacher myself, inclusive. I didn't have an idea of how this electronics with things work, but when we started the training, some of us participated in the training to we discovered that these are very basic science, basic physics, that one can just learn by simply Google it. And really a lot of young people spend most of their time online doing all the social media stuff, but when they can actually use the Internet. And that was a huge lesson. And again, as a center, we're trying to see how do we integrate this lesson? Because all young people are asking and looking for are access to resources, not necessarily funding, access to the Internet, access with platforms that would enable them to be able to be trained for their capacities to be built. And we discovered that there wasn't tons and tons of information about how you can take things from this electronic waste on the Internet and convert it. I must say, it comes with a bit of diligence and commitment and willingness to learn, but we see that there is opportunity within countries that have access to the Internet for young people to just more light and study and see and just mine information and the internet and make use of it. And I think that's what works here. This young guy just putting so simply by having a smartphone that can access the Internet. And he spent a couple of years working on these and the outcome is what we have. So essentially, what I'm saying is that I don't think you have to be a professional listed with the Internet age, with the Internet revolution and access to Internet people. Use it for phone. People can use it for good and young people actually, once they have access to this thing, they can be self-taught, they can have access to information, and they can make valuable time on the Internet training themselves and accessing other experts in this area. And I think that's what help them out. We see amazing results when young people have access to the Internet, we see amazing results when young people have platforms on how to access training and all of that. So you don't really need to be a professional. You just need to have access to the right information about transformers, right? Information about resistors and all of that. And some of this information that's out there in the Internet for free.

## **Jake Lloyd 16:59**

And has it become a viable business for these young people to convert the e-waste into solar panels?

## **Fwangmun Oscar Danladi 17:08**

Yes. So some of the learning experiences we've had is the fact that because, again, the project was a pilot, we learned that it will take much more than just a few weeks or a few months training for them to be able to build viable, sustainable businesses around this stuff. But then we can see the impact, especially on the community. Now, this is a community that has huge energy problem doer not too far. It's an open storm, but it's cut off from the national grid. But you can see business is beginning like particularly when we're evaluating the project. We saw this young lady that has a talent for making hair and all of that prior to now, her business was almost closing up or pulling out because it doesn't have access to light. But because she participated in the training, I was able to learn some basic skills about how to build this stall. And as an outcome of the training, one of the systems was installed in her shop. She talks about the fact that people

now patronize. She now has access to basic power supply, to just parties with music and charge phones. And so, yeah, several other businesses that are coming in, coming out from that project, both in terms of the capacity of the young people. One, some of the learning experiences we've had is that it'll take a bit more than just a few months training, and that is why we have proceeded to engage with one of the training institutions, is a technical school here in Jos, in Nigeria. And we are already building a curriculum. We're getting some experts to see. We have piloted these and these are the results, these are the lessons. How do we integrate it into some sort of certificate program where it's not just about the head knowledge, but is about young people, practical people to see opportunities with an electronic wisdom, all sorts of needs and problems. So, so the learning experience we're having right now is about that. It has to be integrated into some sort of long term training. But then with key components of this, lessons that we've learned and we're hopeful that once the curriculum is out, once the system is set accredited by the government, it's essentially going to be a huge program where more young people will be trained. And these are the ones further between now be able to sustainably build longer systems that would last longer and be able to set up businesses around renewable energy with systems produced locally and not imported.

### **Jake Lloyd 19:57**

And we've we talked mainly about electronic waste e-waste. Yes. So far, I guess everything you're talking about here, this applies to any form of waste. Does it, is there equivalent with plastics, with fabric, with them, with other forms of waste?

### **Fwangmun Oscar Danladi 20:14**

Yes. Yes. So beyond, just, and again, the exciting thing about the Electronic Waste Project and why maybe I think I'm talking too much about it is because of the potential we saw with just that pilot. But moving forward, the center is setting up its social enterprise around plastics because like I said, top on the list is a plastic problem. And we're trying to bring some innovation even in how we collect the plastic waste. Because, again, first, there's a problem with sorting. There's a problem with collections before we even start talking about making products out of it. But then we're looking at opportunities and even making pavement tiles from the plastic with and the technology is quite busy, very simple, accessible when you go on the Internet, when you go on the with it website, you would see different technologies on how to convert this plastic waste into pavement tiles that can be used to sort of make drainages, used to make the road look nice and build houses even with some of those bit by bricks that will come from the plastics, those bricks are even stronger than the ones that come from cement. And we're also looking at opportunities in Woody with some of the technology that quite basic, where people in local communities can convert their woody waste into charcoal briquettes that don't even smoke. And the process is just simply through some basic process of colonisation and just converting them into briquettes, a charcoal briquettes that women can buy and use. So right now, the center is almost about 80% done with that, setting up that social enterprise. We're getting a workspace view where young people can be brought in to sort of get collect this with crush them and convert them into wiring products. So the principal works similarly with that of the electronic waste.



## **Jake Lloyd 22:26**

And these young people to become involved in these ventures as they grow in confidence and things like this, do they begin to lobby governments or anything like that to improve waste management in Nigeria?

## **Fwangmun Oscar Danladi 22:42**

Yes. As a key component of our engagement, we do not ignore the power of policies. And I give you an example. When we started quite early, we started with just this thinking of collecting banners. Banners are we have a lot of churches here that do program church programs and they hang banners for their programs as invitations. And after the program, those banners are still hanging there. And some of them are made of plastic and they are quite, quite durable. And when we started, we wanted to collect those banners, the wall that was the first plan, the initial plan. We wanted to collect the banners and sort of just get them off our streets and clean up the streets. But when we started collecting with us, what can we do with these banners? But then we encountered a huge problem. Some of those churches are coming against us because again, they want their banners hanging, but then the programs are over. Nobody's cleaning up. So we have to engage with the government. It is responsible for ensuring the metropolis is clean and we had to do a lot of high level lobbying and conversation and discussion with them to be able to go into some sort of partnership that enables us to clean up the street. And beyond that, we have government put strict policies about how these banners and these things are hanging on. Government to a large extent, they seem very open. The people are willing to partner with them. So our policy discussions and policy dialogues are very critical to our own method of engagement advocacy visits to key parliamentary members and government members. They are all part of what we decide to do and we have a whole training that we call the advocacy movement, building training. And part of that training is just inventory with young people, with tools for on the stand in the root cause of problems and, you know, designing interventions with clear code strategies on how to engage government. So it's part of it and it has yielded results for us in the last couple of years that we have been walking. We've had opportunities for the government to call us for dialogue, for the government to take us seriously. So you're right, Jake, the engagement is beyond just the grassroots. It is about engaging policymakers.

## **Jake Lloyd 25:18**

Can we talk a bit about the more the sort of the human element of this? I'm curious that you're working with all these young people. I'm interested in what motivates them to get involved. Is it care for the environment, the future of the planet, or is it building a business and generating an income? Or you've talked about faith as an and as a factor as well. Yeah. What is motivating these young people in your experience?

## **Fwangmun Oscar Danladi 25:50**

So before we even bring any young person to work with us, we have processes of recruitment. And one of the great resources is a biblical resource that sort of played a very significant role in setting up the center in starting those up. It's a book, I think by Micah Challenge, edited by Jason Fileta, called 'Live Justly'. Live

Justly is a ten week session that captures ten critical issues around justice, justice and creation, care, justice and generosity, justice, prayer to the whole lot of justice of consumption. So you have all of those critical areas that sort of provides the framework, a foundation for our rule of engagement and every person we engage with. We first request that you go through the study and we the study is designed in such a way that it's done in groups just to bring in the movement building component. So it's done in groups and it is when you have done the first stages of the process of recruitment, we have what we call the Changing Narrative Workshop, and the changing in the workshop is essentially through to challenge and inspire the young person to have the right value for engagement. So it's not about making money. Is not this capitalistic driven mindset, but rather we come from a place of faith. We come from a place of value. We come from a place of wanting to just make a difference and make a change. And then we connected with this whole bigger global trend of climate change, which is visible. And the young people just see all of this thing and they are inspired to want to take action because we are the future. We are the present. The future, whatever affects the future, affects us and affects every single one of us and even our children. So we bring them to that place of urgency to see that we can have the money, but then we lose the environment. But especially we don't ignore the fact that there's a huge unemployment problem. So for us is a synergy between what we call economic and environmental sustainability. So we move the people. But the baseline is to begin from that place of understanding God's justice, God's shalom, and God desire for creation to flourish.

### **Jake Lloyd 28:35**

One thing that often happens with this show is people here, listeners hear a story like yours and they think, How can we, you, do something like this where we live? And I know people might want to ask you what kind of challenges you've encountered in developing this work. What's the what's one of the hardest things you've found in getting this kind of work off the ground?

### **Fwangmun Oscar Danladi 29:00**

So like I said, our being youthful in our context is it's almost considered to be a cost because look at our leaders. Our leaders are mostly all people in their old age. So young people are not taken seriously. They're marginalised. And when we started, one of the things we had to deal with is we have to deal with the fact that we're young and we wanted to make a difference. There's a predominant narrative that anything being led by young people should not be considered serious because again, it's going to crush. So the first two years, the huge challenge we had was the challenge of making it emphatically clear that the center is a youth driven initiative. So we wanted to host a conference, we call it Youth and Green Jobs Conference, and we met with some key government policymakers and we said this is a conference we want to make because we believe that the future is young people and the future is green. And we want to begin to inspire young people to see opportunities in green jobs. So the guys were excited and they said, wow. So we have some young people are thinking, but then they said we would want to advise that you pick off the youth from the title of the conference, Youth and Green Jobs, and simply live it as green jobs. But Jake, you would be shocked that we insisted we said, no, we're leaving because again, this is our selling point. Our selling point is that we're about the young people. A selling point is where young and we want to make a difference. And something we believe strongly in is the fact that the youth are the greatest resource that Africa has. But then we wrestle with that and at some point they just leave us. Is that okay? But so then the challenge we



have is in being deliberately youthful and being unapologetic about that, and it cost us some partnership because a lot of people said we don't want to dove into anything that is youthful because young people are not serious. But then we've done it since 2015, still date and we're seeing amazing results and we're seeing life change within communities impacted by this young people in their own small ways. And we've seen young people that have committed to be in the center without being paid. So we believe that young people at the heart of volunteerism are young people. When young people are passionate about the scene, they can volunteer even if they don't get a dime. I mean, I have been on the fence. A couple of other people have been in the center, but we have not been earning a salary. I think it's about a social enterprise. Even the enterprises we're setting is about giving back to our communities and seeing how we can problem solve. Because if our community flourishes, we flourish. So just that fact of being youthful and trying to have a youthful, youth driven initiative, it was a big challenge. But then we've done it and we're still joining and we're still evolving. And then for me again, that's one of the biggest challenges we have, though, the challenges we've been able to deal with them. But this one I no one wants to take young people serious. So anyone who is wanting to dove into doing stuff like this, I don't know what your context looks like, but then if you are a young person, be ready to go into the when you're ready to go against the storm and be ready to just make the difference.

### **Jake Lloyd 32:56**

I could ask questions all day, but I think we should do it again, I say. And for people listening, they say it listening to their say, who would like to start something like this where they live, whether it be big or small, what's what's the best way to get started?

### **Fwangmun Oscar Danladi 33:16**

For us, it started with just wanting to make a difference. So then vision is important. What vision do you have of your community? I mean, if you don't envision your community differently? Because again, that was where we started. We started by asking ourselves, do we want our community to be the way it is five years, ten years from now? So we, we sort of re-envision our community and this is biblical because the Bible tells us that young people we see vision. So we started by asking ourselves what vision of Nigeria. We knew Nigeria has a bad narrative out there. Once you show a green card and you see a manger and people think you're corrupt, people think you're just lazy or something. But we said No, we want to change that narrative. So it begins with us having a vision of your community and your community differently. If it's a broken community, see it as a flourishing community, then the next thing is you must work on your values. So when you have the right values, which again you don't put the cart before the horse. So we're not chasing money when it's just in wealth. Whereas actually having this value of wanting to see everything flourish and we know the biblical vision, vision of shalom, a biblical vision of justice, a biblical vision of how God desires that is creation work. So once you have the right vision, you have the right value. The subsequent thing is you begin to engage. So we now said, okay, how do we engage? We said, Because we have a very communal context. It's not an individualistic thing because again, when you do it alone, there's someone with if you want to go far, you walk with other people. If you want to go fast, you walk alone. So we decided to walk to go far. We know it's going to take a lot of time, but we decided to go far. So we're working together with others, bring in others who believe in this vision that you have, particularly in the

area of working together in movement. And then you can begin to now combat this vision, which might be abstract into very concrete things and concrete results. How clear strategies of how you desire to achieve it and your risk and be rest assured that you own your right on the right track to achieving good results and setting up impactful projects in these areas.

### **Jake Lloyd 35:49**

Oscar I don't have any more questions, but is there anything is there anything you would like to add?

### **Fwangmun Oscar Danladi 35:55**

Yeah, just so to speak, out to a lot of young people in different contexts. I believe that young people are just the resource that any community would have. And I mean, let's not hold our hands and keep waiting. We can make a difference. And I mean, it begins now. And that's just what I would say begins now, begins with passion, with creativity, and with the desire to just begin now. And if you are a young person, it's a huge opportunity to make a difference. And that's just believe in yourself and believe in God what God is asking you to do.

### **Jake Lloyd 36:37**

It's been an absolute joy speaking to you. Thank you.

### **Fwangmun Oscar Danladi 36:40**

Thank you so much, Jake.

### **Jake Lloyd 36:41**

That was fun. Fwangmun Oscar Danladi from the Justice Green Center in Nigeria. I hope you enjoyed the conversation as much as I did. If you want to find out more about their work, then you can follow them on Facebook. Just search for justice. Green Center and Justice is spelled J AOS. But that's almost it for this episode. Before we go, don't forget you can catch up on previous episodes of How to build community on our SoundCloud page or in your podcast player. Just Search 'How to build community', Arukah Network and Arukah you should know by now is spelled A-R-U-K-A-H. You can help support this show by making a small monthly donation on our Patreon page. Just visit [patreon.com/arukahnetwork](https://patreon.com/arukahnetwork)

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So that's it for me. Until next time. Bye for now.

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