

Executive Summary of the Cross-Continental Exchange Meetings between African and European Foundations



In partnership
with



2024

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Benjamin Bellegry, Executive Director, WINGS

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Thank you



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Foreword

Benjamin Bellegy, Executive Director, WINGS

WINGS, the global philanthropy network, works to establish more strategic partnerships with national and international philanthropic actors to unlock the potential of African philanthropy and increase the impact of African and international foundations working on the continent through collaborations, shared learning and coordination.

Since 2021, WINGS has worked with partners across Africa to strengthen the development of the philanthropy support ecosystem.¹ African foundations have been instrumental in driving positive change at the grassroots level, leveraging local knowledge and resources to address

unique challenges within the continent.² At the same time, we have seen the landscape of local and international philanthropy and grantmaking evolve significantly. European foundations are increasingly aware of the importance of global cooperation and solidarity in addressing issues such as poverty alleviation, education, healthcare, and environmental sustainability.³ The localisation agenda seeks to elevate local actors as strategic partners, thus calling for international foundations to embrace new ways of working with more proximity to and more equal collaborations with local stakeholders.⁴

1 See [“Strengthening the African Philanthropy Support Ecosystem”](#), WINGS, accessed January 26, 2025

2 See Tendai Murisa, [“African Philanthropy: Evolution, Practice & Change”](#) (Higher Life Foundation Press, 2018).

3 See [“Finance for sustainable development”](#), accessed January 26, 2025

4 See [“FROM GLOBAL TO LOCAL: Localisation Through the Lens of a Global Pandemic”](#), accessed February 02, 2025

To build the necessary trust, promote partnerships and strengthen exchanges within and beyond the sector, it is important to be intentional and create opportunities to meet, facilitate spaces for dialogue and decision-making, and engage towards common objectives. We are grateful to Agence Française de Développement (AFD), who partnered with us to create such a space. Together with our valued members and partners Africa Venture Philanthropy Alliance (AVPA), Empower Families for Innovative Philanthropy (ERFIP), Foundations 20 (F20), the Fondation de France (FDF), Philanthropy Europe Association (Philea), Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Network of Foundations Working for Development (OECD NetFWD) and the Tony Elumelu Foundation (TEF), over the course of 2024, we convened 77 participants from 49 African and European endowed and corporate philanthropic foundations. This group explored their common challenges, built relationships, and co-created three high-potential pilot ideas for action in just a few days.

At a time when the world faces unprecedented challenges, these cross-continental meetings have underscored the vital importance of partnership and collective action. Bringing together diverse philanthropic voices from Africa and Europe has proven timely and essential in addressing our time's interconnected crises. These exchanges have shown that collaboration across sectors and borders is the key to unlocking innovative and sustainable solutions.

I hope this executive summary report of the cross-continental exchanges gives you a good overview of the discussions. I invite you to contact the team if you want to learn more or take the next steps with us.

As a global network, WINGS remains committed to fostering these partnerships and being a strategic ally in transforming philanthropy in Africa, Europe and beyond. We will continue to connect stakeholders, amplify voices, and champion the tools and frameworks needed to strengthen the philanthropic ecosystem. Together, we can reimagine a future where collaboration and action lead to meaningful change for communities across the globe.



BENJAMIN BELLEGY

Executive Director, WINGS



Executive summary

Throughout the course of 2024, WINGS, as part of its partnership agreement with Agence Française de Développement (AFD) joined up with the Tony Elumelu Foundation (TEF), Africa Venture Philanthropy Alliance (AVPA), Empower Families for Innovative Philanthropy (EFIP), the Fondation de France, Philea, F20, and OECD NetFWD to organise two cross-continental exchange meetings, bringing together leaders of corporate and private/endowed foundations from Africa and Europe to strengthen collaboration and catalyse transformative change. These convenings, held in Paris and Nairobi, were pivotal in fostering mutual understanding, sharing innovative practices, and exploring collective strategies to address systemic challenges in the operation and execution of ideas in the sector across both continents. The meetings underscored the potential of philanthropy as an enabler of impactful, sustainable change through collaborative learning and action.

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ement (AFD)

The [Paris meeting in May 2024](#) set the foundations for this conversation by introducing the [Philanthropy Transformation Initiative \(PTI\)](#), a guiding framework to reorient philanthropy toward transformative collaboration. Key discussions focused on understanding the differences between European and African philanthropy, power dynamics within philanthropic ecosystems, and philanthropy for climate action and youth engagement. Participants identified the need for comprehensive mapping exercises to chart key actors and activities and committed to leveraging existing resources to enhance coordination and impact. Recognising the urgency of localised interventions and inclusive engagement, the meeting concluded with a shared vision to advance climate resilience and foster systemic change through cross-continental partnerships.

"Addressing the complex challenges of our time, such as climate change, public health, and economic inequality, requires deep collaboration across borders. The need for collective action is more urgent than ever."

Axelle Davezac, Chief Executive Officer of the Fondation de France.

Building on these outcomes, the Nairobi meeting in November 2024 deepened the dialogue through hands-on development of action prototypes, emphasising Africa-led solutions and the critical role of multi-sector collaboration, including partnerships with public institutions and the private sector. Consultative sessions addressed themes such as collaborative climate philanthropy, sustaining corporate giving amidst challenging economic environments, and empowering youth through education and skills development. The resulting pilot projects demonstrate how partnerships across sectors and continents could drive scalable solutions to regional challenges.

The agreed next steps from these meetings include:

- 1. Advancing pilot projects:** Leveraging at least one of the three prototypes developed in Nairobi to translate innovative ideas into actionable initiatives, with WINGS facilitating partner engagements and knowledge exchange.
- 2. Strengthening networks:** Enhancing connections between African and European foundations to foster mutual learning, resource sharing, and joint advocacy efforts. Participants will leverage the contact list to maintain close communication and share organisational updates and potential opportunities for collaboration.

These exchanges represent a milestone in fostering collaboration between corporate, private, and endowed foundations across Africa and Europe. As the first structured engagement of its kind, they have established a strong foundation for building strategic partnerships and leveraging collective resources to address shared challenges. This initiative highlights the potential for philanthropy to drive impactful, cross-continental action and sets the stage for sustained collaboration to advance inclusive and transformative development.

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Background

The historical ties between Europe and Africa have been shaped by complex dynamics, from trade and cultural exchanges to colonial legacies that continue to influence economic and social relations. For the philanthropic sector, these historical contexts have created distinct landscapes on both continents. European philanthropy is characterised by well-established, often endowed foundations with substantial financial resources and a focus on addressing global challenges through strategic grantmaking and cross-border collaborations. In contrast, African philanthropy is rooted in communal giving, solidarity, and locally driven initiatives, with a growing number of formalised foundations leveraging Indigenous knowledge and networks to address pressing regional challenges. Despite these differences, philanthropic organisations on both continents share a commitment to advancing social and environmental progress.



Collaboration between French and African foundations is deeply rooted in the post-colonial relationships that have evolved over decades. Following the independence of African nations, France established cooperation accords to maintain cultural, technical, and military ties with its former colonies, facilitating the presence of French advisors and resources in Africa. These historical ties have manifested in collaborative philanthropic efforts aimed at addressing development challenges across the continent. [The French-African Foundation](#), for instance, works to create generations of leaders committed to constructive bonds between African nations and France, emphasising excellence in diverse partnership. Additionally, initiatives like the [Africa-France Summit](#) have sought to reinvent relationships by focusing on mutual interests and shared goals, moving beyond traditional aid to foster genuine partnerships.

In recent years, there has been a conscious effort to move towards a new paradigm of cooperation, emphasising mutual respect and the co-creation of solutions to

contemporary challenges.⁵ Overall, the historical context of French and African foundation collaboration reflects a journey from post-colonial dependency towards a more equitable and mutually beneficial partnership, acknowledging past complexities while striving for a future grounded in shared values and objectives.

The partnership between the French Development Agency (AFD) and WINGS is an initiative focusing on mobilising French and African foundations, to strengthen their connections with philanthropy in Africa. By providing financial and partnership incentives, the AFD-WINGS collaboration encourages French, European and African foundations to fund projects that contribute to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in priority African countries. Additionally, it emphasises fostering spaces for learning, dialogue, and collaboration among philanthropic actors globally while supporting the structuring and capacity-building of the philanthropic ecosystem in these regions.

5 See Raphaëlle Faure, [“The future of France-Africa relations: Lessons from France’s engagement with Africa under Macron and recommendations for the incoming President of France”](#) (ODI Emerging Analysis, 2022).



An overview of the discussions

- Focus of group discussions
- Climate action
- Youth empowerment and education
- Sustaining corporate philanthropy in a difficult business environment
- Next steps and follow-up actions

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The first Cross-Continental Exchange meeting, held in Paris in May 2024, brought together African and European foundations to foster mutual understanding and lay the groundwork for collaborative action. Over two days, participants explored the philanthropy landscapes of both regions, emphasising the need for transformative practices and innovative collaboration through the framing of the [Philanthropy Transformation Initiative](#).

The Philanthropy Transformation Initiative (PTI) is a global collective effort by philanthropy networks, advisories, support organisations, academic centres, and funders to challenge our field to make a greater impact. This distillation of collective insights and global experiences reflects and builds on many debates, reports, guides, tools, and practices that WINGS' members and partners have developed in their respective spheres of influence. It centres on [three mindset shifts](#) and a set of [10 principles](#) that will guide philanthropic institutions on their transformation journeys. From trust and humility in relationships, collaboration with other sectors, taking risks and being bold, leveraging endowments, and using data, to embracing significant issues like climate using a transversal approach, the Philanthropy Transformation Initiative explores different levers and dimensions of the change necessary to ensure that philanthropy lives up to its potential.

[Aligned with Principle 4 \(Collaboration\)](#) of the Philanthropy Transformation Initiative, the Cross-Continental Exchange focused on fostering meaningful conversations and collaborations, and building trust, as the foundation for transforming philanthropy into a force for greater collective impact. By bringing together representatives from African and European foundations, the initiative aimed to strengthen relationships, build trust, and create opportunities for coordinated efforts. These efforts are grounded in the vision to leverage the collective intelligence, expertise, and resources of philanthropic actors across both continents to drive sustainable development and social impact.

Key discussions during the first meeting focused on advancing climate action through localised interventions, youth engagement, and addressing power dynamics, as well as the importance of mapping philanthropic ecosystems to identify key actors and opportunities.

The meeting underscored the value of participatory approaches, engaging the diaspora, and leveraging the full continuum of capital to blur boundaries between philanthropy, business, and government. Participants committed to fostering cross-continental collaboration through joint advocacy, thematic networks, and multi-stakeholder partnerships, with a shared resolve to drive systemic change and create sustainable impact across Africa and Europe.

Building on the outcomes of the Paris meeting, the second Cross-Continental Exchange meeting in Nairobi in November 2024 sought to deepen partnerships and co-create strategies for transformative action. This gathering emphasised Africa-led solutions, multi-stakeholder collaboration, and recalibrating philanthropic funding models to unlock private capital for social impact. The consultative sessions, informed by pre-meeting surveys, addressed three critical themes: climate action, youth economic empowerment, and sustaining corporate philanthropy in a difficult business environment. Participants developed hands-on prototypes and pilot ideas, demonstrating how collaboration among foundations, the private sector, governments, and development actors can drive scalable, sustainable solutions. The meeting concluded with a shared commitment to ongoing collaboration, innovative funding approaches, and actionable next steps to foster systemic change and create impactful initiatives across the continent.

"Partnerships between international and African philanthropies are critical in tackling economic development and peace-building. Together, we can create lasting change that benefits communities on both sides."

Aline Varre, Director of Strategy and Business Development at PIND Foundation.

Focus of group discussions



Three key themes emerged from the exchanges that highlighted the most pressing challenges and opportunities the participating foundations want to collectively address:

 Climate action:

Addressing the urgent need for systemic change in response to the climate crisis, with an emphasis on integrating climate action across philanthropic initiatives and fostering innovative financing mechanisms and multi-stakeholder partnerships.

 Youth economic empowerment and education:

Recognising the critical importance of engaging and economically empowering youth in their post-education phase by equipping them with the skills and knowledge to transition from “learning to earning”.

 Sustaining corporate philanthropy in a difficult business environment:

Exploring strategies to maintain and enhance corporate philanthropy, especially in times of economic uncertainty, by aligning business goals with social impact and ensuring long-term sustainability in philanthropic efforts.

Climate action

The discussions on climate action underscored the urgency of addressing the climate crisis, particularly its disproportionate effects on the most vulnerable and economically disadvantaged populations. Highlighting the devastating consequences of global heating, including biodiversity loss, food insecurity, and economic disruptions, the discussion emphasised the need for philanthropic organisations to play a more prominent role in climate advocacy and action.

The group discussions called for embracing bold and innovative approaches, leveraging philanthropy's flexibility to drive system-wide change, support capacity-building, and create access to critical climate financing and technology for marginalised communities. Further emphasis was placed on the importance of integrating climate action into the broader work of philanthropy, as climate change exacerbates nearly every issue that the sector seeks to address.

Looking ahead, this group outlined key priorities for collaboration, particularly in preparation for South Africa's G20 presidency in 2025. The identified focal areas include inclusive economic growth, a just energy transition, climate adaptation, critical minerals, food security, and the

reform of global financial structures to include innovations like climate financing and debt-for-nature swaps.

To advance the identified actions, a pilot initiative was developed with the primary objective of enabling African philanthropy to lead, drive, and support climate action. Seven key strategies were proposed to guide this effort. The pilot envisions an initiative to mobilise existing philanthropic entities and foster collaboration — the 'Africa Climate Philanthropy Action Hub', working title "The Climate Octopus". Through this network, philanthropy would engage in advocacy to promote cross-continental climate action. To raise awareness, a philanthropy commitment charter will enhance communication and public relations efforts. African foundations are encouraged to make funding commitments to drive the initiative forward. Solutions will be co-created with space for multi-stakeholder participation, ensuring actionable programs are developed and implemented. Additionally, the initiative will establish innovative data and research repositories, working closely with academia to inform priorities for climate action. Finally, it will address the intersection of climate with inequality and the economy, by ensuring youth, women and other marginalised groups are supported in these efforts.



Africa Climate Philanthropy Action Hub

Aim: To enable African philanthropy to lead, drive and support climate action.



Youth empowerment and education

The group discussions highlighted Africa's rapidly growing youth population, with projections suggesting that by 2040, 60% of the population will be under the age of 30. In some areas, this number could rise to 70%. Rather than viewing this as a challenge, the group agreed to recognise the youth as an opportunity, noting that young people face significant barriers to education, mental health support, and stable employment, especially in informal and precarious sectors. Furthermore, they linked the issue of climate change to youth unemployment and discussed the necessity of creating green job opportunities to address both concerns simultaneously.

Participants developed a pilot initiative to transition young people from learning to earning, bridging the gap between education and industry. Targeting post-school youth not in employment or training, the pilot emphasises promoting artisanal work as a valuable avenue for cross-continental skill-building and movement. Central to the initiative is establishing a post-school apprenticeship program that involves collaboration between higher learning

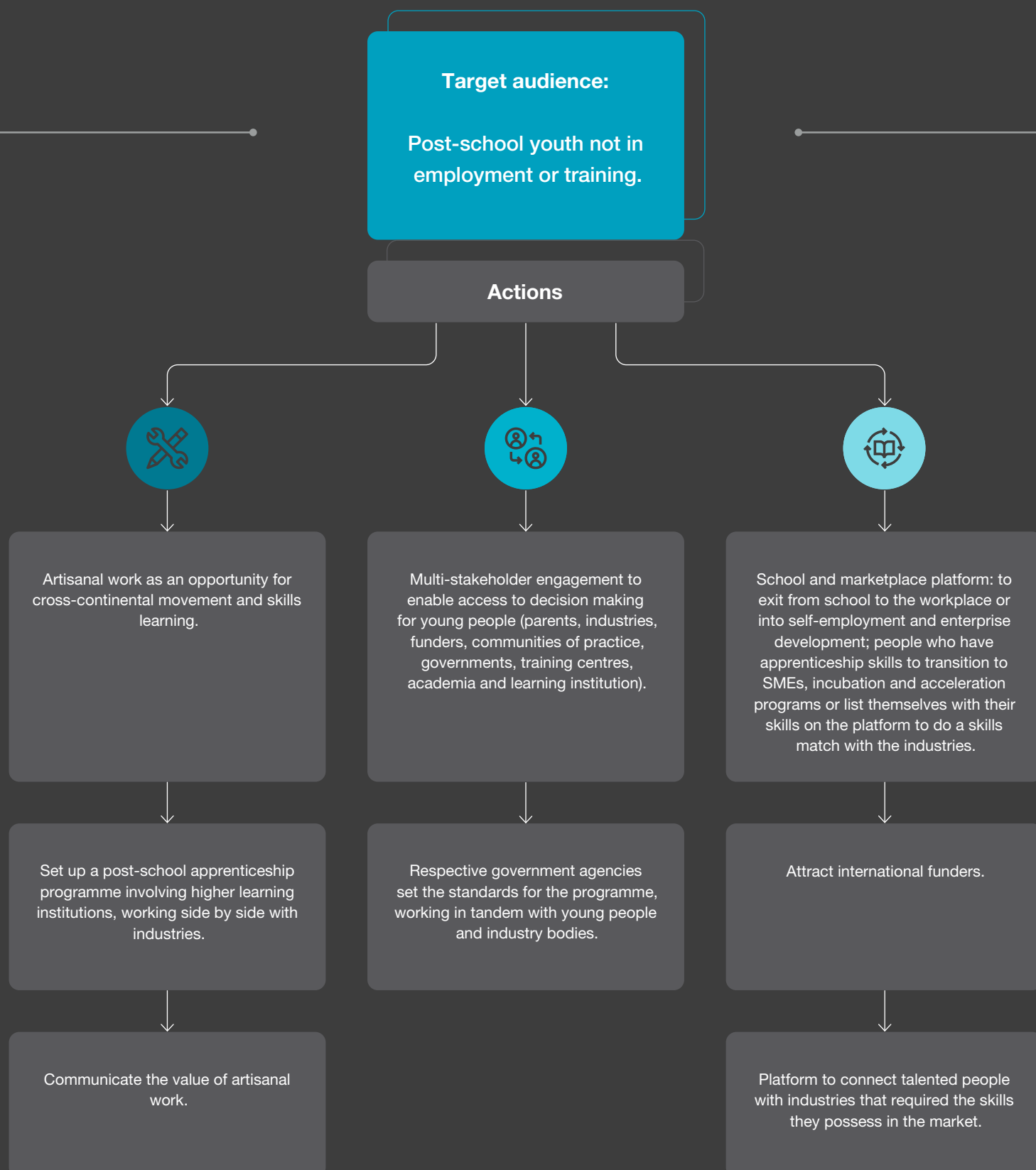
institutions and industries to equip young people with market-relevant skills while highlighting the significance of artisanal professions.

Multi-stakeholder engagement is another cornerstone of the initiative, bringing together parents, industries, funders, governments, training centres, academia, and communities of practice to ensure young people are included in decision-making processes. Respective government agencies will collaborate with youth and industry bodies to set program standards. Additionally, a school-to-marketplace platform will be created to facilitate seamless transitions from education to employment, self-employment, or enterprise development. Through this platform, apprentices with developed skills can access small and medium-sized enterprises, incubation and acceleration programs, or match their skills with industry needs. By attracting international funders and connecting talent with demand, this initiative aims to empower young people with sustainable opportunities and contribute to economic growth.



Learn to Earn

Aim: To transition young people from learning to earning; close the gap between school and industry.



Sustaining corporate philanthropy in a difficult business environment

This discussion focused on strategies to de-risk future revenue and income streams for corporate foundations facing challenges sustaining their philanthropic efforts, especially during difficult business seasons when profits decline. The group explored two key solutions to ensure sustainability and resilience in funding for corporate philanthropic organisations. First, they discussed alternative revenue streams beyond traditional donor funding, such as earning high interest from bank accounts, investing in income-generating assets like property, and purchasing shares in parent companies to create dividend flows. These strategies aim to reduce dependency on fluctuating donor funds and provide more stable incomes for foundation activities. The second solution proposed was the creation of pooled funds to invest in social enterprises (businesses that balance profitability with social impact). By pooling resources across corporate

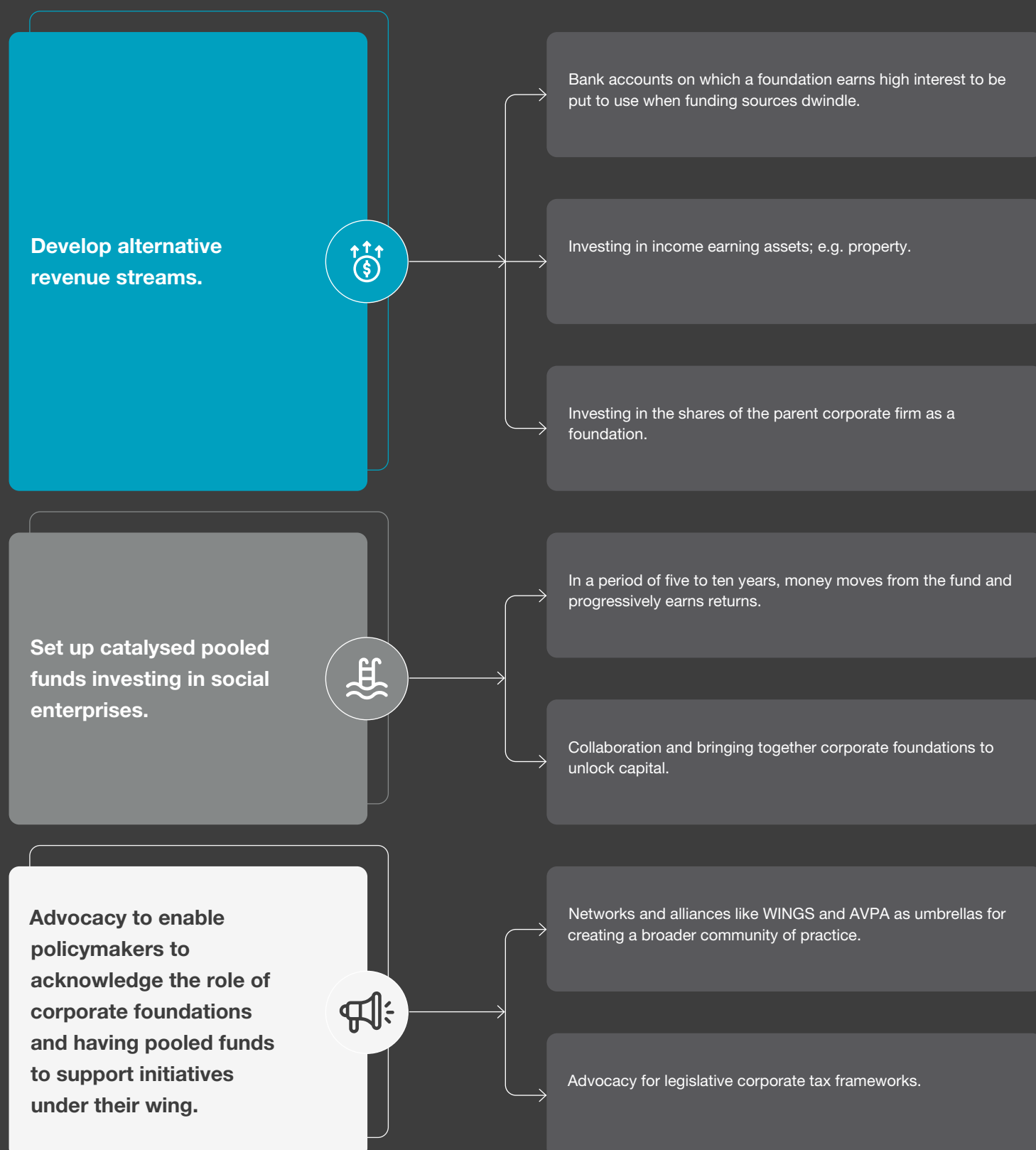
foundations, the group believes significant capital can be unlocked, ensuring long-term support for initiatives in Africa.

The group emphasised the need for advocacy to ensure policymakers recognise the value of corporate foundations in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. They also highlighted the importance of policy changes, as many jurisdictions lack the legislative frameworks needed to support these funding strategies. The group called for advocacy efforts to push for legislative changes, including tax rebates, which would create a more supportive environment for philanthropic work. This advocacy, they noted, could help secure a sustainable future for philanthropic initiatives in Africa as big donors gradually scale back their contributions.



Corporate philanthropy in a difficult business environment

Aim: To de-risk future revenue and income streams through pooled funding and collaboration.



Next steps and follow-up actions

As a next step to build on these initial cross-continental exchanges, the WINGS team will engage partners to develop a roadmap for the Africa Climate Philanthropy Action Hub pilot, which has been identified as a major strategic priority for the wider philanthropic space, with the G20 and Climate Solutions Forum taking place on the African continent in 2025. From this roadmap, WINGS and partners will move the pilot initiative forward by connecting with other relevant initiatives and actors and the Philanthropy for Climate movement. The pilot activities will be funded through a direct award to relevant members, who will be identified as part of the roadmap development.

It is envisaged that the participants of the Cross-Continental Exchange will remain closely engaged in the follow-up activities, and continue their engagement with each other, including through a mailing list.

"The challenge before us is to turn our discussions into tangible outcomes that we can be proud of. Our collective efforts should create something meaningful that drives long-term impact."

Tafadzwa Nyangano, Chief Finance Officer
at the Africa Venture Philanthropy Alliance
(AVPA)



Conclusion

The conversations during the exchanges could not have been more timely or pertinent. In a rapidly changing global landscape, the challenges and opportunities facing philanthropy demand greater cross-continental collaboration and innovation. This initiative highlighted the critical need to engage a broader range of foundations from both continents, recognising that their diverse perspectives and expertise are essential in addressing complex, systemic issues. The exchanges underscored that this is a moment to not only reflect on shared challenges, but also to co-create solutions that drive inclusive and sustainable development. Looking ahead, the focus will be on the pilot initiatives identified during the exchanges, which provide the participants with tangible actions to live out the collaboration they seek towards greater impact in their collective and individual work.

WINGS is committed to supporting these efforts by providing a seed grant to strategic partners to advance

the ideas over the next few years. Testing these pilots will be critical in assessing their feasibility and scalability, allowing us to refine approaches and foster innovation in philanthropy. These pilots represent an exciting opportunity to translate insights from the exchanges into actionable strategies that can have tangible, lasting impact on communities.

Reflecting on 2024, we are energised by the momentum generated through this initiative. We look forward to building on the progress. Together with our partners, WINGS is committed to fostering a more robust and interconnected philanthropy ecosystem that can effectively address the challenges of our time. The exchanges have proven that collaboration across continents is not only possible but transformative, and we are excited to see what the future holds.

Thank you

The success of the Cross-Continental Exchanges would not have been possible without the unwavering support and commitment of our partners. We extend our deepest appreciation to the Agence Française de Développement for their generous funding and strategic vision in enabling this initiative. We also acknowledge the invaluable contributions of the Africa Venture Philanthropy Alliance, the Fondation de France, Empower Families for Innovative Philanthropy, the Tony Elumelu Foundation, F20, OECD

NetFWD and Philea, whose expertise and collaboration were instrumental in shaping the agenda and ensuring meaningful dialogue. Their collective efforts have laid a solid foundation for strengthening the engagement of corporate and private/endowed foundations in Africa and Europe. Lastly, we thank and appreciate all the foundation representatives and partners who participated in the exchanges in Paris and Nairobi.

