

Local Fundraising with Kehinde Ojo

Kehinde Ojo's journey into full-time ministry and how he began local, indigenous fundraising for the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students. It is a model of how local fundraising can be done.

Introduction

Rob: I'm here today with Kehinde Ojo of the [International Fellowship of Evangelical Students](#), known here in the United States as [InterVarsity](#).

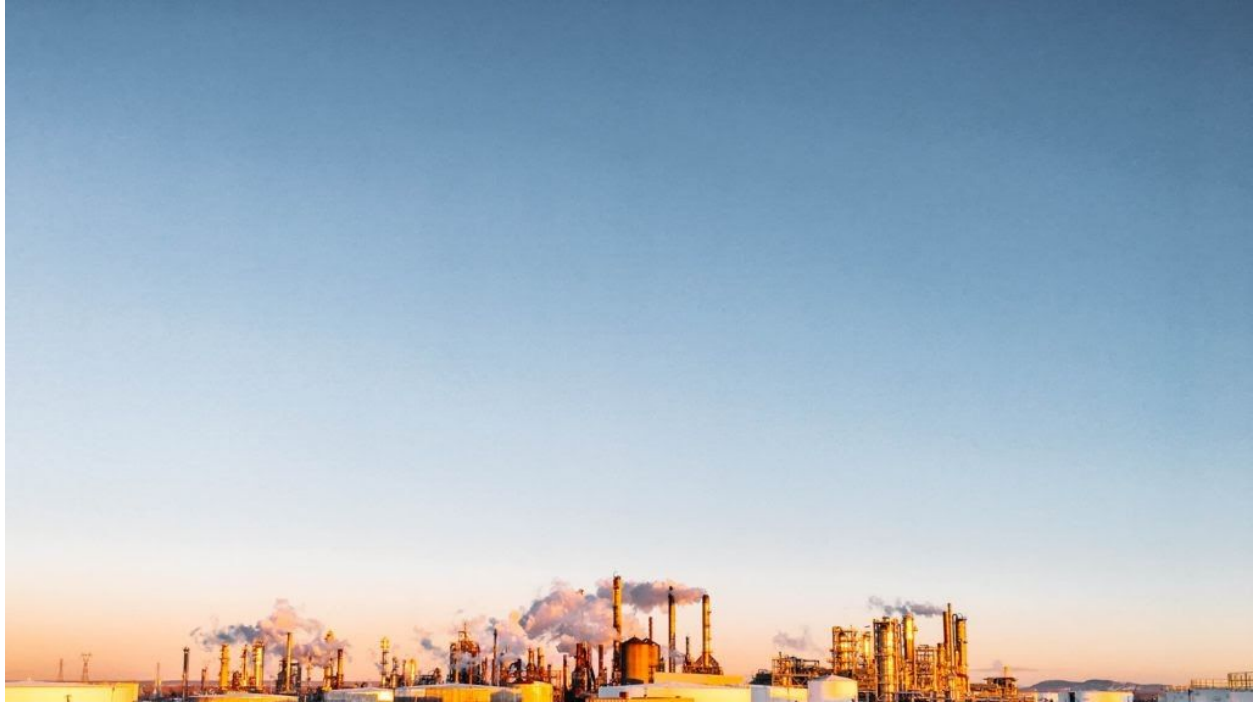
And Kehinde, welcome to this broadcast or this podcast, sponsored by the book [When Money Goes on Mission: Fundraising and Giving in the 21st Century](#).

Kehinde: Thank you Rob. It's good to finally meet you face to face after many years of working together through Skype and Zoom.

Rob: Yes, this is a deep pleasure of mine and a real honor.

Today's podcast, we're gonna focus on indigenous and local fundraising and how you got started in your calling, and actually your walk of faith with God in student work, but also in local fundraising at the same time in Western Nigeria where you were going to college.

Why don't you tell us a little bit about this startup story?



Kehinde's Story: From Engineering to Full Time Ministry

Kehinde: Well, thank you Rob, again. My joy to be here and to be on this podcast with you.

My journey started more than 30 years now, when I first came to Christ in the university through the witness of [IFES](#) Nigeria.

I had given my, or Christ found me, I like to put it that way when I was attending an outreach events, was a breakfast meeting of the Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship.

But because I was an undergraduate at the time that I did place for me to grow up in my faith was on the campus and IFES Nigeria was there to provide that support, that encouragement, that discipleship and leadership development for me to grow in my knowledge of God and God's purposes.

So prior to that, my desire was to study, studying engineering.

It was to work in an oil company and come to think of it, Chevron, which was Gulf Oil Company at the time was the highest paying oil company in Nigeria.

And I did all my industrial training company.

Rob: So you were on a fast track to the highest paying job an engineer could get in Nigeria at the time?

Kehinde: Absolutely, and because I was a Christian now at this time, I thought, God has it all arranged perfectly for me to be this Christian engineer who provides resources for God's work.

Guess what happened? A week to my final exams in the university, God called me to full time Christian work.

And surprisingly I think to some friends of mine, I said yes and that's changed entirely the trajectory of my life.

Rob: God does that, doesn't he?

I mean here you were, set, set for life, able to marry, able to raise a family, able to own a nice home, able to rise in status and power in the country and God calls you away to ministry and you say yes.



International Fellowship of Evangelical Students

Rob: One of the things I love about [IFES](#) is how it has prepared leaders around the world.

In my work as I first began this work and first began traveling and meeting elders and leaders and mission leaders and church leaders in countries, I would ask them, how did they get started in their work?

And I kept hearing this same story about IFES and its ability, it seemed like the ministry, even though it was on campus and it was evangelization, it was discipling leaders and preparing leaders.

There was almost universal.

In fact, that's what led me to IFES in the first place, to make a grant. I found them out and sought them out rather than them seeking out [First Fruit](#).

Kehinde: This is important, this is important that you've mentioned that you sought IFES out because you wouldn't believe this, my model for grant agencies, it's actually taking responsibility and ownership to discover where God would have them invest their resources.

So I'm glad to hear this example because this is my model of how agencies who provide grants should run.

Oftentimes we have too many layers in terms of application to get a grant when in some ways there should be a sense of ownership by the grant agency to seek out opportunities to invest in God's kingdom.

But guess what? Supporting the work of IFES globally, I think is a very wise decision by First Fruit. I am a beneficiary of that.



The Importance of Following God's Calling in Grant Making

Rob: Well tell us about that grant and tie it together to your own understanding of local funding, which had, was already well developed by the time.

This would've been a grant further along in First Fruits work with [IFESA](#) but the grant nine years ago that established the program that you're working in, now in developing local funding for the national and campus chapters of IFES in the 170 countries where you work.

But prior to that, when you were a student leader, coming out of college and going full time into campus work, you developed local funding.

Kehinde: I did.

Rob: Tell us about that.

Kehinde: So when God called me to Christian work, generally what people would have is a kind of fear, can God use me?

Can he provide for me? Can I trust God enough for my resources? What would my family say?

There was this traditional mode for missionaries and they are seen as beggars who don't have enough, who always have to go cup in hand looking for resources.

Thankfully I didn't have such mindset. I rather responded joyfully to God's calling upon my life to serve him in student ministry.

So I said yes with excitement and with a deep conviction that God was going to provide for all my needs.

Now, this is the way it worked with me at the time and still works with me.

I fully do recognize that when God calls to ministry, God, his responsibility is to make available the resources to do that work and so when God called me, I was conscious of the fact that God was going to raise people and organizations to support that work in order to get it done.

As a matter of fact, I believe that when people say they are called by God to go on all alone to fulfill God's purposes, I often tend to think that maybe they didn't hear what God said clearly cause every time God calls, God would raise some people, some organizations to come alongside you to help you to fulfill the purpose of God for your life.

Rob: In my view when I look at grant making and when I'm looking at an organization and I wanna understand, how closely are they following God in their calling?

That's a very difficult judgment for me to make because all we can, we don't see the heart of people, God does, we see the fruit of their work and for me, one of the fruits of a successful mission, whatever, however you define success because that is another whole question for another podcast.

But for me, the thing I'm looking for is are they working together with others? Are they working interdependently? Are they in partnership?

Because we all have these different things that we're very good at and other things that were weak at.

And that's where the other comes in and gives us strength as we go together as we join in these journeys, whether our part is to bring resources, to volunteer or whether to lead or to follow.

We all play a part.

And so you're looking for, I'm always looking for the evidence that the Holy spirit is at work in your ministry and one of those evidences for me is your view of collaboration and partnership and particularly in your calling and your understanding of that.

Kehinde: That very much agrees with my values, Rob.

And in my experience in Nigeria, starting out as a staff worker, I did enjoy the blessings of collaboration, if I could put it that way.

Friends of mine supported my work from my first year in student ministry and how would take the leadership to go to churches and invite them.



"Like Sheep Without a Shepherd"

Kehinde: There are a few places in scripture that asks me to connect with churches and there's this amazing narrative in Matthew chapter nine that talk about Jesus visiting a certain village.

And Bible says, "when he saw the multitude, he was moved with compassion because they were a set of people scattered like sheep without the Shepherd."

Now in my travels, there is no better place to picture that image that Jesus was projecting than on the campuses.

So when I go to the churches, I would say to the congregation, Jesus, had seen far ahead into the future and he knew the challenges of young people all over the campuses, they were like sheep without a shepherd.

When Jesus says something important he say, "pray therefore that the lord of harvest would send forth laborers to his harvest field."

So my visit to your congregation as a church would achieve three purposes.

One, you could pray like Jesus to send more workers to the campuses.

Two, answer to that prayer. You could go as part of that labor force to help the young people on the campuses.

Rob: When you are full time or part time or as a volunteer?

Kehinde: Exactly, there are various opportunities. Exactly Rob.

And then the third point you could give, where you don't have the space and the opportunity to go.

You could not, you should not only pray but you should also give to the student work because those who are there on the field need adequate resources to function and oftentimes most people working on the campuses have the huge challenge and distraction of inadequate funding.

So the church then, came in as a partner, to support the work that they couldn't do because they were assisting in the community and so they church sends the organization that I work with to the campuses, through their support to ensure that the work was done in the --

Rob: And this was all happening in Nigeria?

Kehinde: Very much so in Nigeria.



God's Provisions For Ministry

Rob: And without augmentation from outside funds?

Kehinde: As a matter of fact, in the, I would always focus particularly on my city of residence.

So if I was working in the southern part of Nigeria, that immediate environment, because my constituency for the provision of resources that is needed to do God's work in that environment, in cases when I then get transferred, I would not necessarily ask my partners or donors to come with me because I know God has made provision for me in the place he's sending me to.

I think oftentimes the point we need to keep in view is the recognition that it is God himself who sends.

Rob: So the powerful fundraising point here, if you've come to this podcast looking for help in your own local fundraising and you're struggling in an environment or a country that's not known for its giving yet or that you believe that the church can't do it or it hasn't been asked to do it, how did you overcome that prejudice?

That you, if you were gonna get started in campus work that you needed to look outside of your local church, your local environment and hope for some help from friends in the west or the north or somewhere else.

Kehinde: So I think the question you are asking me, Rob, needs to be rephrased because you are asking me, how I did I overcome a prejudice?

Rob: By the way, Kehinde often does this for me. Helps me get more on point. Okay, thank you brother.

Kehinde: Thank you, Rob. So you are asking me how I overcame a prejudice that I didn't know existed because when God called me as a young graduate in the early nineties.

I had this all-consuming passion that my rule was, make myself available, God was going to do is walk through me.

I wasn't even aware that there was resources somewhere else.

Now, I do say this when I do my training across the world, that James 1:17 tells me that "Every good gift and perfect gift comes from above."

And I would put in parenthesis not abroad from the father of light --

Rob: From above, not abroad. I think we'll rename the book, from above, not abroad.

Kehinde: From the father of light who had either has no shadow of or variableness.

And I think that understanding unto me honestly from a first few years in ministry to look up to God for the provision of my resources.

As a matter of fact, he sent me and I think that kept me going, so I wasn't conscious of this other option to look elsewhere.

I wasn't able to look into my organization for provision.

Rob: Yeah, you didn't go because it was a job that they offered you a salary in that all your everything was taken care of, might not have been the same money you could have made from the oil company, but it still would have been a job to provide.

You just knew that if God called you--

Kehinde: He would look after me.

Rob: He would provide.

Kehinde: And I was more concerned about fulfilling purpose and doing the work he's called me to do, helping young students like me at the time to discover Jesus on campus.



The Benefits of Giving to both the Receiver and the Giver

Rob: How did you overcome your fear of fundraising? The actual asking people for money.

Kehinde: Thank you Rob Now, this time you're not going to accuse me of rephrasing your question because I was studying in Mexico some years ago and they asked me the same question you just asked me and I paused.

I paused because I was conscious of the culture of diversity and I was careful that my honest response would not communicate any offense.

So I then asked them a question, do you really want to know whether I have a fear in fundraising?

Because you have come with a presupposition that I have a fear, the way you asked me, how do I overcome or how did I overcome the fear.

I said, do you really want to know guys? They said, yes, we want to know.

I said, honestly, I've got phobias for many things but not fundraising.

So I didn't need to overcome a fear that didn't exist. It was natural at all for me to invite people to be a part of what God has called me to do and those people would exist in --

Rob: To join you on the journey to the destination of reaching those college students.

Kehinde: Exactly.

Rob: Which is what they cared about.

Kehinde: Which is what they cared about, which is what they didn't have the opportunity to express like me by coming on staff full time to do that work.

So in fact, Rob--

Rob: But they could have the joy of participating through a gift.

Kehinde: In fact Rob, I like it when people give money to the ministry I work for and still tell me thank you.

Do you know why? Because by inviting them to participate in the ministry with me, I have provided a platform for collaboration.

So it's not just enough to provide the resources but to thank me for creating the platform for engagements in recognition that God has called us together to do this work for him.

Rob: We don't think of the giver having the need, do we?

Kehinde: Maybe we should recognize that both the givers and the receivers are both privilege by God to participate in God's kingdom.

Rob: I had a friend sitting in this chair the other day for another podcasting, after years of working in grant-making, he was getting this feeling that he had, it was just all give and he just randomly asked one of the people coming into his office one time, he said, do you know what I need?

And it was a difficult question, it flummoxed, but it also brought in the perspective, the whole purpose of generosity and the role of being generous and being a participant and what do we gain?

This is really the community of giving and receiving that we're trying to come to this place of equals at the cross.

It's not the money or the work. It's us working, It's us coming together equals at the foot of the cross.

Both in need, both in need of each other and both in need of God.



Why is There Fear in Fundraising?

Kehinde: Thank you for saying that Rob.

I think the model that [IFES](#) has tried to communicate, mentoring, coaching and training of leaders across the eight regions of IFES, where we currently work is what you just suggested because why do we have fear in fundraising?

Because we aren't fully recognizing that the work does not belong to us.

So the anxiety comes, in my view, due to a bit of a lack of understanding.

I would define generosity this way, I say, generosity is not the amount given what first it's position of your heart.

So the fact that you have the privilege to give is not first about how much you give and the courses you give to but you recognize that you have a privilege to participate in giving because there's nothing we have that we have not received.

So we are in some ways, investors, investing in the kingdom, not necessarily getting returns, materially.

Rob: Right.

Kehinde: So when we come to the donor space or the given space with that recognition that those who would use the resources are also investing like us.

It becomes partnership.

Rob: Yes.

Kehinde: And that's the model we need to promote and we need to encourage.

And that's also important, not just for the agencies, but for the missionaries who are the end users of this resources, to recognize that they have the same privilege of participation like the guys who are providing the resources.

And they should approach the donor agencies, I don't like to use the word donor I must say, I prefer the word partners.

And so they should encourage the partners to identify with them in their mission.

At the same time recognizing that the partners have needs just like them. And oftentimes the greatest need of a partner is relationship because he has resources anyway.

But a number of people who approach the partners for resources come with the mindset that they have made, they have all their needs met and then it becomes a culture of entitlement, which is very annoying.

You aren't just there to give me and I'm there to use it and often that you even forget to say thank you it's very frustrating.

So what we try to promote is first recognition of kingdom. Where God is the king and we are all privileged partners with God in the task of building God's kingdom.

When we come that way, we become equal at the feet of the cross, which is a phrase taken from your book, all right.

So we become partners, equal partners engaging in building God's kingdom but playing different rules.

Rob: In the amount of the gift is not what's important here, it's the very act of giving.

Kehinde: That's why we have the story of the widow.

Rob: That's right.

Kehinde: The widow is right in scripture because Jesus emphasized to that story.

Rob: The most celebrated donor in history, two pennies.

Kehinde: Give little in comparison, but give everything from the kingdom perspective. Isn't that amazing?

So it's not our mathematics, it's a recognition of our privileges and our willingness to journey with God in generosity.

Rob: That's how you build the foundation.

So now let's go, let's fast forward from that beginning and from that place and how God used all of that learning and all of that ignorance of the other system that a lot of other folks were trying to work in.



Starting Local, Indigenous Fundraising

Rob: And let's go nine years ago when you came into the position of, this global director of indigenous local funding and direction and there was another First Fruit grant.

Kehinde: Very much so.

Rob: At this point to help set that program up.

Let's talk about that program and how effective and efficacious it's been in the countries where you work.

Kehinde: Yeah, thank you Rob.

Again, my appreciation goes to God and First Fruit on behalf of [IFES](#) for their generosity in seeing into the future and providing that grant for IFES at the time.

Leaders across the nation that's the time they were getting so frustrated because they weren't getting enough resources like they used to get to do their work locally because most of these movements in the global South were started by the generosity of the West.

So some of them sent leaders, lecturers to work in these countries, primarily with the purpose of developing students, witnessing university's oncologists.

And that worked so well to the point that the indigenous national movement got started in many of these countries.

Rob: But then it needed to grow up and take over the world.

Kehinde: Exactly because as God answers the prayers, the work grew and then you had more students, you had more staff workers and then you have need for more resources.

Rob: And the sending country, the receiving country became a new sending country.

Kehinde: Right now such that, you then have need of more resources to keep the work going.

And then that comes with some frustrations when the resources are not as available.

So the intervention of First Fruit was to provide the grant to train, to mentor, to coach leaders of these nations in developing local resources for ministry.

Now, that has gone so well in the last nine years, even though nine years ago it was a huge hurdle to cross, first to convince the leaders that God does, God is not localized, God is not regionalized, God does not only work in the Western part of the world, God is for everyone.

And like I said some minutes ago, the resources actually come from above, from the father of light and it took a bit of aligned scriptures to speak into those cultures, to draw them out and recognizing that actually God has provided, in their own local environment, resources for their ministries.

And so that was the first that we have to cross with the leaders in bringing them out of their mindset presuppositions, presumptions to recognize, that God has resources in their immediate environment, with which they could do ministry in terms of time, talent and treasures.

My joy is nine years after that's going so well because we have increased number of staff workers in a number of the national movements where they were understaffed and we have salaries being paid regularly now in national movements that some members were owed in arrears of some months.

Rob: Because they're doing local funding.

Kehinde: Because now they have expanded their opportunities.



What Are Matching Funds?

Rob: So in addition to the training part of that grant, in addition to providing travel budget for you and other things like that so that you could get out into the regions and spread the message and then do actual training.

But one of the strong parts of that grant was the--

Kehinde: Matching fund.

Rob: The matching funds. Tell us how that works.

Kehinde: That's one major strategy that I actually brought out the leaders.

I think it's like the old concept of dangling the carrots and I think everybody likes to have a bite, so that helps the leaders to be motivated to try.

Because the challenge with mindset is once you have locked in, nothing gets you out.

So the matching grant became an invitation to try something different.

Rob: And the matching grant was for new money.

Kehinde: Basically, basically that's the clause.

So if you want to get on this, you would have to make a commitment that you would raise a certain amount of money from new donors, which IFES through the grant from First Fruit could match within a certain period.

That pushed the leaders to cross barriers to make the husk. And you wouldn't believe this, a number of them exceeded their expectation.

Some thought they would approach 50 new donors in a given year.

A particular country approached 98 new donors and they were stunned. In one instance, a colleague of one of the staff members said to them in the office, "you can leave me out of this, I like to give as well."

And so they discovered new opportunities for people to give to the kingdom in there, within their countries that they never knew existed previously.

Rob: And the thankfulness that rises from this, I mean all of us that have ever done any fundraising have experienced that first gift, that first time that someone gives you something and you don't give them anything tangible in return.

It's a spiritual outcome that you're promising to attempt to try and pull off with the gift that they're giving you.

Kehinde: Yeah.

Rob: And there's just this overwhelming sense when that happens for that first time and if the challenge grant gets you to that place where it happens, it just blows your mind that, wait a second, God is really in this.

He did actually call me and he says he's gonna make this happen.



When God Calls, He Insures

Kehinde: I think it's a feeling of gratitude, Rob, and this is one thing I like about the ministry of fundraising.

Fundraising in my view, result in thanksgiving and gratitude to God for looking in your direction and covering you up. He's like an insurance, isn't he?

He's not just sending you out, he's insured you for the work he has called you to do.

My first gift, it was a car for ministry and it blew my mind how that came.

Rob: Because what did you call yourselves? You were traveling secretaries at the time.

Kehinde: We were traveling secretaries based on official designation, but my colleagues and I called ourself trekking secretary because we weren't only traveling.

A number of times we have to trek, maybe after getting off the commuter we would have to trek to the campus because we didn't have any bike or a car.

And imagine as a young graduate, maybe six months into my role, a couple just call me up and give me a car to make to help me do my walk effectively.

Rob: And that expanded the campuses you could go to.

Kehinde: Of course, I was covering 24 campuses at the time spread across the state and it was just impossible to go as fast if I have to go with the public transport.

But then with a car, I could even wait til midnight before I started my trip back home. And that would be done with ease because I had in my care, a car --

Rob: So as long as there was ministry going, you could stay on campus.

Kehinde: I could, so it became such a blessing to have such generosity from people whom God has put in their heart to support the work I was in on the campus.

Rob: Really that's what's missing out, when you don't do local funding.

You're missing out on giving that blessing around. Now, First Fruit likes to stay in the background.

We don't like to take credit for grants and this may, I don't want anyone listening or viewing this podcast to think that this was about enhancing First Fruit because of that grant.

It was a privilege to make that grant. It was a privilege to see what you did with that grant, to be a part of this expansion of this work.



Closing Thoughts

Rob: And in our next podcast with Kehinde, we're gonna talk about another thing that he's doing.

So if you're watching this and you're wondering how can I get in on the training that he's doing at [IFES](#)?

And other things like that, we're gonna talk about something called the [Ministry Fundraising Network](#).

And Kehinde is the core catalyst, another term for director of that network. And we'll expand on what that means and how you can be a part of that if you wish.

Thank you, Kehinde.

Kehinde: Thank you, Rob.