

A close-up portrait of Dr. Jumoke Oduwole, a woman with a warm smile, wearing a black patterned headwrap and a colorful striped shawl. The background is dark and out of focus.

# iWA | INSPIRING WOMAN AFRICA

EDITION 6, 23RD SEPTEMBER 2025

*Happy Birthday*

DR. JUMOKE  
ODUWOLE

FOSTERING **ECONOMIC GROWTH** AS **MINISTER OF INDUSTRY,  
TRADE AND INVESTMENT, NIGERIA**



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# Welcome!

Dear Readers,

It's IWA time!! A great day. We trust you are having the same. Our edition is loaded with articles you will love to read over and over again but let's gist a bit. It has been an interesting season but top on it is Hilda Baci winning her second Guinness World Record. An audacious dream she had and she won.

While many were excited for her and encouraged her, there were a few who had different views. Guess what? She chose not to feed her distractions. The conclusion of the matter? She won! This is indeed a lesson.

Whenever you set your mind to do something, your eyes must be on the mark. The distractions will come but focus is key. At the end of the day, it is your name on that plaque, your name on that result and like Hilda, your name on the award. Moral of the lesson? As long as you can conceive it, you can actualise it.

I also love the support she got from Gino. It is also a win for them too because, as long as this record is being discussed, Gino will always be mentioned. I hope this encourages brands to support people with actualizable dreams, especially those that require funding.

Another moral lesson? Have what people can support you for and work hard at showing them why their support for you was worth it, or will be worth it.

Now, back to the main "dish". On cover this week is Dr. JUMOKE ODUWOLE, MFR, and she is fostering economic growth as Minister of Industry, Trade and Investment, Nigeria.

When you hear the words beauty and brains, Dr Jumoke is who it depicts. Intentional about her responsibilities and passionate about the growth of Nigeria's economy. Since 2015, Dr Oduwole has been on loan to the Federal Government of Nigeria from the Faculty of Law, University of Lagos, Nigeria, where she teaches and researches International Economic Law.

It is her birthday today, we celebrate her and we are grateful she chose to share her special day with us, building hope for Nigeria through her actions, identifying the challenges and providing solutions with the backing of her supportive team.

We wish her the best and we trust you will enjoy this detailed interview and other inspiring and intellectual articles in this edition. She is taking us to class like the teacher she is, and just as we at IWA became more enriched with worthy information, we trust you will too.

Take care and see you soon!





COVER INTERVIEW

# DR JUMOKE ODUWOLE

FOSTERING **ECONOMIC GROWTH** AS  
**MINISTER** OF INDUSTRY, TRADE AND  
INVESTMENT, **NIGERIA**

Kemi Ajumobi

**D**R. JUMOKE  
ODUWOLE  
MFR, is the  
Honourable  
Minister,  
Federal  
Ministry of  
Industry, Trade and Investment of  
the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

Prior to her current role, she served as the Special Adviser to President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, GCFR, on the Presidential Enabling Business Environment Council (PEBEC) and Investment (OVP) from October 2023 to October 2024. Under the Buhari Administration, she served first as the Senior Special Assistant to the President on Industry, Trade and Investment, and subsequently as the Special Adviser to the President on Ease of Doing Business from November 2015 to May 2023. Dr. Oduwole and her team at the PEBEC Secretariat successfully delivered over 200 verifiable reforms across various arms and levels of government.

During her time in public service, Dr Oduwole has worked on various specialised reform committees in the federal government such as AfCFTA implementation Committee and the Tax Policy Reform Committee, and played a key role in the conceptualisation and establishment of the Nigerian Office for Trade Negotiations (NOTN). She Chaired the Technical Working Team on Legislative Imperatives for the implementation of the National Development Plan (NDP) 2021-2025.

*"The vision is ambitious and clear: to diversify Nigeria's economy, strengthen industrial capacity, expand non-oil exports, and position Nigerian businesses to compete effectively in regional and global markets"*





Recognised as one of Nigeria's leading reformers, she was awarded the national honour of Member of the Order of the Federal Republic (MFR) in May 2023 for her contributions to national development. In 2024, the Most Influential People of African Descent (MIPAD) awarded her a Hall of Fame honour for her decade-long work on Nigeria's business climate reforms.

A policy entrepreneur of some repute, she was appointed as a Senior fellow at the Mossavar-Rahmani

Centre for Business and Government (M-RCBG), Harvard Kennedy School, and as a Governance Advisor to Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) Governance Lab in 2022, for her innovation in governance.

She previously served on the Board of Ecobank Nigeria, and she has worked in investment and corporate banking at FCMB and GTBank.

Since 2015, Dr Oduwole has been on loan to the Federal Government of Nigeria from the Faculty of Law,

University of Lagos, Nigeria, where she teaches and researches International Economic Law. Jumoke holds an LL.B from the University of Lagos, an LL.M from Cambridge University, UK and a JSM and JSD from Stanford Law School USA, and is called to the Nigerian Bar.

► **What is your vision for growing the Nigerian economy and how do you plan to achieve this vision?**

Over the past two years, Nigeria has undergone bold economic reforms aimed at stabilising the foundations of its economy. President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's administration has taken decisive action on critical fronts. On the monetary side, measures to address foreign exchange volatility, improve repatriation flows, and ensure greater availability of FX have begun to restore investor confidence. On the fiscal side, the removal of fuel subsidies and the rollout of a revolutionary new tax architecture with the latest Tax Acts coming into force on January 1, 2026 signal a commitment to building a sustainable, rules-based economy.

Yet, every strong economy rests on a tripod. Monetary stability and fiscal sustainability form the first two legs. The third, equally critical leg, is trade policy. With the foundations of stability now in place, Nigeria is well-positioned as we advance through the next phase of growth by harnessing trade, attracting both domestic and foreign investment, and supporting industry - key engines of shared economic prosperity.

During the recent state visit of the Director-General of the World Trade Organisation, Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, she commended President Tinubu on Nigeria's reforms and economic progress, while emphasising the central role that trade plays in unlocking sustainable growth. Last November, Mr President Tinubu appointed me as Honourable Minister of Industry, Trade and Investment (HMITI) and

***"The Federal Ministry of Industry, Trade and Investment (FMITI) is charged with the mandate of diversifying Nigeria's economy, accelerating industrial development, boosting non-oil exports, and strengthening our role in global and regional trade"***



charged me with this critical responsibility.

At FMITI, the vision is ambitious and clear: to diversify Nigeria's economy, strengthen industrial capacity, expand non-oil exports, and position Nigerian businesses to compete effectively in regional and global markets. This means modernising trade policies, upgrading critical institutions like the Nigeria Commodity Exchange (NCX), expanding Special Economic Zones, including Digital Zones, and accelerating digital trade adoption. The Ministry has been instrumental in accelerating the rollout of the National Single Window project, a significant milestone in removing long-standing bottlenecks and making trade more straightforward and affordable for Nigerian businesses.

The impact of these efforts must be felt not only in macroeconomic numbers but in the daily lives of Nigerians. For farmers and exporters, it means finding reliable buyers across Africa and beyond. For entrepreneurs, this means scaling their businesses more quickly with fewer bottlenecks. For young graduates, it means jobs in factories, tech hubs, and export-oriented industries. For global investors, it means seeing Nigeria as a trusted, competitive destination once again. This is the next phase of Nigeria's economic renewal moving from stability to growth. And it is through bold trade and industrial strategies that we will deliver on the promise of the Renewed Hope Agenda, proving that the Nigerian economy can be diversified, our industries revitalised, and our people empowered.

### ► Tell us about FMITI - What is its mandate and how does it function?

The Federal Ministry of Industry, Trade and Investment (FMITI) is charged with the mandate of diversifying Nigeria's economy, accelerating industrial development, boosting non-oil exports, and strengthening our role in global and



regional trade.

Under President Bola Ahmed Tinubu's 8-point Renewed Hope Agenda, item seven specifically tasks us with driving economic diversification and non-oil export growth. Everything we do is anchored on this national priority from trade facilitation and industrialisation to investment promotion and enterprise development.

I am privileged to lead a highly competent and diverse team comprising seasoned professionals with strong technical expertise. I am especially proud of the fact that we have a heavily female leadership team, complemented by dynamic younger professionals, including some who worked with me on the Presidential Enabling Business Environment Council (PEBEC). Together, we bring both experience and fresh energy to the work of reform.

At the core of our structure are the Honourable Minister of State, Senator John Owan Enoh, who is leading and driving Nigeria's industrial policy and vision for Industry, and the Permanent Secretary, Ambassador Nura Abba Rimi, a seasoned diplomat with many

years of experience, with whom I work very closely. FMITI oversees 17 agencies, including the Nigerian Export Promotion Council (NEPC), Nigerian Investment Promotion Commission (NIPC), Nigerian Export-Import Bank NEXIM, NCX, both the Nigeria Export Processing Zones Authority (NEPZA) and OGFZA, TBSMB, Lagos Trade Fair Complex, Standards Organisation of Nigeria (SON), SMEDAN, BOI, and more. Through these agencies, we implement policies generated by our core internal departments. We are enablers of growth. FMITI's departments work across trade facilitation, investment promotion, industrial development, consumer protection, and export market access.

FMITI delivers major national frameworks, and our work is externally tracked every quarter for tangible progress by the Central Delivery Coordination Unit (CDCU) under the Presidency.

Collaboration is central to our mandate. We are working closely with the Federal Ministry of Finance on tariff reviews and policy directions, and with the Central Bank of Nigeria on investment and



trade-related alignment. Because of the scope of our work, we also interface directly with the Presidency, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Ministry of Justice regularly. From an implementation perspective, we are currently actively collaborating with:

- Ministry of Agriculture to expand export market access for agricultural goods.
- Ministry of Communications, Innovation and Digital Economy on digital trade and WEF Talent Acceleration Programme
- Ministry of Creative Economy on intellectual property policy.
- Ministry of Health on investment into pharmaceutical value chains (PVAC).
- Ministry of Solid Minerals Development, Ministry of Steel Development, Ministries of Women Affairs, Youth, Education, National Sports Commission, and the FCT Administration to align policy and investor readiness with sectoral priorities.

We also work closely with State Governments and the National Assembly, continuing the engagement model I established during my PEBEC days. For example, Lagos State is already a key partner as we prepare to host CANEX 2026 and IATF 2027 – a landmark African Trade Fair, being hosted in West Africa for the first time. Similarly, we are collaborating with the Nigeria Governors' Forum, members of our AfCFTA Central Coordination Committee, and have launched the Investopedia Report at IATF 2025 in Algiers and will present it again at the UN General Assembly to further drive Nigeria's investment story.

FMITI functions as the engine room of economic diversification, coordinating across government and with the private sector to ensure Nigeria's trade, industrial, and investment policies translate into real opportunities for businesses, jobs for our people, and confidence for investors.

### ▶ As we approach Q4 walk us through the first 9 months of the year and what can we expect from you as you close out this year?

At the start of 2025, the Federal Ministry of Industry, Trade and Investment (FMITI) released an Outlook Document setting out our priorities for the year. These included:

- Accelerating non-oil exports through reforms and export incentives.
- Driving industrialisation via Special Economic Zones (SEZs) and value-chain development.
- Modernising trade policy and export facilitation
- Strengthening investment promotion, both domestic and foreign.
- Expanding Nigeria's presence in regional and global trade platforms.
- Deepening collaboration with the private sector and development partners.

Many of these priorities are already translating into results. WTO and ITC, under the leadership of NEPC, launched the WEIDE Fund,

supporting 146 women exporters out of 67,000 applicants; we initiated reforms to upgrade the Nigeria Commodity Exchange (NCX); and rolled out a structured review of Free Trade Zones to improve governance and competitiveness.

When I assumed office, I set out four strategic pillars for the year. Let me break these down with highlights:

**Investment Mobilisation:** At home, we launched targeted programmes with domestic champions – the best examples of Nigeria's success highlighted at our first Domestic Investor Summit, reaffirming President Tinubu's 'Nigeria First' policy.

- We have also worked to attract investment at home and abroad. At Davos, in Paris, in Abu Dhabi, and in New York, I engaged global investors, development banks, and CEOs. We co-hosted the Brazil Nigeria Business Forum alongside Brazil's Vice President, securing commitments in agribusiness and energy.

**Trade Policy Reform:** Nigeria became the first African country to complete its





5-year AfCFTA implementation review, producing actionable recommendations. We also co-championed the AfCFTA Protocol on Digital Trade, positioning Nigeria at the heart of Africa's digital economy.

**Non-Oil Export Acceleration:** Our SEZs generated over USD 192 million in exports and 20,000 jobs. With Uganda Airlines, we launched Africa's first AfCFTA Air Cargo Corridor, slashing logistics costs by over 50% for SMEs exporting textiles, cosmetics, and agro-processed goods to southern and eastern Africa.

**Strategic Communications:** Shaping the global narrative of Nigeria's economy has been a priority consistently amplifying President Tinubu's vision and Nigeria's investment story across traditional and digital media as part of our advocacy efforts.

#### Concentric Circles of Engagement

We have structured our diplomacy into concentric circles:

**Bilateral:** Signed a Bilateral Investment Treaty with Brazil, expanded cooperation with Benin and Colombia, and hosted numerous ministerial delegations.

**ECOWAS:** During President Tinubu's tenure as ECOWAS Chair, Nigeria advanced the West Africa Economic Strategy (WAES).

**Africa:** At AfCFTA summits in Lusaka and Algiers, Nigeria pushed for digital trade, fair tariffs, and stronger market access for African SMEs.

**Global South & OECD:** From Addis to London, Kinshasa to New York, we deepened ties with both long-standing partners (EU, OECD, WTO) and new friends (UAE, Saudi Arabia, Brazil).

These engagements matter because they deliver tangible outcomes for Nigerians – from expanded markets for farmers and SMEs to renewed investor confidence in manufacturing, to new job opportunities for young graduates.

#### Partnerships and Agencies

Our work is possible because of collaboration:

In collaboration with UNDP, Afreximbank, AFC, Access Bank, and the World Bank, we are developing tools such as the market intelligence portal for exporters.

With the Organised Private Sector NACCIMA, MAN, OPTS – we are designing policies that reflect business realities.

Through our 17 agencies – including NEXIM, CAC, NEPC, NIPC, SON, NEPZA, and NCX – we are delivering reforms, from investment promotion to standards to SEZ governance.

#### Looking Ahead

As we close the year, we will focus on consolidating these gains: finalising key reforms in SEZs and NCX, expanding the air cargo corridor model to other routes, and deepening AfCFTA-driven market access. Nigerians can expect continued delivery – on trade, industry, and investment – and the acceleration of the Renewed Hope Agenda into 2026.

#### ► How has it been as a woman in this area of government and politics - Challenges and Lessons learnt

Managing a ministry entails a significant expansion of responsibilities beyond those of PEBEC and being a Special Adviser in the Presidency. The ministry is a large one, with nearly 2,000 staff – 1,100 in Abuja and 800 across the country.

Diligence and striving for excellence are a given. It takes a lot of personal sacrifice to stay focused and deliver. There's always so much to do and very little time. Nigerians are rightly impatient for faster economic growth.

Humility and collaboration are critical to succeed. Being open and willing to

learn, paying close attention to relationships and building crucial networks, taking objective feedback, recognising one's mistakes and blind spots, and learning from them – as they say, failing forward is key. Working with the HMS and PS, striving to cover our respective duties and ensure our Directors, Agency heads, and staff are on top of their deliverables. Leveraging support tools within the government, such as the CDCU team, fortnightly top management meetings with directors and department heads, and quarterly meetings with heads of agencies, has helped FMITI's coordination.

As an international economic lawyer and having worked in the Presidency for nine years, building PEBEC from scratch into a national intervention of international repute has given me a significant advantage, as I have worked closely with Ministers, Governors, and Legislators for many years. I also understand the administrative workings of the government, and I already have relationships with colleagues across all arms and levels of government nationwide.

#### ► What initiatives does the ministry have in place to support small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), which are critical for job creation and economic growth?

At the Federal Ministry of Industry, Trade and Investment, we have prioritised SME support through policies, programmes, and partnerships designed to unlock their full potential. Through the Small and Medium Enterprises Development Agency of Nigeria (SMEDAN), we are improving access to finance, capacity-building, and shared infrastructure. In fact, in Q1 2025 alone, SMEDAN generated over 90,000 jobs through its six industrial development centres, a clear demonstration of how targeted interventions can deliver real impact on the ground..

***“As an international economic lawyer and having worked in the Presidency for nine years, building PEBEC from scratch into a national intervention of international repute has given me a significant advantage”***





In addition, the NEPC has launched WEIDE (Women, Youth, Innovation, Digital and Export) Nigeria, a \$2 billion initiative that expands opportunities for women- and youth-led enterprises. WEIDE focuses on digital adoption, export readiness, and value addition, ensuring that SMEs can participate in global supply chains while creating jobs at home.

Together, these initiatives are creating a more enabling ecosystem one where Nigerian SMEs can innovate, expand, and compete regionally and globally. Supporting SMEs is not just about economic growth; it is about building prosperity from the ground up.

► **What measures are being taken to promote local content in manufacturing and production to boost domestic industries?**

At the Federal Ministry of Industry, Trade and Investment, promoting local content in manufacturing is at the heart of our industrialisation strategy. Our goal is clear: strengthen domestic industries, create jobs, and reduce dependence on imports while building globally competitive value chains.

Nigeria's economic transformation must be built on a foundation of domestic strength. Our most significant asset lies in our entrepreneurs the innovators and builders creating jobs, driving industrialisation, and powering growth across technology, agribusiness, and the creative economy. The National Industrial Summit held in June underscored this truth: Nigeria's path to prosperity will be defined by how well we support our local industries.

This is why the Nigeria First Policy directs government procurement and investment strategies toward prioritising local content and domestic value creation. By equipping entrepreneurs with access to finance, supportive regulation, modern infrastructure, and skills development, we are ensuring that the wealth of this nation is built by Nigerians, for Nigerians.

The momentum is already underway. We hosted a Domestic Investment Summit in Abuja, where the conversation focused on three urgent priorities: demystifying reforms in fiscal, monetary, industry, and trade

policy so that businesses can navigate with confidence, tackling the capital gap through innovative financing and institutional collaboration, and expanding market access to enable Nigerian firms to scale and compete across Africa under the AfCFTA.

Today, we have a live and operational NASENI (National Agency for Science and Engineering Infrastructure), which is investing in indigenous R&D, technology transfer, and engineering capacity to strengthen local production capabilities. Meanwhile, projects such as ARISE and the expansion of special economic zones are building cluster-based manufacturing hubs that anchor production locally while connecting Nigerian industries to regional and global markets. Together, these measures are channeling Nigeria's entrepreneurial strength into a new era of industrialisation, competitiveness, and inclusive growth.

Yet, while domestic strength is the cornerstone, openness is the bridge. Nigeria is pursuing an open, rules-based economy that welcomes investment, strengthens partnerships, and builds value chains linking local talent to global markets.

The message is clear: Nigeria's growth story begins at home, but its impact will be felt across Africa and the world.

***“The Ministry has already commenced a comprehensive skills gap analysis to better align our workforce with the demands of the fourth industrial revolution”***



### ► How is the ministry addressing the skills gap in the workforce to meet the demands of a rapidly changing industrial landscape?

The Ministry has already commenced a comprehensive skills gap analysis to better align our workforce with the demands of the fourth industrial revolution. Early findings are striking 90% of Nigerian organisations identify AI, big data, and immersive technologies as the leading disruptors shaping industry-required skills. Nigeria must rapidly develop a digitally skilled, resilient, and future-ready workforce.

While we have a large and youthful talent pool over 80% of our population is within working age the education statistics are sobering. Only 47.2% of Nigerians have completed secondary education, and fewer than 24% hold a university degree or diploma. Unless we address this mismatch, the risk of widespread unemployability within our growing population is significant.

Our skills gap analysis will culminate in an action plan that brings together skills providers across the ecosystem universities, vocational training centres, and EdTech platforms to deliver training and certifications that meet globally benchmarked standards while responding to the specific needs of local industry.

Notably, this plan will not be implemented in isolation. We are committed to working hand-in-hand with the private sector, regulators, and other relevant ministries to ensure coherence, industry relevance, and sustainability. The ultimate goal is to transform Nigeria's demographic advantage into a skills advantage one that powers industrial growth, competitiveness, and inclusive prosperity.

### ► Can you discuss the role of technology in facilitating business reforms in Nigeria?

Technology has become the backbone of Nigeria's business reforms, creating a

more transparent, efficient, and investor-friendly environment. Our goal is to enhance systems for entrepreneurs, reduce costs for investors, and enhance accountability across the government.

A step in this journey was the February 2025 MoU between the Aig-Imoukhuede Foundation and the Federal Ministry of Industry, Trade & Investment (FMITI). This partnership will digitise the Ministry's operations, implement an enterprise content management system, and train public servants to deliver faster, more innovative services. It is a concrete example of how strategic collaboration can unlock Nigeria's trade and investment potential while supporting wider economic growth.

flows, ensuring African businesses especially SMEs and startups are not left behind in the global digital economy.

Ultimately, technology is not just supporting reform it is transforming how Nigeria does business. From fintech to health tech and clean energy, digital innovation is connecting citizens to opportunities and positioning Nigeria to compete globally while building a more inclusive and resilient economy.

### ► How has Nigeria's approach to the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) evolved since its implementation?



We are also seeing practical results on the ground. The Corporate Affairs Commission portal now allows businesses to register entirely online. The Single Window Trade Portal is streamlining customs, while the electronic tax systems are modernising revenue collection. These reforms not only improve Nigeria's ease of doing business rankings but also build investor confidence.

Beyond governance, Nigeria is shaping the future of digital trade. As the AfCFTA Digital Trade Champion, we are leading continental work on e-commerce, digital payments, and data

Nigeria views the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) not just as a trade agreement but as Africa's most powerful lever for inclusive growth and global competitiveness. By transforming a collection of fragmented markets into a single trade bloc of 1.4 billion people, the AfCFTA offers unprecedented opportunities for our entrepreneurs and exporters.

Since its implementation, Nigeria has accelerated its engagement. We completed our AfCFTA 5-Year Implementation Review, transmitted the ECOWAS Provisional Tariff Schedule to the Secretariat, and are





embedding AfCFTA commitments into our National Industrial Policy. Importantly, Nigeria was selected as the continent's AfCFTA Digital Trade Champion, positioning us to shape continental protocols on e-commerce, digital payments, and cross-border data flows. This ensures Nigerian businesses especially SMEs and startups can thrive in the emerging digital economy.

But the AfCFTA is more than tariff cuts. It is about scaling intra-African trade, strengthening Africa's bargaining power in global trade governance, and building resilient supply chains in key sectors such as food processing, pharmaceuticals, and green energy. For Nigeria, this means establishing regional production hubs that reduce import dependence and create local employment opportunities.

At the same time, we must address real challenges: inadequate infrastructure and trade facilitation systems, limited private sector inclusion especially for SMEs and women-led businesses and the slow pace of harmonising standards across member states. This is why Nigeria is prioritising customs modernisation, simplified trade regimes, and regulatory coherence while actively engaging the private sector to identify priority export sectors.

Our vision is clear: Made in Africa, traded across Africa, and respected around the world. For that to happen, implementation must match ambition. Nigeria is committed to ensuring that the AfCFTA delivers tangible benefits for both our businesses and citizens.

► **What strategies do you believe are essential for attracting foreign direct investment into Nigeria in the current global economic climate?**

Attracting foreign direct investment in today's global economy requires clarity, predictability, and a compelling value proposition. Nigeria is meeting this challenge with a deliberate strategy built on reducing friction, maximising returns, and ensuring policy consistency.

Traditionally, one of our strongest pillars has the pioneer status incentive through NIPC, which grants up to five years of corporate tax holidays to companies in high-growth sectors such as renewable energy, mineral processing, infrastructure, and creative industries. We also have about 42 Special Economic and free trade zones, including Africa's first digital free zone at Itana, located in Alaro City, Lagos. These platforms offer tax exemptions, duty-free import of inputs, one-stop approvals, and 100% profit repatriation — the same tools that have enabled Dangote and Indorama to scale their businesses from Nigeria to regional and global markets.

Investor protection is reinforced by over 30 bilateral investment treaties and the NIPC Act, which guarantees free repatriation of returns. Market access is equally attractive: Nigerian products enjoy preferential entry under AfCFTA and ECOWAS ETLS, as well as duty-free access to thousands of products under the UK Developing Country Trading Scheme. Sector-specific incentives further lower the barriers to entry — from special agro-industrial processing zones in agriculture, to VAT waivers for renewables under the Electricity Act 2023, to tariff exemptions for pharmaceutical equipment, backward integration incentives in manufacturing, and Startup Act provisions driving innovation in the digital economy.

Of course, we must acknowledge that FDI has historically been below 2% of GDP in recent years, reflecting infrastructure gaps, regulatory complexity, and foreign exchange volatility that made some investors cautious. But the picture is shifting positively. Thanks to reforms introduced under President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, investor confidence is rebounding. In Q1 2025, total foreign investment rose sharply by 67% to \$5.6 billion compared to the same period in 2024. While portfolio inflows accounted for the majority, FDI still reached around \$126 million, and we are laying the foundation for much larger flows in the near future. Our domestic champions are already

***“As the AfCFTA Digital Trade Champion, we are leading continental work on e-commerce, digital payments, and data flows, ensuring African businesses — especially SMEs and startups — are not left behind in the global digital economy”***





leading the way. The Dangote Group's \$20 billion refinery and petrochemical complex, alongside major expansions by BUA, AGI, and others, are reshaping our industrial base, reducing import dependency, and creating new value chains. These projects show what's possible when capital, policy, and opportunity align.

Looking ahead, as inflation moderates and interest rates ease, we expect FDI inflows to accelerate. Importantly, the President has already unlocked around \$50 billion in signed MOUs and investment interest since 2023, with roughly half about \$25 billion expected to crystallise as FDI over the next few years in agriculture, energy, and industrial infrastructure. Our focus now is on facilitating these commitments, clearing bottlenecks, and ensuring that investors experience Nigeria as a de-risked, rules-based environment with unparalleled opportunities for growth and scale.

***“Nigerian entrepreneurs have consistently demonstrated their capacity to compete on the global stage, excelling in sectors ranging from agribusiness and fintech to the creative industries”***

In short, this is not just about opening doors – it is about building bridges between capital and opportunity. Now is the time to bet on Nigeria.

► **In your opinion, what are the major obstacles facing Nigerian businesses in the international market, and how can they be addressed?**

Nigerian entrepreneurs have consistently demonstrated their capacity to compete on the global stage, excelling in sectors ranging from agribusiness and fintech to the creative industries. However, systemic barriers continue to limit their access to international markets. If we are to build a truly competitive export economy under AfCFTA and beyond, these constraints must be addressed with focus and urgency.

One of the most pressing challenges lies in regulatory fragmentation and outdated processes. Today, exporters often navigate multiple ministries, departments, and agencies with limited integration and inconsistent requirements. This results in confusion, costly delays, and inefficiencies from congested ports and mounting demurrage charges to inland transport bottlenecks and reliance on paper-

based systems that increase the risk of errors.

To tackle this, the Federal Government is implementing a National Single Window (NSW) for Trade, a transformative digital platform scheduled to go live in Q1 2026. The NSW will integrate all trade-related documentation into a single streamlined process. By harmonising requirements, automating approvals, and eliminating duplication, it will reduce costs, cut delays, and strengthen Nigeria's credibility as a trading nation.

Another area requiring attention is compliance with international standards, particularly in agriculture. Nigerian products such as sesame and cocoa are in high demand globally, yet weak sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) compliance and inadequate quality assurance systems have, at times, led to border rejections that undermine farmer incomes and Nigeria's reputation. With the EU Deforestation Regulation (EUDR) now in force, crops like cocoa face even stricter sustainability and traceability requirements.

We are responding decisively by investing in quality infrastructure and standards alignment. For example, the sesame value chain intervention supported by Japan has shown how targeted support can improve farmer practices and reduce rejection rates. Building on such successes, Nigeria is working to align its cocoa and other tree crop sectors with EUDR requirements to safeguard and expand market access.

At the Ministry, our commitment is clear: to create an enabling environment where Nigerian businesses can thrive. Entrepreneurs bring resilience, innovation, and ambition; our role is to dismantle bureaucratic bottlenecks and build systems that foster efficiency, confidence, and competitiveness. With reforms such as the National Single Window and strengthened SPS compliance, we are laying the foundation for Nigeria's full export potential to be realized.





► **What are your priorities as the Honourable Minister of Industry, Trade, and Investment, and what vision do you have for the ministry?**

When I think about Nigeria's economic levers, I see three wheels that must work in sync: fiscal policy, monetary policy, and trade. Trade and industry are where policies translate into factories opening, jobs created, and exports finding new markets. That is where lives are changed.

At the start of this year, we laid out a bold strategy anchored on measurable targets: \$6 billion in foreign direct and portfolio investment, \$6.5 billion in non-oil exports, a 20% rise in trade value, and 200,000 export-led jobs. These numbers are signposts of the Nigeria we want to build competitive, innovative, and outward-looking.

Through carefully targeted investment roadshows and strategic engagements, we have already unlocked over \$50 billion in commitments. The significance of this is not just in the numbers but in the renewed confidence of investors who now see Nigeria as a credible, forward-looking destination. My vision is clear: a Nigeria where trade and industry no longer sit at the margins but drive inclusive prosperity, placing us firmly on the map as Africa's industrial hub and one of the world's most dynamic investment frontiers.

► **How are you engaging with the private sector to ensure that government policies align with the needs of businesses?**

The Ministry has been intentional about creating platforms that genuinely engage and support the private sector. In November, we convened a roundtable with 100 exporters, listening directly to the challenges they face and working with them to remove bottlenecks. We have also identified and are closely tracking 100 Platinum Business Champions large-cap enterprises whose growth and resilience are vital to Nigeria's industrial future. In July, we went further by hosting the Domestic Investors Summit. This landmark gathering brought together Nigeria's leading entrepreneurs,

financiers, and industrialists to chart a course for mobilising domestic capital, expanding market access, and supporting businesses through a regulatory sandbox that allows innovation to flourish while ensuring standards are upheld.

***“When I think about Nigeria's economic levers, I see three wheels that must work in sync: fiscal policy, monetary policy, and trade”***

In parallel, the Minister of State for Industry convened the National Industrial Manpower Summit, shifting the focus to skills, technology, and the workforce needed to power the next phase of industrialisation. By bridging industry needs with skills development, we are laying the foundation for a workforce that is not only large but also competitive and future-ready.

► **How is the ministry engaging the youth in industrial and entrepreneurial activities, considering their significant role in the economy?**

The youth are at the heart of Nigeria's economic future. With over half of our population under 30, we cannot talk about industrialisation or entrepreneurship without placing young people at the centre of policy and practice.

At the Ministry, we are engaging them on multiple fronts. Through SMEDAN, we are equipping youth-led small and medium enterprises with training, access to finance, and business development services to help them scale. With the WEIDE Fund, we are deliberately creating opportunities for women and youth-owned enterprises to access export markets and participate in value chains.

Equally important, under the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), we are working to ensure that young Nigerian entrepreneurs are not left behind in the new single market. From digital trade platforms to capacity-building programmes, we are opening doors for youth-led businesses to expand beyond our borders and

compete across Africa.

We also rolled out Trade Intelligence Tools, which give small businesses real-time access to data on tariffs, export opportunities, and market requirements under the AfCFTA. Before now, this kind of information was often fragmented or inaccessible. Today, a fashion entrepreneur in Aba or a shea butter processor in Niger State can see the same market opportunities that larger companies see.

Another example is the capacity-building programmes we've scaled through NEPC and SMEDAN, equipping MSMEs with both technical and managerial skills. These interventions mean that learning is directly tied to earning; education is no longer just theory, it's about enabling entrepreneurs to participate competitively in the global economy.

So, when we combine targeted training with transparent access to information, we empower young entrepreneurs to move from small, survivalist businesses into enterprises that create jobs, bring in export revenue, and contribute to Nigeria's economic diversification. That is the real power of education and access to information in today's Nigeria.

Our goal is to move young Nigerians from the sidelines to the centre of industrial and trade policy empowering them not just as beneficiaries of programmes, but as active drivers of innovation, enterprise, and growth.

***“The youth are at the heart of Nigeria's economic future. With over half of our population under 30, we cannot talk about industrialisation or entrepreneurship without placing young people at the centre of policy and practice”***



► **Can you share key lessons learnt in public service that has shaped your perspective on governance?**

One of the most important lessons I've learnt is that there are no shortcuts when it comes to driving Nigeria's economic growth. Actual systemic change whether in people, processes, or institutions takes time and deliberate effort. Building a culture of transparency, efficiency, and excellence requires courage, sustained commitment, and constant consensus-building.

I have also prioritised creating a collaborative environment, both within my team and with partners across government and the private sector. Strategic communication has been critical to navigating challenges, aligning diverse interests, and keeping reforms on track.

Finally, I've learnt that balancing expectations while executing high-impact projects demands agility and political acumen. These skills sharpened throughout my leadership journey have been essential in ensuring that reforms not only take root, but also deliver real value to Nigerians.

► **What do you look forward to?**

For me, it is about excellence, impact, and the 200 million Nigerians we serve. I hope my leadership legacy reflects the power of systemic change building a more resilient, equitable, and sustainable business environment where policies translate into real progress and create opportunities for every Nigerian, especially women and young people.

More than anything, I want to inspire the next generation of leaders to look beyond immediate challenges, to embrace bold reforms, and to work relentlessly toward a prosperous and inclusive Nigeria.

► **What do you enjoy most about your job and what do you look forward to achieving in this role?**

I enjoy delivering tangible, measurable, and undisputable impact for Nigerian businesses and the entire economy. It's



***“\* I usually take my birthday off and escape on a personal retreat alone for some hours, but that may not be possible this year. I want God to renew my strength”***

all about the Nigerian role for me. From the nano business of a tomato seller in the market with daily inventory, to our Platinum Business Champions grossing over USD 1 billion in annual revenues, for the last decade, I have been committed to striving to help them succeed, thrive, and scale.

I want to inspire the next generation of leaders to look beyond immediate challenges or gratification, to embrace bold reforms, and to work relentlessly toward the Nigeria we want - a developed, prosperous, equitable, and inclusive Nigeria.

For me, creating jobs, prosperity, and peace for over 200 million Nigerians is why I serve. I am incredibly grateful to God for the opportunity, for the confidence reposed in me by Mr President to deliver on this important national assignment.

My prayer is that my leadership legacy generates tangible and lasting results born out of the power of systemic change building a more resilient, equitable, and sustainable business environment where policies translate into real progress and create

opportunities for every Nigerian, particularly women and young people.

► **It is your birthday today, but your passion for your assignment to Nigeria is heavier on your mind. Besides that, what do you wish for today?**

For me, birthdays are a time to take stock of life and the journey so far, typically a quiet time of thanksgiving and of deep reflection. It's been a pretty busy season for me. I feel profoundly grateful and loved. I usually take my birthday off and escape on a personal retreat alone for some hours, but that may not be possible this year. I want God to renew my strength, to continue to protect and bless my family and me with good health, to prepare me for the assignments and responsibilities entrusted to me, to give me the wisdom to avoid any costly mistakes, and to grant me success in Jesus name.

► **What do you have to say to Inspiring Woman Africa (IWA) especially because you have known the founder for a very long time?**

Kemi, Inspiring Woman Africa is a testament to what your vision and consistency can achieve. I have known you for many, many years. You first interviewed me in 2013, when I was at the University of Lagos and had been awarded a visiting professorship, the Prince Claus Chair, by the ISS in The Hague, the Netherlands. I have seen you persevere and pour yourself, your passion, and your talent into amplifying the voices of women across Nigeria and Africa with sincerity of purpose. What you have built with IWA is not just an organisation it is a movement that gives women the courage to dream bigger, to lead boldly, and to create meaningful change in their communities. What I have to say to you and to IWA for all you do is THANK YOU!!!

***What you have built with IWA is not just an organisation — it is a movement that gives women the courage to dream bigger, to lead boldly, and to create meaningful change in their communities***



WOMAN EXECUTIVE

## Beyond the Seat: What It Really Means to Have Power

By Wola Joseph-Condotti

We often speak about women getting a seat at the table. It is a popular phrase empowering, symbolic, and ambitious. And yes, it matters. Representation matters.

- Visibility matters. Access matters.



But I have come to learn that having a seat is not the final goal. What matters is what you do when

you get there. Real power is not about posture, title, or even presence. It is about influence. It is about responsibility. And it is about what you carry when no one is clapping and no one is watching. Because true leadership is not about having power. It is about knowing how to steward it.

### Power as Stewardship, Not Possession

In today's world, power is often pursued like a prize. Something to own. Something to wield. But power in the hands of the unhealed, the insecure, or the self-serving can be dangerous. Not just to others, but to the soul of the leader herself.

**As Christian women in leadership, we must remember:** we are stewards, not owners. The titles we hold are assignments, not identities. The platforms we occupy are altars, not thrones.



### This mindset changes everything. It means:

**You do not dominate —  
You discern.**

**You do not manipulate —  
You mentor.**

**You do not compete —  
You cultivate.**

### The Weight You Cannot See

People often admire influence from afar, but they do not always understand the cost. The emotional labour of being a woman in power. The spiritual pressure. The constant battle between confidence and humility, between strategy and surrender. The higher you rise, the lonelier it can become. And yet, the greater the requirement to stand in truth, to hold integrity, and to lead with conviction.

You can be the only voice of reason in a room full of noise. The only woman willing to say no when everyone else is nodding yes. The only leader who sees people, not just numbers. That is power. But it is not always applauded.

### Esther Did Not Just Wear the Crown. She Risked It

Queen Esther is one of the most powerful biblical models of female leadership. She had access, status, and position, but she did not confuse the crown on her head with the purpose in her heart.

When the moment came to speak up, she said: If I perish, I perish. That is what real power looks like: not safety, but sacrifice. Not comfort, but courage. Esther did not just sit at the table, she shifted the outcome because she understood the purpose of her presence.

### A Seat Is Not Enough

Many of us have been invited to rooms we once prayed to enter. But the danger is that once we're there, we get comfortable. We silence ourselves to protect relationships. We play small to stay accepted. We forget that influence without impact is just image.

So I ask: What is the point of the seat if your voice is not used? What is the point of power if you are not lifting others as you rise? What is the point of leadership if you are not creating legacy?

### Final Thoughts

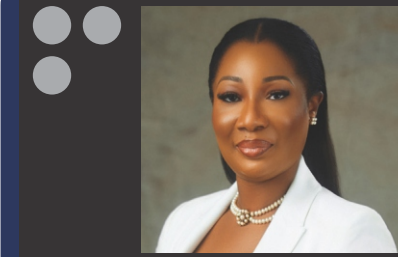
Power is not just the ability to make decisions. It is the discipline to make the right ones, especially when they are unpopular.

So, if you have a seat at the table, well done. But now ask yourself:

Who are you speaking up for?

What are you building?

What will your presence mean for the next woman coming behind you?



### Wola Joseph Condotti

Group MD/CEO of West Power & Gas Limited

Wola is the Group MD/CEO of West Power & Gas Limited, the parent company of Eko Electricity Distribution PLC (EKEDP) and six other affiliate companies with interests in both conventional and renewable energy sectors. In addition to this role, she serves as the Director of the Power and Renewable Division at the Women in Energy Network (WIEN) in a non-executive capacity.

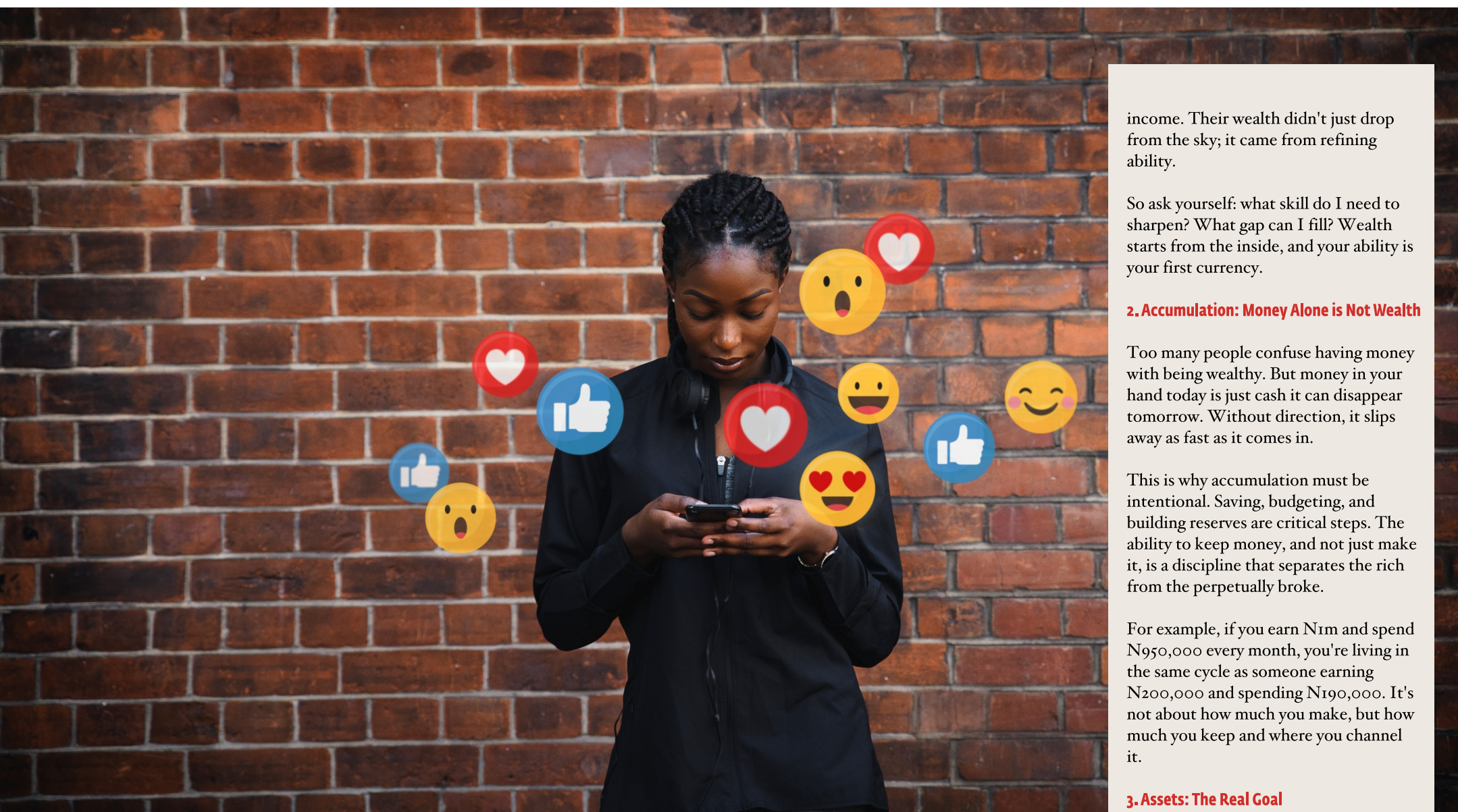
Prior to her current role, Wola was the pioneer Chief, Legal & Company Secretariat at EKEDP. During her tenure, she also held multiple key positions simultaneously including Head of Regulatory Compliance, Chief Human Resources and Administration Officer, Supervising Chief of the Customer Service Department, and Data Protection Officer. Her previous experience includes roles as General Counsel/Company Secretariat Lagoon Home Savings and Loans, and Legal Associate at Banwo & Ighodalo.

Wola holds a law degree from the University of Ibadan, an LLM in International Finance Law from Harvard Law School, and an MBA from INSEAD Business School. She is also an International Finance Corporation (World Bank) Board Evaluation Certified Professional and Corporate Governance Trainer.

Wola's achievements have earned widespread recognition. Most recently, she received the inaugural Leadership Excellence Award of the Year at the Legal Era Africa Awards 2024, becoming the first-ever recipient of this category. The award celebrated her historic transition from General Counsel to Group MD/CEO, a milestone applauded for redefining leadership pathways in the legal profession.

She is a member of the Institute of Directors and the Society for Corporate Governance Nigeria. Additionally, she is an associate member of the Institute of Chartered Secretaries and Administrators of Nigeria, and Women in Management, Business, and Public Service.





## FINANCIAL AdviseHER

# THE 5 A'S OF WEALTH: Beyond the Social Media Hype

Social media has made it easier than ever to peek into people's lives. A new car. A home renovation. A foreign trip. A fresh business launch. Every scroll can make you feel like you're falling behind. But here's the truth: wealth is not built by comparison. It is built by principle, and principles don't trend—they last.

By Sola Adesakin

If you want to cut through the noise and truly build wealth that lasts, there are five A's you must hold on to. These are not theories; they are practical truths.

### 1. Ability: Your Value Brings Money

At the root of all wealth is the ability to give value. Money is a reward for solving problems whether in your job, your business, or your community. That means your skills, talents, and capacities are the first levers you must build.

Think of the tech talent in Nigeria today: coders, designers, and developers solving global problems and earning global

income. Their wealth didn't just drop from the sky; it came from refining ability.

So ask yourself: what skill do I need to sharpen? What gap can I fill? Wealth starts from the inside, and your ability is your first currency.

### 2. Accumulation: Money Alone is Not Wealth

Too many people confuse having money with being wealthy. But money in your hand today is just cash it can disappear tomorrow. Without direction, it slips away as fast as it comes in.

This is why accumulation must be intentional. Saving, budgeting, and building reserves are critical steps. The ability to keep money, and not just make it, is a discipline that separates the rich from the perpetually broke.

For example, if you earn N1m and spend N950,000 every month, you're living in the same cycle as someone earning N200,000 and spending N190,000. It's not about how much you make, but how much you keep and where you channel it.

### 3. Assets: The Real Goal

Accumulation without transformation into assets is wasted effort. Assets are what multiply your money and give you economic value again and again.

Real estate. Mutual funds. Stocks. Farmland. Intellectual property. A small but thriving business. These are assets because they either appreciate in value or generate cash flow.

If you buy a flashy car for N15m, it depreciates the moment you drive it out of the dealership. But if you invest that same N15m into a rental property or high-yield instrument, it starts working for you. Wealth is not about shiny consumption, it is about silent compounding.

### 4. Access: Who You Know Matters

Wealth is not built in isolation. Opportunities flow through relationships. Your network is often the bridge to your next financial breakthrough.

Access doesn't mean being friends with celebrities. It means deliberately surrounding yourself with people who stretch your thinking, open doors, and connect you to possibilities you wouldn't have found on your own.

In business, access to the right partners, suppliers, or investors can make all the difference. As an employee, access to mentors can accelerate your career. Money may open some doors, but people often hold the keys.

### 5. Advancement: Keep Moving Forward

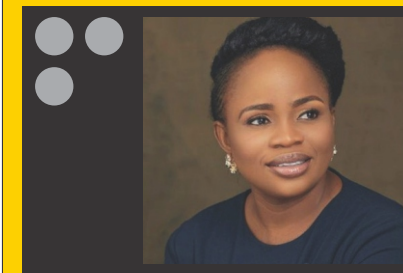
Finally, wealth is a journey, not a one-time event. Too many people sabotage themselves by stopping halfway. They build a little ability, accumulate a little money, maybe buy an asset or two, and then relax.

But advancement requires consistency. The markets may rise and fall, the economy may shift, but those who keep learning, adapting, and pushing forward eventually create lasting wealth.

Think of the entrepreneurs who failed multiple times before breaking through, or the investors who stayed patient while the market fluctuated. Advancement is about staying in the game long enough for compounding to work in your favour.

Social media can tempt you into comparison. But behind every flashy display, there's often debt, pressure, or unsustainable habits. Real wealth doesn't shout it compounds quietly.

As we step into the last quarter of the year, instead of scrolling and sighing, ask yourself: Which A do I need to strengthen? Your focus on these principles, not the distractions online, will determine whether you build wealth that fades or wealth that lasts.



## By Sola Adesakin

Founder and Lead Coach,  
Smart Stewards

Sola Adesakin is a highly respected wealth coach and chartered accountant with over two decades of transformative impact in the finance industry. As the visionary founder of Smart Stewards Financial Advisory Limited and Smart Stewards Advisory LLC, she has revolutionized the financial wellbeing of countless individuals and businesses across 40 countries. Her methodical approach to 'make-manage-multiply' money principles has elevated many from financial stress to prosperity, and mediocrity to exceptional achievement.

Sola is a strong supporter of SDG5 and SDG10, as she seeks to close the gender gap and reduce inequality through financial education, financial technology, and access to funding. Sola's dedication to achieving gender equality and reducing inequality is evident in her work as an alumna of the Academy for Women Entrepreneurs, an initiative of the US Embassy in Nigeria, and the Cherie Blair Foundation's Road to Growth Program. She is also an alumna of Goldman Sachs 10,000 Women program and a member of the Select Global Women in Tech (SGWIT) Mentorship Network of the United States of America. Through the FRUIT Foundation, which she serves as Founder and CEO, she has partnered with the US consulate in Nigeria to champion the economic empowerment of women, assisting them to start and scale their business ventures.

Her impressive academic credentials include a BSc and an MBA degree from Oxford Brookes University and Edinburgh Business School, respectively. She is a fellow of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Nigeria (ICAN), the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants of the United Kingdom (ACCA), and a member of the Chartered Professional Accountants of Canada (CPA). In addition to her impressive credentials, Sola Adesakin is also a Certified Financial Education Instructor<sup>SM</sup> and a member of the Personal Finance Speakers Association.



## GENDER INSIGHTS

## Gender Equality, Peace, and the Case for Special Seats for Women in Nigeria's Parliament

Nigeria faces widespread insecurity ranging from insurgency in the North East, banditry and kidnappings in the North West, farmer-herder clashes in the Middle Belt, to separatist agitations and militancy in the South East and South South, alongside rising urban crime in major cities. Yet, while these crises threaten peace and stability, democracy itself remains fragile because women who make up nearly half of the population hold less than 5% of parliamentary seats. Their absence from decision-making not only deepens inequality but also undermines the very foundation of peace, security, and development in our country.

**Dr. Asmau Benzies Leo**

### Gender Equality as a Pathway to Peace

Across the world, evidence shows that societies where women enjoy equal opportunities are more peaceful and resilient. Women bring unique perspectives to leadership, often prioritising investments in education, health, and community safety. In Nigeria, they are already at the frontline of peace-building mediating disputes, leading

humanitarian efforts, and holding families and communities together in times of crisis. Yet, when critical decisions are made in parliament, their voices are largely absent. This lack of representation means policies often fail to capture the realities of half the population, creating gaps that reinforce inequality and deepen insecurity.

Peace cannot be sustained when the voices of women are missing in the very institutions that shape national destiny.

### Why Nigeria Needs Special Seats for Women

The proposal for special seats for women in parliament is not about charity it is about justice. While critics dismiss it as tokenism, the truth is that Nigerian politics remains overwhelmingly male-dominated, shaped by money, violence, and cultural norms that exclude women. Expecting women to compete on equal footing without addressing these entrenched barriers is simply unrealistic. Special seats provide a corrective

mechanism, serving as a transitional tool to level the playing field until structural barriers are dismantled. Countries such as Rwanda and Tanzania have demonstrated the effectiveness of this approach. Rwanda now leads the world with women holding over 60% of parliamentary seats, which has translated into stronger policies on health, education, and reconciliation. Nigeria can learn from these examples and design a model suited to its own federal structure and cultural realities.

At the Centre for Nonviolence and Gender Advocacy in Nigeria (CENGAIN), we have consistently championed the inclusion of women in governance, and we will not relent until Nigerian women truly Occupy NASS.

Special seats are not a privilege, they are a necessity to correct decades of exclusion.

### Linking Representation to National Security

In Nigeria, women's political representation is not just a matter of fairness, it is a question of peace and national survival. Women in conflict-affected regions disproportionately suffer the consequences of displacement, sexual violence, and economic hardship, yet their voices are consistently absent from peace-building and recovery strategies. Institutionalizing women's representation through special seats in parliament would help ensure that national laws on peace, security, and humanitarian response reflect these urgent realities. Imagine how legislation on gender-based violence, IDP management, or social protection could be transformed if crafted and championed by women who live these challenges every day.



### Beyond Numbers: Ensuring Quality Representation

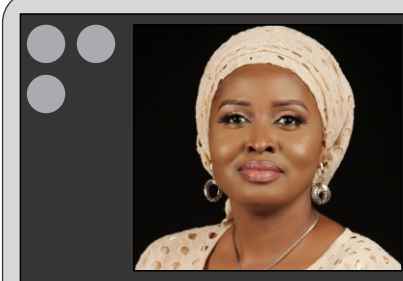
Representation is not just about filling seats; it is about making them count. For special seats to be effective, women must be supported with capacity-building, mentorship, and access to resources that empower them to compete favourably with their male counterparts. Most importantly, this representation must reflect Nigeria's diversity: rural women, young women, and those from marginalised or conflict-affected communities must all have a place. That is how we build a parliament that truly mirrors the nation it serves.

When women lead, societies heal. When women legislate, communities grow stronger.

### A Call to Bold Action

Nigeria stands at a turning point. Special seats for women are not just about fulfilling international commitments like the Sustainable Development Goals; they are about building a democracy that truly works for everyone. Peace, justice, and prosperity cannot be achieved while half of the population remains locked out of governance. Gender equality in politics is not a favour to women, it is a national imperative. By embracing special seats, Nigeria would be sending a powerful message: that our democracy is ready to be inclusive, that our parliament is ready to reflect the true face of its people, and that our nation is ready to choose peace over exclusion.

As stakeholders gathered for the National Public Hearing on Monday, 22nd September 2025, it is critical that this truth guides our deliberations even beyond yesterday. The proposed bill deserves broad support, not just as a women's issue, but as a national priority for strengthening democracy, ensuring representation, and securing a more peaceful future for Nigeria. The time for bold action is now.



**Dr. Asmau Benzies Leo**

Executive Director,  
Centre for Nonviolence and  
Gender Advocacy in Nigeria  
(CENGAIN)

Dr. Asmau Benzies Leo is a development practitioner with extensive national and international expertise in gender equality, peace-building, governance, and humanitarian action.

She holds a PhD in Public Governance and Leadership, a Master's degree in Conflict Management and Peace Studies, and executive certifications from leading institutions including Howard University, Harvard University and Glasgow Caledonian University.

As Executive Director of the Centre for Non-violence and Gender Advocacy in Nigeria (CENGAIN), she has led ground-breaking advocacy initiatives on women's political participation, gender-based violence prevention, and security sector reform across multiple World Bank, UN and EU-supported projects.

Internationally, Dr. Leo has represented civil society at the United Nations, contributed to regional dialogues on Women, Peace and Security, and partnered with global networks advancing gender justice and inclusive governance.

She is a UN Recognised Global Ambassador on Women, Peace and Security. Her expertise bridges grassroots action with policy advocacy, making her a respected voice in advancing gender equality and sustainable peace in fragile and conflict-affected contexts.



Faith, Work &amp; Walk

# My Peace Propelled my Leap... And It Paid Off

## Part 2

Nddi Okonkwo Nwuneli

**Y**ears later, I am thrilled that I took option 3! Through the wonderful support of Fola Adeola and the Ford Foundation, and the hard work of a committed board, amazing staff and over 200 volunteers, I was able to successfully serve as FATE's pioneer ED. The organisation operates offices in Lagos and Port Harcourt, has received numerous international awards and is recognised as one of the most professionally managed and performance-driven nonprofits in Nigeria. Wharton even profiled me back then! What an honour! Wharton Women Mean Business - Wharton Magazine (upenn.edu)

Happily married (to an old friend that I reconnected within Nigeria this was all part of the Master's plan, but I did not realise it when I made the move), Debt-free (Thank God!), I started Leadership Effectiveness Accountability & Professionalism (LEAP) Africa in 2002. Guess What? During the summer of 2003, with support from the Association of Women's Rights in Development, NIA was born.

A little older, and hopefully, a little wiser, I have learnt more than ever before to lean on God's direction rather than advice from any man or woman. For what it is worth, if you are faced with a major decision concerning your career, consider the ten prerequisites that God has placed in my heart and may they be a blessing to you:

**1.** What are you passionate about? What gets you excited? If you are still unclear about what you are most passionate about, make a list of the things in life that make you angry! Rank them in order of priority! (In my case, poverty in Africa makes me angry. The dearth of credible, dynamic, innovative

leaders on the African Continent makes me MAD hence the rationale behind LEAP!)

**2.** What are you good at? What comes naturally to you? Now, I don't mean technical skills but softer skills. (e.g. I never realised how much I absolutely loved public speaking and training until I was put in a position in which I had to do it repeatedly. In your case, it could be that you make everyone around you feel comfortable, regardless of their social, economic and racial backgrounds.)

**3.** Are any of the skills that you listed above directly relevant to the passions that you noted in question 1? (e.g. since I

love training, I believe that I could help more Africans improve their personal effectiveness by organising leadership institutes. In your case, it could be that since you love spending time with all types of people, and are deeply upset about the absence of good African restaurants in Boston, even if you hate cooking, you could consider opening a restaurant! You can always find someone else to do the cooking while you focus on attracting and retaining the customers)

**4.** Would you be willing to do this for free? (Does the option still look attractive to you if you take all financial considerations out of the equation?) Success will always follow passion and

talent! This will not happen overnight, so you need to have enough passion to see you through the empty bank account. Believe me, if you are passionate enough about something, you can always convince others to part with their money or time.

**5.** Would you be willing to do it even if it did not carry a prestige factor? (Oftentimes, we are trapped in resume-building mode and are only concerned about adding brand names to our repertoire. Have you ever considered the fact that you can create your own brand? Oprah is a brand! Believe me, fame follows passion, excellence and talent!)

**6.** When you pray about this opportunity, do you feel at peace about the opportunity? (Of course, you have to be at a place in your walk with God, when you can distinguish His voice from all others. Are you living a life that is Holy and acceptable unto God? Do you spend time in His presence? Are you humble before Him?)

**7.** Is this the right time? Are there any signs from God that indicate that this is the right time to pursue the opportunity? (By signs from God I mean what many of us call unexplained coincidences such as people popping into your life, open doors, unsolicited advice that is surprising on-point etc.)

**8.** Do your close friends think that this is a good move? (e.g. only talk to two or three close and consistent friends who have always told you the truth, even when it hurts!) If you don't have a prayer partner, it may be wise to find one consistent spiritual support is critical to success.

**9.** Do your progressive family members think that this is a good move? (e.g. believe me, when you step out in faith, you always need all the support that you can get, especially from your spouse and progressive family members!)

**10.** Are you prepared to remain committed to God and humble in spite of any success?

If your answer to most of these questions is YES! Then, make the bold move and step out in Faith!



**Nddi Okonkwo Nwuneli**

President and CEO, ONE Campaign

Nddi Okonkwo Nwuneli is the President/CEO of the ONE Campaign. She has over 27 years of international development experience. Nwuneli started her career as a management consultant with McKinsey & Company in Chicago. She returned to Nigeria in 2000 to serve as the pioneer executive director of the FATE Foundation.

In 2002, she established LEAP Africa to inspire, empower, and equip a new cadre of principled, disciplined, and dynamic young leaders in Africa. She also established NIA to support female university students in Nigeria to achieve their highest potential. Between 2008 and 2023, she has focused exclusively on transforming the African agriculture and nutrition landscape through her work as the co-founder of Sahel Consulting Agriculture & Nutrition - West Africa's leading agrifood ecosystem consulting firm and AACE Foods, which produces a range of packaged spices, seasonings, and cereals for local and international markets. In 2019, she established African Food Changemakers (AFC), a digital home for food and agriculture entrepreneurs operating on the African Continent, providing data, funding, training and support to businesses across Africa and elevating African food on global stages.

Nwuneli serves on the boards of the Rockefeller Foundation, Chanel Foundation, Stanbic IBTC Group, Forum of the Young Global Leaders, and the Bridgespan Group.





MADE FOR MORE

# Life-Quake Moments: 5 Years Since the Fire That Changed My Life

By Ifeoma Chuks-Adizue

September 21 2020 is a date I will never forget. That night, our house caught fire. It started in the most unexpected place - our bedroom, from our bed. By every natural calculation, I should have been lying there asleep.

But I wasn't.

I was exhausted. I had already finished a full day at work and was truly ready to sleep but the Holy Spirit nudged me to keep writing the weekly emails for my Uncommon Woman community -my purpose project and assignment beyond my 9 5.

That simple act became the reason I was awake when the fire started..

That assignment saved my life.

We lost nearly everything we owned that night but to His glory, we ALL survived and that fire became yet again a major life-quake moment

## So what are life-quake moments?

They are those unexpected moments that shake us to our core. They interrupt our plans, shatter our routines and sometimes threaten to undo us completely. Yet, paradoxically, they also have

the power to awaken a deeper, stronger and more purpose-driven version of us.

Looking back, I see three lessons from that fire that I carry with me today:

### 1. Assignment Protects You

That night, I could have been asleep in the very bed that caught fire but I wasn't, because I was at my desk doing something that mattered to God - tending to my assignment.

I believe with all my heart that God's hand of protection was tied to that act of obedience. It reminds me of a principle He has repeated to me over and

over again - Do what is important for Me, and I will do what is important for you.

When you give weight to your divine assignment, even in the midst of your full-time job and other responsibilities, God not only graces you for them all but He also defends and preserves you.

### 2. Life-Quakes Are Invitations to Reinvent

In the aftermath of the fire, I was forced to re-examine everything. The first time I'd done this was 10years prior when I survived an ectopic pregnancy; and that one action totally changed my outlook and the

trajectory of my life.

So once again, I knew that If God had spared my life, then surely it wasn't just to continue as before.

Life-quake moments are painful, yes, but they also create opportunities to become MORE of the person God had in mind when He created us. They strip away illusions of control and force us to ask the deeper questions:

- Why am I still here?
- What really matters?

When you dare to ask those questions and respond with obedience, reinvention happens; and reinvention often accelerates growth.

For context, at that point in 2020, I was 15 years into my

career, serving as a Senior Marketing Manager. BUT in the 5 years since that fire, I've moved from Senior Marketing Manager C-Suite Executive now Managing Director for Africa. Given my track record, what could have easily taken me another 10 to 15 years, God compressed into 5 years because I embraced reinvention.

The same is true of the Uncommon Woman Movement. In 2020, we had helped maybe 20 Career Women identify their MORE. Today, five years later, that number has grown 25x to over 500 Career Women who have identified and about 505 of them birthing it and growing it even with their full-time jobs.

### 3. Your Pain Can Become Purpose

Sometimes, the very thing you survive becomes the purpose you were meant to serve.

When you walk out of a fire, literal or figurative, you carry scars, stories and strength that others desperately need. What you survived is no longer just yours, it becomes a lifeline for others still walking through their own flames.

This is why Scripture says we comfort others with the same comfort we ourselves have received (2 Corinthians 1:4). Your survival may be someone else's survival manual.

As I mark 5 years since that defining moment and God's hand of mercy, I'm reminded again that we are not kept alive just to exist. We are kept to live on purpose.

### So today, I want to ask you:

- What life-quake moment have you walked through?
- How did it reshape your perspective, your priorities or your sense of calling/assignment?
- What new strength or clarity emerged from it?

Maybe it was the loss of a loved one, a career setback, a health battle or a financial storm. Hard as it might be, whatever it was, I invite you to see it not only as a breaking but also as a birthing.

As you decide to do this, here are 3 simple ways to do so and not waste these life-quake moments.

### 1. Pause and Process.

Don't rush past the pain. Sit with it, acknowledge it and ask the right questions. The biggest one is: Lord, why have You kept me alive? For what reason am I still here? Write down your thoughts, document your wrestlings and capture any clarity God gives you. Those answers become anchors for the next season.

### 2. Reinvent Through Self-Assessment.

Ask: Who do I need to be to deliver on what God has shown me? Be honest about where you are and where you need to grow. Upgrade your knowledge, skills, habits, mindset and even the company you keep. Remember, reinvention is about aligning your identity with your assignment.

### 3. Obey and Live Intentionally.

If God gives you an instruction or idea of what to do - no matter how big, how crazy or how costly, please just do it. I have come to realize that these instructions He gives us - purpose work like i call it, do not necessarily need you to quit your full-time job. You can deliver the instructions while still thriving in your career, your family and your daily responsibilities. You can nurture your assignment right where you are, even in the middle of deadlines, motherhood, and responsibilities. God graces you to carry both.

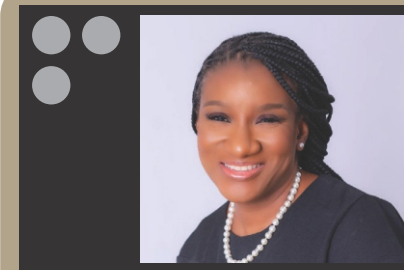
Sometimes the answers may not be clear or the instructions concise. In these situations, simply decide that in every sphere of life you touch, you will leave a mark that is distinct and purposeful. Clarity will soon come as you do this diligently..

As I look back with gratitude that my whole family walked out of that fire alive, I'm reminded not only of God's mercy and kindness but also the fact that even in the middle of demanding careers and complex lives, God's assignment is always calling.

and your assignment doesn't have to wait until the craziness at work slows down or the children are all grown. If God says it is now, then you are already graced for it.

This is why I write to you each week: to remind you that while your job matters, your assignment is bigger. So Step out. Say YES. Do it NOW.

Until next week, keep saying YES to your MORE.



## By Ifeoma Chuks-Adizue

Managing Director Africa  
at Global Citizen

Ifeoma Chuks-Adizue, fondly known as Iphie, is a seasoned professional with a rare mix of experience in brand management, sales, media and over 20 years' experience building global brands across Africa.

Iphie is the Managing Director Africa at Global Citizen - an international advocacy organisation focused on ending extreme poverty now.

Prior to this role, Iphie was the Executive Director Commercial at CAP PLC, makers of Dulux Paint where she led the Sales and Marketing teams to quadruple the business in 4 years.

A graduate of Economics from the University of Jos, Iphie started her career with Procter & Gamble Nigeria where she held several leadership positions, before moving to Cadbury Nigeria, then CAP PLC, and now Global Citizen.

Iphie Chuks-Adizue is the author of two books - The Uncommon Woman and Made for More, and is Founding President of the Uncommon Woman Movement,

She is a wife, mother of three children and recipient of several awards, the most recent being the Exceptional Leader of Excellence Award from the Global Women Economic Forum.





## WOMAN AT THE HELM

# Amina Oyagbola

Board Chair, at Afrobarometer & WISCAR



When you hear the name AMINA, what comes to mind?

For me, it is a woman warrior who ruled the territory she conquered. Our Woman At The Helm this week, who also bears the name Amina, is certainly ruling in an area that is dear to her heart: advocacy for women inclusion and empowerment. Beyond that, she is Chair, Afrobarometer, Managing Consultant, AKMS Consulting, Partner at Oyagbola Chambers, Founder and Chairperson of WISCAR (Women In Successful Careers- a not-for-profit leadership and structured mentoring network for professional women). She is Amina Oyagbola.

With an untiring pledge to progressing women's rights, she traverses multifaceted legal settings with the meticulousness of an expert strategist. Something striking about her presence is both uplifting and impressive. I see why women find succour in her presence, because they are assured they have someone who addresses their needs and challenges with a combination

of compassion, grace and results.

There is something about her regal style; a sight for sore eyes, often adorned in classy ethnic pieces, oozing confidence that is known among dignitaries.

As an inclusion champion, Amina believes we need more women at the top. She says resilience, supportive network and mentorship really helped her but a mindset change from norms that don't help women thrive is important. She recounts that a few years ago, under the leadership of the former governor of the Central Bank Of Nigeria, HRH Sanusi Lamido Sanusi, who introduced an advisory guideline that every financial institution should have 40 percent representation, she says it has had a dramatic impact with results showing today, and that because of the implementation of that guideline, we have several women who are now CEOs of financial institutions, and this has improved such companies as reflected on the balance sheets.

Amina is passionate about mentorship, hence the reason for WISCAR's Mentoring

Book, which covers the story of how the WIN-with-WISCAR Mentoring programme was conceived. Available at Laterna Ventures, Quintessence Bookstore and Rovingheights Books, the book is indeed a must-read.

She is a Chartered Fellow of CIPD UK, Fellow, CIPM, Fellow and First Vice President, Chartered Institute of Directors (CIOd), Fellow, Institute of Management Consultant, member, WCD, a Certified Ethics Officer, Former Chair, Advisory Council member, and Fellow, Africa Leadership Initiative- West Africa and member of the Aspen Global Leadership Network. She is a Chevening Scholar and 2019 recipient of the prestigious HR People Magazine Lifetime Achievement Award and ALTON Award for her contribution to the telecommunications sector in Nigeria.

The former Human Resources and Corporate Services Executive at MTN Nigeria had her Bachelor of Laws from Ahmadu Bello University, her MBA from Lancaster University and her LLM from University of Cambridge.





## WE'VE GOT MEN

# Dr. Richard O. Ikiebe (Ph.D)

Writer. Teacher. Speaker. Researcher. Coach

Kemi Ajumobi

I was a participant in a training he coordinated. Immediately I saw it was him, I said to myself There is certainly going to be a positive mind reset. I remember going to tell a protégée to get ready for an amazing time and before I could even say a word, she said Auntie Kemi, I know him, he was my lecturer, he is an amazing man. I certainly knew there was nothing more to add. If there is one thing about GenZs, they do not sugar coat anything. They share their mind freely. If we follow the scripture Matthew 18:16b "that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established" then, calling our We've Got Men personality of this week a seasoned media practitioner who personifies an outstanding amalgam of wisdom and aptitude, describes him pertinently. He is Richard O. Ikiebe (PhD).

There is no way you will sit under his tutelage that you will remain the same. He ignites something in your

subconscious that gives you reason to think about your life in a way that inspires you to aim high. He validates your big dreams and assures you nothing can stop you if you do not stop yourself. I remember at that training, he also brought some smart speakers who inspired us all. However, one thing was constant, during the training, whenever groups gathered when on break, the conversations were the same Dr. Richard is inspiring, Dr. Richard is an encourager, Dr. Richard wants us to be great It further buttressed what I had said, the summary being, he knows his onions and he is a good man.

One thing stands out, he is an excellent communicator. People make the mistake to think communication is about speaking good English. That is false, because you can communicate even without saying a word. What makes Dr. Ikiebe special is that he communicates to you from a good place. You can tell he means well even when he is firm. He doesn't speak to tear down, he speaks to uplift. He is strict on timing and

appreciates focus, yet he also relates with you like a father and friend. Dr Ikiebe is someone you should book a session with, no matter how highly placed you are, if you need someone to help you align your goals to reality, or your company needs that charge for the next level, he is the one to reach.

His fluency makes him a delightful speaker, yet he desists from speaking in a way that could be interpreted as conceited or narcissistic. He rather engages listeners with unpretentiousness and truth. You will find it easy to connect with him. He is humane.

His students respect him, they admire how his corrections are made with kindness, they enjoy how he encourages them and they do not feel disparaged.

Dr. Richard Ikiebe was until 2021 a full time faculty for over 10 years, and pioneer Director of the Centre for Leadership in Journalism at the School of Media Communication (SMC) at Pan Atlantic University in

Lagos, Nigeria. He continues to work with the University as an adjunct Senior Fellow teaching courses in Media History, Media Leadership, Public Policy and the Media.

He currently serves as the Chairman of TechPoint.ng, an online technology media organisation and BusinessDay.

He has worked as Special Adviser (1998-99) to the Chief of General Staff (Nigeria's Military Vice President), and as Senior Policy Adviser to the Minister of Information (1986-1990). A former Chief Executive of the Nigerian-American Chamber of Commerce, Ikiebe has served on the boards of several companies including as Vice Chairman of Cornerstone Insurance Company Plc.

He obtained his doctorate in Communication and Media Studies from the University of Westminster, London, M.A., International Relations from Ohio University and BA, Journalism from University of Wisconsin-Whitewater.

He is happily married with a family.



## HOLISTIC LIVING

# The Holistic Home – Creating spaces that nurture calm, creativity, and health

By Dr. Maymunah Yusuf Kadiri

If your life were a song, your home would be the instrument that shapes its sound. When the strings are out of tune, even the most beautiful melody

can feel jarring. In the same way, your surroundings affect your mood, your energy, and even your physical health more than you may realise.

A holistic home is not about expensive furniture or trendy decor. It's about intentionally shaping your living space, so it feeds your mind, lifts your spirit, and supports your body's wellbeing. It's about turning the place you return to every day into a sanctuary, not a stress factory.

## Why Your Home Affects Your Health

Psychologists have long known that our physical environment

influences our emotional state. Cluttered rooms can create mental chaos, dim lighting can lower mood, and noisy surroundings can increase stress hormones. On the other hand, spaces that feel open, clean, and harmonious promote calm, focus, and creativity.

A study from Princeton University found that physical clutter competes for your attention, reducing focus and increasing anxiety. This is especially important in Nigeria's bustling cities, where life outside the door is often loud, fast, and chaotic. Your home should be the opposite, a counterbalance, not an extension of the stress.

## The Three Pillars of a Holistic Home

### 01. Calm

Spaces that soothe the nervous system and encourage rest.

### 02. Creativity

Environments that spark inspiration and problem-solving.

### 03. Health

Designs and habits that support physical and mental wellbeing.

## 1. Creating Calm

Calm begins with decluttering. You don't have to live like a minimalist monk, but every item in your home should have a purpose or bring you joy. The fewer unnecessary items, the less your mind must process visually. Soft lighting like warm-toned bulbs or natural daylight can help regulate mood and sleep cycles. In Nigeria's tropical climate, adding greenery indoors through potted plants like peace lilies or snake plants not only calms the eye but also purifies the air. Your bedroom should be a device-free zone where the day's noise stops at the door. Soft fabrics, clean sheets, and gentle scents like lavender can signal to your body that it's time to rest.

## 2. Sparking Creativity

If calm is about clearing mental space, creativity is about filling it with inspiration. Set up a corner of your home dedicated to activities that spark joy reading, painting, journaling, or

even strategic thinking for your business. Keep tools and materials for your hobby within easy reach, so creativity isn't delayed by searching for supplies. Surround yourself with art, photographs, or colours that energise you. Studies show that certain colours like green for balance or yellow for optimism can subtly influence mood and creativity.

## 3. Supporting Health

Holistic health in the home goes beyond just what you eat it includes what you breathe, touch, and see daily.

**Air Quality:** Open windows regularly to let in fresh air and reduce indoor pollutants.

**Natural Light:** Exposure to daylight regulates circadian rhythms, boosting mood and energy.

**Movement Spaces:** Even small homes can make room for physical activity yoga mats, resistance bands, or a space for stretching.

In Nigerian households where cooking is central, ensure kitchens are well-ventilated to reduce smoke and fumes.

## Cultural Roots of Holistic Living

Our ancestors understood the power of intentional spaces. Yoruba compounds were built around a central courtyard, promoting airflow, sunlight, and community connection. Northern mud houses were designed to stay cool in

extreme heat. These principles balance with nature, intentional design, and functionality are timeless and still relevant today.

## Practical Steps to Start Your Holistic Home Journey

- ♦ **Declutter One Room at a Time:** Start small to avoid overwhelm.
- ♦ **Let Nature In:** Plants, sunlight, fresh air.
- ♦ **Designate a "Quiet Zone:** A space where you can read, meditate, or simply breathe.
- ♦ **Choose Colours Mindfully:** Use calming or energizing tones depending on the room's purpose.
- ♦ **Add Personal Touches:** Items that tell your story and make you smile.

Your home should not just store your belongings, it should restore your being. In a world that demands so much of your attention and energy, a holistic home gives you back what life takes away.

By creating spaces that calm your mind, spark your imagination, and support your health, you turn your home into more than four walls, it becomes the most powerful tool in your self-care arsenal.

Because at the end of every day, the world will knock at your door. The question is: when you step inside, will your home heal you or drain you? The choice is yours.



## Dr. Maymunah Yusuf Kadiri

Psychiatrist-In-Chief at Pinnacle Medical Services

Dr. MAYMUNAH YUSUF KADIRI (aka DR. MAY) popularly referred to as "The Celebrity Shrink," is a multiple award winning Mental Health Physician, Advocate & Coach. She is the convener of "The Mental Health Conference" and the Medical Director and Psychiatrist-In-Chief at Pinnacle Medical Services, Nigeria's leading and foremost Psychology and Mental health clinic prominent in the application of innovative clinical approaches in the management/treatment of a wide range of psychological, emotional, and behavioral related disorders.

Dr. Kadiri is a dynamic Consultant Neuro- Psychiatriat and a Fellow of the National Post Graduate Medical College of Nigeria (FMCPsych) with almost 20 years' experience as a practicing Physician. She is a trained and certified Rational Emotive and Cognitive Behavioural Therapist from Albert Ellis Institute, New York, USA. She is also a certified Trauma Counsellor and Neurofeedback Practitioner.

Dr. Kadiri has wide experience in psycho-therapeutic techniques and has perfected her skills whilst in private practice and whilst working for a variety of organizations. She is a recognized radio and television guest Psychiatrist and Psychotherapist. She also contributes to articles published in magazines and newspapers.

She is the only Nigerian with the 14Ps.....Physician, Psychiatrist, Psychologist, Psychotherapist, Practitioner (NLP, BFB, NFB), Public Speaker, Published Author, Producer (movies), Proficient Coach, Parent, Philanthropist, People oriented, Public Health Advocate and Passionate about God and life.

The founder of Pinnacle Health Radio, African's #1 online health radio and a non for profit organization, "Pinnacle Medicals SPEAKOUT Initiative" which is geared towards creating Mental Health literacy in Nigeria and beyond.

The Executive producer of award winning movies, Pepper soup (focused on drug abuse) and Little Drops of Happy (focused on depression, postpartum depression and suicide) and creator of the most innovative mental health app in Africa, HOW BODI.



TRIBE WITH THE VIBES

## The danger of self-isolation

ADULTING CAN BE REALLY HARD, ESPECIALLY FOR NASCENT ADULTS. WHAT DO YOU MEAN I HAVE TO PAY ALL MY OWN BILLS? SIGHS!

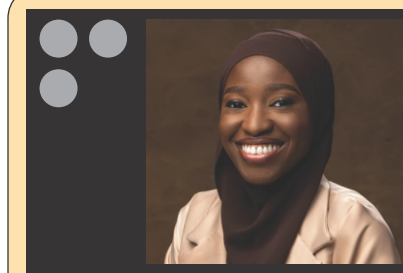
By Zainab Aderounmu

But what no one really prepares you for, is how lonely the journey feels. The quest for personal development, building a life you're truly proud of, is a very solo journey. Even when you have a community of friends, or family, there are some battles that really boil down to 'every man being for himself'.

But what if most of your loneliness is actually self-imposed? Shame may prevent you from reaching out to family or friends for support. It may not even be financial, sometimes it's just emotional or moral support you need. Yet, you find yourself making excuses for them: They're probably too busy, and you choose to suffer in silence.

I got this epiphany a few days ago when I attended a social gathering for the first time in ages. Prior to that, I had been rejecting all forms of invitation; no weddings, no meetups, nothing. I always had an excuse. However, I couldn't reject this particular one because it'll mean I wasn't there for someone I loved, so I attended. Every single person was excited to see me, and I ended up getting clarity from two intimate conversations. 'Is this what I'd been afraid to show up for?' I thought.

The structures that exist in our current society makes our loneliness almost inevitable. Social media platforms make it easy to keep up with each other, but with curated versions of ourselves, not the real ones. WhatsApp statuses may make you feel like you're close to someone but they're only posting a fragment of their reality. This means that we're lonelier than ever before, despite the easier means of communication because we're all now chasing the



**Zainab Aderounmu**

Zainab Aderounmu A. W. is a First Class graduate of English Language and the Overall Best Graduating Student from the Lagos State University, Lagos Nigeria. She's a professional Master of Ceremonies, known as 'The Hijabi Compere', a public speaking coach and Communications Professional. She is currently a Youth advisor to the European Union where she doubles as the Spokesperson and Head of Communications & PR for the Youth Sounding Board.

algorithm, the numbers, not the people who make the numbers.

The irony? As humans, we're biologically wired for connection. Ignoring that need leaves us drained and depressed. And the cycle feeds itself, you feel low, so you withdraw; you withdraw, so you feel even lower.

In other words, society contributes to your loneliness, but your own choices amplify it. Contrary to what you think, you have a community of people who love you and want to support you. Of course, there will always be people who probably want to tear you down but on the flip side, there are people who are genuinely concerned. You just have to stop shutting them out.

TEDx speaker Amy Shoenthal puts it perfectly: turn to your community when you hit a setback. Make connecting a habit. Send a quick text, place that phone call, show up in person when you can. Sometimes, your community sees how amazing you are when you can't.

So, before you decide to suffer in silence, remember there is love at home.



## GARB & GLAM

# SCHOOL IS IN SESSION: THE RISE OF THE NEW ACADEMIC CHIC

By Yolanda Okereke

## THE ANATOMY OF THE SCHOOL LOOK



### THE BLAZER

The backbone of academic chic. Tailored, oversized, or cropped the blazer instantly adds structure. Pair with denim for a casual spin or with pleats for a head-to-toe collegiate effect.



### THE PLEATED SKIRT

Flirty yet disciplined, the pleated skirt is the ultimate nod to school days. In tartan, solid navy, or leather, it swings easily from campus to cocktails.



### THE BUTTON-DOWN

Nothing says lesson ready like a crisp shirt. Worn tucked in, half-tucked, or layered under sweaters, it anchors the look with sophistication.



### THE LOAFER REVOLUTION

Loafers are no longer just sensible shoes for prefects. Chunky soles, patent finishes, and bold socks elevate them into statement pieces.



### ACCESSORIES WITH A WINK

Ties worn loose, headbands with pearls, oversized satchels, or even varsity jackets. These finishing touches take the school look from literal to luxe.



### WHY IT WORKS NOW

In a world obsessed with self-reinvention, the school look offers a return to structure without sacrificing playfulness. It bridges nostalgia with modern edge giving adults permission to relive the thrill of first days and fresh notebooks, but in fashion's language. The aesthetic is smart, polished, and photogenic, making it endlessly Instagram-ready.

### STYLE NOTES by Yolanda

Pair a navy blazer with distressed jeans and loafers for effortless academic chic.

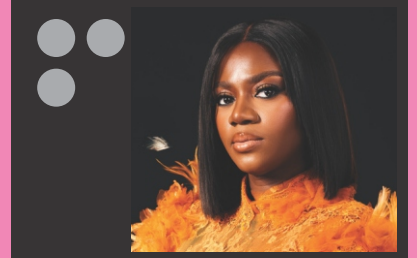
Elevate the pleated skirt with a leather jacket and boots to break away from too cute.

### USE COLOUR POPS

A tie in bold red, socks in neon to keep the look modern.

### BALANCE PROPORTIONS

oversized sweaters with slim skirts, cropped blazers with wide-leg trousers.



## Yolanda Okereke

Founder & Head of The Rani Company

Yolanda Okereke is a visionary fashion entrepreneur and respected industry leader, known for her exceptional work as a Costume Designer and Creative Producer in Film and Television. With over a decade of experience, she has consistently shaped the visual identity of some of Nollywood's most iconic productions, earning a reputation for her artistic depth, organisational precision, and bold storytelling through costume.

She is the Founder and Head of The Rani Company, a leading costume design and styling firm, and The Wardrobe Shack, a costume rental house serving high-profile film and television projects across Nigeria. Rani Gisele was launched while studying Chemical Engineering at university.

Her extensive credits include critically acclaimed projects such as Netflix's Blood Sisters and Olôturé, as well as The Wedding Party, King of Boys, La Femme Anjola, The Set Up, and Day of Destiny.

Her contributions have earned her nominations at the Africa Movie Academy Awards and the Africa Magic Viewers' Choice Awards, and she was recently awarded Best Fashion Collaboration Film at FAME Week Africa, where she celebrated Nigerian costume design through a dedicated showcase.

## FINAL BELL

The school look is not about going back; it's about moving forward with wit, polished, and a dash of rebellion.

Whether you're walking into a classroom, a boardroom, or onto the runway, fashion's new lesson plan is clear: School is in session, and style is the subject.





# A Journey Through Traditional Beauty & Flavor


*Inside Clay Food Shop & The Henna Place*

“Together, Clay Food Shop and The Henna Place offer more than services. They offer belonging. A place where tradition is not just preserved, but honored, elevated, and shared”

## Clayfoodshop

Clay Food Shop is more than just a restaurant, it's a cultural experience. Known for its traditional elegance and modern interpretations of Northern Nigerian cuisine, Clay is a destination for food lovers who seek authenticity in every bite.


From their signature ram suya to rich native sauces, tigernut juice, and wholesome masa, every meal evokes the comfort of tradition.

 [@clayfoodshoplagos](https://www.instagram.com/clayfoodshoplagos)  
: +234909 554 4990

## The Henna Place

Established in 2014, The Henna Place is Nigeria's leading traditional spa, bringing centuries old Moroccan, Northern Nigeria and Arab beauty rituals into the general wellness market. Specializing in Moroccan hammam treatments, sugar waxing, herbal hair care, and intricate henna designs, the spa provides a deeply relaxing and culturally rich self care experience.

With multiple branches across Nigeria, including three branches in Lagos, The Henna Place has become a go-to destination for brides, beauty lovers, and women seeking intentional, soul-restoring care from head to toe, it's a place to cleanse, unwind, and reconnect with yourself the traditional way.

 [@Thehennaplace](https://www.instagram.com/Thehennaplace)  
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