



INSPIRING
WOMAN
AFRICA

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IWA CONFERENCE

LEADERSHIP AT THE FORE OF CONVERSATIONS AT SERIES 14

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HER POINT OF VIEW

Say Yes, Even When
You're Afraid



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Welcome!

Dear Readers,

Wow! Where do I begin from? Inspiring Woman Africa (IWA) Conference Series 14 was an outstanding success. My heart is filled with joy, but what brings the most inspiring feeling is the guests who met me after the event and expressed how much they enjoyed themselves. There is nothing like doing something for impact and seeing the result.

We had 3 fruitful days. Day 1 was the conference and it was themed: Leadership Redefined: Charting New Paths to Excellence. The speakers all did an amazing job.

On Day 2, IWA team and the keynote speaker H.E Sahle-Work Zewde visited Nike Art Gallery and Mama Nike is an awesome host. The songs, the accolades, the gifts, her narration of her experience, everything made us not want to leave her presence. Such a gift she is. An inspiring woman in every way.

Later in the evening of that same day, we were hosted by the Governor of Lagos state H.E Babajide Sanwo-Olu who presented gifts to H.E. We had great conversations and left with smiles, Mr. Governor made us laugh, I must say he's got some jokes. He made us feel at home. A fantastic host he is!

Much later at night, we had dinner in honour of our keynote speaker, and it was graciously attended by some distinguished guests who also came to celebrate her. H.E inspired us with words still playing in our hearts. She is filled with so much wisdom.

Day 3, it was time for our keynote speaker to go back home but before leaving for the airport, we stopped at the house of Mr. and Dr. Mrs Elumelu. I loved the conversations shared, most importantly on what the Tony Elumelu Foundation is doing to support businesses across Africa.

We did our best to capture all the moments in this edition so you also enjoy the experience like we did.

Once again, we say thank you to all our speakers, guests, sponsors and all. You made IWASeries14 a success. Next year will be greater and bigger.

To our dear Keynote speaker H.E Sahle-Work Zewde, we love you, we miss you but you will always have your space and place in our hearts. Thank you for impacting and inspiring us.

We also have other articles in this edition for you to enjoy.

See you next week and take care.

COVER STORY

Inspiring Woman Africa (IWA) Conference

LEADERSHIP AT THE FORE OF CONVERSATIONS AT SERIES 14



The Inspiring Woman Africa (IWA) Conference just concluded and it was indeed a great one. Themed 'Leadership Redefined: Charting New Paths to Excellence' All the speakers did excellently well and in this edition, we shall be sharing on all that happened in details.

By IWA Team

Data has shown that women are able to effectively contribute and lead in society, there's transformation, not only socially but

also economically. The life and career of the keynote speaker at the Inspiring Woman Series 14, embodies what is possible when women lead in society.

As the keynote speaker, the former president of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Madam Sahle-Work Zewde chronicled her life's journey and how she got to become

president of a great country like Ethiopia.

She shared deep reflections from her diplomatic and leadership journey, spanning 29 years, noting her longstanding relationship with Nigeria and her joy at returning, this time as a former president.

Arriving in Nigeria from Tunisia, where she had participated in an African forum on women and security, she stated that the Inspiring Woman Series aligns closely with her lifelong commitment to women's empowerment.

"My lifelong commitment has always been to support women; to whom



much has been given, much is expected," she said.

She says it is important for women to own and tell their own stories, noting that "if a woman doesn't tell her story, nobody will." According to her, women must speak boldly about their experiences and capacities because "what a woman can do has no limit."

Reflecting on her career, she shared that she began her professional journey in France, where she was recruited into the Ministry of Education. She stressed that "education is fundamental if we want to change the world." Over the course of 29 years, she served as an ambassador, specialising in African affairs and postings in Paris, driven by a mindset where she had "only one option; to be successful."

She spoke candidly about her six-year tenure as President, acknowledging that the journey was far from easy. "The road has not been smooth. As women leaders, "we forced the door open" she said.

She also highlighted a critical leadership gap, noting that leaders sometimes fail to listen to community dwellers who possess vital grassroots

insights. According to her, this disconnect limits effective problem-solving because leaders may not fully understand what is happening on the ground.

Addressing power and leadership, she asserted that "nobody gives you power, you have to take it." According to her, sponsors and support systems are important, stating that for substantive change to occur, women must be empowered. While encouraging women to participate actively in politics, she said that they must not do it alone and called on others to support them.

"Let's amplify each other's voices," she urged, encouraging women to join networks and build strong alliances. Anything is possible and the sky is the limit. You work hard and believe in yourself," she concluded.

Beyond her keynote speech, the Founder and Group CEO of the Inspiring Woman Africa Group, Kemi Ajumobi sat with her in an intimate fireside chat to ask her specific questions about her time in office.

She reflected on her first moments in office where she had been chosen, expelling the need to campaign for the position, as both the President and Vice

President in Ethiopia are elected by parliament. She admitted that she was not prepared for the role, noting that it was not something she had imagined for herself. The experience was initially intimidating, but it quickly became a moment of resolve.

"I told myself, I cannot fail, so I worked harder in that phase of my life," she said.

Sharing one of the greatest lessons life has taught her, she spoke about the importance of demystifying power, particularly the office of the presidency. According to her, leadership should not feel distant or untouchable. She said that it is essential to simplify power and lead with humility, noting that humility remains a key leadership value.

Offering advice to women in politics, she encouraged persistence and clarity of purpose. She also urged women to continue pursuing political leadership and to speak boldly about the solutions they bring to the table.

"You have to continue to pursue it. If you have solutions to problems, talk more and more about it. Have clarity, be true to what you believe," she said. She also stressed the importance of staying true to one's beliefs, and standing firmly in what one represents.





The 14P's for Life by Hon. Imaan Sulaiman - Ibrahim, Minister of Women Affairs, Nigeria

The Honourable Minister for Women Affairs, Imaan Sulaiman-Ibrahim, shared 14 life changing nuggets for women at the Inspiring Woman Series 14.

She first commended the founder and CEO, Kemi Ajumobi, for her consistency and diligence, describing the convening as both remarkable and impactful. She noted that the Inspiring Woman Africa (IWA) Group continues to spotlight the brilliance and influence of women, emphasising that women are not merely observers of change but “architects of possibilities.”

Speaking on the work of the Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, she reaffirmed the government's commitment to expanding Nigerian women's access to opportunities.

“As part of our commitment to deepen, improve and expand access to opportunities for women across Nigeria, we are vigorously implementing the renewable Social Impact Intervention Program 774.”

“Within this vision, I employ all participants here today to connect and fully utilise the Happi women's app. This is a digital classic innovation and is more than just an application. It is a gateway to verify information, economic prospects, mental well-being, tools, legal guidance,” she said.

She then shared what she described as the 14 Ps for or life, leadership, and impact:

She began with **purpose**, stating the importance of living a purpose-driven life, supported by **prayers** as a foundation. She spoke about **positivity**, urging women not to see themselves as

victims but to choose optimism, seeing the cup as half full, not half empty.

On **passion**, she noted that it is contagious, and that **perseverance** provides the staying **power** needed to endure challenges. Closely linked to this is **persistence**, the commitment to keep going even when **progress** feels slow. She emphasised the importance of **planning**, to be intentional and strategic, and that **punctuality** lets you own the agenda. She also underscored **practice**, the discipline of continuous improvement.

In terms of leadership and relationships, she spoke about **perspective**, encouraging respect for differing views, and presence, the power of being fully engaged and visible. She recognised **politics** for its role in shaping systems and influence, as well as people who we choose to support and nurture.

Finally, she concluded with **play**, urging women to embrace joy and balance, reminding them that “you only live once.”



► PANEL 1: EXCELLENCE IN ACTION, I COMMITTED TO LEAD

Aristotle once said, “We are what we repeatedly do, therefore, excellence is not an act, but a habit”. The first panel at the Inspiring Woman Series 14 brought together excellent women executives whose careers span banking, media, and entertainment, to speak about what excellence looks like in action.

Moderated by Ozim Ibeziako, Executive General Counsel Africa, GE Vernova, the panel featured Chinwe Iloghalu, Acting MD/CEO of Nova Bank, and Dr. Busola Tejumola (PhD), Executive Head, General Entertainment Channels at MultiChoice Group.

Chinwe Iloghalu began by highlighting that excellence is anchored in intentional growth. Quoting the leadership expert John Maxwell, she said “change is inevitable, but growth is intentional”. According to her, leadership styles shouldn't be a one-size-fits-all. Whether a leader adopts an autocratic or democratic approach often depends on several factors.

“What influences your leadership style is the organisational culture, power dynamics, team dynamics, the team you are leading, and the life cycle of the

organisation. For a growth organisation, you must be willing to be transactional in your role and build a great network you can bank on”, she concluded.

Dr. Busola Tejumola, sees excellence, as empowerment, and leadership as legacy. True leadership, she explained, is creating impact that outlives your tenure. She particularly mentioned how Africa must properly position with increased focus from other parts of the world.

“With global attention increasingly focused on the continent, leaders must ask critical questions: How are we delivering more value? How are we positioning Africa not just as a market, but as a powerhouse of creativity and innovation?” She stated.

MultiChoice has been pushing the frontiers of African creativity and excellence, particularly with the role of the AMVCAs as a tool for rewards and recognition as well as investing in local talents and artists.

“People who haven't gotten an AMVCA, aspire to get and I'm not saying that's the only thing that exists, it is one of the tools that helps to create a great standard benchmark for the market,” she said.

In terms of leveraging AI and Machine Learning, Chinwe Iloghalu explained that

Nigerian Banks leverage technology as a response to customers' needs for speed and efficiency.

“In a country like Nigeria, where we have 70 percent of the people under 30, you just have to change the way you do your business. So whether it's in banking, whether it's in telecoms, it's all about speed and efficiency”, she said.

On the percentage of women's representation of women on board, she emphasised quality over quantity.

“We have decent numbers of women at the top, quality over quantity if you ask me. In 2021, the sustainability banking principle ensured that women are represented at the top level in the banking sector, up to 30 percent on boards and 40 percent in management level. Some factors, however, impede women from getting to these top levels,” she noted.

She also emphasised that women's representation on boards have proven to be fruitful for such organizations that practice diversity.

“Five extra women might not seem like a lot, but we have to look at the impact that these women bring to those boards in terms of social impact, innovation and of course performance. It's been proven that once you have women on the board, the overall performance of the company improves”, she said.

Finally, Dr Tejumola explained how content and entertainment can be used to create possibilities by conditioning people to see what could be.

“There was a lot of awesome content in the past. Reverse Engineering content in TV would be one thing I would love to bring back, where content is intentionally structured to help people see what is possible for them in the future,” she noted.

For her, the possibility of a female president had been seen in movies long before it happened.



► **PANEL 2: VISIONARY LEADERSHIP IN TRANSFORMATIVE TIMES**

What does it take to lead through uncertainty, disruption, and large-scale change? The second panel session at the Inspiring Woman Africa Series 14, was titled: Visionary Leadership in Transformative Times, and it had visionary leaders who have sailed through tough times share their experiences.

The session, which was moderated by Ugochukwu Obi-Chukwu, Founder and CEO of Nairametrics, also featured Obafemi Banigbe, CEO of T2 (formerly 9mobile), Aishah Ndanusa Ahmad, former Deputy Governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria, Mohammed Mustapha Bintube, Chairman, Farinruwa Power Limited and Franca Ciambella, Senior Consulting Counsel at Dentons Law Office.

Obafemi Banigbe launched by outlining four leadership qualities required during periods of significant change. First, he emphasised clarity. “Leaders must define the situation, the direction of events, and reality, honestly. Without a clear understanding of the present, it becomes impossible to design a path forward” he noted. He followed this with courage, explaining that transformational leadership often requires confronting uncomfortable truths.

“Imagine taking up a business where the running cost is ten times the revenue and the infrastructure is obsolete,” he said. “We knew it would take us four years to compete.”

He further noted that this reality forced difficult but necessary decisions, including engaging competitors directly.

“You must listen to others and put yourself in the shoes of the people you are leading,” he said, noting that empathy empowers teams to innovate rather than operate from fear. He also highlighted adaptability as “the ability to adjust, learn, and pivot, especially when the circumstances are unfamiliar, without losing the essence of the mission,” stressing that leaders must adapt.

Stepping into Leadership at the Central Bank of Nigeria, Aishah Ahmad reflected on her time as Deputy Governor at the Central Bank of Nigeria, describing leadership during crises as action driven by responsibility.

“During COVID, ensuring cybersecurity became critical. You do what you need to do because it is the right thing to do,” she stated.

She highlighted measurable progress during her tenure, noting that financial inclusion moved to 74% under her

watch, a feat she attributed to strong ecosystem collaboration. While acknowledging leadership authority, she emphasised facilitation over control.

“You may be in the driver’s seat, but your role is to facilitate to ensure the right thing is done. I believe strongly in competition,” she said, referencing the importance of bridge-building dialogue between regulators and service providers. According to her, trust, literacy, infrastructure, co-creation, and inclusion must be addressed intentionally, with providers and regulators trusting each other.

Addressing the principles that guide system-building and partnerships for transformation, Mohammed Mustapha Bintube emphasised inclusion, trust, and long-term thinking as foundational to sustainable impact.

“I am one of those who believe women have their place at the table,” he stated, drawing from his experience across the banking, insurance, and power sectors. He explained that meaningful transformation requires strong infrastructure and intentional system design. “We build infrastructure, and we do it well,” he said, highlighting his role in advancing financial inclusion through the establishment of Jaiz Bank.

“We don’t charge interest; we share profit and lease equipment,” a model he described as both ethical and inclusive. Outlining the principles that guide his approach, he noted that leaders must first understand their core responsibilities.

Meanwhile, Franca Ciambella shared personal stories on elements required to successfully navigate business and transformation periods. She noted how her 23-year journey in Nigeria pushed her out of her comfort zone.

“It has been an adventure,” she framed transformation as both organisational and personal, noting that leaders must evolve alongside the systems they manage. “We try to be transformative when needed,” she added.

She highlighted the importance of stabilisation during periods of uncertainty. “First, let’s stabilise the situation, be calm and find what works,” she said, emphasising clarity of objectives and principled decision-making. According to her, transformation should not be reactionary. “It’s not just about following trends, but always doing the right thing.”

Listening, she explained, is central to effective change. “You must listen to your employees and take feedback from your clients,” she said, adding that flexibility in vision enables organisations to adjust without losing direction.

Addressing how organisations can retain customers during periods of intense transformation, Obafemi Banigbe likened taking over 9mobile to starting from scratch. “Taking over at 9mobile was like starting over. Every infrastructure was obsolete,” he noted.

To navigate this reality, he explained that the recovery process was divided into four

phases, beginning with stabilisation. “We leveraged other people’s infrastructure”. This was followed by Modernisation, guided by a clear principle: “We must build infrastructure if we must, and share infrastructure if we can.”

He added a candid reflection on leadership humility, stating, “Sometimes, you will need to stoop to conquer. Leverage relationships and never be ashamed to admit your scars.”

From a policy perspective, Aishah Ahmad addressed the role of diversity, equity, and inclusion in leadership and governance. She framed DEI not as a moral obligation alone, but as a strategic advantage. “Diversity and inclusion ensure better decisions are made,” she said, noting that every policy decision carries both intended and unintended consequences.

She explained that “boards that are diverse are prone to less risk because they see situations more holistically.”

Citing an IMF working paper, she added that female professionals contribute to stability because of how they assess risk.” Women, she noted, “are more inclusive and think along spectrums, considering others.”

On the influence of organisational culture in transformation, Franca Ciambella emphasised leadership by example. According to her, “The actions of the CEO set the stage for the organisation.”

She explained that transformation is rooted in values and consistency. “Transformation is about doing the right thing, and it is about change,” she said, noting that when leaders model the desired behaviour, transformation naturally follows. “If the CEO is doing the right thing, then transformation is coming from the top.”

She concluded by reinforcing the role of leadership in shaping culture: “Leadership sets the culture of the organisation, and that is what everyone follows.”





► **PANEL 3: EMPOWERED FOR EXCELLENCE, I AM DRIVING CHANGE**

The “Empowered for Excellence” panel, at the Inspiring Woman Series 14, moderated by Abiola Adediran, Partner at Genea

Family Office, focused on purpose-driven leadership, women's agency, and the power of influence in creating sustainable change. The session featured Patricia Obozuwa, Managing Director, Nigeria Global Reputation Management Project, and Abe Jawando, Executive Senior Sales Director, Mary Kay Cosmetics, whose stories reflected conviction, excellence, and intentional advocacy.

Patricia Obozuwa began by anchoring her answer in clarity of purpose. “It starts from my career purpose. I want to be a change agent,” she said. Drawing from her background in communications, she explained that the work she has done has created tangible impact, particularly in supporting women.

“The work I did in communications made a great difference,” she noted, emphasising that impact is not accidental. “Supporting women is ingrained in the work I do. I am intentional about being impactful.”

Reflecting on her transition from investment banking to entrepreneurship, Abe Jawando shared a deeply personal perspective. “I did not curate my journey from investment banking to entrepreneurship,” she said. For her, the shift was less about careful planning and more about surrendering to purpose. “Sometimes, the path you don't plan leaves the greatest impact in your life.”

She framed her journey through faith and service, stating, “It is not my purpose; it is God's agenda on earth.” Her decision to say yes to entrepreneurship, she explained, has continued to create ripple effects. “My yes to entrepreneurship continues to empower other women.”

Chinyere Okorocho anchored her journey in the last three decades on clarity, courage, and intentional evolution.

“I have a small corner in the Inspiring Woman Africa Magazine, called ‘From My Point of View,’” she began, describing it as a space shaped by lived experience and reflection. “I have been practicing law for 34 years now, and it has been such an interesting journey.”

She explained that her progress was anchored in early clarity. “I was very clear about what I wanted to be and the kind of lawyer I wanted to become,” she said. “I knew I wanted to be a female professional.” This clarity informed her approach to practice. “I ensured that the way I practiced law was different from the traditional way.”

As her career evolved, exposure played a defining role. “I was lucky to be in a very comprehensive law firm,” she noted, one that offered opportunities to attend international conferences. “I saw the women abroad and how they carried

themselves, and it changed my perspective.”

Approaching a personal milestone, she made a deliberate decision to re-evaluate her path. “When I was turning fifty, I wanted to know what my next was,” she said. “There was so much in me that I wanted to give.” Seeking guidance, she engaged a career coach, whose advice reshaped her outlook. “My coach told me, ‘You don’t have to be one thing in order to be another.’”

This insight led her to expand rather than replace her professional identity. “When I became a career coach myself, I didn’t stop being a lawyer” she explained. “I was able to balance both.” She recently captured these lessons in writing. “I just wrote a book on career.”

On women’s advancement, her position was unequivocal. “Women are not limited by capacity,” she stated. “Change the system and let women thrive.”

Addressing whether women are limited by resources when driving change, Patricia Obozuwa spoke candidly about systemic barriers. “The system around us is not built to accommodate women to thrive”

she said, pointing to funding constraints and structural limitations faced by women-led businesses.

Despite these challenges, she rejected narratives of helplessness. “Women are not powerless,” she emphasised. “Women today are not waiting to be given permission anymore.” While advocating for systemic reform, she called for intentional design of environments that support women. “The system should intentionally create structures that allow women to thrive.”

She also stressed personal responsibility and collective action. “Be intentional as a woman to build your network” she said. “Be a great advocate for women.” According to her, influence comes with responsibility. “When you are in a position of power, you have influence. Advocate for other women and the women coming up.”

She concluded with a powerful call to action: “We have it in our hands today to change things. Let women thrive.”

When asked about experiences that inspire her to drive positive change, Abe Jawando highlighted the power of

storytelling. “People don’t remember things; they remember stories,” she said.

She urged women to be intentional about collaboration and support systems. “Women, we need to structure our networks to work for us,” she concluded, reinforcing the idea that collective strength is a catalyst for sustained impact.

Speaking on the steps organisations can take to improve work-life balance, Chinyere Okorochoa revealed that fairness and transparency is key in performance evaluation. “There has to be a clear and transparent way of appraising people,” she said.

She highlighted a persistent structural gap affecting women’s career progression. “When women take time away to have children or care for family, by the time they return, their male colleagues have overtaken them,” she observed. “This needs to change.”

For her, improving work-life outcomes is not about lowering standards, but about building systems that recognise life realities while rewarding competence and contribution



HER POINT OF VIEW

Say Yes, Even When You're Afraid

Chinyere Okorocha

When the invitation first came, I was elated.

I had always loved to travel and thankfully, my career had opened many doors. Over the years, I had represented my firm across Europe and several states in America, attending conferences, meeting global colleagues, and even speaking on international stages. But this was different. This time, I had been invited to represent my firm at the China Trademark Festival in Qingdao, China. An entirely new frontier.

I remember the smile that spread across my face when I got the email, equal parts pride and excitement. Another international platform. Another opportunity to lead. Another stage to shine. And then, almost imperceptibly, that smile began to fade. The excitement gave way to uncertainty.... and then... fear.

China? Me? How... from where?

Doubt crept in like a fog, slowly clouding what had once felt like a clear moment of professional validation. I began to second guess myself. I questioned my readiness. I convinced myself that someone else; anyone else would be better suited for the task. Someone with more experience in Asia. Someone fluent in the culture. Someone more... global. Surely, they had made a mistake.

But they hadn't. And deep down, I knew that.

Still, nothing could have truly

prepared me for the sensory and emotional shock of actually being in China. The language barrier was real. I had to download a translator app just to communicate. Each morning, I would sit with the hotel concierge, asking them to write down my destination in Mandarin on a piece of paper, so I could hand it to the taxi driver like a lifeline. Even simple tasks became monumental. I once walked into a pharmacy feeling unwell, only to realize I couldn't explain my symptoms. I tried hand gestures, facial

expressions, even drawing. It was frustrating. Humbling. Isolating. And yet... somehow empowering.

Then came the conference.

I walked into a packed auditorium of over a hundred people. As I scanned the room, it hit me like a wave: I was the only Black person there. The only one. I felt all the eyes. Not out of hostility, but curiosity. I could have shrunk. I could have stayed silent, hidden behind my badge, taken

notes quietly, and slipped out unnoticed. But I didn't.

I stood tall. I smiled. I introduced myself; as best I could... I asked questions. I delivered my speech... (thank God for the electronic translator). And as I spoke, I felt a familiar fire return, not of fear, but of purpose.

That single experience taught me one of the most powerful truths I've come to live by:

Growth doesn't live in the comfort zone.

If I had allowed fear to win, I would have missed out on a defining moment in my career. But more than that, I would have robbed myself of a deeper lesson in courage, resilience, and self-trust.

Here's what I know now:

1. Your biggest leaps will come wrapped in discomfort.

They won't feel like "next steps; they'll feel like cliffs. And you'll wonder if you're ready. But if you say yes and leap anyway, you'll find that you were always more prepared than you thought.

2. Self-doubt is a liar, but courage tells the truth.

You might not always see yourself the way others do. You might question your seat at the table. But the people who invited you into the room know why you belong there. Don't let fear make you forget who you are.

3. You are not just representing yourself; you are breaking ground.

When you're the "only one in the room," it can feel lonely. But it's also an opportunity. Your presence signals what's possible. And when you do well, you widen the path for those coming behind you.

Looking back, that trip to China wasn't just a passport stamp. It was a personal revolution and the catalyst that led to many more career opportunities that I could only have dreamed about.

So if you're reading this and you've been holding back; hesitating to take on that new challenge, apply for that global opportunity, speak up in that meeting, or say yes to that stage, let me tell you: Say yes. Even if you're afraid. Especially if you're afraid.

Because the most unexpected, life-changing, legacy-defining chapters of your career won't always arrive when you feel ready. They'll arrive when you're willing to stretch.



Chinyere Okorocha

Partner in the Law Firm of
JACKSON, ETTI & EDU

With over three decades of experience as a trailblazer in the legal profession, Chinyere Okorocha has established herself as a leading voice in law, leadership, and career growth for women. As a partner in one of the most prestigious law firms in the country, she has not only navigated the complexities of a competitive industry but has consistently broken barriers to become a sought-after leader, mentor, and advocate for women in the workplace.

Chinyere's career journey is a testament to her resilience, vision, and versatility. She has held numerous leadership positions, served as a director on multiple boards, and is widely admired for her strategic thinking and ability to inspire teams toward excellence. Beyond her professional accomplishments, she has also graced stages as a speaker, sharing insights on leadership, career growth, and the unique challenges women face in their professional lives.

A devoted wife and proud mother of three, Chinyere understands firsthand the challenges of balancing the demands of a thriving career with a fulfilling personal life. Through her own experiences, she has mastered the art of work-life integration, demonstrating that women can achieve extraordinary professional success without sacrificing the joys of family and personal well-being.

Her career development platform, Heels & Ladders, is dedicated to mentoring and guiding women who aspire to redefine success, achieve career mastery, and lead with purpose. Whether you're navigating leadership challenges, striving for balance, or looking to amplify your influence, Chinyere's expertise will help you transform ambition into achievement.

WOMAN EXECUTIVE

The Courage to Pause: Redefining Productivity in an Overstimulated World

By Wola Joseph-Condotti



We live in a world where motion is mistaken for meaning. Where the

calendar is full, the inbox is flooded, and the accolades are loudest for those who never seem to stop moving. Leadership, too, has not been spared. We have glamorized burnout. We wear exhaustion as a badge of honour. We measure our worth in back-to-back Zooms and late-night emails. But at what cost? There is a quiet revolution happening among leaders who are choosing pause over pressure. Who are learning that rest is not weakness. It is wisdom. It is strategy. It is stewardship.

▶ When Rest Becomes a Leadership Discipline

The higher you go in leadership, the more your decisions matter. And decision fatigue is real. When we lead from depletion, our vision blurs, our empathy thins, and our creativity suffers. I have learned (sometimes the hard

way) that rest is not the opposite of productivity; it is what makes productivity sustainable. Pausing does not mean you are behind. It means you are intentional. It means you are willing to step back so you can see clearer, lead deeper, and act smarter. As one mentor once told me, "Clarity does not always come from pressing in. Sometimes it comes from pulling away."

▶ The Spiritual Power of Stillness

As a woman of faith, I find comfort

and challenge in the words of Psalm 46:10: "Be still and know that I am God." Not do more, not run faster. Be still. That verse has recalibrated me in seasons where the pace of life threatened to drown the voice of God. In the stillness, I have heard strategies. In the quiet, I have found peace. And in the pause, I have rediscovered purpose. Jesus, the greatest leader to ever walk the earth, often withdrew to lonely places to pray. Not because He was weak, but because He understood the strength that comes from alignment, not activity.

The CEO's Soul: What Is It Really Costing You?

The truth is, many of us are leading on empty. We are running brilliant organizations and broken lives. We are celebrated in the marketplace but silently drowning in fatigue, anxiety, and the unrelenting pressure to perform. I have seen what it looks like when leaders do not pause: Quick tempers. Sloppy decisions. Broken relationships. And often, a slow erosion of joy and meaning. But I have also seen what happens when

we learn to honour rhythm over hustle: We become sharper, kinder, wiser. We stop reacting and start responding. We stop surviving and start leading.

▶ Redeeming Time by Reclaiming Rhythm

Pausing is not about doing less. It is about doing what matters, with clarity and conviction. Rest does not steal time. It redeems it. Think of it as strategic stillness. Moments to:

- *Reflect on what is working and what is not*
- *Reconnect with your "why"*
- *Rebuild inner alignment so you are not just moving. You are moving with purpose*

For some, the pause looks like a day off. For others, it is a morning of journaling, a weekend retreat, a sabbatical, or even a firm "no" to one more obligation. Whatever form it takes, it is holy. It is necessary. And it is leadership.

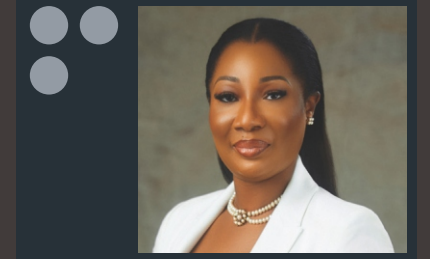
▶ December: A Divine Invitation to Slow Down

Now, as we enter December, the final month of the year, I believe God is giving us all a gentle invitation to pause. Not out of failure. But out of faith. This month is not just a countdown to the holidays; it is an invitation to reset. To breathe. To release what did not go according to plan. To reflect on what you have stewarded well. To listen in for what 2026 will require of you, not from a place of hustle, but from a place of discernment.

The world will still spin when you pause. But you will return more grounded, more centred, and more aligned.

Final Thoughts

To every executive woman reading this: you do not need to earn your rest. You are not lazy for slowing down. You are not failing because you need a break. You are wise enough to know that what you carry is too important to lead on fumes. Let us normalize the pause. Let us honour the rhythms that sustain brilliance. Let us lead (not just with our minds full) but with our souls whole. Because in the stillness, we remember who we are. And more importantly, we remember who God is.



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

Why Your Personal Development Budget Should Be Bigger Than Your Lifestyle Budget

By Sola Adesakin



Every December, many people look at their spending for the year and suddenly realize something: they spent far more on lifestyle — clothes, outings, gadgets, food, soft life than they ever invested in the one thing that actually determines their future: themselves. It's a pattern that quietly keeps people stuck.

In my opinion, your personal development budget should far exceed what you spend on lifestyle needs and wants. Not because lifestyle is wrong, we all deserve comfort, beauty, enjoyment, but because lifestyle does not multiply. Personal development does. Lifestyle spends. Development builds. If you give development a chance, the “you” you become from intentional growth will attract more than enough resources to fuel any lifestyle you desire; sustainably, confidently, and without pressure. But this requires time, patience, and a shift in mindset.

The problem is simple:

Many people are trying to “look” wealthy before they actually become wealthy. They invest in appearance, not capacity. They fuel consumption, not competence. They pay for comfort, not clarity. And while all of that feels good in the moment, it doesn't change anything long-term.

The right books, courses, mentors, communities, and experiences shape your thinking, sharpen your decision-making, and expand your earning potential. Growth is the seed; lifestyle is the fruit. Too many people are trying to water the fruit. Let's break it down with a simple question: Which version of you has a higher earning capacity, the one who spent the year buying lifestyle items or the one who spent the year growing skills, mindset, networks, and knowledge? It's never the lifestyle version. Growth always wins.

Here are a few truths most people learn too late:

Your income rarely grows beyond your mindset.

If your thinking is limited, your earning

power will be limited. Personal development stretches your vision so you can stretch your income.

You are paid in proportion to the problems you can solve.

Bigger value? Bigger earning. Books, courses, mentorship, and training sharpen your ability to solve problems at scale.

Lifestyle has no compound interest.

Development does.

One training today can change the next 10 years of your financial story. One mindset shift can cut years of struggle. One mentor can accelerate your growth faster than any gadget ever will. The market rewards competence, not consumption. Nobody pays you more because of your designer shoes. They pay you more because you know more, can do more, and can deliver more.

If you don't invest in yourself, you eventually pay for it.

Sometimes in lost opportunities.

Sometimes in stagnation.

Sometimes in settling for less.

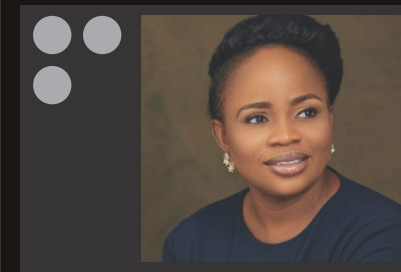
Growth is expensive, but ignorance is costlier.

Here's the good news:

You don't need millions to start investing in yourself. You only need a commitment to allocate more to your growth than to your comfort. The books you've been postponing, the online course you've been eyeing, the mentor you want to work with, the workshops you admire from afar, begin to prioritise them.

Even if your lifestyle budget must reduce for a season, do it. Your future self will thank you, loudly.

Because the version of you that emerges from consistent personal development becomes magnetic: to opportunities, to income, to quality relationships, to breakthrough ideas, and yes, to wealth. Your lifestyle should be funded by your growth, not competing with it. Give it time. Water the seed. The fruit will come.



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™ and a member of the Personal Finance Speakers Association.



WOMAN AT THE HELM

Zeinab Ayaan Adam

CEO, AFC Capital Partners

Zeinab Ayaan Adam is the CEO of AFC Capital Partners. It is the 100% owned Asset Management Subsidiary of AFC, created to mobilise and manage third party funds thereby unlocking new sources of capital to fund the African infrastructure investment gap – estimated at US\$170 billion annually.

At AFC Capital Partners, they mobilise private and public sector capital to respond to the imminent climate crisis. Their belief is that environmental, social and governance (ESG) considerations, including climate change, are fundamental to long-term risk and return. As a climate-focused fund manager, they are committed to delivering competitive returns to their investors, and creating businesses that benefit society by facilitating economic and

social development.

Zeinab brings 27 years of visionary leadership and a strong track record in emerging markets investment, asset management, private equity, infrastructure and climate change-related financing products, with a particular focus on African and Asian Markets.

Most recently, she headed the private sector arm of the Green Climate Fund (GCF), established within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Based in South Korea, she played a key role in building the mandate of the GCF Private Sector Facility and rapidly scaling its portfolio to US\$2.1 billion in three years across Africa, Asia Pacific, Latin America and the Caribbean.

Previously, she was CDC

Group's Managing Director of Africa Funds and had a 17-year career with the International Finance Corporation, serving as a Chief Investment Officer among other roles. US-born and raised in Somalia and Tanzania, Adam holds a Master of Business Administration (MBA) from Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) Sloan School of Management, and a Bachelor of Arts in Mathematics, Summa cum laude from Clark University.

Zeinab is proficient in strategic hiring, team building and training, and promoting culture of continued growth and development. She is a dedicated professional with deep private equity and ESG integration on a global scale and keen ability to forge and manage relationships with partners representing diverse industries and interests.



WE'VE GOT MEN

Oluyemi Oloyede

CEO, UAC Foods

Oluyemi is a seasoned corporate executive with over 18 years of dedicated experience in fast moving consumer goods (FMCG) distribution, profit and loss management, and leadership of multi-functional teams. His track record of achievements at renowned companies such as Procter & Gamble, Kellogg, Kerry Taste & Nutrition and now UAC Foods Limited speak volumes about his ability to deliver and drive sustainable growth. He has consistently delivered outstanding results by driving distribution, marketing, revenue and profit growth across diverse sectors. Grounded in a hands-on leadership style, he prioritises people, innovation and efficiency to deliver profitability and ensure excellence across the value chain.

Currently leading UAC Foods Limited as Managing Director

and CEO, he oversees all aspects of operations, driving a culture of excellence and growing confidence among team to take on new dreams. With degrees in Business Administration and Mathematics from Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife, Nigeria and professional and leadership trainings at The Wharton Business School (University of Pennsylvania) and Said Business School (Oxford University), he brings a strong foundation in analytical and strategic thinking. Passionate about driving organisational success, he is poised to lead organisations toward sustainable growth in the ever-evolving business and corporate landscape. For Olayemi, it is good to invest the best of your time and resources in maximising outputs from your best and fastest growing people, machines, regions, cities rather than trying to

improve the worst performing assets. He said to do so because most resources on the former yield a lot better result overall than on the latter. As former General Manager - West and Central Africa at Kerry, he managed a \$48M business consisting of multiple manufacturing and distribution companies across West Africa and led multifunctional teams in Commercial, RD&A, Finance, and Supply Chain, facilitating global collaboration with innovation centers, manufacturing sites, and customers in West Africa. As former Regional Business Manager - West Africa, Kellogg Company, he managed the transition of Kellogg's business model in West Africa from export to distribution, identifying and appointing strategic distribution partners across key markets.

HOLISTIC LIVING

The Sanctuary Within: How Your Home Shapes Your Mind, Mood, and Momentum

By Dr. Maymunah Yusuf Kadiri

When Ada first moved into her new apartment, it felt like a fresh

chapter, a blank canvas for her dreams. But weeks later, the excitement began to fade. The space that once promised peace now felt heavy, almost suffocating. Her thoughts were scattered, her sleep restless, and her motivation dim. She blamed her job, her phone, the city's chaos until one quiet Saturday morning, she realized the truth: it wasn't just her schedule draining her energy. It was her environment.

Her home had become a mirror of her inner world — cluttered, chaotic, and dim. The piles of laundry, mismatched furniture, and thick curtains shutting out daylight all whispered the same message: this is not a space where peace lives.

The Silent Psychology of Spaces

The truth is, our surroundings speak, constantly. The walls that hold us, the light that fills our rooms, the colors that greet us every morning, all send messages to our brains and bodies. Neuroscience confirms it, our environment is not a backdrop, it's an active participant in our mental health. Clutter clouds cognition. Poor lighting dulls mood. Harsh colors heighten tension.

Ada's home, though filled with things she loved, had slowly become a mental maze. She noticed her anxiety spike when she sat in her living room, the same room where piles of unopened mail and

tangled cords occupied her attention. Her brain was trying to process every unfinished task lying in front of her. And like most of us, she didn't realize that external chaos often amplifies internal noise.

When Your Bedroom Becomes a Battlefield

Sleep, once her refuge, became a nightly struggle. Her desk overflowed with paperwork beside her bed. A glowing phone charger blinked beside her pillow. The environment sent mixed signals, work, scroll, worry, but

never rest. The body cannot recharge in a space that whispers stay alert. Science backs this up, blue light from screens suppresses melatonin, and cluttered bedrooms raise cortisol levels, the very hormone linked to stress. Her productivity followed the same decline. Working from home blurred every boundary. Her "office" was her couch, her "breaks" were endless scrolls, and the line between rest and responsibility dissolved. She wasn't lazy, she was overstimulated. The mind, like a muscle, needs clear zones of focus and release. Without them, burnout isn't far

behind.

The Awakening: Reclaiming the Energy of Space

One day, Ada decided to make a change. She wasn't moving, she was transforming. Her first step was simple: declutter. Letting go was emotional, almost spiritual. Each item donated or discarded felt like lifting an invisible weight off her chest. With every cleared surface, her thoughts felt clearer too.

Then came light. She replaced her heavy curtains with sheer ones, letting morning sunshine seep in. She moved her desk to

face the window, where birds and sky replaced her screen's glow. In that golden light, she rediscovered something she didn't know she'd lost — hope. She added plants, small, green bursts of life that softened her corners and steadied her breath. A peace lily by the window. A succulent on her desk. A vine trailing over her bookshelf. She didn't expect much, but over time, these living things changed everything. The air felt lighter. Her mood steadier. Her creativity quietly bloomed. Science agrees: plants purify air, reduce stress, and even spark new ideas. Finally, Ada studied the flow of her space. She noticed her sofa blocked movement between rooms, her furniture squeezed her energy rather than freeing it. With a few thoughtful rearrangements, her home suddenly breathed. Rooms opened, energy circulated, and so did she. She even moved her work desk out of her bedroom, reclaiming rest as sacred.

The Ripple Effect

Weeks later, Ada noticed the real transformation wasn't just in her space — it was in her spirit. She woke with clarity, her mornings unhurried. Her mind felt sharper. Friends who visited often commented, "Your home feels so peaceful." But what they were really noticing was her. She had created harmony between her space and her soul. Her home had become more than a shelter, it had become a sanctuary.

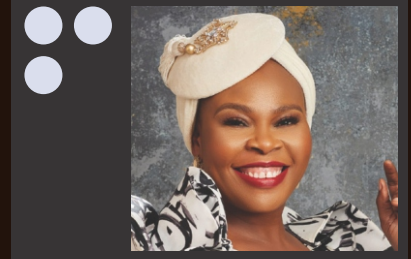
The Home as a Reflection of the Self

We decorate our homes to please the eye, but we forget they also shape the mind. Our walls absorb our emotions. Our spaces echo our pace. A cluttered home breeds overwhelm; an intentional one breeds ease. When we align our environments with how we want to feel, life begins to flow again.

Start small: clear one surface, open one window, bring in one plant. Let light in, both literally and emotionally. When your home breathes, you breathe differently too.

The truth: we don't just live in our homes; our homes live in us. They hold our energy, our habits, our hopes. And when we care for them with intention, they quietly return the favour.

Peace doesn't always begin in the mind. Sometimes, it begins in the room you're sitting in right now.



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- Psychiatrist 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.

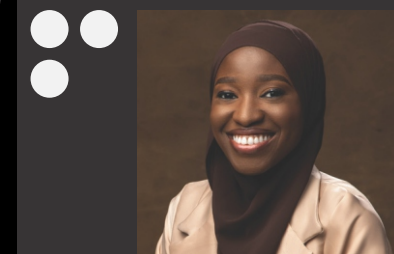
TRIBE WITH THE VIBES

Silence your FEARS

By Zainab Aderounmu



Let 2026 be the year you stop doing things afraid! I know this might sound strange, especially because we often hear the popular advice: “Do it afraid. Do it scared.” But, doing things in fear is not always courageous. Sometimes, it’s limiting. When you act from fear, you end up doing things halfway. You shrink yourself. You hold back. You don’t stretch into your full capacity. Fear keeps you from showing up excellently, because excellence requires rest, confidence, and clarity, not paranoia. Think about public speaking. You can be on stage, holding the microphone, saying the words, yet trembling so much that your message becomes incoherent. Technically, you’re “doing it afraid,” but your message is still lost because you’re not speaking from a place of calm or conviction. The same thing happens in life. When fear leads, impact suffers.



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.

So instead of doing things afraid, do them in faith.

Doing things in faith doesn’t mean you are unaware of your limitations. It simply means you are more aware of who your Lord is. You act not because you believe in your own strength alone, but because you trust in a God who is limitless.

Consider the story of Moses and his people. When they got to the Red Sea Pharaoh and his army were furiously racing towards them. Ahead of him was an impossible body of water. They were between the devil and the sea.

If Moses had been acting from paranoia, he might have asked the Israelites to run into the sea, or even turn back to beg Pharaoh, or surrender entirely. But he wasn’t operating from fear. He was operating from assurance, from deep conviction that his Lord would make a way. And a way was made. You know how the story ends.

That is the power of acting in faith. You move forward, not because the path is clear, but because you trust the One who clears paths. Nothing is beyond God’s reach. Nothing is too big for Him.

So what’s that project you’re executing, who’s that client? Lead with faith, lead with rest, lead with assurance. Do it big. Do it boldly. Move assuredly.



IWA team and the keynote speaker **H.E Sahle-Work Zewde**
hosted by the Governor of Lagos state H.E Babajide Sanwo-Olu



IWA team and the keynote speaker **H.E Sahle-Work Zewde** hosted at the Nike Art Gallery.



IWA Team and the keynote speaker **H.E Sahle-Work Zewde** hosted by Dr Awele Elumelu



Dinner in honour of **H.E Sahle-Work Zewde** hosted by IWA



PHOTOSPLASH

Guests at the Inspiring Woman Africa Conference Series 14



PHOTOSPLASH

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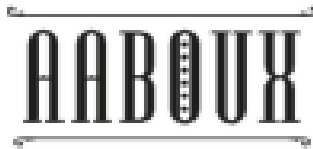


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Inside Clay Food Shop & The Henna Place

“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.

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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.

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