

iWA

INSPIRING WOMAN AFRICA

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EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW

H.E MADAM SAHLE-WORK ZEWDE

TRAILBLAZING PRESIDENT, COMPELLING CHAPTER IN HISTORY

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Welcome!

Dear Readers,

Let me officially welcome you to a New Year! 2026 is here. I trust that all you desire will come to pass.

We start the first edition in 2026 on a powerful note. Our cover personality was in Nigeria in December 2025 to celebrate with us as we marked the 14th year celebration of our annual women's conference #IWASeries14. The days she was with us were packed with activities. First was our conference, then we had visits to the beautiful and momentous Nike Art Gallery in Lekki, later hosted by the Executive Governor of Lagos state and finally The Elumelus.

I knew we would certainly have an exclusive interview. You can't have such a trailblazer and not have a special exclusive interview with her, and yes, we had it. She is the first female President of Ethiopia, H.E MADAM SAHLE-WORK ZEWDE. Like never before, she bares it all in this one of a kind exclusive interview that is guaranteed to inspire you in every way.

Here are other articles in this edition:

HER POINT OF VIEW: Never Underestimate the Power of Sensible Shoes. by Chinyere Okorocha.

WOMAN EXECUTIVE: The Danger of Over-Validation: Leading Without Needing Permission. By Wola Joseph-Condotti.

FINANCIAL AdviseHER: Live for the Right Things: A Smarter Financial Approach for 2026. By Sola Adesakin.

HOLISTIC LIVING: Your Body, Your Wealth: Why Health Should Be Your First Investment in 2026. Dr. Maymunah Yusuf Kadiri.

TRIBE WITH THE VIBES: Haven't Set Goals yet? Here's how. By Zainab Aderounmu.

Our **WE'VE GOT MEN** for this week is the richest man in Africa who keeps breaking his own record. Aliko Dangote, Founder/Group President & Chief Executive of Dangote Group.

Our **WOMAN AT THE HELM** is Aisha Babangida, Founder, WenA/Chairman, Better Life Program for the African Rural Woman.

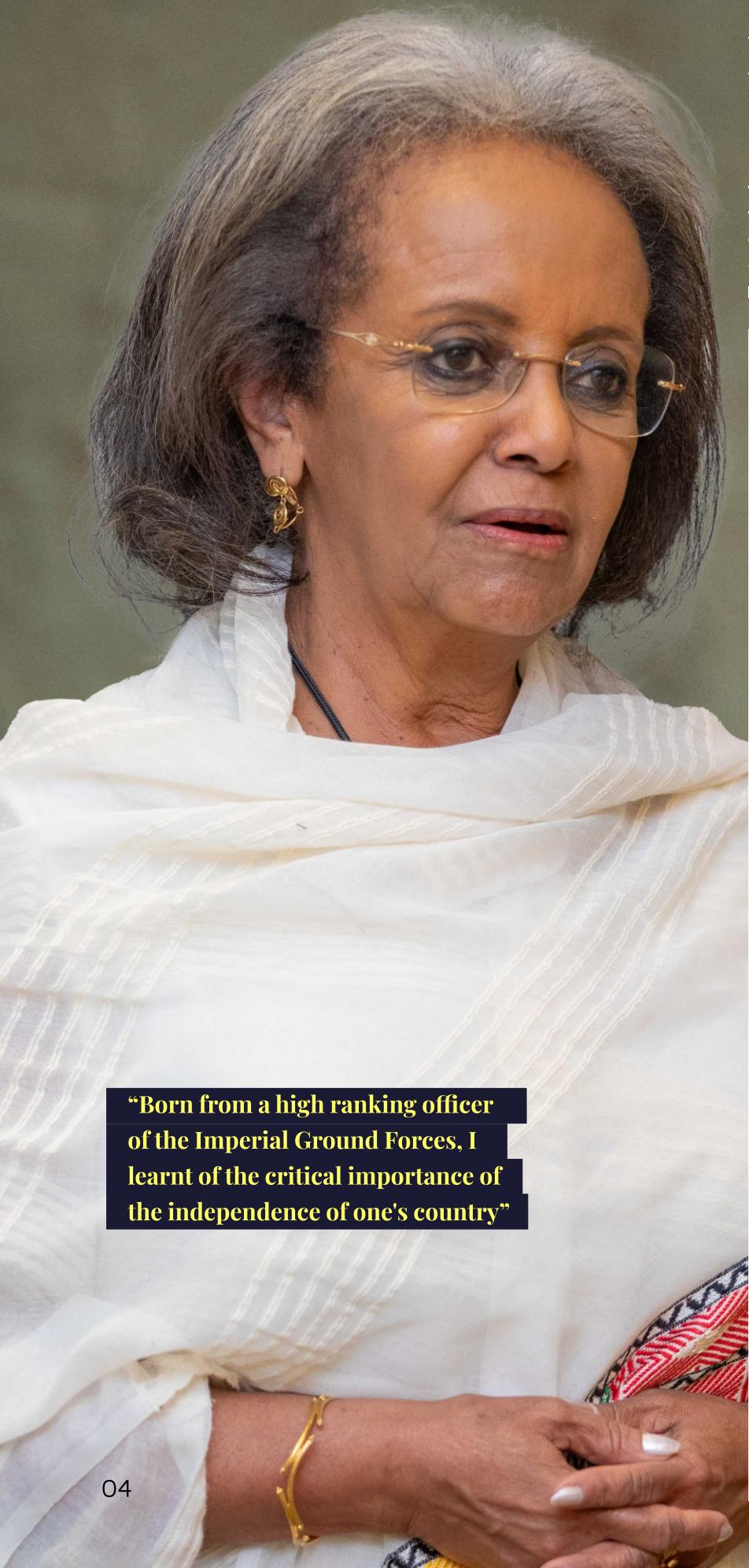
Until we come your way again next week, 2026 has a lot of goodies, start tapping into it and stay positive. Bye for now!

COVER INTERVIEW

H.E MADAM SAHLE-WORK ZEWDE

TRAILBLAZING PRESIDENCY,
COMPELLING CHAPTER IN HISTORY

Kemi Ajumobi



**“Born from a high ranking officer
of the Imperial Ground Forces, I
learnt of the critical importance of
the independence of one’s country”**

H.E Madam Sahle-Work Zewde, the first woman to hold the office of the President of Ethiopia. She served as President from 2018 to 2024. Born in Addis Ababa in 1950, she studied natural science in France before starting her career as a public relations officer at the Ministry of Education.

In 1989, she became the second woman to be appointed as an Ethiopian ambassador, serving in Senegal and five neighboring countries. She later served as Ambassador to Djibouti (1993-2002), Ambassador to France, and Permanent Representative to UNESCO (2002-2006). She was also Ethiopia's Permanent Representative to the African Union.

Her extensive United Nations career started in 2009 as the first African woman Special Representative of the Secretary-General-SRSG at the UN peace-building office in the Central African Republic in 2009.

She was appointed Under-Secretary-General and first Director-General of the UN Office at Nairobi in 2011.

During that time, she served as mediator in the political crisis in Malawi. She was appointed Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) to the African Union. She is fluent in Amharic, French and English.

► **Memories of Childhood**

My childhood has profoundly shaped the adult I became. I had the chance of



having wonderful childhood experiences mainly due to the fact that I was born after long years of waiting, prayers and pilgrimages and so on...and also the first born among four sisters. Growing up, my parents would encourage me to push the limits. My father always said "There is nothing that you won't be able to do." They charged me with responsibilities that other kids of my age or my gender were not asked to carry out. I learnt from my early years how to be accountable, serious among other qualities.

Sustained exposure to such values helped me build strong self-esteem and self-confidence in my capabilities. Born from a high ranking officer of the Imperial Ground Forces, I learnt of the critical importance of the independence of one's country, the provision of service to one's country and its people as well as other core values such as accountability and empathy. My mother was one of the first women entrepreneurs in Ethiopia who broke numerous barriers. I learnt a lot from the very close relationship

between my parents, the resultant support to one another and how such a supportive environment can facilitate far the emancipation of women. Subsequently, when I became President, such lessons helped me use not only my head, but my heart as well.

► **As the first female President of Ethiopia, how did you surmount the challenges that came with the office, especially being a female and what should female leaders know when opportunities of elevation like this come?**

I moved to Ethiopia after having served as head of the only UN headquarters away from New York based in Nairobi for 8 years to become the UNSG representative to the African Union, a dream job for a diplomat who has extensively worked on Africa. Three months later, I found myself as the first female President of my country, a job I have never thought of, even in my wildest dreams. The challenges I had were many, one of the worst being the deadliest civil war known as the war in

Tigray and ongoing deadly fighting in other regions. Some challenges came with the office more so at a time when the country was bleeding. But I did what a Head of State should be doing under similar circumstances and that is staying close to the people, remaining the glue that keeps all Ethiopians together, listening to them, giving them courage, amplifying their voices, speaking truth to them, showing compassion, visiting the displaced, the wounded and so on. But most of all, I remained faithful to my ideals, principles, never forgetting that I was where I was by the will of the people, and in our case, through its representatives. On what female leaders should know, female leaders have to vie for executive positions that would allow them decide and execute positive actions. They should hold positions of

“Female leaders have to vie for executive positions that would allow them decide and execute positive actions”



“I have been a diplomat, mostly as ambassador of my country, but also a decade long service as multilateral diplomat”

real power. They should be able to legislate as well. Otherwise, they risk being used to tick boxes, to just be counted and appear to be politically correct.

► **What steps do you believe are essential for promoting gender equity across Africa, especially in leadership roles?**

The Constitutive Act of the African Union recognises the critical role of women in promoting inclusive development and calls for the AU to “ensure effective participation of women in decision-making,

particularly in the political, economic and socio-cultural areas”. The Constitutive Act has been amended to include the above. There are many steps to be taken both at national and continental levels. We have to domesticate and properly unpack the above. As far as leadership is concerned, I would like to encourage our women to join the National Chapters in their respective countries of the African Women Leaders Network - AWLN, engage in an intergenerational dialogue, be part of the endeavor of producing the women leaders Africa needs. AWLN played a

big role in having women mediators. History was made when the Summit of the AU Heads of States and Governments held in February 2025 adopted the ‘AU Convention on Ending Violence Against Women and Girls’. We have to create this collective force to push governments to be serious on their commitments. We should all push for its ratification and implementation.

► **Your extensive diplomatic experience spans numerous countries and organisations. What lessons did you learn in this process and how important is it for countries to encourage better relationships that can even be mutually beneficial in the long run?**

My diplomatic experience has been the fascinating and best part of my life. I have been a diplomat, mostly as ambassador of my country, but also a decade long service as multilateral diplomat, that spans from the UN, the AU to regional and sub-regional organisations. Diplomacy is an art, skill and practice of the management of relations between states or international organisations through negotiation, representation, finding areas of common interest, in order to advance your country’s national interests. Diplomacy is a tool to resolve disputes. It is grounded in International Law. Through time we see change in the nature and traditional form of diplomacy. But this will be a discussion for another day. As much as we are in this changing world, I think there is a need to preserve the rule based order.

► **In your opinion, what role do women play in shaping the future of politics in Ethiopia and the broader African continent?**

Women have played a big role in Ethiopia’s history. We have had queens, those who led troops in battle fields, and so on. As in many countries, the day history will be written by women, I am sure we will discover many unsung heroes. Politics is a space that has remained unreachable for Ethiopian



“It is sad to see that while women constitute the majority of voters, we have not been able to bring women to power”

women. They are rarely seen as members of political parties. Those who tried have left discouraged and demoralised. It is sad to see that while women constitute the majority of voters, we have not been able to bring women to power. We need to support women candidates. There is a lot to do in raising women's awareness on the formidable tool they have in their hands.

► **As a former Special Representative of the Secretary-General in peace-building, what do you see as the most pressing challenges for peace in the region today?**

To be honest, the main challenge is that, instead of trying to find a solution to conflicts, we spend time, resources and energy on the competing interests of major internal and external actors. In some areas where I have worked, we spent time on groups and actors with not much significance. We most of the time forget that, at the end of the day, the main focus has to be how to support the population and live a peaceful life.

► **You were the first female President of Ethiopia, you didn't lobby, no political affiliation, share that process with us and how you were able to rise to the occasion. Secondly, what should women who are given opportunities they may not necessarily be pre equipped for learn from this?**

Yes indeed. After more than two decades of non-stop ambassadorial and UN/ Assistant-Secretary-General and UN/ Under-Secretary-General positions, I was appointed as the Special Representative of the UNSG to the African Union. I was eagerly looking forward to starting the job. My first two months were hectic. I



learnt about my new office UNOAU, housing and so on. One fine morning in October 2018, I was asked to come to the Prime Minister's office. He asked me to become the President of Ethiopia. Before I even understood what it meant I was sworn in few days later on Oct 25/2018 as the first woman President in our history. For women who are given unexpected opportunities, well, I think no one comes fully equipped, if at all “equipment” exists. I am not sure if same questions are raised for male candidates. Having said that, we shouldn't be asking women to take up positions just because they are women. We have seen that they can also be like any other bad male leader.

► **What advice would you give to young women aspiring to become leaders in their communities and nations?**

I will say just go for it. But make sure you meet the criteria. Do whatever is necessary for what you have enough conviction and dedication for. No one knows it all. Learn. Be humble. It is not a sign of weakness, be your true self, stick to your values, be ready to lead not only with your brain but with your heart as well,

have people you trust not too far. You need your solid rock. Ensure you peak your mind.

► **As you reflect on your presidency, what do you hope your legacy will be, and what are your aspirations for the future of Ethiopia?**

Well, I will keep my answer to this question for another opportunity waiting for me. But let me say that I am serene. I did what was possible for me to do under extremely difficult circumstances. I tried to see beyond myself. It can't be otherwise when confronted with the sufferings of your people. I wish I could have done much more. My aspirations are for a peaceful Ethiopia, where killing your own brother will be a red line not to cross.

► **Throughout your career, what practices or philosophies have helped you maintain resilience in the face of adversity?**

I would say my philosophy was to keep open the door of opportunity that has opened for me so that other women would pass through. I would tell myself that I am not worse than many.

Thinking of the many sufferings I have witnessed and heard has helped me minimise mine.

► **Done with Presidency, what is next?**

The Presidency came as a complete surprise. Therefore what I had in mind of doing after I leave the UN is still valid now. My commitment to an equitable world is life-long. I will do my best to have more women leaders in all areas. My other lifelong commitment is to Africa, the continent of the future. Currently, I serve as one of the five facilitators, member of a Panel of the African Union mediation process in Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo /DRC/. I keep receiving many invitations to speak on diplomacy, the UN, role of women leaders and more. I would like to underline the following. Whenever a woman is assertive or has a different view, not only all is done to sabotage her, but also to undermine her as if she was where she is by the will of a person or a group, as if she hasn't accomplished much in her life. Well, that is not true. We have to believe that we have our own records. We have proved ourselves. I know I stand on my own records of which I am really proud.

► **You visited Nigeria recently to attend Inspiring Woman Africa (IWA) Series 14, take us through your experience**

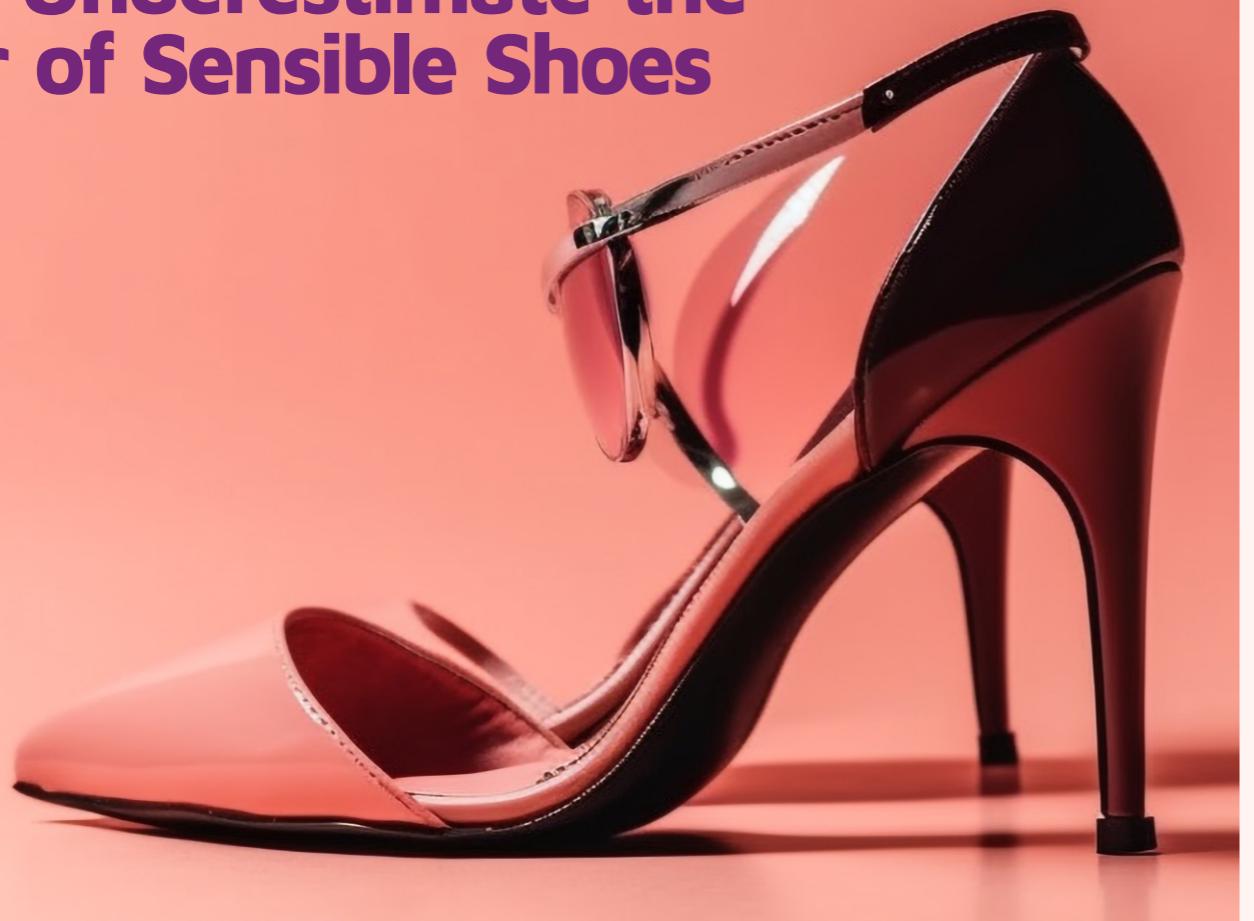
It was a great pleasure to be in Nigeria where I have many friends. I was impressed by what IWA is all about. This is a wonderful platform that will bring us together. It was a big opportunity to meet many accomplished women in many areas. This is how you create solid bonding. My best wishes for more success to IWA.

► **What is the greatest lesson life has taught you?**

When I was a little girl, my dad used to tell me “In life, you will meet persons well dressed, who seem to know how to talk and other endearing attributes, and you will think you can trust them. Beware of those, they might not even have one of the many good values a person should have.”

HER POINT OF VIEW

Never Underestimate the Power of Sensible Shoes

Chinyere Okorocha


When I started my career 34 years ago, I thought power lived in three things: a sharp suit, a firm handshake, and a very high heel. The higher the heel, the stronger I felt. I loved that confident click-click-click across marble floors... it sounded like ambition, like "Make way, I've arrived."

Back then, I could glide through long corridors, sit through endless meetings, and stand at events all evening, all while balancing on stilettos that could double as architectural structures. Comfort was optional. Style was mandatory.

Sensible shoes were for "later in life"... a distant future me would deal with those. Then my career got busier, bolder... and a lot more demanding.

There were international conferences with venues so large they felt like airports, panel sessions that ran back-to-back, meetings on opposite ends of a convention centre, and networking cocktails that started after a full day of serious brainwork. I went from one keynote to another, one breakout room to another, one "Can I have a quick word?" to ten.

Somewhere between the fourth corridor and the fifteenth "quick chat," reality tapped me on the shoulder, right around the time my feet were on fire.

That's when I learned a quiet, life-changing lesson:

Never underestimate the power of sensible shoes.

It didn't arrive as a dramatic movie moment. It arrived as small, very human scenes:

The night I slipped out of a networking dinner early, not because I was tired of people, but because I was tired of pretending my feet weren't screaming. The afternoon I stood on stage to moderate a high-profile session, smiling gracefully on the outside, while on the inside I was praying, "Lord, please don't let me trip in these heels."

The conference where I skipped an important breakout session simply because the thought of walking one more wing in painful shoes felt like a personal attack. Slowly, I started to notice a pattern:

On the days my shoes were comfortable, I stayed longer, I listened better, and I contributed more. I was fully present. It turns out, sensible shoes are not just

about comfort. They're about stamina, presence, and power.

As women, we're often sold the idea that we must constantly juggle style, professionalism, and performance; looking like we stepped out of a magazine while handling the workload of three people and holding meaningful conversations along the way.

But here's the truth: When you are in a room full of decision-makers...

When you are standing for hours, facilitating conversations, asking smart questions, and responding on your feet... When you are walking from session to session at a global conference, trying to absorb information, connect with people, and represent yourself well...

...the last thing you should be worrying about is whether your shoes are slowly plotting your downfall.

Sensible shoes don't mean "boring." They mean back-up dancers to your brilliance; supporting you quietly while you take centre stage.

They mean:

① You stay at the networking event long enough to meet the person who might change your career.

② You walk confidently towards the very table you once felt intimidated by.

③ You stand to speak without rehearsing how you'll get back to your seat without wobbling.

Sensible shoes are a love letter to your future self.

They say: "I want you to still be standing, smiling, and shining three hours from now."

And this is where the metaphor gets interesting.

Because the same rule applies to your career acceleration.

For years, many of us have been trying to "look the part" professionally: collecting titles, chasing visibility, ticking all the boxes, without always building the inner support structures we need to thrive.

High, painful heels are the perfect symbol of this: they look powerful from the outside, but if they slow you down, distract you, or keep you from moving freely, are they really serving you?

In your career, your "sensible shoes" are the things that quietly hold you up:

- ① The mindset that says, "I belong in this room."
- ② The skills that give you the confidence to speak up, not just show up.
- ③ The strategies that help you navigate office politics without losing yourself.
- ④ The network that opens doors you didn't even know existed.

These are not always glamorous. They don't always show up on Instagram. But they are the reason you're still standing when others have burnt out, bowed out, or settled.

That's why I created my signature course, the Career Acceleration Mentorship (CAM) Course—a 6-week transformational program for women who are tired of just "wearing" success on the outside and are ready to actually live it from the inside out.

So as you step into your next season, try this little reflection:

Where in your career are you still choosing "painful but pretty"?

Where are you enduring what you could simply change?

What would your professional life look like if you chose support, strength, and sustainability instead?

Yes, keep the lipstick. Keep the sharp blazer. Keep the heels you truly love. But don't sacrifice your comfort, your clarity, or your calling just to look the part. Your power is not in how high your heel is. It's in how grounded you feel when you walk into the room.

So here's my gentle, slightly playful, but very serious encouragement:

Choose the shoes that support you.

Choose the habits that protect you.

Choose the skills that prepare you.

Choose the strategies that sustain you.

And then, step forward; comfortable, confident, and completely in control of your climb.


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 Danger of Over-Validation: Leading Without Needing Permission

By Wola Joseph-Condotti

From a young age, many women are subtly taught to seek permission before they act. To wait for affirmation. To double-check their worth. To soften their strength. We grow up asking: "Is this okay?" "Do I sound too confident?" "Will they think I am too much?" But here is the truth: leadership (especially at the highest levels) requires clarity, not constant applause. Conviction, not continuous consensus. And yet, many brilliant women are stuck in a holding pattern (gifted, anointed, capable) but waiting for someone else to say, "You are allowed." That waiting room is dangerous. It can delay destinies. It can dim lights meant to shine.

When Validation Becomes a Trap

Validation in itself is not wrong. We all want to be seen, supported, and encouraged. The problem is when it becomes a condition for movement. When our obedience, ideas, and impact become contingent on applause or agreement.

I have seen incredibly competent women question their voice because they didn't get immediate feedback. I have seen executives shrink in meetings, waiting for a nod before contributing. I have seen women stall on launching businesses, writing books, or taking bold decisions, not because they are not ready, but because they are not sure everyone will approve. But leadership is not built on certainty from others. It is built on alignment with purpose and the courage to act even when the crowd is silent.

Biblical Leadership Was Rarely Popular

Consider the story of Deborah, the prophet and judge in Judges 4-5. She did not need validation from a king or committee. She heard from God, she led with authority, and she summoned generals to war. Her leadership was not timid. It was bold, spiritual, and effective.

Imagine if she had waited for cultural permission. Imagine if she had hesitated because "no one had done it before." We may never have had 40 years of peace in Israel under her watch.

Leadership that shifts history often begins with someone willing to move before they are applauded.

How Approval Addiction Shows Up at Work

Let us be honest: approval addiction can hide behind the best professional habits.

Over-asking for feedback before making basic decisions. Waiting for praise before believing in your work. Needing a sponsor to co-sign every new idea. Avoiding hard conversations so you stay liked.

But executives are paid to lead, not please. Influence is not built by fitting in, it is built by standing firm.

What Spirit-Led Leadership Looks Like

As a woman of faith, I have learned to trust the inner conviction of the Holy Spirit more than external applause.

There are moments where what God lays on your heart will make others uncomfortable. Do it anyway. There are decisions you must take that will not trend on social media. Make them anyway.

Because you answer to a higher boardroom. When God gives you a

word, a vision, a strategy, you do not need a hundred likes to validate it. You need courage. And you need to remember who sent you.

Practical Ways to Lead Without Needing Permission

Practice solitude

Learn to affirm yourself in silence before the noise begins. Your clarity grows when it is not crowd-sourced.

Audit your hesitation

Ask: Am I waiting because I lack



information or because I am afraid of disapproval?

Lead small, then scale

Take one bold action per week without over-explaining. With time, your confidence muscles will strengthen.

Pray for holy courage

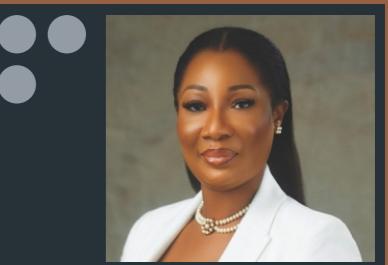
Not arrogance. Not recklessness. But the kind of quiet boldness that Esther had when she said, "If I perish, I perish."

Final Thoughts

You do not need to be unlike to be impactful. But neither do you need to be liked to be obedient.

Let us raise a new generation of women who do not wait for permission to be excellent. Who do not apologize for their God-given voice. Who do not need to be endorsed before they step up and lead with wisdom, strength, and spirit.

Validation is beautiful. But obedience is powerful. And sometimes, the most sacred move you will ever make is the one you make without a round of applause.



**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

Live for the Right Things: A Smarter Financial Approach for 2026

By Sola Adesakin


Every New Year comes with pressure. New goals. New expectations. New standards of

“success” defined mostly by what people are showing online. But if 2026 is going to be financially different for you, it will not be because you spent louder or tried harder to impress. It will be because you lived for the right things. Financial progress is less about dramatic resolutions and more about quiet alignment. The choices you make daily, what you prioritize, what you ignore, and what you refuse to compete with will shape your financial reality this year. Here are five ways to approach 2026

differently, and wisely.

1. Live Within Your Means – Not Below Your Joy

Living within your means is good advice. Living below your joy is not. Too many people confuse financial discipline with self-punishment. They slash everything, deny every pleasure, and turn money into a source of constant stress. That approach rarely lasts. A better approach is responsible budgeting paired with intentional living. Spend consciously, yes, but don't shrink your life to the point where you resent your finances. Instead of constantly asking, “What can I cut?” ask, “How can I earn more and manage better?” Joy matters. A sustainable financial life

includes room for rest, celebration, and the things that make life meaningful. The goal is not to suffer your way to wealth, but to grow into it.

2. Live to Improve Your Means

Financial growth does not come from restriction alone. It comes from expansion. In 2026, focus on improving your earning capacity. Upskill. Reposition. Learn something new that increases your value in the marketplace. Explore additional income streams that align with your skills and interests. The economy rewards relevance. The more useful, skilled, and adaptable you are, the more financial options you create for yourself. Growth-minded people

don't just manage money better, they create more of it.

Saving matters. Budgeting matters. But income growth gives you room to breathe, invest, and plan long-term. Financial freedom becomes more realistic when your capacity increases.

3. Live to Please Yourself, Not the Internet

One of the most expensive habits today is performative living. Buying things to look successful. Traveling for aesthetics. Spending to keep up appearances. Posting moments that look wealthy while the bank account quietly disagrees. Your bank account does not care about likes, validation, or applause. Neither does your future self.

In 2026, choose peace over pressure. Make financial decisions based on your goals, not on what looks good online. There is no prize for looking rich and feeling anxious. Quiet progress is still progress. Real wealth is often unglamorous in the early stages. Let your finances grow in privacy.

4. Live to Build Legacy, Not Applause

Applause is temporary. Legacy is durable. Chasing recognition often leads to short-term thinking: quick wins, fast spending, and fragile success. Building legacy requires patience, discipline, and long-term vision. Think beyond this year. Invest in assets. Build systems. Create structures that can outlive you. Teach financial wisdom to those coming behind you. Make decisions that future generations will thank you for. Wealth that lasts is not built for claps. It is built quietly, consistently, and intentionally.

5. Live to Be a Blessing

Money reaches its highest purpose when it flows through you, not just to you. Being financially responsible does not mean being closed-handed. Impact is a form of wealth too. Supporting others, contributing to meaningful causes, and creating value in your community adds depth to your financial journey. Generosity, when done wisely, expands perspective. It reminds you that money is a tool, not an identity. A channel, not a destination.

The most fulfilled people are rarely those who only accumulated. They are those who used their resources to make life better for others.

2026 does not need louder spending. It does not need performative success or rushed decisions.

What it needs is clearer thinking, stronger values, and better alignment. Live within your means, but don't shrink your joy.

Improve your capacity.

Ignore the noise.

Build for the long term.

And let your money serve both your future and your purpose.

When you live for the right things, your finances eventually fall into the right place.



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

Aisha Babangida

Founder, WenA/Chairman, Better Life Program for the African Rural Woman

Aisha Babangida is a powerful convener on the success of collaborative process in leadership, development and negotiations. She plays roles as a champion, shaper of issues and a great unifier. She serves as the public face for the Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida Legacy Dialogue, the Mothers of the Nation Initiative and for female entrepreneurship development in Nigeria and Africa.

Aisha Babangida is a humanitarian leader and experienced founder with a demonstrated history of working within philanthropy and helping underserved communities throughout Nigeria. She is the Chairman of the Better Life Program for the African Rural Woman, taking over after her mother, who worked previously as the chairman and founder. In addition to the Better Life Program, Aisha has also started

and worked with numerous nonprofit organisations, only fuelling her passion to do more for the people of her country. Aisha loves being able to provide women and girls with educational opportunities and life skills in order to better prepare them for the future.

In addition to her passion and commitment to philanthropy, Aisha Babangida is also passionate about finance and business. She has continued to advocate for female empowerment by working to increase women's rights, and provide them with resources that can help transform their lives and great community.

Through her work and outreach, Aisha Babangida saw the importance of microfinance and banking for the Nigerian economy. In 2016, she founded the Egwafin Microfinance Bank, which helps those in Africa get the access they need to funding and financing that they may not have had access to otherwise. She loves seeing how financial inclusion changes

lives in her community.

In 2018, Aisha Babangida founded Women Enterprise Alliance, which helps entrepreneurs through investing in profitable early stage companies, small & medium enterprises (SMEs) in Nigeria and across Africa. She founded the organisation as a way to help improve the resources that entrepreneurs need to thrive when first starting their own company. The vision of the alliance is to unlock the obstacles that entrepreneurs in Africa face as they grow their early stage into SMEs.

Overall, Aisha Babangida has become known for her leadership in the community, as well as her skills in nonprofit organisations, negotiation, corporate social responsibility, business planning, and analytical skills. She is focused on empowering African women and preparing the next generation of female leaders.



Who best to start our first edition for 2026 of 'We've Got Men' column if not the business magnate and Africa's richest man, Aliko Dangote GCON, Founder/President & Chief Executive of Dangote Group, the largest conglomerate in West Africa with significant presence in 17 African countries.

It was evident that Aliko knew he was going to be a force to reckon with. After graduating from Al-Azhar University in Cairo, Egypt, he commenced his business journey in the late 70s trading in rice, sugar and cement. After a while, he went into production extensively, and like the say, the rest is history, except that Aliko constantly redefines what history embodies, and he does it in a big way.

Dangote never plays small. I mean, if owning a petroleum refinery and petrochemicals, 650,000 barrels per day (BPD)

integrated refinery located in the Lekki Free Zone of Ibeju Lekki Lagos, Nigeria isn't a massive feat, especially coming from an African, a Nigerian—specifically, I wonder what is. The gist doesn't stop there, the refinery isn't only Africa's biggest oil refinery, it is the world's biggest single-train facility. Beat that, then let's hear you out.

Aliko has been on the list of richest Africans for a long time, but I knew that the oil refinery was going to shift things in a different way and like several Nigerians, we all counted down to its official launch. Of course it came with its challenges, even after, and that is because, realistically speaking, nothing great comes easy as most wealthy people will tell you, but one thing stands sure, they won't quit and will ensure the result becomes evident which is exactly what Dangote did.

Honestly, during that period of the process preceding the launch, the challenges were evident.

WE'VE GOT MEN

Aliko Dangote, GCON

Founder/Group President & Chief Executive, Dangote Group

the refinery. Even Halima Aliko Dangote, Group Executive Director, Dangote Industries Limited, who represents him at public events and conferences, and Mariya Aliko Dangote, Executive Director, Operations for Dangote Sugar Refinery Plc, all of them, embodying their roles with confidence and grace simply because their father believed in them and gave them the opportunity to rise.

And one more thing, never assume Aliko is too busy, too calm or too rich to respond to unproven accusations. He rarely pays attention to unprofitable distractions, but if you make allegations you don't have evidence for, or you try to play hanky panky with him, you will be served, and he will come with undeniable receipts. Selah!

So, when we say at Inspiring Woman Africa (IWA) that 'We've Got Men,' Aliko Dangote is an example of whom we are talking about.

HOLISTIC LIVING

Your Body, Your Wealth: Why Health Should be your First Investment in 2026:

By Dr. Maymunah Yusuf Kadiri



As we step into 2026, conversations about wealth are everywhere, the exchange rates, investments, startups, property, side hustles. We are told to diversify portfolios, hedge risks, and plan. Yet there is a quiet, dangerous oversight in many of these conversations: the body that must carry all that success. You can rebuild a business. You can recover money. You can pivot a career. But you cannot replace your body. That simple truth is the reason health

must become our first and most protected investment in 2026.

Across Africa, I see a generation of brilliant, driven, resilient people, the entrepreneurs, professionals, creatives building at full speed while silently running their bodies into overdraft. We have normalised exhaustion. We wear sleeplessness like a badge of honour. We applaud "grind" without asking what it is grinding down. Slowly, subtly, the cost shows up: chronic fatigue, high blood pressure, anxiety, depression, insomnia, hormonal imbalance, emotional numbness, and sudden medical emergencies that no business plan prepared for.

This is not weakness. This is biology asking for attention. True wealth is not just what you earn; it is what you can sustain. Wealth is energy. Wealth is clarity. Wealth is a calm, regulated nervous system that allows you to think well, decide well, and lead well. A tired mind cannot innovate. A stressed body cannot execute consistently. A burned-out heart cannot enjoy success, no matter how impressive it looks on paper. We must redefine success for 2026.

If your body were a business, many of us would discover uncomfortable numbers. High output but poor maintenance. Impressive growth, yet no reserves. Constant withdrawals of energy, focus, and sleep, with little reinvestment. No business survives that way. Neither does the human body.

Health is not a luxury to be addressed "after things settle." It is the infrastructure that allows everything else to function. Ignored health does not disappear; it simply sends the bill later, often at the worst possible time. One hospital admission can wipe out years of savings. One mental health crisis can derail a thriving career. One untreated condition can quietly reduce quality of life long before it becomes visible.

The good news is this: health is not complicated, but it is intentional. Like every worthwhile investment, it requires consistency, not perfection.

In 2026, health investment must rest on four pillars.

The first is mind care. Your mind is the CEO of your life. If it is exhausted, confused, or overwhelmed, every department suffers. Therapy is not a sign of crisis; it is a tool for clarity. Mental rest is not laziness; it is strategy. Protecting your peace is not selfish; it is survival.

The second is body care. Sleep is not optional. Movement is not punishment. Hydration is not trivial. Nutrition is not an afterthought. These are not wellness trends; they are biological requirements. Regular medical check-ups are not invitations for bad news; they are acts of prevention.

The third is behaviour care. Our daily habits quietly shape our future. Screen addiction, excessive alcohol, poor eating patterns, and constant overstimulation erode the body slowly, often invisibly. Burnout does not arrive overnight; it accumulates through repeated small neglects.

The fourth is boundary care. Many people are not sick; they are overwhelmed by what they allow. Constant availability, blurred work-life lines, and emotional overextension drain the nervous system. In 2026, "no" must become a complete sentence.

This is not about slowing ambition. It is about sustaining it.

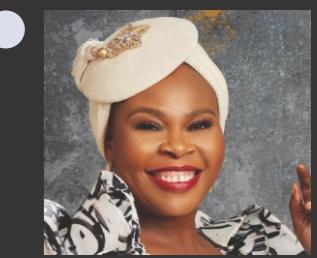
A well-regulated individual thinks faster, recovers quicker, leads better, and makes clearer decisions. Wellness is not the opposite of productivity; it is its foundation.

So as you plan your financial goals for 2026, create a health portfolio alongside it. What are you investing daily? Weekly? Quarterly? Who supports your mental health? How well do you sleep?

Your body is not just carrying you to success, it is the success.

Money can buy comfort, convenience, and status. It cannot buy a new mind, a new heart, or a new nervous system. Your health is your generational wealth.

In 2026, choose health early. Choose it intentionally. Choose it unapologetically. This is because the most asset you own is not in a bank or balance sheet. It wakes up with you every morning. Invest in it.



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 (FMPsych) 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

Haven't Set Goals yet? Here's How

By Zainab Aderounmu



The New Year has begun and making a sense of what you want may feel overwhelming. You may be tempted to 'see how it goes' instead of setting concrete goals, but I don't recommend because what you don't measure, you can't multiply. On that note, here's a step-by-step process of setting your goals for the new year.

1. Start from a place of gratitude: Have you heard the saying, count your blessings and name them one by one? That's exactly what you want to do here. Reflect on the previous year you had, and deliberately fish out the great moments, the little moments that held you together, and people who made it worthwhile. You don't have to tell them (it'll be nice if you did), but write all of it down. At the end of the list, the goal is to have more than 10 things you're grateful for. This helps you frame your mind positively for the year ahead.

2. Review: Do an in-depth review of what worked, what didn't work, and why it didn't work. What you don't measure, you can't manage, not to talk of multiplying. Write out 6 categories of your life, including finance, business, relationships, etc., and rate each over 10. The score on each category would tell you how you performed per category.

3. Cast a vision: This is where you want to close your eyes and imagine what you consider success. At the end of 2026, what would happen for you to consider the year a great one? Leave out inhibitions; you stayed on track and everything worked out for good for you. You got all the opportunities you pursued, and all the doors you knocked on opened. What did your year look like? Write that down. Afterwards, group this raw data into categories of your life and write out three SMART goals per bucket; you should have 6


Zainab Aderounmu

Zainab Aderounmu A. W. is a First Class graduate of English Language and the Overall Best Graduate 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.

buckets to make it easy. For example: Family: (i) Eat dinner with my family once every week. (ii) Go on a local family adventure at the end of each quarter. (iii) Go on a family trip in December 2026.

4. Break it up: Here, you should break your goals up into monthly plans or at least decide what you need to do to achieve each goal. It's not enough to set big goals, you also have to decide the specific actions necessary to achieving these goals, so that you can build a system around them. For example, to achieve a weekly family dinner, you need to decide what day works best and probably log that day and time into everyone's calendar, amongst other things.

5. Seek Accountability: This is totally optional. However, if you need someone who's probably on the same journey to offer support, don't be afraid to seek them out. For instance, I wrote my first book because I had mentioned the intention to a friend, and he wouldn't stop asking me for the first chapter, so I wrote the first chapter and the second one and the final one. I wish you an amazing and fulfilling Year! Don't be afraid to write back to me if you use this system:

wuraolaaderounmu@gmail.com



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.

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