

The logo for Inspiring Woman Africa (iwa) features the lowercase letters 'iwa' in a bold, teal, sans-serif font. A solid teal circle is positioned above the 'i'. The background of the entire cover is a photograph of a woman in a teal outfit, holding white fabric and green plants.

INSPIRING
WOMAN
AFRICA

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HANSATU
ADEGBITE

CELEBRATING THE WOMEN EMPOWERMENT,
INCLUSION ADVOCATE AT 50

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Before You Invest Again, Know Your SGAR



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Welcome!

Dear Readers,

Welcome to another edition of IWA. We are excited about this edition because our cover guest is someone at the fore of promoting women empowerment and advocating for inclusion. She turns 50 today and we at IWA are celebrating her and sharing her journey with you all. She is the phenomenal Hansatu Adegbite. Hansatu Adegbite is a strategic leader with proven expertise in driving initiatives, building alliances, and delivering measurable social impact. A passionate advocate for diversity, inclusion, and women's economic empowerment, she has contributed extensively to national and international development efforts, serving on two Nigerian Presidential Committees. She currently serves as the National Consultant on Private Sector Partnerships with UN Women. As she turns 50, we send her a special shout out and wish her the best in all she does.

Here are other articles in this edition:

FINANCIAL ADVISEHER: Before You Invest Again, Know Your SGAR. By Sola Adesakin.

WOMAN EXECUTIVE: The Governance Gap: Women on Boards and What Still Needs to Change. By Wola Joseph-Condotti.

HER POINT OF VIEW: The Power of a Single Yes: How One Call Changed Everything. By Chinyere Okorocho.

GENDER INSIGHT: Empowering Nigerian women economically through the World Bank project. By Asmau Benzies-Leo.

MADE FOR MORE: The Achievement to Assignment Shift. By Ifeoma Chuku-Adizue.

HOLISTIC LIVING: Mental Health at Work Is a Holistic Wellbeing Imperative. By Dr. Maymunah Yusuf Kadiri.

WOMAN AT THE HELM: Lola Fatoyinbo (PhD). Visiting Professor at MIT, Space and Forest Ecologist & National Geographic Explorer.

WE'VE GOT MEN: Idorenyen Enang, CEO at Corporate Shepherds Limited & Executive in Residence at LBS.

Do not forget to show love to someone this month, especially someone or people who do not expect it.

Have an amazing week ahead!

COVER INTERVIEW

HANSATU ADEGBITE

CELEBRATING THE WOMEN
EMPOWERMENT, INCLUSION
ADVOCATE AT 50

Kemi Ajumobi

Hansatu Adegbite is a strategic leader with proven expertise in driving initiatives, building alliances, and delivering

measurable social impact. A passionate advocate for diversity, inclusion, and women's economic empowerment, she has contributed extensively to national and international development efforts, serving on two Nigerian Presidential Committees. She has served on 15 Boards and Chaired 5 of them. A graduate of Harvard Business School, Business School Netherlands, and the University of Abuja, Hansatu holds degrees in Business Administration. She currently serves as the National Consultant on Private Sector Partnerships with UN Women and is the immediate past Executive Director of Women in Management, Business & Public Service (WIMBIZ). Beyond leadership, she is deeply committed to mentorship and capacity building, serving as a faculty member / trainer at the National Institute for Policy & Strategic Studies, the Policy Innovation Center, and the Enterprise Development Center of Pan-Atlantic University.

“Even as a child, I began to understand what a matriarch truly is, not merely the oldest person in the room, but the steady bond that draws everyone in from near and far”



“Education wasn’t a plan in our home, it was a covenant for a secured future”

Hansatu also holds significant board and advisory roles, including:

- National Steering Council Member, Presidential High-Level Advisory Council for Women and Girls in Nigeria
- Advisory Committee Member, CARE Nigeria
- Board Member, Global Entrepreneurship Festival
- Advisory Board Member, Business School Netherlands
- Board Member, Nigerian Women Trust Fund
- Advisory Board Member, Women in Health Care Network
- Board Member, Women Rising International
- Board Member, Nigerian Conservative Foundation
- Board Member, Women's Radio
- Member, African Women Leaders Network
- Summit Chairperson, Association of Nigerian Women Business Network (ANWBN)
- President, Business School Netherlands Nigeria Alumni

Her contributions have been recognised with prestigious honors, including the Award of Excellence by the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and the Woman of the Year Award by the Voice of Women Empowerment Foundation in 2022. A proud mother of two adult sons, Hansatu remains dedicated to advancing social change, strengthening

inclusive leadership, and shaping the next generation of transformative leaders.

▶ **Childhood Memories and Influence till today**

I was fortunate to know my late maternal great-grandmother, my grandmother, and my grandaunts, remarkable women who left a lasting imprint on my life. They were the matriarchs of our extended family and leaders in their own right, women whose presence commanded respect and whose words influenced and shaped others.

The late Mama Juli Martha Miller, my great-grandmother, was married to the late Reverend Canon Henry Galtir Miller, who became the first Northern Nigerian ordained as a priest in 1924 under the Church Missionary Society, an institution now within the Anglican Communion of the Church of Nigeria. For our family, she was far more than a figure in the archives of our lineage. Great-grandma Miller was among the early female pupils of Dr. Walter Samuel Miller's Missionary School in Zaria City, and she also received education at Kudeti Girls School in Ibadan.

Every Christmas and New Year, she made sure our entire extended family came together at the family home in Wusasa, Zaria. Those reunions are among my fondest childhood memories of a household would overflow with cousins, uncles, aunts, grandparents, grand-aunts and grand-uncles, laughter spilling into laughter, stories travelling across generations, and food and joy flowing with the ease of tradition.

After she passed, the yearly gatherings ended. Even as a child, I began to understand what a matriarch truly is, not merely the oldest person in the room, but the steady bond that draws everyone in from near and far. And when that bond is gone, even the strongest families can slowly drift apart, until what's left are faint recollections and a quiet yearning for the presence that once held everyone together.

The late Helen Asabe Miller was my grandmother and married Mallam Joseph Mijinyawa Taidi, and together they served as nurses at the City Hospital in Kano State, Nigeria. Their lives revolved around compassion, caring for others, saving lives, and being present for people in their most fragile moments. My mother was the first female grandchild in my great-grandmother's line, but she lost her father when she was only three years old, her mother remarried and gave birth to 2 more daughters. My grandaunts, widely known as the Miller twins were the youngest of six children, and in many ways, they helped raise several members of the family at different points of their lives, including my mother. They had a reputation for being strict and unyielding, guided by strong values and high moral standards. Yet as a child, I encountered more of their gentler side, enjoying their stories, the songs they taught us, the small treats they slipped into our hands, and the comforting prayers they spoke over us. Among the Miller twins, Dr. Maude Akanya, OFR broke historic ground, becoming Northern Nigeria's first female Commissioner and later the first woman to be appointed as a Civil Service Commissioner in Nigeria. Long before women's leadership became a popular conversation, she was already demonstrating, by sheer performance and integrity, that competence is not limited by gender. Her twin sister, Jummai Jarma, OFR, was an accomplished educator and widely founding principal of two of Northern Nigeria's landmark women's institutions, Queen Amina College, the renowned all-girls secondary school, and the Women's Teachers' College, both in Kaduna State. She went on to serve as a Director in the Ministry of Education and as a Council Member of Usman Dan Fodio University, influencing policies and structures that went on to shape countless lives. They served in many other roles and earned numerous recognitions over the course of their lives, including the

national honour of Officer of the Federal Republic (OFR), conferred on both of them by the President of Nigeria in 2008. Yet beyond their public achievements, what stood out most was their steadfast devotion to God. For many years, they served as Supreme Mothers of the Kaduna Diocese of the Anglican Communion, highly respected women who led with conviction, offered wise counsel.

► **Why the Choice of a Career Focused on Social Impact, Diversity & Women's Economic Empowerment?**

These five women gave me a powerful inheritance that shaped how I see myself and what I believe is possible. Because of them, I grew up without placing limits on my dreams or my potential. They lived richly and

intentionally, and the lessons they passed on were beyond anything a classroom could offer, I learned most simply by watching the way they lived. In many ways, being raised around these five educated women, each a strong leader in her own right and a meaningful contributor to social development, charted a course for my own life. Their example shaped my commitment to social impact, especially in advancing women's leadership, gender equity, and women's economic empowerment. My work in

“I combine data with stories and stakeholder feedback to ensure the impact is measurable, credible, and sustainable”





“One of the most valuable outcomes of my Harvard Business School course was that it focused on Strategic Perspectives in Nonprofit Management”

Ms. Beatrice Eyong, has been the depth of learning I have gained on measuring key interventions and their impact on society. I have further strengthened this experience through the professional networks, women organisations, Business Membership Organisations (BMOs) and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) that I have worked with and in some cases served on their Boards, while contributing to efforts that address social development gaps and reduce disparities. I also measure social impact through a consistent focus on outcomes, not activities, tracking how my interventions translate into real improvements in women's lives and in the systems that shape their opportunities. Across my work on women's leadership, gender equity, and women's economic empowerment, I monitor clear indicators such as the number of women reached and trained, the quality of partnerships mobilised, policies or institutional practices influenced, resources unlocked for women-led initiatives, and the tangible results that follow such as jobs created, businesses strengthened, procurement opportunities accessed, and safer, more inclusive communities. I combine data with stories and stakeholder feedback to ensure the impact is measurable, credible, and sustainable.

the gender space feels like a continuation of where they left off, an inherited call to service that I stepped into, even though their legacies were already unfolding long before I was born.

I was born into a family of four children, two girls and two boys, I am the second-born and the second daughter. My mother gave us the best of education both in Nigeria and the United Kingdom. Education wasn't a plan in our home, it was a covenant for a secured future. She was a firm disciplinarian, her upbringing showed in the stern standards she set for us, we had to be respectful, upstanding, and hardworking representatives of the family.

As I grew up in life, I became deeply touched by the realities women faced in patriarchal societies, pressures and barriers that often trap them in poverty, leaving them feeling powerless. At the

same time, watching my mother work relentlessly and sacrifice so much to see my siblings and I educated all the way through university left a permanent mark on me on the need to help women in my lifetime to live a more purposeful life with the support that they need from the networks that are relevant to their journey. With over 28 years of selfless and committed volunteering, my values were also shaped and have guided me toward causes where I can do my part to build a more just and equitable society.

▶ **How Are You Able to Measure Social Impact Through Your Work**

One of the greatest advantages of serving as a National Consultant with UN Women's Nigeria Country Office, under the leadership of the Country Representative for Nigeria & ECOWAS,

▶ **Harvard Business School Experience and Influence on your Approach to Leadership and Social Change**

My Harvard Business School experience sharpened and strengthened my approach to leadership and social change by grounding my work in strategy, execution discipline, and measurable results. It trained me to define problems clearly, understand stakeholder incentives, weigh trade-offs, and design solutions that are sustainable, not just well-intentioned. It also reinforced the importance of data, accountability, and adaptive learning, which now shapes how I build partnerships, lead teams, mobilise resources, and scale interventions that advance women's leadership, gender equity, and women's economic empowerment.

One of the most valuable outcomes of my

Harvard Business School course was that it focused on Strategic Perspectives in Nonprofit Management and brought me into a learning community of non-profit executives from across the world. Being in that room exposed me to a rich mix of tested ideas and diverse, validated perspectives, insights that broadened my thinking and strengthened how I approach strategy, leadership, and impact in the social sector.

► **Key Lessons about Effective Governance and Collaboration**

The key lessons I have learnt on effective governance and collaboration are the importance of staying anchored to the organisation's core mission while clearly understanding the internal and external stakeholder landscape, including the power dynamics, without getting drawn into politics that can erode your values or derail your purpose. I have also learned to keep a disciplined focus on the outcomes set out to achieve, resisting distractions that come from personalities, or deliberate attempts to shift attention away from the end goal.

The leaders I admire most in governance are those who deliberately build their capacity, expand their networks, consistently contribute value and that principle has guided my own journey. I have also been intentional about learning from men and women I respect, drawing on their experience and expertise as mentors and role models. Where I needed deeper understanding, I sought formal training, earning corporate governance certifications through the Chartered Institute of Directors (CIoD) and the Institute of Chartered Secretaries and Administrators of Nigeria (ICSAN). I was however practically trained in corporate governance through service by the Founders of Women in Management, Business and Public Service (WIMBIZ) when I served under them as Executive Director as well as other Board that I either served as Secretary or a Member over the past 20 years.

Strong governance is not about bureaucracy to me but about defining purpose, roles, and decision-making lines, setting ethical standards, managing risk,



and measuring performance so the mission is protected and results are visible. In the same way, collaboration works best when partners align around shared outcomes, understand one another's incentives, and commit to structured coordination with clear responsibilities, timelines, and communication. Over time, I have learned that well-documented agreements, transparent reporting, and consistent delivery are what transform good intentions into reliable partnerships, and reliable partnerships into sustainable social change.

► **Essential Qualities of a Strategic Leader in Today's Complex Social Landscape**

A strategic leader in today's complex social landscape combines clarity of purpose with the ability to navigate

“Strong governance is not about bureaucracy to me but about defining purpose, roles, and decision-making lines”

uncertainty and competing interests without losing sight of outcomes. They are systems thinkers who understand root causes and design solutions that can scale, while remaining data-informed and committed to measurable impact. They lead with integrity and accountability, build trust-based partnerships across government, private sector, and communities, and communicate with influence and empathy. Above all, they are adaptive and resilient, able to learn quickly, manage risk, mobilise resources, and translate vision into coordinated action that delivers sustainable results.



influence hiring, board appointments, contracts, and political access, alongside workplace harassment, religious or community pressures, and credibility gaps that force women to be “twice as good” to be seen and heard. In some sectors, unequal access to capital, land, and procurement opportunities further restricts women's pathway into executive and board-level influence, while insecurity and unsafe commuting can reduce participation in public-facing leadership spaces.

Organisations can respond by institutionalising transparent recruitment and promotion processes, creating structured sponsorship and leadership pipeline programmes for women, enforcing strong safeguarding systems, and offering flexible work and childcare support that reflects Nigerian realities. They should also intentionally open access to decision-making networks through board diversity targets, inclusive procurement and supplier diversity initiatives, and partnerships with credible women's professional associations, backed by measurable goals and senior leadership accountability. All of these can be established easily if the right policies are in place with the leaders who are committed to implement them.

► **Discuss the importance of mentorship in empowering women in the workplace, based on your experiences as a mentor?**

I am a product of mentorship from women across five key pillars, family, spiritual (Christian) guidance, professional mentors, sectoral leaders, and social networks, received through both formal structures and informal relationships. Perhaps the ones who invested the most into my life are the spiritual leaders particularly, Pastors Sarah Omakwu, Mary Abioye, Comfort Adesoye, Virygl David and Sister Asibi

Makama. Across these spaces, I have been nurtured, corrected, encouraged, and exposed to opportunities that shaped my values, strengthened my confidence, and expanded my capacity to lead. Their support did more than advise me, it modelled what is possible, opened doors I could not have accessed alone, and taught me how to navigate purposefully while staying grounded in integrity and service. Mentorship is critical to empowering women in the workplace because it closes the “invisible gap” between talent and opportunity. In my experience as a mentee as well as a mentor, I have seen how guidance and honest feedback help women build confidence, sharpen leadership skills, and make strategic career decisions, position their value, negotiate promotions, navigate workplace dynamics, and prepare for bigger responsibilities without shrinking themselves. Mentorship also provides access to networks and exposure that women are too often excluded from, opening doors to stretch assignments, board opportunities, and decision-making spaces. Beyond skills, it creates a safe space for women to process real challenges, bias, work-life pressures, harassment, self-doubt, and to develop resilience, professional boundaries, and a clear leadership identity. Most importantly, mentorship builds a pipeline, when women rise with support, they turn around to lift others, creating a multiplier effect that strengthens organisational culture and performance.

► **What strategies do you recommend for organisations looking to improve their diversity and inclusion efforts?**

To improve diversity and inclusion in a real, measurable way, organisations need to move from statements to systems, embedding inclusion into how they hire, promote, pay, lead, and procure. Start by setting clear diversity and inclusion goals

► **What challenges do you believe are most pressing for women in leadership roles today, and how can organisations address them?**

In Nigeria, women in leadership often face entrenched cultural expectations and gender norms that question women's authority, place a heavier burden of caregiving and household responsibility on them, and limit mobility for networking, late meetings, and travel that many senior roles require. They also contend with “old boys' networks” that

“ In Nigeria, women in leadership often face entrenched cultural expectations and gender norms that question women's authority”

“Businesses can better support female entrepreneurs in Nigeria by intentionally reducing the barriers that limit their access to markets, finance, skills, and supportive networks”

tied to business outcomes and tracking gender- and disability-disaggregated data across recruitment, performance ratings, promotions, pay, and attrition.

They can further standardise hiring and promotion with structured interviews, diverse panels, and transparent criteria, while investing in leadership pipelines through sponsorship, mentorship, and targeted development for underrepresented talent. Then strengthen culture by training managers, enforcing zero tolerance for harassment and discrimination, and creating safe reporting channels that are trusted and independent. Further ensure inclusion is resourced by auditing pay equity, allocating equitable budgets and high-visibility assignments, and adopting flexible work policies that recognise caregiving realities.

Finally, expand impact beyond the workforce through inclusive procurement and supplier diversity also referred to as gender responsive procurement or affirmative procurement, intentionally engaging women-owned and underrepresented businesses, while holding leaders accountable through key performance indicators (KPIs), performance reviews, and regular public or internal reporting on progress.

▶ How can businesses better support women entrepreneurs in Nigeria?

Businesses can better support female entrepreneurs in Nigeria by intentionally reducing the barriers that limit their access to markets, finance, skills, and supportive networks. This starts with inclusive procurement, setting targets for spending with women-owned businesses, simplifying bid requirements, unbundling large contracts, and paying on time to ease cashflow pressure. Companies can also partner with banks and DFIs to expand access to affordable finance through guarantees, invoice discounting, asset financing, and lower-collateral products, while pairing funding with

practical coaching on bankability, bookkeeping, and compliance. Beyond funding, female entrepreneurs benefit from revenue-focused capacity building, mentorship and sponsorship that opens doors to buyers and investors, and shared infrastructure such as business hubs, equipment, logistics support, and digital storefronts. Finally, businesses should design interventions around women's realities, addressing care responsibilities, safety concerns, and legal or regulatory hurdles, while measuring impact through indicators like supplier spend, business growth, jobs created, and enterprise survival over time.

▶ In what ways do you think men can play a role in advancing women's economic empowerment?

The United Nations refer to men who play this role as HeForShe or Male Allies who are very important community influencers for change and support. Men can play a powerful role in advancing women's economic empowerment by using their influence at home, at work, and in society, to remove barriers and open opportunities. In the workplace, this means sponsoring women into high-impact roles, insisting on fair recruitment and promotion processes, challenging bias when it shows up in meetings or performance reviews, ensuring gender-responsive budgets guide decision-making and revenue-generating initiatives.

Men can also champion pay equity, enforce zero tolerance for harassment, and support policies that make work more compatible with caregiving realities, such as flexible work arrangements. Beyond the office, men can support women's economic power by buying from women-owned businesses, connecting them to markets and networks, mentoring them, and advocating for inclusive procurement and better access to finance. At home

and in communities, sharing unpaid care work, backing girls' education, and speaking up against harmful norms helps create the enabling environment women need to earn, build assets, and lead, because when men actively shift systems and behaviours, women's economic empowerment becomes faster, safer, and more sustainable.

▶ Serving on the Nigerian Presidential Committees, what impact do you feel those roles have had or will have on policy-making for women and girls?

Serving on Nigerian Presidential Committees gave me a rare, high-leverage platform to help shape what government prioritises, funds, and measures for women and girls, moving issues from advocacy into policy, budgets, and implementation. These roles have strengthened my understanding and participation in policy-making by bringing frontline evidence and private-sector or development realities into national decisions, convening key ministries or agencies and influential stakeholders around shared targets, and pushing for practical reforms such as gender-responsive budgeting, affirmative procurement, tax incentives and women's economic empowerment strategies and stronger accountability on Gender Based Violence (GBV) prevention and response. Over time, the greatest impact is the ability to institutionalise change, embedding gender considerations into frameworks, performance indicators, and inter-agency coordination, so progress does not depend on individuals, but becomes part of how the system works for women and girls.

▶ UN Women's work and how it has influenced change in private sector partnerships

UN Women's work has influenced change in private sector partnerships by shifting conversations from one-off corporate social responsibility considerations to more strategic, measurable collaborations that address root causes of gender inequality such as philanthropic giving. Through evidence, global standards, and

“UN Women’s work has influenced change in private sector partnerships by shifting conversations from one-off corporate social responsibility considerations to more strategic, measurable collaborations”

practical frameworks, UN Women helps companies see gender equity as both a rights issue and a business imperative, strengthening how partners design interventions, track results, and report impact.

This influence is visible in more intentional partnerships that support women's economic empowerment through inclusive value chains especially in trade, affirmative procurement, climate smart agriculture, safer workplaces, anti-harassment systems, leadership pipelines for women, the care economy and gender-responsive policies. By convening stakeholders and providing technical guidance, UN Women also increases credibility and accountability, making it easier for the private sector to align investments with national priorities while delivering outcomes that are sustainable and scalable.

► **How do you measure the success of initiatives geared towards women's empowerment and social change?**

I measure the success of women's empowerment and social change initiatives by looking beyond activities to evidence of real, lasting outcomes at three levels, individual change, institutional change, and systems change. At the individual level, I track indicators such as increased income, decent jobs created, business growth, access to finance or procurement opportunities, leadership advancement, confidence, agency, and improvements in safety as well as wellbeing.

At the institutional level, I measure shifts in policies and practices, such as gender-responsive budgeting, inclusive recruitment and promotion, safeguarding systems, supplier diversity targets, and

changes in how resources are allocated to women and girls. At the systems level, I look for wider influence, including strengthened partnerships, new funding mobilised, reforms adopted by government or industry, replication across states or sectors, and sustained results over time.

► **Advice to young intending women leaders**

To young women who intend to lead, start by building clarity, competence, and character, know what you stand for, master your craft, and protect your integrity like your name depends on it because literally it does. Be intentional about learning, unlearning and

relearning continuously. Learn by being in the right rooms, attending the right events, signing up for the right courses, reading widely, getting relevant certifications where necessary, and seeking constructive feedback that stretches you.

Invest in relationships and visibility, find mentors and sponsors, join strong networks, and don't be afraid to sit at tables where decisions are made. Learn to communicate with confidence, speak up early, document your work, negotiate fairly, and don't shrink to make others comfortable. Set healthy boundaries and manage your energy because the leadership journey is a marathon, not a sprint.

Prepare yourself for the good, the bad, and the ugly, because leadership exposes you to all kinds of people, some who will support you and others who may come at you with arrows or stones, often without warning.

Don't be overly trusting or naïve, stay wise and discerning. Build shock absorbers around your heart, strengthen your boundaries, and cultivate a resilient spirit so you can stay steady, focused, and grounded through it all.

Finally, lead with service, solve real problems, deliver results, and when you rise, carry other women with you, your success becomes a ladder for someone else. So be known for the problem(s) you solve not those you create.

► **Turning 50**

At 50, my biggest lessons are hinged around the importance of choosing to live in alignment with my inner conviction and sense of purpose, so that I am not derailed by challenges, distractions, nor painful experiences. I have learned to stay true to myself, to refuse the trap of being limited by other people's opinions especially when it becomes harmful, and to own my decisions with courage. I may not always get everything right, but I choose to carry no regrets, only lessons that make me wiser, stronger, and more intentional.

I have learnt that not everyone who applauds you is for you, and not every delay is denial, some seasons are simply refining seasons. Therefore, I have learnt to lead with clarity, to set boundaries without guilt, to choose relationships with discernment,





and to measure success not only by milestones achieved, but by the lives touched and the peace preserved. It is also important to remain grounded with real friends who energise you when you need to the support to just breathe, laugh and play before you keep moving forward. I have been privileged to have a lot of good friends who provide me with support in different ways and at different times especially Olayinka Adeyinka and a lot of my 1988 set mates as well as those from other sets of the Air Force Girls Military School in Jos, popularly known as EX-JAW, they are the real deal. I have also learnt that most human beings are innately selfish, they only care about what value you can add to them, but when

the ships are down, many of them are gone, so you must be careful not to live your life only for others but also for yourself, in such a way that when you die, it will be with a sense of fulfillment that your sojourn on earth was worth it. I am deeply grateful for God's mercy and guidance, for the women and mentors who shaped my values and expanded my vision, and for the strength of my mother's sacrifices that taught me what love looks like in action. I am also grateful for family, friendships who have stood the test of time, for professional relationships, opportunities to serve, to create impact, and for every setback that became my classroom, because each one strengthened my

voice, deepened my compassion, and reminded me that my story is still unfolding.

▶ Greatest wish

I long for leaders in Nigeria and across Africa who genuinely have a heart and deep care for the people they lead. Leaders committed to building countries and systems that work for the good of all. For too long, we have been battered by cycles of structural poverty that breed frustration, insecurity, and a deep sense of helplessness, even among those eager to drive change. And the leadership deficit I speak of is not limited to political alone, it extends to traditional, religious, and business leadership as well, where unhealthy appetites for absolute power and control have widened inequality and steadily hollowed out the middle class. The result is a growing population of young people who feel disenchanting and directionless, despite living in an era filled with possibilities for learning, enterprise, and growth. We are blessed with immense resources, yet too often the benefits are captured by a narrow political class whose priorities have been hardened by self-interest. This is why I am deeply committed to the push for more women in leadership. I believe female leaders are more likely to lead with empathy, to see the humanity behind the statistics, and to prioritise the needs of the marginalised and vulnerable. More importantly, they can serve as critical bridge-builders, helping to create fairer, more inclusive, win-win outcomes for all stakeholders. My greatest wish is for an inclusive and equitable society, one where every person, regardless of background or circumstance, has fair access to the basic necessities of life and the opportunity to live with dignity.

“At 50, my biggest lessons are hinged around the importance of choosing to live in alignment with my inner conviction and sense of purpose”

► **Recharging and maintaining your passion for the causes you advocate for, especially in challenging times**

I recharge by always returning to my “why” and reminding myself that this work is ultimately about people, real women, youth, and communities whose lives can change because someone chose to stay the course.

In challenging times, I lean into my faith, prayer, and quiet reflection to reset my spirit, and I take intentional pauses to rest and protect my energy, because burnout helps no one. Most times I love the privacy of being in my room to relax and rejuvenate. I also draw strength from my community especially from trusted friends, and accountability partners, who help me process disappointments, regain perspective, and keep moving. Practically, I recharge by celebrating small wins and focusing on what I can control, the quality of my work, the value from my choices, and the next right step. Most

importantly, I allow myself to feel the hard moments without surrendering to them, then I re-center, recalibrate, and return to the work with renewed clarity and resolve.

► **What do you envision for the future of women's leadership in Nigeria and globally over the next decade?**

Over the next decade, I envision women's leadership in Nigeria and globally moving from being symbolic representation to becoming normalised with measurable results, more women not only at the table, but shaping budgets, reforms, and outcomes in politics, business, civil service, technology, security, and community

leadership. In Nigeria, I expect stronger pipelines driven by deliberate mentorship and sponsorship, more women entering leadership through entrepreneurship and the private sector, and growing pressure for transparent governance, where women leaders are increasingly seen as credible bridge-builders who can reduce polarisation and prioritise human development, especially in education, health, safety, and economic inclusion. Globally, I see a shift toward women leading in hard power spaces such as finance, climate change, artificial intelligence, peace and security, alongside social sectors, with higher expectations for accountability, performance, and integrity. I also believe the next decade will reward leaders who can collaborate across sectors, use data to prove impact, and build inclusive systems that expand opportunity for the most marginalised, so women's leadership becomes less about breaking ceilings and more about redesigning the room for everyone to thrive.



“I have learned that not everyone who applauds you is for you, and not every delay is denial, some seasons are simply refining seasons”

Concluding words

In 2025, I came across two insights online that reinforced a simple truth for me, I must remain true to myself and stay anchored to what genuinely matters. They reminded me to be intentional at every stage of the years ahead, about the core things I want to do, live for, achieve, and explore, so that I don't drift through life on autopilot or get pulled off course by distractions and other people's expectations.

The first insight came from Nurse Bronnie Ware, a hospice nurse who spent 8 years caring for people who were dying and in their final days. From those intimate conversations, she documented the top five regrets she heard most often from her dying patients, reflections that struck me deeply and reinforced the urgency of living intentionally and true to myself.

The most frequent regret was wishing they had lived authentically, true to themselves, rather than conforming to other people's expectations. The second was wishing they hadn't spent so much of life working tirelessly, and the third was regretting a lack of courage to express how they truly felt. The fourth was wishing they had kept closer ties with friends, and the fifth was wishing they had given themselves permission to experience more happiness. I was sure that I did not want any of these to be my thoughts on my dying bed but to have a sense of inner peace and joy knowing that I had lived a fulfilled life of personal and professional impact.

The second insight came from the idea often described as the three-to-four generation rule, the reminder that, for most people, their personal memory lasts only as long as the generations who knew them in real life like their children, grandchildren, and perhaps great-grandchildren. After that, they can become more of a name than a person, remembered through fragments of stories rather than lived relationships. Many versions of this reflection also note that within about a century, your life's details may fade, your possessions will change hands, and strangers will occupy the

spaces you once called home.

The perspectives were sobering, but also clarifying. It pushed me to be deliberate about what I choose to live for, what I will prioritise, what legacy of impact I want to leave as my footprint on the earth, and the lives I hope to touch in meaningful, lasting ways.



“I long for leaders in Nigeria and across Africa who genuinely have a heart and deep care for the people they lead”

WOMAN EXECUTIVE

The Governance Gap: Women on Boards and What Still Needs to Change

By Wola Joseph-Condotti



It is no longer radical to say that boards perform better when women are present. The data supports it. The world acknowledges it. And in many ways, we have made progress. More women are being invited into boardrooms. Some are even being given the gavel. But for every woman who is made it to the top table, there are still too many who are stuck behind the glass watching, waiting, or walking away. The question is no longer just “Are women on boards?” The real question is: Are we shaping what boards become?

Representation vs Participation

There is a difference between being present and being powerful in a room. I have served on boards long enough to know the difference. Too many women are still battling 'tokenism'. Brought in to tick a diversity box, but never really handed the levers of influence. They attend the meetings, but are not always heard in them. They sign off on papers, but are excluded from real decisions. This is not inclusion. This is optics. And if we are going to build better boards (boards that lead with vision, values, and velocity) we must move

beyond symbolic seats to substantive leadership.

The Pipeline Problem

One of the biggest challenges is not at the board level, it is before it. We are not just facing a lack of female board members. We are facing a lack of prepared, positioned, and sponsored female board candidates. Why? Because many talented women are not being mentored with governance in mind. They are growing as operators, not as owners. They are excelling in execution, but not being exposed to the systems and conversations that build

board-level perspective. If we want more women in boardrooms, we must start preparing them earlier. With intentional mentoring. With real boardroom exposure. With leadership development that includes governance literacy, not just performance metrics. Boards do not just need diversity of gender. They need diversity of experience, diversity of thought, and diversity of conviction. And women bring all three if we give them the tools and access to walk in with confidence.

Silenced Voices and Culture Codes

Let us also talk about the silencing effect many women feel on boards. Sometimes it is subtle. Sometimes it is systemic. You question a financial model and get told to “leave that to the experts.” You raise a governance concern and it is brushed aside for being “too idealistic.” You disagree and get labelled “difficult.” Many women shrink in these spaces not because they are unsure of their competence but because the culture of the boardroom does not welcome their courage. This must change. Because when women feel silenced, organisations lose sound judgment. When diverse perspectives are ignored, risk increases. And when half the room is filtered out of meaningful participation, governance suffers.

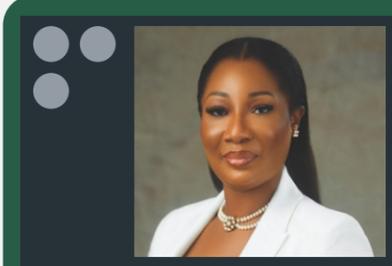
Fixing the Gap Strategically

We do not need pity placements. We need prepared, positioned, and purpose-driven women in governance. And we need boardrooms that:

- Embrace structured onboarding for new female directors
- Promote mentorship and sponsorship, not just vague encouragement
- Demand inclusive facilitation during meetings
- Value governance ethics as much as strategy and finance
- Create pipelines, not just panels

Final Thoughts

The goal is not to fill boards with women. The goal is to build boards where everyone contributes meaningfully. Where women do not just show up, but shape direction, steward values, and speak with authority. Women in governance are not just adding balance they are adding brilliance. So let us not stop at the visible progress. Let us fix the invisible gaps. Because when we strengthen governance with equity, we do not just empower women, we empower institutions to lead better, last longer, and serve deeper.



Wola Joseph Condotti

Chief Executive Officer, Eko Electricity Distribution Company

Wola is the CEO of Eko Electricity Distribution Company (Eko Disco).

Prior to her current role, she was 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.

Wola Joseph Condotti was also 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.

GENDER INSIGHTS

Empowering Nigerian women economically through the World Bank project

Asmau Benzie Leo



On the 5th of February 2026, Nigeria reaffirmed its commitment to inclusive growth with the official launch of the Nigeria for Women Project Scale-Up (NFWP-SU), a flagship, World Bank assisted programme designed to deepen women's economic empowerment and social inclusion nationwide. The launch, held at the State House Conference Hall in Abuja, which marked a transition from a successful pilot phase to a broader national effort capable of reaching millions of women across states and communities. The scale-up builds on the achievements of the initial pilot project, the Nigeria for Women Project, which was implemented in selected pilot states. The first phase adopted a community driven model centred on Women Affinity Groups (WAGs), which is a self-organised collective that enabled women to save together through a village savings and loans association (VSLA), access internal loans, receive financial literacy and life skills training, and engage in livelihood activities.

Evidence from the pilot phase, NFWP had shown measurable improvements in women's income stability, access to basic financial services, entrepreneurial confidence, and household decision

making. Importantly, the project demonstrated that economic empowerment is most sustainable when women build social capital alongside financial assets. The newly launched scale-up phase significantly expands this vision. With support from the World Bank through the Federal Government of Nigeria, aims to strengthen the institutional delivery, leverage digital solutions, and bring additional interested states into a unified national framework.

One of the key innovations introduced into the project at this stage is a technology-enabled platform designed to connect these women to training opportunities, access to markets,

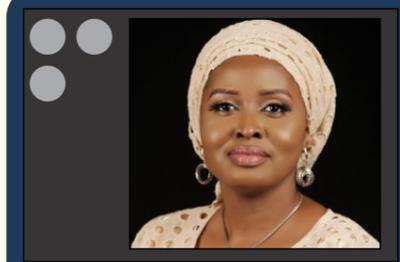
financial services, and government support programmes. By reducing information and access gaps, the scale-up seeks to ensure that women in rural, peri-urban, and underserved areas are not left behind.

At the launch, the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, underscored that women's economic empowerment is not a peripheral social issue but a strategic pillar of national development. He noted that empowering women contributes directly to poverty reduction, food security, social stability, and economic productivity. Framed within Nigeria's broader reform and development agenda, the Nigeria for Women

quality, integrating social safeguards, gender-based violence prevention, and inclusion measures to protect women as they engage more actively in economic life. By aligning the project with Nigeria's national gender and development priorities, the Ministry has positioned it as a long-term institutional programme rather than a one-off intervention. The scale-up also opens new opportunities for additional states to join the initiative. State governments are being encouraged to align their development plans with the project framework, establish functional implementation structures, and invest in women-centred economic initiatives. As more states come on board, the programme is expected to create a nationwide ecosystem that supports women-led enterprises, cooperatives, and value chain participation.

For Nigerian women, the practical benefits are significant. Participation in Women Affinity Groups offers a structured pathway to savings, credit, skills acquisition, and collective enterprise development. Through group based businesses ranging from agriculture and agro processing to trade, services, and small manufacturing, women can move beyond subsistence activities, expand market access, and create employment within their communities. The digital platform further enhances access to information, mentorship, and public services, enabling women to make informed economic decisions.

The Nigeria for Women Project Scale-Up represents a shift from pilot success to systemic impact by consolidating lessons from the first phase and expanding them nationwide. The programme has the potential to reposition women as central actors in Nigeria's economic transformation. If sustained with strong political will, adequate financing, and effective state level implementation, it can serve as a powerful catalyst for inclusive growth, affirming that empowering Nigerian women is essential to building a resilient, a more peaceful and prosperous nation.



Dr. Asmau Benzie Leo

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

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

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

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

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

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



FINANCIAL AdviseHER

Before You Invest Again, Know Your SGAR

By Sola Adesakin



One of the most common money mistakes people make is investing without context. A friend shares a success story.

Social media flashes screenshots of returns. A colleague says, "Just try it." And suddenly, you're putting money into something you barely understand, hoping it works out. Personal finance does not work that way. What builds wealth for one person can quietly destroy peace for another. Before

you invest, there are four critical things you must understand about yourself. I call them SGAR: Situation, Goals, Age, and Risk. Miss any one of them, and even a "good" investment can become a bad decision.

S Situation: Know Where You Are

Your financial situation is the foundation of every money decision. It includes your income stability, existing savings, debts, responsibilities, health, and even emotional state. Someone earning a steady salary with no dependents is in a very different position from someone running a volatile business, paying school fees, and supporting extended family. Yet, both often invest the same way. If you have no emergency fund, irregular income, or outstanding high-interest debt, your priority may not be aggressive investing. It may be stabilising cash flow, building savings, or cleaning up liabilities. Investing without acknowledging your situation is like building a house without checking the soil. The structure may look fine, but it will not stand pressure. Personal finance is deeply personal. One size does not fit all, no matter how attractive the returns look.

G Goals: Know Why You Are Investing

Every investment should answer one simple question: What is this money for? Are you investing for short-term needs like rent, school fees, or relocation? Medium-term goals like buying property or funding a business? Or long-term goals such as retirement and legacy planning? Many people invest without goals and then panic when markets fluctuate. If your goal is five years away, short-term volatility matters less. If your goal is twelve months away, riskier assets may not be appropriate. Clarity brings calm. When you know your goal, you choose investments that serve it. Without goals, money moves randomly, and random money decisions rarely build wealth.

A Age: Respect Time and Season

Age is not about how young or old you feel; it is about time horizon. A 25-year-old investor has time to recover from market

downturns. A 50-year-old investor has less room for error, especially if retirement is approaching.

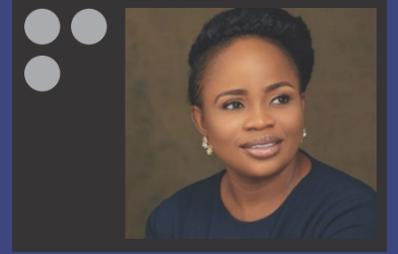
This does not mean older people cannot take risks or younger people should be reckless. It means your age should influence your asset mix and strategy. Younger investors can afford to focus more on growth-oriented assets because time is on their side. Older investors may prioritise capital preservation and steady income. Ignoring age often leads to unnecessary anxiety or irreversible losses. Time is one of the greatest assets in investing. Use it wisely.

R Risk: Know Your Temperament

Risk is not just about numbers; it is emotional. Can you watch your investment drop by 20 percent and still sleep well at night? Or will it give you high blood pressure and daily panic? Different asset classes carry different risk profiles. Stocks fluctuate. Real estate can be illiquid. Business investments can fail. Even so-called "safe" investments carry risks if misunderstood.

Your risk tolerance must match your personality, not someone else's confidence. An investment that causes constant stress is not building wealth; it is stealing peace. There is no reward for suffering through investments you do not understand or cannot emotionally handle. Successful investing is not about chasing the highest returns. It is about alignment. When your situation, goals, age, and risk tolerance are in sync, your money works with you, not against you. Two people can invest in the same asset and have completely different outcomes because their SGARs are different. One will stay calm and consistent. The other will panic and exit at the wrong time.

Before you invest, pause. Ask yourself: Where am I right now? Why am I investing? How much time do I have? What level of risk can I truly handle? Wealth is not built by copying others. It is built by making informed, intentional decisions that fit your life. Know your SGAR, and you will invest with clarity, confidence, and peace.



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 InstructorSM and a member of the Personal Finance Speakers Association.

MADE FOR MORE

The Achievement to Assignment Shift

...Moving from what you've achieved to what you're called to build

By Ifeoma Chuks-Adizue



For many Career Women, achievement comes early. You learn the rules and with time, you master the game. You rise through competence, consistency and grit. You got that degree...got that promotion...then that second or even third degree...delivered results at work... Then quietly without you even realizing it, something shifted.

You can't really put your finger on it... It's not dissatisfaction...nor lack of ambition...it's just there, unearthing questions like - Is this all I am here to do? This is the moment many career women misinterpret.

Some assume they are being ungrateful. Others think they are tired or bored...meanwhile, what is really happening is a transition - the transition from Achievement to Assignment.

Achievement is about what you have proven you can do... Assignment is about what you have been entrusted to build even before the achievements came along Achievement measures performance... Assignment measures impact. Achievement asks - "What have I accomplished?"... Assignment asks, "What am I meant to leave behind?" But hold up, so we get this right...

Breaking News 1: Assignment isn't always Charity. It's any purpose-inspired work that improves lives and creates impact. It can show up through business, leadership, innovation, systems, platforms or products. Purpose is also not confined to non-profits or foundations. It is expressed wherever lives are changed because you showed up fully to do what God had in mind when He created you.

Breaking News 2: That this transition has shown up in your life does not mean your job no longer counts or you should quit your career or lose interest in delivering results..

It simply means that achievement alone has stopped satisfying you and your fulfillment is now tied to meaning, not just momentum.

So what do you do to make the transition from achievement to assignment as

fulfilling as possible....without burning everything down?

1. REINTERPRET THE RESTLESSNESS

That inner nudge is not rebellion or emptiness in itself....it's re-direction. Assignment often announces itself as restlessness, not because something is wrong, but because something more is required. So instead of asking, "What's wrong with me?" ask - What is this season inviting me to build?

2. REDEFINE SUCCESS

Achievement-focused success asks - Did I win?
Assignment-focused success asks - Did I contribute?

Begin to measure your work not only by output but by impact. Who is better within and beyond your workplace because you showed up? What capacity are you building in others? What systems will last beyond you?

3. DETACH YOUR IDENTITY FROM YOUR TITLES

Titles describe roles not purpose. If your sense of worth is tied only to what you do at work, moving into the 'assignment' phase may feel scary and come with the fear of losing relevance. Though the real truth is that you won't even lose relevance. If anything, assignment delivers impact and strengthens relevance where it is most important.

4. START SMALL, START NOW

Assignment does not require a grand launch.It can begin quietly through mentoring, writing, building frameworks, sharing insights, testing ideas or solving problems you deeply care about. Start where you are and grow through action.

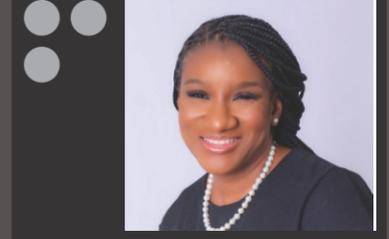
5. BUILD ALONGSIDE YOUR CAREER, NOT AGAINST IT

Your career is not the enemy of your assignment. It is often the training ground, funding stream and credibility platform for it. The goal is not escape...it's integration.

In closing...

Achievement got you here but Assignment is calling you forward. Take the leap and discover deeper levels of fulfillment you never knew possible... and your career need not shrink to allow this.

Until next week, keep saying YES to your MORE.



By Ifeoma Chuks-Adizue

Managing Director Africa at Global Citizen

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

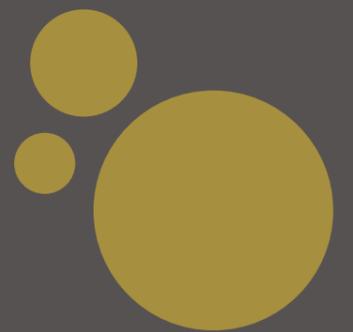
Iphie is the Managing Director Africa at Global Citizen - an international advocacy organisation focused on ending extreme poverty now.

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

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

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

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



HER POINT OF VIEW

The Power of a Single Yes: How One Call Changed Everything

Chinyere Okorochoa

Some of the biggest breakthroughs in our lives don't arrive as grand speeches or dramatic miracles. Sometimes, they arrive as a single yes. One person. One decision. One unexpected act of support that shifts the entire story.

I learned this lesson in one of the most pressure-filled moments of my professional journey.

In 2022, I stepped into my first year as Chairperson of the Nigerian Bar Association Women Forum. It was an exciting new season, but it came with a weight I felt deeply. One of my earliest major responsibilities was to ensure that our 3rd Annual General Conference was held successfully. It wasn't just an event. It was part of a growing legacy. It was proof that the Forum was here to stay, building an institution that would empower women lawyers across the country. I wanted us to do it well. Not just for appearances, but for impact. But two weeks to the conference, reality hit hard.

Despite my best efforts, we hadn't raised enough funds. The pressure was mounting, deadlines were closing in, and the gap in our budget felt like a loud alarm that wouldn't stop ringing.

Those days were a blur of calls, messages, follow-ups, and promises

that simply weren't materialising. I barely slept. I kept refreshing my phone like money would appear by magic if I stared long enough. I carried the anxiety quietly, but it was heavy.

It got so overwhelming that at one point, my husband had to caution me about my health. He watched the sleepless nights, the constant tension, the way I was pushing myself, and he offered to give us the money if it came to that. His support touched me deeply, but I also knew this couldn't become a personal bailout. This was bigger than me. This was an institution. This was a collective mission.

Determined not to let the tradition die on our watch, my incredible Conference Planning Committee and Executive Council did what strong teams do in hard seasons. We adjusted. We got strategic. We cut costs.

We shifted from a two-day physical event to a hybrid model. One day in-person, the second day virtual. It was a practical decision, and it reduced our expenses significantly.

But we still needed funding.

Then came a moment I will never forget.

Two members of our community introduced me to a highly regarded Senior



Advocate of Nigeria and former Senator. A woman of stature, influence, and impeccable reputation. I had never met her personally, but I understood what her support could mean, not just financially, but in credibility and momentum. With nothing to lose, I made the call. I explained who we were. I spoke about our mission. I shared why the NBA Women Forum mattered. I painted the long-term picture, the kind of future we were building for women in the profession, and why this conference was important. She listened attentively. She didn't rush me. She didn't sound distracted. She asked a few questions, then assured me of her support. We ended the call, and I thanked her sincerely.

But deep down, I wasn't certain she would come through. Not because she wasn't sincere, but because I had been disappointed too many times in the weeks leading up to that moment. I had learned that promises can be beautiful and still fail to show up.

A few days later, I received a call from my Treasurer.

Her voice was shaking with excitement. "Chair, ten million naira has been deposited into our account." I froze. I asked her to repeat it. Then I asked, half in disbelief, "Are you sure?"

She laughed and said she had counted the zeros to confirm.

Ten million naira. I was stunned.

That single act of generosity changed everything. It covered almost half our budget. And as if that deposit unlocked something in the atmosphere, other pledges began to roll in. People who had been silent suddenly responded. Commitments that had been shaky became firm. Long-standing relationships I had built over the years came through in ways that reminded me that sometimes, your harvest arrives when you need it most.

In the end, we not only delivered a successful conference, we even had a tidy sum left in our coffers.

But more important than the money was what that season taught me.

The first lesson is perseverance. There are moments when you will feel like quitting, not because you lack vision, but because the pressure is intense. Keep moving. Keep adjusting. Keep showing up. Sometimes your breakthrough is closer than your exhaustion can see.

The second lesson is the power of community. No matter how capable you are, you will always need people. You need introductions. You need support. You need collaboration. You need someone who believes in the vision enough to lend their strength.

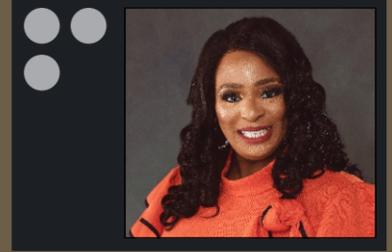
The third lesson is simple but life-changing. Never be afraid to ask. Many women struggle with asking, for help, for sponsorship, for support, for opportunity. We fear rejection. We fear looking needy. We fear being seen as demanding. But asking is not weakness. Asking is leadership. Asking gives people the chance to participate in something meaningful.

The fourth lesson is to never underestimate the relationships you've nurtured over time. Your network is not just social, it is strategic. People remember integrity. They remember consistency. They remember how you made them feel. And when your moment of need arrives, those relationships can become a lifeline.

To that distinguished Senator, and to everyone who made it possible, I remain deeply grateful.

And I'll leave you with this thought. Sometimes, you don't need a hundred people to say yes. You just need one.

Has anything similar ever happened to you? I would love to hear your story.



Chinyere Okorochoa

Partner in the Law Firm of JACKSON, ETTI & EDU

With over three decades of experience as a trailblazer in the legal profession, Chinyere Okorochoa 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 AT THE HELM

Lola Fatoyinbo (PhD)

Visiting Professor at MIT, Space and Forest Ecologist
& National Geographic Explorer

The inspiring story of Lola Fatoyinbo's love for discovery started when she was in her teenage years. From Ivory Coast and then Benin in West Africa, she saw firsthand, what environmental pollution and deforestation caused and chose to do something about it especially as it also affected the poor. Traveling across nations with her parents aided her experiences of these situations and it spurred her desire even more to become an explorer and scientist. In her interview with Avery Truman, published in National Geographic (Newsroom), she said "When I saw that first image of Africa from space, I thought this is how astronauts must feel when they look down at Earth. I realised that I could use this data to explore every corner of our planet, especially those areas that were understudied or inaccessible."

Today, Lola is a visiting Professor at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, a National Geographic Explorer

at National Geographic Society, an external advisory board member at Congo Basin Institute, a Scientific Working Group Member at The Blue Carbon Initiative, and was a research scientist at NASA for over 15 years, where her responsibilities included conducting, publishing, presenting, and competing for funding for research focused on using and developing NASA technology to study the global carbon cycle, climate change, land use change and biodiversity. 45 + grants were received, 18 as principal investigator.

Lola's passion includes earth observation of vegetation structure, carbon stocks, state and land cover change, science to support the UN sustainable development goals, characterising the vulnerability and response of coastal ecosystems to disturbances from land use and climate change, LiDAR and SAR remote sensing of upland and coastal ecosystem structure, conservation, new instrument and new technology development, airborne and field campaigns, applications of

carbon monitoring and ecosystem services accounting.

Each year, the EC50 recognises people who are doing remarkable work to promote science and exploration, and this reflects the diversity of individuals on the cutting edge of exploration around the world. Lola was recently honoured to be selected among them. According to her, "It's such an honour to be amongst them, selected by The Explorers Club's Club as part of the 2026 EC50 cohort, recognising 'The Fifty People Changing the World that the World Needs to Know About.'" She said.

Lola Fatoyinbo is a recipient of the US Presidential Early Career Award in Sciences and Engineering, and the 2024 Royal Geographical Society Esmond B Martin Prize for her efforts on merging scientific priorities with advanced technology to develop innovative applications for ecosystems science. She bagged her B.A in Biology and PhD in Environmental Sciences, both from the University of Virginia, USA.



WE'VE GOT MEN

Idorenyen Enang

CEO at Corporate Shepherds Limited
& Executive in Residence at LBS

Idorenyen Enang is the CEO of Corporate Shepherds Limited and an Executive in Residence at Lagos Business School, Pan-Atlantic University.

Corporate Shepherds provides customised solutions for businesses, individuals and organisations based on their assessed needs and requirements. This relates specifically to business strategy, organisational development and executive coaching. Their approach takes cognisance of the target entity's culture, diversity and values, utilising same as springboard to shape the solution.

Idorenyen setup Corporate Shepherds as a social enterprise to support individuals and businesses to achieve greater levels of performance and productivity. He is a business and leadership coach with strong competencies in building

commercial and business acumen, strategic planning and management. He currently supports a cross section of clients across the FMCG, financial, food and technology sectors as consultant.

Idorenyen was also former Managing Director, L'Oréal Central West Africa and Managing Director, Nigeria, Samsung Electronics West Africa, where he had the General Management responsibility for the growth, development and profitability of the Samsung brand across all the core divisions (Home Appliances, Audio & TV, Hand Held Devices, IT Products and B2B) to deliver share-owner value for the Nigeria business unit.

As Commercial Director, Cadbury Nigeria Plc, he led the Sales & Marketing and provided strategic leadership and change management

initiatives to facilitate the quick turnaround for the Cadbury business which was almost going moribund. According to Idorenyen, it is one of the great success stories of share owner recovery in volume, value and profitability in today's corporate reckoning. "I look back at this with nostalgia and give glory to God and the great team I had the privilege to work with."

Idorenyen was Franchise Manager - East & Central Region, Coca-Cola Nigeria & Equatorial Africa Limited, but before then, he was Executive Assistant to the Division President, Coca-Cola Nigeria & Equatorial Africa, and his responsibility was to provide support to the Division President covering strategic planning and decision making, special business development projects, corporate relations, visioning and thought leadership.



HOLISTIC LIVING

Mental Health at Work Is a Holistic Wellbeing Imperative

By Dr. Maymunah Yusuf Kadiri

For many people, the workplace is where their health is quietly shaped, for better or worse. It is where stress accumulates, where habits are reinforced, where energy is drained or restored, and where emotional wellbeing is either supported or silently eroded. Yet for decades, organisations focused almost exclusively on output, often ignoring the human cost behind performance. That approach is no longer sustainable.

Tunde works in a fast-growing company known for its ambition and high standards. He is talented, dependable, and deeply committed to his role. But beneath his competence is a body constantly on edge. Long hours, unclear

expectations, and the unspoken rule of “always being available” have taken their toll. He sleeps poorly. His blood pressure has crept up. He feels irritable at home and mentally exhausted at work.

Tunde does not think of this as a mental health issue. He simply believes this is the price of success. But his body knows otherwise. This is why promoting mental health in the workplace is not merely a corporate trend. It is a holistic wellbeing intervention that directly shapes the physical, emotional, and social health of employees.

Mental health and physical health are inseparable. Chronic workplace stress keeps the body in a constant state of

alert. Stress hormones remain elevated, disrupting sleep, digestion, immunity, and cardiovascular health. Over time, this biological strain shows up as headaches, body pain, frequent illnesses, hypertension, anxiety, depression, burnout, and emotional numbness.

When mental health is neglected at work, the body carries the burden.

Conversely, when organisations actively support mental wellbeing, employees do not just feel better emotionally, their overall health improves. They sleep more consistently, regulate stress more effectively, eat more regularly, and engage in healthier coping behaviours. Mental safety creates physical stability.

A mentally healthy workplace begins with culture.

Culture is not what is written in policy manuals. It is what happens when an employee admits they are overwhelmed. It is how managers respond to mistakes. It is whether rest is respected or subtly punished. In environments where burnout is normalised and silence is rewarded, personal health deteriorates quietly.

However, workplaces that promote mental health create cultures of psychological safety. Employees feel permitted to speak, to ask for support, and to set boundaries without fear. This sense of safety allows the nervous system to settle, enabling focus, creativity, collaboration, and resilience. Leadership is pivotal.

Managers who are trained to recognise emotional strain, listen without judgement, and respond with empathy shape the wellbeing of entire teams. When leaders model balance, take breaks, and respect boundaries, employees feel less pressure to self-destruct in the name of productivity. Feeling seen and valued protects against anxiety, disengagement, and chronic stress. Policies reinforce culture.

Flexible working arrangements, reasonable workloads, access to mental health resources, and clear expectations around availability are not indulgences. They are protective health measures. Employees who experience autonomy over their time report lower stress levels, better physical health, and improved job satisfaction.

Workplace mental health promotion also strengthens relationships at work and beyond.

Unmanaged stress spills over. It affects communication, patience, parenting, and partnerships. When employees are mentally supported at work, they carry less emotional tension home. This improves family relationships, social connection, and overall quality of life. From a performance perspective, the

evidence is clear.

Burnout is expensive. Presenteeism, absenteeism, errors, conflict, and staff turnover drain organisations far more than preventive wellbeing initiatives ever will. Mentally healthy employees are not slower. They are clearer. They make better decisions, recover faster from setbacks, and contribute more sustainably. Holistic wellbeing at work also involves meaning.

Employees who understand how their work contributes to a broader purpose experience greater resilience. Purpose buffers stress. Feeling aligned and valued reduces emotional exhaustion and strengthens commitment.

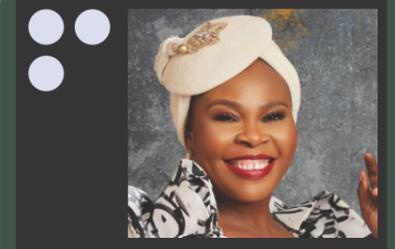
Importantly, promoting mental health does not mean lowering standards or avoiding accountability. It means designing systems that recognise human limits and support long-term excellence.

Simple actions make a difference: regular check-ins, manager training, mental health awareness sessions, access to counselling services, reasonable deadlines, and policies that protect rest. These interventions send a powerful message that people matter, not just performance.

For employees like Tunde, a mentally healthy workplace could mean more than reduced stress. It could mean better sleep, improved physical health, stronger relationships, and renewed motivation. It could mean a career that enhances life instead of consuming it. Workplaces are not separate from personal health. They are central to it.

When organisations invest in mental health, they are investing in the whole human being, the mind, body, and emotional wellbeing. They are building environments where people can thrive, not just survive. Healthy workplaces do not simply increase productivity. They protect lives.

In a world where work occupies so much of our existence, that may be one of the most meaningful legacies an organisation can leave behind.



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.

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