



INSPIRING
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NIKE KERSTIN
AKERELE-DE SOUZA

STRATEGIC LEADER WITH GLOBAL PROFICIENCY

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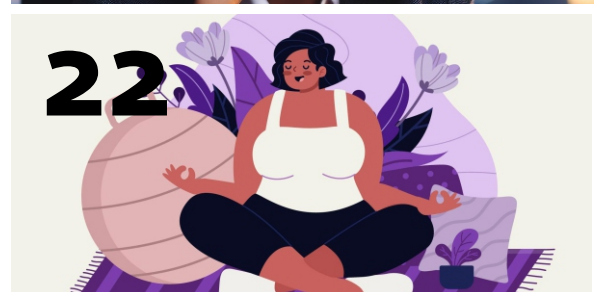
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**If You're New to Investing,
Start With Sense**



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Welcome!

Dear Readers,

Welcome to another edition of Inspiring Woman Africa (IWA). We are still in celebration mode and it is all about celebrating women in the month of March. On our cover this week is NIKE KERSTIN AKERELE-DE SOUZA, the strategic leader with global proficiency.

Nike Kerstin Akerele-De Souza is a strategic and operational leader with international experience in Big 4 consulting, the private sector, development, and social impact sectors. She has been fortunate to live and work across sub-Saharan Africa, the USA, and the UK, building a career that has been as diverse as it has been fulfilling.

As a C-suite executive, she has played a key role in developing organisational strategies and driving execution, with leadership oversight for finance, people, governance, and risk.

A decisive and inclusive leader with calm and effective leadership in periods of growth and change, an advisor and subject matter expert on human resources, diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), and social impact, she has also chaired and contributed to board committees on people, culture, nominations, programmes, finance, and risk. Believe us when we say you will find this very insightful!

Here are other articles in this edition:

FINANCIAL ADVISEHER: If You're New to Investing, Start With Sense. By Sola Adesakin.

WOMAN EXECUTIVE: The Hidden ROI: Investing in People Before Platforms. By Wola Joseph Condotti.

GENDER INSIGHT: Nigeria at CSW70: Strengthening Access to Justice and Rights for Women and Girls. By Asmau Benzies-Leo.

HOLISTIC LIVING: Give to Gain: Why Women's Holistic Wellbeing Is the Real Power Move for IWD2026. By Dr. Maymunah Yusuf Kadiri.

TRIBE WITH THE VIBES: Purpose Is Not a Lost Gem.

WE'VE GOT MEN: Dr. Guevera Yao, U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Vice President, Africa.

WOMAN AT THE HELM: Monica Katebe Musonda, Founder, Java Foods Limited.

Don't forget, the celebration continues! Happy International Women's Month.

See you soon!



COVER INTERVIEW

NIKE KERSTIN AKERELE-DE SOUZA

STRATEGIC LEADER WITH
GLOBAL PROFICIENCY

Kemi Ajumobi




ike Kerstin Akerele-De Souza is a strategic and operational leader with

international experience in Big 4 consulting, the private sector, development, and social impact sectors. She has been fortunate to live and work across sub-Saharan Africa, the USA, and the UK, building a career that has been as diverse as it has been fulfilling. She possesses expertise in finance, human resources, risk management, governance, compliance, operations management, and program design and implementation, serving as a trusted advisor to boards, leadership teams, and senior management. As a C-suite executive, she has played a key role in developing organisational strategies and driving execution, with leadership oversight for finance, people, governance, and risk.

A decisive and inclusive leader with calm and effective leadership in periods of growth and change, an advisor and subject matter expert on human resources, diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), and social impact, she has also chaired and contributed to board committees on people, culture, nominations, programmes, finance, and risk.

In 2003, she transitioned into entrepreneurship. "Building a human resources (HR) consulting business from the ground up was exhilarating and humbling. It challenged me to think strategically while staying



"I grew up in a family deeply committed to social justice and public service in Nigeria"



grounded in people's needs." She stated. She is Principal Consultant/Strategic Advisor, Dressler KBO Consulting, where she works closely with leadership teams and the Boards of purpose-driven organisations (non-profits, social enterprises, social impact initiatives) to understand their challenges, needs, and potential opportunities. Nike is driven by the desire to make a meaningful impact wherever she finds herself. She is focused on building institutions that are not only mission-driven, but resilient by design. She is committed to investing in human capital development, with a personal focus on education (skills development, employability), leadership development, gender, and youth empowerment.

► Formative years and influence till date

I grew up in a family deeply committed to social justice and public service in Nigeria. This shaped my character and values from a young age. Our home was a gathering place for political leaders and a venue for important family and national discussions. My father, Chief Babs Akerele, was actively involved in politics in Lagos State and at the national level. My paternal grandfather, Chief Abiodun Akerele, was one of the founding members of the Action Group, a formidable political party that played a critical role in Nigeria's path to independence.

Their legacy, along with the guidance of mentors throughout my career, profoundly shaped my worldview. From an early age, I understood that my life had to be anchored in service and purposeful leadership. I have always felt a desire to give back to society and the responsibility to use my knowledge, skills, and resources to create positive change wherever I find myself. I learned that character matters more than status, and that life is not merely about personal success but about significance. This conviction has guided my decisions, shaped my career, and has continued to define the life I strive to live.

► Motivation for transitioning from a career in Big Four consulting to becoming a strategic leader in the non-profit and social impact sectors?

I felt compelled to contribute more directly to human capital development in the country. This led me into entrepreneurship, where I established a human resources (HR) consulting firm, PeoplePrime, and an HR outsourcing firm, PeopleTemp. Through our graduate recruitment services, I gained insight into the widening skills gap and the structural inequalities affecting young people

from disadvantaged communities. I became increasingly concerned about the barriers limiting their opportunities and the overall quality of education feeding into the workforce. I was determined to understand the root causes, so I began examining the challenges within Nigeria's primary and secondary education systems to address systemic issues of access and quality. This journey ultimately led to my role in establishing Teach for Nigeria, a non-profit organisation dedicated to cultivating a movement of young leaders committed to ensuring an excellent education for all Nigerian



"My paternal grandfather, Chief Abiodun Akerele, was one of the founding members of the Action Group, a formidable political party that played a critical role in Nigeria's path to independence"



children. That experience marked a defining shift in my career and continues to shape my work across the broader social impact sector.

► **Human capital development has been a consistent thread throughout your career. Why has investing in people remained central to your philosophy?**

I believe everyone deserves access to education, healthcare, water, electricity, and housing. These are the basic building blocks for a meaningful life. Across my career, I have witnessed the

barriers that inequality creates and the ways it limits potential, especially for those from disadvantaged communities. With Africa's demography and the continent with the

“I began examining the challenges within Nigeria's primary and secondary education systems to address systemic issues of access and quality”

youngest population, I see lots of opportunities for our youth, but only if we address the barriers to access for them.

For me, it's not enough to recognise the problem; I feel a responsibility to be part of the solution. Whether through developing talent in organisations, creating opportunities for young leaders, or supporting social impact initiatives, creating transformative impact, I have always sought to empower people to reach their full potential.

► **What pivotal moment in your career significantly shaped your approach to leadership?**

A pivotal period in my career was my early experience at Andersen Nigeria, now KPMG. It was a work environment defined by high standards, discipline, and performance. Client demands were intense, but what distinguished the firm was its uncompromising commitment to the values of transparency, accountability, integrity, stewardship, and excellence, which align with my own values.

What truly shaped me, however, was the culture of service. We were encouraged to give our time and expertise to non-profit organisations, and through my involvement with institutions like MUSON, NESG, and Corona Schools, I began to see leadership differently. I realised that leadership was not about position or prestige; it was about responsibility and our role in strengthening institutions and society.

► **Most significant challenges you've faced while working across different regions, like Sub-Saharan Africa, the USA, and the UK, and how you overcame them**

I've had the privilege of working and living across different regions and each comes with its own unique challenges and opportunities. One of such challenges for me has been navigating differences in culture and work styles. Approaches to decision-making, communication, and leading teams can





vary widely, and adapting to these differences requires humility, empathy, and respect for local perspectives. Over the years, I developed a broad worldview, but I've always felt a strong sense of belonging in Nigeria and across Africa. At times, I've faced personal challenges, including experiences of racism in professional settings and general society outside Nigeria, which have tested me, but have also strengthened my resilience and commitment to inclusive leadership.

Another challenge is balancing global standards with local realities. The approach that has worked best for me is to create clear frameworks that provide consistency, while giving teams the flexibility to adapt to their local context. Fostering open dialogue, encouraging local ownership, and leading by example have been key to bridging differences and achieving results for me.

▶ **As a C-suite executive, what key strategies have you found to be most effective in driving organisational change?**

Vision as a leader is key, but change requires more than this. I believe it requires alignment, discipline, and trust. Over the years, working with various organisations, I have found three strategies particularly effective: clarity of purpose, leadership alignment, and disciplined execution.

Change needs to be anchored in a compelling “why” that connects strategy to values and long-term sustainability. When key stakeholders, especially employees, understand the purpose behind the change, resistance decreases and ownership increases.

We also can't underestimate the role of leadership. Transformation efforts will likely fail when the executive team is not visibly and consistently united. I try to prioritise building consensus at the top, within the leadership team, and the Board, ensuring that we model the behaviours and mindset shifts we expect across the organisation. This forms part of the culture, and change is about people and building trust and shared accountability. Finally, successful



“Organisations thrive when people feel valued, respected, and able to contribute their full potential”

execution is critical. Change is a process and takes time. It requires measurable milestones, clear accountability, and constant communication.

▶ **How do you approach decision-making in high-stakes situations, especially when dealing with diverse teams?**

As a leader, I am responsible for critical decisions and a range of strategic priorities. I try to stay calm and focused, making sure I understand the full picture before acting, though I'll admit, it's not always easy. Emotional intelligence is key. I believe in collaboration, and I make it a point to listen carefully to my team and key stakeholders. Different perspectives often reveal insights I might have missed. The best decisions, in my experience, come from combining experience, insight, and a shared sense of purpose. With my background in risk management, I also consider potential outcomes and mitigations to each scenario. I do my best to communicate openly about these possibilities, so

everyone understands why a decision is made and what it means for them and the organisation. When people feel included and understand the reasoning and possible impact of decisions, they are more committed and engaged, even when the choices are tough.

▶ **How important is fostering an inclusive culture within organisations?**

Organisations thrive when people feel valued, respected, and able to contribute their full potential. Inclusion encourages diverse perspectives, drives innovation, and strengthens decision-making. From my experience, creating an inclusive culture starts with leadership. Leaders must model the behaviour they want to see, listen actively, and ensure that policies, practices, and day-to-day interactions reflect fairness and respect. It's also about giving people a sense of ownership and belonging. It is difficult to be engaged and to feel included where there is no sense of belonging. Inclusion is a mindset. You must want to



include others and honour that diversity. This mindset, values, behaviour, and systems need to be embedded in the way an organisation operates. For me, it's a guiding principle that shapes how I build teams, make decisions, and drive lasting impact.

▶ **Approaches you emphasise when strengthening organisational resilience and enhancing operational effectiveness for purpose-driven organisations**

In purpose-driven organisations, every strategy, process, and decision must align with the mission and its underlying theory of change. This serves as a guiding compass to navigate uncertainty or change.

My experience serving clients over the years and my roles as CEO/COO have provided me with the competencies and frameworks to build strong systems and processes that are adaptable rather than rigid. Whilst navigating an increasingly uncertain and volatile global environment, organisations need to be

resilient and agile to adapt. Resilient and operationally effective organisations respond quickly to challenges without losing sight of their long-term goals. This means investing in people, structures, and systems, fostering a culture of accountability, building strong governance, decision-making, and risk management systems.

▶ **In practical terms, how does strong governance shape organisational credibility and long-term sustainability?**

I believe strong governance sets the standards for accountability, transparency, and ethical decision-making, ensuring that every action aligns with the organisation's mission and values. With clear structures, processes, and checks in place, stakeholders, whether they are employees, investors, partners, or the communities served, can trust that the organisation is well-managed and reliable. Trust not only protects reputation but also enables organisations

to attract talent, partnerships, and resources critical for long-term growth. Governance also allows organisations to navigate challenges and change more effectively. When roles, responsibilities, and decision-making frameworks are clear, teams can respond quickly, adapt responsibly, and maintain focus on strategic objectives. From my experience as a C-suite executive and a member of leadership teams and boards, I have seen the difference in the performance, impact, and resilience of organisations with sound governance.

▶ **What advice would you give to organisations seeking to align their missions with effective operational strategies?**

“I believe strong governance sets the standards for accountability, transparency, and ethical decision-making”

The mission should be clear, and operational strategies should align with the mission. As leaders, we must ensure that every goal, process, and structure directly supports the purpose of the organisation. Without alignment, well-intentioned efforts and plans can become fragmented or ineffective. I advise organisations to take a systematic approach. Starting with articulating the mission in actionable terms, translating it into measurable objectives, designing processes, allocating resources, and assigning responsibilities to support the set objectives. With regular reviews and open communication, strategies remain relevant and connected to the mission as the organisation grows and faces new challenges.

My time at UCL was an incredible experience, collaborating with students from around the world, exploring social challenges, and engaging in research and thought leadership was exhilarating. Then the COVID pandemic struck, presenting unexpected obstacles to the course and its execution. Despite the disruption, I stayed focused and resilient, completing the program successfully. Graduation day was a memorable moment, a personal milestone that reminded me that nothing is impossible. I have learnt to be persistent and to embrace challenges, no matter how intimidating they may seem.

most meaningful opportunities come from unexpected turns. I couldn't have imagined that a career initially in accountancy, along with several bold career transitions, could have led me to do what I do now.

I would also remind myself that resilience matters more than perfection. Challenges, setbacks, and even failures are often the greatest teachers. They build character, sharpen judgment, and strengthen resolve. Finally, to stay true to your values. Titles and achievements will come and go, but integrity, purpose, and the impact you have on others are what truly endure.

▶ **What are the most frequent challenges you encounter when advising non-profits and social enterprises?**

Many organisations are driven by a strong mission and want to do a lot, but they often face constraints in funding, talent, and operational capacity. Part of my role is helping them prioritise initiatives, build sustainable models, and focus on areas where they can create the greatest impact. I have seen that many founders and teams often start with passion, a cause that they are trying to address, or social innovations for transformative change. Making an impact in the community drives these organisations, but operationally, they don't have clear roles, structures, systems, processes, and reporting frameworks, making scaling impact difficult and unsustainable. Helping leadership teams implement simple, practical systems ensures they can deliver results consistently and build trust with stakeholders.

▶ **What day will you never forget and why?**

A few years ago, I made the decision to return to university to pursue a Master's degree at University College London (UCL). Balancing a demanding career, motherhood, and other commitments made the decision daunting, but it was one I knew was worth taking.

▶ **Most rewarding project or initiative you've led, and what impact did it have on the community or sector?**

Teach For Nigeria has been the most rewarding initiative of my career. Nine years after launching across several states, we have recruited and placed over 2,500 young leaders in schools serving disadvantaged communities, reaching more than 400,000 children to date. Beyond the numbers, what has been most encouraging is seeing tangible improvements in learning outcomes, as well as increased enrolment and attendance in the schools where we work. These outcomes affirm our belief that leadership, when placed where it is needed most, can transform lives.

As we look ahead, we are preparing to scale significantly across more states and deepen our partnerships with state governments. Our ambition is bold. We plan to mobilise 20,000 young leaders into the education sector over the next decade and contribute meaningfully towards ensuring quality education for every Nigerian child.

▶ **If you could give one piece of advice to your younger self, what would it be?**

To trust the journey and not rush the process. There were moments early in my career when I felt the pressure to have everything mapped out, to move faster, achieve more, and prove myself. With time, I've learned that some of the

▶ **It's International Women's Month. How does this year's theme speak to you?**

This year's theme is "Give to Gain," and it resonates deeply with me. Throughout my career and life, I've seen firsthand that when we invest in others through giving of our resources and time, the returns extend far beyond the individual.

Organisations and teams grow stronger, communities thrive, and people can live meaningful lives.

As a woman in leadership, I have the responsibility to lift others, open doors to opportunities, and support where needed. I believe that the "gain" is collective. This theme is a powerful reminder that generosity is not a loss; it's an investment in others.

▶ **Concluding words**

I love African proverbs and one of my favourites is:

"If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together."

Every time we choose collaboration over competition, community over individual glory, we're not just solving problems, we're living out the future we want to create.

"As a woman in leadership, I have the responsibility to lift others, open doors to opportunities, and support where needed. I believe that the "gain" is collective"



WOMAN EXECUTIVE

The Hidden ROI: Investing in People Before Platforms

By Wola Joseph-Condotti



When the world talks about return on investment, the conversation often centres on profit

margins, market share, and technological innovation. Strategy meetings revolve around digital platforms, process automation, and scalable models.

But if you strip away the slides, the projections, and the buzzwords, every vision still rises (or falls) on one thing: People.

The real ROI? It is not always found in platforms. It is found in potential. And the leaders who understand this do not just build companies. They build capacity.

Numbers Are Not Enough

I have sat in rooms where the pitch deck dazzled but the team behind it was fraying. I have seen ideas with brilliance on paper fail because people were burnt out, poorly led, or overlooked. And I have also seen modest beginnings soar because someone invested time, mentorship, and belief into another human being.

It is easy to forget that people build systems, people create culture, and people drive vision. Even the best technology needs hearts and minds behind it.

We often say, "People are our greatest asset," but in many organisations, people are the most underinvested resource.

The Cost of Underinvestment

When leaders prioritise output over wellbeing, they may meet short-term targets but they silently accumulate long-term deficits:

- Team members who are disengaged.
- Cultures where people compete instead of collaborate.
- High turnover masked by high performance.
- Loyalty that only lasts until the next offer.

These are invisible leaks in leadership often not captured on balance sheets, but deeply felt in culture.

The Long Game of Leadership

Real leadership is about seeing beyond today's report. It is about recognising that a seed planted in someone today may not bloom immediately, but when it does, it can change the entire landscape. Sometimes that seed is mentorship. Sometimes it is a chance. Sometimes it is just being seen.

I remember a young colleague early in my career who showed up with fire in her eyes but doubt in her voice. She had ideas

but lacked confidence. Instead of micromanaging, I chose to mentor. Years later, she now leads her own team, building with the same intentionality she once received.

That is the ROI that multiplies beyond the spreadsheet.

Human Capital is Legacy Capital

Every woman in leadership must ask: What will last after I leave the room? Not just the deals I closed. Not just the systems I scaled. But the lives I shaped.

When we invest in people:

- We create ecosystems of loyalty and innovation.
- We develop leaders who lead with both strength and soul.
- We sow into futures that will outlive our own timelines.

You can lose a platform and rebuild it. But when you pour into people, you create a leadership legacy that reproduces itself.

Faith, Influence and the "One" Even Jesus, with a global mission, never started with a crowd. He started with the one. He taught, He mentored, He empowered. And the ripple effect of those personal investments became movements, not moments.

That same principle applies today. One mentee. One colleague. One intern. The influence you sow may outlast the organisation you lead.

Final Thoughts

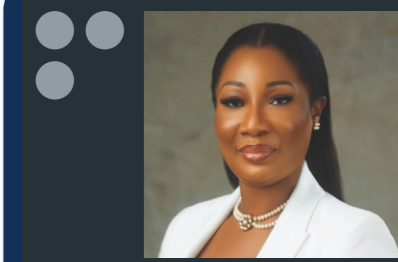
We are in an age where platforms are getting smarter, and people are burning out faster.

But leaders of vision and heart know: You cannot automate loyalty. You cannot outsource trust. You cannot scale authenticity without people who carry the culture.

So before you chase the next platform, pause and look around. Who needs your time? Who is waiting for a door to be opened? Who needs to know they matter beyond what they produce?

Because the hidden ROI is not in what you build. It is in who you build.

And when you invest in people, the returns are generational.



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

Nigeria at CSW70: Strengthening Access to Justice and Rights for Women and Girls

Asmau Benzies Leo

Each year, governments, civil society organisations, and gender advocates from around the world gather at the United Nations headquarters in New York for the annual session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW). Now in its 70th session, widely referred to as the 70th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW70), the forum remains the world's largest intergovernmental platform dedicated to promoting women's rights, reviewing global progress on gender equality, and shaping policies that advance the empowerment of women and girls. Member States participate by presenting national statements, sharing policy experiences, and committing to stronger actions that promote inclusive development.

The 70th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women, holds from March 9–19, 2026, focuses on the theme: "Ensuring and strengthening access to justice for all women and girls, including by promoting inclusive and equitable legal systems, eliminating discriminatory laws, policies, and practices, and addressing structural barriers." This priority theme reflects the growing global recognition that justice systems must work

effectively for women if societies are to achieve sustainable peace, development, and equality.

Nigeria is actively participating in CSW70 alongside other member states through an official government delegation coordinated by the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, under the leadership of the Honourable Minister, H.E Imaan Sulaiman-Ibrahim. The Nigerian delegation is presenting the country's national statement, engaging in ministerial dialogues, and highlighting key programmes and reforms aimed at strengthening gender equality and social inclusion. Nigeria's participation reflects its continued commitment to advancing the rights and opportunities of women and girls while contributing to the global discourse on gender justice.

In his opening remarks, António Guterres, the Secretary General of the United Nations, warned that women's rights across the world are facing renewed threats and setbacks. He emphasized that achieving justice for women and girls requires deliberate investments in legal protections, inclusive governance, and social systems that eliminate discrimination. According to him, strengthening justice systems is essential not only for protecting women but also

for building stable and prosperous societies.

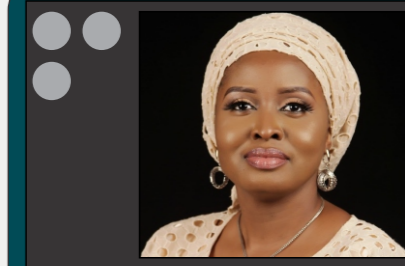
Nigeria's national statement at CSW70 aligns with this global call to action. The country reaffirmed its commitment to gender equality as a pillar of inclusive governance and sustainable development. Under the leadership of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu and the Renewed Hope Agenda, the government has declared 2026 as the "Year of Families and Social Development," emphasising that empowered women and resilient families are essential to national progress.

Nigeria also highlighted notable progress in social protection and economic inclusion. Over the past decade, the country's social protection framework has expanded significantly, from supporting fewer than one million households in 2015 to nearly ten million households in 2026. Women make up more than seventy percent of these beneficiaries, demonstrating a deliberate focus on empowering women economically and socially.

Furthermore, initiatives under the Renewed Hope Social Impact Interventions are working to expand livelihood opportunities, promote digital inclusion, improve access to clean energy, and strengthen financial empowerment for women across Nigeria's 774 local government areas. These initiatives aim to remove structural barriers that limit women's participation in economic, social, and civic life.

Nigeria's engagement at CSW70 therefore represents both a national commitment and a global partnership.

Beyond government efforts, Nigerian civil society organisations, gender advocates, and women leaders continue to play a critical role in advancing accountability, supporting survivors of injustice, and promoting inclusive policies. As discussions continue at the United Nations, Nigeria's voice contributes to a shared global vision: a world where women and girls enjoy equal access to justice, opportunity, and leadership, ensuring that gender equality becomes not only an aspiration, but a lived reality for all.


Dr. Asmau Benzies Leo

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

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

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

As Executive Director of the Centre for Non-violence and Gender Advocacy in Nigeria (CENCAIN), 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

If You're **New** to Investing, Start With Sense

By Sola Adesakin

One of the biggest mistakes new investors make is assuming that investing is about speed. They see people posting profits, stock picks, crypto wins, and “hot tips,” and suddenly they feel late. The pressure builds. The fear of missing out creeps in. And before long, they are buying things they do not understand, simply because everyone else seems excited. But here is the truth: before you chase returns, build sense. Investing is not a race. It is not a performance. It is not a lucky draw. It is a process of planning, positioning, and patience. If you are new to investing, your first goal is not to become rich overnight. Your first goal is to avoid avoidable mistakes. Even Jollof rice is cooked step by step. Nobody pours everything into the pot at once and expects magic. Investing works the same way. Learn in layers. Here are five important things to remember if you are just starting out.

1. Pace Yourself
You do not need to buy everything. Not all the stocks. Not all the crypto. Not every “hot” opportunity.

When people are new to investing, they often feel they must catch up quickly. So they open multiple apps, chase five asset classes at once, and spread themselves so thin that they end up confused and anxious. Pace yourself. Start with one area. Learn how it works. Understand the basics. Then

build gradually. It is better to know a few things well than to participate in everything poorly. A slow, steady beginning is more powerful than an excited, chaotic start.

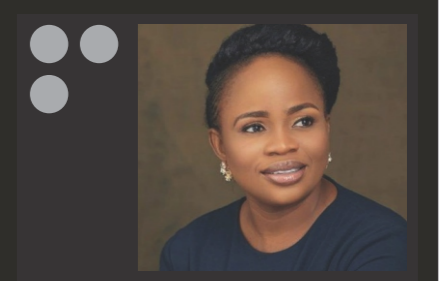
2. Pick With Sense, Not Noise
Do not invest because everyone is buying it. That is not a strategy. That is pressure. The fact that a stock is trending or a coin is being discussed in every WhatsApp group does not make it right for you. Noise is expensive. The market is full of stories, opinions, and hype. If you move with every wave of excitement, you will also feel every crash of panic. Choose investments because: You understand what they are You have done some research They fit your goals and risk appetite Good investing is quiet. It is based on clarity, not crowd control.

3. Pay for Knowledge
Education is cheaper than losses. Many people are willing to lose money in the market but unwilling to spend money learning how the market works. That is upside-down thinking. Read books. Take courses. Join communities. Learn from credible voices. Ask questions. Study financial statements. Understand the basics of risk, diversification, and compounding. You do not need to become an expert overnight, but you do need to become informed. The more you understand, the less likely you are to be moved by hype, fear, or manipulation. If you pay for knowledge now, you reduce the chances of paying heavily for ignorance later.

4. Build a Portfolio, Not Just a Position
One stock is not a strategy.
A real portfolio contains different asset types that work together. Stocks may offer growth. Mutual funds may provide managed exposure. Fixed income can add stability. Gold can serve as a hedge. Real estate offers another dimension of value and income. Diversification is not fear. It is discipline. You do not need all these asset classes on day one, but over time, your financial life should not depend on one thing performing well. A well-structured portfolio helps you manage risk and stay steadier through market changes. Think of it like building a balanced meal.

5. Learn Patience
One ingredient may be great, but it cannot do everything by itself. Markets move. Cycles change. Prices rise and fall. This is where many beginners struggle. They enter with excitement, expect immediate gains, and panic when things slow down or reverse. But solid businesses compound over time. Good assets need time to work. Impatience is what makes people sell winners too early, abandon plans too quickly, and jump from one thing to another without giving anything time to grow.

Investing is not gambling. It is not about guessing what will happen tomorrow. It is about positioning yourself intelligently and staying consistent long enough for growth to happen. If you are new to investing, keep this simple rule in mind: start with understanding, not urgency. Pace yourself. Pick with sense. Pay for knowledge. Build a portfolio. Learn patience. That is how real investors are formed. By learning in layers, like good Jollof, step by step, with attention, and with enough patience to let it come together properly.



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

Monica Katebe Musonda

Founder, Java Foods Limited

Monica Katebe Musonda is a multi-sector entrepreneur and corporate lawyer building businesses that drive economic transformation across Africa. As Founder and CEO of Java Foods, she has spent over a decade creating one of Zambia's leading food manufacturing companies, producing the iconic eeZee Noodles brand. Today, she is expanding her entrepreneurial portfolio into critical growth sectors: power trading and renewable energy through Kanona Power Company and Exergy Africa (where she serves as a Director), mining services through IFS Zambia.

Her entrepreneurial journey is built on a foundation of 25+ years of corporate law expertise. As a dual-qualified English Solicitor and Zambian Advocate, she navigated

complex mergers and acquisitions, capital markets transactions, and regulatory affairs across multiple jurisdictions. As former General Counsel and Director of Corporate Affairs for Aliko Dangote and the Dangote Group in Lagos, she spearheaded Dangote's \$400 million investment in Zambia and negotiated critical government incentives that unlocked the project's success. She brings strategic oversight to multiple organisations as an independent non-executive director, serving on both public sector and listed company boards. She currently chairs the board of Zambian Breweries and sits on the Advisory Board of Affirmative Finance Action for Women in Africa under the African Development Bank—a pan-African initiative addressing the financing gap facing women entrepreneurs.

Monica is passionate about creating pathways for women

in business and has been recognised as the 2017 African Agribusiness Entrepreneur of the Year and the 2021 Leading Agribusiness Entrepreneur of the Year. As a World Economic Forum Young Global Leader and Archbishop Desmond Tutu Leadership Fellow, she leverages these platforms to advocate for stronger African food systems, women's entrepreneurship, and private sector-led development.

Monica is a sought-after speaker on entrepreneurship, women's empowerment, and Africa's economic transformation. Her TEDx Euston talk has reached thousands globally, and she regularly delivers keynotes at international forums. She also maintains Camelot Advisory, her boutique advisory practice providing strategic counsel to businesses navigating Africa's dynamic markets.



WE'VE GOT MEN

Dr. Guevera Yao

U.S. Chamber of Commerce, Vice President, Africa

Dr. Guevera Yao is the Vice President, Africa for the U.S.-Africa Business Center at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. Yao oversees programmes and policy initiatives to broaden commercial relationships between the U.S. and African markets. He advises Chamber's Fortune 500 companies, Small & Medium Enterprises (SMEs), and government leaders to deepen and expand trade & investment opportunities between the U.S. and markets across Africa. He also leads a number of initiatives within the U.S. Chamber's U.S.-Africa Business Centre, including the Trade and Investment Task Forces, the U.S.-Angola Working Group, U.S.-Africa Digital Innovation Competition for African Start-ups, the U.S. Chamber – African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) Secretariat Joint Working Group, and the high-level dialogue between International Oil Companies

(IOCs) and the Africa Responsible Energy Steering Committee (RESC).

Yao is an economist and policy expert with over 20 years of experience in economic integration, regional infrastructure development, and trade and finance for several developing countries. He worked as Coordinator for the ECOWAS Regional Development Program for 8 years, based in Abuja, Nigeria. Prior to ECOWAS, Yao worked as a senior technical advisor for the governments of Tanzania and Namibia to provide policy guidance on the design and enactment of intergovernmental fiscal transfer systems for subnational governments.

He worked as a senior research associate for the International Centre for Public Policy at Georgia State University, where he contributed to several analytical studies. He also

provided consultancy services for the Urban Institute and the World Bank on urban service delivery in South Asia.

Dr. Yao is a MCC Advisory Council member and a Board Member of the ACIDI/VOCA. He holds a Master's and Ph.D. in Economics from the Andrew Young School of Policy Studies at Georgia State University. He is fluent in French, English, and several African languages.

Congratulations to him on recently becoming a member of the Sub-Saharan Africa Advisory Committee for Export-Import Bank of the United States. Established by Congress, the Sub-Saharan Africa Advisory Committee advises EXIM on policies that advance America-first financing and expand opportunities for U.S.-manufactured goods and services in Sub-Saharan Africa.

HOLISTIC LIVING

Give to Gain: Why Women's Holistic Wellbeing Is the Real Power Move for IWD2026

By Dr. Maymunah Yusuf Kadiri



International Women's Day is often filled with celebration — flowers, applause, conferences, and powerful speeches about resilience. But beyond the spotlight lies a more important question: how are women really doing? Across homes, offices, markets, hospitals, and classrooms, women continue to carry invisible weight. They give time, intellect, emotional labor, leadership, and care, often without pause. They show up, fix, nurture, organise, stabilise, and lead. And while society applauds their strength, many women are silently exhausted. This year, perhaps the most powerful message we can share is this: Give to Gain, but give wisely. For generations, women have been conditioned to give until they are empty. Sacrifice has been romanticised. Endurance has been glorified. Rest has

been labeled indulgent. The outcome is predictable: burnout, anxiety, hypertension, depression, strained relationships, and a gradual erosion of joy. Holistic wellbeing demands a rewrite of that script. Giving is not the problem. In fact, research consistently shows that purposeful giving such as mentorship, service, generosity, meaningful contribution activates reward pathways in the brain. It strengthens social bonds and increases life satisfaction. But there is a crucial distinction: aligned giving energizes; obligatory giving depletes. The difference lies in intention and boundaries. Holistic wellbeing goes far beyond spa days or surface-level self-care. It is the integration of physical health, emotional balance, mental clarity,

supportive relationships, and spiritual alignment. When one area suffers, the others inevitably follow. A woman who is chronically sleep-deprived cannot think clearly. A woman who suppresses her emotions cannot lead sustainably. A woman who neglects her health cannot continue to carry everyone else. Consider Ada, a 42-year-old executive and mother of three. On paper, she was thriving. She chaired committees, mentored colleagues, volunteered in her community, and excelled at work. She was admired. But privately, she was unraveling. Insomnia crept in. Irritability replaced patience. Her blood pressure rose. She felt overwhelmed but unable to say no. Ada believed her value was measured by how much she carried. Rest felt like weakness. Declining requests felt like failure. Her identity was built around being indispensable. Then she paused.

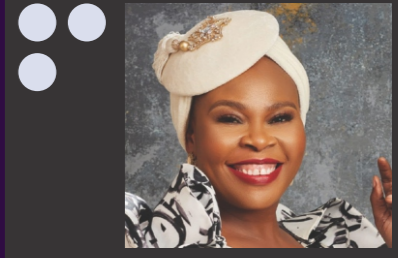
She realised she was giving from obligation, not alignment. That shift changed everything. She stepped down from roles that no longer reflected her values. She limited after-hours work calls. She focused on one mentorship initiative that truly mattered to her. She scheduled non-negotiable time for exercise and rest. Six months later, her energy improved. Her blood pressure stabilised. Her creativity returned. She became more present at home and more strategic at work. Ada did not give less — she gave better. And in doing so, she gained clarity, health, and influence. That is the power of give to gain. When women give with boundaries, they protect their longevity. When they give from overflow rather than emptiness, they sustain their impact. When they invest in themselves — therapy, movement, reflection, spiritual growth they build resilience that benefits everyone around them.

The ripple effect is profound. A regulated woman creates a calmer home. A mentally healthy leader builds a stronger organisation. Children raised by emotionally aware mothers learn healthy boundaries. Communities led by well women become more compassionate and innovative. Holistic wellbeing is not a private luxury; it is a public asset.

Yet, we must confront an uncomfortable truth: many systems reward overwork and overlook wellness. Workplaces often equate exhaustion with commitment. Cultures praise women who “do it all” without acknowledging the cost. If we truly want empowered women, we must normalize boundaries. We must design policies that support mental health. We must create safe spaces for conversations about burnout without stigma. Strength is not measured by how much you endure. It is measured by how wisely you manage your energy.

In this International Women's Month, the boldest act of empowerment may not be adding more to women's plates, but teaching them how to protect their capacity. It is redefining ambition to include rest. It is celebrating women not only for their productivity but for their wholeness. Imagine if every woman paused today to ask: Where am I giving from depletion? Where can I give from alignment instead? What do I need to receive so I can continue to lead? The wellbeing of women shapes the wellbeing of families, organisations, and nations. When women are well, economies are stronger. Relationships are healthier. Leadership is wiser. Innovation is bolder. Giving will always be part of a woman's story. But it must no longer come at the cost of herself.

This International Women's month, let us champion a new model of power rooted in holistic wellbeing. Let us raise daughters who understand that rest is strength. Let us build workplaces that value mental health as much as productivity. Let us honor women not just for how much they give, but for how sustainably they live. Give, yes. But give wisely. Because when women gain their wellbeing, the world gains its future.



Dr. Maymunah Yusuf Kadiri

Psychiatrist-In-Chief at Pinnacle Medical Services

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

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

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

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

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

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

TRIBE WITH THE VIBES

Purpose Is Not a Lost Gem

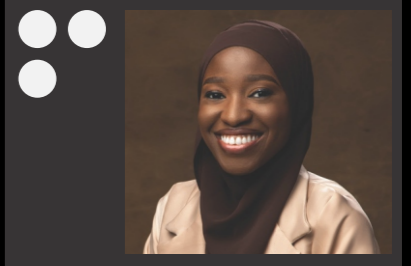
By Zainab Aderounmu



I've met many young people who are on the quest to find their purpose in life. They make it sound like some lost gem that must be found, at all costs, for all to be well in life. Some may even pause their lives to find that purpose first. But what if I told you that purpose is like that item you journey to Sokoto state for, only to find it in the left pocket of your trousers.

The Oxford Learners' Dictionary defines purpose as the objective, aim or function of something. The thing that something, or in this case, someone, is supposed to achieve. So, purpose isn't something that jumps out at you from nowhere; it's that thing you notice in your life's patterns. And you notice by observing. What makes you angry? What do you do better than other people? What is your envy pointing towards? What are you happy to do even when you're not being paid, and what makes you forget about time? Don't attempt to answer these questions by looking outwards; you have to seek the answers within. This also doesn't mean you force stop your life and wait until you find these answers before living fully. Rather, you realise these things by paying attention, finding recurring patterns and taking them seriously. Beyond that, try out new work, and don't be afraid to pivot when something doesn't produce joy, unless you're not bothered about purpose or joy.

The worst mistake many young people make is waiting until they finish college before trying to find what makes them tick. Don't do that. Studies show that only about 10% of people are clear about what their lives ought to achieve, which implies it's neither an easy nor a short journey. As a result of that, the earlier you begin, the earlier and faster you'll find that sweet spot.



Zainab Aderounmu

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

Paul Graham argues that ignorance is why many people are unclear, uncertain and frustrated about the purpose of their existence. Specifically, ignorance about these three things: "You don't know what makes you happy. You don't know many types of work because you haven't tried them, and you don't know how well you can do such work, also because you haven't tried them."

Of course, you would argue that you can do anything, but not everything. Absolutely! For this, he recommends choosing paths that allow seamless transitions later in life when you're more certain, or choices that allow you many options. Essentially, avoid putting all your eggs in one basket. For example, if you're trying to choose between Maths and Economics, choose Maths because you can easily switch to Economics later, but not the other way around. This may apply to choosing a college degree, but don't allow whatever choice you made to stop you from pivoting when you realise you'd rather be elsewhere.

One question that guides me, which Paul also recommended, is "Am I happy to become like the veterans in my industry of choice?" If not, pivot. And quickly.



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.

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: +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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