



INSPIRING
WOMAN
AFRICA

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IBUKUN AWOSIKA

GOVERNING GLOBAL GATHERINGS, PRESENTING LASTING IMPACT

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Welcome!

Dear Readers,

It's IWA time!!!! Yay!!

Hello awesome people, how are you today? It has been an interesting time at IWA as we are excited the Nigerian Bar Association has elected their first female President, OYINKANSOLA BADEJO-OKUSANYA SAN, FCI Arb, We celebrate her and wish her the best!

Now on to another exciting one! Our cover guest for this week!

If you have followed my career through the years, you will know she holds a special place in my heart. She is my ace card! Locally and internationally, when it's time to toot my nation's horn when speaking of outstanding women with global impact and unmistakable relevance, she is right up there!

Talk about someone who lives for purpose and is unbowed about her faith, then she begins your list. This woman's focus on clarity and practical intentionality is mind shifting. When she opens her mouth to speak, wisdom pours. For me, it is how she navigates complexities into order and ushers in sense to redirect distracting confusion.

I admire how she stays anchored in her priorities, leads with grace, plays to her strength and builds lives that are ready to thrive.

Then comes her audacity. Now, that on its own is a masterclass. From daring to enter her line of business when it was not mainstream for women, all the way to becoming the first Female Chairperson of First Bank of Nigeria. In between all of that have been numerous jaw-dropping achievements that make you go "wow!"

Ladies and gentlemen, need I say more? I speak of none other than the visionary, resilient, fearless, disciplined woman of honour and influence, IBUKUN AWOSIKA, Founder of The Chair Centre Group and Convener of The International Woman Leadership Conference (TIWLC) and African Marketplace in Dubai. Loaded right?

In this exclusive interview with IWA, we dig deep into business realities, leadership and her women's conference and marketplace event happening in Dubai in October. Enjoy!

Here are other articles in this edition:

HER POINT OF VIEW: The Secret to Getting Promoted... Start Doing the Job Before You Get the Title. By Chinyere Okorocho.

WOMAN EXECUTIVE: You are over-mentored and under-sponsored. By Wola Joseph-Condotti.

FINANCIAL AdviseHER: The Best Time to Learn About Stocks Is When Nobody Is Talking About Them. By Sola Adesakin.

HOLISTIC LIVING: The Most Powerful Medicine Is Not In a Bottle, It Is In The Way We Live. By Dr. Maymunah Yusuf Kadiri.

GENDER INSIGHTS: When Rescue Comes Late: Lessons from the Release of Oyo Schoolchildren. By Asmau Benzies-Leo.

TRIBE WITH THE VIBES: Anti-Olodo Uprising: How To Stubbornly Cultivate Your Intellectual Side. By Zainab Aderounmu.

WOMAN AT THE HELM: Baroness Dambisa Moyo, House of Lords Member, Principal of Versaca Investments

WE'VE GOT MEN: Mteto Nyati, Chairman, BSG.

Ciao!



COVER INTERVIEW

IBUKUN AWOSIKA

GOVERNING GLOBAL GATHERINGS,
PRESENTING LASTING IMPACT

Kemi Ajumobi



ibukun Awosika is a trailblazing African entrepreneur, author and global leader renowned for her impact in business, governance, and

advocacy. As Founder of The Chair Centre Group and Ibukun Awosika Leadership Academy, she has driven entrepreneurial excellence and leadership development for decades. She has Chaired and served on corporate and non-profit boards across sectors like Education, Energy, IT, Retail, Manufacturing and Financial Services, including as the first Female Chairperson of First Bank of Nigeria and first Chairperson of the Nigerian National Advisory Board for Impact Investing. She also leads/serves several global initiatives, including the UK G7 Impact Taskforce, the Global Steering Group for Impact Investing (GSGI), 2X Global and IFVI (International Foundation for Valuing Impact. A passionate advocate for women's leadership, she co-founded Women in Management, Business, and Public Service (WIMBIZ) and is the Convener of The International Woman Leadership Conference (TIWLC) and African Marketplace in Dubai. Her accolades include the IWEC Award, the International Friendship Award from the Queen of Spain, and the Forbes Woman Africa Chairperson Award. A fellow of the Aspen Global Leadership Network, she holds 4 Honorary Doctorates and continues to inspire through her governance, advocacy, and leadership.

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At the end of the day, the privilege of being the first or the forerunner in anything is that you are the one that gets to set precedence for other people



► **With breaking glass ceilings comes its challenges. How do you navigate tough terrains and what keeps you motivated during those moments?**

The first thing to remember about walking into terrains that are not familiar or that women haven't always been is that it's a wisdom game. First, it's important to try and read the room. Understand the people in the space. Understand how power works in that room. Understand what is your responsibility or your deliverables in that role, and then decide what things are critical for you to play to win in order to achieve your deliverables in

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Growth is a function of opportunities that are available, resources that are available, and understanding of market accessibility in multiple ways

that role. Humility is also required, because there will be many new learnings in a space like that, and you have to learn from the people in the

room. Humility is required in order to build relevant alliances. And with humility comes respect and honour for other people in the room. However, the humility, respect, and honour with which you function in that room must never take away your authenticity and your truth. So, you must at all times be clear about what values are important to you, no matter what the room looks like and the red lines that you will not cross. Because at the end of the day, the privilege of being the first or the forerunner in anything is that you are the one that gets to set precedence for other people, and you carry the weight and the aspiration of others that are coming behind you, including those that have operated in that environment who might not have occupied the seat, but have made it easier for you to emerge in that space. So, that sense of responsibility, commitment to one's values, clarity of what your goals are, and protection of your authenticity combined with humility, wisdom, and respect for others in many ways helps to make it possible to work successfully in a new terrain.

► **As Founder of The Chair Centre Group, what decision had the most lasting impact on the company's trajectory?**

I think one of the most critical decisions I made that impacted on the trajectory and the growth of the business was in the second year of having started the business. I was still in my 20s, but I soon realised that everybody in the furniture business generally at that point in the country was doing home and office, and I started doing that as well. But in a short while, it occurred to me that what I really wanted was to be able to produce in large volumes, certain models that would be critical for growth. I looked at office and home and realised that home had a lot of splintered design options. There are too many pieces, and it didn't, at that stage, and for the size of my company, offer us as many possibilities for volume production. So, I decided I wanted to specialise in office furniture

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When you have smart Ministers of Trade and Industry like Dr. Jumoke Oduwole, you will see that there's a lot of energy being poured into trying to find constructive, sustainable solutions to what is required



and move away from home completely. Because I looked at it, a lot of people will first pay attention to investing their resources to build their office, because that's where they make money, and the returns from it is part of what they spend on their home. I looked at the office, I realised in any office, the general staff was a larger number. Their furniture was largely modular, you can produce 50 of the same type of table, but there would only be one MD, one ED, one general manager and all of that. The volume was in those numbers, and that became my area of interest and focus. Looking at the scenario, the way it looked to me then, I took a hard decision and said I was not doing home furniture. Everybody thought I was crazy because I stood my ground because somewhere in my heart, I knew that I was making the right call. I was giving up something at the beginning that looked like a loss, but it turned out to be my gain. My decision worked. We were the first to specialise in office furniture, and that gave us so much opportunities.

▶ How can African businesses scale responsibly?

Growth is a function of opportunities that are available, resources that are available, and understanding of market accessibility in multiple ways. It's really a function of the vision of the founders of the businesses, the owners of the businesses or the managers of the businesses. Then there's a function of our approach or view of the market and what markets we recognise. Because, you know, many times, we can think of markets in terms of our immediate environment. But the same type of people that we are selling to within our market might exist in multiple other countries at the same time. And therefore, our solution, whilst it solves a local problem, might be easy to transfer and deliver in other markets if we've identified the types of our target customer in those clients. So, the vision, the resources available, the market accessibility, our openness to collaborate where it is required, and our understanding of all the factors at play

that will support what we want to achieve, are important. That would be critical because when we have an understanding of where we want to go, we can build out our strategy considering the resources that we have, but also understanding the collaborative opportunities that might exist. Whenever the market opportunity, product or service clarity exists, resources in many ways always follows. But we must have understanding of the options that are available. The business person of today in the Nigerian environment has multiple opportunities, even from the financial institutions, and when you say financial institutions, there are different kinds of financial institutions. You must identify which one is right for your own business. Are you talking about a microfinance bank? Are you talking about a private equity firm? Are you talking about a development bank? Are you talking about a commercial bank? Are you seeking grant opportunities where they're available? There are multiple options that are available



today as compared to when we started. This understanding of the financial landscape makes it possible to do so much and all those factors will make a difference to your ability to achieve the goal.

► **What is the African Marketplace about? Why Dubai and how is it more than just an African trade fair?**

In talking about the African marketplace, you have to go back and first look at the data. 90% of African and Caribbean productive sector, more than 90% actually, is in SMEs. With so much, such a huge percentage lockdown in small, medium, and large enterprise, and the largest being in the small and medium. In fact, go back to MSMEs, you realise that our ability to have growth within our economy is related to the prosperity of that huge sector. Our ability to earn foreign exchange income is also related to the extent to which we're able to turn that huge sector into an export machine that earns us foreign exchange. We have multiple limitations to that right now. The infrastructure of trade is highly challenged. There's a lot of work being done through AfCFTA and similar organisations. When you have smart Ministers of Trade and Industry like Dr. Jumoke Oduwole, you will see that there's a lot of energy being poured into trying to find constructive, sustainable solutions to what is required. However, we are not exactly where we want to be yet. So intra-African trade is challenged by infrastructure. Flight connectivity across the continent is still a high challenge that affects trade. A flow of payment systems across the continent is still a large challenge. I know that Afreximbank and similar organisations are working extensively to make sure they have solutions. Afreximbank is developing a payment system itself that will link that, and a number of financial insurers are trying to find the solution too. So, we still have all of those issues.

Transportation opportunities for goods across the continent is still a challenge and



if we can increase intra-African trade, we will have major advantage. African

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For decades, Nigerian leather has fed the leather products industry of Europe, but it has never been acknowledged or given the credit

Caribbean trade is at its onset, but African Union has declared the Caribbean as the rest of Africa. So, we're trying to make sure we can connect with you. And then it's the matter of Africa and the rest of the world. The perception of value that is created by African entrepreneurs is still so far behind. For certain sectors, we've had some huge wins. Like fintech, if you take Nigeria for instance, how many unicorns do we have that has emerged now? It is true that we're making strides in certain areas, but the vision of the African marketplace with its industry agnostic posture, is to solve the problem of capacity that most African SMEs have for building international market.

It's to build a platform that is an export aggregator for products and services from African markets and the Caribbean market, and to create market accessibility in a market like Dubai that is friendlier to African markets, that's a softer market, that's easier for African products to find a voice and to find visibility. There is a huge presence of diverse nationality that live and work in Dubai, including Africans.

Dubai represents a core connecting point for Europe, for Asia, for Africa and for the rest of the world. It's an organised market, and if we're able to make the African service and product relevant and sought after, using the infrastructure of trade and connectivity that already exists in Dubai in a friendly environment, then we can take the results of those engagements back home into our different markets. And as our own infrastructure of trade and all of those things that we require continues to improve, we will be in a better place in terms of stirring up growth, creativity, innovation, and market engagement for entrepreneurs.

I've been asked sometimes, "Why aren't you having it in an African country?" Well, let's put it this way. Afreximbank invests a lot of money working with all the African countries to own or to host an African-wide event every two years. There are different other kind of events like that that takes place. But the key question for us is this. If some of the infrastructural challenges that we have is still there for now, should we wait until whenever we solve it? Or should we use every opportunity we have to continue to move forward, even as we work to solve the problems that we have on the continent? The question also is, what do we want to do? We want to open markets for our products. How then do we do that? We go to where the market is. That for me as an entrepreneur is a no-brainer. It makes sense to seek where the market is and seek visibility within where the market is, and make the right connectivity within those markets, and then attract them back home to engage with our people further so that we can get the value that we seek.

So, yes, Dubai has the system, it has infrastructure, it offers us a place of convergence that allows our entrepreneurs to connect amongst themselves as they gather there, to connect with our Caribbean brothers and sisters as they participate in it, and to connect with the rest of the world in a friendly environment of trade. It's more than an exhibition, it's a place of partnership, of collaboration, of investors, of ideas, of support system, of market penetration,



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TiWLC brings women across Africa and the diaspora together in a place of knowledge, empowerment, and entertainment

and much more. The other thing about the African marketplace that is key is that we're trying to tell our own stories. There's a lot of what is originally authentically African that is being lost because we never owned it, because we never told the story of ownership. And so, others are copying the things that are authentically ours, and they are branding, labeling, and telling the story of ownership, and we're losing those. Think of tie and dye prints. For generations of Africa, there are different tie and dye products and patterns and

designs across different African countries that is exclusive to different tribes and their ways of life that is unique and different. Ecobank Nigeria invests a lot of money in an Adire fair that opens your eyes to see the diversity of what Adire is across Africa. We look at loom-based fabrics, there are so many types of them, multiple types in Nigeria alone, not just the Asoke, there are different communities in Nigeria that have their own, and there are multiple African countries like Ghanaians have the Kente. As you move from one country to the other in Africa, you realise there's a diversity of loom-based fabric for generations. Yet, if you visit the museum of some countries outside of Africa, you will see loom-based fabric on display, and the story of loom-based fabrics and tie and dye prints are being told as if some Asian countries are the owners or the originators of it. Look at leather. For decades, Nigerian leather has fed the leather products industry of Europe, but it has never been acknowledged or given the credit. I served in Canada. I can readily remember all the industries where leather is processed and they're shipped into Europe, into Italy and countries like that, where they're then processed and used for bags but there's no acknowledgement of the fact that the leather comes from Nigeria.

Now, there are multiple SME businesses producing leather products out of Nigerian leather. The recognition for the materials that are ours and the products, the finished products that we're now producing becomes possible when we tell our stories and when we show the products. One of the most interesting things that happened when we had the first African marketplace in Dubai, we were being asked if those products that were on display were actually made in Africa. Why? Because they couldn't believe the quality of what the entrepreneurs had on display. That's an embarrassing situation. Because the authenticity of the works of our people is being doubted simply because people are not exposed to the level of quality, productivity and creativity that is going



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We will always have the African marketplace right after the International Woman Leadership Conference, which automatically means the African marketplace will move to April while March is TIWLC

permanent African marketplace in Dubai so you can experience the products made by Africans, not just for a few days in a year at the exhibition. We'll continue to have the exhibition, but then our goal is to build an African marketplace, where you can experience Africa every day.

► **Why the need for a 2026 edition and what should participants and exhibitors expect?**

2025 was a proof of concept. We had a belief. We wrote a concept note. We sought for collaborators. We're grateful for those who partnered with us to prove the theory. Afreximbank was a key partner. Access Bank was a key partner. Multiple financial institutions, WEMA, FCMB, Sterling Bank, Money Point, different other groups like Fashion Souk by Eventful and others. In fact, we had 130 exhibitors from multiple countries. We observed all the reactions, all the questions, all the inquiries, all the

participation, and all the learnings. It was never meant to be a one-off project. We were exploring the belief that we had. Having been an entrepreneur for 37 years and having walked the journey of my life across multiple platforms and exposure to different opportunities that left me with a lot of learnings, it was clear to me that I was sitting at the cusp of something that was needed, or that few would have the audacity to take on. I decided to take the challenge of it. So, it was never about just the first one. The first one was always to prove that the concept was right, and that we found it to be true. Naturally, the plan is to move it forward to an annual project.

► **The International Woman Leadership Conference (TIWLC) is your annual women's conference also in Dubai. Tell us more about it, how long it has been in existence, the vision, goals and results**

TIWLC brings women across Africa and the diaspora together in a place of knowledge, empowerment, and entertainment. One of the critical decisions we've made is that, in the last five years, we have hosted TIWLC in Dubai every year with hundreds of amazing professional entrepreneurial career women sitting at different levels up to C-suite from around the world. From Australia to the Americas, to the Caribbean, Europe, diaspora and multiple African countries. We've had the privilege of working in partnership with Department of Economy and Tourism in Dubai, and within that framework, we had a good learning and understanding of the Dubai environment.

It's special this year because it's our 5th anniversary. It's a pity we've had to deal with the disruption but to mark five years of it, we planned this conference to be exciting, to be fun, and so we moved it up a notch on many fronts. It's a matter of being there to discover the surprises that we have. Also, we're looking forward to receiving all our delegates. The theme is 'Women in Leadership: Losing the fear'. If you followed the International Women's Leadership Conference over the last five years, you would realise that we're telling

on in our different sectors within the SME productive value chain.

If we don't own it, we lose it. It's a tall order. It's a big task. It's a big responsibility. At the first African marketplace 2025, we had 130 exhibitors from about 12 African countries, and it was our proof of concept. We are proud of what we're trying to do with the African marketplace. We still have a long way to go, but our ultimate vision is to show the world what Africa can do to create a



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Nobody's asking you to give any female a position that she's not qualified for, but we're saying to give her a chance to compete evenly for any position, then let the best person win, male or female

a story on how we're moving. From the first year in 2022 themed 'Playing to Win', to the next year of 'Against all Odds', to the year after themed 'Leading with Courage' then to the fourth titled 'Living the Dream', and now, year 5 themed 'Losing the Fear'. When you look at all the themes from each year to the fifth, you would realise that we're building pieces of a whole. We are intentionally and strategically trying to debunk, to demystify, and to fill the gap for the areas that makes it more challenging for the woman to work in the fullness of her capacity, and be the whole value that she is for the development of the company she works for, the nation she belongs to, and the world that she's a part of. That's our goal, and that's what we're doing year by year, strategically, with every single conference.

► **When will registration close for TIWLC and African Marketplace and why should intended participants register now?**

On regular registration, it is completely sold out. Only late registration is open right now and it's always first come, first serve basis. As soon as the slots we have are sold out, we always shut down registration. So, if someone wants to register, it's always best to register as soon as you can. That's one. As for the African marketplace, it's exactly the same. Your companies apply and then we evaluate their work and determine that their product meets the required standard for export products, then we approve them to register. We have a maximum number as well. Once we get to the maximum number we can take, then we shut down. It's always better to register as quickly as possible. In addition, those who are registered for the African marketplace, there are many things we do to prepare them, and until you're registered and paid for it, you cannot be part of that community. We run programmes on their packaging, their presentation, market

intelligence for the market where they want to sell to, and we bring different facilitators through webinars to help us prepare them for the marketplace. So, to be part of all of those programmes, the earlier you register, the better. Also, because you do need time to process your visa and arrange your goods, if you haven't registered, then you don't begin to make all of those plans. We've only got August and September left because it's early in October. Visit <https://tiwle.com/> to register.

► **This year, the date for TIWLC is very close to the African Marketplace, why so?**

The war or the conflicts in the Middle East disrupted our calendar for the year. A conference that was supposed to take place in March has been moved to October. And the African marketplace, which originally was planned for November as we did last year, we decided to bring them back-to-back because it didn't make sense to go in October to have the International Women's Leadership Conference and then have to



come back like two weeks after into Dubai for the African marketplace. And also, we thought it gives us a strategic advantage that if you're hosting a conference with 700 high-level women already gathering in Dubai, they become the first market group for the African marketplace, because the International Women's Leadership Conference is 7th to 9th of October, and the African marketplace was then scheduled to start 10th to 12th of October. With one trip, our delegates get to attend two events or participate in two events. We realised this became a critical advantage because we gather markets beyond the Middle East market automatically through the conference for the benefit of the African marketplace as well. As we move forward with that, we know that seeing this synergy of bringing the two together, we have decided that going forward, that would be the play. We will always have the African marketplace right after the International Women Leadership Conference, which automatically means the African marketplace will move to April while March is the time when the International Women's Leadership Conference typically takes place. It's two, but it's two of many to come. It's a strategic change of its position as well, because running it side by side with the International Women's Leadership Conference becomes a major advantage for all participants in the African marketplace.

► **What are the most effective strategies to cultivate women's leadership in both public and private sectors?**

Technically, a lot of women are competent for every kind of position that you need them to. I mean, let's go back into university education. At that level, the number of girls and boys applying for places are literally even. If you go to the graduation of many universities, you will see that many girls outperform boys in their classes. But that's not even the point. When you then get to the marketplace, whether private or public, if you create an even competitive platform for them to get places at work, you would find that the girls will compete as well as the boys do in getting into organisations. However, the

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WimBiz has proven what can happen when you create systemic solutions and support systems to facilitate the engagement, the empowering, and the nurturing of women in a nation

real challenge is as the years go by, life culture, systems, environments, and just mindsets of institutions and organisations as well, then begin to separate the girls from the boys. Then they marry and get pregnant. That's nature.

There's not a single person in the workplace who was not born by a woman. It's part of a natural process. It is not a handicap situation and women mustn't be seen in that way. In the times we are in, where you have hybrid working environments, if a woman is pregnant, she definitely can still work from home if for any reason she's not able to be at work. If she's off on maternity and taking care of





her children, things that are key and major, she definitely can still do. It's the same. A man could get ill, but pregnancy is not a sickness.

I believe it's about organisations creating an even competitive platform, giving the same kind of opportunities to the girls as they give to the boys. You can decide in an organisation, policy-wise, that for every position you're going to have eight people, you will have four females and four males compete for it based on merit. Nobody's asking you to give any female a position that she's not qualified for, but we're saying to give her a chance to compete evenly for any position, then let the best person win, male or female.

Really, it's not about just putting people there because they're male or they're female, it's about allowing every female and every male. We need to rewire our mindset to understand that no country or organisation can be at its best if it does not maximise all its assets. The thinking of

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A good leader is one who is not envious of those in his or her team, who is not challenged by their superior arguments when they have it, who is able to accommodate their successes and celebrate it

a woman in some ways can be different from that of a man. Having a 360-degree view of any situation is what makes the best organisations who they are. If you do not have men and women at the table giving their opinion from their own perspective, then there are perspectives that are missing in the judgments that guide decisions that are made. This puts every organisation or every nation at a disadvantage. Many values make the best of leaders. Some are natural to women in how they are nurtured and how they live. That's not to say there's something against the men, it is about understanding that

the collaborative use of the gifts of both men and women is what will give us the best human capital, whether it's for an organisation or for a nation. And if you have 50-50% population like Nigeria literally does, if you underutilise your female, then you're overutilising your men. At the end, you're going to have diminished return from your men and you're not going to maximise your talent and perform at your best. It's simply the smartest nations on the standard.

► **As a co-founder of WIMBIZ, how important is it to have and sustain networks like WIMBIZ to drive systemic change?**

The reality is, WimBiz has proven what can happen when you create systemic solutions and support systems to facilitate the engagement, the empowering, and the nurturing of women in a nation. When we started WimBiz, it was 12 women and one man. There was no such platform focused on the matters that WimBiz has become known for, where the girls were concerned. We ourselves were in, I mean, the youngest of us were in our 30s and the oldest ones were in their early 40s. Together, we have created an environment that not only empowered us, but has empowered thousands of women after us, to the point that we as founders are totally out of the leadership of WimBiz. We have, from after the 10 years of the organisation, stopped being the chairman of the organisation. We allowed younger people at the ages that we came in to take over. By the 21st year of the organisation, we totally exited and set up a board of trustee for the organisation made-up of men and women so that we can have a complete view of matters.

WimBiz is celebrating 25 years in November, that's a major milestone for a female-led organisation that has empowered, facilitated, and is very responsive. Because what WimBiz does is we listen, we see what the issues are and we build solutions for the issues. When they said women were not prepared for the boardroom, we built WimBoard. We listened to everything they said the women did not have. We set up a



programme with an international school to start empowering and training already technically competent women with board readiness, our knowledge to make them qualified, available, and competent to serve on board successfully.

We've had huge success with that. We've had multi-generational conversations. The younger women who come into WimBiz are being mentored, being coached, being supported by the older women based on their journey, their experience, and all that. We have a very organised mentorship programme that links mentees with mentors as an active programme for a year in order to make sure that girls can find their way. I think one of the most successful female-led, nationally focused organisations in the world is WimBiz in terms of what it has become. If we approach every major issue that we have as a challenge in our nation with the mindset with which WimBiz has been built and has been transferred to the next generation, we will have an incredible country across every strata that we can think of that is relevant to the development of our nation.

Share with us the importance of good leadership even in the pursuit of ambitious goals

I think the first thing to think about in terms of what good leadership represents is to consider the purpose of leadership. See, a leader is like a conductor of an orchestra. When you're leading other people towards a particular set goal, your responsibility is to identify the gifts and the talents of all the members of your team. Sometimes, some of them are smarter than you in so many different areas, but that's not your problem. Your real responsibility is to identify the strength of every member of your team and to work to bring all their gifts together for the purpose of the organisation, the nation or the institution. And a good leader is one who is not envious of those in his or her team, who is not challenged by their superior arguments when they have it, who is able to accommodate their successes and



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As a boss, sometimes, even when you're about to fall into a ditch, the members of your team will watch you fall in because there is no room for them to tell you when you're wrong

celebrate it, who has the capacity to embrace their gifts to encourage them, to nurture them, and to stay focused on the long play and the full goal.

Wherever that kind of leadership exists, you would find that the organisation, the nation, or the institution benefits. Because in the art of leadership, rather than the art of being a boss, you bring all the best together for the benefit of the institution. When you're a boss, you are the most knowledgeable, the only voice. You are the most powerful. You are the only opinion that counts. You know, sometimes, even

when you're about to fall into a ditch, the members of your team will watch you fall in because there is no room for them to tell you when you're wrong. And honestly, except you're God, I don't see how you won't get it wrong sometimes. And except you are master of everything, I don't see how the people who work with you or who work for you cannot be smarter at some things than you are. Because really, the reason you engage different people is to harness their gifts for you. I have a personal philosophy that says that I'm only made-up of my liabilities and my asset, but for me to succeed in life, I need my liabilities to be made-up by the assets of others. And therefore, it makes me respect others in my atmosphere because their own gift is what makes up for my weakness. It's a combination of their gifts, their own asset with mine that allows me to succeed. I think that's the key difference between what makes a good leader and those who tend to operate as bosses. In our environment in particular, you always run the risk of being a boss rather than a leader.



► **What does legacy mean to you?**

It is about creating a lasting impact in the life of others and my environment. It's not a one thing you do. It is what you do every day, by the way you live, by the way you speak, by the way you conduct yourself, by your values, by your practices, when it's convenient and when it's not, when there are people there, when there's no one there. If any of those help somebody else to find their way, then you lived a legacy of authenticity, of being your authentic self. That's simply for me what legacy is. It's not an event. It's a story, and it's a story of your mind.

► **If you had the opportunity to redesign one policy to catalyse women's leadership and inclusive growth in Nigeria and Africa as a whole, what would it be?**

Honestly, in every room that matters and every place of decision that impacts the lives of our citizens, there should never be a room where women are missing. It isn't about tokenism, not that you just threw one woman there to make a point, it is that you allow a reasonable number of women to be part of the conversation and the decision making in order to ensure that best decisions are made because all views are covered in the process of making it.

► **To that female executive who feels a heavy weight on her shoulders and must still show up, what advice do you have for her?**

It gets better every day. The weight you carry is not just for you, it's for you and the generations of other women around you. If you understand that you do not have to carry it alone, and you find the right tribe and support system, the weight becomes lighter. But the weight also allows you to gain learnings that you would use to lighten the weight of the women coming after you. Don't be overwhelmed by it. Just understand that usually, it's temporary. If you look to your left and to your right, there's help waiting. Find the right help and support and you'll be able to walk through it. Thank you!



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In our environment in particular, you always run the risk of being a boss rather than a leader

Experiences From Participants Of The International Woman Leadership Conference (TIWLC) and African Marketplace, Convened by **Ibukun Awosika** In Dubai



I met businesses and investors from across Africa and the Caribbean, and doors to international partnerships and funding opened in ways I never imagined. I now think of my business as bigger than myself.

-Temitayo Eguabor
CEO and Founder of Cakes N Chocolates



African Marketplace Dubai connects Francophone Africa with the global economy like never before. This platform gives our brands visibility, credibility and the opportunity to expand beyond borders.

- Olatokunbo Ige
Human Right Lawyer and Founder, Togo Mall (Togo).



African Marketplace Dubai 2025 was truly an eye-opening experience. Like many first-time ventures, there were moments that challenged expectations. But when you're driven by a clear vision, those moments don't define the journey, they become the stepping stones to something even greater. I'm already looking forward to African Marketplace Dubai 2026 with great anticipation because I believe the best is yet to come. The initiative by Mrs. Ibukun Awosika to lift SMEs by creating an avenue for growth is remarkable and huge. Its impact is far too significant to be measured by a single event. Building a lasting platform I learnt takes vision, commitment, resilience and continuous learning, and I deeply align with that approach. I am looking forward to an even greater African Marketplace Dubai 2026. To the team behind the scenes, thank you. I pray for greater grace, wisdom, and strength as you continue to build.

-Barbara Ikenna-Ogbozor
Founder & Creative Director, Jodia The Label Ltd (Nigeria).



Attending the TIWLC Conference in Dubai was an inspiring and transformative experience. It provided a unique opportunity to learn from accomplished global leaders, exchange ideas, and build meaningful connections with women driving change across industries. My biggest takeaway was that true leadership is measured not only by personal success but by the impact we create and the people we empower. The plenary session "Woman in Leadership... Living the Dream" had the greatest impact on me because it emphasised authentic leadership, resilience, and intentional legacy-building. It reinforced my commitment to leading with purpose, developing others, and creating lasting value through innovation and service.

Enebeli Ude Somufenia
Ag. Chief Information Officer, MTN Cameroon.



Participating in the African Marketplace Exhibition in Dubai was a defining milestone for Konkéré Designs and a powerful step in our international growth journey. The exhibition provided a prestigious global platform to present our craftsmanship, design philosophy, and proudly Nigerian heritage to a diverse audience of buyers, industry professionals, collectors, and design enthusiasts from across the Middle East and other regions. It significantly elevated our brand's visibility, reinforced our credibility, and demonstrated that African-made contemporary furniture can compete confidently at the highest levels of global design. Beyond visibility, the event created meaningful opportunities for strategic partnerships. We engaged with potential distributors, retailers, interior designers, and collaborators who expressed strong interest in representing or working with the brand in new markets. These connections have laid the groundwork for future expansion beyond Nigeria, positioning Konkéré Designs as an

emerging export-ready brand. Importantly, the exhibition translated into tangible commercial success. We received multiple custom orders from clients who encountered our pieces firsthand, reflecting genuine demand and trust in the quality, durability, and uniqueness of our work. These commissions not only generated immediate business value but also validated the universal appeal of our designs across cultural and geographic boundaries. Overall, the experience broadened our perspective, strengthened our confidence, and refined our understanding of international market expectations. It reaffirmed our mission to create timeless, sustainable pieces from Nigeria for the world, and positioned Konkéré Designs not merely as a local furniture company, but as a distinctive African design voice with growing global relevance.

-Oluwaseyi Gbadebo
Founder & Creative Director, Konkere Designs



Being here is about realising the dream of a truly global African brand. We want to see more finished products from Africa that can compete anywhere in the world.

-Winston Udeagha
Founder, Winston Leather (Nigeria).



This event provided vital visibility and new business contacts that will help us scale and empower more African smallholder farmers.

- Irene Simon Ivambi
Founder of Mrembo Naturals (Tanzania).

Experiences From Participants Of The International Woman Leadership Conference (TIWLC) and African Marketplace, Convened by **Ibukun Awosika** In Dubai



TIWLC 2025 was a transformative experience that brought together visionary leaders, meaningful conversations, and practical insights on leadership, innovation, and impact. Beyond the networking opportunities, it challenged me to think more intentionally about leadership and creating sustainable value. My biggest takeaway came from Mrs. Ibukun Awosika's opening remarks reinforced that extraordinary achievements are the result of consistent, intentional actions taken every day. Complementing this was Fred Swaniker's plenary session on the power of relationships. His message emphasised that relationships should be built intentionally, and with authenticity. He detailed that strong, trust-based relationships are the foundation of sustainable leadership, opening doors to collaboration, opportunities, and long-term impact. This resonated deeply.

-Isimeme Whyte
Founder/GMD, Genius Hub
Co Founder, Bataawork



TIWLC was inspiring and deeply enriching. It brought together women from diverse backgrounds to reflect, learn, and think bigger through conversations that felt honest, personable, and grounded in real life experiences. I left encouraged to embrace new possibilities and approach both my personal and professional journey with renewed purpose, confidence and intentionality. Every session offered something valuable, but the Q&A session had the greatest impact on me. Mrs. Awosika's responses were warm, sincere, and grounded in relatable, real-life examples. Her answers to the questions, including mine, opened my eyes to possibilities I had never considered and helped me appreciate abilities in myself that I had honestly not fully recognised. I left with renewed courage and confidence, and a deeper responsibility to develop my capabilities, apply them with greater intention, and build a meaningful legacy.

- Dr. Ijeoma Agbo
Consultant Public Health Physician



A couple of months after completing the '360 Masterclass with Ibukun Awosika', The International Women's Leadership Conference (TIWLC) was launched in Dubai. There was no convincing needed. It was an immediate "of course I will attend" for me. Mrs. Awosika's imprimatur was on it, and that was enough. I became one of the delegates at the first conference and I must put it out early in this conversation that I have not missed one conference since then. Each year brought something unique:

Year 1 - 2022

I found more than a conference. TIWLC was a living, breathing ecosystem of growth. A space for building new connections, nurturing old friendships, gaining fresh knowledge, and unlocking new opportunities. A hub for anyone hungry for growth, especially through the lens of other people's lived experiences. Because truly, why make every mistake yourself when you can learn from others? Over the years, it has been the shared stories, the strong relationships, and

the deep bonds that have stayed with me. Some old friendships faded along the way, but TIWLC gave room for new ones...women with whom I now share wins, milestones, and meaningful life moments. My year one takeaway: You are only as powerful as your mindset.

Year 2 - 2023

I thought the second edition would just be a routine and can't beat the first ...it did! That perspective shift, paired with the rich, Pan-African conversations and a never-dull agenda, made the experience unforgettable. I can safely describe the experience as Edifying. Electrifying and Liberating all at once. As a lifelong learner, the conference became home. We didn't stop there, we went on to create our own TIWLC Connect, extending the experience beyond the conference in Dubai. My friend, Flakes and I hosted our group in Lagos for a mini soiree that year. More bonds were formed.

Year 3, 2024

It was about 'Leading With Courage', and I learnt lessons that emboldened me to do bigger things.

Year 4, 2025

By this time, I was such a TIWLC addict that I decided to reward three of my staff that had worked hard that year and we had a powerful shared experience. Somewhere in between all the deep conversations and learning moments annually, there are always lighter

moments too...Food, fashion, shopping, sight seeing, dinners, and so many activities too numerous to mention.

Year 5, 2026

We refused to allow global disruptions to shake the impact this community has created. So we converged in Lagos for a mini conference even as we still look forward to the Dubai edition in October. Five years in, one thing is clear. If you sit with women who dream big, your dreams will expand too. If you listen to stories of courage, you will take bold action too, when you experience a shift, you will carry others along on the ride and growth will inevitably compound. At TIWLC, the conversations hit differently. Confidence grows. Vision expands and success begins to feel attainable.

- Tosin Adefeko
Founder/CEO, AT3 Resources



There are conversations that inform, and there are conversations that shape perspective. The 'Timeout with Ibukun Awosika' programme was undoubtedly the latter. I left encouraged, challenged, and deeply inspired, and I am excited to experience an even greater level of insight, connection, and impact this October in Dubai because, with the International Women Leadership Conference coming up, it's offering a timely moment to reflect on the kind of leadership the future requires.

Aderinsola E. Omirin
Principal Strategist, Sync Co.



EVENT SCHEDULE

**5th
October
2026**

**360 Executive Masterclass
with Ibukun Awosika**

Registration ongoing

**6th
October
2026**

**The Woman...her ambition
and relationship**

Registration ongoing

**7th - 9th
October
2026**

**The International Woman
Leadership Conference**

Registration ongoing

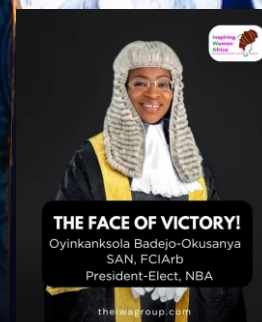
**10th -12th
October
2026**

African Marketplace Dubai

Entry is free



IWA Congratulates The NBA President-Elect



OYINKANSOLA BADEJO-OKUSANYA SAN, FCI Arb

You are over-mentored and under-sponsored

By Wola Joseph-Condotti

Let me say something that might not sit well with everyone, but it is the truth. Mentorship on its own is not going to get you the job. I have watched too many brilliant women, mentored to the hilt, show up to every fireside chat, fill notebook after notebook with advice from senior leaders, and still find themselves three years later pretty much where they started. Not because the mentorship was bad. A lot of it was

excellent. It just was never going to do the thing they actually needed doing. What they needed was a sponsor. And nobody ever sat them down and explained the difference.

The Quiet Difference Nobody Names

A mentor talks to you. A sponsor talks about you. A mentor gives you advice. A sponsor gives you access. A mentor will meet you for coffee and walk you through how to survive office politics. A sponsor

will sit in a room you are not even invited to and say, "Put her name on that shortlist." Both of these matter. But they are not the same thing, and in the careers of most women I know, they turn up in very different quantities.

We are over-mentored and under-sponsored. And honestly, most of us did not even notice it was happening.

Why This Matters More for Women

When men move up, they very often move

up because somebody, usually another man, bet on them in a room they could not see. That is sponsorship. It is quiet. It is decisive. It is how power has always moved.

When women go looking for that same lift, what we tend to get handed instead is mentorship. "Let me give you some advice." "Let me share my journey." Generous. Genuine. But not the same thing at all as somebody spending their own capital to move yours forward. There is a reason for the gap, and it is worth naming. Sponsorship is risky. When a senior leader puts your name forward, they are staking their credibility on you. So people tend to sponsor those they trust, and trust, in most institutions, has historically flowed along lines of familiarity. Which, until fairly recently, was rarely kind to women. This is not an accusation. It is a diagnosis.

The Honest Bit About Mentorship

While I am being honest, a lot of what we call mentorship is not really mentorship at all. It is networking in a nicer outfit. Real mentorship is uncomfortable. A mentor worth having will tell you why you did not get the promotion, even when it stings. They will push back on decisions you were rather pleased with. They will love you enough to disappoint you sometimes.

If your mentor only ever makes you feel good, they are not mentoring you. They are entertaining you.

The Honest Bit About Sponsorship

You cannot ask for sponsorship the way you can ask for mentorship.

You can walk up to somebody and ask them to mentor you. That is fair game. What you cannot do is walk up and ask somebody to spend their political capital on you. Sponsorship is earned. It is what happens when your work is so consistent, your character so steady, and your delivery so undeniable that somebody decides, entirely on their own, that your name is worth defending in your absence.

Two Honest Questions

If your career feels stuck right now, sit with

these two questions.

Who is telling me the truth I do not want to hear? That is your mentor.
Who is saying my name when I am not in the room? That is your sponsor.
If the first list is empty, you are being flattered, not mentored. If the second is empty, you are visible to your peers but invisible to your decision-makers. And no amount of hard work, without that second list, is going to close the gap on its own. The Sponsor You Must Also Become
Here is the part nobody really wants to sit with.

If you have arrived, you are now somebody else's potential sponsor. And the real test of your leadership is not how many mentees you can list off. It is how many names you have put forward, in rooms they were not in, at moments when it actually cost you something to do it.

Mentorship is generous. Sponsorship is sacrificial. Those are not the same thing. A Word From Scripture

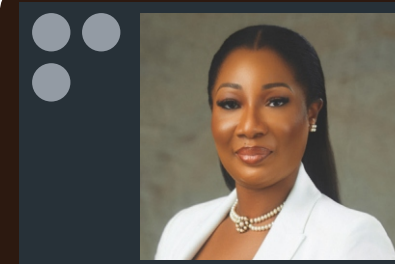
When Barnabas first met Paul, the early church was suspicious of him, and honestly, they had reason to be. His reputation preceded him, and not in the way he needed it to.

Acts 9:27 tells us that Barnabas "took him, brought him to the apostles, and declared to them" who Paul really was. He did not mentor Paul from a safe distance. He vouched for him. He used his own credibility to open a door that was not yet ready to open.

Without Barnabas, there may well have been no Apostle Paul as we know him. That, to me, is sponsorship. Costly, courageous, and quietly world-changing.

Final Thoughts

Find mentors who will tell you the truth. Earn sponsors who will tell others the truth about you. And when your turn comes, and it will, do not just hand out advice. Spend your capital. Put names forward. Stand in rooms and say the things that cost you something to say. Because the women coming behind us do not just need more wisdom. They need somebody willing to actually risk something for them.



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.



There is a pattern that repeats itself in every market cycle without fail. When stocks are rising and everyone around you seems to be making money, the conversation gets loud. Group chats fill up with screenshots. Colleagues who never mentioned investing before are suddenly sharing tips. The entry point feels obvious and the upside feels certain. That is precisely when the risk is highest and the opportunity is smallest.

And then the market shifts. Prices correct. The noise dies down. The group chat goes quiet. And most people, having arrived late and bought high, either panic-sell at a loss or swear off the market entirely and wait for the next cycle of noise to bring them back.

The investor who builds real wealth is doing something different the whole time. She is studying when it is quiet, positioning when it feels uncertain, and holding when everyone else is either euphoric or afraid. She understands something that takes most people years to learn: the market rewards preparation, not reaction. Right now is one of those quiet, uncertain moments. And it is worth paying attention to. The US market has been navigating a period of significant volatility. Trade policy uncertainty, interest rate decisions from the Federal Reserve, and gelatinous consumer confidence have created a market that swings sharply on news cycles. The S&P 500 has seen corrections that rattled short-term investors but have historically represented exactly the kind

of entry points that long-term investors look back on with gratitude. When fear is in the air and prices are down, quality companies are on sale. That is not a crisis for the prepared investor. It is a window. Closer to home, the Nigerian Exchange has its own dynamics. The NGX All-Share Index has shown resilience in pockets, particularly in financial services, consumer goods, and energy stocks, even as broader macroeconomic pressures, currency volatility, and inflation have created a complicated environment for retail investors. But complicated is not the same as closed. The NGX has produced some of the strongest real returns in Africa for investors who understood what they were buying and held with patience. The question is not whether the market is perfect right now. It never is. The question is whether you are building the knowledge

and position to benefit when clarity returns. And it always returns.

Here are five things you can do right now to enter the market intelligently.

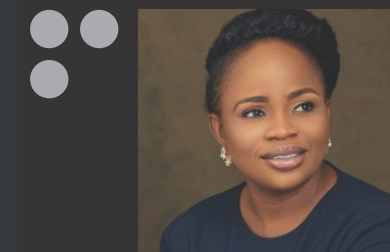
1. Start with financial education, not a brokerage account. Before you put a naira or a dollar into any stock, spend four weeks reading. Understand what a stock actually represents, an ownership stake in a real business. Learn what a price-to-earnings ratio tells you about value. Understand the difference between a blue-chip stock and a speculative one. The NGX investor protection fund and the SEC Nigeria both publish free retail investor education resources. For US markets, resources from Morningstar and the US SEC investor education portal are credible starting points. Knowledge is your first position.

2. Open a regulated brokerage account and start small. In Nigeria, regulated stockbrokers registered with the SEC allow you to buy NGX-listed stocks directly. For US market access, platforms operating legally in Nigeria allow dollar-denominated investment in American equities. Start with an amount you can afford to leave untouched for three to five years minimum. The figure matters less than the habit.

3. Buy quality, not momentum. In a bearish or uncertain market, the instinct is to look for the stock that will bounce fastest. Resist it. Focus on companies with strong earnings histories, low debt, and businesses you genuinely understand. On the NGX, companies in banking, consumer staples, and energy with consistent dividend histories have rewarded patient investors. On the US side, diversified index funds tracking the S&P 500 remain one of the most evidence-backed entry points for new investors.

4. Invest consistently, not occasionally. Set a fixed amount to invest every month regardless of what the market is doing. This approach, called naira or dollar cost averaging, means you automatically buy more shares when prices are low and fewer when they are high. Over time it reduces your average cost and removes the paralyzing question of whether today is the right day to invest. It is always the right day if you are investing for the long term.

5. Define your time horizon before you define your stocks. The single biggest mistake new investors make is investing long-term money with short-term emotions. Before you buy anything, write down when you will need this money and what it is for. If the answer is less than three years, the stock market is the wrong vehicle. If it is five years or more, short-term volatility is noise, not a signal. The market will get loud again. Prices will rise, the screenshots will return, and everyone will have a tip. By then, the prepared investor will already be positioned. Study now. The quiet period is the gift.



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.

HER POINT OF VIEW

The Secret to Getting Promoted... Start Doing the Job, Before You Get the Title

Chinyere Okorochoa

One of the most common conversations I have with women seeking career growth goes something like this: “Once I become a manager, I’ll start thinking more strategically.” “When I become a director, I’ll become more visible.” “When I get promoted, I’ll take on bigger responsibilities.”

My response is usually the same: “No. Start now.” One of the biggest mistakes professionals make, particularly women, is waiting for the title before they begin operating at the next level. The reality is that promotions rarely work that way. Most organisations do not promote people based on what they hope they will become. They promote people based on evidence of what they are already doing.

In other words, if you want the next

role, you must begin demonstrating your ability to perform at that level before the title arrives. This is one of the most important career lessons I have learned over the course of my professional journey.

The Promotion Trap

Many talented women become trapped in a cycle of waiting. They wait for recognition. They wait for permission. They wait for someone to notice their potential. They wait for the promotion before stretching themselves.

Meanwhile, the professionals who advance most quickly are often those who are already thinking, behaving, and contributing at the level above their current position. They understand that promotions are not usually awarded for potential alone. They are awarded when decision-makers have confidence that the individual can already handle the responsibilities of the next role.

That confidence is built through observation. People need to see you doing it before they trust you with it.

A Lesson I Learned Early

Early in my career, I noticed something interesting about the people who advanced fastest. They were not necessarily the smartest people in the room. Nor were they always the most experienced. What set them apart was that they approached their work differently. While others focused only on completing assigned tasks, they thought about the bigger picture.

They anticipated problems. They proposed solutions. They took ownership. They contributed beyond the narrow boundaries of their job descriptions.

Long before they received leadership titles, they had already started behaving like leaders. That observation stayed with me throughout my career. As opportunities arose, I consciously tried to look beyond the immediate task in front of me and understand the broader objectives of the team, the client, the organisation, or the project.

Over time, that mindset opened doors to leadership opportunities that may otherwise have taken much longer to materialise.

Think Like the Person You Want to Become

If you aspire to become a manager, start thinking like one. Don’t simply focus on your own workload. Learn how decisions affect the wider team. Take an interest in budgets, strategy, planning, stakeholder management, and problem-solving. If you aspire to become a director, begin developing an enterprise-wide perspective.

Understand how the business makes money. Learn how different departments interact. Pay attention to industry trends and organisational priorities.

If you aspire to sit on boards, begin developing governance skills, strategic thinking, and the ability to see beyond day-to-day operations.

The higher you rise, the less your value is defined by technical execution alone and the more it is defined by judgment, influence, leadership, and strategic thinking. Start building those muscles now.

Raise Your Hand Before You Feel Ready One pattern I have observed repeatedly among women is the tendency to wait until they feel completely ready before volunteering for new opportunities.

Men, on the other hand, often raise their hands when they are only partially ready. As women, we sometimes underestimate our capabilities and overestimate the qualifications required.

The result is that we miss valuable opportunities to grow. Some of the most significant opportunities in my own career arrived before I felt fully prepared.

International speaking engagements. Leadership positions. Board appointments. Industry roles.

Had I waited until I felt completely ready, I might still be waiting. Growth rarely happens within the comfort zone. Very often, confidence follows action, not the other way around.

Five Ways to Start Operating at the Next Level

First, take ownership beyond your job description. Look for problems to solve, not just tasks to complete.

Second, become more strategic. Ask yourself not just “What am I doing?” but “Why does this matter?”

Third, improve your communication skills. Senior leaders are expected to influence, persuade, and communicate effectively.

Fourth, seek visibility. Share ideas, contribute to discussions, and make your expertise known.

Fifth, invest in continuous learning. The next level often requires skills you have not yet developed.

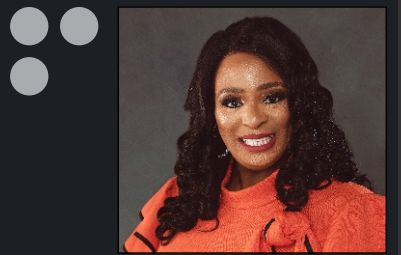
Become the Obvious Choice

The professionals who advance most consistently are rarely surprises. When promotion discussions take place, their names emerge naturally because decision-makers have already seen evidence that they can perform at the next level.

They have become the obvious choice. That should be your goal. Do not wait for the title before acting like a leader. Do not wait for permission before demonstrating initiative. Do not wait for someone else to recognise your potential before you start living up to it yourself. The most successful careers are built when preparation meets opportunity. And preparation begins long before the promotion letter arrives. So if there is one piece of big-sister advice I would leave you with, it is this: Stop asking yourself whether you are ready for the next level. Instead, ask yourself this question:

“What would someone at the next level be doing today?” Then start doing it.

Because the fastest way to get promoted is often to become the person the promotion is looking for before it arrives.



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.

GENDER INSIGHTS

When Rescue Comes Late: Lessons from the Release of Oyo School children

Asmau Benzies Leo

The recent release of the abducted school children in Oyo State has brought a collective sigh of relief across Nigeria. Families have been reunited, communities have expressed gratitude, and the nation has once again demonstrated resilience in the face of tragedy. Yet, beneath the relief lies a sobering reality: the incident is not an isolated one, and the delay in response raises urgent questions about the effectiveness of our early warning and early response systems.

This episode must not simply end as another “successful rescue.” It should serve as a turning point for reflection, reform, and renewed commitment to protecting Nigeria’s most vulnerable, our children.

At the heart of this crisis is the failure of early warning systems. In many

communities, there are often signs before such attacks occur, unusual movements, rising insecurity, local intelligence, and community level anxieties. However, these signals are either ignored, underreported, or not acted upon with the urgency they deserve. Early warning is only as effective as the response it triggers. When communities raise alarms and authorities fail to act swiftly, the consequences can be devastating.

The delay in action during such incidents often allows perpetrators to consolidate their operations, move victims across locations, and prolong captivity. Time, in these situations, is not neutral, it is a weapon that strengthens the captors and weakens the chances of a swift and safe rescue. Each passing hour deepens trauma, increases fear, and heightens the risks to the victims’ lives.

For the children and women involved, the consequences go far beyond the period of

captivity. Abduction is not just a physical violation; it is a profound psychological assault. Survivors often carry invisible scars long after their release. Many may develop Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), anxiety disorders, depression, and severe emotional distress. Symptoms can include nightmares, flashbacks, withdrawal, difficulty concentrating, and a persistent sense of fear.

For children, the impact is even more complex. Their cognitive and emotional development is still in progress, making them particularly vulnerable to long-term psychological disruption. The classroom, once a place of safety and learning, may become associated with fear and danger. This can lead to school avoidance, declining academic performance, and, in some cases, permanent withdrawal from education. The ripple effects extend to families and communities, where trust in public institutions begins to erode.



Women and girls face additional layers of trauma, particularly in contexts where gender based violence may occur during captivity. The stigma associated with such experiences can lead to silence, isolation, and limited access to support services. Without deliberate and sustained psychosocial interventions, these survivors risk being left behind even after they are physically freed.

The long-term societal cost of such incidents cannot be overstated. A generation of children growing up in fear undermines national development. Education is disrupted, human capital is weakened, and communities become trapped in cycles of insecurity and vulnerability.

To prevent recurrence, Nigeria must move from reactive to proactive security strategies, particularly in the protection of schools. The Safe Schools Initiative must be strengthened and expanded beyond policy statements into actionable, well-funded programs at federal, state, and local levels.

First, there is a need to institutionalise community-based early warning systems. Local communities are often the first to detect threats. Establishing structured communication channels between communities, security agencies, and local authorities can ensure that intelligence is not lost. This includes hotlines, rapid reporting mechanisms, and community security committees trained to identify and escalate risks.

Second, early response mechanisms must be significantly improved. Security agencies should have rapid deployment units specifically trained and equipped to respond to school-related threats. Delays caused by bureaucratic bottlenecks, poor coordination, or lack of resources must be eliminated. Response protocols should be clear, time-bound, and regularly tested through simulations and drills.

Third, schools themselves must be made

more secure. This includes raising perimeter fencing, controlled entry points, trained security personnel, and the use of technology such as surveillance systems where feasible. School administrators and teachers should be trained in emergency preparedness, including evacuation procedures and crisis management.

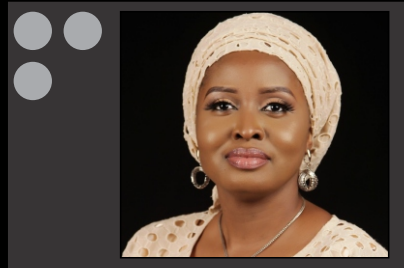
Fourth, there must be sustained investment in intelligence gathering and inter-agency collaboration. Security threats are increasingly complex and require coordinated responses across military, police, intelligence services, and civil authorities. Information sharing should be seamless and driven by a shared commitment to protecting lives.

Fifth, psychosocial support services must be integrated into the response framework. Rescue should not mark the end of intervention. Survivors especially children and women require long-term counseling, trauma care, and reintegration support. Schools should have access to trained counselors, and communities should be sensitised to support survivors without stigma.

Finally, accountability is essential. Where delays or failures in response occur, they must be investigated, and lessons must be institutionalised. Without accountability, the same mistakes will continue to be repeated.

The release of the Oyo school children is not only a moment of relief, but also a moment of reckoning. Nigeria cannot afford to normalise abductions or celebrate delayed rescues as victories. The true measure of success is prevention from its occurrence.

Protecting our schools is not just a security issue, it is also a moral obligation and a national priority. If we fail to act decisively now, we risk raising a generation shaped more by fear than by opportunity. The time to strengthen early warning, ensure rapid response, and secure our schools is now.



Dr. Asmau Benzies Leo

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

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

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

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

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

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

WOMAN AT THE HELM

Baroness Dambisa Moyo

House of Lords Member, Principal of Versaca Investments



Baroness Dambisa Moyo (PhD) is a member of the United Kingdom's House of Lords.

Moyo is a principal of Versaca Investments – a family office focused on growth investing globally. For over a decade, she has served on the board of directors of many large, global, complex corporations.

She sits on several corporate boards, including Chevron, Condé Nast, and Starbucks, along with non-corporate boards like National Geographic Society and Oxford University Endowment.

Dambisa has authored five bestselling books on the global macroeconomy and geopolitics. She holds a PhD in economics from Oxford University and a Master's degree from Harvard University. She is also a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

Moyo is a standout strategist who

moves the needle for senior figures shaping both high-stakes investment decisions and public policy. Admired for the originality of her thinking, she pairs a willingness to challenge conventional wisdom with a steady, evidence-led sense of judgment—turning complex economic understanding into clear, actionable propositions.

She holds a PhD in economics from Oxford University and a Masters degree from Harvard University and is recognised for fresh and innovative ideas as the author of five bestselling book on the global macroeconomy and geopolitics. Her newest book “How Boards Work” was ranked number 5 on the Wall Street Journal best business book list.

Dambisa is an honorary fellow of the Foreign Policy Association, member of the Bretton Woods Committee and member of Trilateral Commission.

She was named to the list of Time Magazine's 100 Most Influential People in the World; has published in the Financial Times, WSJ, Barrons, Harvard Business Review and has travelled to over 70 countries. In her spare time, she runs marathons and practices Pilates.

She is the new Chair of the Board of Trustees of The Economic Club of New York and is positioned to guide the Club into their next chapter as they prepare for their 120th anniversary. “My focus will be on ensuring the Club remains a premier global forum for non-partisan, thoughtful dialogue, particularly as we look at the major forces shaping our future—including AI, the energy transition, and shifting geopolitical alignments.” She stated.



WE'VE GOT MEN

Mteto Nyati

Chairman, BSG

Mteto Nyati is passionate about people and technology. He believes in the capacity and tenacity of human beings to create the future they want. As an engineer he is wired to seek challenges. Mteto Nyati is an accomplished business leader and investor with over 25 years of experience in the telecommunications, technology, and media sectors.

He is the Chairman of BSG, a leading homegrown business and technology consulting company that helps clients deliver their digital transformation goals. He is also the founder of Wazo Investments, a private equity firm that invests in medium-sized companies with high growth potential and scalability.

As a Yale World Fellow and a published author of the bestseller "Betting on a Darkie", Mteto shares his insights and lessons on leadership, diversity, and innovation. His views on age, race, gender and related topics are quite interesting. For instance, he says these labels through which we see people "offer quick judgments, but they rob us of the richness that every individual carry."

Mteto admits he has been fortunate to work alongside people who consistently prove labels wrong and they include "The young professional whose fresh perspective cuts through old assumptions. The woman who leads technical teams with both strength and empathy. The colleague who chose South Africa as home and now pours their talent into building it

stronger. The experienced leader who remains open to learning from those younger than them."

According to him, what they share is not the category others might place them in, but their character, their drive, and their commitment to a purpose larger than themselves.

Mteto Nyati has received multiple awards and honours, including an honorary doctorate from the University of Johannesburg and the IT Personality of the Year in 2014 and 2016. He is passionate about people and technology, and believes in creating a positive impact in society through his work and investments.

By Dr. Maymunah Yusuf Kadiri

Modern life has quietly convinced us that movement is optional. We work from chairs, socialise through screens, order food without leaving our homes and celebrate convenience as progress. Yet while technology has made life easier, it has also distanced us from one of the most fundamental requirements for human flourishing, the need to move.

The conversation about movement is often reduced to losing weight or improving physical fitness. That perspective is far too narrow. Movement is not simply exercise; it is an essential expression of holistic living. It influences how we think, how we feel, how we connect with others and how fully we experience life.

The story of one individual illustrates this beautifully. What began as a reluctant attempt to become more active soon evolved into something far greater than a fitness routine. Every walk, jog and outdoor adventure slowly transformed not just the body, but the mind. Stress gave way to calm. Fatigue was replaced with vitality. Confidence emerged where self-doubt once lived. Most surprisingly, movement created community, introducing friendships that had been missing for years.

This transformation reflects an important truth. Human beings are designed for movement, not merely for exercise but for living. Every step sends signals throughout the body and brain that strengthen physical health, improve emotional resilience, sharpen thinking

and deepen our sense of purpose. Movement is one of the few lifestyle habits that simultaneously benefits nearly every system in the human body.

Yet the greatest reward is not stronger muscles or greater endurance. It is the restoration of harmony. When we

move regularly, sleep improves, stress hormones decline, creativity increases and emotional balance becomes easier to maintain. We become more patient with our families, more productive at work and more present in our relationships. Holistic wellbeing is rarely created by one dramatic decision; it is built through small, repeated acts

that nourish the whole person.

Unfortunately, many people believe they must completely transform their lives before they can become active. They postpone wellbeing until they have more time, more money or more motivation. In reality, sustainable change begins with remarkably small decisions. A ten-minute

walk, dancing in the living room, gardening, taking the stairs or walking during phone calls all contribute to a healthier rhythm of living.

Equally important is choosing movement that brings joy rather than obligation. The most effective form of physical activity is the one people genuinely enjoy enough to continue. Whether it is swimming, cycling, football, hiking or dancing, enjoyment creates consistency, and consistency creates transformation.

Movement also reminds us of something deeper. Our bodies are not machines designed only for productivity. They are remarkable systems that thrive when challenged, restored and respected. Listening to the body's need for rest, celebrating progress instead of perfection and appreciating every stage of the journey are all expressions of self-respect rather than self-criticism.

Communities also flourish when movement becomes a shared experience. Walking groups, family outings, neighbourhood sports and workplace wellness initiatives strengthen social connections while improving health. In an age of increasing loneliness, movement has the unique ability to bring people together around a common purpose.

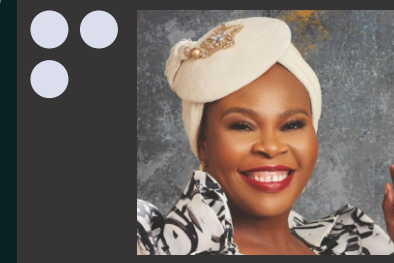
Ultimately, holistic living is not about pursuing the perfect body. It is about creating a life where energy replaces exhaustion, connection overcomes isolation and wellbeing becomes woven into everyday routines. The healthiest people are not those who exercise occasionally with intensity but those who intentionally build movement into the fabric of daily life.

The invitation is therefore simple. Do not wait for illness before valuing your health or for motivation before taking the first step. Begin where you are. Move with purpose. Celebrate progress. Protect your wellbeing.

This is because the greatest transformation is rarely found at the finish line. It begins the moment you decide to stop watching life from the sidelines and start moving through it with intention, joy and gratitude.

HOLISTIC LIVING

Move To Live: The Most Powerful Medicine Is Not In A Bottle, It Is In The Way We Live



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

Anti-Olodo Uprising: How To Stubbornly Cultivate Your Intellectual Side

By Zainab Aderounmu

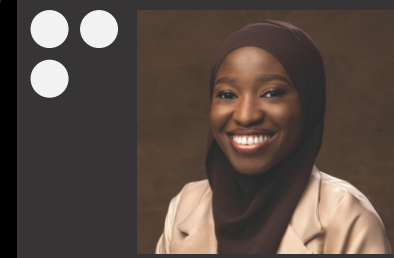
Social media, especially blogs, will not help you combat anti-intellectualism aka, the olodo uprising. This is particularly because the algorithm rewards engagement and virality over quality. Therefore, the onus to enrich your mind and critical thinking

capacity is on you. But how? Let's examine a few remedies.

First, remember you control your timeline. Inasmuch as the algorithm pops random information on your feed, it mirrors the type of content you pay attention to. If you tend to engage with gossip on random blogs, the algorithm will assume that's your jam, and will rank it higher. Try it for a few minutes; turn to your instagram or tiktok and engage solely with food content. Almost immediately, as if in a switch, you'll be bombarded with food content.

Second, never let go of your reading habit. Reading isn't something you only do in school for the purpose of passing an examination. It's a life-long commitment that helps you stay educated and knowledgeable, and when you have knowledge, decision making becomes easier. Beyond that, reading gives you the tools with which you can describe your experiences or emotions. It's the one way you can avoid contributing "omoooo" to an intellectual conversation. Read captions, short essays, long articles, fiction, biographies; always have something you're reading.

Beyond that, create without relying on AI. I'm not saying don't utilise AI tools, but rather, do not overly rely on them especially for creative endeavors. As humans, we're biologically wired to create, which is why overconsumption may sometimes feel depressing. Therefore, overly relying on AI may stunt your creativity and processing capabilities. Every small task becomes 'undoable' except there's an AI tool around. I first noticed my reliance on AI a few months ago. I wouldn't do anything until I had consulted AI first! As someone who prides herself as a creative-intellectual, the realisation was scary. Write, produce, and create, without seeing AI as the alpha and omega consultant. Most importantly, do not water down your vocabulary or



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.

style for the fear of sounding "too intellectual" or "like AI"! Artificial Intelligence doesn't hold the monopoly of intellectualism, humans do.

Also, engage in nation building. A disengaged citizen endorses the olodo uprising at its highest levels. Rather than spending hours researching the lives of celebrities and debating who wore it better, learn what laws are being debated in the National Assembly. How do they affect you! What can be done? I'm particularly excited that we chose not to forget the victims of the kidnap in Oyo; 56 days later, people were still calling on the government to rescue them. Can we do the same for the same for the proposed Women's Special Seats Bill?

You are what you consume, and that determines who you become, which ultimately shapes how you contribute to society. The olodo uprising is a product of the bandwagon effect. A crucial solution is to stubbornly evaluate your actions and decisions while propagating accurate information. Stay curious, and actively seek the answer to questions.



A Journey Through Traditional Beauty & Flavor

Inside Clay Food Shop & The Henna Place

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Clayfoodshop

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

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

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The Henna Place

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

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

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