



INSPIRING
WOMAN
AFRICA

EDITION 49, 4TH AUGUST, 2026



RONKE
SOKEFUN

TWICE FIRST FEMALE CHAIR, LEGACY IN PRACTICE

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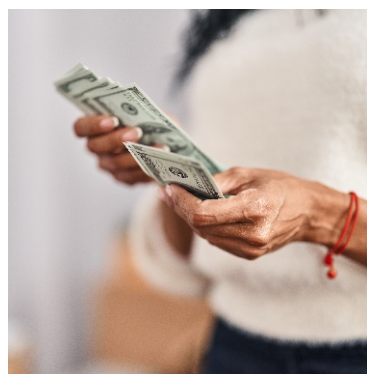
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Welcome!

Dear Readers,

Welcome to the beautiful month of August. We are glad to be here. First and foremost, we are excited to let you know, courtesy FirstBank of Nigeria Plc, we are back in print. Catch us in Punch Newspaper every Tuesday to enjoy IWA.

On our cover this week is Ronke Sokefun, a Partner with the law firm TEMPLARS, a distinguished legal practitioner and boardroom leader with close to four decades of experience spanning corporate law, governance, public policy, financial services, and strategic leadership. She sits as Chairperson of Comercio Partners and was the first female Chairperson of Nigeria Deposit Insurance Corporation (NDIC). Indeed, a legacy in practice.

From serving on boards of several organisations and leading worthy causes with dedication and results to show, Ronke Sokefun is proof that as important as gender is, results mean more and she is all about that.

Here are other articles in this edition:

HER POINT OF VIEW: The "Support Role Cycle": Why So Many Brilliant Women Are Overlooked at Work. By Chinyere Okorocho.

WOMAN EXECUTIVE: When the Sector is Bigger Than You: Leading in Systemically Broken Industries. By Wola Joseph-Condotti.

FINANCIAL AdviseHER: Three Ways Money Can Come to You. By Sola Adesakin.

GENDER INSIGHTS: W/African Women Push for Political Power in Abuja Summit. Asmau Benzies-Leo.

HOLISTIC LIVING: Your Greatest Investment Is the Life You Build Every Day. By Dr. Maymunah Yusuf Kadiri.

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WOMAN AT THE HELM: MFIKEYI MAKAYI, Chief Executive at KoBold Metals Africa.

WE'VE GOT MEN: DANIEL LARBI-TIEKU, Group Chief Executive Officer, Enterprise Group PLC.

Have a great week!



COVER INTERVIEW

RONKE SOKEFUN

TWICE FIRST FEMALE CHAIR,
LEGACY IN PRACTICE

Kemi Ajumobi

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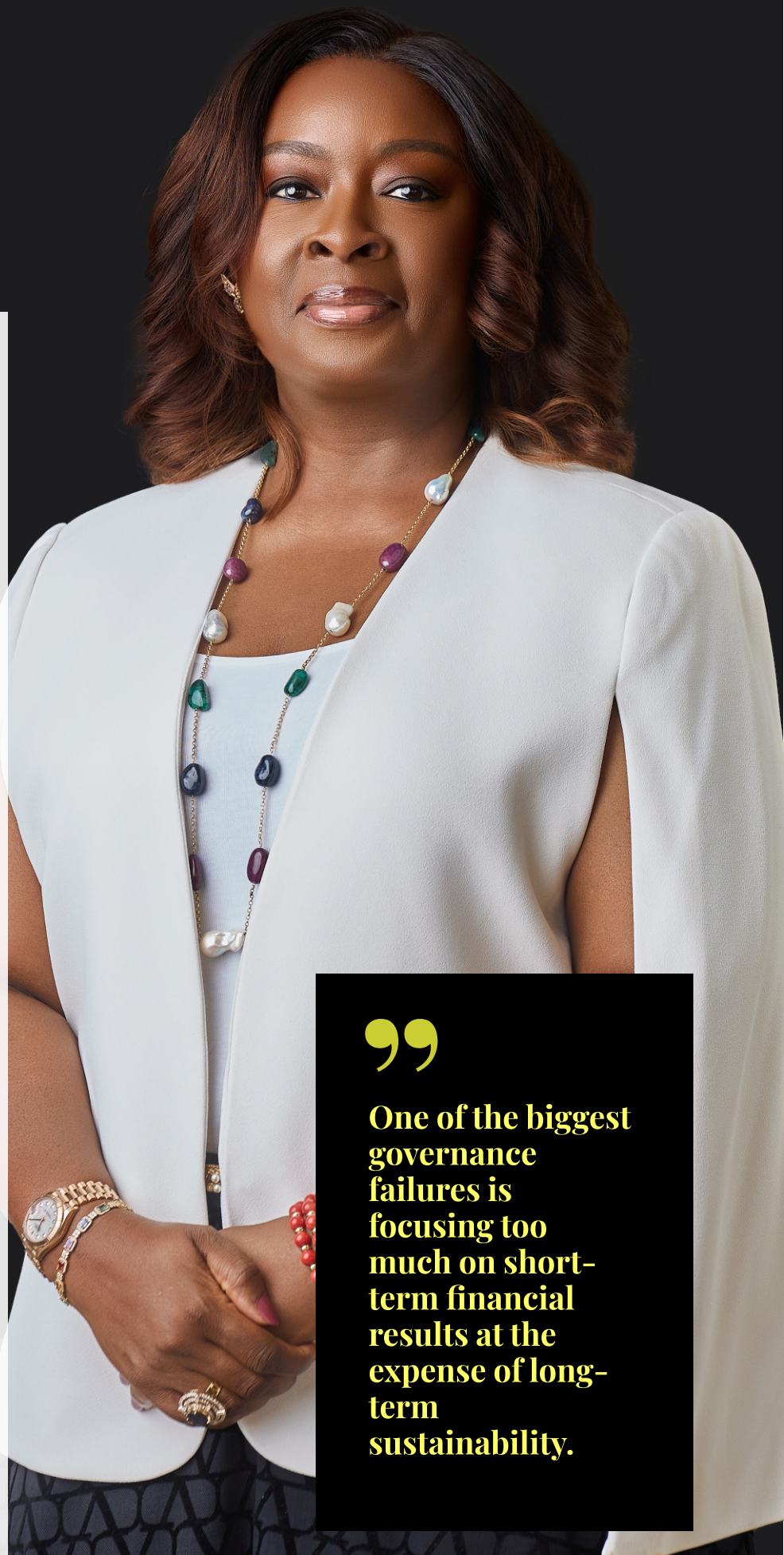
onke Sokefun, a Partner with the law firm TEMPLARS, is a distinguished legal practitioner and

boardroom leader with close to four decades of experience spanning corporate law, governance, public policy, financial services, and strategic leadership.

She began her legal career at Ighodalo & Associates before joining Aluko & Oyeboode, where she rose to the position of Partner. In 2002, she joined Ocean & Oil Services Limited as Head, Management Services and was subsequently appointed Group Chief Legal Officer of Oando Plc in 2007. In 2011, she transitioned into public service with the Ogun State Government, serving first as Special Adviser/Director-General, Bureau of Lands & Survey, and later as Commissioner for Agriculture as well as Commissioner for Urban & Physical Planning. In these roles, she provided strategic leadership and oversaw the effective implementation of key government policies and developmental initiatives between 2011 and 2018.

Sokefun was appointed Chairman of the Board of the Nigeria Deposit Insurance Corporation in December 2018, becoming the first female to hold the position in the Corporation's history. She served in that capacity until December 2022.

She is a Fellow of the Chartered Institute of Directors Nigeria and



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One of the biggest governance failures is focusing too much on short-term financial results at the expense of long-term sustainability.



currently serves as Chairman of its Women's Group. She is also a Fellow of the Institute of Chartered Secretaries and Administrators of Nigeria. Sokefun is the Founder of the M.R.S. Foundation, a non-profit organisation focused on impactful social intervention initiatives.

She obtained her LL.B degree in 1987 and was called to the Nigerian Bar in 1988. She has attended several executive education programmes at globally renowned institutions including Harvard Business School, Kellogg School of Management, Cambridge Judge Business School, INSEAD and the Lagos Business School. She also holds an ESG Certification (GCB.D) from the Competent Boards Institute, Canada. Ronke Sokefun serves on the boards of several organisations and currently chairs the Governance, People & Nominations Committee of the board of a foremost indigenous integrated energy company. She also chairs the board of a foremost Nigerian investment banking and financial services firm.

She is widely respected for her governance expertise, institutional leadership, and ability to build sustainable, high-performing organisations. In December 2025, she received the Olutoyin Olakunrin Woman Director of the Year Award by the Chartered Institute of Directors in recognition of her leadership role and mentoring activities.

► **Effective board leadership in practice beyond formal oversight**

Effective board leadership goes beyond the titles, attending meetings and reviewing papers. It is about building a strong partnership between the board and management while maintaining the right level of independence. It means working together on strategy, understanding the business and market realities, paying attention to culture, staff welfare and succession, while



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When people are valued for what they bring to the table, they thrive

ensuring that governance principles are embedded in the way the organisation operates. Ultimately, it is about helping the institution succeed sustainably.

► **Most common governance failures you've seen in financial institutions - and how boards can prevent them**

One of the biggest governance failures is focusing too much on short-term

financial results at the expense of long-term sustainability. Another is when directors avoid asking difficult questions (when issues are glaring!) because they do not want to appear confrontational. Boards must remember that constructive challenge is part of their responsibility. The difficult conversations today often prevent much bigger problems tomorrow.

► **Structuring how you challenge management without disrupting execution**

I believe trust comes first. You have to build a relationship with management

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I have always believed that leadership begins by setting the right example.



reassess their operating environment, identify emerging risks that could derail their vision and develop appropriate mitigation strategies. Risk management should never be static.

► **Differences noticed between corporate governance and public sector governance**

In my experience, the private sector generally has a greater appreciation of corporate governance and its value. In the public sector, there is still a need for greater awareness of how strong governance improves accountability, productivity and institutional performance. Good governance benefits every organisation, regardless of whether it is public or private.

► **Keeping public policy implementation aligned with the rule of law under political pressure**

Political pressure is inevitable in public service. The important thing is to remain guided by the law or regulation establishing specific institutions and the mandates entrusted to them. Those should always be the compass for decision-making. Once those principles remain clear, it becomes much easier to navigate external pressures without compromising integrity.

so they understand that your questions and observations are not antagonistic but are aimed at strengthening the organisation. Once there is mutual respect, and an understanding of a common goal, robust discussions become easier and everyone remains focused on improving the overall outcome.

► **Increase in the number of women on boards, what is responsible and how can we ensure the numbers keep rising?**

I believe organisations are increasingly recognising the competence, experience and value that women bring to the boardroom. It is no longer simply about representation or tokenism. It is about capability. To sustain this progress, we must intentionally mentor, sponsor and prepare more women for leadership positions so there is a strong pipeline of qualified candidates.

► **When you became NDIC Chair, what was your first priority to strengthen confidence and stability?**

There had been no board at NDIC for about five years before we assumed office. My immediate priority was to understand the backlog of matters awaiting board attention and ensure that we discharged our responsibilities thoughtfully rather than simply rubber-stamping decisions. It took time to settle in, but once we did, we remained focused on delivering our mandate responsibly throughout our tenure.

► **Governance or risk lessons from NDIC that Nigerian institutions should adopt more broadly**

One lesson that stood out for me is that risk is constantly evolving. The risks organisations face today are very different from those of five or ten years ago. Institutions must continually



► **If you had to teach private-sector leaders about public administration, what would you tell them?**

I would first encourage them not to underestimate the quality of people within the public service. There are many dedicated professionals who understand policy, processes and institutional continuity. While public institutions may appear more bureaucratic, many of those procedures exist to ensure accountability and transparency. There is much the private sector can learn from that discipline.

► **Biggest misconception about women's leadership in boardrooms**

One of the biggest misconceptions is that women are there simply to make up the numbers. My experience has been quite the opposite. I have seen women chair some of the most critical board committees and lead boards with distinction, strengthening governance, accountability and decision-making.

► **How Board Chairs and CEOs can create environments where women can thrive - not just participate**

It starts with recognising competence and creating opportunities based on merit. Women should be entrusted with meaningful leadership responsibilities and appointed to board committees where their knowledge and experience can make the greatest impact. When people are valued for what they bring to the table, they thrive.

► **From your experience with the Chartered Institute of Directors (Women's Group), what initiatives have produced the best results?**

Three things stand out for me: inclusivity, recognition and support. When women feel included, their contributions are acknowledged and they are supported to grow, they naturally become more confident leaders who, in turn, lift others.



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I hope that we will continue to raise governance standards and create opportunities based not on gender, but on competence, character and capability

► **Mentorship or sponsorship practices that made the largest difference for you**

Listening and empathy. Some of the people who influenced me most were those who genuinely listened, understood my aspirations and challenged me to become better. Sometimes, believing in someone before they fully believe in themselves can make all the difference.

► **Being Chair of the companies you led as first female**

It has been both an honour and a huge responsibility. When you are the first woman to occupy a position, you know that people are watching (and judging!) - not just your decisions but your conduct. I became even more conscious of punctuality, preparation, temperament and professionalism because a chair sets the tone for the entire board. I have always believed that leadership begins by setting the right example.

► **To every female executive, what would you say?**

Stay the course. Work hard. Own your space. Have a voice. Never stop learning or growing. Never be afraid to make mistakes. And as you rise, make it a point to lift other women along the way.

► **What are you looking forward to?**

I look forward to more opportunities to serve, to make a meaningful impact, to leave institutions stronger than I met them and to continue raising and supporting the next generation of women leaders.

► **Concluding words**

It has been a privilege to share my thoughts on governance and leadership. As women, we have made significant progress, but there is still much to do. I encourage women to join already thriving communities of women e.g. the CIOD Women's Group. It gives a sense of belonging. We just had our Biennial Conference which provided strategic networking opportunities.

I hope that we will continue to raise governance standards and create opportunities based not on gender, but on competence, character and capability.

WOMAN EXECUTIVE

When the Sector is Bigger Than You: Leading in Systemically Broken Industries

By Wola Joseph-Condotti

There is a kind of leadership burden of running a company inside a sector that is, honestly broken.

You inherit ambitious targets. You put together a competent team. You write a credible strategy. And then you spend

most of your week fighting problems you did not create, cannot fully fix, and will still somehow be blamed for when they land on the evening news.

If you have led anything in Nigerian power, oil and gas, aviation, healthcare, education, or most of the infrastructure-

heavy sectors on this continent, you already know what I am describing. The grid collapses, and your customers lose light. Gas supply falters, and generation drops. A tariff order is delayed, and your revenue assumptions shift overnight. A policy changes at the federal level, and the three-year plan you agonised over becomes a one-year plan by Friday. You did not cause any of it. But you will answer for all of it.

The Honest Conversation We Keep Avoiding
In leadership books, we are constantly told to focus on what we can control. It is good advice, and I have given it myself. But it is also incomplete.

Because in sectors with deep structural problems, the truth is that most of what determines your company's outcomes is genuinely not within your control. The infrastructure you depend on. The regulators you answer to. The upstream suppliers you cannot replace. The macroeconomic conditions you cannot steer. All of these shape your reality far more than your strategy ever will. And pretending otherwise sets you, and everyone reporting to you, up for a quiet kind of despair. The despair of working very hard, very well, and still falling short of targets that were never realistic to begin with.

So the first honest act of leadership in a broken sector is this. You have to name the system for what it is. Not as an excuse. As a starting point.

The 30 Percent That Belongs to You
Once you have named the system, the next discipline is to figure out which part of the outcome actually belongs to you. In sectors like ours, that part may only be about 30 percent. Sometimes less. But that 30 percent is sacred, because it is where your leadership actually shows up. It shows up in the quality of your team. In the integrity of your processes. In the discipline of your governance. In how quickly your call centre picks up. In how clearly you communicate bad news. In how you treat staff when the cameras are

off. In the standards you refuse to lower, even when nobody would notice if you did. The 70 percent will write the headlines. The 30 percent will write your legacy. The Trap Inside That Discipline
There is a trap that comes with all of this, and it is worth naming.

It is the trap of perfecting the controllable while going completely silent on the rest. Some leaders, when they realise the system is broken, retreat entirely into what they can manage. They polish internal processes obsessively. They run beautiful staff engagement programmes. They produce flawless board packs. And they go very quiet on the bigger conversation. That is not leadership. That is hiding behind excellence.

The leader of a company in a broken sector has a second responsibility, and honestly, it is the harder one. You have to speak honestly about the system, even when speaking is inconvenient. You have to engage policymakers. Show up in reform conversations. Lend your platform to solutions that go beyond your company. And sometimes, you have to say the thing others in your seat will not say, because they are too afraid of losing access. You cannot fix the system on your own. But you cannot afford to be silent inside it either.

Holding the Tension
The hardest part of this kind of role is the emotional discipline of holding two truths at the same time.

The first truth: I am responsible for what happens in my company.

The second truth: I am not all-powerful. There are forces well beyond my reach.

A leader who only holds the first truth will burn out under impossible standards. A leader who only holds the second becomes passive, blaming the system for everything and building nothing. Mature leadership in a broken sector lives right in the space between those two

truths. You own what is yours. You name what is not. And you refuse to let either truth cancel out the other.

A Word From Scripture

The prophet Nehemiah understood this tension well. He arrived in Jerusalem to find the walls broken, the people scattered, and the systems collapsed. He had not caused any of it. But he did not sit around lamenting the system endlessly, and he did not retreat into only the small things he alone could manage.

He did three things at once. He rebuilt what he could, brick by brick. He confronted the systemic actors, the nobles and officials quietly corroding the city from within. And he prayed. Constantly. "O God, strengthen my hands." (Nehemiah 6:9)

He held the tension between personal action, structural confrontation, and quiet dependence on God. And in 52 days, the wall stood.

Final Thoughts

If you are leading in a broken sector, there will be days when the weight of the system feels heavier than the weight of the role itself.

On those days, hear this, you are not asked to fix everything. You are asked to be faithful with what is actually yours.

Do your 30 percent exceptionally. Speak honestly about the 70. Refuse the comfort of denial and the comfort of despair, because both of them are just different ways of giving up.

And know that the leaders who eventually change broken industries are rarely the ones who waited for the system to fix itself. They are the ones who built well inside imperfect walls, and used their voice to call for better.

That, in the end, is what stewardship looks like when the sector is bigger than you.



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 LL.M. in International Finance Law from Harvard Law School, and an MBA from INSEAD Business School. She is also an International Finance Corporation (World Bank) Board Evaluation Certified Professional and Corporate Governance Trainer.

Wola's achievements have earned widespread recognition. Most recently, she received the inaugural Leadership Excellence Award of the Year at the Legal Era Africa Awards 2024, becoming the first-ever recipient of this category. The award celebrated her historic transition from General Counsel to Group MD/CEO, a milestone applauded for redefining leadership pathways in the legal profession.

She is a member of the Institute of Directors and the Society for Corporate Governance Nigeria. Additionally, she is an associate member of the Institute of Chartered Secretaries and Administrators of Nigeria, and Women in Management, Business, and Public Service.

FINANCIAL AdviseHER

Three Ways Money Can Come to You

By Sola Adesakin

Most people have one relationship with money. They work, and then they get paid. The month ends, the cycle resets, and they begin again. It is reliable, for as long as it lasts, and that qualifier is the part worth examining.

Because the salary, as dependable as it feels, is the most fragile of the three ways money can come to you. It requires your continuous presence, your continued employment, and a set of conditions entirely outside your control to remain in place.

There are two other ways money moves toward people. And the individuals who

understand all three, and deliberately build from one toward the others, are the ones who arrive at genuine financial freedom rather than just financial activity.

The first way is the salary. You already know this one. You show up, you deliver, you get paid. It is linear. Your income is directly proportional to your time and your continued presence in the arrangement. The moment the arrangement ends, whether through resignation, redundancy, illness, or any number of circumstances life does not announce in advance, the income ends with it.

This is not an argument against employment. A salary is an excellent

foundation. It funds your life while you build everything else. But it is a starting point, not a destination, and treating it as a destination is where most people get stuck.

The problem is not that people have salaries. The problem is that they have only salaries, and somewhere along the way they stopped there.

The second way money comes to you is through skills. And this is where the conversation gets interesting, because skills behave very differently from employment. A skill, genuinely developed and well positioned, does not clock in or clock out. It does not require a particular employer to remain relevant. It travels with you. It compounds over time. And

critically, it can be deployed on your terms, to multiple clients, in multiple contexts, at fees you set rather than negotiate downward.

Think about what this means practically. The accountant who works a salaried job has one income stream. The accountant who also consults for three small businesses on the side has four. The financial educator who speaks at corporate events, runs a training programme, writes a column, and advises private clients individually is drawing from the same core skill set in four different directions. The skill does not get used up. It gets more valuable the more it is applied.

This is why investing in your skills is not an expense. It is the highest-returning investment most people can make, and it is

chronically undervalued because the return does not show up on a brokerage statement. It shows up in your earning capacity, your optionality, and your ability to generate income regardless of what any single employer decides.

The third way money comes to you is through assets. And this is the one that changes everything, because assets pay you whether or not you show up. A dividend-paying stock sends you money while you sleep. A rental property generates income while you are on holiday. A money market fund accrues returns on a Sunday afternoon when you are not thinking about it at all. A business that has been systemised beyond your daily involvement earns revenue independent of your hours.

This is not a fantasy, it is a structure. And it is built deliberately, usually starting from the salary that funds the skill development that eventually generates the capital that buys the assets. The three are not competing. They are sequential, and for a period, simultaneous.

The honest question to ask yourself today is: which of these three do you currently have, and which are you building toward? If your only income source disappeared tomorrow, what remains? If the answer is nothing, that is not a judgment. It is a starting point.

Here is your call to action, and it is specific. This month, identify one skill you have that you are not currently monetising and research one way to deploy it beyond your employment. Simultaneously, open or review one investment account and ensure money is moving into it consistently, however modest the amount.

These are not big moves, they are the right moves. And they are the beginning of a financial life that does not depend entirely on a single arrangement remaining intact. A salary pays you monthly. Skills keep paying you, anytime. Assets pay you even when you are asleep.

Know the difference, then build accordingly.



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 “Support Role Cycle”. Why So Many Brilliant Women Are Overlooked at Work

Chinyere Okorochoa

Recently, I had a conversation with a female executive that stayed with me long after our meeting ended.

On paper, she was exceptional.

Highly competent. Dependable.

Intelligent. Hardworking. The kind of professional every organisation says it wants. She consistently delivered results, supported her team, met deadlines, solved problems, and carried responsibilities that were often beyond her job description. Yet despite all her hard work, she felt invisible.

She watched less experienced colleagues receive promotions. She saw others invited into high-level meetings and strategic conversations while she remained the dependable “go-to” person behind the scenes. Leadership trusted her to execute, but not necessarily to lead.

Her frustration was evident when she finally said to me: “Chi, I feel like I’m doing everything right, yet I’m standing still.”

What she was experiencing is something I have seen repeatedly in the careers of many brilliant women. I call it the Support Role Cycle. These women become so valuable in execution that they are unintentionally overlooked for strategy and leadership.

They are the organisers. The fixers. The dependable team players. The women everyone relies on to “hold things together.”

But while they are busy helping others shine, they quietly neglect their own visibility, positioning, and leadership narrative.

The truth is this: many women have built careers around being helpful instead of being strategically visible.

And unfortunately, the corporate world does not always reward invisible excellence.

One woman once shared with me how she spent years mentoring junior colleagues, assisting senior executives with presentations, stepping in during crises, and consistently delivering outstanding work. Yet when a leadership role became available, it was given to someone externally recruited. Why?

Because leadership saw her as indispensable support and not as a strategic decision-maker.

That distinction matters. At senior levels, promotions are rarely based solely on hard work. They are based on perception, visibility, influence, and leadership positioning. Organisations begin asking different questions:

Who can represent the company?
Who can influence stakeholders?
Who can lead transformation?
Who can think strategically under pressure?

This is why many hardworking professionals become frustrated. They believe effort alone should speak for itself. But in reality, visibility and positioning are equally important.

Over the years, I have learned that career acceleration is not always about doing more work. Sometimes, it is about changing how leadership experiences your value.

The executive I mentioned earlier and I worked together intentionally for ninety days. But contrary to what many assume, we did not focus on working longer hours or increasing productivity.

Instead, we focused on repositioning.

We refined how she communicated during meetings. We strengthened her executive presence. We shifted her contributions from operational updates to strategic insights. We identified opportunities for her to lead visible projects rather than remain in purely supportive roles.

Most importantly, she stopped presenting herself as “the helper” and started showing up as “the architect.”

The transformation was remarkable.

A few weeks ago, she called me excitedly. Not only had she finally received the promotion she had long deserved, but she had also been selected to lead one of the organisation’s most important strategic task forces.

What changed?

Not her intelligence.
Not her competence.
Not even her work ethic.

What changed was her positioning.

This challenge is particularly common among women because many of us were raised to believe that humility means silence, and that excellence should naturally be noticed without intentional visibility. But leadership does not work that way.

If people only associate you with support, they will continue to keep you in support roles. So how can women break out of this cycle?

First, stop hiding behind execution alone. Learn to contribute strategically during meetings. Do not just present problems; present solutions, insights, and ideas.

Second, increase your visibility intentionally. Volunteer for projects that place you closer to decision-making and leadership conversations.

Third, document and communicate your impact confidently. Too many women minimise their achievements while others amplify theirs.

Finally, start thinking beyond your current role. Ask yourself regularly: “How do I want leadership to experience me?”

As a helper?
Or as a leader?

Every woman deserves to be seen not only for how well she supports the vision, but also for her ability to shape it.

Because true career acceleration begins the moment you stop waiting to be noticed and start positioning yourself to be remembered.



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

W/African Women Push for Political Power in Abuja Summit

Asmau Benzies Leo



In a defining moment for gender equality across West Africa, a formidable coalition of women leaders, high level policymakers, and international development partners gathered in Nigeria's capital city for a two-day summit with a singular, uncompromising objective: to dismantle systemic barriers and transform decades of symbolic rhetoric into tangible political power for women.

Held from July 30 to 31, 2026, the High Level Women's Political Leadership Forum

convened by the African Women Leadership Network (AWLN) under the theme, Accelerating Gender Parity in Political Leadership in West Africa: From Commitments to Action." Organised against a backdrop of complex political transitions and social challenges across the sub-region, the forum culminated in the unanimous adoption of a landmark regional roadmap, the Abuja Regional Action Agenda, designed to fast-track women's inclusion in governance and decision making architecture across all West African nations.

Addressing a packed auditorium of delegates at

the Transcorp Hotel Abuja, Nigeria's Minister of Women Affairs, H.E Imaan Sulaiman-Ibrahim, delivered a sharp critique of current democratic governance structures that continue to sideline half their populace:

"A democracy that governs with half its talent is not simply unjust, it is underperforming," Imaan said.

Her statement captured the sobering statistical reality that framed every panel discussion and working session throughout the forum. Despite decades of international treaties, regional protocols, and advocacy campaigns, women's political representation in West Africa remains alarmingly low:

- **18.4% of parliamentary seats in West Africa are held by women.**
- **Less than 10% of elective offices in Nigeria are occupied by women.**

What emerged unequivocally from the proceedings is that gender inequality in politics can no longer be dismissed as merely a social or women's issue. Instead, delegates framed it as an active development crisis that directly impairs economic growth, public trust, and political stability across the region.

The forum brought together an influential assembly of the region's most prominent female actors and advocates, including:

Marie-Louise Mwangi, representative of the African Women Leaders Network (AWLN) Co-Convener Bineta Diop, Damtien Tchintchibidja, Vice-President of the ECOWAS Commission, Chantal Fanny, President of the ECOWAS Female Parliamentarians Association, Catherine Touré, representing the AWLN Private Sector Coalition.

From passionate keynote addresses to pragmatic policy breakouts, these leaders spoke with one clear message: the era of decorative commitments, token appointments, and unfulfilled pledges is over.

Research presented during the forum reinforced the concrete benefits of balanced governance. Empirical evidence across regional and global case studies showed that countries with higher female political representation consistently achieve:

Stronger Institutional Accountability: Lower rates of public corruption and greater fiscal transparency.

Inclusive Policymaking: Legislation that prioritises healthcare, public education, social safety nets, and family welfare among others.

Better Social Outcomes: Improved human development indicators and more durable post-conflict peacebuilding processes.

Breaking Down the Barriers:

Achieving parity requires confronting the deep-seated obstacles that historically keep women off the ballot. Delegates systematically identified five persistent barriers stifling progress:

1. Weak Enforcement of Quotas: A lack

of legal teeth behind existing gender equity guidelines.

2. Patriarchal Social Norms: Deep seated cultural biases that frame political leadership as an exclusively male domain.

3. Political Violence: Targeted physical, emotional, and digital harassment designed to intimidate female candidates.

4. High Cost of Political Participation: Hyper-monetized campaign environments that disproportionately exclude women.

5. Exclusionary Party Systems: Opaque candidate selection processes controlled by internal political gatekeepers.

As host, Nigeria stood at the center of both leadership and intense scrutiny. Despite boasting of comprehensive policy frameworks on paper, Nigeria's progress



has stalled due to heavily monetized political systems, repeated failures of constitutional reform amendments aimed at creating special seats for women, and delayed gender equality bills in the National Assembly. However, hosting the forum signaled a renewed national willingness to confront these political bottlenecks head-on.

To bridge the gap between promises and implementation, the summit unveiled the Abuja Regional Action Agenda, an eight-point strategic blueprint designed to bind governments, political parties, and civil society to concrete action:

1. Enforce Gender Quotas: Establish legally mandated quotas for elective and appointive posts, complete with enforcement mechanisms for non-compliant political parties.

2. Reform Political Parties: Internalise gender equity within party constitutions and nomination structures.

3. Fund Women's Participation: Create public and private campaign finance networks and subsidies for female candidates.

4. Address Political Violence: Enact strict legal protections and rapid-response frameworks to shield women from electoral violence and online harassment.

5. Build Leadership Pipelines: Invest in continuous political education, candidate incubators, and mentorship.

6. Improve Gender Data Systems: Build regional databases to track gender metrics in appointments, elections, and voting patterns in real time.

7. Strengthen Regional Accountability: Establish monitoring frameworks through ECOWAS to hold member states accountable to their commitments.

8. Drive Public Advocacy: Mobilise community-level campaigns to shift cultural mindsets and dismantle

patriarchal stereotypes.

This is no longer about inclusion, it is about transformation.

Investing in the Next Generation

Recognising that long-term political equality requires early investment, the forum placed significant emphasis on young women leaders. A key highlight was the announcement of the upcoming African Academy for Women in Political Leadership in Kigali, Rwanda. Designed as a regional training ground, the academy will focus on:

- **Training emerging female political leaders in campaign management and media strategy.**

- **Providing direct mentorship from seasoned women parliamentarians and ministers.**

- **Building cross-border political networks to support female candidates across Africa.**

As the High-Level Forum drew to a close, one crucial question lingered among delegates and observers alike: Will West African governments move swiftly to implement these decisions, or will this become another forgotten declaration stored on regional shelves?

Participants made it clear that civil society, regional bodies, and women's coalitions will actively monitor implementation. The true measure of the summit will not be found in the eloquence of its speeches, but in the political legal reforms adopted in the months ahead.

For millions of women across West Africa, the Abuja summit offers more than policy promises, it presents a tangible blueprint of possibility. For the sub-region as a whole, converting these commitments into political action may well be the historic turning point governance has been waiting for.



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

Mfikeyi Makayi

Chief Executive at KoBold Metals Africa

Mfikeyi is a seasoned mining professional with over 17 years of experience in industry. She worked on one of Zambia & Africa's largest copper mines, First Quantum's Kansanshi Copper-Gold mine in mining operations and the global internal audit division covering Australia, Finland, Mauritania and Panama's operations. She was also the Country Manager and Director of one of Zambia's largest mining and construction equipment supply and services companies, Barloworld Equipment, supplying Caterpillar products to various industries. Her portfolio covered First Quantum's Kansanshi and Sentinel Mines, Barrick's Lumwana Mine, Mopani Copper Mines, and Gemfields' Kagem mine, the world's largest emerald mine.

KoBold Metals journey began in 2018 by Kurt House, Josh Goldman, and Jeff Jurinak. The idea was to find a lasting solution to the growing supply gap of critical minerals needed to build their future economy. They observed that the pace of unearthing effective procedures was dragging due to archaic approaches and other forms of setbacks. More so, per dollar invested didn't make things better. Electrification was going on around the world but theirs wasn't same, which affected their ability to find enough copper, cobalt, lithium, and nickel to meet the growing demand.

This never deterred them. They were determined to effect the changes needed. They understood that to change how exploration is done, they needed to change the incentives as technology couldn't be

developed on its own and KoBold needed to develop and deploy its own systems. They also admitted that they needed to apply a rigorously scientific approach to decision-making where they use AI thoughtfully. This made KoBold become not just a technology company, but a scientific exploration company that enlarged into mine development after unearthing Mingomba.

Mfikeyi has an MBA from Lagos Business School at Pan-Atlantic University, Nigeria. She also received an M.Sc. in Mining Engineering from Camborne School of Mines at the University of Exeter, United Kingdom. She holds a Masters of Engineering in Environmental Engineering and a BSc in Civil Engineering both from Old Dominion University in the US.



WE'VE GOT MEN

Daniel Larbi-Tieku

Group Chief Executive Officer, Enterprise Group PLC

Daniel Larbi-Tieku is the Group Chief Executive Officer of Enterprise Group PLC. Enterprise Group Plc was incorporated on 24th November 2008 and is the holding company of the Group. The original entity was Enterprise Insurance Company, established in 1924 and is the oldest insurance company in Ghana.

It was listed on the Ghana Stock Exchange (GSE) in 1991 as the first insurance company to be publicly listed in Ghana.

Following a restructuring of the Group in 2010, Enterprise Group Plc was incorporated to become the holding company and was listed on GSE in place of Enterprise Insurance which was subsequently delisted.

Their vision is that, in all their markets, their pedigree will be recognised, their strength respected, their expertise valued and their solutions sought by all who desire an advantage in life.

Their mission is to provide all who come into contact with them their desired advantage because, in their words: "We are the best at what we do."

Before joining the Enterprise family in June 2011, Daniel worked at the Coca-Cola Bottling Company where he started as a Management Accountant in 1998 and rose through the ranks to become the Head of Finance in the year 2000.

Daniel also worked in different capacities with Rank Hovis, UK, and Allied Walthamstow, UK between 1995 and 1998. He has

attended a vast spread of international seminars and training programs, notable amongst them are, Coca-Cola Fast 1&2 development programmes, National Examining Board for Supervisory Management, UK, Process and value engineering in Manufacturing, UK.

Daniel Larbi-Tieku is a Chartered Accountant and a member of the Institute of Chartered Accountants, Ghana. He is also a Fellow of the Association of Chartered and Certified Accountants, UK. Daniel is a Bachelor of Science degree holder in Accounting from the University of Ghana and a finalist in a Master of Finance Degree with the University of Wales (Distance Learning).

HOLISTIC LIVING

Your Greatest Investment Is the Life You Build Every Day

By Dr. Maymunah Yusuf Kadiri

When Maggie looked in the mirror, she believed the extra weight she had gained was her greatest problem. It was only the visible sign of a life that had quietly drifted out of balance. Stress had replaced rest, convenience had replaced nourishment, and survival had replaced intentional living. Her transformation began not with a miracle diet but with one decision to care for herself differently. That single decision gradually changed her body, restored her confidence, lifted her mood, strengthened her relationships and gave her a renewed sense of purpose.

Too often we define health by the absence of disease or the number on a weighing scale. True wellbeing is much bigger. Holistic living recognises that our physical health, emotional wellbeing, mental resilience, relationships, sleep, nutrition, movement, purpose and daily habits are deeply connected. When one area suffers, the others eventually feel the impact. Likewise, when one improves, every other area has an opportunity to flourish.

Maggie's story reflects the reality of many people today. Long work hours, financial pressures, digital distractions and chronic stress make unhealthy choices feel normal. Meals become rushed, sleep becomes optional, exercise is postponed and meaningful relationships receive whatever time is left. These choices may seem insignificant in the moment but repeated daily they shape the future of our health and happiness.

The encouraging truth is that lasting transformation rarely begins with dramatic change. Maggie started with small, sustainable decisions. She chose nourishing breakfasts instead of sugary ones, discovered enjoyable ways to stay active, learned healthier cooking methods and surrounded herself with supportive people. Every small victory-built confidence for the next. Over time her energy returned, her resilience grew, her confidence blossomed and her life became richer in every sense.

Research consistently demonstrates that regular movement, balanced nutrition, restorative sleep, effective stress management and meaningful social connections work together to reduce the risk of chronic disease while improving mental wellbeing and quality of life. None of these pillars stands alone. A healthy body supports a healthy mind, and a

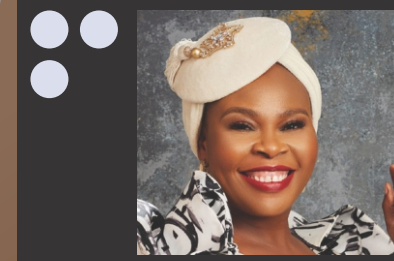
healthy mind strengthens relationships, productivity and purpose.

Holistic living is not about perfection or deprivation. It is about making daily choices that honour the life you hope to live. Drink more water. Protect your sleep. Walk more. Eat foods that nourish rather than merely satisfy. Laugh often. Invest in relationships. Manage stress before it manages you. Seek professional help when you need it. Small choices, repeated consistently, become extraordinary results.

The most inspiring lesson from Maggie's journey is that change begins long before anyone else notices it. Every healthy meal, every walk, every act of self-care and every decision to keep going is a vote for the future you are creating.

Do not wait until illness becomes your motivation. Choose wellness before disease demands your attention. Choose balance before burnout becomes your identity. Choose connection before isolation steals your joy. Choose purpose before routine drains your life.

Your greatest investment is not your income, possessions or status. It is the quality of the life you are healthy enough to live. Build that life one intentional choice at a time.



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.

TRIBEWITH THE VIBES

The Anatomy of Grief

By Zainab Aderounmu



A n icy wave of shock washed over me, as I tried to confirm my suspicions. It can't be that my phone is truly gone. I let out an unhinged cackle that made the lady standing next to me raise her eyebrows. I paused for a moment, trying to retrace my steps. At what point did I lose my phone?

I had woken up excitedly that morning. It was my baby girl's wedding, and I couldn't wait to usher her in with the bridal train. I got ready with a sing-song demeanor, already dreaming of what the day would look like. The venue was in Ikorodu, so I opted to take the ferry. And that, ladies and gentlemen, was where it began to unravel.

It was on the 'napep' between my home and the terminal that I stopped seeing my phone. I walked to the tuk-tuk stand to try to find my guy, but he had vanished, and no one seemed to know who he was. That was when denial set in. 'No, it can't be. How did I lose track of something so important to me? Why did I not put it in my bag? Why did I even have multiple bags?'

In this situation, the Nigerian thing to do is call the phone, to ascertain whether the finder is a thief, or a benevolent soul who wasn't sure how to return a lost item.

"The number you're trying to dial is not reachable at the moment, please, try again later."

I first lowered the ruffled cinch detail I had added to the left front side of my boubou. Heat, with a mix of sadness, rose quickly from my lower belly to

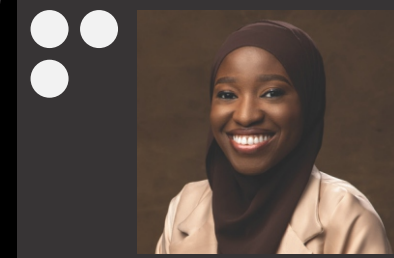
my chest. "Why did I have to be so careless on such a joyful day!? Why would a human being be comfortable with taking other people's things!? Was it the lady who sat beside me? She really didn't look like a thief. God, why me? Do you no longer love me? How could you let this happen to me, your beloved? Wait, I'll have to obtain a new one? What about the pictures I haven't backed up?"

I burst into tears. The woman whose phone I used tried to placate me, but failed. I cried on the short walk home, bumping into people and poles along the way. By the time I got home, I had begun to bargain with myself and with God. "What if someone was kind enough to just return it. What if I hadn't even left my house at all? Why did I have to go to the ferry, why not just by road." By the time I got home, I plonked carelessly into my bed, and wepted for hours.

I've noticed that telling a person to take heart, or move on from something they're grieving does not help. When my friend asked what plans I had to buy a new one, I became very angry. I haven't got there yet!

Depression, especially caused by loss, isn't something you can easily move on from. Moreover, it doesn't matter what you lose, as long as it's valuable to you, grief is a natural response. Modern neuroscience shows that the brain processes grief like physical pain using circuits tied to memory and attachment.

"What will I shoot my content with? What will happen to the data on it?" During the brain's response to grief, the amygdala becomes overactive leading to anxiety and mood swings. The brain continues to search for that which is



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.

lost, which explains the intense yearning, and inability to just 'let it go'. If the brain cannot accept the permanence of loss, its reward and attachment circuits become heightened which prevents healing. Owing to this, some people develop Prolonged Depression Disorder.

However, because it was just a phone, I eventually got to acceptance stage. "At least, it wasn't another loved one. Thankfully, I'm still alive, hale and hearty, I can always get a new one." I spent the rest of my dampened day under my duvet, reading a children's book. At least, I would get less screen time until I got a new device.

Not every form of loss is easy to come out of; grieving isn't a sign of weakness, it's a perfectly normal biological response to loss. The next time you're about to lose empathy, keep that in perspective.

CEO, FUNKE SOYIBO and her guests at the unveiling of her HNK Design Centre and Manufacturing in Lagos recently.



Woman Executive



Wola Joseph Condotti
Chief Executive Officer, Eko Electricity
Distribution Company

When the Sector is Bigger Than You: Leading in Systemically Broken Industries

There is a kind of leadership burden of running a company inside a sector that is, honestly broken. You inherit ambitious targets. You put together a competent team. You write a credible strategy. And then you spend most of your week fighting problems you did not create, cannot fully fix, and will still somehow be blamed for when they land on the evening news.

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Financial AdviseHER



Sola Adesakin
Founder and Lead Coach,
Smart Stewards

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

Every New Year comes with pressure. New goals, expectations. New standards of "success" defined mostly by what people are showing online. But in 2026 is going to be financially different for you, not because you spent louder or tried harder to impress. It will be because you lived for the right things.

Financial progress is less about dramatic results and more about quiet alignment.

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HOLISTIC LIVING



Dr. Maymunah Yusuf Kadiri
MD/CEO Pinnacle Medical Services Ltd.

Your Greatest Investment Is the Life You Build Every Day

When Maggie looked in the mirror, she believed the extra weight she had gained was her greatest problem. It was only the visible sign of a life that had quietly drifted out of balance. Stress had replaced rest, convenience had replaced nourishment, and survival had replaced intentional living. Her transformation began not with a miracle diet but with one decision: to care for herself differently. That single decision gradually changed her body, restored her confidence, lifted her mood, strengthened her relationships and gave her a renewed sense of purpose.

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Her Point Of View



Chinyere Okorocho
Partner & Overall Head of Sectors
at Jackson, Etti & Edu

The "Support Role Cycle". Why So Many Brilliant Women Are Overlooked at Work

Recently, I had a conversation with a female executive that stayed with me long after our meeting ended. On paper, she was exceptional. Highly competent. Dependable. Intelligent. Hardworking. The kind of professional every organisation says it wants. Responsibilities that were often beyond her job description.

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Gender Insights



Asmau Benzie Leo (Ph.D)
ED of the Centre for Nonviolence and Gender
Advocacy in Nigeria (CENGAIN)

Nigeria in 2026: Why True Security Must Have a Woman's Face

As Nigerians step into 2026, one truth remains undeniable: insecurity in Nigeria is not gender neutral. From banditry affected communities in the West to displacement camps in the Northeast, women and girls are not merely collateral victims of conflict; they are deliberately targeted, systematically affected, and often left without access to justice.

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WITH BES



Zainab Aderounmu
Youth Advisor & Ambassador
Delegation of the European Union
to Nigeria & ECOWAS

Nigeria in 2026: Why True Security Must Have a Woman's Face

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

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Published in **The PUNCH** every Tuesday.



A Journey Through Traditional Beauty & Flavor

Inside Clay Food Shop & The Henna Place

“Together, Clay Food Shop and The Henna Place offer more than services. They offer belonging. A place where tradition is not just preserved, but honored, elevated, and shared”

Clayfoodshop

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

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

 [@clayfoodshoplagos](https://www.instagram.com/clayfoodshoplagos)

: +234909 554 4990

The Henna Place

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

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

 [@Thehennaplace](https://www.instagram.com/Thehennaplace)

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