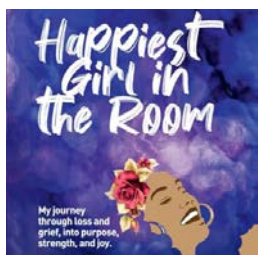


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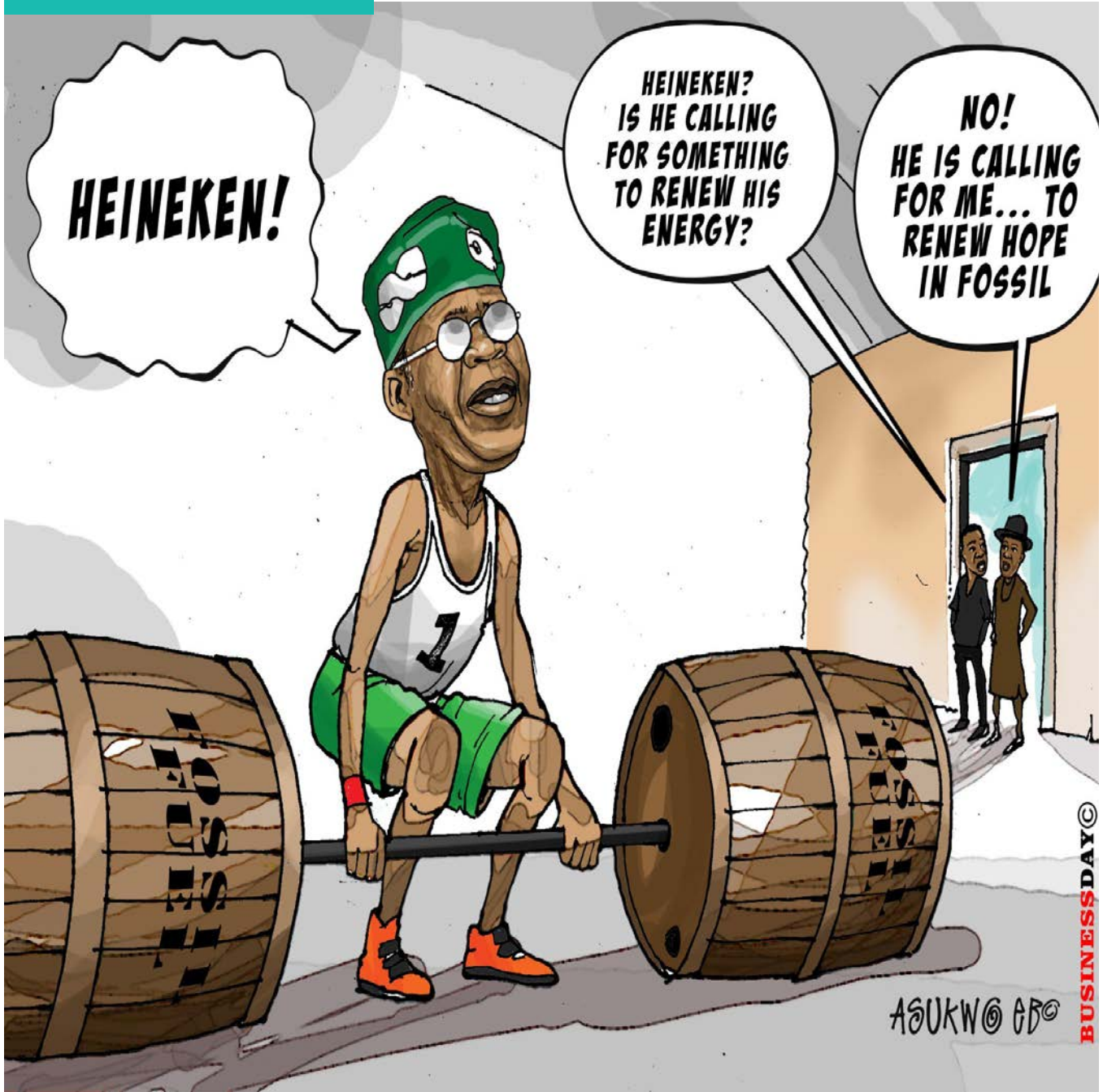
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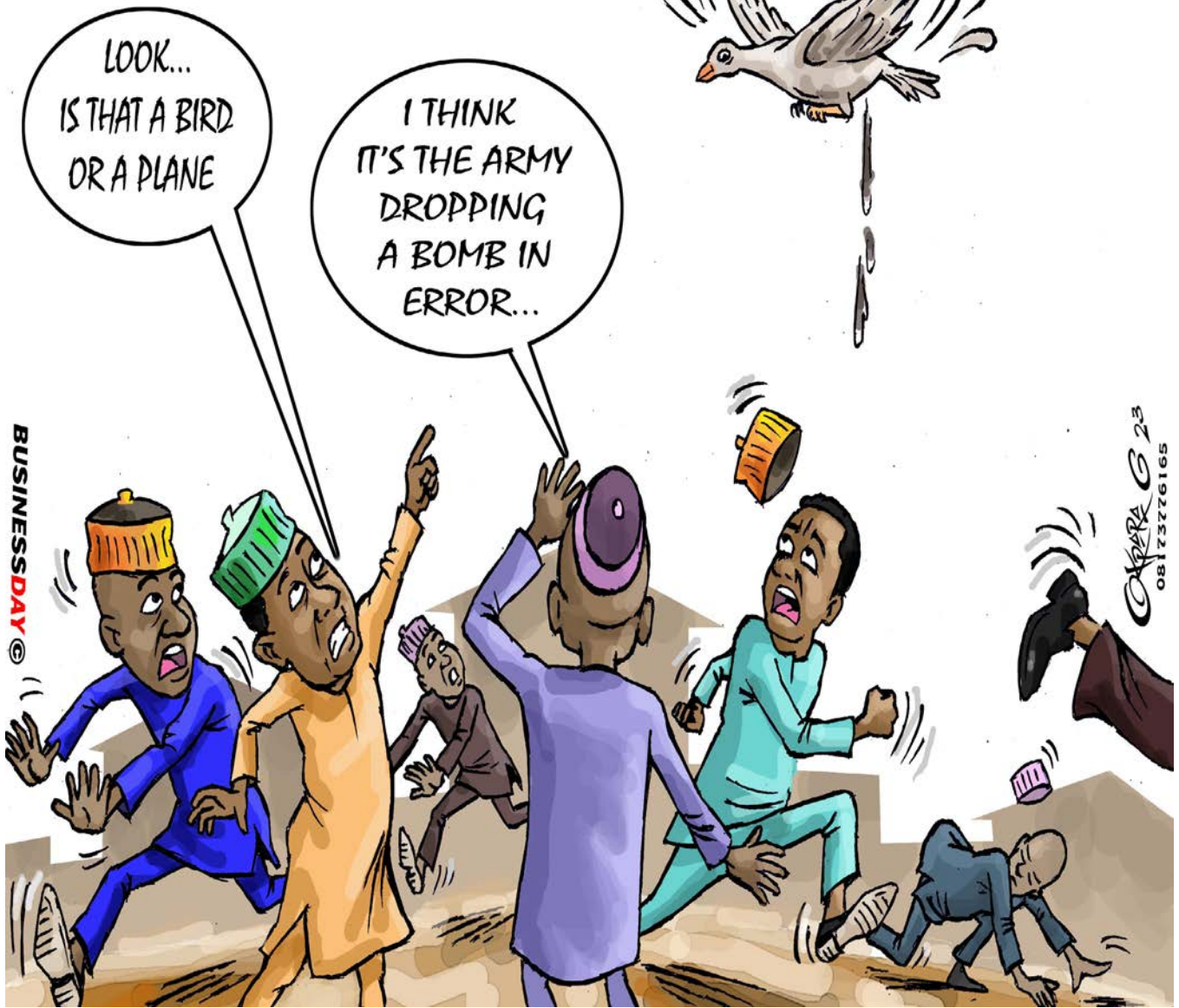


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Meet

JENNIFER OKEKE-OJIUDU

Women in tech are leaders,
mentors opening doors for well-
rounded industry
- Okeke-Ojiudu





Jennifer Okeke-Ojiudu is the Senior Ecosystem Engagements Manager at AfriLabs. In her role, she Heads/Drives the most impactful convening of the African technology and Innovation Ecosystem.

Okeke-Ojiudu also serves as a strategic bridge, fostering positive relationships between AfriLabs and African governments, international bodies, and stakeholders to enhance the organisations image, promote its objectives, and ensure its alignment with regional and international interests. In this interview with IFEOMA OKEKE-KORIEOCHA, she speaks on Working Mother's Guide, a project she spearheaded designed to assist mothers in balancing their professional and family responsibilities. She also speaks on other issues as it concerns advancing women in technology.

AS THE SENIOR ECOSYSTEM ENGAGEMENT MANAGER AT AFRILABS, CAN YOU SHARE SOME KEY INITIATIVES YOU'VE SPEARHEADED TO EMPOWER WOMEN WITHIN THE TECH AND INNOVATION ECOSYSTEM?

That's a really interesting question, in my role at AfriLabs I work in different capacities. However, one project that holds particular significance to me is The Working Mother's Guide. This aims to support working mothers, especially those in the technology and innovation sector. The guide, which I spearheaded, is designed to assist mothers in balancing their professional and family responsibilities. It offers valuable insights for mothers to seamlessly continue working during and after pregnancy. It also provides guidance for parents, including fathers, to take time off work after the arrival of a new baby, this also helps organizations create little but effective changes, fostering a work environment conducive to the continued presence of working mothers.

CAN YOU SHARE SUCCESS STORIES OF WOMEN WHO HAVE BENEFITED FROM AFRILABS' PROGRAMS AND HAVE MADE A SIGNIFICANT IMPACT IN THEIR RESPECTIVE INDUSTRIES?

This entrepreneur's success story echoes the collective achievements of empowered women:

RevUp's unwavering commitment and dedication have been instrumental in our success. Under their guidance, we've achieved remarkable milestones, including consistent revenue growth, heightened customer satisfaction, streamlined operations for efficiency, expanded market reach into new territories, and enhanced team performance.

Our revenue has seen month-to-month growth, a testament to RevUp's invaluable insights into our sales strategies. Their feedback has not only elevated our customer service but also improved our product offerings, resulting in significantly increased customer satisfaction scores.

RevUp's recommendations for process improvements have optimized our operations, reducing costs and boosting overall productivity. With their support, we've successfully entered new markets, broadening our customer base and increasing our market share. The impact extends beyond financial metrics—RevUp's coaching and training programs have elevated our team's performance and morale. This has fostered higher levels of collaboration and innovation within our organization.

In essence, RevUp's consistent efforts have played a pivotal role in our business's remarkable success and growth. Their dedication to propelling us to greater heights is truly commendable."

This testimonial encapsulates the tangible and multifaceted benefits that women entrepreneurs experience through AfriLabs' initiatives, fostering not only individual success but also contributing to the broader landscape of empowered and impactful women in various industries.

AS A WOMAN LEADER IN THE TECH AND INNOVATION SPACE, WHAT HAVE BEEN SOME OF THE MOST SIGNIFICANT LESSONS YOU'VE LEARNED THROUGHOUT YOUR CAREER?

Over the course of my professional journey, I have garnered valuable insights that underscore the significance of resilience, continuous learning, and the strategic utilization of one's unique strengths. Embracing challenges rather than shying away from them has been a fundamental principle that has propelled my growth in the dynamic landscape of the tech sector.

Challenges, when viewed as opportunities for learning and growth, have the potential to shape individuals into more resilient and adaptable professionals. Maintaining a curious mindset has proven to be another pivotal aspect of sustained success in the ever-evolving tech industry. The rapid pace of technological advancements demands a proactive approach to acquiring new skills and staying abreast



of industry trends. This commitment to continuous learning positions individuals to not only keep pace with the dynamic nature of technology but also to contribute meaningfully to innovation and progress. Building a robust support network has been a cornerstone of my career journey. This network, comprising mentors, peers, and collaborators, provides a safety net during challenging times and a platform for collective problem-solving. The power of collaboration and mentorship cannot be overstated; it not only accelerates personal and professional growth but also fosters a sense of community within the tech sector. Furthermore, the importance of recognizing and leveraging one's unique strengths cannot be emphasized enough. Each individual brings a distinct set of skills, experiences, and perspectives to the table. Embracing and celebrating this diversity not only enhances the richness of ideas and solutions but also contributes to a more inclusive and innovative tech ecosystem.

In cultivating a culture of collaboration and mentorship, I have witnessed firsthand the transformative impact it can have on unlocking the full potential of women in the tech sector. By creating environments that encourage knowledge sharing, mutual support, and the celebration of achievements, we pave the way for aspiring women to thrive and make meaningful contributions.

In essence, my career journey has taught me that resilience, continuous learning, leveraging unique strengths, and fostering collaborative environments are not just individual attributes but crucial elements that collectively propel the tech sector forward.

COULD YOU HIGHLIGHT A SPECIFIC SUCCESS STORY WHERE YOUR EFFORTS IN ECOSYSTEM ENGAGEMENT DIRECTLY CONTRIBUTED TO THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN IN TECHNOLOGY?

At this Year's AfriLabs Annual Gathering event I was thrilled to launch The Working Mother's Guide. Currently, we are actively collaborating with our hubs across all 54 African countries where AfriLabs operates to integrate this guide. I am elated to share that we have received endorsements from notable figures such as Sonia Agu, CEO of SA Consulting in Nigeria, Paula Ingabire, Minister of ICT and Innovation in the Government of Rwanda, and Berna Rusagara, Executive Director of Women for Women in Rwanda. This is a huge step in the right direction for working mothers in the innovation ecosystem.

WHAT STRATEGIES DO YOU EMPLOY TO ENCOURAGE MENTORSHIP AND NETWORKING OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN WITHIN THE AFRILABS COMMUNITY?

Within AfriLabs, we have established 'The Women of AfriLabs Platform,' an initiative fostering a network for female hub leaders, facilitators, and partners.

This platform serves as a hub for mentorship, providing opportunities for women to engage in meaningful dialogue, share experiences, and offer mentorship to one another. Each woman within the network contributes by submitting a profile detailing their expertise, qualifications, and what they are happy to teach another woman. This initiative empowers women to connect, learn, and support each other within the innovation landscape.

CAN YOU SHARE YOUR PERSPECTIVE ON THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN SHAPING THE FUTURE OF INNOVATION IN AFRICA?

Women, with their multifaceted experiences and perspectives, play an instrumental role in shaping the landscape of the innovation and technology ecosystem. Their unique journey through life, distinct challenges, and varied backgrounds bring forth a rich tapestry of insights that significantly impact the industry. In the realm of technology, diversity is not just a checkbox; it's the driving force behind innovative thinking and problem-solving.

Women in tech frequently demonstrate a collaborative and sympathetic leadership style, which is a strong influence in the industry. In a world where cooperation and connectivity are critical, women's capacity to promote teamwork generates an environment at work that thrives on collective intelligence. This collaborative spirit not only enhances problem-solving but also leads to the cultivation of a supportive and creative atmosphere.

The story of women's influence is one of flexibility, resiliency, and dedication to diversity. Women in tech are leaders, inventors, and mentors who open doors for a more progressive, dynamic, and well-rounded industry that values the range of experience and ideas that characterizes the voice of women as a whole.

WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO YOUNG WOMEN ASPIRING TO PURSUE A CAREER BASED ON YOUR OWN EXPERIENCES AND ACHIEVEMENTS WITHIN AFRILABS?

For young women who aspire to build successful careers, I believe resilience is paramount. Developing a tough skin and facing challenges head-on are



crucial aspects of this journey. Personally, I've navigated career pivots by embracing resilience and understanding my greater purpose. Many women may lack the confidence to persist through difficulties, and societal expectations sometimes push us to be more fragile. However, as young women in Africa, it's imperative to persevere, view challenges as opportunities for growth, and keep pushing forward. The greater the challenge, the more rewarding the outcome can be.

LOOKING AHEAD, WHAT ARE YOUR GOALS AND ASPIRATIONS EVEN AS A WOMAN WHO HAS DONE WELL FOR HERSELF IN THE CORPORATE SECTOR?

Collaborating with other strong women at AfriLabs and in my surroundings, I recognize the significance of leadership, training, and opportunities for young women. Leadership roles and opportunities are often limited for young women, particularly in Africa. To address this gap, I aspire to establish a leadership academy for young girls, nurturing their innate leadership skills. In my role at AfriLabs, I would like to keep working on initiatives like the RevUp Women initiative, The Working Mother's Guide, and The Women of AfriLabs Platform which will bring opportunities to the typical or to the local African female to propel them to leadership roles. I would like to ensure that women in the workforce accelerate into leadership positions.

Meet

INI OBONG OKON OBINNA- ONUNKWO

**Why African fabrics no
longer tell the true story
of craftsmanship
- Obinna-Onunkwo**



In the Nigerian constellation of fashion design brands, Little Weavers stands out for the uniqueness of its niche: an Afrocentric fashion brand for young people. For many years, it has remained the leading brand for toddlers and teenagers. This month, the 'young people fashion company' reached a milestone and is set to celebrate its 10th anniversary on December 17, 2023.

In this interview with IFEOMA OKEKE-KORIEOCHA, Iniobong Okon Obinna-Onunkwo, the founder and creative director of Little Weaver, she speaks about the good and the bad times, recounting how the brand weathered the storm and how it is preparing for the next ten years. The asset manager-turned-fashion maven also shared some secrets of the fashion industry, along with pitfalls and low-hanging fruits, which will be handy for aspiring and young fashion designers just setting up their enterprises. Excerpts:

HOW HAS THE JOURNEY INTO THIS BUSINESS BEEN FOR YOU SINCE YOU COMMENCED AND HOW HAVE YOU RETAINED AUTHENTICITY ?

We have been able to retain the authenticity of our brand through our stories, keeping in line with our vision. Our vision statement is 'Wear Africa.' We believe the young ones must understand the essence of wearing African clothing, the patterns and the craftwork, as well as the dynamics around wearing African clothing. Whether you are wearing it as a lifestyle or you have been advised by your different institutions, academics, schools, or a religious entity, or perhaps the Asoebi, where people wear the same fabric for an event or ceremony, these young ones must understand that putting on a particular type of woven fabric, whether it's coming from Ghana, that is, Kente, Ethiopia, Kenya, South Africa, or the western part of Nigeria, which is the Asoke, or the Akwete of the eastern region or even of different African countries. We have to tell that story, and that consistency comes from what we are doing during our production process; what type of fabric are we using? If you are using Ankara, what story do we tell in recreating that particular fabric? Or what story does that particular style tell? How are we able to emphasise the finishing? The quality of the fabric is tailored to soothe the skin and also yield proper

satisfaction for the ideal customers, who are toddlers, children, and teenagers, as well as the final aspect of that product.

OVER THE YEARS, TELL US WHICH AFRICAN CULTURE OR TRIBE YOU HAVE WORKED ON.

I will reiterate our vision, which is 'Wear Africa.' The essence of it is creating sustainable African clothing and fashion brands for young ones. We look at all different tribes. By the way, there's beauty in diversity, and the beauty of African culture cannot be overemphasised, from the costumes of the Egyptians to those of Angolans, Ethiopians, and South Africans. I have had the opportunity to travel to some of these African countries as well as do my research. I found out that there is something dynamic about African clothing and that is why they need to connect to the younger ones. Another aspect that I think is important is for people to realise that some of these clothes are becoming extinct. Some have been watered down. You see a typical traditional outfit that is supposed to be heavy, like Kente, which is usually supposed to be woven but now we have them as cotton fabrics so it's super easy to just put them on. That doesn't tell the true story of the craftsmanship of African clothing.

YOU HAVE BEEN TELLING THE AFRICAN STORY FOR 10 YEARS THROUGH FASHION. LET US MEET THE WOMAN BEHIND THESE STORIES.

Ini is a creative person. I am focus-driven and very passionate about African heritage. My story starts with how I transitioned from the asset management industry to the fashion industry. I have had the opportunity for capacity building, and I have a couple of certificates. I have served in different sectors of the hospitality space; I have served as a marketer, life project manager, and product developer. Now, I am the creative director and founder of Little Weaver, which is now 10 years old. I have also served as a volunteer on several platforms, from the African Women Empowerment Programme to the Fashion Designer Association of Nigeria. Currently, I am serving as one of the executives for the Lagos Chambers of Commerce and Industry. It has been a very interesting journey for me.

IN THIS DOWNTURN, HOW HAVE YOU BEEN ABLE TO KEEP YOUR HEAD ABOVE WATER?

It's very important for everyone, whether you are an entrepreneur or not, to have a support system. Without a support system, you cannot manifest the best potential that you have. Your support system can be financial, people support, business support, educational support, mentoring support, and physical support like physical resources that can help you in terms of business growth.

The second aspect is creativity and innovation. You have to be flexible and think of creative ways to improve. For example, during the pandemic, at some point, I decided to shut down the factory and my staff of 10 said, 'Madam, we would stay here and support you.' That is talking about people's support. The second aspect of it was that they were very determined to change the idea of creating clothing by using the idea of sustainable fashion. They recycled some of our pieces as face masks. We did some tests and it was okay. We were able to sell the face masks to big oil companies, supermarkets, and even to individuals who found the face masks very sustainable because they could reuse them. That is a very good example of being creative and innovative. So during the pandemic, we were able to change the dynamics of our operation to suit the current situation of the economy at that time and we have been able to evolve even after that.

WHAT IS YOUR ADVICE FOR ANYBODY WHO WANTS TO JOIN THE FASHION INDUSTRY?

Doing business anywhere in this current global economy is very challenging. There are import and export challenges due to the forex fluctuations. These





days, we hear all sorts of interesting news in the media. So, an entrepreneur is confronted with many questions: How can I position my brand or product to be able to meet my target market? What should I do? How do I leverage the available tools? Is it through the market, technology, or referral?

So, you have to sit back and look at the nature of your product or the services that you are offering to my kind of target market. You have to be able to ask intelligent questions. What are they thinking? What do I do to make it easy for them to connect to my services and products? What are my customers looking for? You need to work around certain things that will help you accelerate new ideas and create new product lines that would satisfy the needs of the target market. You just have to be creative, leveraging existing

tools and technology. Be constantly seeking ways to improve on connecting with your customers and cultivating the support you require.

WHAT ARE YOUR PLANS FOR LITTLE WEAVERS IN THE NEXT 10 YEARS?

I had called on one of our directors to discuss with him and I informed him that we had a tech invitation. The essence of going for this tech invitation is to understand how this new advent of AI technology is going to serve the business. How do we fuse AI technology with fashion? How will it sustain us? How shall we use AI to showcase our kind of service or product to our target market? In the next few years, technology will have taken over a lot of businesses; what do we do? It's a very sensitive question for us right now. Until we can fully answer the question, we will still be operating business as usual. In the next 10 years, we will leverage the AI technology that has come to stay, and see how we can evolve around it without diluting the authenticity of African culture. We want a situation where we can still get our Aso-oke. When we hear things like 3D or 5D production of clothing, we wonder, is it going to displace the craftsmen and women who have been providing these woven fabrics? With the advent of AI technology, these are the questions that we need to be able to answer before we can forge forward in the next 10 years. Apart from that, these technologies also affect our market share. How are we able to seize that market share so that we can change and manage the direction of how people perceive the brand? Are we connecting effectively with the younger ones? Do they see our brand as a trending brand? Do they like the brand? What's so unique, funky, or special about the brand? And why should it be Little Weavers? These are questions taken into consideration and must be answered effectively to be able to move on to the next 10 years.

WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES IN YOUR JOURNEY, WHAT DO YOU WISH YOU HAD KNOWN BEFORE AND WHAT LESSONS DO YOU WISH YOU WOULD HAVE LEARNT?

The first aspect is the challenges we are still experiencing. As they say, experience is the best teacher. In the next 10 years, there will still be new challenges. I see challenges as an opportunity to learn and prove yourself. One of the challenges I have seen is branding. You must invest so much in branding. When I got into the fashion industry, because of the experience I had in the asset management industry, I think I understood what structure was all about. However, operating in this particular fashion industry is a peculiar one.



You have to understand the industry you are operating in because every industry has its peculiarities. One of the challenges was that I didn't do a proper assessment of the industry. I just transferred from the asset management industry to the fashion industry, and a lot of things were already going wrong. There are a lot of things that I had to accommodate, starting with creativity. How do you source for talent or manage talent? The difference between the talent in that industry and this industry is that the asset management industry operates in a white-collar talent-driven industry and the other one is a blue-collar so how are you able to work around your relationship with the blue-collar talent? Secondly,

understand the dynamics of your industry. How do you want to brand and are you coming into that industry as a brand or a business? Constantly do a self-evaluation.

The first question you ask yourself as any normal person is: Am I okay or in the right place? If anything happens to me, do I have a continuity plan? Also, do an assessment that will checkmate where you are coming from and how you want to be able to operate in that particular industry; those assessments will enable you to create surveys and through those surveys, you can amplify them and create a triple effect because some of the surveys that you collate from a particular region will be different from another region because the answers or responses will be different. After all, you are catering to different people with the same service or product. This is one of the things I realised in the industry. I emphasise looking for support again. At some point in the business, we didn't have working capital; we had to leverage government grants and look at those associations that we were connected with to provide us with loans to be able to forge forward. Then you also have to know what kind of association to join. In that journey, I had challenges. We got ourselves associated with very interesting people and got ourselves quickly burnt out with



those kinds of groups. We also had an opportunity to register with the proper platforms that were able to provide us with access to information, funding, and markets, but before we got to that particular place, we had invested in the wrong people and thought that we were in the proper association that would help us. These were challenges that we faced.

The final aspect is talent. Our industry is very dynamic. First of all, the orientation of some of the craftspeople is pretty poor and I think it's something that creative leaders should address quickly; it's very important. Another point in that talent aspect is human resources. When they come into the business, you have to be able to nurture them, create incentives to motivate them, and create a training programme or acceleration programme that will reorient them from the kind of operation that they initially had. You also have to be able to understand how their thought process works, the kinds of family and friends they connect with and the kind of message that you would like to share with them that will constantly resonate in their minds. You find somebody so talented yet you will be asking, 'If you are so talented in craftwork, why haven't you started your business line?' Then you get close to them and find out that their orientation is pretty poor. So, the essence of the coaching and

training is to improve them, and, of course, you know that improving the talent and building their confidence level also helps.

We had a major challenge finding the right talent and retaining it through incentives. These incentives were investments; at the end of the day, we still had to shut down the garment manufacturing arm of the business to continue with the retail aspect. After two years, we came back again to see how we could revive the garment arm and we still had this particular challenge of talent. What has helped us through all of this is the consistency of the support we had from customers—the motivation, feedback, and opportunities we get from customers. We get support that constantly encourages us to keep at it, and the other support comes from government grants and loans. At some point, I lost all of my staff. It was a tipping point for me. Trying to get myself up has been a major challenge.

GIVE US TIPS ON HOW YOU HANDLE YOURSELF THROUGH THE TOUGH TIME.

In these 10 years, there have been times when I have felt like shutting down the business and calling it quit. What I will advise people from my own experience is that you should be very close to your creator; you must have balanced spiritual support where you can meditate and seek God earnestly because, for me, that is where the answers come from.

When you feel that you are on failing ground, all other grounds may be failing but you are standing on a solid rock. My solid rock was God. In my case, the tipping point was going for capacity building and still having this thought of shutting down, doing everything that could be done in the entrepreneurial test but still having this feeling of being a failure because of the expectations I had put on myself.

Another aspect I would mention is support. Having the right network of people around you—people connecting with you in your space. A wise man once said that if you look at five of your friends and they are all successful, you are the sixth successful person. I had support from family, friends, clients, and also the platforms where I was engaged.

WHAT ARE THE HIGHLIGHTS OF LITTLE WEAVERS IN THE PAST 10 YEARS?

The highlight for Little Weavers will start from the beginning, where we were able to identify the kind of product that resonated with the right target market. The second aspect is the amplification of our brand by wearing some of our clothing to meet with some African presidents and advocating for girl child education and empowerment.



Another highlight was when we had the maiden edition at Four Point in 2015 where we invited people from the cultural department of embassies and their feedback was very positive; they liked what they saw. We had over 80 children showcasing different African clothing and we hope that in the upcoming years, we will be able to continue after our maiden edition.

Another highlight was the exhibition we had at different places from Lagos to Abuja and the final part of it was the climax at the African Fashion Week Nigeria, where the Ooni of Ife was invited. The feedback was very encouraging—that we were sharing the message of African culture through our clothing and recreating a very beautiful aesthetic on the runway for him—he had never seen that kind of thing before. Those kinds of messages were very motivational and encouraging for me and the brand.

LET'S TALK ABOUT THE AFRICAN FASHION SECTOR, THE TRENDS, CHALLENGES, AND GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES.

For the African industry, I am very impressed because, under the creative industry, we have entertainment, media, and fashion tech people. We are happy that we are also upcoming and that we are building up our numbers in the creative industry and, of course, we have our value chain in the fashion industry. We have African Fashion Week Nigeria and we also have African Fashion Week London. We have other institutions that are doing well; we recently just had the GTB Fashion Week. We have so many that are doing well by creating access to markets for our fashion

entrepreneurs and also creating brand awareness, which is very important because people, especially those in diaspora, are connecting more. We have a lot of talents leaving the shores of Nigeria, but at the same time, these are people that we would like to connect with Africa or Nigeria for our cultural fashion and, of course, the entertainment industry like Nollywood has been amplified in the diaspora.

I think that there are some things that could be improved upon that they are currently working on. We have had roundtable discussions on taxes and how they can support women-led enterprises. I am very grateful because I also had the privilege and opportunity to receive a grant from one such foreign entity supporting female entrepreneurs. I think they need to have more discussions besides taxing, funding, and access to markets, and of course one that they are currently discussing is the African Trade Agreement, where we can have access to markets in neighbouring African countries. I think they need to look at that policy and how it will be able to impact positively on the value chain in the fashion industry. Of course, that will also affect Little Weavers because it will allow us to leverage this policy and grow not just within Nigeria but also in other African regions and, at the same time, connect with the right network that will provide us with the access to explore more of their cultural fabrics, especially most of them that are becoming extinct. I think some of these are what should be addressed to maintain the sustainability of African fashion in Nigeria.

Unveiling Citisquare Africa's 'THE SEASIDE UNWIND' Event: A Symphony of Luxury, Networking, and Future Investments



The pandemic has ushered in an era where burnout and loneliness have become prevalent, particularly among high-net-worth individuals and millennials. In response, a platform has emerged, not only addressing these challenges but also paving the way for financial independence. Imagine being part of a community that not only supports your well-being but also empowers your financial journey. This platform stands out as an ingenious e-commerce solution, showcasing exceptional capabilities to combat burnout and loneliness.

In the realm of sophisticated lifestyle and forward-thinking investments, Citisquare Africa recently orchestrated a dazzling affair, 'THE SEASIDE UNWIND.' This exclusive beach event wasn't just an evening under the stars—it was a strategic blend of luxury, networking, and an invitation to the future of smart investments.

Nestled at the prestigious Sailor's Creed Private Beach House, Ilashe Beach, Lagos, 'THE SEASIDE UNWIND' was a celebration of camaraderie and pure luxury.

This exclusive gathering welcomed an elite audience, comprising High-Net-Worth Individuals (HNIs), business magnates, and entrepreneurs from Nigeria and the diaspora. The event transcended the ordinary, curated by Citisquare Africa, a brand synonymous with redefining lifestyles.

The theme encapsulated the essence of the evening, a testament to Citisquare's commitment to not just providing a lavish retreat but creating an environment where potential meets opportunity, and success is cultivated. The goal was clear: to transcend the conventional and offer a unique platform where relaxation seamlessly intertwined with strategic networking.

For Citisquare Africa, this event wasn't just about creating a buzz; it was a statement. The picturesque beachside location offered an exquisite backdrop for meaningful connections, providing an ideal setting to reduce burnout and loneliness often experienced by the working class.

The brand, led by Uche Nnama, understands the importance of fostering connections that go beyond the professional realm.

As a brand with a decade-long track record, Citisquare Africa isn't just about lavish events; it's about understanding the evolving needs of its audience. The pandemic prompted the company to conduct comprehensive market research, revealing a fascinating insight into how individuals allocate their newfound financial resources. The findings highlighted two key pursuits: rejuvenating vacations and astute investments.

In attendance were influential celebrities such as Abby Charles, a prominent party and nightlife influencer, Olasunkanmi Ojulari, known as Sunky O, Cross Okonkwo from the BBNaija series, and other luminaries. Their presence added a touch of glamour, underlining Citisquare Africa's appeal to those who seek not just luxury but a curated lifestyle experience.

Beyond the star-studded guest list and scenic location, 'THE SEASIDE UNWIND' presented various engaging activities. From boat cruises to wine-tasting culinary experiences, table tennis, sack races, and dance choreographies—the event was a playground of enjoyment. Citisquare Africa ensured that every moment was not just entertaining but also enlightening.

At the heart of this event was an innovative e-commerce platform by Citisquare Africa, merging lifestyle

enhancement with investment ventures. It introduced curated vacation packages designed to combat burnout and foster relaxation, while simultaneously offering co-investment opportunities in real estate for prosperous financial returns.

Citisquare Africa stands committed to accessibility and inclusivity. The platform offers user-friendly "buy now, pay in installments" facilities for vacation packages, empowering individuals to embark on dream getaways without immediate financial burden. For those seeking outright property ownership, flexible payment options, including cash payments or mortgage plans, are available.

Citisquare Africa is not just a brand; it's a visionary force shaping the future. The focus now turns to creating a secure co-investment program, allowing individuals to acquire fractional ownership in exclusive properties—an opportunity to optimize returns and diversify investment portfolios.

THE SEASIDE UNWIND' by Citisquare Africa wasn't just an event but a symphony of luxury, networking, and a glimpse into the future. It's an invitation to not just experience opulence but to be part of a brand that understands the evolving desires of a discerning audience. Citisquare Africa is not just redefining lifestyles; it's crafting an experience where every moment is a celebration of life's grandeur. Under the leadership of Dr. Uche Nnama, CitiSquare is a trailblazer in the industry. Through harnessing technological advancements, the company revolutionizes lifestyle and investment by offering rejuvenating vacation packages, co-investment opportunities, and flexible payment options. CitiSquare Africa emerges as a force poised to redefine the real estate landscape, empowering individuals toward financial prosperity and enhanced well-being.





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Adepaju Adekoya: From Urban Planning to Real Estate Success

IFEOMA OKEKE-KORIEOCHA

In Nigeria's real estate sector, Adepaju Adekoya stands as a beacon of success and innovation. As the CEO/MD of Pejsun Realty Ltd., she has not only garnered accolades and awards but has also shaped her company into a formidable player in the industry.

Adekoya is a proud alumna of Olabisi Onabanjo University, formerly known as Ogun State University, where she earned a second-class upper degree in Geography and Regional Planning. She further solidified her educational foundation with a Master's in Business Administration (MBA) from the same institution and a Master's Degree in Urban and Regional Planning from the University of Lagos.

Prior to venturing into real estate, Adekoya spent years honing her skills as a marketing manager in the oil and gas and telecommunications industries. This experience equipped her with invaluable insights into marketing strategies, a knowledge base she draws upon to propel Pejsun Realty Ltd. forward.

The Genesis of a Real Estate Career

Adekoya's foray into real estate was a convergence of her two major interests: construction and urban planning. From actively participating in supervising building projects to obtaining a formal education in Urban and Regional Planning, she seamlessly integrated practical experience with theoretical knowledge. This foundation positioned her at the intersection of construction management and urban planning, providing the impetus to launch her career in real estate.

Navigating Challenges in the Nigerian Real Estate Sector

The Nigerian real estate sector is not without its challenges. Adepeju acknowledges the prevalent lack of transparency and ethical standards within the industry, which can undermine investor confidence. In response, she emphasizes the importance of transparency in all dealings. Adepeju ensures investors have access to accurate information, covering property titles, legal documentation, and project timelines to build trust and confidence in the investment process.

Qualities of an Effective Real Estate Professional

According to Adekoya, being an effective real estate professional involves more than technical expertise. Transparency, truthfulness, and self-dignity are fundamental, but she highlights other key qualities such as excellent communication skills, industry knowledge, and a commitment to customer service.

Victory at the 2023 Q3 Sales Growth Program

Adekoya's commitment to excellence was recently recognized at the 2023 Q3 Sales Growth Program organized by Global Real Estate Partners (GREP) where she emerged as the overall sales champion. Adepeju expresses gratitude to the organizers for providing a platform that celebrates excellence and hard work.

Pejsun Realty Ltd.'s Future Vision

Looking ahead, Adekoya envisions Pejsun Realty Ltd. as a globally recognized and trusted real estate development brand in the next 10 years. Her ambition reflects a commitment to sustained growth, innovation, and a continued focus on transparency in the ever-evolving real estate landscape. As Adekoya's journey unfolds, Pejsun Realty Ltd. is poised to leave an indelible mark on the global real estate stage.

Foodetal Lights Up The City with Glamour as it hosts The Afterparty!

CHIGOZIRIM ENYINNIA



The Red Square was filled with high energy and excitement as Nigerian catering services brand, Foodetal Nigeria hosted top-tier influencers and socialites to a memorable tagged “The Afterparty”.

Foodetal, founded by Adebimpe Ahmed is a premium catering services brand created to offer all types of events, top-notch services that elevates the quality of each client’s event.

The memorable evening presented a variety of activities that indulged the guests and ensures that each person had a unique experience.

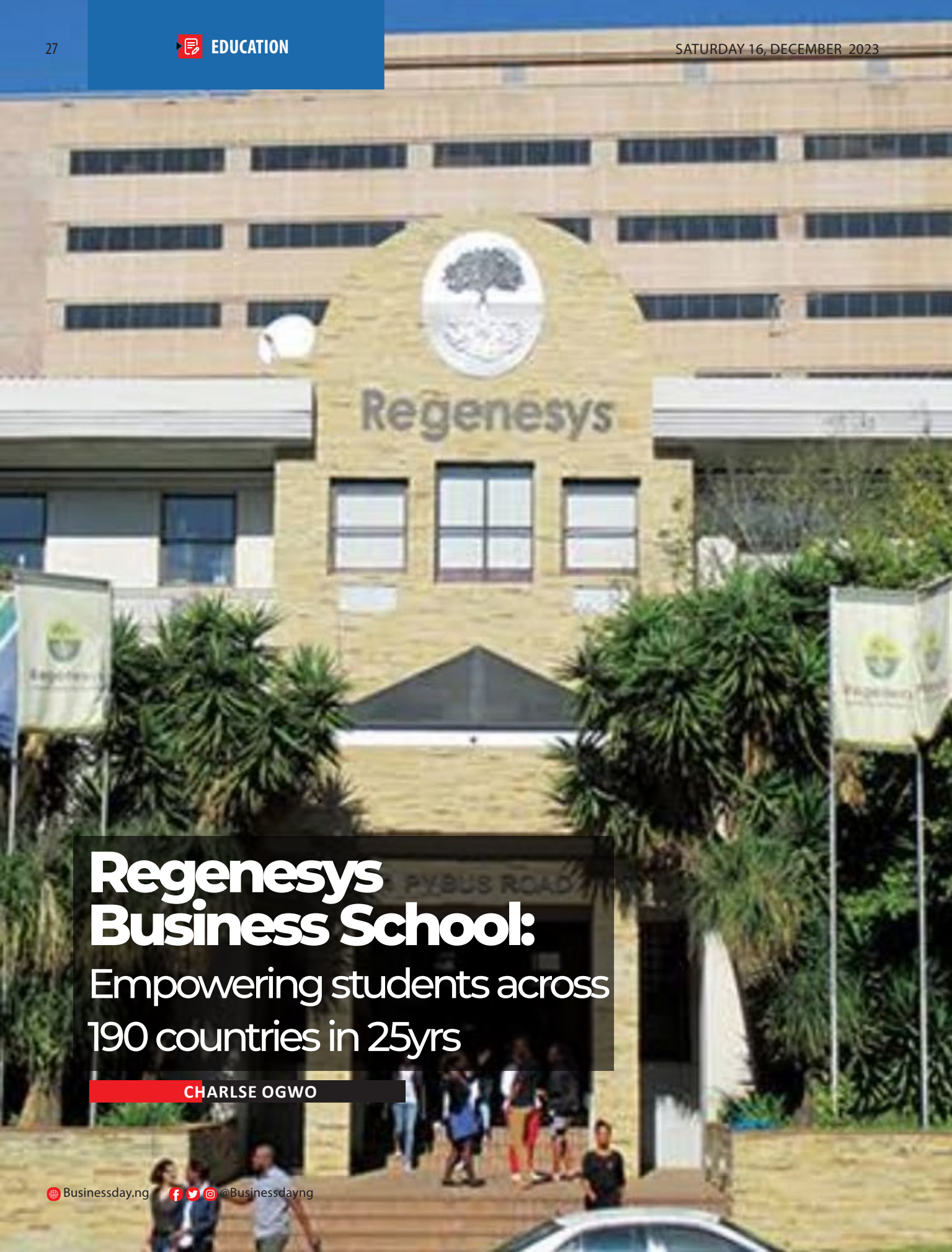
Guests were greeted upon arrival with colorful props to elevate their moods, as well as welcome drinks and cocktails.

The highlight of the evening, of course, was the official unveiling of the Pasta Bar by Foodetal, a mobile pasta station for events and afterparties.

“The Pasta Bar was carefully created by our team to add more color to our client’s events. It has taken us over 3 years to create and iterate the design to what we currently have and we cannot wait to be a key part of major events to come.” - Adebimpe Ahmed. Founder, Foodetal.

As the event concluded guests were treated to fresh pasta meals made by expert chefs of The Pasta Bar, and gave excellent reviews of the taste, texture and quality of dishes served.



The image shows the front facade of a large, multi-story brick building. In the center, there is a prominent arched entrance. Above the arch is a circular emblem featuring a tree. Below the emblem, the word "Regenesys" is written in a large, bold, sans-serif font. The building has several windows, some with white frames. In the foreground, there are several tall, spiky palm trees and two banners on poles, each featuring the Regenesys logo. A group of people is walking on a path in front of the building, and a car is partially visible at the bottom. The overall scene is bright and sunny.

Regenesys

Regenesys Business School:

Empowering students across
190 countries in 25yrs

CHARLSE OGWO

Regenesys Business School: Empowering students across 190 countries in 25yrs

It is often said that the growth of any society is dependent on the level of education of its citizens. Perhaps this is one of the biggest challenges Nigeria has as a country, due to a staggering number of 60 million illiterates in the country.

With a population of almost 200 million people, this puts the illiteracy rate at over 35%.

In a fast developing technological world, Nigeria has its problems cut out for it with its high illiteracy rate, low computer literacy rate and the education system continually producing half-baked graduates that are unable to compete in a technologically inclined world. In changing this narrative, a momentous celebration held at its Victoria Island office in Lagos, Nigeria, Regenesys Business School commemorated its 25th anniversary of delivering quality education.

The event, graced by influential leaders from both private and government sectors, stood as a testament to Regenesys' unwavering dedication to advancing excellence in education and activating transformative changes in countless lives.

Marko Saravanja, the chairman of Regenesys, delivered a stirring address, emphasising the institution's unwavering commitment to delivering quality education and shaping the future landscape of business education in Nigeria.

"This celebration of a quarter-century signifies the paramount importance of education not only in Africa but on a global scale.

I take personal pride in the multitude of students who entrusted Regenesys Business School to guide them in various spheres of their lives, be it entrepreneurial pursuits or professional paths.

The pursuit of academics is imperative for fostering growth, facilitating long-term educational progress, and influencing social change and societal consciousness," Saravanja remarked.

Over 25 years, Regenesys has etched a profound legacy, positively touching the lives of more than 200,000 students and alumni spanning over 190 countries.

The institution distinguishes itself with a holistic approach that transcends intellectual intelligence (IQ), embracing emotional intelligence (EQ) and spiritual intelligence (SQ).

With a truly global footprint, Regenesys stands tall, catering to over 1000 corporate clients with an extensive portfolio of more than 100 programs across six strategically positioned campuses worldwide, including South Africa, India, Kenya, Tanzania, Nigeria, and the USA.

These campuses offer a diverse array of educational opportunities, ranging from Doctorates and MBAs to bachelor's degrees and higher certificates, showcasing Regenesys' unwavering commitment to addressing the diverse educational needs of individuals at various stages of their academic and professional journeys.

Regenesys has not merely marked the passage of time but has also embraced the digital era with the launch of Digital Regenesys.

This initiative focuses on crucial digital skills such as cybersecurity, digital marketing, artificial intelligence, and data science.

It encompasses entities like Health (promoting overall wellness), MyWealth Investments (providing financial market knowledge and dynamic investment products for financial freedom), EdForAll (ensuring affordable access to higher education), and Dananda Talent (a talent acquisition agency).

As the jubilation unfolds, Regenesys gazes not only into its illustrious past but also toward an innovative and globally impactful future.

This 25th anniversary is more than a milestone; it signifies a renewed commitment to empowering individuals, fostering holistic development, and making meaningful contributions to the growth of business education, not only in Nigeria but beyond.

VFS Global's Expansion: A Boost for Nigerian Travelers Seeking UK Visas

IFEOMA OKEKE-KORIEOCHA



In a move set to greatly benefit Nigerian travelers, VFS Global has been awarded a comprehensive contract to manage UK visa and passport services in 142 countries, including Nigeria.

This development, announced in a recent press release, is expected to significantly streamline the application process for the numerous Nigerians who travel to the UK annually.

Nigerian Travelers at the Forefront Nigeria, being one of the top four application locations for UK visas, stands to gain considerably from this new arrangement.

VFS Global's expanded presence in Nigeria promises a more efficient and user-friendly visa application process, aligning with the high demand for UK travel in the region. This is a crucial step towards enhancing the travel experience for Nigerian citizens, who have historically faced challenges in visa processing.

Global Expansion with a Local Impact

While VFS Global's contract covers an impressive range of 142 countries, the impact on the African continent, particularly in Nigeria, is of special significance. The company's plans to open new Visa and Citizenship Application Service (VCAS) Centres will not only provide greater accessibility for applicants but also contribute to local economies.

Technological Advancements for a Better Experience

VFS Global is set to introduce significant technological upgrades aimed at improving the customer journey. This includes the launch of new customer websites and enhancements in in-person services, which are particularly relevant for Nigerian applicants who seek a

seamless and secure application process.

Strengthening UK-Nigeria Travel Ties

This development is expected to strengthen the travel ties between the UK and Nigeria. By simplifying and securing the visa application process, more Nigerians will have the opportunity to travel to the UK for business, study, or tourism, fostering greater cultural and economic exchanges between the two nations.

CEO's Vision for Enhanced Services

Zubin Karkaria, CEO of VFS Global, emphasized the company's commitment to delivering top-notch services, stating, "We are excited to begin operations in new locations, and to take the next step towards providing customers with a seamless, simple, and secure visa and passport application experience."

A Positive Step Forward

The contract is not only a significant win for VFS Global but also a positive development for Nigerian travelers. It is expected to bring about more efficient visa processing, enhanced customer service, and a boost in UK-Nigeria travel, marking a new chapter in global mobility with Nigeria playing a pivotal role.



Emirates reveals ‘most watched and listened to’ content in the sky in 2023

IFEOMA OKEKE-KORIEOCHA

As a busy year of international travel draws to a close, the world’s largest international airline is revealing how passengers spent their time inflight, delving into data to dissect what exactly Emirates customers watched and listened to on journeys to and from 140 destinations around the world.

Most watched movies on ice in 2023
Customers craving top notch entertainment are spoilt for choice with Emirates ice, offering more than 6,500 channels of on demand movies, TV shows, music, podcasts, and even live TV to catch the international news and sport.

From the expansive 2,000 plus Hollywood and international movies available, and all the best movies of 2023, amongst the most watched movies by Emirates customers around the globe were; visually stunning sci-fi film, Avatar: The Way of Water, Ticket to Paradise – a rom-com starring George Clooney and Julia Roberts, and the enduringly popular action movie

TOP GUN: MAVERICK.

Long haul customers across the world also settled into box sets of movies, such as The Lord of the Rings complete trilogy and all four of the

JOHN WICK FILMS.

After English language content, the top viewed international movies include two Bollywood action movies, Vikram Vedha and Bholaa, the French thriller La Syndicaliste, Korean drama Return to Seoul, and the 2023 Cannes Palme d'Or winner, Anatomie d'une chute from France. Arabic speakers tuned into Emirati film Khorfakkan - depicting the 16th century invasion of the city.

Kids and perhaps kids-at-heart, tuned into a myriad of movies with the most popular choices in 2023 noted as Puss in Boots: The Last Wish, Tom & Jerry Cowboy Up! Teen Titans Go! & DC Superhero Girls and The Super

MARIO BROS. MOVIE.

Most binged box sets and TV on ice in 2023 On long flights, Emirates customers loved to binge a box set, with exceptionally high viewership recorded for all seasons of HBO Max's Succession and both seasons of The White Lotus. Within the comedy genre, Emirates customers showed a preference for beloved sitcoms – Friends, Brooklyn Nine-Nine and The Big Bang Theory, while in drama – many travellers selected two historical dramas The English, and Women of the Movement, as well as suspense-filled drama Your Honor starring Bryan Cranston.

Trending TV in the Kids and Teens section included Schooled! – a sitcom set in the 90's and the renowned SpongeBob SquarePants, while younger kids tuned into Australia's Bluey and Hey Duggee and Supertato from the UK.

On Emirates ice live TV channels including Sport 24, BBC World News, CNN and Sky News Arabia, customers tuned into an array of sports and social events including the Coronation of King Charles III and Queen Camilla, Formula 1® races, NFL Superbowl, English Premier League, Augusta Masters, ICC Cricket World Cup 2023, Rugby World Cup 2023, Wimbledon, DP World Tour and the US Open Tennis. The single most watched sports on Emirates live TV in 2023 was the ICC Cricket World Cup 2023.

The tuneful tastes of Emirates customers in 2023 From a library of over 3,000 albums, more than 500 curated playlists, over 40,000 tracks and

more than 4,000 hours of music and podcasts – Emirates' customers showed their sophisticated sides with one of the most popular albums on ice revealed as Mozart's Chamber Music. Ed Sheeran's album Subtract was also in the top three, but unsurprisingly the top spot was scooped by the indomitable Taylor Swift and her album Midnights. Kids couldn't get enough of ice Juniors Music with Cocomelon, Bluey, Kidzbob, and the Encanto soundtrack holding the top spots. The most popular playlists onboard Emirates' flights included the Arijit Singh Playlist, ABBA's Timeless Pop Anthems and the Best of Fairuz and Khaleeji Classics. In Global Music, the top trending regions customers accessed were India, Korea and Africa, with the most listened artists places held by Jimin from Korea, Burna Boy from Nigeria and SB19 from the Philippines. Some audiophiles went for content beyond music and showed love to the Rain, Sleep & Nature Sounds Playlist while relaxing at 40,000 feet.

Finishing 2023 on a high with Emirates ice For those jetting off for the holiday season and beyond, Emirates is closing out 2023 with the biggest movies of the year on ice. Customers can enjoy the top grossing box office movie of 2023 – the fantasy-comedy blockbuster Barbie, available in French, German, Italian, Brazilian Portuguese, Japanese, Russian, Arabic and Chinese. Barbie is also available with 'Closed Captions' (CC) and 'Audio Description' (AD), offering accessibility to the visually impaired, with narration that describes what is happening on screen. Emirates offers up to 130 movies with AD and more than 250 with CC.

Action aficionados can catch Mission: Impossible – Dead Reckoning Part One, a high stakes thriller partly filmed in the UAE, available on ice in up to 8 languages, or The Equalizer 3 starring Denzel Washington. Customers can even watch the entire trilogy on ice. Adrenaline enthusiasts will enjoy Gran Turismo, based on the true story of racing driver Jann Mardenborough, a successful gamer who becomes a real-life racer. ice also has an exclusive interview with Jann Mardenborough speaking about the making of the movie in the Emirates World podcast.



Importance of family planning in reducing maternal mortality rate in Nigeria - UNFPA

CHIGOZIRIM ENYINIA

The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) has underscored the critical role that access to family planning information and services plays in curbing the mortality rate during childbirth in Nigeria.

Family planning enables individuals to determine their choice of having children and the resources, techniques, and knowledge required to achieve it.

According to Esther Somefun, UNFPA's gender/reproductive health analyst, studies indicate that approximately 3.5 million pregnancies could be avoided, and more than 31,000 women in Nigeria

could be saved from dying, if all women had the ability to plan their families and access modern family planning methods.

These findings were highlighted at the recent Family Planning Hackathon in Lagos, organised by the Federal Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, UNFPA, and the Microsoft Engineering Team.

Somefun stressed that health economists estimate that investing around \$603 million in family planning could significantly reduce maternal deaths.



Speaking at the event, she emphasised the transformative impact that technology and innovation could have in reducing maternal mortality. Somefun stated, "We are gathered to explore domestically developed technological innovations that we are sure would facilitate access, increase demand and uptake of family planning in Nigeria."

One of the participating groups, called Repo-create Team, focused on the alarming rate of unsafe abortions in Nigeria and its devastating impact on the mortality rate among young women.

The team shared the tragic story of Bisi, a young woman who died from complications after attempting to terminate her pregnancy through unsafe means. Such stories are unfortunately common in Nigeria, which currently has one of the highest maternal mortality rates globally.

The Repo-create Team, along with other teams present, introduced their individual proposals which aim to address family planning challenges and increase the prevalence of contraceptive use in Africa. The idea is to provide comprehensive sexual and reproductive health education to the public, and in turn allows users to access family planning services from the comfort of their homes, including anonymously.

By offering accurate information and countering misconceptions, these teams strive to empower

individuals to make informed decisions about their sexual and reproductive health.

This feature aims to bridge the digital divide and ensure equal access to family planning resources.

The UNFPA and various organisations attending the hackathon expressed support for such initiatives that combine technology and innovation to increase access to family planning. Rhoda Robinson, the Executive Director of Hacey Health Initiative, emphasised the importance of sustainable solutions to meet Nigeria's family planning targets and address societal challenges.

By leveraging technology and developing solutions relevant to local contexts, Nigeria hopes to reduce its high maternal mortality rate and increase universal health coverage. The goal is to empower women and men with accurate information and easy access to family planning services.

With collaboration from existing organisations and widespread implementation, these interventions could positively impact the lives of thousands of individuals and contribute to achieving the family planning sustainable development goals outlined by the United Nations.

20 Fun places to spend Christmas in Nigeria on low budget

CHISOM MICHAEL



Celebrate a vibrant Christmas in Nigeria without breaking the bank with this guide to 20 affordable and exciting places across various cities.

From the bustling Lagos to serene Ondo and culturally rich Calabar, each destination caters to the holiday spirit and budget-conscious travelers.

Explore nature reserves, amusement parks, and historical landmarks, ensuring an unforgettable Christmas without financial worries.

Lekki Leisure Lake

Lekki Leisure Lake is the ideal low-cost Christmas getaway for families and friends since it provides a tranquil haven with zip-lining, water sports, and stunning sunset views. This charming lake offers swimming, jet skiing, boating, and more activities.

Millennium Park Abuja

With its beautiful scenery, walking pathways, and lively ambiance, Abuja's Millennium Park becomes a festive wonderland during the Christmas season and offers an affordable getaway for holiday picnics. Enjoy a picnic with loved ones and unwind in the lovely gardens right in the middle of the city.



Tinapa Resort, Calabar

Experience Christmas in the welcoming arms of Tinapa Resort in Calabar, where rich culture and reasonably priced luxury collide. Spend less money and take advantage of duty-free shopping, water sports, and the exciting Calabar Carnival. Enjoy an exciting blend of contemporary attractions, museums, a water park, and multiple dining options.

Idanre Hills, Ondo

With its historic buildings, stunning scenery, and reasonably priced hiking opportunities, Idanre Hills in the state of Ondo provides a distinctive Christmas experience. It is the perfect place for travelers on a tight budget who are looking for unspoiled nature. Hike to the top and be amazed by breathtaking panoramic views of the surrounding landscape.

Eleko Beach Lagos

Spend a day at Eleko Beach in Lagos to get away from the hustle and bustle of the city and enjoy affordable beachside relaxation combined with the spirit of Christmas. Take advantage of the

sun, sea, and beach without breaking the bank. Take a nap on the sandy beaches, cool down in the soothing waves, and picnic with breathtaking ocean views.

National Children's Park and Zoo Abuja

Treat the family to Abuja's National Children Park and Zoo for an affordable Christmas full of playground fun, picnics, and wildlife encounters in a festive setting. A children's paradise complete with swings, slides, and a variety of animals for an exciting day.

Olumo Rock, Abeokuta

Climb the famous Olumo Rock in Abeokuta over Christmas for an adventure combining cultural richness and affordability. Ascend the cliff to get sweeping views and become fully immersed in the area's history. Reach the peak of this old monolith to explore its historic caverns and tunnels.



Lekki Conservation Center, Lagos

At Lagos' Lekki Conservation Centre, enjoy a low-cost Christmas in the middle of the outdoors. Take a stroll along the covered path, look for animals, and take in the tranquil surroundings without going over budget. Take in the beauty of the natural world, explore various ecosystems, and discover the local wildlife.

Obudu Cattle Ranch Resort

Celebrate Christmas in style at Obudu Cattle Ranch Resort, which offers a unique festive experience without breaking the bank thanks to its cold environment, breathtaking scenery, and affordable lodging options. Enjoy Christmas in a calm, quiet setting with breathtaking views of the mountains, away from the heat.

Oniru Beach Lagos

With its sandy coastlines, seaside attractions, and holiday celebrations, Oniru Beach in Lagos offers a reasonably priced Christmas break, making it the perfect place for people looking for sun and

celebration. Enjoy water sports, unwind on the beautiful beach, and savor delectable seafood in the neighborhood eateries.

Marina Resort

Enjoy the Christmas festivities at Marina Resort in Calabar, where historical charm and affordable fun come together. Without breaking the bank, take in the local food, amusement park, and cultural exhibits.

Take advantage of the gorgeous beach, swimming pool, and luxury lodgings for a pleasant Christmas vacation.

Abraka Turf and Country Club

Imagine a relaxed Christmas at Abraka Turf and Country Club, which offers reasonably priced leisure, golfing, and water sports in a calm setting away from the bustle of the holidays. For an enjoyable and active Christmas, indulge in a variety of athletic activities including horseback riding, tennis, and golf.

Wonderland Amusement Park Abuja
At Wonderland Amusement Park in Abuja, families can celebrate a budget-friendly Christmas with rides, games, and festive decorations that make everyone happy. Many bumper cars, thrilling attractions, and amusement rides are available for thrill-seekers to enjoy.

Yankari Game Reserve Bauchi
Explore the untamed side of Christmas at Yankari Game Reserve in Bauchi, where spectacular celebrations are paired with affordable safari experiences and opportunities to interact with a variety of wildlife. Take a wildlife safari, see a variety of animals, and take in the reserve's unspoiled beauty.

Oguta Lake Resort Owerri



Celebrate Christmas at Oguta Lake in Owerri, where budget-friendly boat rides, lakeside picnics, and cultural experiences combine for a festive escape in the heart of Imo State. Relax on the scenic shores of the lake, enjoy boat rides, and explore the surrounding villages.

Rojenny Tourist Village Anambra

Experience a spectacular Christmas at Rojenny Tourist Village in Anambra, which offers thrilling rides, cultural exhibits, and reasonably priced lodging for a fun-filled occasion. Take part in museums, traditional attractions, and artisan displays to immerse yourself in another culture.

Port Harcourt Tourist Beach

Port Harcourt Tourist Beach provides a budget-friendly Christmas by the water, with sandy shores, beachside activities, and festive events that cater to both relaxation and celebration. Relax on the sandy beach, enjoy swimming, or try your hand at surfing in the waves.

Ikogosi Warm Spring Resort Ekiti

At the Ikogosi Warm Spring Resort in Ekiti, where nature walks, warm spring baths, and affordable relaxation combine to provide a unique holiday retreat, feel the warmth of Christmas. Take walks in the natural surroundings and benefit from the healing properties of the warm spring pools.

Jos Wildlife Park

Enjoy a wild Christmas at Jos Wildlife Park, which provides visitors looking for a peaceful, natural holiday with affordable wildlife encounters, rich vegetation, and a tranquil atmosphere. See a range of creatures in their native environments, such as giraffes, zebras, and lions.

Ikeja Shopping Mall

Visit Ikeja Shopping Mall in Lagos for an affordable Christmas shopping and entertainment experience. The mall's festive décor, deals, and variety of dining options provide a bustling holiday environment without breaking the bank. Take advantage of the many shops and eateries all under one roof to enjoy a festive shopping spree.

Yuletide fever:

Organised crimes squeeze life out of Lagosians

Charles Ogwo

Christmas is a season that comes once in every year, yet to many people, it comes so suddenly that it takes them unawares.

And to meet up with the yuletide demands, the bustling and hustling that comes with it leave many families with what could be best described as unexpected pleasant, and not-so-pleasant surprises.

The rate at which many residents in Lagos State are witnessing doses of the negative effect of organised crime some few days during Christmas celebrations is alarming. Peter Ubochioma, who resides in the Isheri-Oshun suburb of Lagos State, narrated how he was robbed by a group of boys who plied a tricycle bike along the NNPC – Canoe axis of Ejigbo.

"I board a 'keke Marwa' tricycle bike from NNPC to Jakande gate, as I was about to enter the bike, one of the boys quickly came down and asked me to go inside because he would be coming down along the road.

Just some minutes after we took off, the driver stopped and the men brought out guns, and demanded my phones, and money. They ransacked me and took everything I had with me then; one of them pointed his gun at me and asked me to run towards a particular direction and that I must not look back, else he would blow up my head."

Peter in tears said his Christmas celebration expectations have been shattered.

Adekunle Oguntimehin, a resident at Ilamoshe Estate shared his experience when he boarded a bus to Oshodi from Ilasamaja axis of the Mile 2-Oshodi route.

"As I boarded a bus at Ilasa to Oshodi, four women were on the bus before me. As I made my way in, the driver asked me to enter right inside to allow the conductor to close the door.

However, I declined, not because I knew of their ill intentions, I just felt like sitting by the door, since the vehicle was not filled up.

The driver was grossed by my action and began to speed up. On getting to Iyana-Isolo, I expected him to stop and

pick up more passengers, but he accelerated his speed more. This singular act of the driver made me curious. I took time to observe the speedometer and it was indicating 100+, at that point, I decided to fight for my peace, hence I made efforts to open the door but the conductor resisted me.

After a lengthy duel which led to the vehicle wavering across the lanes, attracting massive onlookers' attention, the driver hissed, and said, "This is a bad market and stopped for me and others to jump out."

Rebecca Nwosu, a mother of two, who runs her business at Balogun market narrated that she fell victim to organised crime at the hands of the 'Keke' operators along the Backnor -Jakande gate axis.

"I waved down a bike at the Transformer bus stop, and as I was about to enter, one of the supposed passengers came down and asked me to enter inside because he would soon highlight from the vehicle.

I innocently obeyed and sat in between two men; as we journeyed for a while one of them brought out a gun and asked me to hand over everything I had with me to them. And to save my life, I complied and gave them all the money with me and my two phones. After that, they ordered me out of the vehicle and zoomed off."

Ajali Faith was robbed via her PoS business. According to her, "Someone called her daughter, Amara, and demanded the pin with a claim that he wants help out from the bank, and the girl innocently gave the pin to the scammer."

She was robbed of all the money in her PoS account just like that.

Organised crime is multifaceted, ranging from drug and human trafficking, smuggling of migrants, cultism, illegal wildlife trade, kidnapping, advanced fee fraud, and others.

Organised crime in the face of Christmas is a yearly experience that can be avoided. And one of the ways to avoid falling victim to this evil is not to leave the house too early.

Besides, one needs to avoid certain bus stops noted for criminal acts, and when someone asks you to go inside, you must study the setting before obliging.



The history of Christmas in Nigeria:

a celebration of faith, family, and feasting

CHISOM MICHAEL

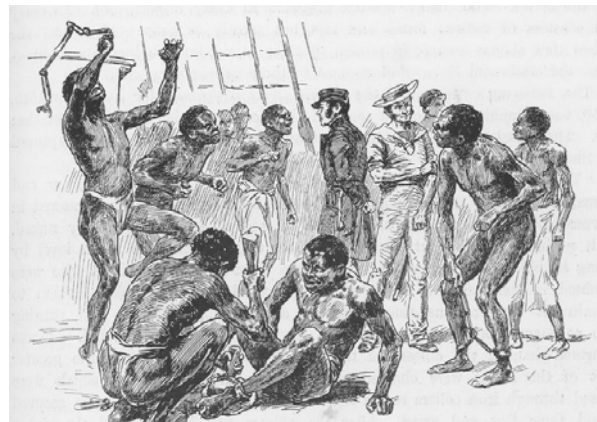
Christmas in Nigeria is a vibrant and joyful occasion, blending Christian traditions with local customs. The celebration, rooted in the rich cultural heritage of the Nigerian people, is a unique and special experience.

The history of Christmas in Nigeria is a fascinating journey, weaving together cultural diversity, religious beliefs, and a strong sense of community. Shaped by her diverse ethnic groups and colonial past, Christmas celebrations in Nigeria reflect a tapestry of traditions.

EARLY BEGINNINGS

The roots of Christmas in Nigeria can be traced back to the repatriation of freed slaves from the United States of America in the 18th and 19th centuries. Many of these slaves returned to their homeland carrying with them the customs and traditions of their adopted culture, including the celebration of Christmas. One

of the earliest documented Christmas celebrations in Nigeria took place in Badagry, Lagos, in 1842.



THE AGIA TREE AND THE BIRTH OF A TRADITION

The Agia Tree in Badagry holds a significant place in the history of Christmas in Nigeria. This ancient tree, which stood for over 300 years, became a focal point for the early Christmas celebrations. Under its shade, freed slaves gathered to sing carols, pray, and share meals. Over time, the Agia Tree became a symbol of hope and new beginnings, further cementing its place in the Christmas tradition. The tree isn't there anymore, a monument has been placed to mark the spot.



A FUSION OF CULTURES

As Christianity spread across Nigeria, Christmas began to evolve, incorporating local customs and traditions. This unique blend is evident in various aspects of the celebration, from the food and music to the decorations and attire. Traditional Nigerian dishes like jollof rice, pounded yam, and chicken stew find their way onto Christmas tables, while vibrant musical performances and colorful clothing add to the festive atmosphere.



FAMILY AND FAITH

Christmas in Nigeria is primarily a family-oriented celebration. Families travel from far and wide to be together, strengthening their bonds and sharing the joys of the season. Church services are well-attended, and the spirit of generosity is evident in the exchange of gifts and acts of kindness.

A SEASON OF JOY AND FESTIVITIES

The festive spirit in Nigeria is infectious. Streets are adorned with lights and decorations, and the air is filled with the sounds of carols and laughter. Children enjoy playing with firecrackers and sparklers, while adults indulge in traditional Christmas treats like chin chin and puff-puff.

A CELEBRATION FOR ALL

Today, Christmas is celebrated throughout Nigeria, transcending religious and cultural boundaries. It is a time for people of all backgrounds to come together, share in the joy of the season, and appreciate the spirit of peace, love, and hope.

The history of Christmas in Nigeria is a testament to the enduring spirit of the Nigerian people. It is a story of resilience, faith, and the ability to embrace and celebrate tradition while forging a unique cultural identity. As the Christmas season approaches, Nigerians all over the world will come together to share in this joyous occasion, cherishing the memories of the past and looking forward to a brighter future.



Christmas Shopping: Where to get affordable items

ESTHER EMOEKPERE



"Christmas is coming, papa buy shoe for me oooo, oyimama, oyimama, oyimama"

Ever sang this Christmas song, asking for new shoes from papa or new clothes from mama? And oh, the anticipation of that sizzling Christmas chicken!

These festive delights were once the heart of the season, eagerly awaited by all. Yet, the recent price hikes threaten to dim the cheer, leaving us uncertain whether 'papa' can grant those shoe wishes or if the tantalizing chicken melody will grace our tables. Despite the soaring costs, Nigeria's markets offer a glimmer of hope to revive these cherished traditions.

Here are markets in Nigeria where you can get affordable items, making this Christmas season merry and bright.

LAGOS STATE

Iponri Market

Located at Surulere is your go to place for home decor, props, souvenirs and home items.

Idumota Market

The market is ideal for shopping for a variety of goods, including clothing and fabrics.

Mile 12 Market

This is Lagos' biggest food market. Food items at the Mile 12 market are known to be affordable, especially when purchased in large quantities. They also have a big goat meat market for the asun and isiewu lovers.

ABUJA

Kado Fish Market

Looking for where to get your fish (smoke, fresh and frozen) and frozen poultry, then the Kado Fish Market located at Zuba Garki Road, By Life Camp Junction is your go to place.

Utako Market

Utako market is the hub of yam, potatoes, plantain, onions and many other farm products. You can also get cheap home decor from this market.

Garki Model Market

Frozen foods, cow and goat meat are sold here.

Kabusa Market

Located around the Lokogoma axis of Abuja and it is a Saturday market. You can get your Christmas bags of rice, beans, onions etc at a cheap rate here.

Garki International Market

This is where you can buy confectioneries and clothing items at a very affordable rate for your Xmas outings.

IBADAN, OYO STATE**Oje Market**

The market is home to assorted fabrics (Aso-oke, Sanyan, Alaari), ornamental beads and even traditional herbs.

Agbeni Market

In this market, you can find all sorts of food produce at wholesale prices.

Oja-Oba

Oja-Oba is well known for its fruits and raw foodstuffs, including peppers, tomatoes, yams, and plantains, all at affordable prices.

Bodija Market

Bodija Market is a primary hub for cattle and livestock sales in Oyo State.

Ogunpa Market

Ogunpa Market, situated around the Dugbe Alawo axis, is known for a variety of locally manufactured and Chinese goods. This market caters to fashion ware, household items.

OGUN STATE**Itoku Market**

Abeokuta's historic Itoku market is well-known for its exquisite kampala and adire fabrics.

Not only that, but you can also find a variety of other fabric types in addition to items like cosmetics and hair extensions, among other things.

Sango Market

This market offers a diverse range of products, including electronics, food items, textiles, cosmetics, hair extensions, clothing and accessories. From fashionable shirts for as low as 200 naira to affordable wigs and classy shoes at just 1,500 naira, Sango market is an absolute gold mine for shoppers.

Olomore Market

If you need to buy fresh pepper and tomatoes, Olomore market is the best place to go in Abeokuta. There's also a large presence of fresh water fishes like catfish and Tilapia. The market also has a sheep and goat market where live sheep and goat are sold.

Imakun Omi Market

Situated in the waterside region of Ogun State, within the town of Makun-Omi, lies Imakun Omi market. The market holds every nine days, upholding the age-old tradition of barter trade. Goods such as plastic items, foodstuffs, and vegetables are exchanged without the exchange of money, carrying on the ancient practice of trade by barter.

EASTERN REGION**Ariaria Market, Aba, Abia State**

This market is well-known for its replica of top luxury brands of shoes, clothes, bags at affordable prices. Talk about slaying on a budget.

Oko Cattle Market, Delta

Located in Asaba, Delta, the Oko Cattle Market is a suitable place to go for your livestock needs.

Onitsha Market, Anambra State

A wide variety is on offer in Onitsha's main market, and these include jewelry, clothing, household, industrial, and office equipment.

Ogbete Main Market, Enugu State

A very crowded market with numerous departments and sections of goods, including general clothing and apparel, food, electronics, and other technologies. The prices in this market are very low, and you can find almost anything for your home and personal use.

Nkwo Nnewi, Nnewi, Anambra State

For your interior and exterior decoration items at affordable price.

NORTHERN REGION**Kasuwar Kwari Market, Kano State**

The market is notable for textile fabrics, like Guinea Brocade, Ankara, quality handmade tie and dye, English laces, and George materials. Clothes from this market are relatively inexpensive.

Maradi Cattle Market, Niger

Located in the central part of Niger, the Maradi Cattle Market is prominent for its sales of the red goat.

Wudil Cattle Market, Kano

Located in Kano, Wudil Market is the state's second-largest market for livestock. It is a weekly market with cattle, grains and onions as its primary sales produce each Friday. The main available grains include white maize, yellow maize, sorghum, red, sorghum white, local rice, beans, soya beans, groundnut, cassava and millet.

Abubakar Mahmud Gumi Market, Kaduna

A variety of goods can be found at the market; including food items, clothes, everyday groceries and other amenities.

Zaki Bram Yam Market, Benue

Looking for the finest quality yams? Look no further than Zaki Bram Yam Market. Renowned for its top-tier yams, this market ensures you bring home only the best for your meals.

Whether you're seeking the perfect outfit, the freshest ingredients for your meal, or unique fabrics, these markets offer a treasure trove of possibilities at affordable prices. So, this Christmas, embrace the spirit of exploration, venture into the vibrant markets of Nigeria, and create unforgettable memories without draining your wallet. Remember, the true essence of the season lies not in material possessions but in the joy of sharing and giving. Happy holidays!



TRADITIONAL NIGERIAN MUSIC HAS HAD PROFOUND IMPACT ON MY STYLE, LYRICAL CONTENT - LIZMO

CHIGOZIRIM ENYINNIA

When you think of a gospel artiste with a voice that can calm frayed nerves and lyrics that uplift the soul, then look in the direction of Olufa Elizabeth Omotolani, know as LizMo a rising star in the Nigerian gospel music industry.

From a young age, LizMo showed an unwavering passion for music, which led her on a remarkable journey as a gospel music minister, songwriter, and music instructor.

Shedding light on how her Nigerian background

influences her music, LizMo said: "Our traditional Nigerian music holds immense cultural significance and has had a profound impact on my style and lyrical content. I am inspired to write songs with a fascinating blend of traditional and modern musical styles and the fusion of these two forms has created a unique sound that mesmerizes listeners both within and outside the country".

On the impact she sees her music making, the soulful singer said: "Music for me is an expression of how I feel, whether happy or sad. Music helps us immeasurably during this time. It's an



understanding force, and there's something about its wordlessness which helps us to see our reflection in its mirror without our having to explain anything. I am inspired to write songs my listeners can connect with, The music matches their mood, or it can help them change it too as they listen to my music and the major aim is for them to be and blessed as they listen to my songs".

Born into a family deeply rooted in music, LizMo's early exposure to music came as a choir member. She officially embarked on her musical career in 2007, where she began her formal musical education at the prestigious Muson School of Music. In 2010, she achieved the remarkable feat of obtaining both Muson School of Music and ABRSM certificates with a Grade 5 certification.

LizMo's dedication and talent were quickly recognized, earning her a scholarship to pursue a diploma program in voice at the Muson School of

Music, which she successfully completed in 2012. She continued her educational journey, enrolling at the University of Lagos in 2016, where she pursued her academic studies and graduated in 2019.

LizMo who has shared her gifts and ministered in various churches, not only in Lagos but also beyond its borders is a proud daughter of Pastor Paul Adeniyi, The Lead Pastor of The Evidence Church, and serves as a singing minister. Her devotion to spreading the message of faith through music led to her debut EP, 'Gratitude,' released in May 2022.

Highlighting what her vision is as a gospel artiste, she said: "I aspire to be a global brand by making creative music and filled with the spirit of God in order to keep being a blessing to my audience both home and abroad".

Fragrance journey begins as Montaigne Place launches 'CREED CARMINA' from The House of Creed Lagos

CHIOMA ONUH



Montaigne place, one of Nigeria's largest Luxury Skincare, Beauty, and Perfumery retail Company hosted an unforgettable evening to unveil the much anticipated Luxury Fragrance; Creed Carmina to its discerning clientele.

The event, held in Lagos, Nigeria, saw the gathering of influential personalities including Marketing & Communications professional, Amaechi Okobi, Serial Entrepreneur, Tanya Omotayo, Nigerian Actress, Anita Joseph. Just to mention a few.

The evening unfolded as an immersive journey into the world of Creed Carmina, with the venue adorned in opulent decor that echoed the fragrance's essence.

Guests were treated to an exclusive preview of the fragrance, experiencing its harmonious notes and exquisite blend.

Speaking at the event, Alali Hart, managing director, stated, "We are thrilled to bring Creed Carmina to our clients in Nigeria. Montaigne Place has always been dedicated to providing a unique and luxurious shopping experience, and the launch of Creed Carmina is a testament to that commitment."

Creed Carmina is available at Montaigne Place outlets and Yves Rocher which are spread across the federation.



Making Christmas count for students on holidays

CHARLES OGWO

It was such a massive kind of fun during Christmas while growing up in the village, it was something more than a holiday, Jonathan Udeani share while recounting his childhood yuletide holidays' experiences.

"It's a season we so much cherished and looked forward each year," he narrated.

"With Christmas chilling atmosphere, the dust and scotching dry skins, going to the stream was such a hectic task that came with pleasant and unpleasant experiences. Unpleasant for stepping out of warm and protective houses that encapsules mankind from the excruciating weather to cold hands of the river side where we fetch water, Udeani continued.

We never liked the daring cold tides gushing down the river coasts, however, we were always excited to sight and embrace budding Christmas flowers from the river side trees.

The December period comes with night hours folk tales as the moon smiles with in anticipation to the birth of Jesus Christ, at least as we were told.

Our parents would sit us down on mats with stories about the craftiness of tortoise and braveness of the lion the king of the jungle, sometimes near the fire to drive off the cold. While we enjoyed the tales, we take time to gossip about our Christmas clothes that had been sent to the tailors, and arrangements made for us to go and take our measurements.

Besides, we were always lost in the euphoria to seeing our relatives who would be coming home for Christmas, some nights, we would just wish Christmas would be tomorrow. Though we did not really know what we were celebrating, we were sure of new clothes, eating rice, going to the central school field to watch inter village football matches and the masquerades, among others.

Even in our ignorance of the origin of Christmas, we embraced the joyous season as we cherished every day of the yuletide."

The origins of Christmas can be traced back to the ancient Roman festival of Saturnalia, a week-long celebration held in December to honour Saturn, the god of agriculture. The early Christians leaders adopted the festive spirit of Saturnalia, associating it with the birth of Jesus Christ.

By the 4th century, December 25th was officially designated as Christmas day. Over time, Christmas evolved, incorporating various cultural traditions and customs.

For instance, in North America, Christmas is synonymous with family gatherings, lavish feasts, and exchanging gifts. Children eagerly await Santa Claus' arrival, leaving cookies and milk near the fireplace. Christmas in Latin America is a vibrant spectacle, characterised by vibrant 'posadas' processions and lively nativity scenes.

Christmas celebrations in Asia blend local customs with Western traditions. In Japan, Christmas Eve is a time for couples to celebrate their love, while in the Philippines, giant lantern festivals illuminate the night sky.

While Christmas traditions vary across cultures, the spirit of joy and togetherness remains constant. For children, and students, the holiday offers a welcome break from academic pressures and a chance to create lasting memories.

How students can make Christmas count:

A fact remains that there is no one jacket fit all approach to having a fun filled celebration during Christmas.

Nevertheless, children could make most of the season by learning and practicing how to decorate their homes, how to join mummies in baking Christmas cakes, chin-chin, etc and/or join their mates in church to sing carols or dance to the tunes to spring the Christmas spirit alive.

Parents could also help children connect with cousins, family friends and loved ones. It is also a time to travel and explore your world.

A time to plunge oneself in various cultural activities by traveling to your hometowns and witness Christmas traditions firsthand.

The timeless hereditary of Christmas exposes every student to a live of friendliness, love, gratefulness, sharing and selflessness.

This is your season, as the world celebrates the birth of Jesus Christ, make sure you enjoy the yuletide by embracing the virtue of giving, and building enduring memories.



Kemi Lewis shines at Afro Hair festival 2023

DAVID IJASEUN

In a grand celebration of African beauty and entrepreneurship, the Afro Hair Culture & Beauty Festival 2023 has honoured KL's Naturals and its founder, Kemi Lewis, for their significant contributions to the natural hair and beauty industry.

The prestigious event, which was held at the Transcorp Hilton in Abuja, Nigeria, on December 1st and 2nd, recognized KL's Naturals for its exceptional growth and pivotal role in shaping the African Natural Hair community.

The festival, now in its fourth edition, is a beacon of inspiration and innovation in the natural hair and beauty sector. This

year's theme, "The African Hair Economy: Sustaining the environment through Afro culture and beauty entrepreneurship," perfectly encapsulates the spirit of the event. Organized by the African Hair Summit in partnership with the Federal Ministry of Information and Culture and other influential brands, the festival drew a diverse crowd. Industry leaders, beauty enthusiasts, influencers, professionals, and global players gathered to celebrate and advance the African haircare and beauty industry.

At the heart of the festival were the awards, shining a spotlight on KL's Naturals' dedication and impact within the African natural hair community. The dual recognition awarded

to the brand and its founder, Kemi Lewis, served not only as an acknowledgment of past achievements but also as an impetus for future excellence in the industry.

Kemi Lewis, in her heartfelt acceptance speech, expressed profound gratitude for the honors. "I am deeply honored to accept this personal award and to receive, on behalf of KL's Naturals, recognition for our contributions to the natural hair community. This isn't just about me; it's a celebration of the collective efforts of our entire team at KL's Naturals," she said.

Lewis emphasized the significance of these accolades, viewing them as both a tribute to the salon's accomplishments and a call to continued commitment towards the growth and empowerment of the natural hair community in Africa. "This recognition

fuels our drive. I assure our clients, stylists, and the community that we won't settle. It's a pledge to raise standards and champion excellence in the natural hair industry," Kemi added with a tone of determination.

Buoyed by these achievements, KL's Naturals is set to further its mission, forging new partnerships and implementing innovative strategies to enhance the natural hair journey for its clients. The brand stands firm in its commitment to delivering unparalleled service, education, quality natural products, and a supportive community for Naturalistas around the world. This recognition at the Afro Hair Culture & Beauty Festival 2023 marks a new chapter for KL's Naturals, one filled with promise and endless possibilities for the natural hair community.



From street hawker to African King

- The rise of Victor Osimhen

ANTHONY NLEBEM

Born and growing up in Olusosun, a dense community in Lagos that is synonymous with dumpsites, the newly crowned African football king, Victor Osimhen, endured a very tough beginning to rising to become the best football player in the African continent. Here, ANTHONY NLEBEM takes an in-depth account of Osimhen's journey to stardom.

CAREER JOURNEY

Osimhen was born on December 29, 1998, and his journey to becoming a professional footballer involved facing various challenges and overcoming obstacles.

One aspect of his story that has been highlighted in some reports is his encounter with football scouts during his youth. Osimhen caught the attention of scouts while playing for the Ultimate Strikers Academy in Lagos. His impressive performances led to opportunities to showcase his talent on bigger stages.

The Super Eagles rose to prominence during the 2015 FIFA U-17 World Cup held in Chile, where he played a key role in helping the Nigerian national team win the tournament. He finished as the top scorer of the competition, earning the Golden Boot, and was named the tournament's best player, receiving the Golden Ball.

After his success at the U-17 level, Osimhen's professional career took off. He initially played for Nigerian club Wolfsburg, then moved to Belgian side Charleroi in 2018, where he continued to develop as a striker. His performances at Charleroi attracted the attention of Lille OSC, and he made a transfer to the French club in 2019.

Osimhen began his senior career in Germany at VfL Wolfsburg in 2017. After spending a season and a half with the team, he went on loan to Charleroi in Belgium in 2018/19, before switching to Ligue1 side Lille.

The 24-year-old made his European football debut with the French club during the 2019/20 UEFA Champions League. In 2020, Osimhen joined Serie A club Napoli for a club-record fee of €70 million.

He won the Serie A Best Young Player award in the 2021/22 season and, in the following season, helped the club win their first Serie A title in 33 years.

FROM STREET HAWKER TO AFRICAN KING

The small tall boy from the streets of Olusosun has become the biggest name in Africa. At the 2023 CAF award night held on Monday night in Marrakech, Morocco, Osimhen was named the 2023 CAF Men's Player of the Year following his heroic performance for the Super Eagles and Napoli in the year under review and also became the first Nigerian winner of the men's award since Kanu Nwankwo in 1999 after another prolific campaign.

Osimhen beat stiff competition from Morocco and PSG defender Achraf Hakimi and Egypt and Liverpool striker Mohammed Salah to win the top award.

It is a "dream come true" for Osimhen, who was raised in the dusty streets of Olusosun, Lagos, having experienced the harsh realities of childhood.

As a young lad, Osimhen sold newspapers and bottles of water on the streets of Lagos to make a





living, describing his situation as being in the trenches

The 24-year-old on Tuesday wrote an emotional piece on his official X account (formerly Twitter) reflecting on his journey to stardom

“As a young boy who came from the streets of Olusosun, who had to hawk in traffic almost every day of the week while growing up to survive the numerous challenges my family and I were facing, becoming a Treasure in Africa and the World Football was a wild dream, Osimhen said on X (formerly Twitter).

“Words can’t express the joy in my heart; this is a very special moment for me. My football journey has been a rollercoaster of highs, tough lows and emotions. The goals and jubilation of victories keep me going even when criticism, hate, and the pain of defeat hit me hard in the chest. Osimhen said after being named CAF 2023 Men’s Player of the Year in Morocco.

DEDICATES 2023 CAF AWARD TO LATE PARENTS

The former Lille forward who started playing football on the streets of Olusosun has proven himself to

be one of the best strikers in the world after helping Napoli win their first Serie A trophy in 33 years.

Osimhen expressed gratitude to his late parents for their support while growing up as a young hawk on the streets of Olusosun in Lagos.

“Losing my dear parents in the course of this journey leaves a scar in my heart as they have always been my major driving force for success since I was a kid. May their souls continue to rest in peace. To my wonderful family, thanks for always having my back and loving me so much. I wouldn’t have made it this far without your esteemed support.

“To my fans and Nigerian supporters, your dedication in supporting me on the good and bad days does not go unnoticed; even amidst the arrows of hatred thrown at me, you all stood by my side. I am grateful. Winning the CAF Best African Player 2023 is a testament to my hard work and your love and support. I am so proud of myself for achieving this prestigious award.



WORDS FOR HIS FANS

The 24-year-old is now the new king of African football, a climax of an excellent one-year football calendar charting a new path to stardom and greatness also thanked his Nigerian fans for their unwavering support even in his shortcomings

"To my fans and Nigerian supporters, your dedication in supporting me on the good days and bad days does not go unnoticed, even amidst the arrows of hatred thrown at me you all still stood by my side. I am grateful. Winning the CAF Best African Player 2023 is a testament to my hardwork, your love and support. I am so proud of myself for achieving this prestigious award."

SINGS AMUNEKE PRAISES FOR DISCOVERING HIM

While speaking after receiving the CAF 2023 Men's Player of the Year Award, Osimhen expressed gratitude to former Nigeria international Emmanuel Amuneke, who discovered him in his early days and coached him at the U-17 level.

"First of all, I want to say thank you to God for everything. Special thanks go to Mr Emmanuel Amuneke; without him, I don't think I would be standing in front of you guys holding one of the most prestigious awards in world football," Osimhen said in Marrakesh.

"He believed in me right from the start and was at the heart of our 2015 FIFA U17 World Cup victory in Chile. He gave me the opportunity to really showcase myself and when things were not going well with me, he was the brain behind the motivation and it is absolutely right for me to acknowledge him at the biggest stage because, behind closed doors, he has helped me a lot. He is present here and here to witness what he has produced," an emotional Osimhen told CAFOnline.

Amuneke, the 1994 African Player of the Year, was crucial to Nigeria's triumph in the AFCON before

taking the world by storm at the FIFA World Cup in the USA scoring against Bulgaria and Italy. He was part of Nigeria's team that won a gold medal at the Olympics in Atlanta in 1996.

EYES 2023 AFCON GLORY

Osimhen further revealed that this prestigious CAF award is a motivation for him and his teammates ahead of the 2023 AFCON 2023 in Ivory Coast in January 2024.

The Super Eagles have won the AFCON three times in 1980, 1994 and 2013 and the Napoli star has set his sights on delivering a fourth AFCON title for Nigeria.

The Super Eagles are in Group A with the hosts, Equatorial Guinea and Guinea Bissau.

"We are ready and preparing very well. The squad is in high spirits. We are raring to go and hope that we shall do well there," Osimhen added.

Osimhen is also the highest goal scorer in the AFCON 2023 qualifiers with 10 goals.

His performances also earned him a nomination for the Ballon d'Or, where he finished 8th, becoming the first Nigerian to make the top 10 of the Ballon d'Or voting.

Osimhen bagged an incredible 31 goals in 39 matches across all competitions for Napoli last season and has continued his fantastic scoring record this campaign, as he has already netted six goals in 10 matches.

Osimhen's rise from a poor upbringing in Lagos to his current position one of the best strikers and players in the world is a testament to his talent, tenacity, and ability to overcome obstacles to become the king of African football

12 Tips to Build Brand Awareness this Christmas (And Beyond)

FEYISITAN IJIMAKINWA



The holiday season is here again and a good number of people believe this is the best season for brands. While the jury is still out on that, the holiday season is the perfect time to nurture your established brand relationships with loyal customers and clients and possibly develop some new ones.

Here are 14 ways that you can keep your brand in the public eye, not only in December but throughout the entire year.

1. SHOW YOUR BRAND, NOT YOUR PRODUCTS.

Use holiday marketing as a time to focus internally. Use this season to market the value that exists within the organisation. Take this time to show your brand, not your products. Publicly, acknowledge the value of your team, during this time, and build a brand image that is focused on the people who make it happen all year. Most consumers already know where the deals are, they simply need to find a brand they want to support.

2. TRY THE “BOUNCE-BACK METHOD”

The holiday period is typically good for retail and restaurants. There's not much to do there. However, the bounce-back method works wonders after the holiday month of December. During this month, issue every paying guest an envelope with some sort of reward. The envelope can only be opened on their next visit in January, during their next purchase. Sales will come close to equal December numbers. I can wager you on that.

3. NURTURE AND ENGAGE WITH EXISTING FOLLOWERS

During the holidays, every brand is trying to get into your shopping cart, especially during Black Friday and Cyber Monday. Businesses can stand out from competitors by nurturing audiences that are most likely to purchase from them. Engaging with your existing social media followers and email subscribers with exclusive offers or valuable messaging, will reinforce familiarity and build loyalty.

4. MEET PEOPLE WHERE THEY ARE

Consider a counter-intuitive approach by focusing on repairing items, purchasing pre-loved goods, or donating to those in need. Take inspiration from Patagonia's "Don't Buy This" campaign. High inflation is real and people are hurting. Lead with empathy and meet consumers where they are.

5. GENERATE THEMED CONTENT

A holiday marketing strategy to keep a business in the public eye is to create themed content. This could be anything from blog posts and social media posts to videos and images. The goal is to create content that is relevant to the holiday and that will appeal to your target audience. By doing this, you can ensure that your business stays top of mind during the holiday season.

6. SHARE PERSONALISED TEXT MESSAGES

Cultivate direct communication with your consumer. Opening avenues for conversation with your consumers via channels like SMS is the quickest and most personal way to share information about holiday sales and promotions. In doing so, you can deliver targeted, personalized messaging that cuts through the noise.

7. SEND HANDWRITTEN GREETING CARDS.

The holiday season is the best time to show appreciation to your loyal customers. So consider sending out some handwritten greeting cards. Also, don't miss out on this opportunity to offer discounts or an exclusive first look at a new product or service. With this strategy, you'll get your customers' attention and express your gratitude simultaneously.

8. GIVE BACK TO COMMUNITY

The holiday season is a great time to focus on giving back to the community and celebrating your hard-working employees. Obviously, you don't want to do either of these things with the goal of getting media attention, but a natural byproduct of taking care of your employees and those less fortunate in your community is the creation of loyal brand ambassadors.

9. BE FUNNY, CREATIVE AND CONNECT

Holiday marketing is probably very different in B2C, but in B2B it is a chance to be funny and creative to connect with your customers on a personal level. It's more about the brand and employees than it is about sales and products, showing that we are all humans and part of a bigger community.

10. ENHANCE THE APPEAL OF YEAR-ROUND BRAND SHOPPING

Smart holiday marketing has to be disruptive in order to cut through the noise of the season, but it also connects with the consumer in a way that will resonate beyond the new year. While the messaging should

centre around being the best place to go for gifting, that sentiment should also extend into being the best shopping experience year-round.

11. DEMONSTRATE EMPATHY TO YOUR AUDIENCE.

Audience empathy is the cornerstone of any great marketing strategy. For any given holiday, consider how your offering addresses the hopes, fears, frustrations, or dreams of your audience. Then have fun leaning into it.

12. MAKE A NEW-TO-YOU HOLIDAY

Create a new holiday, one where you aren't competing with every other business and the time constraints clients already feel at the end of a fiscal year. The new-to-you holiday should resonate with the act of appreciation and connection to the business purpose.

LAST LINE

Whether your company is targeting B2C or B2B, it's also a chance to come up with other creative concepts to grab people's attention, make them smile, and show them that you truly care. If you focus on the humanization of your company, highlighting the effectiveness of your employees, you'll connect effectively with the community at large.

**Feyisitan Ijimakinwa**

Feyisitan Ijimakinwa is a Reputation and Perception Management expert. He is a prolific writer and researcher who, at different times, served as Head of Corporate Communications of top brands quoted on the Nigerian Stock Exchange. A versatile communications specialist, he practiced extensively as a print journalist and was variously engaged in the broadcast media, working on radio and television. Feyisitan continues to write on corporate communications, brand reputation and perception management, and brand intelligence, among others. He organises the 'Brand Intelligence and the Marketplace' masterclass. Feyisitan advocates a pollution free and sustainable environment



CHEATER

UDY OSARO-EDOBOR

He told me lies and I fell for them hook, line and sinker. I left my boyfriend because of him. I thought he was the real deal.....

Fresh out of secondary school, I had several opportunities I wanted to explore before going to the university so I took a year break to do other things.

I was in a very healthy relationship with Marcus. He was in the university so he was hardly around. We've been dating for two years and he was a pretty decent guy. There were no mobile phones back in the day, so we could only communicate through letters.

I took up a part time job in a boutique while I also attended my computer classes. It was a rainy day and there were no buses or cabs available on my route so it was a huge relief when a car pulled up beside me and offered me a ride home. That was how I met "Cheater". He seemed like a nice

person and we hit it off as friends almost immediately. He became a regular face at my computer school and would offer me a ride home every evening. I didn't realize when I began to compare him with Marcus. I felt he was older and more more mature and more exposed too. I was starting to like him even though I knew it wasn't right. In my letters to Marcus, I'd tell him everything that was happening to me but skip the gist about Cheater.

Cheater was a smooth talker. He knew I had a boyfriend but it didn't stop him from expressing his feelings towards me. He told me lies and I fell for them hook, line and sinker. I left my boyfriend because of him. I thought he was the real deal. I didn't even have the decency to break up with Marcus properly, I just wrote him a letter to tell him that it was over between us. He didn't reply my letter and I never saw him again.

When I started dating Cheater, everything seemed nice at

first. I met his friends and his siblings and they all liked me and treated me really well but I later found out that they acted the same way with every girl he showed them.

I never believed in sex before marriage but Cheater was able to convince me to sleep with him and that was the genesis of our troubles. My period was late and I was worried. I voiced my fears to Cheater and he suddenly became scarce. He stopped picking me up from the computer school, he stopped visiting me at home and he was hardly at his office or in his house. I just couldn't reach him. I was dying inside and couldn't tell anyone what I was going through. The only person I could confide in was my Aunt Julie. She wasn't a blabber mouth and she was the most reasonable person in my family... I knew she would keep my secret. Thankfully, she got in touch with Cheater and he showed up a few days later.

I remember his look when he came to see me that day. He sized me up from head to toe, then he hissed. He look at me with contempt before he tossed some notes at me. Then he gave me a piece of paper which contained the address of a hospital and a doctor's name. "Make sure you see him on Thursday, he'll be expecting you", these were the only words he spoke to me before he left.

A few weeks earlier, this guy was professing his undying love to me. He told me that I was wife material and he wanted to marry me. He even promised to wait till I was through with school then he'll make me his wife. He was nice because he wanted to sleep with me, he took advantage of my naivety and he dumped me like used tissue after he had what he wanted. I felt betrayed. I felt used. But I felt wiser.

Cheater made me do two things I never conceived would ever happen to me...sex before marriage and an abortion. I couldn't forgive myself for a very long time but I'm grateful for my Aunty Julie who stayed with me and guided me through it all. We became closer after that incident and she became my compass, leading me all the way.

I heard from mutual friends that Cheater got another girl pregnant and tried to dodge his responsibility but the girl's mom came after him and threatened him with "juju" so he

was forced to marry her. I was happy that he met his match and now he was stuck with a girl he didn't love. Karma dealt him a sucker punch.

So a few days ago, after a long day at work, I was going through all my messages and replying to some of them when I noticed a message from a Randi number. It was a long note about mercy and forgiveness and it made no sense. The senders name was Chester and I had no recollection of anyone by that name so I texted back for more details. The person responded with a picture and I realized it was Cheater. I had gotten so used to calling him cheater that I forgot his real name.

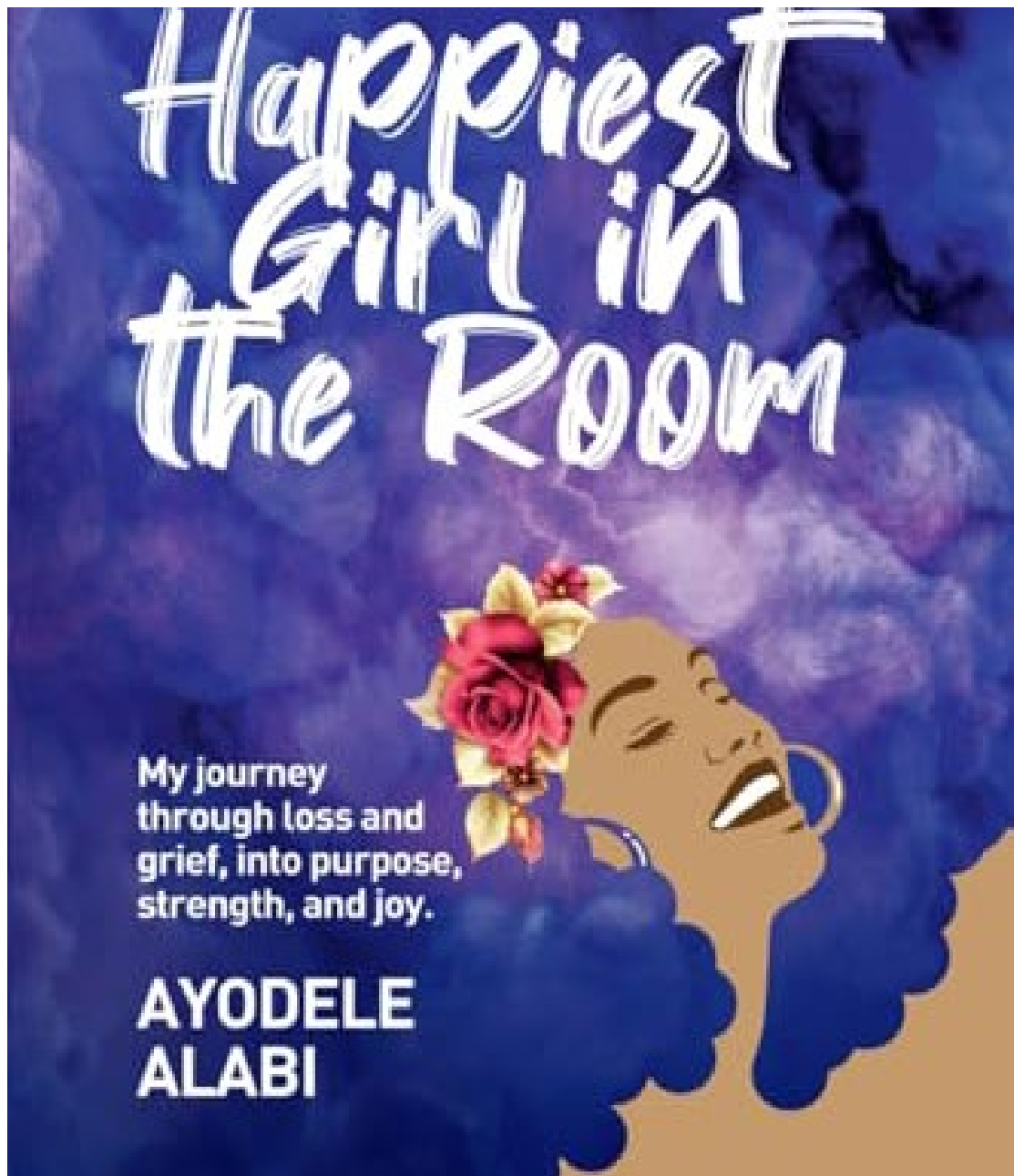
He told of how he had been unhappy in his marriage and how he has never stopped thinking about what life with me would have been. I didn't have any response for him so I blocked and deleted his contact. Cheater is a part of my past that I will never like to revisit.



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How to Successfully Overcome Loss and Grief -A
Review of Ayodele Alabi's Happiest Girl in the Room

Title: Happiest Girl in the Room

Author: Ayodele Alabi

Year of Publication: 2023

Number of Pages: 218

Category: Memoir

DEALING WITH MALICE IN MARRIAGE

TITILADE OYEMADE

Grief has the power to completely transform an individual. Some may retreat inward, while others undergo significant shifts in their personalities, whether for the better or worse. The outcome of this transformation often hinges on one's perspective on life following the loss of a loved one.

Dealing with grief becomes even more challenging when considering that losing one loved one is not the same as losing two. Ayodele Alabi has personally grappled with the unique emotions that accompany losing a loved one twice, earning recognition for her bravery in openly sharing such experiences, a courage not commonly found.

Experiencing widowhood at the age of 32 is certainly not something any woman desires. Nevertheless, the author exudes strength and optimism, aspiring to instill the same in her readers. She underscores the importance of continuing to live and finding joy when life takes unexpected turns. Despite acknowledging the difficulty of this process, the author shares her personal struggles and, having emerged on the other side, encourages readers not to linger in pain, offering practical tips.

While the title of her book may seem more aligned with a children's book than a memoir, the content within is abundant and substantial.

As you progress through the book, you embark on an emotional rollercoaster. There are moments when the narrative evokes a profound sense of sadness, and if you've experienced loss yourself, you can deeply relate to the array of emotions the author navigates. For those who haven't undergone the loss of a loved one, this book serves as a guide on expressing empathy toward those who have.

The book is packed with numerous stories. The author's skill in weaving together her past and present narratives is truly commendable, ensuring that the reader remains engaged without becoming lost in the stories. However, there's a deliberate suspense, with the author holding back on revealing many details about her husband's death. Nonetheless, she gradually opens up, allowing readers to piece together the events chapter by chapter. As you immerse yourself in her narrative, she returns to the purpose behind writing the book and imparts valuable tips on navigating grief more effectively.

The author also incorporates poems, some written before the book's publication and others possibly penned during its creation, adding a delightful touch. The poems provide a preview of what's to come in each chapter, creating a two-in-one experience – a blend of poetry and memoir.

For those currently grappling with loss, the author doesn't leave you alone; instead, she guides you and shares in prayer at each chapter's end. These prayers serve as a comforting resource to revisit during moments of distress.

Upon completing this book, you'll feel invigorated, realizing you're not alone in this struggle. Others have faced similar challenges and emerged stronger, signifying that you, too, can overcome them.

While it's true there's no universal solution for handling grief, this book undeniably holds value for anyone navigating through a loss.

Titilade Oyemade

Titilade Oyemade is a business executive in a leading organisation and holds a degree in Russian Language. She's the convener of the Hangoutwithtee Ladies Event and the publisher of Hangoutwithtee magazine. She spends her weekends attending women conferences, events and book readings. She loves to have fun and to help other women have the same in their lives.
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WEEKENDER

MOVIE REVIEWS

LEAVE THE WORLD BEHIND (2023)

I wasn't sure what to expect from this at all, as the trailer didn't give out a lot, but I was moved to watch it because I saw Julia Roberts in it, and I was convinced that nothing will go wrong, well nothing went pretty right at all in this movie for me, I guess I expected so much and even when I assumed that the good guy was a bad guy, ally Predictions turned out absolutely wrong and the end left me even more speechless. To the movie Amanda "Julia Roberts" as she was called in the movie played the lead role. She noticed that her husband was stressed and decided to rent a lovely apartment away from town where they could go spend the weekend together as a family. We'll what started as a lovely getaway turned out to be one he'll of a Weekend as everything went wrong, the hardest task was to decide to let 2 total strangers in for the night or leave them outside, in the midst of all rhe chaos. We'll do check it out and tell.me what you think. The 141m thriller, drama movie was produced by Julia Roberts, Marisa Yeres Gill, Lisa Gillian, Sam Esmail, Chad Hamilt, they featured actors like Ethan Hawke, Mahershala Ali, Mhya'la Herrold, Kevin Bacon, Charlie Evans.



MARGAUX (2022)

The title of this movie doesn't tell a lot, but the trailer will give you a clue what to expect, the movie actually left me feeling more worried about accepting AI and smart homes. Well to the movie, a group of teenage friends decided to go spend a weekend together in a very beautiful smart apartment, where everything was controlled by the app, to login into the house you have to download an app, fill a form, agree to all the terms and upload your picture. Little did they know that agreeing to that form meant the app having access to every single document and file on their phones. You will need to check out the movie to see how what started out as a simple beautiful weekend, turned out to be a night mare for them all, it was a weekend of pain, terror and confusion. I actually didn't see that plot twist at the tale end, make sure you wait for it. The 104m horror, thriller movie was directed by Steven C. Miller, they featured acts like Madison Pettis, Vanessa Morgan, Jedidiah Goodacre, Phoebe Miu, Jordan Buhat, Richard Harmon, Susan Bennett, Brittany Mitchell, Lochlyn Munro, Louis Lay etc.



CATERING CHRISTMAS (2022)

Remember it's the season of Christmas, so every week I will recommend Christmas movies you can watch with the family. This was a very sweet and interesting Christmas movie, Molly Frost as she was called in the movie, was a sweet pretty young lady, who had a nice catering business, her entire life changed when a lady walks into her store to check it out and invite her to cook for her yearly foundation dinner for the top 1% in her city, doing this right will change her business for life and move her to the next level. You will need to watch the entire movie to see how things turned out for her. It was just a simple and nice movie, if you enjoy Christmas movies then, this will make your weekend. The 85m romantic, comedy movie was directed by T.W. Peacocks, they featured actors like Merritt Patterson, Daniel Lissing, Michael Hanrahan, Rosemary dunsmore, Melanie Leishman, Lily Gao, Michael Copeman etc.



Linda Ochugbua

WEEKEND QUOTES



1

Leadership is knowing the right direction at the right moment otherwise you crash and weary the lead
.....WhispersbyTEN

2

Leaders are the primary change agent in any organisation, hold them accountable to build any culture
.....WhispersbyTEN

3

Leadership calls for higher skill in managing lead.
Unlearn and learn today
.... WhispersbyTEN

4

"Chewing the bullet" on behalf of the people you lead is a commitment
..... WhispersbyTEN