

BUSINESS DAY WEEKENDER

EDITION 280 | 14, FEBRUARY 2026

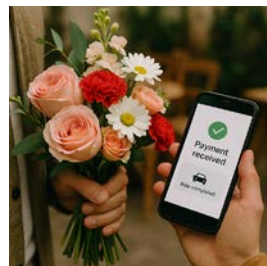


11 simple yet meaningful Valentine's Day activities for couples in 2026



SPORTS

Dantata's Kano Golden Alchemy headlines 2026 NPA Lagos Polo with Sani Dangote Cup triumph



LIFESTYLE

The business of love: What valentine's day really costs young Nigerians

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PUBLISHED BY

BusinessDay Media Limited
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Mobolaji Johnson Street, Ikoyi
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C O N T E N T



7

LAUGHTER IN THE MIRROR



13

INTERVIEW

How Njideka Agbo learnt to navigate the high stakes of media without cutting corners



17

PROFILE

From 6 Rejections to Global Talent: How Nigerian Scholar, Adeyemo, became a leader in UK Academia

24

FEATURE

Makoko's Five-Point Pact: Peace Today, the Implementation Test Tomorrow

27

EDUCATION

5 Steps to Surviving a Snakebite

46

ART INDEX

Looking Past the Capitals_ Where Contemporary African Art Is Taking Shape

48

BRANDS

What If We Stop Advertising

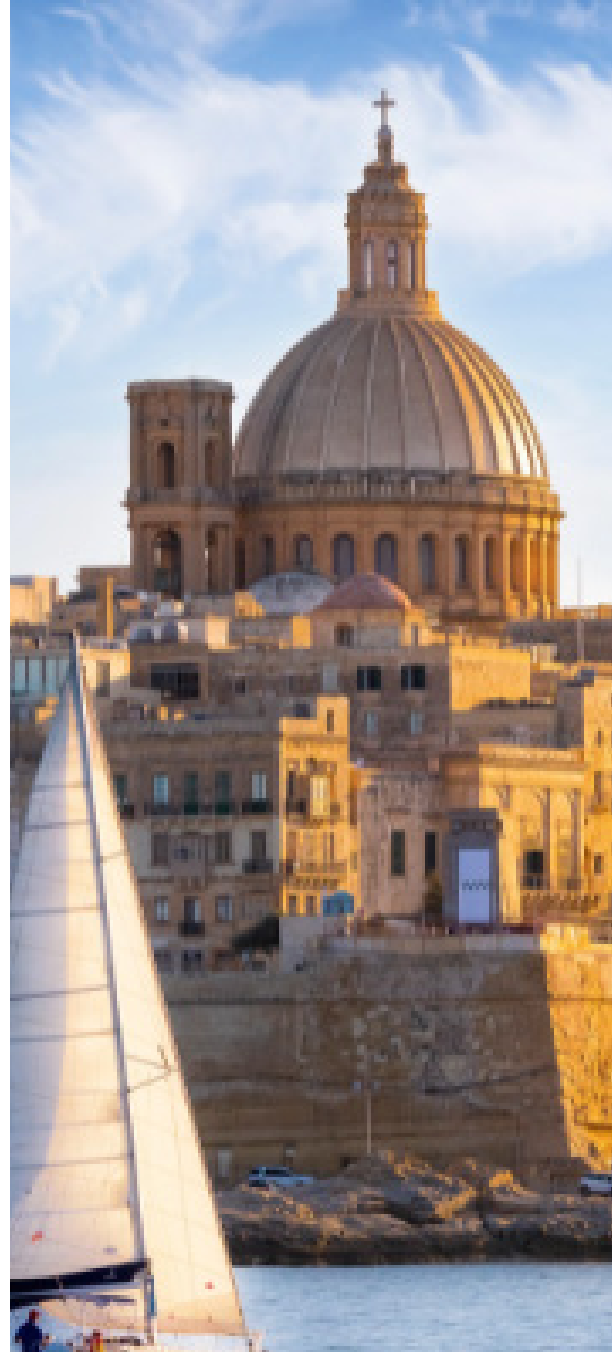
52

BOOK REVIEW

The Son of Your Father's Concubine

56

BD QUOTES





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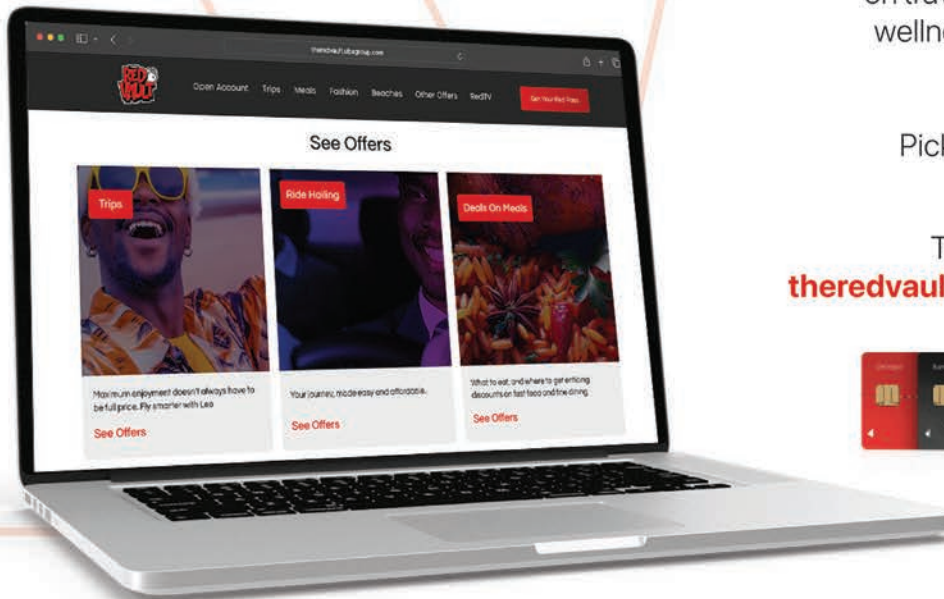


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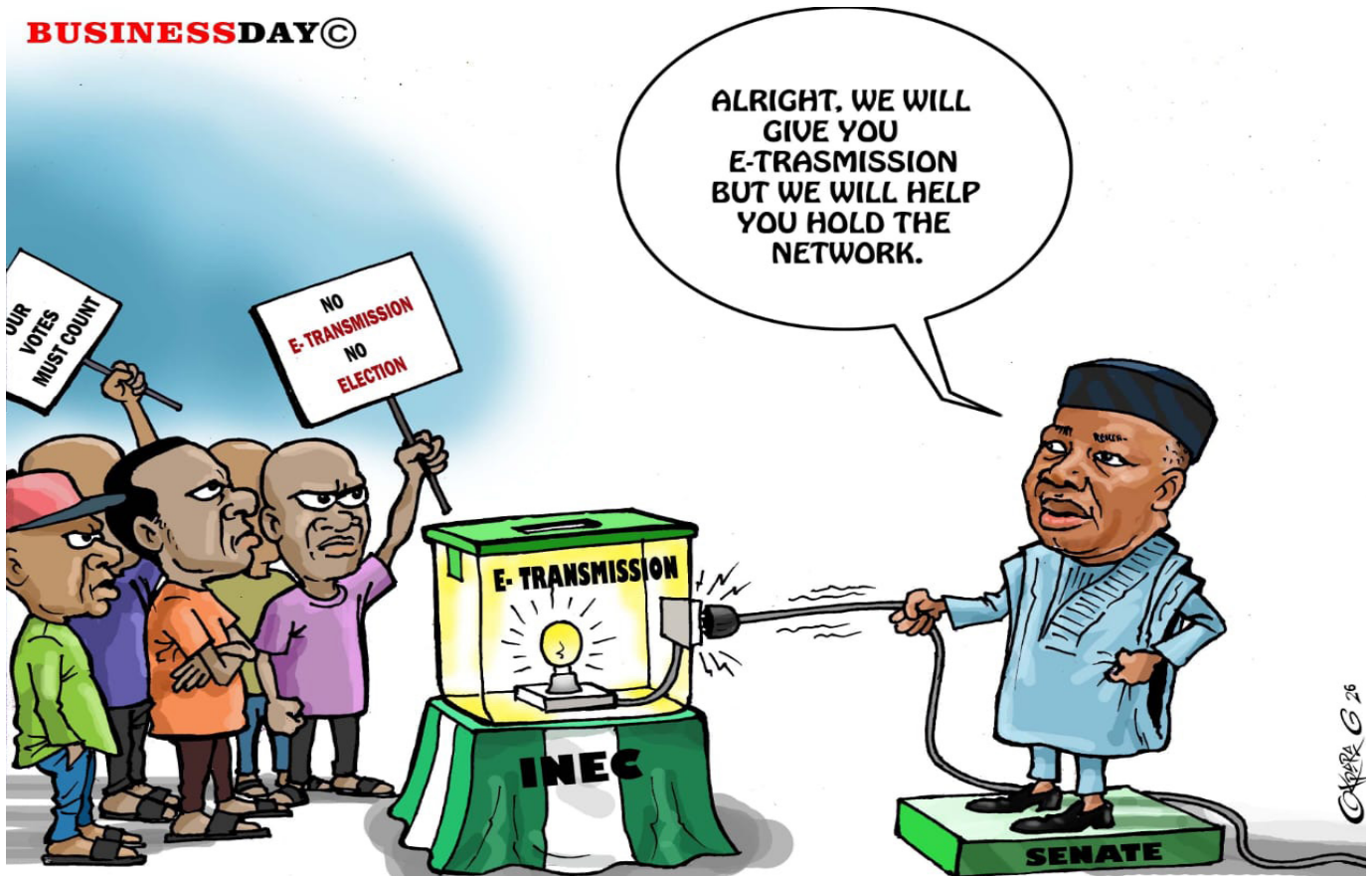


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11 SIMPLE YET MEANINGFUL VALENTINE'S DAY ACTIVITIES FOR COUPLES IN 2026

ESTHER EMOEKPERE



Valentine's Day continues to rank among the most celebrated dates on the calendar, with couples actively searching for ideas on how to make the day count. In Nigeria and across the globe, online searches for "Valentine's Day activities for couples" and "romantic things to do on Valentine's Day" spike in early February. Restaurants release special menus, hotels promote limited offers and entertainment venues schedule themed events to meet the seasonal demand.

Even so, celebrating Valentine's Day does not have to be complicated. Clear planning and shared interest matter more than elaborate gestures. The most successful plans are often straightforward, realistic and suited to your schedule and budget.

Here are 11 simple and meaningful activities to try with your partner this Valentine's Day.

Dinner date

A dinner date remains one of the most popular Valentine's Day activities for couples. To make it more intentional, choose a restaurant that suits your taste rather than following trends. It could be fine dining, a rooftop spot, a local favourite or a new restaurant you have both wanted to try. Book your table early. Confirm the menu, pricing and seating time so there are no surprises. Arrive on time, switch off distractions and focus on conversation. If you want something more private, ask whether the restaurant offers a tasting menu or a quieter section away from large groups.

Recreate your first date

Return to the place where you first met, had your first conversation or shared your first official outing. Sitting in the same space can naturally bring back details you may have forgotten, from what you ordered to what you spoke about. If the exact location is no longer available, choose a similar

setting and focus on recreating the atmosphere. You can also replicate specific elements of that day. Order the same meal, watch the same film or visit a similar venue. If you remember what you wore, consider dressing in a similar style. Small details can make the experience feel intentional without requiring major expense. Talk about your first impressions of each other, what surprised you and what has changed since then. Discuss challenges you have overcome and milestones you have reached together. Recognise growth, appreciate shared history and acknowledge how your relationship has evolved over time.

Plan a surprise activity for each other

Agree in advance that you will both plan part of the day but keep the details secret. One person can organise the first half of Valentine's Day, while the other takes charge of the second half. This keeps the experience balanced and ensures that both partners feel involved. Set a clear budget beforehand to avoid pressure or unrealistic expectations. The activity does not need to be expensive. It could be a carefully chosen restaurant, a planned walk to a meaningful location, tickets to an event or a simple set-up at home. The goal is to show thought and attention to detail.

Plan a staycation or short trip

A staycation is a practical way to create a break without extensive travel. Booking a hotel in your own city can give you access to amenities such as room service, a pool or a spa, all without long journeys. If time allows, consider a short trip to a nearby city or resort for one or two nights. Look for packages that include breakfast, dinner or late checkout. Compare prices across booking platforms and check reviews before confirming. A simple change of environment can make the day feel distinct from routine.

Cook together at home

Cooking together is cost-effective and personal. Choose a menu in advance and divide responsibilities. One person can handle the main course while the other prepares dessert or drinks. Set the table properly, use real plates and create a calm environment. You can play music in the background and agree on a start time, just as you would for a restaurant reservation. Cleaning up together afterwards reinforces the sense of teamwork.

Attend a concert, theatre show or comedy night

Live entertainment offers structure and shared experience. Check event listings for concerts, stage plays, spoken-word events or comedy shows scheduled around 14 February. Purchase tickets early to secure preferred seats. Confirm venue rules regarding entry time and parking. Arriving early allows you to settle in without rushing. After the show, take time to discuss what you enjoyed most. Shared experiences often strengthen connection.

Visit a museum or art gallery

Museums and galleries provide a calm setting for conversation. Walking through exhibitions allows you to learn something new together. It also creates natural pauses for discussion. Check opening hours and ticket costs in advance. Some venues offer guided tours or special Valentine's programmes. Visiting during off-peak hours can make the experience more relaxed.

Book a couples' spa session

A spa session provides an opportunity to relax together. Many wellness centres offer side-by-side massages, facials or access to steam rooms and pools. Book well in advance and confirm what the package includes. Arrive early to complete any required forms and settle in.

Play games together

Staying in can still feel planned and intentional. Choose board games, card games or interactive video games that encourage participation from both sides. Set a time limit for each round and add simple snacks or drinks. Friendly competition can lighten the mood and create laughter. This option is especially useful if you prefer a private setting.

Visit a bookshop and pick books for each other

If you both are book lovers, a visit to a bookshop can be a simple but meaningful Valentine's Day activity. Take your time browsing different sections and notice what catches your partner's attention. Choose one book for them based on their interests, career goals or a topic you have recently discussed. It could be something they would normally pick or something new you think they would appreciate. Afterwards, sit somewhere quiet and exchange the books. Explain why you chose that title and what you hope they gain from it. Adding a short handwritten note inside the cover can make the gesture more personal and memorable.

Create a photo memory session

Take photos together intentionally rather than relying on random selfies. You can book a short session with a photographer or choose a scenic location and take the pictures yourselves. Pick a time with good lighting and wear outfits that feel comfortable and coordinated. Focus on natural moments rather than perfect poses. Walk, talk and interact as you normally would. Afterwards, review the photos together and select your favourites. You can print a few or create a digital album. This gives you lasting memories and something tangible to look back on.

DANTATA'S KANO GOLDEN ALCHEMY HEADLINES 2026 NPA LAGOS POLO WITH SANI DANGOTE CUP TRIUMPH

How Danbata's Kano Golden Alchemy seized the spotlight at 2026 NPA Lagos Polo

ANTHONY NLEBEM



The 2026 NPA Lagos International Polo Tournament once again transformed the historic Lagos Polo Club in Ikoyi into a theatre of elite sport, tradition and high society, with Abba Dantata at the centre of this year's spectacle.

The captain of Kano Golden Alchemy delivered a commanding performance to guide his team to victory in the prestigious Sani Dangote Memorial Cup, defeating Ibadan Imperial Risevest 10–3 in a fiercely contested final that highlighted the competitive depth of this year's tournament.

The NPA Lagos International Polo Tournament, widely regarded as Africa's most prestigious and enduring polo event, attracted top players from across Nigeria and abroad, reinforcing Lagos' status as a continental hub for the sport.

Among a flurry of high-profile fixtures, the emotional weight of the Sani Dangote Memorial Cup stood out. Dantata led from the front as Kano Golden Alchemy emphatically retained the trophy.

Winning for "Sani"

For Dantata, a prominent figure in Nigerian polo and Vice-Chairman of the Nigerian Polo Association (NPA), the victory carried deep personal significance. The cup honours the late Lagos Polo Club President, Sani Dangote, a figure Dantata described as "always in our hearts."

"There is never an easy game," Dantata said after the match, dismissing suggestions that the scoreline reflected a straightforward outing. "It was competitive all through to



the end. We kept our cool, enjoyed the game and had the support of family all around. The Sani Dangote Memorial Cup is very dear to our hearts.”

The triumph marked his second consecutive win in the memorial event.

“We played as a family. I’m happy we did it in front of family and friends,” he added.

A Multigenerational Polo Dynasty

The victory also underscored the enduring legacy of the Dantata-Dangote polo dynasty. Competing alongside his brother, Dantata reflected on the family’s deep roots in the “Game of Kings.”

“The Dantata-Dangote family has been a polo family for generations,” he noted. “I can’t even say when I started playing. I was born into it. I grew up playing, and we hope it continues for many more generations.”

Institutional Progress at Ikoyi

Beyond the field of play, Dantata praised the organisational strides made by the Lagos Polo Club under President Adeyemo Alakija and Tournament Manager Usman Dantata Jnr.

“Lagos Polo Club has done an incredible job. We can see the advancement and growing international recognition. Kudos to the club and the 2026 NPA Lagos International Polo Tournament for promoting polo in Nigeria,” he said.

This year’s edition features a rich lineup of competitions, including the Heritage Cup, Oba of Lagos Cup, Cancer Awareness Bowl, Governors Cup and the Sani Dangote Memorial Cup, reinforcing the tournament’s blend of sporting excellence and institutional legacy. Alakija described the 2026 edition, his first as club president, as a landmark moment.



“We are expecting top-class polo action, camaraderie and a full calendar of social events throughout the tournament,” he said.

Tournament manager Usman Dantata revealed that nearly 30 teams, comprising about 120 players and over 480 horses, are competing across the three-week event, underscoring its scale and logistical sophistication.

Founded in 1904, the Lagos Polo Club remains one of Africa’s oldest polo institutions and a symbol of Nigeria’s sporting heritage. Over time, the Lagos International Polo Tournament has evolved into more than a sporting contest, becoming a convergence point for business leaders, diplomats and cultural influencers.

For Abba Dantata and Kano Golden Alchemy, however, the 2026 edition will be remembered foremost for family pride, competitive composure and the successful defence of a trophy that remains deeply personal.

THE BUSINESS OF LOVE: WHAT VALENTINE'S DAY REALLY COSTS YOUNG NIGERIANS

CHIOMA ONUH



By mid-February each year, Lagos enters what retailers describe as a seasonal spike. Restaurants report higher reservations. Florists extend operating hours. Ride-hailing drivers anticipate longer trips, malls and superstores stock up valentine themed packages, cakes, gifts and roses. Salons see a surge in bookings.

For many young people, especially professionals, Valentine's day now carries financial expectations that might extend beyond a dinner reservation.

The visible costs

A typical Valentine's plan in Lagos often includes several components: grooming, transport, gifts and dining.

Grooming alone can include hair styling, nails, makeup or barbering. Restaurants frequently offer fixed menus for the evening. Ride-hailing demand rises as couples move between mainland and island venues. Add perfume, flowers, chocolates or small tech gifts, and the cost compounds quickly.

For some young earners in love, the question becomes less about romance and more about allocation. What portion of monthly income should go toward a single evening?

The hidden costs

Beyond visible spending are the softer pressures: social comparison and performance.

Social media has amplified expectations. Public displays of affection, curated surprises and coordinated outfits create an unspoken

benchmark. The result is that Valentine's Day is not just experienced privately; it is often performed publicly.

This performance carries economic consequences. Individuals may spend beyond their comfort level to avoid appearing indifferent or inadequate.

There is also a gendered dimension. Traditionally, men are expected to shoulder most Valentine's expenses. However, young women increasingly invest in their own presentation, from hair installations to new outfits and premium beauty services.

In effect, both sides participate in the Valentine economy, even if spending categories differ.

So, is love becoming a luxury?

Most people already feel the inflationary pressures and rising living costs, rent in urban parts of the country is alarming...discretionary spending which is supposed to be key, feels heavier due to social pressure. For entry-level professionals and entrepreneurs, Valentine's Day competes with rent, transport and savings goals.

Yet demand remains strong.


Why?

Because Valentine's Day is not purely transactional. It shows effort and intention. The value is emotional, even when the cost is monetary. However, for some couples, cost do not matter, it is the thought that counts.

Interestingly, economic pressure is reshaping how couples celebrate. Some opt for home-cooked dinners. Others shift to daytime dates, which are often cheaper than evening reservations. Experience-based gifts, such as handwritten letters or curated playlists, are regaining relevance.

Love may not be a luxury though, but in certain contexts, its performance can be expensive.



A portrait of Njideka Agbo, a woman with long, straight black hair, smiling warmly. She is wearing a vibrant blue, textured button-down shirt with a matching collar and a small necklace. Her arms are crossed, and she is wearing a matching blue bracelet on her left wrist. The background is a soft, out-of-focus grey-blue.

HOW NJIDEKA AGBO LEARNT TO NAVIGATE THE HIGH STAKES OF MEDIA WITHOUT CUTTING CORNERS

CHISOM MICHAEL



Njideka Agbo is an award-winning media strategist and communications consultant whose career has helped redefine African lifestyle journalism. A former Editor-in-Chief of The Guardian Life Magazine, she led the publication through a transformative era that elevated it to global relevance, blending culture, innovation, and social impact. With academic training in mass communication and political communication, and executive leadership studies at Harvard Kennedy School, Njideka brings rare editorial depth to strategic storytelling. Today, as Founder of GLANN Media Consult, she advises leading institutions, creatives, and public figures, using narrative as a powerful tool for influence, advocacy, and lasting change. In this interview with CHISOM MICHAEL, she discusses integrity, framing, and the power of cultural storytelling in shaping African media and public perception.

You moved from intern to Editor-in-Chief within one organisation. What personal rules guided your decisions during that rise, especially in moments of doubt or pressure?

I decided very early, before I started working, that I would play the long game. If I was going to grow, it wouldn't be by cutting corners or performing versions of myself

I couldn't sustain. With this thought process, integrity became non-negotiable as my strategic anchor.

I must add that I struggled deeply with imposter syndrome. It was almost comical how visible it was to my colleagues. There were days when someone would laugh and say, "Njideka's imposter has started again."

But what grounded me were the ideas that stayed with me. One was a simple line I encountered in university: "Whatever the mind can conceive, it can achieve." What helped most, though, was the environment. I had colleagues who constantly reaffirmed my competence, and publishers who trusted me with autonomy even before the results were obvious.

By the time I became Editor, I realised hesitation was no longer useful. I took the ideas I had been quietly refining, executed them fully, and the public reception was overwhelmingly positive.

You positioned culture and social issues at the centre of your editorial work. What convinced you that lifestyle storytelling could also serve as a space for serious public reflection?

I've always believed that culture is where truth hides when politics becomes too loud. There's a quote by Udochukwu Okoh, co-founder of Terminal Africa, that has become my moral compass: "everybody lives for somebody, but no one realises it; the young and the hopeless." It made me realise how disconnected many of us are from the realities shaping other people's lives.

As I grew older, I became increasingly aware that we live in what I like to describe as bubbles (economic, social, and emotional bubbles), often without realising it. Lifestyle media had access to an audience with influence, resources, and attention. So I kept asking myself: why shouldn't that space also carry responsibility?

I'm deeply drawn to the arts and to symbolism. I was struck by how little we sometimes knew about our own histories as Africans, which explains who we are and why we behave the way we do. Lifestyle became my entry point to illuminate those gaps, gently but intentionally.

Many of your covers triggered public debate rather than admiration alone. How do you decide when a story should challenge comfort instead of confirming it?

That instinct came from my academic exposure to framing. Even in university, I was less interested in what people were saying than in what their words were pointing to.

For instance, if someone spoke about sports, I heard discipline, aspiration, and survival. If they said education,

I heard conducive environment, teachers' quality and salary. If they said exhaustion, I heard black tax and economic pressure. So when we produced covers, my team and I weren't chasing provocation for its own sake. We were responding to subtext. Comfort is easy to reproduce. Tension is where reflection begins. When a story had implications beyond admiration, we leaned into that responsibility.

You often speak about framing as central to meaning. How has this idea changed the way you approach truth, fairness, and responsibility in journalism?

It has expanded my sense of responsibility rather than narrowed it. I must add that framing reveals consequence. My experience at The Guardian reinforced, for me, that how a story is told determines what society chooses to interrogate and what it chooses to ignore.

Honestly, I think framing is a life skill, not just a journalistic one. Once you understand it, you begin to see how narratives operate in politics, relationships, economics, in fact, in everything. It teaches discernment.

As newsrooms increasingly move online, how has the digital shift changed the way you think about audience attention, credibility, and long-term trust?

The digital shift is necessary and overdue. At the same time, it presents a real tension because we are dealing with shorter attention spans alongside a growing threat of misinformation.

What I've observed is that credibility now depends less on format and more on intent. Each generation processes information differently. Our responsibility is to meet audiences where they are, refine their engagement, and elevate their understanding so they are more informed than they started

You will agree with me that credibility today isn't built by shouting the loudest headline or clickbait. It's built by consistency and respect for the reader's intelligence.

You have worked with artists, royalty, activists, and institutions. What remains constant in your approach when the subjects and power dynamics change?

I've learned to see people as people. Titles disappear very quickly when you remember that you're dealing with people first. That approach removes intimidation and replaces it with trust.





I often tell people: let the audience disagree with your story; they may even be angry, but they should never be able to accuse you of dishonesty. Once integrity is lost, influence becomes manipulation, and that line is irreversible.

You have worked across media, power, and public perception. What ethical tension do you find most difficult to resolve when shaping narratives for influence?

The hardest tension is defining truth in contexts where power actively resists it. Objectivity is a core journalistic value, but power complicates truth by introducing consequences.

Navigating that space requires courage and clarity. You must be willing to stand by facts even when they are inconvenient, and equally

willing to acknowledge complexity when narratives are not clean.

Many of the relationships I formed in media have endured because they weren't transactional. When you approach people as humans, collaboration becomes natural, and power dynamics soften.

Leaving a high-profile editorial role to build GLANN Media Consult was a clear pivot. What question were you trying to answer for yourself at that point?

I wanted to understand where stories begin before they reach the public. Journalism operates at the point of visibility. I became curious about the decisions, values, and power structures that shape narratives upstream.

GLANN is, for me, a continuation of storytelling. It's about helping institutions understand not just what to say, but what they are signalling by their choices.

Storytelling is often treated as influence. In your view, where is the line between influence and integrity, and how do you guard it?

Integrity starts internally. If your inner compass is compromised, no framework will save you.

Looking ahead, what responsibility do African media leaders carry in shaping how the continent is understood, both by itself and by the world?

African media leaders must see themselves as witnesses. And what people see repeatedly becomes what they believe.

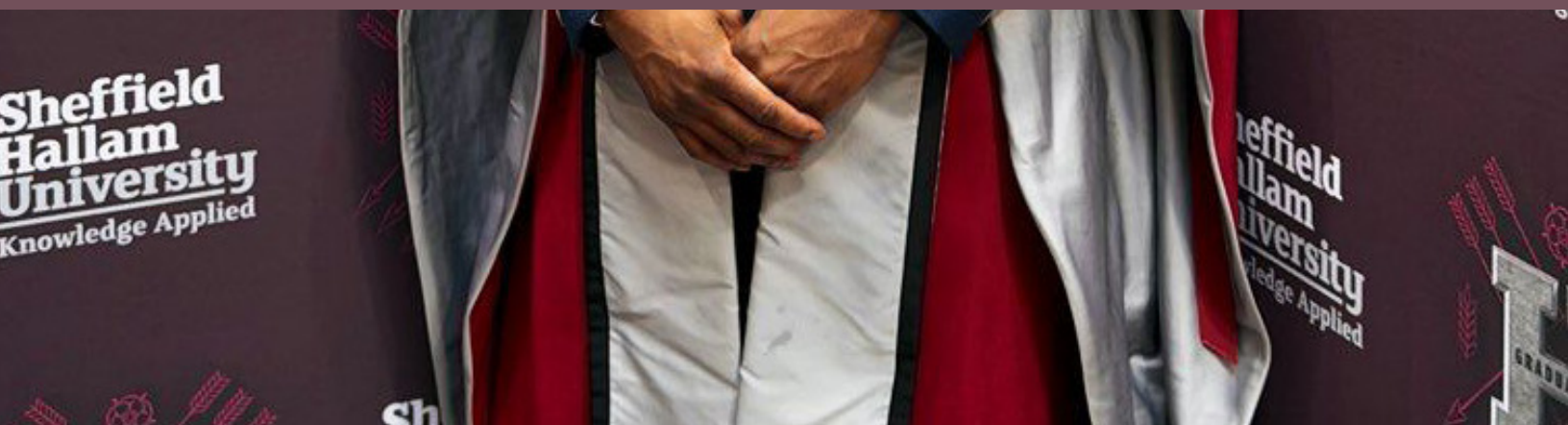
Every editorial choice communicates values, particularly how we see ourselves, and how we expect to be treated. History shows us that nations have reshaped global perception through disciplined storytelling.

Our responsibility is to report truthfully, but also intentionally in a way that forces its citizens to introspect and demand accountability. After all, the strongest form of public relations is not propaganda. It is credibility earned over time.



FROM 6 REJECTIONS TO GLOBAL TALENT: HOW NIGERIAN SCHOLAR, ADEYEMO, BECAME A LEADER IN UK ACADEMIA

IFEOMA OKEKE-KORIEOCHA





For a young African-Nigerian man with many uncertainties about the future, becoming one of the most recognised potential leaders in UK academia is not just a dream come true, but a testament to the rewards of academic excellence and hard work.

Oluwaferanmi Adeyemo, an outstanding Nigerian scholar based in the United Kingdom, recently achieved an outstanding Global status following his endorsement as a UK Global Talent by The British Academy under the Exceptional Promise Route.

Introduced in February 2020 to replace the Tier 1 (Exceptional Talent) visa, the Global Talent is a key part of the UK's offer to attract highly skilled and promising individuals in the fields of science and research, digital technology, and the arts to live and work in the UK.

The visa is similar to elite migration programmes in other developed countries, including the Global Talent visa programme in Australia, the EB1 visa in the USA, the Global Talent stream in Canada, and the Highly Skilled Professional visa in Japan.

Adeyemo's journey to becoming a Global Talent did not begin in 2025; it stretches back to 2020, when he was awarded the prestigious Commonwealth Shared Scholarship for his Master's degree in International Communications and Development at City, St. George's University of London.

The Commonwealth Scholarship is a UK Government prestigious scholarship award managed by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) to attract and support outstanding innovators and academic leaders of the future across the Commonwealth to UK universities.



"My journey to becoming a Commonwealth Scholar started in 2014 when my mum was awarded the scholarship to undertake a master's in Healthcare Leadership and Management at Sheffield Hallam University.

"This became a turning point for me and the motivation for me to aspire to become a recipient. After applying for the scholarship in 2014, I was fortunate to be nominated and selected in 2020 after six attempts."

He completed his Master's degree with distinction, and his growing research experience soon laid the groundwork for doctoral research. During his Master's programme, he conducted dissertation research on the use of participatory communication by NGOs delivering poverty-reduction programmes.

The research exposed him to the realities of organisational struggles in addressing complex socioeconomic problems such as unemployment, inequality, and economic inactivity, issues affecting not only underdeveloped contexts, but also developing and advanced economies.

The early research interest eventually matured into his PhD in Social and Economic Research, which examined the experiences of voluntary sector organisations delivering youth employment services across three British communities.

Adeyemo not only completed his PhD at Sheffield Hallam University in October 2025 within three and a half years, but also achieved something even rarer: he passed without corrections. This is widely regarded as an exceptional outcome, reflecting both the quality of the thesis and his outstanding academic performance.



However, behind this achievement was a difficult journey that tested him emotionally and mentally. In his words: “Embarking on a PhD in a new environment and a different field from my academic background is one of the most difficult yet rewarding experiences I have had in my lifetime. On some days, I asked myself what I got myself into, while I almost quit the programme and returned to Nigeria in 2023, but insufficient funds and the fear of failing myself kept me going. I also had amazing support from my supervisors.”

Beyond his doctoral research, Adeyemo has contributed to a broad range of interdisciplinary research projects spanning climate change and biodiversity, public health, facility management, and decolonising higher education.

One of his most notable recent achievements, he says, is “leading a team of five early career researchers in the UK on a forthcoming edited book chapter on decolonising UK higher education, by Palgrave Macmillan.”

In the UK, black academics are significantly underrepresented, making up roughly three per cent of the total academic workforce, and less than one per cent of black professors. However, Adeyemo is looking beyond these statistics and barriers.

For him, the motivation runs deeper: it is about building on and preserving the legacy for the future.

“My drive and passion stem from following the footsteps of my late grandfather, who was the first Professor of Accounting in Nigeria, as well as those of my mum, who is currently an Associate Professor of Nursing. These two are my greatest motivations, and even though the journey has not been smooth, I always remember what those ahead of me have done. I encourage myself not to give and to keep going.”

Looking ahead, Oluwaferanmi is committed to deepening his interdisciplinary intellectual contributions and ultimately advancing to the professorial rank in public policy or a closely related field.

Beyond this, he is equally driven by a strong desire to give back to Nigeria, through sustained engagement in labour market and employment policy research, as well as strategic secondments, advisory roles, and consultancy work that support national development priorities.

10 AFFORDABLE VALENTINE'S DAY IDEAS IN LAGOS FOR COUPLES, FRIENDS AND SOLO DATES

CHIOMA ONUH



In times like this, gift vendors record surges in perfume, flowers and chocolate sales. They also offer various combo deals to match budget. So February 14 now requires proper planning and budgeting not just romance.

So amid rising living costs and tighter disposable income, many Lagos residents are rethinking how they celebrate. Instead of expensive dinners and high-pressure gifting, there is a growing shift toward affordable Valentine's Day ideas that prioritise experience over display.

Here are 10 budget-friendly Valentine's Day plans in Lagos for couples, solo daters and groups of friends.

1. Sunset picnic at Tarkwa bay or Oniru beach

Packing a picnic reduces costs compared to restaurant dining. Homemade meals, fruit and drinks create intimacy without fixed menu pricing. Going earlier in the day also helps avoid peak ride-hailing fares.

2. Brunch instead of dinner:

Dinner reservations typically attract the highest Valentine's Day premiums. Brunch offers similar ambience at lower prices, and daytime outings mean reduced transport costs.

3. Solo self-care day:

For those choosing a solo Valentine's Day, a basic manicure, massage or spa session during off-peak hours can be restorative without being extravagant. It reframes the day as self-investment rather than social comparison.

4. Art gallery visits

Several galleries offer free or low-cost entry. Exploring art creates a thoughtful, slow-paced date option that avoids restaurant mark-ups entirely.

5. Movie matinee or home cinema night

Early cinema showtimes are typically cheaper. Alternatively, hosting a movie night at home and splitting snack costs

among friends makes for an affordable group celebration.

6. Cook together at home

Groceries generally cost less than dining out. Cooking together also shifts the value from spending to shared experience, which many young couples now prioritise.

7. Rooftop ambience without fixed menus

Some mid-range rooftop lounges offer scenic views without compulsory multi-course pricing. Ordering selectively helps manage costs.

8. Karaoke or game lounges

For friend groups, interactive venues allow shared bills. Splitting expenses reduces individual financial strain and still gives the social fun vibes.

9. Waterfront walks and fitness dates

A long walk along the waterfront, a group workout or yoga session offers also works. Many studios provide trial or discounted sessions.

10. Creative workshops

Sip-and-paint sessions, pottery classes or small creative workshops can cost less than fine dining and often provide more memorable experiences.

MAKOKO'S FIVE-POINT PACT: PEACE TODAY, THE IMPLEMENTATION TEST TOMORROW

ROYAL IBEH



Relative calm has returned to Makoko's waterfront after weeks of tension, protests and uncertainty triggered by the Lagos State Government's demolition of parts of the stilt settlement.

But beneath the fragile peace lies a deeper question: does the newly signed five-point agreement mark the beginning of genuine regeneration, or merely a pause in a long-running contest between urban planning and urban survival?

The truce emerged after the Lagos State House of Assembly intervened, dispatching an ad-hoc committee led by Hon. Noheem Adams for an on-the-spot assessment of the cleared areas. A subsequent stakeholders' meeting involving community leaders, youth representatives, and Babatunde Olajide, the special adviser to governor Babajide Sanwo-Olu on E-GIS and urban renewal, produced a framework now seen as a political cooling-off mechanism.

At its core, the agreement outlines five commitments: residents will halt further construction on demolished sites; the community will establish a 10-man committee to deliberate on compensation for displaced persons; the state will define the boundary of the regeneration plan; the proposed Water City project will be designed for Makoko residents; and, crucially, government affirmed there is no plan to eliminate the community.

For many residents, that final assurance was the most significant line in the pact.

Between survival and safety

Makoko has long occupied an uneasy space in Lagos' urban imagination. To critics, it is a symbol of neglect and environmental vulnerability; to its residents, it is a living, breathing economy built on fishing, informal trade and intergenerational resilience.



The state's justification for the demolition rests squarely on safety. Officials argue that sections cleared fell within statutory high-tension power-line setback corridors, buffer zones where habitation is prohibited due to the risk of electrocution or catastrophic fire outbreaks. In a wooden, water-based settlement, they contend, a fallen cable could result in mass casualties within minutes.

From a governance standpoint, the state frames the intervention as preventive rather than punitive. Allowing people to remain under high-voltage infrastructure, officials insist, would amount to tolerating foreseeable disaster. They argue that similar enforcement actions have been undertaken elsewhere in Lagos and that applying softer standards in Makoko would institutionalise inequality in safety enforcement.

Yet this logic, however technically sound, collided with lived reality. For displaced families, the demolitions were not an abstract exercise in risk management but an immediate loss of shelter and livelihood. Images of floating debris, dismantled wooden homes and disrupted fishing activity fueled public outrage and reignited long-standing suspicions about waterfront land values.

The trust deficit

Even as the government insists that the Water City regeneration model is not a prelude to luxury redevelopment, skepticism persists.

Makoko sits along increasingly valuable waterfront real estate, near the Third Mainland Bridge and vital transport and utility corridors. Residents and civil society actors fear

that "regeneration" in Lagos has, in past cases, translated into displacement, often with compensation frameworks that communities perceive as inadequate or opaque.

This is where the new agreement will be tested.

The commitment to establish a 10-man community committee to deliberate on compensation introduces a participatory mechanism that was previously absent. Equally significant is the state's promise to define clear regeneration boundaries, a move that could reduce ambiguity over what areas fall within safety corridors and what zones are earmarked for in-situ upgrading.

But implementation will determine credibility. If compensation negotiations stall or boundary demarcations lack transparency, the fragile truce could unravel.

The \$10m vision and funding realities

Lagos state's broader defence of its actions rests on a stated \$10 million regeneration vision. Officials say \$2 million has already been earmarked since 2021, with expectations of an additional \$8 million in counterpart funding from the United Nations. Global funding constraints have slowed progress, but the state insists the Water City concept remains intact. The regeneration model, as described by government, prioritises sanitation upgrades, structured housing layouts, improved drainage and regulated waterways, while preserving Makoko's fishing economy. Environmental assessments reportedly ruled out earlier shoreline extension plans due to ecological risks, reinforcing the decision to pursue in-situ upgrading instead.



The policy logic aligns with global urban planning trends that favour incremental slum upgrading over wholesale eviction. But Lagos faces a structural dilemma: the city is expanding rapidly, formal housing supply lags demand, and informal settlements continue to extend into wetlands and infrastructure corridors.

Makoko thus becomes both a test case and a symbol. Can Lagos reconcile safety enforcement with inclusive urbanism?

Politics of intervention

The House of Assembly's intervention adds a political dimension. By stepping in to mediate and produce a written agreement, lawmakers effectively recalibrated the narrative from confrontation to negotiation. For Sanwo-Olu's administration, this offers breathing space and reframes the issue as structured regeneration rather than forced eviction.

Yet political management cannot substitute for social trust.

Residents are demanding visible, immediate measures: compensation clarity, accommodation plans for those displaced, especially families living on boats and a transparent presentation of regeneration boundaries. Their position suggests cautious engagement rather than full confidence.

A defining moment for urban governance

Makoko's truce represents more than a localised agreement; it reflects a broader urban governance dilemma facing megacities across the Global South. How do authorities enforce safety codes in high-risk informal settlements without triggering social upheaval? And how do they upgrade vulnerable communities without turning regeneration into gentrification?



For now, hostility has given way to dialogue. Boats move again through calmer waters. Meetings replace street protests. But the five-point pact is not an endpoint; it is a framework whose legitimacy will depend on what happens next.

Peace has returned to Makoko — temporarily.

Whether planning follows through with protection, participation and tangible improvements will determine if this truce becomes a turning point in Lagos' approach to informal settlements or just another chapter in a cycle of demolition and dissent.

9 EUROPEAN CITIES FOR EVERY TRAVELLER TYPE

CHISOM MICHAEL



Whether you want to connect with nature in the Alps or are craving a seaside reset on the French Riviera, we have just the spot in mind.

Europe remains one of the most visited regions in the world, yet the question many travellers still ask is simple: where should I go? With cities close to each other but shaped by different cultures, languages and traditions, the answer often depends on what you value most.

Some travellers head straight for famous landmarks. Others plan trips around food, art, shopping or time with family. Travel advisers say the key is to match your interests with a city that supports them.

Here are 9 European cities for every traveller type

1. Vienna, Austria

Vienna is known for classical music, but its visual art collections draw global attention. The Kunsthistorisches Museum houses one of the largest collections of European art, including Roman artefacts and Renaissance pieces.

The city's imperial past is visible in former palaces that now operate as museums. The Albertina displays works by Michelangelo and Monet, while the Albertina Modern focuses on contemporary art. At the Upper Belvedere,

visitors gather to view Klimt's "The Kiss", a painting that continues to attract crowds.

For travellers who plan trips around galleries and exhibitions, Vienna offers depth and structure in one destination.

2. Athens, Greece

Athens places history at the centre of daily life. In Plaka, often called the "Neighbourhood of the Gods", visitors walk through streets lined with tavernas while ancient ruins rise nearby.

The Acropolis stands above the city, with the Parthenon visible from many points. The former temple, dedicated to Athena, dates back nearly 2,500 years. Across from the site, the Acropolis Museum displays artefacts discovered during excavations. Its glass floors reveal ruins beneath.

Hotels such as the "Hotel Grande Bretagne, a Luxury Collection Hotel, Athens" offer rooftop views of the monument. For travellers seeking context and continuity, Athens provides both.

3. Paris, France

Paris supports more than 1,300 bakeries and pastry shops. For some visitors, food alone shapes the travel plan.

Pastry chef Cédric Grolet draws long queues at his shop in the Opéra district. Maxime Frédéric operates Pleincœur in Batignolles, where ingredients come from his farm in Normandy. Other popular stops include Mamiche for chocolate babka, Utopie for sourdough croissants and Tapisserie for maple-syrup tart.

Travellers who track flavours across cities often begin and end in Paris. The city's baking tradition continues to evolve while maintaining its roots.

4. Antwerp, Belgium

Antwerp has built a reputation in fashion and design. In the 1980s, the "Antwerp Six", including Dries Van Noten and Ann Demeulemeester, placed the city on the global fashion map.

Today, new hotels such as August and Botanic Sanctuary Antwerp reflect the city's focus on design-led spaces. Creative projects, including Kannal, repurpose industrial buildings into studios and galleries.

For travellers interested in architecture, interiors and fashion history, Antwerp offers access without the crowds of larger capitals.

5. San Sebastián, Spain

San Sebastián has become a point of interest for food-focused travel. The city is known for pintxos, small bites served in bars across the old town.

Local favourites include gilda skewers made with olives, anchovies and peppers. La Viña is often linked to Basque cheesecake. The city has also earned recognition for its number of Michelin-starred restaurants. Three-star Akelarre remains a reference point for fine dining. Wine plays a role in the experience. Many visitors try txakoli, a white wine produced in the Basque region.

For travellers who plan holidays around restaurant bookings, San Sebastián delivers consistency and variety.

6. Nice, France

Nice serves as a base for exploring the French Riviera. The Old Town attracts visitors seeking local markets and cafés, while the Promenade des Anglais connects beach clubs and waterfront spaces.

Recent hotel openings, including Hôtel du Couvent, have added new accommodation options within historic buildings. From Nice, travellers can reach Monaco and Cannes by train. Boat services link the coast to nearby islands and dining venues such as "La Guérite".

For those who want sea access with transport links to other Riviera locations, Nice offers both.

7. Milan, Italy

Milan ranks among the world's fashion capitals. The Quadrilatero della Moda district includes Via Monte Napoleone, where global brands operate flagship stores.

The Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II, near the Duomo, combines shopping with architecture. Concept store 10 Corso Como continues to attract visitors interested in curated fashion and design products.

Travellers leaving the European Union often apply for VAT refunds, which adds a financial incentive to retail tourism.

For visitors who follow runway trends and designer launches, Milan remains a central hub.

8. London, England

London's wellness sector has expanded in recent years. Private members' clubs and hotels now integrate health services into their offerings.

"Surrenne at The Emory" focuses on longevity programmes. The upcoming "Six Senses London" plans to include cryotherapy, flotation therapy and a "Biohack Recovery Lounge". At "The HVN", visitors book consultations that include acupuncture and IV drips.

Outdoor options remain accessible. Epping Forest provides walking trails within reach of the Underground network.

For travellers seeking a balance between city life and personal health, London provides structured options.

9. Copenhagen, Denmark

Copenhagen appeals to families through food, transport and attractions. Street food markets such as Reffen host vendors serving Danish hot dogs and international dishes.

Tivoli Gardens operates one of Europe's oldest wooden roller coasters. Canal tours pass landmarks including the statue inspired by Hans Christian Andersen's "The Little Mermaid".

While restaurant Noma helped shape the city's food profile, visitors do not need a tasting menu to engage with local cuisine.

For parents travelling with children, Copenhagen combines ease of movement with shared activities.

5 FULLY FUNDED SCHOLARSHIPS YOU SHOULD APPLY FOR IN 2026

CHISOM MICHAEL



Many students want to study abroad, but costs remain a barrier. Tuition fees, travel expenses and living costs often prevent qualified applicants from pursuing international education. Fully funded scholarships help reduce this burden by covering major expenses and limiting the need for personal financial support.

In 2026, several governments are offering fully funded programmes for international students across undergraduate, master's and doctoral levels. Most of these schemes provide tuition coverage, monthly stipends and travel support, allowing students to focus on their studies without financial strain. Below are five government-backed scholarships open to applicants from various countries.

Here are 5 fully funded scholarships you should apply for in 2026

The Australia Awards Scholarships are hosted in Australia and funded by the Australian Government, and they are open to Bachelor's, Master's and PhD students. The programme covers full tuition fees, return airfare, an establishment allowance and a monthly living stipend, while also providing health insurance and academic support. The application deadline is April 30, 2026, and further details are

available under "Australia Scholarships 2026".

The Türkiye Scholarships, also known as the Turkey Burslari Scholarship, are hosted in Turkey and funded by the Government of Turkey, and they are available for Bachelor's, Master's and PhD studies. The programme covers tuition fees, provides a monthly stipend, offers free accommodation, includes health insurance and airfare, and also funds a one-year Turkish language course. Applications close on February 20, 2026, and more information can be found under "Turkey Burslari Scholarship".

The Global Korea Scholarship (GKS) is hosted in South Korea and funded by the National Institute for International Education (NIIED), and it supports Master's, PhD and research programmes. The scholarship includes full tuition, airfare, a monthly allowance, medical insurance, research support and Korean language training fees. Embassy and university deadlines usually fall between February and March 2026, and applicants are advised to confirm dates with the relevant institutions.

The Indonesian Government Scholarship (KNB) is hosted in Indonesia and funded by the Government of Indonesia, and it is available for Bachelor's, Master's and PhD programmes. The scholarship provides tuition coverage, a monthly living allowance, health insurance, a settlement allowance and Indonesian language training. The application deadline is March 31, 2026, and further details are available under "KNB Scholarship".

The Taiwan ICDF Scholarship Program is hosted in Taiwan and funded by the Taiwan International Cooperation and Development Fund (ICDF), and it supports Bachelor's, Master's and PhD studies. The programme covers tuition fees, provides a monthly stipend, includes airfare and a housing allowance, and offers health insurance throughout the study period. Applications close on March 15, 2026, and more information is available under "Taiwan Scholarships".

HOW AMERICAN OPEN UNIVERSITY IS SET TO DISRUPT NIGERIAN EDUCATION

CHARLES OGWO

The future of learning in Nigeria takes a bold step forward with the arrival of American Open University, amid existing public and private online tertiary education institutes in the country.

Built on innovation, accessibility, and global standards, the American Open University promises to redefine how Nigerians access higher education, breaking barriers of distance, time, and opportunity.

Education experts admit that the way forward to achieving inclusive and equitable quality education in the 21st-century is through open, distance and e-learning (ODEL) approach, which is in tandem with the sustainable development goal four (SDG4).

Som Naidu, head of research and evaluation in the Department of Teaching, Learning and Research Support at the University of Melbourne, Australia, speaking at the second international colloquium organised by the Distance Learning Institute (DLI), University of Lagos (UNILAG), pointed out that there is a need to unbundle the way higher institutions package learning via integration of technology in teaching and learning.

“For a future focused education, a rethink and recalibration of the educational as well as institutional choreographies is required,” he said.

In today’s rapidly changing world, where technology permeates every aspect of our lives, it is imperative that Nigeria begin to adapt its educational practices accordingly.

Nigeria’s institutions of higher education must embrace this opportunity to reimagine the learning experience and equip their students with the skills necessary to navigate the challenges of the 21st century.

Hybrid instruction, also known as blended learning, combines the best of both of the physical and virtual worlds: the rich engagement and interpersonal interaction offered by face-to-face teaching, and the flexibility and accessibility of online platforms.

With this kind of learning mediums, many Nigerians, especially the working class who desires to further their education can be able to achieve their academic ambitions.

Hence, the addition of American Open University in the list of existing distance and online learning institutions in Nigeria, is a step in the right direction.

David Akanbi, the president/founder of American Open University, reflecting on the journey to landing the institution in Nigeria, said, “Visions don’t die. Even when the visioners pass on, the dream continues. Fortunately, today, the dream has come true, and the team that championed it is here to celebrate it.”

Akanbi articulated the university's core philosophy, inspired by Buckminster Fuller: "You never change things by fighting the existing reality. To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete."

He emphasised that the institution is in Nigeria to bridge the old tradition of 'go to school, get good grades, get a job,' and build an institution with wider walls.

"We have built an institution where the walls of the classroom are as wide as the world itself. Through our hybrid model and partnerships with global giants such as Microsoft, Google, and Cisco, we are telling the Nigerian student: You are no longer limited," he said.

This mode of study will obviously take care of over 76 million Nigerian youth who need to be catered for in the higher education, and unfortunately, the traditional higher institutions' system of campuses will not solve the problem, because the university system caters for a very low percent of people.

Hence, to bridge the gap, the country need technology, therefore, open distance learning is the way it must go.

Some of the functional distance and online institutions in Nigeria includes National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN); Miva Open University, Abuja; Iconic Open University, Sokoto; West Midland Open University, Ibadan; and Al-Muhibbah Open University, Abuja;

There are conventional universities operating distance and online education such as the Distance Learning Centre, University of Ibadan; University of Lagos, Distance Learning Institute;

and University of Abuja, Centre for Distance Learning and Continuing Education.

Others include University of Maiduguri, Centre for Distance Learning; Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Centre for Distance Learning; Modibbo Adama University of Technology, Yola, Centre for Distance Learning; Ladoke Akintola University of Technology Open and Distance Learning Centre; Distance learning Centre, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria;. Lagos State University Open and Distance Learning and Research Institute; and Joseph Ayo Babalola University Centre for Distance Learning.

Also included are University of Nigeria, Nsukka Centre for Distance and e-Learning; Federal University of Technology Minna, Centre for Open Distance and e-Learning; Babcock University Ilisan-Remo, Centre for Open Distance and e-Learning; University of Ilorin, Centre for Open and Distance Learning; Afe Babalola University, Ado-Ekiti - Open and Distance Learning Centre; Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago-Iwoye, Open and Distance Learning Centre; and Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Porthacourt, Institute of Distance Education, among others.

American Open University is in Nigeria, marking a significant milestone in the country's higher education landscape. The institution introduces a flexible, globally oriented learning model designed to expand access to quality education for students and working professionals alike.

By leveraging digital platforms and international academic standards, the university aims to equip learners with relevant skills for today's competitive job market, while contributing to the growth and modernisation of Nigeria's education sector.

UI, UNILAG, OAU AMONG 2026 TOP 10 WEST AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES

CHARLES OGWO

In a significant boost for Nigeria's academic standing, the University of Ibadan, University of Lagos, and Obafemi Awolowo University have emerged in the 2026 top 10 West African universities ranking.

The recognition underscores their commitment to research, quality teaching, and shaping the next generation of leaders across the region.

The 2026 rankings highlight the region's top 10 universities, that are not only advancing academic standards but also shaping the continent's future through research impact, industry collaboration, and talent development.

Tertiary education in the region continues to rise in global visibility and quality, as many of these universities make significant paces in research, teaching and international collaboration.

According to the global universities ranking organisations such as Times Higher Education (THE) and QS World University Rankings which assess institutions on academic and employer reputation, faculty/student ratios, research citations, and international faculty and student presence; here are the top 10 highly regarded universities in sub-Saharan Africa for 2026.

University of Cape Coast (Ghana)

The University of Cape Coast (UCC) founded in 1962, emerged as one of the topnotch tertiary institutions in West Africa, especially in Times Higher Education (THE) World University Rankings 2026, where it was featured in the global 801–1000 band, making it one of the region's best-ranked universities.

The university is noted for its significant performance in research quality and international outlook, positioning it among the very top in West

Africa, according to the Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2026.

The University of Cape Coast is a public collegiate university located in the historic town of Cape Coast in the central region of Ghana.

The campus has a rare seafront and sits on a hill overlooking the Atlantic Ocean. It operates on two campuses: the Southern Campus and the Northern Campus.

University of Ghana, Legon (Ghana)

The University of Ghana founded in 1048, is a foremost research and teaching institution in the region. According to the QS World University Rankings 2026, it was recognised as a top university in sub-Saharan Africa having strong global outcomes, in areas such as employment outcomes and international research networks.

The university is a public university located in Accra, Ghana. It is the oldest public university in the country. The university was founded in 1948 as the University College of the Gold Coast in the British colony of the Gold Coast.

University of Ibadan (Nigeria)

The University of Ibadan (UI), founded in 1948, is Nigeria's oldest degree-granting institution. The university entered the THE World University Rankings 2026 in the 801–1000 range, reflecting its comprehensive academic strength.

The institution also leads national higher education rankings and is widely recognised for research excellence across disciplines.

The university is located in Ibadan, Oyo State. Initially, it was known as the University College

Ibadan, maintaining its affiliation with the University of London.

In 1962, it became an independent institution, making it the Nigerian oldest degree-awarding institution.

University of Lagos (Nigeria)

The University of Lagos (UNILAG), founded in 1962, recorded a significant position in the globe, being ranked in 801–1000 bracket in the THE 2026 rankings, which is a major milestone for the institution.

The institution is a public research university located in Lagos. UNILAG is one of Nigeria's first generation universities, and is ranked among the top universities in Africa in major education publications.

Cheikh Anta Diop University (Senegal)

Université Cheikh Anta Diop Dakar, founded in 1957, made history by entering the THE rankings for the first time in 2026, a major milestone for Francophone West African academia.

The university which is located in Dakar, is named after the Senegalese physicist, historian and anthropologist Cheikh Anta Diop and has an enrollment of over 60,000.

Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (Ghana)

The University of Science and Technology succeeded the Kumasi College of Technology which was established by a government ordinance on October 6, 1951.

It was however, opened officially on January 22, 1952 with 200 Teacher Training students transferred from Achimota, to form the nucleus of the new College.

While not featured in Times Higher Education's top 1000 in 2026, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) is

routinely ranked among Ghana's best and has a growing reputation in STEM fields and research collaborations, which positions it competitively within West Africa's academic landscape.

Obafemi Awolowo University (Nigeria)

Obafemi Awolowo University, formerly known as the University of Ife, is in Ile-Ife, Osun State. The university was founded in 1961 but commenced in October 1962 as the University of Ife.

The university is one of Nigeria's most respected universities, known for landmark programmes in engineering, law, humanities, and sciences. Though it did not register specifically in THE's latest global list, it remains widely recognised regionally and internationally.

Bayero University Kano (Nigeria)

Bayero University Kano has evolved in its research profile and was ranked within the 1001–1200 bracket in Times Higher Education's 2026 rankings.

Its inclusion reflects steady growth and academic strength, especially in science and social sciences.

Covenant University (Nigeria)

Covenant University is a private Christian university in Sango Ota, Ogun State was founded in 2002.

The university attained global standing in the 1001–1200 range in Times Higher Education's 2026 edition, driven by strong industry partnerships and research output.

University for Development Studies (Ghana)

The University for Development Studies (UDS) is widely cited as one of Ghana's most progressive institutions, emphasising community development, research in health sciences, and innovation, positioning it among the region's influential universities.

POTENTIAL IS NOT ONE-DIMENSIONAL: RETHINKING WHAT IT TAKES TO BE FULFILLED

EKEMINI AKPAKPAN

In my usual tradition, early this year, I found myself pausing to look ahead at my life, to ensure it remained grounded in my values, and that I wasn't slowly being shaped into someone I am not. Once again, I returned to my calendar, not as a productivity tool, but as a way of prioritising my whole life, because our life outcomes are ultimately shaped by our routines. I have also come to believe that fulfilling one's potential is inseparable from being fulfilled across the many dimensions of life.

Around the same time, a health diagnosis forced an uncomfortable but necessary reckoning. It reframed my thinking in ways I could not ignore. Life, I realised, is not something that can be managed in compartments; it is whole.

This reckoning is not unique. Many professional women are reaching similar crossroads, where the expectations of modern work collide with the many dimensions of their lives. The challenge is not a lack of discipline or commitment, but a professional culture that continues to reward unlimited availability, overlooking the uneven costs of that expectation. This quiet insistence on availability steadily narrows the possibility of fully realizing our potential.

How our full potential is forged

It is at moments like these that the idea of full potential demands a broader definition. Too often, it is spoken about narrowly, as professional advancement or measurable achievement. Yet, in reality, potential is shaped across many dimensions of life — physical, intellectual, relational, spiritual, emotional, and creative. These dimensions are not distractions from work; they are the very conditions that make sustained excellence possible. A fulfilled life is not one where everything competes for time, but one where different aspects sharpen and reinforce each other.

Growing up, this understanding of wholeness was quietly modelled. Life made room for many things at once: faith, learning, curiosity, relationships, and

rest. There were hobbies and side interests, time set aside for reading and discussion, deliberate family moments, and the slow acquisition of life skills. There was space to observe the world, to explore neighbourhoods, to cultivate plants, to care for one another, and to tell stories at the end of the day. None of these experiences existed in isolation. Together, they shaped perspective, discipline, imagination, and resilience — qualities that later show up in how one thinks, works, and leads.

This is not nostalgia; it is a reminder that human development has always been multi-dimensional. Research consistently shows that life expectancy, cognitive health, productivity, and overall wellbeing are deeply influenced by how people live across the whole of their lives, not just how hard they work. Societies that value longevity, learning, social connection, and health understand that these elements compound over time. When any one dimension is persistently neglected, the cost eventually surfaces elsewhere, often in diminished capacity, reduced creativity, or shortened working lives.

Personality, self-awareness, and identity are also forged in these non-work spaces. It is through varied experiences — community, learning, faith, challenge, and rest — that individuals develop judgment, emotional intelligence, and adaptability. These qualities enable people to navigate complex work environments, collaborate effectively, and exercise leadership with depth. Work does not create these attributes on its own; it benefits from them.

Yet many modern workplaces continue to operate as though employees arrive as fully formed instruments of productivity, disconnected from the lives that sustain them. When organisations recognise and accommodate the full humanity of workers, their need for health, meaning, growth, and connection, they do not dilute performance. They strengthen it. A workforce anchored in wholeness is better equipped to function at its highest capacity, over longer periods, without burning out the very potential it seeks to extract.

Cultivating the dimensions that shape how we work

The way we show up at work is deeply influenced by how well we know ourselves. Self-awareness is not abstract introspection; it is practical intelligence. Understanding one's temperament, personality, emotional patterns, and ways of processing information affects how we lead, collaborate, manage conflict, and make decisions. Tools such as personality or emotional intelligence assessments are useful not because they label us, but because they hold up a mirror. They reveal patterns of how we relate to people, how we respond under pressure, where our strengths lie, and where growth is required. Knowing oneself reduces friction, both internal and relational, and allows work to be done with greater clarity and maturity.

Equally important is the dimension most often taken for granted: the body. Work depends on physical capacity — on sight, movement, concentration, and endurance — yet modern professional life frequently treats the body as an afterthought. Health needs are deferred, compensated for, or ignored entirely in the pursuit of output. Over time, this neglect shows up in subtle ways: diminished focus, chronic fatigue, irritability, and shortened professional longevity. Caring for the body through nutrition, hygiene, rest, and movement is not a personal indulgence; it is foundational maintenance. You cannot continually extract performance from a system whose basic needs are unmet.

Learning forms another quiet pillar of professional effectiveness. Exposure to ideas beyond immediate tasks through reading, study, and curiosity expands how we understand problems and imagine solutions. Learning sharpens judgment, deepens perspective, and keeps thinking flexible. It also anchors work in a broader intellectual context, preventing stagnation. The ability to solve real-world problems is often less about technical competence alone and more about the breadth of ideas one has encountered and internalised over time.

There is also the inner life; the spiritual or reflective dimension from which meaning, values, and perspective are drawn. Whether expressed through faith, meditation, or stillness, this dimension shapes

how individuals interpret success, failure, and identity. It is here that people learn to live from the inside out, rather than being entirely shaped by external demands. When this inner anchoring is absent, work easily becomes the sole source of validation. When it is present, work takes its proper place as important, but not totalising.

Finally, relationships, interests, and support systems sustain energy in ways work alone cannot. We are not one-dimensional beings. When all vitality is consumed by work, there is little left to give creativity thins, patience shortens, and perspective narrows. Interests, friendships, family, and community replenish what work expends. They restore balance not by competing with work, but by ensuring there is something left to return to it with.

These dimensions do not weaken professional commitment; they strengthen it. They shape judgment, resilience, creativity, and longevity. When they are nurtured, work is sharper and more sustainable. When they are neglected, work eventually bears the cost. Recognising this is not a retreat from ambition, but a more honest understanding of how human potential is formed and how it is sustained.

Final thoughts

This article itself is the product of a life structured with intention — written in time deliberately set aside for thinking, reflection, and expression. Not squeezed into the margins of exhaustion, but created within a rhythm that makes room for it. That, in many ways, is the point.

Our lives are shaped by the routines we return to day after day. We all have the same twenty-four hours, yet vastly different experiences of fulfilment, capacity, and possibility, largely because of how those hours are organised. A multidimensional life does not dilute ambition; it sustains it. For professional women especially, the question is not whether we are capable of more, but whether the structures around us allow us to live and work as whole human beings. Potential does not flourish in fragmentation. It grows where life is aligned, anchored, and given room to breathe.

OBASANJO, SANWO-OLU, AND BUSINESS ELITES STORM LAGOS FOR FLUTTERWAVE'S GALA



Olugbenga 'GB' Agboola, Founder and CEO of Flutterwave with Dr. Stanley Ifeanyi Uzochukwu, Chairman and Founder of The Delborough.



Olugbenga 'GB' Agboola, Founder and CEO of Flutterwave with Omotola Jalade Ekeinde, Nigerian actress and singer.

On a night where business met style and innovation met influence, Flutterwave, Africa's leading payments technology company, in partnership with luxury hospitality brand The Delborough, hosted some of Nigeria's most powerful business and public sector leaders for an exclusive Gala Night in Lagos.

Held at The Delborough Lagos, the black-tie gathering brought together decision-makers from technology, aviation, hospitality, FMCG, insurance, fashion & beauty, and the public sector for an evening of elevated conversations, entertainment, and strategic connections.

The event underscored Flutterwave's renewed commitment to strengthening its involvement in Nigeria's business ecosystem and supporting local enterprises as they scale globally.

From the moment guests arrived on the red carpet, the tone was set for a night of sophistication and purpose. Industry leaders, founders, policymakers, and creatives mingled over light refreshments, posed for photographs, and shared candid conversations about the future of Nigerian business.

The highlight of the evening was a keynote address by the Guest of Honour and Chairman of the event, former President of Nigeria, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, who spoke on innovation, leadership, and the role of private enterprise in national development. His remarks set the stage for

broader discussions around economic growth and Nigeria's place in the global economy.

The evening was hosted by Mojibade Sosanya, with Olugbenga 'GB' Agboola, Founder and CEO of Flutterwave, delivering a keynote that reflected on Flutterwave's journey and its evolving role as a financial infrastructure partner for Nigeria's biggest businesses.

The distinguished guest list reflected the breadth and influence of Nigeria's business and cultural landscape. In attendance were President Olusegun Obasanjo; Governor Babajide Sanwo-Olu of Lagos State, former President of Sierra Leone, Ernest Bai Koroma, Pastor Paul Adefarasin, Pastor Flourish Peters, Cosmas Maduka (CON), President and CEO of Coscharis Group, Olu Okeowo, Founder and Chairman of Gibraltar Construction Nigeria Limited, Michael Onuoha, Chairman & Chief Executive Officer of Ailes Group, Ernest Ndukwe, Chairman of the Board of Directors, MTN Nigeria, Erica Nlewedim, Omotola Jalade Ekeinde, Tiwa Savage, and Dorathy Bachor, alongside other prominent captains of industry and public sector leaders.

Adding to the evening's memorable moments, Cosmas Maduka, President and CEO of Coscharis Group, spoke glowingly about the importance of building innovative, resilient businesses in Nigeria.



In good company; GB is flanked by Sir Olu Okeowo, Founder and Chairman of Gibraltar Construction Nigeria Limited to the left and HE Dr. Ernest Bai Koroma, former President of Sierra Leone.



Dr. Cosmas Maduka (CON), President and CEO of Coscharis Group, speaking at the event.



HE Dr. Ernest Bai Koroma, former President of Sierra Leone, speaking at the event.



Governor Babajide Sanwo-Olu, speaking at the event.

He also commended Olugbenga 'GB' Agboola for his leadership and vision, praising Flutterwave's impact on the financial technology landscape across Africa.

Governor Babajide Sanwo-Olu also shared warm and encouraging remarks, offering strong words of support for Agboola and urging him to continue the great work of building globally competitive financial infrastructure from Nigeria.

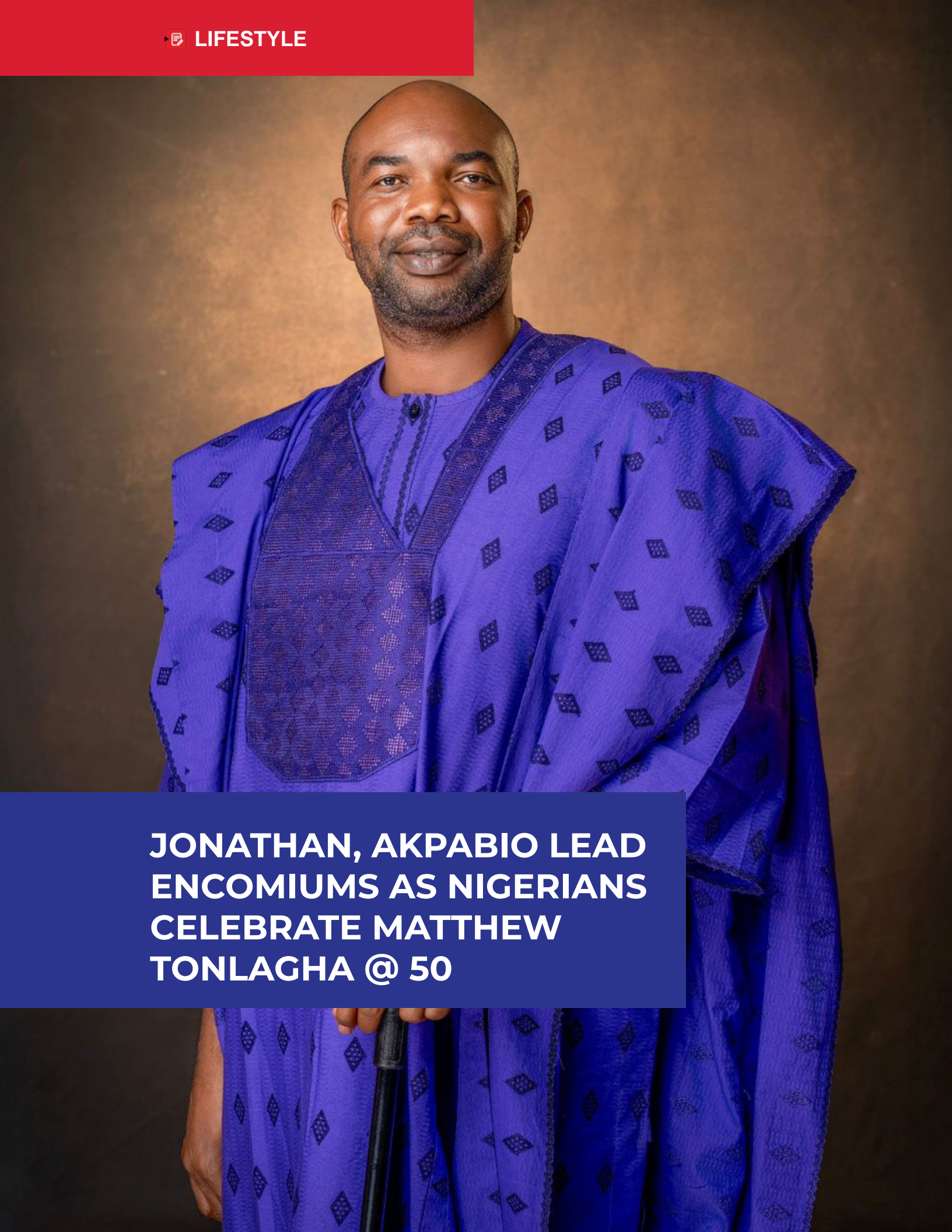
Speaking on the significance of the night, Olugbenga 'GB' Agboola, Founder and CEO of Flutterwave, said: "Nigeria is home, and it remains one of our most important markets.

"Our goal is to build deeper relationships with the businesses and leaders driving the economy. Flutterwave has the infrastructure to support industries across aviation,

hospitality, FMCG, tech, and beyond, and we are committed to working closely with Nigerian businesses as they grow locally and expand globally."

Also commenting, Stanley Ifeanyi Uzochukwu, Chairman and Founder of The Delborough, said: "At The Delborough, our vision is to provide world-class hospitality for leaders who are shaping industries and the future of our country. Hosting this Gala with Flutterwave enables us to do what we are best at – creating a space where meaningful business relationships can be built, ideas can flow, and excellence is experienced at every touchpoint."

The night ended on a high note with a live band, dancing, and continued networking over exquisite cuisine. A fitting close to an evening that celebrated ambition, collaboration, and Nigeria's growing influence on the global stage.



**JONATHAN, AKPABIO LEAD
ENCOMIUMS AS NIGERIANS
CELEBRATE MATTHEW
TONLAGHA @ 50**



High-profile dignitaries and thousands of Nigerians recently showered encomiums on Matthew Tonlagha as he marked his 50th birthday in Abuja.

The colourful event also featured the public presentation of the book *Forged in the Creeks*, written by Olaokun Soyinka.

Among those in attendance were former President Goodluck Jonathan, Senate President Godwill Akpabio, and several state governors led by Sheriff Oborevwo, the Delta State Governor.

Speaking at the event, Senator Akpabio lauded Tonlagha for his contributions to the Niger Delta in particular and Nigeria in general.

Akpabio, who unveiled the book, said: “Your life’s journey has consistently reflected vision, discipline and an unwavering commitment to high standards—qualities that have not only defined your leadership but have continued to inspire many within and beyond your professional sphere.

“Your contributions to enterprise, community development and national growth stand as enduring testimonies to a life of committed progress and excellence,” he added.

In his remarks, Goodluck Jonathan, former President described Tonlagha as a visionary who worked diligently to achieve his dreams.

He said: “Turning fifty is a significant milestone—one that offers the opportunity to reflect on a life of purpose, impact and service. Your journey as an entrepreneur and patriot exemplifies the virtues of resilience and commitment to national development.

“Through Maton Engineering Nigeria Limited, you have demonstrated how indigenous enterprises can contribute meaningfully to economic growth, job creation and capacity development in Nigeria.”

Celebrant was presented with awards by Nigerian Union of Journalists, Coalition of Civil Society Organisations, Nigerian Youth Council



Last week, the Oboro Primary Healthcare Centre in Burutu Local Government Area of Delta State was rehabilitated and fully equipped by Michael Tonlagha, prominent Niger Delta philanthropist in honour of the 50th birthday of his brother, Tonlagha, Chairman of Maton Engineering Nigeria Limited.

The renovated facility was formally unveiled and inaugurated recently drawing political leaders, community stakeholders, and business figures who described the intervention as a major boost to healthcare delivery in the riverine community.

In his opening address, Adowei Binebai, the Chairman of the occasion, described the project as a divine response to the prayers of the Oboro people. He commended the Tonlagha brothers for their timely intervention and also praised the Tarebi Sele-ebi, Community Chairman, for his

perseverance in ensuring the project became a reality.

Speaking during the inauguration, Tonlagha said the project was undertaken to reflect his brother's values.

"By the grace of God, this project was completed within ten months, and all the medical equipment in the facility was generously donated by my brother's wife," he said.

He urged residents to protect the facility and ensure it is put to effective use.

Peremobowei Ebebi, former Deputy Governor of Bayelsa State, lauded the Tonlagha family for its extensive philanthropic footprint across the Niger Delta and congratulated Matthew Tonlagha on his 50th birthday, wishing him good health and greater accomplishments.

Also speaking, Godknows Angele, the Delta State Commissioner for Housing, conveyed the appreciation of the Delta State Government to the Tonlagha family, describing the project as a significant contribution to healthcare delivery. He urged the Burutu Local Government Council to ensure the effective operation and maintenance of the facility.

"On behalf of the Delta State Government, I commend the Tonlagha Dynasty for the renovation and equipping of the Oboro Primary Healthcare Centre. This achievement reflects a genuine commitment to human development and community wellbeing," Angele stated.

The inauguration of the Oboro Primary Healthcare Centre formed part of activities marking Matthew Tonlagha's 50th birthday, providing improved access to primary healthcare services for residents of the riverine Oboro community.

Only recently, as part of activities marking the 50th birthday celebration of Esther Matthew Tonlagha Foundation donated a bus to Ugborikoko Secondary School in Delta state.

Speaking at the event, Esther Matthew Tonlagha, founder of EMTF, explained that education remains a powerful tool for shaping the future, adding that investing in young people is the surest way to build strong communities.



According to her, “this donation is in honour of the 50th birthday of my husband, Mr. Matthew Tonlagha who attended this school. The foundation chose to mark not with fanfare alone, but with a meaningful gift that would directly support students and teachers”.

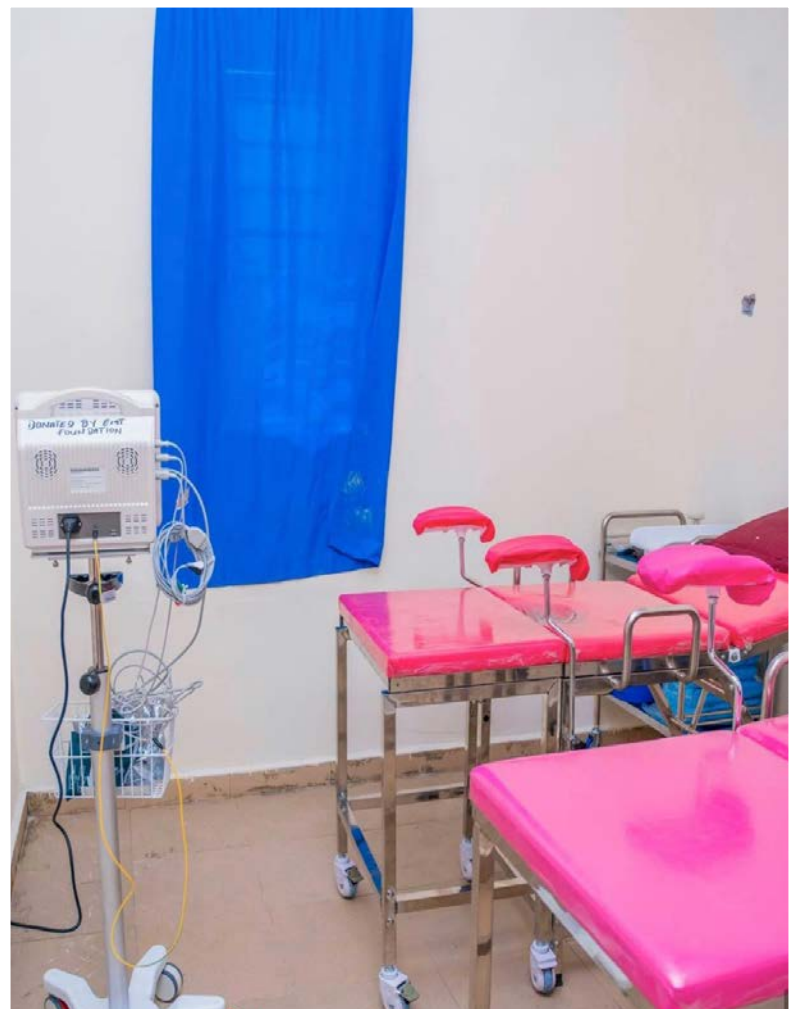
“My husband attended this school and we are happy to be here today because this school is part of his success story. We are using a milestone celebration to create a lasting impact on education and community development”.

Irhirhi Masson Ufuoma, the school's principal, described the donation as timely and transformative, noting that it would immediately improve school operations and student engagement beyond the classroom.

For the school, Ufuoma said the bus represents a solution to long-standing transportation challenges that have limited participation in academic trips, inter-school competitions, and extracurricular activities. With the new addition, opportunities once out of reach are now within reach.

Students welcomed the bus with excitement, while teachers and community leaders praised the foundation for turning a personal celebration into a shared blessing.

Over the years, the Esther Matthew Tonlagha Foundation has remained committed to supporting education, health, and empowerment initiatives across Delta State, and the donation to Ugborikoko Secondary School further reflects its vision of building sustainable impact through purposeful giving.



HIGHER CAPITAL THRESHOLDS AND NEW VASP LICENCES: KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THE NIGERIAN SECURITIES AND EXCHANGE COMMISSION'S JANUARY 2026 CIRCULAR

ADERONKE ALEX-ADEIPE

Introduction

In January 2026, the Nigerian Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) (the "Commission") of Nigeria issued a circular that significantly increased the minimum capital requirements for Capital Market Operators (CMOs). The Commission has highlighted that these changes are intended to strengthen market resilience, protect investors, ensure capital adequacy reflects the risks of market activities, and confirm that regulated entities have sufficient financial capacity to meet their obligations sustainably.

Key Changes to Capital Requirements

The revised capital requirements introduce substantial increases across most operator categories. The circular further states that the Commission will issue further detailed guidance to capital market operators on compliance and capital verification processes. In addition, the Commission has also introduced several new Virtual Asset Service Provider (VASP) license categories, reflecting the growing prominence of digital finance and fintech activities in Nigeria's capital markets. The newly introduced categories include:

1. Ancillary Virtual Asset Service Providers (AVASPs)
2. Digital Assets Intermediaries (DAIs)
3. Digital Assets Platform Operators (DAPOs); and
4. RealWorld Assets Tokenization and Offering Platforms (RATOPs).

The formal inclusion of these new VASP license categories classes highlights an area where further regulatory clarity will be required. The circular does not expressly identify the types of activities that fall within each of the newly introduced VASP categories. In practice, this indicates that the Commission is likely to issue further directives, guidelines, and compliance requirements to clarify the scope, licensing thresholds, and compliance obligations applicable to operators who fall within these new categories. To provide a clear view of the changes, we have summarised some capital market operator license categories alongside the newly introduced VASP license categories in the table below:

Operator Category	Previous Minimum Capital	New Minimum Capital	% Increase
Brokers (client execution)	₦200m	₦600m	200%
Dealers (proprietary trading)	₦100m	₦1bn	900%
Broker-Dealers	₦300m	₦2bn	567%
Full-Scope Portfolio Managers	₦150m	₦5bn	3,233%
Limited-Scope Portfolio Managers	₦150m	₦2bn	1,233%
Robo-Advisers	₦10m	₦100m	900%
Ancillary Virtual Asset Providers	New	₦300m	New
Digital Assets Intermediaries	New	₦500m	New
Digital Asset Platform Operators	New	₦500m	New
Real-World Assets Tokenisation Platforms	New	₦1bn	New

Implications for Market Operators

The substantial increases in minimum capital requirements carry significant implications for market operators. Operators will need to review and potentially adjust their capital structures, raise additional funds where necessary, and explore partnerships or restructuring strategies to meet the new thresholds. Non-compliance could result in suspension or withdrawal of registration, making proactive planning essential. The Commission has provided an 18-month transitional period, giving operators until June 30, 2027, to comply with the new thresholds.

Conclusion

The Commission's 2026 capital requirement revision is a significant development for Nigeria's capital markets. Operators must assess their capital adequacy and compliance strategies, not only to meet higher capital thresholds, but also to prepare for potential upcoming directives relating to the newly introduced VASP categories.

LOVE, INTIMACY, AND DESIRE IN AFRICAN VISUAL CULTURE

When was the last time you saw an African artwork described as “romantic”?

Not politically romantic. Not revolutionary. Just romantic in the simplest sense: two people leaning toward each other, a shared glance, a hand resting without urgency. It is a small question, but it reveals something larger. So much writing about African art foregrounds resistance, trauma, and identity that we sometimes overlook the fact that artists have also been documenting affection, desire, and emotional interiority all along.

In this digest, we look closely at how painters and photographers across generations have visualised love: queer love, domestic love, complicated love, etc., and how these images quietly challenge the assumption that African art must always be explained through struggle. This is not a listicle. It’s a shift in attention.

Love Beyond the Political Frame

Amoako Boafo’s portraits have become instantly recognisable for their tactile surfaces: paint applied with the artist’s fingers and skin built up in thick, expressive strokes. But what often goes unspoken is the emotional temperature of his paintings. Many of his subjects are friends, collaborators, and people within his circle.



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Title: White Pearls | Artist: Amoako Boafo | Year: 2023



Lesedi Modise, Mafikeng, North West, 2010
by Zanele Muholi

When two figures appear together, their closeness feels earned. Knees touch. Shoulders overlap. Their bodies angle inward, not for the viewer, but toward each other.

Collected by institutions such as the Guggenheim Museum and exhibited internationally, Boafo's work is frequently discussed in terms of Black representation and market momentum. Yet standing in front of one of his paired portraits, what lingers is softness. These are not symbols. They are companions.

Photography and the Language of Intimacy

Photography has provided a particularly powerful space for reclaiming representations of desire. Zanele Muholi's ongoing project *Faces and Phases*, begun in 2006 and shown at institutions including Tate Modern and the Brooklyn Museum, documents Black lesbian, transgender, and gender-nonconforming individuals in South Africa. The portraits are collaborative. Sitters meet the camera with steadiness and trust.

The political stakes are undeniable, especially in contexts where queer lives remain vulnerable. But what holds you in these images is intimacy. Shoulders soften. Hands rest gently.

Domestic Spaces and Everyday Tenderness

Not all intimacy announces itself through dramatic gesture. Sometimes it unfolds on a couch in a living room, against patterned wallpaper.

Njideka Akunyili Crosby's paintings, held in collections including Tate and LACMA, are dense with personal and cultural references. In works such as *The Beautiful Ones* (2012), couples occupy domestic interiors layered with photo transfers drawn from Nigerian pop culture and family archives. The figures sit close. Their bodies lean subtly toward one another. Nothing is exaggerated. The intimacy feels lived-in.



Title: Nwantinti | Artist: Njideka Akunyili Crosby | Medium: Acrylic, pastel, charcoal, colored pencil and Xerox transfers on paper | Year: 2012

Crosby's exploration of marriage and diasporic partnership complicates the idea that love is separate from migration or cultural negotiation. It exists within those tensions. It is textured.

Desire, Risk, and Cultural Tension
To depict intimacy, especially queer intimacy, can carry risk. Muholi has spoken publicly about harassment and resistance to their work. Fani-Kayode created images during a period marked by homophobia and the AIDS crisis. In some contexts, even showing two men touching or two women leaning toward each other becomes a charged act. And yet, the works persist. Art offers a space where desire can be held, even when fragile. It can shield through symbolism or confront directly through portraiture. It can insist that softness is not weakness, that

vulnerability is not spectacle.

Perhaps what feels most radical about these images is not their boldness, but their tenderness. They refuse the demand that African bodies be read only through struggle. They allow for affection without explanation.

If we widen our lens, we begin to see that African visual culture contains an archive of love: romantic, queer, domestic, and complicated. It has always been there, leaning quietly into the frame. And maybe the more pressing question isn't whether African art is romantic. It is whether we have been willing to notice.



Keturah Ovio

Keturah Ovio is an Executive at Patrons Modern & Contemporary African Art. She is also an engineer and Founder of Dukka, a Fintech startup providing bookkeeping and payments solutions for small businesses.

Keturah is passionate about African Art and has been collecting art since her early 20s. Now, she advises, curates, and manages collections for individuals and corporate organisations looking to start or diversify their wealth management through art collecting. She strongly believes that a fine marriage exists between Art and Technology

UNTANGLING THE KNOTS OF BRAND, BRANDING AND BRAND IDENTITY

FEYISITAN IJIMAKINWA

“Oh, I love their branding!” — How many times have you said this after spotting a cute logo or striking ad? Do you know that thing you’re pointing at could be the brand, the branding, or the brand identity? Yes, three different things. And if you’re a business owner, marketer, or design nerd, understanding the difference is the ultimate power move.

What is a brand?

Your brand is what people feel when they hear your company’s name. It’s the gut reaction, the trust factor, the vibe, the story. It’s not created by you; it’s shaped by your audience. As Jeff Bezos famously said, “Your brand is what people say about you when you’re not in the room.”

Brand = Perception

Think reputation. Your brand is made of:

- Customer perception
- Emotional connection
- Brand values
- Experience across touchpoints

Misconceptions about brand, branding and brand identity

Misconception	Reality
Branding is just a logo	Branding is the entire process
Brand = Identity	Brand = Perception, Identity = Visuals
Once you design a brand kit, you are done	Branding is an ongoing process

One of the most dangerous myths around is thinking that branding and marketing are the same. No! Marketing pushes a message. Branding pulls people in.

Brand, Branding and Brand identity for business

The Brand: The Soul

Your brand is the story. It’s how your audience feels about you. It’s your voice, your values, and the emotional bridge you build.

Branding: The Action

This is the branding process, what you do to shape perception. It involves:

Brand position: A brand position serves to answer the question, “Why should people buy from us instead of anyone else?” As an example, Volvo’s positioning built around safety, and Tesla’s position as innovators and champions of sustainability.

Product branding: This is how you build and communicate the identity of specific products or services as part of your offering. This gives strong branding to individual products, which differentiates them, allows them to connect with a specific customer function, and creates an overall positive impression of the brand.

Customer experience (CX): The sum of all interactions a customer has with your brand, from their first encounter (seeing an ad) to the post-purchase experience.

Every interaction counts, whether it be your website, retail store, customer service, or social media, and creates their perception of your brand.

Tone of voice: The personality of your brand, when speaking to its audience. For instance, Glo has a voice that is humorous and innovative, while a luxury brand like Rolex has an understated sophistication.

Social media and branding strategies: In the digital age, social media is a powerful tool for branding.

This involves developing a cohesive strategy for how your brand appears and interacts on various social platforms. Consider how brands like Nike use

compelling visuals and inspirational messaging on Instagram to reinforce their athletic and empowering brand image.

Brand Identity: The Skin

This is the face of the brand — visual cues like logos, colours, typography, iconography, and photography style. Think of this as your brand's wardrobe and makeup. It should match the personality you want to portray.

How to create a brand kit that actually works:

- Use consistent typography, colours, and logo placement.
- Create templates for social, print, and web.
- Maintain tone and voice guides.

Why it matters

Still not convinced this isn't just marketing fluff? Here's why it matters:

- Builds trust and credibility.
- Makes you recognisable.
- Sets you apart in saturated markets.
- Fuels word-of-mouth referrals.

Examples of great brands & why they work

1. **Apple: Emotional Excellence**

Apple doesn't sell gadgets. It sells aspiration, minimalism, creativity. Its brand identity ideas are sleek, futuristic, and consistent. Their branding strategies scream "Think Different" — and we do.

2. **Amazon: Customer Obsession**

Amazon's brand = convenience, speed, reliability. From its smiley logo to its UX-first design, every part of its product branding supports this brand promise.

3. **Hermès: Legacy in Luxury**

Hermès nails brand marketing definition. Scarcity, craftsmanship, exclusivity. Their brand identity? Iconic orange boxes, serif fonts, horse-and-carriage elegance.

4. **Louis Vuitton: Consistent Class**

LV's monogram is more than a logo. It's a lifestyle. The branding ideas here tie deeply into history, celebrity culture, and status.

5. **AirBnB: Belonging Everywhere**

Their branding is all about emotion, belonging. From the logo (the "Bélo") to the brand voice, they make you feel at home, worldwide.

Each of these shows how brand and branding together can build empires.

Last line

In the end, it's not just about how good your design is. It's how well you connect. That's what branding does. That's how you create a professional brand. That's how you become a brand. Let's face it: anyone can launch a business these days. But building a professional brand that actually sticks in people's minds? That takes intention, strategy, and soul.

A business sells. A brand connects. A business offers services. A brand offers meaning. Your audience isn't just buying your product; they're buying into your story, your vibe, your values. That's where branding steps in as the MVP. It humanises your company, differentiates you in a sea of sameness, and builds long-term trust. So, don't just aim to look good. Aim to feel right. That's what a strong brand does. It feels familiar, dependable, and alive.



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



MY VALENTINE

UDY OSARO-EDOBOR

I was married to the love of my life for nine years. The first few years were beautiful. We were young, hopeful and deeply in love. Mike adored me. We laughed easily, travelled when we could and we had dreams of growing old together. I truly believed nothing could shake us.

But as the years passed and there was no child, something began to change. The desire to become a father slowly became stronger than the love Mike once showed me. The hospital visits increased. The tests became more serious. Then one day, the doctor said the words that broke my heart... I had Endometriosis. Conceiving a child would be almost impossible.

I was still trying to process my pain when I began to see another side of my husband. He did not insult me directly but his words became sharp. He taunted me in subtle ways. He would sigh heavily when he saw children. He would make careless jokes. The man who once held my hands now made me feel like I was the problem.

Then Mike did the unthinkable. He moved out of our home because his secretary was pregnant for him. That period almost destroyed me. The silence in the house was louder than noise but my family and friends stood by me. They called. They visited. They prayed with me and slowly, I found strength I did not know I had. Still, I questioned life.

My cleaner, Iya Bukola, seemed to get pregnant so easily. At the last count, she had six children. Her husband was a truck driver who travelled across states. She did different jobs to

survive. I was not bitter, I was just confused. Why did life seem so unfair?

Then I noticed she was pregnant again. Her seventh child. I wondered how she would manage. But I kept quiet. It was not my place to question her choices. After a while, I noticed the pregnancy was gone. I thought maybe I imagined it. But then it happened again. She was pregnant and then suddenly, she was not any more. This time, I could not ignore it. Over the years, we had formed a relationship beyond employer and employee.

So one afternoon, I gently asked her. She sighed deeply. She told me the pregnancies were real, but they were not for her husband. She had discovered he was sleeping with women in different states and had fathered two children outside their marriage. Hurt and angry, she decided to "pay him back" by sleeping with other men. But each time she got pregnant and she ended it through traditional means.

I was shocked. She spoke of it so casually, as if it was nothing. Meanwhile, I would have given anything to carry just one child. As she spoke, something inside me broke. I burst into tears. I could not hold it back. It was not jealousy. It was grief.

For the first time, Iya Bukola saw the full weight of my pain. She tried to comfort me the best way she knew how. Months later, she showed up to work visibly pregnant again. I advised her gently. I told her to think about her health. I reminded her that life is precious. But it seemed my words did not change anything.

When it was time for her delivery, I gave her time off work. I asked her to take several months to rest and recover. I paid her full salary and even added extra money. She left that day smiling and praying for me. "God go do your own," she said.

On the morning of February 14th, I was rushing to leave early so I could beat Lagos traffic. When I opened my front door, I froze. There was a baby lying there. A tiny newborn, wrapped carefully, sleeping peacefully. My heart began to race. I looked around but saw no one. Then I looked closely at the wrapper. I recognized it immediately. It belonged to Iya Bukola. I called her at once. She denied everything. She insisted the wrapper was not hers. Confused, I drove to her house but her children said she had travelled out of town.

The police told me to report the case. They suggested taking the baby to child services but asked me to keep her temporarily while they sorted things out. Temporary became one week. One week became one month. By then, I was already in love. I filed for adoption. I was warned that the process would be long and stressful but somehow, things moved smoothly. It was as if heaven had already decided. That was how baby Pearl came into my life.

Four months later, Iya Bukola returned to work. She acted as though nothing had happened. When I asked about her baby, she simply said "he" was fine. She never once hinted that Pearl was hers but deep inside, I knew. I understood what she had done. She had given me what I could never give myself. It was a sacrifice too big for words. I could never repay her but I made up my mind that she and her children would never lack as long as I lived.

Years passed. With my support, she stopped cleaning houses and opened a small provision store. Even when she tried to keep her distance, I made sure she remained part of our lives. She never attended Pearl's school events or birthdays even when invited. I understood her decision. She had drawn her boundary. So I gave myself fully to motherhood.

Pearl was my everything. She was gentle, kind and brilliant. She excelled in school and won awards. Her teachers described her as disciplined and compassionate. She carried herself with grace beyond her years. And when she smiled, it felt like sunlight in my home. She called me "Mummy" with so much love that sometimes I forgot she did not come from my body. She was my pride.

Twenty five years have passed since that February morning. Pearl is now a grown woman, strong and intelligent. On her wedding day, as I watched her walk down the aisle, my heart was full. She was confident, graceful and deeply respectful. She had grown into a woman of substance, the kind every mother prays for.

Sadly, Iya Bukola was not there to witness it. She had passed away a few years earlier from pneumonia. Instead of going to the hospital early, she relied on herbs. By the time she sought medical help, it was too late.

That woman was more than a cleaner.

She was an angel in human form. A quiet hero. The most selfless person I have ever known. Because of her, February 14th will never be just Valentine's Day to me.

Society celebrates February 14th with flowers, chocolates and romantic dinners. But love is not only in roses and candlelight. Love is sacrifice. Love is giving when it costs you everything. Love is choosing another person's joy over your own pain.

On that February 14th morning, I received the greatest gift of love, not from a husband, not from a lover but from a woman many would have overlooked.

That day taught me that Valentine's Day can mean more. It can mean hope after heartbreak. It can mean healing after loss. It can mean sacrifice that asks for nothing in return. Every year on February 14th, while the world celebrates romance, I celebrate something deeper. I celebrate a woman who changed my story. I celebrate the day I became a mother.

And I celebrate Pearl... my daughter, my pride, my greatest Valentine.

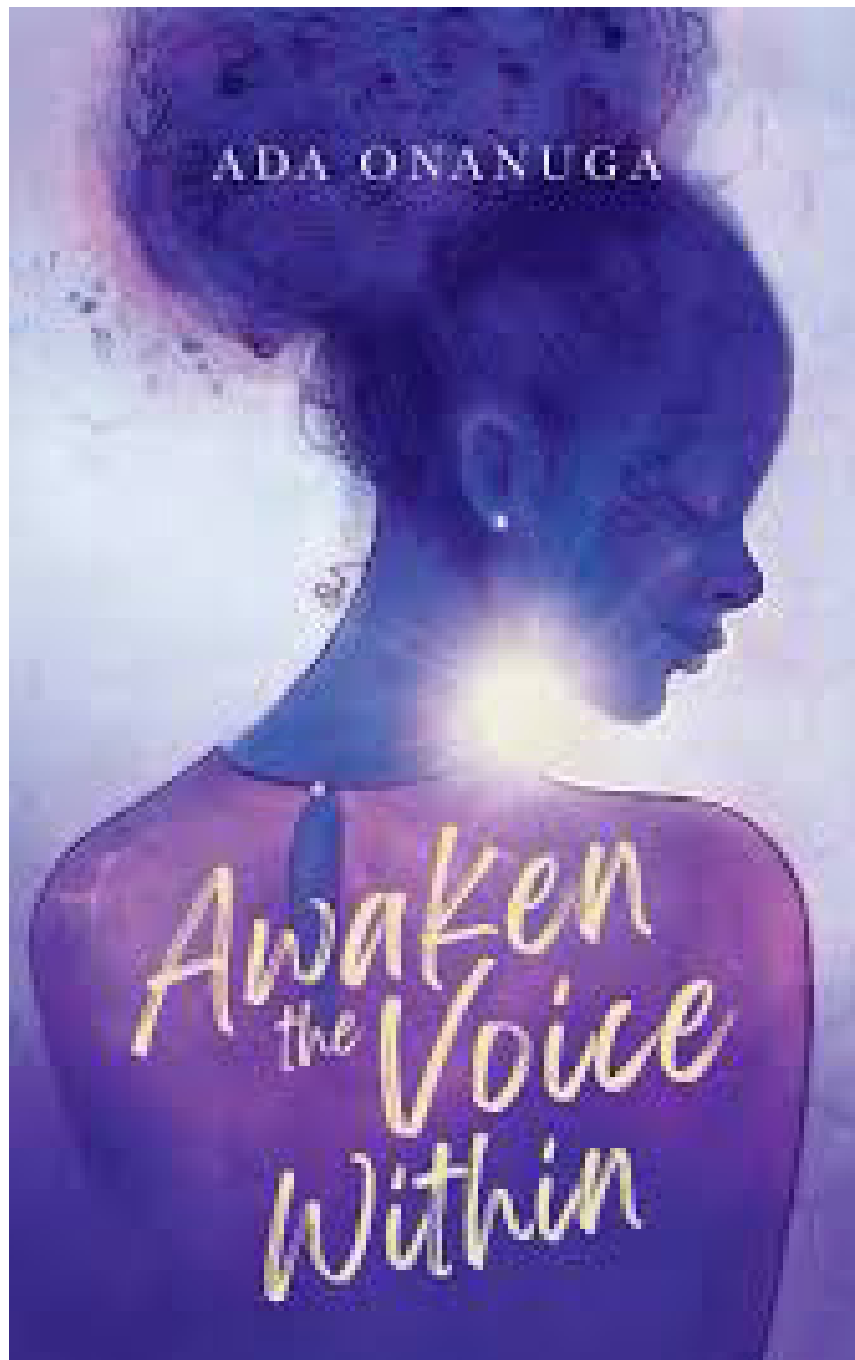


Udy Osaro-Edobor

Udy Osaro-Edobor is the Content Creator for SoTv (Supernatural Online TV) Nigeria. She is a movie/ scriptwriter, editor, and proofreader.

She has several stories to her credit which she posts for free on her Ebook called Udy's Chapter. She is currently working on two short movies. Udy is also a wife, mother, and a "serial entrepreneur".

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The Quiet Journey Back to Yourself-A Review of Ada Onanuga Awaken the Voice Within

Title: Awaken the Voice Within
Author: Ada Onanuga
Year of Publication: 2025
Number of Pages: 161
Category: Self Help

AWAKEN THE VOICE WITHIN

TITILADE OYEMADE

You've probably seen a thousand book titles with "Awaken" in them. At this point, your eyes roll automatically, your head nods sadly, and you mutter, "Ah. Not again." But hold on, *Awaken the Voice Within* by Ada Onanuga is that rare exception that taps you on the shoulder and says, "Relax, I'm not like the others."

Some books shout; some books whisper. This one leans in and speaks softly, yet firmly, to the parts of you you've long kept hidden.

The serene woman on the cover hints at the book's gentle nature, but don't be fooled, this is a book with power. The chapter titles alone invite curiosity, and you may be tempted to skip to the ones that seem to call your name. Resist that urge. This is a journey best taken from the beginning, letting its wisdom unfold naturally.

Ada Onanuga opens with a simple idea: we all enter the world carrying a sound, a purpose placed in us even before we were born. But life, people, and careless words have a way of quieting that sound. Through her book, Ada takes you on a reflective, often transformative journey, showing how we hide parts of ourselves, shrink, and merely try to get by, losing touch with who we truly are.

Her personal stories are candid and relatable. You might get swept up in them, but each story leads somewhere meaningful. The same Ada whose graceful photograph appears at the end once struggled with insecurity, and chances are, you've felt that too. It is this honesty and vulnerability that make the book human. Everywhere, her love for God quietly but unmistakably colors the pages, offering reassurance without preaching.

The book also challenges. It asks you to notice the subtle forces that silence your voice. The people, the habits, the fears that surround you. Ada gives you space to reflect, guiding you through your own life questions. Some repetition in the text is deliberate; Ada Onanuga wants to ensure her words truly sink in, giving readers the time and space to reflect on each point.

This isn't a book of quick fixes. It is gentle, honest work, an invitation to confront the false identities you've carried, name the experiences that silenced you, and begin to heal.

What makes *Awaken the Voice Within* truly powerful is its affirmation. It doesn't tell you you're broken. It reminds you of what has always been true: your voice was never destroyed. It was simply buried under fear, conformity, and survival and it can be awakened.

By the final pages, you feel stirred, strengthened, and ready to reclaim your voice. To return to that first, authentic sound. *Awaken the Voice Within* is not just a book; it is a guide, a companion, and a gentle call to rediscover the power and purpose that has always been within you.



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. Email: titi.oyemade@gmail.com Social: [@tiipreeofficial](https://www.instagram.com/tiipreeofficial)

WEEKENDER

MOVIE REVIEW

LITTLE WOMEN (2019)

Honestly, I wasn't sure what to expect from this movie, but I was glad I finally made out time to watch it. I could relate to the movie as it reminded me so much of how we were brought up by my mum. I guess a lot of things affect our choice of movies; our perspective and background affect how we connect to movies. As a lady, you would relate to this movie better and understand the power of sisterhood. In this movie, Greta Gerwig had four girls—Jo, Amy, Meg, and Beth. She trained and brought up these amazing girls in the fear of the Lord. They weren't rich, but they were content. She taught them to stand by each other and love one another wholeheartedly, no matter what, and that they must learn to forgive each other no matter what. You will need to go check out this movie to see how they overcome the challenges life throws at them as they grow up, how they choose their life partners, and how they move on in life with their various dreams. Remember, all your dreams are valid in life. The 135-minute family film, kids & family drama, filmed based on books, period piece, and social issues, was directed by Greta Gerwig. They featured actors like Saoirse Ronan, Emma Watson, Florence Pugh, Eliza Scanlen, Laura Dern, Timothée Chalamet, Tracy Letts, Bob Odenkirk, Chris Cooper, Meryl Streep, and many more.



YOH BESTIE (2026)

It is another season of love, so this month of February we will be seeing loads of romantic movies on our timeline. This movie is a brand-new movie from 2026, all the way from South Africa. The movie was really nice and left me smiling all through. In this movie Thando was a young, pretty, vibrant lady, she had a guy called Charles. Who was her best friend, before he left for the States, he gave her his apartment keys and promised to be back for her. Three years later he decided to return but rather than returning alone or so she assured he returned with a lady as his fiancée, leaving Thando in great shock at the airport, when Thando thought that was the worse, and the final straw, Charles informs her of their wedding coming up the next weekend and that he would want her to be his best man. This was absolutely unbelievable for Thando, will she say Yes or No? Knowing clearly that she has strong feelings for him. You will need to watch the movie to see how it all played out. The 95-minute South African romantic comedy films, comedies, romantic African was directed by John Barbuzano. They featured actors like Diya Sepotlele, Katlego Lebogang, Die Makobane, Kagiso Mochyze, Honda Thomas , File Mthwalo and many more.



I KNOW WHAT YOU DID LAST SUMMER (2025)

For all the lovers of horror, thriller, and suspense movies, you need to read this as this will be worth your while. For my ardent readers, you know that I struggle with horror movies, but when the recommendation is strong, I will check it out so that I can bring you the review. In this movie, Danica and her fiancé, Teddy, went out with three of their friends to see the July 4th fireworks. While they stayed on the road, a vehicle trying to dodge them lost control and went down the road to the river. They tried to save them but couldn't, and left. Stevie and Ava pleaded with Danica and Teddy to go to the station to report it, but they chose to bury the incident and asked Teddy's dad to cover it up. One year later, while Danica was having her bridal shower, she receives a note warning her that they knew what she did. The card read, "I Know What You Did Last Summer". Immediately after Danica received the card, people around her began to die. You will need to watch the entire movie to see how she lost almost all her friends and to discover who was behind all the killings. The revelation of the culprit at the end will leave you speechless. The 111-minute horror suspense movie was directed by Jennifer Kaytin Robinson. They featured Madelyn Cline, Chase Sui Wenders, Jennifer Love Hewitt, Treddie Prince Jr., Jonah Hauer-King, and Trying Withers etc.



WEEKEND QUOTES



1

Disappointment is an
explosion of oversized
expectations
.....WhispersbyTEN

2

Your past heartfelt desires are
today's evidences. Abba can
be trusted
.....WhispersbyTEN

3

In God's plan there is
no delay or denial
.....WhispersbyTEN

4

What you experience
is just His plan.
.....WhispersbyTEN