

BUSINESS DAY WEEKENDER

EDITION 283 | 07 , MARCH 2026



International Women's Day 2026: 8 female chefs who are changing the culinary world



INTERVIEW

When a woman understands her strengths, she stops shrinking to fit into spaces - Yetunde Ajibade



UDY'S CHAPTER

Strangers Like Friends (2)

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PUBLISHED BY

BusinessDay Media Limited
6A George Street, off
Mobolaji Johnson Street, Ikoyi
01-2799100
www.businessday.ng

LEGAL ADVISERS

The Law Union

BUSINESS DAY
WEEKENDER

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DIFFERENT STROKES FOR OPERATION EPIC FURY

IN IRAN

SOMEWHERE IN NIGERIA



INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY 2026: 8 FEMALE CHEFS WHO ARE CHANGING THE CULINARY WORLD

ESTHER EMOEKPERE



Here are 8 female chefs who are changing the culinary world.

Anne-Sophie Pic (France)

Anne-Sophie Pic grew up around one of France's most celebrated restaurant kitchens. Her father and grandfather had both held three Michelin stars at Maison Pic in Valence, and the family name carried enormous weight in French gastronomy. When her father died before he could properly train her, Pic found herself running the kitchen largely on her own, without formal culinary school or a clear mentor. The restaurant lost its third star in 1995. She spent years working to earn it back. She did, in 2007 — and in doing so became the first French woman to regain three Michelin stars in decades, the fourth female chef to win three Michelin stars, and was named the Best Female Chef by The World's 50 Best Restaurants in 2011.

She now holds eleven stars across her various restaurants. Her cooking is precise and refined but draws openly on memory and personal history, and she has spoken about the importance of evolving recipes rather than simply preserving them

Ask anyone who has ever eaten a great meal cooked by their mother, their grandmother, or the woman who ran the local kitchen they grew up going to, and they will tell you that women can cook. The world has always known this. And yet, for most of culinary history, the professional kitchen operated as though it did not.

Awards, accolades, Michelin stars, head chef positions — these went almost entirely to men. The gap between who cooked and who got credited for it was never about talent. It was about access. Even today, just six per cent of Michelin-starred restaurants are female-led. That number tells you everything about how far the industry still has to go.

That has been changing, slowly and then unmistakably, driven by a generation of women who refused to accept it. This International Women's Day, we are celebrating some of the chefs at the forefront of that shift. Women who have earned Michelin stars, broken records, and built restaurants that are counted among the best in the world. Women who have done it on their own terms, in their own kitchens, with their own food.



Nadia Santini (Italy)

Nadia Santini did not grow up dreaming of becoming a chef. She studied linguistics and married into the family behind Ristorante Dal Pescatore in Canneto sull'Oglio, a remote village in Lombardy. She gradually took over the kitchen and, in time, made it one of the most respected restaurants in Italy. In 1996, she received three Michelin stars, becoming the first woman in Italy to do so, and in 2013 she was named World's Best Female Chef by The World's 50 Best Restaurants. Her cooking is rooted in the traditions of the Po Valley — fresh pasta, seasonal vegetables, slow-cooked meats — but executed with a lightness and precision that has attracted diners from around the world. She has spoken about wanting her success to signal to other women that the top of the profession is genuinely open to them.



Elena Arzak (Spain)

Elena Arzak represents the fourth generation of her family at Arzak, the San Sebastián restaurant that her great-grandparents opened as a wine bar in 1897. She spent years training in kitchens across Europe and Japan before returning to work alongside her father, Juan Mari Arzak, who is widely credited with helping to define modern Basque cuisine. The restaurant holds three Michelin stars and has been ranked among the best in the world. She was also named best Female Chef in the World in 2012. Elena is now one of the leading figures in Basque gastronomy in her own right. Her cooking balances deep respect for the region's culinary traditions with a consistent drive to experiment with new techniques and presentations.



Adejoke Bakare (UK)

Adejoke Bakare did not follow a conventional path into professional cooking. She is largely self-taught, and her big break came in 2019 when she won the Brixton Kitchen competition, which awarded her a three-month restaurant residency in Brixton Village. From there, her reputation grew steadily. Chishuru, her West African restaurant, was named Time Out's Best London Restaurant in 2022, the same year she appeared on the list of 100 Most Influential Women in Hospitality. Then, in 2024, she was awarded a Michelin star, becoming not only the first Black woman in the United Kingdom to receive one, but only the second Black woman in the world to do so. Later that year, she was named Chef of the Year at the National Restaurant Awards. Her cooking is rooted in the flavours of West Africa, and she has been open about her desire to bring that cuisine the serious culinary recognition it has long deserved.



Dominique Crenn (USA)

Dominique Crenn grew up in Brittany and moved to San Francisco in her twenties without formal culinary training, finding work in restaurant kitchens and learning on the job. She spent time cooking in Indonesia and worked her way through various senior kitchen roles in the United States before opening Atelier Crenn in 2011. In 2018, she became the only female chef in the United States to attain three Michelin stars. The restaurant is known for a style of cooking she describes as poetic culinaria — menus that tell a story and treat each dish as an idea rather than simply a plate of food. She was awarded the Best Female Chef Award in 2016 by The World's 50 Best Restaurants and in 2018, she was awarded the James Beard Foundation Award of Best Chef: West.



Clare Smyth (UK)

Clare Smyth grew up in rural Northern Ireland and left school at sixteen to begin working in kitchens. She eventually trained under Gordon Ramsay at Restaurant Gordon Ramsay in London, where she became head chef and helped the restaurant maintain its three Michelin stars. She was the first woman to hold that position there, winning the Chef of the Year award in 2013, and achieved a perfect score in the 2015 edition of the Good Food Guide. She opened Core by Clare Smyth in Notting Hill in 2017, with a menu built around British produce and a philosophy that treats the vegetable as the centrepiece of the plate as often as the protein. The restaurant has three Michelin stars, making her the first ever female chef and second overall to gain three Michelin Stars and become a Three-Hatted Chef.

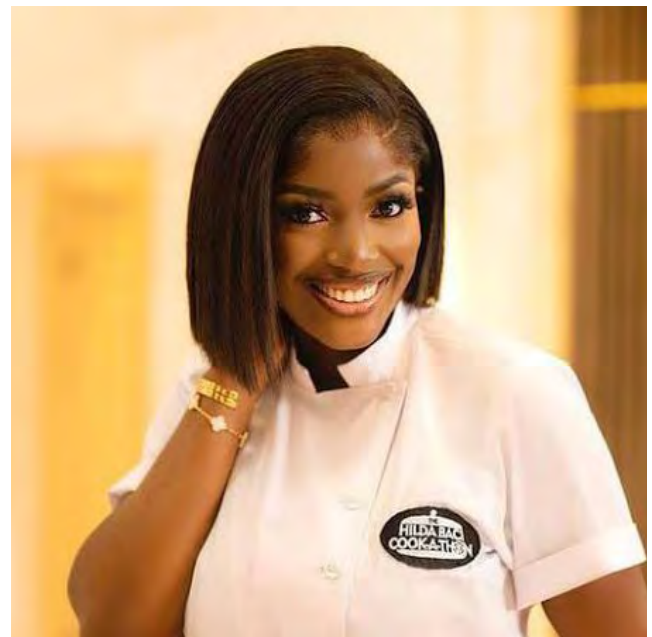


Jay Fai (Thailand)

Duangporn Songvisava, known as Jay Fai, has been cooking on the streets of Bangkok's Samran Rat neighbourhood since the 1980s. She learned to cook from her father and has run her own stall for decades, working alone over open charcoal flames and wearing ski goggles to protect her eyes from the heat — a look that has become her trademark. In 2018, she was awarded a Michelin star, one of the more unexpected announcements in the guide's history given the setting and a recipient of Asia's 50 Best Restaurants Icon Award in 2021. Her crab omelette and drunken noodles are among the most sought-after dishes in the city. She continues to cook every service herself.

Hilda Baci (Nigeria)

Hilda Baci, born Hilda Effiong Basse, is a chef, restaurateur and entrepreneur based in Lagos, where she founded and runs My Food by Hilda. She is one of Nigeria's most recognisable culinary figures, though the moment that brought her to global attention came in May 2023, when she cooked for 93 hours and 11 minutes in a bid to break the Guinness World Record for the longest individual cooking marathon. The attempt drew massive crowds in Lagos and was followed closely across social media worldwide. In September 2025, at the Gino World Jollof Festival in Lagos, she prepared a pot of Nigerian-style jollof rice weighing 8,780 kilograms, simultaneously earning Guinness World Records for the largest serving of jollof rice and the largest serving of any rice dish. She is now a three-time Guinness World Record holder. Beyond the records, what has been notable about Baci's rise is what it represented for Nigerian cuisine. Each achievement brought a wave of international coverage and, with it, fresh curiosity about the food culture she was showcasing.





**WHEN A WOMAN UNDERSTANDS
HER STRENGTHS, SHE STOPS
SHRINKING TO FIT INTO SPACES
- Yetunde Ajibade**



Lawyer, educator, consultant and Philanthropist; Yetunde Ajibade wears many hats, but they all fit a single, powerful mission: Empowerment. Whether she is steering Ace-Michaels Int. Services Ltd. or placing graduates into dream roles through GETWORK NIGERIA, she is a woman who understands that the “hustle” is nothing without heart.

Having spent over a decade turning “unemployable” narratives into success stories, Ajibade is now turning her attention to the women sitting at the world’s highest tables. Sitting down with IFEOMA OKEKE-KORIEOCHA, she speaks on this year’s International Women’s Day theme: “Give to Gain” by delivering a masterclass on executive presence, the danger of “quiet hard work,” and why “giving” your expertise away is the fastest way to “gain” a seat at the head of the table.

You often speak about empowerment. In your experience, how does a woman “give” herself the gift of self-awareness to “gain” authentic confidence in high-stakes environments like Oil & Gas or Banking?

I was invited to speak about empowerment at a Corporate IWD event yesterday and I was asked this question about confidence. I always say it is not something that is handed to you, it is something you consciously give yourself.

And the first and most powerful gift a woman can give herself is self awareness.

In high stakes environments like Oil & Gas or Banking sectors dominated by precision, performance metrics, risk management, and like we know historically male leadership, confidence cannot be cosmetic. It must be rooted. And that rooting begins with clarity.

Self awareness means understanding three things Who you are. What you bring. And how you are perceived.

When it comes to emotional intelligence which is one of my favorite topics to teach as well as being a student of this myself, self-awareness is the strongest predictor of leadership effectiveness. It is not technical expertise alone that elevates women in executive rooms; it is the ability to regulate emotion under pressure, read the room, and respond strategically.

When a woman truly understands her strengths whether analytical thinking, stakeholder management, negotiation, or relationship building she stops shrinking to fit into spaces. Instead, she expands with intention.

In sectors you have mentioned performance culture is intense. Targets are aggressive. Boardrooms are decisive. In such spaces, women who lack internal clarity often overcompensate either by overworking to prove themselves or by staying silent to avoid scrutiny.

But when self awareness is present, a woman understands her value proposition. She knows, “I am not here by accident. I earned this seat.” That internal affirmation changes posture, tone, and negotiation power.

Confidence is not loud, it is deeply anchored in competence and clarity. Look at a woman like Ngozi Okonjo Iweala, She knows her intellectual depth, her economic expertise, and her strategic influence. That is authentic confidence not performance confidence.

So how does a woman give herself this gift? She reflects intentionally. She audits her patterns. Where do I hesitate? What triggers my insecurity? What environments activate my brilliance?

Also seek structured feedback. Not gossip. Not assumptions. But measurable input. This is why 360 degree reviews in global corporations are so powerful.

she aligns her identity with purpose. You will never really have a conversation with me without my mention of “PURPOSE”. It may sound cliché but when your work connects to something bigger than approval, talk about impact, legacy, contribution then fear reduces.

Authentic confidence is the by product of self knowledge plus competence plus alignment.

Empowerment, is not noise. It is knowing yourself so well that even in a room where you are the only woman at the table, you are not intimidated you are informed.

And that is the kind of confidence that does not shake under pressure.

Many women face the “silent ceiling” of internal doubt. What is one internal barrier you had to “give up” or dismantle to gain the professional freedom you enjoy today?

The “silent ceiling” in my opinion is more dangerous than the glass ceiling.

The glass ceiling is external policies, biases, structures. But the silent ceiling? That one lives inside you.

For me, the internal barrier I had to dismantle was the need to be fully ready before I allowed myself to rise.

I used to believe that I needed one more certification, one more validation, one more endorsement before I could confidently step into bigger rooms. Even with degrees, experience, results there was still that whisper: “Are you truly ready?”

Women often underestimate their readiness while men apply for roles when they meet only a portion of the criteria. That difference is not competence. It is conditioning.

That silent voice is also closely tied to another topic I love to discuss in my women leadership classes, what Pauline Clance and Suzanne Imes identified as Impostor Phenomenon, the persistent belief that your success is accidental or undeserved.

The focus should be excellence. “I give the best to be my best.” When excellence becomes normal, women deal with that internal doubt without even thinking about it.

The barrier I had to give up was perfectionism disguised as humility.

I had to understand that waiting to feel completely confident before acting was a trap. Confidence does not precede action, it follows action.

I also had to dismantle the belief that visibility is arrogance. Many women are culturally conditioned especially in African contexts where we are from to equate modesty with silence. But I realized that shrinking does not serve impact. If your expertise can solve problems, silence is not humility, it is limitation.

I learned from first understanding that I am created for dominance as a woman of faith. I do not diminish my voice in conversations. I speak with clarity and conviction not because I am flawless, but because I understand the weight of my contribution.



Professional freedom came when I stopped asking, “Am I allowed?” and started asking, “How can I serve at a higher level?”

Giving up internal doubt did not mean the voice disappeared. It meant I stopped negotiating with it. Today, when I get that feeling of doubt, I respond with evidence, results delivered, lives impacted, rooms influenced. Evidence silences insecurity. So the internal barrier I dismantled was the need for external permission.

The moment I gave that up, I gained freedom, freedom to speak boldly, to pitch audacious ideas, to lead without apology, and to occupy space without shrinking. And I truly believe that when women dismantle that internal ceiling, external ceilings begin to crack.

As a Montessori founder, you understand not harsh judgment foundational growth. How can women re-parent their own inner critic to build a confidence that isn't dependent on external validation?

I deeply believe that everything goes back to foundation. This is why I took my time to study Early Childhood Education adopting the Montessori method for my schools.

Maria Montessori taught that the child is not empty, the child is absorbing. The environment shapes belief before language even forms. And many of the limiting voices we carry today were planted very early through culture, comparison, correction, or conditional praise.

So when we speak about “re-parenting” the inner critic, we are really speaking about consciously rebuilding internal foundations.

The inner critic is often a borrowed voice. It may sound like society saying, “Don't be too ambitious.” It may sound like culture saying, “Don't be too visible.” It may even sound like past authority figures who rewarded performance but not identity.

To re-parent that voice, a woman must first recognize it is not her true voice.

In Montessori classrooms, we prepare the environment so that the child develops independence, not dependence on constant approval.

The same principle applies to adult confidence. If your confidence is built only on applause, titles, or promotions, it becomes fragile. The moment validation withdraws, your identity shakes.

There is something I read that Brené Brown wrote about true belonging not requiring you to change who you are; but to accept who you are.

So as a woman to re-parent yourself you shift from criticism to coaching. Instead of “You are not good enough,” reframe to “What skill needs strengthening?” That is how a healthy parent corrects not with shame, but with guidance.

It is important to separate mistake from identity. In early childhood education, we correct the action, not the child. We do not label a child “bad”; we say, “That choice needs adjustment.” Women must apply the same grace internally. A failed presentation does not mean “I am incompetent.” It means, “That strategy needs refinement.” Build an internal reward system, celebrate effort, growth, discipline not just outcomes. Foundationally, confidence is built the same way a child learns to walk through supported attempts, not harsh judgment, the child could fall but will rise again.

Executive presence is often seen as an “extra.” How do you teach women to use their visual and verbal language to gain command of a room without losing their unique feminine identity?

Executive presence is not an accessory. It is strategy. Too often, women are told that presence is about fashion, posture, or voice projection. Nooooo, there's more to it. Executive presence is really about alignment between who you are, what you know, and how you communicate it.

And this is the key: command does not require masculinity. It requires clarity. When I teach women about executive presence, I focus on three dimensions: visual language, verbal language, and energetic language.

For visual language.

Before you speak, you have already communicated, non-verbal communication is perception. How you show up visually affects how your message is received. This does not mean suppressing femininity. It means intentionality. Structure in tailoring. Clean lines. Grooming that signals precision. Your appearance should say: “I respect this room. And I respect myself”

Then verbal language.

Many women soften their authority unconsciously. What I teach is assertive clarity without aggression.

You can be firm, data driven, emotionally intelligent and unmistakably feminine. You don't need to raise or lower her voice to be taken seriously; strengthen your argument. With energetic language this is the one most people ignore. Energy is the emotional tone you bring into a room. Anxiety contracts energy. Clarity expands it. When a woman is internally settled, she does not fidget, over explain, or rush. She pauses. And pause is power, I had to learn this myself.

Executive presence is not about becoming louder. It is about becoming grounded.

And here is where feminine identity matters deeply.

Feminine leadership should bring relational intelligence, empathy, collaboration. In fact, emotional intelligence is now seen as a core executive competency.

So I tell women: Do not trade warmth for authority. Integrate them.

You can be polished and compassionate. Decisive and graceful. Structured and empathetic.

The goal is not to imitate a male leadership template. The goal is to refine your own.

Because when visual precision, verbal clarity, and internal alignment come together, a woman does not just enter a room she anchors it, I tell you, that is executive presence.

The theme “Give to Gain” suggests that by sharing our expertise, we gain visibility. How can women move away from “quiet hard work” and toward a model of being seen and heard strategically?

Quiet hard work” is admirable but it is often invisible. Many women were raised to believe that excellence will automatically be noticed. But visibility is not accidental. It is strategic.

The principle of “Give to Gain” means contribution must be intentional and positioned. Women must shift from private excellence to public value. That means speaking up in meetings, sharing insights in industry forums, publishing thought leadership internally or externally, and documenting results. If you led a successful project, articulate the impact. Visibility grows when value is translated into language.

Also, move from execution to influence. career advancement is more dependent on strategic networks and visibility than on competence alone. Build alliances, volunteer for projects, and contribute ideas beyond your job description, this positions you as a leader, not just a performer.

Another thing is to detach visibility from arrogance. Many women equate self promotion with pride. But strategic visibility is not self glorification it is clarity about contribution. You can say: “I led this initiative, and it increased revenue by this percentage. That is not bragging. That is reporting impact.

“Give to Gain” means: share your expertise generously, articulate your results clearly, and participate visibly in rooms where decisions are made.

Hard work builds competence but visibility builds opportunity.

And when women combine both, they do not just work in the system, they shape it.

In your management consulting work, what is the one “presence” mistake you see brilliant women make that costs them organizational impact?

The most costly “presence” mistake I see brilliant women make is over explaining, over explaining dilutes authority. This is from my experience.

Sometimes we feel the need to justify every angle of our thinking. We anticipate objections before they are raised. At some point I would be quiet on meetings over analyzing my thoughts and ideas. Sitting in a meeting of about 15 to 20 men and I am one of 2 or 3 women. That’s the internal ceiling I mentioned earlier. And what happens? The message I am trying to pass on gets buried.

Presence is not about how much you say. It is about how clearly you land your point. When a woman speaks with clarity she commands attention without raising her voice. And when she stops over explaining, she stops shrinking. Organizational impact is not just about intelligence. It is about influence. And influence requires disciplined communication. That in my opinion is presence and that shift changes everything.

There is often a narrative of competition among women in leadership. How do we shift the “Queen Bee” syndrome into a “Giving” culture where one woman’s gain is a win for the entire collective?

Leadership in Corporate environments and business in general is still dominated by men, although we are seeing more women at the top more than ever before. Back then there were very few seats available to women. So unconsciously, some women began to protect their access rather than multiply it. When representation is rare, competition intensifies.

Some women feel they must distance themselves from other women to survive in male dominated systems. So the solution is not for us to start accusing one another. We should fix this together.

Mentorship for younger professionals and specifically sponsorship for other women not just mentorship. Mentorship advises. Sponsorship advocates. In most institutions, careers accelerate when someone in power says your name in rooms you are not yet in.

A “Giving” culture means deliberately recommending, endorsing, and positioning other women for opportunities.

Then the issue of comparison. Comparison fuels competition. But when a woman has come to a place of clarity about who she is another woman’s promotion does not diminish her value. It expands what is possible.



As we celebrate another IWD , we should celebrate ourselves visibly.
When a woman publicly acknowledges another's achievements, collaborate and share platforms, we change this narrative.

The shift from "Queen Bee" to collective elevation happens when we move from survival mindset to legacy mindset. If I am clear about my value, I am not threatened by yours. And when one woman rises and intentionally extends her hand backward, she does not lose power she multiplies it. That is what I believe "Give to Gain" should look like.

How does an organization "gain" when it "gives" women the space to lead? Can you share a moment where your intervention as a consultant fundamentally shifted a company's culture?

When an organization gives women the space to lead, it does not lose control , it gains capacity. Diversity at leadership level is not a social gesture; it is strategy. We are vision carriers, we nurture till maturity.

Inclusive leadership leads to better outcomes. We've heard the saying that men are logical, women emotional, this is not true in all cases but a balance wouldn't be a bad idea.

I have several examples, let me give you one. I once worked with an organization where the executive team was technically strong but culturally imbalanced. The women in middle management were highly competent, yet they were rarely invited into strategic conversations.

Through the intervention of my team, we introduced three shifts. We started by implementing cross functional strategic forums where emerging female leaders presented directly to senior executives.

Then we conducted executive presence and influence training ; not to "fix" the women, but to refine visibility and voice.

We also worked with the male executives to address unconscious bias in performance evaluation and their meeting dynamics.

Within a year, something powerful happened. Innovation across the organization improved because ideas were no longer filtered through one leadership lens.

What fundamentally shifted was not just representation, it was culture. The organization moved from “allowing women to participate” to “expecting women to shape outcomes.”

That is the gain. When women are given space, organizations gain depth, sustainability and emotional intelligence in leadership, and broader strategic thinking. Giving women leadership space is not charity. It is intelligent governance.

With GETWORK NIGERIA, you’ve given young graduates a lifeline. What have you personally “gained” from a decade of philanthropy that your legal or marketing degrees couldn’t teach you?

My legal training taught me structure. My marketing degree taught me strategy.

But GETWORK NIGERIA taught me humanity and patience. When we started GETWORK NIGERIA, the goal was simple, bridge the gap between academic qualification and workplace readiness for young graduates especially after working closely with unemployed and underemployed youth over the years in Nigeria and across Africa.

Degrees do not teach you what hopelessness looks like in the eyes of a first class graduate who has faced five years of rejection. They do not teach you how unemployment erodes confidence, identity, and ambition. Through this journey, I gained insights that no formal education could have given me.

Watching a young graduate move from uncertainty to confidence, from job seeker to value creator, reshaped my understanding of growth. Transformation is gradual. It is not instant. It also strengthened my perspective on purpose. Service and social impact gives you the power to transform.

And in giving mentorship, structure, access and confidence, I gained clarity about my own calling. The Co- Founder Bunmi Omeke and I just replicated our relationship on a larger scale with Nigerian graduates .

I met Bunmi when she was a young lawyer but she had this drive and spark that made me see myself in her, she watched me succeed, she watched me fail at other times . Today she is a force transforming any room she walks into and remains one of my most important support systems and she sees me as a mentor.

I have learned the true meaning of loyalty with her. Titles and accolades mean little if they do not translate into tangible impact.

Working with young people forced me to simplify complex ideas, to listen more deeply, and to innovate with limited resources.

Giving does not reduce you it refines you. Give something; your time, money, mentorship. I don’t expect any young person around me to make the same mistakes I made, I walked so you can fly.

For me, it is a privilege watching lives change and that is a return no degree or material things can offer.

As we celebrate “Give to Gain,” what is your challenge to the woman who has reached the top but hasn’t yet reached back to pull another up?

The question I would ask is “What does success mean to you? Achievement or Legacy? Reaching the top in any sector whether in finance, energy, law, consulting or business requires sacrifice, resilience, and competence. No woman arrives there accidentally. For me, it’s not just about how high I have risen but how wide my impact is.

Sponsor talent. Sponsorship is not charity; it is strategy. It strengthens succession plans and builds continuity. If you are the only woman in the room, ask yourself why. Are you the problem or the system? These are questions we should be asking ourselves.

Is it because there are no other capable women? Or because you have not intentionally created access?

If you ask me how you can create access, I can tell you. • Recommend a younger woman • Sponsor another woman • Share lessons you learned the hard way, never paint a perfect picture that doesn’t exist, encourage others with your story on resilience and discipline • Open strategic doors for others

Let’s take it out even to everyday life. Support the market women, support our First Ladies, the First Lady, support women who are audacious enough to go into politics or decide to join the military. We go through the same challenges as mothers, wives, daughters, women in business and careers. Be a shoulder to lean on.

It is also important that I state that we should support the men and collaborate with them. At the end of the day, different parts make the whole.

When women compete, one wins. When women collaborate, systems change.

“Give to Gain” means understanding that your elevation was never meant to be a solo victory. It was meant to be a platform.

Do not just break ceilings. Build ladders. Because the true measure of leadership is not the height you attain it is the leaders who rise because you decided to extend your hand.

STRANGERS LIKE FRIENDS (2)

UDY OSARO-EDOBOR

Revenge did not come to me immediately.

At first, I was really broken. I moved through my days like a shadow of myself. I went to work, smiled when necessary and avoided looking at Ann for too long. I needed to think. I needed a plan.

Then one afternoon, I overheard something that changed everything.

Ann was on a call in the restroom. She did not know I was in one of the stalls. Her voice was low but sharp with bitterness.

“She thinks she’s better than everyone because of that promotion,” she said. “Let her enjoy it. She doesn’t even know Kelvin was part of the plan.”

My hands went cold.

Part of the plan.

I did not step out. I stayed still and listened.

“She needed to be humbled,” Ann continued. “Three years is enough. He has done his part.”

My heart pounded so loudly I thought she would hear it through the door.

So Kelvin never loved me. Our meeting was not coincidence. It was not fate.

It was Ann’s revenge.

Hmmm, about the promotion.

Ann had wanted that position desperately. We had both applied but I got it. She congratulated me with a smile but it all made sense now. She was just a backstabbing and hateful person.

The sudden closeness. The burial invitation... It was never friendship.

Then meeting Kelvin.... It was just strategy.

Kelvin was her cousin. The “perfect gentleman” assigned to me like a project. His job was simple, make me fall in love, use me and discard me.

Chai!! The conniving bastard.

I did not cry that night. Something inside me hardened. If they wanted a game, I was going to give them one. I was going to start with Ann. At work, I became calm. Polite. Professional. I apologized to her for being distant. I told her I was going through personal issues.. “Recalibration” I called it.

She relaxed around me again. She had no idea what I was cooking.

What Ann did not know was that I had access to more than she realized.

As her supervisor, certain reports passed through my desk. Expense claims. Vendor approvals.

Authorization signatures. I began to pay attention.

Ann had been careless. There were small discrepancies first. Inflated logistics figures.

Questionable vendor references. Nothing too obvious until you looked closely. And I was looking closely.

For weeks, I gathered evidence quietly.

Screenshots, email trails and approval stamps.

I did not create anything false. I simply followed the trail she had left behind in her desperation to “catch up” after losing the promotion.

When I had enough, I forwarded the complete file anonymously to the internal audit department and copied senior management.

The investigation moved fast.

Ann was invited to a disciplinary panel. She denied everything at first. But documents do not lie. Her signatures were there. The transfers were there.

The inflated figures were undeniable.

The day she was escorted out of the office,

people watched, colleagues stood at a distance whispering. Her termination letter was not quiet. It

was disgraceful.

She looked at me as she was leaving. There was confusion in her eyes. Maybe she wondered how everything collapsed so quickly. She wouldn’t think I had a hand in this. But soon she will know who and what hit her. She underestimated me.

Kelvin was next.

I did not confront him immediately. Instead, I became softer. I became warmer. I told him I had been stressed because of work but that I missed us. He responded exactly as I expected. He sounded relieved. He was affectionate.

Then I introduced the opportunity.

It was an investment deal through a trusted contact. High returns but it had limited slots. I told him I was putting my own money into it but needed additional capital to secure a larger stake. I spoke carefully and confidently. I had studied enough to sound convincing.

Kelvin liked profit.

He asked questions and I answered calmly with facts. I showed him fabricated projections built from publicly available templates, nothing traceable, nothing illegal on my end. Just enough to bait him.

Within weeks, he transferred a large sum into my account. I confirmed receipt. And then I disappeared. I left the country briefly for a well deserved vacation. Seychelles had been whispering my name and I had to answer. I left. No arguments. No dramatic confrontation. Just me and my silent but dangerous moves. Kelvin called, he texted, he panicked and I responded once.

“Business requires trust Kelvin and believe me, I learned from the best.”
Then I blocked him.

Then I had one more move.

I gathered everything... screenshots of our chats, call logs, hotel receipts, pictures, voice notes where he called me his future wife. I compiled timelines that overlapped perfectly with his family photos abroad. Then I sent a private message to his wife.

Not emotional. Not dramatic. Just precise and straight to the point.

I introduced myself. I attached evidence. I laid out dates, conversations and proof of financial transfers.

Then I wrote, “I did not know he was married. What you choose to do with this truth is your decision.”

She read it but she did not respond. Kelvin’s silence afterward told me everything I needed to know. He was dealing with the consequences of his irresponsible actions.

I did not do it because I was bitter.

I did it because they thought I was a fool and I was weak. They thought humiliation would break me. They thought betrayal would silence me. They thought I would cry and disappear. Instead, I recalculated and hit them when they least expected.

Ann lost the job she schemed for. Kelvin lost the money he thought he was clever enough to risk. And his wife gained the truth he never intended to give her.

They tried to reduce me to a lesson. But in the end, I became the disaster they never saw coming.

They will definitely remember my name for a long time to come...



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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**BEAUTY IS
NOT VANITY,
IT IS AGENCY:
CHIDINMA AKPA
REDEFINES
AESTHETIC
MEDICINE IN
AFRICA**

ROYAL IBEH





Chidinma Akpa, widely known as ‘Dr. Dinma,’ is a medical doctor, cosmetic surgeon, entrepreneur and founder of CGE Healthcare, a growing platform in Africa’s aesthetic medicine space. Through her subsidiaries, CGE Aesthetics and CurvyGirl Essentials, she has built an integrated ecosystem around plastic surgery, patient education, recovery support and post-operative care.

A physician member of the American Academy of Cosmetic Surgery with international training in surgical post-operative care and health management, Akpa has become a prominent voice in conversations around beauty, identity and ethical aesthetics. In this BusinessDay interview, she speaks on the misconceptions surrounding cosmetic surgery in Nigeria, the business philosophy behind CGE Healthcare, and why she believes beauty, leadership and faith can coexist.

You describe beauty as an act of self-expression and self-worth. In a society where cosmetic surgery is often misunderstood, what is the biggest misconception Nigerians still have about aesthetic medicine?

The biggest misconception is that aesthetic medicine is rooted in vanity rather than autonomy. Many still see cosmetic procedures as an act of insecurity or moral compromise. In reality, for many women, it is an informed, deeply personal decision about alignment — aligning how they feel internally with how they present externally.

Another misconception is that cosmetic surgery is reckless or unsafe. Ethical aesthetic medicine is built on anatomy, patient selection, psychological screening, and global safety protocols. When practiced responsibly, it is not indulgence, it is precision medicine applied to appearance.

Beauty, when chosen consciously, is not weakness. It is agency.

You have built CGE Healthcare into a leading platform for plastic surgery and aftercare in Africa. What gap did you see in the industry that others ignored and how did you turn it into a business opportunity?

When I entered the industry, I noticed that the conversation stopped at surgery. There was little emphasis on structured recovery, medical-grade aftercare, emotional support, and continuity of care.

Patients were undergoing life-changing procedures but navigating recovery alone.

Through CGE Healthcare, we built an integrated model — surgery, supervised recovery, medical aftercare, and post-operative support products under CurvyGirl Essentials. We professionalized recovery.

The gap was not just medical — it was emotional and systemic. By solving it, we created a full-circle ecosystem rather than a one-time transaction.

As a physician member of the American Academy of Cosmetic Surgery, how do you balance global best practices with the unique cultural expectations of African women?

My affiliation with the American Academy of Cosmetic Surgery gives me access to evolving global standards in safety, technique, and ethics. However, beauty is cultural.



African women often desire proportion, softness, and femininity that reflects our heritage — not imported templates. My approach is to apply global surgical excellence while respecting local identity. We do not create clones; we refine individuality.

Global standards guide safety. Culture guides aesthetics.

You speak often about ‘doing business God’s way.’ In a competitive and sometimes ethically grey beauty industry, what does that look like in practical terms?

Doing business God’s way means:

- Deferring treatment to patients who are not psychologically ready.
- Refusing unsafe volume-based practice.
- Prioritizing informed consent over profit.
- Paying staff fairly and building people, not just revenue.
- Praying before procedures and acknowledging that skill is stewardship.

In a profit-driven industry, restraint is radical. But integrity compounds faster than shortcuts.

You bridge medicine, entrepreneurship and mentorship. Looking back, what was the toughest decision that shaped both your career and your personal identity?

The toughest decision was choosing long-term credibility over short-term popularity.

There were moments where faster growth would have meant compromising on standards, partnerships, or positioning. I chose slower expansion with structure. That decision forced me to mature — not just as a surgeon, but as a woman who leads.

Identity is formed in the decisions no one applauds.

As we mark International Women’s Day, what do you think is the most urgent mindset shift African women need to make about leadership, wealth and self-worth?

African women must stop shrinking competence to appear agreeable.

Leadership is not arrogance. Wealth is not masculinity. Ambition is not rebellion.

We must normalize women being financially powerful, intellectually authoritative, spiritually grounded, and beautifully feminine at the same time. Those identities are not in conflict.

Many women struggle with confidence, whether in their careers, businesses or even their bodies. From your experience as a surgeon and mentor, what does true self-love look like beyond hashtags and social media affirmations?

True self-love is discipline.

It is going to therapy.

It is investing in education.

It is setting boundaries.

It is declining relationships that diminish you.

It is caring for your body whether that means gym, skincare, surgery, or simply rest.

Self-love is not loud. It is consistent.

If you could leave Nigerian women with one bold statement this Women’s Day, one sentence that challenges and empowers them, what would it be?

You are allowed to be brilliant, beautiful, wealthy, spiritually grounded, and unapologetically visible — all at once.

CGE Healthcare has grown into a recognised platform for plastic surgery, aftercare and recovery support in Africa. What exactly sets your model apart from the traditional cosmetic surgery experience patients are used to?

Traditional models focus on the operating theatre. Our model focuses on the human being.

At CGE Healthcare, we integrate:

- Pre-surgical evaluation and psychological readiness
- Structured recovery planning
- Dedicated aftercare supervision
- Education on long-term body maintenance

We treat cosmetic surgery as a continuum, not an event.

Question: From CGE Aesthetics to CurvyGirl Essentials, you've built a full ecosystem around beauty and post-operative care. For someone considering cosmetic enhancement for the first time, what can they expect from your platform that they may not find elsewhere?

They can expect honesty.

If they are not ready, we will say so.

They can expect structure — clear protocols, recovery mapping, and access to medical-grade products under CurvyGirl Essentials designed specifically for post-operative support.

Most importantly, they can expect dignity. We do not shame women for wanting enhancement, and we do not pressure them into it either.

Over the next five to ten years, what is your long-term vision for CGE Healthcare and the aesthetics industry in Africa and what kind of legacy do you hope to leave, not just as a cosmetic surgeon, but as a woman shaping how beauty, confidence and leadership are defined on the continent?

My long-term vision is for CGE Healthcare to become a reference institution — not just for surgery, but for training, research, ethical frameworks, and structured aftercare across Africa.

I want Africa to export excellence in aesthetic medicine, not import it.

My legacy will not simply be surgical results. It will be this: that a woman can build wealth, uphold faith, maintain femininity, lead with authority, and still create safe spaces for other women to rise.

Beauty is powerful. But integrity is transformative.



5 INSTAGRAMMABLE RESTAURANTS ON LAGOS ISLAND TO VISIT THIS WEEKEND

ESTHER EMOEKPERE



Be honest — half the reason you pick a restaurant is for the pictures. There is nothing wrong with that. Lagos Island has a handful of spots that truly get it, places where the interiors are stunning, the lighting is doing exactly what it needs to do, and every corner looks like it was put together with your camera roll in mind. The food is just as good as the atmosphere, which means you really have no excuse not to go.

Here are five restaurants on Lagos Island that give you every reason to dress up and show up.

Euphoria by Sujimoto — Ikoyi

Located on MacDonald Road in Old Ikoyi, Euphoria is a poolside fine dining restaurant that blends contemporary elegance with an atmosphere designed for memorable moments. With soaring ceilings, exquisite details, and captivating lighting, the space has been built with the kind of intentionality that makes every corner feel like it was designed to be admired. The menu leans into African and Mediterranean influences — think seafood paella, grilled lamb chops, and creative cocktails. The restaurant is open Tuesday to Friday from 6:00 PM to 10:00 PM for Happy Hour for corporate gatherings and Tuesday to Sunday from 7:00 PM to 12:00 AM for dinner and drinks.



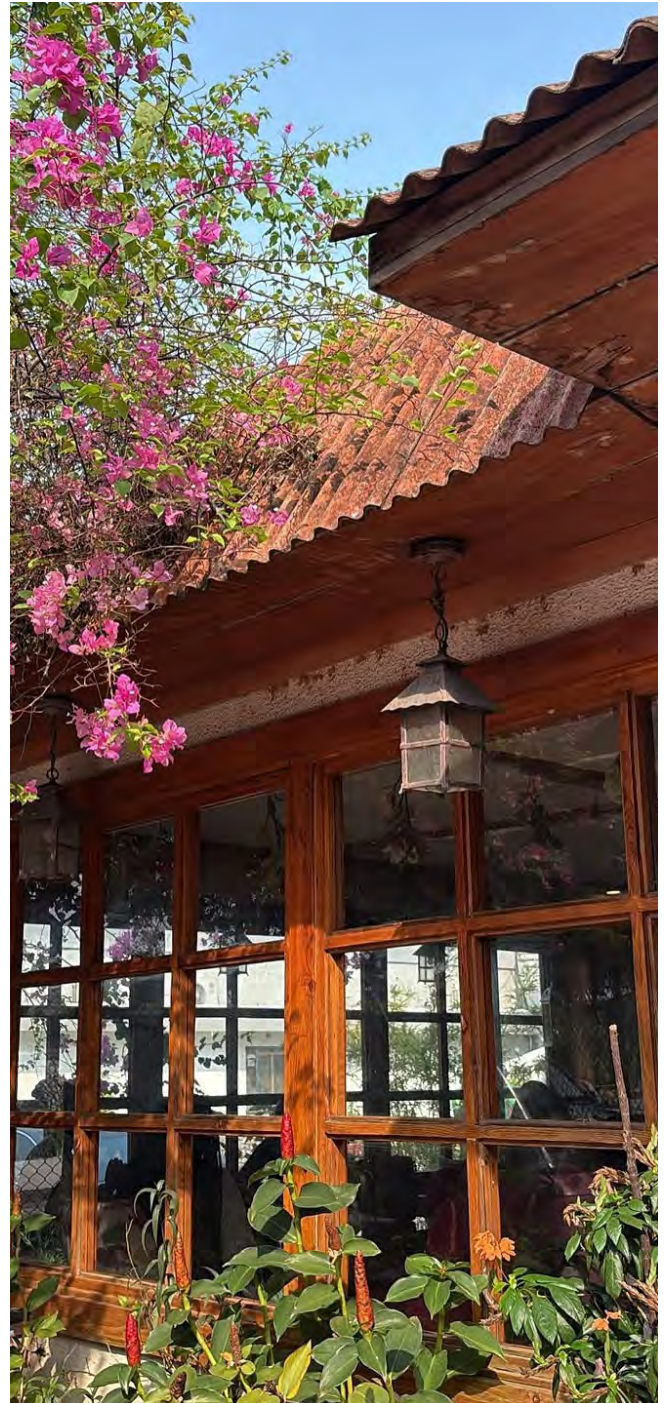
VICI — Victoria Island

VICI is a sleek, modern Itameshi cuisine and chophouse spot on Anifowoshe Street, Victoria Island, built on the concept of using only the finest ingredients and refined techniques. Itameshi is the fusion of Italian and Japanese cuisine, and VICI executes it well — the burrata, duck ravioli and sushi pizza have all picked up strong reviews. The aesthetic is equally refined, with mood lighting and an open terrace that brings a serene touch to the dining experience. It has quickly become one of the most talked-about restaurants on the island. Walk-ins are welcome but reservations are highly recommended.



Marcelino's Pastry — Victoria Island

If you are looking for a daytime spot that photographs beautifully, Marcelino's is it. Tucked close to the seaside within the Lagoon Restaurant compound on Ozumba Mbadiwe, it has a distinctly pinkish Parisian vibe that makes it perfect for capturing Instagram-worthy moments. The café serves breakfast daily across British, American, French and Lebanese options, alongside freshly baked bread, pastries, cookies and strawberry shortcakes. It is quiet, charming, and genuinely pretty — the kind of place you stumble upon and immediately want to show everyone.



Godaif Village — Ikoyi

Godaif Village is one of those spots that is hard to put in a single category, which is part of what makes it worth visiting. Set within a pretty house and courtyard in Ikoyi, it brings together a café, bar, pizzeria and flower shop all in one space. There is a poolside bar, a garden, and a playground for children, so it works just as well for a lazy afternoon with friends as it does for a family outing. The smell of freshly brewed coffee hits you as soon as you walk in, the attention to detail throughout is consistently noted by visitors, and it photographs beautifully from almost every angle.



Terraform — Lekki

Terraform is a waterside restaurant and bar on Wole Olateju Crescent in Lekki Phase 1, featuring a waterfront view, rooftop seating, and a poolside area. The interior blends traditional and modern touches and is well ventilated, with the greenery complementing the handcrafted grey and brown furniture throughout. The menu is West African-inspired with global influences. Visitors consistently praise the cool waterside breeze, the views, and the quality of the pictures you leave with. And aside from all of that, boat rides and cruises are available directly from the restaurant's jetty.

'NIGERIA'S HOUSING CRISIS IS NOT A SHORTAGE PROBLEM, IT IS A SYSTEM PROBLEM' - Imelda on fixing the broken value chain

CHIOMA ONUH





Nigeria's housing deficit runs into millions of units, yet thousands of new homes are built every year.

The contradiction is at the heart of the country's property crisis.

According to Imelda Usoro Olaoye, founder of Thinkmint Nigeria, the real problem is not simply the shortage of houses but a system that produces homes far beyond the reach of the average Nigerian.

From slow land approvals and expensive financing to rising construction costs and weak wage growth, she says the entire housing value chain is misaligned with the realities of Nigerian incomes.

"The problem is not just one thing; it's the entire value chain," she said in an interview.

Land acquisition remains slow and bureaucratic. Title processing can take years, while developers often have to provide basic infrastructure such as roads, drainage and power themselves, pushing prices higher for buyers.

From slow land approvals and high financing costs to rising construction expenses and weak wage growth, the structure that should support home ownership has become increasingly difficult for the average Nigerian to navigate.

"The problem is not just one thing; it's the entire value chain," she said in an interview.

Land acquisition remains slow and bureaucratic. Title processing can take years. Infrastructure such as roads, drainage and reliable power is often absent in developing areas, leaving private developers to provide these essentials themselves. Those extra costs are eventually passed on to buyers.

At the same time, Nigeria continues to build homes that many people cannot realistically afford.

"We design houses aspirationally, not economically," Imelda said. "The supply we produce doesn't match the purchasing power of the average Nigerian."

Even as government officials highlight rising non-oil revenue and infrastructure investments, housing affordability remains out of reach for many salary earners.

The core reason, she said, is that incomes have not kept pace with inflation.

Construction costs have surged in recent years, driven by currency depreciation and the heavy reliance on imported materials. In some segments of

the market, building costs have doubled. Meanwhile, wages have remained largely stagnant.

The result is a widening affordability gap.

“Even if government revenue rises, the average worker has not experienced proportional income growth,” she said.

Closing that gap will require more structured instalment systems, easier mortgage access and deeper collaboration between the private sector and government.

At Thinkmint Nigeria, Imelda focuses on what she describes as low-entry housing solutions. The concept of affordability, she says, must be grounded in realistic entry points rather than abstract policy definitions.

Today, that often means properties within the N10 million to N15 million range, supported by instalment payment plans that can stretch up to 36 months.

Affordable housing, she explains, should not be mistaken for cheap housing.

“It means structured access. Low entry thresholds, flexible payment plans and transparency with no hidden agency fees,” she said.

The aim is to reduce both the financial and psychological barriers that discourage many Nigerians from attempting to buy property.

The mortgage gap

Nigeria’s mortgage penetration remains among the lowest in the world, and previous reform efforts have struggled to gain scale.

According to Imelda, the problem is that most reforms focused on institutions rather than accessibility.

Mortgage banks and intervention schemes exist, but documentation requirements remain heavy and processing timelines are slow. Many workers in the informal sector, who make up a large portion of the economy, are also excluded from traditional mortgage frameworks.

Interest rates have historically been another barrier.

“Without single-digit, long-tenor mortgage products tied to stable funding pools, scale becomes difficult,”

she said.

Although interventions such as the Mortgage Refinancing and Intervention Fund have helped, she believes the gap remains significant.

Trust also plays a role. Many Nigerians still do not fully understand how mortgage systems work or have had poor experiences with earlier housing schemes.

The push to digitise mortgage access

Through Green Mortgage, a digital mortgage facilitation platform, Imelda is trying to simplify and modernise the process.

The idea is straightforward: make mortgage access transparent, trackable and accessible online.

While regulatory resistance has not been a major challenge, she said, behavioural barriers remain.

“The biggest challenge is helping Nigerians trust digital mortgage processing,” she said. “But digitalisation is inevitable. Housing finance will move online.”

Developers under pressure

Developers across the country are also adjusting their strategies in response to inflation and rising interest rates.

Projects are increasingly being designed with smaller unit sizes, phased construction timelines and longer payment structures. Some developers are also exploring locally sourced materials to reduce exposure to foreign exchange volatility.

Margins, she said, are thinner than they were a few years ago.

“The focus has shifted from luxury finishes to functional, efficient housing,” she said.

As inflation persists, many Nigerians now view real estate primarily as an investment hedge rather than simply a place to live.

That shift has both benefits and risks.

On one hand, it brings more capital into the sector and supports project financing. On the other hand, strong speculative demand can push prices further beyond the reach of genuine home seekers.

“It strengthens capital inflow into the sector,” she said. “But if speculation dominates supply, it can price out the people who actually need homes.”

Balancing those forces will require development models and policy frameworks that support both investors and end users.

The policy changes that could unlock housing

If given a few minutes with Nigeria’s housing policymakers, Imelda says three changes could immediately improve the sector.

First is faster land titling processes that reduce approval timelines for developers.

Second is a stabilisation mechanism for mortgage interest rates to make long-term borrowing viable.

Third is tax incentives for developers who focus specifically on low-entry housing projects.

Without these structural adjustments, she believes large-scale housing expansion will remain difficult.

Imelda’s entry into the sector did not begin with development.

After studying marketing in the United Kingdom, she initially built her career as a consultant working across Nigeria and Europe. But over time, the nature of client requests began to change.

“What began as advisory quickly became solution driven,” she said.

Clients were no longer asking only for guidance. They wanted help structuring deals, facilitating financing and shaping development strategies.

“That was when I realised we weren’t just advising the market,” she said. “We were shaping it.”

One of the most difficult business decisions she has faced in recent years was turning down opportunities that promised rapid expansion but lacked sustainable structures.

Walking away from revenue, she said, can be harder than pursuing growth.

“Leadership is not just ambition. It is restraint,” she said. “Growth without structure becomes a liability.”

Navigating a male-dominated sector

Nigeria’s property sector remains heavily male dominated, and she says subtle biases still surface in professional settings.

In some meetings, she notes, technical questions are often redirected to male colleagues even when she leads the deal.

The scrutiny, she adds, is also different.

“Mistakes are remembered longer,” she said.

But consistent performance, she believes, gradually dissolves those perceptions.

“The real estate sector respects results.”

Mentoring the next generation

Through the Business Women Hub, Imelda mentors female entrepreneurs and emerging founders.

One of the key lessons she emphasises is that passion and hard work alone are not enough.

“Hard work is not a strategy,” she said.

Visibility, financial literacy, operational structure and disciplined decision-making are equally important for long-term success.

“Empowerment is not about motivation,” she said. “It is about execution and discipline.”



KELECHI ESIMOGRU: FAITH, SERVICE AND A PATH TO PUBLIC OFFICE

CHISOM MICHAEL





For Kelechi Benwosely Esimogu, service has shaped much of her life's work. Through pastoral leadership, public service and community engagement, she has built a path centred on faith, social support and grassroots involvement.

A native of Okigwe North, Esimogu has spent years working with women, young people and families through church programmes and community initiatives. These experiences now form the foundation of her decision to seek public office ahead of the 2027 general elections.

"My journey has always been about service, serving God, serving people, and standing in the gap for communities in need. Today, I am stepping forward to expand that service through responsible and accountable representation for the people of Okigwe North."

Esimogu serves as a Group Pastor at Powercity International in Port Harcourt. In that role, she leads programmes focused on spiritual mentorship, youth guidance and outreach within communities. Her work within the church often connects faith with everyday concerns facing families and young people.

Alongside her pastoral responsibilities, she works with the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC). Her experience at the commission has provided exposure to government processes related to development projects, infrastructure planning and institutional oversight.

Through her work at the NDDC, she has observed how federal programmes affect local communities and how institutions respond to development needs. The experience has shaped her understanding of governance structures and the implementation of public initiatives.

Outside formal institutions, Esimogu has also been involved in community support efforts. These include the construction of access roads in some communities, the installation of street lighting in underserved areas and empowerment programmes designed to support residents and small business owners.

Her initiatives have also included financial support, skills training and welfare assistance aimed at helping women and young people build stable livelihoods.

Esimogu is the founder of Women on Mission for Peace and Humanity, an organisation that runs programmes focused on women's empowerment, youth engagement and peace advocacy. Through outreach programmes and welfare support, the organisation works with families and community groups across different locations.

As part of its activities, the organisation provides material support, organises empowerment programmes and promotes initiatives aimed at strengthening families and encouraging social stability.

Esimogu has also declared her intention to contest the House of Representatives seat for Okigwe North Federal Constituency in the 2027 general elections.

"Leadership begins with listening. Before policies are drafted and promises are made, we must understand the lived realities of our people. This campaign will be built on conversation, collaboration, and community. Okigwe North deserves representation that is visible, accessible, and accountable. I am offering myself to serve with integrity, humility, and courage. Together, we can build a future defined by opportunity, inclusion, and progress."

She noted that her decision to run is driven by a sense of responsibility to extend her work in service to a broader platform.

BEYOND THE KITCHEN: MEET THE FEMALE VISIONARIES ENGINEERING NIGERIA'S FOOD VALUE CHAIN

CHIOMA ONUH



These women are changing the way food is grown, made, and sold in Nigeria. The movement of food from farms to factories then markets...they are shaping the food system

Every morning across Nigeria, millions of plates are filled with amala, rice, pap, vegetables, spices, and snacks. Behind many of these everyday meals are women whose work rarely makes the headlines.

A modest network of female entrepreneurs, ranging from cassava processors to fruit snack producers and food supply innovators, are contributing to Nigeria's food supply while establishing companies that improve food security, support farmers, and create jobs.

As the world marks International Women's Day, these women represent a growing force in Nigeria's food economy.

Kehinde Kamson, the woman behind Sweet Sensation

Kehinde Kamson is one of the pioneers of Nigeria's modern fast-food industry. In 1994 she launched Sweet Sensation Confectionery Limited from a backyard shed, which used to be the gateman's house, in Ilupeju, Lagos. Sweet Sensation started with modest beginnings selling simple meals and snacks including pastries, chicken, rice and ice cream, over time it grew into one of Nigeria's foremost Quick Service Restaurant brands.

31 years later, the business has since grown to become one of the most successful chain of Quick Service Restaurant businesses in Nigeria with over 25 outlets across the country, over 2,000 employees and over 60 arrays of meals that are served daily.

So YES, Kehinde Kamson is THAT woman who built a business from a small shed and held it up for 31 years while raising a family.

Her business helped redefine fast-food dining in the country, combining local dishes with international menus and creating thousands of jobs in the process.

Amoke Odukoya of Amoke Oge

Amoke Odukoya is the founder of the popular food brand Amoke Oge. She represents the rise of local food vendors into large-scale businesses. She started the amala restaurant with less than N200,000 and built it into one of the most successful traditional food businesses in Lagos.

She is referred to as The Amala Queen. Her brand operates multiple outlets and has become a major presence on food delivery platforms. In just three years, Amoke Oge completed over 500,000 food deliveries on the delivery platform Chowdeck, generating about N2.3 billion in sales.

Her restaurants serve classic Nigerian meals such as amala, ewedu and gbegiri to thousands of customers daily. The growth of Amoke Oge demonstrates how traditional "buka-style" food businesses can evolve into large urban food enterprises while still keeping local dishes at the centre.

Affiong Williams, founder of ReelFruit

Williams is building a billion-naira dried fruit business

If you walk into a supermarket in Lagos or Abuja, you are likely to see packets of dried mangoes or coconut snacks produced by ReelFruit.

She founded ReelFruit with a simple idea: Nigeria grows plenty of fruit, yet much of it spoils after harvest.

Her solution was to process the fruit into packaged snacks.

Today, ReelFruit products are sold in hundreds of retail outlets across Nigeria and exported internationally, while the company works closely with farmers to improve crop quality and reduce post-harvest losses.

By creating a reliable market for farmers' produce, the business helps turn fresh fruit into long-lasting food products while supporting rural livelihoods.

Oluyemisi Iranloye, founder of Psaltry International Company Limited.

In the town of Ado-Awaye in Oyo State, Iranloye's processing plant is transforming one of Nigeria's most common crops into high-value industrial products.

What began as a small agricultural project has grown into one of Nigeria's most recognised cassava processing companies. The firm produces cassava starch, flour and glucose used by food and pharmaceutical manufacturers.

More importantly, Iranloye's business has built a network that connects thousands of rural farmers to steady markets.

Her company directly supports over 100,000 farming families within a 200-kilometre radius of its plant, helping farmers earn income from cassava cultivation while supplying Nigerian industries with locally processed ingredients.

It is true that Nigeria imports many industrial food inputs, but businesses like hers are changing that equation.

She is turning cassava into a global industry

Ijeoma Ndukwe-Egwuronu, founder of Bubez Foods

Egwuronu is the woman who industrialised pap

Pap, also known as akamu or ogi, is one of Nigeria's most common breakfast foods.

But for decades it was mostly produced in homes or local markets.

That changed when Ijeoma Ndukwe-Egwuronu founded Bubez Foods, a business that processes packaged pap products made from corn and mixed grains.

Her company produces several variants of pap paste designed for convenience and longer shelf life, helping modernise a traditional staple.

The innovation may seem small, but it shows a bigger shift: Nigeria's traditional foods are slowly moving into organised food manufacturing.

Olapeju Umah, founder of MyFoodAngels

Food insecurity in Nigeria sometimes has more to do with access than supply.

That problem inspired the creation of MyFoodAngels, founded by Umah.

The initiative helps households access food supplies while also supporting vulnerable communities.

During the COVID-19 lockdown, the platform helped distribute food to more than 3,000 families facing hardship, while building a community network of thousands of people committed to improving food access.

By combining technology, logistics and social impact, Umah's work shows how food distribution itself can become an innovative business. She is in the business of connecting markets to families

Ada Osakwe, founder of Nuli

Ada Osakwe is the founder of Nuli, a healthy fast-casual restaurant chain that focuses on African ingredients and nutritious meals.

Founded in 2016, Nuli aims to make healthy African food convenient and accessible while promoting locally sourced ingredients. The brand's menu includes dishes built around traditional staples like beans, grains and vegetables, presented in modern formats such as bowls and wraps.

Asides the restaurant business, Osakwe's model also supports farmer cooperatives, many of which are run by women, strengthening the connection between agriculture and the urban food market.

Her expansion plans include building an international African food brand, showing how Nigerian cuisine could scale globally.

Across Nigeria's agricultural value chain, women are everywhere.

They plant vegetables, process grains, sell food in markets, and run restaurants that feed entire communities.

Yet despite this presence, they often control only a small portion of farmland and receive limited access to finance and technology.

If these gaps were addressed, experts say women could play an even greater role in boosting Nigeria's food production and agricultural exports.

For now, many continue to do the work quietly.

So everytime you pick up your bowl of pap or amala, packet of dried fruit, bag of cassava flour or walk into any restaurant, it tells a story, one of women building businesses that feed the nation.

IWD: WOMEN RECOUNT DEFINING MOMENTS IN 'SHE SAID YES' CAMPAIGN

IFEOMA OKEKE-KORIEOCHA



In commemoration of International Women's Day, a media and communications agency, Visibility Solutions Media, on Friday, March 6, launched the second edition of its storytelling video campaign titled "She Said Yes."

The project features women from different professional backgrounds sharing personal stories about the moments they had to say "yes" to opportunities, risks and new paths in order to pursue their dreams.

Among those featured in the campaign are Clare Ezeekacha, founder of the Clare Cares Foundation; Adeyinka Ogunjimi, popularly known as Whykayy, an actress, content creator and rapper; Esther Body-Lawson, a public relations and brand strategist; Shukurat Jejelola, founder of Jejra Enterprises; Nankling Dakan, founder of D.Yilson Cleaners; and radio personality Harvest.

In the video, the women recount pivotal moments in their lives and careers when making bold decisions helped shape their journeys and move them closer to achieving their aspirations.

Speaking on the inspiration behind the campaign, the Creative Lead of the project and founder of Visibility Solutions Media, Kehinde Ajose, said the initiative was created to spotlight the courage, resilience and impact of women in society.

According to him, the project aligns with the spirit of International Women's Day, which celebrates the achievements of women and encourages greater support for them across different sectors.

"Women are invaluable to our world. Across industries, they continue to break barriers, challenge stereotypes and make meaningful contributions to society," Ajose said.

He added that this year's International Women's Day theme, 'Give to Gain,' highlights the importance of supporting women and creating an enabling environment for them to thrive.

"When we support women and amplify their voices, society benefits. 'She Said Yes' is about telling authentic stories that inspire other women to take bold steps toward their dreams," he added.

Speaking about her experience, Whykayy said choosing to say yes to her dreams brought a sense of peace and freedom.

"The very moment I said yes, I felt peace, comfort and freedom. I felt peace," she said.

Also speaking, Clare Ezeekacha encouraged women to prioritise themselves and embrace rest without guilt.

"More women should say yes to resting without feeling guilty. They should say yes to themselves before people say yes to them," she said.

The video campaign will be available on Instagram, YouTube and LinkedIn as part of efforts to spark conversations around courage, empowerment and self-belief among women.

The visual strategy and editing for the project were handled by Olajide Ajose, whose creative direction helped translate the women's stories into a compelling visual narrative.

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY 2026: DATE, MEANING AND GLOBAL SIGNIFICANCE

CHISOM MICHAEL



Every year on March 8, countries across the world mark International Women's Day, a global observance that recognises the role of women in society and calls attention to issues affecting their rights and opportunities. In 2026, the day falls on Sunday, March 8, and governments, workplaces, schools and community groups are preparing events and conversations centred on equality, participation and progress.

Over time, the observance has moved beyond a day of recognition into a platform for dialogue on the position of women in social, economic and political life. Across regions, the day brings attention to the contributions of women while also highlighting gaps that remain in access to education, employment, leadership and decision-making.

The origins of International Women's Day trace back more than a century to labour and rights movements that pushed for fair treatment, voting rights and workplace protections for women. Those early efforts gradually led to wider recognition of the day, and it is now observed in many countries each year. The observance later received formal recognition from the United Nations, which uses the day to encourage discussion on gender equality and human rights.

In 2026, discussions around International Women's Day are expected to take place across institutions and communities worldwide. Universities, companies and civic groups are organising forums, campaigns and outreach activities that focus on opportunities for women and girls. These conversations often address topics such as education, leadership, economic participation and representation in decision-making roles.

The day also serves as a moment for reflection on progress made in different parts of the world. While women today participate in areas such as science, governance, business,

sports, and the arts, many reports continue to highlight barriers to full participation. International Women's Day, therefore, functions both as recognition of progress and as a reminder that work toward equality continues.

Public observances often include events that highlight the achievements of women in history and in present-day society. Organisations may highlight the work of women in research, medicine, politics and entrepreneurship. Schools frequently organise programmes that encourage students to learn about women who shaped social and political change.

Businesses and civil groups also use the day to support women-led initiatives and community programmes. Campaigns on social media, workplace recognition events and public discussions form part of the global observance each year. In many places, the day encourages conversations that involve men, women and young people in thinking about shared responsibility for progress.

For many communities, International Women's Day is not limited to a single date. The discussions it sparks often continue throughout the year in policy debates, education programmes and advocacy campaigns.

'GIVE TO GAIN': WHY INVESTING IN WOMEN IS THE WORLD'S SMARTEST 2026 ROI

CHISOM MICHAEL



As the world marks International Women's Day on March 8, the 2026 campaign centres on the theme "Give To Gain", a message that calls on people, organisations and governments to support the progress of women and girls through shared effort and practical action.

Observed each year across many countries, International Women's Day recognises the social, economic, cultural and political contributions of women. The day also serves as a moment to highlight issues that continue to affect women, including equal pay, access to education, safety, legal protection and representation in decision-making spaces.

For 2026, the theme "Give To Gain" promotes the idea that progress grows when individuals and institutions contribute resources, time, knowledge and support. The campaign encourages people to understand that the advancement of women does not benefit women alone. It strengthens families, workplaces and communities.

Organisers of the campaign say the phrase "Give To Gain" reflects a principle of reciprocity. When people invest in women through education, mentorship, funding, leadership opportunities and advocacy, the impact

spreads across society. Communities gain stronger economies, more participation in leadership and wider access to opportunity.

The message behind the theme also aligns with the global focus of the United Nations for 2026, "Rights. Justice. Action. For ALL Women and Girls." The UN campaign calls for the removal of structural barriers that limit women's participation and protection under the law. It urges governments, businesses and civil society to take steps that support equal rights and fair access to resources.

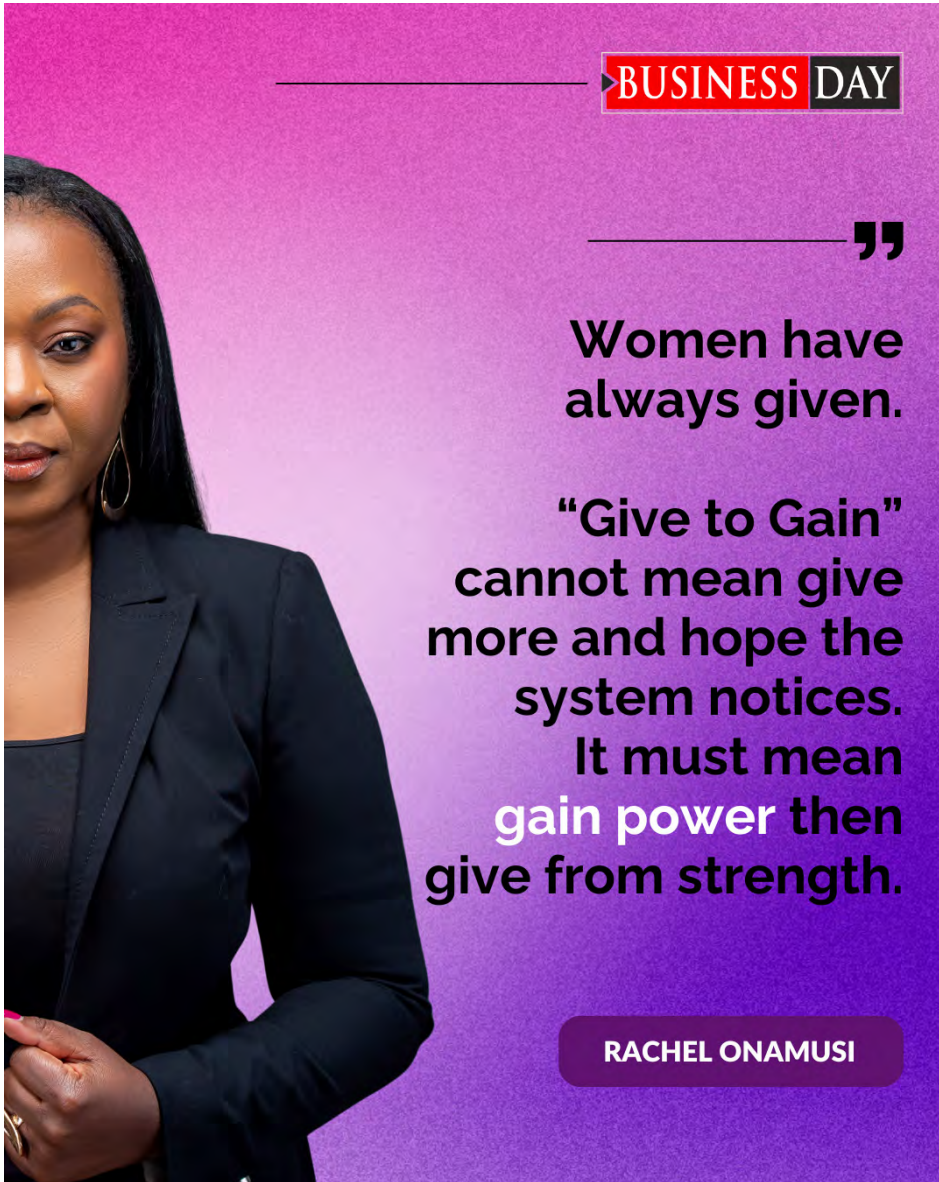
Advocates say "Give To Gain" places responsibility on individuals and institutions. Support can come in many forms, including funding

programmes for girls' education, mentoring young professionals, creating safe workplaces, investing in women-led businesses and promoting policies that protect women's rights.

The theme also highlights the role of collaboration. Progress for women often depends on networks of support that include families, communities, employers, educators and policy makers. By working together, these groups can expand opportunities for women across sectors such as science, business, politics, arts and technology.

International Women's Day also honours women whose work has shaped communities and institutions. Across sectors, women continue to influence education, health care, governance, research and entrepreneurship. Their contributions form part of the wider story of social and economic development.

As March 8 approaches, campaign organisers say the message of "Give To Gain" is intended to move beyond celebration. It is a call to action that encourages consistent support for women and girls. The idea is clear: when society gives support, access and opportunity, everyone stands to gain.



BUSINESS DAY

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Women have always given.

“Give to Gain” cannot mean give more and hope the system notices. It must mean gain power then give from strength.

RACHEL ONAMUSI

We give our time to committees, communities and causes that would collapse without us.

We give support to siblings, parents, friends and colleagues.

We give the benefit of the doubt.

We give second chances.

Somewhere along the way, many of us internalised the idea that giving is noble, but asking is uncomfortable.

So, we volunteer. We over-deliver. We mentor. We pour.

We show up prepared, polished and patient. But when it comes to self-fulfilment, we whisper our needs. We hesitate to ask. We feel awkward charging. We fear making the big demands.

So when a theme like “Give to Gain” appears, it just sounds like one more instruction to follow in the hope that reward will follow.

However, I sat with it for a few days and finally decided that perhaps this theme deserves a bit more grace; a more

strategic interpretation.

The question is not whether women should give more. I doubt there’s more to give.

The question is: gain what?

If we are serious about structural progress, not just annual lip service to womanhood, then women must shift their focus towards gaining the kind of power that changes outcomes.

I’m talking about assets. Equity. Capital. Ownership. Decision-making authority.

Every year, International Women’s Day comes with an inspirational theme.

This year’s theme, however, gave me cause for pause. At first glance, “Give to Gain” felt uncomfortably close to a burden many women are already tired of carrying.

Because, pardon?
Women already give.

We give unpaid emotional labour at home and in the workplace.

We give “just quick feedback” that becomes a full strategy document.

Because the type of power we are seeking does not come from endless giving. It comes from leverage.

Leverage is when you own shares instead of just attending meetings.

Leverage is when you price correctly instead of discounting your expertise.

Leverage is when you negotiate your salary with data instead of hope.

Leverage is when you sit at the table where budgets are approved and decisions are made.

For too long, many women have been the engine of organisations without being on the cap table. We have been the glue without being in executive compensation structures. We have mentored rising stars while staying stagnant ourselves.

“Give to Gain” cannot mean “give more of yourself and hope the system notices.”

It must mean: gain position, gain power, gain equity – and then give from a position of strength.

Consider this: research consistently shows that women reinvest a greater proportion of their income back into families and communities. Education improves. Health outcomes improve. Local economies stabilise. The multiplier effect is measurable.

Now imagine that same reinvestment power scaled from substantial ownership and capital control.

Suddenly, you get real change.

So perhaps the radical interpretation of this year's theme is this:

Before we give more, we must gain differently.

Gain financial literacy that allows you to understand investment vehicles, not just savings accounts.
Gain negotiation skills that protect your earning potential over a 30-year career.

Gain confidence to invoice correctly, to price boldly, to decline unpaid “exposure.”

Gain strategic networks that include sponsors, not just supporters.

Gain board positions. Gain equity stakes. Gain IP ownership. Gain influence over budgets.

These are not selfish pursuits. They are stabilising ones.

When a woman builds wealth, she builds optionality. When she builds optionality, she builds safety. When she builds safety, she can build others – without depleting herself.

None of this dismisses the importance of community, mentorship or service. In fact, those remain vital. But they must be paired with intentional advancement. Everyone should gain, yes. But so must you, the giver.

For younger women entering the workforce, this means thinking beyond competence. Competence is expected. Ownership is transformative.

For mid-career professionals, it may mean auditing where you are over-giving without reciprocal growth. Where are you underpriced? Where are you contributing to profitability without benefiting from it?

For senior leaders, it means pulling other women into rooms where budgets, investments and strategic pivots are determined, not just the same speaking panels and publicity spaces.

“Give to Gain” can become a powerful economic principle if we interpret it correctly.

Gain skills.
Gain capital.
Gain equity.
Gain authority.
Then give.

Because women have always given. Now it is time to gain in ways that shift the structure itself because ultimately, this is what permanent power will look like.

And perhaps that is the most powerful interpretation of all.

Rachel Onamusi is the CEO of VN Sync, a UK-based tech company and full-service marketing firm with expertise in all aspects of media and a strong focus on digital strategy development and implementation. Dedicated to creating lasting impact, Ms. Onamusi is a sought-after speaker, thought leader, writer and frequent media contributor.

TECH FRAUD: NIGERIA'S DARK-SIDE OF DIGITAL EXAMS

CHARLES OGWO



Students and parents waiting outside CBT examination hall, a situation the board had warned

The rapid digitalisation of Nigeria's education sector was meant to signal progress, faster registration, computer-based testing, and improved transparency.

Instead, it has opened new pathways for examination malpractice. From hacked computer-based test systems to the use of smart devices for live answer-sharing, technology is reshaping not only how students learn, but also how they cheat.

As digital examinations become the norm, Nigeria now faces a troubling question: has innovation strengthened academic integrity, or simply modernised fraud?

Recently, BusinessDay reported that the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB) has cracked down on a high-tech scam leveraging artificial intelligence (AI) to target Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) candidates, though the board assured Nigerians of its commitment to safeguarding the integrity of the examination process.

In 2025, instances of technical glitches affected the operations of the JAMB and the West African Examinations Council (WAEC), sparking concerns over the credibility and reliability of standardised digital testing systems in Nigeria.

Some stakeholders are worried that the rush for digitalisation is significantly fueling new, sophisticated forms of examination malpractice in the country, emphasizing that while digital

tools such as Computer-Based Testing (CBT) are designed to improve efficiency and reduce traditional cheating, they have simultaneously created new loopholes that allow candidates, syndicates, and sometimes teachers to manipulate the system.

Nubi Achebo, director of academic planning at Nigerian University of Technology and Management (NUTM), believes this situation is worrisome to the system.

Besides, he emphasised that the transition to full computer-based test (CBT) for external examinations such as WASSCE and NECO is being questioned by stakeholders such as the National Association of Parent-Teacher Associations of Nigeria, citing inadequate infrastructure and poor computer literacy among pupils.

"Students and parents are likely feeling uncertain and frustrated about the whole systematic failures, and the impact on future academic and students' career paths," he noted.

In August 2025, WAEC acknowledged technical glitches and errors in the grading of the 2025 West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) results, particularly for serialised core subjects.

This led the council's temporarily withdrawing access to the result portal to review and correct the errors, apologising to affected students and parents for the issues and the emotional distress caused.



Despite a millions of dollar investment in local data infrastructure, roughly 70 megawatts of data centre capacity is available nationwide, much lower than what is needed to support a robust digital economy.

Data from industry trackers indicate that Galaxy Backbone, the only Tier III Uptime Institute-certified data centre in Nigeria's public sector, operates less than its 2.5MW capacity.

There's no denying the fact that Nigeria lacks sufficient infrastructure to handle nationwide online examinations at the scale the examination bodies are operating.

Besides, it is worrisome that Nigeria seems to be in a haste to embrace digitalization when some developed country are working on balancing print textbook and tech-textbooks usages in schools.

Sweden, for instance, is committing more than €100 million to a sweeping classroom overhaul: replacing tablets and screens with traditional printed textbooks to help reverse falling student performance and sharpen focus.

This is coming after more than a decade of embracing digital-first education, Swedish authorities are now pivoting back to paper-based learning.

Official data and recent studies cited by the ministry of education show that prolonged screen use in class has been linked to shorter attention spans, weaker reading comprehension, and reduced critical-thinking abilities.

Research consistently finds that reading on illuminated screens requires greater mental effort and invites more distractions compared to the calm, linear experience of physical books, factors believed to have contributed to declining academic outcomes in recent years.

Under the new plan, every student will receive printed textbooks for all core subjects, restoring

books as the central learning tool. Digital devices and online resources will remain available as supportive tools, but they will no longer dominate daily instruction.

Obviously, if Nigerian education policymakers are serious about grooming excellent leaders through schools, they should rethink this rush for digitalisation.

How can Nigeria insist on digital examinations when students do not have digital textbooks and the tablets to master what is being taught?

Textbooks are key to establishing a crucial connection between instruction and knowledge acquisition in higher education.

Students' internal study habits have a major and positive impact on their learning outcomes, particularly in topics related to the natural and social sciences.

Nigeria should learn from this €100+ million investment, which signals Sweden's leadership in rethinking the role of technology in education. It underscores a broader, growing recognition worldwide: while screens provide speed and access, the hands-on, distraction-free engagement of physical books supports deeper concentration, stronger memory retention, and more effective long-term learning.

By choosing paper over pixels, Sweden is charting a path toward a more balanced, evidence-informed classroom future, one that puts proven pedagogical principles ahead of unchecked digital trends.

Nigeria stands at a crossroads. The promise of digital examinations was credibility and fairness, yet unchecked tech fraud threatens to undermine both.

If left unaddressed, these sophisticated forms of malpractice could erode public trust in academic qualifications and weaken national development.

Confronting this reality requires urgent reforms, smarter security systems, and a renewed commitment to honesty. Technology should elevate standards, not redefine cheating. The integrity of Nigeria's educational future depends on it.



TURNING MULTIDIMENSIONALITY INTO MULTI-OPPORTUNITIES: WOMEN LEADING PORTFOLIO CAREERS

EKEMINI AKPAKPAN

It is still Women's Month, although, if you know me, every month is Women's Month.

So here I am again, thinking out loud. And perhaps I may be slightly ahead of the curve, but mark my words: women are uniquely positioned to champion the rise of portfolio careers.

For decades, society has repeated the familiar claim that women are natural multitaskers. Research tells us this is largely a myth. There is little scientific evidence that women are biologically better at multitasking than men. What is true, however, is that women's lived experiences have required them to constantly navigate multiple roles from professional to domestic, emotional, social and economic roles, often simultaneously.

Multitasking, then, is not biology, but can be reframed as adaptation, and therefore becomes opportunity. Perhaps it is time we stop describing this reality as burden and begin to recognise it as economic architecture.

From Multidimensional Lives to Portfolio Careers

Have you ever heard the term portfolio career?

A few years ago, while supporting a client with brand positioning for her women-focused non-profit, I proposed to describe her audience as women building portfolio careers. The phrase resonated deeply, yet she hesitated, because it sounded unfamiliar, almost too novel, even though the experience it described was everywhere.

That moment stayed with me, because across Nigeria, countless women are already living portfolio careers without naming them as such.

Think about the corporate executive who consults on side projects; The lawyer who teaches, advises startups, and runs a social initiative; The public servant or 9-5er building a passion enterprise.

These women are often described as distracted or unfocused.

In reality, they are diversifying capability and income in response to economic but also social realities.

The Myth of the Linear Career vs the Opportunity of Portfolio Careers

Research from the Portfolio Collective shows that portfolio careers are no longer professional experiments but an expanding global workforce model. Their recent findings indicate a more balanced gender representation, with women accounting for approximately 52 per cent of new entrants in 2023 — suggesting that increasing numbers of women are deliberately moving toward career structures that offer flexibility, autonomy, and protection from traditional 9-to-5 burnout.

This shift challenges one of the most enduring assumptions about professional success: the linear career path. Modern career systems were built around conditions that historically favoured men — uninterrupted progression, geographic mobility, and near-unlimited availability to work. Implicitly, it presumed that someone else was managing caregiving, household responsibilities, and the emotional labour of daily life.

For many women, that assumption never existed. Instead, women learned early to navigate professional ambition alongside competing responsibilities, pauses, transitions, and reinvention. Careers were rarely linear; they were adaptive. My mum's teaching job, for example, closed by noon many years ago, affording her the flexibility to resume her caregiving responsibilities.

Today, that adaptation is revealing itself as an advantage. What began as a necessity is increasingly evolving into a deliberate career strategy. Portfolio careers allow women to redefine progression not as upward movement within a single institution, but as the expansion of influence, capability, and economic

resilience across multiple platforms. In this sense, portfolio careers do not represent a departure from professional growth. Rather, they expand the very definition of career progression itself.

What Does Building a Portfolio Career Actually Look Like?

If portfolio careers are to move beyond buzzwords, the question becomes practical: what does shaping one actually look like across a woman's professional life?

The truth is that women do not enter portfolio careers from a single starting point. They arrive through lived experience — through transitions, reinvention, caregiving cycles, economic shifts, and accumulated competence. Portfolio careers are less a sudden decision and more an evolution.

Forbes contributor Alli Kushner wrote, "I used to think a 'portfolio career' was something you built after you'd already 'made it.' In my head, you'd sell a company, write a book, start advising founders and then suddenly you're on a panel wearing a blazer that quietly screams, 'This is what success looks like.'"

Across generations, distinct patterns are already emerging.

1. The Exploration Stage: Multipotentiality at Entry Level

For younger women entering the workforce today, careers are rarely defined by a single calling. Many begin as what psychologists describe as multipotentialites — individuals with diverse interests and transferable skills.

A graduate may combine formal employment with digital skills, creative work, advocacy, or freelance assignments. What older systems might interpret as lack of focus is increasingly strategic experimentation; testing competencies, industries, and income pathways early. At this stage, portfolio building looks like skill accumulation rather than job loyalty.

2. The Expansion Stage: Competence into Opportunity

Mid-career women often enter portfolio careers unintentionally. After years of professional experience, opportunities begin to emerge outside formal roles — consulting requests, project advisory work, training engagements, or entrepreneurial ventures built on accumulated expertise.

Here, the portfolio career becomes a mechanism for leverage. Capabilities developed within institutions begin to travel beyond them. Professional identity expands from employee to expert, from role holder to problem solver.

Many Nigerian women already operate here by balancing leadership roles while quietly building parallel professional platforms that provide both income diversification and autonomy.

3. The Transition Stage: Experience into Influence

Later in career, another shift occurs which is rarely discussed openly. As women approach leadership maturity or life transitions such as children leaving home or menopause, professional ambition often evolves from operational execution to knowledge transfer. Experience accumulated over decades begins to translate into board advisory and corporate governance roles, mentoring, speaking, policy advisory,, and institutional consulting.

What might previously have been framed as career winding down becomes, instead, portfolio elevation — moving from doing the work to shaping systems and influencing outcomes. In this model, experience does not expire, it compounds.

4. The Reinvention Stage: Career After Interruption

Perhaps most uniquely, portfolio careers create re-entry pathways for women whose careers paused due to caregiving, relocation, or personal transitions.

Rather than restarting from scratch within rigid employment systems, women can reassemble careers through modular engagement including projects, advisory roles, entrepreneurship, or flexible leadership positions. Portfolio careers therefore recognise something traditional models ignored: careers can pause without ending.

A Different Definition of Career Progress

Seen this way, portfolio careers are not merely flexible work arrangements. They are lifecycle-responsive career architectures.

They allow women to move between exploration, expansion, influence, and reinvention without losing professional legitimacy.

And perhaps this is the deeper opportunity: women are no longer required to fit their lives into careers designed for another era. They can design careers that evolve alongside their lives.

LEADERSHIP IN FOCUS: ALIWA NATIONAL DIALOGUE HIGHLIGHTS CHARACTER CRISIS

CHARLES OGWO



T rue leadership is not defined solely by vision or authority, but by character.

This central message resonated strongly at the Africa Leadership Initiative West Africa (ALIWA) National Dialogue, where speakers challenged institutions and individuals alike to confront the character crisis threatening effective leadership.

The challenge Nigeria is facing today in leadership is a question of character, and not a shortage of talent or ideas. That was the tone at the inaugural National Leadership Dialogue (NLD) hosted by ALIWA at the start of 2026; a convening designed to spark honest conversations about the future of leadership in Nigeria.

Bringing together senior voices from the public sector, private institutions, and civic organisations, the dialogue was not about theory, but about practice, and about the difficult realities leaders face when principle meets power.

From regulators to financial executives, policy leaders to civic voices, the calibre of participants reflected the weight of the conversation. Across two panel sessions, the dialogue moved intentionally from the personal to the institutional.

The first, 'Building Resilient Leadership for the 21st Century', explored how leaders navigate complexity, sustain performance, and make defining decisions under pressure, emphasising that resilience is shaped through lived experience and tested values.



The second, 'Tools for Building Resilient Systems and Structures for Growth,' expanded the focus beyond the individual, examining how governance frameworks, technology, including AI, strategic partnerships, and institutional design enable impact at scale, thereby reinforcing that sustainable progress depends not only on strong leaders, but on strong systems that outlast them.

What emerged from the opening reflections was a shared conviction that ethical leadership is neither symbolic nor situational.

In his remarks, Soji Apampa, president of ALIWA Nigeria, emphasised that in times of uncertainty, leadership must be anchored in integrity, clarity, and a collective commitment to practical action.

He noted that platforms such as the ALIWA National Leadership Dialogue play a critical role in shaping leaders who can define reality honestly and work together to deliver meaningful change for the country.

Building on this foundation, Okechukwu Enelamah, ALIWA Fellow, former minister of industry, trade and investment, and current chairman of African Capital

Alliance, reflected on the deeper lesson of the fellowship experience.

He observed that leadership, when exercised ethically and with purpose, has the power to transform lives, communities, and nations. Together, their perspectives reinforced a clear pattern: resilience and impact are sustained not by intention alone, but by leaders who pair personal conviction with systems designed for long-term credibility and growth.

From the personal journeys shared on the first panel to the institutional frameworks discussed in the second, a clear pattern emerged: leadership is tested in moments of uncertainty but sustained by clarity of purpose and strong design.

The leaders on stage spoke candidly about navigating complexity, making difficult decisions with incomplete information, and staying anchored when outcomes were not immediately visible.

At the same time, the dialogue reinforced that no amount of personal conviction can compensate for weak systems. Sustainable impact requires both



steady individuals and institutions intentionally built to support transparency, innovation, and long-term growth.

Yet the dialogue refused to reduce this to a simple moral debate. Leadership, it was emphasised, operates within systems. When discretion is high and accountability is weak, even well-intentioned individuals can find themselves navigating environments that quietly reward the wrong behaviour.

That is why resilience, in this context, was described not as toughness, but as ethical stamina; the discipline to hold steady and prioritise long-term impact over short-term gain.

A powerful idea that surfaced repeatedly was the "promise of leadership," an Aspen Institute and ALIWA ethos which holds that leadership, when exercised with responsibility and foresight, can transform institutions, communities, and even nations. It builds trust.

It shapes opportunity. It determines whether policies remain on paper or become progress. When leaders truly internalise that promise, leadership shifts from entitlement to stewardship.

In partnership with the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change (TBI) and the Nigerian Economic Summit Group (NESG, the Dialogue reinforced that strengthening leadership in Nigeria requires both personal conviction and institutional reform. Transparency must become routine. Decision-making processes must be documented and open. Accountability must feel normal, not exceptional. Structure and culture must work together.

ALIWA's inaugural National Leadership Dialogue did more than host a conversation; it signalled an intention to shape one. It created space for difficult truths to be spoken aloud and for leaders to reflect not just on what they do, but how they do it.

As leadership demands continue to evolve, the challenge is clear. Will Nigerians treat power as privilege, or as trust? Will they prioritise immediate advantage or long-term impact?

BEYOND THE MUSE: AFRICAN WOMEN ARTISTS REWRITING THE CANON

International Women's Day often prompts a familiar ritual in the art world: a renewed spotlight on women artists who have long deserved attention. Yet the conversation around African art today feels different from the symbolic gestures of the past. Across studios, galleries, and independent art spaces, African women artists are increasingly shaping the direction of contemporary practice—not simply appearing in exhibitions but influencing how stories about African art are told.

For decades, women appeared frequently within African art but were far less visible as its authors. Sculptures, photographs, and paintings often depicted women as symbols of fertility, motherhood, or communal identity, while the artists gaining recognition in museums and catalogues were disproportionately men. That imbalance has begun to shift, not through institutional goodwill alone but through the persistence of artists whose work insists on new forms of visibility and authorship.

In this digest, we look at how African women artists are reshaping the conversation around contemporary African art.

FROM SUBJECT TO AUTHOR: RECLAIMING NARRATIVE AUTHORITY

One of the most striking shifts in contemporary African art is how women artists are reclaiming narrative authority.

Earlier museum displays often presented African culture through objects categorised by tradition rather than individual authorship. In that structure, women's creative labour, especially in fields such as textiles, ceramics, and body adornment, was often subsumed into anonymous cultural production rather than recognised as artistic practice.

Contemporary artists have been steadily undoing that framing. Nigerian artist Peju Alatise, for example, combines sculpture, installation, and storytelling to address gender inequality and social hierarchies.

Her 2017 installation *Flying Girls*, shown at the Venice Biennale, transformed the experiences of domestic workers in Nigeria into a poetic yet politically pointed sculptural environment.



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Peju Alatise, a Nigerian artist, poet, writer & a fellow at the National Museum of African Art.

Artists like Alatise demonstrate how authorship itself becomes part of the artwork's meaning. By placing women's lived experiences at the center of the narrative, they shift African art away from symbolic representation toward personal and social storytelling.

Reimagining Identity Through New Visual Languages

A defining quality of many contemporary African women artists is their refusal to present identity in simplified terms. Instead, their work explores how gender, migration, history, and memory intersect in complex ways.

Ethiopian-American painter Julie Mehretu has built a visual language that blends architecture, mapping, and abstraction. Her large-scale paintings—now held in collections such as the Whitney Museum of American Art and Tate Modern—layer fragments of urban plans, historical references, and gestural mark-making to evoke cities shaped by migration, conflict, and collective memory.



Julie Mehretu, an Ethiopian-American contemporary visual artist

Rather than offering singular narratives about African womanhood, artists like Rezaire and Mehretu construct expansive visual environments where identity remains fluid and constantly negotiated.

Beyond Visibility

The influence of African women artists extends far beyond exhibition schedules and auction records. Many play significant roles in shaping artistic ecosystems—mentoring younger artists, organising independent projects, and contributing to conversations that reshape curatorial thinking.

These forms of cultural labour rarely appear in headlines, yet they shape the future of African art in lasting ways. The canon of African art is not a static archive but a living narrative, continually rewritten by the artists working within it.

As more women claim space as authors rather than subjects, the story of African art becomes more complex, more expansive, and ultimately more truthful. The result is not simply greater representation but a deeper reimagining of what African art has been—and what it can become.



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

FOCUS: THE FIRST RULE OF BRANDING

FEYISITAN IJIMAKINWA

Recently, at a networking meeting, I met a young gentleman and we had a very lovely time discussing issues relating to young people and their mastery of technology. Impressed by his values and world view, I asked him what business he's in. He told me he's a photographer / videographer / Google marketer / dog trainer. I'm just kidding about the dog trainer part. But when he was telling me what he does, I heard that extra part in my head.

By offering up things that didn't seem to fit, he came across as lacking both experience and focus. I stopped hearing the words and started hearing what my brain was saying about his expertise. And to my brain, the business he was describing sounded like this: "I'm a young person who likes to take pictures, have even more fun shooting video, know more than the average person about Google marketing, and I'm hoping to settle my bills and pay my rent by somehow charging people for whichever of these services I can sell them." These aren't the words he used, but they are the way his words were perceived. I stopped hearing the words and started hearing what my brain was saying about his expertise.

I asked him what the connection was between photography and Google marketing. He came up with some explanation of how he was a Google photographer. I know a fair bit about Google and search engine optimization, and I have yet to see any case where the type of photography you provide has any real bearing on the search engine results you get. No doubt you want quality

pictures, especially for Google Local, where the photos of your facilities will have an impression that could lead to business or turn people away. But any decent photographer will provide quality pictures of your facility. To lump Google marketing in with photography and videography is too much of a stretch and you only end up coming across as inexperienced and desperate.

Focus is key

We live in an over-communicated world. We're assaulted with commercial messaging. There are too many messages hitting us from every direction: over the airwaves, online, in print and in person. Unless you are focused with a razor-sharp intensity, you have no hope of building awareness never mind credibility.

To be successful as a brand, you have to pick one specialty to put all your emphasis on. There is no room in today's culture for hedging your bets by picking multiple areas of business expertise, and hoping one sticks in the event that you meet people who don't need one of your other services.

Not too long ago at another networking event, I met a gentleman who sold a hydroponic gardening product. Then he said, "and I also sell these nutrition supplements that are like fruit juice in a pill form." This was another perfect example of a business that was spreading itself across unrelated categories and as a result losing all credibility.

When I asked him about these unrelated things, he explained that not everyone needs a hydroponic garden, so this strategy gave him something else to offer.

This is not how marketing works. This is not how networking works. The only way that you can build credibility is to convince people that you do one thing better than anyone else. When you do multiple unrelated things, the perception is that you are not doing any of them well. Simply put, you pose as a Jack-of-all-trade, but a master of none. If you were, you would not be offering those other things. You wouldn't have to. The only way that you can build credibility is to convince people that you do one thing better than anyone else.

I advised this young gentleman to pick one of the areas in which he does business and only talk about that one area in any business setting. Forget the fact that another area exists. It will only fragment the perception of your business and decrease any impact that you have.

Building trust

Another problem in today's business climate is our general lack of trust. Everywhere we turn, people are trying to scam us. We have our lie detector meter cranked to maximum capacity. We're suspicious of everyone! Again, the only hope you have to build trust in this environment is to be passionate about one thing and live that passion through your words and actions every single day and every single moment.

Of course, in real life you can be passionate about two things (or more), and they may be unrelated things. But you can't market that way. From a branding perspective you must focus on one and only one area. There needs to be energy about that thing — what we in branding refer to as your platform.

You have to talk about it relentlessly, letting nothing else get in the way. You need to live out your passion so that people can see that you are serious about it. You have to make that as much of your life as breathing, and as natural. This is impossible when your business interests cross over unrelated specialties.

Last line

Take a look at how you're communicating your business. Are you focused on one thing and one thing only? Or are you hedging your bets by offering up unrelated services? If so, you are short-circuiting your brand.



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

MICHAEL KAYODE: FROM JUVENTUS ACADEMY TO BRENTFORD STAR

ANTHONY NLEBEM



In the relentless, high-stakes theatre of the Premier League, few emerging stories blend resilience, culture, and ambition quite like that of Michael Olabode Kayode.

Born in the small Italian town of Gattico to Nigerian parents, the 21-year-old wing-back has quickly become a symbol of Brentford's rising project in English football. With the West London side pushing for a European place this season, Kayode's performances have added a compelling new chapter to the long tradition of Nigerian-rooted players excelling in England.

In an interview with Showmax, the Italo-Nigerian defender reflected on his Yoruba heritage, his football education in Italy, and the unlikely journey that carried him from a childhood dream of sprinting like Usain Bolt to becoming one of the Premier League's most dynamic full-backs.

Roots in Two Worlds

Kayode grew up in a household where Italian culture blended naturally with his Yoruba heritage. Although he represents Italy at the youth level, the influence of his Nigerian upbringing remains central to his identity and work ethic.

"My time at Brentford has been amazing. I didn't expect it to be like this at the beginning," Kayode said.

"Obviously, when you move to a new country, you think it won't be easy. But when I joined the club, everything felt very simple. It's already been more than a year, and it has gone so quickly. I already love this place."

He describes the environment at Brentford as something beyond the usual professional setup.

"To be honest, you think you will feel good wherever you go, but not this good. Here, I feel like it's a family."

That sense of belonging was helped by the linguistic foundation laid by his parents, who spoke English at home while he grew up in Italy.

"I knew the language before I came—not perfectly, but well enough from my parents and from school," he explained. "It helps a lot when you can understand the coach and his instructions."



From the Track to the Pitch

Football was not Kayode's first sporting passion. As a child, he experimented with multiple disciplines before settling on the game that would define his career.

"I started with swimming first," he recalled. "Then I moved to athletics. Every time I watched the Olympics and saw Usain Bolt, it looked so easy for him to win. I loved running and thought maybe I could do the 100 metres one day."

The shift to football happened almost by accident.

"I was waiting for my parents after athletics training. There was a small pitch next to the gym, so I tried kicking a ball for the first time," he said with a laugh.

"I scored a really good goal and thought, 'Let's do this.' My dad was late picking me up; that's his fault! That's how I started playing football."

Juventus and the Making of a Professional

Kayode's potential was quickly recognised. He joined the academy of Italian giants Juventus F.C. at just six years old, beginning a demanding routine that tested his discipline from an early age.

"I was the first pickup in a minibus that took us to training," he recalled. "It was two-and-a-half to three hours to the training ground and the same back."

"After school, I would go home, get on the bus, train for an hour and a half, then travel back. I often arrived home at 10 or 11 p.m., four or five times a week."

The experience, however, gave him an early glimpse of the elite level. During his time at the club, he crossed paths with legendary defenders such as Giorgio Chiellini and Leonardo Bonucci.

He even walked onto the pitch alongside Bonucci as a mascot during a UEFA Champions League quarter-final against FC Bayern Munich.

"I was so nervous because I was very young," he said. "When you step onto the pitch and see the stadium from that perspective, it's completely different. I remember thinking: 'I want to be like them.'"

Rejection, Resilience, and Redemption

Despite his early promise, Kayode's path to the top was not linear. After leaving Juventus, he dropped down to Italy's fourth tier with AC Gozzano.

It was a humbling but formative experience.

"Playing in Serie D at 16 with grown men is crazy," he said. "Many of them have families and children. You have to perform every week because football is their livelihood."

Being released by Juventus initially felt devastating, but it ultimately hardened his mentality.

"When they told me I wouldn't play there anymore, it was very hard. But it made me stronger. In my head, it was always: 'I want to reach that level again.'"

His determination paid off when ACF Fiorentina signed him. At the Florence club, he blossomed into one of Italy's brightest prospects, winning the Italian Golden Boy award in 2024 and reaching consecutive UEFA Conference League finals.

The Brentford Breakthrough

Kayode's breakthrough move to the Premier League came when Brentford identified him as a key piece of their long-term project.

"The first time they called me, I was so happy," he said. "Everyone dreams about playing in the Premier League."

His first impressions of England, however, were less glamorous.

"The first time I came here, it was crazy cold and very windy! "I was not expecting that," he laughed. "But I don't care about the weather; it's about the football."

Under Brentford's progressive coaching system, Kayode has developed into a dynamic wing-back known for his pace, physicality and defensive discipline.



The 'Gym Joke' That Became a Weapon

Beyond his defensive qualities, Kayode has gained attention for a rare asset: a throw-in capable of launching the ball deep into the penalty area.

The skill, he insists, was discovered entirely by chance during his time at Gozzano.

"It started as a joke," he explained. "Everyone was in the gym throwing a ball around, and when I did it, they realised my throw was really long."

The team began using it during matches, and the tactic quickly became a strategic weapon.

"Even now, I don't train it much. I think some things come naturally."

Life Beyond Football

Away from the pitch, Kayode's life has also entered a new chapter. The young defender recently celebrated a gender reveal at Brentford's Gtech Community Stadium using, appropriately, a throw-in.

"That was my idea," he said. "When the club agreed, I was very happy. I always wanted to have a child when I was young, so this is the best thing in life."

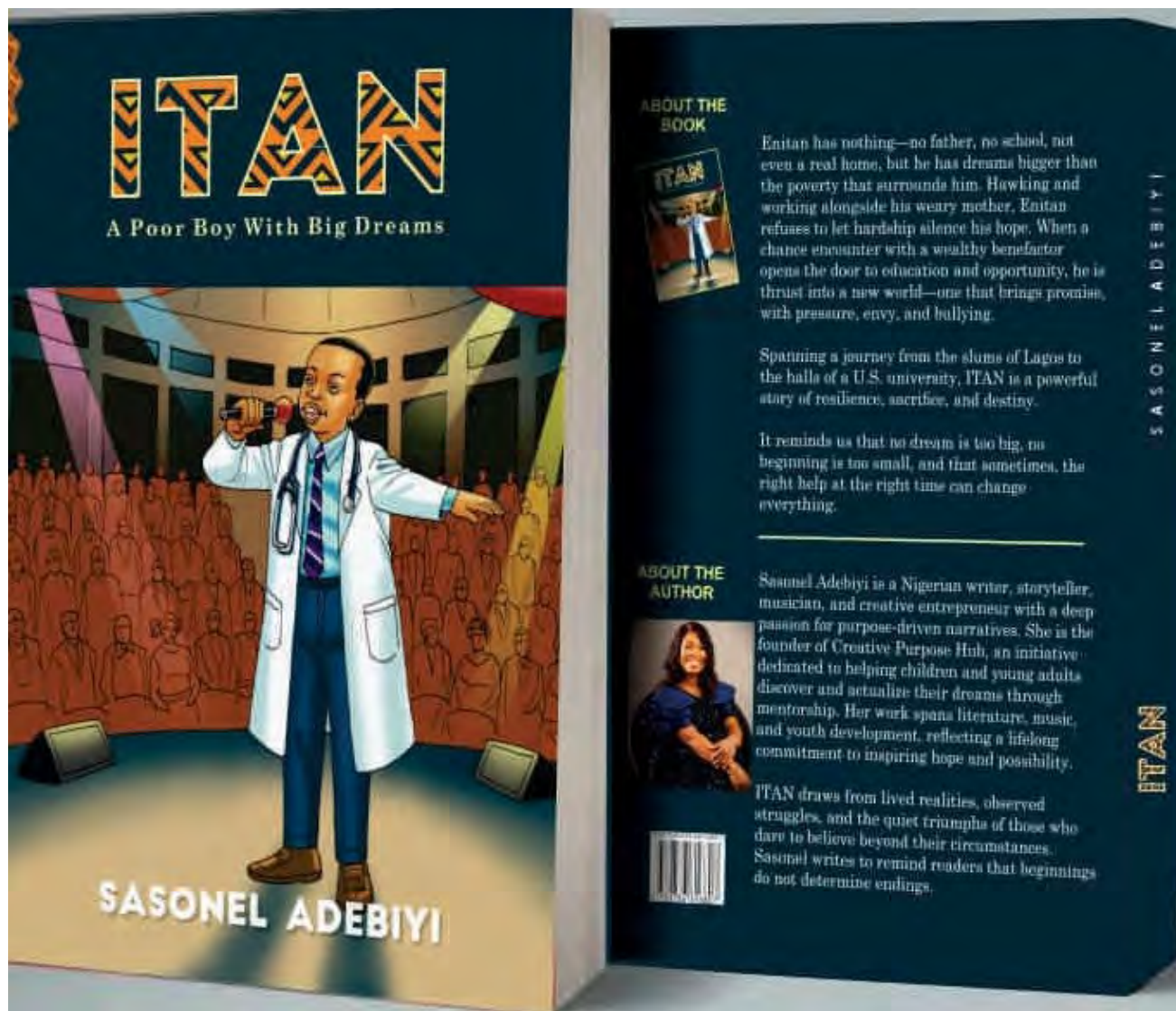


Eyes on Europe

As Brentford continue their push for European qualification, Kayode remains focused on the present rather than on distant ambitions.

"I really think getting Brentford into Europe is possible," he said. "But we take it game by game. We will see in May."

For a player whose journey began with a chance kick of a ball beside an athletics track, Michael Kayode's rise is already remarkable. Yet at just 21, the Italo-Nigerian wing-back may only be at the beginning of a much bigger story



Small Boy, Big Dreams-A Review of Sasonel Adebisi's ITAN

Title: ITAN
 Author: Sasonel Adebisi
 Year of Publication: 2025
 Number of Pages: 54
 Category: Children's Book

ITAN

TITILADE OYEMADE

Sasonel Adebisi introduces the essence of her book ITAN even before you turn the first page. The subtitle, “A Poor Boy with Big Dreams,” sets the tone clearly. This is a story about courage, possibility, and the determination it takes to believe in yourself.

At the centre of the story is Enitan, a boy with expansive dreams. At first, you may wonder whether the title ITAN is drawn from the main character’s name. A quick search reveals that “Itan” means story and that revelation makes everything richer. Enitan is not just a character; he is a story unfolding, a reminder that every child carries a tale worth telling.

The opening reads like the first scene of a film. You are instantly alert, drawn in, and eager to see where the journey will lead. It is fascinating how something as simple as a song becomes a turning point, proof that inspiration often arrives quietly. Just as you begin to settle into the excitement of possibility, reality steps in. The author does not pretend that dreams are achieved without struggle. Instead, she gently shows that the road to greatness is filled with challenges.

You feel every emotion Enitan feels. When he cries, you feel the weight of his disappointment. When he smiles, you celebrate with him. Though the book is written for children, its message stretches far beyond young readers. Adults will find themselves reflecting, remembering their own dreams, and perhaps even reigniting them. Beyond inspiration, the book also enriches vocabulary, introducing new words in a way that feels natural and engaging.

The illustrations deserve special praise. They are warm, natural, and undeniably elegant. The characters feel real, and some of the women are portrayed with style and grace,

so much so that young readers might find themselves admiring their fashion and imagining their own future looks. The artwork is clearly intentional, thoughtfully aligned with the author’s descriptions, and it enhances the storytelling beautifully.

Sasonel Adebisi also ensures that creativity does not end on the final page. By including drawing prompts, she invites children to participate and imagine.

ITAN is more than a children’s book. It is a gentle reminder that dreams are valid, challenges are part of growth, and every child carries greatness within. This is a book every child should own, not just to read, but to experience, to imagine with, and to grow from.



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WEEKENDER

MOVIE REVIEW

ACCUSED (2026)

If you are looking for a nice drama thriller movie, then you should check this movie out. I wasn't sure what to expect, but I was glad I saw this brand-new movie. So, if you do want to enjoy this movie, give it your full attention and wait till the very end. In this movie Dr. Geetika was a very successful doctor. For over a decade she had grown to the top and was just promoted to become a dean of a very big hospital, one of the first female and youngest doctors to become a dean. Everything was going on very well for her till the hospital received an anonymous email accusing her of sexual misconduct. It went from one email to several, and people in the hospital started making allegations against her. What was supposed to be a promotion and a season of celebration became a season of doom for Dr. Geetika. Well, you will need to check out this movie to find out who was blackmailing Dr. Geetika and the reason why they wanted to destroy her life and career. The 107m Indian Hindi crime, drama, thriller, mystery film on social issues movie was directed by Anubhav Kashyap. They featured actors like Lee Konkan, Gen Sharma, Pratiksha Panna, Masheer Amrohi, Aditya Nanda, Sukant Goel, Monica Mahendru, Barbara Blum, Anurag Sachdeva.



ONLY WE KNOW (2025)

If you enjoy Filipino drama movies then this might be worth your while. I don't think this is my kind of movie as the movie was too slow and I struggled to get to the end of the movie. In this very simple movie, a retired professor "Betty" goes on to living her life quietly, she takes a walk daily and hangs out with her friends. In the process of living her simple life, she meets a young widowed engineer. They form an unexpected bond which leads to a peaceful friendship despite their huge age gap as she was in her 60s, her friends could not comprehend why they were together. Well, you will need to check out this movie to see how they managed loneliness and judgement, and if they were able to move their connection from just friendship to something deeper and more meaningful. The 101m Filipino drama movie was directed by Irene Emma Villamor, they featured actors like Charo Santos, Dingdong Dantes, Al Tantay, Sharmaine Buencamino, Max Collins, Joel Saracho etc.



ANONIMOUSLY YOURS (2021)

If you are looking for a fast-paced, feel-good romantic movie then this teenage movie will be worth your while. Vale was a simple teenager who had a strong flair for videography, but as an only child her parents wanted her to take over and manage the family business, But Vale had her own dreams, passion and aspirations. Along the line she receives an anonymous text from an unknown number. What started as a weird, unsolicited message quickly leads them to becoming best friends in the digital world. Little did they know that they have actually met each other in the real world. You will need to go check this movie to find out how they ended this digital friendship and if they were able to find true friendship in the real world as they both lacked communication and real friends in reality. The 101m Mexican drama, romance, teen film was directed by Maria Torres. They featured actors like Annie Cabello, Ralf, Estefi Merelles, Harold Azuara, Alicia Velez and many more.



WEEKEND QUOTES



1

The problem is not how you look outside. It's about the inside. Pay attention to what is important

.....WhispersbyTEN

2

Allow people to receive salvation stop preventing them from the experience

.....WhispersbyTEN

3

Be an advert board not forcing people to understand that God is love

.....WhispersbyTEN

4

Parents should put pressure on their knees not on their children. Take heed

.....WhispersbyTEN