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— Obinna Chukwujioko



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INFRASTRUCTURE, NOT JUST APPS, WILL SCALE AFRICA'S ECONOMY' — Obinna Chukwujioko





Obinna Chukwujioko is a Nigerian entrepreneur and fintech infrastructure builder known for founding and scaling innovative financial technology platforms across Africa. He co-founded Wirepay before transforming its infrastructure into Maplerad, a Banking-as-a-Service platform powering payments, virtual accounts, cards, and FX solutions for businesses across the continent. He also launched Capera and Roam, expanding access to global remittances and USD banking services for Africans worldwide. In this interview with BusinessDay, he discusses fintech infrastructure, cross-border payments, and Africa's digital finance future.

You moved from oil and gas into fintech at a time when Africa's digital payment space was still developing. What problem convinced you that financial infrastructure was worth building?

In Oil & Gas, you see massive scale but also massive silos. When I looked at the digital payment space, I saw a fundamental "plumbing" problem. The problem wasn't a lack of ideas; it was that every new founder had to spend 18 months just building the pipes, banking integrations, compliance, and ledger systems, before they could even launch. I realized that if we didn't build the infrastructure, the ecosystem would move at a glacial pace.

When you co-founded Wirepay in 2020, what gap in cross-border payments were Africans struggling with the most?

When we started Wirepay, the biggest struggle was fragmentation in the different payment methods across Africa. If you were in Lagos trying to pay a developer

in Nairobi or a supplier in Senegal, you were looking at multiple steps, high exchange rates, and days of uncertainty. Africans were essentially "locked out" of the global economy by high-friction rails. We wanted to build a bridge that made a dollar in New York feel and work the same as a dollar in Lagos.

Maplerad grew from a payments product into a financial infrastructure platform. What informed that transition, and what did you learn from the process?

The move from a product (Wirepay) to a platform (Maplerad) was born out of necessity. We realized we had built such a robust internal engine for our own app that other companies started asking to use it. I learned that your greatest value often isn't the storefront you build, but the engine you created to run it. Transitioning taught me that infrastructure requires a much higher level of reliability; you aren't just responsible for your users, you're responsible for their users too.

Many fintech founders focus on consumer products, but you focused on infrastructure. Why do you believe infrastructure matters in shaping Africa's financial future?

Consumer products are the "cars," but infrastructure is the "highway." You can have the best car in the world, but if the road stops at the border, you aren't going anywhere. By focusing on infrastructure, we empower thousands of developers to build specialized solutions. That's how you scale a continent's economy, not by building one app, but by enabling ten thousand.

Building payment systems across different African markets comes with regulatory and operational challenges. How do you approach trust and compliance while still moving quickly as a company?

In fintech, "move fast and break things" can get you shut down. We approach compliance as a feature, not a hurdle. By building regulatory requirements directly into our API logic, we allow our partners to be compliant by default. Trust is earned through transparency with regulators and 99.9% uptime. You move quickly by having such a solid foundation that you don't have to look back to see if the pipes are leaking.

Through Capera and Roam, you are addressing remittances, digital banking and stablecoin adoption. How do you see the relationship between traditional finance and blockchain-based systems evolving in Africa?

I don't see it as a "versus" battle. I see them merging. Blockchain, particularly stablecoins, offers a settlement layer that is faster and cheaper than the legacy SWIFT system.

In Africa, we are “leapfrogging” traditional banking in the same way we skipped landlines for mobile phones. Stablecoins are becoming the liquidity backbone for cross-border trade, while traditional banks provide the necessary regulatory trust.

Roam offers Africans access to USD accounts and global transfers. What does financial access mean to you personally, especially for young Africans building careers and businesses across borders?

For a young African, financial access is sovereignty. It's the ability to work for a company in San Francisco, get paid in a stable currency, and invest that money anywhere in the world without being penalised by your geography. It's about removing the “location tax” on talent.

You mentor founders through organisations such as LSETF, JCI and Alchemist Accelerator. What common mistakes do early-stage African founders still make when building technology companies?

The biggest mistake is over-engineering before validation. I see founders building complex tech stacks for problems they haven't confirmed people will pay for. Another is ignoring unit economics early on. In the current climate, growth is great, but a clear path to “default alive” (profitability) is what keeps the lights on.

African fintech is becoming increasingly competitive. In your view, what separates companies that scale sustainably from those that struggle after early success?

It's operational discipline. Early success often comes from a great idea or good timing. Scaling sustainably comes from building a culture that values documentation, repeatable processes, and talent density. The companies that struggle are usually those that try to solve cultural or structural problems with more VC funding rather than building it into their internal processes.

Looking back at your journey so far, what moment has most shaped your thinking as a founder, and how has it influenced the way you build today?

The realisation that accuracy is everything in finance. Early on, you learn that a single decimal point error or a 30-second delay in price or rate updates isn't just a bug, it's a breach of trust. That shaped my “infrastructure-first” mindset. Today, I build with the philosophy that we must be the most reliable part of our customers' day. If they don't have to think about us, we're doing our job right, which translates to little support interaction.



MEET SEGUN AINA, THE INCOMING 39-YR-OLD JAMB REGISTRAR

CHARLES OGWO





At just 39, Segun Aina is stepping into one of Nigeria's most closely watched education leadership roles as the new registrar of the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB).

His appointment signals a generational shift at the examination body, sparking interest in the background, experience and vision of the man expected to oversee millions of candidates seeking admission into tertiary institutions across the country.

President Bola Ahmed Tinubu on Thursday announced the appointment of Segun Aina as the new registrar of the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB), succeeding Is-haq Oloyede, whose second term will expire on July 31, 2026.

Aina is a renowned computer engineering professor at Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU), Ile-Ife, and is popular for his expertise in examination systems, digital infrastructure, and institutional reforms.

The incoming JAMB registrar studied in the United Kingdom, where he obtained a Bachelor of Engineering degree in Computer Systems Engineering from the University of Kent.

After that he obtained an MSc in Internet Computing and Network Security, as well as a PhD in Digital Signal Processing from Loughborough University.

The academic also attended the Senior Management Programme at Lagos Business School.

According to Bayo Onanuga, special assistant to President Tinubu on information and strategy, who announced the appointment, Aina's relationship with JAMB began during his National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) programme, where he gained early experience in national admissions processes and data management systems.

The exposure reportedly influenced his later work in examination reforms and systems optimisation.

With more than 15 years of post-graduation experience, the university don has worked with major examination bodies,

including the National Examinations Council (NECO), the National Business and Technical Examinations Board (NABTEB), and several state ministries of education.

Aina's proficiency covers ICT systems, examination integrity, digital transition, and operational reforms.

All things being equal, Aina, who turns 40 in July, is set to become Nigeria's youngest registrar in the history of JAMB. Besides, he was previously recognised as one of Nigeria's youngest professors of Computer Engineering.

Aina belongs to several professional organisations, including the Council for the Regulation of Engineering in Nigeria (COREN), the Nigerian Society of Engineers (NSE), the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE), and the Institution of Engineering and Technology (IET).

The faculty member, speaking after his promotion as a professor, attributed his success to both hard work and smart work.

"I think hard work, but I think beyond hard work; I think also smart work. You know, it is not just about working hard; you need to work smart," he said.

As Segun Aina prepares to assume office, expectations are already mounting over how the 39-year-old administrator will shape the future of JAMB and Nigeria's tertiary admissions system.

With growing demands for transparency, innovation and improved examination processes, his leadership will likely be closely watched by students, parents and education stakeholders alike.

Whether he builds on existing reforms or introduces a fresh direction, Aina's tenure could mark the beginning of a new phase for one of the country's most influential education institutions.

11 TYPES OF COFFEE AND WHAT MAKES EACH ONE DIFFERENT

ESTHER EMOEKPERE



You walk into a café for the first time. The barista looks up and asks what kind of coffee you want. You pause. To you, coffee is coffee, a hot, dark drink that gets you through the morning. You did not expect to be asked questions. But in a café, that is rarely the whole story, and the menu above the counter is not making things any easier.

The difference between one coffee and another usually comes down to three things: how the coffee is brewed, how much milk goes in, and what form that milk takes. A small change in any one of those three things produces a completely different drink.

Here is a breakdown of the most common types and what sets each one apart.

Espresso

A small, concentrated shot of coffee brewed by forcing hot water through finely ground beans under high pressure. It is the base for most coffee drinks. What makes it distinct is that it is served on its own, with no milk and no dilution resulting in a strong and dense drink with a strong and rich aroma.

Americano

An americano is made by adding hot water to espresso. This gives it a smoother and less intense taste than plain espresso while still keeping the coffee flavour strong. It is a good option for people who enjoy black coffee but want something lighter.

Latte

An espresso shot with a large amount of steamed milk and a thin layer of foam on top. It is the milkiest of the espresso-based drinks, which makes it the mildest in flavour. If you are new to coffee, this is usually the easiest starting point.

Cappuccino

Made with equal parts espresso, steamed milk and milk foam. What sets it apart from a latte is the thick layer of foam on top and the

stronger coffee taste that comes through because there is less milk overall. Usually served in a smaller cup. It is the most popular coffee choice around the world.

Macchiato

An espresso shot with just a small dash of steamed milk or foam. Unlike a latte or cappuccino, the milk here is not meant to soften the drink significantly. It is still largely an espresso, with the milk added only to take the edge off the bitterness.

Mocha

An espresso-based drink made with steamed milk and chocolate. What makes it different from every other drink on this list is the chocolate, which gives it a sweetness that no other coffee has by default. Often topped with whipped cream.

Flat white

Similar to a latte but smaller, with less foam and a higher ratio of espresso to milk. The result is a stronger, more concentrated coffee flavour than a latte without the frothy texture of a cappuccino. It originated in Australia and New Zealand.

Cortado

A cortado is made with equal parts espresso and steamed milk. The milk reduces the sharpness and acidity of the espresso without overpowering the coffee flavour. Unlike a latte or cappuccino, a cortado has very little foam and is the texture is smooth, balanced, and stronger in taste than milk heavy coffee drinks.

Filter coffee

Unlike the coffees mentioned earlier, this is not an espresso based drink. Instead, its name comes from the brewing method itself. To make it, coffee grounds are placed in a paper or metal filter before hot water is poured over them. As the water slowly passes through the grounds, it produces a smooth and clean tasting cup of coffee. It remains one of the most common brewing methods used in homes around the world.

Cold brew

Made by steeping (soaking) coarsely ground coffee beans in cold water for several hours, usually overnight, cold brew is not simply hot coffee poured over ice. The slow brewing process creates a smoother, less acidic drink with a naturally sweet undertone.

Iced coffee

Hot coffee brewed in the usual way and then poured over ice. Unlike cold brew, it is quick to make and has a lighter, sharper flavour. The two are often confused, but the brewing process is completely different.

LAKOWE LAKES: A CONSIDERED ESCAPE JUST OUTSIDE LAGOS



Distance isn't always what defines a break. Sometimes, it's how quickly you can shift out of one pace and into another.

At Lakowe Lakes Golf and Country Estate, just 90 minutes from Lagos, that shift happens with ease. The transition is gradual but clear—the city gives way to open space, still water, and a quieter rhythm that doesn't need much adjustment. There's no need for flights or extended planning. You arrive quickly, settle in easily, and spend more time being present. It's close enough to feel accessible yet removed enough to create a sense of separation.

Set across 308 hectares, the estate unfolds with intention. Expanses of green, lakes that anchor the landscape, and tree-lined paths that encourage a slower pace. It isn't designed around excess or constant activity, but around flexibility - how you choose to move through your time.

Space That Adapts to You

Golf sits at the centre of the estate but never dominates it. The 18-hole championship course moves through the landscape, shaping it rather than defining it.

Beyond that, the experience remains open. Paddle boating and pontoon cruises offer time on the water. Cycling routes wind through the property. Tennis courts, fishing spots, and walking paths provide enough variety without requiring structure.

For families, the openness allows for movement without rigidity. For couples or solo travellers, it offers space to slow down, uninterrupted.

There is no fixed pace. The estate responds to how you choose to engage with it.

Dining, Without Formality

Dining at Lakowe Lakes follows the same principle - considered, but unforced.

Revivo Restaurant & Bar, set alongside the pool, offers a more casual setting with light meals, fresh juices, and drinks throughout the day. It's where afternoons tend to extend naturally.

The Wine Bar introduces a quieter setting, positioned by the lake. It lends itself to slower lunches, sundowners, or more intimate dinners.



At the Lodge, Restaurant on 18 provides a more structured experience. Breakfast sets the tone early, while later meals bring together Nigerian and continental dishes in a way that feels familiar rather than overly curated.

The Clubhouse Restaurant & Bar remains relaxed, with a menu built around grills, local dishes, and straightforward favourites. As evening settles, the atmosphere shifts subtly - bonfires, open-air cinema, and dinners that carry on without a sense of urgency.

Accommodation That Matches Your Stay

Accommodation at Lakowe Lakes is designed with flexibility in mind. The Lodge on 18 offers hotel-style rooms suited to shorter stays - practical, comfortable, and well-positioned within the estate. Balinese-inspired cottages sit closer to the water, offering greater privacy and a more relaxed pace, better suited to longer stays. For extended visits, one- to four-bedroom apartments introduce a more residential feel. Open-plan layouts, fully equipped kitchens, and considered living spaces allow guests to settle in more fully. It's an approach that accommodates different lengths of stay without compromising on comfort.

A Complete Environment

Part of Lakowe Lakes' appeal lies in its cohesion. Reliable Wi-Fi, secure access, and a wide range of on-site experiences reduce the need to plan beyond the estate. Everything is accessible, but never overwhelming. It works equally well as a short reset or a longer stay. There's enough to engage with, without creating pressure to do so.

A More Structured Option, If You Prefer

For those who prefer a more defined experience, Lakowe Lakes offers curated packages available throughout the year.



The Honeymoon Package includes a two-night stay, full-board dining, a couple's massage, and the option of a lakeside picnic or candlelit dinner - simple, considered, and easy to step into.

The Serene Adventure Escape pairs a two-night stay with a pedal boating experience, complemented by music and a small picnic on the water.

Each is designed to enhance the stay, rather than dictate it. A Different Approach to Getting Away
Lakowe Lakes doesn't rely on excess to define its offering. Instead, it provides something more measured - space, ease, and a setting that allows you to step away from the demands of the city without travelling far from it. You can engage fully, or not at all. Structure your time or leave it open. Either way, the experience holds.

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AHMET BOZER ON PURPOSE, GROWTH AND SOULGERY PHILOSOPHY

CHISOM MICHAEL





Ahmet Bozer is a globally respected business leader, leadership thinker, and former President of The Coca-Cola Company International, with more than three decades of experience leading operations across global markets. Drawing from his extensive career in strategic leadership and human development, he authored *Soulgery*, a transformative book released in 2025 that explores an actionable framework for unlocking human potential through purpose, growth, and lived experiences. Beyond corporate leadership, Bozer has served on several international business and philanthropic boards, shaping conversations around leadership and global impact. In this interview with CHISOM MICHAEL, he discusses how his decades of global leadership shaped the philosophy behind *Soulgery*, the importance of purpose-driven growth, the role of self-awareness and resilience in personal development, and how individuals can transform pressure, adversity, and everyday experiences into opportunities for meaningful growth, impact, and leadership.

How did your global leadership career shape the ideas you present in *Soulgery*?

My global leadership career was like a living laboratory that produced many of the insights shared in *Soulgery*.

Being in a leadership role offers one of the best opportunities to understand people and human potential—beginning with yourself. How you define your responsibilities as a leader and the approach you bring to leadership influence how much of that opportunity you capture. Over the years, I came to define five fundamental responsibilities of leadership: leading with a sense of meaning, focusing on value creation for all stakeholders, forging deep human connections,

building resilience, and fostering continuous growth. As for my leadership approach, I have always believed the best approach is one that is effective for the situation you are in and aligned with who you are.

This perspective on leadership meant I had to cultivate an inner self that would help me fulfil those responsibilities. As I engaged in that inner work, I realised that the fundamentals of leadership are also fundamentals for becoming a fuller human being. The difference is one of context: in business leadership, you apply them in service of the enterprise; in growing as a human being, you apply them across the whole of life.

From that realisation, my focus shifted entirely toward the question of what it means to grow as a human being, and that became the beginning of *Soulgery*.

What is the central purpose of the *Soulgery* model?

The purpose of *Soulgery* is simply to support people in their lifelong growth journey.

The fundamentals I spoke about earlier can be encouraged, but they cannot be imparted to us. They're built through how we engage with life, and too often their development is left to chance.

I believe everyone has the capacity to do this work, but how to do it is not always clear. That is exactly why I created *Soulgery*: to serve as a guide for doing that deeper work. It is a practical, non-dogmatic model, allowing readers to adapt it to their own circumstances and apply it in a sequence and at a pace that works for them.

Can you explain the role of the Self Map within your framework?

The Self Map is a simple idea with profound utility. It emerged from the belief that, if we aim to grow as human beings, we first need a clear understanding of what a human being is and how they work. The Self Map articulates a view of the self, laying the groundwork for the entire model.

It is a holistic map of the human experience, helping us see ourselves as beings with physical, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual dimensions that interact with one another.

Using these dimensions, we develop what I call human equities qualities, such as love, wisdom, and character. We also build skills: the capabilities needed in our professions, as well as the core skills we need in our daily lives.

These human equities and skills are then expressed in how we engage with the outside world.

All of this development is animated by our willpower, guided by our conscience—if we choose to listen to it—and influenced, often in subtle ways, by our sense of self. That interplay is central to understanding how growth actually happens.

Ultimately, the Self Map helps you understand yourself and develop a vision of your better self, acting as both a mirror and a compass.

What do you mean by “Find Your Direction” and “Aim for Impact” in the Acts of Growth?

Find Your Direction—Act 1—is grounded in my belief that when we find inspiration in life itself, our capacity for growth increases and our runway extends across our entire lives. Having said that, inspiration isn’t something we can simply chase; it finds us. So, the best we can do is prepare ourselves to receive it.

That preparation begins by opening our hearts to love and harvesting wisdom from our lived experiences. Becoming ever wiser and more open-hearted paves the way for exploring life’s existential questions more deeply. One of these questions is the why of our existence—the meaning of our lives. The search for that answer can itself become an inner source of guidance and inspiration, helping us self-direct our lives with greater clarity.

Aim for Impact—Act 2—builds on that direction. It is grounded in the idea that our growth accelerates when we focus first on the impact we can have on others. This does not mean ignoring our own needs. Rather, it suggests that an impact orientation is often a more sustainable way to pursue our goals.

We cultivate this impact orientation by embracing what Soulgerly calls a legacy mindset—being intentional about what we leave behind in others. That may be something built over years, or the thoughts and emotions we inspire in everyday moments.

A legacy mindset drives what we do. Our impact is also defined by how we engage with others, and the roots of that lie in our character. Here, Soulgerly speaks to cultivating traits that help us connect more deeply with others—qualities such as integrity, fairness, courage, and care—and amplify our impact.

So, in simple terms, Find Your Direction helps us clarify what calls us forward. Aim for Impact helps ensure that what moves us forward adds value beyond ourselves.

How does “Perform with Excellence” move from intention to action in practice?

Perform with Excellence is where intention becomes lived practice. This happens through several everyday disciplines: personal planning, time management, preparation, and disciplined management of our well-being.

The model focuses on the underlying factors that make us more effective in each. For example, in time management, Soulgerly looks at our ability to simplify, to evaluate how we operate across the different roles we play, and to build steadfast intentionality. In personal planning, the emphasis is on self-reflection, creating space to regroup ourselves and reposition ourselves on what matters.

As for preparation, the focus is on our psychological state at the time of performance, because how we show up internally has a real effect on what we can deliver externally. The same is true for well-being. Excellence is hard to sustain if we treat our well-being as an afterthought. We need the discipline to manage our physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual energy in ways that support the level of contribution we want to make.

As readers experiment with these ideas in their own way, they begin to settle into what I call a rhythm of excellence, a practical way of living and working that helps them bring out their best in whatever they do.

Could you share an example from your own career that illustrates this rhythm of excellence?

I stay disciplined about weekly reflection because it helps me enter each new week with the confidence that comes from being prepared. It gives me a way to convert mistakes into learning before they harden into regret, strengthen intentionality in how I pursue my priorities, and preserve perspective under pressure.

Over time, this practice builds the mental muscles to keep checking in with yourself, and, in turn, you become ever more effective in how you think, decide, and act.

You use the phrase “hacking your growth” in the book. What does this mean in everyday life?

All of us have what I call a default mode. It is the collection of thoughts, emotions, mindsets, and patterns that tend to take over almost automatically when we face pressure or adversity. We develop this default mode over the years, and in many ways it can be helpful. But the deeper question is: does it also help us grow?

Every challenge tests us in new ways and offers an opportunity to move toward our next better version. Hacking your growth means intentionally capturing that opportunity and accelerating your growth as you work through the challenge. It involves becoming more aware of your default mode, understanding how it shapes your responses, and actively adopting a growth-minded approach.

As we hack our default mode, we shift from reacting to adversity toward learning from it, growing through it, and becoming stronger because of it. Over time, we can turn our default mode into what I would call a growth mode, where growth through adversity becomes our natural response.

What motivated you to write Soulgerly at this stage of your journey?

I believe we have a basic human need to express what we have come to understand about ourselves and about life. I felt that need as well.

After many years in global leadership, I began to see that my professional experience and personal background had given me a particular lens on personal growth. I had the opportunity to lead across many cultures and to live and work in both individualistic and collectivist societies. That combination gave me a unique angle from which to reflect on how we grow as human beings, how we find meaning, build resilience, connect with others, and contribute to the world around us.

The motivation to write *Soulgergy* came from that place. It was not simply a desire to write a book; it was a need to share a perspective that had become deeply important to me. That motivation was strong enough to carry me through the eight years it took to complete it—years shaped by observation, self-inquiry, and synthesis.

How do you see the principles of *Soulgergy* influencing relationships and communities?

I believe that when someone internalises *Soulgergy* in their own way, positive change begins from within. The grounding, clarity, and self-awareness that come from this work naturally begin to reflect in everyday life—in how we relate, how we listen, how we respond, and how we show up for others.

That inner shift can create a meaningful impact on the lives we touch. It may be through greater patience in a relationship, greater fairness in a decision, greater courage in a difficult conversation, or greater care in how we lead and support others. These may seem like small moments, but they shape the human environment around us. From there, the effect can ripple outward. We cannot fully estimate how far those ripples may go, but we can reasonably say they move things in a better direction.

The more people embrace this way of thinking about themselves and life, the more positive the development can become—both individually and collectively. In that sense, *Soulgergy* goes beyond personal growth; it can contribute to healthier communities and a stronger human fabric.

In what ways can *Soulgergy* contribute to leadership on a global scale?

On a global scale, I believe *Soulgergy* matters deeply because it invites us to think of leadership not simply as a role, but as a way of being.

Imagine a world where leadership is shaped more consistently by the fundamentals we discussed earlier, and where those qualities are embraced more broadly across institutions, whatever one's level of responsibility may be. Imagine households, workplaces, and communities where relationships are shaped by the human qualities that connect us deeply.

This may sound like a distant vision, and perhaps it is. But even progress toward it can make the world a better place.

How does your approach help people thrive rather than simply cope with pressure?

Pressure can be something through which we grow. The question is how we respond to it. We touched on this when we discussed how to turn adversity into a source of growth. But thriving is not only about how we respond to pressure. It is also about how proactive we are about our own growth, and *Soulgergy* is meant to guide that process as well.

The Four Acts of Growth translate into 19 Focus Areas and 19 core skills that we can continue to build throughout our lives. As progress in these areas accumulates over time, we position ourselves for what can feel like an exponential experience of growth.

So the aim is not simply to cope with life, but to accelerate our growth through it.

What makes *Soulgergy* distinct from other books on personal growth?

Soulgergy stands apart through its unique blend of breadth, depth, and practicality. Many approaches to personal growth focus on one particular dimension of life. *Soulgergy* intentionally spans both the everyday realities of growth, such as overcoming adversity or improving performance, and the deeper dimensions of human experience, such as meaning, love, wisdom, and character.

But this breadth does not come at the expense of depth. Quite the contrary: each area is explored through a distinctive lens, understanding the role our sense of self plays in how we think, feel, relate, and decide. That is one of the central ideas of *Soulgergy*: our sense of self can subtly shape almost every part of our lives, often without our noticing.

At the same time, *Soulgergy* is highly pragmatic. The model is designed to be actionable in everyday life, through reflection on lived experience, and practical shifts in how we engage with our roles, relationships, challenges, and aspirations.

Finally, *Soulgergy* is designed to meet people where they are. Readers do not have to follow it in a rigid sequence. They can begin with any area that feels most relevant to their lives, adopt the framework in any sequence, engage with one or several focus areas at a time, and move at their own pace.

That combination—breadth across life, depth through the sense of self, and practicality for everyday use—is what makes *Soulgergy* distinct.

INSIDE PUSH TO MOVE THE NIGERIAN BOY-CHILD OUT OF THE 'MACHO BOX'

IFEOMA OKEKE-KORIEOCHA



In the discourse of building a sustainable economy, securing a nation or establishing family legacy, there must be ethical men to drive this future.

However, a silent concern is growing at the foundational level of Nigeria's human capital pipeline: the neglect and cultural misconditioning of the boy-child.

At the recent 5th Anniversary Summit and Book Unveiling of the Boy-Child Transformation Centre (BTC) held in Lagos, a high-level panel of policymakers, leadership experts, and civil society leaders gathered to address this developmental blind spot.

The consensus was clear: raising emotionally intelligent, ethically grounded boys is no longer just a social preference—it is a macroeconomic requirement for a thriving society and a secure economy.

Since its inception in 2021, the BTC has stood at the frontline of this advocacy. Over the past five years, the center's mandate has undergone a strategic transition—evolving from merely protecting young boys from immediate societal hazards to actively equipping them to become the conscientious role models, collaborative CEOs, ethical statesmen, and dedicated fathers of tomorrow.

The anchor of the summit was the official unveiling of Unboxed, a strategic book designed to serve as an executive manual for parents, educators, and institutional stakeholders.

Nkiruka Moghalu-Joel, Founder of the BTC and Managing Director/CEO of Avenu Consulting, explained that the book targets the systematic deconstruction of what she terms the "Macho Box"—a rigid societal construct that dictates how manhood is defined and how young boys are raised.

"The 'Man Box' is a silent killer," Moghalu-Joel asserted. "From a very young age, everyone is training the boy-child based on the singular, flawed premise that he must simply 'man up.' We tell them that showing emotion or being vulnerable is a sign of weakness, as if blood is not supposed to flow through their veins. We teach them to conceal their struggles, which ignores the deep-seated issues they carry inside."

Moghalu-Joel noted that out of this "Macho Box" emerges a skewed worldview where emotional intelligence is discarded, emotional expression is shamed, and women are treated as mere objects rather than partners.

One of the keynote figures at the summit shared a personal paradigm shift, noting that he has intentionally committed to letting his own young sons cry and freely express their feelings, breaking the cycle of emotional suppression.

To replace this toxic framework, Unboxed introduces the Mantra Framework, a structured, three-dimensional developmental model.



The book utilises the real-world narrative arcs of three characters—Harvey, Jay, and Kel—tracking their psychological and social experiences from ages 5, 11, 12, up to 18 and 19. The framework provides a practical guide for stakeholders to step in at critical life stages and nurture character over caricature.

Values, Incentives, and Education

Providing a sharp macroeconomic and historical diagnosis of the crisis, Dakuku Peterside, leadership expert and former Director-General of the Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA), argued that Nigeria's current social instability and leadership deficit are rooted in three foundational failures.

The Value Crisis

According to Peterside, the country is facing a severe identity collapse that transcends basic morality.

"Nigeria is getting it wrong in three distinct dimensions," he stated. "First, there is a core values crisis that nobody is structurally addressing. It is deeply embedded in the fabric of how we co-exist, and we are ignoring the rot at the foundation level."

Perverted Economic Incentives

Peterside delivered a stinging critique of Nigeria's contemporary reward system, pointing out how the economy inadvertently funds social decay.

"As a country, we reward wealth without enterprise, we reward crime, we reward vanity, and we reward mediocrity," Peterside argued. "There is a direct line from our values crisis to our economic incentives. What you reward, you incentivize, and what you disincentivize, people lose interest in. Because we do not place a premium on honesty, integrity, and hard work, the younger generation simply isn't interested in those ideals anymore."

Educational Model

The third structural failure lies in the nation's classrooms. Peterside noted that the country remains stubbornly wedded to an obsolete, colonial-era British educational model that over-indexes on paper qualification at the expense of human capacity.

"We are using a model that emphasizes certification over character, competence, and skill," he warned. "We raise children to chase

paper degrees in the hope that the certificate automatically grants them a job. We don't care about attitude; we don't care about societal impact. Parents, unfortunately, have been completely sucked into this system. They are no longer intentional about what they incentivize in their homes."

Representing the public sector, Abisola Dokunmu-Adegbite, the Permanent Secretary of the Lagos State Ministry of Basic and Secondary Education, confirmed that the government is beginning to recognize the strategic necessity of balancing gender-focused development.

Reflecting on the timeliness of the summit, Dokunmu-Adegbite noted that modern digital distractions and devices have escalated the vulnerability of young boys, making immediate intervention imperative.

"This program couldn't have come at a better time," Dokunmu-Adegbite stated, adding her voice to the advocacy. "For a long time, the collective focus has concentrated heavily on the girl-child, effectively leaving the boy-child behind in the development loop. Thankfully, there is a massive wave of awareness building across the country now."

The Permanent Secretary revealed that the initiative has secured high-level political will. The First Lady of the Nation, Oluremi Tinubu, alongside Ibijoke Sanwo-Olu, the First Lady of Lagos State, are both actively passionate about driving structural reforms for the boy-child.

To transition this passion into policy, Dokunmu-Adegbite disclosed that a formal Steering Committee has already been institutionalized in Lagos State, stemming directly from a federal framework, to design and execute state-led interventions for boy-child development.

Winner Of WIMS Challenge

The tangible value of providing young men with platforms for self-expression was on full display during the presentation of the Walk-in-My-Shoes (WIMS) Unboxed Challenge.

The competition's winner, Alade Daniel Adedayo, a law student and spoken-word poet from the University of Abuja, shared the heavy personal narrative that inspired his winning submission. Adedayo turned to his creativity to confront one of the most destructive coping mechanisms of the neglected boy-child: substance abuse.

"I submitted an entry focused strictly on drug abuse because I lost a close friend to it," Adedayo shared. "Drug abuse is a highly salient societal issue that we frequently sweep under the carpet. When I saw the WIMS challenge, I realized it was the perfect avenue to lend my storytelling and creativity to the cause. Of course, the prize money was also a great motivator to give it my absolute best."

Adedayo's experience also shed light on the pervasive imposter syndrome and performance pressures young men face. "I came here hoping and expecting to win because I poured everything into my entry," he admitted. "But the moment I arrived at the summit and saw the sheer caliber of the other displayed entries, my confidence started dropping. I'm incredibly glad and honored that I won."

FROM CAMPUS TO COMMERCE: SQUAD HACKATHON 3.0 LINKS GEN Z AI INNOVATION TO SUB- SAHARAN MARKET SCALE





The Evolution of a Finclusion Revolution

The journey to Hackathon 3.0 was built on a foundation of rapid scaling. The first-ever edition, “Take on Squad Hackathon 1.0,” held at the state-of-the-art GTCO Training Complex (Tayo’s Plaza) in Abeokuta, Ogun State, focused on pushing young innovators to address operational bottlenecks using Squad APIs, cloud computing frameworks, and secure transaction protocols. Apart from cash rewards, the top three teams earned placement in the Squad Hackademy for internships and job opportunities.

By 2025, the second edition expanded into a three-day marathon themed “Finclusion Revolution: Unlocking Access, Empowering Communities.” That cohort produced platforms that digitized agricultural supply chains, enabled efficient group financial management, and streamlined property rental payments through integrated digital wallets—demonstrating deep proficiency in real-time transaction processing and algorithmic problem-solving.

The Hackathon 3.0 themed ‘Smart Systems: The Intelligent Economy,’ GTCO intensified its search for Africa’s next generation of tech architects with higher stakes, intense competition, and a wider set of problem statements.

Participants were given exclusive access to leverage Squad’s cutting-edge APIs to execute ideas that were technically sophisticated, economically relevant, and socially transformative.

A Tenfold Leap in the Tech Talent Pipeline

Reflecting the explosive momentum within Nigeria’s youth-led software ecosystem, this third edition recorded an unprecedented surge in engagement, drawing over 1,600 applications from university students across the federation.

Following a strict technical shortlisting process based on algorithmic competence, team composition, and verified GitHub portfolio submissions, 600 applicants were selected. Ultimately, more than 500 participants progressed to the grand finale to endure intensive coding sessions, product demos, panel discussions, and brainstorming marathons.

Eduofon Japhet, Managing Director of HabariPay, highlighted that student participation expanded more than tenfold compared to previous years, underscoring the platform’s role as a critical bridge.

The global financial technology landscape is moving rapidly from basic digital transaction processing to highly advanced frontiers like artificial intelligence (AI), decentralized finance (DeFi), and complex automation systems.

Yet, as global commercial demand for sophisticated software engineering scales, sub-Saharan Africa’s fintech ecosystem continues to grapple with a persistent operational bottleneck: an acute technical skills shortage.

Bridging this structural gap requires a concerted, deliberate effort from both corporate entities and universities to make the industry visible, accessible, and aligned with practical enterprise application.

Standing at the center of this domestic talent transition is HabariPay, the financial technology subsidiary of Guaranty Trust Holding Company Plc (GTCO). The firm recently concluded the grand finale of its highly anticipated Squad Hackathon 3.0 at the GTCentre, marking the most ambitious, high-stakes iteration of the event since its inception.

What began as localized coding exercises in its 2024 and 2025 iterations has scaled into a rigorous national launchpad.

The annual event challenges student teams to create innovative solutions to problems within their immediate communities and the wider society.

By providing a platform for university and tertiary institution participants to showcase their technical capabilities, the hackathon serves as a vital stepping stone for young innovators to gain exposure, refine their skills, and potentially bring their solutions to market.



“We realized there is still a wide gap between classroom theory and practical problem-solving,” Japhet noted during the finale.

“This platform is designed to help students build real-world solutions using emerging technologies like artificial intelligence and smart systems. We are not stopping at the competition; HabariPay is developing a long-term mentorship and talent pipeline program to support selected participants through structured training, tuition assistance, and potential employment opportunities over the next few years.”

AI-Driven Financial Inclusion: Team ‘Block X’ Takes the Crown

Following a highly competitive innovation showcase, the apex winner of Hackathon 3.0 was announced as Team ‘Block X’, an elite student engineering team from Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU).

The team—comprising Treasure Uvietobore (Platform & Systems Engineer), Naheem Olaide (Frontend & Machine Learning Developer), and Enoch Idowu (AI & Machine Learning Engineer)—secured the coveted first-place position and the grand prize of ₦5 million.

They impressed the panel of judges with Guild, an AI-powered platform specifically engineered to bridge Nigeria’s massive informal labor workforce with the formal financial architecture.

In a typical operational use case demonstrated during the live pitches, an informal artisan—such as a bricklayer—places a voice call to “Tola,” the platform’s localized Nigerian English voice agent.

The user is instantly matched to an open job opportunity, completes the assigned task, and receives secure, real-time digital payment routed directly through integrated Squad APIs.

Crucially, as these daily transactions pass through the system, the platform systematically generates a verifiable digital financial record for the worker. Within 90 days, this transactional footprint builds a reliable alternative credit profile, enabling previously unbanked informal laborers to access conventional banking services, commercial credit, and micro-loans.

Productivity Systems and Regulatory Balance

The action-packed environment also birthed standout solutions outside the financial inclusion space, emphasizing digital automation and workflow efficiency. Among the top-tier innovations was Tracker, an AI-powered workforce productivity monitoring platform designed by Sherif Sani, a Computer Science student at the University of Lagos (UNILAG).

The solution leverages machine learning models to analyze workflow patterns, task completion timelines, and browser activity for remote and onsite corporate teams. To balance operational visibility with compliance, the platform incorporates strict, privacy-focused monitoring controls, addressing a major operational concern for modern distributed businesses.

Reviewing the technical solutions, Segun Agbaje, Group Chief Executive Officer of Guaranty Trust Holding Company Plc (GTCCO), emphasized that the ultimate value of the hackathon lies in developing resilient leadership capabilities through real-world execution.

“You are the best of the best. Everybody who made it into this room today is already a winner,” Agbaje stated, addressing the finalists. “The world is not ruled by extroverts; it is ruled by thinkers. Enterprise building requires resilience, deep collaboration, and ethical execution.”

By providing a structured ecosystem that pairs financial infrastructure with technical talent development, the HabariPay Squad Hackathon 3.0 reinforces GTCCO’s broader institutional commitment to advancing innovation, mitigating the domestic IT skill deficit, and permanently positioning Nigeria as a leading hub in Africa’s expanding digital economy.



6 RESTAURANT CONCEPTS WORTH BRINGING BACK

ESTHER EMOEKPERE



There was a time when going to a restaurant felt like an experience and not just another meal. People stayed longer, conversations flowed easily, and every detail from the menu design to the seating arrangement felt intentional. The food came first, the details were considered, and the room was designed to make you want to stay.

Somewhere between the rise of QR code menus and the obsession with Instagram worthy interiors, dining out lost a few things worth keeping. Digital menus replaced printed ones, tables became less comfortable, and aesthetics sometimes began to matter more than atmosphere.

Some of these ideas never fully disappeared, but they are rare enough now that they feel special when you come across them. Here are the restaurant concepts worth bringing back.

Food as the main event

An Instagram worthy restaurant is always nice to look at, but there was a time when the food itself was the main attraction. Restaurants focused on flavour, portion sizes, consistency, and the overall dining experience instead of creating spaces designed mainly for photographs. A beautiful interior may attract people once, but good food is what keeps them coming back.

Soft background music

Restaurants once understood that music was meant to complement the dining experience, not overpower it. Soft background music created an atmosphere without

interrupting conversations or forcing people to speak over the speakers. Now, some restaurants feel more like clubs with menus. Good music still matters, but it should add to the experience, not compete with it.

Comfortable seating

Not every chair needs to be artistic at the expense of comfort, yet many spaces now prioritise aesthetics while forgetting that diners may sit for hours. Comfortable seating encourages people to relax, settle into their meals, and enjoy the experience properly. When comfort is considered from the start, everything else about the dining

experience naturally improves.

Signature restaurant identity

There was a time when restaurants had a clear identity you could recognise the moment you walked in. From the menu design to the lighting, furniture, staff presentation, and even the way dishes were served, everything felt like it belonged to one unified idea. Today, many restaurants look and feel the same, as if they are following the same design template.

Printed menu

A printed menu just makes the dining experience feel more personal. There is something about being handed a physical menu that feels more considered and intentional than scrolling through a screen. Some restaurants still do this well, but in many places it feels like an afterthought rather than part of the experience.

Generous portions that satisfy

There was a time when dining out meant leaving the table full. Meals were prepared to be enjoyed properly, not minimized or stretched for presentation. Portions were enough to match the experience of eating out, and there was no need to think about another meal afterward. Over time, that sense of completeness has become less common, and leaving a restaurant fully satisfied is no longer always guaranteed.

SIX MOST DEVELOPED COUNTRIES IN AFRICA IN 2026

CHISOM MICHAEL



Development in Africa is often measured through economic growth, education, healthcare, infrastructure, and living standards. One of the most recognised tools for measuring this progress is the United Nations Human Development Index (HDI), which ranks countries by life expectancy, education, and income.

According to the latest HDI rankings, six African countries stand out for their performance in human development. These countries have invested in education, healthcare systems, economic reforms, and public services that continue to shape the lives of millions of people.

According to the World Population Review, here are the 6 most developed countries in Africa in 2026

1. Seychelles — HDI: 0.848

Seychelles ranks as the most developed country in Africa based on the Human Development Index. The island nation has maintained steady progress through tourism, fisheries, and financial services.

The country records one of the highest life expectancy rates on the continent and has near-universal access to education and healthcare. Government investment in social services has helped reduce poverty and improve living conditions for citizens.

Seychelles also benefits from political stability and strong public institutions. While the country has a small population, its economic structure has allowed it to maintain higher income levels than many African nations.

2. Mauritius — HDI: 0.806

Mauritius is Africa's second most developed country and one of the continent's leading economic centres. Over the years, the country moved from an agriculture-based economy into sectors such as finance, manufacturing, tourism, and technology.

Education remains a key part of the country's growth strategy. Mauritius provides free education and healthcare, helping improve literacy levels and life expectancy.

The country is also known for its stable democratic system and business environment, which continue to attract investors from different parts of the world.

3. Algeria — HDI: 0.763

Algeria ranks third on the list, supported largely by its oil and gas sector. Revenue from energy exports has enabled the government to invest in housing, education, and healthcare programmes.

The country has one of the largest economies in Africa and continues to expand infrastructure projects across transport and public utilities.

Despite economic pressures linked to global energy prices, Algeria has maintained relatively high education enrolment rates and access to medical services compared to many countries in the region.

4. Egypt — HDI: 0.754

Egypt remains one of Africa's largest economies and most influential countries. With a population of more than 100 million people, the country has focused on expanding infrastructure, transport systems, and industrial production.

Large-scale government projects, including new roads, cities, and energy developments, have contributed to economic activity. Egypt has also increased investment in digital technology and education reforms in recent years.

The country continues to face challenges linked to inflation and population growth, but its development indicators remain among the strongest on the continent.

5. Tunisia — HDI: 0.746

Tunisia has long maintained strong education and healthcare systems. The country records high literacy rates and has one of the more developed public health structures in North Africa.

Tourism, agriculture, and manufacturing remain important sectors of the economy. Tunisia also has a growing technology and startup sector, especially among young entrepreneurs.

Economic pressures and unemployment remain concerns, particularly among the youth population, but the country continues to rank highly in human development.

6. South Africa — HDI: 0.741

South Africa completes the list as the sixth most developed country in Africa. The country has one of the continent's most advanced financial and industrial sectors.

Its infrastructure network, universities, and healthcare institutions remain among the largest in Africa. South Africa also plays a major role in trade and investment across the continent.

However, inequality and unemployment continue to affect many households. Despite these issues, the country maintains a high HDI ranking due to its economic size, access to services, and institutional structures.

NIGERIA'S MOST SOUGHT-AFTER UNIVERSITIES BY UTME CANDIDATES OVER FIVE YEARS

CHARLES OGWO



As competition for university admission intensifies in Nigeria, certain institutions have consistently emerged as the top choices among candidates sitting for the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME).

Over the past five years, factors such as academic reputation, stable calendars, affordability, location, and graduate prospects have shaped applicants' preferences, driving millions of candidates toward a select group of universities across the country.

According to the Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB) data on UTME application over the last five years, The University of Ilorin (UNILORIN), Lagos State University (LASU), and the University of Lagos (UNILAG), are Nigeria's most sought-after universities.

Lagos State University (LASU):

The Lagos State University (LASU) is a state-owned public university established in 1983 by the late Lateef Jakande administration. The university's main campus is located at Ojo-Badagry expressway.

The university emerged as the most sought-after university among 2026 UTME candidates with 70,080 applicants, and in 2025, the institution also accumulated the highest

number of applicants with 79,000, while in 2024, LASU fell to the second position below UNILORIN. In 2023, LASU was ranked third with 55,964.

Some of the most in-demand courses at LASU include Law, Medicine and Surgery, Nursing, Accounting, Computer Science, and Business Administration, among others.

The University of Ilorin (UNILORIN):

Over the last five years, the University of Ilorin has had the highest number of UTME applicants. In 2026, UNILORIN got 56,758 applicants to emerge third best, and in 2025, it also ranked third with 56,734 applicants.

However, in 2024, 2023, and 2022, UNILORIN emerged the most sought-after university with 64,143, 73,749 and 78,466 applicants, respectively.

UNILORIN was established in 1975 by the Federal Military Government's decree, and the university's main campus sits on an expansive area of land, about 5,000 hectares in the ancient city of Ilorin; making it the largest university in Nigeria and one of the largest in Africa by landmass.



Some of the major courses in-demand include Medicine and Surgery, Law, Engineering, Computer science, and Accounting, among others.

The University of Lagos (UNILAG)

The University of Lagos with 58,645 applicants, emerged as the second most sought-after university after LASU in 2026 UTME, and in 2025, the institution had 58645 applicants to rank second.

In 2024, UNILAG ranked third behind UNILORIN, and LASU, with 59,105 applicants, and in 2023, it ranked second again with 60,606 applicants. Similarly, in the previous year, UNILAG with 59,190 applications placed second behind UNILORIN.

The University of Lagos was established in 1962, as a public research university located in Akoka-Lagos.

It is one of the first generation universities in Nigeria and is ranked among the top universities in Africa in major education publications.

Some of the major in-demand courses include Medicine and Surgery, Law, Engineering, Business Administration, and Mass Communication, among others.

Jessica Osuere, chief executive officer at RubiesHub Educational Services, emphasised that many students and parents now prioritise universities with stable calendars and reduced strike disruptions, as they want timely graduation.

UNILORIN became Nigeria's most preferred university for over a decade primarily due to its uninterrupted academic calendar, which has seen no strikes from 2001, allowing students to graduate on time.

Similarly, LASU explicitly pulled out of the nationwide ASUU strike, holding normal academic activities while other public universities remained shut.

Ibikunle Ganyu, assistant director of Sandwich Degree Programme at LASU, pointed out that parents and candidates are choosing "certainty" over brand name.

"In Nigeria's system, a four-year course finishing in four years is not so common in most Nigerian universities," he said.

As admission competition continues to intensify, the ranking of Nigeria's most sought-after universities is likely to remain influenced by factors such as academic stability, quality of infrastructure, affordability, security, and graduate employability.

For many prospective students, the choice of institution is no longer based solely on prestige, but increasingly on the assurance of uninterrupted learning and better career prospects in an evolving higher education landscape.



PRESIDENT TINUBU'S APPOINTMENT OF 40-YEAR-OLD SEGUN AINA AS JAMB REGISTRAR, RECEIVES WIDE SPREAD APPLAUDS



In what many stakeholders have described as another bold statement of confidence in young Nigerian excellence, President Bola Ahmed Tinubu has appointed Segun Aina as the new Registrar of the Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board (JAMB), entrusting one of Nigeria's most critical educational institutions to a 40-year-old scholar, technocrat, and examination systems expert.

The appointment has generated widespread conversation across the education, policy, and technology sectors, not merely because of Professor Aina's age, but because of the depth of expertise, institutional experience, and reform credentials he brings to the role at a pivotal time for Nigeria's education system.

Announcing Prof Aina's appointment, Bayo Onanuga, Special Adviser to the President on Information and Strategy, noted that the appointment underscores the administration's belief in merit-driven leadership and the importance of positioning forward-thinking professionals in strategic public offices.

"President Tinubu remains committed to building institutions that are efficient, transparent, and future-ready," Onanuga said.

"Professor Segun Aina's appointment reflects the administration's confidence in his exceptional academic background, technological expertise, and deep understanding of Nigeria's examination ecosystem."

He added that the President believes national development requires “a deliberate blend of experience, innovation, and generational inclusion.” “This administration recognises that many young Nigerians are already demonstrating world-class competence across sectors. The President will continue to identify and empower capable professionals who can drive meaningful reforms and deliver measurable impact for the country,” Onanuga stated.

The appointment further reinforces President Tinubu’s growing reputation for identifying and empowering younger technocrats and professionals with demonstrable records of achievement. In October 2023, the President appointed Mustapha Abdullahi, aged 40, as Director-General of the Energy Commission of Nigeria.

In 2024, Jennifer Adighije, aged 42, emerged as the Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer of Niger Delta Power Holding Company, becoming the first woman to occupy the role.

Zacch Adedeji, another prominent appointee widely credited for driving major tax reforms as Executive Chairman of the Federal Inland Revenue Service, also represents the administration’s push to bridge generational divides by placing younger, highly skilled Nigerians at the centre of governance.

Political analysts say the emergence of Professor Aina as JAMB Registrar further reinforces the President’s belief that competence, innovation, and delivery capacity must take precedence over traditional age expectations in governance.

Aina’s credentials have already drawn attention within academic and policy circles. One of the youngest Professors of Computer Engineering in Nigeria, he holds a PhD in Digital Signal Processing and a Master’s degree in Internet Computing and Network Security from the prestigious Loughborough University, alongside a Bachelor of Engineering degree in Computer Systems Engineering from University of Kent. Currently a Professor in the Department of Computer Engineering at Obafemi Awolowo University, Professor Aina has built a reputation as a scholar whose work extends beyond theory into practical institutional reform, digital systems development, and educational process integrity.

Over the past 15 years, he has worked extensively within Nigeria’s examination ecosystem, collaborating with institutions including the National Examinations Council (NECO), the National Business and Technical Examinations Board (NABTEB), the Osun State Examinations Board, and several State Universal Basic Education Boards and Ministries of Education across the country.

Education stakeholders believe this experience positions him uniquely to address some of JAMB’s most pressing challenges, including examination security, digital transformation, result integrity, candidate accessibility, and operational efficiency.

With millions of candidates sitting for JAMB examinations annually, the institution remains central to Nigeria’s higher education framework, making the role of Registrar one of immense national significance.

In his first remarks following the announcement, Professor Aina described the appointment as “a call to national service and institutional transformation.”

“I am deeply honoured by the confidence reposed in me by President Bola Ahmed Tinubu and the Federal Government,” he said.

“JAMB occupies a strategic position in the future of Nigerian education, and I fully understand the weight of responsibility that comes with this office. My commitment is to strengthen institutional integrity, leverage technology for efficiency and transparency, and ensure that every Nigerian student experiences a system that is fair, credible, and future-facing.”

He added that innovation and public trust would remain central pillars of his administration.

“We must continue building an examination system that reflects global best practices while responding to the realities of Nigerian students and institutions. Technology, accountability, and human-centered leadership will guide our approach,” Aina stated.

Beyond academia, Professor Aina also brings governance and private-sector oversight experience into the role. He has served on the Governing Council of Bamidele Olumilua University of Education, Science and Technology, chaired the Advisory Board of Queensland Academy in Lagos, and held governance responsibilities within the United Kingdom’s educational framework as a Governor of Booth Wood Elementary School.

He is also a Non-Executive Director overseeing diversified investments across education technology, agriculture, real estate, and technical education — experience analysts say could prove valuable in managing the operational and strategic complexities of JAMB.

Industry experts believe his appointment comes at a time when Nigeria’s education sector increasingly requires technologically savvy leadership capable of modernizing legacy systems while restoring confidence among students, parents, and tertiary institutions.

For many young Nigerians, the appointment also carries symbolic significance. With Nigeria’s median age estimated at approximately 18 years and a majority of the population under 40, the elevation of a 39-year-old Professor to lead one of the country’s most consequential education agencies is being interpreted as a message that excellence and preparedness can earn national responsibility irrespective of age.

As reactions continue to trail the announcement, one sentiment appears increasingly shared across sectors: Professor Segun Aina’s emergence is not simply about youth representation, but about placing proven expertise, innovation, and institutional knowledge at the heart of Nigeria’s education reform journey.

WOMEN MOBILISE DEMOCRACY: BUT WHAT IS PARTICIPATION WITHOUT POWER?

EKEMINI AKPAKPAN

Introduction

On the heels of another Nigerian election, I recently watched an episode of The Leading Woman Show on the season The Nigeria We Want, and a point made by Adebola Williams stayed with me. He argued that women should not wait to see what is set aside for them or what handouts are offered. Instead, women should convert their numerical strength and voting power into negotiating power.

The point struck me because it reframed an assumption that often sits at the center of conversations about women and politics. We tend to discuss women as though they exist at the margins of political life, waiting to be included. But that framing misses something important.

Nigerian women are deeply embedded in the political system. They mobilise communities, organize campaign activities, activate religious and market networks, sustain grassroots engagement, and consolidate votes. They are often the machinery behind political participation itself. Yet a question remains: if women contribute so significantly to building political outcomes, why does that participation so rarely translate into political power?

Perhaps the question is not why women are absent from politics. Perhaps the more important question is why political systems repeatedly convert women's labour into electoral value without converting that value into decision-making power.

Organising versus Leadership: The Gendered Allocation of Roles

From an early age, societies communicate expectations about who should care, who should support, who should coordinate, and who should lead. Women are frequently socialised into roles associated with nurturing, caregiving, and community cohesion. Over time, these expectations extend beyond households and shape public life. Women become the organisers of ceremonies, coordinators of social networks, mobilisers of collective action, and custodians of community welfare.

The issue is not that these roles are insignificant. In many cases, they are the very work that holds communities together. The issue is that societies often assign insignificant value to this form of contribution. While women are expected to perform the labour of organizing and sustaining communities, formal positions associated with authority and decision-making, including village heads, union presidents, political leaders, and elected representatives, have historically remained dominated by men. As a result, women frequently carry responsibility without corresponding authority.

Over time, this becomes more than a cultural pattern; it becomes a system. The people who organize are not the people who decide. The people who sustain structures don't control them.

Beyond Organizing: The Hidden Power of Women's Networks
If political systems have historically assigned women the work of organizing, the answer may not be to reject those roles altogether. Organizing, mobilizing, and community building have often been treated as supportive rather than strategic, invisible rather than influential.

Historically, women have built and sustained some of society's most enduring social structures: market associations, cooperative societies, religious fellowships, savings circles, professional networks, advocacy movements, and grassroots community groups. These spaces have often functioned as vehicles for care and collective action. However, they also represent something else: social capital.

Social capital matters because networks shape influence. They build trust, coordinate action, distribute information, and mobilize people around shared goals. Increasingly, global evidence suggests women's strong leadership presence in social impact ecosystems and membership-driven organizations where influence often depends on convening power and coalition building.

History also offers examples across different contexts. First Ladies have often wielded influence despite occupying offices with no formal constitutional authority. Through advocacy platforms, coalition-building, and social mobilization, many built significant public legitimacy and shaped national conversations. Consider Michelle Obama, whose influence extends far beyond public office; she built a platform sustained not by constitutional authority but by credibility, relationships, and public trust.

From Electoral Machinery to Political Shareholders
Recognizing women's organizing power is only part of the conversation. The more difficult question is conversion. How do organizing networks become negotiating networks? How does social capital become political capital? How does participation become leverage?

Political influence is rarely a reward for participation. More often, it is the product of organized bargaining power. This may partly explain why women remain highly visible within political systems while remaining underrepresented in formal leadership. To shift from organizing power to deciding power, women may need to move beyond functioning as the machinery of democracy and begin operating as its institutional shareholders. Systems reward structure, coordination, and bargaining power.

1. Consolidate Capital: Financing Political Participation

Politics runs on resources. Campaigns require money, logistics, visibility, coalition building, and sustained engagement. Yet access to financing remains one of the most persistent barriers to women's political participation.

Dependence on party executives and elite gatekeepers for campaign funding can also reinforce existing power asymmetries. This is where women's extensive social infrastructure may offer an untapped opportunity.

Across Nigeria, women already participate in systems of collective financing and economic coordination through savings groups, cooperatives, market associations, *esusu*, *ajo*, and professional networks. Global examples suggest that collective funding models can shift political outcomes. In the United States, EMILY's List built an independent funding ecosystem around a simple idea: early financial support can significantly shape political viability. By aggregating contributions across broad networks of women, the organization created pathways for female candidates to compete outside traditional gatekeeping structures.

Nigeria also has early foundations through initiatives such as the Nigerian Women Trust Fund. The question may now be scale. What would happen if market associations, professional bodies, alumni networks, and women-led communities collectively treated campaign financing as shared political investment rather than individual responsibility?

Upgrading Party Structures: Moving Beyond Tokenism

Political parties often include women within their architecture, but not always within their centers of power. The traditional position of "Women Leader" illustrates this tension. While important, such roles frequently focus on mobilizing women rather than shaping core decisions and institutional direction. This creates a paradox: women become responsible for building political momentum without necessarily influencing where that momentum goes.

If participation is to become leverage, women may need to move beyond isolated representation toward coordinated structures. Internal caucuses, cross-party alliances, and organized voting blocs can create collective negotiating power capable of shaping party outcomes.

History offers important lessons here. Former Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf did not emerge solely through conventional political machinery. Her 2005 campaign benefited from broad coalitions of market women, women's networks, peace activists, and cross-religious alliances that functioned as an alternative infrastructure of support.

Playing the Game of Numbers: Lessons from the Aba Women's War

The Women's War of 1929, often referred to as the Aba Women's Riot, remains one of Nigeria's most significant examples of collective political organization. Far from being a spontaneous uprising, it represented a highly coordinated movement built through market systems, community alliances, and deeply established social networks.

At the time, colonial structures largely excluded women from formal political recognition while imposing economic policies that threatened their livelihoods. In response, Igbo and Ibibio women activated existing systems of collective action, including coordinated protest methods, economic pressure, and forms of social accountability such as "sitting on a man."

What stands out is not simply resistance itself, but organization. Their collective action generated enough pressure to force institutional reforms. Proposed taxes were withdrawn, administrative structures were reconsidered, and pathways for greater participation eventually emerged..

Sponsorship versus Mentorship: Building the Leadership Pipeline

Conversations around women's advancement must emphasize mentorship along with sponsorship. Mentors help individuals navigate systems. Sponsors actively create access within them - recommend mentees, open networks, create visibility, allocate opportunities, and use their own influence to expand someone else's pathway into leadership.

If women's political participation is to become more sustainable, stronger systems for sponsorship may be required. Established women leaders across business, public policy, academia, and civic leadership can play an important role in not only advising emerging leaders but also actively supporting their political pathways.

History again offers a useful example. The Women's Electoral Lobby in Australia did more than encourage women to participate politically. The organization evaluated candidates, informed voters, and helped transform women into a coordinated political constituency capable of shaping electoral incentives.

Final Thoughts

Nigerian women have never lacked participation. The question is how those same numbers can move beyond mobilising power and begin shaping the architecture of power itself. Democracy does not only reward those who participate; it rewards those who organize, negotiate, and build systems. The future of women's political power therefore depends not on women occupying but shaping democracy.

PHOTOGRAPHY BEYOND DOCUMENTATION IN AFRICA

The camera as a construction site

The most consequential photographs coming out of Africa right now are not documenting anything. They are not capturing a moment, fixing a truth, or recording history for someone else's archive.

They are building worlds, staging fictions so precise and so weighted with emotional intelligence that they say more about belonging, memory, and the body than any document ever could.

There is still a persistent assumption, remarkably durable and remarkably colonial in its roots, that African photography's primary job is to show things as they are. To witness.

To prove it.

In this digest, we examine how that assumption is being dismantled, what is replacing it, and why the shift matters for how we understand African visual culture today.

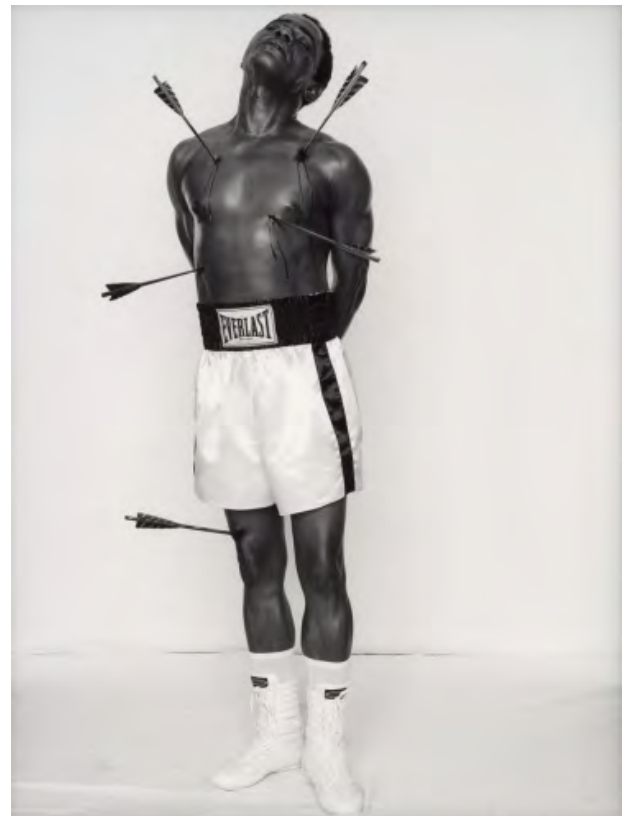
Photography arrived in Africa already carrying a burden. Colonial image-making constructed the continent and its people as subject matter: bodies to be classified, cultures to be preserved in amber for Western consumption.

The ethnographic photograph was never neutral. It was always an argument about who had the right to look and who was condemned to be seen.

Institutions such as Autograph in London and the Walther Collection have spent years excavating this history,



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Samuel Fosso. Untitled from the series African Spirits. 2008



Zanele Muholi, "Somnyama Ngonyama"
(2012–ongoing)

making visible not simply that African photographers existed but that so many were already working against the documentary frame from the very beginning.

Contemporary practitioners are now explicitly and unapologetically working in the register of ideas. Samuel Fosso's long-running self-portrait practice, from his Bangui studio in the 1970s through his "African Spirits" series in which he embodied icons of Black liberation, is not about Fosso the individual. It is a meditation on the politics of representation itself. Zanele Muholi's "Somnyama Ngonyama" uses the self-portrait as a site of political and emotional resistance, manipulating exposure and found objects to confront the viewer with the full weight of how Black bodies have been consumed and discarded.

To call either body of work 'documentation' would be to fundamentally misunderstand what it is asking.

Lebohang Kganye places herself inside archival photographs of her late mother through photomontage, collapsing time to hold a conversation that death made impossible. Joana Choumali layered embroidery directly onto her photographs after the 2016 Grand-Bassam attack, creating objects that sit between photography, textile, and mourning rituals. In both cases, the photograph is not where the meaning lives. It is where the process begins.

If a photograph no longer exists to prove something happened, what new responsibilities does it carry? African photographers are insisting, with increasing clarity and force, that they be the ones to decide what is being proposed. That insistence is reshaping museums, biennales, and art fairs, and it is quietly changing what the rest of the world understands photography to be for.



Keturah Ovio

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THE ROLE OF CORPORATE BRANDING IN TRUST, TALENT, AND MARKET POSITIONING

FEYISITAN IJIMAKINWA

Your brand is one of the most powerful assets that your company controls. But with that power also comes great risk. When managed well, strong corporate branding builds trust, loyalty, and long-term value. On the flip side, small inconsistencies and errors can quietly erode credibility and cost real revenue.

The power and price of corporate branding
Most people associate corporate branding with logos, colour palettes, fonts, or catchy slogans. But really it is the sum of how a company presents itself to the world through every product, service, document, and employee interaction. Corporate branding defines what the business stands for, how it communicates, and the experience it consistently promises to all of its stakeholders.

Why strong branding builds long-term value
When corporate branding is done well, it creates clarity and trust. Customers know who you are, what you deliver, and why they should choose you over competitors. That consistency builds loyalty, fuels word-of-mouth, and increases brand equity. Internally, a strong brand aligns employees around a shared mission and culture, helping attract and retain top talent.

The hidden cost of inconsistency

Branding can also backfire when it is not managed carefully. A mismatched logo on a sales proposal, a presentation that uses the wrong colours, or a document that includes incorrect business information may all seem like small details. But together, they create a patchwork image that weakens trust.

Prospects may question whether your company is as reliable as you claim, and employees may feel unsure about which materials to use.

The real cost is compounded by small errors over time. Each inconsistency chips away at the story your brand is trying to tell. The result is diluted credibility, wasted effort from marketing and sales teams, and an erosion of the brand equity you've worked hard to build.

Corporate branding vs. marketing

It's easy to confuse corporate branding with marketing, but they play different roles. Corporate branding is the long-term foundation—the identity and values that underpin everything else. Marketing is campaign-based, focused on products or services within a given timeframe or context. Both are essential, and effective marketing campaigns often depend on a strong foundation in corporate branding.

Corporate branding: The shortcut to customer trust and loyalty

People do not just buy products; they buy the story behind them. A strong corporate brand creates familiarity and signals reliability, making it easier for customers to choose you over a competitor. When every interaction feels consistent, customers gain confidence. Over time, this consistency builds loyalty. Customers are more likely to return to brands they trust and recommend them to others, creating a cycle of credibility that no ad campaign alone can buy.

Winning the war for talent

Internally, corporate branding is just as important, as it affects how employees feel about working there. A strong corporate brand makes it clear what the company stands for and why it matters. That clarity helps attract people who share the same values and gives current employees a sense of pride and belonging. In today's job market where skilled workers have plenty of options, a trusted corporate brand can be the deciding factor in winning and keeping top talent.

Standing out in crowded markets

Corporate branding helps companies carve out a distinctive place in the market by clearly defining what sets them apart. It turns abstract values like innovation, reliability, or sustainability into visible proof. A company with a strong brand is a leader within its category. This positioning strengthens negotiating power, supports expansion into new markets, and allows companies to weather changes in consumer trends.

Corporate branding services that bring strategy to life
Building a strong brand is just the first step. The real work is in managing it every day. Even the best strategy falls apart if employees cannot apply the brand consistently. That is why most companies combine creative partners with digital tools to keep their brand on track.

-Branding agencies and design studios: Shape or refresh identity, create logos and visual systems, and provide storytelling frameworks.

-Consultancies: Align branding with broader business strategy, culture, and market positioning.

-Technology platforms: Offer digital brand guidelines, asset libraries, and content management systems that make assets easy to find and use.

-Internal brand teams: Act as guardians of brand standards, training employees and monitoring compliance across channels.

But even with the best tools and resources in place, brand inconsistencies happen all the time. The biggest culprit? Business documents. Most business communication still happens in everyday tools like Word, Powerpoint slides, and e-mails. This is also where brand mistakes most often creep in.

How to build a corporate branding strategy that sticks

1. Start with your “why”

Every strong brand begins with purpose. Define why your company exists beyond profit and how you want to be seen in the market. Position your brand clearly against competitors so customers understand your unique value.

2. Put rules in writing

Brand guidelines are your guardrails. Document your visual identity (logos, colours, fonts, imagery) as well as tone of voice and messaging principles. Clear guidelines make it easy for employees, agencies, and partners to stay on the same page.

3. Bake branding into daily work

A strategy is only as strong as its execution. If employees cannot find the right template or asset, consistency falls apart. Embedding branding into everyday tools like documents, e-mails, and presentations ensures your identity shows up everywhere without extra effort.

Protecting the value your brand creates

Corporate branding is a living asset that can either compound in value or quietly diminish depending on how well it's managed. The upside is enormous: stronger customer trust, loyal employees, and measurable equity. The downside is equally real: inconsistent visuals, off-brand messaging, and credibility lost in an instant.

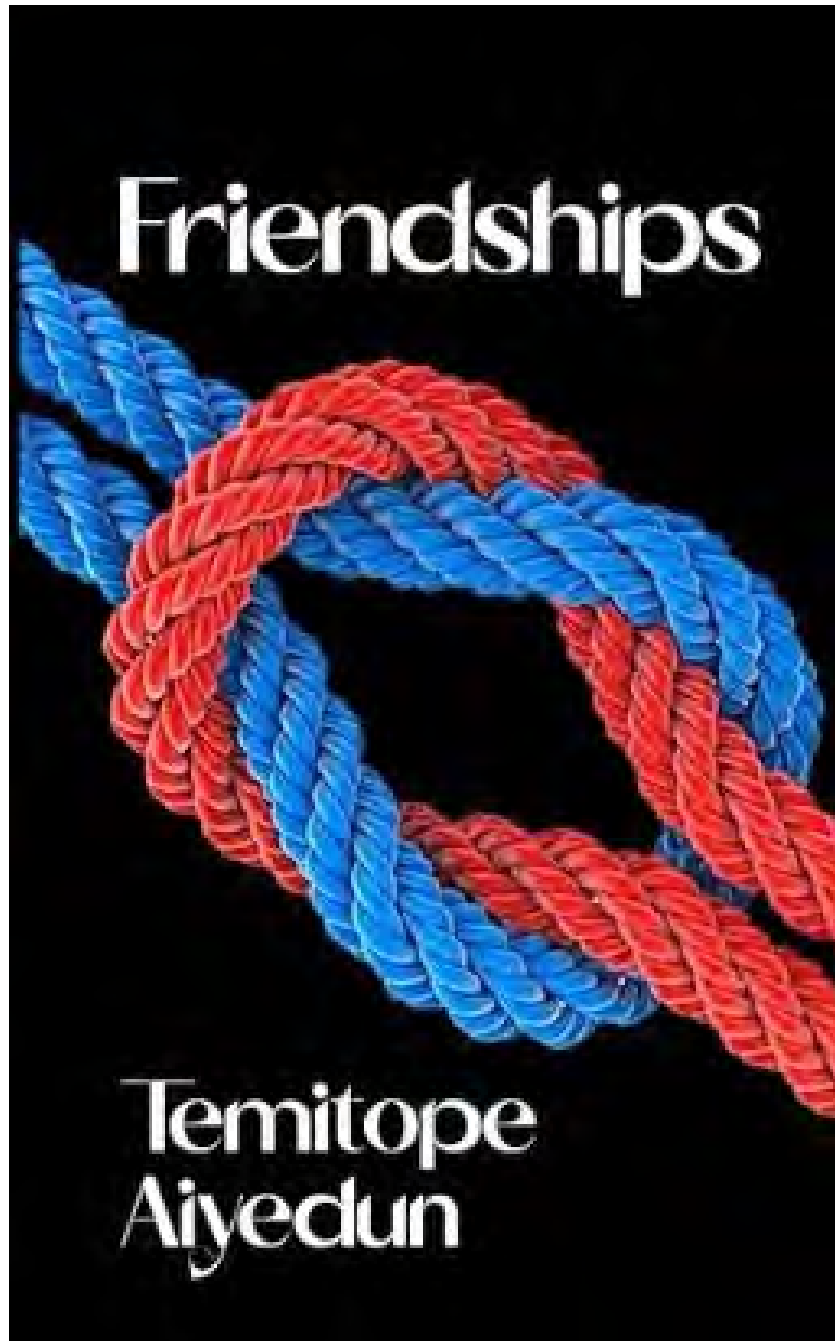
LAST LINE

Treat corporate branding as high-stakes work. Invest in strategy, build clear guidelines, and make sure every touchpoint reinforces the same story. Then give employees the tools to execute consistently. That's how companies protect their brand value and turn it into a long-term advantage.



FEYISITAN IJIMAKINWA

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Be the Friend You're Looking For-A Review
of Temitope Aiyedun's Friendships

Title: Friendships
Author: Temitope Aiyedun
Year of Publication: 2024
Number of Pages: 127
Category: Self Help

FRIENDSHIPS

TITILADE OYEMADE

Friendships these days can feel complicated. Some are one-sided, others are filled with secrecy, and sometimes it seems like people have forgotten what true friendship really means. This is exactly why this book feels both timely and necessary.

Temitope Aiyedun establishes credibility early on. It is clear that she values relationships and has built meaningful connections, which makes you more comfortable trusting her voice on the subject. She truly embodies the idea that if you show yourself friendly, you will attract genuine friendships.

One of the strengths of this book is how direct it is. From the title to the chapter headings and the content itself, the author wastes no time getting straight to the point. She clearly defines what real friendship should look like and does not shy away from addressing the mistakes many of us make. If you have struggled to build or maintain friendships, this is a book you will want to hold on to and revisit.

What makes this book even more engaging is the author's honesty. She doesn't present herself as perfect or act like a saint. Instead, she shares personal stories where she has been both a good friend and, at times, a bad one. This level of vulnerability makes the book deeply relatable. In fact, if you are one of her friends, you might just recognize a shared moment, you will know it when you get to that paragraph.

As you read, the book becomes deeply personal. It stirs memories of friends who have stood by you, and others who may have hurt or disappointed you. At certain moments, it feels like the author is pointing fingers, challenging you to reflect on your own actions. You may find yourself torn between accepting the truth and defending your past behaviour.

Advice flows throughout the book. Left, right, and centre. It is honest and, at times, demanding. If you are not ready to put in the effort that true friendship requires, you might feel overwhelmed. But what makes the book stand out is the author's empathy. She openly acknowledges her own mistakes and growth, which softens her tone. Rather than sounding judgmental, she comes across as someone learning alongside her readers.

A particularly powerful reminder in the book is the importance of being your own friend. While this may seem confusing at first, it ultimately highlights the need for self-awareness, self-respect, and personal growth as the foundation for healthy relationships.

You will also come across lines that linger long after you have finished reading, simple yet powerful reminders like "stay with people who value you." These moments give the book a lasting impact.

In the end, the message is clear: keeping friendships requires effort and intentionality. It may not always be easy, but it is certainly worth it. This book serves as both a guide and a mirror helping you not only understand friendship better but also become a better friend.



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HOW BABAJIDE, OLADIPO WROTE NIGERIAN FOOTBALL HISTORY IN ROMA'S TITLE TRIUMPH

ANTHONY NLEBEM



Nigeria's growing influence in European women's football reached another milestone as Super Falcons stars Rinsola Babajide and Shukurat Oladipo inspired AS Roma Women to the Italian Serie A Femminile title.

Roma sealed their third Serie A Femminile crown with a commanding 2-0 victory over Genoa Women on the final day of the season, as a brace from Giulia Dragoni confirmed their dominance in Italian women's football.

The triumph capped off a remarkable campaign for Roma, who finished top of the table with 55 points from 22 matches.

Babajide Celebrates Nigerian Pride on European Stage
At the heart of Roma's success were Babajide and Oladipo, whose performances across the domestic league and the UEFA Women's Champions League underlined the growing reputation of Nigerian players in Europe.

For Babajide, the title victory represented both personal fulfilment and national pride.

"Winning the Serie A title with Roma is an amazing feeling for me. It's something every player dreams about, and I'm very grateful to be part of this special team," Babajide said.

The winger also reflected on the significance of sharing the success with another Nigerian player.

"To achieve this with another Nigerian sister makes it even more special. We are proud to represent Nigeria and show what Nigerian players can do on the big stage."

Oladipo Emerges Roma's Defensive Rock
Oladipo, meanwhile, described the achievement as a defining moment in her young career.



“This is a huge moment for my family and me. Playing for a great club like Roma and winning the league is a blessing. I’ve learnt a lot this season, and I’m grateful for the opportunity,” the defender stated.

She also praised the collective spirit within the squad and the support from the fans throughout the season.

“The support from the club and fans has been incredible. We worked hard for this title and I’m happy our efforts paid off.”

Serie A Recognition Caps Outstanding Campaign
While Roma celebrated collective success, Oladipo’s outstanding individual campaign also earned widespread recognition across Italy.

The 21-year-old centre-back was named in the Serie A Femminile Team of the Season alongside Roma teammates Manuela Giugliano, Giada Greggi and Dragoni after emerging as one of the league’s most reliable defenders.

In her debut season in Italy, the former FC Robo Queens star quickly established herself as a cornerstone of Roma’s defence with her composure, strength and tactical awareness.

Oladipo featured in 18 Serie A matches, making 15 starts as Roma recorded 11 clean sheets during the games she played, while the club remained unbeaten in league matches she featured in.

Across all competitions, she made 30 appearances, including her UEFA Women’s Champions League debut, highlighting her rapid rise within the squad.



The Nigerian defender’s exceptional performances were further rewarded when she was crowned Serie A Femminile Best Defender at the end of a memorable campaign.

Roma Target Domestic Double
Despite already helping Roma secure league glory, Oladipo and Babajide still have the chance to complete a domestic double when Roma face Juventus Women in the Coppa Italia Femminile final on May 24.

Nigerian Excellence Continues to Shine in Europe
Roma’s title-winning campaign not only reinforced their growing dominance in Italian women’s football but also showcased the increasing impact of Nigerian players across Europe’s top leagues.

For Babajide and Oladipo, the Serie A Femminile triumph stands as another proud chapter in Nigeria’s rich football story, one driven by resilience, excellence and a growing generation of stars making their mark on the global stage.

LAST FLIGHT

UDY OSARO-EDOBOR

I had just boarded the last flight back home and found myself seated between two passengers. I greeted the man on my left and he gave me a quiet response, but the woman on my right instantly picked up the conversation. She had a warm and lively energy about her.

The first thing she talked about was her sunscreen lotion. She went on about how important it was to wear one all the time and protect my skin. As she spoke, I could not help but think about my friend Lami. She had been preaching the same thing to me for years. I smiled to myself because I could not wait to see her again.

In fact, Lami was the reason I had cut my trip short and rushed onto that flight. Before I travelled, she had complained many times about feeling tired. Her job was demanding and she was always moving from one place to another, so we both assumed it was stress, dehydration or maybe the weather affecting her. I advised her to take some time off work and rest and she said it helped.

Then a few days into my trip, she called me from the hospital. She had felt faint at work and had gone in for tests. The doctors had noticed that her heart looked weak and they wanted further scans to understand what was going on. They requested a CT scan and suddenly everything felt more serious than we had thought and she needed me around.

The moment I got that call, I lost focus completely. Nothing around me mattered anymore so I packed my bags and rushed to the airport.

The woman beside me interrupted my thoughts with another story. I had not even heard half of what she had been saying because my mind had been elsewhere. For someone I had just met, she was incredibly talkative. Her name was Toria and she described herself as a traveller. She said that right now, she was on one of the most difficult journeys of her life. I did not really understand how travelling could be someone's occupation but she looked like someone who enjoyed every part of it. I could not wait to tell Lami all about her.

My plan had been to sleep after takeoff but Toria made sure that never happened. Strangely, talking to her felt easy. She was funny and smart and her sense of humour was topnotch. I used to think Lami spoke very fast but Toria completely destroyed that record.

She talked openly about herself and mentioned a health condition she never knew she had until recently. She said that life was short and because of that she never took things too seriously. Somehow I found myself opening up too.

I told her about my struggles at work and how I had been thinking about leaving my nine-to-five job and starting my own business. I even told her about Lami and how worried I was.

Toria listened carefully. Then she gave me advice that felt far beyond her years. The things she said stayed with me. They were simple words but they carried a strange weight. Then she assured me that my friend was going to be alright. She spoke with so much certainty and I remember finding that comforting.

She held my hand gently and told me that everything was going to be okay. Then she asked me to keep an eye on her bag while she went to the toilet. I nodded.

I remember thinking that I would love to stay in touch with her after the flight.

Unlike the man sitting on my left. He had been staring at me almost the entire time and I found it annoying.

A few minutes before landing, the pilot announced that all passengers should return to their seats. I waited for Toria. I looked back several times expecting her to walk down the aisle but she never came.

The plane landed and everyone got off. Everyone except me. I remained seated with the cabin crew while we tried to figure out what had happened. Toria was not in the toilet and she was nowhere on the plane.

They took the bag from me and promised they would contact me if they found anything. By then my hands were shaking. None of it made sense. I was terrified.

My driver was already waiting at the airport and took me straight to the hospital. I asked to see Lami immediately but the nurses said the doctor needed to speak with me first. I sat there and listened as the doctor explained everything.

Right after her CT scan, Lami had suffered a heart attack caused by intense stress. She did not survive. I could not hear anything after that. The world around me suddenly felt distant.

The days that followed became the darkest period of my life. I cried until I thought there were no tears left in me. I slept and woke up with pain sitting heavily in my chest. I stared at my phone countless times expecting to see her name appear.

Sometimes I would pick up my phone to call her before remembering she was gone. I stopped eating properly. I stopped caring about anything.

The silence became unbearable because every quiet moment reminded me that my best friend no longer existed in my world.

People visited me and offered comforting words but nothing seemed to enter my mind.

I felt empty. I felt lost. I felt like a part of me had died with her.

Then a few days later, the airline called me. They told me they had been trying to locate the owner of the bag Toria left behind. But they could not find any records of her. There was no passenger with that name. No ticket. No booking information. Nothing.

At first they thought there had been some mistake. Maybe I had mixed up passengers. So they contacted the man who had sat beside me. The same man that was staring at me throughout the flight. His response made my blood run cold. He told them there had only been two people sitting in that row. Him and me. He said he remembered me because I had spent almost the entire flight laughing and talking to myself.

The airline was confused.

The man was confused.

I was confused.

I kept insisting that Toria was real.

I described her face. Her smile. Her voice. Everything. But nobody understood what I was talking about.

Then came the day of Lami's funeral service. I sat there holding the programme with trembling hands.

My eyes moved slowly across the page.

Then I froze.

I read it again.

And again.

And again.

Lami Victoria Jackson.

Victoria.

Toria.

My body suddenly became cold.

A chill climbed slowly up my spine.

I could not breathe. Then pieces of the flight started returning to me. The way she spoke too fast. The squint in her eyes whenever she smiled. The strange feeling that I knew her somehow. And then I remembered her hand. That cold hand. I remembered exactly how I felt when she held me. Back then I could not explain it. But now I could.

I realised that during the entire flight something had felt familiar.

I started shaking.

Then another thought crashed into me.

Toria had known I was worried.

She had known what I needed to hear.

She had known my friend would be alright.

Because she already knew.

Because she was Lami.

Then another memory rushed back to me and my heart nearly stopped.

Toria had told me she was embarking on the most difficult journey of her life.

I had thought she was talking about a trip to a remote village. But I understood now.

My heart dropped.

The programme slipped from my hand.

I broke down completely. I cried harder than I had cried since her death.

I cried until I could barely breathe.

Because suddenly I understood.

My friend had come to see me one last time. She had come because she knew I would not make it through that pain alone. She had sat beside me through that entire flight while I worried about losing her even though I had already lost her.

Then I remembered something that made every hair on my body stand.

I remembered her last words before she walked away.

"Everything was going to be okay".

For the first time since Lami died, I understood what she meant.

Because even after death she still found her way back to me.



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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WEEKENDER

MOVIE REVIEW

HE'S ALL THAT (202)

If you enjoy teenage romantic movies, then this might interest you. Padgett was a very pretty teenage girl in high school, in the first scene during a live streaming session on social media, she caught her boyfriend cheating, the video went viral and led to their breakup. They were supposed to win high school "Prom King and Queen", and this couldn't happen again. Alden decides to put Padgett to a bet, telling her that she cannot get herself another handsome and famous boyfriend before Prom night. They all decide and pick a loser for Padgett, she must date him, revamp him and make sure they win "Prom king and Queen". You will need to go watch this movie to see if she won the bet and how the entire challenge went South for her. The 88m romantic comedy films, comedies, romance, films based on books, teen film was directed by Mark Waters, they featured actors like Addison Rae, Tanner Bucharan, Rachael Leigh Cook, Madison Pettis, Isabella Crovetti, Matthew Lillard, Peyton Meyer, Annie Jacob, Myra Molloy etc.



POSEIDON (2006)

If you didn't catch this movie then in 2006, I guess you have a new opportunity now to catch it again as this movie is trending in the top timeline 20 years after. In this movie similar to "Titanic", a mighty ship is wrecked by a rogue wave which capsizes the ship, putting the top submerged in water. A few passengers decided to fight for survival in this heart breaking, intriguing movie. You will need to go check out this movie to find out if anyone made it out alive, what they had to do to survive and how they conquered each floor to make it to the bottom of the ship that was now on top. The 98m drama, films based on books, action movie was directed by Wolfgang Petersen, they featured actors like Josh Lucas, Kurt Russell, Jacinda Barrett, Richard Dreyfuss, Emmy Rossum, Mia Maestro, Mike Vogel, Kevin Dillon and many more.



SWAPPED (2026)

If you are a kid at heart and you enjoy kiddies' movies like myself from time to time, then this would be totally worth your while. I enjoyed this simple movie from start to finish and kept praying that Ollie would survive. Ollie was a tiny woodland creature that was so kind and generous. He unfortunately showed a majestic bird how to crack a nut, and that led to his people almost going into a famine. One day Ollie and Ivy swap bodies and they begin to see things differently from their perspective. Ollie and Ivy must work together to help each other switch back and fight to save their people. You will need to go check out this awesome animated movie to see how it went down. The 98m family films, kids & family Comedies movie was directed by Nathan Greno. They featured actors like Michael B. Jordan, Juro Temple, Tracy Morgan, Cedric the Entertainer, Justina Machado, Ambika Mod, Lolly Adefope and many more.



WEEKEND QUOTES



1

Intentional parenting is a worthy investment. Invest today!

.....WhispersbyTEN

2

Being kind enhances your youthful look. Show kindness regularly

.....WhispersbyTEN

3

The faithfulness of God has steadied my footsteps therefore I will not fall

.....WhispersbyTEN

4

By mercy I have chosen to walk only in what is right

.....WhispersbyTEN