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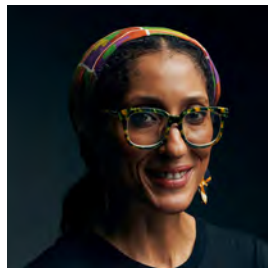


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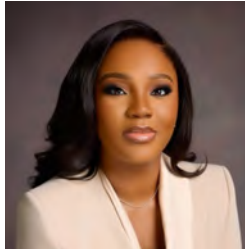
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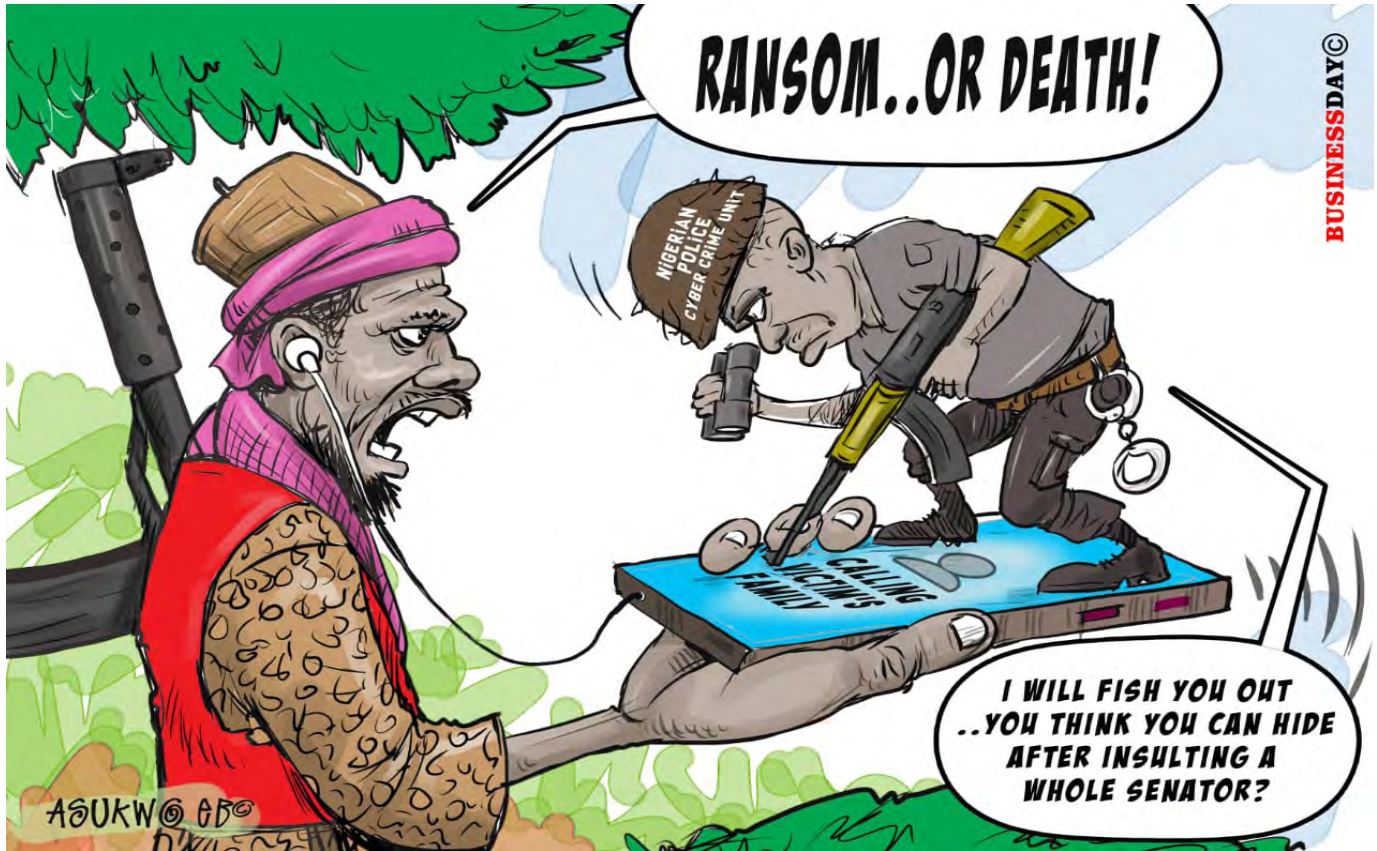


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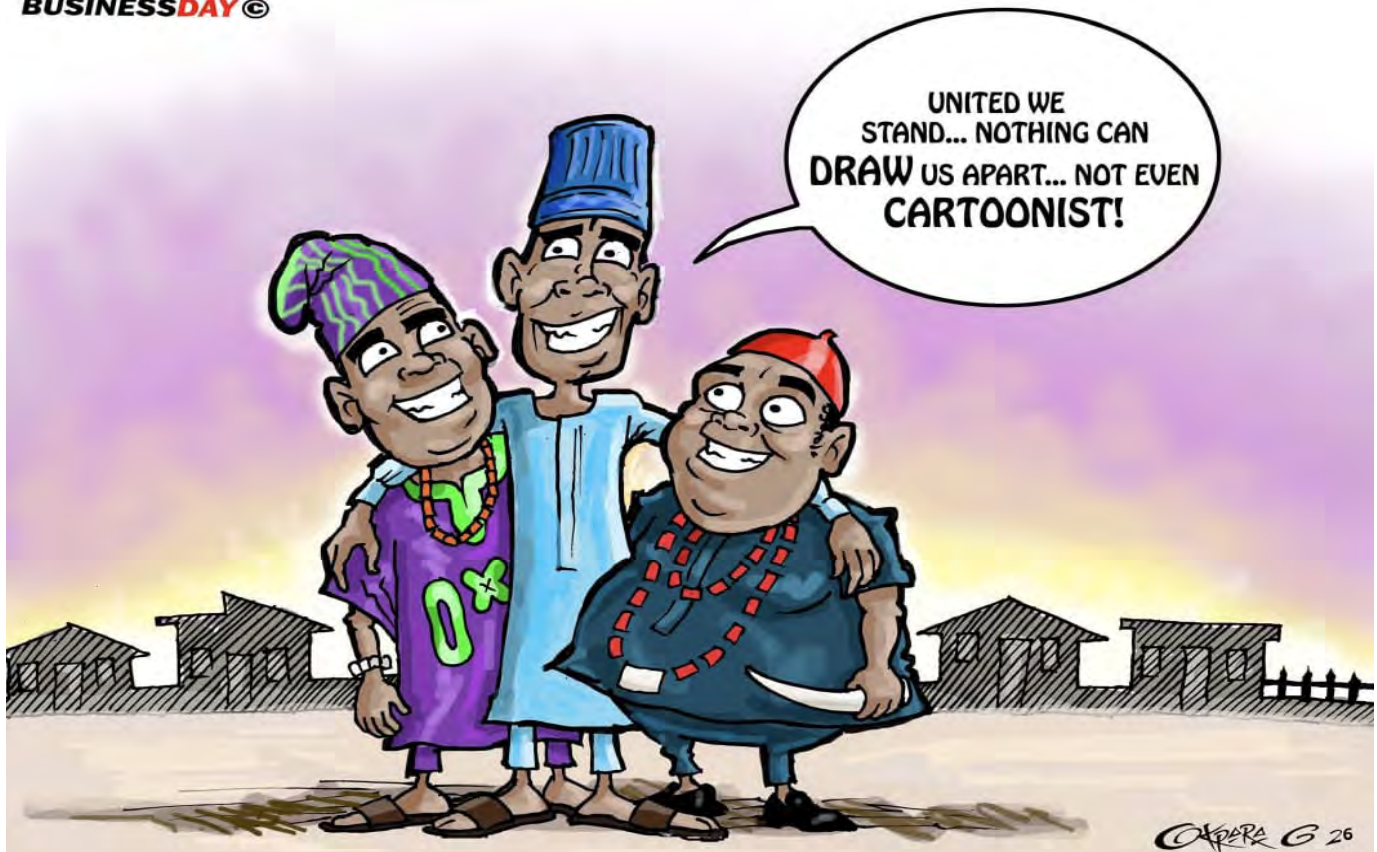
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BIG MONEY: FIVE HIGHEST-PAID COACHES AT FIFA WORLD CUP 2026

ANTHONY NLEBEM

The expanded FIFA World Cup 2026 is finally underway amid concerns over U.S. immigration policies, soaring ticket prices and other off-field controversies. Yet, as the world's biggest football tournament takes centre stage, attention is not only on the players, but also on the managers tasked with leading their nations to glory.

Modern international football has become increasingly competitive, with federations investing heavily in elite coaches whose experience and tactical expertise could prove decisive on the grandest stage.

Here are the five highest-paid managers competing for glory at the FIFA World Cup 2026:

1. Carlo Ancelotti (Brazil)

– €10 million per year

Brazil made a major statement by appointing Carlo Ancelotti, making the Italian the highest-paid national team coach in world football.

The Brazilian Football Confederation (CBF) broke the bank to secure the services of the legendary manager, who is widely regarded as one of the greatest coaches in football history. Ancelotti is the most successful manager in UEFA Champions League history, having won the competition a record five times with AC Milan and Real Madrid.



No manager has ever won the FIFA World Cup while coaching a foreign nation. If anyone can rewrite that history, it may be Ancelotti, the only coach to have won league titles in all five of Europe's major leagues. Brazil will be hoping his remarkable pedigree can deliver a record-extending sixth World Cup crown.

2. Julian Nagelsmann (Germany)

– €7 million per year

Germany's hopes rest with Julian Nagelsmann, one of football's brightest tactical minds.

The former Bayern Munich coach, who won the Bundesliga title in 2023, is renowned for his innovative approach, tactical flexibility and modern football philosophy. Appointed in 2023, Nagelsmann was tasked with restoring Germany's identity and competitiveness following a series of disappointing tournament campaigns.

At just 38, he is among the youngest managers at the tournament and carries the weight of expectations from a nation that has won the World Cup four times.



3. Mauricio Pochettino (United States)

– €6 million per year

With the United States hosting the tournament, pressure is immense on Mauricio Pochettino to deliver a memorable campaign.

The former Tottenham Hotspur, Paris Saint-Germain and Chelsea manager brings extensive experience from elite European club football. Known for developing young talent and building highly competitive teams, Pochettino has been entrusted with guiding the U.S. to its best-ever modern World Cup performance.



4. Thomas Tuchel (England)

– €5.8 million per year

England turned to Thomas Tuchel in pursuit of a first major international trophy since 1966.

The German tactician boasts an impressive résumé that includes UEFA Champions League success with Chelsea in 2021. Having also managed Paris Saint-Germain and Bayern Munich, Tuchel's expertise in knockout football is viewed as a major asset for a talented England squad desperate to end decades of hurt.



5. Roberto Martinez (Portugal)

– €4.5 million per year

Rounding out the top five is Portugal coach Roberto Martinez.

The Spaniard built his reputation during a successful spell with Belgium, guiding the country's celebrated "golden generation" to a third-place finish at the 2018 FIFA World Cup. Now leading a talented Portuguese side featuring stars such as Cristiano Ronaldo, Bruno Fernandes and Bernardo Silva, Martinez faces the challenge of transforming individual brilliance into tournament success.

As the World Cup unfolds across the United States, Mexico and Canada, these highly paid coaches will be under intense scrutiny, with their salaries reflecting the enormous expectations placed upon them to deliver football's ultimate prize.



NATIONAL CUPCAKE LOVERS DAY: 3 CUPCAKE RECIPES TO TRY THIS WEEKEND

ESTHER EMOEKPERE



National Cupcake Lovers Day is celebrated on June 13th, and it is one of those days that gives you a very good excuse to treat yourself.

If you love cupcakes, then this is your moment. No overthinking, no guilt, just something sweet to enjoy.

And honestly, what better way to celebrate yourself than with a cupcake or even better, a few different kinds you can try at home.

So if you are planning to mark the day in a simple way this weekend, here are 3 cupcake recipes you can recreate and enjoy.

Classic vanilla cupcakes

Soft, simple vanilla cupcakes that go well with any frosting.

Ingredients

- 1 and 1/2 cups flour
- 1 and 1/2 tsp baking powder
- 1/4 tsp salt
- 1/2 cup butter (softened)
- 3/4 cup sugar
- 2 eggs
- 2 tsp vanilla extract
- 1/2 cup milk

How to make

Preheat oven to 180°C
 Line a cupcake tray with paper cups
 Mix flour, baking powder and salt in a bowl
 In another bowl, mix butter and sugar until light
 Add eggs one at a time, then add vanilla
 Add dry ingredients and milk little by little
 Mix until smooth
 Pour into cups and bake for 18 to 20 minutes
 Let it cool before serving

**Chocolate cupcakes**

Soft, simple vanilla cupcakes that go well with any frosting.
 Rich and soft chocolate cupcakes for chocolate lovers.

Ingredients

1 and 1/2 cups flour
 1/2 cup cocoa powder
 1 tsp baking powder
 1/2 tsp baking soda
 1/4 tsp salt
 1/2 cup butter (softened)
 1 cup sugar
 2 eggs
 1 tsp vanilla extract
 3/4 cup milk

How to make

Preheat oven to 180°C
 Line cupcake tray with paper cups
 Mix flour, cocoa powder, baking powder, baking soda and salt
 In another bowl, mix butter and sugar until creamy
 Add eggs one at a time, then vanilla
 Add dry ingredients and milk in parts
 Mix until smooth
 Pour into cups and bake for 18 to 20 minutes
 Let it cool before frosting

**Red velvet cupcakes**

Soft red cupcakes with a light cocoa taste and creamy texture.

Ingredients

1 and 1/2 cups flour
 1 tbsp cocoa powder
 1 tsp baking powder
 1/2 tsp baking soda
 1/4 tsp salt
 1/2 cup butter (softened)
 1 cup sugar
 2 eggs
 1 tsp vanilla extract
 1/2 cup buttermilk
 1 tbsp red food coloring
 1 tsp vinegar

How to make

Preheat oven to 180°C
 Line cupcake tray with paper cups
 Mix flour, cocoa powder, baking powder, baking soda and salt
 In another bowl, mix butter and sugar until light
 Add eggs one at a time, then vanilla
 Mix buttermilk, food coloring and vinegar in a cup
 Add dry and wet ingredients little by little
 Mix until smooth
 Pour into cups and bake for 18 to 20 minutes
 Let it cool before frosting



**FROM TINSEL TO PICTURE BOOKS:
HOW TONYE FALOUGHI-EKEZIE
IS SCRIPTING A REVOLUTION FOR
DISABILITY REPRESENTATION**



Tonye Faloughi-Ekezie is a Nigerian entrepreneur, storyteller, and special needs advocate whose work sits at the intersection of creativity, research, and systems change. Inspired by her daughter Simone's Down syndrome diagnosis and recovery from life-threatening heart complications, she created Ugo and Sim Sim, the world's first picture book series featuring a Black main character with Down syndrome, and later founded the Simone's Oasis Foundation.

A former TV and film producer, Faloughi-Ekezie has worked on productions including *Tinsel*, *Big Brother*, *Idols*, *Naija Sings*, and Kunle Afolayan's *October 1*. Through Simone's Oasis, she uses books, animation, music, podcasts, and community programming to challenge stereotypes and

celebrate neurodiversity. Faloughi-Ekezie has spoken at the United Nations, the World Bank, the Dear Mom Conference in the USA, and the INSAR Annual Conference. She was named by *The Guardian UK* as one of the "Ten Most Inspiring People" of 2024 and is a recipient of awards from American Express and

the Tides Foundation.

In this interview with IFEOMA OKEKE-KORIEOCHA, she opens up about transitioning from prime-time film sets to grassroots advocacy, the systemic cultural and colonial

biases holding back Nigerian publishing, and how her newly launched Neurodiverse Creators Lab is structurally carving out career pathways for neurodivergent youth within Nigeria's multi-billion naira creative economy.

Your background includes producing major African entertainment hits like *Tinsel* and *October 1*. How did your experience in prime-time television shape the specific way you approach advocacy through the Simone's Oasis Foundation?

My career in television and film production, I really believe however, unintentional was a foundation on which I built and developed my advocacy. As a producer you have to be extremely disciplined. You have to be able to interact with different teams and back then it was really very much a male dominated space and I had no problems in navigating, leading and garnering the respect of teams that were often majority made of men.

So I think I had to be quite resilient because sometimes we were travelling in isolated places in the country. I learned to be disciplined and extremely hard-working because the hours in production are not normal hours. Sometimes you're on sets or production 18 hours 20 hours.

If I hadn't had first the experience in production, dealing with creatives, thinking creatively, editing scripts, giving feedback and sitting with editors in postproduction, I don't think I would have ventured into the style of the foundation that we do, which is from a creative perspective.

When I wrote my first book; while I wrote it because it was for a personal reason, it was me pulling on my previous experience and skills. It gave me the initial confidence to venture into the space then make that the basis of our advocacy as a foundation.

You have noted before that media representation for Black and African children with disabilities was virtually non-existent when you started. Through the foundation and the Ugo and Sim Sim series, what were the immediate cultural walls you had to break down within the Nigerian publishing and media landscape?

I think there were two major challenges that I had to deal with. One was the attitude that publishers in the media landscape had and some still continue to have about the quality of Nigerian books. I was literally told by retail outlets and distributors that they didn't carry Nigerian books that they only carried for foreign books. I really couldn't understand that because if I was doing the same thing, for example in England, there was no way that a



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retail outlet or distributor would tell me that they do not carry British books. It would be unfathomable. However, here they said it to me without hesitation as if I was the one who was crazy. The hangovers of colonial mentality are still very much alive in how publishers and distributors approach Nigerian works in my case Nigerian children's books. The fact that they weren't even willing to consider, they just assumed.

I remember doing videos in 2021 to shame retail outlets and rating them in terms of what books they carried, if they carried Nigerian books, how many they had et cetera. I think I also surprised a lot of people because my books are not only creatively hundred percent Nigerian; they are printed in Nigeria too. People always think that the books are printed abroad. We've never done that. One of the points I like to make is that our books are 100 percent made in Nigeria end to end so that people can see that they deserve to sit on the shelves in Nigeria and have prime placing with foreign books. Proof that Nigerian made means quality.

Secondly a big wall I came across was the prejudice and stigma regarding disability. I was literally told by publishers and some outlets that no sane parents would buy a book for their child featuring an abomination. I was honestly shocked to hear that but in a way also grateful to know what I was fighting against and I was ready for that fight.

I therefore had no choice but to take the self-publishing route which was a steep learning curve. But it means I understand what it takes and have a deeper understanding of how publishing actually works. So while I was turned down by every publisher I applied to, I had the independence, the drive and the power to make decisions on my own. It was after selling 5000 books that publishers in Nigeria began to look for me. I now have an amazing editor and publisher in Lola Shoneyin and Ouida books who really understand my mission in using creative advocacy to make real life impact.

How do you balance the vulnerability of sharing your personal family journey with Simone with the professional, strategic demands of running an expanding foundation?

To be honest, the two are very much intertwined and it is this personal journey that often feeds the focus of the work of our foundation. It is important that I share aspects of Simone and myself and our journey but I'm very conscious to not share every single detail of our lives. It is important for us to still have some aspect of privacy, especially keeping in mind the consideration of my husband and my son.

I'm a busy Mum. I don't make slick videos about what we're doing. I share openly and authentically when I do. I'm not trying to be someone I'm not. Sometimes I have to share things that are difficult and I really have to think about that before I do. But because I am actually living

this, it's important to share to show the context to show the journey and hopefully be able to give others insight and hope.

So I'll give you an example: Simone is growing up. She's 10 and I can see her growing up and that made me think about her future. What pathways are available to her for a career for a life? When I researched, it was so disappointing to see the lack of inclusion in programs and training in Nigeria for teenagers and young adults with Down syndrome, autism and other challenges. I felt for my daughter and others like her that we needed to form a template and ecosystem to begin to build inclusive pathways into Nigeria's creative industries. That's how our Neurodiverse Creators Lab was born.

In the first quarter of 2026, the foundation launched the pilot Neurodiverse Creators Lab, partnering with heavyweights like Kunle Afolayan Production Academy, Chocolate City Music, and SMIDS Animation Studio. What was the blueprint for bringing these corporate creative giants to the table, and what have been the early milestones of this lab?

Over the years I think I've built a strong and good reputation on any job I've done. I make sure to work hard and treat people with respect whatever their level. I always try to give it my best. People remember that effort and I've kept relationships over the years even though I was no longer having a career as a producer in the mainstream industry.

To be honest, bringing the giants to the table was pretty easy as a result. Kunle and I have kept our friendship over the years. Him trying to draw me back into the industry, me refusing, but he has continuously encouraged me with my advocacy and has kept up with what I was doing. I too whenever I get a chance visit him at his office in KAP HUB and make sure I eat from his restaurant which does the best 'Amala' and it was over one of these 'Amala' visits that I informally pitched the idea of NCL to him and his business partner Seun Soyinka. Before I even finished, they were excited and said yes.

As regards Chocolate City; that was easy too because co-founder Paul Okeugo has a son with autism. It was his wife, Esther, who connected us when I was struggling to find dads to come on to my Special Mums Africa podcast back in 2023 and we have become firm friends and allies since so much so that I encouraged him to write a children's book and introduced him to my publisher. Last year he and Esther authored their first book 'Zizah Does Things Differently'.



SMIDS Animation again was easy. I have so much respect for founder Dami Solesi and in fact SMIDS is part of our foundation story from the beginning when we started to make our animated music videos for YouTube, SMIDS helped us to do that. So it felt only natural for them to be our partner in NCL.

Many NGOs focus strictly on immediate clinical support, but Simone's Oasis intentionally bridges creativity with advocacy (animation, podcasts, music, literature). Why do you believe creative media is a more effective tool for systems change in Nigeria than traditional advocacy models?

To be honest, I just think there are far more qualified people in better positions to offer clinical support. That is not my area of specialisation. My mindset was how could I add to the already good work that's being done? How could I change perceptions and mindsets? And I felt and still do feel that the best way to do this is through storytelling. Everyone loves a good story. Without preaching without lecturing you can open people's minds into different lived experiences and begin to have them think about what that means for them and for others.

For example with the books, if a child loves the character of Sim Sim (which most do) and begins to understand the concepts around that character, when they encounter such in real life, they have an awareness and can be advocates not only in their home, because their parent has to read the book to them, but also in their school and beyond.

When listeners, viewers, readers connect with a story it can cause a mind shift which feeds into change in behavior and attitudes that have real life impact, leading to changes in policy for example and inclusive education for the better. If we're able to get this connection young, it means that these young people grow up to not think it's strange for someone like my daughter be to be in class with them, or to be at work with them, or to have access, or to be at the decision-making table with them using their own voice advocating for themselves.

Operating a special needs foundation in Nigeria's current macroeconomic climate comes with intense challenges. How is Simone's Oasis navigating funding, sustainability, and scaling its community programming amidst rising costs?

Funding is so difficult. It is our biggest problem. In the last year we've been able to scale from just me being the only employee, to now us being three as well as having a team that we employed during projects as well as volunteers. The only reason I've been able to do that



is because we received two international grants last year; one from American Express and one from Tides Foundation (both US organizations). To date we have not received any significant funding or sponsorship from any Nigerian organisation. We run basically from my hustle and kind donations from individuals and occasional small sponsorship.

What organisations fail to see is that the special needs community and ecosystem is huge and growing. On average families raising special needs children spend 30-40 percent more than those raising neurotypical children. Yet there are no products or incentives catered for us. It's a real lack of vision from corporate organizations.

It is extremely challenging, but this past year has taught me that we must keep going because the impact we are making is significant, and at some point, with our foundation becoming more known both here and abroad, we should be able to get the substantial support that is very much needed.

In the meantime, we continue to apply for grants, pitch to organisations and are now for the first time providing services to clients who are interested in supporting our organisation by hiring us to implement some of their creative work as a way of supporting our inclusive NCL team and the mission to build inclusive pathways into Nigeria's creative industries. It is quite exciting.

You recently presented research at the INSAR 2026 Conference examining how media narratives impact the well-being of parents raising autistic and neurodiverse children in Nigeria and the diaspora. What were the most striking or unexpected findings from that data?

I think it confirmed for me just how important media narratives are for parents in this situation. We need to make it easier for them to get the information they need and whilst social media seems to be the most used area for them to source the information, it also shows that it's extremely toxic and adds to their stress. The context of the Nigerian and black perspective matters also. So it's both about making it easier for them to find the information they need, but also creating that information in a culturally appropriate context. To be honest I would love to work with a corporate organisation for example a Telco in creating and aggregating this content for these parents.

You contributed directly to the Creative Industries Development Bill under the Office of the Presidency. How does this bill explicitly safeguard or support inclusive education and career pathways for neurodiverse youth within Nigeria's booming creative economy?

I was brought into this a few years ago specifically for this perspective in making sure that in all the elements that were put in, we were also thinking in an inclusive manner; looking at inclusive practices within the industry, inclusive practices within the education and career pathways. In supporting special-needs practitioners in the creative industries.

However, to date we're yet to see this bill implemented even though some of the elements have been adopted in the new administration. Government takes a long time and to be honest as a foundation we've not even received any support from the government. It certainly has its place, but because time is such an issue in the success of people with disabilities, we can't wait and so we do what we can now. Hopefully one day Lagos state or Federal government will support, with funding, the work we do.

From speaking at the United Nations and the World Bank to seeing your books placed permanently in London archives and galleries—how has this international recognition changed the foundation's leverage back home in Nigeria?

It has given me so much more confidence and it means that people take what we do more seriously. I think people have a concept of what an NGO does and how they do what they do, and we don't operate in that mold at all. We are definitely piquing interest as a result and people are curious. I come from the perspective that we're not begging for money, we're not begging for support. We actually add value to any organisation that wants to support us, that wants to work with us. Their investment comes back to them and can be measured and seen through data.

We're about to start another pitching cycle and with the work we've done this past year the shift in attitudes is noticeable. Why? It's the same old story here in Nigeria. We have to have foreigners like us before our own people pay attention. It's quite unfortunate and a hangover from colonial days.

When you look at the landscape of education, media, and policy in Nigeria today, what does a future look like where inclusion is truly 'designed in from the very beginning' rather than treated as an afterthought? What is the next major mountain for Simone's Oasis?

The landscape...everything is intertwined, it's intersectional and within that we have to also include the health sector as well. Recently I was invited to CCHubbs EdTech Mondays to discuss the rethinking of inclusive and accessible learning for all.



The challenges are really a lot, but I was also extremely hopeful looking at some of the efforts that are being made by individuals and small entrepreneurs, like Victor Ogunbiyi of Dawn AI, in building from the very beginning a.k.a. inclusion by design, technology to bridge the gap in access to healthcare and education.

But even within that, there's still a huge hurdle to be able to have access to those technologies in the first place. The onus cannot just be on individual parents like me. Government must do their part. Corporate organisations must do their part. I know that entrepreneurs are trying and to be honest, like parents we can only do so much on our own to bring that deeper felt impact to a wider population.

As for the foundation, things are really challenging financially, but at the same time it is really exciting too for several reasons:

1. As I mentioned earlier, having our first service client.
2. Two of our NCL students are interning with Trace media as a result of their successful participation in our

Neurodiverse Creators Lab pilot. We have literally shown and built a pathway to skills and careers in the creative industries.

3. Two new Ugo and Sim Sim books in the pipeline
4. We are developing a creative project to build a tool to assist neurodivergent children in learning skills and adapting behaviours.

At the end of the day I am blessed to be doing what I love with a committed and passionate Simone's Oasis team. We also have an oga, in Simone, who inspires us every day with her attitude to life. When we feel low, we get energy from seeing her approach to life and its challenges. It's from her we have learned to be kinder, to care about others, to be generous and live a life seeing value in the smallest of things.

I am certain we will conquer the financial mountain that is restricting us from reaching our fullest potential and making the kind of impact that changes lives on a larger scale.



BEYOND THE RUNWAY: KING JERRY NRIALIKE PITCHES 54-COUNTRY REALITY TV SHOW TO BOOST CONTINENTAL TOURISM

IFEOMA OKEKE-KORIEOCHA



Prophet King Jerry Nrialike, widely recognized during his formative years in the fashion and media circuits as Jerry Jideobi—is a seasoned Nigerian producer, creative director, and cleric whose professional footprint spans over two decades. From his early roots in the year 2000 as an assistant producer for the Miss Abuja pageant to co-producing milestone industry platforms like Nigeria’s Next Supermodel and Lagos Fashion Reloaded 2018, Nrialike has spent his career building platforms that spotlight African talent.

Now balancing his ministerial calling as the founder of Living for Christ International Ministry with his passion for media production, Nrialike is embarking on his most ambitious project yet: Queen of Africa – Africa’s First Lady Reality TV Show. Designed to feature 54 contestants representing every country on the continent, the initiative moves away from the surface-level tropes of traditional beauty pageants, positioning itself instead as a culturally driven, democratically voted broadcast event aimed at unifying African narratives and boosting sub-regional tourism.

In this exclusive interview, he reflects on his transition from mainstream entertainment to the pulpit, the tough corporate lessons of uncompensated loyalty within the fashion industry, and why he is urging corporate brands and banking institutions to invest in a unified vision for pan-African entertainment.

For those who may not know you, could you take us through your journey in the entertainment industry ?

My name is Prophet King Jerry Nrialike, although many people previously knew me as Jerry Jideobi during my years in the beauty, music and fashion industry many years ago, speaking of 2006 to 2012. Yes, I am still passionate about fashion and music but I had to rethink my direction because of my divine calling to serve in the house of God.

It is truly a blessing to share part of my story and my journey so that others may learn from it and draw inspiration.

My journey in the entertainment industry began many years ago, even before 2002. I started out in Abuja as an assistant producer for Miss Abuja beauty pageant in 2000 and entertainment projects, including Most Beautiful Girl in Abuja alongside Ejiro. At that time, I was very young and determined to succeed so I could support myself and help my beloved mother, who is now resting in the Lord.

Over the years, my experience in the entertainment industry has been remarkable. I have spent more than two decades building projects, supporting events, and creating platforms that empower people.

Many people remember seeing me regularly on television stations and in newspapers because I worked closely with several media companies. I partnered with many organizations and supported their projects wholeheartedly, often without focusing on financial gain. My passion was always about impact and helping people succeed.

I also worked as a co-producer on Nigeria’s Next Supermodel. While that experience taught me valuable lessons, it was also challenging because I gave my all selflessly and unfortunately did not receive the appreciation or compensation I expected. Despite that experience, I remained grateful for the journey because every challenge shaped me into the person I am today.

Currently, I am a servant of God and the founder of Living for Christ International Ministry, a movement dedicated to preaching the message of God’s Kingdom to the nations of the world.

That is truly inspiring. Apart from Nigeria’s Next Supermodel, what other major projects have you been involved in?

I have been privileged to work on many projects over the years.

After relocating to Lagos, I became involved with Most Beautiful Girl in Nigeria (MBGN) through a connection with WEN Cosmetics. WEN Cosmetics introduced me to the MBGN platform, and that became a major turning point in my career.



The contestant I personally believed in eventually emerged as the queen, and that moment elevated my profile significantly within the industry.

In 2007, I organized the Celebrity End of Year Party, which became one of the stepping stones in my entertainment career. I later ventured into several other projects, Nigeria at Night documentaries, Noble hair show, fashion productions, and government-related entertainment initiatives.

I was also a co-producer of Lagos Fashion Reloaded in 2018, which took place at the prestigious Eko Hotel and Suites in Lagos. Most of the major events I participated in were hosted at Eko Hotel, and those experiences helped me build strong relationships across the entertainment and business sectors.

At some point, I traveled across several African countries promoting my magazine and networking with influential personalities.

In Ghana, I hosted events and connected with several high-profile individuals and business leaders. I visited places and the owner of Trassaco Estate and Villagio tower, I built meaningful relationships with respected personalities within Ghana's entertainment and corporate sectors.

The journey exposed me to diverse cultures, industries, and opportunities, and I am grateful for every experience.

In 2020, during the COVID-19 pandemic, I had plans for another major event, but the outbreak changed everything globally.

However, during that difficult period, I focused more on humanitarian service. Quietly and without publicity, I personally fed over 500 people because I saw the pain and suffering many families were going through.

I have always believed that true charity does not need public attention. My desire has always been to help people genuinely and make life better for others.

What challenges have you faced in the entertainment industry, and what lessons would you like others to learn from your experiences?

The entertainment industry gave me many beautiful experiences, but it also taught me painful lessons.

One of the major challenges I faced was that many people took advantage of my kindness. Especially the owner of Nigeria's next super model, I have always been someone who loves to support others sincerely. Money was never my primary motivation. My focus was always on helping people succeed and building meaningful collaborations. Unfortunately, not everyone values loyalty and sincerity.

There were moments when I invested my time, resources, energy, and creativity into projects, only to feel unappreciated or excluded afterward. Those experiences were painful, but they also taught me wisdom, strength, and discernment.

Despite everything, I remain grateful because every challenge prepared me for greater purpose.

I have learned that in life, kindness should always remain, but wisdom must guide kindness.

Today, my focus is no longer just about beauty or entertainment alone. My mission now is to create platforms that inspire, empower, unite Africa, and uplift the next generation.

That vision is what birthed Queen of Africa, Africa's First Lady Reality TV Show—a platform not just for beauty, but for leadership, unity, empowerment, culture, and transformation across the African continent.

Staging 54 contestants from 54 countries in Africa. The competition is to be celebrated as same as Afcon. Showcasing the true story of Africa for the World to know Africa is one place where beautiful things are endowed with.

I would like to seize this opportunity to plead with banks, companies, brands and cooperate bodies to come on board for the smooth production of this magnificent competition. We can't do this without your sponsorship. As Africans vote to decide who becomes the first Queen to reign in Africa. It's not a pageant, it's an election for a Queen's democratic office to beautify and development of our tourist centers in Africa, while serving humanity.

What advice do you have for young entrepreneur looking up to you ?

My advice is be more closer to God more than anything else. Heaven is real, hell is real. Be kind to people, don't give into lying and deceiving tongues, all that glitters is not gold. Pray from time to time and love yourself while loving God.

It has truly been an honor sharing my story, and I pray that it inspires people never to give up on their dreams, regardless of the challenges they face.

Africa is rising, and together we can build a stronger future for generations to come.



BEYOND EVENTS: HOW SIKELOLA OSIPITAN SPENT A DECADE REDEFINING THE BUSINESS OF CELEBRATION IN NIGERIA

...As ETAL Events Marks 10yrs, Founder Reflects on Building a Brand That Prioritises Experience Over Excess





For many people, celebrations are remembered through photographs. For Sikelola Osipitan, they are remembered through feeling.

It is a belief that has quietly guided the growth of ETAL Events over the last decade, transforming what began as an ambitious venture into one of Nigeria's most respected luxury experience companies.

As ETAL marks its 10th anniversary, the milestone offers an opportunity to reflect not only on the growth of a business, but on the evolution of an industry. Over the last ten years, celebrations have changed dramatically. Events have become larger, more visible, and increasingly driven by social media.

Yet amid these shifts, ETAL has built its reputation around a different idea: that luxury is not measured by scale alone, but by how deeply an experience resonates with the people within it.

Founded in 2016, ETAL emerged during a period when the Nigerian events industry was rapidly evolving. Clients were no longer seeking logistics alone; they were seeking experiences that reflected their identities, values, and aspirations.

Recognising this shift early, Sikelola positioned ETAL not simply as an event company, but as a partner in creating moments that felt personal, intentional, and memorable.

"People often remember the atmosphere before they remember the details," Osipitan says. "They remember how welcomed they felt, how connected they felt, and the emotions attached to the moment. That understanding has always guided our work."

Over the years, ETAL has delivered experiences spanning private celebrations, luxury weddings, corporate events, and large-scale cultural moments, earning the trust of clients who value excellence, discretion, and thoughtful execution.

Today, as the company enters its second decade, Osipitan believes the conversation around luxury experiences in Africa is only just beginning.



"The future belongs to brands that understand people," she says. "Experience is becoming one of the most valuable currencies in the world, and Africa has a unique opportunity to shape what that looks like."

Ten years later, ETAL's story continues to be one of growth, innovation, and a commitment to creating moments that leave a lasting impression long after the final guest has gone home.

Founded in 2016 by Sikelola Osipitan, ETAL Events is a luxury event and experience company specializing in premium celebrations, corporate events, brand experiences, and experiential design. Headquartered in Lagos, Nigeria, the company is recognized for its commitment to excellence, innovation, and delivering unforgettable experiences for clients across Africa and beyond.

THE FOUNDER'S DILEMMA: CONTROL, CAPITAL, AND THE COST OF FEAR

ANNETTE BEGG ONYEMA



building businesses with remarkable determination. They are creating products, serving customers, solving problems, and often navigating challenging operating environments with limited resources.

Yet despite their ambition, many businesses reach a point where growth begins to slow. Opportunities emerge, demand increases, and expansion becomes possible. But taking the next step often requires something many founders struggle with: external capital and external support.

This is where the dilemma begins.

On one hand, founders understand that scaling a business requires resources, expertise, and structure. On the other hand, many fear what may come with accepting help.

They worry about losing control.

They worry about dilution. They worry about investors changing the vision they

have worked so hard to build. And in some cases, these concerns are justified.

Stories of misaligned partnerships, difficult investor relationships, and founders losing influence over their businesses have created understandable caution across the entrepreneurial ecosystem.

One of the most important conversations in African entrepreneurship today is also one of the least discussed.

It is not about valuation.
It is not about fundraising.
And it is not about growth.
It is about fear.

Across the continent, thousands of founders are

But there is another side to the conversation that deserves equal attention.

What is the cost of allowing fear to make the decision?

Too often, founders view the choice as binary. Either retain complete control or bring in external capital and sacrifice independence.

In reality, the decision is far more nuanced. The goal is not to avoid investors. The goal is to find the right investors. The goal is not to avoid dilution at all costs. The goal is to create more value than you give away.

Many founders focus intensely on ownership percentages. While ownership matters, it is only one part of the equation. A founder who owns 100 percent of a business that struggles to grow is not necessarily in a stronger position than a founder who owns a smaller percentage of a significantly larger and more valuable company. The question is not simply how much of the business you own.

The question is how much value you are building.

This distinction is critical because the strongest founder-investor relationships are rarely built on control. They are built on alignment.

Aligned investors bring more than capital. They bring perspective, networks, governance, accountability, and experience. They help founders avoid mistakes they have seen before. They provide support during periods of uncertainty and help businesses prepare for opportunities they may not have been able to pursue alone.

Good capital does not replace the founder's vision.

It strengthens the founder's ability to execute it.

Unfortunately, many businesses never experience these benefits because fear prevents them from engaging with the conversation altogether.

In my experience, there are generally three paths founders tend to take.

The first founder raises capital too early, accepts unfavourable terms, and enters into partnerships without fully understanding the implications.

This often leads to frustration and regret. The second founder refuses all external support. They maintain complete control, but growth remains constrained. The business becomes heavily dependent on the founder, and opportunities that require additional resources are often left unrealised.

The third founder takes a different approach. They build enough structure to understand what they need. They seek advice, educate themselves on fundraising, and choose partners carefully. They recognise that capital is a tool, not a threat.

More often than not, this is the founder who scales.

As Africa's entrepreneurial ecosystem continues to mature, founders will increasingly need to engage with questions around capital, governance, and strategic partnerships. Avoiding these conversations may feel safer in the short term, but it can create limitations in the long term.

The reality is that poor execution, weak governance, and undercapitalisation destroy far more businesses than investors ever do.

This is not an argument for raising capital at any cost. Nor is it an argument that every business should seek investors.

Rather, it is an argument for approaching the conversation with clarity rather than fear.

Because ultimately, the question is not whether founders should take capital. The question is whether they are choosing the right capital.

And for many African businesses, the answer to that question may determine whether they remain small, or whether they realise their full potential.

Annette Begg Onyema is Founder and CEO of Idia Africa, leading Idia Ego and Idia Legacy to support high-growth African consumer businesses.

She has extensive experience in capital raising and investment across institutions like the African Development Bank and Morgan Stanley.

She also serves as a director at KOCE Enterprises and a Global Council Member at the Smithsonian.

A N15,900 DINNER AT THE PLACE, IKEJA

ESTHER EMOEKPERE



After an evening out, it was already getting late and I was hungry. It was one of those days when I knew I was not going to get home and start cooking, so I decided to grab dinner before heading back.

I stopped at The Place, located beside Ikeja City Mall, at around 8 p.m.

Since it was already late, the restaurant was not crowded. There were only a few people eating, which meant I did not have to wait long before getting my food.

For dinner, I ordered the Turkey Rice and the Asun Pepper Rice. I also added goat meat and stew.

The Turkey Rice cost N7,400, the Asun Pepper Rice was N5,900, and the goat meat and stew cost N1,300, bringing my total bill to N15,900.

Out of the two rice dishes, the Turkey Rice was my favourite.

It tasted really good and was easily the better of the two meals. The best way I can describe it is that it tasted like a well prepared concoction rice served with turkey. The rice

was flavourful, the turkey paired well with it, and it was the dish I found myself enjoying the most.

The Asun Pepper Rice was good, but it did not stand out as much.

There was not anything particularly wrong with it, but it was not memorable either. After trying the Turkey Rice, the Asun Pepper Rice just felt okay. It was decent enough, but it was not a dish that left me wanting more.

The goat meat was well cooked and easy to chew, which is always a plus. Goat meat can sometimes be tough, but that was not the case here.

Overall, it was a satisfying meal and the service was quick, probably because I arrived after the dinner rush.

Would I order the Turkey Rice again? Definitely.

The Asun Pepper Rice? Maybe.

But if I was returning to The Place and could only choose one dish, the Turkey Rice would be my pick.

AFRETRADE MOVES TO BRIDGE AFRICA'S UNTAPPED DIASPORA CAPITAL MARKETS WITH ENTREPRENEUR'S FESTIVAL



As soaring inflation, currency fluctuations, and an escalating cost of living continue to pressure local industries, a major structural pipeline is being rolled out to bridge the gap between African micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) and untapped diaspora capital markets.

Afretrade Inc., a California-based pan-African trade and investment platform, has announced the maiden edition of the Afretrade Entrepreneur's Festival (TAEF) 2026. The three-day economic convergence will take place from June 17–19, 2026, at the Eko Hotel & Suites in Victoria Island, Lagos.

Themed 'Africa's Economic Renaissance,' the summit is explicitly designed to shift the continent's developmental narrative away from high-level rhetoric and firmly into transactional execution.

The summit serves as the formal launchpad for two landmark initiatives: the Afretrade Africa Economic Renaissance Movement—a coordinated international effort mobilizing the African diaspora as institutional

investors—and the Lagos–California Sister State Economic Corridor, designed to structurally link Nigeria's commercial engine with the world's fourth-largest economy.

Speaking at a press briefing ahead of the summit, Charly Lemassi, Chief Operating Officer of Afretrade and Festival Director, emphasized that the current economic realities confronting local business owners demand immediate intervention rather than long-term promises.

"It is critical to execute this right now because people are losing hope," Dr. Lemassi stated.

"With intense inflation and surging living costs, people are exhausted financially, emotionally, and mentally. They are actively looking for clear solutions. We in the diaspora have not forgotten them. We want to lift the burden from the government's shoulders by stepping in to hold the hands of entrepreneurs who are ready to scale."



The event has secured high-level diplomatic support, with the Grand Opening Plenary expected to feature former Nigerian President Chief Olusegun Obasanjo alongside a prominent Californian delegation led by Toks Omishakin, Secretary of the California State Transportation Agency (CalSTA).

“Africa is always called the ‘next frontier,’ but I reject that premise. Africa is now. It is not next. TAEF 2026 is not just a standard conference—it is an execution-driven movement,” Charly Lemassi, COO, Afretrade Inc said.

A major focus of the three-day festival is addressing the persistent structural blocks holding back intra-African trade, which currently languishes at less than 15% compared to over 60% in Europe and 70% in Asia. While policy tools like the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) exist, micro-entrepreneurs on the ground continue to face severe operational bottlenecks.

Lemassi noted that the primary barrier to continental trade is not merely regulatory, but a combination of baseline information gaps and mutual peer-to-peer mistrust.

“For the everyday business person, academic talk about intra-African trade doesn’t mean much,”

Lemassi explained. “A local designer asks: ‘How do I sell my fabrics to Ghana or Nairobi? How do I handle cross-border payments when dealing with different currencies like the West African CFA franc or South African Rand?’ The basic operational pathways are missing.”

“Furthermore, Africans are frequently hesitant to trust one another across borders,” he added. “If a merchant meets a vendor randomly online, there is no confidence to ship goods. TAEF 2026 is building a verified ecosystem.

We are acting as the trusted witness that vouches for a tailor or builder’s capacity and registration, giving cross-border partners the confidence to transact safely.”

To move these businesses from local production to export capacity, the festival features structured deal rooms, a startup pitch stage offering a \$10,000 grant, diaspora business matchmaking forums, a fashion runway, and a multi-sector job fair.

Organizers confirmed that despite being the maiden edition, interest has surged significantly, with corporate participants and digital attendees expected from over 40 African nations, setting up a permanent trade network that outlasts the three-day summit.

WHAT BLUECHIP'S ACQUISITION OF YARNGPT SIGNALS FOR NIGERIAN TECH STARTUPS



The conversation surrounding artificial intelligence in Africa has shifted from superficial chat interfaces to deep enterprise integration, localised language models, and targeted corporate mergers.

This maturation took center stage at the third edition of the Bluechip Data and AI Summit 2026 held in Lagos. Under the theme “The Future, Now,” industry pioneers, tech builders, and policy makers gathered to outline how the continent is transitioning from a consumer of global tech to an active builder of intelligence.

At the event, Bluechip Technologies Limited confirmed the strategic acquisition of YarnGPT, a specialised text-to-speech engine optimized for Nigerian tonal formats and local dialects.

Reflecting on the industry’s rapid growth since the summit’s inception, Olumide Soyombo, Co-Founder of Bluechip Technologies, noted that the enterprise understanding of machine intelligence has undergone a sharp evolution.

“Interestingly, I was watching our first summit from 2023, and everyone’s interpretation of AI was strictly ChatGPT—using a chatbot to answer quick questions,” Soyombo said.

“But the industry has evolved sharply since then. Today, we are looking at agentic AI, AI-enabled startups, and clear applications for business users. In banking and fintech, panels highlighted how operators deploy AI for real-time fraud monitoring, core routing optimization, and base station efficiency.”

Soyombo emphasised that the long-term play for Africa lies in leveraging its young population—projected to reach unprecedented numbers with a current median age of 19—to anchor the global knowledge economy.

He noted that infrastructure investments, such as the Ministry of Communications, Innovation and Digital Economy’s 90,000-kilometer fiber-optic project, are creating the baseline connectivity required to support these high-workload AI applications.

“We are seeing AI’s use case shift into cybersecurity, biosciences, and genome sequencing to discover drugs quicker. The big opportunity for Africa in this race is using our talent in the knowledge economy. Our youth need to be AI-first,” Soyombo added.



Explaining the logic behind absorbing YarnGPT into Bluechip’s ecosystem, Kazeem Tewogbade, Chief Executive Officer and Data Architect of Bluechip Technologies, stated the acquisition was highly opportunistic and fits cleanly into the company’s middle-tier infrastructure.

“The way we are stacked up, we have our data ecosystem, our business operations ecosystem, and an ‘intelligence fabric’ in between,” Tewogbade explained.

“That intelligence fabric houses our predictive modeling and optimization tools. We were looking to build something small internally to convert text to local African dialects when the YarnGPT opportunity arose. Why build from scratch when you can acquire an engine that effectively converts text into indigenous tones?”

Tewogbade hinted that the acquisition is part of a broader corporate growth trend, explicitly advising local startup owners to build high-value, complementary software products with an eye toward corporate acquisition rather than just venture funding.

When questioned on the perennial debate of job creation versus displacement, Tewogbade offered a candid outlook, warning that the velocity of tech disruption often outpaces structural repair. “Will AI take or create jobs? Yes, it will do both. It will destroy jobs, and it will create new ones—we don’t need to kid ourselves about it,” Tewogbade stated.

“For repetitive tasks, where you once needed ten people, you might soon need three or four. But by boosting overall ecosystem productivity, it will give rise to entirely new industries. What governments must do is ensure the velocity of destruction does not outpace the velocity of job creation.”

To support this rapid transition without choking tech growth, Tewogbade urged African governments to implement “smart regulations” that protect data sovereignty while actively modernizing the university system.

Crucially, he concluded, national governments must develop a genuine appetite to consume local software and services, ensuring that the technology driving Africa’s digital transition is both built and sustained on the continent.

TELCO ACCOUNTABILITY: INSIDE THE INDEPENDENT INFRASTRUCTURE AUDIT OF NIGERIA'S LARGEST NETWORK



It was a first-of-its-kind public engagement platform designed to address consumer concerns about mobile data usage, billing transparency, and digital consumption, as MTN Nigeria held its Data on Trial on Saturday, June 6, 2026.

The event brought together consumers, media professionals, content creators, technology experts, and independent auditors for an open examination of how data is measured, consumed, and billed across MTN's network.

Opening the session, Karl Olutokun, the Chief Executive Officer of MTN Nigeria, Toriola, underscored the growing importance of data in today's digital economy and the importance of trust and greater understanding of how modern technologies drive data consumption.

“Data on Trial was created based on a simple belief. Trust, with our customer, grows when they are given access to the information and they are allowed to make up their mind about it.

“Today’s event is an opportunity for everyone to understand the facts, understand the technology behind what delivers technology in real time.

And to ask the most difficult questions and hear different perspectives. This is important because the economy is more digitally driven.

“Data is very important today, and as technology evolves, the quantity of data consumed also evolves,” he continued.

“The applications we use, the quality of content we consume, and the increasing number of connected devices all contribute to higher data usage. It is therefore important that consumers understand what drives their data consumption and how it is measured.”

Throughout the event, MTN’s technical experts responded to questions frequently raised by consumers, including concerns around data depletion, billing accuracy, background application activity, automatic updates, cloud synchronisation, video streaming, and multi-device connectivity.

To provide independent assurance on the integrity of its billing systems, KPMG conducted an independent verification of its Data Usage Portal.

The review assessed whether customer billing accurately reflected actual data consumption and covered records from April 1, 2026, to date.

Presenting the findings, Collins Onah, representing KPMG, disclosed that

the firm’s analysis found a complete alignment between data usage records and customer billing information.

“Our analysis captures perfect alignment with what is on the Data Usage Portal and what is charged to customers,” Onah stated.

He explained that KPMG’s review examined the processes used to capture customer data consumption and reconcile those records with the corresponding charges applied to subscriber accounts.

“In conclusion, the Data Usage Portal accurately reflects customer data consumption, and the associated billing is consistent with the usage records captured on the platform,” he said.

The findings formed a key part of the day’s proceedings, providing participants with an independently verified assessment of MTN’s data billing processes and reinforcing the company’s commitment to transparency.

The event also featured contributions from consumer advocates, creators, media professionals, and technology stakeholders, who engaged directly with MTN’s experts on issues affecting data consumption and digital experiences.

By opening its systems, processes, and explanations to public scrutiny, MTN Nigeria said it hopes to deepen consumer understanding, strengthen trust, and promote greater digital literacy as data continues to play a central role in everyday life.

MY ROOTS RUN DEEP

AKEMINIOBONG MICHAEL



Last week, I told you about my journey into discovering my crown. Today, we are travelling through time to find out about my roots and just how deep they actually run—and, of course, a beginner's guide to caring for your hair.

Welcome to history class. Grab a pack of chin chin and some freshly squeezed fruit juice, and be prepared to learn a thing and two.

Have you ever heard the names Benkos Biohó or San Basilio de Palenque?

Never?

Wow.

Don't fret; I'll tell you all about him and the safe space he created.

For over 400 years, there was an unprecedented war—a very unfair one, if you ask me.

Today, we won't be talking about all the injustices perpetrated by men who saw themselves as superior and, driven by greed, took over kingdoms and enslaved kings.

No.

Today is about what we achieved using innovation, creativity, and the ingenuity of hair.

Long before slave traders arrived, hair and hair designs served as a non-verbal language. A person's braid pattern, texture, and style could immediately communicate their tribe, social status, age, wealth, religion, or marital status.

Hair was really that deep.

Fast forward to the beginning of the transatlantic slave trade. Millions were forced to shave their heads. This was an intentional act meant to strip them of their dignity, culture, and humanity.

But we all know one thing: hair grows back.

As our roots really do run deep.

As their hair returned, enslaved women reclaimed the practice, using the traditional art of cornrowing to outsmart their captors.

One of the clearest historical examples of hair braiding being used for military and geographical intelligence is tied to Benkos Biohó.

"Who is he?" you ask.

Well, Benkos Biohó was a king captured from the region of present-day Guinea-Bissau.

But that's not all there is to him.

After escaping captivity in the port city of Cartagena, Colombia, he went on to found San Basilio de Palenque in the late 16th and early 17th centuries.

The settlement became a fortified village hidden deep within the jungle and is widely recognised as the first free Black settlement in the Americas.

How did he escape?

Hair.

Biohó established a highly organised intelligence network to liberate other enslaved people. Because women often worked in close proximity to slaveholders and were sometimes less strictly monitored in their movements than men, they became his chief cartographers.

Yes, cartographers—the people responsible for the art, science, and technology of making maps.

Enslaved women carefully observed the geography of plantations, surrounding jungles, rivers, mountains, and Spanish troop positions.

Then they literally braided these maps onto each other's heads.

During my research, here's what I found about how they did it:

Paths and Roads: Curved, tightly woven braids close to the scalp represented specific escape routes, rivers, or roads to follow.

The "Departes" Style: This style featured thick, tight braids running straight back along the scalp and tied into small buns at the top of the head. It signalled collective readiness or intent to escape.

The "Mesh" Pattern: Interlocking or net-like braiding patterns indicated that a specific escape plan was already underway and coordinated.

Points of Navigation: The beginning of a braid indicated the point of departure, while the tapering end pointed toward the direction of the safe haven or Palenque.

The use of hair braiding as a tool for communication, survival, and escape during the transatlantic slave trade remains one of the most brilliant examples of silent resistance in human history.

Because enslaved people were stripped of their native languages, forbidden from learning to read or write, and constantly monitored, women transformed a daily cultural practice into a sophisticated hidden intelligence network.

A big, hearty cheers to women, as we continue to break boundaries and leap past barricades—first with our minds and then through every other part of ourselves, including our hair.

Hair Care for Beginners

Hair has always been a powerful tool, and the best way to use a tool effectively is to take good care of it.

One thing I know about caring for African hair is that you must balance moisture and protection.

Protective styling is a cornerstone of Afro hair care.

Styles like braids, twists, cornrows, updos, and locs allow hair to remain secured for weeks or even months, reducing the daily manipulation that often leads to breakage.

I have heard the term "all-back warrior" one too many times, and I am proud to say that I wear the crown.

If you think about it, many of our protective hairstyles still carry a form of cartography. The difference is that today they are viewed primarily as cosmetic—styles meant to beautify rather than communicate symbolism.

As a beginner on your natural hair journey, there are several things you need to know.

First, your hair needs tender loving care because it is an extension of yourself.

Wash your hair regularly. If possible, wash it once a week.

Towel drying beats blow drying any day. Keep your hair away from excessive heat whenever you can.

Use your fingers more than your comb. Remember that your scalp is just as important as your hair.

Massage your scalp with oil from time to time.

Never let your scalp go "ashy"—also known as dry.

If you can't access other oils, try ori, also known as shea butter. Tested and trusted.

Use more natural products on your hair than chemical-based ones, and your hair—and your body—will thank you for it.

Till we meet again next week.

Asiere.



PATHFINDER EMPOWERS 96 SECONDARY SCHOOL GIRLS IN LAGOS THROUGH FUEL HER FUTURE WORKSHOP

...A Personal, Professional and Career Development Initiative Designed to Equip the Next Generation of Young Women



PathfindHer successfully delivered her inaugural workshop themed Fuel Her Future on 22nd May 2026 at Lagos Anglican Girls Grammar School, Lagos — an initiative developed under the SDSN Nigeria SDG Advocates cohort 8 programme. The three-hour event brought together 96 secondary school girls for a session of skills development, mentorship, community building, and SDGs Awareness. The workshop also opened conversations around future collaboration, with the school expressing interest in hosting more mentorship and development programmes for its students in partnership with PathfindHer.

What sets this workshop apart is its deliberate combination of personal development, professional readiness, and peer community support in a single experience.

Participants did not simply hear from facilitators — they learned from professional women who have walked the path, building the kind of confidence that translates directly from the classroom into future careers and communities.

That intersection of professional relevance, mentorship, and sisterhood is what the programme was designed around —



and what made the day's impact felt well beyond the four sessions delivered.

“Equipping girls with professional and career-based skills early enough is no longer optional — it is essential. Fuel Her Future workshop ensures every girl is genuinely prepared for her future.”

Eniola Afanu, Founder, PathfindHer

The workshop covered four sessions:

- Building Communication Skills for Success — facilitated by Temitope Bakare, delivering live communication practicals including structured pair and group exercises.
- Digital Literacy: A Skill for School, Career & Life — facilitated by Aminat Abolade, grounding digital skills in the real-life contexts of participants' schooling and future careers.
- Overcoming Self-Doubt and Identity Crisis — facilitated by Nifesimi Koleowo, guiding participants through storytelling and reflection to build confidence and a stronger sense of self.

The SDGs & You: How Girls Can Lead Change — facilitated by Eniola Afanu, connecting global development goals to the everyday realities of young women in Nigeria.

Project Contributors

Eniola Afanu — Project Lead, responsible for conceptualising, coordinating, and leading the initiative from vision to execution. Temitope Bakare — Facilitator, Building Communication Skills for Success. Aminat Abolade — Facilitator, Digital Literacy: A Skill for School, Career & Life.

Nifesimi Koleowo — Facilitator, Overcoming Self-Doubt and Identity Crisis. Ifeoluwa Oyewole — Pre Event Planning and



Logistics Support

Ibrahim Titilope — Pre-Event Planning and Post-Event Documentation

Adewoye Adegoke - Logistics and Operational Support. Temidayo Ojo — Welfare and Participant Experience Coordination. Akaolisa Nmesoma — Media and Documentation.

Habeebat Itanola — Media and Documentation. Cynthia Eloochukwu —Event Support and Participants Experience Coordination.

Favour Lajuwomi — Event Support and Coordination. Fodeke Omodolapo — Technical Support and Coordination. Lagos Anglican Girls Grammar School — Host Institution, for providing the venue and supporting continued access for future programmes.

PathfindHer is a women-centred initiative dedicated to equipping young women and girls with the resources, guidance, and support they need to make informed life and career decisions.

Built as a leadership ecosystem, PathfindHer exists to raise a generation of young women who are guided by clarity, driven by purpose, and positioned to drive quality education, gender equality, and economic growth in their communities and beyond.

The Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) Nigeria is part of the global UN-affiliated SDSN network, supporting locally-led initiatives that advance the Sustainable Development Goals across Nigeria.

TOP 10 SAFEST COUNTRIES IN THE WORLD IN 2026 — GPI

CHISOM MICHAEL



The world's safest countries for 2026 have been identified in the latest Global Peace Index (GPI), published by the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP). The annual report assesses 163 countries using 23 indicators across three categories: public safety and security, ongoing conflict, and militarisation.

The rankings highlight nations that have successfully built stable societies through strong institutions, low levels of violence, and high social trust. According to the report, these countries continue to provide environments where residents and visitors can live, work, and travel with confidence.

As geopolitical and economic uncertainties persist globally, the GPI shows the importance of long-term investments in peace, governance, and social cohesion. The 2026 rankings offer a snapshot of countries leading the way in creating secure and resilient communities.

Here are the 10 safest countries in the world in 2026.

1. Iceland (GPI Score: 1.161)

Iceland remains the safest country in the world, a position it has held for more than a decade. The Nordic nation continues to benefit from low crime levels, strong social cohesion, and high trust in public institutions.

One of the country's most recognised features is its approach to policing. Police officers are widely known for not routinely carrying firearms while on duty. Combined with a strong sense of community and a focus on equality, Iceland has created an environment where residents enjoy a high level of personal security.

2. New Zealand (GPI Score: 1.343)

New Zealand retains its place among the world's safest nations. Located in the South Pacific, the country has built a reputation for maintaining social stability and effective governance.

The country consistently performs well in global corruption rankings and continues to invest in creating a secure environment for its citizens. Its combination of public trust, political stability, and social development contributes significantly to its standing on the Global Peace Index.

3. Switzerland (GPI Score: 1.363)

Switzerland's long-standing policy of neutrality remains central to its reputation as a peaceful country. For many years, the nation has largely avoided involvement in major international conflicts.

Low crime levels, effective public institutions, and privacy protections contribute to a sense of safety across the country. Switzerland's position in the rankings reflects its ability to maintain stability while supporting economic and social development.

4. Slovenia (GPI Score: 1.369)

Slovenia continues to strengthen its position among the safest countries in the world. Although it receives less international attention than some of its European neighbours, the country performs strongly in areas linked to public well-being.

Investments in healthcare, road safety, and public security have helped create a stable environment. Slovenia has also gained recognition for its environmental initiatives, reflecting a broader focus on quality of life and sustainable development.

5. Ireland (GPI Score: 1.371)

Ireland remains one of the most peaceful nations globally despite a slight decline in its ranking position. The country continues to benefit from low crime levels and a strong sense of community.

In addition to safety, Ireland is recognised for its education system and business environment. These factors have helped support economic growth while maintaining social stability, making the country attractive to both residents and international visitors.

6. Austria (GPI Score: 1.421)

Austria's place among the world's safest countries is supported by low levels of violent crime and terrorism. Incidents such as pickpocketing also remain relatively uncommon compared with many international destinations.

The country's commitment to neutrality, established through the Austrian State Treaty of 1955, continues to shape its domestic and foreign policies. This approach has contributed to decades of political stability and security.

7. Portugal (GPI Score: 1.427)

Portugal continues to rank among the safest countries in the world. The government has introduced measures aimed at strengthening public security, including increasing the presence of armed police officers in strategic locations.

The country's culture and lifestyle have also contributed to its growing appeal among international travellers and expatriates. Low crime levels remain one of the main reasons for Portugal's strong performance in the rankings.

8. Singapore (GPI Score: 1.435)

Singapore is the highest-ranked Asian nation on the list and is widely regarded as one of the safest places in the region. The city-state has built its reputation through strict laws, effective governance, and a strong focus on public order.

Regulations covering crime, firearms, and drugs are strictly enforced. These measures have helped create an environment where people can move around with confidence at almost any time of day.

9. Finland (GPI Score: 1.478)

Finland continues to combine social stability with a high quality of life. The country's welfare system, public services, and social trust contribute to a strong sense of security among residents.

Finland also remains a popular destination for travellers seeking access to nature and urban experiences. Its ability to balance development with public well-being has helped maintain its position among the world's safest countries.

10. Japan (GPI Score: 1.489)

Japan rounds out the top 10 list in 2026. The country is recognised for its public transport network, low crime levels, and organised urban environments.

International visitors often point to the ease of travelling across the country, supported by multilingual signage and efficient infrastructure. Japan's dining culture also supports solo travellers, with many establishments offering dedicated seating options, making independent travel more accessible.



THE WORLD'S BEST AIRPORTS FOR LONG LAYOVERS

CHISOM MICHAEL

A new global ranking has named Singapore Changi Airport the world's best airport for a layover, highlighting how some airports are transforming transit time into part of the travel experience.

The study, conducted by UK-based Airport Parking and Hotels and shared with Travel + Leisure, evaluated the world's 50 busiest airports across 12 criteria, including dining options, lounge access, shower facilities, sleeping pods, and overall passenger comfort. Research was carried out between November and December 2025.

Singapore Changi Airport emerged as the clear leader, earning top marks for its facilities, dining choices, and traveller-friendly amenities. The airport features 247 restaurants and cafés, 16 lounges, and the Jewel complex, home to the world's tallest indoor waterfall. Visitors can also enjoy attractions such as a hedge maze, elevated walking nets, and extensive retail and relaxation areas.

According to the report, Changi's exceptional "sleepability," wide range of food options, and overall comfort helped secure its first-place ranking. The airport has also received repeated recognition from aviation consultancy Skytrax, which has named it the world's best airport for two consecutive years.

The rankings reveal a strong Asian presence. Nine of the top 15 airports are located across Asia, including airports in Singapore, the United Arab Emirates, Japan, South Korea, China, India, and Thailand. The dominance reflects significant investments in airport infrastructure and passenger experience throughout the region.

The United States placed three airports in the top 15, although all ranked in the lower half of the list. No European airport appeared among the top-ranked layover destinations.

The findings suggest airports are increasingly competing beyond connectivity, focusing on comfort, convenience, and entertainment. As airlines and travellers place greater value on the overall journey, a well-designed airport can turn a lengthy stopover into a positive travel experience rather than simply time spent waiting for the next flight.

1. Singapore Changi Airport (SIN), Singapore

Singapore Changi Airport secured the top position thanks to its extensive facilities, dining options and passenger comfort.

According to the report, the airport features 247 restaurants and cafés as well as 16 lounges. One of its main attractions is The Jewel, a large lifestyle complex connected to the airport.

The facility houses the world's tallest indoor waterfall, walking nets, gardens and recreational spaces that allow travellers to spend hours exploring without leaving the airport.

The airport's strong performance in sleepability and traveller facilities helped secure its position at the top of the ranking.

2. Dubai International Airport (DXB), United Arab Emirates

Dubai International Airport ranked second. The airport received high scores for its passenger facilities, sleep options and food accessibility.

With 23 lounges available to travellers, Dubai offers multiple spaces for passengers looking to rest during long transit periods. The airport also scored well for providing food options across different price ranges.

3. Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport (ATL), United States

Atlanta's Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport came third and was the highest-ranked airport in North America.

The airport stands out for its large selection of dining facilities, offering 165 restaurants and cafés. It also features 18 lounges, providing travellers with places to rest and recharge between flights.

4. Haneda Airport (HND), Japan

Tokyo's Haneda Airport shared fourth place in the ranking. The airport is known for its efficient transit system and passenger services.

Travellers passing through Haneda have access to a range of shopping outlets, dining facilities and rest areas, making layovers more manageable.

5. Incheon International Airport (ICN), South Korea

Sharing fourth position, Incheon International Airport continues to attract recognition for its transit facilities.

The airport provides passengers with shopping areas, dining options and rest spaces designed to support travellers during connecting flights.

6. Shanghai Pudong International Airport (PVG), China

Also tied for fourth place, Shanghai Pudong International Airport secured its position through a combination of passenger services and transit facilities.

As one of Asia's busiest aviation hubs, the airport serves millions of passengers annually and offers extensive facilities for travellers in transit.

7. Indira Gandhi International Airport (DEL), India

India's Indira Gandhi International Airport ranked seventh. The airport has invested heavily in passenger services over the years and remains one of the country's key international gateways.

Its mix of lounges, retail outlets and dining facilities contributed to its placement in the ranking.

8. Hangzhou International Airport (HGH), China

Sharing seventh place, Hangzhou International Airport earned recognition for providing facilities that support passenger comfort during layovers.

The airport continues to expand its services as international travel through the region grows.

9. El Dorado International Airport (BOG), Colombia

Colombia's El Dorado International Airport also ranked seventh, making it the highest-ranked airport in South America.

The airport's transit services, passenger amenities and food options helped it secure a place among the world's leading layover destinations.

10. Kempegowda International Airport Bengaluru (BLR), India

Kempegowda International Airport in Bengaluru ranked tenth. The airport has become an important aviation hub in India and offers passengers a growing range of facilities during transit.

11. Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport (BOM), India

Mumbai's Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport shared the tenth position.

The airport handles large volumes of domestic and international passengers while providing lounges, dining facilities and retail services for travellers.

12. Suvarnabhumi Airport (BKK), Thailand

Thailand's Suvarnabhumi Airport also ranked tenth. As one of Southeast Asia's busiest airports, it serves as a major transit point for international travellers.

Its passenger facilities and accessibility helped it earn a place in the ranking.

13. San Francisco International Airport (SFO), United States

San Francisco International Airport ranked thirteenth and was one of only three American airports to make the top 15.

The airport offers a combination of dining, shopping and passenger services aimed at improving the transit experience.

14. Xi'an Xianyang International Airport (XIY), China

Xi'an Xianyang International Airport secured the fourteenth position.

The airport continues to expand its role within China's aviation network while improving facilities for connecting passengers.

15. Chicago O'Hare International Airport (ORD), United States

Chicago O'Hare International Airport completed the list in fifteenth place.

As one of the busiest airports in the world, O'Hare provides travellers with numerous services, dining outlets and lounge options during layovers.

BEYOND FG'S MATHEMATICS WAIVER: THE BROADER ISSUES

CHARLES OGWO



The federal government's recent decision to waive Mathematics as a compulsory admission requirement for certain university courses has sparked widespread debate among educators, parents, students, and policymakers.

While much of the public discourse has focused on the merits and drawbacks of the waiver itself, the controversy has also brought to the fore deeper concerns about the state of Nigeria's education system.

Questions about the quality of basic education, students' preparedness for higher learning, and the widening skills gap in the labour market have emerged as critical issues deserving equal attention.

According to WAEC statistics, in 2023 May/June WASSCE for school candidates, 20.19 percent failed to achieve

a credit pass in Mathematics, in the 2024 May/June, 27.88 percent of students failed to obtain a credit pass, including Mathematics and English Language, while in 2025 WASSCE, 37.04 percent failed to hit this crucial benchmark.

This trend of failure reflects a downward performance in the subject; which experts say calls for attention and not just a waiver.

Tosin Ojo, convener of Verboheit Mathematics League Competition, emphasised that the way the subject is being taught in schools should be a concern to policymakers.

"The logic behind teaching mathematics only in English, instead of in students' mother tongues, is not convincing, why do students need English to understand mathematics? The Chinese teach their children mathematics in Chinese.



That's why they are the continent of technology.

"The Germans teach their children mathematics in German. Why do you need to know English to be able to know maths in Nigeria?" she asked.

In addition, she said, "The way these countries teach mathematics is by demystifying it, because they're not trying to teach them English before teaching the children mathematics."

Mathematics as a life skill/ course

Tolulope Elubode, business development/partnerships at Grovane Advisory Partners, highlighted the roles of mathematics in a person's life, when he said that numeracy is an important skill in a successful career, especially in corporate finance.

"Numeracy, mathematics generally, is something that we need even in life generally.

"Everything is a number, and that's the reason mathematics is an important course, and/or a compulsory course in school; it's a life skill, something you need to apply to your daily life," he said.

According to Rachad Zaki in Cambridge Mathematics, stated that Mathematics is not just a book or an assessment. It is more than a grade or a degree.

Mathematics is relevant for how sublime it is, and we need to accentuate that. Mathematics is not just memorising and applying formulas, sketching a graph, solving an equation, or finding the area of a 2D-shape, and we need to ensure it is not perceived as such.

Nothing activates critical thinking, reasoning and problem-solving skills like mathematics.

It pushes mankind to think about everything he deals with in real life from finances and measurements to more impalpable topics like the origin of the universe and the future of human intelligence, and even infinity and beyond.

However, some scholars argue that Mathematics is not a 'life course' in the traditional sense of a specific university degree. They say it operates as an essential, lifelong toolkit.

From managing personal finances and analyzing data to cultivating deep problem-solving skills, math shapes our daily decisions and professional success throughout our entire lives.

"Budgeting, understanding interest rates, paying off loans, and managing investments are lifelong mathematical necessities for adulthood.

Beyond numbers, math trains your brain to break down complex issues, fostering critical thinking, independence, and resilience in the face of problem-solving," they say.



Adekunle Oguntimehin, a parent, said, “The importance of the subject mathematics cannot be overemphasised. Waiving it for some courses, I think is a big mistake which may later in life affect the student analytical reasoning capability.

“Again most countries in the world are embracing AI and tech irrespective of one’s discipline. Mathematics play a crucial role in the ability to understand tech and AI driven courses, so by implication waving it, will further exacerbate the knowledge gap when compared to other nations who are on the front seat in tech and AI innovations.”

For Gloria Akinsola, a teacher, “Waiving maths only for courses with zero quantitative requirement makes sense. It widens access without compromising the course, but waiving it across the board is risky.

“I lean toward ‘targeted waiver and compulsory basic numeracy’ being the smart move. Mathematics shouldn’t be a gatekeeper where it’s irrelevant, but no graduate should leave university unable to handle percentages, graphs, or basic data.”

However, Friday Erhabor, director of media and strategies at Marklenez Limited argues that one does not need mathematics to be a good journalist.

“How does mathematics help your news gathering and reporting capacity? How does mathematics help a performing artist to excel? How does it even help a lawyer?”

“What is required is basic elementary arithmetic knowledge and not the bogus credit in mathematics,” he said.

Nevertheless, Ojo believes that one cannot be a good financial lawyer without mathematics skills.

“How can you defend a client involved in financial issues if you don’t understand figures as a lawyer, or excel as a business reporter?”

“Mathematics is a core skill that’s integral to life and must be demystified,” she said.

As the debate continues, policymakers and stakeholders must resist the temptation to view the issue in isolation. The real challenge lies in building an education system that equips students with the foundational knowledge, critical thinking skills, and competencies needed to thrive in higher education and the modern workplace.

Rather than focusing solely on admission requirements, attention should be directed towards improving the quality of teaching and learning at the basic and secondary school levels, reviewing curricula to reflect contemporary realities, and strengthening career guidance for students.

MENOPAUSE AND THE INSTITUTIONS THAT WERE NEVER DESIGNED FOR WOMEN

EKEMINI AKPAKPAN

What happens when institutions are designed around an “ideal worker” who never menstruates, never gets pregnant, never gives birth, and never experiences menopause?

Perhaps the answer lies in how many of our modern institutions were originally built. Long before women entered public life in significant numbers, men dominated politics, commerce, governance, and formal employment. From the early democracies of Athens to Wall Street, many of the assumptions underpinning our institutions were shaped around male life experiences.

For me, it is always another day out here seeking an equitable world. That was certainly the case recently while attending WILAN’s cross-sector convening, where women leaders from law, health, finance, agriculture, and other sectors gathered to discuss solutions to challenges they faced in leadership and development. As I listened to the conversations around the room, I was struck by something unexpected.

The women were discussing different industries, different professions, and different experiences. Yet many of them were describing variations of the same reality: navigating systems that were never fully designed with women in mind.

And then it dawned on me. Who are our systems built for? That question led me down a path I had not expected and eventually brought me to menopause.

Let’s consider it for a moment. Millions of women will experience menopause, many at the height of their professional, economic, and leadership contributions. Yet menopause remains largely invisible within workplace policies, health systems, social protection frameworks, and public policy conversations.

To be honest, I thought we were much closer to the finish line on gender equality than this particular issue suggests. Yet the more I researched menopause, the more I realised that it represents one of the clearest examples of institutional blindness to women’s experiences. So once again, I found another bottleneck. And that is where today’s conversation begins.

Menopause illiteracy is rooted in a culture of silence

Perhaps the first reform challenge is that before institutions can become menopause-responsive, societies must first become menopause-literate. Because it is difficult to design solutions for realities we are unwilling to discuss.

Before we discuss workplace policies, healthcare systems, or social protection programmes, it is worth asking a more fundamental question: why has menopause remained invisible for so long?

Part of the answer may lie within the informal institutions that shape how societies understand women’s bodies. Across many

cultures, conversations about women’s reproductive health often exist within a framework of silence, privacy, and, at times, shame. Menstruation, fertility challenges, reproductive health conditions, pregnancy loss, and menopause are frequently treated as deeply personal matters rather than legitimate public health and development concerns.

As a result, many women enter menopause with limited information about what to expect. Symptoms that can affect sleep, concentration, mood, confidence, and physical wellbeing are often endured quietly. In some cases, women may not even recognise that they are experiencing menopause at all.

This culture of silence has consequences beyond individual wellbeing. It shapes institutional behaviour. Issues that are rarely discussed are rarely measured. Issues that are rarely measured are rarely prioritised. And issues that are rarely prioritised often remain absent from policy design, workplace planning, healthcare investments, and social protection systems.

The result is a paradox. Menopause is one of the most universal experiences in a woman’s life course, yet it remains one of the least visible within the institutions that serve her.

Why Menopause Matters Beyond Health

It would be easy to dismiss menopause as a private health issue. Increasingly, however, global health experts, employers, policymakers, and development institutions are treating it as a workforce, economic, and gender equality issue.

The first concern is talent retention. Menopause often occurs when women are at the peak of their professional experience, leadership capacity, and earning potential. Yet many continue to navigate symptoms such as sleep disruption, anxiety, fatigue, brain fog, and difficulty concentrating without adequate workplace support. Experts at the Mayo Clinic note that psychological and neurocognitive symptoms often have a stronger relationship with adverse work outcomes than the more commonly discussed physical symptoms such as hot flashes. Their argument is simple: organizations that fail to recognize and support menopausal employees risk losing experienced talent at a critical stage of women’s careers.

The second concern is economic productivity. According to the Astellas Global Health Report’s “True Cost” analysis, closing the broader women’s health gap, including better support for menopause, could unlock productivity gains equivalent to bringing an estimated 137 million women into full-time employment globally by 2040. As populations age and labour markets seek to retain experienced workers, the economic costs of ignoring menopause are becoming increasingly difficult to overlook.

The third concern is equity and human rights. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) has explicitly framed menopause as a human rights and age-equity issue, arguing that while women drive economies and communities, menopause remains under-prioritized and under-resourced by policymakers, employers,

healthcare systems, development institutions, and investors. This concern is particularly relevant for low- and middle-income countries, where the majority of the world's menopausal women will live and where access to health coverage and workplace protections often remains limited.

Perhaps most telling is that institutional responses are beginning to emerge. In the United Kingdom, recent policy and legislative discussions around employment rights have increased expectations that employers demonstrate how they support menopausal workers. The shift signals an important change in thinking: menopause is no longer being viewed solely as a private matter for women to manage individually, but increasingly as a workforce and institutional issue requiring deliberate policy responses.

What Could Institutional Reform Look Like?

If menopause exposes a gap in institutional design, then the solution is not simply awareness. It is reform. And because women participate in both formal and informal economies, the response must extend beyond the workplace.

1. Flexible Work as a Productivity Strategy

Principle: Build flexibility into workplace design rather than forcing women to choose between performance and wellbeing.

What this could look like: Flexible scheduling, hybrid work arrangements, and short-notice wellness breaks during severe symptom periods.

Example: A growing number of employers in the UK and Australia have adopted menopause workplace policies that prioritize flexibility and symptom management.

2. Manager Training and Leadership Accountability

Principle: Ensure symptoms are not mistaken for declining competence or ambition.

What this could look like: Training managers to recognize menopause-related challenges such as brain fog, sleep disruption, or anxiety, and respond appropriately.

Example: Several large UK employers now include menopause awareness within leadership and diversity training programmes.

3. Menopause-Friendly Workplace Environments

Principle: Small environmental adjustments can have disproportionate impacts on employee wellbeing and retention.

What this could look like: Better ventilation, access to cooling facilities, breathable uniforms, and private rest spaces.

Example: Menopause workplace standards emerging across Europe increasingly include environmental accommodations as part of employee wellbeing frameworks.

4. Integrating Menopause into Health Coverage

Principle: Menopause care should be treated as a routine health need rather than a specialist luxury.

What this could look like: Coverage for hormone replacement therapy (HRT), specialist consultations, and psychological support within employee health plans.

Example: Employers in the UK and parts of North America are increasingly expanding benefits packages to include menopause-specific care.

5. Bringing Menopause into Primary Healthcare

Principle: Women in the informal economy cannot rely on employer-based solutions.

What this could look like: Integrating menopause screening, counselling, and affordable treatment into primary healthcare systems.

Example: Rwanda's community-based health insurance model demonstrates how subsidized health systems can expand access to essential care for women across the life course.

6. Social Protection for Mid-Life Women

Principle: Menopause should be recognized as a life-course transition with economic implications.

What this could look like: Health vouchers, targeted cash transfers, or subsidized healthcare support for vulnerable women aged 40–60.

Example: Kenya's social protection systems and digital payment infrastructure demonstrate how governments can reach women directly through mobile platforms.

7. Designing Markets for Women's Realities

Principle: Public infrastructure should reflect the realities of the people who use it most.

What this could look like: Well-ventilated market spaces, access to clean water, sanitation facilities, and rest areas for traders.

Example: Market modernization programmes across parts of West and East Africa increasingly recognize the importance of gender-responsive infrastructure.

8. Building Social Insurance for Informal Workers

Principle: Health shocks should not force women to deplete business capital or depend entirely on family networks.

What this could look like: Micro-insurance, micro-pension schemes, and subsidized social protection tailored to informal workers.

Example: Senegal's Simplified Social Security Scheme (RSPC) and India's Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) demonstrate how social protection can be adapted for informal-sector women.

Ultimately, the goal is not to create special treatment for women. It is to ensure that institutions recognize the realities of women's lives. An institution designed around the full life course of its citizens is not a concession to gender equality; it is a stronger institution.

THE EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE OF AFRICAN ABSTRACTION

Many people feel comfortable standing in front of a portrait because they immediately know what they are looking at. A face. A person. A story they can begin telling themselves before they have even read the wall label. Abstract art offers no such certainty — and for many viewers, that uncertainty reads as a personal failure rather than an open invitation.

This assumption has followed abstraction for a long time. That, it is difficult. That it belongs to a certain kind of educated, initiated viewer. That, without the right vocabulary, you are simply not equipped to feel anything in front of it.

This digest looks at how African abstract artists communicate what words and figures often cannot — and why the discomfort of not immediately knowing might be exactly where the experience begins.

Emotion Without Illustration

Across much of the African continent, non-representational visual language was never an intellectual exercise. It appeared in woven cloth, body markings, and sacred objects — doing communal, functional, deeply felt work long before abstraction became a movement to debate.

El Anatsui's vast installations, assembled from flattened bottle caps and aluminum seals, carry the physical presence of ceremonial textiles and the moral weight of colonial history. You do not need to know that history to feel something standing beneath one of these works — feeling arrives first, and understanding follows in its own time.



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Ink Splash II by El Anatsui

When History Has No Desire to Be Illustrated

Ibrahim El-Salahi spent years imprisoned in Sudan, and what emerged in his work afterwards was not documentary but something more difficult and more honest. His visual language was shaped by trauma, spiritual searching, and the formal architecture of Arabic script — none of which translated into legible images.

That is precisely the point. Certain human experiences exceed what a recognisable figure or a linear story can honestly hold, and El-Salahi's abstraction meets those experiences on their own terms.



Untitled Ndebele Abstract painting by Esther Mahlangu



Untitled from Prison Notebook by Ibrahim El-Salahi.

There is a version of looking at abstract art that treats uncertainty as a problem to be solved. And then there is another version — harder to arrive at, more rewarding to practice — that treats uncertainty as the point of entry. That recognises the discomfort of not immediately knowing as an invitation rather than a failure.

Perhaps what the most emotionally intelligent abstract art offers is not an answer we can carry out of the gallery, but a question we are still turning over days later. What was that? What did I feel? Why does it stay?

Those are not signs that you missed something. They are signs that something reached you.

Pattern as Archive

Esther Mahlangu's bold Ndebele geometric patterning is not decoration — it carries generations of cultural identity, community belonging, and female creative authority encoded in every triangle and symmetrical band. Abdoulaye Konaté works with a similar understanding of material, constructing large textile installations that address conflict, grief, and spiritual life through colour, repetition, and West African weaving traditions.

Both artists communicate with extraordinary precision without illustrating their subjects once. The abstraction, in each case, is the archive.



Keturah Ovio

Keturah Ovio is an Executive at Patrons Modern & contemporary African Art. She is also an engineer and Founder of Dukka, a Fintech startup providing bookkeeping and payments solutions for small businesses. Keturah is passionate about African Art and has been collecting art since her early 20s. Now, she advises, curates, and manages collections for individuals and corporate organisations looking to start or diversify their wealth management through art collecting. She strongly believes that a fine marriage exists between Art and Technology

INTERNAL BRANDING STRATEGIES: HOW TO UNITE YOUR TEAM AND STRENGTHEN YOUR BRAND

FEYISITAN IJIMAKINWA

Internal branding is about helping employees understand and connect with a company's brand values and mission. When employees believe in the brand, they are more motivated and better equipped to deliver a great experience to customers. Internal branding ensures consistency, builds trust, and creates a strong company culture where employees feel purpose-driven. This makes them more engaged and effective, turning them into natural ambassadors for the brand and helping the company succeed.

The top four benefits of internal branding
Internal branding can deeply impact how your team feels about their work and your company. Below are just a few benefits that can come from successful internal branding.

1. Happier employees

When employees feel like they're part of something meaningful, they're more engaged and satisfied. It boosts morale and makes them want to stay on your team.

2. A sense of belonging

People thrive when they feel part of a community. Internal branding helps employees feel connected to a shared mission, fostering loyalty and collaboration.

3. Improved productivity

When employees are aligned with your brand, they work with more focus, energy and efficiency. They understand their role, and how it contributes to the bigger picture.

4. Happier customers

Employees who believe in the brand create better experiences for customers. They're more genuine, consistent, and enthusiastic, which builds customer trust and loyalty.

The risks of neglecting internal branding
Skipping or ignoring internal branding can lead to serious problems for your business. When employees aren't on the same page about your brand, it can cause confusion, frustration, and even hurt your reputation.

Here are the main risks:

1. Disengaged employees

If your team doesn't understand your company's mission and values, they might feel disconnected and unmotivated. This can lead to lower morale, higher turnover, and a workforce that's not as committed to reaching company goals.

2. Inconsistent customer experiences

Employees who don't believe in the brand or understand it can't deliver a consistent experience for customers. This might result in mixed messages or actions that don't match what your company stands for, which can break customer trust.

3. Wasted marketing efforts

Your external campaigns depend on employees to back them up. If your team isn't aligned with the brand, your marketing message can come off as hollow, wasting time, money, and effort.

4. Weak company culture

Without internal branding, your workplace can feel fragmented. Employees might end up working in silos rather than as a team, which can cause confusion, inefficiency, and even conflict between departments.

5. Missed opportunities for innovation

When employees are engaged and connected to your brand, they're more likely to come up with creative ideas and solutions. Without that connection, you're missing out on the full potential of your team's talent. How to successfully implement internal branding
Rolling out internal branding isn't something you do overnight. It's a process that takes planning, consistent communication, and ongoing monitoring.

Here's how to make it work:

1. Define your mission clearly

Make your company's mission simple and relatable. Everyone—from interns to executives—should understand what the mission is and why it matters. When employees see how it benefits them and their work, they're more likely to embrace it.

2. Talk about it often

It's not enough to mention your brand values once. Keep the conversation going with emails, team meetings, and resources like internal websites. Repetition helps people remember and underscores your company's commitment to its own values.

3. Build your culture around the mission

Your brand values shouldn't just be words on paper. They should shape how you hire, onboard, and celebrate achievements. When employees see the mission in action, it becomes real.

4. Listen to feedback

Internal branding works best when employees are part of the process. Ask for their input, address concerns, and adapt as needed. When people feel heard, they're more likely to be engaged.

How to get employees on board with your internal branding strategy

Involving employees directly in the internal branding process is one of the most effective ways to ensure success. When employees feel like they're part of the process, they're more likely to buy into the new brand and help implement it across the company.

Start by appointing "brand ambassadors"—team members who can champion the brand within their departments. Depending on the size of your business, this might mean selecting one or two people or assigning representatives in every department. These ambassadors should be equipped with all the tools and information they need to share the brand's identity, answer questions, and inspire excitement.

The key to internal branding success: Leadership buy-in

Leaders set the tone for how a brand comes to life within a company. When executives and managers embody the brand's values, they show employees that the rebrand is more than just a marketing update—it's a commitment to a shared mission and vision.

i. Model the brand values

When leaders consistently act in ways that reflect the brand's values, it creates a ripple effect across the organization. Employees are far more likely to adopt the brand's identity when they see it authentically carried out by those at the top.

ii. Make it a shared effort

Leaders can encourage team buy-in by making space for employee feedback, celebrating milestones tied to the rebrand, and recognising individuals who have gone above and beyond. This level of involvement fosters a sense of inclusion and ownership, making employees feel like active participants in the brand's evolution.

LAST LINE

Use internal branding to build a lasting legacy. Branding is more than the sum of its parts—it's the heart of your company's identity, and strong internal branding can inspire employees and unites teams under a shared vision.

The effort you invest in engaging your employees will ripple outwards, transforming your company culture and customer experiences. And when everyone is aligned, motivated, and proud, your brand becomes more than a message—it becomes a movement.



FEYISITAN IJIMAKINWA

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WHAT THE HEART WANTS

UDY OSARO-EDOBOR

I did not have children in my previous marriage and for that, I am grateful. That may sound strange but there is a reason behind it.

I got married as a virgin at the age of twenty-six. I was raised in a strict Christian home. My parents were ministers in our local church and I was a strong advocate for abstinence and no sex before marriage. I held myself to very high moral standards.

I coordinated the Teens Church, served as president of the Young Adults Fellowship, sang in the choir and volunteered as a cleaner. Most people hardly called me Eunice. They called me Miss Efficient because of my dedication and commitment.

When I met Bro. Lawrence at a national youth conference, I never expected him to take an interest in me. He had ministered in songs and many ladies were practically drooling over him yet he chose to come and speak to me.

We exchanged phone numbers and before I knew it, he was calling me every day. Soon, he started attending my church and eventually became a member. He was the best singer in the choir, full of zeal and enthusiasm. Everyone loved him.

Six months later, he asked for my hand in marriage. I was hesitant but everyone around me insisted that ours would be a match made in heaven. My parents preferred him to Sammy, who had been in love with me since our teenage years. Even after relocating abroad, Sammy never stopped professing his feelings for me. He was heartbroken when I told him I was getting married.

Marriage to Lawrence became a painful reminder never to judge a book by its cover. Sometimes, it felt as though he had been sent to punish me for a crime I had committed in a previous life. To outsiders, we looked like a happy couple but behind closed doors, he made my life miserable.

He constantly criticized me for not being submissive enough. He accused me of being selfish because I refused to relocate abroad with him. Whenever I had my monthly period, he would scold me as though it were some personal failure. He mocked me for not getting pregnant, saying that young girls were conceiving with ease while I could not manage to do the same. I often wondered how that was possible when we were hardly intimate.

At times, he even suggested that I had lied about being a virgin before marriage. According to him, girls like me knew how to invent stories to appear innocent. His words were cruel and deeply hurtful.

As time passed, I also realized that his stories about being a businessman did not add up. Apart from his music career which he did not even take seriously, he had nothing going for him. I paid the bills. I took care of him. I took care of everything. Meanwhile, he continued to belittle me.

It was not my fault that the American embassy had denied him visas on multiple occasions. Yet I had taken him to Dubai and Jordan, hoping it would make him happy. It never did.

My younger brother got married and Sammy attended the wedding. I had always liked Sammy. The feeling had always been mutual. But one of the reasons my parents doubted him was because he was not actively involved in church. That mattered greatly to us at the time, although my brothers never seemed bothered by it.

Seeing Sammy again reminded me of everything I had always admired about him. His passion. His drive. His ambition. His outlook on life and people. He was the complete package. Deep down, I had always known that. I had simply wanted a man who would serve God with the same intensity that I did.

During the wedding, Sammy jokingly told me that he was still waiting for me.

He said he was convinced Lawrence was not my husband. He admitted he could not explain why he felt that way but he intended to wait one more year for me. It was one of the most outrageous things anyone had ever said to me with so much confidence.

As unhappy as I was in my marriage, I did not appreciate him saying those things. I immediately told him off.

After the wedding, I returned home.

A few days passed and Lawrence was nowhere to be found. We had barely spoken while I was away, so he did not even know I had returned.

About a week later, I heard a car drive into the compound. I walked to the window and froze. Lawrence was in the driver's seat of my car. Beside him was a woman.

I watched in disgust as he leaned toward her, fondling and kissing her without the slightest concern. Then he stepped out, walked around the car and opened the door for her like a perfect gentleman.

The woman laughed.

Lawrence patted her backside playfully and she practically skipped behind him in excitement as they headed toward the house.

A few moments later, the front door opened. Lawrence walked in and stopped abruptly when he saw me.

The smile disappeared from his face.

He had no idea I was back.

The woman beside him was Monica, one of his band members. I looked from Lawrence to Monica and back again.

In that instant, the events of the previous two and a half years flashed through my mind.

Every insult.

Every humiliation.

Every disappointment.

Every sacrifice.

I had tolerated so much that I was beginning to lose myself.

The idiot was driving my car, spending my money, bringing his mistress into my house and somehow still managing to make me feel small. It felt as though scales had suddenly fallen from my eyes and for the first time, I saw everything clearly. I screamed. I charged at him, snatched my keys from his hand and pushed him out of my house.

Lawrence stood there completely confused.
 “What are you doing?” he kept asking.
 “Eunice, have you lost your mind?”

When he realized I was serious, he changed tactics.
 “Are you not worried about what people will say?”
 “What will people think?”

But I was past caring.
 For once, I chose myself.

Lawrence went around town with his own version of how our marriage ended.
 He painted me as the villain and soon, the phone calls began. The messages followed.
 Everyone claimed they were concerned but most of them were simply looking for gossip.

I grew tired of the questions.
 Tired of the stares.
 Tired of being discussed.
 Most of all, I was not ready to explain myself to anyone. The mistake had been made and it was my responsibility to deal with it.

I needed space.
 I needed distance.
 I needed time away from everyone including my parents, who felt partly responsible for what had happened.
 So I traveled.

When Sammy called to check on me, as he always did, I casually mentioned that I was in town.
 He had already heard about my marriage falling apart but unlike everyone else, he never brought it up. Not once.
 He waited until I was ready to talk and he listened without judgment.
 He never said, “I told you so.”
 He never reminded me of what he had said at my brother’s wedding.
 He was simply there for me. As a friend.

Exactly one year later, Monica found herself heartbroken after Lawrence left her for a new band member. She was a woman scorned and she began to talk.

As his longest serving band member, she had been involved from the very beginning. She revealed that she had planned everything with Lawrence.
 She confessed that Lawrence had been taking steroids specifically to affect his sperm count so that I would not get pregnant.
 The revelation shocked me. At the same time, I felt grateful. I was thankful I did not have a child with him because I did not want a lifelong reminder of the man who had used me.

Monica revealed even more. According to her, Lawrence had seen me as his ticket out of Nigeria. He had done extensive research before pursuing me.
 He knew my siblings lived abroad and we were American citizens. His plan had been simple.

Marry me.
 Relocate abroad.
 Settle down.
 Divorce me.
 Then return for Monica.

I felt sick. Used. Humiliated. Angry.
 But I was also relieved that the truth was finally out. People now knew who Lawrence really was.
 After everything that had happened, I had no plans of returning to Nigeria. I was done.

Over time, Sammy and I had grown even closer. Yet he never once mentioned what he had said about marrying me.
 Not once. I liked him more than ever.
 In fact, I was finally ready to be his, if he still wanted me.

Many times, I wanted to bring it up.
 Many times, I wanted to ask him if there was still a future for us.
 But I never found the courage.

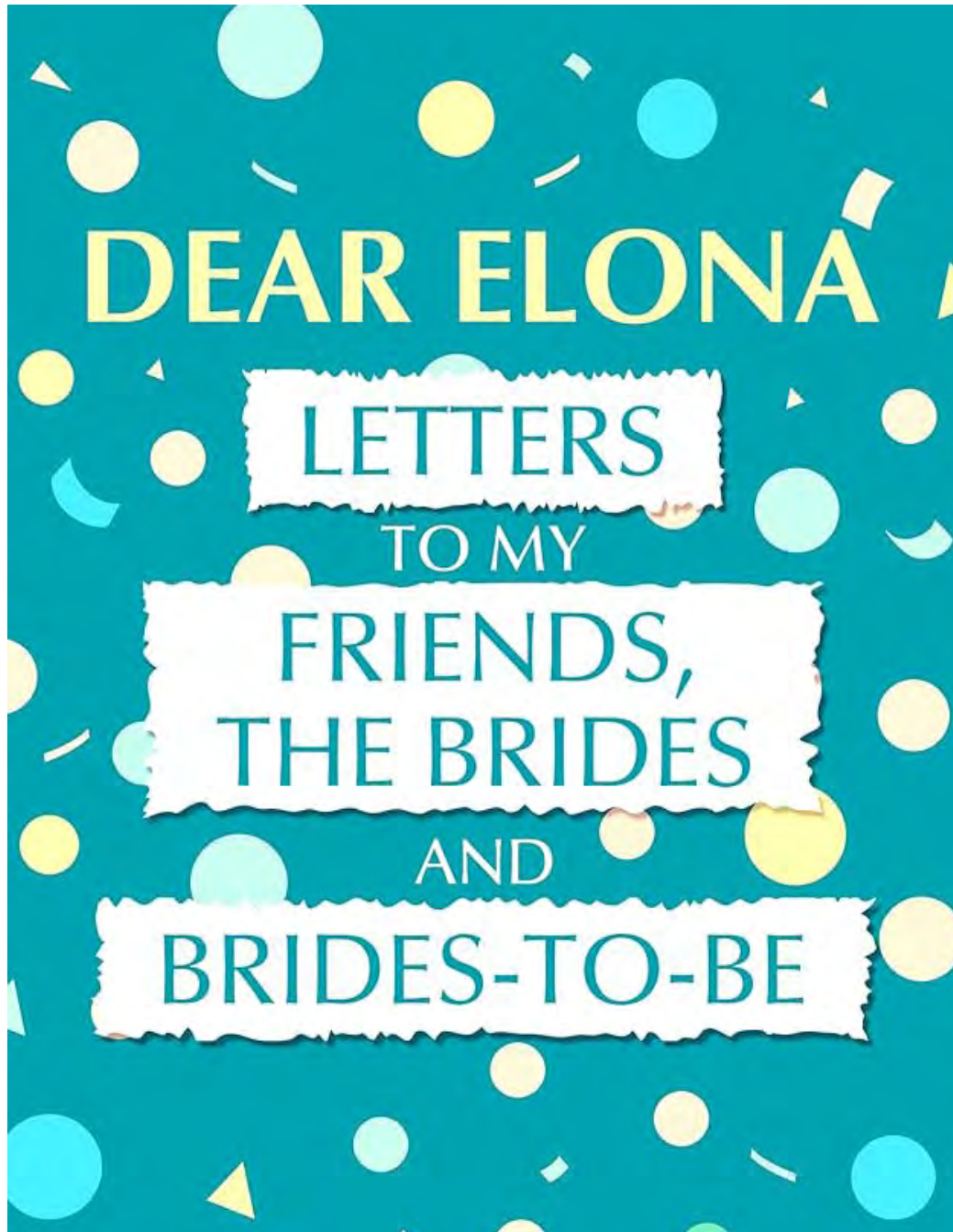
And so, here I was. Finally with the one person who had always truly loved me.
 Yet I still did not know whether there was a future waiting for us.



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Red Flags, Hard Truths, and Honest
Conversations-A Review of Joy Ehonwa's
Dear Elona

Title: Dear Elona: Letters to my Friends, the
Brides and Brides to be
Author: Joy Ehonwa
Year of Publication: 2021
Number of Pages: 213
Category: Self Help

DEAR ELONA: LETTERS TO MY FRIENDS, THE BRIDES AND BRIDES TO BE

TITILADE OYEMADE

The title 'Dear Elona' gives little away. Simple and understated, it does not immediately hint at the warnings and reflections waiting inside. But the blurb changes everything. Promising candid conversations about marriage and relationships, it draws readers in and makes it almost impossible not to begin reading.

The book is written as a collection of letters addressed to 49 women, a format that immediately captures attention. You may find yourself wondering whether the names belong to real people or are simply creations of the author. As the book unfolds, however, it becomes clear that the names matter less than the messages attached to them. Almost every woman who reads the book will find herself reflected in at least one of the letters.

Joy Ehonwa goes straight to the point. At times, she sounds like an older sister offering tough but necessary advice; at others, like a trusted friend sharing lessons from experience. Her honesty is refreshing, encouraging readers to confront difficult truths rather than avoid them.

Each letter focuses on a different aspect of marriage and relationships. Physical attraction, character, values, expectations, and compatibility all come under discussion. Ehonwa challenges readers to look beyond chemistry and romantic excitement and consider the qualities that sustain a healthy marriage.

One of the book's strengths is how personal it feels. Although the letters are addressed to specific women, the lessons are universal. Readers are not simply observing a conversation; they become part of it.

Dear Elona encourages readers to rethink their views about marriage. Those in relationships may find themselves examining their choices, expectations, and the future they are building with their partners. Throughout the book, Ehonwa urges readers not to ignore warning signs or dismiss issues that may seem minor today but could become significant later.

The phrase "shine your eye" appears frequently, alongside reminders not to ignore red flags. At times, the constant cautions can feel intense. There were moments when it seemed as though the author was determined to ensure that no reader entered marriage unprepared, even if it meant making the institution itself appear somewhat intimidating.

There are occasions when the tone feels so direct that you may find yourself putting the book down, not because it is uninteresting, but because it demands serious thought. Ehonwa refuses to let readers approach relationships casually and consistently asks the uncomfortable questions many people would rather avoid.

While some readers may find the numerous warnings overwhelming, others will appreciate them as necessary reminders that marriage is one of life's most important decisions.

The author also has a humorous side, and some of the lighter chapters might have worked well earlier in the book. The opening sections create a level of tension that may feel heavy for some readers. At times, Ehonwa raises concerns without immediately providing clear answers, which can occasionally leave readers unsettled. Yet this may be intentional, encouraging readers to think through the issues themselves rather than rely on simple solutions.

If you have ever struggled with knowing what questions to ask while dating or wondered whether you are focusing on the right things in a relationship, Dear Elona offers valuable guidance. It is not a rulebook but a series of honest conversations designed to help readers make wiser decisions.

Dear Elona is not the kind of book you finish and quickly forget. Its lessons, warnings, and questions linger long after the final letter. Through honest reflection and practical insights, Joy Ehonwa challenges readers to approach relationships with wisdom and a deeper understanding of what makes a marriage work.



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WEEKENDER

MOVIE REVIEW

THE MARKED WOMAN (2026)

If you enjoy thriller, action movies then this brand new movie “The Marked Woman” will be worth your while. In the beginning of this movie the police found a woman inside a shipping container at the Port of Barcelona, she had been badly bruised and was bound and tied. When they let her out, she was taken to the hospital and could not remember anything. The police decided to put Anna Ripley on the case, she was just returning from a bad incidence and was seeing her therapist, they handed her this case because they thought it was a small case and that she wouldn’t be able to handle it. But Ripol nailed it. You will need to go check out this movie to find out Ripol handled this case, how she worked and protected the lady from the flock of bad guys who wanted her dead or alive, fantastic movie I must say. The 109m Spanish, Crime, drama, Thriller, mystery films, films based on books, was directed by Gabe Ibanez, they featured actors like, Candela Pena, Ana Rujas, Kira Miro, Pol Lopez, Manolo Solo, Lupe Rios, Ester Naya, Carlos Troya, Daniel Vart, Pilar Negaus, Montse German and many more.



TRAP (2024)

For all the fans of Psychological, suspense, drama movies, you might want to try this movie out, as they will lead you on, allowing you to keep guessing till the very end. I enjoyed the movie, but felt that there were some loopholes and this made the movie drag. Cooper was an amazing loving dad and to reward his daughter Riley for doing well in her class work, he decides to take her to her favorite artist Pop concert. This was a huge concert with thousands of people and to keep her safe, he decides to accompany her. After registering her and settling in, they realize that they have entered the center of a dark and sinister event. The entire concert was grounded by cops and FBI agents who were looking for a renowned serial killer called "The Butcher". The 105m psychological suspense thriller movie was directed by M. Night Shyamalan, they featured actors like, Josh Hartnett, Ariel Donoghue, Saleka Shyamalan, Allison Pill, Hayley Mills, Jonathan Langdon, Marc Bacolcoly, Marnie McPhail, Kid Cudi, Russ Marcia Bennett and many more.



BLOOD SISTERS (2026)

If you haven't seen Blood Sisters season 1, then you might have to run along to check it out to get a better picture of this new limited series. In the first season, Kemi had to step in by hitting Kola who was beating Sarah up and almost killed her, Kemi had to hit him on the head but little did she know that it would kill him. They both had to flee and hide from the law, but this time around they are framed for what they did and added to it. Each week they were brought to court with new witnesses, their lawyer looked for several witnesses to be brought to testify that they didn't kill Sarah's husband. But all her efforts were fruitless. The only way to get out of this big court case was to fight the powerful Uduak Ademola who knew the real murder, but that would be a far cry to win this battle as she had everyone wrapped around her hands. You would need to check out this series to discover if they were convicted or exonerated and all hope the truth was finally reveal. The 4 episodes averaging 57mins was a drama, Nollywood, crime thriller movie which was created by Temidayo Makanjuola, they featured actors like Ini Dima-Okojie, Nancy Isime, Kate Henshaw-Nuttall, Genoveva Umeh, Wale Junaid, Daniel Etim-Effiong, Gabriel Afolayan, Kehinde Bankole, Ibrahim Suleiman, Mike Afolarin and many more.



WEEKEND QUOTES



1

The light that brings back
the brightness in the midst of
darkness no matter how long
.....WhispersbyTEN

2

To the one who does this by
seasons. We love you
.....WhispersbyTEN

3

The rain that falls on a bullet
to shed it off. We praise you
.....WhispersbyTEN

4

The price for your peace is
the THE BLOOD
.....WhispersbyTEN