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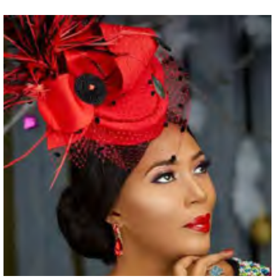
Parents race to lock in citizenship options for children before rules tighten further



FASHION

The Modern Gele: Why Fascinators Have Become an Obsession for Nigerian Women

EDUCATION

2027 International STEM Olympiad: What Nigerian students need to know

PUBLISHER/EDITOR IN CHIEF
Frank Aigbogun

EDITOR
Lolade Akinmurele

FOUNDING EDITOR BD WEEKENDER
Lehlé Balde

DEPUTY EDITOR BD WEEKENDER
Ifeoma Okeke-Korieocha

CHIEF SALES AND MARKETING OFFICER
Ijeoma Ude

ADVERTISMENT MANAGER
Queen Nkwocha

COPY SALES MANAGER
Florence Kadiri

DIGITAL SALES MANAGER
Linda Ochugbua

HEAD OF DIGITALS
Nduka Asoh

DESIGN AND ART DIRECTION
Emmanuel Odo
(officialedenis@gmail.com

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CONTRIBUTORS
Linda Ochugbua
Chisom Michael
Feyisitan Ijimakinwa
Ekemini Akpakpan
Rukevwe Dukuye-Nnachi
Tomilayo Imade
Charlse Ogwo
Royal Ibeh

ENQUIRIES
weekender@businessday.ng

ADVERTS
Ijeoma Ude
+2348033225506

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

LEGAL ADVISERS
The Law Union

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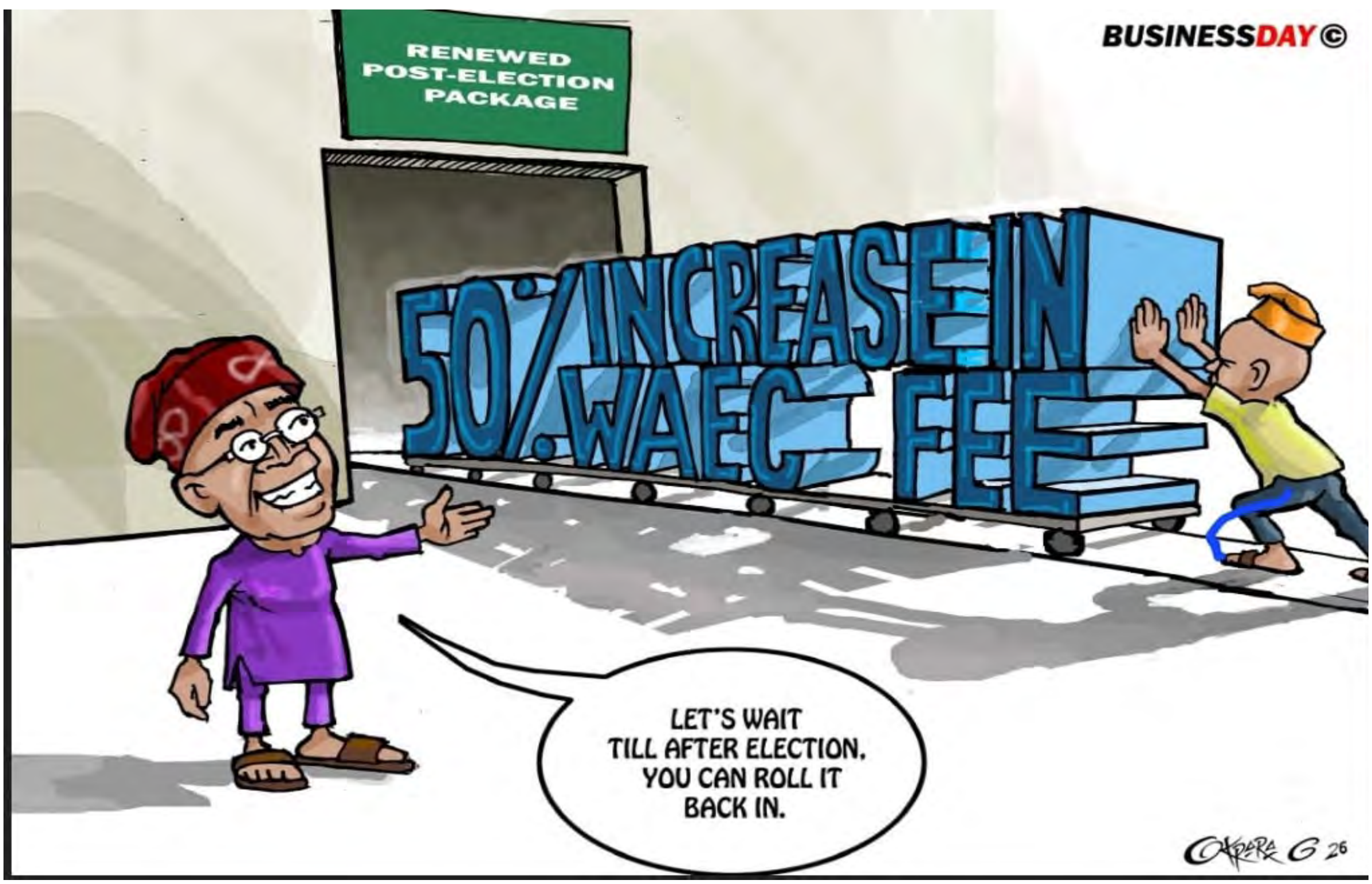
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PARENTS RACE TO LOCK IN CITIZENSHIP OPTIONS FOR CHILDREN BEFORE RULES TIGHTEN FURTHER

CHISOM MICHAEL

A child's citizenship often looks fixed at birth, decided by the country named on hospital paperwork and the passports the parents carry. Immigration lawyers and mobility advisers say the opposite is true: citizenship remains one of the few parts of a child's future that parents can still shape, and the window for shaping it closes at 18.

Three forces determine what passports a child can claim: where they are born, known as "jus soli" or the "right of soil"; who their parents and grandparents are, known as "jus sanguinis" or the "right of blood"; and whether a family pays for citizenship, known as "jus pecuniae" or the "right of money". Advisers say two of the three are narrowing across wealthy nations while the third keeps growing, which rewards families who act while children remain minors.

Birthplace remains the advantage that can be secured only once, at delivery. A child born in a country with unconditional birthright citizenship becomes a citizen the moment they arrive, regardless of the parents' own nationality. That right is now concentrated in the Americas. Roughly 33 countries still apply unconditional jus soli, and nearly all sit in that hemisphere, spanning Canada, the United States, Brazil, Argentina and most of the Caribbean.

Elsewhere, the doctrine has retreated for decades. The United Kingdom ended unconditional birthright citizenship in 1983, Australia closed its version in 1986, and Ireland scrapped its own by referendum in the mid-2000s. The United States remains an exception. On 30 June 2026 the Supreme Court struck down an executive order that sought to end birthright citizenship for children of temporary and unlawful residents, ruling that virtually anyone born on US soil holds citizenship under the Fourteenth Amendment. Several Latin American countries pair birthright citizenship for the child with fast residence routes for the parents; Brazil grants citizenship to any child born there and lets parents apply for permanent residency straight away, naturalising after one year.

Descent claims move faster than most parents expect, and lawyers warn they are shrinking. Many countries pass nationality automatically from parent to child, so a parent who has never claimed a second citizenship through their own parents or grandparents may be sitting on an entitlement their child could inherit once it is formalised. Timing matters: in several countries, whether a child qualifies depends on the parent's status at the time of birth, so securing a citizenship before a child arrives, rather than after, can decide what passes down. Advisers also stress registering a child's birth with the relevant consulate promptly, since an unregistered claim by descent becomes harder to prove once witnesses and records age.

Italy illustrates how quickly ancestral routes can close. Long regarded as the world's most generous descent regime, Italy capped citizenship by blood through Law 74/2025, and its Constitutional Court upheld that cap in March 2026, ending the principle that Italian nationality could pass down an unlimited chain of generations. Italy's highest court, sitting as the "Sezioni Unite", heard arguments on 14 April 2026 over whether an ancestor who naturalised abroad while their own child was still a minor cuts off the bloodline for everyone born after them; a ruling was pending at the time of writing and will govern thousands of pending claims. Italy's reform does allow a parent to pass citizenship to a minor by declaration, but only within fixed windows: three years from birth for children born after 24 May 2025, and an extended deadline of 31 May 2029 for children who were already minors when the law took effect.

Canada has moved the other way on one measure while adding a new condition on another. Bill C-3 removed the first-generation limit on citizenship by descent in December 2025. For a child born abroad after 15 December 2025, however, a Canadian parent who was also born abroad must show at least 1,095 days, or three years, of physical presence in Canada before the birth. Canada also raised its evidence bar in June 2026, briefly ordering some recipients to surrender certificates built on informal genealogy records before reversing course days later and telling most holders to keep their documents.

Residence and schooling build ties an adult applicant cannot buy or backdate. Portugal's revised nationality law, in force since 19 May 2026, now grants citizenship at birth to a child born there only if a parent has completed five years of legal residence, up from one year previously, a change that can split siblings born either side of the threshold. Portugal also doubled its naturalisation requirement to ten years for most applicants, seven for EU and Portuguese-speaking nationals, counting the clock only from the date a residence permit is issued. Its new descent route for great-grandchildren of Portuguese nationals likewise requires five years of residence and a "genuine connection" to the community, the kind of link a school-age child builds simply by growing up there. Language works the same way: Portugal's naturalisation process requires an A2 language exam and a civics test, a bar that a child raised speaking the language clears without effort while it stalls many adult applicants for years.

Investment routes remain the one lever built specifically for families. Grenada's citizenship-by-investment programme requires a non-refundable donation of $235,000, covering a family of four, plus roughly $25,000 per additional child, and permits dual citizenship without residence in the country. Advisers caution that a citizenship added for a child does not automatically cascade to grandchildren, since transmission depends on the destination country's own descent rules.

Every added passport carries obligations alongside benefits. About 60 countries still conscript, and a dual-national child can fall within a second country's call-up rules on reaching the relevant age. A child who holds US citizenship, by birth or descent, carries lifelong US tax-filing obligations regardless of residence, short of renouncing it, while some countries require a person to choose a single nationality at the age of majority. Lawyers recommend auditing every citizenship already held in the family, tracing both family trees for unclaimed descent, then layering residence, schooling, language and, where useful, investment, while mapping the obligations that come attached. Handled early, they say, a child's citizenship becomes a portfolio the child can use for university, work and mobility, rather than an accident of birth that hardens the moment they turn 18.

2027 INTERNATIONAL STEM OLYMPIAD: WHAT NIGERIAN STUDENTS NEED TO KNOW

CHARLES OGWO

For Nigerian students with a passion for science, technology, engineering, and mathematics, the 2027 International STEM Olympiad, to hold in Lisbon-Portugal, could be a chance to compete alongside some of the world's brightest young minds.

Experts emphasise that students' grasping the concepts, learning their application in day-to-day life, and improves one's skills, rather than the traditional rote learning approach, and this is what comes with competing in STEM Olympiad, among others.

Olympiad competitions introduce students to the unique nature of competitive exams at an early age. It lets them gain hands-on experience in attempting different papers and solving different kinds of problems by using their critical thinking and reasoning abilities.

Besides, the distinct paper pattern with multiple-choice questions, time barrier, and a competition-focused environment motivates them to perform their best, unlike a regular semester, thus creating a major shift in their perception towards examinations and results on the whole.

Alex Onyia, CEO at Educare, recently unveiled guidelines for schools, parents and students seeking to participate in the 2027 International STEM Olympiad.

Onyia in his official X handle @ @winexviv, states that interested students will be able to begin registration after August 15, 2026, according to the organisers of the competition.

"The registration portal will open for the new academic session following the successful conclusion of the 2026 International STEM Olympiad and Coding Olympiad Grand Final held in Rome, Italy, from July 2 to 8, 2026.

"The registration guidelines, examination schedules and portal access will become available when registration officially opens after August 15, 2026."

Besides, the organisers confirmed that the 2027 Grand Final will take place in Lisbon, Portugal, inviting students worldwide to begin preparations for the new competition cycle.

The Rome event brought together 1,154 participants and guests from 54 countries, with the award ceremony marking the end of the global competition.

What is the International STEM Olympiad?

The International STEM Olympiad is a global academic competition designed to promote education in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) through real-world problem-solving rather than conventional classroom testing.

Unlike traditional examinations that assess students based mainly on memorisation, the Olympiad focuses on applying scientific and mathematical concepts to practical situations, encouraging critical thinking, logical reasoning and innovation.

The competition is organised by Main Team Organisation GmbH, a Germany-based educational organisation established in 2012, which conducts educational programmes and international competitions for students and teachers across Europe, the United States and other parts of the world.

According to the organisers, the Olympiad was created to provide students interested in STEM with access to international-standard questions and learning materials while giving them the opportunity to compete with peers from different countries.

Categories

Students can participate in three categories: Mathematics – Grades 1 to 12, Science – Grades 1 to 12, and Technology and Engineering – Grades 6 to 11

Who can participate?

The competition is open to students from Grades 1 to 12, regardless of age. Students are expected to register according to their current grade level rather than their age or year of school enrolment.

There is no restriction on nationality, and schools or individual students from participating countries can register.

How to register

Registration will commence after August 15, 2026, through the official International STEM Olympiad portal. To complete registration, students or schools are expected to: Create an account on the official student portal. Register using the student's current grade. Select one or more competition categories. Pay the applicable registration fee, and choose their preferred examination date once announced.

Students are allowed to register for multiple categories, however, payments become non-refundable once completed.

Examination format:

Each examination lasts 60 minutes, and they are conducted under strict online supervision. Participants must use a device with a functioning camera throughout the examination.

Students caught cheating or attempting to use unauthorised materials risk immediate disqualification. The organisers also warned that opening another browser tab during the examination automatically sends an alert to the examination centre.

Note: The organisers stressed that the use of artificial intelligence tools to answer examination questions is strictly prohibited.

Besides, participants are prohibited from using: Calculators, books

printed materials, dictionaries, AI tools, and additional browser tabs.

Languages: The languages of use are English, Spanish, French, Russian, Azerbaijani, and Turkish.

Recall that the Nigerian team at the International STEM Olympiad Grand Finale in Rome, Italy, after the Mathematics and Science competitions involving participants from over 150 countries.

Nigerian representatives comprising of Egejurum Onyedikachi, Onwubiko Chimduebube, and Don Munachimso, won gold at the International STEM Olympiad Grand Finale in Rome, Italy.

THE MODERN GELE: WHY FASCINATORS HAVE BECOME AN OBSESSION FOR NIGERIAN WOMEN

IFEOMA OKEKE-KORIEOCHA

In the theater of Nigerian fashion, the head is a canvas. For decades, the towering majesty of the traditional gele (artistic head tie) has commanded respect at traditional weddings and cultural ceremonies. Yet, alongside this indigenous icon sits another, highly resilient headpiece that has refused to leave the spotlight: the fascinator.

Far from a passing Western trend, the fascinator has woven itself deeply into the fabric of Nigerian social life. From high-society church weddings in Lekki to Sunday morning services, royal funerals, and elite race days, these delicate, architectural headpieces remain a non-negotiable crown of elegance.

But why has this millinery staple sustained such enduring popularity in Nigeria's fashion landscape?

While a beautifully tied gele is unmatched in its cultural prestige, it requires time, expertise, and occasionally, a high tolerance for discomfort. Enter the fascinator.

As Nigerian social events (popularly known as Owambes) evolved, modern women began seeking alternative headwear that delivered maximum visual impact with minimal physical strain. The fascinator offered the perfect compromise: it is lightweight, sits comfortably on a headband or comb, preserves intricate hairstyles, and is incredibly easy to put on. It allows the modern Nigerian woman to transition from the solemnity of a church ceremony to the high-energy dance floor of a wedding reception without breaking a sweat.

The Versatile Canvas of Contemporary Aso-Ebi

Nigerian fashion is legendary for its ability to adopt global elements and infuse them with local flavor. The rise of contemporary Aso-Ebi (family/group uniform fabric) styles has provided the perfect canvas for fascinators.

Rather than sticking to traditional fabrics alone, designers are increasingly creating mixed-media ensembles.

Fascinators crafted from local materials like Aso-Oke, raw silk, or lace are frequently paired with bespoke gowns, creating a striking hybrid of Western sophistication and African heritage. This versatility means milliners can constantly reinvent the headpiece to match any lace pattern, sequin detailing, or color scheme.

The “Sunday Best” and Royal Influences

In Nigeria, dressing up for Sunday service is a deeply ingrained cultural ritual. The “Sunday Best” wardrobe demands a level of poise that the fascinator delivers effortlessly.

It carries a subtle, regal aesthetic—drawing inspiration from British royal style but amplified with Nigerian boldness. The influence of high-profile royal weddings and events across the globe has only fed this obsession. Nigerian women take these international millinery trends and scale them up, opting for larger-than-life structures, dramatic feathers, and vibrant jewels that command attention the moment they walk into a room.

A Thriving Millinery Industry

The enduring love for fascinators has fueled a highly lucrative local industry. Across major fashion hubs like Lagos, Abuja, and Port Harcourt, young creative entrepreneurs have built thriving brands dedicated solely to millinery.

These local designers have moved far beyond importing ready-made hats. They are hand-sculpting sinamay, dying feathers in custom shades, and incorporating local beadwork. Because these designers can customize pieces to a client’s exact outfit and skull shape, the fascinator remains personal, premium, and inherently luxurious.

SINGAPORE ROLLS OUT S$500 CHILD CREDITS AS PART OF FAMILY SUPPORT PUSH

CHISOM MICHAEL

Families in Singapore, ranked as the world's second-richest country by GDP per capita in 2025 according to The Economist, are set to receive S$500 (US$386) in credits for every child aged 12 or younger, as the government continues its effort to ease the burden of raising a family.

The Child LifeSG Credits will be issued from 14 July to families with children born between 2014 and 2025, Singapore's Ministry of Social and Family Development said on Monday. Families with children born this year will receive the credits in April 2027.

The ministry confirmed that the funds will be credited automatically to each child's Child Development Account trustee, meaning parents will not need to submit an application. The process is designed to remove paperwork from a system that already reaches hundreds of thousands of households.

This latest round follows a similar S$500 top-up distributed to more than 450,000 children last year, as reported by The Straits Times. Prime Minister Lawrence Wong first announced the new credits in February, during the presentation of the national budget.

Wider support for families

The credits form one part of a broader set of measures aimed at helping parents manage the cost of raising children.

Among these is a change to household income ceilings for several childcare subsidy schemes, which will take effect next year.

The income ceiling for the Infant and Childcare Additional Subsidy Scheme, along with the Kindergarten Fee Assistance Scheme, will rise to S$15,000 from S$12,000.

The ceiling for the Student Care Fee Assistance Scheme will increase to S$6,500 from S$4,500, according to AsiaOne.

These adjustments mean more families will qualify for support as income limits are lifted.

Speaking at the budget announcement in February, Wong explained the reasoning behind the government's approach to family policy.

"Many young couples hope to become parents. We want to create the right conditions, so they feel confident and ready to start a family," Wong said, as quoted by Channel News Asia.

He added that the choice to marry and raise children remains a private one, but pledged continued government backing for those who choose that path.

"The decision to get married and have children is deeply personal. But for those who wish to take the step, the government will do more to support them along the way," he said.

Additional cost-of-living relief

Beyond support for parents, the government has introduced other payouts this month to help residents with everyday expenses. Households living in public flats will receive S$110 to S$190 (US$86 to US$148) in U-Save utility rebates, along with up to one month of service and conservancy charges rebates.

Separately, eligible adults will receive cash payouts of up to S$850 next month under a scheme intended to help lower- and middle-income citizens manage the Goods and Services Tax and daily costs of living.

A long-term strategy

Singapore has faced a persistent decline in birth rates for years, a challenge shared by many developed economies.

The government's response has combined direct payments to families with structural changes to subsidy eligibility, an approach intended to reduce both the immediate and ongoing financial pressure of parenthood.

For families with young children, the latest credits provide a modest but tangible contribution towards costs such as childcare, education and daily essentials.

Combined with the expanded subsidy ceilings, the measures reflect a policy direction the government describes as one of encouragement rather than obligation, aimed at supporting choices that Wong has called deeply personal.

Whether these steps will meaningfully affect long-term birth trends remains uncertain, but for now, thousands of families across Singapore will see the credits appear automatically in their children's accounts starting this week.

OVER 10,000 GATHER IN LAGOS AS ARISE CONFERENCE DEMANDS 'SHIFT' IN ENTERPRISE, LEADERSHIP

Thousands of young leaders, entrepreneurs, professionals and change-makers gathered in Lagos for the fifth edition of ARISE Conference, a two-day leadership and enterprise summit that challenged participants to embrace change, unlock opportunities and build lives of lasting impact in an increasingly dynamic world.

Held on June 27 and 28, 2026, at the WCCRM Bariga District Centre, Pedro, Bariga, Lagos, the conference attracted thousands of physical participants, while more than 10,000 people joined virtually through YouTube and Facebook.

Approximately 80 percent of the online audience connected from Nigeria, with viewers from the United States and the United Kingdom leading international participation.

Now in its fifth year, ARISE Conference has steadily evolved into one of the flagship youth development initiatives of the Watchman Young Adult Forum. Since its debut in 2022 under the theme Arise, the conference has continued to challenge young people through annual themes including Unlimited (2023), Moving Forward (2024), Access (2025), and this year's timely focus - Shift.

Supported by Zenith Bank, Imperio International Limited, Flinks Foods and Beverages Industries Limited, DAX Tech Group, Fibi, TNG, Cheva Express and Iglow Cakes & Events, the conference brought together respected professionals, business executives, educators, public servants and faith leaders to address the realities of leadership, entrepreneurship, career development, innovation, governance and spiritual growth.

Among the distinguished guests were the Diocesan Pastor of the Watchman Catholic Charismatic Renewal Movement, Lagos Diocese, Protase Opara; the Diocesan Women's Leader, Jewel Opara; the Vice Chairman of the Watchman Young Adult Forum Advisory Board and Marketing Director of Imperio International Limited, Roseline Abaronye; the Chief Executive Officer of Glowfield International Schools, Blessing Anenechukwu; the Director General of the National Institute of International Affairs, Eghosa Osaghie,

represented by Eberechi Nweze; delegates from Nsukka, Enugu State; and several accomplished entrepreneurs and industry leaders.

Opening the conference, Emmanuel Aloysius, Project Coordinator described life as a journey punctuated by defining moments capable of changing destinies.

He urged participants to recognize such moments when they appear and described ARISE Conference as one of those rare opportunities capable of shifting individuals from one level of influence to another.

Beyond acquiring knowledge, he challenged attendees to apply what they learned, transform where necessary and become catalysts for the growth of others.

Delivering the welcome address, Mrs. Roseline Abaronye noted that ARISE had become a platform where leadership, entrepreneurship, communication, innovation, career development, strategic growth and spiritual empowerment intersect.

Reflecting on the rapidly changing global landscape shaped by technological advancement, shifting economic realities and evolving consumer behaviour, she observed that change is no longer optional but inevitable. According to her, those willing to adapt will be best positioned to thrive in the emerging future.

The keynote address by Pastor Dr. Protase Opara laid the spiritual foundation for the conference. Drawing lessons from biblical figures including Abraham, Joseph, Moses, Esther, Peter and Paul, he described the theme “shift” as both divine and intentional - a process through which God prepares individuals for greater purpose.

He identified seventeen critical areas requiring transformation, including mindset, identity, spiritual commitment, emotional maturity, discipline, responsibility, relationships, mentorship, leadership, career and business. Participants were encouraged to abandon limiting patterns, embrace disciplined growth, trust the process of transformation and intentionally surround themselves with people who inspire excellence.

The emphasis on transformation continued with Deputy Superintendent of Police Maureen Chioma Chinaka, Police Public Relations Officer of the Abia State Police Command, whose presentation, From Confusion to Clarity: Designing Your Life and Career Plans, challenged participants to approach their futures with deliberate planning.

She encouraged young people to discover their identity in Christ, identify their strengths, invest continuously in knowledge and skill acquisition, seek mentors and establish both short-term and long-term life plans covering their spiritual lives, careers, character and relationships.

Adding a creative dimension to the conference, spoken word artist Judith Favour delivered a moving performance chronicling the journey of ARISE Conference from its inaugural edition to its current theme, capturing the evolution of both the platform and its growing community.

Entrepreneurship took centre stage as Mrs. Blessing Anenechukwu presented a practical session titled From Certificate to Money: Turning Your Dreams into Income.

She argued that true economic value lies not merely in academic qualifications but in solving real problems. Presenting what she described as an “income formula”—Knowledge + Skills + Visibility + Value = Income - she challenged participants to intentionally develop competencies that create measurable value in society.

A dedicated networking session followed, providing participants with opportunities to build professional relationships, exchange ideas and establish collaborations beyond the conference hall.

Further expanding the entrepreneurship conversation, Emmanuel Nduka, Co-founder of Evolv Africa, introduced participants to his SPARK framework for monetising skills.

The model encouraged entrepreneurs to develop exceptional skills, package them into scalable products or systems, identify a clearly defined audience, build consistent market reach and establish sustainable revenue streams.

In an increasingly competitive economy where technical skills are becoming commonplace, he argued that the ability to commercialise value distinguishes exceptional entrepreneurs from the ordinary.

Representing one of the conference’s lead sponsors, Chukwuemeka Daniel of Zenith Bank highlighted financial products and support initiatives available to small and medium-sized enterprises, reinforcing the institution’s commitment to empowering young entrepreneurs.

Business strategy remained a major focus during an engaging fireside conversation between Michael Oyagha and Bernice Nkolika, Chief Executive Officer of DAX Tech Group. Drawing from years of entrepreneurial experience, she stressed that integrity, continuous learning, service excellence, speed of delivery, strategic branding and intentional networking remain among the strongest competitive advantages available to growing businesses.

The first day concluded with recognition awards presented to outstanding resource persons, including Emmanuel Ndika, Mrs. Bernice Nkolika and Mrs. Blessing Anenechukwu, in appreciation of their contributions to the conference.

Exceptional academic achievement was also celebrated as high-performing candidates from the Watchman Young Adult Forum who scored above 300 in the 2026 UTME received awards and prizes.

The second day shifted attention toward civic responsibility, national development and practical leadership.

Officials of the Federal Road Safety Corps delivered an extensive road safety awareness session, reminding participants that road safety is a shared responsibility.

They urged motorists to avoid drinking and driving, wear seatbelts consistently, refrain from using mobile phones while driving, avoid excessive speeding and maintain roadworthy vehicles, while encouraging pedestrians and all road users to contribute actively to safer roads.

Another spoken word presentation by Abigail John explored themes of identity, resilience and overcoming self-doubt, inspiring participants to embrace personal transformation despite uncertainty and adversity.

In a thought-provoking session on Faith and Governance: Strategic Entry into Politics While Upholding God’s Standard, Barrister Michael Oyagha encouraged greater participation of Christians in public leadership and governance

Emphasising that righteous leadership produces societal progress, he challenged participants to pursue positions of influence while remaining grounded in integrity, justice and biblical values.

Perhaps one of the most compelling personal stories of the conference came from Chartered Accountant, Chukwuemeka Chukwu during a roundtable conversation on How I Shifted from Being a Street Hawker to a Chartered Accountant.

Recounting his journey from selling goods on the streets to becoming a finance professional and successful entrepreneur in the fast-moving consumer goods sector, he underscored the power of resilience, disciplined learning and perseverance. He cautioned young people against get-rich-quick schemes, describing sustainable success as the product of consistent effort and character.

The defining moment of ARISE Conference 2026 came with the highly anticipated Pitch Your Businesscompetition, which transformed the conference from a platform of inspiration into one of tangible economic empowerment.

From an initial pool of fourteen applicants, only five entrepreneurs advanced through a rigorous screening process that evaluated business understanding, market knowledge, competitive advantage, SWOT analysis, resource planning, team capacity and alignment with the Watchman Young Adult Forum’s values of godliness and integrity.

The finalists represented diverse sectors of Nigeria’s entrepreneurial ecosystem. They included Mercy Ezechukwu of Melibs Couture; Gideon Ofoegbu, Co-founder of Kenai Health Solutions; Victoria Chisom Okezie of Edify Writing Enterprise; Esther Ameh of Heritage and Hem Fashion Aesthetics Limited; and Ifeaka Chukwuka of Boldly Handmade.

Before a distinguished panel of judges comprising Patrick Orji of Famek Insurance Brokers Limited, Mrs. Roseline Abaronye, Nnamdi Unachukwu of DAX Tech Group, Onyinyechi Anojulu of Flinx Foods and Beverages Industries Limited and Val Okafor of The Val Okafor Company, each finalist defended their business model, responded to rigorous questioning and demonstrated the viability of their enterprise.

After a highly competitive assessment, Gideon Ofoegbu, Co-founder of Kenai Health Solutions—a health technology platform expanding access to telemedicine and AI-assisted healthcare services—emerged as the overall winner, receiving a N1 million business grant.

Beyond the financial award, all finalists secured access to structured mentorship, business advisory support, increased visibility and future opportunities to compete for larger grants and investment through the Watchman Young Adult Forum Empowerment Project, reinforcing the conference's commitment to long-term entrepreneurial development rather than one-time financial assistance.

The conference concluded with a prophetic impartation session led by Pastor Ben Egbujor, who prayed for participants and committed their aspirations, careers, businesses and leadership journeys to God.

As delegates departed Lagos at the close of the two-day summit, many left with more than conference materials and photographs. They carried new relationships, refined business ideas, practical strategies and renewed conviction that meaningful transformation begins with the courage to embrace change.

Five years after its inception, ARISE Conference has grown beyond an annual gathering. It has become a platform where purpose meets preparation, where faith intersects with enterprise, and where a new generation is being equipped to lead with competence, character and conviction in an ever-changing world.

OPINION

THE GOLDEN AGE OF PR: ENGINEERING TRUST IN A NEW ERA

RUKEVWE DUKUYE-NNACHI

Public relations, as we know, has never been just about the press releases we craft or the media placements we secure; it is about the responsibility we assume as practitioners for protecting the most valuable intangible asset any organization or business leader possesses: its reputation.

Public relations has evolved significantly since the days of Edward Bernays and his philosophy of "the engineering of consent." Over the decades, the industry also moved away from being seen as just a tactical support role, where success was measured by press releases and media lists, into a core part of business strategy. Yet, many Nigerian organizations are still stuck in the past, treating PR as an afterthought and calling communications teams only when a crisis strikes.

As Nigeria marks World PR Day on July 16, 2026, under the theme "The Golden Age of PR," we are collectively reminded of a reality: credibility, once lost, is extraordinarily difficult to rebuild, as some organizations recover while many do not. We must constantly anchor our strategy in empirical truth and consistency, not chasing propaganda but communicating the authentic values of businesses and entrepreneurs.

The organizations thriving today are those that embedded PR at the decision-making table from day one, and they recognize that reputation crises are not communication problems to be managed in isolation; they are strategic business challenges that demand foresight, not just response.

With the rise of AI and digital social platforms, information spreads instantly across digital spaces through X threads, blog posts, and messaging groups, such that negative news travels faster than most organizations can convene crisis meetings. With the speed of today's information ecosystem, there is an even stronger indication that reputation protection cannot be reactive; it must be proactive.

At Comms54, we've worked with organizations across financial services, healthcare, technology, and public sector institutions since our founding in 2024, and the pattern is consistent: those investing in deliberate, proactive confidence-building, transparent stakeholder engagement, ethical business practices, and consistent messaging aligned with actions simply outperform competitors focused solely on short-term visibility.

One healthcare client invested in regular stakeholder dialogues with patient advocacy groups, community leaders, and regulators, not when problems arose but as ongoing processes, and when industry-wide challenges emerged, they became unshaken and intact because credibility had been deposited long before withdrawals were needed. Their crisis became a moment of validation rather than organizational panic.

This year's World PR Day theme reminds us that we've reached an inflection point, and the profession is more respected and influential than ever, though that influence comes with greater accountability. The golden age of PR is about smarter strategy, ethical judgment, and deep understanding of how credibility operates in complex business ecosystems.

For Nigerian CEOs and Founders, Reputation remains one of the most vulnerable assets, yet most Nigerian boardrooms still don't have communications counsel present during strategic planning, this absence means critical reputation risks go unaddressed until they become crises.

For communications professionals, the golden age raises our bar. Surface-level tactics won't suffice; we must bring strategic thinking, stakeholder mapping, and business acumen to every engagement. Our value isn't in writing press releases; it's in protecting organizational reputation, anticipating risks before they materialize, and advising leadership on how stakeholders perceive organizational actions.

The best PR work today requires the same rigor as financial planning or legal counsel, for it demands anticipating reputation risks before they emerge, advising leadership on stakeholder perceptions, and building narrative strategies that align with long-term business objectives. Organizations that understand this are already winning, while those that don't are learning painful lessons in real time.

As we commemorate World PR Day, my call to action is clear: business leaders must stop treating public relations as a support function and start recognizing it as strategic leadership, and we must move from managing perception to engineering credibility through consistent, ethical action.

The golden age of public relations will belong to those who understand that strong relationships and credibility are not built through messaging alone but through the quality of interactions an organization maintains with every stakeholder, and this is not someone else's responsibility; It is leadership work that determines whether organizations thrive or merely survive, so remember: your reputation is everyone's business, but protecting it must be your priority.

Rukevwe Dukuye-Nnachi is the Founder, Comms54.

6 NIGERIAN FOOD ITEMS YOU SHOULD NOT TAKE TO THE UNITED STATES

ESTHER EMOEKPERE

Travelling to the United States with food from Nigeria may seem harmless, but some items that are common in Nigerian homes are either restricted or completely prohibited at U.S. ports of entry. The rules are designed to protect the country's agriculture, livestock and public health from pests, diseases and contaminated food products.

While commercially packaged foods may be allowed after inspection, fresh produce, certain animal products and homemade foods are subject to stricter regulations and can be confiscated by U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP). In some cases, travellers who fail to declare restricted food items may face delays, fines or other penalties.

If you are planning a trip, here are six Nigerian food items you should not pack when travelling to the United States.

Bushmeat

Bushmeat is one of the most restricted food items in the United States. Whether it is fresh, dried, smoked or processed, it is not allowed into the country because it may carry diseases that can affect people and wildlife. Customs officers are likely to confiscate it on arrival.

Fresh meat, fish and dairy products

Fresh meat, fish and many dairy products are also restricted. Even if they are frozen or dried, they may still be seized during inspection. The restrictions are intended to prevent the spread of animal diseases into the US food system.

Fresh fruits and vegetables

Fresh fruits such as mangoes, oranges and pineapples, as well as vegetables like ugu, peppers and okra, should not be packed for travel to the US. These products can carry pests and plant diseases that threaten agriculture. Seeds and untreated grains are also restricted.

Homemade or unlabelled food

Homemade soups, stews and other foods without proper labels should be left out of your luggage. Food packed in unlabelled containers or without an ingredient list can be difficult for customs officers to identify and may be thrown away during inspection.

Excess alcohol

Travellers can only bring limited quantities of alcohol into the US without additional requirements. If you are carrying more than one litre, it must be declared and could attract duty. Failure to declare it may result in seizure or penalties.

Unprocessed plant materials

Food-related plant materials such as untreated seeds, grains and other unprocessed agricultural products are also restricted. These items may contain pests or diseases that could affect crops in the United States and are subject to inspection and possible confiscation.

WHAT WOULD IT TAKE TO IMPROVE THE ECONOMIC POSSIBILITIES OF AFRICA'S GRANDCHILDREN?

EKEMINI AKPAKPAN

How do we improve the lifetime income of the next generation? In 1930, Famous Economist John Maynard Keynes wrote his famous essay, Economic Possibilities for Our Grandchildren, imagining what economic progress might mean for future generations, and his predictions have come in handy. Nearly a century later, one of my favourite Economists Kristalina Georgieva raised the same questions in her essay. I realised I had been asking similar questions: what would it take to improve the economic possibilities of Africa's grandchildren?

This question feels particularly urgent on our continent. Given that by 2050, one in every 4 people in the world is expected to be African. Africa is becoming the world's youngest continent. And if this generation of children inherits low incomes, weak human capital, and limited assets, poverty will simply become intergenerational. So perhaps the better question is this: what is the alternative investment strategy, Africa can have to increase the prosperity of generations yet unborn?

Poverty is rarely an event. More often, it is inherited. A child born into a household with limited assets is more likely to attend lower-quality schools, experience poorer nutrition, enter lower-paying jobs, and eventually raise another generation under similar conditions. That is how poverty travels from one generation to the next.

For decades, most wealth literature assumed one model: men accumulated assets, men owned land, men built businesses, and men passed wealth to the next generation. Families have changed. Our economic assumptions have become outdated. We still speak as though every household has a single male breadwinner. Reality has moved on. Across Africa, we are seeing more female-headed households, more single mums and widows, women supporting unemployed spouses, and dual-income households becoming necessary because of inflation. Clearly, the household economy has changed. Our economic thinking has to.

Women's economic empowerment is one of the fastest ways to increase the productive assets, human capital, and lifetime earnings of the next generation. If Africa is trying to create wealth for the next generation, why are we still treating women's economic empowerment as a social programme instead of an economic growth strategy?

Every generation's greatest capital investment begins inside households. It is where children are fed, education is financed, health is protected, and aspirations are nurtured. When women have economic power, they are not only improving today's household income, they are increasing tomorrow's productive capacity.

The real Generation Shapers

One development that particularly caught my attention this year came on Mother's Day, when His Highness Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum directed that the official designation "housewife" be replaced with "Generations Shaper." He recognised women's potential to develop human capital.

Across decades of development research, one finding has remained remarkably consistent: when women control greater economic resources, households are more likely to invest in children's education, nutrition, healthcare and overall wellbeing. Household resilience improves, child poverty declines, and future opportunities expand. Yet despite this evidence, we continue to underestimate one of the greatest missed opportunities in Africa's development story: enabling women not merely to earn an income, but to build wealth.

The distinction matters because income sustains today's household. Assets secure tomorrow's household.

The Opportunity We Are Not Tapping: What Could Happen If More Women Built Assets?
When we look at women's economic empowerment through the lens of assets rather than income, we begin to see the opportunities our economies are leaving on the table.

More women would contest elections. Political leadership is not simply about ambition; it is about having the financial assets, networks, and economic resilience to withstand the high cost and uncertainty of electoral politics.

More women would become shareholders, investors and even founders of financial institutions. Ownership creates influence. Those who own capital do not shape it, allocate resources and influence the decisions that determine who else gets access to opportunity.

More women-led businesses would grow beyond survival and into scale. Today, many women entrepreneurs dominate consumer-facing markets such as food, fashion, retail and care services, yet investment capital continues to flow disproportionately to sectors and business models that male investors more readily understand or have historically backed.

More women would also access debt financing. Across much of the financial system, credit still follows collateral. Land, property and other productive assets remain the currency of trust, yet these are precisely the assets that many women have historically been excluded from owning.

So Where Do We Go From Here?

If we accept that women's wealth is one of the smartest investments we can make in improving the economic possibilities of future generations, then the question becomes: how do we deliberately build it? Fortunately, we do not have to start from scratch. Around the world, governments, development institutions and the private sector are already experimenting with solutions that are expanding women's ownership of assets rather than simply increasing their incomes.

First, secure women's ownership of productive assets. For generations, wealth has been transferred through land, housing and businesses. Yet these remain the very assets many women struggle to own. Expanding women's asset ownership therefore requires more than financial inclusion; it requires legal and institutional reform.

Some countries have tackled this head-on. Rwanda reformed its matrimonial and inheritance laws to give daughters and sons equal rights to inherit family property, significantly increasing women's land ownership and strengthening agricultural productivity.

Ethiopia's land certification programme issued joint land certificates carrying the photographs of both husband and wife, a relatively simple administrative reform that substantially improved women's tenure security and encouraged greater investment in farmland. Meanwhile, Ghana expanded what counts as collateral by allowing movable assets such as livestock, equipment and inventory to secure loans through its national Collateral Registry, making credit more accessible to women without land titles.

Even technology is beginning to reshape ownership. Georgia's blockchain-enabled land registry has strengthened property records and reduced opportunities for fraud during inheritance disputes.

Second, redesign how capital is allocated. Gender-lens investing is beginning to challenge this reality by asking not only how much capital reaches women, but where it flows and who decides.

The European Investment Bank now integrates gender considerations into its investment due diligence and supports funds with more diverse investment committees. Closer to home, Alitheia IDF has demonstrated that investing intentionally in women-led businesses across sectors such as agribusiness and consumer markets can help move enterprises from survival to scale. Globally, the 2X Challenge has created common standards that enable investors to measure whether their capital is genuinely advancing women's economic participation.

Third, recognise care as economic infrastructure. Perhaps one of the biggest contradictions in our economies is that we depend on care to build human capital, yet we rarely treat care as productive infrastructure.

Countries are beginning to think differently. Canada's Child Benefit provides direct financial support to families raising children, recognising that caregiving contributes to long-term economic development. Chile's Chile Crece Contigo programme combines early childhood services with affordable childcare, making it easier for mothers to remain economically active. In East Africa, Kidogo has transformed informal childcare into formal, profitable enterprises by training local "Mamapreneurs" to operate quality childcare businesses.

Nigeria is also beginning to move in this direction. The Nigeria Women in Leadership Coalition—comprising WIMBIZ, WISCAR, WILAN and the Nigeria Governors' Forum—is advocating for the implementation of a standardised parental leave policy that provides sixteen weeks of paid maternity leave and fourteen days of paternity leave across both the public and private sectors. These reforms recognise that raising the next generation is not merely a private responsibility; it is an investment in the country's future workforce.

Finally, build financial systems designed for women to accumulate wealth.

Women's financial inclusion has improved, but financial inclusion alone does not necessarily translate into wealth creation. We also need financial ecosystems intentionally designed around women's asset accumulation.

Pakistan's First Women Bank demonstrates how financial institutions can be designed around women's entrepreneurial needs. Here in Nigeria, Rising Tide Africa is building networks of female angel investors who are not only financing businesses but also mentoring the next generation of founders. At the global level, gender bonds issued through the International Finance Corporation are directing institutional capital specifically towards women-owned enterprises in emerging economies.

Final Thoughts

The economic possibilities of Africa's grandchildren will ultimately be determined by the investments we choose to make today. Helping more women build assets may prove to be one of the smartest development strategies the continent has ever pursued.

THE DEGREE DELUSION: WHY BRITAIN BUILDS EXPERTS WHILE NIGERIA CHASES CERTIFICATES

TOMILAYO IMADE

In my previous article, The Olodo Uprising: What Nigeria's Social Media Wars Reveal About Our Broken Definition of Intelligence, I argued that Nigeria has created a dangerous culture where intelligence is measured almost exclusively by educational qualifications.

The conversations that followed confirmed something I had long suspected: we have become so obsessed with certificates that we rarely stop to ask whether those certificates are actually producing competence.
But if that article questioned our definition of intelligence, this one asks an even more important question.

How do we actually build intelligent, productive people? Because if our only answer continues to be "go to university," then perhaps Nigeria has been asking the wrong question for decades.
We have built a labour market that rewards credentials before competence. Every year, thousands of graduates leave universities full of hope, only to discover that every job requires experience they have never been given the opportunity to gain.

Employers complain that graduates are unemployable.
Graduates blame universities.
Universities blame employers.
Government blames unemployment.
And the cycle continues.

The irony is painful. We tell every young Nigerian that education is the key to success, yet after spending four or five years obtaining a degree, many are told they are still not ready for work.
How can someone be considered educated enough to graduate but not experienced enough to contribute?
That contradiction should concern all of us.

Living in the United Kingdom has exposed me to something I believe Nigeria urgently needs to study—not because Britain has a perfect system, but because it has embraced an idea that we continue to overlook.

A university degree is respected, but it is not treated as the only pathway to professional success.
More importantly, it is not seen as the only evidence of intelligence.
Britain has invested heavily in structured apprenticeship programmes across industries that many Nigerians automatically associate with university degrees.
Engineering.
Information Technology.
Business Administration.
Finance.
Human Resources.
Construction.
Healthcare.
Digital Marketing.
Manufacturing.
Public Service.

These are not apprenticeships in the traditional sense that many Nigerians immediately think of. They are highly structured programmes where young people are employed, trained, mentored, paid and educated simultaneously. They learn from professionals while gaining recognised qualifications that carry the same respect as many university degrees.

They earn while they learn.
And by the time they qualify, they already possess something Nigerian graduates desperately struggle to acquire.
Experience.
Before anyone says, "Nigeria already has apprenticeships," let me explain the difference.

I am not referring to traditional apprenticeship systems or technical colleges. Those have their own value and have empowered countless Nigerians.
I am talking about regulated, company-sponsored professional apprenticeships.
Imagine a student who finishes secondary school with excellent grades and dreams of becoming an engineer. Instead of spending years waiting for admission into an overcrowded university, the student applies directly to an engineering company.
The company hires them as an apprentice.

Over the next four or five years, they work under experienced engineers, receive classroom instruction, develop practical skills, earn a salary and complete professional qualifications that lead to an accredited degree or equivalent certification.
When they finish, they are not desperately searching for

experience.
They already have it.
Imagine the same system existing for Information Technology, accounting, administration, nursing, project management, quality assurance, banking, cybersecurity, software development and countless other professions.

Imagine thousands of young Nigerians graduating with both qualifications and years of practical experience.
Now imagine what that could do for our economy.
Nigeria has spent decades producing graduates.
What we have not consistently produced are experts.
That is not because our young people lack intelligence.
It is because our system places too much emphasis on passing examinations and too little emphasis on mastering professions.
Some people learn best by reading.
Others learn best by doing.
Yet our educational culture continues to treat practical learning as though it is somehow inferior to sitting in a lecture hall.
It is not.

Some of the most brilliant professionals in the world became exceptional because they repeatedly practised their craft—not simply because they memorised textbooks.
Knowledge matters.
But applied knowledge changes economies.

Our obsession with university education has also created another unfortunate reality.
Many students are not studying what they genuinely want.
They study whatever course accepts them.
Some become accountants because medicine was unavailable.
Others become engineers because law was too competitive.
Many simply choose whichever programme matches their examination scores rather than their passion or strengths.
After graduation, they enter professions they never truly wanted, and many spend years feeling disconnected from their work.

Imagine instead a young person who already knows they love coding, engineering, nursing or business operations.
Why should that passion wait years before being developed in a real workplace?
Why shouldn't employers become active partners in developing the workforce they will eventually need?
In fact, I believe Nigeria should begin considering a bold policy.
What if regulatory agencies required medium and large organisations to reserve a percentage of their workforce for structured apprenticeship programmes?

Not internships.
Not industrial attachments.
Not unpaid placements.
Real apprenticeships with structured learning, proper supervision, recognised qualifications and fair salaries.
Companies would no longer complain that graduates lack practical skills because they would be directly involved in developing those skills.
Young people would enter the workforce earlier.

Unemployment would reduce.
Businesses would develop loyal, highly skilled employees.
Productivity would improve.
And perhaps most importantly, we would begin measuring people less by the certificates they hold and more by the value they create.
This is not an argument against universities.

Universities remain essential.
Research matters.
Academic excellence matters.
Professional education matters.
But they should no longer carry the impossible burden of being the only recognised route to professional success.

A modern economy should provide multiple pathways to excellence.
The future belongs to countries that invest in skills, not just qualifications.
Countries that reward competence, not simply credentials.

Countries that understand that expertise is developed through practice as much as through theory.
Nigeria's greatest resource has never been oil.
It has always been its people.
Yet for too long, we have mistaken certificates for capability and graduation for preparedness.
Perhaps it is time to stop asking young Nigerians only one question:
"What degree do you have?"
And begin asking the question that truly matters:
"What can you do?"
Because nations are not built by certificates hanging on walls.
They are built by experts solving problems.

Author Bio
Tomilayo Imade is a Nigerian writer and project management professional based in England. Passionate about social justice and human-interest stories, she writes thought-provoking articles on culture, mental health, gender, and public affairs. Through her writing, she seeks to challenge harmful social norms, amplify everyday experiences, and inspire meaningful conversations that drive positive change.

WHY YOUR CUSTOMER SHOULD BE THE HERO OF YOUR BRAND STORY

FEYISITAN IJIMAKINWA

Many brands naturally start by sharing their story, their history, features, and innovations. And while that information has value, the most meaningful connections are made when the focus shifts to the customer. People are drawn to stories in which they can see themselves. They want to feel understood, supported, and empowered. The real impact happens when your message reflects their journey, not just your own. That's where the customer hero journey comes in.

What is the customer hero journey?

Think of your brand story like a movie. In the traditional version, your company is the superhero, standing in the spotlight. But customers aren't looking for a hero.

They're looking for someone to help them win their own battles. The customer hero journey is a storytelling framework where the customer is the main character. Your brand takes on the role of the wise mentor. Think Luke Skywalker and Yoda in Star Wars or Frodo and Gandalf in The Lord of the Rings.

Instead of saying, "Look how great we are," you're saying, "We're here to help you succeed."

Rethinking brand-centred messaging

Traditional marketing usually centres on the brand. This can sound like:

 "We've been doing this for 25 years."
 "We're the number one provider of…"
 "We offer the most advanced solution on the market."
 We've won awards and certifications."
And this all makes sense. You're proud of what you've built, as you should be. But here's where a powerful shift can happen.

When you begin to align your message with what your customers are going through and where they want to go, your story becomes their story too. Instead of just presenting credentials, you start showing how those credentials directly help people solve real problems or reach tangible goals.

By reframing your messaging to focus on your customer's needs, desires, and transformation, you'll create an instant connection. You're not just offering a product or service; you're offering a path forward. Today's digital world thrives on relevance. The more clearly your audience sees themselves in your message, the more likely they are to engage, trust, and take action.

Rewriting the script: Be the guide, not the hero

If your customer is the hero, your brand must play the role of the guide. That means showing empathy, sharing expertise, and providing a clear path forward. The language of your brand has to change. The shift will be subtle but powerful. It will speak directly to what the customer is trying to achieve.

Real examples of customer hero journey

Nike
Nike doesn't talk about manufacturing or performance tech. They say, "Just Do It." The message is simple. You can do this. Nike positions itself as a coach, not the champion.

Airbnb
Airbnb highlights stories of travellers and hosts. Their message focuses on connection and belonging. The platform becomes the tool that enables people to create meaningful experiences.

Apple
Apple's ads feature creators, students, and professionals doing remarkable things. Apple is not the hero. The user is. The product simply helps them get there.

How to build your customer hero journey

Here's how to start using this approach in your brand messaging:

1. Identify the customers' problem
Understand what your customers are struggling with. Speak their language. Listen to reviews, surveys, and customer service calls.

2. Clarify the "Why"
Help the customer see what's at stake. What happens if this problem continues? Tap into their emotions, not just their logic.

3. Show that you're the guide
Let them know you've helped others in similar situations. Share stories, not stats. Offer support, not sales hype.

4. Give a clear plan
Don't overcomplicate things. Lay out the following steps so they know exactly what to do. For example:

☐ Schedule a free consultation
☐ Try our service for 14 days
☐ Start seeing results

5. Paint a picture of success
Help your audience imagine their transformation. Describe what life looks like after they've solved their problem with your help.

Why this works

This approach builds connection and trust. When customers feel understood and supported, they are more likely to:

☐ Engage with your brand
☐ Take action on your content
☐ Convert into paying customers
☐ Stay loyal over time

Let your customer take the lead

Your brand has a story worth telling. But it becomes even more impactful when it supports the journey your customers are already on. When you position your customer as the hero and your brand as the guide, your message transforms into something more meaningful. It stops feeling like a pitch and starts feeling like a partnership built on trust and shared purpose.

Consider these questions as you revisit your messaging:

☐ What are my customers trying to achieve?
☐ How does my product or service help them get there?
☐ Am I telling a story where they come out on top?

LAST LINE

Learn how to build your brand through the eyes of your customer. Even small shifts can spark real change. Start by reworking your website's homepage copy, refreshing an ad, or refining your sales pitch to reflect your customer's perspective. Show them they are seen, understood, and supported every step of the way.

FEYISITAN IJIMAKINWA

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

TRAPPED

UDY OSARO-EDOBOR

Celia had a terrible experience at her former place of employment. Her boss was a difficult woman, and her colleagues made life even harder because they saw her as a threat. It was not her fault that she was exceptionally good at her job. Instead of learning from her and asking how she delivered results so efficiently, they chose to bully, isolate, and victimize her. The office became a place of constant tension, and every workday felt like a battle. When an opportunity came to join another company, she accepted it without thinking twice.

She became anxious when she discovered that her new boss was also a woman. Female bosses had left a bitter memory in her heart, and she expected history to repeat itself. She prepared herself for hostility, gossip, and unnecessary competition. But from her very first day, she realized she had been wrong.

Her new colleagues welcomed her warmly. They were kind, patient, and genuinely happy to have her on the team. Within a week, it felt as though she had worked with them for years. They laughed together, supported one another, and celebrated each other's achievements without jealousy.

Her boss was nothing like the woman she had left behind. She was beautiful, calm, approachable, and remarkably generous. She encouraged her staff instead of intimidating them and treated everyone with respect. For the first time in a long while, Celia looked forward to going to work every morning.

The friendship among the staff extended beyond office hours. They regularly organized weekend gatherings that had nothing to do with work. They simply met to relax, eat, laugh, and enjoy one another's company. They also held sleepovers where they spent the night singing karaoke, playing games, acting out charades, eating delicious food, and sharing drinks until morning. It felt less like an office and more like a family.

Celia could hardly believe she had finally found the perfect workplace.
One afternoon, while admiring her boss, Celia complimented the older woman's flawless skin. She wondered what expensive skincare products she used. To her surprise, her boss said her secret was nothing more than ordinary, inexpensive black soap. She then offered to give Celia some, and Celia gladly accepted.

A few days later, the package arrived. Inside was a neatly wrapped bar of black soap with a rich, earthy smell. The scent immediately brought back memories of her childhood, reminding her of the many times her grandmother insisted she bathe with black soap whenever she visited.

Not long after using it, strange things began to happen.
The nightmares started quietly.
Every night, Celia found herself inside the office. It looked exactly the same as it did during the day, except everything felt darker and unnaturally silent. Her colleagues were always present. They gathered around long tables, discussing projects, making decisions, and assigning responsibilities. Her boss was always at the head of the meeting.

The meetings felt real.
Documents were passed around. Deadlines were discussed. New business opportunities were announced. Promotions were mentioned. Everyone participated as though it was another normal working day.

Then something even more disturbing happened. The discussions from those strange meetings began to happen in real life.
Every conversation she remembered from her dreams unfolded in the office exactly as she had seen it. Every assignment, every decision, every announcement became reality.

During one of the dream meetings, the team celebrated the successful completion of a major business deal. Everyone received generous bonuses as a reward for their excellent work.
The following morning, Celia woke up, picked up her phone, and found a bank notification confirming that a bonus had been paid into her account.
The amount matched what had been announced in the dream.
Her hands shook violently.
She threw her phone across the room in terror.
She could no longer dismiss everything as a nightmare.

Something impossible was happening.
Frightened and desperate for answers, she began asking questions around the office. Everyone simply smiled. No one answered.
From that day onward, Celia changed completely.
She became withdrawn and avoided unnecessary conversations. The office that once filled her with joy now filled her with fear. She could not understand why she was working during the day and then returning to the same office every night in her sleep.

She stopped attending every gathering outside work. No more weekend outings. No more karaoke nights. No more sleepovers.
Nothing changed.
The meetings continued every night.
No matter where she slept, she always woke up inside the

office before eventually waking up in her bed.
She was exhausted, terrified, and trapped.

One afternoon, while sitting alone during lunch, her colleague Edna joined her.
Edna gently reassured her and admitted that she understood exactly what Celia was going through because she had experienced it herself. Over time, she had accepted it because no one in the company was hurting innocent people. Being part of the company in both the physical world and the dream world had given her the wealthy life she had always wanted.

Edna revealed the truth.
Their boss was the leader of a cult.
It was not an ordinary cult. It was designed for ambitious young professionals who wanted success, influence, wealth and rapid progress in life. Membership came with extraordinary rewards but everything had a price.

Edna explained that Celia's initiation had already begun the moment she bathed with the black soap.
That had been the first step.
The second step was the blood initiation.
Unlike the first, this stage was voluntary.
Celia was horrified.
She could not understand how anyone could initiate another person without permission.

Edna explained that Celia had already given her consent the day she accepted employment at the company. Accepting the soap had only made the process easier. Even if she had refused it then, another opportunity would eventually have been created.

The blood ritual, however, remained her decision. If she accepted it, she would become a full member and enjoy everything the organization offered. Luxury homes, expensive cars, international vacations, financial freedom, influence and opportunities beyond imagination. If she refused, the consequences were severe.

Edna had watched employees become terminally ill after rejecting the ritual.
Others slowly lost their minds after attempting to seek help from clergymen.
Some simply disappeared.
It was a choice between two horrors...the devil and the deep blue sea.

Celia suddenly remembered the colleagues at her former workplace who had bullied her and made every day miserable. For the first time in her life, she wished she had never left them.
Compared to where she was now, that toxic office felt like the safest place on earth.

Edna warned her against trying to run away. Leaving the company would not change anything.
Their boss would always find her in the dream.

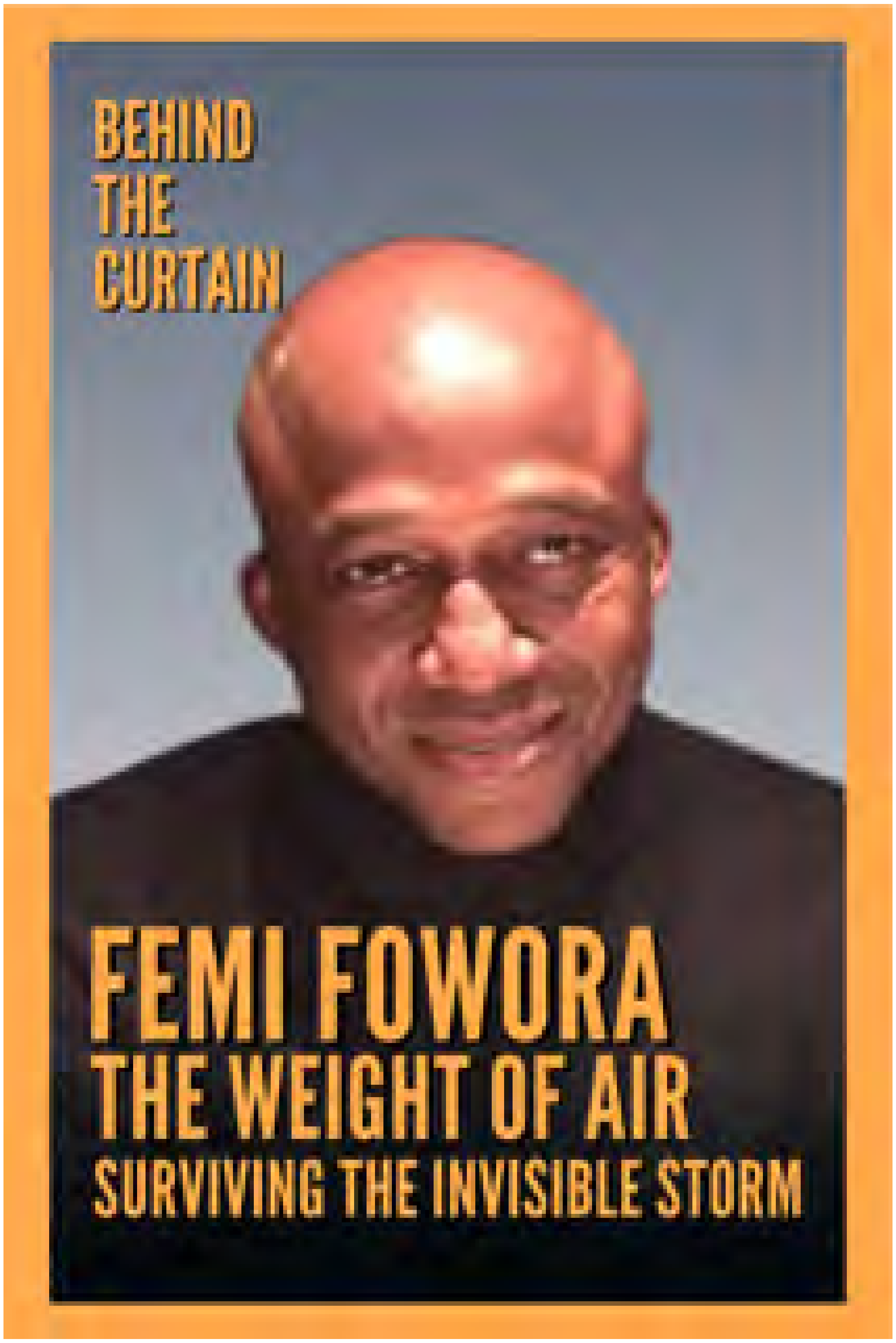
From that day, sleep became Celia's greatest fear. She stayed awake for as long as she could but exhaustion always defeated her.
Every night she returned to the meetings.
Every morning she woke up more frightened than before.

One night, she entered the meeting room again. Everyone was already seated.
The atmosphere was unusually tense.
Her boss slowly stood and looked directly at her.
A silver bowl rested on the table. Inside it was a white envelope. The boss opened it. The room became completely silent. Every face turned toward Celia.
Then they began to smile. She woke up screaming before she could see what had been written on the paper.

On her bedside table lay a sealed envelope she had never seen before. With shaky hands she opened it and brought out a piece of paper, written in neat black ink, were just five words.

Your answer is due tonight.

Udy Osaro-Edobor
Udy Osaro-Edobor is the Content Creator for SoTv (Supernatural Online TV) Nigeria. She is a movie/ scriptwriter, editor, and proofreader. She has several stories to her credit which she posts for free on her Ebook called Udy's Chapter. She is currently working on two short movies. Udy is also a wife, mother, and a "serial entrepreneur".
udy1717@gmail.com



Who Said Rich People Don’t Get Depressed?
-A Review of Behind the Curtain Femi Fowora’s
The Weight of Air

Title: Behind the Curtain: Femi Fowora,
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BEHIND THE CURTAIN: FEMI FOWORA, THE WEIGHT OF AIR

TITILADE OYEMADE

Imagine someone drives up in a luxury car, lives in a beautiful home, flies business class and then says, “I was depressed.” In Nigeria, the first response might not be sympathy. It would probably be, “Depressed about what? Please swap lives with me for one week.”
That reaction is exactly why Femi Fowora’s The Weight of Air is such an important book. It reminds readers that mental health does not check bank statements before deciding who to visit.

This is not a memoir written to impress. It is one written to reveal. Fowora pulls back the curtain on a life many would envy and invites readers into conversations that successful people are often reluctant to have. He writes candidly about panic attacks, fear, self doubt and the slow, often painful journey towards healing.

In a society where many men are raised to believe vulnerability is weakness, The Weight of Air feels both timely and necessary. Fowora neither seeks sympathy nor presents himself as a hero. He simply tells his story with honesty, and that honesty becomes the book’s greatest strength.
Few books speak so directly to Nigerian men, particularly those who have spent years pretending they are fine.
One of the book’s greatest strengths is its conversational style. It never reads like a conventional autobiography. Instead, it feels as though Fowora is sitting across from the reader, gisting over a cup of tea or perhaps a beer. His voice is relaxed, humorous, reflective and remarkably easy to connect with.

From the opening chapters, it is obvious that he comes from a life of privilege. At times, readers may even catch themselves wishing they had his life. But as the story unfolds, it becomes clear that privilege offers comfort, not immunity. It cannot shield anyone from pain, loss or emotional struggles.

Some readers may feel Fowora spends a little too much time describing his privileged upbringing and lifestyle. If that world is unfamiliar, it may even come across as showing off. However, those details serve an important purpose. They reinforce the contrast between outward success and inner turmoil.

There are moments when the memoir feels like an account of “rich people’s problems,” and some experiences may not immediately resonate with the average Nigerian trying to make ends meet. Yet, beyond the wealth lies a deeply human story filled with insight, vulnerability and reflection.

One of the book’s strongest messages is that success means very little if the mind is falling apart. Fowora raises thought provoking questions about purpose, fulfilment and what truly matters, inviting readers to reflect on their own lives.

The memoir is also sprinkled with memorable lines that make readers pause and think. Fowora’s sense of humour provides welcome relief, ensuring that even its heaviest moments are balanced with warmth and wit.

Although depression is at the heart of the story, The Weight of Air is about much more. It reflects on relationships, family, identity, purpose, failure, healing and what it truly means to live a fulfilled life. Perhaps the most inspiring part of Fowora’s journey is that he refused to let his struggles define him.

Instead, he transformed them into purpose by establishing a mental health foundation so others would know they are not alone.

The Weight of Air is a powerful reminder that depression is no respecter of persons. It affects the rich and the poor, the powerful and the unknown.

More importantly, it delivers a message many Nigerian men rarely hear. It is okay to admit you are struggling. It is okay to ask for help. Sometimes, the strongest person in the room is the one with the courage to say, “I’m not okay.”

Behind the Curtain, Femi Fowora’s The Weight of Air is more than the story of one man’s battle with depression. It is a thoughtful challenge to long held beliefs about masculinity, vulnerability and success, and a powerful reminder that healing begins with honesty.

Titilade Oyemade is a business executive in a leading organisation and holds a degree in Russian Language. She’s the convener of the Hangoutwithtee Ladies Event and the publisher of Hangoutwithtee magazine. She spends her weekends attending women conferences, events and book readings. She loves to have fun and to help other women have the same in their lives. Email: titi.oyemade@gmail.com
Social: @tiipreeofficial

WEEKENDER

MOVIE REVIEW

IN THE HAND OF DANTE (2025)

I have been seeing this movie come up on my timeline for weeks. I decided to check it out this weekend; for you to fully understand this hypnotic drama movie, you have to pay full attention. In this movie, Oscar Isaac, Gal Gadot, and Gerard Butler played the lead roles, in this dual roles that occurred across 2 different centuries, in this drama movie, where they were supposed to pull off one of the biggest heists of a priceless and unique Dante manuscript. Dante was supposed to work with Laura, Isaiah to steal the manuscript, but along the line he decided to double cross them, only for him to also be double crossed by another team. You will need to go check out this movie to find out if he survived and how he rekindled with his old-time love Giulietta. The 155m crime, drama, independent, film based on books was directed by Julian Schnabel, they featured actors like, Oscar Isaac, Gal Gadot, Gerard Butler, John Malkovich, Louis Canecimi, Sabrina Impacciatore, Franco Nero, Benjamin Clementine, Paolo Bonacelli, Martin Scorsese, Al Pacino, Jason Momoa and many more.

2 WEEKS IN LAGOS (2020)

Ejikeme and Charlie were friends from the USA who decided to come back to Nigeria to invest and start up a business. On arrival, Ejikeme met Lola, Charlie's sister, and immediately it was love at first sight. At first, Lola pretended she wasn't interested, but deep down, she really loved him. Charlie sought permission from his friend, and they began dating just a few days after Ejikeme arrived. A few days later, Lola found out that Ejikeme was getting married to the only daughter of the biggest politician in Lagos, and this broke the relationship before it even started. You will need to go check out this movie to find out how their love and romance were short-lived. The 106-minute Nollywood drama, romance, social issues, and African movie was directed by Kathryn Fasegha, and they featured actors like Beverly Naya, Mawuli Gavor, Jide Kosoko, Toyin Abraham, Okey Uzoeshi, Deyemi Okanlawon, Shaffy Bello, Tina Mba, Efe Irele, and many more.

ROYAL HOTEL (2023)

This was just a simple drama movie. Although it wasn't my favorite, I had to check it out so that I could review it. In this movie, two friends, Hanna and Liv, went on a trip to Canada. After a few days of having fun, they found out that they were stranded with no funds to take care of their bills. In order to survive, they decided to get a job, and the only job they found was at a faraway pub in a desert where they had only men who worked at a nearby mine. These two friends would have to work hard and work together to survive in this dangerous place, as they were like sheep among wolves. You will need to go check out this movie to find out how they survived and if they made it out alive, as I was really scared for the girls. The 91-minute Australian drama thriller was directed by Kitty Green. They featured actors like Hugo Weaving, Julia Garner, Jessica Henwick, Toby Wallace, Ursula Yovich, Daniel Henshall, James Frecheville, Herbert Nordrum, etc.