

# BUSINESS DAY WEEKENDER

EDITION 272 | 20, DECEMBER 2025



Classical Music  
*Queen,*  
Abiodun Koya  
on 20 Years of  
Bringing Nigerian  
Languages to the  
Global Stage



## TRAVEL

The Nigerian Holiday Map:  
10 Iconic Getaways for a  
Memorable Christmas



## RESTAURANT

Detty December on a  
budget: Five spots where  
you can enjoy good meals  
for less than ₦10,000

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A LITTLE OF WHAT TO EXPECT

THE FAMOUS DAZZLING PRIDELAND CIRCUS | 2 NEW THEATRE SHOWS  
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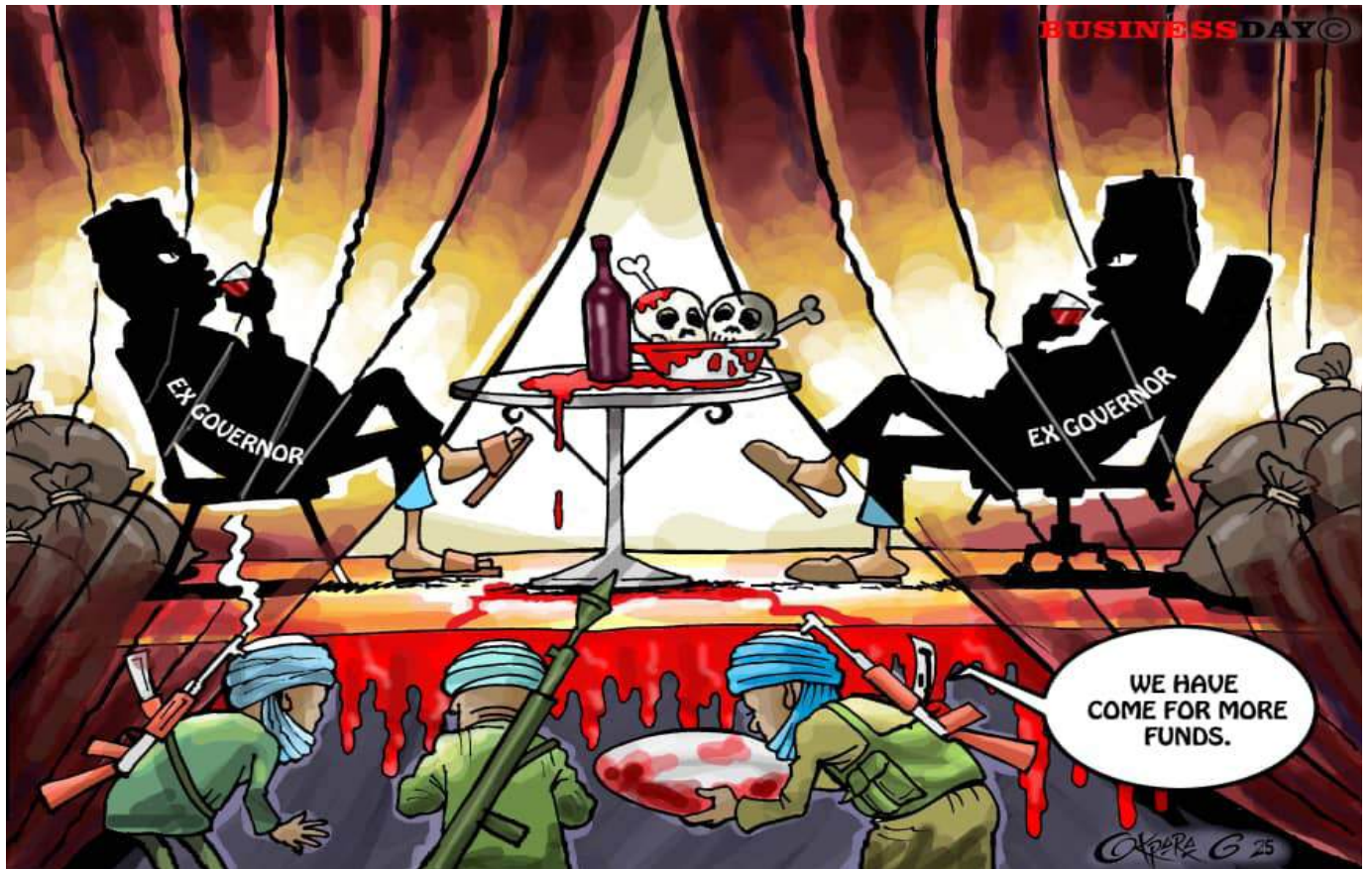
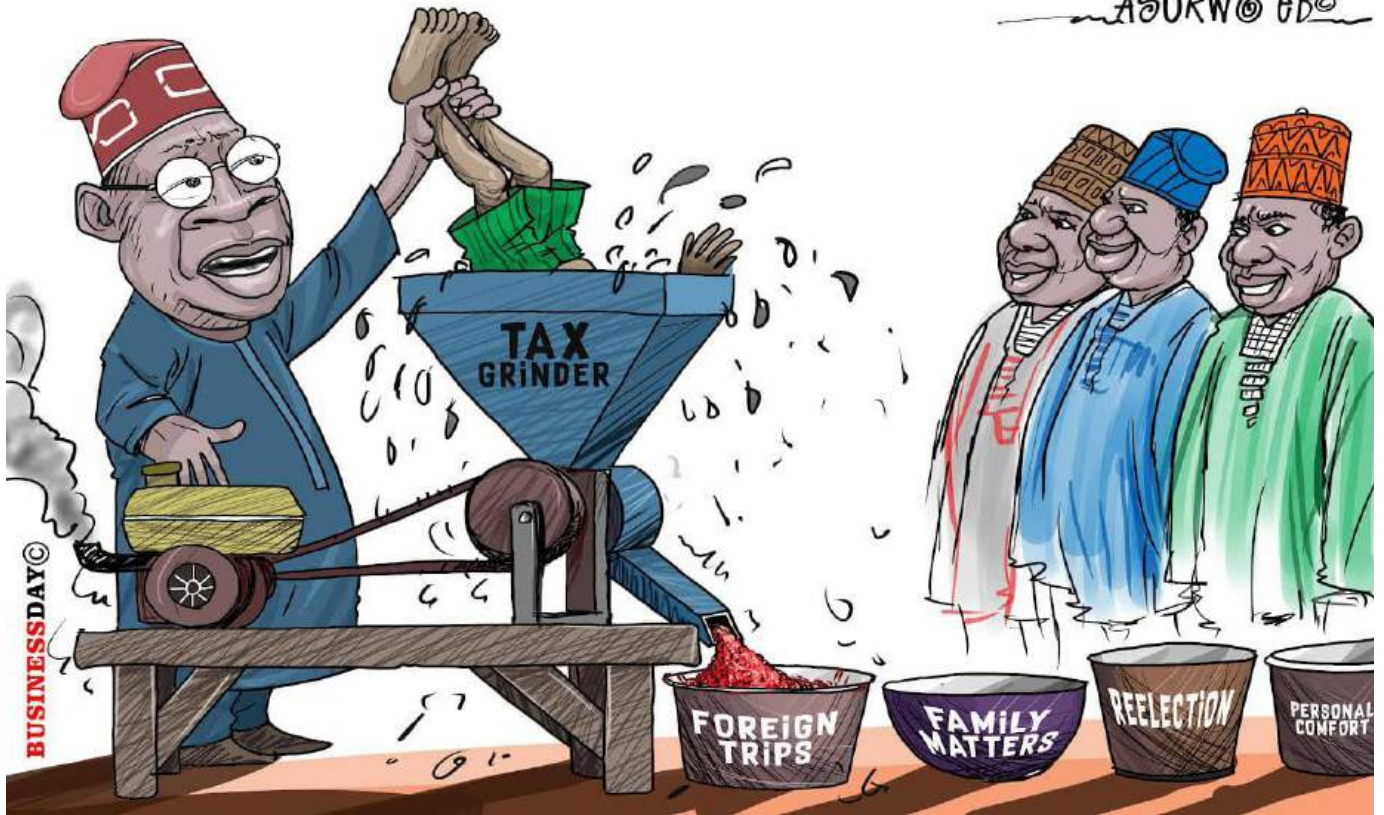


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# CLASSICAL MUSIC QUEEN, ABIODUN KOYA ON 20 YEARS OF BRINGING NIGERIAN LANGUAGES TO THE GLOBAL STAGE

IFEOMA OKEKE-KORIEOCHA



**A**biodun Koya is a Classical/Operatic Singer, Poet and a serial entrepreneur by profession. While singing for some of the world's most influential leaders of today, she has been described as one of the world's most beautiful voices. Born and raised in Nigeria, she is one of the very few professionally trained Classical singers of African descent and of her generation. Her efforts as an artist have been to creatively and purposefully display a positive message and influence diverse cultures across America and the rest of the world. Through her non-profit, Abiodun mentors at-risk children in Nigeria and in the US utilizing her "Music Literacy Program" Initiative.

In this exclusive interview with IFEOMA OKEKE-KORIEOCHA, she reflects on a momentous double milestone: her 45th birthday and her 20th anniversary on the global stage. From her early days designing hair for dolls to performing for audiences of 15,000, Abiodun discusses the "politics" of the opera world, the romantic inspiration behind her poetry, and why she has chosen this moment for a triumphant "homecoming" to Nigeria.

## Tell us a bit about yourself

I am a classical singer born and raised in Ogun State, and I am a proud Ogun woman. I have been singing all my life, and this year marks my 20th anniversary performing globally on stage, representing Nigeria in the classical genre within the Western world.

I am widely regarded as a leading face of classical music for Nigeria and, by extension, West Africa. Across the African continent, professionally trained internationally recognized classical artists remain very few. South Africa has produced a handful of opera stars, while West Africa has very limited representation making my role both unique and significant.

## When you say you represent Nigeria, what do you mean?

I represent Nigeria as my home country on the global classical stage. Whenever I perform internationally, audiences are curious about my origin. Some have already done their research, while others ask directly and I proudly tell them I am Nigerian.

Many are surprised: "Nigeria produced a classical artist?" That curiosity creates an opening for cultural exchange and dialogue sometimes. One of my key missions as a Nigerian classical ambassador is introducing Nigerian languages into classical music. Traditionally, classical repertoire is performed in Western languages: Italian, German, French, Spanish, Latin, and English with little to no African-language representation.

I began performing Nigerian folk songs in Yoruba and occasionally Igbo for classical audiences abroad. I have also translated select operatic arias into the Yoruba language hence the nickname: Yoruba Siren.

## What countries have you travelled to for performances?

I primarily perform across Western countries, including France, Germany, Italy, Australia, and the United States, where I am based. I am in the months ahead going to be performing in middle eastern countries as well.

## Are these performances by invitation?

Yes, absolutely. I receive invitations to perform internationally.

## What did you study, and how did you come into classical music?

My first degree is in Business Management, and I later earned a Master's degree in Music. Creativity defined my childhood. From a young age, I designed clothes for my dolls, styled their hair, brushed their eyelashes, wrote short lyrics, drew, and painted. My childhood dolls were my first creative "laboratory."

I knew very early before the age of ten that I belonged on the stage. However, my parents were concerned about the sustainability of an artistic career. They wanted me to pursue accounting, but mathematics was my weakest subject. So I compromised by studying business management, which satisfied their expectations while aligning with my interest in the art of business enterprise.

Once I completed that degree, I followed my true calling and studied music in the United States. Even before graduating, I was already performing professionally. I was frequently hired by my University Chancellor, and at my graduation ceremony, I performed before an audience of over 15,000 people—my first major audience. I sang “Climb every mountain” from *The Sound of Music*.

### **Where do you draw your inspiration from?**

I am deeply inspired by love and romance: the beauty, mystery, thrill, revival, vulnerability, and complexity of it. Whether I am in love, heartbroken, or reflecting on love, it fuels my songwriting.

Beyond romance, life itself inspires me: relationships, human behavior, and the way I perceive situations from unconventional angles. That perspective usually finds its way into my work.

### **How many songs have you written?**

Many. Some of my songs have evolved into poetry. Three years ago, I released a poetry collection titled *The Moods of a Goddess*, available on Amazon. The book explores themes such as love, spirituality, time, religion, and nature.

One of my astounding poems personifies time as a witness to the rise and fall of civilizations. Another, (*Osùpá*) reflects an intimate experience I once had with the moon on a date with an astronaut while standing on a mountain ridge, feeling as though it was close enough to reach out and hold. That moment inspired a deeply reflective poetry piece.

### **Does this career pay the bills?**

Yes, and I consider myself fortunate. I have never worked outside the creative arts. Beyond singing, I conduct book tours, deliver masterclasses at universities, and very rarely and occasionally offer a very expensive yet high-level vocal coaching. Vocal coaching for me is demanding and time consuming, so I do it selectively but the transformation in candidates is often immediate and remarkable.

### **How receptive are U.S. audiences to your music?**

Very receptive. Many describe my work as exotic and regal. They are fascinated by my cultural background and how I merge African identity with classical tradition. When I sing in Yoruba, audiences are eager to learn. I often teach them simple greetings, creating a moment of cultural exchange.





### How often do you perform in the U.S.?

I typically produce two to three ticketed concerts per year. Outside of that, I am frequently hired to perform at private and corporate events.

### What is your typical audience like?

My audiences often include diplomats, politicians, business leaders, and cultural enthusiasts.

### What advice would you give aspiring classical musicians?

Be tenacious, disciplined, humble and adaptable. Excellence requires commitment, and longevity requires the ability to remain focused, disciplined and humble.

### Do you have daily vocal routines?

Yes. I hum and vocalize while driving or doing house chores. In hotels, I practice discreetly sometimes with the television turned up or in the shower, using running water to mask the sound.



### What major challenges have you faced?

Being a woman in the industry presents unique challenges, including politics and power dynamics. At a certain point, being a strong minded and confident woman, I chose independence over conformity. I established my own production company so I could work on my own terms and bring to life the whimsical creative realms in my head.

Also, while I have encountered some racism, it has not been as pronounced as what others have faced. My greatest challenge and triumph has been asserting autonomy without compromising integrity, self and authenticity.

### What should we expect from your upcoming event?

An intimate evening celebrating 20 years on stage and my 45th birthday, held on the same day. The audience will include diplomats, expatriates, business leaders, political figures, and longtime supporters.

### What does this event mean to you?

It is a homecoming. I had not held an event in Nigeria in six years. This celebration reconnects me with my roots, my people, and my journey. While I will also celebrate in the U.S., this moment in Nigeria is deeply meaningful.

### Who are your role models?

Andrea Bocelli, Sarah Brightman, and Leontyne Price. Bocelli and Brightman successfully transitioning from traditional opera into classical crossover is an artistic space I totally identify with. I consider myself an operatic singer, rather than a traditional opera singer, as I enjoy the freedom and versatility of crossover classical music.

# THE NIGERIAN HOLIDAY MAP: 10 ICONIC GETAWAYS FOR A MEMORABLE CHRISTMAS

CHISOM MICHAEL



As the Christmas season approaches, many Nigerians are planning getaways to relax, reconnect with loved ones and experience new environments.

While the festive period is brief, it remains one of the most anticipated times of the year, marked by travel, leisure and shared experiences. Across the country, several destinations continue to attract visitors with a mix of natural beauty, modern facilities and recreational activities.

From coastal resorts and wildlife parks to cultural landmarks and urban retreats, these locations offer opportunities for rest, entertainment and exploration.

Based on accessibility, available activities and visitor appeal, here are ten destinations in Nigeria that consistently stand out during the Christmas holidays.

**According to Kampari Tours, here are 10 places to visit in Nigeria this Christmas.**

## 1. La Campagne Tropicana Beach Resort (Lagos)

La Campagne Tropicana Beach Resort sits along the Atlantic coastline, bordered by Ikegun Lake. It provides accommodation options that include chalets, tents and shared facilities, alongside a private swimming pool and open beach areas.

Visitors often choose the resort for short breaks, group outings and family gatherings during the holidays. The setting allows for rest, social time and organised leisure without leaving the premises.

## 2. Laquatic

Laquatic operates as an inflatable water park with obstacle courses designed for group participation. Safety is managed through on-site lifeguards, the use of life jackets and secure lockers for personal items. Entry into Landmark, Lagos State attracts a gate fee, while access to the water park is charged hourly. The facility records increased attendance during school holidays and festive periods.

## 3. Tinapa Resort

Tinapa Resort combines business and leisure activities within the Calabar Free Trade Zone. Facilities include a cinema complex, retail outlets, an amphitheatre, a casino and spaces for children's activities. During Christmas, the resort benefits from the wider Calabar festive season, which includes cultural events and the Poetry Festival Calabar, drawing visitors from within and outside the state.

## 4. Obudu Ranch Resort

Obudu Ranch Resort is located in the highlands of Cross River State and remains a regular choice for end-of-year travel. The resort offers activities such as horse riding, a water park, a golf course and evening gatherings around bonfires. Nature walks and family-focused activities contribute to its appeal during Christmas holidays.

## 5. Vega Waterpark

Vega Waterpark in Agbor, Delta state is known for its range of slides, pools and water-based activities. The park also provides restaurants, lounge areas and family cabanas. Its scale allows visitors to spend extended periods on-site, making it a common choice for group outings during festive breaks.

## 6. Wonderland Amusement Park

Covering a wide expanse of land, Wonderland Amusement Park, Abuja offers rides, leisure gardens and an arcade. Food services are provided through restaurants and shops located within the park.

Visitors often combine trips to the park with nearby attractions, including the Fulani Ranch, which serves local and international meals.

## 7. Oguta Lake Resort

Oguta Lake Resort, also known as the "lake of treasure", is located close to Owerri, Imo State. A notable feature of the area is the meeting point of Oguta Lake and the Ulasi River, where both bodies of water retain separate colours. The resort includes a golf course, boat cruises, accommodation and dining services. Historical relics from the Nigerian civil war are also accessible within the area.

## 8. Olumo Rock and Olusegun Obasanjo Presidential Library (OOPAL)

Olumo Rock holds historical importance as a former refuge during intertribal conflicts. Today, it includes access aids such as elevators and visitor facilities located at Abeokuta, Ogun State. Nearby, the Olusegun Obasanjo Presidential Library complex houses a museum, wildlife areas, a hotel, a river view, a game centre and places of worship. Families often visit both sites within the same trip during the Christmas period.

## 9. Port Harcourt Tourist Beach

Port Harcourt Tourist Beach serves as a venue for picnics, family outings and cultural displays. Live performances by cultural groups are common during festive periods. Restaurants, accommodation and open areas for relaxation support longer visits during Christmas.

## 10. Tarkwa Bay

Accessible by boat, Tarkwa Bay, Lagos Island remains a popular destination for those seeking water-based activities. Visitors engage in boat cruising, jet skiing, water skiing and beach picnics. Its proximity to Lagos makes it a frequent choice for short Christmas getaways.

# DETTY DECEMBER ON A BUDGET: FIVE SPOTS WHERE YOU CAN ENJOY GOOD MEALS FOR LESS THAN ₦10,000

ESTHER EMOEKPERE



December is a busy period, and eating out can quickly become expensive. Many people still want places where they can sit comfortably, enjoy good food, and spend time out without worrying about how much the bill will be. As prices rise across the city, finding food spots that remain affordable becomes more important.

Some food spots continue to offer full meals for less than ₦10,000, even during December. These places focus on consistency and value, making it possible to enjoy the season without overspending.

If you are looking to enjoy Detty December on a budget, these food spots offer a comfortable setting and satisfying meals at reasonable prices.

## The Scope Lagos

Located in Yaba, The Scope Lagos is a rooftop lounge on the Mainland with both a bar and restaurant setup. It is known for its relaxed setting and open-air seating, making it a comfortable place to sit out during the festive season. The menu covers a mix of appetisers, pasta, rice dishes,

pepper soup, platters, and grilled options. A plate of white rice starts at around ₦3,225, while jollof or fried rice costs about ₦6,450. Pasta dishes are priced from ₦9,675, grilled asun from ₦8,062.50, and appetisers from ₦6,450. While some meals are priced above ₦10,000, there are enough options within budget to enjoy a full meal. Beyond food, The Scope Lagos hosts activities such as karaoke and Owambe nights, adding to its appeal as a place to enjoy December without overspending.



## Oven and Batter

December usually comes with an appetite for something sweet, and Oven and Batter caters well to that craving without pushing spending too far. Located in Lekki, the spot offers a relaxed setting for desserts, light meals, and casual hangouts. The menu includes breakfast options, ice cream, zobo, milkshakes, yoghurt, cocktails and mocktails, shawarma, burgers, pastries, small chops, cakes, and pastry boxes. There are several choices priced under ₦10,000, making it easy to enjoy desserts or light meals on a budget. While some items cost more, you can still satisfy a sweet tooth and even pick up treat boxes within the ₦10,000 range.



### Bira's Place

Located in Sabo, Yaba, Bira's Place offers dine-in, takeaway, and delivery services. It opens daily from 8am to 10pm and serves a wide range of meals that work for different budgets. The menu includes breakfast options such as sandwiches, toast bread, salads, akara, pap, and tea, with prices starting from about ₦400 to ₦2,000. Main meals include beans and yam, swallow with soups priced between ₦1,000 and ₦3,500, and rice dishes ranging from ₦1,000 to ₦2,200, with protein available separately. The space functions as a restaurant, lounge, and shawarma and grill spot, making it a flexible option for casual dining.



### The Green Pepper

If Chinese food is your go-to this Christmas, The Green Pepper stands out as one of the more affordable options in Lagos. Located at Ikeja Town Square Mall on Obafemi Awolowo Road, Ikeja, it offers dine-in, takeaway, and delivery services for added convenience. The menu includes pastries, soups, rice dishes, noodles, and a wide selection of protein-based meals such as beef, pork, chicken, prawns, fish, squid, and crab sauces. Pastries start from about ₦2,000, rice dishes from ₦3,500, and soups from ₦4,000. Noodles and beef or chicken dishes are priced from around ₦6,000, while pork dishes begin at approximately ₦6,500. Seafood options, including prawn and fish sauces, start from ₦9,000, with squid and crab sauces priced from ₦7,000 and ₦7,500 respectively.



### Plus 234 Grillhouse

Plus 234 GrillHouse is located in Lekki and offers dine-in, pick-up, and delivery options. It is a casual spot with a menu that covers a wide range of comfort meals, making it easy to find something within budget. The menu includes burgers, tacos, shawarma, grilled dishes, rice, pasta, noodles, sandwiches, and loaded fries. A plate of smoky jollof rice with grilled chicken costs around ₦5,000, while a grilled chicken lap is priced at about ₦8,500. Other options include spicy suya burgers for ₦6,000, penne pasta in beef sauce for ₦8,500, stir-fried noodles for ₦3,500, and a cheesy suya melt for ₦6,000. With several choices priced under ₦10,000, Plus 234 GrillHouse remains a practical option for eating out in December without overspending.



# EZIADA FOLASHADE BALOGUN: SHAPING AFRICA'S CREATIVE FUTURE





**E**ziaza Folashade Balogun is a visionary entrepreneur and creative industry leader committed to elevating African excellence on the global stage. She is the founder of the Black History & Lifestyle Award (BHLA), a platform that celebrates African achievers across the continent and the diaspora while fostering recognition, collaboration, and opportunity.

Through initiatives such as the BHLA UNGA Event in New York and the BHLA International Investment Summit & Trade Expo in California, she has connected African creatives and entrepreneurs with global partners, expanding access to markets, investment, and cultural exchange. Her most recent initiative, BHLA Youth in Creativity 1.0, convened over 1,000 young Nigerian creatives in Lagos and featured industry-led panels with leaders such as Bimpe Onakoya, Ugochukwu George Igbokwe, Emmy Kasbit, and Kid Baby, among others. Participants engaged in hands-on workshops and received practical tools including sewing machines, smartphones, curated makeup kits, and professional hair-styling tools, to support careers across fashion, media, beauty, and digital creativity.

Beyond BHLA, she is the founder of House of SOTA, a fashion brand bridging Africa and its diaspora through culture, innovation, and design. With over two decades of leadership experience spanning oil and gas and the creative economy, and executive education from leading global business schools, Eziaza Folashade Balogun continues to

shape Africa's creative future through vision, strategy, and purposeful investment in talent.

In an exclusive interview with IFEOMA OKEKE-KORIEOCHA, Balogun reflects on her "non-linear" journey and the core belief that "passion starts the car, but structure drives it." She opens up about the challenge of changing global perceptions, the vital importance of owning our narrative, and why she is committed to building a "ladder" that ensures no African entrepreneur is left behind on the journey to global recognition.

**We know you from your remarkable work with House of SOTA, your advocacy for African entrepreneurship, and your creation of BHLA, which honors and documents African excellence globally. We'd love to hear more about your journey and vision. You have had a long and successful career spanning oil and gas, fashion, global entrepreneurship, and creative innovation. How has your journey shaped your approach to business and leadership today?**

You know, life is interesting. My journey wasn't a straight line, and I thank God for that. Working in oil and gas gave me my backbone. It taught me that without structure and rigorous standards, you cannot scale anything. But when I moved into fashion and creative innovation, I had to learn to breathe. Today, my leadership is a marriage of those two worlds. I run my creative businesses with the discipline of an oil executive, but I lead my people with the heart of a mother. I've learned that passion starts the car, but structure drives it to the destination.

**House of SOTA has become a bridge between African fashion and the diaspora. What inspired you to create this platform, and what gap did you see in the market that you wanted to fill?**

House of SOTA was born out of a desire to bring order and value to a very chaotic space. We are an Afrocentric brand rooted in sustainable fabrics like Adire and Aso-oke materials that carry deep history. However, I saw a massive gap in the market. The Nigerian space is saturated with creators, but many are simply replicating each other's styles or creating designs that ignore reality; outfits that are not suitable for our tropical climate here or the seasons overseas. I wanted to move away from that noise. I created the House of SOTA to offer a distinction. We treat some of our pieces as Art premium, high-status items not meant for everyday wear, which preserves their value. Other lines are functional and climate-conscious. The inspiration was to stop "copying and pasting" and start creating sustainable, climate-appropriate fashion that honors the fabric's heritage while solving the practical problems of the wearer.

**With BHLA, you have created a platform that celebrates African achievement and creates actionable pathways for entrepreneurs. Why do you believe this kind of recognition and empowerment is essential for Africans both locally and globally?**

We have to look at empowerment as a pipeline. I view our community in layers, and BHLA caters to all of them. First, I look at the youth. We have to “catch them young” and give them that change mindset before the world beats it out of them. Then, I look at the startups the ones who have taken the brave step to start but are starving for funds. Finally, I look at the mid-scale businesses they have money, but they have no global stage. Recognition validates their struggle. When we celebrate them, we are telling the world, “Look at us, we are valuable.” Whether it’s connecting a student to a mentor or an SME to a global investor, we are building a ladder so no one gets left behind.

**Looking at your events, such as the BHLA UNGA Sideline Event in New York, the BHLA International Investment Summit & Trade Expo in California, and BHLA Youth in Creativity 1.0 in Lagos, how do you decide on the themes and structure of these initiatives? What do you hope attendees take away from these experiences?**

I look at what the people in that specific room need to survive and thrive. When I am in California with the Governor’s office, or at the University of Southern California (USC), the conversation is high-level. We are talking about investment, policy, and intellectual heritage. I want those attendees to leave with contracts and partners. But when I come home to Lagos for Youth in Creativity, I cannot talk about policy to a child who needs a tool. That event is grassroots. We gave out sewing machines and phones because I want those youths to leave with a career in their hands. The structure changes, but the mission is the same: unlocking value.

**BHLA emphasizes storytelling, leadership, and cultural empowerment in ways that go beyond celebration. How important is narrative and visibility in driving change for African communities worldwide?**

My dear, narrative is the currency of the world. If we don’t tell our own stories, we will always be characters in someone else’s book. Whether we are collaborating with Nollywood and Hollywood or showcasing at Fashion Week, we are taking back the pen. We are showing the world that African leadership is not an accident; it is a standard. When we control the visibility, we control the value.



**The Youth in Creativity 1.0 event provided practical support, including sewing machines, smartphones, makeup kits, and hair-styling tools. How do you see this hands-on support translating into long-term impact for young creatives?**

I believe in “catching them young.” You can’t tell a young person to be a global leader if they don’t have the tools to practice their craft today. We gave out smartphones because, in this era, a phone is a broadcasting station and a marketplace. We gave sewing machines because they are factories. By putting these things in their hands, we are solving the poverty of resources. The long-term impact is economic independence. We are turning future job seekers into job creators.

**The event also featured speakers like Bimpe Onakoya, Ugochukwu George Igbokwe, Emmy Kasbit... How do you select speakers, and what role do they play in inspiring and guiding young creatives?**

I select them because they are living proof. I brought these people because they have walked this same hard road. I wanted the youth to look at them and say, “If she can do it, I can do it.” Their role isn’t just to speak; it is to show the youth that the ceiling they see is actually a door they can open.

**Across your career and philanthropic initiatives, what challenges have stood out the most, and how have you overcome them to build a multi-faceted brand and global impact?**

The biggest challenge has undoubtedly been changing the perception of value. When you start a philanthropic initiative coming out of Africa, the world often expects you to come with a “begging bowl,” asking for aid. But with BHLA, my vision was different.

I wasn’t coming to ask for help; I was coming to offer value. I was coming to showcase excellence. The challenge was getting global stakeholders whether in Hollywood or government offices in California to see us as equal partners, not just beneficiaries. I had to fight to prove that an African-led platform could host high-level investment summits and influence policy, not just throw parties. I overcame this by being strategic about structure.

I didn’t just build an “awards show”; I built an ecosystem. I aligned us with credible institutions like the State of California and the University of Southern California.



I ensured that for every celebration, there was an economic engine behind it like the trade expos for our mid-scale businesses or the training camps for our youth. We built a multi-faceted brand by refusing to be put in a box. We showed them that we can document history, train the next generation, and facilitate global trade all at the same time. That is how you command respect.

**How do you balance your multiple roles as entrepreneur, innovator, and philanthropist, while still staying connected to your family and personal life?**

I don't believe in "balance" in the traditional sense; I believe in integration and priority. I am a woman with a lot of energy, but my family remains my anchor. They are the reason I work this hard. I approach my personal life with the same intentionality I apply to my business. When I am with my family, I am fully present that is non-negotiable. However, because I have a "millennial mindset" regarding work, I leverage systems. I build teams that share the vision and run with the mandate. I don't try to be the superhero who does everything; I am the architect who ensures everything gets done. That is how you run a global ecosystem without losing your home.

**Looking ahead, what is your vision for BHLA, House of SOTA, and your other ventures over the next 5-10 years?**

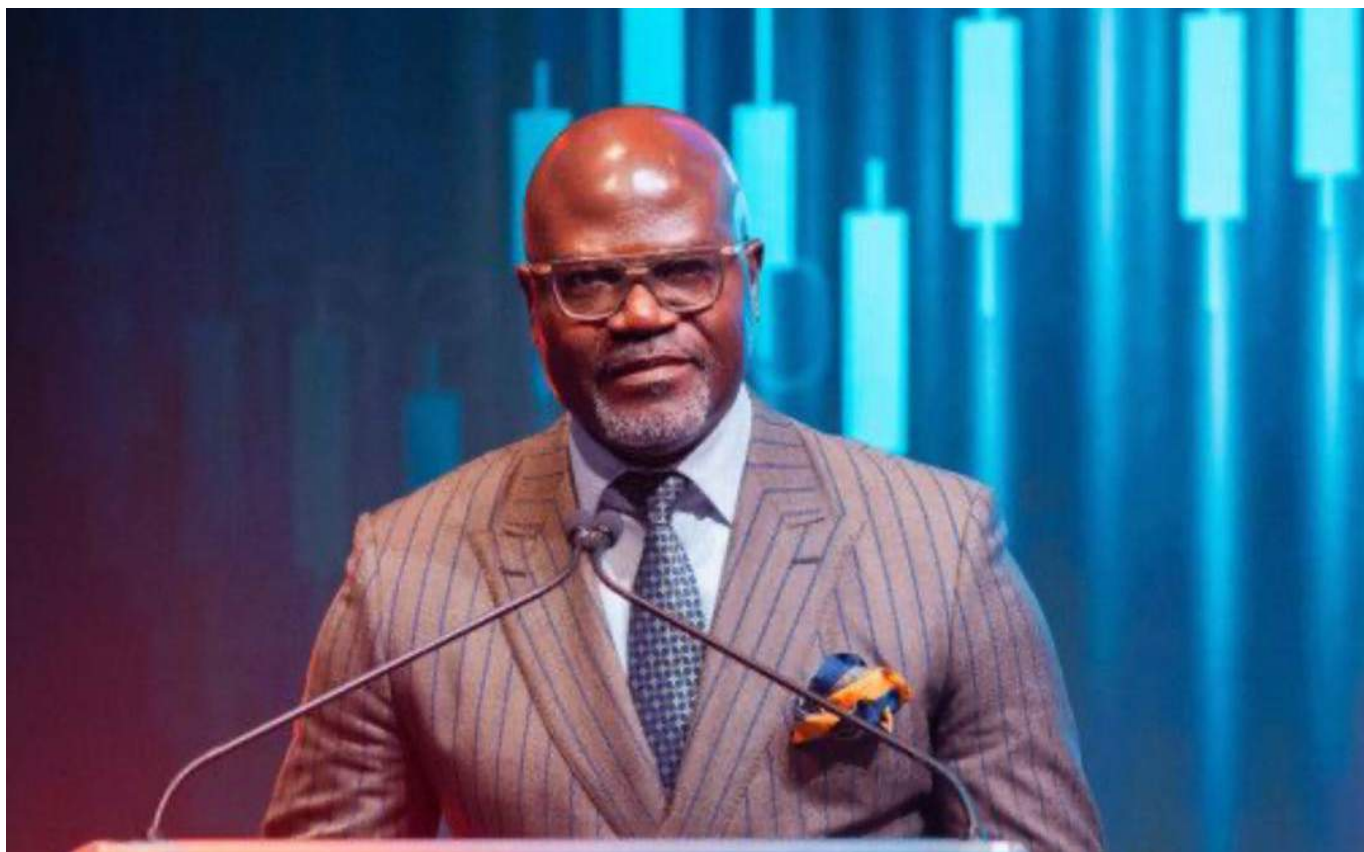
My vision is to solidify this ecosystem. In 10 years, I want to see the youths we empowered today presenting their Adire collection, tech solutions and initiatives at our summit in California. I want House of SOTA to be the global benchmark for sustainable African luxury, and BHLA to be the undisputed bridge moving talent from the "idea stage" to the "global icon stage."

**For young Africans, especially women who look up to you and aspire to make an impact, what advice would you give for navigating challenges while staying true to their vision and culture?**

Do not sell your birthright for a bowl of soup. Your culture is your superpower. The world has enough copies; they are looking for the original. Be intellectually sound, read, learn, understand the business but stay true to your roots. The challenges will come, but if you are authentic, you will always find a way.

# BANKABLE ENERGY: WHY AFRICA'S DOWNSTREAM SECTOR IS THE NEXT GLOBAL INVESTMENT FRONTIER

ANIBOR KRAGHA



Investors do not chase potential – they chase predictability. Africa has plenty of the former and is steadily building the foundations for the latter.

The downstream sector is at a make-or-break moment. Population growth, industrialisation and urbanisation are pushing fuel and LPG demand to unprecedented levels.

The opportunity is immense – but it will remain theoretical unless the continent addresses regulatory fragmentation, infrastructure gaps and financing hurdles that continue to undermine investor confidence.

This is where the African Refiners and Distributors Association (ARDA) is taking the lead: building a modern, coherent ecosystem for Africa's downstream industry – one where projects are structured, transparent, compliant and investment-ready.

Capital flows to discipline, bankability, and credibility – not uncertainty. That's why, to turn Africa's downstream potential into real investment, ARDA is advocating for concrete action: harmonised fuel standards, upgraded infrastructure, and a proven track record of delivering projects on time and within budget.

## Africa's Energy Demand:

**The Demographic Boom Demanding Investment**  
By 2050, one in every four people on earth will live in Africa. This demographic reality will either power prosperity or deepen dependence. The decisive factor will be investment in the continent's downstream sector – refining, storage, distribution and end-use fuel systems.

## Current trends make the opportunity impossible to ignore:

Crude oil consumption in Africa is set to rise from 1.8 million barrels per day in 2024 to 4.5 million barrels by 2050. Yet downstream investment has stagnated even as upstream production grows, leaving Africa stuck in the costly paradox of exporting crude and importing refined products at a premium.

OPEC estimates that Africa will need over \$100 billion in refining investment between now and 2050 – a mix of upgrades, expansions and greenfield projects in order to meet the continent’s booming demand for petroleum products over the same period. The opportunity is immense. But the barriers are equally real.

## Why Downstream Projects Fail: The Bankability Gap

Across the continent, downstream projects rarely advance beyond the drawing board because they fail the first test applied by global investors: bankability. Investors want clarity, not chaos. They look for predictable feedstock and offtake arrangements, stable regulation, enforceable contracts and credible technical and financial modelling. They expect realistic timelines, professional project preparation and ESG compliance that can unlock lower-cost capital.

Instead, they often encounter inconsistent policies, market fragmentation, shallow ports, congested depots, inflationary pressures, exchange-rate volatility and mismatched fuel specifications.

## Fuel Specifications: A Hidden Barrier to Investment

Across the 54 African countries, 46 maintain national fuel specifications, yet the continent still has 12 different gasoline grades with sulphur levels ranging from 10 to 2,500 ppm, and 11 diesel grades ranging from 10 to 10,000 ppm. Closing these gaps is essential: upgrading existing African refineries to meet cleaner fuel standards would require about \$16 billion – an investment that would unlock regional trade, improve efficiency and create economies of scale.

## Infrastructure Challenges: A Drag on Africa’s Energy Potential

A 2024 whitepaper by CITAC and Puma Energy, highlights major logistical constraints. Many African ports are too shallow for large vessels, berths are congested, storage capacity is often inadequate, and roads and pipelines are over-used, with widespread single points of failure. Collectively, these shortcomings add \$20–30 per tonne to landed fuel costs and erode investor confidence in the system’s reliability.

Despite the expansion of refining capacity, with the Dangote refinery and others coming onstream, this alone will not close the supply shortfall or enable the continent to deliver cleaner fuels at scale.

Africa faces broader challenges in moving fuel efficiently across the continent, which results in inefficient and incomplete supply chains from coast to inland zones of consumption, including the mining sector, stifling economic growth.

Addressing Africa’s energy security challenges depends equally on transport infrastructure. Both coastal and land-linked countries require coordinated investment in pipelines, roads, and rail networks to ensure that petroleum products can reach markets reliably and at lower cost to the consumer.

## Clean Cooking: A Massive Untapped Market

More than one billion Africans still rely on biomass for cooking, and the number has grown by 220 million since 2010. The health, environmental and social consequences are enormous – and so is the opportunity. The scale of unmet demand positions Africa as one of the most attractive markets for LPG investments globally.

The conclusion is unavoidable: Africa must modernise its downstream industry to attract global capital, and ARDA is leading this transformation.

### ARDA’s Blueprint for Investment-Ready Downstream Markets

As the continent’s leading voice for the downstream sector, ARDA advocates for technical standard-setting, acts as an investment catalyst and partners on policy. Its mission for Africa is clear: build a bankable, future-ready downstream sector capable of attracting global capital at scale.

The association has identified five strategic priorities designed to create a fully investment-ready ecosystem.

### 1. Harmonising Fuel Specifications

ARDA is driving adoption of low-sulphur AFRI standards, including AFRI-6 (10 ppm), to enable regional markets, reduce supply-chain costs, improve public health, support refinery upgrades and align Africa with global norms. Through partnerships with the African Union Commission, IPIECA, UNEP, and regional economic communities, ARDA is advancing a continent-wide shift to cleaner fuels.

### 2. Rebuilding Infrastructure End-to-End

ARDA advocates a comprehensive upgrade of the downstream value chain – including deeper ports and modernised jetties, offshore SPMs and CBMs, expanded storage facilities with tanks exceeding 150,000 m<sup>3</sup>, new and rehabilitated pipelines, and multimodal logistics systems designed for redundancy. These improvements are essential for achieving economies of scale and giving investors the confidence that supply systems can perform reliably.



### 3. Embedding Regulatory and Investment Discipline

To ensure projects are fundable, ARDA promotes transparent, long-term regulatory frameworks; turnkey, fixed-price EPC contracts; bankable offtake agreements; and rigorous project preparation covering scope, cost, schedule, technology, economics and compliance. ARDA also advances ESG-aligned project design, enabling access to the sustainable finance instruments increasingly favoured by global capital markets.

### 4. Delivering Clean Cooking at Scale

Recognising LPG as both a health and climate priority, ARDA supports the rollout of large-scale LPG and bio-LPG infrastructure, advocates policy reforms that accelerate adoption, and drives partnerships such as the innovative ARDA-GLPGP drive to mobilise public and private sector capital into a \$1 billion LPG Fund that will identify, conduct due diligence and finance bankable LPG projects to propel sustainable LPG market growth across Africa.

### 5. Building a Pipeline of Bankable Projects

Through seven thematic workgroups – Refining & Specifications, Storage & Distribution, LPG, Regulation, Sustainable Financing, HSE & Quality (HSEQ) and Human Capital – ARDA is promoting standardised frameworks, sharing best-in-class technical expertise and championing the building of a resilient workforce to achieve Africa's energy transition ambitions.

A register of investable downstream projects is being built, with clearly defined feedstock, offtake structures and governance, while ARDA's platforms – including high-level forums such as the recent Storage, Distribution &

Jet Fuel Forum in Dakar, Senegal and the LPG Forum in Lusaka, Zambia – are used to highlight key bottlenecks and accelerate policy reforms that attract investment.

Additionally, a Training School – the Human Capital Centre-of-Excellence at ARDA's Headquarters in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire – offers capacity-building programs for the ecosystem and maintains a database of pan-African industry professionals to support project execution across the continent.

This initiative is helping to develop the leaders and professionals of tomorrow who will drive the industry's growth and advance Africa's energy transition.

### The Bottom Line for Investors

Africa's downstream sector is one of the world's last large-scale, high-growth energy investment frontiers. The demand curve is defined by demographics.

The supply deficit is structural. The capital requirement exceeds \$100 billion. And the economic upside is transformative.

One thing is certain. For investors seeking long-term returns anchored in real demand, Africa's downstream sector is not just an opportunity – it is the next frontier.

But capital will only flow where discipline is demonstrated, and that discipline is precisely what ARDA is building through a harmonised, integrated, ESG-ready downstream ecosystem designed for investment.

Anibor Kragha is the Executive Secretary, African Refiners and Distributors Association (ARDA).

# FCMB PARTNERS TENDER HEARTS FOUNDATION TO EMPOWER WOMEN, ADDRESS HUNGER

ESTHER EMOEKPERE



**F**irst City Monument Bank (FCMB) has partnered with Tender Hearts Foundation to launch a food bank and business empowerment initiative aimed at tackling hunger, poverty and women's economic vulnerability across Nigeria.

The programme, organised by Tender Hearts Foundation with strategic support from FCMB, combines food assistance with business grants and access to financial services, targeting women who run micro-enterprises. Organisers say the approach is designed to provide immediate relief while supporting long-term financial independence.

Speaking at the launch, the founder of Tender Hearts Foundation, Dr Sally Otihiwa, said the initiative was deliberately structured to move beyond charity and focus on sustainable livelihoods.

"This is a business grant for women who already have micro businesses, to increase the capacity of what they are doing," she said. "We are not just giving food; we are empowering them to stand on their feet and continue to put food on their table."

Otihiwa said the food bank initiative aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 2 on zero hunger, while also addressing poverty through skills development, access to capital

and business support. She noted that while food assistance meets urgent needs, economic empowerment is critical to long-term impact.

The foundation initially planned to support 350 women, but participation exceeded expectations due to the scale of need in the communities reached. Beneficiaries receive business grants ranging from ₦50,000 to ₦300,000, with the opportunity to access higher funding as they demonstrate repayment capacity.

According to Otihiwa, women who successfully repay their initial grants are referred to microfinance banks, where they can access loans of between ₦400,000 and ₦3 million, depending on their business performance.

"So long as they can pay back, they continue to grow," she said. "At a point, we refer them to the banks so they can access bigger funding and expand their businesses."

She added that the initiative is being implemented in multiple locations across the country, reflecting the widespread nature of food insecurity and poverty.

"The percentage of people who are comfortable enough to eat well is very minimal," Otihiwa said. "Many people do not even have the basic right to food. With the little we are doing, we ensure they have food on their table and also empower them to continue providing for themselves."

Representing FCMB, Lyanda Omoniyi, who oversees the bank's social responsibility and sustainability reporting, said the partnership reflects FCMB's focus on poverty alleviation, empowerment and inclusive growth.

"At FCMB, we run our corporate social responsibility agenda through the lens of poverty alleviation, empowerment and environmental sustainability," Omoniyi said. "We are here to support households and empower women because once you empower a woman, you are multiplying the nation."

He said the food bank initiative is open to both FCMB customers and members of the public who do not yet bank with the institution, while also serving as a pathway to formal financial services for women-owned businesses.

"We are a bank that cares about the needs of the people," he said. "That is why we create strategic programmes that speak directly to the real needs of communities."

Omoniyi added that the partnership aligns with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, particularly those focused on poverty reduction and gender equality, and underscores the role of collaboration between the private sector and civil society.

# HOW ORIKI 11 REDEFINED 'DETTY DECEMBER' WITH A CULTURAL SALON



**D**etty December in Lagos usually announces itself with noise, neon, music, and motion. But Oriki 11, the African-infused premium London Dry Gin, chose to begin the season with a quieter, more intentional gesture: an intimate dinner for Lagos' art community at the upscale S.E.A Experience in Lekki Phase 1, Lagos, recently.

The evening, curated in partnership with A Third Space, the cultural collective that has quickly become a quiet engine for community gatherings and creative exchange in Lagos, unfolded like a cultural salon, a room arranged not for spectacle but for attention.

The boutique artsy hotel, already an ecosystem for visual creators and collectors, offered a canvas that matched Oriki 11's aesthetic: contemporary African luxury rooted in craft, culture, and memory.

**The Communal Ritual:** Wooden Pots, Shared Plates, Shared Stories. In a graceful nod to West African communal dining, dinner arrived not in trays or plated courses but in wooden pots, earthy, carved, and warm to the touch.

Instead of lining up buffet-style, guests passed each pot from hand to hand, lifting wooden spoons, scooping, smiling, offering, and receiving. Each dish was a shared moment; each passing of the pot was a quiet gesture of care.

The room became a constellation of micro-conversations, food, heritage, art, and laughter, all tethered by the refreshingly crisp Oriki 11 cocktails moving between them. It was conviviality in its most African form: communal, rhythmic, and generous.

## A Third Space and the Culture of Slowing Down

Nelson C.J., convener of A Third Space, framed the partnership beautifully: "We wanted a night that allowed for stillness, where creativity wasn't rushed, where people could be present. Oriki 11's attention to heritage and intimacy made that possible."



### Poetry in a Room That Listened

Belinda Doubara Yanga, filmmaker and poet read with a softness that held the room in suspension. Her poems stretched across memory, identity, and the echoes of Lagos life. "This room listened like a friend. It felt like reading inside a heartbeat: quiet, warm, attentive," she said afterward.

### Suni's Lyrical Canvas: When the Mic Became a Brush

Then came Legendary Suni, whose soulful performance broke open into something communal.

He didn't just sing to the room; he invited the room in. At one point, he passed the mic from guest to guest, prompting each person to sing a line, hum a melody, or simply add their voice to the moment.

The room erupted in joyful vulnerability, laughter, harmonies, playful off-key notes, brave riffs, confident runs, and shy whispers.

What emerged was a shared artwork: a collective canvas of voices painting sound onto the night. "Music becomes deeper when everyone becomes part of it. Tonight, the room created the song with me," Suni reflected.

### Heritage in a Glass

Oriki 11, distilled from 11 African botanicals, echoed the evening's ethos. The brand's philosophy, where heritage meets elegance, aligned effortlessly with the slow, textured rituals unfolding across the room.

S.E.A. Experience, which also stocks Oriki 11 in its mart, threaded the spirit into its artistic ecosystem: a gin not just consumed but experienced.

### A December That Begins in Intimacy

Oriki 11's opening note for December felt like a refreshingly cultured alternative to the season's usual crescendo. It was an evening defined by intimacy, creativity, heritage, and shared expression, a salon-like gathering that reminded Lagos that December can begin softly and still resonate loudly.

In a season known for excess, Oriki 11 chose communion and created something unforgettable.



# 8 RESTAURANT ETIQUETTE RULES TO OBSERVE THIS FESTIVE SEASON

ESTHER EMOEKPERE



**T**he festive season brings fuller calendars, busier restaurants, and more reasons to eat out. December is often marked by family lunches, catch-ups with friends, and spontaneous dinners, all of which mean restaurants are operating at peak capacity for most of the month.

In moments like this, how people behave in shared spaces matters just as much as the food being served. Simple habits can shape the overall dining experience, not only for those at your table but for staff and other diners as well. Keeping a few etiquette rules in mind helps ensure that eating out during the holidays remains enjoyable for everyone involved.

## Be mindful of booking times

Many restaurants operate on timed bookings during the festive season to accommodate more guests. Once your meal is finished, being mindful of the agreed time helps staff manage reservations smoothly. Linger unnecessarily can delay the next seating and add pressure during already busy hours.

## Arrive at the agreed time

Being on time matters more in December than at any other point in the year. Late arrivals can affect seating arrangements and delay service for other guests. When delays are unavoidable, a quick call to let the restaurant know is usually appreciated and helps manage expectations.

## Book ahead when possible

Restaurants tend to fill up quickly during the festive season, especially in the evenings and on weekends. Making a reservation helps secure your spot and allows the restaurant to plan seating and staffing properly. If plans change, informing the restaurant early gives them the chance to offer the table to someone else.

## Control your noise level

Festive outings come with laughter and excitement, but shared spaces still require consideration. Loud conversations, speakerphone calls, or videos played aloud can disrupt other diners. Keeping noise at a reasonable level allows everyone to enjoy the atmosphere without discomfort.

## Be patient with service

With more guests than usual, service may take longer than expected. Staff often work extended hours and handle increased demand throughout the season. Patience and courtesy help ease the pressure, and waiting becomes more manageable when the focus stays on conversation and the occasion rather than speed.

## Supervise children

Dining out with children can be enjoyable when they are kept engaged and supervised. Bringing quiet activities or choosing child-friendly meals helps reduce restlessness. Encouraging basic table manners also makes the experience smoother for both staff and nearby diners.

## Tip when you can

December is a demanding period for restaurant staff, many of whom work through holidays and late nights. While tipping is optional, it remains a thoughtful way to acknowledge good service. Even a modest amount is often appreciated and reflects consideration for the effort put in.

## Leave the table in good order

While clearing tables is part of restaurant service, excessive mess can slow down turnover during busy periods. Simple actions such as keeping napkins together, avoiding spills where possible, and leaving the table reasonably tidy show courtesy and awareness.

# HOW FIVE GLOBAL CITIES SET THE PACE FOR TECHNOLOGY IN 2025

CHISOM MICHAEL



**G**lobal innovation rankings identified five urban hubs where technology had become part of everyday life rather than a distant experiment.

Across these cities, routine activities such as payments, transport, and access to services were driven by data and mobile platforms, reducing reliance on cash and manual processes. Research ideas moved quickly into production lines, public systems, and consumer tools that people used daily.

Their leadership did not come from a single invention, but from how well different systems worked together. Manufacturing supported digital services, transport networks responded to real-time information, and platforms linked businesses with users at scale.

Each hub followed a path shaped by local policy, history, and economic structure. Collectively, they showed that modern tech leadership was measured by practicality, consistency, and how smoothly innovation fitted into ordinary life.

**According to Columbia One, here are five global cities that set the pace for technology in 2025**

## **Shenzhen–Hong Kong–Guangzhou: speed plus scale**

The Shenzhen–Hong Kong–Guangzhou cluster placed first in the 2025 ranking. Its position came from the way ideas moved through the system. Hardware concepts could be tested, revised, and produced within the same region, often within days.

Dense supply chains linked designers, factories, logistics firms, and financiers. A product could move from sketch to shelf without leaving the cluster. This reduced delays and costs, and encouraged constant iteration.

Daily transactions relied on digital payments. QR codes and stored-value systems were used in shops, transport, and street markets. Small payments took seconds, even in crowded spaces.

Design played a formal role in this ecosystem. Shenzhen's recognition as a UNESCO City of Design in 2008 reflected how design and technology developed together, shaping both products and urban systems.

### **Tokyo–Yokohama: reliability in motion**

The Tokyo–Yokohama cluster ranked second. Its strength lay in making large systems work smoothly in daily use, especially transport and retail.

Integrated transit cards connected trains, buses, shops, and services. Commuting, transfers, and payments followed clear routines, which reduced uncertainty in daily movement.

This model drew on decades of industrial practice. Robotics, sensors, and manufacturing processes were refined over time and applied across sectors. Systems were trusted because they worked as expected.

The result was often described as “quiet tech”. It did not draw attention to itself, but supported everyday life through consistency and long-term planning.

### **San Jose–San Francisco: where startups scale**

The San Jose–San Francisco cluster ranked third and remained closely linked to venture capital and startup networks. Funding, talent, and research moved through a shared market that rewarded rapid testing.

Autonomous vehicles on public roads showed how new systems could move from trial phases into daily use. Companies could test, gather data, and adjust within the same region.

This structure supported speed. Teams could raise funds, hire specialists, and release updates without long delays. The ecosystem was designed around iteration.

At the same time, the culture of “move fast” brought pressure.

High living costs and competition placed strain on workers and founders, showing the limits of constant acceleration.

### **Beijing: super apps and big ambition**

Beijing ranked fourth, with daily technology use shaped by apps that combined messaging, payments, transport, and services. These platforms turned smartphones into a “city remote control”.

Residents could order food, pay bills, book transport, and manage appointments through a single interface. Services linked together in short digital loops.

Innovation also came from scale. Large research institutions and major firms supported projects that required long timelines and large budgets. This allowed the city to pursue broad goals alongside consumer services.

For visitors, the system was visible in how quickly tasks connected. Tickets, deliveries, and payments flowed through the same channels with few steps.

### **Seoul: convenience as a design choice**

Seoul ranked fifth, with a focus on access and connectivity. Cashless payments, smart entry systems, and automated retail reduced waiting times across the city.

Public transport ran on dense networks that supported movement at all hours. Digital access shaped work, shopping, and leisure without clear breaks between them.

Behind this was infrastructure planning. The city invested in transport links, network coverage, and consumer technology that supported daily routines.

Seoul's approach showed how technology could be woven into city life through planning choices rather than isolated projects.

# HOW FIVE GLOBAL CITIES SET THE PACE FOR TECHNOLOGY IN 2025

CHISOM MICHAEL



Christmas is marked each year by millions of people across the world. For many, it is a time linked with faith, family and tradition. While the celebration is widely recognised, its history and customs are often misunderstood. Here are ten key facts that explain how Christmas developed and how it is observed today.

Christmas is a Christian festival that marks the birth of Jesus Christ, who Christians believe was the son of God. It is widely

celebrated on 25 December. This date was chosen by the Roman Catholic Church, although there is no historical record that confirms the exact day Jesus was born. Over time, 25 December became accepted across much of the Christian world.

Not all Christians celebrate Christmas on the same day. In countries with large Orthodox Christian populations, including Russia, Christmas falls on 7 January. This difference exists because some Orthodox churches follow the Julian calendar rather

than the Gregorian calendar used in much of the world today. Some Greek Orthodox Christians also mark Christmas on 7 January.

The word 'Christmas' comes from the Old English phrase *Cristes maesse*, meaning 'Christ's mass'. The term 'Xmas' is often thought to be modern, but it dates back to the 16th century. The 'X' represents the Greek letter 'Chi', the first letter in the Greek word for Christ, *Χριστός*, pronounced 'Christos'.

Many Christmas traditions in the UK became established during the Victorian period. These include the sending of Christmas cards, exchanging gifts and pulling crackers. Foods such as mince pies and roast turkey also became linked with the season during this time. Queen Victoria and Prince Albert played a role in supporting these customs, which later spread across British society.

Christmas trees also became common in Britain during the Victorian era. The tradition began earlier in 16th century Germany, where people decorated fir trees with fruit and nuts. Later, sweets, paper shapes and candles were added. Historians believe the practice may trace back further, to Roman and Ancient Egyptian use of evergreen plants and garlands as symbols of life.

Each year, Norway sends a Christmas tree to the UK. The tree is placed in Trafalgar Square in London and decorated with lights. It stands about 20 metres tall. The tree is given as thanks for British support to Norway during World War II, and the tradition has continued since 1947.

Father Christmas is one of the most recognised figures of the season. The name Santa Claus comes from the Dutch word *Sinterklaas*, meaning Saint Nicholas. Saint Nicholas was a Christian bishop who lived in the 4th century. He became known for giving to those in need, and he later became the patron saint of children.

Christmas figures differ across cultures. In Italy, folklore tells of *La Befana*, a witch who delivers gifts to children. In Iceland, children place shoes by windows for the *Yule Lads*, a group of 13 figures. Children who behave well receive sweets, while others may find a rotten potato in their shoe.

One of the most widely known songs linked to the season is *Jingle Bells*. Despite its association with Christmas, the song does not mention Christmas, Jesus or Santa Claus. It was written in 1850 under the title *One Horse Open Sleigh* and was first linked to Thanksgiving in the United States.

Christmas has not always been accepted. In 1644, celebrations were banned in England. Similar laws followed in English colonies in America. Authorities at the time believed the religious meaning of Christmas had been lost. Despite the ban, some people continued to mark the day in private. The restrictions were lifted almost 20 years later.

Together, these facts show that Christmas is shaped by belief, history and shared practice. Across time and place, the festival has changed, yet it continues to hold meaning for people around the world.

# LEADERS PUSH REFORM, UNITY AND LOCAL INVESTMENT AT AFRICA-FOCUSED SUMMIT

## ...as GAH Awards celebrates policymakers, business and cultural figures



African leaders, business executives and policymakers have called for homegrown solutions to the continent's economic and social challenges. This was at the 13th Global Achievers Honour (GAH) Awards and Business Summit opened in Lagos.

The event, themed "Africa Reimagined: Innovation, Inclusion & Sustainable Growth," brought together leaders from government, aviation, culture, and development to push a message of African-led growth, stronger institutions, and inclusive progress.

Speaking at the summit, Princess Kelechi Oghene, the Convener, said the GAH platform had grown beyond an awards ceremony into a continental movement focused on empowerment and measurable impact.

"For 13 uninterrupted editions, this platform has stood where excellence meets responsibility," Oghene said. "Africa's future will not be written by outsiders. It will be written by Africans who understand that progress is a responsibility."

She said the GAH ecosystem, which includes the GHA Elite Club and social impact initiatives, has empowered more than 12,000 women and youths through skills training and economic support programs.

Allen Onyema, founder and CEO of Air Peace, Nigeria's largest airline operator, used his keynote remarks to warn that Africa must stop depending on foreign solutions, especially in aviation and trade.



“Nobody will fight for Africa except Africans,” Onyema said. “If you think others will save us, you are wasting your time.” The CEO highlighted structural barriers facing African airlines, including high borrowing costs, insurance premiums, and heavy taxation. He said Nigerian airlines borrow at interest rates as high as 35 percent, compared with 2–3 percent in developed markets, making competition uneven.

He welcomed recent government steps to remove a four percent import duty on aircraft and spare parts, calling it a “positive signal” for local carriers.

Onyema warned that without broader tax reforms ahead of Nigeria’s new tax framework in 2026, more airlines could collapse.

“Our airlines are not expensive by choice,” he said. “Excessive taxes are killing connectivity, jobs, and investment.”

Cultural leadership also featured strongly at the summit. Olori Ronke Ademiluyi-Ogunwusi, representing the Ooni of Ife, Oba Adeyeye Ogunwusi, said Africa’s heritage must serve as the foundation for innovation and global relevance.

“Culture is not our past. It is our future,” she said. “Innovation and tradition must grow together.”

From the public sector, Zamfara State Governor Dauda Lawal, represented by Mouktar Mohammed Lugga, his Chief of Staff, said governance reforms were central to rebuilding trust and attracting investment in fragile regions.

“Investment does not go where the government is weak,” Lugga said. He pointed to improved budget transparency, digitisation of public services, and infrastructure renewal as signs that Zamfara’s narrative was changing.

Lugga said the state was shifting from raw material exports to value-added production, while prioritising women, youth, and rural communities. “Inclusion is not charity,” he said. “It is the foundation of stability and growth.”

Other speakers addressed gender justice, entrepreneurship, culture, and faith-based development, reinforcing the summit’s core message: Africa’s growth depends on strong leadership, inclusive policies, and local solutions.

Award recipients included Anthony Attah, managing director of Renaissance Africa; Obiora Gregory Okonkwo, chairman of United Nigeria Airlines; Nigeria’s Minister of Aviation and Aerospace Development, Festus Keyamo; Zamfara Governor Dauda Lawal; and Osun State Governor Ademola Adeleke.

Others honoured were women’s rights advocate Joe Okei-Odumakin; legal luminaries Femi Falana and Senator Ajibola Basiru; fashion entrepreneur Olori Aderonke Ademiluyi Ogunwusi; business leader Princess Olatorera Majekodunmi-Oniru; and real estate entrepreneur, Kennedy Okonkwo.

Institutions recognised included Wema Bank, the Bank of Industry, Eko Electricity Distribution Company, Amstel Malt, R.T. Briscoe Nigeria Plc, Incel Tourism, and Bare2Beauty Cosmetics, reflecting a broad mix of public and private sector leadership.

As the event closed, organisers said the challenge now was turning ideas into action. “Celebration is not enough,” Oghene said. “Transformation is the goal.”

# THE MAKEUP FAIR SERIES CLOSES 2025 WITH ABUJA, LAGOS EDITIONS OF THE 'CHRISTMAS BEAUTY A'FAIR



The Makeup Fair Series (TMUFS) has successfully concluded the Abuja and Lagos editions of the Christmas Beauty A'Fair (CBA) 2025, bringing its 2025 events calendar to a close with two well-attended fairs that highlighted growth, innovation and resilience within Nigeria's beauty industry.

The Abuja edition, held on November 29–30, 2025 at PSI Park, Mabuchi, and the Lagos edition, which took place on December 6–7, 2025 at Classique Events Place, Oregun, welcomed thousands of beauty enthusiasts, professionals, entrepreneurs, and families for immersive shopping, entertainment and Christmas festivities .



Attendees also benefited from promotional pricing, product demonstrations, brand activations, giveaways, and festive experiences, positioning the fairs as both a commercial and lifestyle destination during the Christmas season.

Speaking on the significance of the events, Omolola Faleye, Founder of The Makeup Fair Series, noted that the Christmas Beauty A'Fair remains a critical end-of-year platform for beauty businesses.

She said the strong turnout, product launches, and new brand participation across both cities reflected the growing maturity and confidence of Nigeria's beauty ecosystem.

With over a decade of operations and more than 136 editions delivered nationwide, TMUFS continues to play a central role in connecting beauty brands to markets, consumers, and growth opportunities, while contributing to the broader development of Nigeria's creative and retail economy.

The two Christmas Beauty A'Fairs were the final events in TMUFS' 2025 calendar, making them the 135th and 136th editions of the platform since it was founded. In total, TMUFS hosted ten fairs across multiple cities in 2025, reinforcing its position as Nigeria's most consistent and far-reaching beauty trade show platform.

Both editions provided a launchpad for industry growth, with several new beauty brands debuting on the TMUFS platform and over twelve brands unveiling and launching new products during the fairs. The events enabled brands to test the market, drive direct sales, and gather real-time consumer feedback in a highly competitive retail environment.

A key feature of both fairs was the Beauty Face-Off Competition (BFOC), held in Abuja and Lagos, which showcased emerging makeup artistry talent while driving audience engagement and foot traffic across the exhibition floor.



# NATIONAL GALLERY, RED DOOR PARTNER TO REVOLUTIONIZE ART INFRASTRUCTURE



The National Gallery of Art and Red Door Designs Limited have entered into a strategic collaboration aimed at strengthening Nigeria's contemporary art infrastructure, deepening value creation across the creative ecosystem and positioning Nigerian art to command greater global relevance.

The partnership, formalised with an official signing, builds on a relationship that dates back to 2014, when Red Door Gallery hosted over 80 works from the National Collection in a landmark Masters Series exhibition supported by the Nigerian Stock Exchange (NSE).

Speaking at the event in Lagos this week, Founder of Red Door Gallery, Bola Asiru, described the agreement as another chapter in a long-standing partnership anchored on a shared vision.

He said Red Door's role goes beyond operating as a gallery to actively contributing across the arts value chain in collaboration with public institutions.

Asiru said, "This day is just another chapter in what has been a very strong partnership with the National Gallery. Our vision has always been to not just play a role as a gallery, but to play a very strong role across the entire arts value chain, and today that vision is coming to fruition."



He noted that the private sector has a responsibility to enhance what has already been built by government institutions, stressing that Red Door would take strategic direction from the National Gallery on priority areas of support.

“There is a lot that has already been done, but our role as a private sector player is to see how we can enhance this.”

Ahmed Sodangi, Director-General of the National Gallery of Art (NGA), said the collaboration will help unlock the full potential of the creative economy.

He described the partnership as critical to helping the National Gallery realise its mandate as a custodian of Nigeria’s artistic heritage. “We are delighted about this very strategic partnership. For us, it is to realise and actualise our full potential as an institution.”

He emphasised that artworks must now be understood as valuable products within an organised value chain, rather than as objects existing outside economic frameworks.

“These artworks around us are not just mere artworks. They are products that carry value. They tell a story about our cultural heritage and the creative intuition of the creator,” he said.

According to Sodangi, a key focus of the partnership is to address gaps within the creative sector by strengthening value creation, certification and professional standards. He said the National Gallery, working with Red Door, would target emerging artists by demonstrating how art can serve as a viable means to economic sustainability.

“As custodians of the artistic treasures and the repository of artistic influence in Nigeria, we are partnering with an organisation that has infrastructure, intellectual and financial capacity to foster the spirit of creatives in Nigeria,” he said, adding that he believes the partnership would be “one to be reckoned with for generations to come.”

In an interview session following the signing, Sodangi confirmed that the partnership would deliver art residencies and capacity-building programmes for artists and gallery owners.

He said future exhibitions would be guided by global best practices, reflecting changes in how art is produced, consumed and valued.

He explained that strategic collaboration with Red Door would also open opportunities for infrastructure investment, financial inclusion and artist education.

A value addition, he said, would be proper certification and documentation of artworks, which could significantly enhance their market value.

“When you have proper certification with documentation and features that authenticate the work, the baseline value of that product changes. That is value,” Sodangi said.

Looking ahead to the new year, he disclosed plans for design-based exhibition masterclasses aimed at raising standards across the sector, as well as increased engagement with digital platforms.

He urged artists to understand that competition is global and that presentation and market approach are critical to value perception.

# MEETING IN THE AMAZON

## ...Essay Entry - The Queen's Commonwealth Essay Competition 2025

MUNACHISO KEN UGWUH



The Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) is a biennial meeting of the governmental/state leaders from every Commonwealth nation. Though it may not seem like it, it's a lot like the animal kingdom: a group of diverse and widespread individuals coming together.

One difference is that animals don't talk about improving economies, but if they did, it would be a talk for the history books and here is how it would be:

It begins with animals from different Commonwealth countries around the world gathering around the great Kapok tree at the heart of the Amazon rainforest.

Each animal is a leader representing their own respective country. From every direction, you can hear monkeys chattering, birds squawking, and elephants trumpeting. Then, out of the tree, comes forth... the mighty lion, King of the jungle, as the head of the whole animal kingdom, to meet every animal attending this biennial gathering.

He lets out a loud and thunderous roar, stretching farther than 8 kilometres, and suddenly, everywhere goes silent as they all bow down before him. He gives off a soft growl to commence the gathering.

Behind him is the head of the jungle, crawling up to give the guests an opening speech. "It is an honour for the Amazon rainforest to be the host of this year's animal CHOGM, and we hope you enjoy what our home has to offer as we come together to discuss more world issues impacting all of the animal kingdom and working on ways to prevent them," she says and crawls back down.

As she leaves, each leader from a Commonwealth country steps forward to introduce themselves and speak about the situations that have been going on in their country and their efforts to reduce the side effects of the problem. After that, they move on to their main objective for this year: inequality among animals – different animals living in the same environment struggle to understand communal living.

All the animals around the Kapok tree go ballistic the moment they hear this. "The leopards walk around like they own Tanzania," yells the Thompson Gazelle (Kenya's Commonwealth animal leader) "always taking all the habitats for themselves, even the ones they can't live in."

"I second that," shouts the Streamertail Bird (for Jamaica), "the owls hog every tree for themselves, like other birds aren't already living there."

Before things can get out of hand, the jungle head gives a sharp hiss to silence them all. "I understand what you're all saying, but what do you expect to gain out of violence? We'll only cause ourselves more trouble unless we take this on from a more peaceful perspective."

The king says and then steps down; all is quiet for a moment. Then Zebra (leader for Botswana) comes forward. "I agree with the king," she says with a snicker, "no one wants to be treated like they're less than, but we won't get anywhere with violence. Starting a war or execution isn't the answer. We need to come up with creative solutions on how to solve the problem so that everyone is treated equally."

After that, one monkey climbs out of the tree. "I say we institute a new policy: all animals should only take their fair share of food and only get more when necessary." She suggests. "And every animal should have a home where everything they need can be provided for them." One toucan says afterwards.

Just like that, every animal is suggesting an action plan on how to tackle the problem.

As they come to the end of the meeting, the lion king steps up to give a closing speech. "I give many thanks to all of you individuals for attending this year's CHOGM. I am glad that every creature here could come together once again to brainstorm solutions on how we can bring all the animals of the world together as one."

Munachiso Ken Ugwu is one of the Gold Medallists from Nigeria for her essay entry into the 2025 Queen's Commonwealth Essay Competition. She is a 13-year-old creative with a strong desire to make the world a better, more liveable place.

With a love for imagination, basketball, drawing, writing, reading, singing, and dreaming big, Munachiso is deeply passionate about art, creativity, and adding a touch of magic to the world, while aspiring to make a positive impact through various forms of artistic expression.

# HOW GRASSROOTS ENTREPRENEURS ARE POWERING NIGERIA'S MSME ECONOMY

IFEOMA OKEKE-KORIEOCHA



Small businesses are the backbone of Nigeria's economy, contributing about 48 percent to gross domestic product and accounting for more than 80% of jobs, according to government and industry estimates.

Across the country, micro, small, and medium enterprises make up about 96% of all businesses, driving exports, local production, and income growth, data from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) show.

Yet many struggle with limited access to funding, weak infrastructure, and skills gaps. At the community level, institutions like Ajegunle Business School (ABS) are stepping in to help close those gaps by training entrepreneurs to build sustainable businesses.

As part of efforts to change this narrative and equip SMEs with the tools to thrive, ABS recently held

its eighth annual Entrepreneurship Award and Graduation Ceremony, celebrating 14 entrepreneurs and graduating 17 founders who completed its eight-week Entrepreneurship Development Programme. Out of 40 participants who enrolled, fewer than half met the graduation criteria.

"We don't reward popularity but impact," said Alfred Konaughe, founder of Ajegunle Business School. "Our goal is to help entrepreneurs survive, grow, and create value in the economy."

ABS, founded about eight years ago, focuses on practical entrepreneurship skills, including problem-solving, communication, and business planning. Konaughe said the school was shaped by personal hardship after he and his wife lost housing due to fraud early in their marriage. "That period changed my mindset," he said. "Ajegunle was no longer a limitation. It became a platform."



Her work intercepts discarded fabrics before they reach landfills and prepares them for reuse across industries. “Textile waste can become a resource,” Folami said.

“Innovation starts with understanding what you already know.”

Beyond training, ABS maintains active engagement with alumni. Konaughe said graduates are monitored through alumni networks and linked to funding and retraining opportunities.

Last year, several ABS alumni accessed a federal government SME loan scheme offering single-digit interest rates of 9%. Many borrowed up to ₦1 million and completed repayment by November 2025.

The awards spanned 14 categories, including CEO of the Year, Techpreneur of the Year, Startup Entrepreneur of the Year, and Fashionpreneur of the Year. The recipients were selected through recommendations and background checks to ensure their businesses had measurable community impact.

One of the award recipients, Chioma Ukpabi, founder of SUWK Technologies Limited, runs a digital vocational learning platform that trains young Nigerians in skills such as fashion design, solar installation, makeup artistry, and hairdressing.

“Our focus is affordability and access,” Ukpabi said. “Our courses cost between ₦5,000 and ₦45,000, compared to about ₦200,000 in many offline centers.” SUWK operates nationwide, using artificial intelligence to guide learners toward suitable skills based on age, literacy level, and interests.

The platform also matches students with apprenticeship opportunities across Nigeria’s 774 local government areas.

Another award recipient, Sidikat Folami, has spent 18 years in the fashion industry and more than two years developing textile waste recycling solutions.

Graduates say the training reshaped how they view business. Ijeoma Ifeoma Nwabue, one of the 17 graduates, said she learned that entrepreneurship is about solving real problems, not just making profits. “I now build my business around value,” she said. “The money follows the solution.”

As Nigeria seeks inclusive growth, stories from Ajegunle highlight how MSMEs—when supported with skills, access, and structure, can help reduce poverty, create jobs, and strengthen the economy from the ground up.



(c)Brainbox

# HOW INADEQUATE HOSTEL SPACE IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES SENDS QUIVERS ON STUDENTS

CHARLES OGWO



**F**or students in public universities, the battle for education often begins with the search for a place to sleep.

Inadequate hostel space continues to unsettle academic life, sending waves of anxiety through campuses across the country.

As dawn breaks on many Nigerian public university campuses, some students are already awake, not because they live nearby, but because they spent the night on a friend's floor, in overcrowded hostels, and/or commuting long distances from off-campus rooms they can barely afford.

For thousands of students in public universities, the struggle for education goes beyond lecture halls, epileptic power supply, and hiked fees into the daily anxiety of finding a safe place to sleep.

With limited on-campus accommodation and rising living costs, the promise of higher education is increasingly shadowed by hardship, uncertainty, and resilience.

As many institutions matriculate new students for the commencement of a new academic calendar, many of the freshers are faced with accommodation malady.

Daniel Akinsola, who matriculated on Wednesday at the University of Lagos, had his joy cut short as he was faced with hostel challenges. He could not get a hostel allocation, and finds it challenging travelling from Igando to Akoka every lecture day.

Even at N80,000 accommodation fees, Adewale Akinsola, his father was ready to make the payment, but the university management insists there was not enough accommodation.



Akinsola is left with no other choice than paying N400,000 for accommodation off the campus to ensure his son is not embodied with the hustles of shuttling from Igando to campus at Akoka.

Another student who gave his name as Kazeem, said he was asked to pay N700,000 to secure a slot in the Femi Gbajabiamila hostel, a private built on-campus accommodation by the former speaker of the House of Representative.

There are concerns that privatisation of public universities' hostels will only lead to the gentrification of the university environment pushing the poor majority out of school especially with the fee regime imposed by the school management on students.

Hostel accommodations have been persistently inadequate for undergraduate students across Nigerian public universities, making it difficult for them to remain dedicated to their studies.

Jibola Ogunjobi, a student at the University of Ibadan, buttressed this point when he explained that because of the limited number of hostel slots, the institution's management decided to attend to 100 level and final year students first before considering others.

"The hostel fee is N60,000 for freshers, but the main challenge is that there is enough accommodation on campus, hence, many are forced to seek refuge elsewhere," he said.

This challenge is driving many parents crazy, even as some are questioning the rationale behind offering students' loans when they cannot secure accommodation to pursue their studies.

Experts argue that it is more advantageous for undergraduates to reside on-campus hostels than staying off-campus; but the total number

of hostel accommodations in public universities is grossly inadequate to meet the need of the overpopulated number of undergraduates in the various universities.

Gift Osikoya, a parent whose child is a student at the University of Lagos decried the unhealthy challenges her son had to face on a daily basis to meet up with his academic routine from Ejigbo suburb of Lagos to the Akoka campus of UNILAG.

"My child has to shuttle from home to school daily because of inadequate accommodation on-campus, and we have not been able to get a lodge for him off-campus.

"It's quite disturbing, he has to jostle to and fro campus every other day, and it's affecting his health and studies. The government who should rise to the challenges are building hostels at exorbitant rates," she said.

At Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU), Ile-Ife, the on-campus hostel fee is at N50,000, though some students expressed concerns that the university management would hike the money any moment, especially with the number of students increasing every session.

A student who spoke with BusinessDay in anonymity, said though there is constant power supply, the water supply is epileptic.

"We have 24/7 lights on campus, but water in my hostel is usually put off and on at a particular time," she said.

A fact remains that education cannot thrive in Nigeria where basic needs are unmet. If Nigerian public universities are to fulfil their mandate, ensuring adequate hostel accommodation must be treated not as a privilege, but as a fundamental part of student welfare and academic success.



# CLOSING THE GAP: ALUMNI INTERVENTION RESCUES EKITI PARAPO COLLEGE FROM DECAYING INFRASTRUCTURE

...holds 40th anniversary

CHARLES OGWO



**W**hen public schools struggle with aging infrastructure and limited resources, help sometimes comes from those who once walked the same corridors.

In a powerful show of gratitude and responsibility, the 1985 alumni set of Ekiti Parapo College (EPC) has returned to their alma mater, not with memories alone, but with tangible upgrades aimed at improving learning conditions for today's students.

Some projects executed by the 1985 set of the old students association include: a big generating set to power the school borehole, set of office table and executive chair for the principal.

Owotuyi Adediran, the principal of Ekiti Parapo College, who was ably represented by Olajide Olubusuyi, the vice-principal expressed gratitude to EPC 1985 set for being a model for other sets to emulate.

He encouraged other sets to respond to the needs of the school in order to sustain the spectacular name of the institution.

Babatope Ilesanmi, a member of the 1975 old students association told BusinessDay that idea to give back to their Alma Mater began some time seven years ago when they started to identify how they could contribute to the development of the institution by making the learning environment more conducive for students and teachers.

"The deplorable state of the school in the last 10 years was quite appalling, but for the intervention of the alumni association.

For our 40th anniversary, it was a combination of projects and thanksgiving. 20 sets of executive chairs at a cost of N1.2 million were donated to the school; and some money was given to the house of God, as our thanksgiving," he said.



He emphasised that as the name of the school implies, the school was established with a collective effort of the entire Ekiti People Group in 1954 in honour of the great warrior- Late Faboro who led Ekiti People in the victorious Kiriji War.

Ilesanmi said that so much is still left to be done in the Ekiti Parapo College, Ido-Ekiti. Hence, the principal was appealing to other sets to emulate the laudable strides of 1985 set and intervene in any little way possible.

The place of old students' association cannot be overemphasized in the development of instructions around the world. Many renowned institutions in world today are being upscaled through the funding from alumni.

Speaking about the thanksgiving, Ilesanmi explained that in the history of the school's West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE), the 1985 set's result was the poorest.

"Only two students had credit passes in six subjects, including Mathematics and English Language. Therefore, nobody expected anything good to come out of the EPC 85 set.

"To the glory of God, doctors, astute politicians, engineers, professors, business tycoons, and pastors emerged out of the supposedly hopeless future," he said.

The occasion was equally graced by the school cultural troops, some students, and heads of department.

The celebrants' gratitude was evident by their attires, Sashes round their necks, and unreserved dancing.



# ONCE UPON A NAIJA CHRISTMAS: GYM PLANS, PARTY VIBES, AND JOLLOF GALORE

CHINONYE ISIDIENU



Every December, I tell myself the same thing. “This Christmas, I will stay disciplined.” And honestly, the month always starts well. My gym routine is steady, my meals are controlled, and I convince myself that this year, I will balance fitfam life with the festive season.

But this Christmas, Aunt Sade peppered chicken calls my name, I will take just one... I said to myself, it's even protein, I'm safe, I muttered again, would just add another one, okay two more after all, my gym instructor says all the time “go heavy on the proteins” kicking off good today, but a Naija Christmas has its own rhythm.

The plan was simple, gym in the morning, well let's just say I skipped this part, stay committed, stay focused. But Nigeria has its own way of rewriting December routines.

By afternoon, the noise coming from daddy's music gets louder, his guests laughing and clicking glasses, this wine is good they echoed.

I should have known, why am I going downstairs, I asked my feet, uncle Chima saw me on the stairs and said, “ehen, Ada, your Aunt baked cake for you just the way you like it”, she said.

“it's special for my baby girl”. Awwwwnnn..thank you uncle, my regards to her, will call her... I told my uncle... “the both of you”, he said laughing as he pointed to where he kept the cake and went to where my dad and his friends are, carrying a plate of chinchin.

Uncle Chima's wife that's so caring of her, how do I not eat my godmother's cake, that would be very rude... I thought to myself and that particular cake I couldn't say no to it, her frostings was always so smooth and glossy, it had that light, creamy finish like she had taken her time with every swirl, the layers were always thick, soft, and not even dry, nor crumbly, just perfect.

I could smell the warm vanilla before I even cut into it, that gentle buttery scent that feels like comfort, I rushed to the direction of the cake and I ate it all, all of it without looking back. Will I regret it? I don't know for now maybe later in Mr Jude's gym running those treadmills.

Later, that day, the invitations start rolling in, my friends kept calling me and saying “we outside” and I totally shunned them with “oooh I can't”, I am helping mum in the kitchen”, well I did that by taking all the edibles I could find, especially plantains; it's not possible to resist hot plantain coming out of oil, so don't blame me, I tried my best but it wasn't good enough.

Turn that jollof rice it's burning.... my mum shouted, I immediately reached out to the wooden spoon and began stirring, I turned and turned until the smoky aroma filled the room one would think I'm making “eba”. At least this one thing I did I might as well do it well.

My first serving was for me obviously; afterall, man must chop... I will eat oooh, I told myself, until I heard my mum footsteps as she strolled in to the kitchen, go and bring plates let's serve your father's guest I quickly dropped my plate and began working, so you are eating, I thought you are doing fitfam? she said after seeing the quantity of rice in my plate on the kitchen counter....ahhh mummy today is Christmas..Hope you are not trying to make up for past days of starving yourself?, bring the moi moi your father likes it, let's give him two wraps.

After daddy saw his guests off and said his goodbyes, he came into the kitchen to tell mum to tidy up quickly, so we can get ready for the carol service, we hurried and left.

This carol service was different not the regular, the songs hit, not quiet and calm but the gbedu just dey enter, I totally forgot myself and danced until the scent of jollof rice, small chops, hit my nostrils, as the ushers swayed their trays towards my direction, those Samosa's and tiny little puffs- today, my fitfam promise, suddenly is more than negotiable.

I reached to grab my plate and that's all I can remember from Voices of Christmas.

This Christmas year was a beautiful mix of laughter, family, parties, and plates piled a little higher than expected. Next year, I will sought out this self control issue, looking down at the weight scale not bad after all, we go again tomorrow, but I hate doing burpees; that's punishment.

# HOW INSECURITY DRIVES NIGERIA INTO NEW POVERTY SPIRAL

CHINONYE ISIDIENU



Lagos is a vibrant place to celebrate the holiday season, from concerts and food outings to beach hangouts and shopping events, the city stays active all season, it is impossible to ignore. Whether you enjoy good food, music, culture, or simply spending time with family and friends, there's something for everyone to enjoy. Here are five fun activities to make the most of your Christmas in Lagos:

**Explore Theme Parks and Amusement Centres:** Theme parks are one of the easiest ways to enjoy Christmas fun in Lagos, especially if you're looking for something playful, active, and family-friendly. Doing Rides, arcades, mini-golf, games, bumper cars, in places like Hakuna Matata Theme Park By Eko Hotels, Funplex Garden Park and Rides in Shangisha, Dream Park and Gardens. It burns energy and keep everyone happy.

## Try Food Spots and Festive Hangouts:

What is Christmas without food, food is a social activity in Lagos. Try different restaurants and lounges, they stay busy and keep late hours, be open to try out new foods or go with your normal. Go to local spots, have suya, grills, etc. Rooftops, food courts, and night markets give you a place to meet friends, relax, and enjoy the season. You can also try something

cultural, Lagos has steady art events. Places like Nike Art Gallery, private studios, and pop-up exhibitions host holiday shows. It's a chance to see paintings, photography, sculpture, and buy handmade gifts.

## Attend Carol Nights and Church Events:

Carol nights and Christmas services give you a calm break from Lagos noise. Churches host music, candlelight programs, dramas, and worship concerts during December. You can go with family or friends, enjoy Christmas songs, and soak in a peaceful atmosphere. It's simple, inexpensive, and helps you slow down before the new year and always remember Jesus is the reason for the season.

## Do a Family Game or Movie Night:

Not every activity has to be outside. You can stay home, watch Christmas movies, play Ludo, cards, Monopoly, Scrabble, or host indoor parties with small chops and the ultimate smoky jollof rice. It saves money and still feels festive. Volunteer or Give Back: Donate clothes, food, or spend time with charity homes. It's meaningful, practical, and spreads the season's spirit beyond partying.

# COMPETENCE, NOT GENDER: THE FUTURE OF LEADERSHIP PRESENCE

EKEMINI AKPAKPAN

**T**oday, I am bothered by how women and girls are forging their leadership identity and presence, navigating a man's world.

But before we can have an honest conversation about this, we must first be clear about what leadership is not. Leadership is not masculinity, and authority and decisiveness are not sex-linked traits.

Biology tells us that humans are born male and female — that is sex. Gender, however, is something else entirely. It is a social construct, shaped over time by norms, expectations, and repeated behaviours.

If gender is socially constructed, then it is also socially modifiable. Civilization, by definition, requires that we evolve our socialization in ways that serve collective progress rather than undermine it.

And yet, we continue to accept leadership cultures that treat exclusion as normal rather than as a structural defect. For me, one of the most persistent contradictions in modern society is the quiet acceptance of systems that exclude nearly 50 per cent of the population from meaningful participation in decisions that directly shape their lives.

Women are biologically central to the continuity of society. They bear the physical responsibility of reproduction and navigate lived realities unique to them.

When policy and leadership decisions undermine their input and leadership presence, societies willingly design systems with incomplete intelligence. This exclusion is not just illogical; it is self-sabotaging.

Consider the health sector in Nigeria, for example, there are only 7 female health

commissioners. This is a sector that governs how people are born and how they live, and one that directly shapes women's bodies and health outcomes. When representation is absent, healthcare systems and policies risk being technically sound yet misaligned, producing outcomes that fail to reflect the realities of the entire population.

Leadership identity and presence, therefore, cannot be reduced to inherited traits or gendered performances. Leadership must shift from perception to evidence, from who fits the image to who delivers results. I remember lamenting to a friend about a female policymaker who always seems to get into gimmicks to make a point, and how it is a draining performance.

## Leadership Is Not Masculinity

Leadership is not masculinity, and authority and decisiveness are not sex-linked traits. This distinction matters because much of how leadership is imagined today is still filtered through gender norms rather than grounded in actual leadership competence.

Masculinity, as it is commonly understood, refers to a set of traits historically associated with men — assertiveness, dominance, emotional restraint, competitiveness, and physical or verbal boldness. These masculine-coded traits in themselves are not leadership competencies. Performing dominance is not the same as exercising judgment.

When leadership is narrowly defined through masculine norms, two things happen. First, women are assessed not on competence, but on conformity; whether they “look” or “sound” like what leadership has been socially conditioned to resemble.

This is not a problem of women lacking leadership ability; it is a problem of societies confusing gendered expression with leadership substance.

The Future: What Leadership Presence Could Look Like Beyond Gender Competency-based Leadership

This is leadership assessed through the substance of one's contribution.

Authority is the ability to guide direction and be accountable for consequences; decisiveness is the capacity to make timely, informed choices in uncertainty; service is the willingness to place collective outcomes above personal comfort or ego.

These are competencies, not masculine traits. In practice, this means prioritising expertise, ethical judgment, and measurable outcomes over image. It replaces charisma as a qualification with competence as proof.

## Inclusive Decision-Making

Inclusive decision-making is not an act of charity. It is a corrective measure that strengthens governance. When half the population is absent, policies become less credible and often less effective.

The Reserved Seats Bill is not a plea for favour but a structural solution to an imbalance. Inclusion is not generosity; it is a rational step toward better outcomes for everyone.

## Representation as Intelligence, Not Tokenism

Representation becomes tokenism when it is symbolic and detached from influence. But when representation is tied to decision-making power, it becomes intelligence. It is not about optics; it is about outcomes.

Where tokenism fills a seat, representation enriches deliberation.

## Systems That Value Lived Experience

A system that values lived experience recognises that expertise is not defined solely by credentials. Real-world experience reveals blind spots and practical implications that data alone cannot capture. When lived experience is treated as valid expertise, leadership becomes grounded in reality rather than abstraction.

### Redefining Leadership Presence and Unclinging to Gender Norms

Gendered norms do more than exclude women; they undermine competence. When women are pressured to fit molds that were never designed for them, their value is filtered through conformity instead of substance. This not only silences voice but strips society of innovation.

Leadership presence should be anchored on:

- Clarity — articulating purpose and direction.
  - Service — prioritising collective interest over personal gain.
- Accountability — owning decisions and consequences.
- Results — translating vision into tangible improvement.

## The Consequence

The cost of clinging to masculine norms is diminished performance. We build systems with incomplete intelligence, make decisions with limited insight, and normalise outcomes misaligned with the populations they serve.

The exclusion of women does not merely hurt women; it undermines leadership itself. In the end, the question is not whether women can lead. It is whether society is prepared to update its definition of leadership so that presence is measured by competence, service, and results, not gendered expectations.

Anything less is a self-imposed limitation on our collective potential. Loudness is not leadership. Dominance is not decision-making. Emotional restraint is not strategic clarity.

# 2026 WORLD CUP: NIGERIA'S DRAMATIC QUALIFICATION CHASE MIRRORS A NOLLYWOOD BLOCKBUSTER

ANTHONY NLEBEM



Nigeria's journey to the 2026 FIFA World Cup has taken on the twists, turns and suspense of a Nollywood movie, following a series of dramatic results, heartbreak and fresh controversy that have unexpectedly revived the Super Eagles' hopes.

## A Flying Start and a Second Lifeline

The script began with high energy as Victor Osimhen demonstrated remarkable form, leading the Super Eagles to a 4-0 defeat of the Benin Republic in Uyo. Despite the win, Nigeria finished second in Group C with 17 points, just one behind South Africa, who sealed automatic qualification. This runner-up finish handed Nigeria a second lifeline: a spot in the CAF play-offs after missing out on direct qualification

## CAF play-offs: Hope and heartbreak

Having emerged as one of the four best runners-up in the African qualifiers, the Super Eagles advanced to the CAF play-off tournament alongside Cameroon, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DR Congo) and Gabon.

Nigeria's hopes received a major boost in Rabat as Osimhen's brace inspired a convincing 4-1 extra-time victory over Gabon in the semi-final, keeping their World Cup dream alive and setting up a decisive final against DR Congo for a place in the Intercontinental Play-Offs. However, heartbreak followed as Nigeria's second lifeline was extinguished after a dramatic 4-3 penalty shootout defeat to DR Congo in the CAF play-off final. The result sparked disappointment across the country, with many Nigerians resigned to the reality that the national flag would not fly at the 2026 World Cup in the United States, Canada and Mexico.

## Fresh twist: DR Congo eligibility claims

Just as Nigeria appeared to be closing the chapter on their 2026 World Cup campaign, a fresh twist emerged. Reports surfaced alleging that DR Congo may have fielded ineligible players during the CAF play-off final, potentially opening the door for Nigeria to receive a third lifeline.



According to the reports, six DR Congo players who switched nationality allegedly failed to complete the required eligibility process, including formally renouncing their previous citizenships. DR Congo does not recognise dual nationality, making the allegations particularly serious. Further claims suggest that some players involved were over the age of 21 while still holding foreign passports, potentially breaching FIFA eligibility regulations.

## NFF petitions FIFA

Reacting swiftly, the NFF submitted a formal petition to FIFA, challenging the eligibility of the DR Congo players fielded in the decisive play-off encounter. NFF Secretary General, Dr Mohammed Sanusi, confirmed the petition, insisting that FIFA may have been misled during the clearance process.

“The Congolese rules say you cannot have dual citizenship. Some of the players have European passports. The rules are very clear, and we have submitted our petition,” Sanusi said.

He explained that FIFA’s approval was based on documentation provided by DR Congo, but alleged that the process may have been fraudulent. “Our concern is that FIFA was deceived into clearing them. FIFA goes by its own regulations based on documents submitted. What we are saying is that the process was fraudulent,” Sanusi added.

## DR Congo fires back

In response, the DR Congo Football Federation warned Nigeria against attempting to qualify through what it described as “the back door”.

“If you can’t win on the pitch, don’t try to win from the back door. The World Cup must be played with dignity and confidence, not legal tricks,” the federation said.

## The Malaysia Precedent: A Glimmer of Hope

Nigeria’s optimism has been further fuelled by a landmark FIFA decision on Wednesday, December 17, 2025. FIFA overturned the results of three Malaysia matches after finding they had fielded ineligible players using forged documents. This precedent, resulting in 3-0 forfeits, has strengthened the belief that FIFA will take a hard line if the allegations against DR Congo are proven.

## Final roll of the dice

Should Nigeria’s appeal succeed, the Super Eagles would advance to the six-team Intercontinental Play-Off in March 2026.

The Intercontinental Play-Off will determine the final two slots for the expanded 2026 FIFA World Cup, offering Nigeria a dramatic and unexpected final chance to qualify for a seventh World Cup appearance.



# ART INDEX AFRICA WRAPPED: AFRICAN ART IN 2025

## PRESS PLAY...

If African art had a Spotify Wrapped in 2025, the headline wouldn't be "fastest-growing". It would be "most consistent". In a global art market defined by contraction and caution, African art didn't spike—it held its ground.

This is Art Index Africa's African Art Wrapped 2025: a data-aware replay of what actually moved the market, shaped visibility, and defined the year—without the hype.

### The Context: A Cooling Market, Not a Collapse

According to the Art Basel & UBS Global Art Market Report 2024, global art sales declined by 4% year-on-year in 2023, driven largely by reduced activity at the highest end of the market.

Ultra-high-value transactions fell, while mid-market and institutional acquisitions showed greater resilience.

African art entered 2025 within this environment—not as an exception, but as a stable category within a cautious market.

What followed was not explosive growth, but measured continuity.

### Sales Signals: Stability Over Speculation

Public auction data up to 2024 shows that:

- Dedicated Modern and Contemporary African Art sales at Sotheby's, Christie's, and Bonhams have generated over \$100 million cumulatively since 2017.
- Sell-through rates for African art sales have remained comparatively strong, particularly for artists with institutional exhibition histories.



This digest is brought to you by Patrons MCAA. Think African art, think Patrons. Patrons is Africa's leading art advisory and dealership firm with deep expertise in African art, helping private and corporate art collectors diversify their wealth through art collection, appraisal, packaging & transportation, storage, insurance, maintenance, and restoration. Purchase or general inquiry? Reach out: [art@patronsmcaa.com](mailto:art@patronsmcaa.com).



*Africa Takes Centre Stage at the 13th edition of 1-54 Contemporary African Art Fair*

In 2025, auction houses reported:

- Fewer headline-making records,
- Continued demand for historically significant modern works and established contemporary artists,
- Increased reliance on private sales for museum and foundation acquisitions.



South African Artist, Moshekwa Langa

**Institutions: The Strongest Metric of the Year**  
If one metric defined 2025, it was institutional integration.

#### Major museums continued to:

- Acquire works by African artists for permanent collections.
  - Include African practices within broader global art narratives.
  - Move away from geographically siloed exhibitions.
- On the continent, museums and foundations strengthened programming rooted in research and historical context, reinforcing Africa's role as a producer of art history, not merely a contributor. Institutional presence—not auction records—was the clearest indicator of long-term value.

#### 2025, Wrapped (What We Can Say)

- Global art market: Down
  - African art demand: Stable
  - Institutional interest: Strong
  - Speculation: Lower
  - Long-term confidence: Higher
- 2025 didn't need dramatic numbers.

It confirmed something more important: African art no longer depends on momentum—it has structure.

This shift reflected a maturing market—less speculative flipping, more long-term placement.  
**Visibility Wrapped: Who Took the Spotlight**  
2025 was not just about “new discoveries.”

It was about expanded visibility for artists already shaping global conversations.

Artists such as Amoako Boafo, Toyin Ojih Odutola, and Joana Choumali continued to appear within museum-led contexts rather than purely commercial ones, reinforcing their positioning beyond market cycles. Meanwhile, artists including Binta Diaw, Cinga Samson, and Moshekwa Langa gained increased curatorial exposure through thematic exhibitions focused on land, migration, postcolonial memory, and material practice—particularly in European institutions.



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

# TOP BRANDING TRENDS TO LOOK OUT FOR IN 2026 (1)

FEYISITAN IJIMAKINWA

What's your brand doing to cut through industry noise and effectively reach your target audience? With only seven seconds to make a first impression, brands aren't just flaunting their missions anymore — they're proving them with actionable messaging and tangible campaigns.

As consumers crave raw, real and relatable content, businesses are shifting towards a more authentic approach in their branding strategies. In this post, we'll explore 14 must-know branding trends and discover how to engage today's audiences, strengthen brand reputation and future-proof your strategy.

2026 will bring exciting developments to branding strategies, with each new generation of consumers shaping the brand voice, persona and visual languages for businesses. As we look into the future, the stakes are higher than ever before for brands to stay relevant and connect with their audience.

Below, we've compiled a list of the top branding trends for 2026 based on their social impact, industry relevance and engagement potential.

## 1. Purpose-Driven Branding

It's no longer enough to have a mission statement presented on a website or a cause listed in your marketing materials. 94% of users value brands with a purpose beyond simply making a profit. Nowadays, customers expect brands to actively demonstrate their values, speak up on societal issues or contribute to meaningful causes.

In 2026, purpose-driven branding will be the new normal for businesses and those who fail to align with a pressing national and global issues may risk losing customers to more socially conscious competitors. Consumers aren't just paying attention to what your brand sells — they're interested in why you do what you do. You can adopt purpose-driven strategies by following these steps:

- i. Identifying causes that align naturally with your business and target audience*
  - ii. Making meaningful commitments*
  - iii. Communicating these efforts clearly and consistently*
- Purpose-driven branding isn't just about building trust — it's about becoming a brand people genuinely believe in.*

## 2. AI-Driven Hyper-Personalisation

Brands can use AI tools to analyse customer data and behaviour, segment their audience and deliver tailored content and recommendations to enhance customer experience. 76% of users are inclined to purchase from brands that offer personalised experiences.

As Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML) continue to advance, businesses can anticipate their target audience's needs, respond to their preferences and deliver hyper-personalized experiences at scale.

For instance, Spotify's annual "Wrapped" campaign uses behavioural data to create unique and tailored summaries for each user, showcasing their top songs, genres and listening habits from the past year. The platform also features personalized playlists like "Discover Weekly", "Release Radar" or custom mixes based on users' listening history.

## 3. Authentic Storytelling

Consumers aren't drawn to polished and picture-perfect narratives anymore but rather focus on imperfect and real stories that they can relate to. A notable 86% of consumers value authenticity from brands they interact with. This shift in customer expectations transcends traditional advertising and marketing tactics, and focuses on building trust and emotional resonance through transparent and relatable content.

A prime example is Airbnb's "Host Stories" series, where the company showcases real-life experiences of hosts and guests.

This approach highlights the personal connections and cultural exchanges facilitated by the platform and humanises its core values.

#### 4. Minimalism and Simplicity

Clean and minimalist branding is all about simple logos, a limited colour palette, strategic use of white space and easily readable typography. This approach focuses on stripping away excess elements to highlight the core brand values and communicate your Unique Value Proposition (UVP). You can take the minimalist route in your website design, social media posts and product packaging for a consistent visual identity across all touchpoints.

While there's nothing simple or ordinary about Airtel's products, its branding strategy is sleek, minimal and futuristic, which puts the spotlight on its innovative and cutting-edge technology.

#### 5. Strategic Underconsumption

Underconsumption core and strategic spending are two raging online trends that reflect a growing frustration with excessive influencer and a desire for authenticity and financial prudence.

This branding trend is the direct result of constant seismic shifts in the global economy, overproduction challenges and impulse purchases that deplete resources.

The underconsumption movement emphasises buying only what's necessary, prioritising quality over quantity and reusing items to combat hyper-consumerism. These spend-curving trends reflect a shift towards mindful consumption, responsible marketing and a preference for sustainable products.

Kilimanjaro, Nigeria's Quick Service Restaurant (QSR) operator, uses eco-friendly packaging — or no packaging at all — as a key branding strategy to promote its environmentally conscious mission and products.

Another great example of a brand promoting underconsumption is Restyle App. It offers personalised styling advice for users to create new

clothing combinations with items they already own rather than constantly buying new ones. This way, consumers can still satisfy their desire for new looks without buying and discarding clothes, which promotes responsible and sustainable fashion choices.

#### 6. Joyconomy Practices

Joyconomy practices try to mitigate the maelstrom of anxiety-inducing news and modern-day stresses by prioritising joy and emotional well-being.

In the face of constant technological advancements and a rapidly changing world, consumers need a form of escapism and self-care to find balance and happiness in their lives. Brands can tap into this joy deficit through wholesome, uplifting and inclusive campaigns that promote positivity, self-love and authentic connections.

To be continued...



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

# THAT CHRISTMAS NIGHT

UDY OSARO-EDOBOR



On the night of December 23rd, the whole of Jabi Estate, where a high profile Christmas event was scheduled for dawn was asleep except one person.

Zara Idogei, a 27-year-old event decorator, was standing in the middle of the road barefoot, holding a frying pan like a weapon. And she was chasing Father Christmas... literally.

The man, fully dressed in a red suit, fake beard in place, sack over his shoulder—was sprinting down the quiet street while Zara ran after him, shouting:

“Thief! Thief wey wear Father Christmas cloth!”

If anyone had opened their window, they would have seen a mad looking young woman in shorts and a tank top, puffed hair and one missing slipper, charging at a frightened, pot-bellied Santa.

Only ten minutes earlier, Zara had stepped outside the event venue within the estate to start her early morning decoration for a wealthy client’s Christmas breakfast party. The contract was big, her rent depended on it and December had already shown her shege. She had just set up her ladder and opened the boxes she stored outdoors when she noticed a shadowy figure in red bending behind her gate.

She stared in confusion, trying to understand what the person was doing—until it hit her.

The man was stealing her entire decoration kit. Ribbons, lights, metallic angels, artificial snow, rechargeable lanterns—items worth more than her generator. That was how the chase started.

After five full minutes, Santa tripped over a pothole and fell. Zara, panting like someone who had just wrestled a masquerade, stood over him and raised her frying pan, ready to beat the living daylight out of him. He raised his hands quickly.

“Madam abeg! Nor hit me! Make I explain!”

“Explain wetin?” she snapped. “That you’re the kind of Father Christmas that steals instead of giving?”

He swallowed hard. “My madam never pay me since August. My pikin dey hospital. I just... I needed money.”

Zara paused.

He removed the beard. What stood before her was not a criminal but a tired man—exhausted, embarrassed and desperate.

For a moment, her anger wrestled with compassion. Then she sighed and dropped the frying pan.

“Oya stand up. Return my things first.”

He obeyed immediately. But as Zara collected the box from him, something about the way his hands shook troubled her. She turned back to him.

“What hospital is your child in?”

“Wuse General. He needs blood tests and I don’t have anybody left to borrow from.”

Zara wasn’t rich but she knew hopelessness. She had tasted it many times herself. So she made a very un-Zara decision.

“Follow me,” she said. “If you help me finish this decoration before 6 am., I will pay you enough for the test.”

His eyes widened. “You will help me?”

“Well,” she shrugged, “at this point, it’s the least I can do.”

Two hours later, the client arrived—a well known Abuja businessman who also served as a Special Adviser to a Senator. He stepped into the decorated space, took a slow look around and suddenly froze.

“Who is that Santa?” he asked sharply.

Before Zara could respond, the man rushed forward and grabbed Santa’s face with both hands.

“Emmanuel?! Is this you?!”

They stared at each other like ghosts.

Emmanuel—the Santa was his childhood friend, the one who had disappeared fifteen years earlier after investing everything he had in a business that collapsed. Ashamed, broken and abandoned by many—including his wife, Emmanuel had quietly faded from everyone’s life.

The special adviser pulled him into a tight embrace. Even Zara felt tears sting her eyes.

“Why didn’t you come to me?” he asked, his voice breaking. “All these years you’ve been suffering?”

Zara stood there, clutching a ribbon, watching two grown men cry without shame.

Within minutes, the special adviser turned to his driver.

“Go to Wuse General Hospital. Pay everything for the boy. Every single thing.”

Then he faced Emmanuel.

“You start work immediately. You’ll head the new welfare unit in my constituency.”

Finally, he turned to Zara.

“And you, young lady, you’re decorating every event I hold next year.” He paused. “And you’re charging double.”

Zara nearly fainted.

Emmanuel’s son recovered. Zara’s business exploded and by the following year, she had so many bookings that she had to hire staff.

Emmanuel never stopped being grateful. He often told anyone who cared to listen that a woman with a frying pan gave him a second chance at life when everyone else had walked away.

On Zara’s next birthday, Emmanuel showed up with a gift—a full set of shiny new frying pans. They both burst into laughter when she opened it. It became their inside joke, a reminder of the night everything changed.

Each time Zara saw Emmanuel and his now healthy, hefty son waving happily, she smiled.

That particular Christmas was her best ever because she got her Christmas miracle —one that started with a fake Santa, a stolen box of decorations and one angry woman holding a frying pan.

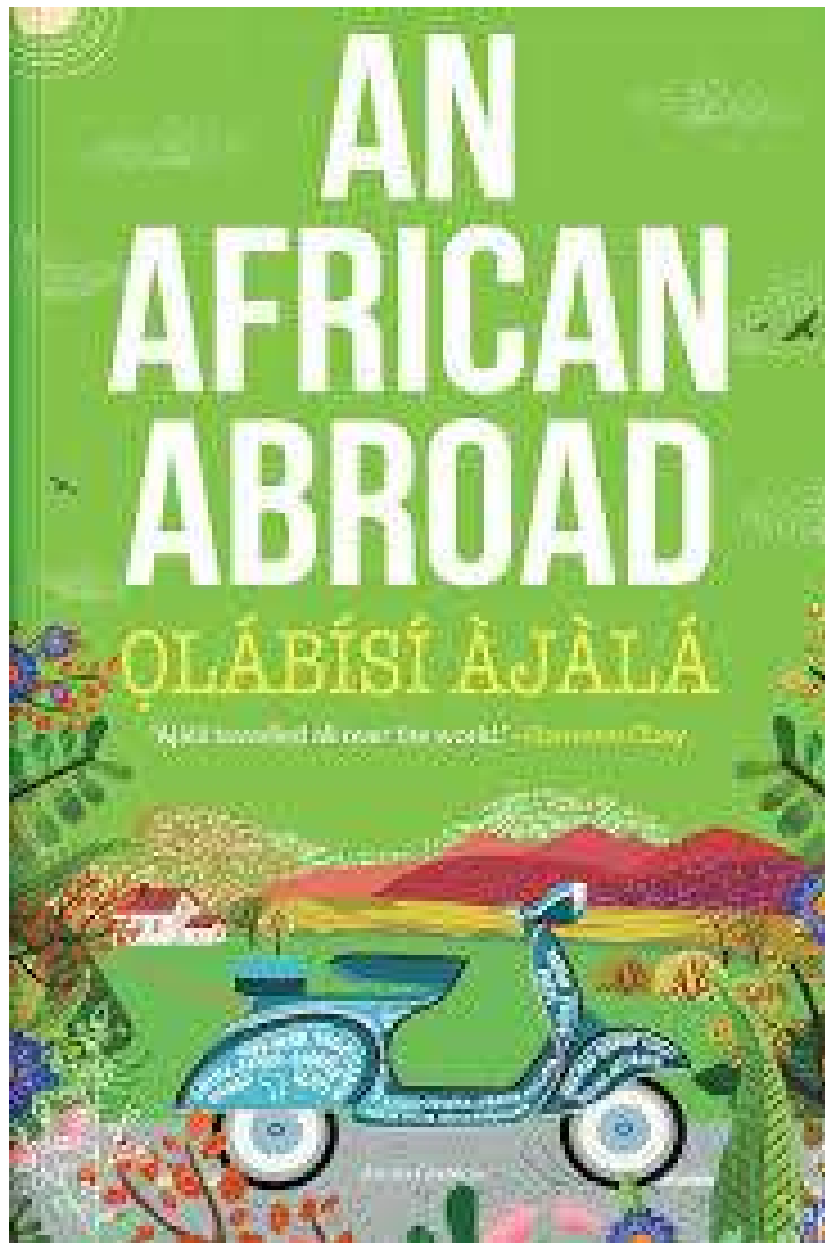


### Udy Osaro-Edobor

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

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

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When Travel Was Not for the Faint-Hearted-A Review of  
Olabisi Ajala's An African Abroad

Title: An African Abroad  
Author: Olabisi Ajala  
Year of Publication: 2023  
Number of Pages: 281  
Category: Travel Memoir

# AN AFRICAN ABROAD

TITILADE OYEMADE

If you are Nigerian especially if you love travel you have most likely heard the phrase “Ajala the Traveller.” What many people may not realise is that this popular saying comes from a real person: Olabisi Ajala, an adventurous Nigerian journalist and globetrotter whose life was anything but ordinary.

This newly published edition introduces readers to a man whose boldness is almost unbelievable. At a time when international travel was neither easy nor comfortable, Ajala set out to roam the world with nothing but a scooter and an unshakeable sense of confidence. Unlike today’s travellers who move effortlessly from one country to another by air, his journeys demanded courage, resilience, and a willingness to embrace uncertainty.

Olabisi Ajala travelled to an astonishing 78 countries, interviewing presidents and other prominent figures along the way. Yet, as you read, you are often left wondering whether he was simply doing his job as a journalist or recklessly courting danger. At times, his actions inspire admiration; at other moments, they provoke anxiety. He frequently finds himself in risky situations, and as a reader, you cannot help but worry about how he will escape them.

Rather than covering all 78 countries, the author focuses on selected regions such as Asia, the Middle East, Russia, Australia and a few others. Some countries clearly hold more personal significance than others. Interestingly, this book reads less like a traditional travel memoir and more like a historical account. Ajala does not romanticise his experiences; instead, he presents them honestly, including the unpleasant realities of the places he visited.

One of the book’s strengths is its structure: readers can choose to read by country, depending on their interests. As the stories unfold, recurring themes emerge, racial discrimination, poverty, assault, and police brutality. These accounts can be deeply unsettling and may even make readers question whether they should visit such countries. However, it is important to remember that these experiences occurred in the 1960s. This contrast encourages readers to reflect on how much the world has changed, or to seek reassurance by comparing past realities with present-day conditions.

Ajala’s experiences feel authentic, particularly because many readers may recognise or relate to the maltreatment he describes. This makes it clear that he is not exaggerating. The book also leaves you with unanswered questions especially about how he managed to fund such extensive travels. If he were alive today, readers would undoubtedly be eager to ask him countless questions.

At certain points, the journeys stop feeling adventurous and begin to feel stressful. Ajala moves from one country to another with reckless casualness, almost as if crossing borders

required no more thought than a trip to the supermarket. He often travels without a clear destination or purpose, something only Olabisi Ajala could successfully pull off. While some chapters offer fascinating insights into different cultures, others seem driven by drama, leaving readers wondering what exactly he was searching for as he roamed the world.

True to expectation, the story ends with him marrying a foreigner perhaps the most predictable outcome for someone who spent his life crossing borders. Amid all the tension and chaos, the book is laced with humour, often making readers laugh out loud despite the seriousness of some situations.

By the final page, you may find yourself questioning your own desire to travel. Instead of awakening a longing for adventure, the book occasionally provokes unease, though this was clearly not the author’s intention. Instead of rushing to dust off your passport or plan your next trip, you may pause, reflect, and reconsider. Yet, in a strange way, the book still succeeds: it reminds us that travel is indeed one of the greatest forms of education. The only question is whether you are brave enough to seek that education in the way Olabisi Ajala did or whether his story will simply spark your curiosity from a safe distance.



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

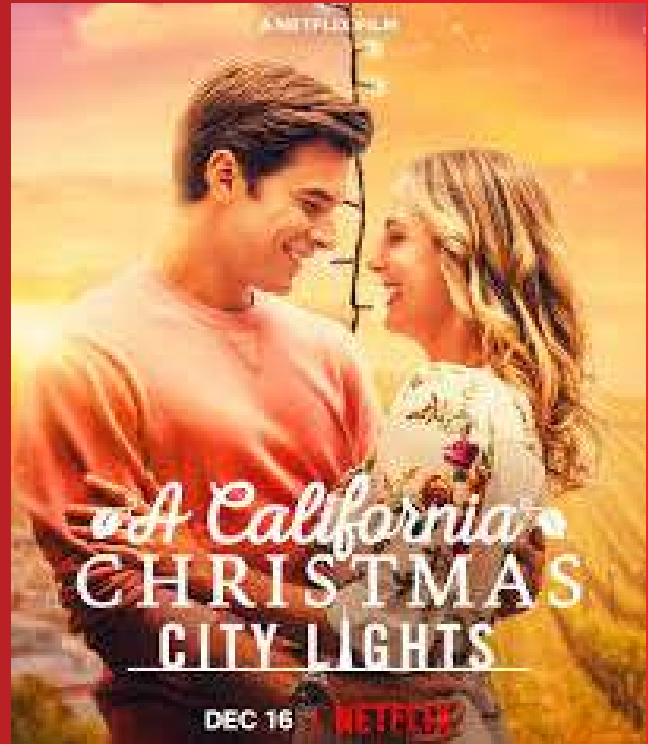
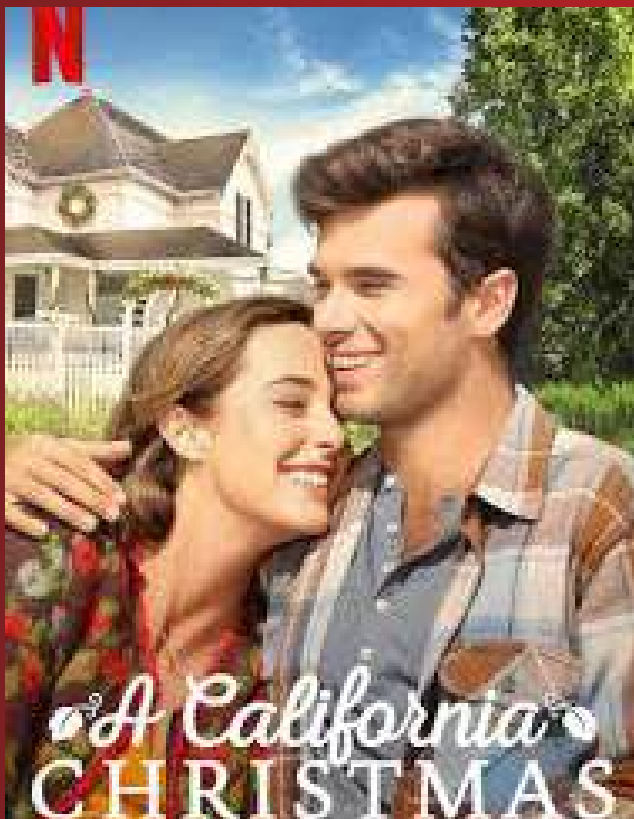
### WINE AND LOVE (2025)

Remember it's the season of love and most of the movies on Netflix are all about Christmas and love. So, let's dive right into it, this week we are reviewing a South African movie. The son of a very wealthy man lived a happy life and felt he could get any girl he wanted, he would date them, use them and dump them after a while. One day during a company event he meets this very pretty young medical student and falls in love with her, but she was a hard nut to crack and wouldn't fall for his tricks. To prove that he loves her, he decided to swap places with his friend who worked with his family. The game was for them to swap names and positions and find out if the girls would still find him attractive, if he was a nobody. You will need to go check out the movie to find out how it turned out for the 2 friends. The 109m South African romantic comedy films, comedies, romance, African was directed by Amanda Lane, the featured Ntobeko Sushi, Masali Baduza, Thandouwethu Zondi, Thando Thane the, Bongile Mantsai etc.



## A CALIFORNIA CHRISTMAS (2020)

Joseph lived a carefree life, nothing mattered to him as he had money, influence, wealth, he could get any girl to date him and just did not care about their life. His mum wanted him to learn, sit up and run the multi-million dollar, he needed to prove himself and to do that he needed to travel to the countryside and convince Callie, a young ranch owner to sell their property to their company for them to build on. In order to persuade Callie to sell, Joseph must pretend to be a ranch manager, take care of the animals and service the ranch. Callie knew there was something off about Joseph but couldn't lay her hand on it, well Callie kept watching him to know who he really was. Suddenly, Joseph found out the mission was going south instead of how his mother had planned. You will need to watch this movie to see how Joseph lost focus on the assignment he was sent on. The 106m holiday romance, comedy, drama, romance movie directed by Shaun Paul Piccinino, they featured actors like Lauren Swickard, Josh Swickard, Ali Afshar, David Del Rio, Katelyn Epperly, Amanda Detmer, Natalia Mann, Gunnar Anderson and many more



## A CALIFORNIA CHRISTMAS: CITY LIGHT (2021)

This is a special sequel to "A California Christmas", this feels like part 2 to my previous movie. In this movie, Callie decided to date Joseph after her mum passed on and they lived happily on the ranch. Joseph was able to convince his mum not to buy the ranch, he helped Callie find a way to sell the part of the winery, he helped her expand it, got some investors and kept the ranch, the funds were able to pay off the debt and they started a new business. In this edition Joseph proposed to Callie and had to take her to the city to help her see what the city hold. He was asked to come and work & save his father's company. Getting to the city they started having so many issues and this led Callie to breaking up with Joseph. You will need to go check out the movie to find out what happened to them and why. The 105m romantic comedy films, comedies, romance was directed by Shaun Paul Piccinino, they featured actors like Lauren Swickard, Josh Swickard, Ali Afshar, David Del Rio, Natalia Mann, Gunnar Anderson, Noah James, Laura James etc.

