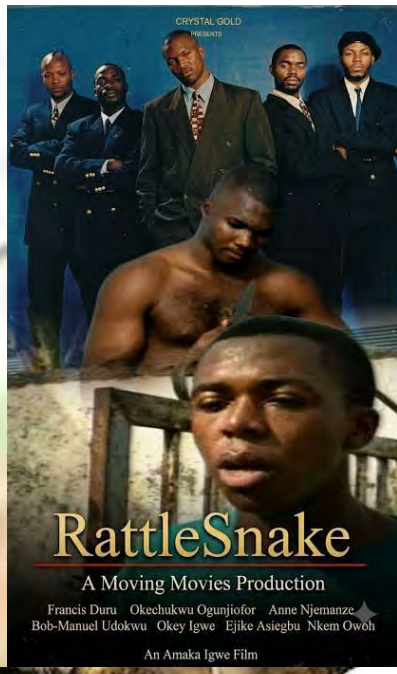
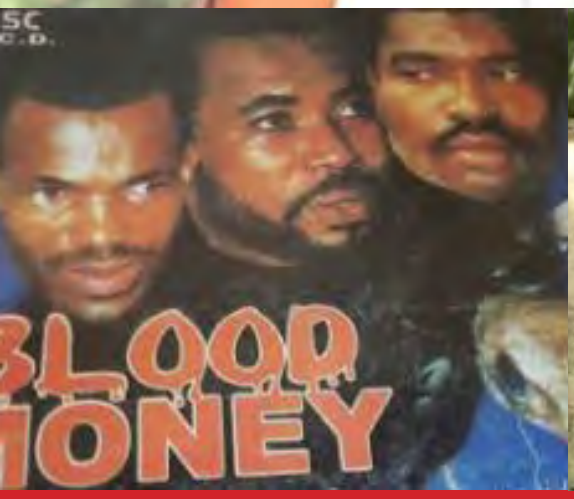
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5 MEMORABLE MOVIES THAT DEFINED FRANCIS DURU'S NOLLYWOOD CAREER



FASHION

The cost of looking at every owambe



FOOD

3 homemade drinks to try in this heat

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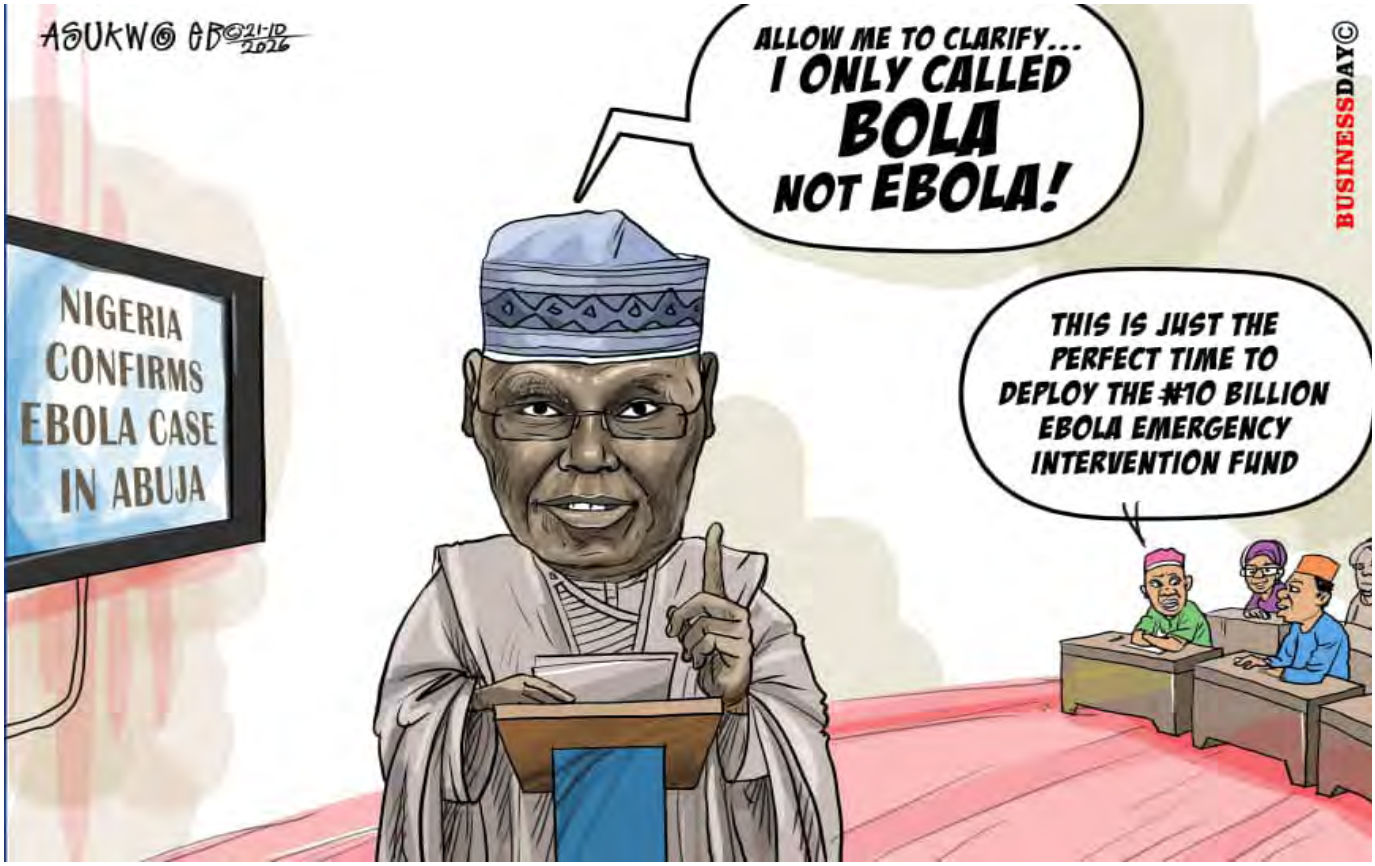
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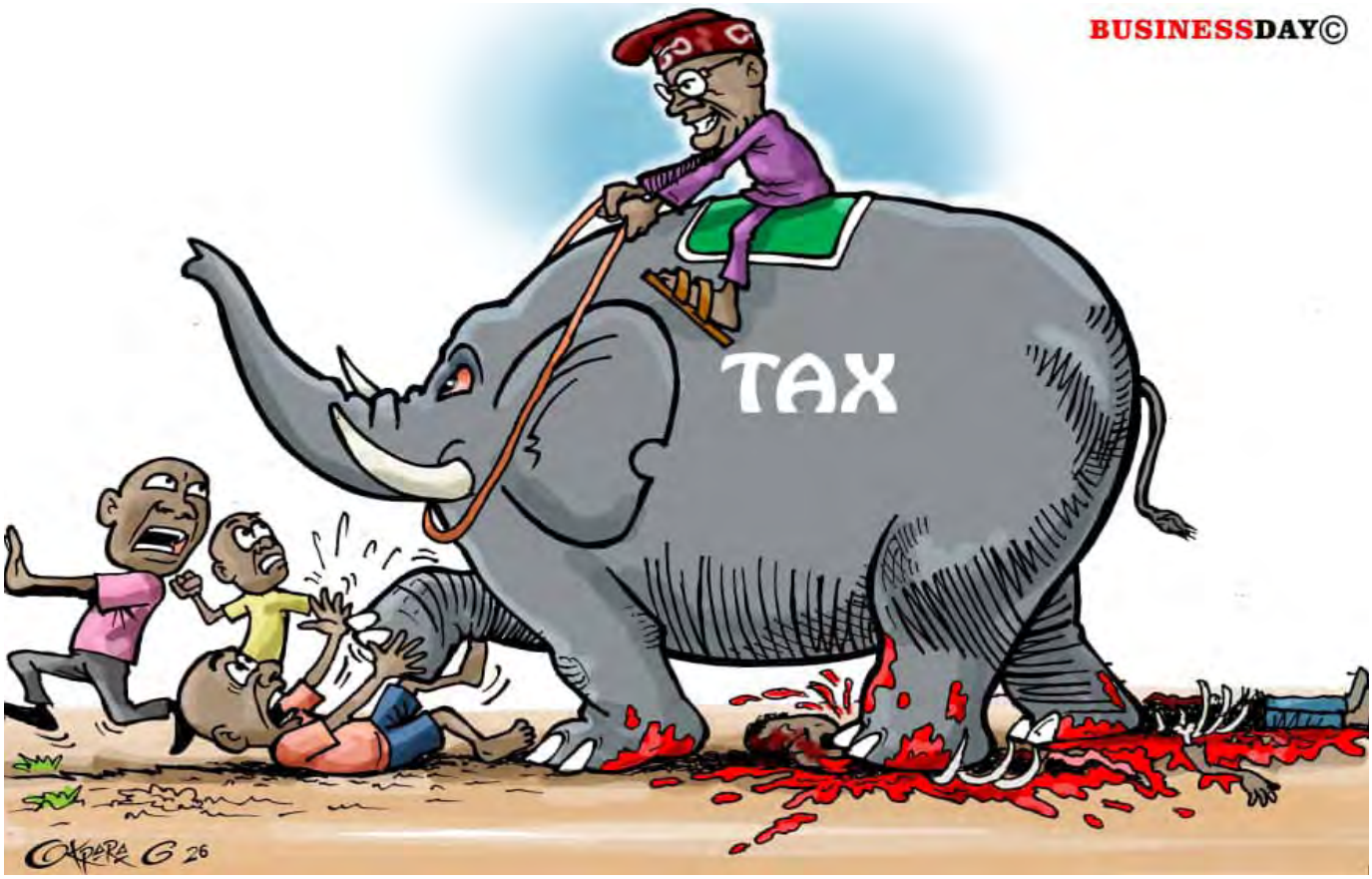


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5 MEMORABLE MOVIES THAT DEFINED FRANCIS DURU'S NOLLYWOOD CAREER

DESTINY CHIEDU



Francis Duru became a familiar face in Nollywood after playing Ahanna in Rattlesnake, the 1995 film that introduced him to a wider audience. More than three decades later, the veteran actor had built a filmography spanning different generations of Nigerian cinema, from the home-video era to newer productions.

Over more than three decades, Duru built a filmography that included crime thrillers, dramas and commercial comedies. His performances in films such as Rattlesnake and Merry Men: The Real Yoruba Demons reflected different stages of an industry that continued to change around him.

Here are five films that offer a glimpse into his career and the work for which audiences remember him.

1. Rattlesnake (1995): The role that put him on the map

For many Nollywood viewers, Francis Duru will always be associated with Ahanna in Amaka Igwe's Rattlesnake.

The crime thriller follows a young man whose life takes a dark turn after a family tragedy pushes him towards crime. Duru's portrayal helped make Ahanna one of the memorable characters of Nollywood's home-video era, giving the actor a breakthrough role that would follow him throughout his career.

The film's importance goes beyond Duru's performance. It became one of the defining productions of early Nollywood, helping demonstrate the appeal of ambitious Nigerian stories distributed directly to home audiences.



For an actor who would spend decades working across film and television, Rattlesnake was the career-defining starting point.

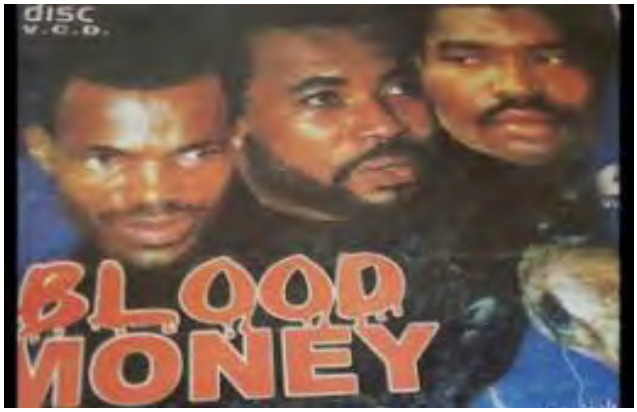
2. Blood Money (1997): A film from Nollywood's controversial thriller era

If Rattlesnake helped establish Duru's name, Blood Money belongs to the wave of Nigerian thrillers that turned anxieties about wealth, ritual practices and moral corruption into popular entertainment.

The film centres on the dangerous pursuit of riches through sinister means, reflecting themes that resonated strongly with audiences during Nollywood's home-video boom.

Such stories provoked conversations about the price of sudden wealth and the choices people make in pursuit of it.

Its place in Duru's filmography connects him to a period when Nigerian filmmakers were building audiences with bold, locally rooted stories that often pushed social and supernatural fears to the forefront.



3. Home in Exile (2010): A reminder of his staying power

By the time Home in Exile arrived in 2010, Duru had already spent more than two decades in the industry. He was no longer simply the actor audiences remembered from the Nollywood classics of the 1990s; he was a performer whose career had continued through changing production styles and audience tastes.

The film represents that longevity, adding to a body of work that extended well beyond his breakthrough years.

Unlike Rattlesnake, which is closely tied to his rise, Home in Exile is best understood as part of the longer arc of his career. It illustrates how Duru continued to work as Nollywood moved into a new phase of filmmaking.



4. Merry Men: The Real Yoruba Demons (2018): His place in modern commercial Nollywood

Duru's appearance as Inspector Jack in Merry Men: The Real Yoruba Demons placed him in a different Nollywood landscape from the one that had first made him famous.

Directed by Toka McBaror, the crime comedy follows four wealthy men whose glamorous lifestyles and daring schemes draw them into trouble with powerful interests. The film starred Ayo Makun, Jim Iyke, Ramsey Nouah and Falz.

Its commercial, star-driven approach reflected the newer Nollywood model, which increasingly combined comedy, action, celebrity casting and theatrical releases to attract wide audiences.

For Duru, the film demonstrated his continued presence in an industry that had changed considerably since the home-video era. He was still finding roles in productions aimed at a new generation of moviegoers.

5. Mboputa (2020): Recognition beyond his breakthrough years

Duru's career received another significant endorsement in 2020 when he won Best Actor in a Leading Role (Igbo) at the Best of Nollywood Awards for Mboputa.

The award gives this film a particular place in his story. While Rattlesnake is remembered as the role that brought him wider recognition, Mboputa represents the professional acclaim he continued to earn decades later.

It also highlights the contribution of Igbo-language filmmaking to Nollywood's wider landscape, where regional-language productions provide space for stories and performances that might otherwise receive less attention in mainstream English-language cinema.

The recognition showed that Duru's career could not be measured by nostalgia alone; his work continued to earn industry honours well into the 2020s.

A career that crossed Nollywood generations

From the breakthrough of Rattlesnake to the recognition he received for Mboputa, Francis Duru's career followed the evolution of Nigerian cinema itself. Blood Money connects him to the era of provocative home-video thrillers, Home in Exile reflects his longevity, and Merry Men places him within modern commercial Nollywood.

These films offer different entry points into the work of an actor whose career extended well beyond the role that first made him widely recognisable.



3 HOMEMADE DRINKS TO TRY IN THIS HEAT

ESTHER EMOEKPERE



The hot weather has many of us reaching for something cold to drink. While there are plenty of options to buy, making your own drinks at home is a simple way to enjoy your preferred flavours and control how much sugar goes into them.

If you are looking for ideas to try, these three recipes are worth adding to your list. They use ingredients readily available in local markets and supermarkets, and each can be prepared ahead and chilled, making them convenient to have on hand throughout the day.

Pineapple and ginger zobo

Zobo is a popular Nigerian drink made from dried hibiscus petals, commonly sold as zobo leaves. Its tangy flavour pairs well with pineapple and ginger, while cloves add a mild spice. Making it at home also allows you to adjust the sweetness to your preference. Ingredients

2 cups dried zobo leaves
1 medium pineapple
1 large piece of fresh ginger
3–4 cloves, optional
Water
Sugar or honey to taste, optional
Ice cubes, for serving

Method

1. Rinse the zobo leaves thoroughly under running water to remove dust and dirt.

2. Wash, peel and cut the pineapple, reserving some of the flesh for the drink. Peel and slice the ginger.

3. Place the zobo leaves in a pot with the pineapple peel, ginger, cloves and water. Bring to a boil, then reduce the heat and simmer for about 20–30 minutes.

4. Remove the pot from the heat and allow the mixture to cool.

5. Strain the liquid into a clean bowl or jug, removing the leaves, ginger and pineapple peel.

6. Add pineapple juice or blend and strain some of the reserved pineapple flesh, then stir it into the zobo. Sweeten to taste if desired.

7. Refrigerate until cold and serve over ice.



Lemon and limeade drink

For a citrus-based option, lemon and lime make a simple drink with a sharp, tangy flavour. A little sweetener balances the acidity, while cold water brings everything together. Fresh mint is optional if you have some at home.

Ingredients

2 lemons
2 limes
Water
2–3 tablespoons of sugar or honey, or to taste
A few fresh mint leaves, optional
Ice cubes, for serving

Method

1. Wash the lemons and limes thoroughly. Cut them in half and squeeze out the juice, removing any seeds.

2. Pour the juice into a jug and add the cold water.

3. Stir in the sugar or honey until it dissolves. Taste and adjust the sweetness or add more water if the flavour is too sharp.

4. Add the mint leaves, if using, and refrigerate until chilled.

5. Serve in glasses over ice, with a slice of lemon or lime for garnish if desired.



Pineapple and cucumber juice

Pineapple brings a sweet, tangy flavour, while cucumber adds a mild, fresh taste. Blended together, they make a straightforward homemade juice that requires only a few ingredients. The sweetness of the pineapple may be enough on its own, so taste the mixture before adding any extra sweetener.

Ingredients

½ medium ripe pineapple
1 medium cucumber
1–2 cups of cold water, depending on the desired consistency
Juice of ½ lime, optional
Honey to taste, optional
Ice cubes, for serving

Method

1. Wash the pineapple and cucumber. Peel the pineapple, remove its tough core and cut the flesh into chunks. Peel the cucumber if preferred, then cut it into pieces.

2. Put the pineapple and cucumber into a blender. Add one cup of cold water and blend until smooth.

3. Add more water gradually if the juice is too thick.

4. Strain through a fine sieve if you prefer a smoother drink. Otherwise, serve it unstrained.

5. Stir in the lime juice and honey, if using. Taste and adjust as needed.

6. Refrigerate until chilled or serve immediately over ice.



THE COST OF LOOKING GOOD AT EVERY OWAMBE

DESTINY CHIEDU





The invitation has arrived, and the first thought is often what to wear. Is there aso ebi to buy? How much will the tailor charge for the design? Will the shoes and bag in the wardrobe match the outfit, or will new ones be needed? Then comes the appointment for makeup, the gele, the hair and the accessories that will complete the look. Before the party begins, there is already a list of expenses to settle.

For many Nigerian women, attending an owambe is an opportunity to dress up, experiment with fashion and put together an outfit that reflects their personal style. From the choice of fabric to the design of the dress and the accessories that bring everything together, getting ready can be just as exciting as the celebration itself.

But that excitement can come at a price, particularly when wedding invitations arrive one after another. A woman who has just spent money on an outfit for one celebration may soon have another event to prepare for, with a different aso ebi, another tailoring fee and more money to set aside for beauty services.

The spending can become even more noticeable when several events fall within the same month. There are clothes to buy, outfits to sew and appointments to keep, alongside the usual expenses of daily life. Even when each purchase seems reasonable on its own, the total can become substantial once everything is added together.

For some women, the question is not whether they want to look good at an owambe, but how much they are willing or able to spend to achieve the look they want. While some enjoy investing in elaborate outfits for special occasions, others have to consider whether buying new clothes for every invitation is worth the expense.

When the fabric is only the beginning

The cost of dressing for an owambe extends beyond the price of aso ebi. Once the fabric has been purchased, the wearer must consider the cost of turning it into an outfit and completing the look.

Consider a woman preparing for a wedding who spends N50,000 on aso ebi and another N20,000 on tailoring. She then spends N40,000 on shoes, a purse and jewellery, N27,000 on nails, N53,000 on makeup and N10,000 on transportation.

By the time she is ready to leave for the event, she has spent N200,000, without accounting for other possible expenses such as hair styling, gele tying or money to spray at the party.

The calculation shows how quickly the cost of a single outfit can rise. What begins as a purchase of fabric becomes a collection of expenses, each contributing to the final appearance.



For women who attend several celebrations within a short period, the spending can accumulate. An outfit that costs N200,000 for one wedding could mean another substantial expense if the next invitation calls for a different fabric, a new design and additional beauty services.

The challenge, therefore, is not only how much a woman spends on one occasion, but how often she has to repeat the process.

The pressure to show up differently

Aso ebi is more than fabric worn by guests at a Nigerian celebration. It helps identify family members, friends and other groups connected to the celebrant, making it an important part of the event's visual identity.

For guests, buying the designated fabric can be a way to show support and participate in the celebration. But the purchase is only one part of the preparation, particularly for women who want to coordinate the fabric with a carefully designed outfit, makeup and accessories.

There is also the question of whether to repeat an outfit. Some women are comfortable wearing a dress to different occasions, while others prefer to create a different look for each event. Attending several celebrations involving the same friends and relatives can make that decision more noticeable, particularly when photographs are shared on social media.

Yet the desire to dress well is not always about pressure. For many women, choosing an outfit, experimenting with styles and getting ready with friends are part of the enjoyment of an owambe. The clothes become a way to express personal taste while celebrating someone important to them.

The difficulty arises when the cost of maintaining that appearance competes with other financial priorities. With several invitations arriving at once, women may have to decide which fabrics to buy, which events to attend and how much they can reasonably spend on each occasion.



Making the wardrobe work harder

For women who attend weddings regularly, managing the cost of looking good can require a change in how they approach their wardrobes.

Rather than treating every invitation as a reason to purchase a complete new look, women can make existing clothes work for different occasions. A well-made outfit can be styled with different jewellery, bags, shoes or hairstyles, creating a fresh appearance without paying for an entirely new ensemble.



Accessories can make a difference, particularly when the clothing itself is versatile enough to accommodate different combinations. A change of shoes, earrings or bag can alter the overall look without requiring another round of spending on fabric and tailoring.

Women can also be selective about which aso ebi they buy, especially when several celebrations fall within the same month. Where the celebrant allows it, wearing an existing outfit in a suitable colour or style can be an alternative to purchasing new fabric.

Planning ahead can also help. Setting a budget for the complete look, rather than considering each purchase separately, makes it easier to see how much an event will cost before committing to additional expenses.

These choices do not have to mean abandoning personal style. They can instead help women decide which parts of their appearance matter most to them and where they can spend less without compromising the look they want.

The people behind the look

The cost of an owambe outfit also supports a network of businesses and service providers. Tailors, fashion designers, makeup artists, gele stylists, hairstylists and accessory sellers all contribute to the final appearance.

Their services offer convenience, specialised skills and the finishing touches many guests want for important celebrations. However, prices can vary according to the complexity of a design, the materials used, the provider's experience and the level of service requested.

For customers, understanding these differences can help them decide where to spend more and where to make adjustments. A woman who wants an elaborate outfit may choose to allocate more money to tailoring, while another may prefer a simpler design and invest in makeup or accessories.

Reducing costs does not always mean choosing the cheapest option. Reusing shoes and bags, planning outfits early and selecting designs that can be worn again may offer better value than repeatedly purchasing items for a single occasion.

Looking good without overspending

Owambe fashion remains an important part of how many Nigerians celebrate weddings, birthdays and other milestones. The clothes, colours and carefully assembled looks contribute to the atmosphere, giving guests an opportunity to express themselves while honouring the people hosting the events.

But when celebrations come in quick succession, the cost of looking good can become difficult to manage. Each invitation brings a new decision about what to wear, what to buy and how much to spend.

Some women may consider an elaborate outfit a worthwhile investment in their appearance and the celebration. Others may prefer to repeat clothes, change their accessories or reserve new purchases for occasions that matter most to them.

Ultimately, looking good at every owambe does not have to mean starting from scratch each time. A wardrobe built around versatile pieces, thoughtful purchases and personal style can make it easier to enjoy the celebrations without allowing the pursuit of a new look to dictate every spending decision.

NIGERIAN FIRMS MUST STRENGTHEN FINANCIAL REPORTING AHEAD OF IFRS 18, SAYS KRESTON PEDABO'S ASEMAH





Nigerian companies need to strengthen financial reporting, internal controls and corporate governance to improve transparency, accountability and investor confidence, Peter Asemah, Partner at Kreston Pedabo, has said. In this interview, he discusses persistent reporting weaknesses, the role of the Financial Reporting Council of Nigeria (FRC), preparations for the implementation of IFRS 18 and reforms needed to strengthen the country's financial reporting framework.

Peter Asemah is a Partner at Kreston Pedabo, a leading professional services and assurance firm in Nigeria. Based in the firm's Lagos office, he has extensive experience in audit, assurance and advisory services, working with clients across diverse industries to enhance financial reporting, strengthen governance and support regulatory compliance. He is recognised for his client-focused approach, technical expertise and commitment to delivering high-quality professional services. He works closely with business leaders and stakeholders to provide practical insights that support sustainable growth, operational efficiency and sound financial management.

The Financial Reporting Council of Nigeria (FRC) continues to play an important role in strengthening financial reporting standards and accountability. From your perspective as an audit partner, how has the evolving regulatory environment changed the way Nigerian companies approach financial reporting and statutory audits?

I would say the biggest shift is that companies are increasingly recognising that financial reporting goes beyond producing numbers; it requires supporting, explaining and defending those numbers. There is now greater emphasis on proper documentation, strong internal controls and compliance with IFRS requirements.

The FRC's oversight has helped make financial reporting discussions more substantive, focusing not only on the accuracy of figures but also on the appropriateness of accounting treatments and the quality of disclosures. Ultimately, this contributes to stronger confidence in financial information among investors, lenders and other stakeholders. However, the level of compliance and commitment to transparency still varies across organisations.

Despite increased regulatory oversight, deficiencies in financial reporting continue to emerge. What are the most common reporting weaknesses or compliance gaps identified during audits, and why do these issues persist?

The recurring weaknesses we observe often relate to areas requiring significant management judgement. These include impairment assessments under IFRS 9, revenue recognition, fair value measurements, provisions, going-concern evaluations and related-party disclosures, among others.

In practice, this shows up in expected credit loss models built on limited historical data, fair value inputs that are not adequately supported, going-concern assessments that stop at 12 months without stress testing, and related-party records that are not kept up to date.

These challenges are often linked to capacity gaps, weaknesses in internal controls and, in some cases, business growth that has outpaced the development of governance structures. Addressing these issues requires investment in people and systems, as well as continuous training for both preparers and those charged with governance.

Auditors can only provide meaningful assurance when the underlying financial information is supported by sufficient appropriate evidence. What are the most common weaknesses you encounter in Nigerian companies, and how have regulatory expectations influenced the way audits are conducted?

I sometimes tell people that auditors are probably the only professionals who can ask for the same document three times and still be told, "We have already explained this to you!" Often, that reflects stretched finance teams rather than bad faith. But audits are built on evidence, not explanations.

A recurring challenge is the gap between the figures reported in the financial statements and the supporting documentation. Incomplete reconciliations, weak records and insufficient evidence can increase audit risk and make it more difficult to support an audit opinion. This highlights the importance of strong record-keeping, effective internal controls and compliance with auditing and quality management standards.

Typical examples are bank and debtor confirmations that do not agree with the ledgers, and fixed asset registers that cannot be traced to the physical assets. Regarding regulatory expectations, FRC audit quality inspections and the requirements of ISQM 1 have pushed firms to document their judgements more fully, challenge management more rigorously and retain evidence that supports every key conclusion.

Investors and other stakeholders rely heavily on financial statements when making decisions. In your view, are current financial reporting practices providing stakeholders with a sufficiently clear picture of companies' financial performance and position?

There has been considerable progress, and many organisations provide reliable financial information that supports informed decision-making. Nevertheless, there is still room for improvement in the quality and transparency of disclosures.

Stakeholders increasingly want to understand not only the numbers but also the underlying assumptions, risks, uncertainties and business drivers. Financial statements are most valuable when they tell the full economic story behind the numbers rather than merely satisfying disclosure requirements.

Related-party transactions are one area where the quality of disclosure can determine whether an investor really understands a company's financial position. From your audit experience, where are the biggest weaknesses in the disclosure of related-party transactions in Nigeria, and what should the FRC be looking at more closely?

Related-party transactions remain a key focus area, as weak disclosures can obscure a company's true financial position. Common issues include incomplete identification of related parties, inadequate disclosure of transaction terms and balances, and limited transparency around non-arm's-length transactions. Beyond these, we often see key management compensation omitted, interest-free balances with no IFRS 9 assessment, and an assumption that related-party loans are exempt from expected credit loss assessment.

Auditors assess the substance of these relationships and transactions to ensure disclosures provide a fair and complete picture. The FRC can support this through effective monitoring, clear guidance and consistent enforcement, ensuring stakeholders have the information needed to make informed decisions.

A thematic review should cover both the disclosures under IAS 24 and the accounting for related-party balances, including expected credit loss assessments under IFRS 9, fair value on initial recognition of interest-free balances, and their current or non-current classification. It would show where the gaps are widest and help preparers close them.

Your organisation has also examined the implementation of IFRS 18, which introduces greater structure around operating profit, management performance measures and disclosures. What do you expect IFRS 18 to expose about the way Nigerian companies currently present performance, and could it make it harder for companies to hide weak underlying performance behind preferred metrics?

IFRS 18 will not prevent management from presenting its performance positively, but it will make it easier for investors to understand and evaluate that performance. By introducing a more consistent structure for presenting financial results and requiring greater transparency around management-defined performance measures, the standard will improve comparability across companies.

It is also expected to highlight inconsistencies in how some entities currently present alternative performance metrics by requiring clearer disclosures and reconciliations to the audited financial statements. As a result, it will be more difficult to emphasise preferred measures without adequately explaining the underlying performance. For auditors, this means increased focus on the classification, presentation and transparency of performance measures disclosed by management.

With IFRS 18 mandatory for periods beginning on or after 1 January 2027, many non-financial companies will see income such as investment returns and dividends move out of operating profit, so reported operating profit may fall without any change in profit before tax. Financial institutions are likely to be affected differently because lending and investing are part of their main business activities.

How prepared do you believe Nigerian companies are for IFRS 18 and other emerging reporting requirements, and what challenges do you anticipate during implementation?

Preparedness varies significantly depending on the size and maturity of the organisation. Large listed entities and multinational groups are generally more advanced in assessing the impact of IFRS 18 and preparing implementation plans. Smaller entities, however, may still be at the awareness stage.

The key challenges will likely involve identifying management-defined performance measures, redesigning reporting templates, updating systems and ensuring staff have sufficient technical knowledge to apply the standard consistently. Early planning, stakeholder engagement and adequate training will be critical to a smooth transition.

Practical steps include a trial restatement of the 2026 figures on the IFRS 18 basis, remapping the chart of accounts, identifying every performance measure used externally, including in investor presentations and press releases, and engaging lenders early on covenants.

Stronger regulatory expectations can be demanding for businesses, but they can also create opportunities for audit firms. How has increased emphasis on financial reporting quality enhanced your audit practice and opened doors to new clients?

Absolutely, it has created opportunities, but the bigger story is that companies increasingly recognise the value of getting financial reporting right. Greater regulatory scrutiny has reinforced the importance of high-quality audits and strong governance.

For audit firms, this has increased demand for services such as statutory audits, IFRS advisory, financial reporting reviews and internal control assessments, subject to applicable independence requirements. It has also shifted client conversations beyond cost and timing to how a robust audit process can strengthen controls, improve accountability and enhance the credibility of financial information.

One of the FRC's notable governance initiatives in recent years has been Rule 14. What was the rationale behind its introduction, what concerns was it intended to address, and how effective has it been in practice?

Rule 14 was introduced to strengthen the responsibilities of external auditors when responding to actual or suspected non-compliance with laws and regulations that may have a material effect on the financial statements. More broadly, it seeks to enhance corporate governance, accountability and confidence in financial reporting.

Based on our experience, the rule has increased awareness of governance and compliance obligations among companies. We have also observed that some organisations were previously unaware of their obligations under the rule and related FRC requirements, prompting increased engagement and client education on their regulatory responsibilities. While implementation has presented some challenges, Rule 14 has generally encouraged stronger reporting practices and greater accountability within the financial reporting process.

If you were advising the FRC, corporate boards and audit committees on strengthening Nigeria's financial reporting framework in 2026 and beyond, what three reforms would you prioritise to further enhance transparency, investor confidence and accountability?

I would prioritise; stronger board and audit committee oversight to enhance accountability and the quality of financial reporting, improved disclosure quality, particularly around significant judgements, estimates, risks and related-party transactions and greater regulatory awareness and compliance through continuous stakeholder engagement, education and effective enforcement.

Looking ahead to the next five years, what would success look like for Nigeria's financial reporting ecosystem, and what role should the FRC, auditors, corporate boards and management collectively play in achieving that outcome?

Success in Nigeria's financial reporting ecosystem would be reflected in greater stakeholder confidence, stronger governance and financial statements that accurately reflect economic reality. Achieving this requires regulators, boards, management and auditors to fulfil their respective responsibilities effectively in promoting transparency, accountability and integrity.

Ultimately, this would enhance investor confidence, improve access to capital and strengthen Nigeria's reputation for high-quality financial reporting. Measurable signs would include fewer restatements and qualified opinions, more timely filings, and boards and management taking ownership of the numbers.



FORTUNE ILELEJI EXPLORES WHY GOOD THINGS FALL APART IN NEW BOOK





Fortune Ileleji, Artist and author has turned his attention to the often-overlooked relationships between life's different elements in his new book, The Law of Cohesion, which examines why seemingly good things can fail when they don't work together.

The book explores cohesion, contradiction and the conditions that enable individuals, organisations and creative endeavours to move in a common direction.

According to Ileleji, the book's idea emerged from questions about why talented people struggle to build successful organisations, why relationships between people who love one another become dysfunctional, and why intelligent, ambitious, and hardworking individuals sometimes fail to achieve their intended goals.
These observations led him to examine how different parts interact, arguing that the quality of individual components does not necessarily determine the success of the whole.

"I became interested in the relationships between the parts. We tend to examine things individually, but a good part does not automatically produce a good whole," he said.

The Law of Cohesion, he explained, grew out of his effort to understand what enables different elements to strengthen one another rather than work at cross-purposes.

The book reflects Ileleji's broader interest in making reality more intelligible by identifying connections that may not be immediately apparent. Rather than focusing solely on individual elements, he pays attention to how they interact, what they reinforce or contradict, and the larger outcomes they produce.

He said the same approach informs his work across painting, writing and his observations of business and everyday situations.

"Sometimes the problem is not hidden at all. Every piece of information is already there. What is missing is the relationship between the pieces. Once that relationship becomes visible, something that seemed complicated can suddenly become obvious," he said.

Beyond examining organisations and human relationships, The Law of Cohesion invites readers to reconsider how their personal decisions, ambitions, and long-term goals connect.

Ileleji believes decisions that seem reasonable in isolation can collectively lead people toward lives they never consciously intended to build.

"You can make sensible decisions about your career, relationships, ambitions, money, health and time, yet discover that together they are constructing a life you never consciously chose," he said.

He hopes the book will encourage readers to examine whether the different aspects of their lives support one another and contribute to a coherent whole.

"The Law of Cohesion gives you a way to see those relationships and ask whether the different parts of your life are actually strengthening the whole," he added.

Ileleji's interest in creative expression dates back to childhood, when he watched his father sketch with a pen. He recalls being fascinated by how an image could emerge from a blank surface, transforming an idea into something tangible.

Although he does not regard the experience as the sole explanation for his artistic development, he considers it an early introduction to the possibility of giving form to something internal.
The Law of Cohesion is available worldwide in print and digital formats through major book retailers so that readers can choose their preferred edition.

THE BUSINESS BEHIND NIGERIA'S WEDDING ENTERTAINMENT

IFEOMA OKEKE-KORIEOCHA



Imagine a Nigerian wedding without an MC. The DJ is playing, but nobody knows what comes next. The couple is ready, but guests are getting restless. The bride's family is asking questions, the groom's friends are becoming impatient, and the event planner is struggling to keep everything together. What should be a joyful celebration can quickly descend into confusion.

This is why a wedding MC does more than crack jokes, hype the crowd or announce the couple. The MC helps control the flow of the event, manages expectations and keeps different moving parts working together.

Behind the microphone, however, lies a business that requires preparation, people skills, professional relationships and the ability to deliver under pressure.

For MC Dammy, who began his professional career in 2014 and has reportedly hosted more than 500 weddings, these responsibilities have become the foundation for a career that now extends beyond wedding hosting into live entertainment and cultural production.

From University Experience to Professional Practice

MC Dammy's interest in wedding celebrations developed while he was a student at Bowen University. During his final year, he travelled to Abuja to host a wedding alongside his colleague, MC Jerry. The glamour of the occasion, the atmosphere and the bride's happiness left a lasting impression on him.

His interest continued during his National Youth Service Corps year in Lagos, when fellow corps members began inviting him to host their weddings. Those early engagements generated referrals, encouraging him to pursue wedding MCing more deliberately.

He began his professional career in 2014 and marked ten years in Nigeria's events and wedding industry in 2024.



Reflecting on the journey, he said, “My journey into wedding entertainment started with an experience that made me appreciate the joy and responsibility that come with being part of a couple’s special day. Over time, those early opportunities and the referrals that followed helped me see that this could become a profession, not just something I enjoyed doing.”

His experience illustrates how professional opportunities in event entertainment can emerge through personal networks and referrals. But turning early opportunities into a sustainable career requires more than securing the next booking. It involves building trust, understanding clients’ expectations and delivering consistently.

More Than Holding the Microphone

Hosting hundreds of weddings exposes an MC to different couples, families, cultural expectations and celebration styles. Each event requires an understanding of the people involved and the experience they want to create.

A wedding MC must understand the couple’s preferences, prepare for the programme and coordinate with the planner, musicians and other vendors. During the event, the MC must manage transitions, engage guests and respond to unexpected developments.

These responsibilities require emotional intelligence, cultural awareness, time management and sound judgement. Weddings can be particularly demanding because entertainment intersects with family traditions, religious considerations and personal expectations. An approach that works for one couple may be unsuitable for another.

A confident stage presence may attract attention, but the ability to interpret a client’s needs and work effectively with the wider team can determine the quality of the overall experience.

“Being a wedding MC goes beyond holding a microphone and making people laugh,” MC Dammy said. “You have to understand the couple, respect the families involved, work with the event team and know how to respond when things do not go according to plan. Your job is to help create an experience people will remember for the right reasons.”

The demands of the job raise a wider question about whether clients and other industry participants adequately recognise the preparation and professional judgement involved in wedding entertainment. The perspectives of MCs, planners and couples could help establish how these professionals are valued and treated.

From Hosting Events to Producing Culture

In 2024, MC Dammy marked his ten-year career milestone with an Owambe concert at Terra Kulture in Lagos. The event represented a move from hosting celebrations organised by clients to conceptualising and producing a cultural entertainment experience of his own.

In 2025, he presented the second edition, MC Dammy Live Owambe 2.0: Faaji Repete, at NECA House in Alausa, Lagos.

The programme brought together live music, comedy, fashion and cultural entertainment, drawing on elements associated with Yoruba celebrations. The event was also reported to have received support and participation from the Lagos State Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture.

Cultural entertainment production introduces responsibilities beyond hosting. A producer must develop a concept, coordinate performers, organise the programme and create an experience that appeals to an audience.

For MC Dammy, the Owambe series also provides an opportunity to explore how cultural traditions can connect with younger audiences.

"Owambe is more than a party. It is part of how we express our identity, celebrate our culture and bring people together," he said. "With Faaji Repete, I want to create an experience that celebrates these traditions while presenting them in a way that younger audiences can connect with."

The series broadens his professional activities by combining entertainment with cultural expression. It also presents a different business challenge: creating an event that audiences will choose to attend, rather than performing at a celebration organised by someone else.

Building an Entertainment Business

His work also extends to Elites Live Band, which forms part of his live entertainment activities. Bringing music, hosting and cultural programming together creates opportunities to develop different aspects of the entertainment business.

However, each activity has distinct operational demands. Live music requires musicians, rehearsals and technical coordination, while cultural production involves event concepts, performers, logistics and audience experience.

Managing these activities alongside wedding hosting highlights the difference between earning from individual performances and building a sustainable entertainment business.

"Talent can open the door, but talent alone cannot sustain a business," MC Dammy said. "You need consistency, financial discipline, good relationships and the willingness to collaborate with people who bring different skills to the table. Every successful event is the result of several professionals doing their jobs well."

The wider events industry depends on collaboration among MCs, planners, musicians, decorators, caterers and venue operators. Their ability to coordinate and deliver professionally can influence both the quality of an event and the likelihood of future referrals.

MC Dammy's membership of the Association of Professional Party Organisers and Event Managers of Nigeria (APPOEMN) and the Association of Event Vendors Nigeria (ASSEV Nigeria) connects his work to the wider professional community.

For creative entrepreneurs, the challenge is to develop relationships and business systems that support growth beyond their personal performances.

The Future of Wedding Entertainment

Nigeria's wedding industry brings together professionals whose contributions extend far beyond what guests see during a celebration. Understanding the industry requires attention to the preparation, commercial relationships and coordination that make these events possible.

MC Dammy's journey from hosting weddings during his university years to working across wedding entertainment, live music and cultural production illustrates one route through this professional landscape.

Looking ahead, he wants his brand to represent more than wedding hosting.

"I want to build a brand that represents more than being a wedding MC. I want my work to contribute to the growth of the events industry, create memorable entertainment experiences and give our culture a platform that can reach more people," he said. "For me, growth means building something that can continue to make an impact beyond individual events."

His career raises questions relevant to the wider industry: how wedding MCs are valued, what it takes to sustain a creative business, and whether cultural entertainment can become a viable avenue for both commercial growth and cultural expression.

Ultimately, the performance may be what guests remember. But behind every successful celebration is a network of professionals whose preparation, judgement and collaboration help make the experience possible.



HOW CLASSIC PACKET SHIRT IS BECOMING NIGERIAN WOMEN'S GO-TO TREND

IFEOMA OKEKE-KORIEOCHA



There was a time when the crisp, folded button-down shirt, popularly referred to across Nigerian fashion circles as the "packet shirt" was strictly reserved for corporate boardrooms, formal job interviews, or Sunday church services. Neatly packaged in plastic sleeves with plastic collar stays and metal pins, these structured shirts were traditional staples of menswear and corporate uniforming.

However, a dramatic shift is underway across Nigeria's fashion landscape. Nigerian women are redefining the narrative, transforming the stiff, buttoned-up packet shirt into the season's most versatile, effortless, and stylish wardrobe essential.

From the bustling streets of Ikeja and Lekki in Lagos to high-end social gatherings, women are swapping overly fitted, rigid women's blouses for oversized, structured men's packet shirts, turning what was once a formal corporate basic into a vibrant fashion statement.

The Appeal: Comfort, Structure, and Effortless Chic

Fashion stylists and trendsetters attribute the rapid rise of the packet shirt trend to a growing demand for functional, gender-fluid fashion that prioritizes both comfort and sophistication.

Unlike soft, flimsy fabrics that lose their shape under Nigeria's warm climate, high-quality packet shirts, often crafted from crisp poplin, stiff cotton, or oxford weaves, hold their structure remarkably well. This structure gives outfits an instant sharp, polished edge, even when styled casually.

The beauty of the trend lies in its adaptability. By opting for a packet shirt, frequently bought a size or two larger, women achieve a relaxed, oversized silhouette that offers breathable comfort without sacrificing elegance.





How Nigerian Women Are Styling the Trend

The versatility of the packet shirt has allowed women to seamlessly transition their looks from daytime professional settings to evening leisure. Popular styling choices dominating social feeds and Lagos street style include:

The Oversized “BFF/BF” Look: Paired with distressed denim jeans, biker shorts, or wide-leg trousers, women are wearing unbuttoned packet shirts over simple tank tops or camisoles, completed with chunky sneakers or sleek mules.

The Cinched Silhouette: To balance the extra volume of an oversized men’s shirt, fashion-forward ladies are cinching the waist with bold leather belts, corsets, or tying the front tails into high-waisted knots paired with tailored shorts or silk slip skirts.

The Dress Shirt Concept: Longer, extra-large packet shirts are frequently worn as standalone shirt dresses, styled with knee-high boots, waist chains, or statement belt bags for a chic, night-out look.

Asymmetrical and Off-Shoulder Drapes: Unbuttoning the top buttons and pulling the collar back to expose the collarbone has become a favorite hack for adding a subtle, feminine touch to an otherwise structured garment.

A Boom for Local Retailers and Thrifting Markets

The soaring popularity of packet shirts has also created a lucrative opportunity for local fashion vendors and boutique owners.

Beyond retail stores stocking boxed button-downs, open-air markets such as Yaba, Balogun, and Katangowa in Lagos are seeing a surge in demand for vintage and pre-loved men’s dress shirts. Young female shoppers and Instagram thrift vendors regularly scour these markets for high-grade, vintage packet shirts featuring unique stripes, pastel shades, and premium cotton fabrics.

For many young Nigerian women, the trend is more than just a fleeting aesthetic, it is a cost-effective, high-yield fashion hack. A single, well-structured packet shirt can be restyled in at least five distinct ways, delivering maximum value in a price-conscious economy.

As the lines between formalwear and streetwear continue to blur, the packet shirt has proven that true style isn’t about buying entirely new wardrobes, it is about reimagining timeless classics with a fresh, confident perspective.



IKOGOSI: WHERE NATURE'S MYSTERIES MEET LUXURY, WELLNESS AND CULTURE

CHINWE MICHAEL



My stay in Ikogosi was a reminder that sometimes, the most memorable travel experiences are not found in bustling cities or luxurious hotels, but in places where nature tells its own story.

At Ikogosi Warm Springs Resort, in Ekiti State, southwestern Nigeria, the experience went beyond sightseeing. It was an encounter with nature, relaxation, adventure and a hospitality experience that left me wanting more.

The first thing I did after settling in was head to the restaurant. Food was ready, and after the journey and the excitement of arriving at one of Nigeria's notable natural attractions, I was eager to see what the resort had to offer beyond its famous springs.

I had not expected too much from the dining experience, but the restaurant quickly changed that assumption. The waiters were welcoming, attentive and willing to help us navigate the menu.

One staff member, Miracle, stood out. She welcomed my friend and I with the warmest smile and answered our questions with patience and detailed explanations.

When it was time to order, Miracle walked us through the menu, offering suggestions that made the decision easier, even though it took us a while to settle on what we wanted. I eventually settled for Afang soup with eba (Garri), while my friend went for seafood okra.

The meal set a positive tone for the rest of my stay. Throughout my visit, food was one thing I did not have to worry about, and the warmth of the restaurant staff added a personal touch to the hospitality experience.

But Ikogosi had more in store than good food.

Where warm and cold waters meet

The defining attraction of Ikogosi is its warm and cold springs, a natural feature that has drawn visitors to this part of Ekiti State for generations.

Walking along the forest paths with our guide, who addressed herself as Victoria, I soon found myself standing before the point where the two springs meet. It was a striking sight: two streams flowing from different directions towards a confluence, each retaining its distinct temperature.

Victoria invited us to feel the water for ourselves. I dipped my hand into the stream and felt the difference almost immediately. One side was warm; the other was cold.

According to our guide, the springs have been known for more than a century. She recounted a local account of their discovery by a hunter called 'Ogongong', a name she explained as referring to a sharpshooter who rarely missed his target.

In the history shared with us, the hunter was searching for drinking water when he encountered the warm spring and later discovered the cold spring nearby. The story has become part of the site's local narrative, adding a layer of folklore to the natural attraction.

"The springs are also associated with traditional beliefs about healing and coexistence," she said.

What remains immediately captivating is the experience itself: warm and cold waters emerging in close proximity, creating a natural spectacle that invites curiosity and wonder.

For a journalist accustomed to examining figures, documents and market movements, it was a welcome reminder that some stories are best understood by being physically present.

Two trees, one root system

If the meeting of the springs was fascinating, the trees growing together nearby offered another reason to pause.

Our guide pointed to two trees standing side by side: a palm tree and a mahogany tree. According to her, the trees had been growing together for more than 90 years, sharing a common root system without one preventing the other from growing.

The guide described their relationship as symbiotic, drawing a comparison with the two springs.

Whether viewed through the lens of nature, culture or spirituality, these features give the destination a distinctive appeal.

Inside the forest's living heritage

The guided walk continued to reveal more of the forest's character.

One of the most memorable stops was a large tree our guide called the Slender Dragon. Its trunk contained a visible hollow, creating an opening through which visitors could look into the tree. Standing beside it, I was struck by the scale and unusual form of the structure.

The guide described the tree as being more than 100 years old and explained that trees of this type could be planted to mark boundaries and indicate ownership of land.

The hollow also created an unexpected opportunity for photographs. Visitors could stand beside the trunk or pose at its entrance, turning a forest walk into an informal photography experience.







Another tree, which the guide called cane wood, attracted attention for its reddish appearance and reported traditional use in body care. She said the material was sometimes applied to the skin in local practices associated with rashes and other skin conditions.

A creative pause: Playing with colours

Beyond the forest and springs, I wanted to try something different.

I had long wanted to experience a slip-and-paint activity, but when the opportunity came, I was initially sceptical. I wondered whether I would be able to do it well, especially without no experience.

Fortunately, we had a patient guide who walked us through the process and explained what to do at each stage.

With the instructions in place, the hesitation gradually gave way to enjoyment. The activity offered a different kind of engagement from the guided tour: rather than observing nature and listening to stories, we could experiment, make something of our own and enjoy the process.

It was a reminder that tourism does not have to revolve entirely around sightseeing. Creative activities can provide visitors with opportunities to relax, explore their interests and create personal memories of a destination.

The spa: An unexpectedly memorable finale

If I had to identify the standout experience of my stay, however, it would be the spa.

I have experienced more than a dozen massage sessions in Lagos, so I arrived with a reasonable basis for comparison. Yet the treatment I received at Ikogosi turned out to be my favourite massage experience so far.

It was also the final activity I undertook before leaving the resort, making it a fitting conclusion to the visit.

After exploring the springs, walking through the forest, taking photographs and trying the creative activity, the spa offered an opportunity to slow down and enjoy a different kind of experience.

The session stood out for its warmth and the sense of relaxation it provided. Rather than ending the stay with another excursion, I finished with a wellness experience that allowed me to appreciate the quieter side of the resort.

EIGHT WORLD'S TOP DESTINATIONS FOR WEALTH MIGRATION

CHISOM MICHAEL



Countries are competing to attract wealthy individuals who can bring investment, establish businesses and contribute to economic growth. Tax policies, residency programmes, political stability and regulations are among the factors influencing where people choose to live and manage their wealth.

Singapore ranks first in the global ranking of destinations for wealth migration, followed by New Zealand and the Cayman Islands, according to data attributed to the Henley Private Wealth Migration Report 2026.

The ranking assesses countries and territories on 12 factors, including tax policy, investor pathways, regulatory quality and the business environment. It offers insight into how governments can attract people with wealth and the capital they bring across borders.

Wealth migration has become an area of interest for governments seeking investment, business creation and economic activity. For individuals, the decision to relocate may involve tax obligations, access to international markets, personal security and the conditions for running a business.

Here are the eight destinations listed in the ranking and the factors that help explain their positions.

1. Singapore: 79.5 points

Singapore tops the list with a wealth mobility competitiveness score of 79.5. The country serves as a financial and business centre in Asia, connecting investors with markets across the region. Its position in international trade, banking and wealth management makes it a destination for individuals seeking access to capital and business opportunities.

Singapore's tax framework, regulatory system and investor services are among the factors that contribute to its appeal. Its location also provides access to markets in Southeast Asia and beyond.

For wealthy individuals, these conditions can support business expansion, investment management and long-term financial planning.

2. New Zealand: 75.8 points

New Zealand ranks second with 75.8 points. The country offers access to markets in the Asia-Pacific region and operates under a legal and regulatory system that supports business activity.

Political stability, public institutions and the country's immigration framework can influence decisions by people considering relocation. For investors and business owners, the ability to plan over the long term is an important consideration.

However, eligibility for residency and the rules governing investments depend on individual circumstances and the requirements in force at the time of application.

3. Cayman Islands: 74.3 points

The Cayman Islands ranks third with 74.3 points. The British Overseas Territory has built a financial services sector that includes investment funds, banking and wealth management. Its tax system is one of the factors associated with its position as a destination for internationally mobile wealth.

The islands' financial services industry connects investors with international markets and supports the management of assets across jurisdictions.

For individuals considering relocation, tax arrangements are only one part of the decision. Residency requirements, living costs and access to business services also matter.

4. Cyprus: 73.5 points

Cyprus records 73.5 points to take fourth place. Located in the eastern Mediterranean, the country provides access to European markets and has links with businesses operating across Europe, the Middle East and North Africa.

Its position within the European Union is relevant to investors looking at regional business opportunities. Tax rules, residency arrangements and the availability of professional services can also influence relocation decisions.

For entrepreneurs, Cyprus can provide a base for managing operations that serve customers in several countries.

5. Netherlands: 72.8 points

The Netherlands ranks fifth with 72.8 points. Its economy is linked to international trade, logistics, finance and technology. The country also provides access to the European Union's single market, which can support businesses seeking to operate across national borders.

Its transport infrastructure, legal framework and network of international businesses contribute to its position as a destination for investors and entrepreneurs.

Tax obligations and residency conditions remain important considerations for anyone planning to move there.

6. Portugal: 72.5 points

Portugal takes sixth place with 72.5 points. The country attracts attention from people seeking a base in Europe, with access to European markets and connections to Portuguese-speaking countries.

Its residency options and business environment can influence decisions by entrepreneurs, investors and internationally mobile professionals.

However, Portugal's tax arrangements have changed in recent years. Individuals considering relocation need to examine the rules that apply to their income, assets and residency status rather than assume that previous tax incentives remain available.

7. Italy: 72.3 points

Italy scores 72.3 points to rank seventh. The country offers access to the European market and has established industries spanning manufacturing, fashion, design, tourism and finance.

For business owners and investors, Italy provides opportunities to establish commercial relationships and manage activities within the European Union.

Tax rules and residency programmes can also affect relocation decisions, although the benefits available depend on each person's circumstances and the applicable legislation.

8. Bermuda: 72.0 points

Bermuda completes the list with 72.0 points. The British Overseas Territory has a financial services sector that includes insurance, reinsurance and investment management. Its links to international financial markets make it relevant to individuals and businesses managing assets across borders.

Its tax framework is another factor associated with its position in wealth migration discussions.

For prospective residents, the cost of living, housing, residency eligibility and access to services are among the issues to consider before making a decision.

TOP 10 EUROPEAN COUNTRIES WITH THE HIGHEST AVERAGE SALARIES

CHISOM MICHAEL



European countries offer different pay levels, with earnings shaped by industries, labour policies and the cost of living. For workers considering a move abroad, average salaries can help identify destinations where employment may provide greater earning opportunities.

Luxembourg tops this ranking, with an average gross annual salary of € 72,000, followed by Switzerland at €68,000 and Denmark at €62,000. Ireland, the Netherlands and Germany also feature among the leading destinations, reflecting the role of finance, technology, manufacturing and other sectors in their labour markets.

The figures below provide a comparison, based on the supplied salary estimates attributed to Eurostat and national statistics offices. Gross salary refers to earnings before income tax and other deductions.

Here are the top 10 European countries with the highest average salaries according to Euro salary.

1. Luxembourg: €72,000 per year

Luxembourg ranks first, with an average gross annual salary of €72,000. Its financial services industry, European Union institutions and international businesses support employment across several professional fields.

The country's location between Belgium, France and Germany also attracts workers who live across its borders and commute for work. For people seeking employment in banking, investment, legal services and financial technology, Luxembourg offers access to a labour market with international connections.

However, workers need to consider housing costs, taxes and other living expenses when assessing how much of their earnings they can retain.

2. Switzerland: €68,000 per year

Switzerland ranks second, with an average gross annual salary of €68,000. Although it is not a member of the European Union, its links with European markets make it a destination for workers and businesses.

Banking, pharmaceuticals, engineering and technology contribute to employment. The country also attracts professionals in research, healthcare and financial services.

Salary comparisons should account for the cost of accommodation, health insurance, transport and everyday goods. High earnings do not automatically translate into greater disposable income.

3. Denmark: €62,000 per year

Denmark takes third place, with an average gross annual salary of €62,000. Its labour market operates within a system in which trade unions and employers negotiate wages and employment conditions across many sectors.

The economy includes pharmaceuticals, shipping, renewable energy, information technology and manufacturing. These industries provide opportunities for workers with technical, professional and management skills.

Anyone considering Denmark should also examine its tax system and living costs, as both affect the amount available for savings and household spending.

4. Ireland: €58,000 per year

Ireland ranks fourth, with an average gross annual salary of €58,000. Technology, pharmaceuticals, financial services and international business contribute to its labour market. Several multinational companies operate European or international offices in the country, creating jobs in software development, engineering, finance, data analysis and business operations.

For foreign workers, Ireland's English-speaking environment can make the transition easier. However, accommodation costs, particularly in Dublin, remain an important consideration when comparing salaries with other destinations.

5. Netherlands: €56,000 per year

The Netherlands records an average gross annual salary of €56,000, placing it fifth. Its economy includes technology, logistics, finance, agriculture and international trade.

Amsterdam is a centre for financial services and technology, while Rotterdam's port supports jobs across shipping, transport and supply chains. Other cities also provide opportunities in research, manufacturing and business services.

The country's transport links and international business environment attract workers from within and outside Europe. Prospective employees should compare salaries with rent, taxation and commuting costs.

6. Germany: €54,000 per year

Germany ranks sixth, with an average gross annual salary of €54,000. As Europe's largest economy, it has employment opportunities across automotive production, engineering, chemicals, healthcare, technology and manufacturing.

Its industrial base supports demand for engineers, technicians, researchers and skilled tradespeople. The country also has opportunities in software development, financial services and business management.

Workers may find different salary levels across regions and industries. Comparing job offers should therefore involve the specific city, occupation and employment conditions rather than the national average alone.

7. Belgium: €52,000 per year

Belgium ranks seventh, with an average gross annual salary of €52,000. Its economy includes pharmaceuticals, chemicals, logistics, manufacturing and professional services.

Brussels hosts European Union institutions and international organisations, supporting employment in administration, policy, consulting and related fields. The pharmaceutical and chemical industries also contribute to demand for scientific and technical expertise.

Belgium's location at the centre of Western Europe provides access to several neighbouring labour markets. Workers should consider taxation and housing costs when assessing the value of a salary offer.

8. Austria: €51,000 per year

Austria takes eighth place, with an average gross annual salary of €51,000. Manufacturing, engineering, tourism, finance and business services contribute to its economy.

Vienna serves as a centre for administration, international organisations and professional services. Other regions support manufacturing and industrial production.

The country's position in Central Europe also connects businesses to markets across the continent. For prospective workers, language requirements, housing costs and the availability of jobs in their field remain important factors.

9. Finland: €49,000 per year

Finland ranks ninth, with an average gross annual salary of €49,000. Its economy includes technology, telecommunications, engineering, forestry, healthcare and education.

Demand for expertise in software, research, manufacturing and digital services creates opportunities for qualified professionals. Finland also places emphasis on workplace arrangements and public services, factors that may influence decisions about where to live and work.

However, workers need to assess taxation, housing and language requirements before relocating. Opportunities can also vary by occupation and region.

10. Sweden: €48,000 per year

Sweden completes the ranking, with an average gross annual salary of €48,000. Its economy includes engineering, telecommunications, manufacturing, technology, healthcare and financial services.

The country has a record of industrial production and technology development, while its labour market includes employers ranging from manufacturing firms to software companies.

Workers considering Sweden should examine the availability of jobs in their profession, the cost of housing and the requirements for working in the country. Gross salary alone cannot determine whether a move will improve their finances.

RECIPE OF THE WEEK: UKODO

ESTHER EMOEKPERE



What better way to get to know a country than through its food? Nigeria's culinary traditions reflect the cultures and histories of its many ethnic groups, with dishes that may be well known in one community but unfamiliar elsewhere. As we continue our journey through Nigeria, this week takes us to the Urhobo people of Delta State to explore Ukodo, a traditional yam and plantain pepper-soup pottage.

Made with yam, unripe plantain and meat cooked in a spicy broth, Ukodo gets its distinctive flavour from native pepper-soup spices such as ehuru, uda, ataiko and irugege, alongside crayfish and pepper. Beyond being a hearty meal, the dish holds cultural significance among the Urhobo and is traditionally served at special gatherings, including marriage and burial ceremonies, as well as New Year's Day breakfasts. It is also prepared for women during postpartum care, known as Omugwo, and enjoyed as comfort food during cold or rainy weather.

INGREDIENTS
Serves 4–6

1 medium tuber of yam
3 medium unripe plantains
1kg goat meat, cut into pieces
2 tablespoons ground crayfish or dried prawns
1–2 tablespoons native pepper-soup spice blend
2 seeds of ehuru (calabash nutmeg)
2 seeds of uda, with the seeds removed
1 teaspoon ataiko

1 tablespoon irugege
1 seed of gbafilo, where available
1 small bunch of lemongrass or scent leaves
1 teaspoon ground dry pepper, or to taste
2 seasoning cubes, optional
Salt to taste
Water as needed
Palm oil, to serve

Method

1. Cook the meat. Wash the goat meat and place it in a pot. Season with salt and, if desired, a seasoning cube. Add a little water and cook until the meat is partly tender, adding more water if necessary.

2. Prepare the yam and plantain. Peel the yam, cut it into medium-sized chunks and rinse. Peel the unripe plantains and cut them into pieces.

3. Prepare the spices. If using whole spices, lightly roast the ehuru, crack it open and remove the seeds. Grind the ehuru, ataiko, irugege and gbafilo together. Remove the seeds from the uda before adding it to the pot.

4. Season the broth. Add the ground spices, uda, crayfish, dry pepper and the remaining seasoning to the partly cooked meat. Stir and allow the broth to simmer so the spices release their aroma.

5. Add the yam and plantain. Put the yam and unripe plantain into the pot. Add enough water to cook the ingredients while keeping the broth flavourful. Add the lemongrass or scent leaves and cook until the meat, yam and plantain are tender.

6. Adjust the consistency. Check the seasoning and add salt or pepper as needed. Stir gently towards the end of cooking. The yam releases some starch into the broth, giving it a thicker, pottage-like consistency.

7. Serve hot. Remove the lemongrass, if used, and serve the Ukodo immediately. Palm oil may be served separately, as it is in some traditional preparations.

CHATGPT LEADS THE 15 MOST VISITED AI TOOLS IN 2026

CHISOM MICHAEL



ChatGPT recorded 5.32 billion website visits in June 2026, exceeding the combined 4.7 billion visits recorded by the next 14 AI tools in a ranking of the world's most visited artificial intelligence platforms.

Google's Gemini ranked second with 1.14 billion visits, followed by Anthropic's Claude with 967.91 million. Canva, Google Translate and China's DeepSeek completed the top six, according to data from AITools.xyz, modelled on traffic data from SEMrush and Ahrefs.

The figures show how traffic is distributed across the AI industry, with ChatGPT accounting for approximately 53 per cent of the 9.97 billion visits recorded by the 15 platforms combined. Its lead highlights the challenge facing other providers seeking to attract users as new AI products continue to emerge.

The ranking covers website visits in June 2026 and excludes usage through mobile applications and application programming interfaces (APIs). The figures therefore do not represent total platform usage across all channels.

The country breakdown also highlights the presence of American companies, with 12 of the 15 platforms based in the United States. Canva, DeepSeek and Magnific represent Australia, China and Spain, respectively.

The platforms serve different purposes, ranging from general AI assistants and search services to design, productivity, translation and music generation. Their positions reflect website traffic rather than a direct comparison of their capabilities or business performance.

The figures provide a measure of where online attention was concentrated during June. While ChatGPT maintains a substantial lead, the presence of other platforms shows that users continue to visit services built around different tasks.

As AI becomes part of more online products, providers will seek not only to attract visits to standalone websites but also to become part of the tools people use to work, search for information, communicate and create.

Here are the 15 most visited AI tools in the ranking and what their positions reveal about the market.

1. ChatGPT: 5.32 billion visits

ChatGPT, developed by OpenAI in the United States, ranked first with 5.32 billion website visits in June 2026.

Its traffic exceeded the combined visits of the other 14 platforms on the list, establishing a gap between the leading AI assistant and its competitors.

Since its launch in November 2022, ChatGPT has become a tool for tasks ranging from answering questions and drafting documents to writing code, analysing information and generating ideas.

Its position at the top of the ranking indicates the scale of its website audience. However, the figures measure visits rather than individual users, so they do not establish how many people use the platform or how often each person returns.

2. Google Gemini: 1.14 billion visits

Google's Gemini ranked second with 1.14 billion visits, making it the closest competitor to ChatGPT by website traffic.

Despite its position, Gemini recorded about one-fifth of ChatGPT's visits during the month. The difference between the two platforms also shows the distance other AI providers must cover to approach the leading service.

Gemini is Google's AI assistant, offering capabilities that include text generation, information analysis and support for tasks across Google's product ecosystem.

Its second-place ranking places Google among the main providers competing for users seeking AI assistance online.

3. Anthropic's Claude: 967.91 million visits

Claude, developed by American AI company Anthropic, ranked third with 967.91 million website visits.

The platform is used for tasks such as writing, coding, document analysis and research. Its position places it behind Gemini but ahead of every other tool in the ranking.

Claude's monthly traffic was close to one billion visits, although it remained below the figures recorded by the two platforms above it.

The result places three American AI assistants in the first three positions, underlining the role of US companies in the website traffic captured by the ranking.

4. Canva: 759.76 million visits

Canva ranked fourth with 759.76 million visits. Unlike the AI assistants in the first three positions, Canva is a design platform that also offers AI-powered tools.

Users can create presentations, social media graphics, documents and other visual materials through its website.

The Australian company was the highest-ranked non-US platform in the list. Its position also demonstrates that AI-related traffic extends beyond chatbots to services that incorporate artificial intelligence into existing products.

5. Google Translate: 343.02 million visits

Google Translate recorded 343.02 million visits to rank fifth.

The translation service allows users to convert text between languages and supports communication across language barriers. Its inclusion reflects the range of activities covered by the ranking, which includes established online services alongside AI assistants and generative tools.

Google Translate's traffic was less than half of Canva's and about one-sixteenth of ChatGPT's.

Its position also means Google had two products among the top five, with Gemini and Google Translate serving different user needs.

6. DeepSeek: 318.81 million visits

DeepSeek, developed in China, ranked sixth with 318.81 million website visits.

The platform gained attention as an alternative in the AI assistant market, where companies compete on model performance, accessibility and the tasks their products can handle.

DeepSeek was one of three non-US platforms in the top 15, alongside Australia's Canva and Spain's Magnific.

Its ranking places a Chinese AI provider among the services attracting substantial website traffic, although its recorded visits remained below those of the five platforms ahead of it.

7. Grok: 189.89 million visits

Grok, developed by xAI in the United States, ranked seventh with 189.89 million visits.

The AI assistant offers conversational responses and other generative AI functions. Its position places it among the platforms competing for users seeking answers, explanations and assistance with everyday tasks.

Grok recorded fewer than one-fifth of Claude's visits, showing the difference in traffic between the third-ranked service and those in the second half of the ranking.

8. JanitorAI: 173.17 million visits

JanitorAI ranked eighth with 173.17 million visits. The platform focuses on AI-powered character interactions and conversations, distinguishing it from services centred on workplace productivity, research or general-purpose assistance.

Its position shows that specialised platforms can attract substantial website traffic even when they serve a narrower set of purposes than general AI assistants.

9. Character AI: 165.46 million visits

Character AI recorded 165.46 million visits to rank ninth.

The platform allows users to interact with AI-generated characters and participate in conversations based on different personalities and scenarios.

Its ranking alongside JanitorAI indicates the presence of conversational entertainment platforms within the wider AI market.

Although both services ranked below Grok, their visits placed them ahead of several tools designed for research, productivity and business use.

10. Perplexity: 140.7 million visits

Perplexity ranked tenth with 140.7 million visits

The US-based platform focuses on AI-assisted search and research, providing responses that draw on information retrieved from online sources.

Its approach places it among the services seeking to change how people find and process information on the internet.

Perplexity's position in the top 10 shows that AI-powered search remains part of the market, even as general-purpose assistants attract more visits.

11. Magnific: 116.84 million visits

Magnific, associated with Spain-based Freepik, recorded 116.84 million visits.

The platform focuses on image enhancement and AI-powered visual creation. Its inclusion in the ranking reflects demand for tools that support creative work rather than text-based conversations alone.

Magnific was the third non-US platform in the top 15 and ranked ahead of Notion, Zoom and Microsoft Copilot.

1**2. Notion: 110.64 million visits**

Notion ranked 12th with 110.64 million visits
The US-based productivity platform supports note-taking, documentation, project management and collaboration. Its AI features allow users to work with information within the platform.

Notion's position highlights the role of AI in productivity software, where users can apply the technology to existing workflows rather than visit a separate chatbot.

13. Zoom: 96.24 million visits

Zoom recorded 96.24 million visits to rank 13th. Known for its video conferencing service, the company has also incorporated AI features into its products to support meeting summaries, information retrieval and workplace collaboration.

Its appearance in the ranking reflects the expansion of AI capabilities into communication tools.

14. Microsoft Copilot: 92.72 million visits

Microsoft Copilot ranked 14th with 92.72 million visits. The platform offers AI assistance for tasks such as answering questions, generating content and supporting productivity.

Its position places it below Zoom and Notion in this website traffic ranking, despite Microsoft's presence across workplace software and digital services.

The figures, however, do not capture all Copilot activity within Microsoft's applications, so website visits alone cannot establish the platform's total reach.

15. Suno: 81.84 million visits

Suno completed the ranking with 81.84 million visits.

The US-based platform allows users to generate music with AI, including songs created from text prompts.

Its inclusion demonstrates that the market extends into music production and other creative activities, beyond search, writing and workplace productivity.

Although Suno recorded the fewest visits among the 15 platforms, its monthly traffic exceeded 80 million, according to the ranking.

‘WE’RE NOT DONE’: ADEKUNLE GOLD, PESA LAUNCH $20,000 SICKLE CELL IMPACT INITIATIVE



The Adekunle Gold Foundation (AG Foundation), in partnership with Pesa, has launched We’re Not Done: AG Foundation Sickle Cell Impact Initiative, a new programme designed to strengthen organisations providing critical support to people living with sickle cell disease.

Launching with a $20,000 commitment from Pesa, the initiative will provide funding to selected sickle cell organisations, helping them expand their work across healthcare access, patient support, education, awareness and advocacy.

For its inaugural cycle, We’re Not Done will support AG Foundation’s work alongside the following 4 beneficiaries, Sickle Cell Advocacy Management Initiative (NIGERIA), Not Just You (CANADA), Sickle Life (GHANA), It Takes A Village (UK) recognising the important work each organisation is already doing within the sickle cell community.

The funding will enable the organisations to strengthen existing programmes, expand their reach and deepen their impact.

For Adekunle Gold, who has lived openly with sickle cell disease and used his platform to advocate for the community, We’re Not Done represents a commitment to supporting the organisations already doing vital work on the ground.

“We’re Not Done is about turning awareness into action. There are incredible organisations working every day to improve the lives of people living with sickle cell, and together with Pesa, we want to give them more resources to do that work and reach even more people,” Adekunle Gold said.

Pesa joins the initiative as its programme partner, supporting both the launch and first cycle of impact.

“Sickle cell affects many people in the Nigerian and wider Black communities we serve. These are our friends, colleagues, and loved ones. Adekunle Gold has shown how a personal connection to an issue can become a force for meaningful change and we’re proud to support the launch of We’re Not Done, an initiative dedicated to raising awareness and supporting the sickle cell community. Through our partnership with the AG Foundation and the other participating foundations, we hope to go beyond awareness and contribute to meaningful, tangible support for individuals and families affected by sickle cell,” Tosin Olaniyi (Head, Global Growth & Marketing, Pesa) said.

Through We’re Not Done, AG Foundation with the support of Pesa aims to build a platform that combines funding, advocacy and visibility to strengthen the wider sickle cell ecosystem and create measurable, lasting impact. Because for the sickle cell community, we’re not done.

Adekunle Gold Foundation was founded in 2023 by singer/songwriter Adekunle Gold. The foundation is committed to improving the lives of those living with sickle cell disease through healthcare access, advocacy and awareness.

HOW BJUMP MENTORSHIP INITIATIVE EXPANDS QUALITY TALENTS PIPELINE FOR CORPORATE AFRICA

...OPENS APPLICATIONS FOR COHORT 5



L-R: Folake “Steaze” Johnson, Mentor, BJUMP; Taopheek Babayeju, member, Board of Trustees, BJUMP; Bolaji Junaid, Founder, BJUMP; Ifeoluwa Egunjobi, Programme Coordinator, BJUMP; Abayomi Ayoola, founder/CEO, Expose Marketing Solutions during a media and partners luncheon held at Ndubuisi Kanu Park to celebrate its 5th Anniversary in Lagos

BJUMP, a career development initiative focused on driving quality talent pipeline for Corporate Africa through structured mentorship, learning programmes, and real-world exposure that enables personal and professional growth across industries and borders marked its fifth anniversary with a media and partner luncheon in Lagos, bringing together media representatives, partners, alumni, and other stakeholders to celebrate its impact and unveil its next chapter.

The event provided an opportunity to reflect on five years of developing talents, building industry connections, and creating pathways for emerging professionals. It also highlighted the role of partnerships and mentorship in bridging the gap between young people’s potential and the opportunities available across Nigeria’s marketing, entertainment, and technology sectors.

Since its inception, BJUMP has focused on equipping young people with practical industry experience, mentorship, and access to professional networks. Through its programmes, the initiative has built a community of emerging and experienced professionals and created opportunities for participants to engage with leading industry practitioners and organisations.

Over the past five years, BJUMP has successfully reviewed over 430 applications within 4 cohorts, placed more than 35 young professionals in their dream jobs, built a community of over 180 members, engaged more than 60 mentors both locally and in the diaspora. Its career reality show styled MET Stars Academy's content has organically reached over five million persons.

Speaking at the luncheon, Bolaji Junaid, founder of BJUMP and CEO of WhyFinite, reflected on the initiative's journey and the importance of building on the progress made over the past five years.

"Five years ago, we started with a vision. Today, we have a foundation to build on. But growth, to me, is not just about getting bigger. It is about becoming better equipped to do the work we set out to do, reaching more people without losing sight of why we started, and creating something that can keep delivering value long after the people who started it have moved on. In the next five years, we want to build an institution that can continue opening doors for young Nigerians, developing professional talents, and creating opportunities for generations to come."

BJUMP has become a registered non-profit organisation with the CAC. Our work is driven by a mission to develop talents for corporate Africa. We are not building BJUMP to distribute profits to owners or Trustees. We are building it to create impact that can be sustained and expanded. And that's why we've assembled trusted persons and voices across professional divides to become our founding trustees ably chaired by Aishah Ahmad, a global finance advisor and former deputy governor of CBN.

A key highlight of the anniversary celebration was the spotlight on MET Stars Academy, BJUMP's flagship programme and Nigeria's first career reality show, designed to prepare emerging professionals for careers across marketing, entertainment, and technology.

Applications for MET Stars Academy Cohort 5 opened on October 15 and will close on November 15, 2026. The programme aims to attract applicants from across Nigeria's six geopolitical zones, expanding access to practical learning, industry mentorship, and opportunities to gain relevant professional experience.

Speaking at the luncheon, Taopheek Babayeju, member, Board of Trustees, said that the initiative is solving a key problem in the Nigerian business ecosystem. We need to have an honest conversation about Nation building. A balance of Entrepreneurship & Intrapreneurship is important. We need people who will build businesses, create jobs, and develop solutions, while on the other hand we also need skilled professionals who can strengthen organisations, lead teams, build expertise, and contribute to the growth of established industries.

"It's the intentionality and robustness of the initiative that has been an attraction to me in the last 5 years, from the cohort recruitment to the selection of mentors and the entire MET Stars Academy programme is novel" said Folake "Steaze" Johnson, a BJUMP Co-mentor and CEO, FSJ Company.

According to Abayomi Ayoola, Founder, Expose Marketing Solutions, we have adopted BJUMP as one of our key partners in talent sourcing and development in the last two years. Moreso, we recently updated our organization's standard operating procedures based on learning from BJUMP, one of the BJUMP Alumni has been a great addition to our team and look forward to welcoming more.

As BJUMP enters its next chapter, the five-year milestone represents both a celebration of progress and a commitment to expanding its impact. Building on the relationships, experiences, and opportunities established since its inception, the initiative aims to continue creating pathways through which young Nigerians can develop their skills, connect with industry professionals, and translate their potential into meaningful career opportunities.

The luncheon concluded a milestone celebration that recognised the people and organisations behind BJUMP's journey while reinforcing its commitment to developing the next generation of talent.

AI IN EDUCATION: GREATEST OPPORTUNITY, EXISTENTIAL THREAT

CHARLES OGWO



It was a tale of two different experiences from one source. Onyekachi had just completed an assignment in minutes with the help of artificial intelligence (AI), but struggles to explain what she had written.

While Amadi, another student, who once struggled to understand a difficult subject, is now grasping it with the help of an AI tutor that patiently explains every concept.

Both are products of the same technology, yet they tell two very different stories about the future of education.

For teachers, parents and students, AI is no longer a distant technological possibility; it is becoming part of everyday learning, changing how knowledge is acquired, assignments are completed and the classroom's function.

While AI offers unprecedented opportunities to personalise learning, bridge educational gaps and empower teachers, it also raises uncomfortable questions about intellectual independence, creativity and the very meaning of learning.

Artificial intelligence is rewriting the rules of education, opening extraordinary possibilities for how educators teach, learn and prepare the next generation for an increasingly complex world.

From personalised learning and intelligent tutoring to faster access to knowledge and improved teaching efficiency, AI holds the promise of transforming classrooms and expanding educational opportunities on an unprecedented scale.

Yet, beneath this promise lies a troubling paradox: the very technology capable of liberating learners and empowering teachers could also undermine critical thinking, erode human judgment and leave an entire generation dangerously dependent on machines.

In education, AI could be the greatest opportunity for progress, or an existential threat to the very purpose of learning. The difference may ultimately depend not on how intelligent the machines become, but on how wisely people choose to use them.

James Dahl, Master of Wellington College, thinks AI in education, as well as in every sector, provides the most incredible opportunity if people can harness this transformational technology for good.



However, he emphasised that AI also poses some of the most existential threats that human beings have ever had if they allow AI to control them.

“We must be in control of how AI is deployed within education and within our schools. If used badly in education, children will become stupider, not cleverer,” he said.

Research on global intelligence tests over the last decade or so, from international academic rankings, such as PISA, reveals that in the OECD countries, young people are genuinely becoming less proficient at reading, writing, numeracy.

Stakeholders are worried that for the first time in the history of the modern world, the human race is becoming more stupid rather than cleverer.

A survey in the UK with a public think tank called Better Together, found out that 83 percent of secondary school age students were using AI at least once a week, and more than half were using it many times a week.

That simply suggests that AI has come to stay, and that young people are using it, even educators are using it. Consequently, Dahl believes that the education stakeholders must make the best of the opportunities offered by AI, instead of thinking of reinventing the technology.

“If AI can be deployed strategically and intentionally in schools in a way that optimises the learning of each individual child, there’s no way that that teacher can’t deliver a bespoke individualised lesson to each child.

“If as educators we can control the AI, deploy it strategically and intentionally, I think we can actually accelerate the learning process. We can make it more efficient,” he stressed.

Proper deployment of AI will free up more time in the school day for teachers to do what they are at their very best at, which is human to human connections with young people.

Lola Olukuewu, certified chief AI officer, emphasised the importance of equipping students with the skills to thrive in the emerging digital era.

Olukuewu noted that learning to innovate with AI is key to unlocking future opportunities; stressing that such an initiative will position students to become future-ready by promoting AI awareness, innovation, and the practical skills needed to succeed in an increasingly technology-driven world.

“Don’t abandon your passion because of AI; rather, evolve it with it. You shouldn’t just consume technology; create with it.

“Being an AI user is a starting point; learning to innovate with it is where the real opportunity lies,” she said.

According to Olukuewu, recent research shows that people who use AI for everything had a 36 percent drop-in brain activity and plasticity, among others; hence, she warned students not to rely solely on AI, because it will make them become mentally redundant.

AI regulation in schools

The need for ethical use of AI in the educational space cannot be overemphasised. UNESCO’s mandate calls inherently for a human-centred approach to AI.

The global agency aims to shift the conversation to include AI’s role in addressing current inequalities regarding access to knowledge, research and the diversity of cultural expressions and to ensure AI does not widen the technological divides within and between countries.

The promise of “AI for all” must be that everyone can take advantage of the technological revolution under way and access its fruits, notably in terms of innovation and knowledge.

According to the European Commission the significant increase of AI usage in education requires the introduction of regulations like the AI Act, which require careful compliance and a growing need for ethical and critical AI literacy.

WHY IS BRANDING IMPORTANT IN POLITICS?

FEYISITAN IJIMAKINWA

It is the season of active political campaigns in Nigeria, and as politicians try to outdo one another to sell themselves to the populace, branding stands out as a strategic element in the whole process. “So, why is branding important in politics,” someone may ask?

In politics, perception reigns over everything–often even reality. That’s exactly when the true essence of branding takes centre stage. The brand’s robustness, wielding influence over perception and reality, possesses the extraordinary ability to sway public opinion and ignite a political landscape transformation.

Hence, branding has evolved into a crucial element of an encompassing political strategy, and it’s not solely about the brand but the story that molds a candidate’s image. This aspect of branding is becoming increasingly important as it shapes the customer experience, or in this case, the constituents’ perception of their political representative.

This piece will delve into branding–not about products or services–but in politics, exploring why a strong brand is vital for a political candidate and how good branding impacts the political landscape. Research has shown that political branding significantly impacts voters’ decisions, further solidifying the importance of a reliable brand strategy. In short, there is an intriguing nexus between politics and branding.

The importance of branding: how a strong brand generates business value and perception

Understanding “why is branding important” unveils that branding, once a concept exclusive to the business world, has become a crucial element in political success. A strong brand can differentiate a candidate in a crowded political landscape.

Why is a strong brand necessary in politics? Branding holds significance as it’s not merely a logo or snappy tagline; it involves determining a candidate’s identity and objectives along with the path to attain them. Brand strategy permeates every facet of a politician’s public image. The perception of a candidate’s brand sticks in people’s minds and guides their decisions at the polls: the better branding, the more potent, and the more substantial impact on voters’ choices.

Hence, branding is important because:

- It shapes voters’ perspectives about the candidate, party, or issues.
- Differentiate the candidate from competitors.
- Convey the candidate’s mission, vision, and values in a relatable way.

Understanding how a brand gives great branding and business value

“Why is branding important” is a question that reverberates far beyond commercial businesses in promoting products and services, increasingly finding resonance in all facets of life, including political campaigns. This is because a well-crafted brand more than targets customers; it creates a strong political presence, value proposition, and unrivaled recognition.

Great branding is consistent and easy; it establishes a clear brand identity encompassing visual and emotional aspects. This constant, easy-to-recognise brand identity fosters trust and loyalty and sets candidates apart. Moreover, an established brand is a dependable force that can signal dependability and create customer loyalty among the voters.

Regarding politics, branding ensures increased support, successful campaigns, and a lasting impact. By shaping every interaction, from speeches to online presence, branding helps craft a message that connects with the people’s emotions and aligns with their expectations.

A consistent brand image and sophisticated branding process are integral to achieving substantial value and presence in politics and the broader commercial world.

Why branding is important: loyal customers, new customers, and referrals

“Why is branding important,” you wonder. Understanding its importance is pivotal in the political landscape. A strong brand is a key that unlocks countless opportunities–from loyal supporters to new, enthusiastic followers.

In politics, loyal supporters equate to repeat voters, a group vital for any candidate or political party. An effective branding strategy breeds political ‘fans.’ These die-hard mobile supporters champion their political figure at every turn, bolstering the brand and turning it into a positive customer experience.

A good brand sets the pace for winning over new supporters. It permeates voters’ perceptions, who, in return, form intricate webs of preference for a political campaign. Furthermore, these engaged new supporters become pivotal in generating referrals and recommendations.

Thus, understanding why branding is important leads us to consider its power in generating word-of-mouth referrals, adding depth to the campaign’s outreach efforts. Branding, thus, encapsulates a consistent message across online, offline, and even peer-to-peer interactions.

Branding increases business value: setting you apart from the competition

A unique brand strategy can make all the difference in an increasingly crowded political landscape. Attracting loyal customers is crucial, and by creating a brand identity that appeals to their emotions, you foster deep connections with voters. It’s these emotional bonds that ensure positive impressions and long-lasting support.

The definition of branding highlights its importance in the political sphere. By encapsulating a clear brand strategy, marketing plan, and online presence, campaigns can showcase a compelling message that resonates with the target audience.

As a brand becomes easily recognisable and well-established, it increases business value and voter traction. A great branding process and visual identity help you connect with existing and new customers, ultimately creating brand loyalty.

Why is branding important? It’s clear: it sets campaigns apart from the competition and strengthens their overall value. With a compelling brand identity and message, a candidate or political party is positioned for success in the political arena.

Branding helps connect and establish a strong brand

In politics, a robust brand enables significant connections with voters. Emotion drives action, ensuring voters listen. The significance of branding in politics cannot be emphasised enough. More than just words and images, it’s integral to every brand strategy. political discourse. It’s a vehicle that carries the candidate’s voice, echoing their values.

LAST LINE

Those who can devise a brand that attracts, resonates, and fulfils can shape the future of politics. With every interaction aimed at forming emotional connections, winning campaigns will emerge from the ashes of competition. And this is a surefire way to prosper within the political arena



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

RECLAIMED

Part 2

UDY OSARO-EDOBOR

Lucas called Matt again. This time, the call went through. Matt answered but neither man spoke immediately.

"Matt," he finally managed.
"Where is Tare?"

Matt's answer came calmly.
"She is with me."

Lucas closed his eyes. For a moment, he could not make sense of the words. Then anger pushed through the shock. He demanded to know how that was possible.

Matt reminded him that he had buried Tare. Lucas had stood there while they lowered her into the ground. But there was something Lucas did not know. Tare had never been dead. Her condition had deteriorated rapidly and she stopped responding. The doctors believed she had died. But before her body was taken to the morgue, Tare regained consciousness.

Matt also told Lucas that test results had revealed that Tare was being slowly poisoned. Someone had been deliberately putting arsenic into her system and the doctors needed to understand what was happening.

They also had another concern. They had noticed Lucas's lack of interest in his wife's condition. His visits were infrequent. His attitude was detached. He did not behave like a husband whose wife was fighting for her life. So the doctors asked Tare if there was anyone she could speak to apart from her husband. She gave them one name.
Matt.
Her childhood best friend.

Matt flew into the country as soon as he was contacted. He stayed only briefly and he made sure Lucas did not know he was there. But the moment he saw Tare, something inside him broke. She was slowly disappearing before his eyes.
She was weak. Frail. Barely holding and at the verge of death.

Standing beside her, Matt realised something... he had always loved Tare.
He had simply mistaken it for the love he felt for a sister. He had known her for so long that loving her had become as natural as breathing.

He had never questioned what was beneath that bond until he saw her fighting for her life.

Not long after he returned abroad, the news came that Tare had died. Matt flew back. But by the time he returned, something extraordinary had happened. Tare had regained consciousness as she was being wheeled to the morgue. She was alive.

Matt took charge of everything and Lucas's lack of interest made it easy. Lucas did not demand to see Tare's corpse. He did not question what had happened. He did not insist on examining her body. He simply accepted the death.

Matt did the opposite. With the help of the doctor, who had by then become his friend, he arranged everything Tare needed to recover. A temporary apartment was secured for her with a nurse. She remained there while she regained her strength.

After the supposed burial, Matt went back to Lucas and asked for Tare's personal effects, including her documents. Lucas handed everything over without hesitation. He had no use for them anyway.

When Tare was finally strong enough to travel, there was little difficulty getting her out of the country because her visa was still valid. She went to Scotland. She went to Matt. Somewhere between surviving death and learning what it meant to have someone genuinely stand by her, Tare began to see Matt differently. He had always been her best friend. Her confidant. The person she had loved like a brother.
But love had a way of revealing itself.

Matt had been there when she was helpless. He had fought for her when she could not fight for herself. He had crossed borders to make sure she survived. He had protected her when the man who was supposed to protect her abandoned her. Tare's feelings changed and when they eventually married a few months later, she knew she had made the best decision of her life.

Lucas had not known any of it. He had simply moved on. He had married another woman. He had complained about her. He had compared her to Tare. He had regretted everything. And all that time, the woman he believed he had buried was alive and building a new life with the man he had once called his buddy.

When Matt finished telling him everything, Lucas exploded. He accused Matt of betrayal. He accused him of stealing his wife. He threatened to deal with both Matt and Tare. He threatened to sue them.
He insisted that Tare was still his wife and that Matt had no right to marry her.

Matt listened.
He allowed Lucas to scream. Then he asked him one quiet question.
How had Tare been poisoned?
Lucas stopped. The anger disappeared from his voice. He stuttered. Then he went silent.

Matt warned him to be careful with the threats he was making because if Lucas wanted to start asking questions about Tare's supposed death, the poisoning was one question he might not want anyone asking.

For the first time, Lucas had nothing to say.
He had acted as if he was the one who had been wronged but now there was something else hanging over him. The unanswered question of who had been slowly poisoning Tare... and why.

Lucas wasn't himself after that phone call with Matt. His indifference had made him a terrible husband but he was not a killer. He had never wished Tare dead.

Matt mentioned arsenic and something jolted inside him. Suddenly, he remembered something he had never considered important. Edna, the woman he had married after Tare's supposed death had once told him about a cousin who was a doctor. According to her, the doctor had recommended some medication that could help Tare recover.

Lucas had accepted the drugs without asking questions and added them to Tare's medication. He had trusted Edna, believing she was simply being thoughtful. Tare had been too ill to notice the new additions.

Now, the truth began to settle heavily on Lucas. He might have been careless, selfish and unfeeling and Edna had used his indifference to get poison into his wife's system.

He decided to confront her. He asked to meet the cousin who had supposedly recommended the medication for Tare and Edna denied ever having such a relative. He then confronted her about the drugs but she stuttered, contradicted herself and tried to argue her way out of the situation. She had no convincing answer. The woman who was usually loud, bold and quick with her words looked genuinely unsettled.

Then Lucas showed her Tare's wedding photographs. Tare was alive. She had survived. The poisoning had not achieved whatever she had intended. Edna looked shocked. She was visibly shaking.

The following day, Lucas returned from work to find his home almost completely stripped. Edna had probably come with a moving truck because she cleared all his belongings, only his personal effects remained.

He had been blinded by Edna's voluptuous figure particularly her full breasts and generous curves and like most men, he had foolishly mistaken her physical appeal for the qualities that made a good woman. He had failed to appreciate Tare's character and the quiet dignity with which she carried herself. Tare had been ten times the woman Edna could ever hope to be, yet he had treated her as though she were a burden.

Now he had lost them both: he had lost Tare to his own indifference and Edna had left him with little more than the clothes on his back.

He sat on the floor in the middle of his empty apartment, surrounded by silence. The full cost of his choices starring him in the face. He had traded a good woman for a lie and now he had to live with the consequences.



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UGO UDEZUE: FROM NBA AGENT TO BASKETBALL'S COMMERCIAL ARCHITECT

ANTHONY NLEBEM



Ugo Udezue's election as Vice President of the Nigeria Basketball Federation (NBBF) places one of the game's most widely travelled insiders at the heart of a new administration: a former international, ex-NBA agent and sports entrepreneur who has spent more than two decades on almost every side of the sport.

Udezue was returned unopposed as vice president at the federation's elective congress in Abuja on Thursday, 15 October 2026, as the sole candidate for the position. Earlier in the process, he was re-elected as the South-East zonal representative on the NBBF Board. He will serve alongside Dr Mustapha Abdullahi, Director-General of the Energy Commission of Nigeria, who won the presidency to succeed Engr. Ahmadu Musa Kida after eight years in office.

Where Abdullahi brings experience in public administration and policy, Udezue brings the view from the court, the agent's table and the boardroom. Together, the pairing gives the federation a blend of institutional management and commercial knowledge at a time when Nigerian basketball faces pressing demands for stronger leagues, better player welfare and reliable funding.



Their shared goal is ambitious: a basketball ecosystem in which a Nigerian player can build a good living at home, without having to travel overseas to make a career of the game.

The challenge before Udezue is to turn that ambition into structures that outlast any single administration.

From the hardwood to the NBA

Udezue's journey began as a player. A product of Nigeria's youth programme, he represented Nigeria at Under-18 level, an experience he has often said changed his life, before going on to play for the senior national team.

He moved to the United States and went on to star for the University of Wyoming, where he studied public relations with a focus on advertising and communications.

A 6 ft 8 in forward, he became one of the leading scorers in American college basketball, earning second-team All-WAC honours and averaging over 20 points a game. He later played professionally before injury brought his playing days to a close.

His next chapter took him to the business side of the NBA. Bill Duffy, founder of BDA Sports Management, one of the most respected basketball agencies in the world, hired him in 2003. Udezue became the first Nigerian certified as an NBA agent in the United States and rose to vice president at BDA, representing athletes for more than 17 years.

His client list included NBA players such as Nenê, Andre Roberson and Nigerian-born centre Festus Ezeli.

That career gave him a working knowledge of contracts, sponsorship, player development and the commercial engine that powers professional basketball, knowledge he would later bring home.

Building a league and a brand

In 2017, Udezue stepped away from the comfort of the American game to pursue a bigger idea: a professional league for Africa. He co-founded the African Basketball League with six teams, later rebranding it as the Continental Basketball League (CBL), which grew to ten teams across six African countries. Before the league, he noted that Nigerians did not pay to watch basketball games.

The league also gave birth to an unplanned business. Unable to secure shoe, apparel or even ball sponsors for the competition, Udezue and his partners created their own. AFA Sports, short for "Africa for Africa", began by making uniforms and shoes for the league and soon became a kit partner to Nigeria's national teams.

Under his leadership as CEO, AFA Sports has manufactured in Lagos rather than outsourcing production, kitted the D'Tigers and D'Tigress, including the women's team at the Tokyo Olympics, and signed an apparel partnership with the Ghana Basketball Association, extending its reach across the continent. Udezue's argument has been consistent: African sport needs indigenous brands invested in its growth, rather than waiting on global giants to come to the rescue.

A seat at the federation's table
Udezue's involvement in federation affairs has deepened steadily. He was first elected South-East representative on the NBBF Board in 2022 and has served, pro bono, as Chairman of the federation's Sponsorship and Marketing Committee, leading its drive for corporate partnerships.

In March 2026, the Ebonyi State Sports Council appointed him Board Chairman of the Ebonyi State Basketball Association. His candidacy for vice president also carried regional significance: he positioned himself as a voice for the South-East, a region that produces a large share of Nigeria's basketball talent.

Ahead of the congress, Udezue publicly endorsed Abdullahi for the presidency, arguing that the sport needed stronger commercial structures, infrastructure and professional management. Nigeria, he pointed out, has more than 220 million people, with half of them under nineteen; a demographic he regards as the game's greatest untapped asset.

Keeping talent at home

For Udezue, the work with Abdullahi is about more than running the NBBF. It is about building an industry. For decades, Nigeria's best players have had to leave the country to earn a living from the game, playing in American colleges, European leagues and beyond, while the domestic game struggled to pay salaries, fill arenas or hold on to its stars.

"Our dream is an ecosystem where a basketball player in Nigeria can live a very good life in Nigeria without travelling overseas," Udezue said.

"To do that, we have to develop our infrastructure and keep our talent in-house."

He sees infrastructure as the foundation of that ecosystem. Modern arenas create match-day revenue and television products. Professional clubs create salaried jobs for players, coaches, referees and staff. A credible league gives sponsors and investors a reason to commit. Each piece, he argues, makes the next one possible, and together they give young Nigerians a reason to build their careers at home.

The commercial agenda

Udezue's stated ambition is to move the NBBF from a bureaucracy to a commercial enterprise, with the Board setting policy and full-time professional staff executing it.

Central to that vision is the domestic Premier League. He has proposed transitioning it from a Board-run competition into an equity-driven company capable of attracting sponsors and investors. He also wants the national teams, the D'Tigers and the D'Tigress, and the Under-18 and Under-16 sides, managed as a sports business, with dedicated leadership, multi-year planning, and professional departments for logistics, scouting and administration.

His platform also includes basketball infrastructure across the six geopolitical zones through partnerships with state governments and private capital, a national digital database of players, coaches, referees and clubs, and digital platforms for competitions, statistics and streaming. He has called for former internationals and members of the diaspora to play a greater role in scouting, technical matters and youth development, and for finance professionals and other high-profile figures to support the federation through advisory councils.

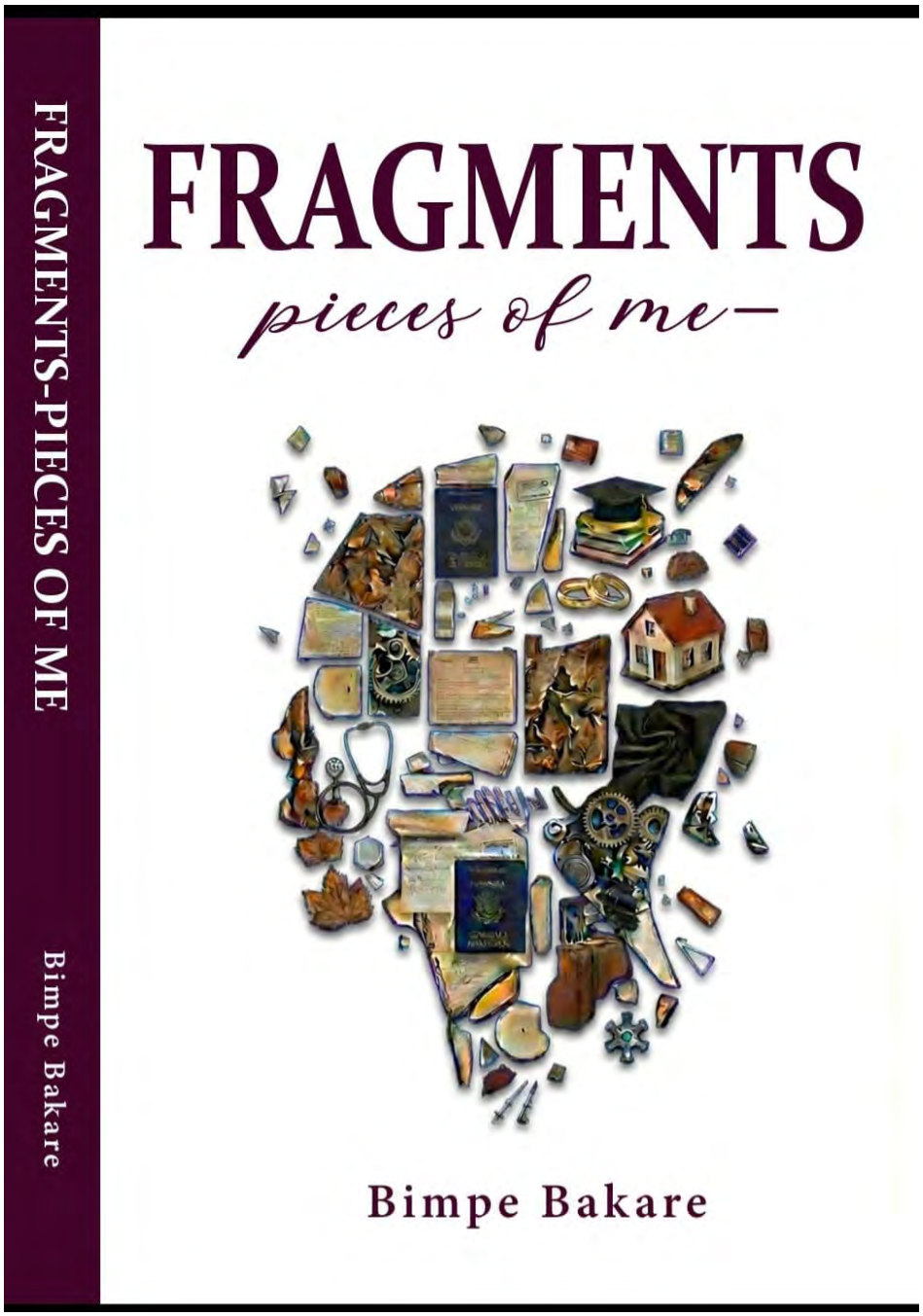
He has pointed to the growth of the Basketball Africa League and rising investment in African basketball as evidence of the commercial opportunity available to Nigeria.

The test ahead

Few Nigerian administrators have seen the game from as many angles as Udezue: player, agent, league founder, kit manufacturer and federation official. That breadth gives him unusual credibility with players, investors and international partners alike.

But the measure of his tenure will be practical. Professional staff must be hired and funded, the Premier League must become attractive to investors, and the national teams must be supported by systems rather than goodwill. Commercial growth will depend on the federation's ability to demonstrate sound governance and deliver value to partners.

For Udezue, the defining test will be whether he and Abdullahi can build an ecosystem in which Nigeria's next generation of players no longer has to leave home to live well from the game.



The Exhaustion of Always Being the Strong One-A Review of Bimpe Bakare's Fragment

Title: Fragments: Pieces of Me
Author: Bimpe Bakare
Year of Publication: 2026
Number of Pages: 187
Category: Memoir

FRAGMENTS: PIECES OF ME

TITILADE OYEMADE

There is something terribly exhausting about being the person everyone considers strong. You are dependable, responsible and seemingly capable of handling anything life throws at you. People admire your resilience and trust you to get things done. But what happens when the person everyone believes is unshakeable is quietly falling apart? In Bimpe Bakare's Fragment, being the strong one is not necessarily something to celebrate. Sometimes, it is a lonely place to be.

The prologue alone is enough to make a reader pause and reflect on life. More than a collection of personal experiences, Fragment is an attempt to understand the person behind them. The book starts like an autobiography, sometimes reads like a work of fiction, and at other times feels like poetry. Bakare moves between styles as she recounts her childhood, school life, friendships, marriage, family, relocation, faith and grief. From Lagos to Aberdeen and back, her experiences gradually reveal that being good at coping does not necessarily mean one is coping well.

Bakare comes across as the sort of person many would describe as easy to deal with: the loner, the diligent student, the dependable friend and the responsible employee. She knows how to meet expectations and keep going. However, beneath this calm exterior lies a more complicated reality. Sometimes, people become so accustomed to being responsible and doing the right thing that they rarely stop to question what it costs them.

This is where Fragment becomes particularly interesting. It draws attention to the survival strategies people develop without even realising it. Behaviours that are often praised can conceal deeper struggles. The quiet child is well behaved, the hardworking employee is dependable, and the friend who never complains is considered strong. Everyone is happy until the person behind these labels begins to wonder whether there is room to be anything else.

Bakare's reflections on survival mode and invisibility are among the book's most thought-provoking aspects. It is possible to fulfil every responsibility and still feel unseen. When people begin to identify entirely with the roles they perform, being dependable becomes an obligation, strength becomes an expectation, and admitting to a struggle feels like failure. For readers who recognise themselves in Bakare's experiences, her tendency to be hard on herself raises an uncomfortable question: how many people are kinder to everyone around them than they are to themselves?

The book also offers another perspective on the woman behind the image of strength and accomplishment. Bakare acknowledges her fears, regrets, disappointments and exhaustion, as well as her doubts about whether the life she is living is the one she truly wants. Not every reader will consider her concerns equally significant. Some may feel that certain experiences do not warrant the level of reflection they receive. Yet what one person considers a minor inconvenience may be the final straw for someone who has spent years holding everything together. An apparently good life does not automatically mean an absence of struggle.

What makes the book interesting is Bakare's honesty about her struggles. She does not pretend to have life all figured out. Her story has its share of disappointments, happy moments, lessons and things to be grateful for. This makes her experiences relatable because life is never all good or all bad.

Another notable feature is the inclusion of reflective questions at the end of each chapter. These encourage readers to examine their own relationships, expectations, survival strategies and definitions of strength. Some chapters may leave readers wanting to pause and consider their own experiences before moving on. This makes Fragment particularly suitable for book clubs and conversations about self-awareness and personal growth.

The book is easy to read, even when Bakare uses poetic language. She has plenty of stories to tell, and the personal touch makes the book interesting. As her story unfolds, she begins to move from simply putting up with life to making choices that reflect what she wants, rather than what others expect of her. She has not found all the answers, but she is learning to ask the difficult questions.

The title Fragment is fitting for a book about the different experiences, expectations and emotions that make up an individual. People are rarely as straightforward as they appear, and even those who seem to have everything under control may be carrying parts of themselves that remain unseen.

Ultimately, Fragment reminds readers that being strong does not mean being invulnerable, and being capable does not mean having to cope with everything alone. Bakare's journey towards greater self-awareness demonstrates the importance of accepting both the person one has been and the person one is still becoming. Perhaps its greatest lesson is that it is possible to be grateful for life, proud of one's resilience and still admit that some parts of the journey have been difficult. You do not have to break before you are allowed to rest.



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WEEKENDER

MOVIE REVIEW

CARGO (2018)



For those of you who enjoy Australian horror movies, then you might want to jump on this. Although I am not a horror movie lover, I had to jump on this as there was a shortage of action movies. This movie felt more like a thriller movie than horror, it wasn't that scary. In this movie, a terrifying Pandemic struck their area. There was a father who had to run all through the desert to save his daughter's life. In trying to save his wife, he got bitten and also had to try to protect his daughter, while trying not to contaminate her. You will need to watch the entire movie to see how he fought to save his daughter's life, how he had to work with a young boy to save all their lives. The 104m Australian horror movie was directed by Yolanda Ranke, Ben Howling, they featured actors like Martin Freeman, Anthony Haryes, Susie Porter, Kris McQuade, Caren Pistorius etc.

STORM (2026)

Honestly, I really haven't seen any clumsier movie than this in a very long while, the movie was just everywhere and left me even more confused than when I started. I really struggled with it, in this movie, a group of old friends left their kids behind in a resort to go attend a beautiful birthday bash at a fantastic beautiful luxury lodge. This lodge had everything in it, a sauna, pool, and enough space to play around. On arrival at the lodge just as the party was getting started a bad storm struck that left them trapped in doors all through. Just as the birthday party was happening the birthday bash turns into a party of chaos, betrayals, grudges, fights and unnecessary battles. The 101m Swedish drama, comedies movie was directed by Josephine Bornebush, they featured actors like Christopher Wagelin, Grustaf Skarsgard, Allttte Opneim, Fillip Berg, Josephine Bornebush, Jonah Rhebong, Jonas Karlsson, Sam Shirpey, Gizem Erdogan.





REMARKABLY BRIGHT CREATURES

If you enjoy movies that talk about underwater creatures, then you might want to jump on this movie. Tora was an old lady, who cleaned classes of an aquarium and along the line started to build a bond with them. Along the line they employed a new guy called Cameron who also started to build a bond with the creatures as he cleaned, tora and Cameron became good friends and built a relationship. You will need to go watch this movie to see if Cameron was able to convince Tora to remain in the city. The 103m drama, film based on books, was directed by Olivia Newman, they featured actors like Sally Field, Lewis Pullman, Alfred Molina, Colon Meaney, Joan Chen, Kathy Baker, Beth Grant, Donald Sales, Mapuana Makia and many more.



Linda Ochugbua

WEEKEND QUOTES

1

Trees are cut down yet they sing your praise; if creation sings your praise so will I.
.....WhispersbyTEN

2

Faithfulness does exempt you from battles, however, it guarantees triumph.
.....WhispersbyTEN

3

When you take a stand on an issue for selfish reasons, always have the end in mind.
.....WhispersbyTEN

4

Define for yourself who God is.
.....WhispersbyTEN