

BUSINESS DAY WEEKENDER

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Trends that would shape Nigeria's restaurant and dining scene in 2026



FEATURE

75 New Year quotes
to welcome 2026 with
celebration and hope



FASHION

Top 10 braid styles Nigerian
women rocked in 2025

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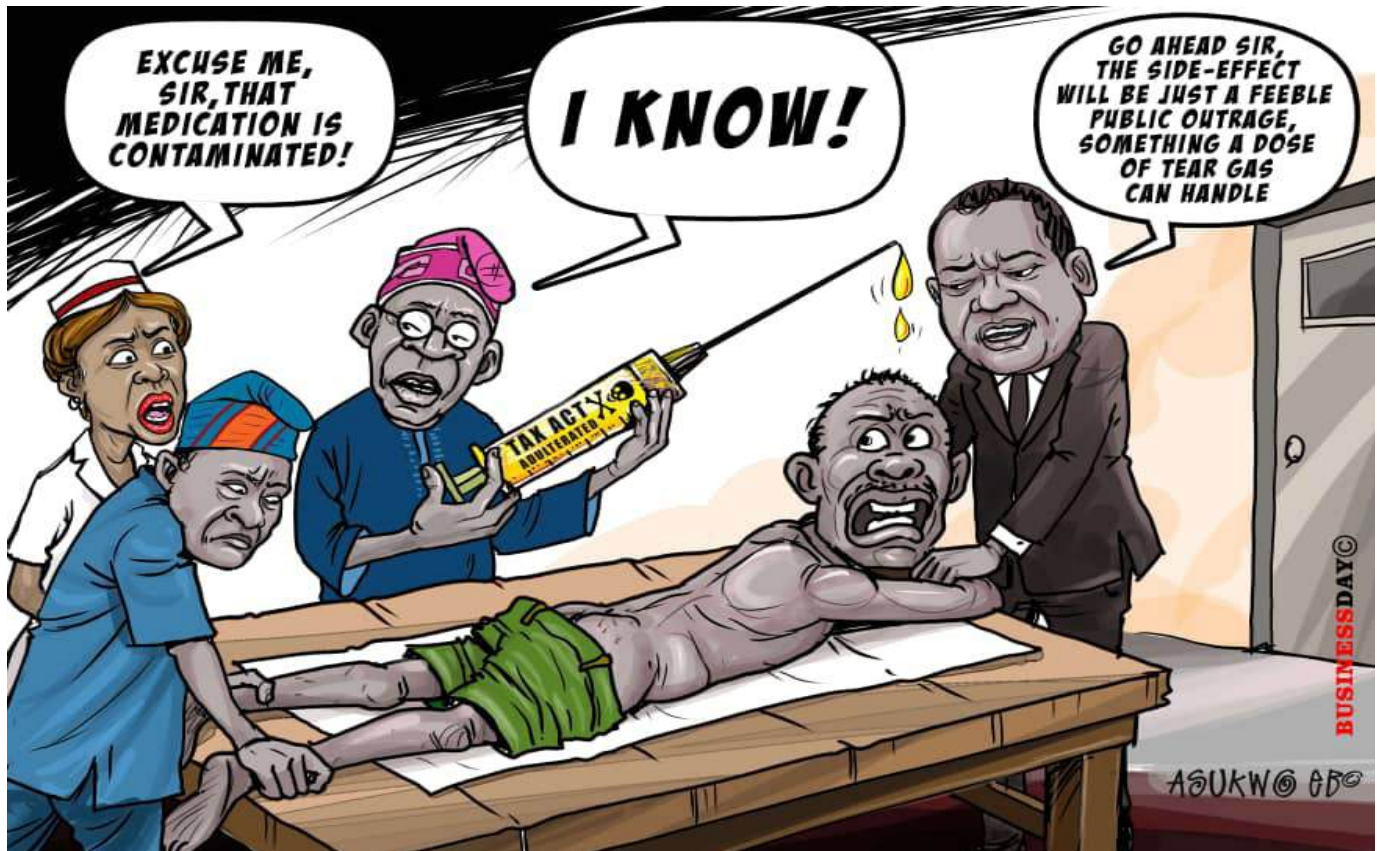
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TRENDS THAT WOULD SHAPE NIGERIA'S RESTAURANT AND DINING SCENE IN 2026

ESTHER **EMOEKPERE**



It's a new year, and looking back, it's wild how much our relationship with food has shifted. Not just what we eat, but how we get it, who we trust to teach us to cook it, and whether it's worth posting before we take that first bite.

Some of these trends made sense. Some were genuinely good. Some were just fashionable. And some? Completely unnecessary. But they all left their mark on how Nigerians interact with food today.

Let's highlight a few of the trends shaping the Nigerian food scene in 2026.

Interior design is now part of the menu

Walk into any well-regarded restaurant in Lagos or Abuja, and the intentionality is obvious: someone thought carefully about how this space photographs. The lighting isn't an accident. Those terracotta walls, the brass fixtures, the plants positioned in corners—they're all doing work.

This isn't vanity. Restaurants have learned that if a space doesn't look good on Instagram, it might as well not exist. Customers are choosing where to eat based on what they see online, so operators are treating design as a form of marketing. Neutral tones, textured surfaces, statement art that doesn't overreach—it's become a recognisable formula, and it works.

The result is that Nigerian restaurants look better than they ever have. The trade-off is that many are beginning to look similar, following the same aesthetic playbook that guarantees social media traction but offers diminishing returns in distinctiveness.

Technology is now deeply embedded in the dining experience

QR code menus felt experimental a few years ago. Now they're simply part of the infrastructure. The same applies to digital ordering, online reservations, and contactless payments—all of which have become baseline expectations, particularly in urban centres.

For diners, the shift has streamlined the experience. For restaurants, it addresses operational challenges: inventory management, rush-hour service bottlenecks, and payment reconciliation. The technology is no longer discussed because it has been absorbed into routine.

Social media, too, has been integrated into restaurant operations. Chefs consider how dishes will appear on a phone screen before plating them. Dining rooms are arranged with lighting and angles in mind. This isn't cynicism—it's simply an acknowledgement of how visibility and reputation are built today.

Fine dining is taking Nigerian cuisine seriously. For years, Nigerian fine dining seemed to operate from a position of insecurity—heavy on French technique, light on

local ingredients, with presentations that could have appeared on any menu in Europe. That dynamic is shifting.

Chefs are working with greater assurance now. Local dishes are being reimagined with attention to texture and balance. Suya spices are deployed in contexts that don't announce themselves. Indigenous proteins and grains are treated with the kind of technical care that allows diners to experience them differently. This isn't fusion as novelty—it's refinement rooted in a clearer sense of what Nigerian cuisine can be within a premium context.

Diners, meanwhile, have shown themselves willing to pay for thoughtful reinterpretations of familiar food, provided the execution feels deliberate rather than performative. The momentum around this shift feels substantive, not fleeting.

Street food has moved upmarket

Street food never disappeared, but its cultural positioning has changed. Suya, akara, bole, roasted corn—foods that have always been present—are attracting renewed attention, particularly among younger urban diners seeking authenticity, affordability, and flavour without pretence.

Part of this shift is structural. Many vendors have improved hygiene standards, presentation, and consistency, making them genuinely competitive with small restaurants. However, the change is also attitudinal: there is now less inclination to treat street food as a fallback option or guilty pleasure. It is increasingly viewed as a legitimate and desirable choice in its own right.

Formal restaurants are responding accordingly. Casual dining spots are borrowing street food formats and flavours—loaded shawarma fries, elevated suya platters, jollof rice with contemporary twists. The boundary between street and restaurant is becoming less fixed, reflecting how Nigerians actually eat when cultural hierarchies are set aside.

Globally trendy foods and drinks are now normalised. Bubble tea is trendy now. So is matcha. Korean corn dogs, iced coffees, gourmet cookies, loaded fries—none of this registers as experimental anymore. These items have moved from novelty to standard menu offerings.

What's notable is that these global trends are not displacing Nigerian staples. They exist alongside them. A customer can order jollof rice and brown sugar boba at the same establishment without contradiction. This reflects how urban Nigerians actually eat—fluidly, without rigid adherence to culinary categories.

Restaurants are making serious investments now: purchasing specialised equipment, training staff properly, and sourcing ingredients with consistency. This indicates that demand is steady and reliable, not driven by passing curiosity. Social media may have introduced these trends, but repeat patronage suggests a genuine appetite.

75 NEW YEAR QUOTES TO WELCOME 2026 WITH CELEBRATION AND HOPE

CHISOM MICHAEL



With the New Year now underway, the arrival of 2026 highlights just how swiftly time moves. It may seem like 2025 began only moments ago, yet a full year of experiences, challenges, and achievements has already passed.

To mark the beginning of the year, a curated collection of New Year's quotes is offering readers inspiration for fresh starts and renewed purpose. Ideal for New Year wishes, social media captions, and celebratory toasts, the quotes reflect themes of growth, resilience, and opportunity.

One standout quote by Nido Qubein reminds readers that present circumstances are only a starting point, encouraging them to embrace change and move confidently into the year ahead.

Here are 75 New Year's quotes to welcome 2026 with celebration and hope, compiled by The Pioneers Woman

Best New Year Quotes

"The magic in new beginnings is truly the most powerful of them all." — Josiyah Martin

"Tomorrow is the first blank page of a 365-page book. Write a good one." — Brad Paisley

"What the new year brings to you will depend a great deal on what you bring to the new year." — Vern McLellan

"Cheers to a new year and another chance for us to get it right." — Oprah Winfrey

"Take a leap of faith and begin this wondrous new year by believing." — Sarah Ban Breathnach

"Write it on your heart that every day is the best day in the year." — Ralph Waldo Emerson

"New year — a new chapter, new verse, or just the same old story? Ultimately we write it." — Alex Morritt

"Be always at war with your vices, at peace with your neighbors, and let each new year find you a better man." — Benjamin Franklin

"The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams." — Eleanor Roosevelt

"Hope smiles from the threshold of the year to come." — Alfred, Lord Tennyson

"New beginnings are often disguised as painful endings." — Lao Tzu

"You don't have to see the whole staircase, just take the first step." — Martin Luther King Jr.

"Every new beginning comes from some other beginning's end." — Seneca

"New year is the glittering light to brighten the dream-laden pathway of future." — Munia Khan

"Year's end is neither an end nor a beginning but a going on." — Hal Borland

"The bad news is time flies. The good news is you're the pilot." — Michael Altshuler

"Each day is a chance to begin again. Don't focus on the failures of yesterday." — Catherine Pulsifer

"Cheers to a gracious New Year. May we uphold one another in peace and love." — Lailah Gifty Akita

"This is a new year. A new beginning. And things will change." — Taylor Swift

"The journey of a thousand miles begins with one step." — Lao Tzu

"Your life does not get better by chance, it gets better by change." — Jim Rohn

"Start where you are. Use what you have. Do what you can." — Arthur Ashe

"Small steps in the right direction can turn out to be the biggest step of your life." — Naeem Callaway

"Learn from yesterday, live for today, hope for tomorrow." — Albert Einstein

"Look not mournfully into the past. It comes not back again." — Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

"Stay close to anything that makes you glad you are alive." — Hafiz
 "A year from now you will wish you had started today." — Karen Lamb

"This year, be structured enough for success and achievement and flexible enough for creativity and fun." — Taylor Duvall

"Renewal requires opening yourself up to new ways of thinking and feeling." — Deborah Day

"Do not dwell in the past; do not dream of the future; concentrate the mind on the present moment." — Buddha

Inspirational New Year Quotes

"You are never too old to set another goal or to dream a new dream." — C.S. Lewis

"Approach the New Year with resolve to find the opportunities hidden in each new day." — Michael Josephson

"The only limit to our realization of tomorrow will be our doubts of today." — Franklin D. Roosevelt

"The beginning is the most important part of the work." — Plato

"Don't watch the clock; do what it does. Keep going." — Sam Levenson

"Your present circumstances don't determine where you can go; they merely determine where you start." — Nido Qubein

"With the new day comes new strength and new thoughts." — Eleanor Roosevelt

"Be bold and mighty forces will come to your aid." — Basil King

"Your present circumstances don't determine where you can go; they merely determine where you start." — Nido Qubein

"The best way to predict the future is to create it." — Peter Drucker

"Be willing to be a beginner every single morning." — Meister Eckhart

"Success is not final, failure is not fatal: It is the courage to continue that counts." — Winston Churchill

"Happiness is not something ready-made. It comes from your own actions." — Dalai Lama

"Yesterday, I was clever, so I wanted to change the world. Today I am wise, so I am changing myself." — Rumi

"Don't count the days, make the days count." — Muhammad Ali

"Do something today that your future self will thank you for." — Sean Patrick Flanery

"The biggest adventure you can take is to live the life of your dreams." — Oprah Winfrey

"Each year's regrets are envelopes in which messages of hope are found." — John R. Dallas Jr.

"To improve is to change; to be perfect is to change often." — Winston Churchill

"Tomorrow is a new day with no mistakes in it yet." — L. M. Montgomery

"What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us." — Ralph Waldo Emerson

"Welcome anything that comes to you, but do not long for anything else." — André Gide

Short New Year Quotes

"The best is yet to come." — Frank Sinatra

"May you live all the days of your life." — Jonathan Swift

"Whatever you do, do it well." — Walt Disney

"Life is short. Live it." — Santana

"Every moment is a fresh beginning." — T.S. Eliot

"Today is the first day of the rest of your life." — Charles Dederich

"New Year's Day is every man's birthday." — Charles Lamb

"Be fearless in the pursuit of what sets your soul on fire." — Jennifer Lee

"Go confidently in the direction of your dreams." — Henry David Thoreau

"The new year stands before us like a chapter in a book." — Melody Beattie

"Celebrate endings—for they precede new beginnings." — Jonathan Lockwood Huie

"Dream big. Start small. Act now." — Robin Sharma

"Believe you can and you're halfway there." — Theodore Roosevelt

"Life begins at the end of your comfort zone." — Neale Donald Walsch

"It is never too late to be what you might have been." — George Eliot

"No matter how hard the past, you can always begin again." — Buddha

"The future begins today, not tomorrow." — Pope John Paul II

"If winter comes, can spring be far behind?" — Percy Bysshe Shelley

"Light tomorrow with today." — Elizabeth Barrett Browning

"The darkest night will end and the sun will rise." — Victor Hugo

"All great achievements require time." — Maya Angelou

"Live each day as though your life had just begun." — Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

TOP 10 BRAID STYLES NIGERIAN WOMEN ROCKED IN 2025

CHIOMA ONUH

2025 was a year shaped by rising costs and hair became both beauty and strategy.

Braids have always been a fashion choice for Nigerian women but in 2025, it was a response to economic pressure, lifestyle shifts and evolving trends. As inflation squeezed household budgets and work-life boundaries blurred, hair routines had to do more with less. The result was a year where braids dominated salons and timelines for aesthetics with a potential to last long and protect natural strands.

These were the braid trends that defined 2025.

Knotless braids

Knotless braids are still the default, it retained its position as the most requested braid style and the reason is straightforward, less tension at the roots, a lighter feel and a more natural finish that made the style suitable for long workdays, frequent outings and extended wear.

2025 was a year where many women delayed salon visits to manage costs, but knotless braids offered durability without discomfort. They also aligned with a growing emphasis on scalp health, particularly among young professionals.



French curl bob

The French curl bob, one of the most popular braid hairstyles of 2025, mixes beautiful, voluminous curls at the ends with polished roots. To achieve the fluffy, voluminous effect, parts of the French curl extensions must be left unbraided.



Boho braids and twists

Boho styles really gained momentum as women leaned into softer and fuller aesthetics. Characterised by loose curls and imperfect finishes, boho braids and twists reigned in 2025. Although it could not really be trusted for longevity as many of the available curl extensions were prone to tangle, the style however resonated in creative circles and among social media users. It became popular for celebrations and content creation.



Fulani-inspired braids

Fulani-inspired braids returned, but with cleaner parts, fewer accessories and more refined finishes. Beads and cuffs were used sparingly, often as accents rather than focal points. It was modernised and braiders got creative exploring different patterns.



Short braids

Shorter braid lengths gained grounds. It became increasingly common, driven largely by convenience. Shoulder-length and chin-length braids reduced installation time, cost and weight, while still offering versatility.



Mermaid Braids

Mermaid braids are short hair friendly, women explored different colours of this braid and the countless styling options available for this braid really made it popular. Although, it can be argued that it is quite difficult to maintain, Nigerian women did not mind at all.



Freestyle Cornrows

Cornrows evolved beyond traditional straight-back designs. Stylists experimented with curved lines, layered patterns and geometric sections, turning the scalp into a design surface.

The style appealed to women seeking low-maintenance options that still felt intentional. It was particularly popular among those who paired cornrows with wigs or preferred a natural, understated look.





Mixed braid techniques

One of the defining characteristics of 2025 was hybrid styling. Braids were no longer confined to single formats. Cornrows fed into knotless braids. Twists blended with plaits. Boho curls was fed into any kind of braids including threading hairstyles...it softened structured bases.

Rather than copying exact styles, women adapted trends to suit their hair texture, lifestyle and budget.



Bora Bora Braids

Ah! Bora Bora braids are one of the big 2025 Lagos trends. Bora Bora braids are bold, eye-catching, and perfect for showing personality. It can be difficult to maintain depending on extension used.

HOW THE GARDEN IKOYI IS TURNING LEISURE INTO A CULTURAL ASSET FOR LAGOS

ESTHER EMOEKPERE



Lagos is a city that rarely pauses. Its rhythm is urgent, ambitious, and unrelenting, a place where time is measured by movement and productivity.

In such a city, leisure is often treated as indulgence, squeezed into margins rather than designed as a way of life. Yet, quietly and deliberately, a different philosophy is taking root in Ikoyi, one that suggests leisure, when thoughtfully curated, can become culture.

The Garden Ikoyi is not simply another restaurant or event venue. It is an intentional response to the emotional and social needs of a city constantly in motion. Designed as a green sanctuary within the urban density, the space invites Lagosians to slow down, gather, and reconnect, not in isolation, but in community.

What distinguishes The Garden is its understanding that culture is built not only through grand moments, but through repeated, meaningful rituals. Its weekly experiences are

less about programming and more about rhythm, creating dependable moments that people return to, build memories around, and eventually claim as their own.

Taco Tuesdays offer a midweek exhale. It is casual, comforting, and unpretentious — an opportunity to step away from routine, share a meal, and ease the pace of the week. In a city where the workweek rarely softens, this simple ritual has become a subtle form of relief.

But it is Owanbe Thursdays that most vividly illustrates how The Garden has woven itself into Lagos' social fabric.

What began organically has evolved into a cultural phenomenon. Each week, the space fills with a diverse audience, leaders in business and government, corporate professionals, creatives, and social tastemakers, drawn not by spectacle, but by familiarity.



Nostalgic music, communal dining, and shared laughter transform the evening into something deeper than entertainment.

The consistency of its demand, often selling out before the next week's date is announced, speaks to something rare: a collective desire for connection rooted in memory. Owanbe Thursdays do not chase trends, it preserves feeling. In doing so, it quietly archives a version of Lagos that values togetherness, celebration, and ease.

Newer additions like Tribal Wednesdays reflect the evolving energy of the city. Though recently introduced, the experience has quickly resonated with young, vibrant lifestyle enthusiasts. Its growing popularity further solidifies The Garden's ability to listen to its audience and adapt, offering experiences that feel current without losing authenticity.

Then there is Sunday Brunch, perhaps the most reflective of The Garden's philosophy. Designed as a family-style feast, it offers restoration rather than excitement, a chance to close the week gently and begin the next renewed. Together, these experiences form more than a calendar. They shape habits. They influence how people choose to spend their time, whom they gather with, and where they feel most at ease. Over time, they transform The Garden from a place people visit into a place people belong to.

This is where leisure becomes cultural infrastructure. Not as an abstract idea, but as lived experience. In cities across the world, thoughtfully designed leisure spaces are increasingly recognised as essential to quality of life, places where social cohesion is strengthened and identity is expressed.



The Garden Ikoyi demonstrates that Lagos, too, is capable of this kind of intentional design.

Importantly, it does so without mimicking other cities. While its sophistication could sit comfortably alongside global destinations, its soul remains distinctly Lagos.

The music, the energy, the communal spirit, all are familiar, refined rather than replaced.

In a city constantly building upwards and outwards, The Garden Ikoyi builds inward, creating space for pause, presence, and shared humanity. It reminds us that leisure, when designed with care, is not an escape from the city. It is a contribution to it.

And in that contribution, The Garden Ikoyi has quietly transformed leisure into something lasting: a cultural asset for Lagos.



**WHY THE 2026 TAX LAW IS
LEGISLATIVE TREASON AGAINST
A STARVING POPULATION
- ADEBAYO**



As Nigeria ushers in 2026, the political landscape remains as volatile as the economy. Amidst the backdrop of the 2nd Adebayo National Marathon in Ondo City—an event that saw over 5,000 athletes race through the historic mountain ranges of the West—Prince Adewole Adebayo, the 2023 presidential candidate of the Social Democratic Party (SDP), remains a man on a mission.

In this interview with IFEOMA OKEKE-KORIEOCHA, the legal luminary and politician draws a sharp parallel between the endurance required for a marathon and the resilience needed to survive what he describes as the “international harassment” of 2025. From the “anti-people” 2026 Tax Reform Law to the controversial student loan schemes, Adebayo pulls no punches. He dissects the “one-party elite” consolidation under the Tinubu administration and explains why he is already tightening his laces for the 2027 presidential race.

The Adebayo National Marathon is entering the 2nd year, can you give us a brief intro for establishing the marathon?

It has given people purpose and the opportunity to use their strength and stamina, and we put people together, and this is me, and this is you. If you want to be successful, you have to endure this. You have to plan, you have to focus, you have to work hard, and you have to project. You have to prepare for this. You have to compete for this. You have to endure. Because just as individuals are running their races, companies are also running their races. This is why development is a marathon.

What’s the turnout like this year?

We have the planning committee, Omoleye Sowore is the chairperson, the secretary, Dr. Oduagunoye is a member, there are a few other members, but they are all around, mostly around competitiveness.

Why a particular marathon? And why the choice of Ondo State?

There’s nothing particular about the marathon. I’m involved in sports very majorly. Judo, basketball is my own home sport, which is boxing, wrestling, and swimming.

So it’s just that today is for marathon. Other days are for other sports. And what we want to get out of it is basically to give it a sportsmanship characteristic.

The country of sportspeople would be a very active country. And sports is the beginning of good health. It’s the beginning of having a strong military.

And if you start with young people, it’s the beginning of developing a character. Because to wake up in the morning and train for a marathon that’s taking place a year from now is a way to develop character, to follow purpose, and to also become part of an international community. And if you stay on your own in highlands, if you check the elevation of Ondo City, we are fairly as good as the average East African area, apart from the Mountain Range, Mount Kenya, and a few other spots.

But generally, we are high enough in the topography to be able to do a just a few kilometers from here to this mountain range and the range of runners.

Is there any further assistance / sponsorship that will be granted to the talents that will be discovered?

Well, many of them, those who won last year, they’re going internationally to run. But I think marathoners are not like other sports. In general, people who live to help their parents, some of them have very resourceful young ones, and they just want to run. So, we have the youth segment where we try to encourage young people to run, and it’s more likely that younger people will need more assistance.

So, it's not a sport for beginners. You don't begin your running career with a marathon. Actually, it's for well-experienced and determined runners.

What's your assessment of the year 2025?

For the people in government, it's a year of abuse. And for the media, it's a year of distraction. We have a list of all the problems of Nigerians. For the political class, it's a year of removing credibility from politics. It's 2025 in Nigeria. For the political class, it's a year of denouncing yourself. We're just leaving the party. Just to see this, fighting, and for Nigeria, it's a year of international harassment.

How would a foreign country be able to come to your country? Even to insult Nigeria before or criticize Nigeria, it was a serious matter. Do you remember the postcard where the US government sent the so-called Peace Corps? And one of the Peace Corps members criticized Nigeria in the postcard that they sent home.

The entire postcard was proscribed. Because Nigerian youths came out to condemn how can you come to a country and insult Nigeria? The kind of messages we get from Mr. Trump and the US, and then the motion that we hope we can perform in social justice. When you look at all of that, it's a year that we've got no way of exacting an opportunity to decide on peace or something.

Now we're going to present 2026 budgets, and they started with constitutional impossibility, of saying that they are repealing the 2025 Appropriation Act. Why do we want an Appropriation Act that has to be repealed?

The moneys spent, Is it to be regarded as stolen money, or lost money, or lost opportunity? In all of the contracts awarded, what's wrong with those subheads? Are you going to revoke all those numbers? Clearly, we don't have the government. We don't have people of power. We don't have access of money to be able to engage them and tackle them. So 2025 was a year where we beat the government without being able to tackle them. And Tinubu was appointing everyone employed on the team as well. So we want to analyze the year as the year where we introduced, or expanded, the most dangerous youth enslavement program in the country.

In a country where, under our constitution, tuition is supposed to be affordable. No one is expected, under our constitution, to take a loan to go to school. It's one of the operations that arose in America. But in America, if you take a student loan, the professors will not be able to study. In the case of Nigeria, if you take a student loan, you're paying interest to the government, or owing government interest. At the state government level, Almost every governor is to be found, on the average, in Abuja. Lining up to wait for Tinubu on one of these medical trips or unexplained journeys.



So, it's the year of governors shutting down the radio stations, and bringing us to the secondary level, the sub-national level of states. About six or seven governments changed their parties to join the APC and many more are begging and spending money to join. There is no attempt to get the politicians to interpret the problems of the people and want to deal with it.

And it's the year with the most military thing you can remember. A general was killed by so-called terrorists in. You really don't see a general being killed like that. And the other military event is Tinubu's minister, and the Navy officer shouted at each other about a piece of land that was in need of them. So, it's the year we've come to the conclusion that it was the year God gave to us to try to make sense of our lives and we decided not to give it to him in that year.

We are ending that year with the threats that by next year we are going to be officially living under the most bracing act of legislative treason, where the fiscal tax law passed by the National Assembly is being suspected by serious members of the National Assembly as having been tampered with either by the president or the part of the National Assembly or both of them.

So, there are so many things. I don't want to talk about sports. It's the year when Nigeria couldn't meet even the most basic record.

In a few months' time, the process for the 2027 election will commence and I know you are interested, but I would want to ask, are you not worried that Nigeria is gradually moving to a one-party state?

I'm not worried at all because logic suggests to you that if you have one tendency elite, it's a matter of time before they will stop pretending to be different and move into one political party. If you look at most of the political parties that have been in existence since 1998, when we started this current transition, which is now 26 years of governments, they're elites are the same. Most of the political parties are the same.

They are mostly neoliberal. The elites are uniformly corrupt. Uniformly pointless.

So you can find someone who has been in government for eight years and you were asked to summarize their political philosophy. You don't know it. But you can find out their political philosophy when they leave office and you charge them to court. So these elites don't understand the sense of a republic.

They don't take the job seriously. They don't have a sense of leadership. And they're not contributing to anyone. Their economic philosophy is contrary to what is in the constitution even though they swear by the same constitution when they are about to resume office. That is not the language of someone who is collecting power from the people. This is for the benefit of the people.

And returning to the people and becoming an average citizen like the rest of us. So all of them now have summarized their aspirations and realized that Tinubu Group is the most successful in all of their career, all of the power structures and all of that. So they decided there's no point competing with them. They just go and align with them. He is the Capon now and they just follow him.

So that is what people call one party state. But in reality, there cannot be a one party state. Because the natural dialectics is that any union between hungry people and the overfed people cannot last. Any union between unemployed people and people who are considered unemployed cannot be together. A union of poor people and those who stole all their wealth cannot endure. So we are reaching a point where the real opposition will not come from the political class.

The real opposition will come from the Nigerian people. Because what Nigerian people need is a political party in which the Nigerian people, the ordinary person, is invested in. And is part of and is committed to.

And it's a mass movement. That is the end of the so-called one party state. But the elite as decadent as they are.

They are the leftover of the crops of military rule. If you look at the history of most of them, their career began with working for military governments during the dark days of military dictatorship. Helping them to hide money. And if you look at the Tinubu government government, you can see how many of them are returning to their virtual homes. Especially in court, they are working for the government. And contractors who were virtuous partners are hiding money from them. So the summary of all of this is that the Nigerian people are having an opportunity to confront the elite with a political alternative. And now that they are enjoying the drama of problems in these elite classes, it is more important to pay attention to how responsive the Nigerian people are to these problems.

How the Nigerian people show character in realizing that these problems won't go away. And you don't have philosophical things like in the past. There's no one who's coming to rescue you. What you need to do is organize, mobilize, and take collective action to save your democracy. This is the only thing you've got. Which is the right to vote, the right to have that vote reflect, the right to have people who think similarly to you, and to put them in a position of responsibility.

So that the wrongdoings will come to an end. Then we can begin to restore the republic to the original intent. I find it particularly unintelligent to fight and gain independence from white people and be a slave to black people.

I don't see any sense in that. And so the Nigerian people now are going back to what Fanon called mass movement against second slavery. Because if you look at the government of the day, they don't regard you as equal or as a citizen.

They regard you as someone who they can deny you all your rights politically, economically, socially, and give the next generation a great future while they are smiling to the banks.

So I don't think that if you start from Lugard to the last colonial master, Robertson, none of them has been as anti-people as Tinubu has been.

And the only thing that is motivating politicians, commonly, is to use politics and the offices they occupy to address their own personal poverty. So it is no longer a government that is meant to provide food for the public. It is a government that is providing an avenue for a few people to run to the kitchen and seek care for themselves.

So that is the answer to the question of one party state. It can't happen. The one party elite has already happened.

The one party state can't happen. We will defeat them and we will send them out. The earlier you get it easy for the common will of Nigerian people to be expressed through election, and he loses the election and goes away, the better for him and the country.

But in whichever way, it is not sustainable for Nigerians to continue with this trajectory. We will defeat him with a broken company. It doesn't matter how many there are.

Are you recontesting in 2027 or is your party forming a coalition ?

I am running and I have already told my party. My party officially knows that I will contest in 2027. I am in the process of it. There is no major political party in Nigeria. Unless you are substituting it for the ruling party, which I can never join, and my deputy can never join it.

Why?

Because I have met criminals. I have been dealing with criminals. First, you have to occupy an office. If you take a lot of office, you need to keep to it. If you were on your way to join a political party, would you join a political party where they are accusing each other of altering legislation? Would you do that?

It is obvious that you can't claim to be patriotic and still be a member of the APC. It doesn't work. You can't say, I am democratic, but I also support apartheid.

There are certain things I don't agree with. You could say, well, I like Tinubu, but I don't care about Nigeria. So, it is not allowed. Because if you interact with politicians, they will say, oh, he is my mentor, he is my friend. You cannot be two things at the same time that are contradictory. You cannot say, I care for the rule of law, and join this government.

It doesn't follow the rule of law. You cannot say, I care about accountability. And they cannot account for money, they cannot account for budget, they cannot account for time. They can't even account for the whereabouts of the president, because of the time.

But some have also accused you of not seeing anything good in this government ?

Because I don't see it, it doesn't exist. This has to exist. When I woke up this morning, I didn't see you until you arrived. So, if something good happens, I will see it. But if nothing good happens, how do I see it? So, I cannot deceive myself. And Nigerian people are not even willing to see it. For example, they say they are reducing the inflation to 16 per cent, about the time when the price of everything has increased. So, why do you calculate your inflation?

How About the price of foodstuffs?

First, put the foodstuffs in the basket. They don't know the government, they don't know how to lie. Number one, if you put the food in the basket, you take all the staples, rice, yam, beans. That's all. Then, you take the processed foods. Then, you take all the other condiments. If you take everything, the food is in the basket. Now, you have the price of rice at N120,000. It comes to N80,000. The minimum wage is out of it. You take the cost of transportation. There is no part of Nigeria where the cost of transportation has reduced. There is no part of Nigeria where the cost of housing has reduced. Anybody here who has a landlord, when you get a landlord saying, okay, I'm reducing your rent now, does it help? There is no part of the country where you would say that I set up a business and my new business that I'm setting up now is costing me less than before.

If you are in the construction industry, the cost of cement, cement-based, cement-block concrete and all of that, the cost of reinforcement, iron, rod, sand, water; none of the cost is coming down. If you compare the three year budget of three roads, for the same project, their cost is rising. So, you have a 90 kilometer road, awarded in 2023 for X amount, because they didn't fund the project, they have no discipline. Now, they carry the same project over to the following year, or some segment of it.

When they are repricing it, it's higher than before. So, we call it variation, and you see David Umahi, coming on TV and talking about variation, variation, variation. So, it goes on like that.

If you travel by air, your airfare hasn't reduced. Even if you adjust for seasonal volatility, it doesn't reduce at all.

If you came by road, it did not reduce, it's increased. Even because I shouted, and many people joined me to shout, people would have been surcharging you 15 percent on top of the fuel you are buying now, so that you can actually put a permanent tax on your property, never to go away again. So, when you look at all of these things, I have not heard of any parents, I have seen many of your parents, where at school, that your child attends, says, oh, we are reducing our school fees, against last year.

And if you buy Christmas clothes for your children at once, there is no fabric that is less than before. So, if you are reducing inflation, at least there is a basket of items that should be in your inflation calculation. Which of them has come down? The only one you mentioned is rice.

This is one out of maybe 1,000 staples. And rice was undergoing hyper-inflation. And what they did was, they allowed rice to be imported. Because when Buhari, in his wisdom, banned the importation of rice, and did not support rice farmers with it, how many rice farmers? I never saw them coming to do anything, because they don't even know the agro-economics of farming. So, I am a farmer. I bought tractors at higher prices. I am maintaining and cultivating my land at higher prices. I go to the mill or somewhere around to buy rice paddy, but the rice paddy nearby, they don't have any support with that. There is no part of the rice production process that they were part of.

But they just assumed that if they ban the importation of rice, and we can charge more money from the customer, it will cover the already too high cost of producing rice. But in reality, what they should have done was to reduce our cost of producing the rice. So that if you are bringing rice from abroad, with the shipment and all of that cost, it's naturally going to be more difficult for you to beat our price.

Since labor is very cheap, and land is almost free in Nigeria. But they don't understand economics. So, to put it all together, what we need to understand is that criticism of Tinubu, not see anything good in them because they are not good.

It's for the good of the country. Because half of their lack of good policies is deliberate. Because there is a conflict between what they want to gain and what is good.

Speaking of policy, the tax reform law is kicking off in 2026. So as a lawyer, what is your take on that?

Do you think that will help reduce the economy of the state, or do you think it will further add to the sufferings of Nigerians?

First, it's a bad law. It's an unjust law. It's an impractical law. It is a distraction. What is the essence of taxation? Taxation has four critical ingredients in its philosophy. One, it must be a stimulant. It must stimulate the economy. It must be taxed. When you have a tax law, it must make people want to produce so that it helps you to stimulate the economy. Two, it must be distributive, fairly distributive. That is to say, you produce tax, it must help you to fund, to take resources from the area where it's wasted to the area where it is useful. For example, if we had a case of homelessness, or maybe you can tax expensive homes, exorbitant homes like mine, and use the money to do affordable housing. If you have, like Ethiopia, problem of public transportation, you can tax those who bring in luxury vehicles and use the money to buy buses, and I take bus lanes. So, you could tax fabric, imported fabric. So those who are wearing expensive cloths; you can tax them and use the money to buy khaki and hat for the poor. So there must be an adjustment, that tax is a modulator.

Three, you must generate more revenue in the long run. Lastly, it must be transparent and easy to follow. You cannot create a tax law that makes someone who is selling in the market thinking of the need to hire a lawyer. If you have

been following the last three months, everybody's thinking, "oh, are they going seize my money in the bank?" Have you not been not following. Its either the president is not in the country mentally or he is not the country physically because he used to be an accountant. At least in the area of finance, you ought to have a bit of a clue. He used to be an auditor, I have a feeling that somehow he's not interested.

And when I went through that law, I read through it, I could easily see the trick. He's not interested in collecting more revenue. He's not interested in stimulating the economy. He's interested in the fiscal singularity. Because he has achieved political singularity in his mind, where almost all the governments are in his party. So what he wants to do is achieve economic singularity, where all the businessmen are his business partners. And then achieve administrative singularity. He's not the one who does all the business, the government collects all the taxes.

So this law is poorly written. And while you are distracted by this clause, the blue clause, the clause you forgot about? Why you say that the customs can't collect some customs duties anymore? It's something that we've been doing from pre-colonial times.

If you look at our old arrangement, the Joint Tax Board even banned states from using consultancy. Nobody should use consultancy to collect revenue because most of government revenue collection of revenue is a sovereign duty. It's like using private people to do the job of the Navy, like they are doing some of the contract design, or using mercenaries essentially to do the work of the armed forces. And very soon they will start using vigilante and private guards to do the work of the police. It's unconstitutional in our own country.

So this is why they are distracting everybody. It's a bad law. It's not going to achieve anything.

Secondly, it is a violation of criminal law to have this law because members of the National Assembly are saying that the copy which they have and deliberated upon and they have in their votes and proceedings and they gazetted; it's not one that has been circulated now. That they have gone to import into the law provisions that National Assembly did not approve but did not deliberate upon at all. They're determined to implement it. Why? Three reasons.

One, they have no respect for the country, the people in it. They believe that, oh, Nigerians, they will make noise, once we start, they will forget about it.

Second, they need money for election, because they want to buy everybody out. So they need that money. They've already internally, mentally spent that money. Three, they want you perpetually be able to be part of those who are collecting your money, even after you have voted them out of government, like they have done at the lower level before. So it doesn't matter if they eventually vote them out of their 10-year espionage. They will still continue to cross their legs at their homes, and each time you go and pay tax or you are forced to pay tax,



they are surcharging you. And they will use that money to finance more politics and eventually subjugate you. At the end of your lifetime, you, your children, everything around you has been appropriated to serve one empire.

Sir, have you joined other opposition leaders to demand for interim government, particularly the likes of Atiku Abubakar, who have fought for the coalition, who have not joined the coalition?

I can't ask for interim government because the government

is elected for a fixed term. It's only when the election comes, if you want to change your life, vote for me and get it if you go home. But until then, the government, I don't know, I can't force them out. I don't want military coup. See, your people whom you brought, they've had to kill you. So you will save your life by turning away and forcing these particular people away. That's all I can do.

And as for the coalition that you mentioned, we are talking about the meaning of the life of the people. The fact that I happen to not like the APC, which is a fact, and you don't like the APC as well, does not solve the problem for people. Chances are very clear that the APC doesn't like me either. But that's not the level at which you do politics.

You must make sure that those things that you don't like



the APC for, like all this litany of bad governance criteria that they are giving to you, that the person who wants to collaborate with you does not have similar tendencies as the APC. Because what's the point for a chicken to vote for any of these three people? The best way to handle chicken during Christmas is to roast them. They don't agree with you to fry them. They say no, you have to parboil them. How would you eat chicken for any of them? Even though they look at their disagreement among themselves, none of them will spare the chicken. If the chicken is distracted, you say, yeah, that guy wants to parboil a lot. I think he should go for that one. We are going to be a dead chicken at the end of the day.

So what we're trying to do is to make sure that people don't capitalise on the bad performance of Tinubu, to come and insinuate it to us, people who just ride on the wave of that anger, and bring Tinubu 2.0 when they come in.

Because we saw it, and I was shouting since 2014 when they said Jonathan was not performing. He could go and repeat those interviews. I said, yes, I know Jonathan very well, we attend the same church, he respects me a lot, and I respect him as an elder brother. But he took the disaster as he did. But as for these people who are coming, they are going to be worse. I knew Buhari very well. I knew him intimately. I knew Buhari does not have a calendar to know which century he belongs to, what date, nothing. So they went and brought him and people were deciding, oh Buhari action, which action?

And these people know what they are doing by bringing Buhari. And Tinubu, all of them, you could see now that when he was doing their 2015 transition, Tinubu gave him the legacy as to why he brought all of them, because he wants to achieve his own aim. So if you haven't learned from that, when are you ever going to learn that now that Tinubu is also not good, you want to make sure that someone worse than Tinubu is not being smuggled in. And then people will say, oh, people in Tinubu's time are slightly better than this. I don't want to experience that.

And that's why each of them that came, I interviewed them. Some are doing better than the other. Who are these

people? You know them. These people came to the party and they're gone. The people wanted to come, I would let them come in. We have now gone to do their own thing, which is not my business to be focusing on them. But many of them, when they came to us, we said, don't even open your mouth, let's go away because you can't say that you wanted to do anything and you are a fraud.

So it is true that you singularly disallow the coalition to involve the SDP?

I did not singularly disallow it, but I convinced my party people that if we cannot help the Nigerian people, let's not kill them. It's better to not enter government than to enter government and become a union of the people. You can't do it. It's just not right. Nigeria has a lot of people who have never tasted government before. All of the people who have been in government since independence, they are not up to one percent. Nigeria is not short of talents.

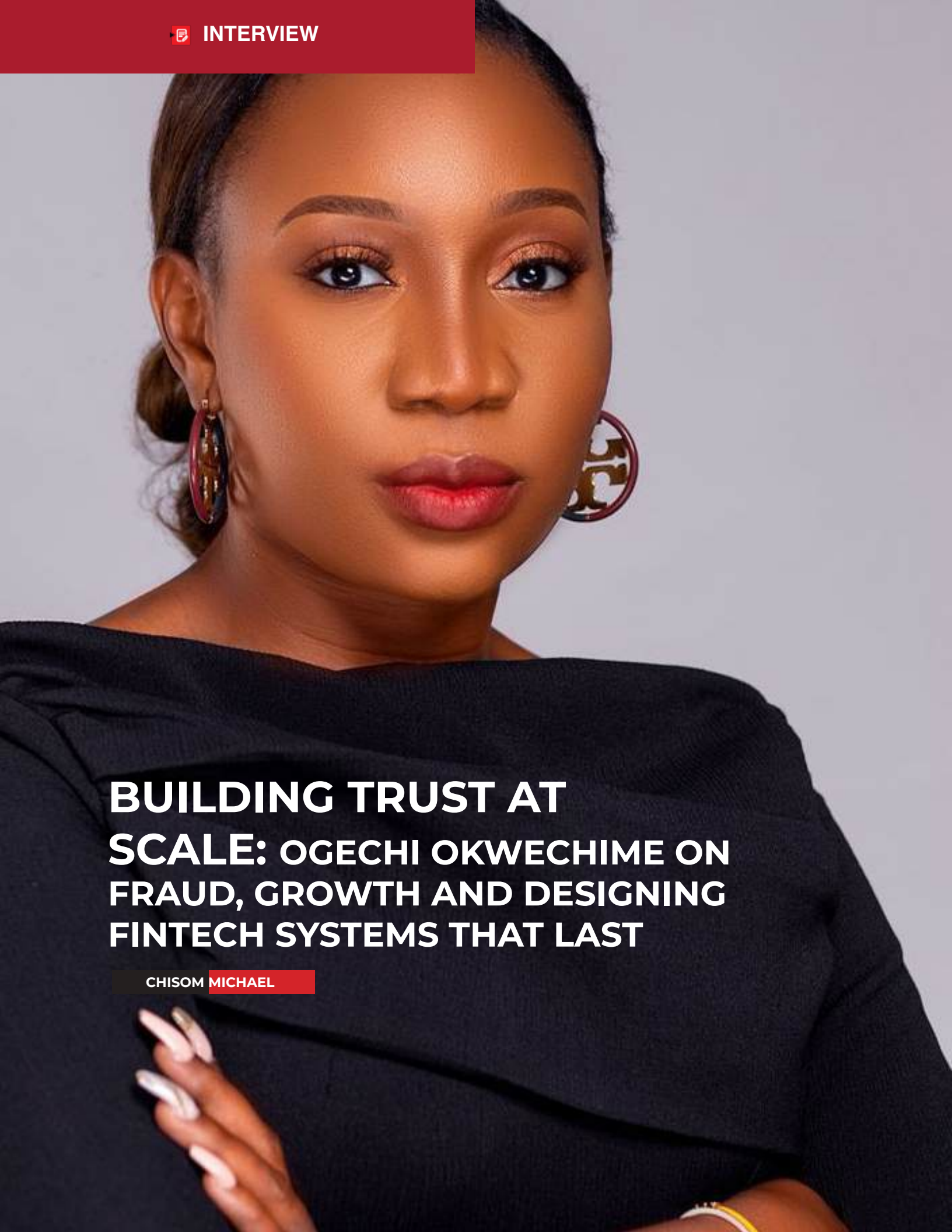
So if you want to stop what is going on, you need to bring fresh people or select among those who have served before, who have relatively good records. And you have to see that the motivation is not about. Some people are incapable of being outside government for six hours. They will be disoriented because they are used to free car, free housing, passing toll without paying, free medical care and all of these are the things that defend in the name of fighting for you. They just can't survive without government perquisites.

They are ministers, tomorrow we will put them as the chairman of a nursery or primary school, but they will go there. They just must drive an SUV car with policeman in front of it. And that is what is motivating their politics. So it's their style. I'm not saying they should not be in politics. I once had a meeting with one of the former governors and he said, "Well, there are many motives for being in politics." I said, "Prince, why are you criticising me? You have your own motive. We have our own motive." I said, "No problem, sir. All motives are welcome in politics. But there can't be various motives into my own party."

So the Nigerians must say, OK, this is a party of people who want to help the country, and this is a party of people who must be in government, even if they are to shed their own blood to be there.

I'm not saying to Nigerian people that don't choose bad government. Just don't cry to me when the consequences of bad government comes. And don't say, ah, I have no alternative.

The main reason why I entered politics and devoted my life to politics was because of that lie that Nigerians were telling themselves, that they had no alternative. So I will go on a TV show, explain the problem of the country and people will see me. It's people like you who want to come in. Me, I'm facing my law practice. I'm doing my thing. Leave me alone. So you just have a way of not doing the right thing and claiming that you have no alternative.

A portrait of Ogechi Okwechime, a woman with dark skin and hair pulled back, wearing large hoop earrings and a black top. She is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile.

BUILDING TRUST AT SCALE: OGECHI OKWECHIME ON FRAUD, GROWTH AND DESIGNING FINTECH SYSTEMS THAT LAST

CHISOM **MICHAEL**



Ogechi Okwechime is a seasoned FinTech strategist and Divisional Head of Growth Marketing (Enterprise) at Interswitch, with over 15 years of experience driving digital transformation across Africa. She is known for bridging technical innovation and commercial strategy, translating complex enterprise infrastructure into scalable market solutions. In her role, she leads the positioning of critical offerings such as real-time payments and fraud prevention systems. A major career highlight was her contribution to Verve's evolution from a local card scheme into a pan-African, borderless solution operating in over 22 countries and enabling global online commerce. Previously, she launched digital loan products for 50,000 borrowers at Access Bank and scaled Fidelity Bank's Instant Banking service to over 600,000 users. A CPM and MCP holder with a Master's in Digital Marketing, she drives inclusive growth through execution-focused leadership. In this interview with CHISOM MICHAEL, she discusses growth through systems thinking, the central role of fraud and security in fintech adoption, and how invisible infrastructure becomes meaningful when it unlocks real

economic value.

Your career has moved across fraud analysis, product management, marketing, and enterprise growth. How has working across these functions shaped the way you make decisions today?

It stopped me from thinking in silos. Today, I don't just look at a "growth" plan and see numbers; I see the potential fraud gaps and the marketing story behind it. It's made me a more balanced leader because I've sat in all those seats - I know where the friction usually starts.

Fraud, trust, and scale are central to fintech adoption in Africa. From your experience, where do most organisations still misunderstand the user's concern?

We often get obsessed with tech "features" while the user is just worried about their "future." In Africa, trust isn't built with a fancy UI; it's built when a transaction fails, and the user gets an immediate alert or a clear path to a resolution. People don't just want a digital wallet; they want peace of mind.

You were involved in expanding Verve card acceptance to over 22 African countries. What was the most complex non-technical challenge in aligning so many markets and partners?

It was the "people" part of the puzzle. Technical integration is easy compared to getting 22 different countries to trust a Pan-African brand over a global one. It took a lot of listening, a lot of presence on the ground, and proving that we weren't there to take over, but to build something that belonged to all of us.

When building products for emerging economies, how do you balance global standards with local realities without weakening either?

I keep the "engine" global and the "driver's seat" local. You don't compromise on security - that's non-negotiable worldwide. But you have to design for the guy on the street who might have a weak data connection or prefers an agent to an app. If the tech is world-class but the experience

doesn't fit the culture, it won't scale.

You have led both product development and go-to-market strategy. Where do you believe friction most often arises between these two teams, and how can it be resolved?

Usually, it's because Product is building for "perfection" while GTM is selling for "now." I resolve this by making sure they talk to each other before the build starts. When Product understands the customer's pain and GTM understands the technical "why," they stop pointing fingers and start solving problems together.

Digital lending has grown rapidly, but it has also faced trust and sustainability concerns. What principles guided your approach when launching loan products at scale?

For me, it's always Integrity over Volume. It's easy to give out money; the hard part is doing it in a way that doesn't trap the user in debt. We focused on building products that actually helped people grow, backed by data that ensured we and they could sustain it long-term.

Enterprise fintech solutions often operate behind the scenes. How do you tell stories that make invisible infrastructure meaningful to decision-makers?

I don't talk about APIs or servers; I talk about the "unlock." I show them how this "invisible" layer is the only reason their customers can pay in seconds. If you can show a leader how infrastructure turns a "no" into a "yes" for their business, they'll value it every time.

In your current role, you oversee growth for fraud, security, payments, and cross-border platforms. How do you prioritise focus in such a broad portfolio?

I go where the impact is highest. Fraud and Security always come first because they are the foundation- if the house isn't safe, it doesn't matter how nice the furniture is. After that, I focus on the platforms that have the most "legs" to grow across borders.



You have worked on products that serve both institutions and end users. How does empathy differ when the customer is a business rather than an individual?

With an individual (B2C), empathy is about making their life easier. With a business (B2B), empathy is about making them look good and stay profitable. When you realise that a business owner's livelihood depends on your platform working at 2:00 AM, your approach to service changes completely.

Recognition often follows impact. How do you measure success internally when external validation is not immediate?

I look at the "small wins" inside the building. Is my team more confident? Are we catching errors faster than we did six months ago? If the internal culture is solid and the product is actually solving a problem, the awards and recognition will eventually catch up.

Looking ahead, what responsibility do senior leaders have in shaping systems that outlast their own tenure?

have in shaping systems that outlast their own tenure?

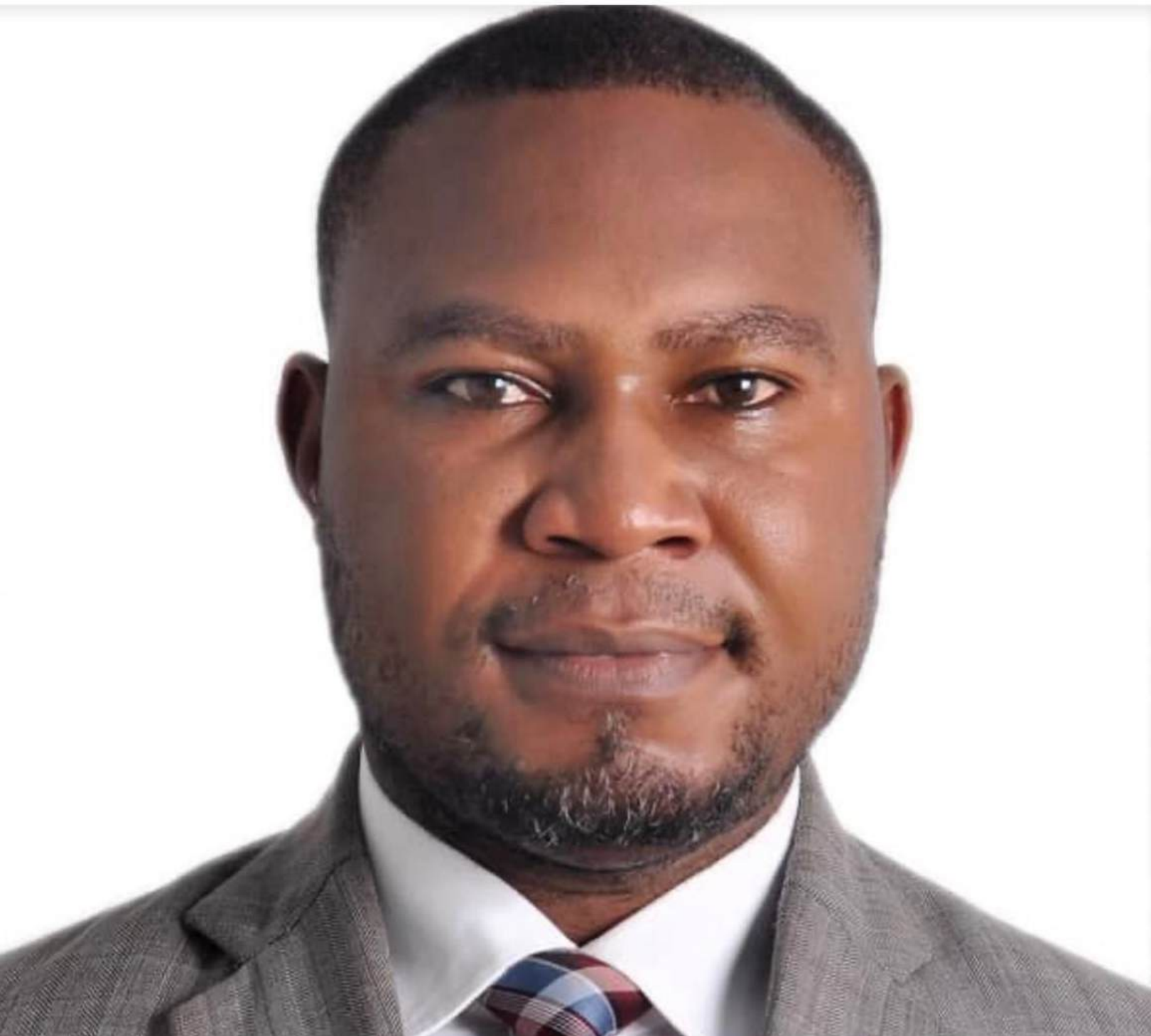
Our job is to leave the door open for those coming behind us. We're not just building companies; we're building the ecosystem. My goal is to create systems and a culture that are so robust they don't need me there to keep thriving ten years from now.

Payments across Africa remain fragmented. What structural shifts do you believe are necessary to move from interoperability discussions to real execution?

We have to stop talking and start collaborating. Interoperability isn't a tech problem anymore; it's an ego problem. We need a shift where we realise that a bigger, connected pie is better for everyone than a small, isolated slice.

THE GLOBAL LAB: HOW NIGERIAN RESEARCHER FEYISAYO OGUNYEMI EARNED A SPOT IN SCIENCE'S ELITE CIRCLE

IFEOMA OKEKE-KORIEOCHA





Nigerian sustainability and carbon researcher Feyisayo Michael Ogunyemi has been inducted into Sigma Xi, The Scientific Research Honor Society, a United States-based international body that recognises excellence in scientific and engineering research through peer nomination and evaluation.

Ogunyemi was elected a Full Member in 2025 following approval by Sigma Xi's Committee on Qualifications and Membership, according to an official digital certificate issued by the Society.

The certificate states that he "was duly elected a Full Member" and has accepted the privileges and responsibilities of membership as set out in the organisation's constitution and bylaws. It was signed by the Society's President, Daniel I. Rubenstein, and its Executive Director, Jamie Vernon.

Founded in 1886, Sigma Xi is regarded as one of the world's leading scientific honour societies, with membership extended only to researchers whose work demonstrates originality, rigour and measurable impact.

The Society counts Nobel laureates and leading global scientists among its members and maintains an international network that supports interdisciplinary research and innovation across science, engineering and applied fields. It also publishes the magazine *American Scientist*.

In a formal communication to Ogunyemi, Sigma Xi said his body of work met its criteria for scientific merit and contribution to the advancement of knowledge.

His research focuses on sustainability accounting, carbon management and emerging technologies, with particular emphasis on the application of artificial intelligence to environmental governance and sustainability reporting.

Ogunyemi's work addresses persistent concerns around the reliability, transparency and accountability of emissions

data used in environmental, social and governance (ESG) disclosures.

By integrating tools such as machine learning, data analytics and automated verification into carbon accounting frameworks, his research seeks to strengthen regulatory compliance and corporate accountability at a time of heightened global scrutiny of climate claims.

Separately, Ogunyemi has also received international recognition for his research on artificial intelligence in carbon accounting. He was awarded the Best Paper Award by the International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research in Science, Engineering and Technology (IJMRSET) for his peer-reviewed study titled "AI-Powered Carbon Accounting:

Transforming ESG Reporting Standards for a Sustainable Global Economy," published in the journal's December 2023 edition.

According to IJMRSET, the paper emerged as the top submission from more than 500 manuscripts reviewed internationally. The journal's editorial board cited the study's methodological depth and practical relevance, noting its interdisciplinary contribution to accounting, environmental science, corporate governance and digital innovation.

The paper examines how artificial intelligence, natural language processing and blockchain technologies can be embedded within carbon accounting systems to address weaknesses in traditional emissions reporting, which critics argue is often opaque and inconsistent.

The research responds to growing demands from regulators, investors and policymakers for more credible and verifiable climate data.

In addition to his academic recognitions, Ogunyemi has been nominated for the Fellowship of the Institute of Management Consultants (IMC), the highest grade of membership within the professional body.

In a letter to him, the Council of IMC described the fellowship as a non-honorary professional distinction reserved for practitioners with demonstrable expertise, leadership and sustained contributions to professional practice.

Ogunyemi is affiliated with Eastern Illinois University and holds professional accounting qualifications, including chartered status.

His growing profile reflects the increasing convergence of accounting, environmental science and digital technologies, as well as the expanding presence of Nigerian researchers within global scientific and professional networks.

Within the broader context of global climate action and tightening ESG regulation, his recognitions highlight how applied research from developing economies is contributing to debates and solutions traditionally dominated by institutions in Europe and North America.

AFTER 7YRS OF SILENCE, BAPTISTA FINDS HER VOICE WITH A NEW ALBUM

ESTHER **EMOEKPERE**





For most of the past decade, Titilope Baptista-Sanusi was not trying to make an album. She was trying to stay afloat.

The Nigerian gospel singer, known professionally as Baptista, spent seven years navigating a stretch of personal loss that included the death of twins, the unresolved disappearance of her sister, financial strain, and prolonged periods of waiting that stalled both her life and career. *I WON*, released between 2023 and 2025, emerged not as a planned creative project but as a by-product of that period.

The album, which premiered on her birthday and Boxing Day, is structured as a reflection on endurance rather than achievement. Its songs document a gradual shift in posture — from grief and unanswered questions to steadier, quieter forms of faith. Baptista has described the writing process as less about inspiration than survival, with each track drawn from moments she did not initially believe she would outlast.

That sense of process shapes the album's sequencing. *Modupe* leans into gratitude in the absence of resolution. *F.O.G* (Focus on God) marks a turning point away from fixation on loss, while *Joy* reframes praise as discipline rather than emotion. The album's closing

stretch moves toward affirmation, not as triumphalism, but as conclusion — a statement that persistence itself can be evidence of victory.

A critical moment in the album's journey came when Baptista stopped actively trying to move it forward. Support arrived unexpectedly from Oluwafemi Aborisade, who independently stepped in to produce the music video for *I WON*. For the artist, the intervention was significant not because of scale, but because it arrived without lobbying or pressure, reinforcing her belief that momentum sometimes returns only after resistance ends.

The project's most notable collaboration is *Yea & Amen*, which features Dr D. K. Olukoya. Known primarily for his influence in prayer and teaching rather than recorded music, his appearance on the track signals a convergence of ministry traditions. Baptista has framed the collaboration as spiritual alignment rather than artistic experimentation — a moment she sees as both endorsement and continuity.

Beyond the music, the album is also inseparable from events that unfolded outside the studio. Following the disappearance of her sister, Motunrayo, Baptista made a public appeal that drew the attention of Ogun State's Attorney General and Commissioner for Justice, Oluwasina Ogungbade SAN. According to the family, he personally reached out after seeing the appeal and provided sustained institutional support through the Ministry of Justice and the Ogun State Police Command over several months.

For Baptista, that intervention remains one of the few tangible points of stability during a period defined largely by uncertainty.

I WON does not present its creator as having overcome every challenge it documents. Instead, it captures what remains when outcomes are unresolved but movement continues. In an industry often shaped by immediacy and visibility, the album stands as a record of delayed arrival — shaped by time, loss, and the slow rebuilding of conviction.

If the title suggests finality, the body of work itself is more measured. It argues that victory does not always announce itself loudly. Sometimes, it arrives quietly, in the simple fact of still standing.

SHAPING THE FUTURE OF SUPPLY CHAIN: PEACE ALUDOGBU'S WORK AT THE INTERSECTION OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE, RESILIENCE, AND EMERGING ECONOMIES

IFEOMA OKEKE-KORIEOCHA



A Ph.D candidate and instructor of Operations and Production Management at New Mexico State University (NMSU), Aludogbu is at the forefront of the balance between the theoretical and the practical within the fields of supply chain resilience, technology assimilation, and the transformation of emerging economies.

Supply Chain
Forecasting and AI

In this day and age, talking about supply chain and AI is a big thing in both industry and academia. Most supply chain systems are predictive and can make decisions based on making redictions from large data sets. The decisions predicted are optimal and human intuition is left out. Aludogbu's work locates itself

at the intersection of tech and real-world resilience. Her research is determining how advancements in data-driven systems can foster the resilience of metastable systems, particularly in the agri-food systems that are the backbone of most developing countries.

This complex system feeds millions and leaves a gap of vulnerability for both the producers and the consumers.

"All blockchains and artificial intelligence should support and enhance human decision-making mechanisms, not supplant them."

As recent trends in global supply chains continue to demonstrate rapid changes, especially from .pandemic to climate-based disruptions, the future will depend on systems that are efficient, adaptive, resilient, and, most importantly, digitized.

Supply chain systems will increasingly leverage emerging technologies in the fields of AI, machine learning, and blockchain in order to optimize visibility, prediction, and strategy formulation.

According to scholars like Peace Aludogbu, businesses and the government's ability to swiftly respond to emerging supply chain challenges rests on these changes.

Aludogbu asserts. She believes that in the right hands, these technologies facilitate prediction for planners to assess and sidestep risks like weather disruption or logistics bottlenecks.

In the same vein, she was directly involved in supporting Native American farmers and ranchers through the Native American Farmers and Ranchers Program (NAF), which was administered by the NMSU Arrowhead Centers' AIBE in collaboration with the Center for Supply Chain and Entrepreneurship (CSCE).

Through this program, funded by a \$100,000 grant, she contributed to the business design, supply chain strategies, and delivery of hands-on workshops focused on value-added food production, inventory management, smart framing, packaging, and food regulatory compliance.

Aludogbu's role involved working with participating entrepreneurs to identify and determine value-added products through the target market, utilizing a food slogan and freeze-drying, as well as understanding food manufacturing requirements and developing practical solutions to improve market access and long-term resilience. These efforts helped Native American farmers navigate local and regional food systems more effectively and cost-effectively.

Aludogbu is making a difference in the world beyond case competitions and published works.

She was selected as a session chair for Reviews on the Scope and Trends in Supply Chain Transformation at the 2025 Decision Sciences Institute annual conference, one of the world's leading conferences in Operations Research and Analytics, demonstrating her expertise and leadership in the field. Her position as session chair places her at the center of discourse on the strategic use of digital technology and human-centered design.

Instead of seeing technology as a magical fix for broken systems, Peace Aludogbu asks a more fundamental question. Who is technology's digital innovation really designed

for? For her research, Aludogbu conducted a review of academic papers versus the intersection of human-centered design, digitization, and global agri-food supply chains.

With the most sophisticated bibliometric and thematic analytical techniques, Aludogbu's research articulates and maps the shifting discourse on artificial intelligence, sustainability, and food systems, to identify where innovation is happening.

She draws from these studies to illustrate how AI, data, and blockchain are pivotal to addressing food insecurity and the challenges of climate change. Aludogbu describes the need for a paradigmatic shift from these 'tech-first' solutions to socially-regenerative systems, where digital technology enhances, not replaces, human decision-making and collective intelligence.

"It's one thing to write about resilience, and it's another to shape the conversation," she says.



A CITY RECLAIMED: HOW OGBOMOSO CRADLES CARNIVAL TURNED ROADS INTO ROUTES OF RETURN

IFEOMA OKEKE-KORIEOCHA



Long before the vibrant drums rolled and the captivating dancers took the stage, something profound began to unfold in Ogbomoso—a heartfelt return.

The town's roads buzzed with activity, long-closed homes flung open their doors, hotels brimmed with guests, and familiar faces emerged as sons and daughters of this historic community traveled homeward for the highly anticipated second edition of the Ogbomoso Cradles Carnival 2025.

For five exhilarating days, Ogbomoso transformed into more than just a host city; it became a vibrant tapestry woven from memory, identity, and opportunity.

Over 100 indigenous socio-cultural associations from across Nigeria and its diaspora converged at the Soun Ogunlola Township Stadium, adorned in stunning traditional attire, to pay their respects to the esteemed Soun of Ogbomosoland, Oba Ghandi Afolabi Olaoye, Orumogege III.

The parades were not mere spectacles—they were powerful affirmations of belonging, echoing with celebration and pride.

The carnival kicked off Thursday, December 19, enveloped in rich cultural rites, tantalizing exhibitions of local cuisine, mesmerizing masquerades, and the infectious energy of traditional drumming.

Spiritual reflections led by the esteemed Araba of Osogbo, Chief Yemi Elebuibon, infused the occasion with a contemplative spirit. He extolled the revival of Yoruba cultural consciousness and lauded the monarch's pivotal role in rejuvenating pride in indigenous heritage.

Among the most poignant moments of reconnection was the remarkable sports segment. Adebayo Majolagbe, a United States-based indigene, returned to spearhead a thrilling 170-kilometre Grand Fondo cycling tour spanning from Ogbomoso to Iseyin and back, guiding over 100 cyclists through landscapes that now gleamed with the promise of tourism.



The Ogbomoso Marathon, held on Saturday, further amplified themes of endurance, unity, and shared purpose.

Throughout the city, the carnival revitalized everyday life. Markets thrummed with energy, hotels reported full occupancy, transport operators extended their routes and hours, while food vendors, artisans, and entertainers basked in heightened patronage.

This celebration turned culture into currency, directly infusing vitality into the local economy.

Traditional games, golf tournaments, and youth-centered activities intertwined seamlessly with regal ceremonies.

The grand celebration of Odun Oole Oba, uniting the five ruling houses, and the installation of new chiefs—including Saka Balogun as Balogun of Ogbomosoland and Adesola Adepoju as Asiwaju of Ogbomosoland—drew dignitaries and returnees to the majestic palace, bridging governance, tradition, and community.

The emotional zenith arrived on Ajilete Day, as Ogbomoso erupted in a fervor of dance, music, and performance, showcasing the Oyo State Cultural Troupe alongside contemporary

entertainers. Streets morphed into vibrant communal spaces filled with laughter, rhythm, and shared pride. Political and community leaders echoed this prevailing exuberance. Senator Buhari Abdulfatai hailed the carnival as a living manifestation of unity and cultural confidence, while Professor Adepoju reflected on the heartfelt returns of many indigenes who had been away for years, all moved by the scale and organization of the event.

In its second year, the Ogbomoso Cradles Carnival accomplished something rare—it made culture profoundly personal again, turning roads into routes of return, festivals into family reunions, and heritage into a dynamic, thriving economy.

In a compelling address during the grand finale held on Monday at the township stadium, Oba Ghandi delved into the philosophy behind the name “Cradles.”

He articulated how it encapsulates Ogbomoso’s identity as a wellspring of art, music, values, bravery, enterprise, and creativity—elements that continuously give birth to greatness.

“This carnival reminds us that we are more than a city. We are a cradle of greatness,” the monarch declared passionately. “A cradle of music, art, dance, innovation, enterprise, values, dreams, and limitless potential. From these cradles, greatness was born, and from these same cradles, greatness shall rise again.”

He portrayed the carnival as both a jubilant celebration and a transformative movement—one capable of sparking a cultural and economic renaissance in Ogbomoso. Recalling the sacrifices of the town’s forebears, the monarch urged the present generation to maximize the opportunities at their fingertips.

“Our forefathers built with less. If they stood tall against challenges, shall we bow to ours?” he inquired rhetorically. “Ogbomoso will not rise because we wish it. Ogbomoso will rise because we rise.”





Oba Ghandi underscored unity, diligence, and collective responsibility as the indispensable paths to rediscovering Ogbomoso's greatness, encouraging youths, professionals, traders, artisans, and farmers alike to see themselves as architects of a new era.

He called upon the sons and daughters of Ogbomoso residing in Lagos, Abuja, Accra, London, Houston, and beyond to return home, invest, and support cultural initiatives.

"When we stand together, we are Ogbomoso—a name that carries honour wherever it is spoken," he affirmed, viewing the carnival as an urgent call to transform heritage into prosperity.

Echoing the monarch's visionary outlook, Chairman of the Planning Committee, Hon. Olusegun Dokun Odebunmi, confirmed that the carnival has already begun to catalyze significant socio-economic development in the city.

"Without question, this festival has brought immense benefits to Ogbomoso," he stated, reflecting the collective spirit of a thriving community ready to embrace its future.

Speaking on the second edition and a take home for all and sundry, Prince Dotun Oyelade, the Oyo State Commissioner for Information, said "Well, I think the event has galvanized the importance of this particular event, with regard to the festival going on right now.

"If you look at the trajectory of events that started last year, in so many respects, it has grown tremendously because the event has galvanized so many interests.

"The people there, the number of people there and the number of representatives of interest which this Carnival has gathered globally. And one of the take homes is that the event is not only a local affair but it has graduated and gravitated from a local affair to a regional affair because we had meetings shown from far-flung areas like Australia, the America, United States of America, all of Europe.

Oyelade explained that the event is going to engender a better framework for next year's outing.

According to him, "we have assurances from what we have seen, that the whole edition is going to be better for the cultural evolution of Ogbomoso and the marketing of the potential of our culture and tradition to the entire world.

"We are very pleased with this event and we are sure that even those that have started before us in Nigeria will have something to emulate from the outing of Ogbomoso Cradle Carnival.

Sharing her assessment of the carnival, the lyalode of Ogbomoso explained "Well, we need to appreciate Oba Ghandi Afolabi Olaoye, Orumogege III, who initiated this. So we have done 2024 and this is the second edition, 2025. We pray it will continue this way."

The Ogbomoso Cradle Carnival came with lot of merriment; on one hand, this is the period of the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ. And at the same time, it has been listed as part of the Oyo State Vibing December fiesta which makes the event a rallying for home comers to engage and unite through the one-week-long Carnival.



FROM NORTHERN LIGHTS TO HISTORIC CITIES: EUROPE'S MUST-VISIT DESTINATIONS FOR 2026

CHISOM MICHAEL



Culture, food and architecture

Brussels is expected to attract more visitors in 2026 with the opening of the Kanal-Centre Pompidou museum in late autumn. The project marks a shift in the city's cultural profile, moving it beyond its role as a transit hub. Throughout the year, Brussels will host events including the Bright Brussels Festival in February, Art Brussels in spring and the Brussels Jazz Festival in January.

Visitors can explore the Grand Place and the Atomium, then sample local food at Maison Antoine for frites or Maison Dandoy for waffles. Art Deco districts such as Sablon offer antique

markets, while the Comic Strip Centre celebrates Belgium's comic heritage. Bozar remains a key venue for exhibitions and performances. Central Brussels suits first-time visitors, while Sablon appeals to those focused on galleries and dining. Saint-Gilles offers markets and street food.

Seville is also expected to gain attention in 2026 as its food and nightlife scenes continue to grow alongside its historic core. Tapas bars and cocktail venues now sit alongside long-standing taverns, reflecting changes in local dining habits. Visitors can attend flamenco shows, explore landmarks such as Seville Cathedral and Plaza de España, and plan trips around major events including Feria de Abril and Holy Week.

Local dishes such as patatas bravas, croquetas and Seville marmalade remain central to the experience. Barrio Santa Cruz is often chosen by first-time visitors due to its location, while Triana offers a local atmosphere across the river.

Prague remains a key destination for architecture and culture and was listed in the World's Best Cities Index 2026. The city will host events including the Prague Marathon, marking 40 years, and the 81st Prague Spring Music

Europe's travel outlook for 2026 is shaping up around culture-rich cities, sun-soaked coastal escapes and nature-led destinations, as travellers increasingly plan trips around major events, food scenes and rare natural phenomena.

After 2025 put classic hotspots like Greece, Spain and France back in focus, alongside nature favourites such as the Faroe Islands and the Dolomites, attention is now shifting to fresh and more immersive alternatives.

With the year drawing to a close, early planners are prioritising sunny weather, striking architecture and outdoor adventure, while sustainability and atmospheric city breaks remain key. From landmark museum openings and global festivals to heightened solar activity boosting Northern Lights sightings, several European destinations are poised to stand out as must-visit locations in 2026.

According to Euronews, here are Europe's must-visit destinations for 2026

Festival. Visitors can walk through Old Town Square, Prague Castle and Charles Bridge, before visiting the Jewish Quarter. Kafka's statue and the Dancing House are also common stops.

Traditional meals such as goulash and knedlíki are widely available, alongside newer dining options in areas like Karlín. Staré Město suits first-time visitors due to its location, while Malá Strana offers quieter streets and smaller hotels.

Sun, sand and sea

The Albanian Riviera is expected to feature among niche travel choices in 2026, as travellers seek coastal areas outside established routes. Beaches in Ksamil, Dhërmi, Jale and Narte draw visitors looking for less developed coastlines. UNESCO-listed sites such as Butrint National Park and Gjirokastrë Castle add historical context to beach-focused trips.

Boat tours, ferry trips to Corfu and dining in Saranda form part of many itineraries. Local menus often include octopus, grilled fish, byrek and homemade raki. Ksamil suits travellers focused on beaches, while Saranda offers access to transport links and services.

Malta continues to appeal to visitors interested in history alongside coastal access. The island has multiple UNESCO-listed sites, reflecting layers of Arabic, Italian and British influence. Valletta offers museums, gardens and dining, while Mdina provides insight into medieval urban planning.

Swimming spots include St. Peter's Pool near Marsaxlokk, while ferries connect travellers to Gozo for the Citadel in Victoria and the Inland Sea. Local food includes pastizzi and fenek. St. Julian's attracts nightlife-focused visitors, Sliema offers transport access, and Valletta suits those focused on culture.



Nature and adventure

Cappadocia is gaining attention for outdoor activities and cultural tourism in 2026. Hot air balloon flights remain central, alongside hikes through valleys, underground cities and cave churches. Winter snowfall can change flight conditions and views. Paragliding offers an alternative activity. The region's inclusion in the 2026 Michelin Guide and the planned Hot Air Balloon Festival in August are expected to increase interest.

Lapland stands out due to solar activity. Until early 2026, the sun remains in its solar maximum phase, an 11-year cycle marked by increased sunspots and geomagnetic storms. This increases the frequency and intensity of Northern Lights displays, offering opportunities not expected again for several years.

Beyond the aurora, Lapland supports activities such as husky sledding, reindeer sleigh rides, snowmobiling and ice fishing. Accommodation includes snow hotels and glass igloos. Rovaniemi's "Santa Claus Village" and national parks such as Pallas-Yllästunturi offer further options.

The Carpathian Mountains also feature in 2026 travel plans as interest grows in eco-tourism and conservation. In Romania, travellers can engage with wildlife projects, including bear sanctuaries, through organised tours. Seasonal trips focus on animal tracking and local culture.

In Slovakia, the town of Trenčín has been named a 2026 European Capital of Culture, drawing attention to regional traditions and sustainable travel. Activities across the Carpathians include hiking, mountain biking, snowshoeing and visits to thermal baths, as well as trips to villages such as Magura and painted monasteries, including Voroneţ and Humour.

ARTHUR OKONKWO: NIGERIAN-DESCENT WREXHAM GOALKEEPER READY FOR SUPER EAGLES TEST

ANTHONY NLEBEM



FIFA Gives Green Light

Arthur Okonkwo, the 24-year-old goalkeeper of Nigerian descent, is now officially eligible to represent Nigeria after FIFA approved his switch of international allegiance from England to the Super Eagles.

The decision ends months of anticipation and clears the path for the former Arsenal goalkeeper to pursue a senior international career with Nigeria, having previously represented England at the youth level.

From England Youth Teams to Nigeria

Born on September 9, 2001, in London to Nigerian parents, Okonkwo featured prominently for England's youth teams between 2015 and 2018, representing the U15, U16, U17 and U18 sides. His final appearance for England came at the U18 level in 2019.

With his progression beyond youth international football stalling, the shot-stopper opted to embrace his Nigerian

heritage. FIFA regulations allowed the switch through parentage, and the approval now makes him fully eligible for selection by the Nigeria Football Federation (NFF).

Arsenal Roots and Early Promise

Okonkwo joined Arsenal's academy at a young age and rose steadily through the club's youth ranks, earning recognition as one of the most promising goalkeepers of his generation.

He made his senior debut for Arsenal in May 2021 during a Premier League match against Crystal Palace. While first-team opportunities were limited, Okonkwo gained valuable experience through youth competitions and a series of loan spells.

Highly regarded within goalkeeping circles, he has cited former Chelsea goalkeeper Petr Čech and ex-Manchester United star David de Gea as key influences on his style.



"I tried playing outfield, but it wasn't for me," Okonkwo once said. "I enjoyed the thrill of making saves – the more spectacular, the better."

Wrexham: A Career-Defining Chapter

After loan spells at Crewe Alexandra and Austria's Sturm Graz, Okonkwo joined Wrexham ahead of the 2023/24 season, initially on loan from Arsenal following the retirement of veteran goalkeeper Ben Foster.

His impact was immediate. Okonkwo played a central role as Wrexham finished second in League Two before completing a permanent move to the Welsh club in 2024.

He has since been a key figure in one of English football's most remarkable rises. Wrexham secured successive promotions, climbing from League Two through League One and into the Championship, with Okonkwo an ever-present presence between the posts.

Numbers That Tell the Story

During Wrexham's promotion campaign, Okonkwo recorded 19 clean sheets in 33 appearances, conceding just 23 goals. This season, he has featured 20 times in the Championship, keeping six clean sheets as Wrexham sit 11th in the table.

The Red Dragons are only four points outside the play-off places, having recovered from a five-game winless run with consecutive victories over Sheffield United and Preston North End. Okonkwo has started Wrexham's last 21 league matches, underlining his growing importance.



Super Eagles Prospects

While the NFF has yet to confirm when Okonkwo could receive his first senior call-up, his eligibility is no longer in doubt. The timing is complicated by the ongoing Africa Cup of Nations and Nigeria's failure to qualify for the 2026 FIFA World Cup, but the goalkeeper is now fully available whenever required.

Interest from the NFF is understood to have intensified following his consistent performances over the past two-and-a-half seasons, particularly his role in Wrexham's rapid ascent.

Looking Ahead

With Wrexham pushing toward the Championship play-offs, the prospect of Premier League football is increasingly realistic. Such progress would further elevate Okonkwo's profile and strengthen his case for a place in Nigeria's national team setup.

For Nigeria, the addition of a goalkeeper with top-level English football experience represents a timely boost. For Arthur Okonkwo, FIFA's approval marks a defining milestone, the start of a new chapter with the Super Eagles firmly in sight.

STRATEGIC BRANDING: DRIVING GROWTH AND ENGAGEMENT

FEYISITAN IJIMAKINWA

After all the planning, projections, forecasts (and predictions) and expectations, here we are in 2026. Not a few people heard, and read about “how much the new year has in store, including its huge potentials”. I often wonder what those words really mean. To me, they are one or two of many seasonal catch phrases and jargons thrown around, especially towards the end of an old year, and at the start of another.

Well, 2026 is here, and in today’s competitive business landscape, strategic branding in Nigeria and, by extension, Africa is not just about creating a recognisable logo or a catchy slogan. It’s about deliberately crafting a cohesive and compelling identity that resonates with your target audience, drives growth, and fosters meaningful engagement.

Strategic branding goes beyond aesthetics; it encompasses thoughtful planning, consistent execution, and a deep understanding of your market and customers. Here’s how strategic branding can effectively drive growth and engagement for your business:

1. Establishing a strong brand foundation

A successful branding strategy starts with a clear grasp of your brand’s mission, values, and unique selling points. Identify what distinguishes your brand from competitors and craft a compelling brand story that resonates with your target audience. Your brand foundation acts as the guiding principle behind all branding efforts, ensuring consistency and authenticity in every communication and interaction.

2. Building brand awareness

Strategic branding seeks to boost brand awareness among your target audience. This entails utilising various channels such as digital marketing, social media, content creation, and public relations to amplify your brand message. Consistent messaging across these channels reinforces your brand’s identity, helping consumers recognise and remember your brand when making purchasing decisions.

3. Differentiation and positioning

In a bustling marketplace like Nigeria, differentiation is crucial for standing out and capturing consumer

attention. Strategic branding helps you identify and articulate your unique value proposition (UVP), addressing your customers’ needs and pain points more effectively than your competitors. Position your brand as the preferred choice by highlighting what sets you apart and why consumers should choose your products or services over alternatives.

4. Engaging your audience

Effective branding transcends passive awareness, actively engaging your audience on both emotional and intellectual levels. Forge meaningful connections by understanding your audience’s motivations, aspirations, and challenges. Tailor your brand messaging and content to resonate with their interests and values, fostering loyalty and advocacy. Engaging branding initiatives include interactive content, community building, storytelling, and personalised customer experiences.

5. Aligning branding with business objectives

Strategic branding is intricately aligned with your overall business objectives and growth strategies. Whether your aim is to expand into new markets, increase market share, or launch new products, your branding efforts should support and reinforce these goals. Measure the effectiveness of your branding initiatives through key performance indicators (KPIs) such as brand awareness metrics, customer satisfaction scores, and sales growth.

6. Adapting to market trends and consumer insights

The business landscape is ever-changing, driven by technological advancements, shifting consumer behaviours, and competitive pressures. Strategic branding demands agility and adaptability to respond effectively to these changes. Stay informed about market trends, monitor consumer insights, and be prepared to adjust your branding strategy as needed to maintain relevance and competitiveness.

7. Building brand loyalty and advocacy

A strong brand cultivates loyalty among its customers, turning them into repeat buyers and advocates.

Deliver exceptional customer experiences that exceed expectations and align with your brand promise. Encourage brand advocacy through referral programmes, social proof, and genuine interactions that inspire customers to recommend your brand to others.

8. Measuring and optimising brand performance

Continuous improvement is a cornerstone of strategic branding. Regularly evaluate the performance of your branding initiatives against established KPIs. Analyse customer feedback, conduct brand audits, and leverage data-driven insights to identify areas for optimisation and refinement. Adjust your strategy based on these findings to enhance brand effectiveness and drive sustainable growth.

Strategic branding in Nigeria is a powerful tool for businesses aiming to achieve long-term growth and foster meaningful engagement with their target audience. Here's how to build a thriving brand:

- Establish a strong brand foundation: Define your mission, values, and unique selling points. Craft a compelling brand story that resonates with your audience.

- Build awareness: Use digital marketing, social media, content creation, and public relations to amplify your brand message. Consistent messaging reinforces brand identity and helps consumers remember you.

- Differentiate your brand: Highlight what sets you apart from competitors. Articulate your unique value proposition (UVP) that addresses your customers' needs and pain points effectively.

- Engage your audience authentically: Understand your audience's motivations, aspirations, and challenges. Tailor your messaging to resonate with their values, fostering loyalty and advocacy through interactive content, community building, and personalised experiences.

- Align with business objectives: Ensure your branding efforts support your business goals, whether expanding into new markets, increasing market share, or launching new products. Measure effectiveness through KPIs like brand awareness, customer satisfaction, and sales growth.

- Adapt to market dynamics: Stay informed about market trends and consumer insights. Be agile and adjust your branding strategy as needed to stay relevant and competitive.

- Foster loyalty: Deliver exceptional customer experiences that exceed expectations. Encourage advocacy through referral programmes, social proof, and genuine interactions.

- Continuous improvement: Regularly evaluate your branding initiatives. Analyse customer feedback, conduct brand audits, and leverage data-driven insights to refine your strategy and drive sustainable growth.

Last Line

Remember, strategic branding is an ongoing journey requiring dedication, creativity, and a deep understanding of your brand's purpose and audience. When done effectively, it can drive significant business outcomes and create lasting connections with consumers.



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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

LAST PROTECTION

UDY OSARO-EDOBOR

As the year gradually drew to a close, a particular story came to Nkem's mind. It had happened several years ago but she felt compelled to share it.

Nkem was a successful banker but her life had not always been easy. She was an orphan and had moved from one relative's house to another, never truly feeling at home. That changed during her service year when she met Atim.

People often called them twins. They looked strikingly alike and it amused them to see the confusion on people's faces whenever they heard their names—names from entirely different tribes. The resemblance was uncanny but their bond was even stronger.

They remained very close after their service year. With support mostly from Atim's parents they pulled their resources together and rented a one-bedroom apartment in the central part of town while job hunting.

For the first time in her life, Nkem lived in a place where she was comfortable—where she could relax, let her hair down and exist without fear of criticism or scolding.

Atim was the sister Nkem never had. As much as she disliked the NYSC program, she remained grateful for it because it gave her the gift of sisterhood. Their hard work eventually paid off. Nkem rose steadily in her banking career while Atim became a brilliant and successful pharmacist.

Years later, Nkem met Dandy and fell deeply in love with him. However, Atim disapproved of the relationship. Her approval meant everything to Nkem—without it, she would not accept the marriage proposal Dandy was planning.

Atim felt there was something about Dandy she did not like but she could not quite put her finger on it. It was an unease she could not explain, yet it refused to leave her.

Dandy on the other hand did not like Atim either. He felt she was intrusive and jealous because her friend had found love while she had not. He was particularly upset that Nkem was willing to call off their relationship simply because Atim disapproved.

Determined to clear things up, Dandy decided to visit Atim to convince her of his intentions. After all, she was the only thing standing between him and marriage to his sweetheart. He hoped their conversation would go well.

Imagine his shock when Nkem told him Atim was dead.

There had been a break-in at Atim's home. The intruders took their time, stealing her gold jewelry and foreign currency before killing her. The police believed it was a robbery gone wrong.

It was a devastating time for Nkem but Dandy stood by her. He supported her, comforted her, and gave her a shoulder to cry on. Nkem could not understand why Atim had disliked such an amazing man. If only she were alive to see how caring and supportive he was.

After Atim was laid to rest, loneliness crept in. Nkem eventually accepted Dandy's marriage proposal, believing love and kindness had finally found her.

Marriage, however, changed everything. Dandy became a completely different person. Nkem soon discovered that he had lied about being an importer of Spanish and Italian tiles. The "office" he claimed to own turned out to be a shared space with a friend who eventually chased him out because Dandy could not pay his share of the rent.

He became a house husband, living entirely off Nkem's income. He loved expensive clothes, luxury items, and parties, spending freely without contributing anything. It was at one of these parties that he met Nancy.

He had left Nkem at home that night. When he arrived at the party and saw Nancy, he froze. For a brief moment, he thought she was Nkem. She looked remarkably like her. Curious and intrigued, he approached her. They connected instantly.

Nancy became his side chick. She was bold, feisty, and exciting—everything Nkem wasn't. She was new in town, having recently returned from abroad and lived in a short-let apartment while she tried to settle in.

Her apartment became their secret meeting place. Dandy spent most of his time there. To him, Nkem had become boring; the only thing he still liked about her was her money.

Nancy brought excitement into his life. She awakened things in him—both physically and emotionally—that he believed he had been missing all along. Soon, he convinced himself that Nancy was the missing piece of his life.

He began planning to leave Nkem.

To fund his new life, he sold Nkem a carefully crafted

business idea. She was delighted, believing her husband was finally ready to be productive. The plan seemed solid and she supported him fully.

Nkem made several withdrawals from her personal account and even took a loan from her bank for Dandy.

Every naira ended up with Nancy. Dandy's intention was to drain Nkem financially. Then, suddenly, Nancy disappeared—vanishing with millions of naira. Dandy nearly lost his mind. For months, he could not sleep or think properly.

He ran out of lies to tell Nkem about her money and the car Nancy had borrowed “for a quick errand” but never returned.

He tried reaching Nancy but her phone was switched off. It was then he realized he barely knew anything about her—only her name, Nancy Shagaya. He knew her family lived in the North and that she had been staying in a short-let apartment. Even the police could do little with such limited information.

The house became unbearable. Nkem gave him an ultimatum: return her money or face arrest.

Then it happened.

One night, a few days into the new year, Nkem's car drove into the driveway—the same car Dandy had given to Nancy.

The car stopped. Nancy stepped out and walked elegantly toward the house. Nkem and Dandy were stunned.

Nancy walked in, greeted Nkem familiarly and silenced Dandy when he tried to stop her.

She told Nkem to brace herself for what she was about to hear.

Nancy explained that she had been sent by Atim to protect her and to prove that her suspicions about Dandy were right.

Nkem was confused. Atim was dead—so how could she send anyone?

Nancy revealed the truth. She herself had died in an accident about a year earlier. Her body had only recently been recovered, and she had been hovering, unable to move on because she had not yet been buried. Atim needed a vessel for her mission, and Nancy agreed.

Atim also wanted Nkem to know the truth about her death.

It was Dandy who killed her.

He had gone to convince Atim to give her blessing for the marriage. When she refused, he struck her on the head with a heavy metal object and then strangled her. The break-in had been staged.

Dandy fainted instantly. Nkem followed shortly after. Nancy waited calmly for them to wake up.

They awoke terrified and hysterical. Nancy managed to calm Nkem, returned her car keys, transferred all her money back, and warned Dandy to turn himself in to the police—or face far worse consequences.

Suddenly, the wind picked up. Curtains billowed. Fog filled the room.

Nancy stood and announced it was time for her to leave. She warned Dandy to watch his back—there were others like her, and they only needed a signal.

The door opened on its own. Nancy walked out. The door shut by itself. Nkem fainted again.

Dandy stared down as he wet himself. His body trembled violently; his legs could barely support him. His phone vibrated. He almost screamed.

It was a message from Nancy.

With shaking hands, he read the words:

“You have work to do. Your time starts now.”

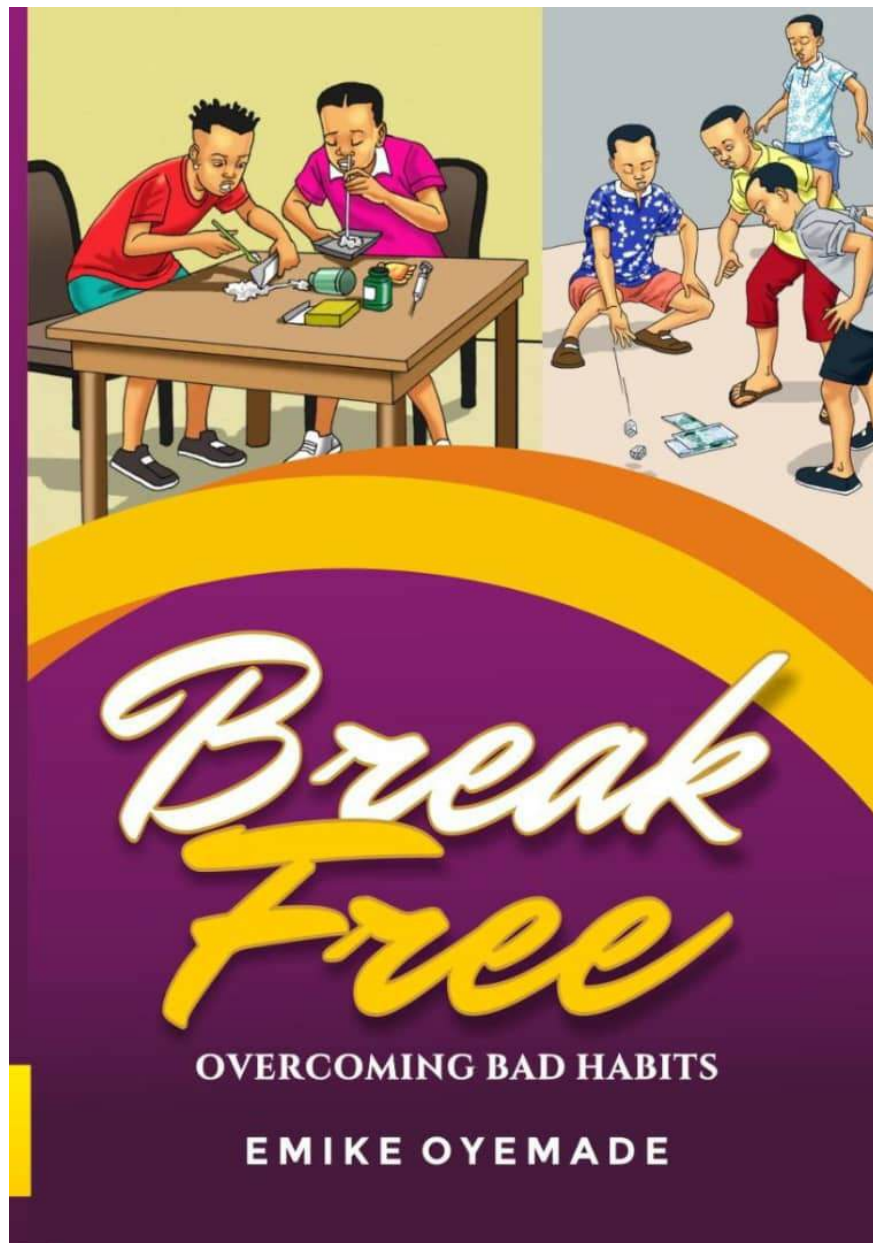


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Tiny Changes, Big Rewards-A Review of Emike Oyemade's Break Free

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BREAK FREE: OVERCOMING BAD HABITS

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You may not be familiar with graphic novels, but *The Unlovables: Scent of Hope* by Fei Kah Yaw is a great place to start. If you enjoy stories with strong visuals, this book makes reading effortless. The illustrations bring every scene to life, so there is no need to struggle to imagine the world, you can clearly see it unfold before you.

From the cover alone, it is clear that Fei Kah Yaw is a fan of fantasy dramas. The title itself may make you pause, *The Unlovables*? Who would want to deal with them? But for Princess Dassas, this is her reality, and she has no choice but to face it.

As you read, female readers especially may feel a sense of relief that they are not among the women of the Kingdom of Zur. The decree of the Titan Throne sends a chill down your spine: one hundred young women are demanded. Fear creeps in as the weight of this command hangs over the kingdom. Yet, just as the tension settles, you are briefly distracted by the surprisingly handsome image of the king. The fear softens, curiosity takes over, and you turn the page.

The female characters are equally captivating. They are beautifully illustrated, and you quickly find yourself interested in getting to know them better. Even as women run in panic, you sense that this cannot be the only trouble in the story. And you are right, this book is filled with drama, slowly revealing deeper trouble than you first imagined.

Then come the three men from the *Unlovables*. The moment they appear, your knees almost tremble. You may even wish you could choose one for yourself, but that choice belongs to Princess Dassas. However, their attractiveness comes with a price. Their beauty hides a curse, and what first feels exciting soon turns unsettling.

Beyond the drama, the book includes moments of humour that make you smile. Just as you begin to relax, a deeper fear sets in, one rooted in hypocrisy. This danger comes from someone close, someone you least expect, reminding readers how power can corrupt and how dangerous the human heart can be.

The story uses flashbacks, much like a movie. Page after page, new revelations are revealed. At times, the transitions move quickly, and the amount of information can feel overwhelming, briefly confusing the reader. Still, the curiosity to know what happens next keeps you turning the pages.

As the story progresses, you begin to realise that those labelled “unlovable” may actually be the most genuine, while those expected to protect and care may be the real enemies. There are moments of repeated arguments that may tempt you to skim ahead, but doing so risks missing important details, as the author often surprises readers with new information.

By the end, there is a happy conclusion, yet some questions remain unanswered. That is when you realise this book is only the beginning, the first piece of a much larger story.

Blending fantasy, drama, and adventure, *The Unlovables: Scent of Hope* draws readers in from the very start. With strong characters, vivid illustrations, and an engaging storyline, this book is suitable for both young adults and adults. It is an interesting and enjoyable read, especially for those who love imaginative worlds brought to life through visuals.



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WEEKENDER

MOVIE REVIEW

THE PRINCESS SWITCH 3: ROMANCING THE STAR (2021)

So, if you enjoyed The Princess Switch 1 and 2, then maybe Part 3 will be for you, this time it will involve the 3 ladies, Margaret, Stacy and Fiona, Margaret's cousin, she also had some similarities like them. In this movie Margaret finds out that Star of Peace was stolen from the palace, this piece was borrowed to them from the Vatican and they were meant to return it. They had no clue how and where they were going to find the Star of Peace, they decided to invite Fiona to help them since she would have some friends from the black market, and could think like a criminal. This time around the 3 ladies would have to work closely together to find the person who stole the Star of Peace and retrieve it back before the Vatican discovers it was gone, go check out the movie to see how they solved this major issue, just before the Christmas eve event. The 100 Family films, kids & family, romantic comedy films, drama, comedies, romance movie was directed by Mike Rohi, they featured actors like Vanessa Hudgens, Nick Sagar, Sam Pallachio, Mia Lloyd, Lachain Nieboer, Ricky Norwood, Florence Hall, Suanne Brown, Mark Fiesch and many more.



WAKE UP DEAD MAN: A KNIVES OUT MYSTERY (2025)

Let's discuss a new drama movie different from the usual Christmas movie, if you enjoy Rian Johnson's previous movie "Glass Onion: A Knives out Mystery" in 2022. Then you might enjoy his new movie with a slightly different story, but felt like a sequel to the one in movie we had seen before, but then had a slightly different story, from the one in 2022. The movie was similar to the one in 2022 but this time, it was to discover who killed the priest. In this movie Lee Ross, was assigned as a new priest to a church in a small town, to work with Samson Helt, who was a very vocal, cruel and mean priest, who talked down on the people and manipulated them, the people were so scared and none could challenge him, but when Lee arrived, he decided to challenge status quo and that was a big issue. A few months later Samson is found dead just close to the altar and Lee is the biggest suspect despite him not being the killer. Well, you will need to go check out the movie to discover who the real killer was and why? The 144m mystery/crime, drama, comedies, thriller, mystery film was directed by Rian Johnson, they featured actors like Daniel Craig, Josh O'Connor, Glenn Close, Josh Brolin, Mila Kunis, Jeremy Renner, Keny Washington etc.



AMBER ALERT (2025)

After watching loads of Christmas movies, I was glad and super excited to watch something other than a romantic movie, but for some weird reasons, this movie wasn't as fantastic as I expected. I was disturbed as the back and forth were so much, that I almost gave up before the end of the movie. This movie reminded me of Inception, but maybe a poorer version. The change of number on her T-shirt also reminded me of "Squid game". In this movie a young woman who had a son woke up to see that their room which was on a very high level was already flooded, she was left in shock and suddenly she gets a call saying that a helicopter was coming to pick them up if only they could make it to the roof top. That faithful day could be their last day on earth, if they do not hurry to the top. You will need to check out this movie to find out if they survived, you will need to pay attention or else you will get lost and confused. The 108m Korean, Sci-Fi, drama, action movie was directed by Ki Byung-woo, they featured actors like Kim Da-mi, Park Hae-soo, Kwa Eun-seong, Yu-na, Park Byuang-eun, Jeon Hye-jin, Kang Bin etc.

