

RISING  
WOMAN

*Africa*





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A portion of proceeds goes to Sesor Empowerment Foundation Nigeria's education and training projects which are focused on internally displaced women and children in Nigeria.

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Our NBC 2022 '33 women amplifying the voices of African leadership' list was ranked 3rd most read digital native article across NBC and its Telemundo Spanish platforms. This is our time. Thank you to all the women supporters featured on that list that inspire this initiative forward and continue to support us.



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MY REAL

*Name is*

You are enough

You are enough

You are enough

You are enough

You are enough

You are enough

You are enough

You are enough

You are enough

*You are enough*



# AONI Aningo

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*Executive Director,  
Global Group Media and Creator,  
Rising Woman Series,  
Author, my real name is*

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Women leaders around the world embody tenacity and individuality. With the world's recent, urgent challenges, it is women who continue to work towards a more equitable future that opens doors for women and girls.

Finding women in leadership positions across Africa isn't something new. Throughout the continent's history, women have proven to be critical problem solvers, from leading militaries and independence movements to fostering change by spearheading transitional post-conflict periods and taking on leadership roles across industries.

I interviewed the Inter-Parliamentary Union's (IPU's) Secretary-General Martin Chungong. He stressed that, while strides still need to be made in seeing the equal representation of women parliamentarians worldwide, we must celebrate countries such as Rwanda, leading the world with 61% of parliamentary seats occupied by women. Cuba is in second position, with 53% of women retaining parliamentary seats, followed by the United Arab Emirates, with 50% of women holding parliamentary seats. Behold the power of leadership and strong governance.

I also wondered about breaking these glass ceilings and how we African women deal with the glass shards, their pain piercing our skin. Are the scars healed or still open sores? Do we still have glass embedded in us? How do we feel once we break all these glass ceilings and ascend to spaces and tables either created by us or that we worked so hard to occupy?

It falls on us to create empowering environments within ourselves and our communities if we are to thrive in these spaces created amid all the shattered glass. This edition focuses on action steps and advice for creating conducive environments for us all.

From leaders in infrastructure and telecommunications to critical roles in government and non-profits, we celebrate **120** women impacting Africa.

I ask you all, to come, and

SAT. TRUTH  
SANG. TOGETHER

... With Me





# NNEKA STEPHANIE EKE

*Chief Operating Officer,  
Nepal Energies Limited,  
Nigeria*

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*I am the Chief  
Operating Officer,  
and I am a woman.*

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As the COO, tell us about operations in your sector. What are the latest trends in energy and sustainability? And how is Nepal planning to be at the forefront of it?

Nepal Energies Ltd is a full downstream and midstream oil and gas company involved in the sales and distribution of petroleum products. My role is to run the day-to-day operations of the company; starting from international trading, to importation and distribution of petroleum products. We run the end-to-end operations of the downstream oil and gas value chain; from importation into the coastal depots, followed by the mobilization of trucks into our inland retail outlets, ultimately fulfilling the needs of end-users across Nigeria. As the world transitions to cleaner energy, there is more focus on generating energy from alternative sources like gas, solar and electricity. As a forward thinking company, we are positioning ourselves to also play in the alternative energy space and take advantage of the emerging opportunities.

How is Nepal Energies Ltd empowering women? Are there any programs within Nepal Energies to mention?

I am the Chief Operating Officer, and I am a woman. The Founder and Group Managing Director of Nepal is also a woman. Nepal is a business that encourages women immensely. Our past CFO was a woman, and we also have women in the operations department, which you'd think would be entirely male dominated in the oil and gas industry due to vessel operations.

We understand that women can compartmentalize more skillfully because we are mothers, wives, sisters, businesspeople, and we are able to manage all these roles. If you can run a home, you can run a business. We encourage gender equity by giving fair and equal opportunities to our male and female employees, where we find a woman and a man equally competent for any role in Nepal.



*Christy Shady*

A professional portrait of Fade Ogunro, a woman with long, dark hair, wearing a dark blue top. She is smiling and has her hands crossed over her chest. She is wearing a watch on her left wrist. The background is a solid, dark grey color.

# FADE OGUNRO

*Founder and CEO,  
Bookings Africa, Nigeria  
& Chairwoman Africa,  
Cherie Blair Foundation*

*As a leading entrepreneur with over 10 years experience, how can African women be empowered and economically independent?*

I am very proud to be a woman and proud of the contributions we make in society and the impact we create.

As an entrepreneur, African women can be empowered economically by up-skilling and re-skilling over the course of time. Especially in the digital world as technology and digital transformation are evolving at a rapid rate. It is one thing to learn a skill and be good at it and it is another to have the capital to turn that skill into a money-making business and be economically independent.

Women run 30% of all registered businesses worldwide, yet only less than 10% of women entrepreneurs have access to the capital they need to grow. Funding for women is particularly lacking in business but if this could change, investing in women would create a ripple effect that would yield multiple benefits, not only for individual women, but also for the community as a whole.

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*I am constantly encouraging my team to develop their skills and become problem solvers.*

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Also, if informal women workers were recognized and were able to participate in the economy at the same rate and level as men, there could be an increase in global GDP by 2025. In developing countries, an estimate of 630 million people are informal workers and a majority of that number are women.

In Nigeria, the informal economy has an estimated worth of about 7.615 trillion Naira (\$48.2 billion) and yet, the activities of these workers remain neglected. Women cannot work their way out of poverty if their average earnings are low while costs and risks are high.

As the CEO of Bookings Africa, women make up 80% of my staff force. I am constantly encouraging my team to develop their skills and become problem solvers. We must create awareness about the potential of women in the workplace. It is important that employers realize the value of competency over credentials. I encourage every Nigerian private sector business owner to hire 2x more women to fill management roles and they would be shocked at the level of growth they bring to the business.

*Congratulations on the success of Bookings Africa. Tell us more about it. What is your vision and mission? And where are you in accomplishing those goals?* Thank you so much. Bookings Africa is an online market place that is pioneering digital work across Africa where clients and creatives connect and payment is securely completed online.

Our vision is to reduce unemployment by unlocking the earning potentials of Africans through gig work. Our mission is to enable individuals monetize their skills, passion and talent by providing easy access to the largest database of professional and digital labor across Africa.

*With an idea to change market trends, what opportunities does your gig marketplace offer African women?* Bookings Africa offers the African woman an opportunity to increase her earning capacity with just a skill.

Our aim is to reduce unemployment through digital work and to unlock the earning potentials of Africans giving them access to international market through gig work and our video call feature on the platform. With over 15,000 talented verified service providers, we have had an average of at least 5 bookings per week, the only digital work platform in SSA with a video call feature, and we successfully hosted over 10 master classes with verified social media influencers.

Our traction since our launch in November 2019 suggests, enabling gig workers with POS systems generates 30% more revenue quarterly. About 70% of women between the ages of 18-50 years old earned above the minimum wage in Nigeria. This is evidence that the Bookings Africa app as well as hardware, directly impacts earning capacity and the general quality of life for our women, and Africa.

# ESTHER ARINNUKAWE

*Chief Human Resources Officer,  
MTN Nigeria Communications PLC,  
Nigeria*

*What are the unique challenges of developing and managing talent in Africa?*

Skills shortages, retention, and brain drain are significant challenges. With respect to skills shortage, the role of educational (especially tertiary) institutions in designing relevant curricula to prepare graduates for the ever-changing world of work cannot be overemphasized. It can also be challenging for organizations to retain top talent. Organizations need to design attractive remuneration packages, create a strong and purpose-driven brand that resonates with talent, institute career planning and management initiatives to engage talent, and support work-life balance. Finally, the loss of critical talent to other markets is another significant challenge for managing and developing talent in Africa.



*How does the Revv Programme address these challenges?*

The Revv Programme is MTN's bespoke intervention which was conceived in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic to support Nigeria's small/medium enterprises (SMEs) customers. It leveraged the knowledge of subject matter experts to equip SMEs with expertise and insights on critical demands for success in the business world, including personnel management. It was designed to address:

- affordability issues and the challenge of attracting talent,
- inaccurate hiring due to underdeveloped hiring practices,
- difficulty maintaining a conducive and professional work environment; and,
- the absence of standard governance policies and processes.

It was expected that the insights gleaned from the masterclasses would be leveraged for procedural improvements, and feedback to this effect has been encouraging.



# DEDO KOFI

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*Multi-Passionate Entrepreneur  
& Business Coach,  
Ghana*

*Tell us about your acclaimed Signature System and the idea behind it.*

The idea for the Signature System arose out of the desire to create a support system for young entrepreneurs building their businesses. Having built my businesses from scratch, I thought the best way to pay it forward was to develop a program that enables other entrepreneurs to navigate the challenges of building thriving businesses.

This led to the launch of the Signature System, the International Business Launch Framework, in 2019. The framework consists of a three-step process for designing, launching, developing, and delivering products and services to consumers in an international setting. This framework guides clients, step by step, through the measures necessary to launch a successful business in Ghana and across the African continent.

Since its launch, the Signature System has provided a workable model for launching several youth and women-owned ventures in Ghana. As a result, it is fast becoming the preferred model for the thriving start-up community in Ghana.

Our vision is for this framework to inspire an ecosystem of thriving businesses across the African continent that provides hope and employment to millions of young people. It would be truly fulfilling to know that I contributed to this process in a small way.



How does TrueLife work to empower young and talented women in Ghana?

TrueLife enables me to inspire, empower, and support young women in tertiary institutions to acquire in-demand soft skills and coaching to start them off on their corporate, entrepreneurial, or leadership journeys. The platform builds their capacity to think creatively and solve real problems that prepare them for work life. My team and I are working on expanding our work on TrueLife and developing it into an integrated program in several tertiary institutions. TrueLife complements the efforts of my personal charity initiative, Orange Hearts, which provides scholarships to needy but academically exceptional students from pre-school to the tertiary level.



LIST OF PLANTATION SLAVES

SEX

AGE

COLOR

DATE OF BIRTH

SOLD FOR

Illustration of a woman in a colorful, patterned dress and a hat, carrying a bundle on her head.

Illustration of a man in a dark, patterned coat and a hat, carrying a bundle on his back.

Illustration of a woman in a yellow and orange patterned dress, carrying a bundle on her head.

Illustration of a man in a white shirt and a hat, carrying a bundle on his head.





Mgart





# RACHEL MORE-OSHODI

*Energy & Infrastructure NED /  
Fintech Founder | Angel Investor,  
Nigeria/USA*

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*I will never forget  
that feeling.*

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*Being a female leader in the energy and infrastructure sectors, what have been some notable milestones in your career journey?*

I have had the opportunity to lead a team through some very exciting projects, many of which are first-in-kind and have since served as templates on the continent.

One of the most notable milestones was the completion of the first privately financed power project in Nigeria following sector reforms. Everything was to be considered and created from scratch. My team worked closely with government officials and other stakeholders to ensure we could complete this much-needed project as quickly as possible. It took us seven years and more than 400 negotiated documents to reach financial close. Despite all odds, we did it.

Another milestone was getting my first project lead role. I remember being so excited to take on more responsibility — having to manage multi-disciplinary teams of engineers, environmental specialists, and lawyers to ensure the timely execution of projects that have provided access to electricity, roads, and broadband services to millions of people globally. I will never forget that feeling.

*What lessons have you learned in your experiences on executive boards and in leadership roles?*

First, I learned that every situation is unique and, therefore, you must always be able to adapt.

As a leader, you must be able to adjust your approach to fit the needs of your team and the goals of your organization. Another lesson I've learned is that the more you open yourself up to the world around you, the more you can learn. The more you talk to people who aren't like yourself, the more you can learn. The more you show up for people who aren't like yourself and try to understand their perspectives, the more you can learn. The more you ask questions and seek out answers from those who do not think like you, the better off we all are. Finally, I've learned that as a leader, you must be able to make hard choices. Sometimes those decisions are going to be unpopular and might make people angry at you, but it's important to stand by your convictions and stick with the plan.

*Moving forward, what next steps and goals do you have in mind in the entrepreneurial sphere?*

I'm going to keep doing what I'm doing. I love it, and I feel like it's really working for me. However, I have always been interested in entrepreneurship, and I'm incredibly excited to be moving forward with my own fintech business. Moving forward, I'm building a platform for kids and teens on a mission to bridge the financial literacy and wealth gaps between kids in Africa and the rest of the world. I'm excited to be on this journey and plan to launch the platform within the next six months. Whatever happens next for me as an entrepreneur, I know that I'll keep challenging myself. All in all, I hope to have a lasting impact on the world.

# DOROTHY DOTTIE LIECH

*Regional Director, Africa, Political Economist, Nordic  
Global Investment Foundation (NGIF) & Founder,  
The Premier Plan Agency, Kenya & Denmark*

## 1. What is Nordic Global Investment Foundation's (NGIF) impact on East Africa with you as Regional Director?

Over the years, I have accumulated a great network with different groups and stakeholders within my country—Kenya—and other parts of Africa. With my current role as Regional Director, I have used these networks to spread the opportunities and positive impact of NGIF. I have previously worked with women of influence, low-income groups, SMEs, sections of the National Government, and many others, thereby giving me a better understanding of the issues facing the region and how NGIF can positively effect change.

With the above insight, I have also managed to organize successful meetings between government and private entities for developmental and economic synergies.

*What are possible setbacks you have experienced in your journey that reflect the challenges women in leadership experience globally?*

In most cases, unfortunately, women are not taken seriously in a room full of men; their voices are silenced and sometimes they are even stifled by fellow women at more senior levels of authority. The biggest challenge is making your voice loud enough so that the “men” in the room can hear you. An aggressive woman is often seen as rude or uncultured instead of empowered, so shifting this perception of women in the corporate scene has been a real challenge.

In my journey, I have met such challenges and have learned to weather them by being consistent with requests and expectations. Instead of lip service, I achieve tangible results in everything I undertake. This has helped me to climb ladders, open doors considered to be un-openable, and propelled me slowly but steadily to where I am today in my career.

*How can women advocate for more inclusion in politics and policymaking in Africa?*

Women need to show up and speak up and let their voices be heard. They need to get into those rooms or round tables and air their views without feeling guilty, belittled, or unwanted and, most importantly, not allow themselves to play the victim at any level. Governments need to adhere to the provisions of legislation and women should work together to ensure their rights under the law are fully met, especially where they are at risk of being infringed.



# TEMI MARCELLA AWOGBORO

Founding Partner,  
Alcent Capital,  
Nigeria

*Describe your personal journey as a global investor.*

As a global investor, with over fifteen years of experience, I have committed over half a billion dollars USD in private capital to tackle some of the world's most pressing challenges. I am a Founding Partner of Alcent Capital, a global venture growth fund investing in innovative technology companies tackling critical global issues and improving the lives of those they serve. Through my early-stage platforms, I have built a portfolio of over 200 inspiring founders globally that are at the forefront of innovation and have the potential to emerge as regional champions and global challengers.

Prior to this, I was the regional investment lead of one of the largest dedicated impact funds globally, which is managed by TPG Capital and The Rise Fund. In addition, I was part of the leadership responsible for scaling the fund from inception to a global platform, which has been highlighted as one of the top 50 leadership efforts that will “come to define the world of tomorrow.” On this journey, I led the investment in and operationalization of one of the largest and most advanced private hospitals in Nigeria, which is transforming the healthcare landscape in the region.

I continue my journey as a global investor, inspired by the mission of connecting innovation ecosystems, unlocking the power of capital as a catalyst for transformation at scale, and unleashing new waves of sustainable and equitable growth.

*How do you manage your time between investing, building companies, sitting on boards, and being a mother and wife—among everything else?*

Women put themselves under undue pressure trying to be everything to everyone. In my pursuit of perfection, I came to realize you cannot have it all at the same time, so I closely examined what “having it all” really meant. Life is a series of choices and trade-offs. I strive to be intentional about my priorities, clear about the trade-offs, and focused on living a life that is purpose driven, passion filled, and performance oriented.



*How important is it for women to be on executive boards and occupying leadership roles?*

I sit on the inaugural Board and Investment Committee of the Equality Fund, bringing together gender-lens investing, government funding, and multi-sector philanthropy to catalyze capital towards the largest self-sustaining fund for gender equality in the world. I sit on the inaugural Africa Advisory Board of Save the Children International and have been appointed by the President to sit on the Nigerian Health Sector Reform Committee under the Chairmanship of the Vice President.

In my view, the future of the world as we know it requires new thinking and strategies. We are fighting a battle between our present array of resources and the future struggling to be born. The unique experiences and perspectives of women at all levels of decision-making are critical in the formulation of platforms, strategies, policies, and laws to create more equitable outcomes for our communities and the world.

I strive to build a world where my daughters can pursue their dreams with unbridled focus and determination, unrestricted by their gender. In the words of Kamala Harris, I encourage all to “dream with ambition, lead with conviction, and see yourself in a way that others might not see you simply because they have never seen it before.”



# SHEFFY KOLADE

*(Member, Forbes Business Council)  
CEO, Boxes and Baskets LLC*

*Congratulations on your acceptance into the Forbes Business Council. What necessary tools can female entrepreneurs leverage to reach the peak of their careers?*

Women have been historically disadvantaged in business due to factors ranging from legal and cultural biases to social norms discouraging accessibility. Despite the increase in the number of women founding businesses, the majority of these businesses are unable to grow. Nonetheless, with the development of information and communication technologies (“ICTs”), we are dismantling these barriers and can manage businesses while juggling our many other responsibilities. Here are some of my personal favorites:

**Mobile Hardware Tools:** These are a necessity for every business owner, remote or otherwise. Access to tools like phones, laptops, and tablets enable me to work comfortably from anywhere. In addition, fast and dependable internet access helps me operate efficiently and communicate with the rest of my team.

**Project Management Tools:** Project management is an important aspect of entrepreneurship. For female entrepreneurs like me, it becomes especially difficult when numerous staff report to you alone from multiple locations. However, I have worked through this issue by utilizing project management tools like Microsoft Teams and Basecamp to track the activities of my employees and ensure we are able to meet deadlines and hold each other accountable.

**Social media:** This is such a powerful tool for brand visibility and growth. Its adaptability and accessibility are uniquely tailored to address the time, mobility, and infrastructure constraints we face as women in business.

*Your company Boxes and Baskets LLC operates in Nigeria and in the United States. How have you been able to handle operations locally and internationally? How would you compare the two markets?*

I have been very fortunate to have found teams across Nigeria and the U.S. that understand compliance requirements and are able to cater to the local needs of both our locations by utilizing best practices. Our workforce thrives on feedback and evaluations to increase efficiency and optimize performance.

As far as markets are concerned, the U.S. and Nigeria are significantly different, and our successes in each country have relied on our understanding of both. The U.S. market, for instance, is capped on ethically sourced materials, and there is a lot of importance given to licenses, approvals, and certificates. This is in stark contrast to our activities in Nigeria, where the market is driven by the lowest item price. Business is also easier in the U.S. because of extensive local production—that is what we are trying to replicate in Nigeria.

*What strategies can entrepreneurs apply to achieve growth in their businesses?*

I believe developing a market niche and a brand is very important for entrepreneurs to position themselves for success. In extremely saturated industries, niche-marketing distinguishes you from the crowd and connects you with your target audience.



# TITILAYO ABIKOYE

*Founder/CEO, Thyaura  
Partners Concept Ltd.,  
Nigeria*



I am proud to say I come from very humble beginnings. Life has thrown everything at me, including the "kitchen sink". I know what it feels like to wonder where your next meal will come from, being a strong woman, preserving your moral principles and dignity, while navigating, and building a business in a male dominated industry.

Life shaped me, but the turning point for me is when I lost my great support, my mother. I couldn't provide for my infant child and my mother who cared for her barely could. Suddenly my mother died on a Saturday in my hands in the hospital partly because I couldn't buy a most affordable medicine she needed.

I had to differ my grief and pain because I needed to put food on the table to take care of my child as I had nobody to turn to at the time and as a woman that is a hard place to be. The very next working day, Monday, I started working with what would be the first official client of Thyaura. This experience changed me and my outlook on life in general, as I held poverty responsible for the death of my mother and swore never to be poor again, so I turned to God, and he has consistently never let me down.

My faith in God and positive affirmations was, is and always has been my biggest weapon. One of my favorite quotes in life is from the Bible, Proverbs 3:5,6 "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not in your own understanding, in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will direct your paths" and it has worked for me since then. Cleaning is my go-to place when sad, happy, or bored and never saw it as a talent, but it was all I knew at the time. So, I turned to it to survive. Looking back now, I am glad I did.

I established Thyaura with a simple idea - A determination to earn an honest living and the belief that value can be consistently delivered and achieved through the meaningful act of providing solutions, and cleaning for me was the catalyst that started everything else. Today, and after a decade in the industry, Thyaura's net worth is in millions of dollars and a company that has gone beyond just being a cleaning company. Thyaura today is an integrated support services company with a wide range of services. Our objective is to ensure incremental value to client's assets through the provision of excellent services in facilities management, professional cleaning and janitorial services, height services, sale of materials, tools and equipment leasing and just recently real estate.

In today's competitive business world, a clean ambiance and an uninterrupted infrastructure management are core business priorities that need to be effectively managed for the smooth running of any organization.

We partner with clients to understand the needs of their business and design facility management solutions that are tailored to meet their sector-specific needs. We work with a wide range of industries such as commercial institutions, construction, NGOs, embassies, aviation, hospitality, healthcare, and we are presently in 22 states in Nigeria.

My industry is male dominated. Growing in this sector has been challenging and rewarding. I have had to fight not only giants but the system and our culture that undermines, and negatively profiles the success and abilities of women. I had to address my fears by facing my challenges and converting them in my thoughts to teachable moments, rather than as obstacles or setbacks. One of such experiences was when I went to train for height services which is 98% male dominated and was refused participation because of my gender, despite being the sponsor of my team. My persistence and refusal to be labelled got me to not only to participate amongst men as the only woman in the team at the time but also to pass the rigorous (IRATA) UK Certification Height Service Training and I must admit, while it was very challenging, it was also a very fulfilling achievement as a woman and a leader. Or the many other times that I have had to sit in board rooms for as the only woman negotiating and strategizing with men. This and many more milestones, assure me that as women we can do anything if we set our minds to it. I had to learn that beyond having a seat at the table, I had to have my voice heard.

These experiences over the years have led to our exponential growth. This and several awards, reflect the trust bestowed on us by our clients. We are proud of these partnerships and our track record is testament to the integrity of our service.

As women, we need to strategically prioritize our value chain. By doing so, we would continually create the opportunities to reshape views about our potentials, there by creating economic and industrial access for ourselves. The world is undergoing significant changes from different developments of global economic markets that we can constantly key into from the very least of services and productions to the highest levels of seats in power. Women most times face the same struggles, and we can no longer sit back and watch. We need an "all hands-on deck approach" if we want to make a difference in our own lives, our countries, and the world at large.

Looking back now, I'm proud of what I have achieved as a woman and what we have achieved as a company. Our growth has been primarily through persistent hard work, people, and a network of connected referrals. In all of this, God first, family and people matter to me and will continue to be my biggest investments.

[www.thyaura.com](http://www.thyaura.com), [info@thyaura.com](mailto:info@thyaura.com)

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*"I have had to fight not only giants but the system and our culture that undermines, and negatively profiles the success and abilities of women."*

# ABISADE ADENUBI

Founder,  
Heritage Apparels,  
Nigeria

Decades ago, Nigeria had a flourishing textiles and apparel industry, but today, the sector has dwindled and most of our clothes are imported. Over the last several years, governments and regional organizations across Africa have recognized the significant potential that the textiles and apparel value chain holds when it comes to creating economic empowerment for Africa's citizens. Keen to engage in this movement, wherein economic potential is transformed into actual financial prosperity, I returned to Nigeria in 2019 to set up a textile and garment production company. The company's mandate is three-fold: to provide locally produced, affordable, quality clothes for the mass market, thus limiting the need for importation; to create decent jobs for young people on the African continent, especially within the context of the predicted hyper population growth in Africa, and to contribute to the revival of the textiles and apparel industry on the continent.

I trained as a corporate finance lawyer in England and Wales and worked in leading global law firms and financial institutions as legal counsel advising clients on a range of corporate and commercial matters. The trajectory of my career was solid, and so quitting my job at one of the most renowned law firms in the world was truly a defining moment. I had reached a point where congruence between my personal values and the work that I was doing became paramount.

A key challenge I faced in building my business was the need for human capital. The business required a significant investment in training, so we developed a model that works by providing a skills acquisition program for trainees. The program teaches technical vocational skills and then creates access to jobs for participants through: (i) directly employing trainees in our factory—we have employed 70% of program participants (75% of whom are under 25, 65% of whom are women); (ii) facilitating connections to clothing brands within our network; and (iii) providing affordable access to a well-equipped production hub for those who choose freelance work. We have witnessed first-hand the impact this approach has had not only in creating a source of income for our staff and their families, but also conferring a new-found sense of self-confidence in our trainees.

I believe that the future of Africa's development is intricately linked to the rise of her industrial capacity. My theory of change is that it is the establishment of factories that will create broad-based prosperity for Africa's citizens. There are several examples in history of how the textiles and clothing industry has powered industrial transformation for the nations and we are working to make this a reality for our continent.

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*I had reached a point  
where congruence between  
my personal values and the  
work that I was doing  
became paramount*

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# ANITA B.Y OTTENHOF

*Hospitality Expert &  
Founder Core Hospitality,  
Ghana*

With over 15 years of experience in the hospitality industry, Ottenhof has worked on various groundbreaking projects in Ghana and remains the go-to person for high end projects. She started her career at the Flying Blue department of KLM/AIR FRANCE in Amsterdam and joined the team at Villa Monticello Boutique Hotel a month after relocating to Ghana. With the experience she gained in those years, she started her own consultancy, Core Hospitality Ghana, in 2018. From her first project, the opening of the Cabin Hotel in Accra's prestigious Airport Residential Area, she moved on to consulting, training, and hiring for various establishments in the country.



# CALBETH ALARIBE

*Founder Coy Fish,  
USA*

"I am no longer accepting the things I cannot change. I am changing the things I cannot accept" – Angela Davis.

Calbeth Chikaodinaka Alaribe is a first generation Nigerian American, who is passionate about advancing health equity and diversifying the health care workforce globally. In Nigeria, she co-founded/co-chaired the Nigerian chapter of Women in Global Health, an organization dedicated to achieving equality in global health leadership. Since its development, the organization has registered over 500 women in Nigeria and the diaspora to help lead efforts in improving health for women and young girls. In the U.S., Chika has led equity efforts as CEO and cofounder of Coyfish, a healthtech startup focused on changing the dynamics of patient-provider interactions for millennial and future generations to come.



# BISOLA ALABI

Founder,  
Heels & Tech,  
Nigeria

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*Education is  
the greatest  
weapon*

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*Why is closing the gender gap in tech important?*

Heels & Tech As an EdTech fully focused on upskilling of women of colour and students with intentions of global mobility. Our women are able to settle in fast in their preferred country, they upskill before they move and land jobs almost immediately in reputable companies like AWS in the USA, the Government of Canada, Saskatchewan Health Authorities, Deloitte UK, and several financial institutions here in Africa. It is a win-win for us. While focusing on closing the gender gap between women and tech, they are also taking part in shaping industries in many countries.

*What makes you feel fulfilled?*

Many women of colour have a lot of things fighting against them, ranging from socio-economic issues to technophobia etc, so when women wake up and decide not to play small, it gives me lots of joy. And as we all know, Education is the greatest weapon. Heels & Tech have also introduced courses that are high in demand as industries and countries are big on digital transformation, and we are proud to say our women are filling the gaps.

# TOYIN SANNI

Founder & CEO,  
Emerging Africa Group,  
Nigeria

*What are the lessons learned & challenges you have come across as a woman leader in the financial industry?*

In my journey as a leader in the financial services industry, I have learned the following important lessons: first, you cannot outsource your personal development, not even to your employers, superiors, or HR officers. I learned to have a clear vision from an early stage in my journey of how high I want to rise, in which industry, and what capabilities I'd have to cultivate to attain that level.

I also learned that, as a woman, you will most likely be overlooked for leadership positions and must consciously and deliberately put yourself out there for any desired positions. You will likely need to achieve twice as much as men to be considered qualified, so focusing on performance is important. I have faced challenges such as conscious and unconscious bias, impostor syndrome, discrimination, and stiff resistance from both genders based on limiting beliefs about the role, place, and capabilities of women in a male dominated industry.

*What is the impact of your work and what is your vision for Emerging Africa Group?*

My work has made a significant and measurable impact, which has brought me great personal fulfillment. First, our work in investment banking has led to the successful raising of over \$1 billion USD for African businesses and communities within our first 42 months of operations at Emerging Africa Group. Working with other female leaders through organizations I've co-founded, such as Women in Finance Nigeria and WIFNG UK, we have inspired, encouraged, mentored, and coached women into leadership positions and contributed to the rising numbers of female executives—from 14% to approximately 30%. During my career, I have personally coached about 51 female executives and entrepreneurs, including graduates from my Executive Mentorship Program. Our impact extends to the food bank, education, healthcare, energy, and other work by the TFS Foundation that has benefited women and girls since July 2022.

My vision for Emerging Africa Group is to be the leading catalyst for Africa's emergence as a global destination for environmental, social, and governance-led investments and finance.



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*I also learned that, as a woman, you will most likely be overlooked for leadership positions and must consciously and deliberately put yourself out there for any desired positions.*

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# KESEENA CHENGADU

CEO,  
*Orama Corporate,*  
*Mauritius*





*“Everybody wants to reach the peak, but there is no growth on the top of a mountain. It is in the valley that we slog through, the lush grass and rich soil, learning and becoming what enables us to summit life’s next peak”*

- Andy Andrews

What are the current barriers to attracting businesses in Africa and how does Órama Corporate help mitigate them?

Africa is home to some of the fastest-growing economies in the world. Considering the increasing affluence, population growth, and rapid internet spread on the continent, Africa’s burgeoning economies present exciting opportunities for expansion in a range of sectors. However, the African business landscape comes with its unique challenges. Despite the unimaginable growth potential, there are risks of doing business in Africa, ranging from tough government policies to difficult regulatory landscapes where it can be challenging to start a business, enforce contracts, and protect investors. These obstacles make it difficult for businesses to build consistent long-term plans, which inherently increases the cost of doing business in Africa. Bank loans often come with high-interest rates due to the perceived risks of doing business in Africa and investors are not encouraged by international rating agencies, which often downgrade African economies.

Órama Corporate Services, a management company licensed by the FSC in Mauritius, promotes using Mauritius as a springboard for doing business in Africa as a key strategy for the investor community. Mauritius overcomes many of the above listed challenges most African countries face, as evidenced by the many accolades the country has received—it is ranked number one in Africa on ease of doing business, number one in Africa meeting all the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) recommendations, and number one in Africa on human development index in 2021, among others. Mauritius supports other African countries in accessing the necessary capital to finance investment by reducing both the risks and costs associated with cross-border dealings and offers excellent protection for foreign business owners. Mauritius undoubtedly has a robust financial regulatory system, courtesy of the financial service commission and a strong banking sector and infrastructure, all of which have projected Mauritius as an environment conducive to business transactions of any scale.

Mauritius also benefits from a stable democracy, highly skilled work force, and strong legal, judicial, regulatory, and political frameworks that enable foreign investments otherwise avoided due to concerns about stability, corruption, and currency controls in developing countries. From well-established corporations to new startups, Órama assists a wide range of companies in navigating Mauritius’ business and legal environment, while also providing tailored asset and portfolio management services, among others.

What is your long-term vision for Órama Corporate Services?

Órama means vision and our Órama is to become pioneers of the African success story—an Africa conducive to growth and thriving business. Not only are we innovative, perceptive, and intuitive in finding the finest solutions for our clients, but we also see the value in investing in Mauritius and the potential to make Africa an economic powerhouse. This vision is embedded in every fabric of the company leadership and passed on to all members of the team through its culture, norms, and ethics. “The Órama way” is at the very essence of the company’s existence. The Órama team is working assiduously to accomplish its vision by promoting Mauritius as a fertile environment and base for businesses to leverage growth and expand across Africa by supporting African business. Doing so is crucial at this moment when the continent is determined to regain its influence within global markets and to provide its entrepreneurs, companies, and investors with the opportunities to thrive and shape a prosperous future. We have spent a great deal of time and effort analyzing the business market in Mauritius and Africa as a whole. There is a good foundation in place and we want to push Mauritius forward as a frontrunner of the African market. Órama believes in building models for sustainable growth and understands that the foundations of such growth are ethics, operational efficiency, risk management, compliance, and quality services.

# DORCAS SERY

Founder & General Manager,  
DSD PROD & AMP; Media,  
Miss Ivory Coast (2005),  
Côte d'Ivoire

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*Education, awareness, and  
information are essential tools  
for empowering women and  
promoting their autonomy*

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How do you effectively address and communicate the pressing women's issues as a central focus in your television productions?

As an African woman who has experienced diverse realities, I conceived the idea of interviewing women who have overcome real and painful challenges. This led to the creation of "La Sery Inédite," a production focused on speaking the truth, fostering open dialogue, and expressing ourselves with kindness and authenticity, devoid of sensationalism.

Having personally faced various obstacles, I compiled a list of recurring and profoundly serious problems that women encounter in our societies. With the concept in place, the approach was simple: to deviate from conventional local productions and engage in honest conversations with women about sensitive issues.

This platform allowed me to share my own truth and provided an opportunity for others to do the same. It empowered individuals to express themselves, while also encouraging other women to connect with me through social networks and share their own stories. Through "La Sery Inédite," our aim is to challenge societal norms, create awareness, and inspire change. By amplifying these authentic narratives, we strive to build a community where women's voices are valued, and their experiences are acknowledged.



How can we empower women to achieve independence and assume leadership roles?

Education, awareness, and information are essential tools for empowering women and promoting their autonomy. An uneducated woman often lacks access to positions where her voice can make a significant impact. Moreover, it is crucial for education to incorporate religious teachings as many actions are carried out in the name of religion without a solid religious foundation. This lack of knowledge often leaves women unaware of their rights, leading to their suffering.

To address these challenges, we must prioritize educating women, equipping them with the necessary knowledge and skills to confidently navigate the world and make their voices heard. It is imperative to inform them about their rights, ensuring they are on par with others in terms of information and opportunities.

By providing women with education, we empower them to actively participate in society and assert their rights. Simultaneously, we must raise awareness among women and society as a whole, enlightening them about the pivotal role and power that women hold within our communities.

Through education, awareness, and information, we can create a more equitable society where women are valued, respected, and empowered. Together, let us work towards providing women with the knowledge and resources they need to thrive and contribute meaningfully to our shared future.







# HANNA, BIRNA KRISTJÁNDÓTTIR

*Chair & Co-Founder of the  
Reykjavik Global Forum /  
Senior Advisor UN Women /  
Former Minister & Mayor  
Reykjavik, Iceland*

*The Reykjavik Global Forum Women Leaders has been taking place since 2018. What is the goal and mission of the Forum, and what will be the focus of the 2023 Reykjavik Global Forum?*

Launched in 2018 under the heading of “Power, Together,” the Reykjavik Global Forum – Women Leaders convene from all sectors of politics, business, civil society, academia, the arts, and media, etc to share ideas and solutions on how to further advance society towards gender equality and promote and positively develop the number of women in leadership positions. Co-hosted by Women Political Leaders (WPL), the Government of Iceland, and the Parliament of Iceland, the Forum attracts hundreds of Conversationists each year from 90+ countries and offers a unique lens into the best practices and proven solutions that leaders are deploying across sectors to achieve parity.

In the last five years, the Reykjavik Global Forum – Women Leaders has grown tremendously in terms of its impact. Furthermore, the Reykjavik Global Forum also gathers information and knowledge through its many initiatives, including the Reykjavik Index for Leadership, the Reykjavik Manual and the Women’s World Atlas. The Reykjavik Global Forum is both a convening and a community. In 2023, the Reykjavik Global Forum will focus on the evolution of the Forum into a year-round Reykjavik Global Community with the aim of empowering more women to attain and retain power.

*What has been the most significant movement impacting gender equality since you began your career in politics?*

In Iceland, which has consistently been ranked first when it comes to gender equality according to the World Economic Forum, there have been various movements and policies that have catalyzed progress on gender equality in the last decades. One of these is the country’s policy of shared and equal parental leave (paternity leave), which has been fundamental in accelerating parity in Iceland.

Moreover, the number of women in leadership in Iceland has also increased significantly, particularly in Parliament, which, 50 years ago, claimed few female members, but where women now make up half of its parliamentarians. Of course, the Icelandic women’s movement, which emerged from the Women’s Day Off in 1975, has also monumentally impacted Iceland’s progress on gender equality. Likewise, Vigdís Finnbogadóttir’s election as the first democratically elected woman president in 1980 changed the landscape of gender equality in Iceland.

Speaking of movements on the international scene, I would say the MeToo movement is the most significant global movement I have witnessed since I began my career in politics. I have also had the privilege to work closely with the Generation Equality campaign as Senior Advisor on Women’s Leadership at UN Women, a campaign launched to follow up on and implement the ambitions of the 1995 Beijing Declaration for Action on women’s rights.



# SILVANA ROCH-MEHRIN

*Founder & President,  
Women Political Leaders,  
Belgium*



*2023 marks the 10th anniversary of Women Political Leaders, congratulations. What do you envision in the long term for the WPL community and what should we expect at next year's convening?*

I see the WPL community as a powerful force for change in the long-term. WPL is here to stay and will continue to uphold its unique platform for women to connect. WPL's mission to increase the number and influence of women in political leadership positions is as relevant today as it was ten years ago, and it will remain so until women are equally represented. At this year's convening, we will look back at the successes, challenges, and lessons learned over the past ten years, and celebrate the achievements of women politicians, both current and former. We will also shed light on the barriers that hinder women's political participation and explore how we can work to change that to allow women to succeed in politics.

*What inspired you to go into politics and why do you believe it is essential to have a platform for women in politics to connect?*

I founded WPL based on my experience in politics, when I wanted to find a space to discuss the challenges and opportunities we face as women in politics. It's essential to provide women politicians with a platform for collaboration, knowledge sharing, and mutual support. WPL has provided just that for women political leaders from all over the world. It has been instrumental in creating a supportive community and, hopefully, it will continue to have a lasting impact on women's political leadership globally.

# EVA OBODO

*Artist, Nigeria*

## Women in My Art Practice

I see women as embodiments of beauty and resilience. I am inspired by Nigerian women and their fashion, particularly in Southeast Nigeria where popular colorful Dutch wax and African print cloths, depending on their designs, are given referential titles such as Oche Eze (King's Stool), Ama Obi Di Ya (Husband's Darling), Aka Nchawa (Prosperity), etc.

I employ fabrics and charcoal as materials in interrogating those referential names. My work processes involve bundling, tying, winding, wrapping, and sewing. Using these techniques to make compositions with fabrics or charcoal helps me in concretizing the beauty, and resilience that women represent to me. As *You Make Your Bed* (2023), for instance, is obviously about women in African society. It was inspired by women dressed in African print wrappers and the meanings of names given to the various print cloths.

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# AYAWA MGART

*Artist, Togo*

Ayawa Mgart is a talented artist from Togo with a passion for realism and a proficiency in mixing techniques such as sand, collage, acrylic, and tint. Her work revolves around the human being and she uses art to communicate her emotions and innermost desires. She is also committed to using her art to defend the causes of children and women in difficult situations and initiated the cultural project "1sourire 1enfant" in 2018 to give vulnerable children the opportunity to express themselves through art workshops. Ayawa currently resides and works in Lomé, Togo, and has a love for team spirit and sharing human warmth with others.



