

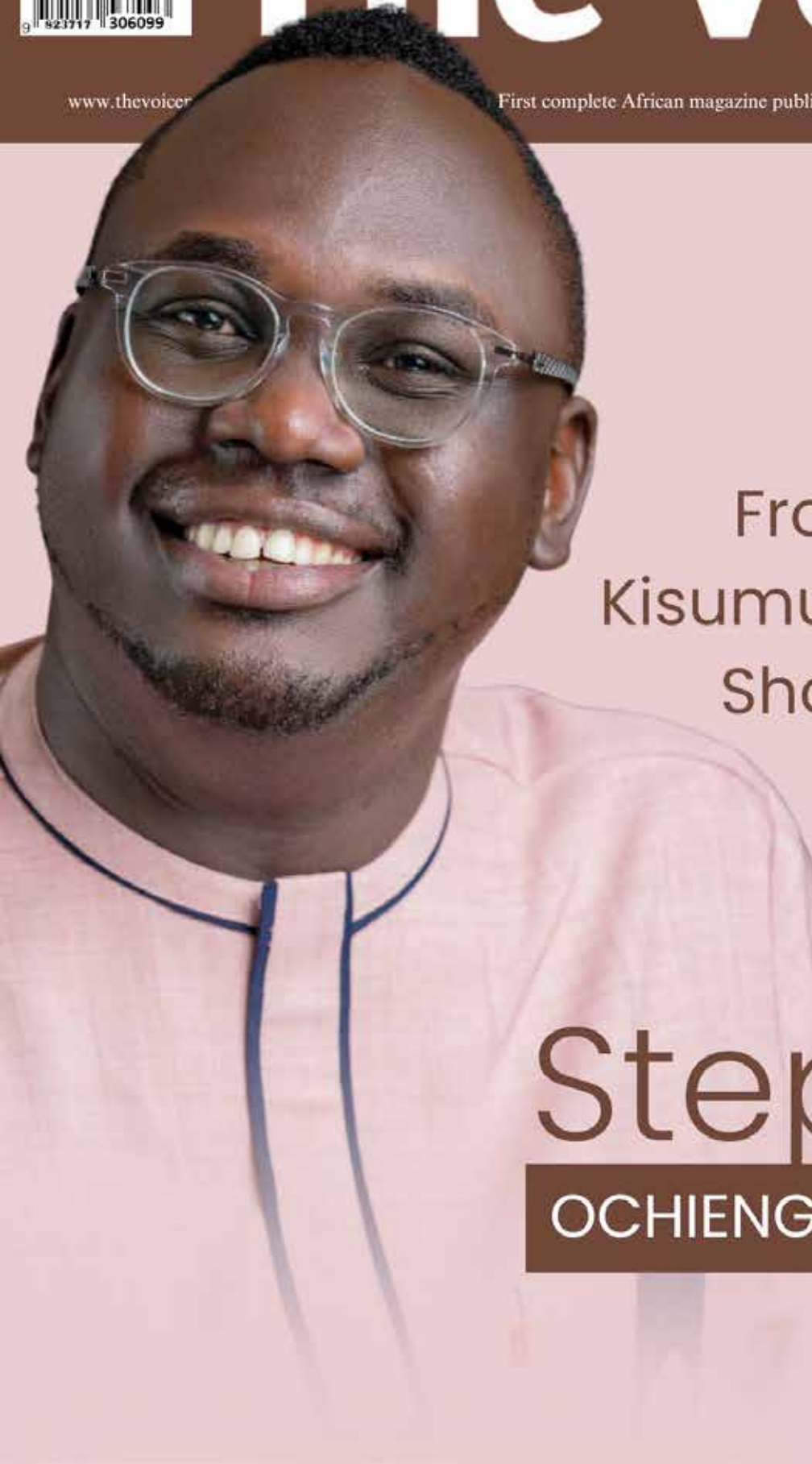
The Voice

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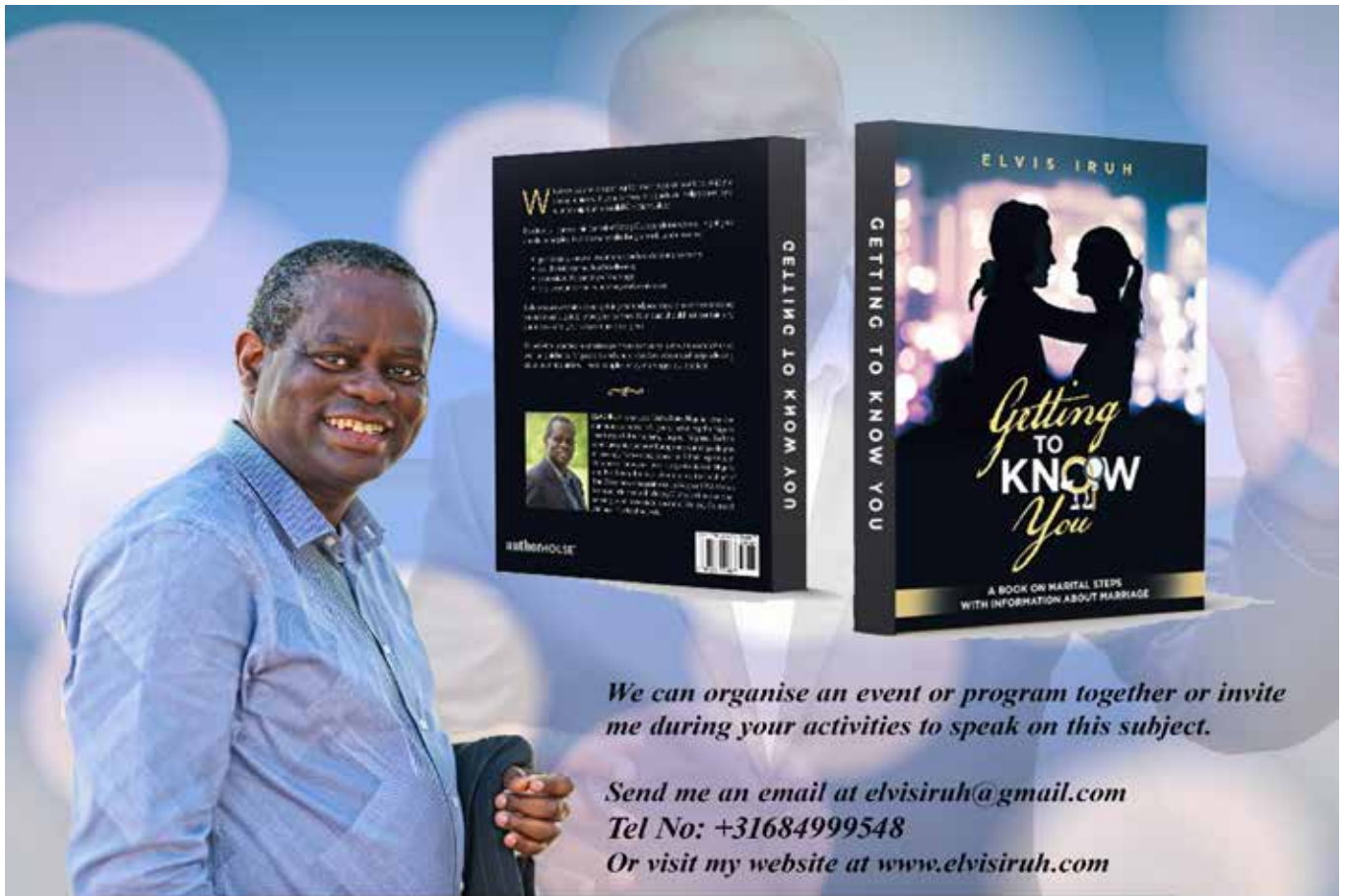
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Getting to know you written by Pastor Elvis Iruh

Pastor Felix Asare wrote the foreword



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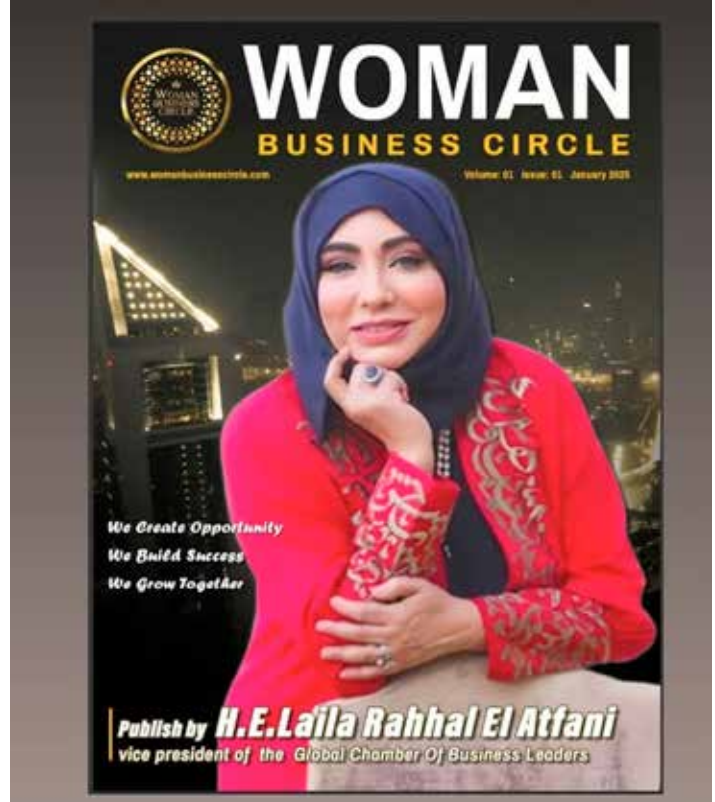
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Welcome to 2025: A Year Of Reset And Focus On New Goals!

2025 is here! A new dawn of fresh hopes and an opportunity to reset and focus on new goals. For many, 2024 was a fast and furious year; it went by very fast but was yet a very difficult one for so many people. In Africa, many countries continue to battle high inflation, climate change, and political instability across the continent. Although we had such happy reports with successful Ghana and Namibia elections bringing in changes of leadership. Still, there were mass casualties with conflicts in the Middle East and Europe, bitterly divided political situations in many countries, widespread economic woes, and social unrest as change continues to sweep the world at a rate faster than many can cope. The year just past once again showed the risks posed by increasing incidents of extreme weather. Apart from implementing more climate change mitigation measures, national and local governments must ensure that funds for flood control are used judiciously and strictly for their intended purposes. We need to address the challenges of global hunger; many people are dying of starvation.

African countries need to have more active efforts to give their citizens better life opportunities, improved quality of life, and living conditions instead of projecting instability that may discourage would-be investors and travelers to Africa. A joyous and prosperous New Year to everyone!

At the Voice News magazine, we are looking forward to an exciting new year with new projects in the pipeline; we ended the year with a new project initiated by my

good brother, Marc Broere, the editor-in-chief of Vice Versa publication, and filmmaker Cissy Nalumansi from Uganda; they started a discussion centered on Debunking Notions—reshaping mindsets. This project is to address the various stereotypes that have existed over the years among Africa, the Netherlands, and, invariably, the whole of Europe. The idea is to address the problems that have made it nearly impossible to have equal relationships between Africa and Europe in all aspects of life; it is a tall order, but it is important that discussion has started. We have a special report in this edition by journalist Elizxabeth Kameo writing for Vice Versa Global. To achieve this, producer Marc Broere from the Netherlands and presenter Cissy Nalumansi from Uganda have put together a podcast series on the theme: “Debunking Notions—Reshaping Mindsets.” They started gathering and recording by hosting a knowledge and experience powerhouse, Pastor Elvis Ndubuisi Iruh. He is the CEO of The Voice News Magazine, the first complete African magazine published in the Netherlands since August 1999. over 25 years ago. “We had a conversation about his journey settling in Europe and starting his journalism career after political persecution in Nigeria and how he maneuvered the new world.” Many more personalities would be featured in this podcast, and you can follow the podcasts via their website at www.debunkingnotions.com.

Kindly watch, share, and subscribe to it so that your voice would be heard around the world until we find a common ground of truly accepting one another as equals. We would be featuring articles on this subject in collaboration with our media partners.

We also have another project, The Voice App, which is a business application targeting the 200 million Nigerian population, and we would inform you more on the progress. Also, the Voice Achievers Award 2025 would be held in Lagos, Nigeria. So we have a busy calendar, and we count on you to make it a memorable year for us all. A very happy new year 2025 to you all, and enjoy your first edition of 2025. God bless you all.

Pastor Amb. Elvis Iruh
Editor-in-Chief
January 2025.



The Voice
AFRICAN NEWS MAGAZINE



Africa's Largest Aviation Group Announces New Partnership

Africa's largest aviation group, Ethiopian Airlines, will partner with the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) to establish Air Congo. The government of the DRC will hold a 51% controlling interest, while Ethiopian Airlines will own 49% and handle management duties. The project is part of Ethiopian Airlines' efforts to partner with African governments to enhance air travel throughout the continent. Air Congo is part of Ethiopian Airlines' long-term strategy. Air Congo began with two 737-800 aircraft flying domestic routes from seven DRC-based airports. With the partnership come technical agreements, consisting of aircraft leases, comprehensive technical support, and systems support. In addition, Ethiopian Airlines will train Congolese nationals as technicians, pilots, cabin crew, and sales and services staff. The joint venture coincides with Ethiopian Airlines' Vision 2035 strategy, a plan to build hubs throughout Africa and add on to existing agreements with Zambia Airways in Lusaka, ASKY Airlines in Lomé, and Malawi Airlines in Lilongwe.



Ethiopian Airlines Group CEO Mesfin Tasew commented: "The launch of Air Congo is a significant step in our strategic plan to collaborate with African governments and enhance air transport across the continent. This partnership will provide greater connectivity for the DRC and Central Africa, facilitating investment, trade, and tourism, thereby contributing to the socio-economic growth of the region. We extend our heartfelt thanks to the DRC government, all stakeholders, and my esteemed colleagues for their commitment and collaboration in making this

partnership a success."

Ethiopian Airlines Group is Africa's largest airline and among the fastest-growing global carriers. Its fleet includes modern and efficient aircraft like Boeing 787s, 777s, and 737s; De Havilland Q400; Airbus A350-900; and Airbus A350-1000.



FONWIP and Kingdom International Ministries, USA Empowers Women With Free Interest Loan In Benin City

By Eubaldus Enahoro

Forum of Nigerian Women in Politics, FONWIP, in collaboration with Kingdom International Ministries, United States of America, USA, has presented the fifth batch of empowerment to women beneficiaries in Benin City with an appeal to the businesswomen to be consistent in using the resources to uplift their lives and families and bring domestic violence to the barest minimum.

funds to make this mission trip all the way from the USA to Benin City, which includes a visit to the orphanage home, dedication of their Nigeria church in Benin City, and holding of a crusade.

“We sincerely thank our partners, Kingdom International Ministries, being led by Apostles Christopher and Lakiesha Colander with other leaders; Deacon Marcus



A cross section of the members of FONWIP during the women empowerment programme in Benin City.

The women who were commended for paying back the interest-free revolving loan were assured that if they continue to keep a good record, there is the possibility of becoming producers and wholesalers, but the choice depends on them.

A former commissioner, Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, Edo State, and president, FONWIP, Hon. (Dr.) Florence Gbinigie, thanked the Kingdom International Ministries for helping to raise

Randal, Melba Streat Turner, Pastor Takisha Randal, and Minister Brandon Turner, for coming all the way from the USA to grace this event with their physical presence and personal donations of various items to the women.

“We say a big thanks for partnering with us to ensure that the poor women, survivors of domestic violence, widows, and those in the orphanage home are given opportunities for survival with your generous donations of cash, food, school supplies, clothing, etc. We extend

our thanks to Overseer Veronica Colander, who personally renders similar support. She has given out jewelry that were sold to raise funds for the sustenance of the business owned by domestic violence survivor Pastor Lizzy Osaherunmwun, whose business has grown as well.

“We also want to recognize with thanksgiving the personal contributions of Elder Rose Deborah, Min. Kamylla Albright, Pastor Crummey, Mother Murphy, Elder Montgomery, as well as that of Min. Ann Colander, to mention but a few. You are not only getting another round of loans, but an increase from what you got in the past, which is due to your reliability, consistency, and increased inflation, which has affected your businesses as we want you to remain in business,” she added.

The FONWIP is a non-governmental, non-profit-making, but voluntary organization established to redress issues militating against women, particularly the poor, widows, and girls development, and also to empower them to become self-reliant, redressing domestic violence and abuse.

The Committee Chair, interest-free revolving loan scheme for women in business, Hon. Favour Eghe Oseki, who disclosed that the theme of the fifth batch presentation is “Invest in Women to Accelerate Progress,” said ten women applied, and nine of them scaled through the screening process to benefit from the loan given for the period of six months, and they are expected to start paying back instalmentally after a month period of grace.

“Those that did not default in the last batch were given the opportunity to reapply and even get an increase of what they got before. We have testimonies from some of our women who have expanded their businesses as a result of this loan opportunity. Special thanks to our Mama (Hon. Florence Gbinigie JP) for her consistency, always present to meet the needs of the women, Christopher Colander, and the KIM for partnering with us,” she added.

In their various testimonies, the women expressed their appreciation and prayed for Hon. Florence Gbinigie for giving them the opportunity to grow their businesses and thereby become self-reliant.



Former Commissioner, Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development , Edo State, Hon (Dr.) Florence Gbinigie (JP) standing addressing the beneficiaries of the Interest free loan.

In the words of Madam Isi Mary, who disclosed that she is taking the interest-free loan for the fourth time, she has been able to run a successful business alongside being a proprietor of a school.

According to her, all other microfinance institutions charge interest, but the loan from FONWIP is interest-free, and this has made many women able to establish themselves in their various petty businesses, which they use to sustain themselves and their families.

In their goodwill messages, Apostles Christopher and Lakiesha Colander, Melba Streat Turner, Pastor Takisha Ranel, and Minister Brandon Turner admonished the women to put their trust in God, and they should not be afraid to take a step of faith.

“You have taken a step. If you have a will, nothing can stop you. As you work, take others along. Turn your pain into purpose because God is in you; do not put a limit on God; let God use your creative mind. Make sure your soul also prospers as you pray while doing your business. When God has a hand in something, it will surely succeed.” They noted, prayed, and ministered to some of the women as led by the Holy Spirit.

Botswana Plans To Legalize Undocumented Migrants

By Paige Bruton and Prashant Rao

Botswana's new government plans to legalize undocumented Zimbabwean migrants, with the country's recently elected president arguing such workers "do jobs that would otherwise not get done."

Duma Boko's remarks came after his historic election win last year, which saw him unseat the party that had ruled Botswana since its independence in 1966.

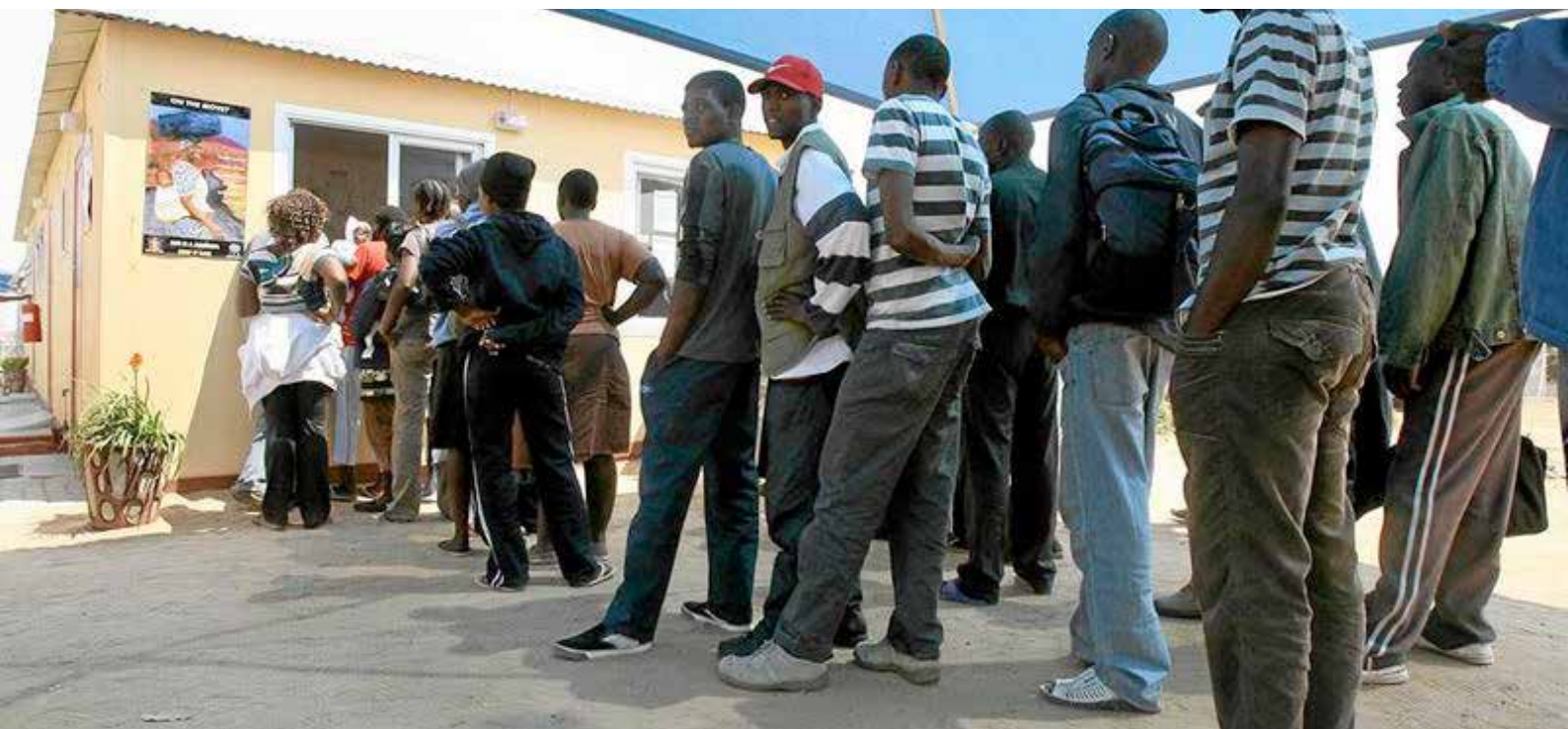
Botswana is host to the second-biggest Zimbabwean diaspora in the world, with many employed as farm laborers or domestic workers, and the country had previously organized periodic deportations.

It followed a similar move by Thailand, which earlier last month approved a pathway to residency and citizenship for a half-million stateless people in the country - the largest reduction of statelessness by any country, ever.

Botswana's move to legalize its undocumented migrants stands in sharp contrast to the US and Europe, where populist leaders are increasingly threatening tougher controls on migration. But there are some immigrants that European governments "quietly" want more of:



skilled foreign workers. "The reason is necessity," said the Economist; while Italy's far-right leader Giorgia Meloni is sending migrants to Albania for processing, her country's agriculture faces an annual shortfall of 200,000 workers, for example. In 2023, Poland's former far-right government quintupled the number of work permits it issued to Asians and Latin Americans. "The end result is that Europe is nuttily deploying barbed-wire fences and "workers wanted" banners at the same time," a 2023 Economist article argued.



Edo Youths Urged To Adopt Flood Mitigation And Reforestation Initiatives With Tree Planting

A youth-led environmental initiative to transform communities in Edo State and equip young people with the knowledge and tools to mitigate floods and promote reforestation is encouraging Youths to plant trees.

Spearheaded by Davies Ugowe, Chairman of the Sustainable Environment and Greenlife Empowerment Foundation (SEGEF), and powered by LEAP Africa and the Nigerian Youth Future Fund, the “Empowering Green: Transforming Youth and Environment” project has already impacted local schools and planted over 193 trees in just two months.

As part of SEGEF’s Nigeria Green Earth Initiative (NGEi), this project focuses on flood prevention and environmental sustainability through the involvement of local youth and a key aspect of the initiative is the “Adopt a Tree” program, which engages school students to plant and nurture trees, contributing to both immediate and long-term environmental resilience.



Ugowe recently addressed students at St. Martins Secondary School, one of the many participating schools in Benin City, emphasizing the critical need for proactive flood mitigation in Edo State.

According to him, “Edo State, like many other parts of Nigeria, is highly vulnerable to natural disasters, including flooding and heavy windstorms. Flooding, in particular, is aggravated by heavy rainfall and occasional water releases from the Cameroonian dam, which overflows into our riverine communities.”

He pointed out that 13 of Edo’s 18 local government areas face significant flooding risks, leading to tragic losses of lives and efforts.

As part of the project’s goals, NEi aims to have students.

By Eubaldus Enahoro

ADDICTED YOUTH: Helping Youths In Seychelles To Fight Drugs Addiction.

In the sun-soaked paradise of Seychelles, a battle rages against an invisible enemy-heroin addiction. While the world knows this idyllic archipelago for its pristine beaches and vibrant tourism, a darker reality haunts its streets, where nearly 10% of the youth population struggles with addiction. Through the lens of compassion and resilience, Soldiers for Christ, a grassroots movement founded by Andrine Bacco, works tirelessly to restore hope.

It is around noon on the bustling streets of Nairobi. Hawkers parade their goods by the alleys, and the traffic seems never-ending, no matter the time of day. Notably, there are many young photographers on almost every street I walk through. I love them though; the vibrant, talented youth who choose to make a living through digital photography rather than getting caught up in crime or depending heavily on their parents.

I'm walking towards a certain restaurant near Kenya Cinema, where I am set to meet Andrine. My phone rings and it's her. Panic sets in momentarily, thinking I might be late. "I'm here, I'm here," I blurt out when I pick up.

"I'm sorry, I think I'm lost," she admits, flustered. It is a common situation here in Nairobi-I get lost all the time myself. I try to describe the street I'm on, pointing out a few buildings in sight, but to my surprise, she knows the area

better than I do. After a few quick directions, we finally meet and head to the restaurant together.

After ordering an ice-cold milkshake -exactly what we need to soothe our throats from the hot, sunny day-our conversation begins.

"I just arrived a few days ago from Seychelles," she tells me. I can tell from the black T-shirt she's wearing, emblazoned with the words 'Solda pou Kris', Kreol for Soldiers for Christ (Kreol is one of the national languages widely spoken by people in the Seychelles).

"It's been three years since I was last there, and this time, it felt different. It was just me, no kids around, meaning I could do things without distractions. With my team, we managed to carry out several outreaches. I was so happy that my brother joined us in one of them, and we groomed him too. He looked presentable after the shave ... look at us in this picture I took," she says, handing me her phone.

The Woman Behind Soldiers 4 Christ

Andrine Bacco is a 36-year-old mother of three, with deep roots in Seychelles where she spent much of her childhood, though she was born in Kenya. With a Seychellois father and a Kenyan mother, she is the second born in a family of three. Bubbly, soft-spoken, and always wearing a smile,



Andrine is someone who immediately captures attention. Her thick, natural dreadlocks complement her warm demeanour. We have met only a few times, but I never tire of admiring the tiny tattoos scattered across her hands. One in particular stands out—the word ‘L.O.V.E’, etched across her right hand, spelling out across her fingers from the second to the index. It’s a simple yet profound message.

Andrine founded Soldiers 4 Christ (S4C) in 2006. It’s a youth group that brings together young individuals to preach hope without judgment in Seychelles. The country is grappling with a high rate of drug addiction, particularly heroin. Her passion for this work stems from a deeply personal place.

“My dad was an addict,” she says, her voice soft but laden with emotion. “It was not easy watching him, seeing how he would react to us, especially to our mum. We were exposed to heroin at a young age, and it breaks my heart that my brother fell into the same trap.” Her words grow heavier as she continues, the pain of the memories evident in her expression. “His struggle with addiction took a toll on me. He’s been a convict, too—spent years in prison.”

Andrine’s life was further turned upside down when she lost her parents within a short time. The weight of sudden loss thrust her into a role far beyond her years, forcing her to become a parent to her younger sister and her brother’s children while still so young herself. At the time, her brother was in prison. This experience not only shaped her into the strong, resilient woman she is today but also fueled her determination to help others facing similar challenges.

Paradise and Its Hidden Scars

Seychelles, often described as a paradise on Earth, is renowned for its breath-taking beauty. An archipelago of 115 islands scattered across the Indian Ocean, it boasts powdery white beaches, crystal-clear turquoise waters, and lush tropical greenery. Its idyllic landscapes attract tourists from all over the world, making tourism one of the nation’s primary economic pillars, alongside fishing. However, behind the postcard-perfect beauty lies a darker reality. Tourism, while vital to the economy, has also contributed to some of the country’s social challenges, including the spread of drug addiction. The influx of visitors, particularly in the 1980s and 1990s, brought with it a rise in the availability and consumption of heroin, turning a once-untouched paradise into a hotspot for addiction.

“The drug situation is appalling. At this point, per capita, as far as the consumption of heroin is concerned, Seychelles is number one in the world,” remarked President Wavel Ramkalawan a year ago. “And this is not a statistic that gives me any personal pride. Roughly ten percent of our



youth population are addicted to it.” These sobering words highlight the immense challenge Seychelles faces, where the same oceans that bring tourists also carry a dangerous trade that has devastated a generation. For Andrine, this tragic reality strikes close to home, fueling her mission to bring hope to the youth caught in the grip of addiction through her Soldiers for Christ program.

Soldiers 4 Christ group members.

With Andrine in Kenya, the program continues to impact communities in Seychelles, even in her absence. One of the leaders carrying the mantle is Johnny Volcere, a 34-year-old father of one, renowned dancer, and founder of Paradise Media. Johnny takes me through his journey of growing up in Seychelles and how their ghetto outreach program has empowered marginalized communities.

“Growing up in Seychelles was like growing up in paradise,” he begins. From a young age, he was fascinated by dance, and in 2006, he found his place in Soldiers for Christ—a group that welcomed young people looking for hope and solace in a country deeply affected by societal challenges. “It was a great group where young people came together to encourage each other. All Christians from different denominations were welcome. All we did was find solace in Bible verses amidst the many challenges we were facing,” Johnny explains. His passion for hip-hop dance led him to join Soldiers for Christ when they started running a hip-hop battle. Since then, he has remained an integral part of the movement.

Ghetto Outreach Program

Around 2013, as members grew older and assumed various responsibilities, including some travelling abroad, the group’s activities slowed down. However, with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, there was a noticeable surge in addiction rates. Recognizing the growing crisis, Johnny and his team decided to revive Soldiers for Christ, this time with a renewed focus on ghetto outreach programs aimed at helping those most vulnerable in their society. “The pandemic worsened an already bad drug situation,

and we knew we had to step up. We couldn't let our youth be consumed by addiction," Johnny shares, his passion evident. "What we do with the outreach is usually simple but impactful," he explains. "We seek funding and then organize visits to various neighbourhoods in each district where substance addiction is prevalent. It's not easy to access such areas, but we're lucky to have people in our group with celebrity influence, like my brother, who is a famous rapper. That opens doors for us."

Once access is granted, the team starts planning their outreach day. "We gather the essentials-items like towels, shaving machines, lotions, and whatever else we need. We identify a spot with a power supply, set up a tent, and prepare ourselves. Many of the people struggling with addiction are unkempt, homeless, and hopeless. Just looking at them breaks your heart, and for us, the main goal is to restore hope in their lives," he narrates with a heavy tone.

The process begins with taking their photos as they are when the team first arrives-capturing their worn-out appearances. "Then we start grooming them. We give them fresh haircuts, sometimes offer clean clothes, and make them look presentable. Once we've done that, we take another picture." These before-and-after photos are shown to them. "We ask them to compare the two images and reflect on who they believe they truly are and who they would love to be."

For Johnny and his team, it's more than just a physical transformation. "This exercise isn't just about looks. It's about showing them that they can always return to the person they once were before addiction took over their lives," he says. "It's always a very emotional session. Many say, 'It's difficult to quit addiction,' but you can see it in their eyes-they want to try. That small gesture of kindness opens their minds and gives them the will to start the journey back to who they used to be."

Dreaming of Change

With each district Johnny and his team visit, he inevitably encounters familiar faces. "Seychelles is very small; it has a population of about 90,000 people," he says. In such a close-knit community, it's no surprise that on nearly every outreach, Johnny meets two or three people he knows. But



one particular incident during an outreach left a lasting mark on him.

"There's one district we visited where I was shocked to find an old man who used to be my traditional dance tutor," he recalls, his voice filled with sorrow. "He taught me so much. He's the one who made me travel to different parts of the world, which built my fame and career. Seeing him later as an addict, broken and hopeless, really crushed me." This was a man who once shaped his path, only to fall victim to the same addiction that has ravaged so many lives in Seychelles. The reality of addiction in Seychelles is overwhelming, and as a father, Johnny admits that it frightens him to raise his child in such an environment. "It scares me, raising my daughter here," he says. "But I have hope that with proper parenting, she'll be able to discern between right and wrong, even when I'm not around." His optimism for his daughter's future reflects the faith he places in her upbringing, though the challenges are ever-present.

Johnny considers himself lucky to have grown up without falling into the same pit of addiction that many around him did. His journey with Soldiers for Christ and his achievements through dance have kept him on a different path, filled with purpose and a desire to give back to his community.

From the numerous outreaches they've conducted, Johnny and his team make it a point to take down contact details and keep in touch with the addicts, making efforts to follow up and support them on their journey. "We boast of a few individuals who've managed to stop using," he says, though he acknowledges that recovery is a long and difficult process. Even small victories mean a lot in a country grappling with such a pervasive problem.

"It's sad that in Seychelles, we have this big problem, but we don't have rehabilitation facilities-not one!" Johnny



says, the frustration evident in his voice. "All we can do is try, with our small efforts, to save those few who feel the impact of our outreach." Their work is significant, yet the absence of structured rehabilitation centres highlights the daunting challenge they face in trying to combat addiction.

As we wind up our interview, Johnny reflects on his hopes for the future. "I wish to see growth in our program. I'd love to see addicts changing and joining us, becoming part of something bigger-a movement for change," he shares. His wish is not just to save individuals, but to foster a cycle where those once lost to addiction return to uplift others. "I want to see more hard working people in my country and fewer drug users," he concludes, his words carrying hope for a brighter future for Seychelles.

Edited by Pius Okore.

Photos Courtesy: Seychelles Tourism.



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Ecowas Gives Burkina Faso, Mali, And Niger Six Montha To Reconisder Withdrawal

The Authority of Heads of State and Government of ECOWAS has given Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger six months, from January 29 to July 29, 2025, to reconsider their decision to exit the regional bloc.

President of the ECOWAS Commission, Dr Omar Touray, announced the six-month grace on Sunday in Abuja after the 66th Ordinary Session of the Authority of ECOWAS Heads of State and Government.

“The Authority takes note of the notification by the Republic of Burkina Faso, Republic of Mali and Republic of Niger of their decision to withdraw from ECOWAS.

“The Authority acknowledges that by the provisions of Article 91 of the revised ECOWAS Treaty, the three countries will officially cease to be members of ECOWAS from January 29, 2025.

“The Authority decides to set the period from January 29, 2025 to July 29, 2025, as a transitional period and to keep ECOWAS doors open to the three countries during the transition period.

“In this regard, the Authority extends the mandate of the President of Togo and the President of Senegal to continue their mediation role up to the end of the transition period to bring the three member countries back to ECOWAS.

“Without prejudice to the spirit of the opening, the Authority directs the President of the Commission to launch withdrawal formalities after the end of the deadline of January 29 2025 and to draw up a contingency plan covering various areas.

“The Authority directs the Council of Ministers to convene an Extraordinary Session during the 2nd quarter of 2025 to consider and adopt both separation modalities and the contingency plan covering political and economic relations between ECOWAS and the Republic of Niger, Republic of Mali and Burkina Faso,” Touray read from the communiqué.

ECOWAS leaders commended the exemplary diplomatic engagement of President Bassirou Diomaye Faye of Senegal and President Faure Gnassingbé of Togo, as well as the diplomatic efforts of the Chairman of the Authority of ECOWAS, President Bola Tinubu, and other individual member states toward the three countries.

In his closing remarks, President Tinubu commended the ECOWAS Heads of State and Government for spirited discussions throughout the Summit.

He noted that the collective resolve underscored their strength



to address the region’s pressing challenges.

“As we move forward to implement the outcomes of this Summit, let us remain united in our determination and steadfast in our commitment to the principles that bind us together as a Community.

“I call on all Member States to redouble their efforts in ensuring that the decisions reached here translate into tangible benefits for our citizens,” he said.

The Nigerian leader encouraged the leaders to carry forward the optimism and the resolve that guided the deliberations.

“Together, let us continue to champion the cause of a peaceful, secure, and prosperous West Africa, to build ECOWAS as a community of peoples anchored on the ideals of freedom, justice, democracy, and a vision of good governance that addresses the legitimate aspirations of our people,” he said.

President Tinubu congratulated the outgoing Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Moussa Faki Mahamat, as he attended his valedictory session as AUC Chair.

He further praised Ghanaian President Nana Akufo-Addo, whom he fondly called “Mr. Democrat,” and wished him resounding success.

He said ECOWAS will continue to draw from President Akufo-Addo’s fountain of wisdom.

By Bayo Onanuga
Special Adviser to the President
(Information & Strategy)



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PRESIDENT TINUBU TO ECOWAS LEADERS: LET'S LEARN FROM GHANA'S DEMOCRATIC EXAMPLE

President Bola Tinubu has urged leaders in West Africa to draw inspiration from Ghana's recent peaceful elections as a model of democratic maturity and commitment to national unity.

At the opening of the 66th Ordinary Session of ECOWAS on Sunday in Abuja, President Tinubu lauded President Nana Akufo-Addo and the people of Ghana for the resounding success of their recent presidential and parliamentary elections, setting a high standard for the region.

"I urge all of us in the region to learn from this good democratic practice and prioritise our country's national unity to ensure political stability of the region so that this manner of peaceful transition becomes the culture of democracy not only in West Africa but also in the entire Africa continent," he stated.

"Despite the challenges of interrupted democratic governance in some West African countries, the region has continued to record democratic gains. Just a week ago, on December 7 2024, Presidential and Parliamentary elections took place in Ghana, the second-largest democracy

in our region.

"One of the leading candidates who happens to be the incumbent Vice President, His Excellency Mahamudu Bawumia, together with the leadership of the ruling party, New Patriotic Party (NPP), conceded defeat and accepted



the outcome of the Presidential election by congratulating the President-elect, His Excellency, John Dramani Mahama of National Democratic Congress (NDC) for his victory, even before the official announcement of the election results. "This gesture, as it happened in Nigeria in 2015, demonstrates political maturity and respect for the will of the people of Ghana.

President Tinubu praised President Akufo-Addo for his exceptional leadership and unwavering commitment to ECOWAS during his two-year term, describing him as a formidable Pan-Africanist.

President Tinubu also congratulated the Government and people of Senegal on their successful parliamentary elections.



He praised Ghana's Foreign Minister, Shirley Ayokor Botchwey, for painstakingly leading the ECOWAS Ministerial Committee of the Reform.

He wished her a successful tenure in her new role as the Secretary General of the Commonwealth.

In his second term as ECOWAS Chair, President Tinubu highlighted achievements from his first term, including strides in regional integration, economic growth, conflict resolution, and counterterrorism efforts.

He said the ECOWAS Trade Liberalisation Scheme (ETLS) and Common External Tariff (CET) have strengthened trade and economic cooperation.

"Similarly, regional infrastructure projects such as the West African Gas Pipeline, the West Africa Power Pool, and modernising key border posts with advanced equipment and joint border operations utilising state-of-the-art technology have significantly enhanced connectivity and promoted greater regional integration.

"Furthermore, our efforts in stabilising our region through peacekeeping missions currently in the Gambia and Guinea Bissau, as well as previous operations in Liberia and Sierra Leone, have demonstrated our capacity to act decisively in the face of adversity.

President Tinubu said the ECOWAS Regional Action Plan on the Fight Against Terrorism has provided a comprehensive framework to combat violent extremism and enhance regional security.

As ECOWAS nears its 50th anniversary in 2025, President Tinubu urged member states to recommit to the bloc's founding ideals of economic integration, peace, and prosperity.

"As a regional community, we must maintain our fundamental responsibility: to protect our citizens and create an enabling environment where they can prosper.

"As leaders, we know that security is not a luxury but a necessity. Equally, enhancing the living standards of our



people is not an aspiration but an obligation," he said.

The Presidents of Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, The Gambia, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, and Senegal attended in person alongside the Vice President of Sierra Leone, the Finance Minister of the Benin Republic, the Minister of foreign affairs of Togo, and the Ambassador of Cape Verde to Nigeria.

The President of the ECOWAS Commission, Dr Omar Touray, commended Nigeria for paying 100 per cent of its community levy for 2023 and substantial remittances for 2024, reflecting Nigeria's leadership and commitment under President Tinubu.

"For the first time in 19 years, Nigeria has paid 100% of its community levy from 2023. I'm therefore pleased to announce that on Friday, December 13, 2024, Nigeria paid N85 billion and \$54 million, representing 100% of the 2023 levy and the 2024 levy up to July 2024.

"We all agree that this payment underscores the leadership and commitment of President Tinubu, the government and the people of Nigeria to our community. At a more personal level, it represents confidence in the management I have been privileged to lead since 2022.

He encouraged other member states to meet their financial commitments diligently.

By Bayo Onanuga
Special Adviser to the President
(Information & Strategy)



COMBATTING HEALTH MISINFORMATION IN THE DIGITAL AGE.

Written by Bethram Jude Buckman

In a world where health advice ranges from ancient remedies to ‘just trust me, bro’ posts, Dr. Erica Ntiamoah Mensah stands at the forefront, challenging misconceptions with dedication and insight. Amid the wild health claims that flood social media, she works tirelessly to bring real knowledge to the public. Inspired by her father, a healthcare legend in his own right, she’s on a mission to turn the tide of misinformation—one myth-busting fact at a time.

In today’s world, where information can be shared with a single click, health misinformation has emerged as a major concern globally. Social media allows unchecked information to permeate all areas of society, resulting in the rapid spread of misleading health ‘remedies’ among the public. Everyone knows that one family member in the group chat—the ‘forwarding warrior’—who eagerly shares the latest ‘health breakthroughs’ without checking their authenticity.

This is the daily reality for Dr. Erica Ntiamoah Mensah. medical practitioners like Dr Erica Ntiamoah Mensah. As one of Ghana’s

youngest doctors in obstetrics and gynaecology, Dr Mensah understands firsthand the impact of these misconceptions on public health. Her family has a strong legacy in healthcare, with a father who encouraged her from a young age to pursue a medical career. In an interview with Vice Versa Media Ghana, she discusses the challenges of combating misinformation and misconceptions while delivering authentic, science-backed health information.

A Legacy of Care

For Dr Mensah, medicine was more than a career; it was a calling shaped by her upbringing. With a father devoted to the field, she had a clear vision from an early age. ‘My inspiration to be a doctor comes from nature and nurture,’ she reflects. ‘I always wanted to be a doctor, even before setting foot in medical school. My father’s dedication to his

work inspired me profoundly. Watching him practice and hearing his passion for the profession drove me toward this path.’

Her father, Dr Eric Ntiamoah Mensah, is a familiar figure in Ghana, known for his health-focused television programme

and widely respected for his dedication to women’s health issues countrywide. Her journey has been fueled by a deep desire to help others. She speaks passionately about her dream to alleviate illnesses and improve health outcomes, a drive rooted in watching her father’s commitment to healthcare.

Although she jokingly dismisses any ‘Ben Carson story,’ her dedication to the medical field is unmistakable. ‘Before I started practising, I had my misconceptions,’ she admits. ‘But on the ground, I quickly saw the sheer volume of misinformation, some of it truly mind-boggling. Recognizing that not everyone has a healthcare



background has helped me approach people with empathy, but misinformation has made our work significantly tougher.’ From viral weight-loss methods to dangerous homemade health remedies, she has seen it all. The prevalence of misleading health information has become a heavy burden for medical professionals. And while social media has connected the world more, it has also become a breeding ground for misconceptions. ‘People are misled by posts that could harm them, but they believe it because it is easy to access and understand.’

Guided by seasoned professionals, Dr Mensah has crafted a balanced approach to addressing health misconceptions. Her father stands out as her primary mentor in health education. ‘He was teaching me about health long before I fully grasped its meaning. His example, along with the insights of my

lecturers and mentors, has deeply shaped my perspective on health communication.'

For Dr. Mensah, the input from these professionals has been invaluable. She acknowledges that while they laid the groundwork for countering misinformation, fresh strategies are essential for today's digital landscape. 'Older professionals created the blueprint, but today, we must adapt our strategies.'

In a country as culturally rich as Ghana, she sees the intersection between tradition and modern healthcare. 'Our culture is deeply rooted. Working in women's health, I often encounter traditional beliefs surrounding childbirth and infant care, even among educated people.' One example she shares involves mothers with jaundiced newborns who refuse medical treatment due to cultural beliefs.

'A mother will often tell me her mother or grandmother advised her to breastfeed and leave the baby in the sun, believing no further medical help is necessary,' Dr Mensah recounts. She has learned to approach these situations



Dr. Erica Ntiamoah Mensah.

with understanding, treating patients like friends and gently encouraging them to see the value of professional medical care.

Social Media for Change

For her, social media has transformed how health information can be shared. 'Social media brings you closer to people. Posting something can feel as personal as speaking to someone in the same room. It gives us a platform to tackle common health misconceptions and disseminate accurate information.'

Social media is a blessing and a curse. It allows the spread of misinformation but also offers an effective avenue for healthcare professionals to reach and educate the public. Dr Mensah uses her platform to correct misconceptions,



Dr. Erica Ntiamoah Mensah.

even if it means addressing unfounded health claims indirectly. She is keenly aware of her responsibility as a healthcare provider on social media, emphasizing that 'we must ensure that what we put out is credible.'

Interestingly, Dr Mensah has found that younger generations can be particularly stubborn in clinging to certain misconceptions, though they are generally easier to inform than older individuals. 'There are young people deeply rooted in these false beliefs, while some older people are quite open-minded.'

Looking to the future, Dr Mensah sees a mixed blessing in the increasing accessibility of medical information. While more people being 'armed with medical knowledge' could aid health literacy, it could also make some individuals more resistant to seeking proper medical advice. 'People



may feel they know enough and try to manage health issues on their own, which could be dangerous,' she cautions.

However, she believes that if healthcare professionals harness the power of social media wisely, they can counteract misinformation effectively. 'Social media has provided an avenue to fight misinformation, but it is up to

Continued on Page 24

us to ensure what we share is reliable and true,' she emphasizes. 'These platforms are where misinformation starts, but they can also be where it ends if we proactively share the correct information.'

She encourages her fellow medical practitioners to use social media platforms to educate and inform. While not all doctors may feel comfortable with social media, she believes those who do should take advantage of the opportunity. 'If you are active on social media, use it to educate. Reach out to people and make health information accessible,' she urges.

Dr Erica Ntiamoah Mensah is deeply dedicated to combating health misinformation, viewing it as a professional obligation and a personal mission. As one of the youngest doctors in her field, she embodies a new generation of healthcare providers working diligently to eliminate the confusion created by misinformation. Through empathy, expertise, and technology, she strives to ensure that the public receives accurate and reliable information.

Edited by Pius Okore.



Photo credit: Bliss.

“Young Orphans United”, Parkistan

Dear Interested Readers,
One of the great problems in the world, and one that concerns me personally, is the countless orphans. Children who sometimes, through tragic circumstances, are given the unwanted status of orphans and in that status often lose all hope of a “normal” life. In many distressing cases we see abuse and exploitation of these children. My hope is that this message will touch your heart. I am writing to share with you an important initiative of Young Orphans United in collaboration with the Overseas Pakistani Christian Alliance (OPCA), with which organization I am also involved. OPCA is committed to providing food, medicine, and care to people in need and has recently launched a new project called YOU (Young Orphans United), aimed at providing shelter and care for homeless children in Pakistan.

The situation these children face is dire. Many are homeless, forced to live on the streets without access to education, food, or basic health care. For these children, every day is a struggle to survive, and the lack of a stable and loving environment only increases their vulnerability.

Young Orphans United and Overseas Pakistani Christian Alliance strongly believe that every child deserves a safe and caring home where they are loved, supported, and able to thrive. This is why we have committed to creating an orphanage through the “YOU” initiative, a place where these children will not only receive shelter and food but

also education, healthcare, and the emotional support they need to thrive.

However, to make this dream and vision a reality, we need the support of people with a heart like you. We ask that you consider donating to help us create a safe place for these children. Your contribution, no matter how big or small, will go directly toward securing a physical space, providing essential services and ensuring that each child receives the care and attention they deserve.

By supporting this cause, you are directly helping to change the lives of some of the most vulnerable children in Pakistan. Your generosity not only provides them with a roof over their heads but also the hope and opportunity for a better future.

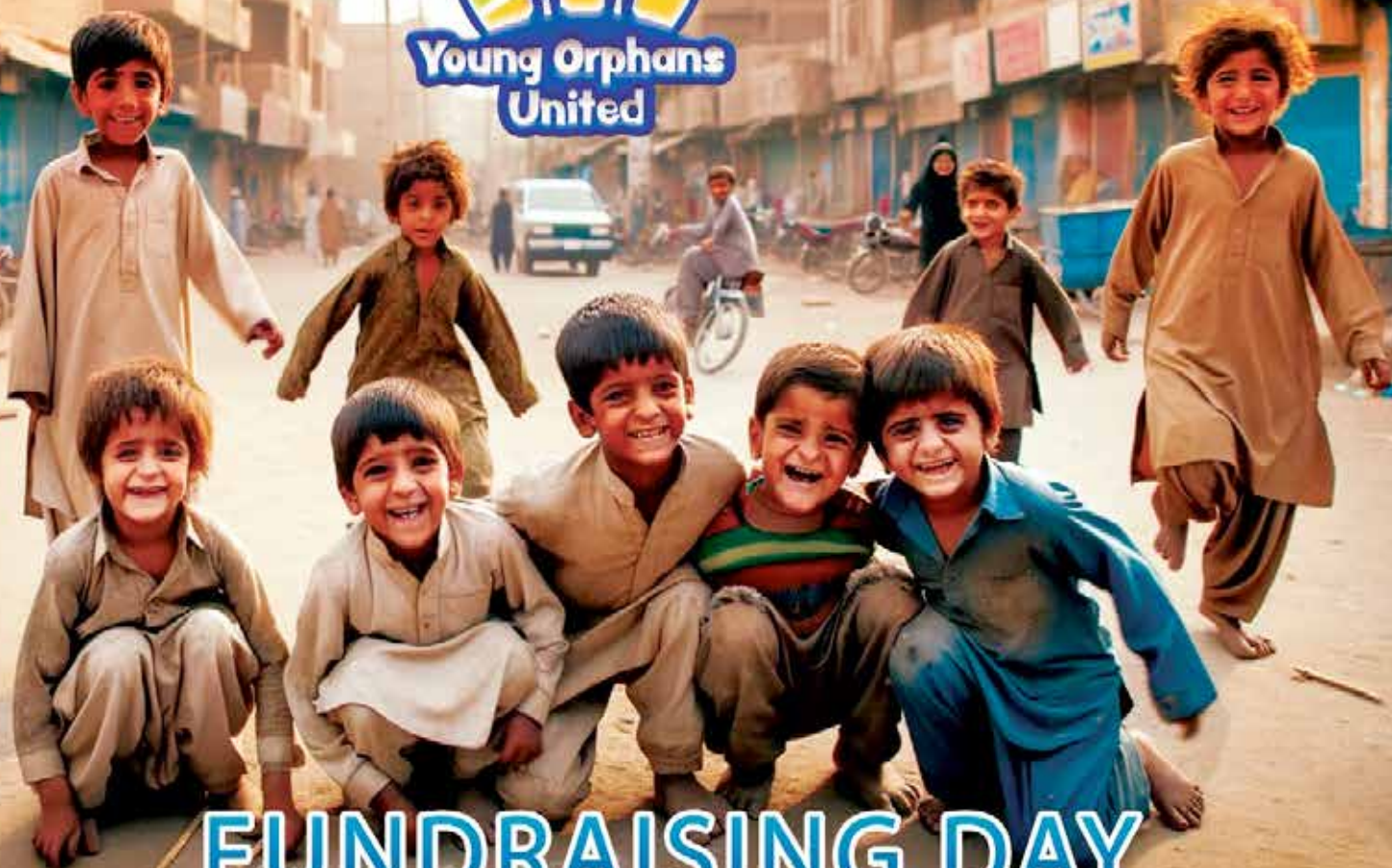
Thank you for taking the time to read this message. Should you donate, we greatly appreciate your consideration and hope that your donation will help make a profound difference in the lives of these children. Together, we can create a future where every child has a safe home and the opportunity to reach their full potential.

I look forward to hearing from you all, and I am grateful for any support you can offer.

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Setting Relationship Goals

By Councillor Uche Obuseh-Ideho
(Councillor UC)

Relationship goals are essential just like settle goals in other parts of life. In business we have business plans and goals. For the New Year we plan and have expectations and goals so also we should have relationship goals. Goals in relationship help you clarify your expectations, work towards common objectives, and strengthen your bond. Here's a comprehensive guide to setting relationship goals:

Types of Relationship Goals

1. ***Short-term goals*:** Achievable objectives within a short period (e.g self evaluation looking at your previous relationship if any. Pointing out possible reasons why the relationship failed and all the red flags).
2. ***Long-term goals*:** Ambitious objectives that require time and effort (e.g. what are your expectations in the relationship how much are you ready to give and the direction of the relationship).
3. ***Emotional goals*:** Objectives focused on emotional growth and connection (e.g. working on your emotions, your attitude towards others improving in your strength over coming your weaknesses).
4. ***Practical goals*:** Objectives focused on daily life and responsibilities (e.g., managing finance and time in the relationship).

Importance of setting relationship goals

1. It makes you committed to the relationship
 2. You intention is to build a healthy relationship
 3. You are focused because you have expectations
- In setting relationship goals you should

1. Embrace compromise Be willing to find common ground and make sacrifices for the benefit of the relationship.
2. Practice forgiveness: Let go of grudges and resentments, and work towards healing and moving forward.



3. Cultivate intimacy Prioritize emotional and physical intimacy, and make time for regular romantic getaways.

4. Show appreciation Regularly express gratitude and appreciation for each other, celebrating the positive aspects of your relationship.

By setting and working towards relationship goals, you and your partner can build a stronger, more fulfilling connection. Remember to communicate openly, be flexible, and prioritize mutual growth and happiness.

NOTE: Mrs. Uche Obuseh-Ideho is a professional educator and relationship conseller. She has

many years experience and she has written a book titled, "the Right way to court - a guide to Christian singles courtship". She is now a columnist in the Voice News magazine. She is also a presenter on Family Affairs on JORDAN 105.5FM Radio Station in Lagos, every Wednesday from 7pm to 8pm, Nigeria time. You can tune in to follow her and if you have any question to ask her, send it through this medium: info@thevoicenewsmagazine.com. She would respond to it soonest.



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OPINION:

Each Man, His Time: A Lesson In Patience

In the journey of life, success and achievement are not a destination, but a process. Every individual has a unique timeline, and it's essential to recognize that each person's moment will come. Nigerians, in particular, can benefit from this wisdom, as the pressure to succeed can be overwhelming.

Let's draw inspiration from Nigeria's rich history. The country's path to independence, for instance, was a long and arduous one. From the early days of British colonization to the eventual attainment of independence in 1960, Nigeria's journey was marked by struggles and setbacks. Yet, the nation persevered, and its people continued to strive for a better future.

In today's fast-paced world, it's easy to get caught up in the hype of instant success. Social media platforms showcase the achievements of others, making it seem like everyone is moving at lightning speed. However, this is often an illusion. Behind every success story lies a narrative of hard work, dedication, and perseverance.

Patience is a virtue that Nigerians can learn from their ancestors. The likes of Samuel Ajayi Crowther, a liberated Yoruba slave who became the first Anglican Bishop of the Niger, demonstrate that success is not solely dependent on timing, but on preparation and persistence. Crowther's story teaches us that our time will come, but it's up to us to be ready.

Rather than focusing solely on the destination, Nigerians should embrace the journey. Every experience, whether good or bad, is an opportunity for growth. The struggles, the setbacks, and the

triumphs all contribute to our unique story.

Nigerian history is replete with examples of individuals who waited for their time. From the early nationalists who fought for independence to the modern-day entrepreneurs who are shaping the country's economy, each person played their part in the nation's progress.

In conclusion, Nigerians should take heart in the knowledge that each person has their time. Rather than rushing to achieve success, focus on preparing yourself for the opportunities that will arise. Embrace the journey, learn from your experiences, and trust that your moment will come. Remember, every great achievement requires patience, perseverance, and dedication. Your time will come, Nigeria. Keep striving!

By Abiodun Adigun.
adigun2000@yahoo.co.uk



Ghana Ends Visa Requirements For Africans

Beginning in early 2025, Ghana is allowing visa free entry to citizens of all countries in Africa, after president Nana Akufo-Addo gave the move the green light in December.

It comes after a pledge made by the president at the Africa Prosperity Dialogues; in the president's words, it aims to build "stronger ties across Africa".

It's hoped that the new approach will increase tourism, trade and travel to the west African country, as analysts have previously pointed to visa restrictions as a hurdle to these sectors.

The nation used to allow visa free access to nationals of 26 African countries, and visas on arrival for citizens of 25 others. Only travellers from two nations on the continent required the document before visiting.



The decision makes Ghana the fifth country on the continent to allow the entry of all holders of African passports. Rwanda, the Seychelles, the Gambia and Benin have the same policy.

SOLIDARITY WITH KENYA

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Join us in solidarity with Kenya as we extend a helping hand to millions left stranded in the wake of devastating floods. While rain is essential for farmers and communities, excessive rainfall has brought about havoc in Kenya, particularly in slum areas around Nairobi and beyond. Homes, businesses, and livelihoods have been washed away, leaving behind a trail of uncertainty and despair.

While the government is doing its part, we believe that collective action can provide greater relief to those in need. As we gear up for the Kenya Business Summit and Achievers Award 2024 in Nairobi on August 15th and 16th, we are committed to supporting affected communities.



Stichting Paddi Europa, in partnership with The Voice News magazine, is launching a fundraising campaign to directly aid those affected by the floods. Led by Pastor Ambassador Elvis Iruh, we urge you to join us in making a tangible difference.



BEYOND THE SCARS

Written by Eva Nakato

At only 19, Kirungi Linneti became the victim of an acid attack from her ex-lover. She turned tragedy into triumph by rising above the scars and is now a renowned activist in Uganda. Her inspiring story brings hope to many women and girls who are the main victims of this heinous act.

It is estimated that there are over 1,500 acid attacks annually in the world, yet this is a crime that often goes unreported for fear of reprisal. An acid attack is an intended act of throwing a corrosive substance on the face and body of a victim, causing long-term scarring, physical disfigurement, and sometimes permanent disability. It is becoming a rampant form of gender-based violence as it aims to disfigure, maim, torture, or kill. Most of the victims end up in total denial while others commit suicide.

In 2012 Linneti was burnt with acid by her violent and obsessed ex-lover, when she was only nineteen years, for turning down his marriage proposal —an incident that almost claimed her life. She had just finished high school and was eagerly waiting to join university when she noticed his behavior change. He started tracking her whereabouts through her phone, diverting her calls to his and went as far as hiring spies to monitor her movements. It became intolerable but she stayed, believing that he would change.

After the holidays, she joined the university and was lucky to secure a job that would help her get by. When she shared the news with her boyfriend, he rejected the notion, saying he was against her working in a male-dominated company. They came to a compromise, agreeing that he would help her get a better job. He failed to do so. Eventually, she took the initial offer and that was when things went from bad to worse.

He hacked her phone, contacted all her male colleagues, and warned them to keep off his wife.

When Linneti finally joined the university, she opted to stay in a nearby hostel, a decision he was also against. He rented a two-roomed house hoping that they would move in together as a married couple, a vision she didn't share since her goal was to focus on her studies before getting married. She then requested him to meet her parents first, and inform them that they intended to stay together, something he refused to do.

The Attack

It finally dawned on her that their relationship wasn't going anywhere when he raised his hands on her because he thought she was deceiving him. He had requested a meet up which she agreed to, but only after she was done with her exams. Due to his insecurity, he checked her timetable to confirm whether this was indeed true only to find out that it was set for the following day.

She tried to explain that she needed the extra day to prepare for the exam but he would hear none of it. This was when he attempted to slap her but she grabbed his hand before he could. She had had enough and asked to end the relationship. He threatened to kill her and any man that would come between them; a threat she assumed was being made out of anger.

The following morning as she set off for the university she recalls hearing footsteps following her and a voice beckoning her from behind. Suddenly a figure dressed in dark clothing, and carrying a blue bucket, poured something on her face. The burning sensation she felt elicited screams from her. A man who was nearby tried to salvage the situation by pouring water on her but her hair caught fire, adding more injuries on

one side of her face.

She ran into the middle of the road ready to die but for more than two hours, no one came to her rescue. She was eventually taken to the burns unit at Mulago Hospital for further treatment. For over a year she underwent six surgeries, including one to detach her neck from her shoulders. She lost an ear but luckily, after two months, her eyesight was restored.

During that time, she interacted with other acid and burn survivors. In some instances, the attackers would come to confirm whether their victims had survived or not. After treatment, Linneti went back to complete her education. Out of fear of the unfair treatment she would face, she put on a veil to hide her identity and managed to graduate with a Degree in Social Sciences.

Her Victory

Her passion for supporting acid attacks and burn survivors grew stronger so she did a counseling course. Doctors at the burns unit usually invite her to hold counselling sessions for fellow survivors.

Linneti established Hope Care Rescue Mission, a nonprofit organization that supports acid attack and burn survivors, victims of GBV, and other marginalized people in Uganda. It offers counselling, palliative care support, and empowerment programs, among others. They also do follow-ups on the survivors to find out how they are coping and later on, carry out an assessment. They also empower their dependents with hands-on skills like arts and crafts.

Sadly, her ex-boyfriend was never held accountable. She is fighting to make sure such cases cease through an ongoing petition demanding for the Ugandan Government to pass a law against acid attacks. 'We know from legal initiatives in other countries that the best way to fight this is by enforcing tougher laws on the sale of acid, and punishment for perpetrators. Presently, someone convicted of an acid attack can be sentenced to up to seven years in prison.

'Not only is this very lenient for an act of attempted murder but perpetrators are rarely charged. Of the over two



hundred acid attack survivors that I have worked with, only twenty percent of their perpetrators were charged or faced any legal consequence for their actions.'

Linnet finally met the love of her life, ten years later, who genuinely loves and appreciates her. She encourages other survivors to never lose hope in themselves and encourages women and girls to never compromise in toxic relationships.



Ghana's Mahama: Navigating Economic Challenges And Democratic Legacy

By Collins Nweke

This past month the good people of Ghana will continue adjusting to last month news of the return of John, not The Baptist, but Dramani Mahama, to the presidential villa. While this is understandably good news for his supporters, those that lined up behind incumbent Vice President Mahamudu Bawumia, his opponent, are left to nurse their wounds. But did this come entirely as a surprise to them? It probably didn't and I will tell you why in a moment. It certainly didn't matter to objective watchers like me with no horse in this race except a desire to see the consolidation of democracy in a prominent West African nation. This is at a time when things are falling apart in the region and dominant regional players like Nigeria are struggling to hold the centre together.

Call it the day after. We can then begin to ask how this victory came about given that the same issues that led Ghanaian to sack Mahama in 2016 are same for renewing their faiths in him eight years later. So where was Ghana then economically and politically? Where are they now; what has changed?

Let us begin with the present. As of Election Day in 2024, Ghana's consumer inflation rose to 23.0% year-on-year, up from 22.1% in October. This marks the third consecutive monthly increase, primarily driven by higher food prices, especially vegetables, yam, cassava, and plantains. However, the second quarter of 2024 saw Ghana's economy grow by 6.9% year-on-year, the fastest rate since the Nana Akufo-Addo presidency. This growth was propelled by strong performances in the mining and quarrying sectors, with the gold sector expanding by 23.6%. The country equally



restructured \$13 billion in U.S. dollar bonds, effectively exiting a nearly two-year debt default. This restructuring reduced the nation's debt by over \$4 billion. This brings with it the prospect of positioning Ghana for a return to global capital markets.

While the nation's debt was reduced, it could safely be said that the elections were held amid significant economic challenges. The high inflation linked to debt defaults was skillfully made electioneering issues. This leads one to ask if Ghanaians are quick to forget that in 2015, Mahama's government equally sought a

\$918 million bailout from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to stabilize the economy and address high debt levels. Ghanaians may not be quick to forget. It might simply be that Mahama was a better political communicator with better packaged messaging than Bawumia and his New Patriotic Party. He may have been better at bringing on issues that influenced voter sentiment at a time when many are seeking change due to rising living costs. Mahama dipped into his accomplishments as President from 2012 to 2017. He successfully emphasized his infrastructure



development that focused on roads, schools, hospitals, and energy projects. He reminded voters of initiatives like the Atuabo Gas Processing Plant and expansion of ports and airports, which modernised Ghana's economy.

Tried as he could, Bawumia was unable to successfully shine the light on the energy crisis that enveloped Ghana under Mahama's watch. Ghana faced a severe power crisis, the so-called Dumsor with frequent outages crippling businesses and causing pains to households.

On his part Mahama got the focus to rest on the efforts his administration invested in to achieve energy mix. This includes thermal and renewable energy plants, to address the power crisis. His campaign was good at deploying contrast communication strategy. For instance while admitting that the economy was hard hit with declining prices of gold, cocoa, and oil, his team was quick to point to the fact that the fault lay with decline in global commodity prices and had nothing to do with government policy or lack of it. To rub it in, they then end the messaging with a pointer to the early years of his administration when oil production boosted GDP.

Mahama drew attention to how he oversaw a relatively peaceful political environment and upheld Ghana's democratic tradition. Despite mostly unfair criticisms, he told voters that he ensured free and fair elections in 2016, where he conceded defeat to Nana Akufo-Addo, solidifying Ghana's reputation for political stability. He could not be blamed for exercising his bragging rights around investments in education including the Community Day Senior High School project, which improved access to secondary education; expansion of the National Health Insurance Scheme; and increased access to healthcare facilities.

While he can't match the records of incumbent President in shuttle diplomacy, Mahama did not shy away from highlighting his key role in regional diplomacy, including efforts to mediate political crises in neighboring countries like Burkina Faso.

As the dust settles, the Bawumia team will be assessing their communication failure in not leveraging on some of the major scandals that docked Mahama. How on earth were they unable to convince voters that they can't trust a guy involved in a contract to brand public buses with photos of Ghanaian presidents with a whopping \$3.6 million? What about the GYEEDA Affair? The Ghana Youth Employment and Entrepreneurial Development Agency (GYEEDA) were implicated in the misappropriation of funds meant for youth employment programs. Yet the youths of Ghana were allowed by Bawumia to trust their faiths in the man's hands! Again? How on earth did the Bawumia campaign miss the opportunity to paint all of the country black with the ghost of the SADA Controversy? The Savannah Accelerated Development Authority (SADA),

established to develop Ghana's northern regions, faced allegations of mismanagement and corruption involving millions of cedis. And then comes the Ford Expedition Gift Imbroglio! Mahama was accused of accepting a Ford Expedition vehicle from a Burkinabe contractor who had won lucrative government contracts, raising concerns about conflict of interest and ethical breaches.

From all indications, it appears the people of Ghana are fine to forgive economic mismanagement and persistent allegations of corruption preferring instead to settle for a legacy of focus on infrastructure development and commitment to democracy. His manifesto, Mahama's First 120 Days Social Contract with the People of Ghana, was a fine read. The next four years will prove whether the people's gamble with Mahama will pay off.

For the renewed presidency of John Dramani Mahama, which by the way, reminds us of the return of Donald Trump of the United States, the challenges facing him are humongous. But he has the parliamentary majority needed to push through his agenda. His legacy will be anchored on a number of policy areas of which analysts are now on the look out to assess his soon to be appointed cabinet. His appointments will give a window to his success or failure in areas crucial in addressing Ghana's current challenges while building on lessons from his previous tenure.

On debt management, who will be his point person in building on Ghana's recent debt restructuring success by adopting prudent fiscal policies to prevent further accumulation of unsustainable debt? Mahama needs to improve revenue collection through tax reforms and combating tax evasion. Are there lessons that he'd pick from the tax reforms components of Tinubunomics? In controlling inflation, Africa will be on the look out for Mahama to deliver a template on successful measures to address rising inflation, particularly in food prices, by supporting local production and reducing dependency on imports.

If his Minister for Employment has no track records of expertise in youth employment through aggressive skills development programmes and projects and incentivizing private sector growth, particularly in industries like technology and manufacturing, he has beautifully set himself up to fail. Of course Mahama must do everything he can to rid himself of the ghosts of GYEEDA by not bringing close to him, anybody that resembles the crooks that misappropriated funds meant to give young people career prospects a decade ago

If you are no proponent of Economic Diversification, Mahama should not have you on the shortlist for consideration either as trade or economic portfolio. Ghana should have reduced yesterday its undue reliance on commodities like gold, cocoa, and oil. But if by tomorrow,

Mahama pays more attention to investing in agriculture, renewable energy, and digital technology, Ghana will not easily forget his second coming.

It is expected that the President-elect will defend his credentials for infrastructure through his policy around sustainable energy solutions. Under him Ghana must expand its renewable energy capacity, through solar and wind to reduce dependency on fossil fuels and prevent future power crises and by so doing wave a final goodbye to the ghosts of Dumsor. While on it, he must strengthen public-private partnerships for energy infrastructure investments. In choosing his international partners for energy, he must keep away from Western leaders who'd preach to him the gospel according to jettisoning oil to embrace exclusively clean energy despite oil still supporting a significant chunk of the economy of Ghana. Amongst the friends he made while serving as a member of European and Pan African Parliaments' Ad hoc Committee on Cooperation, he must know who to run away from and who to embrace as international partners willing and able to respects Ghana's sovereignty and facilitate the provision of targeted subsidies to ensure affordable electricity for low-income households while promoting efficient energy use.

If his job description for Minister for Transport does not include provable experience and expertise in managing investment in road and rail networks, he must withdraw and edit it. It is the imperative of Ghana's time in history to enhance connectivity between rural and urban areas, promoting trade and economic activity. He must expand and modernize ports and airports to make Ghana a regional logistics hub. He did it before. He must do it again in his second coming.

A President Mahama must prioritise building on existing healthcare infrastructure by improving access to quality care, particularly in underserved rural areas. He must strengthen public health initiatives to address ongoing issues like malaria and rising non-communicable diseases. Strengthening of the National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS) to ensure universal coverage and address challenges like delays in claims payments should be a priority.

Building on his efforts up to 2016 and whatever accomplishments of his predecessor, President Mahama must accelerate efforts to make senior high school universally accessible and improve technical and vocational training to align with market needs.

The promise of constituting the leanest and most efficient government in the fourth Republic of Ghana is easy to say because lean government is the new trend. So, this President can't listen to anyone who tells him to create more ministerial portfolios. He however must give consideration to refocusing existing portfolios and perhaps rename or merge some ministries. For instance it might serve Ghana



well to have a ministry for institutional reforms and digitisation into which ministries with overlapping portfolios could be collapsed. Such a ministry could be tasked with strengthening anti-corruption institutions like the Office of the Special Prosecutor and the Auditor-General's office. It must facilitate policies around transparent procurement processes and punish financial mismanagement to rebuild public trust. His Year One accomplishment must include Public Sector Efficiency. This is as urgent as it is. Ghana should urgently show other African countries how to reduce bureaucratic inefficiencies and streamline service delivery to make government programmes and projects more effective. While at it, it must foster greater civic engagement with the civil society to ensure inclusivity in decision-making and policy implementation.

As of today Ghana ranks 133 out of 191 countries and maintains the same human development index (HDI) value for 2020 and 2021 with 0.632. This puts the country in the medium human development category, according to UNDP report. Between 1990 and 2021, Ghana's Human Development Index (HDI) value grew from 0.460 to 0.632, reflecting an increase of 37.4%. However, though Ghana falls in the medium human development category, when considered for unequal distribution of human development, the country records a loss of 27.5 per cent in its HDI. For

instance, Ghana's level of gender inequality remains high over the years and ranked 130 out of 170 countries in 2021 in terms of gender inequality between female and male achievements. President Mahama has every reason to take Social Protection and Welfare seriously. He must make work out of poverty alleviation; expand social protection programmes to cushion the impact of rising living costs on vulnerable populations. Genuine focus should go to food security by supporting smallholder farmers with subsidies, access to credit, and modern farming techniques. Affordable housing in urban centres has remained a challenge. There can't be a better time than now to partner with private developers to create affordable housing units to address the housing deficit.

Not unimportant is how President John Mahama will perform in the international stage with special reference to Regional Leadership and Foreign Policy. The principles enshrined in Ghana's 1992 Constitution, particularly Article 40, which underscores the promotion and protection of the nation's interests, respect for international law, and adherence to the principles of organisations such as the United Nations and the African Union, have continued to guide the country at the international stage. Over the years, the foreign policy has evolved to adapt to changing international dynamics. It is the hope that Mahama will remain consistent in the area of economic diplomacy and will leverage Ghana's strategic position in West Africa to attract foreign direct investment and promote trade through agreements like the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). Doing this will not preclude him from continuing to play a mediating role in regional conflicts to ensure peace and stability in the sub-region.

In conclusion, the 2024 elections that returned John Dramani Mahama as President underscores Ghana's resolve to give him a shot at navigating the country's economic recovery while upholding its democratic traditions. That he received as high as 56.55% mandate by Ghanaians indicates the readiness of the people to give him another chance. He can't take this for granted by assuming that he has completely been forgiven his sins of old. He needs to rebuild trust amongst Ghanaians. As independent onlooker but one with a vested interest in the Pan-African agenda, I urge Mr. President to place accountability and legacy building high on his agenda. It is not enough to state in his contract with the people of Ghana that he'd establish a robust code of conduct and standards for all government officials. The people of Ghana are more interested in his clear mechanisms to address scandals and

allegations of corruption from the past to rebuild credibility. Resting on this, he has no option but to focus on completing unfinished projects from his previous tenure, particularly in infrastructure and energy, to strengthen his governance legacy. By focusing on these recommended imperatives of the time, Mahama can address Ghana's current challenges while leveraging his experience in rebuilding trust among Ghanaians and Africans.



The author, Collins Nweke is opinion-maker writer with The Brussels Times. A Fellow of both the Chartered Institute of Public Management of Nigeria and the Institute of Management Consultants, he serves on the Governing Board of the International Association of Research Scholars & Administrators, where he is also a Fellow. He features on several Afrocentric media as Global Affairs Analyst. A Green Party Municipal Legislator in the legislature 2006 – 2025, he writes from Brussels, Belgium.

Chief Anthony Enahoro- An Icon of Leadership

By Eubaldus Enahoro



On December 15th, 2010 Nigerians and the world in general woke up to the reality of the death of veteran Journalist, Foremost Nationalist, astute Politician and Elder statesman, Chief Anthony Enahoro, the Adolor of Uromi and Okaku'o of Edoland, CON, CFR.

In all of these endeavours, he was in the forefront of the struggle for Nigeria's independence and defense of the

rights of our people in the face of the high handed and draconian policies of the colonial administration.

Chief Anthony Enahoro, born on July 22, 1923 was elected into the Western House of Assembly in his youthful days, where he was not only outspoken, but a true representative of his constituency. As an active parliamentarian, he was the first to move the motion for Nigeria's independence.

He was an outstanding, forthright and fearless member of the parliament, committed to the legitimate desires and aspirations of the people.

It is also on record that Chief Anthony Enahoro moved the historic motion in 1953 calling on the British government to grant self government to Nigeria in 1956. That singular action marked a watershed in the political history and nationalist struggles against British domination in Nigeria.

The ideas of Chief Enahoro received a synthesis with nationalists from other regions of Nigeria, such that on October 1st 1960, Nigeria got her independence without resort to war and this marked the beginning of the First Republic.

The political and constitutional developments which characterized the First Republic especially in the Western region led to the agitations for the creation of Mid Western Region

The situation was such that in 1963, the Mid Western Region was created out of a plebiscite, the only state that has been so created in Nigeria.

As a consequence of the political crises, which enveloped the First Republic, the Military took over in 1966 and Nigeria suffered a civil war between 1967 and 1970. During the Nigerian civil war, he served as Commissioner for Information



and spokesman on international Affairs under the Military administration of Gen. Yakubu Gowon.

For quite a while, the battle to send the Military to their barracks became a herculean task.

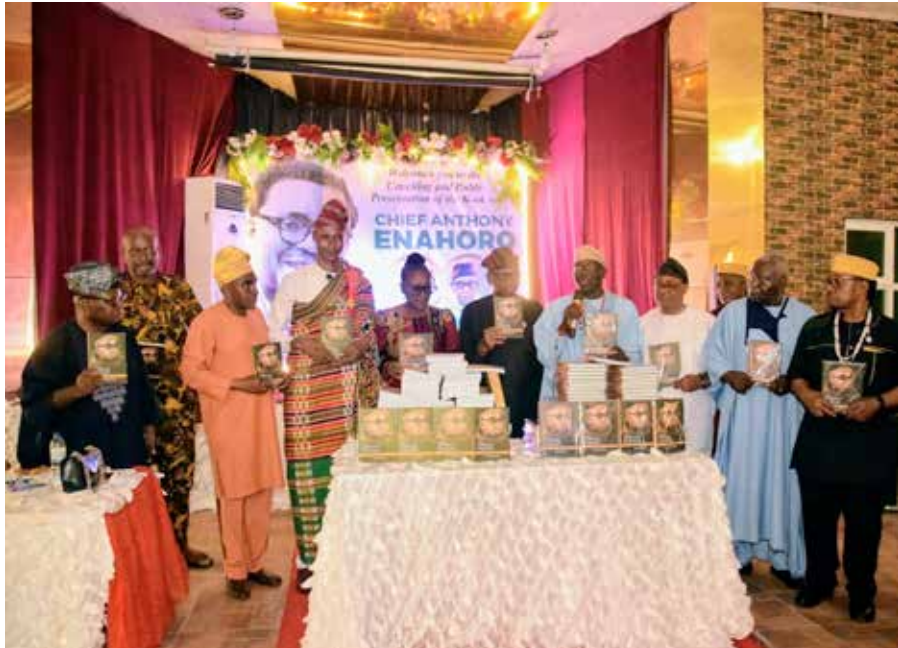
Having witnessed successive Military regimes, a shaky Second and Third Republic characterised by a prolong transition under the Babangida administration, the Nigerian Nation state fell under the arms of late Maximum ruler, Gen. Sanni Abacha.

Chief Anthony Enahoro played a prominent role in sustaining the unity of the country.

In later years, Chief Anthony Enahoro played a pivotal role in the restoration of democracy in our dear country, he being the leader of the National Democratic Coalition (NADECO) to bring the country on the track of true democracy.

Chief Anthony Enahoro along with several of his members, including the President of Nigeria today, Senator Bola Ahmed Tinubu were forced out of the shores of Nigeria where they strategized to fight the Abacha Military Junta and their effort was crowned with the death of General Abacha in 1998.

Chief Enahoro, who was at this time in his old age, returned



Chief Enahoro was a strong proponent of resource control, true federalism, free, fair and credible elections. These were the basic principles, which he pursued vigorously in the complex and fragile Nigerian federation and he spoke through the political movement he formed, the Movement for National Reformation, MNR.

Chief Enahoro never believed in political violence as a means of securing power and authority. He was a true

democrat who believed in the sanctity of the ballot box. He was an elder statesman per excellence

If Chief Anthony Enahoro were alive today, we would be celebrating his centenary anniversary.

To honour this great Icon who died leaving befitting legacies for students of history, Politics, Philosophy, the Uromi Peoples Movement sponsored the publication of a Book, titled, "Chief Anthony Enahoro- An Icon of Leadership" written by Eubaldus Enahoro, former Editor of the Nigerian Observer and Secretary General of the Movement. The book was presented to the public in Benin City on the 14th of December 2024

The Movement for National Reformation, MNR also marked the centennial celebration of the founding Chairman in Abuja with a thanksgiving and Press conference and unveiling of stickers calling for restructuring of Nigeria for true Federalism

There is no doubt that Chief Anthony Enahoro's legacies must be kept aglow by those who seek to enthrone a strong, indivisible nation established on genuine democracy and the rule of law.



from exile to contribute meaningfully to the political and socioeconomic development of a nation state which he served at various times.

The multiparty system adopted in the Nigerian constitution gave him the opportunity to form the National Reformation Party, (NRP)

Women Business Circle Celebrates 53rd Birthday Of UAE In style

The Celebration of UAE by Women Business Circle took place last month as they celebrated the 53rd National Day of United Arab Emirates. 45 nationalities gathered together to celebrate this occasion and it was a huge success. It was well attended and great compliments given to the founding fathers of UAE who had ensure over five decades of unity, growth, and remarkable achievements. As we honour the visionary leadership and the enduring spirit of the UAE, we also reflect on the strength and determination that continue to shape our nations say Ambassador Laila Rahhall.

The Women Business Circle under the leadership of Her Excellency, Ambassador Laila Rahhall says that her company is delighted to host this celebration. It took place at the Bee-Hub, Burjuman Centre. This is a testament to the vital contributions of women in building a brighter future. She calls on all Citizens to embrace the values of innovation, resilience, and collaboration that define the UAE to bring the country further to the envy of the rest of the world. She appeals to those reading this piece and are interested in joining their networking events with the women Business Circle in any country across Africa or around the world, could contact her. In her words, "let us continue to

grow, empower and inspire.

We bring you some amazing pictures from the celebration. Enjoy them



A Visionary LEADER

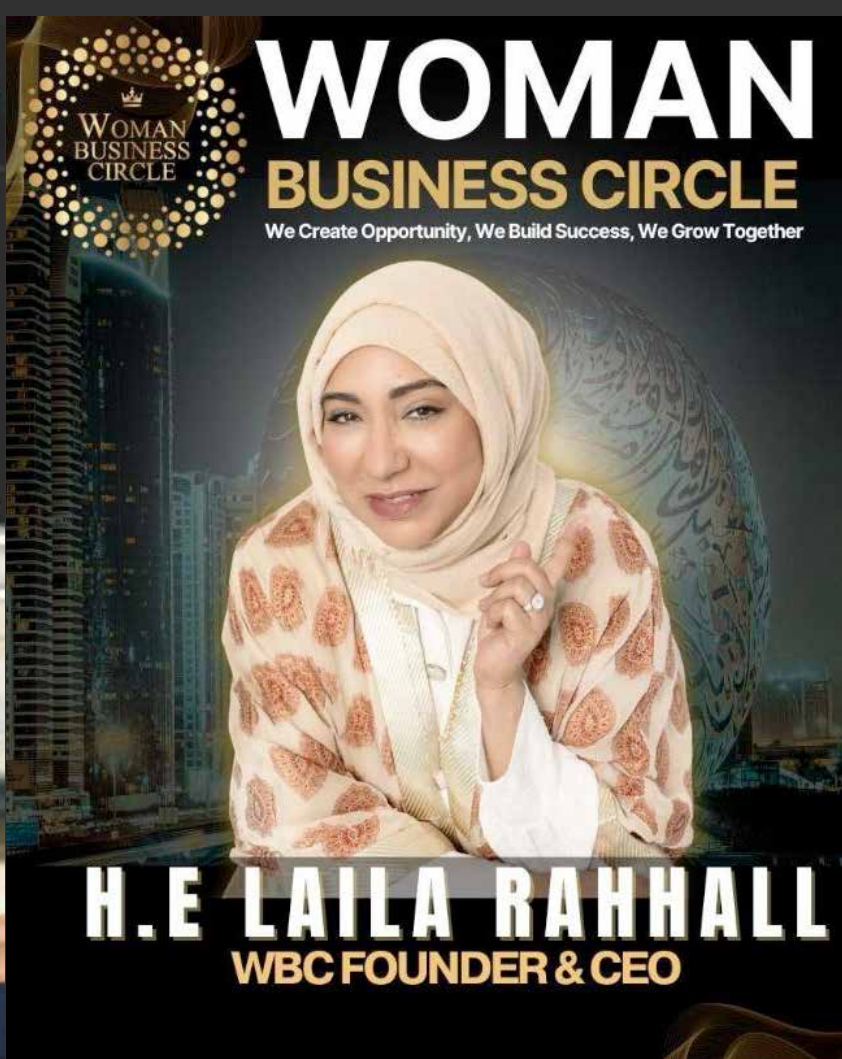
Transforming the WORLD

In a world where true leadership is often in short supply, H.E. Laila Rahhal El Attfani stands out as a shining example of vision, determination and the power of the human spirit. This dynamic entrepreneur and dedicated humanitarian

has made an indelible mark on the global stage, leaving a trail of transformation in her wake. As the founder and president of Business Gate and Founder and CEO of Woman Business Circle, El Attfani has cemented her status as a leading figure in international business development, connecting companies and fostering growth on a global scale.

H.E. LAILA RAHHAL EL ATFANI

Q | Business



H.E. LAILA RAHHAL
WBC FOUNDER & CEO



STEPHEN OCHIENG NYANDIARE:

From Slums Of Kisumu To Rubbing Shoulders With Presidents.

The story of Stephen Ochieng Nyandiare

Stephen Ochieng' Nyandiare (H.S.C.) was born and raised in Kisumu, Kenya, but today he is rubbing shoulders with captains of businesses worldwide and presidents of nations and working as special advisers on global issues to many world leaders. He came into the limelight a few years ago as the first president and representative of the Kenyan Youth in the office of the then Vice President of the Republic of Kenya, His Excellency Kalonzo Musyoka.

From then on, he has spearheaded roundtable discussions on salient issues affecting the African continent, engaging major constituents such as the African Diplomatic Corps, African American Unity Caucus, and members of the Congressional Black Caucus, among others, around the world.

Hon. Stephen was part of the First Cohort of Young African Leaders invited and hosted by President Barack Obama in Washington, D.C., to discuss the future of Africa under the Young African Leadership Initiative.

In 2009, Stephen Ochieng was recognized by late President Mwai Kibaki as part of the 100 most influential young people in Kenya and awarded a Head of State Commendation (H.S.C.) in recognition of his efforts. Stephen has advised and has been consulted on several high-level government projects in Africa, holding high-



level business discussions with global partners and African leaders. Most recently, he has been engaged by the leadership of Malawi, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Kenya, and Ghana, among others.

Stephen has worked with several foreign companies, introducing them to the African markets, and he is a member of the Africa Centre for International Arbitration and Settlement of Investment Disputes, a member of the Rotary Club of Gigiri, a peace ambassador with Peace One Day, a board member of the World Youth Parliament, a member of the International Youth Council, a member of the Pan African Movement, a co-founder of Afrique LLC (a lobbying company), and the founder of One Vibe Entertainment, among other enterprises he runs in Kenya and outside of Kenya.

Hon. Stephen has worked under the African Union (AU) on the Countries Development Agenda (Silencing the Guns of Africa by 2020) in Angola, Botswana, Comoros, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Liberia, Madagascar, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Swaziland, and Tanzania, with several other convenings that he has done, including being



the chief annual convener of the Lake Region Investment Conference in DC.

Stephen has worked with governments advising on foreign direct investments, high-net-worth individuals, multinational companies, and private entities and in the entertainment world.

With a legal and political background, Stephen brings an edge in leveraging business and politics and comes in as a cogent thinker, a persuasive speaker, and a successful conciliator. In August 2024, Stephen Nyandiaré and Dr. Mrs. Ida Odinga were among the 34 winners of the Voice Achievers Award 2024 held in Nairobi, Kenya.

Nyandiaré is among the rising Kenyan youngsters in the global arena who have been recognized by Forbes as Influential Young Africans making a global impact in the area of business enhancement on the African continent. On the heels of these accomplishments, he was appointed as a senior advisor to the prestigious Climate Change Forum (CC Forum). He is currently eyeing the Kisumu senatorial



seat in 2027.

Nyandiaré has previously worked as a property business development director, investment

consultant and strategic liaison personnel on international trades with Africa and around the world, government relations consultant, and building international trades between Africa and global partners.

He is also a political adviser to many African countries and political leaders. Steven Nyandiaré has held several key positions and responsibilities in the past; he is a senior advisor to Sheikh Ahmed Bin Faisai Al-Qassimi, a member of the ruling family of the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

He is also a very strong advocate and lobbyist to ensure the election of Kenya's former Prime Minister Raila Odinga, who is vying to become the president of the Africa Union Commission. Hon. Stephen, accompanied by other powerful delegations, went to Addis Ababa to present his bidding for the top job. Hon. Stephen says he is confident that Rt. Honorable Raila Odinga is well-endowed and prepared to lead the African Union for greater prosperity of the continent, and he should be given the top job.

"This is a time for African youth to be part of decision-making on Africa's business and geopolitics. There is an opportunity for Africa and the African youths," he declares as he attends the inauguration of the newly elected Ghanaian president, President John Mahama.



Come Home, Ghana Told The African Diaspora. Now Some Black Americans Take Its Citizenship

Flipping through a family album, Keachia Bowers paused on a photo of her as a baby on her father's lap as he held the 1978 album "Africa Stand Alone" by the Jamaican reggae band Culture.

"When I was 10 years old, I was supposed to come to Ghana with him," she said. A day earlier, she had marked 10 years since her father's death. Though he was a Pan-Africanist who dreamed of visiting Ghana, he never made it here.

Bowers and her husband, Damon Smith, however, are among the 524 diaspora members, mostly Black Americans, who were granted Ghanaian citizenship in a ceremony in November.

Bowers and Smith moved to Ghana from Florida in 2023 after visiting the region several times between them since the '90s. They now run a tour business that caters to Black people who want to visit Ghana or elsewhere in West Africa, or, like them, have come to consider a permanent move.

The November group was the largest one granted citizenship since Ghana launched the "Year of the Return" program, aimed at attracting the Black diaspora, in 2019. It marked 400 years since the first African slaves arrived in Virginia in 1619.

Ghana's Tourism Authority and the Office of Diaspora Affairs have extended the program into "Beyond the Return," which fosters the relationship with diasporans. Hundreds have been granted citizenship, including people from Canada, the U.K., and Jamaica.

Bowers said moving to Ghana gave her family a certain feeling of ease they didn't have in the U.S.

"When we see Trayvon Martin, Sandra Bland, and all these stories of people being murdered just in their home, living in their home, and being murdered at the hands of police brutality, hearing about it creates trauma," she said.

She also worried about her son Tsadik, 14.

Tsadik towers over loved ones in the way that lanky teenage boys often do. He is shy but opens up around his younger sister Tselah, 11, and the family's dog, Apollo.

"In America, being a Black male with locs who's very tall for his age, he is treated like a threat," Bowers said.

Americans face few obstacles to living in Ghana, with most people paying an annual residency fee. But Bowers



said getting citizenship signified more than simply living in Ghana.

"I didn't need (citizenship) to tell me that I'm African. Anywhere that I go in the world and someone looks at me, I'm melanated," she said.

"But my ancestors who wanted to return and come back home, those ancestors who never made it back," she said, "that passport, for me, is for them."

Between 10 to 15 million people were forcibly taken from Africa to the Americas during the trans-Atlantic slave trade, the majority from West and Central Africa.

Ghana, then a British colony known as the Gold Coast, was a main point of departure.

As memorials to the slave trade become tourist destinations across West Africa, painful reminders of its brutality are easily accessible. From Ghana to Senegal to Benin, one can visit variations of the "Door of No Return," haunting doorways that open to the Atlantic Ocean where slaves left Africa, and their families, for the last time.

Deijha Gordon, 33, was one of them.

"I first visited Ghana in 2015. From then on, I knew this was a place that I wanted to be and a place where I wanted to show other diasporans, African-Americans, that we have a place where we belong," she said.

She moved from Brooklyn to Ghana in 2019 and opened a food truck, Deijha Vu's Jerk Hut, selling Jamaican food. Between bagging to-go orders and speaking to a Black American tourist couple, she explained how she built the business from scratch.

Gordon was giddy while recalling the moment she got



citizenship.

“It just feels good to have a connection to an African country as an African American, as a Black American. Because back in America we don’t have anything to trace our roots to but Africa. To have that connection here, I feel like I’ve done something right.”

Like Bowers, Gordon has had a stream of people reaching out and asking about the citizenship process.

The path is not clearly defined. Citizenship must come from a concession from Ghana’s presidency, a process made legal under the 2000 Citizenship Act. It’s granted to those residing in Ghana who have told the Office of Diaspora Affairs that they are interested in citizenship.

Ghana’s government in part describes the program as a benefit to the economy and focuses on investment opportunities for those wishing to relocate.

Festus Owooson with the local nonprofit Migration Advocacy Center said that though the government

emphasizes the economic angle, the real benefits of citizenship are intangible.

“I don’t think (recipients) were crying because they had landed a gold mine, or they’d found oil or some kind of business opportunity. But it’s something so relieving, which you cannot put value or a price on,” he said.

President Nana Akufo-Addo’s administration, which launched the “Year of the Return,” is on its way out. Ghana’s main opposition party won the presidential election on Dec. 7.

But Owooson said Black Americans and other diaspora citizens are likely to continue receiving citizenship by presidential concession.

Citizenship also can pass to the next generation. The children of Bowers and Smith received it automatically after their parents’ ceremony.

Bowers’ father, like her husband and children, was a follower of the Rastafari faith. “Part of the Rastafarian tradition is to repatriate. We see repatriation as the ultimate experience that you can have on this earth,” she said.

She believes that her father is proud of her. “I really feel like he’s smiling, where he is. He wanted to experience this for himself, so he’s experiencing it through me.”



Bishop Odendaal conferred With Doctorate Of Theology



Bishop Willem Jan Odendaal recently received a doctorate degree in Theology conferred on him by the Governing Council of Word Alive Bible College in Ghana, affiliated institution to Shield of Faith Christian University, USA under Rev. Dr. Galyn Wiemers and a member of the worldwide Association of Independent Christian Colleges and Seminaries.

In his acceptance speech, he thanked the Almighty God for the grace to be saved as far back as September 18th 1974, over 50 years ago now and still able to serve the Lord.

He dedicated the doctorate degree awarded to him to his late spiritual parents, Stig & Tony Sagstrom from Sweden. Through this couple, he started his missionary work with

Jesus Christ, which has taken him to several countries around the world. His ministry has physical presence in nine nations around the world now. He also thanked his wife, First lady Sonja of Houses of Hope Ministries International for her dedication and support on the mission field. According to Bishop Dr. Odendaal, she is the driving and praying force beside him in all he has and continue do for the Lord. She is also the force behind the operations of Houses of Hope Ministries International. He also expresses gratitude to Bishop Humro Immanuel and his wife of Charisma Ministries International in Suriname, South America. This couple assisted them to have the Houses of Hope Ministries registered and established in Suriname in 2005. Back to the Netherlands where he





is based, he wish to thank late Senior Pastor Jofrey Leito of Safe Haven Church Amsterdam for his encouragement over the years as a mentor and friend. Is gratitude also goes to Senior Pastor Patrick van Aalten and his wife, Karin for their great spiritual commitment to their ministry. “They have shared in our joys and sorrows of Houses of Hope Ministries International. Bishop Odendaal also single out the Overseer & Apostle of Houses of Hope Ministries International in Ghana, Cennick Boateng who also bagged his Doctorate degree in Theology at the same ceremony.” I hope to hand over my responsibilities as Bishop of Houses of Hope Ministries International worldwide to him. He is ready for it”, he concluded. Lastly he remembered a young man from America who

reached out to him on the street in 1974, his name is Mike Sipko together with his young family travelled to Europe to reach him with the gospel of Jesus Christ. They came to Europe to spread the gospel to all who came their way. Bishop Dr. Odendaal was one of those reached with the good news and today he has reached thousands of people in over nine countries, saved, educating and providing them a place of worship. He ha planted churches and engaged in projects that help to elevate people from poverty and bring hope to them for a better future in Jesus Christ. It can only be by grace, he added.

Congratulations to Bishop Dr. Willem Van Odendaal



A Voice Of Resilience: Eva Nakato's Life Beyond HIV

Written by Abena Ewusiwaa



HIV/AIDS remains one of the most significant global health challenges, with millions of lives affected worldwide. Yet, as the world marks this year's World AIDS Day, it is stories of resilience, transformation, and empowerment that capture our attention and give hope. In Uganda, a country where HIV/AIDS often remains cloaked in silence and stigma, Eva Nakato stands out as a powerful voice—one that redefines the narrative around HIV and inspires countless others to do the same.

As a journalist and HIV advocate, Eva has chosen to break the silence and fight for those whose voices are often silenced by stigma. Her journey is one of defiance, of turning pain into purpose, and of living beyond the confines of societal judgment. For Eva, living with HIV is not a burden to bear in isolation; it's a story to share with the world.

Eva Nakato: A Journey Living with HIV

Eva's path into living with HIV began at the tender age of 10, when she learned of her diagnosis. This revelation came



after her health began to deteriorate, leading to the discovery that both girls had contracted the virus. The source of their infection was their mother, who had unknowingly received a contaminated blood transfusion during childbirth.

"It was a tough time for us," Eva recalls. "My sister and I were trying to understand what the diagnosis meant. I remember asking my mother about it, and she explained that the blood transfusion she had received during childbirth was the source of the virus."

Their mother became their pillar of support, guiding them through the confusion and challenges that came with their diagnosis. She sought out counseling and medical care for her daughters, reassuring them that their status did not define them. "Our mother was our greatest strength. She always reminded us that we were more than our diagnosis," Eva reflects.

Despite their mother's unwavering support, the stigma they encountered was swift and harsh. Whispers spread through their community, leading to social exclusion and discrimination.

Yet, rather than retreating, Eva and her sister found solace in each other and in their family's love. Over three decades later, Eva continues to advocate for the message that a diagnosis is not an end but a new beginning—a chance to live a fulfilling life.

Overcoming Adversity

One of the most difficult moments of Eva's life came when a trusted friend used their HIV status as a weapon. After returning from a trip, this individual blackmailed Eva and her sister, threatening to expose their diagnosis unless they complied with his demands. The betrayal was particularly painful because the friend had once been considered a confidante.

"For a long time, we didn't realize who was behind the blackmail," Eva shares. "Every time we tried to take action, the friend would intervene, steering us in a different direction. He was using an anonymous number to spread our HIV status to his contacts."

Rather than allowing this betrayal to define her, Eva made the courageous decision to publicly disclose her HIV status, taking control of her own narrative. While this decision led to the loss of friends and the spread of harmful rumors, it also brought an outpouring of support from those who stood by her.

"We lost friends, faced stigma, and dealt with false narratives being spread about us," she says. "But we also gained allies—people who believed in us, who supported us. That is when I knew I had a greater purpose."

This turning point propelled Eva into advocacy. She became determined to use her voice to educate others and to fight back against the stigma that continues to affect millions of people living with HIV/AIDS.

Breaking Down Barriers

In Uganda and much of Africa, HIV/AIDS is still often viewed through a lens of shame and moral judgment. It is not just a health condition but a societal stigma, exacerbated by cultural misunderstandings and fear. Eva personally felt the weight of this stigma growing up, from whispers in her neighborhood to outright avoidance from some family members. Yet, rather than shrinking away, she chose to face it head-on.



Eva became an advocate, sharing her story through community outreach programs and media platforms. Her aim was not only to raise awareness about the virus but also to humanize those living with HIV/AIDS, dispelling the myths that fuel fear and discrimination.

"I realized that stigma thrives on ignorance," Eva explains. "When we remain silent, we allow stigma to take root. So, I made it my mission to talk openly, to break the walls of ignorance. Stigma feeds silence, and silence is deadly."

Through her public speaking, workshops, and media appearances, Eva has created spaces for open dialogue. She empowers individuals to accept their diagnosis, to seek treatment, and to live unapologetically. She stresses that a person's worth is not defined by their HIV status but by their character, dreams, and ambitions.

Eva's personal journey has also shaped her approach to relationships. As someone living with HIV, she has faced numerous challenges, especially in romantic partnerships. Yet, she is unwavering in her conviction that self-worth and honesty are paramount.

"I've encountered men who thought they were doing me a favor by being with me, but I knew my worth," she says. "I believe in being upfront with people. If someone can't accept me for who I am, then they're not meant to be in my life."

A Call to Action: Fighting Complacency

Though significant advancements have been made in HIV treatment, Eva is deeply concerned that complacency is creeping into society's approach to the virus. While HIV no longer carries the same fatal prognosis it once did, it remains a serious health issue that requires continuous vigilance.

"We've come a long way in terms of treatment," she acknowledges. "I now take one pill a day—an incredible improvement from the multiple medications I used to take. But HIV is still very much a reality. We cannot afford to become complacent."

Eva urges people, particularly the youth, to take proactive steps to protect their health. She calls on young men, especially, to get



Continued on Page 50



tested, seek treatment, and understand that early intervention can lead to a healthy, full life.

“HIV is not a death sentence,” she emphasizes. “With commitment to treatment, you can live a full and meaningful life. Don’t be afraid to know your status. Go to the hospital and take control of your health.”

Thriving with HIV/AIDS

At 31, Eva is thriving. Against all odds, she is a mother, an advocate, and a role model for others living with HIV.

“I never imagined I would live to become a mother, but here I am, raising my son,” she says proudly. “My son is my greatest joy, and I show him every day that life continues, no matter the challenges.”

Eva credits her faith, as well as the modern advancements in HIV treatment, for her good health. With the daily regimen of a single pill, she leads a healthy, active life and hopes that a cure for HIV is within reach. However, she warns

against the danger of underestimating the virus.

“People think that because there are drugs to suppress the virus, we no longer need to fear it,” Eva cautions. “This mindset is dangerous. Until there’s a cure, we must continue to educate ourselves and others.”

Conclusion

Today, Eva Nakato is not just a survivor—she is a champion of change. She has become a symbol of hope and resilience for millions of people living with HIV/AIDS, demonstrating that a diagnosis is not a death sentence but a beginning. Through her work in media, advocacy, and her personal example, Eva continues to break barriers, challenge stigma, and inspire others to live beyond their diagnosis.

Her remarkable journey reminds us all that, no matter the challenges we face, we have the power to rewrite our own narratives. Eva’s story is a living testament to strength, courage, and the unyielding spirit of resilience.



2025

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Debunking Notions – Finding True Equality

Text: Elizabeth Kameo, Pictures: Leonard Fäustle

The inaugural Debunking Notions –Reshaping Mindsets dialogue in The Hague sparked powerful discussions on dismantling stereotypes, and bridging cultural divides. It set the stage for a bold, transformative approach to achieving true equality. Participants challenged the Dutch government to abandon one-size-fits-all strategies and confront uncomfortable truths about their past, urging a shift toward more nuanced, equitable partnerships. ‘What comes to mind when someone says Africa? Have any of you recently Googled Uganda? What results do you see when you type Uganda into the search bar? And what about the Netherlands?’ asked Cissy Nalumansi.

It is against this background, of mutual prejudices reflected in Google search results about Africa and Europe that Ugandan film writer and Director at Mpologoma Media, Cissy Nalumansi, kicked off the first dialogue of the Debunking Notions-Reshaping Mindsets project.

‘Media plays a crucial role in shaping perspectives globally. I am doing my part to change the narrative by telling authentic stories, one at a time. While people may post such content innocently, it inadvertently shapes perceptions of us. Every time someone Google’s Uganda or Africa, this is what they see,’ she explained, highlighting a few stereotypical notions.

Challenging Stereotypes

According to Nalumansi, these demonstrations underscore the significance of the Debunking Notions project, which aims to create a platform for dialogue and information exchange to challenge and dismantle misconceptions about Africa and Europe.



Ugandan film Director: Cissy Nalumansi

‘If

we want to change stereotypes about our cultures, we need to immerse ourselves and find ways to learn about them,’ she said. ‘It is frustrating to confront or eliminate stereotypes when viewing them from the outside. But when we sit at the same table, you will understand why I chew loudly, and I will understand why you chew quietly. By seeing things from each other’s perspectives, we move beyond stereotypes and finally understand who we truly are.’

The inaugural Debunking Notions—Reshaping Mindsets dialogue, conceived by Nalumansi in collaboration with Vice Versa Editors-in-Chief Marc Broere and Eunice Mwaura, was held on December 6 at the Netherlands Research Council (NWO) in The Hague. Through talks and breakout sessions, speakers and participants delved into the concept of equality in relationships between Europe and Africa, focusing on research and knowledge exchange.

Supported by Vice Versa, the Knowledge Centre Global Health (KCGH), Netherlands Food Partnership, INCLUDE Knowledge Platform, and NWO (Dutch Research Council), the dialogue brought together a diverse group of participants, including internationally acclaimed novelist Vamba Sherif, who presented a spoken column.

Participants included African PhD students, professors from Dutch universities, former Dutch ambassadors to Africa, members of the African diaspora in the Netherlands, officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, writers, Dutch academics conducting research in Africa, and individuals from civil society organizations working within Africa.



Ambassador Jelte van Wieren chatting with Pastor Elvis Iruh of The Voice magazine

In his opening speech, Marc Broere, Editor-in-Chief of Vice Versa, described the project as an opportunity to take

the next step in advancing the Dutch Africa Strategy. This followed up on the hybrid event hosted in 2023 by Vice Versa and Vice Versa Global in Nairobi and Amsterdam, which explored the strategy in depth.

‘We believe deeply ingrained stereotypes persist between people in Africa and Europe, hindering us from fully exploring opportunities for genuine, equal collaboration. True equality can only emerge once we truly understand one another,’ Broere stated.

He continued, ‘Now it is time to take the next step. How can we further advance the Dutch African Strategy? Who are we, and why do we need each other? What recommendations can we offer policymakers tasked with implementing the strategy, especially since equal cooperation with Africa is not exactly at the top of the current Dutch government’s priority list?’

The Africa Strategy for 2023-2032 outlines the Dutch government’s vision for political and economic cooperation with Africa. The strategy emphasizes that future cooperation with Africa must be rooted in equality, now more than ever.



Awil Mohamoud, Director of the Africa Diaspora Center during discussion session at the event

It aligns with and aims to create synergies with the second implementation phase of the African Union’s ‘Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want.’

Drawing on her fieldwork experience in Mali, scientist and publicist Ellen Mangnus in her talk ‘The Different Layers of Inequality,’ highlighted the complexities that must be considered, raising the question of whose knowledge is valued. She cited the example of farmers’ traditional farming



Former politician and Professor Eric Smaling chairs the session on the importance of indigenous knowledge

practices, often overlooked by scientists.

‘Advocating for equality with words is easy, but putting equality into practice requires us to dive deeper and truly understand with whom we should collaborate on equal terms. It requires working with diverse perspectives and knowledge, fostering relationships beyond writing research proposals or collecting data,’ she said.

Collaborative Change

In response to the question of whether debunking notions is important, panel discussant Melle Leenstra, Strategic Policy Advisor on Africa at the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, emphasized that it is in the interest of both the Dutch government and its people to have African partners eager to cooperate. ‘For me, that is key for the strategy. It means we must focus on building relationships—sustainable, equal, and mutually beneficial ones—and go beyond short-term thinking,’ he explained.

Georgina Kwakye, Founder of Pimp My Village and a panel discussant, emphasized the crucial role of the media in changing the narrative and telling stories honestly, showcasing the positive changes happening in Africa. ‘For the strategy to work, we need equality, long-lasting partnerships, and the right, practical partnerships that are feasible. There is a need for honest, intercultural communication and to highlight the successes on the ground,’ she held.

Panellist Ola Abagun, Knowledge Manager at INCLUDE,

highlighted the need to address three key deficits—trust, respect, and accountability—to achieve equality. ‘Respect for African perspectives is a foundation needed to build the kind of partnership we are talking about. We have to be holistic in how we approach everything, from human rights issues to peace and security and education. The Dutch side needs to listen genuinely,’ she said.

She explained, ‘we need to engage different stakeholders, particularly young people in Africa and the diaspora. Trust is impossible unless the Dutch side relinquishes some traditional power dynamics that characterize the Global North/Global South relationship. The last point I will emphasize is accountability, which in the history of international cooperation has often flowed in one direction. We should rethink these dynamics and ask how the Dutch side can be more accountable.’

Commending the Debunking Notions initiative, Jelte Van Wieren, Director for Sub-Saharan Africa at the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs, emphasized the importance of such dialogues in allowing people to discuss the Africa Strategy in depth.



Dr. Ellen Mannus talks about her research in Mali and collaboration with Malian researchers



The session on how the Netherlands can remain an interesting partner for Africa



Vamba Sherif is not only a brilliant writer, but also knows how to entertain people verbally

Many of the suggestions made are valuable for us. Most of what has been said in the separate groups reflects what the strategy aims to achieve—getting to know each other and



Anika Altaf of INCLUDE during the breakout session on cooperation between European and African researchers

building relationships. If there is one lesson I have learned from my experience in Africa, you cannot do business there unless you know each other. So, we need to invest in that first and move away from the traditional Dutch approach, which is results-oriented and focuses on business without building relationships. That does not work,’ Van Wieren remarked.

Reviving the Civic Space

Acknowledging that the current Dutch government is not strongly focused on issues such as the role of civil society, Van Wieren urged participants to find new ways to recreate civic space. ‘Unfortunately, shrinking civic space is a troubling global phenomenon. You can focus on that all the time and feel disheartened, or you can start working on recreating space in many different ways, and I believe there are numerous possibilities. I must admit, the current government, unlike the previous one, does not strongly believe in the role of civil society, but it remains a fundamental part of the African

Strategy, and we need to take it seriously,' he affirmed.

Admitting that much still needs to be done for the strategy's successful implementation, Van Wieren identified the knowledge gap as the biggest challenge within the Netherlands. 'I feel confident in saying that the strategy is telling us in the Netherlands what African partners want us to change and do. We have a lot of work to do in the Netherlands to bridge the knowledge gap about Africa and its countries. The understanding of cultural differences and how to do business with Africa is lacking here. We need to work on that and gain support from the people in the Netherlands, otherwise, the strategy will fail,' he stated.

In their propositions, participants urged the Dutch government to stop treating Africa as a monolithic entity and recommended that it adopt specialized approaches for individual countries. They also encouraged the Dutch government and its people to openly acknowledge their weaknesses and colonial history to foster equal and honest conversations.

Other propositions from the breakout sessions highlighted the importance of recognizing and documenting Indigenous African knowledge to counter the belief among African



Publisher and Editor-in-Chief of The Voice Elvis Iruh (left) and writer Vamba Sherif take shots of the event

youth that Western knowledge is superior to African Indigenous knowledge. Additionally, participants called for the facilitation of African-initiated and led research, driven by Africans themselves.

The Debunking Notions project will be carried out in the coming years by Vice Versa Netherlands, Vice Versa Global, and Mpologoma Media. In her closing remarks, Nalumansi acknowledged that while debunking misconceptions will require significant effort, the right collaboration and cooperation can shift how Africa is perceived.

'So, what's next? We need to keep working together to bring different perspectives together. We will set up a website to share opinions and ideas on debunking notions, create podcasts, and discuss topics like research, culture, and education. This is the information we will spread. We started in Uganda and the Netherlands, and we plan to expand to



Response from the audience to the panel discussion



Panel discussion with Georgina Kwakye, Melle Leenstra and Ola Abagun, moderated by Ellen Mangnus and Cissy Nalumansi



Max Koffi in conversation with Cissy Nalumansi

other countries,' Nalumansi concluded.

TELLING LIES THE NEW COOL – WELCOME TO THE MISINFORMATION ERA

Written by Elizabeth Kameo



Prof. Dr. Bruce Mutsvairo

Not entirely new, the misinformation and disinformation phenomenon continues to grow out of proportion. It threatens the global health sector, as was witnessed during the COVID pandemic, and undermines democracy. This is exemplified by the rise in popularity of more far-right-wing parties within Europe undermining the electoral process. Amidst the threats and fears, who or what is to blame? Can they be curbed, or is it too late?

Ahead of the pivotal conference hosted by The Knowledge Centre Global Health (KCGH), titled ‘Navigating Truths: Demystifying Mis- and Disinformation in Global Health,’ conference chair Prof. Dr. Bruce Mutsvairo—professor in the Department of Media and Culture Studies at Utrecht University—discusses the challenges posed by mis- and disinformation on a global scale. He emphasizes that although this issue may seem gray, solutions exist.

Growing up, Prof. Dr. Mutsvairo, a KCGH board member, believed the health sector was immune to falsehoods—until the world had to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic. Then, the realities of the dangers of misinformation and disinformation hit hard. ‘Disinformation is a significant issue and a major concern in our society. Regardless of where you live, as long as you are online, you have to deal with misinformation and ‘fake news’ almost daily. You can talk of any sector; even within global health, there is a lot of research that has been done and continues to be done showing dis- and misinformation are major issues,’ he says.

He elaborates, ‘This is precisely why we are organizing this conference—to create a platform for people worldwide to share insights on how they are tackling this, particularly in the global health sector. Growing up, I never imagined this would be one of the sectors affected. It always seemed solid, but as we now see, that is not the case.’

Role of Social Media

According to Prof. Dr. Mutsvairo, more people are getting deceived online by disinformation campaigns. This has become a trend involving more actors. ‘The global disinformation campaign has evolved far beyond individual exchanges; it draws in nations, states, and influencers of all ages—people who leverage their popularity to spread falsehoods and disinformation without hesitation, driven by a desire for fame. In this climate, pursuing popularity often overshadows the commitment to truth.

‘In as much as social media and digital platforms help people access the information they want, they are also a big problem. People only see the good things; they see social media as enabling them to communicate with friends and gain access to information easily without contemplating the dangers,’ he states.

Prof. Dr. Mutsvairo observes that the open nature of social media—accessible to anyone with internet access to create and share their own news—complicates efforts to tackle the ‘fake news’ problem. While many issues can be resolved relatively easily, finding effective solutions to misinformation is no easy task.

‘We can host conference after conference, but we cannot solve the problems caused by social media with a quick fix. To begin considering solutions, we must first recognize and understand the vast scale and complexity of this problem in our society. There are a lot of falsehoods everywhere online set off by different actors who try or use social media or digital platforms to disinform or lie to protect their interests.’

While misinformation and disinformation are not a new phenomenon, the media and journalism scholar believes the advent of social media has worsened the problem.

‘Historically, nations have tried to use propaganda to lie and deceive. In that sense, disinformation has existed for as long as humans have been alive. The deliberate dissemination of false or misleading news or information has always been there, even at the village level in Africa,’ he explains.

‘Even when there was no technology, people could deceive and try to lie; it is human nature. The difference today is, of course, the advent of digital technology has made it easier to transmit and transport those lies and to make them look professional and realistic.’ However, according to Professor Dr. Mutsvairo, as much as misinformation is a global problem, there is a need to understand the contexts and history within the different countries.

‘The impact disinformation has in Uganda will not be the same as in Tanzania, even though these countries are neighbors. There are things you are likely to see everywhere, for example, the accusation that Russia is interfering with the elections in the West. Every Western power today is concerned that Russia could try to have a say in its elections because it has shown that it can. Over the last three years, I have been working in Mali and Ethiopia, trying to investigate the influence of misinformation in conflict countries. The trends are completely different from those of a country without conflict.’

Oftentimes used interchangeably, misinformation and disinformation have distinct definitions and implications. The former refers to the accidental spread of inaccurate information, while the latter involves deliberately disseminating false material with the intent to deceive, often resulting in significant harm. Both forms pose grave threats to democracy. ‘Of course, there is no question that they threaten democracy. For democracy as a system to work, you need to have accurate and truthful information to make informed decisions. This is increasingly difficult—not only in Africa or non-Western societies but globally,’ he says.

Democracy in Peril

‘We saw how Trump tried to convince people that he had won the elections, and there are those who believed him. This represents a significant danger, as it opens the door for individuals like him to gain power in democratic countries. If someone like Trump can be elected based on a platform of lies, it raises the question of how we can expect African

leaders to act differently. People somehow prefer lies to truth; they vote for disinformation. It is considered cool to lie because lies make people popular these days.’

But as the world contemplates the threat of mis- and disinformation to democracy, it goes without saying that the threats to global health go beyond instilling fear and gaining control of the people. The COVID-19 pandemic proved how misinformation in the sector can bring about the public’s mistrust in government and health authorities, posing challenges to control disease and outbreaks.

‘It is important to address misinformation within the global health sector. You can have lies everywhere, but you do not want to have a fake doctor. You do not want somebody to lie about your health. If you go to a doctor, you want accurate information because your health is your well-being; it is your future,’ Mutsvairo says.

But where does this leave the media, both traditional and conventional? Are they doing enough to debunk misinformation and disinformation? ‘The way the media in the Netherlands is trying to protect or ensure that the content they disseminate is truthful is different from the media sector in Indonesia, Malawi or Mexico. It comes down to having access to resources.’

He, however, adds that it is important to think about the role of media from a contextual point of view, especially as complex narratives are dominant today because people set their own agendas. ‘Many journalists have the sense of doing the right thing because they believe it is their role to fight against falsehoods. However, the rise of citizen journalists and influencers who do not need professional training has good and bad sides. Some are being used by different actors to gather and disseminate false narratives,’ he says.





‘At the end of the day, media is people-owned and a business. People want to make money, but not everybody has the ethical mindset to do the right thing. And what is right to one could be viewed as wrong by another.’ Unfortunately, in today’s world, the more complex the narrative, the easier it is to gain attention. According to Mutsvairo, today it is all about attention.

‘People often make controversial statements to attract attention and gain millions of views on their videos to become famous. Critical reflection is lacking. It is too difficult to be critical, so people choose the easier option—liking or sharing a post. They do not care about the potential damage that could bring.’

He further elaborates, ‘People trying to tell the truth are unpopular. It is easy for a voter to accept that ‘immigrants are a threat to your lives, or they want to take your wife, your job.’ You could use the same internet to find out if that is true. However, it costs time, so people are not interested. That is why misinformation is more popular.’

And it is not only the low-income or lowly educated people that are susceptible.

Educated but Vulnerable

‘Research indicates that educated individuals—or those who are considered well-educated—are also increasingly supporting right-wing ideologies. It is a misconception that

only the lowly educated people are the ones who could easily be victims,’ he asserts.

‘However, research has also demonstrated that individuals who have long been exposed to disinformation—often due to being raised in environments where their parents accepted it—are more likely to believe and identify with it. This familiarity can create a strong inclination toward disinformation. Nevertheless, this does not negate the reality that even highly educated individuals are vulnerable to believing false information.’

While the problem may be at its highest, Prof. Dr. Mutsvairo is confident solutions exist. However, it starts with people’s acknowledgment of the problem. ‘We should enhance literacy rates regarding misinformation, as people must recognize its existence and impact. It is crucial to teach individuals to identify misinformation from a young age rather than waiting until high school or university, as this issue will persist for decades—possibly indefinitely. Misinformation is a current reality, but it can be tackled by providing accurate information. Additionally, fact-checking has emerged as a widely recognized solution to combat misinformation,’ he says.

According to Mutsvairo, while fact-checking has been hailed as a movement that could help defeat disinformation, it raises the question, ‘Who will check the fact checker?’ And while the media is part of the problem, Mutsvairo is confident media and journalists can play a significant role and be part

of the solution as fact-checkers.

‘Having a media aware of the state of affairs in this era is crucial. It is also important to have professionally trained journalists who detect and see the importance of fighting for the truth. Journalists have a big role to play. We need honest journalists globally who cannot be bought and desire to tell the truth. Thankfully, they exist because otherwise, it would be a disaster,’ he says.

To ensure that the complexities and nuisances remain in focus, Mutsvairo emphasizes the need for more research funding. This will ensure that research advances at the same level as technologies to enable a better understanding of the trends of misinformation. ‘In this era, academics are the least trusted people because those that promote misinformation see higher education and knowledge providers as a big threat to them,’ he adds.

While researchers, together with professional and honest journalism, could be one part of the solution, Mutsvairo emphasizes the significance of having responsible citizens. ‘We need to instill a sense of responsibility in individuals, helping them understand that before relying on a fact-checker to verify information, they should refrain from sharing anything on the internet they are unsure about. While these principles may seem simple,

they are challenging to enforce effectively.’

He concludes by underlining the need for regulations and laws to tackle the problem. ‘As a journalist, I am somewhat skeptical about regulations since they can potentially restrict freedom of speech. However, I believe we are at a point where regulations are necessary because certain individuals need to be held accountable for their actions.’

He continues, ‘We need laws that can effectively address this problem. These laws should not infringe on freedom of expression, as that is a separate issue. In non-democratic settings, we often see this happening, where regulation is used to silence those who speak out against the government. While this is a significant concern, I still believe some regulation is necessary.’

Mutsvairo believes it is the responsibility of everyone to ensure that whatever they are saying or sharing is not a danger or is not putting the lives of others in danger. And maybe then we may start seeing less danger caused by mis- and disinformation.

Edited by Pius Okore.



Left Behind In Kenya, Children Of British Soldiers Struggle To Find Their Identity

DESMOND TIRO

Margaret Wandia became pregnant after a week-long relationship with a British soldier training near her community in Kenya. They met while she worked at a bar in her early 20s. She knew little about him. He left her with a biracial child.

Now that son is 26, and he is part of an effort by a Kenyan lawyer to take a number of such children to Britain. The goal is to confront authorities over hundreds of such cases reported over the years and to find the fathers and seek their support.

It is a long shot after years of attempts by human rights groups to hold the British military and its personnel accountable for their actions during weeks of training in Kenya—including alleged rapes—and the children they leave behind.

The countries' \$44 million defense cooperation agreement was renewed in 2021. It allows up to 10,000 British forces to train for eight weeks in Kenya every year. Kenya's biracial children are part of broader concerns about the British mission, notably the persistent allegations of rape of local girls and women.

Like many biracial children in largely conservative Kenya, Wandia's son, Louise Gitonga, said he has felt excluded by society and left out of education and employment opportunities for being "too white."

"I have an identity crisis that has driven me to alcoholism," the unemployed Gitonga told The Associated Press at his home in the central town of Nanyuki. "Everywhere I pass, people call me a white man. Others call me an albino. These names cause me a great deal of pain and hurt."

His mother recalled taking him to boarding school and being asked to pay higher fees for her white child. She later married a local farmer, Paul Wachira, who acknowledged the challenges of raising a biracial child.

"At times, I had to hide him from the rest of the family during gatherings to avoid many questions, as he looked very different from his siblings," Wachira said.

Kenyan lawyer Kelvin Kubai represents 10 such children of visiting British forces. He asserted that not all of their parents' relationships were consensual. In collaboration with a British law firm he declined to name, he hopes to



take some of the children to Britain next year and go to court.

"You know, such children do not know the circumstances under which they were born," Kubai said.

He hopes they'll obtain citizenship. According to British law, children born to British citizens are eligible for British citizenship and care of both parents if they are below 18. Seven of the children Kubai represents are under 18. For those older than 18, the trip is a quest for identity and support.

Kubai is also raising money—\$4,600 so far—to conduct DNA testing to help find the children's fathers.

The identity crisis affects children born to white fathers. Kubai said he has yet to come across children of Black British fathers. "They would not be easy to spot and not face discrimination," he said.

A British High Commission spokesperson in a statement to the AP said it and the British military training mission in Kenya "cooperate fully with local child support authorities where there are claims relating to paternity." Those authorities didn't respond to questions.

But Kenyan mothers and civil society groups have long said British authorities have been little or no help.

Jenerica Namoru, 29, has a 5-year-old after dating a British man with the training mission. The man's name appears on the birth certificate as the father after he consented and shared his documentation for the process.

Namoru said the man initially accepted the child and communicated with her but refused to send financial



support. She sought help at the British Army Training Unit Kenya offices. She said they wouldn't listen. "At times, they even blocked me from entering the gate," she said. She's now being represented by Kubai. Biracial children in the area around the British training site date back to the 1960s when Kenya was under British rule. Those born decades ago are also part of current efforts to seek justice and support.

David Mwangi Macharia, 68, bears the nickname "British" due to his light skin color. He said his mother had a relationship with a British soldier. He works as a night guard and part-time mason after dropping out of primary school due to being ridiculed and discriminated against.

"(Kenyans) always think that I cannot do menial jobs despite the fact that I am not educated," Macharia said. He has even found it difficult to get along with his darker-skinned siblings.

Attempts to hold visiting British forces accountable have long gained little traction, Kenyans say.

Marion Mutugi, a commissioner with the Kenya National Commission on Human Rights, said the relationships between British soldiers and local women range from consensual to transactional to forced.

The commission says it has documented over 200 rape cases involving British troops between 1983 and 2003, and it continues to collect data.

Britain's defense ministry dismissed the rape cases as "not genuine," and an investigation by the Royal Military Police in 2007 did not lead to compensation or justice for the victims, the KNCHR said in a report to Kenya's parliament protesting a past renewal of the countries' defense agreement.

"(Authorities) also interfere with investigations by compromising the local community. The human rights defenders on the ground are threatened and intimidated by both the BATUK and the Kenyan forces and Kenyan



officials to ensure that justice is not reached," Mutugi said. "Our take at the commission was that they wanted to put a Band-Aid on a wound instead of lacerating, dealing with it, and operating on it," the commissioner added.

The British High Commission has said it was looking into the allegations. Kenyan authorities have never responded to the allegations.

The most well-known case is that of Agnes Wanjiru, who was killed in 2012 after an evening in the company of British soldiers. An inquest in 2019 concluded that Wanjiru was murdered by British soldiers, but no suspect has been charged. A public hearing by the Kenyan parliament's defense committee, which started in May, has revived investigations.

Kubai said he hopes to provide Kenyan children of British soldiers a much-needed sense of identity.

"What we are bringing in the UK court is not just the issue of rape; it is the issue of these children who happen to be prisoners of an identity they did not choose for themselves," he said.

TVAW Members Visit Spiritual Fathers Of Kenya

During our recent visit to Kenya in preparation for the 2024 the Voice Achievers award which took place in Nairobi, Kenya, we paid courtesy visit to some of the Christian Spiritual fathers of Kenya. First place of call was Dr. Archbishop Jerry Kibarabara, a well-known and travelled man of God in Kenya. In March 2024, he celebrated 60 years of full time ministry reaching millions of souls across Kenya, Africa and the world in general. Although advanced in age but he is still very active preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Over a cup of tea, he received us and shared his experience, particularly with Nigerian missionaries, as he started the Men's Business Fellowship in Nigeria with spiritual giants of the land. Pastor Elvis Iruh introduced members of his team, which included Evangelist Vince Prince, who had arranged for the meeting even on short notice; Madam Ifiyenwa Ezeagabu of the Voice News Magazine; Lady Aminna Jarju, a fashion designer from the Gambia; and Dennis, our cameraman. Pastor Iruh recalled his first encounter with the Archbishop during his missionary sojourn in Kenya and how the Archbishop had accompanied him to the Minister of Integration, the late Otieno Kajwang, to



Dr. Jerry Kibarabara with Pastor Elvis Iruh, Ifiyenwa Ezeagabu and Evangelist Vin Prince Obonyo

secure a resident permit for Pastor Iruh and his family, which allowed them to stay in Kenya from 2005 to 2011. "Those experiences remained valuable to me till this day," Pastor Elvis Iruh remarked.

Archbishop Kibarabara said that it has always been a joy for him to serve foreigners in his country, and many times he had helped Nigerian pastors who had difficulties or challenges in Kenya, so it was his nature. He welcomed the team and also experienced his encouragement through Pastor

Iruh's telephone call to him that the event was going to be held in Kenya. "I wasn't sure if I should advise you not to come because we had a very difficult two months, and it didn't look possible to hold such an event in Kenya, but I must say Pastor Iruh is a man of faith. I am glad you are here, and I pray for the success of the event".

He accepted his nomination to be recognized and promised to attend. (He did attend the award ceremony with his congregation in Nairobi, Kenya.)

The same day, we visited Bishop Dr. Pius Muiru and his wife, Rev. Ambassador Lucy Muiru. In fact, they were the first spiritual father and mother of the land who gave Pastor Iruh their platform to preach the gospel during their lunch hour service and later on a Sunday morning



From left is Aminna Jarju, Evangelist Vin Prince Obonyo, Dr. Jerry Kibarabara, Pastor Elvis Iruh and Ifiyenwa Ezeagabu



Dr. Pius Muiru and Mama Muiru gave a tasteful lunch

Pastor Iruh was invited to minister to the church before he returned back to the Netherlands, and twice he was able to bless the church. In return, he was well appreciated.

Both spiritual leaders were among the over 30 persons recognized at the 2024 Voice Achievers Award, the 13th edition, and on the occasion of the Voice News Magazine 25th anniversary. They both prayed for the team and the success of the event as well as the publication. To their words, the ceremony went well without any disturbance.

I say ongiri to all who made Kenya memorable for us.



service at Maximum Miracle Center, Odeon Cinema, Nairobi, a place where great men and women of God have been raised for the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

They received us very well and hosted us to a five-star lunch prepared by their in-house chef from Nigeria. We did a recap and reconnection of our meeting during Pastor Iruh's stay in Kenya. They accepted their award nomination and promised to mobilize the church to attend and gave it live stream coverage through their satellite television.



From left is Aminna Jarju, Evangelist Vin Prince Obonyo, Bishop Dr. Pius Muiru, Rev. Lucy Muiru, Pastor Elvis Iruh and Ifiyenwa Ezeagabu

Lookman Wins Africa 2024 Best Footballer Award For Africa

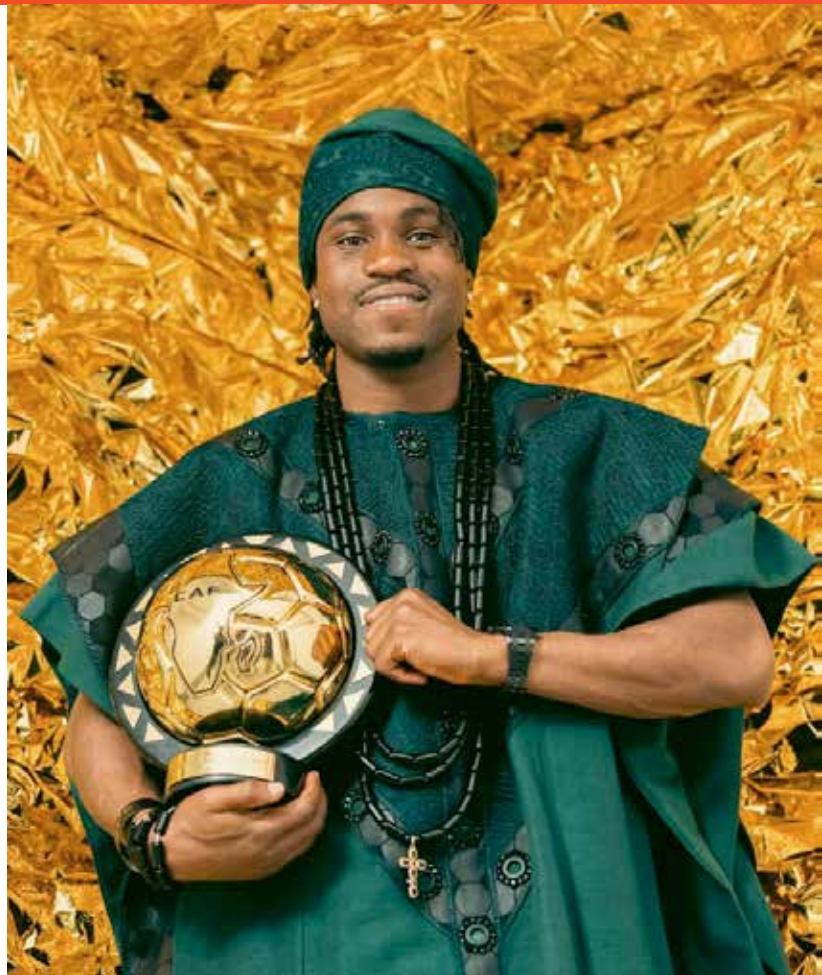
Super Eagles forward Ademola Lookman has finally been crowned the “African Footballer of the Year Award Winner for 2024. He received it from Confederation of African Football, CAF, after a long and intense growing anxiety by the talented footballer, his fans, the media and the football community globally. There were rumours of leaked voting result giving the award to another African player from Morocco.

The 27-year-old Atalanta FC of Italy “talisman” won the prestigious award at a very colourful award ceremony held last month at the Palais des Congrès in Marrakech Morocco. The Nigerian outstanding super star defeated tough competitors and fellow nominees such as top pre-award favourite, Achraf Hakimi of (Morocco/PSG), Simon Adingra, of (Ivory Coast/Brighton), Serhou Guirassy of (Guinea/Borussia Dortmund), and Ronwen Williams of (South Africa/Mamelodi Sundowns) to clinch the African most prestigious football title.

Lookman’s victory is so historical as he proudly wrote his name in gold among the celebrated iconic list of Nigerian African Best Footballer Award Winners since 1993, When Nigeria’s all time highest goal scoring legend Rashidi Yekini, first bagged the award. Other winners are Emmanuel Amunike (1994), Nwankwo Kanu (1996 and 1999), Victor Ikpeba (1997), and Victor Osimhen (2023). Noteworthy, with Lookman CAF award, Nigeria has become the biggest winner of the award on the African continent.



The mercurial forward who was a finalist at the last AFCON, gave Nigeria a back-to-back win of the award. He grandly took over from 2023 winner, Victor Osimhen, of Nigeria and Galatasaray of Turkey. He was gratefully handed the award trophy by the chief host of the award, Dr Patrice Motsepe,



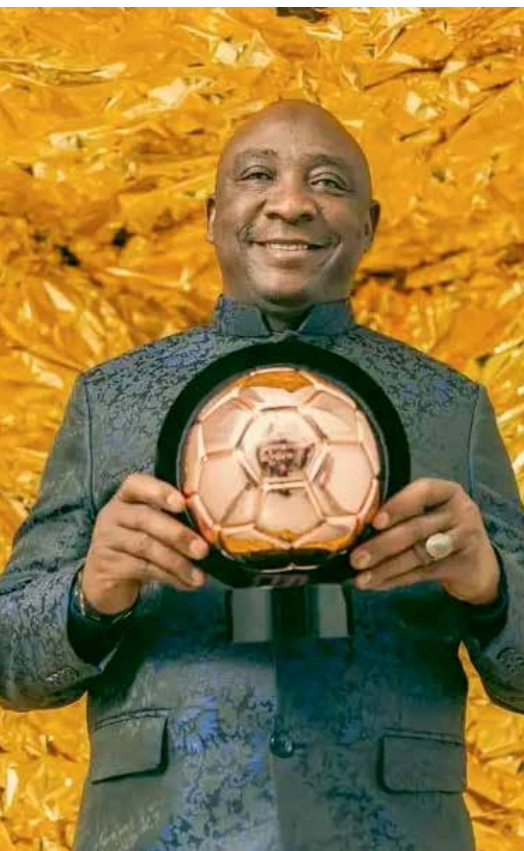
the CAF President and Special Guest of Honor, Gianni Infantino, the President of World football governing body, FIFA.

The Atalanta star-performer duly stood out for the award as he recommended a mega-successful season for his club and country. Notably, Lookman scored a first time stunning Europa final hat-trick for Atalanta in the Europa League final. In addition, the unstoppable attacker justified his esteemed position as one of African, Europe and Global top forwards with crucial goals on the global stage. This feat earned him an honourable 14th place in World Best Footballer Award, Ballon d’or early this year. The highest placing for Africa in this global reputable award.

The Complete List of CAF 2024 Award Winners:

1. Ademola Lookman - Men’s Best Player
2. Barbra Banda - Women’s Best Player
3. Emerse Faè - Men’s Best Coach
4. Lamia Boumedi - Women’s Best Coach
5. Ronwen Williams - Men’s Best Goalkeeper:
6. Chiamaka Nnadozie - Women’s Best Goalkeeper
7. Ronwen Williams - Inter-Club Player of the Year
8. Sanaa Mssoudy - Women’s Inter-Club Player of the Year.
9. Al Ahly FC- Men’s Club of the Year
10. TP Mazembe - Women’s Club of the Year
11. Ivory Coast - Men’s national team of the year
12. Nigeria - Women’s national team of the year
13. Lamine Camara - Men’s young player of the year
14. Doha El Madani- Women’s young player of the year

By ISAAC DANIEL



Hon. Oluwaseun Osiyemi Sponsors Football Tournament In Lagos State

The Honorable Commissioner of Transportation for Lagos State, Hon. Oluwaseun Osiyemi, organizes an annual football tournament for 8 local government areas of Lagos State, which involves legendary players and ex-international footballers still around the Lagos environs. Despite his very busy schedule, the Honorable Commissioner still remembers his old football teammates and remains a part of the All Stars Association, based in the Obanikoro area of Lagos State. He has annually sponsored a football tournament that is eligible to players aged 47 and above as his way of giving back to the community staying in contact with old football colleagues. This year's tournament took place at the CMS Grammar School sports ground at Bariga, Lagos. This tournament takes place at the end of each year to bring

together Lagos legends and ex-Nigerian international footballers. Mr. Osiyemi has done this over the years, rekindling his experience as a former banker with Skye Bank and Heritage Bank; he has participated as a footballer in the bankers' football competition for years. He is also a member

of the Obanikoro All Stars Association to date. In fact, when he left the banking sector, he joined politics but never left his football community far behind. He continues to organize

the annual end-of-the-year football tournament to encourage community bonding and togetherness. The end-of-year get-together would host a charity football match between ex-Nigerian internationals and Lagos Legends at Baptist Academy School at Obanikoro to honor Hon. Oluwaseun Osiyemi for his contributions to the development of communities by supporting their activities and bonding with old pals.

It would be recalled that after this year's event, the coach of the Lagos Legends, Mr. Eric Iruh, accompanied some other ex-Nigerian footballers and Legends to Ijebu to tour the homeland of Hon. Osiyemi's father, birthplace. The players on the trip included Henry Nwosu, Friday Ekpo, Waidi Akani, and Edema Benson, among others.

For the winner, second runners-up, and participating teams are rewarded with cash prizes and trophies. "He is magnanimous to organize this charitable tournament each year to reach his communities and keep the friendship bond with us all says Mr. Eric Iruh, who doubles as coach and player during the tournament. Congratulations to all the football enthusiasts who have supported the program.



NBG Sports Tournament Ends With Winners In Lagos

The finals of the Nigerian Bankers Games (NBG) for 2024 were played before the close of the year 2024, which includes other sports for more participation from other banks. Mr. Eric Iruh is a coach and captain player, as well as a stakeholder and Hall of Famer, having won the tournament five times as a coach and a captain player for his bank. This year he was also at hand to present medals to the winning and losing finalists of the tournament.

This year's edition included a female football tournament for the first time, and it was won by the First Bank female team, while the male tournament was won by Sterling Bank.

Overall, the sports events were won by WEMA Bank. The First Bank team won the most, and the most well-behaved support team in the tournament was there. There were cash prizes for the most-behaved support team, the highest goal scorer in the tournament, the best goalkeeper, the best defender, the best goal of the tournament, and the most valuable player.

Mr. Iruh thanked all the participating banks as well as the sponsors of the tournament for making another year a successful one and looked forward to the 2025 edition, which he promises will be bigger and better.



ATHLETICS

Winner Sifan Hassan Addresses The Netherlands With A Special Message: 'I Have Also Made Many Mistakes'



Sifan Hassan was named Sportswoman of the Year for the third time last month in the Netherlands. She was recently named World Athlete of the Year. She spoke to the press after the award ceremony saying, “suddenly I saw my finish on the screen, I was immediately nervous again.”

If you wish someone every prize and trophy on earth, it is Sifan Hassan (31). Just like in 2019 and 2021, the athlete was allowed to take home the big trophy. How special is this third time for her? “Yes, this is special and special. It is the end of the year, this is the best way to end it.”

In a few days it will be 2025, she says. For Sifan Hassan too, a historic year will come to an end. “I have worked really hard this year. Trained too hard, but everything for that one goal. I see my hard work in this prize.”

So exciting

It was right, based on the polls that Sportnieuws.nl held prior to the Sports Gala. How many athletes had come to tell her that personally tonight? “Yes, everyone. I was sitting very relaxed, chilling in the chair. Suddenly I see my finish on the screen. I was just immediately nervous again. It didn’t feel real. I have no words for it. It’s so exciting to see that marathon again.”

What would she change?

Now that she is once again the most important sportswoman in the Netherlands, she can also tell what she would like to change about the sport here. “My mission is to get a lot of children - and people in general - to move more. It doesn’t matter if they are old or children, boys or girls. Everyone should move more for a better and longer life.”

“Kids shouldn’t be afraid to make mistakes,” she continues.

“I want to show kids that they can try anything. If a mistake happens, you learn from it. You don’t have to be perfect. If you look at my career: I’ve won now, but I’ve made a lot of mistakes in my life. I just kept going. Always challenging yourself.”



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about Marriage



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by Elvis Iruh

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Tinubu Congratulates Lookman, Nnadozie, Super Falcons On CAF Awards

President Bola Tinubu has congratulated Super Eagles forward Ademola Lookman on winning the 2024 CAF Men's African Footballer of the Year.

According to a press statement signed and issued by Bayo Onanuga, Special Adviser to the President on information and Strategy, Tinubu also hails Super Falcons goalkeeper Chiamaka Nnadozie for clinching the CAF Women's Goalkeeper of the Year award and the Super Falcons for being named the Women's



National Team of the Year.

The awards were announced Monday night at the Palais des Congrès in Marrakech, Morocco.

Onanuga said: "The President joins millions of Nigerians in celebrating these athletes, describing them as worthy ambassadors for showcasing their talent and bringing honour to the country on the continental and world stage".

"The President believes that this recognition by Africa's highest football authority will inspire other upcoming athletes to remain steadfast in pursuing their dreams", Onanuga said.

"He affirms that their determination, discipline and confidence underscore the administration's resolve to build a better Nigeria where everyone thrives and succeeds.

"These athletes embody the essential Nigerian Spirit. They signpost the best in us as a nation. Let no one ever write us off. I am incredibly proud of them.

"Thank you for making Nigeria proud and keeping our flag flying.

"Thank you for winning medals for Nigeria both at home and abroad. You will win more in the future," the President said.

By ISAAC DANIEL



Éric Chelle, Appointed Nigeria's National Team Chief Coach

The Executive Committee of the Nigeria Football Federation has endorsed the recommendation of its Technical and Development Sub-Committee for the appointment of Mr. Éric Sékou Chelle as Head Coach of Nigeria's senior men national football team, Super Eagles.

At its meeting held in Abuja on Thursday, 2nd January 2025, the NFF Technical and Development Sub-Committee had recommended the appointment of former Coach of the senior men national team of Mali as the new Head Coach of



the Super Eagles. This recommendation was on Tuesday, 7th January endorsed by the NFF Executive Committee. Chelle, who won five caps for the Aiglons of Mali and coached clubs such as GS Consolat, FC Martigues, Boulogne and MC Oran, has been Head Coach of the Aiglons since 2022.

At the 2023 Africa Cup of Nations finals in Cote d'Ivoire, Chelle's Mali came very close to a place in the semi-finals, losing to hosts and eventual winners Cote d'Ivoire 2-1 after extra time, after leading by a lone goal until the final

minute of regulation time.

The 47-year-old featured for Martigues, Valenciennes, Lens, Istres and Chamois Niortais in France during his playing career.

His appointment is with immediate effect, and he has the responsibility of guiding the Super Eagles to earn a ticket to the 2026 FIFA World Cup finals, with the next round of matches (Matchdays 5 & 6) taking place in March.

By ISAAC DANIEL

Mahama Will Bring Positive Change To Ghana -President Tinubu

Nigeria's President His Excellency, President Bola Tinubu, has remarked that the new President of Ghana, President John Mahama, will bring positive change to Ghana.

President Tinubu, who was the special guest of honour at the swearing in ceremony of President John Dramani Mahama in Accra, Ghana, made statement in his address at the event yesterday. Speaking at the historic occasion, President Tinubu said that "It is always good when a friend and brother can visit the home of a close neighbour to celebrate his success and progress with him.

"We celebrate African Democracy today as Ghana and her beloved people mark the transition from one democratic government to another. This moment does more than symbolise another milestone in the evolution of Ghanaian democratic society. It lays to bed the question of whether Ghana and Africa are capable of democratic and productive endeavours. Ghana has answered that question resoundingly. It is time that Africa's critics stop forgetting the strides your nation, Nigeria and others have made by continuing to ask us to prove ourselves. We have nothing to prove to anyone except ourselves. We have found the critical path to our success. We shall lift our nations out of poverty and build a resilient economy at our own pace.

He added that he came to the event not only as the President of Nigeria but also as an African in resolute support for Ghana and her people. "This moment is a source of pride and honour for you, the entire Continent, and its Diaspora

"The sun is out, and the sky says daylight, but I see today a Black star rising high in the African sky. This black star shines over this nation, and its rays spread across this Continent with a sense of shared history, hope, compassion, unity, and devotion to our common welfare.

"While others may seek to demean Africa and keep brother pitted against brother, that shining star reminds us of who we are. Better yet, it reminds us of who we can be. That star means that we shall always strive to work together. Even when we disagree, we shall dialogue and discuss until we reach an agreement. Never, never shall we harm others and never allow any outsider to hurt us or disrupt the unity for which so many of our heroes gave their sweat, blood, and very lives to achieve.

"The spirit of Ghana's first President, Osagyefo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, is here today, lifting that star higher and higher. Just as Ghana draws inspiration and a well of strength from Kwame

Nkrumah and many of its past leaders, Nigeria similarly draws inspiration from its founding leaders who not only fought for her independence but also cherished the close relationship between our two nations.

"May we always walk in the way and the spirit of these enlightened leaders.

"Ghana is in harmony with that spirit, and President John Mahama's inauguration today reflects that.

The Nigerian President admonished Ghanaians that their new president is a man of patriotic vision and substance. "He loves his nation and its people to the core. He believes that your nation has a

mission and intends for you all to fulfil it. No one can ask more of a leader than that.

"President John Mahama and I share a deep friendship. My dear brother, I am here to work with you. You know you can count on Nigeria's support and goodwill whenever needed. We are your brothers and sisters. The bond is strong and cannot be broken", he assured President Mahama of his support.

He also prayed for President Mahama's successful tenure. "May your administration be a profound success and progress for you, Ghanaians, and our entire region.

"I am confident that the new government, under the leadership of President John Mahama, will work with Nigeria to strengthen this powerful bond, leading to greater shared prosperity for our people. I have no doubt that your administration will bring about positive change and progress.

"Your ascension to power should also mark a new and invigorated momentum

in pursuing subregional integration and progress. With laser focus, we can tackle our people's most pressing concerns: poverty, youth unemployment, instability, insurgency, and many other problems hampering our desired progress.

"May Ghana's democracy continue to grow stronger. May progress and prosperity be your portion. Let us all look forward to a future filled with hope, opportunity, and prosperity.

"God bless Ghana and its Beloved People. God bless Nigeria and its Beloved People

"God bless ECOWAS

God bless our Beloved Africa.

I thank you for your kind attention", President Tinubu concluded.

By ISAAC DANIEL



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