

JUNE 27 - 28, 2026



Vol. 21, Iss. 1207

Life

*Beyond
the pitch!*

African fashion brands
at the World Cup

DRESS SMARTER:
10 PIECES EVERY STYLISH
WOMAN NEEDS



Your Guide:

Where to go this
weekend and beyond



Uche Jombo:
Between image and identity



FEATURED



4

COVER

Uche Jombo...
Between image and identity



10

GUARDIAN WOMAN

SheCan 7.0 calls for women to
lead, build and thrive



6

GUARDIAN GUIDES

So many reasons to step out:
your weekend guide



15

FEATURE

Saving culture of reading in a
fast-paced digital world

THIS ISSUE

STYLE

One woman, many lives: Building a wardrobe that works

7

ART

Yago Sanchez's The Precision of Light in the Dark captivates Nigeria

8

MARIE CLARIE

New hair, new me — these hairstyles can help you get your spark back after a breakup

9

+ One fashion brand to know from every African country at the World Cup

GUARDIAN WOMAN

Delsu's Joyce Obarakpor gets Live It On Campus prize

10

GUARDIAN ANGELS

Seyi Oluyole: Being gifted yet indigent inspired Dream Catchers

11

+ Cancer survivor builds wellness brand from personal healing journey

TRAVEL

Exploring Idanre's Ancient Hilltop City

12

LIVING

Simple ways to make your bathroom look more luxurious

13

COLUMN

Your relationship is only as strong as your identity

14

+ Ask Life's Big Sister

EDITORIAL TEAM

Creators

Toke Alex Ibru, *Chief Executive Officer*

Anita Athena Ibru, *Chief Strategy Officer (Global)*

Editor, Guardian Woman

Ijeoma Thomas-Odia (07033422652)

Contributors

Musa Adekunle, Ese Oghenetega, Tobi Awodipe, Ashim Ojeh, Oluwagbemisola Sadare, Chidinma Enweani, Dolly Ohanyere, Geraldine Akutu,

Design/Graphics

Mayowa Iyiola

Marketing/Adverts/Partnerships

Cyril Anyika (08030567059)

Blessing Oma (07088373524)

Angela Ifediorah (08165066434)

Olayinka Bolarinwa (08086951129)

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Guardian talks

The week in 5 MINUTES

THE NUTMEG

THE INSIGHT

THE PROCESS

15?

INSIDE STUFF

TECH TALKS

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Uche Jombo:

Between image and identity

by Musa Adekunle



Most people know Uche Jombo as one of Nollywood's most familiar faces. They know the films, the characters, the long career and the place she occupies in an industry she helped build.

But behind the screen is a woman who has spent the last decade doing quieter work. She has been investing, producing, and mentoring young filmmakers through Uche Jombo Studios and learning what it takes to build a career that can survive beyond fame.

Now, with *Blood Sisters* and *On Different Grounds*, the conversation around her has become louder again. Some call it a comeback. For Jombo, that word misses the point. She insists she never left, and the projects are there as proof.

Her story is not just about returning to the spotlight. It is about longevity, intention and the discipline of staying present even when the industry is looking elsewhere.

Speaking exclusively with *Guardian Life*, Uche Jombo reflects on the comeback narrative she rejects, the cost

“The industry rewards visibility above almost everything else.”

— Uche Jombo

of building an industry, what fame revealed about herself, why veterans deserve more than applause, and the legacy she hopes will outlive every role she has played.

People call this a “comeback,” but you never stopped working. What do you think people missed about your journey, and why do you think the industry is paying attention again now?

For one, the word “comeback” always makes me smile a little, because it implies I went somewhere. As I have previously said and you rightly framed, I never left nor stopped working. There are projects that are proof.

What people missed, I think, is that I spent a significant part of the last decade doing something that doesn't always make the headlines: building. I was investing in projects, learning the business side of this industry properly, understanding what sustainable creative work actually looks like, and mentoring via my Uche Jombo Studios, the next generation of Nollywood storytellers.

The current attention associated with my partnership with Guguru Talents Management, *Blood Sisters*, and *On Different Grounds* isn't really about rediscovery. I think it's about the fact that my work speaks differently when you're operating from a place of intention rather than survival. And, like a radiant sun, such work is impossible to miss or ignore.

NEED TO KNOW

Uche Jombo has spent more than 25 years shaping Nollywood as an actress, screenwriter, producer and director.

She made her acting debut in *Visa to Hell* in 1999 and has since appeared in more than 250 films, becoming one of the industry's most recognisable faces. In 2008, she launched Uche Jombo Studios, expanding into film production and later making her directing debut in 2015.

She has written and produced several acclaimed films, including *Games Men Play*, *Lies Men Tell*, *Holding Hope* and *Damage*, the latter tackling the issue of domestic violence.

Her recent credits include Netflix's *Blood Sisters 2* and the cinema release *On Different Grounds*, reinforcing her staying power across multiple generations of Nollywood audiences.

Have you ever felt that Nollywood takes its veterans for granted until they become impossible to ignore? Honestly? Yes. And I say that without bitterness, because I think it's less about malice and more about how the industry is structured. Nollywood has always been driven by novelty - the next face, the next story, and the next trend. This isn't an indictment of the industry structure but a contextual analysis. This pattern has transported the industry to its current junction. But, as years of deep observation have shown, that isn't necessarily a sustainable industry practice.

Nollywood veterans don't fit neatly into that constantly-moving-Nollywood cycle unless they keep reinventing themselves loudly enough to be seen. The industry rewards visibility above almost everything else. But I've learned not to let that determine my sense of worth. It's important to say that the pioneering filmmakers who built this industry with their bare hands deserve more than occasional recognition when it becomes convenient.

What the AMVCA does, in giving flowers to veterans while they're alive, is a brilliant and commendable initiative. It needs to be followed up with sustainable financial support so that these veterans can survive after exiting the stage.

After all these years, what is the biggest lesson fame has taught you that success never could?

Fame teaches you who you are when nobody is watching. Success, especially early success, is intoxicating: it tells you that you matter, that you're on the right path. But fame strips that away after a while. It shows you the gap between the person people project onto you and the person you actually have to go home to at night.

For me, one of the biggest lessons is learning to curate and carve out an identity that lives outside other people's perception of you. I had to build a sense of self that didn't need validation from an audience to stay intact. That's not something any amount of professional achievement could have taught me.

What is one thing about today's Nollywood that genuinely worries you?

The pace. I worry that we are producing so much content so quickly that we're not leaving room for the work to breathe or for the people making it to breathe. There's enormous pressure on filmmakers and actors to be constantly visible, constantly releasing, and constantly trending, and what gets lost in that is craft. Depth. The kind of storytelling that stays with you.

Some of the films that defined Nollywood for audiences across Africa and the diaspora were made slowly and deliberately. I worry that in chasing volume, we're trading away the thing that made people fall in love with us in the first place.

“In chasing volume, we're losing what made people love Nollywood.”

— Uche Jombo

There have been conversations about Nollywood veterans not receiving royalties for classic films made in the early days. If you could change that, what would you advise Nollywood veterans to do differently to avoid the same issues recurring?

The first thing I'd say is understand your contracts before you sign them. I know that sounds simple, but in the early days of Nollywood, so many of us were just grateful for the opportunity. We weren't asking questions about ownership, licensing, or what

“We built an industry worth billions, yet many veterans saw nothing from it.”

— Uche Jombo



happened to the rights after a film was sold. That naivety cost a generation of performers enormously.

The work we did built an industry worth billions today, and too many of the people who built it have seen nothing from that value creation.

Going forward, the advice is to get proper legal representation not just any lawyer, but someone who understands entertainment law specifically. Collective advocacy matters too. The veterans need to be organised, not just individually vocal. There's also a responsibility on the newer generation to not repeat the same mistakes to normalise conversations about intellectual property, residuals, and fair compensation before they become grievances. The industry is more professionalised now than it was. Use that. Push for structures that protect



you, because no one else will do it for you.

When people look back on your career, what do you hope they remember beyond the films?

I hope they remember that I was consistent. I showed up even when the industry wasn't looking; I was still in the room, still creating, still fighting for stories that reflected something true about who we are as people.

I also hope they remember me as someone who used whatever platform I had to ask harder questions about how this industry treats the people inside it especially the women.

Beyond the roles and the box office numbers, I want the legacy to be that I took this work seriously and that it mattered.

So many reasons to step out: your weekend guide

by Musa Adekunle

This weekend is packed with activities, but you do not need to overthink your plans. From pop-ups and parties to markets and social experiences, here is our guide to where to go and how to make the most of your weekend.



Gather Market

Gather Market brings together beauty, wellness, skincare, body care and food brands in one space, giving visitors the chance to discover new products, shop local and enjoy a laid-back community atmosphere.

27 to 28 June 2026 | Lagos Encourage Park, Osborne Road, Ikoyi, Lagos



Rewind: The Throwback Experience

Take a trip back to the 90s and 2000s at this nostalgia-driven party packed with classic hits and familiar favourites. Expect a crowd ready to sing along, dance and relive some of the biggest moments from two unforgettable decades of music.

27 June 2026 | Mercury Lagos



Àsìkò Archive Pop-Up

Fashion lovers and vintage enthusiasts can explore a curated selection of authentic designer bags at this one-day pop-up. It is an opportunity to discover rare finds, timeless accessories and pieces with stories behind them.

27 June 2026 | 59 Raymond Njoku Street, Ikoyi, Lagos



Lagos Pop-Up

From fashion and arts to food and everyday essentials, Lagos Pop-Up offers a marketplace filled with local brands and creative entrepreneurs. Visitors can shop, discover emerging businesses and enjoy special deals throughout the day.

27 June 2026 | 5 Raymond Njoku Street, Ikoyi, Lagos



Millennial Party

Designed for lovers of old-school hits and good vibes, this party combines music, games and a social atmosphere. Expect DJs, singalong moments and a crowd looking to relive some of the sounds that defined an era.

27 June 2026 | Barnanas Lounge, CMD Road, Magodo, Lagos



Cruise Festival: Wonderland Edition

Music, games and immersive experiences come together at this themed festival inspired by fantasy and nightlife culture. Guests can expect DJs, entertainment and a vibrant atmosphere designed for a night of fun and socialising.

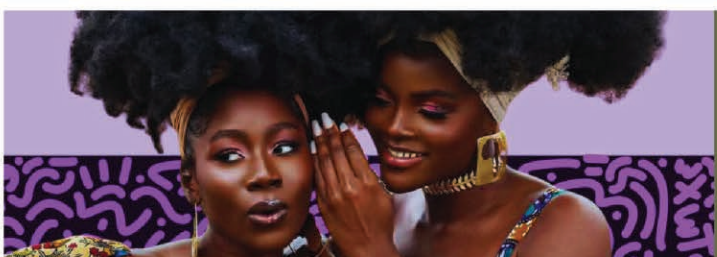
27 June 2026 | Eridan Space, Ikeja, Lagos



Lagos Trivia Night

Test your knowledge and compete with fellow trivia lovers at this interactive quiz experience. Whether attending with friends or joining a team on the spot, expect laughter, friendly competition and plenty of surprising questions.

28 June 2026 | Victoria Island, Lagos



The Lagos Tech Owambé

Technology meets culture at this gathering designed for founders, creators, professionals and tech enthusiasts. Alongside networking opportunities, attendees can enjoy games, giveaways, live entertainment and a distinctly Nigerian twist on the tech event format.

28 June 2026 | Gameland, Lekki, Lagos

Yago Sanchez's *The Precision of Light in the Dark* captivates Nigeria

by Tobi Awodipe

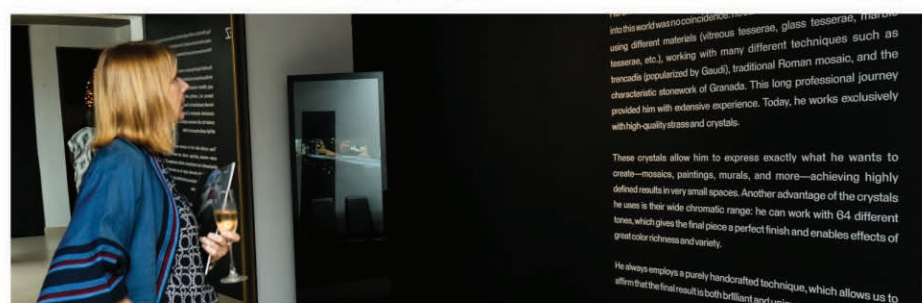


Yago Sánchez is a man with a deep interest in art that soon became a passion.

His artistic beginning into this world was through using different materials (vitreous tesserae, etc.), and the trencadís (popularized by Gaudí) provided him with the tools to create with high-quality stones.

These crystals allow him to create—mosaics, paintings, murals, and more—achieving highly defined results in very small spaces. Another advantage of the crystals he uses is their wide chromatic range: he can work with 64 different tones, which gives the final piece a perfect finish and enables effects of great color richness and variety.

He always employs a purely handcrafted technique, which allows us to affirm that the final result is both brilliant and unique.



From June 17-20, Spanish artist Yago Sanchez held Lagos and Nigeria spellbound with his crystal mosaic works, in an immersive exhibition titled *The Precision of Light in the Dark*.

The first of its kind in Nigeria, the exhibition held at Integra Art Space in Lekki Phase 1, Lagos.

Taking viewers into a deeply immersive experience that challenges perception, at close range, each artwork breaks into hundreds of crystal fragments—vitreous tesserae, glass, and marble—meticulously assembled.

From a distance, the sparkly fragments revealed faces, figures and forms, exploring the relationship between detail and perspective, clarity and understanding.

Employing a fusion of techniques, including traditional Roman mosaic, the trencadís method popularised by Gaudí and Granada's distinctive stone craft, the artworks on display looked both timeless and contemporary at the same time.

As light interacts with the surfaces throughout the day, the pieces shift in appearance, offering a dynamic visual experience. For Lagos audiences, this marks a rare introduction to a unique artistic language not commonly seen in the city's gallery circuit.

Expressing excitement at the warm and eager reception for the first time, Sanchez traced the origins of his art from using mosaics as a living art form before evolving into his present form.

With 60 artworks on display over the four days, he disclosed that many art lovers commissioned portraits, which he said made up a good part of the exhibition.

"My style of art is new here in Nigeria,

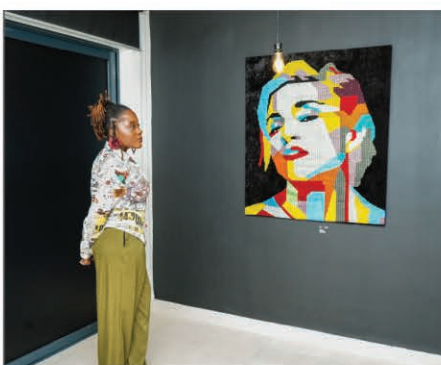
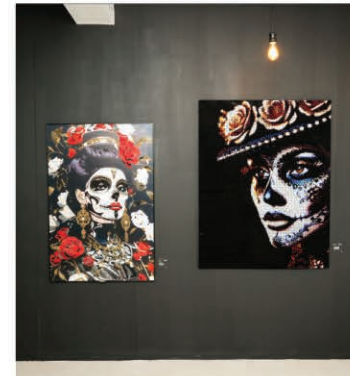
and I am happy to share it with the art community and lovers of art. The theme is well reflected in all the works. The glittering stones form an intricate pattern on pitch-black background, bringing light, glamour and beauty to the darkness."

Exhibition curator, Lola Bashua, described the process as stimulating, exciting and challenging but with fruitful and rewarding results. "I had a clear vision of how I wanted to present Yago's art because it is clearly bold and unique, and that is how I want viewers to experience it. The works speak for themselves, and I am happy everything came together and represented the vision we imagined for it," she said.

Representing Uno Telos Group, a Lagos-based technology and multi-systems integration company operating across nine African markets since 2004 and the exhibition's sponsor, Obidinma Egbokwu, recounted how Sanchez's art was brought to life in Lagos.

"The CEO of Uno Telos Group, Jude Egbokwu, has collected many pieces from Sanchez over the years and thought it important for Nigerians to also enjoy and experience his unique art. Yago's art is not the usual kind we see around us. It involves using crystals to form beautiful and intricate forms, which is not often seen. It also teaches us that art has no boundaries because anyone from anywhere in the world can enjoy art."

Her dream, she said, is to see cross-cultural collaborations of art in all forms for people to enjoy. "This exhibition was well thought of; from the lighting to the artworks on display, the band and everything involved in it. It is clear



this exhibition was put together with precision and excellence, and this is the kind of excellence I want to see in all Nigerian exhibitions in the future."

The exhibition also underscored a deeper connection between Spanish

craft heritage and the evolving scale of contemporary African art, revealing shared histories and creative intersections.

For Sanchez, Nigeria has found a home in his heart, and he vowed to come back, sooner rather than later.

One woman, many lives:

Building a wardrobe that works

by Ese Oghenetega

As one who desires to slay all the time, you must consider what's best for every occasion. Check out some ways you can build a stylish wardrobe that keeps you up to date with fashion trends.

1. Perfect corporate outfits

To look like a boss chic, your wardrobe should contain corporate outfits made with lightweight fabrics perfectly tailored to highlight your beauty and define your personality.

2. Religious attire

If you attend religious gatherings, your wardrobe should have some nice attires that cover every sensitive part of your body. You can add some sophistication to your designs to exude creativity.

3. Owambe looks

No wardrobe is complete without rich Ankara and lace. The latest trend has dresses well designed with beads, which gives a resplendent look and turns heads at owambes.

4. Casual slay outfits

This kind of attire does not need any form of sophistication. For regular hangouts with friends, let your wardrobe have some short dresses that keep you simple and gorgeous.

5. Quality fabrics

Regardless of the occasion you are turning

up at, your wardrobe should not lack quality fabrics. It helps to maintain your personal style wherever you are found.

6. Classy accessories

To brighten your appearance, you need classy accessories. Get jewellery and other accessories that spice up your look and make you the cynosure of all eyes at events.

7. Invest in trendy shoes

The kind of shoes you wear shows how much of a fashionista you are. Stay trendy with the latest designs and make your wardrobe come alive.

8. Have multiple colours

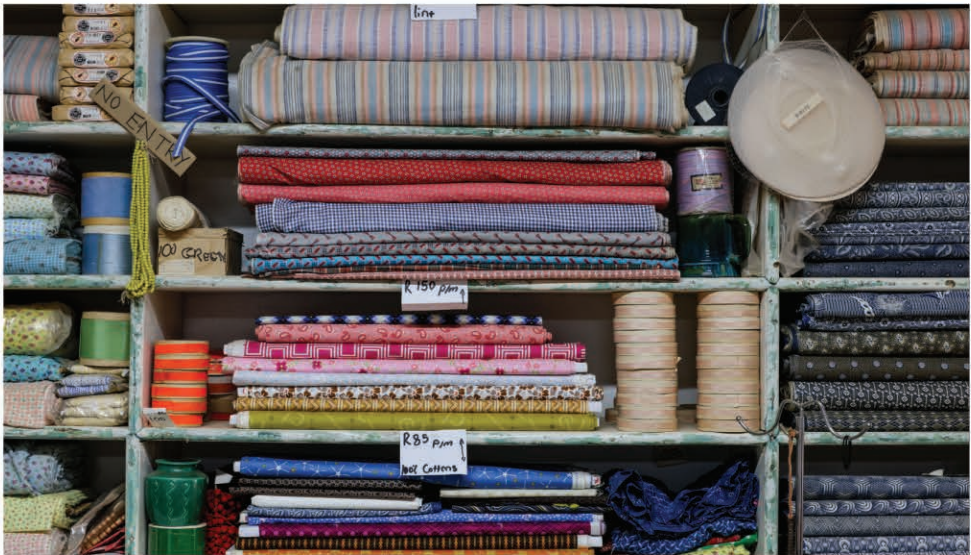
It is advisable to have different colours of outfits and accessories to fit any occasion that calls for a specific colour and dress code. This helps to prevent any unplanned expenditure.

9. Blend colours creatively

To stand out in any event, your colour combination must be top-notch. This can be made possible if you stock your wardrobe with colours that blend perfectly.

10. Classy handbags

Handbags are timeless fashion pieces that showcase a lady's style. Spice up your wardrobe with multiple designs and sizes that offer you options when you need to rock them.



BEAUTY

New hair, new me — these hairstyles can help you get your spark back after a breakup

by Ashim Ojeh

Breakups are tough, especially when they involve someone you once imagined a future with. While some endings are amicable, many leave people feeling lost and craving change. That's often where post-breakup hair transformations come in — from the big chop to breakup bangs. For some, it's about reclaiming control when life feels uncertain; for others, it's a symbolic fresh start and a way of stepping into a new chapter.

So, if you're nursing a broken heart and considering a dramatic hair change, these styles might offer some inspiration. Not because you have anything to prove to your ex, but because doing something for yourself can be a powerful way to begin again. This moment is about you, your healing, and how you choose to welcome your next era.

Break up bangs 2.0

You definitely want to spice things up, and what better way to do that than with beaded bangs? There's a plethora of ways you could style your bangs, but the beads make all the difference. Make sure you go

all out with your selection. Then you can have your breakup bangs after all, without the chop, of course.

Butterfly wing hair

We're all for the whimsy in this new era, so a butterfly-winged hairstyle is a good way to go. Think of it as you flying whimsically into a new you (it helps better if you imagine yourself as an actual fairy).

Koroba braids

Think of it as rolling up whatever attachment you have left for your previous partner and welcome a new era. Also, Koroba is just the cutest style ever, so you'll look fab and be ready to go regardless.

Faux locs

Getting real locs might be a big commitment right now, and we don't want to be getting into one of those again this early. So instead, faux locs make for the perfect in-between. You still get the look, the feel, and that instant switch-up in your appearance, without the permanence.



Bantu knots

Considering a big transformation? Bantu knots are a strong place to start. You can wear them on natural hair or with braids, depending on the look you're going for. The way they sit on the head frames the face beautifully, giving an instant lift and glow that feels just right for a fresh start. Layered braids with beads

The key here is to use as many and as colourful beads as you can. If there's one thing that will lift your mood, it's the sound

of beads clinking as you move through your day. Also, between the compliments and the attention your hair will be getting, you'll be too busy enjoying your new look to dwell on anything else.

Bubble braids

Another style for when you're feeling down is bubble braids. I promise you, you'll be flashing yourself a smile in the mirror once you do this style.

FASHION

One fashion brand to know from every African country at the World Cup

by Ashim Ojeh



We often say African fashion is the future, and with Africa taking centre stage at the 2026 FIFA World Cup, the world is paying closer attention. The tournament's expanded 48-team format has allowed a record 10 African nations to qualify, creating unprecedented visibility for the continent.

As teams like Côte d'Ivoire, Senegal, and DR Congo have captured global attention, interest has extended beyond football to the fashion, creativity, and culture they represent. To celebrate both Africa's sporting success and its thriving fashion industry, we've rounded up standout fashion brands from each of the African countries competing in this year's World Cup.

South Africa - Thebe Magugu

Founded in Johannesburg by Thebe Magugu, the eponymous brand is known for its sharp tailoring, architectural silhouettes, and storytelling-driven designs that explore South African history, culture, and identity. In 2019, Magugu became the first African designer to win the LVMH Prize.

Senegal - Algueye Dakar

Founded in 2012 by creative director Abdou Lahad Gueye, Algueye Dakar is known for its contemporary take on Senegalese fashion. The brand reimagines traditional techniques, fabrics, and signature prints through a modern lens, creating distinctive menswear and womenswear that celebrate

Senegal's rich cultural identity.

Ghana - Christie Brown

Founded in Accra in 2008 by Aisha Ayensu, Christie Brown is a luxury fashion brand known for redefining modern African femininity. Loved for its signature corsetry, dramatic silhouettes, tailored shirt dresses, and innovative denim styling, the brand incorporates authentic Kente weaves, hand embroidery, and African wax prints.

DR Congo - Hanifa

Hanifa is a Congolese-American fashion brand founded by designer Anifa Mvuemba in 2012. The brand is known for its focus on elegance, feminine cuts, and inclusivity, with sizing ranging from XXS to 3XL. It also features innovative knitwear designed to celebrate and flatter women's natural curves.

Morocco - Maison Sara Chraïbi

Architect-turned-designer Sara Chraïbi sits at the helm of Maison Sara Chraïbi, a luxury fashion house based in Morocco. The brand reflects her architectural background by blending geometric shapes with North African design traditions, combining Moroccan cuts with red-carpet-ready designs, and using fluid fabrics like silk, organza, and jersey alongside more structured materials.

Cape Verde - Ângela Brito

Ângela Brito is an award-winning fashion designer from Cape Verde. She founded her eponymous brand in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Her work blends her African roots with a clean, minimalist, and modern style. She made history as the first Black woman to present a collection at São Paulo Fashion Week (SPFW).

Côte d'Ivoire - Loza Maléombho

Loza Maléombho is an Ivorian-American fashion designer known for blending West African style with modern, experimental fashion. In Côte d'Ivoire, Maléombho works closely with local artisans, including weavers, shoemakers, and bronze makers, to create her pieces. Her work gained global attention after being featured by Solange Knowles and when Beyoncé wore her designs in the 2016 Formation music video.

Tunisia - Ali Karoui Couture

Ali Karoui Coutures is a luxury fashion house founded by Tunisian fashion designer Ali Karoui. Today, the brand operates out of the UAE, and Karoui's atelier strives to preserve and promote the beauty of Tunisian design. The main forte of the brand is glamorous, red-carpet evening gowns. His designs often feature feminine silhouettes, detailed embroidery, and rich embellishments like crystals, tulle, sequins, and feathers.

Egypt - Kojak Studio

In 2014, Mohanad Kojak launched Kojak Studio, an Egyptian high-fashion brand. Based in Cairo, the brand is known for blending couture, ready-to-wear, and theatrical costume drama elements.

SheCan 7.0 calls for women to lead, build and thrive

by Oluwagbemisola Sadare

Thousands of women gathered in Lagos last week with a shared determination to expand their horizons, challenge limitations, and redefine success on their own terms.

At the seventh edition of the SheCan Conference, held last weekend at the Balmoral Convention Centre, Federal Palace Hotel, Victoria Island, speakers from diverse sectors encouraged women to stop measuring themselves against others and instead focus on building purposeful, impactful lives.

With over 13,800 registrations for the annual gathering, which has become one of Nigeria's leading platforms for women's empowerment, leadership development, and economic advancement, the theme, She Can Do More, attracted entrepreneurs, professionals, policymakers, corporate executives, and emerging leaders seeking practical insights on personal growth, leadership, financial independence, and resilience.

Opening the conference, General Manager, Enterprise Sales at MTN, Febisola Oyeniyi, challenged women to rethink their understanding of excellence. Drawing from her experience in sales leadership, she described excellence not as perfection but as the commitment to doing things well and confidently acknowledging one's achievements.

Convener and Founder of SheCan Nigeria, Dr. Ezinne Ezeani, reiterated the organisation's mission to educate, empower, and transform women beyond the annual event. She highlighted the year-round initiatives of SheCan Nigeria, including mentorship programmes, business and career development opportunities, networking platforms, charity fairs, and skills acquisition projects designed to help women achieve sustainable growth. "SheCan Nigeria is not just an event; it is a movement," Ezeani said, noting that the organisation remains committed to helping women access knowledge, build meaningful connections, and unlock opportunities for greater impact.

For beauty entrepreneur and founder of House of Tara, Tara Durotoye, success begins with self-awareness rather than comparison. Encouraging women to define achievement according to their personal values and aspirations, she warned against measuring progress through the lens of others.

Her husband, leadership coach and business consultant, Fela Durotoye, challenged societal expectations that often tie a woman's success to the accomplishments of her spouse. He stressed that a woman's growth, purpose, and contributions should be recognised

independently.

Group Managing Director, Mojec Int'l Ltd., Chantelle Abdul urged participants to develop the ability to identify opportunities hidden within challenges. She encouraged women to look beyond immediate obstacles, explore emerging sectors such as agriculture, and cultivate a mindset that prioritises possibilities over limitations.

Chairman of Loft & Keys Advisory, Austin Albert, shared his personal journey from humble beginnings to business success, inspiring attendees with lessons on resilience, vision, and strategic decision-making. Speaking on wealth creation through real estate investment, he encouraged women to embrace financial education and position themselves for long-term prosperity.

Non-executive Director, WEMA Bank, Yewande Zaccheaus focused on the importance of clarity and intentionality, reminding women that not every opportunity deserves acceptance. According to her, understanding one's purpose is essential to making the right decisions.

Faith and resilience formed the core of COO and Executive Director, SAS Textiles Limited, Toyin Bakare's message as she encouraged women to remain steadfast through difficult seasons and continue building even when progress appears slow. One of the most engaging sessions of the day was a panel discussion featuring Managing Director of 7UP Bottling Company, Sari El-Khalil, alongside Abdul and Bakare. The conversation explored leadership, purpose, workplace culture, and personal growth. El-Khalil emphasised the importance of valuing people, noting that organisations thrive when individuals feel appreciated and empowered.

Joining virtually, President of the Africa CEO Club, Dr. Fatoumatta Gaye, reflected on her journey from modest beginnings to global leadership, reminding participants that circumstances at the start of life do not determine future outcomes.

Actor and filmmaker, Ruth Kadiri encouraged women to pursue their ambitions boldly, particularly in creative industries where unconventional ideas are often met with scepticism. She urged attendees to set ambitious goals and avoid limiting their futures to a single outcome.

Closing the conference, Business consultant, Olushola Olaleye reminded participants that success requires daily commitment and continuous effort,



Business Consultant, Fela Durotoye (left); Founder, House of Tara, Tara Durotoye; Founder, SheCan Nigeria and MD, Mbr Signature, Stanley Ezeani



A cross section of speakers at the conference

leaving the audience with a powerful reflection on consistency and discipline.

Beyond the conversations and networking opportunities, the conference also delivered tangible impact. Grants and financial empowerment support were provided to selected participants, while members of the deaf and sickle cell communities received financial assistance.

With two halls filled to capacity and a

programme packed with practical insights, inspiring stories, and opportunities for advancement, SheCan Conference 7.0 reinforced a message that resonated throughout the day: every woman has the potential to do more when she recognises her worth, embraces her purpose, and acts with courage.

As one participant summed it up: "I know I can be more."

Delsu's Joyce Obarakpor gets Live It On campus prize

by Oluwagbemisola Sadare

A 200-level Nursing Science student of Delta State University (DELSU), Joyce Obarakpor has emerged winner of a brand-new car at the MTN "Live It On Campus" experience held in her school. Joyce, who was visibly overwhelmed as she took the driver's seat of the car, said she attended the event with strong belief that she would be the winner, even before it began. "Before the event, I told my cousin she would be my passenger princess," she said, still in shock and excitement as she reflected on the moment.

For Joyce, the experience was more than just a campus event. She said she had already envisioned herself driving home in the car before arriving at the venue, even joking with friends that when she eventually got her car, it would be handled with care.

At the time, her friends laughed it off. But Joyce said she held on to that belief throughout the event, even as she sat among thousands of students gathered for the MTN campus experience, that blended entertainment, digital experiences,

learning opportunities and exclusive value offerings to create meaningful experiences that align with their interests, aspirations and lifestyle.

That belief eventually turned into reality when she was announced as the winner of the grand prize on the final day of the event, sending the crowd into loud celebration as she walked forward in shock. She described the moment as overwhelming, saying she struggled to process her name being called amid the excitement around her.

After the announcement, Joyce said her thoughts immediately went to her mother, who she described as her biggest support system. She spoke about the sacrifices her mother had made to ensure she and her siblings stayed in school and continued pursuing their dreams.

"My mum is going to be very excited because she has sacrificed so much to make sure my siblings and I go to school. I just want to say thank you to MTN. I'm very happy and very excited," she said.



Seyi Oluyole: Being gifted yet indigent inspired Dream Catchers

by Ijeoma Thomas-Odia

A social entrepreneur, filmmaker, and author, Seyi Oluyole is the Founder and Executive Director of Dream Nurture Initiative, a registered nonprofit organisation dedicated to transforming the lives of young people through education, creativity, and social impact. She is widely recognised as the Founder and Creative Director of Dream Catchers Academy, the organisation's flagship programme that uses the arts as a powerful tool for social change. In this interview, she speaks on her passion for quality education for young people, especially school aged children where she has impacted over 15,000 young people.

Looking back to the earliest days of Dream Catchers Academy, what was the specific spark that made you realise you couldn't look away from the plight of these children?

My major spark was living in the United States, working with at risk children and realising that back home, vulnerable children even had less opportunities. The kids in the states got free meals that would include veggies and fruits and they also got to work on personal computers and this was a public school in at risk areas. After about two years in the states, I felt unfulfilled and felt a tug and a call of God for me to relocate back home to continue my work with vulnerable children and families. This moved me to take the big decision of moving back home to Nigeria in 2014 and start Dream Catchers Academy. So, I could create opportunities to succeed for indigent children.

In a society that often overlooks children in vulnerable positions, how did you build a curriculum that prioritises their dignity and artistic expression as much as their formal education?

My desire to build an arts integrated curriculum stems from my personal experience of being gifted yet indigent - I saw firsthand the limitations that can come from lack of opportunities. Also, growing up I would have benefited from a programme like Dream Catchers Academy and unfortunately there wasn't anything like this back then, so I decided to fill a gap in the world. It has taken time; I am learning and growing every day.

Being a "mother" to many while navigating the complexities of running an NGO is a heavy mantle. How do you protect your own mental and emotional space to ensure you remain a pillar of strength for the Academy?

I have an amazing team, we work together towards a common goal and this definitely helps on days when I am feeling burnt out and need some space. I also practice yoga and I believe this helps tremendously.

Beyond the viral moments and the stage lights, what are the systemic challenges you face as a female founder in Nigeria's non-profit sector, and how have you navigated

those barriers to keep the doors open?

People often underestimate me, and a number of times, I have been called a Mr. Also, there's some trust issues that as a female founder, my strategy is not as strong and I say this because when we first started raising funds to build a home for 100 vulnerable girls and I made the first call on social media - there were people who commented that no one was going to give a woman that much money. Also, in terms of opportunities and nominations for awards or grants - people seem to overlook women in the nonprofit sector - almost like I am a woman so caring should come naturally to me so there's nothing significant happening.

How I have navigated the barrier is understanding that I don't need anyone's permission to shine. I believe in what I am doing and I have amazing people and partners who believe in me and the work I do.

We see the children dancing and thriving now, but the journey of healing is often quiet. Can you share a story of a specific child whose transformation through the Academy best illustrates the "Dream

Catchers" philosophy?

I will share the story of a young girl who was dropped off by her mother on a Saturday morning and I got a call on Monday that her mother had passed. This affected the child so much that for two full years, she refused to smile or be friendly.

We had to use some interventions and she got better. Now, she is in her final year in primary school (she came to us in Nursery 2), she is able to read and write fluently. She smiles more often, and it's always beautiful to see her dimples. She is more confident and is one of the students who has represented our school Dream Catchers Academy at international Cultural Exchange Programmes in France, Morocco and Spain.

Looking toward the next decade, how are you evolving the Academy's model to ensure that the impact remains sustainable and that the "Dream Catchers" blueprint can be replicated across the continent? Our work at DCA is built on an existing structure with standard operating procedures, proven systems and well qualified and experienced staff.

Cancer survivor builds wellness brand from personal healing journey

by Geraldine Akutu

What began as a personal fight against breast cancer has evolved into a thriving wellness business for entrepreneur Evelyn Okoloh, founder and Chief Executive Officer of Eves Organics. Okoloh's journey into the health and wellness industry was not driven by commercial ambition but by a determination to regain her health after battling breast cancer. According to her, she initially underwent conventional treatment and travelled to India, where doctors declared her cancer-free. However, the disease later returned, leaving her faced with the prospect of repeating a treatment process that had failed to provide a permanent solution.

Rather than relying solely on the same approach, Okoloh decided to make significant lifestyle changes. She adopted healthier eating habits, embraced natural wellness practices and became intentional about supporting her

body's recovery through nutrition.

The changes gradually produced positive results, restoring her health and strength. Family members, friends and acquaintances soon began noticing her transformation and became interested in the lifestyle choices that contributed to her recovery. Central to her wellness routine were fresh natural juices she prepared daily for personal consumption. As curiosity grew, people began requesting the juices for themselves. Initially, she shared them freely, motivated by a desire to help others benefit from the practices that had supported her recovery. The growing demand eventually laid the foundation for what would become Eves Organics. "What started as a personal wellness journey gradually became a business because people kept asking for the products and sharing positive feedback," Okoloh said.

Today, Eves Organics promotes healthy

living through natural wellness products while encouraging consumers to adopt healthier lifestyles.

Despite the company's growth, Okoloh said the journey was not without challenges. One of the major hurdles was changing public perceptions about healthy living. According to her, many people initially viewed fresh natural juices as a luxury rather than an investment in their wellbeing. To address this, she focused on educating consumers about nutrition and the long-term benefits of healthy lifestyle choices. Building customer trust also proved challenging, particularly because the business deals with fresh and natural products. She said maintaining strict quality and hygiene standards became essential in assuring customers of product safety and consistency.

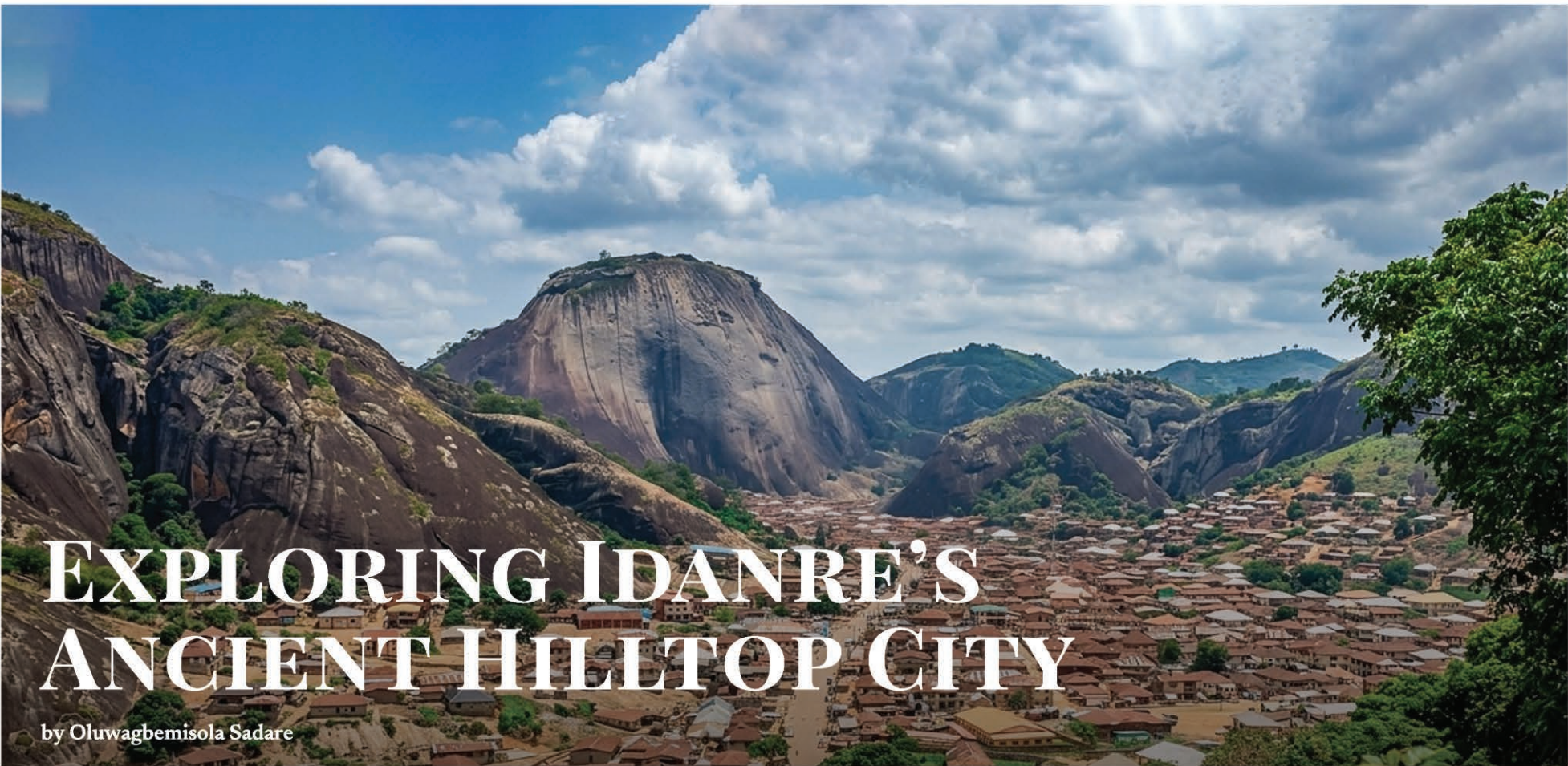
Over time, satisfied customers became



advocates for the brand, helping to expand its reach through referrals and word-of-mouth recommendations.

Like many small business owners, Okoloh also faced funding constraints and rising costs of quality ingredients during the early stages of the venture. Instead of seeking rapid expansion, she adopted a gradual growth strategy, reinvesting profits back into the business and scaling operations incrementally.

She attributed her perseverance to the purpose behind the business. "My experience with illness constantly reminded me why I started. That sense of purpose helped me remain focused during difficult times."



In a quiet town in Ondo State, a massive granite hill has been standing for over 500 million years. But what makes Idanre Hill remarkable is not just its age. It once carried an entire city on its back. And to get there, you climb 682 steps.

Getting there
The road into Idanre looks very ordinary at first. Flat stretches of farmland, scattered houses, then suddenly the hills appear, rising around you. Everywhere you look, there is rock.
For centuries, people lived on those hills. The ancestors of the Idanre people built a community there and remained for nearly 800 years before moving down to the plains in the year 1923 when life became more modern and accessible below. But the old settlement still remains above, almost frozen in time.
The journey begins beneath the Iraye tree, an ancient tree that marks the entrance to Ibi Akaso, the famous stairs leading up the hill.
Not far in, the climb still feels manageable. That is part of Idanre’s trick.
By around step 75, you reach the first resting point and realise the town below already looks smaller than you expected. There’s an old bar carved into the rock here. It no longer serves drinks, but the chairs still remain there.
As you continue climbing, the steps become less predictable. Some are smooth concrete, others uneven stone. During the rainy season they can be slippery; under the dry season sun they seem to absorb heat.
Around step 222, you reach Dagonro, which was once the gathering point for warriors defending the settlement above. Standing there, surrounded by rock with endless greenery stretching below, it becomes easier to understand why generations chose to build their lives here.
Then comes the point where your legs begins to feel it.
Around step 361, the climb is steeper.

You start feeling your muscles strain and for some people, thirst for water kicks in. But somewhere near step 473, you arrive at a resting point where the landscape opens up and Idanre town spreads below, surrounded by the same dramatic hills you’ve been climbing. It is one of those views that makes people stop talking for a moment.
The last stretch is from step 580 to 682. Here, breathing becomes louder, and most people simply focus on putting one foot in front of the other.
Then you arrive. At a plateau.
And on that plateau sits an entire old city.
There is the Owa’s Palace with separate entrances for the king, the queen, and visitors. A courthouse dating back to the 19th century. St. Paul’s Primary School, established in 1896 and believed to be the first school in Idanre, still standing on the hilltop. Burial sites. The clear waters of Arun River flowing across open rock and it is believed by locals to possess healing qualities.
All of it sits roughly 3,000 feet above sea level.
Idanre Hill was added to UNESCO’s World Heritage Tentative List in 2007. Even Nobel laureate Wole Soyinka found inspiration here and wrote one of his most celebrated poems, Idanre, after visiting.
That says something.
Before you climb the stairs
Bring at least one litre of water
Wear shoes with good grip
Use sunscreen or wear a cap to protect you from the sun
Start early before the sun gets intense
Give yourself 2-3 hours to explore once you reach the top



IDANRE HILLS

Word Search

K	E	X	C	L	I	M	B	E	I	A	G
H	L	A	N	D	S	C	A	P	E	B	R
I	M	S	T	E	P	S	U	K	A	B	A
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H	E	R	I	T	A	G	E	O	N	N	E

Idanre

Steps

Adventure

Hills

Climb

Summit

Granite

Heritage

Landscape



Photos by Magnific

Make your bathroom look luxurious

by Chidinma Enweani

Your bathroom is one space in your home that can date quickly, often within a couple of years. Whether it is the combination of dull tiles on the floor, boring walls, a cringe-worthy colour palette, or outdated decor, if not done correctly, a bathroom can appear clinical and sterile, rather than luxurious, which is what it should be. As one of the most-used rooms in your house, your bathroom deserves a refresh and a special touch every now and again.

Consider implementing these changes to bring your luxurious bathroom to life.

Bring in Flowers

Flowers easily brighten up any room, and your bathroom is no exception. Adding a simple vase of fresh flowers gives the space unique vibrancy and color. Additionally, real flowers in a stunning arrangement affordably add some flair.

Hang a Mirror With Flair

The mirror is often the central focal point of any bathroom, yet many homes feature basic, builder-grade glass sheets that lack character. Replacing a standard mirror with an upgraded design is one of the fastest ways to modernise luxury into the space. As a homeowner, look for mirrors with unique shapes, such as asymmetrical curves or sleek ovals, or options with elegant, thin metal frames. For a truly high-end hotel feel, installing a backlit LED mirror adds a soft, premium glow while providing excellent lighting for daily grooming routines.

Pay Attention To Details

A primary reason bathrooms feel clinical is the presence of visual clutter and mismatched items. True luxury lies in the details. Interior stylists recommend removing everyday products from their bright, plastic store packaging and pouring them into uniform, refillable dispensers made of amber glass or ceramic. Furthermore, clearing away countertops and keeping minor items like cotton pads tucked neatly into matching jars on a sleek tray instantly transforms a chaotic space into a curated sanctuary.

Add a Place to Perch

Introducing a piece of furniture that is traditionally kept in the living room or bedroom is a classic designer trick that removes the usual feel of a bathroom. Adding a small stool, an elegant wooden bench, or a plush accent chair creates a place to perch while waiting for a bath to fill or apply skincare. A moisture-resistant

wooden stool placed right next to the tub also serves as a beautiful, high-end ledge to hold a book, a glass of wine, or a scented candle.

Good Lighting

Standard bathroom lighting can often feel cold, harsh, and overly bright. To create a spa-like atmosphere, the lighting scheme needs to be softened and layered. If changing the main ceiling fixtures is not an option, you can introduce secondary lighting sources. Placing a small, battery-operated lamp with a warm bulb on an open shelf or lighting luxury scented candles on the vanity counter instantly changes the mood, creating a relaxing environment that hides imperfections.

Go for aesthetically pleasing towels

Old, fading, or mismatched towels can instantly ruin the look of a beautiful bathroom. Displaying premium, high-quality towels is an absolute must for a luxury aesthetic. Choosing thick, plush cotton towels in neutral tones like crisp white, warm beige, or charcoal grey creates a sophisticated look. For a professional presentation, towels should be rolled tightly and stacked neatly in a woven basket or on an open shelf, rather than hung carelessly on a basic hook.

Add a touch of gold

To break away from the dull and plain hardware, introducing metallic accents can completely elevate the room's colour palette. Adding a splash of gold through brushed brass or warm gold fixtures adds instant warmth and glamour. You do not need to undergo massive plumbing work to achieve this; simply swapping out smaller details like cabinet handles, towel rails, or a soap dish for matching gold pieces unifies the design and delivers a rich, polished finish.

Use diffusers

A diffuser is a small device that releases



scents into the air through heat, compressed air, or ultrasonics. It's typically filled with an essential oil blend, and its small size makes a diffuser the ideal solution for making the bathroom smell luxurious.

Use a diffuser in your own bathroom by placing it on the back of your sink, behind your toilet, or on another stand. It's also great for creating a spa-like environment during a long bath or shower.

Photos by Magnific

COLUMN



Dolly Ohanyere is a Lawyer, Relationship and Marriage Counsellor, NLP Practitioner, and Founder of The Healthy Marriage Hub and Thrive360 Limited. She coaches individuals and couples toward identity, purpose, and thriving relationships.



Photo by Freepik

Your relationship is only as strong as your identity

by Dolly Ohanyere

Before asking, “Is this the right person for me?”, have you ever asked, “Do I know myself well enough?” Dolly Ohanyere explores why that question matters.

Most women enter relationships asking the wrong question. They ask, “Is he the right person?” before they have ever honestly asked, “Am I the right person?” And the relationship pays the price for that unanswered question, not immediately or dramatically, but slowly, quietly, and consistently - in the arguments that go in circles, in the needs that cannot be named, in the dissatisfaction that has no clear address.

Here is what I have observed across years of coaching individuals and couples: the quality of every relationship you enter is determined primarily by the quality of your relationship with yourself. Your identity, your understanding of who you are, what you value, what you will and will not accept, and where you are going, is the foundation on which every relationship is built. A weak foundation produces a weak structure. It does not matter

how beautiful the building looks from the outside.

Identity answers the most fundamental question a human being can ask: Who am I? Not who my parents raised me to be. Not who my past relationships shaped me into. Not who I present myself to be in public. Who I actually am at the level of my deepest values, my honest desires,

“Values alignment does not mean you and your partner must be identical. It means you must be compatible at the level of what matters most”

and my genuine convictions.

When you do not know who you are, you will allow relationships to define you. You will stay too long in situations that diminish you because you have no clear sense of what you deserve. You will attract partners who are drawn to your uncertainty rather than your strength. You will make decisions from fear and loneliness rather than from clarity and wholeness.

When you know who you are, everything changes. You choose differently. You communicate differently. You hold your boundaries without apology. You enter relationships from a place of fullness rather than need. You are not looking for someone to complete you; you are looking for someone to complement you. Those are very different searches, and they produce very different results.

This is not about perfection. It is not about having everything figured out before you are allowed to love or be loved. It is about doing the honest, sometimes uncomfortable work of knowing yourself well enough that you can show up in a relationship as a whole person rather than a half looking for its other half.

The relationship you are in right now, or the one you are hoping for, is only as strong as your identity, not your partner's identity, Yours.

5 ways to understand yourself better before love

1 Know your values

What do you genuinely stand for? Not what sounds good, but what you actually live by. Your values are the non-negotiables that determine which relationships will honour you and which will erode you. Write down your top five and ask honestly: Does my relationship reflect these?

2 Know your patterns

Every person carries patterns from their history into their relationships. The way you respond to conflict, to distance, to love, to disappointment, these are shaped by what you witnessed and experienced long before you met your partner. Name your patterns. They are running your relationship whether you acknowledge them or not.

3 Know what you need

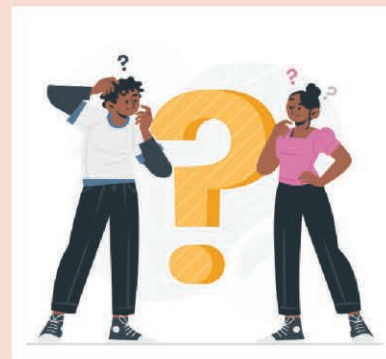
Not what you want someone to give you. What you genuinely need to feel safe, loved, and respected in a relationship. Most people cannot name this. They feel the absence of it but cannot articulate it. A person who cannot name what they need cannot ask for it and cannot recognise when it is being given.

4 Know your worth

Not your achievements. Not your title or your salary or what others say about you. Your inherent worth as a person. A woman who knows her worth does not stay in relationships that consistently treat her as less than she is. Not because she is arrogant, but because she is clear.

5 Know what you were created for

Know What You Were Created For. Purpose is not a career concept; it is the answer to the deepest question you will ever ask: why am I here? A person who knows their purpose does not drift into relationships. They choose deliberately because they know what they are protecting.



Ask Life's Big Sister



How can I tell if our communication is unhealthy?

Unhealthy communication is marked by constant criticism, gaslighting, and avoidance of meaningful dialogue. If you feel unheard or manipulated, or if conflicts worsen without resolution, these are red flags that shouldn't be ignored.



How do I manage to feel alone even when together?

Feeling alone in a relationship is a sign that an emotional connection is lacking. To address this, start by discussing how you feel with your partner. While communicating this, it's important to use a gentle tone so you don't come across as accusatory. Also, set aside ample time to engage in activities that strengthen the bond that already exists.



What should I do if my partner refuses to change?

When a partner refuses to change, it may indicate underlying issues rooted in childhood experiences or past trauma. Extend grace, but not at the expense of emotional or physical suffering. If your partner constantly dismisses your concerns and shows no willingness to improve, then it is time to re-evaluate the relationship.

Have a relationship dilemma or burning question? Ask Life's Big Sister by sending your questions to lifemag@guardian.ng Selected answers will be published in the magazine each weekend. Follow us on social media to join the conversation.



Saving culture of reading in a fast-paced digital world

by Geraldine Akutu

Reading has long been regarded as a gateway to knowledge, personal development, and intellectual growth. It sharpens the mind, broadens perspectives, and equips individuals with the tools needed to navigate an increasingly complex world.

Yet, in Nigeria today, concerns are mounting over what many describe as a declining reading culture, particularly among young people.

While some experts believe the habit of reading has diminished significantly, others argue that reading itself has not disappeared but has merely migrated from printed pages to digital platforms.

The concern is underscored by sobering statistics. According to the National Commission for Mass Literacy, Adult and Non-Formal Education, 38 per cent of Nigerians are non-literate, while four out of every ten primary school pupils

struggle with reading comprehension.

These figures have fueled debates about the state of literacy and the future of education in the country.

For many observers, the problem extends beyond literacy rates to the kind of materials people consume. They worry that while young Nigerians spend considerable time online, much of that engagement is not directed toward meaningful reading capable of expanding knowledge or stimulating critical thinking.

Over the years, notable figures have expressed concern about this trend. Former presidential candidate Peter Obi, in a social media post, lamented the decline in reading habits among Nigerian youths, attributing it to poor educational systems, materialism, inadequate reading materials, dysfunctional libraries, and a waning passion for books.

Earlier, the Chief Executive Officer of the National Library of Nigeria, Prof. Chinwe Anunobi, linked the challenge to changing societal values that prioritise material acquisition over the pursuit of knowledge.

Retired sociology professor and former Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Lagos, Lai Olurode, believes social media has played a major role in reshaping how people spend their leisure time.

He recalled a period when books were a primary source of entertainment and learning, noting that today many commuters who once carried novels now spend hours on their phones. According to him, reading for leisure and imaginative exploration has declined sharply across social classes.

To reverse the trend, Olurode advocates the introduction of reading competitions and prizes, the inclusion of leisure reading in school curricula, greater media support for literacy campaigns, and deliberate efforts by parents to create reading-friendly homes.

Not everyone agrees that Nigerians are reading less. Education consultant Akin Benjamin argues that the medium has changed rather than the habit itself.

According to him, people now consume content digitally instead of through printed books. He maintains that young people continue to read extensively online and that efforts to improve reading culture should focus on producing engaging content and adopting a hybrid model that combines printed and digital materials.

For Rev. Fr. John Njortheast of the Catholic Archdiocese of Lagos, the issue goes beyond books and speaks directly to the nation's value system.

He believes reading is increasingly viewed as irrelevant to achieving success, as society places greater emphasis on wealth accumulation than intellectual development.

This shift, he argues, has contributed to a worrying lack of depth in public discourse.

Njortheast advocates the creation of spaces where ideas can be discussed openly, encouraging citizens to engage with issues through informed debate. He also emphasizes the role of families, schools, and digital platforms in nurturing critical thinking and fostering curiosity among young people.

Public interest lawyer Taiwo Akinlami shares similar concerns. He points to the influence of technology, declining educational standards, inadequate reading materials, poorly trained teachers, and harsh economic realities as factors discouraging reading. He argues that the daily struggle for survival often leaves little time for intellectual pursuits.

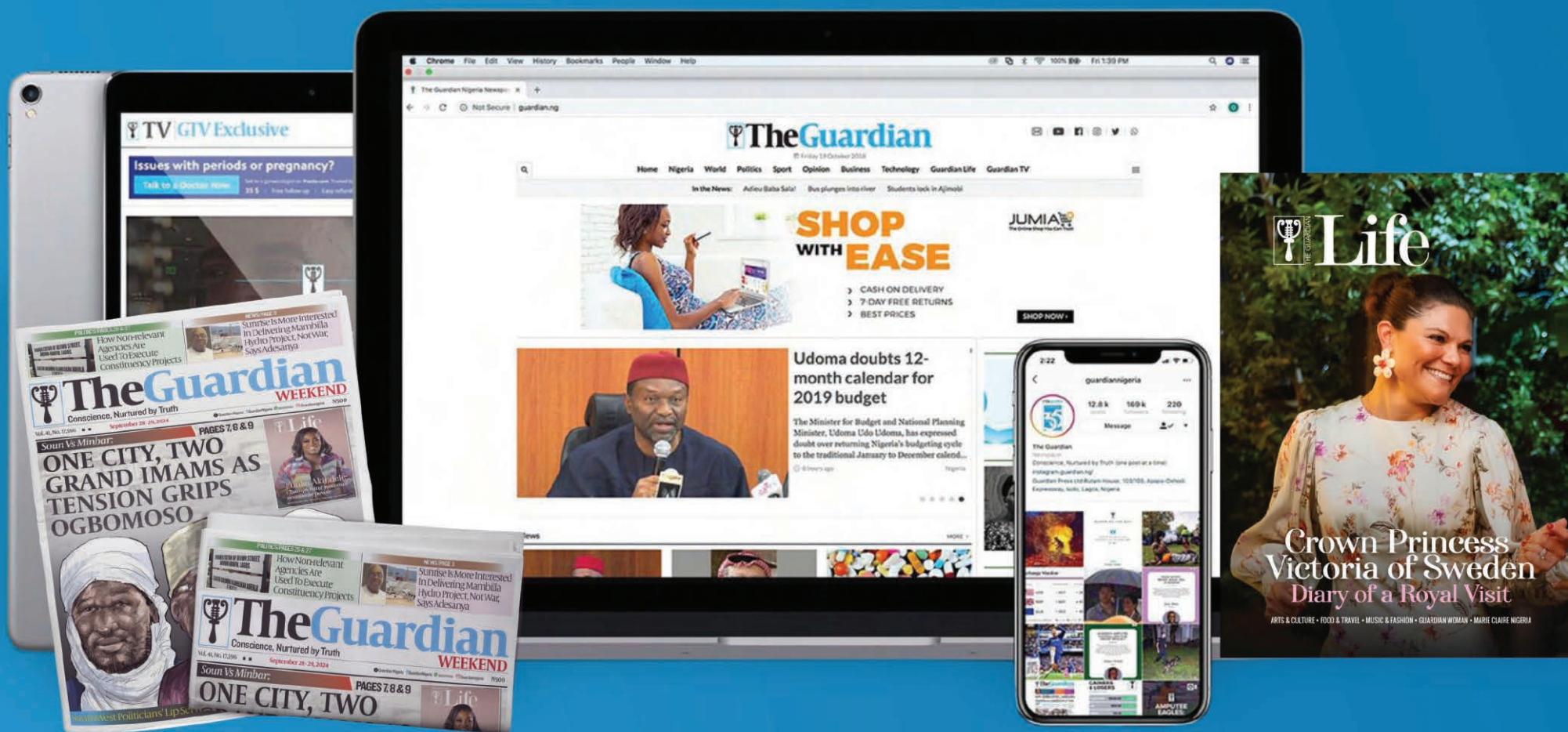
Akinlami believes public libraries must be revitalised and expanded to improve access to books. He also stresses the importance of parents and teachers serving as role models who inspire children to embrace reading as a lifelong habit.

Travel consultant Clara Chinwe Okoro highlights additional barriers, including the high cost of books and poorly funded libraries. She notes that smartphones, social media, and streaming platforms provide instant gratification, making it harder for reading to compete for attention.

Despite differing opinions about the extent of the problem, most stakeholders agree on one point: reading remains essential for national development. Reviving a culture that values books, ideas, and informed discussion will require collective action from government, schools, parents, media organisations, and individuals. Only by investing in literacy and encouraging a love for reading can Nigeria nurture the informed, innovative, and critical-minded citizens needed to drive sustainable progress.



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