AGHOGHIOVBIAGAFAAR, keen on shaping Africa’s future through energy technology
Anyone who knows me knows that every time I get the opportunity to celebrate Nigerians projecting the country positively on the global scene, despite other negative stories flying around, I do.

This week, my cover personality is one of such. The brilliant VOME AGHOGHOVBIA-GAFAR, a first class honours MEng graduate in Chemical Engineering from University College London (UCL) and an MSc in Global Management of Natural Resources.

Reading her response to my questions was truly refreshing. She made me fall in love with the Energy sector and spurred optimism in that sector in Nigeria, brilliantly suggesting ways it can be better and the richness therein. Such a gift! Trust me, after reading her interview, you will say same. Also, it was all about showing kindness at First Bank’s CR&S week, where their esteemed speakers spoke on the importance of kindness in Nigeria’s education environment. Highly informative programme indeed.

Founded in 1990 by Fashion designer Helen Unuane, MAISON DE HÉLÈNE (MDH) is a high-fashion African luxury brand based in Lagos Nigeria. Their exquisite fashionable pieces for the modern day African woman are stunning. We share some with you in this edition.

If I tell you all there is in this edition, I will kill the fun. Why not get yourself a glass of freshly squeezed orange juice in your favorite glass cup, throw in some ice cubes and accompany it with some caramel popcorn as you digest both the content in this edition and your ‘yummelicious’ combo.

Enjoy!

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AGHOGHOVBIA-GAFAAR, keen on shaping Africa’s future through energy technology  

BY KEMI AJUMOBI
Vome Aghoghovbia-Gafaar is an award-winning chemical engineer, energy consultant and the founder of Ignite Energy Africa, an energy consultancy and innovation hub that helps shape the future of energy in Africa. Their mission is to shape Africa’s energy future through knowledge, innovation and education. They deliver high-quality energy data, research and consultations across the energy ecosystem, focusing on clean energy technology, fostering a culture of innovation in the energy sector in Africa. They have global clients, such as Hitachi, and their work has been quoted by academics and institutions worldwide.

Before starting Ignite Energy Africa, (https://igniteenergyafrica.com/) Vome had diverse experience working as an energy specialist at Bulb, UK’s fastest-growing energy company, to working as a management consultant across the energy space. She also has work experience at Google and British Petroleum (BP).

She is a speaker and writer and has written for publications, such as The Financial Times, Business Insider and The Independent. She is the author of ‘Everyone Deserves to Sparkle’ and the founder of the Sparkle Initiatives. This social enterprise empowers Science Technology Engineering Mathematics (STEM) education and inspires young people worldwide to thrive and set the world on fire with their gifts. As a speaker, she speaks in several schools worldwide, such as St Paul's Girls' School, Hammersmith, Haberdashers' Aske's School for Girls, and Pembroke School South Australia.

Vome holds a first-class honours MEng in Chemical Engineering from University College London (UCL) and an MSc in Global Management of Natural Resources. She was awarded a first prize young engineers award for a technical breakthrough by the Institution of Chemical Engineers (IChemE) Milton Keynes.

Vome, along with her sisters, co-founded DVees, a West African food and drinks luxury brand pioneering West African fine dining and flavours through the creation of products, such as DVees Chapman and Rodo sauce.

She is married to Dr Tunde Gafaar, and together they enjoy setting up educational initiatives.
Early life and influence till date

I was raised as the last born of four girls by extraordinary parents. Growing up, we were surrounded by family, love, and strong role models. Gender was never a limitation; we were always encouraged to shoot for the stars and empowered with the tools needed to thrive. I have always felt comfortable in male-dominated environments and have never felt like I did not deserve to be there.

I chose STEM subjects in school because they were my strengths and interests, and I never considered that it was not for me because of my gender. I studied chemical engineering, and I felt comfortable being among a handful of girls in most lecture rooms. Since I started my career, the situation in the room has remained the same (I hope change comes soon), and I have never felt like I should be limited because I am female.

This is attributed to my parents raising us to have strong faith in God and confidence in our abilities to achieve. Also, the opportunities they gave me to explore my passions and interests.

My father, Godfrey Aghoghovbia, always says, “His girls are enough for him” and he is proud of us. Whenever I was making educational or career decisions, he always encouraged me to explore my options and aim for the best. My father is an extremely hard-working man.

My mother, Ese Aghoghovbia, is an Economist and an Insurance practitioner who was among a handful of women in meeting rooms, especially as she worked in the Special Risks Division of Engineering, Marine and Aviation in the Insurance industry.

These values were instilled in us. From my mother, I learnt that I could wear many hats, and my gender should not limit my aspirations as a woman.

My upbringing has been fundamental in helping me explore the different paths I have ventured on. I grew up surrounded by support, and my family has been my cheerleaders.

Why chemical engineering? How can Nigerian government encourage STEM especially among girls?

In primary school, I was average at mathematics. My mother recognised that I could be doing so much better and decided to get me a tutor. My exceptional tutor, Mr Ojimmy Iyakakwa, taught me in a way that unlocked my mind. Mathematics became my favourite subject from then on, and I had a natural flair for sciences, literature, and economics. This taught me that children could excel if they have someone who believes in them and can identify their strengths and areas where support is needed.

I was torn between studying mathematics and economics or chemical engineering at university. This is where my father’s advice was pivotal. He advised me to do an internship at an insurance company to experience actuarial science and at ExxonMobil to see first-hand what different engineers do. I immediately fell in love with chemical engineering. As an analytical and creative person, I found that chemical engineering is a degree that combines both elements with endless possibilities.

As a Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) advocate and enthusiast, I often speak to students about its benefits.

STEM subjects have developed transferrable skills in me that are invaluable in any sphere. That said, I believe that every child should be encouraged to take their unique path and make decisions in line with their strengths, passions, and interest. Literature developed my imagination and writing skills, and I am glad my parents encouraged me to explore other passions.

“Nigeria’s energy sector can be optimised by developing more off-grid decentralised energy”
"I believe that every child should be encouraged to take their unique path and make decisions in line with their strengths, passions, and interest"

STEM is sometimes taught in limited ways. It should not only focus on the facts and figures but also explore creativity and encourage innate curiosity and independent thinking. The solution-focused nature of STEM helps students become great problem solvers. STEM is about learning by doing, and it should not be about ‘not failing’. It is supposed to encourage experimentation and help students embrace mistakes as part of the learning process. As an inventor, Thomas Edison made 1,000 unsuccessful attempts at inventing the light bulb before succeeding.

The Nigerian government should encourage STEM because there is hardly any country that has become a world power without science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. According to the World Bank, 43% of the Nigerian population is between 0 and 14. If the nation invests in STEM education, this can be crucial for technological advances, economic growth, and wealth creation. This can set Nigeria up to become a global force as one of the countries with the largest population of young people.

In today’s highly technological society, scientific innovations have become increasingly important, and students need to develop their capabilities in STEM to levels beyond what was acceptable in the past. In addition, STEM education gives students skills to help them understand a wide range of concepts and raises young people who can transform society with innovation and sustainable solutions.

In particular, girls should be actively encouraged to explore STEM subjects. We often see fewer women in STEM fields, not because they do not have the ability, but because STEM subjects are seen as traditional male subjects. This starts as young as primary school, where boys are expected to enjoy and do better in mathematics and sciences, and girls are expected to enjoy English and social studies.

Also, we become what we see. If you see more men as doctors, engineers, and software designers, it will be instilled in girls from a young age that those fields are not for them. So, girls should be specifically encouraged to explore STEM subjects, and they should be exposed to more female role models in those fields.

The more women we have in various areas, the more diversity of thought we will have in innovation. This will lead to more well-rounded global solutions, economic growth, and a better society at large.

**Working for Bulb**

Bulb is the fastest-growing energy supplier in the UK and the UK’s biggest green energy supplier, providing all their customers with 100% renewable electricity. I joined Bulb as a start-up, and I got to see the company rapidly grow from about 40,000 customers to over 1 million customers in two years.

Working for an innovative energy start-up, I got to see what was possible in energy tech and innovation. This helped to expand my mind and horizons. I learnt a lot about renewable energy, energy compliance, and operations.

Also, working for a start-up, I got to function in different roles and learn rapidly about energy, business, and start-up life.

**Share on your research work in Australia and your experience**

I did an MSc in Global Management of Resources at University College London (UCL). Today, there is a growing demand for versatile managers in the globalised natural resources and commodities industries. The course aims to equip students to become well versed in subsurface and surface energy and mineral industries.

In addition, students develop an understanding of geology and engineering, become effective communicators, and become aware of their socio-economic responsibility.

During my masters, I researched the economic, environmental, and social effects of transitioning to a low carbon future (in terms of stranded assets and acquiring solar technology) in South Australia for six months. It was a transformative experience. It helped me grow individually as I explored a new continent and culture and learned a new way of life. I think travel is an effective way to grow individually. Also, I got to expand my horizons as a professional. I developed my research and analytical skills and increased my energy knowledge.
**Ignite Energy Africa**

With a population of over 1 billion in Sub-Saharan Africa, we cannot afford to ignore the energy access challenge in the region. We cannot solve the global climate change crisis if we do not tackle the issue in all corners of the world. Climate change is having a growing impact on Sub-Saharan Africa. In the last year, there have been distressing floods and an invasion of desert locusts. Secondly, energy is essential to everyday life.

A secure, reliable, and affordable energy future is needed for education, economic growth, job creation, and so on. Also, the pandemic has highlighted the need for efficient energy systems across the world for global health and effectively managing pandemics. A significant barrier to solving the energy crisis in Sub-Saharan Africa is the lack of high-quality data and insights that can drive innovation.

My passion for helping solve this challenge motivated me to start an energy knowledge and innovation hub for Sub-Saharan Africa called Ignite Energy Africa. Our mission is to shape Africa’s energy future through knowledge, innovation, and education. We have defined a new standard for access to high-quality energy data, in-depth research and analysis and insights across the energy ecosystem focusing on clean energy technology.

We are building a comprehensive knowledge-base and providing advisory services on energy access, e-mobility, energy transition, and environmental sustainability. We foster a culture of innovation in the energy sector in Sub-Saharan Africa by analysing ideas, concepts and forming partnerships that help drive innovation in the region.

We aim to build a comprehensive knowledge hub and energy innovation incubation to allow more people to innovate in the energy space. Our goal is to help shape the energy sector in sub-Saharan Africa by transitioning towards a safe, secure, and affordable energy future powered by high-quality data, research and analysis and consulting.

Delivering high-quality energy data, research and analysis that fosters a culture of innovation in the energy sector in Africa

Ignite Energy Africa is an expert in novel areas, such as electric mobility and clean energy technology. We conduct in-depth research into those areas in the energy space in sub-Saharan Africa. For example, we researched the technical and economic feasibility of electric transportation in African cities and the barriers and opportunities in Nigeria, Kenya, and South Africa.

Another critical research area was the logistical issues of distributing COVID-19 vaccines to millions of people in Sub-Saharan Africa. We advised developing an innovative and climate-friendly cold chain distribution network using mobile clinics and innovative transport systems.

We have comprehensive knowledge of the energy ecosystem from a technical, financial, environmental, and social perspective. Our approach also builds on existing data and research and expands on areas that have been explored. We share our research and analysis in the public space and offer research, analysis and consultation services to governments, public bodies, private organisations, academics and so on. Our work is used to explore opportunities, innovate, make key investment decisions among others.

Our in-depth research has been used worldwide. Our energy policy analysis and research work have been published in mainstream media, such as the Financial Times, Business Insider, The Independent. Also, our work is used and quoted by academics, energy professionals and more.

**How can Nigeria’s energy sector be best optimised?**

Renewable energy resources and technology can play a significant part in optimising the energy sector in Nigeria. Some years ago, renewable energy was still viewed as an inefficient source of energy. According to the International Energy Agency, the share of renewables in global electricity generation jumped to nearly 28% in Q1 2020. It is estimated that by 2030, renewable energy sources will power over 60% of new electricity access. This shows vast opportunities within renewables to help meet the increasing global energy demand and economic growth.

According to the Economist, Nigeria’s population is forecasted to double and reach 400 million by 2050. This population growth and the increasing industrialisation in Nigeria means that the energy demand in the country is predicted to increase rapidly. Utilising renewable energy combined with efficient use of fossil fuels with clean technologies can help

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“We often see fewer women in STEM fields, not because they do not have the ability, but because STEM subjects are seen as traditional male subjects”
meet this increasing energy demand and help tackle climate change.

While some parts of the world struggle to have the natural conditions needed for renewables, Nigeria is blessed with sufficient sunlight, adequate wind conditions in certain parts of the country, and ample biomass waste required for renewable energy generation. What makes renewables unique is that they cannot be deleted. If used appropriately with the advances in energy storage technology, it can provide a reliable energy supply almost indefinitely in the coming years.

Secondly, the energy sector can be optimised by developing more off-grid decentralised energy. At the start of the pandemic, energy storage and decentralised energy solutions were used to power isolation centres in Nigeria.

The pandemic presented an opportunity to accelerate access to clean energy across Nigeria. Off-grid renewable energy systems are generated close to where they will be used, mostly by renewable sources, can deliver reliable electricity to rural communities. Off-grid solutions are effective for households and can also be used to support public services, for instance, to aid healthcare and provide clean water.

If given the opportunity, what will you seek to improve in Nigeria’s energy sector?

The aim will be to increase access to reliable and clean energy across Nigeria. The three ways I will seek to do this is through renewable energy, microgrids, and electric mobility.

With renewables, it will be looking into small changes, such as creating incentives and initiatives for new buildings to have solar panels and using solar energy to power street lamps. In addition, exploring more significant investment opportunities to build wind farms and biomass sites. The cost of solar energy and batteries have made renewables an efficient and viable solution.

I think utilising microgrids can be successful in Nigeria. Microgrids connect communities to a decentralised group of electricity sources that generally operates while connected to the grid but can break off and operate independently using local energy generation. This helps to relieve pressure off the grid. Microgrids can be powered by distributed generators, batteries, and renewable resources like solar panels. It can be utilised in a way that the localised energy is shared between households in a community.

According to the World Economic Forum, using real-world data, researchers found that microgrid technologies could make local communities 90% energy self-sufficient, with the potential to become fully self-reliant in the future.

Finally, I believe electric mobility presents a leapfrogging opportunity for Nigeria. I researched the feasibility of electric mobility in African cities. Although there are glaring limitations, the application of electric mobility is possible. This will require changes in policy, the use of solar-powered charging stations, significant investment and so on.

Facts and figures on Nigeria’s energy sector

Energy is vital for economic growth. According to the World Bank, about 85 million Nigerians do not have access to grid electricity. This represents about 43% of the country’s population and makes Nigeria the country with the largest energy access deficit in the world. Also, only an estimated 30% of Nigerians are connected to the national grid.

The lack of access to energy hinders the provision of basic needs, such as education, health care, good hygiene and so on. Nigeria has a population of over 200 million and 176 million people without access to clean cooking fuel or technologies.

According to UNESCO’s 2018 Global Education Monitoring Report, only 22% of African primary schools in sub-Saharan Africa have access to electricity. In addition, in 2020, only 46.6% of the Nigerian population were internet users.

With the increased connectivity in the world and global opportunities, energy is critical for advancement. As mentioned earlier, there are vast opportunities to optimise the grid, develop renewables and off-grid solutions, and utilise fossil fuels in a clean and efficient way to help make energy access a reality.

“A significant barrier to solving the energy crisis in Sub-Saharan Africa is the lack of high-quality data and insights that can drive innovation”
Challenges in your line of work and how you surmount them

A big challenge I have experienced in my line of work is finding where I fit in and my unique voice in the energy space. Energy is a rapidly growing and evolving sector with varying sub-sectors. It can be a bit confusing to know where you fit in.

However, one thing that has helped me along this journey of finding my unique voice has been exploring the opportunities available, being resilient and learning from other energy professionals.

Also, it helps to know that it is a journey and as you make meaningful contributions, you will find your fit and voice.

Balancing work and family

I am married to a wonderful man, Dr. Tunde Gafaar. He is a great support and encourager. He constantly encourages me to spread my wings and achieve my best at work and he is a true partner at home. We support each other with work and at home. Our partnership has helped me balance work and family effectively.

I am also a very organised person and I value work-life balance. This means that I plan my schedule in a detailed manner and I stick to the time I make for work, family, leisure and other activities.

Sparkle Initiative

My passion for seeing people thrive led me to publish my first book, ‘Everyone Deserves to Sparkle’, an inspirational non-fiction book about discovering your uniqueness, understanding the purpose of your gifts and unique attributes, and making a difference.

I am passionate about empowering young people and helping them develop and use their gifts to make the world a better place. This passion led me to start a social enterprise, the Sparkle Initiative. We aim to set people on a journey of embracing their uniqueness and using their gifts to light up the world!

From inspiring content to engaging brunch clubs to captivating talks, the initiative aims to empower education, set young people on a journey through embracing their uniqueness and being positive agents of change to their society.

As a speaker, I have delivered talks and organised workshops at schools such as St Paul’s Girls’ School, Hammersmith, Haberdashers’ Aske’s School for Girls, and Pembroke School South Australia.

What can be done to encourage people like you to come back to Nigeria?

I may not be able to speak for every Nigerian that is contributing to other economies however, there are a few things that I think will be helpful which includes: An enabling environment that empowers people to develop their skills and thrive in education, career, and business. Furthermore, excellent public infrastructure is needed to aid good quality of life for individuals and families. One other key element is providing learning opportunities that are on par with global standards.

Giving back to Nigeria

At Ignite Energy Africa, we give a portion of our profits towards providing solar lamps to the most remote regions in Africa, including Nigeria, to combat poverty and climate change.

As part of my Sparkle Initiatives, I have given free talks and run workshops on confidence and academic excellence at an orphanage in Nigeria, and I have given out my books and resources for free.

The Nigerian youth

I am proud of your resilience and drive against all odds.

Final words

You are a masterpiece, and you can use your gifts and uniqueness to set the world on fire and make a difference by helping others in any way you can.

“We become what we see. If you see more men as doctors, engineers, and software designers, it will be instilled in girls from a young age that those fields are not for them”
Life

IS TO BE LIVED, DESPITE THE ODDS, LIVE IT WELL

BY LONGJOHN DEBORAH

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topped in my track, I take out time to really ponder. I sit here gaz
ing into the ceiling and chewing the top of my pen. It’s one of those days that my mind wants to have a conversation. Who am I to stop her from her right!! I’ve been here for quite some time now, I might not have had as much time as some, but I think I’ve had just enough time. Enough to speak and be heard.

Life is full of surprises they say, but how about when the surprise is you? What then happens when you’ve adapted a pattern of surprising yourself on a daily basis? Do you feel you don’t have as much as you deserve? Or you’re one of those that feel you have way less that you’ve put in? Life unfolds. Like an onion, it makes some cry and some have grown a thick skin. But in all, life is beautiful and each day is another take on an incredible adventure.

The rain will still pour and the sun will follow suit. The clouds well ar-rayed doesn’t mean the night won’t come. Life’s beauty will never diminish and so will some facts. It could get really tough and trust me, I understand. Sometimes, you just cry and other times you wail. Some days you wake up in disappointment and wonder why the dawn came.

It’s not something you want to talk about but not talking about it is killing you the more. Do you fold your arms and allow this become the norm? Rage. You’ve felt that. It wasn’t the initial plan but now you can’t count how many times. It was meant to be a subtle response to an offence.

The plan was talk, maybe yell but that was all. You had your part well played out, but little did you know that it took two to tango. How can you play the drum and get pissed that people danced to it? The talk turned to shout, then there was some sort of rift, and now it’s a full blown siege. You now feel a rage that you would give anything to get rid of. Careful with that little drops, that’s an ocean in disguise.

Pain. She sounds just too familiar. You both go way back. From physical to psychological and even emotional. She has the strength of a man yet could be really slow in her destruction. She could be a teacher and a monster, whichever you choose.

Like a darling, she can help you become better but when mismanaged she could spell doom. Sometimes inevitable and other times unavoidable. She’s as old as mankind yet not wea
died by age. Hate her as you may, she’s an essential part of life.

Love. Why so complicated? Sometimes honey sweet and other times coca-bean bitter! Why so painful! Once clear as crystal, now dim as a shadow. Why so magical! Taking away my very sense just because I took that turn and beheld. Love is blind they say, but I can still remember what I saw. Trust me when I say I’ve had my fair share.

Sometimes, I want nothing to do with it. Don’t get me wrong, it could be a beautiful thing! Not long ago, it took me through the wonder of ecstasy. Journey through dreamlands of peace and tranquill. But like the breathtaking rose; under that veil was a hidden thorn. Oh how it made me bleed, and burn from the scotch of betrayal. Des
derted and left to perish. All because I dared to love.

Maybe, just maybe. Maybe God wanted you to meet the wrong people before the right ones so you’ll learn how to be grateful. Maybe giving someone all your love isn’t an assurance that they’ll love you back, but at least you now understand what selfless
ness means. Maybe losing yourself in trying to gain someone isn’t the smartest decision there is but at least you’ve learnt that you’re more than you know.

Maybe the best kinds of friends are the ones that understand our silence just as much as our words. Maybe the moments you miss those you love is God trying to teach you to cherish every single moment. Maybe your cry of announcement at birth was joyful, but let your smile in that challenging situation show people that love was a person, and she was you!

Truth. You’re hurt, maybe even broken, but don’t relent. I’ve learnt that life isn’t fair but we choose what to do with the leaf called bitter. Some make medicines out of it and take it with all its bitter glory, while others choose to wash out the bitter and use it to pre
pare something sweet.

The leaf is the same, it’s the choice of preparation that differs. Life will always be life, full of everything, but like someone rightly said, if you don’t like what you see, create another.

Everyone has a destiny, the blank book called your life. Take up that pen with confidence and write what you want to be remembered for!

Longjohn Deborah A. is from Bonny, Rivers state. She is a Teen mentor and an Emotion
tal Intelligence enthusiast. She is passionate about the next generation and is always elated whenever she gets an oppor
unity to share life changing experiences with teenagers. She believes she is blessed to bless others and her greatest goal in life is to live an impact
ful life and leave a lasting leg
acy when she exits this world.
P&G makes two Nigerian women country heads in sub-Saharan Africa

BY DESMOND OKON

Consumer goods giant, Procter and Gamble (P&G) has appointed two Nigerian women as its first country leaders in Kenya and Nigeria, respectively.

Chioma Ede was appointed as the company’s country manager for Kenya, while Mokutima Ajileye was appointed into the same role for Nigeria.

Making the announcement on his LinkedIn page, the senior vice president and general manager sub-Saharan Africa, Vilo Trska said the women are the first ever to be appointed as country leaders in both countries.

Trska said the company aims to grow its business across the sub-Saharan region and take it to new heights with their expertise and leadership.

“One day, I’ll feel honoured to have the opportunity to lead P&G Nigeria,” she said. “It will be a privilege to work with them.”

Similarly, Ede thanked the organisation while also looking forward to great achievements in the role.

Both women have held various leadership positions in the company prior to the new appointments.

Ede is an experienced business leader with over 12 years of success in increasing sales, profit, and market share for the company in highly competitive and fragmented markets in the Middle East and Africa. Her core expertise includes, trade marketing and business strategy development; key competition evaluation & research; people management & development; sales and retail management.

Ajileye has led in various capacities including marketing capability leader (Nigeria); marketing manager, Brand Operations; senior regional marketing manager, Liners Design (IMEA) & Femcare Nigeria; director, Always Brand Design, Feminine Care BU (Middle East, Africa & Pakistan); director, E-Business and Strategic Growth Channels, P&G Nigeria; regional director, Digital Transformation & Disruptive Innovation, Europe (Feminine Care BU); senior director, Commercial & Marketing.
SELF-CONFIDENCE: EVERY WOMAN NEEDS IT TO SUCCEED IN BUSINESS & WORKPLACE (PART 1)

AWUNLI EGHOSASERE

In a business summit, a participant asked: “What can enable women advance in their businesses and have high-powered careers?” The host replied: “Many women are waiting for permission or validation before they pursue their dreams and ideas. Many dreams go unrealised because of the lack of self-confidence.”

Why do many women suffer from a lack of self-confidence? The answer may not be far-fetched. According to a prominent life coach, the bulk of it stems from how the girl child may have been raised. Others include societal constraints and self-sabotaging habits.

The push for gender equality and inclusion has resulted in more women ascending positions of power in the corporate world and in public service in recent times. However, the number of women holding leadership positions are still minimal compared to what should exist since the movement began.

Studies have revealed that the reason behind this little number of women at the very top is because women are more cautious about self-promoting and accepting higher roles because they wait for their skills to perfectly match the qualifications required for the job compared to their male counterparts.

One key thing that these studies have unraveled is that, to become successful, every woman would have to take the personal responsibility for developing the confidence they need to succeed.

Many of us may be familiar with those colleagues that always get picked for projects and assignments; those who speak up at every meeting and confidently articulate their ideas. No doubt, these classes of people will always be the first choice when the doors for growth and opportunities open.

One thing to note however is that, they didn’t just become the favorite overnight. The way they projected themselves and their competencies may have played a huge part in helping them become the top choice in the minds of decision-makers within the organisation.

There are many competent people who would rather sit comfortably in a role that limits their potential because they lack confidence in themselves and their abilities.

They go through the organisation and never become known for the value they add. In fact, they may be the one making major contributions to the organisation’s output but because they are afraid, they would rather take the back seat.

Self-confidence is a valuable skill every woman needs and the good news is that it can be developed and nurtured.

WAYS TO DEVELOP THE SKILL OF SELF-CONFIDENCE

Act Confident

To get confident in yourself and abilities so you can properly articulate and project your value at all times, you have to wear self-confidence like you do any good outfit. Though in this case, it is an intangible outfit.

You may wonder how? Visualise an actor or actress who is given a script to act like the character written in the script. The actor puts aside his or her true character and assumes the character written in that script for that moment that he or she plays the role.

Sometimes, when care is not taken, if the actor plays that role for a long time, he may not be able to separate his sense of self from the character he plays. The actor may lose his or her self playing that role.

Benedict Cumberbatch, the man behind the character “Sherlock”, said that playing the character “Sherlock” tampered with his true self. “My mum says I’m more curt with her when I’m filming Sherlock”, he said.

So in the case of self-confidence, when you have made up your mind to become self-confident, and you act confidently at every point in time, you will become a master at projecting yourself confidently, and you wouldn’t need to discard this character as it is needed at every stage or level you would want to get into in life.

Also, Virginia Rometty, former IBM chief executive and the first woman to hold this position recalled a time when she was offered a big job. She didn’t believe she was competent enough until her husband made her think differently. Virginia learnt through that experience that, you have to act confident to be able to take a leap into something you feel is bigger than you can handle.

Focus on What You Have

A C-suite professional once narrated how she was approached to take up a huge opportunity, and all she could think of at that moment was the many ways she wasn’t qualified. She narrated to her boss who was also her friend and wanted her to assume the position how she didn’t have the credentials or experience to assume the role. She lost the opportunity.

She learnt a lesson through that experience years later. Her admonishment to women who are aspiring to move forward in any area of life and at work is this: don’t look at what you don’t have, look at what you have that you can use to perform the job. Even when you are not 50 percent qualified, take a go at it.

Self-confidence is needed at various levels of life and more importantly as women need to work twice as hard than men to prove their competencies. It is a must to help you negotiate a pay rise, execute business ideas, seal business deals, apply for higher roles and achieve greater strides in life.

Awunli Eghosasere is a writing consultant that helps lead- ers and professionals birth their thoughts and ideas into books. She is also the founder of hapigesify.site, a digital platform that curates resources to help young women unlock their potential.
A PUSH FOR FEMALE LEADERSHIP IN UNIVERSITY OF JOS

BY DESMOND OKON

Nigeria’s University of Jos is deliberating on who takes the seat in the office of the school’s vice chancellor. A group of women want a woman in there.

This show of support for each other is driven by women under the umbrella of the National Council of Women Societies (NCWS), Plateau State Chapter, who have intensified campaign for the emergence of a woman in the ongoing selection/election of the Vice Chancellor of the University of Jos.

They have appealed to the governing council of the university to consider gender equality, while deliberating on who becomes the new vice chancellor of the university.

Their show of solidarity to achieve equality and inclusion is understandable as myriads of reports have confirmed that diversity can be flourishing for any organisation.

More justifiable is the fact that the university has not been lucky to have a woman in that capacity for 46 years.

“We wish to put it on record that, of all the nine substantive vice chancellors in the 46 years of the citadel of learning, none is a female,” they said in a statement signed by Felicia Bala, NCWS’s president.

She said the organisation’s state chapter and all its affiliates, as part of its mandate to advocate for gender inclusion, are appealing to the governing council and the University of Jos, to consider appointing a woman as the 10th vice chancellor of the institution.

Although not mentioned, the NCWS said it understands that among those jostling for the position, there is a woman, one they described as a woman of character, an erudite and industrious scholar, credible and intellectually sound with great institutional memory of the University.

Their push is propelled by the belief that when women thrive, all of society benefits and succeeding generations are given a better start in life. An idea once expressed by the late Secretary General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan.

“In the light of the above and for the sake of generations to come, we hereby appeal to the new Council to conclude the selection process already started by the out-gone council of the University,” the body said.

The body emphasised that a qualified woman be considered for the position of Vice Chancellor, as part of the 35 percent affirmative action for women, backed by a national policy of 2006.

Away from that, NCWS expressed delighted at the recent inauguration of the Governing Council of the University of Jos among other 19 universities and Inter University Centres by the Federal Government.
How to Be RESILIENT and Meet the Challenges of the Future!

BY GLADYS AGWAI

I am tougher than any tough time, she said! Most people like her consistently face all types of adversity and crises in their life.

The crises can be illness, loss of loved ones, physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, bullying, job loss, financial instability, terrorist attacks, mass shootings, natural disasters, and pandemics like COVID-19. Each of these situations will affect people differently which brings a flood of thoughts, strong emotions, and uncertainty. To survive and thrive during these times, it requires people to learn coping mechanisms to work through and bounce back from challenging life experiences that include setbacks. Bouncing back does not mean you are down one moment and up the next. It requires time, knowing and executing on your strengths, and getting help from your support systems. Change is constant and you must learn to use change and not be destroyed by change.

The key coping mechanism during adversity is psychological resilience which is your ability to cope with a crisis mentally or emotionally or return to pre-crisis status quickly. When you use mental processes and behaviors in promoting a personal advantage and protecting yourself from the negative impact of the stressors mentioned, you are demonstrating resilience. It does not mean you do not experience stress, emotional upheaval, and suffering. When resilient, you not only have mental toughness, but demonstrate it by working through emotional pain and suffering. But what are the types of resilience?

Emotional: You tap into realistic optimism when dealing with a crisis.
Physical: Your body’s ability to adapt to challenges and recover quickly.
Community: Your ability to respond to and recover from community situations, such as, natural disasters, acts of violence, or economic hardship.

Resilience requires flexibility, adaptability, and perseverance while changing your thoughts, behaviors, and actions around the situation.

Dr. Sood, Everyday Health Wellness Advisory Board, determined the five principles of resilience are: 1) gratitude, 2) compassion, 3) acceptance, 4) meaning, and 5) forgiveness. There is no universal formula to become more resilient. However, anyone can learn and develop how to leverage it.

Resiliency is used during overwhelming moments of crises including all the “daily” stressors encountered while nurturing your protective factors. The factors noted below will help you build your resilience improving your adaptability and ability to cope.

• Social support systems include immediate or extended family, community, friends, and organizations.
• Realistic planning plays to your strengths with a focus on attainable goals.
• Self-esteem provides a positive sense of self and confidence in your strengths to guard against feelings of powerlessness.
• Coping and problem-solving skills empowering you to work through tough situations.
• Clear and effective communication skills enable you to provide and mobilize support of resources and act.
• Emotional regulation provides you with the capacity to manage or get assistance to support overwhelming emotions to remain focused through the challenge.

It is crucial for you to model resilience for the young people in your circles of
influence. Ken Ginsburg, Pediatrician at the Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia, developed the 7 Cs model of resilience to ensure a happier and more resilient life.

1. **Competence**: The ability to know how to handle situations effectively to trust your judgments to make responsible choices.

2. **Confidence**: True self-confidence is rooted in competence and gained in real life situations.

3. **Connection**: Close ties to family, friends, and community provide a sense of security and belonging.

4. **Character**: Fundamental sense of right and wrong to make responsible choices, contribute to society, and experience self-worth.

5. **Contribution**: A sense of purpose and contributing to your community reinforces positive reciprocal relationships.

6. **Coping**: Helps you better prepare to handle adversity and setbacks.

7. **Control**: Internal control helps individuals act as problem-solvers instead of victims viewing themselves as capable and confident.

Increasing your resilience takes time and intentionality. Focusing on the below will empower you to withstand and learn from difficult and traumatic experiences.

- **Build your connections by prioritizing relationships with empathetic, understanding, trustworthy, and compassionate people who understand the skills required to be resilient. Also join a group for social support.**

- **Wellness through self-care for your mental and physical health is important when building resilience. Avoid negative actions, like, alcohol or drugs. Learn to manage your stress rather than eliminating the feeling altogether.**

- **Find purpose by helping others through volunteering or supporting a friend in need. Acknowledge and accept how you feel during hard times and be proactive by assessing your life and any problems you find. Chunk or break up big problems into manageable pieces. If you get fired and you are overwhelmed, update your CV or research things you want to do. Focus on the future and potential opportunities during the struggle, for example, your personal growth, or improved relationships.**

- **Resilience gives you the emotional strength to cope with trauma, adversity, and hardship. When you lack resilience, you are more likely to be overwhelmed, feel powerless, and rely on unhealthy coping strategies. While you may not be able to control all your circumstances, you can grow by focusing on the aspects you can control.**

“*If your heart is broken, make art with the pieces.*” Shane Koyczan

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Gladys Agwai spent 30 years as a corporate executive leader within IBM in the US, Nigeria, Ghana, and Kenya. Her leadership experiences spanned across multiple functional areas, such as, Sales, Marketing, Financial, and Operations, key industries in Public Sector, Banking, Telecommunications, and Small Medium Enterprises, and cultures. She received multiple top leadership and sales awards throughout her career. She was sought out for an IBM Executive Loan program where she spent seven years working with the Committee for the Olympic Games with game changing thought leadership on its resource strategy that was implemented for future Olympic games. She is the Founder & CEO of Ignite Within.

Gladys Agwai can be reached at ignitewithin.org.
FirstBank's CR&S Week: Speakers advocate for kindness in Nigeria’s education environment

BY DE Sm ON OK OB N

With the belief that kindness has a role to play in learning, speakers from different professional backgrounds advocated for the entrenchedment of kindness in Nigeria’s education environment.

The push for kindness in education settings was done at a webinar hosted by First Bank as one of its activities to mark its 2021 Corporate Responsibility and Sustainability Week (CR&S).

The webinar’s topic, ‘Education: Does kindness have a role?’ created an intellectual atmosphere for the women to share ideas and dissect the significance of kindness and compassion in learning, especially in children.

The infusion of kindness and compassion in schools means emphasizing the manifesto of kindness which says kindness must be endless, and that everyone deserves to be treated with civility.

It also means that teachers and instructors need to be kinder in their duties because, according to the science of compassion shared by Liz Grant, assistant principal and director of the Global Health Academy at the University of Edinburgh, watching acts of kindness can stimulate a desire to be kind on others, especially children.

“First Bank’s benevolent week has evolved into one of the biggest CR&S events that staff, customers and the public look forward to annually.”

Meet our Speakers

Keynote Speaker

Prof. Liz Grant
Assistant Principal (Global Health) and Director of the Global Health and Development, University of Edinburgh

Mrs. Folashade Adefisayo
Hon. Commissioner for Education, Lagos State

Prof. Ken Amaeshi
University of Edinburgh, UK and European University Institute Florence, Italy

Temitope Sowande
Head, FirstAcademy, FirstBank

Dr. Maymunah Yusuf Kadiri
Director and Psychiatrist-In-Chief, Pinnacle Medical Services

“You First”
“Kindness can be learned by watching it, by modelling it,” Grant said.

“But I think it’s innate and people want to be kind but culture and systems are pushing it down.”

Speaking on the ‘Extraordinary Ideas of Kindness,’ Grant asserted that compassion involves noticing pain, suffering, interpreting this suffering, feeling empathic concern, and acting to alleviate this suffering.

According to Grant, compassion/kindness takes training, meaning it can be taught and if young people have the gift of kindness, then their values will be impactful.

She noted that some ways to practice compassion include greeting, curiosity, replenishment, giving joyfully, rejoicing in our shared common humanity, being fully present receiving in joy, taking time to pause, and focusing, which is being intentional about what we do to make the a better place.

“Curation, creativity, compassion are the skills you need to survive as a young person. These are the three employability skills we need for the future that will change the world,” she said, adding that compassion is a tool within which we teach.

In her remarks, Maymunah Yusuf Kadiri, director and psychiatrist-in-chief at Pinnacle Medical Services, said kindness is life itself and everyone needs it and it can be given anywhere and everywhere.

Kadiri, a psychotherapist and depression specialist, said education starts from childhood. When kindness is infused in schools, it benefits everyone, reduces bullying, boosts interpersonal relationships, and reduces depression, she intones.

Explaining the concept through an the acronym, ‘KINDNESS’ she said ‘K’ stands for Keeping the children safe, ‘I’ Inspiring them for greatness, ‘N’ Non-judgmental listening, ‘D’ Do not judge and criticise.


“It is easy to replicate kindness when you’re spiritually-minded,” said Kadiri.

She said further that kindness can be driven in schools and infused through its value system, motto, and teachers sticking to these values.

“We should have a World Kindness Day to celebrate kindness,” she adds, implying that the celebration should be made more popular and given attention in Nigeria.

In his view, Kenneth Amaeshei, Professor of Sustainable Finance & Governance, saw kindness as input in education in terms of preparing the environment for learning.

He also called for the need to “think about kindness at the institutional level”. However, he noted that caution should be applied when showing kindness as it could backfire.

“It can be interpreted as weakness and some people see it as patronising, but it shouldn’t stop us from doing the right thing.” He said in his response a question asked.

Since 2017 when it began with initiatives largely focusing on its staff members, the bank’s benevolent week has evolved into one of the biggest CR&S events that staff, customers and the public look forward to annually.

Deepening the gospel of kindness, it has become a veritable tool and platform for the bank to put its entire publics first, and to steer people towards a return to societal values and the age-long virtue of kindness.

Folashade Adefisayo, Lagos State’s commissioner for education, who set the tone for the conversation in her opening speech, described kindness as loaning someone your strength instead of reminding them of their weaknesses.

For her, more kindness can be done in service instead of physically. She encouraged Nigerians to be kind to people not because of who they are but because it is the right thing to do.

She commended the bank’s initiative to be kind. She also praised the SPARK (Start Practicing Acts of Random Kindness) initiative to ensure that their staff members are being kind to their customers.

“It’s clear that First Bank understands the need to be kind especially to people who cannot pay you back,” she said, while also cautioning workers to be firm while being kind as workers means judging situations rightly.
Founded in 1990 by Fashion designer Helen Unuane, Maison de Helen (MDH) is a high-fashion African luxury brand based in Lagos Nigeria.

Celebrated for her bold, elegant and unique designs, MDH works hand-in-hand with indigenous fabric producers and artisans across Africa, to develop exquisite fashionable pieces for the modern day African Woman and women who resonate with amazing pieces and collections from Africa.

MDH offers a full collection of ready-to-wear and accessories, and has established itself as a leader of feminine silhouettes in the fashion industry.

Their raw materials are sourced from rural and remote areas across Africa who have placed a unique premium and proud history on African heritage and production processes involved. These include Fabrics sourced from the Akwete people of Nigeria who specialise in hand woven textured fabrics, the Bark Cloth made in the Buganda Kingdom in southern Uganda, the Mud Cloth from Burkina Faso, Batik from Namibia, Kuba raffia cloth from Congo, Bongolan from Mali, Kanga cloth from Tanzania, and many many more.
Baked Plantains and Egg Muffin

INGREDIENTS
- 2-3 ripe plantains
- 1 tablespoon canola oil
- ½ medium onion thinly sliced
- 1 scotch bonnet pepper diced sub hot sauce
- ½ red/green bell pepper stem, ribs, and seeds removed, then thinly sliced in strips
- 1 small tomatoes
- 1 teaspoon minced garlic
- 1 teaspoon paprika
- 1 teaspoon Fresh thyme or any herb
- Coarse salt and ground pepper
- 6 large eggs
- 1 avocado optional
- ½ -1 cup sausage chopped

INSTRUCTIONS
- Using a sharp knife cut both ends off the plantain. This will make it easy to grab the skin of the plantains. Slot a shallow line down the long seam of the plantain, peel only as deep as the peel. Remove plantain peel by pulling it back. Slice the plantains into desired shape and size.
- Place them on the baking sheets in a single layer, spray lightly over the plantains using the canola oil spray and bake, turning over slices, after 8 minutes for about 12-20 minutes or till golden brown, depending on your oven.
- While the plantain is baking, heat a medium sauce pan over medium high heat and drizzle with 1 Tablespoons of canola oil. Add the onions, tomatoes, green pepper and cook for about 4-5 minutes.
- In a large bowl whisk eggs, add sauté vegetable mixture, season with salt and pepper according to preference.
- Pour mixture into a greased 10-inch baking pan. Layer the baked plantains and sprinkle the parsley in the baking pan.
- Bake in the oven for about 30-40 minutes; until mixture is firm in the center.
- Let it cool for a few minutes, top with avocado if desired.
BUNNY CHOW

Bunny Chow is a deliciously tasty South African street food made with aromatic spices, meat, chickpeas and potatoes served in hollow bread. A one of a kind sandwich!

INGREDIENTS
- 1 pound chicken thighs or breast cut in bite-sized pieces
- 1/2 cup canola or cooking oil
- 1/2 cup or more chicken broth or water
- Salt and pepper to taste

INSTRUCTIONS
- When ready to cook, heat up large saucepan with oil, and add onions, garlic, ginger, cinnamon stick, curry leaves, cardamom pods and curry powder, stir occasionally for about 2-3 minutes until onions is translucent.
- Add tomatoes followed by chicken, stir and sauté for about 2-3 more minutes. Add chicken stock/water if necessary to prevent any burns.
- Next add chickpeas, potatoes and chicken broth, about 1 1/2 cup, add more as needed. Bring to a boil and let it simmer until sauce thickens, it might take about 25 minutes or more.
- Adjust for salt, pepper and stew consistency.

- 2-3 Curry leaves
- 1 teaspoon minced ginger
- 2 teaspoons minced garlic
- 1 Tablespoon curry powder or more
- 1 medium onion diced
- 2 medium tomatoes diced
- 1 cinnamon stick
- 1 1/2 teaspoon paprika

- 3 green cardamom pods lightly crushed
- 8 ounce or less potatoes cleaned and cut into cubes
- 1 15-ounce can chickpeas rinsed and drained
- 1/2 teaspoon cayenne pepper optional

Maculate Bites