

**THE POWER OF**  
**100**

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CELEBRATING THE ACHIEVEMENTS, CONTRIBUTIONS AND  
STRENGTH OF THE WOMEN WHO HAVE HELPED SHAPE NIGERIA







## INTRODUCTION



Welcome to "The Power of 100", a collection celebrating the achievements, contributions and strength of the women who have helped shape Nigeria.

Access Bank produced "The Power of 100" as a platform to recognize Nigerian women. From the young to the old, across all the tribes and regions of Nigeria, these 100 women have no doubt contributed to the economic and social progress of the country.

I have been inspired by the stories of these remarkable women. There are well-known names and others less known, however, they have played important roles but until now are mainly unrecognized.

It is time to honor these role models and inspire the next generation of women to become leaders in their own right, while building a country that is inclusive of all people and offers equal opportunity regardless of gender.

I know that it takes many leaders to make a nation and to change the world. I hope like me, that you find "The Power of 100" inspirational and that it encourages you on your leadership journey.

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**Inez Murray**

Chief Executive Officer

Global Banking Alliance for Women



## PREFACE



Far from being an unattainable dream, gender equality is a necessary step for all societies on the road to success and happiness. The Power of 100 celebrates a group of women who have served as trailblazers and represent Nigeria's achievements towards full gender equality, while simultaneously offering a roadmap to success for the rest of Africa.

"The Power of 100" chronicles women from all walks of life. From the profile of well-respected Professor of Literature, Akachi Ezeigbo, to former Nigerian Chief Justice, Aloma Mukhtar and the first Nigerian female pilot Chinyere Onyenaucheya-Kalu, this book contains engaging profiles of inspiring women who have become leaders in their fields. From police traffic wardens to Olympic medal winners, these women, such as legal practitioner and human rights activist Maryam Uwais, are leading the way to a more just society.

Moreover, this book is not only about successful female entrepreneurs, but more about ordinary women who beat the odds to do extraordinary things with their careers and give back to society. Madam Ekundayo's big heart which caused her to open her home to underprivileged and disabled children is a perfect example of these generous acts of kindness.

Worldwide, over 30% of businesses are owned by women. The strength of this empowered portion of society cannot be underestimated. Strong female business leaders create change which ripples through the economy, driving growth with new ideas a world away from the one-dimensional business environments of previous decades. But 30% is not enough.

To truly achieve equality, the change must be felt on the ground in the everyday lives of Nigerian women. From the shop owner in Kano to the doctor in Lagos, the goal of gender equality is the aim of all women, of all men, and of all Nigerians. Access Bank recognizes these great achievements and seeks to inspire this generation to strive for the stars.



We are constantly looking for ways to support and empower women within our own business, from dedicated mentorship in our Access Women's Network to employee access to new healthcare, education and childcare facilities. We are living proof of how strong female leadership draws other leading women into the work place, helping to strengthen our businesses and our economy.

We hope that these examples of women's economic empowerment can shape and create a motivated and highly satisfied society, showing that financial inclusion for women is not only a matter of values, but also makes sense for the development of businesses and the wider economy.

I truly believe that equality between men and women will lead to greater economic growth. "The Power of 100" profiles the women that are ensuring we become an even safer and more innovative country which will help guarantee that Africa lives up to its potential.

These women have been essential to creating a strong, vibrant and prosperous Nigeria. There are thousands more ready to follow these inspirational women from all walks of life. All it takes is for institutions and organisations to recognise the potential out there and reject prejudice and bias. This is the key to Nigeria's continued success and Access Bank is determined to make this happen.

**Herbert Wigwe**

CEO and Group Managing Director of Access Bank



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# 1. ABIMBOLA AWOLIYI

**Born 1910/Died 1971, Medical Doctor**



Admired for her courage in breaking the barrier of gender inequality, Dr. Abimbola Awoliyi's foray into the field of medicine created the path for the legion of female medical practitioners who later became accomplished; in a profession, which hitherto was exclusive to males in Nigeria.

She is a visionary leader, innovator and advocate of women rights. Her ingenuity hugely contributed to building the Nigerian Health system, and her reputation as 'the Doctor with a motherly heart' saved countless lives and made her the preferred choice by patients seeking medical attention during her eventful career.

Dr. Awoliyi, who became a specialist in infant and mother care when mortality rate was depressingly high, earned a Medical Degree from the University of Dublin, Cafreys College in 1938 to become the first female physician in Nigeria. She rose to become the Chief Consultant and Medical Director of Massey Street Hospital in Lagos, and her tenure opened a new vista in the fields of Gynecology and Obstetrics.

Her transformational initiatives and selfless contributions in both private practice and public service were innumerable. Accordingly, her admiration by the people, community and country she committedly served for over three decades earned her numerous recognitions and laurels.

Some of these include the coveted national honour of member of the Order of the British Empire, and the traditional titles of 'lyale' of Oyo Empire and 'Iya Abiye' of Lagos, testifying to the value placed on her services.

**"A mother in a million and a good woman by any standard."**

Tunji Awoloyi





## 2. **ABIKE DABIRI-EREWA**

**Born 1962**, Journalist and Politician



**Success is not about age or status; it is not by how much you have in your account. It is about how many lives you touch and the people you lift up along the way."**



Right from her days at the National Television Authority, it was clear Hon. Abike Dabiri- Erewa was intent on a life of service. For one, her coverage of human-interest stories, in-depth follow-ups and investigations revealed a woman deeply committed to improving and impacting lives. She warmed her way into the hearts of many Nigerians both young and old with her gallantry and unbiased approach of using television as an effective tool to draw attention to the plight of millions of Nigerians suffering from the pains of poverty and injustice. Some of the landmark stories, including those highlighting the plights of the weak and vulnerable in society, have remained major reference points for today's journalists.

It was therefore not surprising when after 15 years as in the broadcast media she was elected to the House of Representatives, representing the people of Ikorodu Division of Lagos State. For 12 years as a parliamentarian, Mrs. Abike Dabiri-Erewa a commendable level of commitment, focus and diligent to her duties, especially as Chairperson of Committees on Media and Public Affairs, and Diaspora Affairs.

As Chairman, House Committee on Diaspora Affairs (2008-2015), her major spotlight has been in her advocacy and calls for justice and fairness for Nigerians abroad. For instance, visiting Nigerians in prisons abroad including South-Africa, Brazil, Indonesia, saving 24 Nigerians on a death row in Libya, interventions in China, Russia, Cyprus, Ghana, U.S.A, Saudi Arabia and several others.

She championed and sponsored the Freedom of Information Bill (FOI bill) which has now been signed into law in Nigeria, the Nigerian Infant Welfare Scheme Bill, Nigerians with Disabilities Bill, Bill to amend the railway act to allow private sector and state participation, Nigeria Diaspora Commission Bill, An Act to Eliminate Violence in Private and Public Life, A Bill to Promote the Advancement of Nigerian Women and Girls.



### 3. **ADA IGONOH**

**Born 1986,** Medical Doctor and Ebola Survivor

Dr. Ada Igonoh is a Medical Doctor at First Consultants Hospital, Lagos where the index Ebola case in Nigeria, Patrick Sawyer, was treated and died. She treated Sawyer, found him dead and by no surprise contracted the deadly Ebola virus from him...but her survival story is different because not only did she survive the deadly virus, but also gave birth to a healthy child.

Dr. Ada transcends her knowledge into a language that communicates confidence and joy to communities and individuals that she interacts with. Her natural blessings of being inspirational in her outlook, thoughts and words clearly expresses the reason why she took a risk of bearing a child in spite of all

possible medical scientific negative effects on the baby.

Dr. Ada has clearly streamlined love and confidence for the coming generations. She represents hope that is tested and real.

The significance of this heroine of a woman is best described in the words of a renowned Microsoft guru and philanthropist par excellence Bill Gates ... "Dr. Ada Igonoh's story is amazing. She is a Doctor in Nigeria and an Ebola survivor." "I want to thank Dr. Igonoh for her courage..." – Bill Gate.

The high profile risk and the result thereof of a healthy baby spells a defined hope and a new research line for future generations.



**"Her optimism was inspiring. Her story also gave me a deeper appreciation for all the health workers who are heroically caring for patients and trying to stop this epidemic. And it is a good reminder of the way uncertainty reigns in the early days of an epidemic."**

Bill Gate



## 4. **ADEDOTUN AKANDE**

**Born 1969**, Ex-Banker and Autism Centre Founder



Adedotun, like every mother would do, altered the course of her life to ensure a good life for her son, who was diagnosed with Autism. She later built on the challenges of her personal experience, bringing succor to parents in similar situation. To ensure adequate support for her Autistic child, Akande resigned her job as a Banker and dedicated her time to understanding the peculiarity of her son as well as create a nurturing environment for him.

Propelled by her experience, Adedotun, a 1991 Economics graduate of the University of Ado-Ekiti, resolved to contribute to managing the overwhelming challenge Autism poses to children, and by extension, parents. She established the Patrick Speech and Languages Centre in Lagos, in 2006, with two children.

Today with a student population of 42 children who learn differently; the center teaches basic functional educational and vocational skills geared towards raising independent adults. Adedotun's commitments have contributed significantly to giving hope to parents and their Autistic children.

**“I took it upon myself to do everything possible to see that children who suffered from this minor health setback - as I like to call it, get all the care and attention they deserve. So, seeing the joy and happiness on their faces today, makes my heart melt and encourages me to do more.”**





## 5. **ADERONKE KALE**

**Born 1940**, First Female Army Major General



Major General Aderonke Kale is a former member of the Nigerian Army. She was the first Nigerian woman to become a Major General in the Nigerian Army, receiving one and two stars.

General Kale's area of specialty is Psychiatry. She was inspired to study Psychiatry by the late medical giant, Professor Thomas Adeoye Lambo, Africa's first Professor of Psychiatry.

She was enlisted into the army as a Medical Doctor even when the military was not the regular career choice for women. She rose quickly to the rank of Colonel in 1990 holding the position of Deputy Commanding Officer, Medical Corp, Nigerian Army.

When she was elevated to full command at the Nigerian Army Medical corps and School (NAMS), she still maintained her role as Chief Medical Officer of the Nigerian Army until 1996 when she retired from the army.

On the February 13, 2012, she was honoured at the 17th edition of ThisDay Annual Awards for Excellence (Lifetime Achievement Awards).

**“General Kale is an inspiration and mentor to many women in uniform. She stands out as one in many, who dared to be different.”**



## 6. **ADIAHA EDEM UDOMA**

**The Aba Women's Riots of November 1929, also known as the Women's War and OguNdem or Igbo: Ogu Umunwaanyi**



**“The Aba Women riots marked the turning point in the largely unequal relationship between the colonialist and Nigerians.”**

In November and December of 1929, women in Calabar and Owerri organised a mass protest against public policies sanctioned by British colonial administrators. This protest sparked the most notable demonstration of the feminist and abolitionist movement in colonial Nigeria.

Thousands of Igbo women gathered in multiple towns around southeastern Nigeria, danced and chanted which was a traditional way of ridiculing the men that oppressed them. Throughout the two-month 'siege', over a hundred women were either injured or killed by colonial troops sent to control the situation. Among the women killed was Madam Edem/

Udoma who led the woman. She was later posthumously honored during the celebrations of the United Nations Decade for Women 1975-1985, and awarded by the Nigerian Association of University Women, where she was recognized and admitted as an Honorary member under the name of Madam Udoma.

She deservedly earned the recognitions because the riots marked a turning point in the largely unequal relationship between the colonialists and Nigerians, as the taxes levied were removed and the power the warrant Chiefs misused frequently was curtailed. Their voices were heard, loud and clear.



## 7. AFI EKONG

Born 1930/Died 2009, Doyenne of Modern Nigerian Art



Afi Ekong brought a new level of appreciation to art in Nigeria, especially contemporary African art. She studied at the Technical College in Oxford, The Saint Martin School of Fine Arts and Central School of Arts in Holborn, and specialized in painting.

Her works aptly told the stories of colonial Lagos and succinctly recounted the historical transformation that occurred within the city and Nigeria as a nation. She offered art and history lovers the opportunity to live in her perception of the past.

In 1958, she became the first Nigerian woman to organise a solo art exhibition in Lagos. Afik actively promoted Arts councils in Nigeria and ran the Bronze Gallery in several venues in Lagos. She loved flowers and this was depicted in her paintings, including scenes of daily life, with women in focus.

She retired in her native Calabar with five chieftaincy titles and left a legacy of the Bronze Gallery in Fiekong Estate, with more than 60 paintings and other works of art to her name.

**“She removed the fear that an artist could not be an entrepreneur. Her exemplary image had shown that an artist could earn sustainable living outside of paid employment.”**

Dr. Victor Ecoma

## 8. **AKACHI ADIMORA-EZEIGBO**

**Born 1947**, Academic and Fiction Writer



**“Feminism is about empowerment, not aggression.”**

With over 50 publications across the three genres of literature, 60 academic papers and a shelf teeming with prestigious literary and merit awards, including the Nigeria Prize for Literature and ANA/Cadbury Poetry Prize, Adimora-Ezeigbo is clearly established as a pioneer in the Nigerian literary firmament.

This highly respected Professor of Literature, acclaimed internationally for her works of fiction which include novels, plays and short stories for children, with an uncommon ability to reflect her childhood across rural and urban Nigeria in literature, is adept at storytelling.

Adimora-Ezeigbo, a vociferous voice against gender inequality, is notable for using literature as a vehicle for addressing issues around children. Her dexterity at exploring Nigerian folklore for societal development, attests to her interest in humanity.

A fellow of the Nigerian Academy of Letters, the highest academic qualification attainable in humanities in Nigeria, Adimora-Ezeigbo is also a professor of English at the University of Lagos.



## 9. **ALOMA MUKHTAR**

**Born 1944,** Jurist and First Female Chief Justice



Jurist extraordinaire, Aloma Mukhtar was born in Kano State in Northwestern Nigeria, and called to the English and Nigerian Bar in 1966 and 1967 respectively. She is the first woman to become the Chief Justice of Nigeria (CJN) since the nation had her first indigenous CJN in 1958.

Aloma Mukhtar served as the head of Nigeria's judiciary between July 2012 and November 2014, a period described as the peak of her more-than-four-decade law career. She is remembered in the annals of Nigerian judiciary for her vigorous efforts at reforming the judiciary and reclaiming its respect and dignity.

Justice Mukhtar was the 13th indigenous Chief Justice of Nigeria and was decorated with the National Honour of Grand Commander of the Order of the Niger (GCON) for her contributions to nation building.

**“Justice Mukhtar is unarguably a woman of many firsts; the first female lawyer from Northern Nigeria, first female judge of the High Court in Kano State judiciary, the first female justice of the Court of Appeal of Nigeria, the first female justice of the Supreme Court of Nigeria and the first female Chief Justice of Nigeria.”**





## 10. **AMAKA IGWE**

**Born 1963/Died 2014**, Scriptwriter, Producer and Entrepreneur



Amaka Igwe, a movie producer and scriptwriter, is a household name in Nigeria. She is respected for her creativity, and admired for her originality. She made an indelible mark in the Nigerian film industry with chartbusters, such as *Violated*, *Checkmate*, *Fuji House of Commotion* and *Rattlesnake*, which have raised the standard for movie production in Nigeria.

This imaginative creator was a role model to young writers and producers, especially young women, who saw in her the much-needed example and inspiration, required for success in an industry largely dominated by men.

As one of the pioneers of the world's third largest film industry – Nollywood, Amaka's involvement in instituting a culture of excellence, and entrenching competitiveness in Nollywood earned her several recognitions. Notable amongst these is the National Honour of Member of the Federal Republic (MFR), for her contributions to National development. She founded BOBTV Expo, Amaka Igwe Studios and Top Radio 90.9FM.

**“Bold, big, clear-minded, cannily analytical and with a gift for the well-thought-out declarative.”**

Akin Adesokan



## 11. AMEYO STELLA ADADEVOH

Born 1956/Died 2014, Physician and "Ebola heroine"



The story of a people's triumph over the spread of the deadly Ebola disease would be incomplete without the mention of Dr. Ameyo Stella Adadevoh. Although this heroine of modern society no longer lives to regale the glory of her service to mankind, her place in history is distinct.

The shadow of evil cast over Nigeria in July 2014 with the discovery of a patient infected with the Ebola virus sent every citizen into panic and Dr. Ameyo sacrificed her life in the line of duty to quell the looming doom over the country.

As a medical doctor, her conduct

demonstrated the selflessness that defines the profession and highlighted the hazards associated with the vocation. Dr. Adadevoh placed the Ebola virus patient zero – Patrick Sawyer – in quarantine, to prevent the spread of the lethal disease in Nigeria.

In the heroic attempt to keep Sawyer restrained, she became infected and passed away on August 19, 2014.

Her selfless contributions to reducing the impact of the virus saw her posthumously honored with numerous awards, including Nigeria's Hero of the Year 2014.



**"I learnt from my mum how to be a good person because she cared for everybody. There is a disabled man on our street who came around every Sunday. She bought him a wheelchair, and she always gave him money and showed him care. She also taught me how to be incredibly strong, and how to get things done. If she wanted to do something today, she got it done. She taught me how to enjoy life, she loved enjoying life, and she enjoyed it to the fullest. Also, she taught me the importance of faith because faith is the bedrock of life."**

Bankole Cardoso



## 12. AMINA NDALOLO

Born 1948, Public Administrator



Quiet, unassuming and publicity shy Dr. (Mrs) Amina Ndalolo is undoubtedly a patriotic, and public-spirited individual who has touched the lives of thousands of average grass root Nigerian women in many parts of the country.

A one-time Minister of State for Health, Dr. Ndalolo is an alumnus of famous Bayero University, Kano and the University of Ilorin. An accomplished School and Public Administrator, Dr. Ndalolo served as School's Principal for many years both in Kano and Kwara State.

She rose to the rank of Director in the service of Kwara State, serving variously as Director Better Life for rural women and Director, State Ministry of Works in the State. She was appointed Chairperson, Caretaker committee for Ilorin East Local Government of Kwara State.

Dr. Ndalolo has received many national and international awards for impacting positively on the lives of most vulnerable women and children in various parts of

the country.

Thousands of women in Patigi, Edu and other parts of Kwara were empowered on small scale enterprises and adult literacy programmes by her. The same programme was extended to Bida and Mokwa in Niger state and Lokoja and Kotonkarfe parts of Kogi.

As a Minister of State for Health, Dr. Ndalolo's passion in mobilizing Nigerian women and children under-5 for effective participation in Immunization as the most cost effective strategy for prevention of the child-killer disease remains un-precedented.

Dr. Ndalolo currently runs a number of educational centres where hundreds of girls in Patigi (a part of the North) who could not afford western education receive basic education, acquire vocational skills and in some cases attend sponsored professional courses across the country.



## 13. **AMINA MOHAMMED**

**Born 1961**, International Development Expert



Underdevelopment and its consequent poverty would have heightened the hopelessness of mankind but the commitment and selflessness of some individuals have continually helped in creating optimism for humanity. Amina Mohammed belongs to this league of social engineers who have invested their time, talent and resources into creating a better world.

As a seasoned technocrat, Amina is reputed for driving global development agenda targeted at lifting millions out of poverty and coordinating the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in Nigeria, with the office of the Secretary-General of the United Nations (UN).

Amina designed a Virtual Poverty Fund as inventiveness for poverty reduction, budget coordination and monitoring. In the course of her career, she has touched many lives by ensuring the MDGs programmes that provide potable water and basic health services were carefully monitored and executed. She was appointed a minister of the Federal Republic of Nigeria in 2015.



## 14. ANIKE AGBAJE-WILLIAMS

**Born 1936**, First Female Broadcaster



When the first Television station in Africa, Western Nigerian Television Service (WNTS) made its first broadcast on October 31, 1959, the face of Anike Agbaje-Williams was the first to appear. She was also the first female voice on Africa's first commercial radiostation, Western Nigerian Broadcasting Service launched in 1960.

She made her mark as a presenter, producer and newscaster. She is a toast of the younger generation of female broadcasters, who continue to esteem her as a role model.

Agbaje-Williams retired as a director of programs at the Nigeria Television Authority, NTA. She spent 30 years in broadcasting, with 26 of those years in television broadcasting.



**“Broadcasting is just like having a bath in the public, so you must be ideal for people to make you a role model.”**



## 15. **ARUNMA OTEH**

**Born 1965**, International Regulator



**“She did a credible job at the Security Exchange Commission, one year after the financial crisis. It was during her time that the needful transformation at the Nigerian Stock Exchange was made.”**

Stylish, Arunma Oteh is one determined woman who achieves what she sets out to do. A seasoned professional extraordinaire. This is evident in the quality of her achievements and the impact she has made in different spheres of life.

Oteh who graduated with a First Class honours degree in Computer science from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka and obtained a Master's degree in Business Administration from Harvard Business School, had worked at the African Development Bank Group (AfDB).

At AfDB, she was Vice President, Corporate Services before her appointment as Director General of Securities Exchange Commission (SEC) by the Federal Government. Her expertise revived the country's capital market where she courageously and meticulously acted despite opposition from the exploiters of the weaknesses in the system.

In January 2015, she gracefully concluded her five-year tenure as Director General at the Security Exchange Commission, and was appointed the Vice President and Treasurer of the World Bank by Jim Yong Kim, the president of the Institution in July 2015.

Arumah was honoured with the national award of 'Officer of the Order of the Niger (OON)' in recognition of her contribution to economic development and transformation of the Nigerian capital markets by the Federal Government in 2011. She also received the "Distinction in Public Service" award from the Commonwealth Business Council/African Business.



## 16. **AYO OBE**

**Born 1955**, Lawyer and Human Rights Activist



Trained as a lawyer, Ms. Ayo Obe is an eminent and highly regarded human rights activist. Ayo led Nigeria's oldest indigenous human rights body, the Civil Liberties Organisation (CLO) as President, from 1995 to 2003 - a period characterized by human rights abuses in Nigeria and through the country's return to civilian rule in May 1999. She is bold and an acclaimed voice of the oppressed in Nigeria.

As part of her contributions to nation building, Ayo chaired the Transition Monitoring Group (TMG), an election-monitoring/democracy-building coalition of independent NGOs, from 2000 to 2002 and served as the representative of coalition Nigeria's NGOs at the Police Service Commission (PSC) from November 2001 to 2006.

**"The price of our legacy and democracy will be eternal vigilance."**

## 17. **BILKISU YUSUF**

**Born 1952/Died 2015**, Journalist and Women's Rights Activist



Until her death in Saudi Arabia during the Islamic pilgrimage in September 2015, Hajiya Bilkisu Yusuf was the first female newspaper editor from northern Nigeria. She dedicated her life to improving the lives of Nigerian women and children. She was also a promoter for the education of girls and worked in the public sector, media and leading NGOs in her career spanning over 22 years.

As the founder and pioneer member of the Federation of Muslim Women Association of Nigeria (FOMWAN), she used various platforms as a journalist, to advance the cause of Muslim women in Nigeria by emphasizing the importance of gender equality policies. In her lifetime, she was a recipient of the Officer of the Federal Republic Award (OFR).





## 18. **BIMBO ODUKOYA**

**Born 1960/Died 2005,** Televangelist and Life Coach



'Pastor Bims,' as admirers popularly called her was an accomplished woman of God who became a role model to many. In her lifetime, Bimbo Odukoya invested time and resources in teaching young singles to believe in God, themselves, and to make the most of life by serving others.

A passionate marriage counselor, 'Pastor Bims' helped to infuse happiness in several marriages, and caused many relationships to blossom through her writings, teachings and outreach programs on TV.

This highly sought after conference speaker and televangelist, also produced the popular weekly television programme, "Singles & Married" and was the Chairperson of Discovery for Women, a ministry dedicated to inspiring women in their roles as mothers and leaders.

For her contributions to humanity and selflessness, 'Pastor Bims' received over 60 national and international awards. She was a Pastor at the Fountain of Life Church, where her husband, Taiwo, is Senior Pastor. They are blessed with three children. She died alongside 60 school children in a plane crash on December 10, 2005.

**"No love can ever fulfill us apart from God's love. If you do not find God's love, you can never be fulfilled no matter how deeply people claim to love you."**



## 19. **BOLANLE AUSTEN-PETERS**

**Born 1969,** Lawyer and Businesswoman

With master's degree in International Law from the London School of Economics and a degree in law from the University of Lagos, Bolanle Austen-Peters' career has seen her work for the United Nations across Europe, Africa and America. She is passionate about the preservation and promotion of Nigerian art and culture, which motivated her to set up Terra Kulture.

As Managing Director and Founder of Terra Kulture, Bolanle contributes in her daily activities to cultural and artistic diversity of Nigeria. She described the process of

starting the organization in 2003 as "a most rewarding exercise often filled with adventure, frustrations and triumphs". In its 12th year of existence, Terra Kulture has organized over 200 exhibitions, 90 plays and facilitated 60 book reading sessions, and over 10,000 adults and children have attended its language classes and excursions.

She worked as a Consultant to the Ford Foundation Lagos and helped raise millions of dollars for the Museum through the Arts and Business Council.

**"Terra Kulture promotes Nigerian art, culture and lifestyle out of passion, not out of financial gains."**





## 20. **BOLANLE AWE**

**Born 1933**, Academic and Social Reformer

Nigeria's first female professor of History, Professor Bolanle Awe is a shining example of work-life balance, a dexterity that poses a major challenge for most career women in the modern age.

Bolanle, who joined the University of Ibadan in 1960 after obtaining her D.Phil. from Oxford University in 1958, remained firmly committed to traditional African values of womanhood and respect. She used her academic achievements to press for the improvement of the material condition of women and the girl-child, especially with respect to access to education.

The highly decorated Professor of History held various administrative positions at the University of Ibadan. She was Pro-Chancellor and Chairman of Council, University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN) and held numerous portfolios in other universities across the world.

Outside her impressive academic career, Bolanle was Commissioner for Education and Commissioner for Trade, Industries and Cooperatives in the old Oyo State government. In 1983, she was honoured with the national award of 'Officer of the Federal Republic of Nigeria' (OFR). Also in 1983, she was named a Life Member of the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs.

**“More has to be done for women, I believe. I really respect the fact that our women achieve so much despite what they have to put up with.”**



## 21. **BUCHI EMECHETA**

**Born 1944, Novelist**

Buchi Emecheta's life is dedicated to challenging the expectations of Nigerian women. Born in Lagos, she persuaded her parents to allow her go to school, and she optimized the opportunity by earning a full scholarship to the Methodist Girls School through her brilliance. She went on to receive a B.Sc (Hons) in Sociology from the University of London whilst raising five children.

The themes of her novels - child slavery, motherhood, female independence and freedom through education have won her a number of highly coveted awards, acclaims and honours, including 'Order of the British Empire' in 2005.

Emecheta who has lectured at various universities in the United States of America and the University of Calabar, Cross River has written more than 20 books, some of which include *The Joys of Motherhood*, *Second-Class Citizen*, *The Bride Price* and *Double Yoke*. Her novels, most of which chronicle her personal experiences, seek to inspire women in search of independence and focus on societal issues, such as single parenthood, racism in Britain and the role of women in Nigeria.

Emecheta describes herself as an "African feminist with a small 'f'". Like her Nigerian ancestors, she uses stories to teach morals, entertain and instruct.

**"Women are born storytellers. We keep the history. We are the true conservatives – we conserve things and we never forget. What I do is not clever or unusual. It is what my aunt and my grandmother did, and their mothers before them."**

## 22. BUKOLA ELEMIDE

Born 1982, Singer, Songwriter and Recording Artist

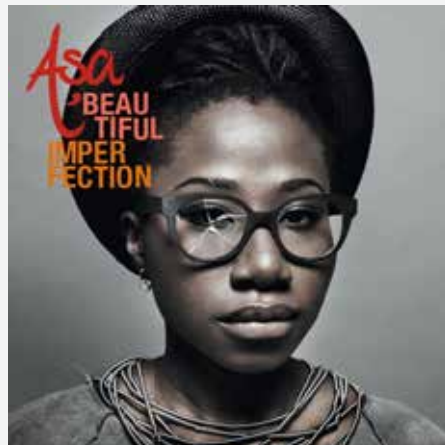


Her stage name is Asa or 'Hawk' in Yoruba; Bukola Elemide is a singer, songwriter and recording artist. Born in France, she moved with her Nigerian parents to Alagbole, a border town between Ogun and Lagos States, at the age of two.

Growing up in Nigeria influenced her love of Soul music, a passion that flourished during her time at Peter King's Musical School in Badagry. Having been signed by the independent French record label - Naïve Records, she produced her self-titled album 'Asha', which spawned global hits like 'Jailer' and 'Fire on the Mountain', songs that examined topical issues in the society. The album won the prestigious French Constantin Award in 2008, this projected Nigerians in good light on internationally recognized platforms.

Since then, she has gone ahead to produce two more studio albums, with the most recent being 'Bed of Stone' produced in 2014.

**"I know I can't change the past but as the river keeps flowing I'll keep moving on."**





## 24. **CHINYERE ONYENUCHEYA-KALU**

Born 1970, Pilot



Chinyere Onyenucheya-Kalu is Nigeria's first female pilot and currently heads the Nigerian College of Aviation Technology in Zaria.

Her career as a pilot cleared the path for many other young women who are now in the flying profession. Chinyere's achievements and sterling record of service inspired many and positively impacted global perception of Nigeria. Her exemplary career and strength of character have earned her numerous recognitions and awards.

Deservedly, she was conferred with the Member of the Order of the Federal Republic in 2006 which was followed by the African International Achievers Merit award in 2007.

**"I felt flying will be challenging and I didn't want to do what everyone else was doing at the time. I wanted something unique, special and challenging, something that I feel will be fulfilling."**

## 23. CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE

**Born 1977**, Author



Nigerian international writer, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie was born into an Igbo family in Enugu, with roots in Aba in the old Anambra state. Her most notable works include *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *Purple Hibiscus*.

Chimamanda grew up in the house formerly occupied by one of Africa's most accomplished writers, Chinua Achebe in Nsukka, as both her parents worked at the University of Nigeria.

After completing her secondary school education at the University Secondary School, Chimamanda had a short stint at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka where she studied medicine and pharmacy for a year and half, before proceeding to the United States at age 19 with a Scholarship in Communication at Drexel University in Philadelphia.

Chimamanda moved to Eastern Connecticut State University where she obtained a degree in Communication and Political Science in 2001. Subsequently, she obtained a Master's degree in creative writing at John Hopkins University, Baltimore, and another Master's degree in Africa Studies from Yale University.



Purple Hibiscus, her first novel, was shortlisted for the orange prize for fiction and emerged the winner of the Commonwealth Writers' Prize for Best First Book and the Hurtson/Wright Legacy award. The novel was also short-listed for the John Llewellyn Rhys Prize and long-listed for Booker Prize.

She published her second novel 'Half of a Yellow Sun', which is also the title of her short stories, in 2006. Although Chimamanda was only born seven years after the Biafra war, the novel is set before and during the war, focusing on the experience of three main characters. The novel explores morality, post colonialism, ethnicity, class, race, love and depicted the effects of the war on Igbo generations. The novel won Chimamanda the Orange broadband Prize for fiction in 2007 and MacArthur foundation fellowship in 2008.

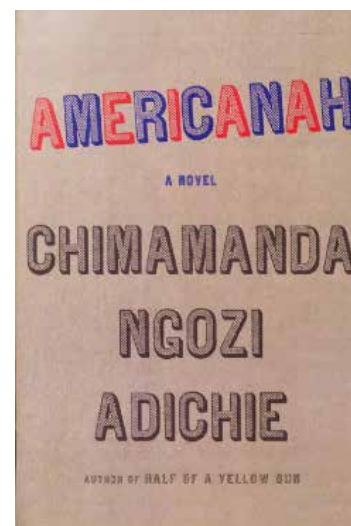
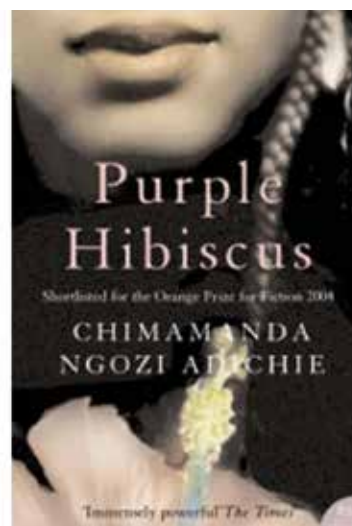
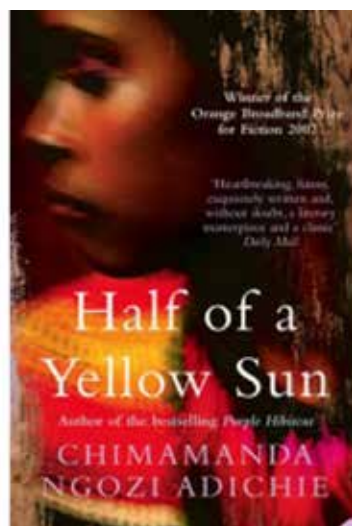
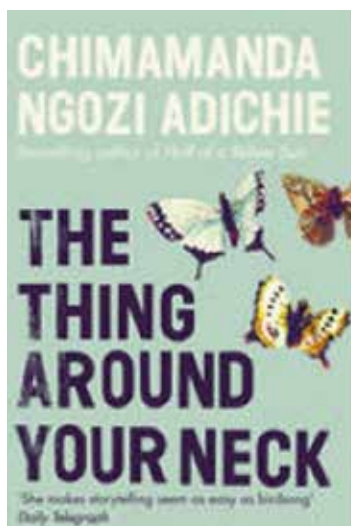
Chimamanda has published numerous short stories (fiction), which have been published in a number of literary journals. In 2003, she

received O. Henry Prize and in the 2005-2006 academic year, Chimamanda was a Hodder fellow at Princeton University where she taught 'Introductory fiction'.

In 2009, she published her collection of short stories, The Thing Around Your Neck. She said her next big project would see her literature focus on the experience of Nigerian immigrants in the United States. Adichie believes there is a greater danger in only portraying a single story and that varying aspects need to be understood. This is particularly evident for Nigeria. She has been described as the '21st-century daughter of Chinua Achebe,' (The Washington Post).

She is married and shuttles between the United States and Nigeria because of her regularly teaching at writing workshops. Recently, she received the 2011- 2012 fellowship by the Radcliffe Institute for advanced study at Harvard University.

**“I was allowed to speak and have a voice. I’m always thinking about how to change things. I wanted to talk about solutions and things that I care about.”**







## 25. **CHIOMA AJUNWA-OPARA**

**Born 1970**, Athlete and Police Officer



Chioma Ajunwa-Opara is Nigeria's only individual Olympic gold medalist. She began her career as a footballer, playing for the Nigerian women football team and the Falcons in the Women's Football World Cup in 1991 before changing to athletics.

In August 1996, she became Nigeria's first and only individual Olympic gold medalist after a leap of 7.12 meters in the women's long jump at the Atlanta Olympic Games.

Now a Chief Superintendent of Police (CSP) and an A star Divisional Police Officer (DPO), Ajunwa-Opara has retired from competitions but not left sports. Her foundation, the Chioma Ajunwa Foundation, has continued to promote sports, especially among young people, through the Mentorship and Campaign against Drug Use in Sports.

In recognition of her contributions to the development of sports in Nigeria, the Olympic medalist has received various accolades, including National of 'Member of the Order of the Niger (MON)'.

**"I braved odds to record all my achievements."**



## 26. CHRIS ANYANWU

Born 1951, Journalist and Politician



**“I am passionate about this place because I see the potential. And the potential is not just in the oil and gas, it’s in the human beings.”**

Chris Anyanwu, a media entrepreneur, was born in Mbaise, Imo State. She owns the rave radio station, Hot FM in Abuja. Following her early studies in Nigeria, she moved to the United States of America where she attended the University of Missouri and Florida State University, studying Journalism and Mass Communication.

Upon her return to Nigeria, she produced the flagship news programme, Newslime, for the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA). In 1989, she was appointed Commissioner for Information in Imo. Subsequently, Chris became the publisher and Editor-in-Chief of The Sunday Magazine, an investigative newsmagazine. She was imprisoned from 1995 to 1998 for treason after reporting the failed coup against the government of Late Gen. Sani Abacha.

While in confinement, Chris was honoured with awards and prizes by several international media organisations and agencies for her courage. These organisations include the International Women’s Media Foundation, the CPJ International Press, and the UNESCO’s Guillermo Cano World Press.





**“Fulfilment, blessings and joy come from giving. To really live is to live for others and in loving others, we prove we love God.”**

## 27. **CHRISTIANA BAMIDELE GEORGE**

**Born 1955,** Reverend and Orphanage Founder

Christiana Bamidele-George founded the Little Saints Orphanage; it's the first private orphanage to be registered by the Lagos state Government in 1994. This was after the establishment of The Family Relief Center of the Strong-Tower Mission where the needs of the poor and widows are met regularly. Here the widows benefit from Business Support to start petty trading and the elderly are put on weekly allowances.

Bamidele-George's journey into supporting the less privileged dates back to 1990 after a stint at the International Bible Institute of London.

As a result of her work at Little Saints Orphanage, people became more educated and embraced the concept of child adoption in Nigeria. 80% of the children have been adopted and fostered by well screened families both in Nigeria and abroad. Subsequently adoption rate in Lagos has increased tremendously.

Since inception in 1994, over one thousand children and babies have passed through the orphanage. With the 3-tier program of

REHABILITATION, REFORMATION and REINTERGRATION, she has three centers in Lagos, one in Delta state and an upcoming in Edo state.

The Little Saints as the children are fondly called are in various schools ranging from Nursery to University and some are gainfully employed.

Bamidele-George also initiated the formation of the Association of orphanages and home operators (ASOHON) in Nigeria to eradicate the menace of baby factories, stop the malpractice of fake orphanages, standardize the operations of orphanages and unite all agencies in the country towards the promotion of the rights of vulnerable children.

She is serving as the National President of the association which has grown with 25 chapters across the country.

She read Accounting at the Ahmadu Bello University and is happily married with children.



## 28. **CHRISTY ESSIEN-IGBOKWE**

**Born 1960/Died 2011**, Musician and Actress

Popularly called Nigeria's Lady of Songs, Christy Essien-Igbokwe had the gift of composing lyrics that cut across age and tribal barriers. Her evergreen songs, "Ever Liked My Person" and "Seun rere," were among her numerous hit records. She sang in Igbo, Ibibio, Efik, Hausa and Yoruba with equal charm and fluency. She was also an actress in the popular "New Masquerade" and the first female President of the Performing Musicians Association of Nigeria, (PMAN).

After her death, Chika Okpala, popularly called Chief Zebrudaya, said, "Christy carved out a niche for herself, while acting alongside Clarus Mgbojikwe, alias Acting Big Man. We missed her on the set. Since she left the production, we have not been able to get somebody to fit into her role. We pray that 'Chineke' God should give her a second chance so that she can return to us." She performed in different parts of the world and won several local and international awards.





## 29. **DEBORAH ENILO AJAKAIYE**

**Born 1939**, Geophysicist

**“I chose geophysics because I felt that this field could make possible significant contributions to the development of my country.”**



Prof. Deborah Enilo Ajakaiye is a pre-eminent Geophysicist in Nigeria and Africa overall. As a renowned and acclaimed expert in her most recent field focusing on crustal structure for petroleum exploration, she has led work in the USA and in several African countries (including Chad, Sudan, Congo) and Latin American countries (Argentina, Paraguay, Guatemala amongst others) to prospect for hydrocarbon reserves particularly in inland basins on behalf of Governments and oil exploration companies.

Prof. Ajakaiye's previous works have led to discoveries of petroleum, mineral deposits and groundwater reservoirs in Nigeria, and she has contributed significantly to mineral and energy development policies for Nigeria. Her recent research activities included: potential fields and seismic surveys for Oil & Gas exploration in the Nigerian Inland basins (Chad, Gongola-Yola, Benue Trough, Anambra, Bida, Sokoto & Dahomey Basins, & Benue Trough); and the hydrocarbon resources potential evaluation in inland basins particularly in Africa and South American countries.

She has served in the last four decades as Convener/Chairman of several international conferences, workshops and seminars in geosciences research and exploration, including; Two training workshops in Gravimetry, held in Cote D' Ivoire, and Nigeria for participants from 16 countries in Africa at each workshop; First major Symposium on Erosion, Desertification, and Environmental Problems associated with Mineral and Oil exploitation in Nigeria; International Conference on 'New directions in Mineral Developmental Policies - Geosciences in International Development' and Commonwealth Road show in Science and Technology for mentoring young East African girls.

Prof. Ajakaiye holds a B.Sc (Hons) Physics degree from University of London, England; an M.Sc degree in Applied Geophysics, University of Birmingham, England; and a Ph.D. degree, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria, where she served as Head of Physics Department and Dean of the Faculty of Natural Sciences, a post she also later held at



the University of Jos,

Prof. Ajakaiye has also authored/co-authored 7 books and monographs, over 140 major reports on Earth Science subjects, and over 60 publications in international journals, and has served on the Editorial Advisory Board of several international journals. She has supervised or co-supervised about 100 graduate students at University of Manitoba, Canada, University of Jos, and Ahmadu Bello University (ABU), Zaria,. At ABU, she initiated and coordinated a B.Sc. programme in Optometry, an M.Sc. programme in Radiation Biophysics, and a M.Sc. course in Applied Geophysics, which was the first in Africa. She is also a fellow of several international organizations.

Prof. Ajakaiye has had many 'firsts' in her distinguished career, including: first female Professor of Physics in black Africa, first female Fellow of the Nigerian Academy of Science, first female President of the Nigerian Mining and Geosciences Society (NMGS), first President of the Association of Geoscientists for International Development (AGID) and first female Africa Region President and Advisory Board Member for the American Association of Petroleum Geologists (AAPG).

She is also the first female African to be honored by AAPG, with a distinguished service award for her substantial contributions to the development and growth of tertiary

geoscience education across Africa and leadership roles.

A fellow of several national and international associations, she is notably the first black African to be awarded an Honorary Fellowship of the Geological Society of London, England. She was one of the first three Nigerians to be honored by the Nigerian University Commission (NUC) for contributions to higher education in the country, and in 2011, NUC honored her as the most Distinguished Physical Science Professor.

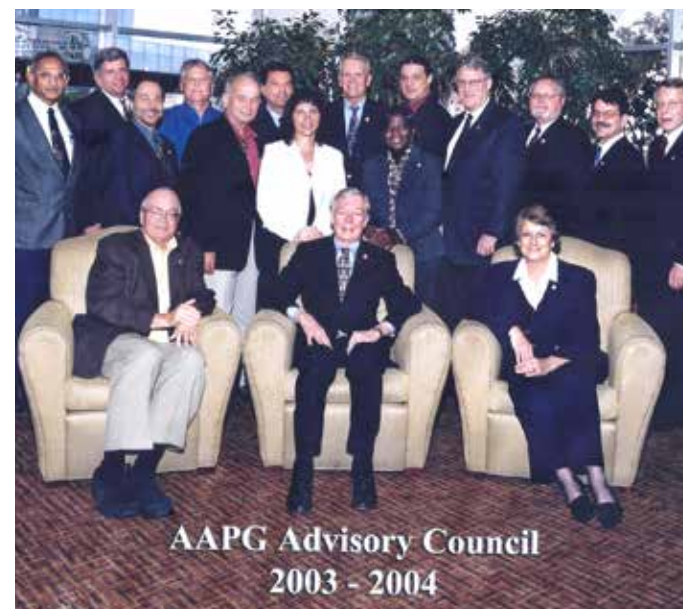
In 1999, she received the Shell Petroleum Development Corporation /NMGS Meritorious Award for landmark achievement in the earth sciences in Africa. In 2007, she was conferred with the Aret Adams' Award (the highest award given to Earth Scientists who have made significant contributions to the field of petroleum exploration), by NAPE (Nigerian Association of Petroleum Explorationists). In 2008, she received the National award of Officer of the Order of the Niger (OON) and in 2010, was honored amongst the 'Top 50 women leaders' in Nigerian history.

In terms of non-governmental and benevolent activities, she has served as Executive Committee member of Hope for the Blind (a non-profit organization based in Wusasa, Zaria devoted to helping the visually

impaired in West Africa).

For several years in St Luke's Cathedral Church Jos, Plateau State she served in various capacities including, Licensed Lay Reader, as well as Chairman, Education Board of the Diocese of Jos and was recently honored with a Selfless Service Award by the Church. She has also served as Licensed Lay Reader and Lay Eucharistic Minister in the Diocese of Texas, Episcopal Church, USA.

Prof. Ajakaiye is the Founder and President of Christian Care for Widows, Widowers and the Aged, (CCWA), a registered Non-Profit Organization founded in 1991. CCWA now caters for the needs of over 25,000 widows, orphans and the aged in 475 groups located in several towns and villages spread across the 6 geopolitical zones in Nigeria.





### 30. **EBELE OKEKE**

**Born 1948, Civil Engineer**

Ebele Okeke studied Civil Engineering at the University of Southampton and holds an MBA from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka as well as an Honorary Doctorate degree in Technology Management from the Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University.

She started her career as a Public Health Engineer with Sandford, Fawcett, Wilton and Bell, Consulting Engineers in London. She went on to become the first female Head of the Civil Service of the Federation of Nigeria and first female Civil Engineer in Nigeria.

Ebele worked toward solving the sanitation challenges in Nigeria and Africa. She is a

founding member of the Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council (WSSCC) and was elected a leading Spokeswoman on the Sanitation and Water for All Steering Committee (SWA).

Ebele founded the Association of Professional Women Engineers of Nigeria (APWEN), Abuja Chapter in 1991 and became the first member and the first Chairperson of the chapter. The organisation has proven to be a critical resource centre for young engineers, especially female engineers. Okeke was honoured with Officer of the Order of the Niger (OON) in 2006 and Commander of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (CFR) in 2007.

**“With her various accomplishments, Okeke has not only sent a heartwarming and inspiring message to every Nigerian woman who strives for excellence but has also ensured that women who came after her will not be considered non-equals among men.”**



## 31. ELIZABETH ADEKOGBE

**Born 1919/ Died 1968**, Assistant Inspector, Teacher, School Headmistress, Journalist and Women's Rights Leader



Elizabeth Adekogbe, nee Adeyemi, was born into the Ajaloorun royal family of Ijebu-Ife in South-West Nigeria. A nationalist, politician and women's rights leader, Elizabeth founded and led The Women Movement of Nigeria in 1953. The association was established with the mission to promote gender equality, universal suffrage and provide education on women's rights.

She strove to increase the international representation of Nigerian women and affiliated the group with the International Council of Women (ICW). She became the first Nigerian woman to take part in an international conference of women, held by the ICW in 1954 in Helsinki, Finland.

As a journalist, Adekogbe's articles, which focused on women's issues, were published in the Nigerian Tribune, the Daily Times, the West African Pilot and the Southern Nigerian Defender. She was also the producer of a radio programme for the Nigeria Broadcasting Corporation, focusing on related topics.

Until her death, she held the title of the Iyalaje of Ikija.

**"At a time when keeping women as permanent underdogs of society was conventional and even considered admirable, Elizabeth Adekogbe rallied 14 other educated women and founded the Women Movement of Nigeria. She became one of the frontline soldiers of women's rights movement in Nigeria right before independence in 1960."**



## 32. **ELSIE OLUSOLA**

**Born 1938/Died 1991**, a former TV Presenter and Actress



The Village Headmaster was a binding force and it brought people from diverse ethnic backgrounds together. Every sitting room where there was a television set; hosted the Village Headmaster viewing guests. Elsie Olusola came to national prominence with the epic programme Village Headmaster, which was created and directed by her Late husband Ambassador Segun Olusola on television. It was one of the most popular television sitcoms in the 70s and early 80s and it ran for over a decade

Sisi Clara as she was fondly addressed in the Village Headmaster series was the fascinating and elegant lady whose glamour and personality made her the trend-setter of Oja Village.

Born to an Efik father and Itsekiri mom. She studied in the UK from an early age and read Drama and Communication Arts at the renowned Rose Bruford Academy of speech and Drama.

Olusola worked with the Voice of America as an African correspondent for several years before she retired to found Talent Associates, a communication consulting firm.

She was a women advocate, and belonged to several women organizations including the National Council for Women's Society, Business and Professional Women's Club and Zonta International amongst others.

Olusola will be fondly remembered for her creative and critical thinking in acting, communication and the promotion of Women's Rights.

### 33. **FALILAT OGUNKOYA**

**Born 1968**, Athlete and First Female to win individual Olympics medal



Falilat has one of the most impressive records in competitive sports in Nigeria, having started at age 12 in 1980. Since emerging as the best runner in an All Secondary Schools Competition held in Sagamu that year, Nigeria’s queen of the track has not looked back in her winning spree.

She repeated the feat at the National Sports Festival in Ilorin, Kwara State in 1985, winning four gold medals. The following year (1986), Ogunkoya became the World Junior Champion in Athens, Greece.

Her true moment of glory, came at the 1996 Summer Olympic Games

in Atlanta, USA, where she not only became the first Nigerian athlete to win individual medals at the prestigious games, but also the first to win two medals (one silver and one bronze). Though retired from competitive sports, she continues to make immense contribution to sports through the Falilat Ogunkoya Sports Foundation, supporting grassroots sports development in Nigeria.

“Her true moment of glory, came at the 1996 Summer Olympic Games in Atlanta USA, where she not only became the first Nigerian athlete to win individual medals at the prestigious games, but also the first to win two medals (one silver and one bronze).”



## 34. FLORENCE NKIRU NWAPA

**Born 1931/Died 1993**, Writer and Beacon of the Literary Arts



Regarded as the mother of modern African literature in certain quarters, Florence who is Nigeria's first female novelist still enjoys the reputation of being Nigeria's first published female novelist in English Language internationally.

Long before the concept of 'feminism' gained awareness amongst Nigerian women, Florence also addressed as Flora had promoted the theme through her writings. She is reputed for creating and portraying very strong and independent female characters in her novels. For her dexterity, she has been described as a pioneer of Nigeria's literary arts, especially for female writers of the generation that came after her.

Florence considers herself as a 'womanist' rather than a 'feminist', and tells the stories of women's struggles and triumphs in a male-dominated world in some of her famous books, such as *Efuru*, *Idu*, *One is Enough* and *Wives at War*.

Notably, her greatest contributions and impact remains her resourcefulness at reuniting lost children and displaced families, and provision of adequate shelter for over 2000 children orphaned after the Biafran war. This attempt at national reconstruction is indicative of her kind-heartedness and responsibility towards humanity.

**"After founding her own publishing company (Tana Press) in the 70s, she had said her goal was to inform and educate women all over the world, about the role of women in Nigeria, their economic independence, their relationship with their husbands and children, their traditional beliefs and their status in the community as a whole."**



## 35. **FINBARR CLANCY**

**Born 1927, Social Worker**



Born in County Clare Ireland, Rev. Sis. Finbarr Clancy joined the Franciscan Missionaries of the Divine Motherhood Congregation 65 years ago and came to Nigeria as a missionary in 1963. Her mission took her to Northern Nigeria where she settled down to give hope and skills to Polio victims.

As a result of the growing number of crippled children crawling and losing the use of their limbs, while in Yakoko in Taraba state, she established the Polio Rehabilitation Center and catered to the needs of these people.

In her quest to educate and rehabilitate polio victims, Sr. Finbarr was never put off by anyone as she went from office to office pleading for funds and support from the Government and philanthropic individuals.

She started with the few children whom she took to Mkar NKST hospital in Benue State to be fitted with callipers and crutches. Through her Center, she provided them with education and skills that made their lives more meaningful. Some of the children are gainfully employed with government Parastatals today.

She earned the name "Yakoko Oyinbo" having fully integrated with her adopted home and her Polio victim "children" with whom she worked for 18 years at the Polio Centre in Yakoko. She has now returned to England after spending 53 years in Nigeria.

**"She gave hope for living to Polio victims who would have otherwise been beggars"**



## 36. **FOLAKE SOLANKE**

**Born 1932**, First Female Lawyer



Chief Folake Solanke became the first female lawyer to become a Senior Advocate of Nigeria (SAN), in March 1981 and this is just one of her numerous achievements. In 1972, she was appointed Commissioner, Western State of Nigeria and chairperson of the Western Government Broadcasting Corporation Television and Radio network services.

On the international scene, Solanke became a source of pride not only for Nigeria and Nigerian women, but also for Africa and the black world as a whole when she became the 42nd President of Zonta International, an international service organization on July 21, 1994.

By this appointment, she became the first non-Caucasian to be elected and to hold the position of President since Zonta was founded in 1919. The feat opened the gate for other African presidents, as her successor was also African.

She has held many positions in various institutions and associations, and published over 70 papers across varied subjects, including law, women's rights, Zonta and Christian topics.

**“Chief Folake Solanke became a source of pride not only for Nigeria and the Nigerian woman, but also for Africa and the black world as a whole. On July 21, 1994, she became the 42nd president of Zonta International, an international service organisation.”**

## 37. **GAMBO SAWABA**

**Born 1933/Died 2001, Social Crusader**



**“If I don’t know book, I know rights...”**

“If I don’t know book, I know rights... I have not been a member of any House of Assembly (legislature). I have not held any office, except that I was a member of the House of Prison.” These words succinctly explain Hajija Gambo Sawaba and her indefatigable fighting spirit that refused to be silenced.

The odds against her were more than enough to stop her. Being married-off at 16 and with her little education were enough reasons for any woman to remain oppressed. Hajija Sawaba, however, defied the odds. As a young adult she became very active in politics, teaming up with some other non-conforming young people from the North to found the Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU) during the First Republic.

Her name Sawaba is derived from Sawabiya (redeemer), a name given to her by a NEPU leader, and a name she lived by until her dying day. More than once she was arrested and imprisoned, but she continued to fight for women’s rights, especially the right to vote and be allowed to participate fully in politics and governance.

A born mobiliser and philanthropist, Hajija Sawaba worked tirelessly, most times expending her personal resources to improve the living conditions of the neglected masses in the northern region, also speaking out on their behalf, even when it frequently got her into trouble with the native authorities.



## 38. **GEORGIETTA YEHOUENOU**

### **Lagos Female Traffic Warden**

"Madam Georgietta" is the tough, passionate traffic warden usually deployed to the Falomo Bridge area of Lagos. Her devotion to work and sense of humour, in spite of the pressure of the work, has endeared her to many motorists and passersby.

She demonstrates the meaning of the truism that 'there is dignity in labour' in her daily conduct and pleasing mien in the face of frustrating circumstances that surround her job. We have all been there - the mazy and crudely planned Lagos roads that drive us up

the wall and test the limits of our nerves. Madam Yehouenou is instrumental to ensuring that traffic flows along these convoluted roads as effectively and seamlessly as possible. Her efforts help motorists keep important appointments and arrive their homes safely.

In fact, it is hard to drive by her post without noticing her devotion, and the passion she brings to her work. In recognition of her role in the society, she was recognised at the '50 Women @ 50 Awards' in 2001.

**"A role model and epitome of dignity in labour".**





**“To her, it’s not about the first female Vice-Chancellor, the first female Chief Judge of a state or the first woman Chief Justice of the Federation, but rather it’s actually about having more women in such high places that it would cease to be a phenomenon! To her, that is when we can say we are making progress.”**

## 39. GRACE ALELE-WILLIAMS

**Born 1932,** Academic and First Female Vice Chancellor

It was probably in this woman that the phrase “beauty and brains” found its earliest expression in Nigeria. When Grace Alele-Williams received a PhD in Mathematics Education from the University of Chicago in 1963, she made history as the first Nigerian woman to be awarded a Doctorate degree but that was only the beginning.

In 1975, Grace became a Professor of Mathematics at the University of Lagos, the first woman to attain such an enviable height. With that, she was literally enlisted into a hitherto exclusive male club. Soon, she recorded yet another first when, in 1985, she was appointed as the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Benin.

Two events that affected the policy and practice of education from elementary level to university level changed her goal from becoming just a secondary school teacher of mathematics. She became exposed to a wider system and understanding of the role of education for any nation while at the University of Vermont, Burlington Vermont, USA. This led her to explore the depth and importance of education and mathematics.

In her seven years as the Vice-Chancellor at the University of Benin, she demonstrated that women are capable of executive Leadership at any level especially academia and she typically broke the glass ceiling.

Grace’s contributions to education in Nigeria is unprecedented. She included extensive work in the areas of mathematics for Primary and secondary schools. Introduced teacher’s guide and mathematics text books for colleges of Education.

Other notable achievements are the introduction of current, relevant and economically viable courses such as Part time undergraduate courses in Law and part time Masters degree in Business Administration amongst others.

Professor Alele-Williams has received numerous awards including the meritorious Officer of the Order of the Niger (OON) in 1987. Her sterling performance in the course of her career and her contributions to the development of education in Nigeria is unparalleled.





## 40. **HADIZA BALA-USMAN**

**Born 1976**, Lawyer and Social Crusader

While Nigeria, like the rest of the world, was still in shock about the kidnap of more than 200 Chibok girls by unknown bloodthirsty renegades, Hajiya Bala Usman was one of the first to immediately act, rather than continuing to rue the sad incident.

She rallied like-minded individuals, mostly women, who had resolved that while they might not be able to go after the terrorists, they would raise a great deal of dust and not back down, until concrete and verifiable plans were in place to recover the kidnapped girls.

Since then, the initiator of the 'BringBackOurGirls' campaign, which went global, has never looked back in spite of unending threats to her life. Her desire to drive change and bring awareness to issues that

affect Nigeria has not been diminished by those who oppose her beliefs

Last year, Financial Times (FT) named her as one of the most influential women of 2014. CNN chose her as the most inspiring woman of 2014, just as Ebony magazine named her amongst the 100 most influential black women in the world in 2014.

Hajiya Usman, who was also recently appointed Chief of Staff by the Kaduna State governor, Mallam Nasir el Rufai, has shown what resoluteness can achieve for a worthy cause, even by a lone voice. She attributes her opinionated nature to her late father, Yusuf Bala Usman an intellectual and outspoken man.

**"I am not going to stop because I am being threatened, or because they are bugging my phones, I have nothing to hide."**



## 41. HAFSAT ABIOLA-COSTELLO

**Born 1974,** A Pro-democracy Activist and Founder of the Kudirat Initiative for Democracy

"What doesn't kill us makes us stronger."

These words by German-Swiss philosopher and writer Friedrich Nietzsche ring ever so true of the life of Mrs. Hafsat Abiola-Costello. She is the daughter of the acclaimed winner of the June 12, 1993 elections, Bashorun Moshood Kasimawo Abiola and his wife, Kudirat Abiola.

Losing both parents suddenly, and under controversial circumstances, did not stop her. Hafsat chose to respond differently. Despite the obvious danger associated with her actions, she refused to be silenced. Through a non-governmental organisation named after her slain mother, the Kudirat Initiative for Democracy (KIND), she promotes the development of women as initiators of change by offering leadership training and raising

awareness about societal issue, such as violence against women.

She was the initiator of the China-Africa Bridge and China Africa Forum, which promote positive economic partnership between China and Africa, with focus on women's contributions to the economy.

Hafsat, who also served as special adviser to the Ogun State government on Millennium Development Goals, is a recipient of several international awards, including the Global Leader of Tomorrow Award from the World Economic Forum, the Youth Peace and Justice Award of Cambridge Peace Commission and the State of the World Forum Change Maker Award.

**"Abiola-Costello has made it her goal to strengthen organisations and create initiatives dedicated to the advancement of women."**



## 42. **IBILOLA AMAO**

**Born 1965,** Social Entrepreneur

Call Dr. Ibilola Amao a woman of many parts and you won't be wrong.

But beyond her membership of various organisations and professional associations, she is certainly one woman with her eyes on the future. Since 1991 when Dr. Ibilola Amao founded Lonadek Nigeria Limited, her commitment to youth development and capacity building has been a driving force that has seen her work tirelessly to impact young people through various projects.

She constantly invests her time and efforts in career counselling, industry awareness and youth empowerment hence the formation of "The Vision 2020: Youth Empowerment & Restoration Initiative" a Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) driven programme in May 2006.

Her personal aspirations have found expression in her company's goals, which focus on local content and capacity building to transform SME's into multinational and trans-generational businesses.

Ibilola also mentors and coaches female professionals and entrepreneurs that are involved in or interested in STEM.

She has a Ph. D. in Computer-Aided-Design and Draughting from Bradford University, UK. She is the Chairperson for the Industry Advisory Team, Lagos State Technical and Vocational Education Board and also an Advisory Board member of the PennWell Offshore West Africa (OWA), a Fellow and Member of Council of the Energy Institute (EI), UK, a chartered member of the Nigerian Society of Engineers (NSE).



**"Working with our Vision 2020 Science Competition winners, NYSC's, STEM teachers/Lecturers, our foreign technical partners and now, most especially, the Energy Institute, I intend to focus on building the capacity, capability and competence of entrepreneurs and youths in STEM focused enterprises and initiatives globally"**



## 43. **IBUKUN AWOSIKA**

**Born 1962,** Entrepreneur and Social Change Engineer

Ibukun Awosika is one of the most astute entrepreneurs in Nigeria. In 2015, she was appointed as the Chairperson of First Bank Plc., the first woman to occupy the position in the bank's over 120 years of existence.

From when she started Sokoa Chair Centre Limited and TCC Security Systems, which became a foremost manufacturer and marketer of office furniture and bank security systems in the Nigerian and West African market, Ibukun's entrepreneurial acumen has established her as an investor of repute.

A distinguishing feature of her entrepreneurial practice is passion for life and commitment

to societal development. She puts her resources to great use, while mentoring young entrepreneurs (youths and women), creating value and championing causes that positively impact the younger generation. One of such transformational initiatives is the 'After School Graduate Development Centre' (AGDC), a social enterprise designed to address employability issues and promote enterprise development amongst young Nigerians.

Awosika, a recipient of multiple awards and a Pastor at the Fountain of Life Church also hosts a popular TV programme called 'Business His Way'.

**“There are challenges everywhere. You must have tenacity; you must have strength of character not to cheat. Don't run at the sight of the first problem. He who confronts challenges wins, you must learn every day, you must seek in order to find.”**



## 44. **IFEOMA FAFUNWA**

**Born 1964**, Creative Director

Ifeoma Fafunwa is the founder and Creative Director of iOpenEye, which utilises performance art to drive social change.

She has over 20 years of professional experience in the UK, US and Nigeria, designing and directing artistic projects in theatre arts and architecture. She leverages theatre as a tool for depicting past and present life, and the struggles and successes along the way.

Born in Lagos, Ifeoma is a graduate of the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, and Dorsey Studios for the Performing Arts. She is a Fellow of the third class of the Africa

Leadership Initiative - West Africa, and Aspen Global Leadership Network. She runs a pro-bono performance art workshop, building capacity in young female performers in Nigeria.

She is adept at producing and directing. Her dexterity in these areas are evident in some of her recent works which include 'HEAR WORD! Naija Women Talk True' – a collection of riveting monologues based on true-life stories of Nigerian women, aimed at challenging social, cultural and political norms that limit the potential and contribution of women. Ifeoma is married with four children.



**"I do not like the word 'feminist'. I think it is outdated. It reminds me of words like 'colored' or 'negro'. It implies a lack of progress as its meaning should no longer be relevant. It is like me asking a man if he were a 'masculinist'."**



## 45. **IFUEKO OMOIGUI-OKAURU**

**Born 1962,** Tax Reformist and Public Servant



Her name is synonymous with brilliance, and her style is elegant. Ifueko Omoigui-Okauru is a reformist who left an indelible mark in the Nigerian public service. She is a Chartered Accountant, Chartered Tax Practitioner, and Management Consultant.

She is the first female Executive Chairman of the Federal Inland Revenue Service of Nigeria, and the Joint Tax Board of Nigeria. Her contribution to transformation of the country's revenue collection process is remarkable and has enhanced the country's fiscal strategy.

Ifueko graduated with a first class in Accounting from the University of Lagos and worked at Accenture for 12 years. She is currently engaged as an associate with the Harvard University Faculty of Arts and Science (FAS) undertaking research in Leadership, Social Enterprise, Culture and the Nigerian Nation.

She was a member of President Goodluck Jonathan's Economic Management Team and a recipient of the Member of the Federal Republic Award (MFR). Ifueko is currently the Executive Vice Chairperson of Restral Consulting one of the earlier indigenous Management consulting firm she established in 1996.

**“Tax collection in the FIRS under Omoigui-Okauru grew astronomically from slightly below N1.2tn to over N4.6tn in 2011.”**



## 46. IRENE MODUPEOLA THOMAS

Born 1917/Died 2005, Medical Doctor and Social Activist



Dr. Irene Modupeola Thomas was an exceptional woman who was committed to improving the wellbeing of the Nigerian woman and child.

In her position as president and trustee of the Inter-African Committee (IAC) for the Prevention of Harmful Practices, she lent her voice to abrogation of harmful practices, including female genital mutilation, the caste system, child abuse and early marriage. The IAC worked to expose and fight harmful practices that undermine the wellbeing of Nigerian/African women.

After her training at University of Durham's King's College School in 1954 where she earned her medical degree, Dr Thomas returned to Nigeria to take up an appointment in Nigeria's public service, serving in several strategic positions.



While serving as general practitioner at the Island Maternity, she discovered the practice of female genital mutilation. The level of mortality associated with the practice motivated her to begin a campaign to eradicate the exercise. Her activities drew the attention of the World Health Organization in 1984, establishing the Inter-African Committee as the frontline for the eradication of all harmful practices affecting women and children in Africa.

Dr. Thomas was the Director of Medical Services and Training, Federal Ministry of Health, Lagos. She had received honors from organizations such as the Nigerian Medical Association, Kenya Medical Association, Council of Ijesha Societies, Cathedral Church of Christ and the Nigerian Government, which conferred on her, the national honor - Officer of the Niger (OON)

**“It was early in her career and in the course of her work as a general practitioner at the Island Maternity, Lagos that she first encountered female circumcision and also observed the high level of mortality that was associated with the practice. She subsequently resolved to embark on eradication work that is aimed at discouraging the practice because she could not find any acceptable and rational reasons for it.”**



## 48. **IVY UCHE OKORONKWO**

### **Deputy Inspector General of Police**

Ivy Uche Okoronkwo is a former Deputy Inspector General of Police.

In 2006, she made history as the first female commissioner of police to head a state police command in Ekiti State and was appointed an Assistant Inspector General of Police to head the Zone 7 Headquarters Abuja.

In 2010, she also became the fourth female Deputy Inspector General of Police in a 371,000-strong male-dominated Police force.

She started her policing career in 1978 after graduating with a Second Class upper division in Sociology and Criminology from the Ahmadu Bello University Zaria. She is also an alumnus of the National Institute of Policy and Strategic Studies (NIPSS) Kuru, Jos.

In recognition of her service towards women and global peace, she was inducted to the 'Hall of Fame' for women in Nigeria. She was appointed the President of Women Police Officers in West Africa.





## 47. **ITUNU HOTONU**

**Born 1959**, Rear Admiral, Nigerian Navy



Admiral Itunu Hotonu is Nigeria's first female Rear Admiral, and the highest-ranking female officer in the Nigerian Armed Forces. Her rank is equivalent to a two-star-General in the Nigerian Army thus making her the second female two-star general in the Nigerian Armed Forces after Major-General Aderonke Kale who retired in 1997.

The first child in a family of four girls, she was raised by her father to do all the 'manly' chores in the house, which undoubtedly, prepared her well for the task ahead. Admiral Hotonu has served at various naval formations and in different capacities across Nigeria.

She was Director of projects, Naval Headquarters Commander, Lagos Logistics Depot and Command Logistics Officer, Headquarters Eastern Naval Command, Calabar. In 2008, she was appointed Managing Director of the Nigerian Navy Post Service Housing Scheme, a position she held until her promotion to the rank of Rear Admiral in December 2010.

Rear Admiral Hotonu also served as Group Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer of Navy Holdings Limited in 2010. She has been decorated with some of the most prestigious military awards, which include FSS, MSS, DSS.

Rear Admiral Hotonu studied Architecture at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka and applied to the Nigerian Army to pursue her military career. She was however not accepted into the engineering corps before she subsequently applied to the Nigerian Navy, and began her training in 1985.



**“I had a dream to get to the top of my career and nothing was going to let me go off that dream. Sometimes it looked like a distant dream, sometimes it would even fade to a dot in the horizon, sometimes I would want to give up but the good thing was that I had a lot of supportive people who believed in me, people who, when the going got really rough, said to me, no, you cannot give up. ”**

**“And believe me there were times when it got really rough and those were the times when that dream was like a dot. The major challenge, I must be very honest with you, is the fact that you know you meet a lot of men who wonder what you are doing in their territory and you have to spend every day of your life proving that you should be here. For me there is nothing in this constitution that says I am not a full- fledged citizen of this country. I don't see it anywhere, but you see, there are still people who still have issues with that, and such people vent their frustration on you. But you have to be resilient enough and claim your place because nobody is going to give it to you”**



## 49. **JADESOLA AKANDE**

**Born 1940/ Died 2008,** Academic, Feminist and First Female Vice Chancellor, Lagos State University



"I am an unrepentant feminist!" These were the words of Professor Jadesola Akande. They were not empty, boastful words – or an attempt to draw undue attention.

Professor Jadesola Akande was appointed as the first female Vice Chancellor of Lagos State University and subsequently became the second female Vice Chancellor of the University of Lagos. Both appointments were in 1989, serving as a valid testimony to her administrative acumen and cerebral nimbleness.

Her life as an academic and women advocate drew attention to the plight of women in the society, especially when it concerned access to and equality before the law. She dedicated herself to correcting the perceived injustice among the women folk.

She represented the Nigerian Association of the University women, a non-governmental association at international and national levels. Before her death at age 68, Professor Jadesola Akande founded and ran the Family Laws Centre, an initiative sponsored by the Ford Foundation to provide poor individuals access to legal services. Her last engagement was serving as the Vice Chancellor of Lead City University, Ibadan, Oyo State.

**"It's about women and women's rights, it's about women rising up to take their place. It also has to do with being a woman and seeing other women not being allowed to rise up, seeing other women whose potential is being killed."**



## 50. **JANET EKUNDAYO**

**Born 1917/Died 2009**, Humanitarian, Africa's "Mother Theresa"

Madam Janet Ekundayo dedicated her life to taking care of orphans, a gesture, which made people refer to her as the 'Mother Theresa of Africa'.

Having had five children of her own, Madam Ekundayo dedicated her life to the service of the orphaned and disadvantaged children. In 1969, she threw herself into the aftermath of the huge displacements and suffering caused by the Nigerian civil war.

By 2007, she had cared for 469 children. In appreciation of her commitment to humanity and love for children, singer and songwriter, Toyin Shokefun Bello (TY Bello) wrote a tribute song, dedicated to Ekundayo and described her as "a wake-up call for all Nigerians".





## 51. **JANET MOKELU**

**Born 1910/Died 2003**, Politician, Nationalist and Activist



Janet Mokelu was a politician, nationalist and activist. In 1959, she was appointed into the Eastern House of Chiefs and subsequently became the first female lawmaker in Nigeria alongside Margret Ekpo, with her election into a regional parliament - the Eastern Region House of Assembly.

Janet was not just a female legislator, but also a patriotic Nigerian who was instrumental to granting universal adult suffrage to women. As an activist and nationalist, she led the demonstration by Eastern Nigerian women against the shooting of coal miners in Enugu by the colonial police and soldiers.

Mokelu served in various capacities in the First and Second Republics under the umbrella of the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC), and was also the secretary of NCNC women's wing as well as Secretary of the United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA).



## 52. **JEAN OBI**

**Born 1935,** Social Activist



Jean Obi is British by birth and the founding Chairperson of the Anglo-Nigerian Welfare Association for the Blind (ANWAB).

In 1962, she moved to Lagos and joined the West African Examinations Council (WAEC), where she taught herself Braille. In 1988, she participated in an international forum in London to find ways of promoting the use of Braille. She came back determined to set up a National Braille Authority in Nigeria, and in 1991 she took part in initiating the National Braille Council of Nigeria (Nabracon). She is the current President of the council and represents Nigeria on the executive committee of the International Council on English Braille (ICEB).

In the 1990s, the national body of Nigerwives, an association of foreign wives of Nigerians, accepted a proposal to set up the Nigerwives Braille Book Production Centre. With her leading role, the association pioneered the computer production of Braille textbooks in Nigeria. In 1996, she also played a key role in setting up a similar organisation, which is now ANWAB. She serves on ANWAB's Management Committee, which she chaired from 1996 to 2007.

Through her work, reading and instructional materials have been provided for blind school children across Nigeria for over three decades, which have helped improve reading culture and academic performance. Over 300 textbooks have been made into Braille by the Nigerwives Braille Book Production Centre.

In 1997, she was awarded the Ulverscroft International Prize for initiative in providing educational services for the visually impaired and was awarded an 'MBE' in the United Kingdom 1998.



## 53. **JOKE SILVA**

**Born 1962**, Veteran Actress and Director

With a glittering career spanning over three decades, Joke Silva is a veteran of the Nigerian Movie industry. She studied Performing Art at the Webber Douglas Academy of Dramatic Art in London and majored in acting. She returned to a flourishing career in Nigeria and subsequently studied English at the University of Lagos in 1988.

Her first appearance was in the movie, 'Violated' and she has since featured in over 100 movies and stage plays, some of favourites include 'Owuro loj'o', 'Secret Laughter of Women', '30 Days', 'Letters to a Stranger', 'Widow's Cot', 'For Coloured Girls', 'White Waters', 'The Amazing Grace', amongst others.

Joke has received several awards and nominations for her work as an actress. Some of these include 'Best Actress in a Leading Role' at the African Movie Academy Awards in 2006 and 'Best Actress in a Supporting Role' at the African Movie Academy Awards in 2008.

Joke is married to another Veteran Actor, Olu Jacobs whom she met at the cast of Wole Soyinka's novel – Jero's Metamorphosis and their marriage is blessed with two children.



## 54. JOSEPHINE UGWU

### Cleaner Who Returned 'Missing' N12M

Josephine Ugwu is a contract staff in the cleaning department of the Federal Airport Authority of Nigeria (FAAN).

On January 23, 2015, she stunned the country with an act of unprecedented honesty when she returned the sum of N12m (Twelve Million Naira), which she found in the restroom of Murtala Mohammed International Airport while diligently doing her job. Josephine's exemplary act of returning the missing money was not a flash in the pan as she has consistently returned missing money at the Airport. In 2006, she

returned the sum of N10, 200,000 (Ten Million, Two Hundred Thousand) at the Enugu Airport and in December 2014, she returned the sum of N600,000 (Six Hundred Thousand) and N3,000,000 (Three Million Naira).

That the amount of money was equivalent of her aggregated salary for many years, stood the country in awe. Josephine's uncommon deed of uprightness reverberated across the country, and restored our dignity as a people.

**“Her extraordinary action will go a long way in changing generalizations and stereotypes of Nigerians as crooks and fraudsters. Josephine, became Nigeria’s mascot of honesty. She was honored at a special parliamentary session by the Lagos House of Assembly. The state recognition was for “integrity, uprightness, sincerity, truthfulness and patriotism”. As proof of the saying that our values shape our behavior, she responded to the honor that “I also want to prove to the world that Nigeria is a good country with people of integrity unlike the wrong impression they have about the country”.**





## 55. DR JOSEPHINE ODUMAKIN

**Born 1966,** Human Rights Activist

Driven by the belief that silence should not be an option in the face of tyranny, Josephine Odumakin has relentlessly participated in the struggle for democracy and responsible governance in Nigeria.

'Joe', as she is popularly known, is the President of Campaign for Democracy, and Executive Director of the Institute of Human Rights and Democratic Studies. An ardent defender of human rights, Joe holds a bachelor's degree in English Education, a master's in Guidance and Counseling and a doctorate in History and Policy of Education from the University of Ilorin.

For her gallantry in the face of oppressive rule and immense contributions to Nigeria's return to democratic rule, the State Department of the United States of America honored her with the International Woman of Courage Award in

2013.

Her activism, which has caused the Nigerian government to change position on some issues, has seen her participate in and lead several advocacy organisations. Some of which include her appointment as the President, Women Arise for Change Initiative, President, Centre for Change in Community Development and Public Awareness and Spokesperson, The Coalition of Civil Society Organisation.

'Joe' acknowledged the risk of her actions in an interview at the beginning of her activism career, saying **"I called my lawyer-friend and told him to prepare my will, and then, I had a mattress and books. I told him that if anything happens, give my mattress to the motherless babies, give my books to the University of Ilorin library."**



## 56. **JOSEPHINE EFFAH-CHUKWUMA**

**Born 1966,** Activist and Counsellor



Josephine Effah-Chukwuma is Founder and Director of Project Alert on Violence Against Women, a non-governmental human rights organisation that seeks to promote and protect the rights of women and young girls.

Using her NGO as a platform, Josephine counsels and provides shelter for sexually abused women. Her struggles in protection of women against abuses have restored hope to many and saved several lives.

Josephine is a member of the National Task Force on Comprehensive Sexuality Education in Nigeria. When she was 23 years old, she worked as acting editor for the women's page of the then Democrat Newspaper. This responsibility subsequently earned her a scholarship to pursue a master's degree abroad.

As a friend of the needy and supporter of the less privileged, she has won a number of awards and laurels. Specifically, the UNDP Rare Gem Award was in appreciation of her contribution to humanity, and the Friends of the Needy and Amazons Award by Cross River State Government.



## 57. **KOFOWOROLA ABENI PRATT**

**Born 1918,** Pioneer Nigerian Nurse

Popularly called Africa's Florence Nightingale, Dr. Chief Kofoworola Pratt, who was former Vice President of the International Council of Nurses, contributed immensely to the development of the Nursing profession in Nigeria.

In the early days of her nursing career, Kofoworola was the only black nurse in the UK's National Health Service when it began in 1948. For the love of her country, she returned to Nigeria to practice in the University College Hospital (UCH), Ibadan, which was Nigeria's first teaching hospital.

Kofoworola was not only the first qualified registered nurse, she was also the Chief Nurse of UCH, the first Nigerian woman to hold such position.

Her admirable nursing career set the path for other Nigerian women to follow in the field of Nursing. She presided over the affairs of the National Council of Women Societies (NCWS) from 1971 to 1976.



## 58. **KUDIRAT ABIOLA**

**Born 1938/Died 1996**, Politician, Social Crusader and Martyr



Kudirat Abiola, a businesswoman who became an activist on the account of injustice done to her husband, Chief Moshood Kashimawo Olawale Abiola, the acclaimed winner of the annulled June 12, 1993 presidential election.

She was a prime supporter of the educational programmes of the Ansar-Ur-Deen Movement in Nigeria and engaged in other philanthropic ventures that alleviated the sufferings of the less privileged in the society.

Kudirat was shot dead on June 4, 1996, alongside her driver by gunmen around her home in Lagos. At this time, this martyr of democracy had been at the forefront of campaign for the release of her husband and his installation as The President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria with a view to restoring the country to democratic rule.



## 59. **LADI DOSEI KWALI**

**Born 1925/Died 1983, Master Potter**

She remains a foremost authority on pottery. Her reputation as a master potter transcends Nigeria and Africa, Ladi Dosei Kwali was a skilled potter, with preference for the 'coiling and pinching' method. Pots made through this approach are noted for their beauty of form and decoration.

Ladi's pottery works were displayed during Nigeria's independence celebrations in 1960 to showcase the artistic potential of the new country and express the beauty of its citizens.

Born in the village of Kwali in the Gwari region - the present Federal Capital Territory, she joined the Cardew's pottery training centre in Abuja as the only woman potter in 1954. For her dexterity and creative excellence, she was awarded a Doctorate and made a member of the order of the British Empire MBE in 1963, and her works were shown in London, at the Berkeley Galleries.

Ladi became the first woman whose image will be on the Nigerian currency and her portrait still adorns the back of the Twenty Naira note. The Abuja Pottery was renamed the 'Ladi Kwali Pottery' and a major street in Abuja was renamed 'Ladi Kwali Road' in her honour.

Her unparalleled vision and creativity redefined the craft of pottery, just as her impact still resounds in the art world.



## 60. **LAILA DOGONYARO**

**Born 1944/Died 2011**, Politician and Social Crusader



Laila Dogonyaro, widely known as Hajiya, was an activist with a passion for feminist movements in Nigeria. She was highly vocal on feminine political issues. She started off fighting to end the suffering of women in northern Nigeria, and later agitated for the participation of women in politics.

During her life, Laila was associated with a number of activist movements, beginning with her involvement with the Jam'iyar Matan Arewa, in the north of Nigeria. She was a former president of the National Council for Women Societies. In 1998, she founded the Women's Opinion Leaders Forum.

Laila was on the team of the UN Women formerly called 'United Nations Fund for Women' (UNIFEM) which was driven to ensure women had a voice in politics. She described the role of women in the politics of the first republic as that of a "flower vase" because some women were then active participants in politics but did not have the right to vote or be voted for.

Despite her limited education to primary school level, she pushed for girls to receive proper education and founded a secondary school in her hometown. She received several awards in her lifetime, including Officer of the Order of the Niger (OON) in 2001.



## 61. LAJA ADEDYOIN

**Born 1955,** Founder of Heart of Gold Children's Hospice

Laja Adedoyin is the founder of the Heart of Gold Children Hospice. The facility which is probably the first of its kind in Nigeria celebrated its 10th anniversary of impacting lives in December 2014.

Having operated centers that cared for people with disabilities in the United Kingdom, she felt compelled by obligation to the Nigerian society to return home with her skills and knowledge in this specialized area. This led to the establishment of The Heart of Gold Hospice

The home cares for children with mental and extreme physical disabilities, and also offers home care services to support families with children with disabilities. In describing her experience, Adedoyin said, "It has remained the most rewarding and challenging journey of my life. It has afforded me the opportunity of being loved and loving others in return."

She has several awards in recognition of her remarkable service to humanity.

**"I believe children have the right to grow to their full potential irrespective of their physical and mental disabilities. For these children who have no clear idea of how much time they have with us, every second counts."**



## 62. **MARGARET EKPO**

**Born 1914/Died 2006, Politician**

Margaret Ekpo was a member of parliament between 1960 and 1966, and was one of the first female politicians in Nigeria. A prominent human rights activist, she pioneered the concept of unions for market women in Nigeria. Margret helped to organize the Market Women Association in Aba and she stood side-by-side male politicians in the fight for independence in the First Republic.

She was one of only three female politicians in the House of Chiefs in the pre-independence era.

**“With grace of carriage, she stood her ground as an equal of men, representing women resolutely and with great dignity in multiple capacities.”**





## 63. **MARY SLESSOR**

**Born 1848/Died 1915, Missionary**

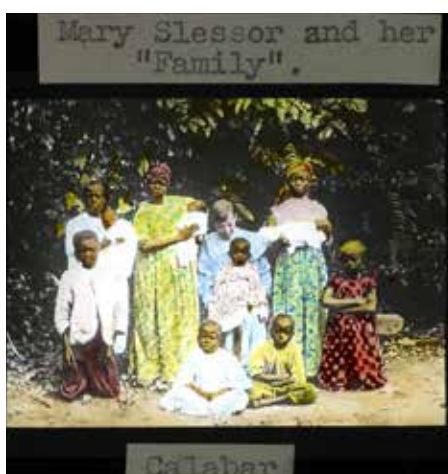


Mary Slessor was a Scottish missionary born in Aberdeen. Inspired by David Livingstone, she left Scotland in 1876, and later arrived in Calabar, a town in Cross River state as a member of the United Presbyterian Church's Foreign Mission Board in Nigeria.

On arrival, Mary had to confront significant issues posed by strongly held traditional beliefs of the locals. One of such is the superstition amongst the Efik that twins were evil, which she ended permanently. She worked relentlessly to arbitrate issues in native courts and spread western education. Ultimately, she earned the trust and respect of the locals because of her affinity to their culture, and has since been commemorated across monuments in Calabar.

Slessor learnt to speak Efik, the native language of the Efik tribe, and made close personal friendships wherever she went, becoming known for her pragmatism and humour. She lived a simple life in a traditional house with the Efik people. Her exploits were heralded in Britain and she became known as the "white queen of Okoyong."

In spite of the multiple bouts of fever as a result of malaria that she contacted on her first arrival, she lived nearly 40 years in Nigeria and earned the name Eka Kpukpru owo (Everybody's mother) before her death in the quiet village of Use Ikot Oku, Nigeria.



## 64. **MARY ONYALI-OMAGBEMI**

**Born 1968**, Athlete



Mary Onyali-Omagbemi is the Special Adviser to the Director General of the National Sports Commission (NSC) and Chairperson of Women and Sports.

She is one of Nigeria's most successful female sprinters. Her interest in athletics began in elementary sports lessons. Mary trained and won competitions throughout her days as a student.

At the international level, Mary won Bronze medals in the 4 x 100m relay at the 1992 Olympic Games and the 200m at the 1996 Olympic Games. She also won seven medals at the All-Africa Games in several individual short sprint events. Her consecutive Olympic appearances from 1988 to 2004 made her the first Nigerian to compete at five Olympic games.

**“When it comes to sports, we all sweat the same way and we all bleed the same way and we all feel the pains the same way. So, we should be treated equally, regardless of gender.”**





## 65. **MARIYA SUNUSI DANTATA**

**Born 1938,** Entrepreneur and Philanthropist



Matriarch of the Dantata Dynasty. Hajiya Mariya Sunusi Dantata is an example of the mustard-small as a seed but mighty as a tree. Although she got married at an early age of 14 years, her works of charity, humility, devotion and faith in community stood her out.

She chose to go into business, after her Qur'anic education. She conducted her business completely in line with the tenet of Islam. The Matriarch ploughed the proceeds from her business into education, building numerous nursery and primary schools with conventional and Islamic curricula in Kano. She was passionate about the education of the girl child and adult education and invested heavily in these causes. One of her children, Aliko Dangote, would become Africa's richest man.

She made a name for herself by investing her personal resources in charitable causes such as women development, building homes for the poor, providing boreholes for potable water in rural and urban area. She built a 120 bed hospital equipped with 100 KVA power plant and handed it over to Kano State Government as part of her contribution towards healthcare development in the state. Hajiya Mariya is a recipient of so many honorary awards and was awarded the national honour of member of the order of the Federal Republic, MFR.



## 66. **MAY ELLEN-EZEKIEL**

**Born 1956/Died 1996, Journalist and Publisher**

May Ellen Ezekiel popularly called 'MEE', was a popular journalist, writer and publisher. She studied at the Nigerian Institute of Journalism and the University of Wisconsin, United States of America.

She started her journalism career at the Sunday Concord in 1982 before moving to Newswatch in 1985 as Assistant Editor. 'MEE' went on to become the Editor of Quality Magazine in 1987. In 1989, she became the publisher of

the highly respected Classique Magazine, which provided valuable perspectives on the society to readers.

A successful author of both fiction and non-fiction works, including children's books; 'MEE' was an astonishing career woman, mother and philanthropist. She was recognised for her charitable work, receiving numerous awards in her lifetime. MEE was married to Richard Mofe Damijo.

**"An adept wordsmith with unique ability to draw in a reader and offer insight into the walled lives of celebrities."**





## 67. **MARYAM UWAIS**

**Born 1959**, Lawyer and Human Rights Activist



**“I will curb the child marriage syndrome of young girls in northern Nigeria.”**

A lawyer and human rights activist, Maryam Uwais is the Principal Partner at Wali-Uwais & Co. She was appointed a member of the National Job Creation Committee in 2010, having previously served as the Acting President of Nigeria’s Presidential Advisory Council.

She founded the Isa Wali Empowerment Initiative in December 2009, an organisation aimed at alleviating the poor conditions of women and children in education, healthcare and empowerment.

Maryam served as a task force member of the Next Generation Nigeria Report convened by the British Council in November 2009 and has worked as a consultant to the Open Society Initiative for West Africa, UNICEF, the World Bank, and the British Department for International Development.

She currently serves on the boards of the Justice Research Institute and as an advisory board member of the Nigerian Women’s Trust Fund. She is a Fellow of the Nigeria Leadership Initiative and a member of the Aspen Global Leadership Network.

Maryam was called to the Nigerian Bar in 1981 and has over 30 years cognate law practice experience. She began her career with the Kano State Ministry of Justice, where she spent seven years before moving to the Nigerian Law Reform Commission, after which she co-founded the law firm, Wali Uwais & Co.

Maryam is currently the special adviser to the President on Social Investments.



## 68. **MODUPE COLE**

**Born 1904/Died 1980,** Educationist & Social Worker

In an era when women were looked upon with condescending compassion as the “fairer sex,” Elfrida Mabel Modupe Cole was determined to leave her footprints in the sands of time. She did not allow the prejudice of the early 20th century get in the way of her mission.

Modupe Cole was the daughter of Mr. Claudius & Mrs. Sussana Macfoy, originally Sierra Leoneans and prominent Lagos merchants.

A Methodist and alumnus of the Methodist High School, Lagos, she was documented in the school's centenary brochure as “one of the outstandingly brilliant student teachers who passed the first year exam in 1922.” But her real passion was in touching lives. She was deeply affected by the high rate of delinquency among teenagers, a malaise she saw firsthand when she served as magistrate of the Juvenile Court.

Apart from providing counseling through the Yaba Girls Club, which she founded, she later travelled to the UK to study how to manage a home for delinquent and handicapped children. In 1961, her passion and odyssey led her to start what is perhaps Nigeria's first privately run home (in Surulere, Lagos) for handicapped children - a home which not only cares for handicapped children but also serves as an orphanage and training center for caregivers. The 55-year-old center serves as home for 500 children and is currently being managed by the Lagos State Government while the clinic established for the children is being managed by the Women Voluntary Organisation.

Modupe Cole, one of the pillars of the Young Christian Women's Association in the 1960s, was honored with an MBE by the British government and awarded Member of the Order of the Niger by the Nigerian government.

**“If you don't have anything good to say about someone, then don't say anything.”**





## 69. **MODUPE OLADUNNI OMO-EBOH**

**Born 1920/ Died 2000**, First Female High Court Judge



Modupe Oladunni Omo-Eboh (nee Akingbehin) was the first female High Court Judge in Nigeria. She was called to bar in Lincoln's Inn London on March 14, 1953 and appointed a High Court judge on November 10, 1969.

Her appointment came virtually at the end of the Nigerian civil war, with the enormous challenges of institutional rebuilding. Modupe's appointment was a big boost to the morale of women, a number of who fought for independence side-by-side their male political counterparts.

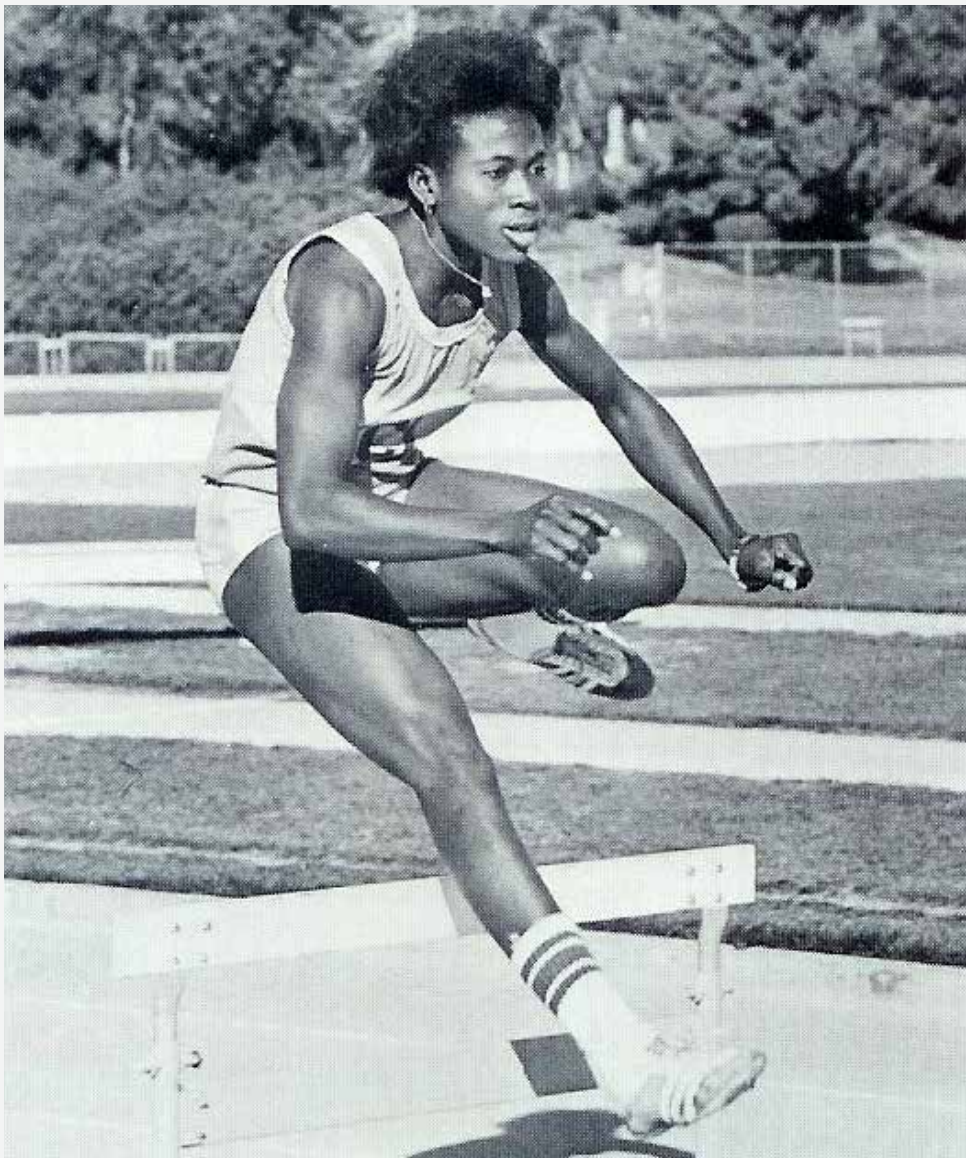
Originally from Lagos, Modupe was married to Hon. Justice Jemonu Omo-Eboh from Edo State – a union that inspired inter-tribal marriages and doused inter-tribal tension.

**“I will curb the child marriage syndrome of young girls in northern Nigeria.”**



## 70. **MODUPE OSHIKOYA**

**Born 1954,** Athlete and Commonwealth Champion



Modupe Oshikoya is a former athlete. During her career, she competed in the women's sprint, long jump and heptathlon events as an Olympian. She also participated in the 1973 and 1978 All-Africa games and won five Gold medals.

She is a one-time Commonwealth Games champion in women's long jump, a feat that made her the first African to win a title in this event.

The importance of homegrown talent in Nigerian sports cannot be understated and Oshikoya has remained a champion for the revival of grassroots sports development in the country.

**"I did sports because I loved doing it."**



## 71. **MOJISOLA MAKANJUOLA**

**Born 1962**, Broadcast Journalist



Mojisola Makanjuola was born in Kwara state. She graduated from the American Heritage University, Southern California and started her media career at the Nigerian Television Authority, where she eventually became the Head of Health and Gender division.

She reports on health issues, using journalism as a platform for service and impact. Mojisola is also a media consultant to UN Women.

After years of journalism service, she wrote a book, "Health Journalism." In recognition of her work in public health journalism, she was awarded a Fellowship by the Knight Journalism Centre for Disease Control. Also, the Government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria awarded her the national honour of Member of the Federal Republic (MFR).

**"If you have the milk of kindness in you, you will take up the challenge of being the voice for the voiceless after seeing the state most people live in. You will work tirelessly to get people in charge to take solutions to places where the people are bogged down by problems that government cannot solve."**

## 73. NIKE DAVIES-OKUNDAYE

**Born 1954,** Art and Culture Creator and Curator



Chief Nike Davies-Okundaye is the brain behind the huge success story of Nike Art Gallery. She is one of the most respected international female artists from Nigeria, who has made great strides in textile, visual arts and mixed media painting.

An accomplished curator and artist with influence across the globe, Nike founded the Nike Art Gallery to train students in sculpture, paintings, beadwork, mosaic, batik, adire, applique, pen and ink paintings; quilting, drum making and dancing. She has four art centres for her craft across the country.

In 1983, she established the Nike Centre for Art and Culture in Osogbo, Osun state, where she offers free trainings to young people. So far, more than 3,000 Nigerians have been trained at the centre.

From her first solo exhibition at the Goethe Institute, Lagos in 1968, Nike has grown to become one of the major imprints on the international art circuits. She continues to travel around the world to promote her arts and craft and intuitively Nigeria. She holds workshops on traditional Nigerian textiles to audiences drawn from across the world, especially from the USA, Belgium, Germany, Japan and Italy and other European countries.

**“The training is free of charge, and accommodation is free. After their training, I present their works and products to the outside world.”**



## 72. **NDIDI NWUNELI**

**Born 1975,** Social Entrepreneur



Ndidi Nwuneli is the founder of LEAP Africa, one of Nigeria's leading non-profit organizations, she is also a co-founder of AACE Food Processing & Distribution, an indigenous agro processing company and a partner at Sahel Capital, an advisory and private equity firm, focused on the agribusiness sector in West Africa.

She has 20 years of experience in international and entrepreneurship development and has led a range of initiatives in Ghana, Liberia, Mali, Nigeria, Rwanda and Senegal.

Preparatory to her impressive career, Ndidi got her first degree with honours in Multinational and Strategic Management from the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania and proceeded to Harvard Business School where she earned her M.B.A.

She started her working career as a management consultant with McKinsey & Company at the Chicago office, New York, and later moved to Johannesburg, focusing on the fast moving consumer goods (FMCG) sector.

To fulfill her passion of promoting entrepreneurship and leadership development in Africa, Ndidi returned to Nigeria to serve as the pioneer Executive Director of Fate Foundation in 2000. Under her leadership, FATE Foundation became the go-to place for young people who wanted to start a business, especially young women.



She later established LEAP Africa in 2002. LEAP is a leading leadership development organization that has worked in 26 states across Nigeria, providing leadership training, and coaching to over 50,000 entrepreneurs, youth, teachers and the public sector.

LEAP has also pioneered curriculum and published eleven books on succession, ethics, governance and management. NIA, on the other hand, empowers female university students in southeastern Nigeria to achieve their potentials.

She was recognized as a Young Global Leader by the World Economic Forum and made an honorary Member of the Federal Republic by the Nigerian Government. She also was listed as one of the 20 Youngest Power African Women by Forbes in 2011.

Ndidi, who serves on numerous international and local boards, was honored by the Global Fund for Women in 2013 during its 25th Anniversary Celebration in San Francisco, United States of America.

**“I believe empowering women to start and grow their businesses is critical to Nigeria’s development, but educating women is the real silver bullet.”**



## 74. **NONYE NWEKE**

**Super Mum, 1962**

Nonye Nweke is the founder of the Cerebral Palsy Centre, Lagos.

In 2006, doctors diagnosed her adopted baby with cerebral palsy, a disease caused by damage to the muscles and nerves, which impairs the victim's motor and communication skills, and leaves them totally dependent on people.

She notified the adoption agency, which sympathized with her and asked her to return the baby. But rather than do so, she resolved to raise the baby, and saw her misfortune as an inspiration for her current work which supports children with cerebral palsy through the Cerebral Palsy Centre founded in 2009.

The Cerebral Palsy Centre, a health centre in Lagos, solicits proper aid and intervention from the government, corporate bodies and individuals for children with cerebral palsy.

**“We, as a group, want the society to recognize that children with cerebral palsy make up part of our society and that their needs matter. Unfortunately, support, counselling and financial help continue to be lacking for most of the parents of children with cerebral palsy in Nigeria.”**



## 75. **OBIAGELI EZEKWESILI**

**Born 1963**, Accountant and Social Crusader



If anyone was looking for an unlikely social crusader, Oby Ezekwesili would be one solid example; the woman who became known as “Madam Due Process”, for being a stickler for rules and helping to sanitize the public procurement process during her first outing in public service.

Oby served as minister in the ministries of Education and Solid Minerals, but the impact will resonate for a long time to come is her social crusade to reclaim the kidnapped 200-plus girls of Chibok, Borno State.

Her determination, courage and single-minded devotion to the safe recovery of the girls in spite of frequent attacks and other forms of discouragement, have marked her out as a woman of conviction.

In April, she made the list of the Time magazine’s 100 Most Influential Persons 2015, alongside President Muhammadu Buhari and US President, Barack Obama. She said, “I frankly have never been a fan of these awards. I am, however, delighted to be on the Time 100 list for the sake of the continuing and persistent campaign for our government to rescue the 219 Chibok girls.”

Oby who is a chartered accountant was a former Vice President at the World Bank and co-founder of Transparency International.



## 76. **OLUFUNMILAYO RANSOME-KUTI**

**Born 1900/Died 1978**, Politician and Activist



Olufunmilayo Ransome-Kuti was born in Abeokuta, Ogun State, Nigeria. She was the first female student at the Abeokuta Grammar School, and later taught at the school before moving to England to study.

Upon her return to Abeokuta, she ran the Abeokuta Ladies Club. In 1946, the club changed its name to the Abeokuta Women's Union and she became its first president. The aims of the AWU included improving education and healthcare services for women.

She was a non-conforming and highly effective social activist and community mobiliser. Her bravery in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds liberated and gave thousands of women in Nigeria the right to vote and be voted for. Notable amongst her struggles was the abolishment of separate tax

rates for women.

Madam Ransome-Kuti's story is the stuff legends are made of. Call her a teacher, politician or even feminist (one of Nigeria's very first) and you would not be far from the truth. This great woman shattered whatever illusions anyone had about what a reverend gentleman's wife should be like.

By the time she died in 1978, she had retired to a seemingly quiet life. Her sons, especially the celebrated Fela Anikulapo Ransome-Kuti and cerebral Dr. Bekolari Ransome-Kuti sustained her legacy of fearlessly speaking truth to power. She was a recipient of the Member of the Order of Niger (MON) award in her lifetime and also the first woman in Nigeria to drive a car.

**She was described in 1947 by the West African Pilot as the “Lioness of Lisabi” for her leadership of the women of the Egba clan, to which she belonged. She led a campaign against arbitrary taxation, which led to the abdication of the Egba High King, Oba Ademola II in 1949”**



## 77. **OLUSOLA MOMOH**

**Born 1958**, Broadcaster, Co-Founder, Channels TV



Born in 1958, Sola Mommoh, after an impressive educational career, had a stint in the banking sector. The workings within this sector brought to the fore Sola's talent for networking and effective communication; This gave her the drive to provide unequal support to her husband when he presented the idea of Channels Television. She has continued to engineer ideas alongside her team with a poise of an uncommon confidence and excellence.

As Co-Founder and Vice Chairman of this inspiring and excellent communications institution, she has demonstrated the Godly injunction of a help meet in the affairs of this organisation that Nigerians and Africans are indeed proud of.

Her quest for transparency and due process led her to take a directorship position at the Convention on Business Integrity (CBI), a non-governmental agency that entrenches transparency and due process. In essence, Mommoh's management discipline does underpin the integrity of the Channels TV brand. To her credit, not only is she a seasoned broadcaster with over 30 years of experience in Television Journalism, she has also cultivated a penchant for maintaining the highest levels of ethical and professional standards both on-air and off-air.





**“Blessed with razor-sharp intellect, she blazed the trail and inspires generations of women Accountants who have followed in her footsteps.”**

## 78. **OLUTOYIN OLAKUNRI**

**Born 1937**, Africa's first female Chartered Accountant

Otunba Dr. (Mrs.) Olutoyin Olakunri is one of Nigeria's most distinguished society matriarchs, a pathfinder and pacesetter in Corporate Nigeria.

She qualified as a member of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of England & Wales in February 1963; and became a foundation member of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Nigeria (ICAN) in 1965. Reputed as Africa's first female Chartered Accountant and the second female President of ICAN, her eventful career saw her audit the Accounts of major Nigerian organizations.

In 1978, Otunba Dr. (Mrs.) Olakunri was the Chief Promoter of the Society of Women Accountants in Nigeria (SWAN), which she served as Chairman for over a decade. Among other initiatives, SWAN has supported women to realize their full potentials in the fields of accountancy and mathematics. In 1997,

in Paris, SWAN launched the World Body for Women Accountants; and has been supporting women of other professions to set up similar organizations at the national, regional and global levels.

Dr. Mrs. Olakunri is also the first female President of the Institute of Directors (Nigeria) and served on the Board of Nigeria Liquefied Natural Gas Limited (NLNG) for 8 years.

Chairman of the then Education Trust Fund (now Tertiary Education Fund) for two terms, she has variously served on the council of the Federal University of Ado-Ekiti, Redeemer's University, Bell University of Technology and Achievers' University.

She is happily married to Elder Simeon Olakunri, SAN with children and grandchildren.



## 79. **OMOBOLA OLUBUSOLA JOHNSON**

**Born 1963**, Electrical Engineer

Nigeria may have been a latecomer to mobile telephony and its ICT spin-offs, but the country has made remarkable progress, with a mobile phone subscriber base of over 160 million, ranking amongst the fastest growing in the world.

A substantial part of transformation of the Nigerian digital landscape occurred within four years (2011–2015), during which Omobola Olubusola Johnson was appointed first minister of the newly created Information Communication Technology Ministry.

In her role, Omobola mounted an ambitious project to put Nigeria on the global ICT map. Her efforts led to the first truly remarkable improvements in the value chain, especially

with the introduction of the National Broadband Strategy and Local Content Guidelines. Her game-changing plan was to ensure adequate and ubiquitous rollout of broadband to all Nigerians by 2018.

Omobola worked for many years in distinguished capacities for Accenture's Nigeria office (formerly Anderson Consulting), before her appointment as Minister of Communication Technology in the government of former President Goodluck Jonathan. She holds Bachelor's, Master's and Doctoral degrees in Electrical and Electronic Engineering and Digital Electronics from universities in the UK and US.

**“By 2020, the year that we dream to be a top 20 economy, we believe that ICT will not only be contributing the maximum share to the national income, in terms of productivity, growth, and performance across all sectors, ICT will be a catalyst.”**



## 80. **OMOLARA OGUNDIPE-LESLIE**

**Born 1937**, Africa's first female Chartered Accountant



Omolara Ogundipe-Leslie is a Nigerian poet, critic, editor, feminist, scholar and activist. She is a distinguished scholar and literary theorist, with numerous published works of poetry and literary criticism to her name.

Omolara is considered as one of the foremost writers on African feminism, gender studies and literary theory. She is also a social critic who has come to be recognized as an authority on African women among black feminists and feminists in general. She argues for an African-centered feminism that she termed "Stiwanism" (Social Transformation in Africa Including Women) in her book, "Recreating Ourselves".

She strongly believes that rediscovering the role of women in Nigeria's social and political institutions may be the best way to improve those institutions. She is known as a writer whose works capture most vividly the complexities of African life.

She graduated with BA English Honors as the first Nigerian with a first class degree from the University of London. She later earned a doctorate in Narratology (the theory of narrative) from Leiden University, one of the oldest universities in Europe.

Omolara has taught English Studies, Writing, Comparative Literature and Gender from the perspectives of cultural studies and development at universities in several continents. Highly talented Omolara who rose to prominence early in her career in the midst of a male dominated artistic field, is deeply concerned about the problems afflicting African men and women.

**"Loving should be fun and self-improving, not self-reducing and servile."**

## 81. **OPRAL BENSON**

**Born 1935**, Honorary a of the Liberian Consulate in Lagos and Style Icon



Opral Benson is where Nigeria meets Liberia. The Liberian educationist married a former Nigerian Minister of Information, the late T.O.S. Benson. Her integration into Nigeria has become so complete that only few remember her Liberian roots. She is now Honorary Consular of the Liberian Consulate in Lagos. She has lived in Nigeria for more than four decades and has been involved in the Nigerian beauty and fashion industry for many years, after leaving the University of Lagos as registrar in charge of Students Affairs.

Her role in the fashion business led to the then Oba of Lagos, HRH Oba Adeyinka Oyekan, bestowing her with the title of Iya Oge of Lagos in 1973. In an interview about her legacy, she said, "I did my best when I was here and to live my life the best way I could - productive and without being a problem to anyone. I tried to help as much as I can in this country, and in Liberia where I was born and brought up. Also I had a school that trained people in the beauty profession and by so doing, we have been able to put many people into jobs and also catering for themselves and to make a living one way or the other through the beauty industry. To be useful to somebody – that is my legacy."



## 82. OYINKANSOLA ABAYOMI

**Born 1897/Died 1990**, Lawyer, Feminist and Nationalist



Lady Oyinkansola Abayomi was a leading nationalist and feminist. She played a critical role in the formation of the Nigerian Girls Guide, and was the founder of the Nigerian Women's Party (NWP). NWP was established as a political vehicle to demand women's suffrage and representation in the Lagos Town Council and Legislative Council for the Colony.

Six years after the formation of NWP, limited women's suffrage was made into law and the party fielded its first candidates, a momentous achievement at the time. She facilitated the founding of Queen's College, the first Non-denominational secondary school for girls in Nigeria.

In her article titled, "Modern Womanhood" published in *The Service*, the newspaper of the Nigerian Youth Movement, she encouraged women to participate in politics to enable them shape their future. Lady Abayomi invested in several causes for the education of young girls and the rights of women to equal pay in the workplace, a difficult task in the 40s. It is to her credit that, against accepted cultural values that relegated women to a subservient role in the community, she strongly advocated women's rights and played a significant role in the gradual emancipation of women.



## 83. PEACE ANYIAM-OSIGWE

Lawyer and Coach



When the history of the success story of the Nigerian and African movie industry is written, Peace Anyiam-Osigwe will occupy a place of pride. A member of the influential and respected Anyiam-Osigwe family, she has deployed her talents, influence and invested a huge part of her family's (Anyiam-Osigwe Foundation) resources to create and nurture the African Movie Academy (AMA) Awards.

Her motivation is to encourage the outputs and works of Africans in the entertainment industry to become the world's number one, and this is gradually turning into a reality with the rise of Nollywood to number three on the global ranking.

Peace Anyiam-Osigwe is the founder of the Africa Movie Academy Awards (AMA AWARDS) - a yearly global event for filmmakers - and its body, the African Film Academy. The AMA Awards, has hosted many international stars, such as Morris Chestnut, Lynn Whitfield, Maya Gilbert and Rockmond Dunbar since its establishment in 2005.

**“I am passionate about being an African and I have no apology to make to anybody about being first a Nigerian and then an African”.**



## 84. **STELLA OKOLI**

**Born 1944,** Entrepreneur



Stella Okoli was born in Kano in 1944. She attended the Federal Science School in Lagos before moving to the United Kingdom to study Pharmacy at the University of Bradford and Biopharmaceutics at the University of London.

She started her career at Middlesex Hospital as a Pharmacist before returning to Nigeria. In 1981, she started importing pharmaceuticals and founded Emzor Pharmaceutical Industries in 1984.

As a testament to the fruitfulness of Stella's vision, Emzor Pharmaceutical Industries now produces over 70 different product lines. A more visible evidence of her entrepreneurial prowess and managerial acumen is the expansion of Emzor Pharmaceutical Industries beyond Nigeria, to neighbouring countries such as Liberia and Sierra Leone.

Stella, who is a recipient of the national honour of the Officer of the Order of the Niger (OON), has consistently shown that she got a heart of gold. When her 24-year old son, Chike passed away, she set up the Chike Okoli Foundation to warn Nigerians of the undetected heart condition Chike suffered from, whilst also developing the entrepreneurial skills of Nigerians.

On the initiative, Mazi Sam Oluabunwa, former Managing Director of Neimeth International and a fellow of the Pharmaceutical Society of Nigeria, said of the Foundation: "Some people know how to turn grief to something spectacular. This foundation is one of them."

**"My doggedness, dynamism and unparalleled energy and passion in the face of daunting odds in Nigeria, have made me a remarkable role model for women and all classes of entrepreneurs across Africa."**



## 85. **SANDRA AGUEBOR-EKPEROUH**

### **The Lady Mechanic**



Sandra Aguebor-Ekperuoh graduated from the Goethe Institute, Lagos, before attending the Benin Technical College and the Auchu Polytechnic in Edo State.

She started her career at the Bendel Transport Service, working in the Maintenance and Repairs Department. She later joined the Nigeria Railway Corporation where she worked on locomotive engines.

Subsequently, Sandra yielded to her entrepreneurial yearning and established her own garage, where she repairs vehicles for both private and corporate clients.

In a country where some fields are deemed exclusive to men, Sandra who is famously called “the Lady Mechanic”, has proven that ‘what a man can do, a woman can also do, if not probably better’. By her towering accomplishments in her chosen field, she has inspired a generation of young women in need of a beacon to follow.

**“It took a long time for people to see that Lady Mechanic was not a flash; that it was something that had come and wasn’t going to fade away.”**





## 86. **TAIWO AJAI-LYCETT**

**Born 1941, Actress**

Persuaded by her husband in 1976, Taiwo Ajai-Lycett returned to Nigeria from Britain in 1976 to launch her long-standing career in acting, entrepreneurship and education.

Born in Lagos, Nigeria, Taiwo relocated to England where she attended the Christine Shaw School of Beauty Science in London before studying Business at Hendon College. Her acting career flourished after she was spotted at the Royal Court Theatre in London in 1967.

By 1975, she had become an Associate Editor with Africa Magazine, and later the Editor of the same Magazine. She later launched the African Woman magazine and worked as a presenter and radio producer for the British Broadcasting Corporation.

She and her late husband, Thomas Aldridge Lycett co-founded Partnership Advertising Limited and Taiwo Ajai Communications (Public Relations) – marketing communications consultancy outfits.

Her commitment to the promotion of Arts and nurturing of young artists later led her to establish Talhouse Private Schools and Talhouse Worldwide Limited.

Ajai-Lycett was honoured with the National award of the Officer of the Order of the Niger (OON) in 2006 by former President Olusegun Obasanjo. She also received a citation as a Leader of the British-American theatre in 2008. Ajai-Lycett is a Fellow of the Society of Nigerian Theatre Artists (SONTA).

**“A true actor is innately gifted like the diamond, crafted by nature but until it is cleaned and polished it remains like a piece of broken glass.”**





## 87. **TARA FELA-DUROTOYE**

**Born 1977,** Lawyer and Entrepreneur

Leading beauty entrepreneur, Tara Fela-Durotoye is the founder and CEO of House of Tara International. She is a veteran in the beauty industry and highly regarded for pioneering the bridal make-up profession in Nigeria.

Accredited with a number of firsts, Tara established her first make-up studio in 2004 and the country's first make-up school in 2005. Whilst the nation was yet catching its breath, she launched the Tara Products line, a brand that promotes ethics and ethnicity, by empowering young women for economic independence using the product narrative to share the African story.

Mrs. Fela-Durotoye started the chain reaction that has produced a large number of makeup artists who are now active players in Nigerian's beauty industry.

She has empowered over 5000 young ladies

with the Tara Beauty Representatives' Initiative that makes them economically independent, improves their self-esteem while building their entrepreneurial skills for national transformation

Under her leadership, House of Tara has truly grown to become a respected national brand with 22 branches and over 100 employees and presence in most major cities across the country.

In 2013, The House of Tara launched "100 Voices," a collection of the Brand's beauty representatives' inspiring stories, from all over the country.

She has received several national and international awards for her contribution to the industry and active role in Empowerment. Tara is happily married to Fela Durotoye and their union is blessed with three sons.



**“Creating a business that impacts and generates income, developing micro entrepreneurs who will grow their business and employ more people so as to make the Nigerian economy better is what's most important”.**

## 88. **TESS ONWUEME**

**Born 1955**, Academic and Author



"Tess Onwueme is Africa's best known female dramatist, whose writing and speaking often poke into taboo and controversial subjects, revealing the untold hidden stories of young women and the poor, who remain caught in various crossfire with family, tradition, race, class, gender, culture and politics."

Often described as "a writer with an active conscience," she uses her plays and writings as a voice for the voiceless.

Tess is one of Nigeria's most celebrated playwrights and widely regarded as the most published and celebrated female playwright to emerge from the African continent. She is presently an eminent University Professor of Global Letters at the University of Wisconsin, USA.

Onwueme's seminal works include *Tell It to Women*, *What Mama Said, Then She Said It* (a play), *Riot In Heaven* (drama for the voices of colour), among others.



## 89. **TOLULOPE SANGOSANYA**

**Born 1982**, Social Change Entrepreneur



Tolulope Sangosanya founded the LOTS Charity Foundation, an organisation that provides shelter, education and everyday needs for young vulnerable children right in the heart of Ajegunle in Lagos State. Her goal is to create an environment that is safe and welcoming for disadvantaged children. The organisation offers literacy classes for up to 100 children.

She began her work in philanthropy while she still in the university and has won several awards for her efforts, particularly, the Future Award for Best Use of Advocacy.

**“I am from a broken home and one of the things people from my background really lack is love and attention. Such people seek love and attention from other sources and not the normal sources”.**





**“Art is about collecting experiences and expressing them. For me music and photography are similar art forms. I collect experiences, stir them in myself and express it in my own language. Just like my photography, music is my language.”**

## 88. **TY BELLO**

**Born 1978**, Photographer, Singer and Songwriter

Singer, songwriter, photographer and philanthropist, TY Bello has evolved into an aspirational brand for young Nigerians.

After a brief stint in journalism, she emerged on the Nigerian music landscape as a member of the defunct group, Kush, an acronym for Kinetically Ushering Salvation into Hearts and Homes. The group eventually disbanded and TY Bello launched her solo career with her first album, Greenland, in 2005. Its title track- Greenland and Ekundayo became instant hits and are now widely accepted household favorites. The Future - her Nigerian jubilee tribute was released on the eve of the April 2011 general elections. It became the awakening song for Nigerians as they steered the fate of the nation with their votes.

She has made a success of her career as singer and songwriter with release of three studio albums.

TY's photography can be described as Avant-Garde; a perfect mix of stunning visuals and apt captions. She is known to

thrill the subjects of her lenses to a music fest during her photography sessions. Her evocative portraits never fail to rouse strong emotions and have made her one of the most applauded and keenly sought after portrait photographers in the country. Indeed she has the unique distinction of having photographed three sitting Nigerian Presidents. Her work is regularly featured in top magazines such as Thisday Style and Genevieve.

Her sense of devotion to the deeper values of life led her to dedicate a song and bring to limelight the works of Madam Ekundayo, an outstanding woman who dedicated her life to caring for 470 children abandoned after Nigeria's civil war.

TY Bello's songs and visuals are not only a source of entertainment; they are also a form of advocacy, a clarion call to hope and an inspiration to many. TY's songs and her photography- which has been exhibited in Nigeria and around the world- have earned awards both at home and abroad.



## 91. UZOAMAKA NWIZU

**Born 1949/Died 2004**, First Female Comptroller-General of the Immigration Service



When on January 14, 2000, Uzoamaka Nwizu was appointed Comptroller-General of the Nigerian Immigration Service; She became the first and only woman to have held that position in Nigeria. Born in Imo State, Uzoamaka studied in Enugu before attending the University of Hawaii and the University of Vermont between 1971-1974, where she earned a first class honours degree in Geography.

Uzoamaka who also earned an MBA from the University of Ibadan, is reputed to have started the reformation of the Immigration Service in Nigeria and was described by Adolphus Wabara, Senate President at the time, as a "thorough and dedicated professional with an uncommon passion for hard work."

Lady Uzoamaka, as she is commonly addressed, is most remembered for repositioning the Nigeria Immigration Service

(NIS) with a view to coming to terms with contemporary expectation. She increased revenue generation during her regime of uninterrupted passport issuance and efficient action control, she also initiated a systematic defreezing of the seemingly stagnant backlog of staff promotion and initiated programs aimed at increasing staff morale through certain welfare packages.

Her able stewardship marked a departure from the past when the cliché was business as usual. Her leadership qualities and doggedness did not go unnoticed as she was bestowed with the national honor of Officer of the Federal Republic (OFR). Again the first Comptroller General to be so honored.

She held the role of Comptroller-General until her death from leukemia in 2009.





## 92. **ZULU SOFOLA**

**Born 1935/Died 1995, Author**



Zulu Sofola was the first published female author in Nigeria, and the first woman awarded a professorship in Theatre Arts at the University of Ilorin. Her work includes commentaries on social problems within Nigeria – such as gender inequality - and the influence of Western culture.

Perhaps the best way to summarize her contribution to social progress is 'change from within'. Through her plays and writings, she fought the use of tradition as a tool for gender oppression and did so remarkably, without contradicting her reverence for tradition.

An adroit playwright, producer and theatre director, Sofola championed women's rights through her work, as seen in her 1972 play, *Wedlock of the Gods*.

She was a Ford Foundation Fellow and received the Literary Award of the International Book Fair of the University of Ile-Ife, (now Obafemi Awolowo University) Nigeria. She also led the Nigerian Association of University Women and was the National Treasurer of the Association of Nigerian Authors.

She won a Fulbright Scholarship to the State University of New York in Buffalo.

**“She was paradoxical in her beliefs in the conceptual approach that a person be treated not on the basis of gender but purely as a human being worthy of respect.”**



## 93. **QUEEN AMINA OF ZARIA**

**Born 1533/ Died 1610**



Queen Amina ruled for 34 years at the turn of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. She was the eldest daughter of Queen Bakwa Turunku who built the capital of Zazzau, later renamed Zaria, the capital of the present-day emirate of Kaduna in Nigeria.

She assumed the throne, following the death of her brother. She was known as the Warrior Queen, having established her dominance as the head of the Zazzau cavalry even before she came to rule. Within three months of inheriting the throne, Queen Amina embarked on what was to be the first in an-ongoing series of military engagements associated with her rule.

Queen Amina stood in command of an immense military band and personally led the cavalry of Zazzau through series of campaigns, waging battle continually throughout the course of her sovereignty. She spent her 34-year reign in military aggression.

She was credited as the architect that constructed protective walls as fortifications around the city of Zaria and other conquered territories, which were reduced to vassal status. The fortifications were known as "Ganuwar Amina" or Amina's walls meant to protect the conquered lands.



## 94. QUEEN EMOTAN OF BENIN KINGDOM

Emotan was a market-trader in foodstuffs in the 15th century in the Ancient Benin Kingdom during the reign of Oba Uwaifiokun and Prince Ogun, later Oba Ewuare, the Great.

It was reported that Oba Uwaifiokun usurped the throne of Benin Kingdom and established himself in place of Prince Ogun, who went into exile but secretly visited the Kingdom knowing that his adventure was fraught with danger. Emotan used to protect Prince Ogun secretly by providing him with safe haven from his adversaries

Emotan was instrumental to Oba Ewuare's reclaim of the throne as Oba of Benin after she told him of a murder plotted against him made by Oba Uwaifiokun and some chiefs during his time in exile. Prince Ogun was eventually crowned the 12th Oba Ewuare of Benin Kingdom and did not forget how Emotan protected him from harm, dangers and threats of death during his period in exile.

He took exceptional care of Emotan in appreciation of her kindness to him and appointed her as the Iyeki, a position given to someone with the task of enforcing market rules and checkmating security matters. When Emotan died, King Ogun, Oba Ewuare the 12th, ordered that the sacred Uruhe tree be planted in her memory, at the spot where Emotan used to sell her foodstuffs at the Oba Market place. He also directed that any person in Benin Kingdom, performing any ceremony should pay homage to Emotan, which they still do.

A life size bronze Emotan Statue was designed in her honour after two Uruhe tree that were planted on separate occasions fell. The statue was designed by John A. Danfor and was unveiled by Oba Akenzua II in cooperation with the British Colonial authorities on May 20, 1954. The statue is presently located at the Oba Market in Benin City.



## 95. **QUEEN IDIA**

### **Mother of Oba Esigie**

Queen Mothers were not established in the kingdom of Benin until the end of the fifteenth century when a great conflict between two sons over the ascension to the throne threatened to destroy the empire. Oba (king) Ozula died and left the throne open to his two sons, Arhuanan, who controlled the city of Udo, and Esigie, who controlled Benin City.

It is said that the mother Idia used her magical powers to help Esigie win a war against his brother and also the neighbouring Igala people, who wished to take advantage of the Benin kingdom's state of weakness and attack them. From then on, the mothers of the kings were honoured and given powers and prestige in the government of the kingdom.

To reward and honour her, Esigie created a new position within the court called the

iyoba, or "Queen Mother," which gave her significant political privileges, including a separate residence with its own staff. Oba Esigie built the Eguae-lyoba (Palace of the Queen Mother), which was quite far from the Oba's palace for the strategic reason that his mother, Queen Idia, wielded too much power. He was able to establish her as queen mother only if he was to never see his mother again. Queen Mothers were therefore viewed as instrumental to the protection and well being of the Oba and, by extension, the kingdom.

Prior to the reign of Esigie, it was customary to behead the mothers of the kings to prevent them from threatening the kingdom by using their magical powers to either initiate a rebellion or take over the throne, or harm the people in some way through the use of witchcraft.



## 96. **QUEEN MOREMI OF ILE-IFE**

Moremi Ajasoro, Princess of the Yoruba, was a member of the royal family of Emperor Oduduwa, the progenitor of the Yoruba people. She was the wife of King Oranmiyan of Ife.

The nation of the Ife was at a time faced with constant harsh raids from adjoining tribe known as the forest people. Moremi sought the assistance of her god, Esimirin, for spiritual guidance for her mission as she went to a certain stream to make an oath to the god of the stream that, if her attempt was successful, she would offer to it the richest sacrifice she could afford.

Moremi aimed to discover the strength of her nation's enemies and she resolved to let herself be captured during one of the raids. She was very confident and skilful, and soon won the trust and affection of the King and people in Igbo land. She found that the Igbo, in preparation for battle, would cover themselves from head to toe with Ekan grass and bamboo fibers.

Moremi realized that if someone could pass amongst the Igbo warriors with a torch, they could be defeated. She escaped and armed with the warfare secrets of the Igbo, the people of Ife were forever freed from the terrors of these previously invincible warriors.

In order to fulfil the pledge Moremi made to Esimirin before embarking on her mission, she made sacrifice of rams and lambs, but these were not accepted. The priests told her that the only sacrifice the gods would accept was her only son - Oluorogbo. Dejected, she allowed her only son to be sacrificed in gratitude for saving her people. The Ife nation mourned with her and she was held in the highest esteem of any woman in the Kingdom. They committed to forever be her sons and daughters in memory of her sacrifice.

## 97. **NANA ASMA'U**

**Daughter of Usman Dan Fodio**



Nana Asma'u bint Shehu Usman dan Fodiyo was a princess, poet, teacher and daughter of the founder of the Sokoto Caliphate, Usman dan Fodio. A revered figure in northern Nigeria, she is seen by many as an important precursor to modern feminist thought in Africa.

She was educated in Qur'anic studies and became a prominent member of the Sokoto Caliphate. Nana Asma'u placed a high value on universal education, and the education of Muslim women in particular.

As a prominent writer, she published over 60 works across 40 years. Her poems of guidance became tools for teaching the founding principles of the Caliphate, and her life serves as an example of female independence within Islam.

## 98. **PRINCESS INIKPI OF IGALA LAND**



Princess Inikpi was the only beloved daughter of Ayegbu Oma Idoko, the Atta of Igala Kingdom. There was war between the Bini kingdom and the Igala people. No house or market was safe. Fear gripped the Igala people for a long time. When the oracle was consulted, it said that their victory could not come unless the princess was buried alive to prevent the inevitable destruction that was hanging on the Igala kingdom.

For days, the Atta could not eat or drink. The Princess noticed how downcast her father was and decided to ask him the reason behind his sadness. He would not tell her. On the seventh day, he decided to tell her. Princess Inikpi did not object or fight, she went voluntarily on the day to the bank of River Niger, where she was to be buried alive.

The Igala people hailed her as their brave heroine. After the sacrifice, as the Binis were advancing, they saw the whole town in flames of fire and went back feeling that there was no need taking a war to a place already on fire. But it was the blood of Inikpi that deceived them. The Ata Igala, Ayegba Oma Idoko and the Igala people lived in peace thereafter.

At the heart of Idah town in Kogi state, Nigeria, stands the statue of the legendary Princess Inikpi Oma Ufedo Baba.

Several plays and books have been written based on the plot of the story and the Princess' sacrifice is still revered amongst the people of Igala in Kogi state. This sacrifice was an expensive one. It made peace reign in Igala land.

## 99. **EFUNSETAN ANIWURA**

**Iyalode of Ibadan**



Efunsetan Aniwura was a merchant, financier, defence contractor and a celebrated warrior.

A renowned entrepreneur of Egba origin, she managed a number of farms that produced vital crops for the Ibadan region. She later began trading with European merchants to bring goods to Nigeria.

She was awarded with the title of Iyalode of Ibadan in the 1860s, and was considered a leading member of society and role model for younger women.



## 100. **MADAM OMOSA OF IBADAN**

Madam Omosa of Ibadan was a merchant, political lobbyist, defence contractor and a celebrated warrior.

During the Kiriji War (1878-1893), Madam Omosa organized trade caravans to supply food, arms, and ammunition to the Ibadan army on the battlefield. When the Ijebu threatened Ibadan while their army was engaged in Ekiti, she mobilized and led a defensive force that drove back the attack and protected the town.

Possessing strong diplomatic skills, she used her influence in the courts of Alaafin to free her husband from prison.



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**INSPIRING.CONNECTING.EMPOWERING**



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We offer to women the W Initiative - the home of everything Access Bank has to offer Women. The initiative is focused on meeting the financial and lifestyle needs of women especially along the following distinct sub segments; the W Young Professional, W & Family and W in Business.

To support and manage these offerings, we have the first team dedicated to women in the Nigerian Financial Industry. With our approach to banking women, we have got all their needs and aspirations covered across all life stages.

W is all about Women. Nigerian Women, Women from all around the world. Women who desire to be inspired, connected and empowered.

W is about you; enjoy the experience.

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- Tailored Product Bundles & Value Added Services
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- Mentor-Mentee Program
- Seminars, Capacity Building Events & Exclusive Networking
- Financial Advice & Guidance
- Access to Market & Finance
- Building Alliances & Partnerships to Expose and Expand You
- An interactive Online Community for Women ([www.thewcommunity.com](http://www.thewcommunity.com)); dedicated to Inspiring, Connecting & Empowering Women
- Entrepreneurial Awards





