

# Under the Baobab Tree

A Quarterly Publication by Baobab for Women's Human Rights



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QUARTER 2, 2025



# EDITORS NOTE



**Welcome** to the latest edition of our newsletter, a reflection on a quarter defined not just by effort, but by unyielding demand for change.

This quarter, the debate surrounding the Special Seats Bill has dominated the national conversation. Our stance is clear, articulated in our feature: this bill is not a matter of social charity; it is Nigeria's most critical economic stimulus package. We are demanding that our leaders stop viewing this as a political favour and recognize it as an imperative that could unlock a potential 9% boost to our national GDP for an investment of less than one percent. The financial cost of inclusion is negligible; the opportunity cost of exclusion is catastrophic.

We are drawing inspiration from global milestones, celebrating the historic swearing-in of President Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah in Namibia. Her success serves as a powerful reminder of what is possible and, simultaneously, an indictment of Nigeria's scandalous retreat on gender parity.

Our work has moved from policy to action as evidenced by our landmark strategy meeting on the Maputo Protocol demonstrating a united feminist front, committed to dragging this charter "from the shelf to the streets." We have established a joint platform for advocacy and set a date to directly engage the National Assembly, demanding legislative compliance with the rights of Nigerian women.

BAOBAB's progress is driven by the dedication of our team and the brave women we support. Read the powerful testimonies of young leaders from the WACSI-BAOBAB Feminist Leadership Programme and the successful RAISE HER 1.0 Mentorship Programme who are forging Nigeria's next generation of female political leaders. Hear from the formidable Rt. Hon. Amb. Uju Onwudiwe, Ph.D, on earning respect in male-dominated spaces. Be inspired by our departing NYSC corps member, Anita Dayil, who transformed from uncertainty to unwavering confidence within the BAOBAB family, and many more stories of impact and resilience.

The path to gender justice is a long, arduous one, but with your continued support, our progress is non-negotiable. Thank you for fueling this essential revolution.

**Until next time,**

*Yeyé Burmi Dipo-Salami*

Editor

## EDITORIAL TEAM

**Anne Lawal**

**Unimashi Ugbe**

**Edna Igwe**

**Ifeoluwa Idowu**

# Events and Activities

## Shattering the Glass Ceiling: How the RAISE HER 1.0 Mentorship Programme is Forging Nigeria's Next Generation of Unstoppable Female Leaders

The numbers are a stark, painful indictment of Nigeria's democracy. Despite national mandates calling for 35% affirmative action—a minimum threshold for inclusive governance—women hold less than 10% of all elective positions across the country. This isn't just a political setback; it is a national crisis of exclusion, particularly evident in key regional powerhouses. In a cosmopolitan hub like Lagos State, with its 40 seats in the House of Assembly, women hold only 4 positions, translating to a mere 10% representation. This vacuum of female leadership represents billions lost in effective policy-making, human capital development, and equitable resource allocation.

Unlike countries that mandate reserved quotas to accelerate parity, Nigeria's female politicians must navigate a challenging, often hostile, landscape with severely limited institutional support, facing systemic barriers from gatekeepers and entrenched patriarchal norms. This is why interventions like the RAISE HER 1.0 Mentorship Programme are not just helpful—they are essential engines of democratic survival and progress.



**RT. HON OLUBUNMI ADELUGBA**  
First Female Speaker, Ekiti State House of Assembly



**RT. HON COMFORT NWUCHIOLA**  
Deputy Speaker, Kogi State House of Assembly



### The Bold Intervention: Forging Fire from Aspiration

In response to this persistent and unacceptable gender gap, BAOBAB for Women's Human Rights, in powerful partnership with the Solidarity of African Women's Rights (SOAWR) and Equality Now, launched the RAISE HER 1.0 Mentorship Programme on April 7, 2025. This was not a modest training session; it was a bold, 12-week virtual crucible designed to equip ten hand-picked, already active young female politicians with the tools, confidence, and unshakeable networks necessary to lead effectively, fearlessly, and righteously.

The transformation was guided by giants in Nigerian politics. Our mentees were paired with two formidable, trailblazing mentors:

1. Rt. Hon. Olubunmi Adelugba: The first and only female Speaker of the Ekiti State House of Assembly—a testament to breaking the highest of glass ceilings.
2. Rt. Hon. Comfort Ojoma Nwuchiola: The Deputy Speaker of the Kogi State House of Assembly—a master strategist in legislative influence.

These mentors did not offer sterile lectures; they offered unvarnished truth. They openly shared their own triumphs and, crucially, their moments of vulnerability, demolishing the myth that female leaders must be perfect. They taught a profound lesson: true leadership is not about flawless execution, but about resilience, tenacity, and the sheer courage to inspire change despite the odds.



## A Transformation Rooted in Emotional Power

The RAISE HER 1.0 programme transcended technical skill development. It focused on the deepest wells of leadership: self-confidence, resilience, and unapologetic personal growth. Mentees consistently reported that the direct, personal interaction with their mentors was truly transformative. One mentee powerfully shared, "I didn't just learn about policy; I learned that the greatest barrier was the doubt I carried inside myself. This mentorship gave me the fire to silence that doubt."

The programme successfully deepened their practical understanding of women's rights policies, particularly the Maputo Protocol, providing the knowledge to fight for its domestication. More importantly, it dramatically strengthened their capacity to engage both grassroots supporters and national stakeholders, infusing their political aspirations with renewed clarity, strategy, and moral purpose.

## A Transformation Rooted in Emotional Power

The 12-week journey concluded on June 26, 2025, with a ceremony that felt less like a graduation and more like a deployment. Mentees demonstrated a profound shift in their readiness, confidently articulating their advocacy plans and showing a clear capacity to influence legislative policy. The mentors' final charge was not a suggestion, but a command: "Take up space unapologetically." This mandate affirmed that RAISE HER 1.0 was merely the beginning of their long and necessary journey in advocacy and leadership.

By the program's conclusion, these ten young women had not only significantly strengthened their professional networks and gained in-depth knowledge of policies protecting women's rights but also acquired the essential skills needed to directly advocate for the effective implementation of critical laws like the Maputo Protocol

## Gratitude and a Powerful Call to Action

As these young, vibrant leaders step out, they carry the fire of their mentors, the solidarity of a growing movement, and the unwavering support of BAOBAB. They are actively dedicated to reshaping Nigeria's political future.

To our incredible donors and partners: Your sustained financial investment is the fuel for this revolution. You are not just funding a mentorship program; you are directly confronting structural exclusion, igniting the passion of change-makers, and building the necessary pipeline of female power.

For these powerful individual efforts to create lasting, systemic change, they must be amplified by political will, mandatory legislative reforms (like the Special Seats Bill), and a sustained, increased investment in gender-inclusive governance. We must ensure that programs like RAISE HER 1.0 are replicated across all 36 states, guaranteeing that a just, equitable, and inclusive society—where women's voices are not just heard, but are the powerful, defining force—becomes our undeniable reality. Join us. The time for waiting is over.



# INTERNAL REVOLUTION: Sharpening the Sword of Our Story



Cross Section of BAOBAB Staff at the Seminar

## The Mandate: Making Every BAOBAB Report an Unstoppable Call to Action

At BAOBAB, we know that excellent work is only half the fight; the other half is telling the story so powerfully it demands action. On April 3rd, our team gathered for a high-impact, energizing seminar on report writing, led by our insightful Programme Manager, Doofan Daga. The objective was simple yet revolutionary: to transform our documentation from mere reports into living records of impact that secure trust and mobilize resources.

We are confronting the crucial challenge of transparency and trust. Our reports are the bridge between our heroic work on the ground and the partners who fund our mission. The seminar was designed to equip every staff member with the skills to craft reports that are not just accurate, but compelling, clear, and strategically urgent.

The training sessions were intense and practical. We unpacked the anatomy of a truly effective report, mastering the art of structuring information for maximum impact. Key to this was learning how to seamlessly weave in the real, powerful voices from the field—the memorable quotes from beneficiaries that inject raw, necessary emotion into policy work. We also addressed the common adversaries of documentation: late submissions and missing details.

By the end of the session, we solidified a shared, organization-wide commitment to timely reporting and flawless documentation. We left with better skills, yes, but more importantly, with a renewed, collective mandate: to ensure every document created at BAOBAB does justice to the incredible, transformative work being carried out daily, turning every single project into a compelling, undeniable argument for continued support. We will make our stories unstoppable.

*"You cannot change the past, but you can try to change the future"*



# VOICES OF UNYIELDING RESILIENCE



## THE CALLING: From Mother's Memory to Divine Mandate

**What was the genesis of your journey into politics and public advocacy?**

My political path was not a matter of career choice; it was a profound, sacred calling, ignited by the memory of my mother. She was a politician herself, and though she passed early, her memory and boundless generosity left an indelible mark. Our home was not just a residence; it was a sanctuary—a constant hub where people, especially women, came to receive help and solace. She gave freely, and in return, the community showered her with unwavering love and respect. This atmosphere taught me a fundamental truth: serving others brings true peace, respect, and strengthens the community at its core.

While I initially resisted politics, witnessing its struggles firsthand, a nomination for Deputy Governor in 2017 became my turning point. After a period of deep reflection and prayer, my family—who had initially feared the toxicity of the political world—gave me their full, emotional blessing. In that moment, I knew this was a divine mandate. I entered politics not out of personal ambition, but from an overwhelming desire to serve on a larger, systemic scale. My commitment is simple: to break down these patriarchal barriers and ensure our government truly reflects the people it serves."

## The Legend of Igolo Njaba: Rt. Hon. Amb. Uju Onwudiwe, Ph.D, on Shattering Imo's Glass Ceiling and Leading with Fire

*She is a force of political nature. Rt. Hon. Amb. Uju Onwudiwe, Ph.D (Igolo Njaba), stands as a monumental figure in Nigerian politics, having been the first woman ever elected and re-elected to represent the Njaba Constituency in the Imo State House of Assembly, serving two historic terms (2015–2023). Her tenure was not just participation; it was a revolution: she sponsored an impressive 14 Bills and moved 10 Motions, fundamentally reshaping the state's legal framework.*

*Her most critical legislative triumph was the successful domestication of the Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) Bill in Imo State—a non-negotiable victory for the safety and dignity of women and girls. Beyond this, she co-founded the state's Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC), creating a lifeline for survivors. Dr. Onwudiwe is defined by her accessible, compassionate leadership, which included the "Blooming Health" outreach, serving over 20,000 people. Her legacy of service is undeniable, solidified by over 70 awards and revered traditional titles.*

*BAOBAB sat down with the 'Igolo Njaba' to understand the source of her unyielding resilience and her urgent vision for Nigeria's political future.*

## THE BATTLEGROUND: Confronting Systemic Violence and The Demand for Justice

**Despite the strides you and others have made, Nigerian women still face deep-rooted structural and cultural barriers. What are the most present challenges, and what seismic shifts are needed to dismantle them?**

The challenges are not subtle; they are violent, aggressive, and systemic. We face brutal cultural biases, entrenched patriarchal norms, political violence, and sexual harassment. Compounding this is the pervasive lack of funding and outright gatekeeping by male-dominated structures. Women are constantly being judged by their marital status or appearance, not by their undeniable merit.

To break these chains, we cannot ask politely; we must demand systemic warfare. We must enforce the 35% Affirmative Action as a mandatory baseline. We must legislate reserved seats for women and push for the 'twin method' (where women automatically hold deputy positions) to ensure instant visibility and power. Campaign financing must be reformed to fund women's campaigns generously.

Finally, the fight cannot stay in the cities; we need mass, grassroots reorientation to burn away the cultural biases at the source. This is the only path to meaningful progress."

## REDEFINING POWER: Leadership Through Empathy and Strategy

**You have navigated political spaces often dominated by men. What has that journey taught you about resilience, resistance, and redefining leadership as a woman?**

It taught me to be bold, fiercely strategic, and emotionally intelligent. I realized quickly that the fight is not won by mirroring masculine force. I chose to redefine leadership through empathy, profound humility, and unwavering service. I never fought the men; I earned their deep, abiding respect.

True leadership, especially for a woman, must be compassionate, intentionally inclusive, and built on authenticity. Women must refuse to be ordinary. We must walk with crystal clarity and commit to leaving legacies that inspire absolute trust. Our power lies in our ability to connect, empathize, and serve—this is the strategic advantage that ultimately overcomes resistance."

## THE URGENT MANDATE: CSOs and the Unsung Heroes of Change

**How critical are partnerships between civil society organizations (CSOs) like BAOBAB and women in politics, and how can we strengthen them to drive real change?**

CSOs are the unsung heroes of our political transformation. They are instrumental in capacity building—training and mentoring women, educating them on the political maze, and helping them focus their ambitious goals. They provide the necessary advocacy platforms that push for critical legislation. Look at the VAPP Bill in Imo State; its successful passage was due to the tireless, strategic work of groups like Alliances for Africa and BAOBAB, who engaged legislators, traditional rulers, and communities until the bill could no longer be ignored.

However, our work is incomplete. We must acknowledge that advocacy is still too centralized in urban areas. If we don't take these conversations, these trainings, and this knowledge to the grassroots, we are failing the vast majority of our women. Real, permanent change is forged when every single woman, at every community level, is included in this revolutionary movement."

## A VISION FOR THE FUTURE: The Final Command

**What is your vision for women's representation and influence in Nigerian politics over the next 10 years, and what is your single message to every Nigerian woman who dreams of leading?**

"My vision is sober, but resolute: without strong, enforceable legal reforms—specifically the 35% Affirmative Action and the Special Seats Bill—women's representation will tragically remain limited. We are already battling financial, cultural, and gatekeeping barriers. To win, we need enforceable policies, economic empowerment, and visibility. We must move beyond talking and show up in communities, visibly demanding equal representation. When women unite, we will force the change we need.

My final message is this: Believe in yourself. Know your worth. Find your voice and let your presence speak with integrity and compassion. Be humble, love your people, and always lead with purpose. Prepare for the inevitable criticism, be resilient, be prayerful, and be emotionally unshakeable. Build powerful networks, uplift other women, and never, ever stop pushing for change. Real leadership begins not with a title, but with character."





# GLOBAL TRIUMPH, NATIONAL INDICTMENT

## The Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah Milestone: A Seismic Shift That Exposes Nigeria's Crisis of Exclusion



**Unimashi Ugbe**

In a moment that sent a seismic wave of hope and inspiration across the continent, Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah was sworn in as the first female president of Namibia in 2025 (BBC, 2025). Her elevation to the highest office, following decades of dedicated service as Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of International Relations, is far more than a personal victory; it is a continental breakthrough that shatters one of the world's most enduring political glass ceilings.

This landmark achievement is a powerful affirmation that gender parity in governance is not a utopian fantasy— it is achievable. Yet, while Namibia charts a course toward inclusive governance, this milestone casts a harsh, unflattering light on the crisis of exclusion currently gripping Nigeria.

Her presidency begins at a critical juncture, facing complex economic challenges, rising inequality, and the urgent need for structural reforms (Al Jazeera, 2025). Her response has been immediate and symbolic: her earliest cabinet appointments included Ericah Shafudah as Minister of Finance. This is not mere tokenism; it is a decisive move to place women in strategic, power-wielding, economic decision-making roles. This gesture sends an unequivocal message across Africa: women's leadership is not just desirable—it is the engine of economic resilience and national integrity (The Namibian, 2025).

### THE NAMIBIAN MODEL: Leadership Forged in Liberation

President Nandi-Ndaitwah's career is a masterclass in committed public service. Her roots are deeply embedded in Namibia's liberation movement, providing her with an unshakeable foundation of conviction and national duty. As a seasoned diplomat, she has spent decades shaping her country's foreign policy, advocating for multilateral cooperation, and positioning Namibia on the global stage.



Nandi-Ndaitwah's ascent serves as a vital rallying point for feminists, activists, and advocates of inclusive governance across Africa, reinforcing the urgency of the African Union's commitment to its 50:50 gender parity goal. While countries like Rwanda have successfully demonstrated that majority female parliaments are possible, the question facing Nigeria is whether it has the courage, integrity, and political will to move from declaration to reality.

### NIGERIA'S SCANDALOUS RETREAT: The Indictment of Inaction

In stark, painful contrast to Namibia's milestone, Nigeria presents a sobering reality and a national shame. The 2023 general elections resulted in a scandalous retreat for women's political representation, with only 17 out of 469 seats in the National Assembly occupied by women.

This single-digit representation is a direct result of deeply entrenched patriarchal structures, deliberate economic exclusion, and the specter of electoral violence—all key barriers that systematically push women out of the political sphere. The political system, designed by men, continues to aggressively resist any attempt at opening its doors.

This resistance is most clearly seen in the repeated legislative failures. Decades of tireless advocacy by civil society coalitions like BAOBAB, the She Persists Coalition, and NFP4MORE have culminated in frustrated attempts to pass critical gender-friendly laws.

## THE UNYIELDING BATTLE FOR THE RESERVED SEATS BILL

The legislative battle surrounding the Reserved Seats Bill is the clearest indicator of this deep-rooted resistance. This crucial bill proposed creating additional seats exclusively for women in both the national and state legislatures—a measure aimed at guaranteeing minimum representation and providing a desperately needed launching pad for more women in governance.

Despite Nigeria's ratification of multiple international instruments, including CEDAW and the Maputo Protocol which legally mandate greater gender inclusion— the National Assembly has repeatedly refused to pass this legislation. The failure of the Reserved Seats Bill and the Gender and Equal Opportunities Bill is not a mere oversight; it is a calculated choice by the political class to actively hinder national progress. The system is designed to sustain the status quo, and only enforceable policies—such as mandatory gender quotas, campaign finance support for female candidates, and stringent protection from electoral violence—will break its grip.

## THE IMPERATIVE FOR TRANSFORMATION AND A CALL TO ACTION

The presidency of Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah is not just an African success story; it is an urgent, final reminder for Nigeria. Gender equality in governance is not an option; it is an economic and democratic imperative.

BAOBAB, through its legislative advocacy and capacity enhancement initiatives, remains unwavering in its commitment to equip women with the skills and resources necessary to seek and hold power. We draw profound inspiration from trailblazers across the continent.

As Osai Ojigho, human rights lawyer and BAOBAB board member, articulated: “The legacy we build today must center women's leadership, not as a token, but as a transformative force for equity, justice, and sustainable development.”

We ask our partners and the nation: Is Nigeria willing to make the necessary political and legislative investments to truly unleash the potential of its women? Or will it continue to lag behind, crippled by a political system that actively chooses exclusion? BAOBAB's mission is clear: we will fight until Nigerian women not only demand seats at the table but also reshape the table itself.

# OUR MISSION

“To promote, protect, and defend the rights of women and girls by improving knowledge and exercise of their rights, as well as advocating for the development and implementation of policies and laws that guarantee those rights.”





## THE POWER SHIFT: FROM SHELF TO STREETS

### **A Declaration of War: How a United Feminist Front is Forcing the Maputo Protocol out of the Policy Shadows and Into Action**

"A nation cannot rise while half its population is left behind." This statement is no longer a rhetorical flourish; it is a damning indictment of Nigeria's political status quo. As the nation grapples with the devastating implications of the stalled Reserved Seats Bill and the persistent, systemic exclusion of women from critical decision-making spaces, the urgency to transform signed international agreements into real-world protection has reached a boiling point. Against this backdrop of democratic failure, BAOBAB for Women's Human Rights convened a landmark strategy meeting to move from policy fatigue to radical, actionable implementation.

On June 26, 2025, in Abuja, BAOBAB hosted the Stakeholders Strategy Meeting on the Domestication and Implementation of the Maputo Protocol in Nigeria. The event, themed "Maputo Protocol in FCT: Paving the Way for Women's Rights and Political Power," was designed to be a crucible of advocacy and political power. It successfully brought together twenty-six influential participants—a potent cross-section of advocates, legislative leaders, policymakers, media, and the next generation of women leaders—united by a singular focus: accountability and immediate action.

#### **THE TWENTY-YEAR INJUSTICE: Policy Delayed is Justice Denied**

As a feminist organization dedicated to the defense of women's rights under Nigeria's complex, layered legal systems—statutory, customary, and religious—BAOBAB recognizes that merely signing an international instrument is the most minor part of the fight

The real battle lies in rigorous domestication, widespread public education, and consistent enforcement.

Nigeria ratified the Maputo Protocol in 2004, a solemn commitment to advance the rights of women. Yet, two decades later, this critical charter remains shamefully dormant. Core articles, particularly Article 9 on political participation and Article 26 on implementation and monitoring, are virtually inactive in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). This legal vacuum renders an international treaty null and void for millions of Nigerian women. BAOBAB's convening was therefore a transformational act of accountability, designed to seize control of the narrative and force the Protocol from being a dusty document on a government shelf to a powerful, enforceable tool.

In the inspiring words of our Programme Director, Anne Lawal, the time has come to shift the Protocol "from the shelf to the streets."

### **THE COALITION OF POWER: Stakeholders Demanding Action**

The urgency of this mission was underscored by the diverse and high-level attendance, showcasing a critical mass of support demanding governmental and societal compliance. The meeting was significantly strengthened by the presence of key governmental stakeholders:

- Hon. Natu Kwaghtagher Iwueseter, Legislative Aide to the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Hon. Tajudeen Abbas, signaling commitment from the highest legislative office



- Hon. Comfort Muese, Special Adviser to the FCT Senator, Ireti Heebah Kingibe, ensuring the participation of FCT political representation.
- Dr. Kayo Kusa, representing the Office of the FCT Mandate Secretary, directly engaging the executive arm within the FCT.
- Dr. Emily Ikhide, Director of the Gender Studies Unit at the National Institute for Legislative and Development Studies (NILDS), bringing essential academic and legislative policy expertise to the table.

Crucially, the strategy meeting gathered a formidable coalition of leading Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and advocates, providing the foundational activism and legal expertise:

- BAOBAB for Women's Human Rights (Host)
- Women's Rights Advancement and Protection Alternative (WRAPA), a key organization in legal aid, gender justice, and grassroots advocacy.
- A powerful cross-section of other CSO leaders, media representatives, human rights advocates, and the next generation of women leaders, ensuring a unified feminist perspective was brought to bear on every policy point



Cross-section of participants, Middle- Rt. Hon Olubunmi Adelugba

## THE NEW MANDATE: Unifying Action and Accountability

The strategy session culminated in a series of clear, non-negotiable resolutions that mark a decisive move toward unified feminist action:

1. **From Silos to Solidarity:** Participants unanimously resolved to establish a joint advocacy platform. This coalition is designed to unify disparate campaigns, strengthen the collective feminist presence in policy dialogues, and ensure that our voice is heard as one, undeniable demand for justice.

**2. Decentralizing Accountability:** Participants agreed that the existing framework for the Coordination and Domestication Monitoring and Advocacy Plan (CoDMAP) needs a critical decentralized push to achieve measurable results on the ground. A smaller, focused working group, led by Dr. Dayo Kusa, has been specifically tasked with driving targeted implementation and monitoring within the FCT. This marks a new era of localized, measurable accountability for the Protocol.

**3. Direct Legislative Pressure:** A high-stakes strategic engagement with the National Assembly has been scheduled for July or August 2025. This direct lobbying effort is designed to compel immediate legislative action on the full domestication of the Maputo Protocol, leaving no room for further delay or political obstruction.

**4. Empowering the Grassroots:** In a critical move to ensure that this advocacy is not confined to the elite, WRAPA pledged to disseminate simplified, accessible versions of the Maputo Protocol. BAOBAB will utilize these simplified versions to empower FCT communities and women's groups, ensuring that the Protocol becomes a tool for empowerment in the hands of everyday citizens, not just a text for lawyers.





# Thought leadership



## THE ECONOMIC CRISIS OF EXCLUSION

The #22 Trillion  
Question: Why the  
Special Seats Bill is  
Nigeria's Greatest  
Economic Stimulus  
Package

*Yèyè Bunmi Dipo-Salami*

### Introduction: A Strategic Investment, Not a Social Expense

In the ongoing national discourse surrounding the Special Seats Bill—a proposed constitutional amendment seeking to create temporary legislative seats for women—a critical, high-stakes economic argument is constantly being silenced by political noise. This bill is far more than a simple matter of social justice or political correctness. A rigorous, cold analysis reveals a powerful, undeniable truth: the Special Seats Bill is a strategic national investment poised to deliver a monumental return on a minimal outlay. It is a smart, calculated, and urgent move to address a fundamental democratic flaw that has, for decades, sidelined massive economic potential. Nigeria is at a crossroads, where a small investment in fixing this systemic exclusion will unlock immeasurable national wealth and secure long-term prosperity.

### The False Dichotomy: Dispelling the Scandalous Myth of Cost vs. Gain

The debate over the Special Seats Bill is tragically plagued by a fundamental misconception. Critics obsessively focus on the financial cost of adding new seats to the legislature, cynically portraying it as an unaffordable drain on public resources. We must vehemently reject this false dichotomy and focus on the opportunity cost of inaction.

Here is the strategic reality: Expert analyses, including those from key policy think tanks, estimate that the cost of maintaining these additional seats would amount to less than one percent (<1%) of the national budget. This is a modest, manageable sum. To put this in perspective, this is a fraction of what Nigeria loses annually to corruption or inefficiency.

The real question, therefore, is not: Can Nigeria afford this negligible cost? But rather: Can Nigeria afford to forfeit the enormous economic benefits that would result from its passage? The focus must pivot from the perceived expense to the proven, catastrophic cost of continued exclusion.

### Unlocking a 9% GDP Revolution: The Economic Power of Inclusion

The true game-changer lies in the potential for massive economic gain. Deputy Speaker Benjamin Kalu and other advocates have cited compelling figures suggesting that a truly inclusive government—one that harnesses the full intellectual and leadership capacity of its women—could boost Nigeria's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by a staggering nine percent (9%).

This is not speculation; it is a projection rooted in sound economic logic and global data.

- **The Monetary Value:** Nine percent of Nigeria's current GDP is estimated to be over ₦22 Trillion (approximately \$18 Billion). The investment required is less than one percent. The return on investment is generational and transformative.
- **Leveraging Full Potential:** By consciously bringing more women into governance, Nigeria instantly leverages the full intellectual, managerial, and leadership potential of half of its population—a massive, previously untapped resource pool.
- **Effective Policymaking:** Diverse representation leads directly to more effective, relevant, and robust policymaking. Female legislators are statistically more likely to champion and prioritize issues like education, healthcare, and family welfare—which are the non-negotiable cornerstones of human capital development.
- **Long-Term Prosperity:** The direct outcome of this inclusive policy would be a healthier, more educated, and therefore more productive national workforce. This, in turn, fuels innovation, dramatically increases national productivity, and builds a more resilient and robust economy that can withstand global shocks for generations to come.

## A Long-Term Strategy for Sustainable Prosperity

The Special Seats Bill is not a temporary political fix; it is a profound long-term strategy for sustainable national prosperity. The economic benefits unleashed by this inclusion would not be instantaneous but would compound over time as the effects of smarter, more inclusive governance ripple through every sector of the economy, from agriculture to technology.

By making the deliberate, courageous choice to invest in the inclusion of women, Nigeria can rapidly foster a political environment that is fundamentally more transparent, accountable, and ultimately more effective at delivering equitable economic growth and public welfare. The bill is not merely a political or social gesture; it is the single most powerful economic tool available for urgent national development and nation-building.

## Conclusion: The Clock Is Ticking. The Opportunity Is Now.

The debate over the Special Seats Bill is a defining moment with monumental consequences. Nigeria is standing at a critical crossroads. On one path lies a continuation of the status quo, where the nation's immense economic potential is capped, constrained, and crippled by the persistent, self-inflicted exclusion of half its population. On the other path is an audacious, forward-thinking decision to invest a negligible fraction of the national budget for a colossal return—a potential nine percent boost to our GDP.

## This is not just a bill; it is the strategic key that can unlock Nigeria's economic destiny.

The question is no longer whether we can afford the small investment, but whether we dare to seize the moment. The choice before Nigeria's leaders is clear: will we continue to bleed billions in potential growth by ignoring the power of women, or will we make the modest, calculated investment that will unequivocally unleash an era of unprecedented prosperity for all? The time for delay is over.

“The time  
to act is  
NOW!”





# Strengthening the Sisterhood: BAOBAB's Vital Trip to NIGAWD in Ekiti State

We are delighted to share the significant impact of our Executive Director, Yèyè Bunmi Dipo-Salami's, recent strategic visit to Ekiti State! This trip which was organized in collaboration with SOAWR and Equality Now with the generous support of the African Women's Development Fund (AWDF), was a powerful step in strengthening the collaborative heartbeat of our women's rights advocacy across Nigeria.



**L-R NIGAWD Team, Executive Director, BAOBAB, Yèyè Bunmi Dipo-Salami, Executive Director, NIGAWD, Abimbola Aladejare-Salako.**

The centerpiece of the visit was a highly productive meeting with Abimbola Aladejare-Salako, the Executive Director of The New Generation Girls & Women Development Initiatives (NIGAWD). As the team lead for the Anglophone West Africa Cluster of the Solidarity for African Women's Rights (SOAWR) since 2020, this engagement was crucial for reinforcing our shared commitment.

This partnership is fundamentally about leaving no woman behind. The discussions focused intensely on advancing the rights and inclusion of women and girls with disabilities, reaffirming our collective pursuit of equality and justice for all.

Beyond the vital internal discussions, Yèyè Bunmi took our mission directly to the public. She featured prominently in two half-hour radio shows, powerfully dedicated to the Maputo Protocol (Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa). These appearances were critical platforms that educated a broader audience on the Protocol's significance, its provisions, and its practical implications for Nigerian women.

Her insights effectively demystified this vital human rights instrument, amplifying the voices of advocates and highlighting our collective mission to ensure the Protocol's full implementation.

This strategic outreach underscores BAOBAB's unwavering commitment to working collaboratively and leveraging every channel to ensure every woman's rights are realized. We express sincere gratitude to our partners and every donor who makes this essential collaboration possible!



**L-R Executive Director, NIGAWD, Abimbola Aladejare-Salako NIGAWD Team, Executive Director, BAOBAB, Yèyè Bunmi Dipo-Salami and NIGAWD team conversing**

## Unlocking Equality: Strategic Engagement to Advance the Maputo Protocol in Liberia

Our commitment to realizing the rights enshrined in the Maputo Protocol reached a new height this quarter! Yèyè Bunmi Dipo-Salami, BAOBAB's Executive Director and Cluster Lead for Anglophone West Africa under the Solidarity for African Women's Rights (SOAWR) Coalition, recently concluded a highly successful working visit to Liberia as part of the Movement Building for Collaborative Advocacy on the Maputo Protocol in Ghana, Liberia and Nigeria implemented in collaboration with Equality Now and SOAWR with funding support from the African Women's Development Fund (AWDF).



**Madam Josephine Kou Gaye, Commissioner for Gender Issues, National Elections Commission (NEC), Liberia and Yèyè Bunmi Dipo-Salami, ED, BAOBAB**



Crucially, this transformative engagement was supported by the African Women’s Development Fund (AWDF). This strategic trip was focused on assessing progress, deepening collaboration, and leveraging regional solidarity to accelerate the Protocol's implementation at the national level.

**Forging Powerful Partnerships**

The visit built crucial bridges across Liberian civil society. Yèyé Bunmi met individually with four vital organizations: WONGOSOL (Women NGO Secretariat of Liberia), Her Voice Liberia, WOFIM (Young Women of Liberia), and WOLPNET (Women of Liberia Peace Network). Every partner expressed enthusiasm and a strong commitment to strengthening their advocacy under the SOAWR framework. This collective action is the engine driving real change!



WOFIM Team and Yèyé Bunmi Dipo-Salami, ED, BAOBAB

**Commitment from the Highest Levels**

The visit secured high-level affirmation from government officials central to domesticating the Protocol. Engagements included meetings with Madam Laura Golakeh, Deputy Minister of Gender, and Madam Josephine Kou Gaye, Commissioner for Gender Issues at the National Elections Commission (NEC). Both leaders unequivocally committed to strengthening institutional frameworks that protect women and ensure gender-responsive governance. The trip successfully highlighted tangible progress in women's electoral participation, including the recent signing of a law to eliminate violence against women in politics.



WONGOSOL Team and Yèyé Bunmi Dipo-Salami, ED, BAOBAB

Key recommendations focus on deepening the government-CSO partnership and utilizing regional peer learning. We extend our deepest gratitude to the African Women’s Development Fund and all our donors. Your support makes this crucial, boots-on-the-ground advocacy possible, helping us turn legal frameworks into lived realities for women across West Africa.

**Charting the Future: BAOBAB at the FEMNET 2025 General Assembly**



L-R FEMNET board member/Alliances for Africa Executive Director, Iheoma Obibi and AMWA Executive Director, Eunice Musiime

In a powerful demonstration of Solidarity, Power & Futures, BAOBAB’s Executive Director, Yèyé Bunmi Dipo-Salami, joined feminist leaders from across Africa and the diaspora at the FEMNET (African Women's Development and Communication Network) Programming Conference and General Assembly (PCGA) in Nairobi, Kenya, from June 21 to 23, 2025. The convening arrived at a momentous time, marking the 30th anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action. The gathering served as a vital platform to reflect on decades of struggle and achievement while collectively charting bold, value-driven feminist pathways into the future.

**Building a Resilient Movement**

Representing BAOBAB, Yèyé Bunmi joined hundreds of delegates to deliberate on critical issues affecting women and girls. Discussions were robust, covering essential themes like economic and climate justice, sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), transformative leadership, and digital organizing. The goal was clear: building a resilient, unified feminist movement.

A highlight was the launch of the Africa Beijing+30 Solidarity Awards, recognizing outstanding African feminists, and the spotlight on the Africa Beijing+30 Parallel Report—a crucial, collective assessment of continental progress and gaps.

BAOBAB’s presence reinforced our commitment to advancing SRHR, political participation, and legal accountability, particularly through the Maputo Protocol. The PCGA was more than a celebration of resistance; it was a clarion call to action. We are profoundly grateful for the sustained commitment of our donors, whose support ensures BAOBAB remains a powerful voice in these crucial regional spaces, shaping a continent where women’s rights are fully respected and realized.



## From Trainee to Trailblazer: How BAOBAB's Institute Shaped a Continental Leader



**Eleanora at the Feminist Exchange in Uganda**

### The Spark: The SVRLA Institute

Eleanora's path to leadership began as a participant in the Sexual Violence Response, Leadership and Advocacy (SVRLA) Institute, BAOBAB's flagship capacity-building program. This institute, generously supported by the African Women's Development Fund (AWDF), targets young female undergraduates and is designed to be more than just training- it's a foundational experience.

During the institute's second cohort, Eleanora immersed herself in deep feminist political education, cultivated a powerful sisterhood, and received strategic leadership development that changed her trajectory. The SVRLA Institute didn't just equip her with knowledge; it sparked a fire. It opened her eyes to the power of her own voice and the immense possibility of impact, setting the stage for her future.

### Growth Within BAOBAB

That solid foundation directly paved the way for Eleanora's entry into BAOBAB's core team, first serving as a Virtual Programme Assistant and now flourishing as a full-time Programme Assistant. Her professional evolution within the organization proves the effectiveness of BAOBAB's model: investing in potential yields dedicated, mission-aligned practitioners.

“Eleanora Boyo's story is a powerful testament to the transformative, long-term impact of BAOBAB's commitment to feminist leadership across Africa. Her journey, from a young Nigerian student to a continental advocate, perfectly embodies our vision: nurturing confident, capable young women who carry BAOBAB's mission of justice and equality into every space they enter.”

### Continental Impact: Uganda Exchange

In May 2025, Eleanora's journey came full circle as she stepped onto an international stage, representing BAOBAB and Nigeria at the Feminist Exchange Meetings on Political Campaigning and Affirmative Action in Entebbe, Uganda. Hosted by Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) under the EU-funded Raising Civil VOICES project, the convening brought together 24 young feminist leaders from across Africa. The goal was to collectively explore sophisticated strategies for political organizing, coalition-building, and implementing affirmative action through a critical feminist lens.

Eleanora actively contributed to key sessions, engaging on topics from "Feminism and Me" to "What's Feminist About Affirmative Action?" and participating in hands-on exchanges about challenging stigma and campaigning across political lines. Her contributions were a clear reflection of the quality and intentionality of the deep feminist political grounding she received at the SVRLA Institute.

### A Launchpad for Movement Building

Eleanora's success in Uganda is more than a personal victory; it is a clear marker of the tangible impact BAOBAB continues to make in nurturing bold, intersectional, and politically grounded feminist leaders. The SVRLA Institute is not merely a program-it is a launchpad for success. Through it, BAOBAB is strengthening feminist infrastructure across borders and ensuring that the next generation of advocates is not only prepared, but powerful.

From the SVRLA training room to the continental stage, Eleanora's journey reminds us that BAOBAB is not just building leaders; we are growing movements, deepening feminist power, and making impact, one sister at a time.

We extend our profound gratitude to the AWDF and all our donors. Your commitment fuels this flagship program, turning potential into powerful action.

# Silent Lessons, Unstoppable Power: Rachimini Malam Moumouni on the WACSI-BAOBAB Feminist Leadership Journey

*By Rachimini Malam Moumouni, Feminist Activist, Alliance Féministe Francophone, Togo*

My journey through the WACSI-BAOBAB Intergenerational Mentorship Programme was a profound, emotional, and often subtle masterclass in leadership. It was far more than a simple learning experience; it unfolded as a series of invaluable silent lessons—quiet, sometimes initially confusing, yet ultimately transformative. From the very moment I began, I understood that this programme was not just about receiving guidance; it was a fierce challenge to step up, take initiative, and confront my own limiting assumptions.

## Lesson 1: The Courage to Ask and the Power of Solidarity

The first, and most crucial, lesson was in the power of the feminist network. As a mentee, I was tasked with choosing a mentor. My mind immediately fixed on the legendary Madame Fati Hassane. The problem? She felt like an unreachable icon. I had no idea how to contact her. Would anyone, especially a busy activist, be willing to share her private details?

Summoning every ounce of courage, I pushed past my hesitation and posted a request in the vast, influential Voix Féministes Afrique Francophone WhatsApp group. To my genuine surprise—and immense relief—someone privately shared her contact information with me! This small, incredibly significant moment taught me the profound truth of our movement: being part of a feminist community transcends mere access to information; it's about deep-seated trust, fierce solidarity, and mutual support. It reaffirmed that when we dare to voice our need, we truly open doors to new possibilities.

## Lesson 2: Confronting Assumption: The Integrity of a Leader

The next lesson in challenging my own biases arrived with the assignment of my mentor, Madame Antoinette Mbrou. Naturally, I searched for her online, but found little public information. A wave of skepticism hit me: Was she truly a feminist? Was she active in my region? Doubts persisted as I noticed her WhatsApp status updates often reflected deep religious devotion. My mind raced with limiting assumptions: Would our professional conversations be derailed by religious beliefs? Would she reinforce traditional gender roles?

I reached out to the WACSI team, who quickly reassured me of her expertise and unwavering commitment to the feminist cause. When we finally began our mentoring sessions, my fears vanished instantly. Madame Mbrou never once imposed her personal beliefs on me. Instead, she provided invaluable, focused guidance, consistently concentrating on my growth as a professional and a feminist leader. This was a life-changing lesson: our preconceived notions about people limit us far more than reality ever does. True integrity means focusing on the mission.

## Lesson 3: The Embodiment of Unapologetic Authority

One of the most transformative moments was not a conversation, but an observation: my visit to her office. It wasn't about what she said, but about how she led. I observed the effortless authority, empathy, and respect with which she treated every single colleague. She was warm, yet undeniably assertive. She took up space unapologetically, spoke with confidence, and people genuinely listened.



This was a deeply personal revelation. As a woman, I often find myself instinctively speaking softly, a habit unconsciously formed by years of societal expectation to remain in the background. Seeing Madame Mbrou command the room effortlessly was an incredibly empowering, seismic shock to my system. It directly encouraged me to embrace my own voice, assert my value, and confidently take up the space that is rightfully mine in every professional setting.

## The Final Lesson: Immersing in Value

The opportunity to travel to Abuja for the workshop arrived, but it was fraught with organizational delays. My structured, planning-focused mind became anxious. Would the trip happen? Would the workshop be worth the disruption? Once I finally arrived, I decided to let go of the anxiety and simply fully immerse myself in the experience. Every single session—from the foundational principles to the complex policy discussions—was engaging, deeply thought-provoking, and truly transformative. This testimony is a celebration of the quiet moments, the unspoken lessons that will define my career. I learned that networking is rooted in courage and trust. I learned that leadership is fundamentally defined by how you carry yourself and the respect you command, not just what you say.

I am profoundly honored to have learned from every single speaker, including Mme Josephine Effah-Chukwuma, Esther Tawiah, Ini Abimbola, Mr. Charles Vandyck, and Anne Lawal. And to Mme Bunmi Dipo-Salami, it is always a pleasure being with you. I consider myself truly privileged, as I am the only one among the mentees who had the opportunity to learn both from you and from my mentor.

A question often echoed in my mind: "If this training had been paid, could I have afforded it?" Probably not. More importantly, would I have recognized its immense, life-altering value right away? Maybe not. This is why I am deeply, profoundly grateful to WACSI and BAOBAB for making this invaluable opportunity so accessible. My deepest gratitude also goes to Mr. Alno Tograbaye for his endless patience and to Omolara Balogun for her outstanding leadership and incredible management. To everyone who contributed, however big or small, thank you from the bottom of my heart.



# From Rejection to Radiance: My One-Year NYSC Transformation at BAOBAB-Finding Family, Finding Fire

***By Naboet'an Anita Dayil, Former NYSC Corps Member***

When I reflect on this past year, I see two distinct versions of myself: the timid, uncertain young woman who first walked into BAOBAB's office, and the confident, capable, and purpose-driven professional I am today. My NYSC journey began with the sting of setbacks. I faced repeated rejections from both public and private sector postings. There was a moment of vulnerability when I considered settling for an easy placement in a ministry, simply to tick a box. But my sister, Sylvia Manan Dayil, issued a fierce challenge: "Aim higher. Find an NGO where you can truly grow." She was right.

I searched relentlessly, contacting over 30 organizations, yet only received four responses. Then, the door opened—at BAOBAB for Women's Human Rights. I still remember the warm, reassuring voice on the other end of the phone: Ifeoluwa from the Programmes team. He guided me through the application process, and to my immense surprise, I was invited for an interview—my very first step into the professional world.

I was a nervous wreck, but the warmth and palpable sense of mission in the office calmed my fears. Later that day, I was called in again, this time to meet the Executive Director, Yèyè Bunmi Dipo-Salami. Walking into her office, surrounded by awards that testified to decades of unwavering advocacy, I was humbled. After a brief, powerful conversation, she offered me a role as her Personal Assistant (PA), adding words that instantly became my personal mandate: "I'm trusting you. Don't disappoint me." That trust became the fuel for my transformation.

I searched online, contacted over 30 organizations, and received only four responses. Then came Baobab for Women's Human Rights, and a warm, reassuring voice on the other end of the phone: Ifeoluwa from the Programmes team. He guided me through the process, and to my surprise, I was invited for an interview. That interview was my first step into the professional world. I was nervous, but the warmth of the office calmed my fears. Later that day, I was called in again, this time to meet the Executive Director, Yèyè Bunmi Dipo-Salami. I still remember walking into her office, seeing her awards, and thinking, Am I really here? After a brief conversation, she offered me a role as her Personal Assistant (PA), adding words that would shape my journey: "I'm trusting you. Don't disappoint me."

I wore many hats during my service year, PA to the ED, Administrative Assistant, and Program Assistant. I managed calendars, coordinated meetings, maintained reports, handled logistics, tracked deadlines, and supported key events, including major advocacy workshops and high-level forums. These were not just tasks; they were opportunities to contribute meaningfully to BAOBAB's mission of advancing women's human rights and political participation in Nigeria.

## **The Forge of Professionalism: From PA to Political Advocate**

My service year was a rigorous, exhilarating education in leadership. I wore many hats: PA to the ED, Administrative Assistant, and Program Assistant. I wasn't fetching coffee; I was actively managing complex calendars, coordinating high-level stakeholder meetings, tracking critical deadlines, and supporting major advocacy workshops and high-level forums. These were not just administrative duties; they were opportunities to contribute meaningfully to BAOBAB's relentless mission of advancing women's human rights and political participation in Nigeria. One of my proudest, most affirming moments was successfully managing the logistics for a critical advocacy workshop, which involved liaising with senior politicians and meticulously documenting every session.



Hearing the Executive Director tell me, "I am proud of your work," was a reward more valuable than any salary.

The work demanded intense personal growth. I had to rapidly develop my emotional intelligence, learn how to accept and process constructive feedback, and remain composed under pressure. Every challenge, from logistical snags to tight deadlines, became a necessary lesson in resilience. BAOBAB invested heavily in my personal and professional development through various capacity-building opportunities that profoundly broadened my perspective on advocacy, ethical leadership, and the complex mechanics of the development sector.

## **The Defining Moment: Finding Family in Crisis**

The most transformative and defining moment of my entire service year arrived when I lost my father in March. During that painful season of grief, BAOBAB demonstrated that it was not just a workplace, but a true family. Colleagues came to visit, the Executive Director called personally, and the organization supported me both emotionally and financially. This act of profound compassion cemented my loyalty and commitment: I was safe, valued, and genuinely cared for.

Today, I stand transformed. I am no longer "Anita the intern." I am a confident woman who can chair meetings, draft strategic reports, successfully engage high-level stakeholders, and actively support advocacy for women's rights. My growth—visible to my family, my friends, and most importantly, to myself—is a testament to the fact that I didn't enter BAOBAB as the most skilled, but I entered willing to learn, and that willingness made all the difference.

## **Gratitude and an Unwavering Hope**

To every young woman facing rejection: know that a closed door may simply be leading you to something monumentally better. For me, that "better" was BAOBAB.

To Yèyè Bunmi Dipo-Salami, thank you for the life-changing trust you placed in me. To Ifeoluwa and every member of the BAOBAB team, thank you for your mentorship, endless patience, and human kindness. To my sister, Sylvia Manan Dayil: thank you for pushing me to make that crucial call. Because of you, I found my place.

To BAOBAB: if there is one thing I still wish for, it is to stay. I want to continue growing and giving back to the organization that gave me so much. I came in unsure. I leave confident. My journey with BAOBAB? I hope it's only just beginning.

## Lighting the Way: Mentoring the Next Generation to Be Unstoppable

Our Executive Director, Yèyé Bunmi Dipo-Salami, delivered an impactful and compelling lecture to inspire the next generation of leaders at her alma mater, Methodist Girls High School (MGHS), Ifaki-Ekiti, during the Old Girls Association Reunion, themed "Let's Light Up MGHS" on June 14th.

Yèyé Bunmi's lecture, aptly titled "Be Unstoppable. Break Barriers. Impact Your World", used her own transformative journey to provide value-driven content and clear calls to action for the students and alumnae.

### From Ibadan to Impact: A Story of Self-Determination

Connecting emotionally with the audience, she shared the powerful story of her start at MGHS: "When I entered these gates for the first time almost 50 years ago, it wasn't my decision". She contrasted that involuntary start with her current standing, noting that "Standing here today is the result of MY decisions over the years".



Yèyé Bunmi Dipo-Salami and fellow MGHS Old Girls Association members

### The Five Pillars of Unstoppable Leadership

To encourage the girls to take control of their destinies, Yèyé Bunmi provided five strategic steps for achieving success and purpose:

1. **Define Yourself:** Ask crucial questions like, "Who am I? What is my vision for myself and for my society? What do I want my life to look like?".
2. **Plan Your Life:** Strategize how to reach your destination and always have backup options: "If plan A doesn't work, what's my plan B? C? D?".
3. **Anticipate the Challenges:** Be ready for potential barriers, especially those faced as a woman, and identify the "limiting beliefs that will stand in my way".



Cross section of MGHS Students at the lecture

4. **Strategize to Overcome Barriers:** Seek knowledge, prioritize financial education, and critically, "grow your network because that's your network". She advised them not to "bellyache or always be a victim," but to "make lemonade" when life throws lemons.

5. **Be the Best Version of Yourself and Take Your Rightful Place:** This final step is the call to action—to be a leader, bridge gaps, protect girls, and mentor young women.

This event reinforced the enduring power of mentorship and community in shaping confident, empowered leaders. Yèyé Bunmi's presence and words were a moment of inspiration, reminding everyone present that each alumna and student has the capacity to light up the world through action and unwavering determination.

We express our sincere gratitude to our donors for enabling our Executive Director to dedicate time and share her invaluable expertise, directly investing in the next generation of women leaders.

# Our Vision

# A society where the rights of women and girls become an integral part of everyday life



# CAPACITY ENHANCEMENT

## Shaping Policy Together: BAOBAB Amplifies Women's Voices at National Assembly Roundtable

BAOBAB achieved a significant outcome this quarter by directly influencing high-level legislative discussions, reinforcing the critical benefits of partnership between state and non-state actors.

Our Board Member, Prof. Hauwa Biu, represented BAOBAB at the pivotal Citizens' Roundtable with the Leadership of the House of Representatives on June 11, 2025, in Abuja. Organized by the Office of the Speaker in collaboration with the Ford Foundation, this event was a key feature of the 10th House's Mid-Term Anniversary.

### Impact and Outcomes of Citizen Engagement

The Roundtable was a powerful platform for direct, constructive dialogue, focused on advancing transparency, accountability, and participatory governance.

- **Gender Perspective in Policy:** Prof. Biu, alongside other civic actors, successfully introduced a strong gender perspective into critical conversations around legislative impact, national development, and inclusive policymaking. This ensures that the distinct needs and rights of women and girls are considered at the highest levels of lawmaking.
- **Direct Accountability:** Citizens from across Nigeria seized the opportunity to pose questions on critical national concerns, including security, youth unemployment, economic inclusion, and legislative oversight. The open responses from lawmakers reinforced a shared commitment to democratic accountability.
- **Legislative Responsiveness:** The dialogue highlighted the importance of such engagement in making the legislature more responsive to citizens' needs, as emphasized by the Executive Secretary of the National Assembly Library Trust Fund, Rt. Hon. Henry Nwawuba.

The presence of the Deputy Speaker Rt. Hon. Benjamin Kalu, House Majority Leader Hon. Prof. Julius Ihonvbere, and other key leaders affirmed the seriousness of the engagement.



Prof Hauwa Biu and a fellow participant at the Roundtable

This event was a tangible demonstration of BAOBAB's commitment to ensuring civil society participation directly shapes legislative priorities. It reaffirmed the power of constructive dialogue and the essential value of our partnerships in driving inclusive policymaking for a more just Nigeria.

## Digital Guardians: Empowering Women and Youth Against Misinformation



Cross-section of participants

BAOBAB is at the forefront of digital truth advocacy, directly transforming citizens into media literacy leaders! Our Programme Manager, Doofan Daga, played a key role in moderating the Women and Youth Training on Fact-Checking and Countering Misinformation in Makurdi, Benue State (May 29-30, 2025).

Hosted by the WAY4Nigeria Alliance and supported by Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES), the training convened 25 participants to tackle the urgent threat of misinformation weakening Nigeria's democratic space.

## Tangible Outcomes & Empowerment

Focused on "Shaping Nigeria's Future Through Women and Youth Participation," the two-day program delivered practical, measurable skills:

- **Fact-Checking Mastery:** Participants were equipped with hands-on tools like reverse image search, metadata analysis, and source verification.
- **Critical Media Literacy:** The training heightened awareness of cognitive biases and the ways misinformation fuels division and disproportionately affects marginalized groups, including women and youth.
- **Commitment to Action:** Attendees left as defenders of truth, making strong commitments to establish fact-checking networks and actively promote media literacy, particularly in rural communities, to stop the spread of unverified information.

Doofan's inclusive moderation guided the deep dive into citizen journalism, emotional manipulation, and ethical digital practices, fostering a safe space for dialogue. By building these crucial skills, BAOBAB is ensuring that women and youth are not just targets of digital manipulation but are active agents of truth and accountability in their communities.

## BAOBAB Nurtures Next-Gen Leaders for Economic Inclusion

BAOBAB is deeply committed to strengthening the capacity of young people for leadership to challenge systemic exclusion in the economy. This commitment was powerfully demonstrated at the Jobberman Roundtable on Technology, Employment, and Inclusion in Marginalised Contexts in Abuja, co-hosted by The African Talent Company and the Mastercard Foundation.

The event confronted the sobering reality that only 4.17% of Nigerian employers actively hire from marginalised communities, relying on exclusionary referral-based practices.

### Young Voices Leading the Way

BAOBAB ensured the perspectives of those directly impacted drove the conversation by facilitating the attendance of young representatives who have developed their skills through our programs. These included: Debo Dunsin (Child and Youth Protection Foundation), Jemilat Rotimi (West Africa Civil Society Institute), Chioma Mbaegbu and Haruna Dongokwami (BAOBAB Alumni)

The presence of these young women and men underscored BAOBAB's core outcome: enhancing the capacity of beneficiaries and guaranteeing their continued growth and development as powerful advocates and leaders.



Cross-section of BAOBAB team and beneficiaries

### Outcomes of Partnership

The Roundtable, guided by the principle that "Inclusion begins with intention," successfully brought corporate leaders and policy experts together with grassroots advocates. This collaboration is vital to dismantling structural barriers—from discriminatory hiring language to inaccessible infrastructure—and transforming the digital economy into a space of dignity-driven employment for women, persons with disabilities, and internally displaced persons. BAOBAB's engagement ensures that our young leaders are at the forefront of this crucial movement.



# Investing in Tomorrow: Budgeting for the Rights of the African Child

BAOBAB recognizes that securing the future for the next generation demands not just advocacy, but profound fiscal commitment and inclusion. This principle underscored our participation in the 2025 International Day of the African Child commemoration, focused on the powerful theme: "Planning and Budgeting for Children's Rights: Progress Since 2010."

The event, gathering over 300 participants—including 220 students from seven FCT secondary schools—was a crucial convergence of youth and policy stakeholders. BAOBAB's Programme Manager, Doofan Daga, delivered compelling insights on career autonomy, effective advocacy, and collaborative governance, directly addressing the young audience.



Experts emphasized the urgent need for accountability and grassroots engagement, pushing for greater inclusion of children in decision-making processes. Crucially, the dialogue highlighted the fundamental connection between rights and resources, calling for the immediate domestication of key treaties like the Maputo Protocol and the Child Rights Act. This commemoration served as a powerful mandate, reaffirming that the full realization of children's rights is inseparable from transparent and inclusive national budgeting. BAOBAB is committed to sustaining this dialogue, ensuring that Nigeria's future is not merely planned for, but budgeted for with intention and justice.

# Sisterhood in Solidarity: BAOBAB Honors a Decade of Disability Rights Advocacy



BAOBAB was excited to join the commemoration of the 10th Anniversary of the Voice of Disability Initiative (VDI)—a profoundly moving celebration of resilience, inclusion, and the power of one woman's dream. Our participation was essential, highlighting BAOBAB's deep commitment to strengthening the Nigerian women's movement by ensuring that women and girls with disabilities are central to our collective advocacy and sisterhood.

The VDI, founded by Barrister Catherine Ede, Nigeria's first female deaf lawyer, has spent a decade boldly challenging stigma and changing the national narrative around disability. The theme, "There is productivity in disability," was powerfully demonstrated through every story shared at the event.

## High-Level Affirmation and Collective Action

The event received a passionate tribute from former First Lady of Nigeria, Dame Patience Jonathan, PhD. Her speech was powerful, challenging harmful norms that lead some fathers to abandon their children when disability arises. She underscored the need for collective action and affirmed that changing the disability narrative is everyone's responsibility.

BAOBAB was strongly represented at this crucial external meeting by Yèyè Bunmi Dipo-Salami (Executive Director) and Unimashi Ugbe (Communications Intern). Their presence reaffirmed our dedication to mentorship, sisterhood, and partnership across the feminist and civic rights spectrum.

## Powerful Outcomes of Inclusion

The event underscored the tangible outcomes possible through unwavering support and inclusion:

- **Challenging Tokenism:** Renowned activist Ene Obi urged stakeholders to move beyond tokenism and commit to building real, equitable systems based on accessibility and respect for Persons with Disabilities (PWDs).
- **Empowerment Through Mentorship:** The moving testimony of VDI board member Mazi Chijioke Josiah demonstrated the long-term impact of VDI's mentorship and support. He shared the journey of his son, Caleb, who lost his hearing but, with support, achieved massive success, becoming an electrical engineer in the United States. Caleb's journey is living proof of what support, love, and inclusion can achieve.

For BAOBAB, the event was a critical reminder of the intersectional work still ahead. Women and girls with disabilities remain among the most vulnerable groups, facing heightened risks of gender-based violence (GBV). By standing in solidarity with VDI, BAOBAB renewed its purpose, leveraging partnership to ensure that the women's movement in Nigeria is truly inclusive and continues to mentor, support, and advocate for the rights and security of every woman and girl.

## Global Reach, Local Impact: BAOBAB Joins Women Human Rights Defenders Worldwide

For nearly three decades, BAOBAB has been at the forefront of advancing women's rights, focusing on legal empowerment, advocacy, and protection for women and girls in Nigeria's complex legal landscape. Our work is dedicated to ensuring that women's rights are not only recognized on paper but are realized in practice—a mandate that requires sustained global solidarity.

As a committed member of the Women Human Rights Defenders International Coalition (WHRD-IC), BAOBAB actively contributes to a powerful transnational movement dedicated to defending the rights of women, feminists, trans, and non-binary defenders globally. This partnership is essential to our mission, allowing us to leverage global resources and amplify Nigerian voices on the world stage.

### Knowledge Co-Creation: Bridging Local Experience to Global Policy

BAOBAB's most vital contribution to the Coalition is through the Knowledge Co-Creation Working Group. Our Program Director, Anne Lawal, plays a crucial role in this group, ensuring that the experiences, challenges, and innovative strategies of Nigerian Women Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs) are documented and integrated into global knowledge products.

This working group is tasked with generating, synthesizing, and sharing knowledge to inform advocacy, policy, and practice in support of WHRDs. By participating, BAOBAB achieves several key outcomes:

**Elevated Visibility:** We connect local, grassroots realities to a global audience, highlighting the innovative strategies Nigerian defenders use to navigate contexts marked by shrinking civic spaces and restrictive laws.

**Enhanced Resilience:** We contribute to strengthening mechanisms for protection and resilience among defenders through knowledge exchange, peer learning events, and the development of essential toolkits and reports.

**Strategic Impact:** We ensure that the Global South's perspective informs the Coalition's 2025-2030 Strategic Framework, Stronger Together, which emphasizes collective action, transnational solidarity, and intersectional approaches.

*Cross Section of members of the WHRD-IC*



### Strengthening the Movement through Intersectional Solidarity

BAOBAB's involvement underscores the importance of intersectional solidarity. In a context where defenders face escalating gender-based violence and threats, our local advocates benefit enormously from the support, visibility, and resources that transnational coalitions like WHRD-IC provide.

Through this sustained partnership, BAOBAB amplifies the voices of Nigerian WHRDs, contributes to global advocacy campaigns, and participates in coordinated strategic communications. This collaboration allows us to strengthen both local and international advocacy efforts, effectively creating a bridge between grassroots realities and global policy-making.

The sustainable impact for defenders is not achieved in isolation but through collective learning, strategic collaboration, and shared knowledge. BAOBAB continues to champion the rights of women and gender-diverse defenders, ensuring they are empowered to advance justice and equality without fear of violence.



# Unlocking the African Commission: BAOBAB Leads Regional push for Women's Rights Accountability

BAOBAB, in strategic partnership with the Solidarity for African Women’s Rights (SOAWR) Coalition and Equality Now, and with vital funding support from the African Women’s Development Fund (AWDF), recently hosted a critical two-day virtual regional convening. The core urgency was translating the promise of regional treaties, particularly the Maputo Protocol, into lived reality for women across West Africa.

The virtual convening, themed “Unlocking Civic Space: Deepening NGO Engagement with the African Commission through the 2023 Observer Status Resolution,” directly addressed the newly adopted ACHPR/Res.572(LXXVII). This resolution updated the criteria for obtaining and maintaining observer status with the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights (ACHPR).

### Unlocking Civic Spaces: Deepening NGO Engagement with the African Commission through the 2023 Observer Status Resolution

2-Day Virtual Webinar on Advancing Civil Society Access to the African Commission

**FACILITATOR**  
**HANNAH FORSTER**  
Executive Director, African Centre for Democracy and Human Rights Studies

**FACILITATOR**  
**SYLVIA HORNAME**  
Executive Director, Initiative for Gender Equality and Development (IGED-Africa)

**MODERATOR**  
**ANNE LAWAL**  
Programme Director, BAOBAB for Women's Human Rights

27TH-28TH MAY, 2025  
10.00 AM

**A Mandate for Action: The Special Rapporteur’s Charge**

The convening was significantly elevated by the immediate keynote address from the formidable Hon. Janet Ramatoulie Sallah-Njie, Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women in Africa. Her presence brought rare gravitas and official weight to the virtual forum, setting a powerful tone for civil society's role.

She powerfully stated that "Observer status is more than a procedural label, it is an open invitation to civil society to shape the future of human rights in Africa." Hon. Sallah-Njie charged participants to view observer status not as ceremonial, but as a vehicle for accountability and sustained legal advocacy, compelling civil society to co-architect the future of the continent’s rights systems. She also highlighted the new African Union Convention on Ending Violence Against Women and Girls as a critical evolution of the Maputo Protocol’s legacy.



Hon. Janet Ramatoulie Sallah- Njie, Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women in Africa for the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights

## Strategic Insight and Regional Solidarity

BAOBAB's strategic goal was clear: to demystify the observer status process and ensure grassroots and feminist organizations could claim their rightful place within the Commission’s formal architecture, thereby strengthening the implementation of the Maputo Protocol across the region. Leveraging the virtual format, the convening brought together over 40 participants, including feminist organizations, legal experts, CSOs, and human rights advocates from five key nations: Nigeria, Liberia, Ghana, The Gambia, and Sierra Leone—all part of the SOAWR Anglophone West Africa (AWA) Cluster. This display of transnational solidarity underscored BAOBAB’s commitment to strengthening the capacity of regional partners. BAOBAB’s Programme Director, Anne Lawal, moderated the dynamic sessions across geographical borders.

## Technical Deep Dive: Tools for Accountability

The heart of the meeting was the shared desire to equip these organizations with the technical knowledge and strategic insight necessary to successfully engage the Commission. The technical sessions were instrumental, drawing on the collective expertise of the SOAWR network:

- Sylvia Horname, Executive Director of IGED-Africa in Ghana and a SOAWR member, unpacked the application process, emphasizing its value for access and legitimacy.
- Madam Hannah Forster, Executive Director of the African Centre for Democracy and Human Rights Studies (ACDHRS) in The Gambia and also a SOAWR member, provided a legal deep-dive, stressing that shadow reporting and treaty domestication are essential tools for advancing women’s rights.

The focus remained on key articles of the Maputo Protocol-reaffirming women’s right to access justice and participate in governance.

The two-day virtual event concluded with a clear mandate for bold, organized, and sustained civil society action. For BAOBAB, this successful, AWDF-funded collaboration reaffirms our unwavering commitment to strengthening the West African feminist movement, turning an "open invitation" into an occupied seat at the table of African governance.

# Strengthening the Movement: BAOBAB's Critical Participation at AmplifyChange National Convening



The AmplifyChange Nigeria Convening in Lagos this June was a vital platform for advancing Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), and BAOBAB was a key voice in this continental push for reproductive justice. The gathering was part of a dynamic series of convenings across Africa, designed to strengthen the solidarity and shared strategy among grantee partners.

For BAOBAB, represented by Executive Director Yèyè Bunmi Dipo-Salami and Programme Director Anne Lawal, the meeting served as a crucial opportunity to reaffirm our leadership within the SRHR movement, strengthen existing relationships, and expand our networks with new partners. We used this platform to spotlight BAOBAB's unique, effective approaches to the SRHR agenda in Nigeria, specifically our expertise in advocacy, grassroots mobilisation, and movement building.

## Impact and Outcomes

The core outcome of our participation was fostering the unity, resourcefulness, and persistence required to achieve lasting change. By sharing our contributions and learning from the successes and resilience of other advocates across the continent, we enhanced the collective capacity of the Nigerian SRHR network.

BAOBAB remains deeply committed to ensuring that the rights, dignity, and voices of women and girls are at the forefront of decision-making processes. Platforms like the AmplifyChange convening are critical for building stronger, more coordinated movements that can successfully drive policy and achieve true reproductive justice.



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# Celebrating Our BAOBAB Family: A Season of Growth and Goodbyes

At BAOBAB, we know that the strength of our mission rests on the dedication of our people. This quarter, April to June, has been a vibrant season of celebrating personal milestones and transitions, reminding us that we are a family built on partnership, impact, and sisterhood.

## A Celebration of Love: Blessing Adesina Ties the Knot

We are thrilled to share the joy of Blessing Adesina, our dedicated Admin & Finance Executive, who recently celebrated her wedding! Her special day was a radiant celebration of love and commitment. BAOBAB was proudly represented by our Executive Director, Yèyè Bunmi Dipo-Salami, Programme Director, Anne Lawal, and Volunteer, Adefunmilola Azeez, underscoring the deep personal connections within our team. We wish Blessing and her spouse a lifetime of joy and shared success. Her unwavering dedication to BAOBAB's mission makes us proud to celebrate this new chapter with her



## Honouring Our Team: Birthday Celebrations 🎂

We joyfully paused to celebrate the birthdays of four remarkable members of our team this quarter: Anne Lawal (Programme Director), Eleanora Boyo (Programme Assistant), Hauwa Yakubu (Admin & Accounts Officer 2), and Feyikemi Akinbinu (Volunteer). We honour their dedication, the unique strengths they each bring to our work, and the impact they generate daily, wishing them a year filled with happiness and personal fulfillment.

## A Heartfelt Farewell: Haruna Dogonkwami

It is with heartfelt gratitude that we said goodbye to Haruna Dongokwami, our valued Programme Officer. We gathered for a celebration filled with fond memories, as colleagues spoke of his professionalism, collaborative approach, and gentle spirit. Haruna leaves behind a legacy of commitment and excellence at BAOBAB. We wish him continued success and fulfillment in his future pursuits, confident that his foundational work with us will empower his next steps.





# Staff Profiles

Meet some of the brains and hearts behind  
**BAOBAB**



**Anne Lawal**  
**(The Strategist)**  
Programme Director

As BAOBAB's Programme Director, Anne Lawal is a seasoned force in the civic and social development sector.

Armed with an MBA in Finance from Ahmadu Bello University, she brings a powerful blend of financial acuity and nonprofit leadership expertise, excelling in program evaluation, public speaking, and crucial fundraising.

Anne's work is driven by a deep, personal commitment to forging inclusive spaces where women and girls don't just exist, but aggressively thrive. Her passion centers on self-development for young women, believing that true empowerment begins with knowledge, confidence, and opportunity.

Beyond her strategic role, Anne is a passionate explorer, finding joy in traveling to new places, immersing herself in different cultures, and trying local cuisines. Her curious mind is always active: a fun fact is that she absolutely loves solving puzzles, whether it's untangling a complicated thread or brilliantly predicting the twist in a mystery film.

With her sharp intellect and compassionate heart, Anne is a foundational driver of BAOBAB's mission for gender justice and transformative social change.

Hauwa Yakubu is the vital heartbeat and organizational anchor of BAOBAB's operations, serving as the Administrative and Accounts Officer.



**Hauwa Yakubu**  
**(The Anchor)**  
Administrative and  
Accounts Officer

Since joining the team, she has dramatically expanded her professional horizons, mastering the essential and often complex intersection of financial management and human rights advocacy. Hauwa ensures the financial integrity of the organization, providing the stable platform upon which all advocacy efforts are built.

Outside of keeping BAOBAB running seamlessly, Hauwa is undeniably the life of the party! She loves to unwind by watching movies, shopping, and going out for a good time. Her infectious energy is legendary—a fun fact about Hauwa is that she famously laughs at the slightest thing, bringing an immediate sense of warmth and lightheartedness to the office.

If you're looking for the person who ensures the budget is balanced and the morale is high, Hauwa is your go-to woman. She represents the essential commitment and vibrant spirit that powers BAOBAB's mission forward every single day.



**Edna Igwe**  
Volunteer  
Programme  
Assistant (The  
Digital Firebrand)

Edna Chinwendu Igwe is a dynamic, next-generation advocate and a crucial member of the BAOBAB team, currently serving as a Volunteer Programme Assistant.

Driven by a fierce belief in the power of communication, Edna is at the forefront of the organization's digital revolution. Her role is to actively support the team in creating impactful social media campaigns, coordinating powerful digital storytelling, and relentlessly amplifying key advocacy messages that challenge harmful social norms and promote gender justice.

Through her dedicated work, Edna has become a powerhouse in drafting strategic social media reports and creating compelling digital content that informs BAOBAB's wider advocacy strategy. Her passion is rooted in sparking social change and fostering inclusive, rights-based communities from the screen outward.

Outside of her vital digital advocacy, Edna is a creative soul: she enjoys creating fashion sketches, curating beautiful mood boards, and having deep, meaningful conversations about life and feminism. She is an expert in enjoying "soft life" moments, discovering new music, and relaxing with a good show.





## Connect with us!



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