

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

RISE OF THE AFRICAN WOMAN

By Ijeoma Eze-Obinali and Ify Ezinwa



The journey towards emancipation for the African woman has been at best, tedious, complicated and fraught with obstacles that in the past, seemed unsurmountable, but some have dared to smash the proverbial 'glass ceiling.'

The Socialist Party of America organized a Women's Day event on February 28, 1909 in New York, and another one the following year. German revolutionary, Clara Zetkin proposed at the 1910 International Socialist Woman's Conference, that March 8 be set aside annually, in honor of working women.

As a result, every March 8, women are celebrated across the globe to commemorate women's right; right to

participate in electoral processes and governance, and a platform to campaign for the rights of the girlchild.

After women gained suffrage in Soviet Russia in 1917, March 8 became a national holiday there. The day was then celebrated by the socialist movement and communist countries until it was adopted by the feminist movement in 1967. The United Nations began celebrating the day in 1975.

In the not so distant past, women were treated as second fiddle; seen, but not to be heard. They were just one of the properties that men acquire in their lifetime; baby-making machines who must pander to their husbands' desires at every point in time, with no minds of their own. In the wake of modernization came the need for adjustments in many areas. The world took a complete turn in technological advancement, and women moved right along with the times, embracing the changes. With exposure to education, women gradually became more expressive. Awareness brought about self-realization for the average woman, and a belief in her potentials to reach any height she desires.

Today, we celebrate powerful women all over the world – women who got to discover who they are and fought for their rights, thereby leaving their names on the sands of time.

This year's International Women's Day celebration is themed 'Choose to Challenge,' and of course, that is exactly what women



have been doing since the beginning of time- challenge the status quo. Organizations and groups around the globe go all out to promote the cause of women and celebrate the female gender on this day. African women are not left out.

As the world join hands to recognize and integrate women in policy making and governance in every organization across the world,



it is important to also celebrate the African woman and how she has been able to rise above the tides of a male-dominated, gender biased continent like Africa.

In recognition of the efforts of the African woman in emancipating herself from mental slavery and taking advantage of her freedom to soar above the sky and compete with her male counterparts in terms of achievements, the international community has

done well to carefully map out this year's celebration, giving it a universal theme – one that every woman around the world can relate to.

The International Women's Day is a focal point in the movement for women's rights and gender equality. Today, more and more women are cutting edges in their various fields and sharpening these edges in preparation for bigger responsibilities.



More is expected of the feminine gender. In this dispensation, there is no room for inferiority complex, timidity, self-relegation, failures hinged on gender peculiarities, discrimination, and oppression of any kind against the female gender.

The world has evolved. Times have changed, and women have started recording landmark victories in areas that were before now, peculiar to the male gender. Today's woman no longer see herself as inferior and incapable of handling 'exalted positions.

As is the case on a day like this, women gather in their numbers, across the globe, to celebrate their freedom, conquests, and achievements. There is always a call to action. This call to action is for women all over the world to start looking within and draw strength from their inner self; have confidence in her ability to conquer the high walls of gender discrimination without fear of castigation for attempting to do more.

Unlike in the days of old when women were used as slaves only worthy of crumbs and left-overs, the women of today know their rights and their place, but what limits them lie within– lack of courage to pursue their dreams. Some do not know what weapon to employ to go after what they want.

This is why women organizations across the globe put so much effort to help women discover their purpose and make the move to attain their full potential.

Lack of skills, funds, access to information and resources are some of the reasons a lot of women of today hide in their shell, unable to stand for themselves; unable to make their voices heard and their person seen.

Feminism is not about women hating on men and wanting to subjugate them, taking primal positions at all time just to make them feel less of themselves (an attempt to kill their pride). Feminism is for women who understand that females are first humans; people who know their worth and can take decisions that bring about great things. Feminism is an ideology that hinge on equal representation, recognition, and consideration of both genders.

African women are exceptionally strong – mentally and physically and they have all it takes to match their male counterparts in all spheres of life. This has always been the case, but the predominantly patriarchal African society chose to hold the women of Africa back from springing forth until gradually, a few who “chose to challenge” broke away from the chains that kept them bound, and the glory of the African woman is coming to light.



Today, there are a great number of African women blazing the trail and contributing immensely to the development of the world; women who the younger generation should borrow a leaf from, so they'll be counted among powerful women changing the world for good.

Africa is home to many women whose successes and wealth rival those of their counterparts in developed nations. Many of them started out with nothing more than a great idea and the will to succeed but today, are billionaires, industrialists, renowned scientists and artistes, successful politicians, and financial experts of international repute.

These powerful women have thrived in a continent that has long struggled with poverty, corruption, and degradation. And while many others migrated to seek better opportunities in other parts of the world, some saw Africa's potentials and chose to remain, or return after their sojourn abroad. The amazons are positively influencing the economic and social lives of people within, and outside their countries of birth.

Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala was Nigeria's former Minister of Finance. She was also the former World Bank's Managing Director, Operations. She held the position of Nigeria's Minister of foreign affairs briefly and was notably the first woman to hold that

position. Okonjo-Iweala is a global finance expert, economist, and international development professional with over 30 years working experience in Asia, Africa, Europe, and Latin America. She currently sits on the board of Standard Chartered Bank, Twitter, Global Alliance for Vaccines, and Immunization (GAVI), and the African Risk Capacity (ARC). She is the current Director-General of the World Trade Organization (WTO); the first woman and first African to ever hold the position. abroad.



Sahle-Work Zewde is Ethiopia's President since October 2018. She is the first elected female president of Ethiopia and currently the only female out of the 54 presidents in Africa. She was sworn in on October 25, 2018 following a unanimous vote by members of the National Parliamentary Assembly. Prior to this, she was a special representative of the United Nations Secretary General – Antonio Guterres to the African Union, and Head of the United Nations Office to the African Union.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is the literary maestro who has undoubtedly carved a niche for herself as an author. She is a strong advocate of Africanism and feminism. She has won several awards for her masterpieces in fiction, non-fiction and short stories, among which are, Orange Broadband Prize for Fiction (2007) and a MacArthur Foundation fellowship (2008). In the Times Literary Supplement, she



Folorunsho Alakija is a renowned Nigerian businesswoman and has been adjudged one of the richest African women and the richest black women in the world. According to Forbes ratings, she is the richest woman in Nigeria. She has businesses in oil, fashion, printing, and real estate industries. In 2014, she overtook Oprah Winfrey as the richest woman of African descent. Currently, her net worth is about \$1 billion.



Oby Ezekwesili is a Nigerian Accountant, human rights activist, and Nigeria's former Minister of Education. In June 2005, she was appointed Minister of Solid Minerals (Mines and Steel) during which she led a vibrant reform program that led to Nigeria's global recognition as a credible mining investment destination. In 2012, she successfully completed her stint as the World Bank Vice-President, Africa Division. She was one of the 2019 presidential candidates during general elections in Nigeria.



was described as "the most prominent" of a "procession of critically acclaimed young anglophone authors, who is succeeding in attracting a new generation of readers to African literature". She is the author of several best-selling novels and a collection of many short stories including, Half of a Yellow Sun, Purple Hibiscus, Americanah. Dear

Ijeawele, The Thing Around Your Neck etc. Chimamanda is a fighter for the course of Africa and African women to the core and she conveys her beliefs and ideologies through her works. Her works fight against "the Danger of a Single Story" by telling her own story and the story about Africa, challenging the ways Africa is portrayed by the Western press and how it is viewed by non-Africans.



Ilhan Omar, a young American politician of Somali descent is another notable African woman who is conquering territories through serving in America as a member of the House of Representatives – a position she has held since 2018. She is the first Somali American, the first naturalized citizen from Africa, and the first non-white woman elected from Minnesota.



From Botswana, there is the young economist cum politician who is the youngest to ever serve as Minister in the Botswana Cabinet. 33-year-old **Bogolo Joy Kewenedo** held the office of Minister of Investment, Trade, and Industry from April 4, 2018 till 2020, with. Her meeting with the former US first lady, Michelle Obama, in 2011 inspired her to establish the Women Leadership and Mentorship Program, in partnership with her friend.



Ever heard of **Bethlehem Tilahun Alemu**? The Ethiopian businesswoman defiantly rose from an impoverished and marginalized community in Addis Ababa to become the founder and Executive Director of soleRebels- Africa's fastest growing footwear company. Alemu has gained international recognition for her industry and efforts to shift the narrative of Africa from poverty to the continent's entrepreneurial spirit, social capital, and economic potential. She has set the pace for other potential, black-skinned girls with interest in entrepreneurship to follow. She is among the most powerful African women doing exceptionally well with her brand.



Photo Credit
UN Photo/Devra Berkowitz, Ky Chung, Manuel Elias, C McIlwaine, Rick Bajornas, Pasqual Gorriz, Eskinder Debebe, Cia Pak, Hintng.com, Chimamanda.com, Dabawa.org, Forward.com, State.gov