

UUBO HAS ENABLED ME TO TRAVEL WIDELY AND MEET FASCINATING PROFESSIONALS

-YINKA EDU, PARTNER, UDO UDOMA AND BELO- OSAGIE.

BORN to Elder Simeon Moronfolu Olakunri, SAN, and Chief Mrs Olutoyin Olakunri, Africa's first female chartered accountant, Yinka Edu hails from a family of very successful professional parents, so it should not surprise anyone that she turned out successful in her professional calling too.

Today, Yinka is a Partner in the highly-rated and top-flight law firm, Udo Udoma and Belo-Osagie. She specializes in finance law, having entered the profession when specialization was becoming increasingly important. She has the record of being the first Nigerian lawyer to be ranked Tier 1 in Chambers and Partners, an international legal directory for fintech work, a growing practice area. She was equally named by African Shapers as one of the 60 African Women Experts in Fintech. Additionally, she was named Market Leader and Women Leader by IFLR 1000 and ranked Tier 1 in banking and finance, capital markets, and corporate/commercial practices. She also happened to be the first Chairman of the Capital Market Solicitors Association of Nigeria.

Married to a lawyer like her, Yinka joined Udo Udoma and Belo-Osagie in the late 1990's after she had qualified as a barrister in the UK and being called to the Bar of England and Wales. But since she could not practice law in Nigeria without having attended the Nigerian Law School, she also had to attend this training institution before she could join UUBO. Explaining her reason for going into the legal profession, she said: "My father, Elder S.M. Olakunri, SAN, is a distinguished lawyer, and former Chairman of the Body of Benchers. He epitomizes a 'lawyers' lawyer' taking the profession and its ethics very seriously. His dedication was so profound that he would type his documents when handling particularly confidential matters. This passion and respect for the profession greatly influenced me. Although I initially pursued a law degree to please him, I soon discovered that I was drawn to the problem-solving aspects of the field".

Aside from her father, she says her late mother was another great influence on her life and career. "My mother, the late Chief Mrs. Toyin Olakunri was an incredible role model professionally and as a mother. She balanced her career and raised seven biological

children and many more non-biological ones. As the first female chartered accountant in Africa, she was a banker, industrialist, and boardroom expert. Despite her many roles, she never missed an important event and was always available for advice. Her ability to manage everything inspired me greatly and continues to do so. It keeps me from feeling overwhelmed or sorry for myself as I see how my mother and other pioneering professional women made it work", she stressed.

Edu also recognizes her husband as someone that has been of significant influence on her. As a fellow lawyer and litigator, her husband, she says, understands her work and brings a complementary skillset and valuable perspectives.

She revealed that she has had a varied and exciting career at UUBO as she has had the opportunity to travel widely for work and meet fascinating professionals worldwide. She added that her professional life in the firm made her to be involved in significant transactions for well-known companies.

Speaking about her experiences on the job, she noted that there have been many memorable ones. She enthused: "one that stands out was when as a relatively young lawyer, I was asked to present some unique features we had introduced into the structure of the Total Merger to the senior management of SEC. At that time, such matters were assessed by a large panel of about twenty people across various departments. Although nervous, I was proud to present and secure approval for a new feature I had helped create".

She contends that every law firm worth its salt must innovate and be ready to embrace new ideas because standing still means going backwards. Thus, she has been open to exploring budding practice areas for UUBO even as she is always ready to integrate technology and learn from the younger generations.

In line with this, she has consequently led the firm's initiative to support startups and SMES through U-Law. This dedicated legal support service provides tailored advice and tech-based solutions to growth businesses. One of such products is the Compliance Calculator, a tech-based tool that allows MSMEs to assess their compliance with basic legal requirements without needing a lawyer.

And to aspiring female professionals, she proffered this counsel: "I genuinely believe you can have it all-though not all at once. You can effectively juggle these aspects of life by recognizing that there are different times and seasons- times to focus on family, work, or personal well-being. It's also important to be kind to yourself. If balancing priorities becomes too challenging, it's okay to consider scaling back".



MY GOAL IS TO ALWAYS GIVE MY BEST AND BE A GREAT AMBASSADOR OF UUBO

- OZOFU OGIEMUDIA, DEPUTY MANAGING PARTNER DESIGNATE, UDO UDOMA AND BELO-OSAGIE.

AN alumnus of Queen's College, Yaba, Lagos, the University of Ibadan and University College, London, Ozofu Ogiemudia has spent her entire working career with the law firm of Udo Udoma and Belo-Osagie. Starting as an intern in 2002, she later got employed as an associate in 2004, rising through the ranks to become a Partner in 2014, and come January next year, she will be making history as the first Deputy Managing Partner of the firm.

Born to Prof Bamidele and Mrs Ajike Sanni who are both retired academics at the University of Benin, Ozofu never wanted to study Law initially. It was her parents that subtly nudged her out of the thought to pursue fashion design after a law degree.

Commencing the Law School in July 2002, Ozofu was fortunate to get an internship at UUBO. This opened her eyes for another aspect of the law that she was not much exposed to in the university- corporate law. She became aware that she could practice law and not have to go to court which suited her very well since she was not keen on being a litigator. When she joined the firm eventually in 2004, she didn't waste time in going for her Master's degree in corporate and securities law. This was at University College, London and to cap it, and expose her to the practical side, UUBO arranged for her to spend three months with the Law firm of Denton Wilde Sapte, now Dentons, in London, where she spent time with the trade finance and corporate finance teams.

Ogiemudia who has been active in the Nigerian Bar Association Section on Business Law since 2016 had her first shot at contributing to the Nigerian legislative process when Mr. Olu Akpata chaired the section. Since then, she had various opportunities from subsequent chairmen of the section to contribute in various ways to enhance the section as well as Nigeria's legal and regulatory system. She says: "I got the chance of a lifetime to chair the technical advisory committee that advised the 8th Nigerian Senate and drafted what eventually became the Companies and Allied Matters Act 2020, and the road that led to this began with a call to serve with the NBASBL.

In July 2024, following the NBASBL's nomination process for the executive committee members that will lead the section from August 2024-August 2026, I emerged as the next chairperson. This is a huge responsibility and I look forward to doing my best to advance the objectives and causes of the NBASBL, leveraging on the wealth of intellectual and other resources within the NBASBL, the NBA as a whole and other partner organizations".

Ogiemudia declared that her expectation

s after law school have been met because she wanted to work in one of the best law firms and become an expert in the areas of law she chooses to specialize in and this has been realized. She maintained that as a commercial lawyer she has enjoyed the work that went into helping companies capitalize, restructure, or merge adding that it has always been rewarding.

On those who shaped her life and career, she pointed out that her parents were the ones who primarily shaped her values and ethos while the leading of the holy spirit and the teachings of the bible took over ever since she got born again in her teenage years. Her husband, family and friends have also played varying roles in influencing her life, she says.

From the point of view of career, she acknowledges that she was fortunate to have a host of role models at UUBO who helped in shaping her. She mentioned the founding partners, Senator Udoma Udo Udoma and Dr. Myma Belo-Osagie in this regards. According to her, Senator Udoma's life in public service influenced her interest in legislative advocacy, while she sees Dr Belo-Osagie as a female amazon in the Nigerian corporate legal scene whose life proved that it was possible to succeed in a career, and at the same time, raise a family and build the right support system to make it possible.

"Most impactful in my career has been UUBO's current Senior Partner, Dan Agbor, who gave me the chance to intern with the firm in 2002, took me under his wing, and taught me how to be a good lawyer and trusted adviser to my clients. Our current Managing Partner, Aniekan Ukpanah, and Managing Partner designate, Jumoke Lambo, are models who lead gently and with compassion," she says.

Recounting her unforgettable experiences in the profession, she stated: "One of my most memorable moments was on August 2020 when I received an SMS informing me that former President Buhari had signed the CAMA 2020 into law. It was surreal. I will never forget the journey that began in May 2017 when our committee was inaugurated, and culminated in submitting our reports and the draft bill in February 2018. This was followed by more than two years and a change of government, during which it seemed that our work would not be actualized."

Saying that her goal is to always give her best and be a great ambassador of UUBO and the Nigerian legal profession, she implored aspiring female lawyers to aspire to get into one of the best firms in their areas of interest where they can learn and build expertise, and be ready to work very hard. Furthermore, she urged them to believe in themselves and aim for the best.



UUBO HAS ALLOWED ME TO GROW PROFESSIONALLY AND PERSONALLY

— FOLAKE ELIAS-ADEBOWALE, PARTNER,
UDO UDOMA & BELO-OSAGIE



Folake Elias-Adebawale

BORN to lawyer parents and having older siblings as lawyers, no one should then wonder why Folake Elias-Adebawale turned out to be a lawyer too. In fact, the family's involvement in diverse legal functions on the bench, incorporate, administrative, government, international and private practice as well as academics and authorship is legendary and was more than enough to incentivise her to go into the profession as well. Coupled with this was her deep fascination for the power of language and how it can creatively impact outcomes.

Thus Folake, who took her O'Level, A'Level and S'Level exams in Felixstowe College, Suffolk, England not only went ahead to obtain a Bachelor in Jurisprudence from Oxford University, London, but also a Master in International Business Transactions, International Trade, Foreign Relations Law and Evidence from the University College, London before returning to Nigeria to attend the Nigerian Law School and got called to the Nigerian Bar. In 1996, she joined Udo Udoma and Belo-Osagie Law Firm, a firm where she has remained since.

Today, she is a Partner in this top law firm, a role she had assumed since 2007. At present she is current co-Head of Mergers and Acquisitions as well as the Head of the private equity, venture capital and oil and gas teams. She says: "Outside oil and gas, my specialisations are sector-agnostic. I get to advise across diverse industries and sectors on domestic and cross-border matters including equity and asset investments, acquisitions, divestment, restructuring and on a range of compliance matters. I have been privileged to advice local and foreign investors and other stakeholders on transactions in the financial services, fast-moving consumer goods, food and beverages including breweries, industrials, oil and gas, renewables, fintech, agriculture and agribusiness, health, pharmaceuticals, real estate, construction and entertainment sectors among others."

"My grand plan was to stay in private practice for no more than a year before exploring options in DFI, finance or impact investing. Life however happened and I found that I enjoyed private practice. Senator Udoma's founding philosophy of fostering a meritocratic culture of excellence at UUBO has helped it achieve unparalleled gender parity. This appealed to me and aligned with my learning and career ambitions, even as my husband and I were growing a young family. It is still a great place to work-it's probably why we have so many lifers."

"I have had opportunities to work on significant transactions and provide

strategic advice to a fantastic plethora of local and international clients, and with every assignment, I learn something new. The journey has been both challenging and rewarding but has allowed me to grow professionally and personally. 28 years later, having never left after my first year of corporate and commercial practice at UUBO, I can safely say that my original plan has completely derailed".

On the people that have been most influential in shaping her life and career, she says her family comes first because they shaped her values, conscience and ambitions. According to her, her father, Prof Taslim Olawale Elias of blessed memory, was a man of unparalleled productivity, unwavering principles and unmatched work ethic and he taught his children to disregard limitations and prejudices even as he instilled in them the belief that they could achieve anything. Coupled with this, were her mother and her grandmother who imbued her with values of female independence, self-sufficiency and compassion. In addition, she stated that her husband has been very supportive and invaluable in helping to maintain a balanced perspective in everything she does.

"My daughters teach me resilience, humility and the importance of dreaming big. I am committed to these values which have led me to wonderful mentoring opportunities. I have also been fortunate to meet individuals whose intellect, far-sightedness, empathy and ethics have profoundly impacted my core values, life experiences, outlook and aspirations".

Nostalgic about her parents and grateful to them, she is ever proud and happy with what the Saile Foundation setup by her brother, Gbolahan and his wife Aramide Elias is doing to honour them. She revealed that the foundation hosts the annual Taslim Olawale Elias football tournament and literary competition amongst Lagos Island children.

Asked of the most memorable experiences that she had in the profession, Elias-Adebawale was quick to point out that there is no one favourite experience. She is however grateful for the many memorable transactions that she'd been part of. Said she: "The thrill of navigating and resolving issues to meet the unique challenges and objectives of each deal never gets old of me. I suspect I'm a bit addicted to the roller-coaster adventure of every deal-every "ride" is unforgettable".

Continuing she noted: "A great privilege of my career has been the recognition of my practice in independent legal rankings such as Chambers Global, Chambers Fintech, The Legal 500, The International Financial Law Review and Lexology/Who's Who Legal and ranked as an IFLR 1000 Woman Leader, an honour for women lawyers distinguished by their expertise, experience, and leadership in complex deals, is truly a remarkable recognition".

Offering words of advice to aspiring female lawyers, she counselled them to be ready to work hard and continually upskill while seizing every opportunity to distinguish themselves "Confidence is paramount", she maintained. "Accept that you deserve a seat at the table, earn it, and then own it. Allow yourself grace, but also hold yourself accountable for your mistakes and learn from your failures. Embrace your strengths and vulnerabilities, they keep you grounded. Tackle challenges with resilience. Actively listen and cultivate empathy. Pace yourself to maintain balance and avoid burnout. Prioritize your health and above all, your faith".

I HAVE BEEN INSTRUMENTAL IN DEVELOPING NEW PRACTICE AREAS AT UUBO

- Jumoke Lambo, Managing Partner
Designate, UDO UDOMA & BELO-OSAGIE



Jumoke Lambo

Mrs. Jumoke Lambo, the incoming Managing Partner of Udo Udoma and Belo-Osagie, one of the foremost law firms in Nigeria today, studied Law at University of Bristol, UK. She had earlier gained her O'Level and A'Level certificates at Ellerslie Girls School, in the same UK. After bagging her law degree, she returned to Nigeria to attend the Nigerian Law School and was called to the Bar in 1989. She subsequently did her NYSC at Udo Udoma & Belo-Osagie and got retained after her service year in 1990, meaning that as at today, she has spent over 35 years in the firm.

Lambo who became a Partner in 2000 disclosed that she decided on reading law because of her passion for justice, equity and fairness in the society. As someone that believes in ensuring everyone has access to justice, and is treated with dignity, with their fundamental rights respected, protected and preserved, she is thus obsessed with law. Apart from this, Mr. Femi Okunnu, SAN, her uncle, was a great influence on her. She reminisced that her discussions with him in her childhood days always centered on current events and this greatly fueled her desire to pursue a career in the profession.

Lambo who has had a distinguishable career at UUBO revealed that her areas of specialization include telecommunications, media and technology, data protection, commercial aviation law, employment law including corporate immigration and business establishment advisory, mergers and acquisitions with a focus on due diligence compliance and general corporate advisory. In 2010, she was seconded to Etisalat Nigeria as head of legal directorate where she was tasked with restructuring the unit. Similarly, she was seconded to Union Bank in 2014 to restructure their legal unit. Additionally, she oversees Alsec Nominees Ltd, the company secretarial arm of the firm which provides company secretarial and corporate compliance services for over 300 companies across almost every sector of the Nigerian economy.

She returns all glory to God for her accomplishments so far in life. Aside from God, she says she owes a great deal to her parents, Mr. Abdul Karim Ohimai Amu, OFR and Mrs. Morayo Yeside Amu and Mr. Femi Okunnu, SAN, who mentored and nurtured her. According to her, there are numerous others who she cannot mention individually

but that she remains grateful to all. She said that her aspirations when she left Law School was to reach the pinnacle of her career no matter where life takes her adding that it is gratifying that her prayers have been answered by the almighty.

Recalling some significant experiences in her over 35 years professional career, she offered: "One standout moment was when the firm was engaged by the Federal Government of Nigeria, through the Bureau for Public Enterprises to work with an international consortium of experts to review the Nigerian telecommunications framework. This project was life-transforming for me, sparking my interest in telecommunications and technology. I'm particularly grateful for this work because its benefits continue to drive advancements in the sector, contributing about 15% to Nigeria's GDP."

She continued; "The secondments to Etisalat Nigeria and Union Bank were also pivotal assignments. These opportunities exposed me to new experiences and broadened my perspectives, significantly impacting how I engage with in-house counsel. They also inspired me to adopt new practices to enhance the firm's efficiency, many of which we have implemented over the years."

Lambo who has been instrumental in developing new practice at UUBO such as the data protection practice, and expanding other practice areas to merge them or broaden the range of services provided to clients also handles the pastoral care of all employees. This involves counselling employees and being a supportive listener to address their concerns. This, she says, is because the firm is deeply committed to her employees' well-being as well as their mental, physical and emotional health, thus ensuring a safe and supportive workplace for everyone.

Speaking on the challenges she'd had in her career, she had this to say: "Challenges often arise from the work clients refer to us and on a personal level. These challenges are what make the practice of law so exciting to me. No two matters are ever the same, regardless of how similar the facts may be. Each case has its unique characteristics, making the task enjoyable as we strive to find solutions that work for our clients. Balancing work and personal life also presented its challenges. I remember working on a project in Abuja while needing to be home every evening for family commitments. For two weeks, I took the first flight to Abuja and returned on the last flight each day. Despite the demanding schedule, the work proceeded smoothly, and my family was not neglected".

As she is on the cusp of becoming the Managing Partner of UUBO, Lambo is eagerly looking forward to an exciting tenure of growth and expansion. On the other hand, she aims to increase efforts at giving back to society and nurturing the next generation of young professionals. And to aspiring female professionals, she has these words of advice: "Dream big and strive to achieve your dreams. While there will be obstacles along the way, the only thing that can stop you is yourself. Surround yourself with women who have walked the path you aspire to take and seek mentorship from them".

A lover of children and youth she contends that she would have been working with children and youth or become a Human Resources professional if she had not gone into the law profession. In fact, even though she turned out to be a lawyer, she is currently involved with organizations supporting young women, providing them with the tools to succeed in their careers and become well-rounded individuals.