

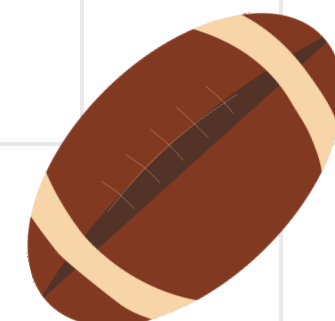
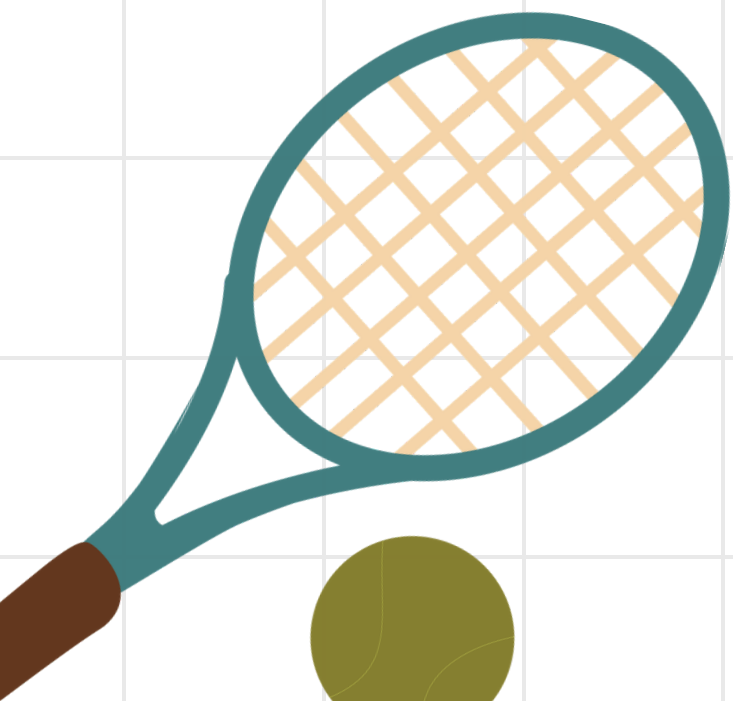
KEYNOTE ADDRESS

INVESTING IN WOMEN AND SPORT IN AFRICA

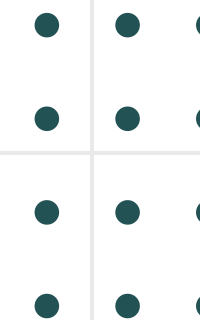


**ARABINRIN ADERONKE | EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
| FOUNDER, FAME FOUNDATION, NIGERIA.**

**9TH IWG GLOBAL SUMMIT ON WOMEN &
SPORT 2026 | ICC BIRMINGHAM, UK | JULY 11,
2026**



× MY OPENING



Distinguished guests, esteemed sports leaders, policymakers, investors, advocates, and champions of women's advancement, good day.

It is both an honor and a privilege to stand before you today to speak on a matter of profound importance to Africa's future — investing in women and sport.

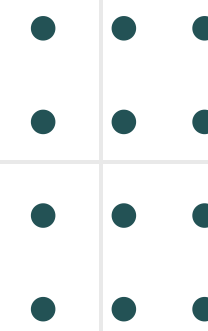
I would like to begin with a story.

A few years ago, I watched a young girl playing football on a dusty field in a small African community. She had no boots, no professional coach, and no proper pitch. Only raw talent, fierce determination, and a dream. She ran with confidence. She played with courage. She moved like someone who believed she belonged on the world stage.

Yet around her, the voices were louder than her dreams.

"Football is not for girls." "Focus on something else." "This is not a future."
And still, she kept playing.





THE CORE QUESTION



As I watched her, one question remained with me.



How many girls across Africa are carrying greatness within them, but may never become all they are meant to be simply because no one invested in them?

That question should challenge all of us.

Because the truth is difficult. Africa is not short of talented women. Africa is not short of ambitious girls. Africa is not short of future champions.

What we lack is sufficient investment. Investment in infrastructure. Investment in training. Investment in sponsorship. Investment in visibility. Investment in leadership pathways.

Too many girls are forced to confront barriers they should never have to face. Not because they are not capable. But because the system was never designed for them to thrive.

× **AFRICAN WOMEN RISING**

Yet despite these barriers, African women continue to rise.

They continue to break barriers and rewrite history.

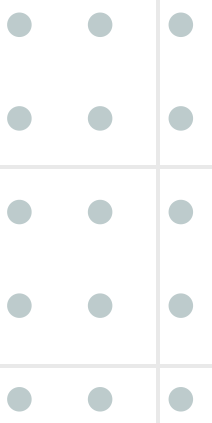
Look at Asisat Oshoala. From Lagos to the global football stage, she has become one of Africa's most celebrated female footballers. She has not only built an exceptional career; she has opened doors for countless young girls across Africa to believe that football belongs to them as well.



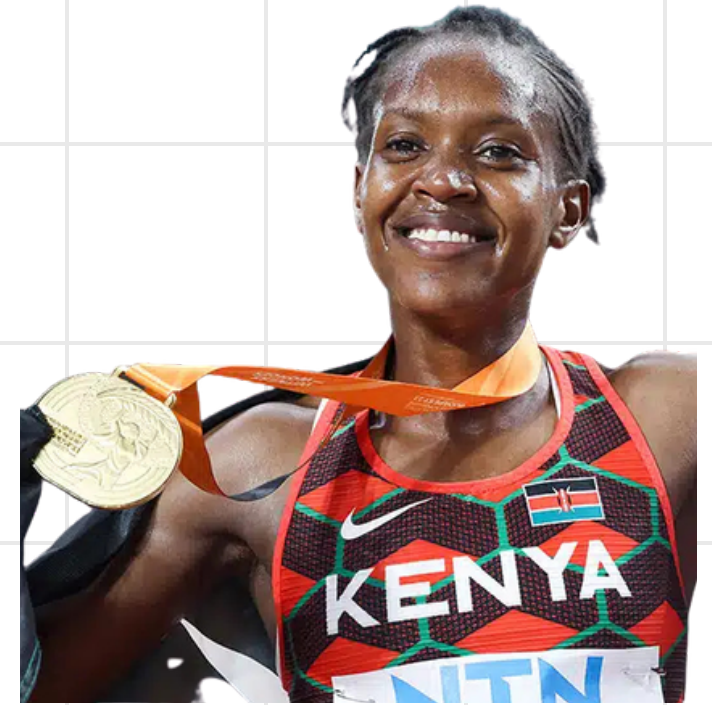
Look at Tobi Amusan. She has demonstrated what excellence looks like through discipline, consistency, and resilience. She represents the strength and brilliance of African women at the highest level.



× AFRICAN WOMEN RISING



Look at Faith Kipyegon. A mother, a champion, and one of the greatest middle-distance runners in history, Faith's journey is a remarkable story of resilience, discipline, and excellence. She has shattered world records and redefined what is possible, proving that African women can dominate the world stage while balancing the realities of life beyond sport. Her story reminds us that when women are supported, they do not merely compete — they transform history.

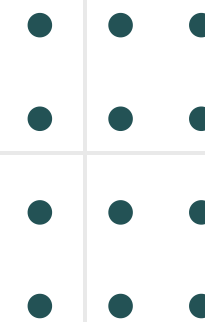


Look at Caster Semenya. Through intense scrutiny and immense pressure, she has shown extraordinary courage and resilience.

These women are not simply athletes. They are symbols of possibility. They are proof that African women can excel globally when talent meets opportunity.



THE VISION & WHY INVESTMENT MATTERS



Now imagine this.

What if millions more girls had access to the same opportunities? What if talent in rural villages, urban communities, and underserved regions received the investment it deserved? What if no girl had to abandon her dream because of a lack of support?

That is the Africa we should be building.

Because investing in women's sports is not merely about competition. It is about transformation.

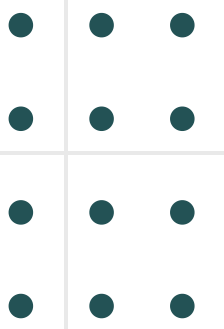
Research consistently shows that girls who participate in sports develop greater confidence, stronger leadership skills, discipline, and improved economic outcomes.

Sport creates leaders. Sport builds resilience. Sport changes futures.

And Africa needs this now more than ever. We are home to one of the youngest populations in the world. The future of this continent depends heavily on what we choose to invest in today. And we cannot claim to be serious about development while leaving women behind. We cannot build a prosperous Africa while underfunding half of our talent. **It simply cannot work.**



THE REALITY CHECK



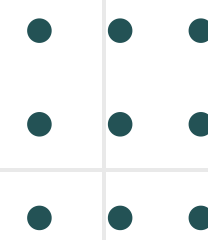
This is why investment in women's sports must move beyond rhetoric. It requires deliberate action.



Governments must establish stronger policies and funding structures. Sports institutions must create inclusive systems. Schools must encourage girls' participation from an early age. Media must amplify women's stories. And the private sector must recognise women's sports for what it truly is.

Not charity. Not a side project. But a strategic investment. A smart investment. An investment with economic, social, and generational returns.





INVEST BEYOND ATHLETES

We must also invest beyond athletes.

We need more women in sports leadership.

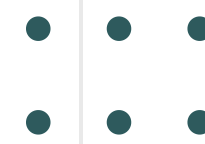
More women as federation presidents. More women as coaches. More women as administrators. More women in decision-making roles.

Because representation changes systems. And systems shape outcomes.

The decisions we make today will determine the future we create tomorrow.

Young girls across Africa are watching us. They are watching what we celebrate. They are watching what we fund. They are watching what we ignore.

And the question is simple. What are we telling them? Are we telling them their dreams matter? Are we telling them they belong? Are we building systems that say, clearly and boldly, that their future is worth investing in?



LEADERSHIP IS ABOUT SOLUTIONS



This room is filled with leaders. And leadership is not simply about identifying problems. Leadership is about creating solutions.

This is our opportunity to shape the future. To create an Africa where talent is not wasted. Where dreams are not buried. Where women are fully empowered to thrive.

I want to leave you with this.

Somewhere in Africa today, a young girl is running barefoot on a dusty field. Somewhere, a girl is waking up before sunrise to train. Somewhere, a girl is carrying a dream too big for her circumstances.

She does not need our pity. She needs our action. She needs our investment. She needs our courage.

And perhaps the greatest tragedy would not be that she failed. The greatest tragedy would be that she never had the chance to try.



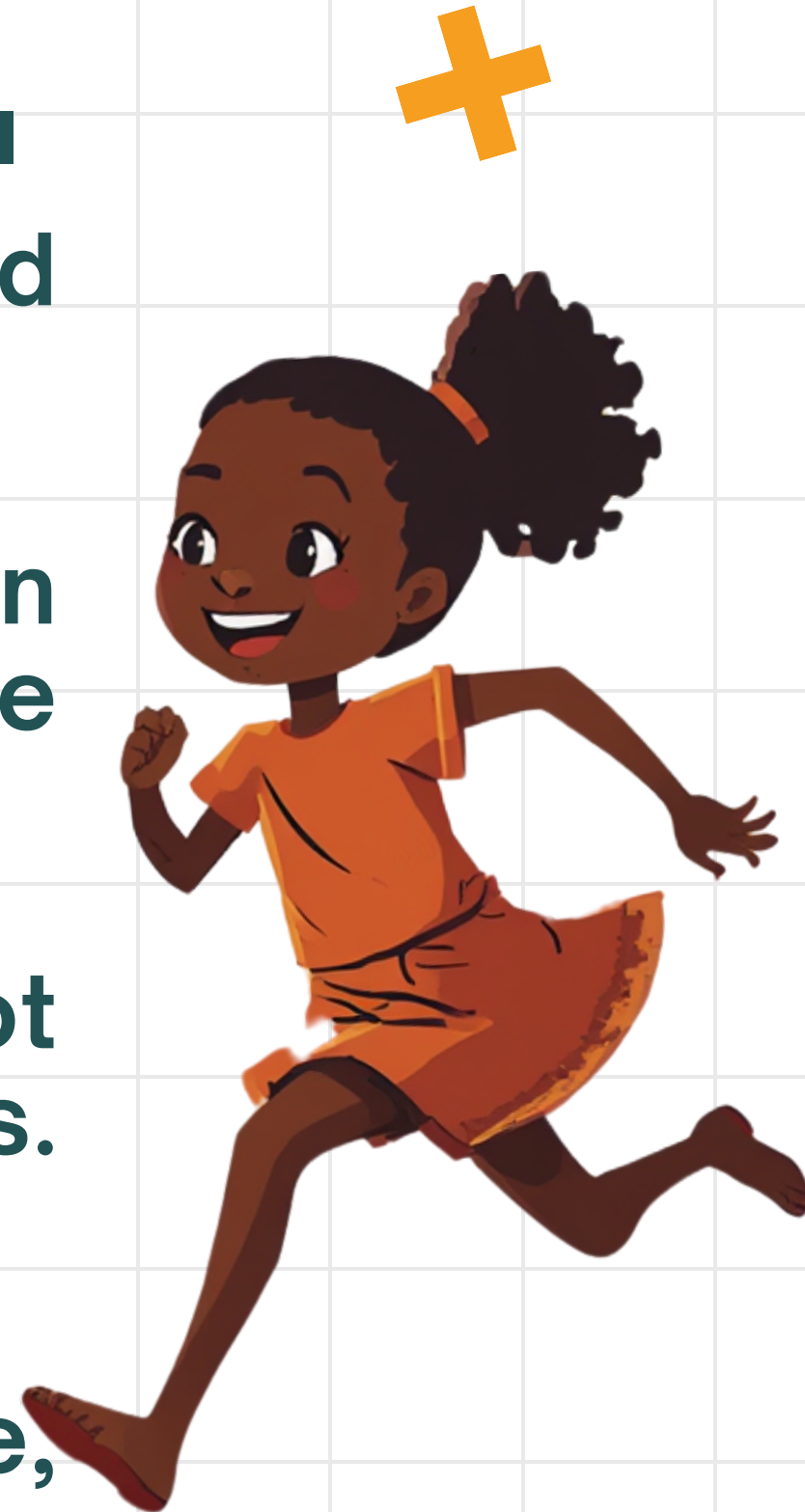
BE THE GENERATION THAT INVESTS

Let us not be the generation that saw talent and looked away.

Let us be the generation that invested. The generation that opened doors. The generation that changed the story.

Because when we invest in women in sport, we do not just build champions. We build hope. We build futures. We build Africa.

And every time a girl is given the opportunity to rise, Africa rises with her.





THANK YOU!

Arabinrin Aderonke

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9th IWG Global Summit on Women & Sport

2026

ICC Birmingham, UK

www.famefoundationwg.org