Akanimo Ekong Oral History Interview

April 16, 2024

Interviewee: Akanimo Ekong
Interviewer: Dawn Chinagorom-Abiakalam
Location of Interview: Zoom

Biographical Note

Akanimo Ekong is a leadership coach, trainer, and recruitment specialist working across human resources, organizational development, and executive search. Born in the Democratic Republic of the Congo to a diplomat father, he spent his early childhood in Nigeria, the United States, Austria, and Germany before returning to Nigeria for secondary school in Ibadan. He studied Chemical Engineering at the University of Benin and later transitioned into human resources and talent development, focusing on leadership training, team building, and organizational capacity building in corporate contexts in Nigeria and beyond.

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Technical Note

This interview was conducted remotely via Zoom and recorded in digital audio format. The recording was subsequently transcribed and lightly edited for clarity and readability. This transcript preserves the content and meaning of the original interview while correcting minor transcription errors and formatting inconsistencies.

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Dawn Chinagorom-Abiakalam: Okay, so I will start by introducing myself. So my name is Dawn Chinagorom-Abiakalam and I am with the Nigerian Stories Archive and today I'm

interviewing Mr Akanimo Ekong and I'm conducting an oral history interview for the NSA. So I'm going to start by asking you some background information about yourself and I'll start by asking you to tell me, a little about yourself, and tell me what part of Nigeria you're from.

Akanimo Ekong: Okay, great. Thanks a lot Dawn. So my name is Akanimo Ekong. What am I supposed to say about myself now? I'm a leadership coach. I'm a trainer, not a physical trainer. So I train employees in organizations. I also counsel, and I do team building. So that's my… and then I recruit, I recruit for organizations. So people who are looking for a job, mid-level or senior level, I find people jobs or organizations reach out to me to say they're looking for people and I find those people. So that's my, what I'll call my five-fold ministry. I read, what I read and what I'm doing now is totally, there's no correlation. I read chemical engineering. And in secondary school, I was very good with physics, maths and all the sciences. So I read chemical engineering, loved my chemistry, didn't really enjoy it when I was in university and shortly after university, I didn't get a job in an oil company and maybe that was a blessing but I don't think I would have enjoyed it. And well, as you say, the rest is history.

Throughout my career, I was working more around HR, human resources and helping people, helping organizations build structure. And I found that when I left, I was, what gave me more joy was impacting lives, impacting lives through training, impacting lives through giving advice, giving direction, mentoring. So when I started my, when I started my business, that's how I ended up in my, in these five things that I do. Yeah. And I'm, I'm from, where am I from? I'm from Akwa Ibom in Nigeria. I'm actually from Uyo, the capital of Akwa Ibom. So that's where I'm from. I never lived there. I don't want to say, I'm, now I think I regret it, but I don't, I don't speak the language either. I don't know whether to blame myself or my parents, but it is what it is. So I don't like it. The only language I know it's English and I wish I had to, if I had to have an instant skill. I think I want to learn, I want to know how to speak Ibibio now. And I want to learn how to speak Spanish, if I could have an instant skill. So that's me in a nutshell.

DCA: Wow. Thank you very much for sharing. And I would like to also ask a little more about your background, because you mentioned that you're from Akwa Ibom, but you didn't live there. So the next question is, did you grow up in Nigeria? And if you did, where, and if you didn't, would you like to share some of the places that you grew up?

AE: Okay. So I was born in, I don't know why I want to laugh. I was born in the Democratic Republic of Congo. And my father was a diplomat. So from there, he came to Nigeria and I stayed in Nigeria for maybe, I don't know, a year. I was just a baby. So because I can't remember anything. And then the next thing I knew, well, I was told we went to Ghana, where my younger brother was born. And then my father was posted to the U.S. I mean, he was in the United Nations for about seven to eight years. So I grew up, my early child was in the U.S., where I schooled in New York. I schooled in New York, yeah. And then from there, we

moved to Vienna and then we moved to Germany. And by the time I knew it, I was maybe 11. And then one day, he just deposited me in Nigeria and said, "Okay, you're coming to do your secondary school in Ibadan." So his sister and my cousins lived in Ibadan, the University of Ibadan. And there's a secondary school there called Charter School Ibadan, so he just dropped me there. I think he wanted me to have a soft landing. So I stayed with my cousins. I didn't go to boarding school. I stayed with my cousins in Ibadan. And that's where, that's where I think lots of things happened to me around that time. Because, you know, I had never been to Nigeria. I was speaking with an accent. I had tried to learn German. It was a huge culture shock for me, being teased, being laughed at. I couldn't speak Yoruba. I didn't know much about Nigeria. So I was coming with American... Some bad habits from the U.S. where, you know, maybe someone upsets me and I'll say, "Your mother." And they will just beat you like that. "In Nigeria, we don't joke with people's mothers o. You do that in America."

So yeah, when I finished secondary school, I did very well. I was what you call a nerd. So I was very into my academics. So I got six A's in WAEC. I scored 300 and something in Jam. And when it was time to go to university, my father said, hey, this is a university called University of Benin. I think you'd like to go there. I wanted a fresh start. Most of the people in my secondary school were going to UI. Sorry were going to UniLag or Ife. And I wanted a fresh start. So I said, hey, let's do this Benin. And that's another phase of my life. So yes.

DCA: Wow. So it seems that you've lived in a lot of places, but interestingly, lots of places where I will not say it's uncommon to find Nigerians. So I wanted you to talk a little more about your experience as a Nigerian growing up in the U.S., in Vienna, and in Germany, like what your experiences were like, specifically as a Nigerian person in these countries?

AE: Oh, that's the toughest question you've asked me so far. I mean, growing up in the U.S., I think, like I said, those were the formative years. That was maybe between ages of three to nine, black and white TV. One thing I remember then was, you know, my father coming to my class to talk about Africa. So you have parents coming once in a while to talk about their countries. And a number of my classmates would be like, oh, wow, Africa, thinking of just jungles and no tarred roads and all that. So I don't really remember much. I remember being bullied. No, I remember trying to belong with my neighbors.

So I had a very interesting incident that I can't forget where they were going out somewhere. And I said, no, I'm young. We don't normally go out beyond our apartment block. And they kept on calling me baby. You're just a baby. You're just a baby and I was with my younger brother. And I just felt that peer pressure of, I'm not a baby. I said, well, if you're not a baby, then you follow us. And before I knew it, there's a part of New York called Harlem. It's not a very safe environment. And that's not where we were living. But before I knew it, we ended up

there, it was more like some kind of nightclub. And so they were drinking, smoking. And so, you know, maybe half naked ladies. And this is how it was, maybe eight years or so. So I said, man, I got to go home. I got to go home. And they said, baby wants to go home. So long as that was, I was calling my brother by the hand and trying to find how to get home and got lost. And I just kept on remembering, I don't know what they do in the U.S. now, but by 10 o'clock, before they knew, they'll say, it's 10 o'clock. Do you know where your children are?

DCA: Oh wow.

AE: And that's how they start the news. I just kept on that thing, kept on flashing in my mind that it's 10 o'clock. I'm eight years old. And I'm not home. But by the time I got home, there were police cars in my building surrounding my building. And my mom was crying and describing me and showing the police my photograph. And I walked in and I said, hi, mom. My father's claim, before he died, I kept on telling, when I tell the story to my younger ones, I said, my father beat me that day. He says, he says he never did. I said, no, daddy, you did. So I don't really recall that. But in Vienna, in Vienna, in Austria, I just remembered a lot of not racism, but it was around the time I think there was a movie called Roots about slaves and all that. And I found the people in Vienna looked at us very strange. So I remember that thing of my sister was born by the time and people who come close to her and actually touch her hair. Almost like, wow, they've never seen this. Like, wow, a black person. It was, it was just, I just found it very strange.

DCA: Yeah, that does sound strange.

AE: Yeah, it was, it was, they found it, they found either our hair or complexion or it wasn't from a race. I don't think it was from a racism point of view, but it was more out of maybe curiosity. Yeah. Yeah. And that's all. And then we moved to Germany where I was there for about a year. And I think Germany, I think, but in a sense, we were protected because we were, you know, diplomats' kids. Yeah. So my major interaction with people was in school and then my father hosts parties. So good life, cooks and good great food. Most of all, we hear news about Nigeria. And I tell this story that I learned German. I actually learned German. I could speak German quite well. But by the time I got to Nigeria and tried to fit in, people were bullying me, teasing, not more bullying, but more teasing, using my accent and all that. I don't know whether it was a traumatic experience for me because I, that German, I wiped it out of my mind. I just, I just write, I can't speak it. It's almost like I just purposely said, I need anything that's going to remind me of growing up abroad, I need to kill it.

DCA: Wow.

AE: So I, in trying to fit in, I think I just removed that. I don't know. I don't know whether this is psychologically possible, but it was, I just couldn't speak German. I just, I just killed it. And then even my accent, people said, ah, for someone who grew up abroad, you speak very, you speak like a Nigerian sha, you speak very Lagos. So I think I just tried to belong. I just didn't want to speak any *fone* or all that. So I really, experiences of growing up. Yep. So that's it. I hope I haven't bored you.

DCA: No, no, no. That's like the German thing, I think is a very interesting response because I don't think I've ever heard something like that before, but it's probably a psychological explanation for why that happened. That's very interesting.

AE: Yeah. Yeah. Like I just did. And so it's now, like now in life, I'm regretting, hey, you should have just built on those experiences, learn, you know, my father could speak French, my father actually studied French. Well, just even just three weeks ago, someone wrote to me on LinkedIn and said, "Oh, hello, Coach Akanimo, I got your number from somebody. We want to do a strategy retreat and team building in South Africa. And we're looking for a coach who can facilitate that and someone recommended you." I was like, yay, I'm going to, you know, someone's going to pay for my ticket, go to South Africa, earn some dollars. I already got to celebrating. And I said, I said, I can do that. I can do that. I said, but why did you write to me in French? And the guy said, "Oh my God, I thought you were bilingual coach." I said "Eh?"

DCA: Oh, wow.

AE: What are you saying? They said "Oh, we need a bilingual coach." I said, "Okay, I can come with someone who can speak French o." So they said no. Yeah, like you see am, I was laughing at, I will tell you, I was killing my German out of my weapons, German out of my mind, my father. And after he dropped me in Nigeria, my, he and my siblings went to Venezuela. So it was ambassador in Venezuela. Venezuela was one of the best, one of my best experiences I was older. I didn't live there with them, but I visited them.

DCA: Yeah.

AE: Yeah. And then at the time, I know there's lots of, I know Venezuela is having a rough time now, but at the time there was a beautiful country. Yeah, everything was just so beautiful. And I really love Spanish. Now that I watch movies, whether I'm watching a mafia movie or a movie on Pablo and he speaks Spanish, I'm like, I really love this language. I wish, I wish I could speak, I could learn it and not give up so easily. So yeah, that's me so far.

DCA: That's so interesting. Thank you. And there's, there's always, there's still time to learn Spanish. So it's not, it's still very possible. But thank you for sharing. That's a very, very interesting upbringing. I don't think I've heard of somebody who had lived in that many countries where they were growing up. And since eventually your world tour ended up with you in Nigeria, I was going to ask what you remember about, I guess, the Nigerian system. Because obviously in history books, we learned that Nigeria changed quite a lot in a really short time, as like we're moving from different kinds of governments like the military to democracy. And I think we even went back and then did it again. So I was wondering, like, when you first moved to Nigeria, what was the climate? What were things like? And what changes did you witness while you were growing up?

AE: Now, that's going to take more than an hour. So that's a tough one. So I don't know who, I'm not one of those people who I won't say I'm very good with history. So I can't even remember who was president when I was in secondary school, maybe Shagari, maybe, I think so. But I just remember, you know, when we say that things are tough, things were even tough then. I was even in the university, within the university system. My uncle was a very tough disciplinarian. I always said I lived the best of two worlds. My father was very gentle, very kind, soft spoken, easy going down to earth. And I think I picked a lot of that from him. But my uncle was the opposite. He was not someone that you could get to the dining table. If you're having lunch and my uncle horns and gets into the house, everybody keeps quiet in the house. You don't just gist around the table, you don't laugh. In my home, I was the exact opposite. You could laugh, you could stretch your hand to my father's plates and grab one of his pieces of meat. So I would say I love both worlds. My uncle is still alive, a great man. And I just think I learned to balance from both of them, where sometimes you have to be very kind, and sometimes you need to be more firm.

But notwithstanding that, so I grew up through, I experienced military rule with who now? Abacha. I think I graduated by then, I'm not sure. I'm one of those people that believe that you should, you can't just be complaining about the environment, you should do something about it. And so at least, I've always been a big proponent of voting. I voted through every election. And experienced one of my greatest pains was Abiola's election, where Abiola won. And they, what's his name, Ibrahim Babangida. General Ibrahim Babaginda canceled the elections. It was very painful for me, I cried. When someone said to me name five incidents where you cried growing up. That was one of the incidents. I remember I was on, I had voted, I had advocated people vote.

In fact, I had foolishly registered near my office, only to be told that there was no movement on the day of voting. So I had a choice either to stay at home and not vote or go and stay somewhere near, yeah. So I stayed in my office. And it wasn't like, it wasn't like there was a bed

there. I stayed on the bench. I remember just sleeping on the table with a loaf of bread, a bottle of Coke, just because I wanted to exercise my rights. Only for that man called Babaginda to cancel the election. So I experienced all that in university, we rioted a lot. So if students don't like something there'll be riots. They'll call in the police. They'll tear gas, they'll shut down the university. So for a five-year engineering course, I think I spent, I got into university in 1983, and I graduated in late 1989. So spent about six years or so of the riot and closure and a few strikes and all that. So yeah, so I experienced a lot of both military rule and civilian rule.

Sometimes in my groups, people say, oh, they think Nigeria or they think Nigerians what will work for Nigeria is military rule. And I say, I'm not that old, but now it's nice. It sounds nice in the beginning when, you know, on the news, they'll say, okay, there's been a coup, and all the politicians have been arrested, and this general in charge, people will celebrate, they'll be happy, they're sending people to jail for stealing and embezzlement. But by the time you start losing your simple things that we take for granted now, so maybe I'm on the radio and I say, oh, I disagree with what government did the other day. And next thing they come and lock me up. If you want to arrest me for what? For speaking against the government, then all of a sudden people will now realize that democracy is still better. Yeah, it's still better.

I mean, yes, the pain will flow sometimes when people are brazenly steal and do things and get away with it. And if you have the right connections on the right amount of money, you can, the courts can acquit you. So it's nice to feel that, okay, with the military guys, they will stop that, they will confiscate your money and all that. That's the good side. But generally speaking, when they start saying, we're shutting down Facebook, we're shutting down Twitter, you're not allowed to do this, you can't speak out on the government, shut down the radio station. This newspaper, you can't write, I will say anything negative about the government. Then you realize that, okay, let's make democracy work, rather than…….

DCA: Yeah, go back to that.

AE: Pray that the military will come back here.

DCA: Yeah, and that's actually a good transition to my next question, because you had mentioned things about riots when you were in university. And so I was going to ask what your thoughts were or are in terms of young people's involvement in governance and politics, and how you think that has changed between Nigeria moving from military rule to now that we're in a democracy?

AE: I believe…..I'm glad to see that younger people are getting involved. It's been a long time coming. I think in this last election, in spite of the negative stories we heard, you see a number of 40-year olds, I don't know if that's young anymore. But you see younger people coming into government, whether as governors or ministers, senators and all that. And it's something that I am very happy with. I think we need more of it. I know the, yeah, sometimes the older people have more, have entrenched themselves, but you see pockets, you see pockets of it in different areas, whether it's on someone I saw recently, too, is it a lady that joined the Senate? And she was in her 30s or 40s, either Senate or House of Representatives. So it's something that I think we just need to continue to encourage. This singer, singer / actor, Banky,, not because he goes to my church, he goes to the same church, but I was very encouraged to see that he was gunning, or this is the second time he went for the House of Representatives. He didn't win, but they just need to put on, keep up the fire. Now some people say, well, we have this young lady who became a minister, and she was involved in some, I can't remember, was it embezzlement?

DCA: It was embezzlement.

AE: So of course, you know, I hear people say, you see, it's not by being young, and we had a governor who was, I think the youngest governor, but people would say that he was like one of the most, I don't want to be condescending, but he acted quite foolishly in many, in many aspects. But he was the youngest governor, I think, was in his 40s. So is it an age thing? Does that mean that young people shouldn't get involved? No. I think we definitely need young people, new ideas,
they understand technology, different perspectives, they're ready to change the status quo. We need to encourage them. And one of the things that personally I like, whenever I teach people,
I say, oh, I'm a millennial, and everybody starts laughing. But I think the reason why I say that is that whenever I have a training course, if I was asked to train gen Xs, baby boomers, millennials, or gen Zs, the people I connect with the most, the people that seem to get impacted by my training, and where I get even more fulfillment is that millennial bracket.

DCA: Wow.

AE: Maybe it's the energy. They don't look at the gray hair on my face and say, okay, they won't ask questions. They will challenge me, they will ask questions. They will research. And someone like me, I just something, something connects that it's something about that I really like. I didn't mention when you asked about growing up, that I think something that molded me as well is when I came to Nigeria, I found that I don't know, I don't know whether to generalize so it is in a general way, but I feel like people are very age conscious. And growing up in the US, I hardly heard anybody say, hey, man, I'm older than you. It was just, you know, bring on your discussion, bring on your arguments, just say it as it is.

DCA: Yes, it's that respect thing in our culture.

AE: Yes. And so if someone asked me, is it more positive than negative? My gut reaction would be more negative than positive. I grew up calling my dad, dad, hi dad, hi mom. I know that for some people in Nigeria, they were like, oh, that's rude. It wasn't rude to us, it was, that's how, you know, it was okay for my dad, it was not disrespectful. I guess American culture got to us there and there. But yeah, there's some things here you come and do, you get some money from your left hand. They say, no, don't do that, that is respectful. I'm like, how is that, how is giving money from my left hand disrespectful to you? See, you don't listen, you don't listen. So I've learned that. But back to the issue of age, because I'm very tall, when I entered university, a lot of the people that I connected with, they were also very tall. And because my senior cousin was a DJ, and I also liked music. So my cousin introduced me to, I became a DJ in university, right for my year one. And so my friends who I met, who I connected with, they were also very tall. And they felt I was much older than I am. And so we all became very close friends. But I realized that anytime we have a fight, anytime we have an argument, they will remind me of how old I am.

DCA: Yeah.

AE: And it's, I think, psychologically, it got to me. And so I think, I think that I can't really connect it. But I think that's why I get along very well with younger people. Because I never, I never ask people how old they are. I never say my, or I never say to people, do you know how old I am?

DCA: Yeah.

AE: It's totally irrelevant to me. If we're having a conversation, and you disagree with my perspective, I want you to say, I disagree with that. And it just, it has never come up to my mouth that I would say, you disagree with me? Do you know who I am? Do you know how old I am? And so when I worked, when I started work, my career, I worked in one company for 25 years. I regret it a bit. I think I should have, you know, explored more. But one of the things I liked in that company was we built a culture, my MD and I in particular, where people could feel free, engage, disagree. If people called me sir, you would get penalized. You have to call me by my first name. You have to call my MD by our first name. So we built, we built, I mean, now it's more common, but we have to build that culture from an early age, from the early start, you say, call us by our names. Disagree where you want to. Bring your argument, bring a better case. You know, we believed in a superior argument, bring a superior argument and that's fine. And I'm happy to have been part of that system.

People told us later on, when they went to other companies, they would, people would say, you must have worked at Resources. And the reason why they would say that is because, you know, maybe the boss in that new company will say something and then this guy will raise up his hand and say, sorry I have a different perspective. And everybody will look at him like, eh, you're challenging the boss and the boss will be like, okay, let me hear you. And by the time he hears his perspective, like, that makes sense. And then people later come and say to him and say, you worked in Resources, right? So you have to say, okay, no wonder. People who worked in Resources are outspoken, they're bold, they bring logical arguments and all that. I don't know, I can't remember your question though, but I think I've just been ranting.

DCA: No, no, no, but you did. You answered the question very well. Thank you. Yeah. And you also mentioned that you are, you were a DJ. So I'm going to transition a bit and ask you about the arts and music. And in general, what your thoughts are in terms of the evolution of the arts and music within the Nigerian space?

AE: I am just, I think I'm overwhelmed. Okay, so I've always liked music. I've always loved music, not I don't like it. I love music. I think I should have written a song by now. Went into university, became a DJ, became a very popular and great DJ. Then music was not democratic. So we use music as a secret weapon at the time. In the sense that if you had certain songs, sometimes nobody else would have that song. And so it was the case of, it was the case of, my DJ name was Akan Sensation. And so they say Akan Sensation is spinning at this party. And girls will say, I'm going for this party because Akan Sensation has these songs.

DCA: Was that the era of vinyl or had CDs already become a thing at that time?

AE: No, it wasn't, it wasn't, it was tapes. Then it was tapes. It was cassettes. So, you know, we, we couldn't, there was, of course, there was nothing like downloading, there was nothing like CDs. You got a song, you could hold on to that song and say, I have this song. So if you want to hear this song at the party, you better call me to be the DJ. Crazy. So yeah, so I've always liked music and I just, and it's funny because now I still love music.

When I first became a Christian, I know I stopped for a while and just listened more to gospel. But now I've gone back and I still like my, I still like listening to, I still like music, all sorts of genres. But I just find out nowadays I only listen, I hardly, I hardly listen to Western music, not that I have anything against it though. Nigerian music I'll just, Nigerian music has scattered my head. Like everything is, I just love Nigerian music. I still listen to my oldies in the 80s, songs in the 80s, 90s. And occasionally I hear a nice Western beat and I'm more into R&B. And I like it, but I just find out most of, when I go to my iTunes library, most of the songs there, if they're

not, they're either R&B from the West in the 80s, 90s, 2000s, but most of the recent music in the last 10, 15 years is Nigerian music. And I'm really proud, I'm really proud of our artists. Every time I watch a video where one of our artists is performing somewhere outside Nigeria, I just get goosebumps. It just makes me very proud. And then people tell me all sorts of stories. Oh, they were in a taxi in Germany and someone was playing Nigerian music and someone said, oh, I was in Australia in a shopping mall and they were playing Nigerian music. And you know, you see one of our artists go to Mexico and the stadium, the theater or stadium is full. So it makes me very proud, very, very proud. And this has nothing, very little government, little or nothing, little or no government involvement. This is just people who just went with their passion and their skill and went for it.

DCA: It's definitely, it's a very beautiful thing to be part of as a Nigerian and even like music, movies, I think it's just amazing how quickly Nigerian artists are evolving, especially on the global stage. And what that means for other people in Nigeria who have interest in these areas because now at least they know that it's possible to do these things and do them well.

AE: Absolutely. And now it's almost like the foreign, it's almost like the artists in the U.S. are looking for collaborations. So they are seeking collaborations with this. It's just something about Nigerian beats, that is, that's just excellent. So super proud of them.

DCA: Yeah, it's amazing. And then, so, my last question is just generally about your, this is, I think, usually a tough question for people to answer, but what your thoughts are on, you know, where Nigeria is right now and what your hopes are for where we should be or where we will end up going.

AE: Oh, you're right. All of a sudden my spirit is down now.

DCA: No, no.

AE: Oh, Dawn, that's a tough one. Okay, let me say this, I think I was having a conversation with someone recently and no, so when people tell me 15 years ago, 20 years ago that they want to leave the country, yeah, I found myself, I found myself a bit upset. I couldn't, I couldn't place it then, but I found myself a little bit upset that, you know, why are you living like, why? I don't think I voiced it. I don't think I could really pick it. I just found that I was a bit upset. Why would you abandon the country? Someone else has built maybe the UK, Canada, USA and now wants to go and benefit. Let's, let's, let's make Nigeria great. And I don't know whether my father purposely did this at the time. I wasn't happy with him, but with all these places that I grew, we traveled to. My father didn't get us foreign passports.

DCA: Oh, interesting.

AE: He didn't. Well, I don't know whether it was on purpose. I don't know whether he felt, you know, Nigeria, you're from, you're from Nigeria, and let's make Nigeria work. No, no, no, no easy, no easy escape routes where, okay, you're a US, you're a US citizen. My sister is a US citizen, because she was born in the US. So I don't know whether unconsciously that influenced me because I just, I always felt like here we dey. This is it. And then I also, for someone who traveled to so many countries, I also find out that anytime I try to travel abroad, if I'm out of the country for more than three weeks, I'm tired.

DCA: That's a valid feeling.

AE: That's a what? I said, that's a valid feeling.

DCA: I think I also have, I shared that sentiment.

AE: So like, abeg I want to come, I always had the mindset of, you know what, I love, I don't mind traveling, but I just want to go visit, come back, go visit and come back. And so when I hear things like embassies turn down someone's visa, I find my heart, I find myself upset from a point of, why would you, why would someone turn down my request for a visa, me? And I'm not coming from a place of being pompous, but from a place of, what is in the country that, I beg, I beg, I beg, I beg. I'm just coming, I'm just coming there to visit. I want to come back home. I'm just going to visit there. I don't want to come and leave there now. What's your issue? So I've gotten the American visa, I think twice and I didn't even travel. They gave me the visa and I didn't go. I had no reason to go and all that.

So anyway, so why the question is tough is that in the last five to 10 years, when people tell me that, hey, I'm going abroad, I'm moving, I'm japa-ing, I'm going abroad with my family, I no longer feel that anger. I think I feel some kind of understanding because the country is tough. It's tough. So even if I regarded myself as a middle-class person, it's tough. It's really, really, some, you know, policies that don't support us. Is it education? You hear someone went to the hospital? Something minor and the person died? Roads, bad roads, police, corruption? So it's not, it's a really tough time.

So for young people that when they tell me, when I hear most young people say, oh, they're leaving, they want to japa and to go to Canada and all that, is that feeling of, one, I don't blame you. But it's also that feeling of sadness that, you know, we're losing this talent. And because I recruit for companies, I also get, let's say mixed feelings. So when I hire someone for a client, of course, I'm very happy the client says, oh, thank you for finding this person. The person's salary

was 20 million. I get 10%. So I get my 2 million and I'm smiling and I'm happy. But the other side of it is when the company comes to me and says, we've lost six of our application developers. They've all resigned, the same time they've gone to Canada, the UK, all of a sudden our mobile app is in jeopardy. Please help us, help us get replaced. It's, I find that, it's saddening for me. That's sad. Like, oh, we've lost so many people. It's sad when I'm looking for talent and I'm going through CVs and someone has gone to university and they can't spell. They come for the interviews and speaking and wondering. I don't know whether you saw the viral video that went around about some pastor who coded one lady who gave a testimony. And I, yeah, people are knocking the guy. He shouldn't have reacted so badly, shouldn't have reacted so quickly and dropped that so fast. And I agree. I understand that as a place for being more…pausing before reacting. But I also, I also felt his pain. I felt when I listened to the girl speaking, I'm like, wow. Six years, five years after graduating this is how she sounds. But I, I experienced it because I, I interviewed and all that. So where do I, do I see there's hope? Yes. It doesn't stop me from occasionally just feeling sad. Yeah. I have children that, they're in Babcock. And sometimes I have to say to myself, what future do they have? If they decided to stick it out here in Nigeria. But it's what it is. And I think what I encourage people in the groups I belong to is enough talk. Talk is cheap.

Let's engage the system. And engaging can be anything from voting, partaking in the election itself. It can even be speaking out, not in our WhatsApp group, because this is where I complain with a lot of my contemporaries. There's a lot of, there's a lot of debate within our WhatsApp groups. But what I like about the younger, the millennials and the Gen Zs is that they'll take those debates outside the WhatsApp groups. If it means they have to stage a protest, if it means they have to go to Twitter, if it means they have to speak out and say, oh, Pastor Edochi you should apologize to this lady. Betty Edu, please step down, step down, step down. You cannot be involved in this kind of thing. And then you're still a minister, step down. So I think this is where our power lies. And where the older people can bring their wisdom and maybe temperance, but they're more calm and say, hey, let's not go this far. But a lot of the younger people, they understand the technology, they're bold, they're willing to engage, they're not afraid that they have to go and stage a protest to the national assembly. They will. Most of the older people will be like, I beg, I beg, I beg. I have my family to feed, I have work to do. So there's not that balance.

But I think the more we engage our leaders, even if we're not participating, it only gets better. And the leaders respond, they're no longer deaf. They could get away with things in the past because people were sucking it up. People were not engaging. I mean, to the last week someone told me that, I don't know whether this is relevant, but I think someone I've said, someone I've given birth, and then they said the baby looks like some popular, some popular…

DCA: Politician?

AE: Gospel singer.

DCA: Oh, okay.

AE: And I was told that the gospel singer had sued.
DCA: Oh, wow.

AE: Sued. Someone else, a lady came out recently on TV or radio and said, oh, this tomato paste has too much sugar or something. And the company sued her. Even though people are pushed to, are not happy with the man, the owner of the business. But the man said, no, I built this business. And then in one day, one lady wants to pull down what I built. So he's suing her, even though it's not, it's not very popular with the populace. People feel like why are you coming down hard on this lady? What I do like about it is that people are challenging the system. People are going beyond their WhatsApp groups and complaining and saying, it is well. To saying, no. Why did you do that? I'm challenging you on that. Apologize. I'm taking you to court. I disagree. And the more people do that, the more the politicians, leaders, corporate institutions have to hit up and respond. And so to that extent, the more we do that, the more I think things, the more I know things will change for the better.

Some people say, or let all the older politicians die off. I don't think that's the solution. Or let the, let's bring in the military. Nah, that's not the solution. The more we use social media, write letters, campaign, and even suggest. But there's a lot of, there's a lot of cynicism, nobody will listen to you, but I disagree. I think we don't, we don't, we don't test the system enough. And that's that's what I think. There are so many examples where people have tested the system and they won. They succeeded. Maybe then, maybe not enough examples. Maybe people are not seeing those enough, but that's where we need to say, hey, use social media to our advantage, not just to crack jokes, not just to spread fake news, but to say, hello, corporate institution. What you did is wrong. You're doing this, it is wrong. You fired this person. You fired this lady unjustly. No. You're selling some fake product. No. Mr. Governor, in this place, you did XYZ. Then we're going to protest or write letters or engage Twitter and Facebook and all that. That's when things change.

DCA: Yeah. Very true. Wow. This was really, really amazing. Thank you so much for everything that you shared. That concludes our interview. So I'm going to stop recording now.