

Speaker 1: [00:00:02] Hi, everyone. I'm Emily. I'm the regional manager for sub-Saharan Africa. [00:00:05][3.6]

Speaker 2: [00:00:07] Hi, everyone. My name is Ron Peter, and I'm being the international officer for the sub-Saharan region. [00:00:11][4.0]

Speaker 3: [00:00:12] Hi, everyone. I'm blessing. I'm the country manager for the University of Aberdeen and I'm based in Nigeria. [00:00:17][5.1]

Speaker 1: [00:00:18] Welcome to our University of Aberdeen West Africa podcast series. We're going to talk about lots of relevant and interesting topics which we hope you find useful. Join us for this week's episode. Hi everyone. Welcome to this week's West Africa Podcast series. We're very lucky to be joined by the lovely Martina Chukwuma-Ezike today. Martina has just been posted in the position of the rector at the University of Aberdeen and she is from West Africa, so we're really looking forward to getting her perspective. So let's kick off today's podcast. Martina, would you like to introduce yourself? [00:00:59][40.3]

Speaker 3: [00:01:01] Thank you so much for having me, Emily Blessing and Ron. So, I'm very pleased to be here to share my views of what I think being an African and being a student once and now working within the university as the law director. So first of all, I want to talk to Blessing and I haven't actually managed to meet someone from the very part of Nigeria we originally come from. So, seeing blessing here is like a bonus. So, thank you so much for inviting me. And Blessing, where did you say you were from in Christ? Very good. So I'm from Abbey. It's a popular place because one of the governors, one of the previous governors from the university is from my local government. So it's a cool place. And I think that's an it's a very similar sort justice. Yes, a handsome one at that. And I'm sure you know that people for my beautiful on my end are very friendly. So I'm really pleased to well, yes. To meet with you. And hopefully when I visit Aberdeen, we can also get to meet in person. That would be nice. You'll be very welcome. Please. And I'll make sure you come to my house. Just coming to Aberdeen. And just to add, Governor Lian McKay's a family friend, so he's somebody I know very well. And he was a great governor. So not that he's handsome. [00:02:41][100.2]

Speaker 1: [00:02:42] He is very. [00:02:43][1.2]

Speaker 3: [00:02:44] Good at being a leader. So, yes, I'm delighted and sorry to add, Where in abbey you are coming from. Okay, from Adama. So that's like a small place to. Well, Governor is from. Oh, so that's like the headquarters of. Yes. Of the local government. Yes. So that's so lovely to meet you. I'm very pleased to meet you. I am so happy to meet you. Blessing. And after the podcast, we'll meet of the podcast. Ask more about being Nigerian. Yeah, I'm very pleased. [00:03:16][32.8]

Speaker 1: [00:03:17] Okay. I'm so glad already that this podcast is connecting people. That is the whole point of this podcast to reduce barriers and to connect West Africans to Scotland. So already 5 minutes into the podcast that we've done that. So job done for today, guys. [00:03:34][16.2]

Speaker 3: [00:03:36] Yeah. [00:03:36][0.0]

Speaker 1: [00:03:37] But yeah, we are very excited to have you here, Martina. [00:03:39][2.1]

Speaker 3: [00:03:42] So Blessing you said something. Yes, I was going to ask. So what's prompt to Johnny from across States and then, you know, travelling to the UK? Was it because of school or you had, you know, other plans around, you know, travelling from Cross River valley, leaving Nigeria and going to the UK? University of Aberdeen brought me to Scotland. Oh, okay. So yeah, I, I used to work in oil and gas, so I needed to do an MBA for career progression and more financial gains. So that was the, the plan. And I did apply for admission in a few schools for Scotland in the US in Canada and I got admitted, you know, I was offered. But why I came to Aberdeen was just because of the exceptional customer service I had received from a member of staff within the business school. So it was good and I did interact with all the admissions officers, but she stood out because she made me felt welcome even though I wasn't physically in Aberdeen. You know, I she gave me the assurance that the university was supportive and that went through even the conversations we had. If I asked any questions, you went the extra mile to ensure I had everything I needed in terms of support, um, you know, even up to having to actually know what I need to get my admission letter and plenty of times I can apply for my visa and I arrive on time. And she didn't just stop this, even my salary. She said, You know what, you are an international student when you arrive, right? Do you want me to come to the airport to pick you? So. Wow. [00:05:32][110.5]

Speaker 1: [00:05:33] So nice. [00:05:33][0.2]

Speaker 3: [00:05:34] That was beyond her job, you know? And even though I said, no, don't worry, I'll be fine. I'll find my way to school, as she did say, You know what? Coming to the business school, once you come in the first office on your right, I'll be there waiting to give you a massive warm welcome didn't that you know so automatically Aberdeen was my destination because I just knew that there were people at the other side of the wall who had, you know, open arms who were very receptive. And I thought, where better else to study that the university, that the staff are always supportive, you know. So that was why I chose Aberdeen and she did not fall to the very first day I walked into the business school and he was there with a big smile, with a big hug, you know, and still did. We are still friends, you know, because I was my first line of support as she has been ever since. So yeah, I came from within because of the staff was super supportive. Oh, that's that's super. Yes. Wow. An interesting one. [00:06:35][60.8]

Speaker 1: [00:06:38] And obviously, you came because you said that you wanted to kind of propel your career forward now that you are in Aberdeen. Is that still your plan or having been immersed in our environment for so long and learning what the culture of Aberdeen is like, what? What are your future plans? [00:06:57][18.8]

Speaker 3: [00:06:58] I am not from Aberdeen, so my future is in Aberdeen. Obviously I graduated in 2009 and my my plan didn't go as I had thought because I ended up staying. And that happened because obviously I had a change in career completely. So I went from walking into oil and gas to working in the sector, which is a charitable sector, you know. So and being in the job that I do, I love my job in that every day I save lives. And and really we seem well over 14,000 lives. So what could

be better, you know, helping people with asthma be able to breathe managed asthma and prevent avoidable that. So, yes, I don't see my future anywhere else. I'm in Aberdeen and I love it. So Aberdeen is home to me. [00:07:54][55.4]

Speaker 1: [00:07:55] Could you maybe elaborate more on your current role just so just so that our listeners kind of can piece together your journey so that they really understand what you're doing now? [00:08:04][9.2]

Speaker 3: [00:08:04] Okay, so I came in to study an MBA in 2008. I graduated in 2009. But instead of going back to Nigeria as I had planned, I stayed back because then I founded the asthma charity, the Asthma and Allergy Foundation, which is Scotland's only dedicated asthma charity. The reason that happened was because of my personal journey of being asthmatic myself and having struggled to cope with the condition. And when I went seeking for support, I found that there was more to managing asthma than just inhalers. And in doing that, I started supporting other families and our children and was started like a support group, actually grew into an organisation. And over a decade now, like I did say, we now support 14,000 people. So my job as the chief executive of Asthma and Allergy Foundation. So I work with my colleagues in Aberdeen, Glasgow and Edinburgh to continue to support people with asthma. And being the university rector is I know that hats have had to bitten because starting an organisation, obviously being somebody who is not from here originally. So I had a lot of support from my university, largely my lecturers who were great in marketing, business development, international business, and obviously my happy, helpful Nikki who was always there on hand, you know. So I tapped into that resources and that network and primarily I succeeded because I had the right sort of support despite the fact that I wasn't from here. So people in the community hidden behind the vision to ensure I succeeded and also starting a business without not huge money in the bank meant I needed people I know having the money to be able to pay them. So I tapped into the resources of students. So having student volunteer to support the work that we're doing while gaining experience. So I established that relationship earlier on with the university and that's, you know, extended all through the years, almost 13, 14 years now and the relationship hasn't ended. So I have been a part of the university and the university has also been a huge part of the work that we do at Asthma and Allergy Foundation. [00:10:25][140.6]

Speaker 1: [00:10:29] That seems amazing. Ron, do you have any questions you want to jump in with? [00:10:33][4.2]

Speaker 2: [00:10:37] Thanks, Emily. So Martina is so nice. We hear about the asthma and allergy foundation that you are running. Could you please let our listeners know more about rector role? [00:10:46][8.5]

Speaker 3: [00:10:51] Um. Thank you. Um, so I have always been a part of the university. You know, I always say when I graduated, I didn't leave. I graduated in that I wasn't a student. What? I still remained a part of the community because I was always coming in like almost every month I was within the university just to talk to students because I was doing mentoring and career advice for young students who needed advice on their career path, and also the volunteers I work with who are some of the medical students. So I was always here and. I took an interest in the university not because of anything else that I gained a lot from the university. I came

in to get a degree, but I got even much more. I got support from lecturers and students alike. I got a place where I could go to if I needed direction. I needed cheering on. I needed somebody to have a coffee or somebody who understood where I was coming from. So it was a place where I found ready help, you know? And also I always say that studying at the University of Aberdeen is one of the best decision I ever made, you know, because I came in to study an MBA and all the things I learned. The course outline was fantastic, the lecturers, the course, the delivery was great, and all the things I learned within the university, you know, business management and marketing, presentation skills because we did a lot of presentation and even during the summer school we did a lot of marketing simulation game, how to build a product, how to market the products. So, I took all the hands on experience of the university into the business that I started and that really helped. So for me, the university gave me so much and it was only natural that I came back and gave my quota by supporting the student and mentoring and guiding them so they could be better, you know. So, yes, I've always been a part and I took an interest beyond that to even attending the University Annual General Council meeting. If the university needed to do anything. I got involved and I enjoy my voice was very strong. I was passionate about my university, you know because obviously the University of Aberdeen is more like an extension of my surname. Whenever I'm being introduced, it's always my signature for my graduate of the University of Aberdeen, you know, so invested, deep breaths. It means I did better because that was my reputation as well, you know. So when the opposite position came in for the role of rector, someone contacted me within the university to say, Look, you have been very well engaged with the university, so we don't have a rector and you are about to open up. Do you think it's something you would be interested in? And I said, okay. So as rector, what would I be expected to do? I have a busy job already, you know, and said well, when they said all they needed to see, essentially it all comes back to giving back to my university community. I said, Well, if that is the only way I can come back and save my university, why not? So I came in, stood for the elections, and thankfully I won. [00:14:12][201.0]

Speaker 1: [00:14:15] That's amazing, Martina. [00:14:15][0.6]

Speaker 3: [00:14:20] Uh. Yeah. Yeah. It's like the university wasn't nice to me. I won't go back. So there were. There were some places where. No, I'm very pleased to be here. [00:14:29][9.8]

Speaker 1: [00:14:30] Is so nice for me. [00:14:31][1.5]

Speaker 2: [00:14:31] Yeah, yeah. [00:14:32][0.5]

Speaker 1: [00:14:32] Amazing story. You're passionate. You are about helping future generations as well. They're coming to the university to ensure that they also have a really wonderful experience. That's great. [00:14:42][10.2]

Speaker 3: [00:14:43] Yeah. [00:14:43][0.0]

Speaker 1: [00:14:45] So what kind of could you maybe go into a little bit more detail about giving back what's kind of expected of the rector, or does that mean that you have to attend events or charity things? [00:14:55][10.3]

Speaker 3: [00:14:56] Um, the role of a rector typically is to preside over the university court. So that's the senior leadership team where they meet, typically the board of trustees, I would call it for you all for businesses. So my role is present over the university court and to ensure that as a university, obviously we're doing that which we're set up to do. So meeting the charitable trust because the University of Aberdeen obviously is a charity in Scotland. And then my other role is to work with the University Student Association to ensure that concerns raised by students are presented at the top level of leadership. So that yeah, addressed. And essentially I believe that every student has the opportunity to be supported, to thrive and when they communicate, they should learn in a safe environment and achieve their degrees and whatever problems they have, be the in their learning, where they leave or to even socialise. We ensure that they are all supported and my role is to do that. So you just don't come through with any problem and show is more. Just listen to what at least something is done to resolve that. So and also I work with staff, I like to support us student like you, these sorts of events. Yeah. So obviously if an event is going on within the university, I'm always keen to get involved to support in the best way I can. [00:16:26][89.9]

Speaker 1: [00:16:28] Do you know, something is so refreshing and so lovely to hear that you have had such a journey with the university. And I think for students listening to this, you're a real inspiration to them because the role of Rector is seriously important and a real leadership position. So the fact that you are doing this really is inspirational to show students that the sky's the limit when they come to Aberdeen. So thank you again for being on the podcast with us because this is fascinating. [00:16:57][28.5]

Speaker 3: [00:16:58] Thank you, Emily. I always like to say that if anything has taught anybody, any lesson is that anyone can achieve anything they put their mind to. I'm Nigerian, but that didn't stop me from achieving or have achieved. I have a great job in the community and I'm rector of this great university and I'm also involved with other businesses, you know, so why not come study here? Why go anywhere else? Come to an environment where you know you're supported? And I can proudly say in all the universities in the UK, University of Aberdeen is the most open and our student can see that you come here, you feel at home, you are not judged and Scottish people are very friendly to you. So yeah, why not? You know, students can come here and they can achieve anything they want it to be. They are not limited or they are not restricted based on where they come from at all is the skill set that speaks for them. I'm a testimony to that. That's great. But you know, so I've been wondering, are you the first woman to occupy this position and then not just that, are you the first African to occupy this position as rectorship in Aberdeen. I'm not the first to run because previous rector was a lady. actually. But I'm the first black person. I'm the first Nigerian ever to hold this position. Oh, that's great. But I'll share that same perspective. Yes. But that also goes on to tell you that the University of Aberdeen is very open to anyone being in any position. So yeah, that's where I am. So I'm impressed, you know, that, you know, based on what you've told us, your journey so far, I'm a choice because of the hard work you've put in, you know, the charitable work as well as positive as well. So I'm it's a good one for prospective students, even including myself, you know, to know that really the sky is our limit of thought. Really great shows that can be done by the students. Yeah, that's usually right. Okay. Okay. Thank you so much. Blessing. Yes indeed. Aberdeen is a great

place to study and to live and like I said, I've been it is home to me and the University of Aberdeen is a great place to study. So everyone is welcome to come learn and grow. [00:19:30][152.2]

Speaker 1: [00:19:32] Martina, what would you say if we kind of circle back around to the early days of when you arrived in Aberdeen? Do you remember what kind of struck you most about our city and the people? [00:19:42][9.9]

Speaker 3: [00:19:46] I think the first thing was the taxi I used from the airport. When I asked him, I said, What do you think of Aberdeen? He looked at me in a very strong Scottish accent. He said, Oh, Aberdeen is lovely, you know. And I said, okay, what do you mean, lovely? He said, We have great institutions. The University of Aberdeen is a great place to study. And are you a student? I said yes. So you came to the right place. And I was like, okay. And what else is said? Yes, so many industries. Aberdeen is the oil capital of Europe. So which means when you graduates, chances are you will find a good job. You go to make a career. So. And then, you know. So he really, really bought me over. Like the first person I ever spoke with entering Aberdeen was all positive and telling me anything I could do within the community. And when I came in, really, I saw the granite is beautiful, you know, and and to say I love the weather because I. [00:20:57][71.4]

Speaker 1: [00:20:58] Love the weather, this is great. Please, please elaborate further. [00:21:01][3.3]

Speaker 3: [00:21:01] On this one. Yeah, because I'm asthmatic and being in Africa is dusty and humid. But Aberdeen, where that is fresh is cool, you know, it's not dusty, so I breathe better. So it worked really well for me. So yes. Yeah, that's an interesting one, Martina, because most people from Nigeria would complain that Aberdeen is really cold, so to hear, you know, something different for me. I think that's a good one for prospective students to also take home with. So that's good. Yeah, it's lovely. Lovely. And we have summer is mostly like here in Nigeria it's very hot so I don't see why not a few months that is a bit chilly is good for me anyway. For my airways. Yes, I love it. Yeah. So how long have you lived in Aberdeen for? Like, how many years? I have been here for ten years. Well. [00:22:00][58.9]

Speaker 1: [00:22:02] Wow, that's a long time. And do you have like a real community around, you know, like have you got a mix of Aberdeen friends and international friends in a West African community, or how does it work for yourself? [00:22:13][11.0]

Speaker 3: [00:22:14] Oh yes, I have a wide network of friends, so I have my friends from Aberdeen, from Elgin up until Aviemore, which is Inverness, the Highlands. And I've got Nigerian friends and, and I belong to a Nigerian community called the ICA as an Igbo community in Aberdeen. Yeah. And I do have other friends from Ghana and other parts of the world, America and Canada. So I'm quite community focussed you can tell, and I belong to a lot of community groups and associations, so. And that's what keeps us going. Yeah. Do you see yourself living anywhere else outside Aberdeen? No. Oh, no. I really love the city that I know. Oh, wow. Yes, I am so glad. [00:23:05][51.9]

Speaker 1: [00:23:07] It's amazing. [00:23:07][0.2]

Speaker 3: [00:23:08] No, I can't. I can't see myself living in ANYWHERE ELSE. You know, I tell you a joke. Last year I went to Nigeria to visit my family and I have a colleague, so he was the interim chief executive when I was on maternity at the asthma allergy foundation. So and he was the formal law professor of Aberdeen. So I went and he sent me a message to say When are you coming back home? You know? And then my mom happened to see the message and he said, What does that mean? When are you coming back home? I said, That's because Aberdeen is home to me and I'm just visiting. I see. I don't think I like him. I said, Well, how about choice? You say the truth so true, but I can't live anywhere else. I love Aberdeen. I love Aberdeen. Aberdeen is home to me. [00:23:56][47.6]

Speaker 1: [00:23:56] And it and your rector, your position, how long does that last? [00:24:00][4.0]

Speaker 3: [00:24:02] It's for three years. So I started on the 1st of January and I'll finish in December 2024. Can they be extended. [00:24:09][7.4]

Speaker 1: [00:24:10] Bored for a while? I'm delighted about this. [00:24:12][1.8]

Speaker 3: [00:24:13] As so I was one when I just finished tenure. No. Okay. Can I finish my tenure. if I ask for extension? Thank you. I think I'll skip out that. Oh, you sound great already. I have to give someone else opportunity. Can you be re-elected in the future Does that happen? Yes. You yes, of course you can be re-elected. But I wouldn't want to do that because I believe in letting people have opportunity to learn new things and also grow. So I would want to support somebody else to come into the position. And if it's another African, I'll be delighted. It to support them. Oh, that's great. Thank you. So outside work, what are some of the activities you enjoy doing in Aberdeen. I'm a mom and I'm a wife. So means I have a social calendar of my kids about my manage as well. So, and I love the scenery. You know, Scotland is one of the best places to visit even on tourism, you know, we have beautiful hills. Benelie. although I don't like hiking, which my husband drives me. I love driving. And you know, we have beautiful scenery, so I love going to the the cairngorms, you know, to do. [00:25:49][95.9]

Speaker 1: [00:25:53] You like shooting Clay? This is awesome. That's so good. [00:25:56][3.4]

Speaker 3: [00:25:58] Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. And I like quad bike as well. [00:26:02][4.4]

Speaker 1: [00:26:02] So good for you, Martina. [00:26:03][0.8]

Speaker 3: [00:26:04] To do that. So. [00:26:04][0.6]

Speaker 1: [00:26:05] Yeah, that's more than me. [00:26:06][1.0]

Speaker 3: [00:26:08] Yes. Yeah. And I like visiting friends, you know, always being there for them. And if COVID has taught us anything, a sense of community is very

important. So I like going to see friends just to check in on them and see how they're doing. And also for a lot of Nigerian students, women that they hear and they give bread, they don't have families. So I always step in to support the best I can so that, you know, that that's lovely. So yeah. [00:26:40][31.5]

Speaker 1: [00:26:40] That's really nice. [00:26:41][0.5]

Speaker 3: [00:26:42] As well as really lovely. [00:26:43][1.4]

Speaker 1: [00:26:44] Yeah. Mhm. [00:26:44][0.8]

Speaker 3: [00:26:46] Yeah. Okay. So what advice would you give to prospective students? What advice would you give to prospective students of Nigeria from Africa who are looking to come study at the University of Aberdeen? The university is a great place to study, is a great institution, not because I studied here, but is one of the best in the world and one of the best in the whole of UK. So coming here is a privilege I would say, and that's no student should take it lightly because you have so much to learn and so much to do. And so much to. Help towards whatever career you plan for yourself. And apart from the university, Aberdeen is a great place, is a great community, and is very safe. I would say, you know, as a student, I used to walk from the library to my home for 4am or 1am. I never was attacked or felt threatened. You know, so if you're safe, where you study and where you live, then you have it all. So why not? Great university. Great environment. Very, very welcoming and friendly people. Scottish people are lovely. So I would say just come and you never know what you could make. Maybe you could be the next rector. [00:28:00][74.8]

Speaker 1: [00:28:01] That's amazing, Martina. [00:28:02][0.8]

Speaker 3: [00:28:02] Yeah, that's. That's good. So do you. Yes. So one one last question for me. You get to visit the African shops in Aberdeen or you get your foodstuff course shipped from Nigeria. I do get my foodstuff from home, but we do have a lot of African shops to buy anything. You know, I always see a home away from home. So you're not going to miss Nigerian food. You have it here. So yeah. Even up to what this Gary does, yam, there's plantain, there's everything. So it's all because of the food. Yeah, of course. There's palm oil. Yes. So anything you're looking for, don't think you're going to come and stuff because you don't want to use Scottish food and even the food habit in Scotland. It's just the basic things people eat in Nigeria, rice, potato pasta, you know. So yeah, the food is great and is always and is cheaper actually because here we've food. So food is not that problem. Oh, that's good. And so it's an affordable and affordable city to live in and study. [00:29:08][65.9]

Speaker 1: [00:29:09] Understudy It's amazing. Martin I honestly have thoroughly enjoyed our podcast session today, and I'm really hoping that when Blessing comes to visit that we can all get together and that I can also have some Jollof fries, please, with you guys, because I would love I would love to meet you in person as well. [00:29:31][22.6]

Speaker 3: [00:29:32] Yes, yes. I'll be I'll be so looking forward to that. So blessing please bring me on the email. Yeah, that's it then we'll keep in touch. Yeah. I very much look forward to welcoming. Yeah. [00:29:46][14.7]

Speaker 1: [00:29:47] Maybe perhaps as well for students listening that we could maybe organise event as well for Martina to meet our new Nigerian Ghananian students when they arrive on campus, if that allows. So just yeah. [00:30:00][13.4]

Speaker 3: [00:30:01] Of course I, Nicky offered me a lifeline when I needed to come to Aberdeen. So even if there are students coming and they think, you know, oh, how do I get there? How from the airport my email is rector@abdn.ac.uk. email me. I don't mind. You know, my arms are always open so I can be there. Your first point. Wonderful. [00:30:24][23.2]

Speaker 1: [00:30:25] Thank you. Okay, Martina, it's been lovely talking to you today. [00:30:28][2.5]

Speaker 3: [00:30:32] Yeah. Welcome, Emily. Yeah. [00:30:34][2.5]

Speaker 2: [00:30:36] Thanks, Martina, for sharing your experience and for being part of our West African Series Podcast. [00:30:40][4.1]

Speaker 3: [00:30:41] Thank you so much Ron. I'm very pleased to spend this afternoon with you and if there's anything else you need to reach out. Thank you so much and have a lovely day. Thank you for blessing and Emily and Ron Take Care. [00:30:41][0.0]

[1750.8]