

Visibility.  
Access.  
Investment.

THE ABS ROUNDTABLE SERIES:

# IMPACT REPORT

## 2024- 2025

### From Conversation to Capital: Building Africa's Future with Women at the Center

From New York to Luanda, the ABS Roundtable Series brought together over 200 leaders across five high-impact convenings. This report captures the milestones, insights, and bold steps taken to close the \$42 billion financing gap for African women entrepreneurs — and the path forward.

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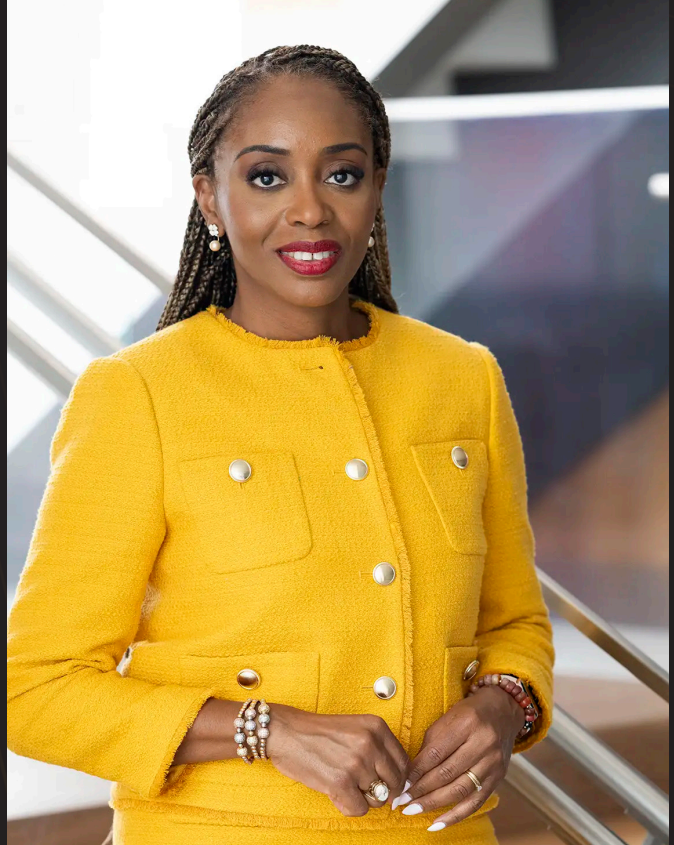
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# Letter from the Founder

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When I launched the African Business Stories in 2020, it was out of a desire to amplify the voices of the women building Africa. That vision quickly evolved into something bigger—a dynamic platform committed to creating visibility, unlocking access, and catalyzing success for female entrepreneurs across the continent.

In 2024, we took a bold step by launching the ABS Roundtable Series, starting on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York. What began as a podcast has become a global platform that mobilizes capital, influences policy, and connects women founders with strategic partners.

In one year, we hosted five high-impact events across New York, Washington, D.C., and Luanda, Angola. These roundtables featured influential speakers, generated powerful insights, and sparked meaningful partnerships. They also surfaced critical truths about what's needed to close the \$42 billion financing gap for African women entrepreneurs.

This impact report captures the journey so far. It highlights not only the milestones but the path ahead, a future defined by inclusive capital, bold partnerships, and scalable action.

Thank you to everyone who made this possible. The next chapter starts now.

**Akaego  
Elizabeth  
Okoye**

*Akaego Okoye*

**Founder**

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The ABS Roundtable Series was created to address the structural and systemic barriers that female entrepreneurs in Africa face when trying to scale. With a focus on visibility, access, and investment, the Series convened over 200 stakeholders across five convenings in the past year:

- **Inaugural Roundtable** – September 2024 | New York
- **Evening with AfDB SVP** – October 2024 | Washington, D.C.
- **Diaspora Investment Roundtable** – April 2025 | Washington, D.C.
- **Namibia Presidential Roundtable** – June 2025 | Luanda, Angola
- **First Lady of Angola Leadership Breakfast** – June 2025 | Luanda, Angola

These sessions facilitated dialogue across public and private sectors, generated actionable recommendations, and catalyzed new partnerships to fund women-led enterprises across the continent.

## Key Outcomes:

- Catalyzed visibility and new market access for founders such as Joyce Awosika (Oriki), who was invited to explore expansion into Angola
- Elevated inclusive financing models such as Moneda Invest Africa's no-collateral approach and AfDB's gender-smart strategies
- Brought diaspora investment to the center of the conversation through engagements with leaders like Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Admassu Tadesse, and Zainab Ahmed
- Secured the first participation of a sitting African Head of State—President Nandi-Ndaitwah of Namibia—at an ABS Roundtable
- Announced the launch of ABS Business Missions to Africa and new programming including masterclasses, bootcamps, and a global newsletter
- Expanded the ABS footprint across the U.S., West Africa, and Southern Africa—bridging ecosystems, capital, and women-led innovation

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# ABOUT AFRICAN BUSINESS STORIES & THE ROUNDTABLE SERIES

African Business Stories (ABS) is a business development platform committed to accelerating the growth of women-led businesses across Africa. Through a dynamic blend of storytelling, strategic convenings, and capital access initiatives, ABS connects entrepreneurs to the visibility, resources, and networks they need to thrive.

Founded in 2020, ABS has evolved into a continent-wide ecosystem builder that bridges entrepreneurs, investors, policymakers, and ecosystem actors. Our core mission is to create access and catalyze success for African women in business.

In 2024, ABS launched the ABS Roundtable Series, a high-level convening platform designed to tackle the \$42 billion financing gap faced by women entrepreneurs in Africa. Hosted alongside influential global forums such as the UN General Assembly and World Bank Spring Meetings, each event brings together financiers, founders, and thought leaders to chart new paths for funding, scaling, and systemic transformation.

**The Roundtable Series serves three key pillars:**

## visibility

for African women entrepreneurs and their contributions to economic development

## access

to capital, markets, and decision-makers

## investment

-readiness through partnerships, mentorship, and technical support

Each roundtable focuses on a unique thematic lens but shares a common commitment to shifting the narrative—and reality—for women-led businesses in Africa.

# EVENT HIGHLIGHTS: CONVENINGS THAT SHAPED THE YEAR

01

## **Inaugural ABS Roundtable: New York City**

**Date:** September 24, 2024

**Location:** New York City, UNGA Week

**Theme:** Funding the Gap: Strategies to Accelerate the Growth of African Female Entrepreneurs

Held during the UN General Assembly week, the inaugural ABS Roundtable brought together entrepreneurs, investors, policymakers, and ecosystem leaders to spotlight the \$42 billion financing gap faced by female entrepreneurs in Africa and explore innovative funding solutions.

**Structure & Flow:** The event began with a keynote by Chair Reta Jo Lewis (then President of EXIM Bank), followed by a dynamic fireside chat moderated by Deniece Laurent-Mantey, and then transitioned into a roundtable discussion.

### **Key Highlights:**

- Jumoke Dada (Taeillo) stressed that although capital is important, technical support, access to the right talent, and mentorship are equally critical.
- Ejike Egbuagu (Moneda Invest Africa) introduced Moneda's no-collateral financing model and stressed the importance of ecosystem building.
- Sarah Dusek (Enygma Ventures) noted the ecosystem's limitations in supporting women at growth stage and highlighted her shift from founder to funder.
- Travis Adkins (USADF) called for democratizing access to finance and unlocking new funding models tailored for African realities.
- Dia Martin (DFC) encouraged women entrepreneurs to leverage the catalytic role of DFI capital and emphasized the need to tell their stories powerfully.
- Fola Ayoola (ElectricFish Energy) during the Q&A session, shared her experience with raising funds and emphasized the role of blended capital in scaling energy solutions.

### **Themes that Emerged:**

- The access to capital gap is especially pronounced in high-growth sectors like energy and manufacturing.
- There is a knowledge gap around venture capital, particularly among first-time women founders.



- Blended finance and gender-lens investing were cited as critical models for scalable, inclusive investment.
- Access to technical support and mentorship is just as vital as financial capital.
- The need for ecosystem players to work collaboratively—from incubators to DFIs to banks—was stressed throughout the event.

### Outcomes:

- Tangible recommendations around flexible finance, co-creation between investors and founders, and founder education pipelines.
- An award presented to Chair Reta Jo Lewis in recognition of her leadership in financing African women entrepreneurs.





# EVENT HIGHLIGHTS:

## CONVENINGS THAT SHAPED THE YEAR

02

**Evening with AfDB SVP:  
Washington, D.C.**

**Date:** October 25, 2024

**Location:** Washington, D.C., World Bank Fall Meeting Week

**Theme:** AfDB's Three-Pronged Strategy to  
Closing the Gender Financing Gap

This intimate evening event held in Washington, D.C. featured a fireside conversation with Marie-Laure Akin-Olugbade, Senior Vice President of the African Development Bank. The session spotlighted AfDB's three-pronged strategy for closing the gender financing gap, aligning with AFAWA's mission to unlock \$5 billion for women-led businesses.

### Structure and Flow

The event began with opening remarks by Akaego Okoye, Founder of African Business Stories and remarks from sponsors Cross Boundary and NGSER. The fireside chat with Ms. Marie Laure Akin-Olugbade was followed by a Q&A session and a networking reception.

### Key Highlights:

- Akin-Olugbade emphasized Access to Finance, Mindset Change, and Access to Markets as the pillars of AfDB's gender-smart financing strategy.
- She underscored the role of development finance institutions (DFIs) in de-risking capital, supporting local banks, and mainstreaming gender metrics.
- She urged women to be relentless and investor-ready, highlighting the importance of preparation and perception in attracting capital.

**Founders Spotlights:** Fritters and Roast (USA) and Sweet Kiwi (Nigeria/USA) shared their products at the post event reception.

### Themes that Emerged:

- Women entrepreneurs must move beyond donor dependency and embrace scale-oriented strategies.
- Mindset change is needed not only among women but also within financial institutions.
- There is a need to rethink risk assessment models to reflect the unique value women founders bring to the table.

### Takeaways:

- Partner with DFIs to unlock catalytic capital
- Design financial products with gender-intentional metrics
- Expand regional market access via AfCFTA

### Outcome:

- Ms. Marie-Laure Akin-Olugbade was presented with the ABS Leadership Award, honoring her role in championing trade and development across Africa.





# EVENT HIGHLIGHTS:

## CONVENINGS THAT SHAPED THE YEAR

03

**Diaspora Investment Roundtable: Washington, D.C.**

**Date:** April 23, 2025

**Location:** Washington, D.C. , World Bank Spring Meetings

**Theme:** Leveraging Diaspora Investment for Africa's Economic Growth

Held on the sidelines of the World Bank Spring Meetings, this ABS Roundtable convened government leaders, financiers, institutional partners, and members of the African diaspora to explore how diaspora capital—financial, intellectual, and relational—can be mobilized for scalable impact.

### Structure & Flow:

The event opened with a welcome from Akaego Okoye and remarks from sponsor Akin LLP represented by Nnedi Nweke. This was followed by two keynote addresses, a panel discussion, a fireside chat, and closing reflections.

### Key Highlights:

- President Admassu Tadesse (TDB) urged African nations to learn from India and Israel in structuring diaspora bonds and investment platforms. He emphasized the need for strong institutions, structured vehicles, and trust-building to attract and retain diaspora capital.
- Zainab Ahmed, World Bank Executive Director and former Nigerian Finance Minister, emphasized that African governments must develop transparent and investable instruments that appeal to a wide range of diaspora profiles. She highlighted the diaspora's power not only in capital but in ideas, access, and voice.
- Joan Manda (UNDP Timbuktoo Initiative) focused on the need for sustainable ecosystems and early-stage pipelines that connect diaspora capital with entrepreneurs at the frontier.
- Barbara Iyayi (Unicorn Growth Capital) stressed the importance of exit strategies and platform-based structures that allow diaspora investors to engage easily, especially those without private equity experience.
- Chidi Blyden (Culturally Bound) emphasized the cultural and trust gaps that often prevent diaspora investment. She called for models that are inclusive, relatable, and values-driven.
- In the fireside chat, Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala (WTO) and Yvonne Ike (Bank of America) explored what it would take to scale diaspora investment. Dr. Okonjo-Iweala noted the urgency of engaging diaspora women in building the next generation of African businesses and called for clear, transparent platforms that allow individuals to co-invest, build, and lead. She urged the audience to shift from support



narratives to strategy, saying, “Even if you employ five people, you have done so much. You do have agency—so deploy yourself.”

### Themes that Emerged:

- Diaspora capital remains underleveraged due to trust gaps, lack of structured vehicles, and limited accessible platforms.
- Diaspora women are both an untapped capital base and potential investees.
- There’s a critical need for mechanisms that allow micro- and mid-level diaspora investors to participate—not just high-net-worth individuals.
- Collaboration between government, DFIs, and the private sector is essential for credibility.

### Outcomes:

- Announcement that the ABS Roundtable conversation will extend to the African continent.
- Commitment to engage more with the diaspora and serve as a bridge for diaspora investment flows to the continent.
- Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala was presented with the ABS Leadership Award, honoring her role in championing trade and development across Africa.



# EVENT HIGHLIGHTS:

## CONVENINGS THAT SHAPED THE YEAR

04

### **Namibia Presidential Roundtable: Luanda, Angola**

**Date:** June 24, 2025

**Location:** Luanda, Angola – U.S.-Africa Business Summit

**Theme:** From Leadership to Legacy –  
Namibia's Vision for Inclusive Growth

The ABS Roundtable was honored to host H.E. Dr. Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah, President of the Republic of Namibia, during the U.S.–Africa Business Summit. The event marked the first time a sitting African Head of State participated in the Roundtable Series.

#### **Structure & Flow:**

The session opened with welcoming remarks from ABS Founder Akaego Okoye, and event sponsor Joao Filipe, CEO of Cabship, followed by a fireside conversation with President Nandi-Ndaitwah. Participants included high-level women leaders and other stakeholders from business, finance, and development, representing over a dozen African countries and the diaspora.

#### **Key Highlights:**

- President Nandi-Ndaitwah emphasized the role of women in shaping Namibia's democracy, economy, and future—highlighting policies supporting women entrepreneurs and her own journey from liberation activist to head of state.
- She announced that Namibia will offer free education up to the tertiary level, emphasizing education as a long-term equalizer for inclusive development.
- She spoke to Namibia's strategic investment in energy, particularly green hydrogen, and encouraged more women to explore opportunities in the energy sector.
- The conversation included powerful reflections on leadership, legacy, and leveraging networks for scalable solutions.

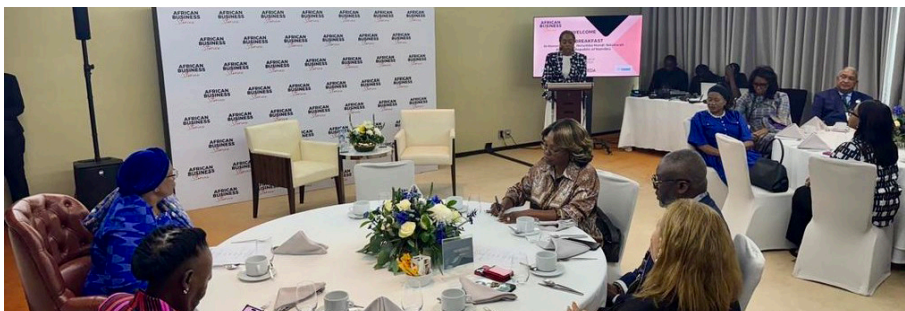
#### **Themes that Emerged:**

- Women leaders are central to peacebuilding, economic transformation, and democratic resilience in Africa.
- More support is needed for women-led SMEs to access regional trade and financing platforms.
- National policies that prioritize gender equity yield long-term economic dividends.



## Outcomes:

- ABS fulfilled its commitment to take the ABS Roundtable Series to Africa.
- Commitment from attendees to deepen ties with Namibia and explore trade, investment, and tourism opportunities.
- ABS strengthened its engagement with southern African markets and leaders.





# EVENT HIGHLIGHTS: CONVENINGS THAT SHAPED THE YEAR

05

**ABS Women in Leadership  
Breakfast: Luanda, Angola**

**Date:** June 25, 2025

**Location:** Luanda, Angola – U.S.-Africa Business Summit

**Theme:** Championing Female Leadership,  
Investing in Africa's Future

Hosted as a private breakfast convening of 30 senior women leaders from across Africa and the diaspora, this intimate roundtable was headlined by H.E. Dr. Ana Dias Lourenço, First Lady of Angola. The event was designed to spotlight women leading in public and private sectors, while fostering cross-border relationships and business collaboration.

## **Structure & Flow:**

Following a warm welcome from Akaego Okoye, the First Lady shared candid reflections during a fireside-style conversation. Participants then shared insights, challenges, and partnership ideas over breakfast.

## **Key Highlights:**

- H.E. Dr. Ana Dias Lourenço shared her journey from economist to First Lady, emphasizing her passion for economic empowerment, education, and cross-sector leadership.
- The First Lady spoke about Angola's evolving investment landscape and welcomed African women to consider Angola a partner in trade and innovation.
- Participants shared candid stories about navigating leadership, motherhood, business expansion, and cross-cultural challenges.

## **Founder Spotlight:**

- Joycee Awosika, Founder of Oriki Spa, gave a powerful presentation on her journey scaling wellness businesses across Africa. She received an invitation to explore launching an Oriki Spa in Angola—a tangible outcome from the session.

## **Themes that Emerged:**

- Storytelling and relationship-building are powerful tools for economic diplomacy.
- There is a growing appetite for intra-African investment by African women.
- Leadership must be redefined beyond titles—to include influence, empathy, and impact.



### Outcomes:

- Strengthened bonds among senior women leaders across the continent and diaspora.
- Invitation extended to ABS to continue engaging with Angola's business and public sectors.
- H.E. Dr. Ana Dias Lourenço was presented with the ABS Leadership Award, honoring her role in championing trade and development across Africa.





# STRATEGIC INSIGHTS & THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Over the course of five convenings across the U.S. and Africa, the ABS Roundtable Series surfaced common barriers and actionable opportunities in the journey to scale women-led businesses on the continent. These themes form the foundation of ABS's next chapter, as the platform evolves from conversation to capital, visibility to investment, and events to programs.

## Cross-Cutting Insights:

### 1. The \$42 Billion Gap Requires Layered Capital Solutions

From New York to Angola, speakers reiterated that traditional financing structures are not serving women founders. The need for blended finance—combining grants, concessional loans, guarantees, and equity—is clear. Models like Moneda Invest Africa's no-collateral approach and TDB's structured vehicles point to what's possible when risk is redefined.

### 2. Diaspora Engagement Must Evolve from Sentiment to Structure

The diaspora remains one of Africa's most underutilized assets. Trust, transparency, and accessible financial instruments are key. Institutions must design pathways that allow small- and mid-sized investors—not just HNWIs—to co-invest, mentor, and scale alongside African founders.

### 3. Visibility Drives Capital – and Vice Versa

Powerful stories attract powerful allies. From the WTO DG's fireside chat to Oriki's invitation to expand in Angola, the impact of well-curated visibility cannot be overstated. Founders must be positioned as investable, scalable, and globally relevant.

### 4. Local Ecosystems Need Reinforcement

A recurring theme was the lack of adequate support structures—incubators, legal advisors, technical experts, and mentorship—that women need to prepare for investment. Capital without capacity building is a dead end.

### 5. Intra-African Investment is Rising – and Women Must Lead It

From Angola's invitation to female investors to Namibia's free education policy and regional trade ambitions, it's clear African governments are opening their doors. African women—on the continent and in the diaspora—must be centered in intra-African economic expansion.

### 6. Leadership Must Be Redefined

Across every event, women leaders demonstrated that influence, collaboration, and care are not soft skills—they are power levers. Building Africa's future economy requires inclusive leadership models that honor both performance and purpose.



# PATH FORWARD

The insights gathered across five roundtables have illuminated a clear path forward. ABS is committed to translating recommendations into action and scaling solutions that move from conversation to capital.

## **I. Launch Masterclasses & Bootcamps for Capacity Building**

- In direct response to the call for technical assistance and business support, ABS will roll out a series of masterclasses and bootcamps.
- These sessions will equip female founders with practical tools to access financing, improve business operations, and expand their market reach.
- This initiative addresses the ecosystem gaps and investment-readiness challenges surfaced across all events—from New York to Luanda.

## **II. Expand Business Missions Across Africa**

- To bridge the diaspora-continental divide and support intra-African expansion, ABS will launch Business Mission Trips to Africa.
- These curated experiences will bring:
  - Diaspora women interested in investing and building on the continent.
  - Women entrepreneurs from Africa seeking to expand into new African markets.
- Each trip will blend networking, business development, and cultural immersion—creating trusted relationships and scalable partnerships.

## **III. Launch the ABS Monthly Newsletter**

- Starting in 2026, ABS will publish a monthly newsletter to keep our growing community informed and engaged.
- The newsletter will spotlight women entrepreneurs, upcoming events, capital opportunities, and thought leadership from across the ecosystem.
- It reflects ABS's commitment to visibility, storytelling, and building a consistent bridge of communication.

## **IV. Invest in the Platform: ABS as a Catalyst**

- ABS will continue to invest in itself as a platform by strengthening its organizational infrastructure, including the ABS Foundation.
- This will allow for the strategic scaling of convenings, content, and capacity-building initiatives under all three pillars—Visibility, Access, and Investment.
- Our programs will be designed with and for the women we serve, creating new entry points for partners, funders, and allies.

ABS is not just a platform—it's a movement. One built by women, backed by partners, and powered by a belief in what's possible when capital meets courage. The next chapter begins now.

# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This impact report and the broader ABS Roundtable Series would not be possible without the contributions, collaboration, and belief of a powerful community committed to the success of African women entrepreneurs.

## Our Partners & Sponsors

Thank you to the visionary organizations that invested in this platform:

- Akin LLP
- Bank of America
- Cabship Angola
- CrossBoundary
- LND Global Network
- Moneda Invest Africa
- NGSER
- Oriki Group

## Distinguished Speakers & Contributors

We honor the global leaders who lent their voices, expertise, and time to these roundtables:

- H.E. Dr. Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah, *President of the Republic of Namibia*
- H.E. Dr. Ana Dias Lourenço, *First Lady of Angola*
- Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, *Director-General, World Trade Organization*
- Marie-Laure Akin-Olugbade, *Senior Vice President, African Development Bank*
- Reta Jo Lewis, *former President, Export-Import Bank of the United States (EXIM)*
- Admassu Tadesse, *President & Managing Director, Trade and Development Bank*
- Zainab Ahmed, *Executive Director, World Bank Group*
- Ejike Egbuagu, *Chief Executive Officer, Moneda Invest Africa*
- Nnedi Nweke, *Partner, Akin LLP*
- Joao Filipe, *CEO Cabship*
- Yvonne Ike, *Head of Sub-Saharan Africa (Ex-RSA), Bank of America*
- Joyce Awosika, *Founder, Oriki Group*
- Travis Adkins, *former President & CEO, USADF*
- Sarah Dusek – *Managing Partner, Enygma Ventures*
- Joan Manda – *Partnerships Lead, UNDP Timbuktoo Initiative*
- Barbara Iyayi – *CEO & Founding Partner, Unicorn Growth Capital*
- Chidi Blyden – *Founder, Culturally Bound*
- Dia Martin, *Managing Director, U.S. Development Finance Corporation*
- Habiba Wazizi, *CEO BGR Africa*
- Jumoke Dada, *Founder & CEO, Taeillo*
- Deniece Laurent-Mantey, *U.S. Department of State*





### **Entrepreneurs & Ecosystem Builders**

To the 200+ women founders, investors, and ecosystem leaders who joined us across New York, Washington, D.C., Luanda, and beyond—thank you. You are the reason this platform exists.

### **ABS Team & Creative Contributors**

Special thanks to the writers, editors, designers, photographers, event producers, venue partners, and logistical leads who made each convening and this report possible. Your behind-the-scenes excellence brought vision to life.

Together, we are creating access and catalyzing success.

Learn more or get involved at:

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