

Two case studies

Case study 1: Solange

Solange is the only girl in a family of four boys. Her parents own and run many successful businesses, and prioritised the best education they could afford for their children. After completing secondary school in Nigeria, Solange was sent abroad for tertiary education, which included a degree in the health sciences field. Her parents always expected her to return to join one of the family businesses.

After working for a few years abroad, Solange decided to return to Nigeria. For the first couple of years, she worked in the aid and health services sector. A chance conversation led her to a meeting with two aspiring entrepreneurs who were thinking around how to use technology to bridge a service gap in Nigeria's health sector. Solange resigned from her job – much to the chagrin of her parents, who chose not to support her financially in what they expected was a passing interest – to undertake what became a profitable tech start-up within three years of starting.

Solange and her colleagues co-founded their enterprise and were accepted into a business accelerator programme, and so were able to raise initial capital of \$2 million for their start-up. The business is now the largest of its kind in West Africa based on customer recruitment and the acquisition of some complementary businesses, and recently raised several million US dollars to continue its programme of expansion. Solange's ambition is to use her experience to help the business to accelerate Africa's transition to a technology-driven healthcare system.

Although the company's recruitment policy prioritises qualifications over gender, slightly more than 50% of its leadership team is female.

Case study 2: Becky

Becky's parents are both university professors and always instilled in her and her siblings the value of finding solutions to any everyday problems that they encountered. Very early in their lives they were taught not to bring their parents a problem without at least thinking through possible solutions. A curious mind, hard work and ability were more important than gender, so Becky and her siblings were encouraged to pursue their interests.

Becky tried to enter the formal job market after graduating from a Nigerian university with a first-class degree in computer science. However, she couldn't find a job that kept her interest, and she also did not feel it was time for her to undertake further education, as was expected by her parents and wider family.

Although she did not have an entrepreneurial role model, Becky's home training to propose practical solutions to problems eventually led her to entrepreneurship. She co-founded two technology start-ups that failed until they found the right model and were able to participate in a business accelerator programme, where they raised a significant amount of money. Based on name recognition and a customer base of more than 250,000 customers, her business is now one of the leading start-ups, solving a problem for a formerly excluded group of people.

Although it was not planned – Becky is an advocate for ‘keeping the door open’ for other qualified women – the company’s workforce is gender-balanced. Based on her business and the work she has done in promoting access for women, Becky has been celebrated globally by being given awards and being profiled in several magazines and newspapers.