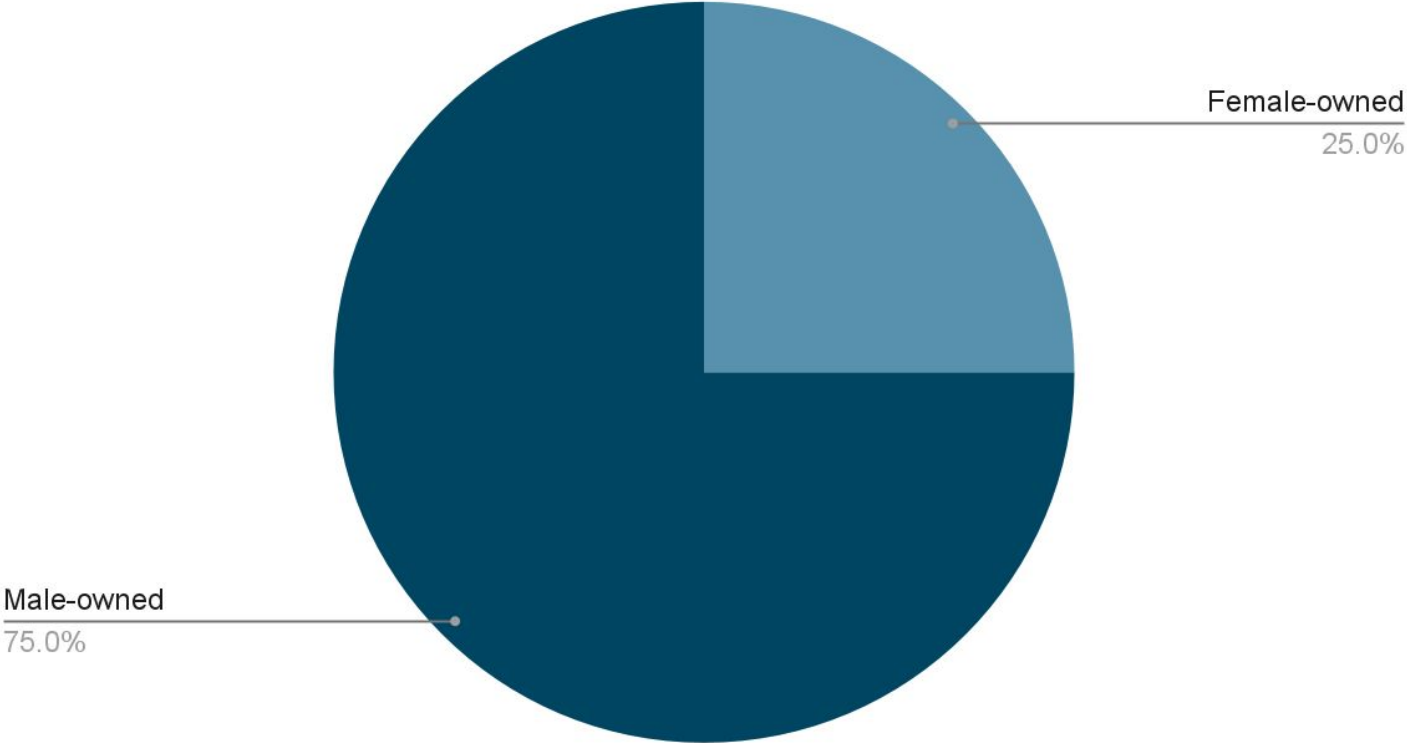


# Business Ownership by Gender







## AFRICANS IN THE DIASPORA

# THE *Right* CONNECTIONS

Lilian Ajayi-Ore is creating an environment where students play a role in generating solutions for gender equality.

WORDS: METAL KENAGA

“THE WORLD NEEDS A LOT OF help,” says Lilian Ajayi-Ore at the other end of the line in New York the Friday evening we speak to her from Johannesburg. “If we are being completely candid, we have to swallow personal concerns in its name of the things we all want us,” says Ajayi-Ore, founder of the Global Connections for Women Foundation (GCWF), a recipient of the Ben & Jerry Humanitarian Award for three years.

As she speaks, you can hear Ajayi-Ore’s year-old son Alexander (Alexander) in the background. “So a man, you never get an off day,” she laughs. “But he is the youngest of all the people I support.”

You can sense the adoration in her voice, both for her son and her other “princes” — the young people she trains and the women and girls she creates opportunities for through her foundation, which has reached 1.8 million people worldwide.

“I am a woman and global advocate, who believes in the importance of creating programs that provide a unique opportunity to assist them in succeeding in life. I am also a believer in partnerships and collaborations that will eventually create more open doors for women and girls to succeed” says the 44-year-old mother from New York, originally from Nigeria.

The reason for these belief systems could be her upbringing by a strong mother who was a single parent.

She was her mother, Chief Yemiweke Ajayi — and her contributions to her community — was the inspiration for GCWF.

“She is also known as ‘Mama Engrasany’ says Ajayi-Ore on her mother, who connects and creates job opportunities for the youth in Nigeria. “I could grow and on about her.” Currently pursuing a doctorate at the University of Pennsylvania, Ajayi-Ore is

also a Harvard graduate and professor at New York University, School of Professional Studies. More recently, she says she created and designed “the very first ‘Teach Gender Equality’ course and ‘Phase 1030’ project on Microsoft.”

“This is to enable a global collaboration that fosters an environment where students can play a role in creating solutions for promoting gender equality and women empowerment,” states Ajayi-Ore.

She previously worked at the United Nations (UN) in New York, representing the Ministry of Nigeria. She also spoke to people in the NGO space to see where she fit in.

That’s when she had an epiphany and decided to create a global connection and work to create up with initiatives to help inequalities by Ajayi-Ore visits Nigeria twice a year and also has plans for programs in Africa.



## LUMINARIES IN THE DIASPORA

**IMAN** is a supermodel and entrepreneur from Somalia. One of her country’s most famous models, when she first arrived in America, people assumed she was “Miss Somalia.” She also started her own line of cosmetics. The combination of her supermodel look and modeling career has made her very famous and respected.

**LEPITA NYONG’O** is a multi-talented actress and screenwriter for her role in the Hollywood hit *12 Years a Slave*. Born in Kenya, she was especially able to relate to Annie, early career actress. Nyong’o had roles in film production and movies, having several awards nominations, including an Oscar. She is also a film director, having written and directed several of her own films.

**EVUNICE OJIEKI** is an entrepreneur, singer, and model. She is known for her use of traditional African medicine with modern science to create a brand of beauty and health products. Using her knowledge in chemistry under her biology and her work at the Stanford Medical, an executive health and wellness company for growth of color that was the World Economic Forum’s Young Global Leader in 2017.

**BERNICE KENYONG’O** is a technology entrepreneur who founded the company Appa for U. Originally from Cameroon, she moved to the US for her graduate school. She came to the US in 1999, and founded AppaTech, serving over 40 countries.

**ABAYI OBEI** founder of the 30 Youngest Power Women in Africa 2016 in Africa, she is an entrepreneur and fashion designer from Nigeria. After the founder of Africa Fashion Week, New York, an honored protégé, one of Obi’s goals is to spread and promote African brands and culture to the world. She believes making these entrepreneurs at Africa their own dreams is just as important as teaching her own.

—Compiled by Annet H. Olu





## Dr. Lilian Ajayi-Ore

Chief Learning Officer | Women's Advocate | Data Scientist | Wife & Mother | Chief Marketing Officer  
Nonprofit Founder | NYU & Columbia Professor | TEDx Speaker | Featured in Harvard Business Publishing  
Forbes, INC., & Entrepreneur Magazine Writer | United Nations, Microsoft, & Social Media Week Speaker  
Harvard & UPenn Alumna | Best Manhattan Charity Recipient | Top 25 Marketing Professionals on LinkedIn



“The good news is that there is some progress, and with progress comes a little bit of restitution in the sense that we are realizing that there are other things that are unbalanced. As you gain balance, there is going to be some rebalancement that needs to happen and that’s why you see that despite the tremendous progress that has already been made.”

*Interview with Dr. Lilian Ajayi-Ore conducted on May 3, 2022.*