

PROFESSOR JANE-FRANCES AGBU TRANSCRIPT

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SPEAKERS

Professor Jane-Frances Agbu, Betty Kankam-Boadu

Professor Jane-Frances Agbu 00:00

The best thing in life is the air we breathe and it is so open. It is cheap, it is free and it is there for everyone, and that is why we are surviving. God, in all His wisdom, gave us that. So why are we so myopic and narrow-minded?

Betty Kankam-Boadu 00:26

Hello, and welcome to Inspiring Open, candid conversations with influential women who have made an impact in Africa. We're talking about their personal, educational and career journeys, the choices they have made along the way, and what they have gained by setting aside their doubts in a world where women's voices and opinions often go unheard and unacknowledged. Inspiring Open is a space to explore the value of sisterhood and how networks of sharing and openness can create waves of change. I am Betty Kankam-Boadu, a journalist and women's rights advocate. Join me as I explore the fascinating backstories behind Africa's most tenacious female personalities. Inspiring Open is a podcast series from Wiki Loves women, a project of Wiki In Africa. Be inspired, be challenged, be bold.

My guest today is Professor Jane-Frances Obiageli Agbu. She describes herself as a therapist who uses open philosophy to heal the world around her. Her need to be open with her work is rooted in the love and guidance she received from her mother and other people she describes as significant others. It is this love that she strives to pass on to others by making life better for them in her own small way. Professor Jane-Frances has a PhD in Clinical Psychology from University of Lagos. Her journey towards open education started in 2006. When she joined the National Open University of Nigeria. She rose through the ranks and was promoted to the position of professorship. She is a laureate of the Institute of Open Leadership. She is also on the board of Open Education Global, and she joined the Commonwealth of Learning in October 2021 as Advisor: Higher Education. Let's welcome Professor Jane-Frances.

On this podcast, we like to start from the very beginning to get to know you as a child growing up, the kind of environment you grew up in. And then the kind of upbringing you had.

Professor Jane-Frances Agbu 02:38

Yes. I'm from Nigeria, specifically from a very vibrant town Onitsha, beautiful town. And I was born December and into a family of 10 children. And I'm actually the eighth child of the 10. We actually five-five, five boys, five girls, so my parents... so we always joked that we can make up a football team. So I'm the eighth child, the last of the girls. We have five girls and five boys, so I'm the last of the girls. So that kind of made me especially close to my mom, because when the girls left, I stayed as the last girl you see a bit more attached and closer to mom. And it's such a lovely family. Very loud, very happy, very vibrant, full of love. And the very spirit-filled family. We are Catholics. Yes. And, I can see that my mom influenced me quite a bit because I grew up seeing the strength, the love that she has, not just for us, but for people around her. A very simple woman, but full of strength, full of wisdom, full of love. She has 10 kids, and you can't really say who is the best of the children. Who she loves the best. I've always wondered how she manages to kind of give us equal love. There's no special child. There is no... I don't know how to put it, but it's amazed me up to today. Because anytime I get to village, she's 85 right now, when I travel the way she welcomes me, we always picture has, if you're with her with her wrapper, she will dance and give me a hug. It is actually the way she welcomes each and every one of us and you feel so loved and special. I don't know, it amazes me and when you come from that kind of love, no matter how challenging things are, you are bound to strive. So that's the kind of background I grew up with. So family love and background is actually very important because it sets the base.

I had my education in Nigeria, my primary education in Onitsha, my town, and my secondary also in my town, and went forward for my bachelor's degree in psychology at the University of Nigeria. And then my Master's at University of Lagos, as well as my PhD in University of Lagos. So, I'm homegrown. Yeah, it gave me the opportunity to really understand who I am, my culture, where I come from. And that is what I tried to pass on to my children, I love that really, because I can embrace my culture, my country and have deeper understanding of where I'm coming from. Yes, so that is that for my background, and my country. I'm proudly Nigerian. I'm Ibo. We have beautiful culture and the culture is so rich.

And another thing about Nigeria's is we love our food, it's the best. You know home is always the best. We think traditional. We may be out there, we may be global, but we always think traditional. In the way we look and to take ourselves, in our food in the way we dress. And also, for us when we travel, because of the warmth we have, because Nigerians are very, very happy people. There is a study I was following on the happiness gene, I don't know whether you stumbled on that. And they

said that the highest, I think 90 something per cent is actually from Nigeria, from the world map where Nigeria is situated.

Betty Kankam-Boadu 08:01

Oh interesting.

Professor Jane-Frances Agbu 08:03

That explains it. Because in spite of everything, we always have something to laugh about, the kind of things that could have broken other countries, don't break us. So, I think there's something unique about ... I don't know, I'm just thinking because we go through a lot of conflict, challenges in our country, but we're always very optimistic. And just I love my country. And I also appreciate the fact that I came from a beautiful, beautiful, loving, supportive family. And I always describe my mom as love personified.

Betty Kankam-Boadu 08:46

Yes, I'm happy you had that kind of foundation. I equally come from a big family, eight siblings, mother and father. So yeah, we could also form a football team. And yeah, there's always something to be said about coming from a big family where you can all share and we're mostly girls, like there are six girls, and the rest are boys. So we will fight, we will bicker, we will do all sorts of things. But when we need to stick together and support each other, oh my goodness, we are right there supporting each other. So it's such a good foundation for children to have. So why the choice of psychology?

Professor Jane-Frances Agbu 09:29

It's quite funny anytime I think about that. I think psychology chose me. Yes, psychology chose me, really. When I was about to apply for my B.Sc. Let me say, I wasn't really so sure of what I wanted to do. During my era, it was about being a lawyer. I knew I will not be able to argue well enough. It was about being a medical doctor. I'm very bad in mathematics, science, physics, chemistry. I mean, I was no good in that area. Engineering, oh my God, I can't do that. So I was thinking, okay, okay, maybe social science, political science. We thought that political science is about being a politician. There it wasn't that straightforward. So when I was going through some... there's this brochure that when you want to go for higher studies, you have to go through them, look at the courses, see the kind of subjects you have, and so on. So I stumbled on psychology. First of all, I liked the sound. Psychology. I said okay, okay I like the sound. So I started reading about it. What is this all about? It's about human mind. Which [indistinct 11:13] let me use my language. I started reading about it. I didn't know and I had just few days to make a choice because I needed to submit something for my grant admission matriculation exam. So I said, okay, since I love the sound of

psychology, let me just try and see. And also the fact that my courses, my senior secondary examination courses aligned with that. So yes, I did psychology, and surprisingly, I got admission at University of Nigeria. And the question that my admission officer, because then we weren't so many studying psychology. So we were not that much when we got there. So the first question he asked me, "Why psychology?" and I stupidly told him, "I like the sound psychologist." Okay. The man looked at me and said, "Okay." He didn't have any response for me. So that's why I said, probably psychology chose me.

When I got there, I realised it's filled with statistics, biology. So, I was like, okay, I'm in, I'm in, there's no going back, I just have to pull through. For the first year, it was off. I had to kind of adjust because I had no alternative. Some of my friends decided to leave, move to other programmes, but I said, I'm curious. let me try to pull through. And unfortunately, some of the courses we were exposed to in psychology in first year are the most complicated. I've loved theory, Skinner's Theory, operant conditioning, psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, I was like, what the heck. I actually crammed some of those courses to pull through in first year. It became a bit clearer, even when I got to Master's and PhD, can you imagine? So, now I'm here as a psychologist, and I think it paved the way for me to understand quite a lot of things about life in general. Because one good thing about psychology is the more you go deeper, you're the guinea pig. Okay, you yourself, you're the guinea pig. Because everything is a cause that every day, you learn something about yourself, as we are also understanding the cause. That's the story of my life. And my journey towards psychology.

Betty Kankam-Boadu 14:17

An interesting one, a very interesting one. And I mean, psychology and you being a clinical psychologist, would you say that psychologists are valued in Nigerian society? I asked that because, I mean, for me, I think the past maybe four or five years, is when I realised that the issues of mental health in particular have really come to the fore and now people are beginning to be more aware. I mean, psychologists were not appreciated then. Or maybe people felt like, you know how we treat mental health in our part of the world. I mean, people would hardly even admit that they have an issue. It's either spiritual or some other means. Being a psychologist, would you say you are appreciated, particularly in an African context?

Professor Jane-Frances Agbu 15:13

It's a tricky one, because of the way we view mental health issues. Like I said, my discipline has been able to help me to understand a lot of things. Because growing up, there are people and children with mental retardation, autistic children, and so on. And, then because of lack of... I can't say ignorance because it was lack of information. First of all, the mother is traumatised. They will accuse the mother that you were a witch, you did something horrible, that is why you get back to

this kind of, we call them [abante : phonetic : 16:01], they say abante children. That's why the mother sometimes is driven out from the family, it is always the mother, not the father. So they always say, okay, this woman is a wicked woman, probably she came from a bad family. And for goodness sake, this child is just suffering from a variant of mental retardation. Then I looked back, I was like, Oh my God. So this is actually what is happening or what happened, and you can see in a situation where nobody had information on what actually was the root cause and how to tackle the issue, the problem. So you see, I'm sure we must have experienced a lot of post-traumatic disorders from the part of the parents and also the child. So there's a lot of mysteriousness surrounding mental illness even up till now. So it's quite a challenge and I'm glad that the current realities, the current global world, there's a lot we let that we have to learn from social media. And these issues are coming up, unlike then when we were coming up, we didn't have social media to also guide us to see okay, this is the cause of this, it is not the fault of the mother or the father. Like for example, this nonsense of having a girl child and a male child. It was like when we studied biology they were like, hello is not our fault. If you give me a Y chromosome, you will male child. I can only produce XX. But then it was this woman, you can't have male child, you are cursed. What rubbish!

Professor Jane-Frances Agbu 18:04

And coming to being valued as a psychologist, you have to understand and value yourself first. I'm proudly a psychologist. I see things a lot different. Even when under so much pressure and trauma, I try to see the silver lining in anything, any situation I'm in. I try to look at okay, everywhere is dark but there is a ray of light somewhere and I look towards the light. Because the world, it's not a bed of roses. Life itself is complicated. It can always be all smiles. When it is smiles grab it, grab the sunshine. But when it is gloomy, you try to be resilient. Okay, let's look at the beauty. Let's see something we can learn from it. Even when we make mistakes, just learn from the mistakes. Move it aside and move on. So in Nigeria, yeah. Nigeria is a very spiritual, religious country. And most of the time, those cases of mental issues will go to your pastor. And you will know, the pastor, within the limit of his or her understanding will tell you, ah, this child is your mother and the village. I don't also blame them because they also don't understand the nitty gritty of that. As I sometimes will encourage pastors to have a bit of ecology 101 to be able to guide the flock properly, so that they don't lead them into... because they are believing in something that is not realistic. So that is just that. So it will help you to have a broader view of so many things. And in my country, especially, we have a strong organisation, of which I'm part of, the Nigerian Psychological Association, and also The Clinical Association in Nigeria. And we have been trying to push our bill. It's taking some time for that bill to pass. And it's almost there. Some have been passed, because we have some of our colleagues in the hospitals that have issues with placement. Sometimes they don't know what to refer to, to call them, whether they are directors, or counsellors, or psychological assessment officers. So we've been able to pass that. And I always give kudos to social media, because this

generation have more information. So they can actually weigh the options and see, okay, they have more information out there. So social media is really, really a very good instrument for this generation. I see my children, the way they grew up with so much information. And I really marvel.

Betty Kankam-Boadu 21:33

Would you say that having some kind of support is very, very needed in this day and age. And by support, I mean, having certain people that you can always pick a phone and talk to, you can always be vulnerable around and you can just bare your heart. I say that because, on a personal level, I was dealing with some very difficult things in 2020. I mean, on second thoughts, I think I should have seen a psychologist then or a therapist, but it didn't even occur to me because I had just started a new job, and the pressures of the job and also dealing with a particular medical condition, and I was just going crazy. It was such a dark, dark time in my life. And I had about four people, including my sister and my mother, that anytime I pick a phone and talk to them and just bare my heart, I leave the conversation uplifted.

Professor Jane-Frances Agbu 22:34

Yes. It's good to tap into, now I use the phrase, our significant others, because every problem, you mustn't run to a psychologist if you have problems. Some of the problems actually need somebody you trust and love to talk to. Somebody that can give you that reality check. Like a girlfriend, they say, "My friend, what is it? You have to buckle up and suck it in." That kind of person that can give you the push. So that kind of that social support is very important. And choose your friends wisely. The way I choose friends, I'm not a very social person, and I have very few friends. And sometimes the way I choose my friends may be different from the norm, but I choose my friends from the kind of interest I have. So you have to also check your personality to know the kind of people, the kind of friends you should move with. Not any kind of person. It is somebody that will add value to you. So that kind of person, you can always share your worries, your anxieties and with that person, and like I said earlier, my mom is my best friend. It's as simple as that. Anytime I speak to her, there's always a lot of wisdom because she has so much strength in that. So what I'm trying to say is, just look for that person, that certain person that brings out the best in you, that certain person that loves you unconditionally, without condemning you. It's very difficult to get those people, that kind of friend. So that certain person that will give you that emotional support and understand your vulnerability. If you're blessed, and you can afford a psychologist, fine. That is for emotional problems that are not so severe, because the severe ones, they are so obvious that you will need a medical assessment and their management. But there are ones that are everyday issues that could potentially lead to a more catastrophic end. So when you notice that you can lean on your friend and see seek for support. That's why most of the time when we see issues of drug abuse and everything, the background is always kind of faulty, because something triggered that. And children

bottle up a lot. As a parent, look at your children. Try to make them feel that they are the best thing that happened to you. You understand? I do that a lot intentionally. When I call my daughter even at 21, I say, "Ah, sweetie, how are you? You know I love you." They say, "Mommy stop that." But it sends a message because it tells her that she's special. No matter the problem she finds herself, she knows that she has a lot of love. It's not as if I don't have other things to do with my life, but it is intentional. Because you must build that emotional resilience. And with that, the sky is the limit. Because they need to be held, they need to be strong, to be able to blossom.

Betty Kankam-Boadu 26:44

And I love that your mom gave this love to you. And you're giving it back to your children and your children will give it back to their children. And you're just creating like a cycle and a generation to generation to generation of love. And that love is going to be unleashed into the world, I think—

Professor Jane-Frances Agbu 27:04

Because I know, my mom, I could see that the love, what she did with those was intentional. I don't know how to put it, but I can you have 10 children and all of them feel so special. There is no tension. And she has time for all of us. So it's probably I grew up with that and I needed to pass it on to my children. And definitely, this is a kind of learning, experiential learning. You experienced it. It's not something you get from the classroom or something. And when you go back, when you get to another stage of your life, you look back. My son will look back and say my mom gave me so much love, and he will love his wife. Because that love came from... this was a feminine love. And, the feminine love is full of warmth, it is just is just beautiful. So I'm sure he will love his wife and the children.

Betty Kankam-Boadu 28:16

Yeah, I love it. I love it. I spoke to Nkem. Nkem is a librarian in Nigeria. I spoke to her on the podcast too. And then she also said that it is so important to love her children to the point that they know that when you go into the world and anything you touch fails, just know that when you come back home, your mom is to love you no matter what. And I think it's such a beautiful thing. And maybe like you said it's a Nigerian thing because this is also coming from another Nigerian, Nkem.

Professor Jane-Frances Agbu 28:56

It is within us, we have it us, we have the gene, we live it. We have the gene, the happy gene.

Betty Kankam-Boadu 29:02

So your introduction to open was as a result of wanting a job closer to you because you had children then, and then you found a job at the university just five minutes away. And that was how you got into the world of open. Tell me about that story. How did that unfold?

Professor Jane-Frances Agbu 29:26

Just like my psychological story. When God wants to chart your path, you will just be guided, no matter where you think you want to go, you will be guided. So when I was about ready for the world of work, because I was a student and a PhD student, so I decided to just focus on my children. I had my three children as a student and I really wasn't... I didn't actually work for for eight years after my marriage, because I was having children. I had to take care of them, and be sure that they are fine. And then it wasn't also very easy for me because I married my friend. And it wasn't... how do I put it?

The finances wasn't there that much. But all I knew was that I wanted to further my education, went for my Master's and PhD. Luckily, I was able to get some kind of support from my university for my PhD, and I was teaching as an assistant lecturer. So my school fees were waived for me. And also because I also needed to, I couldn't walk because I had to be there to take care of the children. I was also pregnant most of the time. Eight years down the line, I felt okay, they are a bit strong enough to at least be in school while I do something extra. And there was the then Open University was just a few minutes away from... I actually moved from another part of Lagos to the part of Lagos where Open University was situated. So when I was moving, I saw the signpost Open University of Nigeria and said, Okay, what is this all about, Open University? I've not heard of it, because then it was very new. They were just less than a year in existence. And actually, I came in [indistinct 31:57], I was the third batch of staff employed. And I also noticed that those that came in before me couldn't really cope, because there was a lot of misconception. So I said, [indistinct 32:16] it has university because I always tell my mom that I want to be a professor. When I made that exclamation, I actually didn't know what it was. I just loved the sound of professor. I was just less than eight, nine years then they say, okay you're a professor. Oh okay, I said to my mom, I love the sound of professor, I want to be a professor. So when I got to Open University, I just saw the university, I didn't actually emphasise the open. I said, what was that as I passed it. We'll see. Okay. So when I applied, then people didn't want to come to Open University. because none of us had the training. None of us. It was quite frustrating and challenging. And because the conventional traditional mode of universities, we are they saw us as a threat. They said, "How can technology... what do you mean that you're supposed to be the teacher and you start there, you talk you're the authority and your students will respect you. You're the best, you're the best knowledge. Everything is about you, that knowledge and everything. So what is technology mediated learning? It was so mysterious to everyone. But I applied. And in the interview, somehow, I was so naïve, they asked me, "What do you know about open?" I said, "I don't know anything. I've tried to understand what

you do here. But it's not clear. But the spirit is willing to learn." Some of the interview panel, they burst out laughing, some didn't find it funny.

Professor Jane-Frances Agbu 34:21

So I say, yeah, I mean, I'm running up my postgraduate, my PhD in psychology. You don't even have psychology in the institution. But I think I can fit in the Faculty of Science and Technology. But I don't really know much about distance education. And I'm also so not good with technology. I can type properly. I was typing with one finger, tap, tap, tap. But I think their vision, because I read their vision, and it resonates with what I believe in: providing access, equity, learning opportunities, and also lifelong learning and reaching the unreached. And I was able to align to that vision because of my training, probably. Because in psychology, where there's what we call humanistic psychology is about bringing out the best in people. And how do you do that by providing opportunities for that person to thrive? And that opportunity is what I saw in the vision of the school. And they gave me a job in 2006. So that was how I came into Open University. And we were set of I think, 10, that came in in 2006. Along the line, half of my colleagues left, because they couldn't understand it. They were the best, they were IT savvy. they're like, what are we doing here? We don't even understand this. It's complicated. How can I wake up in the morning, and I don't stand in front of my students to teach? Because for you to thrive in an open university system, you have to be self-assured, yes. They don't see me, but they can hear me. And you can speak you can make yourself to be heard by be innovative. So they felt oh, then in a lot of newspaper articles about open university and everything, so therefore they got embarrassed and also because they want to be known physically. They want to stand there as the authority. Yes, this is me, I'm Professor So-and-So. If I have come to the lecture room, it must be filled up. And you didn't know sometimes it can be brutal. Because sometimes you give what you want to give and hoard what you want to hoard. Which is not right. It's about guiding them to find the information. And that is the beauty of open educational resources and so on. So that is my journey towards open, I have no apologies for anybody. And I have no regrets. Because I can remember my organisation and the Nigeria Psychology Association, sometimes when I go for the conferences, they don't even call refer to me by my name, they will say the lady from Open University, in a very cynical manner. "Ah, open, okay Open University talk." I'm like, "Hello, I'm part of you. Why treat me differently?" And some things it made me... I drew a bit back because I felt that I was kind of pushed away because of my decision to go towards open education. But here came COVID-19 and the lady from Open University. They now start calling me. "Okay, Open University, what do we do?" I said, "Oh, okay, hello. Welcome to my life." I don't know if I've been able to answer your question.

Betty Kankam-Boadu 38:11

You have answered my question. And it's very interesting, the point you make about the people who left, people like control, and it's because those who left, they just can't imagine like, I need this control. I need to feel powerful. And this system means I have to relinquish that control and the way I want to exercise that control. So a lot of them will run. I can understand why some of your colleagues will treat you the way they treat you.

Professor Jane-Frances Agbu 38:45

Yeah, I even laughed at some of them. First of all, when I joined, they cast a vote informally that I was the person that will be least successful as a psychologist. I was not given a chance there. And I felt my teachers, although they didn't really come to say it to me, but they felt so disappointed. Even one mentioned that he wasted his time training Jane. He said that the training was a waste of time. And when I was going to the Open University, I needed references. It was difficult.

Betty Kankam-Boadu 39:28

It beats my mind. This aversion to open

Professor Jane-Frances Agbu 39:32

It's just about misconception. I don't blame anyone. Because I also started like that. I didn't know what open is. But I was courageous enough. Also pushed by my circumstances, my family circumstances. I was not given... I didn't have an option B. The option is stay very close to home, take care of these children and go to anywhere that has University written on it. So there was no Option B. So but somehow, I had to make up my mind. Okay, let me just embrace this. I saw the vision and see how best I can contribute. So it's about misconception It's about being open-minded. Because open is also being open-minded, because it's such a mysterious thing. And our perception here, anything that is open and free, is free of charge, free open, that's cheap. And they don't want that. And why not? The the best thing in life is the air we breathe. And so open, it is cheap, it is free. It is there for everyone. And that is why we are surviving. So why do we have to... and God, in all His wisdom, gave us that. So why are we so myopic and narrow-minded? So just be open-minded, learn something new. If there's a new, emergent issue that you need to learn, even if you don't believe in that, just be a bit flexible, don't castigate others for trying to embrace that. Just be a bit credible and try to accommodate that, even if you don't believe in that.

Betty Kankam-Boadu 41:35

Yeah. And you describe yourself as a therapist using open to heal everything around you. What does that mean? I

Professor Jane-Frances Agbu 41:46

I was the Dean of the Faculty of Health Science at some point in my institution 2016/2018. And I had to manage nurses. It was one of the highlights of my career. Then the Nigerian government made the declaration that the training, nursing training, usually we start from diploma certificate and all that. So the nurses, they are very resilient people. They spend so many years reading [indistinct 42:20] most modest at the top, and at the end of the day, they don't have their degree. They'll have certificates and midwifery diplomas and these midwifery nursing, general nursing and so on. So the government said, If you don't have a B.Sc. nursing, you will not progress. There was panic everywhere. The nurses couldn't have left their job to go to the mainstream university. So Open University was the only option. That experience, it's a beautiful one. Open University was the only option. So they were able to actually still hold on to their job and enrol in our B.Sc. programme. Then at some point we were the largest population in my faculty, there were up to 25-30,000 then, it was that huge. And to them, it is a deep project. They had to survive. They had to get this very elusive B.Sc. Some people had to go outside the country or the Distance Learning Programme and everything. But Open University was affordable for them. And every convocation that I have to announce my students, the nurses are usually made up to 80% in the congregation, and you can see the shout anytime I announce, I hereby present my students for BNurs in Science, it gives me goosebumps because you see the joy, the joy from 64-year-old nurse that is about to retire and was never promoted because she didn't have a B.Sc.. Okay, and with that B.Sc., once it is attained in the organisation, she gets promoted as a director and retires as a director with all the benefits. And now that programme is our flagship programme. We have trained more than 30-40,000 nurses in Nigeria. We give them that opportunity to work and study. And that is the therapy of Open University. No other... I'm sorry, but the conventional niversity will not give you that flexibility. And also for those women in the 60s 70s age range that were able to get that B.Sc., and retire with dignity, because their dignity was taken from them. So that was a high point for me.

Professor Jane-Frances Agbu 45:13

I always feel proud of myself that I uplifted, even if they're not aware of that, but it's a pact. It's kind of a promise I made to myself that, God, if you give me this opportunity, let me redeem these nurses so that they will stop crying. And I'm sure they no longer cry. And recently, before I came to COL, I was a director at one of our study centres in Abuja, Wuse Study Centre. I always look at it from moving from theory to practical, because that was when I was flooded with the real reality of open education. The beauty of open education, it was so beautiful. I also need to know that, you do the kind of job that every morning you wake up, you smile, and you're happy to go to work. That is how I feel working at Open University. I don't know about others. I'm always happy going to work and everything about open. So when I got to be there, as a centre director, I dropped to 9000 student population. They could feel that happiness from me, because they weren't so sure they had

challenges, and so on technology-wise and some of the teething problems and so on. Anytime I talk to them, we have student week, I look at them, and I try to explain that this is what you need to do. And you have to be open-minded. Their are challenges are these but look at the beauty of this, you have the opportunity to go to school, and go to work, even at your age, at 89. I think my oldest student there was 89-years, a lady. I say Mama is here, she's studying, and you're here, you're complaining, you're 30, you're not sure. I tried to share the beauty of open education. I also learned from my visually impaired students, I had three of them or four, and I didn't know how to reach to them, how to open up to them. So I said, okay, how do I serve you better? They told me that they need this software, they need special concessions if they want to come to exam, and can they be allowed to come with their laptops, because they have their software that will read the questions for them. I had to write to the management to take special permission for that, because I want to accommodate everyone. And an area I found so intriguing and interesting, is in my country, we have this purdah, the women in purdah. I found it so beautiful working with them because there are so many of in my Study Centre, and what I found really interesting was the even the fact that they were given opportunity to enrol in Open University to earn a degree because the purdah experience, you're not actually allowed to interface with the outside world per se. They're not supposed to see your face, I hope I'm right. But Open University give them that opportunity. So they were actually studied in their rooms. Yeah. And they were getting any degrees without coming out at all. And then in my institution for exams, that is where you're expected to actually come out to take your exam. So that is the only time we'll try to see so that we will know that you are not a ghost student. And fortunately, those women are also expected to come out. Okay. So anytime they come out, and I see the hall is filled them, I'm like yes, this is it.

Professor Jane-Frances Agbu 49:15

Because we train a woman you train the nation. That lady in purdah is able to get her B.Sc. in anything and she's the one that is closest to her children. She has to impact something and if you don't have an inquisitive and educated mind, you will not be able to impact properly. So I find that that's what I when I got there I had to interface with the visually impaired, I had to interface with those with mental challenges. I know exactly how to handle how to go about that. How to interface with women in purdah and also, I had to interface with nursing mothers. I allowed them to come... part of our policies, you actually have discretion to allow them to come with their babies. So I have a lot of women, their children will be breastfeeding on their lap, and they're writing exams. So there is a special seat for them at the one side of the hall, because sometimes the child cries out. And before exams, I explained to my students that, yes, we need to accommodate each other. We have the nursing mothers at that side of the exam, their children may cry, but just in the spirit of this... if it's if it's Nigeria, I will say [Na oui oui: phonetical: 50:43], we have to take care of each other. So instead of my students complaining, their children are crying, when they cry, we quickly give the

mother the opportunity to go to a next room, there's actually a baby room next there, where they can finish the breastfeeding and quickly come back. And it is open, it is only an open system that can give you that opportunity. So I don't know if you understand, it is it is so beautiful.

Betty Kankam-Boadu 54:50

Completely beautiful.

Professor Jane-Frances Agbu 54:52

It is so uplifting. It is what humanity should learn to appreciate. You may not understand it, but give it a chance. If I died tomorrow, I will tell my God, Ah, yes. I think I did what you sent me to do. You drop me in the world for something. I didn't know at the time, You were just using your one leg and were just pushing me there. Okay, move. You might say psychology is to find the meaning of your life, is a matter of therapy that we use for our clients. What is the meaning of your life? I think I found it.

Betty Kankam-Boadu 51:55

And it's beautiful. And as you tell these stories, I'll go back to your foundation. Your foundation is love. And love is very inclusive. Love is open. And for me, I think that's where it's rooted. That's where the roots come from. And it's beautiful. How you are just changing lives, making dreams happen for other people with what you do.

Professor Jane-Frances Agbu 52:19

Without much effort, because it's so something that gives you joy.

Betty Kankam-Boadu 52:26

This has been a very interesting conversation for me. It's been very enlightening. I've learned a lot and I really appreciate that and I appreciate your time. You are such a happy person. That is very infectious. It is very infectious so I've just been here laughing and giggling.

Professor Jane-Frances Agbu 52:41

People often say to me when I laugh, can't you be serious for once in your life? I say, I'm serious, but I'm still laughing. It's a blessing really.

Betty Kankam-Boadu 52:56

Your joy is so infectious Prof and I love that I got to experience it. Thank you very much. That was Professor Jane-Frances Obiageli Agbu, a clinical psychologist and an open educational resource advocate.

Thank you for listening to Inspiring Open, a podcast series from Wiki Loves Women. This first series of Inspiring Open was funded through the International Relief Fund for organisations in culture and education 2021, an initiative of the German Federal Foreign Office, the Goethe Institute and other partners; and an annual grant from the Wikimedia Foundation. If you enjoyed today's show, subscribe on Spotify, Apple Podcasts or wherever you listen to your podcasts so you never miss an episode. Feel free to share, rate and review us. We appreciate the support. You can also tag us in your posts. We are @WikiLovesWomen on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram. I'll leave you with the words of Ntozake Shange. "Sisterhood is important because we are all we have to stand on. We have to stand near and by each other, pray for one another and share the joys and the difficulties that women face in the world today. If we don't talk about it amongst ourselves, then we are made silent by the patriarchy. And that serves us no purpose. Until next time, look after yourselves and your sisters. And remember, be inspired, be challenged, be bold. I am Betty Kankam-Boadu and you've been listening to Wiki Loves Women, Inspiring Open.