

Live event platform for African women launches

Two of Africa's media powerhouses and both former CNN anchors, Zain Verjee and Isha Sesay, have launched a new venture, named Rouse.



Launched last month in Marrakech, with the full support and partnership with the Republic of Togo, Verjee, who is Kenyan, and Sesay, from Sierra Leone, put together a gathering at the Jnane Tamsna Boutique Hotel. Rouse curated group of 40 women of African descent from across the globe, a one of a kind un-conference experience with three days of talks, activities, and discourse centered around the themes of the "havoc and harmony" that come with being such disruptive forces in their lives.

Rouse, which Verjee and Sesay co-founded with entrepreneurs Chidi Afulezi and Suneeta Olympio, was conceived as a live event platform for women of African descent to connect, recharge, and build a global sisterhood of Rouse Woman who collaborate on ventures, creative endeavors, and topics.

Since leaving CNN, both Verjee and Sesay observed there is a broader space to explore in connecting trailblazing women from the continent to women in the African diaspora including native North American and European women.

"We wanted to bring together women from all these geographical locations," says Sesay. "They have experiences, points of view and stories to share. When I travel, these are the women I meet, and there was no platform to bring them together to have real conversations, and real stages for collaboration. These are all women of African descent who want inspirational

interactions, an authentic global sisterhood, and ways to do better and do more, both personally and professionally."

The Rouse team wanted to ensure that the format of the traditional conference was against convention with minimal panels, an intimate setting, no VIP treatments, and candid conversations. The beautiful Jnane Tamsna lent itself to an open-air setting the Rouse team christened "The Clearing", that provided both a physical and mental space for the attendees to recharge. Chatham House rules were observed by Rouse attendees in The Clearing to protect privacy, and freedom to speak without fear, for all guests.

Rouse Talks, the team's dedicated series of individual mono/dialogues that integrated audience interaction, ranged from reimagining motherhood, the quest to silence your inner negative voice, and power and purpose. The Clearing provided an open forum for discussions on the power of vulnerability, the search for authentic self, and the search for a global sisterhood.

The Republic of Togo stepped up as the key launch partner for Rouse, and fully subscribed to the views of the founders that new ways of telling the stories of women of African descent need to be found, and new platforms, creative collaborations and open conversations were crucial. Yawa Kougin, in charge of Communications for the Republic of Togo says "Historically women have been at the core of the life of our country. They hold the grass root economy while playing a key role as pillars of the families. They are emerging now in top positions in the administration, sciences and politics. We are very naturally supportive of initiatives like Rouse which aim at acknowledging and promoting women in their essence, and finding unique ways of telling our stories."

Verjee thanked the republic of Togo for launching the inaugural Rouse and allowing the four co-founders to remain true to their vision. "African countries look for ways to tell their home-grown stories by hiring Western agencies to tell their stories for them. Instead they should look to their own talented populations to tell those stories, that are more authentic and more on point," she said. "Thank you to Togo for taking a leap of faith and trusting Isha and I to curate something special that will have impact and ignite change on the continent and beyond. Rouse Women will change the world."

Other Rouse sponsors included GE Africa, which hosted a spectacular evening at the Dar Si Said Museum, and the OCP Group who hosted a desert experience where Rouse Women continued conversations of substance that were empowering, educational and inspirational. The Rouse team is already scouting for the next Rouse location for 2020, which will be on the continent, and will be adding well thought out elements to add more flavor and impact for the attendees and supporters.

"We are already in the process of mapping out what Rouse will be in 2020 and 2021. This is an African play, and all events will be held on the continent to put the shine on the disruptive and powerful woman of African descent, and on Africa," said Sesay.

Verjee added, "This is a very exciting time for the four of us, and we are looking forward to what the future holds for Rouse, and our ability to own and change narratives with partners that can think out of the box, and take our stories to new heights.

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