

Encouraging female African business leaders from the other side of the world

 By [Leigh Andrews](#)

21 May 2019

US-based real estate entrepreneur Rokelle Sun's philanthropic mission is to encourage young girls to pursue careers and success in the underrepresented fields, particularly in Africa, where she spent part of her childhood. She explains this, as well as her love of new experiences like aerophotography, and some of the highs and lows of her earlier career as a multilingual broadcast journalist.



Multilingual broadcast journalist-turned-real estate entrepreneur, Rokelle Sun.

Sun's vast interests and constant drive to upskill herself demonstrate the power of making Wikipedia your best friend. In fact, reading through Sun's well-rounded resume is enough to instil career envy in the most accomplished among us.

Not only did this design enthusiast start out as a multilingual broadcast journalist and move on to become a successful real-estate entrepreneur, she's also a classical/royal style ballet dancer, a sabre fencer and performance kart racer, plus she's completed a summer course in culinary art at the Le Cordon Bleu as well as a fashion, marketing and merchandising summer programme at the Parson's School of Design in Paris, as well as a sommelier programme at UC Berkeley Extension.

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A post shared by [Chloe Rokelle Sun](#) (@chloerox) on Feb 8, 2018 at 7:23pm PST

She also has a strong passion for travel, having grown up in China, Swaziland and the US, and has traveled to 19 countries and counting so far. She is currently pursuing opportunities to build sustainable co-living spaces and communities.

Here, Sun talks us through her philanthropic mission to encourage young girls to pursue careers and success in the underrepresented fields, as well as the importance of seeing opportunities in unlikely places where others thought there was only a dead-end...

■ ***Let's start with your link to Africa. You completed most of your schooling in Swaziland, where your mother also ran a business. Talk us through your memories of this time – what you most enjoyed, and how they contrast against your experiences elsewhere in the world.***

I was born in China, and grew up there as well as in Swaziland, but completed my tertiary studies in the San Francisco Bay area on my own, at the age of 19. After college, I also lived and worked in Paris, France for a year and Tokyo, Japan for six months.

My father is a professional athlete-turned-university professor and my mother is a mechanical engineer-turned-entrepreneur. Growing up watching my parents being the stars of their industries made me believe I can accomplish anything I put my mind to.

During my time in Africa, my formative years, I really enjoyed the beautiful, natural landscape and the diversity of African culture. I met many great people who changed my worldview, and I learned, from watching my mother and other local

entrepreneurs, that businesses should not only be profitable but also positively impact local communities.



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However, compared to other places I have lived, such as China, Japan, France and the US, as a developing country, Swaziland still has far to go with regard to women's rights.

I recall a large gender imbalance in most schools, and I believe that more is needed in this area in terms of awareness and influence from the outside world.



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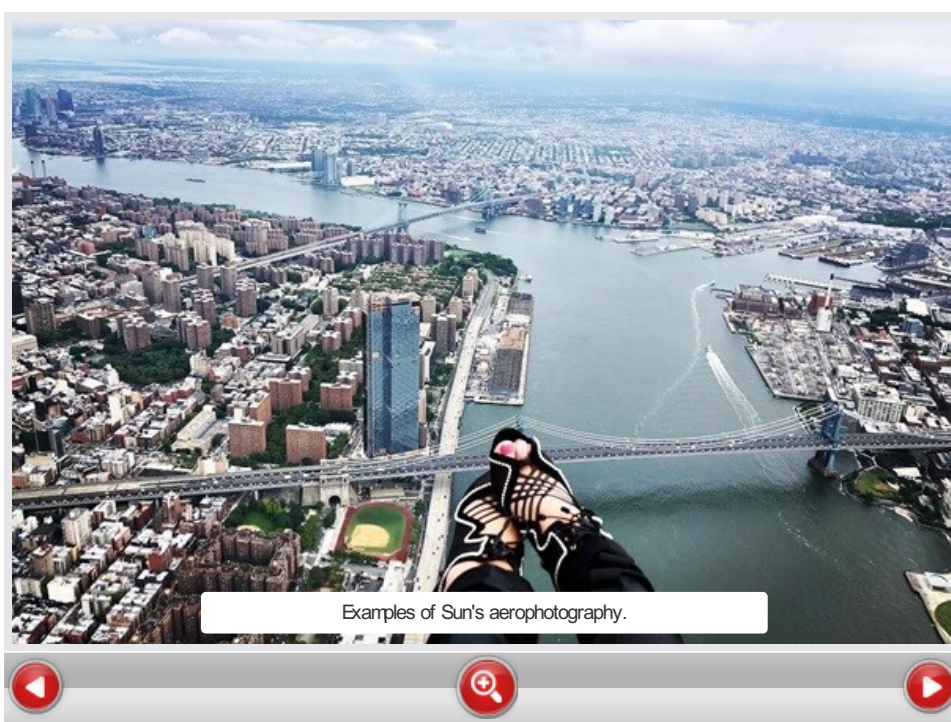


Gender and racial inequality have had a profound impact on the lives of people in Africa as social norms favour boys over girls in most aspects of life. There is, therefore, a direct correlation between gender and race, the ability to exercise civil rights, and the possibility of reaching one's full potential.

Taking this further, only by taking concrete steps toward more diversity in hiring will Africans be able to address and close the gender gap in the workplace.

■ ***Definitely. Let's shift our view to the horizon for a moment: You're involved in taking bird's eye-view photos via aerophotography. Explain how this works.***

I usually do it from a helicopter without doors. You get strapped on to the edge of the passenger seat, from where you can extend your body out of the aircraft in order to get good shots. I love it because it combines my thirst for adventure with my passion for photography. It's fun, artistic and exhilarating.



Examples of Sun's aerophotography.

The exhilaration comes from the creative process, pulling ideas together in the sky, trying different angles, editing, and wondering how the viewer will feel when looking at the finished product.

The experience of shooting while hanging from the edge of an aircraft is not only exciting but also poetic because it's probably as close to flying as I'll ever get while at the same time 'dancing' and creating art. Since I'm a ballet dancer, too, the entire experience reminds me of my experience dancing *La Sylphide*.

I've always been a firm believer of following your passion and do what you love. At the same time, take responsibility for your life, career and happiness. Never be afraid of taking initiatives.

📌 ***That ties in with my next question. Beyond living your own best life, you're also a strong believer in the power of philanthropy to make the world a better place. Explain why it's so important to give back, with a particular focus on getting more girls involved in Stem subjects.***

As a young woman and real-estate developer/entrepreneur, I learned to navigate my industry largely on my own, as an under-represented minority.

As a result, I've always been eager to share my knowledge and experience with others similar to myself, and so my philanthropic mission is to encourage young girls to pursue careers and succeed in under-represented fields.



Girls4Tech programme aims to reach one million girls by 2025

14 May 2019



I do this by acting as a positive role model and participating in non-profit-organisation projects that inspire young girls to pursue opportunities in Stem fields.

I'm currently focusing on *The Modern Women in Stem Book Project*, which seeks inspiring women leaders in Stem to contribute to a collective memoir. In that vein, I encourage female African business leaders and entrepreneurs to send their submissions to modernwomeninstem.com.

I've also been a donor at Unicef for the past decade as aiding children in developing countries is a cause I hold dear to my heart.

📌 ***You're a successful real estate entrepreneur now, but have spent much of your earlier career as a multilingual broadcast journalist. Let's take a step back and touch on some of the highs and lows of this leg of your career.***

I started interning at KTSF TV during college and was hired immediately afterwards. Because I am by nature curious and inquisitive, it was the perfect job for me at the time. Working in news enriched me and opened up broad areas of knowledge across a variety of fields. I had the privilege of meeting, working with, and learning from people from all walks of life.



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Leigh Andrews 30 Aug 2018



In addition, broadcast journalism is very fast paced. Part of my job was producing the evening headline news preview, and I had less than ten minutes to prepare the live, four-story headlines for the 7pm and 10pm news broadcasts.

“ Within that short time-span I had to chase down footage from four different reporters, record two news-anchor voice-overs, edit the video, and add special effects. If I made a mistake, everyone would know, as my work was broadcast in front of a large audience. ”

This experience taught me how to work efficiently and effectively and I discovered that repetition and memorisation were key. I routinely memorised and practised all the keyboard shortcuts in the software and hardware.

This hard work paid off; soon I was able to do the job automatically and much faster than others – I think I got the idea from my ballet and fencing training!

❏ **So interesting! Also interesting is that you say Wikipedia is your best friend. Explain the importance of having access to information at your fingertips and how this helps anyone with a desire to upskill themselves.**

Access to knowledge in the information age has made life-long, university-level learning possible and has greatly benefited me in terms of gaining knowledge and making decisions. I have a very curious mind so I'm always asking questions, taking classes, watching TEDtalks and learning about anything and everything.

I like to keep up with many things: business, law, social issues, philosophy, psychology, technology, art, culture, travel, and anthropology.



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Leigh Andrews 20 Jul 2018



More importantly, I believe in informed decision-making and strategic execution in business based on thorough research.

I always make sure that I have enough time to investigate, study and understand what I want to do professionally, before taking the necessary steps forward.

All this wouldn't have been possible without easy access to information. I think everyone should take advantage of this, adopt a growth mindset, and follow a path of life-long learning.



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Leigh Andrews 21 Jun 2018



Proof that the more you do, the more you can do. Follow Sun on [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) for further inspiration and if you're a female African business leader or entrepreneur, send their submissions to modernwomeninstem.com.

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

Leigh Andrews AKA the #MilkshakeQueen, is former Editor-in-Chief: Marketing & Media at Bizcommunity.com, with a passion for issues of diversity, inclusion and equality, and of course, gourmet food and drinks! She can be reached on Twitter at @Leigh_Andrews.

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