

# RECOUNT



Pan-African commitment made local

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A decade-long  
journey



# One-on-one with Dr. Femi Oyetunji

Group Managing Director, Continental Reinsurance Plc



## Q1.

**What was the path you took to get to where you are today?**

I was told I was restless and inquisitive when I was young, so I was sent to a primary school at the age of four, two years early. Consequently, I got into university early, graduated at age twenty and got my PhD at age twenty-four. My family, the schools and universities that I attended moulded my life philosophy of an international outlook and international best practice at an early age. This early start led to my finding myself in positions of responsibilities early hence the opportunity to prove myself over and over.

The latest opportunity was in 2010 when I was approached and offered the responsibility of leading Continental Re. I was at Alexander Forbes, Nigeria, part of an international group, so I was reluctant at first. I am glad that I finally did because I was able to bring the pan-African experience to Continental Re.

## Q2.

**What was the most significant change / challenge you had to overcome as Group Managing Director?**

Without a doubt, the privilege of taking a Nigerian brand into Africa to create a well-respected pan-African brand.

The minute I walked into Continental Re on the 3rd January 2011, what needed to be done was evident. I needed to engineer a paradigm shift in the staff's mindset from seeing themselves as a small Nigerian reinsurer to a professionally run multinational company.

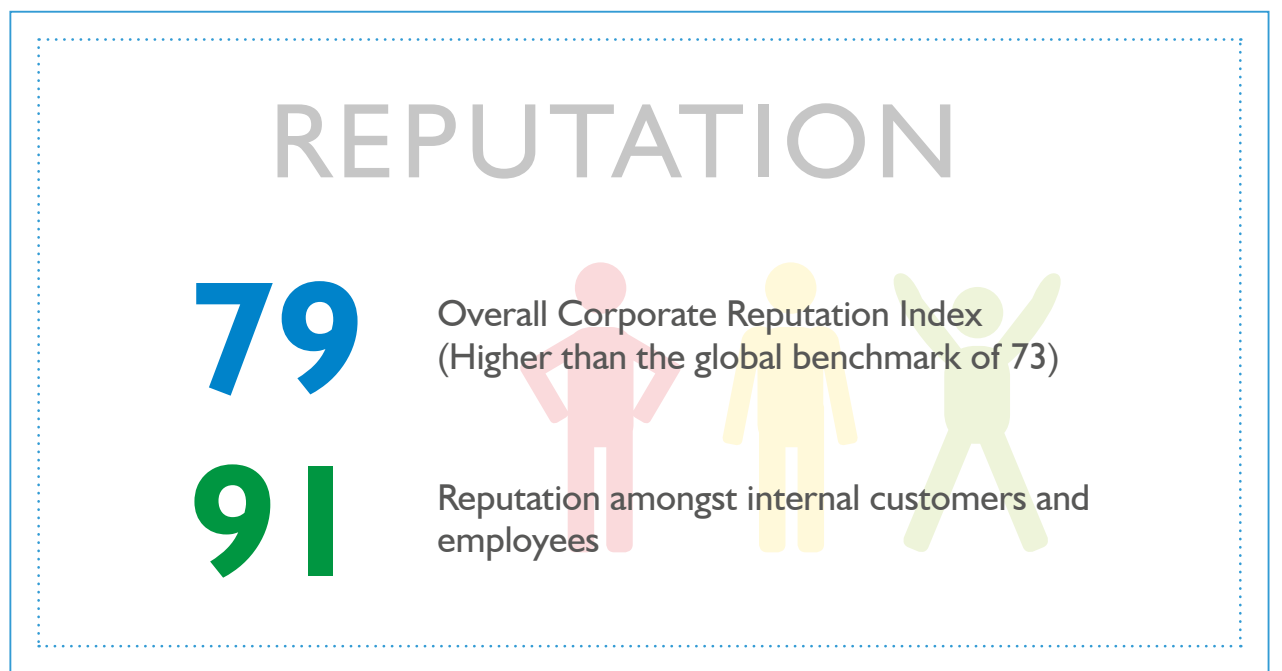
At that time, here in Lagos, the executive team was made up of the Executive Director Life and I (Nigerians), Executive Director Operations (Zimbabwean), Executive Director Finance (Ivorian), and the Chief Risk Officer (Togolese French). Our shareholders then included Nigerians, Zim Re, ECP (USA), CDC (UK), Investec (SA), to mention a few.



We had offices in Lagos, Douala and Nairobi. The staff then saw themselves working for a small Nigerian company (so much that teams in Lagos, Douala, Nairobi were made to wear Nigerian attire on Fridays). Nairobi that is two hours ahead of our time, could not start working until the central server was switched on in Lagos at 8 am, which was already 10 am in Nairobi. Over 70% of our business was from Nigeria in 2011.

I saw it differently. I saw a multinational company, multinational in staffing, multinational in shareholding and multinational in location. What was lacking was, we were not multinational in behaviour. That was the genesis of my vision for the Company, the premier pan-African reinsurer. A large, privately owned reinsurer based on international best practices to provide an alternative in the industry.

In 2020, we decided to commission a research company – **KANTAR** – to conduct an independent brand perception survey. We needed to ascertain to what extent we satisfy corporate reputation in the five categories of overall reputation, favourable impression, trust, economic/financial success and product/service delivery. Based on anecdotal evidence, we knew we could satisfy the set criterion to a good extent, but we also knew that we would need to do much more than we have been doing. It was gratifying to obtain an overall score of 79 points above the global benchmark of 73. Now, however, our goal is to keep pushing our numbers higher.



Reputational gains can be attributed to a successful “inside/out” thinking that considers employees the foundation and starting point of sustainable business planning. Our reputation is strongest amongst the internal customers and majorly with the employees at 91.

The overall brand perception score was a consolidation of individual scores from each of our six regions, with scores in some regions higher than others. Competition is healthy within the Group, and so internally, we use the scores as motivation to get better. The brand perception exercise has enabled us to reflect

inwards, moving us out of silos to working together as a multidisciplinary group, breaking through impediments and pivoting when necessary. We are collectively working towards rebalancing the components that are out of alignment.

**Our transformation may have started as a ‘CEO-passion’, but it has survived because it is embedded in the Company’s DNA.**

### Q3.

## What stands out as your biggest accomplishment in your 10 years with Continental Re?

Three things come to mind.

### In June 2012, far away in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, Continental Re became the first insurance/reinsurance company outside South Africa to sign up for the UNEP Principles of Sustainable Insurance.

I signed up immediately after the presentation because it was clear that huge losses await reinsurance companies, particularly if we did not do anything about our climate. We recognised the need to dedicate time and resources to this important agenda and the need for an internal sustainability champion to secure our corporate momentum in this field. The person currently in this role is Cas Hansa [Group Head: Underwriting & Claims], who, apart from his general advocacy role of the Principles, serves to distil business-relevant impacts, outputs and disclosures, sharing new ideas, and facilitating stakeholder discussions and actions towards a sustainable insurance market and a safer society for all. Cas Hansa was appointed to the UN-PSI Board (2017 – 2020) following a competitive appointment process. Together with other like-minded insurance-related market players, we worked (and continue to work) to create an improved awareness and broader adoption of the Principles for Sustainable Insurance.



### In March 2014, we hosted the first Continental Re CEOs summit in Mombasa, Kenya.

The idea was borne out of a discussion around my dinner table one evening in 2013, from a comment my younger son made. It has become a thought leadership platform where leaders of the insurance industry in Africa gather to address common issues collectively. Nobody will solve our problems for us but ourselves. It had become a must-attend summit by industry leaders until the pandemic interrupted the flow in 2020. An important segment of the summit is the regulators' panel, where we bring together regulators around the continent to fashion out a common approach to insurance issues in Africa.



The journalism awards ceremony has remained a high point of our annual CEO summit since being launched in 2015 as delegates put aside boardroom speak to share a good time. Awards are presented to winners in an evening of culinary delight and entertainment. Continental Reinsurance initiated the pan-African re/insurance journalism awards in 2015 to recognise and acknowledge the media's good work on the continent. Journalists are required to demonstrate how their articles raised awareness and understanding of the insurance sector in Africa. In the six editions, we have received entries from more than 25 countries across Africa. In recognition of the winners' participation and exemplary reporting, Continental Reinsurance awards cash prizes, and all the winners also benefit from mentorship on insurance reporting. All the entries are evaluated by an independent judging panel consisting of international experts in insurance and journalism.





**The third milestone that I will highlight is the beautiful edifice that we moved into in July 2020, the Continental Re Center.**

I take great pride in it because it nearly didn't happen. I am often asked whether I was taking Continental Re out of Nigeria because of our restructuring into Mauritius. Continental Re Center demonstrates this Company's commitment to the Nigerian economy, the insurance companies and the Nigerian shareholders that started it all.



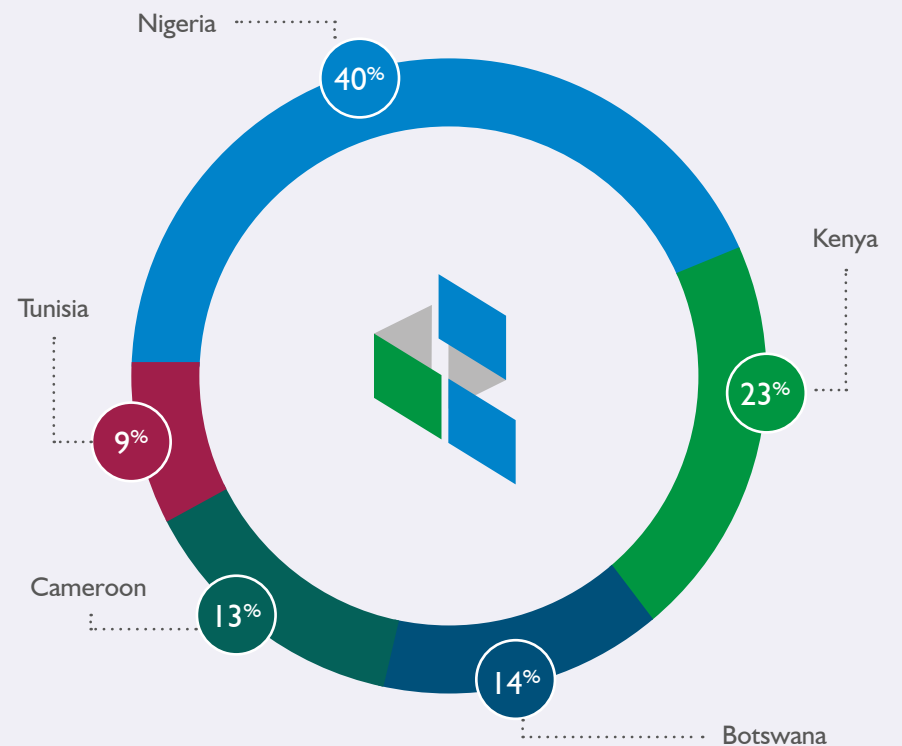
**Q4.**

**What is or are your proudest moments as the GMD of CRe?**

Landing an aggressive strategy to position the Company as a pan-African brand with a strong presence across six key geographical locations; growing revenue fivefold, profitability threefold and more than doubling productivity whilst transforming the Company's culture, processes and standards. We have completed our capital restructuring into Mauritius.

We have made significant progress towards implementing our vision. In line with our business strategy, premised on proximity to our clients, we now have a presence across six countries in Africa through a network of branch offices and well-capitalised subsidiaries staffed by highly skilled professionals.

1. We handle our **Nigerian** and **Anglophone** businesses through a branch office housed in Continental Reinsurance Plc head office in Lagos. Share of group revenue **40%**.
2. The **Kenya** subsidiary based in Nairobi was incorporated in 2012 and handles the Eastern operations. Share of group revenue **23%**.
3. The Southern African operations commenced operating through a joint venture subsidiary based in Gaborone, **Botswana**, in 2014 and later on in 2020, Continental Re Plc acquired 40% of the minority stake through its holding Company, CRe African Investments Limited. Share of group revenue **14%**.
4. In 2014, we also fully commenced operations in **Tunis** through a branch office to cater to Northern African/Maghreb clients. Share of group revenue **9%**.
5. In the CIMA region, we incorporated a subsidiary in Douala, **Cameroon**, in 2019. The Abidjan office, which was opened in 2012, continues to operate as a branch of the Douala subsidiary. Share of group revenue **13%**.



We've grown market share-our GWP from N11.6billion in 2011 to N53.6billion in 2020. PBT grew from N1.6billion to N4.8billion over the same period. Meanwhile, productivity (GWP/No. of staff) more than doubled from N201k in 2011 to N577k in 2020.

The Board of Directors for the subsidiary offices meet quarterly to review strategies and tactics and share best practice. Although each office

operates as an independent business contributing to the joint production of the Group, our staff collaborate for the benefit of the Group. If there's a problem anywhere, they jump in to support one another. Localisation has meant that the teams understand the clients' needs inside out and tailor our products to the clients' specific needs.

**We now have a solid foundation upon which to build the premier pan-African reinsurance company. We look to the future with confidence.**



# Q5.

## What is the biggest challenge CRe faces in the future, and how prepared is the Company?

Digitalisation. However, Continental Re’s future is bright because the focus of the new strategy period is digitalisation. I know the commitment of the incoming team to this, and I know they will succeed. This is both an exciting time and, at the same time, a challenging time for Continental Re to move to the next level.

But in terms of systems and process, we have paid close attention to the Group’s operational efficiency. Our initiatives aimed at delivering a group-wide integrated enterprise with cost and capital effectiveness are bearing fruit. Implementing the Group’s new Operating Model and Group’s ICT solution (SICS) is anticipated to improve operating efficiency significantly.

The business has put in place software that has increased the visibility of agile teams throughout the Group to minimise duplicative work and increase collaboration.

# Q6.

## Any final words?

I did not do it alone; I have never been so presumptuous. I wish to say that the support I have had from all the boards that I worked with and the teams across all our offices has been unprecedented. No CEO with that level of support can fail. Thank you for overlooking my shortcomings. We have a great company; let us make it greater. For Continental Re, the best is yet to come.

