

ACHFN Speakers Bureau

Speaker Biography

African & Caribbean
Heritage
FOOD NETWORK

Olukemi (Kemi) Atijosan

CO-FOUNDER



"Our food traditions carry centuries of knowledge - scientific, cultural, and spiritual. Preserving them is an act of cultural sovereignty."

Olukemi (Kemi) Atijosan, MBA, MIH, FRSA is a Yoruba woman from Nigeria whose deep, embodied knowledge of food, community and survival has driven one of London's most distinctive careers in food justice.

Biography

Olukemi ('Kemi) Atijosan, MBA, MIH, FRSA was born and raised in a village in Nigeria, where she learned early that food is never merely nutrition - it is memory, identity, kinship and resistance. It is from that foundation that she has built such a consequential career in food systems, community care and educational equity.

Kemi arrived in London in 1975, bringing with her a knowledge of food insecurity that most policymakers only read about. Rather than being diminished by that experience, she used it as a compass. She trained in Catering and Hotel Management at Middlesex Polytechnic and went on to earn a Masters in Business Administration from Strathclyde Business School. She eventually completed her MBA in Glasgow in 1983 with a one-week-old baby, a detail that speaks volumes about her determination and resilience.

Her early career was defined by a refusal to let public food services ignore the communities they claimed to serve. As a District Catering Manager in the NHS, she led one of the service's first continental breakfast pilots. In the London Borough of Hackney in 1987, she created the first multicultural (African, Turkish-Cypriot, Jewish and Asian) Meals-on-Wheels services in the borough - an act that was as much political as it was operational, insisting that minority ethnic elders deserved to eat the food of their own cultures.

She later extended this work in Lambeth, establishing Caribbean Meals-on-Wheels, and developed London Borough food policies that explicitly accounted for the city's diverse population at a time when diversity was an afterthought in institutional kitchens.

Throughout the 1990s, Kemi worked at the intersection of public accountability and private sector efficiency, managing multi-million pound catering contracts across London boroughs, winning ISO 9002 accreditation and negotiating directly with major food manufacturers to change their products to meet community standards (including pressuring McCain to alter their recipe for McDonald's chips).

In 2005, she founded Eagle Solutions Services Limited (ESSL), a food consultancy whose vision is to use food as a tool for transforming the lives of children, families and communities. ESSL has delivered food strategy and service improvement across ten London boroughs, contributed to the rollout of the national School Food Plan (alongside the British Nutrition Foundation and the Design and Technology Association), and engaged directly with the All-Party Parliamentary Group on School Food.

As a member of the London Food Board since 2017, Kemi has advised the Mayor of London on food strategy, bringing perspectives rooted in lived experience and global food systems thinking that institutional bodies too rarely hear.

Her commitment to Black food sovereignty has been one of the most defining threads of her work. In 2020, in direct response to the structural inequities laid bare by the Covid-19 pandemic, Kemi co-founded the African & Caribbean Heritage Food Network - an organisation that advocates for Black food sovereignty, raises standards of Afrocentric foods grown in, or imported to, the UK and challenges the systemic barriers that keep African and Caribbean food producers, importers and communities on the margins of Britain's food economy.

To all of this work, she brings a rare insider knowledge of how the food import chain functions, the challenges faced by Afrodescendant food importers, and the economic forces that drive up the cost of African and Caribbean foods on UK high streets. She is also a member of the Black Food Fund, contributing her decades of food systems expertise to efforts that build genuine economic power within Black food communities.

Her work is consciously international. Recognising that London's African food markets are a critical but overlooked part of the city's food chain, she has taken delegations to Nigeria, training farmers and exporters to meet UK food safety standards - working to ensure that the food sovereignty of Nigerian communities in London is supported by a safe, quality supply chain. This commitment also finds expression in product innovation: Kemi developed Avarah Flour, a versatile gluten-free cassava flour offering a diabetic-friendly carbohydrate alternative rooted in the African food tradition; a product that draws on ancestral knowledge to meet contemporary health needs.

In 2015, she climbed Mount Kilimanjaro as a breast cancer survivor to raise funds for charities including cancer research.

In 2018, she established a charity in memory of her parents to provide start-up loans to rural women entrepreneurs in her home community - an act of economic solidarity that closes the circle between the world that shaped her and the world she works to improve. During the Covid-19 pandemic, she also helped establish a luncheon club at her local church to tackle isolation among Afrodescendant elders in Southwark, ensuring they received culturally appropriate meals.

Kemi has been married for over 50+ years, is mother to four children and grandmother to six. She established Latimer Educational Services, running Saturday school classes teaching Yoruba language and culture to children in Southwark...because she has always known that the knowledge carried in a language, like the knowledge carried in a recipe, is worth fighting to keep alive.

Olukemi Atijosan does not fit neatly into any single sector. She is a businesswoman, a community builder, an educator, a food justice advocate, a product innovator and a keeper of cultural inheritance. Her life's work is a demonstration that the most powerful solutions to the challenges facing a city like London are found not in boardrooms, but in the wisdom of people who have known both hunger and abundance...and who have the courage to refuse the erasure of either.

Areas of Expertise

- Cultural Preservation & Food Heritage
- Diaspora Knowledge Systems & Oral Traditions
- Food Justice & Community-Led Strategy
- Public Education, Research & Cultural Advocacy
- Curation, Convening & Interdisciplinary Practice

Speaking Formats

- Keynote: Thought-provoking reflections on food, identity, and cultural sovereignty

- Panel: Insightful contributions to cross-disciplinary and policy-driven conversations
- Fireside: Intimate, story-led explorations of heritage and lived experience
- Workshop: Interactive, community-centred sessions grounded in shared learning

Selected Engagements

- Heritage Lottery Fund Conference - Keynote Speaker. Exploring heritage, community memory, and cultural preservation
- Africa Writes Festival - Panel Moderator. Leading conversations on African and diasporic food narratives
- UCL Food Studies Symposium - Guest Lecturer. Contributing to academic discourse on food systems and identity
- City St George's Food Policy Symposium - Contributor / Speaker. Contributing to critical conversations on food policy, systems transformation, and cultural inclusion
- London Food Board - Member & Public Advocate. Supporting wider dialogue on food strategy, equity, and community-centred policy