

#AfricaMonth with... Yvonne Ndege

This week, we find out what's really going on behind the selfie with technophile Yvonne Ndege, Al Jazeera's West Africa correspondent who says her phone is practically an extension of her arm.



Ndege's had lots of practice smiling at cameras...

1. Where do you live, work and play?

Ndege: It feels like I live and work in the virtual internet world, as so much of what I do is transmitted online. But physically mainly in West Africa, in particular Nigeria. I play in London. I was born and raised in the UK and my immediate family, parents, siblings, and cousins are there. I travel home a lot to see them. I also love Kenya and France for holidays.

2. What's your claim to fame?

Ndege: Covering the Boko Haram Islamist uprising in Nigeria. I was the first international journalist to report on Boko Haram from Maiduguri, the epicentre of the crisis in 2009 when it started, and have covered virtually every aspect of the crisis for six years. I have also covered lots of powerful humanitarian stories across Africa involving my two great passions: refugee and children. I have also done a few terrorism reports in Paris, France that I am proud of. I have been fortunate enough to get rare interviews with the Nigerian President Muhammadu Buhari and his predecessor, ex-President Goodluck Jonathan. I've interviewed the richest man in Africa, businessman Aliko Dangote, which was interesting. I've done a lot, but in a nutshell it's been reporting serious news and current affairs through ordinary people telling simple, moving, compelling, profound and sometimes funny stories. And sometimes through powerful and wealthy people!

3. Describe your career so far?

Ndege: Ah, well, it's been 18 years long so far, but neatly packed. I worked for the BBC for 10 years in the UK, where I started my career as correspondent after university. I joined Al Jazeera eight years ago. At the BBC, I covered the UK and European news and current affairs. It was serious political stuff mainly. At Al Jazeera, I have covered lots of human stories.

4. Tell us a few of your favourite things.

Ndege: I love running and do so 3 to 4 times a week. I love playing around with hair and make up – very girly, I know. I love cooking and a good glass of wine or a gin and tonic from time to time. More seriously, I also love mentoring young people who want to get into the media. I am involved in my old university alumni activities. I studied at London School of Economics in the UK and we regularly hold activities around the world for ex-students and prospective students. I love working in teams.

and with other people. These are all simple things I just enjoy. But above all of them, I am in love with my 21-month-old daughter! She's my favourite person and I love spending time with her.

5. What do you love about your industry?

Ndege: The power to tell stories that put issues on the agenda to create a better, more peaceful and equitable world. Working for a major media outlet like Al Jazeera gives me a lot of reach to talk about the issues I care about.

6. What are a few pain points your industry can improve on?

Ndege: The industry is under a lot of pressure right now. Things are changing fast. Some people think anyone with a smartphone is a journalist. I think we can improve on providing context and analysis of issues – as opposed to just reporting facts. That's where media organisations who want to be a part of the future have to find an edge.

7. Describe your average workday, if such a thing exists.

Ndege: I am on call 24/7, so I have to be ready to go on air within 30 minutes on any given day. So my day starts with hair make up and wardrobe. After that I check Twitter, then Facebook for stories emerging from West Africa, the UK and Kenya – which I have an interest in.

8. What are the tools of your trade?

Ndege: My iPhone, my headphones, a hair brush and good lipstick. But above all that, it's the contacts in my phone. You need lots and lots of good contacts to identify good stories and bring them to TV.

9. Who is getting it right in your industry?

Ndege: Good question. I think different organisations are getting different things right. It depends. Al Jazeera is better than most at giving a human face to major global issues, as well as context and analysis. CNN is very good at breaking news. But there are many internet players now who are breaking stories and providing good video. The BBC is also very good at reach; the BBC has reporters everywhere. The BBC are also masters in excellent written analysis.

10. What are you working on right now?

Ndege: I am working on a piece about the impact of falling oil prices on the Nigerian economy. It does not sound like much fun but it is fascinating. Nigeria relies almost exclusively on oil exports for income, so with falling prices it's being forced to diversify its economy into other sectors, like agriculture and farming.

11. Where and when do you have your best ideas?

Ndege: Usually when working with a team, but I have the very best when I am working alone or jogging.

12. What's your secret talent/party trick?

Ndege: Dancing. I am quite good! I can also do a few disappearing acts.

13. What would we find if we scrolled through your phone?

Ndege: Lots of photos and lots of text messages with my story sources. Texting is my preferred way of communicating. I like to have things on record.

14. What advice would you give to newbies hoping to crack into the industry?

Ndege: The most important trait is self-confidence and self-belief. You must believe you can succeed and that you're good. The currency is having good ideas that can translate to TV/video, audio or text. It's all about approaches to stories that can capture a wider audience.

Read more about Ndege by [clicking here](#), and interact with her through her [Twitter feed](#), [Instagram account](#) and by subscribing to her [public posts on Facebook](#).

*Interviewed by [Leigh Andrews](#)

ABOUT LEIGH ANDREWS

Leigh Andrews AKA the #MilkshakeQueen, is former Editor-in-Chief: Marketing & Media at Bizcommunity.com, with a passion for issues of inclusion, belonging, and of course, gourmet and drinks! Now follow her travel adventures on YouTube @MidlifeMeander.
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