

PRESS RELEASE

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# 2025 RANA Prize Winner to Launch Women-Led Ride-Hailing Innovation in Nigeria

**Jakarta, June 24, 2025** – The International Selection Committee (ISC) of the **R-Adhikarya “Niche” Award (RANA)** and **Cornell University** proudly recognize **Ijeoma Obiedelu** of Nigeria as the 2025 RANA Prize recipient. Ijeoma was also selected as the **Commencement Speaker** at Cornell’s graduation ceremony on May 24, 2025—an honor awarded to an outstanding graduate student.

With support from the RANA Scholarship and the Institute for African Development Fellowship—together valued at approximately **US\$80,000**—Ijeoma earned her **Master of Professional Studies in Global Development** at Cornell University. She was also named an **Einaudi Director’s Fellow** at Cornell’s Institute for African Development.



## **Reclaiming Mobility: A Safe Ride-Hailing Platform for and by Women**

Upon returning to Nigeria, Ijeoma plans to launch a transformative, women-led ride-hailing service. Inspired by models like Uber and Grab, her platform is designed specifically **for and by women**, addressing urgent concerns around **safety, inclusion, and economic access** in the public transportation sector.

The startup aims to provide **safe, trusted transportation for women**—a direct response to the high risks of **harassment and gender-based violence** faced during daily commutes in Nigeria’s cities.

At the same time, the service will train and employ women as professional drivers, opening new pathways to **financial independence and leadership** in a male-dominated sector.

“By giving women greater control over their movement and futures, this initiative challenges outdated gender norms in a deeply practical way,” said Ijeoma. “It’s not just about mobility. It’s about dignity, opportunity, and safety.”

## **From Peacebuilding to Platform Building**

Before Cornell, Ijeoma served as a **UNDP Nigeria Jubilee Fellow**, working on climate security in conflict-affected areas through the **Building Blocks for Peace Foundation**. She is also the **Founder and Executive Director of the Forward Falls Initiative**; a nonprofit she launched to expand higher education access in underserved regions.

Since its founding, Forward Falls has supported over **1,000 students** from Nigeria’s **conflict-affected and marginalized communities**, a testament to Ijeoma’s ongoing work to promote education, equity, and development from the grassroots level.

“The RANA Prize has been a transformative catalyst for my work at the intersection of gender equity, mobility, and economic empowerment,” she shared. “It supports the development of a startup that not



only enhances safety, but also creates space for women to lead in one of the world’s fastest-growing industries.”

**Global Thinking, Local Action**

In her acceptance letter to Dr. Ronny Adhikarya, Ijeoma reflected, “The RANA Prize amplifies the visibility of my work, connecting me with thought leaders, collaborators, and policy advocates committed to inclusive infrastructure. It empowers me to scale a community-rooted solution while advancing my broader mission for systemic change in Africa and beyond.”

**Dr. Ronny Adhikarya**, founder of the RANA Award, applauded Ijeoma’s bold approach, “We are proud to support Ijeoma’s vision. She is tackling complex social issues with clarity and courage: precisely the kind of niche thinking RANA was created to recognize.”

**Professor Lori Leonard**, Chair of Cornell’s Department of Global Development, added, “While the pilot begins in Nigeria, Ijeoma sees this model as globally relevant. It’s an idea with the potential to shift how we think about gender, safety, and mobility around the world.”

Read the full story: [The Guardian Nigeria - Ijeoma Obiedelu’s Story](#)



**About the R-Adhikarya “Niche” Award (RANA)**

The **RANA Scholarship** honors individuals with **visionary and unconventional career paths** in fields that contribute to sustainable development. From 2020 to mid-2025, RANA has supported **12 winners** at top U.S. institutions: **3 at Stanford, 4 at Cornell, and 5 at the East-West Center.**

The award is a personal initiative by **Dr. Ronny Adhikarya** and his wife, **Mee-Ching**, in gratitude for the academic opportunities, intellectual capital, and fellowships provided by **Cornell and Stanford** that shaped his 50-year career with the **World Bank, United Nations/FAO, the East-West Center (EWC)**, and other international organizations.

**Kiroyan Partners**, a leading public affairs consulting firm in Indonesia, supports RANA’s communication and outreach activities and shares its commitment to developing the nation’s human capital.

Program overview: <https://bit.ly/RANA-PROSPECTUS>



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