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THE DIASPORA SPOTLIGHT

FROM

DIASPORA INVESTMENT DESK, **GIPC**

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FORD COMMUNICATIONS

Lakeshia Marie **Ford**

GHANA INVESTMENT PROMOTION CENTRE

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SPOTLIGHT

Lakeshia Marie **Ford**

DID **Kindly introduce yourself and what you do.**

LF I'm Lakeshia Marie Ford, I'm Jamaican-American. I founded a public relations agency, Ford Communications, to link businesses and audiences. I help international brands connect with their audiences across Africa. I also support Ghanaian businesses connect with their audiences locally and globally. I'm passionate about building the future of Ghana and Africa's connection to the Diaspora, specifically the Caribbean. I'm building spaces to energize trade and investment between Ghana and the Caribbean, through a platform called WoodxWatta (Wood and Water).

DID **How long have you been working for?**

LF Ford Communications is 6 years old. Prior to its founding, I worked in banking and across media companies such as Viacom/ MTV Networks and CNN International. I then transitioned to the public sector working with the Millennium Challenge Corporation in the Congressional Public Affairs Office and did a stint with the United Nations Information Centre here in Accra.

DID **What was your motivation for starting Ford Communications?**

LF My motivation to start Ford Communications is a combination of my academic fellowship to Ghana and my training in Public Diplomacy. I realized that African narratives, if not neglected, were deeply misrepresented in Western media and institutions. Further, there was an opportunity for Ghana and other African countries to activate concerted nation branding strategies. That gap specifically inspired me to stay in Ghana and start Ford Communications, to work with governments on nation branding,

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DID What services/products do you offer?

LF Ford Communications is a 360 public relations agency. We partner with our clients providing services ranging from public relations, media management, on-site talent management, event management, crisis management, digital marketing, to copy writing. We also produce special events.

DID What sector of Ghana's economy does your work focus on?

LF Ford Communications cuts across sectors. We work with public institutions and private entities in oil and gas, technology, agriculture etc. Since the Year of Return, our work is increasingly active in public sector institutions, technology companies and culture-focused brands and activations.

DID What informed your decision to work in Ghana?

LF My introduction to Ghana was in 2008, when Ghana had recently discovered oil on the Jubilee Coast. The country was vibrant and filled with growth potential. I knew I wanted to be part of Ghana's transformation and was inspired to push Ghanaian innovative companies globally. I continue to believe that Africa has many unique things to offer and that the more stories we push, the more we can increase awareness and realize business potential - both across the continent and around the world.

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DID **What notable successes have you chalked since you started this job?**

LF Through Ford Communications, I've been able to manage PR campaigns for Arsenal Football Club, World Remit, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and we've worked with Chance the Rapper and Vic Mensa on the inaugural Black Starline Festival, to name a few. We've also launched WoodxWatta (Wood and Water) a platform that is connecting the future of Africa and the Caribbean, through investment, trade and pop-culture, to name a few. We launched last year and will continue momentum with a second event. Looking towards the future, this year I'll build out a larger platform focused on highlighting Ghana's business ecosystems called Africa Beyond Travel ™

DID **What were the challenges you encountered while navigating Ghana's business ecosystem and how did you overcome them?**

LF Each organization is a reflection of the organisms. The team running operations and roles can make or break a business. I'd say hiring talent has been one of the challenging aspects of establishing and growing the agency. I realized the pain points and have incorporated tighter screening in the hiring process. Social vetting is also key. It's an unspoken part of the process, it's who you know and who knows the person coming into your organization. That information saves time and supports efficiency. It's still a lot of learning as things continually change.

DID **What are the positive outcomes so far in investing in Ghana?**

LF For me, one of the highest outcomes so far has been developing talent, ranging from my staff to training over 150 entrepreneurs with Impact Hub and the British Council. Today's entrepreneurs are the ones that will serve Africa's forecasted growth. It's imperative we build capacity on the individual level as well as the ecosystem.

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DID **Kindly send a word of encouragement to other diasporas looking to return home or invest in the limitless opportunities the country presents.**

LF First, I'd say come and visit with an open mind. There's a lot to enjoy and learn in Ghana. For more insights you can connect with me on Linked In or through any of Ford Communications social media platforms.

LF Through serving the business community with public relations, I believe we've contributed to the shaping of Ghana and Africa's narrative. When my clients win, we win. I've enjoyed landing international press for Ghanaian businesses on platforms such as CNN International, BBC and Essence Magazine for example. I truly want to see businesses and dynamic stories from Ghana enter the international markets to help shape and lead the narrative of Ghana and the African continent, at large.

Lakeshia Marie Ford on SOCIAL MEDIA

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Lakeshia Ford

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