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*Prof*

ADAEZE  
OREFH

INTELLECTUAL AUTHORITY AND GLOBAL HEALTH STRATEGIST

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## Kemi Ajumobi

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# Welcome!

Dear Readers,

Wait...we are already in the last month of the first half of 2026? Wow! I thought we just said Happy New Year not too long ago? Indeed time waits for no one. Not you, not me.

On this note, allow me to officially welcome you to June! We trust you are keeping safe and staying well? We pray for peace and safety in the land, and progress in all we do.

Now to our first cover guest for this beautiful month. There are people who are good in theory, and there are people who are great in practice. Then there are those gifted with the grace to execute both brilliantly in a way that leaves little or no room for questioning. We have one of such persons on our cover today, and she doubles as a scholar and leading health expert. She is Professor Adaeze Oreh, a Consultant Family Physician and the immediate past Honourable Commissioner for Health in Rivers State, Nigeria.

When I say this edition requires you jot things down, trust me, it does. From the hands of Prof Adaeze to our minds, I present to you this IWA special edition like never before. You will love it!

Here are other articles in this edition:

**HER POINT OF VIEW:** The "Support Role Cycle". Why So Many Brilliant Women Are Overlooked at Work. By Chinyere Okorochoa.

**WOMAN EXECUTIVE:** The Acquisition Seat: What Changes When Ownership Changes. By Wola Joseph-Condotti.

**FINANCIAL AdviseHER:** The Financial Gift Your Children Actually Need. By Sola Adesakin.

**HOLISTIC LIVING:** Workplace Wellbeing is a Collective Culture, Not A Corporate Perk. By Dr. Maymunah Yusuf Kadiri.

**IN THE NEWS:** Children Under Siege: Securing Schools, Safeguarding Generations. By Asmau Benzies-Leo

**WE'VE GOT MEN:** Serge Ekué, President, West African Development Bank.

**WOMAN AT THE HELM:** Rebecca Miano, Cabinet Secretary for Tourism and Wildlife, Kenya.

Remember, giving up is not part of the plan. Don't!

See you soon!



COVER INTERVIEW

# PROF. ADAEZE OREH

INTELLECTUAL AUTHORITY AND  
GLOBAL HEALTH STRATEGIST

Kemi Ajumobi



rofessor Adaeze Oreh is a Consultant Family Physician and the immediate past Honourable

Commissioner for Health in Rivers State, Nigeria. She has over two decades of private and public healthcare experience, and prior to her appointment as Commissioner, was the Country Director of Planning, Research and Statistics for Nigeria's National Blood Service Commission (NBSC) where she was actively involved in the process leading up to the enactment of the National Blood Service Commission Act 2021, and secured a grant from Fund for Innovation in Development (FID) for an innovative technology for transfusion to mitigate the impacts of blood shortage in Nigeria.

Prof. Oreh was also a Senior Health Policy Advisor with the Department of Hospital Services in Nigeria's Federal Ministry of Health, Adjunct Senior Lecturer with Baze University College of Medicine and Health Sciences teaching undergraduate Epidemiology, Health Policy and Planning, and Contemporary Issues in Public Health, and sat on the Governing Council of Pamo University of Medical Sciences - Nigeria's first private university of Medical Sciences.

She is a Senior Fellow for Global Health with the Aspen Institute in Washington DC, and a Fellow of the West African



**Whether it has been in the pursuit of knowledge, advancing my career in medicine and global health, or contributing my service in leadership, I have always felt that anything worth doing at all is worth doing excellently.**

College of Physicians contributing to the post-graduate training of clinical residents in Family Medicine, a Fellow of the Kofi Annan Global Health Leadership Programme, a Fellow of the Royal Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene and the Royal Society of Public Health, a Member of the White Ribbon Alliance for Safe Motherhood Global Strategy Advisory Group and the International Society of Blood Transfusion COVID-19 Working Group, Donors, and Donation Working Party, and Immune Therapy Sub-group.

With her vast experience and expertise in blood services in Africa, in 2021, she was invited by Harvard University (Harvard Kennedy School and Harvard T.H Chan School of Public Health) to support a cohort of master's degree students in a project on blood services in Nigeria; and recently contributed on a Global Expert Panel convened by the Belgian Red Cross-Flanders to develop a Manual on Blood Donor Recruitment in Africa.

Prof. Oreh holds a Bachelor of Medicine & Surgery (MBBS) degree from University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Master of Science (MSc) degrees in International Health Management from Imperial College and Public Health from the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, Fellowship of the West African College of Physicians in Family Medicine; and is currently awaiting presentation of her Doctoral Thesis in Global Health at the University of Groningen in the Netherlands.

Additionally, she holds Leadership, Management and Public Policy certifications from Harvard Kennedy School of Government, University of Oxford Said Business School, Harvard Chan School of Public Health, University of Bath, and the University of Washington.

Between 2009 and 2014, Prof. Oreh was the Coordinator in charge of Abuja Federal Capital Territory, Nasarawa,

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*My approach to all the roles that I have held and continue to hold is to first identify gaps within the system that could be improved upon*



and Niger States for Nigeria's then National Blood Transfusion Service, where she worked in collaboration with the Federal Ministry of Health, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and the US President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR). Her role was critical to national blood and emergency services policy formulation, data analytics and management, operations supervision, quality assurance and emergency preparedness and response.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, she

drew on her risk communications expertise, taking part in nearly 40 television and radio interviews nationally and internationally, and publishing over 60 editorials to help educate the public on the pandemic.

Before being appointed Commissioner for Health, she regularly conducted voluntary community medical outreach and advocacy campaigns through her foundation, Kaibeya Care Foundation Africa, providing medical and educational support to under-served communities in Northern Nigeria. She also sits on several non-profit boards in Nigeria and West Africa, volunteering, and supporting humanitarian initiatives in blood safety, medical services, maternal and child health, literacy, education, women, and youth empowerment.

A prolific writer on prevalent health and development issues in Africa, Prof. Oreh has authored publications in international, national, and local media outlets. She is a recognised advocate for respectful, dignified quality healthcare that addresses health inequities, universal health coverage and quality medical education in her advocacy and communication and has been invited to speak on several global platforms.

In March 2026, she was nominated 'African Mental Health Advocate of the Year' by Africa Golden Awards and spoke on topical issues such as Universal Health Coverage and Women's Leadership at the 78th World Health Assembly in Geneva in 2025, Ibrahim Governance Weekend in Marrakech in 2025, and at the 74th United Nations General Assembly in New York in 2019. A member of the third cohort (2023 – 2024) of the Kofi Annan Fellowship in Global Health Fellowship with the African Union, Africa Centers for Disease Control, and the Kofi Annan Foundation, she was an invited speaker at the third Conference on Public Health in Africa which held in Lusaka, Zambia in 2024.



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*These fellowships I am involved with provide a concrete platform for networking and collaboration that have greatly expanded my work and outcomes for population health and development*

A recipient of numerous outstanding awards, barely one year following her appointment as Honourable Commissioner for Health in Rivers State, some of the initiatives delivered under her watch included the kick-starting of the state's health insurance scheme – Rivers State Contributory Health Protection Programme, revival of 24-hours emergency medical services and ambulance system, establishment of acute malnutrition management sites, introduction of mental health services and primary eye care into the primary healthcare system, introduction of obstetric imaging in primary health care, the opening of a 750,000L/day medical oxygen plant, free malaria diagnosis and antimalarial treatment, expanded bedspace capacity in the state teaching hospital, unlocking promotion of health workers across the state, payment of 2-year residency training grant, full accreditation of undergraduate medical training and multiple specialties in the state university and teaching hospital among several others.

Prof. Oreh recently shared her career journey titled “Accessible Quality Healthcare – a doorway to improved wellbeing, opportunity, empowerment, and a better future” at TedX Abuja.

With over 125 publications on primary healthcare, infectious diseases, health systems and policy in peer-reviewed journals and mainstream media, her work has been cited by academics and researchers from across the world, and over the past year alone, her research has been cited in countries such as Australia, China, Singapore, India, United Kingdom, Ireland, Portugal, Hungary, Georgia, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, and Nigeria.

She is the co-author of two books, 'Lessons Life Has Taught Me' and 'Sickle Cell Disease in Sub-Saharan Africa,' with four (4) new books in various stages of publication.

► **What inspires you to consistently show excellence in your journey, career and leadership?**

I remember when I was about 13 years old and still in secondary school at the University of Port Harcourt Demonstration Secondary School, Choba. I had just received a gift. It was a blue and pink folder, where I could save notes and other stationary. In trying to personalise it, I thought of writing a quote. I must have spent hours thinking about it, and then I came up with one that to my teen mind was absolutely profound – “Perfection may not be attainable but aim for excellence anyway.” I was so proud of myself! Basically, I think that I have allowed that quote from nearly thirty-five years ago drive everything that I do. So, whether it has been in the pursuit of knowledge, advancing my career in medicine and global health, or contributing my service in leadership, I have always felt that anything worth doing at all is worth doing excellently. This is also something that I observed both my parents embody. Interestingly, the motto of Pamo University of Medical Sciences, my current stomping grounds, is “Excellence for the good of all.”

► **As a Global Health Senior Fellow with the Aspen Institute and other fellowships, how important is it to be a member of such bodies and what impact does it have locally and internationally?**

In 2019, I was one of 25 selected changemakers from countries such as Rwanda, Kenya, Ghana, Tanzania, Somalia, South Africa, Lebanon, Guyana, and Indonesia named Aspen New Voices Fellows by the Aspen Institute headquartered in Washington DC. We were selected from thousands of applications drawn from all over the Global South; to amplify and project the unique work we were doing in diverse aspects of healthcare, law, agriculture, entrepreneurship and innovative technology. This global fellowship offered me the opportunity

to closely engage with colleagues outside of my core profession, and gain insights and inspiration from some very challenging yet amazing work they are doing in their various fields. It also broadened my networks to past and future cohorts of the fellowship, some of whom have become close friends and collaborators locally and internationally. Before 2019, the fellowships I had held included those of the Royal Society of Public Health, and Royal Society of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene. However, those were specific to my profession. I have gone on to become a recipient of two other amazing continental fellowships. One is the Amujae Initiative founded by Her Excellency President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf which has since 2020 convened select cohorts of African women leaders in development, politics and governance and exposed us to high-level leadership gatherings and mentorship. The other is the Kofi Annan Fellowship in Global Health Leadership by Africa CDC which selects African public health leaders from across the continent based on their work and unique contributions to global health. The KAFGHL has definitely provided me with elite opportunities to acquire advanced skills in strategy, management and leadership in public health, ultimately aimed at Africa's public health transformation. These fellowships provide a concrete platform for networking and collaboration that have greatly expanded my work and outcomes for population health and development.

► **As the immediate past Honourable Commissioner for Health in Rivers State, what policies are you proud you initiated and implemented?**

Some of the initiatives I am most proud of in my time as the immediate past Honourable Commissioner for Health in Rivers State, include first kick-starting of the state's health insurance scheme – Rivers State Contributory Health Protection Programme. Interestingly, as at the time of my appointment, Rivers State was the only state in the federation that had not commenced its own state health insurance scheme despite having passed the law about two years before.



Other initiatives were the revival of 24-hours emergency medical services and ambulance system, establishment of acute malnutrition management sites, introduction of mental health services and primary eye care into the primary healthcare system, introduction of obstetric imaging in primary health care, the opening of a 750,000L/day medical oxygen plant donated by UNICEF, Canadian government and HIS Towers, donation of free malaria diagnosis and antimalarial treatment as part of the World Bank IMPACT programme, donation of cold chain equipment to support vaccine storage in Rivers State by the Oil Producers Trade Section (OPTS) a sub-group of the Lagos Chamber of Commerce and Industry, expanded

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*Rivers State has certainly given the country plenty of media content over the past nearly three years, for many reasons – both right and wrong*

bedspace capacity in the state teaching hospital, revitalisation of about 200 primary healthcare centres in collaboration with World Bank (135 centres) and National Primary Healthcare Development Agency through the Basic Healthcare Provision Fund.



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*I conceptualised and conducted global award-winning research on COVID-19 presented by International Society of Blood Transfusion and British Blood Transfusion Society respectively*

Additionally, the donation of a newly constructed and donated 20-bed Comprehensive Primary Healthcare Centre in Ndoni, Ogba/Egbema/Ndoni LGA by Pamo Educational Foundation which collaborates with the state government by providing quality medical and health training through state-sponsored scholarships. There is also a major medical industrial partnership which we revived, that I hope should be

made public soon enough. Evidently, attracting results-oriented partnerships formed a major part of my role as Commissioner.

Additionally, the employment of 2000 healthcare workers in a sector that had not seen the engagement of new personnel in over a decade, unlocking the promotion of health workers across the state that had been stagnated for over eight years, payment of 2-year residency training grants for resident doctors, full accreditation of undergraduate medical training and multiple specialties in the state university and teaching hospital, cutting across internal medicine, surgery, orthopaedics, paediatrics, obstetrics and gynaecology, and radiology; accreditation of the Rivers State College of Nursing Science with 142% increase in training quota, the commencement of work at the permanent site of the Rivers State College of Nursing Sciences with the support of the World Bank IMPACT project, and the expansion of digitalisation in the state health sector.

Other projects initiated include the completion of five (5) 200-bed capacity zonal hospitals, a drug rehabilitation centre, upgrading of the state neuropsychiatric hospital, and the construction of three new general hospitals. In addition, I led the Rivers State health sector to win the Primary Healthcare Leadership Challenge award by UNICEF, Gates Foundation, Aliko Dangote Foundation and National Primary Healthcare Development Agency (NPHCDA) for three (3) consecutive years – 2023, 2024, and 2025.

▶ **You have experienced the private sector, public service, and academia, what are the differences and how have these influenced or taught you generally?**

While, I was in the National blood Service Agency (then Commission), I used to be teased by several senior colleagues in development who were heading different international development organisations, that I worked for the federal government with a tenacity that would cause one to

believe that I was actually an international development partner staff seconded to support the ministry. It became a running joke! My approach to all the roles that I have held and continue to hold is to first identify gaps within the system that could be improved upon, communicate a vision, and work collaboratively with competent teams to create lasting change for the organisation or institution. Across these various spheres, it is always about the people who drive the work, and so, keeping them engaged and motivated is a common thread across the private sector, public service and academia. Thus, in the case of the public sector where remuneration may not be ideal, innovative ways of keeping the workforce inspired and motivated despite obvious setbacks can be enormously tasking but inherently vital to success.

▶ **Nigeria's National Blood Service Act 2021 was a landmark. What were the key policy gaps you helped address in the lead-up to its enactment?**

My first assigned task by the former Director-General of the National Blood Service Dr Omale Joseph Amedu, when I assumed office as the pioneer Country Director of Planning, Research and Statistics was to deliver a draft memorandum to be presented to the National Assembly by the then Minister of Health Prof. Osagie Ehanire. And this was just about two weeks to the scheduled public hearing. Talk about working under pressure! Obviously, I had never prepared a legislative memorandum for a Minister before, so, my team and I had to get to work immediately! It was a successful presentation and kicked off a high-speed chain of events that ultimately led to the passage of that landmark law for blood services in Nigeria by then President Muhammadu Buhari.

Some of the policy gaps that the enactment of the law sought to address included low proportions of regular voluntary blood donations, inability of the previous organisational structure of the institution to properly safeguard blood services in the country against

unscrupulous and potentially harmful practices, the lack of existing legislation in Nigeria to coordinate, regulate and ensure safe blood transfusion practice for the entire country in alignment with World Health Organisation (WHO) guidelines, and the need to criminalise the collection, storage, processing and transfusion of blood without adherence to established and recognised guidelines.

► **You secured a grant for an innovative transfusion technology to mitigate blood shortages. Can you describe the technology, its impact so far, and how you envision it scaling nationally?**

As Co-Principal Investigator at the National Blood Service, we successfully secured a substantial grant from Fund for Innovation in Development (FID) to conduct a controlled trial of cell salvage by microfiltration in gynaecologic and obstetric care in partnership with HemoClear BV as a pilot to the implementation of national autologous (patient-own) blood transfusion services in Nigeria. The goal of the pilot was to understand the optimal method of autologous blood transfusion service implementation, including the clinical and practical support requirements for successful implementation in low-and-middle income (LMIC) healthcare settings. The emphasis on patient-own blood transfusion is to reduce the use of donor blood and the associated risks and costs. This pilot revealed promising results in two high-capacity transfusion sites – one in the North and another in the South, and the outcomes of the pilot when publicized will feed into the lessons and recommendations for scaling not just nationally but to other low-and-middle income countries.

► **In your view, what are the biggest barriers to an efficient, safe, and equitable blood supply in West Africa, and what concrete steps can the government take to overcome them?**

There are myriad barriers hindering efficient, safe, and equitable blood supply in West Africa, and since I joined the National Blood Service in 2009, these

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*The process of assessment and evaluation for the rank of Professor was certainly not a walk in the park*



factors have been a major concern to me not just professionally, but also as a citizen and a mother. One thing I can say is that these obstacles are systemic. For one, there is an insufficient pool of readily available safe blood, drawn from poor voluntary non-remunerated blood donations, poor public health education, rampant risky lifestyle behaviour leading to potential blood donors being excluded and recipients at risk of infections such as HIV and hepatitis B and C, shortages in skilled personnel for donor counselling, blood collection, screening and blood processing. Furthermore, there is fragmented organisation, inadequate leadership and governance, limited funding, suboptimal access to trainings, and limited infrastructure. Added to these, the surveillance systems required to keep blood safe from donor to recipient are largely lacking. These systemic hindrances to the efficient, safe, and equitable blood supply of blood in sub-Saharan Africa have formed the basis of my second doctorate which I have been undertaking on a part-time basis with the Department of Health Sciences, University of Groningen, in the Netherlands. My thesis on this subject matter with recommendations for governments on the continent should be published and publicly presented by the end of this year.

► **Rivers state has been through interesting and challenging seasons, even while you were commissioner. What did that period teach you, what are you most hopeful for about the state and what does the state need to enjoy true progress and peace?**

As I often say to friends and colleagues, Rivers State has certainly given the country plenty of media content over the past nearly three years, for many reasons – both right and wrong. The period taught me very strong lessons in the power of faith, focus, and family. Working in a highly politically charged atmosphere, where your work literally made a difference between life and death for close to 10 million citizens was not a responsibility that I ever took lightly. I felt a keen sense of duty to the people of the



state who have every right to equitable, quality health care regardless of ethnicity or political affiliation. The Executive Governor, His Excellency Sir Siminalayi Fubara often reiterated this to me whenever I was privileged to raise certain healthcare initiatives with him. Regardless, the incessant political play had the potential of being tremendously distracting and detrimental to the regular women, men and children of the state. My faith in God however kept me centred, and my husband and family always kept me grounded. My dream is to see Rivers State transit to a point where the collective focus and ultimate end-goal is the growth and advancement of the state as one unifying entity, and where the needs of her citizens and residents are the drivers of governance for transformative change and development.

► **What role does data, research, and statistics play in decision-making for health systems reform and why must it never be ignored?**

Data, research and statistics are the foundational bedrock of health systems reform. They eliminate playing a guessing game when it comes to evidence-based policy, enabling governments and healthcare organisations to identify systemic gaps in leadership/governance, funding and financing, service delivery, workforce, information systems, and medical products and technologies. These can then translate to optimised resource allocation and continuously tracking the success of health interventions.

Throughout my professional career, whether in clinical practice or leading healthcare programmes, organisations and systems, I have been keenly interested in the role of evidence-based research and its intersection with health policy reforms. Strengthening data, leveraging sound statistics and conducting robust system-wide research were some of the activities that I led not just at the National Blood Service where I conceptualised and conducted global award-winning research on COVID-19 presented by International Society of Blood Transfusion and British



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*Insecurity with threats to life of not just medical personnel, but patients travelling from state to state, seeking quality medical care, including kidnappings and pervasive violent crime, compounded by economic and political instability are also responsible for medical tourism*”

Blood Transfusion Society respectively. Also, while practising Family Medicine clinically where I initiated research in collaboration with other clinical specialties such as Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Paediatrics, Haematology, Otorhinolaryngology, Gastroenterology, Cardiology and Nephrology and in 2021,

was awarded the Montegut Global Scholar Award by the World Organization of Family Doctors and the American Board of Family Medicine Foundation.

During the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, while the scientific community was exploring the potential of COVID-19 convalescent plasma, I was one of only two representatives from sub-Saharan Africa (representing Nigeria and South Africa respectively) coopted into the International Society of Blood Transfusion (ISBT) COVID-19 Working Group to conduct a series of research on the relevance of blood grouping systems and COVID-19 severity, the role of artificial intelligence and predictive modelling, and management of national blood transfusion systems in addressing blood needs during global emergencies. The global recognition of my research role in global blood safety and innovation and



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*Asides from work, being more intentional about self-care and spending more time with my family and loved ones is a major priority for me right now*

my work in risk communication and tackling blood donation myths and misconceptions led to an invitation in early 2023 from the Belgian Red Cross Flanders to join an Expert Panel to develop a Manual for the Recruitment of Voluntary Blood Donors in Africa which we completed and which was published in 2025.

Ensuring that the Rivers State Ministry of Health was more visible in research, data and statistics was therefore very important to me in that role. We therefore sought to leverage the Health Information pillar of our #Health4AllRivers healthcare delivery strategy to enhance healthcare delivery through digital transformation, with strategic emphasis on key focus areas such as Electronic Health Records (EHR), Telemedicine and Mobile Health, Health Information Management Systems, and Data-Driven Decision Making. Our team developed two novel data systems in the state – the Riv-HealthReg digital platform for registering and regulating healthcare facilities, and enhance efficiency, transparency, and accountability in facility oversight, and MedixTrak a Hospital Management Information System (HMIS) to streamline hospital administration, improve patient care, and reduce errors. Additionally, the Ministry of Health set up the Infectious Diseases Institute for Research and Development (IIRD) in collaboration with Rivers State University. Numerous papers have subsequently been published, and some are undergoing peer review across primary healthcare, health security, health financing, blood safety, emergency management and health systems reform. The importance of data, statistics and research cannot be over-emphasised, and when effectively deployed can contribute immensely to evidence-based resource allocation, performance measurement and accountability, disease surveillance and outbreak prevention, enhanced patient safety, clinical quality and programmes and outcomes evaluation.

The recognition of the importance of data by institutions and bodies such as the Federal Ministry of Health and Social

Welfare, Nigeria Governors' Forum and the Nigeria Health Commissioners' Forum has substantially enhanced health outcomes evaluation and state-to-state learning across the country over the past three years.

► **Nigeria's healthcare system is in dire need of attention. Medical tourism has become the order of the day and people who are to fix it are flying out for treatment. What is the way forward to revive this sector?**

One thing we need to realise is that the issue of medical tourism is drawn from many of the larger systemic issues that plague Nigeria's health sector, and it has hydra-headed effects on not just the health sector, but on the economy and nation-building.

In fact, drawing from findings from research I co-authored in 2023 with some colleagues, many of the system-wide issues that lead to the emigration or brain drain of health workers contribute substantially to the decision-making that prompts widespread medical tourism. Inadequately remunerated and demotivated healthcare workers, inadequate medical infrastructure, insufficient technology, and a severe lack of basic supplies necessary for effective patient care. Also, career frustrations such as slow career advancement, limited opportunities for postgraduate training, and frequent labour strikes. Added to that, the systemic insecurity with threats to life of not just medical personnel, but patients travelling from state to state, seeking quality medical care, including kidnappings and pervasive violent crime, compounded by economic and political instability.

While addressing medical tourism is a major responsibility of government, there are also roles that physicians, and other health personnel can play. For government, the impact of social determinants of health such as education, appropriate housing, clean water and sanitation, and security of lives and property which can predispose to health challenges is not talked about enough. In

In addition, deliberate policies should be implemented to improve contemporary medical technology, intentional investment in improving the quality of healthcare infrastructure, services, and worker remuneration in-country, and sustainable funding models to support domestic private sector participation across the healthcare value chain. For healthcare practitioners, knowledge and skills-building, adherence to medical ethics, awareness of available services within Nigeria in their areas of practice, and humaneness exhibiting respect, compassion, empathy, and consideration during clinical encounters, effective communication and patient involvement in the decision-making process.

► **Share details with us on your latest feat as Professor**

Being appointed Professor of Medicine by Pamo University of Medical Science (PUMS) was a culmination of an academic journey over 15 years in the making when I began conducting implementation research first on infectious diseases while with the National Blood Service. Despite leading public health programmes and being involved with postgraduate training through the West African College of Physicians Faculty of Family Medicine where I was the first resident to obtain the Fellowship of the College in that specialty from Garki Hospital Abuja, and had been considered for the Best Performing Candidate in the Part II examinations in my set, I still felt the need to give back to undergraduate medical training even if on an adjunct basis due to my obligations as Country Director of Health Planning, Research and Statistics at the National Blood Service. My first formal academic appointment was with Baze University, Abuja, as Senior Lecturer in the College of Medicine and Health Sciences, at the Department of Public Health where I contributed to the curriculum and taught Applied Epidemiology, Health Planning and Management, and Contemporary Issues in Public Health. I was also quite involved with supporting the institution with obtaining required regulatory body



accreditations. At the time, the then Vice Chancellor of Baze, Prof. Tahir Mamman (who later went on to become a Federal Minister of Education) had been quite impressed by my resumé but stated that I could not be engaged as a Reader (Associate Professor) as it was my first formal appointment in a tertiary institution. However, I was still delighted to have the opportunity to contribute to shaping the training of health professionals at the undergraduate level. So, following my exit from Cabinet, joining the academic faculty at Pamo University of Medical Sciences (PUMS) in Port Harcourt was the next logical step in my professional academic journey, and an opportunity for which I am most thankful. The process of assessment and evaluation for the rank of Professor was certainly not a walk in the park. I compiled a substantial proportion (three times the requirements of the university) of my published peer-reviewed academic papers and book chapters and resumé and submitted them for the first assessment by the Vice Chancellor of PUMS, Prof. Smith Jaja. After his favourable review, my papers and credentials were forwarded to distinguished Professors of Medicine and Surgery – Professor Emeritus Francis

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*Despite any challenges or setbacks you may face, persevere and succeed anyway*



Chinedu Akpuaka who holds a double professorial chair in Plastic/ Reconstructive Surgery and Anatomy, Professor Emeritus Musa Mohammed Borodo of Bayero University Kano who was the 21st President of the National Postgraduate Medical College of Nigeria, and Professor Ugochukwu Bond Stanley Anyaehie who is the current Vice Chancellor of Nnamdi Azikiwe University in Awka. To have them describe my academic profile and contributions as “prolific, meticulous, tireless, meritorious and deserving” was heartwarming and humbling.

Currently, PUMS is in the process of completing the undergraduate training of the fourth set of medical doctors from the institution. The positive feedback from the states across the country where the first three sets have gone on to practise after graduation has been quite rewarding to the institution – teaching hospitals in Ibadan, Ilorin, Ife, Enugu, Abuja, Lagos, and of course Port Harcourt to name a few have given rave reviews on the sound quality of doctors both in knowledge and character produced from the institution. Several PUMS doctors have gone on to achieve great exploits and recognition following graduation, that we could not be prouder. I am therefore now fully involved not just from the Board of Trustees or Governing Council perspective, but with the University Senate and Faculty of Clinical Sciences to ensure the highest standards of academic and clinical training for this set of soon-to-be doctors. That involves the co-development, updating and administration of the curriculum to reflect modern medical technology and educational frameworks leading to the Bachelor of Medicine, Bachelor of Surgery (MBBS) professional degree, provision of a clinical environment where medical students gain hands-on experience by participating in ward rounds, surgeries, and clinics under the supervision of consultant physicians. Only recently, students for the final year class attended the 5th Port Harcourt Cardiovascular Conference where they interacted with leading cardiologists and experts, were exposed to contemporary

cardiovascular practice, and participated in academic sessions, case discussions and practical workshops. It will be interesting to see how many of them will eventually go on to pursue the field of cardiology in future!

Furthermore, I will continue to conduct basic, translational, and clinical research to better understand disease processes and susceptibilities and transform care delivery processes. I will also be collaborating with colleagues in Community Medicine to support public health initiatives by organising rural health postings, vaccination campaigns, and health awareness programmes. I also will be involved in ensuring ongoing capacity building and pedagogical training for clinical faculty and academic staff.

► **What is up your front burner after being commissioner?**

So much on my professional plate as stated previously, however, this time away from a high-pressure environment such as the State Executive Council (and a Rivers State Exco for that matter) has given me ample time to push through on several projects that had been in some kind of

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***One's background, networks or gender may open the door, but it should be your vision, hard work, courage, and integrity that keep you in the room***



hibernation. I have four ongoing passion projects in various stages and hopefully should be able to share these sometime soon. Asides from work, being more intentional about self-care and spending more time with my family and loved ones is a major priority for me right now.

▶ **You have been involved in post-graduate training in Family Medicine and public health. What updates would you propose for curricula to prepare clinicians for evolving health system needs?**

Family Medicine and Public Health are two areas of medicine that thrive on keeping abreast of evolving health system needs. These are ingrained in both the training and practice of both specialties. While the formalised awareness of wider health system needs is an early requirement in the training of all medical and surgical specialties, except in unique situations of personal interest or where the trainee's supervisor or mentor has that health system interest, not many specialists endeavour to continue to keep abreast. This is therefore a weakness for those specialists who eventually qualify and find themselves in institutions where they need to navigate what is often a complex and constantly evolving system. One that is hugely influenced by multiple factors and interprofessional players and vested interests. I believe that to a large extent, any clinical specialist would greatly benefit from building on the training on health systems, policy and management received from the National Postgraduate Medical College of Nigeria and the West African College of Physicians at the commencement of their specialist training.

▶ **What policy and community-level actions are most effective in reducing gender disparities in health outcomes?**

In 2022, I published a sole-authored paper on women's health and rights with the Harvard Kennedy School (The John F. Kennedy School of Government) Africa Policy Journal. This article was based on the Nigerian context, and identified biosocial theories, historical antecedents, metrics relevant to maternal health, and



*In the words of the blogger turned New York Times bestselling author Mandy Hale, "When nothing is certain, anything is possible."*

the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, describing the potential of policy for rights-based interventions. In that somewhat lengthy discourse, I sought to address the prevalent inequity in access to safe basic and emergency obstetric care, disenfranchisement and disempowerment of women, women's rights and respectful maternal care in health care settings.

In that piece, I described the need for innovative strategies that are multisectoral, community-oriented and people-centered to help accelerate the response towards ending preventable maternal deaths. Any intervention which can close this gender gap in health outcomes in Nigeria must be designed with consideration of the broader economic, geographical, and social factors that affect the access of vulnerable Nigerian women to quality health services and thus provide culturally appropriate care in the community setting. This way, their individual values and fundamental human rights would be protected and assured.

▶ **What are your greatest life lessons and mantra?**

I have several personal and professional philosophies, and I will just highlight a few that I have shared in the past on

various platforms. First, despite any challenges or setbacks you may face, persevere and succeed anyway. Drawing inspiration from Kent Keith's paradoxes, I subscribe that we should all continue doing good, building, and helping others even when those actions are met with ingratitude or challenges. Second, leadership has no gender. I am a strong advocate for female empowerment and maintain that competence and capability should not be gendered. Successful leadership should rely on vision, hard work, and courage. One's background, networks or gender may open the door, but it should be your vision, hard work, courage, and integrity that keep you in the room. Third, find a way to integrate your authentic personality into your career so that you can harmonise your work and life more effectively, without relegating your personality and preferences to the back burner. Finally, as both an academic and a policymaker, I firmly believe that research should not just be for the sake of academia but must be translated into policies and actionable recommendations that transform behaviours and positively affect the wellbeing of all, especially marginalised communities. In my co-authored the book, an anthology titled, "Lessons Life Has Taught Me," I share nuggets from some of my career and life experiences.

 **Concluding words**

Two passages from the Holy Bible never cease to uplift and encourage me. First, Joshua 1:9 – “Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your GOD will be with you wherever you go.” Second, Jeremiah 29:11 – “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

That said, my concluding words to anyone who needs to hear them are that there are phases in life that we go through that may be filled with uncertainty. Questions on purpose, on placement, on positioning, and even on power. However, trust in GOD and in the power of seasons, embrace that uncertainty, enjoy the season you are in, use it to reflect, to better understand yourself, use it to grow, and use it to bloom. Believe me, the season of your answers will surely come. In the words of the blogger turned New York Times bestselling author Mandy Hale, “When nothing is certain, anything is possible.”

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*My dream is to see Rivers State transit to a point where the collective focus and ultimate end-goal is the growth and advancement of the state as one unifying entity*



WOMAN EXECUTIVE



# The Acquisition Seat: What Changes When Ownership Changes

By Wola Joseph-Condotti

**T**here is a particular silence that falls over an organisation the day ownership changes.

It is not fear. It is not relief. It is the collective held breath of people who have just been told that the ground beneath them has shifted, and are waiting to see whether it will still hold. I know that silence. I have stood in the middle of it. Twice.

The first time was in November 2013, when West Power & Gas Limited (WPG) acquired a controlling stake in Eko Electricity Distribution Company as part of Nigeria's historic power sector privatisation. I was there as the pioneer Chief Legal Officer, helping to shape what a privatised utility would look like, navigating the unfamiliar terrain of moving from public service to private ownership.

The second time was in December 2025, when Transgrid Enerco bought

that same controlling stake from WPG. The difference this time was that, apart from a new board coming in, I was no longer at the side of the chair. I was being asked to sit in it. No runway. No rehearsal. Just a handover and a Monday morning.

Two acquisitions, twelve years apart, in the same company. And yet, the silence on both days sounded exactly the same. What I have learned across both seasons is that leading through an acquisition is a different discipline from leading through growth, or even through crisis.

Growth has momentum. Crisis has adrenaline. Acquisition has ambiguity. And ambiguity is the hardest environment for a team to stand upright in.

### The First Lie of Transition

The first lie a new leader is tempted to believe is that ownership change requires identity change. That new shareholders want a different company than the one they just bought.

They do not.

They bought what works. What they want is for what works to keep working, and for what does not, to be fixed without drama.

The second lie is the opposite. That nothing should change at all. That continuity means stillness.

It does not.

The real work of the acquisition seat is learning to distinguish what is transitional from what is transformational. Transitional matters require steadiness, clear communication, and the protection of trust.

Transformational matters require courage, conviction, and the willingness to decide before everyone is ready. Confuse the two, and you will either paralyse the company or destabilise it. Both are forms of failure.

### Holding the Room

In the first weeks, I learned that a leader's most important product during a transition is not strategy. It is presence. Staff do not need a new vision deck on day three. They need to see you in the corridor. They need to know the building still has a head. They need to hear questions answered, the small ones and the large ones, with the same composure. Leadership in transition is deeply pastoral work. You are not just managing a balance sheet. You are managing the emotional economy of hundreds of people who have questions they are too professional to ask out loud. Will I still have a job? Will the culture survive? Is the leader I report to still the leader I report to? Does anyone know what is happening, and will they tell me

when they do?

If you do not answer those questions clearly, honestly, and repeatedly, the silence will answer them for you. And the silence always lies.

### Legitimacy Is Earned, Not Inherited

Here is the hardest truth about the acquisition seat: the title does not confer authority. The board can hand you the role. They cannot hand you the room. Legitimacy under new ownership is earned in the first 90 days, and it is earned in small, unglamorous ways. Keeping your word. Making decisions when you said you would make them. Defending good people. Releasing the ones who must go, with dignity. Being the same person in the boardroom as in the back office.

### A Steward, Not a Successor

Scripture offers a quiet model for this season in the life of Joseph. When Pharaoh placed him over Egypt, Joseph was not the owner. He was a steward. And yet he governed with such integrity that when the famine came, the nation did not collapse. He did not treat the assignment as his. He treated it as entrusted. That is the posture of the acquisition seat. You did not build the company. You may not own it tomorrow. But while you are "in the chair", you are accountable for what happens in it.

### Final Thoughts

Ownership changes. Markets change. Boards change. What must not change is the quality of your character in the chair. Because in every transition, people are watching to see not just what you will do, but who you will be while you do it. And long after the transaction is filed away and the press release is forgotten, what will be remembered is whether you held the room with grace, or let the silence do the talking. The acquisition seat is not just a leadership assignment. It is a stewardship test. And stewardship, faithfully held, is how you earn the right to lead.



## Wola Joseph Condotti

Chief Executive Officer,  
Eko Electricity Distribution Company

Wola is the CEO of Eko Electricity Distribution Company (Eko Disco).

Prior to her current role, she was the Group MD/CEO of West Power & Gas Limited, the parent company of Eko Electricity Distribution PLC (EKEDP) and six other affiliate companies with interests in both conventional and renewable energy sectors. In addition to this role, she serves as the Director of the Power and Renewable Division at the Women in Energy Network (WIEN) in a non-executive capacity.

Wola Joseph Condotti was also the pioneer Chief, Legal & Company Secretariat at EKEDP. During her tenure, she also held multiple key positions simultaneously including Head of Regulatory Compliance, Chief Human Resources and Administration Officer, Supervising Chief of the Customer Service Department, and Data Protection Officer. Her previous experience includes roles as General Counsel/Company Secretariat Lagoon Home Savings and Loans, and Legal Associate at Banwo & Ighodalo.

Wola holds a law degree from the University of Ibadan, an LLM in International Finance Law from Harvard Law School, and an MBA from INSEAD Business School. She is also an International Finance Corporation (World Bank) Board Evaluation Certified Professional and Corporate Governance Trainer.

Wola's achievements have earned widespread recognition. Most recently, she received the inaugural Leadership Excellence Award of the Year at the Legal Era Africa Awards 2024, becoming the first-ever recipient of this category. The award celebrated her historic transition from General Counsel to Group MD/CEO, a milestone applauded for redefining leadership pathways in the legal profession.

She is a member of the Institute of Directors and the Society for Corporate Governance Nigeria. Additionally, she is an associate member of the Institute of Chartered Secretaries and Administrators of Nigeria, and Women in Management, Business, and Public Service.

## FINANCIAL AdviseHER



# The Financial Gift Your Children Actually Need

What we need to transfer is financial thinking, the ability to understand money, make decisions with it, and not be afraid of it.

Start with money conversations at home. Not lectures, conversations. Children absorb beliefs about money from the environment around them far more than they do from anything explicitly taught. If money in your household is only ever discussed as a source of stress, scarcity becomes their default frame. If they occasionally see you reviewing a budget, hear you talk about an investment decision, or watch you decline something because it does not fit the plan right now, they begin to understand that money is manageable. That it responds to decisions. That is the foundation everything else is built on.

Give them practice with real money early. A child who receives N2,000 a month and decides how to split it between spending, saving, and giving is learning more than most adults give them credit for. When a child saves for three months to buy something they want and walks away with it using their own money, the lesson about patience and value is not theoretical

anymore. It is in their body. That lesson stays.

For parents with children under ten, the most powerful financial move you can make right now is opening an investment account in their name and putting something consistent into it. N10,000 a month invested from age three in an instrument returning 12% annually becomes approximately N9.5 million by the time that child turns 21. That is not a fantasy. That is compound interest running its full course. Not every parent can do N10,000, but N3,000 consistently beats N20,000 done once and forgotten. Consistency is the variable that matters most.

For parents of teenagers, the conversation needs to become more direct. Let them see what things actually cost. University education at a decent Nigerian private institution now runs between N800,000 and N3 million annually depending on the school and programme. Abroad is a different number entirely. They need to understand what that means, what it requires, and why the financial decisions being made in your household today are connected to the options they will have tomorrow. These are not conversations that

burden children. They are conversations that prepare them.

Talk to your teenagers about credit before the world introduces it to them on worse terms. Explain what it means to borrow, what interest does to the actual cost of something, and why paying on time is not just a rule but a reputation that follows you financially. The earlier they understand this, the less expensive their education in this area will be.

And think about what happens to everything you have built if something happens to you. A will is not morbid. It is one of the most practical financial documents you can have as a parent. Without one, assets you spent decades assembling can end up in legal processes that take years, cost money, and sometimes deliver outcomes you would never have chosen. If you have children and no will, writing one is not a task for later. It is overdue.

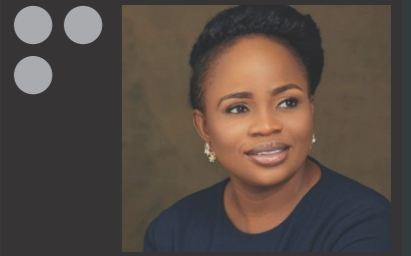
The best inheritance is not just an asset. It is a mindset that knows what to do with one. Build both, and your children will start their adult lives on completely different ground than most.

By Sola Adesakin

**O**ne of the most loving things you can do for a child is not just pay their school fees. That matters enormously, but it is table stakes. The deeper gift, the one that keeps working long after they leave your house, is giving them a relationship with money that actually serves them. Not just survival

instincts. Real financial fluency.

Most of us are raising children in a world that looks almost nothing like the one we grew up in. The jobs they will have may not exist yet. The economy they will navigate will have instruments and opportunities we are only beginning to see. Which means transferring our specific financial story is not enough.



By Sola Adesakin

Founder and Lead Coach,  
Smart Stewards

Sola Adesakin is a highly respected wealth coach and chartered accountant with over two decades of transformative impact in the finance industry. As the visionary founder of Smart Stewards Financial Advisory Limited and Smart Stewards Advisory LLC, she has revolutionized the financial wellbeing of countless individuals and businesses across 40 countries. Her methodical approach to 'make-manage-multiply' money principles has elevated many from financial stress to prosperity, and mediocrity to exceptional achievement.

Sola is a strong supporter of SDG5 and SDG10, as she seeks to close the gender gap and reduce inequality through financial education, financial technology, and access to funding. Sola's dedication to achieving gender equality and reducing inequality is evident in her work as an alumna of the Academy for Women Entrepreneurs, an initiative of the US Embassy in Nigeria, and the Cherie Blair Foundation's Road to Growth Program. She is also an alumna of Goldman Sachs 10,000 Women program and a member of the Select Global Women in Tech (SGWIT) Mentorship Network of the United States of America. Through the FRUIT Foundation, which she serves as Founder and CEO, she has partnered with the US consulate in Nigeria to champion the economic empowerment of women, assisting them to start and scale their business ventures.

Her impressive academic credentials include a BSc and an MBA degree from Oxford Brookes University and Edinburgh Business School, respectively. She is a fellow of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Nigeria (ICAN), the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants of the United Kingdom (ACCA), and a member of the Chartered Professional Accountants of Canada (CPA). In addition to her impressive credentials, Sola Adesakin is also a Certified Financial Education Instructor<sup>SM</sup> and a member of the Personal Finance Speakers Association.



HER POINT OF VIEW

# The “Support Role Cycle”. Why So Many Brilliant Women Are Overlooked at Work

Chinyere Okorochoa

Recently, I had a conversation with a female executive that stayed with me long after our meeting ended.

On paper, she was exceptional. Highly competent. Dependable. Intelligent. Hardworking. The kind of professional every organisation says it wants. She consistently delivered results, supported her team, met deadlines, solved problems, and carried responsibilities that were often beyond her job description. Yet despite all her hard work, she felt invisible.

She watched less experienced colleagues receive promotions. She saw others invited into high-level meetings and strategic conversations while she remained the dependable “go-to” person behind the scenes. Leadership trusted her to execute, but not necessarily to lead.

Her frustration was evident when she finally said to me: “Chi, I feel like I’m doing everything right, yet I’m standing still.”

What she was experiencing is something I have seen repeatedly in the careers of many brilliant women. I call it the Support Role Cycle.

These women become so valuable in execution that they are unintentionally overlooked for strategy and leadership.

They are the organisers.

The fixers.

The dependable team players.

The women everyone relies on to “hold things together.”

But while they are busy helping others shine, they quietly neglect their own visibility, positioning, and leadership narrative.

The truth is this: many women have built careers around being helpful instead of being strategically visible.

And unfortunately, the corporate world does not always reward invisible excellence.

One woman once shared with me how she spent years mentoring junior colleagues, assisting senior executives with presentations, stepping in during crises, and consistently delivering outstanding work. Yet when a leadership role became available, it was given to someone externally recruited.

## Why?

Because leadership saw her as indispensable support and not as a strategic decision-maker. That distinction matters.

At senior levels, promotions are rarely based solely on hard work. They are based on perception, visibility, influence, and leadership positioning. Organisations begin asking different questions:

Who can represent the company?  
Who can influence stakeholders?  
Who can lead transformation?  
Who can think strategically under pressure?

This is why many hardworking professionals become frustrated. They believe effort alone should speak for itself. But in reality, visibility and positioning are equally important.

Over the years, I have learned that career acceleration is not always about doing more work. Sometimes, it is about changing how leadership experiences your value.

The executive I mentioned earlier and I worked together intentionally for ninety days. But contrary to what many assume, we did not focus on working longer hours or increasing productivity.

Instead, we focused on repositioning.

We refined how she communicated during meetings. We strengthened her executive presence. We shifted her contributions from operational updates to strategic insights. We identified opportunities for her to lead visible projects rather than remain in purely supportive roles.

Most importantly, she stopped presenting herself as “the helper” and started showing up as “the architect.”

The transformation was remarkable.

A few weeks ago, she called me excitedly. Not only had she finally received the promotion she had long deserved, but she had also been selected to lead one of the organisation’s most important strategic task forces.

## What changed?

Not her intelligence.  
Not her competence.  
Not even her work ethic.  
What changed was her positioning.

This challenge is particularly common among women because many of us were raised to believe that humility means silence, and that excellence should naturally be noticed without intentional visibility. But leadership does not work that way.

If people only associate you with support, they will continue to keep you in support roles.

So how can women break out of this cycle?

First, stop hiding behind execution alone. Learn to contribute strategically during meetings. Do not just present problems; present solutions, insights, and ideas.

Second, increase your visibility intentionally. Volunteer for projects that place you closer to decision-making and leadership conversations.

Third, document and communicate your impact confidently. Too many women minimise their achievements while others amplify theirs.

Finally, start thinking beyond your current role. Ask yourself regularly: “How do I want leadership to experience me?”

As a helper?  
Or as a leader?

Every woman deserves to be seen not only for how well she supports the vision, but also for her ability to shape it.

Because true career acceleration begins the moment you stop waiting to be noticed and start positioning yourself to be remembered.



## Chinyere Okorochoa

Partner in the Law Firm of JACKSON, ETTI & EDU

With over three decades of experience as a trailblazer in the legal profession, Chinyere Okorochoa has established herself as a leading voice in law, leadership, and career growth for women. As a partner in one of the most prestigious law firms in the country, she has not only navigated the complexities of a competitive industry but has consistently broken barriers to become a sought-after leader, mentor, and advocate for women in the workplace.

Chinyere’s career journey is a testament to her resilience, vision, and versatility. She has held numerous leadership positions, served as a director on multiple boards, and is widely admired for her strategic thinking and ability to inspire teams toward excellence. Beyond her professional accomplishments, she has also graced stages as a speaker, sharing insights on leadership, career growth, and the unique challenges women face in their professional lives.

A devoted wife and proud mother of three, Chinyere understands firsthand the challenges of balancing the demands of a thriving career with a fulfilling personal life. Through her own experiences, she has mastered the art of work-life integration, demonstrating that women can achieve extraordinary professional success without sacrificing the joys of family and personal well-being.

Her career development platform, Heels & Ladders, is dedicated to mentoring and guiding women who aspire to redefine success, achieve career mastery, and lead with purpose. Whether you’re navigating leadership challenges, striving for balance, or looking to amplify your influence, Chinyere’s expertise will help you transform ambition into achievement.

IN THE NEWS

# CHILDREN UNDER SIEGE: Securing Schools, Safeguarding Generations

Asmau Benzies Leo



## 27th of May was Children's Day

Nigeria marked it with the usual colour and ceremony; marching bands, bright uniforms, speeches filled with hope. But beneath the pageantry laid a painful contradiction: across both the northern and southern regions of the country, schools are no longer safe spaces. For too many Nigerian children, the classroom has become a place of fear.

In recent years, school kidnappings have evolved from isolated incidents into a disturbing national pattern. From the insurgency ravaged communities of the North to the relatively stable towns of the South, no region can now claim immunity. The recent abduction of schoolchildren in Oyo State and repeated attacks in Askira Uba, Borno State, underscore a chilling reality that "Nigeria's education system is under siege".

In Oyo, armed men invaded a school, disrupting learning and shattering the illusion that such horrors are confined to distant conflict zones while in Askira Uba, attacks on schools have become tragically familiar, leaving communities traumatised and forcing parents to withdraw their children from education altogether. These incidents are not mere

security breaches; they are direct assaults on Nigeria's future.

Let us be unequivocal: when children are no longer safe in school, the nation has failed in one of its most fundamental responsibilities. Education is not merely a social service, it is a right, a pathway out of poverty, and a cornerstone of national development. Every child forced out of school by fear represents a lost opportunity, a dimmed future, and a weakening of the nation's human capital.

The implications are profound. School closures, declining enrolment, and psychological trauma are eroding decades of progress in education. Insecurity has created a generation of children who associate learning with danger. For girls in particular,

the risks are even more severe, as abduction often exposes them to gender-based violence, forced marriage, and long-term social exclusion.

Nigeria's commitment to the Safe Schools Initiative and the Safe Schools Declaration, signed in 2015, was meant to address precisely this crisis. Yet, more than a decade later, implementation remains slow, fragmented, and largely ineffective. Policies exist, but protection on the ground is glaringly insufficient.

Our educational system is under attack and this must change, and urgently. What then can we do about this?

First, the Safe Schools Declaration must be domesticated into enforceable legislation across all states. Without legal backing, it remains a moral commitment with no teeth. Governments at both federal and state levels must allocate dedicated funding for school safety and establish clear accountability mechanisms for implementation.

Second, a comprehensive national security audit of schools is imperative. Every school, public and private, rural and urban, must be assessed for vulnerabilities. Security measures such as perimeter fencing, controlled access points, alarm systems, and trained guards should be mandatory minimum standards.

Third, community-based security systems must be strengthened. Local intelligence is often the first line of defence. By integrating community leaders, vigilante groups, and parent associations into formal security frameworks, early warning signals can be detected and acted upon swiftly.

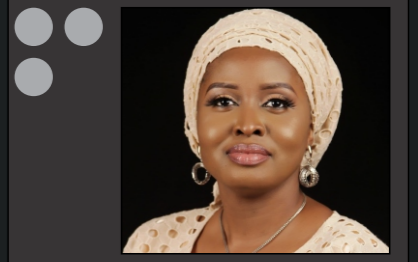
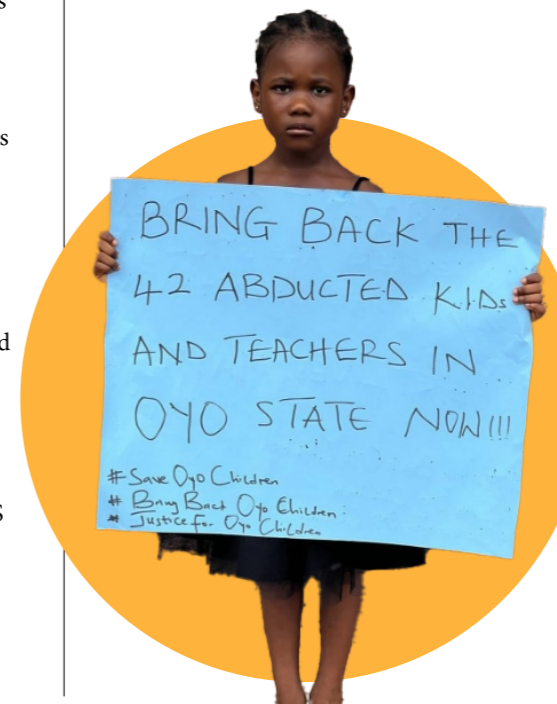
Fourth, technology must be leveraged. Simple but effective tools such as emergency communication systems, GPS tracking for school transport, and rapid response hotlines, can significantly improve response times during crises.

Fifth, survivors of school abductions must receive sustained psychosocial support. Trauma does not end with rescue. Without proper care, affected children may never fully return to normal learning environments. Mental health services must be integrated into school systems, particularly in high-risk areas.

Finally, accountability must be enforced. School proprietors and administrators who fail to meet basic safety standards must face sanctions. The safety of children cannot be optional or negotiable.

Though Nigeria celebrated Children's Day on the 27th of May 2026, the message must go beyond celebration. It must be a moment of reckoning. A nation that cannot guarantee the safety of its children in schools is a nation at risk of losing its future.

These responsibilities lie with government, security agencies, communities, and indeed all citizens. Protecting schools is not merely a policy issue, it is a moral imperative. Nigeria must act decisively to reclaim its schools as sanctuaries of learning, not theatres of fear. The time for speeches has passed. What is needed now is action, visible, measurable, and immediate. Anything less is a betrayal of the very children we claim to celebrate.



### Dr. Asmau Benzies Leo

Executive Director, Centre for Nonviolence and Gender Advocacy in Nigeria (CENGAİN)

Dr. Asmau Benzies Leo is a development practitioner with extensive national and international expertise in gender equality, peace-building, governance, and humanitarian action.

She holds a PhD in Public Governance and Leadership, a Master's degree in Conflict Management and Peace Studies, and executive certifications from leading institutions including Howard University, Harvard University and Glasgow Caledonian University.

As Executive Director of the Centre for Non-violence and Gender Advocacy in Nigeria (CENGAİN), she has led ground-breaking advocacy initiatives on women's political participation, gender-based violence prevention, and security sector reform across multiple World Bank, UN and EU-supported projects.

Internationally, Dr. Leo has represented civil society at the United Nations, contributed to regional dialogues on Women, Peace and Security, and partnered with global networks advancing gender justice and inclusive governance.

She is a UN Recognised Global Ambassador on Women, Peace and Security. Her expertise bridges grassroots action with policy advocacy, making her a respected voice in advancing gender equality and sustainable peace in fragile and conflict-affected contexts.



WOMAN AT THE HELM

# Rebecca Miano

Cabinet Secretary for Tourism and Wildlife, Kenya

**R**ebecca Miano is a seasoned public servant and corporate leader with a track record of steering complex, high-stakes initiatives. A Kenyan lawyer, she currently serves as Cabinet Secretary for Tourism and Wildlife in Kenya.

From November 2023 to July 2024, she served as the Cabinet Secretary for Investments, Trade and Industry, a role she stepped into after being reassigned from the Ministry of East African Community, ASALs and Regional Development under Executive Order No. 2 of 2023. In that period, she brought a pragmatic, hands-on approach to policy and project execution, drawing on decades of experience to navigate Kenya's investment, trade, and industrial priorities.

Before her tenure in the Cabinet, Miano led KenGen as the first female Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer starting in 2017. Under her leadership, the company prioritised reliability, efficiency, and sustainable energy solutions, positioning KenGen as a

pivotal player in Kenya's power sector. She championed renewable energy development, corporate governance, and gender inclusion initiatives, including the establishment of the Pink Energy Forum.

Her earlier responsibilities at KenGen were diverse and influential: she served as Company Secretary and Corporate Affairs Director, Acting Human Resources and Administration Director, and Legal Affairs Director. This breadth gave her a holistic understanding of both the regulatory landscape and the organisational dynamics essential for large-scale utility governance.

Her professional journey spans 33 years of legal and strategic work that has touched both local and international communities. Notably, she has contributed at the global level, including service on the United Nations Global Compact Board as Vice-Chair for Global Compact Kenya.

She has also been a member of

the World Bank Group's Gender and Development Council and represented Africa as the sole member of the COP26 Presidency Business Leader's Forum, among other prestigious roles. These positions reflect her commitment to inclusive growth, gender advocacy, and collaboration across borders.

Born in 1966 in Ndaragua, Nyandarua County, Kenya, she attended Kapropita Girls High School in Baringo County before pursuing a Bachelor of Laws (LL.B) degree at University of Nairobi. She also enriched her leadership toolkit with an Advanced Management Programme at Strathmore Business School in collaboration with Navarra University, Spain. She completed the Advocates Training Programme at the Kenya School of Law and earned a Master of Laws (LL.M) in Comparative Law from Australian National University.

WE'VE GOT MEN

## Serge Ekue

President, West African Development Bank



**S**erge Ekue is the President at West African Development Bank (BOAD). The bank's objectives are to promote the balanced development of its member states and to achieve economic integration in West Africa. It also includes raising domestic funds to finance development initiatives and stimulating the regional capital market.

Drawing external resources into the region is core among the missions assigned to the bank and under Serge's administration, the bank has lived up to her values.

This remarkable feat of excellence in aligning to the goals of the bank didn't start for Serge today, in fact, in the first six months of office, from September 2020 to the end of March 2021, the bank granted Union economies a total volume of financing of 256.1 billion FCFA (390 million euros) for 24 projects in finance and insurance (38.2%), transport, energy and sanitation infrastructure (35.8%), health and education (12.1%), industry (7.8%) and agriculture and rural development (6.1%).

Serge is a confident and proficient professional. He is globally recognised for his expertise in financial and capital markets. He was head at Natixis' Capital Markets activities for the Asia-Pacific region between 2010-2016, before assuming the position of Chief Executive Officer of the Hong Kong-based bank.

Serge has over two decades of professional experience in international and structured finance with global footprints to show.

He is a graduate of Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Bordeaux and holds a post-graduate degree in Banking & Finance from Paris V University and an Executive MBA from HEC Paris.

He is also the President of International Development Finance Club (IDFC), an association of like-minded development banks, where members operate within the framework of development policies of their respective countries and assist their respective governments in fulfilling their national and international commitments, and within the framework set forth by their constitutive documents.

HOLISTIC LIVING

# Workplace Wellbeing Is A Collective Culture, Not A Corporate Perk



By Dr. Maymunah Yusuf Kadiri

In today's high-performance world, workplaces have become more than sites of productivity; they have become ecosystems that shape how people think, feel, and live. Yet, across industries, one dangerous illusion persists—the belief that mental health is a personal responsibility rather

than a shared, systemic reality. The truth is far more complex. Wellbeing at work is not built through isolated self-care routines; it is created through culture, community, and conscious leadership.

Consider the story of HarmonyTech, a thriving company that chose a different path. At a time when most

organisations were chasing output at all costs, HarmonyTech made a bold decision: to prioritise the human experience behind performance. Their transformation did not begin with policies, but with perspective. They understood that people do not leave their emotions, stress, or struggles at the office door. They bring their full selves to work and the workplace, in

turn, shapes who they become.

At the centre of this shift was a simple but powerful idea: collective wellbeing. Initiatives like guided mindfulness sessions, wellness programmes, and access to counselling were not treated as optional extras, but as essential pillars of a thriving organisation. What began as small, structured interventions soon evolved into something deeper—a culture where people felt seen, supported, and safe.

The results were not accidental. They were predictable. When people feel psychologically safe, they think better, collaborate better, and perform better. Research by the World Health Organization shows that depression and anxiety cost the global economy an estimated \$1 trillion annually in lost productivity. However, for every \$1 invested in mental health treatment, there is a return of \$4 in improved health and productivity. This is not just a health conversation; it is an economic one.

The real issue goes beyond stress management or productivity metrics. It is about how we define health in the first place. True wellbeing is holistic. It includes mental clarity, emotional stability, physical vitality, social connection, and a sense of purpose. When any of these elements are neglected, individuals suffer and so do organizations.

Workplace environments can either nourish or deplete these elements. Excessive workload, unclear expectations, toxic leadership, and lack of autonomy are not just operational issues; they are health risks. Similarly, cultures that discourage vulnerability or stigmatise mental health create silent suffering, where employees continue to function outwardly while struggling internally.

Stigma remains one of the most significant barriers to workplace wellbeing. Many employees still fear being perceived as weak, incompetent, or replaceable if they speak up about their mental health challenges. This silence is costly. It delays intervention, deepens distress, and

ultimately impacts both individuals and organisational outcomes.

Breaking this cycle requires more than awareness campaigns. It demands intentional cultural design. Leaders must move from performative wellness to embedded wellbeing—where policies, practices, and daily interactions consistently reinforce care, respect, and psychological safety. This includes creating open channels for communication, training managers to recognise early signs of distress, and normalising conversations around mental health.

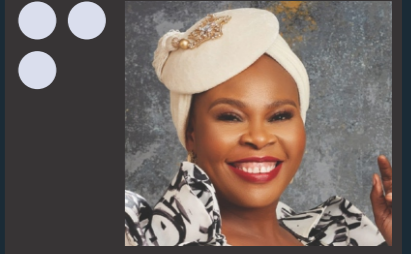
Equally important is the role of community within the workplace. When colleagues support one another, when teams operate with empathy rather than competition, and when organisations foster genuine connection, work becomes more than a task—it becomes a shared experience. In such environments, resilience is not forced; it is naturally developed through support systems.

Preventive strategies must also be prioritised. Flexible work arrangements, realistic performance expectations, and opportunities for rest are not luxuries; they are necessities in a sustainable work culture. Employee Assistance Programmes, mental health days, and access to professional support should be standard, not exceptional.

Ultimately, the question organisations must ask is not whether they can afford to invest in wellbeing, but whether they can afford not to. The future of work is not just about innovation, technology, or profit margins. It is about people.

The lesson is clear. A thriving workplace is not built on pressure alone. It is built on balance, connection, and care. When organisations shift from seeing employees as resources to recognising them as human beings, everything changes.

At the end, wellbeing is not an individual burden to carry. It is a collective responsibility to uphold and the organizations that understand this will not only survive, they will lead.



**Dr. Maymunah Yusuf Kadiri**

Psychiatrist-In-Chief at Pinnacle Medical Services

Dr. MAYMUNAH YUSUF KADIRI (aka DR. MAY) popularly referred to as "The Celebrity Shrink," is a multiple award winning Mental Health Physician, Advocate & Coach. She is the convener of "The Mental Health Conference" and the Medical Director and Psychiatrist-In-Chief at Pinnacle Medical Services, Nigeria's leading and foremost Psychology and Mental health clinic prominent in the application of innovative clinical approaches in the management/treatment of a wide range of psychological, emotional, and behavioral related disorders.

Dr. Kadiri is a dynamic Consultant Neuro-Psychiatrist and a Fellow of the National Post Graduate Medical College of Nigeria (FMCPsych) with almost 20 years' experience as a practicing Physician. She is a trained and certified Rational Emotive and Cognitive Behavioural Therapist from Albert Ellis Institute, New York, USA. She is also a certified Trauma Counsellor and Neurofeedback Practitioner.

Dr. Kadiri has wide experience in psycho-therapeutic techniques and has perfected her skills whilst in private practice and whilst working for a variety of organizations. She is a recognized radio and television guest Psychiatrist and Psychotherapist. She also contributes to articles published in magazines and newspapers.

She is the only Nigerian with the 14Ps.....Physician, Psychiatrist, Psychologist, Psychotherapist, Practitioner (NLP, BFB, NFB), Public Speaker, Published Author, Producer (movies), Proficient Coach, Parent, Philanthropist, People oriented, Public Health Advocate and Passionate about God and life.

The founder of Pinnacle Health Radio, African's #1 online health radio and a non for profit organization, "Pinnacle Medicals SPEAKOUT Initiative" which is geared towards creating Mental Health literacy in Nigeria and beyond.

The Executive producer of award winning movies, Pepper soup (focused on drug abuse) and Little Drops of Happy (focused on depression, postpartum depression and suicide) and creator of the most innovative mental health app in Africa, HOW BODI.



# A Journey Through Traditional Beauty & Flavor

*Inside Clay Food Shop & The Henna Place*

“Together, Clay Food Shop and The Henna Place offer more than services. They offer belonging. A place where tradition is not just preserved, but honored, elevated, and shared”

## Clayfoodshop

Clay Food Shop is more than just a restaurant, it's a cultural experience. Known for its traditional elegance and modern interpretations of Northern Nigerian cuisine, Clay is a destination for food lovers who seek authenticity in every bite.


From their signature ram suya to rich native sauces, tigernut juice, and wholesome masa, every meal evokes the comfort of tradition.

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: +234909 554 4990

## The Henna Place

Established in 2014, The Henna Place is Nigeria's leading traditional spa, bringing centuries old Moroccan, Northern Nigeria and Arab beauty rituals into the general wellness market. Specializing in Moroccan hammam treatments, sugar waxing, herbal hair care, and intricate henna designs, the spa provides a deeply relaxing and culturally rich self care experience.

With multiple branches across Nigeria, including three branches in Lagos, The Henna Place has become a go-to destination for brides, beauty lovers, and women seeking intentional, soul-restoring care from head to toe, it's a place to cleanse, unwind, and reconnect with yourself the traditional way.

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