



INSPIRING
WOMAN
AFRICA

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CHIONOMA
MOMAH

ELEVATING POLICY, PEOPLE, AND PURPOSE

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Welcome!

Dear Readers,

We are delighted to bring you another fantastic edition of IWA. We start on a good note as we are happy the pupils and teachers abducted at Oriire in Oyo State are back home. What a relief! We have two articles in this edition that speak on the matter.

Sitting gorgeous on our cover is someone who moves with a calm confidence that puts others at ease. There is this endearing grace she oozes that shows she naturally embodies years of kindness and consideration. You know how it is when you just enjoy having people you feel safe speaking with around you? Yes, she is one of them. She gives the vibes of someone who will offer you warmth in place of judgment. For me, it's also how she finds silver linings and encourages others to see possibilities in challenges.

Little wonder she currently sits as Head of Policy & Public Affairs at Guinness Nigeria Plc. I mean, if you owned a company and you read about such a pleasant personality, wouldn't you want her on your team?

Celebrate CHIOMA MOMAH with us on this week's edition of IWA. Enjoy our interview with her as she spoke on work, leadership, purpose, balance, being an author and motherhood.

Here are other articles in this edition:

HER POINT OF VIEW: Be Ready Before the Opportunity Knocks. By Chinyere Okorocha.

WOMAN EXECUTIVE: Leading Without The Mask: The Power of Authenticity In A Pretentious 'World.' By Wola Joseph-Condotti.

FINANCIAL ADVISER: The Circle That Changes Everything. By Sola Adesakin.

GENDER INSIGHTS: Affirmative Action or Political Gatekeeping? Interrogating the Electoral College Approach in Nigeria's Reserved Special Seats for Women Bill. By Asmau Benzies-Leo.

HOLISTIC LIVING: Oyo Pupils And Teachers In Focus: Freedom Is Only the Beginning, Every Rescue Must Be Followed by Healing. By Dr. Maymunah Yusuf Kadiri.

TRIBE WITH THE VIBES: The Only 'Mistake' They Made Was Going To School? By Zainab Aderounmu.

WE'VE GOT MEN: Omamofe Boyo, Deputy Group Chief Executive, OANDO PLC

WOMAN AT THE HELM: Tope Oimage, Non-Executive Director, FirstBank of Nigeria Ltd.

We will be here next week with another engaging edition.

See you soon!



COVER INTERVIEW

CHIOMA MOMAH

ELEVATING POLICY,
PEOPLE, AND PURPOSE

Kemi Ajumobi



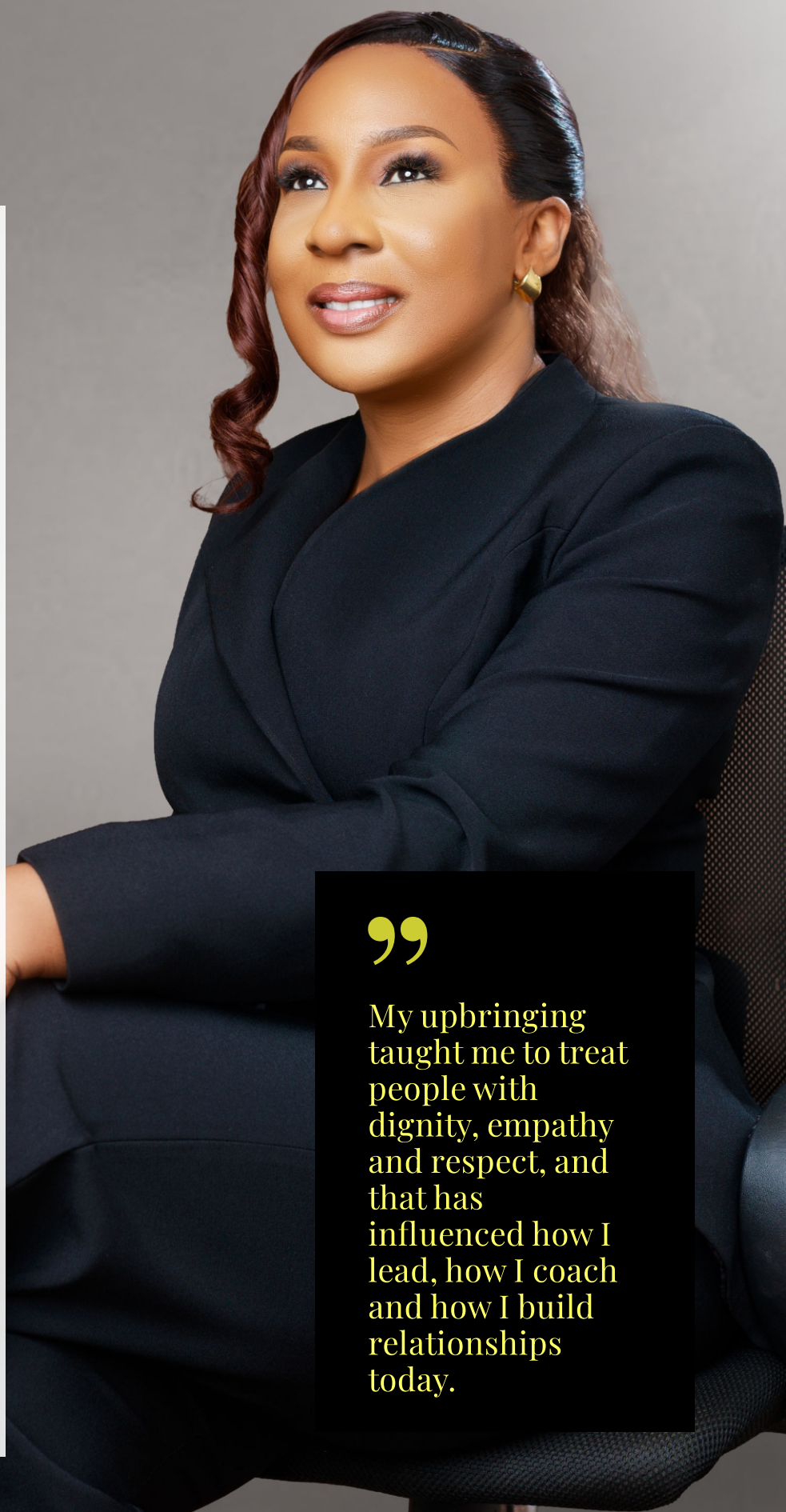
Chioma Momah is a public policy and corporate affairs executive, leadership coach, author, and speaker

with over two decades of experience spanning the public and private sectors.

She currently serves as Head of Policy & Public Affairs at Guinness Nigeria Plc, where she leads stakeholder engagement, regulatory advocacy, and government relations, helping shape conversations at the intersection of business, policy, and sustainable development. Prior to this, she held leadership roles across several public sector institutions, giving her a rare perspective on how government and business can work together to create lasting impact.

Beyond the boardroom, Chioma is passionate about helping people thrive. Through her coaching and mentoring work, she equips professionals, particularly women and emerging leaders, to lead with confidence, communicate with influence, and build meaningful careers without losing themselves in the process.

She is also an accomplished author whose books reflect her passion for leadership, family, and intentional living. Her latest book, "The Not Perfect Parent", is a practical and heartfelt guide that encourages parents to let go of perfection and embrace the everyday journey of raising confident,



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My upbringing taught me to treat people with dignity, empathy and respect, and that has influenced how I lead, how I coach and how I build relationships today.



resilient children with purpose and grace.

A sought-after speaker and moderator, Chioma speaks on leadership, public policy, women's advancement, parenting, personal development, and purpose-driven living. Her ability to combine strategic insight with authentic storytelling has made her a trusted voice across corporate, government, educational, and faith-based platforms.

Whether she is influencing policy, coaching leaders, writing books, or speaking to audiences, Chioma is driven by one mission: to help people and institutions grow with intention, lead with impact, and leave a legacy that matters.

▶ Childhood experience and influence till date

I had what I can only describe as an idyllic childhood. I grew up in Lagos as one of six children to two amazing parents who were both public servants. Our home was filled with love, laughter and lots of affection. We were hugged, encouraged and given the freedom to simply enjoy being children. One of my favourite memories is walking from one end of Ikoyi to another with my younger sister without a care in the world. We were also part of a very close extended family, so every Christmas we travelled to the East to spend time with our grandparents, cousins, aunts and uncles. Those annual gatherings remain some of my happiest memories.

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I work for a company with extremely high ethical standards. Everything we do is based on transparency, evidence and constructive engagement

I often joke that I was like Peter Pan because I genuinely did not want to grow up. Looking back, that upbringing probably made me a little naïve in my early years because I assumed everyone treated people with the same kindness I experienced growing up. But it also shaped one of my greatest strengths. It taught me to treat people with dignity, empathy and respect, and that has influenced how I lead, how I coach and how I build relationships today.

▶ What are your responsibilities at Guinness Nigeria Plc and how do you carry them out?

As Head of Policy and Public Affairs, a significant part of my role is stakeholder engagement. I build and maintain strong relationships with government, regulators, industry associations and other key stakeholders to support an enabling environment for our business to operate responsibly, ethically and in compliance with applicable laws and regulations.

My role also involves monitoring policy and regulatory developments, assessing how they may impact the business and working collaboratively across the organisation to ensure we are prepared, informed and able to respond appropriately.



I work closely with colleagues across different functions because effective public affairs cannot happen in isolation. It requires collaboration, trust and a clear understanding of both the business and the external environment.

Everything we do is grounded in integrity, proactive engagement and evidence based advocacy. For me, the goal is to build trusted relationships over time so that we can contribute constructively to policy discussions while supporting the long term success and sustainability of the business.

► **Aligning strategic business objectives with public policy goals**

I do not believe business success and public policy should compete with each other. Businesses create jobs, contribute taxes and stimulate economic growth, while governments have the responsibility of protecting the public interest.

The goal is to find solutions that achieve both. That requires dialogue, evidence based policymaking and mutual respect. When government and business understand each other's

perspectives, we create policies that benefit society while allowing businesses to remain sustainable and profitable, which is a win-win. That is where long term impact comes from.

► **Misconceptions about regulatory advocacy you want to clarify**

Probably the biggest misconception is that advocacy is about lobbying through unethical means. People hear government relations or public affairs and immediately think of brown envelopes. That could not be further from my experience.

I work for a company with extremely high ethical standards. Everything we do is based on transparency, evidence and constructive engagement. We provide data, participate in policy consultations and work collaboratively

through industry associations.

Advocacy is not about influencing decisions improperly, it is about building trust over time, presenting credible evidence and becoming a respected voice in policy conversations.

► **One policy reform that can unlock sustainable impact for Nigeria and what may be holding it back for now?**

If I had to choose one, it would be meaningful public service reform. Strong institutions are built by capable people, and the public service sits at the heart of policy development and implementation. The quality of our institutions influences the quality of the policies they produce and how effectively those policies are executed.

If we can continue to build a civil

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Stop trying to prove yourself. Rest is not laziness. Self care is not selfish





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I have learnt that not every problem is solved by doing more. Sometimes, it is solved by being far from the maddening crowd and becoming still.



service that attracts and develops the right talent, embraces technology, rewards performance and strengthens accountability, we will unlock progress across every sector, from education and healthcare to infrastructure and economic development.

I also believe our policies must be fit for purpose and consistently implemented. Nigeria has many good policies, but implementation and continuity are often where we struggle. Strong institutions, supported by capable public servants, can help bridge that gap and deliver sustainable impact.

► **Most important mindset shift you encourage among women to sustain both influence and personal wellbeing**

“Woman you are absolutely amazing, but you are not superhuman.”
Too many women spend their lives trying to prove they can do everything. My encouragement is simple. Stop trying to

prove yourself. Rest is not laziness. Self care is not selfish.

Looking after yourself allows you to keep showing up for the people who matter most. You can only pour from a cup that is full.

► **In challenging situations, how do you restore calm? Where do you tap into and how do you progress from there?**

Music helps me restore calm. I especially enjoy worship music because it shifts my focus from the problem to gratitude. Artists like Kaestings and Victor Thompson help me reconnect with what really matters. I also intentionally create quiet space. Sometimes, I simply stay indoors with no agenda. Other times, I book a massage or spend a few hours at a spa. Those moments of stillness help me reset emotionally, think clearly and return with fresh perspective.

I have learnt that not every problem is

solved by doing more. Sometimes, it is solved by being far from the maddening crowd and becoming still.

► **How do you balance ambition with intentional living?**

I still set very ambitious goals, but I have learnt to count the cost. Whenever an opportunity comes my way, I ask myself, "What will this require of me?" Sometimes, it means late nights. Sometimes, it means travelling and spending time away from home. Those sacrifices are part of leadership.

But I also know there comes a point where you have to ask yourself, "At what cost?" If my ambition consistently comes at the expense of my health, my faith or my family, then I need to pause and reassess.

Success is important, but not if I lose the people and the values that make the success worthwhile.



► **Tell us about your latest book and why you chose to write it. Where can it be purchased?**

I have written nine books, and each reflects a different season of my life. I started by writing children's books through my Lana series because I wanted to make learning engaging and fun for young readers. I later wrote the Wisdom from Women series to encourage young people through stories and life lessons.

My latest book, *The Not Perfect Parent*, grew out of years of speaking, coaching

and counselling parents. Parenting is one of the areas I am deeply passionate about, and I spend a lot of time speaking and engaging with parents.

One thing I have realised is that because people see you speaking about parenting, they sometimes assume you have it all figured out. Nothing could be further from the truth. I am still learning.

Parenting is a lifelong journey of learning, unlearning and relearning. Every stage, from newborns to toddlers, teenagers, young adults and even becoming grandparents, brings new lessons.

I wrote the book to remind parents that there is no perfection in parenting. My hope is that parents will see the book as a companion that encourages them to become more intentional rather than more perfect.

The book is available on Amazon, Selar and selected bookstores in Nigeria.

► **As a mother and author of 'The Not Perfect Parent' how do you guide parents to cultivate resilience and purpose without succumbing to perfectionism?**

The first thing I tell parents is that there is no perfection in parenting. Once we accept that, we stop trying to perform and start becoming more intentional.

The second thing I encourage is resilience. We all want to protect our children, but life is not always easy. Our responsibility is not to remove every obstacle from their path. It is to prepare them to navigate those obstacles with confidence, character and resilience.

Whether we are there or not, we want to raise children who can stand, recover from setbacks and continue moving forward with purpose.

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My hope is that parents will see my latest book as a companion that encourages them to become more intentional rather than more perfect.



That desire to support parents also inspired me to create The Butterfly Project, where I work with women, especially working mothers, to help them thrive in every area of life without carrying the burden of perfection.

► **How has your writing shaped your approach to leadership and policy, and what audiences do you most hope to reach with your books?**

Writing has made me a better leader because it has taught me to observe, reflect and communicate clearly.

While many people know me as an author, I also write regularly on LinkedIn, Instagram and other social media platforms.

I love telling stories. Stories about leadership. Stories about parenting. Stories about work. Stories about success and failure. Stories about everyday life.

Stories allow people to see the human side of leadership. One thing I care deeply about is authenticity. Too often, especially as women, we are taught to minimise ourselves, hide our gifts or downplay our strengths because we do not want to appear proud.

I believe we should embrace who we are. We should not be afraid to use our voice, our gifts and our experiences. When we lead authentically, we give others permission to do the same.

Whether I am writing a book, a LinkedIn article or a social media post, my hope is always that someone will read it, see themselves in the story and leave encouraged to become the best version of themselves.

► **If you could imprint one lasting policy or leadership principle on the next generation, what would it be and why?**

Authenticity! When you know who you are and you are comfortable with who you are, you do not spend your life trying to be someone else.



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Writing has made me a better leader because it has taught me to observe, reflect and communicate clearly

Authentic leaders make better decisions because they lead from their values instead of appearances.

When people know they can trust your words because they match your actions, that is where real leadership begins.

► **Personal story or experience that shaped your leadership approach, and how do you translate that into guidance for others?**

One experience that has stayed with me happened early in my career. Around 2010, over 200 microfinance banks were closed, and staff across my organisation were mobilised to support the exercise. Although I was not in the operations department, I volunteered wholeheartedly because I saw it as an opportunity to learn.

Looking back, I am so glad I did because throughout the rest of my time in that organisation, I never had another opportunity quite like it.

It taught me a lesson I have carried throughout my career. Never assume an



opportunity will come again. Raise your hand. Volunteer. Say yes to learning. Step outside your comfort zone because sometimes the opportunity you postpone today never returns.

I will also throw in a second lesson-

People are always watching.

They are watching how you treat people, how you respond under pressure, whether you keep your word and whether your actions match your values.

Leadership is not built only in the big moments, it is built in the ordinary moments that people remember long after you have forgotten them.

► Day never to be forgotten and why?

The day I became a mother. Holding my first child completely changed my perspective. It gave me a deeper understanding of love, responsibility and legacy. It also reshaped my priorities and influenced many of the decisions I have made ever since, both personally and professionally.

► What are you grateful for as you recently celebrated another birthday?

I am grateful for so much! Grateful for life. Grateful for my family, both immediate and extended. Grateful for a career that has allowed me to make a meaningful contribution in both the public and private sectors. Grateful for the privilege of coaching, mentoring and speaking into the lives of so many incredible people. Grateful for my health, and grateful for being blessed with things money can and cannot buy.

Most of all, I am grateful for the people I meet every day. Every conversation, every opportunity and every relationship reminds me that God blesses you through people.

Final words

If there is one thing I would like people to remember, it is this. Be intentional. Be authentic. Keep growing. And wherever you find yourself, leave people and places better than you met them.



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Leadership is not built only in the big moments, it is built in the ordinary moments that people remember long after you have forgotten them.

WOMAN EXECUTIVE



Leading Without the Mask: The Power of Authenticity in a Pretentious 'World'

By Wola Joseph-Condotti

There is a tiredness a lot of us are carrying these days that we do not really talk about. It is not the tiredness of doing too much. It is the tiredness of appearing to have it all figured out. Looking calm when you are stretched

thin. Sounding sure of yourself when honestly, you are still working it out. Posting the highlight while quietly editing out the rest. Somewhere between LinkedIn and life, many of us learned to put on a mask, and now we cannot quite remember when we last took it off. A mask of perfection. A mask of

"everything is under control." A mask of "I have it all together, thank you for asking." The mask does impress people. But it very rarely inspires them.

What the Performance Actually Costs

At some point, leadership started to feel like a performance. We choose our words

carefully. We edit the struggle out. We show up as a version of ourselves that is polished but not quite whole. And keeping that up is expensive, because holding an image in place drains you. Slowly, and then all at once, you drift away from who you actually are.

I have watched it happen to people I respect. Leaders who are celebrated in every room they walk into and yet cannot find one room where it feels safe to say, "I am tired," or, "Honestly, I do not know."

That is the price of leading with a mask on. It puts distance between you and your team. And eventually, quietly, between you and yourself.

Why Real Beats Perfect

Being authentic is not the same as oversharing. Nobody is asking you to turn your Monday meeting into a confessional. It is simpler than that. It is just alignment. The person you are in the boardroom being recognisably the same person you are at your kitchen table. Your public voice not too far from your private one.

People do not really trust perfection. They trust consistency. They trust honesty. They trust leaders who are human enough to be real and steady enough to still lead. And when you lead that way, your team stops performing too. Meetings get more honest. Problems come up earlier, while they are still small enough to fix. Trust deepens in ways you do not always notice until the day you need it.

The Courage It Takes

Let us be honest with each other, this is not easy.

It is much easier to hide behind competence than to admit you are still learning. Much safer to sound certain than to sit in a room and say the words "I do not know yet."

I have had to say those words more than once. In transitions. In seasons when the ground beneath the company was shifting and the team was looking to me for

direction I was still trying to find. Not too long ago, I said to a team, "I do not have every answer yet, but I have every intention of finding them, and we are going to find them together." I honestly thought it would cost me something. It did the opposite. People leaned in. They trusted more, not less. Because what they were hoping for was not somebody pretending. It was somebody honest.

A Word From Scripture

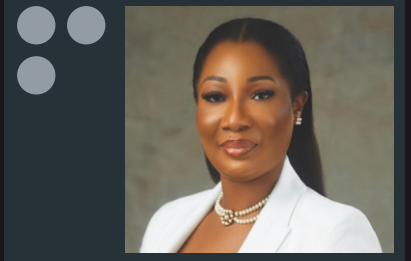
One of the things that quietly moves me about Jesus is how real He was willing to be. He wept. He was openly troubled. He pulled away to rest when He needed to. In His hardest hour, He asked His closest friends to just stay awake with Him. None of that made Him look small. If anything, it made Him more trustworthy. His humanity did not compete with His leadership. It carried it. That is still the model. The Freedom of Being Yourself There is a real freedom on the other side of putting the mask down.

You stop performing. You start leading from a place that feels like truth. And all that energy you were spending on the image, you finally get to spend on the work.

You stop trying to be everything to everyone. And you begin, quietly, to be who you were always meant to be.

Final Thoughts

So, to every woman leading in a world that keeps rewarding the polished version, hear me on this. You do not have to perform success. You do not have to carry perfection. You do not have to keep the mask on to be respected. Your realness is not a weakness. In a world of filters and facades, it might be the rarest thing in the room. So put the mask down. Speak honestly. Show up as yourself. Because the leaders who really leave a mark, in the end, are not the most polished ones. They are the ones who were most true.



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 Circle That Changes Everything

By Sola Adesakin

There is a question worth sitting with as you move into the second half of this year. Not about your budget, your investment portfolio, or your career plan. Those matter, and we will get to them. But this question sits underneath all of that.

Who are you building with? Not who you follow on social media. Not who you admire from a distance. Who is in the room with you, literally or virtually, when you are thinking about where your life is going and what it will take to get there? Because that answer, more than almost any other variable, will determine what the next five years of your life look

like. We underestimate the influence of our immediate circle in a very specific way. We acknowledge it in theory, the idea that you become the average of the people around you has been repeated enough times to feel like common sense. But in practice, most of us have never been deliberate about it. We fell into our friendships. We maintained them through proximity, history, or convenience. And we have never seriously audited whether the people we spend the most time with are pulling our thinking forward or keeping it exactly where it is.

This is not a call to discard your

friendships. It is a call to be intentional about adding to them.

Here is what I want you to do in H2. Find two or three people, you probably already know who they are, who are genuinely hungry for growth. Not people who talk about success constantly but do nothing. Not people who celebrate others publicly but quietly resent their progress. People who are actually doing the work, who take their goals seriously, who will tell you the truth when you need to hear it, and who know how to celebrate someone else's win without making it about themselves. That last quality is rarer than it sounds. Find it.

When you have your two or three, start something simple. A WhatsApp group. A monthly call. A quarterly in-person meeting if geography allows. The container does not need to be complicated. What it needs is commitment and a few clear agreements about what you are doing together.

Pray together if faith is part of your foundation. There is something about bringing your goals before God in a community that moves things. It creates accountability not just to each other but to something larger than the group. It also strips away pretence. You cannot perform in prayer the way you can perform on Instagram. Plan together with actual numbers and

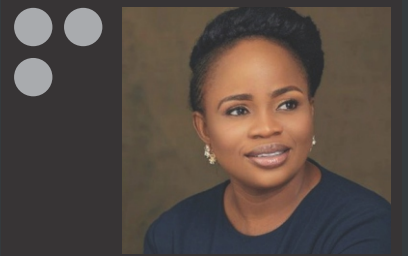
actual timelines. Not vague intentions but specific goals. What are you building this year? What does the end of December need to look like for this to have been a meaningful period in your life? Write it down. Share it with the group. The act of saying your goal out loud to people who will remember it changes your relationship with that goal.

Learn together. Pick one financial concept per month and go deep on it as a group. How does a mutual fund actually work? What is the difference between a fixed deposit and a treasury bill and why does it matter? What does your pension fund actually do with your contributions? Knowledge shared in community sticks differently than knowledge consumed alone. You ask better questions, you surface blind spots, and you hold each other to applying what you learn, not just knowing it.

Hold each other accountable with kindness and without softening the truth. The most valuable thing a good circle does is close the gap between what you said you would do and what you actually did. Not with judgment, but with the kind of honest love that says I remember what you told me you wanted and I am not going to let you quietly abandon it.

Then take action. Individually and together. Support each other's businesses. Refer each other where it is genuine. Show up for each other's launches, events, and milestones. A circle that only meets to talk and never moves is a discussion group. What you are building is something different. You are building a growth engine.

The world has enough solo performers. What changes lives, businesses, and generational trajectories is people who find each other at the right moment and decide to move together. You have six months left in this year. That is enough time to find your people, build the structure, and finish 2026 in a completely different position than you started it. The circle is not just nice to have. It is the strategy!



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 InstructorSM and a member of the Personal Finance Speakers Association.

HER POINT OF VIEW

Be Ready Before the Opportunity Knocks

Chinyere Okorocha

One of the most common career mistakes I see women make is waiting for an opportunity before they start preparing for it. They wait until the promotion is announced before thinking about leadership. They wait until they are invited to speak before improving their public speaking skills. They wait until a board opportunity appears before learning about

governance. They wait until a senior role becomes vacant before developing strategic thinking. In short, they wait for the opportunity before getting ready. The problem is that opportunities rarely wait for us to prepare. More often than not, opportunities favour those who have already done the work long before anyone was watching.

Over the years, I have come to believe

that one of the greatest determinants of career success is not talent, intelligence, or even hard work alone. It is readiness. Being ready before the opportunity presents itself. Opportunity Has a Way of Arriving Unannounced. Something else I learned throughout my career is that opportunities rarely send advance notice.

A speaking invitation arrives unexpectedly. A leadership position suddenly becomes available. A client asks whether you can lead a major project. A board seat opens up. A mentor recommends your name. A recruiter calls. The question is never whether opportunities will come.

The question is whether you will be ready when they do. Too many women spend years saying they want bigger opportunities, yet they are not actively preparing for them. When the opportunity finally appears, they find themselves scrambling to acquire skills, build confidence, gain visibility, or learn what they should have started learning months or even years earlier.

The Myth of Feeling Ready

One of the biggest misconceptions in career development is the belief that readiness is a feeling. It is not.

In my experience, very few people ever feel completely ready. Some of the most significant opportunities I have accepted in my career arrived before I felt fully prepared. I remember accepting leadership responsibilities, speaking engagements, and industry roles that stretched me far beyond my comfort zone. Had I waited until I felt completely confident, I might never have accepted them. What I discovered was that confidence

often follows preparation, not the other way around. The women who advance furthest are not necessarily those with the most confidence. They are often those who prepared long enough and well enough to take action despite their uncertainty.

Preparation Happens in the Quiet Seasons

One of my favourite observations about success is that people often celebrate what happens on stage while overlooking everything that happened backstage. The promotion may happen in a single day. The award may be presented in a few minutes. The appointment may be announced in one email. But the preparation often takes years. The books you read. The courses you take. The relationships you build. The skills you develop.

The extra assignments you volunteer for. The expertise you quietly accumulate. Those are the things that create readiness. The challenge is that preparation can feel unrewarding because there is no immediate applause. No one congratulates you for preparing. The applause usually comes later. Stop Preparing for Your Current Role. This may sound surprising, but one of the best pieces of career advice I can offer is this:

Stop preparing only for the role you have today.

Start preparing for the role you want tomorrow. If you aspire to become a leader, learn leadership before you are promoted. If you want to sit on boards, study governance before the invitation comes. If you want to become a recognised expert, start building your visibility before anyone asks for your opinion.

If you aspire to manage larger responsibilities, begin developing the skills those responsibilities will require. The women who become the obvious

choice are usually the women who have already invested in becoming ready.

Five Ways to Stay Opportunity-Ready

First, commit to continuous learning. Never assume your current skills are sufficient for your future ambitions. Second, develop skills before you need them. Leadership, communication, negotiation, strategic thinking, and networking are all skills that reward early investment. Third, seek stretch opportunities. Volunteer for projects that challenge you and expose you to new experiences. Fourth, build your visibility. Opportunities often flow toward people whose expertise is known and recognised. Fifth, cultivate relationships. Many opportunities arrive through people before they arrive through formal processes.

My Big Sister Advice

If there is one lesson I wish every woman understood, it is this: Do not wait for the opportunity before deciding to become the person capable of handling it. Become her now. Learn now. Prepare now. Develop now. Grow now.

Because one day, perhaps when you least expect it, an opportunity will arrive that has the power to change the trajectory of your career. When that moment comes, you do not want to be saying, "I wish I had prepared." You want to be able to say, "I am ready." The truth is that opportunity and preparation are lifelong dance partners. Opportunity may open the door. But preparation is what allows you to walk through it with confidence. So don't spend your career waiting for the next opportunity. Spend your career getting ready for it.

And when it finally arrives, as it surely will, let your preparation speak for you.



Chinyere Okorocha

Partner in the Law Firm of
JACKSON, ETTI & EDU

With over three decades of experience as a trailblazer in the legal profession, Chinyere Okorocha 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.

GENDER INSIGHTS



Affirmative Action or Political Gatekeeping?

Asmau Benzies Leo

Interrogating the Electoral College Approach in Nigeria's Reserved Special Seats for Women Bill

As Nigeria advances toward a critical stage in its constitutional reform process, the proposed Women's Special Seats Bill-House Bill (HB) 1349, has reignited national debate on how best to address the persistent underrepresentation of women in elective office. With legislative voting on constitutional amendment bills imminent and the National Assembly Open Week commencing today, 14 July 2026, alongside a dedicated Gender Day Session on 15 July 2026, the urgency for consensus and clarity has never been greater. At the heart of the debate lies the proposed Electoral College Model for selecting women into these additional seats, an idea that presents both promise and significant risk.

Nigeria's current representation of women in politics remains among the lowest globally, with less than 5% female presence in the National Assembly. This is not due to a lack of qualified women but rather

entrenched structural barriers, including high campaign costs, political violence, exclusionary party systems, and deeply rooted patriarchal norms. The Women's Special Seats Bill is therefore a necessary corrective mechanism. However, the effectiveness of this intervention will depend largely on how representatives are selected.

Supporters of the Electoral College Model argue that it offers a practical workaround to Nigeria's deeply flawed electoral terrain. By allowing a body of selected electors to choose women representatives, the model could significantly reduce the financial and physical risks associated with contesting open elections. Women who might otherwise be excluded due to limited access to funding or political structures could find a pathway into governance. Additionally, by minimising exposure to electoral violence and intimidation, the system may create safer opportunities for capable women to emerge as leaders. Despite these potential benefits, the model raises fundamental concerns about power,

legitimacy, and accountability. One of the most critical risks is the likelihood of elite capture. Nigeria's political system is heavily dominated by influential male politicians who control party structures and decision-making processes. In such a context, there is a high probability that these powerful actors will hijack the Electoral College system to serve their interests.

Rather than promoting merit-based selection, the process could be manipulated to nominate women who are politically compliant, essentially "stooges" who owe their positions to male political patrons. These women may lack independence and may be unable or unwilling to challenge the status quo or advocate meaningfully for gender equality. This would not only defeat the purpose of the Special Seats initiative but could also reinforce existing gender inequalities under the guise of inclusion.

Furthermore, this dynamic risks sidelining grassroots women leaders, activists, and professionals who possess the competence, experience, and commitment to serve but lack access to elite political networks. The exclusion of these voices would undermine the diversity and representativeness that the Bill seeks to promote.

Another major concern is the issue of legitimacy. Representatives selected through an Electoral College, particularly one perceived as controlled by political elites, may struggle to gain public trust. Unlike directly elected officials, they may not feel accountable to the broader electorate. This disconnect could weaken their effectiveness and limit their ability to champion policies that genuinely reflect the needs of Nigerian women.

Transparency also remains a significant challenge. Without clearly defined guidelines on how the Electoral College will be constituted, how electors will be selected, and what criteria will be used to choose candidates, the process could become opaque and vulnerable to manipulation. In a country where public trust in political institutions is already fragile, such opacity could generate skepticism and resistance.

It is important to note that the constitutional amendment process itself is at a decisive stage, with adoption timelines expected within the current legislative cycle. As stakeholders engage during the National Assembly Open Week today and the Gender Day Session tomorrow, 15 July 2026, these concerns must be addressed with urgency and clarity to ensure that the reform achieves its intended impact.

While the Electoral College Model is not without merit, its success depends on deliberate safeguards and thoughtful design. To this end, the Constitutional Amendment Committee must take decisive steps to strengthen the framework.

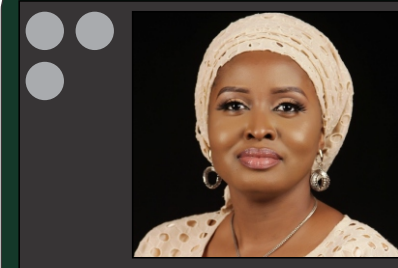
First, the composition of the Electoral College must be broadened beyond political party actors. It should include credible representatives from civil society, women's rights organizations, professional bodies, academia, and marginalised groups. This will help dilute the influence of political elites and ensure a more balanced and inclusive selection process. Second, clear, transparent, and merit-

based criteria for candidate selection must be established. These criteria should emphasise competence, integrity, track record, and commitment to advancing gender equality. Public disclosure of candidates and the selection process will further enhance accountability. Third, safeguards must be introduced to prevent undue political interference. This could include independent oversight mechanisms, possibly involving the electoral management body or a neutral multi-stakeholder committee, as well as strict conflict-of-interest rules for electors. Fourth, accountability mechanisms must be institutionalised. Women selected through this process should be required to engage regularly with citizens through town halls, constituency dialogues, and public reporting. This will help bridge the gap between appointed representatives and the broader population.

Finally, the Electoral College Model should be framed as a temporary, transitional mechanism rather than a permanent feature. The ultimate objective must remain the full and equal participation of women in direct electoral politics. Complementary reforms, such as enforcing party level gender quotas, reducing nomination fees, providing campaign financing support, and addressing electoral violence, must be pursued simultaneously.

In conclusion, the Electoral College Proposal within the Women's Special Seats Bill stands at a crossroads between opportunity and risk. While it offers a potential pathway to accelerate women's inclusion in governance, it also carries the danger of being co-opted by entrenched political interests. Without strong safeguards, it may produce symbolic representation rather than substantive change.

Therefore, as Nigeria moves toward adopting constitutional amendments, stakeholders must ensure that this model is not only politically feasible but also just, transparent, and truly transformative for Nigerian women.



Dr. Asmau Benzies Leo

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

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 (CENGAIN), 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

Tope Omage

Non-Executive Director, FirstBank of Nigeria Ltd.

Tope Omage is a Chartered Accountant who was appointed as a non-executive director of the Board of FirstBank of Nigeria Limited in 2021. Her career spans a landmark tenure at the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), where she dedicated 35 years and culminated in the role of Finance Director. Notably, she became CBN's first female Finance Director. Between 2012 and 2014, she led the Bank's Branch Operations as Director, supervising all 37 branches nationwide. Her broad expertise covers Finance, Audit, and Compliance, among other areas. She currently serves as the Chairperson of Novelty Healthcare Ltd.

Her educational background includes an MBA, complemented by extensive professional development through courses, seminars, conferences, and workshops conducted in Nigeria, the United Kingdom, and the

United States at renowned institutions such as Stanford, Wharton, and Northwestern University.

Furthermore, she holds a B.Sc Honours degree in Mathematics from University of Warwick, Coventry, England and has attended several professional, management, and leadership programmes globally.

Tope is a Fellow of the Nigerian Institute of Management, Member of the Institute of Directors and Chartered Institute of Taxation of Nigeria. She is a Fellow of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Nigeria, a Member of the prestigious Association of Certified Fraud Examiners and a Certified Mediator.

She has served on various Committees of the Institute of Chartered Accountants of Nigeria (ICAN) and was an ex-officio member of ICAN &

district society Abuja and currently a member of the entrepreneurship initiative.

With several feathers to her hat, it also includes being a published author of two books – 'Enjoying Family Life, God's Recipe' and 'Finding Calm in the Storm, the Power of Silence.' Tope is a pastor and a sought-after speaker. She was on the Executive Council, and is a life member of the Women in Management, Business and Public Service (WIMBIZ).

After retirement from the CBN, Tope began Consulting and Events Management. She also runs an NGO – Heritage for Women and Youth Empowerment Initiative (HEFWAYE).

Tope is married with adult children. She enjoys travelling, cooking, reading, supporting youth and women empowerment initiatives.



WE'VE GOT MEN

Omamofe Boyo

Deputy Group Chief Executive, OANDO PLC

Omamofe Boyo, also known as 'Mofe, is a seasoned energy leader who currently serves as Deputy Group Chief Executive at OANDO. He also holds the role of Executive Director and Executive Vice Chairman at Oando Energy Resources Nigeria Limited, and sits on the boards of several fellow ventures, including Oando Trading Dubai, Oando Clean Energy Limited, Ocean and Oil Development Partners, Crown Interactive, and Temple Productions.

With more than a quarter-century of leadership in Africa's energy landscape, Mofe has become a trusted driver of growth, strategic partnerships, and policy influence. He is known for shaping ambitious business moves, guiding mergers, and supporting regulatory reforms that aim to strengthen the sector.

Since joining Oando in 2004,

Mofe has been at the forefront of major expansion initiatives. He played a key role in strategic acquisitions such as ConocoPhillips Nigeria and Nigerian AGIP Oil Company, and he led efforts that culminated in Oando's listings on the Toronto Stock Exchange and the Johannesburg Stock Exchange. He also championed a centralised shared-services model that streamlined operations and delivered significant cost efficiencies, all while nurturing a values-led organisational culture.

Beyond corporate strategy, Mofe has contributed to policy discussions that shape Nigeria's energy future, including input on important legislation like the Petroleum Industry Bill and the Nigerian Content Development Act. He has been a catalyst for transforming Oando from a downstream-focused company into a comprehensive energy player spanning upstream, midstream, and downstream activities.

As a leader, Mofe actively engages with government agencies and industry stakeholders to advocate for reforms and greater local participation. Before taking on his current executive responsibilities, he was at the helm of Oando Marketing and later led Supply & Trading, where he helped establish what became Africa's largest private petroleum trading operation.

He has a solid legal foundation as a member of the Nigerian Bar Association, is a member of the Institute of Directors, and the Nigeria Business Council for Sustainable Development. 'Mofe Boyo has extensive negotiation experience and continues to shape Nigeria's energy landscape, driving sustainable growth and industry excellence.

The images of the Oyo school principal embracing freedom alongside her colleagues and pupils brought relief to millions of Nigerians. Across the country, families who had held their breath, whispered prayers, and lived through agonizing uncertainty could finally exhale. For that, we should all be grateful. Every rescued life is worth celebrating, because every safe return is a victory. As a Psychiatrist, I know there is another story that rarely makes the headlines. “Captivity may end in a moment, trauma often does not.” While the nation celebrates their return, many survivors are beginning an entirely different journey, one that is invisible to the eye but deeply felt in the mind, body, and heart. The greatest misconception about trauma is believing that freedom immediately restores normal life. It doesn't. The human brain and body are designed to survive danger, and after prolonged fear or captivity, they do not simply switch back to normal because the crisis has ended. Long after survivors regain their freedom, their nervous systems may continue to behave as though the danger still exists. Some may startle easily at sudden sounds, struggle to sleep, experience recurring nightmares, or avoid places that remind them of their ordeal. Some children may become unusually quiet, emotionally withdrawn, fearful, clingy, irritable, or easily startled. Adults may appear calm while silently battling anxiety, guilt, intrusive memories, emotional exhaustion, or a constant sense of alertness.

These reactions should never be mistaken for weakness. They are often normal responses to profoundly abnormal experiences.

Over the years at our center at Pinnacle Medical Services, I have had the privilege of walking alongside several survivors of kidnapping as they began the difficult journey from surviving to truly living

again. While every person's experience is unique, the emotional wounds are often strikingly similar.

Many arrived unable to sleep peacefully. Some panicked whenever they heard unexpected noises. Others found themselves constantly scanning their surroundings for danger, unable to relax even in the safety of their own homes. Some struggled to return to work because concentration had become almost impossible. Others withdrew from family and friends, convinced that no one could understand what they had endured. A few carried the heavy burden of survivor's guilt, asking themselves why they returned alive while others did not.

Yet, I have also witnessed something remarkable, I have seen survivors gradually reclaim their lives.

I have watched nightmares become less frequent. Anxiety slowly loosen its grip. Confidence return. Families reconnect. Marriages grow stronger. Parents begin laughing with their children again. Professionals rediscover purpose and return to meaningful work. Many who once believed they would never feel safe again eventually became advocates for resilience, mental health, and hope.

Those transformations did not happen because time alone healed them., they happened because healing was intentional.

Trauma-informed psychiatric care, psychotherapy, compassionate families, supportive workplaces, spiritual strength, healthy daily routines, adequate sleep, physical activity, meaningful relationships, and patient communities all worked together to restore not just their mental health, but their whole lives. That is the essence of holistic living.

Health is far more than the absence of

HOLISTIC LIVING

Oyo Pupils And Teachers In Focus

By Dr. Maymunah Yusuf Kadiri



*Freedom Is Only the Beginning,
Every Rescue Must Be Followed by Healing*

illness. It is the harmonious wellbeing of the mind, body, emotions, relationships, purpose, and spirit. Trauma disrupts every one of these dimensions, which is why recovery cannot stop at physical rescue. True healing begins when we care for the whole person, not merely the event they survived. This responsibility belongs to all of us. Families must create safe spaces where survivors can speak without fear of

judgment or remain silent without pressure. Schools should understand that returning pupils may require patience before they regain concentration, confidence, and emotional security. Employers should recognise that adults recovering from traumatic experiences may need flexibility and understanding rather than unrealistic expectations. Communities should replace curiosity with compassion, resisting the urge to repeatedly ask survivors to relive painful

experiences simply to satisfy public interest.

One of the most damaging phrases we say after traumatic events is, “Be strong,” or “Move on.” Although often well intentioned, these words can unintentionally silence pain and discourage people from seeking help. Strength is not pretending nothing happened. Strength is acknowledging the wound, accepting support, and allowing healing to take its course.

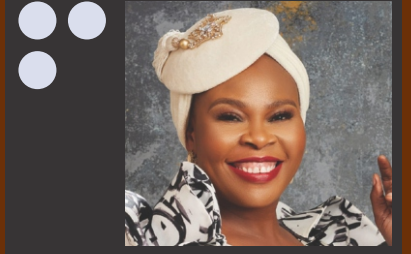
Across the world, psychological first aid is increasingly recognised as an essential component of emergency response because recovery is incomplete when people are only physically safe. Emotional healing is equally important. Early access to mental health professionals, trauma-informed care, supportive relationships, and compassionate communities can significantly improve long-term wellbeing while reducing the risk of persistent psychological distress, depression, post traumatic stress disorder among others.

The rescue of the Oyo school principal, her colleagues, and their pupils is undoubtedly a story of hope. It is also a reminder that our national response to crises should never end with liberation. It must continue with rehabilitation, psychological support, emotional restoration, and sustained community care.

Today, we celebrate their freedom, tomorrow, let us protect their healing. This is because surviving captivity is the first victory.

Rebuilding trust, restoring relationships, sleeping peacefully again, rediscovering purpose, and learning to embrace life without constant fear are the victories that truly define recovery.

As Nigerians, let us become the kind of society that does not only rejoice when people come home but also walk beside them until they genuinely feel safe again. Sometimes the greatest gift we can offer a survivor is not advice or curiosity, but compassion, patience, psychological support, and the reassurance that they do not have to heal alone. Only then can freedom become more than release, it can become restoration.



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.

TRIBE WITH THE VIBES

The only 'mistake' they made was going to school?

By Zainab Aderounmu

Everyone has been celebrating the rescue of the "Oyo 46" who were kidnapped and remained in captivity for 56 days. That's good. We're happy they're back, but I have questions.

Because they're finally back, we can skip the question of 'why it took the government so long to rescue them'. We begin instead, with 'were they truly rescued or ransomed? And if they were rescued as the Presidential spokesperson claimed, who was arrested as a consequence of their kidnap? And, what will be done to the arrested suspects?'

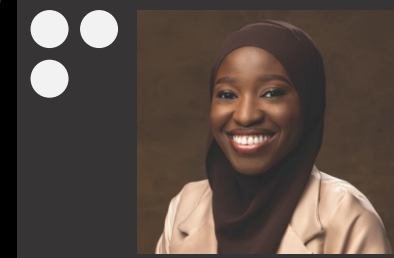
In the video shared alongside the statement, one of the teachers thanked the president for ensuring their rescue, and the kids held something that looked like biscuits in their hands. My second question: Is that the reward for their struggles? What happens to their mental health? How do they continue living with the horrors of a kidnap experience? Or wait, are they expected to just continue living without any form of

psychological intervention?

Let's hold on to that thought for a minute, and think of their education. We love to tout the idea that the youth are the leaders of tomorrow, but the parents of these children already made a mistake of positively grooming them for a meaningful future. The children only made the mistake of going to school and now they'll live with the experience of associating school with danger.

And it begs the question: will they feel safe enough to return to school? Is the government really ensuring that schools are safe? Or will it become a normal practice for kidnappers to raid schools and leave the government to either rescue or not rescue kidnap victims? Generally, is school still safe in Nigeria, and by extension, is education safe to pursue?

In my opinion, the government's responsibility on these particular rescued children has not ended. It isn't enough to rescue them, they must be restored psychologically, mentally and physically. They must be protected and supported up till university education



Zainab Aderounmu

Zainab Aderounmu A. W. is a First Class graduate of English Language and the Overall Best Graduating Student from the Lagos State University, Lagos Nigeria. She's a professional Master of Ceremonies, known as 'The Hijabi Compere', a public speaking coach and Communications Professional. She is currently a Youth advisor to the European Union where she doubles as the Spokesperson and Head of Communications & PR for the Youth Sounding Board.

level, and I'm not talking about student loans, but fully funded scholarships. Their parents, like all good parents, took responsibility for educating their children, and now the government must ensure that their future isn't truncated by this horrendous experience. We mustn't also forget the maths teacher, Mr Micheal Oyedokun, who was tragically beheaded by the kidnappers. His family deserves to be compensated for their loss, by the government. Even while we recognise that no amount of compensation can bring him back.

Beyond these children, justice must be served upon the arrested kidnap suspects, and it must be done publicly. We must know as a society that there are grave consequences for such crimes and schools shouldn't be a regular or normal target for kidnapping. We have normalised many anomalies as a country, regular school kidnaps shouldn't make the list.

If the youths are future leaders, then the most important way of securing that future must be safeguarded by the custodians of that future.



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