AT THE HELM



Women in Public Leadership

Nigerian women are winning everyday...

The women who call the shots.

Daily Circular
Behind. Beneath. Beyond.

OLIVE & MARCH

#IWD 2026

At the Helm Cover was designed as a monument to women in public leadership.

The images appear like a slide of history in motion, capturing women who are pushing past old limits and expanding what leadership can look like. The success of one woman rarely belongs to her alone. Each achievement widens the field of possibility for the women who come after her.

Women's success deserves to be monumentalised because it signals something larger than individual victory. Each woman who rises leaves behind proof that the horizon has moved.

Editor's Note

This brochure was created with one clear purpose: to spotlight women who are not just participating in leadership, but reshaping it. *Our why* is simple — representation changes outcomes. When women lead, institutions evolve, communities strengthen, and the next generation dares to aim higher.

Through these stories, we hope to inspire everyday women, the professionals, founders, students, and builders, to see leadership as accessible, not abstract. To dream bigger. To step forward. To take up space.

Changing the tide of women in leadership will not happen by chance. It will happen because more women decide to rise, and because we choose to amplify them when they do.

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Daily Circular

The Daily Circular is a Nigerian online publication that goes behind, beneath, and beyond the news — delivering content that truly counts.
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NIGERIAN WOMEN IN PUBLIC LEADERSHIP



Image credit: Google Images

FIRST LADY

Oluremi Tinubu

National Mother Figure



Image credit: Google Images

Current First Lady of Nigeria, a former First Lady of Lagos State, and former Senator, Oluremi Tinubu has positioned herself at the intersection of advocacy and influence. Through her focus on women, education, and social welfare, she continues to shape soft power within governance.

MINISTERS

Imaan Sulaiman-Ibrahim
Gender Architect



As Minister of Women Affairs, she stands at the centre of policy design for women and vulnerable populations. Her work focuses on institutional reforms that go beyond symbolism toward measurable inclusion. She has previously served as Director-General of the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP), and Nigeria's Minister of State for Police Affairs.

Jumoke Oduwole
Trade Champion



At the Federal Ministry of Industry, Trade and Investment, the lawyer, investment banker, academic and international trade specialist navigates the intersection of policy and commerce. Her work strengthens Nigeria's investment climate and positions the country within global trade conversations.

Hannatu Musa Musawa

Culture Custodian



Image credit: Google Images

Leading the Federal Ministry of Arts, Culture and Creative Economy, the lawyer, poet and spoken word artist oversees one of Nigeria's most powerful soft-power sectors. Her mandate blends heritage preservation with economic opportunity in the creative industries.

Bianca Ojukwu

Diplomatic Voice



Image credit: Google Images

As Minister of State for Foreign Affairs, the 1988 'Most Beautiful Girl in Nigeria' (MBGN) and former Ambassador to Ghana and Spain represents Nigeria's image abroad. Her work reinforces Nigeria's regional and international standing in an increasingly complex global landscape.

Nkeiruka Onyejeocha
Workforce Advocate

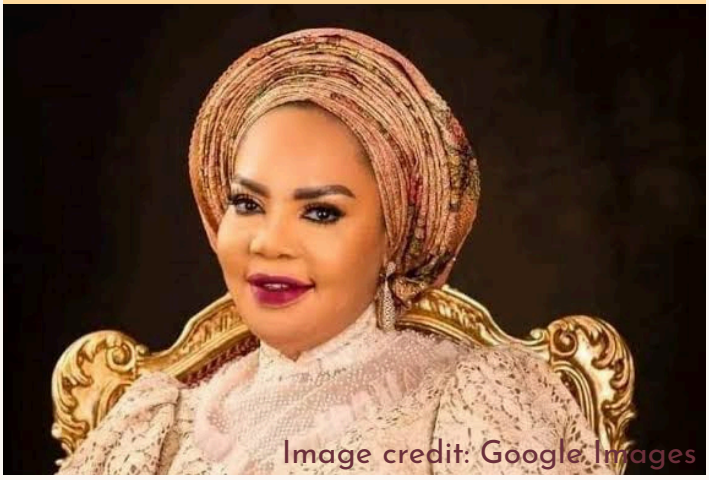


Image credit: Google Images

As Minister of State for Labour and Employment, she engages directly with employment policy and labour relations. Her role shapes the Federal Government's mediation of the balance between workers, employers, and economic growth.

Doris Uzoka-Anite
Fiscal Strategist



Image credit: Google Images

The medical doctor turned chartered financial analyst contributes to economic planning and policy, and financial governance. Her portfolios have touched the engine room of national development – industry, trade and investment; finance; and now budget and economic planning.

Mariya Mahmoud Bunkure
Capital Administrator



Image credit: Google Images

Serving the Federal Capital Territory as Minister of State, the medical doctor helps manage the administrative heartbeat of Nigeria, supporting the Minister's bold efforts in infrastructure and social development. Her work impacts urban governance in one of Africa's most important cities.

Suwaiba Said-Ahmed
Education Reform Advocate



Image credit: Google Images

As Minister of State for Education, the Professor of Science Education works within one of Nigeria's most critical transformation sectors, influencing policy direction affecting millions of learners.

ADVISERS & CEOs

Hadiza Bala Usman
Cabinet Class Captain



Image credit: Google Images

As Special Adviser to the President and Head of the Central Delivery Coordination Unit, she tracks performance at the highest level, ensuring that policy promises translate into measurable results that benefit the Nigerian people.

Olu Arowolo Verheijen
Energy Strategist



Image credit: Google Images

As Special Adviser to the President on Energy, she operates at the centre of Nigeria's power and petroleum reforms. Her work under the oversight of the President as Petroleum Minister has transformed Nigeria's energy landscape, elevating it into Africa's most attractive oil and gas investment destination in 2024 and 2025.

Zubaida Umar
The Resillience Architect



Image credit: Google Images

She is a seasoned public-sector leader with over two decades of experience in government finance, administration, and institutional reform. She became DG at NEMA in 2024. At NEMA, she leads national disaster preparedness and emergency response efforts, focused on building stronger, more resilient systems across Nigeria.

Omolola Oloworaran
Pensions Guardian



Image credit: Google Images

Leading the PENCOM, she manages the regulatory backbone of Nigeria's contributory pension system, safeguarding long-term financial security for millions of Nigerians. Her reforms have focused on expanding Nigeria's pensions coverage to the informal sector, through digital technology.

Fatima Shinkafi

Mining Investment Facilitator



Image credit: Google Images

The Solid Minerals Development Fund (SMDF), an investment vehicle owned by the Federal Government, and led by Shinkafi, has helped identify over half a billion dollars worth of investible projects in Nigeria's mining sector. Shinkafi's work is unlocking the partnerships and financing frameworks needed to make Nigeria a global player in the solid minerals value chain.

Tenioye Majekodunmi

Climate Policy Architect



Image credit: Google Images

At the National Climate Change Council (NCCC), she engages one of the defining global issues of our time. Her work situates Nigeria within international climate commitments, while also helping secure a sustainable future for generations to come.

Jennifer Adighije

Power Integrator



Image credit: Google Images

Engr. Jennifer Adighije was appointed MD/CEO of the Niger Delta Power Holding Company Limited in 2024, to lead efforts to advance Nigeria's electricity generation, transmission, and distribution, close national energy access gaps, and reposition NDPHC as a key driver of infrastructure delivery.

Usoro Akpabio

Regional Development Driver



Image credit: Google Images

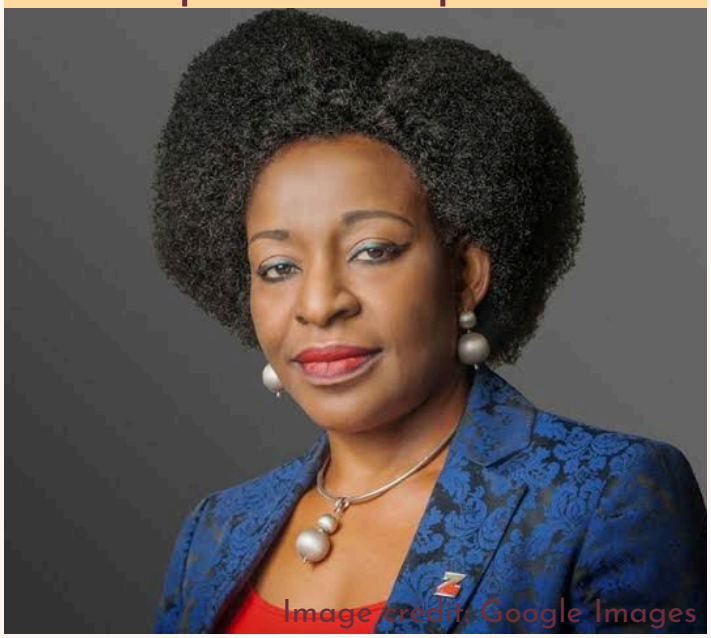
As pioneer Managing Director of the new South-South Development Commission (established 2025), Akpabio has her work – in regional growth and development – cut out; aligning infrastructure, policy, and economic inclusion, and seeking to succeed where previous interventions have failed.

Olubunmi Kuku
Aviation Moderniser



At the Federal Airports Authority of Nigeria (FAAN), Kuku oversees the infrastructure connecting Nigeria to the world. Her leadership impacts airport efficiency, safety, and passenger experience nationwide. Among other projects, she is leading the implementation of a total overhaul of Nigeria's flagship international airport, Murtala Mohammed International Airport, Lagos.

Nonye Ayeni
The Export Champion



A seasoned banking and trade executive with over 25 years, Nonye was appointed CEO of the Nigerian Export Promotion Council (NEPC) in 2023 after serving in senior leadership roles at Zenith Bank and Signature Bank. At NEPC, she is driving Nigeria's shift toward non-oil exports, strengthening global market access, supporting exporters, and positioning Nigerian products and services to compete internationally.

THE JUDICIARY

Kudirat Kekere-Ekun
Benchmark of Justice



Image credit: Google Images

Nigeria's second-ever female Chief Justice, Kekere-Ekun, a 1981 graduate of the Nigerian Law School, and former High Court Judge of Lagos State, stands at the apex of the judiciary, influencing the tone, discipline, and direction of the nation's legal system.

Monica Dongban-Mensem
Appeals Authority



Image credit: Google Images

As President of the Court of Appeal – and only the second woman to head Nigeria's penultimate appellate court – Dongbam-Mensem presides over one of the country's most critical judicial platforms, reinforcing legal interpretation and judicial balance.

THE LEGISLATURE

Natasha Akpoti
Irrepressible Senator



Image credit: Google Images

One of only four women in the current Nigerian Senate, Akpoti is a symbol of conviction and fearlessness. While she divides opinion with her combative style in the upper chamber, there's no doubt that she's a trailblazer for more active and unapologetic female participation in national lawmaking. She overcame many odds to secure her Senate seat, inspiring millions of Nigerians along the way.

INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

Amina Mohammed

Global Administrator



Image credit: Google Images

As Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations, and Chair of the United Nations Sustainable Development Group (UNSDG), she sits at the very centre of global development policy, and is one of the most influential diplomats on the contemporary stage. Mohammed previously served as the Special Adviser to UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on Post-2015 development planning, and as Nigeria's Minister of Environment.

Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala

Global Negotiator



Image credit: Google Images

As the first female and first African Director-General of the World Trade Organization, she occupies one of the most influential economic platforms in the world, while also extending Nigeria's intellectual footprint and diplomatic clout globally. She was previously the first woman to serve as Nigeria's Finance Minister and also as Nigeria's Foreign Minister.

Zainab Shinkafi Bagudu

Health Diplomat



Image credit: Google Images

The President-Elect of the Union for International Cancer Control (UICC), Shinkafi is one of the most active advocates for cancer awareness and support. She founded the Medicaid Cancer Foundation in 2009 and serves on the board of directors for UICC and the advisory board of the Global Initiative Against HPV and Cervical Cancer (GIAHC). She contributes actively to anti-cancer projects and interventions across Nigeria.

SECURITY & LAW

Kemi Nanna Nandap
Border Czar

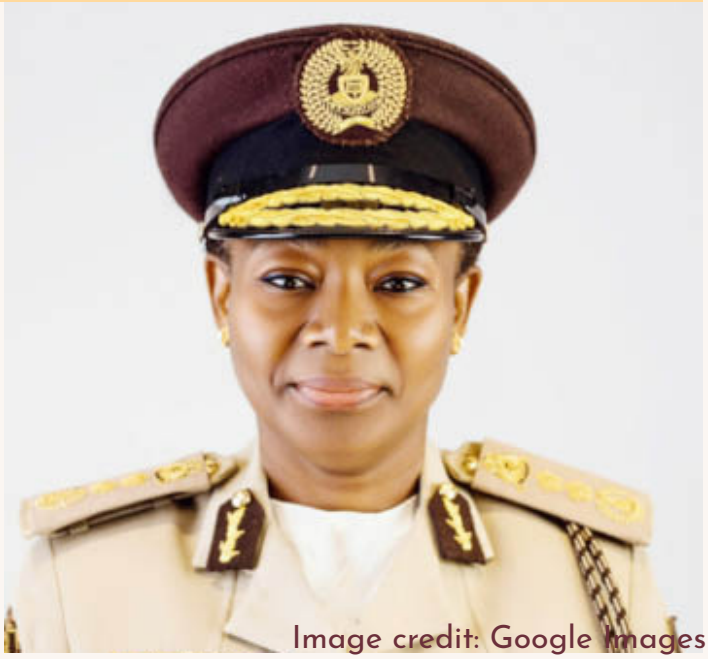


Image credit: Google Images

As the third woman to head the Nigeria Immigration Service – she in fact succeeded a female Comptroller General in 2024 – Nandap is extending a rich tradition of female excellence in the agency that oversees migration control and border security – a critical national responsibility.

AIG Aishatu Abubakar-Baju
Dual Trailblazer



Image credit: Google Images

The first female President of the Veterinary Council of Nigeria, and until this month the most senior female police officer in Nigeria, Abubakar bridges law enforcement, gender equity, and professional regulation. In 2025 she was elected the inaugural President of the Association of Women in Law Enforcement in Africa (AWLEA).

Colonel Onyinyechi Appolonia

Army Trailblazer

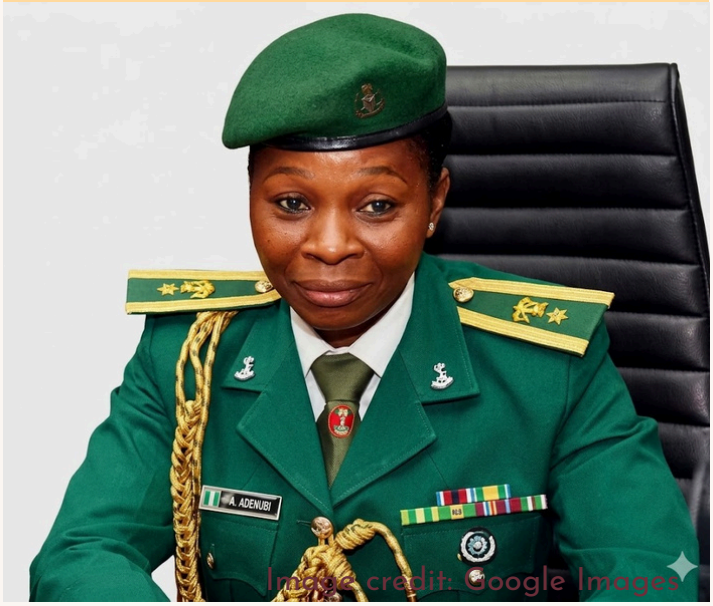


Image credit: Google Images

As the first female spokesperson of the Nigerian Army, she's breaking barriers in military communications and redefining representation within the Armed Services.

Lieutenant Changfe Maigari

Naval Pioneer



Image credit: Google Images

As the first female pilot in the Nigerian Navy, Changfe is expanding the boundaries of service and symbolism within Africa's maritime defence space.

Idayat Hassan

Security Policy Interlocutor



Image credit: Google Images

The lawyer and civil society champion was appointed Secretary of the US-Nigeria Working Group in 2025, where she plays a key role in shaping not only diplomatic relations between the two countries, but also leveraging Nigeria's security architecture to deliver game-changing outcomes.

Nafisat Balogun

Customs Aviator



Image credit: Google Images

As the first female pilot in the Nigeria Customs Service, Nafisat's inspiring rise – from cabin crew to cockpit – will no doubt inspire generations of young people.

26 FACTS ABOUT NIGERIAN WOMEN

1 Wuraola Esan (1960) - First female member of Nigeria's Federal Parliament, breaking barriers at independence.

2 Patricia Etteh (2007) - First and only female Speaker of the Nigerian House of Representatives.

3 Franca Afegbua (1983) - First woman elected to the Nigerian Senate.

4 Virginia Etiaba (2006-2007) - First female governor in Nigerian history, paving the way for future women leaders.

5 Only 20 women serve in the current (10th) National Assembly: 4 of the 109 Senate seats (2.7%) and 16 of the 360 seats in the House of Representatives (4.7%).



6 Ireti Kingibe (2023) - Unseated a long-serving senator who had held his seat since 2011, proving women can win competitive elections.

7 National Gender Policy - Nigeria advocates for 35% affirmative action for women in elective and appointive positions which is above the global 30% Beijing declaration.

8 Captain Josephine Okwuekeleke Tolefe (1960) - First female commissioned officer in the Nigerian Army.

9 Major General Aderonke Kale - First female Major General in Nigeria and West Africa; commanded the Nigerian Army Medical Corps (1994-1996).

10 27.9% female participation in peace support operations - 10% above the UN's 17% benchmark, showing Nigeria's leadership in peacekeeping.

11 In 2011, the first female Regular Combatants Cadets were admitted to the Nigerian Defence Academy, opening combat roles to women.



12 Lieutenant Colonel Onyinyechi Appolonia Anele - First female acting Director of Army Public Relations (2025).

13 Army Warrant Officer Hajara Egbunu - First female Infantry Corps soldier to attain Army Warrant Officer rank (2025).

14 Flying Officer Tolulope Arotile - First female combat helicopter pilot in the Nigerian Air Force. May her soul continue to rest in peace.

15 Blessing Liman - First female fighter plane pilot commissioned in the Nigeria Air Force.

16 Franca Afegbua (1983) - First woman elected to the Nigerian Senate.

17 Amina Mohammed - First Nigerian and first African woman to serve as UN Deputy Secretary-General, championing sustainable development globally.

18 Blessing Obororududu - Most successful Nigerian female wrestler of all time, and winner in 2021 of Nigeria's first (and only!) Olympic medal in Wrestling (Silver).

19 83% of Nigerian women consider themselves entrepreneurs – far higher than the regional average of 51% across other continents.



20 40% of new businesses created in Nigeria are female-led, demonstrating women's entrepreneurial drive.

21 30% of registered entrepreneurial businesses in Nigeria are owned by women.

22 In 2026, 8 out of Nigeria's 28 commercial banks have women CEOs.

23 Women farmers make up 70% of Nigeria's agricultural workforce and produce 60% of the food Nigerians depend on.

24 Women constitute 49.95% of Nigeria's population of over 206 million, representing massive untapped potential.

25 In 1929, women in the Owerri and Calabar provinces began a historic protest seeking the abolition of the warrant chief system, and an end to unfair taxes. It was the first major revolt by women in West Africa.

26 Two decades later, Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti led the 1948 Women's Revolt against unjust taxation, continuing a tradition of women's activism that continues today.





The A-Z of giving to gain:

A Amplify a woman-owned business today. Share their page, buy their product, leave a review. That's marketing money can't buy.

B Buy a book by a Nigerian woman author you've never read before. Try Ayọ̀bámi Adébáyọ̀, Cheluchi Onyemelukwe-Onuobia, Damilare Kuku and Fatima Bala.

C Cook for the woman who always cooks for everyone else. Your mum, your auntie, your wife. Let her sit down for once.

D Donate to a girls' education fund. Even five thousand naira can buy textbooks for a term.

E

Eat out at a woman-owned restaurant. Lagos, Abuja, PH — they're everywhere if you look.

F

Forgive yourself for something you've been carrying. Women are world-class at guilt. Put it down today.

G

Google a Nigerian woman who made history. Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti. Margaret Ekpo. Flora Nwapa. Know the heroes that came before you.

H

Hug a significant woman in your life. Or call her. Or send her a voice note that isn't asking for money.

I

Invest in something. A mutual fund, a Treasury Bill, a side business. Financial independence is feminist.

J

Journal about the woman who shaped you most. Write it down before the memory softens.

K

Keep a promise you made to yourself. That course, that gym routine, that boundary you said you'd enforce.

L

Listen to a woman today without interrupting, advising, or fixing. Just listen.



M

Mentor a younger woman. Even one conversation over lunch can shift someone's entire trajectory.

N

Nominate a woman for an award, a board seat, or a speaking opportunity. Women get overlooked because nobody puts their name forward.

O

Organise a small gathering of women you admire. No agenda. Just food, conversation, and honesty.

P

Pay a woman what she's worth. If you run a business and you know there's a gap, close it today.

Q

Quit one habit that drains your energy. You don't need a new year to start over. Today works.

R

Recommend a woman for that job, that contract, that opportunity you heard about. Be the bridge.

S

Say thank you to a woman who helped you and never got the credit. A text is enough. A handwritten note is better.

T

Take yourself on a date. Somewhere nice. No children, no partner, no agenda. Just you.



U

Unfollow social media accounts that make you feel inadequate. Your phone should not be a source of anxiety.

V

Volunteer at a women's shelter or community centre, even for a few hours.

W

Wear something that makes you feel powerful. Not for anyone else. For you.

X

X out one toxic relationship or dynamic. Life is too short and women stretch themselves too thin.

Y

Yell less at yourself. The inner voice matters. Speak to yourself the way you'd speak to your daughter.

Z

Zero in on one goal for the rest of 2026. Just one. Then go after it like the woman you are.





Image credit: Google Images

HAPPY INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S MONTH

#GiveToGain.

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