WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP ADVANCEMENT IN NIGERIA

Realities, Barriers, and the Way Forward

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Overview

Despite Nigeria's history of influential female figures, women remain significantly underrepresented in leadership and political decision-making. This fact sheet presents key findings from a nationwide survey examining both **structural barriers** and **internal dynamics among women** that shape leadership outcomes, with a focus on actionable pathways for reform and collaboration. The findings draw on a structured survey of established and emerging women leaders across media, civil society, politics, and academia in Nigeria.

Survey Snapshot

Respondents
333 women (exceeding the target of 300)

Target Group
Established and emerging female leaders in media, civil society, politics, and academia

Geographic Focus
Nigeria (with field insights from Abia and Oyo States

Methodology
Structured questionnaire; quantitative analysis and narrative responses

Key Message

Women's leadership advancement in Nigeria is constrained not only by institutional, political, and cultural barriers, but also by internalized bias, limited mentorship, and weak intergenerational collaboration among women. Sustainable progress requires **systemic reform combined with intentional mentorship, solidarity, and leadership accountability.**

KEY FINDINGS

1. Structural and Institutional Barriers Remain Severe

- **79.2%** of respondents agree that Nigeria's political and institutional structures make it harder for women to rise into leadership.
- **Over 60%** identify traditional and cultural norms as a major barrier, regardless of education or professional

Implication: Legal and policy reforms must be paired with institutional enforcement and cultural change initiatives.

2. Internalized Bias Among Women is Widespread

- **~70%** of respondents admit to having doubted another woman's professional ability at some point.
- **59.7%** believe women are less forgiving of themselves and other women when mistakes are made.

Implication: Leadership environments often hold women to higher informal standards, discouraging risk-taking and visibility.

3. Mentorship Gaps Undermine Leadership Pipelines

- **Only 38%** report receiving frequent or very frequent mentorship from other women.
- **Nearly 40%** experience mentorship only occasionally, while some report never being

Implication: Legal and policy reforms must be paired with institutional enforcement and cultural change initiatives.

4. Competition Among Women for Limited Opportunities

- **61.5%** perceive competition among women for limited leadership opportunities.
- **55–60%** have witnessed women undermining or failing to support other women's advancement, often linked to systemic pressure and scarcity.

Implication: Legal and policy reforms must be paired with institutional enforcement and cultural change initiatives.

5. Trust in Women's Competence is Growing, but Respect Lags

- **76.5%** trust female colleagues' professional judgment as much as men
- **Only 27%** believe women leaders are equally respected; 32.1% say they are less respected.

Implication: Credibility gains are not yet translating into authority and influence.

6. Intergenerational Disconnect Weakens Collective Impact

- **About 60%** report experiencing resistance or lack of support from senior women at some point in their careers.
- **Differences** in work styles, communication, expectations, and mentorship approaches are key drivers.

Implication: Without intentional intergenerational leadership models, progress remains fragmented.

THE PATHWAY FORWARD

Conversations Across Generations

• **83.1%** agree senior women have a responsibility to mentor and advocate for younger women.

• **40%** identify mentorship and sponsorship as the most practical and immediate pathway to advancement.

• **65–70%** highlight storytelling, shared experiences, and collaborative engagement as the most effective ways to build trust and solidarity.

## Policy and Civil Society Implications

To accelerate women's leadership advancement, stakeholders should:

- ✅ Institutionalize mentorship and sponsorship frameworks across public, political, and civil society sectors
- ✅ Create intergenerational leadership platforms that promote trust, dialogue, and collaboration
- ✅ Address structural scarcity through gender-responsive political and organizational reforms
- ✅ Integrate cultural change strategies alongside legal and institutional reforms
- ✅ Invest in leadership development programs that combine technical skills with emotional intelligence, empathy, and peer learning

Conclusion

Nigeria's women leaders possess the competence, trust, and commitment needed to lead. The remaining challenge lies in removing systemic barriers, dismantling internalized bias, and transforming mentorship from an exception into a norm. Coordinated action by policymakers, civil society, and women leaders themselves is essential to closing the leadership gap.
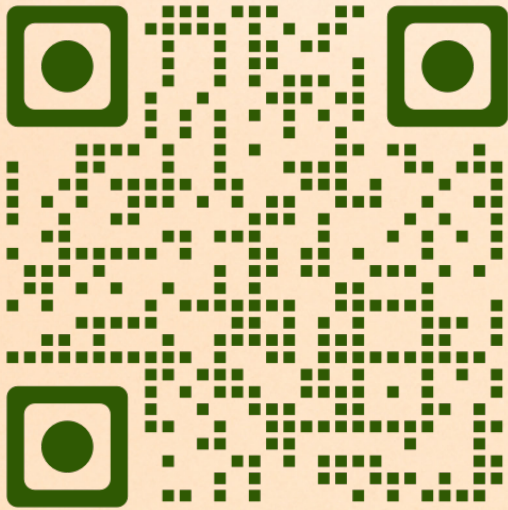
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