




# Driving Inclusion: The Role of Ladies on Wheel in Transforming Nigeria's Transport Sector

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## Abstract

Women are increasingly becoming visible agents of change in Nigeria's transport sector, taking on roles that challenge traditional gender norms and contributing to a more inclusive mobility landscape. This report draws insights from a webinar organized by the Transformative Transport Service Design Initiative (TRATSEDI), which featured the Ladies on Wheel Association of Nigeria—a pioneering platform led by female drivers advocating for equity, professionalism, and empowerment in transportation. The discussion explored how driving offers women financial independence, work-life balance, and the confidence to navigate male-dominated spaces. Through collective advocacy, safety campaigns, and strategic partnerships, Ladies on Wheel is not only supporting its members but also reshaping public perceptions of women behind the wheel. From e-hailing to logistics and public transport, female drivers are redefining service standards while expanding their business horizons. This report highlights their stories, challenges, and the broader societal impact of empowering women in the mobility ecosystem.

**Keywords:** Female Drivers, Transport Inclusion, Advocacy, Gender Equity, Nigeria, Urban Mobility, e-Hailing, Professional Driving, Community Empowerment, TRATSEDI.

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## Introduction

The Nigerian transport sector has long been defined by male dominance — from public bus drivers to logistics operators. Yet, this traditional landscape is being challenged by a wave of bold, determined women who are not just taking the wheel but also reshaping perceptions of who belongs on the road. Leading this movement is Comrade Abiola Nkechi Toluwani, a seasoned professional driver and founder of the Ladies on Wheel Association of Nigeria (LOWAN). Her journey from fashion designer and single mother to mobility advocate and community leader captures the resilience and ambition that now define many women in transport.

This report draws from a powerful and engaging webinar hosted by Dr. Emmanuel Mogaji, which brought Comrade Toluwani and her experiences to the forefront. It explores key themes discussed during the session — including the social stigma faced by female drivers, the professional and economic opportunities within the sector, and the strategies being used to navigate and thrive in often hostile environments. From confronting gender-based harassment to building client bases and running transport businesses, the report showcases how female drivers are transforming mobility into a tool for empowerment.

This report offers insight into the formation and mission of Ladies on Wheel, highlighting how the association is driving change through advocacy, professional development, and collective action. It examines the group's efforts to create safer, more dignified working conditions for women, its engagement with key stakeholders such as government agencies and financial institutions, and the innovative ways members are building sustainable transport businesses. By showcasing both the successes and ongoing challenges, the report paints a compelling picture of how women are reshaping Nigeria's transport landscape — not as passive participants, but as confident, capable leaders of a more inclusive and transformative mobility future.

## Formation and Vision of Ladies on Wheel

The Ladies on Wheel Association of Nigeria (LOWAN) was established to unify women working across different sectors of the transport industry, including e-hailing platforms, traditional bus services, logistics, dispatch riding, and corporate driving roles. Recognizing the isolation often experienced by women in this male-dominated field, the association provides a shared space for collaboration, identity, and support. It offers members a sense of belonging and solidarity, enabling them to navigate the sector with confidence and community backing.

LOWAN's core mission goes beyond representation. It is built on the pillars of empowerment, mentorship, safety, and public engagement. The association provides training and soft-skills development, cultivates leadership among its members, and promotes advocacy for gender inclusion in transport policy. Through public education and outreach, LOWAN is also working to shift societal attitudes about female drivers, presenting them not as anomalies but as capable professionals essential to the future of mobility in Nigeria.

## **Gender Barriers and Social Stigma**

Comrade Abiola Nkechi Toluwani shared a deeply personal account of her transition into commercial driving, recalling how even her own children initially resisted the idea of their mother becoming a taxi driver. This reaction reflects a widespread cultural perception that commercial driving is a profession of low status, particularly unsuitable for women. Such stigmas often prevent women from exploring viable opportunities within the transport sector, reinforcing gendered norms about "acceptable" professions for women.

However, Abiola's journey exemplifies how these biases can be challenged and dismantled through education, exposure, and persistence. By demonstrating professionalism and excellence in her work, she slowly gained the respect of her family and the public. Her experience underscores the importance of visibility and normalization — when women take up space in unconventional roles and succeed, they not only redefine possibilities for themselves but pave the way for others. LOWAN's work amplifies this transformation by creating spaces for women to be seen, supported, and celebrated in their professional journeys.

## **Advocacy and Safety Measures**

LOWAN actively addresses the safety and well-being of its members through direct advocacy with key stakeholders, including the Ministry of Transportation and the Nigerian Police. The association has established open lines of communication with law enforcement to report harassment, extortion, and physical assault — issues that many female drivers face daily. Members are trained to document and report incidents, ensuring accountability and follow-up from authorities. In some cases, direct intervention from the association has led to protection for affected drivers and commitments from public officials to take reports seriously.

In addition to reactive support, LOWAN encourages proactive safety strategies among its members. Female drivers are advised to operate in safer zones, build client networks they trust, and avoid high-risk areas. The association also organizes internal workshops to promote emotional intelligence, de-escalation tactics, and legal literacy, empowering women to handle

challenges with confidence. These efforts not only enhance safety but also reinforce LOWAN's broader mission of fostering professionalism and resilience in the sector.

## **Economic Empowerment and Business Development**

LOWAN does more than advocate — it equips women with tools for economic independence. Many of its members have transitioned from simply driving to becoming entrepreneurs, owning and managing logistics companies, rental fleets, and dispatch services. These women are creating employment opportunities for others, particularly younger women seeking alternatives to traditional career paths. By diversifying their income streams and building brands around professionalism and reliability, LOWAN members are elevating the image of women in transport.

To support these ambitions, LOWAN partners with financial institutions to facilitate access to vehicles through hire-purchase schemes and flexible repayment plans. This model enables women who might otherwise lack capital to build sustainable transport businesses. In an industry where ownership often determines long-term success, these partnerships are vital. LOWAN also encourages members to build a loyal customer base through branding, business cards, and client retention strategies, helping them transition from app-based gigs to independent operators with steady income.

## **Expansion, Visibility, and Future Aspirations**

Though LOWAN has made commendable progress over its seven years of existence, Comrade Toluwani acknowledged that greater visibility is essential. Public awareness of the association remains limited in many areas, particularly at the grassroots level. To address this, LOWAN is developing outreach campaigns to connect with more female drivers across Nigeria. These efforts aim to inform women that they have a support network available and invite them into a growing community that champions their progress.

The long-term vision is even more ambitious. LOWAN plans to expand beyond its current four-state presence and establish branches in every state across Nigeria. Conversations are already underway to create diaspora chapters, beginning with interest from members based in the United Kingdom. By 2030, the association envisions itself as a national and global voice for women in transport — providing leadership, setting professional standards, and creating platforms for learning, collaboration, and advocacy on a much larger scale.

## Partnerships and Collaborations

Strategic partnerships play a critical role in advancing LOWAN's mission. The association is currently exploring collaborations with other women-led groups such as Women in Transportation (WIT) and other relevant association of Nigerian women business network. These alliances will strengthen its advocacy power and expand opportunities for shared training, grants, and visibility. Joining forces with like-minded organizations also allows LOWAN to align with national and international efforts focused on gender equity and mobility.

Beyond gender-focused networks, LOWAN is also looking to partner with regulatory agencies, donor organizations, and transport technology firms to broaden its impact. With support from such bodies, the association can increase access to funding, influence policy change, and deliver scalable solutions to challenges affecting female drivers. These collaborations are essential to positioning LOWAN as not just a driver-led initiative, but a professional body capable of influencing the broader transport ecosystem in Nigeria and beyond.

## Conclusion

This report is a synthesized reflection based on insights shared during the “Ladies on Wheel: Driving Towards Transformative Transport Service” webinar, hosted by Dr. Emmanuel Mogaji and featuring Comrade Abiola Nkechi Toluwani. It draws upon the webinar transcript and audience engagement to present the core narratives and themes discussed. While every effort has been made to preserve the integrity of the voices and stories shared, the dynamic nature of the conversation means that specific contributions may not always be directly attributed. As such, this document is intended as an informed summary rather than a verbatim or academic transcription, designed to be accessible to a broader audience interested in transport equity, female empowerment, and grassroots advocacy.

Importantly, the discussions captured here open up critical avenues for further exploration across academic, policy, and business domains. The experiences and strategies shared by Ladies on Wheel highlight pressing issues such as the gendered barriers in mobility, the importance of collective organizing, and the untapped potential of women-led transport enterprises. Future research could delve deeper into the economic and social impact of female drivers in Nigeria, explore frameworks for scaling such initiatives nationally and internationally, and examine how technology and partnerships can support safer, more inclusive urban transport ecosystems.

We extend our sincere appreciation to TRATSEDI for organizing this timely and impactful webinar, and to Comrade Abiola Nkechi Toluwani for her powerful leadership and unwavering commitment to empowering women through transport. Her insights, along with the contributions from participants, have enriched the conversation and underscored the value of inclusive, community-driven solutions. As Ladies on Wheel continues to grow, ongoing collaboration, visibility, and support will be essential to realizing a future where women are not only present in the transport sector — but are leading its transformation.