



30 Women in Local Government: Celebrating CLGF's 30th Anniversary

Featured Interviewee #16: Hon. Dr Folasade Adeyemo

Chairman, Odeda Local Government in Ogun State, Nigeria



Profile

Hon. Dr. Folasade Waliat Adeyemo is a distinguished Nigerian leader whose career bridges intellectual excellence and grassroots governance. Born into the renowned Soyinka-Olowolagba and Malomo families of Abeokuta, she brings over five decades of

purposeful public service to her work. She holds a PhD in Counselling Psychology from the University of Ibadan and has nearly thirty years' experience across all levels of the education sector - foundations that shape her people-centred and inclusive leadership style.

Elected Executive Chairman of Odeda Local Government, Dr. Adeyemo has emerged as a trailblazer for women in local governance. Her administration, anchored in visionary and sustainable development, earned her a decisive re-election in 2024. She also made history as the first female Chairman of the Association of Local Government of Nigeria (ALGON), Ogun State Chapter, where she champions transparency and local government autonomy.

Charismatic, intellectually rigorous, and deeply committed to community service, she exemplifies modern African leadership.

Hon. Dr Folasade Adeyemo

Executive Chairman, Odeda Local Government, Ogun State, Nigeria; State Chairman, Association of Local Government of Nigeria, Ogun State; National Deputy Welfare Secretary, ALGON. Nigeria.

Interview Highlights

1. How has the role of women in local government evolved over the past three decades, and how do you think women can accelerate action for gender equality today?

In the past 30 years, women at the local government level were mostly in the background. But gradually, women are moving from the background to the forefront, from the backseat to the driver's seat. Before, women mainly functioned as supporters of the local government system. They followed the men, praised them, and sometimes played small advisory roles.

Today, we are seeing clear improvement. We now have women chairpersons within local government, women councillors, vice chairpersons, secretaries to local government, leaders of legislative

Hon Dr. Folasade Adeyemo (Nigeria)



arm, supervisors, and more. So we can say women are coming up. To accelerate gender equality, women must continue to step forward, participate fully in decision making, and take up leadership roles at the local level. The more women lead from the grassroots, the stronger the progress will be.

2. What inspired you to enter local government, and how has your journey advanced gender equality in your community or country?

Let me talk about what brought me into politics. I did not come into politics by chance. My father was a politician, so it was easier for me to get involved. While I was in the academics, I was also practicing politics by the side then as pastime activity.

When the opportunity presented itself at the local government level, some of my leaders called on me to vie for the chairperson position. At first, I was skeptical, but I received encouragement from my home front. Since my father was a politician, my family understood what leadership required, hence they supported me. I accepted because serving my people has been one of my biggest motivations. That is what inspired me: to step up when called upon and use my experience to serve my community through local leadership.

3. What has been your most rewarding experience as a woman leader in local government, and how did it contribute to promoting gender equality?

My most rewarding experience has been being able to lead, including leading several men. This is my second time serving in this position. I had spent three years in office as chairman, I completed my first tenure in the year 2024 and was re-elected same year for another term. That alone is fulfilling because it shows that leadership is not about gender, it is about capacity and performance.

I am also proud that I have been able to bring more women into local politics. Before my tenure, many women were not active in politics. In fact, I was the first woman chairman in my local government since it was established in 1955. Since then, no woman had held that position until I came in. Being the first, and using the opportunity to encourage other women, has made me happy.

4. What challenges did you face as a woman entering local government, and how did you overcome them? What can be done to accelerate overcoming these barriers for future women leaders?

I faced many challenges. Politics is male dominated and the environment is also male dominated. Women receive criticism from men, and there are setbacks meant to discourage you. Financial barriers are another challenge. In our culture, there is a stereotype that funding and political support are for men, not for women. Cultural barriers still affect how people accept women leaders.

I was able to overcome these challenges by being focused, consistent, and courageous. My education helped me, and my experience as an academia also supported me greatly. I did not allow the discouragement to stop me. To accelerate change for future women leaders, we need stronger support systems, mentorship, and policies that reduce financial and cultural barriers so women can compete fairly.

5. What advice would you give to other women considering a career in local government to help them accelerate gender equality in their communities?

First, I will tell them to believe in themselves. A woman must show interest in whatever she wants to do, because interest is the foundation. Once you develop the interest, you can build your capacity.



Women should seek information, learn what the role requires, and connect with mentors who can guide them in the area of their purpose.

Leadership training is also very important. A woman should invest in learning and self development so she can speak confidently and lead effectively. Education matters too because it strengthens both confidence and competence.

Above all, women need self esteem. If you do not believe in yourself, people will not take you seriously. So my advice is: believe in yourself, prepare yourself, get the right mentors, and step forward with confidence.

6. How can we encourage more women, particularly young women, to enter leadership roles in local government, and what actions can governments take to create more inclusive environments for women?

Government should put in place gender friendly policies, and not just policies but laws that reserve a percentage of leadership positions for women. Without deliberate action, women will continue to be underrepresented. Even today, we still have very few women at the National Assembly, and this shows that progress is still slow.

Government should create laws that support and encourage women to actively participate in politics and to contest leadership positions. More women will come forward if they know the system is fair and supportive.

An enabling environment is also needed. Women should feel safe, supported, and accepted. When the environment is inclusive, young women will have the confidence to take up leadership roles and contribute meaningfully to governance and development.

7. Why is it urgent to increase the number and influence of women in local government, and how will this contribute to positive change in governance?

Women have a soft heart and milk of human kindness in them. When a woman is in a home, she is able to handle many responsibilities at once and still put everything in place. That same strength is important in governance.

When more women participate in local government, they will drive the change we are talking about, across the economy, social development, infrastructure, and other areas. There will be advancement, because women understand community needs closely.

Women are also managers of resources. They can manage public resources well, and people believe in women. Women speak truthfully and tell you the facts as they are. That honesty and responsibility builds trust. So it is urgent to increase women's influence because women bring practical leadership, strong management, and a people centered approach that strengthens development and good governance.

8. How has digital technology helped or can help accelerate women's political inclusion in local government, and what steps should we take to make it more accessible to women in leadership?

The world has become a global village. For example, I don't know you and you don't know me, but because of technology we are able to connect. Technology has helped women become more informed, more connected, and more exposed. Women are learning more, getting mentors, and seeing successful women leaders through digital platforms.



Technology can bring more women into politics by strengthening networks and encouraging peer learning and support. Through social groups and online engagement, women can gain confidence and access opportunities that may not be available locally. Government can do more to support accessibility for women, especially by improving access to digital tools, training, and online platforms. Technology is a powerful tool, and it can help women build capacity, visibility, and inclusion in leadership.

9. What innovative practices or strategies have you used to accelerate women's participation and leadership in local government in your region or country?

In my local government, I bring women together through a group called "Women in Governance and Politics." Whether you are a supervisor, councillor, consultant, or women leader in your ward, I meet with women regularly, we organise ourselves, and we even do elections within the group.

We also have a scheme at an acquisition centre where women who are out of school, unemployed, graduates, or waiting for work are enrolled and trained for six months. This helps them gain skills and confidence. In addition, any committee I form in the local government, I ensure women are included and placed in leadership positions. During my campaigns, women supported me strongly, and after the elections I did not send them away. I keep mentoring them, encourage them, and bring them close. Many call me "mommy." Mentorship is important, because the upcoming ones must be ready to take the stage.

10. As CLGF celebrates 30 years, what actions must be taken in the next 30 years to ensure the continued empowerment of women in local government?

We must continue focusing on institutionalising gender equality through strong policies and laws. This will ensure women's empowerment is not temporary but sustainable. Strong legal frameworks help protect women's participation and increase their representation in leadership.

We must also focus strongly on mentoring and mentorship. Mentorship builds confidence, strengthens capacity, and prepares women to step into leadership roles with competence. Women who have already achieved leadership must guide those coming behind them. Finally, we must continue investing in women so that women's voices are heard everywhere and all the time. If we keep building women's skills, confidence, and opportunities, then women will continue to rise and contribute more meaningfully to governance and development over the next 30 years.

CLGF 30th Anniversary Commemoration

In celebration of CLGF's 30th Anniversary, we are honoured to spotlight the inspiring stories of 30 trailblazing women in local government from across the Commonwealth, all members of the Commonwealth Women in Local Government Network. These interviews celebrate their groundbreaking contributions to gender equality and their transformative impact on building inclusive, empowered communities.

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