



From Capacity to Command

Investing in Women's Leadership
in the Nigeria Police Force

Executive Summary

The Nigeria Police Force (NPF) is one of Africa's largest police institutions, yet women hold only around one in ten positions and just four have ever reached Deputy Inspector-General. A 2024 culture survey found the real story. Officers did not doubt women's capability. They doubted whether the system gave them a fair chance. The gap sat in deployment patterns, informal networks, and institutional habit, not in formal rules.

The Women Police Leadership Programme, delivered through the SPAAT partnership between the Government of Nigeria and UNDP, was built to close that gap with evidence, not sentiment. Across three cohorts since 2024, it has trained senior and mid-career women officers through a residential fellowship model. Experiential learning, cross-generational mentorship, and a civilian-police faculty replace the standard lecture format.

The results are measurable. Fifty-nine percent of early graduates have since been promoted or given new leadership roles. Every graduate has gone on to mentor other officers. Over 1,200 officers have been reached through that ripple effect. Every one of the Force's 37 commands now has at least one WPLP-trained woman leader.

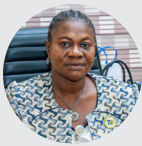
This knowledge product documents how that outcome was engineered: through institutional ownership at the National Institute of Police Studies, a deliberate faculty design, and a pipeline built to outlast any single project cycle. It is offered as a model for other security sector institutions confronting the same question WPLP has already answered in Nigeria: whether women can lead. The evidence says they already do.



Women Police Leadership Programme Alumni with some of the close-out ad hoc mentors, United Nations House, Abuja, September 2025, [Photo: UNDP].

When Assistant Commissioner of Police Nneka Eze talks about May 2024, she describes it as a turning point in a policing career that already spanned decades. She was one of the senior women officers who gathered in Lagos for the first cohort of the Women Police Leadership Programme, a week of leadership training unlike anything she had encountered since joining the Nigeria Police Force.

"It brought out our leadership potentials. After the workshop, I became bolder, expressive, resilient and assertive. It was a journey of self-discovery, a moment of self-awareness that 'I can do it'."



- ACP Nneka Eze,
Gender Unit, Force Criminal Investigation Department, Abuja



Assistant Commissioner of Police Nneka Eze, Gender Unit, Force Criminal Investigation Department (FCID), Abuja, a graduate of the first cohort of the Women Police Leadership Programme interacting with her mentees at the FCID Abuja, July 2026, [Photo: UNDP].

Today, ACP Eze serves in the Gender Unit of the Force Criminal Investigation Department in Abuja, one of the most consequential postings in Nigerian policing for survivors of gender-based crime. She credits the programme, and the follow-up sessions on work-life balance and leading change that came after it, with transforming how she leads: "I have never been the same after the training, always holding my head high. I have become more vocal and daring, but always listening calmly to others, and a better manager."

Her story is no longer the exception. It is becoming the pattern.



Resident Representative, United Nations Development Programme, Elsie Attafuah with some of the participants of the Women Police Leadership Programme, United Nations House, Abuja, September 2025, [Photo: UNDP]

Capability was never the constraint

The Nigeria Police Force is one of the largest police institutions in Africa, with commands across all 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory. Yet women make up only around one in ten of its personnel, and in the Force's entire history only four women have ever attained the rank of Deputy Inspector-General of Police.

A culture survey of programme participants captured the paradox precisely. Fully 96.3 per cent of senior and mid-career women officers agreed that female officers are equally capable as their male counterparts when given equal training, exposure and opportunity, yet a majority did not believe equal opportunities for advancement exist. The barriers sit not in formal promotion rules but earlier in the pipeline: in deployment patterns, informal networks and institutional culture. Capability was never the constraint. Opportunity was.

The Women Police Leadership Programme was designed to close that gap deliberately, measurably and permanently. It is delivered under the Supporting Police Accountability and Transformation (SPAAT) project, Nigeria's comprehensive, government-led police reform partnership, implemented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) with generous funding from the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany and in collaboration with the Global Security-Sector-Reform Foundation and CLEEN Foundation. The same partnership has supported the new Nigeria Police Regulations, gazetted in February 2026, modernised training for

over 4010 police personnel including at least 1,000 trainers, and strengthened officer welfare and wellbeing. These reforms are now carried forward with fresh urgency under the leadership of the Inspector-General of Police, Olatunji Rilwan Disu, whose agenda of professionalism, accountability and community partnership has given the effort decisive institutional ownership. Every result in this story has been achieved together with the Nigeria Police Force, never merely for it.

Three cohorts, one deepening pipeline

The first cohort convened in Lagos in May 2024, bringing together senior women officers from Assistant Superintendent of Police (ASP) to Assistant Inspector-General of Police (AIG). The second, hosted at the National Institute of Police Studies (NIPS) in Abuja in November 2025, exceeded its target with 42 participants and recorded a 95.6 per cent satisfaction rate, with officers rating themselves proficient or expert across key leadership domains rising from 35 to 60 per cent.

The third cohort, delivered in Abuja from 29 June to 3 July 2026 and co-convened by the Police Reform Secretariat, NIPS and UNDP, marked a deliberate deepening of the pipeline: 35 female officers at operational command level, Superintendents of Police (SP) to Chief Superintendents of Police (CSP) drawn from fourteen (14) commands and the force headquarters, the ranks from which the Force's next generation of senior women leaders will rise. The cohort returned an overall programme rating of 97.9 per cent, and every respondent said she would recommend the programme to a colleague.

Inside the fellowship

The WPLP is designed as a fellowship, not a course. At its heart is one week of intensive, residential leadership training built almost entirely on experiential methods. Role play, storytelling and interactive sessions take the place of lectures, walking participants through the fundamentals of leadership, emotional intelligence and how to harness emotion as a source of strength, core leadership practice, and people and environmental awareness. Coaching, mental wellbeing and work-life balance are woven through the week, in recognition of the hazardous nature of the work and because officers cannot lead others sustainably if the institution does not also attend to how they lead themselves.

The faculty is as deliberate as the method. Sessions are delivered through a civilian-police co-facilitation model that pairs leadership experts and serving and retired senior officers with an ad hoc faculty of Nigerian women who have distinguished themselves at the highest levels of public life. For the first cohort, Dr Obiageli 'Oby' Ezekwesili delivered the keynote address.



Participants of the Third Cohort of the Women Police Leadership Programme, National Institute of Police Studies, July 2026
[Photo: Nigeria Police Reform Secretariat]

For the third, the keynote came from Ms Adedayo Benjamins-Laniyi, Director-General of the Maryam Babangida National Centre for Women Development, while Ms Hadiza Bala Usman, Special Adviser to the President on Policy Coordination, served on the ad hoc faculty, bringing officers face to face with women leading at the summit of Nigerian public service.

Participants are grouped into mentorship cohorts, each anchored by a mentor, a woman of distinction in her own field, who works with her group throughout a three-month period: discussing careers, day to day work issues and navigating complex work environment, offering counsel, and leading joint review sessions that consolidate the learning. To bring the programme to an end, a close-out session of a new but prominent ad hoc mentorship conversations and reflections on the programme's impact completes the fellowship. In October 2025, the close-out ad hoc mentors were Elsie Attafuah, Resident Representative of UNDP Nigeria; Beatrice Eyong, UN Women Country Representative to Nigeria and ECOWAS; Professor Olu Ogunsakin, the Director General, NIPS; AIG Aishatu Abubakar Baju, PhD; Mrs. Ene Obi – Gender Activist / Former Country Director, ActionAid Nigeria and Mrs. Charity Umbwe Shekari - Member, Kaduna State University Governing Council.



Interactive Session at the Third Cohort of the Women Police Leadership Programme, National Institute of Police Studies, July 2026 [Photo: Nigeria Police Reform Secretariat]



Participants of the Third Cohort of the Women Police Leadership Programme, July 2026 [Photo: Nigeria Police Reform Secretariat]



Participants and facilitators at the Third Cohort of the Women Police Leadership Programme, July 2026 [Photo: NPRS]



Participants and facilitators at the Third Cohort of the Women Police Leadership Programme, July 2026 [Photo: NPRS]

Built to last: a home at NIPS

Crucially, this is not another ad hoc, donor-driven programme. The WPLP is delivered by the National Institute of Police Studies, the Force's own strategic leadership school. UNDP supported NIPS to develop a four tier leadership curriculum including WPLP, its learning strategy and an ad hoc faculty roster system that draws together police experts, leadership specialists and distinguished external faculty. In doing so, the partnership has helped strengthen NIPS as a centre of learning excellence and one of the Nigeria Police Force's most active learning institutions, ensuring that women's leadership development is owned, delivered and sustained by the institution itself, well beyond any project cycle.



Evidence: What happened next?

In July 2026, a post-programme impact survey asked alumnae of the first two cohorts a simple question: what changed following their participation in WPLP? The answers, from 32 senior women officers serving across all six geopolitical zones, are striking.

59%

have been promoted or appointed to new leadership responsibilities since the programme, including elevations to Assistant Inspector-General and Commissioner of Police, and appointments as Area Commanders, Divisional Police Officers and heads of specialist units.

100%

have mentored, coached or supported other officers since the programme. Every single graduate, without exception.

94-97%

report that the programme strengthened their confidence and influence significantly or extremely, across every dimension measured.

1,200+

officers reached through documented alumnae mentoring, step-down trainings, command lectures and monthly women police forums.

Behind the numbers sit accounts of leadership in action. One Divisional Police Officer described applying the programme's structured decision-making to authorise operations against bandits in her area of responsibility, contributing to a reduction in kidnapping incidents.

A squadron commander now explains the reasoning behind orders at pre-parade briefings, reporting improved compliance and higher morale among her more than 200 personnel. An Assistant Commissioner of Police introduced women-only listening sessions at a community town hall, led by female officers.

"That session uncovered issues of extortion and harassment at a local market that weren't coming up in the main forum. We acted on it immediately and it built a lot of trust. The women now call our gender desk directly."



**- Assistant Commissioner of Police,
First cohort, post-programme impact survey**

"Before WPLP, I had the rank but sometimes hesitated to take visible command in male-dominated spaces. Now I speak up in senior management meetings and chair operations briefings without second-guessing myself. The programme reminded me that leadership is not just about rank; it is about impact."



**- Assistant Commissioner of Police,
First cohort, post-programme impact survey**

The cumulative result is a milestone without precedent in the Force's history: every one of the Nigeria Police Force's 37 commands, the 36 state commands and the Federal Capital Territory, today counts at least one WPLP-trained woman leader among its officers.

And with the programme now embedded as a specialist pathway of the Force's three-tier National Police Leadership Programme, that pipeline is permanent.

The ripple effect

Few stories illustrate the multiplier better than that of ACP Olabisi Okuwobi, Assistant Director of Threat Response at the Nigeria Police Force's National Cyber Crime Centre and a graduate of the programme. Speaking at the Women Police Conference in July 2026, she described how the training changed not only her practice but her intent: "I learned about gender responsive policing, and how to thrive in a male-dominated profession. My mentoring perspective is now intentional."

She mentors male and female officers alike, and even youth corps members serving with the Force, because, as she puts it, gender-responsive policing is everyone's responsibility. When one of her own officers attended the third cohort, the effect came full circle: "When she came back to the office, they were like, 'Madam, did you attend that Women Police Leadership course?' They said, no wonder, Madam, it is just like you are living it in the office." Her officers, she says, returned committed to change and are now mentoring others.

"This is a game changer for the Nigeria Police Force, and it should continue. It should not stop. Eventually, the changes will be uniform. It is just a matter of time."



- ACP Olabisi Okuwobi,
National Cyber Crime Centre, Nigeria Police Force

Her charge to the partnership behind the programme was equally direct: "Do not stop, because it is by not stopping that you will have the fulfilment of this investment."



Participants at the First Cohort of the Women Police Leadership Programme, May 2024 [Photo: UNDP]

Leading where officers are made

What the pipeline looks like at the most senior levels can be seen at the Police College, Oji River, in Enugu State, one of the Force's historic training institutions, where Commissioner of Police Uduak Otu Ita serves as Deputy Commandant. A member of the pioneer cohort in Lagos, CP Ita has served the Force for over three decades: as Area Commander and Divisional Police Officer, as Deputy Commissioner of Police for Finance and Administration at Zone 7 Headquarters in Abuja and has been Gender Adviser to the African Union Mission in Somalia, and as Sector Commander with the African Union Mission in Sudan.

She has attended courses across Africa, Europe and beyond. Her verdict on the WPLP is unambiguous: "It remains one of the most focused, practical and life-changing leadership experiences I have ever undertaken. It did not merely improve my leadership skills. It awakened my leadership consciousness."

Her position places a woman leader exactly where the Force forms its next generation of officers, shaping from the first day of training the professional, people-centred policing culture the reform seeks to build. For CP Ita, the lesson of her own journey, from conflict zones in Sudan and Somalia to strategic police formations in Nigeria, is one the institution can no longer afford to ignore.



Executive Governor of Akwa Ibom State, Pastor Umo Bassey Eno, with Commissioner of Police Uduak Otu Ita [Photo: Akwa Ibom State Government]

“Gender inclusion is not an act of charity. It is a strategic necessity for institutional effectiveness. Women are not asking for special treatment. Women are asking for equal opportunity to serve, to lead, and to contribute.”



- CP Uduak Otu Ita,
Deputy Commandant, Police College, Oji River

Her message to every young policewoman joining the Force is just as clear: “Dream boldly. Prepare diligently. Never allow stereotypes to define your future. Your gender is not your limitation. Your competence is your greatest credential.”

Heard at the very top

The message is landing where it matters most. At the close-out event of the Senior Police Leadership Course on the 05 June 2026, at the National Institute of Police Studies, the Inspector-General of Police left the room with words that captured the shift under way in the force’s thinking:

“I have heard all they have said about the women leading police divisions in Lagos. If they are doing a good job, why would I want to change them?”



- Olatunji Rilwan Disu,
Inspector-General of Police

It is a simple standard, and a radical one: performance, not gender, decides who leads. It is also precisely the standard the evidence from the WPLP has been building towards.



Participants at the First Cohort of the Women Police Leadership Programme, May 2024 [Photo: UNDP]

From Programme to National agenda

On 15 July 2026, the momentum reached a national stage with the reinauguration of women network in the NPF. The Women Police Conference convened in Abuja, bringing together the leadership of the Nigeria Police Force, the Police Service Commission, government ministries, development partners and serving women officers to take stock of progress and drive the implementation of the gender-responsive provisions of the new Police Regulations. As ACP Okuwobi put it from the conference floor, the goal is to ensure the Regulations become “an impactful document that is set to change institutional culture” rather than remaining on paper, with gender awareness built in from the training schools upward and from the top echelons downward.

The timing could hardly matter more. Nigeria is engaged in the most significant conversation about its policing architecture since independence. The Federal Government has declared the establishment of state police imperative for national security, and the two chambers of the national assembly have passed a constitutional amendment to allow for federal and state police, marking the beginning new police system regime in Nigeria.

“Women leaders bring empathy, collaboration, and resilience-
critical for modern policing”



- Elsie Attafuah,
Resident Representative, UNDP Nigeria

If and when state police services are fully established, each will need founding leaders. Nigeria now has something it has never had before: a nationwide corps of women officers, present in every command, trained in transformational leadership and gender-responsive policing, coached, networked, and already stepping into greater responsibility at a rate the impact data makes plain. The Police Service Commission’s own guidelines call for 15 per cent representation of women in senior deployments and a 30 per cent recruitment quota. The evidence suggests these are conservative floors, not aspirational ceilings.

The question the Women Police Leadership Programme puts before Nigeria is therefore no longer whether women can lead its police. Officers like ACP Nneka Eze, ACP Olabisi Okuwobi and CP Uduak Otu Ita have answered it, in every command in



Participants of the Women Police Leadership Programme First Cohort, Lagos, May 2024, [Photo: UNDP]

the country. The question is whether Nigeria, at this defining moment, will give women the chance: in the senior command of the Nigeria Police Force, and at the head of the state police services now taking shape.

‘Empower a woman police officer today’

Asked what she would tell other women in the Force, ACP Eze does not hesitate: the programme, she says, should reach every woman officer, “to help them believe in themselves.”

Fifty-nine per cent of her fellow graduates have already stepped into new roles. One helps lead the college where the Force’s next generation is formed. More than 1,200 officers have already been reached through the mentoring of graduates who, without exception, are lifting others behind them. The leaders, it turns out, were already there.

CP Ita puts the closing challenge in a single sentence: “Empower a woman police officer today, and you strengthen the future of policing tomorrow.” Nigeria is now finding out what happens when it does.



Participants and Facilitators at the Women Police Leadership Conference, United Nations House, July 2026, [Photo: UNDP]

“Empower a woman police officer today, and you strengthen the future of policing tomorrow.”



- CP Uduak Otu Ita,
Deputy Commandant, Police College, Oji River



Participants at the Women Police Leadership Conference, United Nations House, July 2026, [Photo: UNDP]



Signing Ceremony for the Police Reform Phase 3 at the United Nations House, August 2024, [Photo: UNDP]



Participants at the Women Police Leadership Conference, United Nations House, July 2026, [Photo: UNDP]



Signing Ceremony for the Police Reform Phase 3 at the United Nations House, August 2024, [Photo: UNDP]



Participant at the Women Police Leadership Programme, United Nations House, Abuja, September 2025, [Photo: UNDP]



UNDP Resident Representative, Elsie Attafuah with IGP Olatunji Rilwan Disu, June 2026, [Photo: UNDP]



Participant at the Women Police Leadership Programme, United Nations House, Abuja, September 2025, [Photo: UNDP]



Participant at the Women Police Leadership Programme, United Nations House, Abuja, September 2025, [Photo: UNDP]



Engagement with Participants of the Women Police Leadership Programme, Abuja, March 2025, [Photo: UNDP]



Certification Ceremony at the Third Cohort of the Women Police Leadership Programme, July 2026 [Photo: NPRS]



Participants at the 70 Years of Women in Policing Conference, Abuja, December 2026, [Photo: UNDP]



Women Police Leadership Conference, United Nations House, July 2026, [Photo: UNDP]



Women Police Leadership Conference, United Nations House, July 2026, [Photo: UNDP]



Facilitator-led Interactive Session at the Third Cohort of the Women Police Leadership Programme, National Institute of Police Studies, July 2026 [Photo: NPRS]



UN Women Country Director, Beatrice Enyong at the Women Police Leadership Programme, Abuja, September 2025, [Photo: UNDP]



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About the Partnership

The Women Police Leadership Programme (WPLP) is delivered by the National Institute of Police Studies (NIPS) and designed with technical support from UNDP as part of the Supporting Police Accountability and Transformation (SPAAT) project, Nigeria's government-led police reform partnership, with generous funding from the Government of Germany, alongside the Global Security-Sector-Reform Foundation and the CLEEN Foundation. The partnership also supported the new Nigeria Police Regulations, gazetted in February 2026, and trained over 4,010 police personnel

Supporting Police Accountability and Transformation:



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GS-Foundation
Security-Sector-Reform



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