

A mother of three, chartered civil engineer, and Managing Director of Lagos Metropolitan Area Transport Authority (LAMATA), Enjr. Abimbola Akinajo has made it her mission to turn Lagos, the largest megacity in Africa, into an efficient and safe place to move around – a city where everyone can experience enjoyment in their daily lives.

In your view, what is a feminist transport system?

A feminist transport system is one that identifies women’s needs and ensures that deliberate efforts and focus are placed on gender neutrality – including the design, operation, security, and safety of women – while promoting transformational infrastructure that improves the experience of the city for everyone.

How does the experience for women and girls in Lagos influence your work?

I take an intersectional approach to my work, acknowledging that women and girls constitute a larger percentage of vulnerable groups in Lagos. As a result, I actively promote gender equity in all that I do. Under my leadership, LAMATA has developed strategies and policies on equality which were adopted into the LAMATA Quality System (LAMATA Gender Equality Plan 2022–2027). In that time, LAMATA has seen a growing number of women employed in positions from the boardroom to drivers to the shop floor. This includes 38% of indirect workers (drivers, ground staff, janitors, tickets sellers etc.), 40% of directly employed LAMATA staff, and 40% of LAMATA management staff. My goal is to make sure that the plans to increase that are realized.

A project I’m specifically very proud of is EMPOWER, a UKAID-funded program under the High-Volume Transport Applied Research. The program was commissioned to deliver a gender-equitable and inclusive transport system that improves the personal security of female passengers.

It specifically addressed the contributing factors that lead to sexual harassment towards women when they travel. The project developed a tool called Sexual Harassment Engagement – Changing Attitudes Meeting Needs (SHE CAN) to help cities respond to sexual harassment and makes suggestions to improve the safety and security of urban transport for the benefit of women and ultimately for all citizens.

How have you used your role to promote more inclusive transport systems?

In the pursuit of providing a world class, sustainable, integrated, and multimodal transport system in Lagos, I have used my role to raise awareness about the needs of women in public, private, and state council meetings. This has included the Women’s Day March, March Against Gender-Based Violence, quarterly radio, and press advocacies, and notably activating the #SPEAKUP campaign to raise awareness about sexual harassment on public transportation. I also advocate for universal accessibility when implementing public infrastructure and safe transport facilities, as well as ensuring the SHE CAN Tool is utilized on all forthcoming LAMATA projects. My working aim is to actively remove barriers and constraints to women becoming bus drivers and transport professionals, and significantly expand the participation of women in senior roles while encouraging workplace flexibility for women.

Abimbola Akinajo

MANAGING DIRECTOR, LAGOS METROPOLITAN AREA TRANSPORT AUTHORITY (LAMATA)

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Do you have any advice for other people who want to be part of a feminist reshaping of the transport system?

I would advise women and girls to follow their dreams and to never limit themselves or their capabilities because they are women. If you can think it, you can do it. Aim to achieve what you have set out to achieve.

The transport system may appear to be male dominated, however, I would like to advise that men ensure that equal opportunities are afforded to women in the transport system. In Lagos, we have women as drivers, engineers, mechanics, and in various other fields and they are doing phenomenally. I therefore urge women to embrace the opportunities given to them as we collectively improve the transport system.