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MEMORANDUM ON GENDER

WIMBIZ (WOMEN IN MANAGEMENT, BUSINESS AND PUBLIC SERVICE) CASE FOR GREATER WOMEN'S INCLUSIVENESS AT ALL LEVELS OF NATIONAL LIFE

I. INTRODUCTION

If Nigeria is to become an economic powerhouse, then the unique talents, skills, knowledge and abilities of a 100% of its human resources in the loose categories of men, women and youths must be applied, and all individuals empowered to play their full roles. Females are said to account for 50 – 52% of Nigeria's over 140 million population (if estimates are to be believed). Nigeria is yet to capitalize on its female assets, an intrinsic necessity for the development of our country.

The 2014 National Conference would not have fully achieved its purpose if this situation is not redressed. Women must be allowed to make their contributions to nation building in a significant way. This is not about sentiment; there is an established business case for gender parity and the inclusion of women in all areas of national life, whether in the private or public sector. Gender parity simply means equal opportunities, and allows the talents of both men and women to be used. Research has shown that companies with women on their Boards outperform those with only men, because both genders complement each other and bring the best of what they have into joint endeavours.

The Gender issue in Nigeria provokes unending rhetoric but insufficient action. This is nowhere more evident than with the President's Gender policy of 35% of women to be appointed into Federal and State Government positions. This has not been implemented in many States. Indeed, the national average for the representation of women in all appointed offices in Nigeria is 12.96%, representing under 50% of the 35% policy! This figure ranges from 0% in some States to 30% in only Ogun State!

In effect, policy changes to ensure a higher level of women's participation are yet to have the desired reach and impact. There are no incentives for compliance, and no sanctions for non-compliance, so the policy is not being enthusiastically implemented. The business case for greater female participation in key decision making roles, which is simply balance from a woman's perspective, increased productivity and profitability, and better governance, has not found sufficient audience.

The absence of a rallying point for successful women partly informed the establishment of WIMBIZ, Women in Management, Business and Public Service in 2002 with a **vision** 'to be the catalyst that elevates the status and influence of women and their contribution to nation building' and a **mission** 'to inspire and empower women with high potentials to attain leadership positions in management, business and public service.'

Some women have already achieved a measure of success in their careers, and the impetus provided by appropriate Government policies will remove bottlenecks to their ability to increase their contribution to nation building.

So what does WIMBIZ expect as an outcome of this 2014 National Conference?

We want an expanded policy framework for women that complements the President's 35% participation of women in Government, but traverses the public and private sectors, and opens the door to the more robust participation of women in all sectors of the Nigerian economy. WIMBIZ, by being nominated to participate in the National Conference, has been adjudged relevant in the Gender conversation. Our primary objective is to ensure that limiting factors for women in the economic, political and governance landscape of Nigeria are eliminated.

II. FACTS/ISSUES AND ARGUMENTS: THE WIMBIZ AGENDA

WimBiz has become a national voice for greater gender inclusiveness in Nigeria, arguing the business case for having more women at all levels and across functions in Nigeria. To build a greater Nigeria and to achieve the hopes articulated by the President for the outcomes of the National Conference, our concerns merit serious consideration, particularly given the President's references to 'a more **inclusive national consensus**', '**Gender equality**' 'evolve better and more inclusive societies in which **every citizen is a proud and committed stakeholder**', '**the winner must be Nigeria**'. We hope the facts/issues raised in this memorandum will resonate with you, our fellow Nigerian stakeholders. We also hope that our prayers will gain your approval and support, result in an attitude change on traditional gender roles and the place of women in Nigerian society, and ensure that women are enabled to make their full contribution to nation building.

FACT/ISSUE 1: Women are under-represented on the Boards of publicly quoted companies in Nigeria. Results from a 2011 survey show that women comprise only 10.5% of the Directors on such Boards, with only 6.3% (12) as Managing Directors and 2.6% (5) as Chairmen. This is a worldwide phenomenon, not unique to Nigeria, but many countries have introduced policies to change the status quo. Particularly in Europe, policies have been introduced to ensure the increased participation of women (33 - 50%), often with sanctions for non-compliance. In Africa, Nigeria should be at the forefront of ensuring that all its human resources, men and women, are empowered to contribute to the growth and development of their countries. Kenya has already introduced legislation for State Owned Enterprises (SOE's) and South Africa has a proposal under consideration. Research has shown that companies with women on their Boards out-perform those without. If Nigeria is to overcome its socio-politico-economic challenges, more women will need to be involved to provide their unique perspective and complement the efforts of men.

1. WIMBOARD: WIMBIZ INITIATIVE TO GET MORE WOMEN ON BOARDS

WimBoard is a WimBiz initiative the main aim of which is to increase the participation of women on Boards in Nigeria. As previously stated, the business case for this is compelling. Companies with women on their Boards outperform those without - this is an empirical fact. WimBoard operates on four platforms to achieve its objectives.

- **Advocacy** to advance the business case for increased women's participation at all levels.
- **Executive Database:** we have developed a database of Board-ready women who can be appointed on Boards as soon as requests are made. We have already had such requests and anticipate getting more. This database can also provide the names of qualified and capable women for Government appointments.
- **WimBoard Institute:** we are in the process of setting up an Institute in partnership with two international Business Schools with a presence in Nigeria to provide a pipeline of trained women who can take up Board and high level Government appointments.
- **Board Mentoring Programme:** this programme pairs our Board ready women with Board members who will provide learning support.

PRAYERS:

- i. That a gender quota legislation/policy be introduced that requires the Boards of all quoted companies in Nigeria to have at least 30% female membership. This policy can be administered by the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) with appropriate ‘comply or explain’ principles or outright sanctions.
- ii. That the WimBiz database be available as a pool of ready talent for Board, State and Federal Government appointments. This will abolish the idea that qualified and capable women are in short supply.

FACT/ISSUE 2: Women-owned businesses find it difficult to access bank financing. Some banks have established Gender desks to provide some support in presenting proposals, and easier access to loans. It is however still difficult for women to get the funding required for the growth, expansion and diversification of their businesses, in spite of empirical evidence that women are better at meeting their loan obligations than their male counterparts.

2. WIMCAPITAL AND ACCESS TO LOANS FOR FEMALE ENTREPRENEURS

WimCapital is the WimBiz vehicle for making the business environment more accommodating and accepting of women. It is an investment vehicle owned by women, promoting the expansion of their investment portfolios and providing investment education and experience.

WimBiz is also seeking private sector interventions (to be administered by a bank) for the financing of businesses owned by women.

PRAYER:

- i. That a policy be introduced that requires all banks to advance a stipulated proportion/percentage of their loan portfolios to female-owned and managed businesses; all banks to establish Gender desks to provide soft loans to women’s businesses, particularly for expansion/diversification. Compliance can be ensured by the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN).

FACT/ISSUE 3: Women lag behind men in access to the professional support necessary to accelerate or guide their progress up the organizational ladder. Men use the ‘old boy’ network, and social and sporting events to network and support each other. They often mentor each other informally. Institutional structures must be put in place for women since they do not enjoy the social networks and professional support that men do. WimBiz has an established Mentoring/Mentorship programme which it can replicate in both the private and public sectors.

3. WIMBIZ MENTORING/MENTORSHIP PROGRAMME

Mentoring has been identified as an effective tool for facilitating the development of people. The WimBiz mentoring/mentorship programme is structured to provide learning and effective support for women of all ages who identify a need for mentoring. We have an 8-month long programme that we have successfully run for over 5 years. We match our mentees to suitable mentors who are already high level corporate managers or public servants, or successful female entrepreneurs.

WimBiz has been asked by organisations to develop mentoring programmes and assist them in programme introduction and implementation. In this way we have the opportunity to replicate our already successful programme and increase exponentially, the number of women who benefit from it. At the end of the programme, the mentees are better equipped to avoid pitfalls in the workplace. Their mentors, being women who have significant experience in diverse areas, support their personal development. Women must be encouraged and supported to be the best they can be, which will make Nigeria the winner as women become more professional and better equipped for their new and expanded responsibilities in the workplace and in any endeavour.

PRAYER:

- i. That a mandatory Mentoring policy be introduced in Government organisations, particularly for women under 35 years of age. This will improve their chances of success in their careers, increase their professionalism and productivity through attitude change and increased confidence, and provide support and guidance especially identifying knowledge and skills gaps. Appropriate steps can then be taken to ensure that these gaps are closed using the appropriate interventions. WimBiz can be one of the organisational agents for this Mentoring intervention.**

FACT/ISSUE 4: Women’s organisations do not partner often enough with Government to address critical national issues. WimBiz has had the opportunity and developed the necessary experience and competence to do so. This puts it in the unique position of being able to support Government, whilst being a Non-Governmental Organisation, to achieve far reaching results with regards to Government initiatives. Our role as a Gender - based Government consultant should be expanded for the benefit of more women. We have the reach with our programmes and database of women.

4. WIMBIZ: PARTNERSHIPS WITH GOVERNMENT

WimBiz has partnered with the Federal Government in some of its new initiatives.

- In 2012, we partnered with the **Federal Ministry of Finance in the YOUWIN programme** which provided access to funds to young entrepreneurs. This programme involved organising workshops across the country to explain the YouWin programme to interested, young female, would-be entrepreneurs. The project made available up to N10 million to applicants with marketable business proposals. WimBiz was responsible for marketing and running the workshops in the South-South States - Edo, Delta, Rivers, Bayelsa, Akwa Ibom and Cross River AND the South West States of Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Ekiti, Oyo and Osun – a total of 12 States.
- We are currently partnering with the **Federal Ministry of Communications Technology on the SmartWoman Nigeria App** initiative which provides an exciting e-platform for women’s learning and interactions.

PRAYER:

- i. **That more women’s organisations be designated as partners with Federal or State Governments to promote and implement gender initiatives. WimBiz already has the organisational and administrative competence to do this. Our Secretariat is staffed with experienced programme managers and officers under the supervision of an Executive Director. We have proved ourselves capable of managing such initiatives. (also see Mentoring - no. 3)**

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