

## **COMMUNIQUE BY WOMEN IN MANAGEMENT BUSINESS & PUBLIC SERVICE (WIMBIZ) ON THE TRAVAILS OF DRIVING GENDER INCLUSION IN PUBLIC SECTOR LEADERSHIP**

The proportion of female representation and participation in the public service and in politics (elective and appointive positions) in Nigeria, remains undeniably disheartening. The national average of women's political participation in Nigeria remains a mere 6.7 per cent both in elective and appointive positions, far below the Global Average of 22.5 per cent, Africa Regional Average of 23.4 per cent and West African Sub Regional Average of 15 per cent.

Sadly, the situation continues to persist despite the strong advocacy for gender equality and inclusive development by social movements & organisations like Women in Management, Business & Public Service (WIMBIZ) and commitment by the Federal Government in the National Gender Policy (NGP) "to building a nation devoid of gender discrimination, guaranteeing equal access to political, social and economic wealth creation opportunities for women and men".

When this present administration released the list of ministerial appointees in 2019, only seven women made the list out of a total of forty-three nominees, making up just 16.7 per cent. In the National Assembly, women constitute a mere 5.6 per cent of members of the House of Representatives and 6.5 per cent of the Senate. Thus, placing Nigeria in 122 position out of 144 countries in the Global Gender Gap Report of 2017 released by the World Economic Forum aimed at closing the gender gap across nations. Examples of this egregious under representation have become all too familiar with Governing Councils of our foremost Tertiary Institutions reconstituted without female representation and the recently announced 3rd constituted Nigerian Sovereign Investment Authority Board where again, no woman was included.

Being underrepresented is in itself unfortunate given the well documented and established benefits inherent in their participation in all sectors of the economy but regrettably even when women are eventually appointed as leaders in the Nigerian public service or elected into political offices they are often shamed for doing their jobs with transparency and integrity and disgraced out without justification. There are countless examples of female leaders being unfairly targeted, harassed, taunted, bullied & attacked often in excess of what their male counterparts have to contend with. Worse still, they are forced to deal with an unrelentless barrage of gender bias and deep-rooted misogyny.

The under-representation of women in appointive and elective offices in Nigeria cannot be attributed to an absence of capacity, capability or character, since this is abundantly evident in diverse areas across the private sector where women continue to shatter glass ceilings and sit at the helm of affairs of major corporations and industries, disrupting age-long misperceptions and biases about women and demonstrating the inestimable value that female leadership provides in terms of sustainability, governance, shareholder returns, equitable development & employee engagement.

The need for the participation and inclusion of women in political and public office cannot be overstated. To start with, for there to be democracy in its true sense and construct in any country, there must be a descriptive representation of all genders in the country. Since women make up more than half of the population, it is pertinent that the representation in leadership mirrors our demographic statistics to ensure the needs of all citizens are adequately voiced and prioritised. We need to create a level playing field free of discrimination and harassment to attract and retain female leadership in political and public office. Our high achieving women should not be seen as threats but instead, they should be welcomed and acknowledged for their outstanding contributions to nation building and inclusive development.

To reach our full potential, achieve meaningful, inclusive & sustainable development and meet the United Nations Sustainable Development (SDG) Goal 5 target of ensuring women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision making in political, economic and public life by 2030, it is time for all of us to balance for better and wholeheartedly commit to the empowerment of women.

Given the current economic realities and chronic under-development of our nation, the urgency with which this under-representation needs to be tackled, cannot be overstated. Nigeria as a country cannot ride into a prosperous future on one wheel.

For more information about WIMBIZ, visit [www.wimbiz.org](http://www.wimbiz.org)