

# **REPORT OF THE INAUGURAL CONFERENCE AND OFFICIAL LAUNCH OF WOMEN LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE (WLI) HELD AT THE NATIONAL UNIVERSITIES COMMISSION AUDITORIUM, ABUJA ON THURSDAY, JUNE 28, 2018**

## **Introduction**

The Women Leadership Institute (WLI) is an international leadership development organization. WLI provides a professional and non-partisan platform for women in Nigeria and across Africa to develop their leadership capacity and to take on constructive roles in the political and economic development of Nigeria and African in general.

Women Leadership Institute (WLI) has a vision to inspire and motivate the contemporary women to reposition the narrative of women's liberation, empowerment and mainstreaming in the context of contemporary reality. This reality is that the world is constantly changing and society is dynamic. Without the effective representation and participation of women to improve the quality of gender leadership, development will continue to grow at a slower pace.

WLI is the first of its kind in the development of women in the sense that it offers credible and practical programmes that are pragmatic and designed to meet the unique leadership needs of African women.

The programme started with arrival and registration of participants, singing of National Anthem/Introduction of Special Guests and Opening Prayer said by Mrs. Abi Khalidson.

The theme was: **TRANSFORMING AFRICA THROUGH WOMEN LEADERSHIP**

## **OPENING SPEECH**

The Opening Speech was delivered by Amb. Dr. Kema Chikwe. In her opening speech, she expressed her pleasure and welcomed all to the launch of the Women's Leadership Institute (WLI), which she described as a dream come true. She said that the WLI will elevate the dialogues, debates, workshops, conferences on women liberation, empowerment and mainstreaming as well as the Non-governmental Organization (NGO) efforts to the level of institutionalization of many years of women activism. She regretted that so far in Africa, and in particular to Nigeria, no University offers a degree or diploma in Women/Gender Studies

which would have essentially helped to neutralize the perception of African Societies about women. She called on all hands especially the women to unite and ensure the passage of a Bill on Nigerian women by the National Assembly which almost died last year. She said that the passage of that wholesome bill is a challenge to not only Nigerian women, but also the society at large, who must be united in action and consistent and persistent in creating more effective strategies to give women, who constitute more than 50% of Nigerian population. She expressed optimism that with support of people like the Deputy Senate President of Nigeria, Senator Ike Ekweremadu, there is yet a window to pass the bill.

The Ambassador told the audience that over the years, from the 970s, and as a much younger woman, she has been engaged in projecting and promoting the gender optimal pathway to a level of impacting the society on the platform of Women Organizations, including the National Council of Women Societies, Business and Professional Women, Women in Nigerian, Soroptionist, Rural-based organizations and a few others of which she has served on their executive committees. She said that she is a patron to Women in Logistics and Transport (WILAT) and have established her own Non-Governmental Organization – Women and New Orientation for Values Initiatives (WANO).

She said that she has a dream that the first category of students at WLI would be working class professionals and educated business women and the second category would be women in active politics, and assured that WLI will on a regular basis introduce highly motivated leaders who are women in all aspects of national development and concluded by saying that the courses will take off in September 2018 and re-assured the Nigerian public that a remarkable impact will be felt in the next few years.

In conclusion, she sincerely thanked her husband, Chief Nze Herbert O.N. Chikwe for his usual support in all her activities to add value to the society. She equally thanked Tony Ubani and Somachi Kachikwu for their commitments towards WLI. Finally, to the entire staff members, the Governing and Advisory Boards, MC Ernest - the consultant to the project, the Speakers, special guests, service providers the various schools that were represented and participants.

### **Official Launch and Unveiling of the Institute**

The Official Launch and unveiling of the Institute was performed by Senator Ben Bruce and coordinated by Mr. Anthony Ubani. The Institute has the mission to shape a future of shared prosperity for African women by empowering and

equipping them with the leadership, knowledge, skills, competences, confidence, and values that are invaluable to optimize their capacity to contribute productivity and improve their overall well-being as well as the political and economic development of their communities. The vision is to be locally and globally recognized as the leading and preferred institute of gender expertise, advancing women leadership development and training in Africa while the mandate is to provide a non-partisan, professional and progressive platform for the execution and attainment of the mission of WLI.

It was after this that the participants went into panel discussions.

### **1<sup>ST</sup> PANEL DISCUSSION**

**Topic:** *The Courage to Lead*

**Moderators:** Anthony Ubani  
Miss Chinny Okoye

#### **Panelists**

1. Mrs. Aisha Aliyu
2. Ms. Crochelle Harris-Hussein
3. Prof. Chudi Uwazuruike – represented by Mrs. Queen Agbomma Enyi
4. Ifedayo Durosinmi-Etti.

The question was **the significant of Education to the success of a woman in Africa.**

In the course of their discussion, members of the panel agreed as follows:-

- Education is the most powerful tool for every woman to overcome her challenges in life
- That many women faces lots of challenges in their areas of endeavours due to lack of education especially young girls
- Those especially from the Northern part of Nigeria who have been to school knows what education has done for them
- Islam encourages girl-child education to the highest pinnacle
- With education, women have proven to be responsible in their areas of calling
- It is wrong to believe that education is for only boys while girls should be useful in the kitchen only and other domestic duties. Equal education should be given to both boys and girls
- Not only education, but continuous learning is very important.

- Education is the light. The gathering here today is because the convener is educated
- Every educated woman present at the occasion was encouraged to replicate their talents anywhere they found themselves and impact on the younger girls around them.
- Women like Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala etc. are pooling weights in the world as a result of education.
- Educate a woman and educate the nation.

#### On the second question: **How can a Woman Overcome the Fear to Lead**

- It was suggested that this could be overcome by bothering less about what people says about you, although, there is the need to accept feedback
- Be driven by a passion and purpose. Believe in it and let people know where you are going to
- Live your life to the fullest. Be happy with whatever you are doing.
- Pursue whatever you believe and do it with your whole life.
- It is difficult for people especially women to access loans from our various banks. So finance is one barrier to overcome fear to lead
- If you are confidence in what you are doing, financial assistance will fall in
- Get your local people to promote your effort hence contribute financially without doubt.

#### On **How Women Can Communicate Effectively**

- Women should be diplomacy on how agenda should be drawn to avoid the insinuation that it is women thing. Men should be included in drawing up programme and plan for project execution.
- Women should not see themselves as competitors but as partners
- Women should partner with other women who have the same vision as going together takes one to his/her destination faster.

At the end of this interactive session, reactions/questions and answers were taken from the members of the audience on the various issues raised in the course of the discussions.

In concluding this session, Mr. Anthony Ubani encouraged the women especially the girls to take their education seriously, not only education but continuous education by reading various quality materials and look for useful mentors. He said that all concerted efforts should be made to ensure that girl child education

especially in the Northern part of the country is raised higher. He reminded that even when there is free and compulsory education, some parents refused to send their girl child to school because of culture and religion. Finally, he said that there must be lots of reorientation to help force on the parents to send their children especially the girl child to school.

In rounding up, the convener, Amb. Dr. Kema Chikwe reiterated that the first institution of learning should be the home. She said that responsible parenting is where it starts and continuous in the schools and reiterated that education is the key that opens the doors of all possibilities. She encouraged women to be strategic to occupy leadership positions, suggesting that women should not reinforce the narrative that women are enemies to themselves. She requested the women to make use of the Leadership Institute, assuring that everything must be done to ensure girl child education.

## **2<sup>ND</sup> PANEL DISCUSSION**

**Topic:** *Mobilizing the Power of Women to Lead*

**Moderators:** Mrs. Judy Osinowo

### **Panelists**

1. Mr. Linus Okorie
2. Mrs. Eugenia Abu
3. Mrs. Udo Okonjo
4. Mrs. Aisha Ibrahim
5. Mrs. Mary Ikoku

On the topic, the panelists postulated as follows

- Good parenting is a critical issue to reaching the level of expectation
- Parents should not discriminate in training of their children irrespective of gender.
- Leadership position starts at young age. Students were encouraged to be involved In their school extra curricula activities such as debating societies etc
- Every woman's education is a must if the society must develop
- If you are the first to be educated in your village/community, encourage and mentor others to be like you
- Be close to your local people so that they could see you as a role model
- Every woman should be given opportunity to grow. There should be no hindrance

- Government should create policies for every woman to grow by way of granting free education to every girl child and other incentives
- The married men should give their wives every opportunity to improve and grow in their career
- Investment should be made in the girl child education so that their leadership content could grow
- Women should contest and run for any elective position. They should not be contented with the position of Women Leader only
- Women should develop confidence and competence syndrome to lead
- There is the need for national women leaders to collaborate with their local women to last longer in any position
- Women should not see men as their enemies as it is a complete man that can produce a complete women
- To the students, they were told that every single person can do something that can change a situation. Some people are gifted with good writing while others are gifted with ability to read. So pull all your gifts and achieve a common purpose. Do not ever stop learning
- Leadership without mentoring is equal to loneliness
- WLI should be a reference point for women in and around Africa.
- Women will go a long way to achieve a lot if they are together.
- Network with women and communicate effectively. Keep in touch with people you meet in life. Such a person could be your helper in times of need.
- A member of the Panel who said that he is contesting for a governorship position in his state promised to allocate 40% of his cabinet to the women if elected the governor in 2019
- Women should stop undermining their powers as they are the best managers of resources
- Women should take themselves to the table where decisions are taken
- Women should not be given free forms during party nominations. This reduces them to paupers
- Women should save money and compete like their men counterparts in politics
- This fight is not for educated people alone. Students were advised to be the voice that will cry out when they see a parent that kept his or her child at home without education
- Women NGOs/activities were encouraged to be on the watch and take up the cases of children whose parents refused to send them to school because of culture or religion.

As usual, this session came to an end with brainstorming/interactive/questions and answers from the participants, guests and students.

## **CLOSING CEREMONY**

### **Goodwill Messages**

- **Mrs. Omolara Popoola** – representing “Mama Ijebu” appreciated Dr. Kema Chikwe for her guidance and mentorship.
- She advised women to take up their leadership positions politically.

### **Representative of UN Women**

- Called for more women in leadership positions
- Advised women to be part of traditional councils/institutions in Nigeria to get to the grassroots and help in enacting proper rules and regulations against some obnoxious rules made by these traditional institutions
- More women should strive to be appointed as Ministers at the Federal level and Commissioners in the States

### **Representative of NAPTIP**

- Reiterated the earlier call that education is the key
- Informed the gathering that most of the victims of child trafficking are uneducated girls saying that out of 10 victims, most of them are girls.
- She called for synergy in mentoring a girl child to enable her get to her leadership position.

### **Dr. Akilu Sani Indabawa**

- Apologized for coming late saying that he drove straight from Kano to the venue of the meeting hence arrived late due to bad road network.
- He said that women have potentials and encouraged them to mobilize it
- He challenged Nigerian women to borrow a leaf from other African countries where women are occupying Leadership positions such as Presidents, etc
- Mentioned some hindrances that discourage women from participating in politics. It includes women accepting lower positions in the party, late night meetings etc. He challenged the women to rise up and address these issues.
- Assured that this country will be blessed if women accept to take up higher responsibilities
- He advised the women not to carry this battle alone. They should network and identify gender friendly male counterparts to partner with

- Finally, Dr. Indabawa concluded by describing the women as the best economic managers – both in resources and human

### **Next Step**

The next step was handled by Mrs. Amaka Chijioke who informed the participants that all the proceedings of this programme will be articulated into a report and circulated via the Institute's e-mail address. She encouraged all to always view the Institute's website address and give feedback where necessary. She appealed to all participants to fill the Feedback Form and submit to the Secretariat before leaving.

### **Closing Remarks**

The closing remarks was by Mrs. Somachi Kachikwu. She thanked the Special Guests, Board and Governing Advisory Members, Panel Members, Students of Divine Mercy School, Asokoro, Premier International School, Tophill Schools, Wuse Zone 5, Abuja and Kickstart Academy, Suleja for their contribution and intelligent questions. She finally thanked all the sponsors of the programme for their commitment to the Institute.