**NITP/NAT-AWTPN/2023/008** **30th March, 2023**

**SPEECH DELIVERED BY TPL. (MRS) BELLO, RISIKAT BUKOLA FNITP, MNIM, RTPI-UK, 1ST NATIONAL CHAIRMAN, ASSOCIATION OF WOMEN TOWN PLANNERS IN NIGERIA (AWTPN) TO COMMEMORATE WITH CED MAGAZINE & IBA MAGAZINE ON THE INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY (IWD) & WORLD ENGINEERING DAY (WED)-2023 WEBINAR ON ZOOM HOLDING ON FRIDAY 31ST MARCH, 2023 WITH A THEME "CRACKING THE CODE - INNOVATION FOR A GENDER EQUAL FUTURE"**

**PROTOCOLS**

**1.0** As we all aware that digital age has come to stay. Technology is drastically shaping how we live, think, work, communicate and operate on a daily bases, so keeping up with digital trends is vital to every human existence. According to UN Survey carried out in Year2022, there is a considerable gap in accessibility and usage of technology among women in developing countries compared to men that is 37% of women worldwide do not have internet access while it was also estimated that 50% of Nigerian women do not have access as well. This inequality create gaps which has caused few women to lack of access information and information as rightly say is power.

**2.0** However, in my own perfective, I will like to observe that non-accessibility of women to digital world also has to do with our mindset, taken an example of my own case as a Director in Lagos State Town Planning Services, who has been computer literate since year 2006 till date when most people beliefs then that being computer literate is a waste of time and not needed for my cadre anymore, likewise we have some other few Women like this in the Ministry. In view of this, I would say been Women does not limit one access to technology it is our mindset and how you believe we can enhance your work. It will interest you to know that, yesterday 30th of March, 2023 a sign-off on Digital Platform for Full Automation of Physical Planning Processes for the Ministry of Physical Planning and Urban Development was prepared with a Consultant ENL-NOVA Consult for my department to coordinate under my leadership to continue to ensure a sustainable platform for One-stop Operation in Lagos State.

**3.0** Nevertheless, you will agree with me that women are naturally creative in nature and we need to be more focus and be encouraged to do better. We should always apply our skillful and creative knowledge in all our endeavors. Now imagine empowering and encouraging more women with the digital tools needed to strive further; I firmly believe women would make greater ways in digital world. The statistics for women in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) show that women make up 28% of the workforce due to several factors.

**4.0** However, I would like to deliberate on the fact that our society also has a major role on dictating girls and women mindset in encouraging them to harness their potential. According to SDG5 goals, by 2050, 75% of jobs will be related to STEM. In view of this, it is important that we position women to be ready to play more roles in the future.

**5.0** How do we achieve this Digital Inclusion? The UN has made four calls on this which I will discuss here as it affects Nigerian Women:

i. **Remove all barriers to accessing the digital world:** The factors hindering Digital literacy are mostly grass root factors which affects both women in **u**rban and rural areas. Digital Illiteracy

should be tackled from the root by sensitising girls early to understand the advantage of being digitally literate in this modern time. Gadgets are not only meant for the boy child; we should provide young girls with tech devices and supervised internet access even as they grow. People in the rural region should be included as well. Many girls and women in rural areas need digital literacy. Targeting these areas to educate women is vital to closing the gender gap. The introduction of several growth programs whereby women who farm can be digitally equipped to sell their agricultural products online. For instance, what Tingo Holdings is doing in the Agro-Fintech space by providing smartphones and platforms for farmers to sell their farm produce even from the most remote area is commendable.

ii. **Educate and train women in STEM:** Digital Inclusion can be achieved by providing the essential tools needed to empower women to be digitally inclined, most of which can be achieved through educating women. Apart from encouraging women to pursue careers in STEM, we could make available training sessions such as webinars, seminars, boot camps etc, to ensure that women acquire one digital skill or the other, with subsequent follow-up sessions as learning is a continuous process and more women should join STEM.

iii. **Educate women to create tech that meets their needs**: Sometimes, when we hear about innovation and tech, our minds go to building cars and spaceships, but the endgame of these digital tools is to solve problems. For instance, the Lagos Urban Development Initiative (LUDI) is an Urban Planning Initiative that uses digital tools and data analytics to solve Physical Planning problems. LUDI is focused on creating "Gender-Inclusive" designs, creating a safe and inclusive environment by considering women as critical urban users, and creating a platform for women to contribute to Lagos' built environment.

iv. **Eliminate Online gender-based violence:** We have seen the rise of gender-based violence over the years, despite the progressive use of the digital space. Social Media platforms like Twitter have given rise to cyberbullying, and women are often more on the receiving end of such bullying. It can come in the form of hate speech, body shaming, etc. Social media platforms should be more strict with policies tackling gender-based violence.

**6.0** On this note, I would like to observe that the opportunities in the digital space are limitless. It is only fair that we provide the necessary resources for women to key into the ever-evolving tech ecosystem irrespective of our career or age. Also, that it's a male-dominated world, there should be a safe space for women to grow and flourish.

**7.0** Finally, I would like to add that professional women should embrace growth mindset towards development of the use of digital tools and data analytics to solve Physical Planning and other related problems. LUDI is focused on creating "Gender-Inclusive" designs, creating a safe and inclusive environment by considering women as critical urban users and creating a platform for women to contribute to built environment. Let embrace it because an inclusive and transformative technology and digital education is very crucial for sustainable future Development.

**Thank You all and God bless everyone on this programme.**

**e-Signed**
National Chairman,
Association of Women Town
Planners in Nigeria (AWTPN)