

Acceptance Speech by the 24th National President, Medical Women's Association of Nigeria (MWAN), Prof Rosemary Ogu at the Atlantic Hall, Hotel Presidential, Port Harcourt on Friday 15th September, 2023

1. GRATITUDE

As a child growing up, my mother always told me, "You stoop to conquer!" That parental tutelage has brought me to this August occasion where I stand before you in humility and profound gratitude as the 24th National President of the Medical Women's Association of Nigeria (MWAN).

This is the 23rd biennial of MWAN, established 46 years ago. So, it was around the time I learnt to write with chalk on a slate that this great organisation of ours was established. It would be true for me to say that I stand on the shoulders of giants!

Let me start by thanking the Immediate Past President, Dr Adekemi Otolorin for her hospitality, numerous gifts and admonishing. Many thanks to Professor Dipo Otolorin, her husband, for his excellent presentation at our Leadership workshop in Abeokuta. This will be incorporated into our leadership series. To our dear 22nd National President, Dr Minnie Oseji, thank you so much for all you did and still do for MWAN. Special thanks for the 2021- 2026 Strategic Plan which will form the bedrock of our Advocacy tool. Despite COVID-19, you creatively utilised Zoom for MWAN meetings and events, and turned up at the last biennial conference in Ibadan, Oyo State amidst challenging personal circumstances. May God's perpetual comfort abide with you.

To our dear MWAN family, thanks for the vote of confidence in me. I will not let you down.

2. FOCUS

Organised Innovations, greater scale up, unity and networks have informed the theme of the 2023-2025 biennium: **Leadership and Partnership Imperatives for Upscaling Healthcare Delivery in Nigeria**. How will we achieve this? One principle of Christ is found in his instructions to his disciples on spreading the good news: "*And you shall be witnesses to Me, both in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and to the outermost part of the earth.*" (Acts 1:10) In like manner, we start by purposeful, strategic approach to MWAN programmes from now until the next biennium with a focus on people:

a. Medical Women (one programme to benefit each career grade of medical woman across the ages)

- Young Doctors & Clinical Students
- Mid-Career Doctors
- Senior Doctors
- Retired Doctors

b. Pregnant Women

c. Adolescents

d. The Family

I will discuss these in a little more detail in the next section.

3. FROM THE MWAN STRATEGY PLAN

CAPACITY: In the area of Connecting and Empowering Women Leaders in Health, we will conduct leadership training sessions for the National Executive Committee and National Officers during NEC meetings. We will carry out six-monthly leadership and administrative skills trainings for healthcare workers in the country.

- MWAN will support prompt action from state monthly meetings through shared best practices for the administration of MWAN branches; assisting zones and MWAN National to scale up exciting ideas and ensuring prompt communication within and between state chapters and National.
- Arising from this conference, a new MWAN members' directory is available.
- We will make available a database of resource persons in key specialties to enable MWAN chapters and Committees have prompt access to such persons when required. For these activities to be carried out successfully we will ensure a functional national secretariat and support MWAN state offices with improved office environment and standardised Information Management System.

ADVOCACY: It remains disheartening that so many widows continue to suffer injustice at the hands of their in-laws at a time when they need all their support and encouragement. MWAN will continue to advocate for the elimination of obnoxious widowhood practices. In the same vein, we will lobby to involve more males in Reproductive, Maternal, Newborn, Child, Adolescent, Elderly Health and Nutrition (RMNCAEH + N) in Nigeria. The provision of crèches for women to breastfeed and express breast milk in health facilities, offices and during medical conferences will be another area of advocacy. We will intensify advocacy and awareness creation for health promotion through the celebration of World Health Days.

SERVICE DELIVERY: The 2023- 2025 MWAN Biennium will establish and run at least one programme for each of our MWAN age groups. Our desire is that these programmes become institutionalised, outlive our tenure, significantly impact the health and well-being of our members. Our programs will include the following:

- *For the female clinical students:* MWAN members have all been there. We were sent to University to become doctors or dentists. Our universities found us worthy in character and learning. The challenges have not changed but some may have taken new dimensions – academics, school fees, self-esteem, sexual harassment, bullying etc. We will establish an Online anonymous reporting system for sexual harassment and bullying; work with partners to provide support for students and where possible ensure that our partners bring perpetrators to the attention of relevant authorities.
- *For the young doctors:* We will scale up MWAN Young Doctor Mentoring programmes and extend this to the clinical students above. One key aspect of this programme is to link young doctors with senior colleagues in their specialties of choice. We will also strengthen the Young Doctors Forum.
- *For the middle agers, senior doctors and retirees:* We will establish a partnership for an Online Menopause Clinic, Life after Retirement Workshops and scale up social networking and health activities for senior members.

We will organise Monthly CME events on various healthcare delivery topics for health workers. We will reactivate and utilise subscription to the World Continuing Education Alliance (WCEA) for capacity building of members. We will organise Online or Hybrid Work - Life Balance Workshops for MWAN members. Our first step to transforming service delivery beyond our members is to provide regular update and publicise MWAN-owned health services up and down the country. Each State is unique in her approach to healing (caring) with the love of a mother. For more efficient ways of implementing our innovative ideas, this Biennium will support and promote collective ideas for greater impact: 'Working together, we will do great things'. For Adolescents; we will partner with other organisations to promote programmes for their Reproductive Health and mental well-being. For Pregnant Women; we will initiate an action research on an entrepreneurship programme. The use of Mobile Health technology to transform communication and improve antenatal care is another scalable project, to commence at pilot sites in geo-political zones. For all the family we will work with partners to build and launch an App for reminders for health check-ups and uptake of screening. You can today be an early subscriber to **DiaHype**, to support your health and wellbeing, prevention and early diagnosis of cardiovascular risk factors: <https://diahype.netlify.app/>

EVIDENCE - BASED RESEARCH: As the saying goes, "If you keep doing the same things, you get the same results." In order for us to take MWAN to the next level, we must review what we do and seek ways of doing better things using research evidence. To that effect, we will do the following:

- Link up all MWAN state branches to the updated National website: www.mwan.org
- Improve the visibility of the J-MWAN journal by ensuring regular publications
- Publish MWAN-related research findings in high impact international and local journals
- Scale up M&E tools for routine data collection and reporting of activities in all state branches
- Scale up data collection from MWAN projects at State and National levels and report these locally and internationally. You can see from the above that we have set the bar high for MWAN and I believe as I stand before you to take over the mantle of leadership that in unity, there is nothing we cannot achieve. We are an association of ladies with beauty, brains and brawn. In all 36 States and the FCT, MWAN has over a thousand active financial members. Please see our brand new directory. We have female medical and dental doctors in general, specialist and subspecialist categories as well as colleagues who have diversified and become high flyers in industry, politics, etc. We also have MWAN members in the Diaspora. You can see that this is a large body of medical personnel/ human resource. While we may not have the funds, we represent enviable human capacity with mouth-watering opportunities for collaboration to improve the health and by extension wealth of Nigerians and our kith and kin in the West African sub-region. Indeed, MWAN is open for collaboration. We will match your in-kind and financial investment in MWAN projects, programmes and events with our vast human resource. Our programmes will concurrently run for members, their families and the general public.

FUNDRAISING: No great idea comes to fruition without funds and I promise that we will be creative in raising funds to carry out our projects. We will account for every Naira that we raise and continue to positively impact lives and families. So, we expect MWAN members to pay their dues regularly, not on election basis. We look forward to freewill donations from our members, our spouses, our colleagues. Kindly donate now to our **MWAN Ecobank Account Number 2972025462**. We will work in Partnership with public sector organisations. We will collaborate with the organised private sector in the area of Corporate Social Responsibility. We will work at scale with large grant-making Trusts and Foundations as well as locally via the state branches with community-based organisations. We have a target to raise Two Billion Naira for MWAN projects in the next two years.

4. FINAL THANKS

Last week a Medical woman reminded me that in 2007, I said I will one day be National President of MWAN. She belongs to a group of women I privately call 'the cabal', diehard MWAN enthusiasts who have nurtured my love and passion for our organisation. From the centennial celebration in New York, holiday in Maldives, to the upcoming Near Congress in Zambia, we work hard and play hard. Thank you my dear sisters. North to South, East to West, my darling MWAN sisters and mummies who stand for truth, for our Unity, who heal with the love of a mother, I salute you all. We are truly greater together. Many have been part of the journey from my childhood and through the pain and sorrow, tears and joy have emerged your new "NP".

From Mount Mary College, Boji Boji Owa, to the High Flyers Class of the University of Benin Medical School, my primary constituencies – the University of Port Harcourt, the University of Port Harcourt Teaching Hospital, my dear colleagues, I have learnt that medical practice is primarily about service to God through selfless care to people, not titles. May history be kind to all of us that when the baton of leadership was passed to us, we did our best for God and his people: PEOPLE. GOD.

My siblings - Tony Obaze, Vivian Bruce, Clement & Esther Obaze, Helen Okere, my Uncle Tony Uzum, my In-law Chief Marcon Nlemigbo, and all who have supported my MWAN activities, thank you.

To my darling husband, Chief Hilary Ogu and my boys (young men) - Kaka and Nana, who have given me the wings to fly, I cannot thank you enough for all your support over the years. Please join me when it is time to cut the cake so that I can show you off to the world! I love you with all my heart. My final thanks go to God Almighty for giving me life and without whom none of this would have happened. To Him alone be all the glory!

5. CONCLUSION

I have lived in Nigeria for five decades. Many of you for a bit longer. Would I be right to say things have never been this challenging in peace time? Nevertheless, yesterday is gone. Tomorrow is now for the taking. MWAN, through healing with the love of a mother can lead the way. Let us unite, love one another and work hand-in-hand to heal our land. A brighter day is here.

I leave you with words from the MWAN theme song:

The future is here ×2
Goodbye yesterday,
Tomorrow is now for the taking
The future is here ×2
I am the future,
I am the dream,
I am the nation,
I am part of this
Yes, I am so amazing
We are the future
We are the dream
We are the nation
We are part of this....
Thank you all for listening.

Prof Rosemary Ogu

24th MWAN National President.

15th September 2023.