



## Banking on Women in Business: Access Bank, Nigeria

*"Successfully reaching the women's market in Nigeria is key to achieving our retail and small business goals."*

— Aigboje Aig-Imoukhede, Managing Director, Access Bank

### A Growing Opportunity

Women entrepreneurs represent a large potential market for African banks. Financing them is good for business—and good for long-term sustainable development. But most African banks will not cater to women, unaware of the specific challenges they face as business owners.



### Tapping the Market with Help from IFC

Access Bank is different. It is Nigeria's seventh largest bank and recognizes that female-owned businesses make up a significant proportion of bankable SMEs. To help tap this underserved market, IFC has provided Access Bank with a \$30 million credit line for on-lending to women entrepreneurs, along with advisory services to support a successful roll-out of its women's program.

Working with IFC experts, Access Bank first examined the women's market in Nigeria and elsewhere, while analyzing the bank's own assumptions, processes and lending requirements to see what barriers women clients faced. It discovered that highly capable women and good businesses were being locked out of access to finance because of traditional collateral requirements (such as land,

usually registered in men's names), lack of credit history and market information, and a resulting perception that lending to women could be riskier.

"Our sense was that the business case existed. But it was clear we would need to do things a little differently in order to reach this market and be profitable," says Herbert Wigwe, Access Bank's deputy managing director.

"IFC is helping us look beyond the typical challenges faced by SMEs. We are working to explore nontraditional collateral options, new product development, and best practices from the Global Banking Alliance for Women. IFC is training our staff and—critically—they are training local businesswomen in order to build their financial skills and give them confidence to apply for funds."

### Outcome

Access Bank is changing the financial landscape for businesswomen in Nigeria and beyond. Since partnering with IFC in June 2006:

- \$16.56 million disbursed to 117 women entrepreneurs (Oct 06 to Oct 07).
- 1,000 new accounts opened.



Thierry Tanoh, IFC Director and Nigerian Minister of Women's Affairs at the official launch of Access Bank's Gender Program.



- Over 350 women entrepreneurs trained in business management.
- More women-friendly internal credit ratings.
- More flexible collateral options, such as the pledging of jewelry and equipment.
- Access Bank is now replicating its women's program in other countries in Africa.

### Financing at Last: SME Focus

Nigerian **Muni Shonibare** owns Interior Options, Ltd., a successful 150-employee furniture company



**Muni Shonibare can finally focus on long-term capital expansion for her successful furniture company.**

with high growth potential. Her clients include Mobil, the Abuja Hilton, and others. Demand for her products is high.

Muni has considerable potential to increase earnings and create more jobs in the local economy. But something has always blocked her way. Male bankers in Lagos simply did not want to finance the ambitious plans of a female-owned small business, and Muni could not speak the language of finance well enough to convince them. To increase production, she also needed a banking partner willing to help transform her business into a fully automated operation.

Access Bank decided that Muni's situation did not reflect smart economics by the banks. With funding and training on the women's market from IFC, Access Bank has now given Muni a \$800,000, five-year local currency loan—financing, at last, for the long-term capital expansion plans she has always had in mind.

**Access Bank Plc** is a full service commercial bank operating through a network of over 80 branches and service outlets located in all major commercial centers and cities across Nigeria. Access Bank is a member of the Global Banking Alliance for Women. For more information, visit [www.accessbankplc.com](http://www.accessbankplc.com).



**IFC**, the private sector arm of the World Bank Group, is the largest multilateral provider of financing for private enterprise in developing countries. For more information on IFC's support for access to finance for women entrepreneurs, visit [www.ifc.org/gender](http://www.ifc.org/gender).

### Notes

World Economic Forum, World Bank, African Development Bank. 2007. *The Africa Competitiveness Report 2007*, Published by the World Economic Forum, Geneva, Switzerland.