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### **International Women's Day 2025**

*By working together, we can create a more equitable and inclusive society where women and girls are empowered to reach their full potential and have their rights upheld. We celebrate the resilience, strength, and achievements of women across Nigeria and beyond, while recognizing that there is still much work to be done.*

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Today, on International Women's Day (IWD), the Initiative for Research, Innovation, and Advocacy in Development (IRIAD) proudly joins the global community in recognizing and celebrating the essential role of women in shaping communities, advancing democracy, and promoting sustainable development. This day, which was established as a global holiday by the United Nations in 1977, serves as a powerful reminder of both the progress that has been made and the ongoing challenges in achieving full gender equity.

This year's theme, "**For ALL Women and Girls: Rights, Equality, Empowerment,**" calls for action to ensure equal rights, power, and opportunities for all. It envisions a feminist future where no one is left behind. This emphasizes the necessity of dismantling systemic barriers and creating environments where women—especially young women and adolescent girls are not only present but also actively contribute to and lead in all areas of life. This day is particularly significant as it marks the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, the most comprehensive global policy framework for women's rights. It serves as a reminder of the urgent need to accelerate efforts toward achieving gender equity and empowering women and girls around the world.

In Nigeria, despite some progress, women and girls continue to experience various forms of gender bias and stereotypes. A significant area of concern is women's representation in governance. Although women make up nearly half of the population, they are severely marginalized in political leadership. The 2023 general elections, witnessed poor number of elected female representatives. Currently, women occupy less than 10% of parliamentary seats at both the national and state levels. This underrepresentation is not due to a lack of competence or capability; rather, it stems from deep-rooted structural and cultural barriers. These include discriminatory party structures, political stigmatization, financial constraints, electoral violence, a gender gap in education, and various forms of gender bias. A notable example is the gender discrimination and stigmatization faced by Senator Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan, who has repeatedly faced challenges in her career due to entrenched gender biases. In the 2023 general elections, she contested and won a senatorial seat but encountered legal and political opposition that delayed her assumption of office. More recently, she has been embroiled in public conflict with Senate President Godswill Akpabio, which many have interpreted as another example of how female politicians in Nigeria face systemic hurdle, intimidation and efforts to undermine their legitimacy.

This case is reflective of the broader issue of gender based political marginalization in Nigeria, where female candidates often face discriminatory party structures, financial constraints, and targeted political attacks. Similarly, the leadership tussle in the Lagos State House of Assembly, where women's political participation has been sidelined, underscores the need for urgent reforms to promote gender inclusivity in governance. Additionally, there has been a troubling

increase in femicide and other gender-based violence cases in the country, affecting victims of all ages, including the elderly, middle-aged individuals, teenagers, and children. In less than three months, over 20 cases of gender-based violence have been recorded, highlighting a concerning trend. This surge underscores the need for stronger legal frameworks and more effective prosecution to address the enabling environment that perpetuates such violence.

The importance of addressing long-standing systems of oppression that affect the rights of women and girls cannot be overstated. We believe that a truly democratic system is inclusive, participatory, and representative of all citizens. Today, we reaffirm our commitment to empowering women through civic education, research, and advocacy to promote their active and meaningful participation in governance and society. Strengthening democracy requires concerted efforts to eliminate the barriers that prevent women and girls from accessing the opportunities available to them.

IRIAD strongly urges all relevant stakeholders—including governments at all levels, educational institutions, civil society organizations, and community leaders—to intensify their efforts in promoting women's and girls' rights and advancing gender equity.

- **Government and Policymakers:** The government and all policymakers must enact and enforce laws and policies that promote gender equity, protect women's rights, and eliminate discriminatory practices in governance, politics, and other sectors. Political parties should commit to internal reforms that support female candidates by providing fair nomination processes, financial assistance, and mentorship opportunities.
- **Educational Institutions:** The educational institutions should prioritize implementing curricula and programs at the primary and secondary school levels that promote gender equity and create an enabling environment for young girls to thrive and seize the opportunities available to them.
- **Media and Civil Society Organisations:** The media must actively promote positive and empowering images of women while challenging gender stereotypes. This can be achieved by using gender-sensitive language in media campaigns and reporting. Civil society organisations should continue to amplify women's voices by advocating for gender-sensitive policies and engaging communities to combat gender stereotypes, thereby empowering women and young girls.
- **Citizens:** All citizens have a vital role to play in promoting gender equity and supporting the rights of women and girls. Beyond advocating for inclusivity in leadership and governance, individuals must actively challenge gender stereotypes, reject discriminatory practices and promote environments where women and girls can thrive. Men especially, must actively support gender inclusion in daily life, ensuring that women and girls have equal opportunities to contribute to national development.

By working together, we can create a more equitable and inclusive society where women and girls are empowered to reach their full potential and have their rights upheld. We celebrate the resilience, strength, and achievements of women across Nigeria and beyond, while recognizing that there is still much work to be done. The journey toward gender equity requires ongoing



effort, commitment, and collaboration. Together, we can build a future where women's voices are not only heard but also valued and empowered.

*#IWD2025 #ForALLWomenAndGirls #GenderEquity #WomenRightsMatter #IRIADForInclusion  
#SayNoToMarginalisation*

**Signed**

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**ABOUT IRIAD**

The **Initiative for Research, Innovation, and Advocacy in Development (IRIAD)** is an interdisciplinary knowledge and advocacy hub committed and focused on developing a critical understanding of governance processes and regimes from research, documentation, policy engagements, public education and impact advocacy.

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#Advocacy #Results #Impact  
...promoting electoral knowledge, accountability, and integrity**