

NIIA COMMEMORATES INTERNATIONAL WOMEN’S DAY 2025 WITH A ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION ON GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN’S RIGHTS

In commemoration of the United Nations International Women’s Day 2025, the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs, in collaboration with Women Aligned For Growth (WAG) and Women Aligned for Community Impact in Nigeria (WACIN) hosted a roundtable discussion on the theme: “Beijing+30: Gender Equality And Women’s Rights In Nigeria –Progress, Challenges And Opportunities”

The event, which was held on Tuesday, 11 March 2025, and attracted men and women from the academia, civil society organisations, the press and the private sector, was aimed at fostering dialogue, raising awareness and encouraging sustainable actions to address gender equality and women’s rights in Nigeria, 30 years after the Beijing Conference.

The distinguished panel of discussants included Dr. Ifeyinwa Nwakwesi, a growth mindset and integrative lifestyle specialist, Mr. Kalada Belema Meshack-Hart, Executive Director, Engage, Empower, Educate Initiative (EEI), Prof. O.J Para-Mallam, National Coordinator, Christian Women for Excellence & Empowerment in Nigeria Society (CWEEENS), Mrs. Uduak Oludemi, Head, WAG, and Dr. Rita Agu, Senior Research Fellow and Head, Division of International Law at the NIIA.

In her welcome address, the coordinator of the event, Dr. Tola Ilesanmi, a Senior Research Fellow at the NIIA, stated that International Women’s Day is commemorated annually on 8th March to celebrate the achievements of women in every sphere of life and it is also a time to advocate for changes and actions on women’s rights. This year’s celebration coincides with the 30th anniversary of the Beijing Conference and the 30th year celebration in Nigeria which was a time to reflect on the status of Nigerian women, the progress and push backs.

In his opening remarks, the Director-General of the NIIA, Prof. Eghosa Osaghae, who was ably represented by Assoc. Prof. Joshua Bolarinwa, the Director of Research, NIIA, provided a historical overview of International Women’s Day, outlining its origins, significance and the contributions of women globally. He urged Nigerian women to balance cultural and professional responsibilities in their pursuit of professional growth.



The Chairman of the occasion, erudite Professor Femi Otubanjo, a Research Professor at the NIIA, addressed the socio-economic realities faced by Nigerians, while acknowledging that the socio-economic depreciation affects all genders in Nigeria, he called on men to be more accommodating and supportive of

women. He rounded off celebrating the resilience and achievements of women globally, acknowledging their contributions to economic and social developments.

Following the opening and the insightful presentation of Prof. Otubanjo, Ms Yan Yujing, Consul – General of the People’s Republic of China in Lagos, gave a goodwill message commending the NIIA for organizing the program. She expressed her fondness for Nigeria particularly Lagos State. She highlighted China’s commitment to gender equality, stating that gender equality had been enshrined in the Chinese Constitution since 1954, and there have been progress made in gender equality and women’s rights since its adoption. She announced that China would host a World Women Summit later in the year. Going further, Ms Yujing recounted the Chinese government’s long standing support for women’s development in education, health and social welfare, which has led to improved living standards and increased life expectancy for women from 71 years to 81 years. Highlighting the achievements of Chinese women, she drew on the nation’s first female astronaut and Malala Yousafzai, who was awarded the Noble Peace Prize for her fight for the right of every child to receive an education. She noted that women account for one-third of China’s development grants. Despite the advancements, she acknowledged the ongoing challenges women face globally, including discrimination and abuse and urged continued efforts to promote inclusion and equality.

A message from the United Nations Secretary-General on the 2025 International Women’s Day celebration was shared and he emphasized that when doors of equal opportunities are opened for women and girls, everyone wins. Equal societies were more prosperous and peaceful-a foundation of sustainable development.

Hinging on the theme for the day, the first speaker, Dr. Ifeyinwa Nwakwesi advised that in discussions of this nature, the focus should be on solutions and actions to achieve the desired results. She emphasized the importance of strategic thinking in this regard. She counseled women to move away from marginalization mindset, encouraging Nigerian women to strive for leadership positions. she firmly rejected all forms of women victimization and intimidation, calling for societal change to ensure equal opportunity.

Mrs. Uduak Oludemi, the second speaker, emphasized that despite the fact that Nigeria has made some progress regarding gender equality and women’s rights, there are still some significant challenges in the area of poverty alleviation for women. According to her, 87 million Nigerians live on two dollars per day and women were disproportionately affected by this statistics. She highlighted the importance of girl child education, easy access to finance and support for women entrepreneurs as measures to combat poverty and ensure wealth creation for women

Mr. Kalada Belema Meshack, the third speaker, who joined the program virtually, reflected on the

Beijing+30 frameworks and commended the NIIA for supporting gender equality. He emphasized the need to improve education and healthcare access for women noting that Nigeria has one of the highest numbers of girls out of school. He shared his organization's efforts in sending 100 girls back to school across Nigeria and Africa, he also stated that due to the limited representation of women in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) education, his organization trained 25 girls who previously had no knowledge of technology and they are at present doing well within the technology space after training, also his organization facilitated a property acquisition scheme for females only, allowing women own properties in their own names. He challenged financial institutions to create more awareness and access to loans for women-led small and medium enterprises (SMEs), stressing that the empowerment of women is a shared societal responsibility.

Prof. O.J Para-Mallam, who joined the discussions virtually, addressed the systemic discriminations against women and the need to integrate comprehensive legal frameworks to protect their rights. She highlighted that Nigeria lags behind in women's political representation while also having one of the highest maternal mortality rates. She outlined five key action areas, which include universal healthcare, cultural engagements, digital economy inclusion, the address of intersectional discrimination and a fair legal framework. She further emphasized that gender equality is critical for national productivity and development, asserting that the country's progress relies on providing every citizen with equal opportunities to contribute to growth.



Dr. Chinyere Agu, who was present in person, discussed the day's theme from a legal perspective by assessing the policies and legal landscape for gender equality and women's rights in Nigeria. She pointed out the discriminatory nature of some Nigerian Laws, such as Section 46 of the Constitution which grants automatic citizenship to foreign women married to

Nigerian men while denying Nigerian women married to foreign husbands same privilege of automatic citizenship for their spouses . She cited Section 55 of the Nigerian Labour Law, which prohibits women working at night with the exception of Nurses and Section 127 of the Police Act, which prohibits the enlistment of married women into the Nigerian Police as well as Section 18 of the Marriage Act, where only a father can give consent to the marriage of an underage child. She also stressed the difficulties posed by the polarity of the different sources of law in Nigeria, as there were provisions in some of the sources of law that are not favourable to women. While acknowledging that it was not all gloomy, Dr, Agu detailed the progress made in legal reforms including the adoption of the National Gender Policy and the domestication of the Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act (VAPP), as well as the Child's Rights Act in most states, the positive impact of policies promoting girl education. She however stressed that weak

implementation of laws and policies remain a significant barrier. She called for stronger institutional mechanisms to enforce gender related laws and emphasized the need for economic empowerment through increased access to credit and land ownership for women as well as comprehensive constitutional amendments to eliminate discriminatory provisions. In concluding, she called for an alignment of Nigerian laws with international gender equality commitments.

The programme rounded off with a question and answer session, allowing participants engage with speakers on issues relating to gender equality and women's rights.



A group photograph of participants at the programme

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