



Statement on International Women's Day 2023

Each year around the world, International Women's Day (IWD) is celebrated on March 8.

Although every day of the year is a perfect opportunity to support and celebrate women in our communities, on March 8th- we highlight the gains, challenges and lessons learnt in our strife to empower and improves the lives of women and girls. It is also a global recognition of women's incredible achievements, celebration of their significant contributions to the development of societies, an opportunity to raise awareness on women's rights and a clarion call for Governments to ensure gender equality.

The theme for this year, **DigitALL: Innovation and technology for gender equality**, looks at how women and girls are leveraging technology to transform their lives and communities and potentially impacting the wide gender gap on economic and social inequalities.

The theme also highlights the importance of protecting women's access to data and technology, as well as protecting their digital space from exploitation, abuse and other forms of online gender-based violence, especially by traffickers and sex predators.

In The Gambia, despite advancements in the protection of women's rights, inequalities between men and women remain in many areas such as political participation and representation, access to higher education, economic status, and access to digital technology .

The 2022 Digital Report of the International Trade Organisation on The Gambia revealed that the high cost of internet remains a primary hindrance to internet access for many women. In a country such as The Gambia where almost half (48.6%) of the population live in poverty with many women bearing its brunt, barriers to digital access, if left unaddressed, will only widen pre-existing inequality gap between men and women.

Access to digital facilities can enable access to formal financial products and services. The Oususu, for example, a traditional non-formal savings group, is the most accessible financial system for women in The Gambia and can be formalized and digitized, making savings and access to credit for women easier. This can increase opportunities for women's businesses and help address financial gender inequalities in The Gambia.

Access to digital facilities can also contribute immensely to women's access to educational materials, and timely reporting and response to gender-based violence incidences, including domestic and intimate partner violence.

In as much as digital access can positively address gender inequalities, there is a need for caution as it is evident that the digital space presents another forum where the rights of women and girls are violated. Daily we see rising incidences of cyberbullying and mockery of women, with the digital space used to attack the reputation of women, especially those in the political field, occupying high offices or are human rights defenders.

The National Human Rights Commission therefore urges the Government to:

Put in place robust measures to curb the high cost of digital connections.

Enact laws to combat digital violence, online sexual solicitation, and violence against women and girls.

Educate youths, especially girls, about the benefits and dangers of digital facilities and encourage positive use.

Support the digitalization of the Gambian economy.

Equip the Public Utility Authority (PURA) to be robust in ensuring affordable access and monitoring quality of services being provided.

Provide opportunities, including the provision of scholarships, to encourage the participation of women and girls in STEM.