**INTERNATIONAL WOMEN’S DAY ((IWD) CELEBRATION 2023**

**THEME: “DigitALL INNOVATION AND TECHNOLOGY FOR GENDER EQUALITY”**

**LECTURE ORGANISED BY THE ASSOCIATION OF WOMEN TOWN PLANNERS IN**

 **NIGERIA (AWTPN) OGUN STATE BRANCH**

**DATE: THURSDAY, THE 8TH DAY OF MARCH, 2023**

 **PAPER DELIVERED BY:**

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**TOPIC: GENDER EQUALITY AND THE EMPOWERMENT OF ALL WOMEN AND GIRLS:**

**DIGITALIZATION AND TECHNOLOGICAL INNOVATION FOR PROFESSIONAL WOMEN.**

Imagine a future where women and girls have equal access to and control over technology. Right now, I believe that that future is closer than ever before.

Just last year, we celebrated this annual event globally with the theme*“Gender equality today for a sustainable tomorrow”,* it is therefore not a surprise that the world is now stepping up the conversations and outflows/commitments therefrom to this year’s apt theme.

Let me use this opportunity to appreciate all distinguished leaders and members of the Professional Body of Association of Women Town Planners in Nigeria (AWTPN) particularly Ogun State Branch for their commitment in empowering women Town Planners for inclusive and sustainable human capacity development that will influence positively Urban and Regional settlements. I also appreciate your support for women Town Planners and female Urban and Regional Planning (URP) students to undergo trainings through advanced education, research, training and skill acquisition, which I believe this Webinar is a crucial part in achieving these laudable aims and commitment.

It is paramount to note that this year’s International Women’s Day recognizes and celebrates the women and girls who are championing the advancement of transformative technology and digital education. The observance will explore the impact of the digital gender gap on widening economic and social inequalities, and it will also spotlight the importance of professional women in leveraging on technology for career development.

The theme of this year’s celebration, i.e., ***“DigitALL: Innovation and technology for gender equality”*** aligns with the priority theme for the upcoming 67th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW-67), “Innovation and technological change, and education in the digital age for achieving gender equality.

I believe very strongly that the **AWTPN**, particularly Ogun State Branch, must leverage on this year`s theme, so that they can have an all-round and well developed professional body.

Our generation today is in an era where innovations for the advancement of technological, like computers, phones and the social media continues to impact the way we live our lives, do our work and other things. As such, technology has become very essential to our economic development and advancement.

However, a lot of the Nigerian women are not technology savvy to say the least! There are less and less women in the STEM (i.e., Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) discipline. The same situation applies to Tech Entrepreneurship where the number of Male Directors far outnumber the Female Directors, hence the male gender is in larger number in terms of control of the content produced using Technology.

Mercy Makinde, a seasoned entrepreneur, writer, speaker and enterprise advocate, while speaking on the topic, maximizing technology for women’s advancement in the Guardian On-line Publication of 30th January, 2016 said about the drought of African women in the technology sector that: *“This phenomenon invariably extends to the Continent as a whole as African women remain considerably mislaid in the technology sector in terms of leadership, labor force and even usage. Technology has been underutilized in unlocking the economic potentials of women.”* So, we know that it is not peculiar to our jurisdiction alone.

The International Women's Day is a global day celebrating the social, economic, cultural, and political achievements of women throughout the world. The day also marks a clarion call to action for accelerating women's equality. In fact, according to Wikipedia, the International Women’s Day (IWD) is a global holiday celebrated annually on March 8 as a focal point in women’s right movement bringing attention to issues such as gender equality, productive rights, and violence and abuse against women.

Spurred on by the universal female suffrage movement that had begun in New Zealand, the IWD originated from labor movements in North America and Europe during the early 20th century. The earliest version was purportedly a *"Women's Day"* organized by the Socialist Party of America in New York City and Europe on February 28, 1909. This inspired German delegates at the 1910 International Social Women’s Conference to propose that "a Special Women's Day" be organized annually, albeit with no set date. The following year (1911) therefore, saw the first demonstrations and commemorations of International Women's Day across Europe. After women gained suffrage in Soviet Russia in 1917 (the beginning of the February Revolution), IWD was made a national holiday on March 8, and subsequently celebrated on that date by the socialist movement and communist countries. The holiday was associated with far-left movements and governments until its adoption by the global feminist movement in the late 1960s. It is now said that the IWD became a mainstream global holiday following its adoption by the United Nations in 1977.

Suffices to note that the International Women's Day is commemorated in a variety of ways worldwide; it is a public holiday in several countries, and observed socially or locally in others (such as Nigeria) to celebrate and promote the achievements of women.

For me, collective action and shared ownership for driving gender parity or equality is what makes the International Women's Day impactful. According to the United Nations, statistics show that women make up only 22 per cent of artificial intelligence workers globally.  Similarly, a global analysis of 133 Artificial Intelligence (AI) systems across industries found that 44.2 per cent demonstrate gender bias.  Also, a survey of women journalists from 125 countries found that 73 per cent had suffered online violence in the course of their work.  Therefore, the IWD is always an opportunity to reflect on the vital roles women play in the society, homes, governance, the professions, and all walks of life, including the digital world. Although women are not where they should be yet in different spheres of endeavor, I confirm vividly to you all that we can no longer be deprived for too long, as we have and continue to consistently prove that we can hold our own on all fronts, and in all fields.

Speaking of the theme of this day, and my topic, it is very clear that from the earliest days of computing to the present age of virtual reality and artificial intelligence, women have made untold contributions to the digital world in which we increasingly live in. Their accomplishments have been against all odds, in a field that has historically neither welcomed nor appreciated them.  Today, a persistent gender gap in digital access keeps women from unlocking technology’s full potential. Their under-representation in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) education and careers remain a major barrier to their participation in tech design and governance. And the pervasive threat of online gender-based violence coupled with a lack of legal recourse too often forces them out of the digital spaces they do occupy.

At the same time, digital technology is opening new doors for the global empowerment of women, girls and other marginalized groups. From gender-responsive digital learning to tech-facilitated sexual and reproductive healthcare, the digital age represents an unprecedented opportunity to eliminate all forms of disparity and inequality.

No wonder, this year, the United Nations is calling on governments, activists and the private sector alike to power on in their efforts to make the digital world safer, more inclusive and more equitable. Facing a multiplicity of global crises, we have a chance to create a better future not just for women and girls, but for all humanity and all life on Earth. Remember, it is believed that if you train a girl child, you are actually training a community and changing the narrative across board.

Looking at our society today (this time, a direct reference to Nigeria), the challenges facing our women and girls and creating the brick walls are numerous. These challenges range from:

(1) ancient and unrealistic beliefs about the dominance of the male gender to the dark age perception that the girl child need not go to school;

(2) access to finance, which remains one of the biggest challenges for women entrepreneurs who want to start and grow a business;

(3) high prevalence of gender-based violence in the land which has negative economic consequences because such violence hinders women’s productivity while they cope with the adverse physical and psychological ramifications that it brings;

(4) traditional beliefs which place more domestic responsibilities on women than men, which ultimately impacts women’s ability to participate fully in the workplace.

Let us not forget that, in this part of the world, what we see is that even when most women are employed, they are more often in lower-productivity and more in informal jobs, constrained by lack of access to productive resources. We can only thank God and have more hope as this is now changing with the emergence of affirmative actions and many more women in businesses, especially private organizations that are now taking the lead and calling the shots.

(5) another barrier, and maybe the most significant of all is lack of access to education. The World Economic Forum’s Global Gender Gap Report 2021 found that in comparison to other countries, Nigerian females lag significantly behind men and boys in formal education, in terms of attendance, literacy rate and other metrics. We shall explore the summary of the report in a bit.

(6) lack of structures and political will to implement women’s rights. An example of this was displayed by a senator in Nigeria who was reported to have beaten up a lady in a shop while bragging about his clout, connections, affluence and position in the society. The key thing here is that he was reported to have consistently hammered on the fact that nothing would happen even if he’s charged to court for beating up the said lady. I’m however happy that the court proved him wrong. It is unfortunate that in a vast society like ours, the political class and in fact, a vast majority of the male cross-section still bask in the belief or perception that the woman’s place is only in the bedroom or the “other room”.

Looking at the above from the reality of Nigeria, the African continent and even the world at large, you will all agree with me that we have a lot of work to do. In fact, the World Economic Forum (WEF) Global Gender Gap Report of 2021, which I referred to earlier, has provided some statistics which will clear your doubt. Let’s see what it says:

**On Global Trends and Outcomes:**

* *Globally, the average distance completed to parity is at 68%, a step back compared to 2020 (-0.6 percentage points). These figures are mainly driven by a decline in the performance of large countries. On its current trajectory, it will now take 135.6 years to close the gender gap worldwide.*
* *The gender gap in Political Empowerment remains the largest of the four gaps tracked, with only 22% closed to date, having further widened since the 2020 edition of the report by 2.4 percentage points. Across the 156 countries covered by the index, women represent only 26.1% of some 35,500 parliament seats and just 22.6% of over 3,400 ministers worldwide. In 81 countries (to include Nigeria of course), there has never been a woman head of state, as of 15th January 2021. At the current rate of progress, the World Economic Forum estimates that it will take 145.5 years to attain gender parity in politics.*
* *Widening gender gaps in Political Participation have been driven by negative trends in some large countries which have counterbalanced progress in another 98 smaller countries. Globally, since the previous edition of the report, there are more women in parliaments, and two countries have elected their first female prime minister (i.e., Togo in 2020 and Belgium in 2019).*
* *The gender gap in Economic Participation and Opportunity remains the second-largest of the four key gaps tracked by the index. According to this year’s index results 58% of this gap has been closed so far. The gap has seen marginal improvement since the 2020 edition of the report and as a result we estimate that it will take another 267.6 years to close.*
* *The slow progress seen in closing the Economic Participation and Opportunity gap is the result of two opposing trends. On one hand, the proportion of women among skilled professionals continues to increase, as does progress towards wage equality, albeit at a slower pace. On the other hand, overall income disparities are still only part-way towards being bridged and there is a persistent lack of women in leadership positions, with women representing just 27% of all manager positions. Additionally, the data available for the 2021 edition of the report does not yet fully reflect the impact of the pandemic. Projections for a select number of countries show that gender gaps in labour force participation are wider since the outbreak of the pandemic. Globally, the economic gender gap may thus be between 1% and 4% wider than reported.*
* *Gender gaps in Educational Attainment and Health and Survival are nearly closed. In Educational Attainment, 95% of this gender gap has been closed globally, with 37 countries already at parity. However, the ‘last mile’ of progress is proceeding slowly. The index estimates that on its current trajectory, it will take another 14.2 years to completely close this gap. In Health and Survival, 96% of this gender gap has been closed, registering a marginal decline since last year (not due to COVID-19), and the time to close this gap remains undefined. For both education and health, while progress is higher than for economy and politics in the global data, there are important future implications of disruptions due to the pandemic, as well as continued variations in quality across income, geography, race, and ethnicity.*

 ***On Gender Gaps, COVID-19 and the Future of Work***

* *High-frequency data for selected economies from ILO, LinkedIn and Ipsos offer a timely analysis of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on gender gaps in economic participation. Early projections from ILO suggest 5% of all employed women lost their jobs, compared with 3.9% of employed men. LinkedIn data further shows a marked decline of women’s hiring into leadership roles, creating a reversal of 1 to 2 years of progress across multiple industries. While industries such as Software and IT Services, Financial Services, Health and Healthcare, and Manufacturing are countering this trend, there is a more severe destruction of overall roles in industries with higher participation of women, such as the Consumer sector, Non-profits, and Media and Communication. Additionally, Ipsos data from January 2021 shows that a longer “double-shift” of paid and unpaid work in a context of school closures and limited availability of care services have contributed to an overall increase of stress, anxiety around job insecurity and difficulty in maintaining work-life balance among women with children.*
* *The COVID-19 crisis has also accelerated automation and digitalization, speeding up labour market disruption. Data points to significant challenges for gender parity in the future of jobs due to increasing occupational gender-segregation. Only two of the eight tracked “jobs of tomorrow” clusters (People & Culture and Content Production) have reached gender parity, while most show a severe underrepresentation of women.*
* *Gender gaps are more likely in sectors that require disruptive technical skills. For example, in Cloud Computing, women make up 14% of the workforce; in Engineering, 20%; and in Data and AI, 32%. While the eight job clusters typically experience a high influx of new talent, at current rates those inflows do not re-balance occupational segregation and transitioning to fields where women are currently under-represented appears to remain difficult. For example, the current share of women in Cloud Computing is 14.2% and that figure has only improved by 0.2 percentage points, while the share of women in Data and AI roles is 32.4%. That figure has seen a mild decline of 0.1 percentage points since February 2018.*
* *This report also premiers a new measure created in collaboration with the LinkedIn Economic Graph team which captures the difference between men and women’s likelihood to make an ambitious job switch. The indicator shows that women experience a bigger gender gap in potential-based job transitions in fields where they are currently under-represented, such as Cloud Computing, where the job-switching gap is 58%; Engineering, where the gap is 42%; and Product Development, where the gap is 19%.*
* *Through the combined effect of accelerated automation, the growing “double shift”, and other labour market dynamics such as occupational segregation, the pandemic is likely to have a scarring effect on future economic opportunities for women, risking inferior reemployment prospects and a persistent drop in income. Gender-positive recovery policies and practices can tackle those potential challenges. First, the report recommends further investments into the care sector and into equitable access to care leave for men and women. Second, policies and practices need to proactively focus on overcoming occupational segregation by gender. Third, effective mid-career reskilling policies, combined with managerial practices, which embed sound, unbiased hiring and promotion practices, will pave the way for a more gender-equal future of work.*

***On Gender Gaps by Economy and Region***

* *Iceland is the most gender-equal country in the world for the 12th time. The top 10 includes:*
* *The five most-improved countries in the overall index this year are Lithuania, Serbia, Timor-Leste, Togo and United Arab Emirates, having narrowed their gender gaps by at least 4.4 percentage points or more. Timor-Leste and Togo are also among the four countries (including Cote d’Ivoire and Jordan) that have managed to close their Economic Participation and Opportunity gap by at least 10 full percentage points in one year. Three new countries have been assessed this year for the first time: Afghanistan (44.4% of the gender gap closed so far, 156th), Guyana (72.8%, 53rd) and Niger (62.9%, 138th).*
* *There are significant disparities across and within various geographies. Western Europe remains the region that has progressed the most towards gender parity (77.6%) and is further progressing this year. North America is the second-most advanced (76.4%), also improving this year, followed by Latin America and the Caribbean (72.1%) and Eastern Europe and Central Asia (71.2%). A few decimal points below the East Asia and the Pacific region (68.9%), one of the most-improved regions, just ahead of Sub- Saharan Africa (67.2%) and surpassing South Asia (62.7%). The Middle East and North Africa region remains the area with the largest gap (60.9%).*
* *At the current relative pace, gender gaps can potentially be closed in 52.1 years in Western Europe, 61.5 years in North America, and 68.9 years in Latin America and the Caribbean. In all other regions it will take over 100 years to close the gender gap: 121.7 years in Sub-Saharan Africa, 134.7 years in Eastern Europe and Central Asia, 165.1 years in East Asia and the Pacific, 142.4 years in Middle East and North Africa, and 195.4 years in South Asia.*

The question now is WHERE IS OUR NIGERIA? ***Does it not look like*** we are in the category of the generation of women that will have to wait for years to achieve gender parity? This is because, according to the World Economic Forum’s *Global Gender Gap Report 2021,* as the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic continues to be felt, closing the global gender gap has increased by a generation from 99.5 years to 135.6 years.

**Digitalization and technological innovation for professional women**

This is the area where gender parity seems to be crawling the more and, the questions that may be begging for answers on this are:

* + What is responsible for the technological gender gap?
	+ Is modern technology out rightly too complicated or is it due to the ancient fiction that girls are just not good enough for the so-called “STEM education and careers”, or to use technology?
	+ Can anything be done to negate this orientation?

In the High Schools, girls tend towards the Art courses, hence more of them are in the Home Economic labs as opposed to the Introductory Technology or ICT labs. And this appears to be very normal under the circumstances. As a matter of fact, if you have more girls in the Tech or ICT labs then it would appear an abnormally. The story does not change in the tertiary institutions as well in that girls outnumber their male counterparts in the Humanities department; and almost at par in the Law profession where the women are in almost equal proportion with the men folk. While the host of young men flood the Engineering and other STEM faculties.

Little wonder in later life, the word technology is daunting and intimidating to the women folk and even in the very mundane use, women are found to be lagging way behind. This is the reason that we find women with overpriced Smart phones yet they can only use 3% of its function i.e., Calls, SMS and Chat!

The truth however, is that digital technology has become critical to our lives as professional women. Online experiences and opportunities are also important for young people’s and professional women development across a wide range of areas, including: online education, access to formal and informal learning, access to information and digital application for professional fields, being able to engage with their own creative and professionalism; to express their ideas and make meaningful professional contributions and advancement.

According to the UN bringing women into technology results in more creative solutions and has greater potential for innovations that meet women’s needs and promote gender equality. Their lack of inclusion, by contrast, comes with massive costs.

It is shocking to note the revelation by the UN that 37% of women do not use the internet. 259 million fewer women have access to the Internet than men, even though they account for nearly half the world’s population. As such, they are unable to develop the necessary digital skills to engage in digital spaces, which diminishes their opportunities to pursue careers in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) related fields. By 2050, 75% of jobs will be related to STEM areas. Yet today, women hold just 22% of positions in artificial intelligence, to name just one.

There is a gender digital divide: women are disadvantaged when it comes to digital adoption. They have lower levels of access to and use of digital technology than their male counterpart, and often they are not benefitting from digital technology in the same way as boys. Only 63% of women are using the Internet in 2022 compared to 69% of men.

UN observed further that bringing women into technology results in more creative solutions and has greater potential for innovations that meet women’s needs and promote gender equality. Their lack of inclusion, by contrast, comes with massive costs.

What is more, digital products and solutions are often designed for more generic, mostly male, users, and often do not fully consider female users. Women and girls’ digital realities can differ greatly from those of men and boys. Failing to design for their needs means that female user numbers are often very low. Consequently, women and girls engage less and benefit less from digital solutions.

**At the First World Conference on Women, in Mexico City**, **June 19, 1975 – July 2, 1975,** where of the 133 delegations from participating countries, 113 were headed by women, thus opening the door for women’s voices to be heard and respected on the international stage, Sirimavo Bandaranaike, the Prime Minister of Sri Lanka, made a profound statement which became a popular quote credited to her that:

 *“We are not here only to demolish discrimination but to envision the benefits to the human race of integrating this forgotten half of humanity in development.”*

This now brings me to the question, how do we close the gender gap, especially in the digital world, being the focus of the year 2023 Women’s Day celebration?

**WHAT TO DO TO CLOSE THE GENDER DIGITAL GAP**

**1. More Aggressive Digital Education For the Female Gender:** There must be an aggressive digital education for all women to close all gaps in digital access and skills**.** As our daily lives become increasingly digitalized, gender gaps in digital access threaten to leave women and girls even further behind. Though efforts to close these gaps have led to improvements in the gender parity score, the absolute gap between men and women’s access has actually increased by 20 million since 2019. This also applies to digital literacy programs, which can help give women and girls the skills they need to lead, connect and successfully shape the digital space.

**2. Purposeful Support for Women and Girls in STEM:** Today, women remain a minority in both STEM education and careers, representing only 28 per cent of engineering graduates, 22 percent of artificial intelligence workers and less than one third of the tech sector employees globally. Without equal representation in these fields, women’s participation in shaping technology, research, investments and policy will remain critically limited. The same challenges apply to their access to fast-growing and high-paying careers—an inequality compounded by the fact that, as tech and digital innovation disrupt industries, women will bear the brunt of job losses, but this should not be so. A great example of this support for women in tech is UNICEF EAPRO Gender and Innovation team, who are developing a toolkit with best practices, to support innovators, designers and implementers of digital products and services, to benefit girls and young women equally and help close the gender digital divide.

**3. Create Tech That Meets the Needs of Women And Girls:** Technology reflects its creators. So when women and girls are left out of tech and innovation spaces, it’s no surprise that digital tools fail to meet their needs. Severe underinvestment in technology and innovation for women should be improved, for example, digital tools that promote sexual and reproductive health is the natural outcome of decision-making processes that systematically exclude women’s voices.

4. **Inclusion of Digital Technological Use For Every Profession:** Our educational and professional training curriculum must be made to include digital technological inclusion irrespective of gender. Digital access gaps mean women produce less data than men, and a lack of data disaggregation (i.e., the separation of compiled information into smaller units to elucidate underlying trends and patterns) leads to unequal representation in data sets. If you have 70 percent of men using an application and 30 percent of women using the same application the innovators improve more on the number of usage by men and exclude women, this should be eradicated, and innovation should be done to include all gender irrespective of the usage by a particular set of the gender.

**ADVANTAGES OF DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY AND URBAN PLANNING**

1. **Technology** enables us to plan, build, measure, manage and predict using real world data through digital platforms. Making the physical world digital and interactive opens up many possibilities for the people, businesses and municipalities involved in shaping our cities to fundamentally change how they plan and work on projects. The body of Association of Women Town Planners in Nigeria (AWTPN) must be ready to encourage all their members and engage necessary technology for their profession.
2. **Digital urban planning:** digital urban planning is the use of digital tools, assets, and innovational approaches for urban planning. The complexity of modern cities and issues like the housing shortage and climate change, require advanced data models and techniques and the active involvement of citizens, urban planners and stakeholders.
3. **Technology will enable smart cities:** Smart city planning is seeing public and private organizations reimagine the way we live through the application of new technologies. Not only is this done to drive convenience, but it is also an essential method for making urban areas livable and enjoyable as populations increase. For example, the Internet of Things (IoT) approach is helping urban planners to connect practically all aspects of urban spaces through the internet. This includes everything from energy distribution and trash collection to decreasing congestion and improving air quality. By connecting all things in an urban space, urban planners can build a better picture of actions that will improve the overall quality of life. For example, if all vehicles are connected, real-time information on better, less congested routes can be delivered straight to drivers. The same [information can also be used by urban planners](https://careers.snclavalin.com/blogs/2022-7/what-are-the-trends-shaping-the-future-of-urban-planning)to identify high congestion areas and find smart solutions.
4. **Technology will boost productivity:** Technology is already helping urban planners boost productivity and is likely to continue to do so as populations increase and new needs arise. Big data analysis offers urban planners an opportunity to overcome major challenges. Firstly, it offers them a detailed insight into the already established populations of urban areas, helping them to simplify essential communication between both parties. This drastically improves the real-time response to issues.

**THE WAY FORWARD**

Having considered series of data particularly by the UNICEF. UN and WEF on the Global Gender Gap particularly in the 2021 report of WEF, and how in comparison to other countries, Nigerian females lag significantly behind men and boys in formal education, particularly STEM, the continued awareness created for gender equality/parity, and some suggestions on what can be done to close the gender gap, I am optimistic that there is hope for female gender in Nigeria, the African continent and the world at large. The only critical and constant condition is that we must be ready to work. We have all the statistics and results/reports to lead us aright until we achieve the goal. As the popular saying goes, “Nigerian women no dey carry last”, we must rise to the occasion, and get counted in the project of the future for future generations.

I particularly love the way Ayesha Amin, a tech and gender activist and social entrepreneur from Pakistan, who is the founder of the youth- and women-led organization – Baithak puts it. Having experienced first-hand, the discriminatory structure of the tech world, Ayesha highlights in her work, the urgency of involving young people and young women, in particular, in the decision-making processes that will impact their future. She believes that there are no alternatives to this and I completely agree with her.

As we fight to close the gender gap in digital access, we must not leave women and girls in marginalized communities behind. There is therefore a huge need for investments in solutions that can localize technology and that can make tech models inclusive for girls and women who are in these marginalized communities.

I therefore appeal to all of you to embrace technology, form partnerships and alliances, share knowledge and carry the younger generation of women and girls along in the struggle and advocacy for gender parity/equality. We can no longer have excuses that we are not connected because despite the controversial origin of the internet, it is very clear that the internet is fundamentally structured in a way that invites equality and cooperation. It was built on the principles of openness where no one person can own it. Therefore, as a public utility that it is, we can start improving internet governance just by upholding those open internet principles.  And how we interact with it has to be centered on human rights and human dignity as this should be the foundation of internet governance. Bringing gender into technology and internet governance is really about dismantling systems of inequality and ensuring that we all come in the fullness of our humanity with autonomy, with dignity, and we can all participate equally in shaping our digital future.

As we cannot isolate political participation from our lives, governments must begin to build the necessary foundation by fostering equitable participation in tech spaces and applying feminist and intersectional lenses to policies, legislations and government. It is the simple thing of ensuring equal access, ensuring safety by design, and ensuring we can have legislations that are responsive to our human needs online and offline.

As the scripture says in Proverbs 23:7 that: ***“…As he thinks in his heart, so is he.” (NKJV)*** We must therefore begin to imagine what kind of future we really want for women and girls. And that means also imagining what technology should do for us as a people while, not allowing our imagination to be determined by what big tech monopolies are telling us.

**CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, we all must find innovative solutions to help women and girls unleash their human capital and become leaders and entrepreneurs, and agents of change for the digital world and Tech gender parity/equality.

To maximize the impact of the digital transformation on gender equality, it will be important for everyone including your body, the Association of Women Town Planners in Nigeria (AWTPN) Ogun State Branch to ensure that no one is left behind in terms of accessing technology and innovation, especially women and girls. Let us join hands to make sure that technology access is not a privilege for a few, but a right held by all. Increase women’s access to and control of technology, and help grassroots organizations use technology to advance women’s and girls’ human rights.

Together we can attain a future where scientific progress is gender-equal at its core, serving all, for the benefit of all and drawing on the talents of all.

At this juncture, please permit me, to applaud the contributions of all women who work tirelessly in pursuit of success and their various dreams. These set of extraordinary women (which we all are) are pulling their weights, and making it impossible for anyone to downplay their essence. It is most interesting to note that aside from their professional lives, these are the women and mothers (biological or otherwise), around whom the tranquility of homes and society revolves.

I pray to God to grant us all peace, joy and satisfaction, as we celebrate today and always.

Once again, congratulations to all the women. ladies and girls for this year’s international Women’s day celebration, and I sincerely appreciate the body of Association of Women Town Planners in Nigeria (AWTPN) Ogun State Branch, for the privilege to share this auspicious day with them.

I thank you all for your kind attention

**Hon. Justice E.O. Osinuga *FNICArb, MICMC, MCIArb (UK)***

**March, 2023**