

**GENDER EQUALITY: MY VOICE, OUR FUTURE AND  
ACTION ON ENDING EARLY MARRIAGE AND  
SEXUAL EXPLOITATION.**

**A  
PAPER PRESENTATION**

**BY**

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**PRESENTED AT**

**11<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER: INTERNATIONAL DAY OF THE GIRL CHILD  
LEGAL IDEAS FORUM INTERNATIONAL  
(ZOOM MEETING)**

**11<sup>TH</sup> OCTOBER 2021.**



LEGAL IDEAS FORUM INT'L

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11TH  
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2021

# INTERNATIONAL DAY OF THE GIRL CHILD

GLOBAL THEME:

**My Voice, Our Equal future-Action on ending early marriage and sexual exploitation.**



Featuring:

- A conversation on the imperatives of Girl child Education: An Empowerment for Nation Building.
- Panel Discussion/Exposition.

## Meet our Panelists:

Ethel Willie is an Active volunteer of Youth Alive foundation. She is a passionate Advocate for persons With Disabilities/vulnerable groups and the development of the human mind. She is Skilled with knowledge on practical International Humanitarian Law, conflicts and related situations. She believes so much that her effort is required to make a better society. This has lead her to volunteer Campaigns and NGO's with the Aim to empower herself and others to make positive changes.

These Volunteered Projects, Campaigns and NGO's includes:

- #EndGBVinNigeria (10th August 2020 Social media Campaign)
  - UN-EU Prevention of Campus Based Violence (As a Volunteer Ambassador, she Supervised the training of 20 Student Advocate students from in 20 tertiary Institutions in Nigeria) 2020.
  - #Sex4Grades (2016 till date)
  - #SecureUnluyo (2019-2020 Volunteer student under Youth Alive Foundation and Students Organising Change STUNT)
  - Inclusion of persons with Disability (2015 till date. As a student, she has assisted 2 blind student in studying for 5 years)
  - CSFirst Grow with Google (2020, trained 200 teenagers from secondary Schools Volunteer Facilitator of Junior Achievement Nigeria JAN)
  - World giving Tuesday with Junior Achievement Nigeria|WGTwithJAN 2020 Volunteer Teacher.
  - Junior Achievement Nigeria; My Money, Our Niger Delta, Our Company Program (2016-2020 volunteer teacher)
  - #AKYDFBill of Youth Alive Nigeria ( Advocate for the Youth development Fund Bill in Akwa Ibom State Nigeria 2016 till date).
  - #WomenWithBrain (A Personal Advocacy for positive Masculinity and gender equality)
- To mention but a few.

In Summary, Ethel Willie is committed to Human development and Advocacy for Vulnerable Persons/persons with disabilities and the development of human mind.

LIVE ON zoom 07:00PM (GMT +1)



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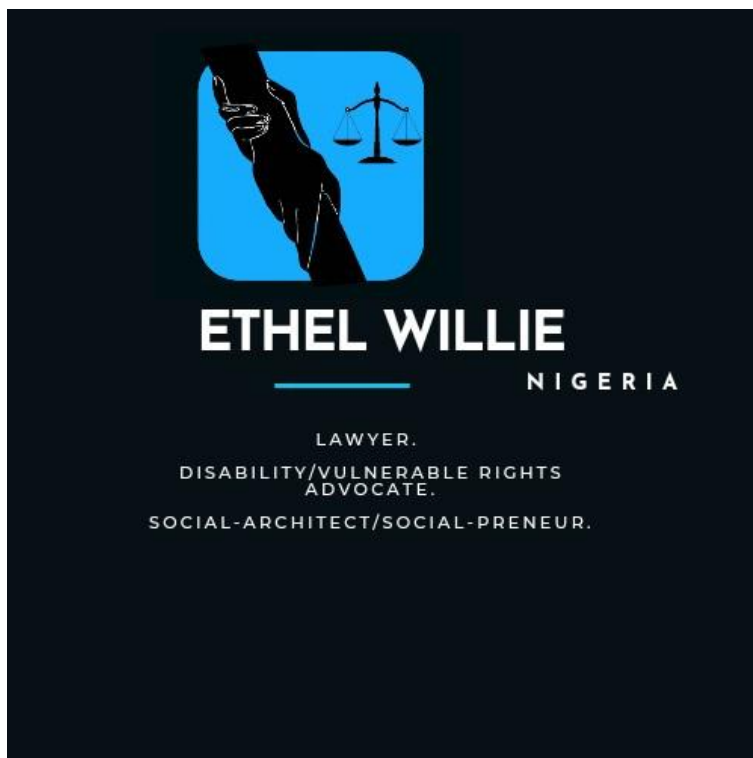


**Ethel Willie**



PARTNERS: |





## **MY VOICE, OUR FUTURE: ACTION ON ENDING EARLY MARRIAGE AND SEXUAL EXPLOITATION.**

### **Introduction**

Ruth is a beautiful girl of 17 years in Senior Secondary School. She is seen to be withdrawn from the happy students playing games in the course of their break, and left, thinking about her life.

Ruth is the first of three children of Mr. and Mrs Bouth. Her other siblings were twin boys.

Ruth had thought that with the father moving to Lagos, she would be allowed to school like her brothers, with the constant reminder that she has to act prime and proper as she may soon be married off. Worst, her bride price has been paid to her father while in JSS3, who used the money to buy himself a fairly used car and also, get another wife.

Right now, she feels so worthless, no better than the car her father acquired.

Ruth envies the freedom her brothers enjoy. She wishes for an opportunity to live her life like a normal human, with no recourse to being recognized as weak, and only good for reproduction. Only a chance to the live life of a full decisive human.

“hmm.....” *she sighs sadly with concern.*

“I wish I could be given an opportunity to study further, I would love to produce an innovative technological device capable to add value to human society.” *Ruth thinks loud to herself*

“But no, they won’t let it happen!” *she adds wiping the tears from her already sore eyes.*

“Don’t cry Sister,” *her brothers try to comfort her.*

*Again they added;* “We have quite some savings, and we plan using it to send you to stay with grandpa. We believe in you and we will protect you. At least over there, father will leave us be”.

That was how the lads took their sister to their grandfather’s house in another town within same Lagos City. They stayed there, and sent themselves to school by hawking.

Years later... Ruth is back to her former school, to give a community trial to her innovative device. The world is so fascinated about her achievements, that everyone in her community, who once frowned at girl child education, now names every first female child Ruth. They all are inspired by Ruth to dream and work towards equal rights and opportunity to a better life.

This is a story that covers one of the very many ugly situations women face in the society. Ruth reminds me of my friend Aziya, who was removed school and married off in her JSS3. Aziya’s situation also reminds me of Zaniab, another intelligent girl, who finished her secondary school, but was denied further studies.

Ruth’s story represents one of the very discriminations against the ‘Female Gender’ in the Society. She was fortunate to have understanding siblings and grandparents. Most other women are not so fortunate.

Aristotle, and few of his contemporaries in their era, believed man to be the most highly evolved being in comparison with women, slaves and deformed children, who were believed to be a step less evolved and mere tools to be used by man. Aristotle also recommended that they should be a law “to prevent the rearing of deformed children.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Minnesota Governor’s Council on Developmental Disabilities *Parallels in Time a History of Developmental Disabilities: Part one ancient Era 1500 B.C-475A.D*, (The Minnesota Disability Center). Available at <https://mn.gov/mnddc/parallels/one/3.html>. Retrieved 10/10/2021.

Hence, children born with disabilities, women and slaves experiences great discrimination. The underling question here is: “Are they not Humans with the inherent right that is indestructible?” “Also, has this discriminatory ideology, changed with time, or still persists?”

These questions and more other important concepts will be answered and explained in the course of this work.

### **Gender Equality**

This goes beyond seeking equality for women and drives deep into humanity value. “Gender equality is a fundamental human right required to achieve a peaceful society with full human potential and sustainable development. Moreover, it is has been shown that empowering women spurs productivity and economic growth.”<sup>2</sup> Thus with the advent of lock down due to the pandemic, the use of internet has increased and has given rise to the need to create awareness and make strong laws on digital. In this light, equality is also needed as a guiding principle in the digital generational rights, to ensure no one is left behind.

### **Discrimination**

Discrimination and its causes are complex and exists not just in nameable states, but in the human society in general. From ancient times down to recent times, discrimination affects all spheres of society such as politics, education, employment, social and medical services, housing, the penitentiary system, law enforcement and the administration of justice in general.<sup>3</sup>

Discrimination based on gender is still common in spite of the progress made in many countries. Laws still exist which, inter alia, deny women the right to inherit matrimonial properties, the right to inherit on equal footing with men, and the right to work and travel without the permission of their husbands. Further, women particularly, are prone to violence and abusive,

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.un.org/en/global-issues/gender-equality...>

<sup>3</sup> United Nation’s Gender Equality “Peace, dignity and equality on healthy planet” United Nation’s Training: Human Right in the Administration of Justice: A manual on Human Rights for Judges, Prosecutors and Lawyers. (chapter13: Pg. 634-639.

Found at: <https://www.un.org/ruleoflaw/file/training9chapter13en.pdf>. Retrieved 9/10/2021.

which is still uncurbed in many countries, thus suffering double discrimination, both because of their race or origin and because they are women.<sup>4</sup>

### **Early Marriage and Sexual Exploitation**

This is another form of discrimination meted to the female gender, often times, the reason is for money or for cultural/religious beliefs. Ebuka Mathias Itumoh, A Blog4Dev Nigeria Winner defines early marriage as marriage before the age of adulthood (eighteen 18years). Although there are many issues concerning age of adulthood and marriage age in the Nigerian legal system, we stick to this definition, as the Nigerian Constitution recognizes one to be an adult when the person is (eighteen) 18 years old.<sup>5</sup>

**Sexual exploitation** includes rape, prostitution, sexual photography, subjection to pornography or witnessing sexual acts and sexual assault or sexual acts to which the adult has not consented or was pressured into consenting. Adults and children can be sexually exploited.<sup>6</sup>

This violation of women's right because of their sex, is inhumane and wrong and against their fundamental right. Women are not the only ones discriminated against on the ground of sex. Men also suffer same, but the rate causality is far greater in women.

### **Facts:**

- Globally, 750 million women and girls were married before the age of 18 and at least 200 million women and girls in 30 countries have undergone FGM.
- The rates of girls between 15-19 who are subjected to FGM (female genital mutilation) in the 30 countries where the practice is concentrated have dropped from 1 in 2 girls in 2000 to 1 in 3 girls by 2017.

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<sup>4</sup> United Nation's Training: Human Right in the Administration of Justice: A manual on Human Rights for Judges, Prosecutors and Lawyers. ( chapter13: Pg. 634-639.

Found at: <https://www.un.org/ruleoflaw/file/training9chapter13en.pdf>. Retrieved 9/10/2021

<sup>5</sup> Section 29 (4) of the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 (herein after referred to as CFRN 1999).

<sup>6</sup> Sunderland City Council "Sexual exploitation" (2021). Retrived 10/10/2021.

Found at -[www.sunderland.gov.uk/article/12180/sexual-exploitation...](http://www.sunderland.gov.uk/article/12180/sexual-exploitation...)

- In 18 countries, husbands can legally prevent their wives from working; in 39 countries, daughters and sons do not have equal inheritance rights; and 49 countries lack laws protecting women from domestic violence.
- One in five women and girls, including 19 per cent of women and girls aged 15 to 49, have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner within the last 12 months. Yet, 49 countries have no laws that specifically protect women from such violence.<sup>7</sup>

### **Facts on Covid-19 as it affects women and girls**

The Covid-19 Pandemic has shaken the core stability of the human world and it possess a serious threat to the success of gender equality. The United Nation's SDG resources<sup>8</sup> reports "...the COVID-19 pandemic could reverse the limited progress that has been made on gender equality and women's rights. The coronavirus outbreak exacerbates existing inequalities for women and girls across every sphere – from health and the economy, to security and social protection."<sup>9</sup>

Furthermore, they added that "Women play a disproportionate role in responding to the virus, including as frontline healthcare workers and carers at home. Women unpaid care work has increased significantly as a result of school closures and the increased needs of older people. Women are also harder hit by the economic impacts of COVID-19, as they disproportionately work in insecure labour markets. Nearly 60 per cent of women work in the informal economy, which puts them at greater risk of falling into poverty."<sup>10</sup>

"The pandemic has also led to a steep increase in violence against women and girls. With lockdown measures in place, many women are trapped at home with their abusers, struggling to access services that are suffering from cuts and restrictions. Emerging data shows that, since the outbreak of the pandemic, violence against women and girls – and particularly domestic violence – has intensified."

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<sup>7</sup> **United Nation's Sustainable Development Goal** "*Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls*"  
**Retrieved 9/10/2021**

Found at: Gender equality and women's empowerment – United Nations Sustainable Development

<sup>8</sup> **United Nation's Sustainable Development Goal** "*Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls*"  
**Retrieved 9/10/2021**

Found at: Gender equality and women's empowerment – United Nations Sustainable Development

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

**“COVID-19 response”<sup>10</sup>**

*“Limited gains in gender equality and women’s rights made over the decades are in danger of being rolled back due to the COVID-19 pandemic,” the UN Secretary-General said in April 2020, urging governments to put women and girls at the center of their recovery efforts.*

Women are not only the hardest hit by this pandemic, they are also the backbone of recovery in communities. Putting women and girls at the centre of economies will fundamentally drive better and more sustainable development outcomes for all, support a more rapid recovery, and place the world back on a footing to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.

Every COVID-19 response plans, and every recovery package and budgeting of resources, needs to address the gender impacts of this pandemic. This means: (1) including women and women’s organizations in COVID-19 response planning and decision-making; (2) transforming the inequities of unpaid care work into a new, inclusive care economy that works for everyone; and (3) designing socio-economic plans with an intentional focus on the lives and futures of women and girls.

UN Women has developed a rapid and targeted response to mitigate the impact of the COVID19 crisis on women and girls and to ensure that the long-term recovery benefits them, focused on five priorities:

1. Gender-based violence, including domestic violence, is mitigated and reduced
2. Social protection and economic stimulus packages serve women and girls
3. People support and practice equal sharing of care work
4. Women and girls lead and participate in COVID-19 response planning and decision making
5. Data and coordination mechanisms include gender perspectives

The COVID-19 pandemic provides an opportunity for radical, positive action to redress longstanding inequalities in multiple areas of women’s lives, and build a more just and resilient world.”<sup>12</sup>

**Feminism a Movement to Gender Equality**

Gender equality cannot be discussed without including feminism in some way. Although feminism seems to spark negative response from the human society, still, it is a response to many discrimination suffered by women and girls by reason of being females. Where Feminism is a set of ideologies, political and social movements sharing a common goal of defining, creating and achieving equality amongst different sexes, mostly on the side of the women; Gender equality is the goal of feminism, that

<sup>10</sup> **United Nation’s Sustainable Development Goal** “Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls”

**Retrieved 9/10/2021**

Found at: Gender equality and women’s empowerment – United Nations Sustainable Development



requires equal access to rights and opportunities by both men and women.<sup>11</sup>In summary, both seek no discrimination to women and girls, but equal opportunity and rights.

### **International Instruments on non-discrimination<sup>12</sup>**

International organizations and states have shown concern towards discrimination. These has led to series of instruments, to promote and protect discrimination of any form. Also the goal of International law is to continually maintain Social order, peace and stability in the society. Thus, there are international laws/instruments with regards to non-discrimination, which includes;

- Charter of the United Nations, 1945
- International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 1966
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, 1966
- International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, 1965
- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, 1979
- Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989
- Statute of the International Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, 1993
- Statute of the International Tribunal for Rwanda, 1994 Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, 1998
- The Four Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949
- The 1977 Protocols Additional to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949

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<sup>11</sup> Kathy Caprino “What is Feminism, and Why do so Many Women And Men Hate it?”(Forbes: March 8 2017).

Retrieved 10/10/2021.Found at:

<http://www.forbes.com/sites/kathycaprino/2017/03/08/what-is-feminism-and-why-do-so-many-women-and-men-hate-it/?sh=>

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

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- Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948
- Declaration on the Elimination of All Forms of Intolerance and of Discrimination based on Religion or Belief, 1981
- Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, 1992

#### **Regional Instruments<sup>15</sup>**

- African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, 1981
- African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, 1990
- American Convention on Human Rights, 1969
- Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment, and Eradication of Violence against Women, 1994
- Inter-American Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Persons with Disabilities, 1999
- European Convention on Human Rights, 1950
- European Social Charter, 1961, and European Social Charter (Revised), 1996
- Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, 1995 The Right to Equality and Non-Discrimination in the Administration of Justice

Hence, the second preambular paragraph to the charter of United Nations, the people reaffirms faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small"<sup>16</sup>

Thus we clearly see that despite the efforts of International States, Organizations and Persons in the protection and promotion of equality of rights, this area has achieved some level of success, although more improvement is needed.

Success Fact Includes<sup>13</sup>:

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

- While women have made important inroads into political office across the world, their representation in national parliaments at 23.7 per cent is still far from parity.
- In 46 countries, women now hold more than 30 per cent of seats in national parliament in at least one chamber.
- Only 52 per cent of women married or in a union freely make their own decisions about sexual relations, contraceptive use and health care.
- Globally, women are just 13 per cent of agricultural land holders.
- Women in Northern Africa hold less than one in five paid jobs in the non-agricultural sector. The proportion of women in paid employment outside the agriculture sector has increased from 35 per cent in 1990 to 41 per cent in 2015.
- More than 100 countries have taken action to track budget allocations for gender equality.
- In Southern Asia, a girl's risk of marrying in childhood has dropped by over 40 per cent since 2000.<sup>14</sup>

With considerable efforts from most countries, violation of women's rights and violence against women still remains a pandemic that threatens all countries and spheres of life. This is such that, the UN women, has made it an open advocacy, where Men are now involved (HeForShe gender equality, that advocates for positive masculinity). Also, in Akwa Ibom state and other states in Nigeria government, organizations and individuals have joined efforts to eradicate this cancerous lump from our society. We will not just try and stop half way; we will keep advocating and educating everyone to the need of a gender equal society, with priority on dignity of the Human person.

Hence, our **Call to Action** are:

- End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls in all spheres.

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<sup>14</sup> United Nation's Sustainable Development Goal "*Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls*" ( Retrieved 9/10/2021.Found at:  
Gender equality and women's empowerment – United Nations Sustainable Development.

- Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking, sexual and other types of exploitation;
- Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation;
- Recognize and value unpaid care and domestic work through the provision of public services, infrastructure and social protection policies and the promotion of shared responsibility within the household and the family as nationally appropriate;
- Ensure women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision making in political, economic and public life;
- Ensure universal access to sexual and reproductive health and reproductive rights as agreed in accordance with the Program of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development and the Beijing Platform for Action and the outcome documents of their review conferences;
- Undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources, as well as access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, financial services, inheritance and natural resources, in accordance with national laws;
- Enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology, to promote the empowerment of women;
- Adopt and strengthen sound policies and enforceable legislation for the promotion of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls at all levels.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Gender equality and women’s empowerment – United Nations Sustainable Development “Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and United Nation’s Sustainable Development Goal girls” Retrieved 9/10/2021.

## **Conclusion**

With the recorded gains, many challenges remain: discriminatory laws and social norms remain pervasive, women continue to be underrepresented at all levels of political leadership, and 1 in 5 women and girls between the ages of 15 and 49 report experiencing physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner within a 12-month period.<sup>16</sup>

Discrimination violates human right as human rights are indestructible and inalienable. Hence, gender equality is not only a fundamental human right, but a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world. There has been progress over the last decade. More girls are now going to school, fewer girls are forced into early marriage, more women are serving in parliament and positions of leadership and laws are being reformed to advance gender equality.

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<sup>16</sup> United Nation's Sustainable Development Goal "Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls" Retrieved 9/10/2021