



IRIAD COMMEMORATES THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF THE GIRL CHILD 2021

“DIGITAL GENERATION. OUR GENERATION”

The Initiative for Research, Innovation and Advocacy in Development (IRIAD) commemorates the International Day of the Girl Child 2021 by celebrating young girls around the world. Our efforts to advance the rights of the girl child include the following:

- Conducting research and advocacy to support the inclusion of women and girls in the political process.
- Organising free trainings for women and young girls.
- Conducting surveys to get the opinions of students, including young girls, on constitutional review.
- Organising sensitisation campaigns in rural and marginalised communities to educate them on the causes and consequences of gender-based violence (GBV).

The International Day of the Girl Child was established by the United Nations General Assembly on 19 December 2011 with the aim of recognising girls’ rights and the unique challenges facing girls around the world.¹ The Day is celebrated on October 11 every year. The theme for this year is “Digital Generation. Our Generation”.

Girls in the 21st century are open to various possibilities that come with being in a digitalised generation and have shown great promise in the lead for digital transformation. However, with this promise comes diverse digital realities facing the girl child which have to be understood if the girl child is to achieve maximum transformation.

There seems to exist a gorge in women and girls’ digital access and use in comparison to men and boys. According to a study conducted by Girl Effect and Vodafone Foundation, boys are 1.5 times more likely than girls to have a telephone and 1.8 times more likely to have a smartphone than girls.² Furthermore, roughly 46% of boys use the internet on their phones, compared to 27% of girls.³ This indicates a huge gap in digital access and literacy between boys and girls.

Something must be done if we are to achieve digital transformation for the girl child. The first step is to provide access to the internet and digital devices for young girls so that they can be on the same level as their male counterparts. The second step is to promote digital literacy among young girls. This is because even if young girls have

¹ United Nations (n.d.). *International Day of the Girl Child*. <https://www.un.org/en/observances/girl-child-day>

² Girl Effect and Vodafone Foundation (n.d.). *Real girls, real lives, connected: A global study of girls’ access to and usage of mobile, told through 3,000 voices*. https://www.girlsandmobile.org/s/GE_VO_Full_Report_Digital.pdf/

³ Ibid

digital access, without digital literacy they might participate poorly in digital life, lack critical and analytical skills, and even become vulnerable to online harassment.

The next step is online safety. The Web Foundation reports that 52% of young women globally have experienced some form of digital harm, and 87% of them believe the problem is getting worse.⁴ According to a report by PLAN International, more than half of girls surveyed, from around the world, have been harassed and abused online, with one in four girls abused online feeling physically unsafe as a result.⁵ These statistics show that as much as we call for the digital access and literacy, priority should also be placed on security and safety of the girl child as she uses these digital tools.

Therefore, the celebration of the International Day of the Girl Child this year is a call to promote safe and equal access to the internet and digital devices for girls, as well as generate increased opportunities for the girl child to access, use, lead, and design technology.⁶

As we commemorate the International Day of the Girl Child today, we urge stakeholders around the world to take meaningful steps to ensure that the girl child is empowered to partake in the digital transformation of our world.

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⁴ The Web Foundation. (2020, March 12). *The online crisis facing women and girls threatens global progress on gender equality*. <https://webfoundation.org/2020/03/the-onlinecrisis-facing-women-and-girlsthreatens-global-progress-ongender-equality/>

⁵ PLAN International. (2020). *State of the World's Girls: Free to be Online?* https://www.plan.de/fileadmin/website/05_Ueber_uns/Maedchenberichte/Maedchenbericht_2020/Free_to_be_online_report_englisch_FINAL.pdf

⁶ UN Women, *In Focus: International Day of the Girl 2021*. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/in-focus/girl-child>