



Press Statement on International Women's Day 8 March #IWD2022

#BreakTheBias by giving equal value and recognition to women's voice and spaces



The International Refugee Rights Initiative (IRRI) is committed to equality and treating people fairly. We believe in non-discrimination and to levelling the playing field. We at IRRI, are cognisant of our duty to respond to intersectionalities within the communities we serve, ensuring cultural, religious, gender, age, ability, language, literacy and other diversity inclusion, in programming, implementation and impact of our work, and among implementers, decision-makers and beneficiaries.

Whilst there are many instruments that provide for gender equality at national, regional and international levels, a lot of work needs to be done to change the structural, systemic and cultural barriers that prevent women and girls from enjoying rights. This necessitates that IRRI remains conscious to the gender inequalities and power imbalances that may define and impact our work, to ensure that we do not further entrench inequalities and exclusion.

In programming in refugee settlements in Northern Uganda we have often come across a prevailing narrative that too many initiatives are targeted at refugee women at the expense of men. This narrative may have the impact of reducing the availability of critical interventions for displaced women and make it harder to achieve gender equality in

displacement settings. We must #BreakTheBias and respond to the real needs of the communities we serve. Women and girls make up 52% (UNHCR) of the total refugee population in Uganda and face intersecting vulnerabilities, and related violence and harmful practices. Further, displacement exacerbates existing inequalities such as women's access to and ownership of factors of production. Statistics show that the COVID-19 pandemic and measures taken to curb it disproportionately affected women and girls with high levels of domestic violence and teenage pregnancies. Reports indicate that refugee women suffered a decimation of their small businesses, exposing them to food insecurity, evictions and arrest, and many were forced into risky behaviour for survival. Furthermore, there was a dearth of access to essential services including sexual and reproductive health services, as programmes of humanitarian agencies and implementing partners were interrupted by the lockdowns.

Determined not to leave anyone behind, IRRI advocates for the inclusion of marginalised people, enabling them to effectively participate and have a voice in community structures and decision-making spaces. Our interventions, research, data collation, community dialogues, and advocacy are deliberately designed to ensure gender and diversity inclusion. As said by Bridget Musungu an Associate with IRRI,

We must be intentional about listening to the different ways in which different women express themselves. An over focus on conventional modes of communication like written texts and meetings, marginalises the voices of women who may communicate in other ways e.g through art, storytelling and song.

Achieng Akena, Executive Director of IRRI, added that,

We must not be dismissive of the alternative ways in which women organise and of the socio-economic safe spaces that they create for themselves. Particularly because conventional spaces like meetings were not designed to accommodate women's needs e.g. childcare.

We must #BreakTheBias by being innovative and deliberate about our commitment to women's participation including giving equal value and recognition to every woman's voice.

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