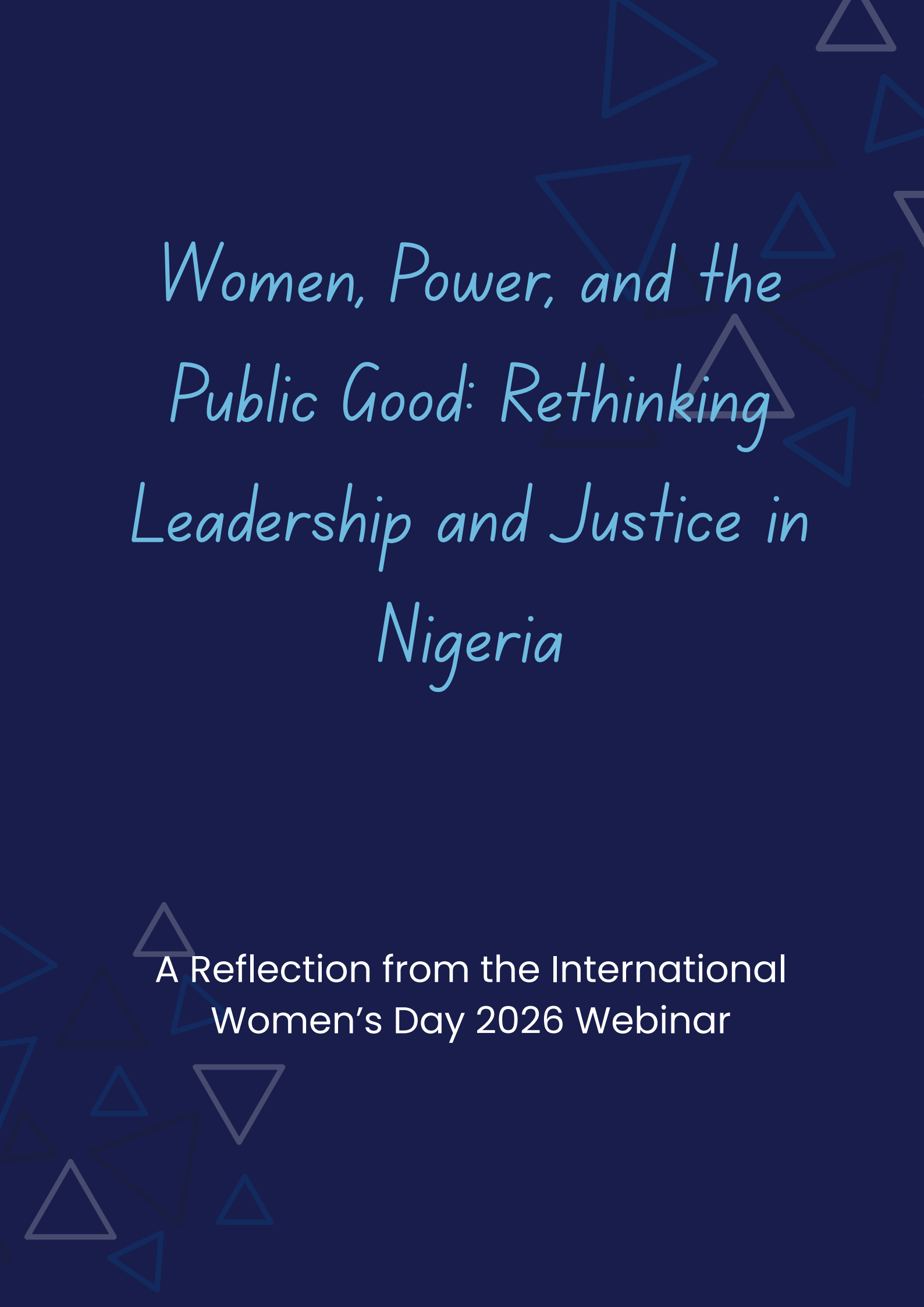


IWD'26 POLICY BRIEFF

Prepared by :
THE ABUJA
SCHOOL OF
SOCIAL AND
POLITICAL
THOUGHT





*Women, Power, and the
Public Good: Rethinking
Leadership and Justice in
Nigeria*

A Reflection from the International
Women's Day 2026 Webinar

Background

In commemoration of International Women's Day 2026, the Abuja School of Social and Political Thought convened a virtual policy dialogue to examine the intersection of women's leadership, justice, and the public good in Nigeria. The dialogue brought together leading voices in civil society and policy to interrogate structural barriers to gender equality and propose pathways for reform.

The conversation was anchored on the recognition that advancing women's rights is not only a moral imperative but also a governance necessity. A functional democratic system, particularly a credible electoral process, was identified as central to enabling women's participation and ensuring justice.

Key Issues Identified

a. Limited Political Representation

Women remain significantly underrepresented in Nigeria's political and decision-making spaces. Despite evidence that women's leadership contributes to improved governance outcomes, such as reduced corruption, enhanced transparency, and better social infrastructure, systemic barriers continue to limit their participation.

b. Structural and Cultural Barriers

Patriarchal norms, cultural expectations, and gender stereotypes were highlighted as major constraints. These factors not only restrict women's access to leadership but also shape public perceptions of women in power.

c. Gender-Based Violence and Social Inequality

High rates of gender-based violence and widespread social inequality continue to undermine women's agency and participation. These issues persist due to weak enforcement of laws, limited awareness, and inadequate institutional protection.

Weak Justice System

Challenges within Nigeria's justice system, including weak judicial independence, police misconduct, overcrowded correctional facilities, and insufficient protection for vulnerable groups, were identified as critical impediments to gender justice.

e. Tokenistic Inclusion in Leadership

Women's participation in formal leadership structures often remains symbolic rather than substantive. Inclusion is frequently treated as accommodation rather than a transformative process that redistributes power and influence.

3. Key Insights from the Dialogue

Women's leadership improves governance outcomes and strengthens the delivery of public goods. Informal leadership spaces often demonstrate more inclusive and responsive governance than formal political systems. True inclusion requires a redefinition of power—from domination to shared responsibility. Legal and institutional reforms are necessary but insufficient without corresponding cultural and societal change.

4. Policy Recommendations

a. Strengthen Legal and Institutional Frameworks

Accelerate the passage and implementation of gender-inclusive laws, including the proposed 35% affirmative action policy. Improve enforcement mechanisms for laws addressing gender-based violence.

b. Reform the Justice System

Enhance judicial independence and accountability. Address police misconduct and improve access to justice for women and marginalized groups. Decongest correctional facilities and ensure humane conditions.

c. Promote Women's Political Participation

Introduce targeted policies to support women's candidacy and leadership at all levels. Provide financial, institutional, and capacity-building support for women in politics.

d. Shift Social Norms and Public Perceptions

Invest in public education campaigns on gender equality. Engage traditional and community leaders in challenging harmful cultural practices.

e. Move from Tokenism to Transformational Inclusion

Ensure women in leadership roles have real decision-making power. Recognize and integrate lessons from women's informal leadership into formal governance systems.

f. Foster Intergenerational Support Systems

Encourage mentorship and solidarity among women leaders. Create platforms to support emerging young women leaders.

5. Conclusion

The dialogue underscored that achieving gender equality in Nigeria requires a comprehensive approach that combines legal reform, institutional strengthening, and cultural transformation. Women's leadership is not merely a question of representation but a critical component of building a just, inclusive, and effective democratic system.

Advancing women's rights, justice, and leadership is therefore essential to securing the broader public good.



THE ABUJA
SCHOOL

...beyond the orthodoxy

*"The difference between a
broken community and a
thriving one is the presence of
women who are valued"*

Uzodimma Lucy Ogo
(2025 TAS LPPG Fellow)

