

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

BY

**THE VICE CHANCELLOR,
PROFESSOR OTLOGETSWE TOTOLO**

ON THE

**OCCASION OF THE INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S
DAY- 2023**

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VENUE: ADANSONIA HOTEL, FRANCISTOWN

(SALUTATIONS)

A very good morning to all of us.

1. It is an honour for me to stand here and address you on the exciting occasion of International Women's Day 2023, a day that celebrates the social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women. The theme for the International Women's Day 2023 in Botswana is "**DigitALL: Innovation and technology for gender equality,**" and the campaign's message is of embracing equity, not just equality.
2. The theme aims to highlight the role of technology in promoting gender equality, closing the digital gender gap, and identifying the gaps that exist in terms of women's participation in the digital world. We cannot ignore the digital world's increasing importance. The COVID-19 pandemic has undoubtedly changed our way of life in more ways than one can imagine and has really pushed us all to leverage more on technology and push the country's drive to digital transformation
3. The underlying thrust of the theme is that gender equality is a human right and requires both women and men to have a comprehensive understanding in facilitating the development of relevant strategies for the elimination of gender stereotypes for the achievement of gender equality and inclusiveness.
4. That notwithstanding, this day provides women and girls with an opportunity to celebrate their achievements and success in a world where access to information, technology, and the internet has become a fundamental aspect of our daily lives. It is a day on which women must pause and reflect on their role in ensuring that gender bias, stereotyping and other gender disparities are addressed and eliminated.

5. The theme provides us with an opportunity to reflect on how we can harness technology's power to promote gender equality. Embracing equity means recognising that women and girls face different challenges, and that equality alone is not enough. We must strive to provide women and girls with the resources, skills, and opportunities they need to succeed in the digital world, which requires considering their unique needs and circumstances. It is, therefore, essential to ensure that women and girls have access to digital tools and skills, which can enable them to realize their full potential, participate fully in society and the economy, and help bridge the gender gap.
6. Today's theme is an important step in the right direction. It recognises the transformative potential of technology in promoting gender equality and calls for inclusive innovation, which considers women's perspectives and needs. Gender equality is not solely a women's issue; it is an economic issue. Research has shown that gender equality can boost economic growth and productivity. However, the gender gap in the digital world is still significant, with women and girls being less likely to have access to technology, the internet, and digital skills. In Africa, for instance, women are 26% less likely than men to use the internet, and the digital gender gap has widened during the COVID-19 pandemic.
7. To bridge this gap, we need to take a holistic approach that combines policy, education, and innovation. We need policies that promote equal access to technology and the internet, including affordable broadband services and digital literacy programs. We also need to promote education and training programs that provide women and girls with the skills they need to thrive in the digital world. Finally, we need to foster innovation that considers women's perspectives and needs, which can help create cohesive and meaningful opportunities for women.
8. Currently, Botswana is striving from being a resource-based economy to a knowledge-based economy which propels organizations to create new value proposals in endeavors to

design products to suit this movement. Vision 2036 envisages Botswana having transited from a resource-based economy to a knowledge economy. To achieve this transition, science, technology and innovation are key. The positive role of innovation and technology in the socio-economic development of a country is undeniable. Botswana's aspiration is espoused in her Vision 2036.

9. One area where technology plays a key role in promoting equity is in education. By leveraging digital tools and platforms, we can provide more accessible and inclusive learning opportunities for women and girls, especially in areas where traditional education may be limited or inaccessible. We can also use technology to promote digital literacy and skills development, which are increasingly essential in the modern workforce.
10. As a Science, Technology Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) institution, the Botswana International University of Science & Technology (BIUST), mandate is to produce world-class research innovation in science, engineering and technology with a view to contribute to our national industrial growth and provide a catalyst for the development of a diversified and knowledge-based economy, building innovation, entrepreneurship, education ecosystem equipped with functions such as education, service, practice and research in a bid to promote sharing of resources, build a well-functioning ecosystem and bolster economic growth.
11. In the context of gender equality, embracing equity means acknowledging the structural barriers that women face in many areas, including education, employment, and leadership. It means recognizing that women often face discrimination and bias, both conscious and unconscious, that can limit their opportunities and outcomes. It means taking active steps to address these barriers and promote more inclusive and equitable policies and practices.

12. It is therefore, befitting for (BIUST), to be part of this day's commemoration as the University plays a key role in the drive to transforming the Botswana's economy through producing competitive products, services and skills as well as promoting better quality of life through innovation and technology. The Sustainable Development Goals (SGDs) speak to a reduction in gender disparity in terms of education and empowerment of women.

13. One of BIUST initiative to recognise the need to offer special attention to girls if they are to find space in the male dominated STEM area is through "Girls Excelling in Mathematics and Science" (GEMS). GEMS aims to influence and encourage young women to be future leaders and subsequently increase their participation in private and public decision-making. It is a mentorship and motivational program meant for passionate, female form 4 students from around Botswana who have chosen to do pure (single sciences) and would like to have a career in STEM. Mentorship for young women who are interested in STEM-focused careers is important and it is one way in which women in STEM at BIUST and other STEM professionals have chosen to contribute to the attraction and retention of women in STEM careers. Innovation and Technology is therefore at the forefront in the Program.

14. Another area where technology can promote equity is in employment. By embracing more flexible and remote work arrangements, we can promote greater work-life balance and support for women, who often bear the brunt of caregiving responsibilities. We can also use technology to combat gender bias in hiring and promotion processes, by implementing more objective and data-driven evaluation criteria.

15. Finally, technology can also play a crucial role in promoting gender diversity and inclusion in leadership positions. By using digital tools and platforms to support more transparent and

merit-based selection processes, we can help ensure that more women can rise to leadership positions in both the public and private sectors.

16. In conclusion, Today, as we celebrate International Women's Day with the theme "**DigitALL: Innovation and technology for gender equality**", it is important to recognise the crucial role that technology can play in promoting gender equality. The digital world has the power to be a great equalizer, but it can also be a source of exclusion if we are not mindful of the biases and gaps that exist. We must concede that embracing equity is essential to achieving true gender equality. We must also acknowledge the structural barriers that women face and take active steps to address these barriers and promote more inclusive and equitable policies and practices. By leveraging the power of technology, we can help create a more gender-balanced world, where everyone can reach their full potential, regardless of gender.

17. Let us all "**Embrace Equity for IWD 2023**" and beyond.

18. Thank you.

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