



**Isa Wali  
Empowerment  
Initiative**

*...empowering women, developing children*



### Welcome to IWEI's Momentum!

Did it feel like 2025 came and went in a rush? It certainly felt that way for us, mostly because our hands were immersed in the work of bringing information, knowledge, and skills to young women and girls across northern Nigeria. We deepened our reach and strengthened our impact, yet the scale of work ahead remains vast.

Across the world, the rights of women and girls continue to face setbacks. In Nigeria, especially in northern states, communities contend with insecurity, poverty, and entrenched cultural norms. When basic rights such as girls' education are questioned, gaps widen and inequality deepens.

For almost two decades, our vision has been steady: to ensure young women and girls across Nigeria have voice, agency, and the chance to live fulfilled lives. We pursue this by expanding access to information and opportunity in the communities we serve, moving the needle one day, one girl, one community at a time.

In this final edition of *The Momentum* for 2025, we are setting aside numbers. Instead, we share four stories from the communities we worked with this year. In the stories of Aisha, Margaret, Zahra`u, and Ismail, we hope you find lessons, resolve, and renewed belief in a future free of poverty, inequality, and marginalisation. Read with us.

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### On the path to medicine with Aisha

We met Aisha in Wurno, a community in Jigawa State where many girls remain out of school. She was eighteen when we met her, but her story began at fourteen, when she was married. As is common in many communities, marriage marked the end of her schooling. Although no law requires married or pregnant girls to leave school, community norms often do, and Aisha quietly settled into family life.

In early 2025, IWEI, began implementing the Building Community Power to End Harmful Practices (Child Marriage) Project, with funding from UNICEF and support from the Jigawa and Katsina State Governments. The project reached sixteen communities across eight local government areas, including Aisha's.

Like most new initiatives, acceptance took time. In Wurno, families were initially hesitant about encouraging girls, married or not, to return to learning spaces. Through sustained engagement with community leaders and parents, attitudes slowly shifted, and girls were allowed to enroll.



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When Aisha heard about the project, something stirred in her. She later told us she had always dreamed of becoming a doctor. Learning about the project spaces reignited that dream. With hope and a bit of fear, she asked her husband for permission to join. After consulting community leaders who had earlier been engaged by IWEI, he agreed to let Aisha join the safe spaces we created under the project.

Aisha became one of 1,500 girls and adolescents enrolled in the project. Three to four times a week, she joined safe spaces led by trained mentors, learning basic literacy, menstrual hygiene, and positive interpersonal skills. The mentors also encouraged the girls to imagine returning to school.



We also recognised the importance of economic independence. One thousand adolescent girls, organised into forty Saving and Internal Lending Communities (SILC)s and aged fifteen to nineteen, received vocational training and start-up materials in cap making, groundnut oil production, and milk candy processing. Aisha was among them.

With support from mentors and peers, Aisha rebuilt her confidence and sense of purpose. Her desire to return to school grew stronger. She shared this desire with her mentor and, supported by a community-based paralegal, raised the conversation again with her husband. After continued dialogue with the mentors, paralegals and community members, he agreed.

Today, with support from the Jigawa State Government, Aisha is back in school. She is doing well and working steadily toward her goal of becoming a medical doctor.

We closed the project with close-out sessions in Katsina and Jigawa States on November 19 and 25, 2025 respectively. One of our concerns was whether the impact would last beyond the project. Seeing Aisha at the ceremony and hearing her share about her progress answered that question.

Aisha's growth has extended into leadership. She now hosts a safe space in her home, mentoring younger girls on menstrual hygiene, confidence, goal setting, and the value of education. Her vision reaches beyond herself. She is determined to challenge harmful norms and advocate for girls' education in her community. Her story reflects what community support, empowerment, and access to information can achieve, and what IWEI strives for every day.



### **A Story That Reminded Us Why Justice Matters**

In November, during a legal sensitisation and outreach visit to Kurmawa and Goron Dutse Correctional Facilities in Kano State, IWEI's programmes team met a woman whose story left a lasting impression on us.

With the approval of the Nigerian Correctional Service and in collaboration with Prisoners Rehabilitation and Welfare Action (PRAWA) and the Legal Aid Council of Nigeria (LACON), the visit aimed to inform inmates of their rights under the Kano State Administration of Criminal Justice Law (ACJL, 2019), screen our short film *Abokin Kowa*, and provide on-the-spot legal support.

Seventy-two inmates participated in the session. As the film was screened, emotions in the room began to shift. One woman, seated quietly with her young child in her arms, struggled to hold back tears.

Her name is Margaret.

Margaret later shared that she had been arrested in place of another person while one month pregnant. She gave birth in custody, and her son—now two years old—has known no life outside the correctional facility. Her case reflects the continued practice of *arrest in lieu*, a violation explicitly prohibited under the Kano State ACJL.



During the legal clinic, Margaret’s case was among 17 documented and immediately referred to the Legal Aid Council of Nigeria for action. For the first time, she learned that her detention was unlawful and that she had a formal pathway to seek justice for herself and her child. LACON is currently pursuing her case.

Stories like Margaret’s are the reason IWEI continues to invest in legal empowerment, community sensitisation, and partnerships that challenge injustice. Through our Protection and Justice work, we remain committed to a simple but powerful goal: that no woman, no child, and no individual should suffer rights violations in silence.



### When Parents Become Partners in Girls’ Education.

We’ve known Zahra’u for a while and on some level, we understood the impact of our work in her life. But this quarter, hearing her speak for herself, in a setting we least expected, truly stood out.

For five years, and with friends from the Jean Herskovits Foundation, we've supported girls' access to school. On December 2, 2025, we had a routine meeting with the State Universal Basic Education Board (SUBEB) to inform them that we were enrolling 186 girls into primary schools. This time, we invited community members to speak on the importance of the support we provide.

We expected her to talk about her daughter, who benefited from last year's scholarship. Instead, Zahra'u spoke for herself.

She said, "This project is close to our hearts. It has impacted not just our children, but us as mothers. Before, we simply lived day to day, not realizing there were ways we could improve ourselves. Since the project began, it has been one activity after another, helping us understand our roles in supporting our children's education, regardless of our own schooling. We have been trained in economic activities, saving, and financial management. Today, our group is registered as a cooperative, enabling us to conduct business together and continue even after the project ends."



Her words reminded us why holistic interventions matter. While girls remain the priority, equipping parents strengthens the entire system around a child's education. Hearing Zahra'u speak, laugh, and acknowledge our efforts was refreshing. It confirmed that we had indeed moved the needle, one step closer to sustaining livelihoods for women and girls.



### **Building community power: Ismail's story.**

Meet Ismail, one of IWEI's community-based paralegals from Ungogo Local Government Area in Kano State.

Trained by IWEI over six years ago, Ismail has consistently supported survivors by documenting cases, providing first-line legal guidance, and referring matters to IWEI's Protection and Justice Department or appropriate institutions.

This quarter, Ismail demonstrated what community-powered justice looks like in practice.

During an evening walk, he encountered a group of children living on the streets without parents or guardians.

Recognising the immediate risk to their safety, Ismail reported the case to IWEI's Protection and Justice Department, which promptly escalated the matter to the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP).

When it became clear that the children remained on the streets, Ismail mobilised community members and took the issue directly to the Ministry of Women's Affairs. Together, they insisted on staying until action was taken. As a result, the children were removed from the streets and their safety secured.

This was not an isolated act. On a separate occasion, Ismail mobilised community members to attend a court sitting in a sensitive rape case, providing visible support to the survivor and reinforcing the message that communities can stand against violence and impunity. Such collective presence strengthens survivors' resolve and places pressure on justice institutions to act responsibly.

Ismail's actions reflect a core lesson from IWEI's work: training paralegals is not enough. The goal is to equip them with the confidence, skills, and community trust to translate legal knowledge into collective action—building the power of communities to demand protection, accountability, and justice.



Stories like Ismail's, alongside those of Aisha, Margaret, and Zahra`u, remind us that lasting change is built through people. They affirm IWEI's belief that when communities are informed and organised, justice becomes possible.

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#### **In other news;**

- We are pleased to share that IWEI has received funding from Malala Fund to expand our work supporting girls to stay in school, regardless of their circumstances. This partnership will strengthen our efforts to address barriers to girls' education and advance re-entry and retention initiatives. We look forward to sharing more details about this project in 2026.
- We will be closing our doors from Friday, the 19th of December to Monday, the 5th of January so we can rest and refresh our minds for the beautiful work we hope to do in 2026.



## Isa Wali Empowerment Initiative

**Finally**, we want to thank you, for supporting us, for reading our posts, our newsletters, donating and everything in between. Together, we will keep advocating this world we dream of; one where young women and girls lead dignified and full lives. Thank you.

From all of us at IWEI, we wish you a fantastic new year ahead!



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