

CHARTER OF DEMANDS

VOICES OF MARKET

WOMEN IN OYO STATE



Preamble

We, the market women of Oyo State—mothers, breadwinners, entrepreneurs, and custodians of the local economy—rise in unity to demand recognition, rights, and resources commensurate with our contributions. Despite our central role in food security, local commerce, and community wellbeing, we continue to face systemic exclusion, abandonment and hardship.

For centuries, we have served as the economic lifeblood of Yoruba Kingdoms, societies and Nigeria at large—building communities, financing families, and influencing governance. From the legendary Iyalojas (women market leaders) who wielded political influence, to the everyday women sustaining households, we have played an integral role in shaping the economy, politics, history, and the future.

Market women in Nigeria, while often overlooked, play a significant role in local and national politics. We are actively involved in sensitizing, educating and mobilising voters, providing logistical support during election campaigns, voting, and advising governments on local policies. Politicians frequently rely on us to reach and mobilise voters, especially at the grassroots level and other hard-to-reach communities, including accessing women in purdah.

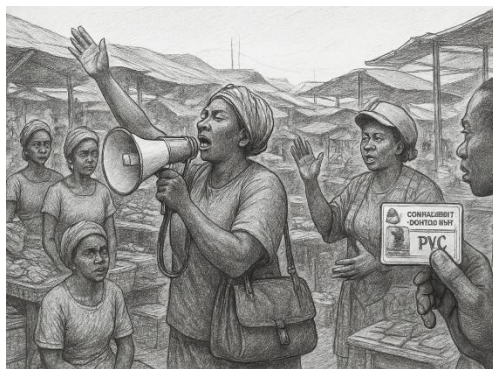
We play a vital role in advancing local governance for rural development. Today, we are not only being erased from our historical position of power and relevance, but we are also being denied our rightful place in the state's democratic processes, economic, and social structural development—for too long we have remained unheard and uncared for.

This Charter of Demands is a call to action to restore dignity, inclusion, and support for the market women of Oyo state, whose voices and lives matter.

We present this Charter of Demands as a call for justice, equity, inclusion, and sustainable support from government authorities, private sector stakeholders, traditional institutions, and the whole of the society.



File Source: Akintunde Akinleye/Reuters.



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I. Historical Significance of Market Women

1. In Yoruba-land, market women, especially in cities like Ibadan, Lagos, Abeokuta, and Oyo, were at the forefront of resistance against colonial injustice and domestic policies that harmed the people. From the precolonial Yoruba cities/states to Nigeria's independence struggle—post-colonial development, and the era of military rule, market women have played a defining role in shaping the political, economic, and social landscape of our land.
2. In places like Ibadan, market women were once pillars of power and decision-making, from the legendary Efunsetan Aniwura to the Iyaloja councils that influenced traditional and modern governance.
3. Market women have historically provided the financial backbone of families and political movements, raising funds for elections, sponsoring community projects, and mediating social conflicts.
4. The Iyalojas were once powerful voices in decision-making—their consent often influenced who got elected at the local level.

Today, even as we stand on the shoulders of our forbearers, we are increasingly marginalised, excluded from representation, and deprived of the resources and respect our work deserves. ***Our historical contributions are being forgotten.***

The markets we built are crumbling. Our needs are ignored.

II. Our Realities: The Challenge of Marginalisation and Deprivation

A. Leadership Crisis in Iyaloja's Role

1. The **Iyaloja's** role, though culturally and economically significant, is currently weakened by internal disputes and leadership crises that undermine its ability to represent and protect market women's interests.
2. Leadership fragmentation has led to missed opportunities for political engagement, reduced access to financial resources, and poor recognition of market women's socio-economic realities.



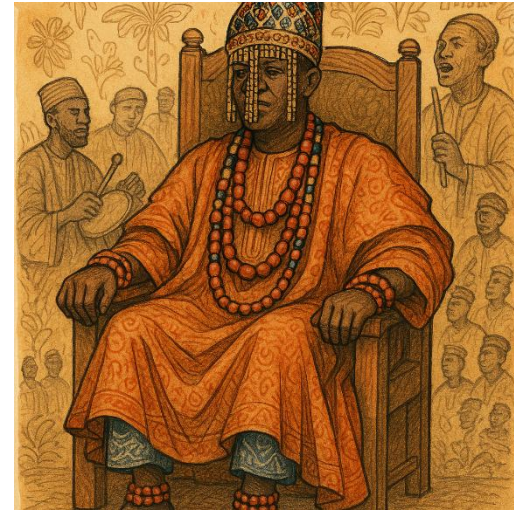
Source: Yorubaness.com {image extract from article written by Akinlolu Da Vinci}



Source: Jonathanmafidor, Ibadan Oyo state 2024

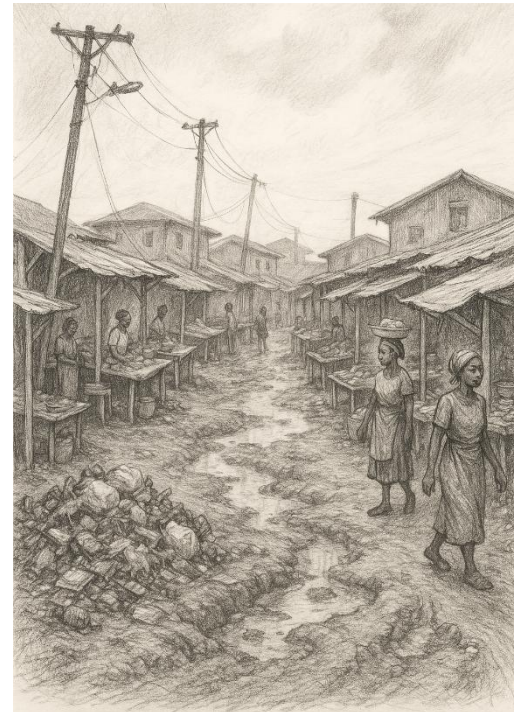
B. Political and Social Exclusion

1. Market women are now largely excluded from political representation at all levels — from market leadership selection to ward, local government, state representation, and even at the national level.
2. Local councils and planning boards often make decisions with little or no inputs from market women, despite our central role in the economy.



C. Economic Insecurity

1. Many market women lack access to affordable and secure spaces in the market.
2. More than others, we the small-scale traders are face rising costs of commodities, harassment, multiple taxation, and exploitative levies.



D. Infrastructural Deficit

1. We lack social amenities in our markets: no clean water, little or no electricity supply, no toilets, no effective waste management systems, no firefighting stations, no health centres, no childcare centres or crèches, no shelters from the rains or the tropical sun, non-motorable road, poor drainage systems, no security lights; the list is so long.
2. Many of us are breadwinners of our families, but our roles are unrecognised in public policies, plans and programs.
3. We face frequent evictions, demolitions, and displacements without compensation or alternative spaces.



III. Our Key Demands:

A. Recommendations to the Iyaloja: Reclaiming Power with Purpose

1. We support one another, not work against each other. The success of one Iyaloja should be the pride of all. There is enough honour, enough light, for every leader who serves her people.
2. Settle disputes with dignity and wisdom. Resolve matters as sisters—behind closed doors, with open hearts.

Because when Iyalojas stand together, no woman is left behind. When you rise together, no market is ignored. When you speak with one voice, the world must listen. Let your unity be your legacy. Let your sisterhood be your strength.

3. Be the voice of women, not the echoes of some self-serving politicians: reject being used as a tool to mobilise votes, while your people's true needs are ignored. Lead from the grassroots, not from behind party curtains.
4. Centre your authority in service, not ceremony. Your power comes from the communities, market women, and traders who see you as their champion. Honour us through advocacy, not just rituals.
5. Insist that political leaders — irrespective of political party, deliver on promises made to women and traders. Engage them not with flattery, but with clear, people-driven demands.
6. Champion economic justice for market women. Advocate for efficient and affordable infrastructure for all women, fair taxation, access to credit, and training for women entrepreneurs. Turn your title as a leader into a tool for transformation.
7. Build alliances with other Iyalojas and women leaders. Across markets, towns, and states—stand in unity. Collective strength breaks systemic silence that women all over the world face, and especially here in Oyo State.



Ode to Iyaloja

She walks where thunder kneels,
Crowned not by gold, but by the will of
women—
A million voices rising,
One name: *Iyaloja*.

Not a whisper in chambers of men,
But the drumbeat in markets,
The fire beneath pots,
The roar behind quiet strength.

She does not bend to crowns unearned,
Nor carry scrolls from hollow thrones.
She is power—rooted in soil,
Watered by sweat,
Raised by the hands of mothers and traders
alike.

She bows to kings with honour,
But dethrones tyrants with truth.
Grace flows in her stride,
Justice rests in her gaze.

She is not messenger—
She is the message.
She is not servant—
She is a source.

O Iyaloja,
Goddess in wrapper and wisdom,
Mother of the streets,
Torch of the voiceless,
Stand tall—
For in you, a nation breathes.
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8. Always remember: you are not a maid to power—you are a maker of history. Your crown is forged by the women who walk behind you, beside you, and after you.

B. Demands in the Light of the Oyo State Iyaloja-General Crisis

1. Immediate Resolution and Legal Finalisation of Iyaloja-General Leadership

- a. We demand that the government lead stakeholders to expedite the resolution of the Iyaloja-General leadership dispute through transparent, inclusive, and legally binding processes.
- b. We call the Governor, the Traditional Council, and market leaders to come together with market women, to select a final and binding recognition of a single, legitimate Iyaloja-General to restore unity and effective representation of market women state-wide, ending the current fragmentation that weakens collective bargaining power.

2. Strengthen the Role of Lower Market Associations and Iyalojas

- a. We demand formal recognition and empowerment of local Iyalojas and market associations as the grassroots representatives of market women, ensuring they have a voice in the Market Leaders' Council and in state governance structures.
- b. Call for decentralisation of power so that local Iyalojas are not sidelined by state-level disputes and can directly access government support and resources for their markets.

3. Institutionalise Conflict Resolution Mechanisms

- a. We demand for the establishment of a permanent, independent conflict resolution committee within the Market Leaders' Council, supported by the state government, to mediate disputes promptly and prevent prolonged crises.

C. Representation and Participation

1. We demand for the appointment of market women representatives in state and local government advisory councils.



The Iyaloja — 'She Who Must Not Serve Masters'

Not a maid for kings in crumbling courts,
Nor a gatherer of women's hopes
To be spent like coins in ballots' game.
You are not a handmaid to power —
You are the power.

Let them not seat you at their tables
Only to feed on your gathered grace,
Only to vanish once the votes are cast,
Leaving your daughters unheard, unseen.
You are not their bridge to the market—
You are the market's thunder.

Rise Iyaloja,
More than a name in campaign songs,
More than a host for empty promises.
The justice in the price of yam,
The voice of widows, traders, fighters—
The backbone of cities.

Honour your crown,
But do not kneel to rulers
Who do not rise for your people.
Speak not only for women—
Speak with them, stand as them.

You are not a messenger for men with no
message. You are mother, lioness, oracle—
Not a maid, but a cradle of destinies.

Let no politician summon your name,
and silence your truth.
Your loyalty is to the people,
To the pulse of the market,
To the cry of the unheard.

Iyaloja, remember who you are.
You were never meant to serve
You were born to lead.

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2. We demand for the recognition and support for women-led market or commodity associations and their leaders in decision-making processes.
3. We demand for the institutionalisation of market women's voices in policies affecting commerce, urban planning, infrastructural development, healthcare, gender matters, and economic development.

D. Infrastructure Development

1. We demand for the provision and maintenance of clean water, functional sanitation, drainage, and waste management (recycling) systems in all markets.
2. We demand for the construction of affordable and secure stalls, shops, storage units, accessible roads, and lighting for safer and more efficient market operations.
3. We demand for the installation of adequate security and surveillance systems to curb theft, harassment and violence.
4. We demand for the installation of firefighting stations to prevent fire and respond timely to outbreaks.

E. Fair Taxation and Regulatory Practices

1. We demand for the elimination of multiple and arbitrary taxation.
2. We demand for transparent revenue collection mechanisms with printed receipts and accessible complaint systems.
3. We demand for the regulation of toutting and unlawful levies in markets.

F. Access to Finance and Business Education

1. Tailored microcredit and low-interest loan schemes for women traders.
2. Strengthening of cooperative societies and support for their registration and sustainability.



3. Financial literacy and business development training programmes for market women.

G. Protection and Justice

1. We demand for an end to the harassment of market women by security agencies, local task forces, and revenue agents.
2. Establishment of market grievance redress mechanisms in collaboration with legal support organisations.
3. Implementation of gender-sensitive laws to protect women from abuse in the marketplace, including women with disabilities.



H. Health and Social Protection

1. Inclusion of market women in health insurance schemes and social welfare programmes.
2. Mobile clinics, crèche/day care and health outreach in markets, focusing on maternal and occupational health.
3. Support for aging traders through contributory pension schemes and community care initiatives.



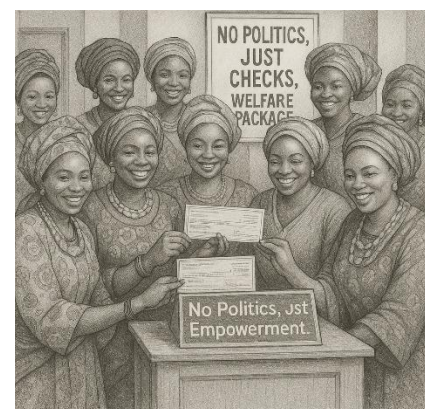
I. Education and Capacity Building

1. Regular training of market women on legal rights, agro-processing, taxation, digital trade, leadership, conflict mediation, hygiene, self-care, life-skills, and climate-resilient practices.
2. Investment in women and youth mentorship initiatives within the markets.
3. Inclusion of market women in policy dialogues, consultations, and civic engagement platforms and programmes.



J. Recognition and Respect

1. Recognition of the Iyaloja system and other traditional leadership structures within the markets as partners in governance and community mobilisation.
2. Celebration of Market Women's Day across Oyo State to honour our contributions.



3. Recognition of market women associations as official stakeholders in economic and infrastructure planning.
4. Acknowledge that most market women are not merely supplementary earners, but primary breadwinners and community caretakers.
5. Remove barriers and norms that limit women's participation in politics and leadership within trade and market associations.



IV. Our Commitment

We commit to:

1. Unity and solidarity among market women regardless of ethnic, religious, or political differences.
2. Peaceful and constructive engagement with all stakeholders.
3. Accountability, transparency, and mutual support in our associations and dealings.

V. Conclusion

This Charter of Demands is not just a list of requests — it is a **moral and constitutional obligation** for all levels of government to respond to the needs of market women who have sustained the economy, held families together, and shaped the soul of the Yoruba society. We are not asking for handouts. We are asking for fairness, dignity, and opportunity.

We, the market women of Oyo State, are ready to reclaim our place in history and build a future where our labour, voices, and rights are valued. Let our leaders listen. Let action follow.

We call on the Governor of Oyo State, State Legislators, LGA Chairpersons, Commissioners, the Office of the First Lady, Traditional Rulers, Civil Society Actors, and all relevant authorities to engage with this Charter of Demands and take immediate steps to address them. Our collective progress and the prosperity of Oyo State depend on the empowerment of its market women.

Endorsements:

This charter is endorsed by market women of Oyo State.

**"WE DO NOT ONLY TRADE. WE BUILD ECONOMIES, WE RAISE FAMILIES.
WE DEMAND DIGNITY, INCLUSION, REPRESENTATION AND JUSTICE."**



With support from:

 **HEINRICH BÖLL STIFTUNG**

ABUJA