

UN Women's deputy chief urges action to invest in women for societal progress

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Online Desk: The deputy chief of United Nations (UN) Women on Friday called for investing in women and girls to drive societal advancement while reiterating the agency's dedication to fostering gender equality and enhancing women's participation in decision-making roles.

"Our first message is: Let's invest in women and girls, let's create opportunities for them to be socially empowered, to be economically empowered, to be in positions of decision-making," Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda, deputy executive director of UN Women, the world body's entity dedicated to promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women globally, told Xinhua in an exclusive interview in the UN Women's office in New York.

"The importance of investing in women is that when women at the household level are educated and have income, they are able to also send their children to school," Gumbonzvanda said.

Without investment in women, the world is short-changing itself in economic terms, she added.

"By investing in little girls to elderly women, we witness dividends across families, societies, and nations," Gumbonzvanda said, underscoring the broad spectrum of benefits stemming from supporting women and girls.

"On International Women's Day and beyond, we implore our member states to intensify their efforts" in "creating economic opportunities for women and fostering violence-free environments in our families and communities," she said.

Meanwhile, investing in women encompasses not just economic aspects but also "empowering their voice and perspective to shape policies," Gumbonzvanda said, as "having women at the decision-making table enables them to address societal inequalities and elevate issues that are often overlooked."

"Political participation and women in decision-making have been priorities since the 1995 Beijing conference," she said.

Gumbonzvanda, from Zimbabwe, assumed her duties as UN Assistant Secretary-General and UN Women Deputy Executive Director for Normative Support, UN System Coordination, and Programme Results on Feb. 6.

Noting that currently elections are taking place in over 60 countries, Gumbonzvanda said: "With 1.3 billion women voting, this becomes a critical moment for them to influence governments to prioritize gender equality."

She urged both men and women in these countries to "support female candidates to achieve the 50-50 parity agreed upon by member states."

Gumbonzvanda also emphasized the critical contributions of women and girls to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by saying, "We cannot fulfill the SDGs without addressing the challenges faced by women and girls, including exclusion and violence, and without expanding their opportunities in society."

She also highlighted the need for "broader fiscal space and the implementation of gender-responsive budgeting" as critical elements in this effort.

Talking about the upcoming 68th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW68), she noted, “The meeting is timely in its focus on poverty, institutional strengthening, and financing for gender equality, alongside social protection concerns, given the current global context.”

Addressing the alarming prediction that over 300 million people could still be living in poverty by 2030, she stressed the need for governmental commitment to prioritize resources for poverty alleviation programs and called for “reform of the global financial architecture to address inequalities and enhance support for gender equality programs, including education and healthcare for women.”

Gumbonzvanda expressed pride in UN Women’s current initiatives with China, particularly the projects in Wuhan, which focus on “bringing our technical expertise to support efforts in the country” and “creating policies and employment capacities” targeting women.

She also revisited the pivotal moment of the 1995 Beijing conference, highlighting its significance in setting the agenda for women’s political participation and decision-making globally.