Global priority and national responsibility on gender equality and women empowerment

The notion of gender equality is not merely an idealistic pursuit; it is a fundamental human right, a driver of sustainable development, and a catalyst for societal progress.

As we stand at the intersection of global challenges and opportunities, the empowerment of women remains both a moral and strategic imperative. Yet, despite undeniable strides in many parts of the world, gender inequality continues to persist, with harmful repercussions for individuals, families, and nations.

Around the globe, Gender-Based Violence (GBV) remains one of the most pervasive forms of inequality, with intimate partner violence being particularly widespread. In many communities, women and girls face violence in their homes, on the streets, and even in institutions meant to protect them. The statistics are both shocking and heart-breaking.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), one in three women will experience physical or sexual violence in their lifetime. This grim reality underscores a stark and inconvenient truth.

Society must bear in mind that gender equality is not solely a women's issue or just a health issue but has economic implications. Women's contribution to economic growth is impacted, and scarce resources that could have been allocated to other development priorities are diverted to healthcare, treatment, or security.

It is a battle that requires both relentless advocacy and sustained action.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has long championed the idea that gender equality is not only a matter of social justice but also one of economic growth and sustainable development. Women's empowerment directly contributes to

poverty reduction, improved health outcomes, and better education for future generations.

Simply put, when women thrive, societies thrive. This vision must transcend borders and cultural contexts, yet it must also acknowledge the unique challenges faced by each nation.

In Lesotho, gender inequality and GBV are pressing concerns that need urgent attention. Despite legal frameworks that protect women's rights, the reality on the ground often reflects a significant disconnect between policy and practice.

Women, girls, and women with disabilities in Lesotho continue to bear the brunt of discrimination, not just through economic inequality and limited political representation but also through widespread violence. As highlighted in Section 4.7 of the Gender and Development Policy of 2018 to 2030, climate change has also been seen to exacerbate GBV.

Additionally, the El Niño drought-induced GBV is a common occurrence in all 10 districts of Lesotho, with physical violence standing at 27.5 percent, sexual violence at 22.8 percent, emotional violence at 20.6 percent, socio-economic violence at 22.9 percent, and harmful traditional practices at 7 percent. The impact of GBV is far-reaching, affecting women's health, their ability to participate in the workforce, and ultimately, their contribution to the national development agenda.

Furthermore, the policy cited that around 31 percent of reported rape cases in urban areas of Lesotho involved females aged between 10 and 19 years. Using abusive language is the most common form of abuse inflicted on family members, followed by GBV and unplanned pregnancies.

Lesotho's commitment to gender equality is enshrined in the Constitution, which guarantees women's rights to equal treatment. The country has also ratified various international agreements, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Gender Protocol. However, much more needs to be done to bridge the gap between law and reality.

Meaningful strides toward gender equality and women's empowerment in Lesotho should be made through a concerted effort to address both the systemic and cultural factors that perpetuate discrimination and violence. This requires an investment in changing the social norms and attitudes that define gender roles in society.

Education, in its most transformative form, is key to challenging these harmful stereotypes and enabling individuals to realize their full potential.

In countries with greater gender equality, GDP growth is higher, poverty rates are lower, and overall well-being improves for everyone. According to the Global Gender Gap Report 2024 key findings, for all 146 countries, the global gender gap in 2024 was

68.5 percent, which increased further by +0.1 percentage points, from 68.5 percent to 68.6 percent.

When considering the 101 countries covered continuously from 2006 to 2024, the gap also improved by +0.1 points, reaching 68.6 percent. The lack of meaningful, widespread change slows down the rate of progress toward achieving parity. Based on current data, it will take 134 years to reach full parity.

Therefore, empowering women economically is central to addressing gender inequality.

By ensuring that women have access to equal opportunities in education, employment, and entrepreneurship, we can lift entire communities out of poverty and set the stage for more robust economies. Historically, women make up the backbone of the agricultural sector, yet they remain disproportionately excluded from the benefits of land ownership and financial resources.

There is a need to address these barriers to unleash their full potential and foster a more inclusive economy.

Investing in women and girls can transform entire societies. The evidence is clear - when women are empowered, economies grow, communities thrive, and future generations benefit. The case for gender equality is not just a moral argument; it is an economic and social imperative.

However, there are still substantial barriers holding women back, from harmful gender norms and violence to limited access to education and economic opportunities. These barriers are compounded by intersecting

inequalities such as race, disability, and economic status, which disproportionately affect marginalized women and girls.

The time to act is now. Governments, businesses, and civil society must come together to build stronger, more inclusive systems. From improving access to quality education and healthcare to ensuring women's equal participation in leadership and decision-

making roles, we must take bold steps to accelerate progress.

Gender equality is not a distant dream; it is a global priority that demands our collective action. The UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a roadmap, but we need sustained investment, policies, and commitment to ensure that no woman or girl is left behind.

Every day, we see how small steps can lead to monumental change. Let's continue to push forward, empowering women to build a brighter, more equal future for all. The future is female let's make it happen.

Ending GBV requires more than just legal frameworks; it demands the active involvement of communities, civil society, and governments. Initiatives like the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence serve as crucial reminders that the fight

against violence must be continuous and must engage all sectors of society.

Men and boys must be brought into the conversation as allies, advocates, and active participants in dismantling patriarchal systems of power.

At both the global and national levels in Lesotho, UNDP continues to integrate gender equality into development projects, ensuring that women's voices are heard and valued in decision-making processes. However, much more can be done. Governments must strengthen policies to support women who have experienced violence, enhance access to justice, and provide critical services like healthcare and counselling.

The government, together with development partners, must prioritize creating safe spaces and resources for survivors of GBV while also investing in prevention through education and awareness campaigns. The path to gender equality and women's empowerment is not an easy one, but it is an achievable goal. In Lesotho, as in other parts of the world, the challenge lies in dismantling the deeply ingrained societal structures that perpetuate gender inequality. This requires collective effort, from local communities to global institutions.

As we work toward ending GBV and empowering women, we must ensure that policies are not only well-crafted but well-implemented, that women's voices are heard at every level of decision-making, and that no woman is left behind.

The question is not whether we can afford to prioritize gender equality but rather that women's empowerment is not just a moral imperative it is a developmental necessity. For Lesotho, for Africa, and for the world, the time to act is now. Together, we can build a future where every woman can thrive, free from violence and discrimination. Let's not just talk about change let's make it happen.

UNDP

Suspected fraudsters - Right of reply

Dear Editor of the Public Eye Newspaper,

The article titled 'Suspected CGM fraudsters off the hook' penned by your reporter by the name of 'Mathato Seboka bears reference, and I wish to make the following reactions to some of the issues which are raised in that article and which are considered either distasteful or inaccurate:

a) Reference and characterization of the individuals named in the article, viz Mrs 'Mathabo Klass and Mr Tseko Bohloa, as fraudsters is both inaccurate and distasteful for the simple reason that none of the mentioned individuals has ever been declared as a fraudster through a legal, regulatory or administrative process in their previous institutions of professional association or employment.

The reason for the withdrawal of charges was that no evidence was provided by the accusing body, CEO, in spite of numerous directives by the courts to substantiate their allegations.

In the circumstances the accusations are regarded as malicious and unwarranted.

The readiness for your publication to serve as carrier of news peppered with value judgements and inaccuracies would therefore, appear to link your paper to the campaign to further cast aspersions on the affected individuals.

b) The paper cannot, and should not permit publication of news which have not been verified, as it is the case in the reference to Mr Bohloa as the Auditor of CGM. Nothing could be farther from the truth.

The accurate position is that the Auditor on record of CGM is Mr Letuka Sephelane, through his audit firm of LETACC Chartered Accountants. To me reporting such a twisted state of affairs can only suggest that this an attempt to mislead the readership by creating a distorted picture about the individuals under reference.

Please be aware that we reserve the right to pursue appropriate steps to reclaim our reputation which the author of the article, supported by your publication, is so determined to tarnish.

In this context, I am copying this communication to my Attorney to act, particularly in the event of your failure to either retract the story or issue a public apology for this intentional assault on my image.

Regards
Tseko A Bohloa