



ICW-CIF

INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL OF WOMEN

CONSEIL INTERNATIONAL DES FEMMES

Founded 1888

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ICW-CIF Statement to Mark International Women’s Day 2024 March 8, 2024

The International Council of Women (ICW-CIF), an NGO in consultative status with United Nations Economic and Social Council, has actively committed to the advancement of women’s equal rights and empowerment since its inception in 1888. ICW-CIF firmly believes that the attainment of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls are indispensable keys to facilitating global progress and development.

ICW-CIF wholeheartedly endorses the theme set by UN Women for 2024 International Women’s Day, “Invest in Women: Accelerate Progress,” as necessary measures to attain gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, which are indispensable to the eradication of poverty and lead to the achievement of sustainable development of the world.

Despite substantial progress in achieving gender equality in education over the past decades, recent events, such as military conflicts, political developments and the COVID-19 pandemic, have resulted in girls being denied their right to education once again. This will most certainly hinder progress in economic growth, in the eradication of poverty, the development of inclusive societies and other factors necessary for sustainable development.

The 2017 Policy Paper published by UNESCO, *Reducing Global Poverty Through Universal Primary and Secondary Education*, concludes that providing universal access to primary and secondary education would lift 420 million people out of poverty, reducing global poverty by more than half. The study also found that in low-income countries girls face steeper barriers to education with more than 34.4 million girls of primary to secondary school age out of school compared to 29.5 million boys. According to *The Gender Snapshot 2023*, published by the United Nations: 340 million women and girls will live in extreme poverty by 2030; 54% of countries still do not have laws to promote gender equality, women still lag far behind men in leadership positions- women comprise 26.7% in national parliaments, 35.5% in local government and 28.2% of management in the workplace. Only 61.4% of prime working age women as compared to 90.6% of men are employed, and women only earn 51 cents for each dollar earned by men. McKinsey & Company finds, in *Women in the Workplace 2023*, that women are promoted at a rate of 87% compared to men, which factor leads to lesser numbers of women available for top leadership positions. The study also notes that workplace discriminations,



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even micro-discriminations, detrimentally lead to women feeling unsafe and burnt-out with thoughts of quitting, while at the same time, reduces their incentives to take risks, to propose new ideas and/or to express concerns. Meanwhile, according to the World Bank, long run per capita GDP of countries would expand by about 20% if there was a zero gender employment gap. In addition, it found that higher income profitability of firms and lower carbon emissions are correlated with more women in leadership positions.

Thus, the world must invest in women to accelerate progress towards women's empowerment, gender equality and sustainable development.

Investing in women starts with making sure that all women and girls have access to quality education so that they can develop skills necessary for employment, increase their productivity and can contribute their talents to society. Education can help lift a woman, family and community out of poverty by providing positive outcomes including the ability to advocate for their rights, to make informed choices, to be employed, to earn income, provide better nutrition for their families and raise healthier and better educated children. Education is accordingly not only a gateway to the empowerment of women and girls, a fundamental human right, and a force for equity and equality but, is also a development multiplier, which provides economies and societies with the necessary tools to progress, prosper and develop. Education lies at the heart of the 2030 Agenda and is crucial for its overall success. Therefore, investing in women and girls' education is an important tool to eradicate poverty and promote development in the world.

Investing in women and girls also means ensuring that the women-led businesses have equal access to financial capital and funding so that women and girls and their businesses can enjoy equal opportunities to grow and prosper. Investing in women should also encompass helping to make sure that the workplace provides a favorable environment and the opportunity for female employees to move up the corporate ladder therein. This entails investing in infrastructure and services that facilitate women in employment e.g., provision of safe transport and child-care facilities. It also entails adopting measures such as company-wide training and workplace rules to ensure that gender discrimination, and its consequences such as gender-based violence, are eliminated from the work environment.

Lastly, investing in women and girls leads to acceleration of progress, because they make up some one half of the world's population, and the increased resulting productivity would surely help to accelerate progress in the world's development. As a widely known African proverb says: "If you educate a man, you educate an individual. If you educate a woman, you educate a nation." Likewise, progress for women is progress for all.

The International Council of Women and its affiliate members around the world strongly believe there are no immovable barriers to women's empowerment and gender equality. **Now** is the time to invest in women and girls.

