

Countries making great strides in empowering women, but...

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WOMEN continue to face numerous challenges, including gender-based violence (GBV).

Such challenges need to be addressed with urgency and collective responsibility. These were sentiments shared by Vijayalakshmi Ram Prasad, wife to the Indian High Commissioner N. Ram Prasad, during the commemoration of International Women's Day last Friday.

The International Women's Day is observed globally on March 8. This year's theme was 'For ALL Women and Girls: Rights, Equality, and Empowerment'.

She highlighted that over the years, India had made a number of achievements in improving and bettering the lives of girls and women. These, she said, included the enactment of laws that played a crucial role in increasing the enrolment of girls in schools and reducing the gender gap in education. She said India also had women-centric schemes that provided employment opportunities for women in rural areas, enabling them to contribute to their families' income and gain financial independence. Prasad also mentioned that during the journey towards empowering women, there were Indian women who became leaders in the fight for social reforms played pivotal roles in advocating for women's education and the abolition of regressive practices like Sati and child marriage. Regardless of these achieve-



Vijayalakshmi Ram Prasad (second from right) and India's High Commissioner to Eswatini N. Ram Prasad in a group photo with some of the participants during the commemoration of International Women's Day at the UN House last Friday.

ments, Prasad said the journey towards complete empowerment was far from over. "Despite these achievements, women continue to face numerous challenges, including gender-based violence, discrimination, and limited access to opportunities.

It is imperative that we address these issues with a sense of urgency and collective responsibility," she stated.

She further noted that this year's theme called for an inclusive approach that recognised the diverse experiences and challenges faced by women and girls across different socio-economic, cultural, and geographical backgrounds.

"It urges us to ensure that our efforts to empower women are not just limited to a select few but extend to every woman and girl, regardless of her circumstances," said Prasad. To achieve this, Prasad said a multi-faceted approach must be adopted. This approach, she added, should

include promoting gender-sensitive education and raising awareness about women's rights as it was crucial for changing societal attitudes and eradicating deep-rooted biases.

She said all stakeholders needed to ensure that schools and educational institutions were safe spaces, where girls could learn and thrive without fear of discrimination or harassment.

Additionally, she said strengthening and implementing laws that protect women's rights was essential for creating a safe and just society. This, according to Prasad, included stringent measures against gender-based violence, workplace harassment, and discrimination.

"Legal literacy programmes can empower women to understand and assert their rights. Providing women with access to resources, skills training, and economic opportunities can also be a vehicle towards empowering women," she said.

Economically empowering women impacts GDP

ECONOMICALLY empowering women is said to have positive impacts to a country's gross domestic product (GDP).

Vijayalakshmi Ram Prasad said the economic empowerment of women significantly impacted a country's GDP growth in numerous ways. One of these is increased labour force participation as when women are economically empowered, more of them join the workforce. Prasad said this expanded the labour pool and increased productivity, directly contributing to economic growth.

"Women who have access to financial resources and opportunities are more likely to start businesses. This not only cre-

ates jobs but also fosters innovation and economic diversification. "Empowering women helps lift families out of poverty, increasing the overall standard of living. This, in turn, drives consumer demand and stimulates economic activity," asserted Prasad. She further stated that entrepreneurship had contributed to the growth of India's GDP. She said women-led startups and small businesses had flourished as a result of mentorship and venture capital support.

"This has not only created jobs but also diversified India's economic landscape. In this regard, I would like to highlight India's partnership with Eswatini, espe-

cially the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) Programme, which has several such specially designed programmes for capacity building.

"These are fully-funded courses in entrepreneurship, self-employment at grassroots which have contributed immensely to the empowerment of women in Africa and which we would encourage our sisters in Eswatini to take advantage of," stated Prasad. She concluded by calling on all stakeholders to amplify their voices, break barriers, and inspire inclusion so as to create a world where every woman's potential is realised, diversity celebrated, and where no one was left behind.