News
Social Justice



A woman is pictured in a file photo studying in a classroom at Garissa University College in Kenya. In advance of International Women's Day March 8, Sister Lucy Hometowu, superior general of the Sisters of Mary Mother of the Church and a medical doctor from Ghana, says equal access to education is the only means by which women can get into and sustain leadership positions in society. (CNS photo/Reuters/Thomas Mukoya)



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Equal access to education is the only means by which women can get into and sustain leadership positions in society, said a Ghanaian nun and medical doctor.

Speaking to Catholic News Service in advance of International Women's Day March 8, Sr. Lucy Hometowu, superior general of the Sisters of Mary Mother of the Church, said "women need to be empowered to have access to health, education, economic opportunities and be free from gender-based violence, fear and intimidation."

"Lack of women empowerment and gender equality results in lack of sustainable source of livelihood and job opportunities. It is also a major cause of teenage pregnancy and child marriage," she said.

Hometowu, an OB-GYN and a fellow of the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists, London, said part of empowering women means they should work together to fight for causes that affect them.

"Working together, they should raise awareness and create systems that allow them to grow, thrive and become who they want to be," she told CNS.

International Women's Day is celebrated every year to recognize the achievements of women around the world and to call for elimination of all discrimination, gender stereotypes, violence and greater equality for women. The United Nations first celebrated International Women's Day during International Women's Year in 1975.

"Women empowerment is the degree of self-determination and autonomy that enables women to break societal barriers," Hometowu told CNS, adding that "it is

their sense of self-worth, ability to determine their own choices and influence societal change for themselves and others."

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Sister Lucy Hometowu is superior general of the Sisters of Mary Mother of the Church, an obstetrician and gynecologist and a fellow of the Royal College of

Obstetricians and Gynaecologists in London. She is pictured in an undated photo. (CNS photo/courtesy Sister Lucy Hometowu)

She indicated that "traditionally, the social role of a woman is housekeeping, taking care of the family, and focusing on the children" but noted that in spite of this tradition "women continue to break the barriers that prevent them from participating effectively in societal affairs by entering male-dominated roles in key leadership positions, including politics where their decision- and policymaking efforts have impacted positively on society."

"Unfortunately, our patriarchal societies do not recognize and celebrate women struggles and achievements, as gender inequality and lack of economic opportunities still hinder their progress," she said.

She noted her own experience as a medical doctor, which she described as "challenging but equally liberating and gratifying."

"Women are at the forefront of health care provision and contribute immensely to quality health care and the effective and efficient running of the health care system."

Hometowu also spoke of how women's rights are violated when they are labeled witches: "It is only the elderly women and widows who are alleged witches who are usually beaten up and banished from their homes to live in witch camps under terrible living conditions."

In 2020, Ghanaians received the news of a 90-year-old woman accused of witchcraft and beaten to death before a crowd of onlookers. The two people who beat the woman were female.

"Living with the status quo is no longer an option," she said. "Let us all continue to raise awareness, take anti-violence initiatives, and break the traditional barriers and bonds that violate the rights of girls and women."