

Working Group on Girls CSW67 Adolescent Girl Consultation Report

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The priority theme of the 67th Commission on the Status of Women lends an opportunity for adolescent girls to be included in CSW dialogues and negotiations to share their experiences and perspectives on innovation and technological change, and education in the digital age for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls.

Without access to technology and quality education and information, girls are unable to adapt and prosper in a rapidly changing world that requires not only basic literacy but digital literacy, skills of global citizenship, and opportunities for meaningful participation in decision-making. Due to the digital gender divide, girls have less access to technology and the internet, impacting their ability to engage in an increasingly technology focused world. Despite this divide, technology could still be wielded to find solutions to address gender inequality, but girls' inclusion and participation is key.

The review theme this year on the challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls in rural areas also brings to light the specific issues that girls in rural areas face. Women and girls in rural areas are often excluded from discussions around gender equality, or policies made to improve gender equality do not reach them. If living in remote areas with little or no access to technology, they are then doubly excluded by the digital divide. Addressing the unique challenges women and girls in rural areas face is an important part of achieving gender equality for all women and girls.

METHODOLOGY

To ensure girls' voices and needs are addressed at this year's CSW, the Working Group on Girls (WGG) developed and provided a toolkit and facilitation guide for girls to lead local conversation circles throughout the WGG networks based on the CSW67 priority and review themes. A conversation summary reporting form was also provided so that the information collected could be shared easily with the WGG, and subsequently UN Women. This document encompasses data collected at these Local Conversation Circles, as well as information obtained via survey responses and written reflections from adolescent girls in relation to the CSW67 priority and review themes.

Participant Representation:

In the local girl-led conversation circles, there were 1657 participants between 10-18 years of age. Participants included adolescent girls from Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, India, Mozambique, Pakistan, Peru, the United Kingdom, and the United States including girls in urban and rural areas.

Survey responses were also incorporated, including responses from Australia and Mauritius, 4 responses from Uganda, all girls from rural areas, and 9 responses from Perú with 7 out of the 9 respondents from rural areas. We also included the summary of over 600 survey responses from India. Written reflections on the CSW priority and review themes from 8 adolescent girls from Colombia, Côte d'Ivoire, India, Kenya, Nepal, and Nigeria, with 7 of 8 reflections from rural perspectives.

LOCAL CONSULTATION SUMMARIES

Key Themes

The key themes that emerged from girls' conversation circles on the CSW67 priority theme included **lack of access to technology, the discrimination girls face in gaining access to technology, education, and information in the digital age and concern for cybercrimes and the importance of policies and measures for safety. Girls highlighted that having access to technology in the digital age is important so that they are educated, informed, and connected to the world and that it is vital for their own economic empowerment.**

In some communities, girls pointed out that education of the girl child is considered of no value to parents or the community, that the girl child should not be educated, in order to prevent her from being exposed to some certain privileges in life. Where girls do have educational opportunities, they highlighted that **technical education and digital literacy programming is still not fully available**, which the pandemic also demonstrated, and **which limits their opportunities for work in the future**. Some girls noted that parents and society also give more priority to general education than technical education for girls. Girls highlighted that they would like to study technical education and work in these fields alongside men if given the opportunity but noted that they are still **challenged by a society that still favors boys over girls when it comes to future economic opportunities**. Girls also reported **gender discrimination in pursuing STEM** because parents think girls cannot perform well in the STEM field. Some girls also reported that because technology is viewed socially as “for boys,” they are discouraged from learning about technology due to discrimination. They also noted that there is a gender bias amongst educators and curricula that is more encouraging for boys to pursue STEM, as men are



more often portrayed in the field than women. Furthermore, where STEM education is available, girls reported feeling discouraged from joining STEM clubs, as they consisted primarily of boys.

In sharing their desire to access technology, girls also shared stories of the **gender discrimination they face in their houses when it comes to giving them permission for use of mobile phones**. Some girls report having less access to technology due to **cyber safety concerns**, and that similarly, **girls are not permitted to travel far away for technical education for security reasons**.

In addition, girls noted that the **social exclusion they experience in relation to access to technology and education in the digital age prevents them from being part of decision making spaces, including decisions for themselves**. **Lack of education and access to technology and information inhibits girls from learning about bodily autonomy and sexual and reproductive health and rights**, and lack of information about menstruation leads to unhygienic and unhealthy menstrual practices, which creates misconceptions and negative attitudes. This motivates bullying, shaming and even gender based violence.

Furthermore, **lack of education and access to information in the digital age prevents girls from being able to position themselves financially in their futures**, including making decisions about educational and economic opportunities. They noted that the **discrimination girls experience** in their equal right to education and equal opportunities **leads to mental stress**. Girls shared that education is the key to succeed in any field in life and that **if girls' education and inclusion is neglected, dreams, goals and visions can be shattered**.

During the COVID-19 pandemic for those who did have access to some form of online education, a significant proportion indicated that they did not enjoy the online learning process or found it initially hard to adjust. Reports of monotonous online classes, eye strain, lack of interaction and poor knowledge of how to use digital education platforms resulted in girls feeling that online education is of inferior quality to face-to-face classroom education. They felt that if we are to reap the full benefit of digital education, measures and policies need to be put in place to ensure that it works to bridge, rather than widen, the existing access gaps between privileged and marginalized communities. For many, the pressing issues preventing full access to digital education opportunities are still the lack of a reliable internet connection and the knowledge of how to use technologies for teaching (or learning) in an engaging and effective way.

Another concern they raised regarding access to **digital technologies is the potential for these platforms to be used for harmful or even criminal uses**. The **girls reported instances of cyberbullying on social media platforms**, receiving or accidentally accessing age-inappropriate content, bullying or harassment regarding their appearance, identity fraud, unsolicited and

sexually explicit or abusive messages from strangers and fake online shopping websites. Some even divulged that they restricted their use of social media to avoid unsolicited messages or that they believed misogynistic comments discouraged women and girls from speaking out about issues that affect them online.

Girls' safety when interacting with the online world needs to be addressed, as there is a very real risk that girls will avoid making full use of the internet and social media platforms and could alienate themselves from the many opportunities for education and empowerment which digital technology can provide.

Challenges Girls in Rural Areas Face

In relation to the CSW67 review theme, girls from rural areas also shared about the unique challenges they face economically, socially, in regard to climate change, and in terms of infrastructure, including challenges specific to this year's priority theme. Specifically, **girls report feeling left out.**

In regards to their education, girls in rural areas also reported having **little to no access to technology, often due to lack of infrastructure, like electricity.** During the pandemic, this meant not being able to engage in e-learning and **falling behind in school. Girls in rural areas also reported unequal access to STEM and learning digital skills while boys' education is prioritized.** Without access to technology, girls in rural areas experience **low digital literacy and are isolated from the rest of the world.**

Furthermore, girls pointed out that **access and affordability of menstrual products** is a challenge, which also affects their health and **whether or not a girl attends school.** Similarly, they also noted **lack of access to water, sanitation and hygiene** in rural areas, which can also inhibit girls' attendance at school. The cost to attend school also prevents girls from being able to pursue their education, as many lack the financial resources to pay school fees. Some girls noted that **having to focus on household chores and work in the fields due to discriminatory sociocultural norms, and lack of infrastructure such as potable water and stable electricity, also means less time to focus on their studies.** They pointed out that the **de-prioritizing of girls' education** in many areas is also mirrored by **early and forced child marriages.**

In addition, girls noted that in rural areas, the wage gap between women and men is very high since women must work outside, including agricultural work, and also do household work. Furthermore, they pointed out that women have **no decision-making power** in the family or in agricultural work. For women who do own farmlands, because of lack of access to technology, they are **not able to monitor climate change** and the weather for planting crops. They noted that

too much rainfall sometimes destroys farmlands, which then results in **loss of jobs** for women and girls who work on farmlands to earn a living. They also highlighted that girls are more **likely to go hungry** if there is food shortage because boys are prioritized.

Girls in rural areas also reported a **lack of security and safety**, where they face **gender-based violence**, including rape. Some girls noted that this is because of lack of law enforcement in their areas. They noted that **their wellbeing is also hindered by lack of access to water and sanitation, lack of parks, and general lack of economic support to rural areas.**

Girls' Recommendations

In reference to the many challenges girls face in relation to technological change, innovation, and education in the digital age, girls also provided their recommendations:

- There must be accountability for the fulfillment and protection of girls' rights, including girls' right to quality education, health, economic rights, and girls' right to be included and participate in meetings and decisions that affect them and for their education to include curricula on all issues concerning society
- Societies should be sensitized on the critical importance of girls' education
- Girls' education in all aspects and at the highest levels should be a respected, upheld, and a protected right and equitable approaches to education should be incorporated
- Girls should have equal opportunity in all fields of life- there should be no discrimination based on gender
- Discrimination between male and female in technical education or working in STEM fields must cease - girls can work in all fields equally with men
 - Girls should be encouraged to go into STEM fields
 - Parents should be informed and educated on benefits of girls entering field of innovation and technology
- Gender discrimination in providing access to technology should be eliminated
- Girls should be given free access to technology such as mobile phones, laptops, and free data packs to ensure that free learning materials are readily provided so that girls can study at their convenience with an established support system
- Girls should be supported in learning how to use technology to support their digital literacy, including digital safety and security
 - Classroom instruction should include the effective use of digital technology for students to further engage
- The tech world must be in favor of donating technology and sharing knowledge for the sake of education
- Governments should also provide funds to schools for school-issued technology

- Women and girls should have equal decision making power in the home
 - Parents should be fair in sharing household responsibilities between boys and girls since this is where equity and equality starts. Boys should not be allowed to go out to play or learn while the girls are tasked with all the housework. In doing so, these boys will grow to respect, appreciate women, and see women as equals in future
- Women and girls' achievements should be promoted to encourage girls
- Campaigns to end cyberbullying should be enacted
- Girls online safety and protection should be guaranteed to ensure their participation in the digital world
- Social media networks should be used to promote gender equality, including awareness campaigns, meetings and live dialogues about gender equality, and highlighting women leaders
- Technology should be used to take action towards a gender equal world
- Girls need to be educated, protected from sexual violence, to know their rights, to be understood and supported- parents, governments, NGOs, communities must help them and assailants must be held to account, not granted impunity
- Girls must be given the chance and space so that their voices can be heard and gender biases removed
- Girls must be educated on their rights
- Girls should be able to learn about the challenges girls in other countries and communities are facing in regard to their rights
- Girls should be encouraged to participate in and lead social activities linked to their own psychological and social development
- Girls' power and leadership as decision-makers and changemakers in their own lives, homes, communities, countries, and the world should be encouraged
- Economic justice and rights and education for economic empowerment for girls should be promoted, including providing and ensuring access to technology for women and girls
 - Girls should be able to learn about and pursue their own financial independence and make their own decisions about their futures and their careers
 - Women and girls should be equally engaged in finance-related decisions at home and in their communities and permitted to spend and save equally, as well as have access to bank accounts
 - Policy makers and governments should enforce policies on social protection systems for women and girls
- Women should be promoted in leadership positions who can also improve the social status of women and girls and their treatment in society
- Girls' sexual and reproductive health education should be accessible and free so that girls can make informed decisions about their own bodies

- Menstrual products should be free to also promote girls' attendance in school
- Girls should have exchanges to learn from each others' experiences and fight for their rights in solidarity and stand up against any form of discrimination against the girl child
- We all must pay special attention to and advocate for girls. Everyone has the power to further the rights of girls. Take a firm stand against discriminatory attitudes. Raise your voice in solidarity.

Girls' Recommendations for Rural Challenges

The specific recommendations from girls in rural areas in regard to the challenges they face include:

- Listen to girls; listen to girls in rural areas
- Consider girls in the same way boys are considered
- Include girls in rural areas in STEM education
- Create community technology centers- bring technology to communities where girls can access it without having to travel far
- Provide network coverage in rural areas
- Include girls in technology schools and user applications
- There needs to be more communication and research with rural communities
- Help girls to know more on their own- educate girls
- Provide basic infrastructure, such as goods roads, stable electricity, potable water, and health services so that girls can more readily focus on their education
- Equip rural schools with adequate technology, internet, devices, and teachers
- Provide proper water, sanitation infrastructure and facilities
- Make menstrual products and education free and accessible to girls so they can attend school
- Women should be given a special place in the outside work and also in the family, including being encouraged in STEM careers
- Women should have rights over agricultural lands and houses.
- In regards to unpaid care work, women should work equally with men. Men have the flexibility to take breaks in between work but not much for women so working hours for women should be fixed by law.
- Use social media to post messages advocating for girls and women rights
- Dedicate more rural spaces to parks and recreational areas
- Make rural areas safer for girls
- Communities should support girls in rural areas
 - Attention should also be given to how communities can educate each other
- Governments should increase economic support for communities in rural areas



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