

Young voices: Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls

RSVP chairnawo@gmail.com

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UK Mission
One Dag
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Chair – Dr Roberta
Blackman Woods MP

Cara Hart, NAWO YWA
“SDG 3: Challenges and
action to improve access to
sexual and reproductive
healthcare for rural women
and girls”

Leah Addo-Brown, Justina
Mutale Foundation
“Quality education as a
catalyst for the advancement
of rural women & girls.”

Ankita Saigal, WAGGGS

Patrycja Kupiec, Director of
YWCA Scotland

Bella Brown, NAWO YWA
“The vicious cycle of poverty,
education and crime, and the
importance of breaking the
cycle for young women and
girls”

Ruwadzano Muzvondiwa,
Rozaria Memorial Trust

The challenges and
opportunities will affect young
women more than any other
demographic. This interactive
panel will hear the voices of
those young women and
provide a perspective from
around the world.

It will look particularly at the
SDGs that relate to rural
women and girls.
Panellists will give their views,
experience, comments,
aspirations and requests – for
us to hear and heed.

Please RSVP :
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Panel Biographies

Cara Hart is a sixth form student from Gloucestershire in the UK. She is currently studying A Levels in English Literature, Politics and History. She has been a successful participant in the European Youth Parliament, and is an avid supporter of women's rights. She hopes to study Law at University, and pursue a career in the discipline afterwards.

Leah Addo-Brown is at CSW62 with the Justina Mutale Foundation. She is also a beauty pageant queen and participated in Miss Globe. She has studied at the University of Ghana. She feels very lucky to have been surrounded by supportive women all her life, and is passionate about women's rights.

Helga Mutasingwa M.D. is a member of TGGA, and has come to CSW62 as a member of WAGGS. As a medical doctor from Tanzania she has experienced the effects of inequality first hand in a variety of hospital settings. She sees CSW62 as a platform to discuss these issues, and hopefully put the appropriate preventative measures in place.

Patrycja Kupiec is the Director of YWCA Scotland. At the time of CSW62 she is working on an original piece of research with her company "The Status of Young Women in Scotland". This is part of a common drive at CSW62 to gather accurate data on the statuses of rural women, as for example it can often be out of date or not gendered and thus unable to give an accurate picture as to the situations of rural women.

Bella Brown is a sixth form student from Gloucestershire in the UK. She is currently studying A Levels Politics, Art and English Literature. She is very passionate about women's rights, and a dedicated member of the Feminist Society at her school. She has for this reason undertaken an EPQ exploring how cultural events can impact fashion with a focus on gender. This also links to her future aspirations to study Fashion.

Executive Summary

The speeches included in this report are a collection of young women's voices speaking on the experiences of young women in rural areas.

A key theme that arose from the session was how young rural women and girls are often made slave to their geographical location by cultural norms and practices. Young women and girls' full potential is never realised for this reason. For example young women entering into forced and early marriage almost never progress beyond a basic education which cuts them off from a potentially thriving future.

Additionally at play are the structural barriers young rural women and girls face today which damage and restrict their futures in a similar way to the cultural roadblocks set in place. For example transport is often unaffordable, unsafe and unreliable in rural areas. Infrequent, expensive public transport with further issues like poor roads make travel living hell for any young woman in a rural area. As a result, young rural women and girls do not have access to the same opportunities as, say, women in urban areas. Poor transport can prevent girls from going to school or participating in extracurricular activities decreasing things like future employability. There is also the issue of access to technology. This includes farming

technology which feeds into not only SDG5, but also SDG2. Technology is also needed to provide a voice to young women. For example radio which has proved useful in removing stigma and altering mind-sets.

It is perhaps a lack of knowledge fed by limited access to quality information surrounding issues such as Sexual Health and Reproductive Rights that perpetuates the seemingly unending struggle of young women and girls living in rural areas. Young rural women and girls are, as a result, often unaware of the help available to them which means they are less likely to seek help for issues like domestic violence.

Moving forward, we need to think about how we provide young rural women and girls with access to a means which can elevate them and provide a platform through which they can break out of the geographical constraints currently placed on them. It is safe to say education is often the most powerful tool. Girls need access to education in order to escape poverty of which harmful traditional practices that cull their prospects are often a side effect. The education needed is not just formal, but also informal which includes development of soft skills. We must also look at how technology is used as a medium through which rural girls can find their voices, providing a much needed platform to reshape certain cultural modes of thinking that are costing them their futures. Accurate data regarding young rural women and girls has the potential to be an invaluable aid in these efforts, and looking forward it is our duty to push for more research in this area.

The issues touched on by the young women at this event are not simply an aspect of life that must be accepted as part of rural living, but solvable problems when the correct preventative measures are put in place.

Please take the time to read the following speeches.

Panel Speeches

Cara Hart



Innovative opportunities for female empowerment in rural areas

Good Afternoon everyone,

My name is Cara, and before I begin, I would like to express my gratitude to NAWO for accrediting me and allowing me to address you today.

I'd like to open this session by highlighting the importance of innovation and digital technology for future achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, and in advancing the empowerment of women and girls. (pause) I'm a 17 year old from a rural region of England, yet I am assured by access to technology and media in all its forms through my day-to-day life, similarly true for millions of others growing up in the global north. My generation; often referred to as 'Generation X', are renowned for our fixation with mobile technology. And I take full advantage of it to communicate, but also feel empowered with a range of other innovations. This *means* that I can be a citizen reporter, an activist, an entrepreneur, hold international authorities to account, and engage with a global community from my rural home, whilst simultaneously being able to enjoy the technologies that shape my lifestyle - cars, taps, takeaways, unlimited electricity and a broadband connection (albeit, a temperamental one) which bring significant relief to the challenges living in a rural location can present. *These* are abilities which many would *justly* classify as 'privileges', however are ones that I believe are fundamental to my own empowerment as a rural young woman. What I refer to as privileges today by 2030 I want to see become universal amenities for all my generation. Not just those from typical western societies, who, like myself know no difference and would certainly settle for no less.

(this is where I deleted a paragraph so it doesn't link very well)

For example, to supplement goals 5 and 16: gender equality and peace, innovation can enhance female leadership opportunities, and create new ones of its own. The inclusion of female voices in governance and politics remains a challenge in rural communities across the world, and - as we know, when women have a political voice and a seat at decision-making tables there is a greater chance of building healthy and fair democracies where women's human rights are valued and realised. Today we have the opportunity to digitise rural women and girl's voices, transmitting them out of their villages and into the public sphere. Eliminating the need for commute to urban government centres (where in many remote communities this remains impossible due to restricted transport), accessibility and participation can be new increased by allowing input from home.

Furthermore informative technology today offers us the invaluable chance to empower women from rural areas through the acquisition of knowledge. Innovative technology such as Unicef's Internet of Good Things (IoGT), is a set of mobile-ready resources and applications that can provide simple access to lifesaving information. for instance content on hygiene, sexual health advice for adolescents and emergency information on diseases such as Zika and Cholera. Another transformative example I learnt of just on Tuesday was one by Practical Action, who are using radio shows on menstrual health to reach girls and women in isolated areas, to remove stigma and educate on hygiene around menstruation, which is further action synonymous with a list of SD goals including 1, 3, 4 9 and 10.

There are various explicit challenges that might stall progress, naturally including a lack of technical skills or information. Additionally women in rural communities may *understandably* be risk-adverse, and so be hesitant in investing in unfamiliar

technologies in case they fail. Realistically, how can we expect women to embrace immediate change in a traditional and normalised way of life? They are also held back by a lack of infrastructure and the failure to bring old technologies – such as electricity – to rural areas, which makes the adoption of new technologies more difficult or even impossible. For instance also staying in my hotel are two delegates from Necessarian, an organisation which works closely with widows) called Alias and Maria. They are originally from rural Kenya, with links with the Masai tribe, and explained to me that despite having mobile phones, (imperative tools which groups in their community such as widows are heavily reliant on), once these run out of charge they become inept, and useless. However, they suggested that a simple solar cell would provide sufficient energy for this purpose, a personal and powerful example of innovation that empowers.

In essence, unlocking the potential of our existing technologies to impact in rural areas as in urban ones is very much modern key through which to overcome the most salient barriers to female achievement, in coalition with the SDGs. One that will pave a pathway to creating inclusive societies and sustainable economies that place women and girls at the centre.

Moving forwards: It is clear that lots of discussion goes on at CSW, but now it is time for action. Where necessary, we need to implement the lack of infrastructure impeding the impact of technology such as telephone networks or something as simple as a solar panel. Let's get Maria a cell to charge her mobile phone, and unlock the education of the Masai! Finally, distant from legislators and government assemblies, the phrase 'out of sight out of mind' seems appropriate. In my experience and from what I have learnt this week: women in rural areas globally are either not listened to, or our voices are simply not heard. More needs to be done to provide effective platforms for us to offer our version of change, particularly for young women and girls. The UN Women youth dialogue this weekend provides an excellent opportunity for young advocates to demonstrate our ingenuity. More specifically, the annual Social Good Summit focuses on how to unlock the potential of technology to empower. So I hope that commissions such as these aim to ensure the greatest youth involvement, and not just from the sidelines. Female empowerment will without doubt be strengthened through each generation coming together, but the question we have to ask ourselves, is who will really be active in 2030? Today the largest ever generation of young people each has an indispensable role to play in achieving international development goals, driving economic and social reform and setting gender equality in *solidarity*. And, as I *know* this panel will demonstrate to you - *we are interested!* So, on behalf of 'Generation X' - Instating and supporting more opportunities for youth advocacy would be a very positive, and worthwhile development from CSW62, and is one which I firmly believe will provide it's *own* engine for change.

Thank you!

Leah Addo-Brown

Leah Addo-Brown spoke on the topic of “Quality education as a catalyst for the advancement of rural women and girls”

Leah believes young rural women and girls are imprisoned by their geographical location. No matter how willing young women and girls are in rural Ghana – as is the case across a lot of

the African continent – the same opportunities are simply not available to them. They face major cultural and structural barriers. African society is very culturally saturated, and women must live according to this. For instance in the story Leah told us of a young girl Fatimah, an early and forced marriage put an end to a scholarship for school and thus bright future. Fatimah was expected to respect her parents and follow their wishes for her to be married. These cultural practices as a result leave rural women and girls powerless. She called for the government to provide more jobs to the families that putting their children through forced marriage is an escape from poverty. She thinks if families in rural areas were more financially stable they are more likely to put girls through education. Structural barriers also face young women and girls living in rural areas.

She believes economic empowerment is key to making women independent. Yet according to cultural beliefs it is disrespectful for a woman to stand alone. Helping women find jobs (through the government) and demonstrate financial capability and independence is a potential route that can dissuade people from the practice of forced and early marriage.

Helga Mutaswina

Helga Mutaswina spoke on multiple issues facing young rural women and girls in Tanzania.

As a medical student and member of girl guides, she has first hand experience of the issues facing the vulnerable group of rural women and girls. They face a number of problems. She spoke of how the society she lives in encourages stereotyping which cultivates the practice of traditional harmful practices such as: child marriage, FGM, and domestic violence. They are very prevalent. Through the story of a young 17 year old girl experiencing domestic abuse, she revealed that young women living in these areas fear judgment from their community about seeking help and are also unaware of the processes in place to assist them. The government processes are thus ineffective in reaching the groups targeted. She believes this is all down to a lack of education regarding the rights of women. Land rights also pose issues for women, and the legislation in place is not enough to prevent land being taken from them. There is also a lack of safety, especially surrounding the issue of transport to and from school, when collecting water or around the village. Girls are often taken advantage of by men in the area offering transport and money for transport in exchange for sexual acts. Again, legislation is not an effective preventative measure in this case.

Dr. Mutaswina did, however, draw attention to the achievements of Tanzania in having a female vice president and free, compulsory education. She herself has taken part in a number of campaigns run by girl guides, and avidly supports non-formal education which the Tanzanian education system has also taken on board. These include the 'Stop the Violence' and 'Free Being Me' campaigns which train girls to identify violence and take action within the community and also teach about body confidence, respectively. She also spent time as a young doctor volunteering in medical camps which provided a platform for her to educate about menstrual health education with her girl guide training. Dr. Mutaswina called for the creation of platforms for young rural women and girls to raise their voice about problems facing them in order to reach out and inspire others.

Patrycja Kupiec

In her speech Patrycja Kupiec made a call for the voices of young women to be heard. She points to a lack of research available regarding young women and girls living in rural areas. In an effort to solve this issue, YWCA Scotland has undertaken a piece of original research known as “The Status of Young Women in Scotland”. She also spoke about providing young women with the force to voice the issues facing them such as: relationships, politics, sexism, sexual health etc. A particular issue facing rural Scottish women is land rights. Land is often passed between the men and not women for example within the agricultural industry men are more often the inheritors of the family farm. YWCA Scotland are currently crowd sourcing for this piece of research.

Bella Brown



NAWO

“The voices of young women:

Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls”

“The vicious cycle of poverty, education and conflict, and the importance of breaking the cycle for young women and girls”

To begin, I would like to thank NAWO for accrediting me, and making it possible for me to speak at this amazing, life-changing event today. I would like to talk about the power of education, which is emphasised through SDG4.

I have grown up in the UK, a country currently unaffected by war; where we do not have to learn of the way different bombs sound, where we do not hear gunfire and the words of those dying, and where we do not have to see the brutal devastation of the place we call home. However, in many countries, this is not the case.

When thinking about speech ideas, as I was given the opportunity to choose my title, I began to think about how conflict and education are linked. This may be well researched, but I still

feel like there is definitely more to be done. I then began to think about how poverty impacts hugely on education. I found that the rate of children leaving primary school in conflict affected countries reached 50 per cent in 2011, which accounts for 28.5 million children¹, according to the UN website; and as shown on the Worldometers website, this is more people than the entire population of Australia². If we then consider the limited prospects in terms of education provided to women and girls in the Global South, it stands to reason that these prospects are even further reduced in conflict-affected areas. In the world's conflict zones, 10 million girls are not in school³, which as reported by the UK government⁴ is more than the number of pupils in education in the UK. As well as this, girls account for only thirty per cent of refugees enrolled in secondary school⁵ and during disasters, girls are 2.5 times more likely to miss school than boys⁶. These figures from Women's Refugee Commission and Womankind illustrate just how dire the situation is in regards to women's education.

In conflict zones, it is girls who seem to bear the brunt of the conflict: women face increases in rates of sexual and gender based violence, including child marriages, unwanted pregnancies and sexually transmitted diseases, both during and after conflict and disasters. Research shows that women are *fourteen times* more likely to die than men in a crisis, and that pregnancy and childbirth kill 507 women a day in settings of conflict or disaster⁷, according to Womankind's data. This means that in conflict zones, women's education is hugely compromised. How can we, in the 21st century, let this stand?

This threat can set girls' progress back even further, affecting whole future generations, continuing a highly damaging cycle. There is not a sustainable development goal that would not be benefited by improved education for women, as explained by the Global Partnership for Education in their report 'Education and the Global Goals'. If all children left school with basic literacy, 171 million people could be lifted from poverty. An extra year of school increases earnings for women by 20%, potentially providing the opportunity for self-reliance, and largely benefitting the economy- and furthermore, one billion dollars is lost per year by some countries in failing to educate girls at the same level as boys. And finally, education reduces the risks of war; if the secondary school enrolment rate is 10% higher than average, the risk of war drops by 3%. These, and a multitude of other statistics, show the positive impact education can have on individuals' security and economic wellbeing, as well as that of nation states.

So, what might one solution be to create this change?

¹ <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/peace-justice/>

² <http://www.worldometers.info/world-population/population-by-country/>

³ <https://www.womensrefugeecommission.org/empower/resources/practitioners-forum/facts-and-figures>

⁴ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/650547/SFR28_2017_Main_Text.pdf

⁵ <https://www.womensrefugeecommission.org/empower/resources/practitioners-forum/facts-and-figures>

⁶ <https://www.womankind.org.uk/blog/detail/our-blog/2016/06/03/women-and-girls-bearing-the-brunt-of-humanitarian-disasters>

⁷ <https://www.womankind.org.uk/blog/detail/our-blog/2016/06/03/women-and-girls-bearing-the-brunt-of-humanitarian-disasters>

BOLD, which stands for 'blog on learning development', explores a solution to women's struggles to receive a consistent education: distance learning. Distance learning is described as "a method of studying in which lectures are broadcast or lessons are conducted by correspondence, without the student needing to attend a school or college". The UK's Open University has created distance learning materials in Malawi and Sierra Leone to allow young women to finish their secondary school education at home. This pioneering technology opens up a possible total re-examination as to how education can be delivered to the most vulnerable people in our world. Upon my return to the UK, I would like to find a way within the community or even the nation to support education for women in rural areas, specifically in the Global South, through distance learning.

There are many factors that influence a girl or young woman's opportunity to receive an education; my focus today is on those affected by conflict, and therefore poverty, but this effect can be worsened by rural location, as I have learnt so far at CSW. Some examples of these obstacles facing women in rural communities are distance from roads, societal barriers and lack of schools in general. The following description from Kimberly Safford, Senior Lecturer in International Development and Teacher Education at the Open University brings to life the reality of a young woman trying to receive education in the Global South, particularly in rural secondary schools in some African countries.

"Perhaps, you've been up since 5am to draw water, gather wood, make the fire, and cook breakfast. You've walked five miles to school. You may have been harassed on the way by some boys on motor cycles. You feel scared.

Maybe, you're late for school so the teacher gives you a humiliating punishment, yelling at you and making you sweep the school yard. He might say something like, 'Education is wasted on you. Why don't you just go and get married?' You've never had a female teacher. You've never even seen one. If you start your period at school, you'll be sent home – there probably aren't suitable toilet facilities. Your teacher has hinted that if you want good grades, you'll have to have sex with him. Your parents need you at home. They can't afford the fees. They'd like you to get married."

Is it hardly surprising that only a third of girls finish secondary school in some countries?

So, what can we do to help?

My school in the UK is twinned through Afritwin with Rustenburg School for Girls and Mfuleni High School in South Africa. The Rozaria Memorial Trust also mentioned during their event 'Fostering social and economic wellbeing of girls in rural communities through sports' about their girls sports team in Kenya being twinned with a sports team in America. In both these cases, this mutual bond provides an opportunity for students and athletes to learn about the lives of others, and I would urge you all to ask your own institutions and businesses to engage in a similar action if possible. Additionally, we can encourage our schools, businesses, universities, and governments to invest in a distance learning programme that could change and empower the lives of many women and girls who struggle to receive an education. There are women in Yemen, there are women in Syria, and there are women from all over the world in conflict who are being left behind. These women and their fight for freedom and peace must not be forgotten, and they must not be left behind. Investing in

education can help lift people out of poverty and create a livelihood, and this ultimately, is incredibly powerful. And quite rightly, it will enable women to fulfil their potential in the world. Thank you for your attention today, and I look forward to the opportunity of working with you in the future.