



**United Nations CSW62 Parallel event:  
Empowering girls everywhere: Pathways to end  
violence against children  
Thursday 15th March 2018**

Violence against children is a major global issue and affects children in all societies and countries. In this panel discussion Arelys Bellorini of 'World Vision' was in the chair. She said that violence against children came in many forms like child marriage, female genital mutilation, sex trafficking and others.

Seated on the dais with the adult panelists was this little girl named Xhorda from Albania. She also was one of the panelists in the forum. She was around 12 years old, a young leader advocating for children's participation on forums which speak about children's rights. She has been campaigning on children's issues and was disappointed that their voice is not taken seriously by the policy makers. Xhorda strongly felt that if you are talking about children, the children should have every right to relate their stories from their point of view.

Justice Joana from the Supreme Court of Mozambique stated that child marriage in Mozambique happened largely due to poverty and traditional culture. Children who resist this practise have no one to turn to. In rural cultures it is difficult to reach the judiciary. The government of Mozambique has tried to find a pathway to address this issue by introducing mobile

tribunals to go to remote areas. These mobile tribunals create awareness and spread information about the illegality of forcing children into early marriages and other scourges that afflict children.

Manus de Barra represented the United Nations Office of the Special Representative of the Secretary General (OSRSG) which works towards ending violence against children.

The organisation advocates that children should have the right to participate in decisions that affect them. Child helpline mechanisms hardly exist and even if they do children are petrified to tell their stories for fear of repercussions. Staff employed in children helplines should be very sensitive when they receive an SOS from a child and the privacy and the confidentiality of the caller should be respected. There should also be prompt follow-up action and legal aid should be provided to the children who have appealed for help. Children will only voice their stories if they know that there are strong child protection policies to safeguard them from further violence.

Debra Jones from 'Save the Children' Foundation spoke on violence against children affected by armed conflict. She was counselling a child refugee from Syria. On Valentine's Day when Debra asked the kid what she would like on Valentine's Day, she said that the Valentine heart should be painted red as a symbol to end bloodshed. It is a protracted crisis for children in armed conflict. There are lack of pathways open to rehabilitate children during conflict and post conflict for recovery and rebuilding their lives. Her organisation practised 'mental health healing arts' for children who undergo trauma.

Diana Quick from the 'Child Fund Alliance' said that their organisation's central goal is to work with children, their rights and to provide a child protection system to ensure their safety.

Little Xhorda made a great impact. In the Question/ Answer session, most of the questions were directed at her and she was confidently able to reply to them all. The message powerfully went through. If a law is being framed for children, then children's voices should be the dominant voice in the discussions and in the policy making.

**'NOTHING ABOUT US WITHOUT US'**



## **United Nations CSW62 Parallel event: What women leaders must do to be more visible in the media**

**Thursday 15th March 2018**

And so I took a New York Cab and rushed to 4W 43rd Street. In the crazy New York traffic, I made it just on time to my destination and to the venue the 'Aqua Room'. My heart sank when I saw there was not a single seat available and people had crowded at the back. I pushed myself forward (not my usual style), but this was one event I could not miss. I squatted on the floor with others young and old.

And imagine my excitement when I saw all the big names in the media world as panelists: Leslie Grossman, Roberta Baskin, Liz Kaplow, Cary Broussard and Sarah Glover. This was going to be one great experience. Here were role models in the media going to talk on the subject through their personal experiences on how they tackled failure and started afresh.

Creativity was at its peak with a audience mesmerised as the speakers individually gave accounts of the times when they were out of a job and how they were able to 'transform disruptive creations into creative disruptions'.

To be successful Sarah Glover said was to first be 'comfortable with yourself.' Being different should not bother you, whether it be due to race or culture. This is a dilemma that society has to face and not the individual who is made to feel different. Failures should be considered as blessings. When you hit the ground, what more can happen? You cannot go further down. You have to

raise yourself up and move on. Diamonds are beautiful because they are formed under pressure. This message from Glover to us today is the same as the one she gave herself years ago. Glover was a 'still life photographer.' After she lost her job, she put her resume together again and realised that she could fit into other job areas as well.

Liz Kaplow said that Public Relations is all about people and their stories. Her strategy was studying not the brand, but the people behind the brand. And most often it was a woman behind the brand. When you speak with a passion, it should also be spoken with authenticity. If one has stumbling blocks in their career, do not shy away from asking for HELP. She received help when she needed it and those who receive help would definitely like to give it back.

Cary Broussard, author of 'From Cinderella to CEO' rewrote her own Cinderella story. No Prince Charming will come to rescue her, she has to make her own way forward by 'stepping out and stepping up.'

Roberta Baskin sent a strong message to be 'inspired by hurdles.' To have a vision and to see it happen, you have to ensure that your voice is heard.

A strong sense of elation swept over me as I left the Aqua Room on my way to the Artisan Fair at the CCUN. Here were powerful and successful women who had come forward at CSW62 to convey powerful messages to women to take that leap and move forward.





## **United Nations CSW62: Prevention of trafficking of rural girls and women**

Woke up this morning to what I thought was a normal day and so I dressed normally and went to the restaurant for breakfast. A minute later I got a message from one of my friends living in New York. Daphne, it is snowing outside and there is a forecast of a snowstorm. So be prepared, wear your snow boots and warm wear before you step out. I looked at the high heel shoes that I was wearing and the light jacket and said 'Oh No.' This snowstorm is going to ruin my CSW experience. I had registered to go to the session conducted by the Holy See on the 'Prevention of trafficking of rural girls and women' at the United Nations Headquarters. I'm also expected to be at the Kimmel House, New York University for a reception at 6 pm decked in our national dress; the saree. Would I be able to make it to the Kimmel House in a saree in a snowstorm and survive? These were my thoughts at the beginning of the day.

I went back to my hotel room changed into my heaviest coat, put on the only boots that I had carried and walked to the elevator. A friendly gentleman greeted me. I asked him about the impending storm which was going to hit New York. And he shrugged his shoulders, threw his hands in the air and said 'New Yorkers exaggerate.'

I made it to the conference. However, my humour changed to horror after I heard the shocking realities of human trafficking at the UN conference. One survivor of human trafficking and five valiant religious sisters from Philippines, India, Africa, England and Canada gave gripping accounts of this crime against humanity.

Mely Lenario from the Phillipines recounted her horrific ordeal in her narration entitled 'Life as a Trafficked Woman: A Story Unfold.' She saw her sister being repeatedly raped by her stepfather when she was only 8 years. She protested and because she did, she was sent to a shelter. She and a few other girls were lured by some 'elegant' lady who offered them education and a better life, but forced them into the sex trade. To get food the girls had to get a minimum of 10 customers a day, else they were made to starve. It left her hating anyone who was 'kind' as she felt that it was 'kindness' which made her fall into a trap. Mely has now changed the course of her life and has become a survivor advocate, helping those women who experienced her hell to rebuild their lives.

Sr Annie Jesus Mary Louis from India spoke on the 'Rural Origins of the Sex Trade'. Like any other business in the world which has a supply chain system, so also does the sex trade. You have a product and someone buys and someone sells. In this case the product is sexual access to another human being. Sexual exploitation is big business. It is governed by exactly the same principles as any commercial activity. Supply and demand. Traffickers cloak their evil intentions with benevolence to lure women away from their homes. Sr Annie's appeal to the audience was to join together to campaign for sexual exploitation to be treated with the same seriousness as other supply chain issues. And to support local organisations working against human trafficking in rural areas.

Sr Lynda DearLove from England spoke on 'Hearing Rural Voices in the Fight against Trafficking'. The rural NGOs are neglected as funding goes only to the big NGOs in the cities. Her organisation 'Women at the Well' work towards giving 'alternate narratives' to rural women as against the false promises of the traffickers. If rural girls were provided with an education and sustainable financial support then the demand would be cut and the supply would also dry up. Sr Lynda lamented that the Global Community does not do much to address this scourge of human trafficking in the rural areas.

Sr Sheila Smith from Canada said that every human being has an inherent dignity, but for women it is an 'aspirational and not an experiential reality. Sr Angela Reed said it was time to listen to the voices of victims exposed to trafficking, publish their stories and give them opportunities to speak at public forums like the CSW.

The UN conference room was overcrowded with people. Those who did not get seats were left standing, but were engrossed for the whole session.

I travelled back to the hotel in the same vehicle with Sr Annie. She works alone in the Chattisgarh region. She feels threatened by the trafficking mafia, their business is slowly getting choked by her interventions. God Bless You Sr. Annie and may you live long to continue the good work that you have been doing at such grave risk to your life.

And to end on a good note, I did make it to the Kimmel Centre of New York University for the reception. The skies cleared and the sun came out specially for me. I went to the occasion draped in my national dress- the SAREE.



Soroptimist Members with Sizani Ngubane founder of Rural Women's Movement, South Africa

## **Consultation day – Sunday 11th March 2018 at United Nations CSW62**

A camaraderie of souls, the great sisterhood of UN Women got together on Consultation Day to launch the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW 62). What a wonderful privilege it was to be a part of this great experience. I was representing Soroptimist International of Great Britain and Ireland. Around 4000 UN Women from Nations across continents congregated at the TriBeCa Institute of Performing Arts. With one common goal in mind 'Achieving Gender Equality and empowering rural girls and women'. The whole atmosphere was fraught with emotion.

'Leave no one behind' was the resounding theme as speakers talked about encouraging, supporting and lifting women up as they climb the ladder. The morning had a conversation session between Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuko, Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and H.E. Ms Geraldine Byrne Nason, Bureau Chair of the Commission on the Status of Women. Ngcuko emphasised that 'encouragement was the greatest gift one could give to women' and it was up to us to correct the trends that were going the wrong way. She said that farm workers who feed us go hungry and are invisible. There should be labour laws for domestic workers and those who work in agriculture. We should find answers for the policy failures in government.

Byrne Nason stressed on the co-operation and power of NGO's to bring about awareness among rural women about the legal system and their land rights.

The post lunch session was on using media and information and communication technologies to advance and empower women and girls. The young speakers spoke eloquently on using dialogues and conversations for bringing out change. Through the medium of documentary films they showed the audience how storytelling influences change and how media can be an effective tool to amplify their stories.

This wave of action has given me an enormous lift. Yes, there are barriers and there will be hurdles; but there is also a silver lining for the young girls and women of the world, because the UN Women will continue to work for a better tomorrow for them.



## **Addressing the diverse needs of isolated rural women: Successful interventions 14th March 2018**

The empowering of women is the primary goal of Soroptimism and SIGBI members came together to collaboratively express concern about the hapless situation of rural women. The session gave valuable insights into the plight of rural women and how different countries responded to the need of lifting up women from the poorest level to a dignified self-respecting life.

Margaret Clark, APD Advocacy, in her introduction said that the purpose of the event was to share good practices, learn of the diverse interventions used for solutions to the issue of isolated rural women. She introduced



Soroptimist International as a global voice for women who educate, empower and enable women and girls, inspire actions and transform lives. Speakers included Soroptimist members from Trinidad and Tobago, India, UK and guest speakers from Nigeria and NAWO Youth.

Barbara Dixon, Program Director who was in the chair highlighted the extent of the diversity of rural women, the additional and diverse challenges faced by them, and the importance of the appropriate use of the terms "rural women" and "women who live in rural areas" within the text that would be negotiated over the following week and which would ultimately result in the CSW62 conclusions on the Priority Theme,

Pepsie Adiukwu of Nigeria presented the thoughts of three women who work closely with rural women in Nigeria; an entrepreneur, a medical doctor and a journalist. The four vital areas of interventions running through these three women's opinions were Poverty, Health, Education and Justice. She said that it was a matter of deep concern that a country like Nigeria which is rich in mineral resources and human capital still have a huge percentage of the world's poorest rural women. She attributed this sorry state of affairs to lack of political will and corruption.

Dame Vera Baird of UK quoted Parliamentary and third sector reports which showed that education funding in rural areas in the UK was half of that in the urban areas. In rural areas women rely on health services during pregnancy, childbirth and as primary carers of children. But there is lack of access to these services due to lack of transportation. The transit systems to the urban areas from the rural areas are expensive, infrequent and slow. Schools cannot be provided with a modern education as they are struggle with weak or no internet connectivity. This lack of broadband services in the rural community worsens rural isolation. Rural women also undergo domestic abuse with no recourse to seek shelter as the escape route is via the local taxi driver, and he could be a relative or a friend of the male perpetrator. Baird in her conclusion said that as western Soroptimists reach out to help women in less developed countries, urban Soroptimists must do the same for local rural women, whose own numbers will never be enough to give them a loud voice and would therefore, continue to remain the neglected sector.

Daphne Pillai, Founder President SI-Bombay-Chembur presented the challenges faced by rural women and girls in India with case study references to successful Soroptimist projects in her region of Mumbai- India. These initiatives have been meeting the very real needs of the women and were identified through participatory consultations and evidence based need assessments. The top priorities requested by these rural women and girls were support to improve their spoken English skills and development of practical skills which would enable them to generate independent income. These community level grassroots interventions are great examples of Soroptimists' aims: educating, enabling and empowering "in action" and were contrasted by Dr Pillai with what can often be rhetoric in the plethora

of government regulations which are passed though not often implemented as evidenced by the C&AG's independent report.

Sr Annie Jesus Mary Louis from India spoke on 'Prostitution as violence against rural women'. She works to rescue and rehabilitate trafficked girls in the region of Chattisgarh. Young rural girls are lured by traffickers who appear in the guise of benevolent godfathers. If education is provided to the girls, this evil could be choked. She said if there was no supply then the demand would also dry up. Her appeal was to support organizations working against human trafficking in rural areas.

Anuradha Pradeep, President SI-Bangalore spoke on 'Empowerment of Women living in rural areas and Government support'. Rural women need support in two categories which she identified as 1) Physical which would include nutrition, menstruation, pregnancy, sexual and old age and 2) Psychological issues like providing them with life skills like communication skills, cultivating positive attitude, capacity to face difficult situations, counseling, etc. She emphasized the importance of government support in aiding rural women. The government has the power to make the policies, to control, to provide the infrastructure and the authority to implement. However, she cautioned that in developing and under developed countries due to corruption and indifferent attitudes, it is best to be careful before seeking government support.

Other speakers were Dr Sylvia Walker from Trinidad and Tobago whose topic was "Education Rural Women: Real Life." and Poppy Ullett who spoke on "Political participation for rural women"

The session successfully brought out the challenges of addressing the needs of rural women in different countries and the various interventions and best practices that have been undertaken to tackle these issues. The session also offered solutions and pathways to address the problems of rural women.



## **CSW Parallel event : “Internet Generation as Pioneer: Rural Women’s Opportunities and Challenges”**

Another day of excitement. After an early breakfast at the hotel, I rushed to the CCUN for the CSW62 orientation where we were briefed on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Millenium Development Goals (MDGs) of the United Nations. Like me, most of the audience were first time participants at CSW.

I then took a cab and braving the New York traffic just made it on time to the next event at 4 W 43rd St where a very different experience awaited me. When I arrived, the Blue Room was getting filled with eager participants. The topic was a very challenging one – ‘Internet Generation as Pioneer: Rural Women’s Opportunities and Challenges.’ The speakers were from Taiwan, Canada, Nigeria and France. What we heard were huge eye openers. While Taiwan was using the Internet as a tool in rural areas to bridge the gap between rural and urban, the speaker from Canada regrettably said that even though Canada is a developed country, internet services had either not reached the rural areas or they were unaffordable. She was shocked when she saw advertisements in New York where cell phones and data plans were available for just \$29 a month. She emphasised that in a digital economy, cell phones are important specially for those living at risk, but issues that rural women face are hidden and invisible making it difficult to advocate for them.

We had a lot of lessons to learn through the story of a rural Taiwanese girl named Shen-Xing-Ling. Before the internet age, she and her family had to be at the morning market at 4 am, then it was the evening market which continued till night. Most of her sleep was in the truck that carried the agriculture products. But when she had access to the internet, she started selling crops through email and was thrilled that buyers for her 'pomelos' were just a click away.

The Kenya speaker described our current age as Generation Z. The generation of Facebook, Twitter, Google and other social media fixations for the youth. It is an age when a mother has to convince her child that 'I didn't download you. I gave birth to you.' The representative from Nigeria spoke on the 'Kids of the Past versus the Internet Generation.' Today digital technology dominates their lives. The final speaker was from France who felt that the internet was a curse as it has become a medium for human trafficking. She had some spine chilling facts to share about internet advertisements that sell a girl child.

The session gave me heaps of insights into the different challenges faced by different countries in using the Internet.

We barely finished the session and then rushed to get a seat at our very own Soroptimist International event in the Aqua Room at 4 W 43rd St. It was such a delight to see fellow Soroptimists from all over the world with their colourful sashes and shining badges. The theme was 'Solutions to address the multi-layered issues faced by rural women.' SIWP, SIGBI, SIE, SIA gave the audience valuable insights into the challenges faced by rural women and their interventions to solve them.

A day well spent in the life of a blogger. There is much to learn, much to do and interactions such as these help pave the way.